Noldorin Plurals in the *Etymologies*

by Bertrand Bellet

Introduction

As Carl F. Hostetter and Patrick H. Wynne state in the foreword to their "Addenda and Corrigenda to the *Etymologies*", "[t]he *Etymologies* is without question our most important source to date for the understanding of the internal history and relationships of Tolkien's Elvish languages, as conceived and imaged by their creator during the drafting of *The Lord of the Rings*". Yet it is also quite well known that this document presents some difficulties for the study of Sindarin, for at that time, Tolkien's Welsh-inspired language was still named "Noldorin" and conceived as the mother tongue of the Noldor, developed in their exile on Middle-earth from the older language they spoke in Valinor, called "Old Noldorin" in the *Etymologies* and "Korolambë" or "Kornoldorin" in the *Lhammas* (V:174). It is evidently very similar to the later Sindarin, yet there are some differences, notably in the development of some consonants and, more importantly here, in the nominal plural patterns. For instance, the Sindarin word **Golodh**, pl. **Goelydh** and — later in the history of the language — **Gelydh**, class pl. **Golodhrim** (XI:364) is already present in the *Etymologies* but as **golodh**, pl. **goeleoidh**, **geleidh** and **golodhrim**.

Sindarin noun plurals have naturally attracted much attention — I especially recommend the article "Attested Sindarin Plurals" by Anders Stenström on the website *Mellonath Daeron*, which I used as a model here. Noldorin plurals have also been studied, but mainly as a tool for the understanding of the later Sindarin. I believe however that they also deserve a study in their own right so as to appreciate more fully how similar and how different Noldorin and Sindarin are, especially regarding the workings of metaphonies, whose traces are used as a plural indicator in both languages. This is the purpose of this article.

In order to delimit precisely what stage of Tolkien's Welsh-inspired language is considered in this study, I have deliberately restricted it to the Noldorin of the *Etymologies*. Most of this document was published by Christopher Tolkien in *The Lost Road*; the rest was presented by Carl F. Hostetter and Patrick H. Wynne in their "Addenda and Corrigenda to the *Etymologies*", the first part of which appeared in November 2003 in *Vinyar Tengwar* 45 and the second in July 2004 in *Vinyar Tengwar* 46.

Methodology

The following inventory intends to record every Noldorin plural nominal form in the *Etymologies*. "Nominal" is understood in a broad sense, and includes both nouns and adjectives, since they share the same plural patterns, and are actually in continuity in the language. Plurals are sorted according to their mode of formation.

- **Plurals by vowel affection**. These are marked by vowel changes only.
- **Imparisyllabic plurals**. These add a syllable in the plural, sometimes with an additional vowel change.
- **Class plurals** are listed separately, since they are a different formation contrasting with regular plurals.
- **Other plurals**. Various formations of limited productivity that cannot be included in the former categories.

The Noldorin words are quoted with their singular followed by their plural. Tolkien not seldom mentions two plural forms, one after the other. This practice is followed here as well. I also include his further comments, which are systematically put between quotation marks. A

few forms in the corpus appear only compounded or mutated; in this cases I have listed the word as I think it would appear in isolation, marked with the sign "#", together with the actual form found in the source.

Plurals by vowel affection

These go back to metaphonies in the development of the language: an old plural suffix in *-i*, well attested in Old Noldorin, caused vowel alternations between the singular and the plural of nouns and adjectives, alternations that became plural indicators themselves when the ending disappeared as final vowels were dropped. These are by far the most numerous, and there is evidence that they are productive in the language and tend to replace other patterns: several forms are said to be analogical.

This section is classified as follows: A first distinction is made between monosyllables, disyllables and the few remaining polysyllables. Within the first two categories, words are sorted according to their vowels in the singular — except for the third, very small group — and given in alphabetic order.

There is an ambiguity in the grapheme *oe*, which is sometimes printed so and sometimes as a ligature *œ*. The corrections in *Vinyar Tengwar* 45 and 46 seem to show that Tolkien used the difference to denote two different sounds: *oe* for a diphthong and *œ* for a monophthong, the result of an *o* affected by metaphony, later evolving to *e*; it must have been a front rounded vowel, possibly mid-open since Sindarin *o* and *e* are as well (cf. LR:1089 and *The Road Goes Ever On* p. 71), something like the German *ö* in *öffnen* or the French *eu* in *peuple*. Unfortunately, the distinction was not maintained consistently in the printing. Therefore I have not tried to standardise anything and treated all instances of *oe* and *œ* alike. It happens anyway that in all our examples the monophthong is intended — etymology allows us to spot this quite easily.

