

# NORSE NAMING ELEMENTS IN SHETLAND AND FAROE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Studies of Norse place-names in the colonies have concentrated on the habitative elements *staðir*, *bólstaðr*, *býr* and *setr/sætr*, and chronologies of settlement and settlement expansion have been constructed from the distribution of these elements (Marwick 1952, 227-251; Nicolaisen 1976, 85-94; Thuesen 1978, 113-117). These chronologies assume that elements replaced each other in popularity and that essentially they all had the same meaning of "farm".

Marwick first created a place-name hierarchy and chronology from the Norse habitative elements found in Orkney (1952, 227-251). According to his interpretation, *býr* was the earliest element, followed by *staðir*, *bólstaðr*, *land*, *garðr*, *skáli* and *setr*. Nicolaisen expanded Marwick's theories to all the Norse colonies in the North Atlantic, constructing a chronological framework on the basis of the absence of certain elements from Iceland which he presumed to have been settled later than the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland (1976). Chronology was thus made the *reason* for the appearance and disappearance of place-name elements to the exclusion of all other factors such as regional differences or, perhaps most important of all, the function and characteristics of the farms represented by the elements. More recently, however, Nicolaisen has noted that "More limited distribution is not always ... an indicator of an earlier linguistic stratum, just as less density in distribution is not always a sign of a late phase" (1984, 364).

Faroe and Shetland provide excellent comparative material with which to analyse the significance of the distribution of habitative elements. Both archipelagos were settled from Western Norway c 800 AD. Prior to the arrival of the Norse, Faroe's landscape was unshaped and unnamed by man though a few Irish hermits may have settled there briefly circa 700 AD (Dicuil, 30). Shetland, however, had long been populated, as evidenced by chambered cairns, field systems,

brochs and, no doubt, the settlements of the populations which the Norse found there, the Picts. Pictish culture did not long survive the Norse incursions and from c 800 to 1500 Shetland fell within a predominantly Norse cultural sphere. From the sixteenth century onwards, Scottish immigrants to Shetland brought innovations, including Scottish place-name elements, but the majority of place-names in Shetland, as in Faroe, are firmly Norse in origin.

All the expected habitative elements are found in Shetland, but *bólstaðr*, *staðir* and *setr/sætr* are essentially absent from Faroe. These elements are, however, found in Iceland which is unlikely to have been settled much before Faroe and a chronological explanation of their absence is no longer entirely tenable. If the date of original settlement is not particularly significant in explaining the place-name differences between Shetland and Faroe, what could account for it? The place of origin of the settlers in the Norwegian homeland has been proposed as a reason for the absence of elements from Faroe. Some regions of Western Norway have significantly fewer *sætr* names, for example, than the rest of Western Norway so it has been suggested that the settlers of Faroe originated there (Sommerfelt 1958, 221). Yet it seems intrinsically unlikely that the settlers of Faroe came exclusively from one district and that they should have used none of the habitative elements found in all the other island groups around, including Iceland, Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides. Linguistic and saga evidence strongly suggest that at least some of the original Norse settlers had already settled in Ireland and the Hebrides. A third explanation regarding the absence of the *setr/sætr* element from Faroe proposes that there was something significantly *different* about the farming practices or settlement there which made the element irrelevant (Sandnes 1956, 84). What are the main similarities and differences of settlement in Faroe and Shetland which might account for the differences in nomenclature?

Faroe is dominated by steep basalt mountains in the interior, up to 880m high, and sheer cliffs which reach heights of 400 to 500m in some places. Most of the eighteen islands are accessible from fjords, predominantly orientated NW-SE and, where possible, settlements lie on the edge of these inlets, where the land is reasonably flat. Like Faroe, Shetland has long, sheltered fjords but its inland landscape is hilly rather than mountainous, with Ronas Hill its highest point at

450m. Glaciation has created broad valleys, allowing successful settlement inland.

