

*The Semantic Structure of*  
**SCOTTISH HYDRONYMY**

---

W. F. H. Nicolaisen \*

INTRODUCTION

Scottish place-names have never suffered from lack of interest. On the contrary, there have always been people, from all walks of life, who have dedicated a considerable amount of their time to the study of Scottish toponymy. Very often the reason for this has been an academic one: an antiquarian's interest in local history, an archæologist's desire to find confirmation of his own research in the place-nomenclature of the region, a geographer's attempt at solving the problems of human settlement or a philologist's quest for data relating to the linguistic past of a district. The most important factors taken into account by these students of place-names are usually the distribution of certain elements, the morphological formation of names, the sound changes they imply and the definition of the language and linguistic stratum to which they belong.

But besides this academic approach there has always been a genuine interest in place-names on the side of the general public, although with a completely different emphasis and attitude. To the archæologist, the geographer, the historian—and even to the philologist, semantic considerations may only be of secondary importance. To them it does not really matter what a name “means”. Not so with the ordinary enquirer and place-name enthusiast. His first, and normally his only, question is “What does this name mean?” And if the name is not easily explained and understood, he resorts to what is usually called “folk-etymology” until its obscurity is made intelligible. Just as a thing, an idea, an event cannot be “mastered” by the human mind until it can be put into words, so one's geographical surroundings cannot be “mastered” till one has given them intelligible names or till one understands the names they already possess. So, this popular approach to a place name—in contrast to the scholarly one—reflects in

\* Junior Research Fellow, School of Scottish Studies.

its special interest in the "meaning" of the name the tendency of the human being to "master" his world—and that includes his geographical surroundings—linguistically.

The Scot—and the Scottish Highlander in particular—seems to have developed an even stronger inclination towards this merely semantic interpretation of toponymic evidence, than members of other nations, as any visitor, especially to the Gaelic-speaking areas, who has ever made any enquiries about place-nomenclature will testify. The crofter, the shepherd, the local schoolmaster—not only will they supply him with the "correct" form of the name and its meaning, but most probably also with a story that explains and underlines this particular meaning. Etymological speculation and imaginative interpretation are applied to the name in question and both have undoubtedly been very strong formative powers in the creation of new names, or the adaptation of old and obscure ones, throughout all phases of Scottish toponymy.

It is typical of this popular approach to the understanding of a place-name—and, indeed, of many a pseudo-scholarly attempt at such an understanding as well—that a linguistic explanation is looked for only in the modern language spoken in that particular area at the time of the enquiry. This is where the peculiar nature of place-names is completely misunderstood, a nature which makes them important source-material of the linguistic history of any country. Personal names wander and migrate with the people that bear them and only in exceptional cases throw much light on the nature of the language or languages spoken in a certain area in the past. But place-names are more stationary, as is to be expected because of their close connection with the land.\* They also possess a remarkable power of survival. When, in the course of extensive migrations and re-settlement people of different linguistic stock arrive in a certain region, settle there and, finally, dominate the earlier inhabitants, politically and linguistically, not every geographical feature is named afresh. Old names are translated, either in part or in whole, or are just adapted in accordance with the phonetic possibilities of the new language; sometimes elements belonging to the old language are used in conjunction with elements that are part of the new one, resulting in a not inconsiderable number of

\* This does not, of course, mean that they cannot be transplanted; names of European settlements in the "New World" prove the contrary; but, in these cases, the original name usually stays behind and remains a stationary feature of the emigrants' home-land.

toponymical hybrids. The main fact emerging from these observations is, that when new place-names are coined in a different linguistic medium, not all the old names are replaced and disappear, but a certain number of them remains, although often disguised and hardly recognisable.

The result is a stratification of various layers of linguistic sediments, the lowest of which leads us much further back into history and prehistory than any other linguistic evidence. It is the task of the place-name scholar to remove layer after layer, examining the morphological and semantic structure of the names each contains and utilising them in the interpretation of the early stages of those languages to which they can be assigned. When the "lowest" stratum is reached that can still be interpreted with the linguistic knowledge now at our disposal, there will still be a number of names left that have defied all attempts at an explanation, but it would be dangerous to treat obscurity as a sign of the great age of a name. Oral tradition of a name is subject to so many influences, especially when more than one language is involved in its execution, that it would be surprising if every single name could be satisfactorily analysed in the course of our investigations.

Generally, place-names ante-dating names of human settlements are those denoting water-courses or mountains and hills, and especially names of burns and rivers. Such throw much light on the problems of linguistic prehistory and so of prehistory in general. The oldest of them are like fossils preserved in later surrounding linguistic media, and it is not too bold to say that the oldest Scottish river-names give us information about the language or languages spoken on the banks of the water-courses they denote, more than 1000 years B.C.

This is not the place for us to outline the course of our investigations in that particular field of research. It will suffice for our immediate purposes to state the results of that enquiry: there are at least five layers of Scottish hydronymy, the English, the Norse, the Gaelic, the "p"-Celtic and the pre-Celtic Indo-European. A closer examination, however, shows that there are really two English strata, one linked up with northern English stream-nomenclature and one moulded upon underlying Gaelic patterns when English began to invade the Highlands. Furthermore, the Norse layer may be divided into three sub-sections, one supplying the generic terms Old Norse *ā*, *grof* and—possibly—*lōn*, the second introducing the *beck*-names near the English border, the third

providing the Scots dialect with the term *grain*. Only two strata cover the whole of Scotland: the latest, the English, and the earliest, the pre-Celtic one. All others are confined to a certain part of the country and usually to a certain period of name productivity.

Morphologically, the top strata of Scottish hydronymy—as those of the other parts of the British Isles and of other European countries—consist of compound names, regardless of the language to which they belong. But underneath these a different class of names is to be found characterised by the formation: stem+suffix. This group only amounts to 8 per cent of all Scottish river-names marked on the one inch Ordnance Survey maps, with the following subdivision: Gaelic names 5·3 per cent, *p*-Celtic names 1·8 per cent, pre-Celtic names 0·8 per cent. With two possible exceptions, Germanic names do not appear in this category, and the formation of river-names by suffixing seems to have ended in their respective languages before the Norsemen and Anglo-Saxons reached Scotland. A number of simple stems occurs in the early hydronymic strata. Even if these early names are few in comparison with the overwhelming majority of modern names, they prove how futile it would be to try to explain every single name of a Scottish water-course from the vocabulary of Modern Anglo-Scottish or Modern Scottish Gaelic.

It is against this morphological and historical background that we wish to outline the semantic structure of Scottish river-nomenclature, i.e. we want to apply scholarly and linguistic methods to that aspect of a section of Scottish toponymy that is normally the prerogative of popular and imaginative speculation. The form in which this will be done will be a systematic classification of names of Scottish water-courses that covers all the categories of meaning which appear in this nomenclature. Significant examples will be chosen from all hydronymic layers, from all dialect areas and from all morphological classes. We shall examine whether and how the predominance of certain aspects of meaning changed in the course of time, and how much each stratum of Scottish hydronymy has to contribute towards each semantic group. We shall also attempt to illustrate, by these examples and by the changes they imply, the change of attitude in the minds of the people who created this Scottish river-nomenclature in its various phases.

The system of classification used will be, in principle, the

one worked out by Bach (1953) for the names of German water-courses. It will be adapted to the special Scottish situation and enlarged to be applicable to the whole of our hydronymy. Comparative notes will be supplied wherever the river-nomenclature of other parts of the British Isles or of other countries in which an Indo-European language is, or used to be, spoken seems to throw light on our particular Scottish problem. Scottish hydronymy is not an isolated entity—either in its semantic or its morphological aspect—and cannot be treated without comparative reference to the terminology applied to rivers and streams in those countries from which the languages, traceable in Scotland's linguistic history, originally emigrated. Scandinavia, Ireland, England, Wales, the European continent proper all have much to contribute to toponymic research in Scotland. Scottish hydronymy, and Scottish toponymy in general, may have many peculiarly "Scottish" features, but nothing could more dangerously impair a satisfactory progress in their investigation than a parochial or national outlook that, apart from ignoring the toponymic situation and research south of the Tweed, refused to look for elucidation from beyond the North Sea, the Irish Sea and the English Channel. The study of place-names in any country must be based on the methods and results of *comparative* linguistics.

The basic material for the following survey has been excerpted from Ordnance Survey maps, scale 1 inch : 1 mile, and supplemented by derivations and explanations of Scottish rivers and burns, given in various place-name studies of which there are not very many that can be accepted and approved without some considerable hesitation. The acceptance of this kind of material as a basis for a genuinely linguistic investigation entails certain handicaps, limitations and inaccuracies, due to the nature of geographical names printed on Ordnance Survey maps covering Scotland, especially in respect of Gaelic names. But it seems that these inexactitudes, slight or grave as they may be, do not seriously impair the validity of the conclusions reached at this stage of Scottish hydronymic research especially in a study of this nature, in which neither comprehensiveness nor finality can be attempted. The advantage of the Ordnance Survey maps is that they cover the *whole* of Scotland, and the 1 inch : 1 mile edition provides a suitable number of names of rivers and burns.

