Occupational names in the Hungarian family name system[1]

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Abstract: Occupational names can be regarded as one of the most characteristic type of the Hungarian family name system: 10 out of the 20 most frequent family names of the current name stock are members of this category. The current paper explores the history of this family name type, with special emphasis on the social distribution of the name type and on the change in its frequency in proportion to other family name types. Furthermore, the survey touches upon the role of the occupational name type in the history of official family name changes in Hungary, investigates the social-historical and political background of choosing occupational family names, and also mentions some newly created occupational family names. Finally, the paper deals with the question of social discrimination on the basis of family names in contemporary history, which can lead to the changing of certain occupational family names into more "neutral" ones.

Keywords: occupational family names, Hungary, typology, official family name changes, historical survey.

Aims and scopes

Occupational family names can be regarded as one of the most characteristic type of the Hungarian family name system: 10 of the 20 most frequent family names of the current name stock are members of this category, as can be seen in Table 1. In the following, the history of this family name type in Hungary will be discussed, with special emphasis on the social distribution of the name type and on the change of its frequency in proportion to the other family name types. Furthermore, the survey will touch upon the role of occupational names in the history of official family name changes in Hungary.

Table 1. Occupational names among the 20 most common family names in Hungary (2007)

Position	Family name	Number of bearers
2	*Kovács* 'smith'	223,808
4	*Szabó* 'taylor'	216,377
7	*Varga* 'shoemaker'	140,709

Position	Family name	Number of bearers
8	*Molnár* 'miller'	109,233
12	*Pap* 'priest'	68,991
13	*Juhász* 'shepherd'	55,286
14	*Takács* 'weaver'	54,102
15	*Lakatos* 'locksmith'	45,830
16	*Szűcs* 'fur-dresser'	42,048
17	*Mészáros* 'butcher'	41,029

The stock of occupational family names in Hungary

Table 1 is based upon the registry of all Hungarian citizens (closed January 1, 2007).[2] It is no great surprise that several of the most common names have equivalents among the most frequent family names in different European family name systems. Let us only mention the equivalents of the most frequent occupational name *Kovács: Smith* is the most common occupational family name in Great Britain, *Schmidt* is in 2nd position in Germany, and *Ferrari* is 3rd in Italy (cf. Brozović-Rončević 2004, Caffarelli 2005).[3]

Studying the number of their bearers, a similar picture can be formed (Figure 1): nearly half of the bearers of the 20 most common family names share these 10 occupational names.
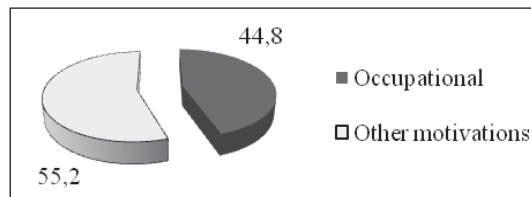

Figure 1. The ratio of the 10 most common occupational
names among the top 20 family names (2007)

In the following, I intend to demonstrate the ratio of occupational family names in the whole population's name stock. Nevertheless, before starting these calculations it is essential to briefly outline the most common Hungarian typology of family names (cf. Farkas and Láncz 2009: 16, Fodor 2013: 522–523):

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[2]   The statistics were achieved by lemmatizing name data to a medium degree, i.e. handling orthographic and pronunciation variants (e.g. *Kovács ~ Kováts ~ Kovách*) together. For more details on methodological questions see Farkas 2015.

[3]   However, comparing these statistics with those in this paper can be slightly elusive since – in contrast with this paper – they separate the variants of a family name, e.g. while *Schmidt* is the 2nd most common family name in Germany, *Schmitz* is the 16th, *Schmitt* is the 17th, and *Schmid* is the 22nd on the frequency list (Brozović-Rončević 2004: 168). Handling these variants together would presumably change the ranking of some names on the lists published by Brozović-Rončević.

1. Many family names reflect a connection to a place, for instance *Túri* (*Túr* settlement name + *-i* 'from' formant).

2. Another significant group of family names are those that reflect family connections, such as *Abafi* ('the son of Aba').

3. The third large category consists of names that reflect a connection to a people or an ethnic group, e.g. *Német* ('German').

4. The first subcategory of the fourth group is that of occupational names, also containing those that reflect social standing or a held office, such as *Bíró* ('Judge'). Other subcategories are comprised of names referring to other social roles, those which reflected the place an individual held in society or a connection to a person of high standing.

