

AN OSCAN NUMISMATIC ALPHABET, AND A NEW OSCAN LETTER

Although it is certain that most Oscan characters derive their forms from the Etruscan, as well as their alphabetical order, no complete and deliberate Oscan abecedarium survives. The several painted alphabets from Pompeii are very fragmentary and most include only the first four or five letters (Vetter 69c-1). The inscription on bronze recently published by La Regina runs only from \aleph to \aleph ¹. Two of the Pompeii alphabets were originally complete but have not survived intact (Vetter 69a-b).

In all this the evidence of the Social War denarii, 91-89 B.C., has been neglected by philologists. Several issues of these coins were struck from dies differentiated by Oscan letters. No study of the denarii, die by die, has ever been published, although I have a *corpus* in preparation. But the phenomenon of the occurrence of Oscan control letters on the denarii was well known to philologists in the nineteenth century². For some reason it has more recently been ignored; thus Vetter lists the coins only to provide the words and names of the Oscan legends, without any indication that many of the coins also bear Oscan letters (200. G. 1-6).

The Social War denarii, like the inscriptions noted above, do not usually progress very far into the alphabet. One exception is Sambon 225³, whose control letters, according to Grueber, «include the whole Oscan alphabet»⁴. This is in fact not correct, but with the assembling of the new corpus enough material is at hand to warrant a reëxamination of the issue. The application of numismatic methodology to a philological problem not only supports the abecedarial order already seen at Pompeii, but reveals a new Oscan letter.

To begin, a brief excursus on the production of dies and of coins in antiquity. *Dies* were produced by incising figures and legends on the face of a metal cylinder. Apart from the figures and legends of national importance — e.g. the Dioscuri and

¹ LA REGINA, *Iscrizioni oscne della Frentania nel Museo di Chieti*, in *AC* XXIV, 1972, see pp. 266-268.

² Thus R. S. CONWAY, *The Italic Dialects*, Cambridge 1897, p. 216: «different specimens show the Oscan letters *a b g* [etc.]».

³ A. SAMBON, *Les monnaies antiques de l'Italie*, Paris 1903.

⁴ H. A. GRUEBER, *Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum*, London 1910.

ROMA on Republican denarii — control marks, of significance only within the mint, came to be added to the face of the dies — letters, numbers, symbols. Their purpose must have been quite varied, for sometimes we find one control mark limited to one die, as if to identify that die; sometimes the same mark for a number of dies, as if to identify the engraver, the office within the mint, the batch of metal, a period of working time, or the like. Sometimes a control mark appears on only one face of the coin, sometimes on both. The letters of the Latin alphabet appeared on Republican denarii first under the moneyer N. Fabius Pictor, ca 126 B.C. (5), and such control marks were sufficiently common by the time of the Social War that the Oscan moneyer would have been entirely familiar with them.

Coins are produced by inserting a metal blank between two dies, an upper (reverse, R), and a lower (obverse, O), and striking the upper die with a hammer so as to force the metal of the blank to flow into the incisions of the two dies.

The two faces of the coin thus produced can be represented: $\begin{array}{c} R \\ | \\ \text{In time the dies} \\ O \end{array}$

will break, owing to the repeated battering which they suffer; characteristically this happens more quickly to the upper die, which receives the direct blow of the hammer, than to the lower which is cushioned by the metal blank. When the first reverse die of a series is irretrievably damaged, a second of the same type will be substituted for it, while the original obverse continues in use. The production of coins from two successive die pairs, sharing a common obverse die, can be

represented: $\begin{array}{c} R R \\ | / \\ \text{Theoretically a long chain of dies can be conceived as having} \\ O \end{array}$

produced a large number of coins, with repeated substitutions of new reverses

and obverses for old: $\begin{array}{c} R R R R R \\ | / | / | / | / | / \\ O O O O O \end{array}$

When damaged dies continue in use, the chronological order of the coins can often be determined from the damage. That is, if two coins, struck from two reverse dies but a common obverse, show that the obverse was in perfect condition in the one case, cracked in the other, that must have been the order of the production of the coins, and presumably of the cutting of the dies.

Sambon 225 is an issue of denarii of these types:

Obverse: Head of Italia 1. $\forall \downarrow \exists \uparrow \vdash \square$

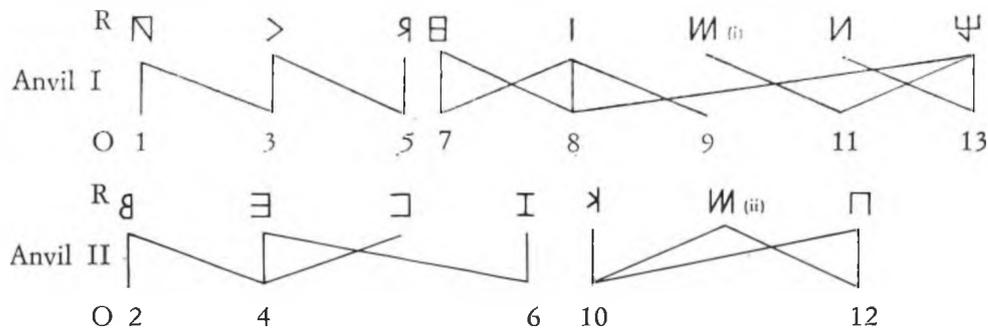
Reverse: Warrior and bull. In exergue, Oscan letter (*fig. 1*).

