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GALLO-ROMANCE THIRD DECLENSION PLURALS

The morphological history of Latin third declension words in Gallo-Romance is one of the more obscure chapters of Romance linguistics, involving as it does the problem of the masculine nominative plurals, which differ from third declension feminines in failing to preserve their etymological flexion. The disappearance of *-es* in such masculine nominative plurals as *canes*, *patres*, *grandes* appears to have been common to all Gallo-Romance dialects and is attested by the regular appearance in both Old French and Old Provençal of 'flexionless' forms of the type O. Fr. *chien*, *pere*, *grant*, O. Prov. *can*, *paire*, *gran*. No exact parallel can be adduced from other Romance regions. In Ibero-Romance the termination *-es* common to both nominative and accusative of third declension masculines survived. In Italian and Balkan Romance, where *-es* failed to survive, the situation is somewhat different, since account must be taken of the fall of final *-s* in those regions, a complication which does not enter into the question in Gallo-Romance. It seems possible that the Gallo-Romance development was shared also by Rhaetic, but in view of the scanty nature of the evidence available about the medieval Rhaetic dialects this possibility is perhaps best left out of consideration. In what follows, therefore, the development of the nominative plural *-es* in Gallo-Romance will be considered as a problem peculiar to the history of Latin in Gaul. For until the Gallo-Romance development can be satisfactorily clarified we are in no position to assess what features, if any, may have been common to Gaul and other regions.

From the survival of *-es*, either as *-s* or *-z*, in the oblique forms of the masculine plural, and also in both cases for feminine plurals, it is clear that we are dealing with a morphological change properly so called, since the facts cannot be explained by appeal to the normal phonetic development of the ending in question.

The usual comment offered on the 'flexionless' masculine nominative plurals of Old French and Old Provençal — that the third declension masculine plurals had been remodelled on the analogy of the second declension — is of small explanatory value, since it is little more than a disguised restatement of the fact that Old French and Old Provençal show no difference as regards the distribution of flexional *-s* or *-z* in the plural between masculines which come from the Latin third declension and those which come from the Latin second declension. Moreover, the date of the elimination of the flexion *-es* is not at all clear. Hypotheses which have been advanced fall into two categories. Some authorities postulate the generalization of nominative plurals of the type **cani*, **patri*, **grandi* in the spoken Latin of Gaul during the Imperial period or the Merovingian period. Others regard the remodelling as a later Romance development occurring after the fall of final vowels. As the analysis below will attempt to show, no theory so far put forward is entirely satisfactory.

The view that **cani*, **patri*, **grandi* etc. were already general in the Vulgar Latin of Gaul was championed by Mohl¹ and has since been accepted by a number of philologists, including Nyrop², Ewert³ and Anglade⁴. According to Mohl the explanation of this early dialectal feature of the Latin of Gaul is connected with the adoption in Gaul of the Classical Latin distinction between nominative and accusative plural in second declension nouns (*-i* : *-os*). This was favoured by the existence of a similar distinction between nominative and accusative masculine plurals in the Celtic dialects of Gaul. Elsewhere, however, — e. g. in the Iberian peninsula — Mohl supposes that Latin nominative and accusative second declension plurals shared the common termination *-os*, thus continuing a more archaic type of Italic flexion. This would explain the fact that whereas *canes* was remodelled to **cani* in Gaul, such a remodelling did not occur in Hispanic Latin, the model from which such analogical forms could be generalized being absent.

However, the case for accepting third declension masculine *-i* plurals as an early feature of the Vulgar Latin of Gaul appears to rest largely

1. F. G. Mohl, *Introduction à la chronologie du latin vulgaire*, Paris, 1899, p. 208.

2. K. Nyrop, *Grammaire historique de la langue française*, Paris-Copenhague, 1899-1930, t. II, § 239.

3. A. Ewert, *The French Language*, London, 2nd ed., 1943, § 175.

4. J. Anglade, *Grammaire de l'ancien provençal*, Paris, 1921, p. 220.

upon the evidence of the forms which this theory is invoked to explain, namely the Old French and Old Provençal 'flexionless' nominative plurals. Mohl writes ¹ :

