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Brynstān

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DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL: A NOTE ON OE BRYNSTĀN

Claudia Di Sciacca

Sulphur is one of the key components of the Christian infernal landscape, being often associated with fire as the typical torment inflicted on the sinful souls¹. This association can ultimately be traced to the Bible, where sulphur is mentioned in both the Old and the New Testament², especially in the Apocalypse³. Eventually, the hellish connotation of sulphur was further endorsed and popularised by the Fathers⁴ as well as by a vast array of homiletic and vision literature, so much so

¹ On the popular representation of hell in the Middle Ages, see at least P. DINZELBACHER, *Hell*, in C. LINDAHL, J. MCNAMARA, J. LINDOW (eds.), *Medieval Folklore: an Encyclopedia of Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs*, 2 vols., Santa Barbara, CA, ABC-CLIO, 2000, I, pp. 471-475. The heathen Germanic otherworld had quite different traits from the Christian one, although it was undoubtedly influenced by the latter at several points; however, fire and related elements do not seem to have been part of the original picture: see A.P.M. ORCHARD, *Cassell's Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*, London, Cassell, 2002, *s.u. Hel*; R. SIMEK, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. by A. HALL, Cambridge, Brewer, 2006, *s. uu. death and life after death and Hel*. 1; and H. BECK, *Hel*, in H. BECK, D. GEUENICH, H. STEUER (eds.), *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* (henceforth *RLGAK*), 37 vols., Berlin, de Gruyter, 1968-2008², XIV, pp. 257-260. As to the Greek and Roman Hades, its essential characteristic was that of an impenetrable darkness where both the good and the bad led an equally cheerless existence: see J.N. BREMMER, *Hades*, in H. CANCIK, H. SCHNEIDER (eds.), *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, 16 vols., Stuttgart, Metzler, 1996-2003, V, pp. 51-52, and R. GARLAND, *Hades*, in G. SPEAKE (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Greece and the Hellenic Tradition*, 2 vols., London, Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000, I, pp. 703-704.

² See Genesis 19: 24, Psalms 10: 7, Deuteronomy 29: 23, Job 18: 15, Isaiah 30: 33 and 34: 9, Ezekiel 38: 22, and Luke 17: 29.

³ See Apocalypse 9: 17-18, 14: 10, 19: 20, 20: 9, and 21: 8. The scriptural connotation of sulphur as an element of both divine punishment and judgement is probably to be related not only to its combustibility but also to its cleansing and medical uses since antiquity: see, at least, H. BECK, *Schwefel und Schwefelkies §1*, in *RLGAK*, XXVII, pp. 468-469. Isidore of Seville recounts the many practical uses of sulphur in the relevant entry in his *Etymologiae*: see W.M. LINDSAY (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi etymologiarum siue originum libri XX*, 2 vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1911, rptd. 1985, II, xvi, i, 9-10.

⁴ Mentions of sulphur in the context of chastisement and judgement are widespread throughout patristic literature, from Tertullian to Bede: see CETEDOC - Library of Latin Texts on-line database last accessed January 2011.

that according to an established tradition, sulphur's characteristic smell is one of the most obvious symptoms of the devil's presence⁵.

This paper proposes to investigate one of the Old English words for 'sulphur', namely *brynstān*, and its alleged derivation from Norse⁶. *Brynstān* is a hapax within the Old English corpus⁷ and is uniquely attested in one of the latest surviving Old English texts, namely the fragmentary vernacular version of the *Elucidarium* by Honorius Augustodunensis, contained in ms. London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian D. xiv, fols. 4-169, a mid-twelfth century miscellaneous codex most likely from Canterbury⁸. Eventually, *brynstān* would rapidly oust what had been the most widespread word for 'sulphur' throughout the Anglo-

⁵ See, at least, J.D. RUSSELL, *Lucifer: the Devil in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca, NY - London, Cornell UP, 1984, esp. p. 68, and R. MUCHENBLED, *A History of the Devil: from the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. J. BIRRELL, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2003, esp. p. 102.

⁶ In the present essay I will use 'Norse' and 'Scandinavian' as synonyms, although strictly speaking they are not and the Scandinavian settlers in England comprised groups of varied backgrounds and descents. Indeed their language had far from uniform traits and cannot be identified with Old Norse proper, i.e. the developed literary dialect of West Scandinavian: see R. COATES, *Names*, in R.M. HOGG, D. DENISON (eds.), *A History of the English Language*, Cambridge, CUP, 2006, pp. 312-351, esp. p. 348, and S. TRAFFORD, *Ethnicity, Migration Theory, and the Historiography of the Scandinavian Settlement of England*, in D. HADLEY, J. RICHARDS (eds.), *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2000 (Studies in the Early Middle Ages, 2), pp. 17-39. On the language-contact situation between Norse and English, see, at least, A.C. BAUGH, TH. CABLE, *A History of the English Language*, London, Routledge, 2002⁵, pp. 90-104; D. KASTOVSKY, *Semantics and Vocabulary*, in R.M. HOGG (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the English Language*. I. *The Beginnings to 1066*, Cambridge, CUP, 1992, pp. 290-408, esp. pp. 320-340; D. BURNLEY, *Lexis and Semantics*, in N. BLAKE (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the English Language*. II. *1066-1476*, Cambridge, CUP, 1992, pp. 409-499, esp. pp. 414-423; S.G. THOMASON, T. KAUFMAN, *Language Contact, Creolization and Genetic Linguistics*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1988, pp. 275-304 and 334-341; H. GNEUSS, *Anglicae linguae interpretatio: Language Contact, Lexical Borrowing and Glossing in Anglo-Saxon England*, «Proceedings of the British Academy. Lectures and Memoirs», 82 (1992), pp. 107-148, esp. pp. 127-131; H.F. NIELSEN, *The Continental Backgrounds of English and its Insular Developments*, Odense, Odense UP, 1998 («NOWELE», Suppl., 19), pp. 165-188; P. BIBIRE, *North Sea Language Contacts in the Early Middle Ages: English and Norse*, in TH.R. LISZKA, L.E.M. WALKER (eds.), *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages: Studies in the Cultural History of North Western-Europe*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2001, pp. 88-107; and M. TOWNEND, *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relations Between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2002 (Studies in the Early Middle Ages, 6), pp. 1-17 and 184-185.

⁷ All lexical concordances have been searched on the Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus URL: <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus> (last accessed January 2011).

⁸ See C. DI SCIACCA, *London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian D. xiv, fols. 4-169: a Case Study of an English Post-Conquest Miscellaneous Manuscript*, in R.H. BREMMER jr, K. DEKKER (eds.), *The Fruits of Learning: the Transfer of Encyclopaedic Knowledge in the Early Middle Ages*, Peeters, Leuven, forthcoming (Medievalia Groningana, n.s.). See also below, pp. 208-213.

Saxon period, namely *swef(e)l*⁹, and become the standard Middle English term for this element¹⁰, being in turn superseded by the Latinate *sulphur* in the modern period, whereas *brimstone* is now of dialectal and commercial use¹¹.

The following analysis will first focus on the etymology of OE *brynstān* as well as on its cognates in the other Germanic languages. Secondly, the putative Scandinavian origin of the Old English compound will be discussed, showing how the extant evidence is indeed contradictory and ultimately inconclusive, when not in favour of an indigenous origin of OE *brynstān* instead. Finally, the context of the only occurrence of OE *brynstān* will be examined, thereby trying to assess the possible reasons for an apparently impromptu and idiosyncratic lexical choice on the part of an anonymous Anglo-Saxon author (or copyist) which, however, will prove consequential for the subsequent history of the English language.

OE *brynstān* and its Germanic cognates

OE *brynstān* ‘sulphur, brimstone’ is a compound where the second constituent or determinatum *stān* is the pan-Germanic word for ‘stone’¹², while the first constituent or determinant is most likely the deverbal noun *bryne* ‘burning, fire, flame, conflagration’¹³. Although it is made up by two substantives, this

⁹ *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of Joseph Bosworth*, Oxford, OUP 1881-1898; *Supplement by T. Northcote Toller with Revised and Enlarged Addenda by Alistair Campbell*, Oxford, OUP, 1921 (henceforth B-T), *s.u.* *swefel*. OE *swef(e)l* can be traced to Gmc. **sweblaz*, *sweflaz*, which is attested in all Germanic languages with the exception of Old Norse; the word is of obscure etymology and is probably unrelated to Lat. *sulphur*: see W.P. LEHMANN, *A Gothic Etymological Dictionary*, Leiden, Brill, 1986 (henceforth LEHMANN), *s.u.* *swibls*; A. WALDE, J. POKORNY, *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der indogermanischen Sprachen*, 3 vols., Berlin-Leipzig, de Gruyter, 1927-32 (henceforth WALDE - POKORNY), II, p. 533; J. POKORNY, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols., Bern-Munich, Francke, 1959-69 (henceforth POKORNY), I, pp. 909-910 and 1046; W. OREL, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology*, Leiden, Brill, 2003 (henceforth OREL), *s.u.* **sweblaz*, *sweflaz*; H.S. FALK, A. TORP, *Norwegisch-dänisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols., Heidelberg, Winter, 1911 (Germanische Bibliothek, I, IV, 1) (henceforth FALK - TORP), *s.u.* *svov(e)l*; BECK, *Schwefel und Schwefelkies...*, p. 468. Eventually, the Germanic term for ‘sulphur, brimstone’ has been borrowed from Low German into the modern Scandinavian languages: see below, n. 23.

¹⁰ H. KURATH, S.McA. KUHN, R.E. LEWIS (eds.), *Middle English Dictionary*, 17 vols., Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001 (henceforth MED), *s.u.* *brim-stōn*.

