

Latin Loans in Old English and Finnish Loans in Modern English: Can We Distinguish Statistics from Myth?

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1. Introduction

One of the dogmas that we teach during the history of English lectures and seminars is that Old English went through several waves of lexical borrowing from Latin, that these loans are divided into continental and insular, vulgar and learned, that they have particular phonological features and belong to particular fields of lexis, etc. (Serjeantson 1935; Kastovsky 1992, etc.). While these distinctions are certainly valid for periodization and classification purposes, statistical analysis has so far been largely absent in the discussions of the Old English Latinate vocabulary, even though a cautionary remark concerning the third, post-Christianisation, period by Barbara Strang has been available to students of historical lexicography for about half a century: “Most of these loans, however, remain very much on the surface. They were borrowed from books by scholars, and remained, while they lasted, rather technical terms...” (1970: 314).

I would therefore like to challenge the accepted conception with corpus data and statistical evaluation. I will go through six Latin loanwords and investigate whether they can be claimed to belong to Old English vocabulary in terms of their frequencies and assimilation, or should they more properly be discussed as instances of translation solutions and author- or text-specific lexicon features. To substantiate these findings, I do a similar study of 12 Modern English words that were reportedly borrowed from Finnish.

The outline of this article is threefold: I will briefly introduce the traditional account of the three stages of Latin borrowings and highlight its weak points; next I will exemplify the same problems in present-day contexts and languages; and these two discussions will merge in the third part, in which I will try to solve some of the Old English lexicographic issues by means of contemporary electronic resources: the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *Dictionary of Old English*, and the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*.

2. Traditional accounts

Following Pogatscher (1888) and Serjeantson’s (1935) *A History of Foreign Words in English*, Latin loanwords in Old English are divided into three periods (cf. Kastovsky 1992):

- 1) Continental loanwords borrowed before c. 400–450 AD, which are separated from the next group by the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon settlement in Britain;
- 2) Early insular loanwords borrowed from spoken British Latin and/or Celtic between c. 450 and c. 600, whose timeframe is arrival in Britain and Christianisation of the Anglo-Saxons;
- 3) Later loanwords borrowed from written Latin after c. 600–650.

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The first period accounts for some 170 lexical items borrowed orally through trade and military contact with Latin speakers. The examples of these words are plants and animals: *piper* “pepper”, *rædic* “radish”, *catt(e)* “cat”; household items: *cyse* “cheese”, *win* “wine”, *candel* “candle”, *cycene* “kitchen”; building materials: *tigle* “tile”, *weall* “wall”; dress: *belt* “belt”, *pæll* “robe”; military and commercial terms: *camp* “field, battle”, *stræt* “road”, *mil* “mile”, *pund* “pound”, *mangere* “merchant”, etc. These loans are typically attested in several Germanic dialects. Among their cognates we find present-day German *Pfeffer*, *Katze*, *Käse*, *Küche*, *Strasse*, and so on.

The second period is supposedly responsible for about 110 lexical items adopted from British Latin or from the local Celtic language, Brythonic. These are words like plants and agriculture: *leahtric* “lettuce”, *senap* “mustard”; household items: *oele* “oil”, *cest* “box”, *pott* “pot”; religion and learning: *mægester* “master”, *græf* “stylus”, *mynece* “nun”, etc.

Finally the third period is about 150 items borrowed from written Classical Latin through the educated clergy, these being military and legal terms: *consul* “consul”, *coorta* “cohort”; music and poetry: *citere* “cither”, *fipele* “fiddle”, *fers* “verse”, *chor* “dance, choir, chorus”; plants: *bete* “beetroot”, *lilie* “lily”, *laur* “laurel”; animals: *delfin* “dolphin”, *pard* “leopard”, *cancer* “crab”; religion and learning: *alter* “altar”, *cleric* “clergyman”, *demon* “demon”, *paradis* “paradise”, etc.

All the three groups contain mainly nouns that can be broadly described as cultural terms, which document civilisational differences between the source culture and receiving culture, and the spheres of life in which the two cultures have most intense contact.

