Personal Names

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Roman Names

Ancient Roman names consisted of three elements: the praenomen (given name), the nomen (the family name), and the cognomen (nickname). Cognomina were generally acquired in adulthood or early youth, often on the basis of some exploit or physical characteristic. In some families, the cognomen itself became hereditary. Typical examples of cognomina are Cicero ‘chickpea’, Plautus ‘flat-footed’, and Africana ‘of Africa’ (this cognomen was acquired by the Roman general Publius Cornelius Scipio on account of his victories in North Africa). These Roman names had a considerable influence on the subsequent naming systems of Italy and other Romance-speaking countries.

Emergence of the Binomial System

Most people in the modern world bear a name consisting of two main parts – a given name (or names) and a surname. So strong and widespread is this binomial system that personal naming systems in cultures where it is not indigenous are nevertheless tending to adapt themselves to it. A typical surname is inherited from the parents, whereas the given name is chosen by them. Various conventions govern the use of both kinds of name. This modern binomial system arose in Europe during the late Middle Ages and is associated with the rise of a feudal bureaucracy, but it has now spread far beyond the boundaries of Europe.

In Europe itself, the system of hereditary surnames, discussed below, generally replaced an older patronymic naming system, in which an individual was known by a forename plus a given name identifying his or her father (which, in the case of women in patriarchal societies, was generally replaced on marriage by the given name of the husband). In the patronymic system, an individual was often expected to know not only his or her father’s name but also the entire genealogy stretching back for several generations. A typical example is an individual in 18th-century Anglesey, Wales, who gave his name as David ap William ap David Lloyd ap Thomas ap Dafydd ap Gwilym ap Dafydd Iwan ap Howell, ap Cynfrig ap Ionwerth Fychan ap Ion werth ap Grono ap Tegern. This genealogical name contains a mixture of English and Welsh forms (David, Dafydd), occasional distinguishing double names (David Lloyd, Dafydd Iwan), and epithets (Fychan, leined form of bychan ‘little’). Such a genealogical name, although no doubt valuable for such purposes as establishing inheritance rights in a society in which written documents were few, is self-evidently cumbersome for most practical purposes. It is therefore not surprising that it was replaced by the more streamlined system that is now used.

Patronymic systems were the norm in medieval Germanic and Slavic languages. In most parts of Europe, they were replaced by systems based on hereditary surnames between the 11th and 14th centuries, but survived as the norm in Scandinavia, Wales, and Ashkenazi Jewish communities well into the 19th century. This system is still used in Iceland, where hereditary surnames are still not established. Instead, an individual is known by a given name and a patronymic; for example, Steinn Sigurðason. Given names often alternate from generation to generation, so the latter’s father is quite likely to have been called Sigurð Steinsson. His sister Raghild is Raghild Sigurðardottir ‘daughter of Sigurð’.

In Ireland and the Highlands and islands of Scotland, the ancient Gaelic clan system made for an easy transition to the hereditary surname system.

Many modern surnames represent patronymics that became frozen at some particular point in time; for example, MacDermot ‘son of Dermot’ in Gaelic; Powell, Welsh ap Hywel, ‘son of Hywel’; and English Wilson, Williams, Wills, Wilks, Wilkinson, all originating as ‘son of Will or William.’

