

Some Notes on a Swiss Bicultural Onomasticon

PETER N. RICHARDSON

THE SWISS CANTON OF GRAUBÜNDEN (Grisons) is bounded by Austria on the north and east, Italy on the south, and the remainder of the Swiss Federation on the west. It is the largest canton, and its situation in the rugged eastern Swiss Alps makes it the most sparsely populated one as well. Graubünden is also the only officially trilingual canton: approximately 57 percent of the population declare German as their first language; Romansh, or Rhaeto-Romansh, is the first language of 26 percent, and Italian is the mother tongue of 16 percent of the population.¹

The present proportions of this mixture reflect the astounding cultural fluctuations which have taken place here since before the beginning of the Christian era. Etruscans and Celts laid the foundation of the Roman province of Raetia, which in turn was eventually conquered and settled by Germanic peoples from the north and west. Thus when Raetia was officially integrated into the Frankish kingdom in 806, the new German-speaking nobility encountered a Romance patois which was undoubtedly still heavily laced with Gallicisms. Since then it has been the task of Romansh, the descendant of this patois, to survive the ever-increasing pressure of Germanization.

Place-name evidence, painstakingly collected and evaluated by such eminent scholars as J. U. Hubschmied, M. Szadowsky, P. Zinsli, R. v. Planta, and A. Schorta, reveals most of what we know about cultural layering in Graubünden during the Middle Ages. Place-names do not, however, provide insight into the problem of cultural mixture at the ultimate locus of contact, the individual. With this hypothesis I investigated church records, tax lists, and community archives in selected villages in the canton for the period 1200–1700 in order to see what personal names might reveal about cultural contact at the most intimate level. My collection of over 20,000 names from these sources throws new light on important aspects of the early settlement history of Graubünden.²

¹ Eidgenössische Volkszählung 1. Dez. 1960. XI: Kanton Graubünden. Bern, 1964, p. 53.

² Cf. Peter N. Richardson, "German-Romance Contact: Name-giving in Walser Settlements" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Dep't of Germanic Languages, Yale University, 1970).

In addition, this investigation reveals a most intriguing variety of names used during these five centuries, as well as a number of unusual names which have evolved in such a way that their relationship to their parent forms is obscure at best. Not only Germanic names, but also those of Christian-Romance origin were subject to extreme modification by German and Romance speakers alike. I submit here a brief etymological sketch of some common names and their unusual derivatives and offer then a partial list of forms whose origin is unclear.

Name variation and duplication play havoc with any attempt to classify statistically the onomasticon of a community. We are dealing in these particular records with a time in Europe when family names were not yet commonly used and when given names alone were often made to bear the burden of everyday identification. According to the whim of the public officials who recorded births, marriages, land transactions, and deaths, a man whom we might call *Johannes* could appear as *Jon*, *Jan*, *Johann*, *Johannes*, *Hannes*, *Hans*, *Hanneli*, *Hansi*, *Hansli*, *Hensli*, or *Henni*. If both father and son are named *Hans*, the father frequently becomes *Grosshans* and the son *Kleinhans* or *Knabenhans*, remaining so even after the father's death.³

In the Davos *Spendbuch* (p. 24) *Hansely* Bûl and *Hans* Bûl are both mentioned, but the context is such that they are clearly not the same person. If they were not named together, but on different pages, they would seem to be identical and could be counted only once. A similar case involves Gallus Bassler, who owns land which "stost abwert an *Bertschy* Plangis gût und usswert an *Bertsch* Blangen gût" (p. 49). It is apparent that these last two are not one and the same person, although this would have to be assumed if they appeared in separate entries. The utmost caution is required in these instances, especially when it is possible that brothers bear the same name as in an earlier Davos listing of "*Hânsli* Brâder und *Hanns* sin brûder."⁴

Johannes, by far the most popular men's name in all communities for this period, is indicative of the contortions to which names were subjected. One of the most apparent characteristics of the Romansh onomasticon

³ This method of distinguishing bearers of the same name is not confined to German-speaking areas. Two men from the Romansh Lugnez valley are mentioned together on page four of the *Jahrzeitbuch* from Pleif in 1499 as Gion *Pitschen* and Gion *grond'st*, the Romansh equivalents of *Kleinhans* and *Grosshans*. *Pitschen* "small" is a common family name in the (German) Davos *Spendbuch* of 1562, where the name *Gross Hanss Pitschen* shows that the Romansh word could no longer be understood literally, but must be seen as a family name.