This account of Latin loanwords in Old English is, however, not unproblematic (cf. Gneuss 1993; Durkin forthcoming). Its weak points lie in the dialectal distribution of the loans, their dating, survival rates, and frequencies, as well as in the text types that document both the loans themselves and their counterparts, loan-translations of all kinds. To be more specific, the traditional account tends to neglect tribal and dialectal division within Old English. Among the peoples that participated in the conquest and settlement of Britain were the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and probably also Frisians, Danes and Franks. Whether all of them were exposed to the same degree of contact with continental Latin and British Latin is doubtful, considering the fact that both their settlement in Britain and the earlier wanderings on the Continent took several centuries. Moreover, Old English is best documented in its West Saxon dialect. Whether the same lists of words can equally be applied to central and Northern dialects is again not without doubt (cf. Durkin forthcoming).

Dating, as has been shown, is based on historical events, which are supposed to correspond chronologically to the pace of linguistic change. This is particularly difficult to accept when we try to distinguish between continental and early insular loans, which may share the same phonological characteristics (cf. Wollmann 1990, 1993; Gneuss 1993; Durkin forthcoming). The survival rate of loanwords, that is, their continuous attestation in and after Old English, is also an important, often neglected, parameter. Word frequencies are also conspicuously lacking in traditional discussions, so that it is often impossible to figure out whether scholars are dealing with real loans or hapax legomena.

Further, lexical borrowings should be distinguished from loan-translations and calques (Gneuss 1955, 1993). For example, *gospel* is a disguised loanword that consists of native English elements—*god* and *spell*—translating the Greek *euaggelion*. We should also remember that many of the so-called loanwords come down to us only in glosses and glossaries, not in running Old English texts, which cannot attest to their wide currency. And finally, with glosses and translations constituting a major portion of Old English data,¹ it is sometimes very difficult to set apart genuine loanwords from instances of code-switching, and educated written words from translation conventions. Therefore ideally, we have to reconsider all the 500 or so (reportedly) Latin loans separately, taking into account as many of the outlined parameters as possible. Before I move on to the six individual case studies, in which these problems are exemplified and highlighted, I would like to demonstrate some of them with present-day data, to take a look at the life cycles of cultural terms today: their first attestation, integration and semantic change in Modern English.

¹ The *DOEC*'s word count of surviving Old English is a little more than 3 million words, of which 726,000 (about a quarter) are glosses, and the rest translations from and adaptations of Latin texts and sources, with remarkably few exceptions.

3. Finnish loans in Modern English

Finnish-based lexis in Modern English offers a comfortable comparandum set. Few in number, these words have for the most part entered English in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. The extensive corpus resources for Modern English should make the task of documenting them uncomplicated, it would seem. Accordingly, the “Language of Origin” search tool produces a total of 12 loanwords from Finnish in the *OED*:

- 1) *essive* “the designation of one of the fifteen cases of Finnish, a declension expressing a continuous state of being”, with 3 attestations between 1890 and 1924 in books and articles on Finnish grammar;
- 2) *kantele* “a form of zither used in Finland”, with 3 attestations between 1921 and 1969: two in musical reviews and one in a novel set in Finland;
- 3) *laitakarite* “a white rhombohedral selenide and sulphide of bismuth”, with 3 attestations between 1959 and 1968 in journals on mineralogy;
- 4) *markka* “the principal monetary unit of Finland, consisting of 100 penniä”, with 6 attestations between 1894 and 1992: two in descriptions of Finland and four in articles on economics;
- 5) *penni* “a monetary unit of Finland ... equal to one-hundredth of markka”, with 4 attestations between 1881 and 2003: two in articles on economics, one in a book on numismatics, and one more in a description of Finland (also quoted s.v. *markka*);
- 6) *pulka* [sic] “a Lapp one-person travelling-sledge”, with 11 attestations between 1746 and 1998 in travelogues and articles on tourism in Finland;
- 7) *puukko* “a traditional Finnish knife”, with 5 attestations between 1925 and 2005: three in articles on tourism in Finland and two in novels either set in Finland or containing encounters with Finns;
- 8) *rapakivi* “a form of granite originally identified in southern Finland”, with 7 attestations between 1784 and 1996 in journals on mineralogy;
- 9) *runo* “in Finland: a short poem or song on an epic or legendary subject”, with 5 attestations between 1780 and 2007 in articles on ethnology and musicology;
- 10) *rya* “a Finnish and Scandinavian type of knotted pile rug”, derived from Finnish *ryijy* and its etymon Swedish *rya*, with 6 attestations of *rya* (one of them saying explicitly “Swedish rya”) and 2 attestations of *ryijy* in articles on Scandinavian textiles;
- 11) *Salpausselkä* “each of two long, wide end moraines in southern Finland that are regarded as marking the last readvance of the ice sheet at the end of the Pleistocene”, with 5 attestations between 1923 and 1968 in articles on geology;
- 12) *sauna* “a bath-house or bathroom in which the Finnish steam bath is taken”, with 10 attestations between 1881 and 1978: three in travelogues, three in descriptions of Finland, and four in other contexts (discussed in more detail below) (*OED*, s.vv.).

