

**Zeitschrift:** Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte =  
Annuaire Suisse d'histoire économique et sociale

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte

**Band:** 32 (2017)

**Artikel:** Naming practices, kinship, and households in late medieval ashkenazi  
communities

**Autor:** Assaf, Lilach

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-842464>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 12.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

Lilach Assaf

## Naming Practices, Kinship, and Households in Late Medieval Ashkenazi Communities

### Abstract

This article explores how names were mobilized to redefine the relationships between men and women, and among kin in general, within Ashkenazi families in the late Middle Ages. The evidence shows an intensified circulation of female names and of names from the maternal stock of names among kin. Perhaps the most surprising phenomenon is the emergence of matronyms based on the first name of a female kin. These shifts in naming practices indicate the reshaping of women's position within their kin groups and their vital role in family economy. On a structural level of kinship, wives' families of origin gained in weight in choosing names, which implies a changing balance between maternal and paternal kin groups in late medieval Jewish communities.

In his 15<sup>th</sup>-century halakhic work *Seder ha-get* ("The Order of Divorce"),<sup>1</sup> Mahari Margalit (d. 1492) recounts an extraordinary story on a married couple that negotiated the name of their newborn son. Each spouse wished the boy to be named after his or her own father – the paternal grandfather was called Meir ("Illuminator"), whereas the maternal grandfather was called Uri ("My Light"). They could not reach a decision about the name to give to their son. Instead, they reached a remarkable compromise. They named the boy *Shneur*, meaning "Two Lights", opting for a third name which semantically referred to both names and linked the boy to both families.<sup>2</sup> This story indicates how the right to name and to attach a child through his name to a certain family needed to be negotiated,

1 The work deals with Jewish laws related to divorce, containing also 15<sup>th</sup>-century examples of actual divorce writs (*gittin*) from Ashkenazi communities.

2 Jacob Margalith, *Seder ha-Get ha-aroeh ve-ha'katzar*, ed. by Yitzchak Saz, Jerusalem 1983, p. 66 f.

suggesting also how name-circulation patterns could indicate the relative position of the spouses and their families in the system of alliance.<sup>3</sup>

Recent research on medieval families and kinship within European communities has shown that analysing naming practices is a useful and valuable research tool for social historians. Thanks to the reconstruction of name-circulation patterns among kin, important insights into kinship structures, gendered division of roles, family memorial practices, and the shaping of family identities have been gained.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in the 1980s, historians of medieval kinship, like Christiane Klapisch-Zuber and David Herlihy, analysed shifts in naming practices on the micro level within specific families, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches.<sup>5</sup> Regarding names as symbolic goods, they examined names as one component of a range of goods and services that circulated within kin groups. In the 1990s, a group of scholars, based in Paris and led by Monique Bourin and Pascal Chareille, published a series of exhaustive studies, examining onomastic patterns in medieval Europe, with a focus on the appearance of second names and models of personal designation in various sources.<sup>6</sup> Within this framework, naming patterns are examined in relation to broader social change in kinship structures, literacy, and political structures.<sup>7</sup> The analysis of a vast corpus of names enables historians to reconstruct major naming trends and to point at long-term changes.

- 3 In her study on naming patterns among Florentine merchant families, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber outlines an opposite trend: Women, who were seen as mediators between two families, but did not fully belong to any of them, had correspondingly a very limited share in name circulation within their families. Cf. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *The Name "Remade": The Transmission of Given Names in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, in: Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (ed.), *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, Chicago 1985, p. 283–309.
- 4 George Beech, Monique Bourin, Pascal Chareille (ed.), *Personal Names Studies of Medieval Europe. Social Identity and Familial Structures* (Studies in medieval culture 43), Kalamazoo 2002; David Herlihy, *Land, Family and Women in Continental Europe, 701–1200*, in: *Traditio* 18 (1962), p. 89–120; Klapisch-Zuber (see note 3); Michael Mitterauer, *Ahnen und Heilige. Namengebung in der europäischen Geschichte*, Munich 1993; Christof Rolker, "Ich, Anna Hartzerin, genannt von Maegelsperg ...". Namensführung und weibliche Identität in der spätmittelalterlichen Stadt, in: *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 20/1 (2009), p. 17–34; Gabriela Signori, "Family Traditions". Moral Economy and Memorial "Gift Exchange" in the Urban World of the Late Fifteenth Century, in: Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner, Bernhard Jussen (ed.), *Negotiating the Gift. Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange*, Göttingen 2003, p. 295–328.
- 5 David Herlihy, Klapisch-Zuber Christiane, *Tuscans and Their Families. A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427*, New Haven 1985, p. 347–351; Klapisch-Zuber (see note 3); David Herlihy, *Tuscan Names 1200–1530*, in: *Renaissance Quarterly* 41 (1988), p. 561–582; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Le nom refait. La transmission des prénoms à Florence (XIV–XVI siècles)*, in: *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 20/4 (1980), p. 77–104.
- 6 Monique Bourin, Pascal Chareille (ed.), *Genese médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne*, 4 vols., Tours 1990–2002.
- 7 See also Beech/Bourin/Chareille (see note 4).

Such methods, though, have not been applied to medieval Ashkenaz.<sup>8</sup> Following older studies, the few recent works on Ashkenazi names in the Middle Ages have mainly dealt with collecting names and mapping onomastic models.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, social historians of medieval Ashkenaz have not used so far name research as a tool for revising our knowledge on Ashkenazi kinship; a reconstruction of actual naming patterns based on a statistical analysis or on the examination of specific and detailed family constellations has not been done until now. The extensive work done over the past three decades on medieval Ashkenazi communities has significantly increased our knowledge of economic structures, shifts in family law, and women's roles within their families.<sup>10</sup> Still, one serious obstacle to social historical research of Ashkenazi communities is the dominance of normative (*halakhic*) sources, and the general lack of archives conserving the documentary traces of social practices.<sup>11</sup>

