

## Reviews

*The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*, edited by Leonard Neidorf, Anglo-Saxon Studies 24 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014). x + 250 pp. £60 hbk. ISBN 978-1-84384-387-0.

One of the most vexed questions in Anglo-Saxon scholarship concerns the dating of the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*. Long attributed to the seventh or early eighth century, revisionist theories put forward in recent years have preferred the ninth, tenth or early eleventh, the date of the sole extant manuscript. The main thrust of the volume under review is to re-affirm the case for an early date, and to place it on a firmer basis than before. In contrast to the impressionistic approach sometimes used to assign the poem to a culturally plausible era, the thirteen essays focus closely on empirical data. Given the editor's magisterial contributions to Old English literary name studies (Neidorf 2013a, 2013b, 2013c), it is unsurprising that onomastic evidence features prominently, and hence the collection will be of interest to many readers of *Nomina*.

The title of the volume alludes to a collection edited by Colin Chase in 1981, where important questions were raised but no clear consensus reached. The advances made in the intervening years, resulting in the greater unanimity displayed by contributors to the present volume, are in part due to the availability of new research tools such as the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (DOEWC). R. D. Fulk's opening chapter on 'Beowulf and language history' discusses a range of linguistic archaisms pointing towards an early date of composition, including forms of the personal names *Ec(g)þēo(w)*, *Ongenþēo(w)* and *Wealhþēo(w)*. By comparing the incidence of spellings of OE *þēo(w)* 'servant' with and without final *-w* as a word within the Old English corpus, and as a name element within the poem, he argues that the scribes were copying an archaic exemplar, a conclusion strengthened by the fact that spellings of the first element of *Ec(g)þēo(w)* and *Ec(g)lāf* without final *-g* are paralleled elsewhere in names from early sources only (pp. 25–6).

In the following chapter on ‘Germanic legend, scribal errors, and cultural change’, Leonard Neidorf uses the onomastic record alongside Anglo-Latin testimonia, Old English poetry and the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies to track the transmission of Germanic heroic legend in Anglo-Saxon England. Pointing out that the shared knowledge base of the authors of *Beowulf* and *Widsið* means that the dating issues relating to the two poems are interconnected, he draws on DOEWC to establish that the ethnonym *Rumwalas*, found in the heroic poem *Widsið*, became obsolete at an early date, being recorded otherwise only in glosses and possibly on the Franks Casket (p. 45). Moreover, the reference to the Roman Empire as *Wala ric* dates this poem to before the ninth century, by which time the word *wealh* ‘foreigner’ had undergone a semantic shift to refer exclusively to Celts or slaves (pp. 45–6). Significant too is the occurrence of etymologically correct names: ‘Like the *Beowulf* poet, the *Widsið* poet uses the forms Hroðgar and Hroðulf, which could not plausibly have been reconstructed from Scandinavian forms such as Roarr and Rolf’ (p. 46). Since, as Fulk observes in connection with *Beowulf*, ‘The names of Scandinavians in the poem are purely English in form’ (p. 20), the evidence is most consistent with a date of composition for both poems prior to the Scandinavian invasions of England.

Another key research tool is the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England database (PASE), which facilitates close comparison between the names in the poem and those on record from different periods. Whereas scribal errors pertaining to names suggest that the figures of Germanic legend were no longer familiar by the time the *Beowulf* manuscript was written (pp. 38–40), comparison of the names recorded from early and late Anglo-Saxon England indicates that the names of legendary heroes were used up to the eighth century but no later, and moreover that they derive from name elements that were not productive in Old English and must therefore have entered the onomasticon from heroic tradition (pp. 47–9). Tom Shippey’s chapter ‘Names in *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon England’ draws attention to ‘the striking lack of fit between the poem’s extensive onomastics and the mostly later records of Anglo-Saxon England as recorded in PASE’, alongside ‘The remarkable

correspondences between the poem's onomastics and those of the original [pre-840] core of the *Durham Liber Vitae*' (p. 75). A controversial issue is whether the 'redundant' personal names within the poem – names used only to identify relationships – are those of legendary characters known to the author, or inventions to create the illusion of a rich historical background. Shippey's fine-grained analysis supports the former position, and alongside it an early date of composition.

