Reviews

Surnames, DNA, and Family History. By George Redmonds, Turi King, and David Hey. Pp. xi + 242. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. $35 (HB). ISBN: 978-0-958264-8

In civics classes around the nation, US school children presumably still learn about the heroic deeds of American patriot Thomas Jefferson. Author of the Declaration of Independence, this prominent gentleman planter served as governor of Virginia from 1779 until 1781, when he was investigated for serious improprieties. After a brief hiatus, Jefferson returned to politics in 1784, when he succeeded Benjamin Franklin as Minister to France. In 1790, he returned to the American political arena and accepted an appointment as Secretary of State under George Washington. Then, in 1801, he began the first of two terms as the third president of the United States. At the end of his presidency, rather than rest on his laurels, Jefferson went on to found the University of Virginia and the Library of Congress. He died in 1826 at the age of eighty-three. Fittingly, the date of his death was none other than July 4. Just as fascinating as this illustrious political career is the personal biography of this founding father.

In 1772, Thomas Jefferson married Martha Wayles Skelton. After her death in 1782, it was broadly rumored that the widower Jefferson had taken a beautiful young mistress. In and of itself this action might not have raised a single eyebrow in polite Virginian circles. What was a sensation, however, was the alleged identity of the planter's mistress. According to Monticello legend, the woman who shared Thomas Jefferson's bed and later bore him several children was none other than Sarah or Sally Hemings, the enslaved mulatto half-sister of his deceased wife, Martha. For nearly two hundred years, this story remained a part of southern plantation lore, that is, until the late 1990s and the advent of genetics-based paternity testing.

In a series of DNA tests conducted by an independent laboratory, it was conclusively determined that the descendants of Sally Hemings were directly related to the Thomas Jefferson family line. Moreover, thanks to the later identification of an exceedingly rare genetic mutation, it was also shown that the progenitor of Sally Henning's children was in all probability Thomas Jefferson himself and not one of his male relatives. The story of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings was not only a landmark for US historians. As the authors of the book under review point out, this case was also one of the first to highlight the significant contribution which genetics can make to the study of onomastics.

In some cases, of course, paternal family ties are overtly marked in surnames. In the UK, for example, the widespread occurrence of surnames featuring either the Gaelic prefixes *Mac-*, *Mc-*, *M-*, and *Ó-* in Scotland and Ireland or the Welsh prefixes *Ap-* and *Ab-* is a cultural monument to long-deceased progenitors. The former prevalence of this tradition and the once limited store of first names are two linguistic factors which are commonly used to explain why certain UK patronyms have an unusually high frequency (e.g., *MacDonald*, *McAllister*, *O'Brien*, *O'Sullivan*, *Bowen*, *Bevan*, *Pritchard*, and *Price*). However, as Redmonds, King, and Hey point out in chapters 1 and 2, this linguistic explanation may be only part of the story. Genetics may also have played a key role in the survival and spread of certain surnames as well as the gradual demise and extinction of others. As they explain: "Because surnames [in the UK] are traditionally passed from father to son, down the generations, the failure to produce a male heir marks the end of the line" (67). It stands to reason, then, that families with a genetic predisposition for producing an inordinate number of male offspring would have a higher chance of passing on their surname than families which eventually "daughter out" (189). According to the authors, this genetic advantage could help to explain the sudden appearance

and concentrated proliferation of the surname *Metcalfe* and its variants, e.g., *Medcalf(e)*, *Midcalf(e)*, and *Mitcalf(e)*.

Based to their research, the earliest instance of this surname comes from 1301, when an Adam *Medecalf* appears on the tax records of Bainbridge, a remote village in the Aysgarth parish. The then unusual surname might well have died out had it not been for Adam's suspected descendant, Sir James Metcalfe. At the time of his death, this gentleman casanova was reported to have sired no less than 300 men of his "knowen consanguinitie" (73). Thanks in no small measure to this prolific progenitor, the once rare name of *Metcalfe* flourished in and around the Bainbridge area. In 1673, there were 70 different *Metcalfes* registered in the tax records. By the 1881 census, this number had exponentially increased to nearly 7000. Redmond, King, and Hey are careful to acknowledge that the current popularity of this surname (or any other, for that matter) cannot of course be reduced to a single paternity event. However, as explained in chapter 3, genetics clearly has an influence upon not only the expansion and decline but also the distribution and migration of surnames (chapter 4). Following this explanation, chapters 5 and 6 explore the complex interplay between linguistic, social, historical, and genetic factors in patrilineal surnaming.

