

Who was 'Mahumet'? Arabs in Angevin England.

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Who was 'Mahumet'?, asks K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, adding 'It seems unlikely that it renders the Arab personal name Mohammed'.¹ Yet her own reference to a sale made c. 1080-3 (*sic*) by another 'Mahumet' in the kingdom of Jerusalem must surely be to a transaction by an Arab called Mohammed.² As Keats-Rohan herself admits, it is not easy to think of a likely Continental European name which could be corrupted into 'Mahumet', and Ann Williams tells me that there is no possible Old or Middle English origin for this name. Why is it so difficult to conceive of a Mohammed living in Wiltshire in 1160/1-1164/5?

It is apparently a little known fact that both Henry II and Richard I had in their employ bands of Saracen mercenaries.³ Indeed, very few of the authorities on medieval warfare refer to these bands,⁴ least of all the specialists on mercenaries.⁵ Likewise, modern biographies of Henry II and Richard I mention their employment of mercenaries in general but not of Saracen mercenaries.⁶ It is therefore by no means out of the question that one of these mercenaries might have settled in Wiltshire, especially as the context of the Pipe Roll entries is to an unlicensed duel with a John de Merleberge, perhaps in or near the royal castle of Marlborough: clearly, it would seem 'Mahumet' had military training and experience. However, after 1165, he disappears from the historical record. This is not in itself surprising: he was pardoned the last mark of his fine 'because of his poverty' and, unless they were fined by a royal court, poor men were unlikely to appear in twelfth-century official records which concerned themselves mostly with the landholding groups in society. We must therefore ask ourselves if it is possible, even probable, that an Arab could have lived and died in Angevin Wiltshire.

Let us first consider, in the absence of better evidence, that of surnames. Two obvious candidates, and one less obvious, come to mind. The first is my own surname 'Moor(e)', for which the standard reference works suggest four possible origins: from a 'Moor'; from a nickname 'dark' or 'swarthy' from the sixth-century saint Maurus; or from residence at or near a moor or fen, from the Old English *mor*.⁷ But, although there are a few surnames *Mor* and *Maurus* and two forenames *More* and *Morus* in the late twelfth century, most references in the Pipe Rolls and other twelfth- and early thirteenth-century records are preceded by 'da la', and are clearly of topographical origin. *Sanctus Maurus* as a surname gave rise to the quite separate surname Seymour. Of non-topographical names, *More* appears as a holder of a bovate in Witham (Lincs.) in 1885: given his humble status, this must be either a nickname or a truncated topographical name.⁸ Their low status similarly suggests that Ralph *filius Mauri* (fined 5 marks in Essex in 1164), Wulfric *Maurus* (fined for having an 'unlawed' dog in Hampshire in 1175), Hugh *Maurus* (fined for having illicit money-dealing in Cambridgeshire in 1182), Hugh *le Mor* (a minor royal servant who died c. 1204), Henry *Maurus* (fined for legal mispleading in Wiltshire in 1205), and Robert *le Mor* (a shipmaster of Sandwich in 1224) were all local men with a nickname that had become a surname.⁹ There may be more doubt about the racial origins of both *Johannes Maurus*, alderman of the London guild of skinnners in 1179-80, given the reputation of Muslim Cordoba for leather-working that had given rise to the Middle English synonym 'cordwainer' for shoemaker early in Henry II's reign, and of Benedict *Maurus*, a

crossbowman in Wiltshire in 1203, in view of the value placed by Ricard II on Muslim crossbowmen.¹⁰ Still, the balance of probability suggests that most Moor(e) (sur)names, when not of topographical origin, derived from nicknames, since there are no certain examples of people of higher status bearing this name before 1200.

