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NAMING CUSTOMS IN OLDER AND NEWER TIMES

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From the beginning of time, for most peoples, it has been customary to indicated continuity between generations by following fixed rules in the naming of children after their ancestors.

Among some people, this has meant that children could be named only for ancestors no longer alive. Further, one should neglect to name children after persons who had an unfortunate fate. This is the case in our own country. As far as the first rule is concerned, that children should not be named for living persons, this is hardly the case for those concerned in Norway.

It is difficult to find in literature exact data concerning naming customs. Perhaps the most thorough in discussing this matter is Troels Lund [in his Daglig liv i Norden, volume 2, p. 712-716 (Oslo, 1939-41)], but nevertheless as one reads his chapter on this subject, he begins to doubt that what he writes is fully valid in Denmark, within the period he is discussing, namely the 1600s.

Troels Lund mentions that it was "a token of respect to have someone named for himself," but says at the same time that "It was a basic rule that the child should be named for a deceased kinsman who they wished the child to resemble. He should 'be repeated with the newest,' they said in Norway. That is, it was an experience that the child inherited the nature and qualities of one still living. From this, it followed that the child not be named for one still living, because when the living person deteriorated and lost his

faculties, in the same way the child grew and thrived."

Troels Lund goes so far as to say "It was a rule so common among the Danish nobility in the in the 16th century that even today we can use it as a guide when we try to trace the personal history of those times: a man must be considered to be dead from the moment his name was established on a younger member of the family." In spite of this, precise data is difficult to obtain, except when it concerns Danish nobility. The latter is not difficult to find with the help of some of the annual volumes of Denmarks Adels Aarbog, which Troels Lund claims are not always in agreement. It appears there that some were named after living persons.

In another place, Troels Lund says "As late as the 19th century, the people in Nordsjaelland felt that 'The old grandfather would consider it as a sign that his son would beat him to death or wish him dead, when he named his child for him while he was still alive.'"

This is not the situation in Norway, and especially not in the 19th century. For example, Johan Jerstad tells in his local history of Fjotland [Johan Jerstad, Fjotland, sogebok (Oslo, 1949), p. 420] about a family on the Spikkeland farm, saying that the old Atlak Tronsen Spikkeland in 1832 "became angry" when his son, Tron Atlaksen "changed the name from Atlak to Andreas." He said that "Now there will be filth at Spikkeland, because they changed the name." And so it turned out.

Peter Lunde [Peter Lunde, Kynnehuset, (Kristiania, 1924), p. 32] gives a similar example, also from Fjotland: "It was not good for the child to have the name changed from that for whom he should be named, especially when it was the eldest son who should be baptized."

Kristoffer Visted and Hilmar Stigen have discussed this subject further in Vår gamle bondekultur, volume 1 (Oslo, 1951), p. 318]. As they explain it: "As people named children for the family, or—as they called it—resurrected the family, they began with the grandparents. As a rule, one should resurrect the person in the family who had most recently died."

One notes here the obvious influence of Troels Lund, but to some extent also from Johannes Skar in his books about Setesdal. The latter writes something similar. But Visted and Stigum do not mention the fact that Skar also writes [Johannes Skar, Gamalt or Saetesdal, volume 2, p. 104-106, Oslo, 1961]: "The old folks arranged so that the name came to life. They gave great gifts to their namesake, dressing him in new clothes from head to foot, or giving him other things which would benefit him. At time they took him in, fed him and gave him all they owned and had."

At the same time, Skar mentions that some persons did not like to be named for someone still living. And he tells the following: "When a child had died before, and they resurrected it when the next one came, and this child did not live—another name should come in between. The same name must absolutely not be used."

The contention that one did not name after living persons is constantly mentioned in genealogical articles and is in part documented with various oral "proof." Although the contention is never disproved, it persists in large part because it is difficult to refute, simply for lack of documentary evidence.

In the following account, we will examine the naming rules only for the period which can be documented, namely, from about 1700, when the church books begin up to about 1900. The area examined is first and foremost Fjotland and Sirdal in Vest-Agder, together with a part of Vang in Hedemarken [Church books for Fjotland (from 1709) and Sirdal (from 1724) in the Regional Archives in Kristiansand. Churchbooks for Vang in Hedemarken (from 1683) in the Regional

Archives in Hamar]. One cannot discern any differences in the rules between Hedemarken and Vest-Agder. For Sirdal, it can be noted that all families in the community are recorded with all established children, even those who were baptized in other communities.

