

## Greek Personal Names in Merovingian and Carolingian Gaul: A Brief Survey

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### Abstract

Ever since ancient times, even before the Roman conquest, there were people and groups in Gaul speaking Greek, so that in the towns of Roman Gaul the Greek communities later became motive factors of Christianisation. It comes as no surprise that many names with a Greek etymology are to be found in Gaul during the Merovingian and Carolingian eras: Eulalius, Euphronius, Eusebius and Eustasius are just a few examples among many.

This paper intends to investigate whether it is possible to determine places in which the tradition of Greek personal names, for example as a result of veneration of saints, was prevalent.

Knowledge of Greek having declined almost to extinction in Gaul by the end of the late Roman period, linguistic adaptations of names into the nascent Romance language become apparent, such as Evanzelia, Elarius, Nicesius, and Estefanus.

In view of the tendency for proper names of Romance or Romanic origin, including those with a Greek etymology, to be replaced by Germanic names as the Franks increased their dominance from north to south, these declined, while at the same time we see a neologistic creativity in dealing with the various traditions of naming manifested in hybrid names. Examples of these hybrid names with originally Greek elements are: Christehildis and Christengaudus.

However, such name formations remained the exception, while on the other hand a number of names of Greek origin could retain and maintain their position within the treasury of French personal names due to their assimilation and their correspondence with saints' names.

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Ever since ancient times, even before the Roman conquest, Greek-speaking population groups had been in existence in Gaul. It was these Greek communities in the towns of Roman Gaul that later proved to be a catalysis for the introduction of Christianity. What is remarkable about this phenomenon is that many names of Greek origin continued to be extant in Merovingian and Carolingian Gaul. The aim of this paper is to illustrate possible lines of development by taking a few examples from the collection of approximately 200 personal names of Greek or partially Greek origin accrued in the course of my participation in a research project on name-giving in the barbarian *Regna* of Europe in the Early Middle Ages. My colleague Christa Jochum-Godglück presented the project "Onomastik und Akkulturation", based at the Saarland University under the aegis of Wolfgang Haubrichs, to this conference (cf. her contribution in this volume).

I will focus my attention on the Merovingian and Early Carolingian eras and in essence provide little more than an outlook on the later Carolingian period and the survival of the tradition of giving children names of Greek origin at the outset of the Middle Ages. However, I will not ignore the regions dominated by Burgundians and Visigoths in southern Gaul that became part of the Frankish Empire in the course of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

What were the starting chances for Greek names in Gaul at that point in time when the late Roman age was progressing into the early Middle Ages? In the late Roman age, as in the rest of

the Western Roman Empire, Greek and Latin cultural traditions existed concurrently. As far as the 4<sup>th</sup> century is concerned, we can consider our prime witness of this fact to be Ausonius, a rhetorician of Bordeaux origin who taught in Trier and even managed to compose a bilingual Graeco-Latin poem in which he contraposed the Greek and the Roman muses (Berschin 1980: 130f.). As late as the 5<sup>th</sup> century, traces of Greek culture can still be found, in particular in the Rhône region. Sidonius Apollinaris, a Gallo-Roman aristocrat and bishop of Auvergne, had his roots in Lyon, and the theologian Claudinus Mamertus was a priest in Vienne (Berschin 1980: 131). Both were influenced by Greek philosophy.

The take-over of power by Goths, Burgundians and Franks led to a break with the traditions of antiquity and as a consequence also with Greek culture and education. One has the impression that the Graeco-Latin linguistic conglomerate was replaced by a new constellation consisting of a Germanic vulgar tongue and Latin and that, in other words, in the long term insufficient cultural powers could be summoned to maintain whatever social trilingualism may have existed in the short term. In the event, the distribution of roles proved to be a radically different one: Latin replaced Greek as the sole *koine* of cultivated people in the *Regna*, while a number of Germanic languages became the tongue of regional potentates, whose power varied from region to region and whose number diminished in those regions where in later times Romance languages were to develop.

