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Contents

Abbreviations	vi
An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon Plant-Name Studies and to this Special Issue	1
C. P. Biggam	<i>University of Glasgow</i>
‘Garlic and Sapphires in the Mud’: ‘Leeks’ in their Early Folk Contexts	10
Tom Markey	<i>University of Michigan</i>
Madness, Medication — and Self-Induced Hallucination? <i>Elleborus</i> (and Woody Nightshade) in Anglo-Saxon England, 700–900	43
Alaric Hall	<i>University of Leeds</i>
Elleborus in Anglo-Saxon England, 900–1100: <i>Tunsingwyr</i> and <i>Wodewistle</i>	70
Alaric Hall	<i>University of Leeds</i>
Old English <i>Hymlic</i> : Is it Hemlock?	94
Irené Wotherspoon	<i>University of Glasgow</i>
Old English <i>Hyme</i> : An Occasional Flavour of Hops	114
Irené Wotherspoon	<i>University of Glasgow</i>
Biting the <i>Bulut</i> : A Problematic Old English Plant-Name in the Light of Place-Name Evidence	137
Richard Coates	<i>University of the West of England, Bristol</i>
What was <i>Lybcorn</i> ?	146
Audrey Meaney	
Old English <i>Safene</i> : Untangling Native and Exotic Junipers in Anglo-Saxon England	206
C. P. Biggam	<i>University of Glasgow</i>
Glossary of Medical Terms	242
Index	244

Abbreviations

ADS	Archaeology Data Service
ASPNS	Anglo-Saxon Plant-Name Survey
BML	British Medieval Latin
BSBI	Botanical Society of the British Isles
CGL	<i>Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum</i>
CNo.	Catalogue Number
COD	<i>Concise Oxford Dictionary</i>
DMLBS	<i>Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources</i>
DOE	<i>Dictionary of Old English</i> (Toronto)
DOEPN	<i>Dictionary of Old English Plant Names</i> (online)
DOEWC	<i>Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus</i> (online)
DOI	Digital Object Identifier; <i>Dictionary of the Irish Language Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials</i>
DOST	<i>Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue</i>
DSL	<i>Dictionary of the Scots Language</i> (online)
EDD	<i>English Dialect Dictionary</i>
EPNE	<i>English Place-Name Elements</i> (A. H. Smith)
Gk, Gr.	Greek
HTOED	<i>Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary</i>
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
LAE	<i>Linguistic Atlas of England</i>
Lat	Latin
MCOE	<i>Microfiche Concordance to Old English</i>
ME	Middle English
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
MHG	Middle High German
MLG	Middle Low German
ModE	Modern English
ModIce	Modern Icelandic
ModLG	Modern Low German
ODEE	<i>Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology</i>
OE	Old English
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OF	Old French
OHG	Old High German
OI	Old Irish
OIce	Old Icelandic
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
ON	Old Norse
OS	Old Saxon
PASE	<i>Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England</i> (online)
PIE	Proto-Indo-European
PN W	<i>Place-Names of Wiltshire</i> (J. E. B. Gover et al.)
PN Wo	<i>Place-Names of Worcestershire</i> (A. Mawer et al.)

RCHM(E)	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments (of England)
TLL	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i>
spp.	species (botanical, singular)
ssp.	species (botanical, plural)
TOE	<i>Thesaurus of Old English</i>
VEPN	<i>Vocabulary of English Place-Names</i>

Short Titles

Old English source texts may be indicated by short titles assigned by the *Dictionary of Old English* and *Microfiche Concordance to Old English*, which refer to specific editions of the texts. They occur particularly in the appendices, and examples include: Lch II (1); Med 3 (Grattan-Singer). The key to these references can be found at the DOE website under ‘Research Tools’ then ‘List of Texts’. See <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca>.

Botanical Latin

Plant-names in botanical Latin aim to provide an international identification for a particular plant or group of plants. They are followed by abbreviations indicating the botanist who assigned and/or reassigned the name, and the most common abbreviation is ‘L.’ indicating ‘Linnaeus’, the famous Swedish botanist. Examples include: *Bellis perennis* L. (daisy); *Betula pendula* Roth. (silver birch).

