



JOURNAL OF THE ENGLISH PLACE-NAME SOCIETY

Volume 15 (1983)

ISSN 1351-3095

Thurstable revisited

L. J. Bronnenkant (pp. 9–19)

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£45 (full)*

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ABBREVIATIONS OF COUNTIES AND EPNS COUNTY SURVEYS

Co	Cornwall
Ha	Hampshire
He	Herefordshire
K	Kent
La	Lancashire
Nb	Northumberland
Sf	Suffolk
So	Somerset
Wt	Isle of Wight
CPNE	<i>Cornish Place-Name Elements.</i>
EPNE	<i>English Place-Name Elements, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN BdHu	<i>The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire.</i>
PN Brk	<i>The Place-Names of Berkshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN Bu	<i>The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire.</i>
PN Ca	<i>The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely.</i>
PN Ch	<i>The Place-Names of Cheshire, Parts 1–5.</i>
PN Cu	<i>The Place-Names of Cumberland, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN D	<i>The Place-Names of Devon, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN Db	<i>The Place-Names of Derbyshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN Do	<i>The Place-Names of Dorset, Parts 1–4.</i>
PN Du	<i>The Place-Names of County Durham, Part 1.</i>
PN Ess	<i>The Place-Names of Essex.</i>
PN ERY	<i>The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York.</i>
PN Gl	<i>The Place-Names of Gloucestershire, Parts 1–4.</i>
PN Hrt	<i>The Place-Names of Hertfordshire.</i>
PN Le	<i>The Place-Names of Leicestershire, Parts 1–7.</i>
PN Li	<i>The Place-Names of Lincolnshire, Parts 1–7.</i>
PN Mx	<i>The Place-Names of Middlesex (apart from the City of London).</i>
PN Nf	<i>The Place-Names of Norfolk, Parts 1–3.</i>
PN Nt	<i>The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire.</i>
PN NRY	<i>The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire.</i>
PN Nth	<i>The Place-Names of Northamptonshire.</i>
PN O	<i>The Place-Names of Oxfordshire, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN R	<i>The Place-Names of Rutland.</i>
PN Sa	<i>The Place-Names of Shropshire, Parts 1–9.</i>
PN Sr	<i>The Place-Names of Surrey.</i>
PN St	<i>The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part 1.</i>
PN Sx	<i>The Place-Names of Sussex, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN W	<i>The Place-Names of Wiltshire.</i>
PN Wa	<i>The Place-Names of Warwickshire.</i>
PN We	<i>The Place-Names of Westmorland, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN Wo	<i>The Place-Names of Worcestershire.</i>
PN WRY	<i>The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Parts 1–8.</i>

THURSTABLE REVISITED

Thurstable Hundred (Ess) is first recorded as *Thur(e)stapel(l)*, *-stapl(e)* 1066–87, *Turestapla* 1086, *Turstapl* 1198 and *Turstapel* 1219.¹ Presupposing the same loss of *n* before *r* seen in the etymology of Thursday, Reaney, Smith and others have assumed the original form to be *Þunres stapol* 'Thunor's pillar'.² In 1962 G. Turville-Petre discussed the possible religious significance of this name by noting ties between deities and special pillars or trees in various Germanic sources.³ 'Sacred pillars and trees are known from many ... sources. Tacitus (*Germania*, 34) mentions "Pillars of Hercules" (*Herculis columnas*), said to be still standing in his day, and probably situated in Heligoland or on the Frisian coast.' The *Frankish Annals* (2.2, 3) related Charlemagne's destruction of a Saxon sanctuary called *Irmīnsul* where *sul* is a cognate of OE *sȳl*, ON *sula* 'pillar, post'.⁴ In Icelandic texts, the god Thor was sometimes associated with *qndvegissúlur* 'high-seat posts', as in *Eyrbyggja saga* 3–4 and *Landnamabok* 85, 197. Turville-Petre believed these and similar references belonged to one common tradition, the dedication of a sacred pillar to a god of strength. He therefore interpreted Thurstable as the former site of a pillar sacred to the god Thunor.

Though his conclusion is intriguing, I believe the chain of evidence forged to reach it breaks under the weight of closer examination. I further propose that a purely secular interpretation rather than a religious one is possible, and perhaps probable, for Thurstable.

