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Font colour key:

[dark blue](#) = non-Scandinavian Germanic word; [dark red](#) = loanword into English; [green](#) = Old Germanic dialect; [purple](#) = Modern Scandinavian word.

Abbreviations: ODanish = Old Danish; OE = Old English; ON = Old Norse; OSwedish = Old Swedish.

Introduction

This small article aims to present and give the etymologies of the chief loans into early modern and modern English from the Scandinavian languages. The many Nordic loans into Old and Middle English have been treated in a separate article.

The primary sources discussing these loans have been the brief discussions appearing in Serjeantson, Speake and Kisbye (see booklist below) and the proposed loans have been checked in etymological dictionaries. Most important and reliable of these have been Barnhart and Hoad, while Skeat has only been consulted as a last resort. Some of the derivations given by Barnhart from Scandinavian words which are rare, curious or dialectal do not appear in the standard dictionaries for those languages, but they are included due to the absence of other information.

As might be expected, many of the loans from the Scandinavian languages in the modern period are terms relating to more or less specifically Scandinavian objects, concepts or creatures, for which English had no appropriate term. As will be seen, a number of these ([RUNE](#), [KRAKEN](#), [SKALD](#), [BESERK](#), [SAGA](#), [TROLL](#), [JOTUN](#), [RAGNARÖK](#)) were borrowed during the period in which knowledge of Old Norse literature (and later Norwegian folk tales) was first being acquired in England and for which our language was lacking equivalent terms. These loans therefore stem mainly from ON or from direct ON descendants in early modern Icelandic.

Loans for more or less peculiarly Nordic phenomena are, for example, [AUK](#), [LOON](#), [RUNE](#) (our native Anglo-Saxon equivalent had long since died in English), [KRAKEN](#), [SKALD](#), [BESERK](#), [GEYSER](#), [SAGA](#), [STORTHING](#), [TROLL](#), [SMØRREBRØD](#), [SMORGASBORD](#).

Others relate to creatures, geographical features and weather patterns which are characteristic of Scandinavian or other northern climes and for which (in some cases), English had the option of, but not necessarily the need, to borrow, e.g. [VOE](#), [JOKUL](#), [FLOE](#), [MAELSTROM](#), [SKERRY](#), [WALRUS](#), [NARWHAL](#), [SQUALL](#) (violent gust of wind), [ICEBERG](#), [ICEBLINK](#), [SKUA](#), [FJELD](#), [PIPKRAKE](#), [TJÆLE](#).

Still others pertain to activities or professions in which Scandinavians traditionally excel or are renowned for, e.g. [YAW](#), [SKOAL](#), [SKI](#), [SLALOM](#), [KLISTER](#), [SKI-JORING](#). The marine animals mentioned in the previous paragraph can also be considered as being relevant here, owing to the Scandinavians' mastery of sailing, shipping and fishing and their extensive knowledge of the sea.

What remains is a number of apparently random loans which seem to have little common thematic ground. They do, however, to some extent reflect Scandinavian (especially Swedish) advances in technology and democracy, as well as a robust

common cultural heritage and a distinctive cuisine, e.g. **ANGSTROM**, **MOPED**, **OMBUDSMAN**, **PALSTAVE**, **TRAP**, **TUNGSTEN**, **HALLING**, **GJETOST**, **GRAVADLAX**, **LANGELEIK**, **ROSEMALING**, **SPRINGAR**, **POLSKA**, **GLÖGG**, **RYA**.

