

ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ
ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ



Αλλάζοντας τον χάρτη
Ζητήματα μετονομασιών
στη Μεσόγειο,
19ος-20ός αιώνας

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Η ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ ΤΟΥ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟΥ ΚΡΑΤΟΥΣ

DIMITRIS DIMITROPOULOS – ELENI KYRAMARGIOU –
YANNIS PAPAONDYLIS

New names – New map:
renaming settlements in Greece, 1831-2011

On May 9, 1822, just fourteen months after the start of the Revolution and a few days after the conclusion of the first National Assembly, the first decree stipulating the renaming of a settlement becomes the fifteenth law to be ratified by the newly-established Greek state.¹ The original toponym, Piada, is first silently discarded in favour of a version that sounds more Greek (Pediada, which means ‘plain’) and is subsequently replaced by Epidaurus, a name derived from the ancient Greek past; thus, a current and practical toponym is abandoned for the sake of powerful symbolism. The law aimed to honour the place where the founding act of the Greek state was signed by upgrading its status from housing settlement to city, by granting it an exemption from the *dekati* tax, thus offering an economic advantage, but most importantly, by rewarding the place and its people with a name which ties them directly to antiquity. It is the beginning of a practical change, an adaptation and an integration of place into the needs of the fledgling state, the start of a race to subjugate the map to national priorities, through linguistic embellishment and the erasure of bothersome traces left by the history of the place.

In the years that followed, the Bavarian Regency selected “euphonious” toponyms from the ancient and Byzantine tradition for the multi-settlement, consolidated Municipalities, which were created in an effort to connect the

1. Archives of the Greek Regeneration [Resurgence], v. 1, Athens 1857 (²Athens 1971), p. 169.

new Greek state with ancient Greece and to break with the Ottoman past. In particular, in the organisation of local government, a selective renaming of Prefectures, Provinces, and the capitals of Municipalities was implemented. In this way, the toponymic map of the newly founded Kingdom was modified, at least on an institutional level, without specific organisation and systematic justification.

After the second half of the nineteenth century, the issue of toponyms became inextricably linked with the administrative organisation of the state and the reaffirmation of its national characteristics. Even though it would be an exaggeration to talk about a comprehensive public dialogue around the preservation or replacement of toponyms, it was during this period that the general framework which shaped future management of the issue was established. Its main element consisted of gradually transforming toponyms from “mere geographical terms into political slogans” around the time of the development of Balkan nationalism and the drawing of new border lines in the Balkan Peninsula.² The annexation of Epirus and Macedonia after 1913 and Thrace after 1919-1920 by the Greek state, along with the Asia Minor Catastrophe, with the subsequent population exchange, constituted the “national time which defined national territory”.

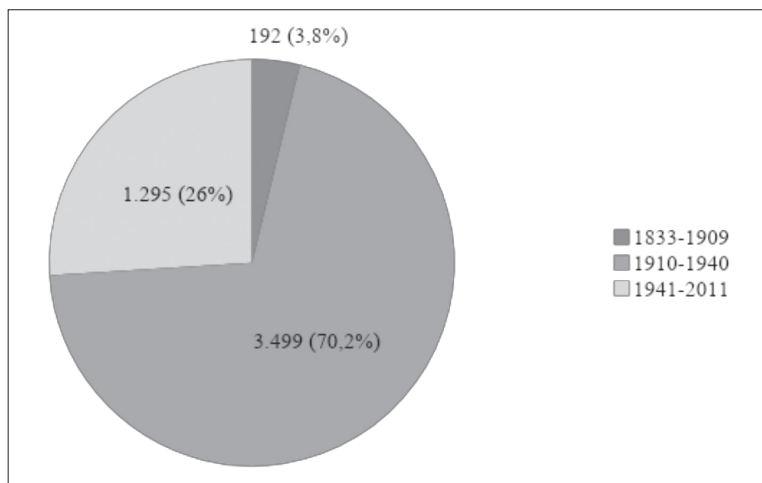
From the creation of the Greek state until 2011, a total of 4.981 settlement name replacements were implemented and published in the *Official Government Gazette*.³ These replacements can be divided into three periods. The first

2. In the Balkans in general, toponymic change is associated with the rise of nationalism and the establishment of nation-states, since similar practices were employed in a number of countries. The “mix of populations” and conflicting Balkan nationalisms led the newly founded states to take an increasing interest in the place-naming process. On “division”, the “mix of population” and the climate of the time, see A. Politis, *Ρομαντικά Χρόνια. Ιδεολογίες και Νοοτροπίες στην Ελλάδα 1830-1880* [The Romantic Years. Ideologies and Mentalities in Greece, 1830-1880], Athens ³2003, especially pp. 26-27.

