

**ENGLISH AND ARMENIAN SURNAMES:  
UNIVERSALITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

Surname, or family name, can be defined as a legal identification tag which is transmitted by family members from generation to generation. The use of a surname is a comparatively recent phenomenon. For thousands of years first, or given names, were the only designations that men and women bore; and at the dawn of recorded historic times, when the world was less crowded than it is today and every man knew his neighbours, one title of address was sufficient. Only gradually, with the passing centuries and the increasing complexity of civilized society, did a need arise for more specific designations.

Different areas of the world adopted surnames at different periods in time. For example, surnames were commonly used two thousand years ago in areas occupied or influenced by the Romans. Other areas of the world were slower to begin using surnames, but they were coming into regular use by the time of the Middle Ages, first by the nobility, then by the gentry.

The present article is an attempt to compare English and Armenian surnames to find the resemblances and differences existing in the given languages.

Both in English and in Armenian “surname” also called *family name*, *last name* refers to a name shared in common to identify the members of a family, as distinguished from each member's given name. Ազգանուն is translated from the Armenian language as “family name”.

Originally family names didn't exist because people lived in small settlements and knew each other personally. If there were several Arams or Barseghs in a village, people simply added an identifying feature or a nickname to their names, for example Bald-headed Aikaz or Bagram the Baker. (Bowman, 1932: 25)

Surnames are generally derived from one of four sources: the name of the person's father (patronymic), the person's locality, the person's occupation, or a descriptive nickname for the person. When they were created, they answered one of the following questions: Who is this person's father? Where is this person

from? What does this person do for a living? What is his or her most prominent feature?

The patronymic name suggests the name of the father or grandfather by the use of some form of "of." In Ireland, "Mac" means "son of," while "O" means "grandson of." When "d'" or "di" is found in an Italian surname, it signifies "son of." In Czechoslovakia, Pavlov is the "son of Paul."

Place names were often taken as a surname. They were derived from the name of the place where one resided or from a description of the place. Mokotoff is from the Russian village of Mokotow; the Irish Slattery is originally from Ballyslattery in east County Clare. More than half of the English surnames used today derive from geographic descriptions, such as e. g. Churchill. Various suffixes which indicate a topographical feature are lee (meadow), bank, don (town), field, house, and thorp (village).

Occupations also helped to distinguish one person from another. John Miller may have owned the mill in the same town where John Smith was the local blacksmith. Bedell was the policeman of the village; Fletcher was the arrow-maker. You will often find names which describe ancestors' vocations, such as Baker, Shepherd, Carpenter, and Wright.

Sometimes nicknames became surnames. These types of surnames were often used to describe something unusual about an ancestor's physique. Small and Petit are obvious examples, as is Blackbeard. (Hanks, Hodge, 1998:25)

Thus, both in Armenian and in English surnames fall into four general groups:

- (1) Surnames formed from the given name of the father
- (2) Surnames arising from bodily or personal characteristics
- (3) Surnames derived from locality or place of residence
- (4) Surnames derived from occupation

The surnames formed from the given name of the father in both languages are as follows: It must be added that such names were formed by adding a prefix or suffix denoting either "son of" or a diminutive. English names terminating in "son" (or the contraction "s"), "ing", and "kin" are of this type, as are also the innumerable names prefixed with the Gaelic "Mac", the Norman "Fitz", The Irish "O", and the Welsh "ap".

The illustration of what has been mentioned above is as follows: the sons of John became Johnsons; the sons of William, Williamsons or Wilsons; the sons of Richard, Richardsons or Richards; the sons of Neill, MacNeills; the sons of Herbert, FitzHerberts; the sons of Reilly O'Reillys; and the sons of Thomas, ap Thomases (ap has been dropped from many names of which it was formerly a

part). There are also German, Netherlands, Scandinavian, and other European surnames of similar formation, such as the Scandinavian names ending in "sen". In the Slavic countries the "sky" and "ski" played the same role.