Dates

Manuscript dates are often given in a form beginning ‘s.’ (for *saeculo* ‘in the century’). Some examples follow:

- s. xiⁱⁿ beginning of the 11th century
- s. xi¹ first half of the 11th century
- s. xi^{med} middle of the 11th century
- s. xi² second half of the 11th century
- s. xi^{ex} end of the 11th century

Biting the *Bulut*: A Problematic Old English Plant-Name in the Light of Place-Name Evidence

Richard Coates¹

1. Introduction

This article arises from a tension between the meanings of the Old English (OE) plant-term *bulut* suggested in the older philological literature, and its appearance in a Lincolnshire place-name. Boultham is a historic parish just south-west of the city of Lincoln, and its situation seems to be hard to square ecologically with those suggested meanings. I shall briefly discuss the place-name to start with, then discuss the problems in establishing the meaning, origin and history of *bulut*, move towards a solution compatible with the geographical and linguistic situation of the place-name, and assess the usefulness of dialect vocabulary in making that solution plausible. The issue is ripe for discussion, since no consensus about the word's meaning exists, but the solution which emerges below will leave some philological questions unanswered.

2. The place-name *Boultham*

The place-name scholar Kenneth Cameron (1998: 18) was probably right to suggest that the parish-name *Boultham* contains *bulut*; no alternative has been put forward, and none has occurred to this writer.² The name first appears in *Domesday Book* as *Buletham*, a highly suggestive spelling repeated in two ostensibly twelfth-century documents. The evidence is sufficient to confirm that the first element is a two-syllable word of Old English. This interpretation is originally due to the Swedish toponymist Eilert Ekwall (1936: 106); thus also in his great place-name dictionary (1960: 55), and it is now generally accepted in this discipline both by scholars with a local focus and those with a national one (for example,

¹ Dr C. P. Biggam has collaborated on and contributed to several sections of this paper.

² The existence of an OE **bult* 'heap, hillock' has been suggested on the evidence of the hamlet-name *Bouts* in Inkberrow, Worcestershire (PN Wo 325), but there are difficult medieval spellings (two instances of *Bultus*), and no firm supporting evidence from elsewhere, so this remains highly conjectural. Note that the noun *bolt* is found in Worcestershire with meanings which include 'bundle of osiers' and 'stone-built drain' (Wright 1898–1905: I.332), and these might be relevant to *Boultham*. Another minor name (*Bulford*, Wiltshire, first recorded as *Bultisford* in 1178) is mentioned in the *Vocabulary of English Place-Names* (VEPN 2000: 67) and this might contain **bult*, but the editors note that it might contain *bulut* instead.

Perrott 1979: 248; Watts 2004: 73). Cameron takes the second element as OE *hām* ‘major farming estate’, but since the place is low-lying by the Witham (though not in a bend of the river) it could just as easily be *hamm* in the application ‘river-meadow’ (Gelling 1960: 147–9; Gelling and Cole 2000: 50–1), as Ekwall originally proposed. The ecological significance of this point will become apparent below. Watts is agnostic about the second element. We shall see that *bulut* probably appears in two other minor place-names with watery associations, in Wiltshire and Radnorshire. This might, but need not, tilt the argument in favour of *hamm* in *Boultham*.

3. The history and meaning of *bulut*

The focus of this piece, however, is on the word *bulut* itself. Its presence in *Boultham* encourages us to reassess all the previous accounts of its meaning, listing all the few known occurrences in Old English as we proceed. Its earliest appearance consists of the two mentions in *Bald’s Leechbook*, in the mid-tenth century MS British Library, Royal 12 D.xvii, printed by Cockayne (1961: II.128, 340), as an ingredient in a salve for ‘wens’ (lumps, swellings, tumours) and a drink for piles, contexts that offer us no very helpful clues for its identification, except lumpiness. Cockayne does not suggest a meaning, and leaves the word untranslated in his Modern English version of the text. In his glossary (which is not in the 1961 re-issue of his work by Singer), he adds a speculative etymology of the word based on one of two superficial phonological resemblances, with enough safeguarding question-marks to make the reader wary:

Bulut, L[eech]b[ook] I. lviii. 2; Bulut, L[eech]b[ook] III. xlvi.; *the root of lychnis flos cuculi?* See Plinius xxi.97 = 26. *Ballota*, Βαλλώτη [sic], *nigra?* *Boletus?* (Cockayne 1864–6: II.374)³

