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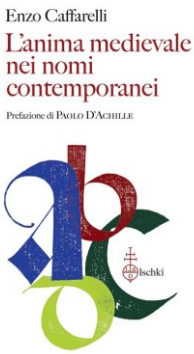

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The end of 2024 brought to scholarly attention an Italian book with the evocative title *L'anima medievale nei nomi contemporanei* [The medieval soul in contemporary names]. In his *Preface*, Paolo d'Achille offers a persuasive explanation of the choice of the title: it is meant to conjure up the values, beliefs, symbols, rites, and customs, in short, everything that animated medieval society (p. XI)[1]. The author of the book, Enzo Caffarelli, is among the most experienced and prolific Italian onomasticians, a scholar whose expertise spans every branch in the field: anthroponyms, toponyms, astronyms, chrematonyms. With this volume, he provides readers with what feels like a small encyclopaedia of proper names. The reader is guided through names of countries, cities, squares and streets; through personal names, including names of figures from the arts, science, and religion (saints, popes, and clergy); and further on to names of historical events, commercial enterprises, means of transport, artistic works, planets, asteroids, and more. Many of these topics have long been featured in RIOn, the journal founded by Enzo Caffarelli, which makes him particularly well suited to explore them on this occasion and to share this knowledge with a wider audience.

The *Introduction* sets out to define the chronological boundaries of the Middle Ages, an important matter, since these limits vary considerably from one country to another[2]. If the starting point is conventionally placed in 476, the year of the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the closing date is less clear. Some traditions indicate 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Turks, while others extend the Middle Ages as far as 1492, the year of Columbus's discovery of America.

The chapter *Hodonymy and medievalism* serves as an immediate and unmistakable gauge of how the Middle Ages are perceived today: the major protagonists as well as the minor figures of the period, the wars and social events, the succession of political regimes and the continual transfer of power, and even aspects of daily life such as occupations, trades, religious beliefs. On the one hand, medieval street names – of squares, alleys, or thoroughfares – often preserve very old designations, particularly in towns/cities that have existed for centuries, of which Italy has many. In such cases we may speak of

[1] For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to translate the quotations from Italian, so that they may be readily understood by the English-speaking reader.

[2] For example, in the case of the Romanian principalities, the Middle Ages are generally thought to have lasted until 1821, when the Revolution of Tudor Vladimirescu marked their end.

a kind of hodonymic continuity, even when the medieval realities have long since disappeared. Yet street names also change, reflecting the architectural and topographical transformation of a settlement, or the emergence of new social, economic, and cultural contexts. If the old names tended to be popular, spontaneous, descriptive, the newer, often externally imposed ones are largely disconnected, shaped by authorities who use them for commemorative, celebratory, educational, or political purposes. Enzo Caffarelli explores the multitude of factors that have influenced the naming of public spaces such as streets, alleys or main squares. Of these, names of main squares particularly reflected the centres of civic (*Palazzo Civico*), religious (*il Duomo*) or commercial (*il mercato principale*) power. The author illustrates his points with numerous examples from Rome, Florence, Bologna, Milan, Palermo, Catania, Ravenna, Verona, and many other Italian towns/cities. These include names connected to literature (*Dante Alighieri*, *Giovanni Boccaccio*, *Francesco Petrarca*), artists (painters, sculptors), scientists, teachers, doctors, architects, engineers, historians, and prelates. Alongside the "classical" figures, Caffarelli also recalls both "local" personalities – linked to a specific city or region – and "international" ones whose relevance was nevertheless tied to local history: *Pietro d'Aragona*, *Re Enzo*, *Regina Bianca (di Navarra)*, *Regina Maria di Sicilia (d'Aragona)*. Street and orientation details are carefully provided, enabling the reader to picture a map of historic centres and their many neighbourhoods.

After presenting several examples of ethnic names (such as *Piazza Normanna* and *degli Arabi*), the author proposes a section about medieval professions as reflected in Italian urbanonymy. Once again, the same towns/cities are drawn upon from the Italian urban landscape, offering a glimpse into the professional complexity of earlier centuries. Some of these occupations have vanished into the mists of time, while others continue to this day; still others survive in anthroponymy, preserved as family names. Enzo Caffarelli observes that it is often difficult to determine which of these names have a relatively recent origin and, regardless of the date of their adoption, which professions were already being practised in the medieval period.