As for the Armenian surnames they can be and they were formed from the given name of the father but very often they were formed from the name of a respectable antecedent. To the first name people added a prefix or a suffix that indicated the reference to a certain family. In the Ancient Armenian language the ending was “quւց”. Later it transformed into “էնց”, and in modern Armenian – into ”յան” (from “յաւնց”). For example, if a person was from the Աշոտու family, he/she was called Աշոտաւնց or Աշոտէնց.

The Armenian authority and rich landowners, as opposed to the commoners, had used surnames from archaic times. They were formed the same way: such surnames signified the reference to a certain aristocrat household, but the ending was “ունի”. That way, in old times and in the Middle Ages the representatives of Armenian aristocrat families had such surnames as Խորխորունի, Ամասունի, Գնունի, Ռշտունի. Later on, when talking about the nobility, they started to add the words “ազգ” (“family”), for example “Rshtuni family”, or “տուն” (“home”) – “Artsruni home” to their surnames. ( Krikorian, 1987: 12-25)

As for those surnames arising from bodily or physical characteristics in English they evidently grew out of what were in the first exemplification nicknames. Thus Peter the strong became Peter Strong, Roger of small stature became Roger Little or Roger Small, and black-haired William or blond Alfred became William Black or Alfred White. A few examples of names of this type are Long, Short, Hardy, Wise, Good, Gladman, Lover, and Youngman. Some people were given flattering surnames like Makepeace, Wise, Smart, Trueman or Young. Others were given surnames like Wilde (because they were wild). However Bragg is derived from a word meaning bold or daring. It was not a nickname for a person who bragged. Moody might also seem straightforward but it actually comes from the old word modig, which meant bold. Some people were given the nickname sharp or sharpe because of their temperament. Tait meant cheerful. Unwin meant an unfriendly man while Darwin meant dear friend.

People with dark hair might get the surname Black or Blake (a corruption of black). Reid, Reed and Read are all from red (redhead). Russell also meant red haired. Blunt is a corruption of blount, which meant blonde. People with white hair might be given the surname Snow. People with golden hair might get the surname golden.

A very big person might be called Bull. The surname Peacock may have been a nickname for a vain person.

Some people were nicknamed magpie or pie for short. They might also be called pyatt, which meant little pie (magpie). That is where the surname Pyatt comes from.

In Armenian the most part of last names were taken from the professions of an ancestor. These names frequently originated with the tax collectors who needed to identify all individuals for tax purposes. Typical examples are Նազարյան "son of a carpenter," Արարյան "son of a wagon/ teamster," and Ոսկարիչյան "son of a goldsmith." Many of these occupations are not Armenian, since the tax man (typically a Moslem Turk, Persian, Arab, etc.) would use his own native word for the appointment; e.g., the name Բոյաջյան is based on the Arab/Turkish word "boyaji" "one who dies."

The most confusing and interesting names are those, which are based on some trait of an ancestor. Typical examples are Թոփալյան "son of the cripple," Դիլիզյան "son of the tongueless one," or Սինանյան "son of the spearpoint." Many of the origins of these names are unclear unless one understands the original context. As an example, Դիլիզյան means that an ancestor had his tongue cut out by the Turks for using the Armenian language, while the term "Sinan" was a slang term applied to somebody either with a very erect military-like carriage or who was "hung like a horse." Some of these traits are not physical, but rather reflect personality or social status; e.g., Մեկիքյան "son of the king" or Հարությունյան "son of the resurrection." The name Հարությունյան could be based on an ancestor named Հարություն (so-named because he was born around Eastertime).

Worthy of note is the fact that the need to create Armenian surnames to distinguish individuals arose after the foundation of large settlements and towns. People began to move from one place to another, and it became rather difficult to use just names and nicknames. It was necessary to add the person's place of birth (for example, Ամայակ Տաթևացի, Անանյա Շիրակացի) or main occupation (for example, Դավիթ Նաղաշ, Արամ Մազհատրոս) to the name. The ending -ցի meant a geographical provenance. For example, Moses of Chorene and Stephan of Syunik are rendered in Armenian as Մովսես Խորենացի and Ստեփանոս Սյունեցի, respectively.

