

# DESCENDANTS OF NORSE *BÓLSTAÐR*?: A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE LINEAGE OF *BOST* & *CO*.

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## INTRODUCTION

The account by Nicolaisen in *Scottish Place-Names* of the Norse settlement of Scotland as seen from place-name evidence is a land-mark in the development of our understanding of that largely undocumented process. His analysis of the distribution of selected generic elements clearly plots the gradual but relentless approach of serial settlement, through the Northern and Western Isles, up to and onto the northern mainland and western coastal belt. The chronology proposed for the settlement generic-elements discussed, places them in the following order: 1. *staðr*, 2. *setr* (and/or *sætr*) and 3. *bólstaðr* (Nicolaisen 1976. 87-94).

The remarkable thing about the last of these elements, *bólstaðr*, is that, according to Nicolaisen, it has yielded a large number of different reflexes in modern forms of names. These include orthographic *bist*, *bister*, *bust*, *buster*, *bost*, *pster*, *mster*, *bus*, *boll*, *poll*, *pool* and *bo* (Nicolaisen op.cit. 94). There is general agreement here among earlier commentators, but there are some dissenters concerning one or two individual reflexes (Appendix 2). For instance, not all would agree that *boll*, *poll* or *pool* forms derive from *bólstaðr*. This in itself does not prompt a complete re-examination of the reflexes of *bólstaðr*, but there does seem to be a sufficiently compelling reason to undertake one.

Enquiring into the form and derivation of *shader*-names over the west of Scotland (in Gaelic, *Siadar* [ˈʃiɑdər] [ˈʃiədər] or final *-seadar* [ˌʃɑdər]), the evidence suggested that an early group of these coincided chronologically with name-forms with the reflex *bost*, but that another group of *shader*-names were of a slightly later stratum than *bost*-names (Cox 1990). This did not say that *shader*-names, derived from ON (-)*sætr*, were contemporary with or later than all names with reflexes hitherto deemed to have derived from *bólstaðr*. However, it somewhat weakened the case for the accepted chronology of *staðr* yielding to *setr* (and/or *sætr*) yielding to *bólstaðr*. Unless we choose to ignore this, it begs the question whether it is possible that more than one ON generic element lies behind the variety of reflexes currently ascribed to just the one element *bólstaðr*. If this proved to be the case, we would have quite a different picture before us of the phasing and chronology of Norse settlement.

Our analysis draws upon 105 names, with the benefit of the pronunciations of 85 of these. Of the remainder, although we cannot be at all certain, we may at least be able to make an educated guess at what the

pronunciation of some of these may or may not have been. The reason for not having pronunciations for all the names concerned is due to a lack of resources. In part this was a question of time and money, but it was also a question of the availability of pronunciations. This last point needs some clarification. The figure of 105 represents relevant names I was able to trace in what, historically, we may call Gaelic Scotland. Caithness and the Northern Isles are therefore not dealt with here. This was because I did not feel qualified to consider questions of historical phonology there at such notice, and also because the area would deserve separate treatment because of the number of relevant names there. In Gaelic Scotland there were instances where I was simply unable to obtain pronunciations of name-forms as used in a Gaelic nomenclature. For the pronunciations I did obtain, my informants included both local individuals and scholars, and I am much indebted to them. The importance of obtaining Gaelic pronunciations of the name-forms concerned is self-evident, though it cannot be overstated: given the phonological developments of the Gaelic language, we are just one remove from the Norse names themselves, while an approach using English name-forms, themselves borrowed from Gaelic, would place us, at its most simply expressed, at a further remove from the original Norse nomenclature.

The main aim of this paper, then, is to look at Old Norse (ON) generic elements that have traditionally been taken, for the most part at least, as belonging to a category of habitation or settlement-names. We are not looking, therefore, at the derivations of individual ON loan-names, and for this reason I have not made a full sweep of the documentary evidence for individual name-forms. This is macro-onomastics, so to speak, and we can anticipate that some points regarding individual names may escape our notice.

Finally, I should like to point out that in my paper on *shader*-names (*Scottish Gaelic Studies* 16, 1990), I made various suggestions about the origin of some of the reflexes we shall be looking at. Suffice it to say that these were speculative and off-the-cuff remarks made without the benefit of later research carried out for this paper, and in consequence there will be no need to refer to them here.

## ON *býli*

The pronunciations of the reflexes under discussion here include [bəl], [bɔst], [bɔ:sta(ɣ)], [basta], [bɔL], [bʌs], [bʌsəɣ], [bɔuLsa], [bɔust], [bɔusta] and [bəl]. In disyllabic forms stress occurs on the initial syllable of the reflex, and in name-final position all forms normally retain a weak stress reflecting the secondary stress of the original ON names.

The first of these, [bəl], we find in only three names, all situated in the Western Isles [Fig. 3.1]. We have *Bayble* in Lewis, and *Paible* which occurs on Taransay, by Harris, and in North Uist. The specific element of the ON reconstructions is *papa* m. a 'cleric, or religious man' as found in

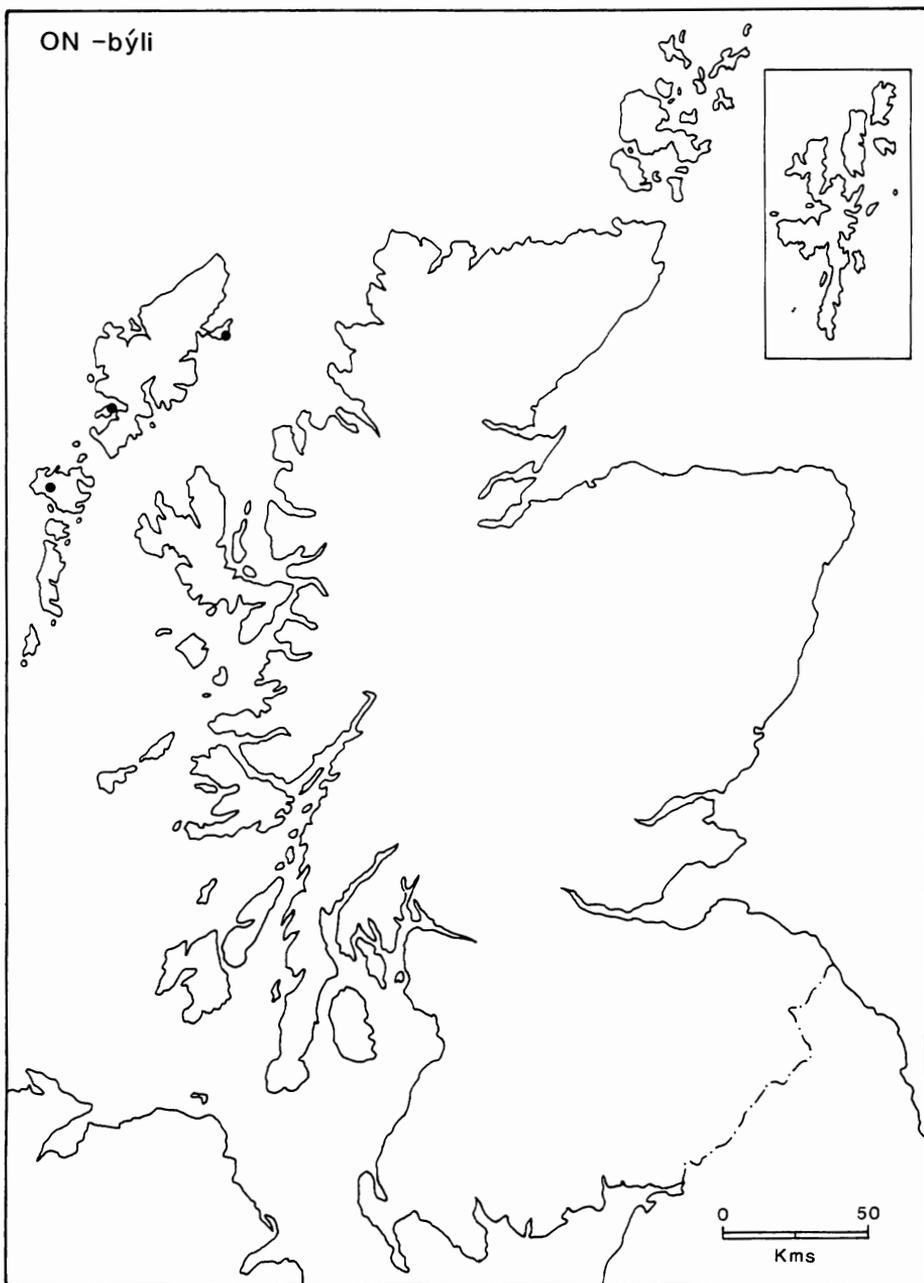


Fig. 3.1 Place-names incorporating ON -býli.

island-names such as *Pabbay*. Our names go back to ON \**Papyli*, as found in the *Landnámabók* (*í Papíli*: Asmundarson 1891. 26) and in the *Orknøyinga Saga* (*Papuli*: Oftedal 1954. 396). In the Northern Isles we also have survivals, for example in *Papyl* and *Papilwater* in Shetland (Brøgger 1929. 61). ON *Papyli* is a syncopated form of \**Papabyli* and the generic here is ON *býli* nt. used in the sense ‘domicile, residence’. It is a derivative of ON *ból* nt., to which we shall come later, and was apparently limited in use to compounds (De Vries 1961; Cleasby 1957). Of course the names Bayble and Paible tell us little about Norse settlement since these clerics were Celts. There is really no problem about the origin of final *-[bəl]* here, and its derivation from ON *býli* is well noted by several eminent scholars, including Oftedal (op.cit. *ibid.*) and Brøgger (op.cit. *ibid.*). The names referred to here have quite unjustifiably been included by Nicolaisen in his distribution-map (Nicolaisen op.cit. 93).

