O QUE É QUE HÁ NUM NOME? ALGUMAS REFLEXÕES SOBRE A NOMEAÇÃO E A IDENTIDADE EM PROSOPOGRAFIA

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Uma prosopografia começa pela identificação de diferentes indivíduos a partir de um conjunto de registos de nomes retirados das fontes primárias. Os indivíduos podem ser identificados mesmo na ausência de todo ou de parte do nome: por exemplo, "o homem pobre" é alguém que foi distinguido de outros pela descrição de "pobre". Contudo, os nomes estão, habitualmente, presentes nos nossos registos, porque todos os seres humanos os têm. São facilmente assumidos como algo incontroverso, e são-no com demasiada frequência, mesmo pelos prosopógrafos. Este artigo reflecte sobre o significado e a função dos nomes, e explora o seu uso como descritivos, destinados a designar e categorizar um indivíduo singular e específico, mesmo quando podem existir outras pessoas com o mesmo nome. A evidência do nome é uma riquíssima fonte para o historiador; mas não pode ser usado acriticamente, antes deve ser avaliado considerando quem o registou tal qual o recebemos – raramente o/a próprio/a nomeado/a –, como e porquê.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? SOME REFLECTIONS ON NAMING AND IDENTITY IN PROSOPOGRAPHY

K. S. B. KEATS-ROHAN

A prosopography will start from the identification of different individual persons among a mass of name records drawn from the primary sources. Individuals can be discerned even where all or part of the name is missing: for example, "the poor man", is a person who has been distinguished from others by the description "poor". But names are normally present in our records, because all human beings have them. They are easy to take for granted, and all too often they are taken for granted even by prosopographers. This paper reflects on the meaning and function of names, and explores their use as descriptions intended to designate and to categorize a single specific individual, even though there may be other persons with the same name. Name evidence is a peculiarly rich resource for the historian, but it cannot be used uncritically but has to be assessed in relation to who recorded the name as we have it – very rarely the name-bearer him/herself –, and how and why.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? SOME REFLECTIONS ON NAMING AND IDENTITY IN PROSOPOGRAPHY

K. S. B. KEATS-ROHAN *

For most of the past year I have been editing some 27 contributions to a wide-ranging Handbook of Prosopography, to which I am myself contributing a paper. In the course of preparing my own paper, on Biography, Names and Identity, for the Handbook, several things struck me [1]. As we all know, at the heart of all prosopography lies the issue of identity, that is, the individualization of the separate persons occurring in a mass of data relating to the group or groups under investigation. Such identification is normally done on the basis of a name record occurring in our sources. Distinguishing one John from another in our often very challenging sources can be a great achievement, but all we have done is to individualize two Johns. Until such time as we can add some concrete personal information to the file of either John, how can we talk of having identified them? What is personal identity? and what can a simple name tell us about it?

Several of the papers in the Handbook deal with the problems that name evidence presents – incomplete name forms, missing names, duplicate names or homonyms, variant spellings, vernacularized forms competing with Latinized forms, and so on – but all of them assume that name evidence is so central to establishing the person list at the core of prosopography that almost none of them actually discuss it. For all of them, 'identification' is the equivalent of 'individualization'. Only one paper discusses name evidence in relation to identity in the sense of awareness of self, of belonging to a family or a social group, but even here, although name evidence and naming practice is crucial to her genealogical study, the link between name and personal identity is oblique. The author, Dr Heather Devine – for you will certainly want to know her name

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1 *PROSOPOGRAPHY approaches and applications: a handbook*. Ed. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (forthcoming, *Prosopographica et Genealogica* 15, Oxford, 2007). The present paper is a small extract of a much larger study of 'Biography, Names and Identity' which will form of this book.

– sets out to explain how aboriginal identity formation in Canada had evolved from a flexible process based on kinship to a rigid phenomenon, dictated by Euro-Canadian governmental and economic policy. If medievalists have trouble with name records, consider the problems faced by Dr Devine in «studying people of mixed ancestry who may be identified by their European name, their European *dit* name, their aboriginal nickname, their aboriginal nickname as expressed in English or French, or shortened versions of any of these names» [2].

