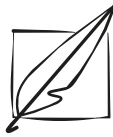

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On etymology and Old English personal names[1]

Fran Colman

Methoni Messinias, Greece

ABSTRACT

An evaluation of competing etyma for the common word base of the prototheme of an Old English dithematic personal name exploits the truism that the data on which we base reconstructions of Old English language and culture are, oxymoronically, not 'given', but are themselves open to (re-)interpretation. Illustrated here is recourse to theories of names and name formation, to orthography, and to theories invoking common word lexical semantic fields, in a minor experiment in *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past* and its language(s).

Keywords: etymology, lexical semantic fields, name, Old English, onomasticon, orthography.

1. Intent and assumptions

The formation of many Old English personal names from elements based on common words contributes to the assumption that spelling forms of a name provide evidence for language, notably phonology. This, of course, assumes a transparent etymology for that name, and a transparent relationship between orthography and phonology.

The single *token* which is the (ultimate) focus here is an Old English personal name represented as **Seolhwine** in Smart (1981: 65), and Colman

[1] Generous communications, telephonic and electronic, of Veronica Smart, have contributed to the delights of *seal*. Two Johns, Anderson and Newman, contribute to humour induced sanity.

(1992: 112). The *type* of which this is a token is the grammatical category of name. An evaluation of two competing etymologies for the common word base of the prototheme of the name cited, may be regarded as a minor exercise in reconstructing an earlier language and culture, or, perhaps as well as, in imagining the unknowable.

The evaluation relies on the theoretical assumptions baldly presented here with supporting references: assumptions about the category of name, about Old English personal name formation, the purpose(s) of recording names, and about putative relationships between orthography and the grammar.

2. On the category of name

That names are categorically distinct from common words is a concomitant of their notional characterisation as lacking sense as defined below, which determines their syntactic distribution. Members of the category of name are stored in an onomasticon, equivalent in grammatical status to a lexicon, the repository for common words, but distinct from the latter in terms of content.

An onomasticon contains information about name(elements) corresponding to lexical information for common words: such as word structure, phonological shape (in the accent of the speaker), declension class, gender (if distinctive), and the person versus place distinction (the latter associated with the feature {loc(ative)}). Unlike a common word, however, a name has neither sense nor range of denotation. Unlike a noun, a name cannot denote a type; it cannot enter into hyponymic relations. The name **Jerzy**, for instance, represents a token-of-a-type, human male. It belongs to a subtype, but does not denote a subtype (Anderson 2007: 159, 112; see Colman 2014: chapter 2: §2.3.2).

The basic function of a name is primary identification (Smith-Bannister 1997: 15; also Colman 2015: §2; Duke 2005: 139; Stüber – Zehnder – Remmer 2009: 36). 'Nouns denote types of entity, pronouns identify entities classified as to speech act participation, and names identify individual entities' (Anderson 2011 [I]: 104), even though this function of names may fail in particular instances. In the words of Clark (2002 [1995]: 115), '[n]ames are in practice often duplicated; but such accidents in no way impugn the principle that each instance is necessarily intended to specify one, and only one, individual'.

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A name taken from an onomasticon by nomination and placed in the lexicon is available for language use, its form potentially manifesting representations of morphosyntactic secondary categories in the shape of inflectional morphology. Although a name may accrue culturally or personally determined encyclopaedic associations, these are extra-linguistic. But by such associations names may be converted to common words by metaphor or metonymy: 'He's a proper Nero'; 'Aimez-vous Brahms?'. And names are subject to puns, by means of resuscitating the etymologies of common word bases: 'Æthelræd Unræd', or by mis-etymology, irresistibly illustrated here by that with which the dedicatee of this offering has been known to introduce himself: 'Woolly Jersey'.

3. Old English personal name formation

Most early Germanic personal names are based on common words, converted to name elements. As discussed at length in Colman (2014: chapter 5), principles of name formation from such elements include the selection of items, typically regarded as associated with the vocabulary of heroic verse (Clark 1992: 457-8; Redin 1919: xxxvii-viii). This association is reflected in the combination of items into dithematic names, determined by alliteration of the prototheme with that of names of family members (Woolf 1939: 246-7). Names of family members showing end variation, where the whole prototheme recurs but with a different deuterotheme, show alliteration by default, each having the same prototheme, as illustrated by **Eadgar** and his descendants **Eadweard**, **Eadmund**, **Eadgyth** (von Feilitzen 1937: 31). For early Old English, at least, personal names could thus have a secondary function as markers of kinship; until the combinations of some dithematic names appear to have become over common, or routine, as the late OE **Godwine** (Colman 2014: 203, 275).

