

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL NAMES: A LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Annotation: This article explores the origins of anthroponyms, their role in different civilizations, and their continuing evolution in modern times. The use of personal names, known as anthroponyms, is a fundamental aspect of human communication and identity. Throughout history, names have served not only as identifiers but also as reflections of cultural, social, and historical contexts. The evolution of naming conventions has been influenced by religion, tradition, geography, and societal norms.

Key words: anthroponyms, prehistoric times, religion, tradition, geography, societal norms, oral naming, occupational roles.

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The earliest naming practices. The tradition of naming individuals dates back to prehistoric times when early humans used descriptive names based on physical characteristics, occupations, or notable achievements. These early naming systems helped distinguish individuals within small communities and facilitated communication.

As societies developed, names became more structured and recorded in writing. Some of the earliest documented names appear in Mesopotamian cuneiform texts, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Chinese inscriptions. These names often carried religious or symbolic meanings, representing divine connections or societal roles.

Oral naming traditions in early societies. Before the advent of writing, names were passed down orally and were often influenced by:

Physical appearance – names based on features such as Tall One or Red Hair.

Geographical influence – names referring to places of origin, such as Riverbank or Forest Walker.

Occupational roles – names linked to social functions, such as Hunter or Healer.

Spiritual and mythological associations – names inspired by deities, celestial bodies, or legendary figures.

Anthroponyms in Early Civilizations

1. Mesopotamian and Sumerian naming systems. In Mesopotamia, names were often associated with deities and power. Examples include:

Nebuchadnezzar – "O Nabu, protect my firstborn son."

Ashurbanipal – "The god Ashur is the creator of the heir."

2. Ancient Egyptian naming conventions

Egyptians frequently included divine names or references to pharaohs, such as:

Tutankhamun – "Living Image of Amun."

Ramses – "Born of Ra."

3. Greek and Roman naming traditions

Greek Names often reflected virtues or mythology, such as Sophia ("Wisdom") or Alexander ("Defender of Men").

Roman Naming System included three components:

Praenomen (Personal Name) – Example: Gaius.

Nomen (Family Name) – Example: Julius.

Cognomen (Descriptive or Lineage Name) – Example: Caesar.

4. Chinese and East Asian Naming Practices

Chinese names traditionally consist of:

A Family Name inherited from ancestors.

A Personal Name chosen for its meaning and auspiciousness.

A Courtesy Name used in formal settings.

For instance, Confucius was originally named Kong Qiu, with Kong Fuzi meaning "Master Kong."

5. Islamic and Middle Eastern Naming Customs

With the rise of Islam, Arabic names gained prominence, often including religious elements:

Abdullah – "Servant of Allah."

Muhammad ibn Abdullah – "Muhammad, son of Abdullah."

Islamic naming traditions also include kunya (honorific names, e.g., Abu Bakr, meaning "Father of Bakr") and laqab (titles of honor, e.g., Al-Farooq, meaning "The One who distinguishes right from wrong").

Medieval and Modern Naming Conventions

During the Middle Ages, surnames became common as populations grew. These were often derived from:

Professions (Smith, Baker, Carpenter).

Geographical origins (Hill, Rivers, London).

Ancestry (Johnson – "Son of John").

Personal traits (Armstrong, White, Black).

The renaissance and enlightenment eras saw an expansion of naming influences, incorporating elements from classical literature, religion, and philosophy.

Modern times have introduced new naming patterns, including:

Hybrid and multicultural names – many people now adopt names that blend cultural influences.

Digital identities – online usernames and pseudonyms (e.g., @TechGuru, Mystic_Traveler) have become prevalent.

Revival of traditional names – efforts to preserve indigenous and historical names have increased.

Anthroponyms carry significant cultural and psychological weight. Research in onomastics (the study of names) and psycholinguistics suggests that:

Names influence social perception and first impressions.

Certain names are linked to success and societal status.

Personal names shape self-identity and confidence.

Personal names have evolved from simple identifiers in early tribal societies to complex naming systems that reflect culture, history, and identity. As globalization and digital communication continue to shape human interaction, names remain a vital part of how individuals and societies define themselves.

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