

Latin *paene* ‘almost’ and Related (?) Forms

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A. Introductory

- 1 this paper: elaboration of brief “personal communications” from me (recorded at Neri 2007:78–9, *LIPP* 2.81n97) about the etymology of Latin *paene*
[the version in Neri also cited (with brief discussion) at *EDLIL* s.v. *paene*]
- 2 including: discussion of forms often thought to be related to *paene*, esp.
 - a. *paenitet* ‘it causes regret/dissatisfaction’
 - b. *paenūria/pēnūria* ‘lack, want, need’
 - c. *pēminōsus/paeminōsus* ‘cracked, with chinks’

plan for the rest of the paper

B. Lat. *paene*: basic philological details (attestations, a formal problem, semantics/usage)

C. Previous etymological proposal

D. A new etymology

E. Related (?) forms (and additional details)

F. Conclusions

B. Lat. *paene*: basic philological details

attestations

- 3
 - a. early Lat.: Pl. 23x (+ jocular superlative adv. *paenissumē* 3x), Ter. 9x, Enn. 1x, Lucil. 1x, Pacuv. 1x, Afran. 1x
 - b. Classical Lat. (and later): very abundantly attested (e.g. Cic. about 235x)

formal problem: *-ae-* vs. *-ē-*

- 4 messy Lat. problem: *-ae-* ~ *-ē-* alternations (Leumann 1977:68–9 with older lit.), already noted by Varro (*L.* 5.97, 7.96–7); see esp. Sturtevant 1940:125–9, de Melo 2019:2.735, 1014–16
- 5 some contributing/complicating factors and developments:
 - a. “rustic” monophthongization of Lat. /ae/ > /ē/, cf. Umbrian (e.g. Lat. *haedus* ‘kid’ [Varro: “in urbe”], cf. Go. *gaits* etc.; but *hēdus* [“in Latio rure”] and *fēdus* [“Sabini”])
 - b. in reaction to 5a.: “hyperurban” <ae> for /ē/ in rustic or other special vocab. (e.g. *fēnum* ‘hay’ probably < **d^heh₁-no-* [EDLIL s.v.], but commonly *faenum*)
 - c. “hyperurban” <ae> also in reaction to some Gk. loans with <η> (e.g. σκηνή → *scēna* ‘the stage’, but mostly *scaena*)
 - d. late Lat. monophthongization of Lat. /ae/ (Väänänen 1981:38), whence both
 - i. ubiquitous <e> for Lat. /ae/ in medieval MSS
 - ii. hypercorrect <ae> even for /ē/ (Pompeii+)
 - e. a special development: /-ai-/ > /-ē-/ in medial syllable before nasal consonant (Nussbaum apud Livingston 2004:53), as in *obscēnus* ‘ill-omened; offensive’ (with *scaevus* ‘left, unfavorable’)

- 6 bottom line: each *-ae-* ~ *-ē-* form must be evaluated on its merits, with relevant factors taken into consideration (attestation pattern, type of vocab., likely background, etc.)
- 7 a first look at *paene* in these terms:
 - a. MS and inscriptional data favor *-ae-* (cf. *TLL* s.v.): *paene* “semper in cod. *A PLAUTI*” and generally in inscriptions, but *-e-* “saepe in codd.” (cf. **5d.i.**)
 - b. not a rustic (or other technical) term, and no reason to assume a Greek borrowing
 - c. no prefixed forms, thus **5e** not a factor
 - d. *paene* listed by Leumann (1977:68) under “*ae* für *ē*” and placed with “*pēnūria*” (more on this form below), among exx. with “hyperurbane Aussprache” (though “fast nur umstrittene Beispiele”)
 - e. but Leumann’s judgment probably based on the traditional etymology, with inherited **-ē-*; so this will have to be evaluated (details below, in **C.**)