- 8 On Jewish naming practices in medieval Austria see the numerous studies by Martha Keil, especially Martha Keil, "Petachja, genannt Zecherl". Namen und Beinamen von Juden im deutschen Sprachraum des Spätmittelalters, in: Reinhard Härtel (ed.), *Personennamen und Identität. Namengebung und Namengebrauch als Anzeiger individueller Bestimmung und gruppenbezogener Zuordnung. Akten der Akademie Friesach "Stadt und Kultur im Mittelalter"*, Friesach (Kärnten), 25.–29. September 1995 (Grazer grundwissenschaftliche Forschungen 3) Graz 1997, p. 119–146; Martha Keil, Hendl, Suessel, Putzlein. Name und Geschlecht am Beispiel des österreichischen Judentums im Spätmittelalter, in: *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 20/1 (2009), p. 35–52. On other Jewish communities, see, for example: Simon Seror, *Les noms des juifs de France au Moyen Age*, Paris 1989; Simon Seror, *Les noms des femmes juives en Angleterre au Moyen Age*, in: *Revue des études juives* 154 (1995), p. 295–325. See also Shlomo D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society. The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. 3: *The Family*, Berkeley 1983, p. 6–14, 314–318.
- 9 Cf.: Alexander Beider, *A Dictionary of Ashkenazic Given Names. Their Origins, Structure, Pronunciation, and Migrations*, Bergenfield (N. J.) 2001; Keil, Petachja (see note 8); Karl-Heinz Müller, Simon Schwarzfuchs, Abraham (Rami) Reiner (ed.), *Die Grabsteine vom jüdischen Friedhof in Würzburg aus der Zeit vor dem Schwarzen Tod 1147–1346*, 3 vols. (Darstellungen aus der fränkischen Geschichte 58), Stegaurach 2011.
- 10 Only to name a few of the important studies published in this field: Michael Toch, *Die soziale und demographische Struktur der jüdischen Gemeinde Nürnbergs im Jahre 1489*, in: Jürgen Schneider (ed.), *Wirtschaftskräfte und Wirtschaftswege. Festschrift für Hermann Kellenbenz*, Stuttgart 1981, p. 79–91; Michael Toch, *Die jüdische Frau im Erwerbsleben des Spätmittelalters*, in: Michael Toch (ed.), *Peasants and Jews in Medieval Germany*, Aldershot 2003, p. XIX, 37–48; Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children. Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe*, Princeton (N. J.) 2007; Birgit Klein, "Der Mann: ein Fehlkauf" – Finanzielle Ehregelungen und ihre Folgen für das Geschlechterverhältnis, in: Andrea Schatz, Christiane Müller (ed.), *Der Differenz auf der Spur. Frauen und Gender im aschkenasischen Judentum (Minima Judaica 4)*, Berlin 2004, p. 69–99; Israel Jacob Yuval, *Getting Married in Ashkenaz. The Financial Arrangements*, in: Menahem Ben-Sasson (ed.), *Religion and Economy*, Jerusalem 1995, p. 191–207; Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious. Jewish Women in Medieval Europe*, Waltham (MA) 2004; Martha Keil, *Business Success and Tax Debts: Jewish Women in Late Medieval Austrian Towns*, in: Eszter Andor, András Kovács (ed.), *Jewish Studies at the Central European University. Public Lectures 2, 1999–2001*, Budapest 2002, p. 103–123; Cheryl Tallan, *Medieval Jewish Widows: Their Control of Resources*, in: *Jewish History* 5/1 (1991), p. 63–74.
- 11 This applies first and foremost to the works of Jewish and Israeli historians, though – not only –

Reconstructing naming practices can provide some precious insights into social lives and actors' orientations on the basis of materials other than normative sources produced by learned elites.

The analysis of extensive Jewish name-materials from the medieval period indicates major shifts in Ashkenazi naming practices from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onward. These changes should be perceived as embedded in a broader process of social change, which took place at that time, redefining gender relations within Ashkenazi families. In this context, names are not to be understood as merely passive indicators, reflecting changes in other areas. Naming practices are rather perceived as a means of actively shaping the relations between persons and groups, such as families. In what follows, I will examine name sharing as a significant tool for shaping kin relationships, seeking to account for shifts in naming practices observed in that period. I shall, first, explore name-circulation patterns within Ashkenazi kin groups during the late 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, focusing on women's growing role in transmitting names. I will then turn to examine a phenomenon, especially visible during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, of men adopting given names of female kin as by-names.

\*

Modern historiography on Ashkenazi communities has tended to focus on patronymics as affiliation markers and to stress the transmission of male names from deceased ancestors to newborns. It tended thus to reduce kin relationships to vertical, especially patrilineal relations, while the possibility that women took part in securing family continuity has not been considered; at most, they were considered as mediators between their male relatives.<sup>12</sup> But more importantly, this picture is inconsistent with naming practices gleaned from the sources, even in regard to the earlier period. Although the evidence on name-circulation patterns in Ashkenazi families prior to the Black Death is relatively sparse, the analysis of Jewish memorial lists contained

depending greatly on the subject matter. An important exception is the vast work done by Michael Toch. More recently historians have tended to use a broader variety of sources, including Christian materials, yet many still incline to rely on normative and narrative texts.

- 12 Recent studies on kinship in pre-modern European communities have extensively re-considered many of the theses which have long predominated this field, especially the model developed by Karl Schmid and Georges Duby which maintained a shift towards patrilineal structures in the turn of the first millennium, suggesting a negative correlation between the degree to which institutionalised forms for organising power were developed and the role played by kin relationships in organising political power. New approaches to this research area are introduced for example in the collection of essays: David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher, Jon Mathieu (ed.), *Kinship in Europe. Approaches to Long-Term Developments (1300–1900)*, New York 2007. See also: Gadi Algazi, Review Essay: Bringing Kinship (back), in: *Mediterranean Historical Review* 25/1 (2010), p. 83–92; Bernhard Jussen, *Perspektiven der Verwandtschaftsforschung fünfundzwanzig Jahre nach Jack Goodys "Entwicklung von Ehe und Familie in Europa"*, in: Karl-Heinz Spiess (ed.), *Die Familie in der Gesellschaft des Mittelalters (Vorträge und Forschungen 71)*, Ostfildern 2009, p. 275–324.



within the *Memorbuch of Nuremberg* suggest some general patterns.<sup>13</sup> The *Memorbuch* consists of a martyrology, which is the main part, followed by two necrologies from 14<sup>th</sup>-century Nuremberg. The martyrology itself, which the following analysis is based on, contains over 5.000 names of Jews from various German regions, starting in 1096 with the pogroms, which occurred during the first crusade, and ending in 1349 with the violent attacks on Jews during the Black Death. The lists are recorded according to the date and place of the events referred. Thanks to the extent use of patronymics and the fact that the *Memorbuch* is divided into family “blocks” patterns of name circulation can be gleaned from the memorial lists.