The question may well be posed as to which enduring sources documenting this era are at our disposal. Apart from inscriptions on stones, there are stamps on Merovingian coins and furthermore narrative sources, bishops' lists, documents and *urbaria* containing the names of landed properties and serfs. They provide us with a heterogeneous picture containing numerous regional and temporal *lacunae*, while at the same time supplying us with names of, for the most part, members of the upper classes.

Our first example is taken from the group of Greek personal names derived from the names of gods and mythological figures: it is interesting to note that names probably understood as deriving from Artemís, the Greek Goddess of the Hunt, such as *Artemius* and *Artemia* (for ancient Greek forms cf. Bechtel 1917: 77), were not considered to be anathema by the educated classes in spite of their association with a heathen goddess. In fact, we find a bishop by the name of Artemius in Vaison in Provence in the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Duchesne 1907: 262) and another by the same name in Sens in Burgundy (Duchesne 1910: 415). Delamarre has meanwhile attributed names such as *Artemia* and related forms occurring in ancient Gaul to derivations of the Gaulish etymon \**artos* masc. 'bear' (2003: 55f.; 2007: 26, 211). Yet even if this may be a plausible explanation for the origin of the name and its derivatives, it cannot be denied that after Gallic became defunct in the late Early Ages and was no longer available as a source of linguistic reference, these names must have been construed as being Greek in the Early Middle Ages. We have, for example, an embossed leaden seal dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> centuries in Early Middle Age Byzantium on which the name of the hypatos or consul is given as *Artemios* (Lilie; Winkelmann: 208 # 646).

In second place, attention may be drawn to a cartularium in the last will and testament of *Vigilius*, bishop of Auxerre in Burgundy at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in which mention is made of a certain *Arthemica*, spouse of one *Ranesindus* (Quantin 1854: § 8), whose name is of Germanic origin. In the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, the polyptych of Saint-Germain-des-Prés near Paris supplies us with further names: a villein (*colona*) by the name of *Artemia* is married to a certain *Gairbertus*, whose name is likewise of Germanic origin (Hägermann 1993: 18). The polyptych also supplies us with the names of their four children: three of them bore a patronymic, whereas the daughter *Aldina* shares the initial vowel of her name with that of her mother (Hägermann 1993: 18). In addition, the name of a villein (*colonus*) called *Artemius* is to be found in the polyptych of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, whose spouse is not named. However, the names of their five children are in no way either derived from or variants of their father's name (Hägermann 1993: 72).

The most fashionable Greek personal name in ancient Rome was that of *Hermes* (Solin 1971: 49, 108; Solin 2003: 368–370), the messenger of the gods, but the only evidence that we have of its use in Gaul in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages is that a bishop of Béziers (Duchesne 1907: 379) bore this name, as did a bishop of Narbonne in the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Duchesne 1907: 303f.). There are many such tales of the demise of Greek names.

Apart from hereditary full names, abbreviated names and pet names, Greek already possessed in antiquity personal names which were structurally similar to the names from which they were derived (nicknames); their use is due to a whole series of motives. In consequence, they obtained a dominant position among Greek names in use in Rome vis-à-vis older Greek names. A Greek slave's name could be changed by his Roman master at will (Solin 1971: 51, 95), and against this background it comes as no surprise that besides many names with positive attributes, many are to be frequently found with pejorative or demeaning associations.

In Gaul in the Early Middle Ages, the situation was quite different. For the most part, we know that, in the Merovingian period at least, Greek names were to be found in families of high rank, who most certainly could only have possessed mere remnants of ancient Greek education and culture. Nevertheless, the choice quite clearly fell in favour of names with positive connotations. Those Greek personal names that continued to be used, even if their meaning or signification was not understood, can likewise be regarded as relics of a lost culture.

Many authors have already made reference to the semantic Christianisation of Greek names, yet this phenomenon is not specific to the Western Roman Empire but certainly – due to the uninterrupted linguistic tradition – more obviously apparent in the Eastern Roman Empire. However, such semantic changes in nomenclature in Western Rome must have been completed before the end of the Graeco-Latin bilingual culture.

