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The <e>/<i> spelling variation in Latin inscriptions from Rome (250 BC-AD 300)

A preliminary (historical) sociolinguistic analysis based on the inscriptional data

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1.1 Framing the problem

The vowel system of “Classical” Latin (henceforward CL) differs from the vowel system of the Romance languages in at least one fundamental feature: it was based on a phonological vowel quantity contrast, most likely inherited from PIE. This phonological contrast was distinctive at both the lexical and the morphological level, meaning that the CL long vs. short vowels could distinguish between different words and between different inflected forms of the same word, a fact that is well exemplified by such minimal pairs as *lēvis* ‘light’ vs. *lēvis* ‘polished’, *mālus* ‘bad’ vs. *mālus* ‘apple tree’, *puellā* ‘girl NOM. SG.’ vs. *puellā* ‘girl ABL.SG.’⁽²⁾ The binary vowel quantity contrast described above survived in none of the Romance languages, as the vowel system of these languages (e.g. modern Standard Italian) is based on distinctions of vowel quality and on different degrees of opening, that is, on a phonological opposition involving open vs. closed vowels (e.g. Italian [‘venti] ‘winds’ vs. [‘venti] ‘twenty’, [‘botte] ‘hits’ vs. [‘botte] ‘barrel’). Notwithstanding this fundamental difference, the open vs. closed quality opposition that characterises the Romance languages can be seen as the result of a long-term trend that is rooted in the very history of the Latin language.

As is the case for many languages displaying (contrastive) vowel quantity, long vowels are generally realised with a greater tension of the speech organs and are therefore higher and more peripheral (that is, more “tense”) than the corresponding short ones. Conversely, the short vowel subsystem is usually more laxly articulated and hence less removed from the “neutral” position of

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(2) ADAMS, 2013, p. 37, LOPORCARO, 2015, p. 2, MAROTTA, 2017, p. 57-58. As MAROTTA and DE FELICE, 2020, p. 437-438 point out, even Roman grammarians were well aware of the fact that vowel quantity was a phonological feature in Latin.

the speech organs.⁽³⁾ Acoustically speaking, the difference in production of long vs. short vowels usually results in the long subsystem being “neater” and therefore in displaying a “greater deviation from the neutral formant pattern”⁽⁴⁾ as compared to the short one. In other words, comparative phonetics for many contemporary languages (such as German or English) clearly indicates that the short vowels are usually characterised by the feature “lax”, and that these vowels are consequently more open than the corresponding long phonemes.

A large body of evidence extensively testifies that this was also the case in CL. First, starting from ca. the fourth c. AD, several Latin grammarians clearly state that the CL (especially mid) vowels were pronounced differently according to whether they were long or short. The grammarian Servius (ca. AD 400), for instance, reports that the phonetic realisation of the CL long /ē/ was not very different from the pronunciation of the CL short /ī/, and that the CL short /ĕ/ sounded similar to what he calls the “*sonum diphthongi*” (that is, to the both long and open [ɛ:] deriving from the monophthongisation of /ae/).⁽⁵⁾ Second, the CL short /ī/ is often graphicised as <ε> in several Greek transliterations that date back to as early as the second c. BC, a fact that is well exemplified by such inscriptional spellings as Λέπεδος (ca. 188 BC), καπετώλιον (ca. 170 BC) and Δομέτιος (ca. 94 BC) for Latin *Lepīdus*, *capitolium* and *Domītius*. Moreover, Greek ε is often represented by Latin <ι> in several loanwords (e.g. Lat. *pīper* ‘pepper’ <Gk. *πέπερι* and Lat. *cītrus* ‘citron-tree’ <Gk. *κέδροξ*),⁽⁶⁾ and in a number of epigraphic forms that are attested in Latin inscriptions from as early as the Roman Republic (cf., for instance, the form *Philumīna* = Gk. *Φιλουμένη* in *CIL*, I² 3005: second half of the first c. BC). The interchangeability between Latin <ι> and Greek <ε> is evidence for a qualitative similarity of the vowels represented by these two graphemes. More precisely, since Greek ε was a short and closed [e], this interchangeability is very likely to indicate that the CL short /ī/ was articulated as [i] (or already variably as [e]) from as early as the Republican age, at least at some points of the Latin diasystem.⁽⁷⁾ Further proof for an open quality of the CL short /ī/ also comes from Oscan inscriptions. As is well known, Oscan and Umbrian underwent similar changes as Latin with respect to their vowel system, since even these languages saw their short-high vowels move towards the place of articulation of the mid-long ones. The latter change is particularly evident in Oscan, which introduced a specific grapheme (usually transcribed as <ι> in modern editions) to represent both the (original) short /ī/ and the long /ē/. More importantly, this same grapheme is often used to render even the corresponding Latin phonemes, as is well exemplified by inscriptional forms such as <pīs> [‘pes] and <líkiítud> [le’ke:tud] that correspond to Latin *quīs* ‘who’ [‘qwis] and *licētod* ‘to be allowed FUT.IMP.3RD.

(3) ALLEN, 1978, p. 47. Cf. also LOPORCARO, 2011b, p. 110.

(4) JAKOBSON and HALLE, 1962, p. 550.

(5) Gramm. IV 421, 16-21. For a detailed analysis of this (and similar) passage(s) cf. LOPORCARO, 2015, p. 30-40 and references therein.

(6) These loanwords are attested in Latin only starting from the time of Varro, that is, from roughly the time of the earliest epigraphic attestations of <ε> for /ī/. Cf. WALDE *et al.*, 1956, p. 308-309 and ERNOUT and MEILLET, 1967, p. 509, s.v. *piper* and WALDE *et al.*, 1956, p. 223-224, ERNOUT and MEILLET, 1967, p. 124, DE VAAN, 2008, p. 116, s.v. *citrus*.

(7) ALLEN, 1968, p. 61; 1978, p. 47-49, STURTEVANT, 1975, p. 110.

SING.’ [lɪˈke:to:d].⁽⁸⁾ Additional confirmation for the phonetic realisation of the CL short /i/ as [i] (and for the corresponding realisation of the CL short /ū/ as [ʊ]) is also found in Latin itself, as the use of the graphemes <e> and <o> for the CL short /i/ and /ū/ is attested in Latin epigraphy from as early as the third c. BC (*cf. infra*). But the both quantitative and statistical analysis that has been conducted for the present paper suggests that the most ancient cases of <e> for /i/ (including the well-known form <Tempestatebus> for the CL *Tempestatibus* in *CIL*, I² 9) are not likely to reveal that a change in quality of the CL short high-vowels was taking place from as early as the time of the *Scipionum elogia* (as is commonly assumed).⁽⁹⁾ On the contrary, the present analysis will show that such *e*-spellings (instead of <i>) might be better interpreted as “hyperarchaising” forms (*cf. infra* § 3). However, the fact that both the <e>/<i> and the <o>/<u> vocalic alternations become more and more common in Latin inscriptions from as early as the (late) Republican age clearly indicates that, already during the second c. BC (*cf. infra*), the CL short /i/ turned out to be much closer to the long /ē/ in the acoustic-articulatory space than it previously was to the long /ī/. This phonetic circumstance is likely to have favoured a tendency for these two phonemes (*viz.* /i/ and /ē/) to be re-interpreted as the members of a new binary length contrast.⁽¹⁰⁾ Along the same lines, a symmetrical tendency must also have emerged on the back-vowel axis, with the CL short /ū/ (phonetically [ʊ]) starting to be re-analysed as “the short counterpart of the long /ō/, rather than /ū/”⁽¹¹⁾ (TABLE 1, a-b).

Classical Latin	A	/i:	i	e:	e	a(:)	o	o:	u	u:/
	B	[i]	ɪ	e	ɛ	a	ɔ	o	ʊ	u]
Common Romance vowel system	C	i	e	ɛ	a	ɔ	o	u		
Sardinian vowel system	D	i	e	ɛ	a	ɔ	o	u		
Romanian vowel system	E	i	e	ɛ	a	ɔ	o	u		

TABLE 1: From “Classical” Latin to the Romance languages (stressed syllables)

The shift in quality of the CL short-high vowels (*i.e.*, /i, u/ > [i, ʊ] > [e, o]) foreshadows the subsequent Romance developments. Once the original vowel quantity distinctions were lost in the entire Latin-speaking world, the outcomes of the CL short /i/ and long /ē/ merged as a closed /e/ in most areas of western Romania. Symmetrically, the outcomes of the CL short /ū/ merged with the outcomes of the CL long /ō/ as a closed /o/ (TABLE 1, c). According to the existing evidence, this so-called “Common Romance” vowel system (displaying both the merger of /ē/ and /i/ as /e/, and that of /ū/ and /ō/ as /o/) was

(8) *Cf.* LEJEUNE, 1975, p. 249-251 and LEUMANN, 1977, p. 56.

(9) *Cf. infra* in this section.

(10) *Pace* WEISS, 2009, p. 64, according to whom no allophonic difference in quality existed for the CL long vs. short vowels.

(11) LOPORCARO, 2011b, p. 110-111. *Cf.* also STURTEVANT, 1975, p. 108-109 and 116-117, ALLEN, 1978, p. 48, ADAMS, 2013, p. 39.

firmly established in central and western Romània by the end of the Roman Empire.⁽¹²⁾ “Eastern” Romance (Romanian) developed a different vowel system, showing the same mergers as in “Common Romance” on the front-vowel axis, but displaying the merger of /ō/ and /ǒ/, and that of /ū/ and /ǔ/ on the back-vowel axis (TABLE 1, e).⁽¹³⁾ Sardinian seems to have neutralised the closed vs. open allophonic differentiation that is commonly assumed in CL, to the extent that no re-association of the Latin high and mid vowels occurred on the island. As a result, the final outcome, the so-called “Sardinian” vowel System, displays the merger of each of the CL long vs. short pairs (TABLE 1, d).⁽¹⁴⁾

The changes that have been discussed in the previous paragraph only apply to vowels in stressed syllables. In unstressed syllables contrastive vowel quantity was lost well before it was lost in the stressed-vowel subsystem, a circumstance that caused confusions in vowel quality to go further than they did in the stressed vowels, except in Sardinian (TABLE 2).⁽¹⁵⁾

Classical Latin	A	/i:/	i	e:	e	a(:)	o	o:	u	u:/
	B	[i]	ɪ	e	ɛ	a	ɔ	o	ʊ	u]
Common Romance vowel system	C	i	e			a	o		u	
Sardinian vowel system	D	i		ɛ		a	o		u	
Romanian vowel system	E	i	e			a	o		u	

TABLE 2: From “Classical” Latin to the Romance languages (unstressed syllables)

The reshaping of the CL quantitative vowel system into the qualitative vowel system that characterises the Romance languages is one of the most important changes that occurred during the so-called “Latin-Romance transition”. For this reason, scholarly studies on this subject have multiplied over more than a century (the first “modern” attempt on the topic being H. Schuchardt’s *Der Vokalismus des Vulgärlateins*).⁽¹⁶⁾ One of the main objectives of these studies was to reconstruct the Latin vowel system in spoken usage or, in other terms, to find evidence for the two aforementioned vowel mergers in non-literary Latin documents from the Roman Empire (with a special focus on Latin inscriptions). Nonetheless, both the scope and the methods of previous research on the topic remain largely unsatisfying. First,

(12) LOPORCARO, 2011b, p. 115.

(13) This kind of asymmetrical merger is attested in all branches of Daco Romance and in parts of western Lucania, a fact that prompted the inference that a significant part of the (formerly) Latin-speaking world experienced a “Romanian” stage. Cf. LOPORCARO, 2015, p. 55-56 and references therein.

(14) On the “Sardinian” vowel system, cf. among others HERMAN, 1985, HERMAN, 2000b, LUPINU, 2000, TAMPONI, 2019.

(15) HERMAN, 2000a, p. 34. Cf. also ADAMIK, 2017, p. 183.

(16) SCHUCHARDT, 1866-1868. Scientific bibliography on the topic is too vast to be entirely collected here. For a detailed overview, cf. ADAMS, 2007, p. 624-670, ADAMS, 2013, p. 37-70 and references therein.

most of the existing accounts on the “Vulgar” Latin vowel system are mainly focused on the epigraphic material that comes from different provinces of the Roman Empire. Conversely, with the exception of some already outdated essays,⁽¹⁷⁾ almost no scholarly attention has ever been paid to inscriptions from Rome, even though these inscriptions refer to different stylistic levels and can also be dated with satisfactory precision thanks to several recent contributions.⁽¹⁸⁾

Second, academic research to date, with some (only partial) exceptions (*cf. infra*), has mainly focused on diatopic (that is, regional) rather than sociolinguistic (especially diaphasic) variation.⁽¹⁹⁾ This kind of approach dramatically contrasts with the methodology that characterises the most recent studies on non-literary Latin (and on other closed-corpus languages), which largely recognises that, according to Labov’s uniformitarian principle, there is no compelling reason to suppose that social factors were less relevant for linguistic change in the past than they are nowadays.⁽²⁰⁾

Finally, the existing accounts on the topic have often limited their analysis to the investigation of small epigraphic corpora, which mostly consist of inscriptions that were composed during the (late) Imperial period (ca. AD 150-300) or during the so-called “Christian Era” (that is, after the year AD 300). Apart from MAROTTA, 2015, no studies to date specifically address the analysis of earlier inscriptions that date back to the Republican age or to the early Roman Empire (ca. 250 BC-ca. AD 150). Because of these limitations, the interpretation of the <e>/<i> (and <o>/<u>) graphemic alternations that occur in the earliest Latin inscriptions still represents a crucial problem for both Latin and Romance linguistics, since these alternations have often been explained in several (and largely incompatible) ways for early Latin, late Latin, and Romance studies.

According to some early Latin scholars, for instance, the earliest cases of <e> for /i/ are connected with vowel weakening, a phonetic change occurring in Latin during ca. the fourth c. BC. This change can be described as follows: all short medial vowels, regardless of their original quality, are reduced to /i/ in non-initial open syllables, while, in non-initial closed syllables, /a/ merges with /e/ and /o/ merges with /u/.⁽²¹⁾ This simplistic picture, however, is marred by several exceptions that cannot be justified on a merely descriptive account. If, for instance, the targeted vowel is followed by /l/, the outcome of the change is determined by the quality of that consonant, that is, by whether the /l/ is palatal (*i.e.*, followed by /i/ or geminate) or velar.⁽²²⁾ In order to provide

(17) *E.g.* KONJETZNY, 1907 and PRINZ, 1932.

(18) The database EDR, for instance, dates several thousand inscriptions from Rome: <http://www.edr-edr.it/default/index.php>.

(19) *Cf.* ADAMS, 2007, p. 624-626 and references therein.

(20) LABOV, 1972, p. 275, LABOV, 1994, p. 21-25. For the application of notions and methods from modern historical sociolinguistics to the Latin language, *cf.* among others CUZZOLIN and HAVERLING, 2009, CLACKSON, 2011c, MAROTTA, 2015. More general accounts are found in WINTER, 1999 and especially MANCINI, 2012, MANCINI, 2014.

(21) WEISS, 2009, p. 116-121. *Cf.* also LEUMANN, 1977, p. 79-91, MEISER, 2006, p. 67-71, CLACKSON and HORROCKS, 2007, p. 92-96, CIANCAGLINI and KEIDAN, 2018, p. 268-269.