Even this brief outline suggests that most of these terms occur in explicitly Finnish contexts; moreover, they all tend to be restricted to particular professional domains of lexis: *essive* to linguistics, *kantele* and *runo* to musicology, *laitakarite* and *rapakivi* to mineralogy, *markka* and *penni* to economics, *pulka*, *puukko*, and *sauna* to tourism, *rya/ryijy* to textiles, and *Salpausselkä* to geology. That is to say, they are borrowed into the various professional registers. Whether or not they later on spread to Modern English more generally can be further ascertained using corpora.

I checked the record of these twelve words in the corpora available through Brigham Young University. It turned out that six of them—*essive*, *laitakarite*, *penni*, *pulka*, *rapakivi*, and *Salpausselkä*—were not attested in either the *Corpus of Historical American English* (*COHA*, 400 million words from 1810 to 2009), the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (*COCA*, 450 million words from 1990 to 2012), or the *British National Corpus* (*BNC*, 100 million words from the 1980s to 1993). The other six had the following distributions:

- 2) *kantele*: 5 attestations in the *COCA*, of these 3 occur in the context of Finnish culture, the fourth in a list of string instruments;
- 4) *markka*: 7 attestations in the *COCA* and 20 in the *BNC*, all of these referring to “Finnish markka” in the context of currency exchange rates and economic reports;
- 7) *puukko*: 3 attestations in the *COCA*, all referring to the specific type of Finnish knife;
- 9) *runo*: 9 attestations in the *COCA*, all of them featuring in a novel set in Finland, *Night of Summer, Night of Autumn* (1992) by Paula Ivaska Robbins;
- 10) *rya*: 1 attestation in *COHA*, in a description of a supposedly stylish home design in a short story by Diane Ackerman; the form *ryijy* is not attested in the corpora;
- 12) *sauna*: 210 attestations (180 in the singular and 30 in the plural) in the *COHA* (from 1944 to 2009), 655 attestations (541 singular and 114 plural) in the *COCA*, and 328 attestations (294 singular and 34 plural) in the *BNC*.

All in all, we have six phantom loanwords (*essive*, *laitakarite*, *penni*, *pulka*, *rapakivi*, and *Salpaukelkä*) restricted to their professional registers and to the *OED* citations, four Finnish-culture specific terms (*kantele*, *markka*, *puukko*, and *runo*), and one lexical borrowing attested both synchronically and diachronically (*sauna*). Further, *kantele*, *puukko*, and *runo* are limited to American English, with *runo* being characteristic of one particular author. *Markka* and *sauna*, on the other hand, are much more frequent in British English, with *markka* featuring prominently in European and British economics until 2002, when it was replaced by the euro. In American English, though, *markka* seems to be better integrated morphologically, since the *COCA* records 3 occurrences of plural *markkas* formed according to the English model and one occurrence of plural *markkaa* formed according to the Finnish model (partitive singular), while all three plural forms in the *BNC* are Finnish-based—*markkaa*. Although the total number of attestations of *markka* is limited to 27, the word may have been known, at least passively, to wider audiences of English-speakers through economic reports in the media before 2002. With 1193 attestations in the three corpora, *sauna* seems to be the only instance that can be safely classified as a lexical borrowing. Let us consider its history in more detail.

