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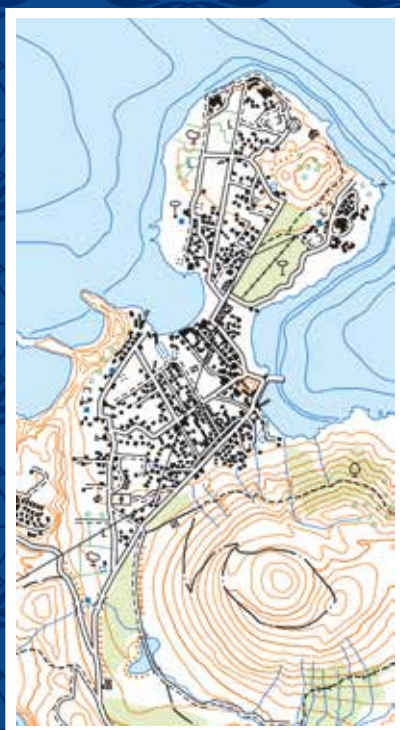
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Toponymy and Cartography between History and Geography

Edited by
Andrea Cantile and Helen Kerfoot



International Scientific Symposium
Venezia [Venice] – Italia, 26th – 28th September 2018

IGMI - Firenze [Florence] 2019

In close cooperation with:

Italian Geographic Military Institute

Veneto Region

Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti

Under the auspices of:



Italian Cartographic Association



Italian Association of Geography Teachers



Italian Association of Geographers



Italian Centre for Historical and Geographical Studies



Italian Geographical Society



Society of Geographical Studies

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The content of this book expresses only the opinions of the authors.

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United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
Romano-Hellenic Division

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IGMI - Firenze 2019

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Toponymy and Cartography between History and Geography: a discussion of problems and opportunities, past and present

ANDREA CANTILE*

Abstract

The cover of the symposium booklet graphically shows the known and essential relationship between Toponymy and Cartography. This double connection takes on greater importance in a diachronic perspective, because it offers to scholars a fundamental source to understand the stages of the appropriation and the transformation of territory by Man and provides an indispensable aid for preserving the collective memory of places. To this end, the paper proposes a quick historical review of the relationships between Toponymy and Cartography from the ancient, medieval and modern maps to the first scientific maps of the 18th century and later.

At the end, the article proposes a consideration on the relationship between Toponymy and Cartography in the present day, highlighting the problematic aspect of updating maps, with regard to the loss of knowledge of the places affected by the changed rapport between Man and his territory.

Keywords: cartography, toponymic desertification, loss of toponymic knowledge, endonyms, exonyms.

Problems and opportunities of the past

According to the biblical tradition, the famous Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico, wrote in his *Principles of new science about the common nature of the nations* “God granted [to Adam] the ‘Divina Onomaturgia’ or the imposition of names on things according to the nature of each of them” (Vico, 1834, p. 250). From this sentence we could infer that toponymy was born from the eighth day after the Creation, and surely this happened, starting from the first form of articulation of language by Man. In reality, we know that we have a fairly recent memory of all this.

In particular, we know that the oldest Egyptian onomastic treatises, perhaps inspired by Sumerian models, date back only to the 12th century BC (Gardiner, 1947, p. 38). While, the first gazetteer of geographical names of the Greek and Roman known world was achieved in the 2nd century BC by Claudius Ptolemy, who, in his *Geographiké Hyphégesis* [*Guide to the drawing of the Earth*], later also called *Cosmographia* and *Geographia*, provided a list of more than 8,000 geographical names, written in Greek, with their respective coordinates (Cantile, 2013, pp. 169-187; Pavo Lopez, in this book).

Also the Roman World produced many lists of toponyms as *itineraria scripta* or *adnotata* [“written itineraries”] with the distance between one place and the

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next one, and a special type of map named *itineraria picta* ["drawn itineraries"], which provided to the users topographic descriptions joined to the toponyms and relative distances in order to plan journeys. The most important testimony of this kind of map is undoubtedly the *Codex Vindobonensis 324*, or *Tabula Peutingeriana* (Fig. 1), preserved today in the Österreichische nationalbibliothek, in Wien.

