

# Biography, Identity and Names: Understanding the Pursuit of the Individual in Prosopography

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The object of this paper is to examine closely the relationship between prosopography and biography, and, via a look at the problems surrounding names and identity, to introduce the newcomer to some of the issues that arise in the preparation of the biographical dossiers required by prosopography. The first part will look at the issues, and the second part will provide some structured examples of how to approach the problems.

## I.1 Biography and Prosopography

The art of Biography  
Is different from Geography.  
Geography is about maps,  
But Biography is about chaps.

Edmund Clerihew Bentley, *Biography for Beginners*

Put another way:

The art of Biography  
Is different from Prosopography  
Biography looks at individual chaps  
But Prosopography studies individuals in aggregate.

I begin on this whimsical note because nothing bedevils the newcomer's understanding of prosopography as much as its relationship to biography. Biography is not merely a venerable form of historiography, with a recorded tradition going back as far as the Greek biographer and moral philosopher Plutarch (c. 46–127 AD),<sup>1</sup> it also belongs to the tradition of *belles-lettres*.<sup>2</sup> Frequently a vehicle for propaganda and polemic, it is a red-blooded animal eager to mark out and to defend its territory.<sup>3</sup> Occasionally, it

<sup>1</sup> See Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, translated by John Dryden (1683), revised by Arthur Hugh Clough (1864), available at [www.constitution.org/rom/plutarch/lives.htm](http://www.constitution.org/rom/plutarch/lives.htm) (accessed 13 March 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For example, Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (New York, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Jon Halliday and Jung Chang, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (London and New York, 2005); described by one reviewer as 'a triumph. It is a mesmerising portrait of tyranny, degeneracy, mass murder and promiscuity, a barrage of revisionist bombshells, and a superb piece of research' (Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Sunday*

becomes the subject of polemic.<sup>4</sup> These instincts have not been confined to biography as monograph, but are also traceable in general biographical dictionaries such as the first edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography*.<sup>5</sup> The group-specific biographical dictionaries or lexicons produced as part of modern prosopography are dispassionate and cold-blooded, almost bloodless by comparison. For, despite the use of unfortunate designations such as collective biography and group biography, prosopography does not privilege biography, it merely collects and exploits structured biographical data. The point to note is that, however they are used and whatever the form in which they are delivered to the end-user,<sup>6</sup> prosopography does not exist without these biographical dossiers.

It follows therefore that the crux of a definition of prosopography is the nature of the relationship between prosopography and biography, as the German historian Neithard Bulst has observed. He goes on:

One must appreciate that different questions and interests are involved when it comes to biography and prosopography, each of which has its own validity. Whereas biography is concerned with the individual, prosopography is concerned with the whole or totality – the individual is constantly considered with reference to his links to the whole. [...] The fact that, nevertheless, prosopography cannot renounce biography as the starting point is brought home by the famous image of Namier, who observed that five hundred men brought together do not constitute a millipede: they remain five hundred different men, which one must find out about individually. [...] One must admit that the common biography of five hundred men is impossible. But research wishing to look at the totality, i.e. the 500, can be achieved by beginning with an outline biography of the individuals.<sup>7</sup>

Dion Smythe cited Stone's definition of prosopography (given above, p. 19) in the course of an article in which he pointed out that the term prosopography was the one favoured by classicists and ancient historians (and medievalists), group-biography the one favoured by modernists, and career-line analysis by social scientists. But, he went on:

Prosopography as 'group-biography' is misleading, as it is not the study of life histories in groups (nor indeed the biography of groups) but rather the study of biographical detail about individuals in aggregate. Whilst prosopography is not averse to statistical analysis, nevertheless the individuality of each actor is preserved.<sup>8</sup>

Another Byzantinist, Paul Magdalino, noted that:

*Times*, May 29 2005, [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/books/article526263.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article526263.ece) (accessed 13 March 2007).

<sup>4</sup> For example, Fawn McKay Brodie's controversial, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (New York, 1974), described in the biography of Brodie herself, Newell G. Bringhurst, *Fawn McKay Brodie: A Biographer's Life* (Norman OK, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, Gen. Eds. Leslie Stephens and Stephen Lee (London, 1894-1900); reissued in 23 vols. 1908-9.

<sup>6</sup> See my Introduction, above pp. 14-15, and section II.1 The Biographical Notice, below.

<sup>7</sup> Neithard Bulst, 'Objet et méthode de la prosopographie', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Age – Temps modernes. T. 100, 1988, 1, La prosopographie. Problèmes et méthodes*, pp. 475-6.

<sup>8</sup> Dion Smythe, 'Putting technology to work: the CD ROM version of the *Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire I (641-867)*', *History and Computing* 12.1 (2000), 85-98

prosopography is most useful in the study of societies where the number of recorded individuals is relatively modest, and where the records do not lend themselves to the construction of major biographies, or yield enough new information to make the rewriting of biographies a major imperative. Biography and prosopography are obviously related and they overlap, but the one is not simply the plural of the other [...] the comprehensive inclusion of extensive data on an individual does not in itself create a biography, which requires a degree of resolution that prosopography, as a research tool, cannot aim to provide. It demands an engagement with the private life and the inner person which is not the business of prosopography [...] biography is primarily concerned with the lives of individuals, while prosopography deals with the connections between individuals in a group, the primary concern of one being the secondary concern of the other.<sup>9</sup>

Or as the authors of the Short Manual [above, p.41] put it: ‘The ultimate purpose of prosopography is to collect data on phenomena that transcend individual lives. It targets the common aspects of people’s lives, not their individual histories’.

These remarks point to an important distinction between biography – the conscientious compilation of a rounded study of the life of a single and in some way singular person – and the amassing of biographical details about individual persons with the sole aim of studying them as members of groups.<sup>10</sup> Prosopography presents evidence about the individual and the exceptional – i.e. the true subject of biography – only in order to uncover the collective and the normal.<sup>11</sup> Terms such as ‘group biography’ (rarely used, in fact) or ‘collective biography’ (very common) miss the point and are misleading.

Although the study of individuals is a prerequisite of prosopography, prosopography is not about individuals *per se*. The study of individuals is the province of biography or genealogy and is therefore limited in scope. As Nicolet observed, biography and genealogy are only a stage in prosopography, not the intended result, which is to achieve an understanding of social reality.<sup>12</sup> Prosopography is concerned with what the analysis of the sum of data about many individuals can tell us about the different types of connexion between them, and hence about how they operated within and upon the social, economic and other institutions of their time. Prosopography can be based upon existing resources that might perhaps be described as collective biography, in the sense of a significantly large collection of biographical data relating to individual persons sharing a common characteristic. The exploitation by many classical scholars of the riches contained in the monumental *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* and the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* is an obvious example.<sup>13</sup> Another is the use

<sup>9</sup> Paul Magdalino, ‘The contribution of prosopography: the Byzantine Empire or why prosopography? A question of identity’, in *Fifty Years of Prosopography: The Later Roman Empire, Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. Averil Cameron (Proceedings of The British Academy, Oxford, 2003), pp. 42-3.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. C.R. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 66 : ‘whereas biography is about exemplary or otherwise distinctive individuals, prosopography compiles and organises those items of biographical data that mark an individual’s belonging to a group. Biographies accentuate the individual; prosopographies make individuals members’.

<sup>11</sup> Claude Nicolet, ‘Prosopographie et histoire sociale: Rome et l’Italie à l’époque républicaine’, *Annales, Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 25 (1970), 1209-28.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1226.

<sup>13</sup> To cite just two, R. Symes, *The Roman Revolution* (1939), and I. Shatzman, *Senatorial Wealth and Roman Politics* (Brussels, 1975)

of A. B. Emden's biographical registers of all the *alumni* of Oxford and Cambridge universities. Indeed, one of the earliest applications of computer technologies in prosopography used this very material. It was developed in Oxford by Oxford University Computing Services for Trevor Aston and Ralph Evans, and was used for a new *History of the University of Oxford*.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, what of a work such as the first edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography*? This set out to provide a potted life of anyone who had any impact in any field of life in this country from the year dot to 1900. Collective biography certainly, but not susceptible to prosopographical analysis because the disparate subjects cannot be meaningfully linked. Different groups are discernible among the whole, but those singled out for treatment in the *Dictionary* were not necessarily typical or representative members of their groups. The biographical data concerning them cannot therefore be used to establish constants and variables, or norms and non-norms, about their society. The recently published *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* has rewritten the entries from the first edition and added several thousand new ones.<sup>15</sup> The online version accesses an underlying fully searchable database. Care has been taken to design a template which each article, about whatever period, should attempt to fit. This establishes certain basic categories of biographical information which will be, extant documentation permitting, common to all entries. Despite the resemblance to the prosopographer's questionnaire, which would in theory render the work susceptible to prosopographical analysis, the same limitations on the genuinely comparative nature of the entries still apply, as the following observations by Christine MacLeod and Alexander Nuvolari make clear:

We investigate the representation of inventors in the original *DNB* (published 1882-1900) and subject its selection criteria to critical scrutiny. Methodologically, this is a vital preliminary step. First, the *Oxford DNB*, while revising the entries of the original edition, includes them all: there are additions to the list, but no deletions. Consequently, the Victorians' selection criteria will continue to inform the twenty-first century's concept of 'the inventor'. Secondly, it is essential to scrutinize our sources for potential biases. Inevitably, this iconic work of collective biography does not provide a random or representative sample of inventors for prosopographical analysis; neither does it offer an objective set of the UK's greatest inventors. In particular, our analysis suggests that (after gender) the type of invention and the patenting strategy that an inventor adopted were the primary determinants of inclusion in the original *DNB*.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500* (Oxford, 1957-9); Id., *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500* (Cambridge, 1963). Malcolm C. Burson, 'Emden's Registers and the prosopography of the medieval English universities', *Medieval Prosopography* 3.2 (1982), 43-52. T. H. Aston, 'Oxford's medieval alumni', *Past and Present*, 74 (1977); Ralph Evans, 'The analysis by computer of A. B. Emden's biographical registers of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge', in N. Bulst and J.-P. Genet eds., *Medieval Lives and the Historian. Studies in Medieval Prosopography* (Kalamazoo, 1986), 381-94. *History of the University of Oxford*, General editor T. H. Aston (8 vols., Oxford, 1984-94).

<sup>15</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (60 vols., Oxford, 2004); also published online at [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com).

<sup>16</sup> C. MacLeod and A. Nuvolari, "'The Ingenious Crowd': A critical prosopography of British inventors, 1650-1850", Eindhoven Centre for Innovation Studies Working Paper n.05.04, downloadable from <http://ideas.repec.org/p/dgr/tuecis/0504.html> (accessed 13 March 2007). Dr Nuvolari read a version of this paper to the prosopography conference in Oxford in July 2005, in a session which also featured a presentation of the superb online *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* by Vivienne Larminie.

All this suggests that collective biography is an entity in its own right, distinct from and different to prosopography.<sup>17</sup> It can vary from large-scale dictionaries of national biography to smaller but still substantial works such as Strickland's *Lives of the Queens of England*.<sup>18</sup> According to the *Writer's Encyclopedia*, a collective biography is:

A volume of biographical sketches of individuals in similar professions, related persuasions or parallel life circumstances. Example: *Winners on the Tennis Court*, by William S. Glickman. The successful collective biography knits the individual accounts together in a meaningful way by suggesting common threads among the lives of the profiled persons.<sup>19</sup>

Small-scale studies are often better described as comparative biography. Examples are Pauline Stafford's study of Queens Emma and Edith,<sup>20</sup> and Simon Ball's study of four Etonians who fought together in the trenches of World War I and later became prominent in British politics.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, the term 'collective biography' is now well entrenched in definitions of prosopography, unhappily often given by persons engaged in collective biography or even forms of comparative biography who have no real idea of what prosopography actually is. If the term is to be used in connection with prosopography it must be as part of a definition that explains the basis of the biographical element, such as that provided by H. de Ridder-Symons:

Prosopography is a collective biography, describing the external features of a population group that has something in common (profession, social origins, geographic origins, etc.). Starting from a questionnaire, biographical data are collected about a well-defined group of people. On the basis of these data answers may be found to historical questions.<sup>22</sup>

To spell it out: prosopography examines a population that shares one or more characteristic. The population is isolated from source material according to carefully defined criteria and the data concerning it are collected and modelled according to equally carefully defined criteria. Whilst every effort is made to identify individuals among the subject population, the focus is not on the individual *per se* but upon the total collection of individuals in aggregate. Analysis is thus based on the whole group considered with reference to its constituent parts; the object is to examine the interplay between a

<sup>17</sup> 'It is desirable to remind ourselves that the compilation of short "lives", or indeed collective biographies, which can be traced back in western literary culture at least to Plutarch, is not same thing as prosopography. Thus, for example, the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Complete Peerage*, although invaluable works of reference for all periods of British history, provide the raw materials for prosopographers, rather than themselves forming contributions to this branch of historical writing', Gerald Aylmer, 'Prosopography and seventeenth-century England', in *L'État moderne et les élites XIIIe-XVIIIe siècles. Apports limités de la méthode prosopographiques. Actes du Colloque International CNRS-Paris I, 16-19 octobre 1991* (Paris, 1996), pp. 19-26.