(22) In the former case, the normal weakening products are obtained, whereas after /l/ *pinguis* one often finds the conditioned outcome /u/ (*e.g.* *Sicūlus* ‘Sicilian’ vs. *Sicīlia* ‘Sicily’; *cf.* Gk. *Σικελία*). *Cf.* WEISS, 2009, p. 117.

a phonologically informed explanation for such irregularities, some scholars have suggested that “instead of being reduced directly to the resulting vowels *i* and *e*, medial vowels were first reduced to schwa”⁽²³⁾ /ə/, to be reinterpreted only later as the full vowels that are found in stressed syllables. This hypothesis is not unrelated to the problem under discussion, since, according to MEISER, 2006, p. 69-70, the earliest epigraphic examples of <e> for /i/ indicate that the change of the weakened /ə/ into /i/ was only completed in Latin after the late third c. BC. The same view (albeit with some important differences) has recently been advocated in LEPPÄNEN and ALHO, 2018, p. 466, who claim that “many instances of the...widely-attested orthographic confusion involving <I> vs. <E> and <V> vs. <O> in Old Latin inscriptions (e.g. TEMPESTATEBUS, MERETOD, CIL, I² 9, late third century BC; SURUPUERIT, CIL, I² 756; COLOMNAS, CIL, I² 1834...) can be explained primarily due to the effect of vowel weakening”. More precisely, these scholars accept (partially) the criticism concerning the typological infrequency of the change /ə/ > /i, e/, as proposed by NISHIMURA, 2010, and maintain that the short /i/ and /ü/ were only partially weakened to [i] and [v]. In other words, Leppänen and Alho suggest that, because of vowel weakening, these two vowels acquired the exact same quality that they are usually believed to have acquired in “Vulgar” Latin, vowel weakening being “the first sound change that caused alternation in the allophonic realisation of Latin short vowels”.⁽²⁴⁾ Their hypothesis is not entirely convincing. First, as has been shown, the prosodic features lax and short are usually associated even in many modern languages (e.g. modern standard English or German). For even in these languages short vowels are realised (and perceived) as more open than the corresponding long ones. It is not clear, therefore, why the latter association (which is shared by many languages whose vowel system is very different from that of CL) should be connected with a sound change that is customarily regarded as “one of the most characteristic features of Latin historical phonology”.⁽²⁵⁾ However, the key problem with this hypothesis is that the evidence supporting it is far from convincing: the form <meretod> (for CL *meritō* in CIL, I² 9), for instance, is better explained as an intentional archaism, an idea that is also supported by the use of the old ablative ending -*ōd* (instead of -*ō*).⁽²⁶⁾ More importantly, with the exception of CIL, I² 9 (which was probably composed during the mid-third c. BC), most of the examples cited in LEPPÄNEN and ALHO, 2018, p. 466 actually date back to the second (or even the mid-first) c. BC, a period during which vowel weakening was undoubtedly no longer a productive sound change in Latin (e.g. <surupuerit>, CIL, I² 756: 58 BC and <colomnas> CIL, I² 1834: first half of the second c. BC).⁽²⁷⁾ In other words, the existing evidence does not support a connection between vowel weakening and the earliest epigraphic examples of <e> for /i/.⁽²⁸⁾

(23) LEPPÄNEN and ALHO, 2018, p. 465.

(24) LEPPÄNEN and ALHO, 2018, p. 465. Conversely, according to NISHIMURA, 2010, the short /i/ and /ü/ were not involved in vowel weakening.

(25) WEISS, 2009, p. 116.

(26) For an alternative possibility (the so-called *alacer rule*), cf. WEISS, 2009, p. 118.

(27) For CIL, I² 756, cf. EDR 167161: 22/09/2018 (D. Fasolini). On CIL, I² 1834, cf. PAPINI, 2017, p. 258-260 and references therein.

(28) A time span for the productivity of vowel weakening can be inferred by considering,

A completely different explanation for the spelling variation between <i> and <e> (and between <o> and <u>) in mid-Republican inscriptions has been proposed by VINEIS, 1984. In his view it is possible to identify as early in the third c. BC two sociolinguistically different registers of Latin: a “higher” register (*viz.* the so-called “Classical” Latin) and a “lower” one, corresponding to the sociolinguistically lowest varieties of the Latin language. The most salient difference between these two registers, according to this theory, is that while phonological vowel quantity was still preserved in the “higher” register, the vowel system of the “lower” was already based on a vowel quality contrast.

The latter view has often been advocated in several sociolinguistically-focused studies concerning non-standard (and diaphasically-low) Latin.⁽²⁹⁾ Among these studies, MAROTTA, 2015 is particularly relevant for the topic under discussion, as this study primarily focuses on the <e>/<i> (and <o>/<u>) graphemic alternations in a corpus of 386 Latin inscriptions that date back to between ca. 350 BC and ca. 150 BC.⁽³⁰⁾ More precisely, Marotta highlights that: 1) spelling variations between <i>/<e> and <o>/<u> are very frequent among lexical items pertaining to the everyday language (such as the form <pocolom> for *pocūlum* ‘drinking vessel’), and 2) such non-standard spellings are mainly attested in the context of unstressed (mainly postonic) syllables (as they are in Imperial inscriptions),⁽³¹⁾ which leads her to the conclusion that they might actually suggest “a premature collapse of Latin vowel quantity, at least in some ‘sub-standard’ varieties of the language”.⁽³²⁾ Although extremely intriguing, the hypothesis proposed in VINEIS, 1984, and advocated in MAROTTA, 2015, does not appear entirely convincing. First, the very cases of <e> for /ī/ (and <o> for /ū/) that are cited to support this theory are often (though not always) open to alternative explanations. For example, as MAROTTA, 2015, p. 53-55 herself admits, most of the “deviations” from the CL norm that are found in her corpus concern lexical items for which a resort to archaism would seem reasonable (such as personal names, nouns referring to public positions and roles, and common nouns that are typical of the epigraphic register).⁽³³⁾ Second, the theory is largely contradicted by the information about the demise of CL contrastive vowel quantity that we can infer from both the metalinguistic testimonies in Latin grammarians and from the inscriptional evidence. When it comes to the Latin grammarians, not only do the first attempts to preserve the CL quantitative vowel system

among other things, the processing of some Greek loanwords that Latin acquired during the war against Pyrrhus (280-275 BC). More precisely, if vowel weakening were still a productive sound change during the Pyrrhic war, such a loanword as *elephantus* would have been rendered in Latin as **elephantus* (*cf.* Lat. *machīna* ‘machine’ vs. Doric Gk. *Μαχανή*). *Cf.* DE VAAN, 2008, p. 10 and especially ADAMIK, 2009, p. 146-148.

(29) *E.g.* BENEDETTI, 1996, BENEDETTI and MAROTTA, 2014, MAROTTA, 2015, MAROTTA, 2017, MAROTTA and DE FELICE, 2020.

(30) MAROTTA, 2015, p. 45.

(31) MAROTTA, 2015, p. 50-54.

(32) MAROTTA, 2015, p. 51.

(33) The same is also true for many everyday lexemes, such as the aforementioned <pocolom> (for *pocūlum*), for this *o*-spelling is generally regarded as an archaizing form retaining the Old Latin orthography (**potlom* > *poclom* > *pocōlum* > *pocūlum*). *Cf.* WEISS, 2009, p. 165.

start appearing in the available sources only from the second c. AD, but Republican *testimonia* clearly indicate that CL vowel quantity was perceived by all Latin speakers, regardless of their educational level. At *Orat.* 173, for instance, Cicero states that even illiterate audiences were perfectly able to distinguish the CL long vs. short vowels, and that the latter ability was granted them by nature rather than by education.⁽³⁴⁾ As for the inscriptions, the analysis of versification errors in a corpus of metrical *carmina* (from Rome and from Africa) conducted in HERMAN, 1982 clearly indicates that CL contrastive vowel quantity was still preserved in Rome during the first centuries of the Roman Empire, at least in the context of the stressed syllables (a rather different picture emerging from Africa, where this feature seemed to have been eliminated altogether from as early as the fourth c. AD).

Finally, as pointed out by LOPORCARO, 2015, p. 39, a non-standard form such as <Tempestatebus> (instead of the CL *Tempestatibus*) in *CIL*, I² 9 is actually carved on the metrical gravestone of a very highly placed Roman magistrate (*L. Cornelius Scipio*, consul in 259 BC), which makes it very unlikely that it represented a low variety of Latin with no contrastive vowel quantity, as maintained by VINEIS, 1984 and MAROTTA, 2015.

For this reason, most scholars, such as STURTEVANT, 1975, ALLEN, 1978, LOPORCARO, 2011a; 2011b; 2015, and ADAMS, 2013, propose a less radical interpretation for the *e/o*-spellings (instead of /i/ and /ū/) that are attested in Latin inscriptions dating back to the third and to the early second c. BC. They maintain that “these documented deviations from the classical norm” only show “that the quality of the short high vowels (*viz.* /i/ and /ū/) was already on its way to change, in the direction later taken by the further romance developments.”⁽³⁵⁾ But this fact *per se* does not provide enough evidence for the claim that CL contrastive vowel quantity was lost altogether.⁽³⁶⁾ Furthermore, since *e*-spellings of the type of the aforementioned <Tempestatebus> are even attested in learned compositions (*e.g.* the *Scipionum elogia*), these scholars also maintain that the open pronunciation of (at least) the CL short /i/ as [i] was widespread in all registers of Latin from as early as the time of the Roman Republic.⁽³⁷⁾ Even this last interpretation, however, is (at least partially) contradicted by a few pieces of evidence. The analysis of the Greek transliteration of 539 Latin names in a corpus of 254 inscriptions from Delos, in ROVAI, 2015, might be evidence that this open pronunciation for the CL short /i/ was actually not particularly widespread among Latin speakers during the mid-second c. BC (the supposed date for most of the inscriptions considered in the study), not even at the (allegedly) low sociolinguistic level

(34) LOPORCARO, 2015, p. 78.

(35) LOPORCARO, 2011a, p. 58.

(36) LOPORCARO, 2015, p. 52-53.

(37) Cf. LOPORCARO, 2011b, p. 111-112, LOPORCARO, 2015, p. 40 and ADAMS, 2013, p. 70. ADAMS' (2013) view on the topic, however, is not entirely clear. At the beginning of his discussion of the CL vowel system, he claims that Republican confusions between <e> and <i> cannot be used to argue for developments in the vowel system (p. 37), a claim that he justifies by asserting that a merger would have been impossible during the Republic, “because the quantitative system was still in place” (p. 41). Later on, however, he seems to downplay his own criticism by asserting that “signs of opening of i are already to be found in the Republican period” and that the existence of such “misspellings” in learned texts testifies “to the openness of the vowel i in educated speech” (p. 69-70).

represented by the language of the Latin *negotiatores* that were active on the island (to whom these names actually belong). The CL short /i/ is represented by the Greek grapheme <ε> (*cf. supra*) in only ca. 9% of the possible cases, which, according to Rovai, may advocate for the persistence of the quality opposition between /ē/ and /ī/.⁽³⁸⁾ Moreover, not even this conclusion considers the fact that, as will be shown in the current paper, all cases of <e> for /ī/⁽³⁹⁾ that appear in Roman Latin inscriptions dating back to between ca. 250 BC and ca. 120 BC are actually attested in “formal” epigraphic texts of the type of the *Scipionum elogia*.

This state of affairs requires a more detailed (qualitative, quantitative, and statistical) analysis, which will be supplied in the following pages.

1.2. Material and methods

In order to address some of the problems highlighted in § 1.1, with a special focus on the sociolinguistic issues concerning the merger of the CL /ē/ and /ī/ as a closed /e/, this paper will analyse all cases of <e> for /ī/ that are attested in a sociolinguistically relevant corpus of 4080 Latin inscriptions from the city of Rome.

As recently pointed out by several scholars, inscriptions deserve a special place among texts that are suitable for the study of linguistic variation in closed-corpus languages. For not only are these documents independent from the manuscript tradition, but they also refer to a social (and geographical) range that is unparalleled by the existing literary sources.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Nonetheless, the use of inscriptions for the study of (especially social) variation in the ancient world implies several specific problems. First, as CLACKSON, 2011a, p. 36 points out, a very small number of the existing epigraphic documents “were composed *verbatim* and written by the same individual”, since the writing process of every inscription always involved many participants (such as the customer who commissioned the text, the so-called *ordinator*, and the stone-cutter).⁽⁴¹⁾ Second, the mere analysis of just a few unrelated inscriptional texts that do not share any chronological or geographical unity is very unlikely to be of use for linguistic purposes. As a result, one should always pursue the study of a “coherent corpus”, that is, “a body of texts about which we know something (as for example their date, authorship, provenance or educational level) and which belong together in one or more senses”.⁽⁴²⁾

In order to achieve this objective (that is, working with as coherent a corpus as possible), all the inscriptions considered in the present article have been arranged according to the methodological recommendations proposed in MANCINI, 2014, p. 37-39. As he maintains, every inscriptional-based study aiming at investigating variation (other than diatopic) in the ancient

(38) ROVAI, 2015, p. 179-180.

(39) With the exception, of course, of those cases that are open to alternative explanations (*cf. infra* § 2).

(40) CLACKSON, 2011a, p. 30 and MAROTTA, 2015, p. 43. For a more general discussion of the topic, *cf. also* HERMAN, 2000a, p. 116-117, GALDI, 2004, ADAMS, 2007, p. 624-683.

(41) ADAMS, 2003, p. 84 and MAROTTA, 2015, p. 43.

(42) ADAMS, 2007, p. 633.

world should always address diaphasic (that is, stylistic) variation first, and diastratic variation only second. In other words, a sociolinguistic judgment of a particular linguistic phenomenon (in our case, the use of <e> for /ī/) can only be issued after a comparison of the relative frequency of the given phenomenon in a corpus of both syntopic and synchronic, but diaphasically different inscriptions. If the phenomenon under investigation appears to be more frequent in informal inscriptions than in formal texts, (only) then can the inference be made that it actually reflects a linguistic feature that was typical of uneducated speakers. Along the same lines, in case such a linguistic feature subsequently spreads to more formal inscriptional contexts (and, in the case of Latin, is continued in Romance), one can derive the hypothesis that the underlying linguistic change (in the present study, the merger of the vowels /ī/ and /ē/) took the form of a “change from below” (that is, it spread in the language mainly through everyday speech).⁽⁴³⁾ The first step towards the realisation of a “coherent” corpus (in MANCINI’S (2012; 2014) rather than ADAMS’ (2007) terms) is therefore the elimination of diatopic (that is, regional) variation. In the present study, this objective has been achieved by only considering epigraphic texts that were composed in the city of Rome. As for synchronicity, all 4080 inscriptions considered in this study have been grouped in four different periods according to their dating: 1) the “mid-Republic” (ca. 250-120 BC), 2) the “late Republic” (ca. 119-1 BC), 3) the “early Empire” (ca. AD 1-150), and 4) the “late Empire” (ca. AD 151-300; TABLE 3).⁽⁴⁴⁾

Period	Number of texts	% of grand total
Mid-Republic (ca. 250/120 BC)	197	4.8
Late Republic (ca. 119/1 BC)	824	20.2
Early Empire (ca. AD 1/150)	1604	39.3
Late Empire (ca. AD 151/300)	1455	35.7
Total	4080	100

TABLE 3: epigraphic sample considered (number of inscriptions per period)

(43) LABOV, 1994, p. 78. A similar view is expressed in MANCINI, 2012. Cf. also MAROTTA, 2015, p. 41 for the claim that “linguistic variation in Latin is always diatopic first, then diaphasic and diastratic”.

(44) As is well known, an exact dating cannot be provided for several inscriptions. But a *terminus post* and *ante quem* concerning their creation is easily inferable for many epigraphic texts (in particular for inscriptions in Rome). In order to place every inscription within the right period, I have therefore calculated the average value for the two years and used this value as an indicator. For example, *CIL*, VI 1356 dates back to between 131 AD (*terminus post quem*) and 139 AD (*terminus ante quem*). The “average date” is therefore the year 135 AD. As a result, this inscription has been grouped with the documents that date back to the “early Empire” (ca. AD 1-150).