The spellings given will be normally those to be found on

these maps, and the county abbreviations, used to indicate the geographical situation of the water-courses concerned, will be those adopted by the place-name department of the School of Scottish Studies. A complete list of these abbreviations will be provided at the end. Names in the Western Isles will be followed by the name of the island in which they occur, not by the county name. Older forms will generally not be mentioned, as that would only extend the already lengthy lists of names without contributing much to our particular attempt at *a classification of Scottish river-names according to their meaning*. Normally only one instance of a name will be mentioned, even if it occurs several times, as is often the case with the names of smaller water-courses.

#### CLASSIFICATION \*

##### A. Streams named after CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WATER

###### (a) *The colour of the water*

O.S.M. 1" (Scotland) † have 412 stream-names derived from the colour of the water. This naming of a water-course after the special characteristics impressed upon the people living near it, through the medium of the eye, is by far the most common, compared with the other groups of names that express a special quality of the water of a stream or river. The figures for these groups are: the *taste and smell* of the water 8; *temperature* of the water 6; *noise* of the flowing water 53; *effect* of the water 12.

Almost the whole colour-scheme is represented in this category, some colours more frequently than others. Yet although, in the majority of cases, the actual colour of the water of a stream may have prompted the name it bears, we must take into consideration the possibility of fashionable name patterns and semantic models. Moreover, in quite a number of instances *black* and *white* do not so much serve to describe the colour of the water as to distinguish between two water-courses that flow into each other, are parallel tributaries of the same river or bear the same name and could be confused because of their geographical proximity.

\* The following name-lists were first compiled for the third chapter of my thesis entitled *Studies in Scottish Hydronymy*, submitted for the degree of B.Litt. of Glasgow University in 1956.

† O.S.M. 1" will be used in this article as the abbreviation for Ordnance Survey map, scale 1 inch : 1 mile, 4th edition.

Here are some examples for the various colours:

Black: *Abhainn Dubh* ROS, *Alltan Dubh* SUT, *Allt Dubh* SUT, *Allt Dubhagan* PER, *An Dubh-Alltan* SUT, *Black Burn* MOR, *Black Sike* SLK, *Black Water* ROX, *Caochan Dubh* INV, *Douglas Water* ARG, *Duack Burn* INV, *Dubh Uisge* INV, *Dupple Burn* DMF, *Dye Water* BWK, *Féith Dubh* SUT, *Lón Dubh* SKYE, *River Divie* MOR, *Uisge Dubh* INV.

Blue: *Allt Ghormaig* INV, *Allt Gorm* INV, *Gormack Burn* ABD, *Feadan Gorm* LEWIS.

Bright: *Light Water* KCD, *Lochar Water* DMF, *Luggie Water* DNB/LAN—DNB, *Peffer Burn* ELO, *River Loyne* INV, *The Lussa* ARG.

Brindled: *Alltan Riabhach* SUT, *Allt Riabhach* ROS, *Caochan Riabhach* INV, *Féith Riabhach* SUT.

Brown: *Caochan Donn* INV, \**Duinnid* (in Inverinate) ROS.

Dark: *Alltan Dorch* ROS, *Leuchar Burn* ABD, *River Lochy* INV.

Dun: *Alltan Odhar* ROS, *Allt Odhar* INV, *Féith Odhar* PER.

Filthy: *Mossat Burn* ABD, *Salachie Burn* ROS.

Green: *Abhainn Glas* PER, *Abhainn Uaine* LEWIS, *Allt Glas* PER, *Allt Uaine* INV, *Glas Allt* ABD, *Glas Burn* ANG, *Glas Féith* PER, *Greenburn* BNF, *Lón Glas* SKYE, *River Glass* ROS.

Grey: *Allt Liath* SCALPAY.

Pic-bald: *Allt Drimmeach* INV.

Red: *Abhainn Dearg* ROS, *Alltan Dearg* SUT, *Alltan Roy* ABD, *Allt Dearg* ROS, *Allt Ruadh* INV, *Dearg Abhainn* ARG, *Dearg Allt* INV, *Red Burn* MOR, *River Roy* INV.

Silver: *Silver Burn* ABD.

Speckled: *Allt Ballach* INV, *Alltan Breac* ARG, *Allt Breac* ROS, *Caochan Breac* INV.

White: *Allt a' Gheallaidh* MOR, *Allt Bàn* INV, *Allt Geal* SUT, *Burn of Canny* ABD, *Cander Water* LAN, *Dìg Bhàn* ARG, *Féith Bhàn* ARG, *Fender Burn* PER, *Finglas Water* PER, *Fionn-abhainn* ROS, *Fionn Allt* LEWIS, *Geldie Burn* ABD, *Gelder Burn* ABD, *Lón Bàn* SKYE, *River Finnan* INV, *Sruthan Bàn* S. UIST, *Sruth Geal* PER, *White Burn* ANG, *White Grain* SLK, *White Sike* SLK, *White Water* ANG.

Yellow: *Allt Buidhe* ARG, *Féith Buidhe* SUT, *Pollan Buidhe* ROS.

Colour adjectives are often used to distinguish between two related water-courses, as for example:

*Allt Bàn*—Lower part *Allt Dubh* SKYE.

*Dubh Lighe*—*Fionn Lighe* (parallel streams) INV.

*White Burn* joins *Black Burn* ANG.



*Black Cart Water* RNF joins *White Cart Water* LAN/RNF—RNF.  
*Black Laggan Burn*→*White Laggan Burn* KCD.  
*Blackadder Water*→*Whiteadder Water* BWK.  
*River Findhorn* (\**Fionn Earn*)—*River Deveron* (\**Dubh Earn*)—  
identical primary river-names in the same district.

That this practice is not confined to Scotland is shown by Welsh doublets like *Braenan Ddu* and *Wen, Claerddu* and *Claerwen, Cleddy Ddu* and *Wen*, as well as by the German river-names *Schwarze* and *Weisse Elster*.

In a few instances colour adjectives seem to have become generic terms for “water, river”. The Gaelic and Welsh term *glais*, “a stream” is based on Welsh *glas* “blue, grey, pale”, Gaelic *glas* “grey, green”, Breton *glaz* “green”, etc. According to Wilhelm Schulze (1934) a similar derivation is to be considered for Gaelic *dobhar* and Welsh *dw(f)r*, “water”, which are connected with Gaelic *dubh*, Welsh *du*, etc. “black”; so the original meaning of these two hydronymic terms seems to have been “the green one” and “the black one”, respectively.

(b) *The taste and smell of the water*

This group of names is small compared with the preceding one, no doubt due to the fact that the senses of taste and smell are easily overruled by the eye and the ear in the determination of the main characteristics of a water-course.—Nevertheless we can list *Allt Bhrachain* PER (“putrefaction”), *Allt Breinag* INV (“putrid”), *Allt Shallainn* PER (“salt”), *Alneel Burn* STL (“sweet”), *Foul Burn* BWK, *Garroch Burn* KCD (“having a bad odour”), *Grotaig Burn* INV (“putrid”), *Sweet Burn* ARG.

(c) *The temperature of the water*

This group of names forms an even smaller category, numerically, in Scottish hydronymy. The hotness or coldness of water have to be extremely intensive before they form the main quality of a stream. Instances are *Burn of Brown* INV/BNF (\**Brutonā*), *Cald Burn* ANG, *Cauld Burn* ELO, *Coldstream Burn* KCD, *Uisge Fuar* ISLAY, *Warm Burn* KNR.

(d) *The noise of the flowing water*

This group contains about one-eighth of the number of names in the category referring to the colour of the water, but it is considerably stronger than *b*, *c* and *e*. Its outstanding feature is the great variety of defining elements which are used to describe the kind of noise peculiar to a certain stream. One



has to listen very long and carefully before one is justified in applying any of these 53 names. *Labhar*, "talkative" seems to be one of the most favoured defining elements, and there are indications that its *p*-Celtic equivalent was used just as readily. In any case, the number of early names in this group is remarkable.—These are some of the names: *Allt Darrarie* ABD ("rattling"), *Allt Eigheach* PER ("noise"), *Allt Gleadhach* ROS ("shrill"), *Blye Water* BNF ("noise"), *Calair Burn* PER ("loud"), *Clattering Burn* LAN, *Kale Water* ROX (\**Calonā*), *Lavery Burn* AYR (\**Labharag*), *Levern Water* RNF (\**Labaronā*), *Liddel Water* ROX ("loud"), *River Balvag* PER ("silent"), *River Braan* PER ("bleating"), *River Garnock* AYR ("noisy"), *River Ythan* ABD ("talkative"), *Rumbling Burn* AYR, *The Shevock* ABD ("quiet"), *Uisge Labhair* INV ("loud"), *Water of Gairney* ABD ("loud").

