

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TERM *ORIGIN* IN THE DESCRIPTION OF GIVEN NAME SYSTEMS

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Abstract

The term *origin* can be understood in several ways with regard to given names. For instance, at least four interpretations coexist in the Hungarian onomastic literature: (1) the language in which the name was formed or from which it was borrowed (these two categories frequently do not coincide with each other), (2) the method through which the name entered the name stock (by category change – e.g. from common noun to proper name –, name-building, revival or recreation of long-forgotten names, borrowing or translation of foreign names, etc.), (3) the source of the name (e.g. the Bible, martyrologies, literary works), (4) the relation of the name to the Christian name stock (saint or profane). As the categories created based on these points of view do not overlap, merging any of these approaches leads to misunderstandings not only in academic discourse but also in the public sphere. Finally, it should also be considered that everyday categorisation does not work on scientific grounds. Consequently, the lay classification of the linguistic origin of a name may differ from the scientific categorisation. The aim of this paper is to create a theoretical model – by separating the above-mentioned points of view – for the proper description of given name systems by origin, based on the contemporary Hungarian given name stock. Due to the similarities between the given name stocks of Christian peoples (and – a certain extent – that of other cultures), the model will hopefully also be useful for the description of various national given name stocks.

Keywords: onomastics, etymology, categorization, theory, given names, origin of names, sources of names

1. The topic of the paper

The paper focuses on the various interpretations of the linguistic term *origin* with regard to given names, and intends to clarify the complicated relations between them, in order to diminish the problems caused by the imprecise and undefined use of the term in the onomastic literature and when informing the public. Namely, it may lead to misunderstanding in scientific exchanges or in comparative studies if this term is used differently by various experts of the same field of study (for problems caused by terminological differences, see e.g. Harvalík 2005: 163–165; Farkas 2014: 16). According to cognitive approaches to terminology (e.g. the communicative theory of terminology, cf. e.g. Cabré 1999; sociocognitive terminology, cf. e.g. Temmerman 2000; frame-based terminology, cf. e.g. Faber 2015) polysemy is natural in scientific terminology and it has its own functions. Nevertheless, if the term *origin* remains undefined, thus its different uses remain undetected, this may lead to incorrect conclusions, for example, in the comparison of the name stocks by origin in different languages, regions or time periods.

However, in academic discourse these problems can be remedied by building on the realisation that the cause of misapprehension lies in varied uses of the term *origin*. Nevertheless, these inconsistencies may lead to larger difficulties in scientific popularisation or everyday use, as people with no linguistic competence do not even realise that there is a misunderstanding. Moreover, the scientific definitions and uses of terms (i.e. “the special-purpose framings of words”; cf. Fillmore 2006: 390) may differ from public use, which may also be a source of misconception (for examples related to onomastic terminology, see e.g. Farkas 2014: 17–18). The subject is an especially important question because the origin and etymological meaning of given names is a topic of high public interest, which is gratified by a vast range of dictionaries and online databases (professional and non-professional). Additionally, an increasing number of academic papers are becoming openly accessible on the internet for non-linguists.

Moreover, different interpretations of the term may cause problems not only in scientific or public communication; rather, they can also be unintentionally merged within one and the same work by certain authors, which may lead to unreliability of their results, as will be evident in Section 2.

Consequently, clarifying the various uses of the term *origin* and the relation of these interpretations is a scientific task of high account. In the following, the problematic points of the term’s interpretation will be introduced through examples of its use in Hungarian. This is followed by an attempt to create a model for the comprehensive analysis of given name systems with respect to the origin of given names in every sense of the term. Although the introduction is based on the Hungarian given name system, it is hoped that the model will be useful for the description of other national given name stocks and for their comparison as well, due to broad similarities between Hungarian and Western given name systems.

2. Problematic points in the use of the term *origin*

At least four interpretations of the term *origin* can be found in the Hungarian onomastic literature: (1) the language in which the name was made or from which it was borrowed (in the following, this interpretation is referred to shortly as *linguistic origin*), (2) the method through which the name entered the name stock, (3) the source of the name, (4) the relation of the name to religion (ecclesiastical or secular).