The similarities and differences in the landscape of Shetland and Faroe are reflected in the settlement sites. In both island groups, primary settlement is generally coastal, at the head of fjords and bays. Secondary settlement, however, differs. In Faroe it is limited by the landscape to the immediate vicinity of the primary settlement – cliffs and mountains preclude successful permanent settlement beyond the eighty-five primary sites. So all secondary settlement is nucleated around the parent site, creating *bygdir* made up of several secondary settlements (Fær. *býlingar*). After the earliest farm was divided, its name became a general collective appellation for the whole settlement or *bygð* while *býlingur*-names located farms within the district. For example, *við Á* (“by the river”) is in itself sufficient only to distinguish that farm from others in the same *bygð* but not enough to locate it within the island of Sandoy without adding its *bygð*-name, *Húsavík*. So the *býlingur* naming pattern required the retention of the primary farm-name to identify the settlement district, thereby ensuring the survival of that name even after the farm itself had been divided and component parts renamed.

In Shetland too, the original primary farm is often no longer identifiable though its farm-name is retained in the name of the settlement district or *scattald*. Nucleated settlements are also found in the form of *townships*. However, in Shetland the landscape allows for much more diversity of settlement and secondary settlements could be established at considerable distances from primary sites. There was potential for expansion to coastal sites, less favourable than primary sites, but nevertheless suitable for permanent settlement. There was also the possibility of settlement in the interior, in broad valleys, and even the rough hill-grazing land could be exploited. Where topography is similar in Shetland and Faroe, therefore, settlement takes similar forms – that is, primary coastal sites and nucleated townships; where it differs, however, there are also differences in settlement.

These similarities and differences in settlement types are in turn reflected in nomenclature. Both island groups have primary settlement sites at the heads of fjords and voes and occasionally in

broad valleys and in both Shetland and Faroe these primary sites are named after the most prominent topographical features in the locality. Seventeen of the eighty-five *bygdir* in Faroe have simplex topographical names (21%) and of them, thirteen relate to coastal features, including Strendur (ON *strǫnd*); Eidi (ON *eið*); Sandur (ON *sandr*); and Vagur (ON *vágr*). There are a further forty-two compound topographical *bygd*-names (50%), thirty-seven of which relate to coastal features. In Shetland too, primary farm-names also tend to be topographical. As in Faroe, names like Aith (ON *eið*); Voe (ON *vágr*); Strand (ON *strǫnd*); Dale (ON *dalr*); and Sound (ON *sund*) illustrate at once the favourability of these sites. In addition to circa forty-one simplex topographical-name primary farms, there are about fifty-three compound topographical primary-farm names. And as in Faroe, the tendency is for the generics to be coastal features.

In both Faroe and Shetland many secondary farms also have topographical names, a factor which has tended to lead to the exclusion of topographical elements from discussions of chronology. As Fellows-Jensen remarks, such names could in theory be coined at any time when Norse was spoken and transferred later from the topographical feature itself to the settlement site (1984, 155). On topographical and land assessment evidence, however, primary farms are easily distinguished from secondary farms. Moreover, the majority of the one hundred and sixty-eight secondary *býlingur*-names in Faroe relate to inland rather than coastal features, in particular to rivers (*á*, 13); mounds (*haugr*, 9); crags (*hamarr*, 8); dykes (*gerði/garðr*, 29); and fields (*bøur*, 11). Only sixteen *býlingar* have coastal features in their names – circa 10%, compared with 60% of *bygd*-names. In Shetland too, secondary farms with topographical names have a much greater tendency than primary farms to be associated with inland features, including Hugon (ON *haugr*); Houll (ON *hóll*); Hamar (ON *hamarr*); Breck (ON *brekka*); and Feal (ON *fjall*). In general, Shetland and Faroe share very similar features of landscape and this is reflected in their shared range of topographical place-name elements.

Just as elements of topography are common to both Shetland and Faroe and are consequently reflected in the place-names of both island groups, so shared aspects of settlement types are also reflected in nomenclature. Township and *býlingur*-names in both Shetland and Faroe include the elements ON *garðr/gerði* (dyke, enclosure); *skáli*;

*stofa*; and *toft*. In Faroe, *garðr/gerði* is a common naming element in secondary *býlingur* farm-names, either as a generic in compound names like *Duvugardur* or *Dalsgardur*, or in the form *við Gjerði* (“by the dyke”). There are twenty-nine *garðr/gerði býlingur*-names.

