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# More on the collapse of contrastive vowel length in late Latin: a review of the metalinguistic evidence

**Abstract:** This article reexamines a thorny and much-debated issue of Latin and Romance studies, i.e. the loss of contrastive vowel length, which Latin had but which did not survive into any Romance language. Among the crucial evidence for assessing the chronology and exact course of the demise of Latin vowel length are the metalinguistic testimonies of grammarians. These have recently received accurate treatment and have been invoked by some (most notably, M. Mancini) to oppose the traditional view, dating back to H. Schuchardt, according to which contrastive vowel length was lost when an open syllable lengthening rule came into being, and to argue instead that its demise was caused by a sound change lengthening all stressed vowels independently of syllable structure during the imperial age. The present article reassesses the relevant testimonies by the grammarians placing them first within the framework of the artigraphic tradition to which they pertain and thereby weighing their value as witnesses to ongoing sound change, concluding that the evidence supports the traditional view. The latter is, finally, further corroborated by prosodic evidence from Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* and Virgilius grammaticus' *Epitomae*, who, at both ends of the period under consideration, attest to the fading of the vowel length contrast and to the subordination of vowel length not only to stress but also to syllable structure.

**Keywords:** Latin grammarians; Romance languages; sound change; stress; syllable structure; vowel length (contrastive vs. allophonic)

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# 1 Introduction: vowel length from Classical Latin to Proto-Romance

The exact way in which the demise of contrastive vowel length (henceforth CVL) occurred is an ever-topical vexed question in Latin and Romance linguistics.[1] In (1a) and (1b) we schematize the two main contemporary opposing views (see, e.g., Bramanti 2022: 401; Mari 2021: 194; Probert 2021):

(1)     Two scenarios for the loss of CVL:
        a.  through the establishment of an allophonic vowel lengthening rule in stressed open syllables;
        b.  through a general lengthening of stressed vowels independently of syllable structure.

The first ([1a]), which dates back to at least Schuchardt (1866–1868; see also e.g. Loporcaro 1997: 55–70, 2015: 18–60; Marotta 2022: 186; Papini 2024: 49; Weinrich 1958: 181–182), suggests that the demise of quantity, which possibly spread out of African Latin (cf. Schuchardt 1866–1868: III, 43 and especially Herman 1982: 229, 1990; Mari 2021: 195–199), occurred through the establishment of an allophonic rule of open syllable lengthening (henceforth OSL) that was in force in Proto-Romance and is maintained in Italian today.

The alternative position ([1b]), upheld by Mancini (2014: 977–978, 2015b, 2019, followed by De Angelis 2022: 439, n. 5),[2] maintains instead that the loss of CVL was accompanied by a generalized lengthening of all stressed vowels, in both open and closed syllables, which occurred during the imperial age:

> The very first outcome of the collapse of vowel quantity in spoken Latin was a neutralization, which surfaced as a general lengthening of stressed vowels, both in heavy and light syllables, a

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**1** The chronology of this change, which will not be in focus here (though see Section 7), is also much debated: while the majority view, represented most prominently by Herman (1985: 88–89, 1998: 9, 21, 1990), places it within the "second wave of dialectalisation" of Latin that was completed by the end of the Western Empire, some scholars – such as Pulgram (1975: 249–263) or Vineis (1984) (followed by Marotta 2018: 407) – believe that already in Plautus' time CVL was, as Marotta (2020) puts it, "limitata alla lingua parlata dall'élite culturale e politica" [limited to the language spoken by the cultural and political elite] (Marotta 2020: 92). See Loporcaro (2015: 34–40) for a refutation of Pulgram's and Vineis' views.

**2** Mancini (2015b: 357) lists a few predecessors: Straka (1959: 183) (1979), Lüdtke (2005: 201–202) as well as Adams (2007: 261, 2013: 47; see also, in less explicit terms, Adams 1999: 114, 2007: 264, 2011: 275). The list of supporters of (1a) is much longer: see e.g. Loporcaro (2015: 65 n. 9) and Mancini (2015b: 316 n. 7) for references.

structural representation still encoded in the conservative Western and Eastern varieties of Romania. (Mancini 2019: 47; see also Mancini 1994: 625 and 2001: 319)

The evidence that can be brought to bear is mainly of two kinds: on the one hand, the deviations from classical prosody that are observed in metrical epigraphs from the imperial age; on the other, the metalinguistic evidence offered by grammarians, particularly that contained in the so-called third part of the *Artes Grammaticae*, which was dedicated to *vitia et virtutes orationis* (on which see at least Baratin and Desbordes [1986] for an introduction). Further evidence, somehow intermediate between the two kinds just cited, can be gained from the metalinguistic accounts of the composition of metrical texts, the data of which must be interpreted in the light not only of the "prosodic revolution" we are concerned with, but also of the progressive fading of the knowledge of classical metrics (and, hence, would require separate treatment).

Here we will focus exclusively on the second type of evidence, reviewing only the non-metrical testimonies. We will scrutinize grammatical passages from the 3rd to the 5th century CE, i.e. the period that, according to Herman's (1998) chronology, preceded the fragmentation of the Romance languages. A first observation is that the grammarians' testimonies are consistent with both positions (1a) and (1b) in that they offer numerous examples of shortening of unstressed vowels, both in open and closed syllables.[3] As for stressed syllables, a collection of passages from Latin artigraphers was provided by Mancini (2019), whose list is reproduced in the synopsis in Table 1.[4] We have classified the testimonies according to the syllabic-prosodic structure of the words at issue (horizontally) and to whether they indicate lengthening or shortening with respect to the expected VL specification in classical Latin (vertically).

As is apparent from Table 1, neither of the views ([1a], [1b]) is confirmed straightforwardly by the data, as the cases of stressed vowel lengthening in closed syllables (Table 1, a.ii) contradict (1a), while, conversely, vowel shortening in open stressed syllables (Table 1, b.i) is at odds with both (1a) and (1b).

Based on a thorough analysis of the passages, Mancini concludes that they are compatible only with the hypothesis of a generalized vowel lengthening in stressed

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**3** Since there is general consensus among scholars on the shortening of unstressed vowels, this change will not be in focus here, but cf. the examples in (4), (21), (29). On the Classical Latin harbingers of the neutralization of VL contrasts in final syllables, cf. Loporcaro (2015: 9–10). As for (11a), (11d), (13c), and (14b) reportedly showing lengthening of an unstressed vowel, this fact provides further, independent proof of their unreliability as witnesses to an ongoing sound change; see Section 4.

**4** Because of the distinction between metrical and non-metrical accounts, we have left out of Mancini's table passages such as Consent. *Gramm.* 13.15–14.4 and Sacerd. II. III. 4, which are concerned with erroneous lengthenings or shortenings in poetical compositions: some of these testimonies are gathered in Mancini's *Appendix* (2019: 51–55).

**Table 1:** Synoptic overview of the passages in Mancini (2019).

| | Stressed | |
|---|---|---|
| | **i. Open** | **ii. Closed** |
| a. Reports lengthening | Sacerd. I XIII.9<br>Don. *Mai.* III 1<br>Consent. *Gramm.* 11.8–9<br>Consent. *Gramm.* 12.2<br>Consent. *Gramm.* 12.13<br>Aug. *Mus.* II 1.1<br>Iul. Tol. *De vitiis* 1. 17<br>*Anecdota Helvetica* CLXXVI | Sacerd. I XIII.2<br>Consent. *Gramm.* 19–20<br>Aug. *doctr. Christ.* IV 10.24 |
| b. Reports shortening | Victor. *Frg.* 36.22–23 N<br>Pomp. *Gramm.* III 9<br>Pomp. *Gramm.* III 16<br>Serv. *Gramm.* IV 444.3 K<br>Serv. *Gramm.* IV 444.13f. K | |

position independent of syllable structure ([1b]). Our discussion will examine anew the relevant testimonies, expanding, with few omissions,[5] on Mancini's collection and placing the passages within the artigraphic tradition to which they belong. It will be shown that Mancini's conclusion cannot be upheld, and the opposite is the case, i.e. that the evidence rather supports scenario (1a).

The article is organized as follows. After briefly recalling (Section 2) a caveat that one needs to keep in mind while investigating the grammarians' metalinguistic testimonies, in Sections 3–5 we move on to the close reading of such testimonies in chronological order (with a few motivated exceptions) to demonstrate the thesis that, if read correctly, the passages of the grammarians are only compatible with hypothesis (1a), not (1b); in Section 6 we depart from the chronological order and move on to consider the independent testimony provided by an author removed from the artigraphic tradition, Aulus Gellius (2nd c. CE), and that by a last grammarian, Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, who wrote at the very end of the history of Latin. Finally (Section 7), we offer our twofold conclusions, on the one hand reasserting the superiority of (1a) as an explanation for the demise of CVL, and on the other hand

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5 In fact, as will become clear in due course, we will not discuss Iulianus Toletanus (*De vitiis* 1. 17) and *Anecdota Helvetica* (*Gramm. Suppl.* CLXXVI) because we consider them irrelevant to the present discussion, as they are works that do not fall within the chronological scope of this study and do not report first-hand material: see note 12.

proposing two general principles of method that can guide the use of the *artes grammaticae* as sources for the reconstruction of pre-Romance Latin.

