



Religious Toponymy in Minas Gerais: The Names of Municipalities

Toponímia religiosa em Minas Gerais: os nomes dos municípios

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Resumo: Adotando os pressupostos teórico-metodológicos da Toponímia, este trabalho tem por objetivo apresentar um estudo toponímico dos 853 nomes de municípios de Minas Gerais, dos quais, sincronicamente, 103 – ou 12% do total – são nomes relativos à Nossa Senhora e aos santos e santas da Igreja Católica. Diacronicamente, entretanto, outros 329 municípios – 38,6% – já tiveram, ao longo de sua história, designações toponímicas dessa mesma natureza; alguns deles com mais de uma denominação como é o caso do município de *Água Boa* cujos topônimos anteriores já foram *São José da Água Boa* e *Santana da Água Boa*. Verificou-se, então, que os motivos para escolha do nome de um município – acidente urbano –, além de observar legislação específica, pauta-se pela subjetividade coletiva e, muitas vezes, também por interesses políticos. Assim, muitos topônimos referentes aos municípios mineiros foram substituídos com o passar do tempo, sobretudo no que concerne aos mariotopônimos. Esses topônimos, no entanto, pelas reduções referentes aos títulos que acompanham a expressão *Nossa Senhora*, deixaram vestígios de sua origem religiosa em todo o território mineiro, o que pode ser observado pela quantidade considerável de denominações toponímicas atuais constituídas a partir dos determinantes *Carmo*, *Conceição* e *Dores*, por exemplo.

Palavras-chave: léxico; cultura; toponímia religiosa; Minas Gerais; municípios.

Abstract: Based on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of Toponymy, this paper aims to present a toponymic study of the 853 names of municipalities in Minas Gerais, of which, synchronously, 103 (or 12% of the total) are names related to the Holy Mother / Our Lady and the male and female saints of the Catholic Church.

Diachronically, however, another 329 municipalities (38.6%) have had toponymic names of this same nature throughout their history, some of which with more than one denomination as, for example, the municipality of *Água Boa* whose previous toponyms include *São José da Água Boa* (Saint Joseph of *Água Boa*) and *Santana da Água Boa* (Saint Anne of *Água Boa*). It was therefore verified that the reasons for choosing the name of a municipality, an urban feature, besides the observation of specific legislations, are guided by collective subjectivity and, many times, by political interests. Thus, many toponyms referring to the municipalities of Minas Gerais have been replaced over time, especially as concerns *mariotoponyms* (names based on the names for the Virgin Mary). These toponyms, however, due to the reductions referring to the titles that accompany the expression Holy Mother / Our Lady, have left traces of their religious origin throughout the territory of Minas Gerais; this can be observed by the considerable amount of current toponymic denominations constituted from the determinants *Carmo* (Mount Carmel), *Conceição* (Immaculate Conception), and *Dores* (Sorrows), for example.

Keywords: lexicon; culture; religious toponymy; Minas Gerais; municipalities.

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1. Introduction

As a social activity, language involves all human actions and thoughts, making it possible for the individual to exert influence or be influenced by the other, to perform its role in society, to interact with the other, and to participate in the construction of knowledge and culture. Moreover, it allows one to be constituted as a social, political, and ideological being.

Beginning with this assumption, to understand the role of language in the life of the community, it is necessary to go beyond the mere study of grammar and delve into the world of social action, where the words are inserted and are constitutive of specific cultural activities, as in the case of the act of naming, where what is illustrated is the importance of the word and its role as the revealing element of the sociocultural aspects of a human group.

According to Biderman (1998, p. 81), the word is more than a mere form of communication, given that “by being magical, cabalistic,

sacred, the word tends to build an extremely powerful reality.” To illustrate his viewpoint regarding the power of the word, this author affirms that, in the numerous cultural traditions of men, language emerges with the institutive word that opens the space for the being to emerge. Thus, it is in this way that men, since the beginning of time, have been using words to name everything around them: animals, plants, people, places, etc.

By referring to the naming of the places, Dick affirms that the act of naming is directly related to the values, actions, and reactions of the human being. According to this author, the centrifugal and centripetal forces of the denominative group are not isolated; to the contrary, they are dependent upon the procedures that involve human activities and, in the center of influences and conditioning factors, man positions himself, in the act of naming, as the protagonist (DICK, 2010, p.197)

Conceived as a linguistic form that has the semantic function of identifying a concrete geographic point, individualizing it, the proper name of the place – *toponym* – safeguards an intimate relationship with the historical-political context of the community, since “its significant burden safeguards a strict connection with the soil, the climate, the abundance or lack of vegetation, and the very cultural features of a region in its diverse manifestations of life” (DICK, 1990, p. 105). It therefore consists of the result of the act of naming that, upon cropping the meanings, through the designation of a specific geographic feature, records the lived moment of the community.

In this point of view, place names formulated by religious names, such as the name of saints, constitute a special group of toponyms, since, in these denominations, it is possible to perceive the communion of psychological aspects of the human being with the geography and the landscape.

In Brazil, the custom of attributing saints’ names to places, which began during Christian antiquity,¹ has, throughout the centuries,

¹ According to Gonzalez (2001, p. 65), giving the name of a saint to places is an old custom. This dates back to the sixth century, when the cathedral and parochial churches had no owner, but the private churches, basilicas, and oratories were normally erected in homage of a saint. Hence, the saint became the symbol of the church and gave its name to it, which would later also be attributed to the lands and the parish which would organize themselves in the surrounding areas of the religious temple.

been passed on from generation to generation and can still be observed even today, “it is even possible to verify the regional preference through the systematic employment of specific male and female saints” (DICK, 2010, p. 187)

In Minas Gerais, this denominative tendency has also, throughout the centuries, been perpetuated throughout the generations, and can be observed, clearly, in contemporaneity, as can be seen in findings from Carvalho’s doctoral dissertation (2014). Entitled *Hagiotoponímia em Minas Gerais (Hagiotoponymy in Minas Gerais)*, the study consisted of a descriptive study – linguistic and cultural – of the toponyms from Minas Gerais, focusing on names of male and female saints and names of invocations to the Virgin Mary, which designate physical and human features in the state’s 853 municipalities.

Linked to the Toponymic Atlas of the State of Minas Gerais (ATEMIG) Project, the study counted on a databank of more than 80,000 toponyms, among which 5,649 religious toponyms were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to verify the regional preference for the systematic employment of these denominations in each of the twelve mesoregions in Minas Gerais. In addition to these toponyms, which constituted the corpus of contemporaneous data, through the consultation of maps from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a second corpus of historical data was formulated, comprised of 647 toponyms. Thus, through the comparative analysis, we could see how the designative process through religious toponyms came about diachronically in the state.

