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On the Survival of an Archaic Latin Case  
Form in Italo- and Balkan-Romance

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Among the *vexatae quaestiones* of historical Romance morphology, the origin and development of Italian and Rumanian third declension plurals in /-i/ from Lat. /-ēs/ (e.g., It. *monti*, Rum. *munți* derived from Lat. MONTĒS) is still high on the list. In his recent *Proto-Romance Morphology* (Amsterdam–Philadelphia 1983), Robert A. Hall, Jr. supports the widely accepted explanation to account for this development when he says that these plurals, which seem to point back to Proto-Romance /-i/,<sup>1</sup> are the result of an *analogical replacement* of earlier /-ēs/ by /-i/ under the influence of the second declension MURI-type plurals rather than a phonetic development, that is, the closing of Lat. [ɛ] to [i] brought about by the following [s]. The implication of this statement is that there are essentially two hypotheses, phonological versus analogical development of /ēs/>/-i/, to account for these plurals. The arguments underlying these theoretical positions may be briefly summarized as follows:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It should be recalled that Hall's "Proto-Romance" is a theoretical construct, and that he deals with a reconstructed morphology based on the earliest Romance attestations rather than with evidence culled from Vulgar Latin texts and inscriptions.

<sup>2</sup> The literature dealing with the problem of 3rd decl. plurals in Italian and Rumanian is quite extensive, since all manuals and studies on the historical morphology of these languages make reference to it. Among the essays specifically devoted to the problem at hand, the following should be mentioned: Robert L. Politzer, "On the origin of Italian plurals," *Romanic Review* 43 (1952), 272–81, and "Vulgar Latin *-es* Italian *-i*," *Italica* 28 (1951), 1–5; Paul Aebischer, "La finale *-i* des pluriels italiens et ses origines," *Studi linguistici italiani* 2 (1961), 73–111; Francesco Sabatini, "Sull'origine dei plurali

- (a) The change to It. *cani*, Rum. *cîni* from Lat. CANĒS is the result of an analogical pull exerted by plurals of the *o*-declension nouns (as in It. *il gallo* versus *i galli*) and the need to differentiate singular from plural, since Lat. CANE(M) and CANĒS would have given It. *cane* and Rum. *cîne* in both singular and plural (after the loss of /-s/, a phonological development shared by both Italo- and Balkan-Romance). A contributing factor influencing the change of final /-ē/ to /-i/ may also have been, so the argument goes, the analogical pressure that the definite article (in the guise of a weakened demonstrative) and the adjective must have exerted in a construction of the *illī bonī canēs* type, changing it to *illī bonī canī*. The same desire to differentiate singular from plural would, then, also explain the /-i/ plural ending of 3rd decl. feminine nouns, e.g., CLAVĒS > It. *chiavi*, Rum. *chei*.<sup>3</sup>
- (b) The change to It. *cani*, Rum. *cîni* from Lat. CANĒS is a purely phonetic development, with /-s/ causing the closing (palatalization) of final /ē/ to /i/: /-ēs/ becoming /-is/ and, finally, /-i/ after the loss of /-s/.<sup>4</sup> As an alternative to the closing influence of /-s/ on the

italiani: il tipo in -i," *Studi linguistici italiani* 5 (1965), 5–39; Sextil Pușcariu, "Une survivance du latin archaïque dans les langues roumaine et italienne," *Mélanges Antoine Thomas* (Paris 1927), 359–65; I. Șiadbei, "Persistența cazurilor latine în România orientală," *Mélanges Mario Roques* (Paris 1952), 231–40; Maria Iliescu, "Notă cu privire la pluralul -i din română și din italiană," *Analele Universității din Craiova* (Științe filologice) 5 (1977), 15–17.

