David Landau, Tampere/Finland

The Source of the Gothic Month Name *jiuleis* and its Cognates

Abstract: In the end of the nineteenth century, the difficulties in resolving the puzzle of the source of the Gothic month name *jiuleis* and its cognates led Tille to suggest searching for a solution outside the sphere of the Germanic languages. In this article I argue that the ultimate source of the Gothic word and its cognates is the Biblical term *jubilee.* I also argue that the word is a nomen sacrum (a sacred name) and, as such, an abbreviation.

1 Introduction

The difficulty in resolving the etymology of the word *Giuli* ('Yule') led Tille (1899, 7) to suggest searching for a solution in different places:

> But the strange fact that no satisfactory Germanic or even Aryan etymology can be given for the oldest names of Germanic three-score-day tides, Jiuleis (Gothic), Lida, Hlyda (Anglo Saxon), and perhaps Rheda, Hreda (Anglo-Saxon), and Hornung, Horowunc (German), seems to point to the probability that these names, like the institutions they denote, have their origin beyond the world of the Aryan family of languages and nations, and were borrowed from Egyptian and Syriac, or some other Oriental language, together with the six three-score-day tides which formed the course of the year.

In this article I argue that the Gothic jiuleis is a nomen sacrum and, as such, an abbreviation. Its immediate etymon is the Greek Iωβηλαιος and/ or the Latin jobelei, both in the sense of the Biblical 'jubilee'. I propose that, in this connection, the word has adopted the sense of the 'Redeemer' and as such became a synonymous to the word 'Christ'.

2 Survey of the Present Conjectures of *jiuleis*

In *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Gotischen Sprache* (1939, s. v. jiuleis), Feist wrote that "Etymologie nicht feststehend" and listed numerous attempts to clear the matter up. According to one conjecture, one possible source

is the word *jer* year. From Proto Indo-European the suggestion is a word which means 'turn of year', or simply 'turn'. From Sanskrit the suggestion is a 'wheel', and from Greek 'circle', 'game' or 'amusement'. From Latin the suggestion was 'eye', 'sight' from the word *oculus*. Lehmann's *Gothic Etymological Dictionary* (1986), which is based on Feist's book, listed some of the conjunctures and on the last ones that he mentioned he wrote that they were "even less credible" (s. v. *jiuleis*).

The etymological reconstruction usually quoted is **jéhwəla*, following Bugge (1888, 135). Hoops (1918/19, s. v. Zeitmessung) wrote that "Daß der Name *Giuli* oder *Jiuleis* mit dem römischen *Julius* zusammenhänge, wie J. Grimm a. a. O. 75 f. und Weinhold, D. deutschen Monatsnamen, 4, annehmen, wird kein mit antiker Monatskunde Vertrauter glauben."[1]

One common explanation is that word has originated from a heathen festival that lasted twelve days and predated Christianity. However, Bilfinger (1901) rejected the notion that the 'Jul' celebration preceded Christianity in the Nordic countries. Comparing the dates and the content of the Christian celebration with what the Nordic peoples preserved as a pre-Christian tradition, he concluded that those celebrations were one and the same. He maintained that it was impossible for two different societies to develop the same type of a feast exactly on the same dates independently. If indeed there was a similar pagan holiday in the Nordic countries, he concluded, it must have originated from Christian tradition and not vice versa. I may add that the overriding fact is that the Gothic word *jiuleis* appears in an obviously Christian calendar at a much earlier date than any evidence of a concurrent pagan celebration. In any case, the evidence from the Nordic countries is based on oral tradition, which is not always reliable.

3 Nomina Sacra in the Gothic manuscripts

The term nomina sacra was coined by Traube in 1906 and since then has been extensively studied and discussed. Traube suggested that the practice of writing sacred names in contracted form began among Greek speaking Jews who sought to imitate the Hebrew consonant writing of the divine names, and that the practice was subsequently adopted by Christians (Hurtado 1998, 664). The list of abbreviated sacred names includes: Jesus, Christ, Son, God, Lord, Spirit, Savior, David, Cross, Mother, Father,

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1 Grimm 1853; Weinhold 1869.

Israel, Man, Jerusalem, and Heaven. The nomina sacra appear in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Slavonic, Armenian, and Gothic.

