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Toponymy and Cartography between History and Geography

Edited by

Andrea Cantile and Helen Kerfoot

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Photo of the participants in Campo Santo Stefano, Venezia.

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Presentation

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to present this second edition of the International Scientific Symposium organized as part of the activities carried out by the Romano-Hellenic Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN).

This year the event was prepared in close cooperation with the Veneto Region and the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, under the auspices of the Italian Cartographic Association, the Italian Association of Geography Teachers, Italian Association of Geographers, the Italian Centre for Historical and Geographical Studies, the Italian Geographical Society and the Society of Geographical Studies.

The occasion was particularly propitious both to reflect on the relationship “Toponymy and Cartography between History and Geography”, and to present the cooperative project, developed by the Italian Geographic Military Institute (IGMI) and the Veneto Region for the creation of a new database of geographical names, which combines, for the first time in Italy, the toponymy of the Regional Technical Map, at scales 1:5,000 and 1:10,000, to that of the Official Map of Italy at the scale 1:25,000.

During the four sessions of the symposium, over one hundred participants, technicians, experts and scholars (geographers, linguists, historians, architects, planners and cartographers) took part in the work, with twenty-one presentations by various experts from Brazil, Canada, Cyprus, France, Nigeria, Spain and from various Italian regions, all recording the general appreciation of those participants.

Considering the successful outcome of the initiative, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Cristiano Corazzari, Regional Minister for the Territory, Culture and Security of the Veneto Region, and to Prof. Gherardo Ortalli, President of the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, for their support and active cooperation.

I would also like to address a grateful acknowledgment to all members of the Scientific Committee for the symposium:

- Andrea Cantile, Chair of the Romano-Hellenic Division of the UNGEGN (Italy);
- Helen Kerfoot, Honorary chair of UNGEGN (Canada);
- Peter Jordan, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Institut für Stadt und Regionalforschung (Österreich);
- Carla Marcato, Università di Udine, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti (Italy);
- Alberto Nocentini, Università di Firenze, Accademia della Crusca (Italy);
- Cosimo Palagiano, Sapienza - Università di Roma, Accademia dei Lincei (Italy).

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to Professor Andrea Cantile, President of the Commission for the Italian Official Toponymy of IGMI, for his efforts in creating this event, and to all the staff of the IGMI, which made possible the achievement of this second International Scientific Symposium and the publication of the related proceedings.

*The Commander of the IGMI
(Maj. Gen. Pietro TORNABENE)*



Territorial identity and place names

LAURA CASSI*

Abstract

Though territorial identity is very difficult to define, this report tries to do it by investigating place names, considering both as dynamic phenomena. Many different research fields can apply to territorial identity, but surely the toponymic ones can 'say' much about it, mostly referring to ancient and densely populated areas like ours. Examples will be discussed, with reference to Tuscany, showing the great content value of the Topographical Map of Italy edited by the Italian Geographic Military Institute to highlight historical population dynamics as well as social and economic features which have characterized the territory over the centuries.

Keywords: place names, territorial identity, Tuscany.

What is territorial identity? Defining it is a difficult task. However, place names are surely one of the most important components of territorial identity. These are both dynamic phenomena, even though, this is not the principal reason for their relationships.

Though many examples could be mentioned, I will limit myself to place names in the Florentine area. Of particular interest, it has been densely populated since ancient times. The place names chosen are referred to in linguistic and geographical terms.

In the early 1960s, a well-known linguist, Pelio Fronzaroli, studied Florentine region place names. He grouped these place names in terms of their etymological origin: four groups were identified, pre-Latin, Latin, Germanic, and neo-Latin. The neo-Latin ones are especially numerous: linguistic stratification clearly highlights the historical population dynamics in our area.

Many years ago, Silvio Pieri, another well-known linguist, identified numerous Etruscan toponyms, such as Corolla, Stella, Mècchio and so on; Mècchio can be compared with the Latin name Vico and Vicchio (vicus, a social grouping or village); for example, from paleo-Mediterranean words we have Monte Albano, from alba, stone, height; from some Mediterranean words we also have the name Arno (arna, sunken bed of a river); Greve from the Mediterranean base grava, gravel; Parga from barga, hut; Falterona from shovel, roundness, bump; even the place names derived from Mediterranean paleo words are quite numerous.

Another very interesting example concerning the linguistic stratification of place names is given by Alberto Nocentini, a glottologist as well known as those I mentioned above, who recently studied the toponymy of the Casentino region (internal Tuscany), offering many significant elements to illustrate the historical

* Università di Firenze (Italia).

identity of this area from a diachronic point of view, as Fronzaroli did for the Florentine one.

