

## What were people called in communal Italy ?

François Menant

École Normale Supérieure (France)

*Personal Names Studies of Medieval Europe :*

*Social Identity and Familial Structures,*

ed. G. T. Beech, M. Bourin et P. Chareille, Kalamazoo, 2002, p. 97-108

(Western Michigan University. Medieval Institute Publications. Studies in Medieval Culture, 43)

This paper presents a synthesis of the results obtained by a group of Italian, French, German and Austrian historians, who have been studying throughout the years 1990-1997 the evolution of the naming system in Northern and Central Italy, from the time of the single name of the high middle ages to the modern two-name system<sup>1</sup>. This research group has used the method that proved efficient in France, in the program « Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne »<sup>2</sup>, adapting it to the peculiarities of the Italian situation<sup>3</sup> ; the documentary basis consists in large archival collections, and lists of citizens or tax payers. The main stage of the inquiry was a dozen or so case studies of cities and small regions scattered through Northern and Central Italy, and as far as

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<sup>1</sup>Published in : J.-M. Martin and F. Menant, ed., *Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne : l'espace italien*, in *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Age*, 106 (1994, t. 2), 108 (1995, t. 2), and 110 (1998, t. 1) ; M. Bourin, J.-M. Martin and F. Menant, ed., *L'anthroponymie, document de l'histoire sociale des mondes méditerranéens médiévaux*, Rome, 1996 (Collection de l'École française de Rome, 226).

<sup>2</sup>*Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne. Etudes d'anthroponymie médiévale. Rencontres d'Azay-le-Ferron*, M. Bourin ed. (later : M. Bourin et P. Chareille), 4 t. in 5 vol., Tours, 1989-1997 (vol. 6 and 7 are in preparation).

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. the introductions of J.-M. Martin and F. Menant to the volumes *Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne : l'espace italien*.

possible representative of cultural areas such as Tuscany, Rome, or the great cities of the North<sup>4</sup>. I must stress the point that this research is not mainly a linguistical one -we have little competency in that field-, but its purpose is to enhance, from a distinctive point of view, our knowledge of the Italian society in the age of communes. The evolution of the name system reflects in fact, in our mind, that of a society, and helps to understand it.

I shall develop three points in my paper : the naming system, the choice of the personal names, and finally some distinctive features of Italian society as factors in the evolution of naming.

### ***1. The personal name system : Italian traits and inner diversities***

As regards the naming system, the evolution shown by our monographic studies is in its main lines similar to that of France, Spain<sup>5</sup>, and Southern Italy<sup>6</sup>. At the beginning of the eleventh century, the single name still predominated, alone or accompanied by other elements which were not yet stable parts of it ; a usual designation was for instance *Tedaldus filius quondam Alberti de loco Ronco*. Later on, those complementary elements were more and more often regularly included in the name : for example Albertus Dominici, Petrus de Puteo, or nicknames like Iohannes Russus, Bernardus Mazabovem. This second element, which characterized the new naming system, would sooner or later become the hereditary surname. Most of the time, it referred to the family, above all as a *nomen paternum* ; place names and nicknames were the two other main origins of Italian surnames, while trade callings were only popular among the urban population. As regards the chronology of this evolution, it was more or less the same in Italy as in the other countries, but the movement was slower and more hesitant than in France or in Spain. Two-element names became standard before the end of the

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<sup>4</sup> Chieri (M. Montanari), Genova (A. Birolini), Milan (P. Corrarati), Piacenza (P. Racine), Reggio Emilia (O. Guyotjeannin), Pisa (E. Salvatori), San Salvatore a Isola (Siena ; M. Ginatempo), Cortona (C. Perol), Rome (E. Hubert and T. di Carpegna Falconieri), all issued in *Genèse médiévale... l'espace italien*, vol. 1 and 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Antroponimia y sociedad. Sistemas de identificación hispano-cristianos en los siglos IX a XIII*, P. Martinez Sopena ed. , Santiago de Compostela –Valladolid, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. various papers in *Genèse médiévale... l'espace italien*, and J.-M. Martin, *L'Italie méridionale*, in *L'anthroponymie, document de l'histoire sociale...*, p. 29-39.

eleventh century in Rome<sup>7</sup>, but only during the XII th century in most Northern cities, around 1250 in Pisa<sup>8</sup>, and still much later, not until the XVIIth century, in other places in Tuscany<sup>9</sup>. These remarks are only worth for masculine names ; as elsewhere in Europe<sup>10</sup>, women usually bore a single name, completed by their father's or their husband's name.