To help readers whose last biology course may have been a few years back, chapter 7 offers an excellent summary of the most important facts about the composition, transmission, and possible mutation of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). To facilitate this explanation, the book also contains eight brilliantly colored plates detailing the passage of genetic inheritance within several surname clusters over multiple generations. Then, in chapter 8, the authors explain how populations can be segregated into genetic groupings or "haplogroups" on the basis of binary genetic markers. Statistical comparisons within and across these groupings can then be run to determine "the probability that two randomly sampled men sharing a surname have a matching haplotype" (179). Alternatively, as was the case in the Hemings-Jefferson investigation, the **m**ost **r**ecent **c**ommon **a**ncestor (TMRCA) between differently surnamed males can also be determined.

Importantly, in the final chapter "The Wider Picture," the authors are extremely careful to warn that there are not only practical but ethical limits to using DNA testing to uncover the secrets behind a family's surname. Because of its intimate relationship to paternity and fertility, illegitimacy and inheritance, surname research has always been a potentially explosive pursuit. Thanks, though, to the unprecedented degree of certainty which DNA can bring, this potential may be dramatically increased. This does not mean that this new methodological approach can singularly unlock the secrets behind surnaming. However, in combination with traditional linguistic, historical, and genealogical methods, genetic analysis can indeed make an important "new contribution to the study of the origins and developments of surnames in Britain, Ireland, the United States of America, and elsewhere" (19).

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A Dictionary of British Place Names. By A. D. Mills. Oxford University Press. First edn revised, 2011. Pp. 576. 5 maps. 196 × 129 mm. $19.95; £10.99 (PB). ISBN: 978-0-19-960908-6

This dictionary of over 17,000 entries is being marketed for its portability, as an invaluable and user-friendly "traveling companion." Originally *A Dictionary of English Place Names* (1991; 1998), it was expanded to *A Dictionary of British Place Names* (2003) when it got an infusion of additional listings for Scotland, Ireland, and Wales from Adrian Room, author of over thirty reference books, including books on names and *The Penguin Dictionary of British Place Names* (2003).

The new entries for Scotland were reviewed by W. F. H. Nicolaisen of the University of Aberdeen, those for Northern Ireland and the Republic by Kay Muir of the Northern Ireland Place-Name Project at Queen's University, Belfast, and those for Wales by Hywel Wyn Owen,

Director of the Place-Name Research Center at the University of Wales, Bangor. Mills himself is Emeritus Reader in English at the University of London and is the author of *A Dictionary of London Place Names*, *The Place Names of Dorset*, and *The Place Names of the Isle of Wight*.

In his substantial introduction Mills explains the types of placename formation, the chronology of the contributing languages, the methodology of placename research, and the wider significance of placename study. Readers who wish to delve deeper are referred to the five-page Select Bibliography that includes other dictionaries, county surveys and monographs, and studies of the interpretation and significance of placenames. Furthermore, readers of this latest edition are invited to go to the dictionary's web page at <www.oup.com/uk/reference/resources/britishplacenames> and click straight through to several dozens of fascinating websites, including *The Romano-British Settlements*, the *Domesday Book Online*, and *The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*.

The inclusion of names depends upon their appearance in "all or several" of the popular touring atlases, containing maps on a scale of three or four miles to the inch, produced by the Ordnance Survey and by the motoring organizations and other publishers. The names of all the "better known" places in the British Isles have been included, "a good number" of villages and hamlets and city suburbs, alongside the names of counties and districts (old and new) and rivers and coastal features. After such earnest protestations of inclusion, it came as a deep disappointment to this reviewer when *the very first* name (*Porthcurno* in Cornwall) that he used as test case failed to appear. And, to make matters worse, Cornwall is not listed by Mills as one of the English counties (Durham, Hampshire, Kent, Lancashire, Somerset, and Suffolk) for which there is as yet no English Place-Name Society Survey.

