

Wymarcha Hektanah
'מַרְחָה הַקְטָנָה'
as appropriate for the persona of a
Jewish female in late 13th Century Angevin England
Marissa Fischer - March 15, 2011

Wymarcha Hektanah lived from 1275 to 1290 in Angevin England, whereupon she was exiled along with over 16,000 Jews to settle as a servant to a French family until her death, in approximately 1348 (if she was still alive when the Black Death hit, she wouldn't have lived much longer.) As such she required a name appropriate for a Jewish female in late 13th Century Angevin England. This paper will attempt to prove that Wymarcha Hektanah is an appropriate constructed name for this persona through the method of selecting a period-appropriate name, ensuring that name is appropriate to her general persona, and constructing a conceivable byname.

I. Selecting a Period Appropriate Name

i. Origins of the “Wymark” name group.

According to one site, variations on Wymark^[a] have existed in England since William the Conquer came over to London in 1066^[1] and it means, more or less WIG (war) and MOER (famous).

Wymark has many accepted variations including:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wymann,• Whymant,• Whayman,• Whyamand,• Whaymond, | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whamond,• Weyman,• Weymont,• Wymans, |
|---|---|

The article goes on to cite unsubstantiated Wymarks including:

- Robertus filius Wimarc (1086), County of Essex;
- WIMARC (without surname) (1219), County of Yorkshire;
- Wymarc Mercatrix (1273), County of Huntingdonshire;
- **Wymarca** filius Roberti (1216-1272).

Other sites back up this claim that various forms of Wymark (1296)^[2] have been documented from around the 13th Century including:

From 1238^[3]:

- Wimar,
- Wimarc,
- Wymarc,
- **Wymarcha**

And^[4] (Abet from a less reputable source.)

- Wimarca,
- Wimarc

ii. Future Disuse

From a source in the late 19th Century looking backwards we learn that by 1878 Wymarca was obsolete^[5]:

The records of the ancient borough of Wallingford contain a large number [of names.] The following which are given in the Sixth Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission...The female names occurring in these records are...all in total disuse at the present time. Many of them it will be seen are of Roman and some of Greek origin: Estrilda, Scolastica, Eliwiz, Claria, Asselina, Claricia, Hawis, Bona, Yngeleis, Gunild, Dionisiu, Sabelina, Alota, Edelota, Evelota, Orenge, Sueta, Basille, Limota, Elmita, Agasa, Juiveta, Pimma, Ydelota, Deonira, Wymarca^[b], Piancia, Ysoda.

iii. Present Day Persona

In knowing the rough era during which the name Wymarca thrived, we can pinpoint an example of someone baring the name within the specific time period in England. It is in *A survey of the Scovils or Scovills in England and America: seven hundred years of history and genealogy*^[6] that we find such a person:

Patent Rolls 13 Edward I (year 1285) m. 24 d.:-

April 24. Langley. Commission of oyer and terminer to R. de Heydon and and R. de Coleshull touching an appeal which Wymarca^[b], late the wife of Richard Baldry, brings in the county of Wilts angaint William de Scoviel, William de Cumber and William de Shadewell for the death of her husband.

Therefore if a surviving widow bore the name a decade after the persona's birth, we have proof that the name was in use during the lifespan of the persona, even if it was not commonly used.

II. Ensuring the Name is Persona Appropriate

ii. Naming Conventions for Jewish Females

Whereas Jewish males required two names – the *shem ha-kodesh*^[7] (Hebrew name) used in Jewish ritual, and the *kinnui*^[7] (vernacular name) for everyday use, Jewish females by virtue of being exempt from most Jewish rituals required only the *kinnui* name. These vernacular names “could be derived from flowers (Fleur de liz, Fleur, Rose); things of value (Almonda, Chera (Greek: *Iekara*, precious stone), Licoria); desirable traits: (Bona (good), Belia (pretty),

Genta (gentle)), terms of endearment (Columbia (dove), Comitessa (countess), Pucella (little girl); or simply the names their neighbors used (Elfid, Auntera, Margaret, Sweetecote).”^[7]

Research indicates that the vernacular names of Jewish females followed whichever culture or region she found herself in, including Germany.^[8]

The modern convention of giving a Jewish girl both a *shem ha-kodesh* and a *kinnui* only came about after the Reform Judaism movement in the mid-20th Century once their part in formerly male-only rituals (batmitzah) was established.

iii. A Brief Discussion of Hebrew

If the documentation indicates, “Wymarca,” as the most common spelling, and we have leave to use vernacular names of the culture in which the persona is situated, why then use the chosen variation, “Wymarcha”? The answer to this lies in the secondary naming qualification – that the name be easily transliterated into Hebrew.

Jewish women could still expect their *kinnui* names to be transliterated phonetically into Hebrew for use in various legal contracts (marriage, property, divorce, death) and as such the most easily convertible spelling would be the preferred one.

In Hebrew, the soft “c” sound does not exist, yet various forms of the “Ch,” and hard “K” sounds do occur.