The main problem is that the categories created through the different interpretations do not overlap, therefore merging them may lead to false results. For instance, let us examine the following citation from a paper on the composition of the 11th–13th-century given name stock of Hungary by Katalin Fehértói (1997: 73): “Approximately 25% (1700) of the 6800 people are mentioned by Christian names of ecclesiastical origin; 20% (1340) of them are mentioned by (Hungarian) names originating from common nouns; 55% (3760) of them are mentioned by (Slavic, German, etc.) loan names or by names of unknown origin.”¹ Three interpretations of the term *origin* mingle in this short summary, pertaining to (1) language, (2) method and (3) the relation of the name to religion. The problematic points of this calculation are the following: (1) not all names of Hungarian origin come from common nouns (cf. point 3.3); (2) (Slavic, German, etc.) loan names and names of Hungarian origin can also be found among names of ecclesiastical origin (cf. point 3.4); (3) names of unknown origin cannot be grouped into the same category as loan names, since several of them might be of Hungarian origin.

¹ “A 6800 személynek megközelítően 25%-a (1700) egyházi eredetű keresztnéven szerepel; 20%-a (1340) községi eredetű (magyar) néven szerepel; 55%-a (3760) jövevény (szláv, német stb.), továbbá ismeretlen eredetű néven szerepel” (translation: M. S.).

Moreover, further problems can be encountered when it comes to defining linguistic origin: the comparison of name stocks by this aspect may be rendered impossible if one name stock is categorised based on the languages in which the names were made, while the other one on the basis of the languages from which the names were borrowed. For example, the most widespread professional dictionary of Hungarian given names (Ladó–Bíró 1998) mostly categorises names by the languages in which they were created, hence *Jolánta* ‘Yolanda, Violant’ is described as a name of Greek origin. At the same time, Bárczi (1938) considered it to be of French origin, since he referred to the language from which the name was borrowed. (For more information on etymological problems caused by this ambiguity and their solution through the example of *Jolánta*, see Slíz 2017.) Ambiguous term use of this kind may lead to large differences in the number of names in a category even in the description of a single name stock while also making different name stocks incomparable.

The inconsistent practice of professional given name dictionaries when specifying the origin of names in their entries may also result in misunderstandings. For instance, the name *Ábrahám* ‘Abraham’ is of Hebrew origin according to Ladó–Bíró (1998), while the name *Jeremiás* ‘Jeremiah’ “comes from the Greek and Latin forms of the biblical, Hebrew name *Jirmejahu*”.² Allowing for the merging of the two interpretations of origin (related to a language and a source) in the entry of *Jeremiás*, the inconsistency is clear: the dictionary gives the language in which the name was made in the entry of *Ábrahám* (although it also was borrowed from Latin), while it also gives the languages from which the name was borrowed in the entry of *Jeremiás*. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that the name were borrowed from Greek and Latin at the same time. The more probable scenario is that the Latin form was its direct antecedent and Greek was only an intermediate language between Hebrew and Latin.

This kind of incoherence in professional dictionaries may easily cause misinterpretations by non-linguists. For example, the information about the Celtic origin of *Brigitta* in Ladó–Bíró (1998) – without a single mention of the fact that it was transmitted by Latin – may result in the presumption of some kind of Celtic–Hungarian relation. Additionally, several given name dictionaries and online “baby name finders” are compiled by non-linguists, who usually misinterpret information on origin given by professional dictionaries, and spread unreliable, distorted data. Mentioning only one example for this phenomenon, the name *Cézár* ‘Caesar’ is of “latin–etruszk” ‘Latin–Etruscan’ origin according to the dictionary edited by Ágnes Laik (1991). (For more information about the methodological faults of lay given name dictionaries related to the description of origin, see Slíz 2020.)

Another issue should also be mentioned: a distinction must be made between the categories NAMES OF HUNGARIAN ORIGIN and NAMES REGARDED AS HUNGARIAN. The first category is based on linguistic fact, which of course may change based on new results in etymological research. The decision whether a name is a member of this category is a binary choice (yes or no). Contrary to this, the second category (NAMES REGARDED AS HUNGARIAN) is organised by typicality. The consideration whether a name is a member of the category depends on its degree of correspondence with a rather complex structure of criteria in terms of prototype theory (cf. e.g. Rosch 1978; Taylor 1991). The most typical members of the category are transparent names, i.e. names which are visibly derived from Hungarian common words. However, names borrowed from a foreign language may also be considered Hungarian, if (a) they have no variants in other languages (e.g. *Zoltán*, *Géza*, which were borrowed from Old Turkic); (b) they

² “A bibliai, héber *Jirmejahu* névnek a görög és latin formájából származik” (translation: M. S.).

