

Place Names and Identity: Place Names of Northern and Southern Latgale Reflecting Vegetation

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Abstract

Within the framework of a research project on linguistic aspects of territorial identity, a detailed study has been carried out on place names of the Northern and the Southern Latgale region reflecting vegetation. The main purpose is to present some general observations, regularities and insights into the complex relationship between plants and people that have emerged through the analysis of geographic names, seen as a system of symbols.

The basic source of data for this research is the place name information from maps on a scale of 1:50,000. The main tasks are to identify plant species in the place names of the area in question, to quantify their representation and to compare the acquired data with common phytogeographical and socio-cultural features of the investigated area. The place names reflect a number of Latgalian forms of plant names and are found in some parishes more often than in others. Standard Latvian is, however, the language form used in most names. Tree names are more frequent than herb names in the formation of place names.

A number of different generics are used in the material, indicating that there is a great variation of topographical features where plants grow. For instance, *kolns* 'hill', *māja*, *mājas*, *sāta* 'farmstead', and *leja* 'valley' are among the most frequent generic elements in the material.

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Within the framework of the research project 'Linguo-Cultural and Socio-Economic Aspects of Territorial Identity in the Development of the Region of Latgale' (ESF project No. 2009/0227/1DP/1.1.1.2.0/09/APIA/VIAA/071) on the linguistic aspects of the territorial identity, a detailed study has been carried out on place names in the Latgale region reflecting vegetation.

The main purpose of this paper is to present some general observations, regularities and insights into the complex relationship between plants and people that have emerged through the analysis of geographic names, seen as a system of symbols.

The methodological approach involves identifying plant families in the place names of Latgale, quantifying their representation and comparing the acquired data with common phytogeographical and socio-cultural features of the investigated area.

The key terms used in this paper are:

- *place name/toponym*: a 'proper noun applied to a topographic feature' (Kadmon 2002: 26); an oral or written linguistic expression that two or more persons use with reference to a particular spatial perception (Helleland 2009: 26);
- *vegetation*: a general term for the plant life of a region, it refers to the ground cover provided by plants. It is a general term, without specific reference to particular taxa, life forms, structure, spatial extent, or any other specific botanical or geographic

characteristics. It is broader than the term *flora*, which refers exclusively to the distribution of species (Wikipedia 2015);

- *phytotoponyms*: all the names for settlements and other geographical objects in which plant names were recognized, such as *Jaunroziņas*, *Maijrozes*, *Rozes*, *Roziņas*, *Roznieki*, *Rozumegi*, *Rožudārzs*, *Rožukalni*, *Rožukalns*, *Rožukrūmi*, *Rožulejas*, all referring to ‘roses’;
- *identity* (personal and group identities): group identity is composed of language, religion and all the other cultural elements shaping a social group (Jordan 2009: 35).

Latgalian identity blends with Latvian identity to different degrees. Latgalians share some common identifying characteristics, such as territory, language, religious affiliation (the religious affiliation of Latgalians is mainly Catholicism), and ethnic identity. Two orthographic traditions co-exist (the old one and the new one). In an interview with *Latvijas Avīze*, academic linguists from the University of Latvia and Rēzekne Higher Education Institution have stated that the Latgalian language should be granted the status of a regional language, which would allow the usage of both languages on an equal basis in the Latgale region. Academics believe that strengthening the Latgalian language at an official level would help to preserve Latgalian identity and culture and to overcome stigmatisation.

Sources and Methods

The information about the place names of Latgale reflecting vegetation was selected and arranged with the use of the Place-Names Database of Latvia. The basic source for this study is place name data from maps at a scale of 1:50,000. The Latvian Address Register has been used for the selection of plant names in farmstead names in cases when phytotoponyms were not found, or when the amount of phytotoponyms was small in the Place-Names Database of Latvia.

A table containing about 150 plant names in Latgalian and Latvian has been established as a basis for investigating their representation in the place names of Latgale. All the toponyms were selected in which the name for a plant in Latgalian differs from the plant name in Latvian. This data was then compared with common phytogeographical and socio-cultural features and analysed. It seems useful to analyse place names in such a way in order to gain an overview of the relationship between humans and plants over a considerably large territorial area.