¹¹ C. MORINI, *Lat. sulphur, i.a. swef(e)l, ingl. dial. brimstone*, «AION - Sezione Germanica», n.s. 4, I-II (1994), pp. 33-51.

¹² B-T, *s.u.* *stān*; OREL, *s.u.* **stainaz*; P. SCARDIGLI, T. GERVAZI, *Avviamento all'etimologia inglese e tedesca*, Florence, Le Monnier, 1978, rptd. 1990 (henceforth SCARDIGLI - GERVAZI), *s.u.* *stone*; and LEHMANN, *s.u.* *stains*.

¹³ See *Dictionary of Old English (A-G)* online edition <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/pub/fasc-a-g-web.html> (henceforth DOE), *s.u.* *bryne*; *The Oxford English Dictionary*, online edition on <http://www.oed>.

formation has been classified among the verb-noun compounds, because it can only be explained through a paraphrase such as ‘stone that burns’, with the determinatum as subject of the verb underlying the determinant¹⁴. Thus, OE *brynstān* denotes sulphur by means of the chief and most evident quality of this element, namely its combustibility.

The determinant of the compound has also been traced to the stem of the Germanic verb **brennanan* ‘to burn, to be on fire (also figuratively)’ (intrans.)¹⁵. The latter is a strong verb attested in all the old Germanic languages [Goth. *brinnan*, ON *brinna*, *brenna*, OE *byrnan* (*biernan*, *beornan*, *biornan*)¹⁶, OFris. *burna*, OS and OHG *brinnan*], of unclear etymology¹⁷. A derivative weak verb is likewise attested (Goth. *ga-brannjan*, ON *brenna*, OE *bærnan*, OFris. *barna*, OS *gi-brennian*, OHG *brennen* < Gmc. **brannjanan*), with the causative/transitive

com (henceforth *OED*), *s.u. brimstone*; J. ROBERTS, C. KAY, L. GRUNDY, *A Thesaurus of Old English*, 2 vols., London, King’s College. Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1995 (King’s College London Medieval Studies, 11) (henceforth *Thesaurus*), 03.01.09.02; 03.01.09.02.01; 17.05.03; and C.T. ONIONS with the assistance of G.W.S. FRIEDRICHSEN, R.W. BURCHFIELD, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, Oxford, Clarendon 1966, *s.u. brimstone*.

¹⁴ H. SAUER, *Nominalkomposita im Frühmittelenglischen. Mit Ausblicken auf die Geschichte der englischen Nominalkomposition*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1992 (Buchreihe der Anglia Zeitschrift für englische Philologie, 30), p. 189; see also ID., *Compounds and Compounding in Early Middle English: Problems, Patterns, Productivity*, in M. MARKUS (ed.), *Historical English: on the Occasion of Karl Brunner’s 100th Birthday*, Innsbruck, Institut für Anglistik. Universität Innsbruck, 1988 (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft. Anglistische Reihe, 1), pp. 186-209, esp. p. 194. According to the recent classification by Bisetto and Scalise, OE *brynstān* is an endocentric subordinate compound, where the second constituent bears a subject relation to the first: see R. LIEBER, *IE, Germanic: English*, in R. LIEBER, P. ŠTEKAUER (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Compounding*, Oxford, OUP, 2009, pp. 357-369, esp. p. 361; see also SAUER, *Compounds and Compounding...*, p. 205. On the Bisetto and Scalise’s classification, see A. BISETTO, S. SCALISE, *The Classification of Compounds*, «Lingue e Linguaggio», 4 (2005), pp. 319-332, and S. SCALISE, A. BISETTO, *The Classification of Compounds*, in LIEBER - ŠTEKAUER, *The Oxford Handbook...*, pp. 34-53.

¹⁵ On the interpretation of *bryn-* as a verb stem, see, amongst others, E. BJÖRKMAN, *Scandinavian Loan-Words in Middle English*, Halle a.S., Niemeyer, 1900-1902 (Studien zur Englischen Philologie, 7 and 11), pp. 181-182; R.K. BARNHART, S. STEINMETZ (eds.), *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, New York, NY, Wilson, 1988, *s.u. brimstone*; and E. KLEIN (ed.), *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1966, rptd. 1971, *s.u. brimstone*.

¹⁶ *DOE*, *s.u. byrnan*.

¹⁷ See, at least, LEHMANN, *s.u. brinnan*; SCARDIGLI - GERVAZI, *s.u. burn*¹; and J. DE VRIES (ed.), *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Leiden, Brill, 1977² (henceforth *ANew*), *s.u. brenna*, *brinna*; A. JÓHANNESSEN (ed.), *Isländisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bern, Francke Verlag, 1956 (henceforth *IEW*), pp. 619-621; OREL, *s.u. *brennanan*; WALDE - POKORNY, II, pp. 167-169, esp. 168; POKORNY, I, pp. 144-145; H. RIX, M. KÜMMEL (eds.), *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben: Die Wurzeln und ihre Primärstambildungen*, Wiesbaden, Reichert, 2001², *s.u. *b^hrejH-*, esp. p. 93, n. 3, and **g^{uh}er-*, esp. p. 220, n. 4; E. SEEBOLD, *Vergleichendes und etymologisches Wörterbuch der germanischen starken Verben*, The Hague - Paris, Mouton, 1970 (Janua linguarum. Series practica, 85), pp. 137-138.

meaning ‘to burn, to kindle, to light’¹⁸. Notably, in Old English and Old Frisian both the strong and the weak verb feature the characteristic Ingveonic metathesis of the Germanic cluster *r* + vowel¹⁹. Precisely because of the lack of such a metathesis in OE *brynstān*, it has been argued that *bryn-* must ultimately be traced to the Old Norse verb *brinna*, *brenna*²⁰. However, it should be noted that the deverbal substantive OE *bryne* mostly occurs with no metathesis throughout the Old English corpus²¹.

Besides English, the compound as such is attested only in another two Germanic languages in the Middle Ages, namely Norse and Low German. In Old Norse, *brennisteinn* was the standard term for ‘sulphur, brimstone’, and it still is in Modern Icelandic²², while in Faroese *brennisteinur* is in use alongside *svávul*²³. In Low German, the compound *bernstē[i]n*, *börnstē[i]n* is attested from the thirteenth century onwards²⁴, but here it denotes quite another element, namely amber, which, like sulphur, is combustible, but unlike the distinctive stench of the latter, amber produces a pleasant scent when burning²⁵. The compound meaning ‘amber’ has become established in both the High and Low German

¹⁸ OREL, *s.u.* **brannjanan*; SCARDIGLI - GERVAZI, *s.u.* *burn*¹. Eventually, a sort of conflation has taken place in the modern Germanic languages between the strong and the weak verb: see *ibidem*; F. KLUGE, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, 23rd rev. ed. by E. SEEBOLD, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1995 (henceforth *EWDS*), *s.u.* *brennen*; R. CLEASBY, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, revised, enlarged and completed by G. VÍGFUSSON, 2nd ed. with a *Supplement* by W.A. CRAIGIE, Oxford, OUP, 1957 (henceforth *CLEASBY - VÍGFUSSON - CRAIGIE*), *s.u.* *brenna*; FALK - TORP, *s.u.* *brænde*.

¹⁹ A. CAMPBELL, *Old English Grammar*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, § 449. 1, and K. BRUNNER, *Altenglische Grammatik: Nach der Angelsächsischen Grammatik von Eduard Sievers*, Halle a.S., Niemeyer, 1965 (Sammlung kurzer Grammatiken germanischer Dialekte, A. 3), § 179. On the metathesis in Old Saxon, see P. RAMAT, *Grammatica dell’antico sassone*, Milano, Mursia, 1969, § 44.

²⁰ BJÖRKMANN, *Scandinavian Loan-Words...*, pp. 181-182. Also ME *brennen* ‘to burn’ (trans.), *brinnen* ‘to burn’ (intrans.), and *brine* ‘fire, conflagration’, have been explained as Norse borrowings, for the presence of both the *r*+vowel cluster and the double *n*: see *MED*, *s. uu.* *brennen* and *brine*; *ANew*, *s.u.* *brenna*; M.S. SERJEANSTON, *A History of Foreign Words in English*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1935, p. 75.

²¹ *DOE*, *s.u.*; see also below, p. 203.

²² *CLEASBY - VÍGFUSSON - CRAIGIE*, *s.u.*

²³ G.V.C. YOUNG, C.R. CLEWER (eds.), *Faroese-English Dictionary*, Peel, Mansk-Svenska 1985, *s. uu.* Like Faroese *svávul*, the word for ‘sulphur’ in the other Scandinavian languages (Dan. *swovl*, Norw. *swovel*, and Swed. *swivel*) is a loanword from MLG *swavel*, *swevel*: see FALK - TORP, *s.u.* *svov(e)l*.

²⁴ *EWDS*, *s.u.* *Bernstein*, and A. LASCH, C. BORCHLING, G. CORDES (eds.), *Mittelniederdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, Neumünster, Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1956-, *s.u.* *bernstē[i]n*, *börnstē[i]n*. See also E. MEINEKE, *Bernstein im Althochdeutschen. Mit Untersuchungen zum Glossar Rb*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984 (Studien zum Althochdeutschen, 6), pp. 63-69, and G. MAZZUOLI PORRU, *Ambra, «lucida gemma». Storia di una parola*, in *Filologia Germanica. Studi in Onore di Gemma Manganella* [= *AION*, 28-29 (1985-86)], pp. 421-470, esp. pp. 444-445.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 444. See also D. BOHNSACK, A.-B. FOLLMANN, *Bernstein und Bernsteinhandel*, in *RLGAK*, II, pp. 288-298.

speaking areas, being the current term for the precious resin in German (*Bernstein*), Plattdeutsch (*Barnsteen*), and Dutch (*barnsteen*). In turn, the compound has been attested since the seventeenth century in Swedish (*bärnsten*)²⁶ and since the late nineteenth century in Frisian (*barnstien*)²⁷; the former is certainly a loanword from Low German and most likely so also the latter, or, though less probably, from Dutch²⁸.

