HISTORY, LANDSCAPE, AND LANGUAGE IN THE NORTHERN ISLES AND CAITHNESS

THE NORTH ATLANTIC WORLD

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History, Landscape, and Language in the Northern Isles and Caithness

'A'm grippit dis laand'. A Gedenkschrift for Doreen Waugh

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'The Wonderful Wort Tormentil'

A Cultural Link between the Faroe Islands and the Scottish Isles

I first met Doreen at the Eleventh Viking Congress in Caithness and Orkney in 1989. Having conducted Viking-Age excavations in the Faroe Islands I had started looking for comparative material in Shetland during the first half of the 1990s. This led to my involvement in conducting surveys and then excavations on the island of Unst. It was during this time I began communicating and cooperating with Doreen, which resulted in a joint paper at the 'The Uses of Place-Names' conference in St Andrews in 1996.[1]

In almost all the settlements in the Faroe Islands, cup-shaped depressions can be seen in bedrock and larger boulders, often close to streams. These depressions typically have a diameter and depth of 10–25 cm. Those who do not know better — including the youngest generations in the Faroe Islands — will hardly pay any notice to them, assuming that they are just vagaries of nature. They are, however, the result of human activity.

In the Faroese language, such depressions are normally referred to as *barkkullur* ('bark depressions'). They are typically found in *barkhellur* ('bark bedrock'), or as portable versions often near streams or beaches, and are the result of the crushing of 'bark' with an oval pestle in order to extract acid for tanning hides and skins. Such cup-shaped depressions appear in settlements all over the Faroe Islands and today represent an almost unknown and unnoticed material relic from the ancient Faroese farming society (Figs 9.1 and 9.2).

Throughout history, tree bark has been widely valued and commonly used for extracting tannin. The Faroe Islands, however, have been virtually treeless since the days of the *landnám* of the Viking Age, so the valued tree bark for producing tanning material was not readily available; therefore, another solution had to be found, which was an extract from the root of the plant species Common Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) (Fig. 9.3). It has a tree-like root, measuring between 2.5 and 5.0 cm in width, with the thickness of a finger and short branches near the top. The external colour of the root is brown or almost black, while it has a lighter colour internally. The root contains between seventeen and thirty per cent tannic acid.[2]

1 Stummann Hansen and Waugh, 'Scandinavian Settlement in Unst', pp. 120–46.

2 Bjørk, 'Børkuvísa', pp. 101–05; Svanberg, 'Plant Knowledge', p. 230.

History, Landscape, and Language in the Northern Isles and Caithness. 'A'm grippit dis laand': A Gedenkschrift for Doreen Waugh, ed. by Ryan Foster and Christian Cooijmans, The North Atlantic World, 6 (Turnhout, 2023), pp. 169–181
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Figure 9.1. Barkhella at Niðri á Lækjuni in the settlement of Fuglafjørður, just a few metres from Við Gjógvará, the site of an excavated Viking Age farmstead.[3] It has a depth of 17 cm and a maximum diameter of 11 cm. Photograph by author.

Figure 9.2. Cup-shaped depressions in exposed bedrock in the stream Hýsisá, Miðvágur, on the island of Vágar. Photograph published by permission, Hanna Hansen.

3 Dahl, 'Toftarannsóknir í Fuglafirði', pp. 118–46.

Figure 9.3. Common Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), whose root was exploited for tannin in farming communities in the Faroe Islands. Photograph published by permission, Jens-Kjeld Jensen.

Traditionally, the roots of *P. erecta* were dug up with a wooden stick called a *barksneis* ('bark stick'), which was typically done by children, while the subsequent crushing of the roots in the depressions in the bedrock was carried out by women (Fig. 9.4). A bedrock would typically have one or more depressions, and there are examples of each household in a settlement having its own private bark depression.[4]

Thus, these depressions are virtually rock-solid material evidence for the ability of the islanders of ancient times to adjust themselves to new conditions via the use of the root of a small plant.

The tradition was first mentioned in the work of Peder Claussøn Friis (1545–1614), which can be characterized as the first reliable topographical survey of the Faroe Islands.[5] It was first published in 1632, but originally written in 1592 based on information that Claussøn had received in Copenhagen from the Faroese student Jacob Oudensøn. The fact that Claussøn mentioned this custom in his work is a strong indication that it was a common and important part of the ancient farming tradition.

