РЕЦЕНЗИИ

Dmitry V. Spiridonov
Ural Federal University
Ekaterinburg, Russia

(MIS)LEADING APPROACHES IN TOPONOMASTICS

Review of the book: Perono Cacciafoco, F., & Cavallaro, F. (2023). *Place Names. Approaches and Perspectives in Toponymy and Toponomastics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xxiii + 298 p.

The paper provides a critical review of a ten-chapter volume dealing with various aspects of the study of place names. Conceived as a concise but comprehensive reference source for students in toponomastics, the book has two distinct focuses, namely historical toponomastics (i.e. the study of place names within the framework of historical linguistics and contact language theory) and social toponomastics, but also covers the study of toponymy in the context of historical geography, language documentation, and cartography. Despite the fact that the book presents a good survey of some topics and contains relevant references to scholarly publications, which may be useful for students, it displays numerous issues in the chapters related to etymology, language change, and historical linguistics, which may give the readers a distorted idea of the research practices normally used in the corresponding sub-fields of toponomastics. In some cases, the analysis proposed in the book lacks arguments and further explanations, while in others, it is simply based on an *a priori* fallacy.

K e y w o r d s: toponymy; historical linguistics; etymology; socio-onomastics; Indo-European; Celtic; textbooks in toponomastics

The volume under review is co-authored by Francesco Perono Cacciafoco from Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (China) and Francesco Cavallaro from Nanyang Technological University (Singapore). It was inspired by a university course in toponomastics given by F. Perono Cacciafoco and therefore conceived as "a general and comprehensive source to be used as an exact and timely reference on the discipline

of toponymy in itself, with a standardisation of the specialised terminology and with a consistent apparatus of examples aimed at triggering and nurturing the interest of students and young scholars towards the study of place names" (p. xviii), which is to be lauded. The book is organized around the following topics: "Language Change," "Historical Toponomastics," "Toponymy and the Historical-Linguistic Reconstruction of Proto-Languages," "Diachronic Toponymy," "Historical Toponomastics and Historical Geography," "Synchronic Toponymy," "Place Names and Society," "Toponymy and Cartography." This list is not exhaustive and does not include some important aspects of toponomastics, neither it looks balanced (the main focus being on historical toponomastics), however, it is sound enough for a student textbook. Each chapter contains theoretical and methodological information with relevant references to scholarly literature and a number of examples or case studies that deal with specific toponyms or toponymic systems. Some examples are retrieved from publications by other scholars; however, the volume also contains case studies from the authors. This structure looks fully consistent and allows the readers to delve deeper into a specific scholarly context. I should also note the geographical variety of the material: although a number of case studies are related to a relatively small area in Northern Italy which has long been in the focus of interests of F. Perono Cacciafoco, they are supplemented with a wide range of examples that go from North America to China and Indonesia.

C h a p t e r   1   provides a general overview of place names and their sub-categories, the distinction between macro- and micro-toponymy, semasiological and onomasiological approaches, endonymy and exonymy, it also seeks to explain the difference between diachronic and synchronic approaches. The authors present different "classifications" of toponyms, namely those by Stewart [1975], Rudnyckyj [1958] (which is developed based on the toponymy of North America and cannot be applied to other language areas), Zelinsky [2002], Rennick [2005], and that by Tent and Blair [2009; 2011], which are not "classifications" properly speaking but rather attempts at building an idea of how toponyms are created and motivated (cf. the "intentionalist" approach, albeit inconsistent, by Stewart, the motivational and derivational approaches by Zelinsky, Tent and Blair). In Section 1.7. the authors consider the concept of toponymic system that they define as "a set of place names that belong to a specific area and share the same etymological stem (and related meaning) and/or the same naming process" (p. 19). There have been suggested numerous definitions of toponymic systems, since this term may take slightly different meanings from the areal, ethnolinguistic, geographical, anthropological, etymological, derivational, and onomasiological perspectives. The interesting examples cited in this section do not quite fit the proposed definition and mostly reflect the meanings that the term acquires in the context of historical, etymological, and anthropological research.

