THE RIVERHEAD OF URUGUAI RIVER: ORIGINS OF A CONTROVERSY

RESENDE A.C.D.R.B., SANTOS C.J.B.D., MATHIAS M.D.A.
IBGE, RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The accuracy of the geographic names in a map much contributes to the accuracy of the cartographic information, making a large contribution to savings and efficiency in the operation of government, business and industry, communication, and education. Geographic names play an important role in issues such as access to disaster-stricken areas, efficiency in communication, not to mention land property and territorial disputes.

In Brazil, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), and the Brazilian Army, the main institutions responsible for the official mapping of the country often face problems with the standardization of the names of rivers, which is one of the most critical issues in the field of Geographic Names, once the country lacks a national institution directly responsible for the standardization of the denominations of these geographic features and their springs. In addition, as rivers often demarcate the boundaries between territories and/or countries, their names are likely to vary along the years, since the action of naming is closely linked to issues of political power. In some cases, the geographic name is the crucial factor in accurately establishing the spring of a river. This is the case of one of the most important rivers in the south of Brazil: the Uruguai River, whose riverhead is claimed to be located both in the confluence of rivers Pelotas and Canoas and Pelotas and Peixe. The Uruguai River constitutes the boundary between two Brazilian States, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul and between Brazil and two countries: Argentina and Uruguay. In the past, this region of boundaries was the cause of intense territorial disputes within both national and international scope.

Concerning international land disputes, since the 15th century, even before Brazil was discovered in 1500, Portugal and Spain disputed the territories of the so called “New World”. Despite the various treaties signed between the two countries, such as the Treaty of Toledo (1480), The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) and the Treaty of San Ildefonso (1777), Portugal managed to advance behind the limits of the treaties and obtain more of the land in South America than agreed.

Especially in the area which today comprises the south of Brazil, one of the many strategies used to push back the limits of the Treaty of Tordesillas was to commit intentional mistakes in the cartographic documents produced as of the 16th century (FERREIRA, 2007), often concerning the names of the course of rivers. This is particularly evident in the elaboration of the “Mapa das Cortes” (1749), the main document through which Portugal obtained the recognition by Spain of the advances in the territorial occupation in the interior of South America by the Portuguese. The rivers, together with the mountains, were used by the Portuguese to establish boundaries between the domains of the two countries, following the Portuguese ideological and political project of establishing their territory in South America through the control of its major rivers, the Amazon, in the north, and the Prata in the south (CORTESÃO, 1958). Portugal sought to establish the natural features (rivers and mountains) as “undisputable” natural limits.

In another case of international territorial dispute in the area the names of rivers played an important part. Known as “Questão de Palmas”, it burst out between Brazil and Argentina in 1857 and involved alleged changes in the naming of the rivers Peperi-Guaçu, Santo Antônio, Chapecó, Chopim and Jangada. These, although mentioned in the Treaty of San Ildefonso as boundaries, were left unidentified in the land, which led to controversies over which water courses they were and, consequently, over the extension of the territories of the two countries. (WACHOWICZ, 2001).

Also in the 1850’s, more exactly in 1853, the State of Paraná was created, in a territory which used to belong to the State of São Paulo, including the area which today is the west of the State of Santa Catarina, as seen in Fig. 1. It is the start of a long territorial dispute between the states of Paraná and Santa Catarina, which only comes to an end in 1917 with the homologation of the Agreement of Limits.

In the 18th century and beginning of the 19th, the state boundary was established as the Preto River, in 1865 Marombas River (which flows into Canoas River) was the border and, in 1879, the Peixe River. During this period, Santa Catarina persistently pushed the border to the west, by means of a strategy of territorial occupation. In 1911, as Santa Catarina had won four consecutive lawsuits (the first one in 1901 and the last one in 1910), Paraná started to take a series of measures so as to gain time and not to have to surrender the territory to the rival state (ITCF, 2006).
In 1912, however, the so called Contestado War broke out, which aggravated the conflict between the two states. The Contestado was a civil war between the National and State military forces and a community based in the state of Santa Catarina led by a religious leader. Its members were mainly unemployed workers dismissed by the Brazil Railway Company after the end of the construction of the railroad between the States of São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul and dissatisfied poor peasants whose land had been confiscated by the government and granted to a lumber company. The group tried to unsuccessfully recover the lands, which were now priced much higher, due to the existence of the railway. The tension grew between the two sides and the community decided to declare itself independent from the national government, which led to an armed conflict with the national military forces. In October, 1912, the group moved to an area under the jurisdiction of the State of Paraná and claimed by Santa Catarina (see fig. 1). Paraná interpreted this as an invasion of its territory in a strategic maneuver by Santa Catarina and sent the State military forces to fight them. Many other violent confrontations followed this first one until the rebels were finally defeated in 1916. The conflict resulted in the Agreement of Limits.