<sup>3</sup> The analogical explanation of Lat. /-ēs/ > It. /-i/ of 3rd decl. plurals is closely associated with the German scholar Gerhardt Rohlf's (*Historische Grammatik der italienischen Sprache und ihrer Mundarten* [Bern 1949], II, pp. 49–52), although he is by no means the first one to propose it. Among his predecessors concerned with the problem one must single out the Italian scholar Francesco D'Ovidio who, after first entertaining the likelihood of a connection between an OLat. FONTĪS nom. pl. and It. *fonti* (*Sull'origine dell'unica forma flessionale del nome* [Pisa 1872], pp. 45–46), changed his mind in favor of an analogical extension of 2nd decl. nominatives to those of the 3rd declension: "è fuor dubbio che *cani* ecc. sono formati analogicamente su MULĪ, BONĪ, ecc." ("Ricerche sui pronomi personali e possessivi neolatini," *Archivio glottologico italiano* 9 [1886], 25–101). So far as Rumanian is concerned, H. Tiktin (*Rumänisches Elementarbuch* [Heidelberg 1905], pp. 80–81) and O. Densusianu (*Histoire de la langue roumaine* [Paris 1901–1938], II, p. 166) must be singled out as early supporters of the analogical theory. More recent advocates of this theory have been Al Rosetti (*Istoria limbii române* [Bucharest 1978<sup>2</sup>], II, p. 42), I. Șiadbei and M. Iliescu (see above, note 2).

<sup>4</sup> In essence, this hypothesis rests on W. Meyer-Lübke's phonological "law" according to which Lat. /-ēs/ > It. /-i/ (e.g., Lat. FLORĒS > It. *fiori*) (*Italienische Grammatik* [Leipzig 1890], p. 60). Politzer, in an attempt to refine the hypothesis of a phonetic development to account for this change, suggested that in the final syllable there occurred a neutralization of the front vowels in late Vulgar Latin resulting in a single /e/ phoneme in that position with an [i] allophone developing before /-s/ and that, with the

preceding /ē/, the vocalization of the final consonant, i.e., turning /-s/ into the semivowel /-j/, may also be envisaged, paralleling the /s/ > /j/ evolution in monosyllables (e.g., Lat. TRES > OIt., Rum. *trei*): /-ēs/ > /-ej/ > /-i/, with the reduction of the diphthong in polysyllables, whereas in stressed position (monosyllables) it is preserved.<sup>5</sup>

In a footnote, Hall notes that “Puscariu (1927) ascribed the Italian and Roumanian /-i/ to the OLat. ending /-i-s/ of the pure *i*-stems,”<sup>6</sup> a hypothesis that the Italian savant D’Ovidio had already entertained over a century ago (see above, note 3) before he changed his mind 15 years later (*ibid.*). Struck by the frequent alternation of orthographic *-es* and *-is* in nominative and accusative functions in *both* consonant and *i*-stems occurring in Latin authors<sup>7</sup> and inscriptions (e.g., *parentes/parentis*; *sorores/sororis*; *partes/partis*), Sextil Pușcariu, the well-known Rumanian scholar of the first half of our century and the first one, to my knowledge, to deal with the origin and development of 3rd decl. plurals in Italian *and* Rumanian, advanced the hypothesis that the OLat. /-ēs/ of *i*-stems had persisted in the spoken language and that after the fall of /-s/ the /-i/ prevailed as a morphological marker of all masculine nouns under the influence of second decl. masculines where the /-i/ plural morpheme is etymological.<sup>8</sup> Feminine nouns, under the influence of those of the first decl., preserved the /-e/ ending (>/-ēs/) somewhat longer, as evidenced in medieval literary texts.<sup>9</sup>

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eventual fall of this consonant, final [i] was phonemesized as a necessary morphological distinction between singular and plural (cf. his article in *Italica* cited above in note 2).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Heinrich Lausberg: “Im Mittel- und Südital., im Vegliot. und im Rum. wird *-s* zu [i] das hinter betontem Vokal (in Einsilbern) erhalten ist, hinter unbetontem Vokal (in Mehrsilben) mit diesem verschmilzt (meist:  $a + \dot{i} > e$ ,  $e + \dot{i} > i$ ,  $i + \dot{i} > \ddot{i}$ ) . . .” (*Romanische Sprachwissenschaft*, II: *Konsonantismus* [Berlin 1967<sup>2</sup>], p. 82). In his *Beiträge zur romanischen Lautlehre* (Jena–Leipzig 1939), Günther Reichenkron advanced a four-stage development of Lat. /-ēs/ > /-i/, involving vocalization of /-s/, as follows: /-ēs/ > /-is/ > /-ij/ > /-i/ (p. 42).

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Varro notes that people said *hae puppis, restis* side by side with *hae puppes, restes* and “in accusando *hos montes, fontes*,” as well as *hos montis, fontis* as reported by Aebischer, *art. cit.* (above, note 2), p. 100. Cf. also Ferdinand Sommer, *Handbuch der lateinischen Laut- und Formenlehre* (Heidelberg, 1914<sup>2&3</sup>), p. 382.