The word also occurs once in the Harley Latin-English glossary, dating from about 1000 (MS British Library, Harley 3376; see Wright 1884: 196; Oliphant 1966: 40, line B506; and the *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE), under *bulut*, sense 2), where it glosses *bresion*, a word which Oliphant despairs of explaining. However, the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (DMLBS) defines it as follows, partly in tune with Cockayne’s mention of *boletus*, a type of fungus: ‘(?) toadstool or species of plant; cf. *britia*’, but then defines *britia* not exactly consistently as ‘cress or (?) fenugreek (bot[anical]); cf. *bresion*’. There are no other mentions in Old English, and the term seems to have disappeared as a living word by the Middle English (ME) period.⁴

It is clear that only guesswork and a desire to connect with the Classical scientific literature have got us this far. We may suspect that Cockayne adduces *ballota* and *boletus* mainly because of a passing resemblance between them and the consonants of *bulut*; though help may be at hand for a connection with *ballota* from a more careful consideration of the Harley Glossary, as we shall see. Holthausen (1934: 38) offers no formal etymology for *bulut*, but both Hoops and Marzell (cited by Bierbaumer 1975–9: I.25) take it to be a loan from *ballota*. There

³ C. P. Biggam notes in correspondence (10 December 2002) that ‘his Pliny reference is in error for book 21, para. 98, which is about *Lychnis* and, crucially, includes the sentence ‘Its root is called *bolites* by the people of Asia’ (*Radicem eius Asiani boliten vocant*).

⁴ *Bultus* appears in the Laud herbal glossary (MS British Library, Laud Misc. 567), a twelfth-century manuscript containing features which clearly indicate that it is derived from an Old English original but, mysteriously, it appears as an otherwise unknown Latin lemma (headword) glossed with Latin *flores*. The entry reads *Bultus .i. flores*, ‘*Bultus*, that is, flowers’, with no explanatory notes (Stracke 1974: 27, no. 217).

are candidates for cognacy (shared origin) in some European languages, especially German, notably in a gloss which reads *hulft vel bult marubium*, ‘*hulft* or *bult marubium*’, cited by Diefenbach (1867: 350a). For more on *marrubium*, see below.⁵

In Bosworth (1898, under *bulot*), the plant is identified as ‘*Ragged robin* or *cuckoo-flower* (*Lychnis flos-cuculi* L.)’. These scholars (Bosworth and his later editor, Toller) evidently based their view on Cockayne’s, but omitted his cautionary punctuation. This became the standard interpretation, as enshrined in the gloss in Holthausen’s etymological dictionary (1934) (*Kuckucksblume*); in Ekwall’s note (1936: 106–7); in Cameron’s discussion of *Boultham* (1998); in *English Place-Name Elements* (EPNE I: 57); in VEPN (I: 67); and in Watts (2004). Ekwall (1936: 107), whilst accepting the connection with *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, also postulated a relationship with a Germanic root **būl-* meaning ‘swell’, which obliged him immediately to shift his gaze away from the distinctly slimline *Lychnis* to its relatives such as the *Silene* species, the various champions with their inflated calyxes (the outer protective layers of buds; the sepals). He could have considered (but apparently did not) whether the swelling in question might have been related to the plant’s medicinal use rather than its appearance (see the issue of lumpiness mentioned above).

More recently, the editors of the *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE) have composed the following more cautious entry for *bulut* (lightly edited here):

Noun (? cf. Latin *ballote*)
 Att[ested] sp[ellings]: bulut, bulot
 3 occ[urrences]
 1. a plant, perhaps black or white horehound
 L[ee]ch[book] II (3) 48.1.1: [quotation]
 L[ee]ch[book] II (1) 58.2.1: [quotation]
 2. glossing *bresion* (? for *prasion* ‘white horehound’)
 H[ar]ll[ey]]G[lossary line] B506: *bresion* [? for *prasion*] bulut
 3. as a place-name element, e.g. *bulutham* and perhaps *bulutford*
 Lat[in] equiv[alent] in m[anu]s[cript]: *prasion*

