

[0534] REAHEL PROBLEMS, THE HOMONYM HEL AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF OLD FRISIAN AND MIDDLE ENGLISH BREG 'BRIDGE'

With reference to the Frisian place name *Reahel*, as an abbreviation for *De Reade Hel*, in Dutch: *Rohel*, *Roohel*, or *De Roode Hel*, two problems can be distinguished: 1. Why is the adj. *read* 'red' used? 2. What is the etymology, the original meaning of *hel*? For a list of places where evidence can be found consult the appendix (7, *infra*).

1. *Modern Frisian read, Old Frisian rād 'red'*.

This colour indication must have a connection with the type of soil. According to Winkler (1898, 299) this also applies to *Reaklif* or *Rode Klif* east of Stavoren, although the red colour is no longer visible, due to changed circumstances. Formerly this hill was also called *De Rawier* (W. *ibid.*), literally 'the red wharf', the same name as *De Reade Wier* near Roodkerk, between Leeuwarden and Dokkum. This was a small terp, long since levelled, consisting of reddish *knip*: a heavy, non-calcareous clay (Botke 40; Wynterp FP 14, 70). In the past the village Warga was also called *Rawier*, but this was originally a place on the west side of the present village center (Kalma FP 2, 38; FP 4, 64; J.J. Spahr van der Hoek FP 15, 95; Encyclop. v. Frl. 116 & 675).

It is also possible that the word red refers to peat. The Encycl. v. Frl. (553) explains *Reahel* on lake Tjeukemeer as 'de rode zetwal van een turfpet': the red wharf or bank of a peat pit. According to Van der Molen (1962, 122) *Reahel* near Buitenpost is named after the colour of peat (See Appendix: 7.2. and 7.5.). In other countries the word occurs in the same way in place names. W. (1898, 216) had already noted *Ruad Klif*, on the North-Frisian island of Sylt. In England, *Radcliffe* (Nottingham) is named after its red clay, whereas peat-stained water or the colour of rocks, esp. sandstone, plays a role in the names of other places, e.g. *Redhills* (Durham: Smith II, 81).

Nevertheless in English as well as in Frisian place names it is not always clear what the colour name refers to. Therefore I hope soil specialists will give attention to names like *Reahel* and *Rawier*. The soil map of Friesland is not detailed enough on this point (Cnossen; Kuijer).

2. *Etymology and meaning of hel*.

The chief problem with *Reahel* is the explanation of *hel*. One characteristic of all places named *Reahel* is that they are low-lying, often near water. The fact that they are low-lying is rather ambivalent. Surely these are always habitations in a low, watery region, but the farm-houses had of course to be built on a small height in the low region. In general, *hel* in place names in Friesland and elsewhere probably means 'low land, bog, pool' (Schönfeld 1943,96 and 1955,127) or 'depression' (Gysseling 1960, 470).

This *hel* is etymologically the same word as *hel* 'infernum': Goth. *halja*, Gmc. *haljô-*. Huisman (9), in his inaugural lecture twenty-five years ago, said that it was plausible that *hel* in Dutch place names also had the meaning of 'the north' because the heathen Germanic peoples imagined the 'netherworld' to be in the north. But in many cases the etymology and meaning are difficult to determine. Blok (1973, 121) discussing field names in Didam, thought of another word: *helle* from *helde* 'slope'. But in Friesland this explanation seems unlikely, principally because in words such as Old Frisian *feld* 'field', *jeld* 'money' and the homonym *helde* 'homage' and 'foothold, handle, shackle' assimilation of *ld* to *ll* did not occur.

In England the earliest form of the place name *Redhill* (Surrey) is *Redehelde* (in 1301: Ekwall *s.v.*). If this is not a clerical or transcriptional error, it points to OE *helde* 'slope, declivity' as the original element. But in *Redhills* (Durham) Smith (II, 81) takes *hill* as 'height'. The Frisian equivalent *hel* 'hill, hillock' will be discussed in the next paragraph.

