



By the Boke

An educational series of articles presented by the Northshield College of Heraldry.

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Annotated Bibliography of Books and Websites

By Aryanhwy merch Catmael, Boke Herawde

What to look for in a source.

The most important feature that a book has to have in order to be useful for SCA documentation is dates. Without dates, there is no way to show that the name was used in medieval times. But not all books with dates are going to be useful (for example, modern encyclopedias are not necessarily good sources), and this is because many authors modernize or normalize the names. It's not always easy to tell if this has happened, but there are some clues to look for. Often, if names have been normalized, the author or editor will say so in the editorial notes (often at the end of introduction or preface). A common occurrence is for the given names to be changed to their modern form, while the surnames are left as found in the primary sources. Even if there are no notes one way or the other, you can often tell just by flipping through the book: Does the same person show up under different names? Does the same given name get spelled in many different ways? If so, then the names have probably not been normalized.

Another way to tell if the source you have is useful is to see what sorts of sources they cite. Modern baby books generally do not provide any sources, so you have no way to double check their statements. Many historical books, however, will cite their sources. A book that cites primary sources generally has a higher chance of having dates and non-normalized forms.

Things to avoid: Avoid baby name books. These generally make no distinction between names coined before 1600 and names coined after. Avoid books with the words 'Celtic' or 'Teutonic'. These are not languages, but rather language families. There is no such thing as a 'Celtic' name, just as there is no such thing as a 'Romance' name.

Recommended Books

Denmark

Denmarks Gamle Personnavne

The title translates to 'Denmark's old personal names'. While this is written in Danish, the book is primarily lists of dated citations for each entry, and so can be used easily without knowing any

Danish. The work comes in two volumes, each with two parts. The first is arranged by given name, the second by surname.

England

Bardsley, Charles.

Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames

This is a good complement to Reaney & Wilson. While many of the citations are the same, he often has many later-period citations the Reaney & Wilson doesn't. Also useful for finding given names.

Ekwall, Eilert.

Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names

Until Watts came out earlier this year, this was the book for English place names. It contains many entries, with dated citations and etymological notes for most of the entries. The only drawback is that the dates tend to go up to the 14th century only, with later citations being fairly rare.

Johnson, James.

Place Names of England and Wales

Moderately useful. Virtually all of the English names can be found in Ekwall or Mills in more detail, but the information on Welsh place names can be useful. Be careful with his etymologies, though: Not all of them should be trusted, and they should all be confirmed by a second source.

Mills, A.D.

Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names

This is not as comprehensive as Ekwall, but it is easier to find copies of. Places are arranged alphabetically by modern spelling, with period spellings in the entries.

Reaney & Wilson.

Dictionary of English Surnames

This is the standard reference for English surnames. As many of the examples in the entries are of full names, this is also a good source for English given names. Care should be taken to only use the dated spellings found in the entries: Not all of the spellings found in the headers are medieval spellings. Some of the spellings did not develop until after 1600.

Withycombe, E.G.

Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names

This is the standard reference for English given names. There are three editions; each edition is substantially better than the last. Most library reference departments have copies; this may be your best bet, as the book is out of print. Not all names in it are period, so you have to read the text of the entries. Withycombe is not a good source for non-English names. When she discusses non-English names she is generally discussing modern usage, and not medieval usage, and many of her derivations and etymologies of non-English names are incorrect.

France

Dauzat, Albert.

Dictionnaire des Noms et Prénoms de France

This is, written in French, is arranged by modern French spelling. Not many dates are given, but most of the surnames can be assumed to have been in use by at least the 16th century, particularly those of locative or patronymic origin. It's more useful if you can read French, less if you can't.

Dauzat & Rostaing.

Dictionnaire Etymologique des Noms de Lieux de la France

This is a dictionary of French place names, including etymological information and period spellings of the place names. This is great for forming locative bynames.

Morlet, Marie-Therese.

Les Noms de Personne sur le Territoire de l'Ancienne Gaule du VIe au XIIIe Siecle

This covers names from the 6th through 12th centuries. Vol. I covers names of Germanic origin, and vol. II covers names of Latin origin. There is an index at the back of vol. II which is very useful. The entries are sometimes hard to read, but dates are enclosed in parentheses after the name forms. This source is very useful for the time period it covers, but because the name pool changed pretty significantly around the 12th century, names found here may not necessarily be appropriate for a later period.

