

ARRAN PLACE NAMES

A FRESH LOOK

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The place names of the Isle of Arran in the Firth of Clyde have fascinated scholars and laymen alike for some considerable time.¹ A fresh look at them may therefore seem to be superfluous, especially if it were to attempt yet another detailed account of the most important place names of the island and of the linguistic strata to which they belong. This essay² is therefore intended to examine the toponymic inventory of Arran from a different perspective assessing a limited number of names as part of a larger, indeed a much larger, nomenclature beyond the shores of the island; if one looks at these names with the benefit of a wide-angled lens Arran place names can be seen to have their locus in a much wider setting. Consequently, Arran, despite what our eyes tell us, ceases to be an island and its place-nomenclature loses its limited and limiting insularity.

Before embarking on such an enterprise which treats the place names in the island as ingredients of the toponymic field which they constitute, first within their insular application and then in a less insular context, let us take a fresh look at the island name itself – *Arran*. As a reflection of the strategic and cultural importance of the island over the centuries, this name is well attested in the historical record, both in Scotland and in Ireland, varying remarkably little in the sequence of surviving spellings, an indication that the pronunciation of the name has hardly changed since it was first adopted into Gaelic and then into Scottish English. The first reference to the island is apparently in the *Annals of Tigernach* in its entry for the year *A.D.* 624. Although the entry itself is obviously not contemporary but medieval its likely implication seems to be that the name of the island was well known to speakers of Gaelic in the seventh century and also, one can presume without compromising scholarly rigour, to those who crossed from Ireland to Scottish Dalriada in earlier centuries. If nothing else, the island must have been important as a navigational landmark, from the first time anybody sailed or rowed into the Firth of Clyde. The name form in the annals is *Ara* and appears to represent the nominative of the name, whereas modern Gaelic *Arainn*, from an older *Araind*, is a locative-dative of which all other spellings, including our own, are reflexes.³ The most common spellings, repeated over and over again, are *Aran* (from the thirteenth century onwards), *Arane* (first found in the fourteenth century), and the modern spelling *Arran* which first occurs in the twelfth century, but we also have *Arrain* (fourteenth century), *Araane* (thirteenth century), *Arayne* (fourteenth century) and *Arrane* and *Arren* (sixteenth

century). Some of these are *hapax legomena* (occur only once) but whether they are common or rare, there is no doubt in my mind that they are all more or less successful attempts at representing the same underlying Gaelic form, employing the appropriate orthographic devices available at the time. They therefore speak of long linguistic, especially phonological, continuity in the awareness and usage of this name.

So far so good, but what was the language of the people who originally coined the name and what does it mean when it is reduced to a word again? The honest, short answer to both these questions is, ‘we do not know,’ but let me comment briefly on our ignorance. All the languages which we can recognise in the shaping of our Scottish place-nomenclature in general belong to the Indo-European family – Old European, Pictish, Cumbric, Gaelic, Norse (or Scandinavian), English, Norman-French. There are, however, in the palimpsest of the Scottish maps names which we cannot ascribe to any language known to us. Among these are prominently some of the most important island names in the west and north, and *Arran* appears to be one of them. Others are *Islay*, *Tiree*, *Mull*, *Rum*, *Uist*, *Lewis*, *Unst* and *Yell*, as well as the name of the *Hebrides* itself, Ptolemy’s *Ebudae*. That there was no shared tradition as far as the name of the *Hebrides* is concerned is demonstrated by the fact that the Gaels called them *Innse Gall* ‘Isles of the Strangers’, Norsemen ‘the southern isles’, and the English ‘the Western Isles’. Attempts have been made to re-interpret several of the individual island names through what is sometimes called ‘folk etymology’ in terms of Gaelic, and the Norse had a go at *Lewis* calling it *Ljóðhús*. *Islay*, for example, has been said to be related to the element *Ilio-* in the Gaulish man’s name *Ilio-mārus*, meaning ‘flank’ or ‘buttock’.⁴ *Tiree* is etymologised as *Tiriath* ‘corn-land’,⁵ *Mull* has been connected with Gaelic *mol-adh* ‘praise’ and *muileach* ‘dear, beloved’ in the sense of ‘Lofty Isle’⁶ (in Ptolemy it is *Malaios*), and *Skye* has had two alternative explanations imposed upon it, depending on whether one links it more closely with Gaelic *sgian* ‘knife’ or *sgiath* ‘wing’;⁷ if the former, then a meaning ‘Divided Isle’ seems to be a possibility, if the latter ‘Winged Isle’ is to be preferred. One can observe recrudescences of such thinking at all times, and there have been various suggestions for the name *Arran* in the same vein. The one most frequently quoted is Early Gaelic *aru* ‘a kidney’,⁸ offered like the etymologies for *Skye* and *Islay* because of the shape of the island. If, in fact, *Skye* is indeed wing-shaped, if *Islay* looks like a behind and *Arran* like an over-sized kidney, the potential perception of such similarities in outline is more likely to belong to a later age when maps and charts had become available, or to an even later period when one could see the shape of the islands from above; circumnavigating an island and viewing it from the sea are less likely to suggest toponymic metaphors even if there are homophones in the vocabulary which might trigger such speculation.⁹ In my view, we are on much safer ground when we think of *Arran* and the other island names as pre-Celtic and also as pre-Indo-European, a solution – if it solves anything – that leaves us with the thought that practically all the major islands in the Northern and Western Isles have ancient names, so ancient and so linguistically and lexically opaque that we do not have any plausible referents for them elsewhere; they are linguistic fossils, perhaps three thousand years old or