The fact that the Uruguai River originates from a confluence of two rivers instead of from a natural spring coming from the ground characterizes the inconsistencies verified in the present mapping of that area concerning its spring as an issue which concerns solely the imprecision of geographic names. As can be seen in Fig. 2 and 3, which show details of sheets of some of the charts produced by the IBGE and the Army, the spring of the river, or its “start” if we may call it so, is located in different spots in the maps, either in the confluence of “Pelotas River” with the “Canoas River” or with the “Peixe River”.

Fig. 1
The objective of this paper is to bring up the issue by presenting the data obtained up to the present stage of the research which is being carried out within the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), aiming at establishing, drawing mainly from historical cartographic documents, and from data obtained by a new survey of geographic names, the exact point to be considered the riverhead of the Uruguai River in order to accurately represent it in the Brazilian official mapping. It also seeks to discover the origins of the controversy regarding the spring of this river, so as to feed the Brazilian Geographic Names Database (BNGB) with accurate historical data on the issue, allowing the access to this information by the Brazilian society as a whole.

This research was motivated by an e-mail sent to our institution in which a Brazilian citizen inquires about the riverhead of the Uruguai River. As a dweller of the city Marcelino Ramos, in the State of Rio Grande do Sul since his early childhood, he claims to have always been taught that the Uruguai River started in his
city, in the confluence of the Pelotas River with the Peixe River. However, he complained that some schools in his region and some maps he had seen showed the riverhead in the city of Barracão, in the confluence of rivers Pelotas and Canoas, about 30 kilometers up Pelotas River (Fig. 4).

Fig 4.
So as to answer his question and check the existence of maps with controversial information as he had mentioned, all the existing charts of that area, in different scales, elaborated by both the IBGE and the Army since 1940 were examined. Thus, we became aware of the inconsistencies in the official Brazilian cartographic documents.

2. APPROACH AND METHODS
In order to understand the problem and solve the inconsistencies, several measures were taken. As a first step towards retrieving the correct name of the river in the area between the two alleged riverheads, we resorted to the official documents where the name of the river in that area could be found. So, the laws which created the municipalities whose borders were the river in the stretch between the possible riverheads were also examined. As the Ururuaí river is the boundary between the states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, laws of creation of municipalities in the two states were analyzed. The results of that analysis can be seen below in Fig. 5.

Fig. 5
Also, in order to verify how much of this controversy is spread within the Brazilian society, thirty Brazilian websites among commercial sites, personal web pages and blogs, sites of official Brazilian institutions, of social and private organizations and of NGO’s were examined. Thus, we found that some institutions such as the Ministry of Transportation (http://www2.transportes.gov.br/bit/hidrovias/Figuras/I-uruguai.htm); and The Brazilian Committee for Dams
(http://www.cbdb.org.br/site/bdados.asp?str_cod=365), which represents the International Commission on Large Dams in Brazil consider the riverhead of the Uruguay River to be in the confluence of rivers Pelotas and Peixe.

Also, some sites of social organizations and/or NGO’s such as the Núcleo Amigos da Terra do Brasil (NATBRASIL) (http://www.natbrasil.org.br/Docs/cartilha_rio_uruguai/hidro1.pdf) from the state of Rio Grande do Sul, member of Friends of the Earth International and a site by two inhabitants of Marcelino Ramos who study the history of the city (http://www.historiademarcelinoramos.com.br/) share the same opinion.

On the other hand, a TV program by a regional network (RBS) and the site of the Projeto Pro Rio Uruguai (http://www.proriouruguai.rs.gov.br/portal/modelo.php?cont=nascentes) – a governmental institution from the State of Rio Grande do Sul meant, among other objectives, to preserve and protect the Guarani Aquifer -, state that the Uruguai River is born in the city of Barração, in the confluence of Pelotas River and Canoas River.

However, the most illustrative example of the controversy on the matter is the fact that the official site of the city of Barração (http://www.barracaors.com.br/fotos.php) shows pictures of the riverhead of the Uruguai River allegedly located in that city, while its northern limits in its Law of Creation were traced in the assumption that the Uruguai River is born further ahead in Marcelino Ramos. (See fig.5)

The next step was to try to discover, through examination of historical cartographic documents, a possible starting point for the controversy.