<sup>8</sup> “. . . le maintien des pluriels en *-i* de la troisième décl. en ital. et en roum., à côté de quelques reliques en *-e*, prouve que l’hésitation entre *-ēs* et *-is*, constatée à l’époque latine archaïque, s’est perpétuée dans le parler populaire de l’Italie et des contrées danubiennes.” (*art. cit.* [above, note 2], p. 362).

<sup>9</sup> Although Pușcariu is not explicit as to the causes of the eventual change of the

It is worth noting that despite his firm belief in “une continuité entre les pluriels archaïques en -ĪS et les pluriels italiens et roumains en -i” (p. 363),<sup>10</sup> Pușcariu gives the force of analogy its due since, as he admits, “les formes à flexion [sont] soumises à l’influence de l’analogie” (p. 361). He rejects, however, the hypothesis of a phonetic /-ēs/>/-īs/>/-i/ evolution, claiming that “il m’a toujours paru étrange que s final ait pu avoir en tombant une autre influence sur l’e précédent que m final” (p. 361).<sup>11</sup>

The frequent alternation of orthographic *-es* and *-is* that Pușcariu observed suggests that there must have been a free variation of two expression elements on the *morphological* level, since it has been generally recognized that this alternation occurs only in 3rd decl. plurals.<sup>12</sup> Scholars who have analyzed Late Latin documents and charters from the Italian area have found that the *-is* orthography was widespread in the plurals of 3rd. decl. nouns, regardless of their stem.<sup>13</sup> Except for a passing reference to inscriptional material in

feminine pl. in /-e/ to /-i/, it must be assumed that it occurred under the influence of masculines, aided by the desire to keep singular and plural apart.

<sup>10</sup> This chronological continuity is also acknowledged by Carlo Tagliavini: “al plurale, specialmente all’usativo, troviamo larghe tracce di *-is* per *-es*, cioè che dimostra la continuazione sviluppatasi nel Latino arcaico” (*Le origini delle lingue neolatine* [Bologna 1969<sup>5</sup>], p. 208).

<sup>11</sup> C. H. Grandgent, a staunch supporter of the theory of analogy, has levelled similar criticism against the alleged closing influence of /-s/ on the preceding vowel, calling it “a conjectural phonetic principle at variance with familiar linguistic experience” totally unsupported by direct evidence. The American scholar wonders, as a matter of fact, “why should -s, which was always feeble in Latin, work such a miracle?” (“Unaccented Final Vowels in Italian,” *Mélanges Antoine Thomas* [Paris 1927], pp. 187–93). It may be more than just a coincidence that Pușcariu’s most virulent critics are those who invoke phonetic criteria to explain the Lat. /-ēs/>/-i/ development in Italian and Rumanian. Cf. Bengt Löfstedt, *Studien über die Sprache der langobardischen Gesetze* (Stockholm 1961), pp. 39–47; F. Sabatini, *art. cit.* p. 34, above note 2.

<sup>12</sup> What adherents of the “phonological theory” seem to have failed to recognize, however, is that the orthographic alternation of *-es* and *-is* reflects a morphological phenomenon (formal variation of /-es/ and /-is/) and that the phonetic factor (such as the closing influence of /-s/) is irrelevant.

<sup>13</sup> In their analysis of the *Codice Diplomatico Lombardo*, the Politzers conclude that “in the nominative plural of the third declension, the distribution of *-es* and *-is* follows no pattern and seems to indicate that the endings were completely interchangeable” (Frieda N. and Robert L. Politzer, *Romance Trends in 7th and 8th Century Latin Documents* [Chapel Hill 1953], p. 28. The same phenomenon is also observed by B. Löfstedt in his study of the language of the *Edictum Rotharii*: “Betreffs der Verwendung von *-is* statt *-ēs* im Edikt ist ferner zu beachten, dass in den ältesten Hss. *-is* ebenso häufig im Nom. wie im Akk. *-es* ersetzt und ebensooft bei Kons. Stämmen eintritt” (*op. cit.*, p. 39). P. Aebischer also finds confirmation of this fact in medieval Latin charters examined by

determining whether the Classical Latin  $\bar{I}\bar{S}$  ending survived in the postclassical period or not, a more systematic examination of inscriptional resources to see if they could yield some clue to solving this controversial problem still remained to be done.