3.1. Sauna in Finnish and English

Originally Finnish *sauna* meant “a small cottage, cabin, lodge” or even “a pit-house” (*NEA* and *SSA*, s.v.). These pit-houses were so slow to heat in winter that people would throw water over the stones of the fireplace to produce steam and to give a sensation of warmth. At some point those who were a bit better-off transferred saunas into separate rooms or even separate buildings. The sauna-house was the place where women gave birth, the dead were prepared for burial, and once people stopped living there, spirits moved in and made it their little temple. So the life of the Finns revolved around the sauna, which was not only a place for washing and bathing, but also one where they could smoke meat, brew beer, and even practice simple medical operations such as cupping and bleeding. Sauna was supposed to be a general treatment for depression and almost any infirmity (Helamaa 1976). Every farmstead had a sauna, and the only hindrance to the continuity of the long uninterrupted tradition was the late-nineteenth–early-twentieth-century migration to towns. Rural traditions are easily lost in urbanisation, and the sauna came under threat when moved to new types of dwellings built of new materials designed to accommodate larger numbers of inhabitants. The quality of the sauna decreased and the number of saunas per capita dropped. In the 1920s and 30s most of the urban population had to use public saunas, until the National Board of Housing stipulated that houses whose construction was financed by the state must have at least one sauna for every 20–35 housing units. Today every block of flats has one or two common saunas, and every detached or semidetached house has a sauna of its own. Official statistics has is that in late 1970s Finland had about one million saunas, with its population being close to five million (Janhunen 1976).

The social role of the sauna is central to Finnish family and business relations, which was formulated very emphatically in his presidential address to one of the international Sauna Congresses in Helsinki in 1974 by Urho Kekkonen: “[The sauna] is a great leveller: there are no ministers, VIPs, labourers, or lumberjacks on the sauna platform, only sauna mates. For me—as for most other Finns—

the sauna is a way of life. In its heat I forget the workaday stress and can meet my friends and acquaintances” (Kekkonen 1976).

In the United States, saunas were first introduced in the late 19th century with the increase of Finnish immigration to Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and to the far west regions of Washington and Oregon (Kaups 1976). So this story is actually similar to the one about rural migration to town back in Finland, except that here the word and concept are introduced to a new language and country. The sauna itself continued to be a local feature of Finnish communities living in the north of the US, until the arrival of the Finnish Olympic team and its saunas at the Squaw Valley Olympic games in 1960 and the much-publicised visit of Vice President Lyndon Johnson to Finland in 1963. Since the 1960s the sauna has been promoted as a means to physical fitness and weight reduction. Exotic massage saunas were established soon afterwards, but many of those were closed by municipal authorities in the 1970s on prostitution charges (Choslowsky 1976).

Let us now consider how this story features in linguistic records. The *OED* defines the word *sauna* as “a bath-house or bathroom in which the Finnish steam bath is taken; the steam bath itself, taken in very hot steam produced by throwing water on to heated stones” (s.v.). The first attestation of *sauna* is dated to 1881. “One of the most characteristic institutions of the country is the *Sauna* (bath-house), called *Badstuga* in Swedish” (P.B. Du Chaillu *Land Midnight Sun* II.xvii.206). This comes from a book *The Land of the Midnight Sun* by a French-American traveller Paul du Chaillu, in which he describes his adventures in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Lapland. So *sauna* here is part of the description of an exotic country with strange traditions. Can we claim that *sauna* was borrowed into English at this point? It depends to an extent on the circulation of *The Land of the Midnight Sun*, but I suspect that the word did not ring a bell to anyone but du Chaillu’s readers. Several more attestations of this sort follow until we come across *The Daily Telegraph* report on 18 December 1939, “The Finnish soldiers ... continue to take their celebrated “sauna” steam baths wherever they are stationed” (*Daily Tel.* 18 Dec. 1/5). Several weeks before the publication of this issue Finland was attacked by the Soviet Union and forced into the so-called Winter War, which lasted until March 1940. On account of its military aggression, the Soviet Union was expelled from the League of Nations on 14 December 1939. This brought Finland and her troops to the media spotlight, and, as we can see, after the Berlin Olympics three years earlier the journalists already claim that the sauna is “celebrated”. It is still essentially a Finnish thing though, and it is only in 1976 that we get an example like “The sauna-like conditions of the Oxford court during the [last] five weeks” (*Times* 22 July 4/4). This one is finally set outside Finland, it shows a bit of English derivation, and it is used to refer to the unbearably hot summer of 1976.² A little less than a hundred years and a lot of European and World history goes into this. The *COHA* illustrates the same story statistically (Figure 1). We can see here how closely the reports of the Finnish Olympic team and its saunas at the Squaw Valley Olympics are followed by the rise in frequencies in the 1960s, and the spread of sauna institutions in the US is paralleled by the first frequency peak in the 1970s. It is indeed only at this point that the loan becomes morphologically integrated. While plural forms (*saunas*) feature consistently only from 1970s onwards, compound words also emerge: *sauna-approach*, *sauna-bath*, *sauna-equipped*, *sauna-hot*, *sauna-like*, *sauna-style*, and *sauna-suit*.

