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Book Review

Viking Migration and Settlement in East Anglia: The Place-Name Evidence. By DAVID BOULTON. Oxford: Oxbow Books. 2023. Pp. xvi + 224. £39.95 (Paperback). ISBN 13: 978-1914427268.

All scholars stand on the shoulders of giants, but the students of Viking toponymics balance precariously on the tops of their predecessors' heads. David Boulton's monograph, an examination of the relationship between Old Norse place names and the Viking settlement of East Anglia, falls within a rich seam of previous studies. While no review can hope to adequately contextualise Boulton's book within so extensive a continuum of previous scholarship, nor to faithfully represent the wealth of examples included within, a number of significant comments emerge. *Viking Migration and Settlement in East Anglia* represents a substantial and significant contribution to this field, particularly in its consistent push-back against simple monocausal explanations. It is not without flaws, however, and the book remains convoluted in its structure and frustrating in both its complexity and its opacity.

At the heart of Boulton's study is a question familiar to historians of early medieval England and students of English onomastics alike: what can the place names of England tell us about the scale and nature of the Viking settlement? Despite this well-trodden ground, Boulton's Introduction (1–11) states the justification for his study clearly: we must afford East Anglia, and Suffolk and Essex in particular, the same attention as other areas of the so-called "Danelaw". Partial studies of this area have been previously conducted but this, it is claimed, is the first systematic study of the totality of the data. This is not entirely true. Boulton's introduction (10) makes clear that he has not systematically examined those place names found in pre-Conquest charters, nor has he exhaustively studied "minor" or field names. Concessions must of course be made for the

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understandable limits of scale imposed by a Ph.D. dissertation, but the book's entire *raison d'être* lies in the *totality* of its analysis.

Boulton's Ph.D. research produced a corpus of relevant place names, which underpin the current monograph; this is hosted online, and the link is provided at the beginning of the book (v). The unwieldiness of the situation soon becomes clear. The inquisitive reader encounters the place name *Baconsthorpe* on page 79 and is redirected, by way of an endnote, to page 106. Here the reader is redirected once again to page v, in search of the URL to access the online data, where the etymology of the name can be found (on page 20 of the online PDF). This online corpus comes to just 85 pages in length; to aid the reader, and to avoid the impermanence of digital records, it might easily have been appended to the monograph itself.

And herein lies a weakness at the heart of Boulton's monograph: examples are cited, but the mass of data is rarely easily accessible. The range of colourful maps throughout lends a degree of clarity, of course, but the sheer quantity of data that they attempt to convey often confuses the reader. Figure 3.4 (39) plots place name variation against soil type; the resultant cacophony of colours and symbols is no easy task to interpret, particularly for those with no background in geology. Indeed, the legend required to interpret this complex mix of settlement types does not accompany the map but appears three pages later, alongside another map. This is not the sole failing of cartographic clarity; throughout the book, the use of a scale is inconsistently applied. On page 80 we find an example that would have been valued throughout, an illustrative table of *-thorp* names throughout East Anglia, and the reader cries out for similar clarity throughout the monograph.

Chapter Two (12–33) sets the historical and archaeological stage for Boulton's enquiry, providing a synthesis of the pre-existing historiography of the Scandinavian settlement of England. This is of substantial utility, if perhaps excessively in-depth for most readers interested primarily in onomastics. On occasion it strays into inaccuracies: Viking raiding activity is first recorded in 789 and not 793 (12; see the ASC, Whitelock, 35); Guthrum submits to Alfred in 878 and not 880 (14) (see the ASC, Whitelock, 49–50); placing the return of "urbanism" to England in the ninth century ignores the *emporia* of the late seventh century (22; see Pestell 2011). It is somewhat surprising to find *Domesday Book* given so brief an introduction (19–20), in light of its centrality to Boulton's data set (see, in contrast, Baxter 2020). Indeed, the handling of *Domesday Book* is suspect throughout; reference is made not to the text but the *PASE* database alone (162) or not at all (187).

Chapter Three (34–50) begins with a clarification of the linguistic nature of the place names under consideration here. The majority of examples comprise two combined components—the specific (e.g., a personal name or a descriptive feature, as in *West-*) and the generic (e.g., *-thorpe*)—although single elements may appear in so-called "simplex" form (e.g., *Thorpe*). What then follows is an outline of the geographical and geological factors that determine settlement characteristics: soil type and fertility, river locations, and the survival and shape of modern parish boundaries. These factors, alongside the archaeological evidence outlined in the previous chapter, are the linchpin of Boulton's methodology: by examining archaeological and geographical/geological context can linguistic variation in place names be explained in terms of the origin, function, and development of a settlement? Are some types of Old Norse names predominantly applied to new Scandinavian settlements and others to pre-existing settlements renamed by their conquerors? Do place names that incorporate personal names ("anthronymics") signify a different type of settlement than those that incorporate other nouns or adjective ("non-anthronymics")?