In this sense, returning to the results of the findings from Carvalho (2014), this work aims to present a toponymic study of the 853 names of the municipalities in Minas Gerais, of which, synchronically, 103 (or 12% of the total) are names referring to the Virgin Mary / Our Lady and saints of the Catholic Church. Throughout our history, however, another 329 municipalities (38.6%) have also received toponymic designations of similar nature, some of which with more than one denomination, as is the case with the municipality of *Água Boa*, whose prior toponyms include *São José da Água Boa* (Saint Joseph of *Água Boa*) and *Santana da Água Boa* (Saint Anne of *Água Boa*).

2. The devotion to saints and the Virgin Mary / Our Lady in Brazil: a Portuguese inheritance

The loyal devotion to the cult and to the tradition of the Catholic Church, which was always a constant in the Iberian nation, extended to the era of the discoveries and of the overseas conquests, to all of the continental and island coasts where the Portuguese vessels arrived, as is the case of Brazil.

The Christian faith and the Catholic Church appeared on the Brazilian coast, in the early sixteenth century by the hands of the Overseas Portuguese Patronage. The Portuguese, who discovered and settled the Brazilian lands, colonizing it gradually, also brought their Christian faith and transferred the better part of their ecclesiastic organization already present in the kingdom to the colony, as well as applied, in a highly developed manner, the royal Patronage Regime, which was to be introduced in the overseas lands of Portugal. The Church that was born in Brazil in the sixteenth century became, to a certain extent, an extension of that Catholic Church that existed in Portugal, with all of its characteristics to express the Christian faith (KUHNNEN, 2005, p.25)

Regarding this influence, Chaves (1957, p.178) explains that the Portuguese could not establish a historical and action hiatus between what was national in Portugal and what had to be equally national overseas. If the metropolitan institutions that were the standard of colonization and administration of the overseas territories and constituted the creative force of this same activity, it was expected that all of the spiritual life of the navigators and colonizers would also be transferred overseas. It is important to note that the Portuguese Christian religiosity was not limited to the sixteenth century; to the contrary, it gained strength throughout the centuries. According to Dias

Vale ressaltar que a religiosidade cristã portuguesa não se limitou ao século XVI, pelo contrário, foi se fortalecendo ainda mais no decorrer dos séculos. De acordo com Dias (1987, p. 234-235):

(...) the apparitions of Maria to the three young shepherds of Fátima on the island of Iria (13/V/1917) caused an impact on the religious life of the Portuguese people and are in the origin of the reinvigoration of the Catholic faith and practice. After the phenomenon of Fátima, the history of Catholicism in Portugal took

a more impacting and broader direction, and the devotion to Our Lady of Fátima became the catalyzer of the religious life of our people. The religious center of the nation, the pilgrimages began to multiply, the physical and, more importantly, moral miracles that occurred there boosted the faith of many people, the Christian life gained new life with the trips of the *Virgem Peregrina* (Pilgrim Virgin Mary) throughout the country and the world, and Portugal once again found itself as the '*Terra de Santa Maria*' (Land of Saint Mary). In the context of Christian nations, Portugal can, for this reason, claim itself to be the quintessential Marian country; and its contribution to the expansion of the cult of the Virgin Mary / Our Lady to Africa, the East, and Brazil through missionaries and settlers had already begun in the Age of Discovery.

In this light, due to the Portuguese heritage, ancestrally rooted in the Christian religion, the devotion to the Virgin Mary / Our Lady and to the saints, especially those connected to Christ and the Mother of God, such as Saint Joseph, Saint Anne, Saint Joachim, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Peter, has always deserved special affection from the Brazilian people.

2.1 The religious devotion and the people of Minas Gerais

As regards the devotions brought to the Brazilian lands, the missionaries and the religious orders to which they belonged deserved to be highlighted, given that, since the first Portuguese voyages, the contingent of these religious figures was always representative: first, in the initial stage of the Brazilian civilization, they came to evangelize and convert the Indians; later, they came for missionary and educational purposes. In this sense, the religious associations had a heavy influence on the origin and diffusion of devotions in Brazil.

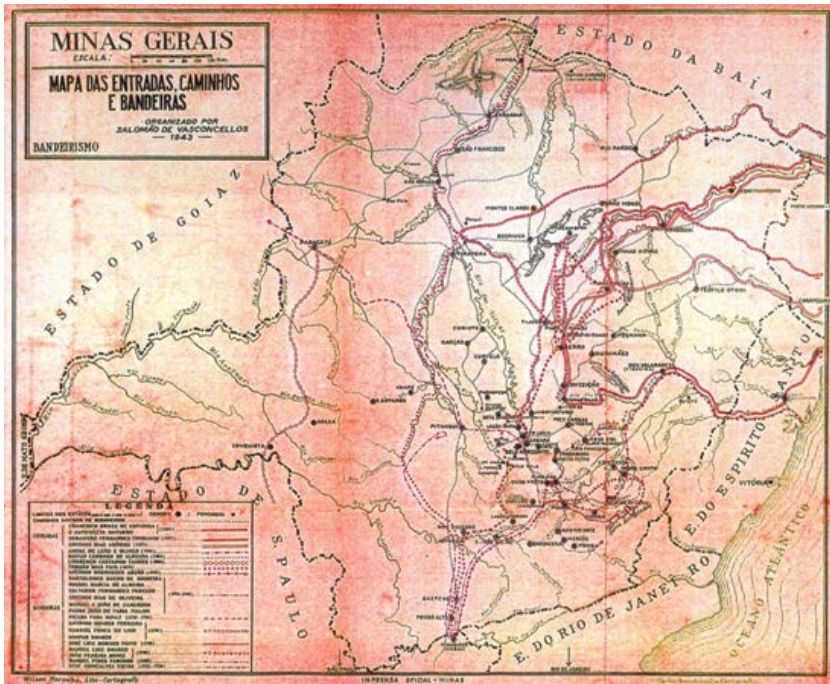
In the territory of Minas Gerais, what stood out were the Carmelite priests, who participated in the beginning of the settlement of the state, since the current town of Mariana, the first town in Minas Gerais, was founded under the protection of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, in the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries.

