LINGUIST List 31.1647

Mon May 18 2020

Review: Historical Linguistics: Parker (2019)

Editor for this issue: Jeremy Coburn <jecoburn@linguistlist.org>

Date: 14-Feb-2020
From: Caterina Saracco <caterina.saracco@gmail.com>
Subject: Changing Names
E-mail this message to a friend

Discuss this message

Book announced at https://linguistlist.org/issues/30/30-2576.html

EDITOR: Robert Parker
TITLE: Changing Names
SUBTITLE: Tradition and Innovation in Ancient Greek Onomastics
SERIES TITLE: Proceedings of the British Academy
PUBLISHER: Oxford University Press
YEAR: 2019

REVIEWER: Caterina Saracco, Università degli Studi di Genova

SUMMARY

Changing Names. Tradition and Innovation in Ancient Greek Onomastics, edited by Robert Parker and published for the British Academy by the Oxford University Press, is a book completely devoted to the onomastics of Ancient Greek

The volume consists of eleven contributions, preceded by a valuable introduction by Robert Parker, Professor Emeritus of Ancient History at the University of Oxford. In his introduction (pp. 1-20) Parker complains about a deficit of work explicitly addressing questions of changes in Ancient Greek naming practices. Most scholars for example know that in Ancient Greece there was an increasing frequency of theophoric names, combined with a decline in local particularisms and a broader loss of variety, and the spread of Macedonian and then Roman names; but studies that precisely describe this situation and that are based upon statistical data are hard to find. This collected book wants to be therefore a first contribution in this sub-field of onomastics research.

The first contribute is Greek or Minoan? Names and Naming Habits in the Aegean Bronze Age of Torsten Meissner (pp. 21-46). In these pages, Meissner discusses about the methodological and practical difficulties he encounters in the study of personal names in the language of Mycenean Linear B tablets. Because of the nature of Linear B script, that does not distinguish between voiceless, voiced and aspirated stops, nor between short and long vowels, the interpretation of a given name can often remain uncertain. In the second part Meissner tries to see how “Greek” the Mycenaean personal names are, both lexically and structurally: he examines a few of the striking types of names in Knossos and in part he compares them to what it can be found on the Greek mainland. A first result is that many differences between the Greek names in Linear B and in later Greek are evident, ranging from differences in morphology to the use, or lack thereof, of patronymics. Even though Linear B tablets are linguistically Greek, the overall onomastics situation is different in many respects from what can be seen in later Greek.

The second paper, Aigeai and Pella: A Tale of Two Cities in Macedonia (pp. 47-70), written by Miltiades Hatzopoulos, speaks about the results of an investigation upon a new fascicle of Greek and Latin inscriptions: the first part comprises documents from Lower Macedonia (Aloros, Aigeai, Mieza, Marinia, Skydra, Neapolis and Edessa), the second part comprises the inscriptions from Kyrros, Gyrbea, Tyrissa, Pella, Allante, Ichnai, Europos and some lesser settlements in Northern Bottia. In the first pages the author compares the funerary inscriptions from Pella and Aigeai and as a third comparandum he adds the evidence from the First Fascicle of the Inscriptions of Lower Macedonia (EKM I) containing the inscriptions from Beroia and its territory. As an appendix, in the three columns of the final table, the personal names of classical and Hellenistic citizens from Aigeai, Pella and Beroia are classified according to four categories: 1) names with a clear Greek etymology; 2) clearly Greek names that can be labelled as “panhellenic”; 3) identifiable foreign names (Thracian, Illyrian, etc..); 4) names without a recognizable Greek etymology, but that cannot be ascribed to any identifiable non-Greek linguistic group.

The Four Seasons of Beotian, and Particularly Thespian, Onomastics of Denis Knoepfler is the third paper of the volume (pp. 71-99). In his contribution, the author analyzes the epigraphic material provided by the Boeotian cities, which is well distributed over time. He therefore tries to conduct an accurate diachronic study of the anthroponymy of this region, taking as point of reference the abundant corpus of Thespiai. He divided the history of this Boeotian city and the available material into four periods: The Classical period (5th-4th c. BC), the high Hellenistic period (330-170), the late Hellenistic period and the beginning of the imperial period down to the Principate of Augustus, the period from the Empire down to the crisis of the third century. Only the citizen population has been considered for this study, therefore names of slaves, metics and women are excluded.