⁴ Fritz Jecklin and Giachen Caspar Muoth, "Aufzeichnungen über Verwaltung der VIII Gerichte aus der Zeit der Grafen v. Montfort", *Jahresberichte der historisch-antiquarischen Gesellschaft von Graubünden*, XXXV (1905), p. 8.

is the frequent appearance of the diminutive suffixes *-at/-et/-ot/-ut*⁵: *Paudett* (< *Paul*), *Klawot* (< *Claus*), *Thomaschutt* (< *Thomas*), *Pedrut* (< *Peter*). Accordingly, *Johannes* became assuffixed to *Janutt*/*Genatt*/*Genott*. From this derivative there then appeared a new nickname, *Nutt*/*Nott*, which retained only the *-n-* of the parent form. And finally a feminine equivalent, *Nuta*/*Nutina*, was created, representing the fifth stage of transformation (*Johann* > *Jan* > *Janutt* > *Nutt* > *Nutina*).

But were these derivatives not still felt to be associated with *Johannes*? A baptism record from Romansh-speaking Salouf in 1695 gives a clue, for here we find “*Otto seu vulg Nutt*” – a clever, but false, etymology by the local priest who was loath to enter nicknames in church records. Lest we accuse him wrongly, however, let us consider whether the apparent *Otto*/*Nutt* confusion is really a mistake. It is clear from the priest’s entry that the correct etymological relationship between *Nutt* and *Johannes* was not understood. Yet a cardinal rule of informant work is that a word means what its speakers think it means; this may justifiably be extended to include names, which “mean” what the name-givers intend. On the basis of this assumption the priest made no mistake, but only if the parents of young *Nutt* agreed with the priest that the nickname came from *Otto* and not from *Johannes*. This is now impossible to determine, of course, but positive evidence is contained in the excellent Oberländer Romansh-German dictionary published by the Ligia Romontscha (R. Vieli and A. Decurtins, *Vocabulari romontsch sursilvan-tudestg*, Chur, 1962), which reports that *Nut* is the Oberländer Romansh equivalent of German *Otto*. Thus an etymological myth seems to have been perpetuated as a popular fact; but people, and not etymological dictionaries, are the immediate sources of name-giving, and this fact may well have been valid already in 1695.

The priest’s helpful note introduces a further complication: *Gian(n)et*, *Janet*, and *Not* all appear in Salouf, as do *Otto* (twice) and *Othones* (once). In spite of the popular equation of *Nutt* with *Otto*, not all of these names belong together etymologically; but should the other occurrences of *Otto*/*Othones* be assumed to be *Nutt* even if no connection is made in the church register? Does the one connection justify grouping all *Ottos* (here, luckily, there are only three) with *Johannes*?

A similar case is found in the Davos baptism register (no. 73a), where a 1608 list of baptisms from 1559 to 1596 records “*Nicodemus oder Nicco*” four times and “*Nicolaus oder Claus*” 23 times. *Nicco* (which also appears as *Nigg*) can be derived from *Nicolaus* as well as from *Nicodemus*, and

⁵ Cf. Giachen Caspar Muoth, *Über bündnerische Geschlechtsnamen und ihre Verwertung für die Bündnergeschichte*. I: Vornamen und Taufnamen als Geschlechtsnamen. Chur, 1892, p. 45f.

the case is strong for the former: *Nicodemus* is not attested in this form among any of the 20,000-odd names examined in my study. *Nicolaus*, on the other hand, is quite common. This is one case in which the minister's correction must be viewed with a measure of suspicion, since it is highly doubtful that anyone but the minister associated *Nicco* with *Nicodemus*, a form probably unknown to the layman.⁶

Ulrich has fascinating variants as well, and again they were produced by both German and Romansh speakers. The most common derivative of Gmc **ōþal-rīk* in late Medieval texts is *Ulrich*, and from this form are derived *U(o)rich* (Obersaxen 1637) and the ever-popular *U(o)li*. In Romansh-speaking areas it can become *Uldalric* and then *Uldaric* (Siat 1671 and 1683), which is syncopated in both Romansh and German areas to *Uldrich* (Davos 1679). (The *-d-* in *Uldrich* may also simply be a svarabhakti consonant easily generated between *-l-* and *-r-*.) A somewhat pietistic touch is added to the name when Gmc **ōþal-* "riches, treasure" becomes *Huld* "grace" in the imaginative forms *Huldenricus* (Splügen-Medels-Sufers 1642 and passim) and *Huldrich* (Langwies 1696 and 1698). The loss of the first syllable (under Romance stress of the second) produces *Durig* as well as the Latinized *Doricus* in Salouf (1653); *-rig* is treated in two ways as the *-g* is palatalized and lost in *Duri* (cf. the historian Duri Campell) and spirantized in *Turrich* (Tavetsch 1450), *Durich* (Bravuogn 1695), and *Durisch* (Siat 1691). By the time *Risch* develops (mainly in the entire Prättigau in both pre- and post-Reformation sources), any popular association of the nickname with its ancestor **ōþal-rīk* is purely coincidental. This treatment of German names by Romance speakers was noticed in 1560 by Aegidius (Gilg) Tschudi⁷:

