PROSOPOGRAPHIE UND SOZIALGESCHICHTE

Studien zur Methodik und Erkenntnismöglichkeit der kaiserzeitlichen Prosopographie

Kolloquium Köln 24. – 26. November 1991

Herausgegeben von

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SONDERDRUCK
Im Buchhandel nicht erhältlich

1993

BÖHLAU VERLAG KÖLN WIEN WEIMAR

INHALTSVERZEICHNIS

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AETERNUMQUE TENET PER SAECULA NOMEN: PROPERTY, PLACE-NAMES AND PROSOPOGRAPHY

Edward Champlin

In the sixth book of the Aeneid, at the urging of the Sibyl, Aeneas buries his recently dead companion Misenus with great honour, raising a huge mound as a tomb, on which he places the arms, the oar and the trumpet of his friend. The tomb lies at the foot of a lofty mountain, which is now called Misenus after him and will bear the name eternally through the ages: *qui nunc Misenus ab illo / dicitur aeternumque tenet per saecula nomen*[1]. For Vergil as for other poets such aetiologies were a compressed and highly charged evocation of Italic history, a link between the present and the heroic past, and within 150 lines he chose to echo the solemn theme of the *aeternum nomen* in the tomb of another companion untimely dead, Palinurus (6. 381): eternal or not, the Punta di Miseno and the Capo di Palinuro are with us yet. There is a magic to *cognomina prisca locorum*, a touch of personal immortality. An altar on the island of Issa, off the coast of Dalmatia, bears a solemn dedication to Jupiter Optimus Maximus Augustus from one, C. Valius Festus, the creator of a vineyard in that place which is now called Valianus after him and will bear the name eternally through the ages: *qui nunc Valianus ab isto / dicitur aeternumque tenet per saecula nomen*[2]. Those are the words not only of a Roman who knew his Vergil, but of a man of property who had been deeply moved by him.

However, the romance of toponomastics, or (in English) place-name studies, has not much touched the hearts of ancient historians, although some excellent handbooks do exist, carefully setting out the evidence from literature, inscriptions, itineraries and the like.[3] Study devoted specifically to microtoponomy, that is to the names not of cities and towns, mountains or promontories, but of farms and fields and other strictly local landmarks, is all but non-existent, the data being so sparse. Yet what data there are have seldom been properly considered. My purpose today is a double one, to sketch the potential value of place-names, and particularly to draw your attention to a great reservoir of untapped evidence. When I say place-names it must be understood

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[1] *At pius Aeneas ingenti mole sepulcrum / imponit suaque arma viro remumque tubamque / monte sub aerio, qui nunc Misenus* (etc.): Aen. 6. 232-235.

[2] CIL III 6423 = CLE 275: *I.O.M. Aug. sacrum / C. Valius Festus conditor vineae huius / loci qui nunc Valianus a Festo* [L. Valla, Buecheler: *ab isto*] *dicitur / aeternumque tenet per saecula nomen / voto suscepto aram adampliavit et / tauro immolando dedicavit.*

[3] E.g., A.L.F. Rivet and C. Smith, The Place-Names of Roman Britain, London 1979; or E. Manni, Geografia fisica e politica della Sicilia antica, Rome 1981.

from the outset that I will refer here to microtoponyms, unless I indicate otherwise, and specifically to farms and fields and other agricultural units: since the vast majority of these bore the names of owners past or present, they may prove interesting to a colloquium on prosopography and social history.

We may best begin by dividing the evidence into two groups: that which is ancient and that which is not.

Of the first, there are of course scores of stray references to the names of properties in our literary sources - *agri, villae, fundi* (above all), *praedia, massae, saltus*, and so forth - to which can be added hundreds more found in inscriptions. More often than not, we know the names of their owners as well. Their prime use has been as bits of evidence to be tabulated in studies of the property of indviduals or of families, and the names by which they were known are irrelevant. My interest in them is somewhat different: when one person owns a property which bears the name of another, that establishes a link between two families (at least), one which is not merely legal, through contract or inheritance, but temporal as well. That is to say, your *fundus Baianus* merely tells me that you hold property at Baiae, but your *fundus Cornelianus* at Baiae tells me something of its history. This is all rather simple perhaps, but the link is usually ignored, even by prosopographers.[4]