1: Scandinavian (source language undetermined)

1500s:

BATTEN (1500s) "feed abundantly, grow fat, thrive" from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian *batne* "improve, grow better", ON *batna* "improve, thrive"; **ROWAN** (1500s) the mountain ash, from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian *raun*, *rogn*, Swedish *rönn*, ON *reynir* "rowan tree"; **RUG** (1551) originally "coarse fabric", cf. Norwegian dialect *rugga* "coarse covering", Swedish *rugg* "coarse hair", *rugge* "tuft" and ON *rögg* "shaggy tuft"; modern meaning from 1591 (Barnhart); **SCRAG** (1542) "skinny person or animal", cf. Swedish *skragge*, Norwegian *skraki* "tall thin person", Icelandic *skröggur* "old man"; **SCRUB** (1545) "rub hard" perhaps from a Scandinavian source, cf. Danish and Norwegian *skrubbe* but Middle Dutch or Middle Low German may be the origin; **SCUD** (1532) "run or move swiftly" from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian *skudda* "thrust", Swedish *skudda* "shake", ON *skjóta* "push, shove"; **SCUFFLE** (1579) is probably the frequentive form of *scuff*, cf. Swedish *skuffa* "push, shove", ON *skúfa* "push aside"; **SIMPER** (1563) probably a loan from Scandinavian, cf. Norwegian *semper* "fine, smart", Danish dialectal *semper* "affected, coy" (Barnhart) but an alternative derivation is from 1500s Dutch *semper* "affected"; **SKIT** (Freeborn claims 1572; others give 1700s) "a brief satirical theatrical sketch" probably from a Scandinavian source; related to **SKITTER** below and therefore to Icelandic *skjóta* "shoot"; **SNAG** (1577-87) "stump of a tree", with the meaning "projection" in 1586, from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian dialectal *snag* "stump, spike"; **SNUG** (1595) from a Scandinavian source, cf. Swedish *snygg* "neat, trim", ON *snöggr* "short haired"; **WAD** (1540) probably a shortened form of 1392 *wadmal* "soft padding material" from ON *vaðmál* "measure of cloth"; **YAW** (1546) probably from a Scandinavian source, cf. ON *jaga*, Norwegian *jage* "hunt, drive, fly".

1600s:

LOON a guillemot (1634) from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian *lom*, ON *lómr* "loon"; **NUDGE** (1675) from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian *nugge*, *nyggje* "nudge, shove", Icelandic *nugga* "rub"; **OAF** (1638 with this spelling) from a Scandinavian source, cf. ON *álfr* "elf, fairy"; **RUNE** (1685; *runic* is recorded from 1662) the word was introduced from Danish *rune* or Icelandic *rún* deriving from ON *rún* "secret or magical lore; magical symbol; written character, rune" (native OE *rûn* did not survive the Middle English period); **SKERRY** (1600s; mainly Scots) "small rocky island, reef", from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian *skjær*, *skjer*, ON *sker* "skerry"; **SKEWER** (1679; earlier 1411: *skuer*) probably from a Scandinavian source, cf. ON *skífa* "cut, slice", Swedish *skiva* "slice"; **SKITTLES** (1634) a plural form of a Scandinavian loan, cf. Norwegian and Swedish *skyttel* "shuttle"; **SMUT** (with the meaning of the modern noun, 1698) perhaps a Scandinavian source, cf. Swedish *smuts*, Danish *smuds* "dirt, mud, filth"; **SQUALL** "cry loudly" (c.1631) from a Scandinavian source, cf. ON *skvala* "shout, bawl"; **VOE** (1600s) "small bay or narrow creek" ultimately ON *vágr* "creek, bay"; **KEG** (1632), a variant of earlier *kag* (1452) from

a Scandinavian source, cf. ON *kaggi* "keg, cask", Swedish *kagge* "keg, cask", Norwegian *kagg* "keg, barrel".

1700s:

COSY (1700s) origin uncertain but probably from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian *koselig* "comfortable"; **JOKUL** (1700s) probably from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian *jøkel, jøkul* "glacier", ON *jökull* "ice, glacier"; **KRAKEN** (1700s) a giant mythical sea-monster thought to live off the Norwegian coast, from a Scandinavian source, probably Norwegian *kraken*; **MUGGY** (1731) probably derived from ME *muggen* (1390) "drizzle" from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian Nynorsk *mugg* "drizzle", ON *mugga* "drizzle, mist"; **SQUALL** (1719) "violent gust of wind", from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian *skval* "rippling, splashing sound", Swedish *skvala* "gush, pour forth"; **MAELSTROM** first recorded as the proper name (1701) of a whirlpool off the Lototen Islands, with the generalised meaning of a large and violent whirlpool becoming current about 1841, from Danish *Malstrøm*, originally from Dutch *maelstrom* (now *maalstrom*).