### ON *bólstaðr* and *bústaðr*

Continuing on the west coast, there are a large number of names which contain orthographic *bosta* or final *-bost*. They are found predominantly in Lewis and Skye but outliers are also found in the Uists and in Coll [Fig. 3.2]. There are two examples of unqualified and 32 of qualified name-forms. The respective pronunciations of the reflexes here are [bɔ:sta] or [bɔ:staʁ], and final *-[bɔst]*; there was one name here whose pronunciation I failed to get. These undoubtedly derive from ON *bólstaðr* m. which translates variously as ‘farm, farmstead, residence’, and commentators are unanimous here. The element is a compound of *ból* (a derivative of which we met earlier) and *staðr* m. a ‘place, stead’, but also ‘farmstead’. *Ból* originally applied to a ‘lying-place for animals’ but was later associated with farm-land and residences. The variants [bɔ:sta] and [bɔ:staʁ] are interesting. Final [ʁ] is not a reflex of ON *ð* but, as is fairly common in the dialects concerned, merely closes an otherwise open final syllable. Compare Gael. *feòil*, gen. [ˈfjɔ:Ləʁ] besides [ˈfjɔ:Lə], ‘meat’; also *Tairigeadh* [NB 1841] [ˈtʰaɪi,gʻaʁ] besides *Taraigea* [NB 2749] [ˈtʰari,gʻa], names found on the west of Lewis and both from ON *Paragið* ‘ravine of the seaweed’. Final syllable [a] in [bɔ:sta(ʁ)] has developed from an intermediate stage in which the original ON orthographic *a* was lengthened after borrowing to compensate for the loss of the final segment of the stem *bólstað-*. In name-final position the reduction of stress was such that not only was the final syllable lost, but long [ɔ:] shortened to [ɔ], although secondary stress is still discernible today, e.g. *Swanibost* [ˈsüāNʻə,bɔst] in Lewis, from an acc. ON *Sveinabólstað* ‘*Sveini*’s farm’ (Oftedal 1954. 373).

There are two other names, however, which we can consider here. These are *Boust* [bɔusta] in Skye and *Bousd* [bɔust] in Coll [Fig. 3.3]. Like *Bosta* [bɔ:sta] in Lewis, these are loans from unqualified ON names. [bɔusta] is essentially the same as [bɔ:sta], except that the long stress

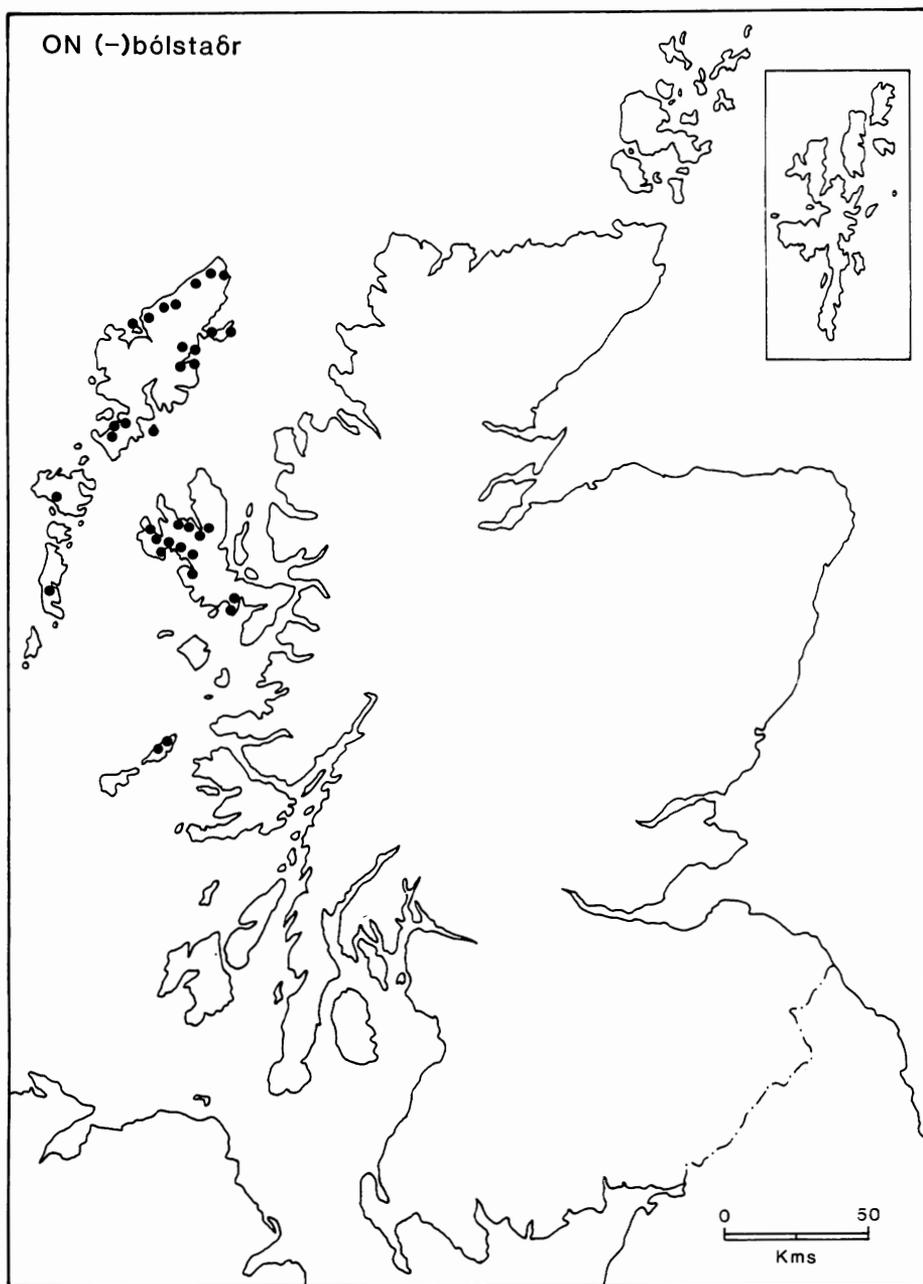


Fig. 3.2 Place-names incorporating ON (-)bólstaðr.

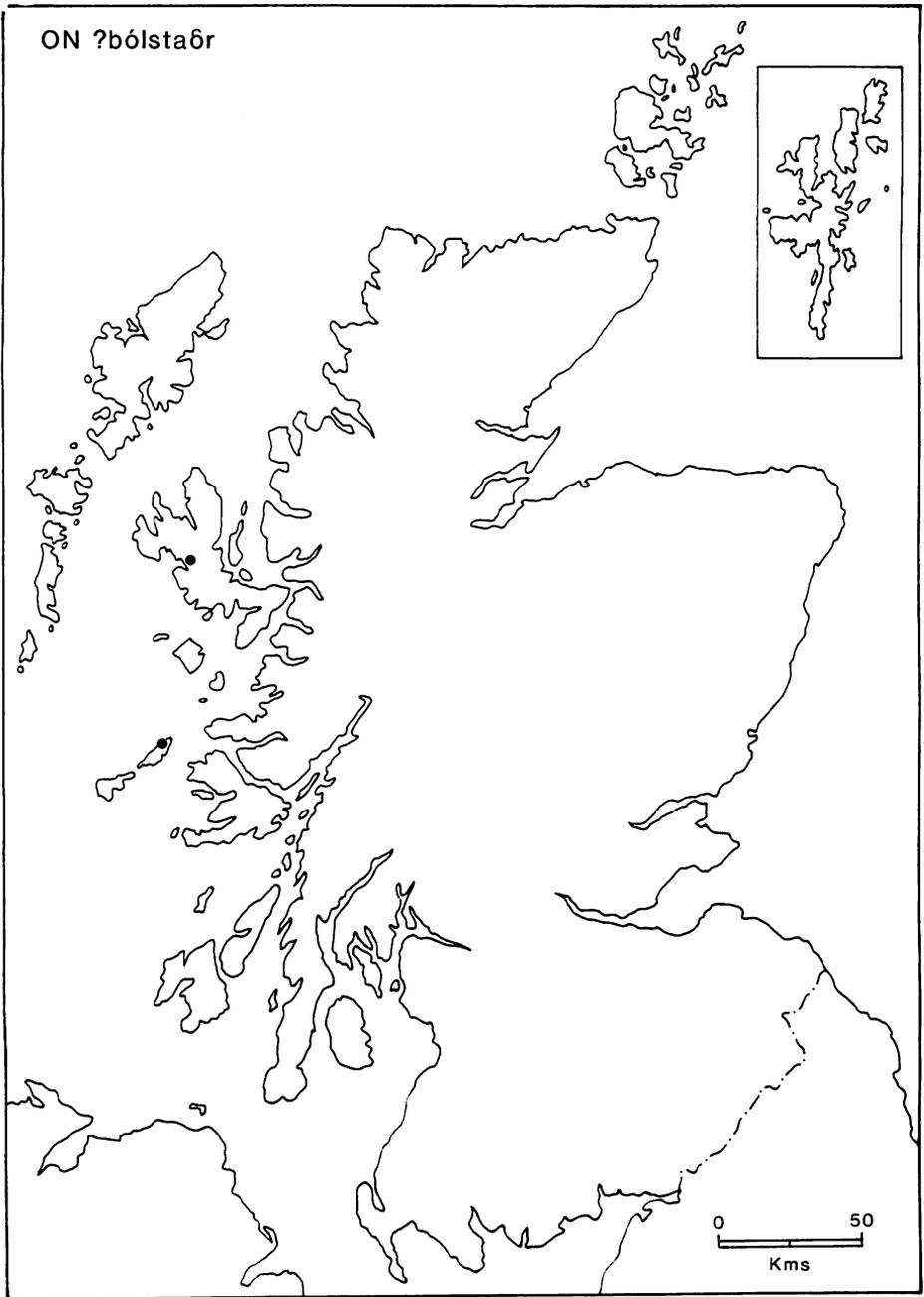


Fig. 3.3 Place-names incorporating ON ?bólstaðr.