Ideally, what we should like to have is the *forma censualis* described by Ulpian, in which owners registered the name of each property, in what *civitas* and *pagus* that property lay, and the names of its two nearest neighbours.[5] Such a register, if we had it, would be a historical goldmine when plotted on a modern map, revealing not just the situation at the time of the bureaucratic snapshot but also, through place-names, something of its history, of the rise and fall of families and the fortunes of the rural economy. The closest surviving documents are the great alimentary tables of Veleia and Ligures Baebiani, which confine themselves to the names, properties and neighbours of the landowners who contributed to the schemes. Just what treasures lay hidden in these documents was demonstrated by the posthumous monograph of F.G. de Pachtere on the Veleia tablet. By close analysis of the names - names of owners

[4] For instance, Cornelius Nepos tells us that Atticus' house in Rome - an ancient edifice with pleasant grounds on the Quirinal which he had inherited from his uncle - was the *domus Tamphiliana* (Att. 13,2); Cicero names an otherwise unknown Baebius as a neighbour (Att. 13,45,1): surely this neighbour was a Baebius Tamphilus, member of a noble family which was (by no coincidence) in genteel decline between a praetor of 168 B.C. and a praetor and proconsul of the age of Augustus. Or again, take two boundary stones from the suburb of Rome: one, from the Tiber bank two miles outside the Porta Portuense, names two neighbouring estates, the *horti Cocceiani* and the *horti Titiani* of Nonia C.f.; the other, from Trastevere, refers to what are obviously the same properties as the *horti* of M. Titius and the *horti Cocceiani* (ILS 5999, 6000). These are clearly relevant to the families of the future emperors Otho and Nerva, through Otho's brother Titianus and that man's son Cocceianus.

[5] *Nomen fundi cuiusque; et in qua civitate et in quo pago sit; et quos duos vicinos proximos habeat* (Dig. 50,15,4).

and neighbours, of properties and *pagi* - de Pachtere was able to produce an imaginative masterpiece of historical topography: to draw up a rough map of the *pagi* of the region and to correlate the nature of the properties with their location and altitude; to demonstrate the gradual erosion of the Ligurian heritage in the face of Roman colonization, and its areas of resistance; to show where and how smallholdings declined and *latifundia* spread over the land; and to trace how old families grew and flourished, or passed away to be replaced by alien and often libertine intruders.[6] Inspired by this, some ten years ago, on a much smaller scale, I tried to elicit from the far less satisfactory tablet of Ligures Baebiani a rather different picture for a different region, a portrait of a remarkably stable, well-entrenched, and cohesive rural elite.[7]

In short, with luck and the proper evidence we can assemble a rough and skeletal prosopography of landholders past and present in a region, and from that we can deduce something about the pattern of landholding and even of settlement in that area.

I come then to the second type of toponomastic evidence, that which is not ancient. Place-names live in the longue durée, they change with astonishing slowness. Thus the standard modern introduction to English place-names can assert that, "The vast majority of our old place-names, whether of cities, towns, villages, parishes or even farms, were in existence by the time of the Norman conquest" - that is to say, they are (or were) Celtic, Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian.[8] Here new problems arise, not simply in the uncertain chances of survival of ancient place-names after the fall of Rome in the West, but in the long centuries of usage and change, orthographical and linguistic, which transformed many of those that did survive, often out of all recognition. Here also we must venture into quite unfamiliar libraries and archives, and sooner or later we must place ourselves under the guidance of historians and linguists expert in the mediaeval and modern periods.

But again, treasures wait to be unearthed. To take one instance, a vast classified repertorium of the general toponymy of modern France has been published very recently, the first volume of which is devoted to pre-Celtic, Celtic and Roman place-names (here obviously toponyms, not microtoponyms): of these, well over 5000 of the places discussed, mainly towns and villages, derive from the names of Roman landowners, not to mention hundreds more which recall pre-Roman

[6] F.G. de Pachtere, La table hypothécaire de Veleia. Étude sur la propriété foncière dans l'Apennin de Plaisance, Paris 1920.

[7] Owners and neighbours at Ligures Baebiani, Chiron 11, 1981, 239-264. That paper was also inspired by P. Veyne, La table des Ligures Baebiani et l'institution alimentaire de Trajan, MEFRA 69, 1957, 81-135, 70, 1958, 177-241. For an example of just how much more could be done on the region, see J. Patterson, Samnites, Ligurians and Romans, Circello 1988; he too emphasizes the difference of Samnite landholding patterns.

