

Gender assignment to German city names: Areal and diachronic perspectives

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With respect to gender assignment, proper names behave completely different from common nouns. In the case of the latter, gender is determined by formal (*Mädchen* 'girl' → n.) or semantic (*Frau* 'woman' → f.) criteria (grammatical or semantic gender). Proper names, by contrast, tend, in the long run, to establish a referential gender that is gender is assigned on the basis of properties of the referent, namely the class of objects: ships → f. (*die Polarstern*), cars → m. (*der Polo*), cities → n. (*das moderne Hamburg* 'modern Hamburg'). However, relatively little is so far known on the transition from grammatically assigned common noun gender to onymic class gender. Against this backdrop, city names are of special interest, which, in Middle High German, still require feminine gender agreement (*diu himelîch lerufalem* f.) before neuter class gender is established. Nonetheless, residues of feminine gender survived in some East Central German dialects (*die Lausche* '[the city of] Lauscha f.' (Weise 1900: 73) – a fact that has gone unnoticed in the literature.

Taking historical (ReM, ReN, FnhdC) and dialectal data (Saxon: *Erzgebirge*) into account, it is argued that, in earlier stages, feminine gender has been productive for foreign and non-transparent names (MHG *die michelû Carthago* 'the-fem vast-fem Carthage', *Wormez*, *diu vil wîte* 'Worms the-fem ample-fem' → f.), whereas in fully transparent compound-like names the gender of the head noun (grammatical gender) was retained and gave rise to neuter class gender (*Ze Heimburch der alten* 'to Heimburch, the old' < -burg f. 'city' → f., *Liupolzdorf*, *daz* < -dorf n. 'village' → n.). As to Upper Saxon (*Erzgebirge*), it is shown that feminine gender persists in names with feminine second elements (*Neuwelt* < -welt f. 'world', *Schönheide* < -heide f. 'heather') and (mainly original Slavonic) names ending in -aul/-a (Zwickau, Schlema) or -itz < (Chemnitz, Löbnitz).

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