The geographical distribution of the compound could spontaneously suggest a putative Ingveonic origin. In particular, it could be speculated that OE *brynstān* and MLG *bernstē[i]n*, *börnstē[i]n* belonged to that portion of Ingveonic lexicon shared with North Germanic, although they are not recorded in Löfstedt's standard study on North-Sea Germanic - Norse lexicography²⁹. In fact, the late dating of the earliest occurrences of the compound in both English and Low German speaks against such an Ingveonic brand. In English *brynstān* is first attested in a mid-twelfth century manuscript, in particular within a text which cannot be earlier than the very end of the eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth century³⁰. As to Low German, the compound emerges only in the thirteenth century³¹, while the Old Saxon term for 'sulphur' was *suebal*, attested twice in the account of the destruction of Sodom in the Old Saxon *Genesis*³². Finally, the first attestation of Frisian *barnstien* is even later, dating to 1869, and here the compound is most likely a loanword from Low German or, possibly, from Dutch³³.

²⁶ E. HELLQUIST, *Svensk etymologisk ordbok*, Lund, Gleerup, 1948³, rptd. 1980, s.u. *bärnsten*. In the other Scandinavian languages, the word for 'amber' is Danish, Norwegian and Faroese *rav*, Icelandic *raf*, also Swedish *rav* (obs., dial.), all traceable to ON *rafr*, of uncertain etymology: see *ANEW*, s.u. *raf*; *IEW*, p. 69; HELLQUIST, *Svensk etymologisk ordbok...*, s.u. *rav*; FALK - TORP, s.u. *rav* and *ræv* I; OREL, s.u. *rabaz*; WALDE - POKORNY, I, p. 146, and POKORNY, I, p. 334. A cognate with the same meaning is also attested in North Frisian, i.e. *reaf*, *rēf*, and Löfstedt speculates that it might be a Scandinavian loanword: see E. LÖFSTEDT, *Beiträge zur nordseeegermanischen und nordseeegermanischnordischen Lexikographie*, «Niederdeutsche Mitteilungen», 19-21 (1963-5), pp. 281-345; 22 (1966), pp. 39-64; 23 (1967), pp. 11-61; 25 (1969), pp. 25-45, esp. 22 (1966), p. 59.

²⁷ K.F. VAN DER VEEN (ed.), *Wurdboek fan de Fryske taal*, Ljouwert, Fryske Akademy, 1984-, s.u. *barnstien*.

²⁸ I am grateful to Prof. R.H. Bremmer jr for his comments and bibliographical help on Frisian *barnstien*.

²⁹ LÖFSTEDT, *Beiträge...*

³⁰ See below, pp. 208-213.

³¹ See above, n. 24.

³² O. BEHAGHEL (ed.), *Heliand und Genesis*, 10th rev. ed. by B. TAEGER, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1996 (*Altdeutsche Textbibliothek*, 4), lines 186b and 318b.

³³ See above, n. 27.

OE *brynstān*: a Scandinavian loanword?

OE *brynstān* has traditionally been considered a Scandinavian borrowing³⁴. In particular, OE *brynstān* would be a loan-translation from ON *brennisteinn*. It might be useful to recall that loan-translations are «morpheme-for-morpheme recreation of foreign compound formations using the native lexical stock, but retaining the underlying model and semantic orientation of the original whole»³⁵. This theoretical definition seems to be entirely applicable to OE *brynstān* and its putative Norse model. However, it should be reminded that, given the difficulty posed to the identification of would-be Norse-derived vocabulary in English by the genetic relations and close similarities between the two languages³⁶, the safest tests for the Scandinavian origin of a given English word are indeed the phonetic ones³⁷. Scandinavian loan-translations in English are particularly hard to identify, since, per definition, loan-translations are recreations of a foreign antecedent made up of native phonological, morphological, and lexical material. However, in the case of two genetically-related languages such as Norse and English, «any scope for phonological or morphological proofs [is] necessarily absent»³⁸.

In the case of OE *brynstān*, the most cogent, though not fully convincing, phonological argument for its Norse-derivation would be the presence of the cluster *r* + vowel in the first element of the Old English compound (hence the lack of the expected Ingveonic metathesis), which has been accounted for by the influence of the ON verb *brinna*, *brenna*³⁹. Also, a possible second element in favour of the Scandinavian origin of OE *brynstān* could be the dating of its first attestation. The twelfth-century first occurrence of the compound would indeed fit in well with the general chronology of the Norse-derived vocabulary in English. Although permanent Scandinavian settlement in England can be dated

³⁴ See BJÖRKMAN, *Scandinavian Loan-Words...*, p. 182, and more recently SAUER, *Nominalkomposita im Frühmittelenglischen...*, p. 362.

³⁵ R. DANCE, *Words Derived from Old Norse in Early Middle English: Studies in the Vocabulary of The South-West Midland Texts*, Tempe, AZ, ACMRS, 2003 (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 246), p. 92. See also R. GUSMANI, *Saggi sull'interferenza linguistica*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 1986², pp. 225-227, and H. GNEUSS, *Lehnbildungen und Lehnbedeutungen im Altenglischen*, Berlin, Schmidt, 1955, pp. 2-3 and 31-37.

³⁶ See, at least, DANCE, *Words Derived from Old Norse...*, pp. 69-103.

³⁷ See the lengthy discussion in BJÖRKMAN, *Scandinavian Loan-Words...*, pp. 30-185 and 193-198; more compact lists of such tests are also in KASTOVSKY, *Semantics and Vocabulary...*, pp. 332-336; DANCE, *Words Derived from Old Norse...*, pp. 141-142; and J. GEIPEL, *The Viking Legacy: the Scandinavian Influence on the English and Gaelic Languages*, Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1971, p. 20.

³⁸ DANCE, *Words Derived from Old Norse...*, p. 92.

³⁹ See above, p. 199.

from the second half of the ninth century⁴⁰, most of the Norse lexical borrowings as well as of the phonological⁴¹, morphological⁴², and syntactical⁴³ impact of Old Norse on English are attested from the Middle English period onwards⁴⁴. Chronology could therefore be advocated a role as a test for the establishment of the Scandinavian origin of English vocabulary, albeit on rather slippery ground⁴⁵.

Apart from Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* classifying *brimstone* as a word of English stock⁴⁶, other similar compilations have been more cautious, when not rather ambiguous, concerning the etymology of the English compound⁴⁷. Recently, the putative Norse derivation of *brynstān*

⁴⁰ NIELSEN, *The Continental Backgrounds of English...*, pp. 165-167, and D. WHITELOCK (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965², pp. 48-50.

⁴¹ K. LUICK, *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache*, 2 vols., Leipzig, Tauchnitz, 1914-1927, rptd. Oxford, Blackwell, 1964, §§ 381-384; KASTOVSKY, *Semantics and Vocabulary...*, p. 332; and BURNLEY, *Lexis and Semantics...*, p. 420.

⁴² See BAUGH - CABLE, *A History...*, p. 100; R. LASS, *Phonology and Morphology*, in BLAKE (ed.), *The Cambridge History...*, II, pp. 23-155, esp. pp. 118-121, and ID., *Phonology and Morphology*, in HOGG - DENISON (eds.), *A History...*, pp. 43-108, esp. pp. 74-75; and J. MILROY, *Middle English Dialectology*, in BLAKE (ed.), *The Cambridge History...*, II, pp. 156-206, esp. p. 176. On the third-person pronoun system in particular, see the two dedicated studies by N. RITT, *The Spread of Scandinavian Third Person Plural Pronouns in English: Optimisation, Adaptation and Evolutionary Stability*, in D. KASTOVSKY, A. METTINGER (eds.), *Language Contact in the History of English*, Frankfurt a.M., Lang, 2003² (*Studies in English Medieval Language and Literature*, 1), pp. 279-304, esp. pp. 286-291, and O. WERNER, *The Incorporation of Old Norse Pronouns into Middle English. Suppletion by Loan*, in P. STURE-URELAND, G. BRODERICK (eds.), *Language Contact in the British Isles*, Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium of Language Contact in Europe, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1991 (*Linguistische Arbeiten*, 238), pp. 369-401.

⁴³ BAUGH - CABLE, *A History...*, pp. 101-102; O. FISCHER, *Syntax*, in BLAKE (ed.), *The Cambridge History...*, II, pp. 207-408, esp. p. 305; BURNLEY, *Lexis and Semantics...*, pp. 422-423; O. FISCHER, W. VAN DER WURFF, *Syntax*, in HOGG - DENISON (eds.), *A History...*, pp. 109-198, esp. pp. 185-187; and B. MITCHELL, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985, § 801; § 1225, n. 288; § 1306; § 1981; § 2304, n. 70.

⁴⁴ One of the most striking as well as baffling features of the Scandinavian lexical legacy «is the extent to which its emergence into written English is delayed [...], since literary sources [attesting Norse-derived vocabulary] greatly postdate the most active periods of Scandinavian influence on English»: see BURNLEY, *Lexis and Semantics...*, quotations at pp. 418 and 422, and I. MOSKOWICH-SPIEGEL FANDIÑO, *Language Contact and Language Change: the Danes in England*, «Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses», 8 (1995), pp. 139-155, esp. pp. 141-143.

⁴⁵ See DANCE, *Words Derived from Old Norse...*, p. 92, and GEIPEL, *The Viking Legacy...*, p. 24.

