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THE OLD FRENCH DIPHTHONG  $\text{ei}$ :  
ITS DEVELOPMENT DIALECTALLY AND  
IN THE LITERARY LANGUAGE DOWN  
TO MODERN TIMES.

by

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I. DERIVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF EI UP TO THE 13TH CENTURY.

The Old French diphthong ei had two developments, (1) ei > oi, (2) ei > ei, (symbolic for e). On this basis I have divided the oral diphthong ei (>oi), from ei + a nasal, and ei + l mouillée (from which resulted ei).

A. The oral diphthong ei came regularly from;

1. Latin ē (vulgar Latin e) in open accented syllables except after a palatal<sup>1</sup>: mei (mē) creid (crēdo) peiset (pē(n)sat) meis (mē(n)sem) vīdeir (vīdēre).

2. Latin ī (vulgar Latin e): (a) in open accented syllables except after a palatal: veit (vīdet) veie (vīam) meie (mīam) seid (sītīm) feid (fīdem) beivre (bībere); (b) before a final consonant queid (quīd).

3. ē + palatal: rei (rēm) lei (lēgem).

4. ī + palatal: leist (līcet) deit (dīgītum) freit (frīgīdus) neir (nīgrum).

<sup>Palatal</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>ē, ī before i. It passes through the intermediary stage iei: cire (cēram) plaisir (placēre) recivre (recipere) merci (mercedem). The modern french cène is due to the influence of the literary language. Reçoit was formed on, boit, doit; anceis, more frequent than ancis, on sordeis; disoit on vendoit.



5.\* In an unaccented syllable *ei* or *oi* have never come immediately from the vulgar Latin *e* as <sup>is</sup> the case in the accented syllable. It must owe its origin to the joining of the *e* with a parasitic *i* originating from a following palatal. This *ei* has a wider range of origin than has accented *ē*, *ī*, since not only classical Latin *ē* + *i* but also classical Latin *ě* (*ae*) + *i* may produce the diphthong *ei*: *medianum* > \* *meien* > *moyen*; *decanum* > *degano* > *deien* > *doyen*\*; *sexaginta* > \* *ses* (*g*) *anta* > *seisante* > *soixante*; \* *pectorina* > *pet* (*t*) *orina* > *peitrine* > *poitrine*.

\* Under the accent *ē*, *ī* + palatal becomes, through *iei*, regularly *i*. *Iei* has been kept in Provençal while in French it became *i*: *legere* > \* *leyere* > \* *lieyre* > *lire*; *medicum* > \* *medigo* > \* *mieye* > \* *mie*; *decem* > \* *dece* > \* *diece* > \* *diez* > *dis* > *diz* > *dix*. In a closed syllable: *texere* > \* *tes(s)ere* > \* *ties're* > *tistre*; *sex* > \* *sès* > \* *sies* > *sies'* > *six*; *pēctus* > \* *pēt(t)os* > *piet's* > *piz* > *pis*. The only case where French does not presuppose the change of *e* into *ie* before an *i* parasite in a tonic syllable, and where the French form is consequently confused with that of the vulgar Latin *e* + *i* is perhaps: *fēria* > \* *fèra* > *feire* > *foire*. The classical pronunciation had become *è* as is shown by the Italian fiera, Provincial fieira. For this reason we have six (*sěx*) under the accent but soixante in the unaccented syllable. Likewise pis, but poitrine; parmi, moyen, moitié. Romania V, III, 66 - 69.



6. Latin ē in closed syllable: tēctum > teit > toit;  
crēscere > creistre > croître.

7. Latin ē, í, ě and y blotting out hiatus: enveyer.

B. (1) ei + nasal (2) ei + l mouillée.

(1) ein comes from

a. oe, ē or í in open syllable before a nasal:

peine (poenam) pleine (plēnam) veine (vēnam) fein (fēnum)  
frein (frēnum) baleine (balēna) sein (sīnum) meins (mīnus)  
meinet (mīnat).

b. Latin í where ń has become in before a consonant:  
ceint (cīntam) ceindre (cīngere) deint (dīgnetur) feindre (fīngere)  
enseint (Alexius) (\*insignet) aceinet (\*accinat) éteindre (extīngere) teinter (tīntare).

(2) eil comes from:

(a) ē, í + liquid l: conseil (consilium) merveille  
(mirabilīa) meilleur (mēliorem).

(Note) ē, í + l > oi: veile (vēlam) > voile; peil (pilum) >  
poil; fedeil (fedēlis) > foil. Modern French fidèle is  
borrowed from the classical Latin. Chameil (camēlus) >  
chamoil. Chameau owes its origin to the Latin camēlus.

b. í + palatal + l: vermeil (vermiculum) pareil  
(pariculum) oreille (auriculum) veiller (vīgilare).

Development of ei to oi.

All Gaul originally pronounced Latin ē and í in an



open syllable as e. Provençal preserves this sound, but in all the French dialects e became ei.

Rossmann offers the following theory for the development to ei.\* The vowel was long in actual quantity since it stood in open syllable, and two impulses of the breath were used in pronouncing it, - a case common in English is the sound of i in machine. The two impulses at first had probably the same values, but through progressive dissimilation were differentiated into e and i (in the same way oo > ou).