In cases when a detailed collection of microtoponyms is available, it would be useful to search for additional information on plant names in place names in order to make the survey more complete.

In the Latgale Planning Region, the Place Names Database of the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA) contains about 10,500 place names of populated places (5,691 village names and 4,704 names of farmsteads), 1,074 lake names, 461 river names, and so on. The Latgale Planning Region was founded in August 2006 with the aim of ensuring the planning and co-ordination of regional development, as well as co-operation between local government and other state administrative bodies. In June 2006, the Saeima of the Republic

of Latvia adopted the amendments to the Regional Development Law (in force since 1 August 2006), granting legal status to the planning regions. The Latgale Planning Region encompasses nineteen municipalities (Aglonas novads, Balinavas novads, Balvu novads, Ciblas novads, Dagdas novads, Daugavpils novads, Ilūkstes novads, Kārsavas novads, Krāslavas novads, Līvānu novads, Ludzas novads, Preiļu novads, Rēzeknes novads, Riebiņu novads, Rugāju novads, Vārkavas novads, Viļakas novads, Viļānu novads, Zilupes novads) and two cities of national significance (*Daugavpils* and *Rēzekne*). The area of the Latgale Planning Region is close to 14,547 km² and the population is 394,058 (2012). Unfortunately, the territory of the Latgale Planning Region is not the same as the historical territory of Latgale in 1939. Historically, the southern border of Latgale was the river Daugava. In my study, I selected place names from the territory of the Latgale Planning Region, but I only included place names from the territories of municipalities located in the north and south of the region.

The research area in Latgale covered Balvi district in the north, and part of Daugavpils district in the south (see Figure 1). There are two main sources for the names of plants in Latgalian: the description of the Tilža dialect by Veronika Ūsele (1998) and the vocabulary of the Kalupe dialect by Antoņina Reķēna (1998). The latter text includes more detailed definitions, for example, *olksna* ‘a low, wet place where only alder grows’.

The names of plants in Latgalian in Līksna parish (written in accordance with their usage in Gančauski) were provided by Ģertrūde Krisunova. As I have a detailed collection of microtoponyms in Līksna parish I was able to search for additional information on plant names in place names in order to make the survey more comprehensive.



Fig. 1. The study area

Results

Place names convey information on the relationship between the name givers and the named objects at the time when the names were coined. Put together, they reveal an enormous amount of detail about the name givers' understanding of the surrounding landscape, so place names may be viewed as a historical oral or written text of the landscape and the people who lived there (cf. Helleland 2009).

Geographical names reflect spatial characteristics, most frequently natural characteristics, but also characteristics of settlement history, land use and economy, former feudal relations, historical events, etc. Village names in Latgale that reflect natural characteristics mostly refer to location, land relief properties, soil conditions, vegetation, and the names of living beings (animals, birds, insects etc.). In this way, these names highlight qualities that the inhabitants considered as remarkable for a certain place. Plants are, and have always been, an extremely important resource for human beings. Trees are a source of building material, and plants are used both in medicine and as food. Place names reflect all kinds of natural circumstances, and many are derived from words describing flora. Plant names can be found in many of the place names in my material, for example the village names *Bērzine* (Latg. *bārzs* 'birch') in Ambeļi parish, *Zeiles* (Latg. *zeiles* 'acorns') in Dubna parish, *Berezovka* (Rus. *берёза* 'birch') in Naujene parish, *Buļvīšu sola* (Latg. *buļvi* 'potatoes', *sola* 'island') in Nīcgale parish, *Līpu Mukoni* [uo] in Vabole parish, *Līpiniškas* (Latg. *līpa* 'linden') and *Osinovka* (Rus. *осина* 'aspen') in Biķernieki parish, *Lozdas* (Latg. *lozda* 'hazel') and *Lazovka* (Rus. *лоза* 'osier') in Višķi parish.

According to the information from the Place-Names Database about the place names of Balvi district, 540 names (22%) out of 2,430 are related to plants. Plant names are less frequent in names of natural features (4%), e.g.:

- streams: *Ašusila strauts*,
- rivers: *Bērzupe*, *Kaņepe*, *Nīdrupīte*, *Skujatne*,
- bogs: *Bierzpiļš pūrs* (*Bērzpils purvs*), *Nīdrumola*, *Peisa pūrs*, *Rutkovas pūrs*, *Vīksnas pūrs*,
- forests: *Olksna 2x*, *Peismola*,
- lakes: *Egļezers*, *Lazdags*, *Obeļovas ezers*, *Odziņš*.

