A SHORTER CONTRIBUTION

PTOLEMY'S GARIENNUS, BURGH CASTLE AND THE YARE

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THE RIVER YARE in Norfolk appears in Ptolemy as *Gariennus;* Burgh Castle (TG 4704), formerly in Suffolk (but in Norfolk since 1974), appears in *Notitia Dignitatum* as Gariannum. The fort is called after the river, and commentators link the forms with Welsh *gair* 'word; phrase', Cornish *ger* 'word, address', and Old Irish *gair* 'word, command', all going back to Common Celtic **gario-* 'call, shout'. Because *Gariennus* lies behind modern *Yare (and Yarmouth)*, it is routinely explained by dictionaries of English toponyms as 'babbling (river)'.[1]

But should it? Norfolk is very flat; and Rivet and Smith observed that the Yare's waters are placid and unclamourous. They hence cited other etymologies, including one by Johannes Hubschmied concerning herons.[2] This has been somewhat lost sight of, so that Dr Parsons of Nottingham describes *Gariennos* as a 'very difficult' form, which he implies may not be Celtic or even Indo-European at all, and Dr Isaac of Galway (who takes the river as the Waveney) thinks the etymology totally obscure.[3] Yet evidence from Welsh seems to allow a simple derivation.

Welsh *garan* 'crane, heron' is well-attested in toponyms, as with *Nantygaranev* 'stream of the herons', near Cymer Abbey (SH 7219), in a record of about 1371.[4] Other instances, extending from Anglesey to Glamorgan, include Garren Brook and Llangarren (SO 3321) near Hereford; Nantygaran 'stream of the heron' (SN 3642) between Newcastle Emlyn and Lampeter; and Weungarod 'meadow of herons' near Llanegwad (SN 5121), east of Carmarthen.[5] There are parallels beyond Wales. Trenarren (SX 0348) near St Austell is called after Tingaran 'heron's fort', a stronghold on craggy Black Head almost surrounded by ocean.[6] In Scotland a Pictish force wiped out a Northumbrian army on 20 May 685 by the pool of Nechtansmere (NO 5149), near Forfar. The Welsh called the victory *Gueith Linn Garan* 'battle of the pool of the heron', thereby preserving the Pictish name of the lake (now drained).[7] Herons and cranes provide name-elements in other languages from Norse to Japanese, as with Tranmere (SJ 3287) 'sandbank of herons' in Birkenhead, or the Korean quarter (with many Korean restaurants) of Tsuruhashi 'crane *(tsuru* bridge *(hashi)*' in central Osaka.[8]

Hydronyms referring to cranes or herons occur, therefore, from Wales to Japan and beyond. It is true that Watson explained Girnock Burn (NO 3192) 'little crier' near Balmoral, Alit Girnaig (NN 9466) near Pitlochry, the River Garnock (NS 2959) near Largs, and Dalgarnock, near Thornhill (NX 8795) in Dumfries and Galloway, from cognates of Welsh *geir* 'word'.[9] But these are all tumbling upland streams which might well 'cry out'. So there is good semantic reason to explain Gariennus as 'heron *(river)*' and Gariannum as 'fort on heron *(river)*'. The heron *(Ardea cinerea)* is a fairly common bird (books speak of 4,000 pairs in Britain), with many arriving on the East coast in autumn; but the common crane *(Grus grus)* is uncommon, a 'rare vagrant, mainly in the south'.[10]

Even if the semantic case is strong, however, it faces a major objection from phonology. The forms in Ptolemy and *Notitia Dignitatum* consistently have -i-, which supports a derivation from Common Celtic *gario* 'call, shout', but not one from garan 'crane'. That is why many linguists accept 'babbling river', even when others regard this as *lucus a non lucendo* since the Yare does not babble. How do we overcome this difficulty? A little reflection indicates what is wrong. The internal *i* of Ptolemy and *Notitia Dignitatum* is surely due to textual corruption. Both these texts are more corrupt than scholars allow. In the latter, for instance, meaningless *Adurni* (Portchester, Hampshire) should, on the basis of Welsh *eiddunaf* 'I desire', be read as *Adiuni* 'much desired one' (a hydronym); meaningless *Othona* (Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex) should, on the basis of Middle Welsh *oeth* 'something hard to get', be read

as *Octona* 'remote place' (aptly describing this fort, as visitors will know).[11]

If *Adurni* and *Othona* require emendation, so might *Gariannum* Scribal error may have come through interference from Latin. *Adurni* for *Adiuni* is perhaps due to confusion with Latin aduro 'I set on fire': *Othona* for *Octona* to confusion with the imperial name *Otho;* and *Gariennus* (in Ptolemy's source) and Gariannum to confusion with Latin *garrio* 'I chatter', With the last there may have been a Latin popular etymology, of the 'chattering' river.

