

In the Beginning was the Name

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names such as rivers and villages there is the interpretation of the early stages of these languages in which they can be assigned. When the "lowest" element is reached that can still be interpreted with the linguistic knowledge now at our disposal, there will still be a number of names left that have defied all attempts at an explanation, but it would be dangerous to treat obviously as a sign of the great age of a name. That condition of a name is subject to so many influences, especially when more than one language is involved in its construction, that it would be surprising if every single name could be satisfactorily analysed in the course of our investigations.

Generally, place-names ante-dating names of human settlements are those denoting water-courses or mountains and hills, and especially names of burns and rivers. These may throw much light on the problems of linguistic prehistory and so of prehistory in general. The oldest of them are like fossils preserved in later surrounding linguistic media, and it is not too bold to say that the oldest Scottish river-names give us information about the language or languages spoken on the banks of the water-courses they denote, more than 1000 years B.C.

This is not the place for us to review the course of our investigations in that particular field of research. It will suffice for our immediate purpose to state the results of that inquiry: there are at least five types of Scottish hydronymy, the English, the Norse, the Gaelic, the "p" Celtic and the pre-Celtic Indo-European. A closer examination, however, shows that there are really two English types, one linked up with northern English stream-nomenclature and one rooted upon underlying Gaelic patterns where English began to invade the Highlands. Furthermore, the Norse have now to be divided into three sub-sections, one supplying the generic name Old Norse i. *gröt* and – possibly – also the second introducing the first names near the English border, the third providing the Norse dialect with the same prefix. Only two names cover the whole of Scotland: the Norse, the English, and the Gaelic, the pre-Celtic ones. All others are confined to a certain part of the country, and usually to a certain period of name productivity.

Morphologically, the majority of Scottish hydronyms – as those of the other parts of the British Isles and of other European countries – consist of compound names, regardless of the language in which they belong. But underneath there is a different class of names as to be found characterised by the formation *verb + suffix*. This group only amounts to 8 per cent of all Scottish river-names mentioned in the very early Old Norse map, with the following subdivisions: Gaelic names 1.5 per cent, pre-Celtic names 1.8 per cent, pre-Celtic names 0.8 per cent. With very possible exceptions, Germanic names do not appear in this category, and the formation of river-names by suffixing verbs to have ended