

The Origins of the Copage/Coppage Surname

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Foreword

Having an unusual surname I have often wondered where the name originated. I grew up near Bournemouth on the south coast of England and knew that my grandfather lived in London but had little idea where his own antecedents came from.

In the early 1990s I discussed this with a cousin, Sue, and she remembered that our grandfather had mentioned a small village in Warwickshire called Tanworth. We went there a few days later and were surprised to find numerous instances of the surname in the parish registers. This was the start of a long investigation to discover the roots of the name.

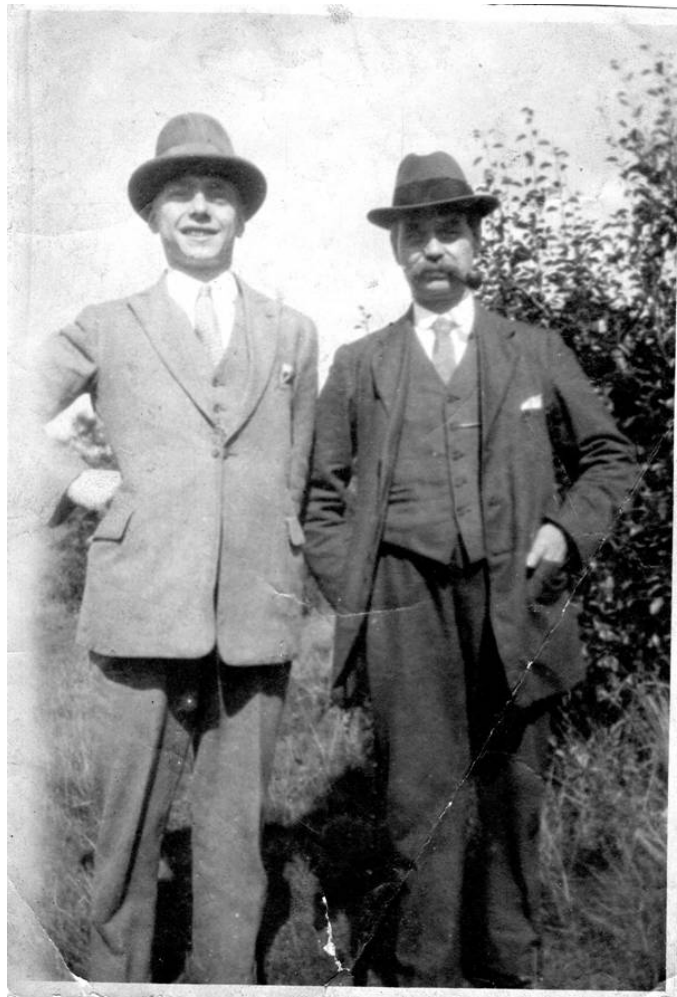
A little while later, in the early (pre-web) years of the internet I posted a query on a Usenet forum and was amazed to learn that the surname (or its variants) was relatively common in the USA. Furthermore I discovered there was even a Copage/Coppage Family Association which was very active and held annual family reunions as it still does to this day.

For the last three decades I have researched my own lineage although focussing on the paternal line to follow the surname through the ages. I have confidently traced the surname back to my great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather John who lived near Tanworth in the late seventeenth century but from there the trail goes cold. The results of this research were published in "Four Centuries of the Copage Line" available as a pdf online at: www.goodtimes.gr/CopageLine.pdf

Over the years I came across instances of the surname name in Ireland and in Canada and even in France. The occurrences of the name in were scattered throughout the UK but the greatest concentrations were in central Southern England in an area which included the counties of Warwickshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Wiltshire.

So having traced my own family line back to Warwickshire I decided to investigate the origins of the surname and the results of this exploration are presented here.

I cannot claim to have reached a definitive conclusion but I believe that I have reduced the various theories that account for the name's origin to one which is particularly plausible and which fits the available evidence.



My grandfather Reginald Copage with his father George c1920

Variants of the Copage/Coppage surname

This is an investigation into the origins of the Copage/Coppage surname but for several centuries the name was subject to numerous variations in spelling. The simple reason for this is that until the late 19th century, the bearers of the surname would almost certainly have been illiterate.

So whenever this rather unusual name was recorded at a baptism, marriage or burial its spelling would depend on whatever the officiating cleric thought he heard, be it Copage, Coppage, Cubbage, Cuppage, Cubbidge, Cobeg, Coppedge, Coppidge, Coppaidge and so on.

