Matronymic Bynames in the Middle Ages

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1 Introduction

This article is a collection information concerning the use matronymic bynames (bynames based on the bearer's mother's name) in various pre-1600 European and Middle Eastern cultures. The intended audience of the article is members of the Society for Creative Anachronism, and hence various references will be made to decisions about the registerability of names by the Sovereigns of Arms of the Society.

1.1 Abbreviations

LoAR Letter of Acceptance and Return. See [15].

1.2   Acknowledgments

Thanks to Mercy Reiger for information on matronymics in German.

2   Arabic

[2] says:

> While patronymic bynames (bynames which indicate the bearer's father's name) are extremely common in Arabic, we have yet to find any definitive example of a matronymic byname. What we have found comes in the context of a more general type of family name. [11,12] In addition to literal patronymics, we find many examples of family names which were originally used literally, but in later referred to someone who lived some generations ago. Some examples include *Ibn 'Awkal* or *Ibn Ṣaghiir* 'son of the small man'. There are examples of these sorts of family names formed from women's bynames (and more rarely, women's given names). [13,14,15] Some examples found in al-Andalus include *Ibn 'Aa'ishah*, *Ibn Aaminah*, *Ibn Faaṭimah*, as well as *Ibn al-Labaanah* ('son of the milkmaid') and *Ibn al-Bayḍaa'* ('son of the white woman'). [16]

The references cited here are:

11 [10]

12 [11]

13 [19, p. 9]

14 [16]

15 [20, p. 128]

16 Unpublished research of Julia Smith based on [17, p. 66].

3   English

Matronymic bynames in English contexts are not unusual. [18] has *Meggeson* 1332 (s.n. Megson). [4] has *Margarete* 1273 (s.n. Margaret). This may represent the Latin genitive of *Margareta*. [8, p. 227] has one *Alexandri filii Alianore* ('Alexander son of Alianora'; the entire phrase is in the genitive case because of the larger sentential context) in 1284.

3.1   Northumberland, 1256

A number of matronymic bynames can be found in [22], including: *filius ejusdem Agnetis* 'son of the aforementioned Agnes', *filius Hawisiæ*, *filius Emmæ*, *filius Mabiliæ* (2), *filius Cristianæ*, *filius Gunildæ*, *filius Margaretæ Suthamelneburn'*, *filius Agnetis*, *filius Agnes*[1], *filius Agnetis de Clanteleye*, *filius Matillidis*, *filius viduæ* 'son of a widow', *filius viduæ de eadem* 'son of the widow of the same', *filia Emmæ*, and *filia Margeriæ*. All of these show the classical Latin genitive ending *-ae* or *-æ*, which was often reduced to *-e* in medieval Latin.

3.2   Yorkshire, 1301

[5] has a number of literal matronymic bynames, including: *Allotesone* (1), *filius Agnetis* (4), *filius Beatricis* (2), *filius Emme* (2), *filius Eve* (1), *filius Margarete* (1), *filius Matill'* (3), *filius Nanne* (1), *filius Sibille* (1).

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[1]This example is noteworthy because *Agnes* is not inflected, nor Latinized.

3.3 Yorkshire, 1379

A number of examples of matronymics in the vernacular can be found in the 1379 poll taxes of Yorkshire. These examples include:

- *Anotdoghter* [18, s.n. Daughters]; the matronym is a form of *Agnes*.

- *Douce-douther* [4, s.n. Dowse].

- *ffelisdoghter* [18, p. li].

- *Malkyndoghter* [18, p. li]; the matronym is a pet form of *Mary*.

- *Rosedoghter* [18, p. li].

4 Gaelic

4.1 Irish Gaelic

There are a handful of examples of people being identified by their female ancestors in the Irish Annals. From [6]:

> *clann ingine Eogain*
>
> 'the sons of Eogan's daughter'
>
> *Sida Occ mac ingini h. Dubidir Sida Oc*
>
> 'the son of O Duibidir's daughter'

From [7]

> *Mac Con Mara .i. mac inghene Uí Dálaigh Mac Namara*
>
> 'Mac Con Mara, i.e. the son of O'Daly's daughter'
>
> *Brian mac an Chalbhaigh Uí Chonchobhair & Mairgrege Brian*
>
> 'Brian, the son of Calvagh O'Conor, by Margaret'

5 German

Matronymics existed in German, but they were rare. For some times and places we can give a detailed discussion of their use; we do so in the subsections below. We have also collected a number of random examples:

- *Elisabet* 1289 [3, s.n. Elisabeth]

- *Ittensun* 1300, *Idenson* 1375, [3, s.n. It(t)ensohn]. The root name is *Itta* or *Ida*.