The individual entries appear in bold and their concise explanations are free of scholarly apparatus or argument. English placenames are broken down into their components that are italicized and followed by an early dated spelling of the name, usually from the *Domesday Book* if they occur there. Some entries (e.g., *Bothwell*, *Elgin*, the river *Maine* in Kerry, *Stirling*) are admittedly of unknown origin, and others (e.g., *Balmoral*, *Edinburgh*, *Glencoe*, *Glenelg*, *Launcells*, *Panxworth*) are partially unknown. In contested cases, there are two or, at most, three hypotheses.

Most Irish, and some Scottish and Welsh, placenames have alternative Celtic and English forms, not always equivalent in meaning, and these are duly noted. For example, *Cardiff* is the anglicized form of Welsh *Caerdydd*, while other places with English or Scandinavian designations have an unrelated Welsh name, such as *Abertawe* "mouth of the river Tawe" for *Swansea* (OScan. "Sveinn's island").

For whatever reason, Irish entries have an abbreviated format, and, although all names are translated, their components are not individually identified. This makes conceptualizing the cumulative significance more difficult (e.g., "black milking place" for *Bouladuff* in Tipperary). And does this refer to a lack of daylight or to tainted milk? On the other hand, most Scottish and Welsh entries are broken down into their components, and the components are defined individually.

Nonetheless, the format and concision make it a browser's delight, and readers can typically glean naming patterns that feature witches and female trolls (*Hascomb*, *Hassall*, possibly *Flawith*), elves and goblins (*Grimley*) or scatological references (e.g., *Skidbrooke*, recorded in 1086 as *Schitebroc*, from OE *scite* "excrement," or *Ballyhack* in Wexford "townland of excrement"). Another phenomenon that rewards the browser is the commemoration of crime sites (*Morpeth* "murder path") and massacres (*Meenagorp* "smooth place of the corpses"). And then there is the whimsy of so many names (e.g., *Annabella* in Cork is "marsh of the sacred tree"; *Womenswold* has nothing to do with women; *Crick* is not "creek," *Swine* is "creek," and *Muck* is "swine").

The majority of placenames derive from personal names once associated with them, sometimes documented, like *Ciolla*, whence *Chillenden*, but more often unrecorded elsewhere. Because, with the exception of *Alfred* (surviving as the first element in *Ifracombe*), *Edgar*,

Edith, *Edward*, and a few others, personal names used during the Anglo-Saxon period disappeared in the wake of the Norman Conquest, it is precisely from placenames that we are able to appreciate the vast inventory of Anglo-Saxon given names. Inferred from comparative evidence and postulated to occur with varying degrees of certainty in placenames, such personal names are customarily asterisked (like **Peohtric* in *Petersham*) to indicate that they are not otherwise documented.

Typical of these vanished Anglo-Saxon given names are *Ebbe* or *Ebbi*, whence *Epsom*; *Eoppa*, whence *Epwell* and *Epworth*; and *Eorphere*, whence *Epperstone*. A few of them have cognates in other modern European languages, such as **Gaerbald*, whence *Garboldisham*, which corresponds to Italian *Garibaldi*; *Tancred*, whence *Tankersley*, which is *Tancredo* in Italian; and *Grimaldi*, whence *Grimoldby*, which survives intact as the surname of the royal family of Monaco, but most are not obviously connected to known roots. Is, for example, the man's name **Weorth* in *Worthington* the same as OE *worth* "enclosure," seen in *Petworth* and *Kenilworth*?

The names of animals, both domesticated, such as goats, sheep, and cows (in *Gatehead*, *Skipwith*, and *Keele*), and wild, such as frogs, toads, and seals (in *Froxfield*, *Tathwell*, and *Selsey*), are much in evidence here and are sometimes hard to distinguish from the names of men once they are combined in a placename. Three of the four *Cowleys* listed are from the personal name **Cofa* or **Cufa* rather than from cows, which, on the other hand, are responsible for *Cowley* in Gloucestershire. Even *Cowesby* in North Yorkshire is the farmstead of an Old Scandinavian name *Kausi* rather than a farmstead of cows. *Bulwell* can be the "spring of the bulls" or the "spring of a man named **Bula*," and *Boxworth* can be the "enclosure of bucks (male deer or he-goats)" or that of "a man named **Bucc*." *Honeychurch* is probably from a man named **Huna* rather than from the bees that may have swarmed under the eaves of the original church.

