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Many studies of the word garçon have been made, but their unsatisfactory results justify further consideration. The aim of this paper is to determine the early meanings of the word, and to suggest a new etymology.

The word gars, g(u)arçun, garsun, guasun, appears in French texts from the latter part of the 11th century onwards, and has two common meanings. As "servant" (Roland, 2437; Cour. de Louis, 2270; Charroi de Nîmes, 388; Aspremont, 2392, 2901, 10677; Beroul, 3689; etc.), it is often used in conjunction with words such as esquier, serjent, pautonier, jumentier, and no doubt had more precise meanings related to specialised activities such as military life, stable work, etc. The meaning "young man, boy" is generally regarded (Dauzat, Pauli) as a 13th century development, but is clearly present in earlier texts such as the "Couronnement de Louis", where it is applied to Louis during his minority (1816, 1110; cf. Enéas, 8572; Aspremont, 6378). The senses "child" and "servant" are commonly found together for a number of words in Classical and medieval times, as Pauli has shown.

It seems to be from the meaning "servant" that a secondary pejorative sense developed, which is found quite early (Gormont, 356; Marcaubru, ed. Dejeanne, No. 9, v. 24; Aspremont, 3562, 9117).

There is no differentiation of meaning associated with the two forms, gars, garsun; the former is more common in adjectival function.

The Latin word garcio, after the checking of Du Cange's sources, cannot be dated earlier than the first quarter of the 12th century, the earliest use found being in Gautier de Therouanne's De vita et martyrio beati Caroli (Migne, P.L., 166, col. 932), dated 1120-30. The meanings are those characteristic of the French word: "servant" and "child", and there are no others. The word appears as a proper name of the King of Navarre in Ordericus Vitalis (Hist. eccl., XIII, 23), dated 1141.

The etymologies proposed have been many: carduus (Diez), gardsveinn (Trana), Garsindis (Suchier) gart, gartja (Vising), gwerc'h (Littre), *wartja (Körting, Meyer-Lübke), *wartio (Nicholson), *Wrakjo (Bloch-Wartburg). These are all to be rejected on phonetic and/or semantic grounds. The last-mentioned, which is the currently accepted etymology, is unacceptable on semantic grounds. Foerstermann links the Frankish proper name Wracchio with Germanic and Slav words meaning "pursuer," "enemy," "outlaw," "hero," etc., which are far removed from the sense of the O.Fr. word. Wartburg links *wrakjo with Germanic words meaning "outlaw," "foreign mercenary soldier" and "rogue", which again are out of keeping with the earliest French uses. There is indeed a very clear distinction in the French texts between the soldiers and their servants, the garçons (cf. Aspremont, 7302-05), and in the Latin texts there is no justification for interpreting the gartio as anything more than "a paid servant" -- he is not a "mercenary soldier".

The new etymology put forward is Celtic wassos "servant" which appears in Latin texts from the Lex Salica on as uassus. The word was Latinised however at an early date, because Gaulish changed w- to gw- early, and *guassus is not found. It is suggested that the word was again borrowed, but from the gw- form, at a later date.

We may justifiably assume that Gaul. gw- would receive the same treatment as Frankish w-, and appear in O.Fr. as gu-, g-. This is the case with the word under discussion. The change of -ss- to -rs- is common in place-names of Celtic origin (Massilia - Marseille, Cadussa - Chaource, Alossia - Alorse, Ussia - l'Ource, Massiliacus - Marsillé, etc.) In addition, a glance at the ALF, and at dictionaries of O.Fr., will show that forms without -r- are also very common, e.g. guason.

The origin of the two forms, gars, garçon, seems to lie in the Gaulish declension system with nom. in -os, acc. in -on, with the flexion surviving in the latter case.

There are no semantic problems attached to this etymology.

Discussion. Dr. Hóllýman pointed out that there was no explanation of the -ti-, -ci- of the Latinised word, to which the g (= [ts]) of the O.Fr. word corresponded. This could not come from -ss-. An influence of arçun might not be impossible, in view of the rôle of the garçons as stable-boys.