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INTRODUCTION

Oscan and its alphabets

Oscan was spoken in southern Italy (Campania, Samnium, Lucania, Bruttium, Sicily) in the second half of the first millennium BC and is known from some hundreds of inscriptions in a wide variety of genres (including legal texts, treaties, religious texts, dedications, building inscriptions, curse tablets and graffiti). It is an Indo-European language belonging to the Sabellic family, which includes a number of other languages of ancient Italy, such as Umbrian, South Picene and other, less well attested languages (for an introduction to these languages see Wallace 2007).¹ Sabellic forms one branch of the Italic language family, which also includes Latin and Faliscan. The range of uses for which Oscan was written down is much wider than that of any other Sabellic language, and Oscan is also found written in a greater number of alphabets than other Sabellic languages.

The earliest may be the ‘alphabet of Nocera’ (Crawford *et al.* 2011: 16), found in three inscriptions from the sixth century BC (Surrentum 2/Ps 5, Surrentum 3, Nuceria Alfaterna 3/Ps 4), if these inscriptions are Oscan rather than ‘Pre-Samnite’ (see p. 6). The major part of the attested inscriptions is written in the Oscan alphabet (also known as the ‘native’ or ‘national’ alphabet). This alphabet, used primarily in Campania and Samnium, clearly owes its origin to the Etruscan alphabet, as shown by its letter shapes, by the use of the symbol 8 for <f>, and especially by the early absence of a letter for /o/. However, knowledge of the Greek alphabet is implied by the existence of letters for voiced stops, which were absent from Etruscan (although early abecedaries

¹ Languages such as Paelignian, Marrucinian and Vestinian are sometimes called ‘North Oscan’ languages. I do not consider them to be Oscan, and will not discuss them here. On the difficult question of the sub-grouping of the Sabellic languages see Clackson (2015).

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maintained and <d> as dead letters, these were not preserved as late as the fourth century, when the development of the Oscan alphabet probably took place). Etruscan had a four-vowel system, /i/, /e/ (presumably [ɛ]), /a/, /u/,² whereas Oscan had a six-vowel system, /i/, /e/, /ɛ/, /a/, /o/, /u/. Consequently, early inscriptions (in the ‘unreformed’ Oscan alphabet) are characterised by the use of <u> for both the back vowels /o/ and /u/ and of <i> for both /i/ and /e/ (with <e> used for /ɛ/). Around 300 BC, a reform was carried out whereby the letters <ú> and <í> were created by adding a diacritic to <u> and <i>, in order to represent /o/ and /e/ respectively (so that <u> and <i> were restricted to /u/ and /i/ respectively). Apart from occasional mistakes, and an uneven adoption of <ú> and <í> in inscriptions written soon after the reform, this ‘reformed’ alphabet is consistently used over all of Campania and Samnium. Other important orthographic features are the use of double letters to mark long vowels and geminate consonants. This convention seems to have been adopted prior to the reform of 300 BC, although some early inscriptions do not use it, and it remained optional and variable, even within individual inscriptions (Buck 1928: 25–6, 100).

A small number of inscriptions from the fourth century use the Etruscan alphabet itself. A slightly larger number of inscriptions use the Latin alphabet; the majority of these come from the late second or early first century BC.³ Particularly noteworthy for our purposes are those from Lucania and Bruttium, especially the Tabula Bantina (Bantia 1/Lu 1), which is a legal text from Lucania written about the beginning of the first century BC, and is our longest Oscan text (on the Tabula Bantina see Crawford 1996: 271–92). Like the Etruscan alphabet, the Latin alphabet also lacks enough letters for the vowel phonemes of Oscan; although it has both <o> and

² An additional vowel is found at Cortona, represented by the usual symbol for <e> facing opposite to the direction of writing. This symbol comes from various secondary processes, such as monophthongisation of diphthongs and contraction of adjacent vowels (Wallace 2008: 34).