have been used widely by several generations, i.e. they have become common in the name using community (e.g. *Anna*, *Dávid*, which came from Latin); (c) they are Hungarian variations of non-Hungarian base forms, which emerged through phonological or morphological changes (e.g. *Erzsébet*, *Péter*, which are the Hungarian variants of Latin *Elisabeth* and *Petrus*); (d) their orthography is Hungarian (e.g. *Mihály*, which contains a unique Hungarian letter *ly*); (e) they have a strong cultural, historical, or religious background connected to the concept of the Hungarian nation, cf. the names of Hungarian saints (e.g. *László*, a saint king's name, which came from a Slavic language); the names of national heroes (kings, leaders, artists, etc., e.g. *Lajos*, a name of French origin, which is connected to at least two great leaders of the Hungarian revolution in 1848–1849, Kossuth and Batthyány); or names created by writers for the characters of widely known Hungarian literary works (e.g. *Tímea* created by Mór Jókai or *Tünde* created by Mihály Vörösmarty in the 19th century). The discussed criteria may correlate and the members of the category are associated with each other based on family resemblance; e.g. the name *Mihály* can be considered a fairly typical Hungarian name, since it meets several criteria: it is a variant of the Latin base form *Michael*, it is written with Hungarian characters, it has been used in Hungary for a millennium, consequently, it was borne by several national heroes (e.g. the great poets Csokonai Vitéz, Vörösmarty and Babits, or the internationally known painter Munkácsy). When a name meets few of the criteria, it may be considered a less typical member, e.g. the names *Dzsindzser* or *Dzsesszika* are written with Hungarian characters, but many Hungarians consider the spelling strange or ridiculous, thus the names foreign, as is evident from online articles and comments dealing with names that have become registrable lately. These opinions are clearly due to awareness of the English forms (*Ginger* and *Jessica*) and the fact that these names were borrowed only recently and are borne by only a few people at present.

3. A model for the description of national name stocks

In the following, the paper suggests a comprehensive model for the examination of the origin of names based on the four interpretations of the term mentioned, taking altogether three cross-sections into consideration. As the linguistic origin of names is in focus, the other three aspects of the interpretation of the term will be connected to this feature in every cross-section. It should be emphasized that the different aspects are coequal; there is no hierarchy between them.

3.1. A short description of the Hungarian given name stock from a diachronic aspect

For a proper understanding, a short introduction to the history of the Hungarian given name stock may be useful, considering its richly compound and various nature. In the following, the historical layers are represented by origin and source, along with information about the relation to Christianity and the methods by which names have been created or borrowed.

Before conversion to Christianity, the base of the Hungarian given name stock was represented by names of Hungarian origin, deriving from common words (e.g. *Fekete* 'black', *Bíbor* 'purple') or proper names (e.g. *Bán* given name > *Bán* + *-k* suffix). Beside them, loan names have constantly been borrowed from various languages: the earlier identifiable layer is from Turkic (e.g. *Tas* 'stone', *Ákos* 'white hawk'), then several names came from German (e.g. *Henrik*, *Hermann*), Slavic (e.g. *László* 'Vladislav', *Kázmér* 'Casimir'), French (e.g. *Gyán* 'Jean', *Jolánta* 'Yolent', etc.). The greatest group is formed by names of Latin origin (or

Greek in some cases) (e.g. *Erzsébet* ‘Elisabeth’, *Péter* ‘Petrus’). While both secular and ecclesiastical ones were among names of German, Slavic, French etc., the majority of names of Latin (or Greek) origin were connected to Christianity. Ecclesiastical names crowded out secular names by the 15th century, and the name stock became quite homogenous and unvarying for centuries. The change was brought by 19th-century national revival, forming a new, national layer: medieval names of non-Latin origin were newly discovered and revived (e.g. *Árpád*, *Béla*), names created by national writers for their characters found their ways into the name stock (e.g. *Tímea* and *Tünde*, see point 3.2), new names were created during the language reform (e.g. *Rezső* as the Hungarianization of *Rudolf*) etc. Loan names have constantly been borrowed from German, Slavic, French since then, along with names from other languages. In recent decades, names of English, Spanish, Turkish etc. origin have also been entered into the name stock (e.g. English: *Brájen* < *Brian*, *Dzsesszika* < *Jessica*; Spanish: *Armandó* < *Armando*, *Rikárdó* < *Ricardo*; Turkish: *Dilára*, *Zejnep* < *Zeynep*), due to cultural contacts (movie, music, sport, etc.). Additionally, some names from other religions also became registrable (e.g. *Mohamed*, *Damajanti*). (For a more detailed historical introduction of the given name stock, see e.g. Slíz 2017a; about the creation of the national name stock, see Farkas 2017.)