older. Quite clearly there must have been more of them, and one cannot help wondering what, for example, preceded the later Scandinavian island names in the Northern Isles, names which, after all, were not given until the ninth century at the earliest.

Like several other Hebridean islands, Arran, too, had a Norse designation which, however, is only recorded in connection with the movements of the Norse fleet in 1263; it is therefore difficult to judge how widely the island was known by the Norsemen and for how long they had used a name of their own for it. In chapter 322 of the thirteenth-century *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* the island is referred to in the phrase *til hereyeia* (variant *vid hereyar*) and the Kilbrannan Sound ('Sound of Arran') as *hereyar sund*; later in the same chapter the island is called *hers-ey* (variant *herey*). In chapter 326 it is also *hers-ey*.¹⁰ There is obviously a good deal of scribal confusion here. Hermann Pálsson has drawn my attention to the fact 'that two island groups in Norway were known as *Hereyjar* (in early Icelandic sources (1) *Hereyar* in Nordland (*Hákonar saga*, *Olafs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Olafs saga helga*); (2) *Herøane* in Sunnmøre (*Sverris saga*, *Fagrskinna*, *Hákonar saga*). The possibility that the form *Hereyjar* for the Scottish island(s) owes its existence to the Norwegian island names should not be dismissed.'¹¹ Alexander MacBain, citing the *Hersey* and *Herey* of Vigfusson's edition,¹² considers these 'doubtless an attempt at the Gaelic name Arran,'¹³ but W.J. Watson rightly points out that it is 'difficult to see how [*Herey*] could have been a Norse attempt at pronouncing Arran.'¹⁴ *Herey*, and even the possibly analogical plural *Hereyjar*, are better candidates for such an assumption. Whatever the Norse reflex may have been, undoubtedly the oldest name on the map of Arran today is the name of the island itself – awesome in its antiquity as a faint echo from linguistic prehistory.

If, as has been argued, Ptolemy's *Epidion* refers to the island of Islay and if, as is almost certain, his *Epidion Akron* is now Kintyre in which *Kin-* may have replaced an earlier *Pen-*,¹⁵ there can be no doubt about the presence of a people speaking a P-Celtic language in the neighbourhood of Arran before the Gaelic-speaking Scots arrived from Ireland. Even a close scrutiny of the place names of Arran, however, has not produced a single toponymic trace in Arran of the *Epidii* whom these names commemorate, and we do not have any way of knowing what the local standing of Ptolemy's names was in their time. Those Arran place names that do show a 'p' either contain a loan-word from Norse or English like *peighinn* 'penny(land)' in *Penrioch* or *Pien* and *Dippin*, or are Norse like *Pladda* or completely English like *Pirnmill*, i.e. they are not Celtic. If one wants to reconstruct a chronological linguistic stratification for Arran, therefore, the lack of Brythonic or Cumbric reflexes in the place-nomenclature of the island leaves a sizable temporal gap between the pre-Celtic island name and the earliest Gaelic names, although it is, of course, possible, indeed very likely, that the island was uninhabited during that period and that, as happens so often in the archaeological unravelling of pre-historic material culture, the accident of survival does not favour us in this linguistic problem either. With ill grace and a good dose of humility we have therefore to be prepared to admit our ignorance because

our place name evidence is silent, and there is no other source. Any speculation would be injudicious in a case like this.