<sup>18</sup> Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England from the Norman Conquest* (8 vols., 1840-9).

<sup>19</sup> At [www.writersmarket.com](http://www.writersmarket.com).

<sup>20</sup> Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Simon Ball, *The Guardsmen* (London, 2004); the subjects are Harold Macmillan, Lord Salisbury, Oliver Lyttelton and Harry Crookshank. A further example, from nineteenth-century American history, is Merrill D. Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay and Calhoun* (Oxford, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> H. de Ridder-Symoens, 'Prosopografie en middeleeuwse geschiedenis: een onmogelijke mogelijkheid?', in *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, n. R., 45 (1991), 95-117, cited in the Short Manual, above, p. 39.

set of variables in order to understand certain historical processes, and not to create some sort of composite individual intended to represent the whole. Collective or comparative biography is not based upon rigorously established selection criteria and the focus remains the individual. It is therefore not prosopography. In collective biography the subjects are selected by the compiler towards an end; in other words, the group is created by the compiler for his own didactic purposes. In a prosopography the number and identity of individuals who compose the group (population) is not usually known at first, because the group is selected as the starting point of an inquiry by the researcher, whose purpose is to discover and to learn. To this extent at least we can distinguish collective biography and prosopography in terms of a subjective and an objective approach.<sup>23</sup>

If, as historians, we wish to employ a term of art such as prosopography, or some synonym of it, to describe the way we work, we should be clear about what it means. This is not quite the same thing as saying that it must be narrowly defined: as we have already seen, definitions are numerous and always wordy.<sup>24</sup> Not infrequently, they are also unsatisfactory, as in: ‘A study, often using statistics, that identifies and draws relationships between various characters or people within a specific historical, social, or literary context’, offered by the *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition. By omitting any reference to biographical detail this definition fails to mention a key defining feature of prosopography.

Words can, of course, change meaning. A technical term used to describe a particular way of doing something might be especially vulnerable to the evolutionary forces of changing preoccupations or even fashions. As Timothy Barnes has shown earlier in this book, the meaning of the word prosopography has changed considerably since its first appearance in the sixteenth century. In its earliest uses it was normally related to the physical description, either (or both) literary and graphic, of important persons, though in a significant group of works published in Germany from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century it could also refer to a description of the personality and character of its subjects.<sup>25</sup> Such works are related to modern prosopography in the way that Neanderthal man is to *homo sapiens* – recognizably the same basic type of creature, but a break in the evolutionary chain has led to marked differences. Unlike Neanderthal man, however, traces of the older forms of *prosopographia* survive.

Although never labelled as such, there are forms of biographical writing, such as Plutarch and Vasari’s *Lives*, that can be described as collective biography and that are similar in intent to the older meanings of *prosopographia*. For these are collections of exemplary lives, assembled for the didactic purposes of their discerning authors. Even

<sup>23</sup> Islamic prosopography, by contrast (see Introduction, p. 28), developed as a dominant form of historiography in Islamic societies in order to address perceived religious, political and social needs. Its purpose was frankly didactic and intended to be authoritative, and its biographical entries were not composed to acceptable modern standards of objectivity. Yet the subjects were chosen according to rigorous criteria identifying them as very specific groups. This is the difference between an ‘organic’ prosopography – a sort of living organism produced to address contemporary needs – and an ‘inorganic’ or research-led prosopography.

<sup>24</sup> See above, Introduction, p. 3, and Short Manual, p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> Barnes, ‘Prosopography Modern and Ancient’, pp. 73–5.

granted that true objectivity is impossible for any historian, whose research interests will inevitably have formed in response to his own experiences and understanding of the world around him, the difference between the work of a prosopographer patiently labouring over his biographical dossiers and the moralizing author of a collection of Lives is patent. As Alison Booth, author of *How to Make It As A Woman*, notes:

Collective biographies offer many [...] rhetorical advantages. The argument implied in selection and arrangement prevents the illusion of a transparent, objective account of a person's life. Collections of lives can rarely disguise their didactic purpose. A collective biography requires an additional rhetorical frame besides that of any biography: the definition of the category or principle of selection, even at the apparently empirical level of inclusive reference works. The anthology of the great teaches greatness, of women womanhood, of writers what it takes to make a writer.<sup>26</sup>

Such collections can never be based on the uniform criteria characteristic of prosopography and hence can never be described as prosopography. The worrying thing about Booth's book is that the author, a professor of English, rather than of history, recognizes that prosopography is a word currently used in senses that have no relevance to her work (she cites Stone and Namier), but she still insists on using 'the daunting polysyllable "prosopography"' because she likes it.<sup>27</sup> She appears to use it in the older sense of description of a person, or of a person's qualities:

Ancient as well as recent prosopographies [Plutarch's *Lives*, the *Dictionary of National Biography*] render subjects as representative interrelated types in the service of civic modelling and national pride. Few have remarked that collective biographies serve to consolidate genders and other social categories. (p. 18)

To drive the point home, consider what Wilmot H. McCutchen has written of Plutarch:

Plutarch's plan in the *Lives* was to pair a philosophical biography of a famous Roman with one of a Greek who was comparable in some way. A short essay of comparison follows most of the pairs of lives. His announced intention was not to write a chronicle of great historical events, but rather to examine the character of great men, as a lesson for the living. Throughout the *Lives*, Plutarch pauses to deliver penetrating observations on human nature as illustrated by his subjects, so it is difficult to classify the *Lives* as history, biography, or philosophy.<sup>28</sup>

We can see in this description both collective and comparative biography, but, as is surely obvious by now, not prosopography.

The problem of terminology will be considered in detail in relation to names hereafter, but one final point can be made here. Idiosyncratic use of terminology is something we can and should guard against, but we also have to be aware that terms of art can be common to disparate disciplines and yet have totally different meanings. Who would imagine that 'collective biography' is also the name of a form of psychotherapy

<sup>26</sup> Alison Booth, *How to Make It As A Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present* (Chicago and London, 2004), pp. 9-10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p.12.

<sup>28</sup> Wilmot H. McCutchen, [www.e-classics.com/plutarch.htm](http://www.e-classics.com/plutarch.htm), Preface to *15 Ancient Greek Heroes from Plutarch's Lives*, an on-line English version, abridged and annotated, of Plutarch's *Lives*.

being devised by psychologists from ‘narrative therapy’?<sup>29</sup>

## I.2 The Biographical Notice and Questionnaire

A prosopography is normally a two-part process, in the first of which a biographical dictionary or lexicon is compiled, providing a set of biographical profiles of each individual in the group under investigation. In the second stage a range of techniques is applied to the accumulated data, which are analysed according to the questions that underlie the research. Ideally, any dictionary intended for publication will consist of an alphabetized list of short notices written in natural language. The constituent data of the notices will have been entered into a relational database in a form suitable for some type of statistical analysis.

If the place of the biographical lexicon at the heart of prosopographical analysis is assured, its format and function can be very variable [see pages 5–10] especially since the advent of computers, which have done so much to advance prosopography and at the same time to muddy the waters. The desirability of some sort of dictionary, with accessible information in recognizable words, in addition to a coded database, was pointed out in 1986 by Jean-Philippe Genet, who ruefully described how his early work on a prosopography of medieval English authors on the basis solely of a coded database set up for statistical analysis ‘did not meet with universal applause’. If he stated a conclusion about 47% of his authors, his audience was glassy-eyed about the statistic but wanted to know the names and details of the 47%, something he was unable to provide:

Clearly, all this meant that a prosopographical study, whatever the sophistication of its statistical apparatus, had to be accommodated by a dictionary easy to read, not coded, but in natural language: therefore a numerically coded database, though a necessary tool for statistical purposes, is not enough.<sup>30</sup>

The exact order or timing in which tasks in prosopography should be carried out, and the relative importance accorded to each, will inevitably vary from project to project. The important thing is to be aware of what the necessary steps are and not to omit any of them. Broadly speaking, of the two stages of prosopography – creation and exploration – the first is the most critical since it is the foundation of the whole. It consists of three multi-layered steps.

The first step is to define the group or groups to be studied, to determine the sources to be used from as wide a range as possible, and to formulate the questions to be asked. The answers to these preliminary questions will furnish the basic data categories of the work, such as names, birth and family details, career outline.

The second step is to establish an Index of Names consisting of a numbered list of all the name forms occurring in the sources, and then to create an Index of Persons from the Index of Names by identifying the different individuals among the mass of name records.

<sup>29</sup> Jane Speedy and the ‘Unassuming Geeks’, ‘Writing With the Unassuming Geeks Group’, *The British Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 2:2 (2006), 29-39; Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon, *Doing Collective Biography* (Open University Press, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Jean-Philippe Genet, ‘The PROSOP system’, *History and Computing*, ed. Denley et al. (1987), p. 192.



In the third step, a biographical catalogue or lexicon for the whole group is created by adding to the file of each individual a summary account of the biographical data derived, according to the 'questionnaire', from the primary sources; at the same time the data are entered into a relational database in a form suitable for subsequent multi-variable analysis. This requires that the data are broken up into small, atomic, units. Although this treatment will facilitate subsequent analysis, it means that the data are divorced from their original context in the source material. Wherever possible, therefore, the first requirement is a qualitative database containing transcripts or other relevant reproductions of the source material, independent of but linkable to the subsequent quantitative database.

Prosopography cannot exist without the individualization of each person in the subject population and the provision of basic biographical information about him or her. What type of data is collected and how it is organized for use in the database and the lexicon will have been pre-determined by the 'questionnaire' established at the start. In addition to basic biographical or demographical data, such as dates of birth and death, parentage, marriage and issue, location,<sup>31</sup> other data may be required, relating, for example, to career, intellectual life, culture or religion, according to the type of population under study and the available sources. Prosopography is entirely dependent on its sources, which have to be carefully assessed in advance; questions can only be asked that the sources are capable of answering by supplying the required type of data. The researcher thus needs to make a well-defined selection of data that will be extracted from the sources by means of a preliminary 'data-capturing' questionnaire.

The questionnaire is therefore a key part of the preparation of a prosopography. Its importance was expressed in an essay on the biographical approach to history by early modernist Sir John Neale, all the more striking for having apparently written in ignorance of the prosopographies produced by the classicists:

I state the obvious when I say that we cannot fully understand the nature and functioning of any human group without knowing about the individuals who compose it. This knowledge must come from a series of biographies. But that is not all. We must first know what questions we hope to answer from the biographies, and if at all possible the necessary information must be got. This is a very different proposition from writing ordinary biographies. Indeed, we may have very little interest in the in the usual contents of a biography. Some of the facts we seek may be difficult to come by; they may seem insignificant and in themselves dull. Once more I may be stating the obvious; but not without provocation. The historians on Colonel Wedgewood's committee dealing with the biographical study of Parliament could never get this fundamental thesis home, and he went on compiling biographies without the preliminary enunciations of questions. Such procedure prevents the vital, broad questions being answered; and the answering of these is in my view the principal – I would almost say the sole – justification for the prodigal labour of compiling hundreds of biographies. All facts are not born free and equal. They may be to the antiquary, but not to the historian.

<sup>31</sup> As Hélène Millet, 'From sources to data: the construction of a prosopographical data bank', *History and Computing*, ed. P. Denley and D. Hopkin (Manchester, 1987), p. 63, said: 'we cannot say that there are any prosopographical data; what is given and cannot be altered is biographic'.

When the same questions are asked and – if possible – answered in each biography, the results can and should be summarized and given in tabular form as statistics [...]. It is from these tables, plus the biographies and all the direct evidence commanded by previous scholars, that we can hope to fashion a new and illuminating interpretation of our subject.<sup>32</sup>

The researcher must record the rationale behind the questionnaire and any changes made to it. In rejecting the attempt of one German school to define the second, analytical, stage of prosopography as a distinct process of *historische Personenforschung*, Neithard Bulst took the point further when he wrote:

Because if it is true that the collection and the exploitation of data are two distinct stages, they are by the choices that they imply in reality so closely interdependent that the envisaged exploitation defines the rules of the data collection, and the manner of bringing together the data limits from the start the possibilities of their exploitation. Since outside ancient history and the early medieval period exhaustive registering of data is impossible, the collection of prosopographical data can only reasonably be done in well-defined conditions and with a precise questionnaire. That implies that one must proceed from the outset on the basis of a selection of data for collection. It is generally impossible to exploit straightforwardly older, and often also more recent, prosopographical catalogues, and still less analyses differentiated in quantitative terms based on such works, for the simple reason that the criteria of this or that catalogue are often opaque. For all statistical exploitation it is indispensable, for example, to know whether certain lacunae are due to gaps in the tradition, or to the absence of a systematic exploitation, or to a deliberate choice of data-entry. In short, the collection of prosopographical data presupposes a standardized taking of data that corresponds to the questions posed, while the catalogue subsequently established must give as explicitly as possible the criteria of selection and the lacunae in the base documentation, so that it can maintain some measure of usefulness in different contexts.<sup>33</sup>

Once the data sought by the questionnaire have been entered into different categories associated with person files, the assembled data can be assessed (for relative completeness and quality of information) in relation to the second, analytical stage. Here the ‘answers’ to the preliminary questionnaire may yield an analytical questionnaire, or final set of historical questions that the researcher can address to the dataset created by the initial questionnaire. The data selected at this stage will form the variables required for multi-variate analysis. The distinction between these two stages in relation to the questionnaire is likely to be greatest where the available data are most abundant. For poorly documented periods or groups the researcher is likely to want to record any data found, even if they fall outside the categories established by the initial questionnaire. It is possible to modify the questionnaire so as to include further categories of information, should the sources permit, or to reduce categories, as well as to collect extraneous information of possible but as yet undetermined interest, but since the final analyses are determined by the results of the preceding questionnaire(s), it is important that all decisions relating to data-collection and associated questionnaires are carefully recorded.

