THE POLITICAL PROBLEM OF BI- AND MULTILINGUAL MARITIME NAMES IN MAPS

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Abstract

One of the problems confronting the cartographer, and in particular the names specialist, relates to seas which carry allonyms, i.e. different names. This is especially acute if these names originate in different linguistic environments, but even more so if they are conferred by different, and perhaps even opposing, political systems.

This paper was sparked off by the as yet unresolved tension following the request, by the Republic of Korea, at the 6th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (1992), to recognize the name Tong Hae (East Sea) alongside the name Sea of Japan – a move strongly resisted by Japan. It deals briefly and systematically with multilingual maritime names, sorted roughly according to the severity of the toponymic problem, as follows:
(1) Unification of names by official consent or mute assent;   (2) bi- or multilingual names by consent as endonyms;
(3) uncontested exonymic names conferred e.g. by explorers or invaders;   (4) politically-induced name changes;   (5) toponymic-maritime conflict or political rivalry.

A Case Study

One of the problems confronting the cartographer, and in particular the names specialist, relates to seas, whether open or inland, which carry allonyms, i.e. different names. Apart from the matter of map scale, this is especially acute if these names originate in different linguistic environments, but even more so if they are conferred by different, and perhaps even opposing, political systems.

The present paper was sparked off by the formally as yet unresolved tension following the request, by the Republic of Korea, at the 6th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (1992), to recognize the name Tong Hae (East Sea) alongside the well-established name Sea of Japan – a move strongly resisted by Japan; this country demanded that only the latter name, today nearly universally accepted, appear in maps other than in Korean ones, because adding another name would only lead to confusion.

As a background to the discussions revolving around the names Tong Hae and Sea of Japan, and perhaps as a guide in future cases of a similar nature, the paper deals with a brief analysis of bi- or multi-lingual names applied to open seas or inland seas, i.e. large lakes – names which have been subject to international tension or given rise to international problems.

It would be natural for a country asking for a particular contested name to be recognized by the international community, to turn to an international tribunal for help. Both the International Hydrographic Office (IHO) and the United Nations might be valid arbitrators. But only in a very few cases has there been international intervention towards a toponymic settlement, and then with little success.

The Republic of Korea organized a number of seminars and symposia (ten to date) with the central topic either of naming the seas, or specifically the name Tong Hae (Korean for East Sea), the name preferred by Korea. To these meetings, toponymists from various countries – Western and East European – were invited ad personam, as well as representatives from Japan. From the latter country some academics attended, but no representative of an official or

other cartographic or toponymic institution. The focal point of practically all these symposia were maps, chiefly ancient and old but also of quite recent origin. The aim was to show the antiquity of the Korean names East Sea and Sea of Korea as displayed in maps. For over half a decade Japan did not respond in kind, until a few years ago when this country countered with old and new maps of its own, with the intention of proving that the name Sea of Japan has been accepted internationally – though not exclusively – by map makers all over the world.

Concerning arbitration, Korea, as mentioned above, turned to the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. However, this international organization (which has only advising powers, not executive or enforcing ones) "suggested that the relevant parties consult each other" [1], i.e. that the two opposing sides, the Republic of Korea and Japan, find a common acceptable solution.

The undersigned was invited several times by Korea within the series of symposia, and expressed the opinion, purely from a cartographic point of view – also supported by others – that since there is no agreement on a common name, and if scale permits, both names should be inserted in maps in the maritime space between Japan in the East and the Korean peninsula in the West, preferably in international waters. There are, of course, similar cases of bi- and multilingual allonyms in other seas in different parts of the world, some of which are being cited in this paper. But in general, a country producing a map or an atlas, usually inserts only one name for a given multilingual maritime or lacustrine entity – either an endonym (local name), or an exonym (conventional name) in the language of the map or atlas (for the definition of technical terms used in toponymy see [2]). Other proposals for a solution were offered, among them the primary suggestion to find one common name for this sea, to be agreed upon by both parties. Among the names proposed were Sea of Peace, Blue Sea, Sea of the Rising Sun and Middle Sea. No response was received from Japan, which amounted to rejection. A political representative of Japan in Israel personally expressed to the undersigned the concern of his country that the Korean move was intended to increase that country's political influence in the region with the aid of maps. In fact, at the Seventh Conference (1998) Japan claimed that the Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names was to deal only with technical matters, not with political questions [3].

A Systematic Approach

Turning now from the particular to the general, the paper deals systematically with multilingual maritime and lacustrine names. The formal status of these names will be dealt with later in the paper.

The examples presented below are sorted roughly according to the severity of the toponymic-political problem (if any), into the following categories:

1. Unification of names by official consent or mute assent;
2. bi- or multilingual names by consent as endonyms;
3. uncontested exonymic names given e.g. by explorers or invaders and later accepted as endonyms;
4. politically-induced name changes;
5. toponymic-maritime conflict or political rivalry.

