

Christian toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia

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ABSTRACT

What story can place names tell about the significance of religion to national and regional societies? This study explores Christian place names in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia, three neighboring countries of Central Europe. Historically, these three nations share predominantly Catholic religious roots. More recently, however, their respective national societies display markedly different attitudes toward religion. Using FamilySearch Places (an online database of place names), the study examines the occurrence and spatial distribution of Christian place names. It considers when these names were initially coined and looks at changes involving Christian place names, since 1900. The research uncovers a number of apparent spatial patterns in Christian toponyms. With few exceptions, the observed name changes were religious to secular in nature.

KEYWORDS

Central Europe; Christianity; regional identity; religion; toponymy

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1. Introduction

Toponymy – the study of place names – can provide unique insights into an area’s history and culture. It demonstrates values and ideologies that were important to local people at the time that a place was named. Like stamps, toponyms can act as messengers of local, regional and national identities, communicating conscious and sub-conscious messages about local populations (Brunn 2011; Reeves 2015). Changes to established place names can also signal significant cultural shifts.

In certain cases, toponyms convey religious meaning and can inform us about the cultural heritage of a given area. Some well-known – and consequently easy-to-overlook – examples include Los Angeles, San Francisco, São Paulo and Saint Petersburg. Each of these toponyms references an important person or concept within Christianity.

Europe in general and Central Europe in particular have a long history of Christian cultural identity. The Empire of Austria-Hungary was closely aligned with Roman Catholicism while, to the north, Prussia’s religious inclinations were split between Protestant and Catholic. In light of this Christian cultural heritage, one might expect to find Christian toponyms in the countries of Central Europe.

This study examines toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia. Specifically, it looks at names for permanently inhabited settlements that have a Christian theme. We seek to answer the following questions.

- How often do Christian place names occur in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia?
- What spatial patterns do they present?
- What can they tell us about the people that coined them and the people that they now represent?

In addition to these straightforward questions, we wish to better understand how Christian heritage is reflected in the place names of Central Europe. How much do place names reflect current identities? How much are they a product of cultural heritage?

2. Studies in toponymy

Place names have been studied by geographers and others to show both their connection to the landscape and their relationship to the people who designated them. A wide array of toponymic topics have been explored, from the politics of street naming in Nairobi, Kenya (Wanjiru, Matsubara 2016) and Arab Palestinian zones (Azaryahu, Kook 2002) to the distribution of geographically descriptive toponyms found in the northeastern United States (Zelinsky 1955) to the identification of ethnic settlements on maps (Raitz 1973). Toponyms can also be an important tool for developing tourism, as in Tuscany, Italy (Lemmi, Tangheroni n.d.).

Studies of toponymy illustrate facets of cultural identity that are embedded in a place and in the

memory of its local inhabitants, as well as the various processes that result in differentiated geographic patterns of place names. It is to these varying perspectives that we add our religious and historical framework of analysis of place names. Many dimensions are involved in naming a place. Because multiple interests could be competing for recognition of their particular agenda, political issues often come into play (Berg, Vuolteenaho 2009). In particular, renaming places can come with cultural and religious political implications such as in specific case studies in Israel (Cohen, Kliot 1992), Belgrade, Serbia (Rajić 2012), and the United States (Nick 2017).

The meaning of place names themselves and the linguistic markers they include present a highly-nuanced view of the connections between place and language (Radding, Western 2010; David 2011). Along these lines, Nash (1999) shows the toponymic implications of changing place names, in this case Irish, from one language to another using phonetic spelling. Wilbur Zelinsky (1997) edited a focus section of *The Professional Geographer* that includes a thoughtful discussion on the historical and cultural significance of names that have become ingrained in the landscapes of the non-Western cultures of the Inupiat Eskimos of Alaska (Fair 1997) and the Canyon de Chelly Navajo in Arizona (Jett 1997).

Many studies consider place names in Central and Eastern Europe. Street names have particular importance in projecting key cultural perceptions to those within and without a given society. For example, with German unification, street naming (keeping old names or changing names) in places such as East Berlin had particular political overtones (Azaryahu 1997). In Bucharest, Romania street naming practices differed during the communist period as compared with the post-Socialist era (Light et al. 2002; Light 2004). Bucher et al. (2013) compare street toponyms within the centers of eight regional cities in Slovakia to show how the shares of different types of names vary by city, while Cureleac (2013) analyzes the place naming practices of the Ukrainian minority in an area of Romania. David (2011a; 2011b) uses Central and Eastern European examples to argue for the recognition of a “commemorative” name category for places that were named by political regimes to reinforce their stance and legitimacy.

Additionally, David and Semian (2015) look at toponyms and geographical nicknames that reference other places – Bohemian Manchester, for example – and how these are used in the Czech media. Finally, Semian et al. (2017) show what the names of local groups in Czechia say about the people that are part of these groups and about the region specifically.

Nash and Simpson (2011) analyze how place names within a language region illustrate ties between a particular people and the land that can continue for generations. This is certainly the case

with religious toponyms that show how early inhabitants of a place demarcated their devotion to a higher power. Consequently, religious toponyms are easily found throughout the many cultural regions of the world.

