On a peculiar morpho-syntactic pattern in the adaptation of Levantine place names into Early Modern Italian
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DOI: 10.2436/15.8040.01.103

Abstract
With a few exceptions, Italian endonyms of towns and cities are typically not preceded by a definite article. It is then noteworthy that the Italian names of important Levantine harbours to be found in Mediaeval and Early Modern travelogues are often preceded by the article (Il Cairo < al-Qāhirah, La Canea < Chaniá in the island of Crete, Lepanto < *L’Epanto < vernacular Greek (Népaktos for Classic Greek Náfaktos; see Migliorini 1927). What is more striking is that a numbers of city names such as Le Smirne = Smyrna and Le Gomenizze = Igumenitsa have been integrated into Early Modern Italian as plurals, as shown by the articles that go along with them. The same adaptation pattern can be found in the names of some Greek and North-African islands, as for instance le Marlera = Ereikoussa, le Gerbe = Jerba and li Gazi = Gozo. In this paper we aim to investigate the genesis of this unusual toponymic paradigm.

1. Introduction
As already observed by Pellegrini (1996: 1376), «en italien les noms de lieux [...] se sont presque toujours fixés sans article, en particulier les noms de villes». Out of the 8092 Italian comuni (the basic Italian administrative divisions) existing today, if we exclude place names of foreign origin like La Thuile, only 8 require a definite article, which is feminine and singular in the totality of cases. This percentage increases if we take unofficial, dialectal or regional forms into account (in 1863, the established form of Morra became La Morra, see DI 2,615). In the field of microtoponymy, though, we still find a significant number of such structures: «[…] casi di toponimi articolati sono offerti da nomi di piccole località, in cui è trasparente il nome comune che ne costituisce l’etimo» (Serianni 1988: 150). E.g. La Strada (Ravenna) ‘the road’, L’Olmo (Perugia, Florence) ‘the elm tree’, La Villa ‘the farm’ (Bolzano). This recurrent pattern, and possibly the influence of the definite article itself, have caused folk etymology to work particularly hard in making articulated non-transparent place names immediately understandable to the speakers, as in the case of la Spezia ‘the spice’ (but prob. < *villa Aspetia or Alba Spetie; cf. Gasca Queirazza et al. 1990: 345). We will see later how this tendency applies to articulated exonyms. Even rarer are plural articulated endonyms, which exclusively refer to little villages or non urban areas: I Forni (Grosseto) ‘the ovens’, Le Casette ‘the little houses’ (Ascoli Piceno, Padua), I Dossi ‘the rises’ (Piacenza), Le Castella ‘the castles’ (Catanzaro).

In Ancient Italian articulated toponyms, both singular and plural, were more common than today: in the first centuries of the Italian language we find Labadia (see DI 1,172), la Cattolica (12,227: «la la Catholica»),2 la Porretta (Sacchetti, LIZ 3.0: «n’andò poi al Bagno alla Porretta»), la Torre (see DI 1,401) today respectively Badia (Bolzano), Cattolica

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1 Paragraphs 1 and 2 have been written by Francesco Crifò, paragraphs 3 and 4 by Daniele Baglioni, paragraph 5 by both authors. They both would like to thank Andrew Spear (Grand Valley State University) for his thorough revision and valuable suggestions for what concerns the language of this essay.
2 The following Old Italian toponyms associated with two numbers are to be intended as quoted from Sanudo’s Diarii (Fulin et alii 1879-1903) with number of volume and page. The distribution of small and capital initials does not necessarily reflect the handwriting of the manuscript.
2. Articulated exonyms

The processes through which endonyms and exonyms come into existence are inherently different: neglecting this fact, or worse, keeping exonyms out of the limelight, can prove tricky. This hasty attitude is probably at the roots of the contradictory statement that we can read in Rohlfs 1966-69: § 649: «In taluni casi tuttavia nomi di città provenienti da nomi comuni hanno conservato l’articolo sino ad oggi: la Spezia, la Mirandola, l’Aquila, la Roccella, la Porretta, la Bastia, l’Aia, la Mecca, il Cairo».