3. The sum of the name changes in the period 1913-1997 can be found in the digital repository of the National Hellenic Research Foundation [<http://pandektis.ekt.gr/pandektis/> under the title “Name changes of Settlements in Greece” and is accessible to the public (last updated: 3/6/2020)]. During the research project “New Names – New Map: The issue of renaming settlements in Greece, 1831-2011”, new research was conducted and all the name changes of the periods 1833-1913 and 1997-2011 were discovered. These name changes are expected to be uploaded on the research project’s web site and they will be accessible to the public. It is worth noting that, according to the most recent count by the Hellenic Statistical Authority, in 2015 the Greek state comprised 13,621 settlements. Obviously this number has always fluctuated,

period begins in 1833, when the first toponym changes took place, and ends in 1909, when the Ministry of Interior created the Toponym Committee in order to deal with the issue of toponym changes in an organised manner. The second period tracks the period of operation of this Committee. Though the greatest part of the Committee’s work was completed by the early 1930s, the second period ends in 1940, as the relevant census of that year includes corrections to many toponyms. Therefore, it can be said that this completes a large cycle of toponym changes. The third and final period begins in 1941 and ends in 2011, with the “Kallikratis” administrative reform.⁴ Through each of these periods, there were common political, administrative, and ideological perspectives which influenced the renaming process.

Chart 1: Settlement renamings (1833-2011) per period



Source: *Official Government Gazette (1833-2011)*

due to the periodic establishment and dissolution of settlements, but it can be used indicatively to provide a general overview of the phenomenon. See <https://geodata.gov.gr/dataset/oikismoι> (last updated: 3/6/2020).

4. It must be noted that toponym changes do not exactly correspond to the number of settlements, as many places changed names more than once.

During the first period, 109 out of 192 toponym changes were identified as taking place in the early years of the Kingdom of Greece, specifically the Regency period, when the administrative division of the fledgling state was carried out. It becomes clear that the intention of state authorities was to rename only the largest settlements which, as a rule, served as the seat of newly founded municipalities. In 1833, for example, Zitouni, subsequently the seat of the municipality of Lamia in the prefecture of Phthiotis, was renamed Lamia. At the same time, the rest of the settlements within the same municipality, such as Fourka, Tsoupalata, Beki, and Sarmounaskli retained their names, even if it sounded bad or was of foreign origin.

A working hypothesis is that the main concern was to revive the ancient onomastic map through naming municipalities after places from antiquity and, in addition, the Hellenisation or antiquisation of the entire toponymic map. The renaming of numerous settlements throughout Greece required long-term and particularly thorough work, which could not be completed in the short term and which, perhaps for this reason, was confined to only the main towns and villages. An additional factor to be born in mind is the fluidity of state composition and organization during the early years of the kingdom of Greece. A case in point is the fact that only 31 out of the 109 settlements retained their new name, in contrast to the remaining 78, which continued to be referred to by their old name in official documents, as early as 1836.

Very few toponym changes deviated from the rule of deriving names from the period of classical antiquity. Among the exceptions were mainly Roman, Byzantine, and Frankish names (e.g., Apia, Eksamilion, and Santorini), toponyms derived from names of saints (e.g., Agia Paraskevi, Agios Georgios), as well as other ancient-sounding changes (e.g., from Kalamata to Kalamai, and from Tripolitsa to Tripolis). As can be seen from the map, the areas in which the most name changes took place were Argolis and Corinth which, both during that period and for a while after, were unified into a single administrative entity. Almost a quarter of the name changes until 1909, specifically 50, took place in that region, all of them between 1833 and 1835. This distribution of, perhaps, due to that fact that Nafplion was the first capital of the Greek state, and it was therefore imperative that the link to the ancient past be emphasised. Moreover, this

link could be established relatively easily, as it constituted one of the regions with known archaeological findings and remnants. The same was true of the Cyclades and Arcadia, which followed with 23 and 22 toponym changes, respectively.

Not many toponym changes are noted in the areas which subsequently became part of Greek territory. For example, Larisa is among the areas with the fewest toponym changes, despite the Turkish etymological origin of nearly all its settlements. There were only nine toponym changes in that area by 1909, which the rest took place mainly during the Interbellum, several years after incorporation into Greece. With just seven, Laconia also had minimal toponym changes, perhaps due to the tension between the local leadership in the region of Mani and central administration during the early years of the kingdom of Greece, when most toponym changes took place. Finally, the lack of toponym changes in certain prefectures can only be accounted for in the case of Evia which, despite being part of the Greek sovereign state, was in practice incorporated in 1833, due to prolonged negotiations about reparations of Ottoman property.