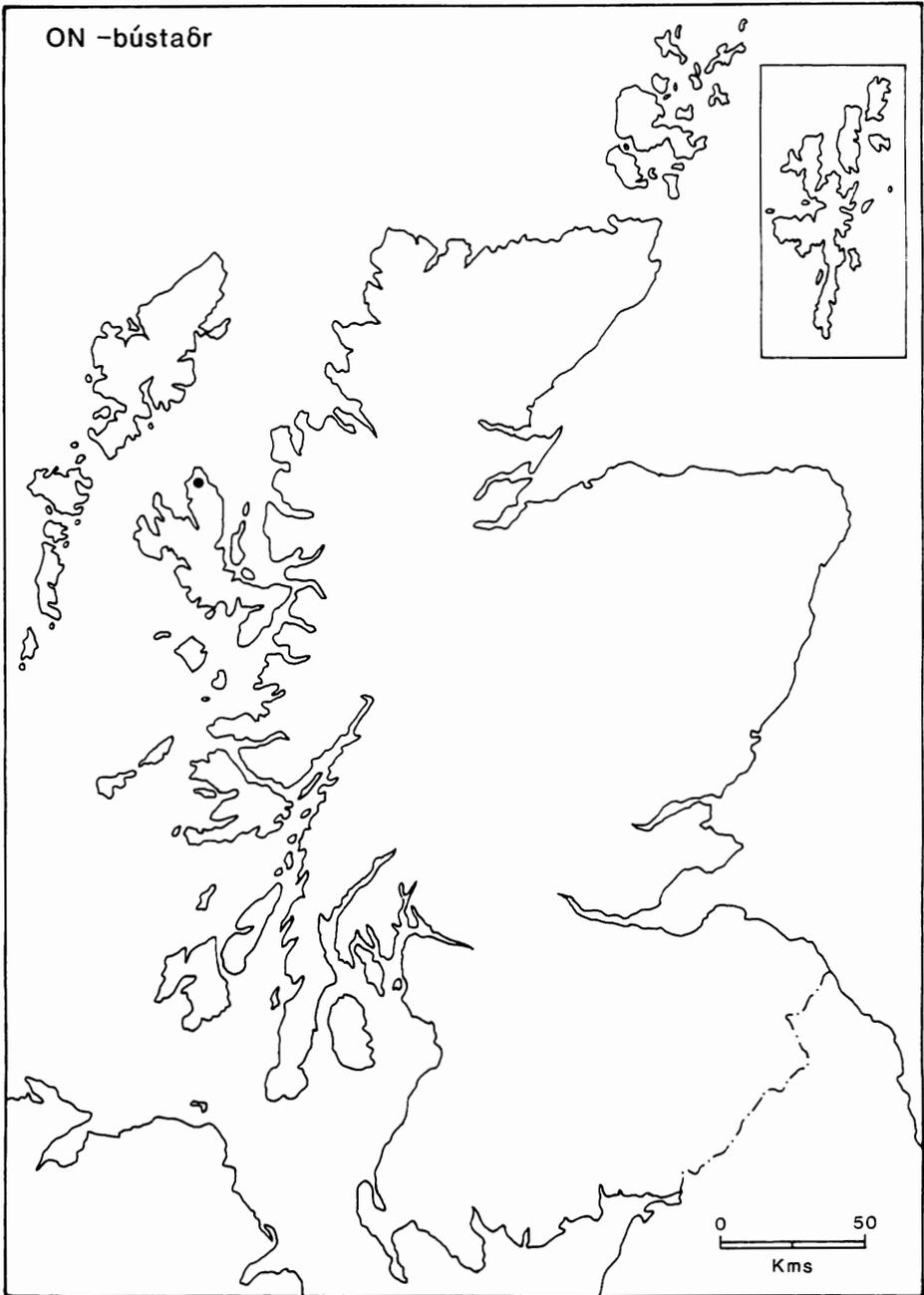


Fig. 3.4 Place-names incorporating ON *-bústaðr*.

vowel is a diphthong rather than a monothong, suggesting that the lateral survived longer in the south than in the north. The Coll name [b̥ʊst] is different, however, in that we must conclude that it has lost its final syllable. Let us for the moment assume that this was the case.

Now in the north of Skye we also have the name *Heribusta* ['hɛrə,βʌsta], and Forbes (1923. 214) takes this to have included final *-bólstaðr* as well [Fig. 3.4]. However, two points immediately draw our attention: firstly the secondary stress vowel is [ʌ], secondly we have final [a]. Could this be a question of dialectal variation so that here we simply have another reflex of ON *bólstaðr*? I think the evidence in fact points to ON *bústaðr* m., an element with the same range of application as *bólstaðr*. Comparing these elements, it looks as if a final *-bólstaðr* could have undergone a development as follows: final ON acc. *-bólstað* initially yielded Gael. \*-[b̥ʊ:Lsta:] compensating for the loss of ð; this gave way to \*-[b̥ʊ:Lsta] with shortening of the final syllable; and this became \*-[b̥ʊLsta] after shortening of the secondary stress vowel, which in turn yielded \*-[b̥ʊ:sta] with temporary lengthening of the secondary stress vowel due to the loss of *l*. Once the final syllable was dropped (due to the retention of secondary stress coupled with the temporary lengthening of the penultimate syllable), we are left with \*-[b̥ʊ:st], and this, with eventual reduction of the vowel length, gives us modern *-[b̥ʊst]*. A final ON acc. *-bústað*, on the other hand, did not need to undergo any further development once the secondary stress vowel was reduced, yielding *-[βʌsta]*, and so the final syllable has survived undisturbed, although its loss would have been of no surprise. Perhaps we also owe something of the survival of this pronunciation to the fact that the location of the name lies well to the north of the cluster of *bost*-names found in Skye. In other words, it may be that there were other *bústaðr*-names in the Western Isles, but which have fallen together in sound with the more predominant *bólstaðr*-names.

### ON *ból* and *pollr*

While *bost* name-forms reached Coll, in the vicinity we also have several names with reflexes written *-poll(t)*. We have two in the north of Mull, two in Coll, and six in Tiree [Fig. 3.5]. I have not obtained pronunciations for one of the Mull and two of the Tiree names but the remainder are pronounced *-[b̥ʊL]*. Gillies in his *Place-Names of Argyll* derives at least two of these names from forms in final ON *-pollr* m. a 'pool, pond': the loan-names in question occur as specifics in the names *Cnoc Bhircepoll* and *Loch Bhasapol* in Tiree (Gillies 1906. 236). However, he also sites the use of the ON element *ból* in Argyllshire (Gillies 1906. 223), although he does not say explicitly in which names it occurs. A reflex *[b̥ʌL]* also occurs in the west of Scotland and purely from a phonetic point of view *[b̥ʊL]* is the more likely candidate for ON *ból*, while *[b̥ʌL]* would formally derive from ON *pollr*. Before considering these Tiree-Coll-Mull *[b̥ʊL]* forms further, it will be profitable to look at the evidence of *[b̥ʌL]* forms.