The pattern that we will try to outline here used to be common in Ancient Italian. Between the 14th and 16th centuries, we find a definite article preceding the names of many Levantine harbours and islands: il Cairo = Cairo (Egypt), la Canea = Chania (Crete), la Prevesa (4,317: «de la Prevesas») = Preveza (Epirus), la Cefalonia = the island of Cefalonia / Kefallonia in the Ionian archipelago (2,139: «la Zefalonia»), Early Modern Ven. el Zaffo (1,645: «dal Zaffo») = Jaffa (in Palestine), etc.; they seem to have been particularly common in 16th century Venetian, even if this perspective may be influenced by the fact that in some earlier possible sources, such as portolan charts, definite articles would not usually be transcribed. Moreover, many other cases are likely to remain doubtful due to the uncertainties of ancient writing, chiefly in the usage of the apostrophe. In one of the chief monuments of Early Modern Venetian, the Diaritii of the Venetian historiographer Marin Sanudo (composed between 1496 and 1533), we find la Janina (2,559: «da la Janina») = Janjina (Dalmatia), el Zonchio (2,1124: «sopra el Zonchio») < Gk. Ζόγκλος = Pylos (Peloponnesse), el Tenedo (23,143: «uno castelo e loco su l’ixola di Candia, chiamato el Tenedo») = Tenedos (today Bozcaada, an island in the Ageaen sea), el Cogno (27,601: «al Cogno») < Gk. Ικόνιον = Konya (Anatolia), la Trapezonta (30,84: «el bassà de la Trapezonta»; see DI 4,633-34 for the idiomatic expressions «perdere la Trebisonda» or acting «a la Trebisonda») = Trabzon (Black Sea), etc.

Most of the articulated exonyms of the Levant can be interpreted as calques of the local forms of the toponyms: e.g. il Cairo < Ar. al-Qāhirah, la Prevesa < Gk. Πρέβεζα, la Canea < Gr. τὰ Χανιά. This explanation is of course particularly fitting for all Greek place names, since the presence of an article preceding a toponym is normal in this language (see Θεσσαλονίκη = Thessalonica, Κύπρος = Cyprus, etc.). Some cases can be explained as an erroneous segmentation of the local form, for instance la Liça (see DI 2,623) < Gr. Λαοδίκεια, la Vrana (27,179: «la Vrana») < Croatian Lovran (Istria), el Zir (26,282: «la impresa del Zir») and el Zer (26,433: «ritornar al Zer») < Ven. Alzer (Algiers), etc. For other exonyms, one would be tempted to put forward phonetic similarities with common names: la Brazza (2,962: «conte di la Brazza»; Cr. Brač) can recall Ven. brazzo, pl. brazza ‘arm’ (Cortelazzo 2007: 220). At some point, the use of the definite article preceding Levantine exonyms must have been both extremely common and occasionally misunderstood, as is shown by those cases in which the article has been conglobed to the noun: Laiazzo (Domenichi 1551: 733: «il golfo di Laiazzoo») = Ayas (a port in Lesser Armenia), Legena (4,83: «la Legena») = the island of Aegina (in the Saronic Gulf), Lepanto < dial. Gk. ᾽Επάντος = the port of Naupactus [Νάπακτος] (according to Migliorini 1927).