<sup>32</sup> J. E. Neale, ‘The biographical approach to history’, in *Idem, Essays in Elizabethan History* (New York, 1958), pp. 229-34.

<sup>33</sup> Bulst, ‘Objet et méthode’, 472-3.

Anna Beerens gave a clear account of how these various elements come together in relation to her study of Japanese intellectuals. Her book includes a substantial section containing the biographical profiles of 173 individuals, laid out as a set of fields, such as name, date of birth, with short data attached (the answers to the questionnaire), followed by a brief 'biographical sketch', and then a section called 'literature', in which she gives bibliographical references. As to how this can be used in relation to Stone's definition of prosopography, she gives the following account:

The biographical profiles contain a small life history and a set of data concerning dates of birth and death, birthplace, social status, source(s) of income and activities, teachers, pupils, members of their 'personal cell' and other first order zone contacts. [...] It seems clear that the dates of birth and death can assist us in gaining insight into generational structures and questions of age distribution. Data concerning location and status can provide insight into geographical and social mobility. Data concerning these individuals' intellectual relationships (including teachers and pupils) should yield information on intellectuals' networks and dominant figures within these networks. Then, of course, data should be 'juxtaposed and combined' in order to find correlations, for instance between age and relationships or location and activities [...] do we [...] find that relationships are mostly with people of the same age group, the same social status, the same or comparable intellectual interests, the same place of birth or perhaps even some striking combination of a number of these factors? Do we find that certain activities are limited to a specific age group, to certain types of employment or certain status groups? Do we find that people travel to a specific location or even a specific teacher for certain activities?<sup>34</sup>

A particularly lucid introduction to the composition of the questionnaire underpinning the biographical dossier has been furnished by H  l  ne Millet, who also offered some reflections on the challenging but important task of producing these dossiers. Since individuals are the primary material of prosopography, all historians of social groups find themselves elaborating biographical notices. The repeated use of the biography of the same person led her to speculate about the finality of prosopography and the way in which the production of the biographical notices affects the conduct of research. Although they are closely intertwined, it is useful to distinguish what are really two different tasks.<sup>35</sup>

Once completed, the study of a social group is presented as a compilation of data matched with commentaries. But the historian must also reckon to furnish the proof of his assertions, and hence to justify his ideas by mentioning his sources. Moreover, unlike the sociologist, he does not have to keep his inquiries anonymous, and he can complement his study with a biographical catalogue. But here again the question is raised as to the form the articles should take: should he content himself with producing the completed questionnaires, accompanied by references, or should he go to the trouble of writing traditional notices (in connected literary prose) for each individual in the dossier?... The first option, which conforms to the requirement to provide proofs, is easier to put into effect, but it also involves leaving out some interesting data – so laboriously acquired! – that does not fit the question-

<sup>34</sup> Anna Beerens, *Friends, Acquaintances, Pupils and Patrons: Japanese Intellectual Life in the Late Eighteenth Century: A Prosopographical Approach* (Amsterdam, 2006), p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> H. Millet, 'Notice biographique et enqu  te prosopographique', *M  langes de l'  cole fran  aise de Rome. Moyen Age – Temps modernes. T. 100, 1988, 1, La prosopographie. Probl  mes et m  thodes*, 87-111.

naire structure. If one chooses the second option, it is as well to appreciate the scale of the undertaking'.<sup>36</sup>

As she goes on to point out, the writing of the notices should conform to the requirements of the method, that is, one should not attempt a full account of all available data, or a full biographical essay. The notices should each contain a summary account of the questionnaire responses so that they can be read in relation to the whole group; they must 'at the same time serve as justification for the study of the group and constitute a reservoir of information for the historical community'.<sup>37</sup>

The inevitable inequalities in the size and richness of the biographical notices are particularly noticeable in the older prosopographies produced by ancient historians, such as PIR and PCBE.<sup>38</sup> It was partly a reaction to this tradition that inspired Dion Smythe to move towards the factoid-based approach which inverts the centripetal biographical lexicon at the core of traditional prosopography in favour of a centrifugal approach in which biographies have to be constructed by combining multiple linked records. In fact, the tensions here are somewhat artificial. Of course, prosopography is not biography and there is therefore no reason why the biographical notice should attempt in any way to mirror the art of biography. But one should not necessarily abandon an attempt to provide a summary biographical notice in natural language simply because the task is time-consuming and occasionally repetitive. Such notices serve to summarize the information collected on the individuals in the group and perform the valuable functions of a quick and easy-to-use reference tool; additionally, they can provide an appropriate place to rehearse reasons for certain decisions, notably in regard to problems of identification. They are straightforward accounts of an often complex collection of data which can be, or have been, coded into relational tables. Within a database structure these 'biograms' can be written to reflect the data categories in such a way as themselves to become susceptible to searching and querying.<sup>39</sup>

A *review of terminology* imposes itself at this point. So far, and throughout my earlier Introduction, I have used a number of different ways of describing the same thing – biographical dictionary/lexicon/register, notice/dossier/profile. Such inconsistency has been a deliberate reflection of current usage. But perhaps the time has come to suggest a more uniform approach. Prosopography should have a distinct meaning for historians working now. It needs to be divorced both from its earlier meanings and from collective biography, which is a distinct entity; moreover, the term 'collective biography' now has an extended meaning in the realm of psychotherapy that is unrecognizable to historians. No term of art serves any useful purpose unless everyone concerned knows what it means.

Biography is a range of techniques within a distinct literary and historical tradition.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 88-9.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Pietri and Luce Pietri deliberately omitted St Ambrose of Milan from their *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire. II Prosopographie de l'Italie chrétienne (313-604)* (Paris, 1999), on the grounds that his biography would have required a separate volume (p. vii).

<sup>39</sup> As I have done in the Continental Origins of English Landholders 1066-1166 prosopographical database. For a full description see the downloadable file at [www.coelweb.co.uk/coeldatabase.html](http://www.coelweb.co.uk/coeldatabase.html).

Prosopography is a tool for the organization and interrogation of biographical data. Biography and biographical data are not the same; though prosopography and collective biography share elements of comparative biography, this should not be used in definition because it confuses the purpose of prosopography with that of collective biography. The great prosopographical corpora or lexica of 'traditional' prosopography are collective biographies on one level, and yet as a preparatory stage to prosopographical analysis they remain distinct from the didactic collections otherwise so named.

The terms biographical dictionary or lexicon are ultimately not too helpful either. Originally used by 'traditional' prosopographers of the ancient world, the label continues to be used in differentiating between the two stages expected by exponents of modern prosopography, the initial creation of a person register and the subsequent analysis of a combined dataset. Of the two stages, the first can stand alone, but the second cannot exist without the prior creation of the other: both are prosopography.

Finally, whatever form the different entries – the biographical notice or profile – take, they are written neither as full biographies (which would require a volume each) nor as dictionary entries as those are normally understood. Would it not be best, then, to use the word biogram, adopting for this specific purpose a word so used in Eastern Europe?<sup>40</sup>

## **II Naming and Identity**

### *1. Identity, Individualization and Identification*

Prosopography is concerned with certain groups of people sharing certain common characteristics. The group is analysed through the study of its constituent parts, the different people who make up the set. So, at the heart of all prosopography lies the issue of identity, that is, the individualization of the separate persons in a mass of data relating to a group or groups – something it is much easier to state as obvious than to achieve in practice. The basis of a prosopographical dataset is an initial register of references to people occurring within the sources being exploited. Such references are called name records, whether or not they include a personal name. The first imperative is to establish a chronology by identifying leading persons such as office-holders for whom dates can most easily be determined, since these identifications will act as a cornerstone for others. From the classical lists of office-holders to the more ambitious modern inquiries into the group mechanics of the lower orders, the basic requirement is always that each individual in the group is identified. This does not necessarily mean that his/her personal name can be determined, or that s/he can be logged in our databases with 'his/her name'. Many ancient and medieval prosopographies are populated by Anonymous 1, Anonymous 2, and so on, with little loss of analytical content. As Dion Smythe puts it elsewhere in this book (p. 129), the 'central problem of history and prosopography' is

<sup>40</sup> See above, p. 16; Neškudla, p. 257.

what makes an individual and how are individuals related to primary sources? For the prosopographer, the limit of an individual is that they must be mentioned in the primary source and they must have at least one attribute – doing something, having something done to them or being described in some way. What is perhaps surprising to the non-prosopographer is that there is no need for a name: unlike onomastics, prosopography copes happily with crowds of Anonymi.<sup>41</sup>

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? 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 extremely rarely posed by historians. The anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers complained in 1976 that an anthropological account of the history of naming systems in Europe was still to be written. Since then there has been a growing interest in the study of names and naming within the separate disciplines of anthropology, onomastics and history. Work is very much still in its preliminary stages, but at least we now have a context of specialized insights in which to work. As Stephen Wilson, whose book *The Means of Naming* broke new ground in aiming to give a history of naming systems in western Europe from Roman times to the present, pointed out, historians have tended not to be interested in the names of those they study. Where more information about them is available, historians are apt to get their names wrong by attempts at modernization and vernacularization of the spelling, as well as to invent 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’.<sup>42</sup>

The first duty of any historian seeking to use prosopography must be to reflect on the nature of names and naming. If, as we have said, we need not insist on being able to discover his or her name in order to be able to include someone as an individual in our database, what apart from the name distinguishes one person from any other? In order to answer such questions we have first to understand how a name functions, both in relation to personal identity and in relation to the way it is used. There are at least three parties involved. The first is the name-bearer, or referent, whose name it is; the second is the party who bestows the name on the referent, usually soon after his or her birth; 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, had two sons by his wife Goda; the eldest, Geoffrey, known as Geoffrey of Bramfield because he was steward of Bramfield, and the younger, Robert Malet. On the death

<sup>41</sup> The essay by David Pelteret examines in detail the importance of *anonymi* to prosopographical research based on sparse or lacunary data (below, pp.185ff.).

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Wilson, *The Means of Naming* (London, 1998), Preface, p. x.

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 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 [...] Afterwards the grateful father gave half of his lands and tenements to his brother Robert Malet, who held them well and peacefully throughout his life 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 (etc).<sup>43</sup>

We can highlight a number of features of this unusually rich document. 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 personal 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 had acquired the Norman name Geoffrey in recognition of his status as a landholder and passed his adopted name to his eldest son. The narrator gives us the reason for the younger Geoffrey's assumption of the toponymic byname *de Bromfield*, and shows that a byname (a second name-element specific to one person) used to distinguish one son from another could subsequently become a heritable surname for that son's descendants.<sup>44</sup> Note also that the reader is assumed to understand the reference to Earl Hugh and King Henry without further information. Fortunately for us, Earl Hugh Bigod of Norfolk and his tempestuous relationship with Henry II are well enough known for there to be no doubt as to their identity, which can therefore provide a clue as to the dating of the story; had the earl in question been Hugh's brother-in-law, one of a long series bearing the name and style of Aubrey earl of Oxford, we should have had far greater difficulty at this remove in time.

As to the rest of the story, it is especially significant 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 his wife, who never held the manor in dower. Even though the unnamed son played a key, if oblique, role in the story, these persons are not important to what is being written, which is an account of how these tenements descended from Alfwy to his great-grandchildren, and hence it is not necessary to record their names. Their existence, their individuality as issue and spouse of Geoffrey, is, however, noted. These people are described in terms of their relationship to other persons; these descriptions then become 'descriptors' acting as

<sup>43</sup> *Sibton Abbey Cartularies and Charters*, Part III, ed. P. Brown (Woodbridge, 1987), no. 817.

<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, he does not give us a reason for the byname of Alfwy's 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.

proxy names. They can be entered into our databases as distinct individuals, even though anonymous, and we can even record a modest amount of information about them.

This story gives us objective evidence of the information-bearing value of names, and their function in relation to personal and group identity; most importantly of all it reveals that at all stages we are entirely dependent on what information the writer of the written record chooses to tell us.