The available data suggests that in the later period, especially in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when most of the materials were produced, it was common practice to confer the name of a deceased maternal grandfather in order to perpetuate his memory. This is furthermore supported by specific family trees from the late thirteenth and the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century reconstructed on the basis of the memorial lists. These cases show that names were chosen from both the paternal and the maternal stock of names, also revealing name sharing among living kin, including between female relatives. One clear example for this comes from the 1298 memorial lists. A Dolce of Heilbronn, who was killed along with her family during the *Rindfleisch* pogroms, is listed with her relatives. As her kin list discloses, her name was circulated within her kin group, already in her lifetime. Three of Dolce’s daughters were recorded with their own daughters. Each one of them passed down the name “Dolce” to her daughter. Thus, we have a clear case of name sharing through the female line both vertically, while names were passed down from one generation to the next, and horizontally shared among collateral kin; between a maternal grandmother and her granddaughters as well as between female cousins on the mother’s side. Another example for name sharing between (living) female kin in this family refers to a grandaunt and her grandniece, both called *Minne*.

Another family tree (fig. 1: The Family of Bella of Worms), reconstructed based on the memorial name lists, is that of *Bella* of Worms, daughter of *Eliezer*, who appears with her relatives on the victims’ list of 1348. Bella had three daughters: *Judith*, *Sarah* and *Guta*. The latter had a son called *Eliezer*, who was apparently named after his maternal grand-grandfather. The boy’s name, however, could allude to more than one figure, for his father was also called *Eliezer*. In such a constellation, a name could refer to different persons, both living and dead, to a relative on the mother’s side and yet to the father himself as well.

We do not know the name of Bella’s husband, but a marked pattern in that family might give us a hint. Each of Bella’s three daughters bestowed the name *Menachem*

13 Siegmund Salfeld (ed.), *Das Martyrologium des Nürnberger Memorbuches* (Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland 3), Berlin 1898.

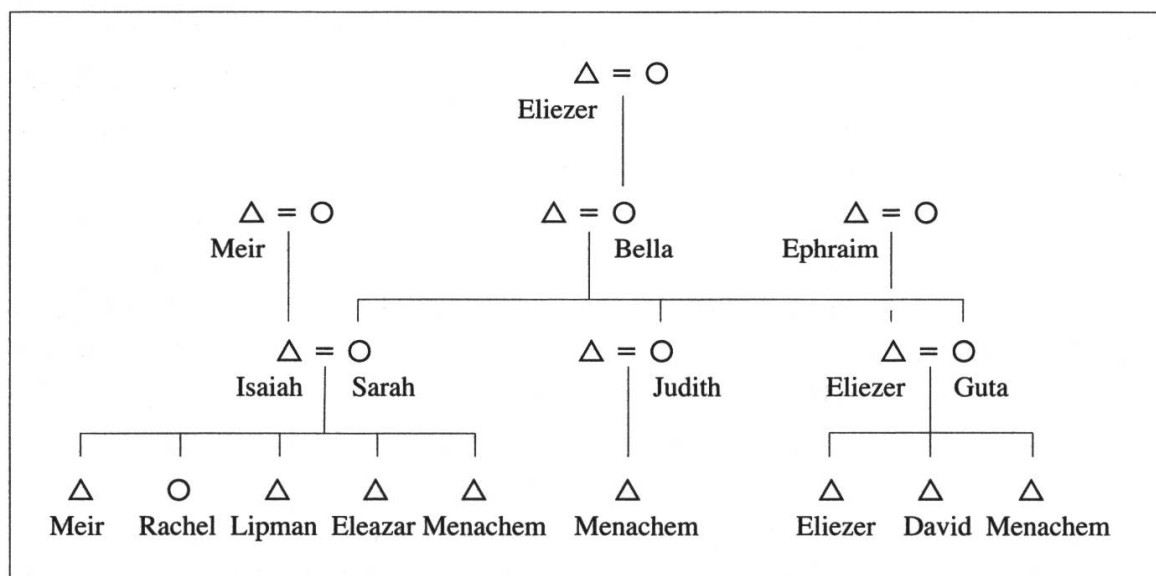


Fig. 1: *The Family of Bella of Worms.*

on one of her sons. Hence, we come across a remarkable horizontal circulation of a male name in the family through the female line; perhaps all three boys were named after their maternal grandfather. In any event, the repeated use suggests that the name *Menachem* had some special meaning in Bella's family.

Such naming practices stress a growing significance of women's families of origin in kin networks. Yet the available data suggests that such naming practices were especially displayed in the later medieval period. There are obvious limitations for an attempt to recover relationships based on minimal traces such as given names. Nevertheless, such findings coincide with rare accounts of name giving, appearing in rabbinic Ashkenazi texts, which provide a remarkable glimpse into the family dynamics behind the practice of naming children.

In his halakhic work *The Order of Divorce*, mentioned at the beginning of this essay, R. Jacob Margalit recounts an explanation given by the well-known scholar Maharil for name-giving patterns. Being asked why the very same vernacular everyday name appears with different Hebrew sacred names (Jewish males had a double name), Maharil replied that "certainly each vernacular name should have one sacred name, only that at times the husband and wife disagree concerning the [child's] name, for each wishes to name him after his own family and occasionally they reach a compromise – the everyday name shall be after the wife's family, and the sacred name after the husband's or vice-versa".<sup>14</sup> In a related story we hear of "a compromise between a man and his wife. She had a brother, whose name in the vernacular was Salman, and he had a brother whose everyday name was

<sup>14</sup> Margalith (see note 2), p. 66.

