NEW ETYMOLOGIES IN THOMAS O. LAMBDIN’S

An Introduction to the Gothic Language

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ABSTRACT

In 2006 Thomas O. Lambdin brought out An Introduction to the Gothic Language. Every lesson is followed by vocabulary notes that include etymologies. Most of them were borrowed from well-known dictionaries, but a few are new. The paper contains comments on those etymologies.

Keywords: etymology, diachrony, language contact, areal linguistics, linguistic history
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Thomas O. Lambdin, a distinguished semitologist, whose 1971 Introduction to Biblical Hebrew has been translated into several languages and whose introductions to Coptic and Classical Ethiopic, as well as studies of Pāñjī, all of them written about thirty years ago, are equally well-known, brought out in 2006 An Introduction to the Gothic Language (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock), a textbook of approximately the same format as William H. Bennett’s An Introduction to the Gothic Language (1980), except that it contains much more text material, shows little interest in historical grammar, and begins with sentences the author made up himself. Compilers of Greek and especially Latin manuals for grade schools often facilitate the first steps to beginners by composing short stories in those languages, but children do not study Gothic, while students are expected to go into it full tilt from the start. Lambdin’s was clearly a bold experiment.

For someone who has dealt with Hebrew, Coptic, and Sanskrit, Gothic is an easy language, a mere dialect of Old Germanic, as Brugmann and Meillet would have called it, but it is still surprising to see a Gothic textbook authored by someone who has never published anything on Germanic. Another surprise is the fact of this book’s appearance. As far as the preparation of college students is concerned, historical Germanic linguistics is a dying area in the English speaking world. So who will use Lambdin’s Introduction, which, even though in a small way, competes with Joseph Wright’s book, the numerous revisions of Braune’s Gotische Grammatik, and Bennett’s textbook? Did the publishers break even? WorldCat shows that only about twenty libraries bought the book. A new introduction to Gothic should have become a major event in Germanic
studies, but it seems to have passed unnoticed. Lambdin, a true polyglot, has
drawn a most usable “handbook.” However, my aim is not to review it. Every
lesson is followed by vocabulary notes interspersed with remarks on etymology,
as a rule, borrowed from Feist, Feist-Lehmann, and Pokorny; yet occasionally
the author offers his own conjectures on the origin of Gothic words. It is only
those conjectures that will interest us here.

*bandwjan* ‘to sign, indicate’, from *bandwa ~ bandwo* ‘sign, token’. Lambdin
to beckon), Eng[lish] *bend*. Apparently two different P[roto]-G[ermanic] verbs,
*bandyan* (to bend, < *bandya-, a band, as [some]th[ing] bent around sthg) and
*bandwyan* (to make a bandwa, i.e. a nod or hand-sign), have merged in ON
*benda* …. Pokorny lists Gothic *bandwjan* under the root √bhā (to shine), but
labels it questionable. The reasoning here, perfectly plausible, is that *bandwjan* is
derived from [[ndo]-E[uropean] *bhāntye- (approx.: to produce a manifesta-
tion). Without further close cognates, however, the etymology remains open.
The derivation from √bhdhn is my suggestion and seems to be the more plau-
sible, especially in the light of the Old Norse forms” (315-316). ON *benda* ‘to
bind’ and *benda* ‘give a sign’ are homonyms, so that reference to merger is not
fully justified. Other than that, no procedure depending on the amputation of en-
largements (extensions, determinatives) carries too much conviction, for the
shorter the stub and the more general its reconstructed meaning, the easier it be-
comes to draw semantic bridges. I doubt that the existence of the Icelandic hom-
onyms can be used as an argument in etymologizing the Gothic noun.

*bauan* ‘to live, inhabit’. Both *bauan* and *trauan* ‘to trust’ “may … be re-
garded as proper essive forms in IE, i.e. zero-grade of root + essive suffix: PG
hūwē- < IE *hūwē- < *hwoHhēyē and PG *trūwē- < IE *drūwē- < *drwoHhēyē-”
(280). Laryngeals in reconstructed forms provide an illusion of depth but add
nothing to the understanding of Germanic forms. *Essive*, a familiar term to a
student of Finnish, is rarely used in Indo-European studies. An essive suffix re-
sfers to staying in one place or permanently occupying a certain position. T.O.L.
does not comment on the origin of the suffix *-we-* or its occurrence outside the
two verbs in question.

*briggan* ‘to bring’. T.O.L. (313) repeats Brugmann’s etymology: from IE
*bhrenk-*, supposedly a blend of two roots: *bher* ‘to carry’ and *enek* ‘to
reach, attain’ (cf. Engl. bear and enough, corresponding to Go. *bairan* and ga-
noh). This etymology has found its way into our most authoritative dictionaries,
and yet there is something fanciful about it, though it accounts for the weak
preterit of a seemingly strong verb. Levitsky (*Etimologicheskii slovodor* german-
skikh iazykov I: 123. Vinnitsa: Nova Knyha, 2010) treats *brigan* as a nasalized
variant of *bher*- ‘to carry’ and refers to the phonomorphological proportion