# 2 A(n obvious) caveat about the Roman grammarians and spoken Latin

Before proceeding any further, let us stress an obvious caution that must be adopted: of course, the materials drawn from ancient grammars do not always reflect the coeval linguistic situation. While Barwick's (1922) idea that the *Artes Grammaticae* were highly stereotypical and thus incapable of providing any insight at all into the linguistic repertoire of the time is exaggerated and now outmoded, a wealth of studies have shown that much of this corpus rests on "an accumulated body of grammatical lore" that "was handed down from one teacher to another" (Law 1982: 13), so that

> each extracted from it what he found useful. Such innovation as there was consisted only of the choice of sources to be followed and of the degree of integration to which material from various sources was subjected. The presentation and ordering of material afforded some room for individual variation, but even that was subject to the traditional schematisation which was derived ultimately from the Stoics and Dionysius Thrax. (Law 1982: 13)

Thus, by far not any form stigmatized by the grammatical tradition can be attributed to pre-Romance Latin. To ascertain whether such forms should be attributed to the repertoire of contemporary Latin speakers, one must bear in mind that

> [i]n alcuni passi gli artigrafi si limitavano a citare forme riprese da una lunghissima tradizione precedente, forme che molto probabilmente non avevano ormai corrispondenza alcuna con quanto si stava verificando nel latino parlato. In altri, pur alludendo a forme riscontrabili nel parlato contemporaneo, le riprendevano da testi anteriori epitomati o commentati. In altri casi ancora – certo meno frequenti – si trattava di citazioni episodiche tratte dall'esperienza diretta del grammatico/parlante [in some passages, the artigraphers merely quoted forms drawn from a very long earlier tradition, forms that most probably had no correspondence by then with what was occurring in spoken Latin. In others, while hinting at forms found in contemporary speech, they took them from earlier epitomised or commented texts. In still other cases – certainly less frequent – they were episodic quotations taken from the direct experience of the grammarian/speaker]. (Mancini 2005: 139–140; cf. also De Paolis 2010: 57)

Against this background, in order to sift the grammarians' testimonies and come up with the tiny subset of the forms they stigmatize that have a chance of being attributed to the verbal repertoire of contemporary Latin speakers, one must first exclude examples that the grammarians draw from texts of classical *auctores* rather

than from everyday Latin. Moreover, sometimes the forms stigmatized do come from everyday Latin, yet not from the language of the writer's own time, but rather from earlier stages in the history of Latin, and grammarians repeated them by drawing on the exemplification of their colleagues from previous periods. Finally, careful attention must be paid to the fact that ancient grammatical theorization also differs significantly from today's linguistic science and, therefore, the data that the artigraphers hand down must always be examined in the light of the context in which they are placed.

In short, at the cost of stating the obvious, one must stress that the evidence delivered by grammarians must always be weighed up and sifted, in order to gain information on contemporary spoken Latin. This is what we are going to do in the following sections.

# 3 At the beginning of the artigraphic tradition: Plotius Sacerdos and Marius Victorinus

Our review begins with Plotius Sacerdos, probably at the end of the 3rd c. (Bramanti 2022: CV–CVIII; Kaster 1988: 352; Zetzel 2018: 318). In the chapter of his grammar entitled *De barbarismo*, he lists eight types of faults which can occur in the spoken (proper *barbarismus*) as well as in the written language (*barbarolexis*). Only three of them are possibly relevant to the issue of VL: they are *productio* ([2]), *correptio* ([3]), and *immutatio accentuum* ([4]).

(2)     SACERD. I XIII.2 (= VI 451.5 K): [*scil.* Barbarismus fit] per productione<m>, ac si dicas 'pernix' <et> PER producas, quae correpta est.
        *pĕrnix* ['pɛr.niks] > *pērnix* ['pe:r.niks]

(3)     SACERD. I XIII.3 (= VI 451.6 K): [*scil.* Barbarismus fit] per correptionem, 'steterunt' te correpta, quae longa est.
        *stetērunt* [ste'te:runt] > *stetĕrunt* ['ste(:)terunt]

(4)     SACERD. I XIII.9 (= VI 451.14 K): [*scil.* Barbarismus fit] per immutationem accentuum, ac si dicas 'Ceres' CE longa{m}, cum brevis sit, et RES breve, cum sit longa.
        *Cĕrēs* ['kɛre:s] > *Cērĕs* ['ke:res]

If all three passages could be relied upon as proofs of contemporary sound changes, we would have one example ([4]) compatible with both reconstructions (1a) and (1b), one ([2]) compatible only with (1b), and one ([3]) compatible with neither (1a) nor (1b). However, none of them holds up to closer examination.

As for (2), i.e. the lengthening of the first vowel of *pernix* in closed stressed syllable, scholars usually compare (and so do we, in violation of the chronological order) a passage from the grammarian Pompey (5th c.; see [14], Section 4) attesting to the lengthening of the stressed /a/ of *arma* in a closed syllable ([5]):[6]

(5)  Pomp. *Gramm.* III. 14 (= V 285.24 K): Quo modo addis accentum? Si uelis dicere
     ârma <pro eo quod est árma>: [numquid possum dicere cursim, quoniam
     naturaliter illa producitur?] plus aliquid ab acuto habet.
     *ărma* ['ar.ma] > *ārma* ['a:r.ma]

Pompey's testimony leaves room for at least some uncertainty as to whether the example was actually drawn from a spoken variety of Latin;[7] however, even setting aside for the moment the problem of "flag-words" (on which see Section 4), if we frame (2) and (5) within the whole diachrony of Latin, we find that they do not indicate a redistribution of VL in the imperial age, *pace* Mancini (2019: 37), but rather are a belated testimony to a late-Republican sound change, i.e. the lengthening of vowels before /rC/ and particularly /rN/. As shown in (6), this lengthening is attested in the epigraphic record through the use of apex or gemination, but did not find its way into late Latin and, hence, into the Romance languages (with the possible exception of Italian *forma* ['forma] < lat. *forma* ['fo:rma] rather than ['fɔrma]):

(6)  [VrC] > [V:rC]: *órnamenta*, *fórma*, *aarmi-* (cp. *inermis*, attesting to an
     originally short *ă*) (Leumann 1977: 114; Seelmann 1885: 91–93; Sihler 1995: 76)

Neither Sacerdos nor Pompey thus provide a description of coeval Latin, but rather at best record an innovation that was older and, more importantly, recessive at their time (though it had perhaps established itself in a few lexemes, such as *forma*). We

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**6** Pompey considers it an example of *additio accentus*, which is not surprising since Latin grammarians, who inherited the description of accents from the Greek artigraphic tradition, often deal with issues of VL within the description of stress profile, "vista anche la stretta interdipendenza sintagmatica tra fatti che concernono la catena sillabica e fatti che concernono la prosodia" [given also the close syntagmatic interdependence between facts concerning the syllable chain and facts concerning prosody], as Mancini (2001: 333 n. 16) puts it; cf. also Scappaticcio (2012: 53–107) and Probert (2019).

**7** As a matter of fact, the noun *arma* had already been employed as a flag-word, i.e. a typical example, to illustrate the case of bisyllables taking the acute accent (Serv. IV 426.10–12 K; Pomp. V 129.5–6 K; 130. 12 K). It is therefore reasonable that it was also adduced to exemplify the erroneous assignment of the circumflex accent in place of the acute, i.e., in Pompey's terminology, the long instead of short vowel: see Zago (2013: 14–17; 2017: 153) and in particular the precept in ps. Prisc. *De acc.* 17. 12–19. 3 Giammona (*Sed notandum quod, si prior sit longa positione, non circumflexo sed acuto pronuntiandae sunt, ut 'arma' 'arcus', quia, quamuis sint longae positione, ideo tamen exprimendae sunt tali accentu, quia non sunt natura l<ongae>*).

must then conclude that neither (2) nor (5) can be counted among the evidence regarding the redistribution of VL in the imperial age.[8]

As for (3), i.e. the apparent shortening of the second vowel of *steterunt* in stressed open syllable, both the provenance of the example and its linguistic interpretation suggest that it should not be given credit as a reliable testimony to late-Latin VL. On the one hand, Sacerdos found his example in the text of Vergil, where this scanning of *steterunt* occurs twice (*Aen.* 2.774, 3.48). As a matter of fact, he mentions this very example also as a case of *systole* 'shortening' (VI 452.16 K), a type of *metaplasmus* related to VL, and his interpretation was followed by Pompey (III 64) and the anonymous Auctor ad Caelestinum (259.10–11). On the other hand, neither (1a) nor (1b) could account for the change Sacerdos illustrates, if it were such. In fact, it does not refer to an alleged \*\*[steˈtɛrunt], but rather, obviously, to the archaic [ˈsteːterunt] (Bramanti 2022: *ad loc.*), with antepenultimate stress because of the retention of the original ending *-ĕrunt*, a form documented in Archaic Latin (see e.g. Plaut. *Bacch.* 928, *Most.* 281), which coexisted with classical *-ērunt* (and *-ēre*), resurfaced in Classical Latin poetry for metrical requirements, and lives on in Romance (e.g. It. *dìssero*, Fr. *dirent* < DĪXĔRUNT, It. *fecero*, Fr. *firent* < FĒCĔRUNT; see Leumann 1977: 608).

Of all the examples quoted by Sacerdos, therefore, all that remains is the *immutatio accentuum* of *Ceres* ([4]), reporting lengthening in stressed open syllable and shortening in closed syllable. As already stated above, this is compatible with both (1a) and (1b). Actually, even this piece of evidence could be doubted, since *Ceres* is a flag-word. The issue of flag-words is not critical here, but it is crucial in assessing the weight of the evidence provided by the scholastic tradition that sprang from the teaching of Aelius Donatus, active in Rome during the fourth century. Hence, it may be useful to introduce it here before moving on to the next author. Flag-words have been aptly defined by Mancini (in a different context):

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**8** The late-Republican origin of this change was noted by Mancini (2000), who defines it "una caratteristica confinata nelle fasce basse del repertorio dei parlanti di epoca tardorepubblicana" [a feature limited to the lower reaches of the late Republican speech repertoire] (Mancini 2000: 52) and rightly credits it with "scarso rilievo nei confronti della formazione del latino popolare preromanzo" [little significance for the development of pre-Romance vernacular Latin] (Mancini 2000: 52). This is at odds with Mancini's (2019) counting (2) among the examples that, in his view, "hint, without a shadow of a doubt, at such a confusion over vowel quantity even in closed syllables" (Mancini 2019: 37). As we have shown, they do not indeed. Bramanti's (2022) interpretation seems to sway between Mancini's two very different positions: while he mentions the passage in (2) together with Consent. 20. 3–7 (allegedly a proof of [1b]: see discussion on [22]) he also cites the late-republican development [VrC] > [V:rC] and concludes that this is "uno di quei fenomeni sociolinguistici caratteristici del *Vulgärlatein,* che non passarono però nel latino preromanzo" [one of those sociolinguistic phenomena characteristic for Vulgar Latin, but which did not carry over into pre-Romance Latin] (Bramanti 2022: II, 401–402).

nel metalinguaggio degli artigrafi venivano impiegate alcune *parole-bandiera* che troviamo costantemente ripetute nei diversi trattati, un po' come ancor oggi in una qualunque lezione o manuale di linguistica comparativa si lavora magari su pochi esempi particolarmente significativi memorizzati e memorizzabili in modo agevole [in the artigraphers' metalanguage some flag-words were employed that we find constantly repeated in the various treatises, much in the same way that even today, in any lecture or textbook of comparative linguistics, we may work with a few particularly significant examples that get memorized and easy to remember]. (Mancini 2001: 316; original emphasis)

They are specific recurrent words that were automatically paired with the phoneme(s) they were supposed to illustrate and thus constituted an effective mnemonic tool for school teaching. It can be assumed, therefore, that once certain words were biuniquely associated, for teacher and learner, with certain phonemes, they could just as easily be reused to illustrate any mistakes in their pronunciation.

