



A Page From the Boke: French Names

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1 Language

While France today is a unified country sharing a common language, this was not the case in our period. France was home to a collection of dialects, some quite similar and some quite different. The most significant division was between the langue d'oïl, or French, spoken in the north, and the langue d'oc, also called Occitan or Provençal, spoken in the south. These were different languages, not just dialects of the same language, and names in them were quite different. In this article, I have focused on later-period French names, primarily from Paris and the surrounding area; I discuss differences between French and Occitan names in brief at the end.

2 Given names

In 1421, 1423, and 1438, the king of France needed money to support his warring habits, and caused three taxes of Paris to be taken. Roughly 2700 people gave up money for the king's use in these taxes. There are roughly 300 distinct masculine given names and 43 distinct feminine names. The following are the top ten most popular masculine and feminine names, with counts for the number of times they occurred in the taxes [1]:

1. Jehan.....	711
2. Guillaume.....	193
3. Pierre.....	182
4. Colin.....	74
5. Jaquet.....	64
6. Estienne.....	50
7. Robin.....	43
8. Perrin.....	42
9. Thomas.....	42
10. Regnault.....	40

1. Jehanne.....	31
2. Guillemette.....	6
3. Jehannette.....	6
4. Perrette.....	6
5. Katherine.....	5
6. Marie.....	5
7. Marguerite.....	4
8. Collette.....	3
9. Marion.....	3
10. Ysabeau.....	3

Note that the most popular name, on both lists, is substantially more popular than any of the other names.

3 Bynames

In the 15th C, descriptive bynames had mostly become inherited surnames (like modern day surnames, passed down from father to son without regard to the literal meaning of the name) in France, though literal bynames had not completely died out, and wives still did not take their husband's surname upon marriage.

Because the surnames have by and large been divorced from their etymological roots, it's hard to make any useful claims about what sorts of surnames are "typical". The tax rolls had 1696 distinct surnames, most of which occurred only 1-2 times each. Therefore, I have selected all the bynames that are found more than 10 times; these are extremely common [2]:

Petit.....	15	'small'
Le Barbier.....	11	'the [masculine] barber'
Le Fevre.....	11	'the [masculine] smith'
Le Roy.....	10	'the king'
le Roy.....	1	'the king'
Moreau.....	10	'from a root meaning 'Moor' i.e. 'darkskinned'

4 Name patterns

Without exception, each person had a single given name and a single byname.

5 Comparisons to Occitan names

I have no good source for Occitan names from the 15th century, to make a direct comparison here, but I have looked at 14th and 16th century sources, and have listed below Occitan forms corresponding to the given names listed above [3,4,5]:

1. Johan (14th)
2. Guilhem (14th)
3. Peyre (14th)
4. (no corresponding form found)
5. (no corresponding form found)
6. Stefe (14th)
7. (no corresponding form found)
8. (no corresponding form found)
9. (no corresponding form found)
10. (no corresponding form found)

1. Johanna (14th, 16th)
2. (no corresponding form found)
3. Johanetta (14th)
4. Pieret (14th)
5. Katerina (14th), Catharina (16th)
6. Maria (14th, 16th)
7. Margarida (14th), Margarette (16th)
8. (no corresponding form found)
9. (no corresponding form found)
10. Isabella (14th), Ysabel (16th)

As you can see, not only does the name pool not overlap much, but where it does, the spellings are significantly different.

References:

- [1] Two maps showing the rough dialect split of French and Occitan can be found at <http://membres.lycos.fr/simorre/oc/geodom.htm> and <http://www.orbilat.com/Maps/Occitan/Occitan.gif>.
- [2] Friedemann, Sara L. (aka Aryanhwyr merch Catmael), "French Names from Paris, 1421, 1423 & 1438" (WWW: privately published, 2002). <http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/paris1423.htm>
- [3] Talan Gwynek, "Late Period Feminine Names from the South of France" (WWW: Academy of Saint Gabriel, 1999). <http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/talan/latefrenchfem/>
- [4] Friedemann, Sara L., "Feminine Names from Pe/rigueux, 1339-1340" (WWW: Self-published, 2003) <http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/perigueux.html>
- [5] Juliana de Luna, "Occitan Townspeople in the 14th Century" (WWW: J. Mittleman, 2002). <http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/juliana/occitan/>