

INTRODUCTION



The Dynamics of Early Modern Naming

JOEL F. HARRINGTON

The human tendency to experience and understand the world through names is an epistemological imperative as old and universal as language itself. As the Hebrew Bible tells us, one of the first things Adam did was give names to all the wild beasts and birds of Eden (Gen. 2:18–20). The study of names, known as *onomastics*, likewise has a long pedigree. Many ancient philosophers—among them Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—closely examined the relationship between names and their referents, in the process posing many fundamental and profound linguistic and epistemological questions that continue to inspire debate today. Later Christian thinkers, most notably Saint Augustine, viewed all creation in terms of the *logos* (divine word), revealed to humans in the Book of Nature as well as in the canonical scriptures and the person of Christ himself.

During the past century the broader field of onomastics has witnessed the traditional subfields of toponymy (or toponomastics, which is the study of place-names) and anthroponomastics (the study of names given to individuals or groups of people), enhanced by new subfields such as literary onomastics and *socio-onomastics*, the latter an area of study particularly important for historians. These and other subfields, like onomastics itself, have developed rich and sophisticated new methodologies and scholarly literatures, ranging from linguistic theories over the inherent semantic features of names to detailed local prosopographies and comparative studies.¹ Social historical field research on naming, on the other hand, lags far behind, thus inspiring in part this current volume.

For the authors of this collection and other early modern scholars, the phenomenon of naming represents both an exciting and a daunting subject for historical study. On the one hand, it allows us to analyze diverse changes (social,

political, religious, scientific) through specific naming practices. On the other hand, it poses many inherent obstacles to historians' goal of making coherent sense of the past. While aspiring to limit and to stabilize meaning, names just as often have the opposite effect. Old and new names alike can be variously interpreted or appropriated by different people in different contexts. Naming is, in a word, fluid. How can a scholar who wishes to analyze continuities and changes over time make use of such slippery, unstable human artefacts as names?

One answer, the premise of our collective endeavor, is to focus on the elusive act of naming (and renaming) itself. The thinking and intentions of namers, even when using the same terms in dramatically different ways, provides an important entry for the modern observer into the thoughts and experience of the past. This is virtually virgin territory among scholars of onomastics, even for those working the relatively new field of socio-onomastics.² Whereas most of these researchers focus on a sociological consideration of various factors (e.g., age, gender, profession), we consider our approach to naming in early modern Germany to be more than "a natural continuation of typological research."³ The term *Sozioonomastik* (socio-onomastics) itself still carries a heavy structuralist legacy since its coinage by the East German scholar Hans Walther in 1971.⁴ The focus of our contributors, by contrast, is on a broader social and cultural context of new acts of naming that nevertheless acknowledges the dynamic agency of various namers. In that respect, we share a greater affinity with early modern social and cultural historians who have begun to explore the dynamics of naming in early modern cartography,⁵ in scientific taxonomies,⁶ in the self-fashioning of scholars,⁷ in nicknames,⁸ in confessional formation of children,⁹ in cursing and obscenities,¹⁰ in slang dialects,¹¹ in the world of clothing and fashion,¹² and so on.

In many ways, the chronological and geographical parameters of this volume provide a fertile field for testing this approach. All of the diverse social and cultural developments in German lands between 1450 and 1750 were characterized by an explosion of new names and the appropriation or redefinition of existing names, in each instance shaping individual and collective understanding of those very changes. Understanding more about the dynamics of naming in this period allows us to view many received ideas about early modern Germans in a different light.

The following chapters represent a broad and interdisciplinary approach to the book's central question. They explore the dynamics and impact of this naming process in a variety of contexts: social, religious, artistic, literary, theological, scientific, and of course historiographical. How and why were specific names chosen, contested, and ultimately accepted or rejected? What was the relationship of these naming processes to larger cultural or political developments? How do these findings enhance our understanding of individual and collective experiences during this period of German history? And how might we as

historical scholars adjust our own use of early modern names in describing the past?

This last question is especially important for today's scholars. The connection between early modern and twenty-first-century naming in fact lies at the heart of the chapters in part I. The larger historiographical discussion revolves around the controversial notion of confessionalization. As originally described by Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling forty years ago, confessionalization represented a church-state alliance in German territories where religious confessions were generally imposed on subject populations, largely for reasons of good social discipline. Many historians have since challenged the evidence for such a phenomenon and instead view the formation of confessional identity as a much more complex, multifaceted, and gradual process.¹³ Still, the legacy of traditional religious categorizations remains influential, in turn shaping our overall understanding of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations. In chapter 1, Amy Nelson Burnett calls into question our modern acceptance of Martin Luther's disparaging term *sacramentarians* and how it has led historians to overestimate both the centrality of Huldreich Zwingli in early evangelical opposition to Luther as well as the overall coherence of that same opposition. Luther, she reveals, had very specific political motivations for lumping together such opponents better known at the time as Picards, Karlstadtians, and Oecolampadians. So, too, modern historians, particularly in Switzerland, had their own polemical reasons for perpetuating the familiar Luther-Zwingli characterization of the early Reformation. In both cases, as Burnett clearly illustrates, our own uncritical acceptance or misunderstanding of early modern names (and their origins) has significantly affected our historical understanding of the Reformation itself.¹⁴

