

## Two Examples of Intercultural Names in Fourth Century Gaul

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Both examples studied here are taken from the context of the late antique author, grammarian, and statesman Ausonius of Bordeaux. As Altay Coşkun and I could show in a previous study ('Cover Names' and Nomenclature in Late Roman Gaul. The Evidence of the Bordelaise Poet Ausonius', published online at the site of Linacre College, Oxford: <http://www.linacre.ox.ac.uk/research/prosop/oks.stm>), it is among the aristocratic families of fourth century Gaul that we have the most convincing evidence of intercultural onomastic traditions. However, we need not rely on onomastic material alone, but we have also prosopographical data and even literary testimonies at our disposal. All these sources taken together give a clear hint at the intertwining of native Gaulish and imperial Roman naming practices. The two examples given below are typical examples of the continuity of native traditions (as clearly in case no. 1) and of a double 'legibility' of names favoured by members of the leading classes of the Gaulish society in the fourth century (as in case no. 2).

### 1. The Name *Bissula*

A person of this name is known from Ausonius only. In a series of poems, a Suebian girl is described who was taken prisoner in one of Valentinian I's campaigns (perhaps in 369). The girl was given to Ausonius, who released her immediately and accommodated her as *alumna* in his house. The poems devoted to her are reminiscent of the *Carmina Priapea*, songs to the ithyphallic garden god. The *Priapea* and an introductory letter to Ausonius's friend, Axius Paulus, reveal sexually explicit "Priapian mysteries" celebrated by Ausonius and his very young intimate. On this context, see further the studies by Paul Dräger ('Bissula – Eliza – Lolita: Priap als Sprachlehrer', *Göttinger Forum für Altertumswissenschaft* 4 [2001]: 187-219; esp. p. 203-205 [<http://www.gfa.d-r.de/4-01/draeger.pdf>, MS p. 17-19], and *Kurtrierisches Jahrbuch* 41 [2001]: 73–107 with full bibliographical references.

Due to her Suebian origin, the name *Bissula* has long been explained as Old Germanic (cf. Old High German *Biso*, *Piso* etc.), but recent research is more reserved in this regard. Hermann Reichert (*LAGN* 142) is hesitant as to a Germanic origin ("möglicherweise Germanisch"), and similar names as *Bisae* (gen.) and *Bisinus* are not taken to be undisputedly Germanic either. A more convincing alternative is a derivation from

Gaulish (Celtic) *\*biss-* ‘finger, cone, twig’, with a hypocoristic ending *-ula*. Gaulish shows different stem formations *bisso-*, *bissu-*, and *bissi-* (DLG 76), cf. also Welsh *bys*, Old Cornish *bis*, *bes*, Breton *biz*, (all:) ‘finger’ and *bizou*, whence French *bijou*, ‘finger ring’, Middle Irish *biss ega* ‘icicle’, cf. further Old Norse *kvistr* ‘little twig’, from Indo-European *\*g<sup>w</sup>is-ti-* (LEIA B–53, s.v. *\*biss*). The meaning of the name may be taken literally, ‘little finger’, referring to the slim figure of the teenage girl, or ‘cone’ may be taken as an obscene reference in the Priapian context.

One of the poems (*carmen* 4) suggests that Ausonius himself gave the name *Bissula* to her, which is beyond the comprehension of a non-Gaul. Thus it could be termed (*nomen*) *rusticulum* ‘a bit rustic (name)’ and *horridulum non solitis* ‘a bit weird for those not accustomed to it’, but *venustum domino* ‘beautiful for her master’. In a broader context, we know of short inscriptions in Gaulish and Latin from the area of Augustodunum (Autun, see Wolfgang Meid, *Gaulish Inscriptions*, Budapest 1992: 52–54; LG 122–125). They were incised on spindle whorls, and address young women in an erotic or obscene manner. Although it is not at all clear what their exact function was, they show ‘Priapian’ attitudes in a native Gaulish context. Ausonius was most likely aware of these connections.

## 2. The Name *Anthedius* or *Anthidius*

Both anthroponyms are not recorded in Ausonius, but they have a similar background. *Anthedius* is the name of a fifth century poet from Vesunnici (Périgueux) in Gaul, mentioned by Sidonius Apollinaris (ep. 8.11.2; *carm.* 9.312.22; *praef.* 2). Valerius *Anthidius* was *vicarius urbis Romae* in 380/81 (Cod.Theod. 9.38.6; CIL 6.1774; 6.3865 = 31945), and maybe a protégé of Ausonius or Syagrius (Altay Coşkun, *Die gens Ausoniana an der Macht. Untersuchungen zu Decimius Magnus Ausonius und seiner Familie*, Oxford 2002: 209 n. 72b). As names of this sort are not recorded among Greek and Roman personal names, it is likely to be an intercultural name, although we do not know whether the *vicarius* had a respective background.