The Gothic text abounds with such abbreviations: *guþ* 'God' is abbreviated as *gþ*, *iesus* shortened to *is*, *iesu* becomes *iu*, *xristus* is *xs* or *xaus*, *xristu* is rendered as *xu*, *frauja* 'Lord' is written *fa*. The same practice is employed whenever those terms appear in declination modes: *guþs* become *gþs*, *guþa* is *gþa*, *fraujan* is rendered *fan*, *fraujins* is shortened to *fins*, *iesuis* reads *iuis*. The reconstructed full word of *jiuleis* might have been **jiubileis*.

Below are two examples from the Codex Ambrosianus.[2] The reading follows Uppström's text (1864–68). Figure 1 includes a text from Eph. 1, 17: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ…"
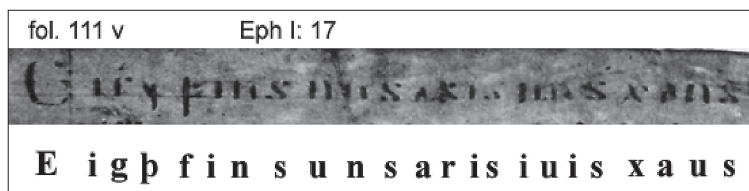

Figure 1. Abbreviations in Eph. 1, 17

Figure 2 includes text from 1 Cor. V: 5 "… in the day of the Lord Jesus".
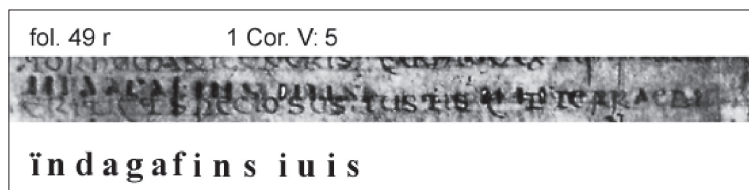
Figure 2. Abbreviations in 1 Cor. V, 5

Figure 3 presents text from the Codex Argenteus, St Matthew V, 33: "… but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths". The line is taken from the facsimile edition from 1927.[3]

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2 For the reading of the Ambrosian text, I used scanned photos taken from the facsimile edition of Galbiati/de Vries 1936.

3 The online edition of the facsimile edition of the Codex Argenteus is at: http://app. ub.uu.se/arv/codex/faksimiledition/contents.html.

Figure 3. An abbreviation in the Codex Argenteus

While the sacred names in the Codex Argenteus are marked with horizontal strokes over them, the abbreviations in the Ambrosian manuscripts are not.

4 The term *Jubilee* in Early Christian Writings

Hippolytus of Rome, who wrote in the early third century, discussed the term *Jubilee* in his deliberation concerning the Psalms:[4]

> 3. Let us inquire, further, why there are one hundred and fifty psalms. That the number fifty is sacred, is manifest from the days of the celebrated festival of Pentecost, which indicates release from labours, and (the possession of) joy… Of which times there was a shadow in the land of Israel in the year called among the Hebrews "**Jobel**" **(Jubilee),** which is the fiftieth year in number, and brings with it liberty for the slave, and release from debt, and the like… Thus, then, it was also meet that the hymns to God on account of the destruction of enemies, and in thanksgiving for the goodness of God, should contain not simply one set of fifty, but three such, for the name of Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit.[5] (Emphasis added)

In the above text Hyppolytus associates Jubilee and the Trinity. In the original Greek text *Jobel* is render as Ιωβηλ and *Jubilee* as Ιωβηλαιος (Lampe 1961, s. v. Ιωβηλ and Ιωβηλαιος).

Hippolytus continued:

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4 The text is taken from the online edition of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers. The Writings of the Fathers Down to A. D. 325* at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/.

5 Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. V. The Extant Works and Fragments of Hippolytus [translated by the Rev. S. D. F. Salmond]. On the Psalms I. http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-05/anf05-17.htm#P2768_891774.

4. The number fifty, moreover, contains seven sevens, or a Sabbath of Sabbaths; …
And the fiftieth psalm is a prayer for the remission of sins, and a confession. For as, ac-
cording to the Gospel, the fiftieth obtained remission, confirming thereby that under-
standing of the **jubilee**, so he who offers up such petitions in full confession hopes to
gain remission in no other number than the fiftieth. (Emphasis added)

Eusebius, the fourth-century church historian, used the jubilees reckoning
in the second part of his *Chronicle,* also known as the *Chronological Canons.*
Eusebius' work was translated into Latin by Jerome and survived extant
in different versions to the present. Eusebius used the birth of Abraham
as year number one and from that time kept counting the years until the
twentieth year of Constantine's reign which, following this chronology,
was the year 2345. Empires appear in the table as parallel columns when
they arise and flourish, and then gradually disappear as the years go on.
Eventually the Roman Empire outlived them all and remained the sole
occupier of that chronology. Table 1 displays the beginning of Eusebius'
chronology (1866–75, 265, 266). At year 51 of the Hebrew column, the sec-
ond jubilee (*Iobel*) commences.

