

**Zeitschrift:** Revue de linguistique romane  
**Herausgeber:** Société de Linguistique Romane  
**Band:** 21 (1957)  
**Heft:** 83-84

**Artikel:** The chronology of some anglo-norman soundchanges  
**Autor:** Bliss, A.J.  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-399221>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 08.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## THE CHRONOLOGY OF SOME ANGLO-NORMAN SOUNDCHANGES<sup>1</sup>

A number of ME words of AN origin, which in AN contain one of the diphthongs *ai*, *ei*, *oi* (*ui*), *üi* followed by certain consonants or consonant groups, appear in ME with the simple vowels *a*, *e*, *u*; the consonants concerned are [f] and [tʃ], the consonant groups are [ntʃ] and perhaps certain groups beginning with [s]. According to Luick<sup>2</sup> the loss of the second element of the diphthongs took place about 1300. It is clear that this dating does not depend on any direct evidence, since the overwhelming majority of the words in question are not recorded until well after 1300. The following are the dates given in the *NED* for Luick's examples (in some cases the *NED* date is conspicuously too early, owing to the misdating of certain texts) : *abash* (1325), *ashlar* (1370), *brush* (1330), *bushel* (1330), *bustous* (1300), *cash* (1593), *crush* (1330), *cush* (1330), *cushion* (1340), *frush* (13..), *must* (1374), *musty* (1386), *obesh* (13..), *puncheon* (1375), *trash* (1300); to these must be added *usher* (1380).

It is in fact not difficult to show that the loss of the second element of the diphthong must have happened already in AN. It is possible to construct a chronological sequence of soundchanges, each necessarily preceding the next, of which the first is the reduction of diphthongs before certain consonants and consonant groups, and the last can be dated with some accuracy about 1100. The following is the sequence in question :

(1) the reduction of diphthongs before certain consonants and consonant groups;

(2) the shift of stress on the diphthongs *ui*, *üi*, *ue* and the triphthong \**uei* after [k] and [g], with consequent change of the first element to [w];

1. L'auteur emploie les sigles suivants : AN, Anglo-Norman ; CF, Central French ; CL, Classical Latin ; ME, Middle English ; MnE, Modern English ; MnF, Modern French ; *NED*, New English Dictionary ; OF, Old French ; ON, Old Norse ; VL, Vulgar Latin.

2. K. Luick, *Historische Grammatik der Englischen Sprache*, § 427.

(3) the reduction of \**uei* to *üi*;

(4) the reduction of *üi* to *ū*.

Of these soundchanges only (3) is found in CF; the remainder are exclusively dialectal.

The special development of the diphthongs *ui*, *üi*, *ue* and the triphthong \**uei* after [k] and [g] is amply attested among the ME borrowings from AN<sup>1</sup>. Examples with *ui* are *quille* < CŪLCĪTA, *quine* 'coin, coign, quoin' < CŪNĒUM, *quine* 'quince' < COTŌNĒUM, *quiras* < CORĪACĒA; with *üi*, *squirrel* < \*SCŪRIÖLUM; with *ue*, *quēr* < CHÖRUM; with \**uei*, *queint* < CÖGNĪTUM<sup>2</sup>. Doubtful examples are *quiture* and *quiver*: if *quiture* is from \*COCTŪRA it has *ui*, if it is from an OF derivative of *cuit* it has *üi*; *quiver* < \*CÖCRUM seems to contradict the chronology given above, since in this word the shift of stress seems to have followed the reduction of \**uei* to *üi*. Other doubtful examples are *queisy* < AN *coisie* and *squeimous* < AN *escoimous*; since the ultimate etymology is in each case unknown, it is impossible to be certain that the sound development is the same as in *quaint*.

It is probable that the development of *ue* was not quite the same as that of the other diphthongs. The other diphthongs were certainly falling diphthongs; but it is possible that the Western OF rising diphthong *ue* had already been adopted in AN before the date of the shift of stress on the other diphthongs<sup>3</sup>. This difference is represented in ME by a difference of quantity: whereas *cui-*, *cüi-* give ME *qui-* with a short vowel, *cue-* gives ME *quē-* with a long vowel<sup>4</sup>. Clearly two different processes are at work: in one the shift of stress is spontaneous and independent of the context, and is accompanied by compensatory lengthening of the second element; in the other the shift of stress is dependent on the nature of the preceding consonant, and the second element remains short. The

1. On this soundchange see M. K. Pope, *From Latin to Modern French* (1934), §§ 1160, 1161; K. Luick, *op. cit.*, § 417.2.