1800s:

AQUAVIT (1870-99) an alcoholic spirit distilled from potatoes, from mainland *akvavit* "water of life", a Scandinavianisation of a Latin expression; **BESERK** (1851; earlier 1822 *berserker*) erroneously adapted into English from Scandinavian, cf. ON *beserkr* "bear sark"; **FLOE** (1817) probably from Norwegian Nynorsk *flo* "layer, stratum", from ON *fló* "layer"; **NAG** (vb.) (1825) probably from a Scandinavian source, cf. ON *gnadda* "mumour, grumble", *nagga* "complain", Norwegian *nage* "gnaw, rankle"; **SKITTER** (1845) from earlier 1721 *skite* "dart, run about", from a Scandinavian source, cf. Icelandic *skjóta* "shoot"; **VOLE** (1805; earlier *vole-mouse*) from a Scandinavian source, cf. Norwegian *voll* < **vollmus* "field mouse" - the source of the English word presumably originally compounds either Norwegian *voll* "grassy field, meadow" or Icelandic *völlur* "plain, field", both from ON *völlr* "plain".

2. Old Norse

JOTUN (1830-69) a member of the race of giants from Old Scandinavian mythology, as preserved in Old Icelandic poetry and sagas - loaned from ON *jötunn* "giant" (cf. Norwegian Bokmål *jotun, jutul*, Nynorsk *jøtul* "giant" and cognate OE *eoten* "giant"); **RAGNARÖK, RAGNAROK** (1870-99) the defeat of the gods and men at the final battle by the forces of evil, as described in Old Scandinavian mythology and there mainly in the Old Icelandic poem *Völuspá*, from ON *ragnarök*, later *ragnarøkkr* (perhaps via modern Icelandic *ragnarök*) from ON *ragna* "of the gods" + *rök* "doom, fate" or *røkkr* "twilight" (cf. German *Götterdämmerung*, Swedish *gudaskymning* "twilight of the gods"); **SAGA** (1709: an Old Norse prose narrative from Iceland or Norway, 1830-69: a narrative regarded as having the traditional qualities of these; a story of heroic exploit) from ON *saga* "something said, tale, story", loaned during the time the ON sagas were becoming known in England (but perhaps the identical word in modern Icelandic, *saga*, is the source of the English loan); **SKALD, SCALD** (1763) an itinerant or court oral poet, a bard, especially in ancient Scandinavia, loaned from ON *skáld*, perhaps mediated via modern Icelandic *skáld* (cf. Norwegian *skald*,

Danish *skjald*).

3: Icelandic

EIDER (1743) via German *Eider* or Dutch *eider* from Icelandic *æðar*(*fugl*) "eider-fowl", genitive of ON *æðr*; **GEYSER** (1780) originally the proper name of a geyser in Haukadal, Árnessýsla, derived from Icelandic *geysa* "gush forth" < ON *geysa* "gush"; **SANDUR** (1870-99) a broad, flat or gently sloping plain of glacial outwash, from Icelandic *sandur* "sand, sandy ground, sea-shore".

4: Faroese

SKUA (1678) apparently a naturalisation of Faroese *skúgvur*, cognate with ON *skúfr* "seagull".