Unfortunately, this introductory part does not cover all the variety of toponymy nor does it touch upon some theoretical problems related to the semantics of proper names in general and toponyms in particular, the processes of place name formation

and evolution (which are obviously different for different categories of place names), as well as the structural variability (both synchronic and diachronic) of toponyms.

C h a p t e r 2 opens with a discussion of the phenomenon of linguistic change and the scope of historical linguistics. Unfortunately, the incidental examples of historical studies in toponomastics cited in section 2.2 do not illustrate so much the historical evolution of toponyms but rather attest to the fact that place names often reflect the language contacts that took place in the past within a specific area. In the sections that follow, the authors show the role the identification of names played in the decipherment of Linear B in order to demonstrate in section 2.7 a "similar" "experimental" approach to the decipherment of toponyms in Linear A writings. Relying on the graphical analogies between Linear A and B, which, in fact, has become a useful (if not the single) way of attempting to decipher the Linear A texts, the authors propose etymological interpretations of a number of Linear A toponyms thinking that this may help in testing the possible Indo-European classification of the encoded Cretan place names. To exemplify the method, the authors analyze nine toponyms from Linear A texts. It is true that at least some of them have previously been interpreted as place names by virtue of known equivalents in Linear B scripts (e.g. *pa-i-to* identified as Φαιστός, a settlement in central Crete) or because of their position in the texts. However, the etymological solutions suggested by the authors sometimes look incongruous. For example, the word *ku-ni-su* is interpreted as having the meaning of 'Dogs' Shrine' and coming from IE *$\hat{k}\breve{u}n$- 'dog' + *-$h_{1/4}ish_a$-, the latter being "associated with the Brittonic *Isu[rium]*",[1] and the sequence *se-to-i-ja* is interpreted as 'passage with path,' derived from a stem related to Celtic *$\breve{s}\breve{e}nt\breve{u}$- 'path,' and another element which "mirror[s] the Lithuanian *pérėja* 'passage, mountain pass'"[2] (p. 43). The authors claim that "[a]t the etymologically and eminently theoretical level, these nine possibly Minoan place names could all have relatively solid Indo-European etymological reconstructions, which are consistent not only linguistically, but also semantically. This, in turn, may even help in identifying the locations of those places in Crete through the hydro-geo-morphology implied in the toponyms" (p. 45). It is obvious that all such improvised interpretations, in both semantic and formal aspects, have no real ground and cannot provide any positive argument in favor of the Indo-European attribution of Cretan

---

[1] *Isurium (Brigantium)*, the name of a Roman fort by the River *Ure* (possibly from *Isurā*), is believed to contain the stem *$\bar{\imath}[s]$- 'to refresh, to heal' coming from IE *$h_x ish_2$- [James, 2023, *159*]. Note that Linear A *ku-ni-su* is most often interpreted as a Semitic word and compared to Akkadian *kunāšu*, *kunīšu* 'emmer wheat' [e.g. Best, 1989, *9*], although in some texts, it is supposedly used as the name of a place contributing grain to the palace.

[2] In Lithuanian, *pérėja* is a derivative from *péreiti* 'to go through, to cross' (a common Balto-Slavic verb, cf. Russian *перейти*), the verb *eīti* 'to go' coming from IE *$h_1 ey$- which, in the authors' opinion, can be reflected in *-i-ja*. The word *se-to-i-ja*, found in both Linear A and B texts, most probably refers to a settlement and must first of all be considered in comparison to other settlement names with the same ending: *ku-do-ni-ja* (Kydonia, Κὔδωνΐᾱ), *tu-ni-ja*, *pa-i-ti-ja*, *do-ti-ja*, etc., in which *-i-ja* has obviously nothing in common with *-ėja* of the Lithuanian noun.

toponyms, nor can they illustrate the methods of studying toponymy in historical linguistics.