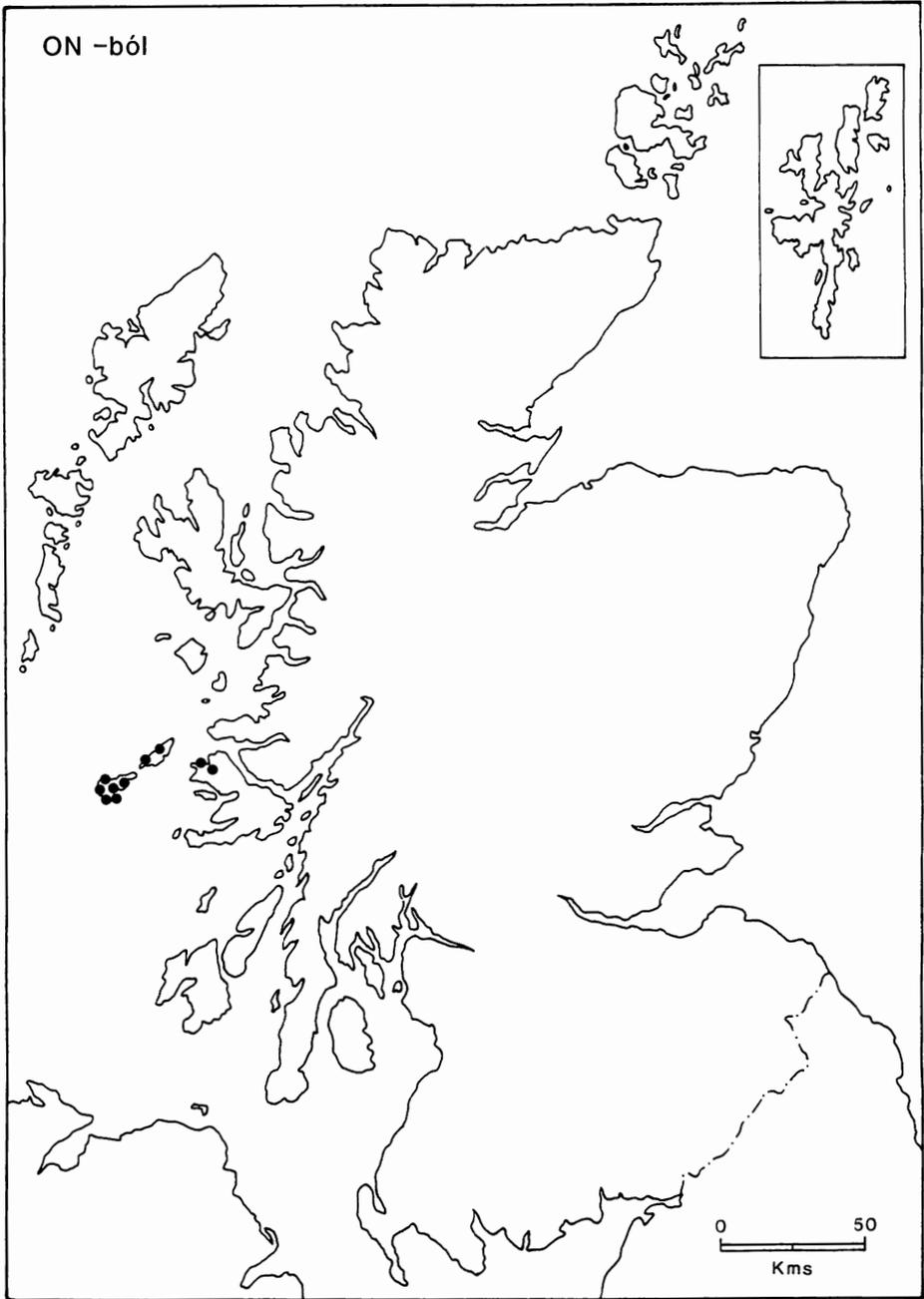


Fig. 3.5 Place-names incorporating ON -ból (Tiree, Coll, Mull).



Of name-forms with a final  $[-\text{b}\text{ə}\text{L}]$  we find a cluster around the north-west coast and two strings down either side of the Minch [Fig. 3.6]. One name I think we can discount at the outset as having anything to do with *bólstaðr* or any other settlement generic-element, but which was apparently included by Nicolaisen in his distribution maps, is *Noustapal* [NF 8220] in South Uist. The pronunciation of this loan-name is  $[\text{'N}\ddot{u}:\text{s}\text{t}\text{ə},\text{b}\text{ə}\text{L}]$ , and it appears to be a metathesised form of ON *Gnúpsdal* acc. with the gen. sg. of *gnúpr* m. a 'peak, summit', found also, for example, in the loan-name *Nüb* [NB 2643]  $[\text{N}\ddot{u}:\text{b}]$  in the west of Lewis. The generic is ON *dalr* m. a 'valley', and the derivation is certainly acceptable topographically.

On the mainland, in the north, we have *Kirkiboll* by the Kyle of Tongue, *Arnaboll* on Loch Hope, and *Eriboll* on Loch Eriboll. Apart from the pronunciation  $[-\text{b}\text{ə}\text{L}]$  these names also have in common the fact that they are located by long narrow lochs. The same is true of *Unapool* and *Ullapool* to the west; and to the south we find *Arnabol* on Loch Ailort (but for which I have no pronunciation) and *Reisipol* on Loch Sunart. Coincidence one might think. Shelter-affording sea-lochs (excluding Loch Hope here) are just the place in which settlements would develop. Yet we are, nevertheless, concerned with features to which the ON generic *pollr* would aptly apply. While it had the sense 'pool or pond' as applied to small round lakes or sections of rivers, it is also well attested in place-names in Norway in the sense 'rounded bay or inlet; or the head of a sea-loch, often one with a narrow opening'; and it is especially frequent in this last sense in the west of Norway (Sandnes & Stemshaug 1980. 247).

At the head of Loch Eriboll is the name *Polla*, for which I have heard  $[\text{'ph}\text{ɔ}\text{L}\text{a}]$  but also  $[\text{'ph}\text{ɔ}\text{L}\text{ə}]$ . Although Gael. *poll* 'pool, hole, mud' is stated by MacBain (1982. 280) to derive from Latin, where we find the sense 'pool, fishing ground', as in the Lewis names *Poll Chràgam* and *Poll an Sgadain* (the former has an ON loan-name as specific, while the latter means 'the pool of the herring'), I think we are in the presence of a loan-word from ON *poll*, acc. of *pollr*. The pronunciation  $[\text{'ph}\text{ɔ}\text{L}\text{ə}]$  of the name at the head of Loch Eriboll seems suspect if we are to consider a derivation from ON *pollr*:  $[\text{ph}\text{ɔ}\text{u}\text{L}]$  would be expected. If  $[\text{'ph}\text{ɔ}\text{L}\text{a}]$  is the more authentic form though, the name could represent an ON *Pollǫ* with the stem form of *pollr* and nom. or acc. of  $\text{ǫ f.}$  a 'river', lit. 'lakehead-river'. While the name *Polla* once applied to the river at the head of Loch Eriboll, the name *Eriboll* originally applied to the sea-loch itself. Applied to waterways, then, these names in final  $[-\text{b}\text{ə}\text{L}]$  might be chronologically earlier than any Norse settlements founded beside them.

There are several other  $[-\text{b}\text{ə}\text{L}]$  name-forms to the south: *Harrapool* in Skye, *Meoble* south of Loch Morar, *Scobull* and *Loch Assopol* in the south-west of Mull, and *Cullipool* in Luing. *Scobull* lies on the long Loch Scridain and would fall in with *Unapool*, *Ullapool* etc. Still in Mull, Loch Assopol could have applied to the sea-loch *Loch na Làthaich*; indeed, it might just be from ON *Hafspoll* acc. (though we would have to accept the development of an intrusive medial schwa), with gen. sg. of *haf* nt. 'sea'. If so, the meaning here would seem to have been 'the bay facing (lit. of)

the open sea' (which it does) rather than simply 'bay' (i.e. indentation of the coast) which a term such as *hafsbotn* m. would have done. Like *pollr*, *botn* was used of the heads of sea-lochs or fiords; it could also apply to valley or lake-heads, and in this sense is found in the Gaelic loan-word *bot*. Harrapool in Skye is also a candidate for a generic with the sense of 'bay'; similarly Cullipool in Luing, where the bay used to be dammed to provide a pond for lobsters awaiting transportation to market (Darling 1969. 84). Meoble, however, if the name has not been transferred away from the loch (which is not impossible), may be an example of ON *pollr* being applied to a pool in a river, in this instance in River Meoble. There are two other names in the Inner Hebrides which are potentially relevant here, though I have no pronunciations for them. The first is *Raonapol* in Rum, and which lies at the head of the deep Loch Scresort on the east of the island. The other is *Corsapool* in Islay. The location here is at the head of Loch Gruinart, a deep sea-loch. The flat land at the head of the lake has long been drained, but it was certainly a very marshy area at one time. Potentially, then, *Corsapool* referred to the head of this sea-loch, or to a nearby pool or pond.

In the Outer Isles there are three names which appear to concern us here. I have no pronunciation for *Port Grigaspul* which lies in Loch Seaforth on the south-east of Lewis, but were we to be able to derive the generic in the ON loan-name here from *pollr*, we would likely link up the sense of the element here with its use in the names *Eriboll*, *Ullapool* etc. *Loch Ulapoll* in east Lewis, though, refers to fresh-water, as does *Loch Chulapuill* in the north of Lewis. While the former, *Loch Ulapoll*, has final  $[-\text{b}\text{ə}\text{L}]$ , the pronunciation I received for the latter was  $['\text{L}\text{ɔ}\text{x}'\text{xu}:\text{L}\text{ə},\text{b}\text{e}\text{N}']$  along with the information that the last part derived from Gael. *cùl na beinne* 'the rear of the mountain'. While the folk etymology need not detain us, it would be nice to know whether another and, we may assume, more authentic pronunciation survives.

ON *pollr*, then, survives in quite a large group of names in the west of Scotland, but possibly in three different senses: the head of a sea-loch, or bay; a pool in a river; and a fresh-water pool. *Arnaboll* on Loch Hope in Sutherland, however, does not apparently fit any of these senses, but it may be that its long shape, its north-south alignment and its vicinity to the sea allowed Loch Hope to be considered in terms of the element *pollr*. That this element was used in the Norse onomasticon in three different ways should not surprise us; this is paralleled by the use of the element *vik* in three distinct ways in the Skye names *Uig* [NG 3963] (of a bay), *Uigseadar* [NG 4246] (of a bend in a river), as well as *\*Uigseadar* [NG 3649] (of a bend in a mountain-range).

