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## THE ORIGIN OF *aroint* AND OTHER *-oint*-WORDS IN ENGLISH

**Abstract.** Regarding the word form **aroint**, I am going to propose an etymological base for it in the group of French loanwords of the structure **oin** + consonant. As far as verbal loans are concerned, the root **-oint** can either stand for the 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. sing. pres. ind. or for the past participle of Old French verbs of the type *poindre* ‘to pierce, prick; to sting, bite’ (AND<sup>1</sup>: *poindre*), *uindre*, *oindre* ‘to anoint; to rub, smear’ (AND<sup>1</sup>: *oindre*). Apart from a short bibliography, the Appendix contains a selection of illustrative material.

**Keywords:** etymology, French loanwords, historical morphology.

The phonological reception of Old French *o/u* + palatalized *n* (also referred to as *n mouillé*) in loanwords from French has been discussed at length in my habilitationsschrift (Diensberg 1985: § 2/90–125). The so-called *oint*-words go back to Latin *-unctus* p. ppl. of verbs ending in *-ungere*, i.e. *iungere* ‘to join’, *ungere* ‘to anoint’ and *pungere* ‘to pierce’, corresponding to the Old French infinitives *oindre* and *poindre* with their past participles *iunctus*, *unctus* and *punctus* which ultimately appear in the source language as *(an)oint* and *point* from which the loanverbs *join*, *(an)oint* and *point* are derived (Diensberg 1985: 108). There is an alternation between forms ending in a nasal consonant and derived from the present stem, e.g. OF *joindre*, present stem *joi(g)n-* yielding English *to join*, as opposed to the noun *joint*, derived from the Old French past participle. English *coin* v., n. and the variant *quoin* n. are of different origin and go back to Latin *cuneus* ‘wedge’ (Diensberg 1985: 92f.).

In fact, both *-oint-* and *-oin-*words form a rather small subgroup consisting of *joint*, *anoint* and *point* and combinations to which *conjoint* adj. and *appoint* and *disappoint* should be added (Muthmann 2002: 276c–277a). The same is true of the *-oin-*words such as *coin* n., *join* v. and derived *subjoin* v. and *adjoin* v.; the noun *loin* and combinations such as *sirloin* n. and, last but not least, isolated *groin* n. (Muthmann 2002: 177a–177b).

The lexeme under scrutiny is of disputed origin as Professor Anatoly Liberman shows in a recent article conveniently entitled *Shakespeare’s aroint thee, witch*,

*for the Last Time?* The word or rather the phrase is attested only twice and exclusively in Shakespeare's works in a context addressing witches using the phrase *aroint/aroynnt thee, witch*, used as kind of an imprecation, usually glossed 'be-gone' (Lieberman 2014b). The word occurs only in *Macbeth* (I.3: 5) and *King Lear* (III.4: 113). According to Lieberman, "the greater part of the scholarly literature devoted to *aroint* predates the 1870s."

The author gives a critical overview of the relevant literature showing that no hypothesis by earlier scholars has found general acceptance (Lieberman 2014b). "An often repeated hypothesis connects *aroint* with *anooint* since witches are related to perform many supernatural acts by means of unguents," nor can *aroint* be regarded as a dissimilation of *anooint*. Eventually, Lieberman makes a good case for the first element of the phrase *aroint/aroynnt thee, witch* going back to the *rowan-tree* (German *Eberesche*) which in popular belief is considered to offer protection against witches. However, this hypothesis is not without its problems.

I would like to tentatively propose an Old French etymon and start from *aroint/aroynnt* and its alleged variants *arongt*, *aroune/arowne*, and *arunt* (Lieberman 2014b). To begin with, *arongt* is undoubtedly a spelling variant of *aroint* since <ong> may be used for <onʒ>, phonetically /onj/ (type III), which in turn alternates with /oin/ (type I) (see Diensberg 1985: 32). As has been stated at the outset (see above), the phonological reception of Old French *o/u* + palatalized *n* (also referred to as *n mouillé*) in loanwords from French has been discussed at length in my habilitationsschrift (Diensberg 1985: § 2/90–125). Consequently, I am going to connect the above forms with OF *roigner/roindre* 'to cut, to lop trees' (see OED<sup>3</sup>: *roin* v.<sup>1</sup>) or rather with prefixed *aroigner/aroindre* (see Diensberg 1985: 111, 113). There is OF *röoignier* to cut or lop trees (T/L VIII: 1464), from L *\*rotundiāre* (FEW: X: 517b). OF (*a*)*roindre* regularly has (*a*)*roint* 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. sing. pres. ind. and (*a*)*roint* functioning as the past participle of the French verb, an assumption which would justify an unattested loanverb *\*(a)roint*; see *-point* 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. sing. pres. ind. and see *point* past participle of OF *poindre* (Diensberg 1985: 107) and see the etymological discussion under *point* v. (OED<sup>3</sup>).