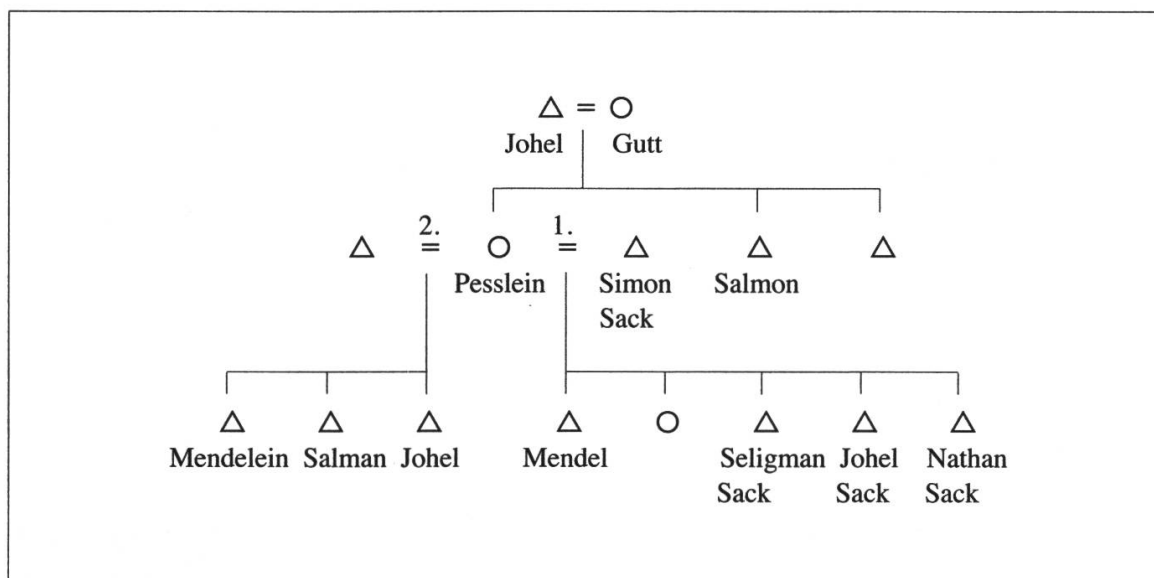


Fig. 2: *The Children of Pesslein.*

Suesskint and his sacred name was Yekutiel. And her brother was also called by the sacred name Yekutiel, and their son was named Yekutiel after both.”<sup>15</sup> On a structural level of kinship, wives’ families of origin gained in weight in choosing names, which implies a changing balance between maternal and paternal kin groups. Moreover, considering given names as symbolic goods circulating within a kin group, while transmitting them, women functioned as agents within the broader system of devolution of family goods.<sup>16</sup>

Name-circulation patterns observed in the late medieval period coincide with general shifts in Ashkenazi kinship from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onward. As moneylending became the main source of livelihood for German Jews, Jewish women increased their involvement in credit business and their participation in economic activity.<sup>17</sup> This was the context in which Jewish women gained the right to appear before court and daughters were now entering the inheritance system. Furthermore, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the practice of a bilateral dowry was introduced in these communities, with husbands and wives contributing a similar share to the marital property.<sup>18</sup> These major innovations in women’s legal status reshaped their position within their families of origin and their position vis-à-vis their husbands.

15 Ibid., p. 67.

16 On the concept of property mediating kin relationships see for instance: Hans Medick, David Warren Sabean, *Interest and Emotion in Family and Kinship Studies: A Critique of Social History and Anthropology*, in: Hans Medick, David Warren Sabean (ed.), *Interest and Emotion. Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship*, Cambridge 1984, p. 9–27.

17 Toch, *Frau* (see note 10); Keil (see note 10).

18 Yuval (see note 10); Klein (see note 10).



This can be illustrated by a specific case from Nuremberg in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. One of the three leading Jewish families in Nuremberg at that time was headed by Seligman Sack. On his mother's side, Seligman was fifth generation to an established family in Nuremberg; his father was Simon Sack, son of Isaac, who was a scholar and the community rabbi in Nuremberg. It was Seligman's mother Pesslein who played a key-role in her kin group, linking older generations of moneylenders to younger generations of scholars, moneylenders and community leaders. She was herself an active and apparently successful moneylender. Among her debtors was also the Margrave Albert Achilles the Prince-Elector of Brandenburg (1414–1486),<sup>19</sup> which indicates a circle of upper-level clients and high-scale moneylending business.

Pesslein had at least seven sons and one daughter from two marriages. As her family tree (fig. 2: The Children of Pesslein) discloses, her children's names were mainly drawn from her family of origin. Hence, we see that her father's name Johel was bestowed upon two of her sons, born by different fathers. Similarly, her son Salman shared his name with his maternal uncle. The high circulation of names from Pesslein's family, including female names, can be observed in later generations too. Among Pesslein's sons, it was Seligman Sack who played a central role in strengthening the family's position in Nuremberg. He was a wealthy moneylender, a learned man, and a key-figure in the Jewish community of Nuremberg in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He had at least two daughters – Preunlein, Fridlein, and probably a third daughter, and a son – R. Salman Sack. Preunlein was married to R. Mair Furstlein, a rabbinical judge in Nuremberg. From 1491 until his death in 1497, the couple was living with Seligman after coming to terms with the city authorities that he could have his son-in-law and his daughter “bey im sein lebtag und seinen [Mair Furstlein's] zins haben und halten mug”.<sup>20</sup> The couple left Nuremberg only with the expulsion, in 1499.

Another married daughter of Seligman who was living at her father's house with her husband was Fridlein. Her spouse, Salman of Worms, was admitted as citizen in 1486, while his father-in-law “derselb Seligkman Sagk dieweil er lebt fur sich und den benanten seinen aiden jerlich 35 gulden [...] zu zins geben”.<sup>21</sup> After Salman's death, Fridlein remarried in 1497 at the latest. In that year, her second husband, R. Israel Reinbach (d. 1505), was admitted as citizen in place of her late spouse under similar conditions.<sup>22</sup> Following the expulsion of the Jews from Nuremberg, Israel Reinbach

19 Michael Toch, Nürnberg, in: Arye Maimon, Mordechai Breuer, Yacov Guggenheim (ed.), *Germania Judaica* 3/2: Ortschaftsartikel Mährisch-Budwitz – Zwolle, Tübingen 1995, p. 1001–1044.

20 Moritz Stern (ed.), *Die israelitische Bevölkerung der deutschen Städte. Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Stadtgeschichte*, Teil 3: Nürnberg im Mittelalter, Bd. 2, Frankfurt a. M. 1896, p. 76.