First a review of Turville-Petre's arguments. He begins with the statement on the form of the name: 'The loss of *n* before *r* has many parallels in Late Old English, and it is therefore not necessary to assume Scandinavian influence in the form Thurstable. We may suppose that, in pagan times, there was a pillar in Thurstable hundred, dedicated to the god Thunor, and that this was a meeting place.' This supposition is based on a weak premise. Though there is no certain sign of Scandinavian influence in the form of Thurstable, Turville-Petre should not ignore it as a possibility, nor should he assume in consequence that because Scandinavian influence is unproven, the name's Anglo-Saxon origin is certain. To deduce further from this that Thurstable possessed pagan religious significance is to reach a desired verdict before the case is tried.

Turville-Petre next discusses several classical references to Hercules and his columns in Germanic territories. For *silva Herculi sacra* from Tacitus's *Annals* 2.12 he concludes: 'If only because of comparison with Norse *Þorslundr*, this may lead us to suspect that by Hercules, Tacitus meant Thunor or *þorr*.' This comparison is misleading, however, because place-names

combining *lundr* 'grove' with the names of deities (as Óðinn, Freyr, Freyia, Ullr, Níðr) are abundant in Scandinavia.⁵ Old English glosses equate Thunor with Jove/Jupiter, not Hercules.⁶ Though Hercules and Thor shared some superficial similarities, their natures and roles in traditional lore were on the whole quite distinct; and early authors seem to have used Hercules's name indiscriminantly to describe different figures in Germanic tradition. Even Turville-Petre admits that in *Germania* 3 *Hercule(s)* seems to resemble a native hero like Sigfrid or Arminius. Thus it need not have signified Thunor or Thor in Tacitus's *Annals*, as Turville-Petre would have us believe.

The next subject is the *Irminsul*, a great column or pillar once venerated by pagan Saxons. Turville-Petre states: 'It is now generally agreed that the element *Irmin-* has some sacral significance, and that its original meaning must be deeper than "big" or "extensive".' So he argued that *Irmin* could be the name of a god. This was not true even in 1962; distinguished scholars do not 'generally agree' on *Irmin*'s significance, with the majority rejecting *Irmin* as a god-name.⁷ Etymologists like Pokorny and Holthausen explain *Irmin* merely as 'great, universal', relating it to Greek ὄψευος 'high, tall'.⁸ Such a meaning is evident in Germanic compounds: OHG *Irminthlod* 'all mankind', *Irmingot* 'Almighty God', OE *eormencyn* 'the entire human race', *eormenlāf* 'great legacy', ON *Ǫrmingrund* 'the spacious earth', *Ǫrmingandr* 'the great (Midgard) serpent'. As Grimm noted, 'that (*Irminsul*) was dedicated to any one god, is not to be found in the term itself', apparently meaning that the proper possessive form of the first element, **Irminnessul*, is never recorded.⁹ Thus *Irminsul* might have signified nothing more than 'great or universal pillar'. This is precisely how Rudolf of Fulda interpreted it in his *Translatio S. Alexandri* 3/17- 8: *Irminsul... quod latine dicitur universalis columna, quasi sustinens omnia*.¹⁰

For *Irmin* as a god-name, Turville-Petre relied heavily upon H.M. Chadwick's discussion.¹¹ He claimed that Chadwick gave 'strong arguments' to support the view that Tacitus meant the god *Irmin* in *Annals* 2.12. Chadwick's arguments were as follows:

1) The Saxon history written by Widukind around 968 states:

Mane autem facto ad orientalem portam ponunt aquilam, aramque victoriae construunt secundum errorem paternum sacra sua propria veneratione venerati sunt: nomine Martem, effigie columnarum imitantes Herculem ... Ex hoc apparet aestimationem illorum utcumque probabilem, qui Saxones originem duxisse putant de Graecis, quia Hirmin vel Hermls Graece Mars dicitur (1.12)

Chadwick translates:

'In the morning they planted their eagle at the eastern gate and, piling up an altar of victory, paid appropriate reverence to the objects of their worship according to the superstition of their fathers, representing by name

Mars, by the likeness of pillars Hercules... Hence the view of those who hold that the Saxons are descended from the Greeks has a certain amount of probability, for Mars is called Hirmin or Hermes in Greek.'

