

# Some remarks on latin monophthongizations

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1 The aim of this paper is threefold firstly to clarify the steps by which certain of the diphthongs attested in early latin were reduced to monophthongs, secondly to consider the combined effect of monophthongization generally on the latin vowel system, and finally to illustrate in the course of both enquiries the importance of distinguishing so far as one can between the roman and non-roman dialects of the language

2.1 The only proto-italic diphthong that does not survive into 3C latin is /eu/ <sup>1</sup> In fact it was also lost prehistorically in oscan and umbrian, e.g., *touto* and *totam* < \**teutā*- 'people' That the absorption of /eu/ into /ou/ was not, however, proto-italic is indicated by the appearance of *Neuna* (= *Nona*, one of the Fates) <sup>2</sup> on two latin inscriptions of around 300 B C (*ILLR*, 11, 12)

2.2 The first stage in the absorption of /ou/ into /u/, viz the change [ou] > [o], was reached before mid-2C Thus *nontata* beside *indoucimus* on 1<sup>2</sup>586 (Tibur <sup>3</sup>, c. 160 B C) By the last quarter of the century examples of *u* are widespread, e.g. *abducier*, *iudices* beside *iouserit*, *ioudices* and *pronontiato* on 1<sup>2</sup>583, *luci* beside *iouranto*, etc on 1<sup>2</sup>582, *iudicati* beside *miourias* on 1<sup>2</sup>585 *Lucius* on 1<sup>2</sup>7 (beside *Loucanam* and *abdoucit*) is almost certainly a late 2C «restoration» on an epitaph that is in any event nearer the end than the beginning of the 3C

2.3 In a few instances [o] was diverted from its normal course and lowered [o] as a result of the influence of cognates in the same semantic

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<sup>1</sup> *neu*, *seu* emerge later, as doublets of *nēue*, *sīue*

<sup>2</sup> See Gell *NA*, 3, 16, 9 f

<sup>3</sup> It is assumed throughout that official texts — edicts, laws consular letters, etc — represent roman («standard») latin no matter where they are found

field Thus *nōnus* beside *nundinae*, *-um* The latter represents the normal diachrony, viz. \**nouendin-* 'nine-day period, market day' > *noundin* by syncope, as in *noundinum* (1<sup>2</sup>581, 186 B C) > *nōndin-*, as in *nondinum* (1<sup>2</sup>582, late 2C) > *nūndin-*, with regular shortening before *nd* to give *nūndin-* Bv contrast *nouenos* 'ninth' > *nounos* > \**nōnus* > *nōnus* (not *nunūs*) by the influence of *nouem*, *couentio* (1<sup>2</sup>581) > \**countio* > \**cōntio* > *contio* (not \**cuntio*) by the influence of *ouentus*, *concilium*

2.4 It is probable that those non-roman dialects that had /e/ for roman /i/ (</ei/ (see § 5.2) also retained /o/ (</ou/)<sup>4</sup> The examples from against roman However, Augustus's use of *domos* as genitive of *domus* (Suet., *Aug.*, 87, 2) is most plausibly explained as a volscian latin reflex of \**domous* Local pronunciations must have survived long long after the local orthography had been standardized to roman

3.1 With /ai/ we encounter the need to distinguish between initial (originally stressed) and non-initial (originally unstressed) position For the latter shows assimilatory raising of [a] to [e] contemporaneous with the raising of non-initial short vowels ('vowel-weakening')<sup>5</sup> The resultant [ei] has the same subsequent diachrony as original /ei/ (see § 5.1), e.g. \**encadesētes* > *inceiderētis* (1<sup>2</sup>581) > *inciderētis*, \**peparai* (cf. Fal., *PEPARA*[I]) > *peperet* > *peperit*

3.2 Initial /ai/ by contrast > /ae/ The earliest examples in both roman and non-roman dialects date from the 3C *Aescolapio* on 1<sup>2</sup>27, 28 (Rome), *aetatei* 1<sup>2</sup>364 (Sardinia), *Aecetiat* 1<sup>2</sup>439 (S. Etruria) The first secure dates are provided by *Aetolia* on 1<sup>2</sup>616 (189 B C)<sup>6</sup> and *Aemilius* on 1<sup>2</sup>618 (187 B C)

3.3 It is unlikely that *ae* represents a monophthong [ɛ] in the roman dialect of this period<sup>7</sup>, though this pronunciation must have been widespread by the 1C A D, when the first *e*-spellings appear The mo-

<sup>4</sup> The regular development in umbrian of course *rofu* < \**roufōf* (\**reudhōns* acc. pl.)