Forenames

A forename (also called given name) is bestowed on a child by the parents, by a priest or other religious or social figure, or by a tribal group or clan. (The terms ‘forename’ and ‘given name’ are synonyms, but the latter emphasizes the role of parental choice in name giving.) Typically, the name is bestowed in a naming ceremony, for example Christian baptism. Naming practices are discussed in some detail in Alford (1988). In secular societies, registration at a registry office has taken the place of a religious ceremony. In European languages, the inventory of standard given names comprises a relatively small set of extremely ancient traditional items, the etymology of which may be lost or not widely known. Thus, the etymology of names such as Elizabeth, Anne, Mary, Jane, William, Robert, Edward, David, and Matthew, all of which are used throughout the English-speaking world and beyond (and all of which have cognate forms in
most European languages; it is known only to a few specialists and enthusiasts. The 'meaning' of such a name rarely constitutes a component in the reasons for choosing it. In other cases, vocabulary words are chosen as names with full cognition of the word's meaning. The 17th-century vogue among Puritans for girls' names denoting virtues and other qualities (e.g., Patience, Prudence, Charity, Endurance, Silence) is an example. Many Chinese and Arabic names are semantically transparent, and this seems to be the norm throughout Africa. Herbert (1999) commented, "This is, in marked contrast to the Semitic and other so-called 'oriental' languages, and on the continent, but one good generalization is that African names have meaning, i.e., the relationship between the name and its lexical meaning is typically a transparent one, at least in terms of translating the name into a European language." The hedge in the last sentence is important: Gardner (1999) wrote of a girl who was named Mophelo, which means 'secret' in Setswana (Tswana). It is not immediately obvious why someone should be called 'secret.' The explanation given by the bearer's family was that it was a prophecy, for "through witchcraft they might kill her or do her harm." Apo- tropic naming of this kind is found in other societies; for example Yiddish Kein, based on Hebrew qayyum 'tough', 'enduring', was given to a sickly child as an encouragement for survival. More transparent examples of Setswana names mentioned by Gardner include Snyyie 'tiny', Selela 'cry over something' (because the child's father died before she was born); d. the Lunda name Poshanana, and Mbo pho (not so very different from Greek Theodorus and Slavic Bogdan, both of which mean 'gift of God'). An individual may also be the surname of another family with which the parents have close ties—for example, the mother's surname before marriage—or they wish to be commemorated. Middle names are sometimes the half-way stage through which surnames enter the given-name stock.

The main parameters governing name-giving throughout the world can be summarized cross-culturally as follows:

- **Semantic transparency:** A vocabulary word may be chosen as a name because of its meaning, although in many cases the particular application or circumstances may be highly particular. This category includes names (e.g., Zulu Routhke 'arrested' (because his father was under arrest when he was born)), apotropic names (to ward off evil), and onomastic names (to encourage success or good qualities). Gardner (1999) also mentioned examples of English words used as names in Boiswana, such as Queen, Story, Comet, Jolly, Wires, Skates, and even Hey and You.

- **Family continuity:** In many places, it is customary to name a child after an older family member or other revered older person. In some societies this is quite strictly regulated. Thus, according to Herbert (1999), in traditional Sesho-Tswana groups, an eldest son is expected to name his first son after his father and his first daughter after his mother; then a second son is named after the late wife's father and a second daughter after the wife's mother, and so on. Among Hindus, according to Krishnamurthy (1990), the motivation for naming a child after a forebear, especially a prominent forebear, is often the belief in reincarnation: "the children are their ancestors reborn." Thus, the honoring of a family member is allied to a religious belief as a motivating factor.

- **Religion:** The most enduring factor in name giving is probably religion. Among Muslims, the most favored names typically honor the Prophet Muhammad himself, along with his family and his immediate successors. Among Christian Arabs, the names Isa 'Jesus' and Fadi 'redeemer' (compare Italian Salvatore) are popular, as are Arabic forms of the names of the apostles (e.g., Boutron 'Peter') and certain Qur'anic figures mentioned in the New Testament, an early saint, or a saint with a local cult). The main sources for such names are the following:
  - The Bible (New Testament): Names such as Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, and Mary have cognates in every European language, with many descriptive or hyponymic forms, which have given rise to countless thousands of surnames. Mention should also be made here of the Hispanic tradition of Marian names, according to which an attribute of the Virgin Mary may constitute a female given name, even if the noun in question is masculine in grammatical gender. Such names include Pilar, Remedios, and Dolores.
  - The Bible (Old Testament): Old Testament names are, of course, of Hebrew etymology, and many of them are used traditionally as Jewish names. In their vernacular European forms, names such as Jof, Ezekiel, Ebenezer, Zillak, and Meibathel have been used by Christian fundamentalists (Puritans, Dinners) since the 16th century. These names are not used in non-literate Jewish communities such as Roman Catholics or High-Church Anglicans, except in cases where an Old Testament name had also been borne by an early Christian saint (e.g., David, Daniel). Some Old Testament names, especially female names, such as Deborah and Rebecca, have become very popular among Protestants, partly because the stock of New Testament female names is very small indeed.
  - Early Christian saints: Some names are very widespread (e.g., Anthony, Francis, Martin, Bernard) and are borne by Roman Catholics, Protestants, and agnostics alike. Others, such as Teresa, Domenico, Ignazio, and John are borne mainly or exclusively by Roman Catholics. Among Roman Catholics in continental Europe, a traditional given name is often chosen in honor of a saint who is the patron of the locality in which the child is born.

