

FETLAR

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ABSTRACT

This article rehearses the history of attempts to account for the name of the island of Fetlar in Shetland. It is concluded that explaining it as pre-Celtic is beset with philological difficulties and that it is probably, after all, Scandinavian, though details of its etymology remain open to debate.

The name of this island is regularly presented alongside those of neighbouring Unst and Yell as a linguistic anomaly in Shetland. This is because they are not obviously Scandinavian, especially as regards their apparent morphology; see for example MacDonald (1977, 107–111); Stewart (1987, 3–4); Fellows Jensen (1996, 116–117); Nicolaisen (1996, 4); Kruse (2005, 141–143); Gammeltoft (2005a, 123; 2007, 4, and 2010, 18–19); also Lindqvist (2015, 50–51), who, like others, regards all three names in their (post-)medieval guises as ‘Deopakisierung’, ‘de-opaque-isations’, i.e. as the result of ‘folk-etymology’ or analogical reformation). The present writer has attempted (Coates 2007) to explain *Yell* as Celtic, but several of the larger northern and western Scottish islands are still viewed as presenting a historical onomastic challenge for which no overarching Celtic solution has been or is likely to be found.¹ This paper aims to review the history of the quest to explain *Fetlar* and to clear the ground for an attempt at an etymology in which I think the direction of travel is justified even if the accommodation at the destination may get mixed ratings.

The one firm fact is that *fetlar* (singular *fetill*) is Old Norse for ‘carrying-straps, shoulder-straps’. However, no-one has come up with a plausible reason for believing this could be the ultimate source of the island’s name. The form of the word is plural; Haswell-Smith (2004, 473, **Fetlar**, entry 11.24) muses that Norse writers referred to Fetlar as if it were two isles, east and west.² He

1. As for Celtic in the Northern Isles, Gammeltoft (2010, 21–22) also sees a connection between the *Het-* which forms the original shape of the first element of *Shetland* and the Middle Irish ethnonym seen in *Insi Cat*, in addition to the well-recognised Celtic base of the name *Orkney* (cf. Old Irish *orc* ‘salmon’; ‘piglet, young boar’; ‘whale’ – the relevant etymological sense is much debated, but always animal; Nicolaisen 2003, 140). See also Jennings (2011a).

2. *Est Isle* and *Wast Isle*, as (?first) reported by Stewart (1968, 175), who says that the island ‘was always spoken of as a pair’ with these names, but gives no source material. (See also Lowe 1988 I, 245.) Following and embellishing Stewart’s remark, Haswell-Smith (2004, 473) states ‘... early Norse records always spoke of Fetlar as Est Isle and

suggests the name is to be understood as if in reference to two islands united by the significant earthwork, now degraded in parts, known as the *Funzie Girt* (*Funzie Gurd*, *Finnigirt*, *Finjigert*); see Maps 1 and 2. This feature appears to be named from being the western boundary of the East Isle settlement called *Funzie* /'fʏɹɪ/, /'fəɹɪ/, but it has been explained by Jakobsen (1936, 175) as being from Old Norse *Finna garðr* 'Finns' fence', where *Finnar* 'Finns' denotes the (mythical) early inhabitants of the island identified or postulated by Norse speakers.³ The settlement name itself is of unknown origin, but it can hardly be from the bare genitive plural *Finna* embedded in the supposed 'fence' name. It seems simplest to strip the *Funzie Girt* of its mythology, despite the alleged concentration of supernatural activity around it (Jakobsen 1936, 175) and conclude that it is 'the fence of Funzie', since there is no evidence that contradicts this.⁴ Jennings (2007) suggests that the place-name itself might derive from an (unspecified) Old Norse word meaning 'a place to look for, steer for, or head for'. *Funzie* was traditionally the first Shetland landfall for sailors from the east.