According to Stewart, there are two hundred and fifty-seven *garðr* farms in Shetland and forty-six *gerði* farms, making up 9% of all Shetland farm-names in total (1965, 252). However, it is often difficult to determine an origin in either *gerði* or *garðr*, the former originally meaning an enclosure, the latter a dyke, enclosure or farm, and probably both words merged, becoming variously *gert*, *gord*, *garth*, *gart*, *gardie* and *gard*. *Garth*-farms tend to be peripheral, on the outskirts of the townships, though not so distant from the core of settlement as *sætr* farms. If the element meant “enclosure”, one might expect to find it out on the pasture land but more often than not, *garðr/gerði* farms are located along the line of the infield dyke or successive dykes.

*Skáli* farms are essentially township and *býlingur* components, probably architecturally distinctive. In saga literature, the *skáli* was the most important building on the farm – the longhouse with its distinctive roof-bearing posts (Eldjarn 1971). As such, it retained strong symbolic functions and continued as a popular building-type even in areas where timber was scarce (Stoklund 1984, 98-100). In place-names the element is applied to large farms in Orkney (Marwick 1952, 238) and to shieling huts in northern England (Fellows-Jensen 1985, 50).

On Sandoy, Faroe, there are neighbouring *bygdíir*, Skálavík and Húsavík, *skáli* and *hús* providing the naming distinctions. *Skáli* appears as a generic in three *bygd*-names – Blankaskáli, Kalsoy; Nordskáli, Eysturoy; and Skáli, Eysturoy; and as a specific in two *bygd*-names, Skálatoftir, Bordoý; and Skálavík, Sandoy – and in five *býlingur*-names as a simplex. As an element in *bygd*-names in Faroe, *skáli* certainly did not represent a hut, especially in the case of the highly-assessed *bygd*, Skáli, Eysturoy (40 merks). At the other extreme, Nordskáli, Eysturoy, has a low assessment. So *skáli* in Faroe could be of high or low status and probably represented a particular *type* of house construction distinctive from a *hús* or *stofa*, and the general tendency is for such houses to be secondary.

In Shetland too, *skáli*-names generally belong to minor settlements in townships though the highly-assessed Langascolls of Twatt, Sandsting and Unst illustrate that, like Orkney *skáli*-farms, they could be large and important settlements. That they were *langr* (long) indicates at once a high social distinction and such *skáli*-farms may represent re-namings of older, primary farms when the distinctive type of building, the *skáli*, was built there. Indeed, *skáli*-buildings were probably inherently larger than other building types.

*Stofa* was applied to houses of a particular architectural construction. In origin it was a building of log-timbering which appeared in Northern Europe around 1000 and it was widely dispersed throughout Scandinavia by 1200 (Stoklund 1984, 101-106). The term came to embrace all box or frame-type constructions, either planks set horizontally or vertical staves in sills. In Faroe a *stofa* was generally a stove-box with an outer cladding of stone and turf rather than a log-timber building (Stoklund 1984, 106). The element is not found in *bygð* or *býlingur*-names but it is applied to many houses within *býlingar*, indicating that it is a late element (Matras 1932, 273). In particular it is applied to many houses which resulted from division post-1584 for in a rental of that date very few farms which later split into *stofa*-farms, are divided. In Kirkjubøur, Streymoy, for example, *Heimi á Gardi* divided some time after 1584 into *Inni í stovu gard* and *Uttar í stovu gard* (Taxationsprotokol, 107).

An important characteristic of *stofa* in Faroe is that it was only applied to houses of crown tenants. While udal land was liable to become very fragmented through the process of inheritance, crown land could not be divided up between heirs to the same extent and remained relatively intact. Crown tenants were therefore the most prosperous farmers and could presumably afford better houses than the independent udal farmers.

In Shetland too, there is evidence that *stofa* was applied to high-status houses. In a document of 1299 concerning Papa Stour, the protagonists met in Duke Håkon of Norway's *stofa* (DN I, 81, no 89) and excavations at the Biggings have revealed wooden flooring, indicative of a high-status site (Crawford 1985, 150).

There are four tax-assessed simplex Stove-farms in Shetland:

Stove, Walls (12 merks); Stove, Northmavine (4 merks); Stove, Unst (16 merks); and another Stove, Unst (16 merks). Only Stove, Walls is of particularly high status as a scattald farm and none is over 18 merks, with an average of 12 merks.