⁴⁶ W.W. SKEAT (ed.), *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1910, rptd. 1978, s.u. *brimstone*.

⁴⁷ Cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, where only two variant spellings of the compound, ME *brenston*, *bremston*, are traced to ON *brennisteinn*: see *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology...*, s.u. *brimstone*. See also *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology...*; *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary...*; F. HÖLTHAUSEN (ed.), *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der*

has been challenged and the compound has instead been considered a new coin of Anglo-Saxon origin⁴⁸. In particular, as far as *bryn-* is concerned, a Scandinavian derivation is not necessary to account for the cluster *r* + vowel, since OE *bryne* ‘burning, fire, flame, conflagration’ is attested throughout the Old English corpus mostly with no metathesis⁴⁹ and as first constituent of many compounds, such as *bryne-ād* ‘fever’, *-broga* ‘dread of fire, fire-terror’, *-giel* ‘burnt offering’, *-hāt* ‘burning-hot’, *-leoma* ‘beam of fire, burning flame’, *-ness* ‘fierce trial, probation’, *-tear* ‘burning tear’, and *-wylm* ‘wave of flame, surge of fire’⁵⁰. Notably, with the exceptions of *bryneād* e *bryneness*, all these compounds are poetic words and occur in poems such as *Beowulf* and *Genesis A* which are traditionally assigned to the canon of the so-called classical Old English poetry and dated to the early Anglo-Saxon period, hence before the establishment of Norse-speaking communities in England⁵¹.

Furthermore, in the late Anglo-Saxon period a further metathesis affected the Old English sequence vowel + *r*, thereby resuming the original Germanic cluster *r* + vowel. This phenomenon was itself independent of the contemporary Scandinavian influence, but the diffusion of the former was enhanced by the latter⁵². As to the second constituent *stān*, it can obviously be traced to the Anglo-Saxon word *stān* (< Gmc. **stainaz*), since it features *-ā-* as root vowel rather than

Englischen Sprache, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949³; E. WEEKLEY (ed.), *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, London, Murray, 1921; and E. PARTRIDGE (ed.), *Origins: a Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, rptd. 1990, all *s.u. brimstone*.

⁴⁸ MORINI, *Lat. sulphur...*, esp. pp. 46-49. Apparently, the compound is not recorded in the vast corpus of Norse-influenced texts from the early Middle English period surveyed in DANCE, *Words Derived from Old Norse...*

⁴⁹ See above, n. 21.

⁵⁰ See *DOE*, *s. uu.*, and *Thesaurus*, 02.08.10; 06.01.08.06.03; 16.02.04.12; 03.01.09; 03.01.12.02; 11.03.01.01; 08.01.03.04.02; 03.01.09.02.

⁵¹ The (relative) dating of Old English poems is, however, a very problematic question: see, at least, D.G. SCRAGG, *The Dating of Vernacular Texts*, in M. LAPIDGE, J. BLAIR, S. KEYNES, D. SCRAGG (eds.), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999 (henceforth *BEASE*), pp. 137-138; P. LENDINARA, *La poesia anglosassone alla fine del X secolo e oltre*, «AION - Sezione Germanica», n.s. 11, I-II (2001), pp. 7-46; D. CRONAN, *Poetic Words, Conservatism and the Dating of Old English Poetry*, «Anglo-Saxon England» (henceforth *ASE*), 33 (2004), pp. 23-50; and Th.A. BREDEHOFT, *Early English Metre*, Toronto, UTP, 2005 (Toronto Old English Series, 15), pp. 21-34. On the dating of *Beowulf*, in particular, see at least M. LAPIDGE, *The Archetype of 'Beowulf'*, «ASE», 29 (2000), pp. 5-41, and A.P.M. ORCHARD, *A Critical Companion to 'Beowulf'*, Cambridge, Brewer, 2003, pp. 5-6.

⁵² K. BRUNNER, *Abriss der mitttelenglischen Grammatik*, Tübingen, Niemeyer 1959⁴ (Sammlung kurzer Grammatiken germanischer Dialekte, 6), § 33; LUICK, *Historische Grammatik...*, §§ 714. 1 and 756. 1; and MORINI, *Lat. sulphur...*, pp. 47-48.

the Norse diphthong *-ei-*⁵³, which is otherwise attested in Norse-derived words in Middle English⁵⁴.

Finally, it should be pointed out that a formation such as MLG *bernstê[i]n*, that is an exactly parallel compound albeit with a different meaning, namely ‘amber’, seems to speak against the derivation of OE *brynstān* from ON *brennisteinn*⁵⁵, or else against ON *brennisteinn* as a unique Scandinavian formation subsequently imitated in English. What is unique about ON *brennisteinn*, however, is its meaning, insofar as in all the other old Germanic languages sulphur was denoted by the various cognates of the Germanic noun **sweblaz*, *sweflaz*⁵⁶. The obvious consequence of this line of argument would be that OE *brynstān* could be classified as a semantic loan rather than a loan-translation⁵⁷, a conclusion, however, immediately denied by the extant evidence which does not attest the extension of a putative pre-existent meaning of OE *brynstān* under the influence of the Norse model⁵⁸. (Indeed, since its earliest occurrence and in all its subsequent history, the English compound has always meant ‘sulphur, brimstone’).

However, semantics is a crucial factor in any situation of language contact and interference, for the very concrete reason that «foreign words are imitated because of their meaning, and not their signifiers»⁵⁹. As has been noted with regard to Scandinavian influence on English, on the whole «what Norse did was to add a few subtleties of meaning and a large number of new ways of saying old things»⁶⁰. In particular, when assessing the relationship between ON *brennisteinn*

⁵³ Both *-ā-* and *-ei-* are regular developments of the Germanic diphthong *-ai-* in Old English and Old Norse respectively: see H. KRAHE, *Germanische Sprachwissenschaft. I. Einleitung und Lautlehre*, rev. ed. by W. MEID, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1969⁷ (Götschen Sammlung, 238), § 32.

⁵⁴ Such is the case, for example, with ME *bleik(e)*, *bleyk(e)* ‘pale’ < ON *bleikr* (cf. OE *blāc*); ME *heil* ‘well, healthy, sound’ < ON *heill* (cf. OE *hāl*); or ME *weik* ‘weak’ < ON *veikr* (cf. OE *wāc*): see BJÖRKMAN, *Scandinavian Loan-Words...*, pp. 41-53, esp. 41, 44, and 52.

⁵⁵ According to Wall, putative Norse-derived words in English which have no distinctive Scandinavian traits, have first emerged after the Danelaw period and have a counterpart in Low German should be regarded as native words: A. WALL, *A Contribution Towards the Study of the Scandinavian Element in the English Dialects*, «Anglia», 20 (1898), pp. 45-135, esp. p. 69.

⁵⁶ See above, n. 9.

⁵⁷ The difference between loan-translation and semantic loan, however, is a very fine one: see GUSMANI, *Saggi...*, pp. 188-196 and 230-234, where he wonders whether it is legitimate to consider loan-translations and semantic loans as two neatly distinct and opposed phenomena and argues that «il calco strutturale e quello semantico, pur nella diversa ‘tecnica’ di riproduzione, presentano delle innegabili affinità di natura» (*ibidem*, pp. 233-234). See also GNEUSS, *Lehnbildungen und Lehnbedeutungen...*, pp. 35-37.

⁵⁸ The extension of the original meaning of a given word on the basis of a foreign model is the very process leading to a semantic loan; on this kind of loans, see GUSMANI, *Saggi...*, pp. 226-228.

⁵⁹ GUSMANI, *Saggi...*, p. 196 (my translation).

⁶⁰ THOMASON - KAUFMANN, *Language Contact...*, p. 303.

and OE *brynstān*, consideration of the semantic dimension could prove decisive and provide the most plausible explanation for the Old English coin and its subsequent success, as I hope the next paragraph will show. For now, it is worth reminding that the attention due to the semantic facet does not exclude aspects of word-formation, as the two are mutually interdependent⁶¹.

OE *brynstān*: a clarifying compound?

OE *brynstān* can be associated with many a compound of the same semantic field which all feature *-stān* as their determinatum⁶². Like OE *brynstān*, some of them denote specific stones and minerals, such as *cealcstān* ‘chalk-stone, limestone’, *gagatstān* ‘agate, jet’, *hēwenstān* ‘lit. blue stone’, *marm(an)-*, *marmel-*, *marmorstān* ‘marm-stone, marble’, *mealmstān* ‘chalk, limestone’, *pumicstān* ‘pumice-stone’, *rēdestān* ‘red colouring matter, ochre’, and *spærstān* ‘chalk, gypsum’. Other compounds are generic terms for ‘gem, precious stone’, such as *eorclanstān*, *eorc(n)anstān*⁶³, *gimstān* and *sincstān*, or denote various kinds of rocks and stones that can be found in nature, such as *clifstān* ‘cliff-stone’, *eastān* ‘stone from a river’, *mægenstān* ‘huge stone’, *papolstān* ‘pebble’, and *sæstān* ‘sea-stone’. Still other analogues of *brynstān* denote kinds of stones and rocks used in masonry, such as *(ge)fogstān* and *hīewenstān* ‘key-stone?, hewn-stone?’, *weallstān* ‘wallstone’, and *weorcstān* ‘stone for building’; in milling, such as *byrðenstān*, *cweornstān*, *mylenstān* ‘millstone’, and in whetting, such as *hwet(e)stān* ‘whetstone’. Finally, there are also a few analogues of *brynstān* that belong to other semantic fields and denote, for example, ‘lighthouse’ (*beacenstān*) or ‘hailstone’ (*gicelstān* and *hagolstān*).