In Hebrew, the letter “Chet,” “het,” (ח) ^[7] is a voiceless pharyngeal fricative consonant, which means that it is “voiceless” (produced without vibrations of the vocal cords), “pharyngeal” (articulated with the root of the tongue against the back of the throat – pharynx), and “fricative”, (produced by constricting air flow through a narrow channel at the place of articulation.)

Hebrew and Yiddish both utilize this form of consonant, English does not. In English, an extraneous “h” is borrowed to change the hard “Chet,” into the English, “Ch.” Many Hebrew words that begin with, “Chet,” are spelled with a “Ch,” when transliterated into English (Chanukah (festival), Challah (bread), Chutzpah (nerve)).

We can therefore extrapolate that in selecting a name from the surrounding culture to borrow, and knowing that it would at some point need to be transliterated back into Hebrew, they would have chosen a name with a “Ch,” like Wymarcha, as in the known Jewish female names Chera, Chipora^[7] and, in France, Chière^[10]) or a name that utilized the various options for a hard “K” sound (for example “Columbia,”^[7] would become, “KOlumbia,” “Clarice,”^[7] would be “KLarice,” and so on.)

Similarly there is no “W,” in the Hebrew language, the Hebrew letter “yeod” (י) (pronounced “yud”), a diphthong that alternately represents the vowel sounds, “/ei/, /ai/, or /oi/”^[9] would preside over the initial vowel, as it had in other contexts (For example, the alternate English spellings of the male Jewish name “Isaac,” and “Ysaac”^[7], both begin with “yeod” in Hebrew, and be otherwise spelled the same.)

Thus the Jews of the late 13th Century, would be unlikely to pronounce, “Wymarcha,” as WHY-MARCH-AH, and would more likely drop the “Whuh” of the “W,” accentuate the hard

“I” of the “Y” and blur the last two syllables to utilize the guttural, “Ch,” sound to create something sounding more like, EYE-MAR-CHYA (The last syllable sounding like urging on a horse to increase speed, “On Shadowfax – Chya! Chya!” but with more guttural inflection)

In Hebrew Wymarcha would look like this (with additional vowel markings):

י מ ר ח

Chet-Resh-Mem-Yeod

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Interestingly enough, the masculine form Wymark, would utilize the hard “K,” sound probably from “Kaph” (כ) like so:

י מ ר כ

[c]sofit-kaph-Resh-Mem-Yeod

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Which would sound like WHY-MAR-K, with the hard “K” coming through strongly enough to stab your quill through the parchment.

Of course this is only a guess at the construction and other considerations might effect the outcome, including the somewhat complex system of puns and kennings in Hebrew (A reference in the bible to David the Lion led to many Jewish males names Lyon, Leon, Leo, Lionel, whose *shem ha-kodesh* might be either the Hebrew for David or for lion.)

Also, the Jewish system of ascribing numbers to letters to create denotative connections between words and concepts might be employed and certain letters switched around. This is where letters like, “Yeod,” and “Aleph,”^[d] come in handy. Having little proscribed usage on their own, they are often inserted as place-holders for vowels, or wherever an extra letter might produce a more favourable mathematical outcome. (Such considerations might be particularly meaningful to a moneylender for whom math is his trade.)

III. Constructing a By-name

i. Ha/He (ה)

In Hebrew, the letter, “Het,” (ה)^[11] can be used to represent the prepositions, “the”, “that”, or “who.” For example, “yeled”, translates to “a boy,”

where as “**hayeled**”, means “the boy”. Certain vowel markings change the pronunciation of “Het,” from “Ha,” to “He,” for the feminine form.

ii. katan (קָטָן) ^[12] / ktanah (קָטָנָה)

“Katan,” (קָטָן) ^[e] in Hebrew, means, “little,” “small,” or as use as a diminutive. Katan, in the singular male form, is used in period as a byname. ^[12]

“Ktanah,” (קָטָנָה) is the singular, feminine form of “katn.”

iii. Hektanah (הַקְטָנָה) ^[13]

In Hebrew, to indicate an adjective such as, “little,” has been qualified by a preposition, “the,” “Het,” (הָ) is simply place in front of it as above. Thus the expressions, “Sarah the little,” “Sarah the little one,” and “Sarah the small,” would all use “Hektanah,” (הַקְטָנָה)

When transliterated into English, “He’ktanah,” “Hektanah,” “heKtanah,” or “HeKtanah,” all seem to be correct. ^[f] Considering 13th Century lack of spelling conventions, it is more likely that it would have been merged into a single word, when put in an official census, rather than the more modern concession of using an apostrophe to indicate their separation in Hebrew. It would have probably followed the convention of bynames and last names to have one capital letter, thus, “Hektanah.”

Therefore, through the Jewish naming conventions for females of using culturally appropriate *kinnui* while ensuring that they can still be transliterated into Hebrew at need, and adapting a known period Jewish byname into the proper gendered form, we can construct the name Wymarcha Hektanah or Wymarcha the Little (וַיְמַרֵּחַ הַקְטָנָה) as appropriate for a Jewish female who lived at the close of the 13th Century in England.