<sup>5</sup> In the *a*-declension paradigmatic analogy with the surviving *ā* in some forms combined to preserve *-ai* Thus n. pl. \**fēmenai* > *fēminae*, d. sg. \**fēmenāi* > *fēminae* The long diphthongs are excluded from this discussion

<sup>6</sup> That the earliest instances should include this toponym is no doubt connected with the convergence of [ai], [ei] and [e] in the aetolian dialect, e.g. *Μελιταια*, *Μελιταέων* and \**Ῥηναίεϋς* beside att. *Ῥηνεῖα* The change [ai] > [ae] > [e] is, however, found in other greek dialects of the hellenistic period, e.g. *Αεθῶν* (cor.) *κη* (bocot.) and in the 2C koine *βαινετα* for *-ε*, *ὄρατε* for *-αι* (papyri) see E. H. Sturtevant, *The pronunciation of greek and latin*, Philadelphia, 1940, 49)

<sup>7</sup> For the contrary view see W. Blumel *Untersuchungen zu Lautsystem und Morphologie des vorklassischen lateins* (München, 1972), pp. 14-15 This work contains the best and most comprehensive account of the latin diphthongs

nophthongization had of course already occurred in some non-roman dialects as early as the 3C *cedre* on 1<sup>2</sup>366 (Spoletium), *pretod* < \*praitor on 1<sup>2</sup>365 (Falerii) This corresponds to the situation in the native languages of these areas, cf umbr *PRE*, fal *EFILES* (=lat *aediles*)<sup>8</sup> Early examples from Latium are *Fortune* on 1<sup>2</sup>48 (Tusculum), *Ceisia* on 1<sup>2</sup>559 (Praeneste) The latter, like *queistores* beside *Victorie* on 1<sup>2</sup>388 (Marsi region), shows a convergence of /ai/ and /ei/ That this need not have been at [e] is shown by the comparable situation in umbrian, where \*/ai/ and \*/ei/ are rarely reflected by /i/ but \*/e/ often is, e.g. *pre*, *eetu* but *habitu* A praenestine pronunciation of *ae* as [ɛ] or [e] is the point of Lucilius's jibe against Caecilius —*Cecilus* <pretor> *ne rusticus fiat* (Var *L*, 7, 96, Diomed, 1, 452)— if, as is generally assumed, this is the praenestine Caecilius Metellus Caprarius who eventually became consul in 113 In mid-1C the monophthongal pronunciation was still distinctive of some non-roman dialects Thus Varro reports that *illic* (sc *apud sabinos*)<sup>9</sup> «*fedus*» in *Latio rure* «*hedus*», *qui in urbe, ut in multis*, «*a*» addito «*haedus*» (*L*, 5, 97)

3.4 No examples of *e* for *ae* occur on roman inscription before the Empire<sup>10</sup> Early in the 2C A.D. we find Terentius Scaurus objecting to the archaic spellings *pictai* and *aulai* on the ground that *magis in illis* «*e*» *nouissima sonat* (7, 16, 9) This implies a diphthongal pronunciation at least in educated speech, though like other grammarians Scaurus was sometimes prone to invent phonetic distinctions for graphemic reasons Even in the scholarly tradition the monophthongal pronunciation was established by the 4C and is presupposed in Servius's description of /e/ as *ucinum ad sonum diphthongi, ut* «*equus*» (4, 421, 20)

4.1 With /oi/ again a distinction must be made between initial and non-initial syllables In the latter the effect of unstressed-vowel raising was the assimilatory fronting of [o] to [e] The resultant [ei] has the same subsequent diachrony as original /ei/ (see § 5.1), e.g., \**castrois* > *castreis* > *castris*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Significantly there are no latin examples in the oscan-speaking South, where the native language preserved its diphthongs The sudden eruption of *e* for *ae* at Pompeii cannot therefore be due to oscan influence, though it might have been stimulated by contact with the koine (see n. 6)

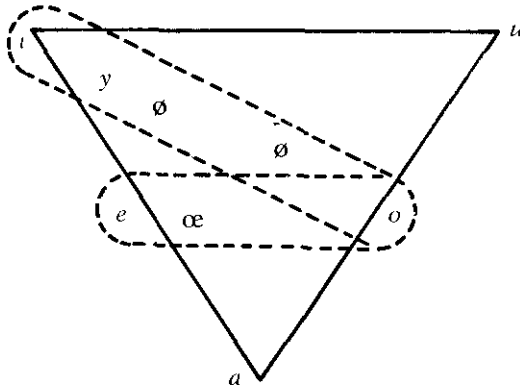
<sup>9</sup> Coming from a native sabine the testimony must be reliable, but it is unclear whether the reference is to sabine latin or —if it was still spoken at this date— to the sabine language itself