As already noticed by Rohlfs (1966-69: § 644), some Levantine articulated exonyms are morphologically plural even if referring to single and undivided entities, not unlike classical pluralia tantum like Ἀθήναι (Athens) and Λουπίαι (Lecce). These must be considered and interpreted differently than the parallel plural articulated toponyms of Italian cities and islands, for the obvious reasons that the latter are always derived from common nouns (see § 1), while this cannot be the etymological root of their Levantine counterparts. As expected at
this chronological stage and in sources which vacillate between Italian and Venetian, the examples of this morpho-syntactic pattern present a vast number of variants, both graphical and phonological, most of which are not taken into account here, not to mention more noticeable fluctuations attributable to folk etymology. Some examples worthy of further examination are: \textit{le Smirne} = Smyrna (Izmir, on the Aegean coast of Turkey; see § 3), \textit{le Gomenizze} = Igoumenitsa (Epirus; see § 4), \textit{i Zerbi} and \textit{le Gerbe} (Jerba, an island in front of the Tunisian coast; see § 4), \textit{le Foje} (1,398: «a le Foje»), \textit{le Foglie} (16,194: «d’ontano da le Foglie una zornata»), \textit{le Zoie} (15,547: «a le Zoie») = Focca (Foça, on the Aegean coast of Turkey), \textit{le Brulle} (3,437: «a le Brulle»), \textit{le Burle} (26,424: «a le Burle») and \textit{li Brulli} (10,110: «per via de li brulli») = al-Burullus (Northern Egypt), \textit{le Gomenizze} (10,110: «per via de li brulli») = al-Burullus (Northern Egypt), \textit{le Spezie} (2,1020: «a le Spezie») = Cetinje (Montenegro). More forms seem to be found exclusively in Marin Sanudo’s \textit{Diarii}, and probably in its sources: \textit{li Casi} (2,981: «in li Casi») = the island of Kasos (Dodecanese), \textit{li Gozi} (25,59: «sopra li Gozi») = the island of Gavdos, to the south of Crete, \textit{le Seres} (5,670: «a le Seres e Salonichi») = Serres (Greek Macedonia), \textit{le Spezie} (5,695: «a le Spezie») = Sfakia (on the Southern coast of Crete, despite the identification with Fez in the index, vol. 5, p. 1116), \textit{le Pigne} (23,108: «a le Pigne») = Bāniyās (Syria). See also \textit{le Cefalonie} = Cefalonia in a public announcement published in Rome in 1572 (Crifò 2008: 99).

In the case of some nesonyms, we may suppose a collective use of the name of the main island in order to indicate the surrounding ones as well (see, for instance, \textit{le Cefalonie = Cefalonia and Ithaca, i Casi = Kasos, Armathia, and Makronisi; but not le Gerbe, since Jerba is not surrounded by islets}). Also, the possibility of an adaptation of an original plural in the source language cannot be ruled out. In at least a couple of names of harbours, the plural results from an ellipsis of a Romance descriptive toponym, as in the case of \textit{le Spezie ‘the spices’ > Gk. οἱ Σπέτσες}. Cortelazzo (1986) analyzed the interesting class of Greek toponyms to be found in Greek portolan charts and derived from Italian names of animals: so arose in Italian \textit{le Quaie ‘the quails’} (also \textit{porto di le Quaie or Porto Quaglio > Gk. ΠόρτοΚάγιο}, ib.: 507-08), cf. Gk. Καβαλλίνες, Καβάλλοι ‘(islands of) the horses’ (ib.: 506) and Πορτζέλοι ‘piglets’ (ib.: 507).

In all other cases, a different explanation is needed.

