

What's in a Name: Names through Italy Grammar, Language, Culture

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Languages in Period Italy

Italian, like the other languages of southern Europe, is descended from Latin, the language of the Romans. We talk about two periods in which Latin was the main language spoken: Classical Latin, which is what you might have learned in school, and Vulgar Latin, which came into use after the Republican period in informal contexts and slowly came to dominate by the fourth century or so. Over time, it evolved into a group of independent dialects that varied from area to area that we call as a group "Romance." The first Romance documents in Italy date to before 1000 AD. But unlike France, Italy was not unified politically, and so the forms of Romance typical of different regions remained quite distinct until even after the end of our period. The kind of Romance typical of Tuscany, the area around Florence, began to be popularized by Dante Alighieri in the late Middle Ages; it would eventually become modern Italian.

But until after 1600, regional differences in Italian dialects/languages are quite pronounced – even today, other languages are spoken within modern Italy. Broadly, the linguistic areas are:

- Venice – typical of the area around Venice
- Milanese – generally typical of northern Italy (Lombardy), though there's some variability
- Tuscan – typical of the area dominated by Florence; many of our important pieces of Renaissance literature are written in Tuscan
- Roman – typical of the area around Rome
- Neapolitan – southern Italy (Neapolitan means the area around Naples)
- Islands – each of the islands (Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, notably) have their own language

Today, we're going to look at names from Renaissance Florence, Venice, and Rome, representing three of the four northern languages, and talk a little about southern names. We're going to start with Florence, as it's most "typically" Italian and the place whose names are best known to Americans and Canadians.

The Grammar/Structure of Names

Like most European names, most people are identified with a given name (sometimes two) plus one or more bynames.

Given names: Given names in Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, come from a variety of sources.

Some are:

- Saint's names – most of the most common names are saint's names
- Classical names – both names derived from Roman cognomens and from legendary figures
- Diminutives of the above

We'll talk about details with each case.

Making diminutives: Diminutives are incredibly common in Tuscany; in 1427, diminutives of Giovanni and Bartolomeo are more common than the base name. Diminutive forms include shortened forms, formed both from the beginning and frequently from the end of names.

Diminutives in these forms include:

- From Giovanni: Vanni, Gianni – you also see forms that change the consonants, like Nanni (from Giovanni) and Pippo (from Filippo)
- From Bartolomeo: Bartolo, Meo

Additional endings (-ino, -ello, -ozzo, etc.) are added as well, both to the original name and to shortened forms. For example, here are 1427 forms of Giovanni:

- Giovannino, Giovannello, Giovannetto, Giovannozzo
- Vannuccio, Vannino, Nannino
- Giannino, Giannello, Giannetto, Gianotto, Giannuzzo
- Nannuccio, Nannini

Many of these are found in women's names as well: shortened forms like Ghita (Margarita), Vanna (Giovanna), Mea (Bartolomea) and Cecca (Francesca); forms with -ella (Nastella, from Nastasia, Martinella), -ina (Luchina, Bartolina, from Bartolomea, Bettina, from Lisabetta), and rarely -ozza (Petruccia, Pierozza). As you can see from the last, occasionally you'll find more Latinized forms of names, so Pietro and Petrocino, as well as the more typical Latin Piero.

Double Given Names: Second given names appear in the 15th century, but don't become common until the 16th century. The first ones to appear are more like compound names: *Giovannibatista* (John the Baptist) and *Micheleagnolo*. By the sixteenth century in Tuscany, there are even people with three given names. However, this practice is always rare – I have seen no data set in which over 90% of people didn't just have a single given name recorded.

Bynames: There are several kinds of attested bynames. Which were used would depend on who you were and the context.

The most common are literal patronymic or marital bynames, that identify a person as the child or spouse of a man using *di* (or another form of the word 'of' sometimes) followed by the man's given name: Palla di Nofri, Michele di Iachopo, Biagio d'Antonio

The second most common are family names, like Medici. These take several forms, which we'll discuss with each case. The most common form is just the family name, like Lorenzo Medici, but you also see the use of the preposition *degli/delli* which means something like "of the Medici (family)," which in turn is sometimes shortened to *de'*

Florence – 1427

In 1427, the leaders of Florence ordered a complete recording of households within its domains: the number of household members, the wealth the household owned, and of course, the names of household members. This was not the first such recording, but it was one of the largest done up to the time, recording over 65,000 households. This recording was known as the Catasto, a term

which refers to records of real property. In the twentieth century, David Herlihy, an historian of Renaissance Italy, began a project to catalogue the data from the Catasto, including 65,000 names. I've analyzed nearly 29,000 names from the "Condado" of Florence, the countryside surrounding the city proper (while I'm reanalyzing the city data, analysis of the raw data from the city itself are available online).

