

D'OU ETES-VOUS REVISITED

THE WORD WURCHER

D'Ou Etes-Vous deals with a phenomenon which has always been of interest to me. Not only in French, but in Russian as well, the naming of people from their places of origin is very complicated.

I believe that the author has not been thorough enough in deriving rules. At the end of the article, he gives a list of cities whose inhabitants' names are contrasted with "well-behaved names." On the contrary, it is the poorly-behaved names that are really consistent and well behaved because, like so many French city-inhabitant names, they are etymological in origin - that is, they are derived from the name from which the present name of the city is derived. Examples include Pau=Palois, Epernay=Sparnaciens, Epinal=Spinaliens, Saint-Dié=Déodatiens, Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux=Tricastins or Tricastinois, Saint-Cloud=Clodoaldiens, Saint-Valery-En-Caux=Valéricais, and Saint-Valery-Sur-Somme=Valéricains.

The last two toponyms serve to differentiate inhabitants of two different places bearing the same name. Further examples are Dunois from Dun-Le-Palleteau or Dun-Sur-Aurons and Duniens from Dun-Sur-Meuse. Surely this desire to distinguish between places of origin must also play a great role in toponym formation, which undoubtedly in many cases - perhaps, indeed, in most - is of learned, not popular, origin. A good example is provided by Lexoviens from Lisieux, the capital of the ancient Gaulish tribe of the Lexovii. Witness also Bourg (Gironde), pronounced bour, with its Bourcais, as against Bourg (Ain), pronounced bourk, with its Bressans or Bourgeois.

Opposed to the various Bourgs, one has Bourges, the ancient capital of the Province of Berry, which city houses Berruyers, to contrast with the Berrichons dwelling in the Province itself. These, to be sure, seem not of learned derivation.

The inhabitants of Saint-Dizier, called Bragards, are in a class of their own with such anomalies as the Mexican Tapatíos from Guadalajara and, by extension, its State of Jalisco, and the Mexican Jarochos from the port of Veracruz (or, for that matter, Americans like the Hoosiers from the state of Indiana).

Further contrasting popular and learned, one has Dreux=Drouais or Durocasses, and Fontainbleau=Fontainbleens or Bellifontains. Entraygues dwelt in by Entrignons, Saint-Malo harboring Malouins, and even Saint-Lô with its Saint-Lois or Saint-Loins impress me as being popular; but when the latter spawns Laudiniens one has a horse of another color (hors d'un autre couleur).

The author instances the startling Collioure with the concomitant

Colliourenchs. This city in the Department of Pyrenees-Orientales shares this ending at least with the city of Vinça with its Vinçan-enchs; hence this strange ending may be dialectically ordained. Here we have another source of variant derivatives.

But of all French toponyms, Eu with its Eudois has my heart. Why? Because Eu started life with the noble name of Augusta which has been attrited to a single vowel (just as the French month of Août, another simple vowel, began its existence as Augustus).

An inhabitant name which in the feminine form has become an English noun is Limousine (from Limoges, which also has Limouge-aud). Limousin is really the inhabitant name for someone from the ancient French province of Limousin, just as Nivernais, denoting those from Nevers, was also a combined province and province-inhabitant name. Alas, how have the mighty fallen: the Limousin dialect, "now a mere patois," was considered by the troubadours to be the purest form of Provençal (and that doesn't cover the whole story of Limousin).

To use the jargon of linguistics, French toponyms must be treated diachronically rather than synchronically: one must examine their past history to better understand their present form.

I wonder what they call denizens of La Négresse, near Dax and Biarritz?

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