## *II.2 What's in a Name?*

A name-bearer will be named, that is, have had a personal name given to him, be known by a name in a formal social situation, be identified or 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 a Babylonian governor of the city of Uruk at the end of the third century BC is mentioned who is named as 'Anu-uballit whose other name is Kephalon who is called [unreadable] in the mouth of the family'.<sup>45</sup> In other words, this locally important man had official names, both Babylonian and Hellenic, that reflected his status and the political aspirations of a Babylonian family in a Greek-dominated world;<sup>46</sup> moreover, he had in addition a more informal or 'pet' name by which he was known in his own home to his own family.<sup>47</sup> Exactly the same thing occurs today and without doubt it also occurred in the medieval period. At a time when formal personal names were often given for reasons combining respect for kindred, especially ancestors, and inheritance, it was not uncommon for children (including those who survived infancy and those who did not) in the same family to share the same personal name. This can pose major problems for the historian encountering them in the written record, but there was no problem in the family, for they did not use the same name to address each child. Addressing someone and referring to someone either in speech or writing are not the same thing; nor, as we shall see, are description, designation and denomination, all of which are features of the functions of names. 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, to be distinguished from 'appellation', which functions as a designation for a group or class of objects. As anthroponomist Cecily Clark put it:

<sup>45</sup> S. Sherwin-White and A. Kurth, *From Samarkhand to Sardis. A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* (London, 1993), p. 151. I am grateful to Domagoj Gladic, a fellow member of *Netzwerk Intefereenz Onomastik* ([www.nio-online.net](http://www.nio-online.net)), for this reference.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153: 'Position and philhellenism go hand in hand... only a limited number of families took Greek names; people who were sufficiently assimilated to be prepared to adopt a Greek name, or to see advantages in doing so – in other words, members of propertied élites who in the hellenistic period practised a degree of self-hellenisation to preserve or acquire political rank'. There are echoes here of Alwfy-Geoffrey's situation in post-Conquest England. For papers on intercultural onomastics see [www.nio-online.net](http://www.nio-online.net)

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151: 'His third name is a 'pet' or 'family' name, common in most human societies and used in ancient Babylonia', citing J. J. Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung* (Leipzig, 1939).



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.<sup>48</sup>

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. 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 always have a personal name.<sup>49</sup> 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 name variation and homonymity in our records, and in what sense can we identify an unnamed person, and how? Before we can consider such questions we have to inquire further into the meaning and function of names, their relation to identity, and the whole question of the classification of names in a name system. At best such an inquiry here, into an endlessly fascinating, and above all key area of human experience, will be superficial and inevitably skewed by my own preoccupations as an English medievalist writing from a conservative West European perspective, but if it serves to awaken the consciousness of the richness of names as phenomena and as historical evidence that so often appears to be lacking in historical writing, then it will at least be worth doing.<sup>50</sup>

#### *a. Function and Meaning*

Personal names are a cultural constant. All human beings have them (save some infants who have died shortly after birth). 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. Onomastics or onomatology are disciplines founded in linguists for the study of the origins and forms of proper names, or the origins and forms of the terms use if specialized fields. Anthroponymy is a branch of onomatology concerned with anthroponyms, the names

<sup>48</sup> Cecily Clark, 'Socio-economic status and individual identity', *Words, Names and History. Selected Writings of Cecily Clark*, ed. Peter Jackson (Cambridge, 1995), pp.100-113, here p.109.

<sup>49</sup> Richard D. Alford, *Naming and Identity: A Cross-Cultural Study of Personal Naming Practices* (New Haven, CT, 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'.

<sup>50</sup> With numerous exceptions, including the ground-breaking *Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne* project which we shall encounter below. As Cecily Clark, op. it., pp. 112-3, said: 'It is no accident that over the last two decades some of the most valuable work on medieval personal-naming has been carried out by interdisciplinary teams led by scholars who are primarily historians, not linguists. For it is often the historian who suspects, indeed hopes, that acquiring onomastic information about some enigmatic personage may throw light upon his or her geographical origins or family background. It is therefore by working within that sort of framework that we, as anthroponymists, can be most effective as members of the wider scholarly community'.

borne by humans. Most naming words denote impersonal objects such as bird, house, man, and are known as ‘common names/nouns’ or ‘appellatives’. Where such words are the names of specific objects like Mont Blanc, Lisbon or Winston Churchill, they are called ‘proper names’. These terms originate from a distinction made by Greek writers for whom *ὄνομα κύριον* (*ónoma kuriou*), rendered in Latin by *nomen proprium* meant a ‘genuine name’, or name more genuinely such than other names. Such names were distinguished from *προσηγορία* (*proségoria*) or ‘appellative’, that is, the general names, or common nouns, to which bird and house belong.<sup>51</sup> We can think of this also as the difference between a personal name, Winston Churchill, and an impersonal name, man. Once a name is a personal name it becomes individualized. Once it is individualized it enters the realm of identification.

Names are not necessarily composed of a single word, but may be formed from a set of words, which denotes 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’, ‘given’ or ‘personal’, name in a typical Western personal name set is ‘proper’ in that it will always refer directly to the referent; an additional name (‘second’, ‘last’ or ‘surname’) will normally locate the referent in a larger group such as a family. Additional names can become formalized into recognizable and required parts of a person’s proper name. At an earlier stage of the evolution of the modern system the second name-element was sometimes a byname, a name that was as individual to the referent as the given name. Unlike family names or surnames, bynames are not heritable.<sup>52</sup> A majority of people now have in addition to their given name or names an additional or ‘sur’name which associates them in some way with their birth family, or perhaps, in the case of women, their family by marriage. Linguistically, such names belong to a group called common proper names. Once they are applied to an individual they form part of his or her proper, i.e. personal, name.

The question of whether or not names have meaning has exercised philosophers and logicians for centuries. A frequent starting point nowadays is John Stuart Mill’s observation that ‘Proper names are meaningless marks set upon things to distinguish one from another’; opposing viewpoints have proposed that names are ‘semantically reduced’ and have limited meanings, and that names have a maximum of meaning.

<sup>51</sup> Sir Alan H. Gardiner, *The Theory of Proper Names: A Controversial Essay* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Oxford, 1954), p. 4. For the problems with the linguistic terminology (as in so many areas of onomastics), see W. F. H. Nicolaisen, ‘Name and appellative’, in *Namenforschung / Name Studies / Les noms propres. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Onomastik / An International Handbook of Onomastics / Manuel international d’onomastique*, ed. E. Eichler, G. Hilty, H. Löffler, H. Steger, Hugo, L. Zgusta (3 vols., Berlin and New York, 1995-6), pp. 384-93, who observes, p. 386, that ‘Grammarians seem to be using indiscriminately the terms *name* and *proper name* for the same onomastic item although there appears, in modern usage, to be no category of names which are not proper; older usage contrasts proper names and common names’. For him, the problems arising in the linguistic classification system from the terms *nomen/name/noun* has deprived (p. 385) ‘the name scholar of a sound base from which to begin the construction of a “theory of names”...If the linguistic dilemma is frustrating, its onomastic counterpart is crippling’.

<sup>52</sup> Compare Willy Van Langendonck, ‘Name systems and name strata’, in *Namenforschung*, pp. 485-9, at p. 488-9: ‘Individual names are personal names that designate individual people. They divide into first names (forenames, Christian names) and bynames (all other individual personal names). A collective name refers to a group of persons that stand in a special relation to each other, e.g. a family. We use the term ‘surname’ for a byname or collective name that is added to, i.e. modifies an individual personal name’.

Much of the argument hinges on how the word ‘meaning’ is understood in cognitive terms.<sup>53</sup> Does a name have intrinsic significance, the power to define or denote itself alone, or extrinsic significance, the power to both denote (refer directly to) and connote (signify indirectly or suggest) its bearer? Sir Alan Gardiner, one of Mill’s admirers, observed that: ‘If “meaning” be taken to signify simply “exchange value”, then obviously all proper names have meaning, since they are words and every word is a sound sign standing for something, this something being its “exchange value”’.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, whereas common names have meaning – i.e. significance – 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: ‘Ordinary words, among which general names play a prominent part, directly convey information; proper names merely provide a key to information’.<sup>55</sup> Consider the difference between ‘large dog’ and ‘Fido’. Gardiner distinguished between disembodied names (‘there were several Marys in the room’), and embodied proper names which identify one individual and are of ‘the sort [...] that is exclusively employed of, and tied down to, a particular person or place’.<sup>56</sup>

Bringing far greater clarity to the issue, onomatologist Wilhelm Nicolaisen has observed that:

While semantically words have meaning and names have content, functionally words connote and names denote: put somewhat differently, words include, comprehend, embrace, whereas names exclude, isolate, individualise. More than any other quality, the functional aspects of names remind us that it is not necessary to understand a name in order to use it competently, but that it is essential to know it.<sup>57</sup>

Names obviously have meaning or significance by the mere fact of their existence – names, whether of people, places, seas, mountains, streets and so forth, are given to things which are of interest to their name-givers.<sup>58</sup> Names once bestowed have a power of their own:

Indeed that landscape out there is structured for us through the place names we know; that society round us is systematised for us through the personal names we have acquired. Anonymity may be permissible but namelessness is not.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic* (London, 1843); Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA, 1972); Keith Donnellan, ‘Proper names and identifying descriptions’, in *Semantics of Natural Language* (Dordrecht, 1972), ed. D. Davidson and G. Harman, pp. 356-79; Otto Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar* (London, 1924; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1964).

<sup>54</sup> Gardiner, *Theory of Proper Names*, p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 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.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> Nicolaisen, ‘Names and appellatives’, p. 390.

<sup>58</sup> Langendonck, ‘Name systems’, p. 485: ‘In essence, proper names are exclusively bestowed upon entities that are of interest to people’.

<sup>59</sup> Nicolaisen, ‘Names and appellatives’, pp. 389-90.

### b. Identity

As historians we do not need to pursue the intractable complexities of philosophical name theory,<sup>60</sup> though it is important to be aware of them. Noting the broad philosophical accord with the anthroponymist Cecily Clark, whose views that personal names uniquely identify was cited earlier, we can turn instead to the ground-breaking work by the anthropologist 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 the Highland Scots, the Lapps, the Serbs and the Yakut in Europe.

Alford makes several vital observations about personal naming practices which have relevance for the historical societies studied by historians. 'In all societies, individuals typically receive a name or a set of names, and in no society are names applied unsystematically or randomly'.<sup>61</sup> The name is directly linked to identity, both social identity and self-identity:

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.<sup>62</sup>

Personal names are inextricably bound up with a sense of identity: if asked 'who are you?' most people will respond with their names; which of their names they use will reveal a great deal about their sense of self-identity and their relationship to, or view of, their interlocutor. 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.<sup>63</sup> Names can locate a child in a specific birth family and a wider kindred, and they can be used to indicate illegitimacy; they can reflect social status – some names are known to be exclusive to nobles, others to slaves, for example – as well as the social aspirations of the parents and their hopes or intentions for the child; the choice of an ancestral name can indicate the child's position as heir to a patrimony or office.<sup>64</sup> If the primary function of personal names is to distinguish, in practice they do very much more. 'They often reflect ethnopsychologi-

<sup>60</sup> Much of which can appear counter-intuitive and frankly unhelpful. See the critique by Ernst Hansack, 'Das Wesen des Namens', in *Namenarten und ihre Erforschung*, pp. 51-65. I can, however, recommend an online paper by JeeLoo Liu, 'The two-component theory of proper names and Kripke's puzzle', which provides references to the key texts in philosophical name theory, <http://faculty.fullerton.edu/jeelooliu/Kripke%20Puzzle.htm> (accessed 5 February 2007). There is a useful summary by Orrin F. Summerell, 'Philosophy of proper names', in *Namenforschung*, pp. 368-72.

<sup>61</sup> Alford, *Naming*, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, P. R. C. Weaver, *Familia Caesaris: a Social Study of the Emperor's Freedmen and Slaves* (Cambridge, 1972); *Id.*, 'The status of children in mixed marriages', in B. Rawson ed., *The Family in Ancient Rome* (London, 1986), pp. 145-69; L. Feller, 'L'anthroponymie de la servitude en Italie centrale aux VIIIe-IXe siècles', in *Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne, t.V, L'anthroponymie de la dépendance*, ed. M. Bourin et P. Chareille (Tours, 2002), P. Franklin, 'Normans, saints and politics: forename choice among fourteenth-century Gloucestershire peasants', *Local Population Studies*, 36 (1986), 19-26; C. A. Cody, 'Naming, kinship and estate dispersal: notes on slave family life on a South Carolina plantation', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 39 (1982), 192-211. For a general survey see F. Zonabend, 'Le nom de personne', *L'Homme*, 20 (1980), 7-23.

cal conceptions of the self. They occasionally link an individual to a place or a caste. And, in societies in transition, they reflect a cultural dualism'. In particular they emphasize family membership and family continuity.<sup>65</sup> Such ideas are shared by historians such as Iris Shagrir, who considers 'the personal name a valuable, though indirect, indicator of the individual's social and cultural affiliation'.<sup>66</sup> According to Françoise Zonabend, 'The combination of all names possessed by a person is an aggregation of his/her identity... a message for decoding'.<sup>67</sup> The *Nomen et Gens* [Name and Clan] project is subtitled 'Personal names as indicators of the linguistic, ethnic, social and cultural group affiliations of their bearers'.<sup>68</sup> Names, in short, bestow social identity and create personal identity.<sup>69</sup>

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.<sup>70</sup> This is true irrespective of whether or not the original semantic 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.<sup>71</sup> 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 that conveyed in the name 'Rose'. The most common information imparted by a personal name is the sex of the bearer, as has been noted by anthroponymists and anthropologists.<sup>72</sup> If it were not so, our work as historians would become impossibly difficult.