' Que l'on n'objecte point que le français *pedre* : *pedres* au pluriel repose sur un métaplasme récent, postérieur à la chute des voyelles finales en français, et qu'en réalité *pedre* : *pedres* ou *grant* : *granx* sont formés directement sur le français *maistre* : *maistres* ou *mur* : *murs* ; *bel* : *bels* ; etc., sans supposer en aucune façon qu'un pluriel tel que nominatif **patrī*, accusatif *patrēs* ait jamais existé réellement dans le latin vulgaire des Gaules. Ce qui prouve très clairement que le système nominatif **patrī* : accusatif *patrēs* n'est point une reconstruction purement fictive et sans fondement historique, c'est précisément encore le féminin *flors*, lequel ne peut reposer que sur *flōrēs*. S'il s'agissait d'une refonte générale de la déclinaison française d'après le paradigme *bon* : *bons* au masculin et *bones* au féminin, sans doute celui-ci eût entraîné les **flores* et non pas les *flors*. '

It is sufficient to dispose of this argument to point out that we are not obliged to suppose, as Mohl assumes, that any analogical remodelling of third declension nouns and adjectives in Early Old French would necessarily have affected feminines as well as masculines. (Mohl's own hypothesis in fact posits a precisely similar partial remodelling of the third declension on the second, with the difference that he assigns it to an earlier date.)

Since the argument derived from purely theoretical considerations is weak, a correspondingly heavier onus must be placed upon textual evidence. While it is certainly true that one can find in Latin evidence of a tendency to assimilate certain third declension words — more particularly adjectives — to the second declension ², such cases are of little value for establishing the existence of a remodelled nominative plural in *-i* for all third declension masculines in Gaul. One searches in vain for attestations that might corroborate such a hypothesis. Nyrop asserts³ that *omni* and *pedi* are attested 'dans les textes vulgaires', but by a curious oversight does not appear to realize that the authority to whom he refers for this evidence ⁴ cites these forms from Latin documents of Italian provenance, dating from the seventh and eighth centuries. They are con-

1. *Op. cit.*, p. 209.

2. C. H. Grandgent, *An Introduction to Vulgar Latin*, Boston, 1907, § 376.

3. *Op. cit.*, t. II, § 239.

4. K. Sittl 'Zur Beurteilung des sogenannten Mittellateins' *Archiv für lateinische Lexikographie und Grammatik* II, 1885, p. 550-580.

sequently of no relevance to the question of *-i* plurals in Gaul. Grandgent comments cautiously on the introduction of third declension *-i* plurals: 'The process may have begun in the Vulgar Latin period, but there is virtually no evidence that it started so early.'¹

The obvious alternative is to relegate the emergence of third declension *-i* plurals in Gaul to the Merovingian period. This is the position adopted by Bourciez² and Pope³. Here again, however, such textual attestations as there are — *folli* in the Reichenau Glosses, *pirpici* (=verveces) and *sapienti* in the Cassel Glossary, *abbati* in a charter of 744⁴ — are so few and so late as to leave doubts as to whether third declension *-i* plurals were ever general in the vernacular of the Gallo-Roman period at all. Certainly had this been the case one would expect them to have left more numerous traces in Merovingian Latin, as do all the other features of the proto-Old French declensional system. Sas⁵ establishes quite convincingly a correlation between the pattern of noun flexions of highest frequency in Merovingian texts and the flexional pattern which emerges in Old French. The only serious divergence between these two patterns concerns precisely the nominative plural of third declension masculines, *-es* and *-is* being the only flexions found in the texts studied by Sas. Somewhat at a loss to account for the absence of *-i* plurals, Sas suggests that the latter 'may be a later development' and that the appearance of Merovingian third declension plurals in *-is* may reflect 'the initial step in such a development'⁶. It is difficult to know how this rather cryptic comment is to be interpreted. Certainly, if **cani* for *canes* is to be regarded as an analogical remodelling, it is not all clear how an intermediate *canis* would represent 'the initial step'. On the other hand, if one regards *canis* as a hypercorrection for colloquial **cani*, this hardly squares with the suggestion that the *-i* plurals were 'a later development'. A third possibility is that Sas considers *canes* > **cani* a phonetic development, but the difficulty of reconciling this theory with the retention of

1. *Op. cit.* § 368.

2. E. Bourciez, *Éléments de linguistique romane* 4^e éd. rev., Paris, 1956, § 215.

3. M. K. Pope, *From Latin to Modern French* 2nd ed. Manchester, 1952, § 792.

4. Of these forms the first three are cited as evidence of a vernacular remodelling by Nyrop, *op. cit.* § 239 and Pope, *op. cit.*, § 792. The fourth is cited by Bourciez *op. cit.*, § 215.