That  $[\text{b}\text{ə}\text{L}]$ -names were not settlement-names makes sense of their wide distribution compared with the more orderly distribution of *bost*-names.<sup>1</sup> Where do the  $[\text{b}\text{ə}\text{L}]$ -names of Tiree, Coll and Mull belong here? It has already been stated that Gillies thought ON *pollr* was behind at least some of these names. While it might be argued that  $[\text{b}\text{ə}\text{L}]$  was from ON *pollr* and that the occurrence of  $[\text{ɔ}]$  rather than  $[\text{ə}]$  was merely a question of

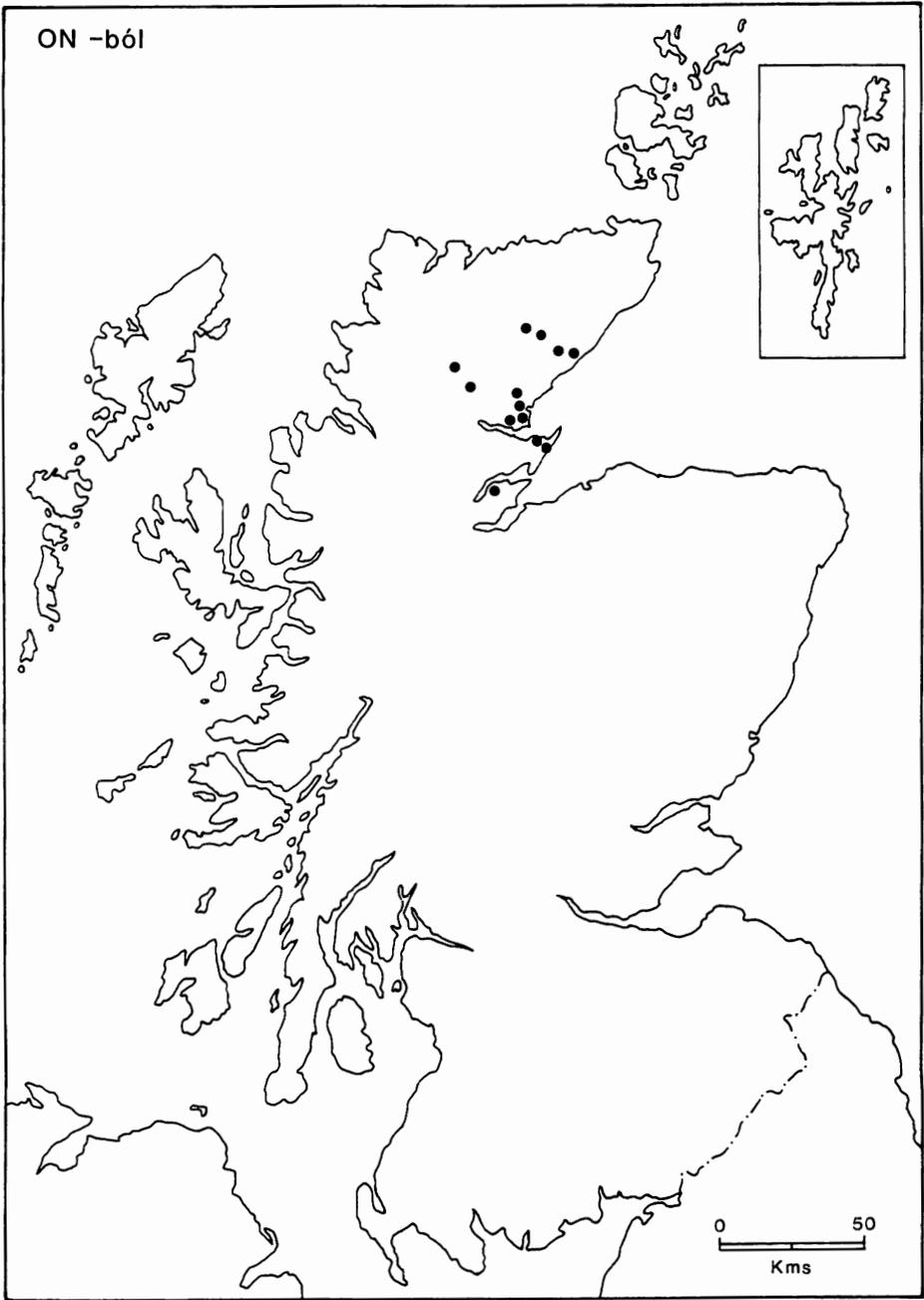


Fig. 3.7 Place-names incorporating ON -ból (Easter Ross and eastern Sutherland).

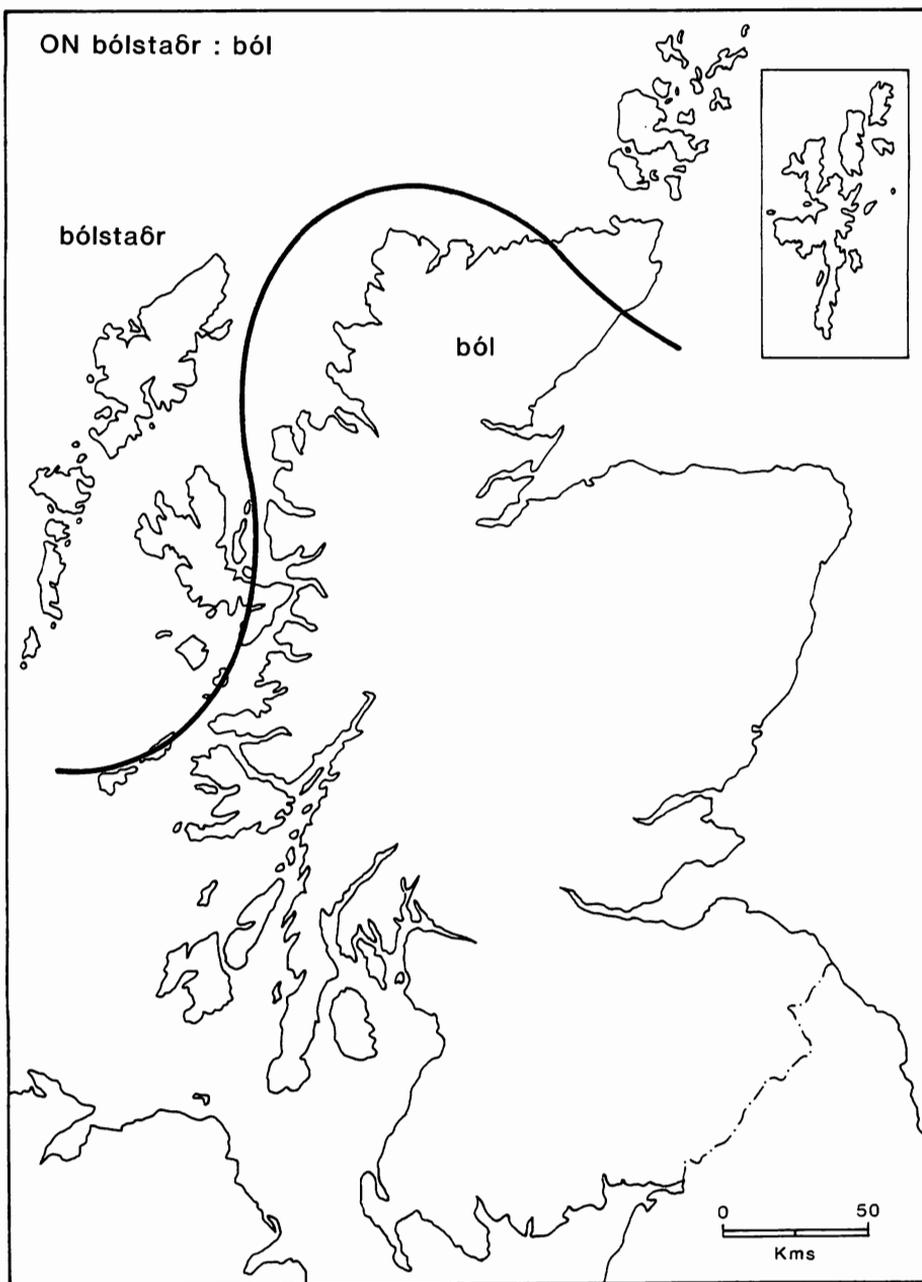


Fig. 3.8 Southern limit of place-names incorporating ON *bólstaðr* — a *bólstaðr*/*ból* isogloss.

dialect, and while the sense 'pool' could be thought of as being relevant in perhaps two or three instances, the phonetic argument is not convincing. Furthermore, if we accept that *pollr* is behind these names we should not leave much in the way of ON settlement-names in Tiree, although we should not will any into existence just because we wish it so! We have already looked at the semantic development of *ból* and seen that it occurs in the compound *bólstaðr*. Interestingly, on the west of Lewis it is found as a loan-word meaning 'stall', but an earlier application is attested in place-names, for example *Bòl Ruairidh* NB2346 '*Ruaraidh*'s (animal) couch, lying-place'. In Tiree, Coll and Mull, however, it seems to have been used of farmsteads, in the Norse onomasticon at least, and from their location and distribution these [bɔ̃L]-names should be seen as a stage separate from that of *bost*-names.

