

Documenting a French name

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Or... *vous voulez être français(e)*.

There are some rules and recommendations for the documentation and submission of a name that are independent of the origin of the name you want. There are some suggestions specific to getting a good French name.

- *“All names must be grammatically correct for period names and follow documented patterns.”¹*

Ideally, select first a time period and place, and look for name sources corresponding. You can be more or less specific and narrow, depending on your own requirement.

Select a Name (cf the section about the sources). Check that it is registerable (the rules are explained below, but it should be checked for conflict against registered names too).

Only then try the name for some time. See if you like how others pronounce it (which might be very different from the way you think it should be pronounced)

- *“A personal name must contain a given name and at least one byname; each of these components will be called a name phrase. A byname is any name added to the given name to identify its bearer more precisely.”¹*

Given names: must actually be a given name

Bynames (locative, occupational, relationship [patronymic, metronymic, etc...], descriptive nickname)

Name and byname should have plausibly been used together. A step from period practice (SFPP) indicates a lower plausibility. One SFPP => not good style, but registerable; 2 SFPP => not registerable

Types of SFPP: *“Every name as a whole should be compatible with the culture of a single time and place.”¹*

- Temporal disparity -> if both elements of the name are not documented within 300 years of each other.
- Linguistic culture disparity: if name elements combine languages (note that some combinations render the name unregisterable)²

There is no SFPP for combining a French name element with English.

There is a SFPP for combining a French name element with anglicized Irish, Anglo-Saxon/old English, Arabic, Latinized old English, Frankish, Gaelic, German, Italian, Latin, Norse, Occitan, Portuguese, Scots or Spanish.

Names combining French and Russian, or French and (early) Welsh elements are not registerable.

¹ Rules for submission: compatible naming style and grammar <http://heraldry.sca.org/laurel/rfs.html#3>

² Lingual weirdness table by Aryanhwyl merch Catmael: http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/sca/weirdness_table.html

Some other issues might render a name unregistrable: for example offense, presumption, use of the protected elements, etc...

- * Presumption: names claiming rank, names claiming powers, names claiming specific relationships
- * Offense: vulgar names, obscene terminology, offensive religious terminology, stereotypical names, offensive political terminology.
- * The name conflicts with one that is already registered

Onto the sources:

Each name element must be documented in the submission form. There is an abundance of sources available for documentation, especially online. It is not always easy to determine which information to trust.

Here are some signs that your source may be unreliable

- No dates are given for the spellings used.
- There is no indication of the sources where the names were found.
- The name spelling is standardized/modernized (for example, you find only the spelling Jean, while across period you'd expect to find Jehan more frequently) or translated (e.g. John).
- There is a meaning given for every name.

Some names sources to avoid can be found at:

Names Sources to Be Avoided in Documentation:

<http://heraldry.sca.org/laurel/admin.html#APPENDIXF>

WWW Names Pages for Medievalists to Avoid: <http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/arval/badpages.shtml>

How to know that a documentation source is reliable:

- Ideally, it indicates the date (and location) for that spelling
- It indicates clearly the source for each name (where the author found it).
- It specifies any editorial modification that has been done (e.g. expanding abbreviations, standardizing spelling).

Some web sources acceptable for the documentation of SCA names:

- SCA Laurel Sovereign of Arms Names Webpage [No printouts/photocopies required from this site]

<http://heraldry.sca.org/heraldry/laurel/names.html>

And especially French names: <http://heraldry.sca.org/laurel/names.html#france>

- Academy of Saint Gabriel Medieval Name Archive [printouts/copies of the article must be sent with the submission] <http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/>

And especially French names: <http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/french.shtml>

Bonus material

From the September 2010 cover letter <http://heraldry.sca.org/loar/2010/09/10-09cl.html>

From Pelican: Some Name Resources (a series)

This series discusses the enormous (and growing) number of resources online that can be useful to heralds and to submitters. Each month, I'm going to post information about some that I think might be useful. If I miss some interesting ones, let me know, because I don't know everything.

There are some great sources for French placenames in Google Books. The standard source that we've most frequently used in the College of Arms is Albert Dauzat and Charles Rostaing's Dictionnaire Etymologique des Noms de Lieux de la France. However, there are other books with listings of period placenames, which include many additional citations. They're especially useful because Dauzat and Rostaing has a bias toward earliest citations, which are often not typical of later medieval citations.

The book I use most is Ernest Nègre's Toponymie Générale de la France. It's a two-volume work, both of which are searchable on Google Books in a preview format. Additionally, there is a series of volumes produced in the 19th century titled Dictionnaire Topographique du Département de X (where X is the name of a department in France). These have substantial numbers of dated citations. I follow different strategies for searching in these two types of sources. For the first, I bring up the Nègre volumes by searching on the title and name. Then I search within the volumes for the name I'm looking for. For the second, I search on "Dictionnaire Topographique" and the spelling I'm looking for. That's to allow me to search within the large number of volumes at once.

If that doesn't work, another approach is to search on multiple spellings of a placename. Start with one that you know is dated to before 1600 (identified from the sources I've already mentioned) and add the one that you're trying to date. If you try this, make sure that the source(s) you find give a clear date for the form.

From the November 2011 cover letter <http://heraldry.sca.org/loar/2011/11/11-11cl.html>

From Pelican: Some Name Resources (A Series)

This month, we continue with French names by turning our attention to the langue d'oc, modern Occitan/Provençal. Unfortunately, there are really no books that are readily available that deal with Occitan. Our main sources, therefore, are online.

Occitan is closely related to another language (or group of languages) spoken in eastern Spain, called Catalan. The best source for Occitan and Catalan names is <http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/occitan.shtml>.

A great source for early names is Ramons lo Montalbes' "French/Occitan Names from the XII and XIII Century" (<http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/ramon/occitan/>). This article, and the author's name, demonstrate an important feature of Occitan: it generally used a nominative marker, which for men is -s. So, we see forms like Azemars, Aimerics, and of course Ramons. Note that the French names in this article are modern, but the Occitan names are original. The other early sources we have are Latinized, which means that the names are written in Latin and modified from the likely spoken form.

For the 14th century, there are articles from several locations. One of the largest is Aryanhwy merch Catmael's "Occitan names from Saint Flour, France, 1380-1385" (<http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/french/saintflour.html>). For the late 16th century, I find myself using Talan Gwynek's "Late Period Feminine Names from the South of France" (<http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/talan/latefrenchfem/>). Unfortunately, many of the articles that deal with southern French names give the northern French versions of Occitan names.

Not name sources, but rules & suggestions on choosing & documenting your name:

- Rules for submission: <http://heraldry.sca.org/laurel/rfs.html#2>
- "General advice" section for the name articles on <http://heraldry.sca.org>
- General Information on Medieval Naming <http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/general.shtml>
- Choosing a name & creating a persona, by Modar Neznanich <http://www.modaruniversity.org/Names.htm>