

Systematic approach to Elvish name translations

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To me a name comes first and the story follows.

Let:165

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Introduction

Translations of personal names into Elvish are very popular all over the Tolkien-interested Internet and they also have a foundation. In his letter to Sam, Aragorn translates the names of Sam's children to make them fit into the Sindarin text and Sam proudly reads them aloud. *'Well that's splendid,' said Frodo, 'now we all have Elvish names (SD:117-118,126).*

The aim of this article is to give an overview about attested translations of names from natural languages by Tolkien and to propose a systematic approach on this basis. This should serve as a guide rather than as an exhaustive analysis.

1 Attested translations

Goldogrin:

- **Faidron, Faithron** 'Francis' (GL:33), cf. **faith, faidwen** 'freedom' [*Franks* = 'free ones']

Qenya:

- **Serinar, Serindo** 'Stephen' (QL:83) < SERE 'twine, tie, bound', compare **serin (d)** 'a wreath, crown' [Greek *Stephanos* 'crown, wreath']
- **Amillo** 'one of the Happy Folk (the Valar), Hilary' (QL:30) [*Hilary* is from Latin, meaning 'hilarious, cheerful'; the derivation of **Amillo** is unclear, but it seems to contain ablative **-llo**, cf. **Vali, Valar** 'The happy folk' (QL:99)]
- **Turambar** 'Sigurðr' (QL:95) < TURU 'am strong', **Amarto, Ambar (rt)** 'Fate' (personified) (QL:34) [Old Norse: *sigr* 'victory', *urðr* 'fate' in the name of the Norn *Urðr, Urd*]

Quenya:

- **Eldakar** 'Elfhelm' (LotR App.A, TI:276,366, PM:192), earlier **Eldahar** (KHAR-, VT45:21)
- **Eldavel** 'Elfworld' (TI:366) ['world' in the sense of 'rule', not in the sense of 'forest']

- **Eldakan** 'Ælfnob' ['elf-courage'] (KAN-)
- **Elendil** 'Ælfwine, Alwin' ['elf-friend'] (NIL-, NDIL-), earlier **Elessar** (SER-), deleted ?**Elériel** or ?**Eléniel** (ÑEL- 'friendship' (VT46:3)), **Elethon** (SON- 'love befriend, cherish', VT46:15)
- **Herendil** 'Audoin, Eadwine, Edwin' ['friend of fortune/richness'] (LR:46,264,378, KHER-), earlier deleted **Aláriel** (ÑEL- 'friendship' (VT46:3), LAR- (VT45:26)) and **Manadhon**, **Manaðhon**, **Manathon** (MANAD- 'bliss, blessedness' VT45:32 + SON- 'love befriend, cherish', VT46:15)
- **Valandil** 'Godwine, Godwin' (LR:60, VT46:4) [can be equated with Theophilus, Amadeus, Gottlieb]
- **Voronwe** 'Trewin, Trewyn, Tréowine' ['true friend'] (SD:252,290,293) – compare BOR-, BORÓN-, **Voronwe** is literally 'steadfast person', cf. Goldogrin **Bronweg** 'the constant one' (GL:24)

From this one can actually suppose that some other names are in fact also translated:

- **Valakar** (LotR App.A PM:199,213 etc.) *'Godhelm' – such an Old English name indeed existed
- **Eldamir**, **Qendemir** (TI:276,366), later **Elessar** (SD:128) *'Ælfstan' (elf-stone) – this name existed as well

Noldorin/Sindarin:

- **Elendil** = **Elvellon** (WJ:412) – if the latter may be also used as a name
- **Eldamir** = **Eledon** – most probably representing Eleðon < **eledh** + (**g**)**ond** 'stone'
- **Elessar** = **Edhelharn**
- **Iorhael** 'Frodo' (SD:129) – the name *Froði* is still in use
- **Meril** 'Rose'
- **Eirien** 'Daisy', earlier forms **Arien**, **Erien** (SD:117,120) – compare Q. **Arien** 'the Sun-maiden' (AR¹-)

Adunaic:

- **Abrazân** = **Voronwe** (see above)
- **Nimruzîr** = **Elendil** (see above and compare **-zîr** with SER-, **Elessar**)

Some names did not exist, but their translations appear authentic:

- **Eledwen**, **Eledhwen** 'Elfsheen' (LR:131,276) ['sheen' = 'beautiful']; here probably **-wen** 'beautiful' < ***-bani**/***-wani**, cf. PE17:57; note that the Old English female name *Ælflæd* has the same meaning
- **Baravorn** 'Hamfast' ['fast' = 'staying, abiding']

On the other hand we sometimes meet phonetic adaptations rather than translations:

- **María** 'Maria' (VT43:26-28)
- **Hrístó**, **Hristo** 'Christ' (VT44:12), thus S. ***Rhíst**, ***Rhist**
- **Yésus** 'Jesus' (VT43:26-27)
- #**Elain** 'Elaine' from dative **Elainen** (inscription for Elaine Griffiths)
Note that **Elpino** (VT44:15-16) was considered as a translation of 'Christ', but rejected. It might mean *'the chosen one' < LEP-, as suggested by the editors of VT.

2 Elements

One can see now that Germanic names dominate in the list above, especially in the later sources; and that these names are translated just by converting the respective elements into Elvish. Many names from other languages work just the same way, i.e. consist out of two significant elements (e.g. Greek, Slavonic). Here one has the best chances of a sound translation. Thus it appears sensible to extrapolate:

- Germ. **Ælf-**, **Al-** = S. **Eledh-**, **El-**, Q. **Elda-**, **Elen-**
- Germ. **Ead-**, **Ed-** = S. ***Heren-**, Q. **Heren-**
- Germ. **Gott-**, **God-** = S. **Balan-**, **Rodon-** (?), Q. **Vala-**
- Germ. **Ham-** = S. **Bar(a)-**, Q. ***Mar-**
- Germ. **Sig-**, **Sieg-**, Gr. **Nik-**, Lat. **Vikt-** = S., Q. **Tur-**
- Germ. **-wine**, **-win**, Greek **phil** = S. **-nnil/-nnel -dil**, **-dil**, **-dil(i)on**, **-dilynir** (masc.), **-*dileth**, ***-dilnis**, ***-dilien** (fem.) (or genderless **-vellon**); Q. **-ndil** (masc.), **-ndilme** (fem.)
- Germ. **-noþ** = S. **-gon**, Q. **-kan**
- Germ. **-wis**, **-weis**, **-vis** = S. **-hael**, Q. ***-sail**
- Germ. **-helm** = S. ***-dol**, ***-thol** (?), Q. **-kar** (cf. also **Russandol** 'copper-top' (PM:353))
- Germ. **-stan**, **-sten** = S. **-harn**, Q. **-sar**; earlier: S. **-(g)on**, Q. **-mir**
- Germ. **wold**, **walt**, **wald**, **wal** = S. ***bel**, Q. **vel**

For S. **-nnil/-nnel**, **-dil**, **-dil(i)on**, **-dilynir** see **Edennil** 'Friend of Men' (MR:306), **gaerennil**, **gaerdilon**, **gaerdilynir**, **Gaerdil**, **Gaerdilion** (PE17:19,27), although these seem to be a phonetic adaptations of Q. **Atandil** and **Eärendil** respectively. See also **Enerdhil** (UT:248), probably being an adaptation of Q. **Anardil** *'sun-lover'. Later we learn that Q. **Eärendil** was among names *not given Sindarin forms in legend*, but was explained to mean **Seron Aearon** (PM:348). However, *causal and accidental* forms **Aerendil**, **Aerennel** were also found (PM:364).

Note that Tolkien gives the Noldorin/Sindarin elements as lenited, e.g. **-gon** instead of **-con**. One may suppose that this is an analogical development, i.e. the lenited forms are generalized to remain recognizable.

Note also that KAN- 'dare' is associated with boldness, valour, courage in *The Etymologies*, but was later reinterpreted to KAN- 'cry, call aloud' with Q. **káno** 'commander' (*Silm.index*, PM:361-362). If a decision for a translation has to be made, *The Silmarillion* will be rather regarded as a canonical source. Luckily, BER- 'valiant' still remains.