This periodisation is inspired by the methodological principles expressed in ADAMIK, 2015, who warns against forcing together inscriptional texts belonging to different linguistic periods. In other words, the periodisation chiefly aims at respecting (and mirroring) the most important sociolinguistic turning-points that characterised the “standardisation” process of the Latin language. Specifically, the first chronological grouping (the “mid-Republic”) comprises all inscriptions that belong to the so-called “Old Latin” period (ca. 325-120 BC in Adamik’s periodisation).⁽⁴⁵⁾ The next two periods (the “late Republic” and the “early Empire”) group epigraphic texts that were composed in Rome during the very important centuries that saw the rise, the definition, and the ultimate affirmation of the so-called “Classical” Latin.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Finally, the last grouping (the “late Empire”) comprises inscriptions that were roughly contemporary to the progressive upsurge of what MANCINI, 2005 defines as “Neostandard” Latin, that is, that kind of everyday register (even including several “non-standard” features) that, starting from ca. the late third c. AD, came to be regarded as sufficiently “prestigious” to represent both the conversational register for (fairly) educated native speakers and the educational “model” for Latin L2 learners.

Finally, all the inscriptions collected in each period were further divided by taking into consideration several extra- (and socio-)linguistic factors, such as the “customer” and the occasion that led to the creation of every single epigraphic text (TABLE 4). The first sociolinguistic grouping (“formal” inscriptions: ca. 30% of the total corpus) comprises those texts that were composed on the behalf of political and religious officers of the Roman state for a public purpose, such as *tituli honorarii*, *tituli sacri publici*, and legal and administrative texts. The second grouping (“informal” inscriptions: ca. 51% of the total corpus) includes epigraphic documents by private individuals but with a public purpose. This grouping is undeniably the largest, as it contains more than 2000 texts pertaining to two main macro-categories, namely funerary inscriptions (ca. 39% of the entire corpus) and *tituli sacri privati*, holy inscriptions that were made on the behalf of Roman “civilians”. The last grouping (“diaphasically low” texts: ca. 19% of the total corpus) consists of all those inscriptions that were created on the behalf of private individuals for a completely private purpose. The largest sub-corpus within this grouping is undoubtedly the “Graffiti del Palatino” (575 out of 785 inscriptions).⁽⁴⁷⁾ But it also contains several other epigraphic texts, such as objects of every-day use (*instrumenta inscripta*), and curse tablets.⁽⁴⁸⁾

(45) ADAMIK, 2015, p. 650.

(46) CLACKSON, 2011b, p. 237-244.

(47) On the “Graffiti del Palatino”, cf. SOLIN and ITKONEN-KAILA, 1966 and CASTREN and LILIUS, 1970. Cf. also ADAMS, 2013, p. 57.

(48) The latter categorisation has been made possible by the unique level of accessibility that characterises the Latin epigraphy section of the EVWRIT database, on which the present research is based. All inscriptions in the database are identified via a unique serial number and possess their own “metalinguistic profile”, which contains all metalinguistic information pertaining to them, including: textual typology (e.g. funerary/honorary inscription, etc.), material, dating, provenance, etc.

Formality	Textual typology	Texts	% as respect to the relevant “sociolinguistic” group	% as respect to the total corpus
Formal inscriptions	Laws and statutes	24	2.0	0.6
	Honorary inscriptions	410	33.3	10.0
	Inscriptions carved on public (or private) buildings	372	30.2	9.1
	Public holy inscriptions	380	30.9	9.3
	Inscriptions pertaining to the administration of the Roman State	44	3.6	1.1
	Total	1230	100	30.1
Informal inscriptions	Funerary inscriptions	1594	77.2	39.1
	Private holy inscriptions	471	22.8	11.5
	Total	2065	100	50.6
Diaphasically low inscriptions	Inscriptions on artworks	12	1.5	0.3
	Anaglypha	8	1.0	0.2
	Oracular responses	3	0.4	0.1
	Graffiti	575	73.2	14.1
	Instrumenta inscripta	174	22.2	4.3
	Curse Tablets	13	1.7	0.3
	Total	785	100	19.3
Gran total		4080	100	100

TABLE 4: epigraphic sample considered (“sociolinguistic” classification)

The “coherent” corpus described above represents the starting point for the both quantitative and statistical analysis that will be conducted in § 3. There I shall consider the relative frequency of the <e>/<i> graphemic oscillations in formal, informal, and diaphasically low texts that date back to each of our four chronological periods. The number of non-standard forms concerning the use of <e> for /ĩ/ in each “sociolinguistic” group will be compared with the number of the corresponding “correct” alternatives (that is, <i> for /ĩ/)

within the same group.⁽⁴⁹⁾ The resulting figure, expressed as a percentage (“degree of error”), will allow us to investigate whether the cases of <e> for /ī/ are significantly more attested in “formal”, “informal”, or “diaphasically low” texts. Since, however, as pointed out in ADAMS, 2013, p. 37, “vocalic misspellings” occurring in Latin inscriptions “might be open to more than one explanation”, the quantitative and statistical analysis described above will be preceded by a qualitative study of all the instances of <e> for /ī/ that are attested in the corpus, to be addressed in § 2. Specifically, section 2.1 will list all those *e*-spellings (instead of /ī/) that might be regarded as merely archaising forms or that occur in hiatus position. But it will also discuss those non-standard forms that can be regarded as “special cases”, in ADAMS’ (2013) terms.

2.1 Qualitative analysis: archaism, hiatus position, and “special cases”

The detailed examination of 4080 Latin inscriptions from Rome that was conducted for the present article allowed us to identify 121 cases of <e> for /ī/ that might testify to the shift in quality of the latter vowel towards the place of articulation of the long /ē/.

24 of these cases, however, may be regarded as simply archaising forms, to be excluded from the quantitative and statistical analysis in § 3. Specifically, resorting to archaism appears to be very common in the <-es> (instead of -īs) and <-ed>/<-et> (for -īt) forms, which represent, respectively, the ending of the genitive singular for nouns of the Latin 3rd declension and the morpheme indicating the 3rd person singular in the active form of the perfect indicative. The former spelling (<-es> for -īs) represents the Old Latin orthography that renders the ancient pronunciation [es] preceding the change /-ēs/> /-īs/ in final-closed syllables, which took place before the end of the third c. BC.⁽⁵⁰⁾ On the other hand, the vowel in the ending <-et> (instead of -īt) likely goes back to an ancient /ei/. The *e*-spelling is generally regarded as representing the intermediate stage /ē:/ (that is, a very closed /e:/) in the monophthongisation of the Old Latin /ei/ diphthong (*i. e.*, /ei/> /ē:/> /i:/), the short quantity of the vowel in CL being due to the so-called iambic shortening (VC(:)V:> VC(:)V).⁽⁵¹⁾ It

(49) The number of those “correct” instances was calculated by means of a partly automatic approach involving several steps: 1) the texts of all the inscriptions in both the chronological and sociolinguistic groups were extracted from the Database; 2) all metalinguistic characters (such as brackets) were eliminated by means of the program *UbiMacron* 1.1, which was created for me by Engr. Massimo Capozza (*cf. supra* n° 1); 3) the texts were submitted to an external macronizer (<http://alatius.com/macronizer>); 4) after a manual check of the results of 3), all metalinguistic characters removed in 2) were restored to the relevant texts; 5) every character included in every kind of brackets (*e.g.* “()”, “[]”, etc.) was removed by means of regular expressions; 6) the instances of <ī> (= short /i/) were counted automatically. Although the semi-automatic method described above still cannot provide an entirely exact count of the cases of <ī> for /ī/ in the corpus, it does present a reliable approximation that suffices for the argument made in this paper.

(50) LEUMANN, 1977, p. 431, MEISER, 2006, p. 71, and p. 138. *Cf. also* CIANCAGLINI and KEIDAN, 2018, p. 268 and p. 278.

(51) ADAMS, 2013, p. 42. The earliest Latin documents also provide evidence for an ending -*ed*, which was likely originated in the thematic aorist. The latter ending (which

is worth noting that such spellings as <-es> (for -īs) and <-et> (instead of -īt) are very persistent in Latin epigraphy, as they are attested even in inscriptions that were composed during the Empire.⁽⁵²⁾ The monophthongisation of /ei/ and the iambic shortening are also relevant for the interpretation of such *e*-spellings as <nise> (*AE* 2008, 222: third c. AD) and <tibe> (*CIL*, I² 875, 4: ca. 90 BC; *CIL*, I² 10: mid-second c. BC) for the CL *nīsī* and *tībī*, as their final short /i/ also goes back to an Old Latin /ei/, with *ī* > *ī* because of the iambic shortening.⁽⁵³⁾ Given the typology of the text and its dating, the form <nise> in *AE* 2008, 222 might actually illustrate the merger of the CL long /ē/ and short /ī/, because this spelling is attested in a curse tablet which dates back to the late third c. AD. But “old-fashioned” spellings of this kind are not rare in Latin epigraphy during the Roman Empire, even in diaphasically low texts of the type of the *tabellae defixionum*, which means that we cannot exclude the hypothesis that the latter spelling was used by the author of the tablet as an intentional archaism.

Intentional archaism is also frequent in several “old-fashioned” writings that go back to the time before vowel weakening occurred (*cf. supra* § 1.1). This is true for such forms as <mereto(d)> (for CL *merīto* <*merētōd*; *CIL*, I² 9; 31; 32; 976: mid-third c. BC; *CIL*, I² 2440: second c. BC; *CIL*, I² 1216: second half of the first c. BC) and <Menervai> (instead of *Mīnervae* DAT.SG.; *CIL*, I² 34: third c. BC), the latter of which is expressly cited by Quintilian (*Inst.* I, 4, 17) as a spelling from the past.⁽⁵⁴⁾ A similar explanation also applies to such a form as <Esquolino> (for *Esquīlino* ABL.SG.), which is painted in *CIL*, I² 416 (third c. BC.). The toponym *Esquīlinus* is very likely to be a compound of the preposition *ex* and the verbal stem **k^wel(ō)*, which, in turn, represents the original form of the Latin verb *cōlo* ‘to cultivate’, with the regular change *el* > *ol* (before velar /l/) and the subsequent simplification of the labiovelar in its first syllable (but see *inquīlinus* ‘tenant’ <*in-k^wel-*).⁽⁵⁵⁾

A different issue is the 13 instances of <e> for /ī/ that occur before another vowel (that is, in hiatus position), a spelling that is particularly attested in non-standard forms such as: <Deanae> (for *Dīanae* DAT.SG.; *CIL*, VI 118: first c. AD; *CIL*, VI 122; 126: second half of the second c. AD; *CIL*, VI 656: second c. AD) and in the inflected forms of the word *ostium* ‘door’

is also attested in Italic and in Faliscan Latin) may also have been the source of the CL (and Old Latin) ending -īt. *Cf.* WEISS, 2009, p. 392-393. *Cf.* also BAKKUM, 2009, p. 158 (for Faliscan).

(52) In the case of <-es>, *cf.* the spellings <Galeones> (for *Galeonīs*; *CIL*, VI 18850: ca. AD 51-149), <Agathocle(s)> (for *Agathoclīs*; *CIL*, VI 19812: ca. AD 51-199) and <cohortis> (for *cohortīs*; *CIL*, VI 1009: AD 140). As for the Republican age, *cf.* <Ceres> (for *Cererīs*; *CIL*, I² 973: second half of the third c. BC) and <Apolones> (for *Apollinīs*; *CIL*, I² 37: third c. BC). The form <fete(t)> (for *fecīt*) is attested in *CIL*, VI 13753: first c. AD. As for the time of the Roman Republic, *cf.* again <fete(t)> in *CIL*, I² 416, <adouxet> (for *adduxīt*; *CIL*, I² 2443: first half of the third c. BC), <fuet> (for *fuīt*; *CIL*, I² 9: mid-third c. BC) and <dedet> (for *dedīt*; again *CIL*, I² 9; *CIL*, I² 31: first half of the third c. BC; *CIL*, I² 477: ca. 169-131 BC and *CIL*, I² 976: first half of the second c. BC). A list of similar cases in Imperial inscriptions is also given in ADAMS, 2003, p. 51.

(53) LEUMANN, 1977, p. 64-65.

(54) For <mereto(d)>, *cf.* WALDE *et al.*, 1956, p. 75-76, ERNOUT and MEILLET, 1967, p. 399, DE VAAN, 2008, p. 373-374, *s.v. mereō*. For <Menervai>, *cf.* ADAMS, 2013, p. 41.

(55) ERNOUT and MEILLET, 1967, p. 132, *s.v. colō*.

<osteis> instead of *ostīis* ABL.PLUR.; *CIL*, VI 2109; 39443: ca. AD 240 and <osteum> for *ostīum* ACC.SG.; twice in *CIL*, VI 2104a: AD 218). The latter instance also applies in the form <corintheam> (for *corinthīam* ACC.SG.; *CIL*, VI 8686: early second c. AD) and in several personal names (often but not always of Greek origin), a fact that is well exemplified by such spellings as <Decune(us)> (probably a non-standard rendering for the *nomen* *Decimīus*; *CIL*, I² 1058: ca. 149-44 BC), <Agatea> (allegedly standing for *Agathīa*; *CIL*, I² 2527a: early first c. BC), <Nicea(s)> (instead of *Nicīas*; KROPP, 2008, 1.4.4, 15: first c. AD), and <Aphrodiseo> (for *Aphrodisīo* DAT.SG.; *CIL*, VI 17406: ca. AD 101-299). To provide an interpretation for such *e*-spellings is highly problematic, above all when they occur in inscriptions that were composed during the Roman Republic. According to most scholars, similar cases of <e> for /ī/ attest that both the CL short-unstressed /ĕ/ and /ī/ came to be realised as [j] immediately before another vowel from as early as the Republican age. Yet, (at least some of) these Republican *e*-spellings might also show the opening /i/ > /e/ in hiatus position, a non-standard feature that was characteristic of some dialectal varieties of Latin (such as Sabinian, Faliscan, and the Latin of Praeneste) but not continued in the Latin of Rome.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The discussion of this issue is well beyond the scope of the present article, but both explanations rule out such instances of <e> for /ī/ as evidence for the merger of the CL long /ē/ and short /ī/. These 13 instances were therefore excluded from the quantitative/statistical analysis in § 3.

In addition, those *e*-spellings (instead of /ī/) with a less certain interpretation were also excluded from this analysis: either their reading and/or the interpretation of the relevant text was somehow unclear, or they occurred in an abbreviated form that could not be accurately spelled out. The former case is well exemplified by the spelling <exset> (probably a non-standard writing for *exīt* ‘to go away IND.PRES.3RD.SG.’), which is found in both *CIL*, I² 2520a and c, two of the five texts that constitute the corpus of the so-called Johns Hopkins *defixiones* (ca. mid-first c. BC).⁽⁵⁷⁾ On the one hand, it is possible that the writer used the indicative *exīt* here instead of the expected subjunctive *exeat* (the verb of a purpose clause introduced by *ut*), and that, in doing so, they also rendered the last vowel of the verb with the grapheme <e> instead of <i>. This possibility becomes even more likely if one considers that: 1) such “slips” in the verb system sometimes occur in curse tablets from Rome,⁽⁵⁸⁾ and 2) another possible case of <e> for /ī/ (<tricipitem> for *tricipitem*; *cf. infra* § 2.2.2) actually occurs in the same text. On the other hand, however, one must admit that the more economic explanation for the spelling <exset> would be to regard it as a subjunctive, and to hypothesise a loss of the last vowel in the word (that is, *exe(a)t* > *exet*), since this possibility only presupposes that a

(56) The former interpretation is found, for instance, in HERMAN, 2000a, p. 35 and ADAMS, 2013, p. 54, and p. 101-108. For the latter hypothesis, *cf.* COLEMAN, 1990, p. 11 and BAKKUM, 2009, p. 97-98.

