

**Alexander Falileyev:**  
***The Celtic Balkans.***  
**CMCS: Aberystwyth, 2013. XII + 182 pp., 5 maps.**  
**ISBN: 978-0-9557182-4-3.**

Dr. Alexander I. Falileyev, a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and currently a research fellow at the Department of Welsh, Aberystwyth University, Wales, has as a part of his past and future endeavours to thoroughly scrutinize the Eastern frontiers of the Celtic world for Celtic linguistic remains<sup>1</sup> (research conducted as a part of a larger project “Gaulish Morphology with particular Reference to Areas South and East of the Danube” funded by the AHRC and run by the Department of Welsh) conducted another thorough examination of the vast and problematic Balkan area, this time focusing on the Eastern part of the peninsula proper, i.e. modern day Serbia and Bulgaria, including the adjacent territories of Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, Greece and the European part of Turkey. His interest in the problematic onomastic landscapes of South-Eastern Europe has already yielded a reappraisal of the full inventory of place-names of Thrace and Moesia Inferior as attested in Ptolemy (A. I. Falileyev, *Восточные Балканы на карте Птолея. Критико-библиографические изыскания*, Munich 2005), an investigation into the “*altceltische Sprachreste*” of Dacia, Scythia Minor, and the lands to the North of the Danube delta (A. I. Falileyev, *Celtic Dacia*, Aberystwyth 2007), and several important contributions dedicated to the study of Old Celtic onomastics in the form of conference papers and a number of articles, some of which were recently brought together and reprinted in his well-rounded monograph *Selecta Celto-Balcanica* (St. Petersburg 2012).<sup>2</sup> The enduring interest in the Celtic *Sprachreste* of the territories to the (south-)east of the Eastern Alpine region seems to be a spin-off of no less than three major attempts to provide a comprehensive enough picture of the actual linguistic Celticity of Europe and Asia Minor, all three conducted at the Department of Welsh in Aberystwyth, and yielding several outstanding publications.<sup>3</sup> The research behind these volumes has undoubtedly proved to be a convincing reminder of all the complexities and uncertainties of the discipline, but at the same time outlined what at present appears to be the best strategy to deciphering the

---

1 Health-warning: the use of the term *Celtic* here concerns linguistic Celticity only.

2 For relevant bibliography “*Celtic*” *Bulgaria. A Select Bibliography* (A. Falileyev/J. Emilov/N. Theodossiev 2010) is to be consulted as well.

3 Such as (limiting the list to works on toponymy only!) G. R. Isaac’s *The Antonine Itinerary Land routes. Place-names of Ancient Europe and Asia Minor* (CD-ROM, Aberystwyth 2002), id. *Place-Names in Ptolemy’s Geography* (CD-ROM, Aberystwyth 2004), two conference proceedings (“*Ptolemy: Towards a Linguistic Atlas of the Earliest Celtic Place-Names of Europe.*” In: P. Sims-Williams/D. N. Parsons (eds), Aberystwyth 2000, and “*New Approaches to Celtic Place-Names in Ptolemy’s Geography.*” In: J. de Hoz/E. R. Luján/P. Sims-Williams (eds), Madrid 2005), P. Sims-Williams’ *Ancient Celtic Place-Names in Europe and Asia Minor* (Oxford 2006), and the *Dictionary of Continental Celtic Place-Names* by A. Falileyev in collaboration with Ashwin E. Gohil and N. Ward (Aberystwyth 2010).

linguistic impression of the Celtic (or any other for that matter) idiom onto the different onomastic landscapes across Europe, i.e. simply that of taking the available data bit by bit, studying it in a comprehensive manner, and, most importantly, in the full context of the area(s) under investigation.<sup>4</sup>