5. L. F. Sas, *The Noun Declension System in Merovingian Latin*, Paris, 1937.

6. *Op. cit.*, p. 485.

final -s in Old French is obvious. Like Sas, Väänänen ¹ interprets the dearth of third declension -i plurals in Merovingian Latin as indicating that the date of remodelling must be very late.

The considerations outlined above may appear conducive to abandoning the third declension -i plural theory altogether in favour of the alternative hypothesis of a late vernacular remodelling after the fall of final vowels. This explanation, advanced by Darmesteter ², seems to have found little favour with philologists since Mohl's attack upon it ³.

Before commenting on this possibility it is relevant to examine the evidence afforded by the early Romance vernacular texts in Gaul. The following list comprises the third declension masculine nominative plurals employed as verb subjects, or agreeing therewith, in the earliest extant texts of Northern and Southern French provenance.

Strasburg Oaths : no examples.

St. Eulalia : no examples.

St. Leger ⁴ : *baron* (< *barones) l. 52 ; *omne* (< homines) l. 211 ; *parent* (< parentes) ll. 14, 117.

Passion ⁵ : *custodes* (< custodes) l. 397 ; *enfan* (< infantes) l. 47 ; *enffant* (< infantes) l. 378 ; *fedel* (< fideles) l. 165 ; *fellon* (< *fellones) ll. 182, 186, 250 ; *fellun* (< *fellones) ll. 222, 243, 248 ; *fellunt* (< *fellones) l. 233 ; *felo* (< *fellones) l. 77 ; *felon* (< *fellones) l. 171 ; *felun* (< *fellones) ll. 138, 141 ; *fidel* (< fideles) ll. 274, 363, 426, 429, 457, 473 ; *gran* (< grandes) ll. 41, 45, 45, 46, 379 ; *munt* (< montes) l. 323.

Boecis ⁶ : *auzello* (< *avicellones) l. 211 ; *cal* (< quales) l. 226 ; *escalo* (< *scalones) l. 209 ; *fello* (< *fellones) ll. 20, 235 ; *jove* (< juvenes) ll. 1, 7 ; *nuallor* (< nugaliore) l. 210 ; *par* (< pares) l. 63 ; *parent*

1. V. Väänänen, 'A propos de l's final dans les langues romanes' *Miscelânea de filologia, literatura e historia cultural à memória de Francisco Adolfo Coelho*, Lisbon, 1949-50 vol. II, p. 33-40.

2. According to Mohl *op. cit.*, p. 208, n. 1.

3. F. Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française* t. I, Paris, 1905, p. 181, and E. Schwan and D. Behrens, *Grammatik des Altfranzösischen*, 11th ed. Leipzig 1919, § 289, mention the possibility that the remodelling may not have occurred until after the fall of final vowels, but refrain from deciding between this and the -i plural theory.

4. Ed. J. Linskill, Paris, 1937.

5. Ed. W. Foerster and E. Koschwitz, *Altfranzösisches Übungsbuch*, 7th ed. Leipzig 1932.

6. Ed. R. Lavaud and G. Machicot, Toulouse, 1950.

(< parentes) ll. 142, 245; *peccator* (< peccatores) l. 76; *peior* (< peiores) l. 21; *ome* (< homines) l. 20; *omne* (< homines) ll. 1, 7, 172, 228, 233.

*Ste. Foi*¹ *baron* (< *barones) l. 562; *cardon* (< cardones) l. 56; *cor* (< *cores) l. 46; *dolent* (< dolentes) l. 410; *dragun* (< dracones) l. 571; *fellun* (< *fellones) l. 575; *homen* (< homines) ll. 251, 352, 412, 512, 524; *lairon* (< latrones) l. 570; *parent* (< parentes) l. 250; *peior* (< peiores) ll. 459, 484; *traitor* (< traditores) l. 575; *trau* (< trabes) l. 272.