Some hydronyms north of the River Arno indicate links with ancient Ligurian populations; they could be evidence of Ligurian settlement in the Arno region, later occupied by the Etruscans: here we have Stura, also to be found in Liguria and Piedmont, and in Northern Europe; Tavaiano, from *tav-*, also present in France and Scotland; Ombrone from an Etruscan personal name: in ancient times this was the name by which the Ligurian populations identified themselves. Among the names of Latin origin, we recall the praedial ones, derived from the name which indicates the person to whom the landed property was assigned. The praedial names are numerous and often end in *-ano*, from the Latin *-anus*, so they are easily identifiable, as in the cases of Gricigliano, Grecilio's field, Ponzano, Ponzio's field, Samprugnano derived from Sempronianu, that is Sempronius' field (on the official map Saint Prugnano erroneously appears). Other praedial names are: Terzolle, Serpiolle, Marignolle and so on; other Latin names originated in Roman landmark computation, and indicate ancient road layouts like Via Cassia, on the right bank of the River Arno. So, starting from Florence (Florentia, a greeting name), we have: Quarto (Fourth mile from Florence), Quinto (Fifth), Sesto (Sixth), Settimello (Seventh). Others refer to Roman centuriation (a grid system by which the Romans divided up cultivable land), such as Quarrata from *quadrata*, Cintoia from *centuria*, Colonnata from *columna*; and again, Gonfienti from *confluentes* (a small stream joining with the River Bisenzio), Compiobbi from *compluvium* (the River Sieve flows into the Arno). Though far fewer than the Latin names there are a number of Germanic ones: they probably refer to Longobard settlements and mostly concern hills and mountains: Monte Perlo (Mount Perlo), Colle Barucci (Barucci Hill), Monterinaldi, Montughi We also find: Barone, Baroncelli, Ghiffia, Cafaggiolo (land reserved for hunting by the lord), Gualdo (wood, *wald*) and many others.

Obviously, historical linguists are mainly interested in ancient names, while geographers are mainly interested in the mass of neo-Latin names since these names, as a whole, can offer the reading, the portrait - one could say - which the inhabitants, inspired by the physical and human landscape characteristics that over the centuries have caught their attention, have drawn up of their territory. Geographical studies on the neo-Latin place names etymological meaning, can surely highlight many social and economic features which over the centuries have characterized a particular territory.

In the area we are dealing with, neo-Latin names are the most numerous and refer to soil morphology, like Poggio Alto (high hill); hydrography, like Padule (swamp), Fontesecca (dry source); vegetation, like Monteloro (laurel mountain), Lecore (holm oak wood); animals, like Gamberaia (a place where shrimps can be fished), Cerbaia (woods where deer live); settlements, like Tavarnuzze (small taverns along ancient roads), Casellina (small house); industrial activities, Calcinaia (a place where mortar was produced); old social organization, like Case Comunanze (common house) and so on.

All these, more or less old names, allude to the (more or less distant) past and therefore to an identity that has taken shape over time. The place names on

the official maps resemble a traditional world which today has undergone great changes, or even disappeared altogether.

So, does toponymy have no relation to current events? Well, it would be wrong to assume that toponymy has only links with the past. Just think of the new place names following the reclamation along Italian coasts in the 1930s or the very recent ones linked to the tourism phenomenon in Sardinia.

So, if we have lost some ancient names, referring to traditional activities, others have appeared, suggested by new activities, like tourism. The new names may well appear as a foreign body in an ancient context, such as Costa Smeralda (the Emerald Coast), Turquoise Coast, Butterfly Bay, Eden Rock. However attractive they may sound, they have nothing to do with the past and traditional activities. However, territorial identity is also changing and today tourism in Sardinia is certainly part of it and we can say the same for other new names.

Returning to the Florentine area, where the toponymic corpus is the result of different word layers, I should like to give an example highlighting how the traditional scattered settlement offers readings that we can qualify as 'identification spies'. Many specificities are recalled in the toponymic corpus, both from a synchronic point of view and from a diachronic one. Under the synchronic profile there emerges a careful reading of the physical and cultural landscape, under the diachronic one the presence of ancient, secular and modern names stands out.



Fig. 1 - A stretch of the Bisenzio Valley.

In conclusion, place names are at the same time photographs and environmental portraits, a representation of a real world and real way of life, but also an interpretation of reality itself and sometimes even an expression of a virtual reality, produced exclusively by the perception of the generations that over the centuries have followed one another in the same territory.

Obviously many other studies can apply to territorial identity, but surely the toponymic ones can 'say' much about it, mostly in ancient and densely populated areas like ours.

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