-Aster, a Latin Suffix

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ASTER, A LATIN SUFFIX

INTRODUCTION

A brief remark in Palmer, The Latin Language, regarding the “pejorative in -astro-” aroused my interest in this rare suffix. The school grammars either do not mention this suffix at all, or at most have brief notices.¹

The most extensive treatment of this suffix was done by Seck, in Archiv für Lateinische Lexicographie und Grammatik, 1884. All later authors are dependent on him. He did not, however, include in his word list many entries from DuCange that are noted here, nor Neo-Latin terms in scientific usage. In this article I have attempted to give as complete a listing of words formed with -aster as possible. To this word list are added remarks on etymology, history of use, meaning, word-formation and types of words using this suffix. A few footnotes and the bibliography will be found at the end.

HISTORY

Words formed with the suffix -aster were apparently used in the popular Latin speech, but were not considered of a quality high enough to be employed in literature of a more formal type. The examples we have from the classical period appear in comedy, in letters (primarily those of Cicero) and in Vitruvius. These citations attest to the popular nature of this formation.

There are also some few examples from Inscriptions. The majority are words referring to persons, especially to family members, such as the common filiaster, brother-in-law.

For some reason this suffix proved very useful in Latin. Consequently it continued in the language, and examples of it are found in

¹ Bennett, François, Hale and Buck, Gildersleeve-Lodge, Harkness, and Zumpt mention nothing; Allen and Greenough, Lane, Roby and Grandgent have brief remarks.
every period of Latinity. There are numerous forms in medieval Latin, in Renaissance Latin, and even in scientific neo-Latin. Botanists in the past couple of centuries have used this suffix to denote various varieties of plants, especially those which appear wild or misshapen. In using this, these scientists are following an ancient practice: even in the earliest period, several names of plants occur, which are formed with this suffix. This is due, Cooper believes, to the influence of the *sermo rusticus.*

**ETYMOLOGY**

With regard to etymology, Leumann remarks: “Ursprung unbe­

kannt.” This neatly sums up the difficulty of this etymology: the origin is in fact unknown, and up to the present, the relationship between *-aster* and any other formation has not been clearly demonstrated.

Nevertheless there are two main opinions regarding its etymology. The first is that *-aster* is related to the comparative *-tero*; the second, that it is basically the instrumental *-stro*.

Despite the many studies which have been done (these are listed for reference in the bibliography) yet it appears that the etymology remains uncertain. However, *-aster* seems certainly related to the comparative *-tero*, and was probably influenced analogically by the instrumental *-strum*.

**MEANING**

Priscian classes the suffix with other diminutives: “In *ster, et cio et leus* satis paucar in usu inveniuntur [diminutival].” From this simple explanation of the meaning, the grammarians of following centuries

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have drawn more and more precise explanations. (A number of these studies have been included in the bibliography.)

It is incomplete to say that -aster is merely a diminutive, or merely a pejorative. Rather, analysis of the terms shows that the suffix -aster denotes restricted similarity. In other words, the compound is both similar and dissimilar to the root, and resembling it only imperfectly. The dissimilarity falls under two headings: diminutive, and augmentative, this latter being the less common type.

As diminutives, several types can be listed: 1. Pseudo-, as Antoniaster; 2. The wild variety of (as of plants and animals), pinaster; 3. Younger than, porcaster; 4. Incompleteness: nigellaster; 5. Worse than, parasitaster.

As augmentatives, the following clarifications should be made: words compounded with -aster have the meaning "larger than", plus a strong note of contempt, such as "more ungainly, overgrown" (as of weeds, or animals,) pullastra.

TYPES

The suffix -aster is used with nouns and adjectives. As nouns, they express 1. Names of persons, including a. proper nouns, Fulviaster; b. nouns of relationship, filiaster; c. nouns of occupation, often denoting contempt, grammaticaster, theologaster; 2. Names of animals, especially the wild types, or a larger (rarely smaller) variety of the usual species, apiaster, porcaster; 3. Names of plants, especially the wild varieties, oleaster, pinaster; 4. A few nouns referring to objects, pallastrum, falcastrum. As adjectives, they have meanings similar to the noun formations.