Hypocoristic shortening of a dithematic name is one source of monothematic names, e.g., **Goda** for **Godwine**, with an inflectional suffix <a> on the form <Goda> reflecting its transference to the weak declension class. So too are lall names, originating in child language, particularly associated with onomatopoeia and reduplication and gemination of consonants, e.g. **Lulla**. Both types of monothematic names are illustrated by, for instance, kings' names in early Anglo-Saxon England (**Anna**, **Beonna**, **Offa**).

Also monothematic are many bynames: names added to or substituted for a given name, that is, either supplementary or suppletive, e.g. **Leofwine**

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accompanied or replaced by **Horn**, **Wulfgar** by **Leofa**, Æ**lfwine** by **Mus**. The adoption of bynames appears to be of non-native influence. The instance cited here are etymologically Old English, but correspond to 'the original byname formation which is so productive in Old Norse namegiving [sic]' (Smart 1981: xv). Bynames gained popularity in the late Anglo-Saxon period, possibly to aid distinction between people with overcommon names. A byname, however, is not a surname. A byname is one creation labelled 'name', yet to which, at least in its original application, might be attributed sense. But the various speculations as to why **Leofwine** was labelled 'horn', or whether or not **Wulfgar** was regarded as 'beloved', and what attributes of a 'mouse' (or their opposites) might be attributed to Æ**lfwine,** remind us that people are named by people, who, apart from following societal norms, may invoke humour or extra-linguistic associations not readily recoverable (discussion in Colman 2014: chapter 5: §5.4.3); and that, once converted to a byname, the original common word acquires the primary identification function of a name, losing sense and denotation.

Whether the form <SEOLCA> of §6 below represents hypocoristic shortening of a dithematic name, or a suppletive byname is not formally distinguished by the inflectional suffix <a>.

In Colman (2014: chapter 5 §5.4) I classify hypocoristic names, lall names and bynames as types of nicknames, with discussions of interpretations of the concepts invoked and recognition of the uncertainties of classification disguised by the preceding ruthless summary. What precedes at least intimates that characteristics of hypocoristic and lall names, such as non-etymological consonant gemination and the role of sound symbolism, confound analyses based solely on Neogrammarian concepts of regularity of sound change (see also 'Heaha' in §6 below).

That some products of these types of name formation may have been more or less etymologically transparent to contemporaries, and may be to latter day commentators, does not contradict the previous claim that names lack sense and denotation: a common word converted to a name(element) loses the sense of the base. 'Once semantically emptied, names draw partly aloof from the language at large. Although the phonological tendencies that affect them cannot be alien to those bearing on common vocabulary, the loss of denotation allows development to be freer, with compounds obscured and elements blurred and merged earlier and more thoroughly than in analogous "meaningful" forms' (Clark 1992: 453).

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4. Why etymologise Old English personal names?

The purpose of etymologising Old English name(element)s is thus not to attribute meaning (sense and denotation) to a member of the category of name. But given the typical formation of Old English names from common word bases, etymology becomes a starting point for analysing the spellings of name elements as potential evidence for reconstructing Old English. Spelling variants are open to analysis in comparison with those representing the common words on which the name elements are based, while acknowledging the loss of lexical semantic content concomitant with conversion to a name element.

Proposed etymologies of the bases of personal names and of place names inform reconstructions of cultures and their histories. Records of non-Old English names in Anglo-Saxon England reflect, for instance, contact with Celtic speakers, invasions by the Danes, and the importation of Frankish moneyers under the Danish occupation of East Anglia (Smart 1986; 2009; Colman 1996: §4). But the assessment of name forms as representing Old English or other Germanic names, itself relies on etymology as well as reconstructing the external history.