(e) *The effect of the water*

Names in this section refer to the health-giving quality of the water, to its blessedness, and to other virtues. They do not necessarily prove any kind of river-worship, but only point to a certain amount of superstition in the medical ideas or practice of the people living on the banks of these streams and possibly to some genuine health-promoting faculty of the "waters", when drunk by the patient. In this connection the usage of Gaelic *fion*, "wine" is interesting (Watson 1926, pp. 436-7). Examples from O.S.M. 1" are *Abhainn Eilg* INV ("virtue"), *Abhainn Bhuachaig* ROS ("virtue"), *Alltan Buadh* CAI ("virtue"), *Allt an Fhìona* INV ("wine"), *Allt Mathaig* PER ("good"), *Allt na Slànaich* INV ("having a healing virtue"), *Allt Sealbhach* SUT ("lucky"), *Allt Slanaidh* PER ("healthy"), *Hallow Burn* PEB, *Polmath Burn* AYR ("good"), *Sound Burn* LAN, *Water of Buchat* ABD ("abounding in virtue").

B. Streams named after CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WATER-COURSE

(a) *The size and length of the stream*

In 211 cases Scottish stream-names marked on O.S.M. 1" seem to refer to either the size or the length of the stream, and amongst these, names referring to the size are in a great majority. The most popular Gaelic name of this category is *Allt Mór*, of which there are at least 61 instances. *Mór* is in these cases seldom used in a relative sense, being meant to denote the absolute size of the stream, although one cannot escape the impression that it is very often just the imitation of a semantic

name pattern not referring to the actual size of the water-course. But in some instances an *Allt Beag* runs parallel to an *Allt Mór* and quite frequently *Mór* and *Beag*, *Big* and *Little* are attached to the names of parallel streams to distinguish them from each other. *Beag* and *Little* are also used to denote a tributary that bears the same name as the river into which it flows.

Examples: *Abhainn Bheag* JURA, *Abhainn Mhór* ARG, *Allt Beag* INV, *Allt Fada* LEWIS ("long"), *Allt Mór* ARG, *Allt Yairack* INV ("short"), *Beg Burn* ROS ("small"), *Big Burn* INV, *Caochan Mór* ABD, *Faeshealloch Burn* INV ("short"), *Feadan Mór* LEWIS, *Féith Mór* INV, *Gearr Abhainn* ARG, *Little Burn* SLK, *Little River* CAI, *Little Water* ABD, *Long Burn* ROX, *Long Grain* SLK, *Long Latch* BWK, *Lón Mór* SKYE, *Meikle Burn* LAN, *Muckle Burn* ANG, *Pillmour Burn* ELO, *River Morar* ROS, *Wee Burn* AYR.

Instances of two *parallel water-courses* distinguished by *mór* and *beag* are *Allt Beithe Mór* and *Beag* PER, INV; *Allt Chaorach Mór* and *Beag* INV, *Allt Dearg Mór* and *Beag* SKYE, *Allt Dhaidh Mór* and *Beag* ABD, *Allt Mór* and *Beag* ARG, ROS, *Allt Ruadh Mór* and *Beag* INV, *Féith Odhar Mhór* and *Bheag* PER, *Feochar Mhór* and *Bheag* ARG, *Fionn Allt Mór* and *Beag* LEWIS, *Scaladale More River* and *Scaladale Beg River* LEWIS.—Here also belong *Allt Mhuic Bheag* INV, flowing parallel to *Allt Mhuic*, and *Little Gruinard River* ROS, flowing parallel to *Gruinard River*.

Examples of *Little* and *Beag* being used to denote a *tributary* that bears the same name as the river into which it flows are *Allt Borgidh Beag* SUT→*River Borgie*, *Beanaidh Bheag* INV→*Am Beanaidh*, *Duibhe Bheag* PER→*Abhainn Duibhe*, *Garbh Uisge Beag* BNF→*Garbh Uisge*, *Kish Beg River* LEWIS→*Kish River*, *Little Allt Bheitheachan* BNF→*Allt Bheitheachan*, *Little Calder* LAN→*Calder Water*, *Little Eachaig River* ARG→*River Eachaig*, *Little Tarras Water* DMF→*Tarras Water*, *Luibeg Burn* ABD→*Lui Water*.—Sometimes the main river shows an additional *mór*: *Allt Cristie Beag* ABD→*Allt Cristie Mór*, *Féith Gaineimh Bheag* CAI→*Féith Gaineimh Mhór*, *Glas Féith Bheag* PER→*Glas Féith Mhór*.

Two water-courses that *join*, belonging to this category, are *Little* and *Big Water of Fleet* KCD which flow together to form the *Water of Fleet*.

Just as in the case of the juxtaposition of Gaelic *dubh* and *bàn* (or *fionn*), English *black* and *white* in the description of parallel

or joining streams of identical names, the usage of Gaelic *mór* and *beag* can be paralleled outside Scotland. In Wales we find, amongst others, *Anghidi Fawr* and *Fechan*, *Dwyfawr* and *Dwyfach*, *Llynfi Fawr* and *Fechan*, etc.

Edward Schröder (1944) in his *Deutsche Namenkunde* points out that tributaries can be named by forming diminutives from the names of the rivers into which they flow; he mentions as examples the continental river-names *Selke* (<\**Selica*)→*Sala* and *Mürz* (<\**Muoriza*)→*Muor*. Schwarz (1950) is of the opinion that this type of name is especially common in the Slavonic languages and that there even the upper reach of a water-course may be called *Little River*. A possible Scottish example of this type is *Spean* INV, if it may be taken to be a diminutive of *Spey* (Watson 1926, p. 474), although it does not, of course, flow into that river. In England and Wales this category is well represented, cf. *Erthig* (Cardigansh.)→*Arth*, *Sochan* (Caernarvonsh.)→*Soch*, *Sturkel* (Dorsetsh.)→*Stour*, OE. *Temedel* (Worcestersh.)→*Teme*, etc.

(b) *The form of the bed of the stream*

In the 184 examples of stream-names referring to the form of the water-course various comparisons with human instruments and tools are made in order to describe the shape most appropriately. We meet the *fork*, the *vat*, the *bag*, the *bowl*, the *ampulla*, the *needle* and the *trough*. This is a type especially common in Wales (cf. Thomas 1938, p. 128) where the names of many tools and instruments have become names of water-courses. In this hydronymic usage names of containers are to be found throughout Britain, the most frequent of them being *cup* or *bowl*, cf. besides the *Quoichs*, *Quaichs* and *Cuachs* of Scotland *Bune* (Oxfordsh.), *Cogan Pill* (Glamorgansh.), *Sence* (Leicestersh.). Obviously, adjectives like *crooked*, *narrow*, *round*, *pointed* were not sufficiently expressive in the opinion of the name-givers, but they saw the river as being *crooked like tongs*, *pointed like a needle*, *round like a cup*, etc., and so the water-course became itself *tongs*, *needle*, *cup*, etc. The same applies to those stream-names that are identical with names of animals or trees.

Besides these metaphorical terms mostly adjectives are used, among which *crom* and *cam* are the most frequent not only in Gaelic hydronymy but also in earlier Celtic river-names. In *Leth Allt*—in the following list the Ross-shire name serves as one example for many instances of this name throughout the Gaelic area—the intermediate meaning of *allt* as “a burn with

steep banks" is preserved, for *leth allt* "half burn" denotes a burn with only one steep bank. References to the form of a water-course in Scotland are much more common in Celtic than in Germanic river-names.

Some typical examples are: *Abhainn Shlatach* INV ("branchy"); *Allt an t-Sniomh* LEWIS ("twist"), *Allt Briste* SUT ("broken"), *Allt Cam* INV ("crooked"), *Allt Caol* CAI ("narrow"), *Allt Chernie* SUT ("angular"), *Allt Domhain* ROS ("deep"), *Allt Gobhlach* SUT ("forked"), *Allt Leathan* PER ("broad"), *Allt nan Criopag* SKYE ("wrinkles"), *Allt Nealagro* LEWIS ("needle"), *Allt Ùtha* INV ("udder"), *An Cam-allt* INV, *Braid Burn* MLO ("broad"), *Broad Burn* MOR, *Builg Burn* ABD ("bag"), *Burn of Ample* PER ("ampulla"), *Burn of Breitoe* SH ("steep"), *Cam Alltan* ROS, *Cammock Burn* AYR, *Campel Water* DMF, *Caochan Cam* INV, *Caochan Crom* SUT ("crooked"), *Caochan Uchdach* INV ("steep"), *Caolie Water* INV, *Crom Allt* ROS, *Crombie Burn* BNF, *Crook Burn* BWK, *Deep Sike* ROX, *Fiar Allt* LEWIS ("winding"), *Gable Burn* SUT, *Gowl Burn* ELO, *Leth Allt* ROS ("half-burn"), *Loop Burn* CAI, *Meoir Veannaich* ABD ("forked"), *Old Hangy Burn* KNR ("slender"), *Poldivan Lake* DMF ("deep"), *Quoich Water* ABD ("bowl"), *Rigging Sike* ROX ("meandering"), *River Bogie* ABD ("bag"), *Smail Burn* SLK ("narrow"), *Snaid Burn* STL ("needle"), *Trough Burn* AYR, *Vat Burn* SUT, *Woo Burn* SLK ("crooked").