First signs of the changing of ei to oi appear in the extreme northeastern part of France and in the french-speaking portion of Belgium as early as the tenth century. From the East the development spread to Paris and exerted an influence there .

The oldest examples of oi (after that of noiedz in the Jonas fragment) are found in the manuscripts C & A of the Gumpot which sometimes has mois for meis, and in the Psautier de Montebourg: voie; desvoient, loials\*\* . Meyer Lübke<sup>+</sup> suggests another: Soifridus Meuse 1078 Gall. Christ. XIII

\*Romanische Forschungen I, 15 - 8.

\*\*Suchier, Les Voyelles Toniques, p 93.

+ Meyer-Lübke, Grammaire des Langues Romanes, I p 95.



instr. 562. Rossmann<sup>1</sup> adds voyant (vidiantem) Passion V, 407 and soyientreye (\*sequentarium) Alberic de Besancon.

Much discussion has arisen as to the date at which *ei* became *oi*. Gaston Paris sets for the date of its completion 1200. Lücking maintains that *ei* must have disappeared long before in the Île de France since éi was forced to pass through èi and ai to become oi.<sup>2</sup> Rossmann says *ei* belongs to the period before the close of the 11th century; *ai* to the first quarter; oi (very open o) to the third; and oi (open o) to the last quarter; oi to the beginning of the 13th century<sup>3</sup>. The difficulty in deciding the proper date lies in the impossibility to discriminate between dialectic influence and the regular development. All authorities agree that by the thirteenth century at least, *oi* (from *ei*) has fully developed and is well established in the Parisian language.

While in the East and center of France *ei* was gradually becoming *oi*, in the western dialects *ei* changed to ei and e. Since in Paris alongside of the development of *ei* to oi in several instances we find *ei* becoming ei and e, it appears likely that Paris is on the boundary between the *oi* district and that of ei. Such forms as Monnaie (moneta) and

<sup>1</sup>Romanische Forschungen, I, 161.

<sup>2</sup>Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie XI, 86.

<sup>3</sup>Romanische Forschungen, I, 163.



raide (regda), with its other form roide, exist alongside of moi, mois, etc.

In regard to the stages of pronunciation through which ei passed to oi<sup>1</sup>, there is again difference of opinion. The authorities in general agree that the accent should fall on the first vowel e, otherwise, as Rambeau<sup>2</sup> says it could not go through the intermediary steps of ei to e. Before nasals ei was the old pronunciation, and the nasal colored e the new. This is explained only by the fall of the accent on e. Had i been the predominating quantity it would have remained, for i + n at the time of the *Chanson de Roland* was not yet affected by nasals: vint (vānit) pin (pinum) cing (quinque).

Rossmann gives the following detailed explanation of the stages through which ei passed to oi. The first variation from ei was ei. Since ei (unaccented Latin ē + palatal) had the same development as ei, and in Norman ei advanced only to ei or e, we may accept the possibility as well as the likelihood<sup>e</sup> of such a change. We encounter differences of opinion in regard to the way ei became oi. Rossmann and Lucking believe the next step to be ai. In attempting to explain the difference between ei and ai Meyer Lübke says: "ei diffère de ai non seulement en ce que le canal vocal est plus resserré pour la première partie de la diphthongue, mais

<sup>1</sup>To avoid confusion with ei and e of the west, I have left discussion of the secondary change of oi to e until later.

<sup>2</sup>Rambeau, *Assonanzen der Chanson de Roland*, p 168.



surtout en ce que le retrécissement a lieu au voile du palais. Par là est rendu possible le passage à a<sup>o</sup> (a vélaire) et en fin, avec dissimilation encore plus forte à "o".<sup>1</sup> The intermediary step between ai and oi is represented by oi a very open o which becomes in time oi.

Ulbrich denies the probability of the ai stage and in its place suggests a sound represented by oi. The sound is discussed somewhat by Gaston Paris in his commentary upon Ulbrich's article<sup>2</sup>. He writes: the proposal to attribute to e (ē, ĭ) a sound between e and o pleases me more because in certain dialects this e is symbolized by other and different vowels, in Lorraine by a, in Burgundy by o, in Berry oi. A writer (in Romania XIII, 89 - 95) remarks: while M. Ulbrich represents the sound of the Latin ē, ĭ in a closed syllable by o he in reality attributes to it about the value of final unaccented e in the Germanic languages.

I believe Rossmann's explanation is a more probable one. The reasons set forward by each are too numerous to be taken up here. The degree of difference is very slight between ei and ai; and through deepening the a we arrive grad-

<sup>1</sup>Meyer Lübke Grammaire des Langues Romanes I, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Romania VII, 137. Gaston Paris, in his criticism of Lücking's intermediary step ai, suggests as a more probable explanation the change first taking place in unaccented syllables, as necatos > noiedz regina > roine. This is not a proof against Lücking's theory and does not preclude ai as a



ually at a very open o, which Rossmann represents by o. Only a very slight change is necessary for oi to become the regular oi. To show the series through which e passed to oi let us adopt Rossmann's system of symbols: e, eə, ėi, ei, ai, oi, oi, oi.<sup>1</sup>

Gaston Paris says that the first words to develop oi were in which ei was placed in the unaccented syllable. Noiedz (necatos) by the side of haverir and doceiet in the Jonas fragment as well as roine (regina) and voyant (vidiantem), Passion V, 407, and soyientreye (<sup>+</sup>sequentrarium) would seem to indicate the change first in the unaccented syllable. From there it spread to the tonic.