The quest for etymology involves identifying one or more orthographic forms (including abbreviations) as representing a particular name, identified by a head form, or citation form, illustrated here by an example from Smart (1992: 44). The name labelled '**Beorhtnoth**' (prototheme based on *beorht* 'bright', deuterotheme on *n*ōð 'temerity') is distinguished from forms of this personal name on late Anglo-Saxon coins, all from the Winchester mint: <BEORHTNOĐ>, <BERHTNAĐ>, <BREHTNOĐ>, <BRIHTNOĐ>, <BYRHTNOD>. Colman (1996) assesses differing motivations both for assigning head forms, and for the choice of a particular form. The choice of head form is responsible for the reliability of analysis of the spellings as (potential) evidence for Old English and the culture(s) that produced it.

I illustrate this with familiar interpretations of the name form <Hunferð>, which appears four times in *Beowulf*, identifying a *þyle* at the Danish court (on which, below).

For Klaeber (1950: 148), the name is '*Unfer*ð, i.e., more properly, *Unfrið*, "mar-peace"'. So, also, Wrenn (1958: 316), 'unpeace', suggesting that 'he was a literary creation rather than a historical person' (1958: 47). The 'erroneous' inital <H> is 'apparently suggested by the *Hūn*- compounds' (Klaeber 1950: 148 fn. 8, e.g., *Hūnlāfing* l. 1143). The initial <h> is typically editorially omitted in conformity with the alliterative pattern (Robinson 1993 [1970]: 221: fn. 2;

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Fulk et al. 2008: 150). This points to <Hun> as a purely orthographic variant of <Un> in the representation of *Unfrið*.

This in turn recalls the invocation of Schönfeld (1911: xxii) of classical influence on 'Prosthese von *h*', as purely orthographic; an interpretation supported by Scragg (1970: 185-186), citing the possibility that 'all Anglo-Saxon scribes were influenced to some extent by the attitude to the graph *h* shown by scribes copying Latin'. That is, because of phonological developments in Latin, 'the symbol *h* became even more erratically used in Late Latin, being frequently omitted and also frequently inserted unhistorically' (also the discussion of the name form <HEBECA> on ninth-century coins in Colman 2004: §6). Robinson (1993 [1970]: 221, fn.2) suggests the 'inorganic *h*' as a 'scribal habit borrowed from the Celts, who indicate that a *u* has vocalic rather than consonantal function by prefixing a merely graphic *h*'.

Fulk et al. (2008: 150), however, cite *Ūn- as* 'a variant of *Hūn-*, probably "high"'. Whether the 'variant' is phonological or purely orthographic is not specified. The claim must, however implicitly, be phonological. The MS form <Hun> is etymologically appropriate for *Hūn-*. But initial [h] is incompatible with the alliteration. Therefore the form <Hun> represents a phonological 'variant' of *Hūn-* with no initial [h]. The MS form <Hun>, representing this phonological variant, is editorially emended to <Un>.

Whereas for (Klaeber 1950: 148 fn. 8: above), the prototheme of *Unfrið* is spelled <Hun> by analogy with the spelling of the etymologically different *Hūn-*, for Fulk et al. it is spelled <Hun> because it is etymologically *Hūn-*. I assume that when Fulk et al. (2008: 150) suggest that the 'first constituent of the name apparently was altered in the course of recopying because *Ūn-* was not a normal OE name element, at least in the later period', they refer not to the name element, but to the orthographic form of that name element. In the context of the alliterative pattern, the MS form <Hun> is interpretable as evidence for loss of initial [h] in Old English.

In sum so far, the MS form <Hunferð> represents either the name labelled **Unfrith** (prototheme based on 'negative' *un*, deuterotheme based on *frið* 'peace'), or the name labelled **Hūnfrith** (prototheme based on *hūn* probably 'high', deuterotheme based on *frið* 'peace').

For these names is proposed the same etymology for the deuterotheme. Under either interpretation, the vowel graph of the MS form <ferð>, compared with that of the common word base spelled <frið> suggests loss of stress in the name element. For some, this informs reconstructions of the behaviour in metrical patterns of names as opposed to common word compounds. Pascual (2020: 262), for instance, sees the form as evidence

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for 'the prosodic weakness of names as compared to compounds, since its second element shows the effects of two processes associated with very low levels of stress (metathesis and reduction of *i* to *e*)', whereas in common word compounds, the base remains as *frið*. That metathesis is not associated with low, or no, stress (OE *brid* > *bird*; *acsian* > *ask*) does not invalidate this illustration of the application of etymological reconstruction.