A few examples of names that have been evidenced in several sources should suffice to illustrate the point. The names *Aspasia* and *Aspasius*, deriving as they do from the Greek adjective ἀσπάσιος *aspásios*, meaning convenient or desirable, refer to social position or status. In its masculine form, there is evidence of the use of the name in the 6<sup>th</sup> century: a bishop of Auch in the south of France (Duchesne 1910: 95), and in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, we find a master minter or coin-maker by the name of *Aspasius* in Rodez in southern Gaul (Felder 2003: 68). Further evidence is supplied by an inscription dating from the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century naming a certain *Aspasius* from Metz (Gauthier 1975: 563–564). At the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, we have another incidence of a person named *Aspasius* (Bergh 1941: 89f.), and in the middle of the same century we have a reference to a further one in the Limousin region (Morlet 1972: 22). It seems that the name must have been more widespread in the southern half of Gaul, because there is no reference to it either in the 9<sup>th</sup> century polyptych of Saint-Germain-des-Prés near Paris or in that of Saint-Remi of Rheims, both of which date from the early 9<sup>th</sup> century and both of which usually offer a mine of information on such issues.

Apart from ἀσπάσιος, mention must be made of those names that begin with *Eu-* (Εὐ-), meaning 'good', which had long belonged to the treasury of personal names in late ancient times (Solin 1971: 105) and in the early Middle Ages and also continued to enjoy a certain popularity in Gaul. In part, they derive from the traditional set of names fashioned according to Indo-European patterns and were particularly suitable for semantic remodelling following Christian patterns. For this reason it cannot come as a surprise that we have a whole series of such names in the Merovingian and also in the Carolingian periods: *Eucherius* (cf. Greek εὐ-γερός 'well-mannered'), *Eugenia* and *Eugenius* (cf. Greek εὐ-γένεια 'noble birth, lineage'), *Eulalia* (Aulaire) and *Eulalius* (cf. Greek εὐ-λαλος 'well-spoken, eloquent'). Thus we find, to take some examples, a *Eulalia* in the polyptych of Saint-Remi in Rheims with a sister by the name of *Christildis*, the first element of the name being of Greek origin and the second element of Germanic etymology (Devroey 1984: 26) and in the polyptych of Saint-Germain-des-Prés we find a *Eulalia* with a mother by the name of *Sanctonia* and a sister called *Angala* (Hägermann 1993: 108). We find

*Euphemia* (εὐ-φημία ‘the good reputation’), e.g., a 848 A.D. *Eufemia* in the polyptych of Saint-Remi in Rheims (Devroey 1984: 24), and *Eusebia* and *Eusebius* (from the Greek εὐ-σεβής ‘pious, God-fearing’), well-documented as the name of a bishop and, in its Romance-influenced form *Eosevius*, as the name of a master minter in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Felder 2003: 144) and again in the 9<sup>th</sup> century several times in the polyptych of Saint-Germain-des-Prés (Hägermann 1993: 47, 52, 174, 175, 192, 193, 212).

The way in which Greek personal names were integrated into the Early French – and by Germanic influence re-formed – system of personal names can be illustrated by taking as an example the family of *Anastasia*, who lived at Boissy-Maugis in Normandy at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and whose name is documented in the polyptych of Saint-Germain-des-Prés (Hägermann 1993: 112). *Anastasia*’s parents bore the names of *Frotueus* and *Ansfringa*. Etymologically, her father’s name can – taking the Romance linguistic development into account – be related to the Germanic name *\*Hrōþiwīgaz*, signifying in a way not inappropriate to a traditional Germanic name ‘fame’ (*\*hrōþaz* masc.) and ‘warrior’ (*\*wīgaz* masc.). Unsurprisingly, his two sons were given the names *Frotbertus* and *Frotlandus* and a further daughter was called *Frotberta*. The first element of the father’s name is thus passed on to the next generation in accordance with Germanic naming tradition. As already mentioned, *Anastasia*’s mother bore the name *Ansfringa*. The first element of her name can readily be associated with the Germanic clan of heroes and gods of the *Anses* (Proto-Germanic *\*ansuz* masc.) or, in its Nordic form, *Æsir*. The second element of her name is not so easy to attribute, but to judge by its phonetic structure at least it sounds Germanic. A further daughter of *Frotueus* and *Ansfringa* was called *Ansberta*. The first element of her name derives from her mother. That three of the five children have the element *-bertus* or *-berta*, deriving from Proto-Germanic *\*berhtaz* ‘dazzling’ in their names seems to confirm a suspicion of the Romance scholar Dieter Kremer that there was a tendency to grasp the Germanic second elements of names in Romance-speaking population groups as suffixes to names (2008: 348). The fact that in each case complete first elements of names, here *Frot-* and *Ans-* respectively, were handed down to the following generation and not just the first sound in a syllable, after the fashion of Germanic alliteration, which was a traditional method of varying names, speaks in favour of this supposition. The name of *Anastasia* fits well into this pattern. It is illuminating to note that the name *Anstasia* is likewise recorded (in Béconcelles, the present-day Orgerus, in the Ile de France; Hägermann 1993: 201) in the polyptych of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. It can be assumed that *Anstasia* was more in accordance with contemporaneous pronunciation, and the name – much to the alarm of Hellenists – can be syllabified as *An(a)s-* and *-tasia*, thereby having a name that fits in well to the system of names prevalent in northern France at the time.