5. Names reflecting a unique characteristic also form a significant group, e.g. *Gyenge* ('weak') or *Álnok* ('deceitful').

6. Names given after a certain event make up only a small group, e.g. *Paplövő* ('priest shooter') etc.

7. A further category comprises family names containing two elements, such as *Györgybíró* (*György* 'George' + *bíró* 'judge').

It is widely acknowledged that the same name can be listed in several categories simultaneously. For instance, the name *Király* does not necessarily reflect a certain social connection to the king, but may also imply the wealth of the bearer's ancestors. It is impossible to discern the motivation behind the giving of these names in retrospect, thus many aspects must be taken into account before listing an element, and all entries remain, at least in part, uncertain. (For a quantitative analysis of the whole Hungarian family name stock on the basis of the widely used typology – patronymics, occupational names, nicknames, and toponymic [and ethnic] names – see Farkas 2015.)
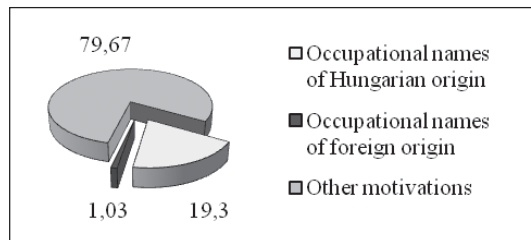

Figure 2. The frequency rate of occupational family names of Hungarian and foreign origin among the entire family name stock (2007)

Knowledge of the most generally used Hungarian typology makes the evaluation of the following results much easier and more accurate. The calculations are based on Mihály Hajdú's corpus, who published a dictionary of Hungarian family names (CsE.) borne by at least 1000 bearers (1230 items), using the population registry from 2007. This corpus contains 194 occupational names of Hungarian origin and 41 names of foreign (German and Slavic) origin. This means that the number of occupational family names of Hungarian origin is nearly 5 times that of the foreign members of the

category. The difference is even larger when their frequency is examined (Figure 2): the group of occupational names of Hungarian origin is nearly 19 times more frequent than the group of names of foreign origin.

Contrasting the overall frequency of all the 235 occupational names (Hungarian and non-Hungarian ones together) to the whole population's name stock (10,162,610 name bearers), it appears that the frequency rate of these occupational names exceeds 20% (Figure 3), while the other 6 categories share the remaining 80%. However, this relatively high proportion is mainly due to the prevalence of the first 10 occupational names since their ratio is almost equal to that of the remaining 225 names.
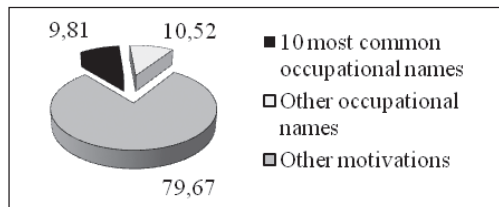

Figure 3. The frequency rate of occupational family names with the entire population (2007)

The history of the occupational family name type in Hungary

The historical formation of the name type

To understand the considerable proportion of occupational family names in the contemporary system of Hungarian family names, it is necessary to reveal the historical changes of this name type. Despite the fact that family names started to emerge in the 13th century, exact onomastic calculations cannot be made concerning the Middle and the Early Modern Ages since the first countrywide census was only completed in 1715. Lacking a comprehensive source from earlier times, any survey conducted has to depend upon the results of calculations based on collections and censuses of different time periods and territories.

The sources of the earliest available data are charters from the first part of the 14th century (1301–1359) from the whole territory of historical Hungary. The corpus, collected by the author of this paper, comprises the male names of nearly 14,000 bearers from all social classes (cf. Slíz 2011). The majority can only be regarded as bynames since it is not possible to prove that they were inherited; however, there are some that are demonstrably family names. When comparing the proportion of occupational bynames or family names to the total ratio of family names derived from common words among the different social classes in Figure 4, it is conspicuous that family names derived from common words and occupational names among them were more characteristic with the ignoble classes than among the nobility. This phenomenon can be traced back to two main causes. Firstly, noblemen did not have occupations: the names found in this category mostly refer to offices, ecclesiastical status or military ranks, such as *Apród* 'paige, squire' (1357: *Ladislaus filius Johannis Aprod dicti* 'Ladislaus, son of John, called Apród', AO. 6: 530), *Kántor* 'cantor' (1348: *Briccius Cantor dictus* 'Brice

