

JOHANNES KRAMER

A LINGUISTIC COMMENTARY  
ON HEIDELBERG'S LATIN PAPYRUS AMULET

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 74 (1988) 267–272

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn



## A Linguistic Commentary on Heidelberg's Latin Papyrus Amulet

R. W. Daniel and F. Maltomini have made accessible to scholarship a Heidelberg papyrus which was lost during the troubles following World War II. They have restored the text of a Latin amulet by using Karl Preisendanz' hitherto unknown transcription, and they have given a most learned commentary to this only known instance of a Latin magical papyrus with Christian background.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the editors have entered into the language of the papyrus, too; nevertheless it might be useful to comment on the linguistic features of the papyrus with special regard to Vulgar Latin studies, for the papyrus offers an exceptionally large number of phenomena typical of the spoken Latin of antiquity. I shall sum up these features, following the order of succession which is to be found in V. Väänänen's generally used introduction to Vulgar Latin<sup>2</sup> and indicating, wherever possible, the corresponding paragraph in M. Leumann's Latin grammar.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. COLLAPSE OF THE QUANTITY SYSTEM

In spoken late Latin, the classical Latin vowel system based on the distinction between long and short vowels is substituted by a new system in which only the quality of the vowels has distinctive functions. So in stressed syllables  $\bar{e}$  and  $\bar{i}$  converge into  $e$ , and  $\bar{o}$  and  $\bar{u}$  converge into  $o$ ; in unaccented syllables we even find the merger of  $\check{e}$ ,  $\bar{e}$ ,  $\bar{i}$  into  $e$  and of  $\check{o}$ ,  $\bar{o}$ ,  $\bar{u}$  into  $o$ <sup>4</sup> (Väänänen § 54; § 55; § 56; Leumann § 57).

In the Heidelberg papyrus, we find two clear instances of these developments: *Gisum* for *Iesum* (5) and *bulumtate* for *uoluntate* (13). With the editors I should prefer to classify *in nomine Domine* for *in nomine Domini* (20) as the result of attraction, bearing in mind that this mistake has been facilitated by the merger of *-e* and *-i*.

### 2. VOWEL ASSIMILATION

As to *a*, Väänänen (§ 52) establishes «pas de changements spontanés». So *Gebrielu* for *Gabrielum* (15) must be considered as the result of vowel assimilation in adjacent syllables, not too unusual in an “exotic” name. In *Rafelu* for *Rafaelum* (15), too, we observe the effects of vowel assimilation: *a* is assimilated to the following accented *e*. At the same time, however, the sequence of *a + a* is avoided, a phenomenon which could be classified as dissimilation.

---

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to the authors for showing me their edition before it was printed. The result is that my commentary can appear simultaneously with the publication of the text.

<sup>2</sup> Veikko Väänänen, *Introduction au latin vulgaire*, Paris <sup>3</sup>1985.

<sup>3</sup> Manu Leumann, *Lateinische Laut- und Formenlehre*, München 1977 (= M. Leumann / J. B. Hofmann / A. Szantyr, *Lateinische Grammatik*, I).

<sup>4</sup> J. Kramer, *Glossaria bilingua in papyris et membranis reperta*, Bonn 1983, 15.

### 3. MONOPHTHONGIZATION

At the latest during the first century A. D., the Latin diphthong *ae* was reduced to a monophthong (Väänänen § 59; learned people retained diphthongal pronunciation until the third or even fourth century, Leumann § 77). The Heidelberg papyrus, which reflects popular Latin, has many instances of *e* written instead of *ae*: *terre* for *terrae* (4), *celi* for *caeli* (4), *letabitur* for *laetabitur* (7), *prebenisti* for *praeuenisti* (8/12), *eternu* for *aeternum* (10), *seculum seculi* for *saeculum saeculi* (10), *letificabis* for *laetificabis* (11), *celestis* for *caelestis* (14), *bone* for *bonae* (20/21). It is interesting to observe that the inverse, i. e. writing of *ae* instead of *e*, does not occur; and what is more, *ae* does not belong to the writer's orthography - at least it is never used.