Numerous studies explore the relationship between religion and place names. This process can be seen with church toponyms in cities such as Chicago or New Orleans, where names differed markedly between African American and “White Euro-American” places of worship (Fairclough 1960; Zelinsky 2002). In a broader context, names of churches can also tell much about the religious makeup of the underlying population such as with Lutheran (Ferguson 1966), Catholic (Stump 1986), and Eastern Rite Roman Catholic (Stump 1988) churches in the United States. Additionally, in terms of place names, rather than simply looking at the naming of churches themselves, Brunn and Wheeler (1966) highlight the fascinating and diverse set of religious toponyms found across the United States.

Gazetteers, atlases, and other place compendiums about our study area can also be valuable resources. These include general place name guides (Room 1997; Everett-Heath 2000) that can give one a flavor of the types and ranges of names around the world and region. Atlases help one locate these places and show their historical development and spatial proximity (Demart 2011; Polska Akademia 1973; Kartografické nakladatelství 1968). A postal guide of Poland (Kay 1992), a study of German towns in Slovakia (Gardiner 1988), and an old explanation and classification of Polish place names (Ehrlich 1915) can also prove helpful. Finally, official gazetteers and dictionaries stand as important references for locations and historical snapshots of places that existed at certain points of time (US Board on Geographic Names 1955; US Board on Geographic Names 1988; Słownik geograficzny 1880–1914).

On the whole, these studies show how toponyms are indicative of cultural identity at various spatial scales. They underscore how place names have a distinct societal importance among a wide range of people in various parts of the world (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010). We highlight the cultural and geographic importance of toponyms in this comparison of religious – and specifically Christian – place names in Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia.

3. Methods

This study employs both national and regional scale levels to examine the toponyms of Czechia, Poland and Slovakia. It uses FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016), a large collection of modern and historic place descriptions maintained for the intent of helping people describe their family history, to identify occurrences of Christian toponyms in the three

countries. In addition to this comprehensive dictionary of toponyms, the study relies on specific and more localized sources to examine a subset of Christian toponyms in select model regions. These sources include Wikipedia articles, historical information or visual presentations available on official municipal websites and detailed toponymic dictionaries for the countries in question (Czech Statistical Office 2006; Hosák, Šrámek 1967–1980; Majtán 1998; Profous 1947–1960; Rymut 1987).

As the title indicates, our intent is to study Christian toponyms. We define a Christian toponym as a place name that refers to a Christian theme. These references to Christianity can be readily apparent, for example *Jerusalem* or *Svatý Jan* [Saint John], or they may require more knowledge concerning a given toponym’s origin and meaning. This is where we turned to the in-depth sources listed above.

At the national scale, we used FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016), to search each of the three countries for any “populated places” – a group of types that includes cities, towns, villages, municipalities and other permanently inhabited settlements – that have certain key Christian terms in their name. We conducted searches for names referencing Mary (i.e. the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ) as well as place names including the word “holy/saint”. The name Mary is rendered as Maria in each of the three native languages, so the search string was simply “Mari*” with the asterisk acting as a wildcard for any number of characters. Because Slavic languages, in this case Czech, Polish and Slovak, utilize noun declinations, our search queries needed to account for a variety of possible endings. The three languages use a word that can be translated into English as either “holy” (as in Holy Ghost) or “saint” (as in Saint Mark). In both Czech and Slovak, the search string for holy/saint is “Svat*”. In Polish, the string is “Swiet*”. FamilySearch Place’s search function is inclusive of all diacritics, so it brings back all results with Svätý (Slovak) or Święty (Polish) and their various derivatives.

Every known location described in FamilySearch Places can have multiple “place representations”. Place representations describe the same place at a different point in its history. They can describe a period when a place was known by a different name or when it belonged within a different political jurisdiction, among other possibilities. To make sure our search results were describing unique places we removed any place representations that described the same logical place from our counts of Christian toponyms. In this way, we represented each place once and only once. This same database feature also helped us to identify name changes over time, which we explore later in the study.

In addition to this country-level view, we wished to examine a sampling of areas within the three countries in greater detail. We selected two districts (okres in Czechia and Slovakia, powiat in Polish) from each

of the three countries. We examined all unique names for inhabited settlements and flagged any that had a potentially Christian theme. After this initial pass, we conducted in-depth research to determine whether the toponyms in question had a verifiable Christian theme. A village could be called *Janov*, for example, simply because a prominent landowner bore the name Jan. On the other hand, the village could be home to a chapel, church or pilgrimage dedicated to Saint John.

A number of common given names have clear roots in Christianity. John (Jan in Slavic languages), James (Jakub), Peter and Paul (Pavel or Pawel), for example, show up rather frequently among the toponyms of the districts we examined. And while use of such a name, regardless of its intended meaning, can still demonstrate a relationship to Christianity, we chose to focus on toponyms that bear a more directly verifiable Christian meaning. Any time we came across one of these Christian given names as a toponym in the model districts, we checked local parish churches, smaller chapels and pilgrimage traditions for use of the same saint's name. If we found a church, chapel or pilgrimage dedicated to the saint in question or

historical information that described said saint as the source of the toponym, we regarded it as a Christian toponym. Otherwise, it was removed from our list and not included in further qualitative analysis.