21 Ibid., p. 88.

22 Ibid., p. 91 f.

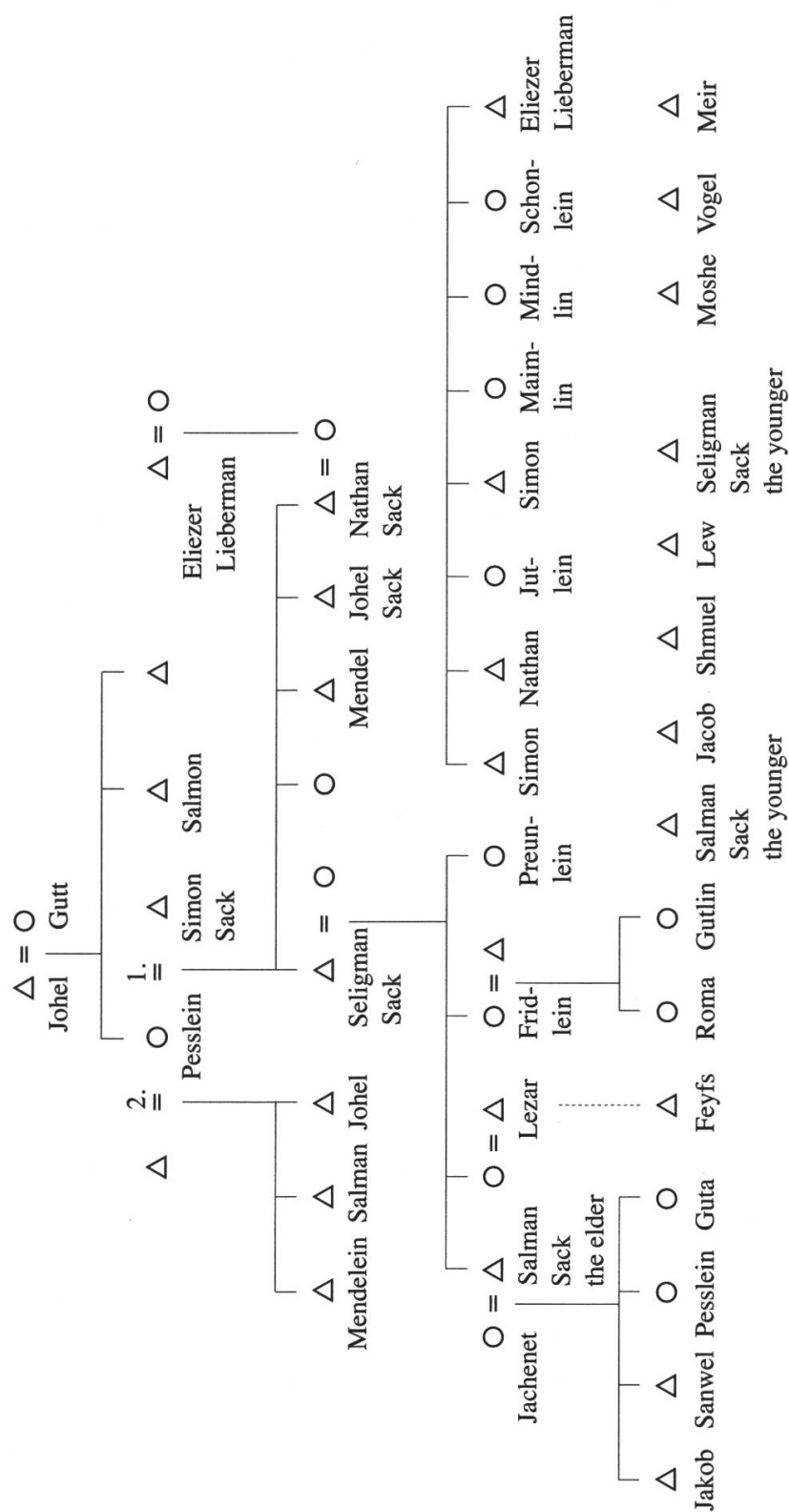


Fig. 3: The Sack Family (Broken line: uncertain).

moved with his family to Frankfurt where he served as the community rabbi. After joining him in Frankfurt, his “brother-in-law”, R. Meir Furstlein, acted as a rabbinic judge in the city.<sup>23</sup>

As Seligman’s daughters and their families lived with him, we see that some of his grandchildren also established families in Nuremberg, while having close relationships with their maternal relatives. A strong association of Seligman’s descendants through his daughters with their maternal relatives is evident through name-circulation practices as well (fig. 3: The Sack Family). Among their children, we encounter a girl named *Gutlin* who shared her name with her maternal great-great-grandmother Gutt, Pesslein’s mother, and with one of her maternal cousin’s. Similarly we come across the name *Jacob* – again, shared by two cousins – whose circulation within this kin group goes back to its “founder”, Jacob Sangmeister. The name *Lew*, which circulated in Pesslein’s family, also appears. Moreover, one of Seligman’s daughters named her son *Salman* – a name that was carried by many of her relatives, including her brother, R. Salman Sack. Finally, in 1497, the city records mention *Seligman Sack the younger*, apparently Seligman’s grandson who was named after his living maternal grandfather. This is, furthermore, an important indication for the transmission of family names through women, which is also suggested by the case of *Salman Sack the younger* – again a son of one of the daughters in the family.<sup>24</sup>

Findings on household structures complement the hypotheses based on name-circulation patterns among kin.<sup>25</sup> In general, local residence-patterns are traceable among sons and daughters within this broader kin group, particularly in case of married daughters. Throughout five generations, married daughters stayed close to their families of origin, occasionally even living with them under the same roof. Sons-in-law, often being scholars, married *into* their wives’ families. These were the daughters of moneylenders – themselves vital economic players, who played an important role in extending the power of their families of origin and in securing their continuity. This was not only about biological reproduction – but also social reproduction.

Generally, name-circulation patterns within this larger kin group testify to powerful kin relationships, which were to a great extent the result of large and complex households (comprising three generations) and more generally, of geographic proximity that intensified the relationships involved. Such patterns of household

23 Toch (see note 19), p. 1019.

24 Cf. Stephen Wilson, *The Means of Naming. A Social and Cultural History of Personal Naming in Western Europe*, London 1998, p. 176 f. See also the discussion on matronyms later in this paper.