*St. Alexis*²: *amperedor* (< imperatores) l. 362; *anceisur* (< *antecessores) l. 12; *empereor* (< imperatores) ll. 306, 356; *empereur* (< imperatores) l. 326; *felix* (< felices) l. 500; *grant* (< grandes) l. 510; *granz* (< grandes) l. 403; *jugedor* (< *judicatores) l. 364; *parent* (< parentes) l. 203; *pechethuor* (< peccatores) l. 361; *pedre* (< patres) l. 44; *pluisur* (< *plusiores) l. 584; *seinor* (< seniores) ll. 499, 516; *seinors* (< seniores) l. 328; *seniur* (< seniores) l. 561.

Of the eighty-four forms listed, all but three are 'flexionless'. *Custodes* (*Passion* l. 397) has the appearance of a Latinism. *Seinors* (*St. Alexis* l. 328) stands alone in the text beside *seinor* (ll. 499, 516) and *seniur* (l. 561): its final -s is perhaps a lapsus calami. *Granz* (*St. Alexis* l. 403) occurs in the phrase *mes granz paleis* which, as the Hildesheim MS stands, should be nominative: but the possessive *mes* (for *mi*) and the fact that MS A has a variant reading which justifies the oblique³ lead one to wonder whether this is not an error of transcription.

The conclusion to be drawn from these forms is quite clear: not only is the elimination of the nominative -es regularly reflected in these early texts, but there is no convincing evidence of survivals of a masculine nominative plural -s (< -es) which might support the view that its elimination was of relatively recent date.

To summarize, we are faced with two alternative theories about the disappearance of -es, each based in the final analysis on negative evidence. From the absence of Old French and Provençal masculine nominative

1. Ed. A. Thomas, Paris, 1925.

2. Hildesheim MS ed. C. Storey, Paris, 1934.

3. The Hildesheim MS reads: *O filz, cui erent mes granz ereditez, / Mes larges terres dunt jo aveie asez, / Mes granz paleis de Rome la citet?*: whereas A reads: *Filz a cui larrai je mes granz...*, etc.

-s plurals one can argue in favour of the Latin -i plural hypothesis. On the other hand, from the small number of attested -i plurals and their late emergence, one can argue in support of Darmesteter for a late elimination of -es, postdating the fall of final vowels.

But in either case, if we suspend judgement for the moment upon the more controversial aspects of the problem, the textual evidence both Latin and Romance, taken at its face value, does throw some light upon the chronological question. An examination of Merovingian Latin shows that the nominative plural -es continued to flourish in the written Latin of Gaul well into the eighth century, with competition only from -is. An examination of the early Romance texts shows no trace of -es or its descendants. It seems therefore reasonable to assign the disappearance of a characteristic third declension masculine nominative plural flexion approximately to the period 750-950 A. D.

This is as far as the available textual evidence will take us. Any attempt to be more precise must rest upon considerations of a different order.

The inadequacy of the theories considered above can be traced ultimately to an assumption basic to both of them, namely that the elimination of -es was the result of analogical remodelling — that is to say a question of unifying declension patterns by removing 'irregularities'. This assumption is questionable, for it is not so much whether a form is 'irregular' that matters, but how its 'irregularity' affects the functioning of the morphological system of which it is part.

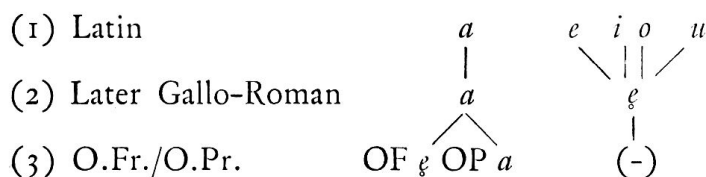
As nominative plurals, both Vulgar Latin *canes* and Old French **chiens* would have been 'irregular' inasmuch as, by contrast with corresponding second declension forms (e. g. V. L. *muri*, O. F. *mur*) both would have been morphologically identical not only with their accusative plurals (V. L. *canes*, O. F. *chiens*) but also with their nominative singulars (V. L. *canes* < *canis*, O. F. *chiens*). Now whereas this anomalous situation — the lack of morphological distinction between nominative singular, nominative plural and accusative plural — would appear to have provoked a remodelling in the late eighth, ninth or early tenth centuries, it had nonetheless persisted for hundreds of years in the period preceding. Yet at all times, presumably, the third declension had been open to the potential analogical influence of the second. Thus the late elimination of -es sets a problem if we look no further than analogical remodelling to account for it.