In the case of the Slovak districts, we realized after we had begun researching and comparing places that district borders have changed significantly over the last fifty years. We chose to use the borders of the so-called "large" districts that were valid from 1960 to 1996. This means that Trnava District also includes the present-day Piešťany and Hlohovec Districts and the Prešov District includes the area now in Sabinov District. Even with this broader historic boundary description, Slovakia's large districts contain fewer settlements than the model districts in Czechia or Poland. In similar fashion, we adhere to the boundaries of Žďár nad Sázavou District as they were before 2005, when a number of municipalities along its eastern border were reassigned to Brno-venkov.

We selected districts that would represent different regions of the three countries and intentionally avoided districts located along international borders. This decision helps the study to focus on the countries' historic core and avoid some of the unique

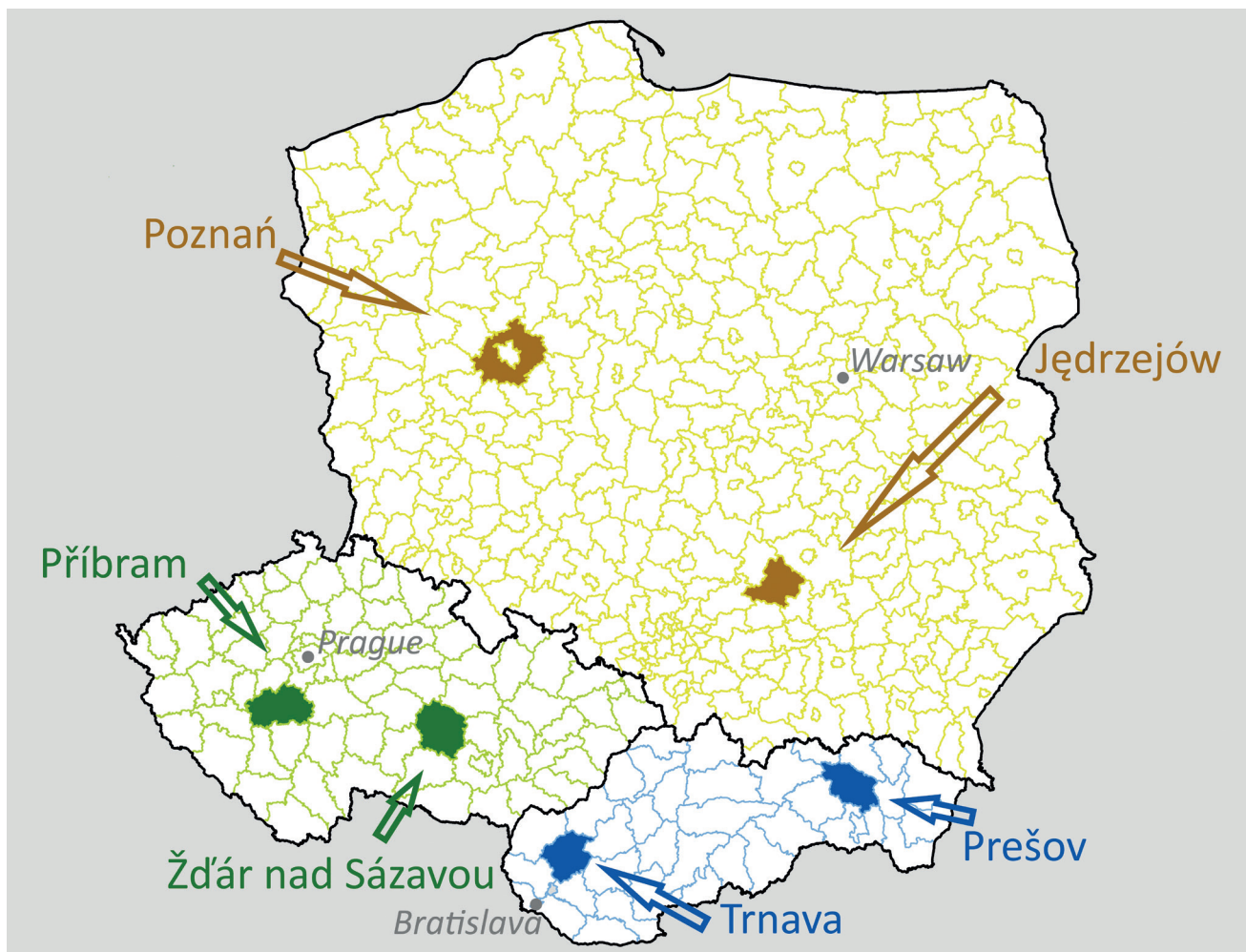


Fig. 1 Model districts examined in the study.

circumstances of border regions. Figure 1 shows the six model districts. In Czechia, they are Příbram and Žďár nad Sazavou; in Slovakia, Trnava and Prešov and in Poland, Poznań and Jędrzejów.