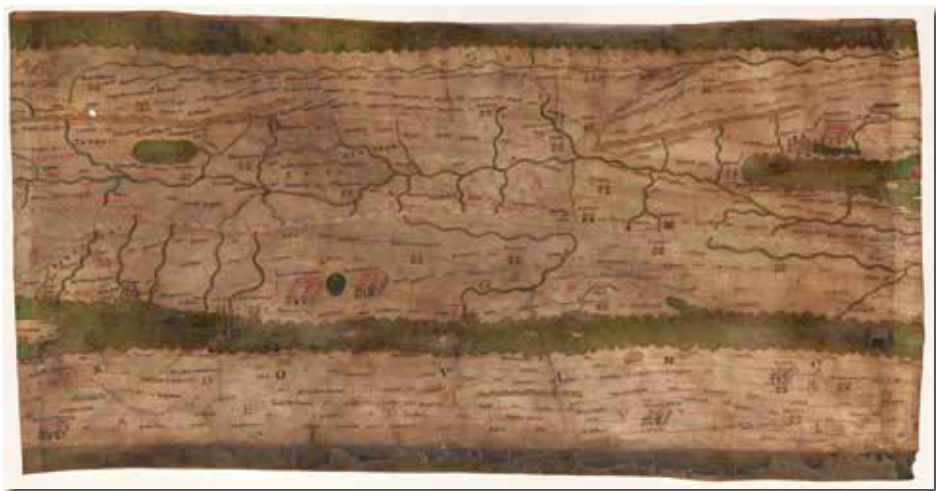


Fig. 1 - *Codex Vindobonensis 324*, or *Tabula Peutingeriana*, Wien, Österreichische nationalbibliothek.

The Middle Ages were mainly characterized by the spread of maps, which, in addition to providing correct geographical information, also reported the existence of imaginary places, on the basis of religious and literary sources. In particular, after the writing of the *Etymologiae* or *Originum sive etymologiarum libri XX* (7th century) by Saint Isidore from Seville and of other encyclopedic works, the glossaries and the lists of cities, mountains, rivers and seas were written in Latin to be memorized and to understand their mystical meanings, according to the teachings of the Benedictine scholar, Rabanus Maurus. In his *De Rerum Naturis* or *De universo libri viginti duo* (842-847) he wrote: "[...] nomina ipsorum simul et locorum ex Hebraica lingua in Latinam transferre placuit, ut inde facilius mysticam significationem explanare possem" (Præfatio ad Ludovicum regem invictissimum Franciæ) and "Nomina locorum quae reperiuntur in divinis libris etiam sine significatione mystica non sunt, sed nos de his omnibus quid typice significant enarrare longum esse arbitramur, ideo nomina ipsorum tantum modo ponentes cum expositione historiæ, cæterum misterium earundem prudenti lectori ad investigandum relinquimus" (VI, De locis).

Since the 13th century, and certainly even before, nautical charts ensured a new registration of the the Mediterranean, Aegean and, later, New World coasts toponyms, without resorting to the traditional contributions of a literary or fantasy geography, but based on the direct experience of sailors and merchants and mainly using languages of navigation and trade. Among the forerunners of the nascent medieval nautical cartography, the oldest text that came into in our time is represented by the famous pilot book entitled *Compasso da Navigare* (Code

Hamilton 396, Berlin State Library) which records 1177 toponyms. The coeval *Carta Pisana* (Fig. 2) represents instead the first known nautical map, with a presence of 662 toponyms for the mainland and 265 for the outlined islands (Conti, 1985, pp. 1-7). This rich production of nautical charts made in the Mediterranean area, in the various workshops of Genoa, Venice, Ancona, Messina, Naples, Livorno, Mallorca, Lisbon, Marseille, Sfax, recorded the solutions adopted by several authors, that selected various geographical information reported by sailors and recorded place names on the maps adapting them according to oral sources from different languages and transliterations from written sources. In this kind of maps, “Polyglossia was the norm of the day, but every chart-maker or workshop spoke it differently, even if the deviation was sometimes only minor” (Brentjes, 2012, p.136).



Fig. 2 - *Carta Pisana*, Paris, BNF, 13th century.

In the same period (about 1355-1360), the Italian writer and poet Giovanni Boccaccio (1313 - 1375) produced an important gazetteer titled *De montibus, silvis, fontibus, lacubus, fluminibus, stagnis seu paludibus et de nominibus maris liber*, in which he listed, in alphabetical order, 568 mountains, 39 forests, 121 springs, 96 lakes, 934 rivers, 76 marshes and ponds and 115 seas, taken almost entirely from latin geographical texts, that were recorded according to an ‘altimetric’ order, from the mountains to the seas (Greppi, 2010, pp. 89-102).