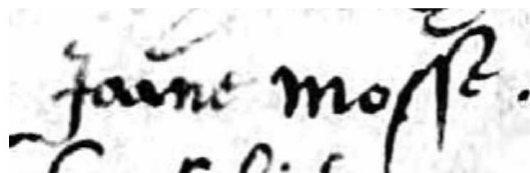
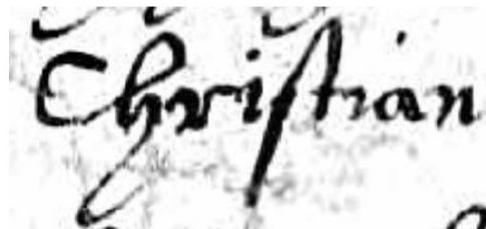
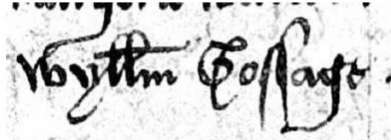
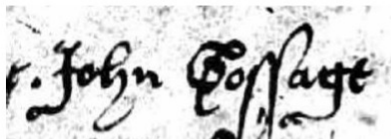
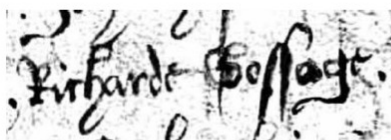
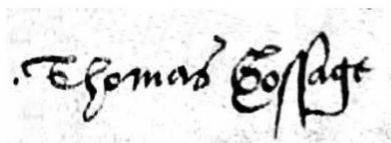
For example, John Cubbage lived in the small Warwickshire parish of Packwood in the late seventeenth century. However, when he died in 1695 he was buried as John Cobbeg. And one of his sons, William, was christened as Cubbage but was later recorded as Coppage when his own children were baptised. And when, in turn, one of William's children, John, got married his name was entered into the register as Copage.

So until the late nineteenth century when literacy became more widespread in England, there are frequent alternative spellings even for the same individual or within the same family line.

Furthermore, searches in genealogical databases such as Ancestry.com can be misleading due to transcription errors with the result that many of the listings are inaccurate.

The original records were digitised by an army of volunteers who went through parish registers and did their best to interpret the barely legible scripts. When coming across an uncommon or undecipherable name they just had to make the best guess they could and move on. The only way to be sure of a spelling is to painstakingly scrutinise other entries written in the same hand to see what the writer intended.

For example, the surnames on the left were all mistakenly transcribed:



These five names from 16th-century records for Solihull were all transcribed as "Coppage". However the entries on the right were written in the same hand and on close examination it becomes clear that the first letter is "G" (as in George) and not "C" (as in Christian). Furthermore the symbol in the middle of the surname is not "pp" but is "ss" (as in Jane Mosse). So these five individuals were not actually "Coppages" but were all named "Gossage" (a fairly common surname in this area at the time).

In short, the Copage/Coppage surname has been subject to numerous variations in spelling and such orthographical differences are of little consequence. The earliest instances of the surname in Warwickshire were often spelt Cubbage but over time members of this same family were recorded as Copage or Coppage. Individuals with such names as Copage, Coppage, Coppedge, Cubbage, Cubbidge, Cuppage, Cuppidge and so on can all be members of the same family.

Where did the surname originate?

Several explanations have been proposed for the origin of the Copage/Coppage/Cuppage name:

1 Germanic Origins

The publication Burke's Irish Family Records has a listing for the Cuppage surname and traces the Irish (and later Canadian) family line to a Faustin Cuppaidge who moved from England to Ireland in 1604. It goes on to suggest that the name had Germanic roots although it is not clear on what evidence this is based. "The Coppage-Coppedge Family 1542-1955", published in the US in 1955, mentions two brothers with the name "Coppetsch" who in the mid-seventeenth century studied at the University of Koenigsburg (now in Germany). However it goes on to point out that there is no evidence of any migration by Coppetsches to England and in any case there are instances of the surname in the UK well before this period.

2 Cup-page

Another suggestion is that the Cuppage surname comes from the term "Cup-Page", the official cupbearer to the king. However there is no evidence for this and while the appeal of such an explanation is obvious it would appear to be based on no more than wishful thinking.