As a matter of fact, the occurrence of *Ceres* in (4) is not isolated in the grammatical tradition, but Sacerdos himself had used it earlier in his work to exemplify the prosodic structure of iambic disyllables and Diomedes would use it for the same purpose ([7a] and [7b]):

(7)    a.    SACERD. VI 498. 9–10 K: iambus ex brevi et longa constat temporum trium, ut Ceres.[9]
       b.    DIOM. II 432. 7–13 K: in disyllabis partibus orationis prior syllaba semper acuitur aut inflectitur. acuitur, si pyrrichium conpleverit, sicut puer bonus amor: item spondium indifferenter positum si habuerit, id est sive natura sit aut positione fuerit longa utraque syllaba, prior acuitur; natura, sicut Cymae Thebae heros; positione, ut sollers: iambum quoque, ut Cato Ceres.

Even for this example, therefore, there is a legitimate suspicion that it was not included because it aptly reflected the coeval language, but due to the requirements of symmetry and correspondence on which the *Artes grammaticae* were typically built.

Similar problems are involved in three passages from Marius Victorinus' *Fragmentum de barbarismis et soloecismis* (end of the 4th c.; cf. Kaster 1988: 437; Zetzel 2018: 328) ([8]–[10]):[10]

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**9**  This section of the work is not included in the edition by Bramanti (2022); we quote the text from Keil (1866–1868).

**10**  Actually, the identification of the author of the fragment with Marius Victorinus, who wrote an *Ars grammatica*, is far from proven. The two manuscripts that transmit it do not contain the rest of the grammar: one of them provides at the outset the abbreviated name *VICTO,* while the other bears no indication of the author. The fragment may also have been originally transmitted anonymously and attributed to Victorinus later on, along with many other unattributed treatises: see Mariotti (1967: 45–46). Yet, the issue of authorship does not impact our linguistic assessment.

(8)     Victor. *Frg.* 36.8–10 N: quomodo [*scil.* fit barbarismus] adiectione temporis? ut "exercet <u>Diana</u> choros"; producta enim Di geminabitur tempus syllabae, cum correpte Dĭana dici debeat.
*Dĭana* [diˈaːna] > *Dīana* [diːˈaːna]

(9)     Victor. *Frg.* 36.16–17 N: quid [*scil.* barbarismus] detractione temporis? ut si dicamus <u>emērunt</u> correpta media syllaba, cum emērunt producta dici debeat.
*emērunt* [eːmˈeːrunt] > *emĕrunt* [ˈeːmɛrunt]

(10)     Victor. *Frg.* 36.22–23 N: quid [*scil.* barbarismus] temporis? ut si quis dicat <u>repono</u> producta prima correptaque media.
NOT *rĕpōno* [reˈpoːno(ː)] > *rēpŏno* [reːˈpɔno(ː)] (Mancini 2019: 39–40)
BUT *rĕpōno* [reˈpoːno(ː)] > *rēpŏno* [ˈreːpɔno(ː)] (our reading)

Example (8), the apparent lengthening of an unstressed vowel, is clearly drawn from the poetic tradition, once again from Vergil's *Aeneid* (1. 498: *exercet Diana choros, quam mille secutae*), and is indeed typically mentioned in the grammatical tradition as an example of *metaplasmus*, more specifically, through *ectasis* 'lengthening' (though indeed *ī* was long etymologically; see Mari 2021: 152; EDL 168); the shortening of the second syllable of *emerunt* ([9]), instead, is linguistically identical with Sacerdos' *steterunt* ([3]): both examples can be safely dismissed as uninformative for the reconstruction of spoken late Latin.

As for (10), it attests to the erroneous pronunciation of the verb *rĕpōno*, with the first syllable long and the second short. Mancini (2019: 40; cf. also Mari 2021: 193, 195) interprets this passage as witnessing the shortening of a stressed vowel, but this explanation would require admitting the simultaneous lengthening of a vowel in unstressed (open) syllable, an unparalleled phenomenon at odds with the phonetic tendencies of Latin at all stages.

A better interpretation is suggested by the fact that in imperial Latin the stress on prefixed verbs that had a short root vowel in the penultimate open syllable was shifting from Classical Latin *cómmŏvet*, *émŏvet* to late Latin/Proto-Romance *commṓvet*, *emṓvet*, without retraction on the prefix, as Italian *commuove* or French *émeut* 's/he moves' etc. still show today.[11] In view of this, we will read *rḗpŏno* [ˈreːpɔno(ː)] and interpret it as a case of hypercorrection reacting to the ongoing change, not involving a shortening of the vowel in a stressed penult, but rather a lengthening of the vowel in an open syllable (the first) that had become stressed, and a shortening of the vowel in an unstressed syllable (the second), which was originally stressed. This is compatible with both theses in (1a) and (1b).

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**11** The shift must have been accomplished by the time of the application of diphthongization of PrRom. /ɛ ɔ/ (from Lat. ĕ ŏ), i.e. in the late 6th/early 7th century in Italy, somewhat earlier in Gaul: see Castellani (1961: 95, 1980) and Bourciez (1955: 94).

# 4 The Donatian tradition

Many of the further testimonies to which we now turn, following chronological order, belong to the Donatian tradition. Donatus wrote an *Ars minor*, an introductory school handbook about the *partes orationis*, and an *Ars maior,* which was more extensive and advanced. Both works soon became best-sellers and played a crucial role in the subsequent development of grammatical tradition (see e.g. Holtz 1981; Zago 2022). The third book of the *Ars maior* begins with a chapter *De barbarismo* providing a sketchy illustration of the matter: the grammarian first of all describes the two levels at which a barbarism may occur (*pronuntiatione et scripto*), its types (*species*: *adiectio, detractio, immutatio, transmutatio*), and the five categories of items (*res*) that are subject to it (*litterae, syllabae, temporis, toni, adspirationis*), to then move on to exemplify their various potential combinations, offering examples of most of them. As far as VL is concerned, Donatus provides four examples ([11a]–[11d]):

(11)  a.   DON. *Mai.* III 1 (= Holtz 653.9–10): [per adiectionem fit barbarismus] temporis, ut <u>Italiam</u> *fato profugus*, cum *Italiam* correpta prima littera dicere debeamus.
        *Ĭtaliam* [iˈtaliam] > *Ītaliam* [iːˈtaliam]
      b.   DON. *Mai.* III 1 (= Holtz 653.12): [per detractionem fit barbarismus] temporis, ut <u>unius</u> *ob noxam* pro unīus
        *unīus* [uːˈniːus] > *unĭus* [ˈuːnius]
      c.   DON. *Mai.* III 1 (= Holtz 654.2–3): [per immutationem fit barbarismus] temporis, ut <u>feruere</u> *Leucaten*, cum feruere sit secundae coniugationis et producte dici debeat.
        *fervēre* [ferˈweːre] > *fervĕre* [ˈferwere]
      d.   DON. *Mai.* III 1 (= Holtz 654.5–6): [per transmutationem fit barbarismus] temporis, ut siquis <u>deos</u> producta priore syllaba et correpta posteriore pronuntiet.
        *dĕōs* [ˈdeoːs] > *dēŏs* [ˈdeːos]

They show the lengthening of an unstressed vowel ([11a]), a stress shift aligned with the shortening of a formerly stressed vowel ([11b], [11c]), and the lengthening of a stressed vowel with the simultaneous shortening of an unstressed vowel ([11d]); no examples of *barbarismus toni* are included ("Pour un désir de faire bref" [for a desire to keep it short] according to Holtz [1981: 144]).

The first three examples have no bearing on the reconstruction of the development of VL in imperial Latin, as they are drawn from poetic language

(unsurprisingly, the *Aeneid*: see [12a]–[12c]) and had already been employed in grammatical treatises (e.g. Quint. I 5.18):

(12)    a.    Verg. *Aen.* I 2: Italiam fato profugus Lauiniaque uenit
          b.    Verg. *Aen.* I 41: unius ob noxam et furias Aiacis Oilei?
          c.    Verg. *Aen.* VIII 677: feruere Leucaten auroque effulgere fluctus

The sole case of *deos* ([11d]) does not seem attributable to a specific poetic context. However, despite the trustworthiness autoschediastically accorded to it by Sedulius Scottus (*Comment. in Don. artem mai.*, 330.91–92 Löfstedt 1977: *Et notandum, quod hoc exemplum non poetica auctoritate, sed e vulgari consuetudine sumpsit*), it is unlikely that Donatus resorted to coeval language for this example alone. The testimony, then, must be taken *cum grano salis*.[12]

    The later grammatical tradition tried to remedy the paucity of examples in Donatus' treatment. First Servius (fl. 4th c. ex.), to whom we owe the canonization of Donatus' text, took up the chapter *De barbarismo* (Zago 2016, from which we quote) and repeated some of his predecessors' examples ([13c], [13d]). What is more, Servius also added two examples unattested in previous grammatical treatises ([13a], [13b]):

(13)    a.    Serv. *Gramm.* I.3 Zago (= IV 444.4–5 K): barbarismus autem dicitur eo quod barbari praue loquantur, ut siqui dicat 'R̆omam' pro 'Roma'.
          b.    Serv. *Gramm.* I.6 Zago (= IV 444.13–14 K): ‹pronuntiatione› [fit barbarismus], si aut naturaliter longas syllabas breuiter proferamus, ut 'R̆omam', aut si naturaliter breues producamus, ut 'rōsam'
               *Rōma* ['roːma] > *R̆ma* ['rɔma]
               *R̆sa* ['rɔsa] > *rōsa* ['roːsa]
          c.    Serv. *Gramm.* I.8 Zago (= IV 444.19–20 K): tempore [*scil.* adicitur], ut "Italiam fato profugus", cum 'Italiam' priore correpta syllaba dicere debeamus
               *Ĭtaliam* [iˈtaliam] > *Ītaliam* [iːˈtaliam]