There is little doubt that Widukind was thinking here of the term *Irminsul*; hence his connection between *Mars/Hirmin* and the Saxons. This surely is only medieval etymologizing. It does not imply that there was a Germanic god Irmin whose characteristics were those of the Greek Hermes or Roman Mars. On the contrary it suggests that in order to explain an otherwise incomprehensible element *Irmin*-Widukind had to invent an irregular form *Hirmin* which he linked to Greek *Hermes*, and hence wrongly to Mars.¹² The title *Irminsul* was the main factor, since the altar represented Mars (Hermes) only by name and not by sculptured appearance. In appearance, *Irminsul* resembled the pillars of Hercules - again, probably no more than a reference to a 'great pillar'. ii) Chadwick next quotes Tacitus's account of a Roman prince who had heard of *Herculis columnas* during the German campaign (Germania 23). Chadwick remarks: 'If Widukind could speak of 'pillars of Hercules' with reference to the *Irminsul*, may not a Romanised German of the first century have been capable of using the same expression?' This is possible. But even if *Irminsul* equalled *Herculis columnas*, there is no reason to assume that *Irmin* was a god-name equivalent to *Hercules*. The equation could well have derived only from the columned appearance of the two monuments. Significantly, Chadwick himself admits, 'Perhaps it may be thought that this rumour is too insecure a foundation to build upon.'¹³ iii) Chadwick then concludes with the main object of his discussion: the identification of the Saxons' tribal origins. He suggests a tentative link between *Irminsul* and the tribal name *Hermiones*. His theory is based on Germania 2, which reads: *e quorum nominibus... Hermlones... vocentur*. This might suggest a god- or semi-god-name similar to *Hermin* which in turn gave its name to the people. However, Chadwick notes that though tribal names like *Marsi* or *Suebi* appear connected with 'religious confederacies', in the case of *Hermlones* (and, incidentally, *Istaeuones*, *Inguaeones*) there is 'no evidence of such confederacies'.

Chadwick's arguments for *Irmin* as a god-name are not as strong as Turville-Petre asserts. Even if we believe *Irmin* was once a god's name, despite the evidence to the contrary, Turville-Petre is unable to correlate him directly with Thunor, a god known to have been worshipped individually by the Saxons.¹⁴ Instead, he hedges by stating that a precise link is unimportant since they both might have been the same type of god. This is obviously a weak argument since the differences in identity between *Irmin* and Thunor, whether they were similar gods or not, would be paramount to any understanding of the significance of 'Thunor's pillar in Essex. The hundred was not called **Irminesstapol*, nor is there any reason to believe Thunor replaced *Irmin* in England while

he did not on the Continent.¹⁵ Interestingly, the only direct link between *Irmin-* and a god is offered by the Old Norse *Þulur* where *Jormunr* is a nickname, not of Thor, but of Odin.¹⁶ For a discussion of Thurstable we must therefore question the strength and relevance of Turville-Petre's *Irminsul* evidence: any solid connection between Thunor and *Irmin* is obviously wanting.

Turville-Petre then jumps several centuries to the Icelandic sagas and histories. He summarizes passages from *Landnamabok*, *Kormaks*, *Gísla saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* which involve the tossing of *qndveglssulur* 'high-seat pillars' overboard.¹⁷ Wherever they drift ashore, their owners will settle, in some instances. Thor played some role in this operation. Turville-Petre concluded: 'It is not told in the Norse sources that any god other than Þorr was patron of the supporting pillars. In fact, they appear to be Þorr's pillars.' A close examination of these sources shows the hollowness of this assessment.

Though no other god is specifically named in connection with *qndveglssulur* in the Norse texts, neither do they expressly nominate Thor as patron of all *qndveglssulur*. For example, *Eyrbyggja saga* 3-4 relates how Thorolftr Mostrarskegg was *mikill vinr Þors* 'a great friend of Thor', in charge of the god's temple on the island of Mostr off Norway. When forced to leave Norway, Thorolftr sacrifices to Thor who advises him to go to Iceland. Thorolftr dismantles his patron's temple, retaining most of its timbers *ok sva moldina undan stallanum þar er Þorr hafði á setti* 'and also the earth from under the pedestal that Thor had stood on.' On his approach to Iceland, Thorolftr threw overboard his high-seat pillars which had stood in the temple: *þar var, Þorr skorinn á annarri... Eptir þat kǫnnuðu þeir landit ok fundu á nesi framanverðu... at Þorr var á land kominn með sulurnar; þat var síðan kallat Þorsnes* 'Thor was engraved on one... After that they explored the land and found that Thor had come to land with the pillars on the point of a headland; that has since been called Thorsnes.' The use of *qndveglssulur* as guides to new homesteads was a common motif in Icelandic literature. Usually though no particular god was named as their source of guidance (e.g. *Landnamabok* 8-9, 270, 289, 297, 307; *Kormaks saga* 2). Bearing this in mind, Thor might have occurred in the above passage only in his capacity as Thorolftr's tutelary god, and because the author was explaining the origin of *Þorsnes* 'Thor's headland' and *Þorsa* 'Thor's river'. Indeed, the rest of the chapter is devoted to describing the sacredness of this region with regard to Thor. That the pillars themselves were not automatically to be associated with Thor is found in the author's explanation that one had his image (?) carved on it. If Thor had been the exclusive patron of *qndveglssulur*, such a statement would have been unnecessary. Also, the fact that Thor 'stood' on a *stallr* 'shelf, pedestal' in the temple indicates that there was the centre of his veneration, not the *qndveglss-* or any other *sulur*. Contrary to