(c) *The speed and movement of the flowing water*

A smallish category in Scottish hydronymy, this group comprises about 70 names extracted from O.S.M. 1" (Scotland). Very often terms normally applied to human moods and states of mind are used to denote the velocity of the flowing water. A rushing stream is *angry* or *quarrelsome* or *boisterous* or *wild*; references to the *fierceness*, *gaiety* or *madness* of a river also occur. Slow burns suggest *sadness*, *tranquility*, *laziness* or the *stately* movement of a procession. A stagnant brook is *dead*.

The following names may be noted as significant examples: *Abhainn Sithidh* ROS ("stately"), *Allt Bheargais* ROS ("anger"), *Allt Bhuailteach* CAI ("quarrelsome"), *Allt Chriosdain* BNF ("quick"), *Allt Sgualach* INV ("moving with a sweep"), *Allt Sniomhach* INV ("sad"), *Allt Socrach* ROS ("slow"), *Bruar Water* PER ("boiling"), *Burn of Sheeoch* KCD ("tranquil"), *Dead Water* ANG ("stagnant"), *Luther Water* KCD ("swift"),

*Mad Burn* WLO, *Maldie Burn* SUT ("slow"), *Powgavie Burn* PER ("boisterous"), *River Farg* PER ("anger"), *River Kingie* INV ("striding"), *Standing Burn* LAN, *Still Burn* MLO.

(d) *The geological nature of the bed of the stream*

Whereas the form of the bed and the movement of the flowing water are described by unusual and imaginative defining elements, the geological nature of the bed is denoted by ever recurring matter-of-fact terms, especially referring to the roughness of the bottom of the stream. So Gaelic *Garbh Allt* with its variants occurs at least 50 times; *Calder*-names are widespread and at an earlier period *Carron* is extremely common, almost suggesting appellative usage of that term, at one stage.

This is a short list of examples: *Allt Carnach* PER ("stony"), *Allt Creagach* INV ("rocky"), *Allt Lathach* INV ("clay"), *Allt Leacach* ARG ("stony"), *Allt Tollaidh* ROS ("full of holes"), *Burn of Turret* ANG ("dry"), *Calder Water* LAN ("hard"), *Carron Water* DMF ("hard"), *Dry Burn* AYR, *Gana Burn* LAN ("sandy"), *Garbh Allt* ARG ("rough"), *Garbh Uisge* BNF, *Garple Burn* KCB, *Grudie Burn* SUT ("gravelly"), *Keltie Burn* PER ("hard"), *Megen Burn* ABD ("boggy"), *Meggat Water* DMF, *Moo Burn* SH ("sandy"), *River Clachaig* ARG ("stony"), *River Elchaig* ROS ("rocky"), *River Greeta* LEWIS ("gravel"), *River Lonan* ARG ("boggy"), *River Pattack* INV ("full of pot-holes"), *River Polloch* ARG ("full of holes"), *River Sligeachan* SKYE ("shelly"), *Rough Burn* AYR, *Sandy Burn* LAN, *Sleach Water* CAI ("slimy"), *Stone Grain* PEB, *Yarrow Water* SLK ("rough").

C. Streams named after the SURROUNDINGS OF  
THE WATER-COURSE

(a) *The terrain through which the stream flows*

It is impossible to give an adequate representation of the more than 1800 Scottish stream-names which qualify for this category. It is the largest semantic group, containing about one-quarter of all names of water-courses marked on the 92 Scottish O.S.M. 1". Reference to the natural features of the terrain through which a stream flows has provided ample possibilities for the naming and re-naming of burns; the corrie, the pass, the hill, the fir-grove, the bog, the water-fall, the valley, the hollow, the point, the field, the slope, the haugh, the meadow, the rock, the marsh—they, and many other

natural features of the countryside, all enter Scottish hydronymy as defining elements, as a rule in the names of smaller water-courses. Many of these descriptive names contain quite a number of words as, for instance, *Allt Cnoc Airidh an t-Seolich Bhig* SUT or *Uisge Dubh Poll a' Choin* INV, and one is entitled to ask how far these accurate *descriptions* are really *names*. Quite a number of them bear much more resemblance to the directions given by a farmer to his shepherd or by a laird to his foresters than to a short, practicable and current proper name. It may very well be the map that will finally turn these descriptions into names and will preserve them as such. Here are a few out of this host of names: *Abhainn Droma* ROS ("ridge"), *Abhainn na Coinnich* ARG ("moss"), *Akran Burn* SUT ("field"), *Allt an Doire-giubhais* ROS ("fir-grove"), *Allt an t-Sneachda* ABD ("snow"), *Allt Bad nan Clach* SUT ("clump"), *Allt Bealach Easain* INV ("pass"), *Allt Choire Phìobaire* INV ("corrie"), *Allt Creag a' Chait* NAI ("craig"), *Allt Eas na Maoile* SUT ("water-fall"), *Allt Lón Ghlas Bheinn* INV ("morass"), *Allt na h-Innse Buidhe* ARG ("haugh"), *Allt Ruigh na Cuileige* ABD ("slope"), *Allt Uamha na Muice* ARG ("cave"), *Caochan Glac na Crìche* INV ("hollow"), *Cleuch Burn* LAN ("ravine"), *Coillechat Burn* PER ("wood"), *Dale Water* SH, *Hamra River* SKYE ("rock"), *Howe Burn* BWK ("hollow"), *Kames River* ARG ("bay"), *Knock Burn* KCB ("hill"), *Laggan Burn* BTE ("hollow"), *Linnshaw Burn* AYR ("copse"), *Loch Strand* WIG, *Longhill Burn* MLO, *Lón Horro* SKYE ("moor"), *Mire Burn*, ROX, *Pertter Burn* DMF ("copse"), *Strath Burn* CAI ("valley"), *Strone Burn* PER ("point").

(b) Tree vegetation associated with the water-course

This group and the following one are not only of interest to the linguist but also the botanist, for if the modern names of this type reflect the distribution of trees and plants as we find it in our own time, older names can contribute towards the knowledge of the distribution of these in earlier periods. At least 16 different tree-names enter into Scottish hydronymy; the birch, the fir, the rowantree, the alder, the willow, and the hazel are especially well represented in younger names, whereas the elm only comes into names of the *p*-Celtic period. Remarkable absentees are the beech and the ash. Apparently, conspicuous single trees, as well as clusters of trees or little groves and larger forests, can contribute towards the making of a name for the stream that flows past them. O.S.M. 1"



has 169 names of this type altogether; in the following list we shall give one or two examples under each tree-name:

- Alder: *Alltan Feàrna* SUT, *Alder Burn* LAN.  
Birch: *Allt Beithe* ROS, *Birken Burn* STL.  
Bird-cherry: *River Fiag* SUT.  
Blackthorn: *Allt Dregnie* BNF.  
Elder: *River Tromie* INV.  
Elm: *River Leven* INV/ARG, *Glen Almagro* LEWIS.  
Fir: *Allt Giubhais* ROS.  
Hawthorn: *River Skiack* ROS.  
Hazel: *Cowie Water* KCD, *Hazel Burn* ANG.  
Holly: *Allt a' Chuilinn* SUT.  
Juniper: *Allt Staoine* CAI.  
Oak: *Derry Burn* ABD, *Oak Burn* SLK.  
Rowan-tree: *Allt a' Chaoruinn* ROS, *Rowan-tree Grains* LAN.  
Sloe: *Allt a' Droighinn* ROS.  
Willow: *Allt nan Seileach* BNF, *Willow Burn* DMF.  
Yew: *River Ure* ARG, *Glen Ioagro* LEWIS.

Not all names mentioned in this list are necessarily derived from trees growing, singly or in clusters, near or on the banks of the water-course they denote. In a number of cases the streams can be rather thought of as being identified with these trees, just as in group B.b. above we find river-names identified with names of tools, instruments and containers. The link between tree-name and river-name may be the shape of the water-course or some other quality that seemed to be common to both the tree and the river in question. But it is quite possible that this identification was due to some other imaginative process in the mind of the name-giver(s) which we are now unable to follow. Of course, the possibility of imitation must be taken into consideration; one river-name derived from a tree-name created another, and so forth.