Naming rules were very stringent, and it was seldom that one deviated from the established line. It can be seen that there are two basic rules, together with four separate rules for special cases.

Basic Rules:

1. Naming for grandparents.
2. Naming for Great-grandparents.

Separate Rules:

1. Naming for former spouses.
2. Naming of a child born and baptized after the death of the father or mother.
3. Naming of a child born out of wedlock.
4. Unusual deviations.

We will examine more closely the different rules for naming.

Basic Rules

1) Naming for grandparents.

This is the basic rule largely known today, but which is unfortunately becoming more and more "loose and diluted." In the rural districts, when a man had allodial rights to a farm, or when he had purchased the rights to a farm, the rules were as follows:

- a. The eldest son was named for the father's father.
- b. The eldest daughter was named for the father's mother.
- c. The next eldest son was named for the mother's father.
- d. The next eldest daughter was named for the mother's mother.

When once in a while one finds "deviation" from this rule, it is only apparent. The church books will usually always reveal that between the children who grew up, there have existed other children with the "missing" forenames, but that these children died young.

When the situation was that a man was married to the heiress to a farm (with allodial rights to a farm), the rule was that her parents

should be named for first. "The name belongs to the farm," said the old folks.

People in the city followed the same rules, but if a woman married beneath her station, as sometimes happened, her parents were willingly named for first.

2) Naming for great-grandparents.

When the names of grandparents were "exhausted," one began using the names of great-grandparents. Here we find no clear fast rules concerning which should be named for first. Here one gets the impression that in many cases one, as far as possible, avoided such combinations as Hans Hansen, Mads Madsen and the like.

If a man was named Mads Iverson, and his father Iver Madsen, one would get the combination of Mads Madsen. When one chose in the first rotation one of the other great-grandparents, and one had four such to choose between, this would work if the spouses were not cousins.

This use of the names of the great-grandparents for naming purposes has in genealogical literature led to misunderstandings, because people today have believed that it was uncles and aunts who were named after. One of Johannes Skar's informants [see earlier citation] has obviously had this idea, because he expresses himself as follows with reference to rules for naming:

"Father and mother of the husband first, then father and mother of the wife. Then it was the father's brother and mother's brother and father's sister and mother's sister of the husband, and then likewise for the wife. Then the brothers and sisters, especially if they had brothers and sisters who had died."

This is absolutely incorrect. Uncles and aunts were never named for, except in clearly special cases where, for example, they turned their property over to a kinsman. See further under special rule 4. For another thing, it could appear that uncles and aunts were named for, because when one began naming for great-grandparents, since there were in an earlier generation, one could get the impression that it was uncles and aunts who were named for.

Separate Rules

1) Naming for earlier spouses.

If a husband had been married earlier, the first daughter in the new marriage should be named for the first wife. The same pertained to women who had been married before; in such cases, the first son in the new marriage should be named for the first husband.

Here could occur some deviations. If they were living on the man's ancestral farm, his father was clearly named for first, then the wife's deceased husband and so on to her father..

If one had two spouses who should be named for, one took them in chronological order. In the 1800s, it became customary to give double forenames, naming for both spouses.

2) Naming of a child born or baptized after the death of the father or mother.

If a son was born or baptized after the death of the father, he automatically was given the father's name. This resulted in a large number of combinations such as Hans Hansen and Mads Madsen. If a daughter was born after her father's death, she should also be named for him, but here one used only a similar name, such as Todne for Torkel. But in the 1800s it became the custom to create new women's names out of men's names. For example, Oline was named for Ola, and the like.

In the same manner, if a daughter was baptized after her mother's death, she was automatically given the mother's name. And the son was given a name similar to that of the mother.

3) Naming of a child born out of wedlock.

If a boy was born out of wedlock, and the man named as the father declined before the court to acknowledge being the father, then the rule was that the father was "punished" by having the son named for him. In this way, also, one could get such combinations as Hans Hansen and Mads Madsen and other.

If it was a daughter who was born, it often happened that the child was named for someone in the mother's family; but more

often, the father was also here "punished" by having the child, for example, baptized as Oline, if the father was named Ole. In 1836 the butcher in Bergen, Johan Adam Wigant, had a daughter with the unmarried woman, Anne Marie Hansdatter. She "punished" the father by naming the child Johanne Adamine.