(57) The reading and the dating of these tablets are provided by SHERWOOD, 1912. *Cf.* also <https://archaeologicalmuseum.jhu.edu/the-collection/object-stories/a-roman-lead-curse-tablet>. For the rendering of the cluster /ks/ with the digraph <xs> (instead of <x>) in <exset>, *cf.* MANCINI, 2019.

(58) *Cf.* for instance KROPP, 2008, 1.4.4, 14 (second c. AD): *Comodo isti non comberu(nt) inter s(e)...ne incognoscunt* (for *incognoscant*)...

single “misspelling” (and not two, as in the first explanation) was committed by the writer. Another example of uncertain interpretation is <serps> (*CIL*, VI 2104a: AD 218). The form might stand for *sīnas* ‘to allow SUB.PRES.2ND. SG.’, as the verb is written with an initial <i> on the preceding line of the text, which refers to the exact same context. But the context itself is problematic: the form occurs in the part of the inscription that should reproduce *verbatim* the *tripodatio* of the Arval brothers, a sacred poem that was performed in an archaising Latin that was undoubtedly very difficult to understand for the writer who inscribed the text, a fact that is extensively attested by several transcription errors that occur in these same lines (e.g. <pleoius>, <rere>, <sia> for *pleores*, *fere*, and *sta*).⁽⁵⁹⁾ In other words, the available evidence would suggest that <serps> is a “misspelling” of a mere palaeographic relevance, not a “phonetic” spelling showing the qualitative similarity of the CL short /ĩ/ and long /ē/.⁽⁶⁰⁾

As for abbreviations, doubts on how to correctly spell them out arise both in the two instances of the form <Caleb> and in the word <Arteme>. <Caleb> is found in two fictile vessels from Rome (*CIL*, I² 416: third c. BC and *CIL*, I² 2487: end of the second c. BC), and it might represent an abbreviation of <Calebus> (instead of *Calibus* ABL.PLUR <Cales, ium a town in southern Campania). But this spelling would be better explained as an abridged form of the personal name <Caleb(ius)> (not as a toponym), as this explanation would allow a much more secure reading for both *CIL*, I² 416 and *CIL*, I² 2487.⁽⁶¹⁾ If this is correct, the form *Caleb(ius)* shows no deviation at all, a fact that would justify its exclusion from the quantitative/statistical analysis in § 3. As for <Arteme>, this spelling (occurring on a brick stamp) probably indicates the name of the owner of the *figlina* (the workshop) where the stamp was produced, allegedly one *Aulus Mucius Artemidorus*.⁽⁶²⁾ But the spelling might also indicate the GEN.SG. of the *cognomen* *Artemas*, *ae* and might therefore represent a case of /ae/ > /e:/ rather than a case of <e> for /ĩ/.

Other *e*-spellings occurring in the corpus may have an alternative (linguistic) interpretation, and can therefore not be used to illustrate the shift in quality of the CL short /ĩ/ towards the place of articulation of the long /ē/. Some of these spellings, for instance, might be better explained by hypothesising a mere case of recomposition (instead of a phonologically-determined case of <e> for /ĩ/), an explanation that fits very well for those non-standard spellings that occur in the inflected forms of compound verbs, such as: <optenui> (for *obtīnui* ‘to obtain IND.PERF.1ST.SG.’ <ob-tēnēō; *CIL*, I² 15: ca. 130 BC),⁽⁶³⁾ <condederunt> (instead of *condiderunt* ‘to settle IND.

(59) SCHEID, 1998, p. 295, and p. 299.

(60) How the script change from <sinas> to <serps> might have occurred, however, is unclear.

(61) *CIL*, I² 416 would then recall a *Caius Serponius* (the alleged owner of the vessel) and his slave *Calebius*, who manufactured the object in the *vicus Esquilinus* (Rome). As for *CIL*, I² 2487, the vessel would belong to a *Marcus Calebius*. Cf. *CIL*, I² 416: *K(aius) Serponio(s). Caleb(ius) fece(t) veqo Esqelino. C(ai) s(ervus)* and *CIL*, I² 2487: *M(arcus) Caleb(ius). Verna serv(us)*. Here *Verna* is probably a personal name. Cf. also *TLL*, *Onomasticon*, II, 76, 5-6.

(62) This interpretation is proposed in *CIL*, I² 2316, p. 706.

(63) Given the typology of the inscription (the metrical eulogy of *Cnaeus Cornelius Scipio Hispanus*, son of *Hispanus*), the form <optenui> might also be an intentional archaism, reproducing the Latin orthography prior to vowel weakening (cf. also the rendering of

PERF.3RD.PLUR.’ <con-dō; *CIL*, VI 18850: mid-second c. AD), <reddedit> (for *reddidit* ‘to restore IND.PERF.3RD.SG.’ <re-dō; *CIL*, VI 37: ca. AD 151-299; *CIL*, VI 29691: AD 206), and <adsteterunt> (instead of *adstiterunt* ‘to stand near IND.PERF.3RD.PLUR.’ <ad-stō; *CIL*, VI 2067: AD 219). Such non-standard spellings as <reddedit> and <condederunt>, for example, are better explained as cases of backformation from the perfects *dedit/dederunt* <do ‘to give’, whereas a spelling of the type of <adsteterunt> might have easily been remodelled on the form *steterunt* <sto. Along the same lines, the forms <vendederit> (instead of *vendiderit* ‘to sell SUB.PERF.3RD.SG.’; *CIL*, VI 17965: second c. AD) and <praesedente> (for *praesidente* ‘to preside over PAR.PRES. ACTIVE.ABL.SG.’; *CIL*, VI 2103: AD 213) are probably due to the influence of, respectively, the present infinitive *vendere* and the IND.PRES. *sedeo*.

The form <cives> (for *civīs* NOM.SG.; *CIL*, VI 46: first quarter of the third c. AD) might also be a “special case”. As GALDI, 2004, p. 170-173 points out, <cives> represents ca. 44% of all cases of <e> for /i/ that occur in the NOM.SG. of nouns of the Latin 3rd declension (Galdi focuses on the epigraphic corpus of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire). Along the same lines, 12 out of 25 cases of <-is> for <-es> in lexical items that belong to this declension involve the word *milēs*. The very high frequency of *civīs* and *milēs* among the <e>/<i> spelling confusions that pertain to nouns of the Latin 3rd declension is therefore assumed to have an analogical (rather than phonological) explanation. Specifically, the diffusion of such a non-standard form as <cives> might reflect “un’alterazione reale della lingua... favorita, per buona parte, da una confusione morfologica col sostantivo *miles*, d’impiego comunissimo sulle epigrafi (spesso in coppia con *civis*) e di struttura fonetica molto vicina”.⁽⁶⁴⁾

An alternative explanation is even possible for those cases that present two spelling variants, the one with <e> and the other with <i>, that are both attested in Latin literary sources. These *e*-spellings (instead of /i/) are very likely to reflect a merely “graphic” (that is, non-functional) variation, and should therefore be excluded from the quantitative/statistical analysis in § 3.⁽⁶⁵⁾

sounded /b/ consonant with the grapheme <p>).

(64) GALDI, 2004, p. 172. Cf. the whole discussion at p. 170-176. It is worth nothing that the words *civīs* and *milēs* occur together even in the relevant inscription from Rome, *CIL*, I² 46:... *M(arcus) Quartinius M(arcus) f(ilius) cives Sabinus Remus, /miles coh(ortis) VII pr(aetoriae) Antoniniane P(iae) V(indicis) v(otum) l(ibens) s(olvit)*. EDR 161382: 23/06/2017 (Antonella Ferraro).

(65) Cf. the forms <Opelius>/<Opilius> (*CIL*, I² 2369: first c. BC), <Vigeli(us/a)>/<Vigili(us/a)> (*CIL*, VI 12221: end of the first c. BC), <Amentinus>/<Amintinus> (twice in the form <Amentini> GEN.SG.; *CIL*, VI 251: AD 27), <Camel(l)ius>/<Camil(l)ius> (*CIL*, VI 6612 in the form <Camelio> DAT.SG.: second half of the second c. AD), <Treveri>/<Treviri> (*CIL*, VI 1625a: ca. AD 141) and <Verginius>/<Virginius> (*CIL*, VI 36936: ca. AD 198). Cf. FORCELLINI, 1913-1920, s.v. *Opelius*, *Vigellius*, *Verginius*, and *Virginius*; TLL, I, 1885, s.v. *Amentinus*; TLL, *Onomasticon*, II, 116, 31-42, s.v. *Camelius* and LEWIS, SHORT and ETHAN, 1969, s.v. *Treviri*. A similar variation also occurs in the case of the *nomen* <Vergilius>/<Virgilius>. Instances of the latter variation have therefore not been taken into consideration in the present article.

Finally, I have also excluded the 6 cases of <e> for /i/ that occur in *CIL*, I² 25 (the well-known honorary inscription of *Caius Duilius* on the *Columna Rostrata*), a text that is particularly relevant for the problem under discussion and that, for this reason, will be addressed individually in § 3.

The qualitative analysis conducted so far has led to the elimination of 65 *e*-spellings that will not do as evidence for the shift in quality of the CL short /i/ towards the place of articulation of the long /ē/. 24 of these spellings were better interpreted as merely archaising forms, while 13 occurred in hiatus position. 22 additional cases of <e> for /i/ were dismissed as having an alternative explanation, either linguistic (e.g. recomposition, existence of two “classic” variants) or non-linguistic (e.g. uncertain reading, problematic context). Finally, 6 more cases were attested on the *Columna Rostrata*, an epigraphic text that needs to be addressed separately. The following section (§ 2.2) will contain a detailed analysis of the 56 remaining instances of <e> for /i/ that occur in the corpus, in order to determine whether they might actually foreshadow the merger of the CL short /i/ and long /ē/ as a closed /e/. In the attempt to provide a more exact dating for this merger, the instances occurring in each of the four periods defined in § 1.2 will be addressed individually.

Before we move to the detailed analysis in the next section, I have to specify the following: in his study on the vowel system of (Christian) inscriptions from Sardinia HERMAN, 1985, p. 187 noticed that the greatest majority of the cases of <e> for /i/ in those inscriptions (10 out of 14) were attested in the IND.PRES.3RD.SG. ending of tenses belonging to the third conjugation (e.g. <ducet> for *ducit*: *CIL*, X 772), which led him to the conclusion that these *e*-spellings were more likely to have an analogical rather than phonological explanation (that is, morphological confusion between the Latin second and third conjugation). However, this is not the case in our sample: out of the 56 cases of <e> for /i/ that will be discussed in the following pages, only 10 could be analogically motivated (including the cases of <-es> for *-is* in the NOM.SG. of the Latin third declension). For this reason, I will follow the interpretation in ADAMS, 2013, p. 60-61, according to whom, such cases as <aidiles> NOM.SG. (*CIL*, I² 8) and <vivet> IND.PRES.3RD.SG. (*CIL*, I² 3002) may actually foreshadow the merger of the CL long /ē/ and short /i/ as a closed /e/.⁽⁶⁶⁾

2.2.1 Qualitative analysis: the Mid-Republican Age (ca 250-120 BC)

The detailed filing of all 197 mid-Republican Roman inscriptions that have been considered for the present article allowed us to highlight 5 cases of <e> for /i/ that might testify to the shift in quality of the CL short /i/ towards the place of articulation of the long /ē/ (with the exception of those *e*-spellings that were already discussed in § 2.1).

2 of these cases concern the writing <aidile(s)> (instead of *aedilis* NOM.SG.), a spelling that is attested both in *CIL*, I² 8 and in *CIL*, I² 2443. The latter inscription (mid-third c. BC) is carved on the edge of a holy basin that was probably donated to Juno’s sanctuary in *Lanuvium* (near Rome) by the *aedilis Scantius, Luci filius*, about whom no further information could be gathered

(66) The same conclusion is reached in HERMAN, 1985, p. 189-191 with respect to the inscriptional corpus of *Gallia Narbonensis*, whose figures are much closer to the figures in our corpus than those of Sardinia.

from either the epigraphic or the literary sources. The former inscription, on the other hand, is the better-known epitaph depicted on the gravestone of *Lucius Cornelius Scipio* (son of *L. Cornelius Scipio Barbatus*), who was consul in the year 259 BC. Rather interestingly, two more mid-Republican instances of <e> for /i/ occur within the *elogium*, in Saturnian verses, involving the same *L. Cornelius Scipio* as appeared in a different text (*CIL*, I² 9). This metrical inscription attests both the form <hec>, instead *hīc* (l. 5), and the well-known spelling <Tempestatebus>, which stands for the CL *Tempestatībus* (l. 6).⁽⁶⁷⁾ Finally, a fifth case of <e> for /i/, the form <Condetios> (allegedly standing for the family name *Condītius*), occurs in *CIL*, I² 37 (third c. BC), which recalls an offer to Apollo on the behalf of the *aediles Marcus Mindius* and *Lucius Conditius*.

None of these *e*-spellings (instead of /i/) can be ascribed to archaism pure and simple. To begin with, neither the final-short /i/ in *aedilīs* (NOM.SG.), nor the penultimate vowel in *Tempestatībus* (DAT.PL) are likely to go back to an Old Latin /e/, for these two phonemes actually represent the original thematic vowel of the so-called *i*-stems that belong to the Latin 3rd declension.⁽⁶⁸⁾ As for *hīc*, its etymology is rather uncertain. Since the vowel of the pronoun can be scanned as long in CL, some scholars have hypothesised this vowel as deriving from an early /ei/ diphthong.⁽⁶⁹⁾ But the same vowel is usually scanned as short in early Latin poetry, a fact that prompted the inference that CL *hīc* might actually be the result of a compensatory lengthening starting from an emphatic pronunciation of the word, with the subsequent degemination of the last consonant (that is, [ˈhik:] > [ˈhi:k]).⁽⁷⁰⁾ If this is correct, the form *hīc* would be better derived from PIE **ǵh-i-ke*, and would therefore never have had a former /e/ (just as *aedilis* and *tempestatibus*).⁽⁷¹⁾

Before moving on to the discussion of those cases of <e> for /i/ in Roman inscriptions that were composed during the late Republic (ca. 119-1 BC), two more facts need to be highlighted. First, with the exception of the “special cases” already discussed in § 2.1, the 5 remaining mid-Republican instances of <e> for /i/ are all attested in formal inscriptions that were made by members of the Roman senatorial class (3 of them are in the funerary *elogium* of *Lucius Cornelius Scipio*: *CIL*, I² 8-9). Second, barring the writing <hec> for *hīc*, the other 4 *e*-spellings that are attested in inscriptions from this period do not involve words that might be regarded as part of the everyday register. Rather, they are: a name referring to a public office (<aediles>, twice: *CIL*, I² 8 and *CIL*, I² 2443), a theonym (<Tempestatebus>: *CIL*, I² 9), and (allegedly) a *nomen gentilitium*: <Condetios> (*CIL*, I² 37). These two facts do not conform to the hypothesis that the shift in quality of the CL short /i/ towards the place of articulation of the long /ē/ evolved in the form of a change from below (*cf. infra* § 3).

(67) For a detailed analysis of this text, *cf. infra* § 3.

(68) LEUMANN, 1977, p. 430, MEISER, 2006, p. 140.

