

PONS-SANZ, Sara M. 2013: *The Lexical Effects of Anglo-Scandinavian Linguistic Contact on Old English*. Turnhout, Brepols. pp. xv + 589. ISBN: 978-2-503-53471-8. 145,14€.



THE STUDY OF THE SCANDINAVIAN ELEMENT IN OLD ENGLISH vocabulary has traditionally been considered unimportant, mainly because Norse-derived terms are scarce in Old English texts (see, for example, Björkman 1900: § 2), and also because they tend to represent the most typical types of borrowings, i.e., technical words directly associated with the culture of the source language speakers. Alistair Campbell put it this way in his influential work on the grammar of Old English (1959: § 566):

The great influx of Scandinavian words into OE caused by the Norse settlements in England is not fully reflected in OE texts, and the development of these words is mainly a branch of ME studies. The Scandinavian loan-words recorded in OE texts are mainly ones for ideas, persons, or things, which were either peculiarly Scandinavian, or of which the OE conception had been modified by contact with the Scandinavian civilization.

Because of these reasons, only a few studies have been devoted to the lexical effects of Anglo-Scandinavian linguistic contact on Old English, the majority of which consist of lists of words for whose elaboration scholars have relied on their immediate predecessors (see, for example, Hofmann 1955, Peters 1981, and Wollmann 1996).

Nevertheless, as the author of the book under review points out (Pons-Sanz 2013: 11–12), many of the Norse-derived terms attested in Old English texts are non-technical, which means that, despite the general opinion, they already evince some of the features that make Norse-derived terms in Middle English so important for the study of the history of the English language. Further, since the studies that address the issue in question rely too heavily on previous works, the doubtful identification of some Old English words as Norse-derived has been uncritically repeated

again and again (Pons-Sanz 2013: 13).<sup>1</sup> It is necessary, therefore, to pay renewed attention to the issue of Scandinavian influence on Old English vocabulary. Pons-Sanz's excellent book furnishes a brand-new study of Scandinavian loan-words in Old English that remedies some of the old deficiencies of the field. First, the author submits to philological scrutiny the Norse derivation of the Old English words that have been repeatedly listed as Scandinavian loans. Second, she does not limit her study to a mere list, but also assesses the textual context of the Norse-derived terms in order to gauge their level of integration into the Old English lexicon. The result is a substantial contribution that will influence future research into the linguistic contact between Old English and Old Norse.

Pons-Sanz's first task, the re-examination of the traditional lists of Norse-derived terms in Old English, is carried out in chapter 2, "Etymological Study," where she discusses the Norse derivation of all the Old English words that she accepts as Scandinavian borrowings. For this discussion, she relies mainly (but not only) on the phonological and morphological structures of the words in question, on the correct assumption that phonology and inflectional morphology furnish the most dependable tools for etymological identification. The kind of philological analysis that the reader will find in chapter 2 can be exemplified by Pons-Sanz's discussion of the Old English noun *sweġen*, "young man." In classical Icelandic, there exists a similar word with the same meaning, *sveinn*, descended from Viking Age Norse *\*suainar*,<sup>2</sup> from Proto-Germanic *\*swainaz*. The Proto-Germanic diphthong *\*/ai/* became */ai/* in Viking Age Norse (later */ei/* in classical Icelandic) and */a:/*

---

<sup>1</sup> The only exceptions to this tendency are Fischer 1989, McKinney 1994, and Pons-Sanz 2007. These studies, however, are much more limited in their scopes than the present book.

<sup>2</sup> In Viking Age Norse, this word is recorded only in accusative singular, *suain*, and nominative plural *sueinar* (see Pons-Sanz 2013: 30).

in Old English. Thus, the Old English cognate of classical Icelandic *sveinn* is *swān*, “herdsman, man.” The word *sweġen*, which seems at first a phonological rarity in Old English, can be made sense of if the spelling ⟨eg⟩ is assumed to be the Old English adaptation of the Viking Age Norse diphthong /ai/ as it appears in \**suainar* (see Pons-Sanz 2013: 28–31). Since the phonological structure of this Old English word can be accounted for only by reference to the linguistic history of Old Norse, it is more probable to regard it as an Old Norse borrowing than to consider it an inexplicable exception to the phonological regularities of Old English. This procedure leads Pons-Sanz to exclude from her list of Norse-derived words some terms that have traditionally been considered Scandinavian loans (for instance, *hæfen(e)*, “haven, port;” *wrang*, “hold of a ship”). These are grouped in Appendix III, “Terms and Structures which Are More Likely to Be Native,” one of the most interesting parts of Pons-Sanz’s book.