Interestingly, in all the above-mentioned compounds *-stān* is modified by either a noun or, though more rarely, an adjective, with the only exception of *hwet(e)stān*, where the first element can be traced to the verb *hwettan* ‘to whet, to sharpen’. This ratio is itself consistent with the English *Wortbildung* in general, where noun + noun formations are by far the most productive kind of nominal compounds⁶⁴. Thus, the evidence of the analogues of OE *brynstān* and indeed the rules governing (Old) English nominal composition as a whole seem to support the view that the

⁶¹ See above, n. 57.

⁶² The following compounds have been searched on the *DOE*, *B-T*, and *Thesaurus*.

⁶³ *Eorclanstān* and *eorc(n)anstān* also render the Lat. *margarita* ‘pearl’ or ‘topazion’: see *DOE*, *s.u.*

⁶⁴ LIEBER, *IE, Germanic: English...*, pp. 357-369; H. SAUER, *Old English Word Formation: Constant Features and Changes*, in O. IMAHAYASHI, Y. NAKAO, M. OGURA (eds.), *Aspects of the History of English Language and Literature*, Frankfurter a.M., Lang, 2010 (Studies in English Medieval Language and Literature, 25), pp. 19-37, esp. pp. 22-24; ID., *Compounds and Compounding...*, pp. 195-200.

first element of the compound is indeed more likely to be the OE deverbal noun *bryne* rather than a stem ultimately derived from the ON verb *brinnan*, *brennan*⁶⁵.

Also these compounds seem to share a certain lexicographic character, insofar as they seem to be *ad hoc* formations. Indeed, at least nine of the above-mentioned compounds are hapax legomena, namely *byrðenstān*, *eastān*, *gagatstān*, *hæwenstān*, *pumicstān*, *rēdestān*, *sæstān*, *sincstān*, and *spærstān*, and seven out of these nine are glosses⁶⁶. As to the other compounds in question, they can count few occurrences anyway, and in some cases they are again concentrated in glossographic texts⁶⁷.

What is, however, more relevant to this discussion, is that in a few instances, the determinatum *-stān*, namely an indigenous word with the general meaning of ‘stone’, is modified by a loanword belonging to the same semantic field as *stān* but with a more specific meaning. In other words, the determinatum is a hypernym of the determinant, and the compound resulting from their association is likewise a hyponym of the determinatum⁶⁸. Such is the case with *cealcstān* ‘chalk-stone, limestone’, where the determinant is a borrowing from Lat. *calx*⁶⁹; *gagatstān* ‘agate, jet’, where the determinant is ultimately a Greek loanword, γαγάτης (λίθος) ‘agate, jet’, borrowed through Latin *gāgātes* of the same meaning⁷⁰; *marm(an)-*, *marmel-*, *marmorstān* ‘marm-stone, marble’, where the determinant can be traced to Lat. *marmor*⁷¹; finally, *pumicstān* ‘pumice-stone’, where the determinant is a borrowing from Lat. *pumex*⁷². Because the association

⁶⁵ See above, pp. 197-199.

⁶⁶ See the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*: <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/>, and *Thesaurus*, 04.01.02.02.09 and 11.11.02; 01.01.02.02.01; 17.04.03.04; 04.06.01.04; 03.01.14.05. *Hæwenstān* is not recorded in the *Thesaurus*: see, instead, Th. WRIGHT, *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies*, 2nd ed. by R.P. WÜLKER, 2 vols., London, Trübner, 1884, I, col. 217, 12.

⁶⁷ See especially *beacenstān*, *mealmsstān*, *mylenstān*, and *papolstān*: the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus...*, and *Thesaurus*, 05.12.01.09.03.05 and 11.09.02; 04.01.02.02.09; 01.01.02.02.02.03; and 01.01.02.02.01.

⁶⁸ SAUER, *Compounds and Compounding...*, p. 204, and H. MARCHAND, *The Categories and Types of Present-Day English Word-Formation: a Synchronic-Diachronic Approach*, Munich, Beck, 1969², pp. 40-41.

⁶⁹ A. WOLLMANN, *Untersuchungen zu den frühen lateinischen Lehnwörtern im Altenglischen. Phonologie und Datierung*, Munich, Fink, 1990 (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Englischen Philologie, 15), pp. 84 and 177.

⁷⁰ DOE, *s.u.*; *Thesaurus*, 17.04.03.04.

⁷¹ B-T, *s. uu.*; MORINI, *Lat. sulphur...*, pp. 46-47. Interestingly, analogous compounds are attested in both ON *marmara-stainar* ‘slabs of marble’ and OHG *marmul-stain* ‘marm-stone, marble’, most likely independent formations relying on a composition type very productive in Germanic: see below, n. 73.

⁷² B-T, *s.u.* In fact, *pumicstān* is uniquely attested in the transcript of the so-called Antwerp-London glossary made by the sixteenth-century Dutch scholar Francis Junius: see WRIGHT - WÜLKER, *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies...*, I, col. 148, 3.

of the loanword with the native term *stān* clearly serves the function to elucidate the meaning of the former and thereby enhance its integration in the target language, this kind of formations – very productive in the Germanic languages – have been defined ‘clarifying compounds’ or also ‘classifying compounds’⁷³, given that they ultimately result in hyponyms. The clarifying scope of such compounds is all the more obvious considering that they are on the whole tautological formations, since in all four cases the loanword making up the determinant is also attested as simplex in the Old English corpus⁷⁴.

Admittedly, the obvious semantic and structural analogies between OE *brynstān* and the clarifying compounds could prompt to extend the equivalence to the etymology of the determinant *bryn-* and consider it of foreign, that is Norse, origin as well. However, there is no evidence to posit a Scandinavian derivation of OE *bryne*, which is widely attested in the Old English corpus both as simplex and as first constituent of many compounds, at least some of which can reasonably be said to predate the Danelaw period⁷⁵.

In sum, *brynstān* could plausibly be an indigenous compound, the structure of which is paralleled in many analogues from the same semantic field and fully agrees with the rules of (Old) English nominal composition. It has been suggested that *brynstān* would have emerged only in the twelfth century because probably it was not until then that the English had a direct and factual knowledge of sulphur, possibly of Icelandic provenance⁷⁶, and, therefore, had first hand experience of its combustibility⁷⁷. Indeed, it can be argued that, like its analogues discussed above, *brynstān* too was originally an *ad hoc* coin, namely it was first coined in the attempt to find a more intelligible formation than the simplex *swef(e)l* for a largely exotic element such as sulphur on the part of a particularly articulate individual. Consequently, the rapid success of the new coin over its predecessor *swef(e)l* could be put down precisely to its ability to make its referent – so recurrent in medieval imagery and so versatile in its practical uses⁷⁸ – more immediately understandable to Anglo-Saxon speakers. The following paragraph will therefore discuss the (con)text of the first occurrence of OE *brynstān*,

⁷³ GUSMANI, *Saggi...*, pp. 73-77.

⁷⁴ See B-T, *s. uu. cealc, gagates, marma, and pumic* respectively.

⁷⁵ See above, p. 203.

⁷⁶ Up to 1900 the main sources of sulphur in Europe were located in Sicily, Tuscany, and a few Italian islands, while the systematic exploitation of Icelandic sources started from the mid-fourteenth century in order to meet the increased demand of sulphur following the discovery of gunpowder: see G. WEISBERGER, *Schwefel und Schwefelkies* § 2, in *RLGAK*, XXVII, pp. 469-471, esp. pp. 469-470. However, it could be speculated that Icelandic sulphur reached England at an earlier date thanks to the presence of the extensive Viking communities in the Danelaw.

⁷⁷ MORINI, *Lat. sulphur...*, pp. 49-50.

⁷⁸ See above, pp. 195-196.

namely the Old English version of the *Elucidarium*, trying to outline the relevant linguistic features of this text and what may have prompted such an idiosyncratic lexical choice as *brynstān*.

Brynstān* and the Old English *Elucidarium

The *Elucidarium* has been defined as a «popularized elementary textbook in theology»⁷⁹ written out as a question-and-answer dialogue between a master and his disciple. The long-disputed authorship of this text has at last been attributed – though not universally – to Honorius Augustodunensis (c. 1070 - c. 1140). In particular, the *Elucidarium* must have been composed at the beginning of Honorius's career, while he was active in England during the episcopate of St Anselm at Canterbury (1093-1109), of whom Honorius was a follower and possibly a kinsman⁸⁰. Indeed, precisely the familiarity with Anselm's writings and direct teaching has convincingly suggested a dating of the *Elucidarium* to the years immediately preceding 1100⁸¹.

The work is divided into three books, dealing with Christian theology, ethics, and eschatology respectively⁸². Because of the comprehensiveness and accessibility of its contents as well as of the lucidity and coherence of its presentation, the *Elucidarium* proved exceptionally popular and influential throughout the late Middle Ages and beyond, as is attested by the considerable number of both Latin witnesses and translations or adaptations into nearly all the European languages⁸³.

The Old English version of the *Elucidarium* is the earliest of these vernacular translations – albeit a radically curtailed one. It consists of two excerpts made up of selected dialogical units from the second and the first book of the *Elucidarium* respectively. The two pieces are contained in a miscellaneous codex, entirely in the vernacular, from the mid-twelfth century, ms. London, British Library,

⁷⁹ E. SCHERABON FIRCHOW, K. GRIMSTAD (eds.), *Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation*, Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1989, p. XXI.

⁸⁰ DI SCIACCA, *London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian D. xiv...*, pp. [11-12].

⁸¹ See Y. LEFÈVRE (ed.), *L'Elucidarium et les Lucidaires*, Paris, Boccard, 1954 (Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 124), pp. 195-196, and V.I.J. FLINT, *The «Elucidarius» of Honorius Augustodunensis and Reform in Late Eleventh Century England*, «Revue Bénédictine», 85 (1975), pp. 178-198, esp. pp. 179-183, rptd. with the same pagination in EAD., *Ideas in the Medieval West: Texts and Their Contexts*, London, Variorum, 1988 (VCSS, 268).