Italian anthroponomy presents an important peculiarity, which had lasting consequences : whereas in most european countries the evolution stopped when the two-element name became majoritary, in Italy it went on at long, and in many regions the surname did not become hereditary before the end of the Middle Ages<sup>11</sup>. Venice was in fact the only place where the surname -which was here nearly always a *nomen paternum*- was fixed early -as soon as the ninth century- and in most cases definitively, without further evolution<sup>12</sup>. It is noticeable that Venice shared in that way the situation of other byzantine islets like Bari or Naples<sup>13</sup>, and at a lesser degree Rome<sup>14</sup>. But the Venetian

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<sup>7</sup> E. Hubert, *Evolution générale de l'anthroponymie masculine à Rome du Xe au XIIIe siècle*, dans *Genèse médiévale... l'espace italien*, I, p. 573-594.

<sup>8</sup> E. Salvatori, *Il sistema antroponimico a Pisa nel Duecento : la città e il territorio*, dans *Genèse médiévale... l'espace italien*, II, p. 427-466.

<sup>9</sup> C. Perol, *Sortir de l'anonymat : apparition et diffusion des noms de famille à Cortone, XIIIe-XVIe siècle*, dans *Genèse médiévale... l'espace italien*, I, p. 559-571 ; Ch. Klapisch Zuber, *Les faux-semblants de l'identité. Noms de lignée, noms cachés, noms-refuges à Florence au XIVe siècle*, *ibid.*, III, p. 159-172 ; A. Molho, *Noms, mémoire, identité publique à Florence à la fin du Moyen Age*, *ibid.*, p. 137-157. Voir aussi Ph. Jansen, *L'anthroponymie dans les Marches du milieu du XIIIe siècle à la fin du XVe siècle : archaïsme ou régression ?*, *ibid.*, p. 201-225 ; G. Casarino, *Alla ricerca di « nome e parentado » : Genova e distretto tra Quattro e Cinquecento*, *ibid.*, p. 227-245.

<sup>10</sup> *Genèse médiévale ...Rencontres d'Azay-le-Ferron*, II, 2 : *Persistances du nom unique* (the greater part of the volume is dedicated to the surnames of the women).

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. *Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne : l'espace italien*, III : the whole volume is dedicated to that problem.

<sup>12</sup> G. Folena, *Gli antichi nomi di persona e la storia civile di Venezia*, in *Atti e Memorie dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Classe di Scienze Morali, Lettere ed Arti*, t. 129 (1970-1971), p. 445-484; reed. in *Id.*, *Culture e lingue nel Veneto medievale*, Padova, 1990, p. 175-210.

<sup>13</sup> J.-M. Martin, *Anthroponymie et onomastique à Bari (950-250)*, dans *Genèse médiévale... l'espace italien*, I, p.683-701 ; M. Villani, *L'antroponimia nelle carte napoletane (secc. X-XIII)*, *ibid.*, II, p. 345-359 ; E.

situation was unique in Northern Italy. Tuscany offered the opposite pattern, with a very slow evolution towards stable and hereditary *cognomina* : in the florentine *catasto* of 1427, only 16% of the families had such a stable name ; all the others were identified by the names of their father and grandfather, as Lapo di Giovanni di Antonio<sup>15</sup>. In other regions, the evolution pointed towards the victory of the two-elements name, but only after a long period of transition : during several generations, a large percentage of individuals, up to 25% on the whole, bore nicknames or second names introduced by a formula like *qui vocatur, qui dicitur*, for instance *Albertus qui vocatur de Puteo*. At Rome, Milan or Reggio Emilia, that transitory period covers the whole XIth century.