3. Homonymy of *hel* 'hell' and *hel* 'hill'.

English *hill* has a vowel that goes back to Gmc. *u*, which through *i*-umlaut became *y* and was afterwards unrounded to *i*. Also in coastal MDutch, esp. that of Zeeland, we find *hil*. This does not refer to a high hill, as in England, but to a low refuge-mound (Moerman 96, 99, 109: *hel*, *hil*, *hul*). The North-Sea Germanic unrounding in this word has produced an *e* in the South-Eastern ME dialects and in Old Frisian (Miedema, forthcoming). So above all in Kent, Essex, Suffolk and also the surrounding counties we find *hell* instead of *hill* (or *Hull*).

Samuels (Lass 327; Samuels 1972, 123) gives a map of ME *hell* 'hill' and *fell* 'to fill'. It shows that the *e*-area for *hell(e)* is much smaller than that for *fell(e)*. In the remaining area *hull(e)* and *hill(e)* have been selected (and have spread from adjacent areas) to avoid homonymic clash with *hell(e)* 'hell'. It seems that in the low terp area of Friesland *hel* 'hill' was also avoided. This Frisian *hel* probably is or was a rather small eminence, wharf or refuge-mound in the low lands or at a bog or pool. At the time of the delabialization it could easily have been confused and merged with the name of the neighbouring *hel* 'depression, which was the existing form (Miedema, forthcoming).

At only a few places outside the low terp area was *hel*, 'hill(ock)' preserved. In the extinct dialect of Wangeroge, the most Eastern of the Frisian Islands on the North-Sea coast, *hel*, was used in the meaning 'hill, dune' (Ehrentraut I, 370). On Terschelling, one of the Western Frisian Islands, the meaning is not so clear: at Formerum is *De Hellen(s)*, which is a low area (J. Smit FP 12, 32), but at Oosterend *De Hellens* (in 1728), now: *Hillen*,

probably means 'heights, small hills' (J. Smit FP 10, 97-98). In East Friesland, where Frisian has become extinct, *hellen un dellen* means 'heights and depressions', 'hills and dales' (Ten Doornkaat Koolman II, 64).

In most places in Friesland *hel* seems to mean 'depression, pit' (Kalma FP 2, 50-54), but in some cases one cannot be sure. E.g. *Reahel*, not far from Slappeterp, is situated in a low area between two rows of terp mounds. But as it is the name of a farm-house, it may originally denote a small hillock or refuge-mound, the Frisian equivalent of the Zealand *hill* (See Appendix: 7, *infra*). The same may be true for the village of *Reahel* on lake Tjeukemeer. *De Reade Hel* near Bolsward was a farm-house situated on or by a small terp mound (Halbertsma, atlas). But here, and also at the other places, it is impossible to say what came first: *hel* 'depression' or *hel* 'hill(ock)'.

In any case we cannot deny the (former) existence of Frisian *hel* 'hill(ock)'. Though this word is found in several important Dutch dictionaries as the Frisian equivalent of Zealand *hil* 'refuge-mound', the evidence is rather scanty, probably by reason of the homonymic clash and confusion with *hel* 'hell, pit, depression'. *Hel* 'hill(ock)' may also be found in the Old Frisian place name *Hellum*, in the province of Groningen. This was mentioned seven times in a Latin chronicle in 1282-1295 (Feith 257-269). See also later *hil* 'hill' in *Hilmaar* (De Vries 54 and *infra*, 6).

4. OFRIS and ME *breg* and *reg* (with *map*).

Better than *hel*, the words *breg* 'bridge' and *reg* 'ridge' show their older distribution in both Old Frisian and Middle English. Professor Samuels has kindly allowed me to copy, from his most reliable material, the Southern ME dialect forms. In Middle English texts the ridges seem to occur more often than the bridges. But in Old Frisian more *breggen* than *reggen* are found, especially in place names. As for the OFris substratum in medieval Holland our map gives evidence for *bregge* only, not for *regge*, which mostly means 'back' and is not readily found in local texts (Miedema, forthcoming).