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[12] It also follows that the repetition of this same example in the work of Iulianus Toletanus (*De vitiis* 1.17; 7th c.) and in the *Anecdota Helvetica* (*Gramm. suppl.* CLXXVI; 10th c.?) is all the less probative (contrary to what Mancini [2019: 32] seems to suggest), insofar as they attest to a later stage of the Latin-Romance transition and were most probably handing down pre-existing artigraphic material: on the former cf. Carracedo Fraga (2015): "en primer lugar se reproduce literalmente el fragmento del texto donatiano correspondiente a la unidad temática objeto de análisis y a continuación se añaden las nuevas explicaciones y los nuevos ejemplos. Es evidente que Julián tiene delante una copia de la obra de Donato y que traslada gran parte del contenido de aquélla a su propio manual" [in the first place the fragment of the Donatian text is reproduced literally, which corresponds to the thematic unit under analysis, and then new explanations and examples are added. It is evident that Julian holds a copy of Donatus' work in front of him and that he transfers much of its content to his own textbook] (Carracedo Fraga 2015: 56–57).

  d. Serv. *Gramm.* I.9 Zago (= IV 444.24–26 K): aut tempore [*scil.* detrahitur], ut
    "steteruntque comae et uox faucibus haesit" pro 'stetērunt' (media enim
    syllaba naturaliter produci debuit)
    stetērunt [ste'te:runt] > stetērunt ['ste(:)terunt]

The last two examples ([13c] and [13d]) concern metrical licenses rather than coeval
sound changes and coincide with Donatus' ([11a]) and Sacerdos' ([3]) examples,
respectively. The other two ([13a] and [13b]) are the shortening of the first vowel of
*Roma* in a stressed open syllable and the mirror case of the lengthening of the first
syllable of *rosa*, which deserve further discussion.

 Later Pompey (probably African, 5th c.), himself belonging to the Donatian
tradition and very close to Servius (Holtz 1971: 48 n. 5; Zago 2017: I XCV–XCVI),
retrieved the by-now traditional examples *Italia* ([14b]) and *steterunt* ([14d]), but also
included words very close to Servius' innovations, introduced as barbarisms *in
pronuntiatu* ([14a]), and the case of *arma* discussed above ([14c] = [5], Section 3):

(14) a. Pomp. *Gramm.* III 9 (= V 285.5–9 K): Est alter, qui fit in pronuntiatu.
    Plerumque male pronuntiamus et facimus vitium, <ut> aut brevis syllaba
    longo tractu sonet aut iterum longa breviore sono: siquis velit dicere
    Rŏma, aut si velit dicere ēquus pro eo quod est ĕquus, in pronuntiatione
    hoc fit.
    *Rōma* ['ro:ma] > *Rŏma* ['rɔma]
    *ĕquus* ['ɛkwus] > *ēquus* ['e:kwus]

  b. Pomp. *Gramm.* III 13 (= V 285.22–23 K): Quo modo addis tempus? Italiam fato
    profugus: Italiam naturaliter breuis est, sed ubique tamen additum habet
    tempus metri necessitate.
    *Ĭtaliam* [i'taliam] > *Ītaliam* [i:'taliam]

  c. Pomp. *Gramm.* III 14 (= V 285.24–26 K): Quo modo addis accentum? Si uelis
    dicere ârma <pro eo quod est árma>: [numquid possum dicere cursim,
    quoniam naturaliter illa producitur?] plus aliquid ab acuto habet.
    *ărma* ['ar.ma] > *ārma* ['a:r.ma]

  d. Pomp. *Gramm.* III 16 (= V 285.29–32 K): detrahimus tempus, stetĕruntque
    comae pro eo quod est stetērunt; detrahimus accentum, si uelis dicere
    Róma, cum tractim debeas dicere: longiorem enim illum accentum ad
    breuem traxisti
    *stetērunt* [ste'te:runt] > *stetĕrunt* ['ste(:)terunt]
    *Rōma* ['ro:ma] > *Rŏma* ['rɔma]

While (14b) and *steterunt* in (14d) can be easily dismissed as traditional examples
from poetry (see once again discussion on [3] and [11]), *Roma* in (14a) and (14d) is one
of the most controversial passages in our dossier due to serious problems with the

transmission and constitution of the text. Yet, the latest editor of Pompey's third book, Zago (2017: *ad loc.*; but see already Zago 2013 with further bibliography), proved that Pompey's two examples concern the mispronunciation of the nouns *Roma* and *equus*, the former with a short stressed vowel, the latter with a long stressed vowel.

While neither the lengthening in *rosa* nor in *equus* require particular explanations inasmuch as they can be intuitively reconciled with both (1a) and (1b), the case of *Roma* has attracted much scholarly attention. If *Roma* with the shortening of the first vowel were to be taken at face value as indicating a phonetic fact, it would be compatible with neither (1a) nor (1b) and should hence appear problematic to Mancini as well. Nonetheless, Mancini (2019) attaches great importance to this example and interprets it as a hypercorrection, allegedly supporting his thesis of vowel isochrony ([1b]):

> in fact, if the R[omance]Q[uantity] rule applied, within a very predictable pattern of syntagmatic distribution of syllabic quantity and its consequent shortening of long vowels in closed syllable and lengthening of short vowels in open syllable, the shortening of old, long vowels in open syllables would not make sense. (Mancini 2019: 41)

Actually, if one were to appeal to hypercorrection, one would have to admit that this would be also compatible with the opposite thesis ([1a]): it is easy to imagine that a speaker/writer, noticing the widespread tendency to lengthen vowels in open stressed syllables, reacted to this tendency by shortening them indiscriminately, including those that were etymologically long.

However, the problem is cut off at the root when one observes that the examples of barbarism chosen by Servius and Pompey are not random, but also occur in another section of the *Ars* in Donatus' tradition, namely in the first part, which was devoted to the description of the sounds of Latin. In this section, each phoneme is associated with a word illustrating it. Thus, Servius distinguishes the pair $\breve{o} \neq \bar{o}$ through the nouns *rosa* and *Roma*/*orator* ([15a]), and similar examples are also provided by the so-called Sergius (to whom the *Explanationes in Donatum* I and II have been attributed; cf. De Paolis 2000; Zetzel 2018: 321–322) and Pompey ([15b] and [15c]):

(15)  a.  Serv. *Gramm*. IV 421.16–21 K: Vocales sunt quinque, a e i o u. ex his duae, e et o, aliter sonant productae, aliter correptae. nam o productum quando est, ore sublato vox sonat, ut "Roma"; quando correptum, de labris vox exprimitur, ut "rosa". item e quando producitur, vicinum est ad sonum i litterae, ut "meta"; quando autem correptum, vicinum est ad sonum diphthongi, ut "equus"

b. Serg. *Gramm*. IV 520.27–31 K: Vocales sunt quinque. hae non omnes varios habent sonos, sed tantum duae, e et o. nam quando e correptum est, sic sonat, quasi diphthongus, "equus"; quando productum est, sic sonat, quasi i, ut "demens". similiter et o quando longa est, intra palatum sonat, "Roma" "orator"; quando brevis est, primis labris exprimitur, "opus" "rosa".

c. Pomp. *Gramm*. V 128.38–129.3 K: Disyllaba pars orationis uno modo recipit circumflexum tantum, si et prior naturaliter longa sit et ultima naturaliter brevis, ut meta: me naturaliter longa est, ta naturaliter brevis est, circumflexum habet accentum. id est quando est trochaeus naturaliter, tunc est circumflexus in disyllabis; aliter non licet, ut puta meta Creta Roma. (cf. also V 101.27–102.7 K and Filipponio 2006)

The examples of barbarisms cited by Servius and Pompey (and particularly the unusual *Roma* with a short first vowel) contain what, following Mancini (2001: 316), we have defined as flag-words (see the discussion of [4] in Section 3). Their choice can be motivated by the tendency not to introduce new words and to resort to stock examples already provided in the first part of their work.

Thus, the thorough examination of the relevant passages, not taken individually but framed within the whole of the work to which they belonged, allows for the conclusion that all the examples discussed so far should not be interpreted as reflecting a phonetic change taking place at the time of the grammarian who cites them, but rather as depending on an arrangement of grammatical theory based on the demands of internal symmetry and correspondence. Of course, nobody would deny that the abundance of examples in the Donatian tradition derives from a progressive fading of the ability to correctly assign VL, as amply documented in various testimonies by late antique grammarians (see e.g. *Ult. syll. gramm.* IV 222.28–30 K; Serg. IV 522.24–27 K; *De primis, mediis et ultimis syllabis* 174–6, Corazza 2011) who at times propose tricks to determine it (see e.g. Diom. *gramm*. I 347.19–22 K; *Ad Basilium amicum Sergii* VI 242.20–31 K). Certainly, however, one cannot take all these examples as direct documents of the ways in which this fading was realized at the phonetic level. Thus, the probative value of both *rosa, equus* and, especially, the aberrant *Rŏma* is considerably reduced.[13]

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13 Along the same line of argument adopted here, Mari (2021) suggests the following intriguing hypothesis: "in fact, *Roma* is used in both Servius and Pompeius as a stock example for different phenomena […]. The fact that both commentators use the same example, *Rŏma,* for the shortening of an accented syllable, but different examples, *rōsa* and *ēquus,* for the lengthening of an accented syllable, might reveal that they had several examples at hand for a common phenomenon but that they had to resort to an artificial one for an unattested phenomenon" (Mari 2021: 195).

At this point, a first conclusion can be drawn: the entire grammatical tradition examined so far, whether it is Sacerdos or the Donatian strand of *Schulgrammatik*, does not provide reliable data about the concrete ways in which the redistribution of VL occurred in Late Latin, which will come as no surprise, since as early as Quintilian ([16]) the grammarians themselves point out the fictitious character of many of the examples they offer (apart from those that they drew from poetic texts), and Pompey himself ([17]) admits that many examples could disprove the rules laid out in the grammar:

(16)   Quint. I 5.10–11: Tertium est illud uitium barbarismi, cuius exempla uulgo sunt plurima, sibi etiam quisque fingere potest, ut uerbo cui libebit adiciat litteram syllabamue uel detrahat aut aliam pro alia aut eandem alio quam rectum est loco ponat. Sed quidam fere in iactationem eruditionis sumere illa ex poetis solent, et auctores quos praelegunt criminantur.