Robinson (1993 [1970]: 222) interprets the MS form <Hunferð> as follows. Agreeing that <Hun> represents 'the negative prefix *un-*', he retains the <e> of the deuterotheme, which thus represents '*ferth* (also spelled *ferhth*)': 'mind, intellect'. The role of *þyle* is as 'scurrilous jester' or 'entertainer'. The name of this comic is **Unferth**. The spelling of the deuterotheme gives no evidence of loss of stress.

Specifying a head form and claiming its etymological base(s) distinguishes a name from the orthographic form(s) of a name, thus open to interpretation as evidence (or not) of something phonological. Depending on the identification of the name as **Unfrith**, **Hunfrith**, or **Unferth**, the MS form <Hunferð> may be interpreted as evidence (or not) of loss of initial [h], and as evidence (or not) of loss of stress on the deuterotheme.

And as in the interpretations of Klaeber, Wrenn, and Robinson, postulating a name and its etymological base(s) contributes to the pleasure of interpreting a story and its protagonists. Indeed, the juxtaposition of alternative suggestions thus formalised, rather than imposing a three-way either/or decision – a 'correct answer' as it were, allows for simultaneous echoes in the reader/hearer's mind; echoes that may reverberate differently at different points in the story.

Names lack meaning in terms of sense and denotation; but they may be associated with what Robinson (1993 [1968]: 179) calls 'latent etymological senses which could be shown to be appropriate to the characters who bear them'. With reference to the works of Robinson and of mediaeval scholars, Colman (2014: 120) invokes 'a widespread scholarly practice of associating name elements with common words – perhaps not even etymologically appropriate ones – for the sake of paronomasia. Onomastic puns often deliberately mis-etymologize names ...'.

Fulk et al. (2008: 150) argue that since both *Hūn-* and *-friþ* are well attested as Germanic name elements, the assumption of 'literary artifice in the construction of the name ... is at least unnecessary', and that the 'mar-peace' interpretation conflicts with, for instance, the character's trusted place at the Danish court. This seems simply to spoil the fun. But more, it appears to ignore the literary onomastics 'particularly congenial in an age

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when etymology was not a minor philological interest, but rather a dominant mode of thought' (Robinson 1993 [1968]: 179).

The following discussion acknowledges that reconstructing 'the Anglo-Saxon world view' (§7 below) is itself influenced by the culture in which it is reconstructed: reflecting the inspiration of Eric Stanley's (2000) *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past*.

5. Semantic classes of name bases

As anticipated in the preceding section, etymological arguments for associating an Old English name(element) with a particular common word base consider the orthographic forms of names, as well as reconstructed unwritten ones, compared with those for the posited base (§6 below). The same orthographic sequence may, however, represent more than one common word. Therefore, etymological arguments also consider the types of lexical semantic classes attested as bases for name elements. But identification of the latter may be influenced by subsequent assumptions of suitability of the lexical semantics of the proposed base for its conversion to a name identifying a human being.

Lexical semantic class is invoked by, for instance, von Feilitzen (1937: 227), for the etymology of the name given the head form **Dunna**. Here the choice is between Irish *dunn* 'a dark colour', and Irish *dun* 'a fortified hill'. Von Feilitzen prefers the former, given the frequent use of colour words as bases for Old English name-elements ('cf. the frequent occurrence of *Blæc-*, *Brún-*, *Hwít-* etc.').

The question of perceived suitability of a proposed base is illustrated by the deuterotheme of the name **Beadugils**. This is supposedly based on a common word *gisl*, typically glossed 'hostage', not regarded by latter-day interpreters as an appropriate personal name-element base. This judgement could, of course, reflect societal differences in naming; but Germanic societies were not apparently among those who give a child an opprobrious name in the hope of warding off evil (cf. those cited in Ogden – Richards 1956: 28). In this instance, however, as suggested by Kaufmann (1968: 148), the earlier semantics of the common word involving shoots of a plant were extended by metaphor to a scion, or offshoot, of a noble family: appropriate as a name-element base. Subsequent to the name formation, the semantics of the common word metonymised to 'hostage'.

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The prototheme of the late Anglo-Saxon moneyer's name given the head-form **Seolhwine** cited in §1 above is represented as <SEOLC> and <SELC> (§6 below). Two competing etyma have been suggested: OE *seoloc*, *seolc* 'silk', and OE *seolh* 'seal'. Redin (1919: 158) dismisses the former as 'certainly not to be thought of as an etymon'. The latter is supported by Smart (1973: 116), since it 'fits neatly into an onomasticon which chose Wolf, Raven and Hawk in the formation of its names' (to which may be added 'eagle': OE *earn*, name element **Earn**-: Colman 1992: 94). There is an apparent discrepancy between interpretations of the orthography and of the appropriate semantic class (§6 below).