And then there is the case in which the child's father denied his part, receiving a court judgment clearing him from the charge. Then the child's mother was "punished." The child became "fatherless," and could not use a patronymic, but only a matronymic, for example, such as Lars Adlaugson.

Norway's history offers us several examples of this. Many possibly remember the Dane, Svein Alfivason, who was king of Norway in the years, 1030-1035. He was the illegitimate son of the Danish king, Kut the Great, and an English woman named Alfiva. In some history books he is still mentioned as Svein Knutsson.

When a woman gave birth to a girl, and the child's father received a court judgment clearing him, the situation then was that the daughter was given the same forename as her mother, and she had to use the matronymic. Thus, one might get such a combination as Dorte Dortesdatter.

In some cases it happened that the child was baptized before the legal judgment had been given. In 1811 in Bygland in Setesdal, a boy was baptized who was born out of wedlock. The father was named Anen Torjesen, and the boy at baptism was named Anen Anensen. The mother named Sigrid (or Siri). This boy later came to Sirdal. In census records and church books, he is always listed as Anen Anensen, but the father had apparently cleared himself by court judgment, because tradition today has him known as Anen Sigridson.

But what happened to children born out of wedlock when they themselves had children? Did they name them after their father? No, this they didn't. Perhaps they came up with a related name, but more often they did not.

Sometimes it happened in the case of a child born out of wedlock that the man and woman later were married to each other. If one sees their children segregated, without reference to the year of marriage, one can possibly get the impression that the rules of naming have not been followed. Perhaps the

father was named Peder Olsen, and the mother Anna Niilsdatter, while their son was named Peder Pedersenn. If one learns that the child was born before the marriage, one can understand that the name was given as a "punishment" for the child's father.

4) Occasional deviations

There are a number of less common rules; here we will mention a few of them:

a) The married couple has received some property as a gift from childless kinsmen.

In such cases, the givers are often named for first. As mentioned earlier, the name should belong to the farm.

b) The married couple names a child for someone who in an earlier generation was attempted to be named for, unsuccessfully.

This is something we see now and then. A man has unsuccessfully sought to have his sons named for his father, but the sons died. He remained with only daughters. When the eldest daughter married, it happened that as a gesture, she named her first son as the grandfather her father had sought to name after.

c) The married couple gives up the attempt to name after a specific individual.

As mentioned earlier in Johannes Skar's books (see earlier citation), one should especially not name a child with the same name as that of one who had died. "There must come another name inbetween." This rule doesn't always apply. It was customary that parents should confidentially continue to name children after their deceased child. One can find many examples of this. Ommund Pedersen Jisdal in Sirdal in the years, 1803-1822, had 5 sons, all of whom were named Peder. All died. He couple made no attempt at another name inbetween.

Occasionally, one had to give up. In the years, 1823-1845 the couple, Torkel Halvorsen and Astrid Knutsdatter Sinnes had in all 15 children. Astrid was the heiress to the farm. In this case, it is clear that the couple had decided to name after the wife's grandfather first, since her father, Knut Jorgensen, had attempted to do that. It is clear that the daughter did not have much success with this.

They first had a son in 1823, who was baptized as Jorgen. Four sons followed with the same name. They all died shortly after birth. After this, it appears that the couple gave up, and had two sons named Knut and Halvor. But they hadn't given up. In 1842, 19 years after they had brought the first Jorgen to be baptized, they had another son whom they named Jorgen. This Jorgen grew up. They were successful with the sixth attempt. Belief that it brings bad luck to name children after deceased brothers or sisters apparently does not prevail.

d) Wrong name at baptism.

Although this may happen, it was very rare. But if the child received at baptism a name decided upon, it could not be changed. On October 10, 1824, Salve Evertsen Lunde in Sirdal and his wife, Berit Olsdatter, had a child who at baptism some weeks later got the name of Marthe. The pastor has written in the margin of the church book:

"The child's name should be Gunvor, but the woman carrying the child to the baptism made a mistake, and named it Marthe."

Naming customs in Norway have probably changed little in historical times. The names that were used were occasionally changed. It would be accurate to say that one in earlier times was motivated by fashion. With the introduction of Christianity new names came to Norway, such as Peter, Jon and others. The Royal House of Oldenburg was the source for the names of Christian and Federik becoming common. It is known also that the name of Oscar came into use in recent centuries, after we had had kings with that name.