Turville-Petre's assertion that the phrase *þórr var á land kominn með sulurnar* 'nearly identified' them with the god, in fact it expresses some degree of separation between them.

Turville-Petre also mentions Landnamabok. This apparent evidence of Thor as patron of high-seat pillars is weakened when we understand that Hallsteinn was the son of Thorolf, *mikill vinr þors*, of Eyrbyggja saga. Gull-Þoris saga 7 informs us that Hallsteinn thereafter put up a temple to Thor; so, like his father before him, he cultivated that god. Hence Eyrbyggja saga 3-4 and Landnamabok 123 are not independent pieces of evidence linking Thor to the *sulur*. They deal with a single family who asked guidance from their patron Thor.

Turville-Petre's bias is more evident in his summary of the only remaining Thor-*qndveglssulur* episode, Landnamabok 197. He says: 'It is told of a settler in northern Iceland that, when he first sighted land, he refused to jettison his pillars, saying that he would rather invoke Þórr directly, and ask the god to show him where to land.' The text itself reads: *en er þeir komu í landsyn, gekk Hreiddarr til siglu ok sagðsk eigi mundu kasta qndveglssulum fyrir borð, kvezk þat þykkja ómerkiligt at gera ráð sitt eptir því, kvezk heldr mundu helta á þor, at hann vísað honum til landa* 'and when they came in sight of land, Hreiddarr went to the mast and said he would not cast his high-seat pillars overboard; he said he thought it silly to make one's decisions in such a way, and that he would rather pray to Thor so that he should direct him to a place to settle.' Hreiddarr wished to invoke Thor instead of casting his pillars overboard (which he thought silly) not because of his desire to skip the middleman. Turville-Petre's sense of 'directly' is nowhere conveyed in this passage. Indeed, the implication is that Thor's invocation was considered a distinct alternative to jettisoning the *qndveglssulur*. That Thor was a guide independent of the pillars, is seen in the continuation of Landnamabok 197 and in Landnamabok 218: *Helgi var blandinn mjök í tru; hann trúð á Krist, en het á þor til sjófara ok harðæða. Þá er Helgi sa Ísland, gekk hann til fréttu við þor, hvar land skyldi taka, en fréttin vísað honum norð um landit* 'Helgi's faith was very mixed; he believed in Christ but prayed to Thor for sea-journeys and in difficult times. When Helgi sighted Iceland, he consulted Thor as to where he should land, and the oracle guided him to the north of the land.' Considering these passages we might argue the existence of two separate beliefs: i) that *qndveglssulur* could take a man where his family was destined to settle, ii) that the family's patron god (here Thor) could lead them to their new homestead. Eyrbyggja saga 3-4 and Landnamabok 123 might have been conflations of these two ideas.

Curiously, Turville-Petre's article ends upon a circular argument in which Thurstable, the supposed subject of the paper, is used in evidence for the theory that Irmin was a god:

'From the arguments so far given, it seems that by Hercules,

Tacitus could just as well have designated Irmin as Þorr (Thunor). In either case, he had good reason. Irmin and Þorr resembled Hercules in that all three were gods of supporting pillars. While the *Irminsul* supported the world of the Saxons, Þorr, with his *qndvegíssulur*, upheld the house of the Icelandic farmer, and with his *stapol* he assured the security of the Essex hundred... Who, then, is Irmin, if the arguments that he is a god are accepted?... Irmin, since his pillar upholds everything, must have been conceived as a god of the same type as Þorr, Herakles, Indra. It is, therefore, of minor importance whether we identify the Germanic Hercules of Tacitus with Þorr or with Irmin.'

I disagree. It is extremely important at any rate with regard to understanding the significance of Thurstable, especially as neither Thor nor a god Irmin was necessarily meant by *Hercules*.