The *stofa* farms of Faroe and Shetland are chronologically late because the architectural type which they represent was a late introduction, circa 1200. Because of their late establishment, they provide neither *bygð* nor scattald-farm names and in Faroe not even *býlingur*-names. By their nature, however, they do tend to be high-status farms and in many cases they probably represent re-namings of older farms, the *stofa* being the most distinctive and noteworthy feature in the settlement.

The element *toft* is, like *skáli* and *stofa*, common to both Shetland and Faroe. It can mean a green grassy place; a homestead; a place marked out for a house or building (Cleasby-Vigfusson, 636) and in modern Faroese, "ruin". In Faroe it is both a *bygð* and a *býlingur*-name, as well as a house and field-name.

Three Faroese *toft*-names belong to *bygðir* – Nordtoft, Skálatoftir and Toftir, Eysturoy. There are ten *býlingur*-names including the element *toft* and a great many house and topographical-feature names which include the element. It is impossible to date them though it is tempting to assume that some may have resulted from abandonment during the period of economic contraction after the Black Death.

None of the Shetland *toft*-farms are scattald farms though there are nine tax-assessed *toft*-farms, four of them the simplex Toft or Taften. Two sites, Udalstof, Delting and Colbinstof, Fetlar, have church-sites and four farms are 18 merks or more. The early occupants of some of the *toft*-farms can be recognised in place-names such as Colbinstof, Fetlar and Eirikstofir, Miðvágur, Faroe. In the *bygð*-name Skálatoftir, the type of ruins, ON *skáli*, is actually identified and in Udalstof, Delting, the nature of ownership may be identified in the first element ON *udal*.

A *toft* was recognised as a different type of site from a *hús*, though *toft* farm-names are, like *hús*-names, given to individual houses within

townships and *býlingar* rather than to large landed farms. In both Shetland and Faroe they may represent plots which lay uncultivated and which were eventually built upon.

The fifth element which is common both in Faroese *býlingur*-names and in Shetland township names is ON *hús* (house). In Faroe, there is one *bygd*-name, Húsar, containing the generic *hús* and one, Húsavík, containing *hús* as a specific. It is more common, however, as an element in *býlingur*-names, in particular, as in Shetland, compounded with locational elements. There are seven *býlingur*-names containing *hús* – heimi í Húsi (1); uppi í Húsi (1); í Húsi (3); and níðri í Húsi (2).

*Hús*-names are almost invariably found in Shetland within nucleated townships. Generally they take specifics which define their location within the township – East/Easter; West/Wester; North/Norther and so on. In the 1299 Papa Stour document, Uphouse is recorded as “uppi i hus” (DNI, 81, no 89), a prepositional construction of the sort still used in Faroe. Only two Shetland *hús*-farms are also scattald farms – House, Burra (36 merks) and Kewhouse, Unst (12 merks). Few *hús*-farms (30) appear in the tax-lists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries since only independent farms with their own arable lands are assessed separately and *hús*-farms within townships tend to have their arable within townland which was shared by several farms. In some cases, however, large *hús*-farms have resulted from the splitting of large primary farms. In Twatt scattald, Sandsting, for example, the original farm of Twatt (ON *pveit*, clearing), was divided up into two farms of Langascoll (ON *langr-skáli*) and Northhouse (ON *nordr-hús*), each highly assessed at 18 merks. Similarly in Aith scattald, Aithsting, the original farm of Aith is lost as a farm-name and its lands have been divided between two large *hús*-farms which resulted from its division – Uphouse (21 merks) and Northhouse (20 merks).

The status of *hús*-farms then, is far more varied than the rentals suggest, with both high and low assessments and their chronology is far more complex than the ascription “secondary” can imply. The one characteristic shared by all *hús*-farms in both Shetland and Faroe, taxed or untaxed, early or recent, is their function as the expression of a particular type of expansion within the immediate vicinity of the



parent farm, part of a long continuous process in the growth of townships and *býlingar*.