The second possibly relevant surname is 'Sarazin' or the later 'Sarson' derived from the medieval Latin *Saracenus* or perhaps again a nickname for a swarthy person.¹¹ However, given the hatred of Saracens during the Crusading age, the use of such a nickname would be perjorative in the extreme, and in the case of both 'Moor(e)' and 'Sarazin', there were neutral options available such as 'Brown' (*Brunus*) and 'Black' (*Niger*) for those with a dark complexion – a well-known example is the Sicilian Thomas Brown in Henry II's Exchequer. Again, it is probable that some instances of the surname 'Saracen' are in fact nicknames, such as *Eggerum Saracen[um]* in Norfolk in Richard I's reign:¹² *Eggerum* must render Old English 'Eadgar', and since such Old English forenames were going out of use in and after the twelfth century, they are rather unlikely to be given to Arab immigrants in Angevin England. Two other probable examples of the surname derived from nicknames are *Petrus Saracenus*, described as *ciuis Romanus*, 'a citizen of Rome', and his son John, both king's clerks: Peter received a yearly allowance from John and Henry III, and acted as an agent of Peter, bishop of Winchester, in Rome c. 1235; his son John received ecclesiastical preferment from John.¹³ On the other hand, given the contemporary hatred of Saracens, a forename such as *Sarazina* or *Sarracena*, 'a female Saracen',¹⁴ is very unlikely to have been given as a baptismal name unless she was indeed the daughter of a Saracen. Many of those surnamed *Saracenus* are clearly of knightly status who are generally unlikely to have been given pejorative nicknames, though this cannot be regarded as an inviolable rule: there is one well-known instance of a high status person being given a nickname – Hugh *Asinus*, 'the Ass', holder of the barony of Snodhill (Herefs.) in 1086.¹⁵ Robert *Saracenus* was the steward of William de Hastings, an East Anglian landholder, and served as a knight on county juries in Leicestershire and Warwickshire from c. 1190 onwards;¹⁶ Robert is preceded by Oliver *Saracenus* (see below), perhaps his elder brother, as a witness to a chart of Henry, son of William de Hastings, relating to Odstone (Leics.) c. 1190. William 'le Sarazin' was a defaulter from Oxfordshire county jury in 1212;¹⁷ an earlier Peter *Saracenus* witnessed one of Henry II's charters at Quevilly c. 1174, was granted land at Lordington (Sussex) by the king in 1184-5, and in 1193-4 was given Glatton (Hunts.) 'in exchange for his lands in Nottinghamshire'.¹⁸ Oliver *Saracenus* was a witness of the Odstone charter (above) c. 1190 and purchased the wardship of Hervey de Arci in Lincolnshire in 1178-9; he also acquired part of Ralph fitz Wigan's serjeantry at Willoughby (Warws.) which he gave as a dowry with his daughter Petronilla to William de Flamvill and passed on after William's death to William and Petronilla's children.¹⁹ Two other 'Saracens', the brothers Robert and Ralph, witnessed for Ranulf, Earl of Chester, in 1168-1217 and were probably serving in his household;²⁰ Roger Sarazin also appears in Leicestershire around 1200,²¹ and Philip *Sarracenus* or 'le Saracin' in Somerset and Devon at the same time.²² Finally, Alexander son of William Sarazein was considered of sufficiently high status to be one of the hostages for John de Curcy, lord of Ulster, in 1205.²³ Nevertheless, it must be admitted that none of these instances offer decisive proof either of Arab or Anglo-Norman lineage. For this we must turn to consider the context in which entries were made in the Pipe Rolls and other sources.

Before doing so, we must first consider the third surname which may be relevant to our enquiry, that is the rare Mammatt or Mammett, which Reaney and Wilson, the only authority on surnames to mention it, consider to be a reduced form of 'Maminot'.²⁴ They provide no evidence for this assertion which seems *a priori* to be improbable on both linguistic and historical grounds: 'Maminot' is more likely to be reduced to 'Mamnott' or 'Mammott' than 'Mammatt' or 'Mammett', while the known genealogy of the Maminot family appears to reject their suggestion decisively. Gilbert de Maminot's barony of West Greenwich (Kent) passed on his death in 1101 to his son Hugh and on Hugh's death before 1131 to Hugh's son Walkeline I, and to the latter's son Walkeline II by 1157. When Walkeline II died childless c. 1190, his heir was his aunt Alice, daughter of Hugh de Maminot.²⁵ Since, therefore, there were no male heirs of Gilbert de Maminot known c. 1190 who, had they existed, would automatically have had precedence over Hugh's sister as claimant to the barony, it seems quite clear that 'Mammatt' or 'Mammett' cannot represent the surname Maminot. However, it is possible that 'Mammatt' or even more 'Mammett' could be a reduced form of 'Mahumet' borne by his descendants (if any). But the surname is exceedingly rare: it is not mentioned in the locational analyses of Guppy and Hitchings.²⁶