Personal Notes on Why I Chose This Name

i. Wymarcha

“Wymarcha,” has some ties to my mundane name “Marissa,” although the “Mar” in my own name is meant to derive from, “mer” as in “of the water.” I am also born in March, and while the “March” in “Wymarcha” is meant to relate to battle, it seems a prudent pun to bestow on a girl child born in spring.

Also, having been born in the era of the Reform Jews, I have a *shem ha-kodesh*, “Miriam.” In Hebrew “Wymarcha,” and “Miriam,” appear similar.

Miriam looks like this:

מ ר י מ
[c]sofit mem-yeod-resh-mem
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As you can see, “Miriam,” and “Wymarcha,” share most of the same letters, although in a slightly different order.

“Wymarcha,” also shares ties with my history in the SCA to present. For the past six years I’ve been known as Winifryd, mostly responding to the nick-name, “Wendy.” Now that I am starting the process of formalizing my persona, I wanted a name both appropriate to the persona, and which wouldn’t be too jarring of a transition for the friends I have accrued in the past six years. Thus, “Wymarcha,” is not too different from “Winifryd,” and I can use the nick-name, “Wy,” (WHY) which seems a bit like a shorter version of “Wendy.” (There is also the inherent amusement in a precocious girl child being given the pet name, “Why?”)

ii. Hektanah

When I came across, “Katan,” originally in the list of period Jewish bynames, I knew it was perfect immediately. I met my second husband in the SCA, and his pet name for me is, “little one.” I also have a strictly persona husband, whose period family name is, “Little.”

Footnotes:

^[a] This source believes Wymark to be masculine, even though SCA articles have classified it as feminine. However, there appears to sex associations to specific spellings, whereby Wymark, Wymarc, Wimarc, Wimark are masculine, and Wymarca, Wymarcha are feminine (conforming to the convention of adding an extraneous vowel to the end of the name to femininize it.)

^[b] Both of these two sources confirm the association of the Wymarca spelling variation with the feminine.

^[c] The sofit form in Hebrew is a final letter form which occurs at the end of words, and which only five Hebrew letters (kaph, Tsadi, Mem, Nun, and Pei) can take. The vernacular would actually be, “[letter] sofit,” but the line it appears on is trying to explain the Hebrew. It is hard to explain Hebrew with English characters while the reading direction is moving opposite to English.

^[d] Aleph, (א) ^[14] in Hebrew is further problematic by being the first letter of the alephbet and thus, the 1. This means that it is also, “The One,” or the “The One who is G-d, Ruler of the Universe, etc.” Oftentimes this means that Aleph is inserted where it is not so much literally needed, as where the author deemed the presence of G-d should be more keenly felt, or that G-d should be waiting for us at the end of a word. Prior to 1290 in England, the local Rabbi might put Aleph at the end of Wymarcha both to indicate that despite the anti-Semitism and taxation, G-d’s presence was keenly felt in the Old Jewery ghetto where Jewish moneylenders, scholars and physicians thrived, as well as to inject G-d into an otherwise goyem (non-Jew)ish name. Post 1920, Wymarcha would probably have dropped the extraneous aleph, feeling that in being exiled from England, G-d, too, had fled.

^[e] The first three Hebrew letters are the same for both words, but in Katan the “kaph” is in its sofit form as it is at the end of the word.

^[f] In this article on Shmuel haKatan^[15], we see his name alternately presented as, “haKatan,” and “Hakatan,” indicating that both are probably equally valid alternate ways of expressing the concept of masculine, “the small,” in English. It is also a period example of a man using “Hakatan” or “the small” as a byname.

References:

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[³] Instances of Wymarcha variations from Devon (1238):

<http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/english/devonfem1238.html>

[⁴] Listing of Obscure but unsubstantiated Medieval Names:

<http://www.gaminggeeks.org/Resources/KateMonk/England-Medieval/Rarities.htm>

[⁵] Notes and Queries 5th Series, Vol. 9, Jan/June 1878 London, published by John Francis

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[⁶] A survey of the Scovils or Scovills in England and America: seven hundred years of history and genealogy

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~dollface/enter.html>

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http://www.archive.org/stream/surveyofscovilso00brai/surveyofscovilso00brai_djvu.txt

[⁷] Article on Jewish Naming Conventions and Jewish Names in Angevin England

<http://heraldry.sca.org/laurel/names/jewish.html>

[⁸] German Jewish Names Throughout History

<http://jewishwebindex.com/Names.htm>

[⁹] Yoed

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yodh>

[¹⁰] Names from 1292 Census of Paris (Jewish names are collected at the bottom of the page)

<http://heraldry.sca.org/laurel/names/paris.html>

[¹¹] Het

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He_%28letter%29

[¹²] List of Jewish Bynames in the 10th – 13th Centuries

<http://www.s-gabriel.org/names/juetta/titles.html>

^[13] Yahoo Answers explanation of katan/ktanah
<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20060923135126AAKbyOa>

^[14] An Article All About Aleph
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleph>

^[15] An Article about Shmuel haKatan
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shmuel_haKatan