3.2. The linguistic origin and the sources of given names

After this necessary digression, let us return to the description of the model. First, the complicated connection between the linguistic origin and the sources of names will be discussed in detail. Henceforth, linguistic origin will refer to the languages from which the names entered the Hungarian name stock, as this is the only interpretation which is in conformity with the linguistic reality of the period when the name was borrowed. Although, (similarly to other languages) the given name stock in Hungary consists of several categories by origin beside the category NAMES OF HUNGARIAN ORIGIN, the subcategories NAMES OF TURKIC, GERMAN, SLAVIC, FRENCH, ENGLISH, ETC. ORIGIN may all be consolidated into a main category called NAMES OF FOREIGN ORIGIN. Therefore, only two main categories should be taken into account: NAMES OF HUNGARIAN ORIGIN and NAMES OF FOREIGN ORIGIN.

Two main categories can be formed for the sources of names as well. The category of FICTIONAL NAMES contains all names that were made by known or unknown writers, poets, etc. for their fictional characters in literary works, mythology, legends, films, computer games, etc. The other category, which consists of names coming from Hungarian common words or borrowed from the given name stocks of other languages, may be called NON-FICTIONAL. It should be noted that the term *source* also has two interpretations: it may refer to the primary source or to the source from which the name was borrowed by a language, in this case by Hungarian. Similarly to linguistic origin, it is advisable to use the latter interpretation, as it provides a real picture of the source of the name from the viewpoint of a given name stock.

The two categories can be delineated within the categories of linguistic origin: both NAMES OF HUNGARIAN ORIGIN and NAMES OF FOREIGN ORIGIN contain names from real name stocks and names that were created by artists. Examples for non-fictional names of Hungarian origin: *Bátor* (‘brave’), *Virág* (‘flower’); for fictional names of Hungarian origin: *Tünde* (made from the word *tündér* ‘fairy’ by Vörösmarty), *Gyöngyvér* (made by compounding the words *gyöngy* ‘pearl’ + *vér* ‘blood’ by János Arany); for non-fictional names of foreign origin: *Henrik*, *Dzszenifer*; for fictional names of foreign origin: *Boromir* (from *The Lord of the Rings*), *Denerisz* (from the book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* and its television series version *The Game of Thrones*).

However, the borders of the categories FICTIONAL and NON-FICTIONAL are fuzzy and names can fluctuate between the two easily. Namely, existing given names may be chosen by writers for their characters and these names may find their ways into another name stock, not due to familiarity with the original name stock, but due to familiarity with the literary work. For instance, the name *Hatidzse* is a member of the contemporary Turkish name stock (*Hatice*) but it was only brought to notoriety in Hungary by the Turkish television series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (The Magnificent Century). Conversely, names created by artists may spread in a real name stock and can be borrowed by another language from it and not from the literary work itself. For example, the name *Pamela* was created by the English poet Sir Philip Sidney in the late 16th century and spread in the English-speaking world presumably due to the success of Samuel Richardson's 18th-century novel (cf. Hanks–Hodges–Hardcastle 2016, entry *Pamela*). The name became a member of the Hungarian given name stock only at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, not due to the English literary works but due to the American actress Pamela Anderson. Additionally, it may also have become known in Hungary due to the influence of the television series *Dallas*. Its multiple possible sources make the name a perfect example of the fuzzy borders between FICTIONAL and NON-FICTIONAL names. The same can be said for ecclesiastical names: it cannot be decided whether they were borrowed from the existing name stocks of other Christian peoples through the intermediation of the clergy (NON-FICTIONAL) or from the Bible and legends directly (FICTIONAL). The most feasible explanation is that both possibilities played a role in the borrowing.