All the contributors take names for granted. Everyone has them. Apart from the fact that the names of historical people are often time-consumingly confusing to modern historians, what else is there to say? It may be that there is not much to say, but such lack of curiosity about the meaning and function of names seems to me at best somewhat blinkered and at worst a dereliction of duty. A useful preliminary to research involving names is surely to reflect on names *per se*. This will provide at least some guidance when dealing with the apparently intractable problems of homonymity and orthographic variation thrown up by our sources.

The basis of a prosopographical dataset is an initial register of what we call name records, whether or not they actually include a personal name. Whatever group we are studying, the requirement is always that each individual in the group is identified. This does not necessarily mean that his or her personal name can be determined, or that he can be logged in our databases with 'his name'. Many ancient and medieval prosopographies are populated by Anonymous 1, Anonymous 2, and so on, with little loss of analytical content.

So if the occurrence of Anonymous 1 and others like him merely deprives us of a full dataset from which to run name-frequency queries, but does not otherwise violate the imperative to establish identity, how are we to understand the meaning and function of a name, particularly in relation to identity? Or, to put it another way, how are we to establish identity in the absence of a name? Does identity for our purposes have to mean anything more than 'individuality'? For we must distinguish establishing personal identity – a set of specific characteristics exclusive to one individual – from individualization, the distinguishing of one John Smith from another, and identification, i.e. showing that two John Smiths are in fact one and the same. These are questions of fundamental importance to prosopography, but they are rarely posed. Since 1980 there has been a growing interest in the study of names and naming within the separate disciplines of anthropology, anthroponymy and history. Work is very much still ongoing, but we now have a context of specialized insights in which to work. And not before time. As Stephen Wilson, author of *The Means of Naming*,

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[2] DEVINE, Heather – Prosopographical approaches in Canadian Native history'. In *PROSOPOGRAPHY approaches.*

has observed, historians have tended not to be interested in the names of those they study. Where more information about them is available, historians tend to get the names wrong by attempts at modernization and vernacularization of the spelling, as well as inventing names that the people concerned never had. «While convenient and familiar, such procedures in effect tamper with historical evidence in a way that would not be acceptable in other circumstances» [3]. The study of names is the foundation of prosopography, and accuracy in recording them is absolutely essential. Note that Wilson writes of the *Means of Naming*, that is, naming systems, and not the 'meaning of names'. It is perfectly possible, and commonly done, to discuss naming systems without considering 'meaning' in relation to names, yet reflection on this question can be very fruitful. 'Meaning' is here not a straightforward term, since we can speak of the meaning of names in lexical, linguistic and philosophical terms, and still leave for consideration the more practical aspect of meaning, that is, function or purpose.

Our first duty must be to reflect on the nature of names and naming. If we need not insist on being able to discover his name in order to include someone as an individual in our database, what apart from his name distinguishes him from any other person in a historical record? To approach such questions we have to understand how a name functions, both in relation to personal identity and in relation to the way it is used as a reference term or identifier. There are at least three parties involved, at least one of whom and usually two, comes to our attention in a name record. The first is the name-bearer, or referent, whose name it is; the second is the name-giver, who bestows the name on the referent, usually soon after his or her birth, though later changes of name may be due to subsequent name-givers; the third is the party that attributes the name to the referent at the point at which we, as historians, encounter the name, hence normally the scribe of a written record. Consider the following *narratio,* written in the late twelfth century:

> «A certain Alfwy, who was called Geoffrey as a mark of respect, lord of Wenhaston and Walpole [in Norfolk], had two sons by his wife Goda; the eldest, was Geoffrey, known as Geoffrey of Bramfield because he was steward of Bramfield, and the younger, Robert Malet. On the death of their father Alfwy, Geoffrey the firstborn succeeded him, giving Walpole in dower to his mother Goda. His brother Robert entered the service of Earl Hugh and became a knight. Geoffrey, likewise a knight, took a wife and had issue by her a son and three daughters. Unfortunately, whilst still a young man, the son killed a man whom he found embracing his mistress and was forced to flee

[3] WILSON, Stephen – *The Means of Naming*. London: UCL Press , 1998, preface, p. x.

