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ON THE ALLEGED VARIATION
DĒLĒNIŌ ~ DĒLĪNIŌ

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1. Introduction

The status of *delinio*, the spelling variant of *delenio* in manu-
scripts (for Plautine and Ciceronian loci, see Corssen II^2 [1870]
420) abides an explicit critical assessment. The problem is to know
whether it is feasible to regard *delinio* as an authentic variant;
i.e., whether it is possible, at least in principle, that e.g. Plau-
tus sometimes wrote *delenio* and sometimes *delinio*. As *delenio* is
doubtlessly the orthographic representation of /dēlēniō/, it is clear
that if *delinio* is authentic, it must stand for /dēlīniō/. So, the
solution to the authenticity problem depends on whether the reality
of the phonological representation /dēlīniō/ can be established in
an intersubjectively controllable manner.

2. In search for the source of *delinio*

2.1. It is generally held that *delinio* reflects the prehistor-
ical change from the initially accented *dḗlēniō to dēlīniō (Sommer,
1914, 102; Leumann, 1977, 54); whereas *delenio* is defined as standing
for a later, yet prehistorical, recomposition on the model of the
simplex verb *lēniō*, i.e. *dē-lēniō* (Solmsen, 1897, 15; LEW I^3 338).
To be sure, as an exemplification of the prehistorical sound law
ē>ī, *dēlīniō* would indeed evidence the authenticity of the manuscript

spelling *delinio*, but unfortunately this sound law is a linguistic
artifact - despite the fact that it is accepted in the most authori-
tative codifications of Latin historical phonology and morphology.
The reality of this sound law hinges crucially on two instances only,
viz. *suspĭciō* (<*sŭspēciō) and *dēlīniō* (<*dēlēniō). Therefore,
Otrębski's (1939, 243) note was in order: "Darauf kann man aber kaum
ein Lautgesetz bauen". Furthermore, it is made evident in Nyman (in
prep.) that *suspĭciō* was formed on the verb *suspicor* in accordance
with the relative chronology $e>i>ī$; it is also argued there that the stem
vowel in *suspĭcio* was lengthened in order to differentiate the noun
stem from the verb stem. (Synchronically, then, *suspĭcio* belongs to
those nominalized forms in which the nominalization is morphophono-
logically (co-)signalled by the lengthening of the stem vowel.)

2.2. The upshot of the preceding paragraph is that it is not
feasible to derive *dēlīniō* from *dēlēniō* by means of a sound law.
Consequently, *dēlīniō* must be traced to another source, if we wish
to argue for the authenticity of the spelling *delinio*. One such
source was conceived by Osthoff (1884, 115 n.1) who suggested that
dēlīniō was a folk-etymological word-blend: "... so mag leicht auch
hier bei der bedeutung 'durch schmeicheln oder liebkosungen oder
list gewinnen, für sich einnehmen, bezaubern' die volksetymologie
ihr spiel, und zwar mit *līnum* 'zuggarn, netz', getrieben haben; man
vergleiche unser *umgarnen* oder auch *auf den leim locken*". Osthoff
made his suggestion only casually in a footnote, and obviously it
was not supposed to be taken very seriously, as is evidenced by the
fact that four years later (in 1888, 401) he did not hesitate to
replace it by another suggestion. Nevertheless, this suggestion de-
serves attention, because it involves a possible solution to a se-
mantic peculiarity observable in the relation of *delenio* to the
adjective *lenis* from which it derives.

Delenio belongs to the verb type that has been formed on the
pattern *de*+ADJ+*o*; i.e., by means of the prefix *de*+ attached to a
verb derived on the model of an adjective stem. The meaning is in

principle the same as that of respective simplex verbs (ADJ+o), viz.
'to make ADJ'. For example,

ADJ		*de*+ADJ+*o*	
/+alb+/	'white'	*de*+*alb*+*o*	'to whiten'
/+klãr+/	'clear'	*de*+*clar*+*o*	'to declare'
/+lass+/	'tired'	*de*+*lass*+*o*	'to tire out'
/+mutil+/	'mutilated'	*de*+*mutil*+*o*	'to mutilate'
/+nigr+/	'black'	*de*+*nigr*+*o*	'to blacken'
/+nūd+/	'nude'	*de*+*nud*+*o*	'to denude'
/+prãw+/	'distorted'	*de*+*prav*+*o*	'to distort'
/+sŏl+/	'deserted'	*de*+*sol*+*o*	'to desert, abandon'.