<sup>10</sup> The form of the loanwords *scaena*, *scaeptrum* (att. σκῆνη, σκῆπτρου Var, *L*, 7, 96) has not been satisfactorily explained and cannot be used as a secure basis for inferences about native latin phonology For the latin change of [ae] to [ɛ] see further Coleman, TPS, 1971, pp. 175-191, and 1974, pp. 86-92

<sup>11</sup> *commoinis* not \**commeinis* (see § 4.5) must be due to the forms with initial *moi-*

4.2 It is often assumed that the absorption of initial-syllable /oi/ into /u/ was by way of the change [oi]>[œ]>[u]. This is unlikely for several reasons. In the first place the earliest instances of *u* for *oi*—e.g., *utier* on 1<sup>2</sup>10 (c. 170 B.C.) and *unius* on 1<sup>2</sup>583 (123-122 B.C.)—predate the earliest instances of *œ*<sup>12</sup>—e.g., *oetantur* beside *oima* and *unius* on 1<sup>2</sup>585 (111 B.C.), and *coerauere* and *loedos* beside *murum* on 1<sup>2</sup>678 (106 B.C.). The latter inscription is from Capua, and the digraph forms here and on the companion texts 675 and 677 (*coir-* and *loid-*) may be due to Oscan influence. For [oi]>[ui] in Oscan, as in *ŪŪTTIUF* (< *oitiōns*), Paenignian cognates of *coerauere* and *loedos* occur complete with diphthongs in *coisatens* and *luisarifs*, and the one word in these inscriptions that consistently shows a monophthongal pronunciation is *murum*, which would not be subject to bilingual influence since the Oscan equivalent would be *FEIHUM*.

4.3 A transitional stage [œ] seems in any event improbable phonetically. Consider the following diagram.



We should have to posit an assimilatory lowering of *i* to *e*, followed by a monophthongizing movement of the whole diphthong in the reverse direction, viz. upwards as well as backwards. In fact if Lat. [oi]>[œ] the subsequent monophthong would have been a long vowel in the band [e]-[œ]-[o]. Something of this sort seems to have happened in Beotian Greek. At 3C Tanagra we find *Χοέριλος*, *Φηκαδάμοε* for earlier *Χοίριλος*, *Φηκαδάμοι* (dat.). A little later we find in Boeotian generally

<sup>12</sup> *Poenicas* on 1<sup>2</sup>25 is impossible for the mid-3C and must be listed with the other spurious archaisms, like *nauebos*, *clasetis* and *exfoctont*, which belong to the early imperial «restoration» of the inscription.

forms like *Fθκία* (<*Fοικία*, cf att οἰκία) with *v* for [y], in contrast to *ou* for [u], and *Βοιωτῦς* (<*Βοιωτοῖς*), where the first /oi/ is retained because the /i/ formed a glide to the following vowel. The boeotian diachrony therefore was something like [oi]>[oe]>[æ]>[ø]>[y]<sup>13</sup>. For latin should have to posit a final stage [y]>[u]. How plausible would all this be?

4.4 Now it is true that greek *v* was regularly transliterated as *u* in loanwords before the introduction of the *peregrina littera* *y* in the late 2C or early 1C<sup>14</sup>. Some words, like *gubernator* and *tumba*, were borrowed at an early date, probably from the dorian communities in Italy, which still had [u] for /u/. The transition to latin /u/ was therefore easy and the romance reflexes show that [u] was never replaced. Other words, like *cymbalum* and *timum*, were probably borrowed from the attic-based koine, which had [y] for /u/. However they were pronounced in early latin, their classical spellings *cymbalum* and *thimum* indicate the adoption of [y], which was subsequently replaced, as in greek, by [i]. Hence the romance reflexes <*cimb-* and *tim-* (with the variant *tum-*<sup>15</sup> revealing a dialectal division in VL between the new *y* and older *u* forms). While it is possible that *u* could in the 2C have represented [y], it is perhaps more likely that any [æ] or [y] that emerged in the native phonology would have behaved like the borrowed [y] later, losing its lip-rounding rather than its frontal location. We may therefore envisage for latin a sequence [oi]>[ø]>[o]>[u], with the penultimate stage attested in a 3C non-roman dialectal form *coraueron* (1<sup>st</sup>59, Praeneste).

