

From Leofgyth to Lioba: Perpetuating a medieval Anglo-Saxon name

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This article explores the history of a rather uncommon Anglo-Germanic first name, a Christian name in the original sense, tracking it back to its medieval roots in eighth century Wessex. Emphasis is made on Leofgyth's effort fostering the education of women in the then pagan Germany, following the English model, and how this seemed to have been the cause of confrontation with the Church of Rome and its patriarchal concept. Furthermore links are drawn to the present, depicting the name's imprint on some nowadays' institutions, predominantly in Germany. Finally, with a truly cross-cultural approach, and touching four continents (Europe, Africa, America, and Asia), reference is made to some of the few people who bear this name (and why) in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Leofgyth of Wessex; eighth century; education of women; Christianization of Germany; cross-cultural approach

The Benedictine monk and teacher Rudolf, also known as Rudolph or Ralph (died in Fulda in 862), was one of the most distinguished scholars of his time. He is recognized as the first chronicler of the English Benedictine nun who came over as a young woman to take an active role in the Christianization of – the then heathen lands of – Germany, and who will be the subject of the ensuing pages. In 838 and at the suggestion of his master Rabanus Maurus, Rudolf compiled, from notes of the priest Mego and from oral tradition, a Life of St Leobgyth,¹ who had died a few decades earlier. This was to be part

¹ Rudolfus magister Fuldensis, *Vita Leobae abatissae Biscofesheimensis*. Bibliotheca Laureshamensis digital, München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 11321.

of the *Annales Fuldenses*, a worthy supplement to the history of that time, especially since Rudolf was connected, through his superior Rabanus (who was appointed to the Archiepiscopal See in Mainz) to the court of Louis the Pious,² who was king of Aquitaine from 781 until his death at Ingelheim am Rhein in 840. Originally started by Einhard, Rudolf continued the *Annales Fuldenses*³ between 838 and 863 in a similar style. Another authoritative source of information about Leofgyth's life is the letters exchanged with Boniface, as will be mentioned further on.

Numerous both ancient and contemporary works make reference to Leofgyth as an important figure in the Christianization that went out from the British Isles to the continent in the eighth century.⁴ Thus, in *The Beginnings of English Society*, Professor Dorothy Whitelock includes an account of the evangelization that spread from England to the barbarian territories in Europe. The name of Leofgyth comes up several times, first when she refers to a young girl from Wessex who was meant to take the veil and was related to Boniface. Whitelock explains that in the seventh and eighth centuries many double monasteries⁵ had spread in England, and this type of foundation, she writes:

Legendarium (Collectanea hagiographica) http://bibliotheca-laureshamensis-digital.de/view/bsb_clm11321/0205 (accessed 15/07/2015). Also referred to in "Acta SS.", VII, Sept., Antwerp ed., 760–769, and in "Mon. Germ. Script.", XV, i, 121–131.

² Also called "the Fair" and "the Debonaire". From 813 he was furthermore King of the Franks and co-Emperor with his father, Charlemagne, of the Holy Roman Empire.

³ There are many editions of the "Annales Fuldenses sive Annales regni Francorum orientalis", yet that of Friedrich Kurze (Hanover, 1891) is considered the most reliable (German translation by Wilhelm Wattenbach, *Geschichtsschreiber der deutschen Vorzeit*, XXIII, Leipzig, 1889). More information about the life of Rudolf can be found in: Patricius Schlager, "Rudolf of Fulda". *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 13. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13218a.htm>. Retrieved 25/07/2015.

Further Sources: August Potthast, *Bibliotheca historica medii ævi* (Berlin, 1896), I, 67; II, 1151, 1429, 1540; Wilhelm Wattenbach, *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter*, II (Berlin, 1893), 227 sq., 238 sq.

⁴ This article will mention merely some of them, with no claim to representativeness.