The complete article can be found at <http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/juliana/condado>.

The names were relatively easy to enter into a database, as they were very standardized in the declarations of property in the Catasto. Most people are identified by a given name, followed by *di* (of) and their father's name (or in the case of widowed women, by their husband's name), and by a family name. Examples of names from declarations (not the database, but an actual declaration) include:

Berto di Guido Triniciavelli
Benedetto di Piero degli Strozzi
Palla di Nofri
mona Bartolomea
Michele di Iachopo fabro
Biagio d'Antonio
Antonio Filippi
Mariotto di Franciescho di ser Sengnia
Marcho del Conte dala Lastra
Antonio
Magio
Francesco

Note that some have all three names, while others have only a given name and family name, a given name and father's name, or only a given name (these are often family members of the declarer, making any further identification unnecessary).

Given Names

A large number of given names are represented in this data; the 24,201 men in the Condado share 1362 names (counting each spelling variant separately). Despite this, men's given names in this data are more concentrated than they were just a generation previous; the 26,367 men given as fathers and husbands in the document share 2105 names. The five most common names for men (counting variants and hypochoristics with their base form) account for 37.8% of individuals, while the top 10 names account for 54.5% of individuals. To compare, in late 15th century Spain, the top 5 men's names accounted for 53% of individuals.

The top ten men's names (including variants and hypochoristic forms) are:

1. Giovanni	11.0%
2. Antonio	9.3%
3. Bartolomeo	6.1%
4. Piero	5.9%
5. Domenico	5.6%
6. Francesco	4.9%
7. Iacopo	3.7%

8. Matteo	2.9%
9. Michele	2.7%
10. Andrea	2.4%

Women's names are somewhat more diverse; the 2664 women share 389 names, which means that there are three times as many names per person as for the men. This is an unusual pattern, though one that is found more broadly in Italy. Not surprisingly, then, the most common names also account for fewer individuals. The five most common names for women (counting variants and hypocoristics with their base form) account for 31.8% of individuals, while the ten most common names account for 49.2% of individuals. To compare, in 13th century Perugia, the twelve most common women's names account for only 34% of the sample, while in 15th century Spain, the top 10 women's names account for 75% of individuals.

The top ten women's names (including variants and hypocoristic forms) are:

1. Giovanna	220	8.3%
2. Caterina	175	6.6%
3. Margherita	161	6.0%
4. Antonia	147	5.5%
5. Bartolomea	143	5.4%
6. Francesca	141	5.3%
7. Piera	124	4.7%
8. Lisabetta	68	2.6%
9. Iacopa	67	2.5%
10. Niccolosa	64	2.4%

One very striking feature of this data is the large number of hypocoristic (pet) forms. For many common names, hypocoristic forms are almost as frequent as the base name: there are nearly as many men with some hypocoristic form of *Giovanni* as men named *Giovanni* or *Gianni*, while there are actually more men named *Meo* than *Bartolomeo*, from which it is derived. The same thing can be found for women: the hypocoristic *Cecca* is more common than *Francesca*, from which it is derived.

Hypocoristics are formed in several ways. The most common form is a shortened form of the name, usually derived from the end of the name rather than the beginning of it: *Vanni* from *Giovanni*, *Chele* from *Michele*, *Meo* from *Bartolomeo*, and *Lippo* from *Filippo*. Some take this form and alter the initial consonant: *Nanni* from *Vanni*, *Pippo* from *Lippo*. The second major pattern is the addition of diminutive endings to a root name, generally *-ino/ina*, *-ello/ella*, *-ozzo/ozza*, and *-uccio/uccia*. Sometimes these diminutive endings are added to a shortened form: *Vannuccio* (from *Giovanni*), *Menichello* (from *Domenico*), *Colino* (from *Niccolo*), and *Puccino* (a double diminutive of a shortened form of *Iacopo*). In some cases, this creates diminutive forms whose root name cannot be clearly identified, such as *Dino* (a shortened form of the diminutive formed with the *-ino* ending from some name ending in *-do*), *Tuccio* (again, from some name ending in *-to*).