Using the very same methodological apparatus, *The Celtic Balkans* brings together, amends (*Nicovosus*, for instance, first considered<sup>5</sup> possibly Celtic is now rejected as improbable), updates, and adds to the research of the Celtic linguistic elements in the eastern Balkans previously conducted by the author. The data covers toponymy (including river and mountain names) and anthroponymy (including divine names and ethnonyms), drawing from both ancient and medieval sources alongside the published as well as yet unpublished epigraphic material. The ultimate corpus may be trusted as maximally accurate and comprehensive, especially owing to the fact that the author takes into account all the relevant publications produced by several local scholars and has (re)examined many epigraphic sources *in situ*. The monograph is arranged in the form of an alphabetical dictionary (pp. 1–156), equipped with five maps for basic orientation in the area (viii–xii), a full bibliography (157–79), and an alphabetic index to the items discussed (180–2). The headwords offer a recovered, or in a few instances a reconstructed image of the element(s) under discussion. The entries aim to be both comprehensive and concise, which does not afford space for the repetition of well established facts, meaning that the reader will normally be directed to consult other authoritative works on a particular subject. In contrast to the arrangement of the data in *Celtic Dacia* the discussion of toponymy and anthroponymy is not arranged so as to fall under separate headings, neither are the place-names treated according to the territory in which they occur. This is due to two factors: first of all, the corpus of the relevant place-names of the eastern Balkans comprises an incomparably larger number of items than could be extracted from Dacia and lands to the north(-east), on the other hand, many of these items are to-date too imprecisely localised (or in some cases lack localisation altogether) to be confidently arranged geographically. All names are assigned an index of Celticity chiefly intended, I think, for quick orientation. However, the assigning of a particular index to a name seems not to have been always entirely felicitous and is, as we are well aware, very often still largely a matter of opinion, meaning of course that one should study the full discussion before forming their own opinion on the basis of the juxtaposition of all the different *viable* and competent approaches to the problem. *The Celtic Balkans* is chiefly intended as a polemic work and *not* as the final word on the subject! It is precisely for this reason that the data extracted from the book should not be misused for any kind of statistical analysis. In the analysis a five-degree marking system seems to have been applied: Celtic (no symbol), probably Celtic (?), very probably non-Celtic/may be non-Celtic but at least consistent with Celtic (†?/?†),

4 Cf. Falileyev, Alexander (2005) “In search of Celtic Tylis: onomastic evidence.” In: J. de Hoz/E. R. Luján/P. Sims-Williams (eds), *New Approaches to Celtic Place Names in Ptolemy’s Geography*. Madrid: Ediciones Clásicas, 107–133 (p. 116).

5 Cf. Falileyev, Alexander (2007) “Zwischen Mythos und Fehler: Pseudo-keltische Ortsnamen auf der Balkanhalbinsel.” In: H. Birkhan (ed.), *Kelten-Einfälle an der Donau*. Wien, 195–202 (p. 202).

non-Celtic (†), with one or two uses of a double question mark (??). However, the intended distinction between the use of the latter symbol and the questionable cross-out of a name from the list of Celtic linguistic remains of the area (†?) is not entirely clear to me. In fact, the whole system of indexation would perhaps need some additional elucidation, especially as the introductory chapter announces a three-degree scale only. The use of the double question mark seems justified for personal names such as *Sebaiacus*, *Vinulus* or *Vinus*, which appear on poorly preserved inscriptions, meaning that the interpretation depends heavily on the reading and may vary accordingly, so neither ? nor † would really be suitable here (on much the same grounds, by the way, *Vipius* (p. 153) should be indexed as uncertain too). However, I cannot find sufficient justification for the use of ?? for place-names such as *Tegulicium*, which although resisting a convincing Celtic explanation cannot be readily assigned to another idiom used in the area either. Indeed, being able to say that a particular name belongs to a particular idiom is the best indication that it is not Celtic (even if, in theory, it could be), but at the present state of our knowledge of the local idiom(s) such a name surely cannot be on a different level with, say, *Braiola* (marked †), which allows for a Celtic interpretation but is more likely to be non-Celtic. Similar “corrections” towards greater consistency in the use of the marking system could perhaps be applied to PNN *Avitus* (?), *Gallus* (†), *Manneius* (?) *Nonnula* (†), *Ronela* (?), *Vindenis* (†), *Viracius* (?), and LNN *Rimesica* († or better still ?), *Mediolana* (??), *Tannonia* (†) etc.

**Toponymy.** A note of warning is perhaps in place concerning the remark that “the problem of ‘places, Celtic names’ is known to linguists and historians alike” (p. iv), the implication not being, of course, that the Romans went around the Roman Empire giving Celtic names to their settlements – Celtic place-names still presuppose Celtic presence –, but rather that one should not make far-reaching demographic conclusions on the basis of statistical analysis. By way of a summary the following picture can be established (imprecisely located places are placed between square brackets, probable but uncertain Celticity is indicated by the question mark): there is a definite presence of Celtic place-names in the territory of the *Scordisci*, who, as we know, after the defeat at Delphi settled *in conflente Danuvii et Savi* (Iustinus, *Epitoma* 32, 3, 8). The exact limits of their territory are unknown but judging from the distribution of Celtic toponymy in the area must have roughly coincided with present-day central and (south-) eastern Serbia. The place-names in question cluster along the river *Istros* (Danube), between and around *Singidunum* (Belgrade) and *Bononia* (Vidin, BLG): ?*Rittium*, [*Iatumentianae*], [*Capedunon*], *Singidunum*, *Tricornium*, ?*Vinceia*, ?*Viminacium*, ?*Taliata*, *Bononia*;<sup>6</sup> on the *Naissus* (Niš) – *Serdica* (Sofia, BLG) road: ?[*Brittura*], ?[*Olodoris*], ?*Magimia*, *Lucunanta*, ?*Remesiana*, ?*Burgaraca*; and in the area between *Serdica* and the *Ister* in the north (more or less SW Bulgaria): [*Arcuna*], ?[*Ardeia*], ?[*Duria*], ?[*Vorovum Minus*]. The second remarkable cluster of Celtic place-names is to the far east of the Scordiscan territory and can according to the author be historically connected