There can, on the other hand, be no doubt at all that the next group of settlers who arrived in Arran something like 1500 years ago were speakers of an early form of Gaelic which they brought with them from Ireland. This is a linguistic stratum which has continued in the island up to our own time although it is unlikely that many publicly accepted and used Gaelic names have been given to major topographical features in the last century or so. Even a superficial glance at the map of Arran indicates that the majority of place names of all kinds in the island are of Gaelic origin, many of them quite transparent in their lexical meaning, others less so. This toponymic material will be interrogated with three questions in mind: (1) Is it possible for us to subdivide this extensive Gaelic stratum as undoubtedly this is a cumulative nomenclature because not all the names were given at the same time? (2) How do the Gaelic names of Arran fit into the wider picture of the nature and distribution of Gaelic place-names? And (3) what kind of view or understanding of the Arran landscape is conveyed by these names?

Of these three questions, the first is without a doubt the most difficult to answer although it is a question which has occupied my mind and challenged me for much longer than the other two. In fact, there was a time when I thought that it would never be possible to discover criteria which would allow us to identify strata within the Gaelic stratum. All types of names and their generics could possibly have been given at any time during these 1500 years, as their elements appeared to have remained productive as long as Gaelic has been known in the island or, indeed, in the whole of Gaelic-speaking Scotland. All the components seem to have been in place since Gaelic names were first mentioned in the medieval written record, and they are also to be found in Ireland betraying their common ancestry. In fact, Watson's magnificent overview of the history of the Celtic place names in Scotland orients itself frequently on P.W. Joyce's *Place Names of Ireland*, either in order to document identical counterparts in Ireland or to contrast different usages on both sides of the Irish Sea.¹⁶ Sir Herbert Maxwell, who had a lifelong interest in the place names of Galloway, simply called all these elements as he found them in the Scottish south-west, 'Irish' because of their close affinity as well as their geographical proximity to the place name elements of Ireland.¹⁷

The key to this problem, I have long been convinced, lies in the spatial distribution of various place-name elements, as long as one can translate this spatial scatter into temporal terms, but after the construction of many distribution maps what seemed to have been laid bare were two kinds of pattern: one which demonstrated that the element mapped had indeed been productive wherever Gaelic had been spoken in Scotland at one time or another; the other an indication of regional dialectal usage within such overall pattern. Then, *mirabile dictu*, I stumbled across the toponymic term *sliabh*, as in the Arran name *Sliabh Fada*. There is nothing mysterious about the

lexical meaning of this name; an English translation would be ‘Long Moor’ or ‘Long Hill’, depending on where one is in Scotland and on what dialect of Gaelic one speaks, but the limited distribution of the generic *sliabh* suggests that it might be susceptible to temporal interpretation.

The distribution of *sliabh* as a general toponymic element in Scotland, first published in *Scottish Studies* in 1965¹⁸ and later incorporated in *Scottish Place-Names*,¹⁹ shows that most of the names which contain this element are found in the two areas which we surmise to have been the first to have been settled by Gaelic-speaking Scots from Ireland, both of them close to the Irish north and north-east coast – the Scottish Dalriada in Argyll and especially the Rinns of Galloway where *sliabh* names are thick on the ground. The Anglicised form of the word in Galloway is *Slew*- just as it is in the many instances in which it occurs in the names of seventeenth-century Irish townlands;²⁰ there are three *Slewfads* in the Rinns, obviously the same as our Arran *Sliabh Fada*. *Sliabh*-names are also found outside these two settlement areas although not very far afield and in quite a thin distribution. The best known of these is probably *Slamannan* in Stirlingshire, recorded as *Slefmanyn* in 1275; its specific is the same district name *Manau* (of the Gododdin) as in *Clackmannan* ‘the stone of Manau’. *Sliabh* was therefore used as a creative place-name generic beyond the areas in which the Gaels first settled, and one might ascribe its earliest usage tentatively to a time-span from the fifth to about the seventh century. What is so exciting about *sliabh*-names is that they are the only Scottish place-name type discovered so far that can with conviction be claimed to be pre-Norse.

This, however, does not mean that all of them go back to a very early period; it would probably be prudent to say that many of them do not, and this may include one or two of our Arran examples. When I first interpreted the *sliabh*-map I simplistically translated more limited spatial distribution as temporally earlier. While such an equation has validity in principle it is also true that within a limited distribution the creation of some types of place names may have continued for a long time although an expanding spatial dissemination of such place name types or elements had come to a halt.²¹ What this means for our current quest is that *Sliabh Fada*, while occurring in an area which does contain very early instances of Gaelic names in Scotland, is not necessarily one of those early examples. Whatever its precise dating, however, its direct links with such early naming remain impressive and even if it were a comparative latecomer it still bears witness to the fact that the island of Arran was amongst the earliest parts of Scotland to be settled by speakers of Gaelic – not surprising perhaps but still nice to have confirmed *in situ* by place names.