### 4. ANAPTYXIS

There seems to be one instance of vowel development (anaptyxis): *bulutu* for *uultu* (11). Vulgar Latin, however, only has the inverse phenomenon, syncope (*calidus* > *caldus*, see Väänänen § 63; Leumann § 107). In view of the fact that the writer of the Heidelberg papyrus is not inclined to hypercorrectism, we should consider the possibility that we are not faced here with anaptyxis, but with an attempt to express velar *l*; in fact, it is known that preconsonantal *l* in Latin was pronounced as a velar sound, similar to Rhenish, Russian, or Catalan preconsonantal *l* (Väänänen § 118; Leumann § 19), and possibly our writer tried to express this particularity by *lu*.

It is not sure whether we have another example of anaptyxis in *uir tute* (6), because we find *birtute* in line 7 without any trace of anaptyxis; maybe Preisendanz has misinterpreted the traces.

### 5. VOWEL CONTRACTION

Hiatuses tended to be eliminated in Vulgar Latin. «Lorsque deux voyelles consécutives ont le même timbre, ou des timbres très rapprochés, elles tendent à se contracter en une voyelle longue avec le timbre des voyelles en question, ou avec celui d'une d'elles» (Väänänen § 74; see also Leumann § 133). The Heidelberg papyrus has *tum* for *tuum* (6/7) and *benemter* for *uehementer* (8; the *-h-* is a mere graphical sign to separate vowels of the same type, see below 10.).

### 6. PROTHETIC VOCALIZATION

The prothetic vowel *i* before “*s impurum*”, that is preconsonantal *s* at the beginning of a word (Väänänen § 82; Leumann § 116), occurs once: *iscripsi* for *scripsi* (13; the preceding word ends in a vowel). There are, however, more instances of *s impurum* (1; 6; 14).

### 7. BETACISM

In the Heidelberg papyrus *b* is written very often instead of consonantal *u*: *birtus* for *uirtus* (6/7), *benemter* for *uehementer* (8), *bitam* for *uitam* (9), *bulutu* for *uultu* (11), *bulumtate* for *uoluntate* (13), *bolumtatis* for *uoluntatis* (21). There is only one instance of this phenomenon in internal position, *prebenisti* for *praeuenisti* (8/12), and as this is after a prefix, we cannot really speak of intervocalic position. The inverse writing, *u* for *b*, does not occur, and there is not a single instance of consonantal initial *u* written as such.

If, when, and under which circumstances the original labio-velar fricative *v* (written *u*, like the vowel, and pronounced like *w* in English *water*) has merged with the original bi-labial occlusive *b*, is a very disputed question; Peter Blumenthal, *Die Entwicklung der romanischen Labialkonsonanten*, Bonn 1972, 25-46 gives a useful survey. In any case one must differentiate between initial and internal position, as Carlo Battisti has pointed out most clearly:<sup>5</sup> «In questo conguaglio confluiscono due tendenze, di cui una, quella della pronuncia *b-* per *v-* in posizione iniziale e postconsonantica, va tenuta distinta dalla lenizione intervocalica di *-b-*. Unico elemento che congiunge questi due fonemi è il fatto che la pronuncia intervocalica di *-v-* era così lene di fronte a quella della stessa consonante in posizione iniziale o post-consonantica, da far sì che quest'ultima potesse essere praticamente conguagliata a *b-*, come ci dimostrano nomi locali del tipo *Volsinii Bolsena*, *Mevania - Vebania - Bevagna*. Ma, mentre *v* può passare a *b*, il caso opposto, cioè, *-b- > -v-*, è realmente aderente alle premesse della lenizione, in quanto esso è limitato alla posizione intervocalica. Alcuni esempi di lenizione del *-b-* intervocalico passato a *-v-* datano del secondo secolo; essi aumentano sensibilmente nel terzo. ... Questo *-v-*, fino dal periodo classico, aveva una pronuncia affievolita, di semivocale, simile alla *w* inglese, cfr. lo scherzo *cauneas - cave ne eas* in Cicerone, *div.*, II, 84. Può dunque essere che *b-*, usato per *v-* iniziale, non sia che un ripiego per distinguere fra *v-* forte (*b*) e *-v-* debole (*u*). In conformità a questa supposizione sta il fatto che *b-* per *v-* viene usato correntemente dal secolo II ... in tutto il mondo latino, Africa compresa (*birtus, bila, boluntas*), ma specialmente in Italia, cfr. per es. *bocant* per *vocant* nello Pseudo Dioscoride III, 395, *livera* per *libera* nella *Concordia de sing. causis* (VIII sec.) 259, 6».

