

Greek and Germanic Settlements in Eastern Languedoc: New Evidence from a Place Name Survey.

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Any comprehensive place name survey is likely not only to substantiate and supply further detail regarding patterns of settlement whose existence has long been known, but also to identify population movements and limited groups of settlements that have hitherto been unsuspected. Such is certainly the case of the survey I have carried out for the *département* of Hérault in southern France – more specifically, in the eastern part of the province of Languedoc, generally styled “Languedoc méditerranéen” or “bas Languedoc”. The following pages attempt a brief synthesis of evidence, culled from my larger study¹, concerning two of the lesser-known cultural and ethnic influences upon this region: Greek and Germanic elements, some previously detected and others newly discovered, will be reviewed in turn.

Many generations of historians have recognized that the city of *Agde*, situated at the mouth of the river Hérault, was a link in the chain of Greek colonies and trading posts that extended along the western Mediterranean coast. Submarine archaeology has, in recent years, amply confirmed the references in Strabo, Pomponius Mela and Ptolomy; and a C.N.R.S. team under the leadership of Madame Monique Clavel-Lévêque has revealed impressive evidence of a system of land-division in this area which is patently of Greek origin². Stephen of Byzantium’s explanation of the name by the phrase ἀγαθὴ τύχη “good fortune” should, perhaps, be regarded with some caution: both ancient and medieval references leave room for interpreting the second element as a mundane πόλις “city” no less readily than by the more evocative τύχη “fortune”. As we shall see, this Hellenic outpost almost

¹This volume entitled *Les Noms de lieux du département de l’Hérault; nouveau dictionnaire topographique et étymologique*, is expected to be available in 1982 or early in 1983. The reader is referred to it for the sources of early forms which appear in the present article.

²I hereby express my sincere thanks to Mme Clavel-Lévêque for making the unpublished results of this research available to me.

certainly gave rise to a number of secondary establishments within a radius of some 70 km.

Relatively close to the source of the same river Hérault stands the little town of *Ganges*, which has lost an initial vowel and is repeatedly cited in medieval sources in the non-aphaeresized form *Agantico*. Dauzat and Rostaing proposed³ to explain this name as a formation based on the latinized Greek plant name ἄκανθος — *acanthus*. While I am aware of no other examples of the acanthus in toponymy, this theory is not entirely improbable: the plant in question (*a. mollis*), an introduced species, does occur quite widely in the neighbourhood of Ganges, and some authorities attribute medicinal value to it. However, the adjective ἀκανθικός is itself an attested and normally-derived element of the Greek lexicon, being used notably by Theophrastus in his *Historia plantarum* with the meaning ‘‘spiny, thorny’’⁴ quite clearly derived directly from ἄκανθα ‘‘thorn’’. The appropriateness of such a term is immediately apparent to anyone familiar with the vegetation of the Languedoc hill country, where a wide variety of spiny plants are abundant. Not surprisingly, we find the Latin equivalent of ἀκανθικός — *spinosu(m)*, *-a(m)* — well represented in the toponymy of the region, in particular by *Espinouse*, originally the name of a small parish in the *commune* of Cambon-et-Salvergues and now well known as that of a large massif extending south and east of this location.

In the hills south east of Ganges, the term *Plage* ([pladžɛ] in its Occitan form) occurs twice – at distances of about 5 and 10 km. from the town – in sites which preclude any possibility of interpretation by the present-day general meaning ‘‘beach, shoreline’’; instead, they indicate the sense ‘‘hill-side’’ which the Latin *plagia* inherited from its Greek antecedent but which has been lost in most of the reflexes found in the modern Romance languages. As I have already suggested in a note in *Revue des Langues Romanes*⁵, there is reason to believe that Languedoc was influential in propagating this term in the western Mediterranean; it seems reasonably safe to conclude that, like Ganges, these two examples of *Plage* directly reflect an element of the Greek lexicon rather than a latinized descendent.

When we turn to place names derived from personal names, we find that the eastern part of the *département* under consideration, between the rivers Hérault and Vidourle, affords four examples with counterparts in Greek anthroponymy. (Here, however, a word of caution is necessary: I. Kajanto

³*Dictionnaire des noms de lieux de France*, Paris: Larousse, 1963.