The lasting complexity and instability of the name system was probably a general feature of most italian regions in the late Middle Ages, as some recent studies have shown, especially on Emilian towns such as Bologna and Parma. A good example is given by the lists of members of the city counsel of Parma during the XIIIth and XIVth centuries : some of them bore rather classical two element names, with a forename and a surname, others *nomina paterna*, while many others bore chains of personal names in florentine style, or a collective name as de Barateriis or de Rossis. Those systems were often combined, giving way to rather complicated designations : a relative of the chronicler Salimbene de Adam was called *Bernardinus Oliverii Rolandi Oliverii*, and the jurist Odofredus *dominus Odofredus doctor legum filius quondam domini Bonacursii Ricardi de Denariis*, while another Bolognese bore the name of *Guido Cazanimici Alberti Ursi de Cazanimicis*<sup>16</sup>. In fact the predominant pattern seems to be a complex system based on references to a main household, and to as many ancestors as necessary to allow the identification of the person in the urban society. That structure of the names corresponds in fact to a political and social organization which is in great part

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Cuozzo, *Qualche nota sull'antroponimia aristocratica di Gaeta tra IX e XI secolo*, *ibid.*, p. 343-344 ; *Idem*, *L'antroponimia aristocratica nel Regnum Siciliae. L'esempio dell'Abruzzo nel Catalogus baronum (1150-1168)*, *ibid*, I, p. 654-656 (Amalfi).

<sup>14</sup> E. Hubert, *Evolution générale de l'anthroponymie....*

<sup>15</sup> D. Herlihy et Ch. Klapisch, *Les Toscans et leurs familles*, Paris, 1978, p. 532-543.

<sup>16</sup> O. Guyotjeannin, *L'onomastique émilienne (XIe-milieu XIIIe siècle). Le cas de Reggio Emilia d'après le fonds de San Prospero*, in *Genèse médiévale... l'espace italien*, I, p. 381-446.

based on patrician households ; once again, the best examples of such a situation are to be found in Tuscany and especially in Florence, where they were analyzed by Christiane Klapisch Zuber<sup>17</sup>. Another aspect of the variability of the system is, that an individual may be designed in more or less sophisticated ways, according to the documents. That concern with complex systems was to be found above all in the leading groups, the urban aristocracy, but it is clear that the rising classes such as the merchants and craftsmen of the popolo adopted that fashion as part of their acculturation to the aristocratic way of life. One should not believe however that those trends were absolutely standard in Italy of the communes : I have myself recently studied the case of the city of Cremona, and found out that around 1300 most of the inhabitants, of whatever social standing, were designated, in a very simple modern way, by a forename and a surname which appears to have been hereditary<sup>18</sup>. This example confirms the fact that communal Italy was a world of variety, and that only exhaustive -but absolutely impossible- research could allow us to establish general laws of evolution. In the present state of research, we can only point to general tendencies, nothing more.

Personally I think that social differences are still more important than local ones. For instance, while the leading urban classes developed sophisticated systems of identification<sup>19</sup>, many peasants of the Quattrocento and even citizens of a small town like Cortona in Tuscany<sup>20</sup>, had not yet acquired a stable surname. The classical analysis of the florentine catasto by Christiane Klapisch and David Herlihy shows very well a fact that can be confirmed by other, less rich, sources : the sophistication and the

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<sup>17</sup>Ch. Klapisch Zuber; *Les faux-semblants de l'identité...* ; cfr. the papers collected in the two volumes Eadem, *La maison et le nom. Stratégies et rituels dans l'Italie de la Renaissance*, Paris, 1990 ; Eadem, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, Chicago, 1985.

<sup>18</sup> F. Menant, *Comment s'appelaient les habitants de Crémone vers 1300? Contribution à l'histoire du nom de famille en Italie*, in *Genèse médiévale... l'espace italien*, III, p. 183-200.

<sup>19</sup> O. Guyotjeannin, *Problèmes de la dévolution du nom et du surnom dans les élites d'Italie centro-septentrionale*, in *Genèse médiévale ... l'espace italien*, II, p. 556-594 ; N. Wandruszka, *Die Entstehung des Familiennamens in Bologna (XII. und XIII. Jahrhundert)*, *ibid.*, p. 595-625 ; F. Menant, *Les modes de dénomination de l'aristocratie italienne aux XIe et XIIe siècles : premières réflexions à partir d'exemples lombards*, *ibid.*, p. 535-555 ; Id., *Ancêtres et patrimoine. Les systèmes de désignation dans l'aristocratie lombarde des XIe-XIIe siècles*, in *Nomen et gens. Zur historischen Aussagekraft frühmittelalterlicher Personennamen*, D. Geuenich, W. Haubrichs et J. Jarnut ed. , Berlin, 1997, p. 176-189.