After collecting and counting instances of Christian toponyms in the six model districts, we took a closer look at the place names themselves. This qualitative analysis enables us to identify and describe a number of categories. It also allows us to highlight unique names, examine their meanings and recognize spatial patterns.

4. Findings

4.1 National comparisons

When we conducted the queries for this research project, FamilySearch Places included descriptions for 16,462 settlements in Czechia; 4842 in Slovakia and 50,380 in Poland (FamilySearch 2016). Normalized against these totals, country-wide queries for Christian-themed place names show differences among the three countries. Table 1 describes both the raw numbers of Christian toponyms, searched at the country level, as well as their relative frequencies. Mary place names are more common in Poland than in Czechia or Slovakia, while the opposite is true of Holy/Saint place names. Slovakia’s relative frequency of Holy/

Saint toponyms stands out in this comparison, reaching nearly one percent (0.93%) of all place names in the country.

Figure 2 graphically portrays the prevalence of these two particular cases of Christian toponyms in the three countries. The lower percentages – describing Mary toponyms in Czechia and Slovakia and Holy/Saint toponyms in Poland – are quite similar.

Figure 3 and 4 present the overall numbers and geographic distribution of Christian toponyms resulting from these queries. Mary place names, as shown in Figure 3, are more frequent in Poland. And within Poland they show a thicker concentration centered south and east of the country’s present-day geographic center. This spatial pattern is reminiscent of Poland’s pre-World War II territorial extent and suggests that place names incorporating the name Mary were not used as frequently by the German speaking inhabitants of what is now western and southwestern Poland (Pomerania in the northwest, Silesia in the southwest). This German cultural area tended to identify with Lutheranism more than with Catholicism and would, therefore, be a less likely location for observing toponyms honoring the Virgin Mary.

The Holy/Saint place names – depicted in Figure 4 – are more common in Czechia and Slovakia, particularly considering the overall numbers of settlements in the three countries (see Tab. 1 and Fig. 4). Within Czechia these place names occur with greater frequency in Bohemia (the western two-thirds of the country) and even more specifically along the German and Austrian borders of southern Bohemia. Central Slovakia is home to two distinctive clusters of Holy/Saint toponyms in the Liptov and the Turiec regions. The Turiec region, with its central city Martin, is often viewed as a cradle of Slovakia’s language and culture, perhaps signaling a greater cultural significance in the place naming patterns employed there.

Historically, Martin was known as *Svätý Martin* or *Turčiansky Svätý Martin* [*Saint Martin* or *Turiec Saint Martin*], while Liptovský Mikuláš – the largest town in the Liptov region – was called *Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš* [*Liptov Saint Nicholas*]. In both cases, the word *saint* [*Svätý*] was removed from the toponym, resulting in a more secular place name.

These are two examples of a broader trend during the twentieth century towards more secular place

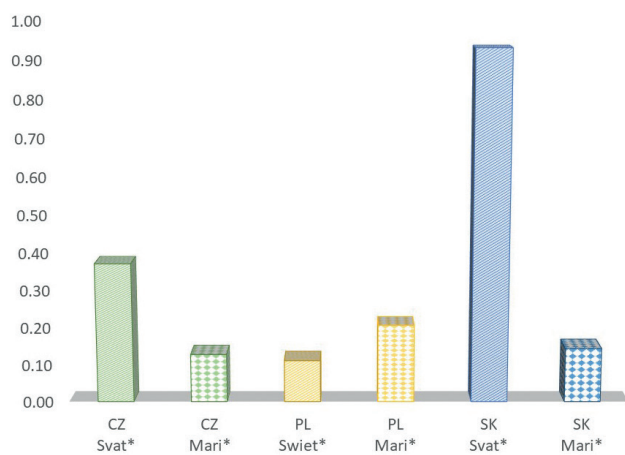


Fig. 2 Holy/Saint and Mary toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia as a percentage of total settlement names.

Tab. 1 Country-level queries in FamilySearch Places, numbers and relative frequencies of toponyms beginning with Saint/Holy [Svat* or Swiet*] or Mary [Mari*].

Country	Czechia		Poland		Slovakia	
	Svat*	Mari*	Swiet*	Mari*	Svat*	Mari*
Search string	Svat*	Mari*	Swiet*	Mari*	Svat*	Mari*
Matching place names	61	21	56	104	45	7
Total number of settlements	16462		50380		4842	
Percentages	0.37	0.13	0.11	0.21	0.93	0.14

Source: FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016)