Concerning case No. 5, it will be shown below that a geographical name could lead to actual – and not only toponymic-verbal – warfare. Finally it will often be the cartographer who supplies the (practical) solution.

We are dealing here with a matter of names standardization – a topic forming the background of the work of the U.N. Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names mentioned above – and mostly with cases involving two or more countries. The primary (but hardly attainable) aim is the "one object – one name" principle. But while national standardization of geographical names can be imposed by a national authority, such as a government-installed board of geographical names, true international standardization can be attained only by cooperation and goodwill. If such goodwill cannot be achieved, and there is no appropriate ruling, there remains another means of obtaining *de facto*, if not *de jure*, recognition of allonyms by the international community. This, in certain instances, is mapping, and will be briefly dealt with in the final paragraph.

Unification by Official Consent or by Mute Assent

There seem to be few cases answering to this classification. Probably the best-known example of cooperation between countries – although involving only the unification of the spelling of a name – is the maritime name of the sea arm between southern Sweden and Norway and northern Denmark. In the past his was spelt respectively Skagerak, Skagerack and Skagerrak by the three countries until, in 1970, they agreed on the uniform and standardized name Skagerrak, now used by all three.

A different case is that of the lowest water body on Earth, sharing its lacustrine surface – at the (rapidly falling) elevation of, today, some 425 metres below Mediterranean mean sea level (m.s.l.) between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The former calls it officially by one of its biblical names, Yam haMelah, ים המלח, (pronounced Yam Hamelach), the Salt Sea, while the latter's name for it is al-Bahr al-Mayyit, آلبحر آلميت, the Dead Sea, and also Bahr Lut, بحر لوط , Sea of Lot (Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt; see Genesis 19). Bahr, Sea, is pronounced Bachr, with the ch roughly as in German *ach* or Scottish *loch*. But since this is an internationally well-known geographical feature, both countries use the same English exonym for it, namely Dead Sea, used also in translation into nearly all other languages. Its specific component "dead" points to the fact that owing to the extremely high salt content of its water, some 33 percent by weight, it admits no living organism.

Bi- or Multilingual Names by Consent or by Mute Assent

For this class of names it is easier to find representatives. The English Channel can serve as a first example. Its French name is la Manche, i.e. the sleeve (and this, as an exonym, is also its German name, Ärmelkanal). Both English Channel and la Manche are endonyms, and no country challenges the other concerning its use.

Another example, not very far from the first, is the sea which extends between Germany in the South, the eastern counties of England in the West and Danish Jylland (or Jutland) in the East. All three countries apply wind-rose names to it – but different ones. Germany, naturally, calls it Nordsee, while England uses the same name in English, North Sea, although it lies to the North only of the county of Norfolk. Denmark, to the East, names it Vesterhavet, the Western Sea. Here we find diversity by consent.

Between Sweden, Germany, Poland, the Baltic States and Russia lies the Baltic Sea. This English exonym, based on the Russian endonym, represents, among others, the Swedish name Östsjön (East Bay), the German one Ostsee, the Russian Балтийское море and the Estonian one Läänemeri. Again, no problem is involved.

The sea which stretches between Greece in the West and Turkey in the East carries the name Aegean since Greek antiquity. But in the first Turkish atlas printed in Turkey in 1803 this sea was named "Anatolian", after the name of the west Asian peninsula of Anatolia, known in history also as Asia Minor, which constituted the major part of Turkey. Kemal Atatürk used the name Akdeniz (Mediterranean Sea) for the Aegean. The present-day official Turkish name for it is Ege Denizi, while its Greek name is Αιγαίο Πέλαγος.

As a final example let us take the Red Sea. Its Arabic name is al-Bahr al-Ahmar, آلبحر آلأحمر , (pronounced al-Bachr al-Achmar), meaning indeed the Red Sea, translated from ancient Greek texts and maps Ἐρυθρά Θάλασσα and from Latin ones Ruber Mare, or Mare Rubrum. However Israel, which "owns" just a small stretch of shore of the Red Sea in the Gulf of Aqaba or Gulf of Eilat, names it in Hebrew Yam Suf, ים סוף, meaning reed sea, after the reeds which grow along its shores – and this is its original biblical name. So, again, we have multiple names.

Uncontested "Exonymic" Names given e.g. by Explorers or Travellers and accepted as Endonyms

This class of names deals with toponyms whose language differs from the official language or languages of the respective region.