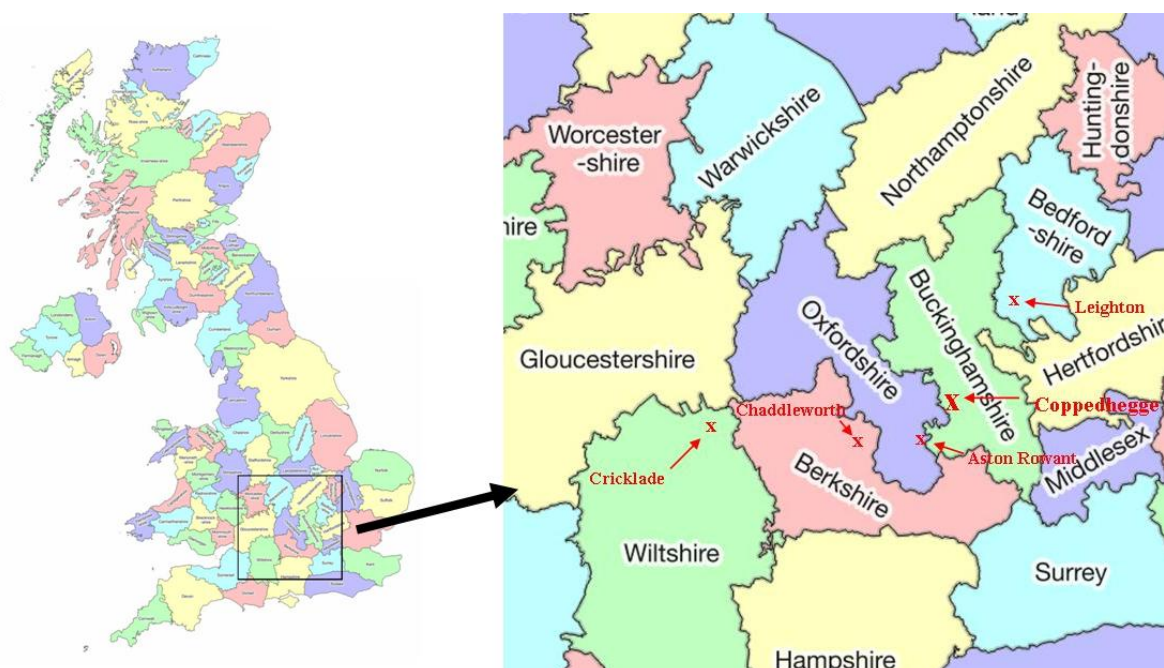
3) Corbridge

The village of Corbridge in Northumberland is built on the site of the ancient Roman fort of Coriosopitum, part of the defences along Hadrian's Wall. However it is highly unlikely that the name "Corbridge" would transmute to "Coppage" as this would require both "R"s to be dropped. Furthermore, words ending with the common Saxon "bridge" tend to remain unchanged.

4) Coppedge Forest

In the late thirteenth century there was a small forest in Buckinghamshire called "Coppedge" near the border with Oxfordshire and now part of Bernwood Forest. Coppedge comes from the Anglo-Saxon "Copedehcg" and given that the Saxon terms "cop" and "Hcg" mean "top" and "forest" this suggests a "topped forest" or "forest on a rise". Only three inhabitants were recorded in the forest, possibly woodcutters, and it is possible that they bore or were given this surname. What lends credence to this last theory is the striking proximity of the forest to known clusters of bearers of the surname in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The forest is very close to Aston Rowant in Oxfordshire (5 miles), Chaddleshall in Berkshire (15 miles), Leighton in Buckinghamshire (21 miles) and Cricklade in Wiltshire (25 miles). There are numerous records of Copages in all these four settlements.

So while we may never know for certain the origin of the Copage/Coppage/Coppedge/Cuppage surname the last of these four theories would seem to be by far the most likely.



The area surrounding Coppedge forest showing nearby clusters of Copages

The Copage Surname in England

In England the surname Copage and its variants is first recorded in the sixteenth century in various parts of the country. There are four instances in Norfolk, two in London and one each in Gloucestershire and Somerset. The earliest confirmed record is the will of one Anthony Copage of London in 1537.

The greatest concentration of records from this period is to be found in the Oxfordshire village of Aston Rowant with some 15 events between 1557 and 1603 mentioning a Cubbidge.