Each reverse die bears a different letter of the Oscan alphabet (for the single exception to this pattern, see below). It is reasonable to assume that the engraver cut the letters in an alphabetic order, not at random, but until the surviving

⁵ M. CRAWFORD, *Roman Republican Coinage*, Cambridge 1974 [hereafter *RRC*], p. 291, no. 268.

examples of the issue had been collected and the dies identified it was not possible to affirm that this was the case. Nor was it certain what purpose the control letters served. It is now clear that the dies link into several chains, within which the control letters identify the individual reverse dies. The obverse dies bear no control mark. I assign them numbers below in the approximate order of their use in striking, and so presumably of their original production. The order of use in striking is observable from several instances of progressive die damage.

When all this material is set in order, the pattern of die linkage reveals that the coins were not struck in a single sequence, but in two simultaneous sequences which share no dies between them. From the beginning two anvils worked to strike this issue, and replacement dies were supplied to each as became necessary:



The life of any single die would have been of unpredictable length; thus at Anvil I reverse \mathfrak{N} apparently broke, was replaced by $\mathfrak{>}$, and that broke and was replaced by $\mathfrak{ʒ}$, before the first reverse at Anvil II, $\mathfrak{ʒ}$, was consumed, because this latter is only succeeded by $\mathfrak{ʒ}$. From the interdigitation of the letters of the reverse dies, the following alphabet emerges:

$\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{ʒ}\mathfrak{>}\mathfrak{ʒ}\mathfrak{ʒ}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{K}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{W}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{H}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{H}$, plus the sign $\mathfrak{Ψ}$.

It is obvious that Grueber was wrong: the series is not the complete Oscan alphabet, but stops with \mathfrak{H} . Since more than 250 examples of Sambon 225 are now known, the complete absence of pieces with exergual letters running from \mathfrak{D} to \mathfrak{V} cannot be accidental. Our series is of course not an abecedarium in the strict sense, an orderly array of the letters of the alphabet to a philological end, but an alphabetic series (as La Regina's inscription) wherein the letters represent essentially a number sequence. Still, the sequence itself is meaningful only because of the implied abecedarium which gives it shape. If our series is incomplete, that results from the circumstances of coin production and has nothing to do with the abecedarium as such.

Within this series are two peculiarities: (1) the repetition of \mathfrak{W} in a pattern which otherwise restricts each letter to one die; and (2) the use of the sign which stands at the end of the Anvil I group. As to (1), note that the letter $\mathfrak{ʒ}$ is omitted. Conceivably some example of it might yet be found, but the omission

occurs just where \mathbb{M} is doubled. Note too that the two \mathbb{M} 's occur at separate anvils; that is, one was not intended as a substitution for the other. I believe, therefore, that no die is lacking here, but that there was simply a mistake in the lettering of the dies, and that \mathbb{M} (i) ought to have been \mathbb{V} .

But given that our alphabet remains incomplete, what of the last exergual mark at Anvil I? Friedländer long ago wrote, « Ψ and Ψ occur in the exergue of some coins [scil. of this issue], though not elsewhere in Oscan script. They cannot represent the Greek Ψ since the sounds *ps* are spelled in Oscan with $\mathbb{P}\mathbb{S}$. Also we find *nicht selten* the sign Ψ , which is otherwise unknown. Perhaps these marks are ligatures, the latter roughly a combination of \mathbb{P} and \mathbb{V} »⁶. This description is inaccurate: of the three signs alleged here, the first two do not occur in fact, and must be badly reported instances of the third, Ψ . And this sign occurs in all the Oscan sources only once, on this coin die. It happens that more examples of denarii struck from this reverse die have survived than from any other die of Sambon 225 save one. That we find (and that Friedländer found) this sign «not seldom» is merely a circumstance of the coins' survival, and has nothing to do with the frequency of the sign itself which, like the letters which precede it, is cut in the exergue of a single die.

Nor is it likely that the sign is a ligature. Elsewhere the Oscan inscriptions have provided many ligatures, but not such a one as this. Such combinations are normally produced *ad hoc*, as when the conjunction of two uprights offers the lapidary the chance to save a stroke, e.g. $\mathbb{N}\mathbb{N}$ becoming $\mathbb{N}\mathbb{N}$ ⁷, which would have been possible on the denarii of Paapius (Sambon 215-223). But in fact no example of ligature occurs in all the epigraphy of the Social War coins, Oscan or Latin. And only a unique contortion of letters, more appropriate to a Greek monogram, could have produced the ligature which Friedländer suggested.

