The "Malachi" Given Name Pattern in a Swedish Village, 1500-1800

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An inventory of parish records contains the given names of some 2,000 males and nearly 2,000 females in the village of Ljustorp, Sweden over three centuries. Three-fourths of all males shared eight given names and three-fourths of all females shared another eight names. The duplication of personal names across generations comes from the practice of naming children after close relatives. The naming pattern had three characteristics: repetition of the same given names for different people; selection of a child's name from a specific set of close family relationships; and assignment of the relative's name to the namesake child according to birth order. Although the specific pattern may be labeled name repetition in some onomastic and genealogical discussions, a precise term for the naming practice is lacking. I suggest it be called the "Malachi" pattern, after the description of the prophet who foresaw the restoration of family ties in the latter days.

The village of Ljustorp lies in a tract of forested farmland, northwest of Sundsvall, Sweden, in the Medelpad district of Västernorrland province, across the Gulf of Bothnia from Finland. At the heart of the parish is a luminous white chapel with two red schoolhouses, situated on a rise, surrounded by cultivated fields and rolling hills. For generations, Lutheran church officials kept parish registers, conscientiously recording the births, marriages, and deaths of all the individuals in Ljustorp.[1]

In the summer of 2002, I obtained a copy of *Ljustorpsbor 1500-1800*, a compilation of parish records by Swedish genealogist Agneta Olofsson in 2000. The *Ljustorpsbor* typescript handbook gives extensive vital statistics for 773 family groups who lived on farms in 26 different Ljustorp homesteads from about 1598 to 1818. The inventory includes the families of hantverkare (day-laborers) and båtsman (sailors) who lived in the parish, along with basic information about individual farmers and widows who owned land before 1598.

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The *Ljustorpsbor* handbook provides a wealth of onomastic as well as genealogical information. The common Germanic practice of clipping longer names into shorter ones, for instance, was evident in the variation of given names. Many full-length names for both sons and daughters were shortened into nicknames (*Nils* and *Claus* from *Nicolaus*; *Kirsti* and *Stina* from *Cristina*). As I tabulated the names and their variants, several questions emerged: Which given names were most frequent? Was there a pattern to the giving of names, and, if so, what was its origin and was it the same for sons and daughters? These and other questions led me to a comprehensive study of the given names in the *Ljustorpsbor* data.

Given Name Preferences and Patterns

An alphabetical index for män (husbands) and kvinnor (wives) facilitated a preliminary frequency count of given names in the data, which showed that male children were given a total of only 67 different names, and female children a total of only 46 different names.

Biblical names predominated because of the influence of the Catholic Church in Sweden from the 11th to the 16th centuries and the subsequent dominance of the Lutheran Church from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Many Ljustorp given names were derived from Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew, or Latin names in the Old Testament (*Jonas*, *Sara*) or the New Testament (*Per*, *Märta*). A few Old Germanic names (*Eric*, *Ingrid*) carried over from the pre-Christian era, but some of these also had Christian associations because of the practice of naming children for early saints who happened to have Old Norse names such as *Olof* or Celtic names such as *Brita*.

The eight most frequent male given names (including variants) were *Olof*, *Erik*, *Lars*, *Jonas*, *Nils*, *Per*, *Anders*, and *Johan*. These eight names account for about 76% of the male names in Ljustorp. *Olof*, an Old Norse compound from Germanic roots meaning 'ancestor's descendant', was the most common given name for males. Although *Olof* is not a Biblical name per se, a Christian influence is evident. St. Olaf Haraldson was the Norwegian king who established the Catholic church throughout northern Scandinavia in the early 11th century. As a Viking warrior, Olof had encountered Catholic Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England. After his conversion, Olof was instrumental in establishing Christianity as the dominant religion in Norway and Sweden. The influence of St. Olof was so profound in northern Sweden in the Middle Ages that the Medelpads district wherein Ljustorp lies was generally known as St. Olof's Land. At that time Ljustorp was not an inland village. Much of

the land where the city of Sundsvall now sits was still under water, and Ljustorp sat closer to the shores of the Baltic Sea, with a port named St. Olof's Harbor. The Lutheran church in Ljustorp today features a sculpture of St. Olof from the 12th century, and a priest named Olof Olofsson presided over Ljustorp parish from 1571 until 1610.