These five elements, *garðr/gerði*, *skáli*, *stofa*, *toft* and *hús*, are common to both Faroe and Shetland and are applied to houses distinguished by location on the dyke, by architectural form, or by a previous characteristic as a grassy plot within nucleated settlements. So just as Faroe and Shetland share topographical features which are reflected in place-names, so they share features of nucleated settlement, expressed in the use of similar place-names.

There are other forms of expansion, however, which only Shetland's landscape allows, reflected in the absence from Faroe of the associated place-name elements used to reflect these settlement types – *staðir*, *bólstaðr* and *sætr/setr*. *Staðir* in Norway is characterised as a secondary element, common where *vin* and *heimr* are rare (Stemshaug 1976, 102) but accorded to very favourable sites. Often it is combined with a personal-name specific, indicating personal ownership as a characteristic feature of farms so-named. Generally, *staðir* is translated simply as “farm” though Hellberg has suggested that in Orkney and Man it was used of “fields in meadowland” (1967, 282-284). Because the element is always used in the plural (except in some later Icelandic examples which seem to have been deliberately changed to the singular form to denote their status as lands owned by the church (Cleasby-Vigfusson, 586)), it has also been suggested that it was used of nucleated farm settlements (Fenton 1978, 28).

The thirty-two *staðir*-farms in the Shetland rentals tend to be of high status, almost without exception taxed. Twenty-three of them are scattald farms (72%) and circa 23 have a land value of 18 merks or more (72%). Moreover, eleven (34%) have church-sites close by. Shetland *staðir*-farms also share the characteristic of personal-name specifics. Although it is not always easy to distinguish personal names from appellatives, circa twenty-three of the thirty-two Shetland *staðir*-names (72%) are probably combined with personal names. In fact, characteristic of *staðir* in Shetland are the types of specific with which it does *not* combine. The locational specifics, common with *bólstaðr* and *býr* and the specifics descriptive of land quality found with *bólstaðr*, *setr* and *garðr* are never combined with *staðir*, suggesting that in Shetland at least, *staðir* never meant “field in meadowland”. If it had

such connotations, one might expect a greater variety of specifics, especially adjectives.

By looking only at the habitative elements *stadir*, *bólstaðr*, *býr* and *setr*, one can easily come to the conclusion that *stadir*-farms are primary settlements. However, when one compares the locations of scattald farms with *stadir*-names and those scattald farms with topographical names, the secondary nature of the *stadir*-farms becomes apparent. The *stadir*-farms are on good land and do attain high status, but relative to many of the topographical-name scattald farms, they are distinctly secondary in character. Gunnista, Bressay, for example, does not have the prime location of its neighbour, Aith, nor does Wethersta, Delting have the sheltered situation of Voe to the south. Many of the coastal *stadir*-farms do not actually have very good landing-places – Calsta, Northmavine and Oddsta, Fetlar, for example, both lack the excellent harbouring facilities of the Voes, Wick and Firths of Shetland.

However, the nine *stadir*-farms which are 1000m or more inland, are not necessarily all on peripheral sites. Asta, Tingwall is 1600m inland but it lies in the very fertile Tingwall valley and at 36 merks and a scattald farm, it is clearly no marginal settlement. Similarly, Baliasta, Unst, though 1800m inland, has coastal access to both east and west and is the most highly assessed scattald in Shetland. So just as proximity to the coast is not necessarily an indication of a favourable site since there may be cliffs or only a poor landing-place, so great distance from the coast does not automatically indicate marginality. Nevertheless, the inland *stadir*-sites on the whole lack the several attractions of the simplex topographical and often inland Dale-farms which have very convenient coastal access as well as good, sheltered arable land. And the *stadir* coastal sites on the whole lack the excellent harbouring facilities found at the simplex topographical scattald farms called Voe, Wick and Firth.

To some extent, therefore *stadir* can be seen within a chronological context in Shetland but this is because of its function as a naming element applied to a particular type of secondary settlement. It is given to high-status sites which were probably colonised after the most favourable coastal sites had already been settled and before it became necessary to take recourse to the very marginal inland *setr*-sites.

