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"L'ORIENTALE"

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*del Dipartimento di Studi  
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JOHN TRUMPER

## COCK, COCK-TAILED, COCKTAIL, AND HAYCOCK: AN ETYMOLOGICAL CONUNDRUM

### Abstract

Starting from the generally accepted etymology of cocktail as deriving from the cockerel's tail, evident in the Italian fascist period translation as 'coda di gallo', one attempts to show a different origin. One begins from the 'cock' verb present in the cocktailing of workhorses, the well-known custom of cutting their tails into a clump, given that long tails are an obstacle to their usual work. Workhorses are not thoroughbred, thus the meaning reference is to mixture. In the hypothesis elaborated the 'cock' verb is associated with the noun 'cock', a clump, heap or mass, the base of 'cock of hay', 'haycock', which would appear to have a multiple origin.

*Keywords:* Cocktail, Cocktailed Horses, Cock, Haycock, Multiple Etyma.

In this synthetic squib one attempts to demonstrate that in the case of outcomes resulting from multiple etyma no sure attribution of a historical origin can be given, though paths pursued usually offer interesting points of reflection on historical processes and on ideologically based refusals to accept certain word histories.

*Cocktail* as a drink<sup>1</sup> has been mostly referred, with little or no semantic justification, to the *cock* word (= *cockerel*), from Skeat, 1849, and Müller, 1879, on, with few exceptions. These exceptions would take it to French *coque* 'eggshell' > *coquetier* 'eggcup', contaminated with the regional *coquetel* drink (= \**coqueteau*), as did Weekly 1909 and 1921, taking its origin to the early Seventeen Hundreds<sup>2</sup>. Others take it to *cock-ale* (Sixteen

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<sup>1</sup> Since 1806 or 1809, according to the commentator.

<sup>2</sup> Obviously *coquetier* 'eggcup' derives from *coquette* diminutive of *coque* 'eggshell' (for texts and dating see Godefroy 2. 295a), *coque* from Latin *cōccum* pl. *cōcca* (< Greek *κόκκος*, with gender change), as in Gamillscheg 250a, DELF 157b, extended in FEW 2. 823 (see FEW 2. 822a-826a: with an early Twelve Hundred origin). Semantically, this would imply a reference to the container and not to the 'drink contained' in such a container.

Hundreds), but even the ODEE is skeptical on this score. Some do not mention it (Klein, 1986<sup>6</sup>, therefore “unknown”) or declare its real origin to have been lost in the mist of time (ODEE), a rather strange statement, given that the name only exists since the first years of the Eighteen Hundreds<sup>3</sup>. The real etymological breakthrough had already come in Låftman, 1946, unnoticed by many, when *cocktails* were associated with *cocktailed horses* (= docked horses) as non-thoroughbreds and the word antedated to 1806 rather than 1809.

Liberman, 2007, took up Låftman’s first hypothesis, associating cocktails with the cocktailing or tail-docking of work horses<sup>4</sup>, which, as non-thoroughbreds, were of mixed origin, thus by extension the word applied to any mix as not being purebred, even to mixed-origin drinks. Liberman, 2009: 72, only dealt with *cock-a-...* in compounds where the sense was *mixed* or *composed* of two or more elements (*cockagrice*, *cock-a-leekie*, *cock-a-bondy*), which semantically was certainly relevant. However, Liberman, 2010: 172-173, reflected that any reference to a cockerel’s tail should morphologically be realized as cock’s-tail > \*cockstail/ \*coxtail, just as cock’s-comb > cockscomb > coxcomb. He first considered docking to involve the creation of a short, tufted tail (“having the tail docked so that the short stump sticks up like a cock’s tail”), which would, of course, take the discussion back to a *cock* origin (= *cockerel*). His conclusion, nevertheless, was in favour of cocktailing as referring to the tail-docking of non-thoroughbred work horses, therefore to the production of a non-thoroughbred, a mixed product. Thus, the drink would be a reference to mixing, as stated. This, of course, though resolving quite admirably the origin of *cocktail* as a drink, i.e. in a scientific fashion in terms of morphological and semantic cohesion, leaves the *cock* verb (= *dock*) and derivatives such as *cock of hay* > *haycock* quite unexplained.

Scholars have admirably and correctly ascertained the origin of the cocktail (non-thoroughbred > mixed), but what do cocktails and cocktailed horses have to do with cocks of hay or haycocks and with

<sup>3</sup> ODEE 187b hypothesized that *cock-tailed*, on a par with *cock-taile proude* in 17<sup>th</sup> century texts, be taken to cock’s tail, viz. “with the tail docked and sticking up like a cock’s tail”, therefore to *cock* as a male bird.