> the country. Distraught, Geoffrey turned to his brother Robert Malet for help, promising him half his land if he could persuade Earl Hugh, then on very good terms with King Henry, to obtain the king's pardon for his son which was duly done. Afterwards the grateful father gave half of his lands and tenements to his brother Robert Malet, who held them in his lifetime and was succeeded by his son Walter Malet. After the deaths of Geoffrey and his son, his three daughters succeeded to the remainder of his lands. Two of the daughters died and so the inheritance passed to the third, Basilia, who by her husband Ralph of Spexhall, had a son Geoffrey» [4].

We can highlight a number of features of this unusually rich document. In the first place we see evidence of naming in relation to social mobility. This record was produced over a century after the Norman conquest of 1066, but the effects of that upheaval can still be seen. Alfwy, whose given name reveals that he was an Englishman, would have found that such a name set him at a social disadvantage, since there was still considerable legal and bureaucratic discrimination against the native English. Many Englishmen and women had for that reason started to give Norman names to their children, abandoning the Old English names of their own ancestors. Alfwy and his wife Goda, whose name is also English, did this for their children. Alfwy passed his adopted name Geoffrey to his eldest son. The narrator gives us the reason for Geoffrey's assumption of the toponymic byname *de Bromfield*. In both cases he tells us something significant about these men by telling us their names. Unfortunately, he does not give us a reason for the byname of his younger son Robert, which was that of a powerful Norman family who had forfeited their considerable estates in Norfolk during the reign of Henry I.

Here we have evidence of given names as indicators of ethnicity and social mobility; we have evidence for the reason why a byname came into being, and for the fact that a byname that can be used to distinguish one son from another can subsequently become a heritable surname for that son's descendants. As to the rest of the story, note that only persons who make a material contribution to it are named: the *anonymi* are the son and two daughters of Geoffrey of Bromfield, all of whom died without issue, and the wives who had no dower interests in the land. Their names are not important to what is being written, which is an account of how these tenements devolved from Alfwy to his great-grandchildren. Their existence, their individuality, is, however, noted. We can enter them as individuals into our databases, we can make meaningful statements about their relationships to other, named, people. We can identify them; but we know nothing of their personal identity. This story gives us objective evidence of the information-

[4] *SIBTON Abbey Cartularies and Charters*. Part 3. Ed. P. Brown. Woodbridge: Boydell , 1987, no. 817.

bearing value of names, and their function in relation to personal and group identity, and yet at all stages we are entirely dependent on what information the writer of this written record chooses to tell us.

A name-bearer will be named, that is, have had a name given to him, be known by a name in a formal social situation, be described by some form of name in an official document, and be 'called' by a name by his intimates. These names are not necessarily the same at any one time; any of them can change throughout the bearer's life. Let us take an example from the Seleucid empire. There was, at the end of the 3rd century BC, a governor of the city of Uruk: «Anu-uballit whose other name is Kephalon who is called [unreadable] in the mouth of the family» [5]. In otherwords, this important man had official given names, both Babylonian and Greek, that reflected his social status and his high office, but he also had a more informal or 'pet' name by which he was known in his own home to his own family. Exactly the same thing occurs today and without doubt it also occurred in the medieval period. When we encounter a family in which three sons all bore the same name, the problem for us is the way that formal given-names were recorded in official writing; there was no problem in the family, for they did not use the same name to address each child. Daunting all this may sound, but such many-sidedness is part of the reason why names can yield so much important evidence about people and the societies in which they live.

There is one point on which everyone is agreed: a 'name' serves as a signifier for an individual person. As anthroponymist Cecily Clark put it:

> «The essential thing about any and every personal name, at whatsoever date and in whatsoever society current, is that, within its own proper context, it signifies one unique individual. Names are in practice often duplicated; but such accidents in no way impugn the principle that each instance is necessarily intended to specify one, and only one, individual» [6].

But the problems are only now beginning. For if it is true that every personal name signifies one and only one person, the converse, that one person will always be designated by the same personal name, is not [7]. On the other hand, it is true that every human being is given a name some time after birth; even though different names may thereafter be used or acquired by that person, he or she will

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[5] SHERWIN-WHITE, S.; KURTH, A. – *From Samarkhand to Sardis: a new approach to the Seleucid empire*. London: Duckworth, 1993, p. 151.