Boulton's first three chapters are necessary footwork. They are also undoubtedly overlong: it is page 58, of a total 205, before we reach any new findings. The four chapters that follow each take a grouping of Scandinavian place names for closer examination. Chapter Four (51–75) focuses on those names compounded with the element *-by* ('dwelling'; 'land prepared for cultivation'). Boulton has spotted a convincing variation in use between anthronymic and non-anthronymic forms: those deriving from personal names are generally positioned at a further distance from rivers on more productive land, and they are afforded a greater value in *Domesday Book*, with a greater number of associated spokemen. The explanation for this variation, Boulton suggests, is chronological: toponymic *-by* settlements were established first by Scandinavian settlers, on unoccupied and therefore inferior land; those based on personal names were formed later, as a result of the division of larger pre-existing estates into smaller parcels, and took the name of their new Scandinavian owners.

The study of *-thorp* place names in Chapter Five (76–106) produces further evidence for a difference in origin for anthronymic and non-anthronymic place names. The majority of all *-thorp* examples are located on productive soil, and those derived from Old Norse personal names in close proximity to waterways are responsible for "primary parishes" and, unlike their non-anthronymic counterparts, show archaeological evidence of occupation before the Viking Age. A similar chronological model emerges as in the previous chapter: non-anthronymic sites may reflect Scandinavian expansion onto virgin unsettled land, with the anthronymic sites reflecting the renaming of pre-existing "English" settlements with Old Norse personal names, perhaps as the result of estate fragmentation.

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Chapter Six (107–131) covers a range of other Old Norse place name elements. Those with *-toft* cluster are primarily in Norfolk but illustrate no particular geographical concentration beyond this, perhaps a result of the early adoption of the term into Old English noted by Boulton. A number of elements appear to denote forests: *-lundr*, *-skogr*, *-eik*, and *-askr*. As these are also concentrated in Norfolk, Boulton suggests a possible correlation between these names and higher-status settlements. On archaeological and orthographic grounds, he suggests those place names with Old Norse *-þveit* represent new Viking settlements, the result of clearing trees for farmland. The chapter then closes with a substantial number of non-arboreal topographic place name elements. These are notably less frequent, but those that appear along the coast are more widely spread than many of their other Old Norse counterparts.

Chapter Seven (132–184) takes as its theme the so-called hybrid place names, which blend together Old Norse and Old English elements. Boulton notes the group of non-anthroponyic Old Norse terms coupled with *-tun* ('enclosure'; 'farmstead'), including the remarkable frequency of the name *Carlton*. He then turns to the far larger group of "Grimston hybrids": those place names that combine an Old Norse personal name with *-tun*. Two possible explanations have previously been posited for this class of name: the renaming of pre-existing settlements or the later fragmentation of larger estates. What Boulton provides, quite rightly, is not a solution to this debate but a necessary complication: geographical and archaeological evidence varies to such a degree that a single simple model seeking to explain the origin of these "Grimston hybrids" is unproduction.

Chapter Eight (185–200) draws together Boulton's findings, proposing a (somewhat convoluted) interpretative model to explain the variations in his onomastic data. A geographical variation is proposed: the northern section of East Anglia features a greater glut of Scandinavian place names than the south, framed by Boulton as a result of greater contact with Scandinavia, a longer-term experience of migration, and a greater degree of political autonomy. By synthesising broader anthropological models of migration and settlement, chronological variation is also explained. The presence of anthroponyics is associated with the early stages of pioneer migration, those of a non-anthronymic form with secondary migration, and hybridised place names with the final stages of assimilation.

I cannot help but feel that Oxbow Books have let Boulton down in some regards. Most qualms are relatively minor: pages 27–28 and 29–30 are printed in the wrong order, and the strangely large margins throughout add an oddly underpopulated feeling to the text. Less forgivable, however, is the monograph's front cover. The *vegvísir* stave that appears in the bottom right-hand corner of the cover is not Viking in origin, nor even medieval. Boulton has produced a work of serious scholarship pitched at an expert audience, and any book cover must reflect this.

The remainder of my specific onomastic quibbles are minor, and as follows:

- Among the list of place names likely deriving from bynames (52–3), the *Orm-* in *Ormesby* is surely far more convincingly interpreted as a forename than a byname, in which form it appears across England (Watts 2004, 452).
- The suggestion that the personal name in *Algarthorpe* is "unambiguously" Old Norse (82) ignores the fact that the Old English *Ælfgar* appears in the form *Algar* throughout pre-Conquest texts (*PASE*).
- It should be noted that Old English *mor* seems also to bear the meaning 'high waste ground, a mountain' (108; Bosworth and Toller, 607). If, in light of the Norfolk countryside, Boulton's suggested 'marshland' is presumably more likely in this case, the complexity of name-element translation should be noted.
- There are some notable inconsistencies of Old English orthography: *Æþelred* is styled with a *thorn* (35), but *Æthelflæd* is not (17).

Boulton reminds us throughout that he is dealing with a pool of data that is necessarily "diverse and complex" (169) or, less charitably, "patchy and incomplete" (168). The result is messy, often frustratingly so, but in that messiness lies the importance of the work. Monocausal explanations are consistently proved to be oversimplifications of the complex multi-stage processes of migration and assimilation. Boulton might have held the hand of his reader a little more, and this book will undoubtedly prove hard work for anybody who is not already deeply immersed in the world of Viking-age onomastics, but the end result is of substantial value.

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