However, even if Haswell-Smith were right, '(the) carrying-straps' hardly seems an appropriate way of expressing the twin-isles concept in a name. Gammeltoft (2005b, 263) notes that such a plural name would be 'entirely

Wast Isle.' This cannot be literally true since *isle* is a French borrowing into Scots. Moreover, I have found no such forms in Norse/Norn documents in SD (Smith and Ballantyne 1999). However, names of this form do not need to be understood as denoting separate islands; compare *South Isle* and *North Isle* on Mousa, separated by a declivity crossing the island, much as Fetlar is dissected by two deep dips, though neither is so striking on the map as Mousa's — and the *Funzie Girt* (see immediately below) does not truly shadow either of them. The Mousa names are interpretable as 'north/south part of the isle'. On the other hand, the North and South Isles of Gletness are true separate islands. For the division of Fetlar into two groups of five scattalds, see Lowe (1988 II, 278, Fig. 53) and, somewhat differently, Stewart (1968, 175). This does not sit easily with Jakobsen's observation from his stay on Fetlar in the 1890s (1897, 117) that an old woman 'informed me, that she had been told by her grand parents, that the island ... had once been divided into three separate districts, each with its own ting or law-court', Herra being one. [*Scattald*: a unit of rough upland grazing (Smith 1984; Coull 2003).]

3. Compare what is said about the 'Finns' and the representation of Otherness in eastern Scandinavia by Aalto (2014, 216–218) and Aalto and Lehtola (2017, 14–16), and by Jennings (2011b).

4. *Funzie* is a township (*Feinzie*, 1578–79, SD 260), but there is no individual croft of this name. For some discussion of the place's farming history, see Thomson (1970, 176), who suggests nevertheless that the place originated as a single farm of that name. His article does not mention the *Funzie Girt*. Jakobsen (1936, 175) guardedly equates the place-name with *Funningur* on Eysturoy in the Faroe Islands, but that does not look right.

unprecedented', echoing mildly the blunter words of Jakobsen (1936, 118) about earlier proposals: '... the explanations hitherto offered are useless.' Johnston (1892, 110) had toyed with a link with Icelandic *fitla* 'to touch lightly'. Edmondston (1866b, 150) had attributed to P. A. Munch a connection with Old Norse *fótr* 'leg or foot' and *lær* 'thigh' (cf. Munch 1875, 153–154; Taylor 1954, 118), 'from a fanciful resemblance in the shape of the island to a human thigh', according to Dasent in his introduction to his translation of *Orkneyinga saga* (1894, viii). Edmondston mentions various other similarities to words in Scandinavian languages with proper scepticism. I assume that such ideas are the ones diplomatically anonymized and panned by Jakobsen.⁵

Haswell-Smith's apparently preferred suggestion (2004, 473) is followed by the author of the page about Fetlar (2011) on the Undiscovered Scotland website⁶ in suggesting that the name comes 'from the Old Norse for *prosperous* or *fat land*'. But the earliest spellings, to which we now turn, do not support derivation from Old Norse *feitr* 'fat'.⁷

THE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

The textual evidence from the Middle Ages is sparse, but appears as follows:

IN POETRY

References follow the edition *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*.

5. Edmondston (1866b, 150):

... said to have been anciently written Foetilor and Fotilara, and, according to Munch, Foetalar, and Fétélaa, and Fotlara. In Norse, Foti means a foot, and Laer the thigh; Leir is clay or mud (argilla). Fótlaigr is short-legged. Fotul, or Fetill, a band to bind with, a fettle. ... (151) Also, in Norse, is a word Fiddlur, explained by [Óskar] Haldorsson as "Tricke, Iilde, Forvikling" ... entangling or fettering. All this, however, is very doubtful. It has been suggested to me that this island was formerly 'Fedorsoy' – i.e. 'Theodore's Island.'

For more on the post-literary attested name-forms, see below.

The material in glossaries of Shetland vocabulary reveals nothing that is likely to have a bearing on the etymology of *Fetlar* except insofar as it continues Old Norse. Edmondston (1866a, 30–33) records *faittle* 'to wind a band around an object', *fettle* 'a horse-girth made of straw, a straw-rope', *feytllins* 'the skin from the legs of an ox, of which "rivlins" ['rawhide sandals', RC] are made,' and *fittl* 'to take short steps in walking'. Stout (1914, 43) has *fettle* 'bearing-band', which in the applications of this form noted by both authors is clearly from the singular of Old Norse *fetlar*.

6. <<https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/fetlar/fetlar/index.html>>, accessed 18 July 2019.