In the eighteenth century in Minas Gerais, religiosity, sociability, and sisterhoods are (con)fused and overlap. In effect, if the religious ceremonies were and are a form of social interaction and sociability in that context, such an affirmation proved to be exemplary. Within it, limited to the actions of

the Catholic Church by the Portuguese Church, the sisterhoods were the promoters of the rituals and celebrations, inside and outside of the temples, also built and maintained by them. It is important to highlight that the sisterhoods therefore presented themselves as an auxiliary, complementary, and proxy force of the Catholic Church (BOSCHI, 1986, p. 59)

During this period, many devotions that were until then restricted to the coast began to spread to the countryside through the migration of shepherding along the Rio São Francisco (St. Francis River), of the “Entradas” (Entrances into the jungle) and later of the “Bandeiras” (Explorers from São Paulo). It was the era of the beginning of gold and diamond mining in the rivers and hillsides of Minas Gerais, in which, under the most diverse of invocations, a number of religious temples were built, especially in the historical cities of Minas Gerais, such as Mariana, Ouro Preto, and Sabará, the first villages of the state. The main “bandeiras” that passed through Minas Gerais are listed on the map below:

FIGURE 1 – Map of the Entrances, Trails, and *Bandeiras* in Minas Gerais



Source: Vasconcelos, 1944, p.345.

Observing Vasconcelos' map (1944), we can see that, following the watercourses of the rivers, and, by extension, of its tributaries, many "Bandeiras" passed through the territory of Minas Gerais in the beginning of its settlement. Among them, one who stands out is Fernão Dias Paes, who, on July 21, 1674, venturing out from São Paulo, sparked the beginning of the history of Minas Gerais.

The "bandeira das esmeralda" (emerald flag explorers) did not find the sought-after stones, but they were important to the discovery of the current territory of Minas Gerais. They created trading posts, as well as lands with corn and manioc plantations, pigs, and poultry, in order to feed the explorers. In each trading post, a captain remained with some soldiers, along with some black people (males and females), a name that they called the Indians. Of these trading posts, some disappeared, others remain even today. Following the trails opened by Fernão Dias Paes (1674-1681), the *Bandeirante* explorer from Taubaté, Antônio Rodrigues Arzão, discovered the first gold mine in the hinterlands of Minas Gerais in 1692 or 1693. According to Diogo de Vasconcelos, after a brief stay in Itaverava, Arzão reached the Guarapiranga Mountains, from which, in the morning, one can see the sharp pinnacles of "Arrepiados" ("Shivers"). One can also affirm that, due to the Eastern lights, they imagined that they were closer to the mountains. Thus, following in that direction, one would come across the Piranga river.

(...) In mid-1694, Bartolomeu Bueno and Carlos Pedroso da Silveira, the latter a companion of Arzão, discovered gold in the Itaverava mountains and sent samples to Rio de Janeiro. Due to a lack of food, Bartolomeu Bueno divided his men, leaving some men, under the command of Captain Miguel Garcia de Almeida e Cunha, to care for the corn plantations, and set out with others in the direction of Rio das Velhas (das Velhas River). While waiting for the crop production, Miguel Garcia, made some forays, reaching the Gualaxo do Sul River, in whose riverbed he discovered signs of gold (SEABRA, 2000, p.108-110).

According to that put forth by the author, it could be noted that, in the expeditions taken by the São Paulo *Bandeirante* explorers to the current territory of Minas Gerais, the majority of the explorers had no interest other than the discovery of gold and precious stones. In other words, these pioneers had no intention of staying and settling the lands, given that the first settlement, as we mentioned above, would only occur

when, between 1695 and 1696, when the Bandeirante explorer from Taubaté, Salvador Fernandes Furtado, in command of a large group of explorers, discovered the rich mines in the *Ribeirão do Carmo* (Carmo brook), and there they stayed. There then emerges a settlement that was raised to the category of village – the first of Minas Gerais – a *Leal Vila do Ribeirão do Carmo* (Loyal Village of Carmo brook).

Another explorer who also deserves to be mentioned in the settlement of Minas Gerais is that commanded by Antônio Dias de Oliveira, together with Father José de Faria Fialho. This expedition reached the region that is today Ouro Preto on June 24, 1698, when a mass was celebrated on the mountaintop, which received the name of St. John. Still in the seventeenth century, the chapel in homage of St. John was erected. As soon as they had settled in the region, the churches of *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* (Our Lady of Immaculate Conception) and *Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso* (Our Lady of Good Counsel) were built simultaneously by Antônio Dias and Father Faria. The second church, after its reconstruction, began to be dedicated to the *Virgem do Rosário* (Virgin Mary of the Rosary).

Due to the success of the new gold discoveries, the explorers created the hamlet, the nucleus of the future town of Ouro Preto, around the main church, *Nossa Senhora do Pilar* (Our Lady of Pillar). In addition to the invocations mentioned above, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Minas Gerais temples belonged to the patron saints of Our Lady of Piety, St. Anne, St. Sebastian, and St. Quiteria.

Sponsored by the Church and by the Portuguese rulers, the Baroque art, incremented by the riches of the region, gave value to dramatic themes, spreading the worshiping of the sufferings of Mary: Our Lady of Sorrows, of Solitude, of Anguish, the penitent saints of Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt and, primarily, the martyrs of the primitive Christian church, such as St. Stephen, St. Lucia, St. Barbara, and St. Cecilia.

The blacks also had their religious predilections, especially for their patron saints of African captives, Our Lady of the Rosary and Our Lady of Lampadosa, and by the black saints, such as Our Lady of Aparecida, St. Benedict, St. Balthasar, St. Elesbaan, and St. Ephigenia. In general, these black saints were more worshiped because of the black servants of the big houses (plantation houses) of the mills and coffee farms, since the slaves preferred those syncretized with the African *orixás*, such as Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of

Light, St. George, St. Lazarus, St. Jerome, St. Barbara, Saint Anne, the adored twins Cosmas and Damian, whose white skin did not attract the attention of the master, nor of the police, in the colonial period.

It is also important to highlight the strong presence of the cult of Mary throughout the entire territory of Minas Gerais as a firm devotion to the Virgin Mary / Our Lady, brought to Brazil by the Portuguese and which was also disseminated among the afro-descendants. It addresses, according to Torres (s/d, p.643), an old Portuguese tradition in respect and veneration of Dona Maria I, Queen of Portugal, which would become common in Minas Gerais with the advent of the House of Braganza and which would be revealed in the profusion of Marian sanctuaries, some from the most poetic inspirations – Our Lady, Mother of Men (Caraça), Our Lady of Good Voyage (Belo Horizonte), among others.