Some last names are based on geographic origin and end in "յան" (Turkish) or "ցյան" (Armenian). Typical examples are Սիվասյան "from Sivas," Ուրֆայան "from Urfa" and Վանեցյան "from Van." These names were typically given to an immigrant who migrated from a different region of Armenia.

Obviously everyone living in Marash would not call himself or herself "Սարաշյան".

This type of surname formation in English is probably the largest of all. It must be noted that such names were used in France at an early date (such as La Porte "at the entrance to") and were introduced into England by the Normans, many of whom were known by the titles of their estates.

The surnames adopted by the aristocrats were chiefly of this type, being used with the particles "de", "de la" or "del" (meaning "of" or "of the"). The Saxon equivalent was the word "atte" ("at the"), which is found in such names as John atte Brook, Edmund atte Lane, Godwin atte Brigg, and William Atwood, John Atwell and Atwater; in other cases the Norman "de" was substituted; and in still others, such as Wood, Briggs, and Lane, the particle was dropped. The surnames of some of the Pilgrim Fathers illustrate place designations. Winthrop, for instance, means "of the friendly village"; Endicott, "an end cottage"; and Bradford, "a broad ford". The suffixes "ford", "ham", "ley", and "ton", denoting locality, are of frequent occurrence in such English names as Ashford, Bingham, Burley, and Norton.

As for the surnames derived from occupation in Armenian they are as follows: Բակկալյան means Grocer, Բալյան means Honey, Բալիկյան - Iron, Չոբանյան - Shepherd, Չիլիկաբալյան - Locksmith, Բոյաջյան - Dyer / Painter, Էլմասյան - Diamond, Սարաֆյան- Money changer, Սեմերջյան - Saddle, Փանջարյան -Beet, Պատրիկյան -Patriarch, Փիլավյան - Pilaf, etc. The prefix Տէր or Տէր, which comes from how one addresses a priest, is typically Armenian. It might be followed by a space or attached directly to the root. If someone possesses a surname containing "դէր" or "տէր" it usually signifies that this person has a patrilineal ancestor who was a priest. (Ավետիսյան, 1987:69 )

The earliest of the English surnames formed from occupation seem to have been official names, such as Bishop, Mayor, Alderman, Reeve, Sheriff, Chamberlain, Chancellor, Chaplain, Deacon, Latimer (interpreter), Marshall, Sumner (summoner), and Parker (park-keeper). Trade and craft names, although of the same general type, were developed slightly later. Currier was a dresser of skins, Webster a weaver, Wainwright a wagon builder, and Baxter a baker. Such names as Smith, Taylor, Barber, Shepherd, Carter, Mason, and Miller are self-explanatory. In France similarly we have La Farr (iron worker); in Germany there was Winegar (vine dresser) and Müller (Mi).

In both languages some surnames of today which seem to mean classification or explanation are corruptions of archaic forms that have become

disguised almost beyond recognition. For instance, Troublefield was originally Tuberville; Wrinch was Renshaw; Diggles was Douglas; Sinnocks and Snooks were Sevenoaks; Barrowcliff and Berrycloth were Barraclough; and Strawbridge was Stourbridge; Such corruptions of family names, resulting from ignorance of spelling, variations in pronunciation, or merely from the preference of the bearer, tend to baffle both the genealogist and the etymologist. Shakespeare's name is found in some twenty-seven different forms, and the majority of English and Anglo-American surnames have, in their history, appeared in four to a dozen or more variant spellings. For example the German family Winegar that came to North America in the Palatine Migration of 1709 has their name listed in various lists as Winegar, Wenniger, Winneger, Weyniger, Wyniger, Weneger, Winiger and Wienneger. ( E.F. Dunbar, M. Flanders, 2006: 52)