Genealogy sites such as Ancestry.com list a number of Coppages in Solihull in the sixteenth century. However a close examination of the original records shows these to be transcription errors and the surname recorded was actually "Gossage". The section on spelling variants shows examples of such errors.

By the seventeenth century the focus had moved to Warwickshire, particularly the village of Tanworth and neighbouring settlements such as Packwood, Studly and Edgbaston. The publication "Four Centuries of the Copage Line" traces one family line from this period to the present day.

Around this time there were also several Copages in Wiltshire, especially in the village of Cricklade just north of Swindon. Other records from this era are placed in Norfolk, Yorkshire, London and Leighton (now Leighton Buzzard) in Buckinghamshire. These are shown on the previous page.

It is interesting to note that the American-based Coppage-Coppedge Family Association trace their lineage to Richard Coppidge of Cricklade Wiltshire. Richard's father, William Copege (also spelt Copegge and Cowpage), studied at Oxford University before becoming Chaplain of Queens College. By 1587 he was serving as vicar of Chaddleworth in Berkshire (some 30 miles from Cricklade).

As can be seen on the map on the previous page, the settlements of Aston Rowant, Cricklade, Chaddleworth and Leighton are all remarkably close to the site of the ancient forest of Coppedge which lends credence to the theory that this was the origin of the Copage surname.

So far it has not proved possible to establish a link between this Wiltshire line with all its US descendants and the numerous Copages of Warwickshire. Furthermore, the records make it clear that these two groups occupied quite distinct levels of society. While the Wiltshire Copages were fairly well to do and could be described as middle class those in the Tanworth area were of humbler origins and typically worked as labourers. This was a period of very low social mobility which suggests that either these two clusters were unrelated or that their paths had diverged decades or perhaps even centuries earlier.

The Cuppage Surname in Ireland

There are numerous records in Ireland of the Cuppage (or Cuppaidge) surname dating from the early seventeenth century onwards. However the Coppage name itself is not common in Ireland and the few instances that exist are probably mis-spellings of Cuppage.

The Irish family traces its origins to one Faustus Cuppaidge who moved from Cumberland in England to Ireland in 1604 where he bought an estate near Coleraine in County Derry, Ulster. Such a move was not uncommon at the time and formed part of the "Plantations", the colonisation of Ireland by settlers from Great Britain. This was just after the "Nine Years War" which ended in 1603 and which had been a response to the Tudor Conquest of Ireland.

Stephen Cuppaidge, son of Faustus, was MP for Coleraine in the mid-seventeenth century and his son, John Cuppaidge bought Clough Castle in County Antrim. Over the next two centuries the family acquired a number of substantial properties in Ireland including Mount Edwards and Retreat Castle, both in County Antrim, and Clare Grove just north of Dublin.

Several Cuppages served as MPs and there were a number who held senior military positions, at least five of whom served in India. For example Lieutenant-General William Cuppage served in Gibraltar and India before becoming Inspector-General of the Royal Artillery and Navy in 1815. His son, Lieutenant-General Sir Burke Douglas Cuppage fought at the Battle of Waterloo and went on to become Lieutenant-General of Jersey from 1863 to 1868. There are also numerous records of Cuppage family members with senior clerical positions in Ireland.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century one member of this family, Granville William Vernon Cuppage, emigrated to Canada where he became Deputy Commissioner of Land and Works in Victoria, British Columbia. He had one son, Edward Reade Vernon Cuppage, who established the Cuppage line in Canada (see the section on North America).

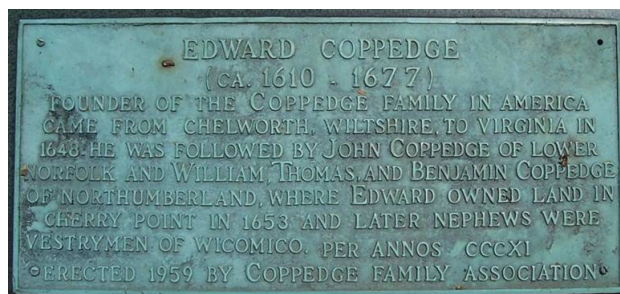
Burke's Irish Family Records lists the antecedents of Edward Reade Vernon Cuppage from Faustus onwards. The publication also claims that the surname Cuppaidge may have Germanic origins although it provides no evidence for this claim.