6 This area, i.e. the northern part of the Scordiscan territory, coincides with the southern-most limit of the area under the interest of *Die vorrömischen Namen Pannoniens* (P. Anreiter, Budapest 2001), where the bulk of these names is discussed from the »*pannonian*« perspective.

with the group of Celts in ancient Thrace (2nd half of the 3rd c.), who, as we know from Polybius, παραγενόμενοι πρὸς τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον ... αὐτοῦ δὲ κατέμειναν ... and κρατήσαντες τῶν Θρακῶν, καὶ κατασκευασάμενοι βασιλείον τὴν Τύλιν (Polybius, *Historiae* IV, 46). Their short-lived kingdom is only roughly (none of the toponyms are precisely localised) but convincingly located in the area of eastern *Haemus* (The Balkan Mountains): ?[*Casibona*], [*Orcelis*], ?[*Rimesica*], ?[*Tylis*], [*Valla*]. To the north-east of this enclave, in northern *Scythia Minor* (Dobrudja, ROM), we find another area with close distribution of convincingly Celtic toponymy: *Aliobrix*, ?*Arubium*, *Noviodunum*.<sup>7</sup> There are two or three other very probably Celtic place-names interspersed through the area such as *Icacidunum* and *Zeisodunum* but both are left unlocalised. The last group is perhaps represented by three or four potentially Celtic place names to the south of these Celtic areas proper, i.e. in the area of ancient Macedonia (*Gallicum*, *Galata*, ?*Klitai*, ?*Cambunii m.*).<sup>8</sup>

**Anthroponymy.** As with place-names, or even more so, different chronological strata need to be clearly distinguished within the corpus of personal names, areal distribution then applying to each of these strata in turn. As is expected, the greater bulk of Celtic names in the area are introduced after and during the Roman occupation. These names are interesting from the point of view of the administrative “movements” of the (mostly western) Celts and are as a rule difficult to separate from the genuine Celtic nomenclature used in the area. Chronologically earlier names cluster around (south-)eastern Bulgaria and Albania, Macedonia and Greece: *Ambicatos*, *Berimaros*, *Biturix*, *Bosborix*, *Brikkon*, *Cassignakos*, *Dercimaros* (on a thus far unpublished inscription!), ?*Miros*, ?*Mogita*, *Smertomarus*, *Smertos*. By far the most interesting attestation is *Gaisatos* (Γαῖζατε, voc. sg.) from present-day Albania (pp. 69–70), which seems to be a personal name rather than its homonymous appellative. Other possibly autochthonous names (i.e. at least not occurring on imported objects) cluster in the area to the north and north-west of *Haemus*: *Caurus*, *Itouvius* (< \**it-ow-yo-* to \**it-u-*, \**it-ew-*), ?*Magio*, ?*Melitta*, ?*Manneius*, ?*Rusonius*, ?*Vericia*; and to the south and south-west of the Scordiscan territory: *Amaca*, *Abudius*, *Amba*, *Ambactus*, *Attedius*, *Attedia*, ?*Cutius*, ?*Iaritus*, *Nantius*, *Oclatius*, ?*Viracius*, ?*Voconia* etc. Special mention should be made of *Birbilo* (pp. 22–4), a name of a *miles* yet undetected in western Celtic nomenclature, which although of no immediate relevance to the onomastic landscape at hand will very likely be an invaluable addition to the Celeian name-inventory of Celtic provenance. With personal names, of course, one needs to tread cautiously. Celticity of a particular name, for instance, does not mean that that name will be Celtic in all its attestations (cf. p. 8). We are aware of names that will be Celtic in a Celtic context and indigenous in another (cf. *Attalus*, *Melitta*, *Silus*, names in *Tout-* etc., on which see s. vv.). What the author calls “Celtic symptoms” (p. v) of a particular inscription, i.e. the presence of other indisputably Celtic names, may occasionally facilitate the decision as to the Celticity of a problematic and yet unknown name. Very often, however, extra-linguistic

7 Falileyev, Alexander (2007) *Celtic Dacia*. Aberystwyth: CMCS Publications, pp. 3–10.

8 Cf. Falileyev, Alexander (2008) “Celts on the Margins: Toponymic Notes.” In: J. L. García Alonso (ed.), *Celtic and Other Languages in Ancient Europe*. Salamanca, 145–152 (pp. 149–151).

arguments such as the historical context (cf. the names of “Celtic” chieftains in the accounts of ancient authors) or a (historio-)geographical reference may help to point in the right direction (cf. p. 48). It remains a matter of careful consideration, then, whether one should entertain more suspicion about the lack of a “good” Celtic etymology or the ancient authors’ often imprecise and indiscriminate use of the term “Celtic” *uel sim*.