In the first secret nautical charts of the New World were recorded for the first time the names of the lands “discovered” by Christopher Columbus and by the following explorers and conquerors of the Americas. They entrusted the memory of Spanish and Portuguese conquests, conducted in the name of an evangelization that was a simple pretext to hide the real purposes of exploiting the resources of those lands, and became over time “an unconscious portrait of how successfully an European colonial society had reproduced itself in the New World” (Harley, 2001, p. 143).

We can find the real aims of the European conquerors, for example, in the map of the New World included in the *Cosmographiae universalis* (Fig. 3) by Sebastian Münster, which showed a land almost without toponymy in the southern part of

the new continent. This map ignored the rich toponymy of natives (as the paper of Tiago Gill and Vinicio Maluly show us in this book), but revealed the abundant presence of snakes, gold and pearls (“*Paria abundat auro et margaritis*”). In other words, this kind of map reveals its real nature as a communication device that implicitly sanctioned the right to conquer and loot, as if the lands represented were a Dantesque “world without people” (Dante, *Inferno*, XXVI, 117), but which instead determined horrendous massacres and destruction by the European conquerors. In the same way a similar map of the Portuguese Diego Hurtado de Mendoza entitled *Peruviae auriferae regionis typus* (Fig. 4), included in the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* by Abraham Ortelius, is very significant in this regard with its toponyms “*Isolas de las perlas*” and “*Aurea Regio*”.



Fig. 3 - Sebastian Munster, *Cosmographiae Universalis*, 1554.

Toponymic problems presented themselves when the *Geographia* of Ptolemy was rediscovered in Europe, at the end of the 14th century, after being unknown for about thousand years. In this case the Florentine ‘map painters’ formally posed the first problem of toponymic transliteration from the Greek to the Latin alphabet and in Florence, in the year 1415, the ‘mapmakers’ Francesco Lapaccini and Domenico Boninsegni achieved the first Latin version of the maps annexed to the *Geographia* and Latin became the language of geographical names for maps intended for scholars.

After the large diffusion of Ptolemy’s *Geographia* in Europe, the atlases of Ortelius and Mercator and the rich cartographic production that characterized the Modern Age collected, ordered and spread a world toponymy, borrowed from the various documentary sources, making extensive use of Latin, a learned language that granted these works an international diffusion. In these atlases and loose maps all the toponyms of the world are generally Latin exonyms, except, of

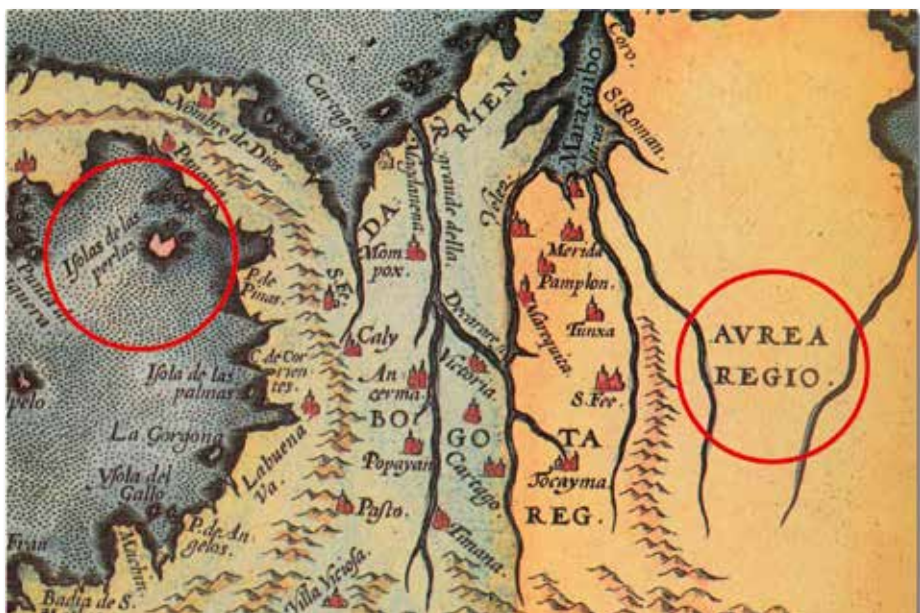


Fig. 4 - Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, *Peruviae auriferae regionis typus*, in Abraham Ortelius, *Teatrum orbis terrarum*, 16th century.

course, of the Latin ones, whose choice was not free of ideological and cultural conditioning, as in the case of the toponymy of the New World and the Middle East, in some maps produced after “the abandonment of the Ptolemaic representation” (Siniscalchi and Palagiano, 2018).



