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*On the cover: Jakob Philipp Hackert, Castel D'ovo (1774), with colour change in blue.*

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# **Permanence, transformation, substitution and oblivion of geographical names**

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## Landscape and place names. Traces from the Tuscan toponymic corpus

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### **Abstract**

*Is it legitimate to state that the landscape communicates by means of place names? It definitely is: by means of new place names coming into use over the centuries by human communities, as the result of the way in which their place of settlement has been inhabited, exploited and organized. However, caution should be exercised concerning what the names actually “communicate”, either explicitly or obscurely, and on occasion even ironically, so as to highlight specific natural or human characteristics, or even “deny” them, as is the case with names like Montaùto [monte acuto i.e. sharp mountain] to the south of Florence, which is neither a mountain nor sharp. And a name like Bosco del Lupo, what does it mean? A woodland where a wolf was once seen or a woodland where usually wolves live?*

*Characterized by a notable suggestive charge, place names reflect both objective conditions and perceptions, as evidenced by the frequent use of metaphorical or antiphrastic expressions. In Italy, from the Alps to Sicily, the frequency of metaphors is very high, and the landscape often speaks in allegories.*

*The relationships between place names and landscape can be investigated by examining single environmental categories or the entire toponymic corpus of sample areas. If we look at some significant characteristics of the landscape, such as vegetation, the terrain shapes, waterways, human activities (including names concerning the world of agriculture and livestock), settlements, and roads, the terms of this fascinating “dialogue” between names and the landscape can be easily identified. Many examples are illustrated in the volume *Nomi e carte. Sulla toponomastica della Toscana* (Place names and maps. About Tuscan toponymy), edited by Laura Cassi, Pisa, Pacini, 2015.*

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That place names are both fascinating and complex is evident, if not undisputable<sup>1</sup>. We are naturally curious about why a place has a particular name,

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<sup>1</sup> On several occasions, I have dealt with the links between place names and landscape in Tuscany – both from the point of view of the links between names and single environmental characteristics, such as vegetation, landforms, waterways, settlements, and historical road systems, and from the viewpoints of the relationship between the place name corpus of a territory and its landscape – see the research listed in CASSI L., *Nomi e carte. Sulla toponomastica della Toscana*, Pisa 2015, together with further bibliographical references on the subject. Here I shall take the opportunity to return briefly, to a number of questions.

the reason for that name rather than another one, as well as who thought up that name and why a place has changed names over time. Many questions arise, and in many cases a plausible answer is unlikely.

At the same time it is important to remember that most place names, even in ancient, densely populated urban areas like those in Italy, especially in Tuscany, are mostly the result of “mere conjectures”, that is common terms in a standard language or dialect which have been promoted to proper nouns, as pointed out by Giulio Cornelio Desinan and before him by Olinto Marinelli. Even apparently obscure names like those of the rivers *Arno*, *Bisenzio*, and *Serchio* are nothing more than the product of ancient descriptive terms [running water] which over time have lost semantic clarity.

Although this “dismantles” in a way, the fascination of place names, their attractiveness is not diminished, because, being mostly made up of ordinary words, makes them useful pointers to present or past environmental conditions, as is the case with place names evocative of wooded land where the woods have disappeared long before. Moreover, since names are the result of mental processes registering specific aspects of the environment and territory, the result is an interpretation of the landscape filtered through observations of successive generations.

Being characterized by considerable fascination, place names reflect, at the same time, objective conditions, as shown, for example, by frequent use of metaphors and expressions opposite to the normal meaning of a word. The interest of place names also extends to seemingly marginal, but, at the same time, attractive aspects, such as the frequency of metaphors to be found from the Alps to Sicily, where the landscape often communicates by means of allegory. We only need to think of names

like *Il Ramo del Diavolo* [the Devil's Horn], *Il Monte Scavezagenoci* [Mount Nutcracker], *L'OmoMorto* [the Dead Man], *Il Poggio Stancalasio* [Wearry Donkey Hill], *Cefalù* [High Headland], to mention only some of these expressions, which, in many cases, are portraits of an environment. The numerous examples from Tuscany include *L'Oncino* [the Hook], a winding river with a particularly striking outline, *La Piazza di Siena* [Siena's main square], describing a

