

# OIcel. *kærr* ‘dear, beloved’ and the “Picardian hypothesis”

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## 1. Introduction

In Fischer’s 1909 pioneering work on loanwords in Old West Nordic one finds only one word for which a North French, Picardian, comparandum is given, i.e. *kærr*, ultimately from Lat. *cārus* ‘dear, precious, valued, beloved, esteemed’.<sup>1</sup> The reader is thus left to assume that the word somehow wandered into Nordic (and not just West Nordic, as it is also attested in Danish *kær* [1300+] and Swedish *kär* [13<sup>th</sup> c.+]) from Picardian. Hence my wording “Picardian hypothesis”.

From the viewpoint of a theory-informed approach to lexical borrowing, one is left wondering the following:

1. Is it necessary to assume a specific dialectal source for this word?
2. If so, why?
3. Are there any other possible words from that very same dialectal source?
4. Is assuming the provenance of one or more words from a specific dialectal source the most economical explanation at hand?

This short article provides a new, simplified etymology for the word *kærr* and establishes that no Picardian loans with original Latin /ka(:)-/ can

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logically be claimed for Icelandic, as the outcome of phonological adaptation would exactly be the same as for OFr. or ME /tʃ/.

## 2. Fischer's analysis (and its forerunner)

Fischer's entry (p. 80, my translation) is as follows:

*kérr*, 'dear', ODan. *kær* : OFr. *cher*, Pic. *ker*, Lat. *carus* (as already observed by Jessen). *kérleikr* m., ODan. *kærlek*, *kérliigr* and other derivatives.

Significantly, Picardian comparanda are nowhere else to be found in Fischer's work, so there must have been a reason for providing the reader with that comparandum in particular. A hint regarding the origin of this analysis is given by the reference to Jessen, in whose work it is stated (s.v. *kierr*) that the word is "likely a loan from Normandy" [*sic!*], my translation). The reference to Jessen's work clarifies that the Picardian comparandum is inserted specifically to provide a source of comparison which is omitted by Jessen (although Normandy is not Picardy).

In order to reconstruct Fischer's (and Jessen's) line of reasoning, one has to consider sound changes which happened *en route* from Latin to French:

- Second palatalization (5<sup>th</sup> c., Riefelder 1976: §§ 394, 395), whereby Lat. /k, g/ > /\_ /a/ > OFr. /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ (> /j/, /z/ around 1200, Riefelder 1976: § 398), respectively.<sup>2</sup>
- Bartsch's Law (5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> c., Riefelder 1976: § 225), whereby Lat. /a/ > OFr. /jɛ:/<sup>3</sup> in stressed open syllables after palatalized consonants (Lat. *capra* > OFr. *chievre*, Lat. *laxāre* > OFr. *laissier*), together with (for comparative purposes) the fronting of Lat /a/ in stressed open syllables (Lat. *lavāre* > OFr. *laver*, Riefelder 1976: § 77) and that of unstressed Lat. /a/ in open syllables after palatalized consonants (Lat. *caballus* > OFr. *chéval*, Lat. *camisia* > OFr. *chemise*, Riefelder 1976: § 228).

Fischer's (and likely Jessen's) belief that the word was a North French loan

<sup>2</sup> The first palatalization, before palatal vowels, which happened in the 3<sup>rd</sup> c., had a different outcome for Lat. /k/: > OFr. /ts/, later /s/, as in *cerf* [tʃɛrf] 'deer' (Riefelder 1976: §§ 391–393).