There are no clear examples of double given names in this data, unlike the situation in 1458 and 1480 (when additional Catastros were done). In other parts of the Catasto, a handful of either

compound names or double given names are found for men, including the definitely compound Giovanniba[tista] (John the Baptist) and Micheleagn[olo] (Michaelangelo). Possible double given names include Gianbernar[do], Giovannifr[ancesco], Giovannipi[ero], Giovansimo[ne], Pieropagol[o], each of which occurs once in the data (making the incidence of double or compound given names about 0.01%). All the examples occur with the five most common men's names (except the special case of Michelagnolo). There are no examples of women with double given names, even in the data from 1458 and 1480.

Bynames

There are two types of bynames found in this data: literal patronymics and family names. While literal descriptive bynames of various sorts are regularly found in other data sources, they are not found in the database. In the declaration, literal occupational bynames are often appended to the name, but the editors of the database treated them as not part of the names. While literal bynames were assuredly used for many purposes, they seem to have been at best extraordinarily rare in these declarations (perhaps because of the requirement of a literal patronymic byname).

Literal patronymics are formed by adding *di* 'of' in front of the father's name. Around 98% of individuals in this part of the Catasto database have a literal patronymic. Women are sometimes identified in the same way as the wife of their husbands; men are occasionally described with two generations worth of patronymics (identifying their father and grandfather). Occasionally in the declarations, the father (or other man) is identified with a title: the example *Mariotto di Franciescho di ser Sengnia* illustrates both ideas. Using a title in a name is probably a claim to rank, which is not allowed under the RfS. The list of names used in patronyms here is similar but not identical to the list of given names; it is not included here for space considerations (but will be included in the online version of the article). There are a handful of examples of literal matronymics: *Lorenza*, *Giovanna*, and *Margherita* are all found in the patronym database section. However, they are very rare (certainly less than 0.1% of all patronyms). When the father's name begins with vowel, *di* becomes *d'*.

Family names are quite varied and much rarer: fewer than 10% of individuals in this part of the Catasto database have family names (the number in Florence proper is somewhat higher). Family names seem to be limited to prominent families, and are rarely repeated. Even the most common family name, *Martini*, is held by only 44 individuals (out of nearly 27,000); only 2 family names account for more than 1% of the people with family names (not counting the 90% of the heads of household with no family name).

Family names fall into several types: patronymics (which are formed differently than literal patronymics), locatives, occupationals, and descriptives. Patronymic family names are formed by putting the father's name into the old Latinized genitive case (which had fallen out of general use): *Martino* becomes *Martini*, *Lippo* becomes *Lippi*. No preposition (*di* or otherwise) is used with these. These are by far the most common form of family name. Some patronymic family names are formed in this data by putting *del* in front of the unmodified form of the name: *del Nero*, *del Drea*, *del Duccio*. But these are much rarer than the first type. There are a few cases that use *degli/delli*, the plural form of the preposition and article; you can think of *delli Medici* as meaning "of the Medici (family)."

Occupational family names are mostly also in the genitive case, as they are not so much a claim to an actual trade, but to descent from someone in an occupation. In this data, we see examples such as Cancellier[i], Calzerone (a rare non-genitive example), and *Forestani*. Again, these are sometimes formed with *del*: *del Fabro* and *del Medico*.

Locative family names are formed with *of*. The most “typical” form, *da*, rarely appears here. Instead, family names with town names seem to be formed with *del*: *del Cortona*, *del Milano*, *del Romagne*. More common are names derived from generic toponymics, which are found with *della* (feminine) and *dello* (masculine), or more rarely *dalla* and *dalle*: *della Caste[la]*, *della Querc[ia]*, *della Torre*, *della Valle*. Note that when the toponym starts with a vowel, the final vowel of *dalle/dalla* is lost, and it is written as in *dell'Abadia*.

Descriptive family names are formed in two ways: with *del* or in the genitive form: *del Grosso*, *del Rosso*, *Rossi*.