FORMS

The suffix -aster is found to form nouns and adjectives, as well as two derived verbs. The nouns generally have the following forms: -aster, -astra, -astrum. Others include -astrium/jius; the verbal abstract -astratio; and spelling variants, mostly in Inscriptions: -astus, -aler.

5. F. Cooper, loc. cit. Much of this arrangement has been taken from this work.
Adjectives show the same variety, including -asticus, -astrinus/-astinus, -astrina, and the locative -astrensis.

Only two verb forms have come to light, both late: *falcstrare* and *silvastrare*.

There also exists a certain number of double suffixes, a clear indication of the plebeian nature of these words. There are two types: those in -ell-aster, *(nigellaster)*, and the more common -ast-ellus, *(pinastellus).*

**FALSE COGNATES**

The following three words appear to be derived from the suffix -aster, but are more correctly derived from other forms.


*pilastrum*: noun; "pilaster," an architectural term. Not from *pila*, pillar, but Gk: *parastates*.

*scholaster*: noun. French: *écolâtre*. Not from *schola*, but *scholasticus*, a by-form of this term; orig. Gk: *scholastikos*. The French form might be explained as a popular etymology from -aster. Meaning a certain type of ecclesiastical dignity of the Middle Ages.

There are also a number of scientific terms derived from Greek which could be confused with the Latin suffix:


*cremaster*: Gk. *kremannunai*. The name of a muscle.

*diaster*: Gk. *aster*, star. Many terms are formed with this suffix.

**WORD LIST**

*acalvaster*: adj. of *acalvus* (spelling in DuCange.) "Bald in front."

"Est acalvaster vir calvus ab anteriori parte, recalvasteretro calvus habetur." (DuC.) Also: *adacalvaster, acalvaster, acalvester.*

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6. The suffix has a widespread use in Romance languages, with a great range of forms, meanings and types. Ital: *-astro*; Fr: *-âtre*; Sp: *-astro*, and dialectal *-astre*; Port: *-astro*. Likewise in several other languages and dialects: Catalan: *-astre*; Gallego: *-astro*; Italian dialects: Genoese, Milanese, Sardinian, Sicilian, Venetian; Provençal: *-astre, -astro*; Rhaeto-Roman, *-aster*; Rumanian: *-astru*.

7. The sources used to draw up this word list are mainly cited by the author’s name alone, the full citation being found in the Bibliography. Abbreviations: DuC: DuCange; LS: Lewis and Short; TLL: *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. 
-Aster, a Latin Suffix

albaster: adj. of albus. "Whitish." Ernout, s.v. albus, remarks that Romance languages attest to the presence of this word, but no true instances of it have been found.

alicaster: adj., a correction made by Scheller of "halicastrum" in the edition of Gesner and Schneider of Columella, in favor of the noun listed below.

alicastrum: noun, of alica, a grain. "A kind of spelt", having substantially the same meaning as alica. (Col. 2.6.3; Isidore, Or. 17,3,9; TLL. Alphita: alicastrum.)

alleaster: noun; perhaps the same as oleaster; Latham, anno 1292.

alnaster: noun, of alnus, the alder tree. Botanical; a subgenus of alnus. Name from Endlicher, 1894-1894.9

amastra: noun, of amma (Syr), a mother; or nun, in the sense of a spiritual mother. Zimmermann, from CIL 8, 17323.9 Brugmann lists Amaster, proper name.10


Antoniaster: Noun, of Antonius. "Pseudo-Anthony", an imitator of Antonius. This nickname was used by Cicero (Varen. Frag. 2,10, ap. Priscian,) and Quint. 8,3,22. TLL, s.v. antius.

apiastellum: noun, of apium, celery. "Wild celery; the plant batrachion." Pliny, 8,66. TLL.


apiastera: noun, of apis. "A bee-eating bird; the bird merops." Serv. ad Verb. georg: 4,14. TLL.

apiastrium: noun, of apis. "Bee-hive." DuCange: apisterium, and apistrium. (From -aster?)