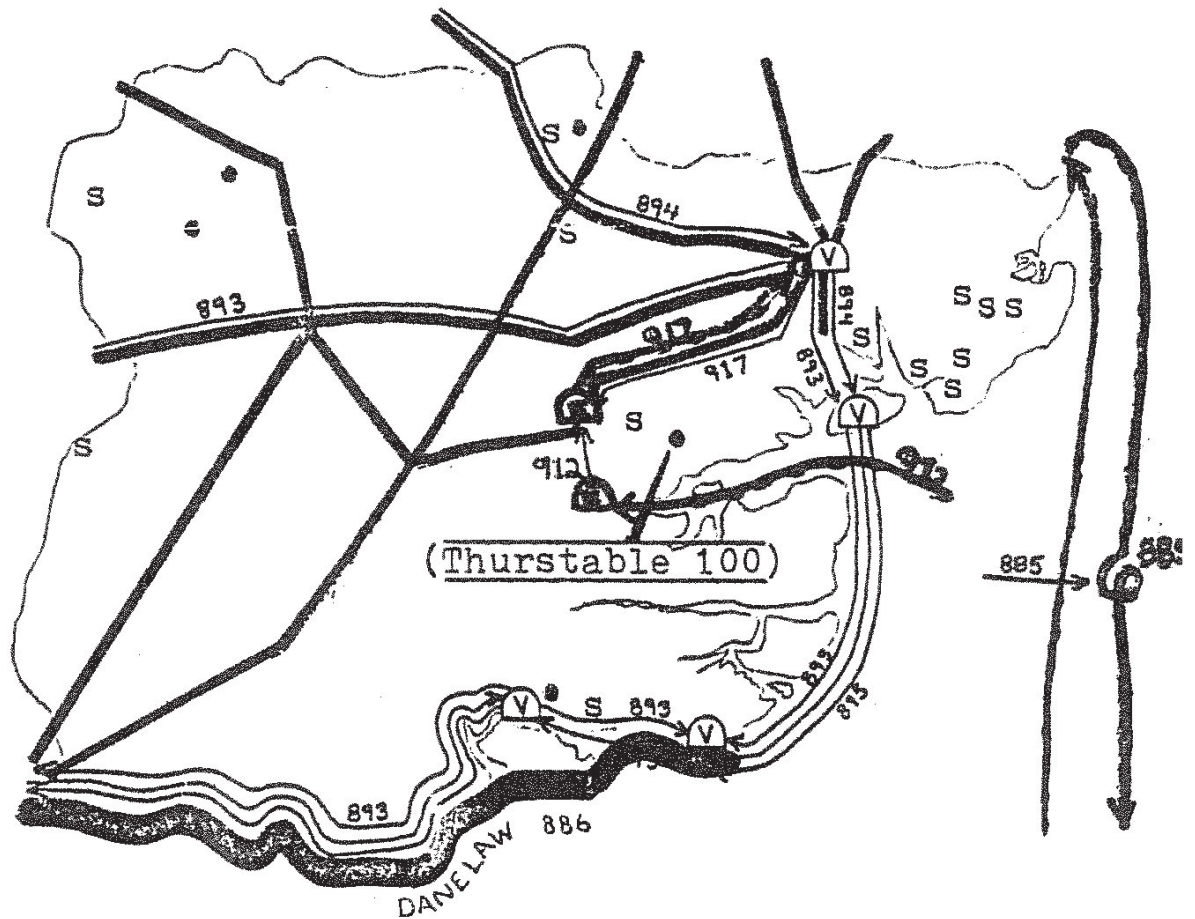
In closing, Turville-Petre attempts to explain why *Jörmunr* was Odin's nickname instead of Thor's. He says: 'But some of Óðinn's names do not appear to be nicknames, but rather the names of forgotten gods, whose functions Óðinn has absorbed.' If Odin had indeed usurped Irmin's role - and therefore his association with pillars - how does Turville-Petre justify his inclusion of the contemporary Thor-*qndvegíssulur* evidence? According to him, they should have been Odin's high-seat pillars.

It is apparent that much of Turville-Petre's argumentation relies on a series of unproved and insecure associations. Precisely who or what was designated by *Herculis columnas* and similar phrases is unclear. So too is the significance of *Irmin* - in the compound *Irminsul* - whether it be a lost god's name or more likely an adjective denoting 'great, universal'. Even if *Irmin* were a god, Turville-Petre can show no direct correlation between him and Hercules or Thunor/Thor. Thor's relationship with *qndvegíssulur* might have been intimate; but it is at least as possible that his appearance in these stories was only because he was patron of the family who used the pillars. A span of many years looms between Tacitus, veneration of the *Irminsul* and *qndvegíssulur* tales. Turville-Petre's attempted bridge between them rests on insecure foundations and cannot support the weight of his assertion that Thurstable was the site of a pillar sacred to Thunor.