Lychnis flos-cuculi has disappeared, and Cockayne’s alternative and tentative suggestion of horehound has come to the fore. The DOE identifies the *bresion* of the Harley Glossary with Greek *prasion* (πράσιον), a derivative of *prason* (πράσον), ‘leek, *Allium porrum*; a kind of sea-grass’ (Frisk 1960–72: II.589; translation by R. Coates; compare Markey, this volume, Section 6.2.2). The word *prasion* itself is said by Frisk, basing his view on more than three primary sources, to denote *Andorn*, *Marrubium* usw., ‘white horehound, *Marrubium* etc.’, though he cites Andrews (1961: 76), who raises the spectre of an alternative identification with a species of marjoram (*Marjorana onites* (L.) Benth.). Linking *bresion* and *prasion* has the effect of suggesting a meaning for *bulut* that offers a chance of an etymology: a formal link with Latin *ballote*, which may denote one of the horehounds (*Ballota nigra* L.), though not certainly, as indicated by both the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (OLD) and Liddell and Scott (1897) for Greek. The OLD gives as its definition for *ballōtē*:

A plant, perh[aps] black horehound.
 [1 reference:] [ballot]en alio nomine porrum nigrum Graeci uocant [The Greeks call ballote by another name: ‘black leek’] PLIN[IUS]. *Nat[uralis historia]* 27.54.

Liddell and Scott, under πράσιον (*prasion*), say:

⁵ These citations can be found in the online *Dictionary of Old English Plant Names* (DOEPN; under *bulut*). This online publication is a revised and augmented version of Bierbaumer (1975–9). The dictionary’s plant interpretation for *bulut* is ‘? *Ballota nigra* L., black horehound’.

Biting the Bulut

- [1.] horehound, *Marrubium vulgare* [3 references]; also *Marrubium peregrinum* [2 references]
2. τραγορίγανος λεπτόφυλλος [*tragoriganos leptophyllos*] D[io]sc[orides] 3.30 [rock savory, *Micromeria juliana* (L.) Benth.] [2 references].
3. βαλλωτή [*ballōtē*] Ps[eudo]-D[io]sc[orides] 3.103.
II. a seaweed, Arist[otle] *H[istoria] A[nimalium]* 591a16.

For *prasion/-ium* in Latin, however, Lewis and Short had plumped for ‘an herb, white horehound’, resting on the texts of Celsus and Pliny, and their view has presumably informed the one in the DOE.

The editors of VEPN also suggest, following the DOE, that *bulut* may (‘probably’) derive from Latin *ballote* ‘black horehound’ (which gives modern botanical Latin *Ballota (nigra)*). The generic is acknowledged to be a borrowing from Greek βαλλωτή (*ballōtē*), of unknown ultimate origin but meaning ‘black horehound’ (on the authority of Renaissance interpreters of the first-century CE botanist Dioscorides Anazarbeus) (Frisk 1960–72: I.217). But linking Greek *ballōtē* with OE *bulut* raises serious phonological difficulties because of the first vowel ⟨u⟩ in the Old English word. There is no parallel for the Old English representation of Latin /a/ by ⟨u⟩, nor is there any known phonological process which could effect a relevant phonetic change.

In addition, if *bulut* were an oral borrowing from the time when other plant-names were being borrowed, one would expect final ⟨d⟩/[d] in Old English for Latin /t/.⁶ A Latin medial, originally voiceless stop appears lenited (voiced) in the Old English borrowing of the word for ‘fennel’: OE *finugl(e)* from Latin *foeniculum* (showing voiceless ⟨c⟩ changing to voiced ⟨g⟩).⁷ Latin *final* voiceless stops also become voiced in Old English, as has happened to the final sounds, shown as ⟨d⟩, in the following: OE *æced/leced* ‘vinegar’; *abbod* ‘abbot’; *morod* ‘sweet wine’; and *tapped* ‘carpet’ (Campbell 1959: 210).⁸ A very early oral borrowing, which would allow the spelling ⟨t⟩ (that is, with Latin /t/ unaffected by voicing), seems unlikely in the case of a non-staple plant when words for other simples (herbs) were evidently being borrowed later, after voicing had already occurred. If, on the other hand, it were a *late* borrowing from a written form, which would allow the spelling ⟨t⟩ in Old English, one would expect greater fidelity to all details of the original form which the writer was transcribing, including the vowels. It is open to question, also, whether a plant-name borrowed from Latin would find its way into an Anglo-Saxon place-name. This could be perceived as a problem, but the present writer has made a case that *Poulner* in Hampshire contains OE *polleie* ‘pennyroyal’ from Latin *pulegium* (Coates 1989a: 134; 1989b: 9–10), and it is uncontroversial that OE *mint* ‘mint’, from Latin *mentha*, is found in such names as *Minstead* (Sussex and Hampshire; Sandred 1963: 171, 257, 270 and especially note 3 there).