11. The works of Ambrosiaster are found in ML 17, 45-508, and CSEL 50.
**Aster, a Latin Suffix**


arecastrum: noun; of areca, Neo-L., from Port, from Malayalam: “betel palm.” Botanical, “Queen palm.” So named because the “seed [is] very irregular in shape.”

asinastelli: noun, of asinus. Cited by Seck from Pliny 15,41; not in LCL. Diminutive of asinastra.


azaleastrum: noun, of azalea (Linné, from Gk.) Botanical, subgenus of rhododendron. Name from Rydberg, 1860-1931.


capitastrum: noun, of caput(?). “Land-register; polltax.” Derivation uncertain. Körtig believes it is either from caput, or Gk. katástakon. OED cites caput, s.v. “cadastre.” Webster’s III believes it is an Italian alteration of Venetian catastico, Gk: katástikhon, a notebook.


catulaster: noun, of catulus, young animal. “Boy, lad.” Seck believes this was the name of an animal; Ernout, a term of endearment.

Aster, a Latin Suffix


Catulastr: noun; proper name. Priscian, 3,26. Of the same type as Antoniaster. Seck.

catulaster: from catulus (?). DuCange and Forcellini believe this is feminine; defined as “puella iam grandis et viri patiens.” Seck, a neuter plural of catulastrum: “ludus puerilis”, citing Dracontius, Lib. 2, fin.: “Non catulastra gerit puerilia.”

catulastrum: DuCange. Probably the neuter adj.

celaster: Noun; derivation uncertain. Ony in TLL from Gloss. 3,181, 27, for Greek pallêx; same as catulastr. TLL s.v. catulastr.

clargaster: noun, of clericus. “Young cleric; clericum.” Clement IV (c. 1265): “Praecentor aliquem clericulum non possit facere, seu clagrastrum...” DuC.


clericaster: noun, of clericus. Latham, anno. 1255. cf. clargaster.

cotoneaster: noun, of cotonea, the quince. Botanical, so called since the leaves of some species resemble the true quince.


falcastrare: verb, of falx, bill-hook. “To cut with the falcastrum.” DuC.


Filastrius: noun, of filiastrer (?). Name of the Bishop of Brescia, c. 397. CSEL 38. Also: Philastrius.

15. Ital: falcastro, bill-hook; Fr: fauchon, falx militaris.

filiastinus: adj., of filiaster. DuCange, wrongly, I believe, "referring to one's son." Probably "due to stepchildren," as in Henry I of England to Anselm, 1109: "filiastinus amor." (Perhaps an error for filiastrinus, by analogy with mediastinus.)

filiastera: noun, of filia. Meanings are probably analogous to those for filiaster, although normally "stepdaughter" alone is listed. Also: filiatra (Insc.)

fluastrum: noun, related to flustra. Seck lists this as a late form [error?] used by Hesperius.

formaster: noun, of formus, warm; or forma, form. "Fop, dandy.

Hapax legomenon in Titinius, Com. 166, ap. Festus, s.v. Obstrudant: "aut luculentaster aut formaster frigidus." If the word is from formus, the expression here is an oxymoron. Otherwise, it is analogous to oleaster, etc. TIL.

formastrum: noun, of forma (?). Gloss. Isid: "Opus pistorium." The reading and derivation are doubtful: TLL.

fraxinaster: noun, of fraxinus, the ash tree. Botanical; sectio of the group fraxinus. Name from de Candolle, 1778-1841.


Fulvinaster: noun, of Fulvinus, proper name. This form is read for Fulviaster, cf. LCL. Forcellini.

16. Forcellini: "Est tamen non probae notae verbum, seu potius plebis Romanae prorprium." S.v. filiaster. This term is widespread in Romance: Ital: figliastro; Fr: fillâtre; Sp: hijastro; Cat: fillastre; Friulian: fijâstrî; Prov: filhastre; Sard: fijastru; Sicilian: figghiastru and its derivative figghiastreddu. The parallel forms for sister-in-law are similarly widespread. E.g., Ital: sorellastra. See: S. Patterson, "Interchange of Suffixes." Modern Language Notes, (December 1909), 241-243.


haliacastrum: noun; same as alicastrum, so spelled in Columella. TLL s.v. alicastrum.

higgaster: cf. hogaster. Latham, anno 1508.