Isolated and scattered names are treated separately and can serve as valuable "local sources". Just as we encounter *hapax legomena*, one may also find names recorded only once, usually in the city where the individual was born, lived or died, a fact which brings us to the criterion "de la compatibilité, de l'adéquation du signifié au signifiant, celui du nom de la rue" (Felecan 2013: 146). For those interested in hodonymic statistics, these can be found on pages 74–91, presented in tables and accompanied by brief commentaries. The author concludes this section by noting a few missing names, which may be considered by future name-givers seeking to complete the street nomenclature across the Italian Peninsula.

The chapter *Toponymy. The restoration of medieval names* begins from the premise that most municipalities and small settlements in Italy took shape

during the Middle Ages, and that their toponyms therefore have medieval origins. As elsewhere[3], many Italian place names evoke defensive structures, built around elements such as "*Castel-*/ *Castigl-*/ *Castion-*", "*Tor-*/ *Torr-*/ *Turr-* (*Torre*, *Torri*, *Turri*, *Torrazza*, *Torrazzo*, *Torricella*, *Torriglia*, *Torrile*, *Torrino*, *Torrion*/ *-ni*, *Torrita*/ *-o*, *Turrita*, *Torretta*, ecc.)" or *Rocc-* (*Rocca*, *Cocchetta*, *Roccella*, *Roccellatta*, *Rocchette*), *Castr-* and *Muro*/ *-a*" (p. 93). Some of these sites have become celebrated tourist attractions, visited by millions of people every year: the *Leaning Tower* of Pisa, the *Asinelli and Garisenda towers* in Bologna, the *Torre dei Lamberti* in Verona, among many others. With an eye also to the tourist promotion of his homeland, Caffarelli frequently refers to the association *I Borghi più belli d'Italia*. In this way, his book doubles as a gateway into some of the most beautiful corners of the country – places, villages, and cities that continue to fascinate visitors from all over the world.

The briefest chapter is devoted to *The Middle Ages in the solar system*. Although the naming of planets and asteroids has been shaped especially by classical languages and mythology – yielding theonyms, anthroponyms, and toponyms –, Caffarelli identifies striking medieval references. Among them are writers such as *Dante* and *Petrarca*, as well as characters drawn from medieval literature (*Casanova*, *Dulcinea*). Here, fictional names (*Don Juan*, *Excalibur*) intertwine with historical ones (*Abelard*, *Avicenna*), of Italian origin or from farther afield. That this subject continues to capture scholarly interest is evident from recent initiatives, such as the *Conference on literary, polar and extraterrestrial place names* (*Rome*, Accademia Nazionale dei *Lincei* – November 2023).

The following section of the book turns to *Reenactments, tournaments and historical festivals*. These, Caffarelli notes, fall broadly into two fundamental types, though the distinction is not always apparent from the titles of the events themselves. On the one hand, there are environmental reconstructions, enriched on several levels: emotionally, through various competitions; visually, through costumes displayed in parades and processions; and gastronomically, through food and wine traditions. On the other hand, there are more specific reenactments of individual events – sometimes martial and even bloody, sometimes festive –, especially those marking the arrival of a new ruler, occasions that signalled the beginning of a prosperous period, both militarily and economically, and which were therefore remembered as milestones in local history. The author supplies detailed historical information covering a broad geographical range, from the

[3] In the chapter *Constructions féodales. Ouvrages défensifs*, Stéphane Gendron (2025: 186–193) offers parallel examples from France, illustrating how medieval fortifications and defensive works also left a deep imprint on French toponymy. "Par exemple, *château* (lat. *castellum*) est extrêmement répandu sous diverses formes orthographiques à travers la France, soit seul, soit déterminé par un nom de personne, de village voisin, un nom de région, de rivière ou par un adjectif : *Castels*, *Castet*, *Casteil*, *Chastel*, *Cassel*, *Castillon*, *Castellet*, etc." (Felecan 2025: 339).

northern to the southern reaches of the peninsula, as well as the major Italian islands. These festivals serve a dual purpose: a) they commemorate historical events and thus preserve cultural memory; b) they provide entertainment and commercial appeal, where carefully chosen names can play an important role in attracting audiences.

The largest chapter of the volume is devoted to *Anthroponymy and medievalism in the 20th and 21st centuries* (pp. 139–232). It is structured in three parts: nicknames, surnames and first names. The guiding premise is that the anthroponymy characterising twentieth-century Italy may, to a considerable extent, be described as medieval or medieval-leaning. Many personal names have been transmitted directly, or reappeared after a period of dormancy; even more numerous are surnames derived from medieval patronymics and matronymics, as well as from ethnic names, toponyms, and lexical items – for instance, those linked to professions or to professional and honorific titles. Within this framework, Caffarelli examines nicknames associated with colours (*Rossi*, *Rosso*, *Russo*), symbols, zoonymy (*Riccardo Cuor di Leone*), and cardinal numerals (*Cinquemani*).

