

Thoughts on the Comparative Study of European Surnames

A review of PATRICK HANKS and FLAVIA HODGES [special consultant for Jewish names DAVID L. GOLD], *A Dictionary of Surnames*, Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 1988, liv+826pp., £50.

This is an imposing tome with far-reaching ambitions: in its compilers' words, 'This dictionary is intended as a reference work for surname researchers, genealogists, family historians, local historians, social historians, historical linguists, comparative linguists, demographers, and other readers, in all parts of the world where European surnames are of interest. It contains entries for most major surnames of European origin, as well as for many rarer ones' (p.v).

The onomasticon itself is preceded by a fifty-page Introduction (with Abbreviations and Bibliography) and is followed by an index of names. The latter is necessary, because cognates in different languages are grouped together under single lemmata: e.g., the French, German and English surnames deriving from the Frankish personal name (*C*)*haribert* are all listed under **Herbert**.

The breadth of scope inherent in such a volume is so great that even the informed reader is inclined to approach it with a certain apprehension. Such a project, covering, as it does, several European linguistic regions, must be backed up by an adequate bibliographical apparatus. The authors in fact content themselves with a mere two pages of bibliography, and that showing some inexplicable omissions. English and Scandinavian onomasts will be puzzled not to discover there the works of Fransson and Thuresson on Middle English occupational surnames, of Jönsjö on Middle English nicknames or of Löfvenberg on locative surnames, nor indeed such fundamental compendia as *Danmarks gamle Personnavne*, *Sveriges medeltida personnamn* or Lind's *Norsk-isländska dopnamn ock fingerade namn från medeltiden* and *Norsk-isländska personbinamn från medeltiden*. Among essential Continental works in this field, the following fail to appear: A. Bach, *Deutsche Namenkunde*, Band I,1,2: *Die deutschen Personennamen*, 2nd edn (Heidelberg, 1952-3); C. Marynissen, *Hypokoristische Suffixen in oudnederlandse Persoonsnamen* (Ghent, 1986); H. Naumann, ed., *Familiennamenbuch* (Leipzig, 1987); J. M. Piel and D. Kremer, *Hispano-gotisches Namenbuch* (Heidelberg, 1976); R. Schützeichel and A. Wendehorst, eds, *Erlanger Familiennamen-Colloquium* (Neustadt an der Aisch, 1985). Even where standard reference works are cited, the information given is not always beyond reproach: for example, Max Gottschald's *Deutsche Namenkunde: Unsere Familiennamen* is listed only in the editions of 1942 and 1971, even though these have been completely superseded by the (fifth)

edition of 1982, containing Rudolf Schützeichel's introduction with its excellent account of German surnames. On the other hand, the authors have scoured numerous telephone directories from the British Isles, Continental Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia in the hope of determining patterns of distribution and frequency.

The Introduction is banal, yet at the same time misleading, informing us that European surnames are 'remarkably homogeneous', and that 'with few exceptions, the communities of Europe have similar social structures, similar social histories, and similar social attitudes' (p.v). Such platitudes hardly do justice to the complexity of the subject in hand. There are, of course, modes of surname formation, such as derivation from patronymics or from occupational terms, which are common to most European languages, but structural parallels of this nature must be set off against a background of socio-historical, lexical and onomastic diversity. The major determining factor in the evolution of surnames is the relationship between historical and linguistic developments. Thus, the onomastic patterns found in northern France, where there were heavy settlements of Salian Franks, differ greatly from those of the Midi, where the Merovingian and Carolingian conquests were not accompanied by large-scale Frankish settlement and where ancient Roman senatorial families retained influence well into the Merovingian period. Likewise, if we take the German-speaking area as it existed in 1900, we find strong regional variations. For example, certain surnames from occupational terms, such as *Pfister* < Latin *pistor* 'baker' and *Sauter* < Latin *śūtor* 'shoemaker', are characteristically South German, while in East Prussia, the north-eastern part of which was for centuries an area of close contact between German and Lithuanian, surnames in *-eit* were common; this suffix represents the Lithuanian masculine *-aitis*, which occurs in such Lithuanian surnames as *Antanaitis*, *Gustaitis*, *Jonaitis*, etc., and originally had a patronymic function.¹ Particularly interesting are East Prussian hybrids combining German specifics with the *-eit* suffix, examples being *Schneidereit*, *Schustereit* and *Tischlereit*. These and other regional variations in German surnames are treated by Schützeichel in his introduction to Gottschald (pp.65-7). Again, there is the question of government regulation of surnames: as Schützeichel points out (*ibid.*, 75-6), changing of surnames was forbidden in Bavaria in 1677, in Austria in 1776 and in Prussia in 1794, while a decree of Napoleon imposed the adoption of fixed surnames in Frisia in 1811.