25 The hypotheses presented in this essay are further developed and more elaborately discussed within my dissertation: Lilach Assaf, *Names, Identifications, and Social Change. Naming Practices and the (Re-)Shaping of Identities and Relationships within German Jewish Communities in the Middle Ages*, submitted at the University of Constance 2016.

formation were certainly organised by external constraints, such as the migration policy of late medieval Nuremberg and the instability which characterised Jewish community-life in general after the Black Death.<sup>26</sup> But they were also the result of early-marriage patterns that were to increase the family's economic capacity and to enable some sons or sons-in-law to study. Such a desired state of affairs was, though, mainly the share of the powerful families of the community who had the means as well as the Christian authorities' permission to accommodate their married children and their families.<sup>27</sup>

In this setting, daughters emerge as vital social actors who played a significant role in securing the continuity of their families of origins. Moreover, playing a notable role in transmitting and giving names, women marked not only themselves, but in many cases also their children, as belonging to their families of origin; their children who spent most of their lives in close proximity to their maternal relatives were also closely associated with them, often by carrying their names.<sup>28</sup>

## Matronyms and female economic actors

While naming patterns in the late Middle Ages indicate the important role played by married daughters in transmitting names, they also suggest the growing significance of female economic actors who became more socially visible in their positions as mothers and mothers-in-law. The sources offer two important indicators of such a process: designations of males in relation to their female relatives and the practice of men adopting the name of a female kin as a by-name.<sup>29</sup>

26 See for example: Hans-Jörg Gilomen, *Juden in spätmittelalterlichen Städten des Reiches. Normen – Fakten – Hypothesen*, in: *Kleine Schriften des Arye Maimon-Instituts* 11 (2009), p. 7–58; Michael Toch, *Jewish Migrations To, Within and From Medieval Germany*, in: Sara Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Le migrazioni in Europa. Secc. XIII–XVIII*, Florence 1994, p. 639–652. See also Dean Phillip Bell, *Sacred Communities. Jewish and Christian Identities in Fifteenth-Century Germany*, Boston 2001, p. 126–148.

27 Toch, *Struktur* (see note 10), p. 67 f. In 1448, the Jewish community in Nuremberg appealed for elementary residence permit (for one year) to newly married couples accommodated by their parents. See Stern (see note 20), p. 293. Cf. Israel Jacob Yuval, *Scholars in Their Time. The Religious Leadership of German Jewry in the Late Middle Ages*, Jerusalem 1988, p. 34 f.

28 In her instructive study on name giving among leading Florentine merchant families in the late medieval period, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has shown how naming practices interrelated to circulation patterns of family goods. Of particular interest for our discussion is that in this setting, shifts in family structures, stressing patrilineal affiliation and excluding women from the inheritance system, found expression also in the circulation of given names. Fathers played the leading role in giving and transmitting names, as children's names were mostly drawn from the paternal stock of names. See Klapisch-Zuber (see note 3).

29 Cf. Herlihy (see note 4), p. 92 ff. Herlihy found correlation between the increasing usage of matronymic and the growing participation of women in feudal inheritance. The important economic functions of women – above all their increasing role as land owners/transmitters, but also

Personal designations tend to cover a broad spectrum of kin relationships, including affinal relations. Perhaps unlike given names, which may mark kin relations, which are not necessarily active – personal designations are usually a strong indication of practised social relationships.<sup>30</sup> The identification of a man in the city tax records, for instance, as the son-in-law of someone, is a sign for spatial proximity to his wife's family of origin. Whether he is associated in urban sources, such as tax lists, with his father-in-law or his mother-in-law can cast light also on the economic status of women and the gendered division of roles within the family.

The designation of males – whether sons, husbands or sons-in-law, in relation to their female kin is often treated in the literature as indication of a remarkable economic success gained by few women.<sup>31</sup> One of the examples cited recurrently in this context is that of the well-known Anglo-Jewish financier Licoricia of Winchester (13<sup>th</sup> century) whose sons were associated with her and whose business scale and success were certainly exceptional.<sup>32</sup> In mid-14<sup>th</sup>-century Regensburg, we encounter yet a woman named Chändel who was in a leading position within the Jewish community. She was “commissioned by the city to assess the taxes due from newly settling in Regensburg”.<sup>33</sup>

The practice of designating males in relation to their female kin, becoming widespread among Ashkenazi communities in the later period, went hand in hand with a growing economic role played by women. Michael Toch has found that in the late fourteenth and throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century, 25% of the (systematically) documented businesspeople in 41 German Jewish communities were women.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, some

as household/land managers – specifically in case of households of knights and married clerks, as well as their role in royal administration, made them more visible in the records, linking their male relatives to them.

30 For general methodological considerations, see Reinhard Härtel, *Personennamen und Identität. Historische und quellenkundliche Probleme*, in: Härtel (see note 8), p. 3–16. Analyses from a gender perspective is offered in: Monique Bourin, Pascal Chareille (ed.), *Persistances du nom unique. Désignation et anthroponymie des femmes. Méthodes statistiques pour l'anthroponymie (Genèse médiévale de l'anthroponymie moderne 2/2)*, Tours 1992.

31 See for example Keil, Hendl (see note 8), p. 7 f.

32 Judith R. Baskin, *Jewish Women in the Middle Ages*, in: Judith R. Baskin (ed.), *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, Detroit 1998, pp. 101–127, here 115; Judith R. Baskin, *Women in Medieval Christian Europe*, in: Michael Berenbaum, Fred Skolnik (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 21, Detroit 2007, p. 156–209; Victoria Hoyle, *The Bonds that Bind: Money Lending between Anglo-Jewish and Christian Women in the Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews, 1218–1280*, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 34/2 (2008), p. 119–129, here 122. On Licoricia of Winchester, see Charlotte Newman Goldy, *A Thirteenth-Century Anglo-Jewish Woman Crossing Boundaries: Visible and Invisible*, in: *ibid.*, p. 130–145. See also Joseph Jacobs (ed.), *The Jews of Angevin England. Documents and Records from Latin and Hebrew Sources, Printed and Manuscripts*, London 1893, p. 371.

33 Daniel M. Friedenberg, *Medieval Jewish Seals From Europe*, Detroit 1987, no. 180, 193.

34 Toch, *Frau* (see note 10), p. 40–42. Cf. William Chester Jordan, *Jews on Top: Women and the Availability of Consumption Loans in Northern France in the Mid-Thirteenth Century*, in: *Journal*



businesswomen in those communities were engaging in large-scale moneylending – their financial capacity being sometimes much greater than that of their male counterparts.<sup>35</sup> In Nuremberg, for instance, one of the wealthiest Jewish widows in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century was Jutta Rapp whose father was designated on the tax lists as *der Ansel der Reppin vater*. A similar case is that of another wealthy businesswoman, *Sanwelin von Basel*, the widow of *Samuel von Pasel* who was a citizen of Nuremberg. On the tax list from 1388, we encounter one of her male relatives *Josliep von Hersfelden der Sanwelin freunde*. Another example is that of *Ell[e] de Eystet*, a prosperous moneylender who appears in 1382, paying 200 gulden together with *Joseph und Jeklein ir eyden*.<sup>36</sup> Generally, when the mother-in-law played an important economic role, it was very likely for her sons-in-law to be associated with her.