It remains to be explained why there are no *staðir*-name farms in Faroe. Given the chronology argument, one might expect to find them there since there are over 1,000 *staðir*-names in Iceland but this absence from Faroe actually has more to do with topography than chronology. There are only eighty-five *bygd*-sites in Faroe and the vast majority of these have topographical names, as shown above. These settlements parallel the earliest phase of settlement in Shetland and Iceland which is also represented in the main by topographical place-name elements. After these eighty-five sites had been settled in Faroe further settlement was extremely limited. The mountainous landscape precluded any possibility of settling further along the coast or inland so all secondary settlement had to take place in the immediate vicinity of primary farms. The *staðir* element clearly was not pertinent to this kind of nucleated settlement expansion. So chronology of settlement alone cannot account for the absence of the element from Faroe and its very absence here helps to shed some light on how it functioned in Shetland.

The second habitative element absent from Faroe yet found in Shetland is *bólstaðr*. In Norway there are about ninety *bólstaðr*-farms, mostly in the district between Sognefjord and Tingvollfjord and about half of the *bólstaðr* compounds contain the specific *mikill* (great, large) (Olson 1983, 223-224). According to Brøgger, the *bólstaðr*-farm in Norway was of high status, “ranking in dignity as if it were the old family estate” (1929,90).

In Orkney, Marwick describes *bólstaðr*-farms as “relatively early” and continues, “Individual examples of each type may indeed represent *original* Norse settlements” (1952,233). Nicolaisen interprets the wide distribution of the *bólstaðr* element throughout the colonies as an indication that it was in productive use over a very long time-span (1976, 19). As an element indicating status, *bólstaðr* is described by Fellows-Jensen as, “a small farm, possibly a division of a larger unit” (1984, 159) though Nicolaisen disputes that *bólstaðr* ever had a specific meaning in the colonies other than as a general term for “farm” (1976, 92).

In the Hebrides there are more *bólstaðr*-names than there are in the whole of Norway – over one hundred in fact, with the greatest density in Skye and The Oa, Islay, where they are often found in

groups of two or three. According to Olson, “ a large number of *bólstaðr* holdings share common boundaries with other *bólstaðr* settlements” (1983, 241). The majority of specifics combined with the element in the Hebrides are topographical appellatives though there are also about ten personal names, three compass points, four *Kirkjubólstaðrs* (church-farms) and five *Miklibólstaðrs* (great farms). There are only seventeen *bólstaðr*-farms in all of Iceland and eleven of them are *Breidabólstaðr*-farms (Stáhl 1957, 69), as is the one *bólstaðr*-name farm on Man, Bravost (Marstrander 1932, 243). Generally in Orkney the element combines with locational specifics such as *øfra* (2); *eystri/eystri* (5); *vestri/vestr* (2); with adjectives, including *breiðr* (4); with topographical elements including *vatn* (3) and *haugr* (3); and with structural elements such as *kirkja* (10) and *skáli* (4).

There are two principal characteristics of *bólstaðr*-farms in Shetland. First of all, the range of specifics with which the element is combined is very limited, and secondly, *bólstaðr*-farms tend to have a particular location relative to an earlier primary farm. Both the naming pattern and the situation of the *bólstaðr*-farms suggest that the *bólstaðr* element referred originally to farms established on cultivated fields.

Stewart found fifty *bólstaðr*-farms in Shetland (1965, 251) but as he does not list them all, they cannot be fully verified. Only twenty-nine are represented in the tax list of 1716 and a further seven can be traced from maps, documents and rentals. Thirteen of the Shetland *bólstaðr*-names combine with specifics descriptive of location, relative to a reciprocal point. Six such farms provide three pairs of reciprocating farm-names: Simbister and Norbister, East Burra; Nethrabister and Evrabister, Weisdale; and Symbister and Isbister, Whalsay. Of the remaining unpaired locational *bólstaðr*-farms, several may have lost their reciprocating farm-names. Both Estabister, Papa Stour and Isbister, Delting are now lost farm-names (Crawford 1984, 46; Jakobsen 1901, 180) and it is possible that there are several others which may have disappeared without trace.

Nevertheless, not all *bólstaðr*-names necessarily have other *bólstaðr*-names with which to reciprocate and Estabister may have been named in reciprocation with the central farm on Papa Stour, the Biggings. Outrabister, Lunnasting is named because of its location

relative to the settlement of Lunna since it is clearly *out* along the ness from the primary settlement. Similarly, Trebister in the parish of Gulberwick is “out” towards the sea from the primary farm of Wick. In these examples, no reciprocating *bólstaðr*-farm is required.