> Den Urt Tormentilla voxer der ofuerflødige / saa at de dermed barcke deris Huder eller Læder / fordi de hafue icke barck aff Træ / oc det blifuer got Lær som saa barckis; en Pige eller Dreng bør at grafue 1/2 Tønde tormentilla en dag / deris Suin blifue oc fæde aff tormentilla, dog holde de der icke mange Suin
>
> > (Tormentil grows there in such abundance that they use the wort to tan their hides and skins, as they do not have tree bark, and good leather that is tanned this way. A girl or boy can dig up half a barrel of Tormentil in a day. Their pigs also eat Tormentil, but the people who live there do not rear many pigs)

The tradition was also mentioned in the subsequent topographical survey of the Faroe Islands, Thomas Tarnovius' (1644–1684) *Ferøers Beskrifvelser* ('Desciptions of the Faroes') from 1669:

4 Bjørk, 'Børkuvísa', p. 117.
5 Claussøn Friis, *Norriges og omliggendes Øers Bescriffuelse*, p. 149, n. 4.

Figure 9.4. Reconstructed illustration of the working process for producing an extract from Common Tormentil root for use in tanning. The photograph was taken in the late 1940s on the island of Koltur by Holger Rasmussen (1915–2009), ethnologist and curator at the National Museum of Denmark. Published by permission, National Museum of Denmark, Modern History and World Cultures.

> Den gemene Mand paa Øerne, de bruge Sko af Oxehuder, sælhuder, Kalschin oc lamschin; huilcke huder de meget vel tilberede og barcke med den herlige urt Tormentilla, huiclken der udi stor Offuerflødighed voxer, oc kaldis af de ferische Bark.[6]
>
> (The ordinary people in the islands wear shoes made from the skins of cows, seals, calves, and lambs, which they perfectly produce and tan with the wonderful wort Common Tormentil, that grows in abundance there and is often referred to as Faroese bark).

6 Tarnovius, *Ferøers Beskrifvelser*, pp. 70–71.

Tarnovius' immediate successor, Lucas Debes (1623–1675), also offered a short description of the tradition:

> Dernæst saa vokser her meget overflødig allevegne Tormentilla, hvilken, efterdi Indbyggerne ikke have Bark af Træ til at barke deres Huder med, saa haver Gud og Naturen aabenbaret dennem denne Urtes Tørhed, saa at de bruge den til at barke deres Huder og Skind dermed, hvorfor de og kalde den Bark.[7]
>
> (Furthermore, Common Tormentil grows in abundance here, and God and Nature have revealed the dry wort to them to use it to tan their hides and skins since they do not have tree barks to tan their hides and skins, hence they call it bark).

However, none of the topographers mentioned described the details of the working process in their reports. This was first presented by the Faroese topographer Jens Christian Svabo (1746–1824) a little more than a hundred years later:

> Man garver i Almindelighed, med Tormeltil-Roed (Bark) saavel Huder som Skind. Omgangs Maaden er den simpleste, vel kan tænkes; man knuser nemlig disse Rødder smaa med en Steen, kommer Vand dertil, og gnier denne Grød paa Haar-Siden af Skindet, efter at Haarene ere vel afragede, folder det sammen, saa Haar-Siden vender mod hinanden, og bliver i denne Tilstand liggende en 2 à 3 Dage.
>
> Naar man vil have en guul Farve paa Skindet (Roturo), smør man Barken paa, 2 eller 3 Gange, og hver Gang ligger da Skindet dermed en 2 eller 3 Dage. Man vasker og tørrer det imellem hver Gang, Barken paasmøres. Naar man vil barke paa denne Maade, rager man ikke Haarene af, men lader Skindet, befugtet, henligge en kort Tid, da Ulden løsner.[8]
>
> (Normally hides, as well as skins, are tanned with the root (bark) of Common Tormentil. The method is probably the most simple that one can think of; they crush the roots with small stones, add water, and rub this mush on the hairy side of the skin. After the hairs have been cut off, the skin is folded so that the hair sides face each other, and then kept in this condition for two to three days.
>
> If they want a yellow colour on the skin (Roturo), the bark is smeared on the skin two to three times and after each round of smearing, the skin is left for two to three days. The skin is washed and dried between each round of smearing. The bark is smeared on. When one wants to tan this way, the hairs are not removed, but the moistened skin is stored for a short time, as the wool then loosens).

