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The northern cliffs of Lochnagar, the subject of Sheila Young's article on climbers' route names. Lochnagar is properly the name of the corrie lochan: Loch na Gàire, 'loch of sound or laughter', perhaps from wind noise generated by the topography. Its Gaelic 'mountain' name is Beinn nan Cìochan, 'mountain of the breasts', referring to the Scots-named Meikle Pap and Little Pap, hidden in the fringe of cloud in this photo by Nick Bramhall (29/4/2012). Creative Commons licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/legalcode>

***BILL NICOLAISEN AND PLACE-
NAME EXPLANATORY ELEMENTS
IN LEGENDS***

Bill Nicolaisen (1927–2016) was a prominent researcher both as an onomast as well as a folklorist, and throughout his career he published a series of articles combining the two subjects.

Therefore, to pay homage to Bill Nicolaisen, my paper was set in this interdisciplinary field of research, because, as Nicolaisen himself stated in a presidential address given to The Folklore Society in 2001, “the people who give, receive and use names are the same people who tell, listen to and enjoy stories” (*Folklore* 113 (2002), p. 1).

In the folkloristic genre known as *legend* we quite often find place-name explanatory elements, commonly based in the storyteller’s quick associations with living word material. Nicolaisen was much aware of this phenomenon, which, in a Danish framework, is also the main focus of my PhD project. In comparison to Nicolaisen’s theoretical framework and findings on the topic, my paper presented some preliminary results from my PhD project.

Nicolaisen, like others, regarded the phenomenon of place-name explanatory elements in legends a matter of people’s desire to understand the origin of weird sounding names, closely connected to the concept of *etiological* or *explanatory* legends. The assumption is that many legends, including the name-explanatory legends, emerge and are told primarily because people want to explain the origin of animate and inanimate things they do not understand.

Many place-names are, on a lexical level, unintelligible to the name-users, either owing to the names deriving from a different language than that mastered by the name-users, or

because the names have lost their original word meaning because of language historical changes. Thus some legends, Nicolaisen argued, restore meaning in what appears to be a meaningless name.

My approach to the topic is different: inspired by especially Timothy R. Tangherlini's work on Danish legends and legend tellers, I analyse legends from the synchronic perspective of the legend teller and his folkloristic repertoire. I re-contextualize the legends by consulting the original field records, notes and memoirs written by the Danish folklore collector Evald Tang Kristensen (1843–1929). Hereafter I match the information with censuses and church records in order to draw a rough map of the legend teller's life history, for instance social mobility or lack of the same.

In my analysis of the legends I use GIS (Geographic Information System) in order to locate the spatial elements of the legend within the legend teller's social, political and economic reality and his perception of his spatial environment. My results are in opposition to Nicolaisen and others' understanding of the phenomenon of place-name explanatory elements in legends.

The name-explanatory element itself often function as a spatial anchor point, being part of the rhetoric strategies that are used to add credibility to the legend, cf. Elliott Oring's notion of the rhetoric of truth in legends. Legend tellers in general do actually not care much about the origin of place-names, and legends very rarely take their primary point of departure in an urge to explain and understand things.

The categories of the etiological legend and the name-explanatory legend are wrong. When we analyse a legend with reference to such categories we have already decided what the legend's function is within the tradition community and what meaning it contains to them. Thus we completely miss the complex mixture of meaning, which is usually found in legends when they are analysed in connection to the people who actually told them and the environment they inhabited.

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