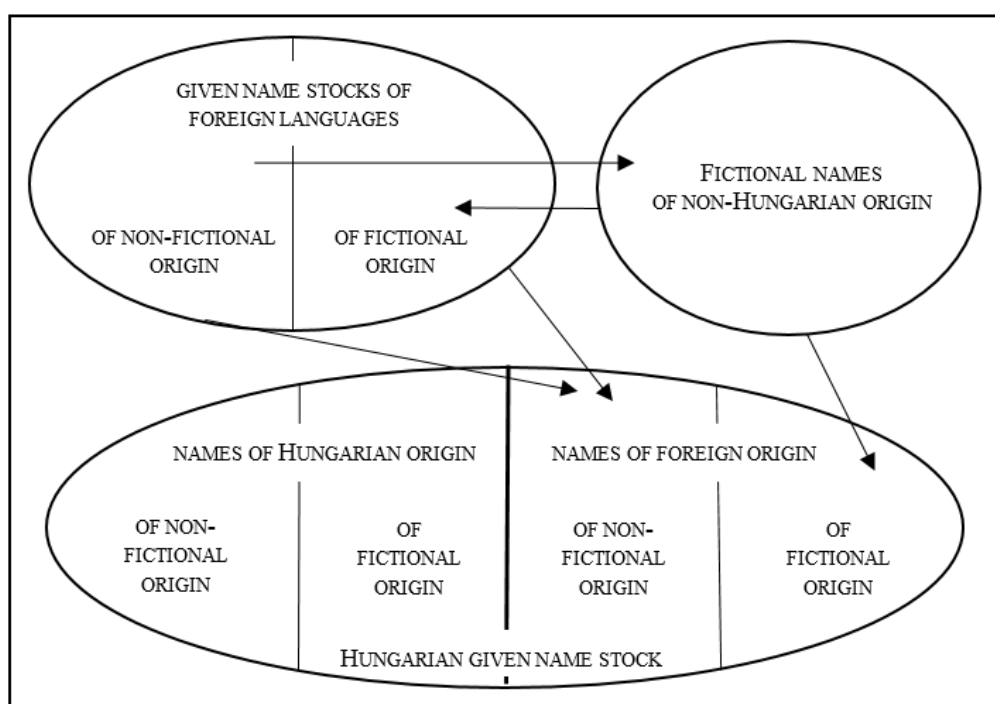


Figure 1. The linguistic origin and the sources of given names

3.3. The linguistic origin and the method through which the name entered the name stock

In the second cross-section, the connection between the linguistic origin of the names and the method through which they entered the Hungarian name stock should be considered.

A given name stock may grow from within the lexicon of a language and from other languages. On the example of Hungarian: names of Hungarian origin may be created from common words through two different methods. One is category change (from COMMON NOUNS to GIVEN NAMES, e.g. *gyopár* ‘edelweiss’ > *Gyopár* female name, or from A SUBCATEGORY OF PROPER NOUNS to GIVEN NAMES, e.g. *Kászon* place name > male name). The other type (referred to as name-building in the paper) utilizes various morphological methods (e.g. suffixation: *áldás* ‘blessing’ + *-ka* diminutive suffix > *Áldáska* female name; or compound: *Anna* + *virág* ‘flower’ > *Annvirág* female name). However, names of foreign origin are always borrowed. It should be noted that when a name was created (regardless of the method) from a loanword, it should be ranked among NAMES OF HUNGARIAN ORIGIN, as the base of the creation was an element of the Hungarian lexicon and the creation happened in Hungarian.

However, this is only Phase 1: in another, optional step (Phase 2), given names can be created from other given names. At this point, the linguistic origin of given names is out of the picture: names of Hungarian and foreign origin may equally be the bases of name creation. Given names can be created from other given names through several methods of name-building (e.g. suffixation: *Gyopár* female name + *-ka* diminutive suffix > *Gyopárka* female name; compound: *Anna* + *Róza* > *Annaróza* female name). Additionally, other methods are specific to this phase. For instance, the translation of foreign given names or the revival of extinct medieval given names as applied during the Hungarian language reform of the 19th century (e.g. translation: *Constantine* > *Szilárd*, *Victor* > *Győző*; revival: *Árpád*, *Géza*, *Olivér*, etc.). (For more information on the creation of a new national given name stock in the 19th century Hungary, see Farkas 2017.) Methods can be combined as a matter of course, e.g. *Aurora* > *Hajnal* (translation) + *-ka* diminutive suffix > *Hajnalka*.