- *Katerinen son* 1336 [3, s.n. Katharina]

5.1 Upper Rhine, 12th–13th C

Mercy Reiger provided the following information from [21, p. 578]:

> Metronymica. In den wenigsten Faellen braucht hiebei uneheliche Geburt angenommen zu werden; der Sohn kann nach der Mutter den Namen empfangen haben, weil der Vater frueh verstorben war, oder weil die Mutter sich in Handel und Wandel hervorthat, oder wegen ihrer vornehmen Abkunft. So heisst im Nibelungenliede Siegfried *daz Siglinde kint.*

Translation:

Metronymics. Illegitimate birth can be assumed hereby ["hiebei" is probably a typo for hierbei] in the fewest cases [i.e., it's the rarest reason]; the son can recieve the name of the mother because the father is deceased early [this doesn't distinguish between the father dying before the baby is born and childhood orphans], or because the Mother excells in trade and Wandel [literally "change", at least now, but we think it's probably "conduct" or "moral conduct" or something related. The modern word for "moral conduct" is "Lebenswandel"], or because of her noble descent. Thus, in the Nibelungenlied, Siegfried is called "the child of Siglinde".

Thus, a child might have a metronymic if

a it was illegitimate (but this is the rarest reason)

b their father died either before they were born or while they were small

c their mother was exceptionally noted for her conduct and/or success in trade

d their mother was of high birth (the implication being, higher than the father)

6 Hungarian

[1] says:

> Matronymic bynames, which identify the bearer by his or her mother's given name, were never common in Hungarian, and we have not found examples before the 15th century. [1,3] We did, however, find examples of matronymics based on both *Maria* and its pet form *Mariska*: *Mykola Marya* in 1497, *Joanni Marya* 1525, ¡Augustinus Maria¿ 1559, ¡Maryska¿ (with no given name listed) 1551, and ¡Ladislaus Mariska¿ in 1570. [2] Hungarian often formed bynames like these, using just the parent's name without the addition of any suffixes. All of the examples we've seen of matronymic bynames use this pattern.

7 Italian

The February 2007 LoAR says:

> **Violetta Belladonna**. Name. This Italian name consists of a given name and an unmarked metronymic. Precedent states:
>
>> **Oriana di Octavia Volpe da Venezia**. There was some question whether matronymics were used in Italian names. Talan Gwynek, "15th Century Italian Men's Names", includes a *Giacomo de Argentina*. The third real paragraph of this article says: "If the final *a* can be trusted, *de Argentina* is probably metronymic." This is sufficient to give the submitter the benefit of the doubt that names of this form are registerable. [August 2006]
>
> However, since that time, we have reconsidered the evidence and decided that a single ambiguous example is not sufficient to allow metronymics in Italian. As the precedent notes, the only evidence we have for metronymics in Italian is a single ambiguous example from Talan Gwynek's "15 [sic] C Italian Men's Names" (`http://www.s-gabriel.org/docs/italian15m.html`). This is hardly a ringing endorsement for a naming pattern, and a single example is not enough to establish a general pattern. Therefore, barring clear examples of metronymics, either marked or unmarked in Italian, Italian names using metronymics are not registerable.

8 Jewish

8.1 14th-century Navarre

We have two examples of Jewish matronymics, in Spanish contexts, from this locaton and period: *Çima, fija de Oru* and *Buenastruga, filia de Ceti Aragones* [14].

9 Old Norse

According to [9], matronymics were used in Old Norse.

10 Welsh

[12] says "although it was far commoner to reference one's male ancestors, it was also correct throughout our period [to 1600] to be known as your mother's child. There was no implication of bastardy by this practice" [p. 28]. [13] says that "extremely rare, although not unheard-of, for a mother's name to be used" in a relationship byname, such as a matronymic byname.

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