The eight most frequent female given names in Ljustorp (including variants) were *Brita*, *Anna*, *Catarina*, *Cristina*, *Märta*, *Margareta*, *Ingrid*, and *Sara*. These eight name types account for about 75% of the women's names. *Brita*, the most popular name for females, is a clipping of *Birgitta* and means 'high goddess' in Irish Gaelic. The name was originally linked to St. Bridget, an early convert to Christianity in Ireland. However, the cultural context for the Swedish naming preference includes St. Birgitta Birgersdotter, the Swedish mystic who founded an order of monks and nuns in the mid-14th century. Like St. Olof, the influence of St. Birgitta was quite evident in Västernorrland. The Birgittakapellet (Brigit's chapel) in Skön parish near Ljustorp underscores the popularity of the given name Birgitta and its variant Brita. The popularity of Brita continued into the late 19th century, as exemplified by the 1879 christening of my great-grandmother as Brita Oliva Forsstrom in Ljustorp parish.

In total, and ranging over three centuries, just sixteen different name types (eight male and eight female) accounted for three-fourths of all the given names in the community. This means that duplication and recycling of names was very high in Ljustorp. The names that sons and daughters received were reiterated through multiple generations by repetition and variation.

These results from a parish in northern Sweden are remarkably similar to those documented by Olof Cronberg in a study of given names from 8,700 marriages in the Skytt area of southwest Sweden. In the district of Scania from 1664-1815 about 75% of males and females shared the ten most common names (1988, 17).

Characteristics of the Naming System

A common namesake repetition pattern explains the high degree of generational name sharing in Sweden (Fredriksson 1974; Utterström 1995) and also in Norway (Alhaug 1986). This practice entails giving the names of close relatives to newly-christened infants according to their gender and birth order.

The names of close relatives were bestowed upon infants in Lutheran christening ceremonies usually performed within a few days after the child's birth. In the *Ljustorpsbor* data the practice of naming infant sons after relatives followed a general pattern whereby

first sons were named after the *farfar* (father's father),
second sons after the *morfar* (mother's father),
third sons after the *far* (father), and
fourth sons after a *farbror* or *morbror* (paternal or maternal uncle).

Daughters in Ljustorp received their given names in a corresponding pattern whereby

first daughters were often named after the *farmor* (father's mother),
second daughters after the *mormor* (mother's mother),
third daughters after the *mor* (mother), and
fourth daughters after a *faster* or *moster* (paternal or maternal aunt).

Many Ljustorp families followed these patterns rather strictly. Of the 574 couples who had at least one son, 334 named him after the father's father, and of the 574 couples who had at least one daughter, 226 named her after the father's mother.

However, other Ljustorp families followed the pattern of namesake repetition more loosely, using the names of close relatives but varying the usage in the birth order slots. A couple might choose to name their first son after the mother's father instead of the father's father, or they might name their first daughter after the mother's sister instead of the father's mother. Overall, nearly 90% of all parents named their first son after one of the expected relatives. Naming for female children was less regular, but the traditional pattern was still dominant, with more than two-thirds of parents naming their first daughter after one of the relatives. Thus, nearly everyone in Ljustorp, from the 16th through the 18th centuries, had been given the name of a grandparent, a parent, an aunt, or an uncle.

The apparent dominance of this name pattern warranted a statistical analysis. Was there a relationship between birth order and the given names chosen for sons and daughters in Ljustorp? To answer this question I inventoried children from the 659 Ljustorp households, according to birth order. I collected data for the first four sons in each family group with relation to seven possible name conventions: paternal grandfathers, maternal grandfathers, fathers, and uncles. For daughters

I considered the names of paternal grandmothers, maternal grandmothers, mothers, and aunts.[2]

A chi-square analysis of the given names in Ljustorp showed that the birth order pattern for the names of both sons and daughters is statistically significant at a p-value < .000. Thus I concluded that there is a statistically significant pattern to the naming of both male and female children in Ljustorp.[3]

Variations in family circumstances led to changes in the traditional namesake repetition pattern, resulting in modified adherence to birth order in the assignment of given names. Name duplication also resulted in modifications of the naming pattern. Cronberg (2006, 8) notes several deviations from the basic pattern:

> If a widower remarried, the next born daughter received the name of the deceased wife. Similarly, widows who remarried named the next-born son for the deceased husband.
>
> If a child died, the next born child of the same sex received the name of the deceased sibling.
>
> If a child other than the firstborn received the name of a grandparent, often the grandparent had died in the year before the child's birth.

