

## VARIA

## CLISEAM

Richard A. V. Cox, *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, University of the Highlands and Islands*

According to the Board of Ordnance's Object Name Book, 1876–1878,<sup>1</sup> *Cliseam*, at 2,622ft in.,<sup>2</sup> is the highest mountain in the Outer Hebridean Isle of Harris. The 1st edition of the Board of Ordnance's 1:10,560 map (1843–82) spells the name *Clisham*,<sup>3</sup> while the Object Name Book also gives the variant spellings *Cleisham* and *Clisheim*. These are English-based orthographic forms, of course. The name is pronounced in Scottish Gaelic with an open *a* in the final syllable, viz [ˈkʰlʲiʃam], hence the Gaelic spelling *Cliseam*.

*Cliseam* seems most probably to derive from an Old Norse name in initial *klif* nt, gen. sg. *klifs*, 'steep mountain with path' or 'steep rocky ascent; path up a steep slope', which is found, for example, in the watercourse name *Cliosgro* [ˈkʰlʲi ʃkro]<sup>4</sup> from ON *Klifsgróf* '[the] stream of the steep rocky ascent'.

The *klif* in question would seem to be *An Aonaig Mhòr*, the steep, rugged cliff-face immediately to the north of the summit of *Cliseam*.<sup>5</sup>

The substantive *klif* is related to ON *kleiv*<sup>6</sup> 'steep rocky ascent; path up a steep slope', found, for example, in the Old Norse loan-names *Cliasgro* and *Cliasproc*,<sup>7</sup> in which the Old Norse diphthong *ei* yields an expected diphthong [ia] – via earlier long [e:] – before a non-palatal consonant in modern Gaelic.

1 Inverness-shire, Outer Hebrides, Vol. 4 (OS1/18/4/173): 'The name applies to the highest mountain in Harris which is situated about 6 miles East of Tarbert and about a mile and a half N W of the Public Road leading to Stornoway.' <<http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/ordnance-survey-name-books/inverness-shire-os-name-books-1876-1878/inverness-shire-outer-hebrides-volume-04/173#zoom=2&lat=1096.5&lon=1651.5&layers=B>>.

2 At 799m (Drummond 2007, 71).

3 Sheet XI, surveyed 1878, published 1881.

4 Located in Borghaston, Lewis.

5 ONB (OS1/18/4/144): *Aonaig Mhòr* (without article) 'Is applied to a cliff of considerable size situated on the north side of the hill called Clisham. Signification "Big cliff": With *G aonaig* f. (Dwelly A: 'a boulder of stone'), a word related to *G aonach* m. '(steep) hill' and *aonadh* m. 'ascent' (MacBain 1911, s. v.).

6 In the following reconstructions, the word is neuter, though it is cited in dictionaries as feminine.

7 Located in An t-Acha' Mòr and Siabost a Deas, Lewis, respectively; from ON *Kleifsgróf* '[the] stream of the *kleif*' and *Kleifsbrokku* '[the] slope of the *kleif*'.



CLISEAM AND RELATED SUMMITS FROM THE NNE

Similarly, *Cliasam Creag* [ˈkʰlʲiasəm ˌkʰrʲek]<sup>8</sup> seems likely to derive from an ON *Kleifsholm-creag* ‘*Kleifsholm-crag*’, where *Kleifsholm-* ‘the knoll of the *kleif*’ is a former Norse name and *creag* (albeit written in modern Gaelic here) represents a Gaelic loan-word in Old Norse.<sup>9</sup> ON *holmr* m. (or *holmi* m.) is more usually found in the sense ‘islet’, e.g. *Cràgam*,<sup>10</sup> *Bhiondalam*,<sup>11</sup> *Grèineam*<sup>12</sup> and *Lingeam*,<sup>13</sup> with the vocalism of final [-am] in these names<sup>14</sup> marking the development of an earlier long vowel, since shortened on the loss of the lateral. In the case of *Cliasam Creag*, the element has been reduced further in stressless position to [-əm].

In the case of *Cliseam*, a derivation from an ON *Klifsholm* acc. seems doubtful unless we can suppose that the sense of ON *holmr* had been extended here to mean ‘mountain’.