Distinctions between *bost* and [bɔ̃L]-names may prove significant in terms of chronology and/or demography, or merely in terms of onomasticon. On the east of Scotland, moreover, we have a group of names that may link up chronologically with the [bɔ̃L]-names of Tiree, Coll and Mull.

Unfortunately, it is on the east of Scotland that I fared worst in collecting pronunciations of names. Of 13 that I had noted, I have the pronunciations of just four [Fig. 3.7]. One of these, for *Torboll* in East Sutherland, has final [-bil'] which appears to be an oblique case-form now used as the radical form. The other three have final [-bɔ̃L], although in the case of Easter Ross *Cadboll* the dental lateral has been displaced by an alveolar lateral. Modern English spellings of the reflexes here include *bo*, *ble* and *bol(l)*. Despite the *bo*-forms we can tell from documentary evidence that we are dealing with forms that originally ended in a lateral. Although the vocalism in the few examples I have is [ə], ON *pollr* may have little to do with this group of names. ON final *-ból* would be expected to yield [-bɔ̃L] in East Sutherland due to restrictions on the distribution of vowels outside the main stress (Dorian 1978: 56), and this may also be applicable to Easter Ross. It is also notable that few of the names could have been applied in the sense 'lakehead, or bay'. Suffice it to say that it is possible that we have several *ból*-names in the east of Scotland. The evidence from the west would seem to support this view. If we draw a line on a map showing the southern limit of the *bólstaðr*-area, it cuts through Caithness, southern Skye and the tip of Coll, while leaving the north-west mainland untouched [Fig. 3.8]. Both on the west and the east of the country this line can be seen as a *bólstaðr*-*ból* isogloss. This comparison between what was taking place on the west and what was taking place on the east certainly suggests the distinction between *bólstaðr* and *ból* was more than just a question of lexis: they represent different chronological strata. Whether or not *ból*-names represent internal movement or fresh intake, so to speak, from Norway is harder to judge, but this comparative evidence would favour the latter. But let us now move on.

### ON ?\**bólshagi*

Heading further south on the west of Scotland we get a very different

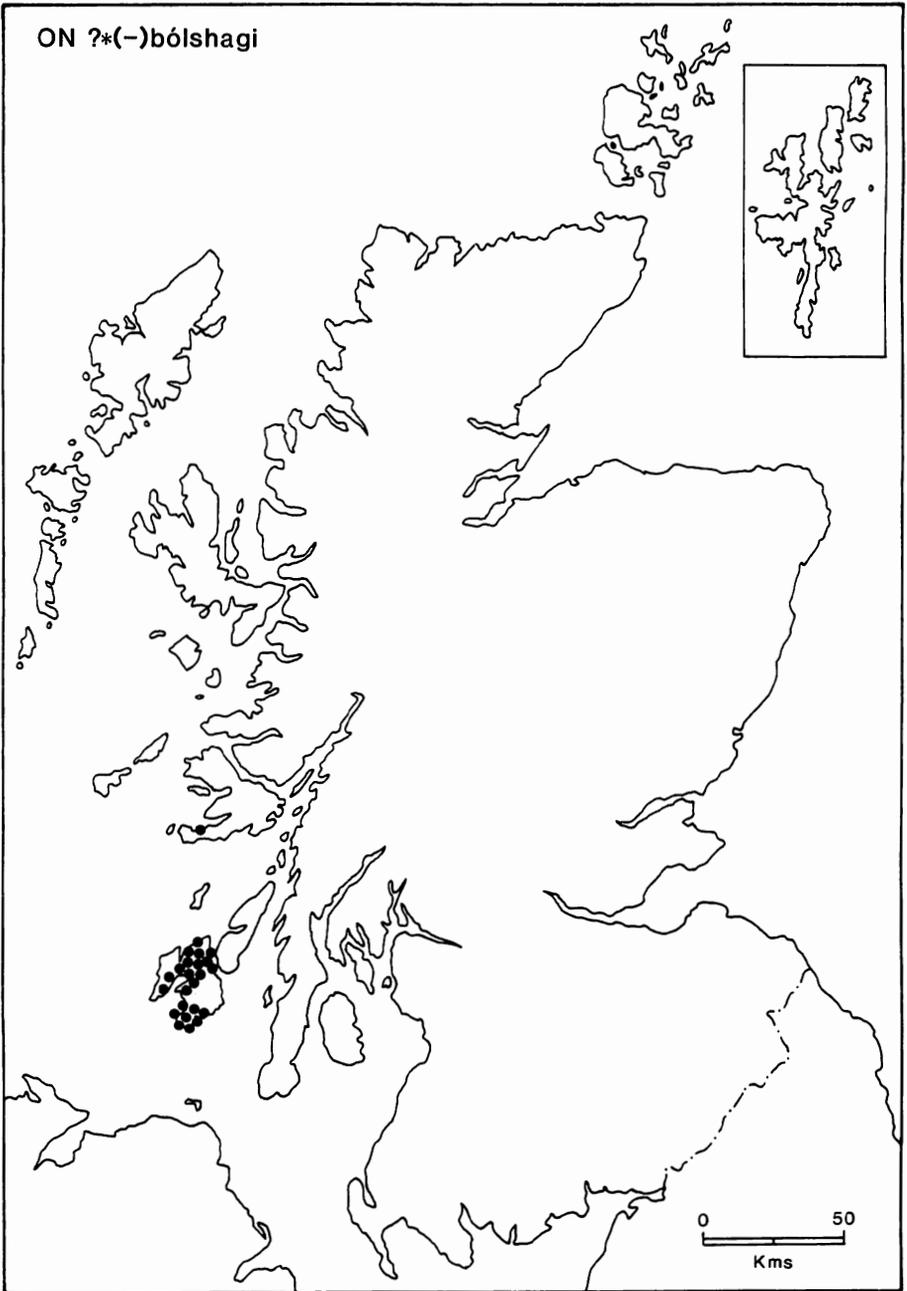


Fig. 3.9 Place-names incorporating ON ?\*(-)bólshagi.

picture. In Islay, the reflexes [bɔuLsa], [ɸasəʃ] and [ɸas] occur. There is at least one example of [ɸas] in Mull as well [Fig. 3.9]. The first question to be asked concerns the possible relationship between these three reflexes. The first, [bɔuLsa], occurs in the unqualified form *Bolsay*, and probably also in the form *Bolsa* but whose pronunciation I failed to get. The other two reflexes only occur in qualified name-forms. Their distribution is interestingly determined by the number of syllables occurring before the generic. So we have *Grobolls* ['grɔ:,ɸasəʃ] and *Robolls* ['Rɔ:,ɸasəʃ] where the specific has one or has been reduced to one syllable, but *Coillabus* ['khəL'ə,ɸas] and *Nereabolls* ['N'ɛ:rə,ɸas] where the specific consists of or has been reduced to two syllables. Could the reflexes here be one and the same? Let us view them diagrammatically, with the hypothesis that they do derive from the same ON element:

(1)		b	ɔuL	s	a	
(2)	X	b	ʌ	s	ə	ʃ
(3)	X	X	b	ʌ	s	

In (1) we have full name-stress remaining on the initial syllable of the reflex, and we see a long vowel and lateral surviving before the [s]; the original vowel seems to have been a long  $\bar{o}$  which was later diphthongised before the lateral. Further we have final [a] which points to an original long vowel or lost consonant. In (2), once the element moves into name-final position, its stress is severely weakened, which affects the vowels of both syllables; final-syllable [a] is reduced to a schwa, and the original stress vowel and lateral have yielded [ʌ]; interestingly, the final syllable is closed by an epenthetic [ʃ]. Finally, the process of reduction continues in (3), where the increased syllable count forces the removal of the final syllable. (Long ON loan-names have almost invariably been pared down to three syllables in their modern Gaelic forms; an exception here is the Skye name *Heribusta*.) These three reflexes, then, do seem to have arisen from the same ON element. In addition we have documentary evidence which suggests that the forms in question go back to a common source-element.

The form of the element suggested is *bóls+Ǫ+C* or *bóls+Ǫ(+C)*. All commentators, however, derive these Islay names from (-)*bólstaðr* (e.g. Gillies 1906. 223; Johnston 1934. 41-2; Henderson 1910. 197-98). What has happened to the original *t*? To say that the original medial cluster *-lst-* has lost its *t* in favour of a cluster *-ls-* as a result of dialectal preference is a solution, but by no means conclusive. It would seem more likely for the lateral to be the weakest link in a cluster *-lst-*, as was the case in areas where we can be certain *bólstaðr* occurred; compare Islay [pɔustər] (Holmer 1938. 130) and Kintyre [bo'əsɔər] (Holmer 1962. 46), whose etymon gives Eng. *bolster*. In addition to the phonological evidence here, there is the negative evidence of the absence of *bólstaðr*-names, considered in the light of the reflexes looked at so far, in the area of Tiree and Mull: why should the wave of *bólstaðr*-names peter out in Coll only to reappear so strongly in Islay?