These and other factors contributed to systematic modifications of the given name pattern seen in the Ljustorp data. Sometimes a child's given name came from both a parent and a grandparent because the parent was a first born child named after the grandparent. In that case, the given names in the pattern would shift to next-born children in the birth order. For example, Olof, the first son of Olof Olofsson shares his father's and his grandfather's name. So, a third son in the birth order would need a name other than the father's, perhaps an uncle's name.

Sometimes a husband and wife both have fathers with the same name. Jon Eriksson and Kerstin Eriksdotter both have fathers named Erik, in which case, their first-born son, Erik, has the names of his father's father and mother's father, so a second son would have the name of his father Jon instead of a repetition of the name Erik. Per Larsson and Cecilia Larsdotter both have fathers named Lars and mothers named Brita. So, the given names of their sons and daughters will fall into different birth order slots.

The statistical significance of the given name pattern in Ljustorp families suggests that this can be a useful tool in Swedish genealogical research. One can often determine the probable name of an unknown

ancestor by considering the naming pattern. For example, Ingemar Hansson has a father named Hans, but the name of Ingemar's mother is unknown. We know that Ingemar named his first daughter Märta and that Ingemar's sister Anna Hansdotter also named her first daughter Märta. Ingemar's family and Anna's family strictly followed the pattern of naming their other children after relatives by birth order. This suggests quite strongly that the mother of Ingemar and Anna is probably Märta. The given name pattern may not reveal the names of all missing relatives, but it can reveal the names of some ancestors through the given names of children. Like the well-known patronymic pattern for surnames, the given name pattern can also reveal the names of children through the given names of their ancestors.

A New Name for the Old World Given Name Pattern

To my knowledge there is no generally accepted term for the naming tradition practiced in Ljustorp so faithfully for centuries. The practice of naming children by birth order and by sharing the names of certain close relatives does not seem to have a precise name in either genealogy or onomastics.[4] *Patronymic*, defined by Room (1996, 78) as a "forename deriving directly from that of the bearer's father," is inadequate since it does not account fully for family relationships and birth order.

Scholars such as Eckhardt (1955), Wagner (1984), and Mitterauer (1993) use the German word *Nachbenennung* 'naming after' to refer to a variety of name-sharing patterns. The index to Mitterauer's *Ahnen und Heilige: Namengebung in der Europäischen Geschicte* lists at least 100 different sub-categories of *Nachbenennung*, such as naming children after ancestors, apostles, aunts, brothers, grandparents, great-grandparents, heroes, parents, popes, relatives, royalty, saints, teachers, and uncles (1993, 512-12). Mitterauer discusses the naming of children after close kin and ancestors but he does not have a concise term for the naming of children after a specific set of relatives or forebears by birth sequence.

Mitterauer (1993, 33-34) describes a pattern of given name repetition throughout the Old World and the Near East. The pattern includes children who are named after paternal and maternal relatives and recorded on Persian royal family inscriptions from the 7th century B.C., in Babylonian texts from the from the 5th century B.C., and in Semitic records from the 1st century B.C. The pre-Christian name pattern appears among the Egyptians, as well as among the Jews of Palestine and the Diaspora.