⁶ The brackets used here and elsewhere reflect certain linguistic conventions. Square brackets, as in [d], indicate a *phone*, that is, an exact sound, usually denoted by the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Slashes, as in /d/, represent a *phoneme*, that is, a sound or sounds considered to be a single significant sound in the language under discussion. Angled brackets, as in ⟨d⟩, indicate a *grapheme*, that is, the way in which a sound or sounds is represented in the written language.

⁷ Also possibly in OE *seperige* ‘savory’ from Latin *satureia*, if ⟨þ⟩ truly represents a fricative consonant rather than an English reinterpretation of a scribal ⟨th⟩. A *stop* is a sound made by briefly blocking the flow of air in the mouth, and then releasing it ‘explosively’, as in the ⟨c⟩ of *cat*. A fricative is a sound which involves the noisy passage of air through a narrow gap between organs of speech, as in the ⟨f⟩ of *foot*.

⁸ All from Latin words with stems ending in /t/: *acetum*, *abbatem*, *moratum* and *tapetum*. Borrowed Latin /p/ remains [p] since Old English had no single [b] in relevant environments.

The connection of both words, Latin *ballote* and OE *bulut*, with *Marrubium* (horehound) is therefore not watertight, though the gloss in Diefenbach supports it from outside English. The Harley Glossary form (*bresion*) relates to a lemma that *may* represent *prasion*, and *prasion may* mean ‘white horehound’. Cockayne’s early view, however, brings together OE *bulut* and *black* horehound, but *Ballota* (black) and *Marrubium* (white) *may* be equatable since they are, after all, assigned the same vernacular English name, though possibly on the basis of some learned tradition. However, it is evident that they are now taxonomically assigned to separate genera within the family Labiatae. The basis of any connection or confusion is unlikely to be visual (see the drawings in, for example, Ross-Craig 1967, or in any standard botany textbook). *Marrubium vulgare* L. has white flowers (of which the lower ones grow in whorls, that is, they encircle the stem at the same level), variably woolly stems and leaves, ovate leaves with slightly toothed margins and marked horizontal side-branches, and it is aromatic. In contrast, *Ballota nigra* L. has pale purple flowers (the lower ones of which are axillary, that is, growing in the angle between the main stem and the leaf stems), it is not tomentose (woolly), has ovate leaves with strongly toothed margins and side-branches which are more nearly upright, and it has an unpleasant smell. *Ballota* is also much taller than *Marrubium*. Furthermore, they have quite different traditional medicinal uses; *Marrubium* is even now a useful item in the pharmacopœia as a laxative and expectorant (Grigson 1975: 352) whilst stinking *Ballota* was used in accordance with the doctrine of sympathetic magic for stinking ulcers (and the bite of rabid dogs). There is little to link them except a passing similarity of leaf-shape and the shared English name, although both were used for afflictions of the respiratory system (Allen and Hatfield 2004: 214; 216).

Yet the suggestion of *Lychnis flos-cuculi* (Ragged-Robin) is also very implausible. It has an unusual petal-shape which makes it a striking though not flashy flower, but it is and has been of virtually no medicinal, culinary or other practical use (Grigson 1975: 93–4),⁹ unlike either *Marrubium vulgare* or *Ballota nigra*. It is much more a favourite of post-eighteenth-century sensibility than that of the sixth or seventh century. Its one ‘virtue’ is early flowering, but this, if it were the only special feature, would make it a surprising candidate to appear in an old place-name.