Thus, we proceeded to the examination of historical maps and charts, found in the Arquivo Histórico do Exército (Historical Archives of the Brazilian Army) and in the archives of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and in the Arquivo Nacional (National Archives). The results of the analyses were then organized in a chart in chronological order:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description of Maps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
  There is no Pelotas River. Denominated Vruguay from the spring in the mountains until it flows into Prata River. |
  There is no Pelotas River. Denominated Vruguay from the spring in the mountains until it flows into Prata River. Neither Peixe nor Canoas River are represented, although several tributaries are shown. |
| 1749a | Printed copy. “Mapa dos Confinis do Brasil com as terras da Coroa de Espanha na América Meridional” (“MAPA DAS CORTES”)  
  There is no Pelotas River. Denominated Uruguay from the spring in the mountains until it flows into Prata River. Neither Peixe nor Canoas River are represented, although several tributaries are shown. |
| 1749b | Printed copy. Another version of the “Mapa das Cortes”.  
  There is no Pelotas River. Denominated Uruguay from the spring in the mountains until it flows into Prata River. Peixe River is represented, but not Canoas. |
| 1764 (1748) | Reproduction of the map, published in *Le Petit Atlas Maritime*, |
Map 49. Published in 1764, based on “La Carte D’Amérique” de D’Anville, 1748

There is no Pelotas River. Denominated Uruguay from the spring represented in the mountains. Neither Peixe nor Canoas River are represented, although several tributaries are shown.

**Before 1821**

“Mappa da América Meridional Dividido em Províncias e o Brazil em Capitanias”. Copy made in the Military Archives in 1870. Indeterminate date, but surely before 1821, when the system of “Capitanias Hereditárias” was definitely extinct. The denomination “Capitania” was no longer used.

There is no Pelotas River. Denominated Uruguay from the spring in the mountains until it flows into Prata River. No Peixe or Canoas river. Some tributaries represented but not named.

**1846**

“Carta do Império do Brazil”. Reduced copy made in the Military Archives in 1873.

Represents the river as “Pelotas” until at least Timbé River (by its position this river appears to be the present Peixe River). Denomination “Rio Uruguay” appears right after the junction with Peperi-guaçu River.

**1856**

“Nova Carta Corográfica do Brazil”. Reduced copy made in the Military Archives in 1867.

DOES NOT locate the spring in the confluence with Canoas, once the name “Rio Pelotas” is written surpassing the area of the junction. Locates the riverhead in the confluence with Timbé River, which appears to be the Peixe River, taking into consideration the position of the locality “Campos Novos”. At that time, the municipalities which today have the Peixe River as west boundary still belonged to the jurisdiction of “Campos Novos” or did not exist. The west boundary of Campos Novos was Peixe River (according to its Law of creation as a municipality in 1881). The Law does not mention the Timbé River.

**1863**


Shows Pelotas and Canoas. Places the riverhead in the confluence of Pelotas and Canoas. The denomination “Rio Pelotas” appears immediately before the confluence of this river with the Canoas. Peixe River not represented, at least not with this denomination. The denomination “Uruguay” appears further ahead, together with a variant name, “Rio Geiser (ou Geisen, the visualization is not clear).

**1865**

“Mappa do Sul do Império do Brazil”.

The exact location of the riverhead is not absolutely clear. It may be interpreted as being in the junction of Pelotas and Canoas, once the latter is the only river named between the denominations “Pelotas” and “Uruguay”. The denomination “Uruguay” only appears next to the point where the river flows into Prata River.

**1875**

“Mappa do Sul do Império do Brazil”.

The exact location of the riverhead is not absolutely clear. It may be
interpreted as being in the junction of Pelotas and Canoas, once the latter is the only river named between the denominations “Pelotas” and “Uruguay”. The denomination “Uruguay” only appears next to the point where the river flows into Prata River.

1896

Digitalized image. “Mappa do Estado do Paraná” (State of Paraná)

Uruguai River DOES NOT start in the confluence of Pelotas and Peixe. The spring is represented in the confluence of Pelotas and Canoas. However, the river flowing into the Pelotas is the “Marombas”. Today, this river is considered one of the main tributaries of Canoas and flows into it a bit before Canoas flows into Pelotas.

1908 or before


Clearly the Uruguai River does not start in the confluence of Pelotas and Canoas. The name “Pelotas” appears immediately after the junction of these rivers. The name “Uruguay” is next to the mouth of the river and there is no other denomination until the above mentioned one. Seems to establish the riverhead in the confluence of Pelotas and Peixe.

1908

Digitalized copy. “Planta da viação do Estado do Paraná”

Shows exclusively the territory of Paraná in its extension at the time. The south border is the Uruguay River, in all the extension of the river represented, the only denomination is “Rio Uruguay”. The west boundary is the Marombas (Canoas), showing disobedience to the limits established in 1879. The Peixe River, which should be the state boundary, is not represented, only the railroad that runs along it. This indicated the riverhead is not considered in the confluence of this river and the Pelotas. However, it does not indisputably indicate that the riverhead is located in the confluence with the Canoas (Marombas).