[6] CLARK, Cecily – Socio-Economic status and individual identity. In *Words, names and history: selected writings of Cecily Clark*. Ed. Peter Jackson. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995, p. 100-113, here p. 109.

[7] On the problems of using 'personal' name for the first or given name, see BRENDLER, Silvio – Namenarten und ihre Erforshung. In *NAMENARTEN und ihre Erforschung: ein lehrbuch für das studium der Onomastik*. Ed. Andrea Brendler and Silvio Brendler. Hamburg: Baar, 2004, p. 36-40.

always have a personal name [8]. So a name is intimately connected to the referent, that is, the person to whom it applies uniquely, and therefore identifies. If we are at once to recognize the ineluctable fact of naming in relation to people, and to insist on identification of the individuals in our group prosopography, how are we to approach the formidable problems of homonymity and name variation in our records, and in what sense can we identify an unnamed person, and how? Ultimately the way we deal with such questions will depend upon the nature of our sources, but a useful preliminary is to inquire further into the meaning and function of names and their relation to identity. Also important, but impossible for reasons of space here, is the thorny question of the classification of names in a name system.

Names are a cultural universal [9]. All human beings have them. But what is a name? Names are a part of language. In order to talk about objects all languages develop a word to signify those objects; these words are naming words, called names or nouns in English. Most such words describe impersonal objects such as bird, house, man, and are known as 'common nouns' or 'appellatives'. Where such words are the names of specific objects like Mont Blanc, Lisbon or Tony Blair, they are called 'proper nouns' or 'proper names'. These terms originate from a distinction made by Greek writers for whom κύριου (onoma kuriou), rendered in Latin by *nomen proprium* meant a 'genuine name', or name more genuinely such than other names. Such names were distinguished from προσηγορια (prosegoria) or 'appellative', that is, the general names, or common nouns, to which bird and house belong. We can think of this also as the difference between a personal name, Tony Blair, and an impersonal name, man. Once a name is a personal name it becomes individualized. Once it is individualized it enters the realm of personal identification.

Names are not necessarily composed of a single word, but may be formed from a set of words that in some way describes the thing or person to which it refers, that is, the referent, with the intention of identifying the referent by isolating it from anything with which it might be confused. The first, or given, name is 'proper' in that it will always refer directly to the referent; a second name will often locate the referent in a larger group such as family. Additional names can become formalized into recognizable and required parts of a person's proper name. A majority of people now have in addition to their given name or names a sur-name which normally associates a person with his birth family in some

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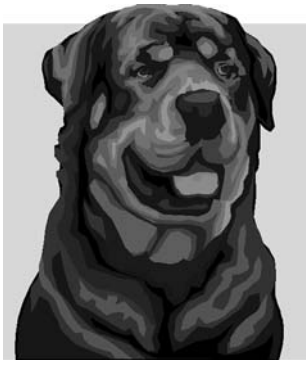
[8] ALFORD, Richard D. – *Naming and Identity: a cross-cultural study of personal naming practices*. New Haven, CN: HRAF Press, 1988, p. 1: «Ethnographic research has failed to identify a single society which does not bestow personal names on its members. For some time, personal names have been recognized to be cultural universals».

[9] On this complex and problematic issue see the essays in *NAMENARTEN und ihre Erforschung.*

way. Linguistically, such second names belong to a group called common proper nouns. Once they are applied to an individual they form part of his or her proper name.

The question of whether or not names have meaning has exercised philosophers and logicians for many years and they have yet to reach a consensus. The usual starting point is John Stuart Mill's observation that «Proper names are meaningless marks set upon things to distinguish one from another». Much of the argument hinges on how the word 'meaning' is understood in cognitive terms [10]. Whereas common nouns have meaning and connotation – the single word 'dog' will convey a complex picture of what a dog is – a proper name merely denotes a specific individual without offering additional information: As Sir Alan Gardiner, one Mill's admirers, observed «Ordinary words, among which general names play a prominent part, directly convey information; proper names merely provide a key to information» [11]. Consider the difference between 'Fido' and 'large dog'



Anthroponymists have no such reservations. Students of personal names, their discipline, according to Iris Shagrir, considers «the personal name a valuable, though indirect, indicator of the individual's social and cultural

[10] MILL, John Stuart – *A System of Logic*. London, 1843; KRIPKE, Saul A. – *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, MA, 1972; DONNELLAN Keith – Proper names and identifying descriptions. In *SEMANTICS of Natural Language*. Ed. D. Davidson and G. Harman. Dortrecht: Reidel, 1972, p. 356-379; JESPERSEN, Otto – *The Philosophy of Grammar*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1924; 2nd ed. 1964.