Fig. 5 - Giovanni Battista Riccioli, *Geographiae et Hydrographiae reformata*, 1611.

The first glossary for translating the geographical names from Latin to the Italian vernacular and vice versa was proposed by Italian Jesuit, Father Giovanni Battista Riccioli, in his *Geographiae et Hydrographiae reformatae* (Fig. 5), edited in the 17th century. The eleventh chapter of this book contained a list of seventy-six pages that provided translation of the main geographical names of the world (Riccioli, 1661, pp. 542-618).

Only the age of scientific cartography, supported and financed by the national states, elevated the map to a geometric model of terrestrial surface and slowly introduced also in the nomenclature of the places the recourse to a taxonomic process of toponymic collection. The names of places included in this new kind of national maps were derived from investigations, directly conducted in the places to be represented, questioning the inhabitants and those who frequented them on a continuous basis.

Scientific cartography shows a new focus on toponymy and in some cases the sensitivity of the cartographer signals the endonyms used by the inhabitants also in the lands of conquest, alongside the names imposed by the colonizers. This is the case, for example, of the map created by Christopher Middleton in 1773 titled “To The King, this Chart of Hudson’s Bay [...]” (Fig. 6), in which we can see the note “New Groenland, called by the Inhabitants Secamunga”.

Scientific maps make every possible effort to represent the real state of the territory, in relation to its denominations and compatibly with the scale of the map.

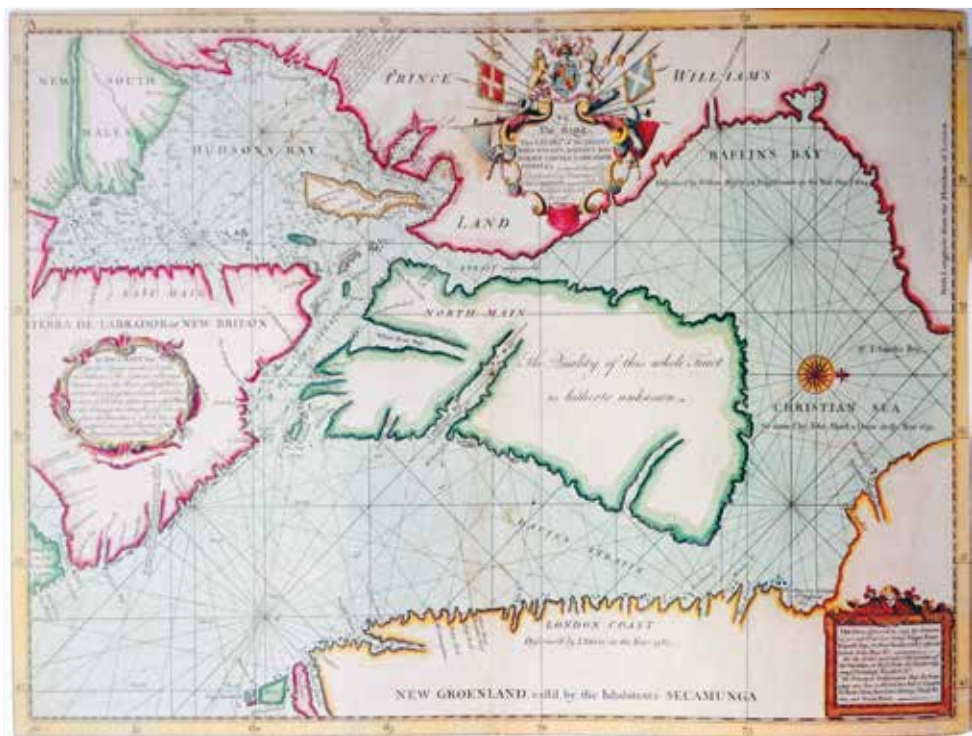


Fig. 6 - Christopher Middleton, Chart of Hudson's Bay, 1773.

The merit of having made the first, systematic large-scale toponymy collection of great parts of the territory is especially due to the first geometric cadastre (Fig. 7) and the importance of this source is further confirmed on this occasion thanks to the papers of many contributors to this book.

Scientific cartography starts a new era in the representation of the earth's surface and highlights the existence of ancient and new problems in the toponymy field.