This was mostly the case with widows, though married women were also active economic players and could engage in moneylending either with their male relatives – often with a husband or a son-in-law, or alone. This can be illustrated in case of Surlin in Nuremberg, daughter of Mayr, mentioned earlier. Surlin had two children we know of: a daughter named Zürl like her mother and a son called Jacob after his maternal grandfather. It was quite unusual for children to be designated only through their mother as was the case with Surlin's children; her son appears in the tax records as *Jacob der Surlin sun* and her daughter, after getting married, was designated as *der Surlin tochter sein [Salman von Pybrach's] eliche wirtin*.<sup>37</sup> It should be noticed that Surlin was at least economically the head of her household, for she was the one – not her husband, who appeared as a tax payer. Moreover, Surlin's son (who was a scholar) adopted later his mother's name as a by-name to become known as *Jacob Zorlin*.<sup>38</sup> I would like to call attention to this specific model. Although such matronyms appeared sporadically earlier,<sup>39</sup> it seems that this practice has become a significant

of Jewish Studies 29/1 (1978), p. 39–56. The latter deals, however, mostly with small loans made by Jewish women to Christian women, while in case of German communities, there were also women who engaged in large-scale moneylending. Furthermore, in German communities, according to Toch, women's business activity was patterned similarly to that of men's. On this point see Toch, *Frau* (see note 10), p. 42 f. On Jewish women's economic activities in medieval Austria, see: Keil, *Business Success* (see note 10); Martha Keil, "Maistrin" und Geschäftsfrau. Jüdische Oberschichtfrauen im spätmittelalterlichen Österreich, in: Martha Keil, Sabine Hödl (ed.), *Die jüdische Familie in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Berlin 1999, p. 27–50.

35 Toch, *Frau* (see note 10), p. 42 f. Some examples are coming from Nuremberg, Frankfurt, Coblenz, Regensburg, and Constance.

36 Stern (see note 20), p. 28. Elle von Eichstätt loaned the city of Nuremberg 1938 gulden. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

37 *Ibid.*, 52, 55, 56, 58.

38 Yuval (see note 27), p. 54, note 189.

39 A brief survey of matronyms in medieval Ashkenazi communities is offered in Erika Timm, *Matronymika im aschkenasischen Kulturbereich. Ein Beitrag zur Mentalitäts- und Sozialgeschichte der europäischen Juden*, Tübingen 1999, p. 19–26. See also Martha Keil, *Unsichtbare Frauen oder: "... was nicht sein darf"*. Jüdische Geschäftsfrauen im Spätmittelalter als Forschungsobjekte, in:

phenomenon, first during the late fourteenth and especially in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup> Such matronyms were usually based on either a mother's, a mother-in-law's or, rarely, on a wife's name.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, most of the examples come from scholars' families. A few known Ashkenazi scholars who carried this sort of matronyms are *Aaron Blümlein/Plumel* in Krems (circa 1360–1421) who apparently adopted his mother's name (also transmitted to his daughter as a given name *Plumel*),<sup>42</sup> *Moshe Bonlin* in Mainz (15<sup>th</sup> century),<sup>43</sup> *David Sprintz* in Nuremberg (15<sup>th</sup> century),<sup>44</sup> and *Moshe Zaret* in Ulm (15<sup>th</sup> century), the son of Zareth or *Zara Lichtenfelzerin* – a prosperous moneylender in Nuremberg.<sup>45</sup> In Italy there appears around 1500 a certain *R. Abraham Zaret* who might have been his son.<sup>46</sup> In 15<sup>th</sup>-century Cologne we come across a scholar known also by the name *Abraham Guetlin*, who was the son of *Guetliene*.<sup>47</sup>

Such by-names based on a female first name were sometimes passed down throughout a few generations, thus becoming family names. This pattern can be traced in case of the well-known scholar *Jacob Margalit* (d. 1492) who adopted his mother's name as a by-name, which would be carried by at least three generations of scholars in this

Sabine Hödl (ed.), *Zwischen den Zeilen. 20 Jahre Institut für jüdische Geschichte Österreichs*, St. Pölten 2008, p. 40–49 (online 39–49), here 46.

40 There are examples for the practice of males carrying female names as by-names among Christians as well. See Hans Bahlow, *Metronymika. Frauennamen des Mittelalters als Familiennamen*, in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 108/4 (1979), p. 448–466. Yet concentrating on linguistic and literary aspects, this article cites examples without embedding them in a specific family constellation. Furthermore, the examples at hand illustrate the usage of female names as by-names – there is no evidence that those names were in fact family names. Moreover, it appears that most of the examples precede the Black Death. Cf. Wilson (see note 24), p. 176 f.

41 In 14<sup>th</sup>-century Coblenz, we come across a successful businesswoman whose second husband designated himself in relation to her: “Ich Moisse, Reynetten Mann”. On this case, see Franz-Joseph Heyen, Koblenz, in: Arye Maimon, Mordechai Breuer, Yacov Guggenheim (ed.), *Germania Judaica* 3/1: Ortschaftsartikel Aach – Lychen, Tübingen 1987, p. 624–632, here 627 f.

42 Christoph Tepperberg, Krems an der Donau, in: Maimon/Breuer/Guggenheim (see note 41), p. 677–685, here 679. See also Keil, Maistrin (see note 34), p. 107.

43 Friedrich Schütz et al., Mainz, in: Maimon/Breuer/Guggenheim (see note 19), p. 786–831, here 801.

44 Stern (see note 20), p. 77; Toch (see note 19), p. 1014 f.

45 Stern (see note 20), p. 79; Toch (see note 19), p. 1015 f.; Gudrun Emberger-Wandel, Ulm, in: Maimon/Breuer/Guggenheim (see note 19), p. 1498–1522, here 1505 f. Mahari Margalit mentions a certain מֵהַרָּז יִינֵט, *Maharaz Jent* (?), which might suggest that the latter carried the female name *Jenta* as a by-name. See Margalith (see note 2) p. 78.