called Kántor', AO. 5: 255–256), *Nyilas* 'archer' (1347: *Johannes dictus Nyilas*, 'John called Archer', AO. 5: 113). Secondly, noblemen's family names can mostly be grouped in the first two categories: they originated from a relative's given name or from the name of their estate, as these two pieces of information were more important in signalling their inherited right to their lands and powers.
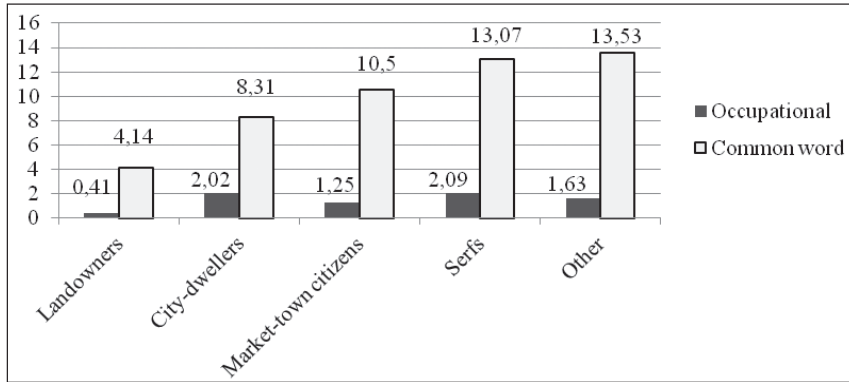

Figure 4. The ratio of occupational bynames or family names and the total ratio of family names derived from common words among the different social classes (14th century)

The following data were established on the basis of 15–16th century documents and censuses from different areas of Hungary; despite this they show similar proportions. While the 14th-century ratio of occupational bynames did not reach 14%, these later data exceed the contemporary frequency of this name type (20.33%). The explanation again lies in social differences: while János N. Fodor's corpus is socially mixed, as is the name stock from 2007, the sources of the other two calculations mostly contain the names of serfs or other ignobles.

Table 2. The ratio of occupational family names in the 15–16th centuries

	Ratio of occupational names (%)	Ratio of name bearers (%)
1401–1526 (Fodor 2010)	18.3	22.5
1522 (Kálmán 1961)	18.4	31.3
1524 (Tábori 2014)	19.3	28.7

As the onomastic processing of the countrywide census from 1715 is yet to be completed, similar calculations cannot be based on it for the time being. However, the frequency rates of the 20 most common family names of the corpus are available; there are 9 occupational names among them. Comparing this list with the frequency and order of the first 10 occupational names from the top 20 of the present family name stock, a great similarity is revealed, especially among the first four entries of the table, where even their order is unchanged (Table 3):
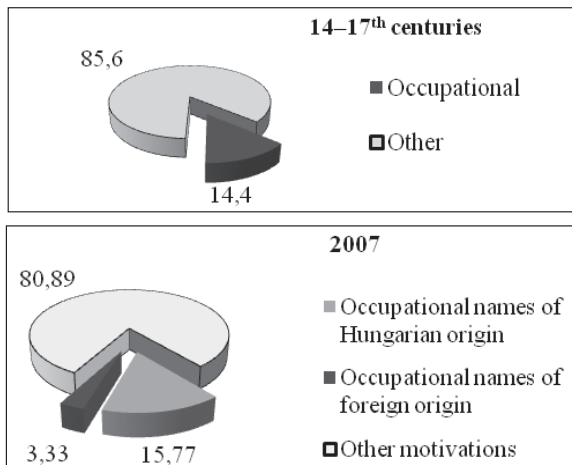
Table 3. The most frequent occupational family names in 1715 and in 2007

1715 (DHHS.)[1]		2007 (Hajdú 2003)	
Position	Family name	Position	Family name
1	*Kovács* 'smith'	2	*Kovács* 'smith'
2	*Szabó* 'tailor'	4	*Szabó* 'tailor'
5	*Varga* 'shoemaker'	7	*Varga* 'shoemaker'
8	*Molnár* 'miller'	8	*Molnár* 'miller'
9	*Takács* 'weaver'	12	*Pap* 'priest'
10	*Pap* 'priest'	13	*Juhász* 'shepherd'
12	*Szűcs* 'fur-dresser'	14	*Takács* 'weaver'
13	*Mészáros* 'butcher'	15	*Lakatos* 'locksmith'
17	*Juhász* 'shepherd'	16	*Szűcs* 'fur-dresser'
–	–	17	*Mészáros* 'butcher'

[1] I wish to express my gratitude to János N. Fodor for giving me access to the findings of his research.