[11] GARDINER, A. H. – *The theory of proper Names: A controversial essay*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954, p. 32. Sir Alan concludes with the following definition: «A proper name is a word or group of words which is recognized as having identification as its specific purpose, and which achieves, or tends to achieve that purpose by means of its distinctive sound alone, without regard to any meaning possessed by that sound from the start, or acquired by it through association with the object or objects thereby identified». This is the 1954 revision, found in the appendix, of his earlier formulation, given on p. 43.

affiliation» [12]. Names are given or acquired in a meaningful way that attests 'to the common ascription of significance, symbolic or other, to the personal name'; the personal name is used as a referent, or a 'denoter', of a social of spiritual affiliation. «In a more traditional context, names may reflect ethnicity, religion, residence, position in lineage and other kinds of affiliation» [13]. According to Françoise Zonabend, «The combination of all names possessed by a person is an aggregation of his/her identity…a message for decoding» [14] The same ideas are found in the work of anthropologists such as Richard D. Alford, who was the first to pose many of the key questions relating to naming and identity, based on a cross-cultural study of societies from all over the world, including a few from Europe.

Alford makes several vital observations about personal naming practices which have relevance for historians. «In all societies, individuals typically receive a name or a set of names, and in no society are names applied unsystematically or randomly» [15]. The name is directly linked to identity, both social identity and self-identity [16].

For most people, their personal name is inextricably bound up with their sense of identity: if asked 'who are you?' they respond with their names. In modern as well as historical societies, the decisions about the name of a child made by the original name-givers, often but not always the parents, are intended to convey information to society about who the child is and to convey messages to the child about who he is expected to be [17]. If the primary function of personal names is to distinguish, in practice they do very much more. In particular they emphasize family membership and family continuity [18].

As historians we often experience names as written phenomena. As people we are well acquainted with them as a phenomenon of speech. But names relate to identity beyond either, as the McKees tells us of the deaf community in New Zealand:

> «In Deaf communities around the world, members are commonly referred to by sign names given to them by other Deaf people at various

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[12] SHAGRIR, Iris – *Naming Patterns in the Kingdom of Jerusalem*. Oxford, 2003, p. 1. Prosopographica et Genealogica; 12.
[13] *Ibidem*, p. 2.
[14] ZONABEND, F. – Le nom de personne. *L'Homme*. 20 (1980) 17-18.
[15] ALFORD – *Naming and Identity*, p. 1.
[16] *Ibidem*, p. 29. Just as naming objects and places in the natural world makes them socially significant by providing a common label, naming a child is part of the process of bringing the child into the social order. A named child has, in a sense, a social identity. To know a child's name, in a sense, is to know who that child is. And when the child is old enough to know his own name, he, in a sense, knows who he is'.
[17] *Ibidem*, p. 51.
[18] *Ibidem*, p. 54-55.

> stages of life, which are different from the legal (spoken language) names given by parents at birth. The study of name signs provides a window on the relationship between sign language, social interaction, and identity... Because they are bestowed by other Deaf peers through a period of close acquaintance, name signs both signal and construct a person's identity as a recognized member of a Deaf community, which is often regarded by members as an extended "family" (Monaghan 1996, 463)» [19].

Alford's study indicates that names do colour our perceptions of named entities, whether they are objects, places or people, and hence Shakespeare's view of his question 'What's in a name?', that the rose would smell as sweet by any other name, is mistaken [20]. This is true irrespective of whether or not the original lexical meaning of a name has been lost, and Alford's cross-cultural study strongly indicates that all names have an original lexical meaning, even though in older, more complex societies where names are drawn from a traditional corpus, this meaning has normally been lost. Instead, names are often given on the basis of some sort of association, perhaps with a relative, living or dead, an admired but unrelated person, or some other resonance, such as 'Rose'. The most common information imparted by a personal name is the sex of the bearer, as has been noted by anthroponymists and anthropologists [21]. If it were not so, our work as historians would become impossibly difficult.