Many plant names not found in the place names of Latgale can be found in the rest of Latvia, such as *henbane* (*Hyoscyamus niger*), Latg. *driġine*, Latv. *driģene*, Lith. *driġnė* (see Fig.2). A search for the element *driġ-* resulted in three farmsteads bearing the name *Driģenes*.



Fig. 2. Location of farmsteads bearing the name *Drīgenes* in Zentene parish, Vestiena parish and Pilskalne parish

Some plant names like that of the potato (*Solanum tuberosum*), Latg. *buļvi*, Latv. *kartupeļi*, Lith. *bulvė* can be found only in the place name *Buļvīši* (a village in Nīcgale parish), but many other plant names are common across the territory of Latvia, for example the farmstead *Astras* ‘aster’ (*Callistephus chinensis*) in the Kalupe parish, the farmstead *Dilles* ‘dill’ (*Anethum*) in the Rugāji parish, and the farmstead *Zilenes* ‘bog bilberry’ (*Vaccinium uliginosum*), Latg. *girtūklis*, *reibinis* in the Maļinova parish.

Quite a few plant names occur in several place names, such as hops (*Humulus lupulus*), Latg. *apeiņš*, Latv. *apinis*, Lith. *apynys*, in place names such as *Apiņu mājas* (2x), *Apiņumājas*, *Apiņziedi*, and *Kalnapiņi*, or the name of plantain (*Plantago major*), Latg. *dzeislīne*, Latv. *ceļteka*, Lith. *plačialapis gyslotis*, in the place names *Ceļtekas* (3x), *Ceļtekas 2*. Some plant names are particularly frequent, for instance *auzas* ‘oat’, or *bērzs* ‘birch’. More widely used in toponyms are *ozols* ‘oak’, or *liepa* ‘linden’. In Latgale, the number of these names is similar. For instance, the following place names can be found in Northern Latgale: *Liepas* (12x), *Liepas-1*, *Liepaskalns*, *Liepava*, *Liepiņas*, *Liepiņi*, *Liepiņsalas*, *Liepiņu māja*, *Liepkalni* (2x), *Liepna/Līpna*, *Liepnieši*, *Liepsalas*, *Liepsēta*, *Liepu mājas* (2x), *Liepukalni*, *Liepukalns*, *Liepukalns*, *Liepulejas*, *Liepziedi*, as well as *Ozolāres*, *Ozolbirze*, *Ozoli* (8x), *Ozoliņi* (4x), *Ozolkalns* (2x), *Ozolkrasti*, *Ozollejas* (2x), *Ozolnieki* (6x), *Ozolsala* (4x), *Ozolsalas*, and *Ozolzīles* (2x). In the farmstead name *Liepozoli*, both tree names are represented (*liepa* and *ozols*).

Less widely used in toponyms are the names of the willow tree (*vītols*), alder (*elksnis*), fir tree (*egle*), pine (*priede*), and aspen (*apse*). Other tree names as components of toponyms are rare, for instance the name of the elm tree (*goba*). Names with the element *gob-* are only to be found in the Northern Latgale region: *Gobas* (3x) – which are farmsteads in Balvi, Susāji and Medņeva parishes – and *Gūbusola/Gobusala* in Kubuļi parish.

In Latgale, 36 phytotoponyms were found featuring the element *ūzul-* ‘oak’ (*Kolna Ūzuli*, *Lielā Ūzuliņa*, *Lielā Ūzulīņa*, *Mazā Ūzulīņa* (2x), *Ozolsala*, *Ūzula kalns*, *Ūzula līkne*, *Ūzuldorzs*, *Ūzuleņi* (2x), *Ūzuleņš*, *Ūzuliški*, *Ūzulišķu ezers*, *Ūzulkolns*, *Ūzulmuiža*,

Ūzulmuižas ezers, Ūzulova (4x), Ūzulsola, Ūzulu sala, Ūzulu sola, Ūzuļņīki, Ūzuldorzs, Ūzuleņi (2x), Ūzuliški, Ūzulmuiža, Ūzulova (2x), Ūzulsola, Ūzulsola, Ūzuļņīki). Among these names are ten village names (Fig. 3).