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7 Debes, *Færoæ & Færoa reserata*, p. 53.

8 Svabo, *Indberetninger fra en Reise i Færøe*, p. 284 (1033–1034).

Svabo also described how variations in the colouring could be obtained through this process:

> Roden af Hømiliä [*Rumex acutus*], som undertiden bruges imellem Tormentillens, skal gjøre Skindet hvidguult. Nogle mene at have erfaret, at Roden af den Tormentille, der voxer i Hjemme-Marken (Hajma-Bark) skal gjøre Skindet blegguult; den, som voxer i Udmarken (H͡eää-Bark) rødguult; og den, som voxer imellem Lyng allerrødest. Naar man vil garve blegt, kommes Søevand i Barken, men for at faa det rødguult, som ansees for den smukkeste Farve paa Skindet, kommer man Urin deri.[9]
>
> (The root of Acute Dock [*Rumex acutus*] is sometimes mixed with Common Tormentil to make the skin light-yellow. Some people are said to have experienced that the root of Common Tormentil, which grows in the infield (home-bark), gives the skin a pale-yellow tint; the one which grows in the outfield (outfield-bark) a red-yellow, while the one that grows among heather gives the reddest tint. Sea water is mixed with the bark to give the skin a pale colour, but in order to give the skin a red-yellow colour, which is regarded as the most beautiful, urine is added to the mush).

From Svabo's description, it appears that driftwood was used if nothing else was available:

> Paa sine Steder garver man til daglig Brug, naar andet Bark ej kan haves, med Spe͡un-Bark [Faroese: *spónbark*] ə: en rødagtig Bark af Træe, uden Tvivl af Gran, der findes opdreven af Søen. Man karver det smaat, kaager det en Stund i Vand, og naar det kun er vel lunkent, kommes Skindet deri, og bliver liggende til næste Dag. Naar Barken er rød, faaer vel Skindet en rød Farve, som dog sortner, naar Skindet tørres.[10]
>
> (In some places, where no other tanning material is available, they had to use Speun-Bark [Faroese: *spónbark*, which literally means 'chip-bark']: a reddish bark of wood, probably from spruce that drifts ashore. They cut it into small pieces, boil it in water for a while, and when it is lukewarm, they put the skin into it and leave it immersed until the next day. As the bark is red, the skin gets a red colour but blackens, when the skin is dried).

Priest Jørgen Landt (1751–1804) also mentioned the tradition in his topographical survey from 1800, in which he stated that work with the Common Tormentil root was typically done by women.[11]

But where does the tradition come from? Although the species is present in the Scandinavian Peninsula, England, and mainland Scotland, the use of its root for tanning does not seem to have been practiced in those places. This is probably due

9 Svabo, *Indberetninger fra en Rejse i Færøe*, pp. 284–85 (1034–1035).
10 Svabo, *Indberetninger fra en Rejse i Færøe*, p. 285 (1035–1036).
11 Landt, *Forsøg til en Beskrivelse over Færøerne*, p. 421.

to the fact that these areas were heavily forested, and the inhabitants therefore had easy access to all the tree bark they would need for tanning. This situation was in strong contrast to the Faroe Islands and the Scottish archipelagos, with their almost treeless landscapes.[12]

In Shetland, the species is known by the name *Bark*. In a description from 1793 from the island of Unst, the most northerly of the Shetland Islands, Shetlander Thomas Mouat (1746–1819) and the Scottish minister James Barclay (1742–1793) stated that the root of Common Tormentil was used for tanning skins.[13] A few years later, Samuel Hibbert (1782–1848), an English geologist with an interest in antiquarian matters, stated that: 'the skins of the Shetland sheep are in requisition for the purpose of affording the fisherman a sort of surtout, that covers his common dress. The *tormentilla erecta* has been long used in the process of tanning'.[14]

The tradition is also reflected in several place-names, for instance *de burkli* and *de borkali*, 'bark slope' (hlíð = slope), and *borkhul*, 'bark slope' (hul = hill).[15] In Shetland, the word *barkklepp* or *berkikepp* is also on record, being the term for a crooked piece of iron fastened to a wooden handle used for pulling the Common Tormentil up by its root.[16] This tool resembles the abovementioned Faroese *barksneis*, which was a completely wooden item. In Shetland, like in the Faroe Islands, people distinguished between the so-called *arthbark* (Faroese: *heimabark* — i.e. from the infield) and *hill-bark* (Faroese: *hagabark* — i.e. from the outfield).[17]