In a reference guide for Jewish genealogy, Warren Blatt (2004) cites the use of a namesake pattern among both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews. In the Ashkenazic system, children (of either sex) are named after the closest relative who has died before the baby's birth (but without a birth order component). In Spain, the Sephardic given name pattern focuses on honoring a specific set of close relatives and with a birth order component:

> The first son is named for the father's father, the first daughter for the father's mother. The next son is named in honor of his mother's father and the second girl after her maternal grandmother. Any subsequent children are named in honor of aunts and uncles. (35)

A name repetition pattern featuring both birth order and a set of close relatives is thoroughly attested in several branches of the Indo-European language family. Salway (1994) reports that in the Roman Empire in the 1st and 2nd centuries 99% of all males shared only 17 given names. First-born sons tended to receive the names of their fathers, and the names given to subsequent sons may have been "subject to an order of precedence" involving the use of given names to "commemorate noble forbears" and to "emphasize generational continuity" (125, 141, 145). Rather than receiving the given names of female ancestors, many Roman women received a literal birth order designation such as Segunda (second daughter) or Tertia (third daughter) in addition to their father's surname (126).

The name pattern featuring both birth order and names of close relatives is also pervasive in the Germanic branch of Indo-European, including the North Germanic Scandinavians, the East Germanic Goths, and the West Germanic Anglo-Saxons. Henry Bosley Woolf (1939) notes that repetition is one of the three main patterns for name-giving in Old Germanic (2). One of the earliest attestations of the Old Germanic name repetition pattern is a 5th-century Eric who shared the name of his 4th-century great-uncle in the royal Yngling family of Sweden (255). As early as the 10th and 11th centuries, children in Nordic lands received the names of parents in linear succession, of grandparents in alternating generations, or of collateral siblings (255-58).

The earliest Swedish given names are attested on rune stones from the beginning of the 6th century. Early personal names usually expressed desirable characteristics for the newborn child, such as 'might + power' in the compound name *Ragnvald*. These were followed by Germanic compound variations of initial or end themes in a close relative's name,

so that *Torulf* and his wife *Gunhild* had children named *Guntor*, *Gunnolf*, *Gunsten*, *Hildulf*, *Torgun*, *Torhild*, *Stenhild*, and *Ulfhild*. Later, children in Sweden received the full names of relatives and ancestors according to the namesake and birth order repetition pattern. That practice led to the "present day custom of naming a child after his parents and grandparents" which helped preserve "old Swedish names from generation to generation" (Johansson 1972, 21).

George Flom relates the name repetition pattern to an Old Germanic belief in the transmigration of the soul after death. Rather than alliteration or a variation of a relative's name, the entire name of the ancestor is repeated so that the soul and personality of the deceased "shall continue a new existence in the present descendant" (1917, 17). Parents may use namesake repetition to encourage children to honor them (Mitterauer 1993, 195, 198) or to emulate a noble ancestor "whose fine qualities they hope to see replicated in the child." Parents may wish to "stress continuity of family line, by naming a son for the father, or a daughter for a grandmother" (Kass 1995, 17). In the Swedish tradition, the "full given name of a deceased ancestor was given to a descendant in order that the ancestor might be remembered" (Johansson 1972, 21).

In keeping with the Biblical roots of Swedish names as well as early Semitic onomastics, I suggest that we call this naming practice the "Malachi" pattern. In the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi foresees the restoration of family ties in latter days:

> Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers . . . . (Malachi 4: 5-6).

Malachi's prophecy is fulfilled metaphorically, iconistically, and onomastically in Ljustorp's given name pattern. The names of close relatives turn into the names of newborn children, and the names of the children turn back to their relatives.

Notes

1. The parish books are available for research at the Landsarkivet in Härnösand, Sweden. Microfilm copies are also available through the Family History Library of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah.

2. Some instances were indeterminate because information was insufficient to say whether the child's name followed the pattern or not. Occurrences of the indeterminate pattern were greater for daughters than for sons since the patronymic system of surnames gives access to more male given names than female. For example, the

patronymic surnames of Jonsson and Jonsdotter point to a father named Jon but give no information about the name of the mother.

3. For help with the statistical analysis, I would like to thank Dave Stromberg, consultant at the Brigham Young University statistics laboratory, who prepared the data for the chi-square analysis.

4. An Internet search turned up allusions to a "common European" naming pattern but these are clearly inadequate since the origins of the practice extend beyond historical Europe. There were no responses to a query posted on the American Name Society listserv (ANS-L) in March 2007. Ironically this pattern of naming is itself nameless.

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