Those who possess old and honored names - who trace their surnames back to sturdy immigrant ancestors, or beyond, across the seas and into the mists of antiquity - may be rightfully proud of their heritage. While the name, in its origin, may seem ingenious, humble, surprising, or matter-of-fact, its significance today lies not in a literal interpretation of its initial meaning but in the many things that have happened to it since it first came into use. In the beginning it was only a label to distinguish one John from his neighbor John who lived across the field. But soon it established itself as part of the bearer's individuality; and as it passed to his children, his children's children, and their children, it became the symbol not of one man but of a family and all that that family stood for. Handed down from generation to generation, the surname grew inseparably associated with the achievement, the tradition, and the prestige of the family. Like the coat of arms - that vivid symbolisation of the name which warrior ancestors bore in battle - the name itself has become a badge of family honor. It has become the "good name" to be proud of and to protect as one's most treasured possession.

It must be noted that today many Armenians shorten their surnames

or modernate them to help pronunciations by non-Armenians; e.g., the name Մուգերդիյան /Մկրտչյան becomes "Mugar," "Հուսենիզյան," becomes "Hewsen," and "Սամուրկաշյան" becomes "Samour." These abbreviated names often drop the "յան" ending, and are not immediately identifiable as being Armenian to an outsider. The name categories of Occupation and Trait can differ significantly between Eastern Armenians and Western Armenians, since the eastern names often have Persian, Georgian or Russian roots, while the western names may have Turkish, Arab, or Greek roots.

The way Armenian names are rendered across cultures, in different parts of the diaspora, may also reveal some secrets. The Armenians of India, for instance, were great practitioners of outright translations and Anglicizations of their names. So, Պողոս Ղուկասյան would become “Paul Lucas” and Մեկնես Սողոմոնյան would be “Moses Solomon.” And then one comes across the names “Arathoon,” “Carapiet,” and others, which are the versions of “Հարություն” and “Կարապետ” adopted in India alone, as opposed to the “Harry”s and “Charlie”s in the States. To give another example, “Gérard” often takes the place of “Ժիրայր” in France, not so much because it is a translation or convenient nickname, as simply because they sound alike.

On the contrary English surnames are not shortened or modified by their bearers as they do not have the problems which Armenians meet outside their country, this fact is rather problematical nowadays as Turkish policy continues to trouble Armenians.

As for the English surnames we can meet many surnames derived from French this is because the Norman brought hundreds of new names to England (then to the rest of the British Isles). Many evolved and were Anglicised with time, or disappeared in France. Here is a list of the names that have survived with the exact same spelling (though not the same pronunciation) in both countries. Some names are not Norman, just happen to exist in both countries. These surnames are: Archer, Barret, Baron, Roche, Rose, Roy, Royal, Salmon.

One of the differences between English and Armenian surnames is a fairly large group of English surnames formed from first names and their derivatives and diminutives. This list includes some of the most common female names at the time surnames were becoming fixed in England, and their connected surnames. Matronymics (or metronymics) do not necessarily imply illegitimacy as a posthumous baby took its mother's name and a wife's dominating nature or more unusual name (if her husband had a very common one) might have led to her given name becoming the child's surname. For example: Agatha-Agasson, Agace, Aggas, Barbara-Babb, Babbitt, Babbs, Babcock, Bable, Barbary, Juliana-Gell, Gill, Gillett, Gillot, Gilson, Jewett, Jillson, Jolyan, Jowett, Julian, Julien, Julyan.

To sum up it must be noted that in today's society we all want to know who we are and where our names originated from. Our names are what give each of us our own style and individuality, the importance of style and individuality can be related back to our original surnames. Our surnames have come from all areas of the world, each with specific meanings to our family. Surnames or

last names have an important meaning to all of us, they give us identity through our family's history.

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