Schwan and Behrens<sup>2</sup> say that the first words to develop oi from ei were perhaps those in which a labial preceded the diphthong: meis > mois, veit > voit.

I believe the proofs are for the first theory<sup>3</sup>.

The nasal ei in general failed to become oin: veine (vēna) sein (sīnus) serein (serēnus) frein (frēnum); but in a few words oin developed: foin (fēnum) avoine (avēna) poine (poena) (Boileau) moins (mīnus) moindre (mīnor). Why in certain cases ein developed as the oral ei and why, in the majority of instances, ein did not become probable step.

<sup>1</sup>Rom. For. I, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>Schwan and Behrens, Grammatik des Altfranzösischen, § 225.

<sup>3</sup>In French ei passed to oi (doubtless through öi) probably



oin is a matter which will be discussed later.

In the beginning ein was pronounced as a diphthong e and i, but ein changed to ein, and became identical with ain (1150), before the oral ei had become oi. The i was becoming gradually absorbed by the n, but the process was not completed until the end of the sixteenth century, when for ei in pleine, peine, etc, the accepted pronunciation was e. Eil remained unchanged in form. As in ein, the l had a strong tendency to become palatalized, and in so doing to weaken the quality of the i; so quite early the simple sound of el was used in the Ile de France. In some of the dialects, however, the diphthongal character was preserved.

## II. DEVELOPMENT IN ÎLE DE FRANCE TO 16TH CENTURY AND IN THE DIALECTS.

We have presented two theories as to the development of oi from ei in the east and center of France. The change was unknown to the dialects of the west, where ei became ei or e. Paris was on the border between these two divisions, and tendencies peculiar to the west, influenced the Parisian language, as well as those characteristic of the east.

Let us take up in more detail the matter of dialectic development in regard to ei. Suchier<sup>1</sup> takes as a basis of division the treatment of the open unaccented a. For the <sup>science</sup> after the vocalisation of the l: peus from peils (pilus). Suchier, Les Voyelles Toniques (translated into French by





sake of convenience, we will accept his division as a foundation, and then make another analysis Geographically on the ground of the development of *ei*.

Suchier divides France into three parts: (1) Provençal, (2) Middle Rhone district, (3) French dialects proper. In Provençal *e* did not become *ei*, so we leave it out of consideration and will deal rather briefly with the Middle Rhone district, which is on the border line between Provençal and the French dialects.

Before entering upon a discussion concerning the development of *ei* in the dialects there are a few general facts to be noted.

The sound of *oi* from *ei* is to be found inside a line comprising; Abbeville, (Somme), Amiens, Beaupré (Oise), Clermont, Pontoise, Mantes (Seine-et-Oise), Paris (Seine), Château-Landon (Seine-et Marne), Orléans (Loiret), Beaugency, Saint-Aignan (Loir-et-Cher), Villantroy (Indre), Levroux, Sancoins (Cher), Bussières-près Culan, Autun (Saône-et-Loire), Louhans, Saint-Claude (Jura), Lons le Saunier, Besançon (Doubs), Baume-les Dames, Saint-Imier (Suisse). The old pronunciation is found in the west up to the following places inclusive: Le Tréport (Seine-Inférieure), Gisors

Guerlin de Guer, 1906. p. 43 c.

Note 1, p. 10. Suchier, *Le Français et Le Provençal* p. 64.

(Translated into French by P. Monet, 1891).



(Eure), Évreux, Nogent-Le-Roi (Eure-et-Loir), Chevreuse (Seine-et-Oise), Étampes, Chartres (Eure-et-Loir), Blois (Loir-et-Cher); In the east from the southern part of Lorraine to Savoie<sup>1</sup>.

In the center of France eil remained unchanged in form, but in the east it became oil. We find in Champagne, Burgundy and Lorraine, forms which continued to develop as the oral ei in an open syllable and appear with oil; con-soil, vermoil, soloil<sup>2</sup>. As I mentioned in the first chapter, there were two pronunciations for eil. In the center the i became absorbed in the l before the oral ei became oi, and the pronunciation became that of the simple e + l. But this was not the case in Champagne, Burgundy, and Lorraine, for there, eil must have had the value of a diphthong and gone through the same stages as the oral ei<sup>3</sup>. Ei + nasal did not ordinarily change. In Lorraine e before n in an open syllable became ẽ, but when a labial preceded, it became uõ: awon, puon, fuon, muon (minus); or avon, pon, fon, mon. A still further step is found in Burgundy where e before n developed as before the other consonants and we have: plain, plaine<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Suchier, Le Français et Le Provençal pp. 82.- 83.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer Lübke, Grammaire des Langues Romanes, I § 86.

<sup>3</sup>Meyer - Lübke I § 86.

<sup>4</sup>Meyer - Lübke, I § 92.



### A. The Middle Rhône District.

The language of this region was influenced by Provençal and also by the French dialects proper. As before stated, Provençal failed to develop the diphthong ei as the northern part did.

e continued as e and more often as ey, ei: puer (potēre), ser (serum), cortesi (+ curte(n) siam), pueyr, treystres, corteis, meis, peys, peis, deveir, feyes, (foetas), torneis.