**Traditional Given Names in European Languages**

In all European languages, the set of given names in conventional use is remarkably small. In countries where there is an established Christian Church, the menu of given names from which a name may be chosen is generally regulated by the Church or by a secular authority operating within a Christian cultural tradition. These names have some Christian association, and certain Canonical forms mentioned in the New Testament, an early saint, or a saint with a local cult. The main sources for such names are the following:

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- Ancient Continental Germanic: Some very familial names, such as William, Robert, Richard, Roger, Geoffrey, Guy, Hugh, Arnold, Baldwin, Wilhem, Alice, Gertrude, Jocelyn, Hildegard, and Matilda— all of which have well-established cognates in German, Dutch, French, and other languages— originated in Germanic pre-history. They reached English by a circuitous route. The official end of the Merovingian and Carolingian Franks (6th-9th centuries) was Latin, but their vernacular language was a Germanic dialect, and their personal names were mostly of Germanic etymology. These Frankish personal names became established in medieval France and in due course were picked up by the Vikings who settled in Normandy in the 9th century. The Anglo-Saxon personal names were brought to England in 1066, these personal names were brought to England, where they largely replaced traditional Anglo-Saxon personal names such as Ethelred and Aethelfryth. A very few Anglo-Saxon personal names survived, for example Edward, which was borne by King Edward the Confessor (c. 1002-1066; reigned 1042-1066), the offspring of an Anglo-Saxon king and a Norman noble, who was revered by Anglo-Saxons and Normans alike. A rather different case is that of Alfred, an Anglo-Saxon name that fell out of use under the Normans, but was revived in the 19th century in honor of the great 9th-century king of Wessex.
- Old Norse: Old Norse is, of course, a Germanic language, but its naming tradition is quite different from that of continental Germanic, and many traditional Norse names are still used in Scandinavia today, for example Olaf, Harald, Håkon. There has been much borrowing from German (e.g., Helga, Ingeborg). Some Nordic names such as Ingrid have been adopted much more widely. In the latter case,
the film star Ingrid Bergman (1915-1982) was a

- Ancient Celtic languages: In the British Isles and

  - Ancient Slavic languages: Names such as Wójciech (Wojciech), Bogusław (Boguslaw), and Stanisław (Stanislaw) are hardly known in the English-speaking world except among Slavic immigrants, but represent a vital and independent Slavic tradition, with cognates in various Slavic languages. Such names are predominantly Polish and are favored even more significantly by American-Poles, no doubt as a result of the erroneous belief that it is a cognate of the Polish forename Stanisław.

- Feminization: The most common English female given name has been augmented in many languages by feminization of masculine names. For example, the English female name Joan, Jean, Jane, and Janet all originated as feminizations of the New Testament male name Johannes (English vernacular John). This process is illustrated by the examples below.

- Flowers and gems: Finally, mention must be made of the large number of female names, especially in the English-speaking world, that were adopted in the late 19th and early 20th century from vocabulary words denoting flowers (Marguerite, Daisy, Emily) and gemstones (Beryl, Ruby, Pearl).

A standard reference work surveying forenames in European languages with Dutch as the focal language is Van der Schaar (1964, 1992). Studies of European forenames with English as the focal language include Hanks and Hodges (1990), 2001, and Pickering (1999). These works reflect the decline of religious influence on name giving in the English-speaking world. A traditional scholarly account of English forenames continues to be Tracey's (1976), although the first edition appeared in 1945 when cultural and religious homogeneity could still be assumed. In North America the choice of a forename is not regulated, but conventional names are used alongside more adventurous naming coinages. In some families, second- and third-generation Americans bear forenames in honor of their immigrant ancestors, even in cases where they do not speak the language. Cultural loyalties are slow to die. Thus, second- and third-generation Americans of Irish descent may continue to use, respectively, the traditionally Irish names, such as Lars and Stig. Irish-American names are Declan or Finn, though they may never acquire more than a word or two of the Irish Gaelic language. Many of these names are derived. Polish Americans are named Zbigniew or Malgorzata out of cultural respect for their immigrant ancestors. American names are often chosen after public figures or historical events by parents who may not be American themselves.

