PROVENCAL SOR AND MOLHER, LONE SURVIVORS OF THE

FEMININE IMPARISYLLABLES

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ABSTRACT

Fairly well represented in Latin, the imparisyllabic flexion
of feminine nouns counts only two members in Old Provencal: sor - seror
and mólher - molhér. Based on a wide range of examples, this article
explores some of the analogical pressures that were brought to bear on
these remnants of an earlier declension.

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With the exception of sǒror and mǔlier, the feminine imparisyllabic declension had become parisyllabic in Vulgar Latin. This change was mostly brought about through the creation of a new nominative singular, based on the accentual pattern of the accusative: CL potéstas - potestátem > VL *potestátis - potestáte > PR po(d)estátz - po(d)estát. There are relatively rare cases of a leveling process, using the nominative as the starting point to which the accusative is then adapted through a shortening and a shift in stress: CL potéstas - potestátem > VL *potésta - potésta(m) > PR po(d)ésta - po(d)ésta. This latter evolution is attested through position in rhyme in the following example from Bertran de Born: de rei ni de gran poesta (Stimming 16, 30), rhyming with testa, and it is well-known from Old French: podéste versus podestét, povérte versus povretét, etc. The important point to be made here is that such doublets show no functional distribution, but rather, they are used indiscriminately in nominative or accusative function. They are not, in other words, to be considered relics of the Latin imparisyllabic flexion, since this would have required the shorter form to appear as a nominative, the longer form as an accusative only, an observation which was already made by Nyrop for Old French[1]. We may thus consider sor and molher to be the only Provençal vestiges of the imparisyllabic feminine declension of Classical Latin.

The purpose of this article is to establish the declensional pattern of these two isolated feminine nouns and to study the analogical pressures that were brought to bear on these two nouns because of their tenuous position as relics of an earlier flexional category.

Sŏror evolves as follows in Provencal:

      nom. sing. sŏror > sor

      acc. sing. sŏrōre(m) > seror

      nom. plur. sŏrōres > serors

      acc. plur. sŏrōres > serors

The flexional norm is thus represented by the use of sor as a nominative and seror as an accusative singular: sa sor fo eretia (Appel 7, 102); donex non es vos ma sor (Vaqueiras VI, 32); ab Audiart, sa seror (Brunel 104,3); ad huna ma seror (Daurel, v. 662). Sŏror also yields a collateral form, sorre, with e as a supporting vowel for the retained rr cluster, as in carru > car and carre, while, in the normal evolution of sŏror, final r has dropped: eu Marcenca, lur sorre (Brunel 177,2). The vocative, bela sore (Ste. Agnès, v. 373), is but a graphical variant. A flexional nominative singular s is rarely added; two instances of this were found in Flamenca: ma sors es la belaire del mon (v. 116-117); Margarideta, bella sors (v. 4781). Parallel to the loss of final r in sŏror > sor is the reduction of the accusative seror to sero, of which an isolated instance was encountered in the old deeds: per U. nostra sero (Brunel 496,7). The plural is serors: et eran ab mi mas serors (Marien-klage, v. 247); en las doas serors (Denkmäler 324,39). The undissimilated soror is not very frequent; it is attested in la Vie de Sainte Enimie: on lay lo cors de sa soror (v. 1514); on sa soror fo sebelhida (v. 1583).

Sŏror, with its unusual imparisyllabic feature, is, as to be expected, subject to a certain amount of form-leveling. Sor is attested as an accusative: e a Dolza, sa sor (Brunel 347,4); e car es mos cunhatz

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e a ma sor espozea (Croisade 131,15); det sa sor a Buvo (Daurel, v.
1821); de sa sor (Daurel, v. 623), and an analogical plural, sors, is
drawn from the nominative singular: ellur sors Resta et Una (Brunel
82,5); las mias sors (Mystères, v. 2336). The alternate form, sorre,
is encountered in accusative function in this example: non a sorre ni
molher ni cozi (Audiau-Lavaud XLIV,14). Seror is sometimes used as a
nominative singular: e mezura es seror de drechura (Bartsch 44,26); on
sa soror fo sebelhida (Ste. Enimie, v. 1583); que fara, fraire, vostra
seror (Ste. Agnès, v. 697). In view of the evolution in French: sŏror >
suer > soeur, it is not surprising to find that, after the loss of the
two-case system, it is the nominative, sor, which survives: ma sor
Misericordia es venguda (Jutgamen, v. 997); vay sonar ta sor cara
(Mystères, v. 2174).

