

Parting ways with tradition: Romance, dating, and vowel breaking.

The diphthongisation of Latin *ĕ* and *ō* in much of Romance has a long descriptive and explanative tradition and is one of the most clearly visible phonological transformations between the Latin ancestor and the Romance descendants. However, there is no consensus on the manner or dating of its initiation and spread. In Portuguese diphthongisation does not occur at all, while in Castilian diphthongisation has occurred in all stressed syllables; this is also true in Neapolitan where the outcome is affected by the quality of the final vowel (De Blasi & Imperatore (2000: 38-45, 79-88). In Old French, diphthongization has operated in stressed open syllables, ex: *bene* → *bien* leading Bourciez (1937, p. 94), Wartburg (1950, p. 82, 141) and Castellani (1961: 95) to reconstruct an origin in Open Syllable Lengthening. Loporcaro (2011, p.121) has furthermore outlined the existence of dialects, conditioned by both the stressed open syllable and the post-tonic vowel as in Arezzo (Eastern Tuscany), ex. *vieni* ‘come.2SG’ vs. *vene* ‘come.3SG’, *bu(o)no* ‘good.msg’ vs. *bona* ‘good.fsg’ (Castellani 2000: 368).

The *communis opinio* regarding the absolute dating of diphthongisation relies on very poor philological evidence: ***<dieo>*, ***<uobit>* and ***<niepos>* for classical *DĒO* ‘god.dat.s’, *ŌBIT* ‘die.3SG.pcf’ and *NĒPOS* ‘nephew.nom.s’. Though Hermann (1970, p. 30) signalled the shaky philological evidence upon which this diphthongisation rested and Loporcaro (2011; 2015) has reiterated that “two out of the three examples of alleged diphthongization from Latin inscriptions quoted in support of this chronology are indeed phantoms due to incorrect readings”, the tradition founded by Richter (1934, p. 155f), Straka (1953, p. 268) and propagated by such works as Zink (1999, p. 53), has yet to be discarded.

In this presentation we will go a step further explaining how these phantom readings arose and the methodological difficulty this has posed for the discipline. Presenting data from Author (2022) we give philological evidence that the final example of the alleged Imperial Age evidence of Romance diphthongisation, *<niepos>* is also a phantom concluding that there is not a single shred of philological evidence pointing to Romance diphthongisation (vowel breaking) in the Imperial Period.

Hope is not lost however, since several pieces of post-Imperial evidence are authentic witnesses to the diphthongisation process: *<dieci>* for classical *DĒCĒM* in a private Merovingian Age Charter dated to 673 (cf. Vieliard 1927 ; Author 2022), (though note the monophthong in fr. *dix* [dis]) and potentially *<miecio>* for *Metio* or *Medio*, an anthroponym (perhaps related to fr. *mi* ‘medium’) in a royal diploma dated to 677, both from northern France. Gallo-Romance joins with Northern Italy and Rhaeto-Romance as well as Catalan in showing some interaction of diphthongisation and metaphony before palatal(ised) consonants (cf. Sánchez Miret 1998:213; Lausberg 1976:232). Russo & van der Hulst (2014) have pointed out metaphonic effects in Gallo-Romance and the Merovingian data concords with the form *<quosa>* for **cosa* (classical *CAUSA*) in a mid-seventh century attestation from Langobardic era Tuscany (Castellani 1961:95). Ultimately the philological record suggests a later dating of the diphthongisation process (early 7th century) and suggests that Open Syllable lengthening and metaphony may well have interacted in Romance, even within the ancestor of Old French.