

# Oscan inscriptions from Pompeii

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I am reviewing the Oscan inscriptions from Pompeii collected in past epigraphic collections, starting from the most recent one by Crawford (2011).

**Why Pompeii?** Pompeii, with its rich and unique history, is a first-rate center for the study of the history of the Oscan language, including its death, and its relationship with the most important languages of the Mediterranean (Etruscan, Greek, and Latin). Inscriptions from Pompeii reflect the mutual influence of languages and cultures among the Mediterranean populations.

## púntram or [h]úntram

Regarding the inscription VE 8, everyone nowadays reads [h]úntram '(viam) inferiorem'. I have proposed restoring the original reading **púntram** 'bridge' and have evaluated the hypotheses put forth by Hamp (1980): A compound of the root *\*pónth1-* with the verbal root *\*trh2-* 'to cross' > *\*pontatrā* or *\*pontitrā* (cfr. *pontifex*) > *\*pontra* through apocope > **púntram** [acc. sg. f.] for the gemination cfr. **alttram**. Another possibility is to derive from the same root but with the mediative suffix *\*-tro/eh2-*. Instrument nouns are typically deverbal (though cfr. Umbr. **krenkatrum** and Oscan **pestlúm**) and usually have *\*o* grade (though cfr. *ρόπτρον* 'hammer', *ἄροτρον* 'plow'). I propose a derivation from the root *\*pent* 'find a way,' which is not attested in the Italic branch (though Latin *pons* may be related), with the same instrumental suffix. The *\*o* grade can be explained by analogy with the nominal outcomes of the root (e.g., Latin *\*pons*), but it might also be an inherent possibility in this type of derivation, as shown by the Greek examples. The meaning of the compound would be 'instrument for finding a way' > 'bridge,' i.e., an instrument, sometimes temporary, that enables the creation of a path.



## The sarínu gate

The Oscan inscriptions from Pompeii attest several names of city gates, including the gate **sarínu**. Among the various etymological proposals, the hypothesis that has gained the most support is the association of **sarínu** to the root for 'salt' *\*sal*, but the linguistic justification is complex. I propose a link with the root *\*sʷs* (extended root from the zero grade *\*ser-* 'to cut off'). The derivatives of the root are related to viticulture (e.g., Lat. *sarpio*, *sario*, cfr. *Cat. Agr.* 33, 4), also the door opens onto the hills that, according to sources, were full of vineyards (*Colum. Re Rus.* III, 2, 10). It is not implausible that originally the name of the gate was connected to an agricultural practice but that the Romans later associated it with the *salinae* outside the gate (as the vineyards).

## Key questions about Pompeian inscriptions:

Addressing critical issues in previous editions, such as absent commentaries, limited philological analysis, disorganized arrangement, and (sometimes) superficial readings;

Assessing the originality of certain inscriptions (e.g. The Testament of Vibius Adiranus);

Exploring the Latin-Oscan linguistic relationship: Latinization of Oscan or Oscanization of Pompeian Latin?

Considering the fate of the Oscan language: was it truly extinct or did it experience survive after the colonization?

Placing the inscription within its broader urban context;

Improved bibliography (new and old texts added)

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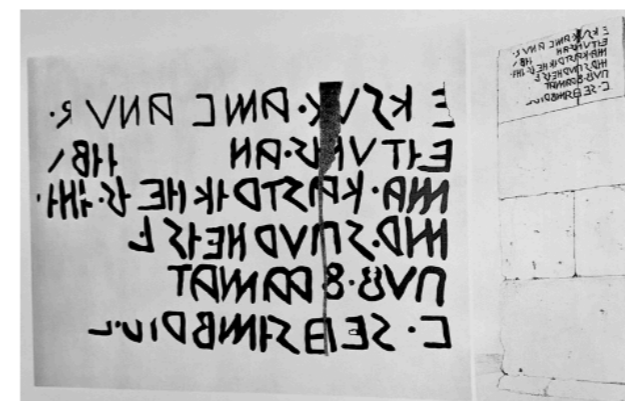


Figura 5 Zvetiaeff 1878, tav. XV.

Tipologia: iscrizione parietale

Datazione: periodo della guerra sociale, 91-89 a.C.

Supporto e conservazione: l'iscrizione è dipinta con vernice rossa su un muro, oggi quasi completamente distrutto, situato tra la Reg. VII, 6, 23 e 24.

Dettagli epigrafici: alfabeto nazionale osco, ductus sinistrorso.

Bibliografia: Fiorelli (1875: 437-38); Zvetiaeff (1876: 58-60; 1878: 82, tav. XV; 1886: 162); Nissen (1877: 500-2, 509); Von Planta (1897: 49); Conway (1897: 63); Degering (1898: 134, n. 3, tav. V, II-IV); Campanile (2009: 745-59); Coarelli (2000); Poccetti (2020: 152-7; c.d.s.).

Riferimenti: VE 25, St 36, ImTr 4.

Testo:

eksuk. amv[ī]anud.

eituns. an̄te[r] tr[ī]rībū(m)

ma. kastrikīeīs. inī(m).

mr. spurīeīs l.

puf. faāmat

v. sehsimbrīis v

Apparato: L.6. v. sehsimbrīis I VE 25, St 36; v. sehsimbrīis v ImTr 4.

Traduzione: Gli eituns da questo quartiere, tra l'edificio di Mamercus(?) Castricius e Maras Spurius, (figlio) di Lucius, laddove comanda Vibius Sextembrius, (figlio) di Vibius.

Each text is accompanied by a detailed commentary on linguistic and historical-archaeological matters.

**AIM:** To compile a comprehensive collection of Pompeian texts, complete with analyses and commentaries, in order to assess the Oscan language of Pompeii. Gathering inscriptions means finding historical clues about Pompeii and its people. We can't separate the Oscan inscriptions from the people who spoke the language or from the city's story. **Historical sociolinguistics (Mancini 2012).**

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Mancini, M. (2012), *Su alcune questioni di metodo in sociolinguistica storica: le defixiones sannite*, in Borghello, G. e Orioles, V. (Eds.), *Per Roberto Gusmani 1. Linguaggi, culture, letterature 2. Linguistica storica e teorica. Studi in ricordo*, pgs. 239-271, Forum: Udine.

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Poccetti, P. (2020), *Pompei e l'incontro con Roma: gli aspetti linguistici*, in Torelli M. (Ed.), *Pompei 79 d.C. Una storia romana*, pgs. 111-126, Electa: Milan.

Väänänen, V. (1966) *Le latin vulgaire des inscriptions pompéiennes*. Akademie Verlag: Berlin.

Weiss, M. (2020) *Outline of the Historical and Comparative Grammar of Latin*. Beech Stave Press: Ann Arbor.

If you are interested in discussing the inscriptions or have any suggestions, or if you are aware of new epigraphic discoveries, please contact me at [federico.iacozzilli@uniroma1.it](mailto:federico.iacozzilli@uniroma1.it)