Comparing the name entries of the historical and the contemporary family name dictionary (CsnSz. and CsnE.), another parallel offers itself (cf. Figures 5 and 6). According to the summary of the reverse dictionary of the historical family name dictionary (Farkas and Láncz 2009: 17), occupational names make up more than 14% of the corpus, considering all possible motivations. Their proportion in the name stock of the contemporary dictionary is similar: approximately 16%.

To conclude the results of the historical comparison, the ratio of occupational names in the family name stock seems to be stable in time. The following part of the paper will highlight the reasons for this supposed steadiness.

Figures 5–6. The ratio of occupational family name entries in the historical family name dictionary and contemporary family name dictionary, respectively

Natural changes in the stock of occupational names

Reviewing the pages of the historical dictionary, one can notice that some occupational names registered in it are absent in present times. One reason for this is that many 14th-century names in the historical dictionary may only have been bynames and were not inherited by subsequent generations. Another reason can be found in the history of economics. As presented above, the most frequent occupational family names have been the same for centuries. These occupations (smith, tailor, weaver etc.) were found both in villages and in cities since their products were continually needed by everyone everywhere. Unlike these, more special craftsmen, such as bookbinders (*Könyvkötő*) or shield makers (*Pajzsgyártó*), found their considerably smaller market in bigger towns and cities only, while other occupations were connected to certain areas, such as salt mining (cf. *Sóvágó, Sótörő* 'people who cut and crush salt'). Several specialized handcrafts disappeared through becoming only a part of the production process, e.g. making chimneys stopped being a unique craft and became a part of the mason's work (cf. *Kéményfonó* 'chimney maker') or baking milk-loaf merged into the tasks of the baker or the cook (cf. *Kalácssütő* 'milk-loaf maker'). The third reason is linguistic: several compound occupational names were shortened by leaving out the second constituent or changing it with a suffix, e.g. *Szappangyártó* > *Szappanos* (*szappan* 'soap' + *-s* suffix). A rare family name that dies out along with its bearers must also be mentioned as a fourth possible reason. Finally, it is worth noting that the contemporary corpus only contains the family names of present-day Hungary, i.e. from a territory which is slightly less than a third of historical Hungary, lacking the family name stock of the current Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries. This deficiency may also have affected the difference between the historical and the contemporary proportion of the name type in question; however, this could only be revealed by means of geonomastic research. Nevertheless, these changes would not have presumably been significant since, as seen before, no great territorial differences appear in the proportion of occupational family names.

The negative tendencies presented above decreased the number of occupational family names by the end of the 18th century. However, most of the names that vanished were probably rarely used, as seen above. Consequently, their disappearance could not have changed the frequency of this name type significantly.

Artificial (and official) changes in the stock of occupational names

In addition to these negative changes, positive changes have also taken place during the history of occupational family names, as new names emerged with new crafts or trades. While changes in the name stock mostly happened naturally until the end of the 18th century, they became a result of official name changes after the beginning of the 19th century. Since then, the Hungarian family name stock has become relatively constant. However, minor changes have happened following this period due to language shifts in registration or through errors. Nevertheless, significant changes have

only happened officially since the 19th century. As a first step towards the official regulation of family names, an edict of Emperor Joseph II in 1787 forced Jewish people to take a family name if they had not had one before and forbade change of their family names. Similar edicts were issued concerning the members of different social and religious groups, e.g. the members of the Orthodox Church (mostly Serbs) between 1814 and 1817. In these years, edicts of King Francis I allowed the change of names but only following permission granted by the state. This can be considered to be the beginning of official family name changes. (For further information on the history of official name changes in Hungary see Karády and Kozma 2002.)

Since occupational names form a typical type of the Hungarian family name system, it is not surprising that many of them were fairly common among newly adopted family names. Nevertheless, the popularity of this name type proves to be different among Jewish and Christian applicants. The differentiation of these two groups is motivated by the fact that the Jewish participation in the history of name changing was extraordinarily high until the middle of the 20th century: for example, their proportion among applicants exceeded 50% at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (cf. Kozma 2009: 153). While the favourite name type of Christians consisted of names originating from place names as a great proportion of them were mistakenly considered to signal noble birth, Jewish people preferred names originating from common words including occupational names (cf. Table 4).