4.5 A number of CL doublets have both *oe* and *u* forms: *poena*, *pūnīre* (<ποινᾶ), *Poenus*, *Pūnicus* (<Φοῖνιξ), *moenia*, *mūnus* and *mūnia* (<*-moin-*, cf *comoinē[m]* on 1<sup>st</sup>581)<sup>16</sup>. The variation can hardly be explained on phonological grounds, given the similar environments. It probably came about as follows. Like other words in the sacral, legal and analogistic registers (including *coirare* and *foidus*) *poina*, *moinia* and *Poinus* retained the older spelling along with the new pronunciation. But eventually a spelling-pronunciation as [oi] emerged. The *oe* spellings that appear towards the end of the 2C reflect either an autonomous change of this [oi] to [oe] or the influence of *ae* for earlier *ai* (see § 3.2). In relation to § 4.3 it is significant that this [oe]>[e] not [u], cf *it pena* but *pūnīre*.

<sup>13</sup> The shift from [oi] to [y] in the hellenistic koine is revealed by the growing confusion between *oi* and *v* in papyri from the 2C onwards, e.g., ἀνύγετε, λοιμανάμενοι (Sturtevant, *op cit*, p. 52).

<sup>14</sup> The authenticity of ms variants like *goerus*, *lagoena* beside CL *gyrus*, *lagōna* (<γῦρος, λαγῦνος) is doubtful. If they do reflect early spellings with *oi*, these need be no more than a product of the confusion that followed the change of [oi] to [u].

<sup>15</sup> Cf *logod tumbu* with, *it timo*.

<sup>16</sup> *pomerium* also, if the old etymology (<<sup>s</sup>*post-moir-om*, cf the variant spelling *pomoe-rium*) is correct (See also n. 17).

5.1 /e/ was absorbed into /i/ by way of the transitional stage [e], which is attested in both roman and non-roman dialects in the 3C, e.g., *plourume* on 1<sup>29</sup> and *sueq* (< <sup>t</sup>*souetsque*) on 1<sup>262</sup> from Praeneste. This transitional vowel must have remained distinct, at least in roman, from /e/, which did not share in the change to /i/ <sup>17</sup>, whence we may infer that the qualitative distinction between /e/ and /e/ reported by Servius (*loc. cit.*, § 3.4) and implicit in VL confusions of /e/ and /i/ had not yet emerged.

5.2 In roman dialect the transition to /i/ is revealed by *purgati* on I<sup>2586</sup> (c. 160 B.C.). But an *e*-vowel, which probably did become assimilated, as [e] or even [e], to /e/, seems to have survived in some non-roman dialects. Varro cites (*R.*, 1, 2, 14, 48, 2) *ueha*, *uella*, *specu* as rural variants of *uia* (< *uia*), *uilla*, *spica*, in all of which *i* < *ei*. It is probable that Cicero (*de Or.*, 3, 45) is referring to the same phenomenon when he says that *Cotta noster*, *quoniam tu illa lata*, *Sulpicii*, *non numquam imitaris*, *ut iota litteram tollas et e plenissimum dicas*, *non mihi oratores antiquos sed messorum uidetur imitari* <sup>18</sup>. The change of <sup>s</sup>/e/ to /e/ is widespread in central Italic, e.g., umbr. *PREVE* (< <sup>s</sup>*preuet*), *ETU*, fal. *HEC*, volsc. *DEVE* (< <sup>s</sup>*deuat*), so the retention of *e* in Latin inscriptions of these areas would not be surprising. Examples are hard to come by, since inscriptions are few, and from the 2C onwards their graphemics rapidly became standardized to roman practice. In any event the subsequent raising of /e/ and loss of vowel length in unstressed position in vulgar Latin, both roman and non-roman, removed whatever dialectal differentiation of this kind had survived.

6.1 An even sharper distinction between roman and non-roman dialects is found in the treatment of /au/, the diphthong whose components are maximally differentiated, being respectively the lowest front <sup>19</sup> and highest back vowel. In non-initial position once again vowel raising produced a partial assimilation, [au] > [ou], whence [u], as in <sup>s</sup>*adcausō* > *accūsō*, <sup>s</sup>*exclaudō* > *exclūdō*. Initial syllable /au/ was retained in roman and in many provincial dialects outside Italy <sup>20</sup>, where it survived into

<sup>17</sup>In *lex iure faciundo*, etc., the archaic form is kept, as in other terms of the sacral and legal registers, cf. *pomērum* for <sup>s</sup>*pomirum* (n. 16) and § 4.5.

<sup>18</sup>A reference to the use of [e] for [i] in rural *Menerua*, etc., or of [e] for [i], as in VL *magester*, etc. (see Wilkins *ad loc.*), is less likely. All three examples of *e* for *i* are lumped together by Quintilian (1, 4, 17).