The methodology of historical toponomastics presented in C h a p t e r 3 largely follows the "intensive model" outlined by Tent [2015], which is hardly a "methodology," but rather a general algorithm, in which the authors tend to overestimate some steps and ignore others. The approach is illustrated by two examples providing interpretations (both by F. Perono Cacciafoco) of the Italian toponyms *Sessame* (village in Piedmont) and *Squaneto* (a hamlet in Spigno Monferrato, Piedmont): the two etymologies proposed for *Sessame* (from either IE *sĕk- 'to cut' or IE *sag- 'to seek') are based mainly on archaeological findings of the Neolithic Age (sic!) and have no linguistic reliability, while the interpretation of *Squaneto* as derived from either *sub-aquanetum* or *ex-aquanetum* 'under/from water place' ultimately relies on the geography of the place located near the Valla stream (actually, a very small brook) and is phonetically, morphologically, and semantically dubious.[3]

C h a p t e r 4 *Toponymy and the Historical-Linguistic Reconstruction of Proto-Languages* starts with the discussion of five hypotheses related to (pre-)proto-languages: Giacomo Devoto's Mediterranean theory, Marija Gimbutas' Kurgan hypothesys, Hans Krahe's Old European hydronymy hypothesis, Theo Vennemann's Vasconic substratum theory, and Mario Alinei's Paleolithic continuity theory. The wide and very controversial field of substrate (Pre-Indo-European) toponomastics is illustrated with the authors' own analysis of toponymy related to the IE root *alb- for which "Perono Cacciafoco postulates the existence of a Pre-Proto-Indo-European[4] root, *$h_a$albh-, etymologically more ancient than *alb-/*albh-, which would have generated the Proto-Indo-European stem (*alb-/*albh-)" (p. 98). The $h_a$albh-family is supposed to include toponyms that the author derives from *alb- (*Alba*), *olb- (*Olbia*), and *orb- (*Orba*, *Orbicella*).[5]

---

[3] For *Squaneto*, the authors seem to agree with Guido Borghi who provided a Celtic interpretation of the name as 'pasture of the flowers' trail' or 'territory renowned for flowers' (which is an interesting case in itself), but believe that these meanings "appear to belong to the 'second stage' of the naming process" and that they were "carried out purely at an etymological level and did not take into account any analysis of the hydro-geo-morphology of the territory." The interpretation that links the name to Latin *aqua* is interestingly believed to be "a more ancient and original explanation of the name" as it is linked to the landscape features of the place (p. 58). The semantic relationship between the interpretation proposed by G. Borghi and that by F. Perono Cacciafoco is not discussed.

[4] In the volume, the term *Pre-Proto-Indo-European* interestingly refers to "the more ancient variety of Indo-European spoken by the Indo-Europeans before they spread across Europe" (p. 95), while *Proto-Indo-European* is meant to correspond to the idiom reconstructed, for example, in Pokorny's dictionary, but (sic!) "without taking into consideration possible language contact, in prehistoric times, by the Indo-European during their journey(s) towards Europe" (p. 95). This intriguing view is nowhere further explained.

[5] The list of these toponyms looks very heterogeneous and definitely requires detailed comments. It comprises, for example, *Olbia* (known to be from ὄλβος 'happiness, wealth,' of probably Pre-Greek origin) and *Orba* (river name in Italy, first attested as *Urba* and most often considered in relation to Latin *urbs*), as well as *Albenga* (< *Album Ingaunum*) and *Ventimiglia* (< *Album Intimilium*), in which *album* (*alba*) is sometimes interpreted as a substrate (Pre-Indo-European) element with the meaning 'elevation → city' [e.g. Nègre, 1961, *128*].