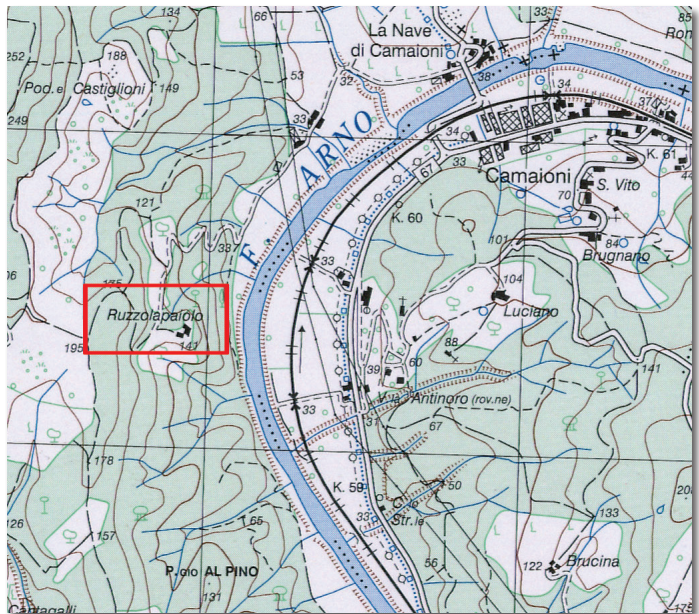


Figure 1. IGM's map scale 1:25,000, sheet no. 275 IV, Firenze, 1992.

wide, level ridge just to the south of Monte San Michele in the Chianti area, *Monte Libro Aperto* [Mount Open Book] in the Apennines of the province of Pistoia, *Podere Ruzzolapaioli* [a smallholding whose name recalls the rolling of pots on a slope] (Figure 1), *Podere Bramasole* [a smallholding longing for the sun], *Casa Mezzosso* [half-bone house]. Names like this, originating from the context of a rather poor, previous sharecropper, provide significant information on their history and meaning. Furthermore, the interest created by naming strategies expressed by many of the names should not be forgotten, such as those inspired by political history and territorial marketing.

So, are we allowed to state that the landscape communicates by means of place names? The answer is a definite “yes”. This takes place by means of the creation of new descriptive terms over centuries by human communities, the result of the way in which their territory was perceived, living there, exploiting it, and planning it. It is, however, necessary to pay attention to what the names “say”, openly or indirectly, or even, occasionally, ironically, so as to point out natural or human characteristics, which might even be “denied”, as is the case with names like *Montauto* (Figure 2), to the south of Florence, which is neither a mountain nor sharp.

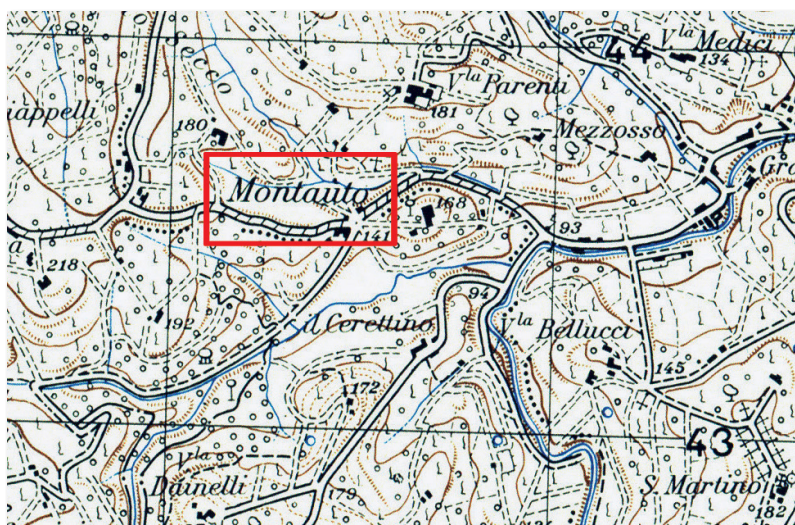


Figure 2. IGM's map scale 1:25,000, sheet no. 106 II SO, Impruneta, 1963.