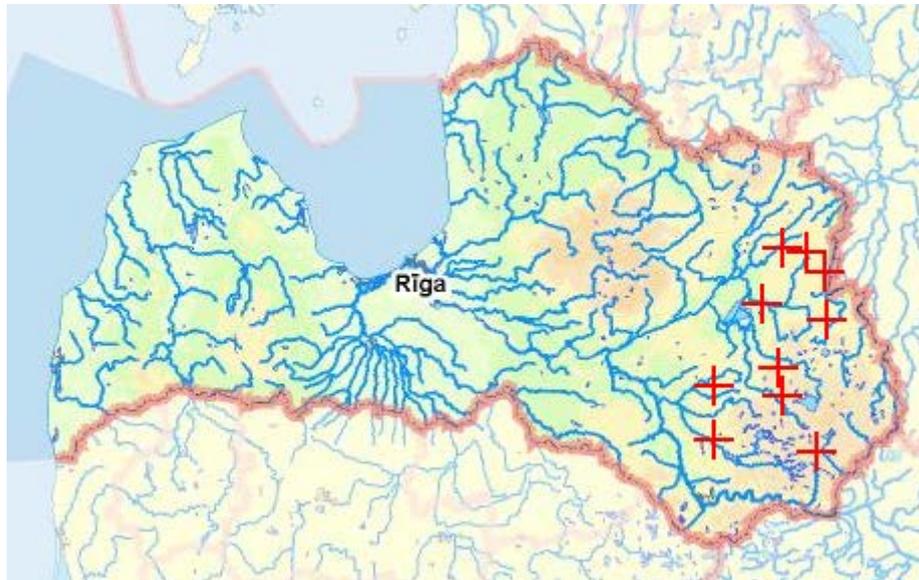


Fig. 3. 10 village names featuring the name of the oak tree (Latg. *ūzuls*): *Ūzuldorzs, Ūzuleņi (2x), Ūzuliški, Ūzulmuiža, Ūzulova, Ūzulova, Ūzulsola (2x), and Ūzuļņīki*

In order to find all the phytotoponyms, I had to search for several other elements, for example the elements *lazd-* and *lozd-* (*Corylus*, Latv. *lazda*, Latg. *lozda* 'hazel').

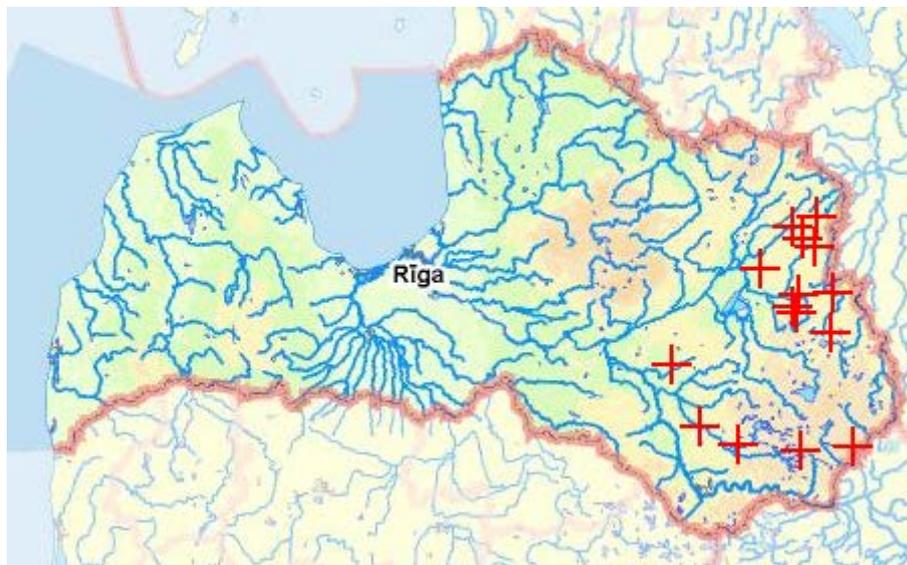


Fig. 4. 18 place names featuring the element *lozd-* (Latg. *lozda*): *Lozdukolns, Lozdas (4x), Lozdova (5x), Lozdu grovs, Lozdu kolni, Lozdukolns (3x), Lozduļova, Lozdupeite, and Lozdusola*