2. H. M. Flasdieck, *Pall Mall* (1955), 215 footnote, 4 objects to this interpretation of *queint* on the grounds that the correct Latin form is CÖGNĪTUM; but the Latin quantity is doubtful, and there is too much change of quantity between CL and VL to justify such dogmatism. For a list of *quei*-forms in AN see H. Suchier, *Les Voyelles toniques du vieux français* (1906), § 33 c, corrected by E. G. R. Waters, *The Anglo-Norman Voyage of St Brendan* (1928), cxlvii, footnote 2.

3. M. K. Pope, *op. cit.*, §§ 553, 1156.

4. A. J. Bliss, 'Vowel-Quantity in ME Borrowings from AN', *Archivum Linguisticum*, iv (1952), 133 footnote.

change of *ue* to *uē* is exactly paralleled by the change of *ie* to *iē*, which is discussed below<sup>1</sup>.

The next step is to determine whether this shift of stress preceded or followed the reduction of diphthongs before certain consonants and consonant groups. It is customary to establish the relative chronology of two soundchanges by examining words in which the conditions required for both soundchanges are present; normally the recorded forms of the words are consistent with only one chronological sequence. In a homogeneous dialect where all the soundchanges act without exception this method is very reliable; unfortunately AN is very far from being a homogeneous dialect, and there are many exceptions to the two soundchanges in question. The word *custron* < COCISTRŌNEM, for instance, has variants like *coystron*, *quystron*; and *custrel*, of unknown origin, has a variant *coistrel* but no trace of *\*quystrel*. The co-existence of the three forms *custron*, *coystron* and *quystron* is not consistent with either of the two possible chronological sequences, unless there were exceptions to both soundchanges; for if the shift of stress came first the only form should be *quystrel*, and if the reduction of diphthongs came first the only form should be *custrel*. Yet, once we admit exceptions, there is no longer any evidence for either sequence rather than the other.

Fortunately there are two words whose forms are rather more helpful, though neither is free from ambiguities: they are *cushion* < \*COXĪNUM and the obsolete *cuisse*, *cuish* < COXĀLE<sup>2</sup>. The problem of *cushion* is complicated by the existence in OF of anomalous and unexplained forms, the ancestors of MnF *coussin*<sup>3</sup>; *cuisse*, *cuish* is obsolete, and many of the instances recorded by the NED are conscious archaisms. None the less, these two words share one great advantage: AN knew two dialectal forms, only one of which contains the conditions required for the reduction of diphthongs. In the south Norman dialect the reflex of CL [ks] was the normal OF [s]; but in north Norman, as in other northern OF dialects,

1. It is likely that the lengthening of the second element of *ue* was accompanied, in certain dialect areas at least, by some degree of rounding. The word 'choir' is frequently spelt *queor* in western and south-western ME; and the rounded vowel cannot be the result of any ME soundchange, since the rounding mentioned by Luick § 374 is found only in the verb 'weep' and is due to the influence of the past tense.

2. The forms given are those used by the NED, where an ample list of forms can be found.

3. The suggestion in the NED that these forms are also the ancestors of MnE *cushion* will not bear examination.

the reflex was [j]. AN knew two forms of the word *cushion*, *cuiassin* and *cuischin*; the conditions for the shift of stress are present in both, but the conditions for the reduction of diphthongs are found only in the second. If the shift of stress came first, the ME forms should be *quyssyn* and *quyschyn*; if the reduction of diphthongs came first, the ME forms should be *quyssyn* and *cuschyn*.