Table 4. The ratio of occupational names among newly adopted family names (%; based on Farkas 2012a: 11)

1897–1908		1948	
Jews	**Christians**	**Jews**	**Christians**
29,8	22,8	20,5	13,5

For example, the name *Kertész* 'gardener' was the 3rd most frequent and the name *Révész* 'ferryman' was the 8th most frequent among names newly adopted by Jews, while they only held the 21st and 59th positions among Christian applicants during the existence of Austro-Hungary (1867–1918).

Table 5. The most popular officially adopted occupational family names among Jewish applicants and their position among Christian applicants during the existence of Austro-Hungary (based on Farkas 2012a: 10)

Jews	Family name	Christians
Position		**Position**
1	*Kovács* 'smith'	1
3	*Kertész* 'gardener'	21
6	*Vajda* 'voivode'	178–182
7	*Molnár* 'miller'	2–3
8	*Révész* 'ferryman'	59

Another piece of evidence for the typicality of this category is that the Hungarian family name stock has also been expanded with the names of certain occupations that did not exist before the 18th century: *Csendőr* 'Gendarme', *Mérnök* 'Engineer' and *Programozó* 'Programmer' (the last one is only the second part of a double-barrel family name; cf. Farkas 2012b). Since the natural emergence of family names had mostly finished by the beginning of the 19th century, it is evident that these names were created artificially. Consequently, these names are rarer today and are considered to be fairly strange (especially the completely new *Programozó*), in spite of the typicality of the motivational type they belong to.

While the frequency of occupational family names has mainly increased through official changes, a counter-movement that started in the second half of the 20th century can also be observed. While for about a century the largest ethnic group participating in official name changes were the Jews, currently Romani people are the most active ethnicity of this process. To avoid or terminate stereotypes and prejudices based upon their family names several Romani people have chosen to change their "typical gypsy" family names. There are some occupational names that may be considered as such, e.g. *Lakatos* 'locksmith', *Kolompár* 'tinker', *Orsós* 'reel maker or -seller', *Kanalas* 'spoon maker or -seller' – these cases of official name changes slightly lessen the natural increment of these occupational names. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the number of official name changes does not even approximate that of earlier periods, and the most characteristic motivations of name changes today are personal reasons, including discrimination.

Conclusion

The present diachronic study of the occupational name type in the Hungarian family name system has revealed the differences in the frequency of the elements of this category (the frequency of the 10 most common occupational names is almost equal to that of the remaining 225 names). Furthermore, the social distribution of the antecedents of this family name type has also been explored: these names were more common among the ignobles, since noblemen had no occupation and signalling their family relations and estates were more important in their social, legal and political roles. The social distribution unveiled the causes of the differences in frequency mentioned above: the most frequent occupational family names can be derived from occupations which were common in cities and villages (e.g. smith, weaver, tailor, shoemaker), while many rarer occupational names can be traced back to more specialised professions and occupations typical of larger cities (e.g. jeweller, shield maker). A lingual difference can also be detected: occupational family names formed from compound words are much rarer (e.g. *Szappangyártó > Szappanos*). One reason for this phenomenon is that a typical way of expressing specialised professions is augmenting the name of the profession with a constituent (e.g. *szappan* 'soap', *szíj* 'belt', *íj* 'bow', *pajzs* 'shield' + *gyártó* 'maker'). A second reason is a change tendency among those occupational family names that developed from compound words: many of them lost their specialised constituent over

the course of time (e.g. *Sóvágó* 'salt + cutter' > *Vágó* 'cutter'). Regarding the geonomastics of this name type, it can be stated that there are no significant differences in the geographical distribution of this family name type. However, a more detailed picture can only be drawn by a geonomastic survey of the entire Hungarian family name system, which is a future task for Hungarian historical anthroponomastics.

Reviewing the natural and artificial changes of the family name type in question, it becomes conspicuous that the majority of changes in the number and the diversity of occupational family names were caused by natural processes, while these changes had little influence on the frequency of the name type. Unlike these, artificial changes have had a greater impact on the frequency of this type, while they had less effect on the variability of the stock of occupational family names. Consequently, while the pool of occupational family names in Hungary has seemingly remained unchanged, due to the tendencies examined above, changes have occurred on the level of particular names; thus, the pool has become more homogeneous over time.

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