That is why

Why is a group of crows called a murder?

The name began as wordplay in medieval word lists. The spooky battlefield stories came later.

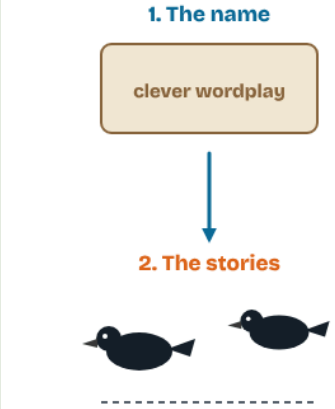
A The paper trail



A courtly word game

These "terms of venery" were a way to show off vocabulary and sound courtly. The Oxford English Dictionary calls "murder" one of many "alleged" group names from such lists. The crow's cousin got one too: "an unkindness" of ravens.

B Name first, story later



Battlefields, gallows, omens: these tales grew around the name afterwards and helped keep it alive. They are not in the medieval lists.

Folklore, not the origin.

C What it tells us

1 Not about behavior

The phrase "was probably never a description of crow behavior at all."

2 Why it stuck

A dark word met a bird that already looked the part.

3 Real crow smarts

Crows really can remember human faces. That part is science.

The name is older than the scary stories told about it.

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