An alternative generic might be ON *hvammr* m., which equates well in sense with G *coire* m. ‘corrie’; so ON *Klifshvamm* acc. ‘the corrie of the cliff-face’, the corrie in question lying immediately below *An Aonaig Mhòr*.<sup>15</sup>

In this scenario, ON *Klifshvamm* acc. originally referred to the corrie below the steep cliff-face of the mountain, but the name, either in its Old Norse form or in its Gaelic rendering, *Cliseam*, has been transferred to denote the mountain itself, while the notable cliff-face has since acquired its own, Gaelic name, *An Aonaig Mhòr*.

A further development has taken place in that the name *Cliseam* is frequently found with a preceding masculine Gaelic article, i.e. *An Cliseam*, e.g. *leathad a' Chliseim* ‘the hillside of *An Cliseam*’ (NicGumaraid 2006, 26); *gu deas air a' Chliseam* ‘to south of *An Cliseam*’ (Eòghan Stiùbhart, *The Scotsman* 22 October 2016); which in turn has given rise to the English form *The Clisham*.

Watson (1904a, xlv) opines that Norse loan-names in Gaelic ‘very seldom, and then only in Lewis, never on the mainland’ contain the Gaelic article. Elsewhere, Watson (1904b, 29) states that ‘The presence of the [Gaelic] article

8 The name might be written *Cliasamcreag*; located in Cirbhig, Lewis.

9 *G creag* is attested as a loan-word elsewhere in Lewis in names of Old Norse creation, e.g. \**Creigeastròm* [ˈkʰrʲekʲə ˌstrəm] (cf. Oftedal 1980, 188). The possibility of *Cliasam Creag* being a Scots creation, i.e. with Scots *crag* (< G *creag*), is ruled out by the absence of any similar examples in the area (Cox 2002); and of being a Gaelic creation by the absence of lenition in final *-creag*.

10 ON *Kræk-holm* acc. ‘crow-isle’.

11 ON *Vind-holm* acc. ‘wind-isle’ acc. (Cox 2000, 213ff).

12 ON *Grón-holm* acc. ‘[the] green isle’.

13 ON *Lynq-holm* acc. ‘heather-knoll’.

14 Located in Càrlabhagh, ditto, Britheascleit and An Dùn, Lewis, respectively.

15 ONB (loc. cit.): *Coire na h-Aonaig Mòire*.

is usually a sign that the name with which it goes is either pure Gaelic or borrowed into Gaelic and naturalised. Norse names are very rarely found with the Gaelic article, except in Lewis, where it is not so uncommon.' He may be thinking of forms like *Na h-Eileabhatan* and *Na h-Eubhatan* 'the Eileabhats' and 'the Eubhats', respectively, which are collective Gaelic forms built on names long since borrowed from Old Norse. These pluralised forms are similar to the likes of the English name *The Cairngorms*, a collective name for the range of mountains near Aviemore, one of which has the Gaelic name *An Càrn Gorm* 'the dark hill'. Watson repeats his earlier observation (1904a, lvi), noting that 'In Lewis ordinary Norse names are sometimes found with the article, e.g. *Cnoc a' Mhiasaid*', but this is 'the hill of the basin', with G. *miasaid* m. < EG *mías* (< Lat. *mensa*) + suffix of place (Cox 2002, 149 and 60); Cox 1992, 143.

In the case of *Cliseam*, the use of the article may have been inspired by its use elsewhere in the trio of Gaelic names for the juxtaposed summits *An Cliseam*, *An t-Isean*'s *An Langa*.<sup>16</sup> *An t-Isean* 'the wee one'<sup>17</sup> denotes the low peak between *Cliseam* and *Mulla fo Dheas*. *An Langa* is cited as *Langa* on Black's 1862 map,<sup>18</sup> but as *Mullach an Langa* by local informants in the ONB (OS1/18/4/92) and on modern maps. The element *mullach* 'summit' occurs in over seven names in the area and its use with *An Langa* may have been further prompted by the adjacent *Mulla fo Dheas* and *Mulla fo Thuath*, the latter once cited in the ONB as *Mullach fo Thua*[*th*] (OS1/18/4/146). I have recorded *An Lang* [ə<sup>1</sup>ɫ̪ɑŋk] and *An Langa Deas/Tuath*<sup>19</sup> [ə<sup>1</sup>ɫ̪ɑŋkə<sup>1</sup>ɫ̪ɛs/ɫ̪hʉə] – the latter presumably regional variants for *Mulla fo Dheas* and *Mulla fo Thuath* – and it seems more likely that [ə<sup>1</sup>ɫ̪ɑŋk(ə)] represents an ON *á Langinum*, with the preposition *á* in the sense of 'at, on or by', with the dative of *Langrinn* 'the long one [= ridge]', with substantival use of the adjective