Jaime Curbera is the author of the fourth paper, An Essay on Satyr Names (pp. 100-137). It deals with satyr personal names, most of them from Attic vases, and how do we make sense of these names. Curbera has the idea that this kind of matter is better understandable only viewed against the backdrop of an old tradition or folk culture. The view that satyrs are not purely mythical beings is not completely new (s. Wilamowitz 1931 and Hedreen 1992) and this perspective sounds unusual, but it accounts for more names and facts than a purely mythical or artistic interpretation. In the first part of this chapter we find a discussion of some general aspect of this phenomenon. The scholar describes in detail names of satyrs originated as names of revelers and mummers, the discrepancy between names (above all those alluding to animals) and the images of satyrs on vases, the use of metonymical shifts in the conceptualization of names, the completely invented names. The second part deals with a group of 41 illustrative and intriguing satyr names and covers more practical aspects (use of masks and soot, puns, dances, coarse names, shouts and cries, etc.).

In the fifth paper, written by Thomas Corsten and titled Name Changes of Individuals (pp.138-152), are discussed those rare cases, when individuals change their personal names. Changes in naming systems or name changes within groups of people are in fact more frequent in history and it is easier to detect the reasons for doing so. Apart from religious reasons, the author describes other reasons for the change of an individual’s name: Corsten distinguishes between “active” and “passive” name changes, that is changes that were decided by the person concerned and those that were imposed by others. In this line he exemplifies and examines three different categories of name changes: 1) name changes for slaves (passive); 2) name changes of free-born people as a consequence of changes in status or of “Hellenization” and “Romanization” (active); 3) other minor name changes of free-born people.

The name Δημοκράτης is instead analyzed by Stephen Lambert in the sixth paper, Δημοκράτης the Democrat? (pp. 153-166). One of the underlying assumption is that Demokrates means “democrat”, or at least connotes “democracy” and Lambert tries to explore this assumption in his paper. In doing so he shall make a case that the name Demokrates displays onomastic change over time, not in the usual sense of change in naming practices and pattern, but in the connotation of the name’s use, reflecting wider contextual changes in political language, ideology and culture. A more general corollary is that the relationship between a name, its literal “meaning” and its connotation may in some cases be loose and fluid rather than static and fixed.

In Onomastic Interactions: Greek and Thracian Names (pp. 167-194) Dan Dana pays attention to the Thracian region, long exposed first to the Greek influence and then to Roman domination, and its naming system. The author treats in this article the chronology of certain changes and evolutions of the system of personal names in the north Balkan regions, in connection with the choice of names, product of onomastic interactions between Greeks and Thracians. The repertory of Thracian names is collected from OnomThrac (Dana 2014): more than 1500 names and a total of more than 7000 occurrences. Dana pays attention to their chronological and geographical distribution, which clearly reflects the internal diversity of Thracian personal names, as well as to their interactions with Greek and Latin names (theophoric and hybrid names, potamophoric names, mythological names, ethnical personal names).

The eighth paper is titled Lycian, Persian, Greek, Roman: Chronological Layers and Structural Developments in the Onomastics of Lycia (pp. 195-216). Thanks to the new volume (V.B) of the Lexicon of Greek Personal Names, which covers the southern coast of Asia Minor, Christof Schuler tries to reconstruct the history of Lycian onomastics. Stephen Colvin (2004) divided his data from LGPN V.B into three periods, in order to be able to describe changes; Schuler proposes to divide onomastic developments in Lycia into phases which are defined by qualitative criteria: 1) phase I from the 5th c. until late 3rd c. BC (indigenous names + Greek and Persian names that begin to be used; 2) phase II from 200 BC until 50 AD (increasing preponderance of Greek names); 3) phase III from 50 AD until 300 AD (continuity of local traditions, Roman elements and global trends); phase IV covers the Late Antiquity (described by Destephen in the twelfth chapter). From this view, onomastics reflects the general course which the Lycians followed in all periods, a flexible, adaptive and impressively successful strategy to define their place in the wider Hellenistic and Roman world.

The Diffusion of Roman Names and Naming Practices in Greek Poleis (2nd c. BC – 3rd c. AD) is the ninth contribution of the volume (pp. 217-236), written by Jean-Sebastien Balzat. This chapter concerns another large-scale onomastic phenomenon in the history of Greek onomastics: the adoption of Roman names and naming practices by the citizens of the different poleis, after Rome became the prominent military actor in the East (from the 2nd c. BC). Balzat tries to shed light on the main features of the two stages in the diffusion of Roman names and naming practices – stages which are divided by the Caesar’s dictatorship – with an emphasis on the ruling group of the poleis. At the end, he attempts a socio-onomastic analysis, with the aim to contribute to our understanding of the societal transformations of the poleis during the Late Hellenistic and the Roman imperial period.