If we consider a number of significant categories of landscape, such as the vegetation cover, terrain features, water, human activities (including names concerning the world of agriculture and animal breeding), settlements, and roads, the terms of this “dialogue” between names and landscape can easily be identified. A glance is enough at the region’s distribution of place names evocative of beech woods (Figure 3) to realize that it retraces the actual vegetation area, despite a number of exceptions that actually make this distribution even more interesting. The same can be said about place name reflections of hill and mountain areas, in certain cases sensitive to local perception, which is able to point out a slight rise in the terrain compared with its surroundings, by use of the label “mount”. Place names



linked to water are just as, or even more interesting, both in hydrographic terms as well as in concept. In the case of the relationship between names conceptually referring to roads and the actual historical road network, place names fulfil their role as “fossils of human geography”, as they are called by Jean Brunhes. In this case however, we must again be cautious, since a place name may not remain linked to the original object for ever.

Another interesting category is that of place names derived from personal names, an indirect mirror of landscape components, though significant because it reflects individuals who have contributed to its shape over the centuries. We begin with very ancient, pre-Indo-European names followed by those of Latin, then Germanic origin and so on up to modern times.

Nonetheless, the first point to bring forward is that the study of place names, in the words of Giovan Battista Castiglioni, is a “disciplinary crossroads”, and that analysis of the links with present and past situations presupposes the ability to recognize names, starting out from linguistic study, which precedes geographical, historical and naturalistic investigation, particularly in places inhabited for centuries, and in which there have been significant linguistic changes and contacts with other languages.

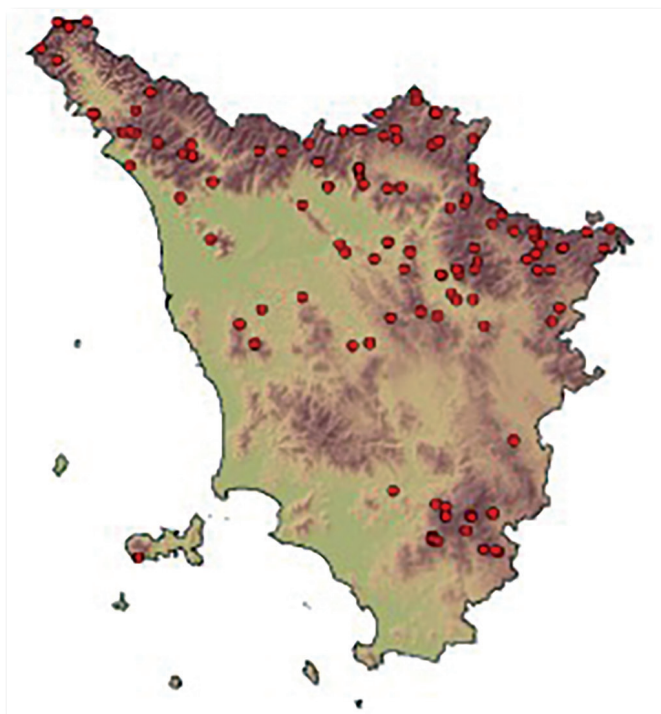


Figure 3. Distribution map of place names related to Beech in Tuscany (IGMI's maps 1:25.000).

If the landscape “speaks” by means of toponymy and is not lacking in wit, in the words of Franco Farinelli, place names are no less so, and feedback should be carefully examined. Do a *Casa al Faggio* [Beech Wood House] or a *Casa La Sughera*

[Cork Oak House] refer to a large number of beech or cork oak trees, or else is it their exceptional presence that attracts attention? If we were to argue, somewhat deterministically, that toponymy is unconditionally linked to the landscape, we would be mistaken, because, the fact should not only be taken into consideration that a name given to a place is not the result of only one possible choice, but also could have been suggested by something exceptional attracting attention. Some scholars have stated that toponymy is more likely to deny rather than assert that a *Bosco del Lupo* [Wolf's Wood] could refer to a wood populated by wolves or a wood where a wolf has exceptionally been seen, Are we dealing with numbers or a single case?