- Nontraditional Forenames: In English-speaking countries such as Britain, choice of a forename is not regulated by the Church, but local registrars can and do advise strongly against the choice of outrageous or frivolous names; for example, a string of 11 forenames commemorating the forenames of all the members of a victorious football team or the punning choice of Brick and Stone are given names for twins by a Mr and Mrs Wall. In rare cases, parents defy the registrar's advice. A more common source of unusual forenames is the desire to commemorate the surname of some other family with which the individual is connected, which is often but not always the mother's maiden name. In some cases, the stock of conventional given names has been augmented in this way. For example, Shirley, Dudley, and Douglas were originally forenames, but are now exclusively used as forenames. Stanley is a case that illustrates the influence of popular and literary culture. Originally a male given name until the mid-19th century, it changed gender and greatly increased in popularity as a direct result of its choice by Charlotte Brontë for the eponymous heroine of her 1849 novel.

- Patronymics: Among the most common forenames in all the languages of Europe are those derived from an ancestor's personal name. Some are themselves derivatives of ancient clan names (e.g., Macleod), and the creation by parents of a unique forename for a child (i.e., that is inherited on eponymous principles from the basic
range of affixes with a patronymic function is quite large. Some are prefixes (Gaelic mael, Welsh ap, ab), but the majority are suffixes (e.g., south Midland English -son). Suffixes are derived from personal names of individual houses with signs on them (where the surname is also the word for the sign; for example, Swan, Bell). Other kinds of local surnames may refer to counties, the names of islands, and indeed whole countries.

Regional and ethnic tendencies tend to be acquired when someone migrated a considerable distance from his original home. The significance of his specific identity may be so great that the surname would have been meaningless to his new neighbors; he would be known simply as coming from 'the East' or from 'Devon' or from 'France.' Some of these names derive from adjectival forms (e.g., French, Dench 'Danish', Walsh 'Welsh'); others are in the form of nouns denoting a person's nationality (e.g., Flemish 'from Flanders', Langou 'the Englishman'; Moscop 'the Moravian').

Metronymics: Much less common than patronyms are names derived from a female forename. In European Christian society, it was the given name of the male head of the household that was normally handed on to successive generations. The few cases of surnames derived from female names (e.g., Matrim, Levecott) are probably derived from the names of women who were either powerful and influential widows or else heiresses in their own right.

Kinship names: A few surnames derive from connections (by marriage, e.g., English Hickmott 'Richard's in-law'), or family relationship (e.g., English New, Neve, Neff 'nephew' or 'cousin'; Maew 'relative' or 'brother-in-law'; Lamos 'uncle', Ayor 'heir'; German Vetter 'kinsman'). Presumably, the original bearers of such names were related to most important people in the district.

Foundling names: Surnames bestowed on foundlings in the days when legitimacy mattered included Dutch Weese and Polish Serota (both meaning 'orphan'); French Jette (literally, 'thrown out'); Italian Esposto (meaning 'exposed'); Innocenti (innocent); Comunale (like English Parish, a name for a child reared at the expense of the community), D'Amore (literally, 'of love'); and Di Dio (literally 'of God'); and German Kegel (literally 'little pin'). Some surnames based on Christian saints' names are undoubtedly of this origin, being taken from the name of the patron saint of the local church where the baby was abandoned or that ran the local orphanage; however, these are indistinguishable from names of patronymic origin.

Names derived from a locality:

Topographic names are derived from a descriptive reference to a feature of the landscape such as a stream, a ford, a tree, or a hill. They can also refer to a river by its name or to a man-made feature, such as a castle, a city wall, an abbey, or a church.

Habitational names are taken from the names of towns, villages, farms, or other habitations, many of which existed long before surnames came into being. Such names include those derived from the names of individual houses with signs on them (where the surname is also the word for the sign; for example, Swan, Bell). Other kinds of local surnames may refer to counties, the names of islands, and indeed whole countries.