semantics, usage of *paene*

- 8 first pass: *OLD* **1** (main entry) “Almost, all but, practically”, plus a few specific locutions (e.g. *paene dicam* ‘I might almost say’, Cic.+; *paene insula* Caes., Cat. → *paeninsula* Liv.+)
- 9 more revealing: *TLL* main entry: “pertinet potius ad *totum enuntiatum* (vel ad partem orationis, quae enuntiati vice fungitur; *paene* verbo fere anteponitur”) — and the vast majority of examples have perf. or pluperf. indic.
- 10 cf. the Plautine usage of *paene*: nearly all with perf. indic., and all but two with *paene* preceding the verb; similarly Ter.
- 11 most common: *TLL* category “ante verba *delendi, pereundi*”, with some patterns repeated, e.g. Pl. —
 - a. *paene confregi* (Mo. 453, 456), *paene effregisti* (Am. 1026, Ba. 586)
 - b. *paene concidi* (Ep. 200), *paene ... decidi* (Per. 594)
 - c. *interfecisti paene* (Tru. 518), cf. *paene perdidisti* (Mi. 408), *perdidit paenissimum* (Au. 466)
 - d. *paene oblitus fui* (Poe. 40, Ps. 171), *paene oblitus sum* (Poe. 118)
- 12 similarly Ter.: *paene incidi* (Andr. 782), *paene periit* (Hec. 818), *paene perdidit* (Heaut. 814), *paene inlusi vitam filiae* (Andr. 822); et al. OLat., e.g. *paene perdidisti* Afran. tog. 264

C. Previous etymological proposal

- 13 etymology of *paene*:
 - a. often said to be unknown or uncertain (e.g. *TLL*, *OLD*); similarly *DELL*: “Aucun rapprochement sûr; mot à diphtongue en *ae*” (the latter statement: *DELL* code for “suspect form!”)
 - b. but connection with *paenitet* and *paenūria* (also *paeminōsus*, **2c**) often mooted
- 14 there is, though, a traditional etymology of *paene* (Walde-Pokorny II.8, *IEW* 792–3, *LEW* s.v.):
 - a. neuter **pēne* (*LEW*: “G[rund]b[e]d[eutung] ‘mit Mühe und Not, mit Ach und Krach’”) of adj. **pēnis* ‘damaged, defective’, i.e. neut. used adverbially (type *facile* ‘easily’)
 - b. i.e. **peh₁-ni-* to (*LIV*) **peh₁i-* ‘tadeln, schmähen’ (Ved. *pīyati* ‘scorns, taunts’, Go. *fijands* ‘Feind’)

- 15 Lat. simplex adjs. in **-ni-*: very rare (perhaps only *omnis* ‘all’, *sēgnis* ‘sluggish’), but a possible formation; still, two cogent objections registered by de Vaan (*EDLIL* s.v. *paene*):
- a. “the semantics do not match well”, since “[t]he basic meaning of the stem *paen-* seems to be ‘missing, lacking’”
 - b. “the root ... does not explain Latin *-ae-*”, cf. 9a on *-ae-* favored in MS and inscriptional data
- 16 additionally, if *paene* belongs with *paenitet* (2a) and if that actually continues **pēni-* (14):
- a. **peh₁-ni-* could account also for a **peh₁-ni-to-* (possibly in the background of *paenitet*, on which more below), cf. (roughly) Ital. **moj-ni-ko-* (O. *múiníkú*, *múiníkad*, etc.)
 - b. but **peh₁-ni-* is distinctly unhelpful for the *-ū-* of *paenūria/pēnūria*