Where adjectives provide the specific, they describe the quality of land rather than the farm-buildings. Habitative elements like *hús*, *skáli* and *stofa*, all building types, take descriptive specifics such as *langr*, *nýr* and *steinn* to describe the nature of the building. *Bólstaðr*, on the other hand, takes descriptive specifics such as *brattr*, *flattr* and *breiðr*, all of which describe the fields on which the farm is built rather than the farm buildings. These fields can be easter, wester, inner, outer, flat, broad, steep, by water, near a church, by a house or at a cross, like the *býlingur*-names við Á, við Kirkja, inni á Bø and so on. The *bólstaðr* element, then, implies a larger area than habitative elements like *hús*, *skáli* and *stofa* where only the building is implicit in the farm-name. With *bólstaðr*, the surrounding fields are also an implicit part of the farm as described in the farm-name.

The impression of *bólstaðr* as a field-name is reinforced when the location of the *bólstaðr*-farms in relation to primary farms is analysed. The eighteenth-century Dundas Rental gives revealing descriptions of the relationship of the lands of some *bólstaðr*-farms to nearby farms, in each case scattald and probably also primary farms: “the lands of Wadbister to which Snarravoe lyes contiguous”, (Unst, Dundas, 51); “the Scatald the same with that of Underhoul”, (Crossbister, Unst, Dundas, 53); “entered in the rental as a distinct town, but in fact one & the same toun and the lands lying runrig with those of Hoove”, (Wadbister, Whiteness, Dundas, 64). The Shetland *bólstaðr*-farms therefore may have begun as cultivated fields, either on a primary farm or at a distance from it and the naming element may have indicated “farm established on a cultivated field”.

In both the characteristics of naming pattern and location, the Shetland *bólstaðr* farm-names may be likened to the Faroese *býlingur*-names which similarly locate each secondary farm in relation to a topographical feature of the infield or reciprocally with another farm. While in Faroe this type of expansion soon became the only possibility when all the primary farms had been established, in Shetland expansion on to nearby fields was only one of several possibilities.

Settlement could also take place at distant coastal sites and inland marginal sites and as a result the type of expansion itself became a distinguishing feature. The term used to indicate the *býlingur*-type of division on to existing cultivated land in Shetland seems to have been *bólstaðr*.

This implies that the reason for the absence of *bólstaðr*-names in Faroe has nothing to do with the date of settlement or the provenance of the settlers. Rather, it is the result of the limited nature of Faroese settlement expansion.

Once all eighty-five primary sites were occupied, only one type of expansion was possible, that of the *býlingur*, close to the parent farm in the only area where cultivation and building were possible. Since all expansion took place in this way, there was no point in adding the generic *bólstaðr* since it would serve no distinguishing function. There is only one possible *bólstaðr*-name on Faroe, Velbastaður, Streymoy (ON *vé-bólstaðr*, sacred-*bólstaðr*) (Ljunggren 1955), perhaps a later expansion from the farm to the south, renamed Kirkjubøur (church-farm) when the church was built there after Christianity was introduced in Faroe.

The final example of a habitative element found widely in Shetland but absent from Faroe is *setr/sætr*. In Faroe there are no place-names containing the element yet from Shetland there are one hundred and seventy examples, representing 5% of all Shetland farm-names (Stewart 1965, 250). There are two possible origins for the *setter*-farms of Shetland – ON *sætr*, n (shieling, pasture) and ON *setr*, n (dwelling, pasture).

All but one of the documented *setter*-names from medieval Shetland indicate origins in *sætr* – at Brecka sætr, a Bruar sætri, 1299 (DN I, 81, no 89); a Bræida sætre, 1307 (DN I, 97, no 109); Skarwasætre, Sætre, 1355 (DN III, 234, no 284); Breida setr, 1360 (DN III, 251, no 310); Nwtasæther, 1490 (Bergen), (DN VIII, 437, no 426); Sigríðhusætre, 1295 (Bergen), (DN XII, 16, no 19). The one exception, Breida setr of 1360, appears in 1307 as Bræida sætre and this may indicate that *setr* and *sætr* came to be used interchangeably though originally only *sætr* was used. There is, then, no certain evidence of any *setr*-names in Shetland (Fellows-Jensen 1984, 161).