Of particular importance for the study of toponym changes during the early twentieth century, and more generally for our research, is the archival material located at the Historical Archive of Antiquities and Restorations (Ministry of Culture). It consists of fifty letters of recommendation, issued between 1870 and 1914 by successive Director Generals who acted as heads of the Service, the topic of which was the attribution of toponyms, attached to which were the relevant municipal council resolutions and various covering letters. This material is of particular interest, as it demonstrates that the changes in the names of hamlets and municipalities, at least during that period, was not the exclusive initiative of central government, but a process which also began at the local level, through relevant petitions filed by municipal councils. These applications ended up at the Ministry of Interior, and were subsequently forwarded to the Archaeological Service, which was the body responsible for examining the historical accuracy of the recommended names and, more generally, for selecting suitable names on the basis of ancient or modern history and the topography of each area.⁵

5. Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Managing Directorate of the National Archive of Monuments, Historical Antiquity and Restoration Archive, Boxes 118 & 193. See also Alexandra

There were various reasons for submitting such a request. The main one was the “barbaric” origin of a toponym (usually turkish, albanian, or slavic), followed by the discrepancy between the current and historical or topographic names, sharing a name with another settlement, whether in the same or different region, and etymological proximity with colloquial terms bearing a negative or mocking meaning -e.g. the village Vlaka in Messinia, a word which probably means something entirely different in Slavic, but in Greek means “a stupid person”. Municipal councils either petitioned the authorities to identify suitable names or submitted specific recommendations. These mainly comprised names inspired by classical antiquity, and reflected the descriptions of the area by ancient geographers, such as Pausanias, foreign travellers such as Leake, or local intellectuals. For example, in 1870, the name “Aristomenis” had been proposed for the renaming of the village Mustafa Pasa in Messinia, in honour of the leader of the ancient Messinians during the Second Messinian War. Similarly, in 1898, in Platanos village in Achaia, the municipality proposed that it be renamed to Krathis, due to the village’s proximity to the namesake river, the name of which had already been changed back to its ancient one.

The special emphasis placed on classical antiquity when composing the new toponymic map is not surprising, as this was a central point of reference for the national imaginary of the Greek nation state from its inception. In the resolutions and decrees of municipal councils, the erasure of foreign toponyms as often characterised as an issue of national importance and a debt to ancient forebears. The foreign names brought to memory the years of “slavery” and “tyranny”, namely the period of Ottoman rule, and were an insult to the Christian faith and dignity of the Greek people.

Though the process of toponym changes was cloaked in the requisite scientific legitimacy, with the cooperation of the Archaeological Service, the results were poor. The discrepancy between the archival material and the official data of the Ministry of Interior showed that very few petitions by municipal councils were accepted during that period, even following approval by the Director General of the Archaeological Service. In fact, in a few cases, the effect was exactly the opposite, namely a name was changed despite Archaeological Service having previously disapproved of the endeavour.

Alexandri, «Names and emblems: Greek archaeology, regional identities and national narratives at the turn of 20th century», *Antiquity* 76 (2002), pp. 191-199.

These data show that the process of changing the name of a municipality of settlement was particularly complex and perhaps necessitated broad consensus between the administrative bodies involved.

The year 1909 marked the beginning of the systematization of national policy in relation to the question of toponyms. The decision to dissolve multi-township municipalities in the early twentieth century, would bring to the fore once again the totality of foreign-sounding and cacophonous toponyms which had, up until that moment, been concealed by the ancient Greek municipal names. In order to address this problem, the Ministry of Interior proceeded, in 1909, to the institution of a “Committee for the study of Greek toponyms and the verification for the historical reasons behind them”. The institution of the committee entered the issue of toponymic changes in the second period. The new committee would opine on the change of both “foreign” and “cacophonous” names of “no historical value”, including for toponyms which had been changed since the foundation of the Greek state, which had, for various reasons, meanwhile been judged to be unsuitable. The above tendencies were reflected in the makeup of the Committee. Chaired by N.G. Politis, the work of finding “pleasant-sounding and beautiful” names was undertaken by university professors, functionaries of the Archaeological Service, intellectuals, and high-ranking civil servants with census and cartographic duties.⁶

The change of the frontier line of the Greek state, following the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, signaled not only the territorial but also the ideological expansion of the Greek state. The Great Idea of a Greece spread over 2 continents and 5 seas started to dominate the plans and the goals of the Greek political leadership. Simultaneously, in the “New Countries”, the laws of the Greek state were already been implemented. In 1917, Law No 1051 approved institutionally the procedure of name-giving already in force in the rest of the Kingdom. In Macedonia and Epirus, the communities with a “foreign” or “bad-sounding” name were the overwhelming majority, and the need to rename them was considered imperative. From 1915 to 1920, the Committee approved 168 renamings, 25 of which concerned Macedonia, while only one concerned Thrace.

6. *Government Gazette*, Issue 125, June 8th 1909.