⁵ These double monasteries, such as the great monastery of Winburn (or Wimbourne), built by the West-Saxon kings, were each separated from the other and surrounded with high walls. No monk was allowed to set foot in the enclosure of the nuns, except in their church to say mass; and immediately afterwards he stepped down

was primarily a house for nuns, but had alongside it a house of monks, who saw to the external administration and provided the priests to serve the community of women. The whole was under an abbess, often of royal birth, and many of these double monasteries rose to distinction as places of learning and education. [...] Leofgyth, Boniface's chief woman helper in his mission to the Germans, was educated first at Minster, then at Wimborne. Her biographer tells us that at the latter place there were separate monasteries for the monks and the nuns, and the segregation seems to have been more complete than it was, as far as our evidence goes, at other places, for even the abbess spoke to the monks only through a window. Boniface and his fellow-missionaries founded similar establishments in the lands which they converted.⁶

Boniface (in Latin: Bonifatius, born in Wessex in 675) was the name the West Saxon Wynfryth took when setting out from the British Isles as appointed papal legate and archbishop to the Germans in the eighth century. Many English helpers joined him and Willibrord⁷ on their mission to convert and educate the pagans, and were named bishops in the newly created sees, and abbots and abbesses at the monasteries founded above all in Thuringia and Hesse, but also in Frisia and Bavaria. Whitelock continues:

Abbots include Wigbert of Fritzlar, Beornred of Echternach, who became archbishop of Sens (died 797), and Wynnebald of Heidenheim, a double monastery like those they were accustomed to at home, in which he was succeeded by his sister Waldburg. Boniface's chief woman-helper was Leofgyth, abbess of Tauberbischofsheim, mentioned above.⁸

The role of women in this undertaking was crucial, and some of them followed in the footsteps of their male brethren, as was the case of Waldburga

from the altar to leave the church and return to his own cloister. As a rule no nun could ever go out of her own enclosure.

⁶ Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* (From the Anglo-Saxon Invasion). Pelican books, Harmondsworth (1952, reprint 1962), chapter VIII, "The Church", p.171. This synthesis of the life and thoughts of the Anglo-Saxons has become a classic and used to be widely read as a textbook.

⁷ Willibrord (born 658 in Northumberland) founded the Benedictine Monastery in Echternach in 700, where he died in 739. He has since become the patron saint of Luxembourg.

⁸ Whitelock, *The Beginnings*, p.178.

who eventually came to run a double monastery, thus being in charge of both religious women and men. Leofgyth is mentioned again in Whitelock's account of the Anglo-Saxons, when referring to Chronicler Rudolf's⁹ compilation of data on the Saint's life:

Aldhelm's writings for the nuns of Barking and Rudolf's Life of St Leofgyth, Boniface's helper in his missionary work, who was educated at Minster and at Wimborne, show that women, like men, studied the scriptures and their fourfold interpretation, the works of the Fathers, chronography, grammar, and metrics.¹⁰

Rudolf's compilation is, indeed, a main source for the entry in Butler's authoritative mid-eighteenth century work *Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and other Principal Saints*.¹¹

St. Lioba's namesday is generally celebrated on September 28th,¹² yet in some calendars it appears to be September 22nd, or even September 23rd. On the pages containing the entries of September 28th, the day corresponding to St. Lioba, Abbess, Butler starts out:

This saint was a great model of Christian perfection to the Church, both of England, her native country, and of Germany. She was descended of an illustrious English-Saxon family, and born among the West-Saxons at Winburn[sic], which name signifies fountain of wine.¹³

⁹ As mentioned above, the Benedictine Rudolf, a most distinguished scholar of his time, compiled in 838 the *Life of St Leobgyth*.

¹⁰ Whitelock, *The Beginnings*, p.198.

¹¹ Alban Butler's great work, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and other Principal Saints* (*Butler's Lives*), the result of thirty years of industry and research, was first published in four volumes in London, 1756–1759. It has passed many (sometimes quite altered) editions and translations. The quotations in this article are from the 1866 revised edition published by James Duffy, 15 Wellington Row, Dublin, and 22 Paternoster Row, London, pp.315–317.

¹² For instance, Manuel Raisch, *Lioba, die Missionarin an Bonifatius' Seite. Die Notwendigkeit von Frauen in der Missionsarbeit*. Nürnberg 2013, p.65, referring to September 28th "Dies ist ihr Gedenk-und der wahrscheinliche Todestag". On the other hand, Leinweber names September 23rd as the day of her death, and September 28th as the day of her burial in Fulda. Josef Leinweber, *St. Lioba: Leben u. Wirken*, Bistum Fulda, 1980.

¹³ If not stated otherwise, the ensuing shorter quotes stem from Butler's *Lives* vol. IX, pp.315–317.