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Names derived from an occupation or role in society:

Occupational names refer to the trade or occupation that followed as the first bearer. European surnames contain a virtual inventory of the trades of medieval Europe. These occupations can be divided into classes, such as agricultural (e.g., Shepperd, Potterer), manufacturing (e.g., Smith, Wright, Glover), and retail (e.g., Monger, Chandler, Draper). Some occupational names refer to the activity involved (e.g., Hunt, Well) and are derived from an agent noun (e.g., Hunter, Webber, Weaver, Webster, Potter). Others are derived from a noun plus an agent noun (e.g., Ledbetter 'lead beater', Rademaker 'wheel maker').

Metronymic occupational names refer to an occupation by metonymy, naming an object associated with the activity in question, typically a tool: for example, Axe, Pick, Spacel (an implement for beating flax), Polish Szydlo 'awl' - or a product (e.g., German Brot 'bread'). In other cases the connection is less direct, for example Italian Danno 'fallow deer', denoting a deer hunter.

Occupational nicknames may also refer to a typical event involved in the occupation of the person concerned, sometimes in a humorous way (e.g., Catchpole for a bailiff).

Status names originated with social status, denoting a particular role in medieval society such as Bachelor, Franklin, Knight, and Squire. Other status names, such as Alderman, Beadle, Sheriff, and Reeve, denoted a particular administrative function. Some status names cannot be understood without reference to land tenure and social structure. In Greek, for example, Sphodros literally means 'free', but in particular denoted a category of free peasant farmer distinct as a serf. Dyvikar a farmer's tenant, the lord of the manor. A Sedlik was a slightly lower class of farmer, but who had more land than a Zabradih, a smallholder, or a Chabohnik, a cottager. Similar traces of old social status are preserved in the surnames of many other European languages.

Servant names derive from status as a servant or member of the household of some person of higher social status. Many names are extensively status names (e.g., King, Prince, Duke, Earl, Squire, Bishop, Abbott, Prior) are more likely to have been either servant names or nicknames. In other cases, such names may have been acquired as an 'incident name' by someone who had acted such a role in a pageant or other festivity, or else the name may have been given mockingly to someone who behaved in a lordly manner. Because servants tended to be known either by the surname or by the social role of their master, it is impossible to determine whether someone now called Squire is descended from a squire or from the servant of a squire - or, indeed, whether the name is a nickname. Occasionally, the servant relationship is made explicit, for example, by use of the genitive case or a suffix, such as Englishman (e.g., Hart, Hartman, from Hart, for but Bateman 'Bartholomew's man' is not). More often, however, servant relationships are implicit, rather than being explicit in surname-forming elements.

Descriptive nicknames: The most typical descriptive nicknames refer to some aspect of the physical appearance of the person concerned (e.g., Black, Blake, Schwarz, Russell, Whitehead, all referring to hair color). Others refer to a person's character (e.g., Spanish Cortés and English Hendy, both meaning 'sourmous' or 'kind', German Karg 'dry' and Kluge 'refined' or 'clever'). Other names make reference to a favored article or style of clothing (e.g., Boot, Caple). People in past ages were less neatly-maintained than we are today, so it comes as a surprise to many that the origin of their surname may have drawn attention to a physical deformity; for example, names meaning 'lame' include English Half, German Lahn, Dutch Manck, Polish and Czech Chromy, Italian Gatto, Zoppo, and Lithuanian Kuly. Names such as German Hand 'hand' and Danen 'thumb' may be presumed to be a deformity, referring to the speech defect or stammerer include Irish Elcho and Spanish Bobo. Names may also have been obscene. It is quite possible that the surnames Shakespeare and Wagner are of obscene nicknames.

Bird and animal names: Surnames derived from the names of animals and birds mostly originated as nicknames, from the attributes traditionally assigned to these creatures in folk culture. These associations were reinforced by folk tales depicting birds behaving like humans. The nickname Fox (Danish Fos, German Fuchs, French Goupi, Polish and Czech Lis, etc.) would thus be given to a cunning person, Lamb to a gentle and timid, and Knight to a lynx, for example.

Anecdotal surnames: Some surnames arose as the result of some otherwise unrecorded and now irrecoverable incident. Probable examples include English Foll'swul's fall in the well, Topiday and Topldyf, Italian Mezamotto 'midnight'. Who topped or tipped the lady, and what action precisely did it involve? Who did it at midnight, and did he do it habitually, or just once? We shall never know. Only the names survive, to tantalize subsequent generations.