Germany

Bahlow, Hans, tans. Edda Gentry.

Dictionary of German Names

This is a book of German surnames, though many of the examples of surnames contain given names as well. The English translation is more useful than the German original, but there are occasional translation errors (usually in the form of an untranslated German word). The surnames cover much of the area that is Germany today, with perhaps a leaning towards the east and the north, so Bahlow is more likely to have Low German and East Middle German spellings.

Brechenmacher, Josef Karlmann.

Etmologisches Wuerterbuch der Deutschen

This book of surnames is arranged by modern German form, with dated citations in most of the entries. The coverage of this book is very wide, like Bahlow, but Brechenmacher leans a bit more to the south and west, so this will have more Upper German and West Middle German spellings.

Socin, Adolf.

Mittelhochdeutsches Namenbuch.

The names in this book are primarily from Switzerland and southwestern Germany; the dialect is Alemannic, one of the two main Upper German dialects (the other being Bavarian). He does occasionally go further afield, however, so you have to be a little bit careful. The book is arranged in a somewhat complicated manner, but there is an excellent index.

Hungarian

Kálmán, Bela, *The World of Names: A Study in Hungarian Onomatology*

The best quality about this source is that it is written in English. However, it should be used with care, because in some cases his scholarship has been superseded, and not all entries are given dates.

Kázmér Miklós, "Régi Magyar Családnevek Szótára: XIV-XVII Század"

This is the standard source for Hungarian names. Though it is written in Hungarian, you can usually identify the dated citations without too much trouble. The only thing to be aware of is that many of the citations are Latin spellings, not Hungarian, and so may

not reflect the actual spoken Hungarian form of the time.

Iceland

Haraldsson, Geirr Bassi.

The Old Norse Name

This little pamphlet has lists of primarily Viking-era Old Norse given names and nicknames, as well as a discussion of grammar and pronunciation. The names are taken primarily from historical sagas, and so can be assumed to be period.

Lind, E.H.,

Norsk-Islandska Dopnamn ock

Fingerade Namn från Medeltiden.

This source is somewhat hard to get your hands on (even large research libraries don't always have copies), but it is extremely comprehensive. While Geirr Bassi tends to normalize all the names (picking one standard spelling of the name and counting all variants of the name under that one spelling), Lind provides citations in the forms found in the actual sources. He also covers from the Viking-era through the late Middle Ages.

Ireland

MacLysaght, Edward. *The Surnames of Ireland*

This book is arranged by modern English form. Specific dates are very rare, but he often provides a short history of the family that bore the surname, which can help establish medieval usage. Not all of the surnames were originally Gaelic in origin; there are many that were originally English or Scots, and a few Dutch ones as well. If a surname has a Gaelic origin, he provides the modern Gaelic form. While the modern Gaelic form is often acceptable for the 16th century, it is not always. Thus, this book is a great place to start, but not necessarily an end in itself.

Ó Corráin, Donnchadh & Fidelma Maguire.

Irish Names

This is the best book out there for Gaelic given names. The names are arranged alphabetically, with the Middle Irish (c. 900-c. 1200) form(s) first, followed by the Early Modern Irish (c.1200-c. 1700) forms, and then the Modern Irish (c.1700-present) forms. Not all of the names are suitable for SCA purposes, however: A lot of the names are of legendary or mythical people, and so unless the entry specifically gives a date or evidence of usage such as "a relatively common early name", then the name should be avoided.

Woulfe, Patrick.

Sloinne Gaedheal is Gall / Irish Names and Surnames

This book should be used with care, but if used properly it is incredibly useful.

The book is divided into two parts, given names and surnames. The given names section is not very useful for our purposes, as it gives modern Gaelic forms and provides no dated citations or other evidence of medieval use. The surnames section, on the other hand, is arranged by Early Modern Irish (c. 1200-c. 1700) form, and the entries contain histories of the families that bore that surname. After each header form follow a number of English spellings. Those in italics are taken from documents from the time of Elizabeth I and James I, and hence are appropriate for our purposes. Ones that are not in italics are taken from modern sources, and are thus not appropriate. One word of warning: Surnames in *Mac-* or *Ó-* were used literally in our period, and these are the masculine forms. The feminine forms will not differ much, but they will differ.

Italy

De Felice, Emidio.

Dizionario dei Cognomi Italiani

De Felice, Emidio.