Phonetically, the name is similar to a few beginning with *Anted-*, *Anteθ-*, e.g. *Anted/θ-rigus* (KGPN 131; cf. 278) which is explained by K.H. Schmidt as an abbreviation of *\*Ande-teθθi-rix*; ‘king of (= with abundant) internal heat’; *teθθi-* ‘heat’ (DLG 248 f) is an abstract formation, from Indo-European *\*teps-ti-* (cf. Old Irish *tess* < *\*teps-tu-*). Less similar names include *Ad-tettius*, *Atessas*, and non-related *Aθθed-* etc. For semantic reasons, a composition with the privative prefix *an-* (Indo-European *\*n̥-*) instead of *ande-* ‘within’ seems to be ruled out. The existence of the homophonous word *andedío-* ‘inférieur’ (DLG 40) in the Chamalières inscription has recently been

doubted by Patrizia de Bernardo Stempel (*Historische Sprachwissenschaft* 114 [2001]: 164–170), but the form is quite possible and may have existed in Gaulish, whether in Chamalières or not (< Indo-European \**ndhe-d-jo-*, opposed to *uxsedio-* ‘supérieur’ < \**upsi-d-jo-*, M. Lejeune, *Études Celtiques* 22 [1985], 86 f); so, the name could possibly have a relation to the common *dubno-* names (meaning ‘dark; underworld’).

On the other hand, *Anthidius* could be a translated name. As is well known, Greek sounding names were much in favour among the late Roman Gallic aristocracy (cf. Aeonina, Cataphronius, Dryadia, Melania). So one could think of a reminiscence to ênyow ‘flower’ (cf. Sanskrit *andhas-*; *IEW* 40 f.; on the possible verb \**h<sub>2</sub>endh-* ‘blühen, sprießen’, *LIV* 266). PNs with this significance seem indeed attested in Gaulish, as *Blotu-rigi* (dative, *KGPN* 151) ‘flower or grain/ flour king’ or ‘rich in flowers or grain/flour’, more securely in place names: *Blato-magos* ‘flower or grain field’ (i.e. Blond, Haute-Vienne) or \**Blātināko-* ‘flowery or grain growing (place)’, (today Blénod, a. 836 *Bladenaco*). The basic lemma is *blāto-* ‘flower’ (*DLG* 67, cf. Welsh *blawd* ‘bloom’, *blodyn* ‘flower’, Old Irish *bláth* < \**blātu-* ‘flower’, perhaps French *blé* ‘grain’ if this is not of Old Franconian origin; from Indo-European \**bh<sub>1</sub>h<sub>3</sub>-tó-*, cf. *IEW* 122) or it is *blāto-* ‘flour’, instead \**mlāto-* (cf. Welsh *blawd* ‘flour’, from Indo-European \**m<sub>1</sub>h<sub>2</sub>-tó-* ‘ground’, cf. \**melh<sub>2</sub>-* ‘zerreiben, mahlen’ *IEW* 716 f; *LIV* 432 f, *contra* Peter Schrijver, *Studies in British Celtic Historical Phonology*, Amsterdam/ Atlanta GA 1995: 179).

## Abbreviations

DLG = X. Delamarre: *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*, Paris <sup>2</sup>2003.

IEW = J. Pokorny: *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vol., Bern 1959–1969.

KGPN = K.H. Schmidt: ‘Die Komposition in gallischen Personennamen’. *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 26, Tübingen 1957: 33-301 (also published separately).

LAGN = H. Reichert: *Thesaurus Palaeogermanicus I/1: Lexikon der altgermanischen Namen*, Text. Vienna 1987.

LEIA = J. Vendryes: *Lexique étymologique de l’irlandais ancien*. 7 vols. Dublin & Paris 1959–.

LG = P.-Y. Lambert, *La langue gauloise. description linguistique, commentaire d’inscriptions choisies*, Paris 1994 (later eds.: 1995; 1997; 2003).

LIV = H. Rix & M. Kümmel: *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben*, Wiesbaden <sup>2</sup>2001.