It would, nevertheless, be just as imprecise to insist on such a negative stance. There are many examples of a positive approach. I can mention a simple, though explicit, one. A historical linguist, one of my university colleagues, saw nothing unusual, when I had pointed out that the names linked to Saint Columbanus on large scale Italian maps are all in the north and never south of the Tuscan-Emilian Apennine range, the reason being that the Saint in question was an Irish monk who had been sent to Bobbio by the Lombard King Agilulf and had never travelled further south.

One of the most significant study areas, as I have already mentioned, is that of the relationship between landscape and place names linked with vegetation, a landscape-environmental component particularly representative of the naming process, as can readily be seen in the large number of relevant place names, when compared with other categories. Surface vegetation is undoubtedly one of the most eloquent, visually striking aspects of the appearance of a territory, also being of considerable importance from the viewpoint of a traditional economy. In Tuscany, names linked with vegetation growing naturally and without being tended or cultivated are one of the richest sources for the naming of settlements and various geographical features, such as mountains, valleys, waterways, and more or less extensive land areas linked to sensations like *Cerreto* [*Quercus cerris* or Turkey Oak Wood], *Suvereto* [Cork Tree Wood], *Faeta* [Beech Tree Wood] as well as single examples like *Casa al Pino* [Pine Tree House], *Podere la Sughera* [Cork Oak Tree Smallholding], where the choice could have been determined by an exception i.e. an isolated tree (not forgetting the fact, however, that names in the singular can also stand for a numerous group).

If many place names by association give us an idea of the species [Carpineto i.e. Oak-hornbeam Trees, Pineta i.e. Pine Grove, Fargneto i.e. *Quercus robur* or English Oak Wood, Borro di Faètole i.e. Beech Gorge], there are also many that suggest a wood in general terms, often accompanied by additional evocative adjectives [Boscotondo i.e. Circular Wood; Selvabuia, Dark Wood; Selvagrande, Large Wood], like the case of the place name *Selvamaggio* [Main Forest], which now designates an industrial area. The evocative and symbolic values communicated by woodland areas have probably contributed to the wealth of the related place name corpus. The forest has always expressed a clear contrast with cultivated and organized land. The forest is the symbol *par excellence* of wild nature, the opposite of culture in its disorderliness. It is the place of fear of the unknown and, in the popular imagination, its inhabitants are characters symbolizing danger and risk for those who enter. It is also the place where one gets lost and a journey or adventure begins, with decisive encounters, as we learn from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and

which we can read about in poetic tales of chivalry and a host of fairy stories. The forest is impenetrable and inhospitable, but not for everybody: a hermit is not afraid, in fact he makes it his home. Limited areas such as isolated wooded scrubs or groves, on the other hand, are seen as places for gatherings and meetings, in classical antiquity reserved for worshipping the gods, and they remained sacred spots for Celtic and Germanic peoples.

Apart from their fascination – arguably greater nowadays than in the past – names associated with vegetation are of interest for a variety of reasons. They can rightly be seen as useful for the reconstruction of the ancient extent of a wood. The geographical distribution of terms such as *Bosco* [Wood], *Selva* [Forest], *Lecceto* [Holm Oak Wood], *Faggeto* [Beech Wood] and so on has been a clear indication of the presence of woods where nowadays none can be seen. Information is also supplied on different climatic conditions from the present-day ones and different configurations in the past of the vegetation cover. Additional information is occasionally supplied by heterotypic synonym areas near place names in quite different positions to present day areas of vegetation.

In the nineteen thirties Alberto Chiarugi found some beech shrubs at a low level near the Tyrrhenian Sea coast. Near these beech heterotypic synonym areas the large scale Italian Geographic Military Institute map shows place names like *Faeta* [Beech Tree Wood], a clear indication of the presence of vegetation, proof of different climatic conditions than the present day ones, possibly dating back to the Little Ice Age of some centuries ago, when the climate was more humid and colder than nowadays, thus allowing beech trees to grow at a lower altitude closer to the coast. The cork oak also has some place name connections outside its present-day area, as is also the case with the holm oak, which occurs in place names at an altitude of 1,200 metres. It is these exceptions that are a stimulus for research, since they offer information on conditions different from those of today, and which by way of names have left traces of their existence.