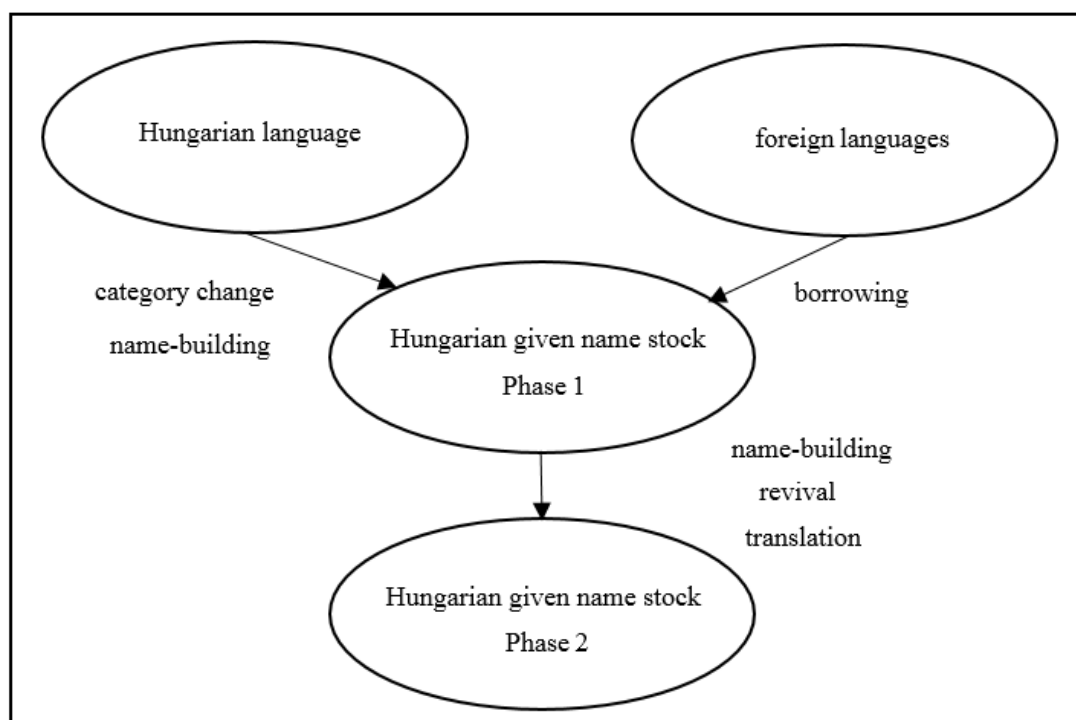


Figure 2. The linguistic origin and the method through which the name entered the name stock

3.4. The linguistic origin and the relation of given names to religion

With regard to the third cross-section, the connection between the linguistic origin of names and their relation to religion is not a necessary aspect. However, in Western cultures, the relation of given names to Christianity is a regular question of analyses, especially in diachronic surveys, due to their common history: the Christian name stock (generally transmitted by Latin or Greek) was built upon the secular given name stocks of European languages. Consequently, the onomastic literature (at least in Hungary) is disposed to put an equal sign between the categories NAMES OF HUNGARIAN ORIGIN and SECULAR NAMES, and similarly, between NAMES OF FOREIGN ORIGIN and ECCLESIASTICAL NAMES. Nevertheless, the picture is far more complicated.

First of all, members of the category SECULAR NAMES may be transferred to the category ECCLESIASTICAL NAMES due to the canonization of their bearers. E.g. the secular name *Imre* (which came from German) became a member of the category ECCLESIASTICAL NAMES due to the canonization of Prince Emeric, son of King Stephen I in 1083. The category of ECCLESIASTICAL NAMES may be broadened with names of Hungarian origin due to this process. At the moment, only one name within the category is of Hungarian origin: the name *Szilárd*, since the 20th-century bishop Szilárd Bogdánffy was beatified in 2010. However, it is also possible for other names to enter the category. Contrarily, most members of the category NAMES OF FOREIGN ORIGIN are actually ecclesiastical names in Hungary, but there are secular names among them, too; moreover, their number has been on the rise at an increasing pace for at least a century.

The opposite direction of change, i.e. from ECCLESIASTICAL NAMES to SECULAR NAMES is rather untypical, but also conceivable, since saints could be deleted from the martyrologia if their historical authenticity cannot be proven (for instance, this happened to Saint George in 1969). Nevertheless, this act does not necessarily lead to the secularisation of the name: it may remain a member of the category ECCLESIASTICAL NAMES due to other saints sharing the same name or the community's collective memory and veneration, which may still continue to regard the excluded bearer as a saint despite the official decision. Using again Saint George as an example, new churches continued to be dedicated to him after 1969 (e.g. in Debrecen, 2015, where a bell was also dedicated to him³).