Many of the shorter Old English and Scandinavian names for males appearing in placenames resemble those used in modern times for women, and for that reason Mills is careful in his entries to specify the gender of the person involved. Examples include men named *Anna* or **Amma* in *Amble* and *Ancaster*, *Betti* in *Bettiscombe* and *Beachley*, *Emma* in *Emley*, *Kati* in *Cadeby*, *Lill* in *Lilleshall*, and possibly *Sali* in *Saleby*. By the same token, some Old English and Scandinavian female names have a rather masculine look, such as *Hjalp* (*Helperthorpe*), *Cynehild* (*Kenilworth*), and *Wilburh* (*Wilbraham*). Straddling the issue, *Bowden* is "hill of a woman named Bucge or of a man named Buga."

By 1066, most settlements and features of the English landscape already had established names, and the impact of French vocabulary on placenames is minimal. In the view of this reviewer, however, Mills fails to recognize a French origin for *Cantlop*, with its earlier form *Cantelop* (1086), from the common placename type *C(h)anteloup* used for sites in France where wolves were heard howling or "singing." French influence is most evident in "double-barreled" names that the great French-speaking feudal families affixed to the names of their manors (e.g., *Kibworth Harcourt*, *Sutton Courteney*, *Bovey Tracey*). In some cases these manorial affixes merged with the original elements to form such compounds as *Herstmonceaux*, *Owermoigne*, *Stogursey*. Spelling adjustments made by Norman scribes, who turned *Sarisbury* into *Salisbury* and *Dunholm* into *Durham*, are a further aspect of French influence.

Old English was a highly inflected language, and some of its endings are preserved in placenames. The genitive (singular and plural) of weak nouns and personal names often survives, as in *Shucknall* "hill haunted by an evil spirit," or *Bonehill*, from *bulena*, the genitive plural of *bul* "bull." The dative singular of weak adjectives *(-an)* survives often in the middle of a modern name, such as *Bradnop* (OE. *bradan hope* "[at] the broad valley"). The common element *burh* "fortified place" appears in placenames as *Bury, -bury* if from the Old English dative singular *byrig* but as *Burgh*, *-borough* if from the nominative case of the same word.

Mills recognizes that river valleys, that provide fertile soil, ease of access, and a bountiful supply of water, loom large in the study of placenames, and accordingly is diligent in his coverage of their names. Scottish *Banff* is "piglet" in Gaelic, as a nickname for the present River

Deveron, seen as "rooting" its way to the coast. The Irish name *Avoca* is explained as "adapted from Ptolemy's *Oboka* (2nd century) for a length of Avonmore." The name of the Welsh river *Teifi* seen in the Welsh name *Aberteifi* for *Cardigan* is conceded as being of uncertain origin. *Derwent* is a Celtic name for "river where oak trees grow abundantly." Traces of pagan commemoration survive, especially in such Celtic river names as *Shannon* in Ireland and *Dee* in England and Scotland, meaning "goddess," that suggest an ancient Celtic cult of river worship. But many more placenames honor Christian saints, such as Welsh *llan* "church of" in combination with the saint's name, for example, *Llanasa* (St Asaph), *Llandeilo* (St Teilo), *Llandudno* (St Tudno), *Llangollen* (St Collen), *Llantrisant* ("three saints," i.e., Sts Dyfogwg, Gwynno, and Illtud), and *Llanpumpsaint* ("five saints," i.e., Sts Ceitho, Celynnen, Gwyn, Gwynno, and Gwynoro).

Placenames redeem lost history and confirm the migratory routes of people. The three hundred or so names in Northeast Scotland (such as *Pitcairn*, *Pitlochry*, and *Pitlurg*) that contain the element *pett* "share of land," a word ultimately related to English *piece*, indicate the area settled by the Picts, an inference supported archeologically. *Mersey* is the "boundary river" because for centuries it formed the historic boundary between Cheshire and Lancashire. *Blair Atholl*, which means the "Plain of New Ireland," was named by the Gaels after they left Ireland to settle in this part of Scotland. *Donegal* is "fort of the foreigners" and refers to the Danes active there in the ninth century. *Galloway* is the land of "stranger Gaels," a people of mixed Irish and Scandinavian descent who settled there in the ninth century. The historic region of *Sutherland* was a "Southern" territory to the Vikings who settled in Orkney and Shetland.