In the above list, *River Fiag* SUT (= Gael. *fiodhag* "bird-cherry"), *River Tromie* INV (= \**tromm-de* "of elders"), *River Skiack* ROS (= Gael. *sgitheach* "hawthorn", or < *Allt na sgitheach*), *Cowie Water* KCD (= O.Ir. *collde* "columnus") and *Derry Burn* ABD (= O.Ir. *dairde* "oaken") seem to belong to this category, although the meaning "abounding in elders, hazel, oaks" is not ruled out for the names in *-ie*, *-y*. For this type of name in Russian and Polish hydronymy refer to Paul Trost, *Der blosse Baumname als Gewässerbezeichnung*, *Zeitschrift für Namenforschung* XIV (1938), pp. 170. Nearer home Wales



provides quite a number of examples, cf. *Castan* (Glamorgansh.), *Cerd(d)in* (several), *Coll* (Cardigansh.), *Helygen* (Cardigansh.), etc.

(c) *Plants, other than trees, associated with the water-course*

Various other plants, besides trees, enter into Scottish river-names. Most of them are referred to just once, and there are hardly any doublets, except for names indicating an abundant growth of fern or berries in the neighbourhood of the stream. This section is small and contains only 63 names, perhaps because plants are not conspicuous enough to be the most impressive factor in the natural surroundings of a water-course. Examples of this group are *Allt a' Chreimh* SUT ("wild garlic"), *Allt Dogha* INV ("burdock"), *Allt Luachair* INV ("rushes"), *Allt na Cuilce* INV ("reed"), *Allt nan Eithreag* SUT ("mountain-strawberry"), *Allt Raineach* ARG ("fern"), *Berry Grain* DMF, *Blaeberry Burn* LAN, *Féith Shiol* INV ("oats, corn"), *Feuchaw Burn* DMF ("heather"), *Hay Sike* SLK, *Lusragan Burn* ARG ("herb"), *Nettly Burn* FIF, *River Cannich* ROS-INV ("bog-myrtle"), *River Nant* ARG ("nettle"), *Starragro* LEWIS ("rough grass").

(d) *Animals, birds, fishes, etc. associated with the stream*

A great variety of names of animals, birds, and fishes must have seemed to be apt characterising elements to those responsible for the creation of Scottish hydronymy. Foxes that had their dens near the stream, horses that came to drink out of it, heifers that grazed in the neighbourhood, birds that built their nests somewhere on its banks, trout and salmon that filled its pools—they all attracted the attention of the name-givers, and apparently most of our stream-names which contain names of animals, etc. refer to the living fauna near the water-course.

But there seems to be another kind of relationship between animal or bird or fish on the one hand, and the stream on the other. Rivers were called after animals whose special characteristics seemed to express the peculiar qualities of the water-course, and so were more or less identified with these animals. This is suggested by names like *River Bran* ROS ("raven"), *River Tarff* INV ("bull"), *River Einig* ROS ("little bird"), *River Enrick* INV ("snipe"), etc., where we need not suppose any genitival relationship as in the usual name pattern *Allt nan Each* ("Burn of the horses") or *Caochan na Feòraige* ("Streamlet of the squirrel"). A similar identification can be

assumed for names which are derived by suffixing *-aidh* (*-ie*, *-y*) to the name of the animal, for instance: *Burn of Buckie* BNF (“buck”), *Kirkney Water* ABD (“hen”), *Brocky Burn* KCD (“badger”), *Markie Burn* INV (“horse”), *Tarvie Burn* PER (“bull”). There are also diminutives like *Abhainn Chonaig* ROS (“little wolf”), *River Eachaig* ARG (“little horse”), *Allt Laoghainn* PER (“little calf”).

Again, many names of this latter kind are to be found in Welsh river-nomenclature (Thomas 1938, p. 52; *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 1935, p. 128). There not only the names of almost all domestic animals, but also those of wild beasts, birds and insects, have been employed in the naming of water-courses. An instructive example is *banw* “young pig”. This term (*Archiv für Celtische Lexicographie* 1907, p. 43) is applied to water-courses “forming deep channels or holes in which they sink into the earth and are lost for a distance”. It is only a short step to calling a tributary of this stream *twrch* “boar”.—As in the case of river-names, identical with names of trees, we have to consider the influence of analogy, but a river like *Bran* ROS may have received its name because of its dark colour and *Tarff* INV may be due to the wild speed of its flow (Trost 1936, 1938; Schröder 1937, Pokorny 1954, Krahe 1951-52).

But it is the former category that interests us here. For it, the following names may serve as illustrations: *Allt a' Ghamhna* SUT (“stirk”), *Allt a' Ghobhair* SUT (“goat”), *Allt an Daimh* ROS (“ox, stag”), *Allt an t-Seangain* PER (“ant”), *Allt na Feadaige* INV (“plover”), *Allt na Muic* SUT (“pig”), *Allt na Seabhaig* ARG (“hawk”), *Allt Nathrach* INV (“snake”), *Bo Burn* KCD (“cow”), *Caplaich Burn* CAI (“horse”), *Cock Burn* ABD, *Conglass Water* BNF (“wolf”), *Crow Burn* SLK, *Ishag Burn* PER (“lark”), *Lamb Burn* ELO, *Lón nan Earb* SKYE (“roc”), *River Laxay* LEWIS (“salmon”), *Stag Burn* KCD.

(e) *The situation of the water-course*

This is, with more than 300 names, an astonishingly large group. The names it contains not only express the absolute position of the water-course but also the position in relation to other streams or to other geographical features. In this latter sense, the names of the four chief points of the compass are frequently used; other favourite terms are words meaning “back”, “fore” or “across, transverse”. Very often water-courses form the boundary of some piece of land, be it a field

or an estate or a county, and in many instances this stream is just called the *boundary river*.<sup>\*</sup> There are plenty of examples of this, in this category. Most of the names occur over and over again; so a few examples may suffice: *Allt Deas* ABD (“south”), *Allt na Criche* INV (“boundary”), *Allt Shios Bhreac-achaidh* ARG (“below”), *Allt Tarsuinn* ROS (“cross”), *Back Burn* MOR, *Burn betwixt the Laws* BWK, *Cross Burn* BWK, *Easter Burn* ANG, *Fore Burn* BNF, *March Burn* INV, *Meur Tuath* NAI (“north”), *Mid Grain* DMF, *North Burn* SUT, *Powmeadow Burn* LAN (“middle”), *Thorter Burn* PER (“transverse”), *Twart Burn* SH, *West Water* ANG.

Besides colour-adjectives and words denoting the size of the stream, terms referring to the relative situation of the water-course are used to distinguish between two burns bearing the same name and flowing parallel to each other or joining each other. For *parallel* streams we may list: *Auchlyne East* and *West Burn* PER, *East* and *West Burn* AYR, *Easter* and *Wester Burn* ROX, *Eastplace* and *Westplace Burn* PER, *High* and *Low Mill Burn* KCB, *North* and *South Black Burn* AYR, *North* and *South Burn* AYR, *North* and *South Burn of Grimista* SH.

Examples of *joining* water-courses are: *Allt Shios* and *Shuas Chulaibh* PER, *Back* and *Fore Burn* BNF, *East* and *West Burn of Builg* KCD, *East* and *West Burn of Glenmoye* ANG, *East* and *West Grain* ANG, *Easter* and *Wester Burn* BWK, *Easter* and *Wester Glen Quoich Burn* INV, *Eastrig* and *Westrig Burn* PER, *North* and *South Garvan River* ARG, *River North Esk* and *River South Esk* MLO, *Warroch East* and *West Burn* KNR.

#### D. Water-courses named after HUMAN INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN BEINGS

##### (a) *Water-courses associated with human institutions*

This category is represented by 366 names; it does not include stream-names derived from place-names proper, which will be listed separately under E.a. We cannot even attempt to give a representative cross section of this name group because the range of defining elements referring to human life and institutions on the banks of the respective water-courses is far too wide. It comprises mill and fort, creel and deer-trap, bridge and booth, church and mill-dam, hospital and sheep-pen, gallows and kiln, mine and penny-land, orchard and byre

\* Continental river-names derived from the fact that the water-courses they denote form boundaries, are dealt with by Hans Krahe in *Beiträge zur Namensforschung* VI (1955), 1-13.

and many another imprint of human culture and civilisation upon the neighbourhood of our Scottish streams. We select at random, and mention *Abbey Burn* KCB, *Abhainn Rath* INV ("fort"), *Allt a' Mhuilinn* JURA ("mill"), *Allt na Craidhleig* INV ("creel"), *Allt na h-Eaglaise* SUT ("church"), *Allt na h-Eilrig* INV ("deer-trap"), *Allt na Làrach* INV ("ruin"), *Allt nan Ramh* SUT ("oars"), *Bught Sike* ROX ("sheep-fold"), *Castle Burn* STL, *Kiln Burn* DMF, *Kirk Burn* DMF, *Lead Mine Burn* AYR, *Mill Burn* LAN, *Puball Burn* ARG ("tent"), *Pulharrow Burn* KCB ("wall"), *River Borgie* SUT ("fort"), *River Brora* ROS ("bridge"), *River Ericht* PER ("assembly"), *River Housay* HARRIS ("house"), *Smithy Burn* ANG, *Spittal Burn* PEB, *Tower Burn* DMF, *Whitehouse Burn* ARG.