Item der tütsch nām Rûdprecht / so von
tütschen abkomt / ob ein Italianer den zû-
namsen gefragt / wurd er vō anerbörner art
Robert nāmsen / dannenhar habend sy Robertus
daruss gemacht / dān sy kōnnend nit Rûdprecht
nemēn mit anderer stī̄m. Dessglych vss Adel-
brecht Albertus / Sigbrecht Simpertus / Wild-
brecht Philibertus v̄n dero noch vil / die wir
wissend vss tütschen nāmen entsprungē.

⁶ In 1679 "Otthonia vulg Notegna" appears in Salouf, presenting the same difficulty as did "Otto seu vulg Nutt" in 1695. *Notegna* is a palatalized variant of *Nutina*, which is simply the feminine of *Nutt* < *Johann-utt*. This note introduces the possibility that other occurrences of *Ott(h)onia* are "corrected" forms of *Nut(t)ina*.

⁷ *Grundtliche und warhafft beschreibung der uralten Alpischen Rhetie / sampt dem Tract der anderen Alp gebirgen und Schweitzerlands: nach Plinij / Ptolemei / Strabonis / auch an deren welt und gschichtschrybern warer anzeigung ...* Basel, 1538, p. 116.

More complicated is the fate of *Elisabeth*. (*E*)*lis(a)**beth(a)* is common to all German and Romansh communities, and *Elsa*/*-i* is nearly as popular. One name characteristic of Romance regions is *Jeulsha* (Flem and Trin)/*Jelscha* (Bravuogn)/*Jelza* (Bever); *Eulscha*/*Euscha* appears in Salouf and seems to have been assuixed to *Schetta* in Bravuogn. *Jeltscha* is attested in Thusis in 1651.⁸ The *Rätisches Namenbuch*⁹ assigns *Eulscha* (and, therefore, these other forms as well) to *Elisabeth*, but other women's names obscure this association to such a degree that other sources for the shortened form might profitably be considered. The following men's names appear in Romansh areas with their abbreviated forms: *Julius* (*Jüli*, *Jilli*), *Aegidius* (*Gilg*, *Gellj*), *Georgius* (*Gieri*, *Jiere*, *Jeri*, *Jöri*), *Jeremias* (*Jeri*, *Jöri*), and *Gregorius* (*Göri*, *Gory*). Feminine forms of two of these names (*Julia*/*Jülia* and *Gilgia*) are attested in Flem, Glion, and Siat; or do these forms represent more than two names? Examples of *-r*/*-l* exchange in Romansh areas are commonplace: *Margreta* > *Malgiaretta*, *Wilhelm* > *Guglerm*/*Goulerm*, and so on. Thus for *Eulscha* an entire name complex of *GVl*/*GVr*-/*JVl*/*JVr*- (V = vowel) is open to consideration and could even include *Urschla*/*Oschla* (< *Ursula*).¹⁰ It would be surprising if *Eulscha* and its other forms were not in part inspired by this wide-ranging onomastic association.

Possible short forms of *Christina*/*Stina* are equally perplexing. *Tschina* is common in the Prättigau throughout the 1600's, and a connection with *Christina* is suggested by analogy to a nickname of *Christian* which is still popular today: *Hitsch*. The combination *Christian*/*Hitsch* could conceivably have produced *Christina*/*(Hi)**Tschina*. Other names both confuse and clarify the problem. *Otschina* in Langwies (1684) and *Eutscha* in Bravuogn (1586-1625) suggest that some origin other than *Christina* might be considered; but what?

Tschina occurs commonly with *Schina* in the Prättigau, yet *Schina* seems to be inseparably connected with *Sina*, which is found throughout the canton. *Sina* is in turn a nickname for *Ursina*, which is extremely common in Samedan from 1639 to 1700; or is *Sina* short for *Rosina*/*Rosa*, attested in Nufenen, Glion, and the Prättigau? Both are possible, but the latter may be more plausible in view of the 1608 entry in the Davos baptism register which records "Eüphrosina oder Sina" 12 times between 1559 and 1596.

If the *Sina*/*Schina* relationship seems to be clear, *Tschina*/*Otschina*/*Eutscha*, and the possible derivation from *Christina*/*Stina*, are still very

⁸ Ernst Haffter, "Zwei Schnitzlisten der Nachbarschaft Tartar aus den Jahren 1651 und 1671", *Bündnerisches Monatsblatt* (1899), p. 225.