An interesting group of anecdotal surnames in Czech are derivatives of the past participle of a verb. Examples include Doležal, a nickname for a lazy man meaning something like 'laid back', Daskař, denoting an agle man, literally 'leapt about', Kratočkal 'had a good time', Kasaľ 'bullied', and Krupí 'rushed'.

Seasonal surnames: It has been suggested that at least some of the surnames that refer to a season (e.g., English Winter, Summer, German Lenz, Herbts), a month (e.g., English May, French Davoy 'August'), or day of the week (e.g., German Freitag 'Friday') refer to the date of a person's birth, baptism, or conversion. Surnames denoting a Christian festival (e.g., Christmas; or French Toussaint 'all saints' and its Italian equivalent Ognissanti) were most likely acquired in this way. However, seasonal surnames may also have been nicknames denoting a 'foxy' or 'sunny' character, and it is possible that day names may have referred to feudal service owed on a particular day of the week.

Humane names: During the Renaissance, especially in Dutch- and German-speaking areas, Latinized forms of Germanic surnames were sometimes adopted. In some cases, the alteration consisted of nothing more than adding the Latin -ius noun ending to an existing name (e.g., Dutch Bergs, based on Bergard 'orchard', or Goertsche, from German Goertsch, a pet form of Gottsch. In other cases, especially with occupational names, the whole surname was translated into Latin: Agricola is a translation of Dutch Boer and German Bauer 'farmer'; Euler is a translation of German Schmidt and Dutch Smnt 'smith'. Silvus 'of the woods' represents a vernacular name such as Dutch Van den Bosch or German Forster. The humanistic pattern of forming surnames was subsequently copied in Sweden in the 18th and 19th centuries.
The second example concerns the family name Clinton. This name too has been well researched, but there is no evidence of any generally plausible origins. Reaney and Wilson's Dictionary of English surnames (1991) records examples of the surname in England (Staffordshire, Northamptonshire, and Essex) from the 17th and 18th centuries and attributes its origin to the place name Clinton in Northamptonshire. However, this attribution is probable rather than certain. Furthermore, Reaney and Wilson do not note that Clinton is also an Irish name. MacLysaght (1957) traces MacClinton to the Irish Gaelic name Mac Goil Mohammed, i.e. the son of the van (of St.) Fintan, which is associated with West Ulster. However, he also mentions the Irish form de Coilltin, which is an Irish name imported from England, rare now but prominent in medieval Irish records, and comments that "the famous American Clintons were of Clintonstown, Co. Louth." Thus, there is a probability (but not a certainty) that most if not all American Clintons are descended from bearers who came to America from Ireland, but in Ireland their name is most probably of 12th-century Norman English origin, rather than Gaelic. Here, the balance of probabilities at all steps is high, but they are not necessarily compelling, and each succeeding step adds an element of uncertainty.

A third example is the English surname Bickley. Although this name is well established in East Anglia and looks convincingly like a habitational name from an Anglo-Scandinavian area (where the -by ending is common), no place of this name is recorded. The most plausible guess is that the surname be an altered form, with a Middle English suffix -by or Middle English -bygge. This is morphologically and geographically plausible, but is not supported by documentary evidence.

The fourth example is the American family name Dano. The 1880 U.S. census shows that this name was already well established in the northern states at that time, namely in West Virginia. Its etymology is very uncertain. Hungarian, Slovak, Bulgarian, and French etymologies have been speculatively proposed, and a study of the correlations between present-day American surnames and surnames (Hanks and Tice, 2000) shows that a sizeable number of Americans bear Hispanic surnames such as Anastasi, Urran, Lova, Margarita, Pacheco, and Pedro. The etymology of the name is an unsolved mystery. Detailed genealogical research remains to be done. A glance at the International Genealogical Index shows several 18th-century examples in Quebec and other American states, but no firm conclusion can be drawn. The American bearers of the surname Dano are descended from a common ancestor (see Sykes and Irvon, 2000; Sykes, Denmark). However, even if this French etymology is confirmed, there is no guarantee that it accounts for the origin of all bearers of the modern surname. It is only probably, given the geographical distribution and the correlated formulae, the modern surname represents a coalescence of several surnames that originated in quite different forms in different languages. Cumulatively, there is therefore great uncertainty about this name, which may never be resolved.