<sup>3</sup> OFr. /jɛ:/ > /jɛ/ was later (end of 13<sup>th</sup> c.) monophthongized to /ɛ/ (with optional raising to /e/) or retained as such (Riefelder 1976: § 226): cf. Fr. *chez* [ʃɛ] < Med.Lat. *casa*, Fr. *chèvre* [ʃɛvrɛ] < Med.Lat. *capra*, and Fr. *chien* [ʃjɛ̃] < Med.Lat. *cane* (see also Riefelder 1976: § 414).

is based on the assumption that ON ⟨k⟩ is a direct reflex of an unshifted original Latin velar plosive, and that the Second Palatalization did not affect Picardian or (North) Norman (see Schwan 1911: § 139 Anm.; Riefel 1976: § 396). These suppositions are not entirely correct. In fact, Lat. /k/ also underwent palatalization to some extent in Picardian (de la Chaussée 1974: 69): cf. the Old Picardian (with fronted vowel ⟨e⟩) and palatalized /k/ as showed by the digraph ⟨ki⟩ and the Old French forms: OPic. *kier*, *kien*, *kief*: OFr. *chier*, *chien*, *chief* < Lat. *cārus*, *canis*, *caput* (Gossen 1970: § 41.2).<sup>4</sup> The palatalization was, however, not realized throughout, as other words demonstrate: OPic. *cambre*: OFr. *chambre*, with epenthetic *b*, from Lat. *camera* < Gk καμάρια (*FEW*, s.v. *camera*);<sup>5</sup> OPic. *cable*: OFr. *cha(a)ble* (*FEW*, s.v. *capulum*);<sup>6</sup> “norm.-pic. *canavach*” (*SAOB*, s.v. *kanfas*), Norm. *canevas*: OFr. *chenevas* (*FEW*, s.v. *cannabis*).<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Dating

The earliest attestation of the word *kærr* in Old Icelandic, and hence also the oldest attestation of the word in Old Nordic, is found in the first stanza of a skaldic poem on Haraldr hárfagri by Þjóðólfr ór Hvini (9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> c.):

Margir gerðu  
hraustir menn

<sup>4</sup> The process is exemplified by the following three stages: Lat. [k] > (1) [c] > (2) [tʃ] (by the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> c., cf. Eng. *change*, *channel*, *Charles*) > (3) [ʃ] (by 1200, cf. Eng. *Charlotte*, *chef*, *chute*).

<sup>5</sup> Contrast OÍcel. *kamarr* from MLG *kamer* rather than North French, where only variants with epenthetic *b* are attested (this was meant in Tarsi [2022: 220] with “the word appears not to be attested as such in any North French variety”). The chronology of Lat. *camera* > OFr. *chambre* is the following (based on the chronological overview by de la Chaussée 1974: 153–203): Lat. *camera* > \**camra* (late 2<sup>nd</sup> c./beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c.) > \**cambra* (end of the 4<sup>th</sup> c.) > \**chambra* (5<sup>th</sup> c.) > OFr. *chambre* (from the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> c.)

<sup>6</sup> OÍcel. *kabel* (< MLG *käbel* < ONFr. *cable* [Tarsi 2022: 127, with refs]). The chronology of Lat. *capulum* > OFr. *chable* is the following (based on the chronological overview by de la Chaussée 1974: 153–203): Lat. *capulum* > \**capulu* > \**caplu* (beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c.) > \**cablu* (end of the 4<sup>th</sup>/beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> c.) > \**chablu* (5<sup>th</sup> c.) > \**chablō* (end of the 5<sup>th</sup> c.) > OFr. *chable* (by the 8<sup>th</sup> c.).

<sup>7</sup> OÍcel. *kanifás* (< MLG *kanevas* [ÍOb, s.v. *kanifás*] < ONFr. *canevas* [Normandy, *FEW*, s.v. *cannabis*]). The Old French word was *chenevas*, which was superseded in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. by *canevas*, likely an Italian loanword (It. *canovaccio*) of northern origin, possibly from the Flanders, (*FEW* and Meyer-Lübke, s.v. *cannabis*, with refs).

eigi síðr  
 gamlir menn  
 milding snaran  
 heim at sœkja;  
 ǫðling fylgðu  
 ok gerðusk kærir.  
 [ed. Fulk 2012]

Another early attestation is preserved in the tenth stanza of Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Knútsdrápa* (11<sup>th</sup> c.):

Kom á fylki  
 farlyst, þeims bar  
 hervíg í hug,  
 hafanda staf.  
 Rauf ræsir af  
 Rúms veg suman  
 kærri keisara  
 klúss Pétrúsi.  
 [ed. Townend 2012]

The word is fairly well attested in other poetic texts from the Middle Ages from the twelfth century as well as in prose texts from the earliest period onwards.