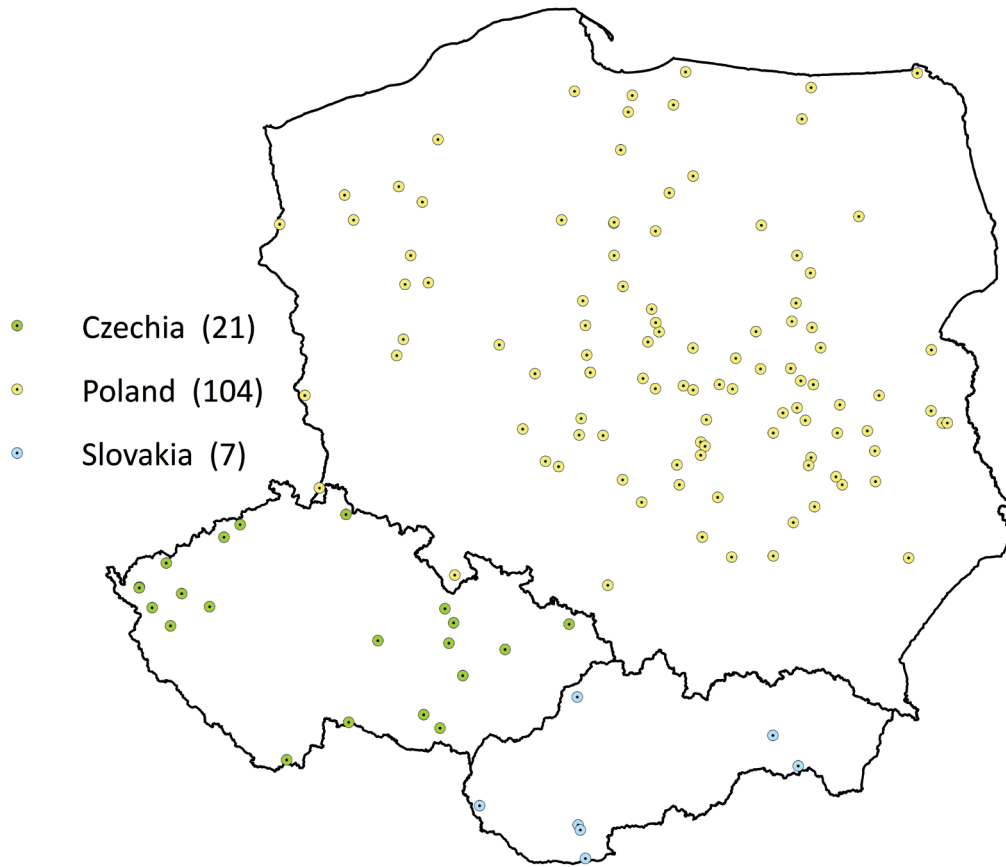


Fig. 3 Spatial distribution of Mary toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia.

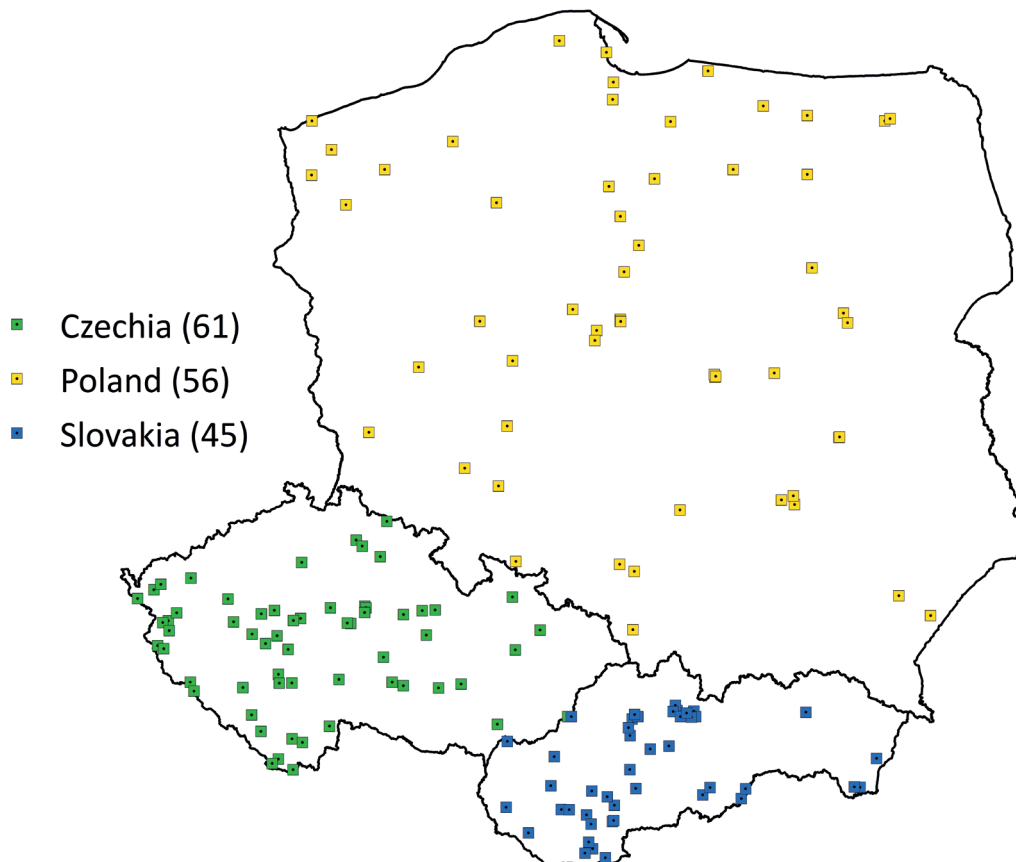


Fig. 4 Spatial distribution of Holy/Saint toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia.

names. While it is still clear to those familiar with these places that the names reference St. Martin or St. Nicholas, the toponyms are less overtly Christian now than they were one hundred years ago. Martin took on its present shortened name in 1951 and Liptovský Mikuláš lost its “saintliness” in 1952.