What we actually find is a mixture of forms; and we must make allowances not only for exceptions to the soundchanges, but also for genuine mixed forms<sup>1</sup>. A survey of the ME forms reveals that the most common forms are in fact *quyssyn* and *cuschyn*; forms of the type *cuyschyn* are extremely rare, but *quyschyn* is not uncommon. If the shift of stress came first, the rare *cuyschyn* and the common *cuschyn* can only be explained on the assumption that there were very many exceptions to the shift of stress, nearly all of which were affected by the reduction of diphthongs; but this assumption is not confirmed by the forms of other words, in which exceptions to the shift of stress are very rare<sup>2</sup>. If, on the other hand, the reduction of diphthongs came first, then the common *quyschyn* can be very easily explained as a mixture of *quyssyn* and *cuschyn*<sup>3</sup>. This conclusion is fully confirmed by the forms of *cuisse*, *cuish*, where (in the plural) both *quyssewes* and *cushes* are very common, while *quyschewes* is extremely rare; this latter is most probably a mixed form, and the rare *cussues* is certainly mixed.

If it is accepted that the reduction of diphthongs preceded the shift of stress after [k] and [g], the next step is to show that the shift of stress preceded the reduction of \**uei* to *üi*. Evidence within AN leaves no doubt that this is so, for the *quei*-forms cited by Suchier<sup>4</sup> can only be explained on this assumption; except after [k], \**uei* is always prehistoric, and is replaced in the earliest texts by *üi*, so that its survival can only be due to the shift of stress. The ME evidence, however, is much less clear. On the one hand there is *queint* < COGNITUM, in which the shift of stress clearly came first: on the other hand there is *quiver*, in which the

1. Such a form as *quoise* < \*CÖCTĀRE < COACTĀRE cannot be explained by any theory of exceptions; the regular forms are *coite* and *quite*, and *quoise* is a mixture of the two.

2. There is a strong contrast between the MnE forms: *choir*, *quince*, *squirrel* on the one hand, *cushion* on the other.

3. There is yet a further possibility, that the [s] of *quyssyn* became [ʃ] spontaneously, as it did in *push* and perhaps in *rush*.

4. References have been given above.

reduction of *\*uei* seems to have come first. In the light of the AN evidence it is obvious that there must be some other explanation of *quiver*. It is possible that ME *quiver* (not recorded before 1300) is not after all from AN, but from later CF *cūivre* with the general shift of stress on the diphthong *ūi*, which happened in the thirteenth century, but earliest after [k] and [g]<sup>1</sup>; and this late origin is the more probable because the word is a term of chivalry. Yet it is also possible that *quiver* is derived by soundchange from AN *queivre*<sup>2</sup>. An enlightening form in this context is ME *squiller* < *\*SCUTELLĀRIUM*. Here the ancestral form is *escu·elier*, where the turned point indicates hiatus; on the analogy of *bowel*, *trowel* we should expect ME *\*scoweller*; but, allowing for the shift of stress, we might have *\*squeller*. But in fact the only recorded form is *squiller*, and we have to account for the raising of *e* to *i*; since the *l* is not palatalized, we cannot invoke the northern OF soundchange illustrated in *pavillon* < *paveillon*<sup>3</sup>. The number of instances is too small to allow the soundchange to be stated precisely: all that can be said is that in unknown circumstances *que-* may become *qui-*; and perhaps, in circumstances also unknown, *quei-* may become *qui-*<sup>4</sup>.

In proving that the reduction of *\*uei* to *ūi* preceded the reduction of *ūi* to *ū* we are no longer concerned with a preceding [k] or [g], so that the number of instances available is much larger. Examples among the loanwords in ME are *pūe* < *PODIA*, *lūre* < *\*LŌPRIA-NT*, *nūs-ance* < *NŌC-ENT*; in each case the reduction of *ūi* has affected *ūi* < *\*uei*. Both these soundchanges were certainly complete before 1100, for both are represented in rhyme in the earliest AN texts<sup>5</sup>; and it follows that the other soundchanges which have been shown to be earlier than these were also completed before 1100.

The approximate dating of these soundchanges can be confirmed in a variety of ways. It has been suggested above, for instance, that in different varieties of western OF the diphthong *ue* had two different developments, to [we:] and [wø:] respectively, so that *cuer* < *CHORUM* became

1. M. K. Pope, *op. cit.*, § 515.

2. For the AN form see *The voyage of St Brendan*, 1416, 1427 (both in rhyme).

3. M. K. Pope, *op. cit.*, § 422.

4. The complete absence of forms with *e* makes it unlikely that *squiller* shows the effect of the ME raising of *e* to *i* before dentals (Jordan-Matthes, *Handbuch der Mittel-englischen Grammatik*, § 34.1), since this soundchange is purely sporadic.