7. A number of works on Scottish place-names, or on British names more generally, which might have included Fetlar are silent about it: Darton 1994, Nicolaisen 2001, Room 2003.

Superscript roman numerals refer to volumes of this series.

Anonymous *Pulur, Eyja heiti* (Pul Eyja) 4/3^{III} (ed. Gurevich 2017)

fætilǫr (normalised *Fetilǫr*) c.1300 (A)

The text is believed to have been compiled c.1200, and the only significant manuscript is AM 748 1 b 4^o (A), c.1300–25. *pula*, plural *pulur*: a versified catalogue (from about 1200) of poetic terms, in the case of **Pul Eyja** terms for islands. **Pul Eyja 4** contains mostly Norwegian names, but also includes three from Shetland.

<æ> in this MS occurs for both historic [e] and [æ:], the latter representing the *i*-mutation of <á>. The metre of the *pula* requires that the vowels in the name are short, with so-called *resolution* of the first two syllables, i.e. two short syllables functioning as the metrical equivalent as one long.⁸

Note also:

Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Víkingarvísur* (Sigv Víkv) 12/3^I (ed. Jesch 2012)

(*i*) *fetla firði* (normalised (*i*) *Fetlafirði*) c.1250–1300 (Holm2)

The form (confirmed in other MSS) is dative singular, implying a nominative form **Fetlafjörðr*.

Sigv Víkv 12, composed in the early eleventh century, is quoted within a narrative of raids on southern Europe in two related works by Snorri Sturluson (died 1241): *The Separate Saga of S. Óláfr* and his great compilation *Heimskringla*. The name also occurs in the preceding prose. The oldest MS. of the *Separate Saga* is Holm perg 2 40 (Holm2, c.1250–1300), while for most of *Heimskringla* seventeenth-century paper transcripts of *Kringla* constitute the best witness, since the medieval MSS only survive in small fragments.

(*vestr i*) *Fetlafiorð* is also found in a corresponding narrative in the saga-compilation *Fagrskinna* (c.1220; main MS Oslo University Library 371 fol^x (Fsk B^x, c.1700, fol. 40v; ed. Finnur Jónsson 1902–03, 143).⁹ **Sigv Víkv 12** is not cited, but other verses from the poem are, and the compiler may well have known this one.

This is a (the only) certain toponymic occurrence of *fetill*. It appears in a very early (11th-century) Old Norse verse, though the scholarly tradition

does not associate it with Fetlar, not least because the word is compounded with *fjörðr* ‘sea inlet, firth’,¹⁰ and *fjörðr* ‘sea inlet, firth’ does not match the topography of Fetlar. Moreover, and crucially, the narrative sequence in both poem and sagas points to a much more southerly location, as we shall see. Despite this, the existence of this name is helpful in establishing that the word may appear as the qualifying element in a place-name and, if the place could be identified, it might help in establishing what kind of topography (if any) it denoted. In its narrative context, a numbered sequence of coastal military engagements in Europe (here the twelfth), it has been taken to be the major arm of the sea called *a Ría de Betanzos* (‘the firth of Betanzos’) in Galicia (e.g. Finlay 2003, 314 (index); Jesch 2012, stanza 12, line 3, citing Johnsen 1916, 16–17; probably not France as suggested by Finnur Jónsson 1902–03, 408, and Taylor 1954, 118). At the head of this inlet is Betanzos, identified as the Roman town of Flauvium Brigantium. Scrutiny of Google Earth images has not led me to identify any feature that suggests the reason for the Norse name; but see further below.

IN PROSE

Magnúss saga skemmri (‘The shorter saga of Magnús’) **chapter 20** (ed. Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, 328)

(*norðan of*) *fetilár* c.1400 (235)

The saga of St Magnus of Orkney probably originated at the end of the twelfth century and the ‘short’ version is preserved in AM 235 fol. (235, c.1400,¹¹ fol.10ra). The phrase is sometimes cited as *af* (‘from’) *Fetilár*, but the photographic image of the page on the *Skaldic Poetry* and *Handrit*¹² websites shows clearly that the preposition is *of* (‘over, through’). *Af* would require the dative case, which renders the phrase as transmitted problematic because an indication of the dative case of a recognisable noun is lacking. *Of* may take the accusative, which, if a suggestion I make two paragraphs below is accepted, is unproblematic.

