

## A Few Words on Selecting and Registering an SCA Name

Our newer members, and perhaps even some older ones, may be considering registering an SCA name for themselves. To give you a start, here is a little bit about registering SCA names and what it means, in a questions-and-answer format.

Q. Am I required to register a name to participate in the SCA?

A. Not at all. Some gentlefolk have played in the SCA 20+ years without registering a name. It's also not a prerequisite for being an officer. Registering your name is optional.

Q. Do I have to be a paid member to register an SCA name?

A. No, not under the current rules.

Q. If it's not required to register a name, what are the advantages of doing so?

A. There are basically 3 advantages to registering a name.

1. Once registered, no one else may register that same name or something too similar to it. That name is protected as uniquely yours.
2. Via the registration process, you are assured that your name has been examined by experts in the area of medieval names and found to be a name that is reasonably possible to have had in the medieval period. In other words, you can feel good about having an authentic name.
3. You may register a device and badge. Devices and badges are not registered unless the person submits a name before or at the same time as the armory submission. Without the name, they wouldn't have anything to file the armory under.

Q. What does a name need to include in order to be registered?

A. Your name must have a given name and a surname. The given name is the one you would have been given at birth by your parents. In English this is the "first name," although in some languages (Japanese, for example) the given name comes last.

The surname is the name that people use to distinguish you from other people who have the same given name as you. In English this is the "last name." In much of our period, surnames were not inherited as they are today. The surname might have been created by others using your occupation, your father's name, the place where you lived, your behavior or your appearance.

Q. Where can I find good names for registration?

A. Whether you use the Internet or books, you want to find a source that tells what date that name was used (dates before 1650!), and what primary source is their proof for that date. It is part of a herald's job to help you find a name, so local heralds may have reliable books that you may look in that have good names. Then, when you submit your name, you need to send in your

documentation, which includes title and authors of the sources you used, page numbers the name was found on (if applicable), web address (if applicable) and photocopies of the pages in question (always a good idea, but there are some very well-known sources among SCA heralds that do not require photocopies – see a herald to find out which ones they are).

Q. What are sources to avoid when looking for a name?

A. Please spare yourself and your heralds much pain by avoiding the following sources: baby name books, fantasy books and films, and websites that give no indication that they are based on real research. And above all, please do not pull a name out of thin air and then expect a herald to document it for you!

Q. Does it matter if the given name and surname are from the same time period?

A. They should be reasonably close. Plus or minus three hundred years is considered close.

Q. Does it matter if the given name and surname are from the same place or language?

A. Yes, the two names should be from the same geographic location and in the same language. Someone always wants to say, "My mother was from country X and my father from country Y, so I have a given name from one language and a surname from another language." OK, the persona story is not unfeasible in many cases. However, it is the College of Herald's policy to ignore persona stories. In addition, while your parents may have come from 2 different places, you can only physically live in one place at a time. While living there, the medieval locals would have called you something that made sense and was pronounceable in their language. They wouldn't have addressed you by a foreign name. This is borne out in period documents calling the same person different things in different languages.

There are a few exceptions to this policy. There are some cases in which you have a surname in one language and a given name in another if the two locations had a lot of contact with one another in the medieval period. There is actually a chart that states which languages/locations may be mixed in this manner. See your local herald if this is your situation.

I hope this primer has been useful to some of you. Good luck in your name search!