Chapter 3, “Lexico-Semantic Study,” analyzes the degree of integration of the previously identified Norse-derived terms into the Old English lexicon. Firstly, the Scandinavian loan-words are classified according to grammatical categories and lexico-semantic fields. This classification reveals (1) that nouns are the most numerous borrowings (Pons-Sanz 2013: 126); and (2) that technical terms, especially legal words, outnumber non-technical words (Pons-Sanz 2013: 128–129). Secondly, Pons-Sanz presents a series of tables showing the textual and lexico-semantic distributions of the Norse-derived terms recorded in Old English. On the basis of that information, the author explores the position of the Norse loans within their lexico-semantic fields in terms of coreness or periphery (Pons-Sanz 2013: 123). Thus, the textual distribution of a Norse-derived noun like *sceġð*, “warship,” which appears not only in texts from the Scandinavianized areas and which ended up referring not only to Scandinavian ships, indicates that it is a core term of its lexico-semantic family (Pons-Sanz 2013: 201–205). A word like *sweġen*, however, recorded only in the *Peterborough Chronicle*,

is classified as a peripheral term within its lexico-semantic field (Pons-Sanz 2013: 220–221).

Chapter 4, “The Norse-Derived Terms in their Texts: Some Case Studies,” analyses the Norse-derived terms in particular texts, such as the D and E versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or Ælfric of Eynsham’s works, among others, in order to explore not only what the texts can tell us about the terms, but also what the terms can tell us about the texts. As the author demonstrates, this kind of reciprocal approach deepens our understanding of the dialectal distribution of some Scandinavian loan-words and also helps us establish the dialectal origin of the texts in which they are recorded (Pons-Sanz 2013: 271–272). The methodology followed by the author in this chapter is the same as she has applied in previous works (see, for example, Pons-Sanz 2007, 2008). In this respect, the book under review points the way to how the study of Norse-derived terms in specific texts will be carried out in the future. A recent reviewer of Pons-Sanz’s book has lamented that “there is no mention of *Beowulf* in the six hundred pages of this book” (see Frank 2014). This is a wise choice, however, since, as R. D. Fulk has pointed out, the indubitable authenticity of the proper names in *Beowulf* tells against a post-Viking dating of the poem (see Fulk 1982: 343). Indeed, Neidorf 2014 has comprehensively reviewed the philological evidence and demonstrated that a date of composition in the first half of the eighth century, well before the onset of the Danish invasions, is exceedingly probable.

The final part of the book comprises a short chapter with the author’s concluding remarks and four appendices (the first listing all the Norse loans in Old English, the second all the Old English texts where those loans are recorded, and the fourth containing a list of early Middle English Norse-derived words). As Pons-Sanz states (2013: 273), she “has attempted to present a comprehensive study of the Norse-derived vocabulary in Old English.” In the present reviewer’s opinion, her monograph is in fact the most comprehensive study of Scandinavian loans in Old English to

date, and as such, it will be a milestone in its field. The rigorous philological analysis of the Norse-derived words that the reader will find in the first part of the book is complemented by the extensive survey of their textual and lexico-semantic distributions in the second. It is precisely this original double approach that allows so far unknown insights into the Anglo-Scandinavian sociolinguistic contact during the Anglo-Saxon period. This penetrating book will be of interest to Anglo-Saxonists and historians of the English language alike.

Rafael J. PASCUAL  
Universidad de Granada

REFERENCES

- Björkman, E. 1900: *Scandinavian Loanwords in Middle English*. Vol. 1. Halle, Niemeyer.
- Campbell, A. 1959: *Old English Grammar*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Fischer, A. 1989: Lexical Change in Late Old English: From *ǣ* to *lagu*. In A. Fischer ed. *The History and the Dialects of English: Festschrift for Eduard Kolb*. Heidelberg, Winter: 103–114.
- Frank, R. rev. 2014: Pons-Sanz, S. M. (2013) *The Lexical Effects of Anglo-Scandinavian Linguistic Contact on Old English*. In *The Medieval Review* 14.05.02.
- Fulk, R. D. 1982: Dating *Beowulf* to the Viking Age. *Philological Quarterly* 61: 341–359.
- Hofmann, D. 1955: *Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*. København, Munksgaard.
- McKinney, P. R. 1994: *To munde us sylfum: A Semantic Study of the Old English Legal Terms for Protection*. (Ph.D. dissertation). East Lansing, Michigan State University.

- Neidorf, L. 2014: *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment*. Cambridge, D. S. Brewer.
- Peters, H. 1981: Zum skandinavischen Lehngut im Altenglischen. *Sprachwissenschaft* 6: 85–124.
- Pons-Sanz, S. M. 2007: *Norse-Derived Vocabulary in Late Old English Texts: Wulfstan's Works, a Case Study*. Odense, University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Pons-Sanz, S. M. 2008: Norse-Derived Terms and Structures in *The Battle of Maldon*. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 107: 421–444.
- Pons-Sanz, S. M. 2013: *The Lexical Effects of Anglo-Scandinavian Linguistic Contact on Old English*. Turnhout, Brepols.
- Wollmann, A. 1996: Scandinavian Loanwords in Old English. In H. F. Nielsen & L. Schøsler eds. *The Origins and Development of Emigrant Languages: Proceedings of the Second Rasmus Rask Colloquium, Odense University, November 1994*. Odense, Odense University Press: 215–242.