The other Gaelic elements are, in contrast, well attested in the whole of the present and former *Gaidhealtachd*. Names containing Gaelic *baile* ‘farmstead’ and *achadh* ‘field’ are significant examples in this category. Arran settlement names like *Ballygown*, *Ballymeanach* and *Ballymichael* are comfortably at home in the Gaelic toponymy of

Scotland, with many identical equivalents in other parts of the country.²² Names like *Auchencairn*, *Auchareoch*, *Auchmore* and *Auchenhew* also share with the Anglicised, formerly Gaelic-speaking parts of the country, particularly in the south-west, the levelling of the genitive to the definite article so common in such phonological adaptations²³ and are therefore typical of their name type in general and have many parallels elsewhere.²⁴ *Kilbride*, *Kilmichael*, *Kildonan*, *Kilmory* and *Kilpatrick* are also the expected reflexes of Gaelic names in *Cill* 'church or churchyard', and even the sixteenth century alternative *Kirkpatrick* for the last of these is in keeping with practice in the areas in which Gaelic, Norse and English linguistic influences mingled, especially in the Scottish south-west but also further north.²⁵ As echoes of the cultural imprint of Gaelic-speaking people on the landscape, including agricultural organisation, ownership, land measurement and land value, and the life and concerns of the church, there is therefore nothing peculiarly *Arannach* about these names, a fact which may make them less exciting to some but by no means diminishes their importance as signposts to the Arran past. The local, insular actualisation of more generally encountered principles and types always has its own fascination anyhow. After all, it creates a sense of belonging while at the same time asserting a sense of identity.

What, in comparison, do the Gaelic names of natural features tell us about the way in which their coiners perceived the landscape, or perhaps rather their environment since it is only through the naming and individuation of features that an unstructured environment is turned into a knowable and familiar habitat, a structured landscape? How did their namers, one might ask, make this environment, this wilderness-cum-potential-landscape their own, *i.e.* readied it for orientation and mental survival? How did they, for instance, perceive the island's limits on the shore? Apart from *Machrie* (from Gaelic *machair* 'raised beach', *Traigh a' Chaisteil*, the Gaelic name for Brodick, is the only one that refers to the beach or strand itself. Designating some of the minor coastal features, *rubha*, usually referring to a rounded and not very precipitous promontory is very common. There are 'harbours' like *Port Mór* and *Port Leacach*, natural landing places for boats where they might safely beach and be pulled above the waterline, the kind of facility that in formerly Scandinavian-speaking parts of Scotland would be called a *noust*. Rinn 'a headland' and *cleiteadh*, probably a borrowing from the Norse *klettr* 'rock', occur. Otherwise it has to be taken into account that most of the features originally designated by Gaelic *aird* – *Ardlavenys* is an exception – are now English 'points' or sometimes 'heads'; in many of these 'translations' the first or specific elements are still Gaelic though usually in an Anglicised spelling. One or two small offshore islands, like *Eilean Mór* and *Eilean Màiri* and *Leacan Ruadh* 'red flagstones', denote other coastal features as does, of course, *An Coileach*, the metaphorical 'Cock of Arran', probably so named by fishermen rather than farmers, and perhaps even used as a fishing mark. What is named on the shore by primary Gaelic names are, therefore, mostly features that protrude from the coastline, everything that encroaches on the sea, and hardly at all the inroads the sea makes into the land, on an ever-changing coast being chiselled and re-chiselled by the eternal battle between water and land. This nomenclature projects a view from the

island towards the sea and one that emphasises *terra firma* rather than the unreliable, risky, threatening water that surrounds it.