It is clear, then, that names may reasonably be taken to have meaning, and that they both bestow social identity in the act of being given, and convey information about identity both to society and to the name-bearer through the choice of the name itself; moreover, this is true however many homonyms may exist. As Alford remarks,

> «If the primary function of personal names is to differentiate individuals, why is it that many naming systems are not better designed to fulfill this function? Certainly a naming system designed around this function alone would assign completely unique names to all individuals. The answer seems to be that naming systems serve *two* central funtions: differentiation and categorization» [22].

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[19] MCKEE, Rachel Locker; MCKEE David – Name Signs and Identity in New Zealand Sign Language. In *BILINGUALISM and Identity in Deaf Communities*. Ed. Melanie Metzger. Washinton DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2000, p. 1.

[20] *Ibidem,* p. 59.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 67: 'It is interesting to note that of all the messages that personal names may convey, none is more likely to be conveyed than the sex of the individual'; Clark, 'Socio-economic status' [note 32], p. 104: 'All our West-European traditions use baptismal-name vocabularies that distinguish the sexes'.

[22] ALFORD – *Naming and Identity*, p. 69.

He goes to state the general principle that naming systems will evolve means both to categorize and to differentiate. In the case of the Highland Scots, whose given names are drawn from a very restricted name pool, and whose family names are one of very few clan names, he observes that these two names categorize the individual and locate him within a social matrix. But they are poorly differentiated. To achieve differentiation – distinguishing one individual from another – a system of by-names unique to each person has evolved. We doubtless all had classmates at school who shared the same name, prompting the teacher to give one of them another name in order to distinguish them.

To the objection that the adoption of unique given names would solve a whole raft of problems, Alford makes a telling observation:

> «A unique name emphasizes or proclaims a person's individuality and uniqueness, But in all societies, individuality in excess may be socially destructive, divisive or dangerous (and this may be especially true for small, kinship-centered societies)» [23].

At no stage in western European society have personal names been unique, but in the early Middle Ages, up to about the end of the tenth century, a single personal name, often a compound name formed of two different elements, was normal. After that time there was a decrease in the number of personal names in use and a consequent increase in the occurrence of homonymity. At a similar date a two name-element system developed, which saw a byname added to the first, or given name. Over the course of about four centuries this new system stabilized into the modern surname as we know it today. Research has shown no direct correlation between these processes, which occurred independently of each other and at different paces in different places. As Iris Shagrir has said:

> «the adding of a second name should be understood in the context of various social factors: demographic increase and a growing inclination to define persons more rigorously with the refinement of bureaucratic procedures, the placement of the individual with the context of the larger community, especially in an urban context, an indication of emergence from the cellular family into the commuinity, a sign of growing participation in public life…» [24].

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[23] ALFORD – *Naming and Identity*, p. 73.

[24] SHAGRIR – *Naming Patterns*, p. 11, based upon BOURIN – Bilan de l'enquête. In *GENESE médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne*. General Editors M. Bourin and P. Chareille. vol. 1. Tours: Publications de l'Université de Tours, 1982, p. 245-246.

In other words, differentiation and categorization had to keep pace with the demands of the written record for precise reference, which is the primary function of the name, written or spoken.

Homonymity is a problem for historians, for whom the fact that by the fourteenth century about a quarter of all men were named John, can be a major headache. But a sense of personal identity as individuals was not thereby impaired. The names had meaningful associations for the name-givers and could produce a sense of group-identity as well as personal identity for the bearers. It is in this light that we should look at the account of the chronicler Robert of Torigny, which tells of how, at a meeting of the king's court in 1172, William fitz Hamo, seneschal of Brittany, invited to a feast only those men named William; the rest were to dine with the king [25]. One hundred and seventeen men were able to accept his invitation! William, the name of the conquering duke of Normandy and king of England, shared with John the domination of male personal naming from this time on until the twentieth century.