<sup>19</sup>That /a/ was [a] not [a] is clear from unstressed-vowel raising, <sup>s</sup>*adfactus* > *affectus* not <sup>s</sup>*affoctus*, <sup>s</sup>*dēcadō* > *decidō*, not <sup>s</sup>*decidō*.

<sup>20</sup>The best introduction to which, it is especially pleasing to remark in the present context, is provided by Lisardo Rubio and Virgilio Bejarano's *Documenta ad Linguae Latinae Historiam Illustrandam* (Madrid, 1955), a collection impressive not only for its geographical and temporal range but also for the diversity of material that is represented in its pages.

the respective romance languages, cf port *cousa*, prov *kauza*, o prov *aur*, roum *aur*

6.2 The reduction of /au/ to /ɔ/ is attested in the umbrian and faliscan languages, e.g. *TURUF*, *toru* < \**taurons*, *Polla* = lat *Paulla*. In the latin dialects of these and adjacent regions *o* is also attested, e.g., *plostru* on 9 4171 (2C North Aequi area). The emperor Vespasian's pronunciation of *plaustrum* as *plostrum* (Suet *Vesp*, 22) reveals that the monophthong was a feature of sabine latin in the 1C AD. It is generally agreed that roman *cōpa* (beside *caupo*), *ōlla* (beside early lat *aula* P. Fest., 21L), etc., and family names like *Plōtius* came originally from rural Latium or further afield. In fact the area comprising umbrian, faliscan and sabine latin may have been the focus for the replacement of /au/ by /ɔ/ (after loss of length in [o]) in the vulgar latin of Italy.

7.1 A general picture of the diachrony of latin monophthongization and its effect on the system as a whole is presented in the three charts below. Chart (ii) shows how rapidly the five diphthongs were reduced in non-initial syllables to just two long vowels, the highest front [i] and back [u]. In each instance the transition was by way of the raising of the first and lower component in partial assimilation to the second. These changes belong with the vowel-weakening that was complete by the latter part of the 3C.

c 300 BC		c 200 BC		c 150 BC		c 100 BC		c 300 AD
[ei]	>	[e]	>	[i]			>	[i]
[ai]			>	[ae]			>	[ɛ]
[au]							>	[ɔ]
[oi]			>	[oi]	>	[oe]	>	[e]
				[u]				
[ou]			>	[o]	>	[u]	>	[u]

(i) Roman initial syllables

[ei]		}	>	[e]	>	[i]		>	[i]	
[ai]	>									[ei]
[oi]	>									[ei]
[au]	>									[ou]
[ou]			>	[o]	>	[u]		>	[u]	

(ii) Roman non-initial syllables

[ei]	>	[e]	>	[i]
[ai]	>	[ɛ]	>	[e]
[au]	>	[o]	>	[ɔ]
[oi]	>	} > [o]	>	[u]
[ou]	>			

(iii) Certain dialects of central Italy

7.2 A very different and more complex situation obtains in initial syllables (Chart (i)). The changes that occurred in the 2C all show assimilation of the second component to the first, partial in [ai] and [ou], virtually complete in [oi]. Only [ei] and [ou] show reflexes corresponding to those in non-initial position, viz [i] and [u]. Leaving aside the small group that shows [oe] as the reflex of [oi] (§ 4.5), we find that the only two diphthongs that survive beyond the 2C are those whose first component was [a], the most sonorous of the vowels—[au] being especially tenacious (§ 6.1). When the two *a*-diphthongs were at last reduced, it was to the relatively low vowels [ɛ] and [ɔ], whence with the general loss of length as a functional feature [ɛ] and [ɔ]. The reflexes here were thus spread more widely among the vowel phonemes, being severally absorbed into /i/, /e/, /o/, /e/ and /u/.

7.3 In those central Italian districts—including non-Roman Latium—for which evidence is available it is impossible to recover any distinction between initial and non-initial positions or to plot the stages by which the various monophthongizations occurred. For all the diphthongs were already reduced by the late 3C. In contrast to the Roman dialect, it was not the high vowels that were the beneficiaries of these changes. The standardization of orthography throughout Italy, beginning in the mid-2C, has obscured the dates at which the four monophthongs in the second column of chart (iii) were replaced by those in the final column. On the evidence from vulgarized inscriptions of the late Empire it is assumed that by this period there was no longer a clear division in spoken Latin between non-Roman and Roman. Hence the close correspondence between the final columns of charts (i) and (iii).