Surnames, Geography, Genealogy, and Genetics
The most common surnames — for example, Smith, Johnson, and Brown — are "polygenetic"; that is, they originated separately and independently in many different places at different times. In contrast, many European surnames, including most of the uncommon ones, are "monogenic"; that is, all modern bearers are descended in the male line from just one original bearer. Polygenetic surnames are, typically, quite widely scattered throughout a language or dialect area, but monogenetic surnames have a characteristic pattern of frequency distribution, with an epicenter where the surname originated or where an ancestral migrant first arrived, from which widening circles spread outward in patterns of decreasing frequency. Examples are the English surnames Armitage, Clee, Oxenham, Rockley, and Rootbarn. This phenomenon was first noted by Guppy (1890), who studied the frequency distribution of farmers' surnames in thebusiness surnames in the business area of England. The statistical study of surnames distribution is greatly facilitated as more and more collections of censuses and other historical records become available in machine-readable form, and in the present-day differences in geographical distribution of the various spellings of the surname Heard (southwestern English), Hard (Midland), and Herd (northern and Scottish) correspond to the different Middle English dialect pronunciations of this word, denoting a hearthman. In other cases, different terms can be used in different regions in medieval times; too they correlate statistically with the present-day distribution of the surname. For example, Fuller (southeastern English) denotes the same occupation (strengthening or 'filling' drift by trampling on it in a bed of water and dry) as Tucker (southwestern) and Walker (northern and Scottish). The geneticist Bryan Sykes has pointed out, however, because male children typically inherit the Y chromosome but also their surname from their father, DNA evidence can be adduced for or against the monogenetic hypothesis for any surname. He conducted a survey by which the bearers of the surname Sykes are descended from a common ancestor (see Sykes and Irvon, 2000; Sykes,
it could equally be an ornamental-occupational name adopted by a jeweler.

Scattered names, derived from the priestly caste of Kohanim and Levites are common among Jews from all European countries: the form of the name varies according to the local vernacular language (see table). Furthermore, names found in Kogan, because Russian has no /f/.

Among Jews as among Gentiles, habitational names are common, ranging from city names such as Berlin, Krakau, and Warsaw, to house names, of which the most famous is surely Rothschild 'red shield', from a house in Frankfurt bearing the sign of a red shield.

The Russian Jewish name Golod 'elephant' may have originated as a descriptive nickname for a large man, but equally possibly it was a house name from a house bearing the sign of an elephant.

Jewish surnames from the 18th- and 19th-century Russian Empire, from 15th- to 18th-century Prague, and from the former Kingdom of Poland have been assiduously collected by Beider (1993, 1995, 1996).

Arabic and Muslim Personal Names

Arabic and Muslim names present the problem of overlapping sets. Many names of Arabic etymology are used in languages unrelated to Arabic; for example, Iranian, Urdu, and Bahasa Indonesia. In contrast, Arabic names include many cognates of Christian and Jewish names – for example, Hirwe 'Aaron' and Isa 'Jesus' – which are used among Muslims and Arabic-speaking Christians alike.

Traditional Arabic personal names are quite different in structure from European names. A reliable study is Schimmel (1989). The five elements of a traditional Arabic name are:

1. Kuruwa (teknonym); for example, Abu-Da'ud 'father of David' or Umm-Da'ud 'mother of David'. Naming someone in this way is traditional.

2. Ism (given name); plural asma'; for example, Ahmad 'most praised' or 'most praised', Na'far 'good fortune'.

3. Nasab (patronymic or lineage name); for example, ibn-Saud. In some cases, the nasab is genuinely patronymic; in other cases, it is inherited over several generations and so refers to a more distant ancestor.

4. Nabiya (a name denoting a family's tribe or place of origin); for example, Al-Kaawisit 'the Kuwaiti', Al-Qaryshiy 'descended from the Qurashi' (the leading tribe in Mecca at the time of the birth of Prophet Muhammad).

5. Lagab (a nickname or distinguishing epithet); for example, Al-Awsad 'the black', Al-Haidar 'the lion'.

The main linguistic source of Muslim names after Arabic is Persian. Names such as Firdaus (meaning 'paradise') and John 'world holder' are used among Muslims throughout the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere.