If it is the case that the origin of the Copage surname and its variants was the ancient forest of Coppedhegge in Buckinghamshire then this raises questions as to whether Faustus Cuppaidge of Cumberland was a member of the same family or whether the similarity of the surname is a coincidence. Clusters of Copages are common in Southern England around this time but not in the North and Cumberland (now Cumbria) was more than 200 miles from the Coppedhegge area.

The Coppage/Coppages/Coppedges Surname in North America

There have been Copages/Coppages/Coppedges in America since the middle of the seventeenth century and the number of Americans bearing this surname is now far higher than in the UK.

In the US, the Coppage-Coppedge Family Association, formed in 1948, has several hundred members throughout North America. The association traces the origins of the surname to Edward and William Coppage who migrated from England to America between 1648 and 1652 where they settled in Virginia. Over the years, the association has organised annual family reunions in various locations in the Eastern USA and has helped to distribute "The Coppage-Coppedge Family Chronicles". This book was first published in 1955; the third edition is currently under preparation. The association can be found online at ccfa.website



Bronze marker in Virginia commemorating Edward Coppedge

The extent to which the surname is more common in America than in Britain can be seen by a comparison of search results on Ancestry.com for the twentieth century:

	Copage	Coppage	Coppedge
US	1,666	64,018	66,197
UK	92	1,136	40

Number of records on the Ancestry database for the twentieth century

The Copage name is most commonly found in California while Coppage and Coppedge occur most frequently in Texas, North Carolina, Virginia and Kentucky.

Perhaps the most famous American Copage is Marc Copage born in 1962 and who as a child actor starred in the sitcom Julia for all three seasons beginning in 1968. One possibility is that Marc is descended from a slave who took the surname of his owner.



The American actor Marc Copage

The name Copage (and its variants) can also be found in Canada although it is quite rare. In the early part of the 20th century the greatest concentration was in New Brunswick where 7 occurrences were recorded in 1911.

Burkes Irish Family Records has a listing for Edward Reade Vernon Cuppage born in 1911 and who lived in Victoria British Columbia. Edward's lineage is traced back to the Cuppages and Cuppaidges of Ireland. His father was Granville William Vernon Cuppage who emigrated from the family seat at Mount Edwards in Ireland to Canada where he became Deputy Commissioner for Lands and Works, Victoria.

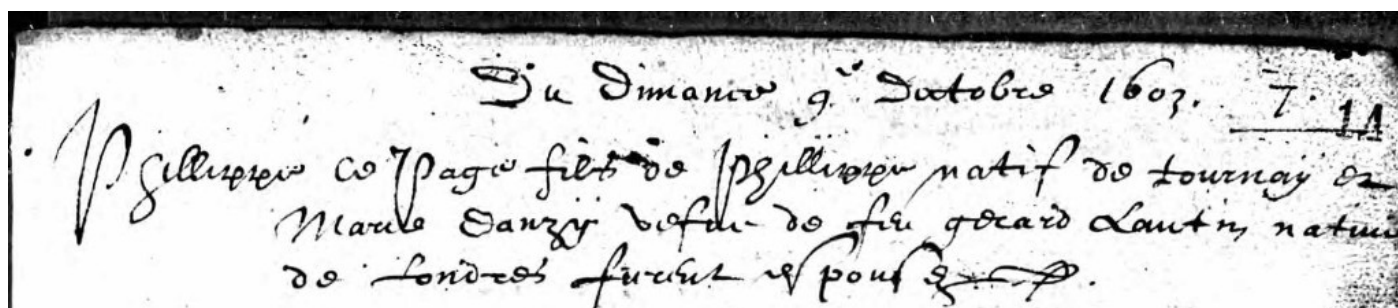
The Copage Surname in France

It is sometimes thought that the Copage surname may have French origins. After all, the suffix -age is very common in French as in such words as "fromage", "potage", "dommage", "étage", "ménage", "dommage" and so on. The suffix is also used to form French nouns from verbs (equivalent to gerunds in English) such as "lavage", "affichage", "apprentissage".

In fact there are many records of the surname "Copage" occurring in France from the seventeenth century onwards, particularly in the departments of Aube, Somme and Indre. Other surnames with similar spellings include Capage, Cabage, Coubage, Coupage and Capaje. These names can often be associated with actual French words:

Coupage = cutting
Coubage = bending
Capage = covering
Copage = coping
Capaje = a medieval cloak

Of particular interest is the marriage in Spitalfields, London in 1603 between a Phillippe Copage and Marie Danzy, both of whom were French protestants. It is highly likely that these two were part of the mass exodus of Huguenots who fled France for England in the decades following the St Bartolemews massacre in 1572.