(17)   Pomp. V 176.6–8 K: Vide quia, quodcumque tibi dat exemplum, dat secundum artem, ne recurras ad auctoritatem et rumpas hoc ipsum quod proponit. Multa enim contraria sunt.

As far as reconstruction is concerned, then, the text of professional grammarians is itself a vivid testimony to the uncertainty in the assignment of VL, but provides no real data about its allophonic (re)distribution.

# 5 Two "heterodox" grammarians: Consentius and Augustine

In light of the foregoing discussion in Sections 3–4, it is easy to understand why the method of selection and illustration of the *exempla* employed by the grammarians was the object of criticism on the part of some ancient authors who departed from the artigraphic tradition. Among these Consentius and Augustine also provide valuable evidence on coeval changes in the vowel system, given their autonomy with respect to the practice of their "colleagues". Such, admittedly rarer, testimonies turn out to be all the more significant against the background of the general unreliability – for our present purposes – of the grammatical tradition reviewed in Sections 3–4.

## 5.1 Consentius

Consentius was a grammarian himself, who wrote an *Ars de barbarismis et meta-plasmis* in Gaul during the fifth century (Kaster 1988: 396; Mari 2021: 2–5; Zetzel 2018:

291). In its introduction he explicitly reproaches his predecessors, i.e. the grammarians of the Donatian strand, for illustrating their linguistic descriptions through poetic quotations, and announces that, on the contrary, he will provide examples "which can be heard in the usage of everyday speakers":[14]

(18)     Consent. *Gramm.* 10.17–11.1: Nunc iam quibus modis barbarismus fiat tempestivius proferemus. In quo equidem non imitabor eos scriptores, qui exempla huius modi vitiorum de auctoritate lectionum dare voluerunt, quo factum est, ut eorum vitiorum confusione paene iam nemo intellegat, quid barbarismus sit, quid metaplasmus. […] Nos exempla huius modi dabimus, quae in usu cotidie loquentium animadvertere possumus, si paulo ea curiosius audiamus.

This testimony is of the utmost importance not only because it confirms the picture of the artigraphical tradition we have been giving in Sections 3–4, but also as it makes it possible for us to acknowledge the original status to be attributed to Consentius for the purposes of reconstructing the phonology of Late Latin, which is a generally agreed upon fact among scholars: see Kaster (1988: 396), Maltby (2012), Mancini (2015a: 20–21, n. 7), Mari (2021: 185–186) as well as the earlier references cited there. Consentius is usually a reliable source and often provides data which turn out to be crucial for the Latin-Romance diachrony (see e.g. Loporcaro 2007: 99, 104–105 addressing changes in the lexicon as well as in the phonology). Of course, this does not imply that no *exempla ficta* may occur in his work nor that each of his testimonies does not require accurate sifting in its relationship with the previous tradition.[15]

As far as VL is concerned, Consentius attests to the lengthening of vowels in stressed open syllable ([19] and [21]) and to the shortening of vowels in unstressed syllable ([20], [21]):

(19)     Consent. *Gramm.* 11.8–9: temporis [*scil.* fit barbarismus per adiectionem], ut quidam dicunt piper producta priore syllaba, cum sit brevis, quod vitium Afrorum familiare est.
         *pĭper* ['piper] > *pīper* ['pi:per]

(20)     Consent. *Gramm.* 11.18–20: temporis [*scil.* fit barbarismus per detractionem], ut si quis dicat orator correpta priore syllaba, quod et ipsum vitium Afrorum speciale est.
         *ōrator* [o:'ra:tor] > *ŏrator* [ɔ'ra:tor]

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**14** We cite from Mari's (2021) edition, who in turn indicates the page and line from that of Niedermann (1937).

**15** An example (which will not concern us here, as it is not about VL) has been recently discovered in his discussion of the noun *orator*, a veritable flag-word which Consentius uses to exemplify various – and sometimes incompatible – instances of *barbarismus accentuum*: cf. Mari (2019: 226).

(21)    CONSENT. *Gramm.* 12.2 and 12.12–13: temporis [*scil.* per immutationem], ut si
        quis <u>pices</u> dicens priorem extendat. […] temporis [*scil.* per
        trasmutationem], ut si quis <u>pices</u> producta priore et correpta sequenti
        pronuntiet.
        *pĭcēs* ['pike:s] > *pīcĕs* ['pi:kes]

Since neither *piper* nor *pices* occur elsewhere in the grammatical tradition, it is safe
to assume that these phenomena were drawn from contemporary language. Only
*orator* is a flag-word (see above), but the reliability of Consentius' testimony is in this
case guaranteed by the comment that follows the exemplification, namely "that this
very mistake is typical of African speakers" (*quod et ipsum vitium Afrorum speciale
est*), which echoes the similar comment also made on *piper* (*quod vitium Afrorum
familiare est*).[16] Overall, in these passages, Consentius returns a picture consistent
with both scenarios (1a) and (1b).

    More intricate is the case with another example that Consentius provides some
paragraphs later to justify the claim that more than one barbarism can occur in a
single word ([22]). This is the neuter plural *ossua*, which the grammarian finds
incorrect because of the addition of *-u-* before the ending and because of the
lengthening of the initial vowel:

(22)    CONSENT. *Gramm.* 19.20–21 and 20.3–7: qui dicit <u>ossua</u> barbarismum facit per
        adiectionem litterae; […] nam barbarismum non uno modo in una dictione
        posse fieri, ut si quis hoc ipsum quod diximus ossua producta priore syllaba
        pronuntiet: erit enim barbarismus per adiectionem temporis in prima
        syllaba et per adiectionem litterae in secunda syllaba.
        *ŏss(u)a* ['ɔs:(u)a] > *ōssua* ['o:s:ua]

The latest editor and commentator of Consentius' treatise, Mari (2021), offers good
reasons to suspect the actual spread of the form *ōssua* based on the very structure
of the section in which it is found. As we said, towards the end of the work, the
grammarian takes into account the possibility of two faults (either barbarism or
solecism) occurring simultaneously in the same word. As a starting point of his
discussion, he cites the forms *ossua* and *strenuas* as examples of barbarism *per
adiectionem litterae*. Immediately afterwards he abandons the double focus to
devote himself only to *strenuas* and asserts that those who would utter the singular
*strenuam* would incur solecism: as a matter of fact, Consentius is the only one

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**16**  We cannot address here the much-debated issue whether, at that time, this way of departing from
the Classical Latin norm was indeed typical (only) for African speakers: see discussion and previous
references in Loporcaro (2015: 24–25).

among all our sources to count *strenuae* among *pluralia tantum*. Displaying both the erroneous addition of a letter and a mistake in the assignment of number, the case of *strenuas* allegedly allows Consentius to prove his point, i.e. to conclude that "one and the same word is by nature susceptible to incurring multiple errors" (20.1–2 *capaces esse per naturam singulas partes orationum, ut uitia multiplicata suscipiant*). Only at this point does he resume the parallelism with *ossua* by claiming that a further fault would occur if one uttered it lengthening the first vowel. Mari (2021) rightly stresses that "[w]hat *ossua* and *strenuae* have in common is obviously the epenthetic *u*. Since C[onsentius] is most interested here in the concurrence of barbarism and solecism that he finds in *strenua*, *ossua* might have been chosen only as a match for it" (Mari 2021: 273). If this were the case, the lengthening of the first vowel of *ossua* could be deemed an "*exemplum fictum* which C[onsentius] made up for argument's sake as he had *ossua* to hand" (Mari 2021: 273). While expressing some preference for the latter possibility, Mari admits, with due caution, that the possibility of this being a phonetic phenomenon actually attested in coeval Latin cannot be definitively ruled out. The peculiarity of the section in which the example of *ossua* is placed, coupled with the fact that it would be a *testis unus*, should be sufficient to question its reliability for the purposes of reconstructing the phonology of late Latin.[17]

## 5.2 Augustine

From Consentius we move on to Augustine, whose inclusion in the category of the grammarians calls for some explanation. Augustine (354–430) was for a long time (at least 374–386) a professional teacher, but he taught rhetoric, not grammar. Nonetheless, Augustine addressed grammatical issues throughout his works, devoting more or less extensive excursuses to linguistic discussions that display significant points of contact with the contemporary and earlier grammatical tradition. At the same time, yet, in these passages Augustine often distances himself from the praxis of professional grammarians: sometimes he asserts grammar's subordination to the doctrinal content of sacred discourse, sometimes he emphasizes its pedantry and abstractness as opposed to the practical and utilitarian function that language should assume as a vehicle for the message of God.

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**17**  An anonymous reviewer asks: "is a pronunciation /oːsua/ with long /oː/ but shortened /s/ out of the question?". We are unaware of any arguments, from either the grammatical tradition or the Romance outcomes, that could support such a speculation.

Particularly, Augustine often voices the idea that the language should ensure correct understanding even by the most uneducated recipients, a goal that could make it necessary to consciously include grammatical errors so as to avoid ambiguities in the comprehension and interpretation of the sacred text, even at the cost of bitter doctrinal disputes (see Marrou [1958: 536–540] for similar judgments throughout his work). Augustine's attitude towards the grammarians is famously encapsulated in the motto *melius est reprehendant nos grammatici, quam non intellegant populi* (*In psalm.* 138.20). Grammar and grammarians thus feature prominently in Augustine's work (cf. e.g. Kaster 1988: 18) and their mention often accompanies Augustine's description of the language of his time.