A further problem arises over the morphological history of the *pater*, *frater* type. If, as Darmesteter supposed, analogical pressure from the second declension had caused the early Old French nominative plural **peres* (< *patres*) to yield to *pere*, one may well ask why at the same time *peres* did not replace *pere* as the nominative singular. For *pere* as a nominative singular labours under disadvantages no less great than **peres* as a nominative plural. The introduction of *pere* as a nominative plural renders the nominative singular *pere* identical with both accusative singular and nominative plural: yet the analogical remodelling *peres* is not generalized as a nominative singular to remedy the situation — at least in Parisian French — until the late thirteenth century.

A comparison between this remodelling and that of the nominative plural *-es* is interesting and significant. The rapid and definitive elimination of *patres* > **peres* between 750 and 950 contrasts sharply with the protracted hesitation characteristic of the elimination of *pater* > *pere*, which persists obstinately through the Old French period. Again, the explanation of analogical remodelling fails to account for the contrast.

In order to do so, one must situate the problem of the elimination of *-es* in the context of the phonological and morphological development of the Gallo-Romance vernaculars.

Phonologically, the relevant question is the development of unstressed vowels in the final syllable. The history of both French and Provençal points to a gradual weakening of vowels other than Latin *-a* in this position, and their eventual fall except when retained in certain cases as supporting vowels. This process may be schematized as follows.



This reduction of final vowel distinctions must have profoundly disturbed the pattern of noun declension in the Gallo-Roman period.

While the Gallo-Romance dialects maintained a distinction between unstressed *e*, *o* and *i* in the final syllable, the paradigm of *canis* remained distinct from that of *murus*, giving a morphological system which we shall call for convenience 'type A'. This embraces all masculine forms with the exception of nominative singulars of imparisyllabics and *-er* words.

A

1.		2.	
NS	-es	NP	-es
OS	-e	OP	-es
NS	-os	NP	-i
OS	-o	OP	-os

From A, with the merging of all final unstressed vowels other than *-a*, there would have arisen a new system ('type B'), involving the obliteration of morphological distinction between the two paradigms in all forms but the nominative plurals.

B

1.		2.	
NS	-es	NP	-es
OS	-e	OP	-es
NS	-es	NP	-e
OS	-e	OP	-es

The third system in the series to be considered is that typified by Early Old French after the fall of final vowels ('type C').

C

1.		2.	
NS	-s	NP	-Ø
OS	-Ø	OP	-s
NS	-es	NP	-e
OS	-e	OP	-es

The morphological situation corresponding to C might more simply be described by distinguishing between two classes of masculines — those ending in a 'consonant and those ending in *-e* — and recognizing a single system of flexions for both classes, namely addition of *-s* in the nominative singular and oblique plural. While such a description would be synchronically correct, it is nonetheless true that from the diachronic point of view there are two descendants, not one, of Latin *-es* in Old French, namely *-es* and *-s*, and it is important not to lose sight of this fact in an examination of the history of the flexional system.

In the above tabulations we have made the assumption that *-es* was not replaced by *-i* as the third declension nominative plural ending in the period before the merging of quality distinctions among final vowels, and we are now to explore the validity of the assumption and its consequences. We need not for our present purposes be concerned with assigning dates to A, B and C, nor with discussing what chronologically intermediate systems there may have been. Nor does it matter that for the sake of simplicity we leave out of consideration the question of whe-

ther or not the reduction to a two-case system preceded the merging of quality distinctions among final vowels. (If not, A would need to be completed by the addition of other case forms.) Let us consider A, B and C simply as representing three successive stages through which the masculines passed in their evolution from Latin.