(69) HAMP, 1993, p. 157-158. In his view, the writing <hec> in *CIL*, I² 9 would be better explained as *hēc* <**heic* <PIE **ǵheike*.

(70) ERNOUT and MEILLET, 1967, p. 293.

(71) WALDE *et al.*, 1956, p. 644-645 and DE VAAN, 2008, p. 284. Alternatively, a form **ǵhoke* may also be reconstructed (*cf. WEISS*, 2009, p. 344).

2.2.2 Qualitative analysis: The Late Republican Age (ca. 119-1 BC)

The picture described in § 2.2.1 changes entirely when one addresses the 14 cases of <e> for /ī/ occurring in inscriptions from the late Republican age. These *e*-spellings are not only attested in the context of formal texts (as it was the case during the mid-Republic), but they also occur in informal documents (8 out of 14 cases) and in diaphasically low inscriptions (4 cases).

The spelling confusion between <e> and <i> appears as particularly frequent among personal names during the late Republic. This confusion concerns the writing not only of such *nomina* as <Numetoria> (for *Numītoria*; *CIL*, I² 1121: ca. 149-45 BC) and <Vebellinus> (probably for *Vībellinus*; *CIL*, I² 1407: end of the first c. BC), but also the *cognomen* <Protemus> (supposedly a variant of the form *Protīnus*; *CIL*, I² 1143: ca. 149-51 BC) and the variants of the name *Mīthridates*, ātis, which is sometimes written without aspiration and with an <e> in its first syllable. The form <Metradati(s)> (for *Mīthřdatīs*), for instance, is attested in both *CIL*, I² 730 and *CIL*, I² 2309. The latter inscription is carved on a brick stamp (first half of the first c. BC) and recalls, as usual, the name of the owner of the *figlina* that produced the object, one *Marcus Curtius Mithridates*. The former inscription appears in a bilingual text that was probably donated to the Roman Republic by a son of King Mithridates VI, between ca. 83 BC and ca. 80 BC.⁽⁷²⁾ Interestingly, both these inscriptions exhibit the form *Mithridates*, spelled with an <a> in the second syllable of the word. That is, they both display the more “correct” variant of the name, which goes back to the Old Persian model **Miθra-dāta*,⁽⁷³⁾ a fact that is perfectly expected in the case of such a formal inscription as *CIL*, I² 730, but remarkable in the case of a brick stamp such as *CIL*, I² 2309. The form <Mitredatis>, on the other hand, is attested in *CIL*, I² 1334a, the funerary inscription (last quarter of the first c. BC) of one *Lucius Lutatius Paccius*, who defines himself as *thurarius* ‘dealer in frankincense’ *de familia rege* (for *regīs*) *Mitredatis*.⁽⁷⁴⁾

Cases of <e> for /ī/ also occur in the case of adjectives. The epithet <tricepitem> (instead of the CL *tricīpitem* ‘three-headed’), for instance, is used to summon the infernal hound *Cerberus* in three out of the five Johns Hopkins *defixiones* (*CIL*, I² 2520a, c, and e). This last instance requires further commentary. According to ERNOUT, 1973, p. 103, <tricepitem> could be explained by recomposition based on the NOM.SG. of the same adjective (*i.e.*, *triceps*, *-cipitis*). But even though a recomposition of this kind may be conceivable in the case of compound verbs (*cf. supra* § 2.1), it is much less likely to involve a nominal stem, as vocalic alternations occurring in nominal/adjectival paradigms (in the case of *triceps*, /ē/ vs. /ī/) are usually morphologically conditioned ones. Moreover, one may note that no further case of recomposition occurs in the entire text of *CIL*, I² 2520 a, c, and e, but that the same *defixiones* actually display many other linguistic phenomena of phonetic and phonological relevance.⁽⁷⁵⁾ In view of the evidence, therefore,

(72) WARMINGTON, 1940, p. 139.

(73) SCHMITT, 2011, p. 261-262.

(74) The form <rege> might also be a case of <e> for /ī/, but it is better explained by hypothesising the use of an ablative instead of the expected genitive, a case confusion that might have been triggered by the preceding ablative *familiā*.

(75) *Cf.* for instance the rising of /e/ in hiatus position in <polliciarus> (for *pollicearis*

it does not seem unwarranted to regard even the spelling <tricepitem> as a “genuine” case of <e> for /i/, and to count it among those “misspellings” that might actually be evidence for the shift in quality of the CL short /i/ towards the place of articulation of the long /ē/.

Moving forward, three more *e*-spellings of the type in question also occur: in the IND.PRES.3RD.SING. <vivet> (for *vivīt*; *CIL*, I² 3002: mid-first c. BC), in the expression <ab luco Lubent(inae)>, allegedly standing for *a luco Libitinae* (*CIL*, I² 1411: second half of the first c. BC), and in the form <oppedis> (instead of *oppīdis* ABL.PLUR) in *CIL*, I² 583 (ca. 123-112 BC).⁽⁷⁶⁾

Finally, *CIL*, I² 1203 and *CIL*, I² 1204, two of the three inscriptions that form the well-known epitaph of the rich baker *Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces* (mid-first c. BC), are also very likely to contain two more possible instances of <e> for /i/. The inscriptions, whose text is identical, read as follows: *Est hoc monumentum (for monumentum) Marcei Vergilei (for Vergilī) Eurysacis, pistoris, redemptoris, apparet*. Although the epitaph, which displays some non-standard features (*cf. supra*), is very clear in its general meaning, the interpretation of the form <apparet>, which closes the eulogy, is difficult. According to most scholars, this spelling should be regarded as the regular IND.PRES.3RD.SING. of the verb *appareo* ‘to come in sight’, and refers either to the owner of the grave (indicating that he was still alive when his funerary monument was created) or to the monument itself. In the latter case, the inscription would mean [this is the memorial of *Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces*, baker and contractor. Here it stands].⁽⁷⁷⁾ The main problem with this interpretation, however, is that there is almost no other similar instance among the epigraphic records from Rome. The only other Roman inscription that displays the verb *appareo* with the absolute meaning of ‘to be a public servant’ (*CIL*, VI 1945; first half of the first c. AD) shows this verb along with a DAT.PLUR, indicating the public officers that were assisted by the *apparitores* mentioned in the text (*cf. the expressions “qui co(n)s(ulibus) cens(oribus) pr(aetoribus) apparere solent”* in l. 2 and “*apparuit Caesari Augusto*” in l. 3). Further, that people were still alive when their grave was made is generally indicated by such expressions as *vivit/vivus* during the Republic, and *se/sibi vivo fecit* during the early and late Empire.⁽⁷⁸⁾ The noun *apparitor*, on the other hand, does occur at least twice in an abbreviated form (second half of the first c. AD): *CIL*, VI 1944, the funerary inscription of a *Marcus Falcidius Marci filius Cupidus*, who defines himself as *apparitor(is) Augusti*, and *CIL*, VI 1959a, which mentions a *Turranus, verna tab(ularius) apparitor(um)*. These inscriptions are particularly relevant for the problem under discussion. Not only may they provide a more secure interpretation for the obscure <apparet> in *CIL*, I² 1203 and *CIL*, I² 1204 (namely as an abbreviation of the

‘to hold forth SUB.PRES.3RD.SG.’), the monophthongisation of /au/, and the syncope of the post-stressed middle vowel in <oriclas> (instead of *auriculas* ‘ear ACC.PLUR’). Quotations are from EDR 072513: 13/05/2015 (Andrea Cappellucci).

(76) For the use of <e> for /i/ in the third person singular endings of the indicative present, *cf. the discussion in ADAMS, 2013, p. 59-60. For CIL, I² 583, cf. CRAWFORD, 1996, p. 39-111.*

(77) *Cf. WARMINGTON, 1940, p. 26-27 and CIL, I², p. 509. Cf. also MOMMSEN, 1848, p. 22.*

(78) FRIGGERI and PELLI, 1980 and ZELENAI, 2018.

GEN.SG. *apparitoris* ‘civil servant’), but they may also allow us to list the two instances of <apparet(oris)> among those Republican *e*-spellings that may actually foreshadow the merger of the CL long /ē/ and short /ĭ/.

Before we proceed to the discussion of the early Imperial instances of <e> for /ĭ/ in the next section, one further difference should be highlighted between *e*-spellings occurring in Roman inscriptions that date back, respectively, to the mid-Republic and the late Republican age. As has been shown in § 2.2.1, all but one of the possible instances of <e> for /ĭ/ that occurred in mid-Republican inscriptions (ca. 250-120 BC) involved lexical items that were not part of the so-called *sermo cotidianus*. The same does not hold for the sub-corpus represented by the late Republican inscriptions, since the *e*-spellings among these seem to involve both words that pertain to the everyday register (such as personal names, verbs, and adjectives) and lexical items that are part of the “learned” tradition (e.g. gentile names, theonyms, etc.), a fact that is in keeping with the spread of the qualitative shift [i] > [ī] > [e] throughout the lexicon.

2.2.3 Qualitative analysis: The Early Imperial Period (ca. AD 1-150)

The analysis of the 1604 Latin inscriptions from Rome that date back to the early Imperial period (ca. AD 1-150) revealed 10 *e*-spellings (instead of /ĭ/) that might foreshadow the merger of the CL short /ĭ/ and long /ē/ as a closed /e/. Of these, 7 are attested in the context of informal inscriptions, while 3 occur in diaphasically low texts. Notably, formal epigraphic documents of the early Empire showed no instances of <e> for /ĭ/ (with the exception of the “special cases” discussed in § 2.1), a fact that will be addressed in § 3.

As it was the case during the late Republic (cf. *supra* § 2.2.2), the deviations from the CL norm involve both everyday words and lexical items that pertain to the “highest” registers of the Latin language. To begin with, 4 of the 11 early Imperial instances of <e> for /ĭ/ concern personal names (*cognomina* in particular). These *e*-spellings are in the form <Meni> (for *Mīni* GEN.SG.; *CIL*, VI 5093: second half of the first c. AD) and <Caletyche>/<Caletiche>, two variants of the Greek name *Callityche* (cf. Gk. *Καλλιτύχη*), a female *cognomen* that is particularly attested among slaves and freedwomen from the city of Rome.⁽⁷⁹⁾ These spellings occur in two funerary inscriptions (*CIL*, VI 7185: first half of the first c. AD and *CIL*, VI 9537: first c. AD) and in KROPP, 2008, 1.4.4, 15, a curse tablet from the Palatine hill that was very likely composed during the first c. AD.⁽⁸⁰⁾

In addition to personal names, instances of <e> for /ĭ/ also occur in the case of adjectives and, again, theonyms. To give an example of the latter, *AE* 2007, 260, one of the most ancient *tabellae defixionum* from the so-called *Anna Perenna* spring in Rome displays the form <Gegantes> for *Gīgantes* ACC.PLUR. As for adjectives, two more *e*-spellings occur each in the sentence <sit tibi terra leves> (for *levīs*; *CIL*, VI 11807: second half of the first c. AD) and in the expression <atversar(ios) annor(um) menor(um)> (for *adversarios annorum mīnorum* [my enemies that are younger in age]), that is,

(79) SOLIN, 2003, p. 99-100.

(80) PANCIERA, 2006.

in the pronouncement that concludes KROPP, 2008, 1.4.4, 15, the same *tabella defixionis* from the Palatine hill that was just mentioned.

Finally, 3 more early Imperial instances of <e> for /i/ occur in the IND. PRES.3RD.SG. <aget> (for *agīt*; *CIL*, VI 26158: mid-second c. AD) and in the expression <sene querella> (instead of the CL *sine querella*) that is attested in both *CIL*, VI 23263 and in *CIL*, VI 27523 (first half of the second c. AD). The latter form requires further commentary. Even though the etymology of CL *sine* ‘without’ is not entirely clear, the comparison with Toch. A *sne*, Toch. B *snai* ‘without’, and with the Old Irish adjective *sain* ‘different’ advises against simply ascribing the writing <sene> to archaism, as the CL form likely goes back to PIE **sn̥hi*.⁽⁸¹⁾ According to ADAMS, 2013, p. 54, however, this *e*-spelling (which also occurs in the so-called archive of *Claudius Terentianus*: early second c. AD)⁽⁸²⁾ could be interpreted as a false archaism. He claims that the writing <seine> (allegedly a hypercorrection based on the interchangeability of the graphemes <ei> and <i> for /i/ in Republican Latin) is attested in the so-called *lex repetundarum* (*CIL*, I² 583). Therefore, Adams continues, if the spelling <seine> had the “status of archaism”, one can hypothesise <sene> as having been taken as “an archaic variant showing the early *e*-spelling originally representing” /e:/ </ei/. But this argument is not entirely convincing. First, is not easy to imagine that Imperial writers operating around the mid-second c. AD (and usually having little to no education) were able to reconnect two different graphic variants (*i.e.*, <ei> and <e> for /i/) with a phonetic change (the monophthongisation of /ei/) that took place in Latin centuries before their time. Second, even assuming that <sene> was regarded as a “false” and intentional archaism in some (allegedly formal and conservative) registers of Latin, it is difficult to see why such a complex resort to archaism would occur in two fairly simple texts (*CIL*, VI 23263 and *CIL*, VI 27523) which display no aspiration for literariness. In view of the evidence, therefore, it would seem warranted to regard even the form <sene> as an *e*-spelling showing the phonetic realisation as [i] of the CL short /i/, and consequently to include the two instances of this form in the quantitative and statistical analysis in § 3.

2.2.4 Qualitative analysis: The Late Imperial Period (ca. AD 151-300)

The detailed filing of the 1455 Latin inscriptions from Rome that date back to the late Imperial period (ca. AD 151-300) allowed us to identify 27 instances of <e> for /i/ that might foreshadow the merger of the CL long /ē/ and short /ī/. As it was the case for the late Republican inscriptions in § 2.2.2 (but not for the mid-Republican and the early Imperial documents analysed in § 2.2.1 and § 2.2.3), the *e*-spellings that are attested in this last sub-corpus occur both in formal (14 of 27 instances) and in informal texts (9 instances). Moreover, they also appear in diaphasically low inscriptions (4 instances).

Late Imperial instances of <e> for /i/ are notably frequent in verb forms, and fairly often in the case of verb endings, as is well exemplified by such spellings as: <vibes> ‘to live IND.PRES.2ND.SG.’ (*CIL*, VI 142: third c. AD), <possidebet> ‘to own IND.FUT.3RD.SG.’ (*CIL*, VI 25520: third c. AD), <dicet>

(81) DE VAAN, 2008, p. 565, s.v.

(82) On this corpus, cf. the analysis in ADAMS, 1977.

‘to say’ and <futuet> ‘to make love with IND.PRES.3RD.SG.’ (SOLIN and ITKONEN-KAILA, 1966, p. 229-230, n° 304 and CASTREN and LILIUS, 1970, p. 234-235, no 283: ca. mid-third c. AD) for *vivīs*, *possidebūt*, *dicīt*, and *futuīt*. Verb *e*-spellings are even more frequent in such forms as <contegit> IND.PERF.3RD.SG. and <contegerunt> IND.PERF.3RD.PLUR. (for *contīgīt* and *contīgerunt*), which occur in some of the *Carmina Fratrum Arvalium* (*CIL*, VI 2067: AD 219, twice; *CIL*, VI 2103; 2109: AD 237; *CIL*, VI 32391: ca. AD 222-237; and *CIL*, VI 39443, three instances: AD 240). These forms require a more detailed analysis. As is well known, *contīngō* ‘to reach’ is a compound from the preposition *cum* and the verbal stem *tangō* ‘to touch’, a stem that in turn very likely derives from PIE **th₂ngō*. As a result, the reduplicated perfect *teīgīt*, which is attested in CL, is generally regarded as going back to an earlier **te-tag-ai*, with the change /ā/ > /ī/ due to vowel weakening, an etymology that is further demonstrated by a comparison with several cognate forms (e.g. U. **antakres** ‘untouched ABL.PL.’ <**n-tag-ro* and, perhaps, even Gk. *τεταγών* ‘having seized’).⁽⁸³⁾ In other words, an old /ē/ seems to have been attested neither in *tangō* nor in its perfect *teīgīt*, a fact that makes it very difficult to ascribe the forms <contegit> and <contegerunt> to pure archaism.