The location of the Shetland *setter*-farms bears out an origin as shielings. Almost all have a characteristic situation – inland, on the hill-grazing land beyond the infield dyke. Either they originated as temporary shielings or as animal enclosures by particularly good pasture land.

On the whole, *setter*-farms are not very far from primary farms by virtue of the Shetland topography. Though the *setter*-farms are mostly inland, because of the size and shape of the islands and the pattern of the scattalds, inevitably no settlements are more than 3km from the sea and most are less than 1km from it. Because *setter*-farms in Orkney are so close to their nearest farms within the infield dyke, Marwick felt they could not have been used as shielings and that all the names were therefore originally *setr*, purely pastoral (1931,27). This is true of many *setter*-farms in Shetland too – Bragasetter, Papa Stour, for example, is only 900m from the main farm at the Biggings – and it hardly seems worth overnighing such a short distance from the home farm. However, in a study of the shielings of Assynt, it appears that “No less than one-quarter of the 246 shielings are under half-a-mile from the parent settlement” (Miller 1967, 202). On Fair Isle Miller identified “what would appear to be shiels... less than a mile from the uppermost farm..” (1967,217). So there is evidence that shielings could be remarkably short distances from home-farms and it is quite possible that many *sætr*-farms in Shetland began life as authentic shielings and that with population pressure on existing settlement, they too were eventually taken in as permanent settlements.

The sheer number of *setter*-farms in Shetland suggests that the element continued in productivity over a long period of time. Indeed *setter* passed into Shetland dialect not as a shieling but as an area of improved pasture, and some of the *setter*-farms may have originated not as shielings but as animal enclosures on good pasture land. The large number of animal-names compounded with *setter* also suggests that the element was applied to grazing areas or enclosures.

The one hundred and seventy *setter*-farms in Shetland represent a very significant phase of expansion. They vastly exceed the *stadir* and *bólstadir* farms in number. They are absent from Faroe because the nature of the terrain precluded them – it is simply not possible to establish permanent farms beyond the hill-dyke in the mountainous

interior. Instead, one finds the remote *ærgi*-sites (Gaelic *airigh*) which could only ever have provided temporary summer accommodation. *Setter* in Shetland place-names, then, may have been used of farms established on previous sites of shielings or good pasture.

In conclusion, primary settlement and secondary expansion are reflected in the place-names of Faroe and Shetland. The prime settlement sites on long fjords and voes or in sheltered valleys, share common topographical features and therefore common naming elements. Topographical farm-names represent the earliest phase of settlement and by analysing aspects of settlement favourability and the status of farms with topographical names, it is not difficult to discriminate between primary farms with topographical names and secondary farms which took pre-existing names of topographical features.

Just as topographical features common to both Faroe and Shetland led to common place-names, so architectural styles found in both areas resulted in the appropriate naming-elements being common to them both – *skáli*, *hús* and *stofa*. Other types of settlement – *toft*-farms on grassy plots and *garðr/gerði*-farms on enclosures and dykes – are also common to them both.

However, three important habitative elements found in Shetland – *stadir*, *bólstaðr* and *sætr* – are absent from Faroe because the *types* of settlement which these elements represent are absent from Faroe, a factor obscured by the traditional chronological argument. In Shetland, *stadir*-names were applied to secondary but favourable sites, separate from primary farms; *bólstaðr*-names were given to large farms established on existing cultivated fields or to divisions of existing farms; and *sætr*-names were given to marginal settlements on hill-grazing land. All these types of settlement are absent from Faroe, precluded by the constraints of the landscape. Chronology remains significant because of course particular types of expansion such as those represented by the *bólstaðr* and *stadir* elements became redundant when suitable land was no longer available and the elements therefore fell out of productivity. At an early stage, therefore, Norse *bólstaðr* and *stadir*-names ceased to be coined in Shetland. However, it is at least as important to stress that it is the presence or absence of a particular topographical feature,



architectural style or settlement type which primarily determines the presence or absence of the associated naming elements.

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