Among these many passages, scholars have long singled out some testimonies on the fate of Latin CVL that have been deemed crucial to the assessment of the thorny issue we are dealing with (suffice it to mention Adams [2007: 260–263], Herman [1982, 1990], Lupinu [2000: 19–20], Mancini [2001, 2019: 33, 37]). A well-known example is found at the beginning of the second book of *De musica*:

(23)     Aug. *Mus*. II 1.1: itaque uerbi gratia cum dixeris <u>cano</u> uel in uersu forte posueris, ita ut uel tu pronuntians producas huius uerbi syllabam primam, uel in uersu eo loco ponas, ubi esse productam oportebat; reprehendet grammaticus, custos ille uidelicet historiae, nihil aliud asserens cur hunc corripi oporteat, nisi quod hi qui ante nos fuerunt, et quorum libri exstant tractanturque a grammaticis, ea correpta, non producta usi fuerint.
         *căno* ['kano] > *cāno* ['kaːno]

Augustine has a grammarian, famously defined as *custos ille … historiae*, reproach a pupil for erroneously lengthening the first syllable of the verb *cano* (either in normal speech or in metrical compositions). Augustine's description, which has no parallel elsewhere in the grammatical tradition, can be straightforwardly reconciled with both (1a) and (1b), as it describes OSL.

Mancini (2019) includes in his catalogue another equally famous passage that he rubrics among those that "refer to lengthening also in closed syllables" (Mancini 2019: 37):

(24)     Aug. *Doctr. Christ.* IV 10.24: cur pietatis doctorem pigeat imperitis loquentem 'ossum' potius quam 'os' dicere, ne ista syllaba non ab eo, quod sunt ossa, sed ab eo, quod sunt ora, intellegatur, ubi afrae aures de correptione uocalium uel productione non iudicant?

This remark is one of most compelling pieces of evidence for the attribution of a vowel system of the Sardinian type to African late Latin (see the primary sources and the literature reviewed in Loporcaro [2015: 47–49]). However, when it comes to

VL, Augustine makes no reference to (phonetic) lengthening and speaks only of phonemic neutralization between ['oːs] 'mouth' and ['os] 'bone' for Africans, without specifying any details as to how exactly this happened phonetically (as recognized e.g. by Loporcaro [1997: 56] and Mancini [2001: 319]). Therefore, besides confirming the difficulty involved in assigning VL in late Antiquity, (24) cannot be used to support either (1a) or (1b) and, consequently, must be expunged from our present dataset.

On top of these oft-quoted references, less known is the fact that, after retiring to *Cassiacum* (in 386 CE), Augustine also wrote a *Liber de grammatica*, whose text went lost and is now accessible only through a later epitome bearing the title *Ars Augustini pro mediocritate fratrum breviata*.[18] With the text of this treatise we are back in the domain of traditional grammar. VL is touched upon only in two quick references in the chapter *De barbarismo*:

(25)     Aug. *Gramm*. 100 [= XI.2]: aut si dicat "<u>pone</u>" et primam syllabam corripiat detractione temporis, barbarismus est
*pōne* ['poːne] > *pŏne* ['pɔne]

(26)     Aug. *Gramm*. 100 [= XI.2]: aut si dicat "<u>bonus</u>" et primam syllabam producat adiectione temporis, vitium est
*bŏnus* ['bɔnus] > *bōnus* ['bɔːnus]

While (26) patently reports OSL and is thus compatible with both (1a) and (1b), (25) would be a case of shortening of a vowel in open stressed syllable, a phenomenon, as we pointed out with regard to *Roma* above (Section 4), at odds with both reconstructions (1a) and (1b). Mancini does not cite it, but Mari (2021: 193 and 195) associates it with *Roma* and *repono* and notes that Mancini regards all these examples as hypercorrections. However, the possibility still exists that once again we are dealing with traditional material and, if so, that neither (25) nor (26) can be conclusively attributed to the verbal repertoire of late Latin. In fact, in the corpus of Latin grammarians *bonus* is quoted twice as a stock example for pirrich words, i.e. words composed by two light syllables ([27]):

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**18** The existence of this treatise is guaranteed by a later passage by Augustine himself (*Retract*. 1.6.6), which also attests to its subsequent disappearance. The *Ars breviata* was first discovered by Mai (1852–1854: I 2.167–181) and interpreted as the epitome of Augustine's work by Crecelius (1857) based on Cassiod. *Instit*. 2.1.1. Actually, the authorship of the *Ars breviata* has been widely debated: while most scholars are now inclined to accept the hypothesis of the epitomization (cf. Bonnet and Bermon 2013; Law 1984: 155–183; Oniga 2007; Pizzani 1985: 361–383), Jakobi (2019) has recently argued that the attribution to Augustine is autoschediastical. Be that as it may, the authorship issue does not concern us here; for our purposes, suffice it to note that the treatise might, in principle, offer useful insights into coeval Latin independent of its authenticity.

(27)     a.    Diom. *Gramm.* II. 432. 8 K: in disyllabis partibus orationis prior syllaba semper acuitur aut inflectitur. acuitur, si pyrrichium conpleverit, sicut puer bonus amor:

          b.    Don. *Mai.* I. 5 (= Holtz 609.16–17): ubi ambae [*scil.* sylabae] breves fuerint, acuemus priorem, ut bonus malus.

On the other hand, in the grammatical tradition the preposition/adverb *pone* recurs when the grammarians advance prosodic criteria to distinguish it from the homophonic imperative of the verb *pono* ([28]):

(28)     a.    Victor. *Gramm.* VI 193.19 K: item adverbium pone posteriore acutum accipit accentum, ne sit verbum.

          b.    Don. *Mai.* I. 5 (= Holtz 610.13–15): in Latinis neque acutus accentus in ultima syllaba poni potest nisi discretionis causa, ut in adverbio pone, ideo ne verbum putetur imperativi modi

          c.    Diom. II 433.5 K: in Latinis neque acutus accentus in ultima syllaba potest poni nisi discretionis causa, ut in adverbio pone, ideo ne verbum putetur, et in quibusdam praepositionibus.

          d.    Serg. IV 525.9 K: nam et cum dicimus Thyas Nais, acutum habebit posterior accentum, et cum Themisto Callisto, ultima circumflectitur; quod utrumque Latinus sermo non patitur, nisi raro, ut sola occurrit coniunctio ergo, in qua posterior circumflexa invenitur; item adverbium pone, ne sit verbum.

          e.    Pomp. *Gramm.* V 251.12–23 K: item pone erit verbum: muta accentum, et facit pone et erit adverbium […] ut autem intellegam pone, hoc non solum discerno sensu, sed etiam accentu

          f.    Prisc. II 372.15 K: similiter accentus 'pone', 'ergô' differentiae causa in fine ponitur.

Just for the sake of distinction (cf. Pomp. *Gramm.* V 131.1 K: *item discretio potest [causa discretionis] corrumpere istas regulas, ut pone et pone*), the artigraphers prescribe that the adverb *pone,* properly a trochaic word with a circumflex accent on the first syllable (according to the grammarians' terminology), be accented on the last syllable. Since VL and accent were usually described with similar examples in the artigraphic tradition and the circumflex accent could only appear in trochaic words, its change could perhaps also be described, in terms of VL, as a shortening of the first syllable. In any case, the frequency with which *pone* is employed by ancient grammarians suggests that it could function as a flag-word.

# 6  At the two ends of the "second dialectalization": Aulus Gellius and Virgilius Maro Grammaticus

## 6.1  Aulus Gellius

The picture drawn so far is confirmed by a text removed from – but not unaware of – the artigraphic tradition, Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*, a work dated to the 2nd c.[19] Four passages in this work contain prosodic *testimonia* to the uncertainties in the assignment of VL; they were gathered by Mancini in a previous study (2015a), but were then neglected in Mancini's (2019) assessment of the metalinguistic evidence on VL:

(29)    GELL. IV 6: Quod succidaneas hostias senatus appellavit, quaeri solet, quid verbum id significet. […] Succidaneae autem hostiae dicuntur A et E litteris per morem compositi vocabuli in <I> litteram mutatis quasi succaedaneae appellatae, quoniam, si primis hostiis litatum non erat, aliae post easdem ductae hostiae caedebantur; […] succidaneae nominatae <I> littera scilicet tractim pronuntiata; audio enim quosdam eam litteram in hac voce barbare corripere.
*succīdaneae* [sukki:ˈdaneae] > *succĭdaneae* [sukkiˈda(:)neae]

(30)    GELL. VI 10: Ut haec ususcapio dicitur copulato vocabulo A littera in eo tractim pronuntiata, ita pignoriscapio iuncte {sunt} et producte dicebatur.
*ususcăpio* [ususˈkapio] > *ususcāpio* [ususˈka:pio]
*pignoriscăpio* [pignorisˈkapio] > *pignoriscāpio* [pignorisˈka:pio]

(31)    GELL. VII 15: Amicus noster, homo multi studii atque in bonarum disciplinarum opere frequens, verbum quiescit usitate E littera correpta dixit. Alter item amicus, homo in doctrinis quasi in praestigiis mirificus communiumque vocum respuens nimis et fastidiens, barbare eum dixisse opinatus est, quoniam producere debuisset, non corripere. Nam quiescit ita oportere dici praedicavit, ut calescit, nitescit, stupescit et alia huiuscemodi multa. Id etiam addebat, quod quies E producto, non brevi diceretur.
*quiēsco* [kwiˈe:sko] > *quiĕsco* [kwiˈɛsko]

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**19** *Grammatici* appear frequently in Gellius' work (which we cite from Holford-Strevens' [2020] edition) and are, in most of the instances, the object of harsh criticism; yet, Gellius exhibits great mastery of grammar and the large number of grammarians featuring in the *Noctes Atticae* testifies that he was well versed in the kind of technical disputations in which they engaged: the scholarship on this subject is abundant; see Holford-Strevens (2003: 83–97, 157–192) and Morgan (2004) with further bibliography.