The authors would have done well to have considered questions of this kind in their Introduction. Instead, they present us with a brief account of the different types of surname formation and a series of thumbnail sketches of surnaming in various European countries. The latter is useful, since it contains information not readily found elsewhere in English, but it suffers from its brevity and is not free of inaccuracies. Thus, the authors, having rightly pointed out the rôle played by Visigothic personal names in the Iberian peninsula, then add that Visigothic names utilized certain elements not paralleled in North and West

Germanic, citing as examples *sind* 'path', *swinth* 'strong' and *funs* 'ready, prompt' (p. xxxi). In fact, *sind* < Germ **sinþ-a-* is well represented in Frankish sources, in such names as *Sindegisel*, *Sindericus*, *Audosind*, *Childesind*, *Gundesind*, *Leudosindus*, *Sigosind* and *Theudesind* found in Merovingian records from Saint-Martin of Tours.² Again, the *Gesta abbatum Fontanellensium* shows the father of Austrulfus, who was abbot of Saint-Wandrille [de Fontenelle] (*dép.* Seine-Maritime) from 747 to 753, as bearing the name *Sindulfus*, and state that Austrulfus came from the *territorium* of Courtrai [in Flanders].³ As for *swinth* < Germ **swinþ-a-/swinþ-i-*, this also is well attested in West Germanic, as is indicated by such names as OSax *Swithbald*, *Swithbôdo*, *Swithgêr*, *Swithard*, as well as by the numerous Old English feminines in *-swið*, such as *Æðelswið*, *Cyneswið*, *Hereswið*, *Torhtswið*, etc., while cognates of Gothic *-funs* (< Gothic **funs* 'ready, brave') occur in Olcel *Sigfúss*, *Vigfúss* and OE (Northumbrian) *Wigfús*. Turning to Italian surnames, the authors remark: 'Some medieval Germanic given names were in use in Italian-speaking areas, especially in the north, and have given rise to surnames' (p. xxxiii). This assertion is not, however, either historically or philologically precise. In the first place, the Germanic element in the Italian onomasticon is primarily Langobardic, and this was certainly not limited to the north, but was also fully represented in the south of the peninsula during the Lombard and Carolingian periods, as is made clear by Elda Morlicchio, *Antroponimia longobarda a Salerno nel IX secolo: I nomi del Codex diplomaticus Cavensis* (Naples, 1985). Of course, other Germanic names were brought to Italy by the Carolingians, the Ottonians and the Hohenstaufen, as well as by the Normans and Angevins, but the decisive element was that which stemmed from the invasion and settlement of the Lombards. This is evident from such Italian surnames as *Ansaldo* < Langobardic *Ansoald* and *Garibaldi* < Langobardic *Gâribald*.

Extensive analysis of the Introduction has been necessary in order to illuminate the methodological shortcomings inherent in this dictionary. The authors might with advantage have turned their attention to some of the theoretical questions involved in the production of etymological dictionaries, and might in particular have done well to consult the series of articles in A. Bammesberger, ed., *Das etymologische Wörterbuch: Fragen der Konzeption und Gestaltung* (Regensburg, 1983). The test of any dictionary lies in the quality of the individual entries. Though the compilers of the one under review present much that is of value and not easily found elsewhere (at least, not in English), their individual entries often suffer from the thinness of documentation and consequent inexactitude characterizing the Introduction. It is obviously impossible within the compass of a review-article to discuss all the points of contention, but the following may be taken as representative:

Amery. The authors group OFr *Amalri(c)*, *Aunari(c)*, *Amauri*, *Emaurri*, *Haimeri* and *Ymeri* as derivatives of Frankish *Amalrîk*. In fact, *Emaurri* and *Ymeri*

contain reflexes of the Germanic root **am-ja* 'busy, industrious', while *Haimeri* belongs to the West Frankish *Haim-*, *Heimerîk*, a name corresponding formally to OHG *Heimrîh*, *Heinrîh* (cf. OFr, ME *Henri*).