³ There may be a couple of third century cases of Oscan written in the Latin alphabet in the coin legends *aisernim* (Aesernia 1, 263–240) and *ladinod* (Larinum 1/nFr 2a, 250–225). However, the former could be a mistake, while *-od* could still be a Latin ablative singular in the third century (Weiss 2009: 155).

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<u> (used respectively for Oscan /o/ and /u/), it has only two signs for front vowels, so that <i> is used for both /i/ and /e/, while <e> is used for /ε/. Unlike the Oscan alphabet, which uses <z> to represent the sequence /ts/, <z> in the Tabula Bantina and in Bantia 2/Lu 38 is used to represent /z/ < *di- (a phoneme possibly absent from Oscan in Campania and Samnium; see pp. 110–12) and [z], the intervocalic allophone of /s/. The Tabula Bantina provides significant evidence for the phonology of Oscan and for possible dialectal variation within Oscan, as discussed throughout this book and in Zair (2014b).

Apart from the inscriptions written in the Latin alphabet, and an even smaller number in the Oscan alphabet, the vast majority of Oscan inscriptions from Lucania and Bruttium are written in the Greek alphabet (there are also a few in the Greek alphabet from Campania). By the time of the fourth century, there was no longer much difference between the different versions of the Greek alphabet which had existed previously (on which see Jeffery and Johnston 1990). The alphabet used to write Oscan is based on the East Ionic alphabet, which included the following letters: <α>, <β>, <γ>, <δ>, <ε>, <ζ>, <η>, <θ>, <ι>, <κ>, <λ>, <μ>, <ν>, <ξ>, <ο>, <π>, <ρ>, <σ>, <τ>, <υ>, <φ>, <χ>, <ψ> and <ω>. As we shall see, there are some differences in the way that these letters were used to write Oscan compared to the writing of Greek. In particular, <β>, <θ> and perhaps <φ> are all used on occasion for writing the Oscan phoneme /f/, which Greek did not possess, although the most common letter used is <φ>, a local addition to the Greek alphabet (on the spelling of /f/ see pp. 98–105). Other letters were also used for Oscan phonemes which were not present in Ionic Greek, this time taken from other Greek alphabetic traditions found in ancient Italy. Thus we find <φ> /w/ and <h> /h/. This last grapheme has two different symbols, H and I; H is also the symbol for <η>, and only context allows us to tell whether H is being used as <h> with the value /h/ or <η> with the value /ε/ (on the symbols and use of /h/ see pp. 96–8 and pp. 147–56 respectively).

At base, this book deals with one – apparently simple – question: ‘How was Oscan spelt when written in the Greek alphabet?’ Answering this question is a worthwhile aim in itself: the understanding of Oscan inscriptions rests on identifying the meaning

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of individual words and on recognising nominal and verbal morphology. Apart from contextual evidence, the main ways of doing this are by connecting words and endings to other words and endings in other, better understood inscriptions, and by means of the comparative method, which allows us to reconstruct proto-forms and find cognates in the Italic languages or other Indo-European languages. Both of these approaches are seriously hampered, and may lead to mistaken interpretations, if we do not understand what sounds the letters used to spell them represent. For example, proposals for understanding currently obscure inscriptions such as Anxia 1/Lu 39 will fail if they do not take into account the fact that the last two letters of the word πολλοῶμ in this word represent /om/ rather than /um/, and hence that the word is most probably an accusative singular of an *o*-stem or consonant-stem noun or the infinitive of a verb, and cannot be the genitive plural of an *o*-stem (as shown on pp. 80–3). So, the spelling of Oscan in the Greek alphabet is a topic which is intrinsically important to the study of Oscan.