Technically, we should think of assigning a name as an act of denomination, or that a

<sup>65</sup> Alford, *Names and Identity*, pp. 54-5.

<sup>66</sup> Iris Shagrir, *Naming Patterns in the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Oxford, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> F. Zonabend, 'Le nom de personne', 17-18.

<sup>68</sup> *Nomen et gens: Personennamen als Indikatoren für sprachliche, ethnische, soziale und kulturelle Gruppenzugehörigkeiten ihrer Träger*, www.nomen-et-gens.de.

<sup>69</sup> '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 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"' (Rachel Locker McKee and David McKee, 'Name Signs and Identity in New Zealand Sign Language', in *Bilingualism and Identity in Deaf Communities*, ed. Melanie Metzger (Washington DC, 200), p. 1.)

<sup>70</sup> Alford, *Naming*, p. 59.

<sup>71</sup> As Cecily Clark, *op. cit.*, note 48, p. 101, observed, '...names work differently from items of common vocabulary. The denotation of a "name" has by definition become divorced from its etymological meaning and focused upon some extra-linguistic entity. This is so whether or not a name-form remains lexically transparent: no one expects to find cattle wading the river at Oxford or Mr Smith toiling over an anvil. [...] The meaning of a name is always extra-linguistic, that of a personal name being primarily a social one'.

<sup>72</sup> Alford, *Naming*, 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 48], p. 104: 'All our West-European traditions use baptismal-name vocabularies that distinguish the sexes'.

name denotes something, that is, refers specifically to or signifies directly. In fact, as we shall see, it is often more apt to consider personal naming in relation to description, rather than the more rigid ideas of denomination and denotation. Names in some way describe the referent, often because they have connotations (and hence significance or meaning) for the name-giver that were conferred upon the name-bearer. The ancestors of many modern surnames were 'unique descriptions' devised by record-keepers to denote specific persons.<sup>73</sup> This notion of description applied to a name or set of names should not be confused with the lexical meaning of names, even where these remain transparent, as in Mont Blanc (white, i.e. snow-capped, mountain), because most proper names are now traditional and lack connection to their original lexical meanings.

It is clear, then, that names may reasonably be taken to have meaning, not in the way that words or appellatives do, but because they require 'content', that is, their purpose is to signify or identify a specific individual.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, they bestow social identity in the act of being given, and they 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 functions: differentiation and categorization.<sup>75</sup>

He goes to state the general principle that naming systems will evolve means both to categorize and to differentiate.<sup>76</sup> 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 bearing the same name – a system of bynames 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).<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Zofia Kaleta, 'The evolutionary stages of Slavic surnames in the context of European name-giving', *Onoma*, 29 (1989), 11-25.

<sup>74</sup> According to Nicolaisen, op. cit., p. 388, the required significance of names is not lexical, but is its 'onomastic meaning' [the denotation of a specific person], or 'name content'.

<sup>75</sup> Alford, *Naming*, p. 69.

<sup>76</sup> Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris, 1962), chapters 6-7, observed that the proper name serves to identify, to classify and to signify.

<sup>77</sup> Alford, *Naming*, p. 73.

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 and the variety of forms very considerable. After that time changing fashions in personal names led overall to a marked decrease in the number of personal names in regular use and a consequent increase in the occurrence of homonymity. Among the most notable results were the introduction of Christian names such as John, Simon and Jordan, and the dropping of most of the old family-based Germanic personal names in favour of a more limited number borne by successful rulers such as William, Richard, Geoffrey and Bernard.

As anyone wrestling with a database of name records from virtually any period of history will discover, first or given names alone are a poor basis for an attempt at identifying individuals. The fact that by the fourteenth century in much of western Europe about a quarter of all men were named John or William, can be a major headache for historians. But for the name-bearers a sense of personal identity as individuals was not impaired by such levels of homonymity. The names had meaningful associations for both name-givers and referents, and could induce 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. One hundred and seventeen men were able to accept his invitation.<sup>78</sup> 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.

From the eleventh century onward a two-element name system developed in Western Europe, which saw a byname, or set of bynames, added to the given name. A byname is a second name-element specific to an individual. Only when the same name was passed through successive generations does it become a family name or surname. The modern surname as we know it today has evolved over several centuries. Tempting though it may seem to make, the straightforward correlation of the widespread adoption of the second name-element, or byname, with the need to assist identification of the referent of a common given name has not been borne out by research. The *Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne* [The Medieval Genesis of Modern Anthroponymy] project, led by historians Monique Bourin and Pascal Chareille, has systematically investigated the evolution of the second-name element in medieval Western Europe over a number of years and has shown that the twin processes of a contracting first-name pool and the increase in the use of a second name-element occurred independently of each other, at different paces in different places, but were driven by similar social and cultural phenomena.<sup>79</sup> As Iris Shagrir has said:

<sup>78</sup> *The Chronicle of Robert of Torigny, abbot of Mont St Michel*, ed. R. Howlett in *Chronicles of the reign of Stephen...* (4 vols., London, 1884–9), iv, Rolls Series, pp. 81–315, *sub anno* 1172.

<sup>79</sup> *Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne*, General Editors M. Bourin, and P. Chareille (5 vols., Tours, 1982–2002).

‘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 community, a sign of growing participation in public life...’<sup>80</sup>

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.

### *II.3 The Classification of Name Elements in the West European Two-Name System*

So far we have established that everyone has a name. In most Western societies these usually contain at least two elements (each of which might be composed of more than one name), and that names have both meaning and function.<sup>81</sup> In themselves names contain and convey important information relating to both individuality and identity. Such information helps us both to distinguish one person from another and to learn something about each one. Nevertheless, name evidence is not easy to collect, codify or collate and is far from easy to interpret. The reasons are various, depending as they do upon period and sources, but two main problems can be identified: the complexities of an evolving name-system viewed with hindsight from the written record, and the problems with modern name classification systems.

As may by now be obvious, the study of names is immensely complex. Name studies, known as onomastics or onomatology, is a multi-disciplinary affair. As the editors of the massive *International Handbook of Onomastics* observe:

The universe of names as objects of research lacks any clear-cut limits. The interest in names can be linguistic or philosophical, historical or contemporary, theoretical or practical, legal or political, ethnographic or religious; and in each of these and other cases, interest can concentrate on a single language, a group of languages, or a family of them.<sup>82</sup>

In fact, to be fully sensitive to peculiarities of naming practices, one needs to adopt the perspectives of the philologist (to explore etymology, pronunciation and spelling), the philosopher (in order to investigate meaning), the anthropologist (to be sensitive to naming systems, cultural peculiarities, and aspects of kinship and status), the historian (to be aware of the temporal aspects of names and the changes that occur for historical reasons such as the Norman Conquest or the adoption of Christianity), the psychologist (the personal factors involved in the adoption of certain names) and the sociologist (to take account of the reasons for changes in modern societies, including political changes). The sheer richness of the function of names in human society ought to make proper consideration of them essential to prosopographers, no one of whom will be able to encompass the different specialisms involved and their associated specialized vocabularies. Prosopography, however, is peculiarly well-placed to be an interdiscipli-

<sup>80</sup> Shagrir, *Naming Patterns*, p. 11, based upon Bourin, ‘Bilan de l’enquête’, in *Genèse* 1, pp. 245-6.

<sup>81</sup> For the labyrinthine complexity, to Western eyes, of the medieval Islamic naming system, see R. K. Jaques, p. 407 below.

<sup>82</sup> *Namenforschung*, p. xi.



nary pursuit and is frequently conducted as such, especially on the larger, team-based, projects. There would seem to be few aspects of the work where interdisciplinarity could be more fruitfully applied than in the matter of names. But there are a number of minefields to negotiate. In this section I shall try to exemplify some of the difficulties by drawing on examples from English, German and French sources.

The two-element name system, containing at least one given name and at least one family name, has been characteristic of Western societies for several centuries now. The system, which varies from country to country, has never been completely fixed, and remains susceptible to changing fashions and social norms. In England and France, for example, most people have at least one forename and a following surname, passed on by their fathers. In Spain, by contrast, the surname is composed of two elements, the first of which is the father's family name, followed by the mother's family name. One notable recent development is the trend by married women in some English-speaking cultures to stress their individuality by abandoning the tradition of adopting their husband's name on marriage, either retaining their own name instead or adding the husband's name to their birth family name to create a new composite (or double-barrelled) name. The consequences for the names of their children are not yet clear. Whether in due course an Iberian-style naming system, where the surname is a composite of father and mother's family name, will emerge in Britain and North America remains to be seen. It will also undoubtedly be the case that the names of the large numbers of migrants now arriving and settling in Europe will affect and be affected by the naming systems of their adopted countries.

Though a good deal is now known about the evolution of Western naming systems, and about the types of name that became the modern family name, or surname, a major outstanding problem is the terminology used for name forms by different commentators, who come from different scholarly disciplines, different language groups, and different naming systems. In order to limit the difficulties of a potentially complex discussion, I shall restrict what follows primarily to West European society, with particular reference to a *Handbook for the Study of Onomastics* (name studies) written in German by onomatologists, and the already mentioned long-running study of the evolution of the modern European two-name system written in French by historians, *Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne*.

The study of naming practices is still relatively young and is only relatively recently become the routinely interdisciplinary study that it needs to be, but there are major obstacles to mutual understanding, including lack of agreement about a detailed classification system and discussion of the problems in different languages. A group of German scholars have recently come together to address the issues in a book presented on his seventieth birthday to onomatologist and philologist Karlheinz Hengst, subtitled a *Handbook for the Study of Onomastics*. In his introduction Silvio Brender points out that at present the Latin terms *proprium* for *nomina propria*, personal names (*Personnenamen* in German) are used synonymously with the term *onym*, derived from Greek *onoma*, name. 'Onymie' indicates the entire name stock (the associated adjective is 'onymic'). Hence the word *onomasticon*, which originally meant name index or register, has come to mean in addition name-treasury, in other words it has subsumed

the meaning of *onymie*. *Onomastics*, from the Greek for ‘art of name-giving’, now means the study of name forms, with ‘onomastic’ as the corresponding adjective. An older term is *onomatology*, which has come in the second half of the twentieth century to compete with *onomastics*; the adjectival form is *onomatological*. This tendency for one word to assume the meaning of another is not in the interests of a clear and unambiguous terminology, the establishment of which should be a priority of the emerging discipline of the study of naming systems.<sup>83</sup>

Brendler outlines some of the problems relating to name types and their classification, including the practice common in *onomatology* of using words built on the Greek idea of *onymie* to describe names.<sup>84</sup> The advantage of this is that one can not only describe the elements of a name set, but also introduce categorization of the different semantic types of names involved; for example, some family names can be analysed according to their derivation as toponym, for place name, zoonym for animal name, hydronym for water name. A similar approach also frees us from the dilemmas involved in distinguishing the given name or (in German) *Eigennamen* (prosoponym) from any additional element without any distorting assertions about the ordering of the names. Indeed, one can understand a person’s full name as being composed of a hyperonym, referring to a full name set, of which one is the hyponym, or intimate personal name attached to an individual from his earliest days. Any name available for human use is an anthroponym. Such a system, which cheerfully permits the proliferation of neologisms, has the flexibility required to overcome the difficulties of achieving a much-needed universal system of name classification. But the ideal still falls far short of the reality because linguists and others are still not in agreement about the basics of classification, and because the Greek terms (morphemes) used are ‘too broad for terminological precision’.<sup>85</sup>

Brendler gives us an insight into the problems confronting an attempt at classification in German. For example, we have no difficulty in distinguishing between the concept of ‘name’ (*Name*) and that of ‘personal name’ (*Eigennamen*), which relate to an individual person. The problems begin when we consider the term ‘forename’ – *Vorname* (in French *prénom*) – that is, an intimate personal name, in relation to the term ‘personal name’ (*Personnenamen*), which can nowadays refer to the whole name set (forename + family name), though in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century it was used in opposition to ‘family name’ (*Familiennamen*), that is, a group name. At the same time the term ‘anthroponym’, which used to have the meaning of fore- or given name (*Rufnamen*), is now applied to any part or all of the human name set, including fore-, family-, by- or nickname, the same range of meanings as is now conveyed by ‘personal name’. Although the former usage involving the

<sup>83</sup> Silvio Brendler, ‘Namenarten und ihre Erforschung’, in *Namenarten und ihre Erforschung. Ein Lehrbuch für das Studium der Onomastik*, ed. Andrea Brendler and Silvio Brendler (Hamburg, 2004), pp. 40-1.

<sup>84</sup> On the attempted adoption of Greek-based (and some Latin-based) terminology for a name classification system and its occasional problems, see Teodulius Witkowski, *Grundebegriffe der Namenkunde* (Berlin, 1964), and Id., ‘Probleme der Terminologie’, *Namenforschung*, pp. 288ff; see also the comments by Ladislav Zgusta, ‘Names and their study’, *ibid.*, pp. 1876-92, who attributes the first elaboration of the system to Czech linguist Vladimír Šmilauer. See Jan Svoboda, V. Šmilauer, et al., ‘Grundsystem und Terminologie der slavischen Onomastik’, in *Zpravodaj Mistopisné ČSAV*, 14 (1973), 1-280.