<sup>20</sup> C. Perol, *Sortir de l'anonymat...*

stability of the naming system was linked with two main factors : a person's position in the social scale, as determined by his/her wealth and political influence, and his distance from the city : a member of a patrician family of Florence or Parma had three or four names, which taken together placed him clearly in the hierarchy of urban wealth and power ; on the contrary, the poorest peasants and serfs may have had only one name (sometimes down to the XVIIth century), to which they added a dull nickname or their father's name when the fiscal or seigneurial clerks asked for a more precise identification. A source like the *Liber paradisus*, the list of the serfs of the Bolognese district in 1257, confirms the difference existing between the complex names of the lords, referring to social connexions and long series of ancestors, and those of their serfs, reduced to elementary forms<sup>21</sup>. Another example pointing to an analogous conclusion is that of the village of Aspra, not very far from Rome : a close analysis showed that the *cognomen* became usual there four or five generations later than in the neighbouring great town<sup>22</sup>. We find the same backwardness in the evolution if we observe the choice of the christian names : from lists of inhabitants of Roquebrune, on the Genoese Riviera, Benjamin Z. Kedar noticed that the people living in that village bore the same forenames as the Genoese who lived a hundred years earlier<sup>23</sup> ; at Florence, the name Martinus, once very widespread, became insulting after the middle of the XIIIth century. After that time it was still born by many peasants, but no longer by the citizens, who preferred more modern names like Filippo or Giacomo<sup>24</sup>.

If we analyse further those differences and those variations in naming evolution, we notice that in fact, in the italian society of the communal era, several systems of designation coexisted and influenced one another : the old seigneurial aristocracy of the

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<sup>21</sup> F. Menant, *Une source pour l'étude de l'anthroponymie servile : le Liber Paradisus (Bologne, 1257)*, to be published in *Genèse médiévale ... Rencontres d'Azay-le-Ferron*, 6 ; cfr. Id., *L'anthroponymie paysanne en Méditerranée occidentale*, in *L'anthroponymie, document d'histoire sociale...*, p. 349-363.

<sup>22</sup> E. Hubert, *Structures urbaines et système anthroponymique (A propos de l'Italie centro-septentrionale, Xe-XIIIe siècle)*, dans *L'anthroponymie, document de l'histoire sociale...*, p. 313-347.

<sup>23</sup> B. Z. Kedar, *Noms de saints et mentalité populaire à Gênes, au XIVe siècle*, in *Le Moyen Age*, 73 (1967), p. 431-446.

<sup>24</sup> O. Brattö, *Studi di antroponimia fiorentina. Il libro di Montaperti (an. MCCLX)*, Göteborg, 1953, p. 33-35 ; cfr. G. Folena, *Fra i Lapi e i Bindi del Duecento : note di antroponimia fiorentina*, in Id., *Culture e lingue nel Veneto medievale*, Padova, 1990, p. 211-226.

deeply feudalized Po plain, for instance, took the names of their castles, in accordance with the use of many other European aristocratic families, and sometimes added a collective title taken from the feudal hierarchy such as *capitanei de Raude*, *confanonerii de Cicognara* or *seniores de Rodengo*. On the contrary, the urban élites mostly bore the name of an ancestor, and when a branch withdrew from the household, it took the name of its founder<sup>25</sup>. As we have seen, this system was to predominate from the XIIIth century onwards, with the generalization of names like Alberti or de Albertis. At a lower level of urban society, small merchants and craftsmen usually bore only two names, the second one being often a nickname or an occupational name such as Ferrarius or Textor. And at the bottom of the social ladder, poor peasants often lacked even a surname. Those various designation systems were far from being unchangeable : the main tendency among the rich was to adopt a complex eponymous designation, system based on the model of the urban patriciate. But every group in the complex society of communal Italy displayed its own designation system, which reflected its material and cultural wealth, its links with political power, its proximity to the town and, finally, its collective self-awareness.