It is interesting to observe, in this context, the large quantity of churches dedicated to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception in Minas Gerais. The explanation may well be the reaction of the Counter-Reformation to the followers of Luther, who did not accept the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Maria as well as due to the consecration of the Portuguese crown to the Immaculate Virgin Mary, undertaken by D. João IV. As regards the saints, the most popular was St. Anthony, due to his Portuguese roots (MEGALE, 2002, p. 238)

In light of that presented above, we can affirm that in Minas Gerais the presence of the Christian religiosity reflected in the devotion to Maria and to the saints, since the beginning of its settlement, is considered to be remarkable and can be observed, among other forms, by the presence of the religious associations, such as the sisterhoods that, upon participating in the emergence of the first populational settlement, through patron saints, has left its mark upon toponymy in many regions of the state, especially in those located along the trails of the *Bandeirante* explorers, as Megale (2000, p.22) points out:

The toponymy of the trails of the *Bandeirante* explorers documents the presence of these religious figures: if the command was of the Carmelites, the inhabited sites that arose perpetuated the memory of the patron saint Our Lady of Mount Carmel; if the command was of the Franciscans, followers of St. Francis, as well as with other similar orders, the patron saints marked their passage. There, where the settlement is new, the religious name inaugurates it; if there was a previous Indian name, the new religious name would substitute it.

From this perspective, it can be seen that the religious devotion leaves its tracks, not only in the liturgical texts and religious temples, but especially in the geographic space, through the naming of the physical and human features, thereby reinforcing its historical and sociocultural dimension.

3. Marks of religiosity in the geographic space

The custom of giving places the name of a saint is age-old. According to Gonzalez (2001, p. 65), dates back to the second half of the sixth century, when the Cathedrals and Parish Churches had no patron saint, but the private churches, basilicas, and oratories were already erected in homage of a saint. Thus, the saint began to be the symbol of the church and give it its name, which later was also attributed to the lands and to the parish who organized themselves in the surrounding regions of the religious temple.

In this sense, this custom, which began in the beginning of Christian antiquity, has, throughout the centuries, been perpetuated throughout the generations and can be observed clearly even today, that is because “the place names are like a “speakerphone” of the people, populations, and groups that have disappeared, transmitted from generation to generation, from mouth to mouth.” Thus, the toponym “is the propriety of no one and of everyone at the same time.” It includes, to a certain extent, the collective memory of a people, insofar as, as a communication vehicle, “it bears witness to the context of its origin and reveals the transformations of a people” (MENÉNDEZ PIDAL, 1952, p.4 *apud* CARVALHO, 2012, p.29)

The place name formed by names of saints constitute, in this perspective, a special group of toponyms in which one can clearly perceive the communion of psychological aspects of the human being with the geography and the landscape:

There are many localities that are proud of being called by the names of their patron saints, who are alive in their popular imagination, even insofar as to have an egalitarian and fraternal pact with them: the saint is in the church, but it is also a neighbor like anyone else, to whom one can ask for favors and who is invited to participate in their joy and sadness. When the saint gives his/her name to the parish, it is because he/she has been

able to gain the appraisal of his/her neighbors, saving them from calamities and accompanying them in the good and bad moments of their lives. (GONZALEZ, 2001, p.63).

There also arise the hagiotoponyms, a vocabulary term constituted of the Greek elements *hagios* (saint), *topos* (place), and *onoma* (name).

The linguistic scheme is always the same: a *hagionym* (saint's name) serves as a determining factor for a common name that expresses the notion of the population nucleus: place, villa, village, etc. This can become only implied, saying (villa) *sancti Martini* with the omission of the first term, or later, after falling into disuse of the genitive, in the place of the Villa of S. Martinho, only S. Martinho. The Latin genitive, which gave way to numerous sets of peninsular toponyms, constitutes a safe testimony of the antiquity of population nuclei, as well as of the cult of the respective saints. (GONZALEZ, 2001, p.65).

In the realm of toponymic studies, a wide range of studies have mentioned the influence of the devotion to saints and to the Virgin Mary in the naming of geographic features. This thus illustrates the fact that, venerated since the first temples of the Church, seen as models of Christian life, and invoked as intercessors in the face of God, the saints, as well as the diverse Marian invocations, have marked the history of Christianity and, even today, are representative in many realms of society. "We can find them in the popular piety, in the devotions and the liturgical cult, in the baptism names of people and place names, in the traditions of the people and their folklore, legends, and proverbs, in art, and in literature." They are a part "of the religious heritage of humanity, as well as of cultural heritage" (DAIX, 2000, p. 11).

4. Methodological Procedures

Guided by the theoretical assumptions of the studies of the lexicon, which are based on the inter-relationship among language, culture, and society (SAPIR, 1961; MATORÉ, 1953), and focusing on the names of municipalities, this work constitutes a clipping of the findings of Carvalho (2014), in which, through a diachronic analysis, we observed how the naming process occurred through religious toponyms in Minas Gerais.

For this, adopting the concept of culture set forth by Duranti (2000) and the principles of onomastic science from Dauzat (1926) and Dick (1990a, 1990b, 2004, 2006), this study counted on two corpora: the first, which was obtained through the consultation of the ATEMIG Project Databank, containing 5,649 toponyms; and the second, which was organized through the consultation of maps from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which include the work organized by Costa et al. (2002), entitled *Cartografia das Minas Gerais: da capitania à província* (Cartography in Minas Gerais: from the captaincy to the province), containing 647 toponyms.

In this work, however, only contemporary data was considered. This is because, as it was not always possible to identify the type of geographic feature on the consulted maps, historical data was not considered. In this sense, only the names of municipalities documented in topographic maps (source: IBGE) were observed, with scales that varied from 1:50,000 to 1:250,000 – which constitute the ATEMIG Project databank.

According to Dick (1990a, p. 311), hagiotoponyms constitute a subdivision of hierotoponyms, a toponymic category referent to the sacred names of different beliefs. This terminology differs, to a certain degree, from that used in Spain by Luís Lopes Santos, who defines hagiotoponym “as every vocabulary term of the religious lexicon converted into a toponym, that is, linked to the geographic and converted into a place name.”

The author recognizes the divergence and clarifies that this does not invalidate the Brazilian classification, “it merely addresses an inversion of concepts: what for one is seen through a particular perspective, for the other is perceived through an overall and comprehensive character, which does not absolutely denature the substance of the content of the researched elements” (DICK, 1990a, p.311).