D. “And now for something completely different ...”: basic idea + 2 versions

the basic idea

- 17 *paene* a compound consisting of preverb (or adverbial particle) **pe* ‘away’ + a form of the verb seen in Gk. αἵνυμαι ‘take’ (cf. Myc. *a₃-nu-me-no* MN) and TB *ai-* (TA *e-*) ‘give, mid. take’ (*LIV* **h₁ai-* ‘geben; nehmen’, but Leiden **h₂ej-*: e.g. *EDG* s.v. αἵνυμαι) [Malzahn (2010:543) on the root: PIE **h₂ej-* ‘give’, or “possibly rather **h₁ai-*”]
- 18 **pe* (and **po*) + collocated verbal roots: in extenso Weiss 1993:49–59, Neri 2007:65–79, further *LIPP* 2.74, 81, Hackstein 2023:3–4, e.g. (not exhaustive!)
- a. **pe* + **h₂erk-* ‘hold (off), restrain’ (Hitt. *harzi*, *harkanzi*, Lat. *arceō*): Hitt. *pē har(k)-* ‘offer’, Lat. *parcō* ‘spare, refrain from’ and *porcō* ‘hinder’
 - b. **pe* + **h₂elh₂-* ‘wander’ (Gk. ἀλάομαι ‘wander’, Lat. *ambulō* ‘walk around’): Lat. *pālor* ‘wander’
 - c. **pe/o* + **h₁ej-* ‘go’ (Ved. *éti* etc.): Hitt. *paizzi* ‘goes’, OCS *po-iti* (Russ. *pojti*) ‘go off’
 - d. **pe/o* + **h₃elh₁-* ‘be destroyed’ (Gk. ὀλλυμι, Lat. *aboleō* etc.): Gmc. *falla-*, Li. *pūlti*, Arm. *p’lanim* ‘fall’ (Neri 2007)
 - e. additional examples attested as isolated nominal forms in Latin (Weiss 1993:56):
 - i. **pe* + **h₁ed-* ‘eat, bite’ (Lat. *edō* etc.): Lat. *pēdis* ‘louse’ (Pl.+)
 - ii. **pe* + **d^hg^{wh}ej-* ‘perish’ (cf. Ved. *kṣíti-*, Gk. φθίσις ‘perishing, decay’): (**pe-sitis* >) Lat. *pestis* ‘destruction’ (Pl.+)
- 19 **pe* + **h₁ai-* (or **h₂ej-*) itself: traditionally seen in Hitt. *pāi*, *piyanzi* and CLuv. *pīya* ‘give’ (*LIV*), but this analysis now generally abandoned — contra:
- a. Kloekhorst 2006 (**h₁p-ó₂-ei* / **h₁p-₂-énti*, cf. **h₁ep-* ‘take’)
 - b. Melchert 2022:113–16 via **peh₁i-* (but with unclear cognates, i.e. not **peh₁i-* as above [14]; followed and developed by Yates 2025)
- 20 **h₁ai-* (or **h₂ej-*) in Italic:
- a. direct attestation as verb: perhaps not —
 - i. yes: Untermann (1995:345–9, 2000:71–2) for U. *aitu/aitu*, *aituta* ‘move, drive’
 - ii. no: U. *aitu* generally rather with Lat. *agō* etc. < **h₂ég₂-e/o-* (Meiser 1986:124, Weiss 2010:106, 186)
 - b. but widely accepted for *ti*-stem in O. *aeteis*, **a]íttíúum** ‘part (of a possession)’ (Untermann 1995:348 and 2000:55–6, *EDLIL* 28 s.v. O. *aeteis*, Weiss 2010:233)

- 21 on Italic **aḡnu-* (~ Gk. ἀῖνυμαι): the canonic *n*-infix form should have zero grade of the root (cf. *LIV* **h₁i-néu-*, s.v. **h₁aḡi-*); but secondary full grade no more problematic in Italic than in Gk. (cf. Lat. *sternuō* ‘sneeze’)

version 1 (deimperative)

- 22 pre-Lat. **p(e)-aḡnu* ‘take [s.th.] away!’ > (with elision) **p’aḡnu* > *paene* regularly (PIE **-ũ #* > Lat. *-e #*: Weiss 2015, 2020:159)
- 23 thus **paḡnu* + V = ‘V, [but] take [s.th.] away’ ~ ‘almost V’; esp. (10) **paḡnu* + V_[perf] ‘X-ed, [but] take [s.th.] away’ = ‘almost V-ed’, ‘nearly V-ed’, ‘didn’t quite V’ etc.
- “extreme” nature of the verbal meaning in early Lat. (11–12) somehow significant?
- 24 about the (pseudo-)“serial” construction with 2 sg. imper. + V = ‘almost V’:
- a. may seem (or may be) difficult; but typology of ‘almost’ expressions very varied, and does include imper. formations — e.g. Russ. *počti* (dial. *počitáj*) ‘almost’ (Fasmer–Trubačev 3.349 s.v.)
 - b. a possible early reinterpretation of imper. **paḡnu* will be suggested below

version 2 (via suffix **-ni-*, cf. C. on **peh₁-ni-*)