Monosyllables

A

- *fang* pl. *#feng* in *Enfeng* (V:387).
- *lalf* pl. *lelf* (V:348).
- *parf* pl. *perf* (V:380).
- *rhanc* pl. *rhenc* [for an older pl. *rhengy*] (V:382).

E

- *cef* pl. *ceif* (V:363).
- *fern* pl. *firn* (V:381).
- *hent* pl. *hint* or *henn* pl. *hinn* (V:364) [revised entry].
- *telch* pl. *tilch* (V:381).

O

- *orch* pl. *yrch*; overwritten alternative pl. *erch* (V:379, VT46:7).
- *orn* pl. *yrn*; deleted alternative pl. *ern* (V:379, VT46:7).
- *toll* pl. *tyll* (V:394).

Ó

- *bór* "anal[ogical]" pl. *býr* [for an older pl. *berein*, *beren*] (V:353, VT45:7).

Â

- *Dân* pl. *Dein* (V:375).
- *mâl* pl. *meil* or *mely* (V:386).
- *pân* pl. *pein* (V:380).

- *tâl* pl. *teil* (V:390).

Ê

- *cên* pl. *cîn* [deleted entry] (VT45:20).
- *hên* pl. *hîn* (V:364).

Ô

- *pôd* pl. *pŷd* (V:382).

Û

- *lhûn* pl. *#lhuin* in *Eredluin* vs. *Lhúnorodrim*, *Lhúndirien* (V:370).

AU, AW

- *gwaun* pl. *guin* (V:397).
- *iau* pl. *iui* (V:399, VT46:22).
- *naug* pl. *nuig* (V:375, VT45:37).
- *naw* pl. *nui* (V:378).
- *rhaw* pl. *rhui* (V:383).
- *thaun* pl. *thuin* (V:392).

EI

- *feir* pl. *fîr* (V:381).
- *geil* pl. *gíl* (V:358, VT45:15).
- *gwein* pl. *gwîn* (V:399).
- *sein* pl. *sîn* (V:385).

IE

- *rhien* pl. *rhîn* (V:389).[1]

IO

- *hniof* pl. *hnyf* (V:387).[2]

Disyllables

A-A

- *adab* pl. *edeb* (V:390).
- *adar* pl. *edeir*, *eder* (V:349).
- *Anfang* pl. *Enfeng* (V:348, 387).
- *aran* pl. *erain* (V:360).
- *Balan* pl. *Belein*, *Belen* (V:350).
- *falas* pl. *feles* (V:381).
- *habad* pl. *hebeid* (V:386).
- *nawag* pl. *neweig*, *neweg* (V:375).
- *salab* pl. *seleb* (V:385).
- *talaf*, pl. *teleif* (V:390).

A-E

- *angren* pl. *engrin* (V:348).

- *dangen* pl. *#dengin* in *Hauð i Ndengin* (V:375).
- *glamren* pl. *#glemrin* in *Eredlemrin* (V:358, 367).
- *gwathel* pl. *gwethil* (V:392).
- *harfen* pl. *herfin* [originally written *harven* pl. *hervin*] (VT45:23).
- *lalven* pl. *lelvin* (V:348).
- *malen* pl. *melin* (V:386).

A-O

- *Afor* pl. *Efuir*, *Efyr*; deleted version *Avor* pl. *eveir* (V:347, VT45:5).
- *amon* pl. *emuin*, *emyn* (V:348).
- *annon* pl. *ennyn* (V:348).
- *Fannor* especially in *Gurfannor*, *Olfannor*, pl. *Fennyr* or *Fennuir* (V:387, VT46:15).
- *gwador* pl. *gwedeir* (V:394).

E-A

- *fela* pl. *fili* (V:381).

E-E

- *brethel* pl. *brethil* (V:376).[3].
- *ceber* pl. *cebir* (V:363, VT45:20).
- *Eledh* pl. *Elidh* (V:356).
- *ereg* pl. *erig* (V:356).
- *penedh* pl. *penidh* (V:366).
- *Sethel* pl. *Sethil* [deleted entry] (VT46:13).
- *tele* pl. *telei* (V:392).