Note that Tolkien uses **Vala** instead of **Eru** to translate 'God'. Indeed, it is highly doubtful that **Eru** could have appeared in Middle-earth names, as it was a word left for the most exceptional occasions, compare the description of Elvish weddings:

For this blessing there was a solemn form, but no mortal has heard it; though the Eldar say that Varda was named in witness by the mother and Manwë by the father; and moreover that the name of Eru was spoken (as was seldom done at any other time). (MR:211)

When Cirion called upon **Eru** in his oath the words *filled those who heard them with awe* (UT:305) and Tolkien comments: *It had been held lawful only for the king of Númenor to call Eru to witness, and then only on the most grave and solemn occasions.* (UT:317)

And finally note that Tolkien usually does not append an agentive suffix to his translations. Thus we do not meet ****Iorhaelon**, ****Eldaveldo**. In fact, it appears that such suffixes are used whenever a name is derived from a single adjective, element or root, as **Ancalim-e**, **Ancalim-on**, **Cal-iondo**, **Voron-we**, **Saur-on** and so on ...

Note also that Tolkien does not always use full nouns either, e.g. **Eldakan** has just the suffixed root KAN- 'dare' rather than the full noun **káne** 'valour' (PM:260).

3 Approach

Going further, one can try to translate more elements and use them as a basis:

- Germ. **-wart, -ward** = S. **-dir(n)**, Q. **-tir** [sense 'guard, watch, look out for', cf. warden] (TIR-)
- Germ. **-mund** = S. **bar**, Q. **var** (BAR-)
- Germ. **-rik, -rich** = S. **-hir**, Q. **-her** (see **Ostoher** (LotR. App.A), **Barahir** (BARÁS-)) or S. **-ar** (see **Gwaewar** 'the Windlord' (TI:134, LR:301), Rohar (WR:137)) or S. **Tor-, -dor**, Q. **-tar** (as in **Sorontar**, **Thorondor** 'King of Eagles' (TĀ-, TAĜ-)) (KHER-, ĜAR-) or S. **-gon**, Q. **-káno** according to PM:361-362 and *The Silmarillion*
- Germ. **fried, frid, fred** = S. **sedh, sidh** (?), Q. **ser, sen(da)** (?) (SED-)
- Germ. **Adal-, Edel-** = Q.,S. **Ar(a)-**, S. **arod** (cf. **Thinrod** 'noble member of the Thindrim (Sindar) (VT41:9))
- Germ. **Volk-, Theod-, Diet-** = S. **Gwaith-**, Q. **Lie-** (?), perhaps also Q./S. **-nos, nost-** or **noss-** (WEG-, LI-, NŌ-)
- Germ. **hart, hard** = S. **tara, tar-**, Q. **tarya** (?) (cf. **Tarlang** 'Stiff Neck', a not uncommon man's name' (RC:536)) (TĀRAG-)
- Germ. **-muot, -mut** = S. **-in**, Q. **-indo** (cf. **Túrin, Túrindo** 'victory-mood' (TUR-)) (ID-)
- Germ. **-bert, -brecht** = S.,Q. **Cal-** (KAL-), S. **-gal**
- Germ. **-mann, -man** = S. **-dir**, Q. **ner-** (cf. **Nerwen** (UT:456)) (DER-)

Germanic gods sometimes also appear in names. But even then a translation is not impossible. When Eriol (Ælfwine) arrives at Tol Eressea in the *Lost Tales*, he tells the Elves of his gods and these identify Odin with Manwe and Thor with Tulkas. Some theophoric (or rather *valaphoric?) personal names are attested in Quenya: **Aulendil, Manwendil, Oromendil** (UT:210).

And now the task would be to combine the elements fittingly. The following list contains some propositions:

- Alfweis, Elvis = S. ***Elhael, *Elethael**, Q. ***Elessail, *Eldasail**
- Eadwart, Edward, Eduard = S. ***Herenvar, Q. *Here(n)var**
- Eadmund, Edmund = S. ***Herendir(n)**, Q. ***Herentir**
- Dietrich, Dirk, Theoderich, Piudareiks = S. ***Gwaithir, Q. *Nostoher**
- Sigmund = S. ***Turvar, Q. *Turuvar**
- Philipp = Q. ***Roccondil, S. *Rochennil, *Rochdil, *Rochdil(i)on, *Rochdilnir**
- Alexander = Q. ***Varaner, S. *Baradir**
- Berthold = S.,Q. ***Calavel**
- Albert, Albrecht, Adalbert = S. **Ar(a)gal, *Cal(a)rod, *Aracchal, *Arochal** (cf. **Aracchír, Arothir** (VT41:9)), Q. ***Arakal, *Arkal**
- Walther, Walter = S. ***Rimbel, *Hothvel, *Belhoth, Q. *Rimbevel**

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