Inland the greatest degree of differentiation is to be found in the terms employed for eminences of varying shapes and sizes, the vertical equivalents of the horizontal promontories and other protrusions, so to speak, or *vice versa*. *Croc*, *druim*, *monadh*, *torr*, and also *beinn*, *creag*, *meall*, *maol*, *sail*, all refer to the different and numerous outcrops of rock and hills that dominate the Arran landscape. Their concave counterparts without which they could not be perceived so easily as individual, separate, namable features bear names containing generics like *blár*, *coire*, *cùl*, *gleann*, *lag*, and *srath*; in a sense, the features perceived as slopes, i.e. the ones called *learga* and *leitir*, mediate between the ups and downs of this landscape which is essentially a topography conceived and perceived in vertical terms and, if one adds the specifics to the conceptual mix, in terms of size and colour. This does not mean that distinctive horizontal features are not recognised or are ignored, as the term for an inland promontory – *ros* – shows, including its suitability for extension into a district designation. That these names portray a landscape understood in visual terms goes without saying. From a practical point of view, it expresses the relationship which the hill farmer and the shepherd have to the land in their care and under their feet, and not that of the climber, sportsman and tourist. Embedded into this landscape are the woods (*coille*), thickets (*doire*), meadows (*leana*) and burns (*allt*) that nature created for human use or that were created by humans in their acts of domesticating the wilderness (in parenthesis it might be added here that *allt* appears to have been applied to Arran streams after its specific meaning of ‘burn with high banks’ had changed to ‘burn’ in general). Fields (*achadh*), now toponymically regarded as part of the cultural landscape inhabited by those who domesticated it, also belonged to this category of designations of portions of the earth’s surface found in suitable spots in that vertical landscape. Again, there is nothing unusual about the employment of these Gaelic toponymic elements as we come across them in Arran; all of them occur in abundance elsewhere, sometimes with dialectal distributions, and a Gaelic-speaking stranger confronted with the place-nomenclature of the island for the first time will not be confused by it although Arran [kronk] may at first be a little puzzling until it is recognised as the island’s equivalent of [kroyk] or [krok]. It is a micro-toponymy appropriately employed and one with which a non-Gaelic-speaking visitor would not quarrel after learning its lexical meaning.

The Scandinavian adstratum of the place-nomenclature of Arran which must have come into existence between the ninth and the middle of the thirteenth century bears very different characteristics. Although many of the names of Scandinavian origin are now names of farms and villages, none of them started out as such.²⁶ They are all names of coastal features or of features easily seen or reached from the coast, almost within sight of their boats. These include two bay names, *Brodick* and *Sannox*, (possibly three, for the second element of *Glen Shurig* (*Glenservaig* 1445–60) suggests that the name may have been transplanted from the coastal region); eight names of

small river valleys or ravines (*Glenashdale, Glen Chalmadale, Ormidale, Glenscorrodale, Kiscadale, Catacol, Corrygills, Glen Scaftigill*) and three river names (*Lochranza, Loch Iorsa, Glenrosa*). The only exception is *Goat Fell*, the most prominent mountain on the island, easily seen from the sea and the dominating feature in the island landscape even for non-resident visitors, for this is what the inventory of Scandinavian place names represents – not the nomenclature of a settled people but of occasional, albeit fairly regular but not always very welcome, visitors.²⁷ It is a nomenclature that experiences the island from the sea, not only visually but also while exploring and utilising it. It is a sailor's toponymic vocabulary and that of the fisherman and the hunter and the herdsman involved in transhumance. It is very similar to the Scandinavian nomenclature which one can distil out of the toponymy of the west coast of the Scottish mainland, especially Argyll. For the island dwellers of the Hebrides, if the names they left behind are anything to go by, Arran was experienced more as part of the mainland to the east than of their own insular kingdom. Not one Norse name indicates that its giver ever stayed on during winter or had any permanent dwelling in the island although it will never do to discount the possibility of the name of a natural feature becoming a settlement name even during the four hundred years when the Scandinavians held sway in the Western Isles. Nevertheless, such re-categorisation looks more like the exception than the rule because the place names in question all point in the other direction.

Again, there is nothing peculiar about this Scandinavian place-nomenclature: *á, dalr, fjall, gil*, and *vik* are amongst the most common and taxonomically most general terms for the features they designate, and are to be found in great numbers on the relevant maps of Scotland, as well as in Norway, of course. The distribution map of *dalr* in particular makes this point very persuasively,²⁸ leaving us with no other conclusion but that *Arrania Scandinavica* is an integral part of non-settled *Scotia Scandinavica*, albeit very close to its southernmost end and to the non-Scandinavian mainland. Therefore it is not to be compared with the richer toponymic vocabulary of Orkney and Shetland and likewise of the Outer Hebrides. It is undoubtedly to be understood as part and parcel of that coastal Scotland that was invaded, dominated and exploited by water-riding Norsemen who ultimately came from Norway via the Northern Isles and the Hebrides whereas the Gaelic linguistic allegiance at that time was largely to the south and Ireland.

Thus the Norse place names of Arran are a nomenclature of outsiders who, like the water, greedily encroached upon the island, snatching at it at every high tide and being beaten back by every ebb. Impermanence is its hallmark and the seeming permanency it has been given on our maps is a *contradictio in adjecto*. These are not the names given by tourists from Stavanger, Bergen or Trondhjem, or by visitors from Stornoway in Lewis or even Kirkpoll in Tiree; they are the names of seasonal intruders depleting the rivers and grazing their heifers and their yearlings on shielings on the best grassland easily accessible from the shore. These names are more like onomastic graffiti: 'Skorri was here' proclaims *Scorradel*, 'Skapto rules O.K.'

announces *Skaftigill*. Back comes the defiant, though somewhat anachronistic, *Traigh a' Chaisteil*, trumpeting 'Go home Lochlannach, if not to Lochlann then at least to Innse Gall where strangers belong. We don't need your Broad Bay in which your boats menace us; *an traigh*, the shore, is ours!'