In the creation of official geometrical maps, the national official languages regulated the systems for writing geographical names within each state. Those languages, that contributed to the creation of the conditions for the unification of communities distinguished by dialectal idioms or different languages, provided the first rules for the transcription of local names, derived mostly from dialectal or vernacular expressions.



Fig. 7 - *Catasto gregoriano, Palazzo (Arcevia), State Archives of Ancona (Italia), Sezione Archivio di Stato di Fabriano, "mappe pontificie", cart. n. 80, Foglio XII.t.*

Scientific cartography did not allow forms of diglossia. It was not possible for the official maps to show geographical names according to the official language coexisting with dialectal denominations. In the name of the construction and/or strengthening of national identities, through the systematic use of the official language, maps produced during this period determined, however, the loss of many place names based on the knowledge and use of the poorest social class of the population. The process of linguistic standardization was affected by numerous errors of toponymic transcription, determined by misunderstandings and by the inability of the topographers to write the dialectal names, according to the orthographic and phonetic rules of the official language. But even if many toponyms were corrupted, misinterpreted or incorrectly transcribed by topographers, fortunately we have today many other generic terms (e.g. river, mountain) that contain the memory of the original dialectal expressions.

In the creation of small and smallest scales geographical maps of exotic lands, however, the foreign toponyms became a serious problem, for which it was necessary to identify an orthographic and phonetic system that ensured the correct transcription and pronunciation of geographical names belonging to languages that did not use the Latin alphabet or that were even unwritten, because “[...] the diversity of transcription and pronunciation of geographic names as a direct consequence of the inconsistencies and imperfections of traditional alphabets [was] one of the main obstacles to the vulgarization of geographical knowledge” (Ricchieri, 1896, p. 505).

In 1788, Sir William Jones (1746-1794) formulated an orthographic and phonetic principle for the transcription and pronunciation of Asiatic geographical names, proposing among other things that for the vowels the Italian or German notation was adopted and avoided both the English orthography and the introduction of new characters, rather using diacritical marks (Jones, 1788, cit. in Asiatic Researches, 1790, pp. 317-322).

A transliteration system formulated in Europe was instead created by Karl Richard Lepsius (1810-1884) and published in his *Das Allgemeine linguistische Alphabet* (Berlin, 1855), but geographers judged as impractical this system for application by the masses (Lebrecht, 1891, p. 18).

At the end of the 19th century many Geographical Societies (e.g. Roma, London, Paris, Berlin, Washington) adopted their system for transcription and pronunciation for foreign toponyms.

In 1885 the Council of the Royal Geographical Society of London adopted the following rules for such geographical names that are not, in the countries to which they belong, written in the Roman characters, on the basis of the principles of Sir William Jones (Jones, 1788) and of those adopted for the Admiralty charts. These principles were as follows.

1. No change will be made in the orthography of foreign names in countries which use Roman letters: thus Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, &c., names will be spelt as by the respective nations.
2. Neither will any change be made in the spelling of such names in languages which are not written in Roman characters as have become by long usage familiar to English readers: thus Calcutta, Cutch, Celebes, Mecca, &c., will be retained in their present form.
3. The true sound of the word as locally pronounced will be taken as the basis of the spelling.
4. An approximation, however, to the sound is alone aimed at. A system which would attempt to represent the more delicate inflections of sound and accent would be so complicated as only to defeat itself. Those who desire a more accurate pronunciation of the written name must learn it on the spot by a study of local accent and peculiarities.
5. The broad features of the system are that vowels pronounced as in Italian and consonants as in English.
6. One accent only is used, the acute, to denote the syllable on which stress is laid. This is very important, as the sounds of many names are entirely altered by the misplacement of this stress.

7. Every letter is pronounced. When two vowels come together, each one is sounded, though the result, when spoken quickly, is sometimes scarcely to be distinguished from a single sound, as in, *ai, au, ei*.

8. Indian names are accepted as spelt in Hunter's *Gazetteer*" (System of Orthography, 1885, p. 535).

In Italy, Giuseppe Dalla Vedova considers the problem solvable as a "scientific-international method" and a "geographic-national method". The first one, with a philological nature, "determines the exact form of the names [and reproduces the sounds] with the greatest possible exactness", using special subsidiary and diacritical signs. The second, adopted by the Italian Geographic Society, rejects the use of "other signs other than those of the national alphabet", accepting a certain approximation in the pronunciation of the names (Dalla Vedova, 1884).