The purpose of this paper is an attempt to show, by drawing on evidence culled from inscriptions exclusively, that not only did this Old Latin ending survive, but that in this particular context Lat. /-ēs/ and /-īs/ may be looked upon as variants of the 3rd decl. nominative and accusative plural morpheme, and that they reflect a continuation and extension of the alternation between consonant and *i*-stems in Classical Latin. The inscriptional data are drawn from a corpus of funerary prose inscriptions published in Ernst Diehl's *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* covering the Italian Peninsula, Dalmatia, and the Danubian Provinces.<sup>14</sup> In order to give inscriptional evidence greater weight for the documentation of *-is* spellings in 3rd decl. nominatives and accusatives, I have attempted to give a comparative, quantitative, and chronological presentation of the *-es/-is* orthographic alternation, in the hope that it may yield some interesting results and, thus, contribute to the resolution of a problem that, to date, remains largely unsolved.<sup>15</sup>

Here, then, is a numerical summary showing the ratio between *-es* and *-is* spellings in both nominative and accusative cases, based on dated epitaphs:

	century	-es	-is
(a) Danubian Provinces	IV	2	3
	V-VI	0	0
(b) Dalmatia	IV	5	1
	V-VI	2	1
(c) Northern Italy	V	10	11
	VI	5	7
(d) Central Italy	IV	26	2
	V	6	2
	VI	3	6

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him: "les formes en *-es* de la troisième déclinaison ont passé dans leur majorité à *-is* . . ." (*art. cit.*, p.104).

<sup>14</sup> Since I am only concerned with developments in Italo- and Balkan Romance, my corpus is limited to 3296 inscriptions, broken down as follows: Danubian Provinces (the inner provinces of Noricum, Pannonia, Dacia, Moesia, Thracia, and Macedonia): 83; Dalmatia: 212; No. Italy: 418; Ce. Italy: 280; So. Italy: 485; and Rome: 1818.

<sup>15</sup> Approximately 40 percent of all inscriptions from the Italian area are dated, but only about 20 percent in the Eastern Provinces. Because of the scanty material from the latter, fifth and sixth cent. inscriptions are lumped together. Note also that in No. Italy there are no dated inscriptions before the fifth cent.

(e) Southern Italy	IV	2	4
	V	7	3
	VI	10	18
(f) Rome	IV	68	42
	V	29	15
	VI	3	12

Many of the orthographic changes in this material involve the form *mensis* (for CLat. MENSĒS)<sup>16</sup> as well as an alternation in the spelling of substantivized adjectives of the *octobris/octobres* type. But there are plenty of other examples of *-is* for *-es* spellings (as well as *-es* for *-is* where we would expect the latter in regular *i*-stems) in both nominative and accusative functions. The same alternation observed in non-dated epitaphs supports the data concerning the alternation of *-es/-is* in dated inscriptions. Here are a few illustrative examples taken at random:

*coniuncti amantis se bene dicere debent* (1336, 4th cent., Noricum)  
*parentis dolientis . . . ficierunt* (847, No. Italy)<sup>17</sup>  
*fratris se bibi . . . fecerunt* (4146F, a. 400, Rome)  
*de filius [= filios] ipseius qui superstitis sunt* (2372, Rome)  
*de tres fratris cursoris* (381B, Rome)  
*cum . . . sororis suas* (808A, Rome)  
*inter innocentis* (2500B, Rome), etc.

An interesting example of the concurrent use of *-es* and *-is* occurs in the following accusative absolute construction: *locum emerunt presentis omnis fossores* (3761, Rome).

The data presented in this summary show a clear trend in the direction of the *-is* spelling, particularly in the Centro-Southern

<sup>16</sup> It has been suggested that in the numerous instances in which *mensis* is preceded by *annis*, as in *vixit annis LII mensis VIII* (Diehl 3252A), the *-is* spelling may be due to an orthographic assimilation to the form *annis*. (Cf. B. Löfstedt, *op. cit.*, p. 41.) This is not the case. A careful count has revealed that in more than half of the instances in which the form *mensis* (also spelled *mesis* and *mensis*) was found it is preceded by *annum* and *annos* (or *annus*). In fact, it is not unusual to find cases where *annis* is followed by *menses*, e.g., *vixit annis L menses sex* (Diehl 1329). Without meaning to deny the likelihood of such an orthographic analogy, I believe the evidence does not seem to suggest it; rather, it would seem that the *-es/-is* alternation is independent of what precedes or what follows. The concurrent use of *menses* and *mensis* in the same inscription (Diehl 3761n)—both times preceded by *annos*, incidentally—only confirms my contention that the apparently interchangeable use of orthographic *-es* and *-is* reflects a variation on the level of form.