- 25 adj. **p(e)-aḡ-ni-* ‘lacking’ < ‘taken away, removed’ (again [14a] neut. **paḡne* as adv., type *facile* ‘easily’); but as noted (16b), *i*-stem not promising for *paenūria*, so no further consideration here

E. Related (?) forms (and additional details): *pēminōsus/paeminōsus*, *paenitet*, *paenūria/pēnūria* *pēminōsus/paeminōsus* ‘cracked, with chinks’ (of a surface)

- 26 a hapax (Varro, *R.R.* 1.51.1), in a survey of the features of a threshing-floor (*area*): it should be built of packed dirt — but if it’s made of clay, it should not develop cracks from heat (*aestu peminosa*)
- 27 MSS of Varro transmit the form as <peminosa>, hence the booking as *pēminōsus* in most standard lexica (e.g. *OLD*, *TLL*, *DELL*, but s.v. *paeminōsus* in *LEW*)
- 28 otherwise found only in a gloss by Nonius (240.12L), with echo in *CGL* (V.646.39):
- a. [Nonius] PAEMINOSVM, mali odoris: a paedore dictum. Varro de Re Rustica lib. I.
 - b. [*CGL*] peminosum: fetidum, a pedore
- 29 Nonius’s etymology from *paedor* ‘filth, stench’ (echoed in *CGL*) has no basis; but his spelling <paem-> is a good candidate for a hyperurban <ae> in an agricultural or technical term perceived to have “rustic” /ē/ (5ab)
- 30 given /pēm-/ and the semantic basis in ‘cracking’ or the like:
- a. no difficulty in maintaining the traditional etymology (so *LEW*) based on PIE **peh₁i-* (14)
 - b. cf. more specifically the **péh₁-mṇ* of Hom.+ πῆμα ‘distress’ and its masc. counterpart in Ilr. (e.g. AV+ *pāmán-* m. ‘skin disease, scabies’, cf. *EWaia* II.121 s.v.: “~ lat. *paeminōsus* [für *pēm*°]”) [cf. Eng. *distressed* (materials): “intentionally marred or faded to convey an antique or used look”, *AHD* 3 s.v.]

***paenitet* ‘it causes regret, dissatisfaction’ (Part 1)**

- 31 in terms of form: <paen-> better represented than <pen->, e.g.