1911

Digitalized image. “Mappa do Estado do Paraná para servir ao estudo da questão de limites com o Estado de Santa Catharina”. (State of Paraná)

Clearly the Uruguai River does not start in the confluence of Pelotas and Canoas. Marombas River flows into Pelotas. The word “Río” (of “Río das Pelotas”) is written immediately after the junction with the Marombas (Canoas), in the space between the alleged riverheads, thus showing the denomination of the river does not change after the junction. The words “das Pelotas” come immediately before the confluence. The denomination “Río Uruguay” is not written immediately after the confluence with the Peixe River, however the map seems to indicate the riverhead to be there, once it is the major tributary in the area between the two denominations.

1912

Digitalized image. “Mappa do Estado do Paraná” (State of Paraná)

Clearly the Uruguai River does not start in the confluence of Pelotas and Canoas. Marombas river flows into Pelotas. The denomination “Río das Pelotas” is written immediately after the junction with the Marombas (Canoas), in the space between the alleged riverheads, thus showing the denomination of the river does not change after the junction. The denomination “Río Uruguay” is not written immediately after the confluence with the Peixe River, however the map seems to indicate the riverhead to be there, once it is the major tributary in the area between the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>Until at least the year of 1821, the Uruguai River is represented, in its many different variations of spelling, as having a natural spring in the mountains of Serra Geral. No denominations as River Pelotas appear. Neither the reason nor the exact time of the appearance of this denomination was yet investigated. It has not yet been verified whether rivers Canoas and Peixe are not represented or represented with different names.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>However, in the maps analyzed until the present moment, the first documents in which the denomination “Rio Pelotas” appear (1846 and 1856) clearly establish or seem to establish the riverhead in the confluence of Rivers Pelotas and Timbó, and undoubtedly not in the confluence of Pelotas and Canoas. There are strong evidences that the watercourse identified as Timbó may be the River Peixe. Whether this is true will be the object of further investigations. If this is the case, then, up to the present moment those two maps are the oldest references to the riverhead as being located in the confluence of two rivers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>After that period, until approximately the year of 1908, all the maps studied represented or seemed to represent the riverhead in the junction of rivers Pelotas and Canoas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Then, in the period of 1908 to 1912, two maps made in Paraná in two consecutive years (1911 and 1912) show the riverhead in the confluence of Pelotas and Peixe. One of them, of 1911, was especially made to support with historical arguments the claims of the State of Paraná over the disputed territory. It visualizes the contents of all legal instruments which establish the territorial limits and describes the area occupied by Santa Catarina as “invaded area”. In this period Paraná had been defeated by Santa Catarina in several lawsuits and Santa Catarina continued with the strategy of territorial occupation. This may lead us to consider the possibility that Paraná was attempting a strategy of establishing the riverhead of the Uruguai River at that point, acknowledging the existence of older maps which represented it there (such as the maps of 1846 and 1856, in case Timbó and Peixe are the same watercourse) and then establish this as an “unquestionable” limit, once this would consist in a remarkable landmark. The fact that the map of 1919 - made by Paraná after the Agree of Limits had been homologated in favor of Santa Catarina – shows the riverhead in the confluence of rivers Pelotas and Canoas may be one more evidence of this attempt, which may have helped establish the controversy regarding the riverhead of the Uruguai River in that region. However, this cannot be considered an actual hypothesis, once it is based on such elementary studies. It must be considered as a conjecture which indicates the need of further historical investigations, especially of maps and documents issued by the State of Santa Catarina at that time.

After that period, the maps analyzed are either somewhat vague regarding the representation of the riverhead or show it in the confluence of Pelotas and Canoas.

3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Maps and the history of the region within the years of 1764 and 1846 will be searched for and analyzed so as to try to establish why and when the denomination “Pelotas River” appeared.

Documents mentioned in the 1911 map and land property certificates of both states especially the ones in the period of the territorial dispute between Santa Catarina and Paraná will be searched for and studied.

Also, a field trip to the area studied is planned for the first semester of 2011, in order to promote a new collection of the name of that particular stretch of the watercourse by interviewing inhabitants of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul. Taking into account the long existence of this controversy, another objective of this trip is to verify its extent and effects in loco, which will inform the possible solutions for the standardization of the denomination of this stretch of the river.

The possible identification of the watercourse denominated Timbó River as the present Peixe River, will be checked using the free software Quantum GIS to compare the images of the digitalized copies of the maps in which this river appears to present digital maps in which the Peixe River is represented.

An important follow-up to this research would be the investigation of the historical evolution of the names of the rivers represented in the charts studied, with the same method of comparison using the free software Quantum GIS to be used in this study. The results would be uploaded to the BNGB and thus made available for the solution of any issue involving the historical names of these rivers.

4. BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES


WACHOWICZ, R. História do Paraná. 9. ed. Curitiba: Imprensa Oficial,