There were small changes in names, retaining only the initial letter of the person being named for. This has been called "to change name" or "to discontinue name." This happened especially beginning in the 1770s. It appears that pastors of rationalism contributed to the introduction of this custom. Old Norwegian names were "modernized" and replaced by foreign names. Aslak could be changed to Andreas, Gaute to Gabriel, Torkel to Tobias, Ragnhild to Rakel, Todne to Tonette.

The last name came some years after the French Revolution, coming from the naming of the French queen, Marie-Antoinette, who was executed in 1793. Her name gave rise to many new names in Norway, such as Anne

Tonette, Antonette, Karen Tonette, Inger Tonette. Tonette along later became Nette and Netta.

In older times a child received only one name. According to Troels Lund, it was King Christian IV who was one of the first to break with this rule, in that in the beginning of the 1600s he started to give children two or more names at baptism. In Sweden, it was also the royal family which introduced this custom; it appears that the Swedish king, Gustav II Adolf, who was born in 1594, was the first in that country.

The custom spread to the Danish cities about the middle of the 1600s, but it became common in Norway somewhat later. Here also for us, it came first to the cities. In the country communities, it probably was used first in the coastal communities.

In Sirdal, which is a typical inland community, one finds the first child with a double name in 1741. This was a lady who had been baptized in the community of Lund, south of Sirdal. She was named Anne Lisbeth.

The first child born in Sirdal to be given a double name was baptized in 1766, but it was all of 12 years before the next child with a double name was baptized in 1778. It was several more years before the custom became fixed. Especially in the period of 1814 one finds many double names such as Ole Andreas, Per Tobias, Christian Fredrik, etc.

In several genealogical articles one can find the suggestion of the erroneous idea that it was common in the old days to have several children with the same name. There is reference, for example, to the fact that one can find in the same family brothers named Stor-Ola, Litle-Ola and Vesl-Ola, and thus assume that it was common with such families. Had one studied the entire family, he would have discovered that the three Oles were named according to clearly stringent rules.

If, for example, Mads Olsen, had married Karen Olsdatter, their two eldest sons would have been baptized with the names of Ola. If in addition, Karen Olsdatter had been married earlier to an Ola Hansen, and that in that earlier marriage she had been able to name a child for her father, she must in her second marriage name a child for her first husband. In this way, there would be three sons with the name of Ola.

Exactly the same would happen in this example, if the mothers of both Mads Olsen and Karen Olsdatter were named Ingrid, and if Mads Olsen had been married earlier to an Ingrid; and had not been able to name a child for his mother. Then Mads Olsen must first name a child for his first wife, Ingrid, then for his mother, Ingrid, and finally for his second wife's mother, Ingrid. Had Mads been married twice before to a woman named Ingrid, he would have been obliged to name 4 daughters with that name.

One can understand how some genealogical authors could fall into the belief that it was customary to name 2 or more children with the same name. The following example could at first glance appear a little strange:

Hoskuld Pedersen Ousadal in Sirdal was married in 1831 to Siri Stalesdatter Knaben from Fjotland. Their 2 eldest sons were baptized accordingly Peder and Stale. But the next 2 sons were also named Peder and Stale. For what reason? Because Hoskuld's father was named Peder Pedersen Ousadal and Siri's father was named Stale Stalesen Knaben.

In our 3 most northerly counties, we can see signs that the rules for naming are beginning to fall apart. It is possible that this is only apparent. In the Lappish population in Finnmark, it is obvious that the people followed the same rules through the 1800s. It is not unlikely, therefore, that these rules have applied in the whole country, perhaps over the entire North. On the basis of allodial rights, it is possible that the rules about the ancestors of heirs should have them named for first, but not to the degree one finds in other Scandinavian countries.

Today naming customs, especially in the cities, but also in rural communities, are in full dissolution. Often, one does not make an attempt even to use a name starting with the initial letter of the name of an ancestor. In addition, there are many fashionable names, often of foreign origin, and more are continually coming in. This is an enormously sad development.

Should we not take the spoon in the other hand and reintroduce the old rules for naming. In this way we can show that we still have appreciation for honoring our ancestors. This will certainly delight many grandparents. And it surely will be of invaluable use to the genealogists of the future.

Editor's note: The article, published earlier in Norsk Slethkshistorisk Tidsskrift, 1977, volume 28, number 2, was written by the author, as a Norwegian contribution to the jubilee issue I the hope that "this possibly could give rise to a debate about circumstances in Sweden in this field." (Compare SoH, 1959, pages 270ff).