4.1. *Bregge* and *reg(ge)* in South-Eastern Middle English dialects (the numbers referring to Samuels' material):

Sussex *reg* (572).

Kent: *reg[ge]* (589), *regg*, *breggis* (592).

Essex: *regge* (602) and *reg* (632).

Hertfordshire (West of Essex): *bregge* (660 and 662).

Buckinghamshire (West of Hertfordshire): *bregge* (663, not on our map).

Cambridgeshire (West of Suffolk): *bregge* (829) and *reg* (851).

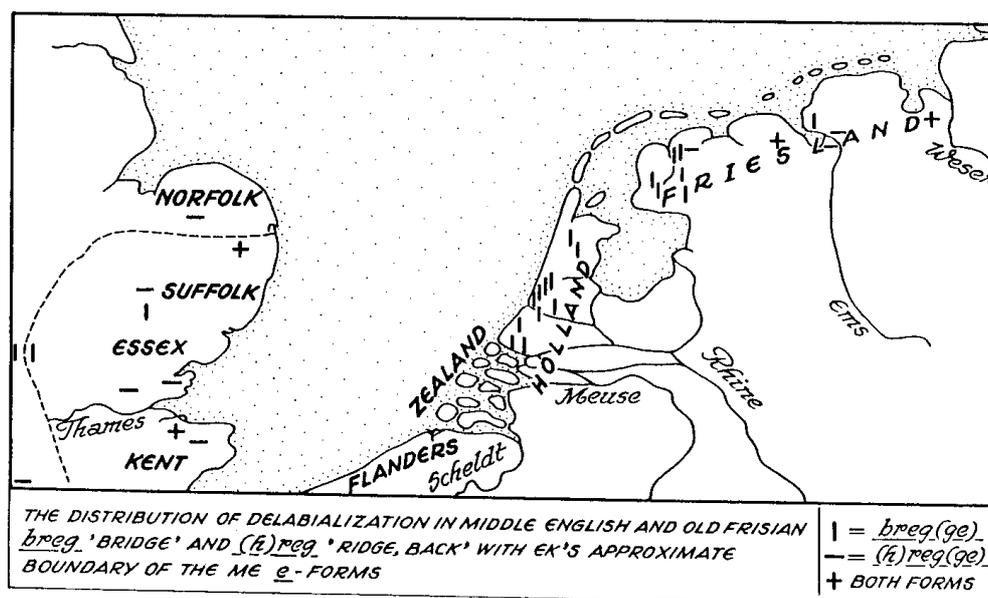
Norfolk: *bregge*, *regge* (841), *regges* (879).

Herefordshire (between Wales and Worcester): *regge* (736), not on our map).

4.2. Breg(ge) in Old Frisian:

In the modern provinces of SOUTH and NORTH HOLLAND *bregge* is one of the survivals of the OFris substratum in coastal Dutch. Before 1100 this area still belonged to FRISIA, but after 1100 it was called the county of HOLLAND (Bakker 1962 and 1969; Blok 1969, 349 and 358).

Rotterdam *bregmeyster*, Schiedam *bregge*, Leyden *breg*, Haarlem *bregghe*, Alkmaar *bregge* (Heeroma 12). Not far from Alkmaar: *Quakelbregge* (1419, Vangassen nr. 303, orig.). Rijswijk 1340 *Hornebreghe*, Oegstgeest 1327 *De Steenbregghe*, Woubrugge 1493 *Woubrugge*, Lisse 1443 *Horenbregge*, Hillegom 1555 *Tillebreg* (Blok 1959, 19-20; Daan 41-42).