E-EI

- *cebeir* pl. *cebir* (VT45:20).

I-E

- *fileg* "analogical singular" for the pl. *filig* (V:381).
- *tithen* pl. *tithin* (V:394).

O-A

- *cobar* pl. *ceb...* [unfinished form, deleted entry] (VT45:23).
- *rhofal* pl. *rhofel* (V:382).

O-O

- *doron* pl. *dœrœin*, *deren* (V:355, VT45:11).
- *golodh* pl. *goeloeidh*, *geleidh* (V:377).
- *orod* pl. *ereid*, *ered* (V:379).
- *thoron* [beside *thôr*] pl. *therein* (V:392).

U-U

- *curu* pl. *cyry* (V :366, VT45:24).
- *tulus* pl. *tylys* (V:395).

Ú-E

- *dúven* pl. *dúvin* (V:376, VT45:38).

UI-E

- *muinthel* pl. *muinthil* (V:392).

UI-O

- *muindor* "analogical" pl. *muindyr* (V:394).

Other polysyllables

- *Alchoron* pl. *Elcheryn* (V:367).
- *avaron* pl. *everuin* [deleted] (VT45:5).
- *Caleledh* pl. *Celelidh* [reading uncertain] (VT45:19).
- *Lhoebenidh* or *Lhoebelidh* pl. 'Green-Elves' (V:368); sg. not given, but VT45:26 states that these entries were initially written *Lhebenedh* and *Lhebeledh*, respectively.
- *Mirion* pl. *Miruin* (V:373).
- *thalion* pl. *thelyn* (V:388)

Interpretation

The Noldorin plural patterns appear to be as shown in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Vowel affection in monosyllables

Singular	Plural
a	e
e	i, ei
o	y
â	ei
ê	î
ó, ô	ý, ŷ
û	ui
au	ui
ei	î
ie	î
io	y, ui?

Table 2: Vowel affection in polysyllables

Singular	Plural — final syllable	Plural — non-final syllable
a	ei > e	e
e	i	e
i	–	i
o	œi > ei > e / ui > y	œ > e
o < au	ui > y	o
u	y	y
ú	–	ú
ei	i	–
ui	–	ui
io	ui > y	–

The variation between *ei*, *e* for the affection of *a* in final syllables probably reflects a diachronic development. Tolkien sometimes lists both forms, in *ei* then in *e*, probably meaning that the former is earlier than the latter. Conceivably *ei* was monophthongised to *e* in post-tonic syllables late in Noldorin. The same explanation holds for the variation between *ui* and *y* as the affection of *o* in final syllables.

The variation between *œ*, *e* and *œi*, *ei*, *e* must be similar: the vowel *œ* and the diphthong *œi* were first unrounded to *e* and *ei*, which then evolved together with *e* from other sources.

The distribution of *e* and *ei* for the affection of *a* and *â* in monosyllables probably reflects a phonetic conditioning. Short *a* affected to *e* in the plural appears before consonant clusters, and lengthened *â* affected to *ei* in the plural before single consonants. It would be interesting to know if this difference of vowel affection once existed in final syllables of polysyllables too, but it is not really possible, for the original pattern is confused by the late shift of post-tonic *ei* > *e* that was referred to above. One can see nevertheless that no instance of *ei* as final affection of *a* appears before consonant clusters in our corpus.

The affection of *e* in monosyllables might also depend on the structure of the word. It shifts to *i* in the plural before consonant clusters, but to *ei* before single consonants. We have only one example of the latter; and in monosyllables having a lengthened *ê*, the affection appears as *î*. It may be surprising that *cef* does not follow the same pattern that *cên* or *hên;* this discrepancy is perhaps linked to the slightly different consonantal environment, but our data are really too limited to ascertain anything.