HEBR. Abraha-mus	ASSYR. Ninus	SICYON. Europs	AEGYPT. XVI dynastia. Thebaei
I	43	22	I
2	44	23	2
3	45	24	3
4	46	25	4
5	47	26	5
6	48	27	6
7	49	28	7
45	35	I	45
46	36	2	46
47	37	3	47
48	38	4	48
49	39	5	49
50	40	6	50
51	41	7	51
52	42	8	52

Principium XLI. *iobelaei se-cundum Hebraeos. Iobel autem*

Table 1. JOBELAEI in Eusebius' *Chronicle*

5 *Jiuleis*

The word *jiuleis* appears in the Gothic calendar, first published by Mai/
Castiglione (1819, 26). Grimm (1926) categorizes the word as nominative
singular. Eventually, the cognates of *jiuleis* are *Yule*, *geola*, (Finnish) *joulu*,
'Christmas', (Finnish) *juhla* 'celebration', etc., all of which lost the final 's',
except the Icelandic *ylir* which has preserved the 's' as 'r'. With *jiuleis* as a
nominative, the Gothic expression *frumajiuleis* may mean 'first jiuleis', fol-
lowing the expression *frumabaur* 'first born' (St. Luke 2, 7). Bosworth/Tol-
ler (1954 [1898] s. v. Geóla) proposed "Se ærra geóla *the ere*, or *former yule*,
December". Streitberg (1960 [1919], 472) suggested, as a model, the Greek
expression fruma sabbato (St. Mark 15, 42) 'the day before the Sabbath'. In
my opinion Streitberg's analogy does not really work here.

   Bede of Jarrow, the eighth-century scholar, while describing the Ger-
manic calendar, mentioned one month *Giuli* as December and another
Giuli as January:

> Primusque eorum mensis, quidem Latini Januarium vocant, dicitur Giuli… December
> Giuli, eodem Januarius nomine, vocatur. Incipiebant autem annum ab octavo Calen-
> darum Januariarum die, ubi nunc natale Domini celebramus. (Beda Venerabilis: *De
> Temporum Ratione*, Caput XV: De mensibus Anglorum[6])

> The first month, which the Latins call January, is Giuli; … December, Giuli, the same
> name by which January is called. They began their year on the 8th kalends of January
> [25 December], when we celebrate the birth of the Lord. (Bede 2004, chapter 15: The
> English Months)

I suggest that jiuleis is an abbreviation and that its etymon is either the
Greek word Ιωβηλαιος, which ends in the sound /s/ and or the Latin
jobelaei. The Biblical sense of the word *jubilee* is 'redemption' and in this
context an interpretation of the word would be the 'Redeemer', which,
like the 'Lord' (*frauja*), should be abbreviated. One possible model for the
abbreviation of Ιωβηλαιος into *jiuleis* is the rendering of ουρανος 'heav-
en(s)'. In its abbreviated form, the word is rendered as ουνος where the
medial ν is preserved.

   The transformation of the Latin /o/ into the Germanic /u/ is explained
by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) (s. v. Jubilee) in this manner:

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6 Patriologiae cursus completus: Series Latina 90. Paris 1862. http://www.nabkal.de/
   beda/ beda_15.html).

The Latin form *jubilæus* instead of *jobelæus* shows associations of the Old Testament word with the native Latin *jubilum* wild cry, shout, and *jubilare* to shout to, shout, halloo, huzza; and in Christian Latin there was established an association of sense between these words and the Hebrew 'jubilee', which has extended to the modern languages of Western Christendom.

Another possible explanation, more native to Gothic, is the confusion between *u* and *o*. According to MARCHAND (1956, 147) "we find *u* written for *o* 4 times in our MSS". One example is *sunjus* sometimes written as *sunjos*. Marchand suggested the possibility that "if this confusion of symbols has any significance, phonetically speaking, it can only mean that the two sound types have fallen together". I suggest that the Finnish cognate *joulu*, which is pronounced the way it is written – [joulu], is probably the ultimate manifestation of this confusion. According to the *OED* (s. v. jubilee), in Italian the term 'jubilee' is spelt *giubbileo* where the first three letter are identical to Bede's Latin *Giuli*.