The comparison is particularly instructive in revealing certain aspects of the equilibrium of flexional systems and the economy of morphological changes. A and C are both complete two-paradigm systems, but with an important difference, namely that whereas the distribution of the flexions of A throughout the vocabulary is purely morphemically determined, that of C — in its earliest chronological phase — is exclusively phonemically determined (by the presence or absence of certain stem-final consonant groups: *murs* C1 but *peuples* C2). By comparison with B and C, A is a system rich in flexions (*-es*, *-e*, *-os*, *-o*, *-i*) in which although *-es* is allomorphic not only with *-os* but also with *-i*, there remain a number of contrasts (*-es/-e*, *-os/-o*, *-es/-o*, *-os/e*, *-os/-i*, *-i/-e*, *-i/-o*) which consistently mark grammatical distinctions. Here may lie one reason for the persistence of the nominative plural *-es* in face of the apparent disadvantage of its identity with the nominative singular *-es* and the oblique plural *-es*: the system is rich enough (i. e. has a sufficient variety of flexional contrasts available) not to be unduly impeded in its functioning by the possible ambiguity of *-es*. To remove such an ambiguity if need be, resort can always be had to a qualifier (demonstrative or adjective) drawn from A2. (The relationship between the development of demonstratives into definite articles and the history of substantival flexion might profitably be explored from a comparative Romance viewpoint more fully than has yet been done.) Another reason for the persistence of *-es* is suggested by an examination of A. Those who regard the third declension nominative plural as having been remodelled to *-i* in Vulgar Latin take it for granted that from the earliest times *-i* had been a morphological competitor of *-es*. In one sense this may be true. But there may be another and more relevant sense in which it is false. In the nominative singular, oblique singular and oblique plural paradigms A1 and A2 are remarkably symmetrical. This symmetry is upset by the appearance of *-es* as nominative plural of A1. But it would be even more radically upset if *-i* appeared as nominative plural of A1. There would then be complete identity at one point between two otherwise distinctive paradigms, and this might open the way to considerable analogical disturbance. As mat-

ters stand, the oblique counterpart of *-i* can be nothing other than *-os* : but if both *-os* and *-es* were oblique counterparts of *-i*, there might be considerable uncertainty as to the correct distribution of the flexions throughout the vocabulary -- an uncertainty which could be removed by no morphological adjustment less sweeping than the complete elimination of A1 in favour of A2 or vice versa. In short, the generalization of *-i* for the nominative plural of both paradigms would lead almost inevitably to a prolonged period of hesitation and morphological confusion between the two. Simplicity is often invoked by philologists as a motivating factor in morphological change : but this may have been a case in which the greater simplicity lay in maintaining the *status quo*, imperfect through it might be. Finally, although morphologically identical with both the nominative singular and oblique plural of A1, the nominative plural *-es* was perhaps enabled to survive precisely through the support it received in the flexional system from the existence of *-i*, that is to say by virtue of the fact that the speaker could consciously or unconsciously equate it with the *-i* of A2, as distinct from the nominative singular and oblique plural *-es*, both equatable with *-os*.

Thus, from the examination of A as a system emerge several considerations which might explain the stability of *-es* as a nominative plural in spite of its obvious disadvantages. We have only to compare A with B to see that here these considerations cease to be valid. In B the oblique singular *-ē* corresponds to both the *-e* of A1 and the *-o* of A2. The one nominative singular *-ēs* has inherited the functions of both the *-es* of A1 and the *-os* of A2, and similarly for the oblique plural. Thus three of the features which formerly distinguished A1 from A2 have now disappeared. The result of this blurring of the boundaries between two formerly distinct classes of word is to bring the surviving nominative plurals into acute competition, for they are now the only surviving features from A which prevent the achievement of a unified new system. Thus the roles have been reversed : whereas in A the tendency to merge nominative plurals would have endangered the equilibrium of the system, in B it is only their remaining distinct which disturbs the equilibrium of the system. But another factor contributes, perhaps even more powerfully, to bring the nominative plurals into competition. By comparison with A, B shows a marked reduction in the number of flexions available in the system. Both A and B operate with one or more flexions fulfilling more than one function, but B cannot afford the luxury of having one

function (the nominative plural) denoted by more than one flexion, for the compelling reason that there are only two flexions in the system. In other words, with the transition from A to B, the only flexional contrast capable of preserving distinctions of case and number is that between *-ēs* and *-ē*. It is clear that *in these circumstances* the continued existence of the regular etymological derivative from the nominative plural *-ēs* would not merely be an 'irregularity' — in the sense of failing to provide a flexion distinct from nominative singular and oblique plural — but menace the whole flexional system of which it was part. The coexistence for an indefinite period of both *-ēs* and *-ē* as nominative plural allomorphs would have been fatal to a system which must depend ultimately for its efficiency on establishing a functional opposition between *-ēs* and *-ē*. Thus a homomorphism tolerable in one system (A), when transferred into the context of a new system (B), becomes the decisive factor in the elimination of the third declension nominative plural.