There is no concluding chapter to the monograph but, as is convincingly argued in the introductory section (i–vii),<sup>9</sup> one is not actually needed. Especially in the light of the inconclusiveness of much of the data discussed, a summary or a statistical analysis etc. would necessarily force one to make concrete decision as to the validity or relevance of a particular item and therefore demand an imposition of a personal opinion, which, as we know, is better avoided at the present state of research. A sketchy overview of the main emerging trends, however, is given in the Introduction. Working with problematic onomastic remains in problematic onomastic landscapes opened several methodological questions and demanded a refinement of many a methodological point. These, however, are nowhere explicitly laid out, although a general methodological undertone can undoubtedly be followed throughout *The Celtic Balkans* and, for that matter, any other author’s publication on the same or similar subject(s). It may be useful therefore to briefly summarize them here. A fair point has been made that “the absence of a single undeniable trace of Celtic onomastics in the area (preferably a compound like *Neviodunum* or *Mediolanum*) makes it uncomfortable to suggest Celtic etymologies for the place-names which may be interpreted altogether differently” (p. 102).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, despite the remarkable progress in this area of Celtic studies, the complex picture of Continental Celtic linguistic and onomastic systems is still too insufficient to afford absolutely reliable markers for the identification of Celtic elements *regardless* of the complexity of the onomastic landscape they form(ed.) a part of. By default, we may therefore expect that a fair amount of data will be at least *consistent* with Celtic but not necessarily Celtic at all. The only really reliable criterion for excluding an item from the list of *possible* Celtic names is to be able to attribute it to another idiom in the area. In case of false friends the entire configuration will of course play the decisive role. One needs to be extra cautious with names not attested in the “Celtic West”. At present we know next to nothing about dialectal differences within Gaulish, to say nothing of the possible “Eastern Celtic” linguistic peculiarities, so possible Celticity of place-names on the periphery of the Celtic world should not be blindly measured against the “Western” trends (immediately noticeable, for instance, is the significantly lower productivity of compounded names at the expense of those derived with a whole array of suffixes). A useful aiding tool is provided by the clustering principle (first advocated by Prof. Sims-Williams and drawn upon fruitfully by Falileyev), which states that moving away from the central Celtic area to more peripheral areas where Celtic comes in contact with several other idioms, Celtic place-names will nearly always come in groups. The chances are, therefore, that possible Celticity of an isolated item will be due to

---

9 Cf. *Celtic Dacia*, p. xi.

10 Cf. ‘Celts on the Margins: Toponymic Notes’, p. 148.

coincidence, more so when we move on the fringes of the known Celtic world or well outside it. On the other hand, of course, the presence of an undoubtedly Celtic place-name in an area does not by default force us to attribute other names in its vicinity to Celtic. The same goes for archaeological finds. There is no doubt that the presence of La Tène finds in an area with relative density of Celtic names adds to the cumulative value of the evidence in favour of Celtic presence, but we certainly cannot afford to make similar conclusions to the contrary on the basis of the *absence* of such evidence. The correlation between the linguistic remains of the Celtic idiom and the physical imprint of its users (especially on the periphery of the Celtic world), along with the methodological question to what extent it can actually be fruitfully drawn upon, remains a moot point. In all fairness one should maintain that the use of the term “Celtic” in linguistic studies is as accurately and unambiguously defined as it may be in archaeology and that the two do not necessarily coincide. Author’s working hypothesis “where the Celts are there must be Celtic place-names”,<sup>11</sup> as reasonable as it sounds (although one would want to tone it down slightly), should therefore be taken with some amount of caution. The only “Celts” that one is safe to regard as a reliable indicator as to the Celticity of an area are the ones whose linguistic attribution makes them Celtic. The best proof for or against the Celticity will therefore be the presence of other remains of the “*altceltischer Sprachschatz*” in the area under investigation such as personal names, ethnic names, and, possibly, texts.

**Luka Repanšek**

Fran Ramovš Institute of the Slovenian Language  
Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of the Sciences and Arts

---

11 ‘In search of Celtic Tyllis’, p. 110.