It turns out that the answers to this question also have important repercussions for other aspects of the study of Oscan both as a linguistic and a historical phenomenon. Studying the spelling of the inscriptions reveals new information about Oscan phonology or confirms possibilities raised by the evidence in other alphabets. It suggests the existence of dialectal differences between Oscan spoken in different areas. It tells us more about Oscan morphology, and in one case it provides evidence to answer a long-standing question about Proto-Italic nominal morphology (the *o*-stem genitive plural comes from **-ōm*, not **-om*; see p. 82). But it also tells us important historical information about the type of society in which Oscan speakers in the south lived: unlike for Oscan-speakers in Samnium and Campania, there was apparently no widespread and standardised system of orthography. If there were any such systems, agreed standards must have applied only over small areas, and often we get the impression that individual writers decided on the spur of the moment how to spell a given sound, without even being interested in internal consistency. It may be that this failure to develop a standard has to do with the position of Greek as the prestige written language, in a world in

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which many, if not most, writers of Oscan were also bilingual in Greek. At the same time, there are signs that at least some writers were aware of the Oscan alphabet, and occasionally adopted its orthographic features into their usage of the Greek alphabet. Lastly, understanding the way the Greek alphabet was used is critical to the dating of the Oscan inscriptions written in it: as is discussed below (pp. 10–12), orthography has frequently been used as a criterion for dating the inscriptions in the absence of other evidence, an approach which has, I will argue, been misapplied.

In pursuing the questions and approaches outlined here, Chapter 2 is dedicated to investigating and describing the spelling of Oscan vowels in the Greek alphabet, and Chapter 3 to the spelling of consonants. Chapter 4 discusses possible instances where spelling in the Greek alphabet has been influenced by the conventions of the Oscan alphabet. Chapter 5 summarises the results of this work, and considers them from the point of view of what variation in spelling suggests about the social situation in southern Italy, dating of inscriptions, and the phonology and morphology of Oscan.

Chapter 6 provides a lexicon of all Oscan words in the Greek alphabet used as evidence, with discussion of their phonology and origin. Since Untermann's (2000) otherwise excellent *Wörterbuch des Oskisch-Umbrischen* does not consistently address Oscan forms attested in the Greek-alphabet inscriptions, and much of the evidence discussed here consists of personal names, which are not considered at all by Untermann, I hope that this chapter will provide a useful supplement to that book.

The linguistic situation of south Italy

The earliest linguistic evidence available from southern Italy comes in the form of inscriptions left by Greek-speakers, starting in the eighth century with the foundation of cities at Pithecussae (modern-day Ischia) and Cumae by colonists from Euboea. Subsequently, further cities were founded in Sicily and along the coast of southern Italy (Magna Graecia), stretching from Cumae to Taras/Tarentum (Taranto), and including Posidonia/Paestum, Elea/Velia, Rhegium (Reggio Calabria), Locri Epizephyrii, Sybaris, Heraclea and Metapontum (Graham 1982a: 94–113, 1982b). Colonists came

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from many cities in Greece, and the dialects primarily represented in Italy at this time were Ionic, Doric and North-West Greek. Although originally colonies spoke the dialects of their mother cities, in the cities of the south Ionic was largely abandoned, except in Velia and around the Bay of Naples. The end of the fourth century, with the beginning of the Hellenistic period, saw the spread of the koine, largely based on Attic-Ionic, across the Greek-speaking world (Horrocks 2010: 79–123), including in southern Italy, although Doric and North-West Greek features are still found in inscriptions into the early centuries AD (Bartoněk 1975; Consani 1996). As a result of these developments, it is likely that Oscan-speakers were in contact with several different varieties of Greek, depending on time and place; it is quite possible that a given speaker may have been aware of more than one dialect of Greek.