[8] K. Cameron, English Place-Names, London ^{3}1977, 18.

owners.[9] That is to say, where settlement patterns were not disrupted, the name of a Roman proprietor as reflected in his *fundus* has passed to a late-antique villa and a mediaeval domain, and has then been taken over by a village on the land, a phenomenon which can in fact be observed already in Roman times. It remains then a task to correlate these names with other ancient and mediaeval records, particularly inscriptions. As a model of what can be done when such data are combined with a knowledge of ancient epigraphy and modern topography, I would hold up the book of M. Calzolari on the plain of Modena in Roman times, with its subtitle of "studies in topography and toponomastics".[10] In the third chapter of that book, the author is able to demonstrate with striking vividness how (for instance) the spread of place-names derived from Roman landowners corresponds almost exactly with the areas of centuriation, how they rarely overlap from one century into another (an observation worth considering), and how colonists from central Italy completely drove out the former Celtic inhabitants.[11]

It is the cardinal rule of place-name studies to discover the very earliest attested spellings of a name, to seize it at the earliest possible stage in its transformation from its original to its most recent and sometimes unrecognizable form. In England, paradoxically, where most names antedate the Norman Conquest, relatively few spellings survive from before 1066 because so many documents have been lost. Other countries have been far more fortunate, particularly Italy, from which I shall take my examples. There exist of course vast archives of documents, both published and unpublished, ranging from the registers of monasteries, cathedrals, and even parish churches, to saints' lives, the letters of popes and bishops, histories and canonical collections, which record the particulars of life in late antiquity and the early middle ages (up to, say, 1100). For instance, for our purposes, the published registers of the great Benedictine abbeys at Farfa and Subiaco alone mention the names of hundreds of their properties in central Italy, most of which probably go back centuries.[12] Thirty-five years ago, working on the British School field survey of Southern Etruria in Roman times, Frederiksen and Ward-Perkins noted in passing "the wealth of detailed information" from mediaeval sources which had been "hardly anywhere ... worked out in

[9] E. Negre, Toponymie générale de la France I. Formations préceltiques, celtiques, romaines, Geneva 1990, 429-460 (nos. 6352-11640).

[10] M. Calzolari, La pianura modenese nell'età romana. Ricerche di topografia e di toponomastica, Modena 1981.

[11] Also to be noted is the excellent paper of Y. Burnand, Epigraphie et anthropotoponymie. Contribution à l'histoire social rurale de l'Empire Romain, in: Akten des IV. Internationalen Kongresses für Griechische und Lateinische Epigraphik, Wien 1964, 51-62 (a reference I owe to Prof. Christol). The author further stresses the contribution of archaeology.

[12] I. Giorgi, U. Balzani, Il regesto di Farfa di Gregorio di Catina, Rome 1878-1904; L. Allodi - G. Levi, Il regesto sublacense dell'undecimo secolo, Rome 1885.

detail on the ground", and they cited as example a list compiled by Tomassetti of some 150 estate-names from the immediate neighbourhood of the rather unimportant municipium of Nepet.[13] That list could be multiplied many times over, and the information from mediaeval sources generally remains still unworked out in detail, whether on the ground or in the study.

Let me give you first a few brief but intentionally striking samples of the raw material available. A pontifical charter survives, inscribed in marble and affixed, probably in the seventh century, to the titular church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo on the Caelian hill in Rome, confirming that church in the possession of various properties in the Campagna, which it lists in what it calls a *notitia fundorum*. Among the twenty *fundi* named and located in the document, two catch the eye, a *fundus Capitonis* near the 3rd milestone on the Via Ardeatina, and (listed right after it) a *fundus Fonteianus* at the same spot.[14] These properties must once have belonged to the Fonteii Capitones, a senatorial family from Tusculum which reached the praetorship early in the second century B.C., waited almost 150 years to advance to the consulship under the second triumvirate, and died out with the Julio-Claudians: an estate at the third milestone presumably held their tomb.[15] The great G.B. De Rossi, who published the inscription, mentions nothing of this, nor does any work on imperial prosopography. That is because 500 years lie between fact and evidence, and the passage from ancient to mediaeval, pagan to Christian, but the lapse of time does not make the fact any less sure.