<sup>85</sup> *Namenforschung*, p.1887.

personal–family name dichotomy was correct, it was abandoned and not adequately replaced.

None of the terms used were entirely satisfactory because they did not meet the criteria required for a standard classification system. The terminology was problematic. Which names of a person in the dichotomy ‘personal/family name’ are to be treated as person-name? Is the so-called family name not a personal name? If ‘family name’ is to be understood as conforming to the classification-criterion ‘Name of an individual family’, then what is usually signified by ‘family name’ does not conform. For example, ‘Thomas Wagner is my friend’. Here the name Wagner does not indicate the name of an individual family. It is the second element of a two element personal name. On the other hand the statement: ‘Thomas is the eldest son of the Wagner family’ does locate Thomas in a named individual family and also works as a personal name composed of given and family name.<sup>86</sup>

Another dichotomy concerns the way a personal name functions. The names Thomas and Wagner make up a classification criterion for the individual of that name. Only the name Wagner indicates group membership. Such group names occur in a wide variety of forms and themselves raise classification issues, to be discussed below. Another confounding factor is the way that names are actually used. In many periods people were known or addressed by their titles, ‘my lord Chancellor’, or by reference to a kinship role, ‘my cousin York’, rather than the more intimate given name. Although hard to categorize according to the scheme just laid out, these titles are still functioning as names because they exist in written form and are thus identifiers of specific individuals as well as modes of address (reference).<sup>87</sup>

As we have seen more than once already, the tendency of words, including technical terms, to change meaning is also problematic. Brendler points to the term ‘anthroponym’. The referent of the term ‘personal name’ can only be an individual person; hence making ‘personal name’ synonymous with ‘anthroponym’ robs the latter term of its full range of meaning. If we take anthroponym back to its Greek roots it means ‘name of a human being’ (*Menschenname*) and therefore stands for all names applied to humans, irrespective of name category. An individual personal name – a given or *Eigename* – could then be expressed with the Greek-derived term ‘prosoponym’. One can then divide a whole group of ‘names of human beings’ into two sub-groups, names of a single human – personal names (*Personnenamen*) – and names of groups of humans (*Menschengruppennamen*). The former can then be sub-divided into Forename (*Vorname*), Middlename (*Mittelname*) and Following name (*Nachname*), while the latter can be divided into family name (*Familiennamen*), kindred names (*Sippennamen*) tribal name (*Stammesnamen*) and folk names or ethonyms (*Völkernamen*).

This German solution has a certain elegance (and works in English if not in other languages) but it soon encounters major obstacles as a system aimed at an emerging discipline. The term forename, inextricably associated in English, French and German,

<sup>86</sup> Brendler, ‘Namenarten’, pp. 36-40.

<sup>87</sup> Wilson, *Means of Naming*, p. 263: ‘Titles were of the greatest significance in the hierarchical societies of early modern Europe and were generally used in both address and reference’.

with the given name, has much to commend it; it is certainly to be preferred to 'personal name', which often stands for the whole person name, or 'baptismal or Christian name', since such terminology makes assumptions which often cannot be demonstrated, however true we take them to be. On the other hand, in several societies, including modern Hungary, China and Japan, the family name comes first and the given name last. In both Spanish and Portuguese societies a person can have more than one given name and two family names, one derived from the father's family and the other from the mother's; in the former case the mother's family name appears last, in the latter it precedes that of the father. Describing the elements of a name set in terms of their order is therefore unsatisfactory.

In addition to the variety of different terms for a person's given name (the one by which he is most likely to be known by his immediate family and friends), terminology for the second element in the personal name, or rather, the additional element that locates someone in his birth family, is equally problematic. Even the term 'family' name is not wholly satisfactory because of its ambiguity when applied to women, most of whom in British society still assume the name of their husband's family upon marriage, or, more confusingly still, use different family names, their own and their husband's, in different circumstances. In some societies, such as Spanish and Portuguese, where the second-element names are composed of names taken from both father and mother, and hence, like the patronyms and metronyms of modern Iceland and Greenland or medieval Europe, vary from generation to generation, the term 'byname' or 'surname' is more appropriate than 'family' name.<sup>88</sup>

As we have seen, a major stumbling-block to an agreed name classification system is that discourse in name studies is conducted in a variety of languages which have different approaches to terminology. English, for example, uses the term 'surname' for 'family name' or name indicating group membership. In French the equivalents of English (given) name and surname are *prénom* and *nom*; the term 'nom de famille' usually means patronym, while 'surnom' means byname or nickname. In fact, English derives the term 'surname' from medieval French 'surnom'. This is because when the second name element started to appear it was a descriptive identifier rather than a heritable family name. The latter is now known in English as a 'byname', a name standing in relation to a given name in order better to distinguish the bearer; once the byname became a settled element passed from generation to generation it is called in English a 'surname'. The word 'surnom' is still used by French historians to discuss the bynames of this stage of second-name formation, notably in the studies led by the *Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne* project.

This project has highlighted many of the difficulties historians of medieval Western Europe face when dealing with name evidence from a period when the two-element name system was evolving. The important point is that the second of the two elements, which follows the given name, could be a complex structure containing one or more terms. It is generally agreed by onomatologists that bynames fall into four basic categories, each of which has contributed heritable names to the modern surname pool. They are:

<sup>88</sup> Walter Wenzel, 'Familiennamen', in Brendler and Brendler ed., *Namenarten*, p. 705.

- names derived from occupations – Baker, Smith, Chandler
- names derived from a place (toponym)
- names derived from a parent, usually the father (patronym), but occasionally the mother (metronym)
- names derived from a nickname or sobriquet (of various categories requiring further classification).

Basing their research primarily on cartulary evidence, by definition a *post factum* record of transactions compiled by a scribe for a particular recording and reference purpose, the *Genèse* team sought to distinguish ‘denomination’ – the product of a formal naming process including name and cognomen [a non-heritable byname attached to the given name, eg. Geoffrey Grisegonelle] – from ‘designation’ – a collection of divers elements attributed by a record keeper for a specific reference purpose. At some point after a transitional phase in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the divers elements that could be attributed, most notably toponyms, each became dominant hereditary surname types. The complexities of the evolving medieval system, and the problems of classification faced by modern historians, are illustrated in the table below. Despite the problems it reveals, this template provides a potentially useful coding tool not only for anthroponymists but also for prosopographers working on European records between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. In the left-hand column is the template established for their research by the *Genèse* team, and in the right-hand column is my attempt to provide the English equivalent. Although the French can be translated into a workable system in other languages, the English version attempts to highlight some of the problems encountered when transferring terminology from one language to another.

I Système à nom unique	I Single name ( <i>idionym</i> ) system
II Un nom + un désignation complémentaire	II A personal name + a complementary designation
IIa: la désignation complémentaire est d'ordre familial:	IIa : the complementary designation is familial:
IIa1: fils de	IIa1: son of ( <i>patronym</i> )
IIa2: autre relation familiale	IIa2: other family relationship
IIb: est d'ordre professionnel ou sociale (on regroupe dans cette catégorie les indications de fonction et titre: <i>Dominus Petrus</i> etc.	IIb : relates to professional capacity or status; includes indications of function and title: <i>Guillelmus armiger</i>
III: Forme anthroponymique à deux éléments:	III. Anthroponymic form with two elements:
IIIa : le surnom est un nom	IIIa: the byname/second name is a personal name eg. Geoffrey Arthur
IIIb: le surnom est une caractéristique professionnelle	IIIb: the second name refers to a profession, e.g. John Baker
IIIc: le surnom est un sobriquet, <i>Crassus, Rufus</i>	IIIc. the second name is a sobriquet/nickname, e.g. Redhead

IIIId: le surnom comporte une indication de lieu	IIIId : the second name refers to a place (toponym)
IIIe: divers	IIIe: other
IV. Forme anthroponymique complexe:	IV. Compound anthroponymic form
IVa: surnom en forme de nom et indication de lieu (soit IIIa + IIIId; ex. <i>R. Petri de Saissaco</i> )	IVa: byname contains a personal name and a toponym (i.e. IIIa + IIIId), e.g. <i>R. Petri de Saissaco</i> [this genitive form is a patronym, R. son of Peter de Saissaco]
IVb: surnom en forme de caractéristique professionnelle et indication de lieu (soit IIIb + IIIId; ex ; <i>R. textoris de Saissaco</i> )	IVb: byname refers to a profession and a place (i.e. IIIb + IIIId, e.g. <i>R. textoris de Saissaco</i> , R. weaver de Saissaco)
IVc : sobriquet et indication de lieu (soit IIIc et IIIId)	IVc : sobriquet and toponym (i.e. IIIc + IIIId)
IVd: autres solutions	IVd: other

### II.3 Working with name evidence

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 names, which holds interest for anthropologists, sociologists and historians. 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, i.e., these names, or anthroponyms, became variant name forms. At least two approaches are possible. To use terms introduced for social analysis by linguist Kenneth Pike, an etic investigation, one conducted in terms meaningful to those involved, will try to understand the etymology and morphology of these names, but an emic investigation, one that is meaningful to the observer, will try to understand from the inside how the name system worked and how the name forms were understood.<sup>89</sup>

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).

Attention to detail in recording names and their variants is so central to prosopography – especially the more remote from our own period, or the more different from our

<sup>89</sup> Rosa Kohlheim and Volker Kolkheim, 'Personennamen', in Brendler and Brendler, *Namenarten*, p. 678.

own society, the evidence on which it is based – 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.<sup>90</sup> The medieval period, which saw a change from a single-element name system to the two-element name system that has long been used in many societies world wide 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 since it is during the Middle Ages that the modern West European two-element name system evolved. 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 the principal forms taken by the second-element names, or bynames, viz occupational names, place names, patronyms and metronyms, and nicknames or soubriquets.

Unlike first names, bynames frequently have transparent semantic value. *Johannes Willelmi* [John son of William], is described according to a patronym, that is, a byname that gives us the name of John's father. *Johannes de Oxenforde* [John of Oxford] has a toponymic byname 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 s/he may occur with only one name-element. Not infrequently, a byname is itself composed of two elements: *Willelmus Faber de Grimstun*: William (the) Smith of Grimston.

Studies of corpora of name records have indicated ways that the meanings suggested by byname formations can be understood. One such was Cecily Clark's study of a large body of data relating to the medieval town of King's Lynn in Norfolk. She observed that:

Occupational bynames, like locative ones, appear in either primary or secondary position. Instances of the latter – always, presumably, indicating the actual trade practised – include the Gaywood Roll's *Ricardi Hymeyn, calwere*, Richard Hymein, calf-herd [...] [those] standing in primary place are never to be uncritically accepted at face-value. Latinized ones fall – equally with *filius*-formulas and with some locative phrases – under suspicion of being scribal contributions; in which case their evidence is excellent for economic activities, less so for colloquial name-usage.<sup>91</sup>

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*.

Some locative names denote domicile; those of the gentry often referred to a principal estate. With burgesses, on the other hand, and with some families of gentry as well, they functioned mainly as *noms d'origine*, personal or familial; locatives of this sort offer vital evidence about

<sup>90</sup> Cf. the essay by Heather Devine, below, pp. 361–86.

<sup>91</sup> Cecily Clark, 'Early personal names of King's Lynn: Part II. Bynames', p. 267.

population-movements...this type of byname, so frequent in Lynn's specifically urban records, seems to have been especially common among men who were mobile socially as well as geographically.<sup>92</sup>

The same material allowed her to make another fundamentally important point about bynames:

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.<sup>93</sup>

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.<sup>94</sup>

The modern surname can thus be understood as an 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 identify one and only one person in a specific context. Once they become formalized and unvarying – Smith, Johnson – they become proper names, divorced from any original lexical meaning, and they become family names or surnames, 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. Although our knowledge of the 'poor man's' personal identity will be impoverished if we continue to lack his name, that lack of a name can tell us something about other, named, people who occur in the same text, and about the attitudes of the scribe who referred to his existence, which it is important that we record. 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 or descriptors, that is, any byname or other description relating to an individual.<sup>95</sup> The minimum requirement for our purposes is that the description refers to an individual and permits us to identify that individual as such. Where homonyms are common and other means of individualization, such as date records or records indicating personal relationships, are lacking, there is no choice but to assume each record relates to a separate individual, however unlikely that is.<sup>96</sup> It will be clear

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. See also Z. Kaleta, 'The evolutionary stages of Slavic surnames', op. cit. note 73 above.

<sup>95</sup> This word is so used by some 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.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Dion Smythe, above, p. 135: 'There are two cardinal sins for prosopographers: fission and fusion. In fission, a single individual in history is recorded as two (or more) separate individuals; in fusion, the



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 our not knowing his personal name does not prevent our 'poor man' from 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 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 deliberately employed in order 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.