The <e> generally indicates a short vowel in this manuscript, but it might in theory represent long [e:]. This would however not allow an interpretation of *fetilár* in any of the languages mentioned in this paper, and would be

8. I am indebted to Professor Kari Ellen Gade for confirming this point through the good offices of Professor Diana Whaley.

9. þaðan for hann vestr i Fetlafiorð oc atte þar orrastu hina tolfth ‘from there he went west to F. and had the twelfth battle there’.

10. Fetlar is separated from neighbouring Yell by seaways with the Norse-derived name-element *sund* (< *sund*) and the two major inlets in the island itself are named with the Norse-derived *wick* (< *vík*). It has no *fjörðr*.

11. So most sources, though the *Skaldic Poetry* website gives c.1275–1300.

12. <[https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/imaging/da/AM02-0235#page/9v++\(22+of+140\)/mode/zup](https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/imaging/da/AM02-0235#page/9v++(22+of+140)/mode/zup)>.

inconsistent with the point about the metre of the þula explained above. The significance of the apparent stroke on the <a> is not fully clear. If it is authentic and not an error, and if it indicates vowel length, which seems inescapable but highly unusual in this manuscript, it suggests that the second element of the island name might be the plural of *lá* f. ‘the line of shoal water along the shore, edged by the surf’ (Cleasby - Vigfusson; so also in Modern Icelandic (Zoëga, s.v.)). *Of fetilár* would thus mean ‘across the ... lines of shoal water’; for a further possibility involving *á* f. ‘river’, see below.

Note that

Orkneyinga saga (‘The saga of the Orkney men’) chapter 57 (ed. Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, 126 and n. 2) makes reference to the Faroe Islands at the corresponding point:

ór Færeyjum

Magnúss saga lengri (‘The longer saga of Magnús’) chapter 34 (ed. Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, 377) makes a more general reference to Shetland at the corresponding point:

af Hjaltlandi

Magnúss saga skemmri chapter 20, on the other hand, has *Fetilár*. Taking into account the relative geographical salience of the three named places, this would appear to be the *lectio difficilior* and is accepted here as an authentic medieval reference to Fetlar.

IN PRE-1588 NON-LITERARY TEXTS

Documents are in Scots unless stated otherwise.

Føtalare 1490 Diplomatarium Norvegicum [DN] VIII, no. 426, variants *Søtalare*, *Søthalar*; in Norwegian. [This is transcribed *Føtalare* 1490 Shetland Documents [SD] 32, from a certified copy (*vidisse*) of a document of 1516, translated into English, but names and terms of art are diplomatic.]

Given the literary records cited above and the evidence that follows, it is probably safe to regard the <ø> in this form as anomalous. Perhaps it is due to local labialisation after initial [f], as in Faroese, or perhaps it arises through a sequence of scribal reinterpretations <æ> >> <œ> >> <ø>.

Fetlar 1554 [copy dated 1624] SD 98

Fetler 1554 SD 99

Fetlar, *Fetler* 1558 SD 112

Fatler [x 3] 1560 SD 123

Vettelo, *Vetelloe* 1562, Staatsarchiv Bremen; correspondence in Low German preceding SD 140 and cited in a note to that document; <v> is a Low German

representation of /f/

Fetlo 1563 SD 140; original in Low German; as with the previous item, the indigenous name is clearly reduced and compounded with Middle Low German *ô* ‘island’

Fetlare 1563 SD 183, 1572 SD 193, 1576, 1578 Stipends of ministers (SD appendix 5)

Fetlair 1560s Books of Assumption (SD appendix 4) 132r, 1576 Stipends of ministers (SD appendix 5), 1577 SD 237 11v, 13r, 14r, 16v, 17r, 19v, 20r, 20v, 21r [otherwise occasionally *Fetlar*], 1587 Shetland Documents II 102

Fettlar 1560s Books of Assumption (SD appendix 4) 134v [otherwise *Fetlar*]

Fetelaa 1575 SD 212; in Danish ‘with one or two Norwegianisms’

Other mentions, including some interpretations as opposed to sourced citations, include

Faetilör, as cited by Goudie (1892–96, 307)

faetilør [sic], as cited by Jakobsen (1936, 127), apparently knowing *Þul Eyja* 4/3^{III}

Fotlara, or *Pheodor-oy* 1582 George Buchanan, *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*, Book I, 47. Buchanan apparently knew of the spelling in DN VIII 426 (above), but the source of the alternative is unknown. Edmondston (1866b, 151) clearly knew this form, mentioning an anonymous suggestion made to him that it represented *Theodore*.