(b) *Water-courses connected with human beings*

Not only have human activities and institutions been recorded in Scottish river nomenclature, but also names of gods \* and saints, personal names, or names referring to personal callings or titles, are frequently to be found. This group comprise almost 200 names, *all* of the modern compound type.

Personal names, names of saints, gods and goddesses: *Abhainn Catriona* HARRIS, *Allt Eoghainn* MOR, *Allt Màiri* INV, *Allt Mhàrtuin* ROS, *Allt Rostan* DNB (saint's name), *Allt Uilleim* INV, *Bennet's Burn* ELO, *Caochan Roibidh* INV, *Duncan Gray's Burn* ABD, *Murray's Burn* KCB, *Patrick Burn* AYR (saint's name), *River Tora* SKYE (god's name).

Human occupations, titles, etc.: *Allt a' Bhodaich* INV ("old man"), *Allt an Àirich* ARG ("shepherd"), *Allt na Caillich* SUT ("old woman"), *Altgillie Burn* ANG ("lad"), *Caochan Greusaiche* PER ("shoemaker"), *Fiddler Burn* LAN, *King's Beck* LAN, *Laird's Burn* ABD, *Lón a' Chleirich* SKYE ("clergyman"), *Pollgowan Burn* AYR ("smith"), *Priest's Water* ABD, *Salter Grain* DMF ("salt-dealer"), *Scots Burn* LAN, *Thief Sike* ROX.

## E. Water-courses containing the NAME OF NAMED OBJECTS

(a) *Water-courses named from the names of human settlements*

In this category of "names from names", there are more than 1000 place-names proper used as defining elements, the second largest sub-section in Scottish hydronymy. In these cases,

\* Difficult to assess are mythological names like the two *Dees* (< \**Dēuā*) in ABD and KCB and the *Don* (\**Deuonā*) in ABD. In these cases the river-name seems to mean simply "goddess", implying in all probability river-worship on the part of the Celtic name-givers.

as well as in the following groups, we would describe the river-name as being *secondary*, i.e. based on the name of some other geographical feature or on a primary river-name. Of course, we cannot expect any discrimination as to the origin, age or linguistic make-up of the place-names which occur as hydronymic elements, and so we find names of all strata of languages in this group. It will suffice to mention a few of them, as they all follow an ever recurring morphological pattern. *Allt Baile nan Carn* INV (Gael. Pl. N.), *Allt Gharbh Ghaig* INV (<pass-name), *Balnakailly Burn* BTE (<Gael. farm-name), *Burn of Auchentumb* ABD (<Gael. field-name), *Forrestburn Water* LAN-WLO (<Engl. river-name), *Golspie Burn* SUT (<ON. Pl. N.), *Gruinard River* ROS (<ON. bay-name), *Inveruglas Water* DNB (Pl. N., containing Celt. river-name), *Keith Water* MLO-ELO (<*p*-Celt. wood-name), *Kilfinnan Burn* INV (<Gael. church-name), *Lealt River* SKYE (Pl. N. <Gael. river-name), *Monynut Water* ELO (<Celt. hill-name), *Nethertown Burn* MLO (Engl. Pl. N.), *Pitcarmick Burn* PER (Pict. farm-name), *River Alness* ROS (Pl. N., containing pre-Celtic river-name), *Wauchope Burn* ROX (<valley-name).

(b) *Water-courses named from the names of hills*

In section C.a. we came across river-names referring to hills, rocks and knolls past which the stream flows. But the defining elements used in those cases were purely appellative and descriptive, or at least appeared to be so from map evidence. The names of this present group, on the other hand, contain the proper name of the hill or height after which they are called, and so, in our terminology, would have to be classified as "secondary" stream-names. The generic terms used in this category are almost exclusively *burn* and *allt*; we find *burn* qualified by Gaelic hill-names but have no example of *allt* alongside a hill-name of Anglo-Saxon derivation. Here is a short list of examples \*: *Allt a' Chnoic* DNB (1614), *Allt a' Mhàim* SKYE (1335), *Allt an Tuirc* INV (2422), *Allt Bhuidheannach* PER (3064), *Allt Càrn na Fiacail* INV (1913), *Allt Creag an Lèth-choin* INV (3448), *Allt na Glas Bheinne* INV (2127), *Benbrack Burn* KCB (1900), *Ben Glas Burn* PER/DNB (2037), *Carewoodrig Burn* DMF (1117), *Cruach Neuran Burn* ARG (1988), *Cuff Burn* LAN (1111), *Kingsseat Burn* ROX (1747), *Risingclaw Burn* LAN (1591), *Shalloch Burn* AYR (1777), *Toardy Burn* ANG (1935), *Tushielaw Burn* SLK (1431), *River Horneval* SKYE (218).

\* The numerals in brackets denote the height of the hill in feet, as given on O.S.M. 1".

(c) *Water-courses named from the names of valleys*

Naturally, a river and the valley through which it flows are very closely associated in the minds of the people living near them, and so it is not surprising that large numbers of streams are named after the glen, dale or dean that houses them. The O.S.M. 1" (Scotland) has at least 469 of them, not counting valley-names now only used as names of human settlements. These are some of them: *Allt Gleann Gniomhaidh* INV, *Allt Scamodale* ARG, *Burn of Glendui* ABD, *Finland Burn* DNB, *Glendow Sike* DMF, *Glensherup Burn* PER, *Greenhope Burn* BWK, *Lón a' Ghlinne Bhig* SKYE, *Ravendean Burn* PEB, *Rimsdale Burn* SUT, *River Erradale* ROS, *Strathmore Water* CAI.

(d) *Water-courses named from the names of lakes*

The "normal" practice in Scottish hydronymy, especially as far as the larger water-courses are concerned, seems to have been to derive the lake-name from the name of the river which flows out of, through or into the loch. We need only think of *Loch Tay*, *Loch Earn*, *Loch Awe*, *Loch Shin*, *Loch Carron*, *Loch Ness* to realise this pattern. But there are almost a hundred, usually smaller, streams mentioned on the Scottish O.S.M. 1" that show the opposite semantic development: they are named after the loch out of which they issue.\* Here belong amongst others: *Abhainn an Loch Bhig* SUT (→Loch Beag), *Abhainn Caslavat* LEWIS, *Allt an Lochain Duibh* INV, *Allt Loch a' Ghael* ARG, *Burn of Pettawater* SH, *Gossawater Burn* SH, *Lochbroom Burn* PER, *Loch Gower Burn* WIG, *Loch of the Lowes Strand* KCB, *Lón Loch Mhóir* SKYE.

(e) *Water-courses connected with primary river-names*

Pleonastic usage of generic terms denoting "water, river" seems to have been common in all periods of Scottish hydronymy. It is normally an expression of a change from one language to another, probably starting with an explanatory quality in a time of bilingual transition, but becoming petrified and losing its interpretative character when the older language dies out and is no longer understood. The oldest instance in Scottish hydronymy is apparently *Allander Water* DNB, where Celt. *dubron* was added to a pre-Celtic *Alaunā*. Celt. *dubron*, in its Gaelic and Brythonic variants, is, on the other hand, furnished with a pleonastic *burn* or *allt*, as in *Gelder Burn* ABD, *Allt Calder* INV, *Deer Burn* DMF. Three linguistic strata are represented

\* There are one or two exceptions, where the defining element is supplied by the name of the lake into which or through which the stream flows.



not only in *Allander Water* but also in *Feardar Burn* ABD: Brit. \**dubro-* or Early Gael. *dobur*, Gael. *féith* and Engl. *burn*. To names in *-glais* usually an explanatory water is added as in *Finglas Water* PER and *Douglas Water* DNB, whereas river-names containing *poll*, *pwll* are, as a rule, followed by an additional *burn*, cf. *Polmood Burn* PEB, *Dipple Burn* LAN, *Pillmour Burn* ELO. ON. *ā* enters into quite a number of hydronymic compounds, but always—with the possible exception of *The Lussa* ARG (but cf. also *Lussa River* JURA)—demands a more “modern” pleonastic term, as we see it in *Allt Torray* LEWIS, *Laxo Burn* SH, *Iorsa Water* ARRAN. A few river-names with other pleonastic hydronymic elements suggest that the south-western counties at one time knew *allt* as a river-name element, but it cannot have been very prolific. There are *Garwald Water* and *Garrell Water* in DMF and *Garvald Burn* on the LAN-PEB border, all of which probably stand for Gael. *garbh allt* “rough burn”; *Altigabert Burn* in AYR, *Burn of Altibrair* and *Allivolie Burn* in WIG and possibly *Old Water* in KCB. The maps show 24 names of water-courses altogether in which the primary *allt*-name has been supplemented by a Germanic hydronymic term.