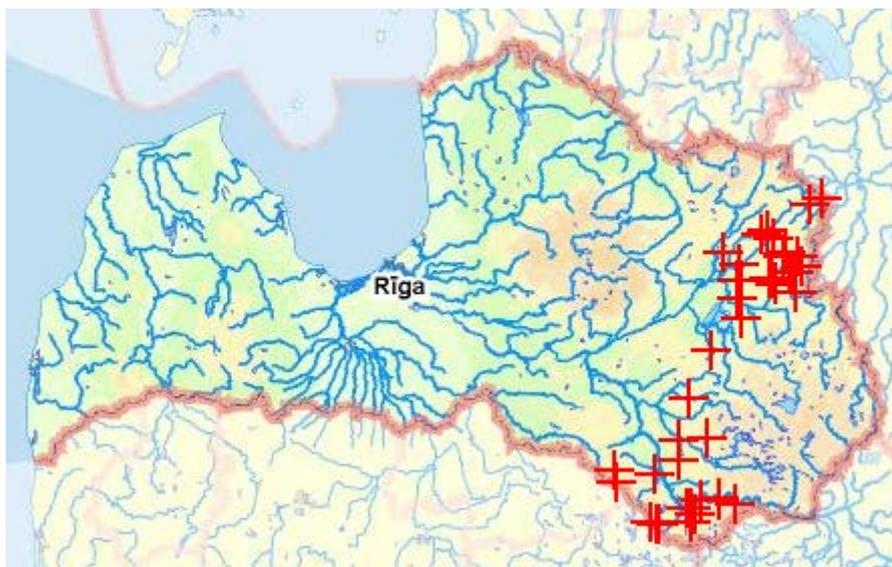


Fig. 5. Place names containing the element *lazd-* (Latv. *lazda*)

Some plant names can only be found in a small number of place names, even though the plants themselves may be common across the territory in question, as in the case of the sharp-leaf willow or Siberian violet willow (*Salix acutifolia*), Latg. *vierba* or *pyupūls*, Latv. *smaillapu kārklis*, Lith. *smaillialapis karklas*. The name of this plant can be found in the farmstead names *Pūpoli* in Baltinava, Dubna, Nīcgale, Vabole, and Kalupe parish and *Pūpoli 1*, *Pūpoli 2*, and *Pūpoliņi* in Naujenes pagasts. In Latvia there are more than twenty species of willow and more than sixty hybrids of willow (Pīra-Rezovska 2014). Therefore, many names can be found containing the element *vītol-*, such as *Vītoli* (8x), *Vītoli-1*, *Vītoliņi* (3x), and *Vītolkalni* in the Northern Latgale region, and *Vītoli* (2x), *Vītoliņi*, *Baltvītoli* (2x), *Pavītoli*, and *Sudrabvītoli* (2x) in the Southern Latgale region. It is striking that only one name of this category appears in Latgalian in the Place-Names Database, which is *Veituli* in Krišjāņi parish.

In some cases, there are differences with respect to names between the highland area (*Latgales augstiene*) and the lowland area. For instance, no names featuring the element *lazd-* ('hazel', Latv. *lozda*) were found in the upland territory of the *Latgales augstiene* (Fig. 5), which is dominated by place names containing the element *rutk-* (*Raphanus sativus*, Latv. *rutks*, Latg. *ruduks*) (see Fig. 6). In the Northern Latgale region, the Latgalian plant name *ruduks* is found in place names *Ruduki*, *Rudukova*, and *Ruduku mājas*.



Fig. 6. 15 place names containing the element *rutk-* (Latv. *rutks*, Latg. *ruduks*): *Rutkeviču ezers*, *Rutkeviči*, *Rutkeviču astraveņa*, *Rutki* (5x), *Rutkova* (2x), *Rutkovas pūrs*, *Rutkovsku Kaži*, *Rutkovsku Kažu kapi*, *Rutku mežs*, and *Rutkuški*

A similar situation is found when it comes to rowan (*Raphanus sativus*), Latg. *sārmyukša*, Latv. *pīlādzis*. The Latvian name is dominant in place names such as *Lejas Pīlādži*, *Pīlādžītis*, *Pīlādžogas*, and *Pīlādžu mājas*, while only one name appears in Latgalian: *Sārmūški* in Vecumi parish.