⁹ Andrea Schorta, *Rätisches Namenbuch*. Vol. II. Bern, 1964, p. 552.

¹⁰ Cf. *Rätisches Namenbuch* II, 603.

much a mystery. And surely we dare not associate *Eutscha* with the *Elisabeth* derivatives *Euscha* and *Jeltscha* – or do we?

As we have seen, explanatory notes by the priest or clerk recording names can be most helpful. In Siat in 1665–66 we find “Plasch (Plasius),” “Jüli (Julius),” and so on. Obersaxen records include “Elsi vel Elisabetha” in 1691 and the Davos books record “Gorias (scripsit pro Gregorius)” in 1688; in Seewis (1697) “Thö-” is stricken and changed to “Anthoni.” An apparent popular etymology is by chance correct in the Greek name *Dorothea* in Splügen-Medels-Sufers (1661): “Dorothea i.e. Donū Dei vel Donata à Deo.” “Latiné Elisabeta” is written in Roman letters under “Elssbedt,” which appears in German script in the Rheinwald in 1658. These entries are valuable, for they shed light on aspects of name-giving which would otherwise have to go unnoticed. From the Oberland baptism note in 1634 “nomine Theophilum aut Duff nostro idomate”¹¹ the etymology of *Duff* < *Theophil* (not *David*) seems to be clear.¹²

But our encounter with “Otto seu vulg Nutt” above reminds us that we must proceed with caution. This is especially true when an onomastic problem extends across cultural or linguistic borders: in Romansh areas *Gugliam* is a common form of *Wilhelm*. Like *Guigs* (< Gmc **wig-*), it shows the Romance treatment of Germanic **w-* as in Old High German *werra*: Romansh *guerra*, Gothic *wida*: Romansh *guida*, etc. *Wüdencz*, in the Romansh-speaking Unterengadin, is an attempt to restore *Gaudentius* to a more “correct” – but nonexistent – German form by a scribe aware of the Romance *w-/g-* correspondence. *Heinreich* and *Ulreich* are other Unterengadin examples of overcorrection, in which both members of the Middle High German doublet *-rich/-rîch* are treated as accented forms and diphthongized to *-reich* according to the written (but not spoken) language.

Many problems remain to be solved. The *Historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (IV, 410) attributes the family name *Joos* (and thus the first name *Jos(t)* as well) to the “Walser saint” Theodor, commonly called Joder. In doing so it overlooks the more obvious derivation from Jodocus or Joseph. The former is found in both Walser (German) and Romance areas: “Jodochus gen. [genannt] Jost Bertsch aus Avers” in 1580¹³ and “Judocus de Vettano” in the Unterengadin (1353 or 1390); the latter appears commonly in the German-speaking Rhine Valley.

¹¹ Iso Müller, “Die sprachlichen Verhältnisse im Vorderrheintal im Zeitalter des Baarocks,” *Bündnerisches Monatsblatt* (1960), p. 302.

¹² Cf. also Muoth, *ibid.* p. 40, note 3.

¹³ Nicolaus von Salis-Soglio, *Regesten der im Archiv des Geschlechts-Verbandes derer von Salis befindlichen Pergamenturkunden*. Sigmaringen, 1898, p. 97.

Hercli, found in the Romansh-speaking Oberland, could be either *Hercules* or *Hartwig/Hartmann/Hart-li* with the common Romansh shift of *-tl-* to *-cl-*.¹⁴

While some reasonable etymologies may be offered for many problematic forms, there are still dozens of names which await identification. A list of problems would have to include the men's names

Algoss	Fleize	Pelay
Biett	Jarde	Schkein
Dade	Mes	Wellukg
Dalrigallen	Nön	

and the women's names

Acola	Resa
Ensa	Wirat.
Rebotscha	

As unusual as these names might appear to us, we should remember that their bearers surely never suffered what Ernst Pulgram called "the opprobrium of namelessness,"¹⁵ and it may simply be a consequence of our modern penchant for categorization and definition that the forms are presented here as puzzles awaiting solution by any and all comers.

Yale University

¹⁴ Cf. Lat *tabulatum* + *-aceu* > *Clavadetsch*, a family name in the Prättigau (*Rätisches Namenbuch* II, 336), or the nickname *Greicli* for *Greitli* (< Margareta). Hercules von Salis (1503–1578) is often recorded as either *Hercli* or *Hertli*.

¹⁵ Ernst Pulgram, "Theory of Names", *Beiträge zur Namenforschung*, V (1954), p. 165 note 59.

ANS ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the American Name Society will be held on December 28–29 in New York in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association. Further details will be announced in the fall.