Tribes later known to have spoken Oscan are mentioned in historical sources referring to the fifth century onwards, and were in control of much of the south by the beginning of the fourth century (Purcell 1994). Sabellic languages are attested in south Italy from the sixth/fifth centuries in the form of eight inscriptions from Campania and a pair of inscriptions in Lucania (Nerulum 1/Ps 1, Blanda 1/Ps 20); whether the former are in the same language as the (clearly non-Oscan) latter, or are in fact the earliest known Oscan, is presently unclear (Crawford *et al.* 2011: 16–17, 448; Clackson 2015: 26–7). At any rate, Oscan inscriptions dating from the fourth century onwards are found in Campania, Samnium, Lucania, Bruttium and Sicily. Despite the increasing power of Oscan-speaking groups in Lucania and Bruttium from the fourth century, including conquest of some Greek cities, this did not mean either the destruction of Greek culture or a conclusive switch away from Greek. We have ample evidence for the continuation of the use of Greek in Magna Graecia in the last few centuries of the first millennium, for contact between Greek- and Oscan-speakers, and bilingualism (on the latter two aspects, see McDonald 2015). Oscan inscriptions are extremely rare, if not non-existent, after the first half of the first century BC, such that it seems likely that Oscan was dying out at this time, at least as an

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epigraphic language (see McDonald 2012: 51–4 on the possibility of Oscan surviving in Pompeii in the first century AD).

The fourth century was also the beginning of the spread of Roman power throughout Italy, with fighting between Rome and Samnites, Campanians and other Oscan-speaking groups beginning with the first Samnite war of 343 BC, followed by the planting of Roman colonies in conquered areas. By the mid third century, Rome had control of Lucania and Bruttium, including a colony at Paestum (Cornell 1990). Along with Roman influence came Latin, the official language of the colonies, as the result of Roman cultural and economic power. The details of the adoption of Latin by speakers of Oscan from the fourth century onwards are not clear, with only isolated pieces of evidence here and there: for example, the third-century legal text from Luceria in Apulia (CIL 1².401) provides evidence for the learning of Latin as a second language by an Oscan speaker (Wallace 1988), while in 180 BC the city of Cumae is reported by Livy to have asked Rome for permission to carry out official business in Latin (Livy 40.43.1; for this and other evidence see Adams 2003: 112–59). Most examples are from Samnium and Campania rather than from Lucania and Bruttium, which are the areas focussed on in this book. However, knowledge of Latin and its alphabet by Oscan speakers is clear from Bantia in the late second/early first century, and there are Oscan (-influenced) inscriptions in the Latin alphabet from elsewhere in Lucania in the second century (Lucania 2, Numistro 2). It seems reasonable to assume a certain level of Oscan–Latin bilingualism from at least the second century onwards in Lucania and Bruttium.

The remaining language found in the south of Italy in the first millennium BC was Messapic, which was an Indo-European (but not Italic) language spoken in the Salentine Peninsula in modern-day Puglia, with inscriptions dating from the sixth to the first century. The language was written in the Greek alphabet. There is practically no evidence for contact between speakers of Oscan and Messapic, but some contact seems plausible on geographic grounds (for inconclusive discussion of the possibility that Ennius spoke Messapic and Oscan see Adams 2003: 117).

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Oscan phonology and morphology

A brief sketch of the phonology of Oscan assumed is given here, and is particularly important for understanding the phonological forms of the words listed in Chapter 6. Oscan had the phonemes shown in Table 1 (consonants) and Figure 1 (vowels) (see Wallace 2007: 11–13).

Inherited long vowels were shortened in non-initial syllables; the only certain examples of long vowels in non-initial syllables arose through borrowing or univerbation; it is also possible that compensatory lengthening processes caused long vowels, but there is no direct evidence of this. Oscan had long, i.e. geminate,