Lentulaster: noun, of Lentulus, proper name. Analogues to Antoniaster. Sedulius, Seck.

ligustrina: adj., of ligustrum, q.v. Botanical, for “adelia ligustrina.” Name from Michaux.

ligustrum: noun, of ligus (?), the proper name of an Italian tribe. “The plant privet, henna.” Vergil: E., 2,18. Ernout classes this with oleaster regarding the form of the suffix. LS.


luculaster: adj., derivation and meaning uncertain. Cited only by Seck, who rejects this reading; cf. laetaster.

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17. This term found its way into English. Further examples of English loan words are: astrologaster, cricaster, ligustre, medicaster, oleaster, philosophaster, poetaster, politaster, theologaster.

luculentaster: noun, of lucuns [Ernout.] “A fop, dandy” (?). LS s.v. formaster; Ernout s.v. formarius, p. 368.
malvastrum: noun, of malva, the mallow. Botanical; “the false mallow.” Cited in Bailly.
mancaster: adj., of mancus, maimed. “Maimed.” same as the rootform, perhaps with an added note of contempt. DuC s.v. mancus. TLL.
matrastra: noun, of mater. “Step-mother.” CIL xi, 6730, 4. TLL. Also: matrasta, DuC; mayrastra, DuC, reflecting Provençal matrastra.19
mediastinus: adj., of unused mediaster, medius. 1. “Lowerclass slave; drudge.” 2. “Custodian of a building.” 3. “Second in order.” 4. “In the middle of.” 5. Transferred: “Heating brazier,” so-called since it was placed in the middle of a room. 6. Adjectival form of mediasticus, q.v. The word is attested from the time of Cato. It is unsure why these slaves were so called. LS. Also: mediastinus, mediestinus, mediestrinus. Alphita.
mediasticus: noun, of medius (?). “Mixed grain.” DuC.
nigellaster: adj., of nigellus, niger. “Blackish.” From Gloss., cited by André, and Cooper, but without further references.20

19. Also: Span: madrastra.
20. The use of -aster with terms denoting colors is widespread in Romance, primarily in French. E.g., Blanchâtre, bleuâtre, grisâtre, jaunâtre, etc. Italian: biancastro, rossastro; Rumanian: albâstru. (This form and several alternate and derived forms or albâstru are listed in Rumanian works, but are not treated systematically.) J. André, Étude sur les Termes de Couleur dans la Langue Latine (Paris: Klincksieck, 1949), p. 256.
oleastellus: noun, diminutive of oleaster, q.v. "A Calabrian species of olive tree." Col. 12,51,3. LS.
oleaster: noun, of olea, olive tree. "The wild olive." Isidore, Etym. xvii, 340,61. Attested from the time of Cicero. Widely used by the Church Fathers (Aug. De Civ., 21,8), due to its use in the Vulgate: Rom. 11,17ff. Seck believes the gender was altered from feminine, based on olea, to masculine to show that the tree no longer bears fruit.
oleaster: adj., of olea. Pliny 16,28,70: "Tria eius [buxi] genera... Gallicum, oleastrum, tertium." Also a place name, Pliny 3,1; and a name to a grove near Gades, Mela. 3,1.
oleastrensis: adj., of oleaster. A proper name, applied to a type of lead: Pliny 34,164: Nigri [plumbi] haec sunt nomina... Oleastrense." Forcellini.
oleastrum: the same as oleaster, or as Oleastro (Forcellini.) Used by Calp. Ecl. 2,44, changed due to meter.
olivaster: noun, of oliva. Vulgar form of oleaster. DuC.21
opulaster: noun, of opulus, a maple. Botanical; synonym of physocarpus, the ninebark. Name: Rafinesque-Schmaltz, 1784-1842.