Consideration of the context in which individuals were mentioned in the Pipe Rolls may aid our task. In the first place, 'Mahumet' is not the only apparently Arab name to occur in this source: another is *Paucamatus* who is recorded as receiving 30s 5d p.a. out of the Winchester city *feorm* from 1159/60 until 1180/1, when he presumably died; significantly, he is accompanied by *Stephanus Sarracenus* who receives the same yearly payment (1d per day) from 1159/60 until 1183/4 when he received 26s 5d. *antequam moreretur*.²⁷ It is difficult to see what *Paucamatus* can represent except an Arab name such as *Bakmat*, 'the dumb one' (allowing for the interchange of B and P in transliterating Arabic) or *Pachmat*, for the Turkish 'Pasha Mehmet'.²⁸ It is even possible that a detachment of the Saracen mercenaries employed by Henry II in France served his son in England to 1190/1 when a payment is recorded to *Waltero Sarraceno et sociis suis xx li de liberatione xx dierum*.²⁹ Nor was the employment of Muslim mercenaries by European rulers an innovation of Henry II: it had occurred in pre-Carolingian Provence and had been standard practice in Italy and Sicily since the eleventh century.³⁰ Indeed, the Angevin kings were not the only employers of Saracen mercenaries in twelfth-century France: in 1183 mercenaries led by a Saracen called Curbaran were hired by the vicomtes of Limoges and Turenne to harass Henry II and Count Richard in Poitou, and in 1195 15 men stated to be 'Assassins' (*Accini*), and therefore, we may presume, Arabs, tried to kill Richard I at Chinon, perhaps at the instigation of Philip Augustus of France.³¹ Such employment of Arabic mercenaries in both France and Italy is paralleled by the employment of native troops, 'Turcoples', in Crusader Palestine by both the barons of Outremer and the military orders.³²

In conclusion, we may ask why it is so difficult for some modern medievalists to accept the idea of Arabs being present in Angevin England. If Walter Map is to be believed, Henry II understood Arabic,³³ and certainly, as a very recent book has shown, as part and parcel of the 'twelfth-century Renaissance', an explosion in the knowledge of Arabic literature and science was taking place in Angevin England.³⁴ Given, as we have seen, the very evident difficulties in understanding names like 'Mahumet' and 'Paucamatus' except as names of Arab-Turkish origin, and in explaining the quite widespread occurrence of the surnames

‘Sarazin’ or ‘Saracenus’, if these on at least some occasions do not denote what they seem to denote, namely Arab descent, such historians might well remember the dictum of England’s only first-rank medieval philosopher: *entia non multiplicenda sunt sine causa*. And the words of Sherlock Holmes also come to mind: ‘Once you have eliminated the impossible, you are left with the possible, however improbable’.

NOTES

¹ ‘Queries’, *Prosopon*, 9 (1998), p. [6].

² If the charter in question does refer to a sale ‘in the kingdom of Jerusalem’, the date c. 1080-3 cannot possibly be correct.

³ *Magni Rotuli Scaccarii Normanniae*, ed. T. Stapleton, 2 vols (London, 1840-4). There is no additional information on these Saracens in *Magni Rotuli Scaccarii Normanniae de Anno Domini ... MCLXXXIV*, ed. L. Deslisle (Caen, 1851). Ricard I’s use of Saracen mercenaries is mentioned by J.A. Brundage, *Richard Lionheart* (New York, 1974), pp. 223-4, and by J. F. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages* (Amsterdam, 1977), p. 122, neither of whom provide source-references.

⁴ Standard works consulted include: C.W. Oman, *History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages* (London, 1924); J. Beeler, *Warfare in England, 1066-1189* (Ithaca, 1966); H.G. Richardson & G.O. Sayles, *The Governance of Medieval England from the Conquest to Magna Carta* (Edinburgh, 1963); R. Mortimer, *Angevin England, 1154-1258* (Oxford, 1994); M. Strickland, *War and Chivalry. The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217* (Cambridge, 1996).

⁵ J. Boussard, ‘Les mercenaires au XIIe siècle: Henri II Plantagenet et les origines de l’armee de metier’, *Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Chartes*, 106 (1947), 189-224; J. Schlight, *Monarchs and Mercenaries: A Reappraisal of the Importance of Knight Service in Norman and Early Angevin England* (Bridgeport, Conn., 1968). Studies of Philip Augustus also say little about his use of mercenaries: for example, F. Lot & R. Fawtier, *Histoire des institutions françaises au moyen age*, 3 vols (Paris, 1958), II, livre V, ch. 1; J. W. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus: Foundations of French Royal Power in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Calif., 1986), ch. 11.