⁸² LEFÈVRE, *L'Elucidarium et les Lucidaires...*, pp. 103-190 and 201-205, and D. GOTTSCHALL (ed.), *Das 'Elucidarium' des Honorius Augustodunensis: Untersuchungen zu einer Überlieferungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte im deutschsprachigen Raum mit Ausgabe der niederdeutschen Übersetzung*, Niemeyer, Tübingen, 1992 (Texte und Textgeschichte, 33), pp. 17-24.

⁸³ DI SCIACCA, *London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian D. xiv...*, nn. 52-53.

Cotton Vespasian D. xiv, fols. 4-169, most likely from Canterbury, Christ Church⁸⁴. The Canterbury origin of the Vespasian codex, together with its date, remarkably close to that of the original *Elucidarium*, is of uttermost relevance because it apparently helps filling a crucial gap in the early tradition of the Latin text, of which «no early manuscript can be assigned with certainty to Canterbury»⁸⁵. Given the place and date of composition of the Latin text, on the one hand, and of the Vespasian codex, on the other, the vernacularisation of the *Elucidarium* as we know it must have occurred very much in the wake of the Latin source-text⁸⁶, most probably in Canterbury, Christ Church too⁸⁷. In particular, Förster argued that the accurate preservation of the Old English inflectional system and vowel-system in accented syllables as well as the conservative orthography suggest that the Old English translation of the *Elucidarium* was made by an old man at the turn of the eleventh century⁸⁸.

The two vernacular pieces of the *Elucidarium* have been identified as *De peccato* and *De resurrectione* respectively, both putative titles derived from the ones originally assigned by H. Wanley and loosely based on their content⁸⁹. The former, from the second book of the *Elucidarium*, concerns the nature of sin and contrasts earthly fortunes of good and evil men, while the latter, from the first book, concerns Christ's resurrection and ascension. OE *brynstān* occurs in *De peccato*, namely within the rendition of *Elucidarium* II, 16, a dialogical unit focusing on the inverse proportion ruling the afterlife destiny of those who are needy and afflicted in this world (and therefore will be bountifully rewarded in

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. [3-8].

⁸⁵ V.I.J. FLINT, *The Career of Honorius Augustodunensis: Some Fresh Evidence*, «Revue Bénédictine», 82 (1972), pp. 63-86, esp. p. 76, rptd. with the same pagination in EAD., *Ideas in the Medieval West...*

⁸⁶ Indeed so much so that Förster was initially tempted to suggest that the Anglo-Saxon translator did not rely on Honorius but on the same sources as Honorius: M. FÖRSTER, *Two Notes on Old English Dialogue Literature*, in *An English Miscellany: Presented to Dr Furnivall in Honours of His 75th Birthday*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1901, pp. 86-101, esp. p. 89.

⁸⁷ W. HOFSTETTER, *Winchester und der spätaenglische Sprachgebrauch: Untersuchungen zur geographischen und zeitlichen Verbreitung altenglischer Synonyme*, Munich, Fink, 1977 (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Englischer Philologie, 14), no. 131, pp. 321-322.

⁸⁸ FÖRSTER, *Two Notes...*, pp. 93-101.

⁸⁹ M. FÖRSTER, *Altenglische Predigtquellen. 5. Honorius' Elucidarium*, «Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen», 116-117 (1906), pp. 312-314, esp. p. 312, and S. HOLLIS, M. WRIGHT with the assistance of G. MILLS and A. PEDDER, *Old English Prose of Secular Learning*, Woodbridge-Rochester, NY, Brewer, 1992 (Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature, 4), pp. 76-77. The two items are N.R. KER, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957, reissued 1990, no. 209, arts. 48-49; ed. R.D-N. WARNER, *Early English Homilies from the Twelfth Century MS. Cotton Vesp. D. XIV*, London, OUP, 1917 (EETS o.s., 152), pp. 140-145. The corresponding Latin text is ed. in LEFÈVRE, *L'Elucidarium et les Lucidaires...*, pp. 405-411 and 390-392.

heaven), and of those who now live a life of comfort and sensual pleasures (and therefore will be all the more tormented in hell)⁹⁰. In particular, OE *brynstān* occurs within a clause where this kind of inverse reward is conveyed by contrasting the love of beautiful women that the rich have enjoyed on earth with the stench of sulphur that will torment them in their hellish afterlife. The clause in question reads:

for þære fægere wifmanna lufen heo sculen drigen brynstanes stænc
 ‘instead of the love of beautiful women they shall endure the **stench of sulphur**’⁹¹

and translates the Latin:

pro mulierum amore [induentur] sulphureo faetore
 ‘instead of the love of women (they are covered with) the **sulphurous stench**’⁹².

The reasons behind this idiosyncratic lexical choice are admittedly obscure and probably destined to remain so. It is virtually impossible to ascertain whether the anonymous Anglo-Saxon translator of the *Elucidarium* or the scribe who copied the work of the latter into the Vespasian manuscript⁹³ can be credited with the original coin or whether, in turn, either of them simply replicated a new word they had come across with. Even though his lifespan coincided with one of the most momentous phases in the history of the English language⁹⁴, the author of

⁹⁰ This inverse proportion is a favourite theme with Old English homilists: see, for example, Vercelli Homily xxii (D.G. SCRAGG [ed.], *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, Oxford, OUP, 1992 [EETS, o.s. 300], pp. 366-379); the Macarius Homily (R. ZAFFUTO [ed. and trans.], *Edizione e Analisi dell'omelia 'Ic bidde and eadmodlice lære men þa leofestan'*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Università degli Studi Roma Tre, 1999, pp. 178-197); Napier xxix (A.S. NAPIER [ed.], *Wulfstan. Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien*, Berlin, Weidmann, 1883, rptd. 1966 with updated bibliography by K. OSTHEEREN, pp. 134-143); and the *Sermo Augustini* (A.M. LUISELI FADDA [ed.], *Nuove omelie anglosassoni delle rinascenza benedettina*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1977, pp. 139-157).

⁹¹ WARNER, *Early English Homilies...*, p. 143, lines 30-31; my translation and emphasis.

⁹² LEFÈVRE, *L'Elucidarium et les Lucidaires...*, p. 411; my translation and emphasis.

⁹³ R. HANDLEY, *British Museum Ms. Cotton Vespasian D. xiv*, «Notes and Queries», 219 (1974), pp. 243-250, esp. pp. 247 and 250.

⁹⁴ On twelfth-century English, see, at least, M. SWAN, E.M. TREHARNE (eds.), *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, CUP, 2000 (CSASE, 30); M. SWAN, *Old English Textual Activity in the Reign of Henry II*, in R. KENNEDY, S. MEECHAM-JONES (eds.), *Writers of the Reign of Henry II*, New York, NY - Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 151-168, esp. pp. 151-152; E.M. TREHARNE, *English in the Post-Conquest Period*, in P. PULSIANO, E.M. TREHARNE (eds.), *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, Oxford-Malden, MA, Blackwell, 2001, pp. 403-414. For an overview of the literary and linguistic context of twelfth-century England, see I. SHORT, *Language and Literature*, in C. HARPER-BILL, E. VAN HOUTS (eds.), *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2003, pp. 191-213.

the Old English *Elucidarium* himself did not seem to be especially prone to innovation nor to foreign influence for that matter. Indeed, in his 1901 study of the language of the Old English *Elucidarium*, Förster pointed out the «total absence of any Scandinavian and French element», namely a «remarkable» feature in a twelfth-century text, which, however, «might be accounted for by the assumption that the translation was made in a district free from Scandinavian influence and by an old man»⁹⁵. More recently, Hofstetter has classified the lexicon of the Old English *Elucidarium* as fully conforming to the so-called Winchester vocabulary⁹⁶, upon which the impact of Scandinavian borrowings or indeed of other vernaculars, such as French and German, seems to have been on the whole quite limited⁹⁷. As to the Vespasian copyist⁹⁸, he too seems an unlikely candidate for the inclusion of *brynstān*, insofar as he has also been considered a fairly conservative scribe, whose orthography is predominantly late West Saxon, with a number of non-West Saxon and early Middle English features⁹⁹.

⁹⁵ FÖRSTER, *Two Notes...*, p. 89; see also above, p. 209.

⁹⁶ HOFSTETTER, *Winchester und der spätaenglische Sprachgebrauch...*, p. 321. On the so-called Winchester vocabulary, see, at least, H. GNEUSS, *The Origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold's School at Winchester*, «ASE», 1 (1972), pp. 63-83, esp. pp. 75-83, rptd. with the same pagination and addenda in ID., *Language and History in Early England*, Aldershot, Variorum, 1996 (VCSS, 559); W. HOFSTETTER, *Winchester and the Standardization of Old English Vocabulary*, «ASE», 17 (1988), pp. 139-161, esp. pp. 139-141, 152, and 157; M. GRETSCH, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*, Cambridge, CUP, 1999 (CSASE, 25), pp. 93-113; EAD., *Winchester Vocabulary and Standard Old English: the Vernacular in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, «Bulletin of the John Rylands Library», 83 (2001), pp. 41-87, esp. pp. 41-47 and 53; and EAD., *In Search of Standard Old English*, in L. KORNEXL, U. LENKER (eds.), *Bookmarks from the Past: Studies in Early English Language and Literature in Honour of Helmut Gneuss*, Frankfurt a.M., Lang, 2003, pp. 33-67, esp. pp. 35-37.