On the other hand, the various products of the affection of *o* and *ô* are not explained so easily. Monosyllables regularly show a shift to *y* (there are signs that Tolkien also considered a shift to *e* but abandoned it); when the word ends with a single consonant, we have a lengthened *ô* in the singular, a lengthened *ŷ* in the plural. In final syllables *o* is either turned to *œ* > *ei* > *e* or to *ui* > *y*, while in non-final syllables *o* either shifts to *œ* > *e* or remains. The latter treatment can at least be explained: it is attested in the word *rhofal* where the *o* comes from an earlier *ā* — Tolkien reconstructs the ancestral form as *rāmalē (V:382). Quite clearly, while non-final affection turned original *o* to *œ* > *e* it left *o* < *ā* unchanged, most probably because it was still at the intermediate stage *ō*. We also have an example of the *final* affection of *o* < *ā* in the word *Afor* (from *abārō, V:347): it yields *ui* (as in monosyllables), which later becomes *y*.

Yet an earlier version of the entry *Afor* pl. *Efuir*, *Efyr* gave *eveir* as the plural of *Avor*; moreover both developments are encountered from original *o*. At that time the contrast between the developments of original *o* and *o* < *ā* does not explain the discrepancy, at least not at the stages of Noldorin recorded in the *Etymologies*. Possibly it did once, before the pattern was confused by the merger of the two kinds of *o* and further developments redistributed the two kinds of affection (but the rules for this do not appear clearly). Externally speaking, it is probable that Tolkien simply changed his mind while composing the *Etymologies*. It may not be insignificant that final affection of *o* is usually to *y* in Sindarin (with the noteworthy exception of *ered* as a pl. of *orod* 'mountain' and the "Gondorian" *ened* as a pl. of *onod* 'Ent', beside regular *eryd* and *enyd*, cf. L:224 no. 168).

A few words do not follow the same rules.

aran pl. *erain* foreshadows the later Sindarin plural pattern. In Sindarin *ei* > *ai* in final syllables (compare *erain* and *Ereinion* 'Scion of Kings', another name of Gil-Galad); this rule is usually not operative in Noldorin. Instead Tolkien seems to have considered that the shift of *ei* > *ai* was characteristic of the Noldorin dialect spoken by the Fëanorians (see the entry MAG- as presented in VT45:30).

fela pl. *fili* and *tele* pl. *telei* can be explained by their history: the former comes from a earlier *felʒ pl. *filʒ where *ʒ* (spirant *g*) was ultimately vocalised, whereas the latter might come from a contraction of vowels; the primitive form is given by Tolkien as *télesā, and we can reconstruct an Old Sindarin form *teleha, pl. *telehi. Possibly intervocalic *h* disappeared earlier in the plural than in the singular (because of the different vowel qualities), yielding first *teleha pl. *telei then *teleh pl. *telei > *tele* pl. *telei*. The *Etymologies* are inconsistent on that matter, however: there is a similar case with the imparisyllabic *thêl* pl. *thelei* (V:392) but it is contradicted by *pêl* pl. *peli* (V:380, VT46:8).[4]

Comparison with Sindarin

The patterns of vowel affection in Noldorin appear rather similar to Sindarin, but there are a few differences.

The final affection of *a* is to *ei*, later monophthongised to *e* in post-tonic syllables. The first development probably occured in Sindarin as well at an early stage, but *ei* later shifted to

ai in final syllables. For the same reason, the alternation *ei / î* appears as *ai / î* in Sindarin (e.g. *cair* 'ship', cf. LR:1029, footnote, and XII:371, pl. *#cîr* in the name *Círdan* 'Shipwright', cf. UT Index).

The final affection of *o* is regularly *y* in Sindarin, without forms in *œi* > *ei* > *e* except in *ered* as a plural of *orod* 'mountain' beside *eryd* and *ened* as a Gondorian alternative to *enyd* as a plural of *onod* 'Ent' (L:224 no. 168). It is not even certain that this *y* was conceived as the result of an earlier form in *ui* (as in Noldorin polysyllables), for no affection of *o* > *ui* is explicitly attested in that language.

It seems that the final affection of *au*, which is *ui* in Noldorin, was changed to *oe* — the diphthong — in Sindarin, for the name *Nibin-noeg* for the Petty-Dwarves (UT:148 n.16) evidently shows the plural of *naug* 'dwarf'.