5: Norwegian

AUK (1674) a short-winged, heavy-bodied Atlantic seabird, from Norwegian *alke*, cf. Icelandic *álka* "auk"; **FIORD, FJORD** (1674) from Norwegian *fjord, fjord*, descended from ON *fjörðr* "firth, inlet"; **FJELD** (1830-69) a high barren rocky plateau, especially in Scandinavia, from Dano-Norwegian *fjeld* "mountain" descended from ON *fjall* "mountain, fell"; **GJETOST** (1900-29) a cheese made from goat's milk, from Norwegian Riksmål *gjetost* (*gjet* "goat" + *ost* "cheese"); **HALLING** (1830-69) a Norwegian country dance in duple rhythm (from *Hallingdal*, a valley in southern Norway); **KLISTER** (1930-69) a wax applied before a ski-run to aid the glide of the skis on the snow, from Norwegian *klister* soft ski-wax (literally "paste"); **KRILL** (1907) a luminous shrimp, from Norwegian *krill* (perhaps related to Icelandic *kríli* "little thing"); **LANGELEIK** (1900-29) an early Norwegian stringed instrument resembling the zither, from Norwegian *langeleik* (*lang* "long" + *leik* "play"); **LEMMING** (1713) from Norwegian *lemen*, descended from ON *læmingi, læmingr* "lemming"; **NARWHAL** (1658 *Narh whale*, 1747 *Narwhale*) probably from Norwegian *narhval* (or perhaps Danish *narhval* or Swedish *narval*), derived from Icelandic *náhvalur*, ON *náhvalr* "corpse-whale" (from its whitish colour); **RORQUAL** (1827) a whale of the finback family, via French from Norwegian *røyrkval*, cf. ON *reyðarhvalr* "rorqual" (literally "red-whale"); **ROSEMALING** (1930-69) the art of painting wooden objects with flower motifs, from Norwegian *rosemaling* "rose-painting" (*rose* "rose" + *maling* "painting"); **SKI** (1755) Norwegian *ski*, from ON *skíð* "snowshoe, stick of wood"; **SKI-JORING** (1900-29) a winter sport in which the skier is towed by a horse or vehicle, from Norwegian *skikjøring* (literally "ski-driving"); **SLALOM** (1921) from Norwegian *slalåm* a skiing race, literally "sloping track" (Nynorsk *sla* "sloping" + *låm* "track" (made by skis)); **SPRINGAR** (1930-69) a piece of music for a Norwegian country dance in 3/4 time, from Norwegian *springar* < verb *springe* "bound, jump, leap"; **STORTHING, STORTING** (1834) the legislative assembly of Norway, from Norwegian *storting* (*stor* "large" + *ting* "assembly"), ultimately from ON *stórr* + *þing* ("great assembly"); **TROLL** (1616) probably from Norwegian *troll* "troll, monster, goblin" (cf. Swedish *troll*, Danish *trold*) ultimately from ON *troll* "giant, demon".

6: Danish

ANGST (1859, but not in popular use until c.1956) "fear, anxiety" from Danish *angst*, earlier *angest* "fear, anxiety, dread", a loan from Middle Low German [German *Angst*, however, may be the source of the English word]; **BAT** (mammal) (1575) is a replacement for earlier ME *bakke*, both being loans from Scandinavian, probably Danish from Old Danish *bakkæ* or perhaps Old Swedish *backa* "bat"; **ICEBERG** (1774) from Danish *isbjerg* [or from Dutch *ijsberg*]; **ICEBLINK** "the gleam from distant ice structures" from Danish *isblink* (*is* "ice" + *blink* "gleam, flash"); **LANDNAM** (1930-69) the clearance of woodland for agricultural purposes or evidence of this act, from Danish *landnám* "taking or occupation of land" (apparently based on Old Norse *landnám* or Icelandic *landnám* "the taking of land" (usually in reference to the settlement of Iceland) from *land* "land" + *nám* "taking, occupation" (< Old Norse *nema* "take, take possession of"; cf. German *nehmen*)); **LANDRACE** (1930-69) a breed of large white pig originally bred in Denmark, from Danish *landrace* (*land* "national-" + *race* "breed"); **MOR** (1930-69) a layer of acidic humus formed in cool moist conditions where decomposition is slow (such as in coniferous forests), from Danish *mor* "humus"; **PALSTAVE, PALSTAFF** (1851; archeological usage) a kind of celt (usually bronze) fitting into a split wooden handle instead of a socket, from Danish *pålstav*, apparently a Danish loan and adaptation of Old Norse *pál-stafr*, a kind of heavy missile (from *páll* "spade, hoe" + *stafr* "staff"); **SKOAL** (c.1600, Scots only) "cheers!" from early modern Danish *skaal* (now *skål*, literally "bowl") "toast" - probably from King James' visit to Denmark in 1589; **SMØRREBRØD** (1900-29) from Danish *smørrebrød*, literally "bread and butter" an open sandwich, hors d'oeuvres served on slices of bread.

