The Greek digraph representing the sounds /ou/ or English /w/ before a vowel

The record of the marriage of Pierre Couc dit Lafleur de Cognac and Marie Mitè8amèg8Kèè, an Algonquin Indian, exists in two forms, one a beautifully handwritten transcription (copy)\(^1\) of the original record, and the other the original register itself in Latin.\(^2\)

Translation into English:
In the year of our Lord 1657 on April 16, I Paul Ragueneau, priest of the Society of Jesus, after having announced the three bans of marriage according to custom during the celebration of masses in the Blessed Virgin Chapel in Trois-Rivières, having questioned them and received their mutual consent by word and by their presence, I united in marriage Pierre Couc dit [usually also known as] Lafleur, son of Nicolas Couc and Elizabeth Templair of the parish of Cognac; and Marie Mitè8amèg8Kèè, Algonquin by nation; Algonquin witnesses were Charles Pachirini and Barthélemy Anaræ8i; French witnesses were Mr. Pére, merchant, and Mr. Ameau dit St. Séverin.

On this record, what looks like an /8/ is actually a Greek upsilon \([u]\) on top of a Greek omicron \([o]\), producing a symbol which the Jesuits and other officials used to represent a sound not found in French, close to French /OU/ or English /W/ before a vowel.\(^3\) When this symbol was transcribed and printed for publication, no appropriate equivalent was available to the typesetters, so the numeral /8/ was chosen to take its place. PRDH always transcribes the /8/ as /OU/. On the original handwritten documents the symbol looks somewhat like this Microsoft Word© Wingding 61535, \(\text{}\). See the record above and below for its actual form.

**mariam Mitè8amèg8Kèè”**

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1 FHL #1298969. I originally worked with the Family History Library microfilms. Digital images are now available on Ancestry and also on FamilySearch.

2 FHL #1294977 or #1018092, an earlier filming. This reel also contains registers for Saint-Joseph Miamis (or des Illinois), now Niles, Michigan. My thanks to Jean Quintal for telling me about the Wingding symbol for the Taurus sign of the zodiac after reading an earlier version of this article.

3 The “u” above an “o” is a Greek upsilon \([u]\) combined with an omikron \([o]\) to represent the sound. Only by using the international phonetic alphabet would we come close to reproducing what the Jesuits heard. E-mail from Fr Owen Taggart, pen-name of Father John Sullivan, 8 July 2002: “The pronunciation of /8/ . . . sometimes represents the vowel-sound [ou] of the French language, and sometimes the consonantal [w] of English (which does not exist, and is “unimaginable” for French speakers to distinguish from the [ou] sound). It is incorrect to merely substitute the /8/ by a [ou] for a very simple reason: The /8/ represents two distinct phonemes. Sometimes, the transcription [ou] is correct, but sometimes, it is correct to transcribe with [w]. It is really unfortunate that the written transcription /8/ has disappeared, since it reminds us quite pointedly that the precise phonemic pronunciation of /8/ is distinction both from the usual pronunciation of both native French and native English speakers.”
Mariam [Latin form of Marie] Mite8amig8k8e: MeetewameegouKoue or Kway [possible pronunciation]

The /K/ is usually recorded in the upper case form and may have represented a sound closer to a hard /G/. It is usually transcribed with the accents as MitéouamigouKoué.

Michael McCafferty, Miami language scholar at the University of Indiana, wrote this to me about the name:

> Beautiful!
> > I think it’s actually "Mite8amig8k8e" with grave accent marks over
> > the two e’s and the middle i.
> > This name is transparent, phonemic /miteewamiko(o)kwe/. This is
> > standard IPA [International Phonetic Alphabet], so the -ee- is not the orthographic -ee- of English but
> > just like French /e/ but extended. Vowel length is phonemic in
> > Algonquian, i.e., a short vowel in a word with a long vowel would
> > change its meaning, e.g., /nipi/ 'water' but /niipi/ 'my arrow'.
> > Your ancestor's name is composed of the morphemes /miteew-/ 'shaman',
> > amikw- 'beaver and -ehkwe 'woman', 'shaman-beaver-woman', 'spirit
> > power-beaver-woman'.
> > Again, the -g- in the spelling comes from the pronunciation of /kl
> > following /ml/. Standard Miami. The -kw- of /amikw-/ goes to /o(o)/
> > when it combines with a following morpheme, in this case /ehkw-/,
> > the 'woman' noun suffix, and the first vowel of that term assimilates
> > to the "stronger" vowel /o(o/ of the 'beaver' term.
> > This a beautiful name.
> > Michael

And Michael also made this kind comment:

“Well, she's part of you. From what I can tell, she is responsible in
part of your strength, your indomitable nature, for surely that was her
nature.” [email 28 December 2013]

Here is another example: Ancestry.ca, Early U.S. French Catholic Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1695-1954 D ➔
Détroit, Ste-Anne; Autres Registres ➔ 1704-1744 ➔ image 24 of 198. See below for an English translation.
Baptism of Marie Louise Roy

This day 19th of May 1708 was baptized by me the undersigned Missionary Marie Louise daughter of pierre Roy inhabitant du Detroit [of the Detroit, the strait] and of Marguerite 8abanKiK8é of the Miami nation her father and mother in legitimate marriage. the godfather was sieur Louis Gastineau, merchant, and the Godmother Marie Dussault wife of S. Langlois, inhabitant of this fort pontchartrain, the Godmother declared not knowing how to sign, the godfather having signed with me the same day and year as above.

signed] castineau fr. Cherubin Deniau
Pr[iest] Miss[ionary] Re[collet] [with paraphe, a fancy scribble]

Marguerite 8abanKiK8é [pronounced WabahnKeeKway]

Michael McCafferty also interpreted the meaning of this name and gave the phonetic pronunciation as: “/waapankiihkwa/”. And “Ouabankikoué …. That's a Miami name and means 'swan woman’”. He added, “(It would also have had a curious homonym that meant "tomorrow-woman" <- /waapanke/ 'tomorrow', which probably gave rise to some jokes in her childhood. :-).”

Marie Mitè8amèg8k8è is an ancestor of Suzanne Boivin Sommerville.

Marguerite 8abanKiK8é is an ancestor of Diane Wolford Sheppard.

We thank Michael McCafferty for his emails of 25 and 31 January 2012 and December 2013.