Thus *arunt* features Middle English short *u* and *aroune* shows ME long *u*. The absence of the dental consonant in the last word is not infrequent and may be due to either assimilation or have been modelled on strong participles in *-oun*, e.g. ME *fon, fun, foune* for *found* p. ppl. (see MED, s.v. *finden*). Starting from a root such as *\*roin-* in the above word family, an unetymological or excremental *-t* after a final nasal consonant is anything but rare with loanwords from French (see Diensberg 2008: 42–47). As loanwords such as *join* (Diensberg 1985: 93–96) as opposed to (*an*)*oint* and *point* (Diensberg 1985: 108) demonstrate, there is indeed an alternation of the type *-oin* (derived from the present stem of Old verbs on *-oindre* and *-oint*, derived from the past participle of that verb group).

As I have shown in my brief treatise, there is frequent variation between /oi, ui/ and long and short *u* in French loanwords ending in a nasal consonant (Diensberg 1985: 32, 90–125).

From a semantic point of view, the verb *aroint* rendered by ‘to cut, to lop, etc.’, combined with *thee* (*witch*) could be easily interpreted as an injunction to disappear, corresponding to ‘begone’, or simply rendered by ‘beat it!’.

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## Appendix

### **anoint** v. (1303, BDE)

ME *anointen, enointen* ‘to smear, daub’, adapted from *enoint, enuint* p. ppl. of AF *enoinde, enainde, enhoindre, enuindre, enuingdre; enointer; inoinde* ‘to bedaub; to grease; to smear (with ointment); to anoint; to soak in oil; to sprinkle with; (fig.) to beguile’ (AND<sup>2</sup>: **enoinde**), from L *inungere* ‘to smear on’; cf. the Latinism UNGUENT *n.*; see ModF *oindre* (DEHF: 521a); see MED, s.v. **enointen** v., also *anointen, anynten*, etc.; see Diensberg (1985: 104f., 107, 108); cf. also OINT v. and NOINT v.; (BDE: 37b; KDEE: 48b; ODEE: 39a).

**Nota:** The lowering of AF/non-CF *en-, em-* > *an-, am-* in pretonic position is attested in numerous loanwords in (Early) Middle English manuscripts, e.g. MS Cleopatra of the Ancrene Riwe (c1225–30) – see Dobson (1972: XC–XCIII and footnotes). Under main stress Anglo-French/non-Central French dialects show the development of *an-, am-* (from this source) to *aun-, aum-* and eventually to *on-, om-* as relevant loanwords in (Early) Middle English manuscripts testify – see Diensberg (1988: 51–63).

### **oint** v. anoint (c1375, BDE) (a1382, OED<sup>3</sup>: **oint** v.)

ME *ointe(n), ointe(n)*, adapted from AF *oint, uint* p. ppl. (derived from L *unctum* p. ppl. of *ungere*) of *uindre, oindre, hoyndre; oynder* ‘to anoint; to rub, smear’ (AND<sup>1</sup>: **uindre**), from L *ungere* ‘to smear’. See ModF **oindre** ‘to anoint’ (DMD: 521a, 1120) and **oint** ‘unction’ (DMD: 521a, s.v. *oindre*, 15<sup>th</sup> c.); cf. the Latinism UNGUENT *n.*; see Diensberg (1985: 104f., 107, 108); cf. also ANOINT v. & NOINT v. and OINTMENT *n.*; (BDE: 37b, s.v. *anoint*; KDEE: 48b; ODEE: 39a).

### **point**<sup>1</sup> v. (c1300, BDE) (c1374–75, OED<sup>3</sup>: **point** v.<sup>1</sup>)

ME *pointed* ‘having a sharp end’, also *pointe(n)* ‘to insert the mark of punctuation’ (a1376), also ‘to prick, stab’ (a1400), adapted from AF *pointer*,

*ponter, punter* ‘to sharpen; to embroider’ (AND<sup>1</sup>: *pointer*<sup>1</sup>), derived from *point* p. ppl. of *poindre* ‘to pierce’, cognate with *point* n. (< L *punctum*); see POINT n.; cf. ModF *pointer* ‘to pierce’ (DMD: 594b, s.v. *point*, 1180) and ModF *poindre* ‘to stab, pierce’ (DMD: 594a, 11<sup>th</sup> c.). (BDE: 811b, s.v. *point* n.; KDEE: 1084b, s.v. *point* n.; ODEE: 692a, s.v. *point* n.).

**Nota 1:** The role of *point* 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. sing. pres. / *point* 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. sing. pres., etc. for the verbal character (Fouché 1967: 67, 77, 133, s.v. *peindre* and 67, 77, 221, s.v. *poindre*).

**Nota 2:** OF *-aindre, -eindre, -oindre* inf., *-aint, -eint, -oint* p. ppl. will either be integrated as *-AIN* (*complain* v.), *-OIN* (*join* v.) if derived from the present stem *-ain(d)-re* and *-oin(d)-re* or as *-AINT* (*paint* v.), *-OINT* (*point* v.) if derived from the past participle *-aint(e), -einte* or *-ointe* respectively.