- a. Plautus: nearly always in *A* (11x out of 15)
 - b. regularly in *CIL* XIII 1668 (*Orat. imp. Claud.*, “Lyon tablet”; 48 CE): PAENITENDI, PAENITET (2x)
- 32 etymological discussions of *paenitet* generally connect *paene* and sometimes *paenūria* (connection among these three already Gell. 17.1.9), together with the following plausible suggestions:
 - a. the basis is a participial form **paenitus* (cf. *paenitūrum* [Accius])
 - b. impersonal *paenitet* developed under the influence of other 2nd conj. impersonal verbs (*piget* ‘it disgusts’, *pudet* ‘it causes shame’, *licet* ‘it is permitted’, etc., cf. *pigito-*, *pudito-*, *licito-*)
- 33 beyond that there’s significant disagreement, e.g. in two monographs on the 2nd conj.:
 - a. Vernet i Pons (2008:387–8) operates with the traditional etymology of *paene* via PIE **peh₁i-* (14), but does not explain <paen->
 - b. Hocquard (1981:156) rejects this approach because it cannot account for <paen->
- 34 but Hocquard’s own account is not promising: basis in adj. **paenis* (neut. *paene* used adverbially), whence “denominative” *paenitet* with **-t-* as “un élargissement à valeur déterminative”, as perhaps in *niteō* ‘shine’, *fateor* ‘assert’, *lateō* ‘be hidden’; but
 - a. there is no regular Lat. “denominative” formation in **-t-*
 - b. no clear evidence for a “valeur déterminative” for **-t-* or **-t-ē-* (and unclear what that would mean for *paenitet*)
 - c. no explanation for the background of her adj. **paenis*
- 35 for *niteō*, *fateor*, *lateō*: such forms are built to verbal adj. stems (**ni-tó-* etc.); thus
 - a. again: something like **paenitus* is a possible basis for *paenitet* (32a)
 - b. but rather than **paenito-* as such, in principle **pānV-to-* (before vowel weakening)
 [more below in *paenitet* ‘it causes regret, dissatisfaction’ (Part 2), 47–49]
- paenūria/pēnūria* ‘lack, want, need’
- 36 for *paenūria* (Ter. *Ad.* 442+): good evidence for <paen-> both inscriptionally and in early MSS — e.g. symptomatic Festus entry (247.28L), where the MSS show <penuria> but the alphabetic order favors <paenuria>; hereafter assume *paenūria* as basic
- 37 for the background, authorities (since Gell., 32) vaguely assert relationship with *paene* and point to a formal parallel with (and influence from) the semantic opposite *luxuria* (Pl.+) ‘extravagance’ (← adj. **luxu-ro-*, cf. *luxus* ‘excess’)
- 38 more explicitly: Solmsen (1909:157, followed by *LEW* s.v. *pēnūria*) conjectures a *u*-stem nominal basis **pēn-u-*, whence adj. **pēnū-ro-* (again comparing *luxuria*)
- 39 two further points about Solmsen’s treatment:
 - a. he alleges comparison with Gk. *σπάνις* ‘scarcity, lack’ (Hdt., trag.+); rightly rejected already by Walde-Hofmann (*LEW* s.v. *paene*) and in any case without support for the presumed *u*-stem
 - b. he has little to say about the formal difference between **pēnū-ro-* and **luxū-ro-*

- 40** for the first time, the proposed deimperative basis **pajnu* for Lat. *paene* (**22**) provides an actual *u*-stem (or at least a “*u*-form”)
[Höfler (2020:120n17) also conjectured a frozen *u*-stem underlying *paene*, with derivational relationship to *paenūria*, but without specifying the background of *paene*; further detail at **46**]
- 41** working backwards from **pajnū-ro-*: this suggests a deinstrumental *ro*-adj. *pajnuh₁-ro-*, formally similar to
a. Lat. *mātūrus* ‘ripe; early’ (← **meh₂-tuh₁* ‘at/with the proper/early time’; Fortson 2007:88)
b. Lat. *astūtus* ‘clever’ (← [instr.] *astū* ‘with cleverness, cleverly’; Weiss 2020:290, 313)
[critique of decasuatives: Fortson 2020; but deadverbials (e.g. deinstrumentals) less problematic (2020:94)]
- 42** this, in turn, suggests that the original imperative **pajnu* ‘take away!’ was reinterpreted as a *u*-stem nominal or adjectival form, roughly ‘(s.th.) taken away, lacking’; formally more than one option, e.g.
a. archaic (adverbial) neut. acc. *u*-stem **pajnu* (i.e. before neut. *u*-stems develop *ū*-inflection) ‘lacking (s.th.)’ > *paene*
b. in *pausa* instr. sg. (“Kuiper form”) **pajnu[h₁]* ‘characterized by a lack (of s.th.)’ > *paene*
- 43** parenthetically: Lat. *paene* (in its primary behavior with verbs, ‘almost X-ed’ etc.) could reflect this nominalized (but adverbial) usage rather than the original imperatival meaning (cf. **24b**)
- 44** interesting parallel for the in *pausa* H-loss option (**42b**): cf. Lat. *rīte* ‘duly, correctly’ beside *rītus* ‘manner, way’, but OLat. virtually restricted to “abl.” (< instr.) *rītū* ‘with [such-and-such] manner, behavior’
- 45** as shown by Weiss (2015): both *rīte* and *rītū* derive from (virtually) the same instr. sg. pre-form, i.e.
a. instr. sg. **(h_x)reġth₂-u-[h₁]* (in in *pausa* H-loss environments) > pre-Lat. **rītū* > Lat. *rīte*
b. instr. sg. **(h_x)reġth₂-u-h₁* otherwise > Lat. *rītū*
[see Weiss 2015:189 (with n.14) for other examples of Latin adverbs from shortened instrumentals]
- 46** thus here also perhaps
a. in *pausa* instr. sg. **pajnu[h₁]* > pre-Lat. **pajnū* > Lat. *paene* *‘lacking’, with verbs ‘almost’
b. instr. sg. **pajnuh₁* > **pajnū* ‘lacking’ (~ adv.) → deinstr. adj. **pajnū-ro-* ‘lacking’, then (with influence from *luxuria*) *paenūria* ‘lack, poverty’
[**pajnū* ~ **pajnū-* (both instr.) like *rīte* ~ *rītū*: this parallel already noted by Höfler (2020:120n17), cf. **40**]