Indeed, her father Dynne (also: Dimo, Tinne, born around 665; died around 725) was an Anglo-Saxon nobleman, and her mother was called Aebbe (or Ebba, born around 665; died after 630). They belonged to the second generation after the Christianization of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms that had spread from Ireland. The legend goes that Ebba had been barren for a long time. Before she eventually conceived (at the then – and even today – relatively advanced age of 44), she dreamed of hearing a bell ringing in her belly. This was interpreted by her fostress as a sign of her forthcoming pregnancy.¹⁴ Moreover was it taken as God's behest to promise the child to him. Consequently, when her daughter was born (c. 710), Ebba offered her to the Church “and trained her up in contempt of the world”. The infant had been baptized Truthgeb, or Truthgeba, but came to be called Leofgyth, or Liobgeth(a), then abbreviated to Leoba or Lioba, which means “the dear one” or “the beloved” (by God, and her parents). When a young girl, probably at the age of seven, she was placed in “the great monastery of Winburn in Dorsetshire, under the care of the holy abbess Tetta, a person still more eminent for her extraordinary prudence and sanctity, than for being sister to a king”. Rudolf refers that once the girl was sent to the monastery, the fostress who had predicted her birth, and who seems to have been a serf or bond servant, was granted her freedom.¹⁵ Lioba is reported to have made “great progress in virtue”, she understood Latin and loved reading. However, “she read no books but such as were proper to nourish piety and devotion in her soul”. In the monastery Lioba received a comprehensive education in all seven liberal arts and underwent a thorough literary and theological training, including in ecclesiastical law. She is described as intelligent, good-tempered, charitable, modest, and patient. Soon she took the religious veil and was devoted to teaching, first in monasteries of Wessex and Kent (including Minster-in-Thamet). These monasteries supported the missionary work of St. Boniface.

St. Boniface, a relative (possibly a cousin) of Lioba's mother, Ebba, had kept up an epistolary correspondence with the novice and later young nun, and appreciated her abilities. So he requested the abbess to give leave to Lioba, Thecla, Waldburga, and others from their quiet abbey in Wimborne to join him in the heathen wilds, “in order to settle some sanctuaries and nurseries of religion for persons of their sex in the infant church of Germany”. Tetta could

¹⁴ This is the reason why in the imagery Leofgyth is sometimes depicted with a bell.

¹⁵ Rudolf, *Vita Leobae*, ch.6.

not oppose the urgent demand, though she “regretted the loss of so great a treasure”. In Germany, Lioba and her “little colony” of thirty companions were settled by St. Boniface near Mainz, in the monastery of Bischofsheim (i.e. Bishop’s House). Butler proceeds:

By the prudence and zeal of our saint, this nunnery became in a short time very numerous, and out of it she peopled many other houses which she founded in Germany. She never commanded others anything which she had not first practised herself. Her countenance appeared always angelically cheerful and modesty breathing a heavenly devotion and love. Her time was spent in prayer, and in holy reading and meditation. She knew by heart the divine precepts of the Old and New Testaments, the principal canons of the church, the holy maxims of the Fathers, and the rules of the monastic life and perfection. By humility, she placed herself beneath all others, and esteemed herself as the last of her community and washed often the feet of the sisters. The exercise of hospitality and charity to the poor was her delight.¹⁶

Butler’s account is patched with idealizing terms seeking to enhance Lioba’s halo as a saint, yet the underlying facts are historically contrasted. Later, so the chronicles go, Lioba became abbess of Tauberbischofsheim in Franconia, serving for twenty-eight years, and actively contributed to the education of girls of the upper class in the neighborhood. Thereby she followed the model known in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, which proved to be an effective way to connect with these families while fostering the Christianization of the local elite. Some of her disciples in turn became teachers and would thus carry on the torch of learning. It is especially noteworthy how, by applying the educational model known from her motherland, Lioba contributed to the empowerment of women. However, this model was soon to be undermined by the patriarchic model imposed by the increasingly powerful Church of Rome. Meanwhile, Lioba was “respected and honoured” by kings and princes, “especially Pepin king of the Franks, and his two sons, Charles or Charlemagne and Carloman”. When Charlemagne reigned alone after the death of his brother, he “often sent for her to his court at Aix-la-Chapelle, and treated her with the highest veneration. His queen Hildegardis loved her as her own soul, and took her advice in her most weighty concerns”. The queen, indeed, wished to have the abbess as often as possible at court, to

¹⁶ Butler’s *Lives* vol. IX, pp.315–316.