In chapter 2, Birgit Emich makes a similar argument about the origins and long perpetuation of *the Tridentine Church*. Naming early modern Catholicism, particularly after the Protestant Reformation, was from the beginning a polemical exercise, particularly in the case of the Protestant characterization of a *Counter-Reformation*, suggesting a reactionary, siege mentality from the Council of Trent on. Yet more than seventy years after Hubert Jedin's famous proposed alternative use of the term *Catholic Reformation*,¹⁵ and following much recent scholarship on the diverse (and often negligible) impact of Trent, the monolithic term *Tridentine Church* continues to be used widely by historians.¹⁶ Emich, like Burnett, finds powerful sixteenth-century motivations behind this name, chiefly at the service of the papacy, a process that really declined only after the reforms of Vatican II (1962–65). Once more, the politically motivated naming of the past was adopted uncritically by subsequent generations until the present day.

David Mayes, in chapter 3, complements the other two chapters of this part perfectly in his careful study of the terms *Lutheran*, *Catholic*, and *Reformed*, before and after the Peace of Westphalia. All three names, he writes, "carried

a powerful charge because they were disputed, mutually invoked, contested, rejected, purposely not used, or used pejoratively as terms of abuse." In other words, the sheer variability in term usage before 1648 underscores their very fluidity. Yet here, too, modern scholars continue to apply such names uncritically to sixteenth-century individuals, and also use anachronistic terms like *Protestant* and *Catholic*. Like Burnett and Emich, Mayes challenges us not just to be more scrupulous in our own writing, but also to imagine what this instability says about the nature of religious confession and identity in the sixteenth century. He does not go as far as Frauke Volkland who urges us to drop the entire notion of early modern "confessional identity," but he does counsel more caution in applying confessional names.¹⁷ If we truly understand the significance of naming in the past, our current use of names and other mental categories cannot remain unaffected.

The second part of the volume deals with naming as a means of organizing knowledge. Like confessionalization, this topic has received much attention during the past thirty years, particularly among cultural historians of science (albeit rarely with a specific focus on naming).¹⁸ As in part I, the arguments of each chapter in part II have important implications for our current naming practices in making sense of the past. In each instance the authors underscore both the resilience and the fluidity of early modern naming, often flummoxing modern attempts to establish uniformity and order. In chapter 4, for instance, Alexander Fisher describes early Protestant appropriation of the pre-Reformation psalter to the extent that all psalm songs became widely identified as Protestant. Yet even this apparent confessionalization of sacred music, Fisher reminds us, was not straightforward or stable. Lutheran and Calvinist vernacular translations and paraphrases of the psalms also strongly influenced later Catholic versions, even in some aspects of melody.¹⁹ Defining and categorizing Protestant music remains difficult.

In chapter 5, Heiko Droste similarly resists our ready application of the name *early modern* to all developments of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. In his analysis of the correspondence of seventeenth-century Swedish diplomats (*diplomat* itself an anachronistic term), Droste demonstrates that the status of such individuals, particularly in terms of the development of an absolutist modern bureaucracy, was far from stable or pointed toward modernity. The very variety of names for *royal service* and *compensation*, he argues, suggest a distinctive culture that defies linear notions of state development. To understand the dynamics of this period, which Droste prefers to name *Baroque*, we must cast off our teleological Weberian spectacles and attempt to understand such developments on their own terms.²⁰

Amy Newhouse examines the difficulty of categorical naming and other attempts by both contemporaries and modern scholars to impose order in a

dynamic world. In chapter 6 she describes the frequent confusion in names for the city of Nuremberg's two plague hospitals—a confusion that she argues stems from the palimpsest nature of place-names, where function and location are often mixed in different forms. Thus both the plague hospital and the syphilis hospital, located in different parts of the city, were sometimes referred to by their location and other times by their function. At times, for instance, each hospital was referred to as the *Lazareth* or *St. Sebastian*, with usage going back and forth over the course of the sixteenth century. Some onomastic scholars would describe this phenomenon in terms of toponymic attachment, a newly identified and relatively unexamined phenomenon, especially for this period.²¹ While the logic of Nuremberg's city councilors and citizens often remains opaque, Newhouse reminds us that all modern attempts to standardize names may give us a semblance of stability, but in fact they distort the protean nature of such institutions within their lived contexts.