Unfortunately, it is not explained on what premises F. Perono Cacciafoco reconstructs the root as $h_a albh$- and why he interprets it to mean 'water.' The only relevant explanation of the latter comes from the hypothesis that the root is the result of contacts between Indo-Europeans and Semitic peoples as it probably relates to Sumerian ḫalbia, Akkadian ḫalpium 'spring, water mass' (p. 99). It seems, however, that the ultimate basis for such an interpretation is the abundance of hydronyms that fall under the umbrella category of $h_a albh$-type names, which, in its turn, gets us back to the question about the epistemological status of what is here referred to as Pre-Proto-Indo-European and to the very logics of semantic reconstruction. Another example is the toponymic family with the root *kar- 'stone,' identified within the framework of Krahe's theory. Perono Cacciafoco considers the root *kar- to be a variant of *kal- 'strong, hard,' both being presumably borrowed from a Pre-Indo-European substrate. This conception by itself may contain a rational kernel,[6] but further details seem confusing. For example, the idea to link Italian *Carcare* (village in Liguria) to this toponymic family may in fact be productive,[7] but it is extravagant to explain the root reduplication by the "hydro-geo-morphological features of the place," namely by "the large amount of *calanchi*[8] that surrounded Carcare" (p. 105).

C h a p t e r 5 introduces the reader to diachronic toponymy which is surprisingly defined as "the discipline studying toponymy in the context of undocumented and/or endangered languages" (p. 114). In this context, "diachronic toponymy" mainly corresponds to the study of toponymic legends, as well as to documenting indigenous place names. The authors propose a simple algorithm of collecting information about such toponyms and to illustrate this approach, they reprise their study of a number of Abui[9] place names. The study follows a traditional approach of language documentation, but it only partly corresponds to the proposed algorithm as some of the questions the scholar must answer according to the suggested methodology normally cannot have answers when applied to undocumented languages. A similar algorithm is proposed for the semantic analysis of such place names. It is aimed at understanding whether the name is semantically transparent and, if so, whether the meaning correlates to the geographical setting, and as such does not have much heuristic value.

The importance of geographical landscape is the main subject of C h a p t e r 6. The authors particularly emphasize the role of historical geography and landscape archaeology in historical toponomastics, which is supported by interesting examples from previous research by other scholars. The authors' own etymological examples

---

[6] For a survey of the reflexes of *kar- and *kal-, see [Santano Moreno, 2003].

[7] The settlement name *Carcarèrs* (a commune in Gascony), an obvious parallel to the Ligurian *Carcare*, has previously been explained as a reduplication of *kar- [see Dauzat & Rostaing, 1984, *147*].

[8] The Italian term *calanco* refers to "sedimentary rocks and soils that have been eroded by wind and water." The authors, following [Devoto & Oli, 1975], link it to the abovementioned root *kal- (cf. French *calanque* that has a long tradition of being explained in a similar way).

[9] A language of the Alor-Pantar family spoken in Eastern Indonesia.

are not so convincing. When discussing the earlier proposed etymology of the Italian toponym *Pareto* (village in Piedmont), the authors arguably refute its interpretation as derived from Latin *pĭrus* 'pear tree' — but mostly for geographical reasons, and for the same reasons they derive this name from Celtic **br-/*bar-* 'rock,' which can hardly be taken for granted and requires further explanations.[10] The most interesting part of the chapter explores the representation of the landscape features in the Abui toponymic legends and oral traditions.