“enjoy the edification and comfort of her example and instructions”, so refers Butler. Yet Lioba seems to have preferred the retreat of her monastery and always made haste to return to it. Bishops are reported to have had conferences with her, “and listened to her counsels”.

Before Boniface went on his mission into Friesland (where he suffered martyrdom in 754), he placed Lioba at the head the mission, and beseeched bishop Lullus of Mainz to grant her special protection. Furthermore he declared his desire, “as by his last will, that after her death she should be buried by his bones, that both their bodies might wait the resurrection and be raised together in glory to meet the Lord, and be for ever united in the kingdom of his love”. Boniface’s wish, however, was not fulfilled. Upon Lioba’s death about the year 779¹⁷ in Schornsheim, to where she had retired, apparently following the advice of Lullus, the monks are said to have feared to disturb the relics of St. Boniface. At least this is Rudolf’s official version. So she was interred at Fulda, on the north side of the high altar.¹⁸ Historians have read between the lines that there was more to it than just a breach of Boniface’s last will. As a matter of fact, after the latter’s death a fight started between the bishop Lullus and the first abbot of the monastery of Fulda, Sturmius regarding the question of authority. It was eventually won by the bishop. The sources do not clearly disclose where Lioba stood in this dispute. Yet with her status as Boniface’s protégée she seemed to have been caught in the crossfire between Lullus and Sturmius. The fact that she did not spend her last years in one of the monasteries founded by her but in a retreat organized ad hoc in Schornsheim, southeast of Mainz, where she eventually died, point at the possibility that her role and her mission was to be mitigated by the expanding authority of the representatives of the Church of Rome. As mentioned above, it is most likely that her stance in favor of women actively participating in ecclesiastical and educational issues was being questioned by the increasingly male dominated concept dictated from Rome, and thus she could have become a political nuisance factor. Furthermore the disputes over the destination of her remains and the successive removal of them to three different sites seem to shed light on how the Church struggled with this truly emancipated female figure, ahead of her time.

¹⁷ Some sources declare she died in 781 or 782.

¹⁸ After being removed twice, (part of) her remains now rest behind an altar in a church dedicated to Mary and the virgins of Christ in Petersburg in Fulda.

Butler concludes his account of this saint's life: "Her tomb was honoured with miracles; her historian assures us he was himself an eyewitness of several". "Her historian", Rudolf, indeed refers to several legends reported and miracles believed to have been performed by the saint, both before and after her death. Among those during her lifetime are: her dream of a red woolen thread emerging from her mouth, of such length that it could be wound onto a reel. A senior nun interpreted this dream as the red thread representing God's love that should be passed on to others. Lioba is also said to have saved the monastery and part of the town of Tauberbischofsheim from a fire deploying salts consecrated by Boniface; to have appeased a thunderstorm; and to have healed a mortally ill nun. Rudolf furthermore reports events of the saint's actions after her death, such as the story of an iron ring which oppressed a man's arm and unlocked while he was praying at the tomb of the saint; and, around the year 836, of a Spaniard with a nervous disease (probably Parkinson) who was cured of his tremors while praying at the saint's tomb.¹⁹

The closeness between Leofgyth and Boniface, also accredited by touching letters, has given rise to conjectures that there might have been more to it than just a special affection between them; if not an open *affair*, at least some kind of platonic attraction. That speculation continues to offer food for debate (though it will not be taken up in this article), and has got as far as Korea, with scholar I Deug-Su inquiring: "Lioba – dilecta Bonifatii. A love story in the 8th century?"²⁰

Altogether there are numerous works dealing with aspects of the life of this outstanding forerunner not only in the Christianization but also and significantly in the education of young women.²¹

¹⁹ Rudolfus magister Fuldensis, *Vita Leobae*, chs. 8, 13, 14, 15, 22 and 23.

²⁰ I Deug-Su: "Lioba - dilecta Bonifatii. Eine Liebesgeschichte im 8. Jahrhundert?" *Medieval and Early Modern English Studies*, published by The Medieval And Early Modern English Studies Association Of Korea, vol. 10.2, 2002/12, pp. 29–80.