Difficult, in this connection, is the interpretation of the usage of Engl. *river* (and in many cases also *water*). It does occur as a genuine generic element, but where it is attached to a “primary” river-name it is doubtful if it is an integral part of the resulting secondary name, at all. Is it just map-usage or is it an early stage of pleonastic interpretation and addition? We suspect the former although the latter is just possible.

#### F. “WATER-WORDS”

By this term we mean names which simply mean “river” or “stream” or “flowing water”, without any reference to any particular characteristics of the water-course itself or the countryside through which it flows. Names of this kind are to be found in most strata of Scottish hydronymy although they are not very common in modern river-nomenclature. They are well represented amongst the names that have come to us from early linguistic periods, and all names to be ascribed to the pre-Celtic stratum are, without exception, to be classed here. There are 95 of them altogether, 75 of which belong either to the *p*-Celtic or the pre-Celtic layer, and so it is not surprising that we find here most of the names of the larger



Scottish water-courses. Examples are: *Allan* (Water) PER-STL, *Armet* (Water) MLO, *Avon* (Water) LAN, (River) *Awe* ARG, (River) *Ayr* AYR, (River) *Glyde* LAN, (River) *Doon* AYR, (River) *Eden* KNR/FIF, (River) *Esk* DMF, *Leithen* (Water) PEB, *Lyne* (Burn) FIF, (River) *Lyon* PER, (River) *Naver* SUT, *Pow* (Water) PER, *Rye* (Water) AYR, (River) *Shiel* ROS, (River) *Tay* PER, (River) *Tyne* ELO.

#### STATISTICAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this study examples of the various semantic groups have been chosen from all temporal and morphological strata of Scottish hydronymy. It remains now to find out how the semantic categories are distributed over these strata, whether certain morphological types of names are connected with certain semantic aspects and whether certain periods preferred reference to certain characteristics of the water, the water-course, the surroundings, etc.

In examining the most modern names first, we leave aside all smaller groups like names in *sike*, *lane* or *grain*, as well as those in *feith*, *lón*, *dig*, etc., and concentrate on the two most prolific river-name elements: Engl. *burn* and Gael. *allt*. Names containing these generic terms refer, in the majority of cases, to the surroundings of the water-course, be it natural or man-made. But the difference between the percentage figures is significant. Whereas 64·9 per cent of all *allt*-names refer to the *natural* surroundings of the water-course and only 11·3 per cent to the *human imprint* on them, the respective figures for the *burn*-names drop to 42·1 per cent referring to the *natural* surroundings and rise to 35 per cent for names incorporating names of *human* settlements, institutions, occupations and personal names. The difference is especially striking as far as the derivation of river-names from place-names is concerned; names of that category amount to a mere 2·5 per cent in *allt*-names but include more than a quarter (26·2 per cent) of all *burn*-names, *expressing the high degree of influence human civilisation and culture has had on the naming of our younger and smaller Anglo-Scottish stream-names*. Not even half of all names containing *burn* as a generic term are primary river-names, for 53·4 per cent are "names from names" (place-names, hill-names, valley-names, lake-names, personal names, primary river-names), including 8·7 per cent in which *burn* is used pleonastically. The respective figures for Scottish *allt*-names are 14·9 per cent and 1·7 per cent. Only 15·4 per cent of all

*allt*-names and 7.3 per cent of all *burn*-names refer to characteristics of the water and the water-course themselves.

The share of secondary names is even greater in the special type "*burn of—*". Here 63.2 per cent are "names from names",

Morphological Group	Linguistic Stratum	Semantic Group	A		B			
		Element	a. colour	d. noise	a. size	b. form	c. speed	d. bed
Compounds	Anglo-Scottish	burn	79	10	17	30	15	25
		burn of	1	...	1	1	...	...
		water	16	2	1	1	1	5
		water of river	...	1	...	...	...	...
	Old Norse	á	7	...	...	1	1	5
	Gaelic	allt	101	11	62	88	22	90
abhainn		17	1	12	5	4	3	
uisge		11	...	...	...	...	3	
	Early Celtic	glais	7	...	...	...	...	...
pow, poll		7	1	1	5	1	6	
dubro-		4	...	1	1	...	20	
Suffixes and Simple Stems	Gaelic	-ach	15	3	1	12	7	41
		-ag	5	6	2	5	3	9
		-an	6	1	...	3	4	9
-agan		2	...	...	...	...	1	
	Early Celtic	-aidh	23	5	...	17	9	26
p-Celtic		27	14	...	...	5	22	
	pre-Celtic		...	...	...	...	...	

*This table shows the semantic structure of all Scottish river-names to be found on O.S.M. 1". Its figures are by no means final and may be subject to slight alterations, but the over-all picture is undoubtedly correct.*

including 37.2 per cent place-names and 11.5 per cent primary river-names. Whereas 76.6 per cent of all names of this group point to the surroundings, natural or artificial, of the stream, only 1.1 per cent (3 names) refer to characteristics

of the water and the water-course. With the pattern “*burn of—*” we may link the type “*water of—*”; “names from names” are represented by an almost identical percentage, i.e. 62·7, but the distribution is very different, for this figure

C					D		E					F		
a. terrain	b. trees	c. plants	d. animals, etc.	e. situation	a. human institutions	b. persons	a. place-names	b. hill-names	c. valley-names	d. lake-names	e. river-names	water-words	Miscellaneous	Obscure
426	24	12	36	111	155	59	634	129	247	14	212	2	21	131
54	1	2	3	2	3	...	97	17	14	7	30	...	...	16
38	...	2	7	9	10	2	59	1	25	...	104	...	1	34
1	1	...	3	...	...	...	4	...	2	...	26	...	...	8
36	2	3	5	4	7	2	110	6	57	2	173	...	5	15
8	...	...	8	...	5	4	...	...	...	...	...	...	1	...
1075	87	27	131	70	139	75	61	51	71	61	43	1	40	55
84	2	1	6	5	11	4	18	4	41	9	13	1	2	6
3	...	...	...	1	...	...	...	...	1	...	1	...	2	2
...	...	...	4	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3	...
14	7	4	22	4	10	9	1	...	...	...	...	...	11	10
...	...	2	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1	...	6	...
6	8	6	6	3	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3	8	5
...	...	...	7	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1	2	6	2
3	5	3	4	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2	3	1	...
...	1	1	2	...	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	1	...	...
7	5	4	26	3	...	...	...	...	...	...	1	7	...	...
1	3	...	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	32	12	8
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	43	...	3

is made up of 51 per cent primary stream-names, 7·8 per cent place-names and 2·9 per cent other names, stressing the strong accent on pleonastic usage which this type has in modern Scottish hydronymy. 13·7 per cent of all names speak of the natural surroundings of the river and 1·9 per cent (1 name!) of the water itself.—*Water* in the more “normal” morphological

pattern, i.e. *following* the defining element, again is qualified by terms pointing to the surroundings of the water-course or by primary geographical names: 25·3 per cent refer to the natural surroundings of the stream, 21·9 per cent to traces of human civilisation in the neighbourhood, 32·1 per cent show pleonastic usage; the share of “names from names” is just over 50 per cent. We arrive at similar figures for the usage of Engl. *river* in Scottish hydronymy: natural surroundings 26·4 per cent, human influence 27·3 per cent, pleonastic usage 39·7 per cent; but the category of “names from names” goes up to 78·9 per cent, a confirmation of the view expressed earlier that *river* has no real creative value, in the “primary” sense, in Scottish river-nomenclature.

The Gaelic generic elements corresponding to Engl. *water* and *river*—*uisge* and *abhainn*—preserve more of the primary hydronymic character than their English equivalents. Exactly half of all *uisge*-names refer to the water or the water-course and another 18·4 per cent to the natural surroundings; only 2 names (6·8 per cent) are “names from names”, one of them with pleonastic *uisge*. *Abhainn* approaches more closely to the usage of Engl. *river* than *uisge* to that of Engl. *water*, but *the highest percentage—60·1—goes to streams named after the natural surroundings of the water-course and only 13 per cent to those referring to human settlements, institutions and personal names*. Characteristics of the water or water-course are denoted by 17 per cent of the defining elements used. The share of “names from names” is 35·2 per cent. So the main usage of *abhainn* corresponds to that of Gael. *allt*: neighbouring geographical features supply the defining term. In this respect, *abhainn* and *allt* are joined by Gael. *poll*, W. *pwll*, Scot. *pow*, for 45·3 per cent of the names of that class refer to the surrounding countryside and only 11·1 per cent to human civilisation.

It is interesting to compare, at this point, the semantic aspects of the defining elements qualifying ON. *ā* in Scottish hydronymy, for we find that *ā* does not go together with the other Germanic terms mentioned—*burn*, *water*, *river*—but can be classed with their Gaelic equivalents in so far as the natural surroundings of the water-course are referred to in 40 per cent of all cases, whereas only about half that number has any connection with human life in the neighbourhood. But in one respect the usage of *ā* points away even from *allt*, *abhainn* and *uisge*: 35 per cent of all *ā*-names indicate special qualities of the stream itself.