***paenitet* ‘it causes regret, dissatisfaction’ (Part 2)**

- 47** what kind of ‘regret’ or ‘dissatisfaction’, exactly?
a. Hocquard on *paenitet* (1981:156): “la parenté avec *paene* (et sans doute avec *paenūria*) est très vraisemblable, car le sémantisme de tous ces mots implique l’idée d’un ‘manque’” (cf. again *EDLIL* and Gell. on *paen-* [**15a**, **32**])
b. *TLL*: *paenitet* defined via *paenuria* — “i. q. *paenuriae* cuiusdam conscientia afficit aliquem dolore”
- 48** thus attractive to operate with a basis **pajnū*, hence here **pajnū-to-* (cf. **35b** on pre-vowel-weakening **pajnV-to-* rather than generally-assumed **pajni-to-*)

49 expect **paīnū-to-* for deinstr. adj. (type *astūtus*, 41b)? but basis in the short-vowel instr. form also OK in principle (?); or cf. *u*-stem non-primary *ro*-adjs. (**luxu-ro-* [37], **satu-ro-* > *satur* ‘sated’)? — in any case, possible support from other short-vowel **-to-* ~ **-t-ē-* forms (**nī-tó-* ~ *nītē-*, **b^hh₂-tó-* ~ *fatē-*, **lh₂-tó-* ~ *latē-*)

a. perhaps especially: semantically proximate *lateō* (Pl., Enn.+) ‘is hidden’

b. then as above (32b), i.e. **paīnū-to-* > (post-V-weakening) *paenī-t-ē-* (impers., cf. impers. *piget*, *pudet* etc. and intrans. *latet*)

F. Conclusions

50 a. Lat. *paene*, *paenitet*, *paenūria*, with basic sense ‘lack(ing)’, all etymologically related (so already Gell.)

b. the traditional etymology via PIE **peh₁i-* ‘blame, revile’ is formally and semantically unworkable for these

• but it *can* account for *pēminōsus* ‘cracked, with chinks’ (though this is sometimes placed with *paene* etc.)

c. *paene* (+ Verb_[perf]) < **p^hai_{nu}* ‘take [s.th.] away!’, cf. **pe* ‘away’ + **h₁ai-* or **h₂ei-* (Gk. αἴνυμαι)

i. provides a new example of PIE **-ǔ #* > Lat. *-e #*

ii. perhaps with early reanalysis as *u*-stem **paīnu(-)* ‘taken away, lacking’

d. for 50c.ii, specific formal proposal: instr. *in pausa* form **paīnu* (> *paene*) vs. instr. **paīnū-* in deinstr. adj. **paīnū-ro-* (whence *paenūria*), cf. *rīte* and *rītū* (Weiss 2015)

e. adj. **paīnu-to-* ‘lacking’ → **paīnu-t-ē-* ‘is lacking’ > impers. *paenitet*, cf. **lh₂-tó-* ‘hidden’ → **lh₂-t-ē-* ‘is hidden’ > *lateō*

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