⁹⁷ GRETSCH, *The Intellectual Foundations...*, pp. 384-324, and GNEUSS, *Anglicae linguae interpretatio...*, pp. 131-137. The very origin of the Winchester vocabulary has been traced to the careful study, paraphrase, and translation of Latin texts as well as to the cultivation of the so-called hermeneutic style in Latin: see GRETSCH, *In Search of Standard Old English...*, pp. 35-36; EAD., *The Intellectual Foundations...*, pp. 93-113 and 333-349; and EAD., *Winchester Vocabulary and Standard Old English...*, pp. 48-57. On the hermeneutic style, see at least the classic study by M. LAPIDGE, *The Hermeneutic Style in Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Literature*, «ASE», 4 (1975), pp. 67-111, rptd. with addenda in ID., *Anglo-Latin Literature 900-1066*, London - Rio Grande, O.H., The Hambledon Press, 1993, pp. 105-149.

⁹⁸ Three scribal hands in total have been identified in the Vespasian manuscript, but the copying was mostly carried out by one scribe, with few exceptions; while *De peccato* was copied by the first and main hand, *De resurrectione* was the work of a second scribe, responsible only for *De resurrectione* and the following item: see KER, *Catalogue...*, pp. 276-277.

⁹⁹ HANDLEY, *Ms. Cotton Vespasian D. xiv...*, p. 247, and M.P. RICHARDS, *On the Date and Provenance of MS Cotton Vespasian D. XIV ff. 4-169*, «Manuscripta», 17 (1973), pp. 31-35, esp. pp. 31-33. Scandinavian borrowings have been identified in individual items of the Vespasian manuscript, especially in the Old English version of a Latin sermon by Ralph d'Escures on the Assumption of the Virgin and a homiletic piece known as the *Prose Phoenix*, but these Norse elements have been

Förster ascribed the Old English *Elucidarium* to a «West Saxon district, perhaps somewhere near the Mercian frontier»¹⁰⁰. In fact, more recent scholarship seems to point to Canterbury as the most likely place of origin, not only of both the Vespasian manuscript and the Latin *Elucidarium* but also of the Old English version¹⁰¹. Canterbury too hardly belongs to what have traditionally been considered the areas of primary Scandinavian influence, namely the North and the East of England¹⁰². On the other hand, this datum per se is futile, as accepted notions of the geographical distribution of Norse-derived vocabulary in English have recently been challenged and a new cataloguing of such words region per region has been called for¹⁰³.

Against this general ‘conservative’ background’ of the language of the Old English *Elucidarium*, however, Förster noted a few non-standard lexical choices¹⁰⁴ and concluded that, in spite of «the traditional, three century old orthography [the Old English *Elucidarium*] gives us some glimpses of the real English then spoken»¹⁰⁵.

OE *brynstān* could then be counted in among these innovative, albeit scarce, features of the Old English *Elucidarium*. Furthermore, I would suggest that this novel lexical choice may also have been motivated by the immediate context of

considered original features of these texts rather than subsequent additions by the scribe: see KER, *Catalogue...*, no. 209, arts. 44 and 49 respectively; ed. WARNER, *Early English Homilies...*, pp. 134-139 and 146-148; M. FÖRSTER, *Abt Raoul d’Escures und der spätae. ‘Sermo in festis S. Mariae’, «Archiv», 162 (1932), pp. 43-48, esp. p. 46; HOFSTETTER, *Winchester und der spätaltenglische Sprachgebrauch...*, nos. 72 and 88, pp. 239-240 and 257; and S.M. PONS SANZ, *Two Compounds in the Old English and Old Norse Versions of the Prose Phoenix*, «Arkiv för nordisk filologi», 122 (2007), pp. 137-156.*

¹⁰⁰ FÖRSTER, *Two Notes...*, p. 100.

¹⁰¹ DI SCIACCA, *London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian D. xiv...*, pp. [3-4 and 9-10], and EAD., *Vulgarising Christianity: the Old English Version of the Elucidarium*, in A. PETRINA, M. SANTINI (eds.), *The Medieval Translator. Traduire au Moyen Âge*, Papers Presented at the Tenth International Conference on the Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages (Padua, 23-27 July 2010), Turnhout, Brepols, forthcoming (The Medieval Translator, 14); see also above, pp. 208-209.

¹⁰² H. PETERS, *Zum Skandinavischen Lehngut im Altenglischen*, «Sprachwissenschaft», 6 (1981), pp. 85-124, esp. pp. 86-87, and D. KASTOVKY, *Vocabulary*, in HOGG - DENISON (eds.), *A History...*, pp. 199-270, esp. p. 224.

¹⁰³ DANCE, *Words Derived from Old Norse...*, pp. 10-12; S. HUG, *Scandinavian Loanwords and Their Equivalents in Middle English*, Bern, Lang, 1987 (European University Studies. Linguistics, 62), p. 367, and MOSKOWICH-SPIEGEL FANDIÑO, *Language Contact...*, pp. 143-145. See also C. DI SCIACCA, *OE lyft and loft: a Competing Doublet?*, in G. BORGHELLO (ed.), *Per Teresa. Saggi e ricerche in memoria di Teresa Ferro. I. Dentro e oltre i confini*, Udine, Forum, 2009, pp. 253-282, esp. pp. 254, 262-263, and 277.

¹⁰⁴ Förster listed at least four words «not instanced» in either B-T or J.R. CLARK HALL, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary with a Supplement by Herbert D. Meritt*, Cambridge, CUP, 1960⁴: see FÖRSTER, *Two Notes...*, pp. 99-100.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

its occurrence. Indeed, the passage where *brynstān* occurs refers to a very concrete quality of sulphur, namely its unpleasant smell, which is indeed the most distinctive feature of this element together with its combustibility. Yet, besides this passage from the *Elucidarium*, the stench of sulphur is explicitly mentioned only once more within the Old English corpus, that is in Book IV of the Old English version of Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*¹⁰⁶. In particular, in a passage describing the rain of fire and sulphur sent by God over Sodom, mention is made of «se fula stenc þæs swefles» ('the foul stench of sulphur')¹⁰⁷. (Predictably, here the word for 'sulphur' is the 'standard' *swefl*). Elsewhere, in the Old English corpus, 'sulphur' is qualified as 'foul' four times, but no explicit reference to its distinctive smell is made¹⁰⁸.

I would argue that precisely the mention of sulphur's stench (OE *stænc*), could provide a possible motivation for the preference of the compound *brynstān* over the standard *swef(e)l*. Such a choice could have been triggered by stylistic or rhetorical concerns, since the second constituent of the compound, *-stān*, is linked to the following *stænc* by both alliteration and consonance. These sound effects would have nicely matched the consonantal repetitions (*r*, *m*, *l*) connecting the two Latin phrases and, especially, the rhyme linking the two nouns (*amor* and *fetor*) representing the heads of the two contrasting phrases of the Latin source (*pro mulierum amore/ sulphureo faetore*)¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁶ This translation was first accomplished by Wærferth, bishop of Worcester († 915) at King Alfred's behest; eventually a heavily revised version was undertaken by an anonymous translator c. 950-1050: see R. JAYATILAKA, *Werferth*, in *BEASE*, p. 469.

¹⁰⁷ H. HECHT (ed.), *Bischofs Waerferth von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, 2 vols., Leipzig-Hamburg, Wiegand-Grand, 1900-1907 (Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa, 5), p. 323, line 18. Apparently, *swefl* is the reading occurring also in the later version of the Old English *Dialogi*, as it does not feature among the readings differentiating the two versions listed in D. YERKES, *The Two Versions of Wærferth's Translation of Gregory's Dialogues: an Old English Thesaurus*, Toronto, UTP, 1979 (Toronto Old English Series, 4).

¹⁰⁸ See Ælfric, *De oratione Moysi*: «God sende ða fyr on merigen and **fulne swefel** him to» («Then God sent to them, in the morning fire and **foul brimstone**»): W.W. SKEAT (ed. and trans.), *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, London, OUP, 1881-1900, rptd. as 2 vols. 1966 (EETS, o.s. 76, 82, 94, and 114), I, p. 298, line 211, trans. at p. 299 (my emphasis); Ælfric, *Interrogationes Sigeuulfi in Genesis*: «wurde mid þam **fulan swæfle** gewitnod» ('was tormented with **foul sulphur**'): G.E. MACLEAN (ed.), *Ælfric's Anglo-Saxon Version of Alcuini Interrogationes Sigeuulfi presbyteri in Genesis*, Halle, Karras, 1883, p. 104, lxvii, 460 (my translation and emphasis); Vercelli Homily xxiii: «and eac þa **fulan** receas tunge **swefles** þær geseah upgeotan» ('he saw the **foul** belching of **sulphur**'): SCRAGG, *The Vercelli Homilies...*, p. 390, lines 126-127 (my translation and emphasis); and the Apocalypse of Thomas: «ealle bioð **mid swefles fulissum** aðisterade» ('all are made dark by the **foulness of sulphur**'): M. FÖRSTER, *A New Version of the Apocalypse of Thomas in Old English*, «Anglia», 73 (1955), pp. 6-36, at pp. 22-23 (my translation and emphasis).

¹⁰⁹ On Honorius as a refined stylist, see LEFÈVRE, *L'Elucidarium et les Lucidaires...*, pp. 208-209; V.I.J. FLINT, *Historical and Religious Writers of the Latin West: Honorius Augustodunensis of Regensburg*,

Brynstān vs Cwicfyr?