### II.3 *Preparing a Prosopographical Name Register*

So how should we set about producing a name register? The first step is to prepare the ground by some general considerations of the function of names (such as we have done in the preceding sections), and some more specific reflections on the nature of the source material we shall be using. Silvio Brendler advises us to apply a five-fold test to name evidence, which in German, but not other languages, gives the five-Ws of the science of names.<sup>97</sup> These are Why?, by Whom, to Whom or What? (*Wem/Wen/Was*), Where and When? These questions seek the reason for the form of the name, the identity of the person giving, attributing or employing the name and of the name bearer (i.e., what can we discover or deduce about either), and the localization and date of the name record. Name evidence will be of greatest value the more fully these questions are answered. When they are fully answered name data is useful for the posing of further (research) questions. However, when trying to account for name data making precise statements, as in the answers to a modern questionnaire, should be avoided. Often it is better to provide a prototype answer. For instance, one must guard against bias or inaccuracy in the reporting of names by trying to determine the relative social status of the name-attributor and the referent (was an aristocratic Benedictine monk writing about an illiterate peasant? for example). The importance of context must again be stressed. The same person may be mentioned more than once in the same text: the

opposite prevails: information about two or more individuals in the past is recorded under the heading for one individual'.

<sup>97</sup> Brendler, *Namenarten*, pp. 41-2.

exact form of the name, even if unvaried, should be noted for each occurrence. Variation or lack of variation form part of the evidence in relation to both the name itself and what it tells us about its bearer.

The solution to problems presented by name data is specific to the particular sources being used and the use to which the researcher wishes to put the data. The problems are the more intractable the older the material, since this will normally mean that data are scarcer and written in now dead languages. But if one starts out by reflecting on why name evidence is important and how we come to have it, significant steps towards laying out a useful register of name records will have been made. Success will depend on how well we incorporate contextual information into our registers. We need to remember that the data we extract represent both name forms – i.e. the functional parts of a naming system – and a statement of some sort about an individual person.

To illustrate some of the issues, let us take a selection of twelfth-century charters in which the same group of people occur in slightly different contexts. The first is a charter taken from a collection of charters belong to Colne Priory, in Essex, a cell of the abbey of Abingdon in Oxfordshire.<sup>98</sup>

William, by the grace of God archbishop of Canterbury and legate of the Holy Roman Church to all the faithful of the church and the sons situated throughout England, greetings and benedictions of God Himself.

We wish it to be known universally that all the goods and possessions and alms in the land and the tithes of the churches, liberties and any other things whatsoever that the monks of Abingdon serving God at Colne in Essex possess or shall possess by the grant of Alberic de Vere or his wife Beatrice and their posterity or other faithful persons or in any other pious fashion, are confirmed and strengthened by this our present muniment. Wherefore, the sentence which our predecessor Ralph the lord archbishop imposed upon those harming them, we corroborate by the authority of God and the lord pope and our own, and we give and concede to their benefactors confraternity with the brotherhood both of Canterbury and Abingdon. Farewell.

In this charter Archbishop William of Canterbury identifies himself by the two offices he then held, the archbishopric of Canterbury and legate of the Holy See. Such information can provide important clues as to the date of a document at a time when very few documents were dated. The charter confirms what his predecessor as archbishop, Ralph, has already confirmed. Useful information again, since churchmen, great and small alike, were usually only identified by a given name and the name of their office. We could distinguish this William from another archbishop of Canterbury by virtue of a predecessor Ralph. Hence our record concerning this William needs to record both his offices which appear in lieu of a family or byname. We should also record of Ralph both his office and that he was predecessor of William. The confirmation relates to grants said to have been given to Abingdon by Alberic de Vere and his wife Beatrice.<sup>99</sup> Beatrice is named only in relation to her husband; if she ever used her father's name, or any other byname, we know nothing of it.

<sup>98</sup> J. L. Fisher, *Cartularium Prioratus de Colne* (Essex Archaeological Society, Occasional Publications, 1, 1946), no. 13.

<sup>99</sup> The translations use the normalized vernacular form of the name de Vere, which always occurs in Latin as de Ver.

In the next charter, from the same collection, we read:

Henry king of England, to Maurice bishop of London and Gilbert abbot of Westminster and Hugo de Bochelanda and all his barons and ministers in France and England of London a thousand greetings.

Know you that I have conceded to the church of S. Mary in Abingdon, in the time of Abbot Faritius, the church of Kensington and whatever pertains to it and the land in the same village between the church and the other land of two hides from twelve and twenty acres, which Alberic de Vere gave to the aforesaid church for the soul of his dead son Geoffrey. And the aforesaid church of Abingdon shall hold that church with the land in perpetual peace and quiet.

Witnesses: Queen Matilda, and Eudo the steward, and William [de] Curci, and Nigel de Oili, and Ursone de Abetot, and Robert Malet. Near Cornbury.<sup>100</sup>

This undated charter also contains a number of clues as to its date. If we can identify the time at which King Henry and the other named persons were holding their respective offices, then we can assign a date or date-range to the charter. The names of the witnesses are equally important in this respect. In fact we can apply a relatively small date-range to both charters. In the case of the first charter, Archbishop William is otherwise well-evidenced as William de Corbeil, archbishop from February 1123, but legate from 1126 to 1130, and again from 1132 until his death on 21 November 1136. His predecessor was Ralph d'Escures, archbishop from 1114 until 20 October 1122. The second charter contains numerous clues as to date. The king is Henry I (1100-1135) and his first wife Matilda (d. 1 May 1118) is still alive; Bishop Maurice died in late September 1107; Gilbert of Westminster died 6 December 1117; Faritius, unlike the two last, was appointed only in 1101 by Henry himself; he died on 23 February 1117; Eudo the steward died in 1120 and Urso de Abetot in 1108; Robert Malet left for Normandy with the king in 1107 and never returned. Hence the charter must belong to the period 1101-1107. The fact that it was given at Cornbury might also help to narrow the date.<sup>101</sup>

Like the archbishop's, the king's confirmation also names Alberic de Vere and his wife Beatrice, offering the further information that the grant was made for the soul of their deceased son Geoffrey. So we have further information about Alberic's family, including that his son Geoffrey died before the date of this charter. Of Geoffrey we learn nothing, apart from the fact of his existence, not even whether he died as a child or an adult. None of the Colne priory charters elucidates this point, but there is another source that sheds light on this. Among the charters collected in the history of their abbey by the monks of Abingdon is the following:

Geoffrey, son of Alberic senior, brother of Alberic junior, firstborn of his brothers, and hence future successor to the paternal inheritance, renowned as much for the nobility of his character as for that of his kindred, turned to Abbot Faritius [a famous doctor] in search of healing; for he was ensnared by a serious illness. For three months the abbot laboured to cure him, but

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 3.

<sup>101</sup> Perhaps to 1105, October 18, the date of a dated charter confirming a grant to Abingdon also given at Cornbury; *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, 1, ed. H. W. C. Davis, (Oxford, 1913), no. 701.

because there is no medicine against death, another illness overcame him, compelling him to leave this life. And so, the end of his life drawing near, the sick man made a grant in perpetuity to Abingdon of a church in his patrimony at Kensington, with twelve and twenty acres of land from two hides, and a part of one virgate, with the consent of his father Alberic, his mother Beatrice and his brothers. Which gift was also confirmed by the authority of the king's edict.<sup>102</sup>

This account sheds considerable light on the origin of the gift. The original donor was in fact Geoffrey himself, a death-bed grant made in recognition for the medical care he had received, however futilely, from Abbot Faritius. The eldest son and expected heir of his father, he was clearly a young adult at the time of his death. Such information will mean that we might expect to find other references to his parents up to twenty years before this date. In fact, Alberic de Vere was one of the barons whose holdings are listed in the Domesday Book, based on a survey of 1086. The fief of his wife also occurs, though she appears as 'wife of Alberic' rather than under her personal name. At that date Alberic held Kensington in Middlesex and the manor of Colne in Essex.

The charters of Colne priory are all formal deeds of grant or confirmation. In addition to the original grants by Alberic and his wife there were associated grants by the men (and sometimes women) who were his tenants, as well as further grants by various of his descendants. Nowhere is it explained why the church of a manor in Middlesex was given to a Berkshire abbey and subsequently became the basis of a cell of the abbey in distant Essex. It was not the purpose of this series of records to enter into reasons and motivations, beyond the conventional 'for the repose of the soul of' or 'for the salvation of his soul', but merely to record what were regarded as legally binding transactions. The charters emphasize levels of jurisdiction at the expense of more personal information, as shown by the use of a given name followed by the name of the office in virtue of which authority was being exercised – king, archbishop, bishop, i.e. the descriptors in each case distinguish and categorize their bearers in terms of their function and not their family. Once again, however, we are fortunate in this case to have the History of the abbey in which we are told that Geoffrey died and was buried at Abingdon, whence his parents conceived their affection for the abbey. But their principal holdings were in Essex, a long way from Abingdon, and so the monks agreed to send some of their number to Alberic's manor of Colne and there to establish a cell of the abbey at the church of St Andrew. The Colne charters record grants that were made of land and other resources primarily in Essex by the de Vere family and those of their principal tenants. Kensington remained an endowment of the mother house.

Charters of donation will contain the names of several people linked in different ways. The links will be tenurial, familial, jurisdictional or a combination of these. The following is an extract from the first confirmation by Henry I:

To all the faithful of the church under my rule I wish it to be known that I Henry, by the grace of God king of the English, for the remission of my sins and the salvation of my soul concede to God and the church of Saint Mary in Abingdon and the church of St Andrew in Colne, which as daughter of the mother cleaves to and is subject to the church of Abingdon as a

<sup>102</sup> *Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon*, ed. J. Stevenson (2 vols., London, 1858), II, pp. 55-6.

member to the head, and I authorize to remain forever all those gifts which Alberic de Vere and his wife Beatrix and their son Alberic, with his brothers, and their men have now given or will give to the aforesaid church...the land of Almar Long and the land of Wulfwin the forester...in Hedingham two mills that Aldwin used to hold, ten solidates from the land of Adelelm of Burgate, half the tithe of Miblanc of Colne, and the third part of the tithe of Ranulf Magnus.<sup>103</sup>

The first witness was Robert bishop of Lincoln, in whose diocese the abbey of Abingdon lay. The king and the bishop represent the jurisdictional levels. On the familial level, this extract shows the potential for confusion offered by a sequence of Alberics de Ver whose careers often overlapped. The use of their titles of office, king's chamberlain and, later, earl of Oxford, is often crucial for distinguishing father from son. A given name and surname passed from father to son is not unusual in baronial families at this time, but if they do not occur together in the same document we may lack the obvious means of distinguishing one from the other that can be afforded by additional descriptors, since the scribe had no need of them. On the honorial level, we are also meeting some of the men subject to Alberic's lordship. The Englishmen both had byname descriptors, one a sobriquet (Long, meaning 'tall') and the other an occupational name, forester. Mention of Adelelm of Burgate, whose descriptor is a toponym that refers to a manor he held of Alberic de Ver in Suffolk and became a hereditary surname for his direct descendants, takes us back to an entry in Domesday Book. So too does 'Miblanc' of Colne; in Domesday Book a man named *Dimidius Blancus* in Latin, or *Demi-blanc* ('half-blond') in French held one of two manors of Colne from Alberic. Nothing more is heard of this man, but the two manors came to be distinguished as Earl's Colne, which occurs in some of these charters as Alberic's Colne, and Colne Miblanc. The association of personal names and place-names in this way can be useful evidence for the prosopographer, so thought needs to be given as to how to store such information.<sup>104</sup> The English tenants of a baron such as Alberic, who were often of low status, did not necessarily form a community of interest with his military tenants and may not have voluntarily ceded their lands or revenues. For the military, or honorial, tenants, there were firm bonds between man and lord that encouraged them to patronize their lord's foundation. The Abingdon History tells us that Abbot Faritus formally received Alberic's grant of St Andrew's Colne at the church itself, on which occasion Adelhelm of Burgate made his gift of ten solidates of land in order that he might eventually be buried there. The same record notes the names of Alberic's other sons, Alberic, Roger, Robert and William, and goes on to say that, not many years later, the first Alberic took the habit of a monk of Colne shortly before his death and was buried there.<sup>105</sup> The richness of such contextual information is entirely missing from the confirmation charters from Colne. They are nonetheless valuable, principally for the name data they contain, which can still furnish us with a great deal of information about the relative status of the people mentioned, their families and sometimes their

<sup>103</sup> *Cartularium...Colne*, 1.

<sup>104</sup> David Pelteret points out the importance of such evidence, noting though that 'Some areas of England are devoid of published place-name surveys and, as yet, there is no database of place-names containing personal names' (p. 185 below).

<sup>105</sup> *Chron. Abingdon*, II, pp. 59-60.

careers. Often the same families can be traced over a long period up to the sixteenth century, when the priory was dissolved.