## 4. Other French loans with original Lat. /ka-/

To appreciate the broader context for these putative loans, it is necessary to observe how other purportedly French loans in Old Icelandic with original Lat. /ka-, albeit not in stressed position, behave in the recipient language and whether they lend support to the hypothesis discussed here. Two words are of interest: *katel* and *kisill*.

### 4.1 *katel* ‘property, article of property, household utensils’

The Old Icelandic word *katel* is earliest attested in a hagiography from the second half of the thirteenth century, *Thómas saga erkibiskups* (oldest MS from the beginning of the fourteenth century), which, in turn, is based on

a Latin text, the *Quadrilogus prior* (MSEnc., s.v. *Thómas saga erkibiskups*). The word is a reflex of a substantivization of the neuter of the adjective Lat. *capitālis* ‘capital, of the head, chief, first’, *capitāle*, with the meaning ‘principal sum of money, capital, wealth, property’ and corresponds to Eng. *cattle* (ME *cadel*, *catel*, *catil*, *catele*, etc.), a loan from ONFr. *catel* (OED, s.v. *cattle*), beside *chattel* (< OFr. *chattel*).<sup>8</sup> The fronting /a/ > /e/ in this word is blocked since the syllable becomes closed before the fronting of the vowel (contrast with Lat. *cabāllus* > OFr. *cheval*, *chival*): Lat. *capitāle* > \**captale* (before the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> c.) > \**chaptale* (5<sup>th</sup> c.) > \**chaptale* (6<sup>th</sup> c.) > \**chaptel* (6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> c.) > \**chafel* (7<sup>th</sup> c.) > OFr. *chattel* (later during that same century).<sup>9</sup>

The three main sources for Icelandic etymology, *AeW*, *IeW*, and *ÍOb*, consider the word to be a borrowing from “OFr. *catel*”. This form is undoubtedly North French: ONFr., OPic. *catel* (*FEW*, s.v. *capitalis*). Another useful comparandum is Med.Lat. *catellum*, beside *catallum*, which is attested from at least the twelfth century (cf. *Du Cange*, s.v. *catallum*).

Given the phonological structure of the Icelandic loan, together with its likely period of borrowing, it is conceivable that the word is a North French, perhaps Picardian, loan in Icelandic. A Middle English loan is, however, more likely in light of Icelandic history (see more in § 5).

#### 4.2 *kisill* ‘shirt of fine fabric’

The word *kisill* is a *hapax legomenon* in the Old Icelandic corpus, as it is found only in one of the two main witnesses of the chivalric saga *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, a work adapted from French to Icelandic in the fourteenth century. The existence of this word in Old Icelandic was challenged by Fritzner (s.v. *kisill*), who proposed an emendation to *kyrtsla*, i.e. *kyrtla*, acc. pl. of *kyrtill* ‘tunic, long shirt’, but this proposal has not been widely accepted as *kyrtill* and *kisill* denote two different items of clothing (see Falk 1919: 147 et seqq.). The Old French text has *bliaus* ‘blouses’ in all relevant manuscripts.<sup>10</sup>

The three Icelandic etymological dictionaries have the same etymology,

<sup>8</sup> The forms with geminated *t* are late (see OED, s.vv. *cattle* and *chattel* and also MED, s.v. *catēl* and DSL, s.v. *Catale*, *Catall*, *Catell*).