(32)  GELL. IX. 6: Ab eo, quod est ago et egi, uerba sunt, quae appellant grammatici frequentatiua, <u>actito</u> et actitaui. Haec quosdam non sane indoctos uiros audio ita pronuntiare, ut primam in his litteram corripiant, rationemque dicunt, quoniam in uerbo principali, quod est ago, prima littera breuiter pronuntiatur. Cur igitur ab eo, quod est edo et ungo, in quibus uerbis prima littera breuiter dicitur, esito et unctito, quae sunt eorum frequentatiua, prima littera longa promimus et contra dictito ab eo uerbo, quod est dico, correpte dicimus? num ergo potius actito et actitaui producenda sunt? quoniam frequentatiua ferme omnia eodum modo in prima syllaba dicuntur, quo participia praeteriti temporis ex his uerbis, unde ea profecta sunt, in eadem syllaba pronuntiantur, sicuti lego, lectus facit lectito; ungo, unctus unctito; scribo, scriptus scriptito; moueo, motus motito; pendeo, pensus pensito; edo, esus esito; dico autem dictus dictito facit; gero, gestus gestito; ueho, uectus uectito; rapio, raptus raptito; capio, captus captito; facio, factus factito. Sic igitur actito producte in prima syllaba pronuntiandum, quoniam ex eo fit, quod est ago et actus.
       *āctito* ['aːktito] > *ăctito* ['aktito]

Example (29) attests to the shortening of a vowel in unstressed syllable,[20] while (30) describes the lengthening of a vowel in stressed open syllable.[21] Therefore, they are compatible with both (1a) and (1b). On the other hand, (31) and (32) are concerned with the shortening of a stressed vowel in closed syllable.[22] If vowel isochrony (scenario [1b]) were in place, long vowels in stressed closed syllable should remain intact, certainly not undergo shortening. Rather, such shortenings are perfectly explained in light of the long-term tendency of Latin to get rid of superheavy rhymes. This tendency appears to be operative as early as the pre-literary stage with such phenomena as the simplification of certain consonant clusters after long vowels (*\*mēdcum > mēcum*) and the degemination of geminate sibilants after long vowels or diphthongs (*\*cādsus > \*cāssus > cāsus*; *caussa > causa*): cf. e.g. Leumann (1977: 181), Loporcaro (2015: 11–12), Sihler (1995: 222).

Thus, in the 2nd century CE, well before the grammarians' accounts reviewed above (Sections 3–5), Gellius documents the (at least incipient) fading of CVL in the

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**20** Gellius' remark may find a precedent in FEST. 242.11–12 L (*<Praecidanea porca prod>ucta syllaba <secunda pronuntianda est>*), but the restoration proposed by Müller (1839) is itself dependent on Gellius' passage.

**21** The parallel of *suspīcio*, pointed out by Holford-Strevens (2003: 182 n. 45), is difficult to account for.

**22** *Quiescere* has an *apex* in the Roman *titulus* in *CIL* VI 25531.3, and the length is indeed consistent with all Romance outcomes (see *REW* 6955, 6958), though Holford-Strevens (2003) suggests that the form with shortening is presupposed also by the Brythonic development "*que > \*cu* (e.g. Welsh *cwsg* 'sleep', not *\*cwysg* from *ē*)" (Holford-Strevens 2003: 181 n. 45).

direction of its subordination to not only the position of stress, but also syllable structure (scenario [1a]). This is the very conclusion reached in the study of Gellius' language by Mancini (2015a: 41) himself, while commenting on the passages in (28)–(31) (see also Mancini 2015a: 356, 2015b: 3):

> Non resta che ipotizzare che Gellio stesse parlando di un *allungamento della vocale tonica;* non certo che stesse confondendo accento e quantità vocalica come vorrebbero Rolfe, Marache (e Rusca). […] Gellio attesta alcune significative oscillazioni che si distaccano dal canone classico:
>
> a) abbreviamenti in sillaba pretonica (*succīdaneae → succĭdaneae*);
>
> b) allungamenti in sillaba tonica aperta (*ususcăpio → ususcāpio, pignoriscăpio → pignoriscāpio*);
>
> c) abbreviamenti di rime stralunghe in sillaba tonica chiusa (āctito → ăctito, quiēsco → quiĕsco).
>
> [All that remains is to speculate that Gellius was talking about *stressed vowel lengthening*; certainly not that he was confusing stress and vowel quantity, as Rolfe, Marache (and Rusca) would have it. […] Gellius testifies to some significant deviations from the classical canon: a) shortenings in pre-tonic syllable; b) lengthenings in open stressed syllable; c) shortenings of extra-long rhymes in closed stressed syllable]. (Mancini 2015a: 41; emphasis added by M.L. and L.O.)

However, in later proposing scenario (1b) for the demise of CVL, Mancini (2019), though discussing another passage from Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* (that is, 13.6.2–4 on speaking *barbare* and *rustice*), does not include the Gellian evidence in (29)–(32) that, as he himself convincingly argues in the passage just quoted, militates in favour of the opposite scenario (1a).

## 6.2  Virgilius Maro grammaticus

Gellius' *testimonia* are the first hints of the changes that eventually resulted in the prosodic arrangement described centuries later by Virgilius grammaticus, writing probably in the 7th century (see Stangl 1891: III; Kaster 1988: 389, 432; Ó Cróinín 1989: 20–22; Law 1995; Zetzel 2018: 354), most probably in Gaul, as Mancini (2014) convincingly argues rejecting alternative localizations in Hibernia or Anglia (*contra* Zetzel [2018: 354], who seems however to ignore Mancini's [2014: 960] compelling argument explaining the obscure *clefabo* 'I will speak', *Epit*. II 30, with Old High German *klepfen/kleffen* 'to chatter', indicating language contact which may have taken place in Merovingian Gaul but not in the British Isles). At that time, the political and linguistic unity of the Western Empire had long dissolved and the different

diatopic basilectal varieties of Latin were on the verge of becoming independent languages as a product of what Herman (1985: 88–89, 1998: 9, 21, 1990) dubbed the "third wave of the dialectalization of Latin". Thus, Virgilius can be said to have written his grammatical work at around "the end of the history of Latin" as a natively acquired language in Gaul (according to the chronology established by Herman [1996, 2006]). It seems to us, therefore, that this is a very fitting last piece of data to conclude our review of artigraphers' testimonies, which describes a situation that is seamlessly carried on in the Romance of Gaul. Yet, before quoting the relevant testimonies, it is necessary to address in advance the issue of Virgilius grammaticus' reliability as a grammarian. His works (both the *Epitomae* and the *Epistolae*) contain so many odd and bizarre passages that they "have been interpreted as parody of grammar, as showing complete ignorance of Latin, and as a mystical and hermetic discussion of wisdom" (Zetzel [2018: 354]; an overview of scholarly judgments is provided by Gamberini [2014: 26–28]). While some features of his work can indeed be regarded as jocular inventions, they are very few in number and appear in specific sections. Elsewhere, however, Virgilius demonstrates knowledge of and mastery over the earlier grammatical tradition and, which is crucial for us, transmits linguistically sound information, particularly as far as late Latin/proto-Romance innovations are concerned: see for instance his reporting the analogical paradigm of "*poteo* secundae coniugationis" ('2nd conjugation *poteo*', with regular forms such as *potebunt* 'can.FUT.3SG', see *Epit*. VIII 38–41 and XII 121–123; Löfstedt 2003: 186–187, 245; ThLL 10.2 300), which completely ousted Classical Latin *possum* in all Romance languages (REW 6682).

As for VL, in the *Epitomae* Virgilius describes a synchronic rule whereby long vowels occur in open stressed syllables and short vowels in closed stressed syllables, that is, in complementary distribution:[23]

(33)     Virgilius grammaticus, *Epit*. III, 11–18 Löfstedt (2003): Sciendum sane est quod ubicumque uocalem quamlibet in media arte possitam s duplicata secuta fuerit, eandem uocalem corripiemus, ut uassa uossa clussit uissit uessit; at si una s, uocalis producetur, ut gloriosus uisus; omnis superlatiuus gradus s duplicatam semper habebit, ut altissimus. Sic et m duplicata antesitam corripit uocalem ut summus gammus; sin alias, producetur, ut sumus ramus. Una littera, quae sillabae opus facit sicuti fortis, ita et longa erit, ut a e i o.

Once again here we espouse Mancini's (2014) diagnosis, which ascribes such an allophonic rule to Virgilius's Latin:

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**23** We print here Löfstedt's (2003) text. The differences from Polara's (1979) edition, such as *vossa* instead of *fossa* and *sicuti fortis* instead of *sicut i fortis,* are orthogonal to the present discussion.

> Virgilio sta chiaramente alludendo a una struttura prosodica *che sarà tipica della cosiddetta "quantità romanza"* per cui le alternative ['V:$^{\$}$C] ~ ['VC$^{\$}$] si dispongono in distribuzione complementare: la scrizione mediante consonante semplice o geminata rappresenta il segnale della nuova prosodia delle vocali poste sotto accento. [Virgilius is clearly alluding to a prosodic structure *that will be typical of the so-called "Romance quantity"* whereby the alternatives ['V:$^{\$}$C] ~ ['VC$^{\$}$] are arranged in a complementary distribution: the spelling with singleton or geminate consonants represents the signal of the new prosody of vowels occurring under stress.] (Mancini 2014: 978; emphasis added by M.L. and L.O.)

However, this is not, unlike what he claims a few lines earlier, "una situazione profondamente diversa rispetto a quella dei *testimonia* grammaticali precedenti" [a situation profoundly different from that of the earlier grammatical testimonia] (Mancini 2014: 977), but rather the same situation depicted by Augustine and Consentius (Section 5), the harbingers of which can already be glimpsed in Gellius's testimonies (Section 6.1).

# 7 Conclusion: the artigraphic evidence and the demise of Latin CVL

We are now in a position to take stock of the foregoing discussion. In Table 1 we reproduced Mancini's (2019) catalogue of the relevant testimonies. As we tried to show, though, testimonies by ancient grammarians that deal with deviations from the classical norm possibly related to VL are far more abundant. Our analysis has taken into account 31 passages against Mancini's 15. Yet we have also argued that the grammarians' remarks cannot simply be collected and compared with one another, but require careful sifting to assess their place in a very conservative tradition, the provenance of their examples (that is, whether they are extracted from metrical texts, selected for reasons of consistency throughout the entire work, or taken from contemporary language), and the linguistic information they provide. Close reading of the passages has made it clear that in most instances Latin grammarians, especially when sticking to the orthodox methods and practices of the artigraphic tradition, hand down no reliable testimonies about the demise of CVL. Modern appraisal of the data they provide must be wary of the difficulties involved in handling these texts. Our review has revealed that nine testimonies refer to metrical texts ([3], [8], [11a]–[11c], [13c], [13d], [14b], [14d]), five (or perhaps six) are concerned with other linguistic phenomena ([2], [5], [9], [14d], [24], [3]?), and seven (or eight) contain flag-words ([4], [13a], [13b], [14a], [14d], [25], [26], [5]?). Table 2 collects all and only the passages that we feel have some chance of describing the development of VL

**Table 2:** Synoptic overview of the relevant passages.

| | Stressed | | Unstressed | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **i. Open** | **ii. Closed** | **iii. Open** | **iv. Closed** |
| a. Reports lenghening | Gell. VI.10 Victor. *Gramm*. Frg. 36 Don. *Mai*. III 1 Consent. *Gramm*. 11.8 N Consent. *Gramm*. 12.2 N Consent. *Gramm*. 12.12f. N Aug. *Mus*. II 1.1 Virgilius grammaticus, *Epit*. III, 11–18 L | Consent. *Gramm*. 19s N | | |
| b. Reports shortening | | Gell. VII 15.1–6 Gell. IX 6.1–3 Virgilius grammaticus, *Epit*. III, 11–18 L | Gell. IV 6.5–6 Consent. *Gramm*. 11.18f., 12.12f. N Victor. *Gramm*. Frg. 36 | Don. *Mai*. III 1 Consent. *Gramm*. 12.12f. N |

in pre-Romance spoken Latin (the testimonies also included in Table 1 are in bold, even when our interpretation requires putting them in a different category).