Further confirmation of the relationship between names and vegetation growing naturally comes from the marked general nature of place name distribution linked to oak trees and oak forests, corresponding in our region to the general nature of distribution of a number of species of oak tree such as the downy oak. On the map (Figure 4) I have already mentioned there are more than 4,000 place names connected with vegetation.

Another interesting landscape-environmental component linked with place names is landform, especially in hilly areas, basically owing to the fact that morphology is a kind of landscape imprinting, an initial and clear characteristic locating and identifying it.

The widespread hilly character of the Tuscan Region is frequently reflected in place names, with a sequence derived from names such as *poggio* [hillock], *colle* [hill], *monte* [mount], in their simple or composite forms often qualified by adjectives specifying certain conditions like: *Montaùto* [Sharp Peak], *Montebello* [Beautiful Peak], *Poggio Secco* [Dry Hillock], (Figure 5), *Poggio Deserto* [Desolate Hillock]. There are also frequent references to the shape of the quarries (Vallecava, Vallicella, Vallone) and the appearance or nature of the land *Pietra del Diavolo*, [the Devil's Stone], a bizarre, picturesque limestone rock sticking out from the marlstone



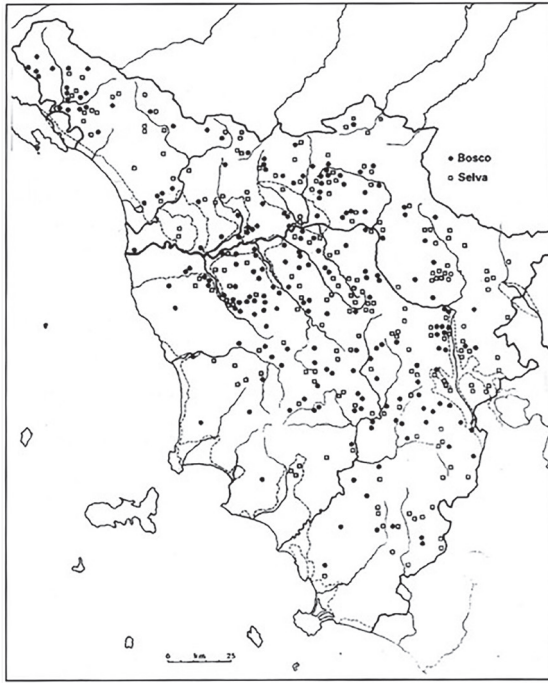


Figure 4. Distribution map of place names related to Woods and Forest in Tuscany  
(Source: IGM's maps 1:25.000).

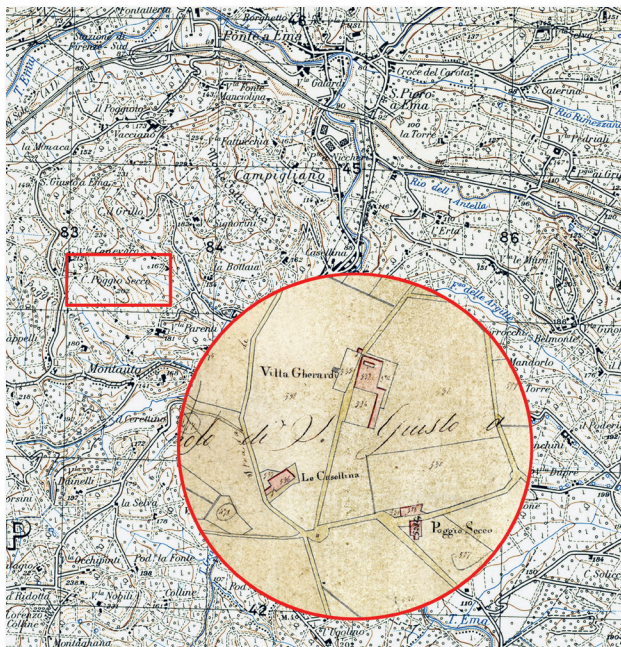


Figure 5. IGM's map scale 1:25,000, sheet no. 106 II SO, Impruneta, 1963,  
with the detail of Cadastral map of Tuscany, 19<sup>th</sup> century.

at Pania di Corfino in the Apuan Alps in northwestern Tuscany; *Sassi Neri* [Black Rocks], from the dark colour of the ophiolitic rocks at l'Impruneta near Florence. I should like to recall here the names linked with the exposure of a slope such as *Bacio* [shady], *Solatio* [sunny], *Lubaco* [in the shade] and those linked with the microclimate, like *Casa Spazzavento* [House sweeping the wind away], *Podere Scaldagrilli* [Smallholding where the crickets warm up in the sun], *Nebbiolo* [Mist].