After verbs, the second most represented category among *e*-spellings that occur in late Imperial Roman inscriptions is personal names. Instances of <e> for /ī/ are attested both in the case of *nomina* and in the GEN.SG. ending of some Greek *cognomina*. The former group is represented by such forms as: <Beppsanio> (for *Vīpsaniō* DAT.SG.; *CIL*, VI 29002: first quarter of the third c. AD), <Tettediū> (instead of *Tettīdiū*; *CIL*, VI 17248: early third c. AD), and <Catelium> (for *Catīlium* ACC.SG.; *CIL*, VI 2095: second half of the second c. AD). For the latter group one may cite the spellings <Eufrates> (KROPP, 2008, 1.4.4, 14: second half of the second c. AD) and <Heraclides> (*CIL*, VI 18079: third c. AD), which stand for *Euphratīs* and *Heraclīdīs*.

The graphemic oscillation between <e> and <i> also appears in: common nouns, as in <quietes> (*CIL*, VI 142: third c. AD) and <digitationes> (*CIL*, VI 2134: ca. AD 247-257) for *quietīs* and *digitationīs* GEN.SG., and <sacri(f)ecium> (instead of *sacrificium* ACC.SG.; *CIL*, VI 2099: AD 183); adverbs, such as the form <lebens> (for *lībens*; *CIL*, VI 12863: first half of the third c. AD); and adjectives, such as in the spelling <commentarese> instead of *commentariensīs* (NOM.SG; *CIL*, VI 775: third c. AD).⁽⁸⁴⁾ Finally we have one *e*-spelling in the form <omnes> (for *omnīs* NOM.SG.), which occurs in CASTREN and LILIUS, 1970, p. 238, n° 289, an elegiac couplet carved on the walls of the so-called *Domus Tiberiana* (ca. mid-third c. AD).⁽⁸⁵⁾

As for lexical items that are not part of the everyday register, possible instances of <e> for /ī/ occur in the case of theonyms, such as the form <Menestratori> (instead of *Mīnīstratori* DAT.SG.), the epithet of Mercury in *CIL*, VI 84 (second half of the second c. AD), and in the spelling <Chendies>

(83) DE VAAN, 2008, p. 606-607, s.v.

(84) The form <commentarese> also attests: the simplification *ie* > *e*, the rendering of <ns> as <s>, and the dropping of word-final *-s*, linguistic phenomena that are consistent with the use of a non-standard variety of Latin by the writer.

(85) The instances of <e> for /ī/ that occur within the *Graffiti del Palatino* are further discussed in ADAMS, 2013, p. 57.

(for *Cnīdiae* DAT.SG.), which occurs in *CIL*, VI 2273 (first half of the third c. AD).⁽⁸⁶⁾ A concluding case of <e> for /ī/ is in the form <flamenem> (for *flamīnem* ACC.SG.; *CIL*, VI 2103).⁽⁸⁷⁾

Before we move on to the quantitative and statistical analysis in § 3, I need to specify the following: in § 2.1 I dismissed the spelling <-es> for -īs in the GEN.SG. of nouns belonging to the Latin 3rd declension as a merely archaising form. I also showed that this ending (which is mainly attested during the Republic) is also fairly consistent in Latin epigraphy, as it happens to occur even in some Imperial inscriptions. But archaism does not seem likely for inscriptions that date back to as late as the third c. AD, especially when these inscriptions happen to be very simple texts (such as funerary inscriptions or private dedications to the Gods) that do not show any aspiration to literariness. I have therefore decided to count even the late Imperial instances of <e> for /ī/ that occur in this particular context among those *e*-spellings that might actually foreshadow the merger of the CL long /ē/ and short /ī/ as a closed /e/.

3 Quantitative and statistical analysis

The qualitative analysis in § 2 permitted us to identify 56 instances of <e> for /ī/ that may testify to the shift in quality of the CL short /ī/ towards the place of articulation of the long /ē/. Almost half of these instances (27) are clustered in epigraphic documents that were composed in Rome during the late Imperial period (ca. AD 151-300), whereas only 5 are attested in inscriptions that date back to the mid-Republican age (ca. 250-120 BC). Of the remaining 24 instances, 14 occur in late Republican texts (ca. 119-1 BC), while 10 cases are attested in inscriptional records from the early Imperial period (ca. AD 1-150).

The majority of these *e*-spellings (ca. 71%, or 40 of 56) occur in unstressed syllables. Since, however, according to HERMAN, 1968, p. 197 the proportion of stressed vs. unstressed syllables in Latin is ca. 1/3 (*viz.* 37% stressed vs. 63% unstressed), the proportion of *e*-spellings in unstressed syllables may not seem statistically significant, at least when the mid-Republican and the Imperial inscriptions (13 of the 16 stressed instances of <e> for /ī/) are considered. Based on an exact binomial test, there is not enough evidence to support the hypothesis that the observed proportion of the cases of <e> for /ī/ that are attested in unstressed syllables in our sample (71%) is significantly higher than the expected ca. 63% ($p = 0.22$). This observation may be particularly relevant for the topic under discussion. On the one hand, the (relatively) high frequency of cases of <e> for /ī/ in stressed syllables during

(86) Even in this last case, the non-standard forms (the incorrect use of aspiration, the metathesis in both the first and the second syllable of the word, and the “Greek” ending <-es> for -ae) very likely suggest a low variety of Latin on part of the writer. For the spellings <aes> and <es> instead of the CL /ae/, *cf.* ADAMS, 2003, p. 479-483, ADAMS, 2007, p. 673-674, ADAMS, 2013, p. 19. *Cf.* also CLACKSON, 2011c, p. 515.

(87) In the case of <flamenem>, one might also hypothesise the influence of the NOM. SG. *flamen*, which displays a <e> in its last syllable. But such cases of recomposition are not very likely to occur in the case of nominal stems (*cf. supra* § 2.2.2 the commentary on the form <tricipitem> instead of *tricipitem* ACC.SG.).

the mid-Republic may provide further validation to the hypothesis that will be proposed *infra*, namely, that *e*-spelling occurring in inscriptions dating back to this period cannot be used to argue for developments in the CL vowel system. On the other hand, the same observation in epigraphic documents that were composed during the Imperial period may indicate that, at some point during the time of the Empire, qualitative confusions concerning the CL short-high (that is, /ī, ū/) and mid-long vowels (*i.e.*, /ē, ō/) ceased to be (at least statistically) dependent on stress. This issue, however, is beyond the scope of the present article, and will therefore be addressed in a future contribution.

In the following pages I shall analyse the distribution of these 56 *e*-spellings within formal, informal, and diaphasically low inscriptions, which were composed in each of the four chronological periods identified in § 1.2 (that is, the mid-Republic, the late Republic, the early Empire, and the late Empire). I shall compare the number of non-standard spellings showing <e> for /ī/ that occur in each sociolinguistic group (*viz.* formal, informal, and diaphasically low texts) with the number of standard orthographies (that is, <i> for /ī/) attested in the same group. The resulting proportion, expressed as a percentage (“degree of error”), will allow us to analyse whether the considered cases of <e> for /ī/ happen to cluster significantly in inscriptions that adhere to one (or more) of the identified diaphasically different registers. This analysis, in other words, will allow us to investigate whether the shift in quality of the CL short /ī/ towards the place of articulation of the CL long /ē/ (that is, /ī/ > [ī] > [e]) actually evolved in the form of a change from below. The use of such a quantitative method as the calculation of the “degree of error” is entirely justified in the case of a sociolinguistic analysis of the type performed in the present article. As even HERMAN, 1971, p. 125-126 admits, while the ratio of correct vs. incorrect spellings cannot be used for the study of regional (diatopic) variation, it may be suitable for an inquiry into social (in the present case, diaphasic) variation.

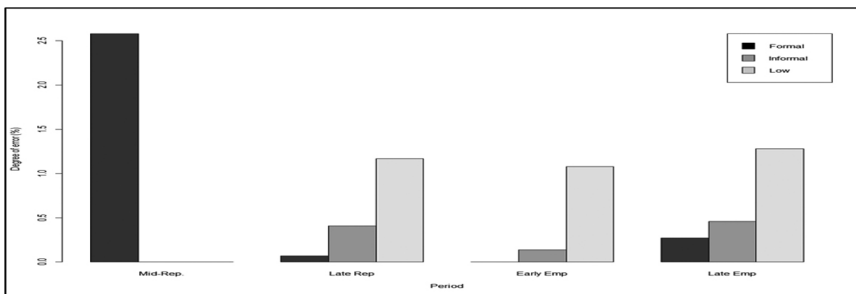


CHART 5: <e> for /ī/ in Latin inscriptions from Rome (degree of error)

Period	Mid-Republic (ca. 250/120 BC)			Late Republic (ca. 1191 BC)			Early Empire (ca. AD 1150)			Late Empire (ca. AD 151300)		
	I	E	DoE (%)	I	E	DoE (%)	I	E	DoE (%)	I	E	DoE (%)
Formal inscriptions	189	5	2.58	2776	2	0.07	4844	0	0	5223	14	0.27
Informal inscriptions	75	0	0	1961	8	0.41	4968	7	0.14	1956	9	0.46
Low inscriptions	39	0	0	339	4	1.17	275	3	1.08	308	4	1.28

TABLE 5: <e> for /i/ in Latin inscriptions from Rome (degree of error)

The results of the analysis are summarised in TABLE 5 and in the associated CHART 5 above. As this table clearly shows, when these deviations from the CL norm are compared with the corresponding standard orthographies, the proportion of *e*-spellings that may foreshadow the merger of the CL long /ē/ and short /ĭ/ is particularly low in inscriptions from Rome, in all time periods. The degree of error concerning the use of <e> for /i/ ranges from a value of ca. 2.6%, in formal inscriptions that were composed during the mid-Republican age (5 “misspellings” vs. 189 correct forms), to a value of less than 0.1% in formal texts that date back to the late Republic (2776 correct instances of <i> for /i/ vs. only 2 cases of <e> for /i/). Moreover, no deviations at all were found in the early Imperial formal epigraphic records (barring the “special cases” analysed in § 2.1). Surprisingly, such low figures are found even for diaphasically low texts, as the error rate in these texts barely exceeds 1% during the entire period ranging from the late Republic up to the late Imperial age (whereas mid-Republican diaphasically low inscriptions yielded, again, no instances of <e> for /i/). Two considerations should be made to account for such low figures. First, one could advance the hypothesis that the open pronunciation of the CL short /ĭ/ as [i] was only very limitedly attested in Rome, even as late as the third (or even the early fourth) c. AD. But this hypothesis would be contradicted by the testimony of the so-called *Appendix Probi*, a text that was likely composed in Rome between ca. the third and ca. the seventh c. AD and that contains many examples of the spelling confusion between <i> and <e>. (88) Second, similar figures as those emerging from the present study also appear in GAENG, 1968, p. 61-64, and p. 147-154, who analysed vocalic “misspellings” in a corpus of Roman Christian inscriptions dating back from ca. the fourth to ca. the seventh c. AD. GAENG’S (1968) investigation could only locate 21 instances of <e> for /i/, as against 1084 cases of <i> written correctly (a degree of error of only ca. 1.9%). As ADAMS, 2007, p. 657-658 points out, this second fact is not likely to demonstrate that the merger of the CL short-high and mid-long vowels was in this late period not

(88) LEPPÄNEN and ALHO, 2018, p. 474-475. Providing an exact dating for the *Appendix Probi* still represents the crucial point of a long academic debate. On this particular topic, cf. MANCINI, 2007 and, more recently, ASPERTI and PASSALACQUA, 2014. Cf. also DE PAOLIS, 2015.

taking place in Rome, since Romance outcomes clearly indicate that the usual merger of the CL long /ē/ and short /ĭ/ actually did occur in Rome, as it did in most parts of the Italian Peninsula. Consequently, the almost non-existent rate of error concerning the incorrect use of <e> for /ĭ/ in our corpus is very likely to have a non-linguistic explanation: one may hypothesise that the epigraphic corpus from Rome was the work of fairly good scribes, whose orthographic competence was able to obscure the linguistic changes that were occurring in speech. This is further confirmed by the comparison with the degree of error concerning the use of <e> for /ae/ in the (roughly) contemporary and syntopic inscriptional corpus analysed in PAPINI, 2019, p. 108. With the exception of the *Graffiti del Palatino*, even the error rate pertaining to the <ae>/<e> spelling variation is very low, ranging from ca. 1.6% in formal inscriptions to ca. 4% in informal texts. This circumstance might of course have a very negative impact on a quantitative and statistical analysis such as the one performed in the present article, since the (alleged) orthographic competence of Roman scribes might have easily disguised the sociolinguistic dynamics that emphasised the vocalic merger of /ĭ/ and /ē/. Nonetheless, I believe that the current analysis may still shed some new light on the modalities that characterised the spread of this change across the social spectrum.

In this respect, the most interesting result that emerges from CHART 5 is the striking contrast in the distribution of the <e>/<i> graphemic oscillations between inscriptions that were composed during the mid-Republican age and during the whole period from the late Republic through the first three centuries of the Roman Empire. The distribution of *e*-spellings in the epigraphic records that date back to after the year 120 BC clearly takes the form that one would expect in the case of a change from below: percentage figures concerning the spelling variation between <e> and <i> are very low in the case of formal inscriptions, but these same figures gradually increase in informal epigraphic documents, to reach their peak in diaphasically low texts. Based on a Pearson's *X*-square test, this distributional pattern is very unlikely to merely be due to chance,⁽⁸⁹⁾ as the low *p*-value obtained from this test actually suggests the existence of a very significant statistical association between the formality of the inscriptions and the use of <e> for /ĭ/, at least for those texts written in Rome between ca. 120 BC and ca. AD 300 ($X^2(2) = 44.466, p < 0.001$).⁽⁹⁰⁾ The analysis of the standardised residuals (TABLE 6) further confirms that cases of <e> for /ĭ/ occurring in formal and diaphasically low records gave the greatest contribution to the obtained *p*-value. Not only did this analysis indicate that significantly fewer cases of <e> for /ĭ/ occurred in the context of formal inscriptions (std. res. = -2.398), but it also showed that such *e*-spellings were attested in diaphasically low texts with much more than the chance frequency (std. res. = 6.152).⁽⁹¹⁾

(89) This test examines whether two categorical variables (in the present case, the number of instances of <e> for /ĭ/ with respect to the corresponding correct spellings, and the register of the texts in which these spellings occur) are independent of each other.

(90) Conventionally, a *p*-value <0.05 is regarded as significant.