3. From Smirna to Smirne via Le Smirre

A very interesting case is presented by the Italian name for Smyrna, the well-known harbour on the Aegean coast of Anatolia corresponding to the modern city of Izmir in Turkey. The Latin name of the city, \textit{Smyrna}, an adaptation of the Greek Σμύρνη, is at the basis of the Italian \textit{Smirna} (see \textit{DI} 420), which can be found already in a text dating from the late 13th century, i.e. Bono Giamboni’s translation from Latin into Tuscan of Paulus Orosius’ \textit{Historiae adversus paganos} (TLIOMat). The same form \textit{Smirna} appears frequently in the 14th century, for instance in Petrarch’s \textit{Canzoniere} and in Boccaccio’s \textit{Trattatello in laude di Dante}, and later on in Renaissance and Baroque poets such as Pietro Bembo, Giovanni della Casa, and Giambattista Marino (\textit{LIZ} 3.0). However, \textit{Smirna} is not the only form occurring in Medieval and later texts. A plural variant \textit{Smirne} is also to be found both in chronicles and in travelogues, but very seldom in poetic compositions. The form \textit{Smirne} has survived to the present, while \textit{Smirna} becomes rarer and rarer after the 17th century and does not seem to occur anymore after the first half of the 19th century (\textit{LIZ} 3.0). As a result, since the occurrences of \textit{Smirna} are mostly contained in translations from Latin and in poetic texts, it is considered likely that the form is a Latinism; on the other hand, the plural \textit{Smirne}, which in Old and Early Modern Italian is very often preceded by the feminine plural article \textit{le}, is likely to have been the most common form from the Middle Ages on.
How to explain, then, the variant *(le)* Smirne? There is no extralinguistic reason why this toponym should have been adapted as a plural, since Smyrna in the Middle Ages was a pretty compact city, not a dispersed urban area with multiple centres (and, in fact, the name of Smyrna is singular in all other Romance languages). One might think, then, of an influence of the corresponding Greek form Σμύρνη, but this hypothesis is readily rejected, both phonetically, because Σμύρνη’s final vowel is -i and not -e as in Italian, and morphologically, because Σμύρνη is a singular (see Gk. ἌΣμύρνη). The question gets even more problematic if we consider other variants that were common in Medieval Italian vernaculars, most of which were plurals just like *le* Smirne. For instance, a form *(le)* Smirre often appears in 14th century texts, not only in Florentine literary prose (in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and Giovanni Villani’s *Cronica*: see TLIOMat), but also in bureaucratic documents, such as the official letter addressed from the city council of Ragusa (nowadays Dubrovnik) to the two merchants Mate de Mençe and Piero de Piçnegi in 1347, for which the local variety of Venetian was employed (Dotto 2008: 281 [66.7]). The variant Esmire without article is used once by the Tuscan writer Binduccio dello Scelto in his translation of Bеноît de Sainte-Maure’s *Roman de Troie* dating from the first decades of the 14th century (Gozzi 2000: 477): the corresponding toponym in the French original is *Islaure* ‘Isauria (a region of Asia Minor)’ (Constans 1904-1912: IV, 11, verse 23287), which has been probably misread as *Ismire* or *Ismirne* and translated as Esmire. A slightly different variant, Esmirre with a geminated vibrant, occurs frequently in an anonymous chronicle from Rome dating from the same century and is regularly preceded by the feminine plural article (Porta 1979: 337).

If we take a closer look at the chronology of all these variants, we realize that the form that has survived until today *(le)* Smirne is actually less old than *(le)* Smirre and *(le)* Esmirre, the latter ones already occurring in the first half of the 14th century, while Smirne starts circulating a few decades later. In fact, an isolated occurrence of Smirne appears besides the singular Smirna in the already mentioned translation of Paulus Orosius by Bono Giamboni dating from the second half of the 13th century (Tassi 1849: 17), but the edition of this text by Francesco Tassi is old and not very reliable. As a result, since all other occurrences of Smirne are concentrated in texts dating from the second half of the 14th century on, the form to be found in Tassi’s edition is likely to be a banalization for Smirna. More evidence that Smirre and Esmirre are older than Smirne is provided by phonetics, since the assimilation of the consonant cluster -rn- to -rr- is characteristic neither of Tuscan nor of Venetian: therefore, a derivation of Smirne from Smirne is not regular at all and needs further explanation. On the contrary, the Latin form Smirna and its vernacular counterpart le Smirne might well have merged into a new form *(le)* Smirne, phonetically similar to the Latin etymon and morphologically plural like the vernacular form.