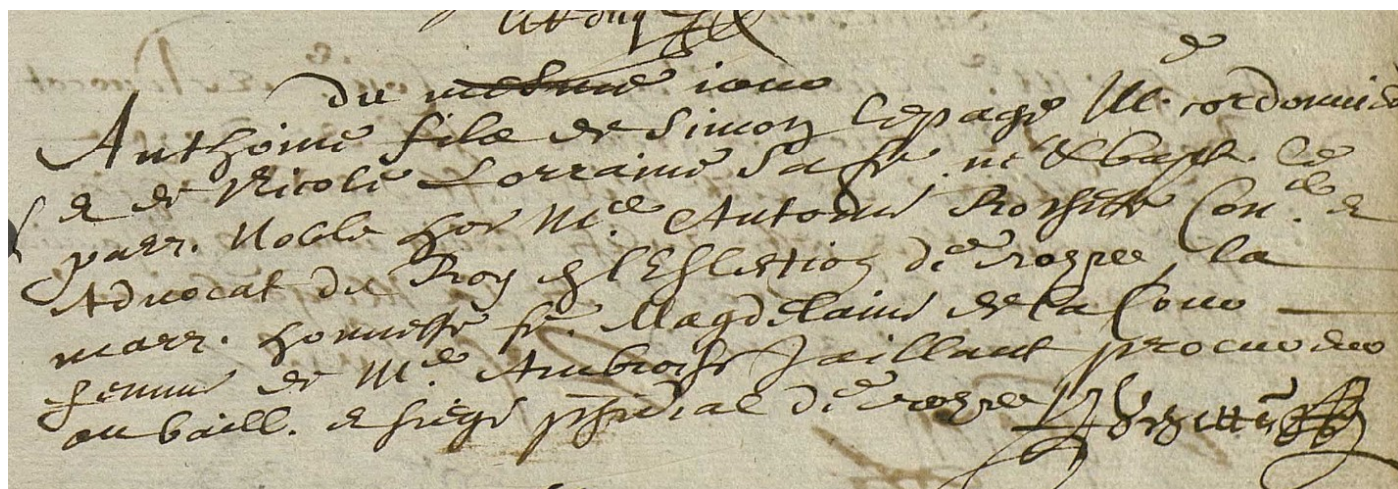


The image shows a handwritten record in French, dated 'Du Dimanche 9. Octobre 1603. 7. 11'. The text reads: 'Phillippe Copage fils de Phillippe natif de Lorraine et Marie Danzy veuve de feu Gerard Lantier natif de Londres furent épousez & p. s. p.' (Phillippe Copage, son of Phillippe, native of Lorraine, and Marie Danzy, widow of the late Gerard Lantier, native of London, were married & p. s. p.).

Record of the 1603 marriage between Phillippe Copage and Marie Danzy in Spitalfields, London

However, there are numerous instances of Copages in England in the sixteenth century which pre-date this wedding. Furthermore the Huguenots tended to settled in London or South East England, particularly Kent and not in the areas which were later known to have clusters of Copages.

It can therefore be safely assumed that the Copages of Warwickshire do not have French antecedents although it is possible that some of the Copages recorded in London in the seventeenth century might have descended from Phillippe and Marie Copage (not that they are mentioned in any records of christenings).



The image shows a handwritten record in French, dated 'Du dimanche 10. Janvier 1671'. The text reads: 'Antoine fils de Simon Copage M. ordonné & de Nicole Lorraine sa femme & de Bapt. Co. parr. Noble for M. Antoine Prost (ou. & Advocat du Roy & l'Escluzion de Troves la marr. femme p. Magd. Laine & la Cou. femme & M. Ambroise Jaillat procureur au baill. & juge p. p. de Troves' (Antoine, son of Simon Copage, M. ordained, & Nicole Lorraine, his wife, & Bapt. Co. parr. Noble for M. Antoine Prost (or. & Advocat du Roy & l'Escluzion de Troves la marr. femme p. Magd. Laine & la Cou. femme & M. Ambroise Jaillat procureur au baill. & juge p. p. de Troves).

Antoine Copage baptised January 1671 Troyes, Aube (parents: Simon Copage & Nicole Lorraine)