Pheodor Øy 1665 Blaeu’s map, following Buchanan¹³

Fetlor 1703 Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*

The most frequently encountered ancient spelling of the name outside academic literature is *Fætilar*. This, so far as I can tell, was first used by Anderson (1873, Preface), but I do not know on what authority. It is the sole form cited by Field (1980, 71) and it is the form used in some versions of Wikipedia. For example, Gaelic Wikipedia says ‘Lochlannais/Nornais [*sic* for *Nòrnais*]: Fætilar’. But Faroese Wikipedia offers *Fötilör* (1490), which is not a correctly cited form.¹⁴ The variety of spellings in the record led Taylor (1954, 118) to suggest pre-Norse origin and ‘that there may never have been any one definite ON form’. This is too pessimistic.

13. These aberrant forms in <Ph->, and a few similar ones with <F->, are explained by Stewart (1968, 175) as possibly from [Old Norse] *foeda* ‘food’ + *øy* ‘island’, but that does not suit forms with medial <r>.

14. Also a variant of an etymology mentioned above which is not supported by the record: ‘Navnið er helst av piktiskum uppruna, men kann eisini vera norrønt “Fetaland” í týdninginum “fitilendi”. (‘The name is probably of Pictish origin, but can also be Norse “Fetaland” in the sense “fat pasture” [a technical term of husbandry in the Faroe Islands, RC].)’

DISCUSSION

As we have seen, the current consensus is that, despite the heavily Scandinavian cultural context and despite its superficial appearance, the name is ‘pre-Scandinavian’ or ‘pre-Norse’. However, Gammeltoft (2005b, 259; 2010, 19) makes, in passing, an appropriately qualified claim that deserves deeper analysis, namely that *Unst*, *Yell* and *Fetlar* ‘seem to be adaptations of Pictish names to Old Norse.’ It appears that he is using ‘Pictish’ as a default equivalent of ‘pre-Scandinavian’, but there is reason to be wary.

It is now widely accepted that Pictish was a P-Celtic language which had absorbed some toponymy from an earlier, unidentified, substrate (Forsyth 1997, especially 21–22). Pictland may or may not have extended as far north as Shetland; there seems to be no corroborative linguistic evidence that it did, and much would therefore hinge on whether it is defensible to equate the bearers of the broch-building culture or the carvers of the ‘Pictish’ stones with speakers of the Pictish language. But if Pictish shared key phonological features with Brittonic, it would follow that it had no inherited initial /f-/. Such a phoneme develops in Brittonic from Proto-Celtic initial sequences */sp-/ and */sr-/. These developments occur no later than the second half of the sixth century (Jackson 1953, 526, 528).¹⁵ The new pronunciations might therefore have been heard in the mid-first millennium in Brittonic-speaking territory but, even if that had been the case, the appearance of unlenited intervocalic /t/ in early spellings of *Fetlar* rules out a Brittonic-type, or indeed a Gaelic-type, etymology without special pleading. It is therefore improbable that *Fetlar* is of any kind of Celtic origin unless that Celtic was of an untypical and undocumented type; and indeed there is no obvious etymology to be gained out of a form */fet-/*fed- with P-Celtic initial *s + consonant, as can be judged from the comprehensive list of toponymic elements discussed by James (2019) or from Continental Celtic place-names (Falileyev 2010). In addition, if early Pictish/P-Celtic had absorbed an unknown earlier toponymy, any earlier name with initial /f-/ would not have survived adaptation intact.