Before n, e is treated in the same manner: arena (arēnam), plen (plēnum), areyna, aveyna, peyna, pleyna, pleina, pleins. Ect, esc = e, ei: drez (directos). There is a transposition of i in liet (lectum), deliez (dilectus). i = ey, ei: peyvros, peis, veis, navey, decyvre, mens (minus), seyns, seins. Before n or m, e remained e or ei, or even reduced to i: ren, rein, bein (bene), fein (fenum) engin, bin, beins.<sup>1</sup>

### B. The French Dialects.

#### 1. Wallon.

The Wallon dialect covers the territory included in a triangle, the top of which would extend north of Liège, its base running along the political frontier of France and Belgium, one side marked by the limit of the Germanic language and the other by the Meuse as far as Namur and the

<sup>1</sup>Romania, XIII, 544 - 546.



Sambre around Charleroi.

Wallon developed oi from ei (Latin ē, í) in unaccented syllable (noiedz, roin), at least in the tenth century.<sup>1</sup> In some cases this oi weakened to o = soent, poent, avoent.<sup>2</sup> oe = oi is frequent: doet, troes, soet,. The liègeois forms of minus and poena are mo(i)n and po.(i)ne, and not paine and mains. Since the change of oi to e is due to a displacement of accent from óe to oé, and this shifting is foreign to Wallon and Picardy, oi and e do not appear in rhyme with each other.

Du Gardin remarks à propos of the rhymes fournaise, seize, Françoise, diocese; We Wallons pronounce ai, ei, and oi in such a way that one hears in these three diphthongs the a + i, e + i, and o + i. The Parisians confuse them.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Picard Dialect.

The Picard developed oi from ei alongside of the French and under the same circumstances. Raynaud states that the Picard was the first dialect in which ei passed to o<sup>4</sup>, but the general opinion seems to be with Gaston Paris, that the Wallon was probably the first to take that step, as early as the tenth century<sup>5</sup>. Ei had another development

<sup>1</sup>Romania, VII, 137.

<sup>2</sup>Romania XVII, 557.

<sup>3</sup>Thurot, De la Pronunciation Française, I, 292.

<sup>4</sup>See Raynaud, Étude sur le Dialecte Picard, p. 79.

<sup>5</sup>Romania, VII, 137.



also. E + i (palatal) became i: lit, gist.<sup>1</sup> Before ss, i was always derived from unaccented ei and oi: pisson (poisson), conissions.<sup>2</sup> Ei + nasal > ein<sup>and</sup> was written as ain, since the two sounds had become identical.<sup>3</sup> Bèze says: the Picards pronounce in peine both the e and the i.<sup>4</sup> Ei + l did not develop to oi. While written as a diphthong eil was not pronounced as such, but, as in the Île de France, with e followed by a palatal l.

### 3. Norman Dialect.

In open syllables ē (Latin ē, í) > ei, and is found as such in the texts of the Middle Ages: seir, mei, fei, rei, treis, torneis, heirs, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Ei > ē through the intermediary step ei, E, however, never appeared alone in the texts, but always in connection with ei.

E became the accepted pronunciation for ei in the patois from the beginning of the sixteenth century. Thurot says: the Normans pronounce ei as e, in the words where ei is etymological. Sylvius cites as examples of the Norman pronunciation: tele, estelle.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Suchier, Ancassin et Nicolettee (trans into Fr by A. Coun-  
son, 1903, §11, p. 80.      <sup>2</sup>Suchier, § 26, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup>Raynaud, p 74.

<sup>4</sup>Thurot De la Pron. Fr. I, 338.

<sup>5</sup>Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie, XIII, p. 378.

<sup>6</sup>Thurot, De la Prononciation Française, I 374.



E, i, in closed syllables, appear usually as e, but in the southern part, forms occur with the diphthong ei: meis (missus), seis (siccus).<sup>1</sup>

E, i, before nasals > ai, (written ai or ei): eleine, serain, fain (fenum), desmaignes (dominium).<sup>1</sup>

In individual cases, after whispered sounds to characterize the latter as such, ie was employed: franchies, and sometimes in the patois before r: niers (nigros).

ai was confused with ei much sooner in Norman than in French, but on the other hand ei and oi are still kept distinct in Norman while in French they have become confused.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. The Northwest Dialects.

Bretagne, Anjou, Maine, Tourraine.

Here the development of ei, in central and eastern France, exerted an influence, for we find both oi and e from ei. In the southwest, free from foreign influences, e became ei in open syllables, which in Poitevin remained as e. In the northwest, oi appeared commonly in the documents, in spite of the many cases of ei. That oi from ei was unknown up to that time is shown by the fact that in the rhymes of the Livre des Manières oi (from ei) never rhymed with oi (o + i). The copyists avoided assonances in oi, and whether ei or oi prevailed, depended upon the individual scribe. By the end of

<sup>1</sup>Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie, XIII, p. 380.

<sup>2</sup>Suchier, Vie de Saint Alexis, p. 45.



the fourteenth century there were only scattered remnants showing ei. Oi is not, however, a native development, but one due to the influence of central France.<sup>1</sup>

In the patois there is still a wavering today: bair=boire; cheir = choir; cret=croit; daig, daigs = doigt; fre=froid, dre=droit. Also da = doigt; sa = soir; na = noir.