Against Friedländer, Grueber apparently took the sign to be the Greek Ψ , for he so transliterated it (II, p. 329, no. 30). I assume him to have been influenced by the fact that Greek letters had already occurred as control marks on Roman Republican denarii⁸, and by the misapprehension that the exergual letters of Sambon 225 «include the whole Oscan alphabet» (II, p. 328, note 1). But a single Greek Ψ on an Oscan die would have been without context; and in any case our series of Oscan letters is not complete, but stops with \mathbb{P} . Had the engraver gone on to cut additional reverse dies for the series he would have produced \mathbb{Q} , \mathbb{R} , etc. But he did mark one die in this alphabetical sequence with Ψ . It must therefore be that Ψ represents a letter of the Oscan alphabet.

That letter has to fall, as the die sequence proves, near the end of the series as cut. It must have occurred in the immediate vicinity of \mathbb{V} (with which

⁶ J. FRIEDLÄNDER, *Die oskischen Münzen*, Leipzig 1850, pp. 75-76.

⁷ To illustrate how random is the phenomenon, see NS 1916, p. 156 = VETTER 28, where in the same name occur $\mathbb{Q}\mathbb{M}$ and \mathbb{M} (1.8). Vetter's *ma* for *mr* is incorrect; the *r* is certain – see the other *a*'s and *r*'s in the same inscription.

it is die linked) and of \sqcap . It follows \sqcup , as the continuing deterioration of their common obverse die shows. Since it does not occur in the inscriptions it must be a survival of an otherwise unused letter. It can then only represent the Etruscan \boxplus . We conventionally believe that this letter died early, and that it was not included in those alphabets which derived from the Etruscan⁸. Two of the Oscan abecedaria from Pompeii include the sequence $\sqcup\sqcap$, leaving no room for Ψ . But both are written from left to right, contrary to traditional Oscan usage (and to the strict observance of the Social War coins), which suggests that they are relatively late and influenced by the Latin.

The coins then reflect an older tradition. Our new letter must have survived from archaic times to the first century B. C. in an Oscan abecedarium for which we have otherwise no evidence. Unfortunately we cannot be entirely certain of the letter form here. All editors represent it as Ψ , in accordance with its unique appearance on the die. Having examined it in magnification I am not confident that the short diagonal at the base — or rather emerging slightly above the base — is not rather an accidental die scratch, and that the intended form was not Ψ . In any case it must be a reduction of the Etruscan \boxplus . By what steps the archaic form became that of the first century B. C. can be determined only when the intermediate Oscan abecedaria have come to light.

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⁸ The earliest examples are the issue of C. Blasio, ca. 112-111 B.C. (RRC p. 309, no. 296).

⁹ M. LEJEUNE, *Sur les adaptations de l'alphabet étrusque*, in *Revue des études classiques* XXXV, 1957, see p. 95.

OCR- ED ACR- NELLA TOPONOMASTICA DELL'ITALIA ANTICA

Numerosi toponimi antichi e moderni della penisola italiana sono riferibili ad un nucleo radicale *ocr-*. Di essi nella esposizione, che segue, si forniscono le fonti antiche (autori, *itineraria*, iscrizioni, monete), la posizione geografica, le connessioni morfologiche ed etimologiche con il tema dal quale si ritiene derivino ed altre notizie pertinenti allo scopo della pubblicazione, che è, anzitutto, quello di estendere una lista dei siti ed una carta della loro distribuzione, ma anche di contribuire alla determinazione dei significati. A tal fine verranno prese in considerazione le attestazioni dei derivati di *ocr-* nelle lingue antiche della penisola italiana.

Come in seguito verrà più ampiamente esposto, esiste un altro nucleo radicale *acr-*, anch'esso generatore di toponimi, di cui si fornirà parimenti una lista, estesa con gli stessi criteri usati per quello con la vocale in *o*. Anche di questo si esamineranno le testimonianze nel lessico delle lingue della Italia antica.

Infine si esaminerà il rapporto intercorrente tra *ocr-/acr-* e la base *arc-*.

Riteniamo che lo studio degli argomenti suddetti possa offrire un contributo al tema delle vicende degli insediamenti preistorici dell'Italia antica*.

1. TOPONIMI DERIVATI DA OCR-

A) *Fonti antiche*

1) OCRICULUM (Umbria)

Le fonti antiche ci forniscono del nome di Oriculum e dei suoi abitanti le seguenti attestazioni:

a) *La città*

Oriculum¹

Oricula³

b) *L'etnico*

Oriculumani²

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¹ LIV. 12, 2; TAC. 3, 78; AUR. V., *Epit.* 32, 1; PLI., *Ep.* 6, 25; AMM. MARC. 16, 10, 4.

² LIV. 9, 41; PL., *n.h.* 3, 114.

³ GU. 53.