46 Emberger-Wandel (see note 45), p. 1518, note 1229.

47 Erich Wisplinghoff et al., Köln, in: Maimon/Breuer/Guggenheim (see note 41), p. 632–650, here 637. In a sepulchral inscription from Frankfurt dated to 1409, a man was designated as *Eleazar bar Kalonymos b Rivkes*. Although the designation appears incomplete, the matronym *Rivkes*, רִבְקָה, stands out, especially at this early stage. See Mordechai ha-Levi Horovitz (ed.), *Sefer Avnei Zikaron. HaKtav ve-haMichtav miBeit haKvarot haYashan deKehila Kedosha Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurt 1901*, no. 80. See also the online database <http://www.steinheim-institut.de/cgi-bin/epidat?function=Ins&sel=ffb&lang=de&inv=7028>.

family.<sup>48</sup> His sons – both scholars, were called *Isaac Margalit* and *Samuel Margalit*. The latter had a son called *Moshe Mordechai Margalit* (d. 1616), a rabbi in Cracow,<sup>49</sup> and another son who came to be known as the convert *Antonius Margaritha*, who clearly kept his family name even after becoming a Christian. The Latin (name) “Margarita” – just like the Hebrew “Margalit”, signifies “Pearl”.<sup>50</sup>

An example of a son-in-law who adopted his mother-in-law’s name, later circulated as a family name, comes from Nuremberg. In 1389 the tax lists record a certain *Abraham Sprintz*, a citizen of Nuremberg, who would be later designated as *der Abraham der Sprinczin aydem*.<sup>51</sup> Probably living near or with his mother-in-law, Abraham adopted her name as a by-name and became known as *Abraham Sprincz*; not only he himself would be designated in this way from now on, but his sons as well (one of his daughters was also named *Sprincz*). It is not clear why Abraham adopted his mother-in-law’s name, but an instructive case from 16<sup>th</sup>-century Posen may suggest which social mechanisms could have operated in similar cases.

In his youth, the later great Talmudist R. Shmuel Eliezer Ha-Levi went to Posen where he married the daughter of Edel and Moshe Ashkenazi Heilpronn. Later, due to his mother-in-law’s generous support for his yeshiva (Talmudical academy) in Posen for twenty years, he adopted her name and became known as *R. Shmuel Eliezer Edel’s*.<sup>52</sup> This is an illustration of how a name could function as a gift and the adoption of it as an expression of gratitude.<sup>53</sup> Therefore Abraham Sprintz of Nuremberg could have adopted his mother-in-law’s name as a by-name as a token of gratitude for her support – whether due to social contacts or material assistance.

As the examples show, women – especially mothers and mothers-in-law – played an increasing role in marking social affiliations. This is supported, furthermore, by other patterns of name-circulation, associating males with their maternal relatives. One example is that of the Eppstein family in 15<sup>th</sup>-century Frankfurt. The name *Eppstein* carried by the known scholar R. Nathan Eppstein and his brother R. Semel Eppstein

48 Toch (see note 19), p. 1016; Peter Herde et al., Regensburg, in: Maimon/Breuer/Guggenheim (see note 19), p. 1178–1230.

49 Herde (see note 48), p. 1227, note 1483.

50 The Hebrew word “Margalit” meaning a gem appears in Talmudic sources, for instance in the Babylonian Talmud, “Avodah Zarah”, 8b. A link between “Margarita” and “Pearl” in the Latin appears in the popular 13<sup>th</sup>-century collection of hagiographies known as the *Legenda aurea* (*The Golden Legend*) compiled by Jacopo da Varagine. In the story of St. Margaret’s life, it says that “Margareta dicitur a quadam pretiosa gemma, quae margarita cocatur”. See Jacobus de Voragine, *Jacobi a Voragine Legenda aurea*, Leipzig 1801, cap. XCIII: De sancta Margareta, <http://tinyurl.com/3uspadl>.

51 Stern (see note 20), p. 39, 46, 49, passim.

52 Mordechai Margalio, *Encyclopaedia le’toldot gedolei Israel*, vol. 4, Jerusalem 1950, p. 1320 (in Hebrew).

53 See Gadi Algazi’s illuminating introductory essay, which offers a useful theoretical framework for studying gift exchange in pre-modern societies: Gadi Algazi, *Doing Things with Gifts*, in: Algazi/Groebner/Jussen (see note 4), p. 9–29.

was passed down through their mother Eva, daughter of Gutlin von Eppstein, who was a wealthy businesswoman. Apparently Gutlin's son-in-law Jacob von Eppstein adopted his mother-in-law's name carried by his sons, too. Furthermore, it seems that Nathan Eppstein's son-in-law Gumprecht Eppstein similarly adopted his by-name through his wife, Nathan's daughter.<sup>54</sup>

In other cases, we can trace sons taking the family name of the maternal grandfather. For example, in the Rapp family, a wealthy family of financiers in 14<sup>th</sup>-century Nuremberg/Treviso, Henndlin, daughter of Jacob and Jutta Rapp, had a son called *Chaim Rapp Soten*.<sup>55</sup> In addition, in 15<sup>th</sup>-century Nuremberg, we encounter two grandsons of Seligman Sack, sons of his daughters, carrying his family name: *Seligman Sack the younger* and *Salman Sack the younger*. These examples seem to reinforce the interrelation between women's participation in the circulation of family goods and their role in transmitting names. In such cases, by transmitting family names, mothers played a crucial role in forming family circles, linking their sons to their maternal grandfathers and uncles.

\*

Shifts in naming practices observed in late medieval Ashkenazi communities indicate the reshaping of women's position within their kin groups and their vital role in family economy. As married daughters, women played an important role in transmitting names, including female names, while associating their children with their families of origin. Furthermore, in case of significant female economic actors, women's names were increasingly regarded as symbolic goods used both in interactions with Christians and within the Jewish milieu itself. Although in legal contexts patronymics continued to play the leading role as a family marker, in a host of social contexts, men could be associated with their mother or with her family of origin. In fact, the emergence of competing naming models such as matronymics enabled to express a broader variety of social ties, paying tribute to women's contribution to their families.

54 On this family, see: Yuval (see note 27), p. 239; Dietrich Andernacht, Michael Lenarz, Inge Schlottbauer, Frankfurt am Main, in: Maimon/Breuer/Guggenheim (see note 41), p. 346–393, here 176. We encounter a similar model in Christian communities in the earlier period. In the Christian case, when the estate went to an heiress, her father's by-name could be passed to her husband or sons. See Wilson (see note 24), p. 176.

55 See the reconstruction of the family tree in Angela Möschter, *Juden im venezianischen Treviso (1389–1509)* (Forschungen zur Geschichte der Juden. Abteilung A, Abhandlungen 19), Hannover 2008, p. 351.