21. The forms lášter, lavašter and lavašir are found in the Spanish-Arabic recorded in M. Palacios, Glosario de voces Romances registrados por un Botánico anónimo Hispano-musulmán (Siglos XI-XII), (Madrid: Granada, 1943), s.v.

*palliastrom:* noun, of *pallium*, the pall. “A rugged mantle.” Apul., Met. 1,6: Scissili palliastro semiamictus.” L.S.


*paraster:* noun, of *pater*. “Father-in-law.” Several spellings: *paraster* reflecting French *pardre*; *pariaster*, by analogy with *filiaster*; *patraster* and *patrater*, CIL; *patreaster*, DuC; and *patrastus*, DuC s.v. *patraster*.

*peditastellus:* noun, diminutive of unused *peditaster*, of *pes*. “A wretched foot soldier.” Only in Plautus, Mil. Gl. 1,1,54. LS.


*piceaster:* Schwabe cites “piceaster pinaster” for Pliny 16,16. The term is not found elsewhere; possibly for “pinus atque pinaster.”

*pinastellus:* noun, diminutive of *pinaster*, q.v. Apul. Herb. 94, where the plant *peucedanum* is meant. Forcellini. Also: *pinastellum*.

*pinaster:* noun, of *pinus*, the pine. “Wild pine.” Pliny 14,127; 16,16. LS.


23. ALL, 1 (1884), 324ff.
24. C. Mahoney, *The Rare and Late Latin Nouns, Adjectives and Adverbs in St. Augustine's De Civitate Dei* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1935.)


raphanistrum: noun, of raphanus, radish. "The wild radish; the plant jointed charlock." Botanical; OED s.v. radish.

rapistrum: noun, of rapum, turnip. "The wild turnip." Col. 9,4,5. "Raphistrique olus", an herb of a baser quality. For the suffix, Ernout points to this as a type of -aster comparing apiastrum, ligustrum, and oleaster. Also Schwabe. 25

ravastellus: cf. gravastellus, of which this is an alternate reading. Also: ravistellus.


rhodorasstrum: noun, of Gallic rhodora, a plant name. Botanical; part of subgenus Eurhodendron. Name: Maximowicz, 1827-1891.

roastrastrum: noun, of ros (?). "An aromatic plant, briony." Alphita, 154: 40-41; 228, and note 27.

saliasterum: noun, of salix, the willow tree. "Similar to the vine salictum." Pliny 23,14,20.

seliquastrum: noun, of sella, a seat. "A kind of seat or stool, probably used in the bath." Varro: "Ab sedendo appellatae sedes, sedile ... seliquastrum." Arnob. 2,23 ap. Festum. Also: siliquastrum. LS.

serperastra: Seck lists this word, but the etymology and meaning are unclear. Stolz\textsuperscript{26} lists two meanings: in Cato, reprimands; in Varro, knee-splints (bandages to straighten the crooked legs of children, derived of serpo, and rastrum: hoe, rake.) Ernout: “Formation populaire d’origine obscure.” Cic. Att. 7,3,8.


silvastreare: verb., of sivastrum, q.v. “To inhabit the sivastrum.”

Cited in Seck.

sivastrum: noun, of siva, forest. “A kind of grove or wooded area.”

Seck.

sivastratus: noun, of sivastrare, siva. “Inhabitant of the forest.”

Seck cites this as a synonym of nemoratores.


Cic. Tusc, 5,40,116. Niedermann\textsuperscript{27} remarks that this is the only example of this suffix in “Hochlatein.” LS.


theologaster: noun, of theologus, a theologian. “A second-rate theologian.”

Used by Luther, 1518. OED.


virgastrum: noun, of virga, a rod. “A thicket; an osier bed.” DuC, anno 993. Same as virgetum.

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\textsuperscript{27} M. Niedermann, “Über Einige Quellen Unserer Kenntniss des Späteren Vulgärlateinischen,” Neue Jahrbücher für das Klassische Altertum, XXIX (1912), 313-342.
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Meaning
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