(91) Just as the *p*-value of a *X*-square indicates whether the alleged association between two categorical variables is statistically significant, the value of the standardised residuals (that is, a measure of the error between the expected and the observed frequencies in a *X*-square) expresses the contribution of each cell to the obtained *p*-value. A standardised

<e> for /i/ in Latin inscriptions from Rome (120 BC-AD 300)		Formal	Informal	Diaphasically Low
<i> for /i/	Count	12843	8885	922
	%	99.876	99.731	98.821
	Std residuals	0.114	-0.042	-0.292
<e> for /i/	Count	16	24	11
	%	0.124	0.269	1.179
	Std residuals	-2.398	0.891	6.152
$\chi^2(2) = 44.466, p < 0.001$				

TABLE 6: X-square test and analysis of the standardised residuals

In other words, the quantitative and statistical analysis performed so far is likely to have shown that, during the period ranging from the end of the second c. BC to the beginning of the fourth c. AD, the open pronunciation of the CL short /i/ as [i] held the value of a “sub-standard” (and allegedly stigmatised) sociolinguistic variable, confined to the (at least diaphasically) lowest varieties of the Latin diasystem. This variable could thus find its own way into the orthography of inscriptional texts that had been realised on a merely private basis (*i.e.*, *instrumenta inscripta* or *tabellae defixionum*), but was much less likely to be represented in the spelling of (formal) epigraphic documents for a public purpose.

In an attempt of providing a more nuanced description of the sociolinguistic dynamics that characterised the shift in quality of the CL short /i/ towards the place of articulation of the long /ē/, I have further analysed the distribution of the 56 *e*-spellings discussed in this article by means of a log-linear analysis for categorical data, an extension of the standard X-square procedure, which accounts for significant interactions among more than two categorical variables.⁽⁹²⁾ In the present case, this procedure has been used to relate the two variables already addressed in the X-square test above (that is, ratio of correct and incorrect spellings, and formality) with the study of a third categorical variable, namely time. That is, the log-linear analysis permitted an investigation of whether the degree of error concerning the use of <e> for /i/ in epigraphic records adhering to different diaphasic registers varied significantly over time from the mid-Republican age up to the late Imperial period. Such a three-way log-linear analysis produced a final model that retained all the effects (*i.e.*, the saturated model, having a likelihood ratio $\chi^2(0) = 0$ and $p = 1$), an output indicating that the highest order three-way interaction (*viz.* degree of error x formality x period) was statistically significant ($\chi^2(6) = 21.921, p = 0.00125$).

residual value greater than 1.96 or smaller than -1.96 indicates that a particular cell made a statistically significant contribution to the result of the X-square (the plus or minus sign indicating the direction of that contribution).

(92) An introduction to log-linear analysis and a walkthrough on how to perform it in RStudio is offered in FIELD *et al.*, 2012, p. 835-852.

In other words, the analysis suggested that the distribution of the investigated *e*-spellings in formal, informal, and diaphasically low inscriptions varied significantly during the four chronological periods that have been considered in the present article. The saturated model produced in our analysis has been visualised by means of the mosaic plot in TABLE 7, which provides a graphic representation of the frequency data regarding the cases of <e> and <i> for /i/ that occur in our corpus.⁽⁹³⁾ As this mosaic plot exemplifies, even the analysis of the log-linear model seems to have further confirmed the hypothesis that, during the period from the late Republic to the late Imperial period, the open realisation of the CL short /i/ (*viz.* [i]/[e]) was likely confined to the lowest register of Latin. Indeed, the results of this log-linear analysis have suggested that many more cases of <e> for /i/ than expected happened to cluster in the context of diaphasically low texts during both the late Republic and the late Empire. More importantly, this analysis is also likely to have highlighted the existence of a significant difference in the distribution of the *e*-spellings attested in late Republican and late Imperial texts and in epigraphic records that were composed during the early Empire (ca. AD 1-150). For this statistical test has suggested that the absence of cases of <e> for /i/ in formal inscriptions that date back to the latter period is very unlikely to be due to chance (see the red shading of the relevant cell in the mosaic plot).⁽⁹⁴⁾

In my opinion, the distribution of the *e*-spellings in early Imperial inscriptions (which have no cases of <e> for /i/ in formal epigraphic records) may be related to the standardisation process (selection of a particular variety of the language, codification of this variety in school and grammar, election of a canon of authors to provide a model for speakers' linguistic choices, etc.) that the Latin Language experienced from ca. the early first c. BC to ca. the late first c. AD.⁽⁹⁵⁾ As CLACKSON, 2011b, p. 242 points out, interest in the "correct" use of the language as a social marker seems to have reached its peak during the early Empire, to the extent that not even the emperor was immune from criticism.⁽⁹⁶⁾

(93) The area of each box in the plot is proportional to the frequency of the relevant variable that the same box represents. As for the shading, the colour of each box exemplifies the contribution of the relevant cell to the obtained *p*-value. Blue indicates a positive (and statistically significant) standardised residual value for the figure that the cell exemplifies, whereas red stands for a negative estimate for the same value (the darker the colour, the more significant the contribution).

(94) The log-linear model in TABLE 7 also suggested that the concentration of *e*-spellings in diaphasically low inscriptions of the early Empire is not statistically significant (*cf.* the grey shading of the relevant box in the mosaic plot). This result, however, is likely only to reflect the fact that these inscriptions attest many fewer cases of both <e> and <i> for /i/ than the diaphasically low texts composed during the late Republic and the late Empire (*cf.* TABLE 5).

(95) As CLACKSON, 2011b, p. 237-242 points out, the way towards the standardisation of Latin seems to have commenced in the early first c. BC, when the anonymous treatise known as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (ca. 90 BC) provides the first definition of *Latinitas* ('correct) Latin', as *sermo purus* and *ab omni vitio remotus*. This process likely reached its summit ca. two centuries later, when Quintilian (ca. AD 35-100) could list Virgil, Horace, Livy, Sallust, Cicero, and Caesar as the *auctoritates* that Romans could set alongside their Greek counterparts and that would provide speakers with a model for "standard" Latin. For the stages that led to the creation of "Classical" Latin, *cf.* also ADAMIK, 2015. For standardisation in modern languages, *cf.* among others AMMON, 2015.

(96) See, for instance, the very well-known episode concerning the senator *Mestrius*

Based on the results of the quantitative and statistical analysis so far, one might thus hypothesise that the spreading of the change [i] > [i] (> [e]) across the social spectrum was influenced by the rise (and decay) of the Latin standard: although it largely kept its status as a “sub-standard” variable, the open pronunciation of the CL short /i/ might have experienced a certain expansion during the late Republic (when cases of <e> for /i/ are even attested in the context of formal inscriptions). But this pronunciation seems to have been temporarily banned from the most formal registers of Latin during the early Empire (when the “pressure” of the standard seems to have reached its highest point), to then probably experience a new and broader expansion during the late Empire. This hypothesis might also explain why most cases of <e> for /i/ that were found in late Imperial formal inscriptions happened to cluster in the *Carmina Arvalia*, as these (official) texts were probably the work of (uneducated) servile scribes, and might therefore (at least partially) mirror the attempt of less prestigious speakers to adhere to the standard language.⁽⁹⁷⁾ The generalisability of this explanation, however, needs to be validated by further breaking down the effects of the log-linear analysis performed here in the context of a more exhaustive statistical study, which I shall pursue in a future contribution.

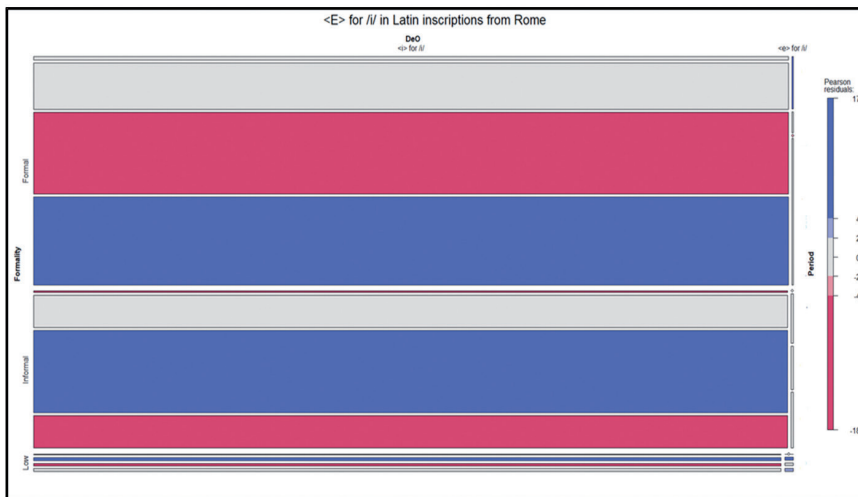


TABLE 7: log-linear analysis for categorical data (mosaic plot)

Florus and *Vespasian*, which is reported by *Svetonius, Vesp, 22*.

(97) As SCHEID, 1998, p. IV-V points out, the creation of the epigraphs concerning the *Acta Fratrum Arvalium* took place in several phases and involved various personalities from different social strata. First, a detailed report of the entire rite was put together at the behest of the *magister* of the fraternity (usually of senatorial rank). Second, this report was registered in the *codex Fratrum Arvalium*, under the supervision of a *commentariensis* (either a freedman or a slave), who was even responsible for the selection of those passages that were to be transcribed on stone. Third, the actual *codex* was written by the so-called *tabularii* (a particular category of *servi publici*). Finally, some passages were carved on stone by several writers (either slaves or *ingenuii*).

Having analysed the epigraphic records that were composed between ca. 120 BC and ca. 300 AD, the final section of this article will focus on those cases of <e> for /i/ that occur in mid-Republican inscriptions. As highlighted in § 2.2.1, all the *e*-spellings from that period are clustered in formal inscriptions (*cf.* also CHART 5), a fact that is very inconsistent with the distributional pattern that one would expect in the case of a change from below. Based on the log-linear analysis in TABLE 7, this distribution is not likely to be coincidental, since our analysis seems to have confirmed that significantly more cases of <e> for /i/ occurred in formal inscriptions during the mid-Republic (even in comparison with the other periods investigated here). In my opinion, it would be unwarranted to justify this distribution by simply asserting that the occurrence of similar *e*-spellings in “learned compositions” would only “testify for the openness of the vowel *i* in educated speech” (as is commonly assumed).⁽⁹⁸⁾ For this notion does not justify the fact that (apart from the form *hec* in *CIL*, I² 9) all *e*-spellings attested in inscriptions from the mid-Republic actually involve lexical items that are themselves part of the “learned” tradition. Moreover, if Adams were right (*cf. supra*), one would expect to find instances of <e> for /i/ even in informal or at least diaphasically low texts, but we do not see this in our corpus.

As discussed, of the 5 instances of <e> for /i/ that were found in epigraphic records from the mid-Republican age, 3 actually occur in the two inscriptions that constitute the eulogy of *Lucius Cornelius Scipio*, son of *Barbatus* and consul in the year 259 BC (*CIL*, I² 8 and *CIL*, I² 9). A close inspection of these two epigraphic texts, and a comparison with the well-known inscription on the *Columna Rostrata* (*CIL*, I² 25), may therefore be the first step towards the solution of the problem regarding the distribution of the *e*-spellings from the mid-Republic. The inscriptions read as follows (the relevant cases of <e> for /i/ are highlighted in bold):

CIL, I² 8: *L(ucios) Cornelio L(uci) f(ilius) Scipio*
aidiles, cosol, cesor.

Translation: Lucius Cornelius Scipio, son of Lucius,
(he was) aedile, consul and censor.

CIL, I² 9: *Honc oino ploirume cosentiont R[omane]*
duonoro optumo fuise viro C[or]nelio(m)]
Luciom Scipione. Filios Barbati
çonsol, censor, aidilis hic fuet a[pud vos];
hęc cepit Corsica Aleriaque urbe,
dedet Tempestatebus aide mereto[d].

Translation:⁽⁹⁹⁾ This man alone, most Romans agree, was the best of good men: Cornelius Lucius Scipio. Son of Barbatus, he was consul, censor and aedile among you. He took Corsica and the city of Aleria; he gave to the deities of the Storms a temple in return for the benefits he received.

(98) ADAMS, 2013, p. 70, but *cf.* also *supra* § 1.

(99) The English version of this text is from CLACKSON and HORROCKS, 2007, p. 140, with minor changes.

As several scholars point out, the overall concise and simple language of the *Scipionum elogia CIL*, I² 6-9 exemplifies the most important features of the official and formal Latin that was in use in Rome during the third and the mid-second c. BC. Already very literary in their character, *CIL*, I² 8-9, for example, display several archaising spellings that refer to many of the key sound changes in the transition from the so-called “Old” to “Classical” Latin. When it comes to vowels, one may particularly emphasize the absence of vowel weakening in <Cornelio> (for *Corneliūs*: *CIL*, I² 8; l. 1) and <cosol> (instead of *consul*; l. 2), but also in <oino> (instead of *ūnūm*; l. 1), <optumo>, <viro>, <dedet>, and <aide> (for *optīmūm*, *vīrūm*, *dēdīt*, and *aedēm*), etc. As for consonants, one may consider the dropping of final /-m/ and /-s/ in each possible context except for the forms <aidiles> (*CIL*, I² 8; l. 2), <Luciom>, and <filios> (*CIL*, I² 9; l. 3). Even /n/ is usually omitted before /s/ (cf. <cosol>, <cesor>: *CIL*, I² 8; l. 2, and <cosention>: *CIL*, I² 9; l. 1), but <ns> is written normally in *CIL*, I² 9; l. 4, which attests that <n> had been already restored at the time when the eulogy of *Barbatus*’ son was composed.

In addition to such old-fashioned spellings, *CIL*, I² 9 also features an intentional archaism in the form <plourume> (which stands for the CL *plūrīmī* ‘many’). The form *plourume* would be expected, which probably represents a remodelling of Old Latin *pleirumei* (<PIE **pleh₁-is-mmoi*) based on the neuter comparative *plous* ‘more’ (<**pleus*, which was in turn modified from PIE **pleh₁-jos* because of the influence of its antonym *minus* ‘less’).⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ The second vowel in <plourume> is also relevant. Here, as in the form <optumo> (l. 2), the *u*-spelling (instead of /i/) represents the so-called *sonus medius*, which is characterised by the graphemic oscillation between <u> and <i> (another artificial, and intentional, archaism).⁽¹⁰¹⁾

In my own view, the occurrence of such an intentional archaism as <plourume> in *CIL*, I² 9 is key for understanding why all the *e*-spellings in Roman inscriptions dating back to the mid-Republican age happen to cluster in formal texts, as will be shown by the comparison with *CIL*, I² 25, the very famous *elogium* of the consul *Caius Duilius* on the *Columna Rostrata*. The inscription recalls this consul’s naval victory over the Carthaginian fleet in the year 260 BC, during the first Punic war. *Caius Duilius*, therefore, held his consulship only one year before *Lucius Cornelius Scipio*, whose honorary inscription (*CIL*, I² 8-9) has been presented above. But *Duilius*’ eulogy cannot have the same dating as the *Scipionum elogia*. As Mommsen points out, the shape of the letters and the very same material used for the monument actually suggest that this particular text should be dated to the early Empire, probably the Augustan (or even the Claudian) period.⁽¹⁰²⁾ Nonetheless, *CIL*, I² 25 can be still seen as a very important document for the problem addressed in the present article, since it is clearly re-modelled on the simple and solemn style that characterises the celebratory inscriptions of the Scipio family. To offer just some examples of this, *Duilius*’ eulogy contains the sort of paratactic phrases (of the type “he did x, he did y”) that one also finds in *CIL*, I² 9 (e.g. *CIL*, I² 9, ll. 5-6: *hec cepit Corsica Aleriaque urbe, dedet Tempestatebus aide mereto[d]*

(100) CLACKSON and HORROCKS, 2007, p. 142.

(101) CLACKSON and HORROCKS, 2007, p. 138-142. Cf. also WACHTER, 1987, p. 301-342, and CIANCAGLINI and KEIDAN, 2018, p. 291-293.

(102) Cf. *CIL*, I², p. 386-387 and CLACKSON and HORROCKS, 2007, p. 108.