C h a p t e r 7 focuses on toponymy in the context of historical geography, both physical and human. From this perspective, place naming "reflects how people interact with, perceive, use, understand, and change their environment" (p. 161). The idea is illustrated by the case of the village name *Bistagno* in Piedmond, which is traced back to a presumed IE root **agn-/*ang-* 'water' that the authors also discerned in the river name *Agno* in Vicenza (no other examples are given) — a random solution that simply does not hold up. The authors display almost an obsession to derive the name of a settlement located by a river from any more or less suitable root meaning 'water,' just because there is no way — at least so it seems — for the name of such a settlement to have any other motivation.[11] In this case, however, the authors propose one more interpretation, no less surprising: "the toponym *Bistagno* could derive from an Indo-European (then Celtic) form **bĭst-ăgnŏ-s* (noun) 'little pheasant' (or 'little bird similar to a pheasant'), which would have generated, among others, the attested Old Irish word *besān* 'pheasant'" (p. 168), — an etymology that, in the authors' interpretation, can indicate to the fact that in the area of Bistagno, "this specific species of birds was possibly common at the time of the related naming process" (pp. 168–169). Fortunately, some more plausible examples are cited to show that "place names can sometimes, when properly verified, be useful in providing scholars with information on the local fauna of a territory at a specific time" (p. 172). It should be admitted that, when not going deep down into the past and principally relying on research by other scholars, the authors are definitely able to provide interesting case studies, as in this chapter where they discuss the evolution of street names in Bucharest in the 20th century (although in the context of the chapter that deals mainly with the natural environment, this example is out of character and would be more suitable if placed in Chapter 8).

C h a p t e r 8 focuses on synchronic toponymy and provides a survey of different studies that deal with either place naming patterns within an area at a specific time period or place naming policies that determine the process of creating new names. The authors'

---

[10] Especially the passage from **b-* to *p-*. The attempt to see the same passage in Latin *parīes* 'wall' — the only parallel provided by the authors — is of no value [cf. de Vaan, 2008, *445*].

[11] Throughout the book, the authors tend to overestimate the geographical ("hydro-geo-morphological") setting of the places and sometimes artificially construct their etymologies so that they could be directly linked to the relevant (and, in some instances, most probably irrelevant) landscape features, however odd it may look.

own example of such research relates to the odonymy of Singapore in the colonial and post-colonial periods. The authors proceed with discussing the concept of critical toponymy which refers to the processes of renaming places and restructuring the toponymic landscape that may result from serious political changes. Another interesting phenomenon discussed in this part of the book is the commodification of place names when they get endowed with symbolic capital and attractiveness that can be commercialized, for example, as a tourist brand.

The l a s t   t w o   c h a p t e r s provide an overview of two theoretical subjects: social functioning of place names and the relations between toponymy and cartography. With reference to numerous publications, the authors consider place names as social constructs and the act of naming — as taking possession of newly colonized or explored lands. This approach opens an interesting, although not innovative perspective on colonization and decolonization, place naming policies, and the phenomenon of unofficial toponymy (that the authors clumsily refer to as "toponymic nicknames"). In the same vein, maps are considered as ideological tools that codify not only specific toponyms but also the whole set of social, cultural, religious attitudes that lead a political entity to procure new lands.

The volume is supplied with a list of terms used in the field of toponomastics, an index, and a bibliography.

Overall, the book produces mixed impressions. It certainly succeeds at the abundance of examples and references to scholarly literature in the last chapters which can easily be recommended for students and all those interested in socio-onomastics. The weakest part of the volume is the historical and etymological approach it adopts. The authors provide incongruous examples of etymological research, which probably makes the whole volume unusable for teaching purposes as it gives a distorted idea of how place names should be etymologized, especially if the readers are not competent enough in historical linguistics and are thus unable to have a critical view on the respective parts of the book.

References

Best, J. (1989). Grain Varieties on Tablets and Roundels from Hagia Triada. In J. Best, & F. Woudhuizen (Eds.), *Lost Languages from the Mediterranean* (pp. 7–11). Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Dauzat, A., & Rostaing, Ch. (1984). *Dictionnaire étymologique des noms de lieux en France*. Paris: Librairie Guénégaud.

Devoto, G., & Oli, G. C. (1975). *Vocabolario illustrato della lingua italiana* (Vol. 1). Florence: Le Monnier.