In contradistinction to the foregoing verbs in which the meaning
of the ADJ-stem is transparent, only the simplex verb *lēniŏ* is sem-
antically compatible with the adjective *lēnis*; e.g. Verg. Aen. 2,
782 *leni fluit agmine Thybris*; 8,86-87 *Thybris ... fluvium ... tu-
mentem / leniit*. On the other hand, the meaning of *dēlēniŏ* cannot
be accounted for by the paraphrase 'to make *lēnis*'; thus, it would
scarcely have been possible to say [?]*Thybris fluvium tumentem dele-
niit*. Obviously this semantic idiosyncracy of *dēlēniŏ* must be attri-
buted to an interference coming from another lexeme, and now this
word would conceivably be Osthoff's *līnum*.

    In Plaut. Amph. 844 the manuscript reading *delinitus sum*
(*profecto ita ut me qui sim nesciam*) could be taken as authentic by
the virtue of the meaning 'I have been fooled' which becomes quite
understandable if *līnum* is considered to have exerted an influence
on *dēlēniŏ* both phonologically and semantically. However, editors
usually write *delenitus* after Nonius (278 M. = 427 Ly), and although
we, *qua* linguists, are often not too well served by critical edi-
tions (as is well argued by Frösén 1974; cf. also Meillet 1923), this
editorial solution is likely to be correct.

    Now consider Plaut. Cist. 517 where we again face the problem
of semantic opacity. Here Melaenis disturbs Alcesimarchus' invocation
by pedantic interruptions, until he exclaims: *tu me delenis!* Here the
meaning of the adjective stem /lēni+/ is entirely irrecoverable, but

the semantic gap would be well bridged by referring, again, to the
interference of *līnum*. The trouble is, however, that only *delenis* is
attested in manuscripts, and it would be bad methodology to substitute
the tradited reading for *delinis* just in order to back up an uncer-
tain explanandum. To clinch the case, Osthoff's *līnum* must be re-
placed by Eutyches' *lēna* (GLK 5,454,18). The use of *dēlēniō* wit-
nesses quite clearly that Romans perceived this verb as being related
to *lēna* 'procuress; seductress' and *lēnō* 'procurer; enticer' (recall
also the word-pun in Trabea, com.1 Ribb. *leno delenita argento*).

The semantic impact of *lēna*, *lēnō* on the use of *dēlēniō* ap-
pears, then, in Cist. 517 where the semantic nuance of seduction
(of the attention, in this case) is necessary for the proper un-
derstanding of Alcesimarchus' exclamation. This assumption also backs
up the editorial decision to write *delenitus* in Amph. 844. The in-
fluence of *lēna*, *lēnō* can be perceived also in other Plautine, as
well as in Ciceronian, etc., instances. But let us content ourselves
with only one more example.

In Stich. 456 the parasite Gelasimus decides to pay a visit
to his patron Epignomus, *ut eum advenientem deleniam* (A)/*deliniam* (P)
'in order to get him into a favorable mood, when he arrives'. Here,
too, the authentic spelling is quite evidently *deleniam*, firstly be-
cause it is preserved in the old Ambrosian palimpsest, and secondly
because the choice of *dēlēniō* can be taken as conditioned by the
situation in which Gelasimus is metaphorically assuming the role of
lēnō in order to pander to his own case.

2.3. The above discussion suffices to bring home the claim
that the variant *dēlīniō* can be derived neither by means of the sound
law *ē>ī*, nor by referring to an alleged blend with *līnum*.[1] In fact,

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[1] At the end of his treatment of *suspīciō* Otrębski (1939, 245-6) of-
fers a speculation concerning the source of *dēlīniō*. According to
him, the change *ē>ī* was conditioned by a *horror aequi*: "Dieses Verb
hat sein *ī* wahrscheinlich im Perfekt erhalten, und zwar im Zusammen-
hang mit der schwankenden Gestalt des suffixalen Elements: *-ī-bam*:
-iē-bam. Es standen vielleicht nebeneinander: *dēlēnībam*, aber *dē-
līniēbam*." However, the linguistic conditioning and psychological
backing of this suggestion are questionable (for a criticism of ar-
guments based on the *horror aequi*, see Schopf, 1919, 34-5).

given the association of *dēlēniŏ* with *lēna*, *lēnō*, the possibility
of an authentic *dēlīniŏ* becomes highly improbable. What can, then,
be the source of the spelling variant *delinio*? To answer this ques-
tion, we must ask a more general question: What is the most usual
source of the spelling variation *e/i* in medieval manuscripts? It is
of course the merger of the classical Latin phonemes /i/ and /ē/
into one single phoneme in Vulgar Latin (e.g. Väänänen, 1974, 82).
Now my claim is that also the spelling variation *delenio/delinio*
is an orthographic reflex of this merger. Scholars seem to have
been prevented from venturing this interpretation by the "tic" that
the *-i-* in the variant *delinio* must stand for a long /-ī-/ (cf. the
reasoning of Keller, 1879, 189). But this is an elementary mistake,
because we are of course not allowed to be anxious about metrical
requirement before the authenticity of the variant in question has
been established.