In the Vocabulaire du Haut Maine (p. 30), oi is pronounced sometimes oë, oué, and sometimes ai. Ei had an open sound often identical with (1) ai (a + i): Gefray, pouvoir, sayent; (2) aie: haier, maies (mois); (3) ae: avaer, traes; (4) aei; estaeit, avaeit, faeyt; (5) leey, asseier. The accent came to fall so strongly on the second part of the diphthong oé, that the o disappeared, and we have left simply e. Not only do we find e for oi (ei) in the patois, but also for o + i: craie = croix, lain = loin.<sup>2</sup>

e + n > (1) e (written ei); pleine, aveine, peine- e: fren, plene, -ai mains, avaine; (2) oi: poins, moindre.

e + l (commonly) > eil. Twice it appears as oil: consoil, oroilles.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Görlich, Die Nordwestlichen Dialekte der Langue d'oïl p. 38

<sup>2</sup>Görlich, Die Nordwestlichen Dialekte der Langue d'oïl, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>Görlich, Die Nordwestlichen Dialekte der Langue d'oïl, p. 71.



## 5. The Southwest Dialects.

Poitou, Aunis, Saintonge, Angoumois.

E (Latin ē, ĩ) became in open syllables usually ei; sometimes, however, it remained as e. ei > e in the course of time: (e) assaver, tres, aver, hers; (ei) mei, seit, puis-seit, aveie, assaveir, etc..... E was fixed probably by the middle of the sixteenth century. The people of Poitou know only e in the manuscripts of the sixteenth century, as well as in the patois of today.

E + nasal became en, ein, and ain, but never did it develop into oin, as in some of the eastern dialects:<sup>1</sup> plain, fains, demaines, maine, alaine; meinz, domeine, plein, aleine, veines; estrene, alène, plenne, menz.

E + nasal + i had the same development, as is shown by domeine, domaines (dominium). E + liquid l became eil in most cases. Before l mouillée, accented Latin i did not usually become a diphthong. The liquid l is generally expressed by il, at least, at the end of words,<sup>2</sup> which would tend to prove for eil the vowel sound e.

## 6. The Dialect of Lorraine.

E in open syllable (usually) oi: tonoire, (tonitru). In learned words ei remained: espeirent, secreit. Also in

<sup>1</sup>In penas there is no diphthong, a thing frequent in the S. W., Romania, XIII, 179.

<sup>2</sup>Görlich, Die Südwestlichen Dialekte der Langue d'oïl p. 78.



the suffix -ërium; mysteires.

E in closed syllables > e, which appears often as ai; saiche, vairai.<sup>1</sup> E + i before the accent > oi: royaulme, loiens, loial, royne, loisir.<sup>2</sup> Ei is used in the cantons of La Vôge as the circumflex is used in French, that is, to denote the open e: feiste; beistes. Lorrain has the diphthongs ei and oi coming from e + i and o + i: mei (Latin mei), deis (decem), pois (possum).<sup>3</sup>

E + n in open syllables > e; but when a labial preceded, it tended to change the sound to uo: awon, puon, fuo, muo, (minus); or avon, pon, fon, mon, - but pyē (plenum), elen (haleine) sē.<sup>4</sup> Accented ai, ei > i before n: ensignieiz, ensigne (through analogy).

Latin a + l + i > e + l̃ expressed by aill, ordinarily; sometimes by eill: traveill, bateillaus; and often by i; batillieir. Forms in eille represent also i + l + i: merveilles; i + gutt. + l (fr. e + l̃): oreille, bouteille. Here are also forms in oil, which are peculiar to the east: oi + l: consoil, berroil, soloil, apparoilles.

Ai, ei before the accent = i. i + l̃: mervillouse, apparillieit. F + G + T ei : teit. I + G + i oi: benoiz.

<sup>1</sup>Sometimes e, a mat (mitte) espas (espissos) p XX, § 31, Apfelstadt, Lothringische Psalter. <sup>2</sup>Apfelstadt, Lothringische Psalter § 60.

<sup>3</sup>Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie, II, 276.

<sup>4</sup>Meyer - Lübke, I, § 92.



### 7. Champagne.

At the time of Chretien de Troyes, ei had given way in ~~un~~accented syllables to oi, which rhymed with oi.

Unaccented ei remained: covoit, but coveitier; cor-  
tois, corteisie; dameisele; veisin; meitié.<sup>1</sup> On the other  
hand we meet i or oi but never ei in liier, proiier.

Eil seems to have had the value of a diphthong, and to  
have developed to oi, since forms like consoil, and soloil,  
are found in the manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes.

### 8. Burgundian.

The Burgundian dialect goes farther than the others in  
its development of the diphthong ei to oi. E in open syl-  
lable > oi in the south east<sup>2</sup>.

Oi developed from the Latin e in the thirteenth cen-  
tury, and in the fourteenth, had the sound o.e. E + n, and e + n  
+ following vowel > oi<sup>3</sup>. N and n were frequently interchang-  
ed. E + n + g or c (in s. e.) > ai, or oi. The common French  
development is also found. E + l > eil > oil: consoil, mervoille,  
paroil. If any forms are found with ei, they may be traced to  
the influence of the literary language.