There are other things to note about such evidence. One is the problem of variant orthography. The name of Alberic I's son has been given here as Geoffrey, the vernacular form of the Latin name written as *Goisfredus* or *Gosfredus*. It is etymologically distinct from Godfrey, or *Godefredus*, but at least once Geoffrey's name is so written in the Abingdon History. All variant forms should be recorded, but eventually a decision will have to be reached as to which is the preferred form. A name register may contain thousands of names, many of them relating to the same person. But a register of persons is organized according to one name for each person. The eventual decision as to the preferred, or standardized, form will be made on the basis of a number of criteria, as the sources and experience dictate, but a careful note of the basis of the decision should be kept. There is considerable orthographic variation among the Colne charters – Edwin/Eadwin, Myblank/Miblanc, Wulfini/Wulfwini/Wulwini – but the context makes clear that the same person is meant each time. The cohesion of the Colne charters makes the task relatively straightforward. Where the name data is drawn from more scattered sources the association between person names and place names can be essential aids to identification.

There is no doubt that wherever possible computerized prosopography should be based on a complete machine-readable archive of the sources, which will normally be documentary, but could also include artefacts such as coins and seals. The name register can then be linked directly to the archive. The advantages are that it is easy to check the source context of any name isolated in the name register, which facilitates the work of person identification and reduces the need for supplementary registers, such as registers of place-names. Another benefit is the ease with which the whole source archive can be searched. Producing the archive requires a considerable investment of time in transcribing or scanning in the texts, but the effort is more than compensated by the results.

The assumption these days is that any one setting out to produce a prosopography of any size will want to use a computer. This is not necessarily the best way for a beginner to start. Unless you do include an archive of sources in your database you are unlikely to develop the required familiarity with your sources if you simply enter names straight into a database table or a spreadsheet. Early ventures into prosopography should involve lots of reading of sources and the creation of a card index. For the sake of illustration here, however, we will assume that you want to start by creating a standard data file consisting of rows and columns. The resulting table expresses the answers to questions you have asked of your sources. In the case of a register of name records, the column headers – or field names – relate to name forms. Bearing in mind what we have already seen about name forms, calling our columns 'first name', 'last name', or 'family name', may not be desirable. Essentially we want to distinguish between a given name and any following descriptors, be they relationship terms, titles, bynames or surnames. Additional problems not so far mentioned include the unnamed or anonymous persons who are nonetheless recognizable as individuals, and the collectivities, such as 'the monks of Abingdon', who act as a single legal entity; the same entity is

also expressed in the term ‘the church (or abbey) of Abingdon’. All of these need to be accommodated in our table, since this will form the basis for a subsequent analysis of the name records as distinct individual persons.

Each row (the ‘answers’ to the ‘questions’ posed by the field names) should be unique, even if there is a duplicate value for the name. This uniqueness is normally enforced by a record number, often automatically entered by software such as Microsoft Access, which might be called Entry Number or Entry ID (identifier). The second field should be a Reference ID, locating the information in its source of origin. Subsequent fields will give the name information. We could use ‘Name’ to stand for the first or given name; it is shorter than ‘anthroponym’ or ‘forename’, the best alternatives. Further names are best described as Descriptor 1, Descriptor 2, and so on. If there is to be an onomastic or anthroponymic side to the work, adding a column coding the name record according to a system such as that used by *Genèse médiévale* would be valuable. For projects using the scarce data of the pre-modern world such an approach is strongly to be encouraged, given the wealth of information contained in name evidence. Since this is a register of name records from which individuals will be distinguished there is not much to be gained from attempting to analyse the name forms at this stage. What the name-records for each identified person reveal about office or family can be incorporated with far greater economy of effort and greater effectiveness into fields in a register of persons.

As soon as we start to enregister our name data we will notice how slippery name evidence can be. Look again at the first charter and notice how two of those mentioned are assigned given names but described in terms of their relationship to someone else, ‘his wife’ ‘my predecessor’. The ‘faithful sons of the church’ are an amorphous mass who need not concern us, but the Legate of the Holy Roman Church surely had a specific ‘lord pope’ in mind, since he refers to the authority of God, the pope and himself. If we shear Archbishop Ralph of the relational term ‘my predecessor’, we shall lose valuable information; so too if we simply enter the name Beatrice in her name record. With proper controls we can keep all the information together. One technique is to use the nesting techniques of text encoding. Applied to the opening our second charter this would give something like this:

<name>Henry <descriptor>king of England</descriptor></name>, to <name>Maurice <descriptor>bishop of London</descriptor></name>, <name>Gilbert <descriptor>abbot of Westminster</descriptor></name>, <name>Hugh <descriptor> de Bochelanda</descriptor></name> and all his barons and ministers in France and England of London a thousand greetings.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Based on a tagging system used in an online tutorial I have developed (<http://protopography.modhist.ox.ac.uk>). An alternative approach to a tabular database is to use TEI (Text Encoding Initiative, [www.tei-c.org/](http://www.tei-c.org/)) mark-up to analyse a text. This would yield something like the following: <persName key="HK1"> <givenName>Henry</givenName> <roleName type="office">king of England </roleName>, to <persName key="MBL"> <givenName>Maurice </givenName> <roleName type="office"> bishop of London </roleName> and <persName key="GW"> <givenName>Gilbert </givenName> <roleName type="office"> abbot of Westminster </roleName> and <persName key="HB"> <givenName> Hugo </givenName> <addName> de Bochelanda </addName> and all his barons and ministers in France and England of London a thousand greetings.

Representing this as a record in a table is more clumsy and less flexible, but much quicker and much clearer. We should have something like the following:

NameID	Doc. Ref.	Name	Descriptor 1	Descriptor 2
1	Colne Ch. 13	Alberic	de Vere	
2	Colne Ch. 13	Beatrice	his [Alberic de Vere] / [1] wife	
3	Colne Ch. 13	William	archbishop of Canterbury	legate of the Holy Roman Church
4	Colne Ch. 13		monks of Abingdon	
5	Colne Ch. 13	Ralph	my [Archbishop William] predecessor	lord archbishop
6	Colne Ch. 13		lord pope	
7	Colne Ch. 13		brotherhood of Abingdon	
8	Colne Ch. 13		brotherhood of Canterbury	

It would not be useful to include a separate field for ‘anonymous’ since this stands for ‘descriptor of a person for whom no given name is present’. We could represent the ‘his’ as in ‘his wife’ in two ways, either by supplying his name in square brackets or by using his unique Entry ID for the relevant source; though used here for convenience, the latter is undesirable because of problems that will occur if name records are later added or deleted.

Just using the de Vere family names common to each of the other three texts we have used, we could continue this table as follows:

NameID	Doc. Ref.	Name	Descriptor 1	Descriptor 2
9	Colne Ch. 3	Henry	King of England	
10	Colne Ch. 3	Alberic	de Vere	
11	Colne Ch. 3	Geoffrey	son of [10]	
12	Abingdon 2:55	Geoffrey	son of Alberic senior	brother of Alberic junior
13	Abingdon 2:55	Alberic	father of [11]	
14	Abingdon 2:55	Beatrice	mother of [11]	
15	Colne Ch. 1	Henry	king of the English	
16	Colne Ch. 1	Alberic	de Vere	
17	Colne Ch. 1	Beatrice	his [16] wife	
18	Colne Ch. 1	Alberic	their [16, 17] son	

Geoffrey is described in terms of his relationships to two other people, Alberic senior and Alberic junior. Although they function as part of a description of Geoffrey, they are clearly two individuals whose existence we shall want to note separately. In each case there is a descriptor attached to their given name, senior and junior. Although their relationship to Geoffrey and to each other is clear from their occurrence as descriptors



of Geoffrey, these relationships are not part of their descriptors – we can infer that Alberic senior is father of Geoffrey, but what is stated is that Geoffrey is son of Alberic senior. To preserve the information relative to someone else contained in their name records we have to make clear that the information has been inferred.

NameID	Doc. Ref.	Name	Descriptor 1	Descriptor 2
19	Abingdon 2:55	Alberic	senior	father of Geoffrey]
20	Abingdon 2:55	Alberic	junior	brother of Geoffrey]

Interpreted material should be distinguished from literal transcriptions by being placed in square brackets, except at the beginning of an entry since that will impede computer searches. An alternative is to place the information in a note or memo field. The functionality of such fields will depend upon the system used, but it is a good idea to have a note or memo field for all tables so that oddities can be recorded and, most importantly, the reasons behind any decisions that have been made during data entry.

Once the register of names is complete, or nearly complete, the task of ‘nominal record linkage’ can begin. Amongst the mass of name records will be the names of individual persons. One person may have many name records, containing many different forms of his name. These can be considered as aliases of a person. In a register of persons all these aliases need to be linked to the sole individual whom they describe.<sup>107</sup> You should only link aliases where there is certainty or a high probability of their relating to the same person. Wherever an identification falls short of certainty, some sort of note of the problems, perhaps indicating the level of probability, should be made in a memo or notes field. If you fail to record the reasons for your decisions you may well be unable to recall them later, and the reliability of your work will be seriously undermined. Creating the register of persons entails establishing a standardized form of the person’s name, since only one name can be used for sorting and retrieval purposes. For subsequent usability of the material, the criteria for the standardization should be recorded and a look-up table of variants established for potential users. This is particularly important for names taken from Latin documents, which not only varied in form in their own time but also give rise to a number of different vernacular versions in common use in modern times.

PersonID	NameID	Name	Descriptor
101	1	AlbericI	de Vere
102	2	Beatrice	de Vere
103	3	William	archbishop of Canterbury
104	5	Ralph	archbishop of Canterbury
105	9	Henry	king of England
101	10	AlbericI	de Vere
106	11	Geoffrey	de Vere
106	12	Geoffrey	de Vere
101	13	AlbericI	de Vere
102	14	Beatrice	de Vere

<sup>107</sup> See note 72 above.

PersonID	NameID	Name	Descriptor
105	15	Henry	king of England
101	16	Alberic1	de Vere
102	17	Beatrice	de Vere
107	18	Alberic2	de Vere
101	19	Alberic1	de Vere
107	20	Alberic2	de Vere

This table yields the following list of individuals identified among the original list of names:

PersonID	Name	Descriptor
101	Alberic1	de Vere
102	Beatrice	de Vere
103	William	archbishop of Canterbury
104	Ralph	archbishop of Canterbury
105	Henry	king of England
106	Geoffrey	de Vere
107	Alberic2	de Vere

Note the way that different persons of the same given name are distinguished, by the addition of a number.

These tables represent the most basic level of creating a prosopography. So far none of the biographical data required for analysis is present. Desired information for entry into our files (the ‘answers’ to the ‘questionnaire’) will include dates of birth and death, place of birth and burial, parentage, marriage and issue, education and career structures, including dates of offices held. In the case of medieval persons such as these de Veres much of this information is irrecoverable, so we shall need to develop other strategies for gathering comparative data based on what we know of how society worked; an obvious example is the place and extent of landholdings and the relationship between members of the family and those from whom they held land or those who held land from them.

At all levels of society at this period, when the two-element name system was evolving, we are dependent upon name information, especially descriptors that have not yet stabilized into a surname, for the sort of biographical data that we can subsequently use in prosopographical analysis. Almost all the data of biographical relevance garnered from our sources will have been attached to a name record of some sort. Information will have been either or both stated and implied in the context of that name record and in the name itself. How that information is dealt with is a matter of interpretation. As we have already seen from the very simple cases looked at here, it is almost impossible even to create a tabulated list of names without the need for interpretation on our part, and hence the potential for contaminating our database exists at every level, including the most basic. Almost any category, apart from names and dates, in our databases will

have been devised by the researcher, rather than representing ‘pure’ source data. Whatever a contemporary had a mind by identifying someone as *monachus* (monk) or *rex* (king) is undoubtedly different from our anachronistic attempts to squeeze such descriptors into interpretative categories such as condition, office or status. Awareness of these problems, and conscientious recording of the solutions devised and constant review of the issues, as discussed by Francesca Tinti elsewhere in this book, will ensure that the problems are not insuperable and that a viable result can still be obtained. It is only by struggling with the problems that we can gain the experience that will determine how best to deal with them. How rich the result will depend to a considerable extent on our understanding of the meaning and function of names, the intentions of those who recorded them and the context in which we encounter them.

### Bibliographic Note on Name Studies

As a branch of linguistics, there is a voluminous literature on name studies, much of it by East European scholars, going back to the early twentieth century. Full bibliographies will be found in the two handbooks mentioned in this article, *Namenarten und ihre Erforschung. Ein Lehrbuch für das Studium der Onomastik*, ed. Andrea Brendler and Silvio Brendler (Hamburg, 2004) and the three-volume *Namenforschung / Name Studies / Les noms propres. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Onomastik / An International Handbook of Onomastics / Manuel international d’onomastique*, ed. E. Eichler, G. Hilty, H. Löffler, H. Steger, Hugo, L. Zgusta (3 vols., Berlin and New York, 1995-6), begins with an overview of societies and institutes world-wide dedicated to name studies. These include the International Council for Onomastic Sciences, created in 1993 from the International Committee of Onomastic Sciences, formed in 1949. This body, ICOS, holds an annual conference and publishes its Proceedings. It also publishes *Onoma. Journal of the International Council for Onomastic Sciences*. Other journals are *Nomina. Journal of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland*; *Onomastica: Revue internationale de toponymie et anthroponymie* and *Beiträge zur Namenforschung*.