Names containing such plant names as *agrosti*, *buldurjuoņi*, *buruoki*, *casnāki*, *dzeislinis*, *garškys*, *girtūklis*, *gundaga*, *klubnīki*, *kreņi*, *lazdīki*, *ližeicenis*, *meža lūki*, *romūleņi*, *ružinka*, *skuobinis*, *šļukys*, *snīga pyka/snīga bumba*, *soltuos mātrys*, *ušņa*, *vaivierņi*, *valnaukys*, *vieršņi*, *vuorpota/soldonuo zuoļa/vuorpatine*, *vuosilka*, *zemneidzys*, *žybžainis*, and *žydaukys* cannot be found in place names. The main reason is likely to be that people are no longer familiar with these names of plants in Latgalian.

Some names, such as *Īves* ‘the yew’, are formed directly from the tree name, but other place names in the material follow a structure using the plant name as the specific (first element), in genitive or stem form, combined with a generic (last element) representing a topographic word, for instance *Līpusola* ‘the lime-tree island’. There are many different generics used in place names, which means that there is a great variation of topographical features where plants grow. For instance, among the more frequent words are:

- *kolns, kalns, kalni* ‘hill’
- *māja, mājas, sāta* ‘home’
- *leja, lejas* ‘valley’
- *līči* ‘inlet’
- *pļava* ‘meadow’
- *sola, sala* ‘island’
- *strauts* ‘stream’
- *ezers* ‘lake’

- *pils* ‘castle’
- *pilskalns* ‘castle’
- *upe, upīte* ‘river’ etc.

In space-related identity building, place names function as labels, while also performing a function of supporting emotional ties. The place names of an area are a vital factor for ‘feeling at home’, so it might be considered important to use more plant names in Latgalian (see Table 1), but the examination of the material shows that place names in Standard Latvian are dominant in Latgale.

<u>Plant name in Latgalian</u>	<u>Plant name in Latvian</u>	<u>Scientific name</u>
agrosti	ērķšķogas	<i>Grossularia reclinata</i>
agurks	gurķis	<i>Cucumis sativus</i>
meļneidzys	mellenes	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>
meža lūki	lakši	<i>Allium ursinum</i>
mudrauka	lapegle	<i>Larix</i>
muškets	pelargonija	<i>Pelargonium</i>
nasturka	krese	<i>Tropaeolum majus</i>
palākī eļkšņi	baltalkšņi	<i>Alnus incana</i>
paričkys	jāņogas	<i>Ribes rubrum</i>
pasolis	pupiņas	<i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i>
pelieji	vērmeles	<i>Artemisia absinthium</i>
romūleņi	kumelītes	<i>Chamomilla recutita</i>
sirsneitis	čemuru augstiņi	<i>Centaurium erythraea</i>
smerškys	sievmētras	<i>Elsholtzia ciliate</i>
soltuos mātrys	piparmētras	<i>Mentha × piperita</i>
svieris	pērkonenes	<i>Erysimum cheiranthoides</i>
vuosilka	rudzupuķe	<i>Centaurea cyanus</i>
žybžainis	pelašķi	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>
žydaukys	plūškoki	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>

Table 1. Some plant names in Latgalian that cannot be found in place names

Conclusions

1. Research on the plant names featured in the place names of Latgale contributes to the understanding of the cultural heritage of this specific geographic area.
2. This study shows which plants are represented in the place names of Latgale (in the selected material), thus giving an indication of the distribution and frequency of various plants, with the most frequent being the names of the linden, oak, and birch trees.

3. Most of the plants used in place names can be found growing in the territory in question. In Latgale, the names of wild plants are more widespread than the names of cultivated plants.
4. Phytotoponyms in Latgalian have an important role in identity building in Latgale and in supporting emotional ties.
5. The Place-Names Database of Latvia covers only a part of the total number of place names in the explored territory. It would be useful to search for additional information on plant names in microtoponyms in order to expand the scope of the survey.
6. Such an investigation may be of interest for other areas in Latvia as well as for name scholars in other countries.

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