James, A. (2023). *The Brittonic Language in the Old North. A Guide to the Place-Name Evidence* (Vol. 2). [s.l.; s.n.]. Retrieved from https://spns.org.uk/resources/bliton

Nègre, E. (1961). Albi et Albigeois. *Revue internationale d'onomastique, 13*(2), 121–130. https://doi.org/10.3406/rio.1961.1729

Rennick, R. (2005). How to Study Placenames. *Names, 53*(4), 291–308. https://doi.org/10.1179/nam.2005.53.4.291

Rudnyckyj, J. B. (1958). *Studies in Onomastics* (Vol. 2). Winnipeg: Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences.

Santano Moreno, J. (2003). Descendientes de IE **(s)kerb(h)-* 'torcer' y **kar-* 'duro' en las lenguas romances y el vasco. *Nouvelle revue d'onomastique, 41/42*, 5–49. https://doi.org/10.3406/onoma.2003.1439

Stewart, G. R. (1975). *Names on the Globe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tent, J. (2015). Approaches to Research in Toponymy. *Names, 63*(2), 65–74. https://doi.org/10.1179/0027773814Z.000000000103

Tent, J., & Blair, D. (2009). *Motivations for Naming: A Toponymic Typology*. South Turramurra: Placenames Australia.

Tent, J., & Blair, D. (2011). Motivations for Naming: The Development of a Toponymic Typology for Australian Placenames. *Names, 59*(2), 67–89. https://doi.org/10.1179/002777311X12976826704000

Vaan, de M. (2008). *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the other Italic Languages*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Zelinsky, W. (2002). Slouching Toward a Theory of Names: A Tentative Taxonomic Fix. *Names, 50*(4), 243–262. https://doi.org/10.1179/nam.2002.50.4.243

ABBREVIATIONS

IE   Indo-European

* * *

Spiridonov, Dmitry Vladimirovich
PhD, Associate Professor
Department of Germanic Philology
Ural Federal University
51, Lenin Ave., 620000 Ekaterinburg, Russia
E-mail: dmitry.spiridonov@urfu.ru
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8263-5581

Спиридонов Дмитрий Владимирович
кандидат филологических наук, доцент
кафедры германской филологии
Уральский федеральный университет
620000, Екатеринбург, пр. Ленина, 51
E-mail: dmitry.spiridonov@urfu.ru

Д. В. Спиридонов

Уральский федеральный университет
Екатеринбург, Россия

(БЕС)ПЕРЕСПЕКТИВНЫЕ ПОДХОДЫ В ТОПОНИМИКЕ

Рец. на кн.: *Perono Cacciafoco F*. Place Names. Approaches and Perspectives in Toponymy and Toponomastics / F. Perono Cacciafoco, F. Cavallaro. — Cambridge : Cambridge Univ. Press, 2023. — xxiii + 298 p.

В рецензии представлен критический обзор новейшего англоязычного учебника, посвященного различным аспектам изучения географических названий. Книга задумана как краткий, но всеобъемлющий справочный источник для студентов, изучающих топонимику, хотя в фокусе внимания авторов в основном находятся два направления изучения топонимии: историческая топонимика (т. е. изучение географических названий в рамках исторической лингвистики и теории языковых контактов) и социальная топонимика. В учебнике также кратко освещается изучение топонимии в контексте исторической географии, картографии, документирования малых языков. Несмотря на то, что в книге представлен хороший обзор некоторых тем и содержатся многочисленные ссылки на научные публикации, что действительно может быть полезно студентам, главы, связанные с этимологией и исторической лингвистикой, могут создать у читателей искаженное представление об исследовательских подходах, применяемых в этих разделах науки. Предложенные в книге примеры самостоятельного историко-этимологического анализа топонимов либо недостаточно аргументированы, либо просто основаны на ошибочных допущениях и представлениях.

К л ю ч е в ы е   с л о в а: топонимия; историческая лингвистика; этимология; социоономастика; индоевропейские языки; кельтские языки; учебники по топонимике