Returning to the explanation offered by Dick (1990b, p. 33) for the toponymic classification of the religious names, it could be observed that, in addition to referring i) to the sacred names of different beliefs; ii) to the religious ephemerides; iii) to the religious associations; iv) to the locations of cults, the hierotoponyms can still present two subdivisions: v) hagiotoponyms – toponyms referring to the male and female saints of the Roman hagiology and vi) mythotoponyms – toponyms referring to mythological entities. In this manner, in relation to the other 26 categories proposed by the author, the hierotoponyms constitute a more complex

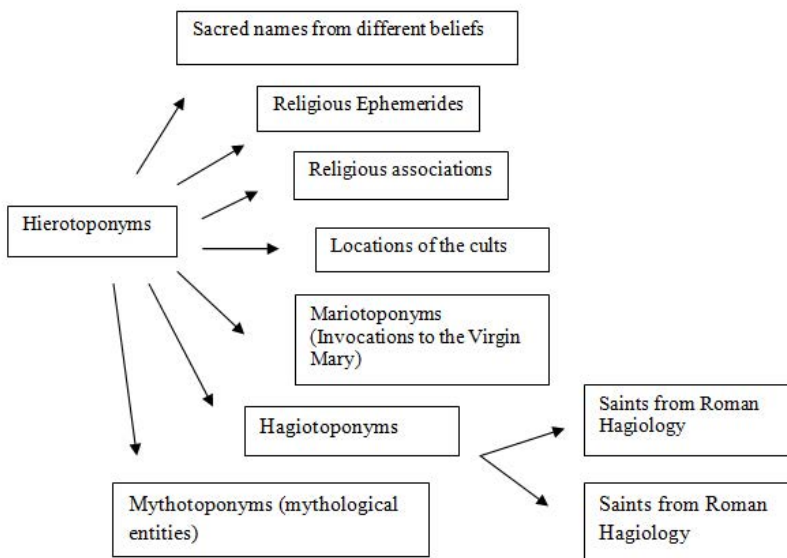
category, as they unite, within the semantic field of sacred names, the six distinct categories of related toponyms.

This study adopted the terminology set forth by Dick, that is, we considered hagiotoponyms to be only the place names that refer to the male and female saints of Roman hagiology and not simply any vocabulary term from the religious lexicon.

As regards the toponyms referent to the Holy Mother / Our Lady, it is important to say that these denominations have been classified, in toponymic studies, in diverse forms, sometimes as hagiotoponyms – Castiglioni (2008), Zamariano (2010), and Carvalho (2012) – sometimes as hyperonymy, that is, as hierotoponyms – Seabra (2004), Carvalhinhos (2005), and Ananias (2013) – as also proposed by Dick (1990b, p. 33).

As they have not been constituted by the linguistic structure of hagiotoponyms – qualifier (male/female saint + anthroponym (prename) – the toponymic denominations referent to the invocations of the Virgin Mary were classified in Carvalho (2014) as mariotoponyms, which is justified by the guidance provided by Dick's toponymic model. However, due to the fact that, according to Dias (1987, p. 228) the diverse titles of the Holy Mother / Our Lady arose, in the Middle Ages, through the hagionym of Saint Mary, the mariotoponyms were considered to be a subdivision of the names of saints from Roman hagiology – female hagiotoponyms, which was not considered in this work. From our point of view, precisely due to the linguistic explanation mentioned above, such denominations could figure as a subdivision of the female hagiotoponyms. From this perspective, different from what was done in 2014, in addition to the hagiotoponyms and the mythotoponyms, the mariotoponms should be considered as yet another one of the subdivisions of the category of hierotoponyms proposed by Dick (1990b, p.33), according to that presented in Figure 2 below:

FIGURE 2 – The hierotoponymic category and its subdivisions



Source: Carvalho (2014, p. 89 – Adapted).

5. Data analysis

Through the consultation of the ATEMIG Project databank, which, to date, is made up of more than 80,000 toponyms collected from contemporary maps of Minas Gerais, Carvalho (2014), in his research, focused only on the religious place names referent to invocations to the Holy Mother / Our Lady and the male and female saints from Roman hagiology, which constitute 5,649 occurrences of toponyms included in the databank.

It was therefore verified that, representing only 6.5% of the total number of toponyms of the state, these religious toponyms appear not to constitute the predominant category in Minas Gerais. However, in the overall computation of the ATEMIG data, in which one can observe for each mesoregion the number of occurrences of each one of the 27 categories proposed by Dick (1990b), it could be verified that, among the anthropocultural taxonomies, the hagiotoponyms stand out in all of them, figuring between 1st and 5th place.

The mesoregion of Zona da Mata, for example, stands out in relation to the others, since the names from this category appear in 1st place. Regarding the other mesoregions, it was observed that such religious denominations appear in 2nd place in the mesoregions of Vale do Mucuri, Vale do Rio Doce, Northeast of Minas, and the South and Southeast of Minas; in 3rd place, names appear in the mesoregions of Jequitinhonha, Triângulo Mineiro, and Alto Paranaíba; and in 4th place, names appear in the mesoregions of the Center-state and the North of Minas Gerais; and in 5th place, names appear in the mesoregions of Campo das Vertentes, the Metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, and Western Minas Gerais.

After having been identified, these toponyms were analyzed through the observation of three onomastic categories, which are: the names of male saints, the names of female saints, and the names of invocations to the Virgin Mary, which we call mariotoponyms.

It was therefore found that the names of saints are predominant in the territory of Minas Gerais, as can be seen: of the total of 5,649 toponyms, 3,801 are from this onomastic category, covering a total of 1,658 occurrences or 29.3% of the data. The names referent to the invocations to the Virgin Mary, by contrast, figure into the toponymic lexicon of the state with a much lower number, given that only 190 occurrences of mariotoponyms were quantified, which represents 3.4% of the total number of hagiotoponyms analyzed in this study.

5.1 The names of the municipalities of Minas Gerais

Minas Gerais is the Brazilian state that presents the largest number of municipalities – 853. Of these, currently, only 103, representing 12% of the total, have toponymic denominations referent to the invocations of the Holy Mother / Our lady and the names of male and female saints from the Catholic Church, according to that listed in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1: Municipalities of Minas Gerais, synchronically, with names of male and female saints and names of the Holy Mother / Our Lady