²¹ Apart from the ones quoted from on these pages, the following likewise deserve mention, again, with no claim to exhaust the matter: Heinrich Hahn, *Lioba*. As part of: *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (ADB). Band 18, Duncker & Humblot, Leipzig 1883, S. 725; Hieronyma Angelika Hieber, *Hl. Lioba. Erste Lehrerin Germaniens und Patronin des Taubertals. Dokumentation einer Sammlung*. Tauberbischofsheim 1989; Brigitte Kasten: *Lioba*. In: *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (LexMA). Band 5, Artemis & Winkler, München/Zürich 1991; Petra Kehl: *Die Verehrung der hl. Lioba*. In: *Fuldaer Geschichtsblätter* 67 (1991), S. 141–150; Gabriele Lautenschläger: *Lioba (Leobgith), Heilige*. In: *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (BBKL). Band 5, Bautz,

Nowadays Leofgyth, or Lioba, is remembered above all as a pioneer in the Christianization of Germany, and more specifically for her active role in the creation of nunneries and therefore the education of women. In times of patriarchic dominance, it is astounding how some women not only stood their ground but actively engaged in the organization of the incipient Church, and sometimes, as in the case of Leofgyth, became helms in its structure.

In Schornsheim, where she died, a statue that represents Lioba can be admired in a town square. The authorities of Tauberbischofsheim declared Lioba the patron saint of the town during an official ceremony in 2005, and every year the last Saturday of September is celebrated as an official holiday in the town. This decision was not received without controversy since the Lutheran church rejects the veneration of saints. A widely supported argument by the locals advocated that Lioba's prayers had saved the town towards the end of World War II, while the nearby town of Königshofen was almost completely destroyed.

In the German village of Bad Nauheim, close to Mainz, there is a secondary school with the name of the saint: St. Lioba-Schule,²² and a primary school carries her name in the Westphalian town of Warstein.²³ In the Bavarian city of Nürnberg we come across a St. Lioba Church, with a Catholic kindergarten attached to it,²⁴ and in the Black-Forest capital Freiburg we can find a St. Lioba monastery.²⁵ Even a mineral fountain in the South of Germany bears the saint's name, under which water and other soft drinks are commercialized.²⁶ Across the world there are several religious communities, such as in France, the Frères et Soeurs bénédictins de Ste Lioba in Simiane-Collongue.²⁷ A detailed browsing of the internet may yield many more curious results. Yet little or nothing can be made out in her home country, England, where monasteries, convents, and Roman Christian communities (such as priories and friaries) had been suppressed in the dissolution processes between 1536 and 1541 under Henry VIII, after he separated England from the Papal authority.

Herzberg 1993. Manfred Weitlauff: Lioba. In: *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (NDB). Band 14, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1985.

²² <http://www.lioba.de/>

²³ <http://www.lioba-schule.com/>

²⁴ http://www.stadtkirche-nuernberg.de/pfarrgemeinden/st_lioba.html

²⁵ <http://www.kloster-st-lioba.de>

²⁶ <http://www.mineralbrunnen.bad-liebenzell.de/produkte/lioba.html>

²⁷ <http://www.lioba.com/en/histoire/sainte-lioba/>

Regarding the name of Lioba as such, a dwindling number of women have borne or are bearing it. Even in Germany it is not only extremely uncommon, but also widely unknown.

Now let me continue striking a more personal key. As I am writing this note, I am hosted by the Department of Comparative Literature of the University of Georgia, in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, in Athens, some seventy miles from Atlanta, capital of Georgia, USA. The head of Department is Prof. Dr. Lioba Moshi. Three years ago, when first visiting this University as a guest of the English Department, I spotted her name on the list of Faculty and was curious to find out how she came by it, especially since I spotted a picture of her: she is ebony black. When we eventually met, she told me that she was born in Tanzania and her first language was Swahili. At first I thought, what a coincidence, a local or tribal African name which happens to be spelled and pronounced [li:ɔba] the same way as my own. Yet she explained to me that this was related to the role of the German Catholic missionaries who had worked in the district of Moshi, the home of her family (whence she derives her surname), while it formed part of the German empire (and was called Deutsch-Ostafrika).²⁸ As a matter of fact, her ancestors were in touch with them, albeit not volunteers, since the religious men were considered part of a foreign power. It was only later, in the generation of her father, that the experience with the missionaries bore its fruits. When I beseeched her to provide me with some further details for this article, she sent me an email with this interesting account:

How I got my name

I am a third born preceded by two brothers. We come from a catholic family which means our names are taken from a book of saints.