Technically, Thurstable's early forms can also represent **Þures stapol* 'Thur's pillar', where *Thur* is an Anglo-Scandinavian personal name.¹⁸ Thoresby (Nott), Thoresthorpe (L), Thruscross (YWR), Thursby (Cu), Tusmore (Ox) and similar names attest to the appearance of *Thur* in place-names. Reaney rejected this interpretation on the grounds that an Essex hundred-name containing an Anglo-Scandinavian name was improbable.¹⁹ Presumably, he felt that the small total number of Scandinavian place-names in Essex, when compared to those in other Southern Danelaw territories like Northamptonshire or Cambridgeshire, indicated superficial Scandinavian influence or settlement.

MAP 1

s	Scandinavian place-name	(V)	Viking fort
•	Pagan place-name	→	" movement
—	Roman road	(A)	English fort
		→	" movement



902: Essex Vikings aid Ethelwold

912: Southern Essex submits to Edward

917: The remainder of Essex submits to Edward

Such an argument overlooks the similar situation in Huntingdonshire. It was located in the heart of Danelaw country, between Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire. It too possesses few place-names exhibiting Scandinavian influence. Nevertheless, two of its four hundred-names are among them: Toseland and Normancross. Evidently Scandinavian influence was strong enough to affect half the county's hundred-names without greatly altering the general nomenclature. Perhaps the situation was similar in Essex.

Essex's historical background would support such a theory. Map 1 places the county's Scandinavian place-names in context with known Viking movements there up to c. 920. The majority of the names are clustered in the north-eastern portion of Essex near the Suffolk border. Several surround the Viking bases at Colchester and Mersea, while two others are along the Roman road connecting Colchester to Cambridge. Most are along the coast or a large river which would have allowed easy access to Viking ships. Thurstable is in the clustered north-eastern area, directly across the river from the English forts at Witham and Maldon. This indicates that the English considered Thurstable as hostile territory. It was apparently under Scandinavian control as long as any other Essex region before the Viking submission in 920.

O. S. Anderson's study of English hundred-names shows that their titles and character constantly changed throughout the late Anglo-Saxon period.²⁰ He cites the Scandinavian settlements as a major factor. For example, several new hundred-names consisted purely of Scandinavian elements, such as *Maneshou* (YNR) 'Manne's *haugr*', *Toseland* (Hu) 'Toll's *lundr*', *Framland* (Leu) 'Frani's *lundr*' or *Grimshoe* (Nf) 'Grimr's *haugr*'. Hybrids of Old English and Scandinavian elements, though rarer, were also formed, as in *Aslakestou* (Db) 'Aslacr's *stow*', *Barkston Ash* (YWR) 'Bqrkr's *tūn*' or *Thurgarton* (Nott) 'Thorgeirr's *tūn*'. For hundred-names we have (*æt Wyðete crosse* (Nth) 'Wigthryth's *cros*' and perhaps also *Godderthorn* (Do) 'Guthrun's *þorn*'. *Normancross* (Hu), another example, consists of OE *norðnan* and ON *kros*. *Norðnan* was a term specifically applied to Norwegians, and sometimes acted as a personal name for them or their descendants. *Kros* was a loan-word from OIr *cros* 'cross'. Because the Norwegian incursion from Ireland into England began late, in the tenth century, the name *Normancross* was probably coined towards the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. *Kros* often designated a meeting-place. OE *stapol* seems to have served the same function; so *Thurstable* could be compared to *Normancross* in both form and meaning.

It is worth noting again that (*æt Wyðete crosse* (S 1448, AD 963?) was formerly a hundred in Northamptonshire.²¹ There, in the heart of the Danelaw, an Old English personal name was combined with an Old Norse loan-word to create a late

hundred-name. Together with the other evidence, this equal but opposite example to Thurstable implies that the presence of an Anglo-Scandinavian personal name in an Essex hundred-name is more probable than Reaney believed. Old English-Scandinavian hybrids occur in several major place-names in England. Significantly, all of Essex's Scandinavian place-names (except Kirby-le-Soken) are of this type. Of special interest is the parish name of Thorrington, which is apparently an *-Ingtūn* derivative of the Anglo-Scandinavian name *Thurl*.

