

The misunderstood Patronimic- Jansz or Janszoon

Surnames, in the meaning of family names, were relatively uncommon in the United Provinces (Holland) in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Most people identified themselves using patronymics- a reference to the first name of their father- as a second name. They were registered as such at birth. Willem Janszoon would have been the son of Jan (i.e. Jan's zoon, pr. zone). If Willem J. had a son called Thomas he would have been registered as Thomas Willemszoon. Because it was unwieldy to spell the full patronymic, it was common practice to abbreviate written names by omitting the 'oon' and adding an abbreviation point: Jansz., or by using the so called internal abbreviation Janszn without such point. The name was however always pronounced in full and generally still is in the Netherlands where this bit of common knowledge is taught at school (like we will always pronounce etc, even without abbreviation point, as '*et cetera*'). Therefore when writing for *readers in the English speaking world* where this kind of abbreviation is not recognized as such, we should always write the name in full: Janszoon, Jacobszoon, Bastiaenszoon, etc when referring to people of that period.

If we do not, we cause the person to be known by another name in the English speaking world. We inadvertently mislead.

Jansz, Jansen, Janssen, Janzen etc are known as petrified (or frozen) patronymics and were derived from Janszoon when it became more common (and under Napoleon legally compulsory) to have a family name. These are the surnames that still exist today; Janszoon is not in use any more, but for one family. The shorter name Jansz therefore is typically NOT a name from the early 17th century.

Historians in Australia, unaware of this bit of linguistic inside information, have faithfully copied abbreviated names from 17th century documents and subsequent publications, often without the abbreviation point and as a result the name Jansz (here pr. Dyens, one syllable) was widely used to indicate Australia's first recorded European mariner. There seems to be an effort being made today by those in the know, including by people of the State Library of NSW, the Duyfken Replica Foundation, the VOC Historical Society, the Netherlands Mission in Australia, Australia on the Map 1606-2006, etc. (check all their websites and it will confirm this) to call the gentleman in question Janszoon with two syllables including in writing. And it is catching on as it is not hard to understand how this 'Jansz error' crept into Australian history.

Some publishers of English historical literature when correctly presented by authors with text containing these patronymics with the abbreviation point added, have simply removed the points arguing that this 'full stop' in the middle of sentences is confusing for the English reader, thereby wrongly embedding the abbreviated name as the real one in the readers' minds. This happened for example with the text of "Batavia's Graveyard" according the Cambridge educated historian Mike Dash. This is the more reason to write the full name in the first place.

The message therefore is simple: do not use abbreviated patronymics when writing in English about 16th and 17th century Dutchmen and nobody will be confused. Some

people of the period had a name consisting of, apart from the given name, a patronymic and a family name. The best known example in Australian history is Abel Janszoon Tasman. Others had a patronymic and an acquired name referring to where they came from or to some other personal peculiarity.

Peter Reynders

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