Some further examples, briefly. Among the handful of local properties of the church of S. Andrea in Silice at Velitrae in the early middle ages were two *fundi*, *Gallicani* (sic) and *Squilla* (sic): together they point inevitably to the second century and to two men, father and son, both M. Gavius Squilla Gallicanus, ordinary consuls in 127 and 150, respectively. Senatorial at least since the days of Tiberius, the family is best attested by epigraphy at its native city, Verona, and in the great Bacchic inscription from Torrenova in the neighbourhood of Tusculum, but not thus far by

[13] M. Frederiksen - J.B. Ward-Perkins, The ancient road systems of the central and northern Ager Faliscus (Notes on Southern Etruria 2), PBSR 12, 1957, 67-208, at 193. The reference is to G. Tomassetti's "La Campagna romana antica, medioevale e moderna" in four volumes, Rome 1910-1926. Much more information is to be gleaned from a long series of articles by the same scholar which appeared under the general title "Della Campagna romana nel medio evo" in the Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria (ASRStP), running from 2 (1879) 1-35 to 30 (1907) 333-388.

[14] G.B. De Rossi, Charte pontificale gravée sur marbre. Bull.Arch. 1873, 40-46: *Fund. Capitonis via Ardeatina mil. III/Fnd. Fonteianus in int(egro) via ssta ml. ssto.*

[15] Tusculum: Cicero, Pro Fonteio 41. The last recorded members are C. Fonteius Agrippa (cos. 58), killed as legate of Moesia in 70 (PIR F 466); C. Fonteius Capito (cos. ord. 59; PIR F 471); and Fonteius Capito (?cos. ord. 67), killed as legate of Germania Inferior in 68 (PIR F 467/468).

any ancient source at Velitrae.[16] Again, an early 8th century papal register records different transactions involving properties of the *patrimonium Labicanum* near Tusculum; these include a *massa Iuniorum* and a *massa Silanis*, and of course the noble Iunii Silani, who died out under Vespasian, are attested at Tusculum.[17] But they must also have held suburban property at Tibur: no ancient text places them there, but an early mediaeval inscription recording properties at Tibur of the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore includes a *massa Silanis* and a *fundus Iunianellus*.[18]

Such isolated facts may be enlisted to supplement ancient evidence and indeed to put it in a new light. In one brief section of his excellent monograph on the organization of Roman brick production, T. Helen tried to show that four of the major estates which produced bricks in the early empire were to be located around the neighbouring towns of Ameria and Horta, near the confluence of the Tiber and the Nar. One of them, by its name, obviously lay near Horta, but the case for the other three was circumstantial.[19] Further proof of the hypothesis lay not in ancient documents, but in two papal confirmations of its possessions from the mid-tenth century which were preserved in the register of the monastery of S. Silvestro de Capite.[20] With this confirmation we can go on confidently to construct a nexus of country families in the first and early second centuries, large local landowners with common interests cemented by intermarriage, socially and economically dominant in the region and with great influence at Rome.[21] As it happens, much of this land fell into the patrimony of the emperor and ended up as property of the church.

[16] G. Tomassetti, Della Campagna Romana nel medio evo, III, ASRStP 2, 1879, 156. On the family see G. Alföldy, "Gallicanus noster", Chiron 9, 1979, 507-544.

[17] V.W. von Glanvell, ed., Die Kanonessammlung des Kardinals Deusdedit, Paderborn 1905, repr. Aalen, 1967, I. 364 ff, lib. III. 236, 219, 224; cf. Tomassetti, ASRStP 9, 1886, 416. Silani at Tusculum: CIL XIV 2720, 2500.

[18] Tomassetti, ib. 30, 1907, 385. As it happens, the same inscription mentions, among many other names, a *fundus Plautianus*, which is likewise named on the Charta Cornutiana of 471, and recalls the long-forgotten glory of the Plautii of Tibur, a family whose property had centuries before fallen by inheritance into the imperial house.

[19] T. Helen, The Organization of Roman Brick Production, Helsinki 1975, 76-82. They are the *figlinae Caepionianae, Marcianae, Subortanae*, and *Ocianae*.