Not relevant here is the Old English prototheme in names such as **Selethryth**, **Seleweald**, based on OE *sele* m. 'hall, dwelling' (e.g., von Feilitzen 1937: 354, on <Seleuuinus>), noted by Whitelock ed. (1967: 369) as rarely recorded outside verse, and itself forming several compounds restricted to verse.

I turn now to the orthography of the prototheme of the name cited as **Seolhwine**, before appealing to lexical semantic classes.

6. 'Seal' or 'silk': Orthography

The head form **Seolhwine** in Smart (1981: 65) and Colman (1992: 112) cited in §1 above subsumes forms of this name on two coins of Edward the Confessor (AD 1042-66) from the Gloucester mint: <SEOLCǷINE> and <SELCǷINE>. These represent the prototheme as <SEOLC> and <SELC>, not <SEOLH>: that is, with <C>, usually interpreted as representing [k], rather than <H>, representing [x]. Smart (1992: 96), however, cites the name (for the same moneyer) as **Seolcwine**; and the form <SEOLCA>, for a moneyer or moneyers for Æthelred II (AD 978-1016) at Southampton and Winchester is given the head-form **Seolca** in Smart (1981: 65). The <A> here represents the inflectional suffix cited in §3 above.

Representation of the vowel as <EO> is appropriate for either etymon. *Seolh* 'seal' reflects breaking before [lx] (e.g., Campbell 1959: §146). *Seoloc* 'silk' reflects back mutation, and *seolc* the loss of the conditioning unstressed vowel (Campbell 1959: §205, 390). The form <SELC> reflects late Old English monophthongisation of the short diphthong (or simplification of the digraph, according to one's view of Old English 'short diphthongs'). For *seolh*, it may alternatively reflect Anglian 'smoothing'.

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It is the graph <C> that may suggest the *seolc* etymon. From the point of view of orthography alone, support for the *seolh* etymon considers <C>, rather than <H>, as a possible representation of (a reflex of) OE [x]. The distribution of [x] is determined by lexical-item stress, in turn determined by lexical-item structure. Its reflex [h] is limited to foot-initial position (*healdan* 'hold', *behealdan* 'behold'). [x] appears foot-finally (*seolh* 'seal', both elements of the compound *heahburh* 'chief town', cited by Campbell 1959: §461).

The structure of a dithematic name is analogous to that of a commonword compound consisting of a root plus another root. Since in Old English, word stress is associated with the root (e.g., Strang 1970: 411), each element of a dithematic name is lexically associated with an ictus, or foot head (whatever may be postulated about its function in metrical patterns). The prototheme-final consonant is thus foot final. That is, if the orthography indeed represents an unreduced compound. If <SEOLCƿINE> represents **Seolhwine**, <C> represents foot-final [x], or a reflex thereof.

And if so, and if <C> represents [k], this suggests strengthening of the voiceless velar fricative [x] (represented by <H> / <h>) to the voiceless velar stop [k] (represented by <C> / <c>): phonetically natural in certain contexts, if not "regular" in a Neogrammarian sense. This is otherwise attested in common word forms when the fricative is followed by [s], as in, e.g., the second element of the compound *weocsteall* 'altar place', cf. **weoh* + *steall* (Campbell 1959: §416; also Brunner 1965: §209; Bülbring 1902: §482), but is cited by von Feilitzen (1937: 121) as occurring before other consonants in personal name-forms (see also Colman 1992: 205).

In an inflected form of a monothematic name, such as that represented by <SEOLCA>, the root element is associated with a foot, the inflectional syllable is not. The final consonant of the single name element is thus foot medial. In foot-medial intersonorant position in pre-Old English, the fricative [x] typically lenites to the point of loss (Campbell 1959: §461). This is reflected in forms of *seolh* 'seal' with an inflectional suffix, e.g., gen. sg. <seoles>. Compare *seoloc* 'silk', gen. sg. <seolces> (Campbell 1959: §§574 (2), (4)).