These name changes were forced upon local communities by Czechoslovakia’s communist regime, which sought to reduce the significance of religion in the daily lives of its citizens. The town of Svätý Jur, in southwestern Slovakia, is a well-documented example of this larger trend: “During the socialist period the name Svätý Jur, considered to be politically inappropriate, had to be changed to the more neutral Jur pri Bratislave. After the [Velvet] revolution the town quickly returned to its original name” (Filip 2013: <http://omestach.sk/svatyjur/svatyjur.html>; translation by authors).

As these examples demonstrate, each toponym has its own unique story. And while some trends can be observed at the country level, it is necessary to move closer to the toponyms themselves, i.e. to the regional and local levels, to more clearly view the picture they are painting.

4.2 Regional comparisons

Figure 5 portrays the relative frequency of Christian toponyms within the six model districts described above (see Figure 1) while Table 2 provides a more

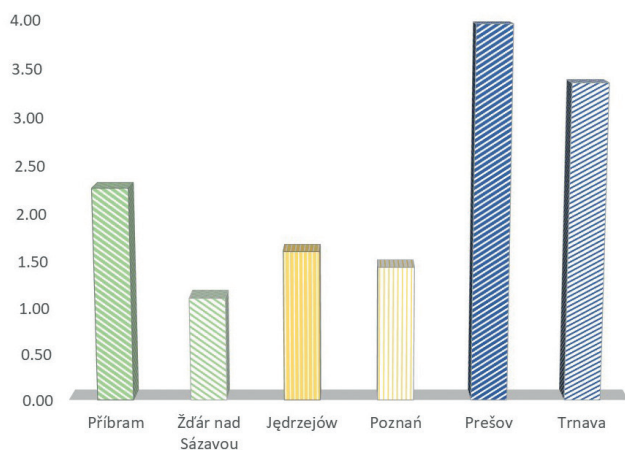


Fig. 5 Christian-themed toponyms as a percentage of total settlement names in the six model districts.

detailed breakdown of the numbers. The two Slovak districts Prešov and Trnava show the highest ratios with more than three percent of their settlements paying nominal homage to Christianity. Přebíram, one of two Czech districts, is home to nine Christian toponyms that account for approximately two percent (2.27%) of its settlements. Poland’s two districts come next – in descending order – with percentages close to one and a half. Jędrzejów is slightly higher (1.6%) and Poznań slightly lower (1.43%). Žďár nad Sázavou, Czechia’s second district in the study, displays the lowest percentage (1.1%) of Christian place names from the six model districts.

In recent decades, the inhabitants of Moravia have identified much more with Christianity than the people of Bohemia (Havlíček et al. 2009). This trend is not in line with the higher ratio of Christian toponyms in Přebíram – a district within Bohemia – as compared to Žďár nad Sázavou – in Moravia. However, the fact that the toponyms in question originated several hundred years ago, during a period when Christianity was the dominant religious and political player in both Bohemia and Moravia makes this result appear less of an anomaly. Přebíram District is also home to a regionally significant pilgrimage site, Svatá Hora, and a pair of toponyms honoring the Czech Brethren. These observations could cause Přebíram to exhibit a slightly higher ratio of Christian toponyms than the average for all of Bohemia.

Žďár nad Sázavou District had 20 toponyms based on a given name with apparent Christian origins and initially appeared to have an abundance of Christian-themed place names. However, in-depth investigation affirmed that all but three of these toponyms are derived from the name of an early settler/land owner and have little to do with Christianity. The remaining Christian toponym (one not based upon a Christian, given name) in Žďár nad Sázavou, Křížovice, references the cross and a nearby church dedicated to the Holy Cross [Kostel Povýšení svatého Kříže] (Wikipedia [https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kostel_Povýšení_svatého_Kříže_\(Dobruška\)](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kostel_Povýšení_svatého_Kříže_(Dobruška))).

Any remaining toponyms (see Tables 3, 4 and 5) based on the given names of important figures in Christianity had to meet stricter criteria to be considered Christian. The village or town needed to include a chapel or church dedicated to the Saint referenced in the toponym, or there needed to be

Tab. 2 Christian toponyms in the model districts, raw numbers and relative frequencies.

Country	Czechia		Poland		Slovakia	
District	Přebíram	Žďár nad Sázavou	Jędrzejów	Poznań	Prešov	Trnava
Christian place names:	9	4	4	5	7	5
Total number of settlements:	397	363	250	349	177	149
Percentages	2.27	1.10	1.60	1.43	3.95	3.36

Source: FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016); Authors’ calculations

evidence of a local pilgrimage honoring the Saint in question, or historical documents or community symbols needed to reference the Saint as the source of the toponym. Martinice in Žďár nad Sázavou District, for example, continues to honor Saint Martin with a traditional lantern celebration every November (Nedělková 2017).