Municipalities of Minas Gerais with denominations relative to religious devotion		
Names of male saints	Names of female saints	Names of invocation to the Holy Mother / Our Lady
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Santo Antônio do Amparo 2. Santo Antônio do Aventureiro 3. Santo Antônio do Gramma 4. Santo Antônio do Itambé 5. Santo Antônio do Jacinto 6. Santo Antônio do Monte 7. Santo Antônio do Retiro 8. Santo Antônio do Rio Abaixo 9. Santo Hipólito 10. São Bento Abade 11. São Brás do Suaçuí 12. São Domingos das Dores 13. São Domingos do Prata 14. São Félix de Minas 15. São Francisco 16. São Francisco de Paula 17. São Francisco de Sales 18. São Francisco do Glória 19. São Geraldo 20. São Geraldo da Piedade 21. São Geraldo do Baixio 22. São Gonçalo do Abaeté 23. São Gonçalo do Pará 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Santa Bárbara 2. Santa Bárbara do Leste 3. Santa Bárbara do Monte Verde 4. Santa Bárbara do Tugúrio 5. Santa Efigênia de Minas 6. Santa Helena de Minas 7. Santa Juliana 8. Santa Luzia 9. Santa Margarida 10. Santa Maria do Itabira 11. Santa Maria do Salto 12. Santa Maria do Suaçuí 13. Santa Rita de Caldas 14. Santa Rita de Minas 15. Santa Rita Ibitipoca 16. Santa Rita do Itueto 17. Santa Rita do Jacutinga 18. Santa Rita do Sapucaí 19. Santa Rosa da Serra 20. Santana da Vargem 21. Santana de Cataguazes 22. Santana de Pirapama 23. Santana do Deserto 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Madre de Deus de Minas 2. Senhora de Oliveira 3. Senhora do Porto 4. Senhora dos Remédios 5. Virgem da Lapa
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 24. São Gonçalo do Rio Abaixo 25. São Gonçalo do Rio Preto 26. São Gonçalo do Sapucaí 27. São Gotardo 28. São João Batista do Glória 29. São João da Lagoa 30. São João da Mata 31. São João da Ponte 32. São João das Missões 33. São João Del-Rei 34. São João do Manhuaçu 35. São João do Oriente 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 24. Santana do Garambéu 25. Santana do Jacaré 26. Santana do Manhuaçu 27. Santana do Paraíso 28. Santana do Riacho 29. Santana dos Montes 	

36. São João do Pacuí		
37. São João do Paraíso		
38. São João Evangelista		
39. São João Nepomuceno		
40. São Joaquim de Bicas		
41. São João do Oriente		
42. São José da Barra		
43. São José da Lapa		
44. São José do Jacuri		
45. São José do Mantimento		
46. São José da Safira		
47. São José da Varginha		
48. São José do Alegre		
49. São José do Divino		
50. São José do Goiabal		
51. São Lourenço		
52. São Miguel do Anta		
53. São Pedro da União		
54. São Pedro do Suaçuí		
55. São Pedro de Ferros		
56. São Romão		
57. São Roque de Minas		
58. São Sebastião da Bela Vista		
59. São Sebastião da Vargem Alegre		
60. São José Sebastião do Anta		
61. São Sebastião do Maranhão		
62. São Sebastião do Oeste		
63. São Sebastião do Paraíso		
64. São Sebastião do Rio Preto		
65. São Sebastião do Rio Verde		
66. São Tiago		
67. São Tomás de Aquino		
68. São Tomé das Letras		
69. São Vicente de Minas		

Source: Formulated by the authors of this study.

It is important to note, however, that according to IGA/ALMG (1997) in the work entitled “*As denominações urbanas de Minas Gerais*” (“The urban denominations of Minas Gerais”), in addition to the listed municipalities, another 329 (38.6%) had already had, at some point in history, a denomination motivated by the devotion to the Holy Mother / Our Lady and to the saints of the Catholic Church. Table 2 below presents a sample (10%) of these municipalities.

TABLE 2 – Municipalities of Minas Gerais with prior denominations referent to the names of male and female saints and invocations to the Holy Mother / Our Lady

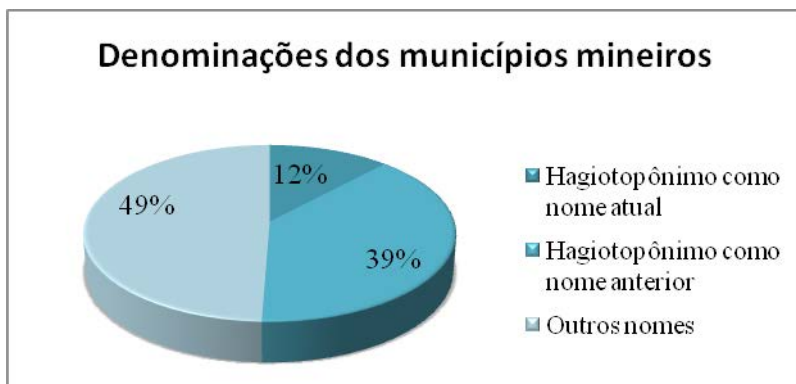
Current Toponym	Prior Denomination(s)
Abadia dos Dourados	Nossa Senhora da Abadia.
Abaeté	Nossa Senhora do Patrocínio do Marmelada
Acaiaca	São Gonçalo do Ubá.
Água Boa	São José da Água Boa / Santana da Água Boa
Águas Formosas	São José das Águas Belas.
Alagoa	Nossa Senhora do Rosário da Alagoa da Aiuruoca.
Além Paraíba	São José de Além-Paraíba
Alfenas	São José de Alfenas / São José de Dores dos Alfena
Almenara	São João da Vigia
Alpinópolis	São Sebastião da Ventania
Alterosa	São Joaquim da Serra Negra
Alto Rio Doce	São José do Xopotó
Alvinópolis	Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Paulo Moreira
Amparo da Serra	Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Amparo do Serra
Andrelândia	Nossa Senhora do Porto do Turvo / Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Porto da Salvação
Alvorada de Minas	Santo Antônio do Rio do Peixe
Araponga	São Miguel e Almas dos Arrepiados / São Miguel do Araponga
Barão de Cocais	São João Batista do Morro Grande / São João do Morro Grande
Barbacena	Nossa Senhora da Piedade da Borda do Campo
Barra Longa	São José da Barra do Gualaxo / São José da Barra Longa
Boa Esperança	Nossa Senhora das Dores do Pântano
Bom Despacho	Senhora do Bom Despacho do Picão
Bom Repouso	São Sebastião e São Roque do Bom Retiro
Botelhos	São José dos Botelhos
Brasília de Minas	Santana das Contendas
Carmo do Cajuru	Nossa Senhora do Carmo do Cajuru
Carmo do Paranaíba	Nossa Senhora do Carmo
Carmo da Mata	Nossa Senhora do Carmo da Mata
Carrancas	Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Rio Grande / Nossa Senhora da Conceição das Carrancas
Cataguases	Santa Rita do Meia Pataca

