

<uo> for /we/ before a Coronal

In the course of the second century BC, /ɔ/ became /ε/ after /w/ and before a coronal, other than a single /r/ (Weiss 2020: 152), for example *uoster* > *uester* ‘your’, *uoto* > *ueto* ‘I forbid’, *aduorsom* > *aduersum* ‘against’. The earliest inscriptional example comes in the *Lex repetundarum* of 123–122 BC (CIL 1².583), where we find a single example of *auersum* beside five cases of the spelling <uo>. I have found 6 instances of the <uo> spelling dated to the first century BC, beside 52 examples of <ue>.¹

This suggests a fairly rapid replacement of the <uo> spelling by the <ue> spelling (although *diuortia* apparently remained the standard spelling for this word), which is supported by the fact that only 13 instances of <uo> are found datable to the first four centuries AD.² Of these, 5 are instances of the divine name *Vortumnus*, in which archaic spelling might be expected to be retained longer than in other items. Two late cases of *uostras* (ICUR 5.14057), *uostrum* (CIL 8.9081) may well reflect the analogical effect of *uōs* and *noster* which led to the **o* of the Romance languages in this word (e.g. Spanish *vuestro*, Italian *vostro*, French *vôtre*). We find *uortice* (AE 2015.1186), *uorsum* (twice, CIL 6.20674) in verse inscriptions of the second century AD, where the effect is probably intended to be archaising; the latter inscription also features the spellings *paussa* for *pausa* ‘pause’, *gnatam* for *nātam* ‘daughter’, *ollim* for *ōlim* ‘once’, and *ollis* for *illīs* ‘them’.

¹ I carried out a ‘wrong spelling’ search on EDCS for ‘vors’, ‘vort’ and ‘vost’ with a date range –100 to –1 (19/11/2019); ‘vot’ had to be omitted because of the many tokens of *uotum*, but a search for ‘v<e=O>’ in a text file containing all inscriptions (as of 18/06/2019) found no examples. I searched for ‘vers’, ‘vert’, ‘vester’ and ‘vestr’, in ‘original texts’ with the same date range (20/07/2021).

² Searches for ‘vors’, ‘vort’, ‘voster’ and ‘vostr’ were carried out in the ‘wrong spelling’ search of EDCS (19/11/2019), with date and text checking carried out by me and Victoria Fendel. I leave aside instances of *diuortia* and the name *Mauortius*.

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The writers on language make it clear that the <o> spelling is outmoded. Quintilian makes the following comment:

quid dicam ‘uortices’ et ‘uorsus’ ceteraque ad eundem modum, quae primus Scipio Africanus in e litteram secundam vertisse dicitur?

What shall I say about ‘uortices’ and ‘uorsus’ and other words spelt in the same way, in which Scipio Africanus [184–129 BC] is said to have been the first to turn the second letter into *e*? (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.7.25–26)

While this passage is expressed somewhat cryptically, I take it to mean that he considers the <uo> spelling to be absurdly old-fashioned, and it comes as part of a list of such spellings. Cornutus and Marius Victorinus also address the topic:

‘uostra’ olim ita per *o*, hodie per *e*, ut ‘aduorsa’ ‘aduersa’, ‘peruorsa’ ‘peruersa’, ‘uotare’ ‘uetare’, ‘uortex’ ‘uertex’, ‘conuollere’ ‘conuellere’, ‘amploctere’ ‘amplectere’.

uostra used to be written as here with *o* but now we write *e*; the same is true of *aduorsa* beside *aduersa*, *peruorsa* beside *peruersa*, *uotare* beside *uetare*, *uortex* beside *uertex*, *conuollere* beside *conuellere*, *amploctere* beside *amplectere*.³ (Cornutus, in Cassiodorus, *De orthographia*, 1.37 = GL 7.149.16–18)

‘uoster, uortit’ et similia per *E*, non per *O*, scribere debemus.

We ought to write *uoster*, *uortit* and the like with *e*, not with *o*. (Marius Victorinus, *Ars grammatica* 4.18 = GL 6.10.22)

Accordingly, none of the corpora preserves the <uo> apart from the curse tablets. This phonological context appears only in a very few lexical items so there are not that many tokens of it in most corpora (I count 7 instances in the tablets of the Sulpicii, for instance, and 6 in P. Dura, although 5 of these are in the same text), but the curses as a genre happen to contain many instances of *uerto* ‘I turn’ and lexical items derived from it, so there are particularly large numbers of examples. Only 3 of these (across 2 tablets) appear to show the spelling with <uo>, as opposed to 93 with <ue>. Two belong to the same tablet (Kropp 1.4.2/1, Latium), *aruosarius* for *aduersārius*, and *aruosaria* for *aruersāria*. Since the tablet is dated to the first half of the first century BC, this usage is not relevant for spelling

³ Obviously the last two examples are not examples of the specific spelling being discussed here.

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under the empire. The spelling is probably already old-fashioned, but not overly so, as both /wo/ > /we/ and *ar-* for *ad-* before a labial fricative are characteristic of the second century BC. The remaining instance is *uostrum* for *uestrum* (I.I.I.I/1, Arretium, second century AD). Although this text does also include another old-fashioned spelling in the form of *uoltis* for *uultis*,⁴ *uostrum* could again instead be an instance of analogy from *uōs* and *noster*.

⁴ Unless EDR (EDR121894) is right to give a wider dating of AD 251–450 on the basis of the archaeology. If this is correct, *uoltis* could reflect the late confusion of /u/ and /ɔ:/.