Latin e + t and l often > a<sup>4</sup>: latres, matres; also ei:

<sup>1</sup>Kristian von Troyes, Cligés, Förster, 1901. Introduction XLIV.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer-Lübke, I. § 92.

<sup>3</sup>Görlich, Der Burgundische Dialekt im XIII u. XIV. Jahrh-  
hundert, page 58.

<sup>4</sup>Görlich, Der Burgundische Dialekt im XIII u. XIV. Jahrh-  
hundert, page 72.



leittre, meitre.  $\text{E} + \text{g}$  and  $\text{c} > \text{ei}$ ,  $\text{ai}$  and  $\text{oi}$ <sup>1</sup>; pleige; privi-  
laiges; ploigissance, ploige.

### 9. French.

To say just what is the pure French from which the modern French language developed, is not a simple task to undertake, since each dialect is influenced, to a greater or less degree, by the surrounding dialects, and in turn influences its neighbors. There is no clear cut division separating one district from another.

The Norman and French dialects, in general, are considered as the basis for the modern French. Suchier attempts to differentiate what he terms the francien, or French proper, from the Norman<sup>1</sup>. Ordinarily the French writes o, or ou, for the sound o, where the Norman writes o, or more frequently u. The French uses two i's, which belong to two syllables, while the Norman only one: (paier, proier, French) (paier, preier, Norman).

(1) French changed en into an, except when i preceded, (bien, moyen) ex: formant (fortimente) vant (vendit) vandange (vindemiam).

(2) French diphthonged o into ou as well as e into ei. The Normans know only ei from e, not ou from o.

(3) ei became oi in French, but was unknown to the dialects of the west.

<sup>1</sup>Suchier, Le Français et Le Provençal (translated into French by P. Monet, 1891), page 50.



(4) In other cases the phonetic steps are more advanced, and developed in French, sooner than in Norman.

In the Île de France, ei regularly became oi, except before nasals, in the majority of cases, and before liquid l. At the end of the Middle Ages, the sound oi was changed to oë. Oë appeared first only after consonants.<sup>1</sup> Oë > ouë or oè, at the end of the fifteenth century: mirouer, terrouer; terroer, miroer.<sup>2</sup> Words which later appear with the e sound, (written ai, sometimes ei, as well as è), up to this time are written and are pronounced oë. For example, we find monnoie, poine, concoistre, roide, etc... In the imperfect and conditional verb forms, the same thing is true: avoit, priôit, aimeroit, with the sound of oi. Let us represent the development in the pronunciation as follows: ei - eï - ai - oi - oi - oë - oë - ouë.

The oldest French poems distinguish the sounds of ei, oi, and oi. It is obvious that, when the accent fell on the second part of the syllable, the difference in the sounds of the o's (o, o, o (eï)) would tend to lessen, in proportion as the accent became stronger on the e.

Meyer-Lübke<sup>3</sup> considers oie in the texts of the west, as a fusion of the French pronunciation oë and the e of

<sup>1</sup>Suchier, Les Voyelles Toniques, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Darmsteter - Hatzfield, Le Seizième Siècle en France, p. 211.

<sup>3</sup>Meyer - Lübke, I, § 75.



Normandy, for example: voier, (verum), savoier, troies, avour. These forms occur in the west during the thirteenth century, in that region where e became e<sub>i</sub>, and not oi, but are absent in older texts of that territory. Soair, voair, choair force one to consider them as attempts to represent the sound resulting from a confusion of oi and of e, which would rest on a pronunciation in imitation of oe.

### III. DEVELOPMENT IN FRENCH IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY AND DOWN TO MODERN TIMES.

In the sixteenth century two different changes took place in the pronunciation of oi. (1) ou<sub>e</sub> > oua, and was used commonly, first in Paris, for all words not included in the second change; (2) ou<sub>e</sub> > e-, (a) in the imperfects and conditionals of verbs; (b) in a few individual words: connoistre, croie, étroit, foible, harnois, monnoie, paroistre, roiide; (c) especially in the names of peoples: François, Anglois, Piemontois, Polonois, Hollandois, Japonois, etc.

There had been wavering between o and ou, but by the sixteenth century, ou was fairly well established as a consonant. Open e had a sound similar to a, as is indicated in the spelling: voarre, voARRIER, voARRIERE. This special pronunciation was attributed to the people of Paris: moas, foas. In spite of the protests of the grammarians, the pronunciation gained ground, and in the eighteenth century oa was established for a certain number of words. A great deal of ~~dis-~~



cussion took place, as to when *oi* was to be pronounced by *oè*, and when by *oa*. In condemning *oa*, the critics followed tradition rather than common usage. Dumarsis (1754) recognizes three sounds of *oi*: (1) *oè* (*è* with an open sound approaching *a*), foi, loi, toict, moi, froid; (2) *oa*: mois, mois pois; (3) *oua*; bois. In 1805, Domefque condemns absolutely the pronunciation *oè*.