² I am grateful to Professor Margaret Tudeau-Clayton for supplying eyewitness information about the summer of 1976 in connection with this quotation.

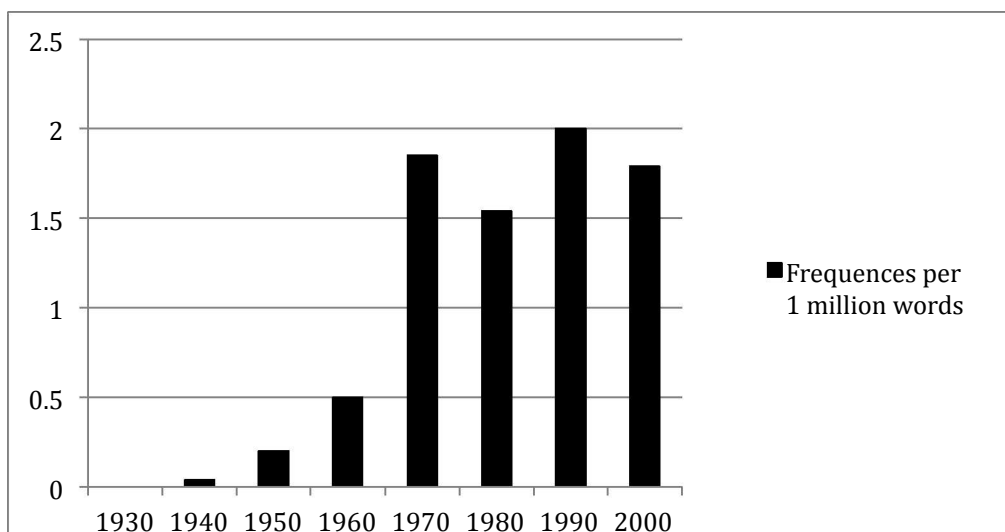


Figure 1. *sauna(s)* in the *COHA* database.

What we have seen so far is that dictionary criteria for classifying a word as a loan are enough for a lay query, but too unspecific for a linguistic study. Dictionary statistics may turn out to be a myth, in that lists of loanwords are misleading because they do not give us the information about the actual usage; similarly, first attestations are misleading because they often document the use of a culture-specific term in the source culture rather than the receiving culture. Word frequencies, on the other hand, can give us a more reliable picture that can be ascertained still further with historical and cultural data. Integration of loans is only partly documented in dictionaries. For example, the *OED* records the phonologically integrated pronunciation of *sauna* /'sɔ:nə/ but does not comment on its morphological integration and the emergence of derivatives. The distinctions between British and American, and professional and general usage are also absent from dictionary entries (at least in these 12 cases).

Concluding this section, I would like to suggest that in the list of 12 words that the *OED* attributes to Finnish origin only the last one can be classified as a lexical loan into Modern English. This is based on the following criteria:

- 1) *sauna* is a gap-filler in the receiving cultures, it introduces them to a new concept of a bath,
- 2) *sauna* is integrated morphologically and phonologically;
- 3) *sauna* has English-based derivatives;
- 4) *sauna* is frequent in the corpora;
- 5) *sauna* is used in non-Finnish and non-professional contexts.

I am now going to apply these to the Old English data.

4. A reappraisal of six Latinate words in Old English

Let us now have a closer look at six Latin loanwords in more detail. In these case studies, I will only examine words of the third period, insular learned loans, taking into account what are reportedly two terms for animals, two military terms, and two musical terms. I will try to solve some of the lexicographic issues by means of contemporary electronic resources: the *Dictionary of Old English* and the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*.