Anthroponyms are part of an onymic or naming system and form part of a linguistic and extra-linguistic environment. In the former they are both a part of language and of speech and can be investigated by etymologists in terms of linguistic roots and original lexical meanings. Their extra-linguistic environment is their application as person-names. Examples abound such as that of the names Matthias and Matthäus which are etymologically two different names; but among the people of Regensburg in the fourteenth century they were used interchangeably as variant forms of the same name. At least two approaches are possible in such cases. An etic investigation will try to understand the etymology of variant name forms, but an emic investigation will try to understand from the inside how the name system worked and how the name forms were understood [26]. The bedrock of prosopography is the name forms, with all their associated problems of variation, occurring in its sources. Any prosopography will gather a great deal of name evidence that, if handled correctly, will provide a valuable fund for interdisciplinary research. Provided that the names are recorded accurately, they can be investigated by specialist linguists and anthroponymists (the etic approach), as well as by the historian, who will normally not be concerned with the semantics of the names as linguistic units, but with the information that they can provide about individual identity and about the society in which they lived (the emic approach). Since anthroponymy and prosopographical analysis both use comparative, quantitative, approaches,

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[25] *CHRONIQUE de Robert de Torigni... suivie de divers opuscules historiques de cet auteur.* Ed. L. Delisle. 2 vols. Rouen: A. le Brument, 1872-1873, *sub anno* 1172.

[26] KOHLHEIM, Rosa; KOLKHEIM Volker – Personennamen. In *NAMENARTEN und ihre Erforschung,* p. 678.

the riches of our name registers should routinely be devised for collaborative exploration with anthroponymists.

Attention to detail in recording names and their variants – especially the more remote from our own period, or the more different to own own society, the evidence on which it is based – is so central to prosopography that it should not be undertaken without thorough grounding in the whole issue of names and their function and the naming practices relevant to the society under study. We should ask basic questions about what a name is, how it is used, and what it can tell us about the person to whom it uniquely refers. The west european medieval period, which saw a change from a one name system to the two name system that has been used world wide for the past several centuries provides some excellent material from which this point can be considered.

Medievalists are particularly aware of the variety of forms a personal name can take. It took several centuries for a stable two-name system to emerge, but research bears out Alford's maxim that names are never given unsystematically or randomly. Although terminology remains an issue, both because discussion is conducted in more than one language and because of individual preferences, there is general agreement about the classification of forms taken by the second-name elements. These are:

names derived from occupations
names derived from a place, a toponym
names derived from a parent, usually the father (patronym), but occasionally the mother (metronym)
names derived from a nickname (of various categories requiring further classification).

The earliest form to be applied was the patronym. In most west European societies the patronym was superceded by toponyms as the prevalent form by the early twelfth century. Portugal is unusual in an early adoption of the true patronym – i.e. one that regularly changed each generation to reflect the father's given name – and the dominance of that form until at least the fourteenth century[27]. The value to researchers of the true patronym is later mitigated by the fact that the contraction of the name pool and the emergence of a few favoured personal names occurred in Portugal, as elsewhere, leading to a significant problem of homonymity of both given name and patronym. In many cases only distinguishing descriptors added to the patronymics allow of secure individualization.

[27] DURAND Robert – Données anthroponymiques du *Livro Preto* de la cathédrale de Coïmbre. In *GENESE médiévale de l'antroponymie moderne.* Ed. M. Bourin. Vol. 1. Tours: Université de Tours, p. 219-232.

Unlike first names, by-names normally have transparent semantic value. *Johannes Willelmi*, is described according to a patronym, that is, a by-name that gives us the name of John's father. *Johannes de Oxenforde* has a toponymic by-name that suggests his origin in Oxford. A great deal of information is contained in such descriptions, but they can be extremely difficult to use. There are many confounding factors, including orthographic variation, sometimes moderated by local dialect; many name forms result from a specific notarial need to identify the bearer, who will not necessarily be identified the same way twice, even by the same scribe. Or he may occur with only one element. Not infrequently, a by-name is itself composed of two elements: *Willelmus Faber de Grimestun*: William (the) Smith of Grimston.