**Nota 3:** All verbs in this subgroup ultimately reflect past participles of the type *-aint(e), -einte* (< L *-inctum*) of verbs in *-aindre, -eindre* (< L *-ingere*), although the source language had already formed verbs in *-ainter, -einter* (< L *-inctāre*), e.g. *depeinter, \*peinter* (see above). OED<sup>3</sup> *paint* v.: The word was probably earliest adopted in Middle English as the past participle, leading to the adoption of the form in *-t* as the present stem form also, although the present stem is in fact first attested only very slightly later than the past participle, as are past participle forms in *-ed*; cf. also the Anglo-Norman variant *peinter* and Old French (rare) *peintier, pointier*. (Cf. also earlier PAINTING n. and discussion s.v.) For a somewhat similar development, see ATTAINT v. For the stem form which would normally be expected, see COMPLAIN v., DISTRAIN v., etc.

**roin** v. (arch.) to prune trees (*not listed in OED*<sup>3</sup>)

ME *roine(n)*, adapted from AF *roigner, rogner, roiner, roinner; reoigner; ronger, rounger, runger, runjer* ‘to gnaw; to cut (hair); to clip (coinage); to ruminate on, ponder; (of animals) to chew the cud’ (AND<sup>1</sup>: *roigner*); see also OF *rōoignier, rēoignier, rōeignier, roignier* ‘to trim, cut, lop’ (T/L VIII: 1464), from L *\*retundiāre* for *rotundiāre* ‘to round off’, from *rotundus* ‘round’. Cf. ModF *rogner* ‘to cut down’ (DEHF: 673a, *reoignier* ‘to round off by cutting, shear’, 1131; ‘to cut’ 13<sup>th</sup> c.). See related *prune*<sup>3</sup> v. ‘to cut, prune trees’ – see Diensberg (1985: 111, 113); MED: *roinen* v.1 [OF *rōoignier, roignier*, AF *roinner*] (a) ‘to trim away (putrified matter from a sore); (?) to trim (the edges of a wound)’ (c1350) (a1333); (b) ‘to pare away the edge of (a coin), clip’ (a1475) (?a1430).

OED<sup>2</sup>: *aroint* | *aroynt*, v.

**Pronunciation:** /əˈrɔɪnt/

**Etymology:** Origin unknown. Used by Shakespeare, whence by some modern writers. The origin of Shakespeare’s *aroynt* has been the subject of

numerous conjectures, none of which can be said to have even a *prima facie* probability. (Compare also *arunt* v.) The following passages are usually cited as pointing to the same word.

Ray North C. Wds. (1691) has: *Ryntyte, by your leave, stand handsomely*. As ‘Rynt you, witch, quoth Bessie Locket to her mother’; Proverb. Cheshire. Thoresby Lett. to Ray 1703 (Yorkshire Words) has: ‘Ryndta, used to cows to make them give way, and stand in their stalls or booyes.’

In parts of Cheshire (and? Lancashire) *ou* /au/ is pronounced  $\bar{i}$ ,  $\bar{y}$  /aɪ/ – i.e. /aʊ/ has been unlauded to /aɪ/, and delabialized to /aɪ/; elsewhere it is reduced to /aə/, /a(ə)/, or /a:/ – so that **round** becomes **rȳnd**. *Rynd-ta!* is thus merely a local pronunciation of ‘round thee, = move round, move about!’ The local nature, the meaning, and form of the phrase, seem all opposed to its identity with Shakespeare’s *aroynt*.

1. In *aroint thee!* (? verb in the imperative, or interjection) meaning apparently: ‘Avaunt! Begone!’  
1608: Shakespeare, *King Lear* xi. 113: *He met the night mare..bid her, O light and her troth plight and arint [1623 aroynt] thee, witch arint thee.*  
a1616: Shakespeare, (1623) i. Iii. 5: *Aroynt thee, Witch, the rumpefed Ronyon cryes.*  
1816: Scott, *Antiquary* I. vi. 117: *Aroint thee, witch! wouldst thou poison my guests with thy infernal decoctions?*  
1831: P. Heidiger, *Didoniad* ix. 248: *Aroynt, thou lingering, long-drawn mortal Strife.*
2. Used by Robert and Elizabeth Browning as a vb.: ‘to drive away with an execration’.  
1850: E. B. Browning, *To Flush* xviii: *Whiskered cats arointed flee.*  
1878: R. Browning, *Two Poets of Croisic* in *La Saisiaz & Two Poets of Croisic* 156: *That Humbug, whom thy soul aroints.*  
1880: R. Browning, *Pietro* in *Dramatic Idyls* 22: *Aroint the churl who prophesies.*

**OED<sup>2</sup>:** †*a'runt*, v.

**Etymology:** Etymol. unknown.

*Obs.* ‘to rail at, revile, scold, rate; or? to drive away’. (If the latter is the sense, cf. Shakespeare’s *aroint* v.)

1399 Rich. Redeless iii. 221:?  
*Arounted [MS. has Arouutyd] ffor his ray [≡ array, dress] and rebuked ofte.*

1496 Dives & Pauper (de Worde) vii. iv. 280: *Make the plesaunt in speche to the congregacyon of poore folke..and yelde thy dette & answeere peasable thynges & mekenesse, not to arunt them ne rebuke them ne chyde them.*