The nature of the eponymous hero of *Beowulf* has long been disputed. Was he drawn from the stock of traditional heroes or was he the poet’s...
invention? So far, answers to this question have been given on exclusively literary-critical rather than onomastic grounds. This article argues that the usage of the name ‘Biuuulf’ (Beowulf) in the seventh century suggests that legends of Beowulf existed well before the composition of our extant poem. Considered in the immediate context of the *Liber Vitae Dunelmensis* in which it appears, the name ‘Biuuulf’ can be seen to conform to a recognizable pattern: it is one of several names containing words uncommon in or foreign to the Anglo-Saxon onomasticon, which appear to have been used due to familiarity with heroic-legendary traditions. Names like Ætla, Offa, Hama, Ingeld, Theodric, and Wyrmhere deviate from statistically demonstrable name-giving trends; so does the name Beowulf. These names were likely given in accordance with a custom, previously adumbrated by H. M. Chadwick and Patrick Wormald, in which children were named after characters from heroic legend. I conclude that the monk named Beowulf was named after the same traditional hero whom a later poet placed at the center of a heroic-elegiac masterpiece.

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