In the hilly area around l'Impruneta, to the south of Florence, there are many place names such as *Monte* [mount], *Mezzomonte* [half mount], *Montoriolo* [clock mount], but there are no mountains near Impruneta. Here we have a case of the perception of the environment by the person who made up the name and who considered a modest rise in the land as a “mount” which evidently stood out in the surroundings (Marinelli had already pointed this out more than a century ago). It is no accident that there are as many as 1,400 place names containing the word *monte*, in its simple or composite form and often accompanied by a qualifying adjunct, as I have already pointed out, all over the large scale regional maps, without a specific relationship to a genuine mountainous area (Figure 6). And if in the really mountainous areas, such as the Apuan Alps and Apennines, they are plentiful, they are mainly concentrated in central Tuscany, in the hilly area between Florence and Siena, the term *monte* [mount] being used for these uplands, which, however modest, are typical of the area without actually being true mountains.

Concerning names like *Montebello* [literally *Beautiful Mountain*], mention should be made of the fact that, in traditional place names, the aesthetic component



Figure 6. Distribution map of place names related to Mount in Tuscany  
(Source: IGM's maps 1:25.000).

is rare: “bello” stands for “useful” or, in the case of names such as *Belvedere* and *Bellavista* reference is made to the position of the place and the view of it from higher ground. “Bello” in the truly aesthetic sense dates from the emergence of new place names, such as those created in Sardinia in recent decades, i.e. *Cala degli Angeli* [Angels’ Bay], *Cala Paradiso* [Paradise Bay] and so on, inspired by the tourist industry. There are names like *Casa Paradiso* [Paradise House] in traditional toponymy, that mostly reflect exposure, as in the use of *Inferno* [Hell] mostly symbolizing morphological characteristics.

But perhaps the most attractive landscape-environmental category is that concerning water, both in the form of names for waterways and also that of conceptual reference. Water is the basic resource *par excellence*, rich in intrinsic and symbolic values, and therefore hydronyms are generally the most ancient ones in a territory.

Many names of Italian rivers are derived from very ancient linguistic strata, even Pre-Indo-European ones, gradually adapted to population and language shifts. It should also be remembered that, generally, hydronyms pre-date mountain names (with the exception of the names of mountain chains), since waterways have always represented a fundamental reference point for orientation and localization and they have been used for communication. Moreover, water, inasmuch as it is a fundamental resource for life and human activities, is a strong signal, buried in the depths of human consciousness, at the same time being a bearer of love-hate relationships. Water is the expression of the source of all forms of life, as well as of dispersion and drowning: floods wipe out those who displease the Divine Being; rain is associated with energy and prosperity; placid rivers are a symbol of an ordered lifestyle, while whirlpools represent danger and difficulties. The links of water with the afterlife are as old as human beings, as is clear from the myth of the immersion of the sun to warm the world in the dead of night, water being a sacred purifying and ritual entity, as recalled by the ancient religious cults linked with thermal springs. In the popular imagination, lakes and springs have often contained natural spirits, water sirens and genies but also terrifying demons.

Water is a well-represented category in Tuscan toponymy, in relation to naming springs, running water, stagnant water, and ice, as well as place names conceptually linked to water regardless of the actual object, and the connections between the antiquity of a populated area, distributive typology and the density of the hydrographic pattern are so close that even the tiniest waterway has a name.

It should be noted that the number of names seems rather independent of the greater or lesser availability of water, as can be seen in the case of the Isle of Elba, where there is a considerable number of names conceptually linked with water, probably brought about by perceptive mechanisms sensitive to the exceptional nature of a spring (Figure 7). This is a sign that water is such an important resource that it sets up a powerful conceptual basis, both in situations of abundance and scarcity.