Here  $\bar{a}$  (itself belonging to a fairly early Germanic stratum) links up with those two Celtic terms which must be thought of as part of an older layer of Scottish hydronymy than the one *allt*, *abhainn* and *uisge* belong to: *glais* and *dobhar* (*dw(f)r*). Not a single one of the names which contain them as generic terms implies a reference to human activity in the neighbourhood of the stream referred to, though the natural surroundings are mentioned in 28·6 per cent of all *glais*- and in 5·9 per cent of all *dobhar*-names. The decisive difference, however, is expressed by the fact that 50 per cent of the names containing *glais* and 76·5 per cent of those containing *dobhar* (or *dwr*) speak of special characteristics of the water or the water-course. This semantic evidence underlines and confirms the view, based on morphological grounds, that names containing Celt. *dubron* belong to the earliest stratum of hydronymic compounds in Scotland, for it closely corresponds to the distribution of semantic aspects in names formed by adding a suffix to a word or word-stem, a group that, on the whole, undoubtedly belongs to an earlier period than compound names.

If we first look at the names ending in *Gaelic* suffixes, we find that the basis of 80·9 per cent of all these names is a word or stem referring to the water or water-course, whereas only 17 per cent point to the natural surroundings of the stream (including names in *-ach*, derived from names of animals, etc.). Names of human settlements, human activities and institutions and personal names are not incorporated, four names are examples of pleonastic usage (1·1 per cent) and the rest come under the headings "miscellaneous" and "unexplained". For *p-Celtic* names almost the same remarks apply, for, as to their name-bases, 80 per cent mean special characteristics of the flowing water or its course, in contrast to 3·2 per cent (4 names) that point to the countryside near it and 16·8 per cent miscellaneous and unexplained names. Again human civilisation does not come into the nomenclature of this morphological stratum, at all. If we step even further back to examine the Scottish river-names which we believe to have come down to us from a *pre-Celtic* period, we find that even references to the natural surroundings are not implied by the stems used, but that all explainable names (93·5 per cent) refer to the water or water-course, most of them simply meaning "water" or "river" or "something flowing", probably with various and sensitive shades of meaning which we can no longer detect.

A comparison with figures given by Hans Krahe (1949) for the semantic structure of the river-names in the catchment area of the River Main in Germany may be very instructive at this point. There the youngest, German, layer—compound names containing the element *-bach*—consists of 41 per cent of names referring to human beings and human civilisation, 46 per cent pointing to the natural surroundings and 13 per cent to the water itself and its characteristics. This corresponds roughly to our *burn*-names, where the equivalent figures are 35, 42 and 7 per cent—In the Main area the main basic element in the older, Germanic, stratum of compound names is *-aha*, cognate with OE. *ēa* and ON. *ā*. Names belonging to this group show a different distribution of the semantic categories: only 6 per cent are derived from human activities and institutions, 54 per cent are connected with the natural surroundings and 40 per cent describe characteristics of the flowing water itself. With these formations in *-aha* we may compare our Gaelic river-names containing *allt* or *abhainn* as generic elements, but it must be noted here that *allt*- and *abhainn*-names show a more “modern” trend in so far as they include a higher percentage of names derived from the human imprint on the surrounding countryside and, at the same time, do not refer as often to the water or the water-course themselves. No name-group comparable with our category ending in Gaelic suffixes is mentioned in Krahe’s short survey, based on a dissertation by M. Belschner (1943); but our *p*-Celtic simple stems have an equivalent in Early Germanic names of the same morphological structure, and what Krahe says about the latter is just as applicable to the former (Krahe 1949, p. 24) :

And here man is not mentioned anymore, here everything is only nature, or—more precisely—only the water itself. At this early stage the mere description as “river” is predominant, and only here and there a special quality of its course or its character is referred to more explicitly.

As the oldest accessible hydronymic stratum seems to have been the same in the part of Britain examined by us and in the catchment basin surveyed by Krahe—a pre-dialectal Indo-European group of simple stems—it is not surprising that they are identical semantically in both areas, i.e. they consist exclusively of a great variety of “water-words” describing only the water itself.

If we interpret the above lists and the subsequent summary

and examine the development and changes in the semantic aspects expressed in the various strata of Scottish river-nomenclature, we find that the oldest names just refer to the water itself and its flowing. It suffices at this early stage to call the river "the flowing one"; and even the colour and noise of the flowing water do not play any part yet, but only become significant attributes, together with the nature of the bed in which the stream flows, in the slightly later Early Celtic hydronymy. In the next layer the importance of that aspect is still obvious but references to the natural surroundings occur, first of all to the flora and fauna on the banks of the water-courses, then also to hills, woods and glens. Names including the surrounding terrain, plants, trees, animals, become more common during the following period and form, in our most "modern" river-nomenclature, the strongest semantic subsection, although greatly challenged for pride of place by the numerous names to be connected with human life near the water-course. The growing number of references to human activities in the widest sense becomes especially apparent in the group of names containing Engl. *burn* as a generic term; here man and his civilisation are, as we have seen above, referred to in at least 35 per cent of all examples found on the Scottish O.S.M. 1".

In this youngest semantic stratum—in which reference is made to the natural and artificial surroundings of the water-course—the number of compound names is extremely great. It is possible to say that the inclusion of the surrounding countryside as a source for river-nomenclature is the semantic equivalent of the morphological development from simple stems and suffixed formations to compound names. The form and meaning of a name prove to be almost interdependable. A change in the morphological structure, i.e. the creation of new morphological types, seems to have made possible, or even necessary, a new semantic aspect, and, on the other hand, an altered semantic attitude has necessitated new modes of morphological expression.

As references to foreign hydronymies have shown, this semantic structure and development is not confined to Scotland or to the British Isles. It represents a change in the connection between name and meaning and in the creative process of naming in general, at least in those parts of the world in which Western European languages have formed the structural basis for the linguistic expression of thought.



## COUNTY ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	Aberdeenshire	LAN	Lanarkshire
ANG	Angus	MLO	Midlothian
ARG	Argyllshire	MOR	Morayshire
AYR	Ayrshire	NAI	Nairnshire
BNF	Banffshire	ORK	Orkney
BTE	Buteshire	PEB	Peeblesshire
BWK	Berwickshire	PER	Perthshire
CAI	Caithness	RNF	Renfrewshire
CLA	Clackmannanshire	ROS	Ross-shire
DMF	Dumfriesshire	ROX	Roxburghshire
DNB	Dunbartonshire	SH	Shetland
ELO	East Lothian	SLK	Selkirkshire
FIF	Fife	STL	Stirlingshire
INV	Inverness-shire	SUT	Sutherland
KCB	Kirkcudbrightshire	WIG	Wigtownshire
KCD	Kincardineshire	WLO	West Lothian
KNR	Kinross-shire		

## REFERENCES

- ARCHIV FÜR CELTISCHE LEXICOGRAPHIE, 1907, *Archiv für Celtische Lexicographie* iii, 43. Halle.
- BACH, A., 1953, *Deutsche Namenkunde* ii, 278-84. Heidelberg.
- BELSCHNER, M., 1943, Das Stromgebiet des Mains. Eine flussnamenkundliche Untersuchung. Würzburg. Typescript only.
- BULLETIN OF THE BOARD OF CELTIC STUDIES, 1935, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* vii, 128.
- KRAHE, H., 1951-52, *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* iii, 14. Baltic river names of this kind containing *nt*-suffix are here listed.  
1949, *Ortsnamen als Geschichtsquelle*. Heidelberg. Pp. 21-25.
- POKORNY, J., 1954, *Beiträge zur Namenforschung*. P. 92.
- SCHRÖDER, E., 1944, *Deutsche Namenkunde*. Göttingen. P. 371. (2nd Ed.).  
1937, Zum Thema: Tiernamen als Flussnamen. *Zeitschrift für Ortsnamenforschung* xiii, 63.
- SCHULZE, W., 1934, *Kleine Schriften*. Göttingen. P. 120 with note 2.
- SCHWARZ, E., 1950, *Deutsche Namenforschung II (Orts- und Flurnamen)*. Göttingen. P. 94.
- THOMAS, R. J., 1938, *Enwau Afonydd a Nentydd Cymru. Caerdydd*. Under Gwachell, pp. 99-100. Under Cathan, p. 52.  
1935, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* vii, 128.
- TROST, P., 1936, Der bloße Tiername als Gewässerbezeichnung. *Zeitschrift für Ortsnamenforschung* xii, 89. Gives this type of name in general.  
1938, *Zeitschrift für Namenforschung* xiv, 172, note 5.
- WATSON, W. J., 1926, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*. Edinburgh and London.