The role of B as an intermediary between A and C emerges as an interesting and vital one. B prepares the way for the changeover from a morphemically conditioned flexional system to a phonemically conditioned one, and for the establishment of a viable uniform flexional system through the elimination of the nominative plural *-ēs*. B is in fact continued vestigially (but for the nominative plural) in C₂, but by that stage the phonemically conditioned distribution of flexions is in operation: C₁ has taken over the bulk of the masculine words, thus relegating C₂ to a position of minor importance.

It may be convenient at this point to summarize the argument presented above. An examination of the masculine flexional system in early Gallo-Romance shows that, contrary to the assumptions of the *-i-* plural theory, there are reasons why the distinction between second and third declension nominative plurals should have been maintained until the merging of final vowels. On the contrary, after the merging of final vowels there are pressing reasons for the elimination of this distinction. This theory accords with the conclusion independently reached from an examination of textual evidence that the elimination of a distinctive third declension masculine nominative plural occurred between 750 and 950. It is in a sense misleading to think of this elimination in terms of analogical remodelling at all, for it is rather a case of the morphological reorganization of a new paradigm. The etymological third declension form was suppressed not because of the analogical pressure from a greater

number of second declension masculines but because its continued existence would have wrecked the system of which it was part.

Indirect confirmation of this interpretation comes from an examination of the development of *pater* and *frater*, to which reference has been made above. These forms also give rise to anomalies in the system, but of a somewhat different kind. Under the new conditions brought about by the merging of final vowel distinctions, the nominative plural *patres*, like *canes*, constituted a threat to the new morpheme system and was eliminated. In the singular, however, before the eventual fall of final vowels, the nominative (< *pater*) was still morphologically distinct from the oblique singular and the plurals. The terminaison *-er* constituted an 'irregularity' but nothing more — i. e. it belonged to a minority group of words but it did serve adequately the functional purpose of distinguishing the nominative singular from the other paradigm forms and it did not by its existence give rise any potential confusion in the morphological system of masculines as a whole. This is the situation of the etymological descendant of *pater* up to the fall of final vowels. But when the fall of final vowels eventually brings about identity between nominative and oblique singular of words like *pater* the critical moment has passed: the new masculine system is no longer in the process of formation but is already established. It is henceforth of little importance that a few exceptions fail to conform to it. Such exceptions cannot impede the reorganization of functional oppositions along the lines of system C, since this reorganization is already accomplished. Nor can they provoke a new reorganization of the system because they are not sufficiently numerous. There is no urgent reason, therefore, for their elimination. Hence the nominative singular *pere* is allowed to persist 'unregularized' into Old French.

If the above reconstruction is in essentials correct, attestations of eighth century Latin *-i* plurals of the type *sapienti* are to be interpreted as errors reflecting the appearance in the vernacular of the new third declension nominative plurals without *-s*. It is difficult to follow Pei¹ in regarding the attested cases of third declension *-i-* plurals as being without significance. Commenting on the *-i-* plural theory, Pei dismisses these forms

1. M. Pei, *The Language of the Eighth-Century Texts in Northern France*, New York, 1932, p. 150.

as 'a few examples which may all be explained by analogy'. One is tempted to ask 'by analogy with what?'. If the answer should be 'by analogy with second declension forms' it is not easy to see on what grounds they can be rejected as evidence in support of the *-i-* plural theory. It seems more satisfactory to regard these attestations as having some significance, but a significance other than that attributed to them by supporters of the *-i-* plural theory. For neither the *-i-* plural theory nor the hypothesis that they are random errors accounts for why they begin to appear at such a late date.

To conclude, the elimination of *-es* emerges as a phenomenon peculiar to Gallo-Romance, conditioned specifically by the reduction of final unstressed vowel distinctions and the new role of morphemic importance thereby thrust upon final *-s*. Its importance in the morphological history of Gallo-Romance is not adequately stressed in most manuals of historical grammar, where it is often presented simply as an exception to the general rule that the surviving Old French and Old Provençal case flexions of masculines continue etymologically those of Latin. It should be pointed out that it is the only case in which the preservation of an etymological derivative of the Latin flexion in a whole group of commonly used words would have seriously impaired the new Romance morphological system. Paradoxically, the elimination of *-es* bears witness to the tenacity with which Gallo-Romance, faced at this stage in its evolution with the choice of either following the other Western Romance regions in dropping case distinction altogether, or maintaining a simplified but efficient case system, adhered to the latter alternative.

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