<sup>9</sup> Syncope takes place at different times and under different circumstances in Latin and daughter languages. One early example of syncope is quoted by Quintilian (*Instit. orat.* I, 6, 19), namely that Augustus (emperor 27 BC–14 AD) favored the colloquial form *calidus* (which is continued in Romance) to *calidus* (see furthermore Niedermann 1907: § 16 and Weiss 2009: 122–124 [I did not have access to the 2020 edition], who also mentions this on p. 172, fn. 23). I thank my mentor, Jón Axel Harðarson, for drawing my attention to this detail.

<sup>10</sup> BnF fr. 375 (ed. Wirtz 1937), BnF fr. 1447 (ed. Pelan 1956), both from the second half

taken in all likelihood directly from Hjalmar Falk's 1919 work on Old West Nordic clothing, namely that the word "is a loan from OFr. *chesil*, *chaisil* < mlat. *camisāle* ⇐ *camisia* 'shirt'" (my translation). The medieval Latin word underlying the French one, and hence the Old Icelandic borrowing, is instead *camisāle*, as also reported by the *OED* (s.v. *chaisel*, *cheisil*), following *Du Cange* (s.v. *camisa*, *camisia*, cf. also *FEW*, s.v. *camšsia*). More precisely, the Middle English variants in *-el* have the following origin: OFr. *-el* < Lat. *-ā.l-*, whereas those in *-il* imply OFr. *-il* (< Lat. *-īl-*). OFr. *chesil*, a variant not attested in the *FEW*, is listed in Godefroy's dictionary (s.v. *chainsil*) as preserved in Marie de France's lai *Le Fresne* (late 12<sup>th</sup> c.). Old Picardian has *ca[i]nsil* (*FEW*, s.v. *camšsia*). Lat. /a/ does not shift to /e/ in *ca(i)nsil* (*cha(i)nsil*, etc.) possibly on the same grounds holding for *c(h)atel*. OFr. /a/ in stressed open syllable diphthongizes to /ā̃/ in front of /n/, which arose by partial assimilation to /s/ (Rheinfelder 1976: § 217–218), hence: Lat. *camisāle* > \**camsil* > \**cansil* > OPic. *ca(i)nsil*.

The Old Icelandic word is not likely to be a borrowing from Picardian, as the quality of the root vowel cannot be derived from Old Picardian /a/ or /ā̃/ in any way. OIcel. /i/ implies a source word which had a mid to near-high vowel. OFr. *chesil* /tʃesil/ is a valid option. The word might have wandered into Icelandic via Middle English (< OFr., Anglo-Norman *chesil* among other variants),<sup>11</sup> with a voiceless postalveolar affricate in initial position. The adaptation of this word in Icelandic clearly shows that /tʃ/ was reduced to a palatal plosive /c/ in Icelandic, the closest available phoneme possible.<sup>12</sup>

## 5. Picardian loans?

So far, we've established that there is another loan in Icelandic whose origin might be ascribed to the northern dialectal area of the *langues d'oïl*, more specifically Picardian.

In order to determine the lending language one has to ascertain whether

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of the thirteenth century; Vatican Pal. lat. 1971 (ed. Short 2020), last quarter of the twelfth century.

<sup>11</sup> No variants without non-palatalized plosive are found. Hence, a "genuine" North-French form was not borrowed into English (Anthony Esposito, *OED*, p.c., November 2, 2021; my paraphrase).

<sup>12</sup> On this phoneme in Icelandic, see Jón Axel Harðarson (2007: 88).

there are other elements, beyond just the phonological structure, which lend support to, or argue against, the chosen candidate.

In the case of *katel*, there are no elements other than phonology, which speak in favor of Picardian. Moreover, the phonology here is not crucial, as it is not specific only to Picardian, for compatible source words are also found in Middle English (*cadel*, *catel*, etc.) and Medieval Latin (*catellum*).

Instead, there are convincing elements which weigh against Picardian as the lending language.

These are:

- a. The late attestation of the word in Icelandic (*vis-à-vis* the early attestation of *kærr*).
- b. The presence of the word in Middle English, where it is of undisputed North French origin. The word is ultimately of Medieval Latin origin: Med.Lat. *catellum*.