In summary, in internal position *-b-* and *-v-* merged into a sound which was felt to be different from initial *v-* (and, of course, initial *b-*). For a naïve speaker the difference between initial *b-* and *v-* had much less importance than that between initial *v-* and intervocalic *-v-* (including *-b-* pronounced in the same way as *-v-*). So one was tempted to write *b-* at the beginning of a word and *-u-* in internal position. However, this clear distribution was counteracted by the wish to respect classical orthography with its differentiation of *b* and consonantal *u* in all positions;<sup>6</sup> so we find many instances of hypercorrect writing. Nevertheless, *b-* instead of *u-* in initial position is much more frequent than the inverse case. It is even possible to indicate the geographical extension of the phenomenon: «Le bétacisme a été fréquent à Rome et en Italie du sud, rare en Italie du nord, Espagne et Gaule, un peu plus fréquent en Afrique. Les provinces sud-est européennes se sont situées à cet égard à côté de l'Italie centrale et méridionale».<sup>7</sup>

Only texts with very little respect for the literary language show a distribution of *b* and *u* which comes near to a possible rule, according to which *b* would be used in initial position and *u* in the interior of a word. The vulgar *Folium Parisinum*<sup>8</sup> does not show a single instance of initial *u-*, and the Heidelberg papyrus, which has no propensity to hypercorrectism, corresponds with it. The

<sup>5</sup> C. Battisti, *Avviamento allo studio del latino volgare*, Bari 1950, 153-154.

<sup>6</sup> Hence the appearance of manuals concerning the correct use of *b* and *u* (e. g. *Adamantii siue Martyrii de B muta et V uocali libellus*, Keil GrL 7, 165-199).

<sup>7</sup> Haralambie Mihăescu, *La langue latine dans le sud-est de l'Europe*, București / Paris 1978, 195

<sup>8</sup> J. Kramer, *op. cit.*, 89-95 (= Nr. 14).

fact that the differentiation between *b* and *u* is observed in the interior of the words, may be due to the circumstance that, but for the incertain [*c*] *onserutor* (4/5), we only find verbal forms, where the distinction between *-b-* and *-u-* was important for the temporal system (future or perfect, at least in some forms) and therefore the distinction was felt to be necessary.

As to the use of *b* and *u*, E. A. Lowe's Sinai texts show roughly the same features as the Heidelberg papyrus, but, if the explanation given above is right, that alone is no reason to presume any particular affinity. With reference to Lowe's assumption that frequent use of *b* instead of *u* might have its source in the normal Greek substitution of *v* by  $\beta$ , I think it would be wise not to stress this aspect, all the more so as according to a rough calculation of R. L. Politzer<sup>9</sup> substitution of *u-* by *b-* has the lowest percentage in the whole Roman Empire in Latin inscriptions from Greece, whereas it has its peak in inscriptions from Latium and southern Italy.

The Heidelberg papyrus shows the results of a general tendency of vulgar Latin texts to substitute every initial consonantal *u-* by *b-*; the parallel tendency of always writing *-u-* in the middle of a word is less manifest, because it is counteracted by the preservation of the distinction between *-b-* and *-u-* in all morphologically relevant cases.