The problem of the initial consonant is all the more acute because not one of the other languages which, however implausibly, have been considered candidates for involvement in the prehistoric toponymy of Britain had an initial /f/. That rules out not only Proto-Indo-European or Proto-Celtic and their immediate descendants, but also North-West Semitic (Gzella 2011, 432–35) and its daughters (Phoenician and Punic), and Pre-Basque (Trask 1997, 125–28, 132); that is, neither Old European nor Vennemann’s hypothesised

‘Semitidic’ and ‘Vasconic’ substrates can be of any help (Vennemann 2003), and the hypothetical Mediterranean sailors of Coates (2012) cannot have contributed the name.

Unless we continue to favour attribution to an unknown source, or settle for complete agnosticism, it seems that we must come back to Old Scandinavian, which did indeed have initial /f-/. We might bear in mind that North Germanic had no native initial */p-/, and that that phoneme appears only in loanwords. Might [f] have been a very early attempt to render the [p] of some other language? Proto-Celtic */p/ is generally believed to have passed through a stage [ϕ], a voiceless bilabial fricative (see for example Lewis and Pedersen 1961, 26), which has evident articulatory and perceptual affinities with labiodental [f]. But, with a few special caveats, that change and the subsequent general loss of the fricative were complete in both branches of insular Celtic in prehistoric times (Thurneysen 1946, 138–39; Jackson 1953, 394). It is impossible to envisage any scenario in which such an early Celtic development could have been heard by speakers of North Germanic/Old Scandinavian in a Shetland colonised by them in the eighth century. Since North Germanic had no native /p/ (see above), one might contemplate a very early adaptation of a P-Celtic (i.e. here Pictish) [p] by phoneme substitution. But there is no solid linguistic evidence for P-Celtic Pictish north of the southern part of Sutherland (as witness the three lexical maps in Nicolaisen 1996; also Jackson 1956, 149–53). In any case, that most characteristic of Pictish toponymic elements, *pett* ‘share, piece’ (or a borrowing of it into other languages), which might excite attention here as a possible source for *Fet-*, has not been found to occur in an island name. Jakobsen (1936, 169–73) noted a few local names in *Pett-* in Shetland. He believed the word derives from the name of the Picts and implied that folk memory has associated the word for the possible older inhabitants with trolls or other supernatural beings present in the landscape. It follows from that that local names of the type *Petta-X* are Norse, because *X* is invariably a Norse generic, and that they mean something like ‘trolls’ *X*. Whatever the truth about this anthropologically interesting matter, the existence of such names definitively removes the possibility that the island name can have descended from a Celtic form with initial /p-/. It is safe to say that *Fetlar* cannot be Pictish, nor P-Celtic more generally.

STEPS FORWARD?

A Scandinavian solution may be possible after all.

The name as first transmitted has three syllables. The many records clearly suggest that the first syllable contained an unrounded mid to low front vowel. The conventions used in writing Old Norse allow the possibility that

15. *Forcus* on the Drosten/St Vigeans 1 ‘Pictish’ symbol stone is evidently Celtic, indeed Gaelic, with <f> for proto-Celtic */w-/, as has long been established (Jackson 1956, 140; Clancy 1993 and 2017).

where <æ> or <e> appear in the first syllable they might be for a long mid-low front vowel of the type [ɛ:]; or for a short high-mid vowel of the type [e] (which seems required by the weight of the manuscript and modern phonetic evidence alongside the metrical evidence for a short vowel); or conceivably [œ:], i.e. a reflex of *i*-mutated [ɔ:] (Gordon, Taylor 1957, 266–67). There is one (Norwegian) record (*Føtalare* in 1490) suggesting a rounded vowel. The second vowel is [i]. The third is either a front mid rounded vowel whose length cannot be ascertained, [ö], or else [a]. The poetic record favours [ö] or the like; in the prose record we find [a]. The early-modern record also appears to favour [a], but it is possible that <a>-spellings of this period represent local reductions of an [ö]-like vowel to schwa. The consonant frame is completely consistent [f...t...l...r], with minor adjustments arising only in a Low German documentary context.