Close examination of the specific instances of Christian toponyms found in the six selected districts provides an opportunity to recognize and describe categories and patterns. It also enables us to take a closer look at some unique place names. Tables 3, 4 and 5 list the Christian toponyms that we identified in each of the six districts. We have organized these

Tab. 3 Christian toponyms from two districts in Czechia.

Czechia		
Příbram	English explanation	Žďár nad Sázavou
Bratřejov	Bratr – Brother (referencing Czech Brethren)	
Bratřkovice		
Křížov	Kříž – cross	Křížovice
Daleké Dušníky	Dušník – fuedal property directly supporting a church	
	Cyríl – Saint Cyril	Cyrílov
Jerusalem		
	Martin – Saint Martin	Martinice
	Matěj – Saint Matthew	Matějov
Svatá Hora	Svatá Hora – holy mountain	
Svaté Pole	Svaté Pole – holy fields	
Svatý Jan	Svatý Jan – Saint John	
Petrovice	Petr – Saint Peter	

Source: FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016); Authors' translations

Note: Pay attention to the justification of information in the English explanation column. Right justified indicates that the explanation pertains to a toponym or toponyms described in the right column. Left justified denotes an explanation of the left column. Explanations that are centered within the center column refer to toponyms on both sides.

Tab. 4 Christian toponyms from two districts in Poland.

Poland		
Jędrzejów	English explanation	Poznań
Kościelna Górka	Biskup – Bishop	Biskupice
	Kościel – church	Ceradz Kościelny
Mnichów	Krzyżownik – crusader	Krzyżowniki
Mniszek	Mnich/Mnisz – monk	Krzyżowniki
Pawłowice	Paweł/Pawł – Saint Paul	
	Łazarz – Saint Lazarus	Łazarz

Source: FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016); Authors' translations

Note: Pay attention to the justification of information in the English explanation column. Right justified indicates that the explanation pertains to a toponym or toponyms described in the right column. Left justified denotes an explanation of the left column. Explanations that are centered within the center column refer to toponyms on both sides.

Tab. 5 Christian toponyms from two districts in Slovakia.

Slovakia		
Prešov	English explanation	Trnava
Janovík	Jan/Janov – Saint John	
Křížovany	Kříž – cross	Křížovany nad Dudvážom
Ondrašovce	Ondra – Saint Andrew	
Petrovany	Peter/Petr – Saint Peter	
	Kostol – church	Svätý Peter pri Váhu
Prameň Salvator	Salvator – Savior	Veľké Kostolany
Šarišské Michal'any	Míchal – Saint Michael	Zákostolany
Svätý Jur	Svätý Jur – Saint George	Biely Kostol

Source: FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016); Authors' translations.

Note: Pay attention to the justification of information in the English explanation column. Right justified indicates that the explanation pertains to a toponym or toponyms described in the right column. Left justified denotes an explanation of the left column. Explanations that are centered within the center column refer to toponyms on both sides.

by country, with Table 3 presenting the two Czech districts, Table 4 the Polish districts and Table 5 the Slovak districts. The wide column in the middle of each of these tables provides an English explanation of the religious elements of the various toponyms. We have reduced some of the redundancy of these English explanations by sorting duplicates within the same district and lining up duplicates within the same country. English explanations that are aligned to the right of the center column apply only to toponyms in the district on the right of the chart, while explanations aligned to the left apply only to the district on the left. English explanations centered in this middle column describe place names in both districts.

Several of these toponyms invoke the name of a recognized saint – in a Catholic/Protestant sense. These include the names of some of Jesus Christ's apostles, for example Andrew, John, Mathew, Peter and Paul [Ondra, Jan, Matěj, Petr and Paweł]. ... a number of regionally important saints: Cyril, George [Jur], and Lazarus [Łazarz], Martin and Michael [Michal]. Other observed Christian toponyms do not reference a historical figure. Instead they focus on deity, an institution or a symbol. Examples include the cross or crusaders [Kříž, Krzyżownik], monks [Mnich, Mniszek], bishop [Biskup] or the word church [Kostol, Kościel].

Not surprisingly, place naming practices show strong regional correlation. Toponyms referencing crusaders, for example, are only found in Poznań District, where there are two. Place names using the word church [kostol/kościel] are found in Trnava District, where there are three, and once each in the Polish districts. They are not present in the remaining three districts. Příbram District contains the only toponyms that describe things – fields and a mountain – with an adjective as holy, as well as the only references to the Czech Brethren. In both cases, there are two such names. It appears that principles of innovation and diffusion apply to toponyms. Well-liked place names are contagious.

While gathering information about Jędrzejów District and the places within it, we learned about Świętokrzyskie Province (or Voivodeship), of which Jędrzejów is a part. The province's name Świętokrzyskie means Holy Cross. Although information about the province describes it being named for the Świętokrzyskie Mountains that it contains; its website, coat-of-arms and official logos demonstrate a clear connection to Christian symbols. The province was created quite recently, in 1999, as part of large-scale administrative reforms. The selection of a Christian toponym with its associated symbols in the context of recent political action demonstrates the ongoing significance of Christianity to the people of southeastern Poland.