But the merger *i/ē* forms only a general background for the
spelling *delinio*. In fact, *(dē)lēniŏ* came to be "contaminated" with
the verb *linō* 'to smear'. In Vulgar Latin, speakers tended to apply
the inflectional pattern of the 4th conjugation to verbs which ac-
cording to the norm of Classical Latin belonged to the 3rd conju-
gation (see Rönsch, 1875, 285; Neue III[3], 1897, 248-53). As far as
the verb *linō* is concerned, this phenomenon is observable rather
early in technological writers; witness Vitr. 5,10,3 *liniantur*
(norm: *linantur*), Cels. 4,4 *linire* (for *linere* which is, incidentally,
Marx' "correction") (for other instances, see TLL VII, 1456,48-51).
This change implies a move from a less iconic inflectional pattern
to a more iconic one, quite in accordance with what is said by Pau-
nonen (1976) about the dynamic relations of allomorphic influence.
Now, on the sociolinguistic stratum conventionally referred to as
Vulgar Latin, the verb stems /lēnĭ+/ and /linĭ+/, complying to the
same, i.e. 4th, conjugational pattern, became homonymous in conse-
quence of the quantity collapse and the merger *i/ē*; i.e.,

 /lēnĭ+/ > /lini+/
 /linĭ+/ > /lini+/.

Given the homonymy, it is understandable that these verbs, earlier distinct in form and meaning, were confused with each other (cf. TLL VII, 1142,50-1; 1456,47-51), and eventually even abductively perceived as a single polysemous verb the sememic structure of which was, roughly, the conjunction of the sememic structures of the homonymous verbs. That this was indeed the case is evidenced by glossators some of whom present the verb *delenio* as a lexical blend; CGL 4,225,24 *DELINITUS deplacatus unctus* (the first meaning component pertaining to the classical *dēlēniō*, and the second one, to *linō*); likewise 5,496,17 *DELINITI placati delectati uncti*; 5,285,32 gives *DELINITI placati uincti* but *uincti* may be a correction of *uncti* (though this is not absolutely sure; also 4,225,32 has the variant reading *uinctus*). The fact that in glossators' lemmata the verb in question is written invariably as *delinitus, -i* also speaks in favor of the perception of *delinio* as a single lexical entry (in the psychological sense).

3. Epilogue

3.1. The attitude of editors. As a rule, editors always write *delenio*, and in this they happen upon the correct solution. But it must be emphasized that this is likely to be an accident, because whatever the rationale behind this editorial practice is, it is certainly not of a linguistic nature. It has been made plain by Frösén (1974, 206-21) that in their preoccupation with the textual content, editors tend to neglect the formal variation occurring in the manuscripts and to "normalize" the textual form by eliminating the variation according to certain preconceived principles which are supposed to generate the text of the autograph. Often the normalization serves only the convenience of readers, as may be the case in the consistent selection of *delenio* to be written in the current text. This practice may also involve a non-committal way of bringing out the fact that it is impossible to determine which variant was actually used by the author in a given passage. It has be-

come evident, however, that in the case which has been the object
of the discussion in this paper, the editors should always write
delenio in the current text, but the variant spelling, being lin-
guistically significant in that it reflects the état de langue of
later copyists, ought to be recorded in the critical apparatus (cf.
Meillet 1923).

3.2. The attitude of lexicographers. The entries for the
verb *delenio* are usually given in the form "*dēlēniō (-līn-)*", or
something to this effect. This is supposed to be understood so that
dēlēniō is recognized to have the facultative variant *dēlīniō*. We
have seen, however, that **dēlīniō* is an artifact which never existed
as a variant of *dēlēniō* in the system of the Latin language. The
spelling *delinio* is a kind of "rajeunissement" (cf. Redard 1956)
made by later copyists probably *in scribendo* (hence the diffusional
character of the attestations of *delinio*).

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