There is no ambiguity in these names, no middle ground and no compromise. And yet there cannot have been just animosity and confrontation, for the Scandinavian names of Arran that have come down to us were adopted by the Gaels to supplement their own coastal nomenclature and their hydronymy created from an inlander's perspective. Some became Gaelic and later English names without much more than minimal phonological changes, like *Ormidale*, *Kiscadale* and *Catacol*. Others were acquired by adding what looks like a tautological term – *Glenashdale*, *Glen Chalmadale*, *Glen Scorrodale*, *Glen Scaftigill*; yet others were incorporated in an associated Gaelic name – *Lochranza* for the loch and *Kinlochranza* for the settlement, *Loch Iorsa*, *Glen Rosa*, *Glen Shurig*; one was part-translated – *Geita-fjall* into *Gaot-bheinn*; and yet another, *Sandvik* 'Sand Bay', was so thoroughly Gaelicised that when the place was subdivided it received a Gaelic plural name, *Na Sannocan* 'the Sandviks' which from the middle of the sixteenth century on was morphologically translated into *Sannox*, heavily obscuring its origins. A very curious case in this respect is *Brodick* whose late-fourteenth-century form *Brethwic* is close to the original Norse *breid-vik* 'broad bay' and whose fifteenth-century spellings indicate attempts to express the same pronunciation in contemporary English orthography – *Brathwike* 1405, *Brathewik* 1440, *Brathwic* 1444 and 1447, *Braithwick* 1445, *Bradewik* 1449, *Bradewyk* 1450, *Bradwec* 1459, and *Bradwic* 1460. Notice the English stop -d- in place of the Norse fricative -ð- in the later forms. In the sixteenth century this Anglicising change of the consonant is followed by the -o- in *Brodik*, the dominant spelling from then on. Even when taking into account the influence of maps and written records, it is a mystery why the name did not come out as *Breivig* or the like as it has done elsewhere (see below, p. 10). Why is this name so English in its phonology? It is, in fact, a surprise that it has survived at all since Gaelic speakers have not needed it for some considerable time; after all, it was foreign graffiti and they had their own *Traigh a' Chaisteil*.

Both *Brodick* and *Sannok*, by the way, belong to that category of names which I used to call 'instant' because they are ready-made, off-the-peg names which are not formed from lexical material each time they are given and are not transfers of particular, identifiable names from elsewhere either.²⁹ By the time the hunting, fishing and grazing Norsemen reached Arran, such nostalgic naming would have been rather unlikely anyhow since contact with Norway was probably rather loose and sporadic though a transfer from the Hebrides or Northern Isles might have been a possibility as the grazing areas of Arran were probably Hebridean shielings. My hunch is that when the Scandinavians left their homeland, first to raid and then to settle in Scotland, they had with them in their mental baggage not only a lexicon, a vocabulary of words, but also an onomasticon, a vocabulary of names, which they applied whenever called

upon to name analogically: ‘This kind of bay we always call *Breið-vik* “Broad Bay”,’ they might say or think, although no other bay they had ever seen had been exactly that shape. Or, ‘This kind of bay we always call *Sand-vik* “Sand Bay”,’ although extent, colour and texture of the sandy bottom they encountered might be identical with those of no other *Sandvik*. However that may be, both *Breið-vik* and *Sand-vik*, very satisfactory names in an Arran context, are quite common in the Western and Northern Isles (cf. *Breivig* in Barra, *Breivick* in Shetland; *Sandwick* in Lewis, etc.) and in other Norse colonial territory; they are also numerous in Norway itself, where there are over forty farm names called *Breið-vik* and over fifty called *Sand-vik* without any article and twenty-three called *Sandviken*, with the definite article.³⁰ How many Norwegian bays whose names never became farm names are called *Breið-vik* or *Sand-vik* is difficult to say; one suspects that there might well be many of them. *Ashdale* (Norse *aska-dalr*), like *Ascog* (Norse *aska-vik*) in neighbouring Bute, also has many Norwegian counterparts.