In 1919, the Committee issued a circular, stressing the need to speed up the whole process, as the foreign names of settlements “contaminate and mar the face of our beautiful country” and allow for disadvantageous ethnological conclusions. Conclusions, indeed, which could be used mainly to the detriment of the *greekness* of the part of Macedonia which had been included into the Greek state. The circular of 1919 demonstrates the determination for the creation of a new toponymic map which would be more “Neo-Greek”. During the next few years, the political changes would militate in favor of this decision, speeding up the process of change of toponyms.

The annexation of Eastern and Western Thrace into the Greek Kingdom in 1919 signaled the actual transition of the name-changing process from the level of scientific study to that of urgent political decision. The toponymic change in Thrace did not follow the lines set by the Committee’s instructions, although at first there was an attempt to abide by them, through the setting up of a special three-member Committee. In 1922, the Ministry of the Interior proceeded overnight to the radical change of toponyms as “it was not an arbitrary alteration, but a restoration of historical accuracy in the toponyms of this country”. As a result, 381 towns and villages were renamed in Western Thrace in 1921.

The Asia Minor Catastrophe signaled the end of the Great Idea on an ideological level while also signaling a huge shift in the socio-political reality of the country, no aspect of which was left unaffected. The shifts that followed included the toponym change process. The fluid situation in Macedonia and Thrace was combined with a period of crisis in the internal political life, which was fed by long-standing military entanglement. These new territories were still disputed by neighboring countries, while their foreign-speaking populations constituted another factor of destabilization. The change of toponyms, regarding at least the settlement network, appeared as the fastest and most effective solution in order to hellenize the map, on an administrative level at first. The need to complete the process as quickly as possible was obvious, yet not always attainable. The important thing here is that the whole process was not connected to the Committee any longer. The political decision taken had bypassed the literary pursuits of its members. Although time-consuming at first glance, the whole process actually took a mere fifteen days to complete. The hurried nature of the name changes can be also seen in the usual practice of translating “foreign-like toponyms”

or in the corruption of existing names towards a more Greek-like version. Empirical evidence proves the size of the phenomenon: between 1926 and 1928, 2.579 name changes took place in the whole of the Greek state, most of which in Macedonia. To get a notion of the number of toponym changes that took place during this period, it's worth noting that in the entire country 4.451 name changes took place from 1913 to 1961; that means that more than half of them took place between 1926 and 1928. Greek Macedonia was the centre of this activity. In the Prefecture of Drama, 208 name changes were recorded in the period between 1926 and 1928, 123 in the Prefecture of Thessaloniki, and 219 in the Prefecture of Kilkis.

In 1929, the new map of Greece was ready; 2.579 villages had a different name which “sounded nice and was Greek”. The end of the Great Idea was followed by the years of national integration, renaming had been a priority of a Greek state trying to homogenize and define its territory by eradicating the traces of the presence of population groups which constituted a disharmony in the historic-geographic continuum of the uniform Greek national state. The change in the map was accompanied by the completion of the exchange of populations, which meant that in the greatest part of the inhabited territory Greek speaking population was now prevalent. Through these two complementary processes, the sovereignty of the Greek state in Macedonia and Thrace was solidified. Toponyms changed in a fragmented and hasty way, without, more often than not, exhaustive historic and linguistic study, under the pressure of the territorial acquisitions of the 20th century, when the “Principle of Nationalities” was considered to find full justification on the diplomatic level. The whole effort constituted an inevitable nation-building process in the context of the homogenization and integration of the new regions within the national state.

Finally, during the third period — between 1941 and 2011, a total of 1.294 toponym changes took place, most of which relating to the wish to be pleasant sounding and easy to pronounce, or to correct toponyms assigned in the past. For example, Gribovo or Grimovo, north of Naoussa, was renamed Lefkogeia in 1929, in 1940 it was renamed Nea Strantzza, before being once again renamed Rodakinia in 1954. Gropino would be changed into Tropino, which in turn would be renamed Valtolivado in the 1940 census, once more rejecting this name in favour of Dafni twenty years later.

The responsibility for the toponym changes was, in June 1945, taken on by the Council of Toponyms, which was instituted by the Minister of Interior and which remains active to this day, comprised of administrators and with mainly ratifying and bureaucratic duties.

For the vast majority of the political and scholarly world of the 20th century supporting the dominant narrative regarding the historic continuity and self-identity of the Greek territory and its inhabitants, the toponymic issue was interpreted either as a mere accident suffered by the area during its century-long historic trajectory, without any repercussions whatsoever on its racial character, or, in the “felicitous” case of the continuation or restoration of the Greek name, as proof of the *greekness* of the area and its people, despite all vicissitudes. Therefore, in all its linguistic forms, the toponymic issue went hand in hand with Greek nationalism, and it was used accordingly in order to serve the same purpose. It reflected the choices and the contradictions of the “national question”.