= *CIL*, I² 25, ll.: 5-7 *Macela[mque opidom][p]ucnandod cepet...[bene][r]jem navebos marid consol primos c[eset]...*. *CIL*, I² 25 also displays several old-fashioned spellings that reproduce some authentic Old Latin features, such as the use of the grapheme <c> for /g/ (<macistratos>; l. 4 and <[p]ucnandod>; l. 6), the omission of geminate consonants (<olorum>; l. 11 and <numei>; l. 15), the absence of vowel weakening (<consol>; l. 7 and <exfocient>; l. 5) etc. Finally, even the honorary inscription on the *Columna Rostrata* displays several “artificial” and intentional archaisms of the type already observed in the spelling <plourume> in *CIL*, I² 9. The form <dictatored> (l. 11), for instance, reveals the overextension of the ending /-d/ (which was typical of the *i*-stems) to the 3rd declension ABL.SG. of a consonant stem, whereas such spellings as <claseis> and <naveis> (ACC.PLUR; ll. 9 and 13) attest the incorrect use of the diphthong <ei> instead of /ī/, “in the mistaken belief that this ending...was earlier spelled with the diphthong”.⁽¹⁰³⁾

More importantly, *CIL*, I² 25 also attests 6 instances of <e> for /ī/. 4 of these (the IND.PERF.3RD.SG. <exemet>, <cepet>, and <ornavet>; ll. 3, 6, and 8, and the preposition <en>; l. 6) may be regarded as simply archaising forms.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ But the same cannot be said of the form <navebos> (instead of the CL *navībūs* ABL.PLUR.; ll. 7 and 9), since this *e*-spelling occurs in the very same context as the form <Tempestatebus> in *CIL*, I² 9. Moreover, the literary and markedly archaising character of *CIL*, I² 25 definitely speaks against viewing such a form as <navebos> as a “phonetic” spelling showing the open pronunciation of the CL short /ī/ as [i] during the early Imperial period. In light of the evidence, the best solution therefore seems to be the one proposed in CLACKSON and HORROCKS, 2007, p. 110, who suggest that even <navebos> is an intentional archaism, of the type already observed in such spellings as <plourume> (*CIL*, I² 9), <dictatored>, <claseis>, and <naveis> (*CIL*, I² 25). The writer might have used the grapheme <e> here to represent the CL short /ī/ in order to reproduce the archaic and solemn style of the *Scipionum elogia*, based on the false assumption that the relevant vowel “would have been unweakened”⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ during the mid-third c. BC. This hypothesis is strengthened further by the “orthographic correction” that occurs at l. 9 of the *Columna Rostrata*. Here, the writer had initially spelled the word *navībūs* as <navebus>, employing the customary ending <-bus> of the 3rd declension abl./dat.PLUR. But they subsequently corrected themselves by superimposing an <o> grapheme over the <u> that they had previously written.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ The only compelling reason for such a “correction” must have been the stonemason’s desire to reproduce the Old Latin ending <-bos> (<PIE *-*b^hos*>), which is sometimes attested in early Latin inscriptions.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

Intentional archaisms of this type are a bit similar to such hypercorrect forms as, for instance, <hinsidias> (instead of *insidias* ‘ambush ACC.PLUR.’),

(103) CLACKSON and HORROCKS, 2007, p. 110, on which the linguistic commentary provided in the present paper for both *CIL*, I² 8-9 and *CIL*, I² 25 is based. Cf. also the entire discussion at p. 108-111. For *CIL*, I² 8-9, cf. p. 138-142.

(104) For the old ending <-et> in the perfect, cf. *supra* § 2.1. The form <en> is also attested in *CIL*, I² 4, the so-called Duenos vase.

(105) CLACKSON and HORROCKS, 2007, p. 110.

(106) Cf. *CIL*, I², p. 384.

(107) LEUMANN, 1977, p. 437 and CIANCAGLINI and KEIDAN, 2018, p. 279.

in Catullus' *Carmen* 84: just as hypercorrection is the overextension of a prestigious feature (in the latter example, the use of word-initial /h-/) because of the speakers' desire "to sound closer to standard language",⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ a "false" archaism such as <navebos> could be linked to the authors' attempt to elevate the language of their text, due to their perception of archaisms as adhering to a more formal and literary register.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ I thus propose to label this type of phenomenon as a "hyperarchaism".

The fact that <e, o>, instead of /ī, ū/ could have a positive sociolinguistic value in the orthography of early Latin inscriptions is further confirmed by the analysis of the ending <-os> vs. <-us> in personal names by TAMPONI, 2017, who analysed a corpus of 414 Latin inscriptions (from Rome and the surrounding countryside) dating from ca. 400 BC to ca. 50 BC. She found that the Old Latin ending <-os> is generally preferred over <-us>, both in Rome and in the countryside, in epigraphic documents that date back to before 250 BC. A different picture emerges regarding inscriptions composed between ca. 250 BC and ca. 50 BC. Not only does the ending <-os> (instead of <-us>) generally occur more often within funerary inscriptions of freeborn citizens, but this same ending is mainly used at Rome in honorary inscriptions for illustrious and noble personalities who had often held public offices. As TAMPONI, 2017, p. 120-123 concludes, this fact is due to the linguistic "prestige" that was maintained by the "archaising" variant <-os> as compared to <-us>: since archaism was perceived as an integral part of a higher register, it sometimes altered the spelling of such formal inscriptions as *tituli honorari*, as it did in *CIL*, I² 8-9 and *CIL*, I² 25.

When this last piece of evidence is added to what I have already argued about the (alleged) intent of "hyperarchaising" forms such as the ones that occur in the *Scipionum elogia* (and in the *Columna Rostrata*), we can attempt to explain the peculiar distributional pattern of *e*-spellings in Roman mid-Republican Latin inscriptions. If the author(s) of *CIL*, I² 25 perceived the use of <e> for /ī/ as an "old" and "prestigious" feature, to the extent that they even overextended this feature to an etymological short /i/ as in <navebos>, would it really be unwarranted to hypothesise that a similar explanation might also apply to such forms as <aidiles>, <hec>, and <Tempestatebus> in *CIL*, I² 8-9? In other words, the comparison with the *Columna Rostrata* suggests that we should not view the instances of <e> for /ī/ that occur in mid-Republican Roman inscriptions as "phonetic" spellings showing that the CL short /i/ was already realised as [i] from as early as the mid-third c. BC. On the contrary, the *e*-spellings would be better explained as "hyperarchaising" forms employed in formal inscriptions because of the perceived association between archaism and a formal register. One might hypothesise that such "hyperarchaisms" were remodelled on (actually) old-fashioned spellings of the type of <dedet> and <mereto>, for not only were similar *e*-spellings still in use in Latin epigraphy during the third and the second c. BC, but they were also perceived as an integral part of the solemn and literary style that characterises the *elogia* of the Scipio family (cf. <dedet> and <meretod> in *CIL*, I² 9; l. 6).

(108) CLACKSON, 2011c, p. 507.

(109) ROVAI, 2008.

Even negative evidence should be taken into account. For example, one must emphasize the fact that the mid-Republican age lacks diaphasically low (or even informal) texts of considerable length, which is not true for our other time periods. Nonetheless, the hypothesis advocated in the present article may provide a coherent (and linguistically informed) explanation for some of the inconsistencies that challenge the study of the CL vowel system during the Roman Republic. First, it may explain why all mid-Republican instances of <e> for /ī/ cluster in formal epigraphic texts. Second, it may also clarify why (with the exception of the form <hec> in the same *CIL*, I² 9) mid-Republican *e*-spellings involve lexical items that are not part of the everyday register (such as theonyms and names referring to public positions and roles). If the hypothesis proposed here is correct, one should therefore suggest that the change /ī/ > [i] (> [e]) did not enter the Latin diasystem before the second c. BC, at least as far as the Latin “spoken” in Rome is concerned.

Conclusions

The detailed filing of 4080 synchronic and syntopic but diaphasically different inscriptions from the city of Rome allowed us to identify 121 instances of <e> for /ī/ that might testify to the shift in quality of the CL short /ī/ towards the place of articulation of the long /ē/. But the qualitative analysis in § 2 has led us to dismiss 65 of those instances as merely archaising forms or as “special cases” having an alternative (either linguistic or non-linguistic) explanation. In the context of the quantitative and statistical study in § 3, the remaining 56 cases were set against the corresponding “standard” orthographies by considering the “degree of error” concerning the use of <e> for /ī/ in formal, informal, and diaphasically low inscriptions. In order to conduct this study on a maximally coherent corpus (§ 1.2), a further division was made among inscriptions based on time period, namely the mid-Republic (ca. 250-120 BC), the late Republic (ca. 1-191 BC), the early empire (ca. AD 1-150), and the late Empire (ca. AD 151-300). The results have shed new light on the sociolinguistic dynamics that characterised the merger of the CL short /ī/ and long /ē/ as a closed /e/.

First, the analysis of the distributional pattern concerning the *e*-spellings (instead of /ī/) that occur in Latin inscriptions from the mid-Republic (§ 2.2.1, and § 3) may suggest that the change /ī/ > [i] (> [e]) did not occur in Rome before the second c. BC. For not only do all the mid-Republican instances of <e> for /ī/ cluster in formal inscriptions (of the type of the *Scipionum elogia*), but they also primarily involve lexical items that are not part of the everyday register (such as theonyms and nouns indicating public positions and roles). These *e*-spellings may thus be better explained as “hyperarchaising” forms than as phonetic spellings testifying to the openness in quality of the CL short /ī/ from as early as the mid-third c. BC.

Second, and conversely, the distribution of *e*-spellings in epigraphic records that were composed between ca. 120 BC and ca. 300 AD is more consistent with the figures of a change from below: cases of <e> for /ī/ are more frequent (with respect to the corresponding standard orthographies) in informal than in formal inscriptions, and most frequent in diaphasically low texts. This distribution is likely to account for the fact that, during the entire

period from ca. the last century of the Roman Republic through the first three centuries of the Roman Empire, the open realisation of the CL short /i/ (that is, [i]/[e]) was probably regarded as a “sub-standard” feature, to the extent that it appeared mainly in the orthography of less formal epigraphic documents.

Finally, the log-linear analysis performed in § 3 seems to have highlighted some important differences in the distribution of *e*-spellings that occur in our various time periods. It may have shown that the open pronunciation of the CL short /i/ probably went through a certain “expansion” across the social (and diaphasic) spectrum during the late Republic, to the point that it sometimes appeared even in formal and informal inscriptions. But from this time onwards, the history of this change seems to be interwoven with the rise and decay of the Latin “standard”: previously confined to the lowest varieties of the language by the grammatical norm of the early Empire, this open pronunciation seems to have enjoyed a new and broader spread during the late Imperial period, which anticipated, in a certain sense, the subsequent “Christian” and Romance developments.

The generalisability of these results is, of course, subject to several specific limitations. First, the accuracy of my analysis may be affected by the structural deficiency of available data, which derives from the (supposed) orthographic competence of Roman scribes. Second, the hypothesis advocated here needs to be validated by further breaking down the effects of the log-linear analysis in § 3 through a more extensive statistical study, which I intend to offer in a future contribution. Finally, my hypothesis also needs to be confirmed by more extensive studies on both the spelling variation between <o> and <u> and the presence of other non-standard spellings that might testify to the shift in quality of the CL short /i/ (such as <i> for /ē/).

In spite of these limitations, however, I think that the present study is still a useful contribution to the relevant literature on the “Vulgar” Latin vowel system. Not only has it provided a more fine-grained sociolinguistic analysis of the (Proto-)Romance merger of the CL long /ē/ and short /i/, but it has also paved the way for future studies of this topic.

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SUMMARY

Alessandro PAPINI, *The <e>/<i> spelling variation in Latin inscriptions from Rome (250 BC-AD 300). A preliminary (historical) sociolinguistic analysis based on the inscriptional data*

This paper analyses the cases of < e > for /ī/ which occur in a corpus of 4080 Latin inscriptions from Rome. All the inscriptions considered were divided into four periods (“mid-Republic”, “late Republic”, “early Empire” and “late Empire”), and in three sociolinguistically different groups (“formal”, “informal” and “diaphasically low” texts). Chapter 2 offers a qualitative study of all the *e*-spellings (for /ī/) in the corpus, in order to ascertain whether they might actually testify to the merger of /ē/ and /ī/. Chapter 3 examines the distribution of these *e*-spellings in the chronological and sociolinguistic groups defined above. The obtained results support a new interpretation for the mid-Republican instances of <e> for /ī/ (ca. 250-120 BC). Moreover, they also suggest that, from this period onwards, the merger of /ē/ and /ī/ took the form of a “change from below”.

Latin epigraphy – historical sociolinguistics – corpus linguistics – <e>/<i> spelling variation

SAMENVATTING

Alessandro PAPINI, *De spellingvariatie <e>/<i> in Latijnse inscripties uit Rome (250 v. Chr.-300 n. Chr.). Een voorlopige (historische) sociolinguïstische analyse op basis van de inscriptiegegevens*

Deze studie onderzoekt de gevallen van <e> voor /ī/ in een corpus van 4080 Latijnse inscripties uit Rome. Alle inscripties werden onderverdeeld in vier perioden (“midden-Republiek”, “late Republiek”, “vroege keizertijd” en “late keizertijd”), en in drie sociolinguïstisch verschillende groepen (“formele”, “informele” en “diafasisch-lage” teksten). Hoofdstuk 2 biedt een kwalitatieve studie van alle *e*-spelling (voor /ī/) in het corpus, om na te gaan of ze daadwerkelijk kunnen getuigen van de fusie van /ē/ en /ī/. Hoofdstuk 3 onderzoekt de verdeling van deze *e*-spelling in de chronologische en sociolinguïstische groepen die hierboven zijn gedefinieerd. De resultaten ondersteunen een nieuwe interpretatie voor de midden-Republikeinse gevallen van <e> voor /ī/ (ca. 250 v. Chr.-ca. 120 v. Chr.). Bovendien suggereren ze dat vanaf deze periode de fusie van /ē/ en /ī/ de vorm aannam van een “verandering van onderin”.

Latijnse epigrafie – historische sociolinguïstiek – corpuslinguïstiek – <e>/<i> spellingvariatie

RÉSUMÉ

Alessandro PAPINI, *La variation graphique <e>/<i> dans les inscriptions latines en provenance de Rome (250 av. J. -C.-300 ap. J. -C.). Une étude préliminaire de sociolinguistique historique basée sur les données épigraphiques*

Cet article analyse les cas de <e> pour /ĩ/ qui apparaissent à l'intérieur d'un corpus de 4080 inscriptions en provenance de Rome. Toutes les inscriptions étudiées ont été réparties en quatre périodes (« milieu de la République », « fin de la République », « début de l'Empire », « deuxième partie de l'Empire »), et en trois groupes différents du point de vue sociolinguistique (textes « formels », « informels » et « diaphasiquement bas »). Le deuxième chapitre consiste en une analyse qualitative de toutes les graphies de <e> (pour /ĩ/) au sein du corpus, afin de savoir si elles peuvent effectivement témoigner de la fusion de /ē/ et /ĩ/. Le troisième chapitre examine la distribution de ces graphies e dans les groupes chronologiques et sociolinguistiques définis ci-dessus. Les résultats obtenus autorisent une nouvelle interprétation des cas républicains de < e > pour /ĩ/ (250 av. J. C.-120 av. J. C.), en plus ils suggèrent qu'à partir de cette période la fusion de /ē/ et /ĩ/ est due à un « changement par le bas ».

épigraphie latine – sociolinguistique historique – linguistique de corpus – variation graphique <e>/<i>

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