

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 *Gothia*, in southern Russia, and *Götaland* 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 *Da-*) led to the confusion in literature of these two places, separated geographically though they are by almost the entire breadth of Europe.

It has been asserted that the identification *Dacia* = 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)¹ and *Dudo of St Quentin* (1220).² *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 *Dacus* 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.

- (1) *DACORUM* (HUNDRED): *Danais*, *Daneis* 1086 DB, *Daneishdr* 1160, 1176, 1188, 1190P, 1240 RBE, *Daneshdr* 1161P, *Daneys* 1255 Ass, (de) *hundredo Dacorum* 1196, 1230P, *Hundred Dacor'* 1248 Ass, *Hundred de Dakore* 1275 RH, *Hundredum Dacorum* 1303, 1402, 1428 FA, *Daycorum* 1539 LP.³
- (2) *ST CLEMENT DANES*: *par. Scti Clementis ecclesie Dacorum* 1100-35 (1330) Ch, *ecclesia Sancti Clementis que dicitur Dacorum* 1185, 1189 Templars, *gara Sancti Clementis (Dacorum)* 1187, 1194, 1197P ... *Denscheman parosch* 1266 FF, *parochia Scti Clementis le Daneys extra Lond'* 1274 Ass ... *Seynt Clement Danes* 1500 AD v.⁴
- (3) Part of *THE STRAND* (near *St Clement Danes* church): *vicus Dacorum* 1222 FF, (or *Densemestret*) 1233 ib ... *Densyemannestrete* 1246 ib.⁵
- (4) *OFFORD DARCY* (Hu): *Offord Willelmi Daci* 1257, *Offord Daneys* 1260, *Offord Daneys* 1295, *Offord Daneys al. Daneys* 1322 Ipm, *O. Dacy* 1474, *O. Dacy al. Danes* 1525, *O. Darcy al. Dacie* 1596.⁶

In (4) *Dacus* is, of course, a family name, translating *Le Daneis* or *Le Daneys*, 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, *Dacus* tends to be used alone, but after that date there is either a pairing with *Daneis* (&c) as alternative, or a reversion to *Daneis* alone. The continuance of *Dacy* (&c) 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, *Dacus* in all these names indisputably translates *OF Daneis*. 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/ME* words, clearly merits independent consideration as an element; in particular, the citing of *Dacorum Hundred* sv *ON Danir* in Smith's *Elements* seems particularly inappropriate (the reason doubtless being its early form *Daneis hdr'*). Or is it necessary to await the discovery of further *Dacus* 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 *Dacus* occur fairly frequently between pages 278 and 501, e.g. *rex igitur dacie* 278, *cum dacis* 280, *et secum scotos, norquengenses, & dacos conducentes* 353, *Aschillus rex dacorum* 454, *aschillus rex dacie* 501, *orchades, norgegiam, daciam subiecit* 504.
2. *Dudo of St Quentin* in *Migne*, P.L. 141, in which we find such expressions as the following: *ex ferocitate saevae gentilitatis Dacigena* 629, *Daciscae gentis ib., in partibus Daciae ib., Rollo Dacus* 632, *Guillelmus dux Dacorum* 661. It is worth noting that *Ademar* (1219) uses only *Danamarcha* &c (*Migne* P.L. 141) and *Honorius of Autun* also avoids *Dacus* (*Tempore hujus Lotharii, Nordmanni et Dani usque Parisius* (sic) *navigos venientes* - P.L. 172, 191).
3. *The Place-Names of Hertfordshire* (EPNS XV), 25.
4. *The Place-Names of Middlesex* (EPNS XVIII), 165.
5. *Ibidem*, 173.
6. *The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire* (EPNS III), 262-3.

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