Arscott. The first element of the place-name *Arscott* Salop. is OE **Eard*, a short form of OE *Eardnôð*, *Eardwulf*, etc., and not, as the authors suggest (partly following *DEPN*), a shortened form of a compound personal name such as OE *Æðelræd* or *Eanræd*.

Attenborough. The authors wrongly interpret this as a "habitation name" for someone who lived 'at the manor house'. It is a toponymical surname derived from *Attenborough* Notts.

Aznar. Our authors' proposal that a Latin name *Asinarius* (> Spanish *Aznar*) is ultimately a Germanic personal name formed from **ans-u-* and **har-ja-* (cf. OHG *Ansheri*, OE *Oshere*) is absurd; it is the Latin occupational term *asinarius* 'ass-driver'.

Bos. The West Germanic personal name *Bōso* (cf. OE *Bōsa*, OSax *Bōso*, etc.) is not connected with ModGerm *böse* 'bad, evil' (not merely 'naughty' as glossed by the authors), but belongs to the same IE base as Greek Φῶς 'nobleman', cf. F. Holthausen, *Gotisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1934), s. v. *Bōsō*.

Grabowski. Hanks and Hodges take this to be a Polish and Jewish (East Ashkenazic) surname derived from any of the places whose names contain Polish *grab* 'hornbeam', a surname which is perhaps sometimes also used as an occupational name for a yoke-maker. Although the suffix *-ski* is characteristic of Polish surnames, the surname *Grabowski* is not uncommon in German, where it is derived from the place-name *Grabow*, Polabian **Grabov-* 'place where hornbeam grew', for examples of which from Kreis Belzig and Kreis Pritzwalk in Brandenburg see R.E. Fischer, *Brandenburgisches Namenbuch*, Teil 2: *Die Ortsnamen des Kreises Belzig* (Weimar, 1970), 51-2. The place-name is quite common in the former Polabian areas of north-east Germany.

Ingram. The etymon is West Frankish *Ingoramn* (> OFr *Enguerrand*). The authors' suggestion that the first element of this name might alternatively be the element *Engil-* is only relevant insofar as there is a certain confusion between forms in *Engel-*, *Ingelram* and those in *Ing(e)ram* in records of the Middle English period, cf. T. Forssner, *Continental-Germanic Personal Names in England in Old and Middle English Times* (Uppsala, 1916), 73-4. We can dismiss the authors' assertion that the Frankish *Ing(e)ram* was reinforced in England by a (non-existent) Old Norse cognate **Ingrafn*.

Insley. Hanks and Hodges correctly derive this from an unidentified place-name and assign it to the Midlands. They are also right to assume that the second element is most likely OE *-lēah*, but their suggestion that the first 'may be from the gen. case of the OE personal name *Ing'* lacks all substance. The *Ing* of the Old English *Runic Poem* was a deity (Germ **Ingwaz*). The names of deities are not used to form personal names in Old English, and there is no evidence for the cult of *Ing* manifesting itself in the first elements of English place-names.⁵

In the absence of early forms, it is hazardous to speculate about the etymology, but I would suggest an OE **Inesteah*, the first element being OE *Ine*, known as the name of a king of Wessex and a short form of OE *Ingeld*, *Ingild*. Perhaps the solution to this question will emerge as the EPNS surveys of Shropshire and Staffordshire progress.⁵