The tenth contribution has the title New Identities in the Greco-Roman East: Cultural and Legal Implications of the Use of Roman Names (pp. 237-257), written by Athanasios Rizakis. It is devoted to the interaction of the Roman and Greek cultural traditions in those communities established in the Roman colonies founded in the Greek East. These communities acted as vectors of influence especially through intermarriage and proved to be the best channel for the adoption by Romans of the Greek naming system or by Greeks of Latin names. The author tends to describe the shifts from the exclusive use of Greek names by Greeks to occasional adoption of Roman names and the adaptation of Roman onomastic practices to Greek standards. This form of acculturation displays great regional variability, which meant a different reception in the various cities as well as in different social classes. After discussing the legal and social implications of the use of Roman tria nomina, as well as their meaning of pride, prestige and power, Rizakik reports that this naming system as identity marker of the free citizens in the Hellenistic area of the Roman Empire did not last long: by the end of the 3rd century the single naming system using individual Greek and Roman names appeared, facilitated by the progress of Christianity and the decline of the Empire and its values.

The last chapter is Christianization and local Names in Asia Minor: Fall and Rise in Late Antiquity by Sylvain Destephen (pp. 258-276). The scholar explains that the study of individual names is made possible in Asia Minor by the extensive epigraphic documentation, which testifies that the onomastic patrimony of late antique Asia Minor underwent a twofold process of transformation and simplification. Instead of choosing names to set themselves off from their pagan neighbors, early Christians bore varied and common names. Before the Emperor Constantine, the Roman naming systems in this region consisted in a simpler form with duo nomina; after that Christianity was authorized, the new religion influenced personal names from the fifth century onwards: biblical, pious, “divine” names, many ordinary or theophoric names received a new religious flavor in connection with popular martyrs. At the end of the Late Antiquity there was a diminution of the stock of Christian names, but few of these came to be borne by more and more people. On the eve of the “dark ages” sources and inscriptions underwent a sharp decline, but Destephen writes that the fame of some names is also a result of popular cults of saints (such as Saint George), even if many saints (and therefore names) remained local figures.

EVALUATION

With this volume Robert Parker finally fills a distinct gap in the study of onomastics, that is a lack of systematic studies on the repercussions in naming practices of the (more or less forced) contacts between the Greek and Roman world, as well as the impact that Christianity had on the anthroponymy of the populations living in the Hellenic world.

This text is undoubtedly essential for all scholars of Greek onomastics; however it also represents a valuable tool for those who are interested in Greek, Roman and Near East history.

The volume is clearly focused on the on the object of study and the different contributions are linked together in a perfect way: each of them focuses on a different geographic region, there are diachronic and synchronic studies, each essay analyzes linguistic material contextualizing it with the help of other disciplines such as archeology, anthropology and the history of religions.

Concluding, the book edited by Robert Parker certainly represents an excellent starting point for future studies not only about the anthroponymic mix between Greek and Roman peoples, but also between Greeks and Slavs or between Greeks and Germanic populations (such as the Vandals, with whom Greek-speaking individuals had contacts in the Ancient Egypt during the fifth century).

REFERENCES

Colvin, Stephen. 2004. Names in Hellenistic and Roman Lycia. In YCS 31. 44-84.

Dana, Dan. 2014. Onomasticon Thracicum (OnomThrac). Répertoire des noms indigènes de Thrace Macédoine Orientale, Mésies, Dacie et Bithynie. Athens: Fondation nationale de la recherche scientifique, Institut de recherches historiques.

Hedree, Guy Michael. 1992. Silens in Attic Black Figure Vase-Painting. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Wilamowitz, Ulrich. 1931. Der Glaube der Hellenen II. Darmstadt: WBG.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Caterina Saracco is a post-doc assistant in Linguistics at the University of Genoa (Italy). Her research interests are the onomastics, morphology and semantics of Old Germanic languages, the cognitive metaphor and metonymy theory, ethnolinguistics. She received the PhD in 2017. Now she teaches General Linguistics and German Linguistics in Milan and Turin.