Stapol was a popular element in place-names, frequently joined to personal names: (to) *Ætheres stapole* (S 800, AD 975), (to) *allan stapule* (S 577, AD 958), *Winagares stapul* (S 964, AD 1032), (to) *Wigheardes stapele* (S 419, AD 932) and so on. The same combination occurs in major place-names too, as Chipstaple (Som) 'Cippa's *stapol*', Dunstable (Bd) 'Dunna's *stapol*' or Bitchstaple (Ha) 'Bica's *stapol*'. Anderson lists Staple (W, Sx), Staploe (Cam), Barstable (Ess) and Whitstable (K) beside Thurstable as examples where it occurs in hundred-names.²² Evidently it acted as some kind of marker in all these instances; and for Thurstable it need not have had a more special significance.

We know little of Thurstable's history as a hundred before 1066. It is conceivable that its name was created after the Scandinavian invasions. This is further enhanced by testimony from the Domesday Book, which states that some parishes in Thurstable were held by Gunner (Gunarr), Gudmund (Guthmundr) and Torbern (Thorbiorn).²³ The presence of *Thur* in Thurstable might have reflected the Scandinavian background of this area.

More significantly, the loss of *n* which Turville-Petre suggests for Thurstable is not shown by other Essex place-names which certainly incorporate the name *Thunor* (as Thunderley: *Tunresleam* 1086, *Tunrele* 1198, *Tunderl(e)* 1238; Thundersley: *Thunresleam* 1086, *Tunresle(gh)* 1203, *Tunderle* 1203; Thunderlow: *Thunreslaw* 1086, *Thundreslawe*, *Thunderloue* 13th). In fact no other reliable *Thunor*-name in England exhibits such an early loss of *n* (cf. Thunderfield (Sr): (æt) *þunres felda* S 1507, AD 873-88, (cum) *þunresfelda* S 420, AD 933, *þunres feld* S 528, AD 947, (in) *þunresfelda* S 752, AD 967, *Thundresfeld(e)*, *Thondresfeld* 1316; *Thunoreshlæw* (K): *þunores hlæwe* 11th, *Thunorshleaw* 12th, *Thunorslope* 1414; *Thunorslege* (Sx): (on) *þunorslege* S108, undated; *Thunresfeld* (W): (to) *þunres felda* S 308, AD 854; *Thunreslea* (Ha): *þunres lea* S 276, AD 826, *þunres lea* S 446, AD 939; *Thunreslea* (Ha): *þunres lea* S 636, AD 956, *þunres lea* S 1008, AD 1045).²⁴ An explanation that Thurstable was some kind of dialectal exception seems weak.

Reviewing the evidence, past spellings for Thurstable can yield either the meaning 'Thunor's pillar' or 'Thur's pillar'. The first interpretation requires the assumption of consonant loss not seen in other, reliable *Thunor* place-names. Turville-Petre's thesis

on Thurstable's possible mythological significance was based on a series of uncertain premises which offer little support, when closely examined, to a meaning 'Thunor's pillar'. Historical and additional place-name evidence indicates that Reaney's dismissal of *Thur* in Thurstable's etymology was premature. It is quite possible that Thurstable was named in the tenth or eleventh century after a Scandinavian called *Thur*. Perhaps he was the product of English and Scandinavian parents who loyally served English lords. Perhaps he was a powerful land-owner who possessed key property in a newly formed hundred. The possibilities are endless. In any case, Thurstable does not certainly denote a former place of Anglo-Saxon pagan worship. A purely secular interpretation of the name is equally possible, perhaps probable.

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FOOTNOTES

1 Additional forms are listed in P.H. Reaney, The Place-Names of Essex EPNS 12 (Cambridge, 1935), p. 302; O.S. Anderson, 'The English Hundred-Names', pt.3 Acta Universitatis Lundensis 37 (1941), 47-8. Anderson accepts Reaney's interpretation but adds on p. 48 n.1: 'In Ess we may also have to reckon with influence from ODa *þur*.'

2 A.H. Smith, English Place-Name Elements pt.2, EPNS 26 (Cambridge, 1956), p. 146. For a more recent opinion, see M. Gelling, 'Further Thoughts on Pagan Place-Names', in Otium et Negotium: Studies in Onomatology and Library Science Presented to Olof von Fyllitzén, ed. F. Sandgren (Stockholm, 1973), p. 122.

3 G. Turville-Petre, 'Thurstable', in English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien, ed. N. Davis and C.L. Wrenn (London, 1962), pp. 241-9; reprinted in G. Turville-Petre, Nine Norse Studies Viking Soc. Text Ser. 5 (London, 1972), pp. 20-9.

4 R. Holtzmann, ed., 'Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg', in Mon. Germ. Hist. Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum 9 (Berlin, 1955).