Saint George's example reflects that the official decision of the Christian Churches whether a person can be regarded as a saint is not the only criterion of ECCLESIASTICAL NAMES: membership may be based upon the judgement of the community in question. This is confirmed by the example of Saint Margaret of Hungary, whose veneration started immediately after her death (1270), although her canonization was not achieved until 1943.

The border between ECCLESIASTICAL and SECULAR NAMES is fuzzy: here are, for instance, the variants of ecclesiastical names which were formed in the same language (this case in Hungarian), but more or less seceded from their basic name form, e.g. *Endre* (from *András* 'Andrew') or pairs of ecclesiastical names by gender (e.g. *Györgyi*, the feminine pair of *György* 'George'). Similarly, foreign equivalents of ecclesiastical names that have been used in their Hungarian form for centuries can be found among newly borrowed names (e.g. *Dominic* and *Martin* as the new equivalents of *Domonkos* and *Márton*). These new names bear no ecclesiastic connotations to the majority of Hungarians: non-professionals usually do not even know that they have their equivalents in Hungarian. Therefore, they presumably categorise these names as secular ones, while those who are aware of their connection with the basic forms may consider them ecclesiastical names.

³ Felszentelték a debrecen-józsai Szent György-templomot. *Magyar Kurír* 2015. nov. 23. <https://www.magyarKurir.hu/hirek/felszenteltek-debrecen-jozsai-szent-gyorgy-templomot>

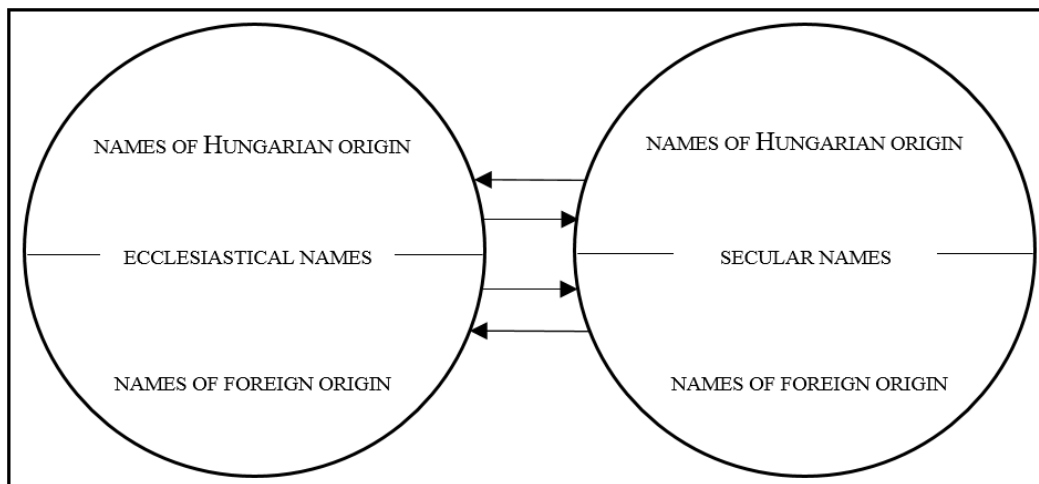


Figure 3. The linguistic origin and the relation of given names to religion

4. Conclusion

After an overview of the three cross-sections, it becomes evident that the categories based on the four interpretations of the term *origin* do not converge: the category of ECCLESIASTICAL NAMES is not equal with NAMES OF FOREIGN ORIGIN; not every name of Hungarian origin was created through category changes; names created by artists can be borrowed from real name stocks, etc. Consequently, the investigation and comparison of given name stocks by origin or even the description of the origin of a name in a dictionary can only be accurate if the four interpretations are studied and demonstrated coequally. For instance, the origin of the name *Árpád* can be described as follows: (1) by language it is of Hungarian origin; (2) by method it derives from a common noun through name-building: *árpa* ‘barley’ + *-d* suffix; it died out by the 15th century and was revived in the 19th century; (3) by the source it is non-fictional; (4) and by its relation to religion it is secular. It is hoped that this method for describing the origin of names may prevent misunderstandings and misinterpretations in both academic discourse and public communication as well as miscalculations in the study of an actual name stock by different approaches or in the comparison of name stocks.

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