Here is Mancini's (2019: 40) analysis of his collected data:

(34)　"there are three certainties:
　　a.　Eight passages show lengthening in open stressed syllables […].
　　b.　Three passages refer to lengthening also in closed syllables […].
　　c.　Four passages […] show shortening of long vowels in open syllables".

After our discussion, this assessment must be modified as follows:

(35)　a.　lengthening in open stressed syllables: four or five examples left ([10] [*repono* but analysed differently], [19], [21], [23], maybe [11d]), to which one of Gellius' testimonies ([30]) and Virgilius' synchronic rule ([33]) should be added:
　　　ergo: 4/5 + 2 = 6 or 7 (compatible with both [1a] and [1b])
　　b.　lengthening in closed syllables: among the three examples mentioned in (34b), (2) and (24) fall and neither (5) nor (24) can be added; only (22) remains (maybe):

<u>ergo: 3 – 2 or 3 = 1 or 0 (supporting [1b])</u>

c.    shortening of long vowels in open syllables: three of the four examples in
       (34c) concern the same flag-word *Rōma*, hence we exclude it; the fourth
       ([10]) is best analysed otherwise and listed under (35a); no other example
       can be added:
       <u>ergo: 4 – 4 = 0 (supporting [1b])</u>

d.    shortening of long vowels in stressed closed syllables: the two testimonies
       of Gellius ([31]–[32]) and Virgilius' rule ([33]) must be added:
       <u>ergo: 0 + 3 = 3 (supporting [1a])</u>

Mancini's three categories ([34a]–[34c]) are all heavily downgraded from our
investigation, since most of the artigraphic testimonies, except Consentius's and
Augustine's remarks, do not withstand closer examination; on the other hand, Gel-
lius' and Virgilius' accounts are to be added to the list, thus introducing a new
category ([35d]). Globally, the relevant evidence thus sifted is only compatible with
scenario (1a), that is, with the hypothesis that Latin CVL was ousted by the rise of an
OSL allophonic rule: shortenings of long vowels in closed stressed syllables ([35d]) do
not reconcile with (1b), whereas the dissolving of the evidence which would allegedly
attest to "lengthening also in closed syllables" and "shortening of long vowels in open
syllables" ([35b] and [35c]) shows that scenario (1b) makes an unnecessary
assumption that is not needed to account for any of the relevant data.[24]

   This conclusion is in keeping with what we know independently about long-term
trends in Latin phonology (see Section 6.1), where superheavy syllables tended to be
eliminated and where – as demonstrated by all counts, based on both texts (see Kiss
1971; Marotta and De Felice 2023) and dictionaries (see e.g. Marotta and De Felice 2019:
448) – only open stressed syllables hosted a higher percentage of long vowels, while
short vowels prevailed, to varying degrees, in all other contexts, thus foreshadowing
the further Romance development and, in particular, the allophonic distribution
determined by the OSL ([1a]). By contrast, scenario (1b) assumes (without valid
evidence, neither textual – as we have shown, see Table 2 – nor structural)[25] that at a

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**24** Basically, this sifting, and the downsizing of the corpus of relevant evidence it implies, results in
reverting to Herman's (1982, 1990) view, that is to considering only Consentius and Augustine, while
adding Gellius and Virgilius.

**25** As seen in Section 1 in the quotation adduced to illustrate (1b), Mancini (2019) argues that the
"general lengthening of stressed vowels, both in heavy and light syllables" (Mancini 2019: 47), for
which he believes he can find evidence in the testimonies of Latin grammarians, corresponds to "a
structural representation still encoded in the conservative Western and Eastern varieties of
Romania" (Mancini 2019: 47). However, while a lengthening effect of stress, regardless of syllable
structure, is a phonetic universal (see e.g. Lehiste 1970: 18–19; Maddieson 1997: 623–624) that is
proved experimentally to be found in all Romance languages (see e.g. Ortega-Llebaria and Prieto

certain point this long-term tendency was reversed and that new superheavy syllables were systematically created by lengthening short vowels even in stressed closed syllables, not only in open ones, as foreseen in (1a).

Our conclusion in favour of scenario (1a) is further corroborated by a crucial chronological argument, namely that that "certain point" when the long-term trend was reversed cannot actually be identified at any given moment in time. As seen in Section 6.1, Gellius describes in the 2nd century CE the harbingers of OSL: the latter is clearly operating in the imperial Latin of Africa (see Adams 1999: 114; Herman 1982, 1990), is well established in Rome at the end of the Western Empire (see Herman 1982, 1990), and is later described for Gaul in the 7th century by Virgilius Maro grammaticus. The same situation can be reconstructed for the pre-literary Old French of one to two centuries after Virgilius (Morin 2003: 121):

| (36) | | a. ECCĬLLAM | b. ECCĬLLUM | c. PĬLUM | d. TĒLAM |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | underlying form | /et'tsella/ | /et'tsello/ | /'pelo/ | /'tela/ |
| | phonetic realization | [et'tsella] | [et'tsello] | ['pe:lo] | ['te:la] |
| | degemination | [e'tsela] | [e'tselo] | – | – |
| | apocope | – | [e'tsel] | ['pe:l] | – |
| | diphthongization | – | – | ['pei̯l] | ['tei̯la] |
| | Old French | *icele* | *icel* | *peil* | *teile* |
| | gloss | 'that.F.SG' | 'that.M.SG' | 'hair' | 'cloth' |

Diphthongization in (36c)–(36d) applied to a long vowel, which had been in turn lengthened through the same OSL described for the Latin of Gaul by Virgilius. Finally, OSL left unmistakable traces in the Romance varieties from the North Sea to Sicily and is still at work in Standard Italian, Central-Southern Italo-Romance dialects and Sardinian (Loporcaro 2015: 25–30).

Since all we have now said regarding the period from the 7th century to present rests on established facts (i.e. it does not rely on textual interpretation as strongly as the evidence – as valuable as it is – provided by Latin grammarians), proponents of (1b) must meet a non-negligible burden of proof. They assume that CVL did not collapse due to the emergence of the OSL, which is independently known to have arisen, but was lost when a completely different change (of which we have no independent evidence) occurred, which allegedly lengthened all stressed vowels regardless of syllable structure. To support their view effectively, they should answer

[2007: 162] for Spanish, Renwick [2014: 135–138] for Romanian, or Müller and Martín [2012: 154, 156–157] on the Occitan dialect of the Ubaia valley), there is no evidence that this situation, precisely because it is universal, may have come into effect at a certain moment of the Latin-Romance transition; see Loporcaro (2024: 35, n. 7).

the following questions: when exactly would such a generalized lengthening (also in closed syllables) have been established? And when did it yield to OSL?

We submit that such answers cannot be supplied. Given that (a) Gellius, in the 2nd century, shows the harbingers of OSL ([1a]), not of generalized lengthening ([1b]); that (b) this is the same situation that Virgilius Grammaticus depicts as having become the rule five centuries later; that (c) the Romance varieties of Italy and Gaul/France are known to have OSL, or to have had it in the past; and, finally, that (d) OSL is in itself logically sufficient to explain the demise of Latin CVL, the inescapable conclusion, in our view, is that there is no room in the chronology of Latin and the Latin-Romance transition for (1b) to ever have come into being. This change, in fact – unless one wants to postulate a back-and-forth of changes (without any evidence) – should have preceded Gellius' time, but on the other hand it is reconstructed based on texts of artigraphers much later than Gellius, which is contradictory.

By contrast, our conclusion in favour of (1a) is free from contradiction and compatible with the chronology of sound change in Romance as well as with the data furnished by the artigraphers' pertinent testimonies.

In addition to this conclusion on the specific issue of the demise of Latin CVL, we finally propose a conclusion on method, in the form of the two principles in (37) and (38), that are relevant to the study of the metalinguistic testimonies by Latin grammarians:

(37)   Flag-word exclusion principle
       If a given example/word is in the list of traditional examples, its reiteration is not indicative of coeval linguistic phenomena (unless this can be proved on the basis of independent evidence).

(38)   Principle of testimonial autonomy
       More weight is to be attached to the testimony of grammarians (or portions of their work) which are known to be based not on traditional materials but on their own observation – and *a fortiori* to that of authors not belonging to the artigraphical tradition – than to that of traditionalist artigraphers.

The first principle ([37]) states that the mere repetition of examples from the traditional stock is of no value to the diachronic phonologist when it comes to establishing and dating pre-Romance changes in the phonology of Latin, unless – of course – the information provided by the relevant testimony is backed up by independent evidence.

The second principle ([38]) gives all the more weight to the testimony of ancient grammarians that are demonstrably independent of previous tradition. In this way, while obviously recognizing the importance of evaluating individual testimonies

locally, a hierarchy emerges whereby the testimony of authors outside the artigraphical tradition, such as Gellius, weighs more heavily than that of artigraphers of acknowledged originality, such as Consentius, and that of the latter in turn weighs more heavily than that of traditionalist artigraphers, particularly within the Donatian tradition, such as Servius or Pompeius. There is probably no need to stress that such hierarchies are local rather than global, and that authors that for some matters turn out to be unreliable may provide valuable material in other sections of their work.

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