<sup>4</sup> As opposed to thoroughbreds who kept their handsomely long tails.

English rivers such as the Cocker? Pertinent are Ekwall's comments on the Cocker (various northern streams and rivers)/ Cocker Beck and Cock Beck. What Ekwall says (Ekwall, <sup>2</sup>1968: 83-84,) about Cocker is highly pertinent, his proposal of an etymon being

Cocker represents the fem. form of an adj \*kukros 'crooked', which may be the source of Elr cúar 'crooked, perverse'. A British form \*kukrā would give \*cocrā, \*cocr (W \*cogr). [...] I am now inclined to adopt the said derivation definitely. There seems to be sufficient reason to accept the derivation of Ir cúar from \*kukro-, as suggested by Stokes.

This, again, was taken up in Ekwall <sup>4</sup>1960: 114b:

Cocker is a Brit river-name, derived from OBrit \*kukro- 'crooked', which corresponds to early Ir cúar 'crooked, perverse'. The immediate base is the feminine form \*cucrā, which became \*cocrā, \*cocr. The meaning 'crooked river' suits all the Cockers.

In the case of Cock Beck, as treated in <sup>4</sup>1960: 114a, the proposed solutions are twofold: (1) a reference to OE *cocc* 'cockereſ' (even to W *cog* 'cuckoo'), (2) a reference to OE \**cocc* found in place-names and "in haycock, and which seems to have meant a 'heap', 'a hillock', 'a clump of trees'."

With reference to a possible British Celtic base \*kukro- (> \*cogr) and its documented Irish equivalent *cúar* (DIL <sup>2</sup>1990: C-575), there is no documented exact British equivalent, notwithstanding the presence of similarly derived nouns which, related to Irish *cochæ* from the same base, support this reconstruction<sup>5</sup>. The Irish *cúar* occurs both as an adjective ('curved') in Best, Ériu 2. 28 §11 ca. 800-900 AD, *ergo* late OIr ("Nār cuar rus romuith rodonfe foebra fibafes maclimairb" - a courageous, curving narrow face [...]), as a Personal Name in early MÍr (Stokes, Ériu 4. 30, 8 "cless Caítt 7 cless Cuair" the feast of Catt and the feast of Cúar; Book of Leinster line 12543 etc.), and as the derived verb *cúarad* 'to distort, skew' in the Lebor na hUidre 7087 (*Cúarscéith chredumai foraiþ* from the Togail Bruidne Dá Derga §76 'Curved shields of bronze

<sup>5</sup> A hypothetical proto-British equivalent \*cogr remains a possibility.

they bear'). An associated word, from the IE point of view, is, as stated, OIr and MÍr *cochæ* 'heap; bundle; clump; bunch' (> 'knuckle', 'nape', see DIL C-138, even 'hump-back hill'<sup>6</sup>), with which MW *cogwrn* (pl. *cegyrn*) 'heap; bundle; mass; corn stack' (> 'hillock')<sup>7</sup> and Middle Breton *kogell/ koguen*- id. (Ernault <sup>2</sup>1895: 112) are related. For the derivation of these terms from IEW 588 \*(S)KEU(H<sub>x</sub>)-K- see Schrijver 1995: 53-55 (the W via \*KUKĀ > \*KO(KĀ)-KORNV-).

English cock = haycock was taken by Skeat, 1879-1882: 118a, cock<sup>4</sup>, to Early ME *cokk(e)/ cock* (Piers Plowman, later Tyndale), thence to a hypothesized OE \*cocc (undocumented). This was accepted as etymon in Pierce 1968: 34 for the Cock-element in precise place-names, but always related to ON *køkk*. This latter, together with English (hay)cock would, then, have to be considered derivatives of IE \*GENG-/ \*GONG- (see Falk-Torp, 1. 560, 563, Danish *kok*<sup>3</sup>, *kogle*, Norwegian dialect *kokke*, *kukle*, *kongla* -e, *kungle*; Marwick, 1929:92, for Norn *kokk*, cock 'heap; haycock'; De Vries, 1977: 342a, *køkk* referred to Greek γόγγρος, γογγύλος, hence to Proto-Germanic \*KANK-[UL]- < IEW 370, 379 \*GONG-). Klein, <sup>2</sup>1969: 1. 306-307, took the English cock directly to ON *køkk* as a borrowing, since there is no documented OE \*cocc. This I believe to be the heart of the matter: there is no such OE form! The Middle English word might, accordingly, be a Scandinavian loan, though this is not the only possibility.