When tracing the evolution of Italian *Surnames from the Middle Ages to the 2000s*, the book offers a wide-ranging exploration of their diverse origins. We encounter surnames derived from laudatory and honorific secular names (such as *Rimedio*, which appears in different graphic forms depending on regional usage). Others stem from Germanic forenames, including those derived from *Riccardo*, *Guglielmo*, *Berta*/*-o.* Chivalric literature also left its mark, giving rise to names like *Orlando*/*Rolando*, *Oliviero*. Occupational surnames reflect the world of trades and crafts, as in *Granari* or *Lapidari.* Prepositional forms linked to toponyms are also common, exemplified by *Peppino Di Capri* and *Nicola Di Bari.* Ethnonyms from the medieval period remain among the most widespread sources for family names – *Greco*, for instance, still ranks among the top eight surnames in Italy. Finally, the endurance of illustrious medieval names, such as *Petrarca*, is notable, with more than 1,500 Italians still bearing it today.

According to Caffarelli, the characteristic first names of the Middle Ages may be grouped into six main categories. The first comprises names of Germanic origin – introduced by the Ostrogoths, Goths, Vandals and, most enduringly, by the Lombards, Franks, Normans, Swabians, and Angevins. These gave rise to such enduring forms as *Carlo*, *Federico*, *Franco*, *Ludovico*/*Luigi*, *Ranieri*, and *Roberto*. A second category consists of secular names with descriptive, honorific, or augural connotations, such as *Amadeo*, *Bella*, *Christophorus*, *Grazia*, *Natalis*, and *Paribono*. A third group reflects the influence of chivalric literature, which popularised names like *Ginevra*, *Isotta*, and *Tristano*. The fourth category encompasses names of saints, particularly those associated with the mendicant orders, including *Antonio*, *Bonaventura*, *Caterina*, *Chiara*, *Domenico*, *Margherita*, and *Tommaso*. Toponymic names make up the fifth category. These names are often drawn from local parishes or regions, such as *Alexandria*, *Parma*, *Talia* < *Italia*, and *Venesia*. Finally,

there is the category of medieval names of more ancient provenance: Hebrew, Latin, or Greek in origin. These can be further subdivided into biblical names (*Andrea*, *Giovanni*, *Maddalena*, *Pietro*), theophoric names and names related to angels from the Greco-Latin and Byzantine tradition (*Basilio*, *Costantino*, *Demetrio*, *Giorgio*, *Marco*, *Nicola*), and those of martyrological resonance (*Lorenzo*, *Stefano*). The discussion is supported by means of extensive statistical tables drawn from different regions and centuries, culminating in a comparative analysis of medieval and contemporary naming practices. Appropriately, the survey also turns to the *nomina pontificalia*, a subject of particular interest to the author.

The exploration of religious onomastics continues in the chapter *Transonymies and hagionymic disguises. The modern perception of medieval saints*. Here, Enzo Caffarelli traces the presence of saints' names across municipalities, hamlets, thoroughfares, and parish dedications. Alongside figures from Christian antiquity – such as *Giovanni Battista*, *Michele Arcangelo*, and *Pietro* –, the Middle Ages saw the widespread veneration of medieval saints, most notably *Sant'Antonio di Padova*, whose name is associated with more than eighty localities. A particularly revealing table documents regional distributions across northern, central, and southern Italy, demonstrating that commemorations are significantly more numerous in the north than in the south.