My father was an only son to my grandmother. He also had one sister. My grandmother was the youngest of four wives to my grandfather. By the time my grandmother got married to my grandfather, he had an average of six children by each of his other three wives. As such, he told my grandmother upfront that he did not want many more children. To secure a place in my grandfather's extended family and to be able to claim property if my grandfather died before her, she needed a son. She was blessed with a son as her first born. My grandfather allowed

²⁸ As of the late 1870s, Germany participated in the process of colonization, a fact that caused animosity with the other colonial powers such as Great Britain and France, and decidedly contributed to the outbreak of World War I and the Reich's loss of all its colonies (mainly Namibia, Tanzania and Togo).

her to have a second child and this was my aunt. My grandfather was now contented and declared to my grandmother that she was secure because she had a son to claim inheritance on her behalf and a daughter to help her around the house. The culture does not allocate inheritance to females in the family. That is how my father ended up in a household of predominantly females which I am sure made him very protective of my grandmother and my aunt and later my sister and I, the only girls among nine brothers.

Through my grandmother's efforts, my father went to school. This {special effort of the grandmother} was because my grandfather did not want to have anything to do with the missionaries to the extent that he refused to be baptized up until when he was on his death bed. Being a descendant of the chief's clan, my grandfather felt that the foreigners were stripping the chiefdoms the power they customarily have on their subjects. He also felt that their intentions were to acquire their property and services illegally.

From his primary school 5th grade class, my father was picked with several other students to go to a teacher training college. The missionaries wanted to phase out the use of foreigners teaching at the primary school level (grades 1–4) and use locally trained teachers. There were two major reasons for this, one the language of instruction was Kiswahili, the national language, and two, they wanted the curriculum to include the understanding of local cultures. With my father going to school under the missionaries, he got baptized and made sure that his mother and sister were baptized too.

The knowledge and experience with the missionaries must have influenced my father in a big way, so much that when he got married and had children he became keen on finding unique names that no child in the village had. As such, all of my siblings and I were the first in the village to bear these unique names. The other thing that my father did was that he had criteria for choosing certain names. In the culture, parents choose names for their children based on the events of the day the child is born, after a major or unforgettable incident or after someone they admire. My father, who was known to be an independent thinker, had his own ideas about his children's names. He used the book of saints and named his children with the rarest name closest to the birth date or some sort of pairing system. For example, my oldest brother was born in September and so my father picked the closest rare name after his birth, Wenceslaus. The second child, also a boy born in September, two years later, was named Ladislaus. Both these names were European and the lives of these individuals influenced my father's choice.

When I came along, my father named me Lioba. I can only think of two reasons. It was a rare name in the village and my father liked the biographic sketch of saint Lioba. The second factor was that I was born July 30th and there was no unique name in that month. Because I was the first born girl he paired me up with my oldest brother, the first born male. We share the same feast day as our namesakes,

September 28th. I am sure if he had known beforehand that he would have a girl, he would have named my brother Boniface because of the relationship Lioba had with Boniface. However, knowing how my father's mind worked and his affinity to the women in his life, he gave me the name in the hope that I would grow up to be just like my namesake. I think when I look at my life at this age and how I have tried to live my life; there are a few characteristics that are inscribed in the story of St. Lioba.

Needless to say, the name Lioba is still very rare in Tanzania and I only know of two, all from the same village I grew up in.²⁹

Having known Prof. Moshi for some time, it becomes evident that bearing the name of St. Lioba has had a seminal influence on her life, as she herself admits. Not only is she a scholarly character, she has also crossed the sea (first from Tanzania to the UK, then to the United States of America where she has culminated her academic career), and devoted her life to teaching. Moreover is she a person with deep religious convictions, and has been caring for her large community, with a special focus on empowering women. For some time now, and with a view to her forthcoming retirement, she has been fostering an orphanage in Northern Tanzania,³⁰ to which she plans to devote the remainder of her life. Thus the sentence quoted above from Butler's *Lives* referring to St. Lioba: "The exercise of hospitality and charity to the poor was her delight" likewise matches Prof. Moshi.

