S. Liccardo, *Old Names, New Peoples. Listing Ethnonyms in Late Antiquity*, Leiden, Brill, 2023 (Brill's Series on the Early Middle Ages, 30), 336 pp. ISBN 9789004685895

In *Old Names, New Peoples*, Salvatore Liccardo offers a compelling and original exploration of how ethnonyms – the names given to peoples or ethnic groups – were employed, organized, and understood in Late Antiquity. The book's primary focus is not the internal social dynamics of these groups or grand narratives of migration, but rather the textual practices that preserved, shaped, and circulated their names. Liccardo argues that lists of ethnonyms, often embedded in panegyrics, schoolbooks, maps and administrative texts, reflect the cognitive and political strategies of Late Roman and early medieval societies. In doing so, he addresses a critical yet under-explored question: What can the act of naming peoples tell us about the structure of identity and power in the post-Roman world?

Liccardo begins by laying a firm theoretical foundation for the study of ethnonyms in the general introduction (pp. 1-22). He defines them linguistically and functionally, distinguishing between endonyms and exonyms, and classifies them as either relational (referring to a place, origin, or mythic ancestry) or qualitative (based on perceived characteristics). Drawing on sociological and anthropological scholarship, especially the work of Frederick Barth, Liccardo adopts a constructivist view of ethnicity, framing it as a relational and performative identity constantly reshaped through contact with others. He underscores that while ethnonyms may appear to be simple lexical units, they are embedded in complex socio-political, rhetorical, and cognitive frameworks. Ethnonyms, he argues, are never neutral: their deployment in texts reflects broader understandings of the social world and often operates ideologically. Liccardo then introduces the book's central analytical categories – listing, declaiming, memorizing, and locating ethnonyms – and proposes to study how these functions are realized through key sources.

In the first part of the volume (*Listing and Declaiming Ethnonyms*, pp. 25-97), Liccardo examines how lists of ethnonyms served rhetorical and performative functions, especially in the context of imperial praise and elite literary culture. He begins by exploring the broader aesthetics of listing in Late Antiquity, arguing that enumeration was a valued literary and rhetorical device. Lists signified control, mastery, and cultural capital, particularly when attached to military victory or administrative knowledge. Ethnonyms, when declaimed in panegyrics or poetry, became tools to demonstrate Roman hegemony over space and peoples.

One of the focal points is the use of ethnonymic catalogues in the *Laterculus Veronensis* and the *Panegyrici Latini*, where names such as Scythians, Sarmatians, and Franks evoke a literary heritage while asserting imperial dominance. Liccardo demonstrates how these texts often recycled classical ethnographic knowledge and dramatized military success through the symbolic reduction of peoples to names – sometimes even suggesting that, after defeat, nothing remained of a *gens* but its ethnonym. In this light, ethnonyms not only evoke historical continuity but also participate in constructing an image of a victorious, universal Rome.

The second part of the book (*Listing and Memorizing Ethnonyms*, pp. 101-166) focuses on the pedagogical contexts in which ethnonyms

were preserved and transmitted through mnemonic devices and didactic structures. Liccardo turns to schoolbooks and geographical treatises – especially those of Vibius Sequester, Lucius Ampelius, and Julius Honorius's *Cosmographia* – to show how ethnonyms became part of the formal educational curriculum. These texts present the world as a systematized compilation of place names and peoples, organized spatially or alphabetically to facilitate memorization. Julius Honorius's *Cosmographia* is a central case study. Liccardo provides a close reading of its organization, showing how the work divides the world into four cardinal quarters (Eastern, Western, Northern, and Southern) and populates them with ethnic names. The aim is not geographic accuracy, but rather cognitive mastery through repetition and compartmentalization. The placement of ethnonyms reveals a world structured along Roman perceptions of centre and periphery, civilization and barbarism. Liccardo argues that such texts served both educational and political functions. On the one hand, they helped students learn the layout of the Empire and its neighbouring peoples; on the other, they encoded a worldview in which ethnic diversity was both acknowledged and organized hierarchically. Ethnonyms became cognitive shortcuts to associate regions with peoples, and peoples with qualities – whether hostile, exotic, or subordinate. Thus, memorizing ethnonyms was also a form of cultural conditioning.

The final part of the book (*Listing and Locating Ethnonyms*, pp. 169-240) investigates how ethnonyms were used in geographical and cartographic texts to visualize the world. Here, Liccardo discusses how ethnonyms not only marked spaces on maps but helped construct a conceptual geography that defined imperial boundaries and the spaces beyond. Key sources include the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* and the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a medieval copy of a late antique map. In the *Expositio*, Liccardo highlights how the Eastern regions are described in highly ethnic terms – filled with named peoples – while the Western territories are more civic in nature, described through cities rather than ethnic groups. This reflects a subtle dichotomy between the ethnic "otherness" of the East and the familiar civility of the Roman West. The *gentes* listed at the empire's frontiers perform a cartographic function, identifying "a clear-cut division between Romans and non-Romans, in which cultural elements are combined with geographical, environmental, and economic factors" (p. 202). The analysis of the *Tabula Peutingeriana* is particularly rich. Liccardo challenges older views that regard some of its ethnonyms as medieval interpolations. Instead, he argues that the map, while schematic and symbolic, retains a late antique logic of representation in which ethnonyms reflect both contemporary political realities and inherited literary traditions. Names such as "Persae" are not mere erudite annotations – they encode a vision of space populated by peoples who are significant either for their proximity, their threat, or their symbolic role in Roman ideology.

In his concluding reflections (pp. 241-247), Liccardo revisits the main insights of the book and argues that listing ethnonyms in Late Antiquity was more than an archival practice. Listing functioned as a cognitive, rhetorical, and ideological tool, shaping how individuals and communities navigated the complexities of identity, power, and geography in a fragmented world. The practice cut across genres and disciplines, showing remarkable adaptability to various political and intellectual needs. Ethnonyms in lists did not merely document the

existence of peoples, but they constructed, situated, and evaluated them. Whether used to glorify emperors or teach children, these names reveal the mechanisms by which Late Antiquity made sense of the "self" and the "other".

Old Names, New Peoples is a methodologically innovative and intellectually ambitious contribution to the burgeoning field of late antique studies. Liccardo's approach – focusing not on the historical content of ethnonyms but rather on their textual uses and epistemological implications – is both refreshing and rigorous. He successfully demonstrates that listing is not a passive act but a meaningful intervention in the construction of social knowledge. One of the book's great strengths lies in its interdisciplinary method. Liccardo draws from philology, ethnography, anthropology, and historiography without succumbing to jargon or fragmentation. He manages to breathe intellectual life into sources that are often neglected or considered too dry, showing that catalogues are sometimes as ideologically rich as narrative texts. In sum, *Old Names, New Peoples* is a thoughtful exploration of how naming can become a form of power. It opens a new avenue for understanding late antique ethnonyms and offers a model for how to engage with the seemingly marginal or technical literary materials of the Migration Period. The book deserves a wide readership among historians, philologists, and scholars dealing with ancient geography.

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