An interesting court proceeding of 6 November 1679 from Sweinasiter, Mainland Shetland, reflects the importance and value of the Tormentil root:

> Forasmuchas it is informed by James Oliphant of Ure that ther was ane act emitit by the deceyst Magnus Mowat of Bolquholie, with consent of uthers concerned, prohibiting al persones in Northmaven to repair to Ronishil for tacking of bark, expect [*sic*] alenorlie the scatalers, lykas they were also prohibitit to repair to the effect forsaid without macking aplicatione to the said James Oliphant, and procuring ane liscence thairfor. And in regaird ther is great abuise comitit, seing the said act is not put in executione, therfor it was creaved that the same may be ratified. In consideration quhairof the judge ratifies and aproves of the same in everie circumstance, and ordaines it to be put in exact execution for the futor.[18]

12 Bjørk, 'Børkuvísa'; Svanberg, 'Plant Knowledge', p. 230.
13 Mouat and Barclay, 'Island and Parish of Unst', p. 187.
14 Hibbert, *A Description of the Shetland Islands*, p. 443.
15 Jakobsen, *The Place-Names of Shetland*, p. 145.
16 Jakobsen, *Etymologisk Ordbog*, 1, pp. 27, 35.
17 Bjørk, 'Børkuvísa', p. 115.
18 Gardie House Archive GHA/bi/625/1679. Shetland archivist Brian Smith directed me to this record, and Wendy Scott of the Gardie House Archive kindly put it at my disposal. Transcript by John Ballantyne supplied by Shetland Archives.

Describing the Western Isles, botanist John Lightfoot (1735–1788), in his book on Scottish flora, stated:

> The roots consist of thick tuberales, an inch or more in diameter, replete with a red juice, of an astringent quality. They are used in most of the western isles, and in the *Orkneis*, for tanning of leather; in which intention they are proved, by some late experiments, to be superior even to the bark of oak. They are first of all boiled in water, and the leather afterwards steeped in the cold liquer. In the Islands of Tirey and Col the inhabitants have destroyed so much ground by digging them up that lately they have prohibited the use of them.[19]

In the Western Isles, fishermen also used Common Tormentil for tanning their fishing nets, and a visitor to remote St Kilda in 1698 described how the inhabitant's leather 'is dressed with the roots of tormentil'.[20] In the Western Isles, the species is known by its Gaelic name, *Braonan a' Mhadadh ruaidh*, and among fishermen as *Cairt-Lair*.[21]

There is a documentation that the exploitation of Common Tormentil for tanning was part of daily life in Orkney too. Scottish naturalist Patrick Neill (1776–1851) described this:

> On the sides of Hoy hill we observed several small bristly hogs digging with great keenness. On examination, we found that it was the tuberous root of tormentil (*tormentilla officinalis*) which they were in search of; and which, being plentiful here, forms, together with the roots of rushes, their principal food. The root of tormentil is frequently gathered by the natives for the purpose of tanning; and not without reason, it having been lately ascertained that it contains a larger proportion of the tanning principle than any other astringent wood or bark.[22]

Prominent Orcadian historian Hugh Marwick (1881–1965) stated in 1929, that Common Tormentil, known by the name 'Hill-bark', was highly valued for its root, which was used for tanning fishing nets.[23]

In Ireland, which in general had an abundance of trees, there seems to have been little tradition of using Common Tormentil for tanning. However, when in the early eighteenth century there was a decline in forested areas, the government granted William Maple (*c.* 1661–1762) £200 for finding a method to tan skin with Common Tormentil root. In 1729, Maple published a small pamphlet, titled *A Method of Tanning without Bark*.[24] Later in the eighteenth century, when there was a shortage of trees in Ireland, tanners were encouraged, through a scheme organized by the Royal Dublin Society, to extract tannin from the Common Tormentil root.

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19 Lightfoot, *Flora Scotica*, I, pp. 272–73.
20 Martin, *A Voyage to St Kilda*, p. 455.
21 McNeill, *Colonsay*, p. 118.
22 Neill, *A Tour through some of the Islands of Orkney and Shetland*, p. 53.
23 Marwick, *The Orkney Norn*, p. 10.
24 Maple, *A method of tanning without bark*.