5 cf. E. Wessén, 'Schwedische Ortsnamen und altnordische Mythologie', Acta Philologica Scandinavica 4 (1929-30), 97-115, where no less than twenty-eight names are listed incorporating *lunðr* and a god-name other than *Thor* in Sweden; K. Hald, Vore Stednavne 2nd ed. (København, 1965), 196 for Danish examples.

6 W.M. Lindsay, The Corpus Glossary (Cambridge, 1921) 1, 479; T. Wright, Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies 2nd ed. by R.P. Wulcker (London, 1884), 425/36, 526/20.

7 For example, cf. K. Helm, 'Erfundene Gotter?' Studien zur deutschen Philologie des Mittelalters: Friedrich Panzer zum 80.

Geburtstag (Heidelberg, 1950), pp. 4–5 and refs.

8 J. Pokorny, Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch (Bern + Munich, 1959), 1, 58, 328; F. Holthausen, Altenglisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch (Heidelberg, 1934), p. 92; J. de Vries, Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch (Leiden, 1961), p. 295 also relates *Irmin-* to Greek ὄρνευος but adds a footnote in which he points to the 'unbedingt zur religiösen sphere' of the term.

9 J. Grimm, Teutonic Mythology, trans. J. S. Stallybrass, 2nd ed. (London, 1882), 1, 118.

10 G. H. Pertz, ed., Mon. Germ. Hist. Scriptores 2 (Hannover, 1829), p. 76.

11 H. M. Chadwick, The Origin of the English Nation (Cambridge, 1907), pp. 226–30.

12 Widukind's mythology is of course confused, Hermes= Mercury, not Mars. On this passage, cf. R. Meissner, 'Irminsul bei Widukind von Corvey', Bonner Jahrbücher des Vereins von Alktertumsfreunden 139 (1934), 39.

13 This Germania passage is one which Turville-Petre quotes as an example of 'Sacred pillars and trees ... known from many ... sources.' In fact, Germania here says absolutely nothing about sacred pillars, merely that there were some features called the Pillars of Hercules. A recent authoritative commentary on the passage interprets them as either 'Meerespforten' or 'Naturgebilde' (R. Much, Die Germania des Tacitus, with H. Jankuhn and W. Lange (Heidelberg, 1967), p. 310).

14 An Old Saxon renunciation formula survives in a tenth-century manuscript, but was probably originally drawn up in the eighth century for new converts. The final portion reads: *end ec forsacho allum dloboles uuercum and uuordum, Thunaer ende UUoden ende Saxnote ende allum them unholdum the hira genotas sint* 'And I forsake all the Devil's works and words, Thunor, Woden and Saxnot, and all the fiends that are their companions'. Irmin, the alleged upholder of the universe, is conspicuously absent. Ironically, this formula is printed in G. Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North (London, 1964), p. 100.

15 The Frankish Annals 2.1, 3 tell of Charlemagne's destruction of the *Irminsul*. If the name Thurstable contains a pagan reference to Thunor, it must antedate this event by at least a century.

16 F. Jónsson, Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning (København + Kristiania, 1912–15), A. i. 682.

17 Old Norse prose texts are quoted from the Íslenzk fornrit editions, numbered by chapters.

18 cf. E. Björkman, 'Nordische Personennamen in England', Studien zur englischen Philologie 37 (1910), 146–7; O. von Feilitzen, The Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book *Nomina Germanica* 3 (Uppsala, 1937), p. 390, where *pur* and *þor* appear to have been alternating forms of the same name.

19 Reaney, p. 302.

- 20 O.S. Anderson, 'The English Hundred-Names', Acta Universitatis Lundensis 30 (1934), 1-174, 35 (1939), 1-239, 37 (1941), 1-239.
- 21 For this lost hundred, cf. Anderson (1934), 114 and (1941), 191.
- 22 Anderson (1941), 187-8.
- 23 cf. H.A. Doubleday and W. Page, The Victoria History of the County of Essex, reprint ed. (Folkestone, 1977) 1, 468b, 469a, 491b. Other possible Scandinavian owners are Brun (Brunn) p. 491b, Cola (Koli), p. 499b, Turbert (Thurferth), p. 503a, Sercar (Styrkarr), p. 547b.
- 24 As Gelling (footnote 2) states for Thursley (Sr) whose earliest forms are *Thoresle* 1292, *Thoresly* 1303: 'the spellings are too late for complete certainty' regarding its authenticity as a Thunor place-name. S 108 is written as AD 772 but is undoubtedly a later charter.