It seems inescapable that, for whatever reason, the first element is *fetill* ‘strap’.¹⁶ Most previous commentators have not taken into consideration that the final syllable as transmitted does not necessarily represent the Old Norse plural suffix *-ar*. But Lindqvist (2015, 51) describes the form in *Magnúss saga skemmri* (*fetilár*) as ‘looking like a compound’. The most obvious such compound would be *fetil-ár* ‘strap rivers’. It is not clear to me in what sense the main south-flowing burns of Fetlar, those of Northdale, Feal and Aith, might be viewed as strap-like, unless straightness was an essential characteristic of *fetilar*; but in any case such a solution requires metonymy: a description of watercourses being applied as the name of the island which contains them.

Another possible solution which is not structurally difficult, but which offers an onomastic difficulty instead, is that the name represents the singular *fetill* + (following the poetic record) *örr* ‘scar’. That would suggest that the island is named by metonymy from (presumably) the Funzie Girt, itself understood metaphorically as the scar in the landscape in the form of a strap. This solution respects the *lectio difficilior* of the possible second element and the phonology implied by the earliest spelling, but introduces the difficulties that (1) so far as I know, neither *fetill* nor *örr* has otherwise been found in toponymic use in the Atlantic islands and (2) that early Norse toponymy is not noted for being metaphorical except in the sense that, as in other Germanic languages, some widespread and general landform words such as *hryggr* ‘back; ridge’ or *hals* ‘neck; pass’ are applications of body-part terms. These analogies may be enough to help the case, but I know of no other walls being named as

16. The word *fetill* is evidenced in the byname of *Þorbiörn fētill* in one manuscript of *Ectors saga* (1713). Kalinke (2012, 86, note 38) would prefer to normalise the word to *fetill* for MS-internal consistency, but *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*, as cited in her article, opts for *fetill*.

if they were scars (?in the form of raised welts). The suggestion might also gain credibility if the unique spelling with a final <-e>, recorded in a legal document at the late date of 1490, could be interpreted as the otherwise absent reflex of *ey* ‘island’. However that does not seem to be defensible because <-e> for this element is otherwise unknown in Shetland.

A further and still less attractive metonymic solution might be that the second element is *ögr* ‘inlet, small bay or creek’; the loss of a voiced fricative representable by <g> in the Old Norse record would not be particularly remarkable from a general phonetic perspective, but I know of no analogy in Norse for this. The word is found in a local name in western Iceland: *Í Ögri, Ögrs-vatn* (Cleasby, Vigfusson 1957, s.v.).¹⁷ But ‘strap inlet’ creates problems of its own, of both interpretation (as an island name) and identification (of the source of the metonym), although the point at which the Funzie Girt in its prime descended to the small bay at Houbie might be suggestive.

Fourthly, we might also consider *vörr* ‘fenced-in landing-place’ as the second element (Cleasby, Vigfusson 1957, s.v.), with <v> lost before a rounded vowel (Gordon, Taylor 1957, 279), but again a metonymic understanding of such a name (as ‘island with such a landing-place’) is required. This is evidently a topographical word, but I have not found it in toponymic use in Old Norse. If the spelling with <á> in the prose of *Magnúss saga skemmri* is the one to be taken seriously, then the best solution might be that the island-name is for **fetil-lár* ‘strap shoals’, perhaps ‘shoals of a linear form’, used metonymically as a name for the island bordered by shoals showing unusual linearity. *Of Fetilár* in the saga is then unproblematically ‘over or through such shoals (used as the island name)’, in the accusative plural form. That said, there is no bathymetric evidence of any such shallows around Fetlar that differ in kind from those around the other islands of Shetland. However there is a long (over one kilometre) shallowly shelving sea floor in the north-west (landward) sector of Fetlar’s largest inlet, the Wick of Tresta on the south side of the island. Perhaps it is not too much to see the name as alluding to the curving ‘strap’ of partly vegetated dunes which separate these shallows from the freshwater lake Papil Water (see image).¹⁸

17. The farm Ögur still exists, on the southern shore of Ísafjarðardjúp in the north-west of the island, close to a distinct small bay (Google Earth).

18. *Laar* in modern Shetland means ‘breeze’ (*Dictionary of the Scots language*), irrelevant here.