In chapter 7, John Jordan and Gabi Schopf echo this theme of the often-unpredictable durability and uncontrollability of some names. Using the evidence of Swiss bankruptcy records and newspaper advertisements from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Jordan and Schopf analyze patterns among the various names used for *cotton*, a newly revitalized staple of European manufacturing. Like the other authors in this part of the book, they find deliberate attempts to steer this naming process repeatedly frustrated, and old names difficult to replace. Building on the pioneering work of such scholars as Lisa Jardine, Paula Findlen, and Harold Cook, they situate the history of cotton within a broad and tangled web of global commerce, knowledge production, and colonialism.²² As in part I, then, we see that the history of naming, an intentional individual or group action, remains quite distinct from the history of names, a more spontaneous and often unpredictable process, reflecting the nature of language itself.

In the final part of the book, three scholars address the naming of others, an intentional process that often appears to have more staying power than attempts at self-naming. In chapter 8, Carina Johnson analyzes various terms and images for non-European others—particularly the terms *Turk* and *Moor* over the course of the sixteenth century—within the context what she calls “prehistories of race.” In closely examining various visual portrayals of individuals from different parts of Africa and Asia Minor, Johnson discovers that the printing press played a pivotal role in stabilizing and standardizing images of people perceived as being inferior that reinforced the cultural superiority of Latin Christendom. Most intriguingly, she suggests that the early-sixteenth-century tendency to underscore diversity in skin tones in support of imperial power gradually gave way to portrayals of universally darker complexions that stressed both cultural and racial inferiority. At the same time, the charged names of *Turk* and *Moor*

likewise became less ethnically specific and more generalized in application to all Muslims and other non-European others.²³

Ashley Elrod, in chapter 9, adopts more of a local perspective in examining applications of the ostracizing legal designation of *prodigus* or *Verschwender* (spendthrift) over the course of the sixteenth century. Whereas Johnson emphasizes the collective, almost unconscious, emergence of a new type of racial naming, Elrod focuses on the very deliberate and variable interpretations of a newly revitalized category from Roman law in German communities. Like all of the authors in this volume, she recognizes the “fluid process of articulating social identities.” In the instance of designating someone a spendthrift, though, she stresses the process of social negotiation between the intentions of jurists and governmental authorities on the one hand, and families and villages on the other. Sometimes individuals applied the legally disempowering term along the lines intended by their rulers; other times they manipulated the designation for their own purposes. Names such as *spendthrift*, Elrod argues, “drew their power from the communities who enforced them.” Whether or not pejorative naming had any lasting power ultimately depended not on the courts, but on popular reputation and self-interest.

In chapter 10, David Luebke returns us to the centrality of the Reformation in sixteenth-century German life, particularly the emergence of new names for the competing Christian denominations. As in David Mayes’s argument in chapter 3, Luebke finds considerable fluidity in the usage of such names as *Lutheran* and *Calvinist* before the Peace of Westphalia. Yet he also argues for a logic and structure in the emergence of new names, particularly in the attempts to discredit members of rival denominations, most notably the people denounced as *Anabaptists* or *Tibben*, both derogatory terms he examines in depth. Many individuals, Luebke finds, had a very elastic notion of the Augsburg Confession, capable of encompassing a variety of beliefs and practices that subsequent confessionalists and historians would unambiguously designate as *Evangelical*, *Reformed*, or *Catholic*.²⁴ Like all of the authors of chapters in part I, Luebke believes that we are often guilty of projecting backward a consistency and conformity that simply did not exist among sixteenth-century Christians. Until we recognize the actual dynamics of their naming, our own naming practices will remain hopelessly anachronistic.

In his afterword, Randolph Head addresses directly both the challenges and the opportunities resulting from the fluidity of naming practices. Scholars of the past, he observes, are hardly immune to changing interests and priorities, evident in the continually changing names and categories we apply to this period in German history. As Head’s own important work on archival history has demonstrated, the past is forever open to reconceptualization and new categorizations—in other words, new naming.²⁵ What he and all of the scholars in this volume propose is that these modern choices be ever more informed by the

realities of the past, as opposed to the polemics or other lazy generalizations of the present. Stability in naming may be a chimera, but careful attention to the voices of those we claim to study is not.

The other conclusion to come out of this collection is that the dynamics of early modern naming needs both more historical field work and greater familiarity with the theories and methods of onomastics among historians. While the editors of this volume intentionally sought a deeply interdisciplinary approach, there is room to broaden still further to include linguistic and anthropological discussions of our topics in different geographical and chronological contexts. The same is true of onomastics, which has also become increasingly interdisciplinary but has not fully engaged with the latest work in social and cultural history. “Do name changes reflect changes in identity, or do they bring them about?”²⁶ This chicken and egg question from onomastist Emila Aldrin identifies just one of many areas of common concern. If our collected contributions help spur further research and interdisciplinary cross-fertilization in early modern naming, we will be gratified.