A form such as <heahra> comparative 'high', alongside forms without the medial <h> is attributed by Campbell (1959: §463) to 'the analogy of *hēah*': it is not clear from the notation of Campbell whether the analogy is to be regarded as phonological or purely orthographic. Stenton (1989 [1913]: 17 fn. 1) says of the attestation of a document by one 'Hæha', in or before AD 709: '[t]he name Hæaha is a weak formation from the stem Heah, frequently compounded in O.E. personal names, such as Heahmund

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and Heahbeorht. It is possible that the name Heaha, although it has never been identified, may exist in local nomenclature. Under such conditions the name would be indistinguishable from the O.E. adjective heah = "high"'. Again, an <h> is present in the spelling in a context conducive to loss of medial [x]. Amos (1980: 41 fn.6), however, perceptively suggests that as the name may be a nickname (a hypocorostic formation: §3 above, as supported by the dithematic names just cited), the retention of <h> may reflect a geminated consonant in '**Heahha*'.

Retention of foot-medial intersonorant geminated [x] represented by <hh> is illustrated by *crohha* 'pot, crock', in Campbell (1959: §464) and Brunner (1965: §220). The latter cites the alternative forms with <cc>, *crocca*, weak masc., and *crocce*, weak fem. (§220, Anm. 2). For geminated [x], Sievers (1903: n. 1) notes the not infrequent manuscript use of 'simple **h** instead of **hh**' (recalling 'Heaha' above), and 'even at times **ch**' (the last adopted from Old Irish as representing a fricative in early Old English: see, e.g., Campbell 1959: §§55-57).

According to Pheifer (1998 [1974]: lxxxiii), however, <ch> and <c> in <crocha> 'crock' (Épinal l.171), <chroca> (Erfurt l.171) represent the ungeminated fricative, 'where it was normally lost between voiced sounds', but preserved in the Épinal-Erfurt glossaries in certain instances, notably between vowels, and between a voiced consonant and a vowel.

From this discrepancy between interpretations of the medial consonant in 'crock' may be extrapolated at least the following. Foot-medial intersonorant [x] is retained only if geminate, or if not, only in very early texts. If the late Old English form <SEOLCA> is to be based on *seolh*, and not *seoloc*, *seolc*, a literal interpretation of the <C>, as representing [k], would suggest strengthening of [x] to [k] in exactly the foot-medial intersonorant context conducive to its lenition and loss.

The co-existence in late Old English of the dithematic <SEOLCƿINE> and <SELCƿINE> with <SEOLCA> (albeit at different mints and different dates) may suggest that the monothematic name is hypocoristic: a reduction of the dithematic one in which the strong noun base of the prototheme (either *seolh* or *seoloc*) is converted to a name by transference to the weak declension class with nominative singular expounded by the <A> suffix. Alternatively, <SEOLCA> may represent, by the same conversion, a byname, a supplementary nickname, without the accompanying given name (discussion in Colman 2014: chapter 8: §8.4).

In neither case do I regard the <C> as evidence against the *seolh* etymon. The conversion of this common word to a name element is long

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after the early period of loss of [x] in the relevant contexts. Moreover, the loss does not occur in all varieties of English. Whether <C> represents [x] or [k], it may be seen as mirrored in some varieties of present-day Scots where not only final [x] is retained, but has been retained in intersonorant position as [x] or [k]: *selchy* [sɛlxɪ], [sɛlkɪ], as well as *selch* [sɛlx], 'seal' (Robinson 1985: 599). I return to this in §7 below.

Perhaps more significant is the function of the form: to identify a name element, which functions to identify a moneyer, a person in an official capacity, identified on legal coinage. Considering this function may prevail over an urge to invoke supposedly regular 'sound change'. If <C> represents a reflex of [x] strengthened to [k] (§6 above), the retention of a reflex of [x] in <SEOLCA> reflects a defiance of foot-medial [x]-loss in favour of its function in identifying the name. Or, does <C> here represent a geminate consonant in a hypocoristic formation (cf. '**Heahha*', above)?

The next section reconsiders characterisations of the lexical-semantic fields into which the common words *seoloc*, *seolc* and *seolh* might fall.

