
In Memoriam

Henri Diament, 1933-1999

In Henri Diament, who died suddenly of a heart attack on 18 January 1999, the world of onomastics has lost one of its most versatile figures.

He was born in Paris, and he always regarded himself as a Frenchman, first and foremost. But Henri's family left France for the United States during the war years. Consequently all his education at the secondary and university levels was American, culminating with the completion of higher degrees at Columbia University. The blend of cultures in his background was reflected in all aspects of Henri's career. His MA and PhD theses led after revision to the book-length publications *Anglicisms in the Speech of French Bilingual Immigrants in the United States* (Mexico, 1962) and *The Toponomastic Reflexes of Castellum and Castrum: A Comparative Pan-Romanic Study* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1972).

These titles and publication details provide a hint of the variety of places and roles spanned by a career that included not only the position at the University of Haifa (Israel) from which he had been due to retire in 2001 at the age of 68, but also temporary appointments at Stanford University and the University of California, Irvine, a full-time associate directorship of the University of California's Education Abroad Program at the University of Bordeaux, France (1969-71), a visiting professorship at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa (1991), and a semester's sabbatical as a visiting scholar in the Department of French at the University of British Columbia, Canada (1996-97).

The topics that Henri Diament examined, in some thirty published articles and a similar number of papers given to conferences and other meetings, are extraordinarily diverse—from the etymology of several Old French lexemes to Middle Eastern place names attributable to the Crusaders' presence, from the territorial limits designated by the name *France* in past ages to the code names of French secret agents in World War II, from changes in personal name sought at various times by some people of Germanic origin to pseudo-Spanish placenames in California, from the naming of chemical elements and explosives to the hidden

meanings of proper names as used by Raymond Queneau, Valéry Larbaud, and other authors. How many contemporary scholars could demonstrate such a wide range of vision and true intellectual curiosity? Whenever his mind was sufficiently piqued, by even the most impossible-looking question, his uncanny knack for ferreting out nuggets of relevant information started with those stored in his own memory; then he exploited to the full whatever library or archive resources were accessible to him. Of Henri's articles, published in *Names*, *Onomastica Canadiana*, *Nouvelle Revue d'Onomastique* and several other journals and collections, rather more than two thirds are written in French, the remainder in English. A significant part of his non-onomastic activity was devoted to the theory and practice of translation. Also outside the field of onomastics is a book-length work, *Puis-je aimer tendrement Coïmbre? La grande littérature française en tant que vecteur de l'antisémitisme 1871-1948* [*Can I love Coimbra dearly? Mainstream French literature as a carrier of antisemitism 1871-1948*], which remains to be published posthumously.

A man of true sensitivity, Henri was an excellent correspondent and a very warm-hearted friend. I was initially put in touch with him thirty-five years ago by a colleague of mine who was a mutual friend and knew that both Henri and I had embarked seriously on Romance-language name research. However, we knew each other only through letters until 1981 when, as it happened, we met for the first time—at a Société Française d'Onomastique colloquium held in Dijon. Our paths crossed several times after that date, at various international conferences and ultimately (during the sabbatical mentioned above) in Vancouver.

Those of us who knew Henri will sorely miss his effortless bilingualism, his ready wit that ranged easily between the dry and the wry, and—above all—his great resourcefulness in providing information, in either published or unpublished form, on a seemingly endless variety of topics. He is survived by his mother, by his wife Charlotte, and by his son Guy, all of whom can be assured of the profound sympathy of a very wide international circle of name specialists.

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