While material evidence of the exploitation of the root of Common Tormentil for tanning ('*barkhella*') is present in almost all Faroese settlements, the situation is somewhat different in the Scottish Isles. In Shetland, only one such possible site (on the island of Yell) has been identified.[25]

But why this difference between the Scottish Isles and the Faroe Islands? The answer may lie with the quern stones. In the early days of agriculture, grain was ground on a 'saddle quern', where an upper-stone with a flat lower face was pushed back and forth on a lower-stone with a likewise flat upper side. With the expansion of the Roman Empire, a new type of quern, the rotary quern, was spread to the British Isles and Scandinavia. This type of quern seems to have replaced the prehistoric quern completely around AD 200.

The prehistoric inhabitants of the Scottish Isles had also developed the so-called trough quern or 'knokkin stein', which in form, size, and function may be compared to the Faroese '*barkkulla*'. Therefore, the reason we do not find bark processing on bedrock in Shetland may be because this took place entirely on the farmsteads (Fig. 9.5). Thus, in Shetland, there would have been no inclination to make cup-shaped depressions in the bedrock for the crushing of the Common Tormentilla root, as they already had the necessary tools for this in their traditional household. In this connection, it is also worth noting that Jakob Jakobsen did not report any Shetland term for the Faroese '*barkhella*'.

The Faroe Islands were only settled after the collapse of the Roman Empire, and by that time the rotary quern was already the standard quern for grinding grain in Scandinavia.[26] This type of quern stone was well-suited for grinding of grain, but would have been completely unsuitable for the crushing of the Common Tormentil root. Viking Age immigrants with a Scandinavian background to the Scottish Isles and the Faroe Islands in the Viking Age would have had no knowledge of the tradition of using the Common Tormentil for tanning, but they would face two different scenarios. Settlers in the Scottish Isles could build on an existing tradition using tools developed for this purpose back in prehistoric times, while the settlers in the Faroese Islands were forced to develop their own technology for this process. They obviously preferred to crush their roots in bedrocks along the streams.

There can be little doubt that the tradition known in the Faroe Island was a local craft, most likely going back to the *landnám* of the Viking Age. The tradition of using

25 Ian Tait, Shetland Museum & Archives, pers. com.

26 For a long time there has been circumstantial evidence that people were in the Faroe Island before the *landnám* of the Viking Age. Recently the site *á Sondum* (literally meaning 'on the sand', i.e. the beach) near the settlement of Sandur on the island of Sandoy produced charred *Hordeum* macrofossils dates of cal. AD 600–770 and 350–540. The results have significance not only for the antiquity of barley cultivation in the Faroes, but critically for demonstrating that people were living there prior to the conventional arrival date of the early Norse settlers. Whether these people were Scandinavians or, possibly Irish *papar*, is unknown (Church and others, 'The Vikings Were Not the First Colonizers', pp. 228–32).

Figure 9.5. Thomas Gray of Grisigarth on the island of Foula using the 'knokkin stein' for grinding of grain. His wife Kitty is standing knitting at the doorway. Photograph from 1902. Photograph from 1902, published by permission, Shetland Museum & Archives.

the Common Tormentil, however, is presumed to have been copied from the native people of the Scottish Isles.

Erik Arne Bjørk (1918–1972) was pointing in the right direction when he stated:

> […] tað kan eingin ivi vera um, at tað er haðani, barkingarhátturin kom til Føroya. Norðmenninir, ið nómu hesi lond, hava lært háttin av keltiska heimafólkinum, og við tað at føroyska landnámið helst fyri ein part er komið haðani, eru tað hesir landnámsmenn, og kanska helst keltisku trælirnir, sum teir høvðu við, sum hava havt við sær til Føroya kunnleikan um henda barkingarhátt.[27]
>
> (There can be no doubt, that it was from there that the tanning method came to the Faroe Islands. The Norsemen, who took land, have learned the method from people of Celtic origin, and as the *landnám* of the Faroe Islands probably partly originated from here, it is these settlers and probably most likely the Celtic slaves they had with them, that brought the knowledge of this practice to the Faroe Islands.)