On the already mentioned IGMI maps the place names featuring *acqua* [water] are present in various forms: diminutive, augmentative, affectionate or as composite adjectives and reflect deliberate actions: *Acqua Santa* [Holy Water], *Acquaviva* [Living Water], *Acquafredda* [Cold Water], *Acqua Turchina* [Turquoise Water],

*Acqua Rossa* [Red Water], *Acqua Fresca* [Fresh Water], *Acqua Borra* (a term used to describe water with medicinal properties), *Fosso dell'Acquachiara* [Ditch with Clear Water]; and there are also connotations like *Acqua Nera* [Black Water], *Valle di Malacqua* [Bad Water Valley], *Acquatorbida* [Murky Water], *Acquamara* [Bitter Water], *Acquacidula* [Sour Water], *Podere Falsacqua* [Stream Smallholding], in some cases describing hot and cold thermal springs, which had been very popular in the past (examples: *Acqua Calda*, *Acquibogliolo*, *Bollori*, *Acquiputoli*, *Bagno* and derivations, *Rio dell'Acqua Puzzola* [Stream of the Stinking Water]). Certainly the very sound of the word “acqua” is uniquely suggestive, beginning with the very famous line “chiare, fresche, dolci acque” [clear, fresh, sweet waters] from a poem by the 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian poet Petrarch. And it is no accident that water gave rise to some especially attractive names. As confirmation of its highly symbolic nature, it is enough to turn to names like *Chiarofonte* [Clear Spring] and *La Fonte delle Fate* [the Fairies’ Spring], the bearers of fascination between myth and reality, a reality, that from the environmental viewpoint, today often seems disappointing and humiliated.



Figure 7. Distribution map of place names related to bath (springs) in Tuscany  
(Source: IGMT's maps 1:25.000)

Coming to the human components of the landscape, roads are one of the most representative of the human presence. The road has always had a vitally important role as the framework of settlement *par excellence*, and, as a consequence, its

reflection in place names is of particular interest. Settlements were set up along roads and so we find place names such as *strada* [road], *via* [street or route], and those linked with crossroads [*croce*, *crocicchio*], referring to divergent routes [*trebbio*, *trivio*, *bivio*] or to distances along a road [*Quarto*/Fourth, *Quinto*/Fifth, *Sesto*/Sixth, influenced by ancient Roman milestones], to services along the route as in *Tavarnelle* [Little Taverns], *Tavarnuzze* [Refreshment Stops For Travellers], or *Spedaletto* [Hospitality Service].

The links between place names and roads are well known to linguists and scholars studying ancient road networks, concerning the advantages of etymological analysis of local names for historical topography, with its aim of identifying ancient roads and traces of Roman land measurement called centuriation, as applied by Giovanni Uggeri. This scholar has reconstructed many ancient routes by way of, among other things, survivals, which are variously hidden, from the point of view of linguistic evolution, of the name of the road or names referring to constructions and services relevant to it.

There is no doubt that suggestions from place names can, in some cases, be decisive. However, though etymological interpretation can provide correct linguistic solutions, we must be careful about accepting or suggesting hypotheses, since this method must always be compared with the data on the land and in the archives. The distribution of a place name category, as has already been pointed out, though clearly symptomatic, is not in itself the only direction to follow in examining the concept.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that interest in names linked with roads is particularly keen, when they preserve the memory of otherwise unknown infrastructures, for example, in cases when place name indications allow the identification of unknown or confusing routes and variants, possibly in the category of secondary routes. However, the fact that we are dealing with general names like *strada* [road] or *via* [street or route] and only a few of them are accompanied by qualifying elements like *Via Reggi* [Via Regia, Royal Route], or *Via Maggio* [Via Maggiore, Main Route] – and they are even more significant when they no longer refer to main routes – this fact obscures the link between place names and the hierarchy of road routes.

But if it is true that, from this category of names, albeit with the necessary caution, one can identify a kind of template of the historical road network, more or less accurately, according to individual cases, and if the present distribution of names generally agrees, it is not a binding rule that names linked with roads are actually evidence of previous routes, since names occasionally are shifted from the original site. As is well known, during the centuries following the fall of the Roman Empire, for example, the coastal areas were gradually abandoned and inland sites preferred. The settlements favoured hilltops, while, in more recent times, the opposite has happened. In some cases, names may have followed the inhabitants of an abandoned site.