Cássia	Santa Rita / Santa Rita de Cássia
Chácara	São Sebastião da Chácara
Chalé	São Domingos / São Domingos do Rio Jose Pedro São Domingos do José Pedro
Chiador	Santo Antônio / Santo Antônio do Chiador
Cipotânea	São Caetano / São Caetano do Xopotó / Xopotó.
Coimbra	São Sebastião de Coimbra
Coluna	Santo Antônio da Coluna
Comendador Gomes	São Sebastião das Areias
Conceição da Barra de Minas	Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Barra
Conceição do Rio Verde	Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Rio Verde
Conceição dos Ouros	Nossa Senhora da Conceição dos Ouros
Congonhal	São José do Congonhal
Conselheiro Lafaiete	Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Campo Alegre dos Carijós
Consolação	Santana do Capivari
Curvelo	Santo Antônio da Estrada / Santo Antônio do Curvelo
Desterro de Entre- Rios	Capela Nova do Desterro / Nossa Senhora do Desterro de Entre-Rios
Diogo de Vasconcelos	São Domingos
Dionísio	São Sebastião de Dionísio.
Divinolândia de Minas	Nossa Senhora da Glória de Guanhães
Dom Joaquim	São Domingos do Rio do Peixe
Dom Silvério	Nossa Senhora da Saúde
Dom Viçoso	Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Dom Viçoso
Dores de Guanhães	Nossa Senhora das Dores de Guanhães
Dores do Indaiá	Nossa Senhora do Indaiá / Nossa Senhora das Dores do Indaiá
Dores do Turvo	Nossa Senhora das Dores do Turvo
Doresópolis	Nossa Senhora das Dores das Perobas
Ouro Branco	Santo Antônio do Ouro Branco
Passa Vinte	Santo Antônio do Passa-Vinte
Piedade do Rio Grande	Nossa Senhora da Piedade do Rio Grande / Arames
Piedade dos Gerais	Nossa Senhora da Piedade dos Gerais
Queluzito	Santo Amaro
Raposos	Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Raposos
Raul Soares	São Sebastião de Entre-Rios
Resende Costa	Nossa Senhora da Penha de França do Arraial da Laje
Ressaquinha	São José da Ressaquinha
Riacho dos Machados	Santo Antônio do Riacho dos Machados / Nossa Senhora do Riacho dos Machados
Rio Acima	Santo Antônio do Rio Acima
Rio Casca	Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Casca / Bicudos
Rio Manso	Santa Luzia do Rio Manso
Urucânia	Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso do Urucum
Virginópolis	Nossa Senhora do Patrocínio / Nossa Senhora do Patrocínio do Serro Nossa Senhora do Patrocínio de Guanhães

Source: Carvalho (2014, p. 612-632. Adapted)

In this sense, considering the denominations – prior (12%) or current (38.6%) – there are 432 municipalities that were designated, at some point in history, by religious toponyms, which is equal to 50.6% of the total number of 853 municipalities, which can be seen in Graph 1 below:

GRAPH 1 – Identification of hagiotoponymic denominations in municipalities of Minas Gerais



Source: Carvalho (2014, p. 611)

Given this information, we observed that of the 432 listed municipalities with denominations motivated by religious devotion – prior and current – 405 went through one or more changes over the years, which is equal to 94%, while only 24 of these maintained their original name, which corresponds to 6% of the total. We have listed these municipalities here below with the respective dates in which the name was adopted in parentheses: *Santa Bárbara do Monte Verde* (1839), *Santa Margarida* (1859), *Santa Maria do Salto* (1948), *Santa Rita do Jacutinga* (1835), *Santo Antônio do Amparo* (1802), *Santo Antônio do Rio Abaixo* (1708), *Santo Hipólito* (1910), *São Brás do Suaçuí* (1728), *São Geraldo do Baixo* (1944), *São Gonçalo do Abaeté* (1923), *São Gonçalo do Rio Abaixo* (1850), *São João da Lagoa* (1922), *São João do Manhuaçu* (1890), *São João do Oriente* (1925), *São João Nepomuceno* (1811), *São Joaquim de Bicas* (1836), *São José da Barra* (1876), *São José do Jacuri* (1852), *São José da Varginha* (1881), *São José do Divino* (1948), *São Pedro da União* (1870), *São Pedro dos Ferros* (1849), *São Sebastião da Bela Vista* (1874), *São Sebastião do Paraíso* (1853), *São Tiago* (1802), *São Tomás de Aquino* (1887), *São Thomé das Letras* (1770).

One can observe that the majority of these municipalities received the designations, which have been preserved even today, between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period prior to the Decree-Laws that set forth the toponymic regulations for Brazilian municipalities, which date from the twentieth century, more precisely from 1938 and 1943. These decrees, in summary, condemn the existence of repeated names for municipalities and discourage the adoption of toponyms named by dates, foreign words, names of people who are alive, and expressions with more than two words; they also recommended the adoption of indigenous names with local ownership (COSTA, 1970, p. 30-31)

As regards the cases of toponymic changes, it is important to stress that we adopted the methodology proposed by Dauzat (1926, p. 45) and used by Seabra (2004), which characterizes the substitutions of the toponyms in two distinct manners, which are: i) *spontaneous change* – that which is spoken after the invasions or conquests of a territory, which can occur either by the total substitution of the lexical items or by their partial substitution – ii) *systematic change* – is that which, regardless of conquests, generally evokes the name of a ruler or authorities from a region and is imposed with the objective of paying homage to someone.

In this light, the denominations of 405 municipalities that suffered changes over time thus divide into: 42 that went through a systematic change, which corresponds to 10%, and 363 that went through spontaneous change, corresponding to 90% of the names.

Among the cases of systematic change, we can cite, for example: *Comendador Gomes* < *São Sebastião das Areias*; *Diogo de Vasconcelos* < *Vasconcelos* < *São Domingos*; *Heliadora* < *Santa Isabel dos Coqueiros* < *Santa Isabel*; *João Pinheiro* < *Alegres* < *Santana dos Alegres e Senador Cortes* < *Monte Verde* < *São Sebastião do Monte Verde*.