Yet since it can scarcely be presumed, if at all, that the meanings of Greek names were readily comprehended after the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, semantics can no longer explain the motives behind giving children names of Greek origin. One possible explanation could be that a certain stock of Greek personal names in use in Christian families led in time to the assumption that they were good, Christian names that could continue to be used.

Throughout the whole period under investigation, we find Greek names first and foremost among the clergy and the inhabitants of monasteries, although we have no means of discovering whether these were the names given at birth or the names given on entry into a monastery or a scholastic establishment. However, their usage among the clergy reinforces the effect that such names were considered to be particularly Christian.

In view of the increasing use of Germanic names as Frankish rule spread from north to south, the use of Romance personal names, including those of Greek etymology, began to wane, those of Greek origin initially more strongly than those of Latin origin (Descombes 1985: 174–177). What developed was a creative and inventive employment of the various traditions of name-giving, which is manifested in the use of so-called hybrid names. Some of these hybrid names, as the

polyptych of Saint-Germain-des-Prés documents, were formed using elements of originally Greek names: *Christehildis* (Hägermann 1993: 150), *Cristengaudus* (Hägermann 1993: 52) etc., but such formations remained the exception.

Later, as a result of re-naming and the veneration of the saints, a small selection of personal names of Greek origin succeeded in firmly establishing itself in the inventory of French or Occitanian personal names. Sole mention may be made here of the first bishop of Paris and martyr *Dionysius*, in French *Denis*, who lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and whose name is not to be found within our period of investigation.

To summarize: A considerable number of personal names of Greek etymology continued to be in use after late Graeco-Latin era in Merovingian and Carolingian Gaul. After a rapid decline in use at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, these names continued to fall into disuse, initially more rapidly than Latin-based names, although they never entirely disappeared.

For the most part, though not entirely, their use is restricted to the clergy, and it is astonishing that we find later a whole series of these names in early Carolingian polyptychs. Since the veneration of the saints was not so advanced as to serve as a motive for giving children such names, our attention must be focussed on traditions of thought. A small number of names of Greek etymology were deemed to be good, Christian names and therefore remained in use. It is appropriate that these names of Greek etymology with Christian connotations occur relatively frequently within a family together with other names inspired by Christian sentiment, such as biblical names.

In view of the fact that the peasant classes in the Paris basin recorded in the polyptychs were far more strongly influenced by the Germanic practice of name-giving than elsewhere, yet at the same time vary and inherit them according to a Romance linguistic practice in the period of transition from Vulgar Latin to Old French, it comes as no surprise that Greek names also became involved in this process of nomenclatural variation. It is one of the ironies of the history of name-giving that Greek personal names, which in part owe their existence to Indo-European patterns of name formation, were divided into their component parts and re-combined, albeit following a Germanic pattern, early Romance morphological structures and without being semantically understood. Yet this, just as the neologistic combinations containing elements of names of Latin and Germanic etymology, remained but an episode: the only names of Greek origin to have a chance of survival into and beyond the Carolingian era were those of saints venerated in the Middle Ages.

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