## **2. Personal names**

My second point will deal with the choice of personal names<sup>26</sup> ; I prefer to say personal names rather than forenames or christian names, at least until the XIIIth century, because, as we shall see, many people bore only one name, and that single name very often had no link with a saint or any other christian reference. As for the choice of personal names, Italy shared roughly the evolution of the other western countries, which was characterized by several concomitant phenomena : christian names become more popular, German names regressed, but in fact very slowly in Northern Italy, where Lombard and Frankish onomastics remained very widespread ; the main evolution, at

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<sup>25</sup> Cfr. F. Menant, *Ancêtres et patrimoine...* ; Id., *Les modes de dénomination de l'aristocratie ...*

<sup>26</sup> I shall use information collected in the papers mentioned above, especially in *Genèse médiévale...l'espace italien*. Cfr. E. Carpentier, *Les prénoms à Orvieto à la fin du XIIIe siècle*, in *Villes, bonnes villes, cités et capitales. Mélanges offerts à Bernard Chevalier*, Tours, 1989, p. 371-379 ; A. Grohmann, *L'imposizione diretta nei comuni dell'Italia centrale nel XIII secolo. La Libra di Perugia del 1285*, Perugia-Roma, 1986, especially p. 107-108, 121-127, 142-145.

least quantitatively, was the concentration of the choices on a few names, born by an ever larger part of the population : above all John, followed by Peter and James.

The main characteristic of Italian names at that period, however, was their extreme individualization. Many names were derivatives of an existing name, and many more were creations of new names. For instance, the first method created the very common Florentine names Bindo et Lapo as diminutives of Jacobus and Aldobrandus<sup>27</sup> ; or Guidottus and Johanninus from Guido and Johannes ; by adding a qualifying adjective, one got the very usual Iohannesbonus (Zambonus) and Ottobonus. The most usual names, as Johannes, Ugo or Guido, had a lot of those diminutives and derivatives, which could be used more than the original name ; for instance, in Pisa in 1228, Ugolino was eight times more frequent than Ugo.

Moreover, there was an extraordinarily high number of rare or unique names, which were born only by one or by few people in one city : 28% of the Florentine soldiers bore such names in 1260<sup>28</sup>. Some of those very personal names express for example a wish, as Detesalvus or Omnibene ; others are nicknames born as single names or forenames : nobles for instance were fond of warlike names as Salinguerra, Vinciguerra or Vincicastello, and many ordinary people were called Mangiavacca, Russus, Bracciaforte, Mezovillano, or even Senzanome. In XIIth century Northern Italy, we found a series of scatological names like Cagainputeo, « defecates in the oven », or Cagainbraga, « defecates in his trousers ». The name of the family could be used as forename too, and many nobles are called Amatus de Amatis or Ponzonus de Ponzonibus.

As a consequence of those tendencies, the population of the period of the communes was split up between a large number of people bearing few very common names, and many others who had hundreds of very rare names. In Rome for example, between 1100 and 1250, about one third of the men were called Peter or John, while fifty per cent bore a rare or very rare name<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup>O. Brattö, *Studi di antroponimia fiorentina...* ; G. Folena, *Fra i Lapi e i Bindi...*

<sup>28</sup> O. Brattö., *Nuovi studi di antroponimia fiorentina. I nomi meno frequenti del Libro di Montaperti (An. MCCLX)*, Stockholm, 1955.

<sup>29</sup> E. Hubert, *Evolution générale...*



In the last decades of the XIIIth century a new change took place, as a result of which forenames became much more modern, I mean closer to our own taste. In fact the mass of diminutives and nicknames, which had made so strange the landscape of Italian names, disappeared and gave way to names of saints, and especially of great saints. Benjamin Kedar noticed for example that, among the consuls and other rulers of Genua, only 12% bore saints names in the XIIth century, but that they were 25% in the XIIIth century, and more than 50% in the XIVth<sup>30</sup>. That change was studied above all in Tuscany and Umbria ; Charles de la Roncière and David Herlihy showed, from detailed studies of the Florentine population, that it took place more precisely between 1280 and 1320 or 1340<sup>31</sup>. In the catasto of Orvieto of 1292, most of the men were already called with « new » names such as Dominicus, Franciscus, Mattheus, Angelo, Andrea, beside traditional names such as John, Peter and James ; in other places we find Antonius, Bartolomaeus, Laurentius, Stefanus... ; those names all sound very modern to our ears<sup>32</sup>. As a consequence, the total number of different names was reduced drastically : in Pistoia, less than 3 men bore the same name in 1219, but 4, 4 in 1427. We can say that, if many Italians of the Quattrocento were still very far from the modern system of denomination, on the other hand, the forenames they bore were not very different from those of nowadays.