Joel F. Harrington is Centennial Professor of History at Vanderbilt University. He has published seven books on various social, legal, and religious aspects of premodern Germany, including *Dangerous Mystic: Meister Eckhart’s Path to the God Within* (2018) and *The Faithful Executioner: Life and Death, Honor and Shame in the Turbulent Sixteenth Century* (2013). He served as president of the Frühe Neuzeit Interdisziplinär from 2012 to 2015 and hosted the society’s triennial conference at Vanderbilt in 2015.

Notes

1. For an overview on the state of onomastic theory, see Van Langendonck and Van de Velde, “Names and Grammar”; Nyström, “Names and Meaning”; and De Stefani, “Names and Discourse.” See also Debus, *Namenkunde und Namensgeschichte*.
2. For a similar approach to the early modern Netherlands, see Cook and Dupré, *Translating Knowledge*.
3. Ainiala, “Names in Society,” 372.
4. See the overview of Aldrin, “Names and Identity.” See also Bucholtz and Hall, “Identity and Interaction”; and Taylor and Spencer, *Social Identities*.
5. Lupter, *Romans in a New World*; Dym and Offen, *Mapping Latin America*; and Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain*.
6. For a discussion of the topic of new scientific names in the German age of discovery, see Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World*. See also Pavord, *Naming of Names*; Schiebinger, “Names and Knowing.”
7. Nauert, *Humanism*; Furdell, *Publishing and Medicine*.
8. For an introduction to the onomastics of nicknames, see McClure, “Nicknames and Petnames”; and Bylla, “Bynames and Nicknames.” For an initial foray into early mod-

- ern German nicknames, see Schindler, "The World of Nicknames," esp. 57–62. For an older historical approach to the topic, see Bock, "Nürnberger Spitzname."
9. See, e.g., Balbach, "Name—Geschlecht—Individuum." See also Balbach, "Jakob, Johann, oder Joseph?"; and Eichler et al., *Namenforschung*.
 10. The broader context of late medieval and early modern cursing is masterfully discussed in Schwerhoff, *Zungen wie Schwerter*.
 11. See, e.g., the fascinating discussion of the social context of *Rotwelsch* in Jütte, *Abbild und soziale Wirklichkeit*.
 12. For an exploration of the changing vocabulary of fashion, see Rublack, *Dressing Up*.
 13. See especially Forster, *Catholic Revival*; Forster et al., "Forum."
 14. For a fuller treatment of Karlstadt's role in the early Reformation, see Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins*.
 15. Jedin, *Katholische Reformation*.
 16. The naming of the Catholic response to the Reformation has been a lively issue over the past twenty years. See esp. O'Malley, *Trent and All That*; Ditchfield, "Tridentine Catholicism"; Wassilowsky, "Das Konzil von Trient"; and Reinhard, "Mythologie des Konzils von Trient."
 17. Volkland, "Konfession, Konversion." See also Mayes, "Divided by Toleration."
 18. See, e.g., the recent Fransen, Hodson, and Enenkel, *Translating Early Modern Science*. For an earlier work, see Campbell, *Wonder and Science*. For a specific focus on naming in early modern science, see Egmond, "Names of Naturalia"; and Dijkstra, "Translating Astronomy."
 19. See also Danckwardt, "Konfessionelle Musik?"
 20. On the term *absolutist*, see Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism*; and Duchhardt, "Absolutismus." The word *Baroque* has been traditionally used to denote any kind of contorted and complicated process of thought, and until the late nineteenth century was applied to any odd, grotesque, exaggerated, and overdecorated style, as an antonym of sorts to the Renaissance.
 21. See the discussion in Kostanski, "Toponymic Attachment." See also Montello, "Cognitive Geography," esp. 162–63.
 22. Thomas, *Entangled Objects*; Jardine, *Worldly Goods*; Smith and Findlen, *Merchants & Marvels*; Nussbaum, *The Global Eighteenth Century*; Cook, *Matters of Exchange*; Bleichmar and Mancall, *Collecting Across Cultures*; and Findlen, *Early Modern Things*. See also a recent special issue of *Art History*, Bleichmar and Martin, "Objects in Motion."
 23. See also Leitch, *Mapping Ethnography*; Smith, *Images of Islam*; and Harper, *The Turk and Islam*, 41–66.
 24. For more on this topic, see Jörgensen, *Konfessionelle*. See also Luebke, *Hometown Religion*.
 25. Head, "Knowing Like a State."
 26. Aldrin, "Names and Identity," 389.

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