Another section of the volume is devoted to *Hagionyms in chrematonymy and popular traditions*. There is a strikingly wide range of gastronomic brands bearing saints' names: cheese (*Santalucia*), beer (*San Biagio*), wines (*Santa Cristina*), poultry (*San Bartolomeo*), cured meats (*San Vincenzo*), hams (*San Michele*), and even mineral waters (*Santa Croce*). Such examples attest not only to the enduring religiosity of Italians but also to their inventiveness in naming practices. Further subchapters expand on themes such as *nomina pontificalia* and medievalism, saints and warfare, saints as geographical patrons, canonisations from Paul VI to Francis, and the presence of saints' names within the liturgy. The author observes that the Catholic liturgy has preserved a number of prayers that originated, flourished, or were refined in the Middle Ages, including the *Salve Regina*, the *Angelus Domini*, and the *Stabat Mater*. Likewise, many important feasts of the liturgical year still celebrated today have medieval roots: the *Assumption* (seventh century), the *Nativity of Mary* (eighth century), *All Saints* (ninth century), the *Trinity* and the *Immaculate Conception* (tenth century), among others. The Middle Ages also saw the foundation of numerous religious congregations and orders – most of which remain active –, ranging from the *Basilians* and *Antonians* (eleventh century) to the *Trinitarians*, the *Teutonic Order*, the *Templars* (*pauperes milites Christi*), and the *Cistercians* (twelfth century), followed by the *Franciscans*, *Dominicans*, *Augustinians*, *Celestines*, and *Carmelites* (thirteenth century), and later the *Olivetans* and the *Jesuits* (fourteenth century). Even concepts such as Purgatory, or the custom of giving gifts to children on religious feast days (for instance, on the feast of St Nicholas, 6 December), can be traced back to medieval tradition.

As the book is intended not only for specialists but also for a wider readership with a general interest in culture, the author explains the notion of *chrematonymy*, which forms the subject of the following chapter. This term refers to names associated with commercial and social activities – above all the signage of shops and retailers of every kind, as well as restaurants, theatres, cinemas, stadiums, and educational or community institutions such as schools, universities, and libraries. The presence, spread, and character of dedications to medieval figures or events in such contexts reveal not only a reflection of contemporary perceptions of the Middle Ages (as in the case of hodonyms), but also the deliberate use of "guarantee names": designations chosen in the belief – or at least the hope – that they might attract customers and lend prestige to a commercial enterprise. This section, too, is enriched with a wealth of examples, testifying both to the author's deep familiarity with the Italian cultural landscape and to his wide-ranging bibliographical and field research.

The penultimate chapter turns to *Deonyms from medieval eponyms*. The enduring presence of the Middle Ages in contemporary culture can also be traced through such terms – lexical items derived from proper names, especially anthroponyms. Drawing on lexical entries from a range of dictionaries, Caffarelli presents numerous examples spanning nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. From *Petrarca* alone, no fewer than twenty-eight lemmas have developed, illustrating both the ingenuity of speakers and the remarkable flexibility of Italian word-formation through processes such as prefixation (*antipetrarchismo*) and suffixation (*petrarchesco*). The use of suffixoids and prefixoids further enriches the lexicon, producing forms such as *petrarcologo* and *petrarcologia*. Particularly engaging are idiomatic expressions – functional phraseological units that exist in all languages in popular and literary registers. Among these are *la sindrome di Carlo Magno*, referring to someone reputedly able to read but not to write, a sort of semi-illiterate condition caused by his advanced age; and *la sindrome di Marco Polo*, describing an insatiable curiosity that drives one to explore new worlds and cultures.

The volume concludes with a chapter on *Ideonyms: Medieval inspirations and settings*. Here, the reader is introduced to the author's wide-ranging engagement with cinema, theatre, and music, as he traces the ways in which medieval authors and characters – much like those of the Antiquity – have continued to captivate writers, directors, screenwriters, composers, television producers, and advertisers alike. In this light, the Middle Ages emerge not as a remote or obscure epoch, but as a cultural reservoir that feels both familiar and immediate to the contemporary imagination. To illustrate this enduring appeal, the author highlights a cluster of key terms that encapsulate the medieval vocabulary: *abbey, castle, cathedral, courtly love, crusade, dragon, heroes, knight, magic, millenarianism, pilgrim*, *prince, princess,* and *sword* (pp. 322, 327).

The conclusions of the volume are carefully drawn and succeed in synthesising a work in which medieval names truly take centre stage.

Anthroponyms, toponyms, chrematonyms, and many other categories are revisited across a rich variety of contexts, sustaining the reader's interest throughout. It is worth quoting a striking *mise en abyme* passage, which serves equally well as a summation of the book's spirit: "Of course, the intelligence, creativity, and expertise of an Umberto Eco are necessary to generate *The Name of the Rose*, but it also takes the Middle Ages with its values, its enlightened faith and darkness, its imagination and mysteries, bonfires and poisons, its conception of life and death, sin and forgiveness, its great artistic and literary expressions, its characters and languages, its chosen and imposed names, for a novel to transform into a cultural event of global proportions, with its own multimedia representations and its own imitative influence" (p. 327). The cited sentence highlights the essence of Caffarelli's achievement: a demonstration that the medieval world, far from being consigned to the past, continues to animate the cultural imagination and to shape the very names through which Italians – and by extension Europeans – conceive their heritage.

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