### ***3. Some factors influencing the naming system in Central and Northern Italy***

To conclude, I would like to point to two factors which may contribute to explaining the peculiarities of the Italian naming system in the age of the communes. The first is the

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<sup>30</sup> B. Z. Kedar, *Noms de saints...*

<sup>31</sup> Ch. M. de la Roncière, *L'influence des Franciscains dans la campagne de Florence au XIVe siècle (1280-1360)*, in *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen Age, Temps modernes*, 87 (1975), p. 27-103 ; Italian translation in Id., *Tra preghiera e rivolta. Le folle toscane nel XIV secolo*, Rome, 1993, p. 137-194 ; Id., *Orientations pastorales du clergé, fin XIIIe-XIVe siècle : le témoignage de l'onomastique toscane*, in *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1983, p. 43-64 ; D. Herlihy, *Tuscan Names, 1200-1530*, in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 1988, p. 561-582.

<sup>32</sup> E. Carpentier, *Les prénoms à Orvieto...*

presence of the notary, an essential character in the evolution of names<sup>33</sup>. His documents reflected all the aspects of everyday life, and when writing them he managed to follow the changing patterns of the verbal designations of people ; but he inevitably had to translate the oral use in written formulas that were not exactly those of the everyday use, and could not have its flexibility. Those written documents are today the unique source upon which we can rely to know the ways people used to call one another, and they express in fact the compromise between the « real » designation habits and their adaptation by the specialist of writing<sup>34</sup>.

Another decisive factor in the evolution of naming is communal organization itself. It represents in fact the Italian version of the State that developed everywhere in Western countries during that period, and exerted heavy pressure to fix in written documents the names of subjects, of tax-payers, and of suspects. The commune presented however some peculiarities in comparison with monarchic or seigneurial States. Its subjects, or at least some of them, exercised power collectively themselves, and they were therefore enumerated, by hundreds and thousands, in many lists of members of the counsels of the City-State, soldiers, or citizens who approved treaties with other cities<sup>35</sup>. On the other hand, the precocity of administrative techniques in the communes, and the presence of numerous notaries and clerks in their offices led to the production of abundant written sources, in which the individuals were identified as precisely as possible. Among those documents, the fiscal ones, *estimi* and later *catasti*, were the most remarkable, and the most important for the social history of the uses of naming<sup>36</sup>. For instance they played a great, and often decisive, part, in the spreading of complex names among the peasantry : the fiscal lists forced them to write down a surname, while everyday practice seemed to remain much more hesitant. Finally the intense and changing political life of the City States gave a real importance to the precise identification of individuals and of

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<sup>33</sup> O. Guyotjeannin, *L'onomastique émilienne...*

<sup>34</sup> About the « real » designation and its transcription, cfr. F. Menant, *L'anthroponymie du monde rural...*

<sup>35</sup> The best study of such a list is that of E. Salvatori, *La popolazione pisana nel Duecento. Il patto di alleanza di Pisa con Siena, Pistoia e Poggibonsi del 1228*, Pise, 1994, p. 129-135 ; cfr. Ead., *Il sistema antroponimico a Pisa nel Duecento...*

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. for example A. Grohmann, *L'imposizione diretta...*

collectivities such as families, seigneurial groups or neighbours : I have mentioned that the transformations of the names of the patrician households were partly due to political circumstances, being linked to their place in the urban community<sup>37</sup>. The problem of the name is at the very heart of the genesis of the modern State in Italy at the time of the communes and of the urban seigneuries, and it is in that range both social and political that the cultural identity of this country. mostly clearly shows<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> About that theme, cfr. especially the works of Ch. Klapisch Zuber, mentioned above.

<sup>38</sup> I thank Prof. George Beech and Mrs. Andrée Cabillic for their help in the translation of this paper from the french.