On the origin of the place name Tübingen

The city name Tübingen first appeared as Tuwingen in the chronicle Anno Zwifalt in the year 1078, not long after the introduction of place names in the 10th century in Southern Germany.

Later it was written in various chronicles as Tuingen (1088), Duiwingen (1117), Thuyngin (1139), Touingen (1162), Tuwingen (1164), Tougen (1165), Doenga (1183), Tuewingan (1275), Tuengen (1287), and Thuengen (1333). On the origin of this onomastic term, Bök (1774:6) writes that it has become lost in distant antiquity. According to von Schmid (1931:146), it has remained as puzzling as ever. But this has not stopped writers from trying to explain the mystery of Tübingen. This writing offers a summary of these attempts, both fanciful and scientific, especially to those who were, are or will be associated with exchanges between American universities and the Universität Tübingen.

Let us first survey the fanciful attempts. Johann Ulrich Steinhof (Neue Wirtembergische Chronik, 1744) points out that in the old chronicles, the city was called Toingen, which he says is derived from Göw or Gäu (cf. Eimer 1945:3). Ludwig Uhland derives the name from Tiu, which he claims came in turn from Cyuvari (cf. Förstemann 1916:782). Von Schmid (1931:146), writes that it supposedly derives from Wingen, Wengen, Wangen, winja with an initial t as in Twiel, instead of Wiel or Weil. Several have connected Tübingen etymologically to its Zwinger ('fortress'), which was completed in 1535. From Zwinger (Middle High German twing 'jurisdiction') comes the name daingean, and from daingean comes French Donjon, earlier Donjion 'strong fortress.' Modern English dungeon (Middle English donjon) belongs to this purported family. Finally, Eisenbach (1822:1-2) relates the following tale: When Caesar Vespasianus occupied Jerusalem, there is said to have been among his troops a certain Rabotus, a territorial count from Tübingen who behaved so bravely that the Caesar bestowed upon him a fortress on the Bläsiberg. The inscription T.V.B. (Titi Vespasiani beneficio) was fixed on this fortress. When a city arose next to it in the valley, it received the name Tübingen, which was based on the contraction of these letters. In order to lend prestige to their race, the counts promoted this etymological tale, and still maintained in the 16th century that they had written a document about it on bark and on a cup that had been a gift from Vespasianus, their forefather. But during the Reformation, when a spirit of discovery spread throughout the sciences and historical researchers demanded to see this evidence, it perished.

With a hazy understanding of phonological shifts and morphological boundaries, these
early interpretations are, at best, naive. Equipped with finer linguistic tools, recent attempts probe more scientifically at the name of this Swabian city.

Many researchers see it comprising a root of Celtic origin and the suffix -\textit{ingen}. During the 2nd through the 4th centuries A.D., the area now comprising Southwest Germany was a Germanic world with a Celtic substratum. Before Caesar's \textit{Gallic War}, the only evidence of the relations between these two tribes consists of personal and place names. Egli (1893:268) says \textit{tub} in \textit{Tübingen} was taken from the Celtic stem \textit{dubo-}, meaning 'dark, black' (\textit{Dubis 'the black one}') and also 'sad, wild,' while Förstermann (1916:755) says \textit{dubo-} means only 'dark, black.' This root is found in the place names \textit{Dublin} (\textit{Duibh-linn 'black pool'}), \textit{Devlin, Dowling, Doolin,} and \textit{Ballindoolin}. Bahlow (1965:490) claims that since the concept 'dark, black' frequently occurs in areas with marshes and moors, \textit{Tübingen} must contain an element meaning 'a dark body of water.' He cites \textit{Tubney, Tubbanford, Tub Mead,} and \textit{Tub Hole} in England to confirm this (cf. Late Latin \textit{tubeta 'mire'}). In fact, Bahlow (1955:9) has gone so far as to say that Celtic concepts of nature underlie all Southern German place names, such as Celtic \textit{meg 'meadow'} in \textit{Meggingen}. This explanation with \textit{dubo-} is an accordance with phonological laws for the Celtic and Germanic branches: Celtic \textit{d-} (subject to lenition in Irish) \textit{dh-} or \textit{*d-}, and Germanic \textit{t-} \textit{bh}; Celtic \textit{-u-} and Germanic \textit{-u-} (\textit{-ü- in \textit{Tübingen} shows i-Umlaut} \textit{eu-}). Reconstruction yields Indo-European \textit{*dheubh 'dark, black.'} In Celtic, this root has manifested itself in Old Irish \textit{dub, Modern Irish dubh, Old Welsh dub, Modern Welsh du, Old Cornish duw, Middle Cornish du, Breton du,} and Gaulish \textit{dabis, all in the meaning of 'black.' It also appears in Gothic \textit{daubs} and Old High German \textit{toub 'dumb.'}

Others find an element of Germanic origin in \textit{Tübingen}. Von Riezler (1909:11) says that -\textit{ing-} was joined predominantly with age-old Germanic personal names that had already become archaic in the 11th and 12th centuries. These names are partly from peasants, but mostly from city dwellers, especially patricians, knights, noblemen as well as clerics. Thus, with the dative plural -\textit{en} probably in the meaning of 'with,' \textit{Sigmaringen} means 'with the people of Sigmar,' \textit{Gundelfingen} 'with people of Gund(w)olf,' \textit{Onstmettingen} 'with the people of Ausmuot,' \textit{Tailfingen} 'with the people of Tagwolf,' etc. The area around the Neckar River teems with place names such as \textit{Bempflingen, Esslingen, Göppingen, Nürtingen, Reutlingen,} and \textit{Tailfingen}. By analogy, one naturally posits a similar formation for \textit{Tübingen} 'with the people of Tub(o).'

These etymological interpretations only allow us to guess at the age of \textit{Tübingen}. We only know that place names with -\textit{ing(en)} occur in the oldest documents. Schwarz (1950:232) claims that these cities were found as early as in the 8th century. He cites the city name \textit{Reinting}, based on the personal name \textit{Rihmunt}, who in the years 806-818 testified in legal affairs pertaining to the places Frauenfels, Elsenbach, Strogen, and Velden. The names of his cowitnesses also formed the base of several place names, such as \textit{Liutto > Loiting, Ohhard > Onharting,} and \textit{Sigolf > Sigsling.} In his astrological chronicle, Andreas Goldmayer claims that \textit{Tübingen} was founded in the year 37 after Christ, on the 14th of May at 5:43 a.m. Goldmayer did not use science to prove himself right. But in those days, universities were not yet sending students to \textit{Tübingen} who could have proved him wrong.

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