4.3 Temporal comparisons

To document changes in Christian toponyms over time, we employed a series of military maps compiled by

Austria-Hungary between 1900 and World War I (Austria-Hungary 1900–1914). We closely examined the entire territory of each of the six model districts and searched for Christian toponyms. In the process, we checked on the place names we were already researching (Tables 3, 4 and 5) to investigate whether they had changed during the last hundred years. We then looked at modern maps, using both OpenStreetMap and Google Maps, to determine whether the remaining Christian toponyms found on the old Austria-Hungary maps describe a settlement that still exists under a different name or whether these communities and toponyms have disappeared from the map entirely.

Changes involving Christian place names were rare in the model districts, comparing one hundred years ago with the present. In Czechia, we only recorded one change from a Christian toponym to a name that is not recognizable as Christian. The village of Kocanda in Žďár nad Sázavou District is shown on the old Austria-Hungary maps under its historic, German name Gottseida, in which the word God (Gott in German) is evident. While the Czech and German names are phonetically similar, they do not share the same meaning. The Czech name does not imply anything Christian.

Poland's model districts include three Christian toponyms that were altered in some way after 1900. Two of these places appear to be deserted settlements, as neither modern maps nor satellite images give any indication of their existence. The third, a village in Poznań District, changed from Święty Łazarz [St. Lazarus] to Łazarz losing the descriptive *Saint* from the toponym. Although the meaning remains, the modern and shortened name is less overtly Christian than it was a century ago.

Slovakia provides three more examples of place names becoming more secular, at some point during the last hundred years. The old Austria-Hungary maps show three villages in the Prešov District Szentmihályfalva, Tarczaszentpéter, Szentesdubrava that are now known as Šarišské Michaľany, Petrovany and Dubrava, respectively. Each of these villages lost the descriptor *szent* [saint] from their name. (We should point out that these three historic toponyms and the word *szent* are Hungarian and not Slovak. The Austria-Hungary military maps commonly employed Hungarian names to describe places in what is now Slovakia.) Of these three toponyms, two of them became less overtly Christian while the third no longer has a Christian element. The third toponym Dubrava is derived from words meaning a grove of oak trees. We could, therefore, translate it – before and after the change – as “Holy Oak Grove” and “Oak Grove”.

To summarize the observed changes over the last hundred years in the model districts: two toponyms changed from being recognizably Christian in nature to conveying no Christian meaning, three toponyms are less overtly Christian than they were and two settlements that had Christian toponyms have been abandoned and no longer appear on modern maps.

We observed no new Christian toponyms in the model districts; nor did we find cases of toponyms changing to more openly convey Christian meaning.

5. Conclusion

Toponyms are a feature of the cultural landscape that can be read and studied by those wishing to pay attention. Back in 1955, well-known cultural geographer Wilbur Zelinsky issued the following call to action:

“Most urgent is the need for a series of careful studies of the toponymy of a selected group of communities that will include generic terms, specific names, and vernacular topographic language and will treat these subjects in their full geographic and historic context.” (Zelinsky 1955: 349)

Though this study focuses on a specific subset of place names, i.e. Christian place names, it does answer Zelinsky’s call for “careful studies of ... toponymy”.

Czechia, Poland and Slovakia are home to many Christian toponyms, though they comprise a fairly small percentage of all toponyms in these countries. Slovakia proved to have the greatest relative frequency of such names. Czechia and Poland show similar frequencies at both the national and regional scales. Czechia, however, is rather diverse at the regional level. Bohemia appears to have more Christian toponyms while the representative district from Moravia ranks lowest of all the model districts. This particular result is a reversal of recent statistics and studies that depict Moravia as more Christian than Bohemia (Havlíček et al. 2009). Further research could shed additional light on differences in the prevalence and typology of Christian toponyms in Bohemia and Moravia.

Comparisons at the regional level, including changes over time, allowed us to take a more qualitative approach. Close examination of the Christian toponyms in six model districts uncovered a number of regionally significant patterns. Areas near regional borders, for example, sometimes affix regional descriptors to otherwise Christian toponyms, as in the Czech and Slovak model districts. Ideas are often contagious and Christian toponyms prove to be no exception. Some of the more unique names or name types were used multiple times in a single region, but appeared in none (or few) of the other model districts. In terms of changes to place names over the last hundred years, we observed several changes towards more secular toponyms, but also a pair of changes in the other direction; a new Christian toponym for a Polish province and a return to a traditional and Christian name for a Slovak town.

Toponymy presents many opportunities for further research, from viewing name changes over time in their historical context, to examining cultural impacts of imperialism, to investigating regional marketing. The recent de-communization of place names in Ukraine provides an example of top-down, politically driven

events that can impact people’s sense of local identity (MacFarquhar 2015). Rather than simply focus on contested space, in such a situation political geographers may wish to explore contested toponyms.

Toponymy proved to be a viable way to explore religious heritage. It depicts cultural elements that were important to local communities at the time that places were named. Czechia, Poland and Slovakia clearly have strong cultural roots in Christianity and this is reflected in their toponymic landscape.

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