Roper. Here we are informed that 'in the SE Midland dialect of Eng., which became standard, OE *-ā* /a:/ became ME *-ō* /o:/ and eventually mod. Eng. /əʊ/, whereas in the N Eng. dialects it was preserved, becoming mod. Eng. /eɪ/'. The authors should have consulted their historical grammars. The rounding, raising and ultimate ophltangization of OE, ON /ā/ > /ǣ/ did, of course, take place in all the southern dialects, spreading north to reach the Ribble in the west and in the east the southern boundary of the Lindsey division of Lincolnshire by c.1330 and following the sequence: OE [ɑ:] > ME [ɔ:] > e. ModE [o:] > ModE [əʊ]. In the North, however, the results of the unrounded OE, ON /ā/ range through [ɪə], [ɪa], [ea] in the modern dialects, cf. M.F. Wakelin, *English Dialects: An Introduction*, rev. edn (London, 1977), 89.

Théodore. The authors have included Welsh *Tudor* as a cognate of this French surname, which is derived from the personal name *Théodore*, ultimately of Greek origin. Evidently, they have accepted uncritically the etymology given by DBS (p.356). Had they consulted Kenneth Jackson's *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), 624, they would have learnt that the personal name underlying the surname *Tudor*, i.e., Welsh *Tudyr*, represents a British **Tōtorix*, though it should admittedly be added that Max Förster, in his 'Keltisches Wortgut im Englischen', his contribution to the Liebermann *Festschrift* of 1921, pointed out that ModWelsh *Tewdwr*, *Tudur* has undergone a change of association, being now regarded as a substitute for the Greek-Christian name *Theodoros*.

Tutt. Hanks and Hodges take the etymon here to be an Old English personal name **Tutta*, but it is more likely to be a Middle English nickname derived from ON *tottr*, *tuttr* m. 'a tom-thumb'.

Despite its bulk, the book under review has obvious gaps. A good many well-known German habitational surnames of Slavonic origin, such as *Bülow*, *Lützow* and *Virchow*, are omitted, and we search in vain for such well-known aristocratic names as *von Richthofen* and *Yorck von Wartenburg*. Nor does there seem any principle behind the choice of names picked out for biographical or genealogical notes. For example, under **Woolcott**, we are told that Oliver Wolcott (1726-97), a signatory of the American Declaration of Independence, was a descendant of Henry Wolcott, a clothier who had settled at Windsor, Conn., in 1636, whereas under **Baamonde**, no mention is made of Franco, whose full name was Francisco Franco y Bahamonde; what makes this omission all the more strange is that the authors do mention the surname's Galician origin, Franco himself being born at El Ferrol on the Galician coast. Again, under **Woodhouse**, the ancestry of P. G. Wodehouse is briefly noted, whereas under **Kleist**, the

dramatist Heinrich von Kleist is passed over in silence. Similarly, under **Chapaev**, we are merely informed of possible etyma, with no mention that the name was borne by a Red partisan commander in the Russian Civil War, whose exploits formed the subject of a famous Soviet film of 1933/4.

The test of any etymological dictionary obviously lies in assessment of the quality of its material and its interpretations of this. In the case of onomastic dictionaries, documentary evidence is essential for enabling the user to check the etymologies and lines of interpretation followed by the authors. Because the work under review offers no historical material at all, we are practically compelled to take a leap of faith in accepting the authors' etymologies. As the present review-article has demonstrated, it is open to question whether this can be done with a good conscience.

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NOTES

- 1 See A. Senn, *Handbuch der litauischen Sprache*, I: *Grammatik* (Heidelberg, 1966), 655a, 662.
- 2 See P. Gasnault, ed., *Documents comptables de Saint-Martin de Tours à l'époque mérovingienne*, Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France (Paris, 1975), 87-91.
- 3 S. Loewenfeld, ed., *Gesta abbatum Fontanellensium*, MGH SS rer. Germ. (Hanover, 1886), 40.
- 4 See K.I. Sandred, 'Ingham in East Anglia: a new interpretation', in *Studies in Honour of Kenneth Cameron = Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. XVIII (1987), 231-40.
- 5 In the present reviewer's home town of Preston in Lancashire the surname is extremely rare. However, his paternal grandfather moved to Lancashire from Burton upon Trent earlier this century, and it is probably in the western part of the Trent Valley that the home of this surname is to be sought.