⁶ R. Barber, *Henry Plantagenet* (Woodbridge, 1964); W. L. Warren, *Henry II* (London, 1973); J. Gillingham, *Richard the Lionheart* (2nd edn, London, 1989); J. Gillingham, *Kingship, Chivalry and War in the Twelfth Century* (London, 1994). This comment applies equally to King John: S. Painter, *The Reign of King John* (Baltimore, 1949); W. L. Warren, *King John* (2nd edn, London, 1978); R.V. Turner, *King John* (London, 1994).

⁷ B. Cottle, *Penguin Dictionary of Surnames* (2nd edn, London, 1978), p. 260; P. H. Reaney & R.M. Wilson, *Dictionary of English Surnames* (3rd edn, London, 1991), p. 313; P. Hanks & F. Hodges, *A Dictionary of Surnames* (Oxford, 1998), p. 374.

⁸ *Records of the Templars in England in the Twelfth Century: The Inquest of 1185*, ed. B.A. Lees (Oxford, 1935), p. 115. Pace Reaney & Wilson, *Dictionary*, p. 313, I can find no record of a *Johannes filius More* in this source in the Lincs. folios, and there is no Index entry for this name.

⁹ *P.R. 11 Hen.II*, p. 17; *P.R. 22 Hen.II*, p. 197; *P.R. 29 Hen.II*, p. 43; *Rotuli de Liberate*, p. 101; *P.R. 8 John*, p. 164; *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum*, pt. 1, p. 601.

¹⁰ *P.R. 26 Hen.II*, p. 154; *P.R. 6 John*, p. 248. ‘Cordwainer’ had entered Middle English by 1169: *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. H. Kurath (Ann Arbor, 1959), vol. C-D, pp. 599-600, citing *P.R. 15 Hen.II*, p. 119. The word is omitted from B. Thureson, *Middle English Occupational Terms* (Lund, 1950). For Richard I’s use of crossbowmen, see Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 122; P. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1984), p. 72.

¹¹ Reaney & Wilson, *Dictionary*, p. 393; Hanks & Hodges, *Dictionary*, p. 471. ¹² *Curia Regis Rolls*, I, 13.

¹³ *Rotuli Chartarum*, pp. 187b, 200, 202b, 212b, 216; *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium*, pp. 118, 120, 120b, 126b, 151, 172b, 193; *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum*, I, 44, 140, 175b, 211b, 220b; *P.R. 2 Hen.III*, p. 43 (1217/18); *P.R. 3 Hen.III*, p. 73 (1218/19); *P.R. 4 Hen.III*, p. 134 (1219/20); *P.R. 14 Hen.III*, p. 97 (1229/30); *Foreign Accounts, Henry III*, Pipe Roll Soc., NS, 44 (1982), p. 72 (c. 1235). Peter is probably to be identified as the man of the same name who was granted land in Winthorpe (Notts.) to maintain himself while in the king’s service in 1211-12 (*P.R. 14 John*, p. 167) and was in command of royal ships in south-east England in 1213-14 (*P.R. 16 John*, p. 28).

¹⁴ *Rotuli de Oblatione et Finibus*, p. 18 (1199): ‘Sarazina fil[ia] Maceling[e]’. *P.R. 2 John*, p. 236: ‘Sarracen[a]’; *P.R. 2 John*, p. 236 (1199-1200); *P.R. 4 John*, p. 159 (1201-2); ‘Sarracena’ (all references are to Croxton Kerrial (Leics.): the name is also wrongly extended as ‘Sarraceni’ in *P.R. 4 John*, p. 164; *P.R. 5 John*, pp. 228, 231; *P.R. 6 John*, p. 3; *P.R. 7 John*, p. 178.

¹⁵ I. J. Sanders, *Englosh Baronies. A Study of their Origin and Descent, 1086-1327* (Oxford, 1960), p. 79. Presumably Hugh, like the writer, had big ears!

¹⁶ *Rolls of the King’s Court, Ric. I*, Pipe Roll Soc., 24 (1900), p. 222 (1196); *Memoranda Roll, 1 John*, Pipe Roll Soc., NS, 21 (1943), p. 78 (1198-99); *Curia Regis Rolls*, I, 206-7, 445 (1200-1), V, 69, 150, 160 (1207-8), VI, 60 (1210).

¹⁷ F. M. Stenton, *Documents Illustrative of the Economic and Social History of the Danelaw* (Oxford, 1920), p. 341; *Curia Regis Rolls*, VI, 386.