Other names like *Catacol*, *Goatfell*, and *Ranza*, the ‘rowan river’ of *Lochranza*, cannot be linked directly with equivalent names in Norway but their generics are common and their specifics do occur with other generics. There are, for instance, the Norwegian names *Kattaruð* and *Kattenes*, and there may be other compounds but it is not always easy to distinguish the animal name from a man’s name *Katta*. With *Goatfell* we might compare *Geitarberg*, *Geitarheimr*, and *Geitarskarf*, and *Ranza* with *Reinsnes* which contains Old Norse *rognir* ‘rowan’; there is also a Norwegian *Røyna* ‘rowan river’ but the specific of this is obviously the feminine noun *raun* ‘rowan’ and not its masculine counterpart as in *Ranza*. The Norwegian farm names that look most seductively similar, like *Reinsaasen*, *Reinsby*, *Reinsfjeld*, *Reinshausen*, *Reinsnaas*, and *Reinsviken*, contain either the word for ‘reindeer’ or a man’s name. It would be unproductive to look for exact equivalents for *Chalmadale*, *Ormidale*, *Scorrodale*, and *Skafitigill* since the analogical model ‘personal name plus topographic generic’ which is at work here allows as many different permutations as there are personal names and topographic generics. That these Arran names would also fulfil Norwegian morphological and semantic requirements and they would be acceptable in Norway, because all the personal names and generics also occur there, there is no doubt. Toponymically, then, Arran, at least seasonally for up to four hundred years, was in some coastal areas ‘Little Norway’ but this sphere of influence never had any noticeable impact on the island’s interior. The presence of one-ness name would have spoiled this picture; the presence of one -*boll*, -*bost*, or -*bo*, -*bu*, or -*bus* name would have destroyed it.

If I make short shrift of the English stratum this is because it forms a very thin toponymic veneer. Thoroughly-English-looking names like *King’s Cross*, *Black-waterfoot*, and *Whiting Bay* are very late additions; all of them are first on record either in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, all of them, like *Point*, involving a translation from Gaelic. The addition of English generics to Gaelic names shows the accretive nature of this nomenclature although some of them may be as much the

products of map-makers as local usage. Individual English imports of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries speak of industrial development, however short-lived, as in *Pirnmill*, and of the creation of smaller farms or cottages newly built or remodelled. Their names are often of an optimistic bent like *Springhill* or *Sunnybank*, or pay tribute to the ornamental and beautiful, as in *Primrose Cottage*, rather than to the roughly and strenuously agricultural.

What, then, are we to make of it all? Linguistically, the affinities of Arran place names are obvious and offer no surprises – Gaelic, Norse and English – although some Arran quirks have been added to the general picture. The majority of names speaks to us of an island that was thoroughly Gaelic for well over twelve hundred years, with a Norse adstratum in which references to permanent settlement, indeed any kind of settlement, are absent and in which hints at seasonal occupation and exploitation dominate. English names are late and snuggle in to a long-established pattern. The total absence of any linguistic clue to a pre-Gaelic Celtic or non-Celtic presence is, apart from the name *Arran*, itself disappointing.

The contents of the Gaelic and Norse names of Arran, especially the former, were determined by the sculpting that nature undertook as long as fifty to sixty million years ago, or certainly within the last five-and-a-half million years. Geologists may think of the effects on Arran, of the dirty, melting, slithering ice as merely cosmetic. For the people who have made their lives here for a millennium and a half they have been a matter of defining themselves within the world around them and, not least, of survival. The way in which these people have appropriated the island toponymically is a telling expression of this relationship to the land's surface. From a geological perspective, they appear to be a hardly noticeable scratch on an age-old granitic rock or sandstone deposit; for those of us who care about these scratches of a more immediate past they are often as elusive as the votive crosses in the Preaching Cave or as difficult to decipher as the runes on Holy Island but they are our darlings because often they are all we have; for the inhabitants of Arran they are the results of a vital creative process that has made life for them possible and has located them in the circumscribed topography of their insular existence while linking them at the same time with that larger world beyond the waters that surround them.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Dr. Alexander Cameron, 'Arran Place Names', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 15 (1888–89), 122–139, also printed as a *separatum* under the title *Arran Place Names Historically and Philologically Explained* (Inverness: Northern Chronicle, 1890); Ronald Currie, *The Place Names of Arran* (Glasgow, 1908); 'Place Names of Arran', Appendix I in R.A. Downie, *All About Arran* (London, 1933); Robert L. Bremner, 'Norse Place-Names of Arran, Grouped under their Old Norse, i.e. Icelandic Derivatives', Appendix D in W.M. Mackenzie, *The Book of Arran*, vol ii (Glasgow, 1914). There are also many occasional references to Arran

place names in works devoted to the island itself or to the history and geography of the Scottish west, especially in Norse times. The Gaelic pronunciation of several Arran names is included in Nils M. Holmer's survey of *The Gaelic of Arran* (Dublin, 1957). In *Nomina* 1.2 (1977) 35–36, George Broderick reported on his Ph.D. project of 'Collecting place names in Arran', indicating that 'Completion of this task will take place in due course' but the current status of that project is not known to the present writer. Mr. Ian A. Fraser of the School of Scottish Studies has been patiently compiling a card index documenting the place names of the island with a view to publication. He kindly gave me permission to peruse his files for this paper.