Dizionario dei Nomi Italiani

Cognomi covers surnames and *Nomi* covers given names. These books are arranged by modern form, and few dates are present. However, as with Dauzat, many of the names in here can be assumed to be period, especially those of descriptive, locative, and patronymic origin. With the given names book, he often says explicitly whether the name has been in use since the medieval times or not. The spellings are modern Italian, and are generally appropriate for the central Italian dialects, such as Florentine.

Fucilla, Joseph G.

Our Italian Surnames

This is a chatty, accessible book on Italian surnames, focusing primarily on modern names. He rarely if ever provides any dates or evidence of medieval usage, but this, combined with De Felice, can be used as a starting point for researching Italian surnames.

Japanese

Solveig Thronardottir.

Name Construction in Mediaeval Japan

Affectionately known as "Solveig's little pamphlet", this book contains thousands of Japanese name elements from throughout our period. This is probably the best source on medieval Japanese names out there.

Scotland

Black, George F.

Surnames of Scotland

This is the best source out there for Scottish surnames. The names are arranged by most common modern

spelling, and the entries contain history of the names as well as numerous citations. The dated citations are almost always Scots or Latin, and not Gaelic, and so are not generally appropriate for Gaelic-language names. When he provides Gaelic spellings, they are often modern, and so not appropriate. As with other surnames books, this is often useful for documenting given names as well.

Johnston, James B.

Place-Names of Scotland

Many Scottish place names which gave rise to surnames can be found in Black, but for those that didn't, Johnston is a good supplemental source. In some cases, he does have citations that Black does not. However, his etymologies should be treated with great care: Quite often they are incorrect. This source is best used as a source for creating locative bynames, rather than a source for constructing Gaelic place names.

Sweden

Sveriges Medeltida Personnamn

This is 'Swedish Medieval Personal Names'. *SMP* is currently published through the end of the <H>'s, and its aim is to be 100% comprehensive, i.e., a listing of all known Swedish given names. Because many of entries include citations of entire names, this is also a useful source for researching bynames.

Spain

Diez Melcon, R. P. Gonzalo.

Apellidos Castellano-Leoneses.

This is a book of Castilian-Leonese surnames. I can't find my copy, but it focuses primarily on the earlier part of our period, and is fairly useful, but only names from Castile-Leon, and not Catalonia, Galicia, or Portugal.

Wales

Gruffudd, Heini.

Enwau Cymraeg I Blant / Welsh Names for Children

This source is one step up from a modern baby name book, but only one. All the names are given in standard modern forms, and most of the names are modern coinages. However, when a name is medieval, he generally cites specific people. This book should be used as a starting point - once you find a name with a date, you can go to other sources to find period spellings - but not an ending point.

Johnson, James.

Place Names of England and Wales

Moderately useful. Virtually all of the English names can be found in Ekwall or Mills in more detail, but the information on Welsh place names can be useful. Be careful with his etymologies, though:

Not all of them should be trusted, and they should all be confirmed by a second source.

Morgan, T.J. & Prys Morgan.

Welsh Surnames

This excellent book contains thousands of citations for Welsh surnames. Like Reaney & Wilson, the examples generally also contain given names, and so this can often be used to find period spellings of given names as well.

Books to avoid

All of the following are commonly found in library reference departments, and all of them are unsuitable for our purposes because they provide no dates or other evidence of medieval usage:

Coghlan, Ronan.

Irish First Names

Coghlan, Grehan, and Joyce.

Book of Irish Names

Dunkling, Leslie & William Gosling.

New American Dictionary of First Names

Hanks & Hodges.

Dictionary of First Names

Hanks & Hodges. *Dictionary of Surnames*

Surnames

Kolatch, Alfred J. any book

Yonge, Charlotte.

History of Christian Names

Recommended web sites

The single best place to go on the web for reliable sources for medieval names is the Medieval Names Archive, <http://www.s-gabriel.org/names>. The standards to get into the MNA are high, and only reliable sources are included. You can hardly go wrong here.

The Academy of S. Gabriel (<http://www.s-gabriel.org>) helps people research authentic names and arms. You can search their past reports for specific name elements, which is often very useful. The search engine is at the bottom of their web page.

Web sites to avoid

The Medieval Names Archive maintains a list of web sources that should be avoided, at <http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/arval/badpages.shtml>. None of the websites linked here provide any sources for their material, or dates, and quite often their etymologies and classifications are incorrect. You should strongly discourage everyone from using these sites.