Beagle is the English name of a species of dog. Canal Beagle is the maritime name of the narrow waterway between Spanish-speaking southern Argentina's Tierra del Fuego and Chile's XIIth Region in the North, and Chilean Isla de Navarino and the Cape Horn (Cabo de Hornos) area in the South. The name commemorates Charles Darwin's ship of this name which traversed the channel in 1832. The English specific component Beagle has been accepted as part of the official name in a Spanish-speaking region.

Estrecho Wellington, Estrecho Nelson and Canal Baker are three waterways between the mainland of southern Chile's XIth Region and the archipelago of a multitude of islands sheltering it in the West. These names with purely English specific components were accepted by the purely Spanish-speaking government of Chile as valid endonyms and appear thus in Chilean maps and gazetteers .

One last example out of a multitude: the Dutch name Cape Keer-Weer ("turn-back") in the York Peninsula of Queensland, is an official one in English-speaking Australia.

Politically-induced Name Changes

Here we deal primarily with changes of names of large lakes resulting from changes in the political environment. Toponymic history reveals several major periods of "revolutionary" name changing. One of these, and the one with which we'll be dealing here, occurred after the end of, or even during the course of, the Second World War. Numerous countries threw off the yoke of their colonial masters, declared their independence and chose new names not only for their newly acquired territory but also for topographic features within it, including lakes, especially if their national language did not coincide with that of the former colonial power. In many such cases the new government simply reverted to former endemic endonyms. These had often been kept alive in the local language.

One such case was the Sea of Galilee, also known in English as Lake Genezareth, in British-administered Palestine which in 1948 became the State of Israel. It re-acquired its old Hebrew name, ים כנרת, Yam Kinneret, i.e. Sea of Kinneret, as the official toponym, documented already some 2,500 years ago in the Hebrew Bible (the "Old Testament") in the fourth Book of Moses (Num. 34,11). In the King James ("Authorised") English translation of the Bible it is found as Chinnereth.

Africa displays a goodish selection of names of this description. Some examples are Lake Nyasa in British-held Nyasaland which became Lake Malawi, or Lake Rudolf in British Kenya which became Lake Turkana in the Republic of Kenya. But Lake Victoria, shared by Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, retained its Imperial name. Lake Edward, shared by Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo was, from 1976 to 1979, given the name Lake Idi Amin Dada. Guess by whom…..

An interesting case is found in the open sea constituting the eastern border of Kenya and Tanzania. This is part of the Indian Ocean. In older maps, such as the pre-WWII "Times" atlases, one finds the name Azanian Sea, which surrounds the Zanzibar Islands. This maritime name rather disappeared later, but its origin is of interest. In the middle of the 12th century the Arab geographer and cartographer Idrisi of Ceuta entered the name Ard az-Zanj in his maps in parts of eastern Africa. The translation of this Arabic name is Land of the Blacks, or the "niggers", and was apparently given by Arab traders from the Arabian Peninsula who frequently crossed the Red Sea pursuing the slave trade, "exporting" thousands of black Africans. Az-Zanj later turned into Azania, and is in effect a derogatory allonym of Africa.

Maritime Toponymic Conflict or Political Rivalry

Under this heading we find the more severe form of relations between allonyms, or rather between their proponents. The fact – well-known to many toponymists – that a geographical name can lead to warfare, actual-physical and not only verbal, has been described e.g. in *Toponymy – the lore, laws and language of geographical names* [4] with the help of the example of Macedonia. This name nearly led to a real – and not just toponymic – war between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. So the United Nations assigned to the new republic the official name FYROM, an acronym of the final part of the previous sentence. But in the present paper we are dealing with maritime names.

The first Gulf War began in 1991. Which gulf? This is *a priori* not quite clear. The war did not start because of a name, but two allonyms of the same maritime object featured prominently in it and in the original reports of the belligerents and of some other parties involved. The people in the country to its East call it the Persian Gulf, and so do most western countries, following the ancient Greeks and Ptolemy. But not so the inhabitants of the countries bordering the Gulf on the western side; for them its name is the Arabian Gulf, al-Halij al-'Arabi, ألخليج ألغربي, found already in al-Batani's map of A.D. 959.

These toponymic-maritime differences even spill over into the economic sphere. A well-known British cartographic firm produced, in 1977, two versions of a map of the same region, differing only in these and a few other names, thus ensuring sales to both sides, and making everybody happy – perhaps most of all the firm itself. Lately a demand has been raised by Iraq for conferring the Arabic name Arabian Gulf as an official one in all maps and atlases. There is a high probability that this move, if adopted, will lead to further toponymic friction, if not to renewed trans-gulf warfare.

And this brings to mind the case of Tong Hae, the East Sea or Sea of Korea, and the refusal of Japan to recognize this allonym of the Sea of Japan. However, today various cartographic institutions around the world do already insert both names in their maps.