Interestingly, the choice of a new coin for ‘sulphur’ as an alternative to *sweƿ(e)l* is not unparalleled in the Old English corpus. Indeed, two twin Old English passages concerning again the fiery rain falling over Sodom attest to another rendition of Lat. *sulphur*. The two relevant extracts are part of the two related interlinear glosses to the Lindisfarne and the Rushworth (or MacRegol) Gospels. The former gloss is the earliest surviving gospel translation in English and was written by Aldred, a priest of the community of Chester-le-Street, between c. 950 and 970¹¹⁰. Eventually, the Lindisfarne gloss served, though not entirely, as a source for the interlinear gloss to the Rushworth Gospels¹¹¹, and together they make up two of the most relevant witnesses to the Anglian dialect group¹¹².

The passages in question are the rendition of Luke 17: 29, in particular the clause «pluit ignem et **sulphur** de caelo» [‘(God made) fire and sulphur rain from the sky’], which is rendered as «feall þæt fyr & þæt **cwicfyr** of heofnum» (‘fire and **sulphur** fell from the skies) in Lindisfarne and replicated as «gifeoll ðæt fyr & **cwicfyr** of heofne» (‘fire and **sulphur** fell from the sky’) in Rushworth¹¹³.

Although occurring twice in the Old English corpus, *cwicfyr* in fact represents an even more idiosyncratic lexical choice than *brynstān*. Unlike the latter, *cwicfyr* does not seem to have any equivalents in the other Germanic languages nor any continuation in the successive history of the English language¹¹⁴. (It may

Aldershot, Variorum 1995 (Authors of the Middle Ages, 6), p. 59; EAD., *The Place and Purpose of the Works of Honorius Augustodunensis*, «Revue Bénédictine», 87 (1977), pp. 97-127, esp. p. 110, rptd. with the same pagination in EAD., *Ideas in the Medieval West...*; and EAD., *Heinricus of Augsburg and Honorius Augustodunensis: Are They the Same Person?*, «Revue Bénédictine», 102 (1982), pp. 148-158, esp. pp. 151-152, rptd. with the same pagination in EAD., *Ideas in the Medieval West...*

¹¹⁰ D.G. SCRAGG, *Aldred*, in *BEASE*, p. 27. On the Lindisfarne Gospels, contained in ms. London, British Library, Cotton Nero D. iv, see at least M.P. BROWN, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe*, London, British Library, 2003.

¹¹¹ On the Rushworth Gospels, contained in ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. D. 2. 19, see the introduction by W.O. HASSALL to the microfilm *The Macregol or Rushworth Gospels*, Oxford, Oxford Microform Publications, 1978 (Major Treasures in the Bodleian Library, 10). The vernacular gloss to both Gospels has been ed. by W.W. SKEAT, *The Holy Gospels in Anglo-Saxon, Northumbrian and Old Mercian Versions, Synoptically Arranged*, 4 vols., Cambridge, CUP, 1871-1887, rptd. Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970.

¹¹² T. HOAD, *Dialects*, in *BEASE*, pp. 140-141; HOFSTETTER, *Winchester und der spätaltenglische Sprachgebrauch...*, no. 233, pp. 479-481; and H. SCHABRAM, *Superbia: Studien zum altenglischen Wortschatz*, Munich, Fink, 1965, pp. 61-62.

¹¹³ W.W. SKEAT (ed.), *The Gospel According to St Luke: in Anglo-Saxon and Northumbrian Versions Synoptically Arranged*, Cambridge, CUP, 1874, p. 171 (my translation and emphasis). The corresponding passage in the West Saxon version of the Gospel features *sweƿl*: see R.M. LIUZZA (ed.), *The Old English Version of the Gospels. I. Text and Introduction*, Oxford, OUP, 1994 (EETS, o.s. 304), p. 139.

¹¹⁴ Mod. English *quickfire* and the derivative *quickfirer* denote a type of gun which can fire shots in rapid succession: see *OED*, *s. uu.*

be relevant, however, to note the analogous formations *quicksilver* ‘mercury’, a loan-translation from Lat. *argentum uiuum*, attested since the Old English period and paralleled also in OHG *quecsilabar*, MLG *quiksulver*, MDu. *quicksilver*¹¹⁵, as well as *quicklime* ‘calcium oxide’, again a loan-translation from Lat. *calx uiua*¹¹⁶.) The uniqueness of *cwicfyr* can be accounted for by its being a non-West Saxon word¹¹⁷, which has otherwise remained unattested. I would also suggest that the choice of *cwicfyr/cuicfyr* in the particular context of Luke’s phrase could have been motivated by what looks like an obvious attempt at achieving a sound effect through the rhyme and epistrophe linking the crucial doublet *fyr* and *cwicfyr* as well as through the alliteration linking the two nouns with the verb (*ge*)*feallan* (*feall þæt fyr & þæt cuicfyr / gifeoll ðæt fyr & cwicfyr*).

The very texts where *cwicfyr/cuicfyr* occurs further enhance the relevance of the compound for this study, since the two related interlinear glosses to the Lindisfarne and Rushworth Gospels have both long been included in the canon of Old English texts showing a significant Scandinavian influence¹¹⁸. In general, «an intrinsic similarity [linked] Anglian English and [Scandinavian]»¹¹⁹, and, in particular, St Cuthbert’s community, to which Aldred belonged, «must have had [close contact]» with the Scandinavian settlers of Northumbria¹²⁰. However, it has been noted that among the «important number of Scandinavian loanwords [in the Lindisfarne gloss,] there are many words missing that would be very common during the Middle English period and, in fact, we do not even find one of the most important loan-words of the period, *lagu*»¹²¹. In the light of these considerations, the choice of *cwicfyr/cuicfyr* to denote sulphur instead of an allegedly Norse-

¹¹⁵ The compound is also attested in ON *kviksilfr*, but here it is a loanword from MLG: see C.T. CARR, *Nominal Compounds in Germanic*, London, OUP, 1939 (St Andrews University Publications, 41), p. 147, no. 2; *OED*, s.u.; *Thesaurus*, 01. 01.02.02.03.01.

¹¹⁶ *OED*, s.u.; C. KAY, J. ROBERTS, M. SAMUELS, I. WOTHERSPOON (eds.), *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford, OUP, 2009, 03.10.12.03.04. It may also be worth to point out the two EME compounds *brim-fīr* ‘the fire of burning sulphur’ and *quik-brimstōn* ‘native or virgin sulphur’: see *MED*, s. uu. *brim-fīr* and *quik* 5 b.

¹¹⁷ F. WENISCH, *Spezifisch anglisches Wortgut in den nordhumbrischen Interlinearglossirierungen des Lukasevangeliums*, Heidelberg, Winter, 1979 (Anglistische Forschungen, 132), p. 313.

¹¹⁸ D. HOFMANN, *Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*, Copenhagen, Ejnar Munksgard, 1955 (Bibliotheca Armamagnæana, 14), pp. 167-181; J. HINES, *Scandinavian English: a Creole in Context*, in STURE-URELAND - BRODERICK (eds.), *Language Contact in the British Isles...*, pp. 403-427, esp. pp. 409-413 and 424-425; and S.M. PONS SANZ, *Analysis of the Scandinavian Loanwords in the Aldredian Glosses to the Lindisfarne Gospels*, Valencia, Universitat de Valencia 2000 (SELL Monographs, 9).

¹¹⁹ HINES, *Scandinavian English...*, pp. 412-413, quotation at p. 413. See also THOMASON - KAUFMANN, *Language Contact...*, pp. 287-290.

¹²⁰ PONS SANZ, *Analysis of the Scandinavian Loanwords...*, p. 130; see also *ibidem*, pp. 23-39.

¹²¹ PONS SANZ, *Analysis of the Scandinavian Loanwords...*, p. 129.

derived synonym such as *brynstān*, could admittedly be explained as one of these perplexing idiosyncrasies of the vocabulary of the Lindisfarne gloss. On the other hand, it could be argued that at the time of the compilation of the Lindisfarne and Rushworth glosses, OE *brynstān* had not yet been coined, therefore it could not have represented an alternative to the ‘standard’ *swef(e)l* anyway. Such an alternative was instead found in the rare coin *cwicyfyr/cuicyfyr*, which, furthermore, turned out to be a stylistic option fitting the context seamlessly.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be summed up that neither the arguments pro nor those against the Scandinavian derivation of OE *brynstān* are fully conclusive. On the one hand, the phonetic and morpho-syntactical features of *brynstān* are both of an Old English cast and the two constituents of the compound are also drawn from the Old English lexicon, where they are abundantly attested¹²². On the other, the stringent equivalence with ON *brennisteinn* – an equivalence not only in terms of word-formation as with the corresponding Low German compound *bernstē[i]n* ‘amber’, but, what is more, in the semantic sphere – as well as the chronology of its first occurrence inevitably evoke a Scandinavian context for the origin of *brynstān*. Also, the derivation of the Old English compound could possibly match the itinerary through which its very referent may have reached early medieval England, that is from Iceland¹²³.

Indeed, it seems to me that OE *brynstān* is a perfect case in point of what Björkman called the difficulty of establishing «what is to be called a loan-word and what is only a native word influenced by Scandinavian»¹²⁴. In other words, the rapid success of *brynstān* from the early twelfth century throughout the Middle English period seems to exemplify what has been called «commonality or convergence» between two languages, namely «the success or emergence of similar or equivalent items within languages in contact as a result of their contact rather than their transference from the one to the other»¹²⁵.

In sum, OE *brynstān* is yet another subtle phenomenon of language interference, the fascinating discipline of which late Prof. Gusmani has been such an insightful, indefatigable scholar. It is to be hoped that he would not have been too displeased with this modest contribution in his memory¹²⁶.

¹²² See above, pp. 202-204.

¹²³ See above, p. 207.

¹²⁴ BJÖRKMAN, *Scandinavian Loan-Words...*, p. 13, n. 2.

¹²⁵ HINES, *Scandinavian English...*, p. 411.

¹²⁶ My warmest thanks to Prof. P. Lendinara for her helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.