Imparisyllabic plurals

Most of these plurals go back to forms the base of which had a final consonant in the singular in Old Noldorin. These were eventually dropped, but were retained before an ending, and this produced a difference in the number of syllables between the singular and the plural in Noldorin.[5]

- *bór* pl. *býr* for older *berein*, *beren* (V:353).
- *fêr* pl. *ferin* (V:352, 381).
- *oel* pl. *oelin* (V:349).
- *ôl* pl. *elei* (V:379).
- *pêl* pl. *peli* (V:380, VT46:8).
- *thêl* pl. *thelei* (V:392).
- *thôr*, *thoron* pl. *therein* (V:392).
- †*tôr* pl. *terein* (V:394).

Three words have plurals in -*y* with a different origin.

- *mâl* pl. *meil* or *mely* (V:386).
- *orch* pl. *yrch*, archaic *yrchy* (V:379, VT46:7); *yrchy* overwrites an alternative pl. *erch* added above *yrch*.
- *rhanc* (archaic) pl. *rhengy*, usually *rhenc* (V:382).

These go back to words in -*u* in Primitive Quendian, with plurals in -*ui*, which gave sg. -*o* / -*ui* in Old Noldorin; and while final -*o* was dropped like most other final vowels, final -*ui* was retained and monophthongised to -*y* (perhaps through an intermediate long -*ŷ*). This ending shifted a preceding *a* > *e* and *o* > *y*. The historical development was as follows.

- **orku* (Tolkien's reconstruction) pl. **orkui* > ON *orko* pl. *orkui* > N *orch* pl. *yrchy*.
- **smalu* (Tolkien's reconstruction) pl. **smalui* > ON *malo* pl. *malui* > N *mâl* pl. *mely*.
- **ranku* (Tolkien's reconstruction) pl. **rankui* > ON *ranko* pl. *rankui* > N *rhanc* pl. *rhengy*.

As our three examples show, these rare plurals tended to be replaced by analogical plurals with vowel affection.

There are two cases where a plural ending -*in* might appear.

- *lhagr* and *lhegin*; reading uncertain, perhaps *lhegrin*; the two forms are merely listed side by side, and they may be doublets rather than a singular followed by a plural (V:367, VT45:25).
- *naugol* (*naugl-*) pl. *nauglin* in the expression *mîr na Nauglin*, an alternative to *Nauglavir*, the "true N idiom" corresponding to the Doriathrin form *Nauglamîr* (V:375).

Its origin is not clear; Helge K. Fauskanger suggests that it was abstracted from historical imparisyllabic plurals.[6] Such a reanalysis is interestingly at the origin of the Welsh plural endings. Another possibility in the earlier linguistic scenario is that Noldorin was influenced by the native languages of Beleriand, for the plural ending -*in* is well attested in Doriathrin and Ilkorin.

Class plurals

These have a collective meaning, and can be seen to contrast with other kinds of plurals. They are built on singulars by the addition of a suffix: in Noldorin *-iath* and *-rim* are attested. The latter is in fact a form of the noun **rhim** 'crowd, host', as Tolkien states in V:383, so the class plurals built with this ending could actually be considered as compounds, and they are historically, yet Tolkien regularly calls them "plurals". In L:178 (no. 144) he states about Sindarin that "the general plurals were very frequently made by adding to a name (or a place-name) some word meaning 'tribe, host, horde, people'". There are also syntactic arguments to consider them as plurals in Sindarin, since they trigger plural agreement of adjectives (cf. **Pinnath Gelin** 'Green Ridges' on the map for *The Lord of the Rings* and in *The Silmarillion* Appendix) and articles (cf. **Tol-in-Gaurhoth** 'Isle of [the] Werewolves' in *The Silmarillion*, similar to the unquestionably plural **Annon-in-Gelydh** 'Gate of the Noldor'). This is very probably true of Noldorin also.

- **Eledhrim** class pl. of **Eledh** (V:356).
- **firiath** (?)class pl. of **fîr** [later emended: **fîr** 'man, mortal' was replaced by **feir** pl. **fîr**] (V:381; VT46:10).
- **giliath** class pl. of **geil** (V:358 corrected in VT45:15).
- **Daðrin** (read *Daðrim*?) class pl. of **Dân** (V:375).[7]
- **golodhrim** class pl. of **golodh** (V:377).
- **orodrim** class pl. of **orod** (V:379).
- **Penedhrim** class pl. of **penedh** (V:366).
- **siniath** class pl. of **sein** (V:385).