4.1. *coorta*

Among military terms, Old English is said to have borrowed Latin *cohors*, *cohortis* > Old English *coorta* to mean “cohort” (Serjeantson 1935: 281). Thus, we may assume that Old English armies just like Roman legions were subdivided into smaller units of about a hundred men. I do not doubt that such subdivision is a logical and strategically useful thing; what I do doubt though that this military term was really used by the Anglo-Saxons. The *DOE* records a mere 2 occurrences of *coorta*, both in the genitive

plural, both in the Old English *Orosius*. Indeed it refers to a “cohort, a subdivision of a Roman legion” (*DOE*, s.v.), but a closer look at the context in which the term is used reveals that it is not an integrated feature of Old English lexicon.

- (1) he [Pompeius] hæfde eahta & eahtatig **coortana**, þæt we nu truman hatað (Or 5 12.127.13)
 “Pompeius had 88 **cohorts**, which we now call trumas (troops)”

Both times *coortana* is used to describe the Roman army, a foreign word in a foreign context, just the way *sauna* was used until 1940s. Moreover, we are told that the Anglo-Saxons have an equivalent (or similar) military unit, *truma*, by means of which *coorta* is explained. I believe that with only two attestations in early Old English and the existence of the equivalent term *truma*, *coorta* is a weak candidate for representing a loanword in this period.

4.2. *consul*

With Latin *consul* > Old English *consul* we seem to be on a safer ground. Not only is Old English *consul* recorded as a Latin loan in Serjeantson’s list (1935: 27, 30, 281), but it also has 225 occurrences in the *DOEC*. Of these 220 are again found in the Old English *Orosius*, and the remaining 5 are in the Old English translations of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* and of Boethius’s *The Consolation of Philosophy* (both from Alfredian canon, translated within the same educated circle at the court of Alfred). The word is further attested in Ælfric and in glosses. According to the *OED*, *consul* is the “title of the two annually elected magistrates who exercised conjointly supreme authority in the Roman Republic” (*OED*, s.v.), a practice that has no parallels in Anglo-Saxon England. Accordingly, it has to be explained to the Old English audience:

- (2) him ða Romane æfter þæm ladteowas gesetton, þe hie **consulas** heton (Or 2 2.40.12)
 “The Romans later on appointed leaders whom they called **consuls**”

- (3) ða Romaniscan leoda ... hæfdon him **consulas**, þæt we cweðað rædboran (ÆJudgEp 15)
 “The Romans had **consuls** whom we call rædboras (counsellors)”

There is a hundred years’ difference between these two quotations, yet in both of them the term *consul* has to be explained: by means of *ladteow* “leader” including “military leader, general”, which actually comes closer to Latin *dux* or *ductor*, in the earlier text, and by means of *rædbora*, literally “advice-bearer, counsellor” in the later text, both being a bit too far from the idea of elected power shared by two persons. This is not to suggest, however, that a poorly understood concept and word cannot be borrowed; rather, I think, that in spite of the good record of 225 occurrences, *consul* is nevertheless an exotic word, hardly known to anyone but the most educated.

4.3. *cancer*

The next item on the list, Latin *cancer* > Old English *cancer*, seems to me to represent a misclassification. According to Serjeantson (1935: 32, 285) Latin *cancer* is borrowed into Old English as *cancer* (the second *c* being pronounced as /k/ or /tʃ/) among other educated loans belonging to the category of animals. Her classification suggests that *cancer* means “crab” in the first place (also in Kastovsky 1992: 308), and the medical sense “cancer” comes second. The *DOE* records a total of 26 occurrences of this lexical item in several texts with different datings and provenance (s.v.). So frequency-wise it may seem again that the item is well documented, and we can safely assume that *cancer* “crab” is a borrowing from Latin. A closer look at the *DOE* data reveals that *cancer* is mainly attested in medical recipes, which provide various ways of treating ulcers or cankers, as in this example:

(4) wiþ **cancre** nim gate geallan & hunig, meng to somne begea emfela, do on þæt dolh (Lch II (3) 36.1.1)

“for **canker** take cornel juice and honey, mix both in equal proportion and put on the wound”

The dictionary further remarks that *cancer* is not necessarily a malignant disease, so the sense “cancer” in Serjeantson seems to be dictated by the present-day meaning. Most importantly, however, the sense “crab” does not come out from the data at all, so that the animal list seems to be in need of revision.