⁴H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edition, Oxford: Clarendon, 1968.

⁵‘‘Sur la plage à 240 mètres d’altitude: réflexions sur les voyages d’un mot’’, *Revue des Langues Romanes* LXXXIII: 1(1978), pp. 449–454.

has shown⁶ that Roman nomenclature itself incorporated numerous Hellenic elements, and it is therefore possible that these four place names belong with about two hundred others which, in this one *département*, I have been able to identify as names of Gallo-Roman *fundi* or agricultural estates.) Firstly, the medieval parish of *Sogrado*, first mentioned in 799⁷ and now represented by the farm of *Saugras* in the *commune* of Argelliers, corresponds to the widespread personal name Socrates (Σωκράτης). Then, closer to the coast, in the present-day *communes* of Cournonsec and Cournonterral, the adjoining parishes of St Martin and St Julien are generally identified in medieval sources by the expression *de Scaffaco*⁸. This last term belongs to the pattern of Gallo-Roman *fundus* names with the Celtic suffix *-acu* (retained in provincial Latin with this usage), but the root can – for phonetic reasons – hardly be anything other than the Greek personal name Σκάφιας. Rather less assuredly, the neighbouring village of *St-Georges-d'Orques* probably owes its second element to the feminine personal name Δορκάς: the rather sparse medieval references to this place name⁹ suggest that the *d* is not originally a preposition but is the deglutinated initial consonant of the final element. Finally, three of the earliest references¹⁰ to the village of *Beaulieu* give it an earlier name *Aissadanicis*: here, the suffix is readily recognizable as one that is widespread in the Gallo-Roman toponymy of the region; although the root could possibly be an unattested Latin **Ascatus*, a metathesized version of the Greek name Ἄστακος – with a pre-suffixal *-i-* added to conform to the pattern of most Latin *nomina* – appears more probable.

The hypothesis of a Greek origin in this last case is supported by the name of the small coastal river whose upper course forms part of the boundary of this same present-day *commune* of Beaulieu – the *Bérange*. While the most common medieval spelling of this name is *Besangue*, other variants unambiguously point to a pronunciation [bezãdže], identical with that of modern times except for the substitution *-s- > -r-* which corresponds to a pattern of rhotacism widespread in the region. More significantly, a reference of 1236 gives the spelling *fluvium Besantici*, which almost certainly provides an accurate reflection of the original suffix which, by syncope, gave rise to the

⁶In particular, see I. Kajanto, *Onomastic Studies in the Early Christian Inscriptions of Rome and Carthage* (Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae, II: 1), Helsinki – Helsingfors, 1963.

⁷*Loco qui dicitur Osogrado* (var.: *Assogrado*), 799; *loco qui dicitur Sogrado*, *Sogradus*, 12th C. (?); *de Sugras*, 1154; *de Solgras*, 1191; *Sogranant*, 1273.

⁸*Ecclesiam S. Martini de Scaffaco*, 1109; *ecclesiam S. Juliani d'Escalfiac*, 1122–34, etc. Last attestation: *de Stafiac*, end of 14th C.

⁹*S. Georgium d'Orcas*, 1157; *ecclesiam S. Georgii de Dorcas*, 1165–7.

¹⁰*Villam de Aissadaneguez*, 1194; *de Ayssadanicis, id est de Bello Loco*, 12th C. (?); *ecclesie S. Petri de Aissadanicis*, 1211.

affricate in the final syllable. One readily discerns in this, with the suffix -ικος already noted in ἀγαντικός > *Ganges*, a derivative of Βυξάντιον. The importance of Byzantium in the development of Mediterranean trade is too well known to require further demonstration; that this trade was active in the vicinity of the Bérange has been shown by excavations at the small port of Lattes¹¹, a few kilometres west of its estuary.