¹⁸ *Cartae Antiquae Rolls, 11-20*, Pipe Roll Soc., 33 (1957), pp. 73-4; *P.R. 31 Hen. III*, p. 172; *P.R. 6 Ric. I*, p. 77; *P.R. 8 Ric. I*, pp. 200, 275; *P.R. 9 Ric. I*, p. 223.

¹⁹ Stenton, *Documents*, p. 341; *P.R. 25 Hen. III*, p. 49; *Book of Fees*, III, 1279.

²⁰ *Medieval Miscellany for Doris Mary Stenton*, edd. M. Barnes & C.F. Slade, Pipe Roll Soc., NS, 36 (1962), pp. 40, 42; *Charters of the Anglo-Norman Earls of Chester*, ed. G. Barraclough, Lancs. and Cheshire Rec. Soc., 126 (1988), pp. 190, 224, 229, 244, 250, 266, 279-82, 298, 367.

²¹ *P.R. 5 John*, p. 35 (1202-3); *P.R. 6 John*, p. 225 (1203-4); *P.R. 7 John*, p. 31 (1204-5); *P.R. 8 John*, p. 3 (1205-6).

²² *P.R. 4 John*, p. 93 (1201-2); *Somerset Pleas*, ed. C.E.H. Chadwyck-Healey, Som. Rec. Soc., 11 (1897), p. 5.

²³ *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium*, p. 55b.

²⁴ Reaney & Wilson, *Dictionary*, p. 296.

²⁵ Sanders, *English Baronies*, pp. 97-8 and references cited, p. 97, nn. 9-10. The Emma who temporarily controlled the Maminot barony in 1129-30 (*P.R. 31Hen. I*, p. 67) was presumably Hugh's widow.

²⁶ H. B. Guppy, *Homes oof Family Names in Great Britain* (London, 1890; repr. 1968), pp. xlii, 519; F.K. Hitching, *References to English Surnames in 1601 and 1602* (Walton-on-Thames, 1910; repr. 1968).

²⁷ *P.R. 6 Hen. II*, p. 49 and *passim* to *P.R. 27 Hen. II*, p. 135 (*Paucamatus* and *Stephanus Sarracenus*); *P.R. 28 Hen. II*, p. 146; *P.R. 29 Hen. II*, p. 147; *P.R. 30 Hen. II*, p. 85 (*Stephanus Sarracenus* only).

²⁸ I am most grateful to my colleague Dr Robert Gleave of the Dept. of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Bristol, for providing these possible interpretations of the name behind the Latinized form *Paucamatus*.

²⁹ *P.R. 3 Ric. I*, p. 91.

³⁰ J. Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe, 730-1200* (Ithaca, 1971), pp. 74-5, 88, 152; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 55, 71.

³¹ K. Norgate, *Richard the Lion Heart* (London, 1924), pp. 53, 301, citing Geoffrey de Vigeois, *Chronica*, ed. P. Labbe, 2 vols, (Paris, 1657), II, 333, and Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series, 51 (London, 1868-71), III, 283.

³² R. C. Smail, *Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193* (Cambridge, 1956; repr. 1972), pp. 111-12, 179-80, 184; C. Marshall, *Warfare in the Latin East, 1192-1291* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 58-69, 134, 151, 158, 262-3, 266.

³³ Warren, *Henry II*, p. 208, citing Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 237-42.

³⁴ C. Burnett, *The Introudction of Arabic Learning into England* (London, 1998).

MAHUMET: EDITOR'S NOTE

John Moore's paper given above continues our investigation of this interesting and perplexing personal name. In the light of his discussion, it is worth briefly drawing attention to some further instances of the name itself. In the Pipe Rolls 4 Henry III - 6 Henry III (1220-22), a figure called Theobald *filius Mahumet* (or *filius Mahomet*) occurs in

Hampshire. In addition, two cartularies from the same county seem to preserve the name as a surname Mahumet, Maumet, Moumet, and Maumyet during the late twelfth and first half of the thirteenth century: see K.A. Harris, *The Cartularies of Southwick Priory*, I, 16-17, 84, II, 66, 281; and, S.F. Hockey, *The Charters of Quarr Abbey*, pp. 122-23, 125. This evidence suggests that the Mahumet deserves further attention!

Also, Moore's suggestion 'Pasha Mehmet' offered above is certainly dubious: the Turkish title *pasha* (from Persian *pādishāh*) seems to have originated in the thirteenth century and gained wider currency in later centuries (ie., too late for this twelfth-century *Paucamatus*) and the expected word-order according to normal Turkic usage would be 'Mehmet Pasha'. Clearly, *Paucamatus* also deserves further study.