Undoubtedly it would be interesting to check – in the context of local names in a given territory – the percentage of names linked with roads out of the total and their relation to other name types, thus identifying the weight of the influence of the road system in the context of the components of the landscape reflected in



toponymy. Routes are one of the main features, not only because they are visible, but also because they are fundamental, in consideration of their function as a basic infrastructure, for a series of movements, such as the circulation of people and goods (the latter linked to ideas) up to the very recent past, to the extent of taking on the role of an energetic factor in settlement and economy localization. For example, the road was the most characteristic feature of the Roman rural landscape.

However, since it is, in most cases, the major roads (independent of the duration of their importance) that give rise to place names, it is clear that this category cannot play a leading role, when numerically compared, for example, with the names linked with locations, vegetation or the shapes of the land, these being more widely distributed and spread over the territory. It is true that the role of roads had been of considerable importance in the past, and, as such, was one of the territorial elements clearly envisaged by human beings when place names were created, that is when it was a duty and desire to identify objects on the landscape with a specific name.

Locations, another basic category in the character of a territory, are the certain source for a rich, varied place name corpus, as has been fully demonstrated by recent research. However, seeing that an overview, albeit not a truly comprehensive one, but at least illustrating the relationships between landscape and place names, has been presented, I will conclude with a look at the entire place name corpus of a territory.

A few years ago, an investigation was carried out in the already mentioned area of Impruneta, a countryside area with urban development belonging to the Florentine landscape, a hilly district densely inhabited since very ancient times, characterized by scattered settlement and intense exploitation of the territory. The survey aimed, on the basis of the almost complete collection of names, to establish, with the aid of a quantitative calculation of the contribution of the various natural and human phenomena, how the geographical landscape, including historical and natural characteristics, was reflected in place names. What emerged clearly was that almost all of the names vividly expressed the process of the creation of the place name stock, reflecting the various natural and historical aspects of the area under examination. Despite the fact that they did not allow an organic reconstruction of the appearance of the territory, owing to changes over time in the historical stratification of names, there was a close relationship between local names and the physical and human characteristics of the territory. Besides, the conceptual categories of naming, although somewhat varied, turned out to be devoid of imagination and were aesthetically banal, as can often be noticed in modern urban developments. This coherence was also confirmed by research in the Chianti area. Hopefully, there will be further investigations of other territories.

From all the examples mentioned, a number of mechanisms have emerged as basic to the process of place naming, they are: the unconscious operations of registering a specific "image" provoked by a particularly significant phenomenon or aspect and, complementary to this, the conscious, voluntary aim to clearly identify a place, foregrounding an aspect considered especially expressive. As already pointed out, place names are not banal, chance objects indifferent to surrounding reality. On the other hand, since they satisfy the need to identify an object, they aim to express a significant qualification in relation to the environment in question. In this way, they appear to be the expression of a

mental operation aiming at highlighting specific features. In the case of a house in the country it could be the owner's name or another evident characteristic such as a dovecote and so on... We should not forget that the same place can have different names given by people speaking different languages, just as in our towns and village names, being mostly of ancient origin, reflect the way in which inhabitants of the past described them.

Nevertheless, a place name goes beyond the mere need for distinction and topographical reference and it almost seems to transmit the function or the history of what is named, thus taking on a specific cultural value: place names reflect a direct link between a human being and a territory, a reflection of the environment and landscape, of which it is an essential component. This is demonstrated by interest in micro-toponymy, which is a recent development and is seen through the spread in various parts of our region of signs with the names of isolated houses and indications of name changes in various residential areas.

To conclude, vegetation cover, terrain shapes, water, historical road networks and settlements, all or most of these factors represent the landscape in toponymy, naturally with the necessary caution often mentioned. Toponymy is one of the most complex, and emblematic aspects of the process of knowledge and organization of a territory by human societies and makes up one of the outstanding features of local culture and a clear manifestation of the identifying traits of the *Genius Loci*.

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# Permanence, transformation, substitution and oblivion of geographical names

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