Pisa: Later Renaissance

The Pisa data I'm using here is from my “Names from 15th and 16th Century Pisa,” which studies baptism records indexed by historians at the University of Pisa. In Pisa between 1457 and 1557, men's names are much the same as they were in Florence in 1427, while women's names have shifted somewhat. It's worth noting that the gap here in time is bigger than it seems – the 1427 catasto lists heads of household, while this data is newborns. So the gap in naming is more like a century.

The top ten names were in order:

- For men: Giovanni, Francesco, Piero, Domenico, Antonio, Bartolomeo, Iacopo, Vincenzo, Niccolo, Sebastiano
- For women: Caterina, Lucrezia, Elisabetta, Alessandra, Maria, Francesca, Angela, Ginevra, Camilla, Bartolomea

Diminutives are still common and varied, though not as common as in 1427. Double given names occur for both men and women, and some (male) examples with three given names even appear. However, over 90% of people – 92% of boys, 99% of girls – still have a single given name.

The most common identifier for these folks was as their father's child, using *di* followed by their father's given name. It is sometimes followed by their grandfather's given name and a family name. So we might see *Caterina di Giovanni di Sebastiano Carraci* in a complete form. Family names are relatively common in this data, compared to the 1427 data. Some children are identified as their mother's child instead; sometimes the title *monna* is used before her name.

The same times of family names that are found in Florence are found in Pisa, though they are

Rome – Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century

The construction information here is taken from Mari Elspeth nic Bryan's "Italian Men's Names in Rome, 1473-1484" (<http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/mari/Studium>). Once again, the vast majority (156 out of 163) of individuals have a single given name and byname, most of which

are literal patronymics. But there are examples with family names both with without either a patronymic or a literal descriptive or locative byname. There are examples of two given names, but the vast majority have a single given name. The most common "double" given names are obvious pairings like Giovanni Battista, Marcantonio, or Pietropaulo.

The most common men's names were Antonio, Giovanni, Pietro, Lodovicho, Bartolomeo, Francesco, Domenicho, Jacopo, Girolamo, Nicholo, Paolo, Andrea, Bernardino, Guglielmo, and Lucha. These spellings can be found in Florence as well, but are not the most common ones. Note that spellings with <ch> rather than <c> dominate, and spellings with <J> are as common as spellings with <Gi->

I have two projects that look at women's given names; neither allows much examination of frequency because they document a small number of families or a nunnery (both places where you'd expect repetition of names for idiosyncratic reasons), but here is a list of feminine names found in sixteenth century Rome. The most noteworthy trait of this list is the number of names of classical Roman origin:

Adriana	Cintia	Fiorina	Isabetta	Polisena
Agnese	Claudia	Francesca	Johanna	Sigsmonda
Amelia	Clementia	Gentile,	Laodomia	Silea
Angela	Cornelia	Gentilesca	Laura	Silvia
Antonia	Costanza	Geronima	Livia	Temperanza
Attilia	Delia	Ginevra	Lucretia	Vera
Aurelia	Diamante	Giocomina	Maddalena	Virginia
Califurnia	Elena	Giulia	Martia	Vittoria
Camilla	Emma	Helena	Mattea	
Carolina	Fausta,	Hieronima	Ottavia	
Caterina	Faustina	Innocentia	Panta	
Cecilia, Cilla	Felice	Isabella	Paola, Paula	

Men's names from the same source include:

Agostino	Bernardino	Curtio,	Giacomo	Innocenzio
Alberto	Bonaiuto	Curzio	Giocomino	Ippolito
Alemanno	(Jew)	Daniele	Giorgio	Jacobo
Alessandro	Bruto	Domenico,	Giovanni	Justinis
Alessio	Camillo	Menico	Giovanni	(Latin)
Ambrosio	Carlo	Enrico	Battista	Ludovico
Angelo	Cecco	Fabritio	Giovanni	Lelio
Annibale	Cencio	Filippo	Pietro	Livio
Antimo	Cesare	Francesco	Girolametto	Loreto
Antonello	Cosmo	Gano	Gismondo	Luisso
Antonio	Cosmo	Gennaro	Giuliano	Marcantonio
Ascanio	Pallavicino	Georgio	Giulio	Mario
Bartolomeo	Cristofano	Geronimo	Guglielmo	Niccolo
Battista	Cristoforo	Giacobo	Hieronimo	Onorio

Orazio	Pietro Paolo	Silvestro	Tiberio
Ottaviano	Paolo	Simone	Troiano
Ottavio	Pompeo	Stefano	Vespasiano
Pietro	Sebastian	Teodolo	Vittorio

Venice

We have relatively little organized data from Venice, and thus can't say much about which names are most common, but the answers seem to be not dissimilar from elsewhere in Italy. There are a few features of Venetian that need to be pointed out. First, there are phonological differences: <Gi-> is often replaced with <Z-> and the final vowel is often dropped from both men's names and family names (though not from women's names).