2. This is an extensively revised version of a paper read at the annual conference of the Scottish Society for Northern Studies held at Brodick, Arran, 10th to 14th April, 1991.

3. For a full account of these spellings and their significance see W.J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), 96–97.

4. *Ibid.*, 87.

5. *Ibid.*, 86.

6. *Ibid.*, 38.

7. *Ibid.*, 39.

8. *Ibid.*, 96–97.

9. Cameron, 'Arran Place Names', 2–3, considers a derivation from Gaelic *ara* 'kidney' extremely doubtful but has no alternative derivation to offer; Currie, *Place Names of Arran*, 13–14, rejects the connection with *ara* for sound reasons but the several alternative etymologies which he lists are all unacceptable, including the one he proposes – *Arr-inis* 'stag island' (*ibid.*, 15–19).

10. These manuscript spellings were kindly provided by Mr. Ólafur Halldórsson of *Stofnum Árna Magnússonar*, Reykjavik, Iceland. The exact archival references are available from the present writer.

11. In a letter of 2nd October, 1991.

12. Guðbrand Vigfusson, *Hákonar Saga* (Rolls Series, London, 1887). A translation by Sir B.W. Dasent was published in the same series as vol. 88.4 (1894). The ms. spellings provided by Mr. Halldórsson (see n.10) show that Vigfusson's emended spelling *Herrey* does not occur anywhere in the manuscripts.

13. A. MacBain, *Place Names Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Stirling, 1922), 78.

14. *Ibid.*, xix.

15. Watson, *Celtic Place Names*, 24, 37, 72.

16. See W.F.H. Nicolaisen, 'P.W. Joyce and Scotland', in B.S. MacAodha (ed.), *Topothesia: Essays presented to T.S. O'Maille* (Galway, 1982), 72–89.

17. Sir Herbert Maxwell, *Studies in the Topography of Galloway* (Edinburgh, 1887) and *The Place Names of Galloway* (Glasgow, 1930).

18. W.F.H. Nicolaisen, 'Scottish Place-Names: 24. *Slew-* and *sliabh-*', *Scottish Studies* 9 (1965), 91–106.

19. W.F.H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names: Their Study and Significance* (London, 1976), 39–45.

20. Y.M. Goblet (ed.), *A Topographical Index of the Parishes and Townlands of*

- Ireland* (Dublin, 1932), 355. The modern Anglicised form in Ireland is usually *Slieve*.
21. W.F.H. Nicolaisen, 'Maps of Space – Maps of Time', *Names* 32 (1984), 358–366; W.F.H. Nicolaisen, 'Place-Names Maps: How Reliable Are They?', in *Studia Onomastica; Festskrift till Thorsten Andersson* 23 Februari 1989 (Lund, 1989), 261–268.
22. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, 137.
23. *Ibid.*, 140.
24. *Ibid.*, 125.
25. *Ibid.*, 142.
26. Perhaps this is what Worsaae meant when he said that 'Norse place names have disappeared' (ere de norske Stedsnavne der forsvundne'). See J.J.A. Worsaae, *Minder om de Danske og Nordmaendene i England, Skotland og Irland* (Kjobenhavn, 1851), 345. If, however, as is more likely, the Danish term *Stedsnavne* in this context does not mean 'settlement names' but place names in general, then R.L. Bremner is quite right in objecting that 'this last statement is not correct', in 'Some Notes on the Norsemen in Argyllshire and on the Clyde', *Saga Book of the Viking Club* 3 (1904), 377.
27. This would confirm Worsaae's view (see n.26 above) that Arran (as well as Bute and Cumbrae) never had a Norse population *per se* ('de ikke have havt nogen egentlig norsk Befolkning'); this statement obviously refers to the lack of any *permanent* Norse settlement in these islands (see Bremner, *Some Notes*, 377).
28. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, 95.
29. See, for example, W.F.H. Nicolaisen, 'Scottish Analogues of Scandinavian Place-Names', *NORNA-rapporter* 45 (1991), 147–154.
30. Oluf Rygh (ed.), *Norske Gaardnavne*, 18 vols. (Kristiania/Oslo, 1898–1936).