#### 8. PALATALIZATION OF *C* AND *G* BEFORE *E* OR *I*

There are very few direct attestations of palatalization of *c* and *g* before *e* and *i* (Leumann § 159); nevertheless the beginning of this process goes back to the first century B.C. (Väänänen § 100). In the Heidelberg papyrus, the writing *ecelsis* for *excelsis* (20) suggests a pronunciation like \**esselsis*. Consonantal *i-* and *g* before *e* and *i* merged into a common sound, which offered «degrés d' assimilation variés selon le temps, la classe sociale, voire la région» (Väänänen § 96); our papyrus has *Gisum* for *Iesum* (5) and *Geremielu* for *Ieremielum* (16/17).

#### 9. ASSIBILATION OF *-(C)TI-* AND *-DI-*

Assibilation of *-ti-*, *-cti-*, and *-di-* is well attested (Väänänen § 99; Leumann § 139; J. Kramer, *Literarische Quellen zur Aussprache des Vulgärlateins*, Meisenheim 1976, 70-73). In the Heidelberg papyrus we find *benedizione* for *benedictione* (8; 12/13), *delectaziones* for *delectationes* (11/12), and *gauzio* for *gaudio* (11).

#### 10. LOSS OF ASPIRATION

At least in the course of the first century B. C. there was a general tendency not to pronounce initial aspiration (see Catullus 84, the famous poem on Arrius); consequently the Heidelberg papyrus has *osanam* for *hosanna* (20) and *ominibus* for *hominibus* (20). Internal *-h-* has always been a mere graphical sign, indicating syllabic division (Väänänen § 101); in Vulgar Latin texts this sign tends to be omitted, as in *benemter* for *uehementer* (14). The Greek aspirates  $\theta$ ,  $\phi$ ,  $\chi$ , which correctly had to be written *th*, *ph*, *ch*, were never really integrated into popular Latin (Väänänen §

<sup>9</sup> R. L. Politzer, *On B and V in Latin and Romance*, Word 8, 1952, 211-220, especially 213; E. G. Parodi, *Del passaggio di V in B e di certe perturbazioni delle leggi fonetiche nel latino volgare*, Romania 27, 1898, 177-240.

102; Leumann § 165); so *Cri[s]tum* for *Christum* (5/6), *Micaelu* for *Michaelum* (14), *tronu* for *thronum* (18) are nothing exceptional. *Sambaoc* for *Sabaoth* (19) is to be seen in this context, too.

#### 11. DEGEMINATION

Degemination, that is simplification of double consonants to single consonants (Väänänen § 109), is to be observed in *osanam* for *hosanna* (20).

#### 12. SIMPLIFICATION OF GROUPS OF CONSONANTS

There are some effects of the general tendency of Vulgar Latin to simplify groups of consonants by assimilation (Väänänen § 113). In combinations of nasal and occlusive consonants «la nasale implosive était très faiblement articulée» (Väänänen § 119), which could result in the complete elimination of the nasal: *dicut* for *dicunt* (19). This weakness of nasals may also explain one of the particularities of the Heidelberg papyrus, the writing of *mt* for *nt* (in Classical Latin, the combination *mt* is not possible, because by insertion of a glide consonant there has to be written *-mpt-*): The preceding vowel was nasalized (written expression: vowel + *m*), but there was no nasal consonant left. Our papyrus has: *bulumtate* for *uoluntate* (13), *bolumtatis* for *uoluntatis* (21), *amte* for *ante* (18); as simplification of *-nct-* to *-nt-* was regular (Väänänen § 116), *samtus* for *sanctus* (1; 19) belongs here, too.

#### 13. UNORGANIC *M* BEFORE *B*

At first sight *Sambaoc* for *Sabaoth* (19) belongs into the context of weak nasal consonants, being a hypercorrectism (other instances: Väänänen § 119). But given the character of a loan word from Hebrew one has to be careful. In Greek, unorganic nasals before β are frequent, especially in the case of Semitic words.<sup>10</sup> So it would be possible, that the *m* of *Sambaoc* does not result from Vulgar Latin phonetic peculiarities, but from the primarily Greek tendency of «irrationale Nasale vor Verschlusslauten»;<sup>11</sup> of course Greek words with μβ managed to enter into spoken Latin, as is to be seen in the history of σάββατον / σάμββατον.

