NOTES AND ARTICLES

Dacus = 'Dane' in English Place-Names

Medieval Latin Dacus occurs as an element in Dacorum Hrt and Offord Darcy Hu (now Ca), and in early forms of the names of St Clement Danes church and of The Strand (London). Apart from a few words of rather cryptic comment (e.g. in PN hrt 25), little attention seems to have been paid to this term in English place-name literature, and it is not separately recorded in Smith's Elements. The fact that, as will be shown, Dacus is, in this context, strictly a misnomer, does not appear to be an adequate reason for excluding it from onomastic consideration. The following notes are intended to present a case for the recognition of the term as a genuine name-element.

The Roman province of Dacia was the vast territory north-west of the Black Sea and lying between the rivers Bug and Danube. The transfer of the name to Denmark was an error of such magnitude that it could only have been perpetrated in real life - and in such a word-biased culture as that of the European Middle Ages, when a name might take precedence over the thing it signified. The source of the error seems to have been a confusion of the names of Gothic, in southern Russia, and Getaland in Sweden. The proximity of the historical Dacia to the former, and of Denmark to the latter (coupled, of course, with the fact that names of Denmark and Dacia both began in -a-) led to the confusion in literature of these two places, separated geographically though they are by the entire breadth of Europe.

It has been asserted that the identification Dania = Denmark occurs in Orosius, followed by Isidore of Seville and Hrabanus Maurus, but examples cited are at most ambiguous. Definite instances occur in Geoffrey of Monmouth (1136) and Dudo of St Quentin (1220). Honorius of Autun, in the twelfth century, had, however, been able to distinguish the authentic Dacia from Denmark. Subsequent writers failed to follow him in this, their regular employment of Dacian being reinforced by the official use of the term in documents such as papal bulls.

In the light of these facts, it is instructive to examine the early forms of the English names in which the element occurs.


2. ST CLEMENT DANCES: par. Sfa Clementis ecclesiae Dacorum 1100-35 (1330) Ch, ecclesisa Sancti Clementis quod dictum Dacorum 1185, 1189 Templars, varia Sancti Clementis (Dacorum) 1187, 1194, 1197 ... Donaghhean parosh 1266 FF, parocho Sfa Clementis le Damey estre Lond' 1274 Ase ... Sigea Clement Danes 1500 AD v. 3

3. Part of The Strand (near St Clement Danes church): viuwas Dacorum 1222 FF, (or Demegemnestrct) 1223 lb ... Demegemnestrcte 1246 lb. 4


In (4) Danis is, of course, a family name, translating Le Dains or Le Dameys, but to be placed alongside the term used otherwise in place-names.

The period of use, it is to be noted, extends beyond the currency of the Latin form in those names. Between c.1120 and 1250, Dacius tends to be used alone, but after that date there is either a pairing with Danesas (Ac) as alternative, or a reversion to Danues alone. The continuance of Danys (Ac) forms in (4) may be explained by confusion with the not uncommon surname Darcy. The name of the Hertfordshire hundred is anomalous in its survival unaltered to the present day (with a fresh lease of life by transfer to a new district), but its preservation of this form may be explained by the more frequent occurrence of a hundred name in Latin documents than in vernacular ones.

In spite of such variations as the earliest and latest dates of use, however, Dacius in all these names indisputably translates OF Danies.

Such a translation, surviving as it does at least in Dacorum, and in a slightly mutilated form in Offord Darcy, and being, moreover, etymologically unrelated to the OF/ON/NE words, clearly merits independent consideration as an element; in particular, the citing of Dacorum Hundred sv ON Dakir in Smith's Elements seems particularly inappropriate (the reason doubtless being its early form Danas haedr'). Or is it necessary to await the discovery of further Dacian forms in analogous names before the independent status of this element can be recognised?

Notes

1. Geoffrey of Monmouth: Historia regum Britanniae, ed. Gibson, (Longmans) 1929. Dacia and Dacuis occur fairly frequently between pages 278 and 501, e.g. rex tigur daci 278, sua dacia 280, et secun avtut, non-anglenses, 3 daces confiduntium 353, Anchilis nec daci 454, Anchilis nec dacie 501, archades, vornegiam, santum subident 504.

2. Dudo of St Quentin in Migne, P.L. 141, in which we find such expressions as the following: ex forcostte naues gentilbatia Davigna 629, Daciaces gentis ib. in partibus Larvi ib., Polio Dacius 632, Williamus du Doacorum 661. It is worth noting that Ademar (1219) uses only Danemaroas &c (Migne P.L. 141) and Honorius of Autun also avoids Danus (Adamore amb Lohartii, Nordmann et Dami sive Pandits sic navigus Iovantesca - P.L. 172, 191).

3. The Place-Names of Hertfordshire (EPNS XV), 25.

4. The Place-Names of Middlesex (EPNS XVII), 165.


6. The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire (EPNS III), 262-3.

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