Other plurals

- **filig** pl., analogical singular **fileg** or **filigod** 'small bird' (V:381).
- **lhoth** 'flower(s)', sg. **lhothod** [reading of the second **o** uncertain] (V:370 corrected in VT45:29).

These nouns actually mark number in a different way from the others. The basic, unmarked form is really a *collective*, from which a form indicating a unit extracted from it — technically a *singulative* — can be built by way of a suffix. At the end there is a singulative / collective opposition which is superficially like the more usual singular / plural opposition. There is a complete parallel in the Brythonic languages: Welsh has for instance *moch* 'pigs, group of pigs' vs. *mochyn* 'a pig', or *coed* wood, 'group of trees' vs. *coeden* 'tree'. This category especially includes items often found in groups; the data are too limited to say if it is also the case in Noldorin.

- **hên** pl. **hîn** dual **hent** 'eye' (V:364, VT45:22).
- **lhaw** 'ears (of one person)' from "an old dual *lasū* — whence singular *lhewig*", first written as **lhaweg** (V:368, VT45:26).

Here we see the isolated survival of the old category of dual (still alive in Quenya) in Noldorin. In the second case we also have a dual / singulative opposition. Brythonic languages also have a few duals for parts of the body, especially Breton, which has for instance *lagad* 'eye' / *daoulagad* 'a pair of eyes' / *daoulagadoù* 'pairs of eyes' or *skouarn* 'ear' / *divskouarn* 'a pair of eyes' / *divskouarnoù* 'pairs of ears'. This formation is more restricted in Welsh, which has for instance *glin* 'knee' pl. *gliniau* dual *deulin*, or *dwylo*, an original dual now used as the plural of *llaw* 'hand'.[8]

- **feredir** pl. **faradrim** (V:387, VT46:9).

Feredir is clearly *farad-dir* 'hunting-man' with vowel affection — which incidentally suggests that compounds of this kind must be old. The unaffected form of the first element is seen in the plural. In this compound we see suppletion: **dîr** 'man', used as an agental ending with a shortened vowel (cf. V:354), is replaced by **rhim** 'crowd, host' (V:383) in the plural. This formation is similar to class plurals. There is an interesting parallel in German, which has a series of compound names for occupations whose second member is *Mann* 'man' in the singular and *Leute* 'people' in the plural: *Kaufmann* 'shopkeeper' pl. *Kaufleute*, *Fachmann* 'specialist' pl. *Fachleute*, *Seeman* 'seaman' pl. *Seeleute*, etc.

Notes

This article was first published on Aaron Shaw's website The Noble Tongue — *I Lam Arth* (http://sindarin.weet.us/).

1. Actually the two forms are merely listed side by side, and they may well be doublets.

2. The entry reads "*hniof* (pl. *hnyf*) and *hnuif*". This last form is apparently a variant, but it is not clear whether it is singular or plural.

3. In V:352 and V:381 **brethil** is implicitly given as a singular.

4. Helge K. Fauskanger discusses this thoroughly in his article "Sindarin — the Noble Tongue", section "Expanded plurals".

5. I developed this point in the article "Imparisyllabic nouns in Sindarin" on the website The Noble Tongue - *I Lam Arth*.

6. See "Sindarin — the Noble Tongue", section "Plurals in -**in**".

7. The entry reads "N *Dân*, pl. *Dein*, *Daðrin*". The **n** of the latter is in the manuscript. I tend to think it is a slip for *Daðrim, a class plural in -**rim** common in ethnic names (cf. the above mentioned **Eledhrim**, **golodhrim**, **Penedhrim**), all the more so that this presentation singular — plural — class plural is not isolated in the document. Tolkien alludes to the Sindarin shift of **nr > ðr** (**dhr**) in LR:1087, and it is attested elsewhere in the *Etymologies*: consider for instance the Noldorin forms **odhron** and **odhril** from the root ONO- (V:379). Yet one cannot entirely rule out that it is a rare kind of plural, which should then be classified among the imparisyllabic, near the -**in** forms. See *Lambengolmor* messages 743 (Sep. 20, 2004) and 745 (Sep. 21, 2004).

8. Ball and Fife (1993), p. 310 and 365.

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See also the general *Tengwestië* Bibliography.

Change Log

- 2008-11-08 14:28:09: Formatting changes only: converted text to Gentium/Basic, deprecated all Gentium tags, converted combining diacritics to modifiers where possible

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