As regards the spontaneous changes, there are 106 cases of the total substitution of the lexical items, or 29%, and 258 cases of partial substitution, 71%. These latter cases are generally characterized by cases of reduction of the ellipse.² This type of spontaneous change includes the following examples: *Santana do Deserto* < *Nossa Senhora da Santana do Deserto*; *São Geraldo* < *São Sebastião da Serra de São Geraldo*; *Senhora do Porto*

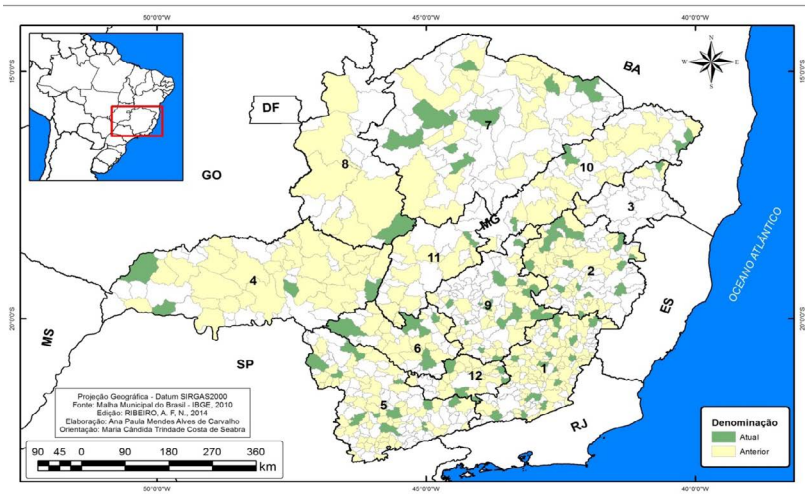
² Regarding the ellipse in toponyms, DAUZAT (1926, p. 59) affirms “Il n’est pas nécessaire que ce composé soit encore compris: il suffit qu’un de ses éléments, généralement le premier, ait pris une place prépondérante pour qu’il suffise à évoquer le lieu à lui Seul. [...]” And stresses: “Lutetia Parisiorum, civitas de Parisiis, puis Parisiis, Paris.”

< *Porto de Guanhões* < *Nossa Senhora do Porto de Guanhões*; *Toledo* < *São José do Toledo* < *São José da Campanha do Toledo*; and *Tombos* < *Tombos de Carangola* < *Nossa Senhora da Conceição dos Tombos*.

The spontaneous change through the total substitution of the lexical items can be observed, especially in the municipalities today that have indigenous names, which is due to the recommendation mentioned in the Decree-Law of 1943 as regards the adoption of indigenous names with local ownership (COSTA, 1970, p. 31). As an example, we can cite: *Abaeté* < *Dores do Marmelada* < *Nossa Senhora do Patrocínio do Marmelada* < *Arraial Novo da Marmelada* < *Marmelada*; *Igaratinga* < *Santo Antônio do Rio São João Acima* < *Santo Antônio de São João Acima* < *São João Acima*; *Itutinga* < *Ponte Nova* < *Santo Antônio da Ponte Nova*; e *Piracema* < *Rio do Peixe* < *Nossa Senhora das Necessidades do Rio do Peixe*.

Having shown the cases of toponymic changes that occurred in the denominations – current or prior – of the 432 municipalities in Minas Gerais, we now present a toponymic map drafted to geographically demonstrate the localization of these municipalities, in which those that maintain a hagiotopeponym in their current denomination are represented in green and those that, at some point in history, were designated by these religious names are highlighted in yellow.

FIGURE 3 – Toponymic map of the index of religious denominations in municipalities in Minas Gerais



Source: Carvalho (2014, p. 635)

Among the mentioned denominations, the mariotoponyms stand out, since, currently, only five municipalities are names through toponyms relative to the invocations of the Holy Mother / Our Lady, which are: *Madre de Deus de Minas*, *Senhora de Oliveira*, *Senhora do Porto*, *Senhora dos Remédios* and *Virgem da Lapa*. On the other hand, those that present this category as prior denominations total 110 occurrences.

This significant reduction of occurrences, as mentioned above, seems to be able to be explained by the adoption of the toponymic legislations set forth by Decree-Law 5901 from October 21, 1943, which, in the first half of the twentieth century, recommends, among other things, the non-adoption of compound toponyms of more than two words. Thus, the municipalities of Minas Gerais named *Carmo do Cajuru*, *Conceição dos Ouros*, and *Dores do Indaiá* were previously called *Nossa Senhora do Carmo do Cajuru*, *Nossa Senhora da Conceição dos Ouros*, and *Nossa Senhora das Dores do Indaiá*, respectively.

It is important to highlight, however, that, long before this federal law, the denominator, even if unconsciously, already had this idea of linguistic reduction, which can be seen, for example in the naming of creeks, around which the beginning of settlements in Minas Gerais, which, even if named by the invocation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, received only the specific form “of Mount Carmel”, thus constituting a simple toponym.

6. Final considerations

Brought by the Portuguese to Brazil, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Christian faith and its main manifestation, which is the worshiping of saints, was gaining territorial expansion, as the newly discovered lands were settled. While they erected crosses and chapels to host the diverse images of their devotion, the pioneers took custody of the territory, baptizing it in their own language and according to their own culture.

Thus, it is in this context that the religious toponyms emerge in the territory of Minas Gerais, maintaining themselves, throughout the centuries, primarily in rural features, such as farms and streams, whose naming motivation is connected exclusively to the individual subjectivity of the denominator and, as they are references in private properties, the toponymic changes are less common.

By contrast, the motivations for the choice of the name of a municipality, an urban feature, in addition to observing the specific legislation, is based on collective subjectivity and, many times, due to political interests. Thus, as we have shown in the previous section, many religious denominations referent to the municipalities of Minas Gerais were replaced over the years, especially regarding the mariotonyms.

However, these toponyms, due to the reduction referent to the titles that accompany the expression of the Holy Mother / Our Lady, have left traces of their religious origin throughout the territory of Minas Gerais, which can be observed by the considerable quantity of current toponymic denominations stemming from the determining factors of ‘Carmo’ (‘Mount Carmel’), ‘Conceição’ (‘Immaculate Conception’), and ‘Dores’ (‘Sorrows’), for example.

Considering that presented in this study, we therefore conclude that the custom of giving places a name referent to the devotion of saints has always been a constant act throughout the many periods of history in Minas Gerais, from the beginning of the settlement of the state to the present day, which illustrates a true social-linguistic-cultural heritage.

In this sense, to finish this study, we deem it pertinent to return to the claims of Dick (1990b, p.155) concerning toponymic investigations related to religious devotion:

Maybe more than in any other onomastic category, it will be possible to perceive in this the tight bonds that must exist between the denominator and the shifting of the denomination, in this case, the physical feature (river, lake, mountain, etc.) or human feature (village, city, region, bridge, etc.). The study of this denominative class thus allows one to transform the toponymic science into a true “chapter of social psychology”, in the common sense of the scholars who follow Dauzat, so long as the “feeling” and the “want” of isolated elements reflect, thanks to introspective processes, communitarian behavior itself.

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