*langr* 'long' + suffixed article (Rygh 1919, 26–27; Sandnes and Stemshaug 1980, 200).<sup>20</sup>

The use of the suffixed article in Old Norse forms surviving in Gaelic place-names is attested elsewhere, for example in the names *Lòbaid* < ON *Hlaupit* 'the leap' (Ofstedal 1980, 186), *Stafainn* < ON *Stafinn* 'the pillar' (Cox 1992, 143) and inferred in a group of names derived from Old Norse forms structured

16 MacIver (1934, 48): '*Langa* is the long hill. An Clisham, an t-Isean san Langa, side by side.'

17 *G isean* refers to 'the young of any bird or small animal' and *An t-Isean* is usually translated as 'the chicken'.

18 <<http://maps.nls.uk/joins/759.html>>.

19 Or *An Lang a Deas/Tuath*.

20 Such a loan-shift (Cox 2009, 19–25) is also found, for example, in G *Na Hearadh* (The Isle of Harris) < ON *Herað* '[the] district' (Cox 2008, 52).

generic + specific, e.g. *Beirgh Làgha* < ON *Bergit Lága* ‘the low promontory’ (Cox 2007, 17).<sup>21</sup> The Old Norse preposition *á* may survive in the anglicised Gaelic Old Norse loan-name *Queen o Scot* < ON *Kvín á* — ‘the enclosure at or by —’, a prepositional-phrase structure found commonly in Norse-derived names in the Faroes and Northern Isles (Cox 2007, 16–17, 21, 23).

It seems possible, therefore, that an ON *á Langinum* has been interpreted as *An Lang(a)* [ə 'l̪ãŋk(ə)] in Gaelic, as though containing the Gaelic article, and which, along with the name *An t-Isean*, may have given rise to the use of the Gaelic article with the Old Norse loan-name *Cliseam*.

The names *Mulla fo Dheas* and *Mulla fo Thuath* conceivably contain a shortened form of G *mullach*, but this seems unlikely; cf. *Mulla Chleiseabhal* and *Allt a' Mhulla*, some 6km east. The Gaelic element *mulla* m. – translated as ‘lump’ in the ONB (e.g. OS1/18/4/150) – is unlikely to be from EG *mul* m. ‘globular mass, heap, lump’ (*DIL*; from which G *mullach* is derived), whose genitive inflection occurs in *Beinn a' Mhuil* and *Abhainn a' Mhuil*, about 6km north-east.

*Mulla* might be a loan-word from Old Norse *múli* m., or rather obl. case *múla* ‘mouth, snout; promontory’; there is no reason to suppose, however, that the long Old Norse vowel should not yield a long vowel in Gaelic.

A more likely derivation would be from Scots *mull* ‘mouth, muzzle, snout’, used of promontories and precipitous headlands, itself from Old Norse *múli* (*DSL*, s. v. *mull*); so also Norn (Jakobsen, s. v. *mul*; de Vries, s. v. *múli*).<sup>22</sup>

The Norse loan-name *Cliseam*, therefore, seems to have attracted the Gaelic article to it through the influence of the neighbouring *An t-Isean*, a Gaelic name containing the Gaelic article, and *An Langa*, an Old Norse loan-name originally containing an Old Norse preposition which was interpreted as the Gaelic article in the process of borrowing into Gaelic. While the onomastic meaning of the name *Cliseam* has been transferred from its original cliff to the summit above and to the mountain itself, the Gaelic name *An Aonaig Mhòr* has since been applied to the cliff. The two peaks between *An t-Isean* and *An Langa* – the latter also called *Mullach an Langa* under the influence of the several other *mullach*-names in the vicinity – have most likely been coined using a Scots loan-word *mulla*, ultimately from ON *múli*, viz *Mulla fo Dheas* and *Mulla fo Thuath* ‘the southern and northern mulls’. The sense of G *mulla* is similar to that of G *maol*