7. 'Seal' or 'silk': Lexical semantic fields

The invocation of semantic classes of name-element bases in §5 rests implicitly on lexical semantic field theory. Identification and classification of lexical semantic fields is controversial enough for a living language (relevant discussions are in, for instance, Lyons 1977: §9; Magnusson – Persson 1986: esp. 6-7; Persson 1990 passim). The issue involves concepts such as hyponymy, and is inextricable from the perceptions of a society at large, or of individuals, and can depend on particular contexts (linguistic or linguistically external). The difficulties in coming to grips with the perceptions of speakers of a language known only from written texts are illustrated in Strite's (1989) work on the various semantic fields indicated by extant Old English vocabulary. Biggam (1991: 118) exemplifies such difficulties as follows: '... "Colour" can be taken to include studies on pigments, dyes, fabrics, manuscript illumination, gemstones, etc.' (on 'colour', see, in particular, Berlin – Kay 1999).

Although the arrangement of their *Thesaurus of Old English* (TOE) is based largely on Dutch's 1962 edition of Roget, Roberts and Kay (1995: xxxiv) explain that '[a]s far as possible, we tried to be guided by what we knew of the Anglo-Saxon world view rather than by modern taxonomies (although our knowledge is obviously limited and this is another area in which we hope that the TOE will stimulate further research). Thus, the

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major headings in **02.06 Animal** might not impress a modern zoologist, but seem to us to indicate the priorities reflected in the vocabulary'.

This attempt to re-create an Anglo-Saxon 'world view', in place of a present-day one, may be taken as an invitation to re-examine the types of contexts in which the items glossed as 'silk' and 'seal' occur in an Anglo-Saxon world. *Seolc* 'silk' is classified in TOE under '4. Material Needs', specifically under '04.04 Weaving' as either the fibre or thread (04.04.04), or as woven material or fabric, specifically 'fine woven material from silk, cotton or linen' (04.04.05.05). But given the physical sources of the commodity, and in the light of references to its use, a reassessment of its classification as mere 'material needs' is not uninvited.

Even today, silk can be excused as constituting a luxury item in Britain (except, perhaps, for those who regard Prada shoes and Veuve Clicquot as 'material needs'); but how much more so would have been the silk from Byzantium, purchased by merchants travelling to the continent to bring it for sale in Anglo-Saxon England (for instance, to Pavia, capital of the Lombard kingdom, and 'a convenient stopping place ... for merchants wanting to purchase Byzantine silks, often adorned with peacocks': Gannon 2003: 122 n.105). 'Silks commanded fabulous prices in western Europe' in the ninth century (Harris 2015: 102). Among references to the use of silk, the following well illustrates its luxurious status. 'Among the pilgrims who came [to the shrine of Cuthbert then near Durham] in the tenth century was King Athelstan, who donated the elaborate vestments he wore when his body was excavated in 1827, including silk garments embroidered in gold thread' (Taylor 2001: 180-181).

If 'silk' is to be regarded not simply as one of various fabrics for clothes and furnishings, but as a luxury commodity, the word denoting it would fall in with other words denoting wealth: words certainly attested as bases for Germanic name-elements, such as OE *ead* 'wealth' (**Ead**-, Colman 1992: 81), *gold* 'gold' (**Gold**-, Colman 1992: 100). Roberts and Kay (1995) cite *ead* in the field of 'Happiness, blessedness' (08.01.01.03.03), as well as in the field of 'Treasure, riches, wealth' (15.01.03), along with *gold*, and *feoh*, *sinc*, *wela*, *hord*.

A source of unease, of course, and as incidentally illustrated by the preceding, is that silk was not a Germanic commodity. The Chinese formula for its fabrication was apparently acquired by the Byzantine Justinian. The word *seoloc* is sparsely recorded in Old English, and not (as far as surviving texts allow) recorded in heroic verse, unlike terms for other treasurable objects, which, in the terms of Clark (1992: 457-8) and Redin (1919: xxxvii-viii) quoted in §3 above, were available for conversion to Old English personal

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name elements. A bale of silk does not come to mind as companion to the bling of a Germanic dragon-guarded treasure hoard.

On the other hand, although *seolh* is apparently unattested in verse, it figures metonymically in compounds such as *seolbaþ*, as does 'whale' in *hwælweg*, 'sea' (Colman – Anderson 2004: 559).