The glossary of common elements in *A Dictionary of British Place Names* is less than seven pages, is obviously not exhaustive, and is predictably partial to Old English. For Celtic elements there are a few "triple-barreled" entries like *druim*, *droim*, *trum* "ridge" or *ros*, *ros*, *rhos* "promontory, wood" for Gaelic, Irish, and Welsh respectively, and this reviewer, for one, would appreciate seeing more of them. With computer indexing, there is no excuse for such an incomplete glossary, albeit one limited to "common" elements.

Although this is the second edition of *A Dictionary of British Place Names*, the improvements since 2003 are modest. In addition, the size of the print continues to get smaller with each successive edition, so if this pattern continues into future editions the print will eventually be too small to read. A map of Scotland with the caption "Counties and Unitary Authorities" has been reprinted from the earlier edition irrespective of the fact that "counties" in Scotland were abolished forty years ago. A number of etymologies have been replaced or refined in light of recent scholarship (e.g., *Hameringham* is no longer "homestead of the dwellers at the cliff" but now possibly "homestead of the family or followers of Hathumaer") and there are about two hundred new entries (e.g., *Deanshanger* "sloping wood of a man called Dynni" and *Tibenham* "homestead of a man called Tibba"). Also new to this edition are a number of more recent "transferred" names such as *California*, *Botany Bay*, *Lilliput*, and *Quebec*, and a handful of particularly iconic names such as *Piccadilly* and *Sutton Hoo*.

With a congenial format and sound scholarship that strives to stay abreast of all modern research into the origins of placenames, this handy, concise, and remarkably inclusive dictionary is highly recommended.

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Journal of Literary Onomastics 1 (2011)

A new journal with a historic pedigree, the *Journal of Literary Onomastics* issued Volume 1 in June 2011 to take up the legacy of *Literary Onomastics Studies*, which began publication at the State University of New York at Brockport in 1974 and remained in print until 1989. Under the editorship of Stefan Jurasinski of the Department of English at Brockport, the revived, renamed journal is unique among scholarly periodicals in its onomastic focus on literature, whether prose, poetry, or drama.

Support for the journal has come from across the national and international onomastics community. In March 2010, the Executive Council of the American Name Society voted unanimously to consider it an affiliate publication, and ANS members are among the experts assembled for its editorial board: Michael Adams, Andrew Breeze, Richard Coates, Claire Culleton, R. D. Fulk, Carole Hough, John Insley, Wilhelm Nicolaisen, and Matthew Townend.

The inaugural issue of what is anticipated to be perhaps an annual publication does not disappoint. The four articles selected well represent the breadth of literary onomastics and the field's varying perspectives. First, Andrew Breeze provides a succinct commentary on "British Places and Rauf de Boun's *Bruit*." He considers several problematic instances of placenames from the fourteenth-century *Le Petit Bruit* in its 1987 edition by Diana Tyson, along with her subsequent reflections in *Notes & Queries* (2000). Breeze's research serves its immediate purpose by correcting a number of errors; it serves the wider purpose of the journal by highlighting the cross-disciplinary nature of onomastics, here by analyzing a medieval literary text through modern toponymic methodologies.

In "Spenser, Wolfram, and the Reformation of Despair," the second article, Susannah Brietz Monta and Lisi Oliver examine *Trevisan* and *Terwin*, the names of two knights in Book I of *Faerie Queene*, and suggest a possible origin for them in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, the best-known German version of the Arthurian legend. The authors' analysis encompasses the soteriological as well as the onomastic, suggesting that in Trevisan's escape from the cave of Despair Spenser probes a key theme of emerging Protestant theology, revising the chivalric tradition of the earlier work.

The longest article, by Michael Adams, delves into the etymology of *Cratchit*, surname of one of Dickens's most beloved families. Concluding that the name derives mainly, although, pointedly, not exclusively, from *cratch* "Nativity manger," Adams finds evidence of Dickens's "onomastic finesse" (46). The expansive article is important not only for its exploration of the name but also for its insights into literary onomastic theory, noting that the etymology of the well-chosen name is "essential to understanding, not only the significance of the name, but the significance of the novel, as well as something about the aesthetic assumptions or inclinations underlying both" (31).