<sup>17</sup> The form *parentis* occurs quite frequently in late 4th/early 5th cent. Italian epitaphs in nominative function. It is also found in the Eastern Provinces.

Italian area, with 75 percent of all 3rd. decl. nominatives and accusatives in the area of Rome by the sixth century, suggesting that it may well have been the focal point of the survival of OLat. /-īs/ in the popular language, whence it spread to other Latin-speaking areas. In any event, this kind of evidence is difficult to reconcile with Grandgent's statement that "apparently -ēs crowded out the rarer -īs which left no sure traces,"<sup>18</sup> or the view that the /-īs/ ending of *i*-stems had become "moribund" by the early third century A.D.<sup>19</sup> Quite the contrary would seem to be the case. Inscriptional data suggest that not only did a free variation between /-ēs/ and /īs/ persist throughout the Vulgar Latin period (echoing what must have been a similar alternation between consonant and *i*-stem plurals in Classical Latin) but that /-īs/ also gained considerable ground, taking the upper hand in the Roman area by the sixth century. It is this persistence of OLat. /-īs/ in inscriptions (which, after all, are more faithful and reliable monuments of everyday speech habits than would-be charters or other legal documents<sup>20</sup>) that led Pușcariu to argue that /-īs/ had lived on in the spoken language and that, after the fall of /-s/, final /i/ prevailed as a morphological marker of all 3rd decl. masculine nouns under the influence of 2nd decl. masculines where /-i/ is etymological. Thus, the hypothesis of a chronological connection between OLat. /-īs/ and 3rd. decl. plurals in /-i/ and the analogical extension of the "masculine declension" come to complement each other, in that what speakers felt to be the plural pattern in /-i/ eventually helped resolve an age-old conflict between Lat. /-ēs/ and /-īs/, a conflict extending well into the Italian and Rumanian phases,<sup>21</sup> in favor of the /i/ plural marker in modern Italian and Rumanian.

The parallelism between the Italian and Eastern Latin developments becomes evident when we consider that the Eastern Provinces were, in the main, colonized by Italic immigrants from the lower social strata who brought with them their rustic speech habits.<sup>22</sup> It is

<sup>18</sup> Cf. C. H. Grandgent, *An Introduction to Vulgar Latin* (Boston 1907), p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. M. Iliescu, *art. cit.*, p. 15; also B. Löfstedt, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> B. Löfstedt, *loc. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> "Il y avait donc en latin une oscillation entre la désinence -ĪS (à l'origine justifiée seulement pour les accusatifs des radicaux en *i*) et -ĒS. Cette oscillation apparaît chez les écrivains classiques, après même que la grammaire eût déclaré correcte la forme en -ĒS. La même hésitation entre -ĪS et -ĒS s'aperçoit dans les inscriptions et elle continue jusque dans l'italien (*le vite et le viti*) et le roumain (*care, pace* à côté de *cari, păci*)" (Pușcariu, *art. cit.*, p. 363).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Walther von Wartburg, *Die Ausgliederung der romanischen Sprachräume* (Bern 1950), p. 22.

not surprising, therefore, to find early attestations of plural forms in /-is/ on written monuments from the East also.

Unless one refuses to admit, as Pușcariu's critics do,<sup>23</sup> that certain "vulgar" or "rustic" features of speech could well have been transmitted from an archaic Latin period to the Romance languages "im Dunkeln der Volkssprache"—to borrow Karl Meister's expression<sup>24</sup>—there is solid evidence to support the hypothesis of a chronological continuity between /-īs/ of Old Latin *i*-stems and the modern plural outcome of Italo- and Balkan-Romance languages.

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<sup>23</sup> See above, note 19.

<sup>24</sup> "Altes Vulgärlatein," *Indogermanische Forschungen* 26 (1909), p. 89.