

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

NAMES

AND NAMING

Edited by
CAROLE HOUGH

With assistance from
DARIA IZDEBSKA

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CHAPTER 7

RIVER NAMES

SVANTE STRANDBERG

7.1 THE CHARACTER AND IMPORTANCE OF RIVER NAMES

RIVER names constitute an important body of linguistic and historical material, owing to their considerable age, wide linguistic range, and role in society.

Names of rivers provide the most important evidence of an early linguistic European community. They can bear witness to human thought, activities, and conditions in very remote ages, and naturally to early stages of language development (lexicon, phonology, morphology, and semantics).

Historical research in a country like Sweden has concerned itself to a very great extent with lake names; these can be as old as river names and concern the same words or roots. River names derived from names of lakes are common in Sweden. In Denmark and Norway, too, much research has been done on lake names. For topographical reasons, in areas of Europe such as England and Germany more attention has been paid to river names than to lake names.