5. Cf. E. G. R. Waters, *op. cit.*, cxlvi, cxlix.

either [kwe:r] or [kwø:r], ME *quēr* ou *queor* <sup>1</sup>. It is possible that the development of *ue* to [wø:] was much more widely distributed; that it was, in fact, a stage in the development of *ue* to [ø:] which is common to most of the dialects of OF. Since the change to [ø:] was apparently completed in the twelfth century <sup>2</sup> the preliminary change to [wø:] must have been earlier still; and this can be linked with the statement above that the general shift of stress on the diphthong *ue* must have preceded the specific shift of stress on other diphthongs after [k] and [g].

Further information about the date of the shift of stress after [k] and [g] can be garnered from its association with the depalatalization of palatal *l'*, which, accompanied as it was by the generation of an epenthetic *i*, gave rise to a new series of diphthongs; were these new diphthongs affected by the shift of stress? There is one very clear instance, the verb *aquyle* which seems to occur only in *Pearl*, but is found there twice, once in the infinitive and once in the past participle *aquylde*. There can be no doubt, in spite of the uncertainty of the NED, that this verb is from *acuillir*, MnF *accueillir*; the diphthong, which could only arise from the AN depalatalization of *l'*, has undergone the shift of stress. Another probable instance is ME *quelet*, *quylet* < COLLECTA influenced by some form of the verb *cueillir* <sup>3</sup>. The form *quelet* shows the influence of the strong form *cueill-* [kueλ-, kwø:λ-, kwe:λ-]; it must stand for \**queilet*, and is another example of the modification of *quei* in circumstances that cannot be precisely delimited; but it is not helpful for the present purpose, since the shift of stress might have happened before the depalatalization of *l'*. The form *quylet* may represent a further modification of *que-* < *quei-* as in *squiller* and perhaps in *quiver*; but it may also show the influence of the weak form *cuill-* [kuλ-], and in this case it is relevant to the discussion and supports the evidence of *aquyle*.

On the other hand there is *cullion* < \*CULLĒŌNEM, which has variants *coillon*, *coylon*, but no trace of any form *quyllon*. In this case the general survival of the palatal *l'* as [lj] is sufficient proof that we have to do with no ordinary loanword; the word is doubtless a term of aristocratic abuse, and is not from AN at all but from CF. In the variant forms *coillon*, *coylon* the palatal *l'* has undergone its usual ME development, and these are

1. ME *quēr* might, of course, be derived also from [kwø:r] by the east Midland unrounding of [ø:] to [e:].

2. M. K. Pope, *op. cit.*, § 551.

3. The later form *culet*, with a rather different meaning, is not influenced by *cueillir*.

*Revue de linguistique romane.*



perhaps lower-class forms; the more usual forms show a closer approximation to the pronunciation of CF [λ], and may belong to the upper classes. Certainly this word cannot be held to contradict the previous conclusion that the depalatalization of *l* preceded the shift of stress. This depalatalization, a characteristic AN soundchange, had already taken place before the writing of the earliest texts <sup>1</sup>, but it cannot be more precisely dated.

The shift of stress after [k] and [g] can also be linked with another soundchange, the characteristic AN development of OF *ie* to *ē*. Here the most important word is *squire*, the development of which in ME has received insufficient attention. The ancestral form is *escū·ier* < SCŪTĀRĪUM (the turned point indicating hiatus), and, since OF *ie* normally appears in ME as *ē*, we might expect ME *squēr*; but in fact this form is rare and late, the normal forms being *squīer* (disyllabic) and *squīre*. These forms can only be explained on the assumption that *ie* passed through a stage *iē* [je:] on its way to *ē* <sup>2</sup>. Thus the ancestral *escū·ier* first becomes *escū·iēr*; then *i* combines with the preceding vowel to form the diphthong *īi*, giving *escūi·ēr*, and then, by the shift of stress, (*e*)*squī·ēr*; finally, short *i* in hiatus undergoes the usual lengthening to *ī*, giving *squīēr*, *squīre* <sup>3</sup>. Thus there can be no doubt that *ie* passed through a stage *iē*, just as *ue* passed through a stage *uē* <sup>4</sup>, and that the development of *iē* preceded the shift of stress after [k] and [g]. The development of *iē* belongs to the eleventh century <sup>5</sup>, which is consistent with the dating of the shift of stress proposed above.