Here are some men's names from sixteenth century Venice:

Agustin	Bernardin	Giulio	Nicolo	Zacharia
Alvise	Biasio	Guglielmo	Paolo	Zago
Ambroso	Bortolo	Hieronimo	Petro	Zordan
Andrea	Carlo	Iacomo	PierAntonio	Zorzi
Angelo	Claudio	Ippolito	Rocco	Zuan
Annibale	Cristofolo	Iseppo	Salvador	Zuan'Antoni
Antonio	Dionisio	Lodovico	Stefano	o
Anzolo	Domenico	Lorenzo	Teodor	Zuandomene
Aurelio	Filippo	Luca	Tommaso	go
Baldissere	Francesco	Lundardo	Valentin	ZuanGiacom
Bartholomio	Galeazzo	Magno	Valerio	o
Bastiano	Giovanni	Marcantonio	Ventura	
Battista	Giovanni	Marco	Vincenzo	
Benedetto	Battista	Miro	Vittorio	

And some women's names:

Agnese	Betta	Elena	Isabella	Marcella
Alba	Borthola	Elisabetta	Isabetta	Margarita
Alessandra	Camilla	Emilia	Iseppa	Maria
Anastasia	Cassandra	Faustina	Justina	Matthia
Andriana	Caterina	Felicita	Laura	Menega
Angela	Cecilia	Fiametta	Leandra	Moderata
Anna	Chiara	Fiordelise	Leonarda	Nicolosa
Antonia	Christina	Franceschina	Libera	Olivia
Anzola	Clara	Giulia	Livia	Orelia
Barbara	Cornelia	Giustina	Lodovica	Orsa
Bella	Corona	Gratiosa	Lucia	Osana
Benetta	Daniela	Hortensa	Lucrezia	Paola
Benvegnuda	Diana	Iacoma	Maddalena	Pasqueta

Pelegrina	Pulisena	Stella	Veniera	Vittoria
Perina	Regina	Susanna	Veronica	Zanetta
Philippa	Rosa	Tomasina	Viena	Zuanna
Pollonia	Samaritana	Valentina	Vincenza	
Portia	Santina	Vendramina	Violante	
Prudentia	Simona	Veneranda	Virginia	

The bynames here are mixed, with some literal bynames and others inherited family names. There are several types, including patronymic, locative, occupational, and descriptive bynames. Patronymic bynames are the most common. They take two forms: literal patronymic bynames formed with *di* or *de* followed by the father's name, like *di Zorzi* and *de Bastian*; and family name structures formed with *-i* (which may represent either a nominative plural or a genitive singular Latinized form), like *Ludovici* and *Mafei*. In addition, there are some unmarked patronyms (like *Marcello*), and others with the final ending dropped (like *Orsin*).

Locative bynames are the second most common. They take two forms: the first are formed with *da* followed by the placename, like *da Mosto* or *da Spin* (where the *o* has been dropped from the placename *Spino*); the second are formed as adjectives of place, either literal, like *Trivisana*, or *Pisani* (which takes the family name form).

Other kinds of bynames are relatively rare, but are frequently used to describe people. Occupational bynames generally agree in gender with the person, though some do not. Examples include *Molino*; many more are used in descriptions of witnesses in trials, like *fornera* (baker) and *herbardina* (herb-seller). Possible descriptive bynames are *Malatesta* and *Verde*, though both may also be unmarked patronyms.

There are in this data no examples of people with two bynames, though there are some examples with two bynames in Talan and Arval's article about names in fourteenth century Venice. Some seem to add a second given name, others add a descriptive byname to a family name, but only one gives the normal Tuscan patronymic plus family name.

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