27 Bjørk, 'Børkuvísa', p. 116.

It is interesting to note that, at least in more recent times, Common Tormentil does not grow in one of the Faroe Islands, namely the most westerly island of Mykines. It is likely that it grew here originally but was extirpated due to human exploitation. So how did these islanders cope with the situation? There is oral evidence that they exchanged Tormentil roots (probably for birds) with the neighbouring island of Vágar.[28] If they acquired roots and not extracted tannic, they would have to do this themselves, and it would therefore be expected that bedrock or portable stones with cup-shaped depressions are present in Mykines. It has not been possible so far to identify examples of this, but by a stream about 100 m above the settlement of Mykines, the place-name '*barkhella*' has survived.[29]

The Faroe Islands became the most northerly place in the North Atlantic where the Common Tormentil root was used for tanning. In the likewise dominantly tree-less Iceland, the tradition is unknown, for which there is a simple explanation: the Common Tormentil is almost completely absent from the Icelandic landscape.[30]

The use of Common Tormentil root for extracting tannic was first mentioned in 1592, but there is no evidence as to when this practice began. But the fact that the method in Shetland is reflected in an Old Norse terminology in Shetland dialect may indicate that it goes way back in time. Therefore, although it cannot be proven, it is likely that the method was a fully integrated part of the working processes in the farming communities of the Faroe Islands during the Viking Age. In this connection, it is worth noting that Sverri Dahl (1910–1987) mentioned a possible *barksteinur* ('pestle') uncovered in the floor layer of a Viking Age structure he excavated in 1957 in the settlement of Sørvági on the island of Vágar.[31]

In the Faroe Islands, this ancient tradition only came to an end when hide shoes were replaced with factory-produced rubber ankle boots during the first half of the twentieth century.[32] Bjarne Stoklund (1928–2013) stated that when staff-members of the National Museum of Denmark visited the islands in 1959 and 1961, hide and skin shoes had almost gone out of use, and it was rare to meet people who still wore this old-fashioned footwear. However, shoes of thin lambskin used for gymnastics were still made, but they were white and not red-yellow like the old ones. This was due to the fact that they were processed with alum and not with 'the wonderful wort Tormentil', to which Tarnovius referred.[33]

Because of strong influences from Britain's trade and culture, ethnographic customs eroded faster in Shetland when compared to the relatively isolated Faroe Islands. With the huge increase in commercial fishery in Shetland from the early eighteenth century, imported commodities were needed, including oak bark used in preserving lines and sails. As it was suddenly available in huge quantities, the native tradition would have died out quickly. That would explain the absence of the use of

28 Jógvan Meinhard Johannesen (1931–2018), Mykines, pers. com.
29 Esbern á Eyðansstovu, Mykines, pers. com.
30 Bjørk, 'Børkuvísa', pp. 99–100.
31 Dahl, 'Víkingabústaður í Seyrvági', p. 20.
32 For a detailed study of Faroese hide and skin shoes, see Dahl, 'Føroyskur fótbúni'.
33 Stoklund, 'Skindsko og træsko', p. 48.

Tormentil in nineteenth-century antiquarian writings, other than general mentions of the plant as an animal tonic.[34]

Karl Grossmann (1851–1916), a medical doctor with a keen interest in geology, who visited the Faroe Islands in the mid-1890s, also paid attention to the tradition and stated:

> The small brook which runs through the town was particularly dry during our visit; a pretty stone bridge led across it. Higher up, the brook is used by the women for washing clothes. We found in the rocky bed several round holes, which one of my companions felt inclined to interpret as 'potholes', or glacial mills. I was somewhat skeptical about them, and at last elicited a different explanation of their origin. It appears that the Faroese are well acquainted with the dyeing properties of various lichens. After maceration, the lichens are pounded with stone pestles on a slab of rock, and, in order to have water near at hand, the process is carried out on the elevated parts of the river-bed. By constant pounding these pseudo-potholes have attained their present size and shape — an interesting warning not to be led into a trap by a scientific explanation where the possibility of artificial causes are possibly responsible. It may here be mentioned that all their woollen garments are dyed as well as manufactured by the Faeroese themselves.[35]

Despite the fact that the practice was still in use in the Faroe Islands until a few generations ago, it is virtually unknown to the present generation. To many, the cup-shaped depressions in the bedrock along the streams are seen as natural phenomena, which Grossmann called 'glacial mills'. However, these depressions deserve much more attention than they have so far received, and should be respected and protected for what they are — a unique monument to the practical sense and innovative thinking of the people of the Faroe Islands, and of an ancient cultural link between these islands and the Scottish Isles.[36]

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34 Ian Tait, Shetland Museum & Archives, pers. com.

35 Grossmann, 'The Færoes', p. 10.

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