Lastly, Wilhelm Nicolaisen contributes "'Eve's Neighborhood': Fictionalized Factual Place Names in an Off-Campus Novel," an analysis of the names of real places that appear in *Home Repair*, the 2009 novel by Liz Rosenberg. Nicolaisen first stakes out his ground by arguing that all names in a literary text, even "real" names, are to be considered literary names. He then uses the novel's setting — Binghamton, New York, where he taught for twenty-three years, several of them as the novelist's colleague — as example of the rich "cumulative inter-contexts" that arise when local placenames infiltrate a fictive world (57).

Individually and collectively, the four articles and opening Editor's Note that comprise the first volume of the *Journal of Literary Onomastics* present a compelling argument for the journal's renaissance, the need for a forum for the exploration of literary onomastics. Both theorists and practitioners will salute the return of a valued resource in this multi-disciplinary field.

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Knowledge Cards. GeoNova Publishing Inc/Pomegranate. $9.95. ISBN: 978-0-7649-5047-6

Knowledge Cards is a series of educational flashcards for sale in book and gift shops. Recently, I ran across a set ready-name for *Names* readers: *From Peculiar to Oddville: A Quiz Deck of Bizarre Place Names*.

The back of the box asks, "What's in a name? Do names matter? If you've ever wondered where those strange names on the map come from, well, wonder no more." Inside the box are

forty-eight "quiz" cards about the names of unusual-sounding US places. We are asked, for example, "How odd is Oddville?" and flip the card over to learn that Oddville, Kentucky, was named by a postmaster establishing a post office on that site and needing to name the locale (this was 1851). His first choice was Mount Washington, but that was rejected — too many Washingtons in the state already. His solution was to swing the other way and ask if state officials would accept an "odd" name . . . which they did.

"What's so peculiar about Peculiar?" another card asks. The answer is that, like Oddville, the name is due to a frustrated postmaster, this one in Missouri in 1868. Apparently, there was already an Excelsior (the first choice); second and third and fourth choices were also rejected, so the postmaster finally said he would settle for anything peculiar. He got it.

We learn about towns whose strange names are the result of bad translating: the Native American Lenape named a spot *cheseh-oh-ke*, which became *Cheesequake*, in New Jersey. *Smackover*, in Arkansas, was a bad pronunciation of the French *Sumac-Couvert*. (There were many French settlers in the area, as well as sumac.)

Other names are the result of savvy business practices: *North Pole*, Alaska, so products from the town could say "Made in North Pole!" and *Frostproof*, Florida, a town renamed by real estate developers to lure citrus growers in 1886. *Hot Coffee*, Mississippi, was the site of a rest stop for travelers in the late 1800s and is now the name of the town built up around it.

Some names are not good business draws. *Dirty Sock Springs*, California, is called such because of its proximity to springs with a sulfuric odor.

The cards admit when a name's origins are ambiguous. *Gun Barrel City* in Texas, we learn, is named either for its straight roads (like a gun barrel) or less than straight, that is, lawless, behavior of its citizens during the 1920s and 1930s.

We find names that are misnomers: *Hurricane*, West Virginia, never had a hurricane. But surveyors in 1774 thought the angles of the trees looked like one had just struck. And *Ding Dong*, Texas, is not full of bells. *Ding* and *Dong* were actually the family names of two settlers.

My favorite is the town of *Zzyzx* in California. A radio evangelist named C. H. Springer settled in the Mojave Desert and wanted his new town's name to be the last word in the English language.

A note of caution, however: the cards provide no official sources for any of these name origins. Validating the stories in the deck would make a productive assignment for a linguistics class. The deck of cards leaves us with a "joker" card of odd names, the stories of which we need to dig up ourselves: *Zigzag*, Oregon; *Frankenstein*, Missouri; *Cookietown*, Oklahoma; *Round O*, South Carolina; and *Bar Nunn*, Wyoming. Here is another lesson plan.

Whether for teaching purposes, games at (nerdy) parties, or discussion items at the next faculty meeting, these cards are worth the small cost for some onomastic fun.

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