Papil Water (Ian Moodie, CC BY-SA 2.0) and the north-west end of Wick of Tresta, taken from Fitsyi Field on Lamb Hoga, with Stackaberg (centre) and Vord Hill (right) in the distance.

It is a large step, but if it could be concluded that *fetill* was, originally metaphorically, applied to a tombolo or a sand-bar of any description, then ‘shallows by the tombolo or sand-bar’ is not too fanciful a literal description of the landward end of the Wick of Tresta, though we still need to acknowledge a metonymic application of that description as the name of the island.¹⁹ But if that is an acceptable solution, the intriguing possibility arises that the *Fetlafljóðr* mentioned by Sigvatr Þórðarson can be understood as ‘sea inlet marked with a tombolo or sand-bar’. A classic instance of a feature describable in this way is the Ría de Arousa, the firth in Galicia that allows the closest sea approach to Santiago de Compostela (Martínez-Graña et al. 2017). Near its entrance, on its southern side, is *O Vao* ‘the ford’ in Galician, known touristically as the site of the *Praia da Lanzada*, a large tombolo attaching the island-like peninsula on which the town of O Grove sits to the mainland of Pontevedra province. Such a location would not do any harm to the sequence of battles set out by Sigvatr in *Víkingarvísur*.

Arne Kruse (2005, 143) correctly notes that *Fetlar* is among those northern and western Scottish island names which ‘... are unusual because they are ... among the very few island names in the Norse colonies without the generic *-ey*, and semantically they are atypical because they do not have a content which instantly relates the island to a location, shape or ownership in the form of a personal name.’ I acknowledge that each of the tentative suggestions just offered is partly atypical in these respects, especially where there is an appeal to metonymy, which amounts to a lack of ‘instant relation’ because it is a trope. But the conclusion I offer is that, whilst they each present difficulties, whether of form, chronology or literal applicability to the place, these are not collectively so great as to rule out the phonologically based possibility that the name of *Fetlar* is Scandinavian in origin. On the other hand it cannot, I submit,

19. *Tombolo* ‘a bar or spit of sand or shingle joining an island to the mainland’ (OED).

be P-Celtic, and no other possibility seems thinkable. If it is a Scandinavian reinterpretation of an earlier name, there are insuperable phonological obstacles to identifying the language in which any such name was formulated.

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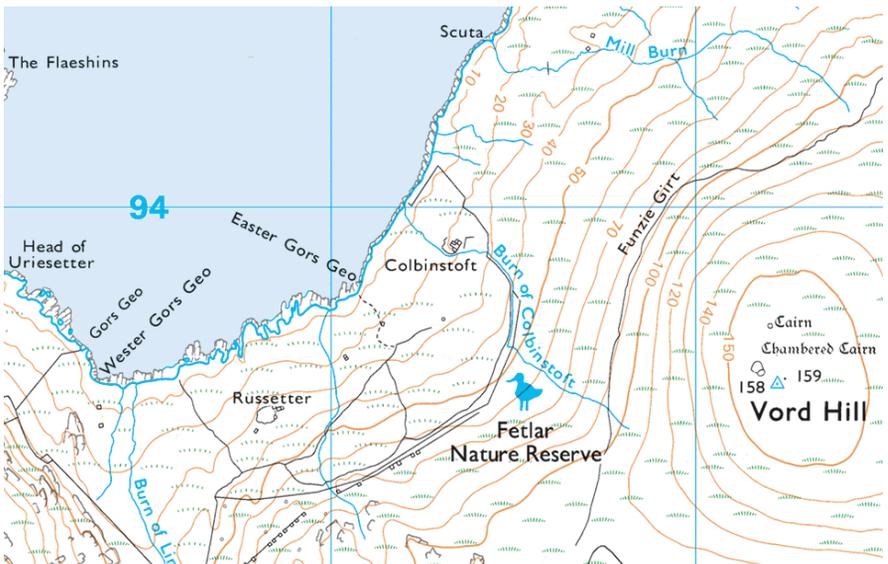
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Map 1: Fetlar. The Funzie Girt curves round on a hillside on the west side of Vord Hill and peters out in the direction of Houbie.



Map 2: The upper surviving part of the Funzie Girt on Vord Hill