Unfortunately, no obvious derivation for [bɔuLsa] etc. springs readily to mind, at least when we make comparisons with the commoner settlement-generics surviving in Norway. Certainly it appears that we have a compound in initial *ból*. Theoretically, the following [s] could be from its genitive form or the initial sound of the second element in a compound-word, as in *bólstaðr*. Could we here be in the presence of a new generic-term, one only marginally in use in Norway, or perhaps one not even pertinent to events in Norway? There is plenty of evidence to show that the Norse nomenclature in the west developed on different lines to the one in Norway itself, and that even within the western area there were distinctive patterns. For example, the absence of *setr* or *sætr* name-forms in Iceland; the high productivity of the stream-element *gróf* in Lewis, e.g. in the name *Allt Alagro* [NB 1939] -['ɑ:Lə,grɔ] fr. ON *Álagróf* 'stream of the eels'; and the use of the early Gaelic loan-word *ærgi* (Gael. *àirigh* a 'shieling') in many Hebridean islands.

Now in the south-west of Norway there is a name *Bolshus* (NG 9, 308). This would appear to give ON *Bólshús* 'the house of the farm', with gen.sg. of *ból*, and *hús* nt. a 'house, or group of buildings on a farm'. We might speculate that [bɔuLsa] etc. derive from a metathesised form of ON \**bólshús*, or, perhaps less likely, \**ból-hús* with the stem form of *ból*. Altogether better would be an ON compound \**bólshagi* with final masc. *hagi*. *Hagi* originally meant an 'enclosed field', but also evolved the more general sense 'pasture'. In modern Scandinavian languages we find the senses 'garden; enclosed pasture; hedge or fence; and meadow'. Reduction of \**bólshagi* to [bɔuLsa] is quite straightforward, and although the compound is not attested in Old Norse nor found, to my knowledge, in the modern Scandinavian languages, it is not unfeasible. We can speculate that its sense could have been similar to the use of Gael. *geàrraidh* in Lewis, where it applied to the enclosed land immediately around, often attached to, the dwelling-house and later to the stance of land upon which the dwelling-house stood (Cox 1987. I. 268; II. 18). A modern Norwegian parallel would be *selsbø*, an 'enclosure adjoining a mountain summer farm'.<sup>2</sup>

At this point we can remember that we are looking here at Islay alone, with the exception of one, perhaps two examples in Mull. *Bólstaðr*-names come as far south as Skye and Coll, and in the latter area, as we have seen, *ból* itself then became functional as a settlement generic-element. Once this happened, even if the element had fallen into disuse as regards its other senses, *ból* was again available for re-use in the formation of some other compound-noun. This, I suggest, occurred in Islay.

The south Mull example of -[bʌs] could be seen as an extension of influence or settlement from Islay. Gillies (1906. 232) mentions another apparent [bʌs]-form, but I do not know its location. (An island-name, *Bolsa*, is also cited by Gillies (op.cit. 227) but it is not included here because I do not know its location either.) However, the Mull names could be taken as a link between what happened in the Tiree-Coll-Mull area (the transferral from the use of *bólstaðr* to *ból*) and what occurred in Islay (the employment of another element compounded with *ból*). There may be a

geographically closer link though, in the Coll name *Bousd*, but which earlier we attributed to *bólstaðr*. The problem with this name is the loss of the final syllable. It is not as if the generic here were in name-final position, with its stress considerably weakened, which would tend to promote its being dropped. Of course, a general influence from name-forms in final [bɔst] could be cited, although this has not apparently occurred elsewhere. An alternative solution is that [bɔust] is in fact not from *bólstaðr* but from *\*bólshagi*. An original Coll name, \*[bɔuLsa], which yielded \*[bɔusa], would be in a position to be influenced by [st]-forms, but its overall shape could be retained by a simple process of segmental substitution: \*[bɔusa] giving \*[bɔust].

## AN OVERVIEW

While the case for a derivation of Islay name-forms from ON *\*bólshagi* is not conclusive, because we have no knowledge of such a compound being used elsewhere, the fact that *bólstaðr* is not the only generic element that has contributed to the range of reflexes under discussion here should surely make us wary of making assumptions regarding a derivation from *bólstaðr*. Let us turn and look at the overall picture.

The few names with ON *býli*, as we have seen, do not contribute to our knowledge of Norse settlement patterns. Rather they say something about what Norsemen found already in existence at certain locations when they themselves settled in the vicinity. On a map showing the areal distribution of the generic elements we have been discussing, then, *býli* occurs within the area where *bólstaðr* is found [Fig. 3.10]. This includes Caithness, the Western Isles, and most of Skye and Coll. We are looking at a relatively peripheral penetration of settlement from the north-east and from the north-west. Within this area we also have evidence for the use of the element *bústaðr*, although this was certainly marginal.

Directed inward from this, from Caithness down to the Moray Firth, and in the west within an area including Coll, Tiree and Mull, we find names in *ból* [Fig. 3.8]. That this development is found on both sides of the country suggests, I think, that we are probably not looking at a purely local innovation. *Ból* is found in Norwegian place-names, though its derivative *bøli* nt. is commoner (see Sandnes and Stemshaug 1980. 86; Rygh 1898. 44, 46). And it is also found in Iceland, e.g. *Drápsból*, and *Háaból* (Allee 1973. 48, 50).

The development we next find in the west is not, however, paralleled on the east of Scotland. The generic element here, I suggest, was an innovation and not one we should expect to find necessarily reflected, therefore, in the place-nomenclatures of Norway or Iceland. This was possibly an otherwise unattested *\*bólshagi*. While the area concerned includes Islay and at least part of Mull, the name *Bousd*, which was discussed earlier in relation to Islay names, may well indicate that part of Coll also lies within this area.

Finally, over the whole area with which we have been dealing (except

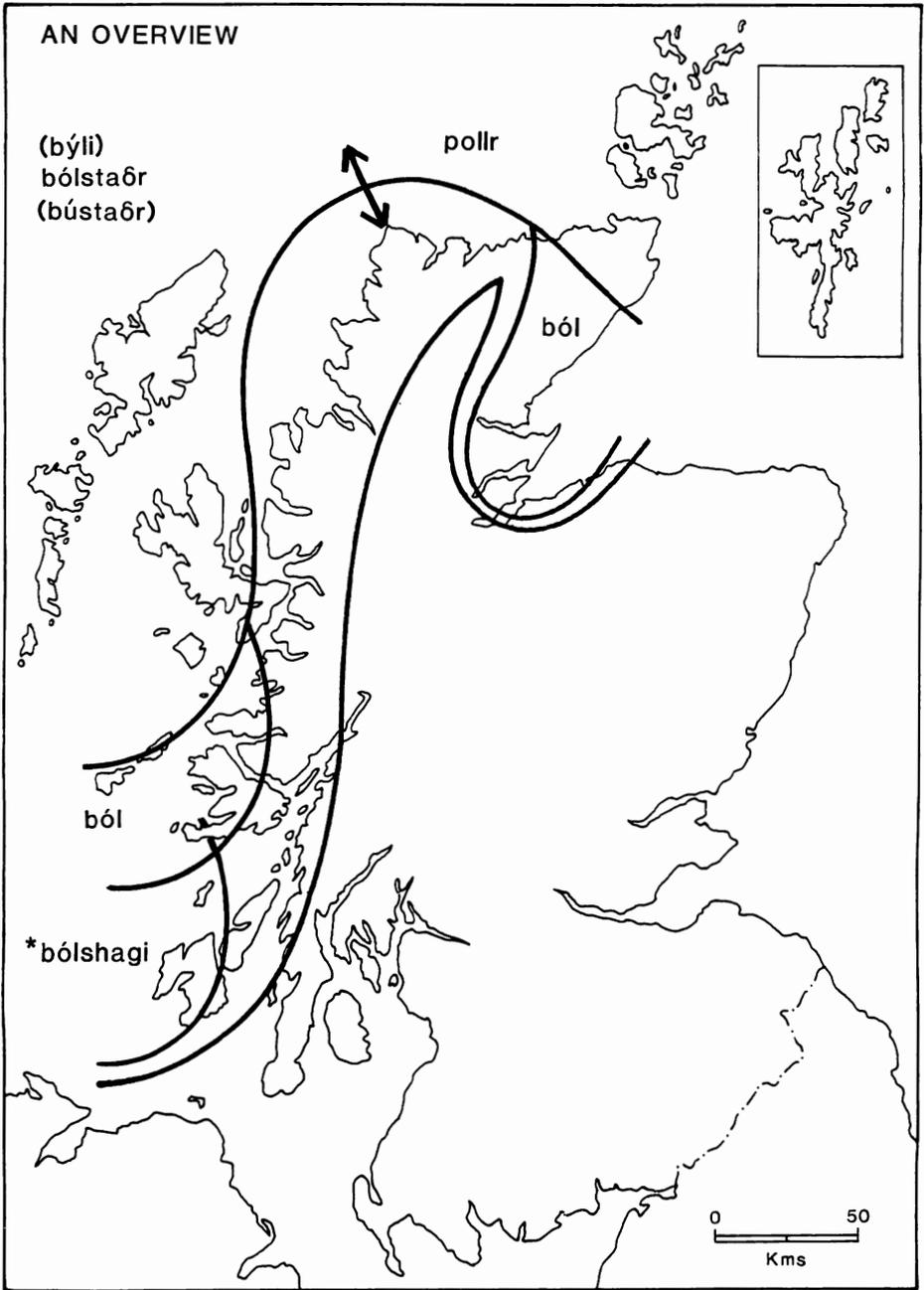


Fig. 3.10 Overview of the areal distribution of the ON generic elements discussed.

perhaps for Caithness, East Sutherland and Easter Ross), we find evidence of *pollr*-names. Since these originally applied to some sort of feature involving water, we cannot view them as settlement-names for our purpose, though they were later transferred to settlements. Of limited occurrence compared to valley-names in ON (-)*dalr*, they nevertheless have a similar significance in showing the distribution of Norse influence as opposed to Norse settlement.