4.4. *pelican*

Pelekan is a Greek word supposedly borrowed into Old English via Latin *pel(l)icanus* > Old English *pelican*. We would think that the pelican is a large aquatic bird with a long beak and throat pouch for catching prey. Serjeantson (1935: 54, 285) thought along the same lines for she interpreted it Old English *pelican* as “pelican”. In the early Middle Ages, however, the pelican is “a bird of uncertain identity, associated with the wilderness” (*OED*, s.v.). It refers chiefly to the bird in Psalm 101.7. In his commentary on this Psalm St Jerome (*Tract. in Psalmos* (G. Morin *Anecdota Maredsolana* III.2 (1897) 178)) “says that there are two kinds of *pelicanus*, one the waterbird, the other that of the wilderness” (*OED*, s.v.). Later on the pelican becomes an important Christian symbol. As I already mentioned, it is not impossible to borrow something you don’t understand or have never seen, medieval texts are full of tigers and elephants, let alone dragons, that were never seen by anyone in England. The pelican case is somewhat different though.

It is recorded only once outside glosses, in *Paris Psalter* we find:

(5) Ic geworden eom **pellicane** gelic,

se on westene wunað (PPs 101.5)

“I have become like a pelican / who lives in the wilderness”

This verse of the poetic translation of the Psalter corresponds to *Similis factus sum pellicano in solitudine/solitudinis* (Ps 101.7) in the Vulgate. There are 12 more attestations of the word in Psalter glosses and 2 in glossaries in the *DOEC*, in which *pelicanus* is glossed as (cf. Lass 1994: 195):

stangella “stone-yeller”
wanfota “a bird with dark feet”
fugel “bird”
nihthraefn “night-raven”
dufedoppa “diving diver/duck”
gushafoc “goshawk”

The glossators were obviously confused by St Jerome’s commentary and interpreted *pelicanus* both as a water bird and a carnivore. But the one who had not read the commentary produced the most astounding gloss

felle hundes “dog’s skin”

calquing into Old English what he believed to be a compound *PELLI-CANO*. Thus this gloss reads (PsGIE (Harsley) 101.7): “I have become like dog’s skin”, which is perhaps a very powerful metaphor, but, in terms of etymology, totally misguided.

It has been suggested that *wanfota* is a possible emendation for the verse of the *Paris Psalter*, as it fits the line much better than *pellicane* in terms of metre and alliteration (Robinson 1982: 397):

Ic geworden eom wanfotan gelic

In which case the only attestation of *pelican* in the running Old English text may be a case of unconscious code-switching on the part of the translator.

4.5. *citere*

Another Greek word that enters Old English via Latin is *cythara* > Old English *citere*. According to Serjeantson (1935: 283) and Strang (1970: 338), *citere* means “cither”, that is a stringed instrument of mandolin shape with flat back. This definition, however, is anachronistic, as the instruments of this type reached England only some 300 years later. The *DOE* records 28 occurrences of *citere* defining it as “lyre, harp”. Frequency-wise it seems that we have enough evidence. But alas, *citere* occurs only in glosses to Psalter. In the Latin of the Vulgate it is King David who plays the psalterium and cythara, glossed in Old English as *hearpe* and *citere* respectively. Further, over half of the glossators translated *cythara* as *hearpe*, thus glossing *psalterium* and *cythara* as *hearpe* and *hearpe*, which brings us to an instrument of the type found in the Sutton Hoo burial, an instrument with two arms whose strings are attached between its yoke and cross-bar. Outside Psalter verses, King David is praised as the best harper (*hearpere*), which is in line with contemporary reconstructions of Psalter instruments. Jeremy Montagu suggests that both *psalterium* and *cythara* in Psalms 33, 92 and 144 refer to lyre-type instruments that differ somewhat in size and shape, and are probably played differently (Montagu 2002: 44–45). Thus *citere* in Old English could be the same as *hearpe*, referring exclusively to one of the lyres of the Psalter.

4.6. *fiðele*

Finally, Serjeantson (1935: 283) reports that Old English **fiðele* derives from Latin *vitula* and its meaning is “fiddle”. There are in fact no attestations of *fiðele* in the entire *DOEC*, and Serjeantson’s claim is based on a reconstruction. The *DOE* does record *fiþela* glossing Latin *fidicen* (1 occurrence) and *fiþelere* likewise, glossing *fidicen* (2 occurrences), with the meaning of both forms being given as “fiddler, one who plays a stringed instrument” (*DOE* s.v.). Further, there is one occurrence of *fiþelestre* glossing *fidicina* “(female) fiddler, one who plays a stringed instrument”. These four fiddle-players are found in glosses and in Ælfric’s *Grammar* at the point where he discusses grammatical gender (*ÆGram* 40.4).