But what is the origin of *(le)* Smirre and *le* Esmirre? The most plausible answer is the Turkish name of the city, i.e. İzmir, an adaptation of the Gk. ἌΣμύρνη in which the last syllable has been taken to be a morphological element (see Tk. Genitive İzmirin ‘of Smyrna’) and subsequently dropped. It is highly plausible that in the early 14th century, when the Turkish dynasty of the Aydinids conquered Smyrna, thus provoking the reaction of the Christian forces coordinated by Pope Clement VI, the city, whose fame had immediately grown in all Western countries, began to be known under its Turkish name. Evidence for this assumption includes the Old Catalan L’Esmira (a form used by Ramon Muntaner in his chronicle: «Ét de la Tira lo megaduc tramés missatge a l’Esmira, e de l’Esmira al Xiu», Casacuberta 1927-1951: 34, 20-21) and Middle High German Ismira (in Johann Schiltberger’s *Reisebuch*: «Und die ander Stat und das land das dortzu gehört, ist gehaisen Ismira», Neumann 1859: 94), which are clearly derived from Tk. İzmir and not from Lat. Smyrna. If we suppose that – as in Old Catalan – the name of the city was given the definite article in its Italian adaptation, İzmir might well have become l’Esmirre through epenthesis of
-e and gemination of the final consonant (as, for instance, in Manzanarre < Sp. Manzanar or in the anthroponym Baldassarre < Lat. Balthasar). L’Esmirre, then, might have been erroneously segmented as a feminine plural Le Esmirre or Le Smirre. Finally, the phonetic similarity between the new and the classical name of the city might have been responsible for the hybrid form le Smirne, which was soon to become the most common variant of the exonym.

4. Le Gomenizze, le Gerbe

There are at least two other feminine plural exonyms of the Mediterranean area which occur quite often in Old Italian. These are le Gomenizze, the harbour of Igoumenitsa in the Northern Greek region of Epirus, and le Gerbe, the island of Jerba in nowadays Tunisia. Unlike le Smirre, neither form can be found in Medieval texts, although their diffusion in Early Modern Italian is considerable (nowadays they are both obsolete). Le Gomenizze, for instance, apparently occurs for the first time in a public announcement published in Bologna in 1571 (Crifò 2008: 126). A year later the same form appears in two Venetian accounts of the war of Cyprus (1570-1571), these being Giovanni Pietro Contarini’s Historia delle cose successe dal principio della guerra mossa da Selim ottomano a’ Venetiani and Emilio Maria Manolesso’s Historia nova, nella quale si contengono tutti i successi della guerra Turchesca [...]. Beside (le) Gomenizze, we notice a singular variant Gomenizza occasionally preceded by the definite article la, which is slightly older (since 1531, Fulin et al. 1879-1903: 55,401: «la Gomenizza»; see also, for instance, la Gomenizza in Marco Guazzo’s Historia di tutte le cose degne di memoria [...], first published in 1544; Guazzo 1544: 275) and much more frequent, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. We can try to explain both forms as the result of an erroneous segmentation of the Greek name Igoumenitsa, just as in the case of le Smirre < İzmir. In order to do this, we have to suppose that Igoumenitsa was first adapted as *l'Igomenizza and then segmented as li Gomenizza. The resulting combination of a masculine plural article and a feminine singular noun would have been regularized by declining either the article as a singular (la Gomenizza) or the noun as a plural. Strangely enough, though, a feminine plural originated, while we would have expected a masculine plural *li Gomenizzi, of which we find no traces in the texts.