The last of the Greek elements in the toponymy of this *département* is found in the valley of the Hérault itself, about midway between Agde and Ganges. First recorded in the phrase *molendinis de Carabotas* dating from 1264, *Carabotes* is now the name of a *château* in the *commune* of Gignac and a field-name on the opposite bank. Local tradition at Gignac explains *carabota* as a “small boat for crossing the river”. With the meaning “light ship”, the Greek κάραβος was adopted by popular Latin and gave a considerable number of reflexes in various parts of the Romance-speaking world¹². For other parts of southern France, notably Gascony, Mistral (*Lou Tresor dou Felibrige*) and Alibert (*Dictionnaire occitan-français*) cite *gabar(r)ot*, *gar(r)abot* “bateau non ponté”. Both from a geographical and from a morphological point of view, however, the occurrence of *Carabotes* as a toponym appears to be quite isolated and can therefore hardly be explained otherwise than by a survival from the days of Greek colonization.

It would be unrealistic to imagine that name studies can, in themselves, reveal the full extent of this colonization. Indeed, none of the names cited above, taken separately, provide any actual proof of direct Greek influence¹³. But the trends which, together, they demonstrate can hardly be accidental. In particular, their geographical distribution is strongly suggestive – along the valleys of the Hérault (where the importance of Agde is clearly the overriding factor) and of its smaller neighbour the Bérange, and scattered through the intervening territory. We are, I believe, obliged to conclude that a Greek

¹¹See J. Arnal, R. Majurel and H. Prades, *Le Port de Lattara (Lattes – Hérault)*, Bordighera – Montpellier: Institut International d’Etudes Ligures, 1974.

¹²W. Meyer-Lübke, *Romanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3. Aufl., Heidelberg: Winter, 1935, n° 1672; Wartburg, *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 68 (1952), p. 13; G. Alessio, *Lexicon Etymologicum*, Napoli: Arte tipografica, 1976, p. 76; W. von Wartburg, *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bonn – Basel, 1922–, II, pp. 352–3.

¹³It is well known that extensive Greek influence pervaded all aspects of Roman civilization and language. See, for instance, L.R. Palmer, *The Latin Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), especially pp. 81–4. An overview of the Greek influence on the Latin of Gaul is presented by W. von Wartburg in his *Evolution et structure de la langue française* (10th edition, Berne: Francke, 1971), pp. 17–21, and in ‘Die griechische Kolonisation in Sudgallien und ihre sprachlichen Zeugen im West romanischen’, *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 68 (1952), pp. 1–48. Among further terms for which a Greek origin is possible are Occitan *to* “vaulted space, tomb” (<Θολος), *romieu* (< *romaeu* < βρωμαίος) as in *cami romieu* “road to Rome” and hence “pilgrim road”.

presence in this region, contemporary with the trading activity of Agde, had wider onomastic consequences than have hitherto been recognized.

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While all authorities agree that, in the period of Germanic invasions that brought the end of the western Roman empire, Languedoc first came under the control of the Visigoths who had their capital in Toulouse in the 5th and early 6th centuries, and then became part of the Frankish kingdom, attention is rather rarely drawn to the traces of this Germanic rule that can be found in the toponymy of the region. Such traces are, it is true, quite slight by comparison with the massive scale of Frankish and Burgundian settlement in northern and eastern Gaul¹⁴. But the main obstacle to giving a proper account of Germanic influence on the toponymy of the south is a methodological one: it is difficult – and frequently impossible – to differentiate between names that directly owe their origins to the invasions and those that merely bear witness to the fashion of using Germanic personal names and lexical items, a fashion that became widespread throughout the country. I shall here omit any discussion of common nouns and adjectives of Germanic origin which appear in place names; for, almost without exception, these comprise elements such as *blank*, *bosk*, *sala*, *waita*, *warda* that entered the general Romance lexicon at a fairly early date.