These two facts combined argue persuasively that the word is either a Middle English loan, for its attestations (which are anyway sparse) are from the Middle English period, or it stems directly from Med.Lat. *catellum* (attested beside *catallum*), as the text in which the attestations appear is based on a Latin text. Furthermore, the distribution of the word in North Germanic, i.e. only in Icelandic, speaks against it being an early loan (*vis-à-vis* OÍcel. *kærr* and Nordic cognates). The same applies to *kisill*.

Three possible alternative scenarios for the appearance of Picardian loans in Icelandic seem plausible:

1. *kærr* (and other Nordic cognates) is an early borrowing from Picardian.
2. *katel* is a late borrowing from Picardian.
3. Both words are borrowings from Picardian.

Scenario 1 implies a widespread influence of North French early on in Scandinavia; scenario 2 presupposes an influence limited just to Iceland; scenario 3, the least likely of all, requires both early and late influence from North French to hold true.

## 6. A final phonological argument

From the arguments set forth here, it is clear that assuming a borrowing from Picardian for OÍcel. *kærr* (and North Germanic cognates) is an

untenable proposal. In order to test its untenability, the etymology of two other ultimately French loans with original Lat. /ka-/ was explored: OIcel. *katel* ‘property, article of property, household utensils’ and *kisill* ‘shirt of fine fabric’. Whereas the proposition that *katel* is a Picardian loan can only be rejected on external grounds, the word *kisill*, together with *kærr*, provides a decisive internal phonological argument that assuming a Picardian source for *kærr* is, in fact, not necessary. This argument can be schematized as follows:

Given that:

- a. OFr. *cher* has the phonological structure /tʃɛ:r/.
- b. Picardian orthographies such as ⟨kier⟩ show that Lat. /k/ sometimes underwent palatalization in Picardian, hence /çɛ:r/.
- c. ME *chesil* (and variants), the likeliest source for OIcel. *kisill*, starts with a voiceless postalveolar affricate /tʃ/.
- d. OIcel. *kisill* has the following phonological structure /cɪsɪl-/.
- e. OIcel. *kærr* has the following phonological structure /çɛ:r-/.

It follows that:

- f. /tʃ/, whether from Old French or Middle English, > OIcel. /ç/.

Hence:

- g. It is not necessary to suppose that *kærr* comes from Picardian, as it would, in any case, be adapted in the same fashion as /çɛ:r-/.

In fact, in that position, /\_(V+front), Icelandic had a palatal plosive [c<sup>(h)</sup>] and not [k<sup>(h)</sup>], which Jessen and Fischer originally assumed, i.e. ON ⟨k⟩ as direct reflex of unshifted Lat. /k/ (see § 2).

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## Summary

This article challenges Fischer's 1909 implied proposal that Old Icelandic *kærr* [9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> c.+] is a North French, Picardian, loan. Fischer's etymology, which was preceded and inspired by Jessen's 1893 work on Danish, is rejected on the phonological grounds that the initial plosive in Icelandic is palatal and not velar, cf. orthographies such as ⟨kier⟩. Moreover, it is also demonstrated that Picardian, actually, could show an incipient palatalization of /k/ in that phonological context, as shown by orthographies such as ⟨kier⟩, so that Fischer's initial assumption was faulty to begin with. The inadequacy of the "Picardian hypothesis" is demonstrated by reference to two other French loans, *katel* [1250+] and *kisill* [14<sup>th</sup> c., *hapax*]. The former, which in theory could be a loan from Picardian, is a Middle English (or even Latin) borrowing, whereas the latter, for which a Picardian source word is not attested, shows that the outcome of the adaptation process of [c] or [tʃ] is invariably Old Icelandic /c/. A further external argument is that, in light of Icelandic and Scandinavian history, one cannot assume that both *kærr* and *katel* are loans from Picardian, because that would entail an early Picardian influence in Scandinavia which only continued in Iceland well into the thirteenth century.

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