

VITTORE PISANI: *L'etimologia, Storia, questioni, metodo*. Milano, 1947.

In this book, apparently intended for a larger public, Professor Pisani succeeds in dealing with some general views, without lapsing into philosophy, and to explain lucidly, in a general way, and soberly the main points of that which is connected with etymology. The eight chapters successively treat of the concept of etymology and its history of linguistic relationship and other connections between languages, borrowing, social linguistics, phonetic development, semantics, morphological systems, and popular etymology, etc. Among the many good things contained in the book in the details it is interesting, that the author as an Italian has chosen most of his examples from his mother-tongue, and thus has given illustrative material which to many linguists has the fascination of novelty.

By the side of many correct observations, which one would like to underline, one also comes upon some formulation, occasionally, (e.g. on page 114, where the origin of the root-determinatives is called clear, without any qualification) — nothing to be astonished at in a book on the subject — or upon some example — and among the examples we find many new shrewd ideas concealed —, about which there may be a serious difference of opinion, e.g. in the case of the uncertain etymology of Latin *glōria* (p. 97); the statement that the origin of the wide-spread use of the word for *camphor* lies in Indian (Skt. *karpūra*), is incorrect: it is an Austric word (cf. my *Austric and Arisch, Utrecht, 1932, p. 23*).

Not always does the author indicate the fact that some etymology is a matter of dispute, or that it is only one possibility by the side of others. Here and there one finds traces of a somewhat one-sided Indo-germanistic bias, e.g. on p. 124, where without more ado the complete separation of verbal and nominal roots is taught. It is regrettable, that the author enlarges almost exclusively on the European development of etymological thought. Presumably lack of space prevented him from entering further into the problems of the influence of the substratum, the mixing of languages, etc. Mention might have been made of e.g. a nice little book by Nyrop: *Das Leben der Wörter*, in the list of books to be consulted, though this list was not meant to be exhaustive. In the discussion of semasiology one would have liked to learn the author's opinion on the semantic rules formulated by others (e.g. by Sperber).

Every now and then Pisani incidentally speaks about the method of treatment applied by the authors of etymological treatises and dictionaries (e.g. p. 125). It would have been useful, if he had criticized in greater detail the method adopted e.g. by Walde-Pokorny, or the consistently perfectionistic ideas of a man like Wüst; if he had more elaborately shown that the classification of words under roots is often carried too far: in these books the material is often more conveniently arranged, it is true, but at the same time there is too strong a suggestion of certain definite, and often direct, genealogical connections. It is not seldom possible (once the road to *Wurzelzerlegung* is chosen) if all that can in any respect belong together is collected, to invent (with as much or as little probability) a scheme of a different nature by emphasizing certain other meanings or certain other words or forms. Thus many etymologies, including the so-called certain ones that one finds in the handbooks, might be supported by philological investigations, especially as regards their semantic aspect.

In a book like this one I would have highly appreciated an elaborate refutation of popular misconceptions concerning the value of historical comparative linguistic investigations; misconceptions that I for one have often met and which to a large extent are based on an interpretation of the concept 'etymology' which, to my mind, is far too narrow. "The etymology of a speech-form", says Bloomfield (*Language*, p. 15), "is simply its history and is obtained by finding the older forms in the same language and the forms in related languages which are divergent variants of the same parent form". And according to Marouzeau (*Lexique*, p. 78) etymology is, "selon la conception de la science moderne: reconstitution de l'ascendance du mot en remontant de l'état actuel à l'état le plus anciennement accessible". Of course, these definitions are correct as far as they go. But they refer to etymology only in the narrow sense of the word. They take only the formal side into account, and for examples such as the one given by Bloomfield (Engl. *mother* etc. < I. E. *mātēr*), the meaning of which is perfectly clear, this restriction will be sufficient. But in innumerable cases it will be entirely insufficient. Not only in cases of popular etymology, or of the so-called contamination or double etymology, to which Pisani quite reasonably gives a great deal of attention, and on account of which he rightly says, (p. 141), that the etymologist, (whose task consists in (p. 79), "determinare i materiali

formali adoperati da chi per primo ha creato una parola, e insieme il concetto che con essa egli ha voluto esprimere”) may be required “di ricercare le origini della forma e del valore semantico di una parola al momento in cui essa viene primamente creata: intendendo per ‘parola’ non solo la forma esterna, ma il tutto inscindibile costituito dai suoni e dal significato”.

But also in quite a number of cases we should interpret the definitions given of ‘etymology’ in such a comprehensive way, that the whole of the semantic history of a word, as far as it can be traced back, is included. The etymologist should not be satisfied to state that the Javanese word *yasa* “building” is a loan from Sanskrit (*yaśas* “dignity, prestige, fame”), that Engl. *hose* is etymologically identical with German *Hose*. In this and in similar cases he should extend ‘etymology’, as much as possible to ‘Wortgeschichte’. A historian investigating a religious or a social phenomenon and trying as accurately as possible to determine the content of the terms relating to that phenomenon, is engaged in the history of words, though from another point of view he may call his work a religio-historical or a historico-philological investigation. His result, e.g. in the case of ancient Greek, that the words *οἰκονομία* and *φιλανθρωπία* had another meaning than in modern languages, is important to him, because it sheds light on historical problems, and via the meaning of the words in Greek he is able to draw conclusions concerning economic and social conditions among the ancient Greeks. But viewed from another side, the result of the semantic investigation of those words represents specimens of transitions of meaning, which, as so often happens, should be seen against their social background.

If it is permissible to require from the historian engaged in the history of terminology that he is sufficiently grounded in linguistics, the student of historical linguistics should certainly be sufficiently informed in a religio-historical sense when dealing e.g. with the origin of religious terms. This will benefit the appreciation of linguistics, which is not always as great as it should be among the students of other branches of science. In these days of splitting up branches of science into many separate units, too many sometimes, it did not seem superfluous to me to remind scholars of this.