If *i* should be removed, it suggests readings *Garannus* for the Yare and *Garannum* for Burgh Castle. The internal *e* of medieval forms (*Gernemwa* ;Yarmouth; in Domesday Book, *Gerne* 'Yare' in about 1150) would therefore be due, not to Celtic *i*-affection, but Old English umlaut. That would be no surprise. The Yare valley was settled by the Anglo-Saxons early, in the late fifth century: and English pirates may have known Burgh Castle's name still earlier, as they apparently knew that of Reculver.

This can be shown as follows. Jackson dated *i*-affection in British to about AD 500.[12] Since the English had by then settled on the Yare, our form in *Garan-* would be borrowed as such, at first keeping its original vowel just as Old English *Cantware* 'men of Kent' retains *a* and *Racuulfe* or Reculver retains *u* (both also having been borrowed before *i*-affection in British). The *e* of *Gernemwa* 'Yarmouth' and the like would thus, as noted, be due to changes in Old English, not Celtic. As for its initial consonant, it seems *Garan* was borrowed by primitive Old English (lacking a velar stop) with a velar spirant (through sound substitution), which ultimately gave the *y* of Modern English Yare.[13]

The above explanation apparently provides a consistent and satisfactory explanation for *Garannus* or the Yare and *Garannum* or Burgh Castle (as we may now write them). 'Heron river' is a satisfying description of the Yare, where herons abound. 'Babbling river' is not. It does not describe the Yare and does violence to the semantics of Common Celtic *gario-* 'call, shout'. It may be convenient to trust the textual accuracy of Ptolemy and *Notatia Dignitatum*. But it is not wise, especially with Celtic forms meaningless to Greek and Roman scribes, who might well repeat superfluous *i*, as Rivet and Smith's list of copying errors suggests.[14] The evidence of Welsh, Cornish, and Pictish toponyms, together with some comparative philology and textual emendation, hence vindicates in modified form Hubschmied's argument of 1955 for a meaning 'heron (river)'.

If the above is correct in explaining *Garannus* or Yare as 'heron (river)', place-name dictionaries should now explain *Yarmouth* as '(town at the) mouth of heron (river)'. It is a pity this comes too late to affect Yarmouth's heraldry. (A heron would have made a good supporter for the town's coat of arms, with its lions and herrings.) An etymology from babbling waters may be dropped. So may Dr Parsons's view that the forms are 'very difficult'. They can be shown as Celtic, and hence no evidence for a pre-Celtic or Bronze Age stratum in East Anglian prehistory.

A last point. Restored *Garannus* may signify more than one might think. The crane and heron were sacred birds for the Celts. An inscription found in 1711 under Notre-Dame cathedral, Paris, refers to TARUOS TRIGAPANUS 'bull with the three cranes'; the medieval Irish would not eat the meat of cranes except under constraint; and these birds have a sinister role in medieval Irish story and modern Gaelic folklore.[15] The Britons of the Yare perhaps also regarded herons with superstitious veneration. If so, the Yare's ancient name will have more than philological interest. It may shed light on the religious mentality of Celts in pre-Roman Norfolk and Suffolk. Heron bones are effectively unknown in Welsh and Irish middens.[16] Ancient taboo may thus be a special reason why we should not, therefore, expect to find them in Celtic middens by *Garannus* the Yare or 'heron river'.

NOTES

1 Gelling, 1970, 197; Mills, 1991, 375.
2 Rivet and Smith, 1979, 366.
3 Parsons, 2000, 169-78; Isaac, 2004.
4 Geiriadur, 1950-2002, 1380.
5 Lloyd-jones, 1931-63, 521; Thomas, 1938, 68-9, 187-8; Charles, 1963, 85-110; Coates and Breeze, 2000, 134.
6 Padel, 1988, 168.
7 Jackson, 1963, 20-62.
8 Harding, 2002, 45; information from Professor Yoko Wada, Kansai University.
9 Watson, 1926, 449.
10 Fitter, 1966, 164-6.
11 Breeze, 2004, 180-3.
12 Jackson, 1953, 600-3.
13 Jackson, 1953, 271-2; Campbell, 1959, 25, 85, 173, 175.
14 Rivet and Smith, 1979, 202-3,
15 Evans, 1967, 263; Ross, 1974, 351-65.
16 Alcock, 1963, 34-40; Jones, 1972, 279-382; ó Corráin, 1972, 58-9,

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