In fact, in the following decades and for most of the 20th century, the place names of the various parts of the world were written in various forms, according to the most disparate orthographic and phonetic rules, producing a variably deformed toponymy, that sometimes was very far from the real names of the evoked places. However, implicitly accepting the principle that "[...] the real name of a geographical entity is that given to it by the inhabitants of the locality in which it originally appears [...]" (Crotta, 1889, p. 58) and recognizing that the sovereignty of the act of naming the places belongs to each state of the world, the United Nations organized in Genève (4th - 22th September 1967) the first International Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, E.68.I.9, 1968; E.69.I.8, 1969), giving rise to a commendable process that still inspires the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

Problems and opportunities of today

Our time is characterized by the advent and diffusion of geo-databases, which have radically transformed the concept of the map and its archiving; they have led to a widening of the storage, research and querying of data; and have enabled a wider range of capabilities for the cartographer. As for toponymy, this has led to the opening of absolutely new scenarios, in which all the traditional limits imposed by the cartographic technique based on analogue procedures seem radically out-dated by the new potential offered by the Information Communications Technologies.

Unfortunately, a problematic aspect in the relationship between toponymy and cartography concerns today the map update. New problems have been added to the old ones, while interesting perspectives are possible with the growing attention towards the return to consideration of the dialects and vernacular forms of expression, considered, on the one hand, "as relics of the past, as evidence of the different, as an object of folkloric study" (Rosiello, 1979, p. 310), and, on the other hand, with the intent of recovering the traces of a past at risk of being lost.

In Italy, the internal migration of many populations from mountainous, hilly and agricultural areas to cities has resulted in people losing memory of various toponyms and microtoponyms in the recent past, as they no longer frequent the

places. This has led to the absence of such toponyms on more recent editions of the maps, which, by reflecting these changes in toponymic use, have highlighted the phenomenon of “toponymic desertification” (Cassi, 2004, p. 726).

In fact, we observe a reduction in the number of geographical names on the new edition of the Italian topographic maps, compared to the previous ones, which does not concern the names of municipalities but mainly has to do with the so-called minor or non-administrative toponymy, as names of small geographical regions, watercourses, mountains or hilly areas.

If this process of “toponymic desertification” cannot be remedied, a paradoxical scenario could arise in which the future maps will have large areas without toponyms, such as the Medieval representations of “unknown lands” (Fig. 9).

The questions in this regard are, therefore, at least two.

Does the topographic map have to correctly reflect the state of the places and strictly reveal also the loss of toponymic knowledge of a given epoch in a given territory, as an effect of the complex relationships between man and his territory?

Or should it ignore this loss of knowledge and follow in the footsteps of previous maps, reporting all the toponyms of a given place, even ignoring the temporary loss of memory due to social and economic dynamics?



Fig. 9 - Series of invented maps showing the phenomenon of “toponymic desertification” over time.

The solution to this problem may seem immediate, inserting all place names on maps, even if they are no longer in use or are unknown to the local communities.

However, this solution would contradict the fundamental principle of scientific cartography, according to which a map must represent the true, actual state of the territory, including in relation to its real local names. If this were not the case, the map would offer a false or not actual representation of the state of the places. The absence of the unknown toponymy would in fact testify to the actual mutation

of the relationships between the territory and its inhabitants, as a consequence of economic or demographic transformations, such as abandonment or rare frequentation of the territory by the residents.

The removal of unknown out-dated toponymy could also lead in the future to the birth of new toponymy, replacing the previous one, as an evident result of the changed relationship between Man and the environment, yet, as well as it could consolidate over time the loss of memory of places.

The most correct solution, from a scientific point of view, should therefore be inspired by the respect of the fundamental principle, referring to the study of historical cartography the research on the previous denominations of place, with the risks that this would entail in the social memory. Historical maps and toponymic databases could offer in this case valuable help to scholars and those interested in this kind of research.

A solution that could, however, constitute a correct mediation between scientific needs and conservation of social memory could aim to graphically highlight within the maps, toponyms in use, as opposed to disused ones, using different fonts, weight or colour in the names (Fig. 10). This would entail a preservation of the reliability of the map and the potential renewal of the memory cycle, because “Memory [...] aims to save the past only to serve the present and the future” (Le Goff, 1979, p. 1005).



Fig. 10 - The example of the same map with place names in different colours to avoid the phenomenon of “toponymic desertification” over time.

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