#### 14. *CT* > *T*, *X* > *S*

A special type of simplification of groups of consonants is to be seen in «l'amuissement de *k* devant *t*» (Väänänen § 123; Leumann § 197), which is illustrated by *beneditus* for *benedictus* (19), and in the reduction of *x* to *s* (Leumann § 204): *res* for *rex* (7; 20), *destera* for *dextera* (12). Also the form *ecelsis* for *excelsis* is to be seen in this context (for the exact pronunciation, see 8.).

#### 15. LOSS OF FINAL NASALS

All final consonants had a weak pronunciation in Vulgar Latin (Väänänen § 126). Final *-m*, in particular, has never been a “normal” consonant; it was probably in the first place a sign for the

<sup>10</sup> W. Schulze, *Samstag*, *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung* 33, 1895, 366-386, especially 376-386.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Dieterich, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der griechischen Sprache*, Leipzig 1898, 92.

nasalization of the preceding vowel (Leumann § 228). The Heidelberg papyrus very often drops *-m*: *eternu* for *aeternum* (10), *angelu Micaelu* for *angelum Michaelum* (14), *[ang]elu Rafaelu* for *angelum Raphaelum* (15), *angelu Azazielu* for *angelum Azazielum* (16), *angelu Urie[lu]* for *angelum Urielum* (16), *angelu Geremielu* for *angelum Ieremielum* (16/17), *angelu Fotuelu* for *angelum Fotuelum* (17), *tronu* for *thronum* (18). There is one instance of hypercorrect *-m*: *osanam* for *hosanna* (20).

#### 16. METATHESIS, ASSIMILATION, AND DISSIMILATION

At first sight, *benemter* (18) is a clear attestation of metathesis, representing *bementer* = *uehementer*; one has to remember, however, that *nt* is always written *mt*. Under these circumstances, we either can speak of the assimilation of the first *-m-* to the following *-nt-*, which is, however, written *-mt-*, or of the dissimilation of *-m-* from the following *-mt-*; it is a matter of taste, which solution one prefers. In the case of *alimalia* for *animalia* (18) we have nasal dissimilation *n ~ m* and at the same time assimilation to the following *-l*.<sup>12</sup>

#### 17. MORPHOLOGY

Hebrew names of persons are not treated as indeclinables, as we are used to from Christian writers and the Vulgate, but they are given the *-us* of normal Latin masculine nouns: *Micaelu* (14), *Gebrielu* (15), *Rafelu* (15), *Azazielu* (16), *Urielu* (16), *Geremielu* (16/17), *Fotuelu* (17). It is certainly a pure coincidence, that Flavius Iosephus gives normal Greek *-ος* to the Hebrew names which have no desinence in the Septuagint.

There is one instance of change in conjugation: *regere* is treated as a verb of the *e*-conjugation, *regent* for *regunt* (18).

#### 18. CONCLUSIONS

The Heidelberg papyrus is one of the rare attestations of the written expression of spoken late Latin without much interference of literary traditions. The writer reproduces - of course by means of the normal Latin alphabet - the pronunciation that Latin words had in the fifth or sixth century: He hardly even attempted to respect Latin orthographical conventions. For a relatively short text, consisting of only 21 lines, the papyrus offers an enormous number of phonetic features of Vulgar Latin, some of which have hitherto been only seldom attested.

Siegen

Johannes Kramer

<sup>12</sup> There are many Romance forms of this word which presuppose some form of dissimilation similar to that attested in the Heidelberg papyrus (French *aumaille*, Spanish *alimaña*, Portuguese *alimária*, etc.; see W. Meyer-Lübke, *Romanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Heidelberg <sup>3</sup>1935, Nr.476, and V. García de Diego, *Diccionario etimológico español e hispánico*, Madrid <sup>2</sup>1985, 465), but it is difficult to say whether these forms go back to Vulgar Latin dissimilation or resulted from more recent, independent Romance dissimilations.