In the modern province of FRIESLAND:

Leeuwarden: *breggha toe Aldaehouwe*, O I, 147 orig. 1457. Lekkum by Leeuwarden: *by Haya breggh*, O I, 271 orig. 1476. Nes by Akkrum: *tho Wobbenghabreggha*, O I, 43 orig. 1425 (also: O I, 109 orig. 1449; O II, 29 contemp. copy 1450: *toe Nesse ... toe Wobbyngha breggha* and O I, 188 orig. 1467; Van der Molen 1958, 48-49; Bakker 1977, 2). Rottum by Heerenveen: *beyde bregghen*, O II, 373 orig. 1539. Smallebrugge, south of Sneek: *to Smellebreg*, O IV 43 orig. 1474 (also O I, 256 orig. 1475 and O II, 353 orig. 1530). Ysbrechtum by Sneek: *sonder breg*, O I 105 contemp. copy 1449. The place names *Bretzhum*, ca 1265 Vita Siardi (Wybrands 129, now *Britsum*, north of Leeuwarden) and *Waghenbreghe*, 1276 (Van Richthofen 384; Brouwer 1957, 6) are not given on the map, because they occur in late copies.

In the modern province of GRONINGEN: Fivelgo *bregge* (Sjölin). In OSTFRIESLAND (now in Germany), between the rivers Ems and Weser: Wybelsum, west of Emden *Bregwey*, nr. 628 from 1450, *Bregkwey*, nr. 786 from 1463, later *Bruggeweck*, nrs. 1104-1105 from 1483 (Friedländer). Rüstringen: *bregge* (Buma).

4.3. Reg(ge) in Old Frisian:

In the modern province of FRIESLAND: Oudkerk, between Dokkum and Leeuwarden, *op den reg*, O II, 205 orig. ca. 1510. Blija *regghen*, O III, 21, 1438 late copy: not on our map; the *reg*-forms of local penal tariffs (Von Richthofen 447, 449, 456, 457, 492, 496) have not been mapped either. In the modern province of GRONINGEN: Fivelgo *reg*, *regge*, *reggis* (Sjölin). In OSTFRIESLAND (Germany), between the rivers Ems and Weser: Emsgau *rechscerd* (Sipma) and *oppe sinen hreg* (Fokkema). Rüstringen *reg lemithe* (Buma).

5. Palatalization and assibilation of gg.

There are not many OFris assibilated forms of *bregge*) left: *Bretzhum*, ca 1265, later *Britsum* (*supra*: 4.2.), *Weynbritsera* 1374, later *Wymbritseradiel* (Brouwer 1957, 6), *oxena brids*, O I, 170 orig. 1463. They seem to have been ousted by the non-assibilated forms, in the same way as *edse*, *edze* (Sipma) were by *egge* edge. But in the verbs *ledza* lay, and *sedza* say, the assibilation is still in common use. Cf. also OFris *wedze*, *widze*, OE *wicg* 'horse' and Old and (Modern Frisian *widze*, Dutch *wieg* 'cradle'. I have not found assibilated forms of OFris (*h*)*regge*.

In the English Danelaw the palatalization of *k* and *g* was interrupted by 9th century Danish influence. Gysseling (1962, 13) presumes that this also applied to palatalization in Friesland. (Later) MDutch and Middle Low German influences on Frisian probably also played a role in the supplanting of palatalized and assibilated forms.

6. Later variants: Hil, hol and brigge.

In the course of the 15th century *e* mostly became *i*, especially in the OFris charters, not only in *ig(ge)* edge, *lidza* lay, *sidza* say (Gmc *a*), and *jild* money (etym. Eng. *yield*: Gmc *e*), but also in *briggen* bridges (O II, 50, 1462 a late copy, Franeker) and in later recorded forms as *miggen* midges (R. Bogerman, 16th c: De Boer) and *righ* ridge, back (Burmania 1614: Brouwer 1940 *passim*). Nowadays *rich* and *brigge* are typical for the North Western dialect of Friesland (Hof 188; Daan, map 4), but the East Frisian dialect of Saterland (Germany) still preserves *Brääch*, *Määge*, *Rääch*, bridge, midge, ridge or back (Kramer).