This paper closes with a last case, involving the Mediterranean Sea, which occurred in the last century. Italy, under the dictator Benito Mussolini, insisted on the name Mare Nostrum ("our sea") because the Mediterranean ("inland") sea lay between the Italian mainland and its colonies in North Africa. But WWII quickly relegated this name *ad acta historicae*, since it was, indeed, a latter-day revival of an old Roman name, now to be used no more.

The Formal Status of Maritime Names

We shall now briefly investigate the formal status of the names dealt with above. This depends on three factors, namely (a) who gives the name, (b) what use is made of the name, and (c) to which part of the sea or of a lake the name is applied.

As to (a), this depends on the status of the name-giving authority. Concerning (b), this depends on the context in which the name is used. There is a difference between two uses of a toponym. On the one hand it may be used in an international application such as a map or any other document designed for international use or circulation. On the other hand it may appear in a text in a particular language which is not that of the country of the specific name in question. For the former applications the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, recommend (they cannot command or force) to use official endonyms when referring to places "abroad", i.e. where the language differs from that of the map or atlas; see e.g. [5]. Therefore in an English atlas the capital of Poland should appear as Warszawa (and not as Warsaw), København (and not Copenhagen), or Athina (and not Athens). But in the second case, for "home" or "domestic" use, and in particular in general literature and running texts, exonyms can still be used, e.g. in the forms in parentheses in the previous sentence. But the United Nations warn against the excessive use of exonyms because they might give rise to international friction and even conflict [6].

Now to point (c). There is clearly no difference of opinion on the status of a name of a lake or of an inland sea entirely enclosed within a single state. Only this country can decide on the name, which then becomes the official endonym. The same can be said of the territorial open-sea waters of a particular state. Thus, Gulf of Aqaba (Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt) and Gulf of Eilat (Israel) are both valid endonyms. The same is true of a lake or inland sea which shares its shoreline among two or more states, such as the Caspian Sea (Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Iran) or the Dead Sea (Israel and Jordan).

But what about the sea areas outside the territorial waters of large water bodies such as oceans and their parts? Here, no official exclusive endonym can be applied to the entire sea. Therefore any country, whether bordering on the sea in question or not, can apply its own names. Examples are the Baltic Sea mentioned above, or the Pacific Ocean/Stiller Ozean, or Ishavet/Nördliches Eismeer/СЕВЕРНЫЙ ЛЕДОВИЫЙ ОКЕАН. Formally, of course, one should not infringe on the official names of territorial waters, though practically this is sometimes unavoidable, especially in small-scale maps. Often such "nationally based" names extend over the entire water body.

This also seems to cover the case of the sea between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago, where the Japanese name Nihon Kai (Japanese Sea) and the Korean one Tong Hae (East Sea) can both be applied.

So, Finally, What Can be Done?

The first thing to do in a case of different names being applied to a single water body and leading to friction would be to follow the recommendations of the United Nations or the International Hydrographic Office , namely for the two (or more) countries to try to reach agreement on a single unified name – as in the case of the Skagerrak cited above. If different allonyms still prevail without giving rise to toponymic or political problems, as in the case of bi- and multi-lingual names described above, perhaps no action needs to be taken.

However, if one side in a names conflict feels it needs redress from the other, it can turn to a third party in order to try and solve the problem. The United Nations would be a natural third party in such a case. But as has already been noted, the world organization, through the U.N. Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, has no powers to force a solution on the sides. This can be done only by the Security Council or the General Assembly and has been attempted only once to the present writer's knowledge, in the case of Greece vs. Macedonia/FYROM, as mentioned above.

But if consultation and arbitration do not help, and since there is no clear and binding ruling on sea names, a practical step can still be tried. Since maps and atlases are perhaps the major and most important repositories of geographical names, even in this age of digital geographic information systems (GIS), the party which feels slighted or underprivileged can approach map and atlas publishers around the world with the request to print its preferred maritime name in addition to any other. If this request is reasonable, and is accompanied by documentary evidence supporting the claim, it might be followed up by cartographers (and perhaps by other publishers). In a map there is, however, one limitation: the scale of the map may be too small for including more than one name. In this case, it is up to the cartographer (or his political backer) to decide which name to insert.

Thus, this paper ends on a more practical note than on a formal or even "legalistic" one, but with the hope that in future, cases of this nature will be resolved by agreement and consent.

References

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[5]   Second United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, London, 10-31 March 1972, Resolution 29 (I). Vol. I, Report of the Conference, p. 15. See also Fifth Conference, Montreal, 18-31 August 1987, Resolution 13. Vol. I, Report, p. 38.

[6]   Fourth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Geneva, 24 Aug. – 14 Sept. 1982, Resolution 20. Vol. I, Report of the Conference, p. 35.

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Biographical note

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