Indian Personal Names

In India, traditional personal names are intimately bound up with the beliefs of Hinduism (forenames) and the social structure of the Hindu caste system (surnames). An individual's name typically consists of a forename and a surname. There are, of course, distinctive names in India associated with other religions. As we have seen, Muslim names are mostly inherited from Arabic and Persian. In South India particularly, a strong Christian tradition has encouraged the use of English forms of Biblical given names, many of which have subsequently come to be used as surnames alongside those derived from Hindu given names, as South India does not have a tradition of surname use.

In Hindu society, children are often given a forename inherited from an ancestor. The motive for doing so is often a belief in reincarnation: children
Chinese Personal Names

Chinese personal names consist of a surname and a first name, the surname being placed first. Useful accounts can be found in Louie (1998) and Ning and Ning (1985). The earliest surnames are at least 5000 years old. In their written form, many contain a radical that denotes 'woman', from which some have concluded that the ancient Chinese inheritance system may have been matrilineal as well as patrilineal. The ratio of forenames to surnames in Chinese is precisely the opposite of that in European languages: Despite the vast population of China and Chinese speakers throughout the world, the number of Chinese surnames is small (about 2000), or at most 10,000, depending on how the estimate is made, whereas the number of given names is large, indeed open-ended.

The Chinese word for 'surname', xingzi, is composed of two elements: xing, which originally denoted a tribe, and zi, which originally denoted a subdivision of a tribe. This distinction is now lost, and the two terms survive in a single word. It is a common misapprehension that there are only 100 Chinese surnames. This error derives from a misinterpretation of Bai Jia Xingzi, the title of a rhyming list of Chinese surnames compiled in Hangzhou during the 12th or 13th century a.d. (Southern Song dynasty), which was once learned and recited by all Chinese children and is still regularly recited in Chinese alma- nacs. Literally, it means 'Hundred Family Names' but since it contains over 500 names, the term 'hundred' is not to be taken too literally: It also means 'many'.

The origins of Chinese surnames are lost in the mists of time, surrounded by myths associated with the legendary emperor Huang Di (ruled c. 2800 B.C.) and his successors. Hard facts come much later; nevertheless, many modern Chinese identify the origins of their surname in clan names of the aristocracy in the Zhou dynasty (1122-221 B.C.). Many of these ancient clan names are associated with a place name; others commemorate an ancestor, either by his rank or occupation or by his given name. Legends about the founders are carefully preserved. The etymology of ancient place names in Chinese is mostly lost, but in other cases the etymology of a personal name is clear: for example, the surname Wang is from a word meaning 'ruler', which was adopted independently as a surname by the ruling families of different places during the 2000 dynasty or before.

The Chinese writing system is ideographic, not phonetic, so that the true form of a surname can only be determined from its written representation. A nice illustration of this concern is a certain Li Lihen who lived during the Shang dynasty (c. 1766-1122 B.C.), whose surname, Li, denoted a title of the aristocracy roughly equivalent to duke. Having offenders the emperor, he fled and changed his surname to a new character meaning 'plum tree', also pronounced 'li'.

The Chinese word for given name is ming. In principle, any Chinese vocabulary word may be used in creating a given name, although in practice inevitably some are preferred, and others are rare. A word used as a given name takes on a symbolic meaning. For example, the word ming meaning 'bright, clear, distinctive', when used as a name conventionally symbolizes bright eyesight, good eyesight, or intelligence. A uniquely Chinese naming practice is the Pu-pi system, which literally means 'raking in rows.' It is sometimes called the 'generation name.' As explained by Bauer (1959), it works like this: brothers in the same family are given different names, all of which share certain written characters. This character will not be found in the name of male first cousins of the same generation. Thus, a particular character serves to identify members of the same generation not only among brothers but also among cousins of different ages.

In large families, a number is—or was—often used as a name for a child, reflecting his or her birth order. Moreover, in traditional Chinese etiquette, children do not address their elders by their given name; instead, a numerical kinship term such as 'Aunt Number Four' is used.

See also: Nicknames; Place Names; Proper Names: Linguistic Status; Proper Names: Semantic Aspects.

Bibliography


Beider A (1993). A dictionary of Jewish surnames from the time of the founders are carefully given. The etymology of ancient place names in Chinese is only lost; but in other cases the etymology of a personal name is clear: for example, the surname Wang is from a word meaning 'ruler', which was adopted independently as a surname by the ruling families of different places during the 2000 dynasty or before.

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