



Placenames of the World: Origins and Meanings of the Names for over 5000 Natural Features, Countries, Capitals, Territories, Cities and Historic sites

By *Adrian Room*



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Placenames--whether they be of a city or a river, a country or a mountain--denote something about the region. They often provide a brief history or description of the feature, sometimes telling in a word who founded a city (e.g., Barcelona, Spain, named for Carthaginian general Hamilcar Barca) or giving a full description in a single word (e.g. Cape Roca in western Portugal, which derives its name from the Portuguese roca, "rock"). In this reference work, the origins of the placenames for over 5,000 cities, natural features, countries, and historic sites are provided. All seven continents are included here. Each entry provides, first, the name of the feature, a brief description and its geographic location; an account of the names origin and meaning then follows, with appropriate historical, topographical and biographical references. Cross references provide former names and alternate spellings or forms of current names.



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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Room (Placenames of Russia and the Former Soviet Union, McFarland, 1996) defines toponymy, or the study of place names, as a "complex science" involving history, geography, and language. Useful background information, toponymical explanations, and locations are included in the brief entries he offers here for more than 5000 of the world's "most familiar" place names. Bodies of water, towns, cities, provinces, territories, countries, and historic sites are all included. One minor failing is the lack of specific inclusion criteria. Thus, one can only surmise why historic sites such as Petra, Machu Picchu, Stonehenge, and Teotihuacan are included but relatively well-known sites such as Xian (the location of the terra-cotta soldiers) in China or Newgrange (an ancient burial ground in Ireland) are not. More distressing are inconsistencies in categorization. Thus, the city of Lake Charles is listed in the L's, but an actual body of water such as Lake Okeechobee is listed under Okeechobee. The entry for the city of Miami, Florida, refers to an Ojibwa term from the Great Lakes area without mention of a Tequesta term from the Everglades region or indication of an interconnection. Obvious See references include "Peking, See Beijing" and "Rhodesia, See Zimbabwe," but a reference from the less-familiar Trucial States to the more-familiar United Arab Emirates is not given. The use of some less-familiar transliterated place names and the sparse See references prevent ready-reference use of this resource, especially in conjunction with an atlas. Libraries may purchase this book because of its currency, but those owning Chambers World Gazetteer (o.p.) or other geographical dictionaries may well pass. For larger public and academic libraries. Elizabeth Connor, Univ. of Connecticut Health Ctr. Lib., Farmington
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From [Booklist](#)

The origins and meanings of the place-names of more than 5,000 countries, cities, regions, and other geographic features worldwide form the main part of this reference work. A very informative introduction considers the basic principles of place-name study, the classification of place-names, naming patterns, and the presentation and arrangement of entries in this volume.

Each entry, arranged alphabetically, has three elements: the name; identifier of the name, such as town, city, river, island; and origin of the name and its meaning. Occasionally a pronunciation guide is provided. Cross-references refer to similar names, former names, or forms of current names; for example, *Kampuchea* see *Cambodia*; *Leningrad* see *St. Petersburg*; *Peking* see *Beijing*. The author notes that "the purpose of the present book is not primarily to serve as a (literally) politically correct gazetteer but to present the origins and meanings of geographical names. Hence the general preference for the traditional or conventional form."

Following the main selection of the book are two glossaries, seven appendixes, and a select bibliography. The glossaries consist of a guide to the many languages cited in the entries, and "Non-English Language Placename Components," such as *band*, which denotes mountain range in Persian, and *berg*, which means mountain in Dutch, German, Norwegian, and Swedish. The appendixes, a gold mine of trivia, comprise "Indigenous Country Names," "Roman Names of Towns and Cities," "Bilingual Placenames" (for example, the Welsh and English names for places in Wales), "Coastal Touristic Names," "Inhabitants of Towns and Cities" (people from Cambridge, England, are called Cantabrigians), "Canting Civic Coats-of-Arms" (lists of cities whose coats-of-arms refer to their names), and "Words from Names."

Works in French, German, Polish, and Russian (with titles translated into English) are included in the

bibliography. The majority of titles in English are published in the British Isles.

Adrian Room, a notable toponymist, maintains the high standards of his other books on place-names and word origins. This book updates his earlier *Place-Names of the World: A Dictionary of Their Origins and Backgrounds* [RBB S 1 88], which, with approximately 1,000 entries, is much more limited in focus. The new work is an easy-to-use, straightforward, useful reference source for public and school libraries.

Review

"[an] easy-to-use, straightforward, useful reference source" -- *Booklist/RBB*

"a reference book replete with solid and interesting information" -- *Names*

"a useful collection" -- *The Library Association Record*

"an excellent ready-reference work" -- *ARBA*

"lays out the principles of placename study" -- *C&RL News*

"the sheer scope of this world-wide guide justifies its place on your shelves" -- *Collection Building*

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