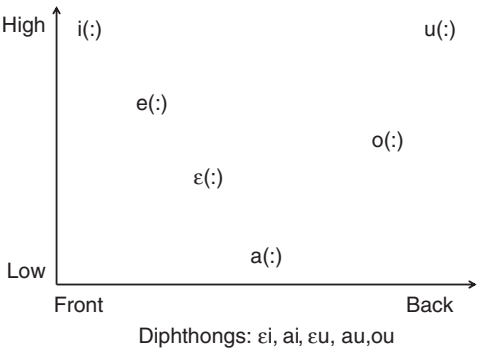


Figure 1: Vowels in Oscan

Note: It is possible that there was also a vowel /y(:)/, which would have come from **-ū-*. Meiser (1986: 53) posits such a value to explain the apparent variation in the spelling of **-ū-* between <u> in **fruktatiuf** (Abella 1 A.21/Cm 1) ‘produce’ < **b^hrūg-* and <i, i> in *castrid* (Bantia 1.8/Lu 1) ‘head (abl. sg.)’ < **kastrūd*, **tiium** (Capua 34/Cp 37), **tiú(m)** (Saepinum 2/Sa 31) ‘you’ < **tū-om*. However, other scholars have not taken this evidence as proof of the existence of /y(:)/. Buck (1928: 41) suggests that **-ū-* became **-ī-* in final syllables only (we would then have to take **tiium** as analogical on **tī* < **tū*, or explain it in another fashion), while Seidl (1994: 349–51) argues that **-ū-* normally gave **-ī-* everywhere, but was prevented in **fruktatiuf** by the labiality of /f/ at the beginning of the syllable. The <u> in **fruktatiuf** could also be explained as reflecting /u/ < **-ū-* < **-ū-* due to shortening by Dybo’s rule (on which see Zair 2012a: 132–50), although if so it is surprising that Latin *fructus* ‘having been enjoyed’ was not affected (perhaps length was restored by analogy with *fructus* ‘produce’, *frūx* ‘crop’?). At least in the south, Oscan did have [y], but this was an allophone of /u/ (see pp. 74–9 and Zair 2014b).

Table 1: *Consonants in Oscan*

	Labial		Dental		Palatal ^a		Velar		Glottal	
	voiceless	voiced	voiceless	voiced	voiceless	voiced	voiceless	voiced	voiceless	voiced
Plosive	p	b	t	d			k			
Fricative	f	[v] ^b	s	[z] ^b				g		h
Nasal		m		n						
Lateral				l						
Rhotic				r						
Glide						j		w		

Note:

^a It will be concluded that Oscan had palatalised dental and velar consonants; it is not clear whether these were phonemic or merely allophones before /j/ (see pp. 112–25 and pp. 184–5).

^b Letters in square brackets represent voiced allophones

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consonants. It probably had a phonemic difference between /i/ and /j/. This is most clearly seen in the name system (see pp. 117–20). The prehistory of these phonemes will be discussed as relevant in the text. For general information about the historical phonology of Oscan, see Buck (1928), which is, however, outdated in some respects (notably the vowel system, on which see Lejeune 1975 and Seidl 1994).

Information on the nominal and verbal endings of Oscan can be found in Buck (1928), Wallace (2007), Tikkanen (2011: 25–48). Note particularly the discussion of, and conclusions about, *o*- and consonant-stem noun endings in Chapter 2, pp. 80–3.

Dating inscriptions

As will be seen throughout this book, the dating of the Oscan inscriptions in the Greek alphabet is a key factor in understanding the orthography of the inscriptions. Previous scholars have used datings to argue for chronological changes in the orthography, and have also used apparent chronological developments in the orthography to date inscriptions; the resultant risk of circularity has not always been avoided, as can be seen in Chapters 2 and 3. Consequently, analysis of the orthography can have important implications for dating. I will outline in this section the basis for the datings of the inscriptions discussed in this book.

The starting point is the set of criteria for dating the inscriptions of Rossano di Vaglio and surrounding sites established by Lejeune (Adamesteanu and Lejeune 1971: 78–80, restated at Lejeune 1990: 26–35). These are (1) archaeological context, (2) indications from the language, (3) letter shapes and (4) orthography. Where the dating of an inscription, as given by Crawford *et al.* (2011), is established on the basis of (1), I will accept this without further comment. With particular reference to the inscriptions from around Rossano di Vaglio (which make up the majority of the Potentia inscriptions in Crawford *et al.* 2011), Lejeune considered that only a small number of inscriptions could be dated archaeologically, and Crawford *et al.* (2011: 51–4) show that even these datings are unreliable. Crawford *et al.* divide the inscriptions from