A new sound of *e*, for *oi*, had become prominent in the language of Paris and in that of the court. It held ground and disputed sway with *oa*. Pelletier (1535) says: we pronounce priet, criet, etudiet, and all the third persons of the imperfect indicative, coming from infinitives in *-ier*; and at the same time we write prioit, etudioit; we cannot do otherwise and not offend "l'usage, la deduction et l'intelligence des mots".<sup>1</sup>

Sylvius (1531) notes that at Paris, for *oi*, the sound of *e* existed alongside of *oa* and oue in a great number of words. Palsgrave recognizes only one such word pronounced with *e*: royne. The most frequent instances in which *oi* = *e* are in those words where the accented *oi* is followed by an *e*, or an *a* final: François, Anglois, monnaie, croie, etc. Bèze attributes to the people of Paris the *e* sound, for the imperfects and conditionals; j'aimerois, and in some other words,

<sup>1</sup>Livet, La Grammaire Française et les Grammairiens du seizième Siècle (1859), § 151.



as droit, froid, estroit, croistre, connoistre, paroistre. This value of "e" for oi, existing in words at the same time with the older pronunciation, caused much confusion in regard to the proper sound for oi. By the ~~seventeenth~~ <sup>eighteenth</sup> century, a difference had grown up between the pronunciation in formal speech, public addresses, etc., and in ordinary conversation. The broader "oè" was employed in declamation, and the "e" was left for everyday use. This distinction was observed generally in the eighteenth century. Usually "e" is kept in the common names of countries ending in ois: François, Hollandois, Anglois, but some remain unchanged: Danois, Hongrois, Chinois. Paraître and connaître have had the sound e, mainly since the second half of the sixteenth century. At that period e became quite common in paraître and connaître, and in the seventeenth, recognized as the regular pronunciation. For a while croître, and even croite, followed their example. In the seventeenth century also, monnayer, effrayer, vois, Saus-saie, frayer gained the victory over the forms in oi. Monnaie followed them in the eighteenth century. However, in the nineteenth, étret went back to étroit, and roide remains alongside of the form in ai. The same is true of harnois and harnais.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tonnerre and verre in the sixteenth century had the pronunciation oa: voarre, tonnoarre, according to Thurot I, 356. The change of oi to e in their case was a later development.



At the first glance, the explanation of the change in pronunciation of oi to e by dialectic influence from the west, may seem the most natural one, since e (ei) exists in that part of France. I believe a more plausible reason may be advanced. It certainly can not be denied that the dialects of the west influenced the language of the Île de France.

Noting where the changes occur, - namely in the imperfects and conditionals, forms used most commonly, I think it unlikely to suppose that these forms would be affected by other dialects, while words less used, but still common, retain the old pronunciation. In other words, very uncommon words are more liable to be replaced by new importations than those used habitually in ordinary conversation. The dialectic influence may account in part for strengthening the tendency, but I can not believe it the main cause.

Rossmann<sup>1</sup> puts forward a theory which is as follows: e is a further development of oi due to a change of accent (oē, oē'). In support of this, he quotes a law of Sievers to the effect, that the more sonant of two vowels in a diphthong will ultimately gain the accent. In the vowel scale (u, - o, - o, - a, - e, - e, - i) the sonancy increases towards the center, - hence the change from a falling to a rising diphthong when the second element is the more sonant. In the modern French oi (= ua) the accent must have been on

<sup>1</sup>Romanische Forschungen, I, §165.



the second element before the vowel "u" became consonantal (= u). In the case of  $\acute{o}e \rightarrow \acute{o}é$ , the rule holds true, since  $e$  is nearer the center of the vowel scale than is  $o$ <sup>1</sup>.

Another reasonable explanation for "e" in the imperfects and conditionals, is to attribute it to the influence of a few forms, whose stems were such as made the older pronunciation difficult, or even impossible. Such forms are priouèt, noueyouèt. Instead, they became prièt and noyèt, and analogy brought over others: lisèt, fesèt.

It has been claimed that the Italian courtiers were responsible for the change in the names of nationalities: François, Anglois, etc.

Thurot<sup>2</sup> gives the probable origin of this belief, and scouts the idea. The popularity of "e" for oi according to him is due to the greater ease and grace with which the courtiers could say "e", without widening the mouth to produce the broader sound "oa".<sup>3</sup>

Except for the imperfects and conditionals there is no

<sup>1</sup>Ulbrich advances a rather curious explanation of this matter, (Zeitschrift für Rom. Phil., II, 532)  $e$ ,  $éi$ ,  $ói$ ,  $ói$ ,  $óo$ ,  $óe$ ,  $óé$ . The one above seems a more natural development.

<sup>2</sup>Jusqu'à l'arrivée de Catherine de Medicis en France, jamais cette diphthongue ne s'étoit prononcée autrement que comme nous faisons dans roi (d'Olivet, Remarques sur Racine, page 268).

<sup>3</sup>Thurot, De La Prononciation Française, I, p. 376.



rule, apparently, as to what group or class of words should undergo the change.

It was first in the eighteenth century, that we find the writing ai for the older oi in the imperfects and conditionals, in several names of nations, and in a few other words. Voltaire introduced this new way of spelling in Zaïre (1732) but it was not recognized by the Academy, until in 1835.