In general, the names of people within the poem are considered more interesting than those of places, offering more scope for investigation. As Shippey notes, 'All his place-names ... (other than well-known national territories) look as if they have been created according to a simple formula: animal-name in genitive plus familiar word for natural feature, so *Earna Naes*, *Hrefnes Holt* and three more, plus *Biowulfes Biorh*' (p. 72). Most onomastic discussion within the volume therefore focuses on anthroponymy. In 'Beowulf and the containment of Scyld in the West Saxon royal genealogy', Dennis Cronan argues against the view that correspondences between the names in the Scylding genealogy at the beginning of the poem, and those in the genealogy of Æthelwulf in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, support the case for a late dating, while Frederick M. Biggs's chapter 'History and fiction in the Frisian raid' includes the suggestion that the tribal names 'provide a first indication that the poet does not intend to present a historically accurate account of the encounter' (p. 144). Toponymy is not entirely neglected, however, as 'A note on the other Heorot' by Joseph Harris deals closely with place-name evidence in the course of a detailed examination of the name of the monastery *Heruteu* mentioned in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

The remaining chapters are primarily concerned with other kinds of dating criteria for the poem, including historical, metrical, palaeographical and semantic considerations. In 'Scandals in Toronto: Kaluza's law and transliteration errors', George Clark revisits Roberta Frank's (2007) arguments for a late dating on metrical and palaeographic grounds, and exposes flaws in her use of the evidence. Metrical patterns are also central to chapters by Megan E. Hartman ('The limits of

conservative composition in Old English poetry’) and Thomas A. Bredehoft (‘The date of composition of *Beowulf* and the evidence of metrical evolution’). The religious context of the poem is explored in chapters on ‘*Beowulf* and conversion history’ by Thomas D. Hill and ‘Material monsters and semantic shifts’ by Rafael J. Pascual, who argues that the words *scucca* and *byrs* are used in their pre-conversion meanings of physical monsters rather than in the later Christian meanings of spiritual devils. The distinction is an important one which may have implications for the interpretation of place-names containing the same terms.

In “‘Give the people what they want’: historiography and rhetorical history of the dating of *Beowulf* controversy’, Michael D. C. Drout presents an incisive critique of the emergence and influence of the Toronto conference volume (Chase 1981). With his collaborators Emily Bowman and Phoebe Boyd, he analyses all English-language articles relating to the poem’s date during the decades immediately preceding and following the conference, demonstrating that its effect was to overturn a broad consensus in favour of a date before 800 and to replace it with the view that the poem is undateable. A similar theme is addressed in the ‘Afterword: *Beowulf* and everything else’ by Allen J. Frantzen, which is informative and wide-ranging but reads more like an introduction to the volume than a postscript.

All the chapters are stylishly written, with an abundance of references to recent scholarship, and the volume itself is well produced. The index is somewhat minimal, at just two pages. The reader interested in names will find an entry for ‘namegiving, heroic-legendary’, but may not think to look under *P* for ‘proper names’, where subheadings limited to ‘corruption of’ and ‘etymologically correct OE forms’ give little hint of the richness of onomastic detail throughout the volume. Indeed, to locate all the relevant discussion, it is necessary to read the book – a highly recommended activity! Taken together, the collection makes a strong case for an early dating of the poem *Beowulf*. It makes an even stronger one for a scientific approach to the dating of Old English poetry, and for the use of all available kinds of data, including name evidence.

## REFERENCES

- Chase, C., ed. (1981), *The Dating of "Beowulf"* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).
- Frank, R. (2007), 'A scandal in Toronto: *The Dating of "Beowulf"* a quarter century on', *Speculum* 82, 843–64.
- DOEWC = A. diP. Healey (2009), *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project) <tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus>
- Neidorf, L. (2013a), 'Beowulf before *Beowulf*: Anglo-Saxon anthroponymy and heroic legend', *Review of English Studies* 64, 553–73.
- Neidorf, L. (2013b), 'The dating of *Widsið* and the study of Germanic antiquity', *Neophilologus* 97, 165–83.
- Neidorf, L. (2013c), 'Scribal errors of proper names in the *Beowulf* manuscript', *Anglo-Saxon England* 42, 249–69.
- PASE = Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England, at <pase.ac.uk>.

CAROLE HOUGH

George Redmonds, *A Dictionary of Yorkshire Surnames* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2015). xviii + 844 pp. £49.50 hbk. ISBN 978-1-907730-43-6.

George Redmonds is one of the leading authorities on the history and development of English surnames, with a particular interest in the surnames of Yorkshire. He has published a number of onomastic works, not just on surnames and family history, but also on Christian names, place-names and local history, though he is perhaps best known for his research on surnames. In his 1997 work, *Surnames and Genealogy*, Redmonds made a compelling case for a change in approach to research on surname origins, and it is this approach, along with the ever increasing availability of historical records in print and online, that has led to the production of his *Dictionary of Yorkshire Surnames*.