In conclusion, it is submitted that the group of reflexes under discussion here are not all from the one ON element *bólstaðr*, but in fact from six different ON elements: *býli*, *bústaðr*, *bólstaðr*, *ból*, *pollr*, and an unconfirmable form, perhaps an unattested *\*bólshagi*. Despite the lack of certainty regarding an etymon for the Islay reflexes, the phasing of Norse settlement in Scotland is clearly more serial and more complex than has hitherto been thought, and we must especially review the situation with regard to the west and north-west coast of the mainland. Once a detailed analysis of each individual name has been made, the evidence must be collated with other information about settlement patterns that we already have at our disposal, and, hopefully, new evidence that may yet come to light. In doing so, various tantalising questions of chronology will also have to be addressed. For instance, what had been happening when the abbot quit Iona in 807 AD? This, however, along with other such questions, is not within the remit of this paper.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Dr Doreen Waugh suggested to me that we might in some cases be dealing with names where *pollr* as an element in the onomasticon was used implicitly of a 'settlement at the head of, or on a fiord'. This is certainly possible, and should be taken into account in making a more detailed examination of the names.

<sup>2</sup>*\*Bólshagi* could be objected to on the grounds that it is an unlikely compound since it contains the genitive rather than the stem of *ból*. However, the development of a compound as an appellative — one then used in the onomasticon — is plausible.

## Appendix 1

The names relevant to this survey are listed here according to island or area, along with grid references and relevant pronunciations. In addition, three names are given whose locations are uncertain. These are unnumbered below and are not accounted for on distribution maps. However, given their likely locations, they do not contradict conclusions drawn above. *Noustapal* should be discounted, and is also unnumbered.

### Lewis

1. Habost	NB5262	-[bɔst]
2. Swainbost	NB5162	-[bɔst]
3. Melbost	NB4157	-[bɔst]
4. Shawbost	NB4625	-[bɔst]
5. Bosta	NB1841	[bɔ:sta(ɣ)]
6. Bosta	NB1440	[bɔ:sta(ɣ)]

7.	Kirkibost	NB1835	-[bɔst]
8.	Loch Chulapuill	NB4843	-[bɛN']
9.	Garrabost	NB5033	-[bɔst]
10.	Upper Bayble	NB5331	-[bəl]
11.	Melbost	NB4157	-[bɔst]
12.	Crossbost	NB3824	-[bɔst]
13.	Lcurbost	NB3725	-[bɔst]
14.	Loch Ulapoll	NB3222	-[bəl]
15.	Habost	NB3219	-[bɔst]
16.	Calbost	NB4117	-[bɔst]
17.	Port Grigaspul	NB2214	?-[bəl]

*Harris*

18.	Scilebost	NG0696	-[bɔst]
19.	Horgabost	NG0496	-[bɔst]
20.	Tràigh Nisabost	NG0496	-[bɔst]

*Taransay*

21.	Paible	NG0399	-[bəl]
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*Scalpav*

22.	Meall Challibost	NG2294	-[bɔst]
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*North Uist*

23.	Paible	NF7368	-[bəl]
24.	Claddach Kirkibost	NF7865	-[bɔst]

*South Uist*

25.	Barp Frobost	NF7525	-[bɔst]
—	Noustapal	NF8220	-[bəl]

*Skye*

26.	Heribusta	NG4071	-[bɔsta]
27.	Prabost	NG4249	-[bɔst]
28.	Carbost	NG4348	-[bɔst]
29.	Skeabost	NG4248	-[bɔst]
30.	Breabost	NG3653	-[bɔst]
31.	Colbost	NG2149	-[bɔst]
32.	Husabost	NG2051	-[bɔst]
33.	Heribost	NG2745	-[bɔst]
34.	Orbost	NG2543	-[bɔst]
35.	Colbost Point	NG3130	-[bɔst]
36.	Eabost	NG3139	-[bɔst]
37.	Boust	NG3537	[bɔusta]
38.	Carbost	NG3831	-[bɔst]
39.	Ben Meabost	NG5316	-[bɔst]
40.	Kirkibost	NG5517	-[bɔst]
41.	Harrapool	NG6522	-[bəl]

*Rum*

42.	Raonapol	NM4099	?-[bəl]
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*Coll*

43.	Bousd	NM2563	[bɔust]
44.	Grishipoll	NM1959	-[bəl]
45.	Arnabost	NM2160	-[bɔst]
46.	Crossapoll	NM1253	-[bəl]
47.	Mibost	NM2059	?-[bɔst]

*Tiree*

48. Cnoc Bhircepol	NL9544	?-[bɔL]
49. Barrapoll	NL9543	-[bɔL]
50. Heylipoll	NL9743	?-[bɔL]
51. Crossapoll	NL9943	-[bɔL]
52. Kirkapoll	NM0447	-[bɔL]
53. Loch Bhasapol	NL9747	-[bɔL]

*Mull*

— Lurabus	?	(Gillies 1906. 232)
54. Sunipol	NM3753	-[bɔL]
55. Crossapol	NM3853	-[bɔL]
56. Scobull	NM4627	-[bɔL]
57. Eorabus	NM3823	-[bɔL]
58. Loch Assopol	NM4020	-[bɔL]

*Islay*

59. Asabus	NR3141	-[bɔL]
60. Kinnabus	NR2942	-[bɔL]
61. Risabus	NR3143	-[bɔL]
62. Coillabus	NR3243	-[bɔL]
63. Lurabus	NR3343	-[bɔL]
64. Upper Cragabus	NR3245	-[bɔL]
65. Cornabus	NR3346	-[bɔL]
66. Cnocan Bhrannabuis	NR3447	?-[bɔL]
67. Grobolls	NR3360	-[bɔL]
68. West Carrabus	NR3163	-[bɔL]
69. Eallabus	NR3363	-[bɔL]
70. Eorabus	NR3664	-[bɔL]
71. Coullabus	NR2965	-[bɔL]
72. Lyrabus	NR3065	-[bɔL]
73. Scarrabus	NR3465	-[bɔL]
74. Kepolls	NR3865	-[bɔL]
75. Dùn Chollabus	NR3567	?-[bɔL]
76. Robolls Hill	NR3967	-[bɔL]
77. Persabus	NR4168	-[bɔL]
78. Torrabus	NR4270	-[bɔL]
79. Bolsa	NR3877	? [bɔLsa]
80. Nereabolls	NR2255	-[bɔL]
81. Bolsay	NR2257	[bɔLsa]
— Tösabus	?	(Henderson 1910. 198)
82. Corsapool	NR2966	?-[bɔL]

*Luing*

83. Cullipool	NM7313	-[bɔL]
— Island of Bolsa	?	(Gillies 1906. 227)

*Moidart*

84. Reisipol	NM7264	-[bɔL]
85. Meoble	NM7987	-[bɔL]
86. Arnabol Hill	NM7584	?-[bɔL]

*Wester Ross*

87. Ullapool	NH1393	-[bɔL]
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*West Sutherland*

88. Unapool	NC2333	-[bɔL]
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*North Sutherland*

89. Eriboll	NC4356	-[bəL]
90. Polla	NC3854	['phɔLa] ['phɔLə]
91. Kirkiboll	NC5856	-[bəL]
92. Arnaboll	NC4657	-[bəL]

*Easter Ross*

93. Arboll	NH8781	?-[bəL]†
94. Cadboll	NH8777	-[bət]
95. Culbo	NH6360	?-[bəL]†

*East Sutherland*

96. Embo	NH8192	-[bəL]
97. Skelbo	NH7895	-[bəL]
98. Skibo	NH7389	?-[bəL]
99. Torboll	NH7599	-[bɪl']
100. Torroboll	NC5904	?-[bəL]
101. Colaboll	NC5510	?-[bəL]
102. Eldrable	NC9818	?-[bəL]
103. Duible	NC9219	?-[bəL]
104. Lcarable	NC8923	?-[bəL]
105. Borroboll	NC8726	?-[bəL]

*Appendix 2*

Exceptions to derivations from ON (-)bólstaðr of the names listed in Appendix 1, as given by earlier commentators, are noted below with relevant references, according to source-element.

ON *býli*: Oftedal 1954. 396 (Bayble).

ON *ból*: Forbes 1923. 212 (Harrapool); Gillies 1906. 223 (no examples given); Johnston 1934. 41-42 (no examples given); Henderson 1910. 152-53, 188, 192-93, 355 (names in orthographic *-bol(l)* *-pol(l)* and *-pool*, except Ullapool p. 158); Watson 1976. 40 (Cadboll), 47 (Arboll), 121 (Culbo).

ON *pollr*: Gillies 1906. 236 (Cnoc Bhircepol, Loch Bhasapol).

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