7: Swedish

ANGSTROM (1951, altered from earlier 1906: *Ängström*) from Swedish *ängström*, a unit of measurement named after the Swedish physicist A.J. Ångström; **DESMAN** (1700s) a mole-like amphibious mammal, from Swedish *desman-råtta* literally "musk-rat"; **FARTLEK** (1930-69) "interval training": a method of training used by middle and long distance runners alternating fast and slow work in cross-country runs, from Swedish *fartlek* (*fart* "speed" + *lek* "play"); **GAUNTLET** (1646 in the form *gantlope*) punishment of running between two rows of armed men ("running the gauntlet") from Swedish *gatlopp* (*gata* "track" + *lopp* "course") probably imported by English troops fighting in the Thirty Years War, later confused with *gauntlet* from another source; **GLÖGG, GLUGG** (1900-29) a spiced Scandinavian winter alcoholic drink, from Swedish *glögg* (cf. Norwegian *gløgg*); **GRAVLAX, GRAVLAX/GRAVLAKS** (1930-69) raw salmon cured with salt and herbs, from Swedish *gravlax, gravlax* raw spiced salmon (*grav* "grave, trench" + *lax* "salmon"; the spicing process was originally undertaken in a trench in the ground); **MOPED** (1956) from Swedish *moped* formed from *mo(tor)* + *ped(al)*; **OMBUDSMAN** (1959) from Swedish *ombudsman* "commissioner" (cf. Old Norse *umboðsmaðr* "commissionary, steward"); **PIPKRAKE** (1930-69) an ice-needle, needle ice, from Swedish *pipkrake* (*pip* "pipe" + (dialectal) *krake* "frozen ground"); **POLSKA** (1870-99) a processional Scandinavian folk-dance of Polish origin, usually in 3/4 time, from Swedish *polsk* "Polish"; **RUTABAGA** (1799) the Swedish turnip, from dialectal Swedish *rotabagge* (*rota* "root" + *bagge* "bag"); **RYA** (1930-69) a Scandinavian variety of knotted pile rug, from Swedish *rya* "long-pile rug" (originally *rya rug*); **SMORGASBORD** (1893) from Swedish *smörgåsbord*, a cold buffet consisting of various hors d'oeuvres (literally *smörgås* "bread and

butter" + **bord** "table"); **TJÆLE**, **TÆLE** (1900-29) a frozen surface at the base of the active layer in a periglacial environment, from Swedish *tjäle* "ice in frozen ground, ground frost"; **TRAP** (1700s) a fine grained igneous rock, from Swedish *trappa* "stair"; **TUNGSTEN** (1770) from Swedish *tungsten* "heavy stone" (*tung* "heavy" + *sten* "stone"); **VARVE** (1900-29) a band of sediment deposited in glacial lakes, consisting of a light layer and a dark layer deposited at different seasons, from Swedish *varv* "layer; turn"; **WALRUS** (1655) [via Dutch *walrus*, *walros* "whale-horse"] probably from Swedish, *valross* cf. ON *rosmhvalr*, *hrosshvalr* "walrus" (literally "horse-whale").

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