In the sixteenth century, among the authorities opinions were divided in regard to the pronunciation of -eine. Ein was identical with ain and in.<sup>1</sup> After quoting various opinions of sixteenth century writers on the subject, Thurot gives the preference to the diphthongal sound, for the greater part of the sixteenth century. During the last part of that century there sprang up a tendency to cut off the i, and the general pronunciation became that of the open e in words ending in -eine.<sup>2</sup>

Some classes of words which do not come under the general rule (ei / oi), remain to be explained. These are: (1) words ending in eil or eille; soleil, merveille, oreille, pareil; (2) ei followed by a nasal: foin, avoine, moins; and veine, pleine, frein; (3) verbs ending in é, i + palatal: précare, negare, necare > prier, nier, noyer.

(1) Words ending in eil and eille; soleil, oreille, merveille, pareil, vermeil, conseil, sommeil, corbeille,

<sup>1</sup>Meyer - Lübke I, § 89.

<sup>2</sup>Thurot, I, p. 341.



abeille, - did not develop into -oil and -oille in the Île de France. In Champagne, Burgundy, and Lorraine, however, we find forms which have continued their development to oil and oille: consoil, soloil, vermoil, . Why in one section of the country did eil retard its development, and in the other follow the general rule in regard to ei ? The explanation is to be found in the pronunciation of ei. Ei is used frequently as a symbol for the e sound, as has just been seen in pleine, peine, etc. In the Île de France the regular pronunciation of ei in "eil" was not that of the diphthong, but "e"<sup>1</sup>. Before ei began to change to oi, the i of the diphthong was absorbed in the l, due to the palatalization of the latter. Hence we are not dealing with a diphthong, but with only one vowel sound.

This does not hold true in some of the dialects. The diphthong was pronounced as such in Champagne, Burgundy, and Lorraine<sup>2</sup>, and there eil regularly became oil and oille.

Forms found ending in -aus: consaus, vermaus, were derived from the nominative case. Ei passed through the stage ai, so quite naturally the form vermailz results. The l became u as is often the case and we have vermeilz, vermailz vermailz vermauz or vermaus. In the accusative, the l remains as a liquid and absorbs the i: conseil, etc.

(2) In French, Latin ē, ī, oe + nasal became ein but

<sup>1</sup>Koschwitz, Grammatik, page. 48.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer - Lübke, I, § 92.



did not in general become oin: vēna > veine, plēnum > plein,  
poena > peine, strēna > estrene (modern French, étrenne),  
arēna > areine (modern, arène), serēnus > serein. For i + pal-  
atal nasal ng > ei: cingere > ceindre, figere > feindre, ping-  
ere > peindre.

There are a few words which kept on in their develop-  
ment to oin. These are moins, moindre, foin, avoine, and  
poine. Poine, however, yielded to one of the tendencies of  
the sixteenth century, and changed back to peine at that time.

In explanation of this also, several theories have been  
advanced. Suchier<sup>1</sup> says, that when a labial precedes ein in  
the popular Parisian speech, it becomes oin. He cites avoine,  
foin, poine.

His theory does not hold true for every case. For ex-  
ample we do not find oi in veine (vēna) and feint, in the Île  
de France. If the labial is strong enough to bring about oi  
in spite of the influence of the nasal, why did not verre re-  
main voarre, and peine, poine ?

Again the fact has been suggested that foin, avoine,  
moins, moindre are words used most frequently in popular  
speech, but peine and veine have no more claim to be consider-  
ed learned words than the others.

I do not believe the explanation is to be found here,  
but in the pronunciation, as in words with eil and eille. Was  
ei a diphthong, or was i absorbed by the n ?

<sup>1</sup>Suchier, Les Voyelles Toniques, page 134 b.



As was mentioned in chapter I, ein had originally a diphthongal value. Ein was changed to ein, and became identical with ain (1150), before the oral had become oi (1200). The i was slightly absorbed by the n, and so while the absorption was not completed until the sixteenth century, ein can not be considered as an oral diphthong.

Duvivier claims for peine, ameine, pleine, in the sixteenth century, the open "e".

This explains the failure of ein to become oin in general, but leaves the forms in oin unaccounted for. I believe the forms in oin have been carried over from the east, and, for some reason not obvious, withstood the influence of the other words of their class.

The same rule for the pronunciation of ein does not hold in Burgundy and Lorraine, that existed in the Île de France. In Lorraine, e before n in open syllables became e, but after labials uo; awon, puon, etc, but elen (haleine) pye (plenum). In Burgundy, ei before a nasal, has the same development as the oral ei; plain, plaine, which indicates the same sound value as ei. In this respect it differs from the development in the cenar and west.<sup>1</sup>

(3) Verbs ending in -icare or -egare would ordinarily be expected to become -oier, since i + palatal, unaccented, becomes oi (See I A. 5). In dealing with verbs one must take into account the shifting of accent in the different forms. In

<sup>1</sup>Meyer - Lübke, I, § 92.



the singular and third person plural of the present indicative and subjunctive, the accent falls on the stem of the verb and as a result we have prie, nie, etc., while the infinitive and other forms have oi. Usually the form in i gained supremacy over the one in oi: prier (precare), nier, (negare), plier, lier. But in some cases oi becomes general throughout the verb as noyer (necare), employer (implicare). Some verbs in eier or eier (icare) underwent the change which became general in the sixteenth century, that is, the transformation of oi into e expressed variously by ei, ai, è. Such was the case in the verb frayer (Latin fricare, Old French froyer).

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