A number of previous surname dictionaries, including Reaney's well-known *A Dictionary of British Surnames* (1958; published as *The Oxford Dictionary of English Surnames* in 1997, a revised third edition with contributions by R. M. Wilson), did much to advance the field of surname study, but employed a flawed methodology in which genealogy, family history and geographical distribution were largely ignored. The eight-volume *English Surnames Series* showed the value of local history and distribution in researching surname development, and Redmonds has refined this approach, arriving at many more reliable explanations of surname origins than those given by Reaney, and others, who relied heavily on linguistic analysis.

While linguistic analysis is, of course, important in the investigation of surname origins, it should never be the sole consideration in such a study. Some surnames are known to have undergone changes that cannot be explained by current knowledge of phonological and morphological development, and these can often only be reliably identified through genealogical and distributional investigation. For example, Redmonds suggests the surname *Kennerdale* is 'probably a form of *Kenworthy*' (itself a locative name from Kenworthy in Cheshire). Clearly, the alteration of *Kenworthy* to *Kennerdale* is not one which can be easily explained according to known linguistic rules, but the connection between the two names is identified through distributional comparison, with *Kennerdale* occurring alongside *Kenorthey* and *Kenerley* (known variants of *Kenworthy*) in the same parish register. Throughout Redmonds' dictionary, it can be seen that many names follow their own particular paths of development, influenced by a number of different factors, and this raises an important general point about research on surname history: that each name should be analysed without any preconceived notions of how surnames behave, and should be studied in terms of family, regional and social history, alongside linguistic and distributional considerations.

Redmonds is also right to point out, in his introduction, that 'Stephen Archer's CD entitled *The British 19<sup>th</sup> Century Surname Atlas* has arguably done more than any other publication to highlight the

fundamental role of distribution in surname research'. This CD allows the user to view the distribution of every surname in the 1881 census for England, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, providing a vital clue on a surname's geographical origin. In the introduction, Redmonds gives an example of the importance of historical distribution, showing how Reaney's explanation of the surname *Shackleton* is incorrect, with the 1881 distribution confirming Shackleton near Heptonstall as the most likely origin of the name, rather than the parish of Scackleton as suggested by Reaney. Overall, Redmonds takes account of a number of different factors in his surname research, including heredity, ramification, linguistic development, social history and distribution, resulting in what is one of the most reliable surname dictionaries available.

The book is easy to read, with a clear font printed on good quality paper, and has an attractive dust jacket. It begins with a list of sources and a short, yet informative, introduction on the state of surname research, outlining the author's methodology, with a well-reasoned justification for his approach. This is followed by the main body of the dictionary, made up of 830 pages. Surnames are arranged alphabetically, and a typical entry includes a name's etymological origin, the early bearer evidence which permits the suggested etymology (along with the sources in which the bearers have been found), a discussion of the name's linguistic development, and a statement on the name's distribution and frequency. Where the author disagrees with an etymology that has been suggested in a previous work, this is made clear. Entries are well-written, and in the majority of cases are very thoroughly researched; it is very rare that an explanation in the dictionary is unsatisfactory, even if the origin of a surname is left unexplained. At the end of the book is an appendix with the title 'The most popular surnames in Britain in 1881', in which the author states that a number of surnames that are relatively common in Yorkshire are not included in his dictionary, because they are frequent throughout the country and have, for the most part, been satisfactorily dealt with in other works. There is also a brief discussion of Welsh,

Scottish and Irish names, and the importance of historical distribution for surname research is again emphasized.

This mention of the omission of some of the most common surnames does, however, unintentionally highlight the fact that the criteria for a surname's inclusion in the dictionary are not clear. The author states that some common Yorkshire names are not included because he has 'found no evidence of a distinctive association with the county', implying that the surnames in the dictionary have been included because they *do* have a distinctive association with the county. What is meant by a 'distinctive association' is not immediately obvious, and it suggests there has been a degree of arbitrary selection. Though it does not seem that a significant number of typical Yorkshire surnames have been omitted, it would have been helpful if the selection criteria had been provided. Some readers may also be disappointed that etymologies are not provided for the personal names and place-names behind the surnames, but the author does state that there are other scholars who are more able to provide such information, and that the information is available in other works.

These are my only minor criticisms of what is a very impressive piece of work. It is a model for future regional surname dictionaries, and I recommend it to anyone interested in onomastics. Parts of the dictionary have been used to inform entries in the forthcoming *Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland*, and members of its research team (the author of this review included) have learnt much from Redmonds' methods. It is sure to be of great value to anyone interested in the etymology and development of Yorkshire surnames, but perhaps its greatest achievement is the establishment of a methodology that will lead to a higher level of accuracy in future research on surname origins. In the introduction, the author states that he hopes the work is seen as a 'step in the right direction'. In my opinion, it is a leap in the right direction, and contributes a great deal to the field.

HARRY PARKIN