We take the Celtic forms (*cochæ*, *cogwrn*, *kogell* etc., as well as Ir *cúar*) to IEW 588-592 \*(S)KEUH<sub>x</sub>-(-K-[RO-]) (cp. also IEW 954 \*SKĒU<sup>-6</sup> for \*SKEUH<sub>x</sub>-). To this base we can also take ME *shock*<sup>2</sup> ('pile of sheaves of

<sup>6</sup> For OIr see St Gall glosses 67<sup>a</sup>14 *coche* † less: 'clunis tam masculine quam feminine generis', 67<sup>a</sup>16 *onchochu* [...] *discidunt clune puellæ* (behind, hind-part < curved part, in the dative), for Late OIr Táin Bó Cúalnge 2599 *co m-batar* for *coich* a *munéoil* (the hind-part of the head, nape of the neck, in the genitive), for MÍr O' Mulcrony's Glossary 256 (*Cluain a clune .i. o chuchu*) etc. The reference is to a curved hind-part.

<sup>7</sup> In the Thirteen Hundreds in *Dafydd ap Gwilym* (poem 21 v. 83, Parry p. 62 "Rhugn sugn soeg gegoeg gegyrn- rhwth rywmyfol"- a sucking noise, remains of a cock breaking open - a mass opening up), in the Fourteen Hundreds in *Dafydd ap Edmwnd* (Roberts p. 129, poem lxx v. 16 "nid mwy na dwrn kogwrn kerdd" - the mass of [your] music is no more than the blow of a fist) and in the *Delw y Byd* n° 13 p. 33 "ac oc eu kogyrneu y gwneir lluesten didos y dynyon"- and from their swollen mass is made a covered tent for men).

corn', 'shock of hair'), which, as Skeat, 1879-1882: 558a, *shock*<sup>2</sup> and ODEE 822a *shock*<sup>1</sup> have already shown, go no further back than ME (*schokke*, *shocke*), but can be compared with Danish *skok* (Falk-Torp 2. 1017-1018, ON *skokkr* De Vries 1977: 497a), and relevant Old West Frisian and German forms. There is no documented OE form, but the presence in Anglo-Saxon Latin documents of *scoka*, *schockum*, *schokkum*, *socca* and variants with this meaning<sup>8</sup> makes a hypothetical OE \*sceocc easier to hypothesize<sup>9</sup>. In conclusion, therefore, we can either suppose that English *cock* (> *haycock*, *cocktail* etc.) was a Scandinavian loan, or, on the other hand, an extremely old Celtic borrowing into Old English corresponding to Ir *coch*, *cochæ*, W *cogwrn* (*cegyrn*), Breton *kogell*. So far, we seem not to have found any decisive criterion for reaching a conclusion, as is most usually the case whenever we come across a *contaminatio*. There is a Gaulish personal name Cocus -a, a supposed variant of Coccus -a, which all commentators thus far take to Late Latin coccus -a -um 'reddish' (cp. Delamarre, 2001:100-101,), rather than take it to a \*K(E)U-KEHa base, which gives the Celtic words discussed above. The origin of Cocus in coccus (< κόκκος) may, then, also be doubted. Might it not be someone with his hair all heaped up or in a bun?

### Conclusion:

If cocktail is not a reference to a cock/ cocktail (cock's tail), in which the semantic core would be colour, the alternative hypothesis relates with the cocktailing of workhorses, i.e. non- thoroughbreds of mixed origin, where the semantic core is mixture. From a historical linguistic point of view cocktailing and the verb to cock derive from the noun cock (clump, heap, mass) which may either be the product of a Scandinavian loan (køkk) in

<sup>8</sup> Latham <sup>6</sup>1999: 425, 438; earliest reference in documents of 1180-1181, at the end of the OE period.

<sup>9</sup> This hypothetical Anglo-Saxon \*sceocc seems to have constituted the base for a Gaelic borrowing *siog* 'sheaf / shock of corn' (MacBain, 1896: 292.), which, in turn, has passed into Erse, to judge from Dineen, 1927: 1035, *siog*. However, there is no trace of such an item in DIL or LEIA, so it cannot be very old. Welsh and Breton seem never to have known the item, which reinforces the hypothesis of an OE borrowing into Gaelic.

OE, comparable to a possible OE form \*sceocc (> shock), or the Anglicization of the Celtic base \*KUK-Ā (OIr. cochæ, MW cogwrn, Breton kogell).

#### Abbreviations

OE= Old English; ME: Middle English; DIL: see AA. VV. <sup>2</sup>1990; LEIA: see below; OBrit = Old British; Ir = Irish (Erse); Elr = Early Irish; OIr = Old Irish; Mlr = Middle Irish; IEW: see Julius Pokorny 1959; IE = Indo-European; ODEE: see C. T. Onions et al.; W= Welsh; MW = Middle Welsh.

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