The *OED*, together with a long tradition of scholarship, to which Serjeantson belongs, says that the most likely etymology of *fiddle* (and its cognates OHG *fidula*, Icel. *fiðla*) is a Latin loan *vitula*. In Latin *vitula* with a small *v* is “a she-calf/cow”, while *Vitula* with a capital *V* is “a goddess who presided over victorious feasting” (*OLD*, s.vv.). While it is possible to see a connection between the horns of a cow and a musical instrument of a similar shape (after all in Greek and Roman poetry lyres are often referred to metonymically as tortoises, because early lyres were made of tortoise-shell), in literature the etymology is explained by means of *Vitula*, the goddess, because it is assumed that feasting and music always go together.

Another tradition holds that *fiðele* is derived from Latin *fidicula* “a stringed instrument, a small lyre; the constellation Lyre” (*OLD*, s.v.; Prieto 2006: 3–4). I believe that the evidence of Old English glosses on *fidicen* and *fidicina* supports this etymology rather than the one relating *fiðele* to *vitula*. The question remains, is Old English *fiðele* a plucked stringed instrument or a bowed one? According to Bachmann (1969, quoted in Remnant 1989), bows were invented in Central Asia not later than ninth century AD. They are well documented in the Islamic and Byzantine empires after 900 and appear to have reached Spain and Italy by the tenth century. Their arrival in northern Europe can be dated to the early eleventh century (Remnant 1989: 47; Montagu 2007: 161–162). It has been suggested that after the bow had been introduced in Europe, it began to be applied to instruments that had previously been plucked. It is therefore possible that *fiðele* was originally a small lyre distinguished from *hearpe* by its size (and maybe form), to which later on a bow was applied. The result of this evolution could have been an instrument of the type of the Celtic *crwth* or Finnish *jouhikko*.

5. Conclusions

The conclusions that can be drawn from these studies are twofold. In terms of individual loanwords, we have learnt that they are definitely text-type specific: *cancer* occurs mainly in medical texts, *consul* in historical accounts about Rome, *pelican* and *citere* only in the Psalter (although their present-day meanings appear to be misleading); similarly Finnish loans in Modern English are restricted in their usage to particular professional domains, e.g. *kantele* and *runo* to musicology, *laitakarite* and *rapakivi* to mineralogy, *markka* and *penni* to economics, and so on. Frequencies matter a lot—with 2 attestations of *cohort* within the same text, it is hard to claim that this term was borrowed into Old English in the late ninth century (moreover, its first attestation in the *OED* is dated to 1489). Here again a comparison with more recent loanwords is useful. Finnish *essive*, *laitakarite*, *penni*, *pulka*, *rapakivi*, and *Salpaukelkä* are attested in the *OED* but not in the three corpora collections whose joint size is close to one billion words, which can hardly signal to their currency outside the professional domains. On the other hand, frequencies don't matter. We have 225 occurrences of *consul* between 890s and 990s, but the word still has to be explained as a Roman culture-specific term. Glosses should not always be taken as evidence for loanwords, as is the case with *pelican* and *citere*. At the same time non-occurrence of a word in the data is not always negative evidence, as is probably the case with *fiddle*, which should not be too hastily defined as “fiddle”. Importantly, all the six Old English words are associated either with glosses or with professional usage (medical or religious), maintaining a strong connection with their source Late Roman culture, something that we can observe today if we study the early history of such international loans as *sauna*.

At a more general level, I believe that a critical re-evaluation of the text-book description of Old English loanwords from Latin has been long overdue (cf. Gneuss 1993; Durkin forthcoming). I have shown only the most obvious candidates for revision, a thorough study of the remaining several hundreds, one that will take into account the data from late Latin and early Romance and trace their loan history in all the available Old English sources, comparing them to other Germanic languages and linking them to cultural, religious and historical developments is more than desirable. After all, we would not like statistics to be taken as myth and myth as statistics.

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