4. Botanical and dialectal considerations

Since we are still some way from a convincing identification, let alone an explanation, of *bulut*, let us search for clues by returning to the Lincolnshire place-name. The traditional pronunciation of *Boultham* was, and indeed still is, /bu:təm/ (Forster 1981: 33); the alternative /bu:ðəm/ must be a later pronunciation deriving in part from the written form. In other words, the first syllable is pronounced like *boot*, a pronunciation which gives us the clue we need.

Several plant-names contain the names of footwear of various kinds, nearly always with an obvious motivation in the shape of the flower or some other part of the plant, as with *lady’s-slipper* (*Cypripedium calceolus* L.), *shoes and stockings* (for example, *Lotus corniculatus* L.) and *cuckoo’s* or *gowk’s boots* (*Endymion nonscriptus* (L.) Garcke). The one clear exception is *Boots* and *Yellow boots*, found along with *Meadow bout* and *Marybout* as local names in

⁹ Except for a single record of its use, in Cardiganshire, in an ointment for snakebite. This may, however, result from confusion with the Red Campion (*Silene dioica* (L.) Clairv.), also known as Ragged-Robin, which is associated with snakes in western Wales where it is known as *blodwyn neidr* ‘snake flower’ (Allen and Hatfield 2004: 93).

Biting the Bulut

Shropshire, Cheshire and Lancashire for the marsh marigold, *Caltha palustris* L. (Wright 1898–1905: I.344; Grigson 1975: 32–5). This plant has nothing boot-like about it. It is much more eye-catching than *Lychnis flos-cuculi* by virtue of the fact, not only that it flowers early, but also that its flowers are very large and conspicuous. I suggest that *boot(s)* is a folk-etymologized reinterpretation of (-)bout /bu:t/, the lineal descendant of *bulut* via a form pronounced */bult/ which is not found separately in the record, but which is required in the etymology of *Bulford* (Wiltshire) and is attested in the record of that place-name (*Bultisford*, recorded from 1178; PN W 362), and mentioned in the DOE entry cited above (and see also note 1).¹⁰ Note also that *ford* in the Wiltshire place-name guarantees the connection with water which the interpretation of ‘marsh marigold’ requires, and so does *brook* (following PN W), in the minor place-name *Boultribrooke* in Norton (Radnorshire), mentioned but not analysed by Charles (1938: 174).

The name *bulut* for *Caltha palustris* must originally have competed with the anciently-recorded *mearh-gealla* ‘horse-gall’ (seen in the name *Marlborough* (Wiltshire)) which could have been confused with *marigold* — hence the usual modern name (Grigson 1975: 34).¹¹ But both names have been replaced over much of the country by such names as *kingcup* (the usual one in Lincolnshire now), *horse-blob*, *X’s buttons*, *May X*, *water X* or their variants, where each *X* covers a range of possibilities. Most significant of all, however, is the fact that *bolt(s)* is on record as a dialect plant-name, equated with *buttercups* in Parkinson’s *Theatrum botanicum* (1640) and with *Trollius europaeus* L., the globeflower, in the appendix to Gerard’s *Herball* (1597). Both are cited in Britten and Holland (1886: 57), though, curiously, this name is absent from the otherwise encyclopaedic Grigson (1975). These two plants are, like *Caltha palustris*, members of the family Ranunculaceae, and both of them share a wide range of vernacular names with *Caltha palustris*, including *marybuds*, *gowan* and *kingcup* (Grigson 1975: 32–7, 46–8); they have in common the fact that all have bright yellow flowers, if not of exactly the same hue. I suggest that *bolts* and **bults* are too phonologically close not to have a common origin. One can read off from Maps Ph41a (*colt*) and Ph56a (*coulter*) of the *Linguistic Atlas of England* (LAE) that the pronunciations deriving from ME /olt/ and /ult/ coincide in most of England south-east of the Severn-Trent line, in fact almost everywhere where ME /ul/ has not become simple [u:]. The village-name *Boultham* must enshrine the older, northern development of /ul/ seen in modern times north of the Humber (LAE Map Ph56a), whilst the modern form /ɔul/ seen in *coulter* in Lincolnshire today is no doubt simply the cognate southern form, creeping northwards like many a phonological feature since the Middle Ages.