One major problem concerning my suggestion is the appearance of the letter *h* in the Old English cognates of the Gothic word, such as *geoh(h)ol*, *gehhel,* or the Finnish *juhla.* The fact that Finnish has both forms *joulu* and *juhla*, suggests that the word was borrowed twice, in two different paths. On the face of it, the existence of *h* in some of the cognates may indicate that the original word included *h* and that that sound was eventually disappeared in newer formations. This is the apparently the source of BUGGE's reconstruction (*jéhwəla).

However, I suggest that the *h* is unetymological and was added as an orthographic means to give the word a divine connotation; *h* appears in the Biblical name of God (YHWH). Adding an *h* does not necessarily change the pronunciation of the word. Since antiquity the letter *h* is known to carry various meanings. Here is one example (Gen. 17,5, King James Version):

Neither shall thy name any more be called **Abram**, but thy name shall be **Abraham**; for a father of many nations have I made thee. (Emphasis added)

The earliest examples which include *h* the *OED* cites are from the beginning of the tenth century, for example *gehhol* from Laws of Ælfred, 901.

One example of adding the letter *h* is the word *Jesus.* In Gothic it is *iesus*, in Old English it was rendered as *Healend* ‚saviour‘ and in Middle English

as *Iesu*. However, in Tindale Bible (1526) it is spelt in two places as *Ihesus* but elsewhere usually *Iesus (OED*, s. v. Jesus). In Wyclif Bible (1388) the *OED* cites a spelling *Jhesus* (s. v. ghost).

Examining various terms in the *OED* reveals that the addition of 'h' is not that uncommon. In Old English 'church' appears as *cirice*, *circe*. The word 'ghost' appears constantly as *gaest* in the Exeter Book and 49 times in the Hatton MS. The spelling with *gh* appears first in Caxton, who, according to the dictionary, was probably influenced by the Flemish *gheest*. The spelling with *gh* remained rare until the middle of the sixteenth century and was not completely established before about 1590. In Old English 'Christ' was written as *crist*. The dictionary states that "this word and its derivatives and cognates were very rarely (and perh. only accidentally) spelt with *ch-* in ME., but this has been the regular fashion since 1500".

Another major problem is the gemination of *h* which usually means a loss of /x/ with compensatory lengthening. However I offer another possible explanation. According to the *OED* (s. v. H):

> After a vowel, *h* is regularly silent, and such a vowel usually long, such as *oh*, *ah*, *bah*, *hurrah*, the addition of *h* (so usual in modern German) is one of the expedients which we have for indicating a long vowel in foreign or dialect words. The silence of *h* in certain positions contributed to the currency of such spelling as the obsolete *preheminence*, *proheme*, *abhominable*.

I suggest that the duplication of *h* in some spelling served as an expedient to indicate that the *h* is not silent but rather should be pronounced. In Finnish the *h* in *juhla* is pronounced as /x/.

In the manuscript *jiuleis* (figure 4) is not marked with a stroke over it.[7] As mentioned above, the nomina sacra are not marked in the Ambrosian manuscripts. That, of course, does not prove that the word is an abbreviation, but the lack of the stroke over it does not rule out that it is such.

6 Conclusions

Solving the etymology puzzle of the Gothic *jiuleis* and its cognates has kept scholars busy for a long time. Allowing the possibility that the source of the Gothic word *jiuleis* and its cognate is neither Germanic nor Indo-

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7 For a thorough discussion concerning the month-line of the Gothic calendar see LAN-DAU 2006.
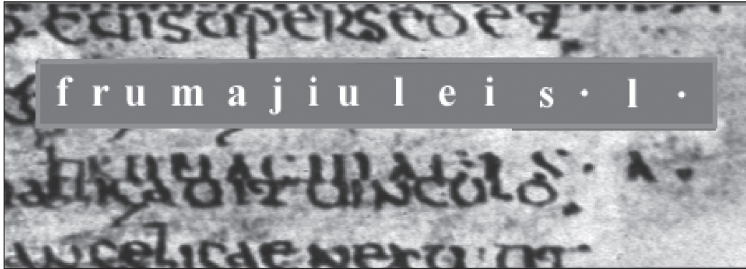
Figure 4. *frumajiuleis l* (frame and transliteration added)

European, the scope of potential etymons increases. Following Tille's suggestion, I propose the Biblical *jubilee* as the source of this family of words. The key for my proposal is the early Christian custom of using nomina sacra. Considering the list of such sacred names: Christ, Lord, Savior, David, Israel, Man, or Jerusalem, a term such as the 'Redeemer' fits in well.

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