21 Located on the east coast of Lewis, north-east of Skye and west side of Lewis, respectively.

22 With the adjectival adverbs *fo dheas* ‘southern’ and *fo thuath* ‘northern’, potentially going back to OG *fa dess* ‘to the south’ and OG *fa thúaith* ‘to the north’, or, through interchange of prepositions, to G *mu dheas* and *mu thuath*; cf. the Gaelic adverbial expressions *fo dheireadh* (sometimes written *bho dheireadh*) ~ *mu dheireadh*, *fa sgaoil* ~ *ma sgaoil*; the Lewis village names *Dail bho Thuath*, *Dail bho Dheas* and *Tolstadh bho Thuath* (all pronounced with initial *f*-) will have a similar provenance.

m., also used of promontories, e.g. *Maol Chinn-tìre* ‘the Mull of Kintyre’, from the Old Gaelic adjective *máel* ‘crop-headed, shaven; > bald’.

## REFERENCES

- Cox, Richard A.V., 1992, ‘The Norse Element in Scottish Gaelic’, Proceedings of the 9th International Congress of Celtic Studies (Paris 1991), *Études Celtiques* XXIX, 137–45.
- Cox, Richard A.V., 2000, ‘The Phonological Development of Scottish Gaelic *uinneag* “window” and Related Questions’, *Scottish Gaelic Studies* XX, 212–21.
- Cox, Richard A.V., 2002, *The Gaelic Place-names of Carloway, Isle of Lewis: their structure and significance* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies).
- Cox, Richard A.V., 2007, ‘The Norse Element in Scottish Place-names: syntax as a chronological marker’, *The Journal of Scottish Name Studies* 1, 13–26.
- Cox, Richard A.V., 2008, ‘*Tamhnaraigh* ~ *Tamnabhagh*: the development of Old Norse *-fn* in (Scottish) Gaelic’, *The Journal of Scottish Name Studies* 2, 51–68.
- Cox, Richard A.V., 2009, ‘Towards a taxonomy of contact onomastics: Norse Place-names in Scottish Gaelic’, *The Journal of Scottish Name Studies* 3, 15–28.
- DIL* — *Dictionary of the Irish Language and Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language*, ed. E.G. Quin et alii (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy 1913–1976).
- Drummond, Peter, 2007, *Scottish Hill Names: the origin and meaning of the names of Scotland's hills and mountains* (1st pub. 1991; Scottish Mountaineering Trust).
- DSL* – *Dictionary of the Scots Language* [comprising electronic editions of the 12-volume *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* and the 10-volume *Scottish National Dictionary*], on line at <<http://dsl.ac.uk/>>.
- Dwelly A: Dwelly, Edward, collector, 1991, *Appendix to Dwelly's Gaelic-English Dictionary*, ed. Douglas Clyne, completed by Derick Thomson (Glasgow: Gairm Publications).
- Jakobsen, Jakob, 1985, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland*, 2 vols (Lerwick: Shetland Folk Society; 1st pub. (Vol. I) 1928 and (Vol. II) 1932).
- MacBain, Alexander, 1911, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language* (1st pub. 1896; Stirling: E. Mackay).
- MacIver, D[onald], 1934, *Place-names of Lewis and Harris* (Stornoway: printed at the Gazette Office).
- NicGumaraid, Màiri, 2006, ‘Latha Mòr na Hearadh’, *Gath* 9, 26–27.
- Oftedal, Magne, 1980, ‘Scandinavian place-names in Celtic territory: An attempt at a linguistic classification’, *Ortnamn och språkkontakt*, ed. T. Andersson, E. Brylla and A. Rostvik, *Norna-rapporter* 17, 163–91.
- Rygh, O., 1980, *Norske Gaardnavne* XII, ed. A. Kjær (1st pub. 1919; Kristiania: Børsums Forlag og Antikvariat A/S).
- Sandnes, Jørn and Stemshaug, Ola, 1980, *Norsk stadnamnleksikon* (Oslo: Det

Norske Samlaget).

Watson, W.J., 1904a, *Place-names of Ross and Cromarty* (reprinted 1976; Inverness: Ross and Cromarty Heritage Society).

Watson, W.J., 1904b, 'The Study of Highland Place-names', *Celtic Review* I, No. 6, 22–31.