Another example of the development of OF *ie* along these lines is to be found in the word *chair*. Here CATHEDRA > *cha·iere* > *cha·iēre* > *chai·ēre* > ME *chaiēre*, *chaire*. Less clear is the development of QUATERNUM, OF *quaer*. There are no less than four distinct forms of this word in ME <sup>6</sup>: *quaier* (*quair*), *quēr*, *quēr* and *quire*. Of these, the first two seem to go back to an ancestral form in which, as in MnF *cabier*, a glide-vowel has filled the hiatus: *qua·er* > *quaier* > *quair* > *quēr*. Alternatively,

1. M. K. Pope, *op. cit.*, § 1182; E. G. R. Waters, *op. cit.*, cliv.

2. Cf. M. K. Pope, *op. cit.*, § 1155.

3. It does not matter whether this lengthening was an AN soundchange (A. J. Bliss, *op. cit.*, § 54) or a ME soundsubstitution (H. M. Flasdieck, *op. cit.*, § 11.325.)

4. Cf. A. J. Bliss, *op. cit.*, § 18.

5. M. K. Pope, *ibid.*

6. The NED s. v. *quire* distinguishes only three.



these forms might be derived from a northern OF form with the characteristic 'breaking' of *e* before *r*: *qua·ier* > *qua·iēr* > *quai·ēr* > *quaiēr* > *quair* > *quēr*. The forms *quēr*, *quīre*, are much less easy to explain. They can hardly go back to any form with the hiatus filled by a glide-vowel, since there is no trace of the inevitable diphthong; nor can they go back to *qua·er* without a glide vowel, since the lengthening of *e*, whether through the absorption of the vowel in hiatus or through the influence of the following *r*, could only result in the open vowel *ē*<sup>1</sup>. They might perhaps go back to the northern OF *qua·ier*, on the assumption either that *ie* could pass directly to *ē*, or that the *i* of *iē* might exceptionally not combine with the preceding vowel.

In conclusion, therefore, the shift of stress after [k] and [g] can be used as a convenient chronological dividing line. The following changes can be dated *before* the shift of stress:

(a) the reduction of diphthongs before certain consonants and consonant groups;

(b) the change of *ie* and *ue* to *iē* and *uē* respectively;

(c) the depalatalization of *l'*.

The following changes can be dated *after* the shift of stress:

(a) the reduction of *\*uei* to *üi*;

(b) the reduction of *üi* to *ū*.

It is only the last group of changes which can be given a definite date, and of these all that can be said is that they were complete before the composition of the earliest AN texts. On the other hand, the depalatalization of *l'* is a characteristic AN change, and can be reasonably explained as due to the influence of English speech-habits<sup>2</sup>; it cannot, then, have happened before the Norman Conquest in 1066. The whole sequence of changes must have occupied a comparatively short space of time, roughly covering the second half of the eleventh century and the first quarter of the twelfth<sup>3</sup>.

It is clear that Luick post-dated the reduction of diphthongs in words of AN origin by about two hundred years; but this does not mean to

1. A. J. Bliss, *op. cit.*, §§ 26 and footnote, 40 and footnote.

2. M. K. Pope, *op. cit.*, § 1182.

3. There is no reason why the reduction of diphthongs before certain consonants and consonant groups and the modification of *ie* and *ue* should not have preceded the Norman Conquest, since they are not the consequence of English speech-habits; but it is unlikely that they were much earlier.

say that no reduction of diphthongs took place about 1300. The majority of Luick's instances of the reduction before consonant groups beginning with [s] are not of AN but of ON origin, and these cannot have been affected by the AN change discussed above; there must have been a second reduction, restricted to consonant groups beginning with [s], which affected all the words which either had not been or could not have been affected by the earlier AN change. There seems to be no reason to doubt that this second reduction took place, as Luick supposes, about 1300.

A. J. BLISS.