[20] F. Federici, Regesto del monastero di S. Silvestro de Capite, ASRStP 22, 1899, 213-300, at 281-282. Pope John XII mentions among the properties of the *massa Ortana* a *Moiana* and an *Occiana*; Agapitus II has among the properties of the *massa Maiana, territorio Ortano*, an *Occanum*. Occiana/Occanum is clearly Occianae; Maiana/Moiana looks very much like Marcianae.

[21] "Figlinae Marcianae", Athenaeum 61, 1983, 257-264. In that study, which depended heavily on place-names, I tried to show (among other things) that the emperor Trajan had deep roots in the area, his mother [Marcia] being a daughter of the stoic senator Barea Soranus (cos. 52), who owned the eponymous *figlinae Marcianae* there. On further reflection, the argument seems to me stronger than ever.

Sometimes later sources may preserve such a body of material that we can work on a rather larger scale. I offer two examples. Both happen to derive from a single but very complex work, the *Liber Pontificalis*, a compilation begun in the 6th century which incorporated earlier material, since it is easily available and relatively familiar. Similar material is equally to hand in (say) the canonical collection of Deusdedit or the Register of Farfa, but it would require considerable patience to elicit.

One of the great families to rise with the principate was that of the Statilii Tauri. Founded by a general of Augustus who was, like Agrippa, remarkable for his very obscure origins and his exemplary loyalty, they died out with the Julio-Claudians. We know that they owned a house on the Palatine, gardens in the suburbs, and estates in Istria, while much can be gleaned about their wealth during their century of prominence from the over-400 epitaphs which survive from their tomb on the via Appia, recording their slaves and freedmen - one of whom was in charge of inheritances received by the family.[22] It is not difficult to imagine in what direction the wealth of the Statilii flowed: among the last of their house, one conspired against the emperor, one committed suicide after his gardens aroused the cupidity of the emperor's wife, and a third married the emperor's son.[23]

But we can say with assurance that much of the land of the Statilii remained in the imperial patrimony for 250 years, until the emperor Constantine gave it away. Among his massive donations to his new basilica Constantiniana at the Lateran, some 20 large properties both in Italy and overseas were assigned to the holy font (*donum sancto fonti*): listed side by side are a *massa Statiliana* in the territory of Cora, and a *massa intra Sicilia Taurana* in the territory of (probably) Palermo. (The latter may be compared with the massive estates acquired by Statilius' comrade Agrippa after their campaign with Octavian in Sicily.) St. John the Baptist at Alba further received a *possessio Statiliana*; the basilica of the Apostles at Capua, a *massa Statiliana* in the territory of Minturnae; the titulus of Pope Silvester in Rome, a *fundum Tauri* at Veii. I have no doubt that they (and probably others) are the fourth century remains of a great first century fortune, one which had passed from a lucky general through three generations of his descendants into the imperial patrimony and thence, after 250 years, into the possession of several churches favoured by the first Christian emperor (where, for all I know, vestiges may remain today).[24]

[22] I. Shatzman, Senatorial Wealth and Roman Politics, Brussels 1975, 399. CIL VI 6213-6640; inheritances, 6291.

[23] PW s.v. Statilius, 17, 37, and 45.

[24] These estates alone produced an income of over 1200 solidi per annum, and it can be suspected (given the state of the text as transmitted) that they are but the tip of the iceberg. LP 34,14, *massa Statiliana, territurio Corano, prest. sol. CCC; massa intra Sicilia Taurana, territurio Paramnense, praest. sol. D*; 30, *possessio Statiliana* (no location given, possibly at Alba, possibly at Cora, if it accompanies the estate immediately preceding it in the list,

My second example begins with the inscription from an aqueduct near Viterbo and Ferentium, in Etruria, a text which traces the course of the *aqua Vegetiana* from its source over some six miles to its destination, the *villa Calvisiana* at Aquae Passerianae.[25] The owner of both aqueduct and villa is named as the consularis Mummius Niger Valerius Vegetus, the member of a well-known senatorial family whose consulship may be assigned to the reign of Hadrian.[26] The interest of the inscription lies in the fact that it names the estates over which the aqueduct passed and the owners from whom he purchased the right of way: 11 *fundi* owned by 7 men and 1 woman, all with local Etruscan connections and three or four of them senatorial in rank.[27]