The declension of mŭlier is as follows:

nom. sing. mŭlier > mólher

acc. sing. mŭliere(m) > molhér

nom. plur. mŭlieres > molhérs

acc. plur. mŭlieres > molhérs

Phonologically is to be recalled that the stress moved from i to
e in Vulgar Latin: CL mŭlíerem > VL mŭliére, except for the nominative
singular which, of course, has a different accentuation pattern. The
flexion of PR molher is not easily determined, since the lack of any
indication of stress makes it virtually impossible to distinguish the

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nominative from the accusative. Brunel singles out this difficulty in his edition of the old deeds[2]: "les variantes qui continuent la déclinaison du latin mulier, sont d'une interprétation douteuse puisqu' aucun signe n'indique la place de l'accent dans une forme telle que moiler". In view of this, it comes hardly as any surprise that the flexion of molher has long puzzled scholars. Appel inflects it like naus (i.e. sing. molhérs - molhér, plur. molhérs - molhérs), while Meyer-Lübke lists it with rosa and maire, stating that "in diese Klasse gehört auch mólher"[3]. If declined like rosa or maire, molher would show the same form in the nominative and accusative singular, but this seems to be true in graph only, since we have a nominative mólher versus an accusative molhér, with a shift in stress. Furthermore, molher is susceptible of adding a flexional s in the nominative singular, while rosa never is, and maire only in extremely rare cases. The stress may actually be ascertained in some cases through the study of poetic rhythm, as in: morta es ma molher e so ne fort iratz (Daurel, v. 1229), which clearly calls for mólher, and the same poem offers yet another example: on es ma molher que ieu puec tant amar (Daurel, v. 1974). Levy[4] quotes an example of a nominative mólhers from the Vida de Sant Honorat: Na Gualhorcs qu'era móyllers de Raynaut lo baron. It is Levy's contention, though presented with some restraint, that molher is imparisyllabic in Provencal: nom. mólher - acc. molhér, and it is interesting to note that, in addition to secondary use of the accusative molhér as a nomi- native, he posits two analogical nominatives: mólhers and molhérs, com- parable, in his view, to the use of trobaires and trobadors as analogical

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nominative singulars. In examples where a sigmatic nominative occurs,
we are, indeed, unable to make any well founded decision as to where
the stress should be placed: e na Guillema, moillers d'en W. (Brunel
336,5); era moillers d'un ric baron (Boutiére 49,C,H,14-15); es mollers
verament del fill Deu (Sta. Agnès, v. 406-407). In view of the fact
that all imparisyllabic feminine nouns, with the exception of sŏror,
had adapted their nominative singular to the accusative case: CL dŏlor
- dŏlōrem > VL *dŏlŏris - dŏlore > PR dolors - dolor, etc., it would
seem most logical to read molhérs and to draw this form from an ana-
logical *mŭliéris - mŭliéra, yet there are precedents for the direct
addition of s to the nominative singular, not only in the case of sors,
but also insofar as the entire group of imparisyllabic comparative ad-
jectives is concerned. An example like: maiers es la merces (Appel
106,55), presupposes a máior - s and can in no way be traced back to
a *maiōris, based on the accusative maiōre. One might perhaps further
suspect that sénhers, sigmatic variant of the nominative sénher, may
have exerted some influence here.

If proper attention to matters of metre and rhythm can thus ascer-
tain the existence of a nominative singular mólher, we may conclude that
Levy's description of the declension of this elusive feminine impari-
syllable is the correct one.

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1) Nyrop, Kr.: _Grammaire historique de la langue française_, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 19??, vol. 2, § 281, Rem.

2) Brunel, C.: _Les plus anciennes chartes en langue provençale_, Paris: Picard, 1926, 1952, supplément, p. xiii.

3) quoted from E. Levy's review of C. Appel: _Provenzalische Chrestomathie_, in _Literaturblatt für germanische und romanische Philologie_, vol. 19, 1898, pp. 152-153.

4) quoted from the same review.

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