Roberts and Kay (1995) place *seolh* in the benign-seeming field of 'Marine Animal', along with *dolphin*, *walrus*, *whale* (02.06.05.01). It would not immediately suggest one to which war-like or otherwise ominous characteristics are known to be attributed, such as wolf, raven, hawk or eagle (Smart 1973: 116, quoted above). Here literature may provide an insight into 'the Anglo-Saxon world': <nalles hearpan swēġ wīġend weċċean, ac se wonna hrefn fūs ofer fǣġum fela reordian, earne secgan, hū him æt ǣte speow þenden hē wið wulf wæl rēafode> (*Beowulf* : Fulk et al. 2008: ll. 3023-3028); 'no sound of harp shall wake the warriors, but the dark raven, eager after doomed men, shall recount many things, and tell the eagle how it sped him at the feast, when he, contending with the wolf, laid bare the slain' (translation by Clark Hall 1950).

Although a 'vitullus marini' may have been a source of fear for some more than others, it could seem that seals had rather more to fear from men: witness the ship-ropes made of hides of whales and seals referred to in the account of the voyages of Ohthere (Whitelock 1967: IV ll. 54 & 58). And in some varieties of present-day English *seal* denotes a fat, clumsy person. Perhaps the word *seolh* does not rest entirely easy in the same lexical field as *wulf*, *hrefn*, *hafoc*, *earn*.

Perhaps, again, speculations on ultimately untestable mental associations might be chastened by a reminder of the influence of fashions of thought offered, for instance, by a history of interpretations of OE *wyrd* in discussions of the supposed surviving paganism, and attributions of Germanic so-called fatalism and melancholy, in Anglo-Saxon literature, documented and evaluated in Stanley (2000 [1975]: chapter 11).

The 'seal' word appears in a tenth-century moneyer's name at York. Smart (1982: 106), discussing Norse names on the coinages of York, describes 'the compounds such as *Selecol* ... where the first part of the name was not originally a name-forming element but descriptive or attributive, qualifying the name. This is typically Norse, and is frequently met in the sagas in such names as *Skalla-grim*, *Viga-glum*. Thus *Selecol* (ON *Sela-kollr*) is "Kollr of the seals"'; see also von Feilitzen (1937: 357) on the *Domesday Book* form <Selecolf> as "ON ***Selakollr**"; 'the first el. is the gen. plur. of ON *selr* "seal"'. *Selecol* was presumably coined in England, as Smart (1982: 112) notes

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that the complete name *Selecol* ‘is not known in Scandinavia although *Kollr* is common there’.

The single coin form <SELECOL> to which Smart (1982: 112) refers does not unambiguously represent a genitive suffix on the prototheme. The function of the medial <E> may have become that of connecting vowel, or composition joint (Colman 2014: 154), and the attributive function supposed for the theme in the name’s original composition obscured. The common word *seal*, with sense and denotation, may have become a base for, and been converted to, a name element, which lacks these.

Dr. Veronica Smart (personal communication) reminds me that seals have a particular relationship with humans in Scottish – and Scandinavian – mythology, as shape changers, male and female: ’I am a man upon the land/and I am a silkie in the sea’. This engenders a fear of killing a seal, for fear of killing a human; perhaps the Ohthere reference to ropes of seal hide intimates that for the audience of the account, this was at least unusual. This, and the very benignity of a seal, might encourage a view of *seal* as a base for a personal name element.

The coin forms <SEOLC>, <SELC>, for Edward the Confessor (AD 1042-66) from the Gloucester mint, and for Æthelred II (AD 978-1016) at Southampton and Winchester, a long way from the York of Scandinavian rulers and their successors, and the combination of the prototheme with the OE name element **wine**, argue against a Norse bearer of the name element in these instances (see the discussion in Colman 1992: 115, invoking again the views of Smart). Plausible interpretations of the orthography allow that they may rather suggest conversion of the common word *seal* to an Old English name element.

Agreement with the views of Redin (1919: 158) and Smart (1973: 116), cited in §5 above, may be expressed by subsuming the forms <SEOLCƿINE>, <SELCƿINE> and <SEOLCA> under the head forms: **Seolhwine**, **Seolha**.

8. Conclusion

Old English data are not ‘given’, but susceptible to (re-)interpretation. Jerzy Wełna’s writings on early English present the student with, not facts, but possibilities to be theoretically and empirically assessed. May this birthday bagatelle indicate that this student is not (wilfully) deaf to his teaching.

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Address: FRAN COLMAN, PO Box 348, Methoni Messinias, 24006 Greece.
ORCID code: orcid.org/0000-0002-4746-9426.

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