Some centuries later, when Innocent I was pope (402-417), a certain *inlustris femina* named Vestina made arrangements in her will for a titular church at Rome, to be dedicated to Saints Gervasius and Protadius. Among her gifts for its support, as listed in the *Liber Pontificalis*, were nine urban and six rural properties. In an intricate study published some years ago, R.E.A. Palmer demonstrated the strong likelihood that three of Vestina's six estates were to be identified with four of the farms over which Vegetus' aqueduct passed, and that two more of the six lay very near by. This required some emendation of the text, but there was more: Palmer showed further that the urban properties which Vestina donated - 6 houses, 2 baths, and a bakery - clustered near her church in the Vicus Longus, in the Sixth Region of the city, and that the greatest private house in their vicinity was none other than the mansion of the Valerii Vegeti.[28] That is, in the age of the Antonines a great Roman aristocrat or his heirs bought up farms near to one of his villas in Southern Etruria; in the age of Honorius, another great Roman aristocrat, heir to the first, at last relinquished some of those lands, leaving them, along with ancestral properties in

in which case cf. above and below) *prest. sol. LXX*; 31, *massa Statiliana, territurio Menturnense, prest. sol. CCCXV*; 33, *fundum Tauri, territurio Beientano, prest. sol. XLII*. Also to be noted are: LP 34,3 (to the titulus of Equitius in Rome), *fundum Valerianum, territurio Sabinense, qui praestat sol. LXXX; ... fundum Corbianum, territurio Corano, qui praest. sol. LX* (cf. the conspirator T. Statilius Corvinus, cos. 45, presumed grandson of the orator M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus, cos. 31 B.C.); 14, *massa Statiana, territurio Sabinense, prest. sol. CCCL*; 33, *fundum Statianum, territurio Tribulano, prest. sol. LXVI et tremissium*.

[25] CIL XI 3003 + p. 1313 = ILS 5771 = FIRA² 106 o.

[26] The statement here avoids numerous problems: R. Syme, Antistius Rusticus, a consular from Corduba, Historia 32, 1983, 359-374, at 372-374 = Roman Papers IV, Oxford 1988, 278-294, at 292-294; otherwise, PIR² M 707.

[27] The region was one of spas: it may have offered to the elite not agricultural investment but pleasures similar to those which they sought in the suburb of Rome or on the Bay of Naples, though on a smaller scale.

[28] LP 42,3-6. R.E.A. Palmer, Roman shrines of female chastity from the caste struggle to the papacy of Innocent I, RSA 4, 1974, 113-159, at 146-156.

Rome and considerable plate and jewelry, to the establishment and upkeep of a new Christian church.

I apologize for dwelling at such length on examples, but not for emphasizing their origins: late antique and early mediaeval church records are simply a more important source for ancient microtoponyms than are the ancient literary works and inscriptions themselves. Much private wealth, both goods and chattels, passed over the centuries, either directly, or indirectly through the emperor, into the possession of the church. Outside of Egypt, private and imperial archives have long since crumbled into dust, but the church has survived and along with it a mass of evidence about its holdings and their names. Embedded in those records are the fossil names of thousands of long-dead Roman landowners and indications of where their properties lay.

Very seldom can we point to the moment at which a place-name was created, be it at initial conquest or settlement by the Romans, at colonization, at census, or at whim. Names change, and names from different eras coexist, and without an inscription we can seldom point to a single person as owner at a particular time. Nevertheless, if we accept such chronological imprecision, toponomastics seem to offer value in two related areas, the study of land-holding and the study of settlement patterns. Settlement patterns, the macrocosm, I have not much dealt with, and their preoccupations are more ethnic (and linguistic) than prosopographical. But as regards land-holding, place-names have two contributions to make to social history through prosopography, as we have seen in detail. First, they may help us to sketch a picture of the scattered agricultural holdings of a family or even of an individual. And since in general the *latifundia* of any substantial landowner were geographically dispersed, such information is very hard to come by, reliant as it is mainly on deductions from epigraphy and on the chance literary record of a Melania or a Trimalchio. Second, and more fruitful, place-names when matched with epigraphy and archaeology may help us to reconstruct a map of property-holding in a particular region, potentially a three-dimensional map in the sense that it reveals to us shifts over time, through the passage of property from one owner to another. Place-names then have a real contribution to make to local history, and since the great majority of Roman place-names are personal, that contribution is prosopographical in nature.