The case of le Gerbe is even more problematic. This exonym is plural not only in Italian, but also in other Early Modern Romance languages such as Spanish (los Gelves) and French (les Gerbes). Moreover, in Medieval Italian texts a form Gerbi (Zerbi), which could be interpreted as a masculine plural, is very common: this form survives until the Early Modern period, when it is sometimes preceded by a masculine article in both the singular and plural (see, for instance, al Zerbi and ai Zerbi ‘to Jerba’ in Marin Sanudo’s Diarii). A feminine variant le Zerbi is also to be found, not in Sanudo’s Diarii, but in slightly later texts such as Marco Guazzo’s Cronica (1553) and Alfonso de Ulloa’s report of the war of Tripoli (Ulloa 1566: 53). In order to explain the Italian plural forms of the exonym, which are to be found from the 16th century on, we may take as a starting point the dialectal Arabic sequence lī Jirba ‘to Jerba’ and suppose that it was perceived as a plural, either masculine (i Zerbi) or feminine (le Gerbe). Of course, this explanation is problematic, since we would expect the masculine form to prevail due to the presence of lī, just as in the case of Gomenizza. Moreover, it is bizarre that the presumed influence of the Arabic preposition lī left no traces in the Middle Ages, when the linguistic contacts between Southern Italy and North Africa were much deeper than in the Early Modern period. As a result, the origin of the Italian and Western Romance plural exonyms for Jerba is still very enigmatic. We can only remark that Fr. les Gerbes, which is mostly contained in 17th century translations from Italian, is probably a calque of It. le Gerbe, while Sp. los Gelves is likely to have a different origin due to internal reasons (its phonetic shape, which has been plausibly influenced by the local toponym Gelves.
in Andalusia) and the general historical frame (the island of Jerba was occupied twice by the Spanish army in 1521-1524 and 1551-1560).

5. Preliminary conclusions
The diffusion of plural articulated exonyms referring to Levantine place names is a largely unknown phenomenon that deserves further investigation. This morpho-syntactic pattern seems to be the result of erroneous segmentations that occurred in the adaptation of a number of Mediterranean place names either beginning with \(i\)- (\textit{le Smirne, le Gomenizze}) or, as in the case of \textit{le Gerbe}, being possibly preceded by the Ar. preposition \(lī\). Although one of these forms, \textit{le Smirne}, already appears in late Medieval texts, this toponymic pattern becomes more and more frequent in the 15\textsuperscript{th}-16\textsuperscript{th} centuries, when it repeatedly occurs in Marin Sanudo’s \textit{Diarrii} and in coeval chronicles, travelogues, and portolan charts, which were mostly written or published in Venice. Analogy seems to be responsible for those cases to which no possible phonetic explanation applies, characteristically names of cities like \textit{le Foje, le Cadene, le Sfeze} and \textit{le Pigne}, but also nesonyms like \textit{le Marlere} and even limnonyms such as \textit{le Brulle}. As hinted before, folk etymology plays an important role as well, and the majority of these toponyms closely resemble, or are oonyms of, Italian words, many of which belong to the semantic field of navigation. This is shown by the cases of \textit{al-Burullus > le Brulle} ‘the bare lands’ or \textit{le Burle} ‘the tricks’, \textit{Cetinje > le Cadene} ‘the chains (e.g. the chains barring entrance to an harbour)’, \textit{Foça > le Foje} ‘the leaves’ or \textit{le Zoie} ‘the gemstones’ or ‘the garlands’ (Cortelazzo 2007: 1534-35), \textit{Bāniyās > le Pigne} ‘the pine cones’, and even \textit{le Gomenizze}, whose phonetic shape has been plausibly influenced by It. \textit{gomena ‘sailing cable’}. In this way, the unusual articulated plural exonyms have been made intelligible in the same way as the several endonyms following the same morpho-syntactic pattern. From the 17\textsuperscript{th} century on, plural articulated toponyms become rarer and rarer and are gradually replaced by the corresponding singular forms. However, some traces of this toponymic vogue have survived to the present day, as in the case of \textit{Smirne}.

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*TLIOmat = Corpus of Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Originis* [http://gattoweb.ovi.cnr.it](http://gattoweb.ovi.cnr.it)