Another Lioba I met personally is the German opera singer Lioba Braun, who specializes in Wagner female roles.³¹ It was some ten years ago in Madrid, after the Schubert Mass No. 5 Concerto the mezzosoprano had sung in, that I knocked on the door of her dressing room to congratulate her on her performance and ask her how *she* came by her name. She was overjoyed to meet somebody sharing it, and gave me a big hug. Her first question was "Did you also experience so many difficulties as a child?" She admitted to having had her leg pulled more than once on account of that *strange* name. Yet in her professional career that unusual name, paired with a more common surname, has certainly contributed to her being more easily distinguished, she said.³²

²⁹ Quoted from an email by Prof. Dr. Moshi, 16/07/2015.

³⁰ <http://www.upendo-okat.com/>

³¹ <http://www.lioba-braun.de/>

³² In my childhood teachers were generally surprised at the name, yet would quickly learn it and not forget it, while it would take them longer to remember the more 'normal' names of my classmates.

When I was about to leave Lioba Braun's dressing room, she stopped me, "wait a second!" and handed me over the spectacular bouquet of dozens of pink roses she had been presented together with the audience's applause on the stage. I dried it and have since then kept it in a place of honor.

Further resonances of that name may come when hearing of king Favila³³ of Asturias in the Northwest of Spain, who is reported to have died at the hands (or rather paws) of a bear when hunting in the year 739. He had been married to a lady called Froliuba.³⁴

Altogether, the name bears a touch of exceptionality. Recently I learned that a younger member of the Habsburg family bears it. According to a web page that features statistics on names, *MyNameStats*,³⁵ in the United States there are only 110 people named Lioba, and the national rank of that name is 43,092. Seventy-three percent of them are reported to be white, sixteen percent of Hispanic origin, and nine percent black. The state with the most people named Lioba is Texas (where seventeen people bear it). The website offers a breakdown by states and interesting complementary data.

Yet the probably most surprising – to me at least – bearer of that name is a male: Lioba Aragón. I met him personally some years ago in Spain, and we were both not a little astounded when we introduced ourselves. It turned out that he had never heard of the saint. So when I explained it to him, he fell out a-laughing. No wonder: he had been given his name for radically different reasons. His father was an admirer of Leon Trotsky, born Lev Davidovich Bronshtein. In Russian it is written ЛЕВ, pronounced [ˈlʲɛf], and its diminutive (on which M. Aragón's father had grounded his choice) is ЛЕВА (pronounced [ˈlʲɛvə]).³⁶

³³ Favila was the only son of the Visigothic King Pelagius (Pelayo), whose victory in the Battle of Covadonga around 722 marked the beginning of the *Reconquista* – the Christian recovery of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors.

³⁴ I have not been able to find references to her background. That her name could be a compound of "Fro" (from Old-German "Frouwe", now "Frau", i.e., Mrs.) and "Lioba" is merely a personal conjecture. At that time the saint was a young woman in her late twenties, and though already abbess, it is not clear how widely known she was beyond her monastery.

³⁵ <http://www.mynamstats.com/First-Names/L/LI/LIOBA/index.html>

³⁶ Not really with a bilabial [b], but a labio-dental [v]; therefore it should have been written *Lieva* (I consulted a Russian speaking Estonian student in one of my classes about this).

When I was in Cuba some years ago, people seemed to be acquainted with the name and often addressed me without hesitating as *Lyuba*. I found out that this was due to the Cuban-Soviet friendship, and the existence of a similar Russian name, Lyubov (ЛЮБОВЬ), pronounced: [lj-oo-BOHF']. Further research disclosed that this means: love, affection, passion. So, the Slavic and Anglo-Saxon words share the very same root and meaning. In traditional Russia it seemed to be a popular custom to bestow on daughters of the same family the three consecutive names, Vera (Truth, or Faith), Nadesha (Hope), and Liubov (Love, Charity, Christianity), with clear Biblical resonances (Corinthians 13:13). The existence of literature and even a – not very highly rated – war movie produced in times of the Soviet Union by Vladimir Grammatikov as late as 1984 with the title: “Vera, Nadezhda, Lyubov”, give proof of that popularity.³⁷

To conclude, I may add that some years ago I won a prize (a train ticket for two persons to whatever destination I chose in Spain³⁸), when responding to a call issued in a Spanish radio program on a September 28th, along the lines: “Today is the feast of St. Lioba. Is there anybody out there who bears such a name?”

Yes there is, indeed.

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³⁷ “Вера, Надежда, Любовь” on Memocast.com, e.g. www.youtube.com/watch?v=89_SEaZT_yo

³⁸ So I travelled with my daughter, whom I have NOT given that name (they asked me about it), to Cádiz.