So it is no wonder that *hil* instead of *hel* was found at Herbayum in the North Western part of Friesland: *de hillen*, *Bazama lijtkje hille* (Kalma FP 2, 51, Ungebûr 1546: R III). These *hillen* are perhaps the same as *dae hillen* in a charter of 1471 (O I, 219 late copy). Later *De*

Rohel or *De Roode Hel* (a farm-house and grasslands at Midlum (Appendix: 7.3.) was recorded in the same area. In the South Western dialect of Friesland another variant is found: *hol* instead of *hel*. The village *Reahel* on lake Tjeukemeer is mentioned for the first time in 1507, having two names: (*Delffster*) *Nyegae off Radehol*, *Raede Hel*, *Rade Hol*, in 1509: *Rodehel* (Dutch form) or in 1517: even *Roerdehel*, and in 1514: *Hel* (Appendix: 7.5.).

The 'hypercorrect' spelling *Roerdehel* is an indication that the *r* before a dental consonant was by then no longer pronounced, so that the name could be confused with the name *Roorda*. From this we may suppose that the same was the case in *Helporta* (O IV, 118 orig. 1500) near Jutrijp, for **Helpette* or, in SW dialect, **Holpotte* 'hell-pit', interpreted by popular etymology as 'hell-gate, hell-door' (OFris *porte*, Latin *porta* 'gate'). In the direct neighbourhood also *Sâltpotten* 'salt-pits' are found (O. Santema FP 12, 1959, maps: 68-69).

7. Appendix: the distribution of Reahel-Rohel.

7.1. **BOLSWARD:** *De Reade Hel* or *De Roode Hel*, a farm-house, north-west of the town, on or by a former terp mound (E., W., Halbertsma: atlas). The situation has been changed very much by levelling (Kuijer's map).

7.2. **BUITENPOST:** *De Rohel*, *Roohel*, *Reahel*, *De Reade Hel*, *De Roode Hel* (L.C. 1773, 1775, 1780, in the files of the Onomastic Section of the Frisian Academy; E., W.): a hamlet, west of Augustinusga on the Kolonelsdiep, a canal (See Van der Molen 1962, 122 and *supra*, 1).

7.3. **HARLINGEN:** *De Rohel*, *De Roode Hel*, farm-house and grasslands at Midlum, east of the town (L.C. 1851 and 1867, in the files of the Onomastic Section of the Frisian Academy). See 6, *supra*: *de hille(n)*.

7.4. **SLAPPETERP:** *Rohel*, *Reahel*, *De Reade Hel*, farm-house in low lands between two rows of terp mounds, north-east of Franeker (E., W.).

7.5. **TJEUKEMEER:** 1507: *Nyegae off Radehol* (SR 4143) = *Delffster Nijegae* (SR 4091) = *Raede Hel* (SR 4480) = *Rade Hol* (SR 4482, 4491), 1509: *Die Rodehel* (SR 3830), 1514: simply *Hel* (SR 4669), 1517: *Roerdehel* (SR 5224), 1528: *Nijegha alias die Roede Helle* (Kempo van Martena, Annael: Schw. II, 28). See E., W., Muller (II, 519) and Huisman (9). Now *Rohel*, *Reahel*, a village on the north-eastern bank of the lake. Cf. 1 and 6, *supra*. Outside *Reahel* the village is sometimes called *De Hel*, as it was in 1514 (Hoekema 35).

7.6. **WORKUM:** *Roohel*, *De Reade Hel* (Beetstra FP 15, 118), a farm-house at *De (Greate) Hel* in Het Heidenschap, east of the town.

7.7. **BENNEBROEK** (outside the province of Friesland): *De Rooheller Zandvaart* or *Bennebroekervaart*, not far from De Haarlemmermeer, south of Haarlem (province of North Holland). See Van der Aa 9, 627, published in 1847, before

the reclamation of the lake. But I must confine myself to *Rohel-Reahel* in the province of Friesland.

7.8. *THE SURNAME* Roëll might be derived from the place name *Rohel*, but this is difficult to prove. It seems that the first Dutch *Roëll* was H.A. Roëll, professor at the universities of Franeker (1686-1704) and Utrecht (1704-1718). If he was the owner of *Rohel* at Slappeterp, this farm may well have been named after him. His father was a German officer. However, it would take me too far afield to go into this question now.

8. *Bibliography and Abbreviations.*

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