Studies of corpora of name records have indicated ways that the meanings suggested by by-name formations can be understood. One such was anthroponymist Cecily Clark's study of texts from the medieval town of King's Lynn in Norfolk. Occupational by-names, she observed, like locative ones, appear in either primary or secondary position. Examples of the latter, such as *Ricardi Hymeyn calwere*, Richard Hymein, calf-herd, presumably always indicate the actual trade practices. Caution should be exercised when faced with such by-names in primary position; these like some *filius* formations are as likely to represent scribal convenience as they are an authentic name form, though they nevertheless succeed in differentiating and categorizing, and in providing us with useful information [28].

Clark divided toponyms into two groups, locative and topographical. The latter refers to some feature of a place, *atte Welle*, by the well, whereas a locative refers to a place name as such, *de Oxenforde*. Locative name often indicate the place where someone lived. Those of gentry often referred to a principal estates. For burgesses and some gentry, they functioned rather as *noms d'origine*, indicators of familial or personal origin. locatives of this sort offer vital evidence about population-movements. [29]

The same material allowed her to make another fundamentally important point about by-names:

> «In any case, by no means all the patronymic, occupational and, especially, residential qualifiers found in this material seem to have represented forms in regular, everyday currency. Some bear signs of having been devised *ad hoc* by the scribe, constituting descriptions, potted biographies even, rather than 'names' as ordinarily understood»[30].

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[28] CLARK, Cecily – *Early personal names of King's Lynn.* Part 2: *By-Names,* p. 267.

[29] *Ibidem,* … this type of by-name, so frequent in Lynn's specifically urban records, seems to have been especially common among men who were mobile socially as well as geographically.

[30] *Ibidem,* p. 260.

Giving the example from the same document of 'Helena wife of Ralph of Southmere, staying over at Wighall, varying with Helen widow of Ralph of Southmere', she wrote:

> «Such periphrases are not, of course, unrelated to probable colloquial usages …and could be said to represent an embryonic stage in by-naming, before the distinguishing traits have been selected and given set expression» [31].

The modern surname is a evolutionary product of an ad hoc system of description, which sought precision of reference in both written and spoken contexts, for both of which our only evidence is a written record. The essence of such descriptions is that they are intended to identity one and only one person in a specific context. Once they become formularized and unvarying – Smith, Johnson – they become proper names, divorced from any original lexical meaning, and they become family names, which can identify groups as well as a single person. When looking for evidence of the individuals that will compose his study population, the prosopographer is looking for descriptions of people. Whether or not they contain a proper name, these descriptions will not conceal an individual if one is meant. 'A poor man at the feast' is a man for all that he lacks a name. This gives us a straightforward basis for the setting out of our registers of name records: a field for name, representing the first or given name if it occurs, and the descriptor, that is, any by-name or other description relating to an individual [32]. The minimum requirement for our purposes is that the description refers to an individual and permits us to identify that individual as such. Undoubtedly, our knowledge of the 'poor man's' personal identity will be impoverished if we continue to lack his name. It will also be clear that the context from which the name record is extracted is key to our subsequent interpretation of it, and any use to which we might wish to put it.

Context is for us the all-important key to understanding the complex relationship between name and identity. If we examine why, when and by whom a record containing name forms was written, we will have guidance as to how we can subsequently interpret the name. Just as not having a person name does not prevent our 'poor man' being an individual, having a name attributed by a scribe does not mean that the referent was actually so named. However difficult it may seem to use, all evidence relating to names, including the lack of them, is

[31] *Ibidem.*

[32] This word is so used by historians of late Roman and early medieval Europe. In information technology it is defined as a word, phrase, or alphanumeric character used to identify an item in an information storage and retrieval system.

extremely valuable: it should certainly not be taken for granted. Further insights will come from considering our own experience of names and naming. Amongst the things we will notice is how our own names change over time, in relation to different people and situations. We will also notice the offence taken when someone gets our name wrong; our identity is being challenged at a primal level. So much so that misusing, misrepresenting or mispronouncing a name are all strategies that are used deliberately to upset, injure, or show contempt for other people. Exactly the same is true of our written records, where the scribes dispose also of an additional device, to withhold the name altogether. In doing so they cannot deny a person's individuality, but they can deny him a personal identity. If as historians we appreciate the difference, then we can learn something about both the scribe and those of whom he writes, whether with or without a name.