The marsh marigold is therefore the likeliest denotation of the Old English word seen in *Boultham*; the globeflower is not a plant of the eastern counties. The original village centre of Boultham, where the church of St Helen stands, lay in low-lying flat land close to the floodplain of the Witham, and the ground in the vicinity was formerly waterlogged, as can still be seen from the existence of natural pools such as The Swan Pool close by, reduced in size in 1805 (National Grid Reference TE 957 706), and other pools in an even less natural

¹⁰ A separate Old English word **bult* has been postulated with the sense ‘hillock’ (see Note 1 above), and for this there is a Low German cognate with the same form (see, for example, Watts 2004: 332, under *Inkberrow*). This may need to be considered for the Wiltshire name, but it is inappropriate for the situation of *Boultham*.

¹¹ Grigson scornfully, and surely correctly, dismisses the idea that OE *mear(h)-gealla* could have meant ‘gentian’, as Ekwall had claimed (1936: 110–1) following Bosworth (1898). Regrettably, Watts (2004: 399) continues to give credence to the older ideas.

state. The habitat would have been ideal for *Caltha palustris*. *Lychnis flos-cuculi* also likes damp habitats, but is not specialized to marshland in the way that *Caltha palustris* is. *Ballota nigra* has no such preference at all.

The root of *Caltha palustris* may, like the buttercup (*Ranunculus* spp.) of which it is a giant relative, have been used as a counter-irritant, which is at least not inconsistent with the claimed use of *bulut* against wens and piles. *C. palustris* itself was used against eruptive rashes (Cockayne 1961: II.100; Grigson 1975: 35).

I submit that the facts of the dialect vocabulary make a good circumstantial case that *bulut* is really 'marsh marigold', and that the situation of Boultham, whose name surely contains the word, gives some support for this identification, reinforced by the existence of similar dialect words for other Ranunculaceae. We can dismiss the other etymologies offered as speculations based on superficial resemblances to anciently-recorded words.¹²

5. Conclusion

That is as far as we can go with philology and ecology alone, but there is scope to wonder whether (but not to establish that) other regional names for *Caltha palustris* are in fact folk-etymological variants or reinterpretations of *bulut*. Given the existence of *Marybout*, it seems possible that *Marybuds*, found in Dorset and Warwickshire, belongs with it. In south-western counties, names of the form *bull X* are quite frequent for no obvious reason, and perhaps these too might be considered to be reinterpretations of *bulut*, though no doubt of ancient date because any such reinterpretation would rely on the historical [i] still being audible, that is, before this [i] became a semivowel when a consonant immediately followed it.

The one thing which is not advanced by this discussion is the question of the formal etymology of *bulut*, which appears almost isolated. It certainly cannot be casually equated with, or derived from, *ballote* and the like, most particularly because of the vowel in the first syllable.¹³ But the strong consonantal similarity means that a connection cannot be dismissed out of hand. The existence of *bult* in an early German gloss (Diefenbach 1867: 350a) may represent evidence either for native Germanic status of the word, or for very early (oral) borrowing into both English and German, or for relatively late learned borrowing into both languages.

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¹² Possibly, in view of the Radnorshire name, we should seek a Celtic origin: compare Welsh *bulwg* 'poppy' (these days often 'corncockle'), whose structure appears to be *bu* 'cows, cow-' (from British Celtic **bow-*) plus an obscure element (hardly *llwg* 'scurvy'); if so, there may have been other such compounds. Early Brittonic **/ow/* might give OE */u:/*, as in the name of London (for the latest account of this name's history, see Coates 1998: 208, 215, 222). If the story is to approach completion, we need to assume that the first <u> in *bulut* is a long vowel, but that may be inconsistent with the appearance of ModE */u:/* in *boots* and the like, unless it was shortened before the */t/* cluster in **bult*. This is all speculative and doubtful, and if there are Germanic cognates, as noted above, a Celtic origin is highly implausible or impossible.

¹³ Single <l> for a Latin geminate (<ll>) in this metrical position, that is, before the syllable which bears the stress in Latin, is possible; compare OE *pylece* 'robe' for Latin *pellicia* (Campbell 1959: 202). Some Plinian glosses also have single <l> in *ballote* (TLL I.1703), but the recorded variants are many and sometimes problematic.

Biting the Bulut

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