The medieval vogue for the use of Germanic personal names has had long-term consequences in the high frequency of occurrence of such names as *Bernard*, *Giraut*, *Raymond*, *Bérenger*, etc., which owe their popularity either to the fact that they were borne by widely venerated saints or to their adoption by ruling families. But these names comprise only a very small fraction of the anthroponyms formed from a wealth of elements that were originally in use¹⁵. Among those that lost currency at a relatively early date are several which, with or without suffixes, are reflected by place names in the *département* of Hérault: *Brunenchus* or *Bruningue* (Brunan, St-Guilhem-le-Désert), *Francolinus* (Frangouille, La Tour-sur-Orb), *Frodo* (Frouzet, St-Martin-de-Londres), *Freio* (Fréjorgues, Mauguio), *Grimma* or *Grimo* (Grémian, Cournonsec), *Tedo* or *Tezo* (Thézan-lès-Béziers), etc. The last three examples show that the suffixes widely used in the formation of Gallo-

¹⁴The most extensive view of this influence is provided by E. Gamillscheg's *Romania germanica*, Berlin-Leipzig, 1934–6 and by Th. Perrenot's *La Toponymie burgonde*, Paris: Payot, 1942. A useful synthesis of scholarship in the field is to be found in W. Caljouw, 'Germanic Elements in French Toponymy', M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1981.

¹⁵An extensive (though inevitably incomplete) listing of these names and their constituent elements is provided by M.-Th. Morlet, *Les Noms de personne sur le territoire de l'ancienne Gaule du VIe au XIIIe siècle*. I. – *Les Noms issus du germanique continental et les créations gallo-germaniques*, Paris: C.N.R.S., 1968.

Roman *fundus* names continued to be productive into the Germanic period, with *-anicu* giving place to a variant *-onicu* to accommodate the final vowel of *Freio*; a similar formation is found in the lost name *Ortonegues*, attested in 1139 and 1147 and probably derived from a hypocoristic **Orto*.

More numerous, within this *département*, than place names constituted by a personal name standing alone are those in which a Germanic personal name forms the second element of a compound with the Romance *mont* (< Latin *montem*) or its synonym *puech* or *pui* (< *podium*): *Montaubérou* (a former parish in the territory of Montpellier), *Montarnaud*, *Montady*, *Montbazin*, probably *Montferrand* (one of the most important strongholds of the region during the Middle Ages), *Puéchabon*, *Puilacher*, *Puissalicon*¹⁶. It is significant that, in names of this type, the second element is rarely of Latin origin¹⁷: clearly, this series of hill villages originated at a time when Germanic names were already dominant and the strategic value of a hill-top had become important, by contrast with the security of the Gallo-Roman period in which most new settlements were established in the valleys and plains. In some such cases, the name of an earlier inhabited site survived alongside that of a new village, as at Montarnaud where the Gallo-Roman name *Cesteirargues* designated a parish as recently as the Cassini map of 1770–2. This relationship between earlier and later settlement sites is most vividly illustrated by the example of Montpeyroux, although the toponyms concerned do not happen to contain any Germanic element: a large *fundus* (the Gallo-Roman *Adicianum*) was flanked, on a hilltop about one kilometre distant, by a fortified position given the Romance name *Montpeyroux* ‘‘stony hill’’; the latter became the more important establishment and remained so for several centuries, with the result that, when the main population centre reverted to the site of its Gallo-Roman antecedent, the latter came also to be called by the name of the neighbouring castle – while the original name has survived (in the form *l’Adisse*) only as that of a district within the village. In at least one instance, it is practically certain that a toponym of Germanic origin supplanted an earlier one which disappeared without trace: the personal name *Olaricus* (quoted here, as with other Germanic names I have mentioned, in the latinized form found in source documents) explains that of the town of *Olargues*, situated on a prominent rounded hill rising abruptly from the valley of the river Jaur; there is, as one might expect, archaeological evidence that this strategic

¹⁶The personal names in these compounds are, respectively, **Arbedo* or **Erbedo*, *Arnaldus*, *Atinus*, *Basinus* or *Basenus*, *Ferrandus*, *Ab(b)o*, *Le(u)lgerus* and *Salico*.

¹⁷In a different geographical context, this fact was pointed out 70 years ago by Ch. Marteaux, *Revue Savoisienne* 53 (1912), pp. 202–4.

position was inhabited long before the Germanic invasions, but we have no information of whatever name (or names) it previously bore.

While one should be cautious of exaggerating the significance of the data presented above, these minority groups within the place names of Languedoc aptly serve to remind us that the cultural tradition of the region owes its character to a succession of superposed influences and is not entirely the product of the overriding preponderance of Rome.

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