<qu> for /k/ before Back Vowels

Original *k^w was lost before back vowels in Latin, as in *$sek^w ondos$ > *secundus* 'following, next', *$k^w ol\bar{o}$ > *col\bar{o}* 'I cultivate', in the second half of the third century BC (Meiser 1998: 92; Weiss 2020: 165).[1] The spelling with <qu> was maintained (or reintroduced) in some words (e.g. *equus* 'horse', *aequus* 'equal', on the basis of parts of the paradigm where /k^w/ occurred before a non-back vowel; *quottidiē* 'every day', which is attested later than *cottidiē*,[2] Ernout and Meillet 1985: 146), notably in *quom* for *cum* 'when, since' < *$k^w om$ (and by extension, also for *cum* 'with' < *kom*). The spelling *quom* is found frequently in epigraphic texts of the first century BC and earlier, and there are still occasional examples in the first century AD and later.[3] An 'original texts' search on EDCS for ' cum ' (date range '1' to '400', 29/09/2022) finds 4,489 inscriptions containing *cum*. Such a small number of instances suggests that the spelling was old-fashioned by the first century AD, and this is likely to be all the more true for other spellings with <qu>.

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[1] The earliest inscriptional evidence for this change appears to be hypercorrect *oquoltod* for *occulto* 'hidden' in the *SC de Bacchanalibus* (CIL 1².581, 186 BC). It took place after monophthongisation of /ɛi/ to /eː/ about the middle of the third century BC (see p. 40), on the basis of cases like *deus* 'god' < *$d\bar{e}os$ < *$d\bar{e}uos$ < *$deiuos$ (Weiss 2020: 110; assuming that *u and the rounding of *k^w were lost at the same time).

[2] The <qu> spelling is preferred by Cornutus (in Cassiodorus, *De orthographia* 1.29).

[3] I have found the following dated instances for *quom* 'when': CIL 6.38824 (AD 1–50, EDR170711), CIL 3.8135 (first century AD, Cugusi and Splendorio Cugusi 2008 no. 1), CIL 11.6125 (AD 51–100, EDR107371), CIL 11.5325 (AD 201–300, EDR123338), also CIL 4.1846, 4.10024 (both before AD 79); *quom* 'with': AE 1926.23 (AD 40 or shortly after, AE 2010.1847), Paribeni (1923: 373) (AD 1–50, EDR000294), AE 2011.1182 (Augustan/first century AD); uncertain whether 'when' or 'with': CIL 4.5269 (before AD 79); *quomque* (CIL 6.12133; AD 1–50, EDR151276); *quae{.}quomque* (CIL 11.600; late Augustan period, Cenerini 1992: 43); *queiquomquẹ* (CIL 4.1857; before AD 79).

Velius Longus and Curtius Valerianus confirm the view that on the whole the <qu> spellings are old-fashioned:

'q' quoque littera facit differentiam uocum ab antiquis maxime obseruata<m>. <nam 'cum'> quotiens pro aduerbio temporis scribebant, 'q' littera utebantur; <quotiens> pro praepositione, 'c' ponebant. aliud est 'cum subito adsurgens', aliud 'cum fluctu'. et haec pronomina, 'cuius' et 'cui', per 'q' censuerunt quidam scribenda, quo magis seruaretur origini fides, ut, quomodo 'quis' inciperet a 'q', si<c> 'quius' 'qui'. hoc amplius, quo pinguior esset enuntiatio, 'o' quoque inserebant et per 'quo' 'quoius' 'quoi' scribebant. nos ad breuitatem festinauimus scribendi et illam pinguitudinem limare maluimus, tam hercule quam 'cur' magis <scribimus quam 'quor'> quod genus est ἐτυμολογίας.

Also the ancients used the letter *q* very much to make a distinction between words. Whenever they used to write *cum*, in the sense of a temporal adverb, they used the letter *q*; whenever they used it as a preposition they spelt with *c*. Because 'when (*cum*) suddenly rising up' is a different thing from 'with (*cum*) the tide'. And some of them thought that the pronoun forms *cuius* and *cui* should be spelt with *q*, the better to faithfully represent their origins, so that, just as *quis* begins with *q*, so should *quius* and *qui*. Furthermore, so that these words should be pronounced more fully, they also inserted an *o* and used to write *quoius* and *quoi* with the sequence *quo*. We in our hurry aim for brevity in writing and have preferred to file off such fullness, even going so far, by Hercules, as writing *cur* rather than *quor*, which is etymologically correct. (Velius Longus, *De orthographia* 8.4.1–3 = GL 7.70.15–71.3)

item 'cui' utrum per 'q' an per 'c' debeat scribi, quia non nulli inuenti sunt qui 'q' littera<m> illo catholico tuerentur, quod in nulla uoce per declinationem prima littera immutetur. ita cum sit 'quis', 'quius' et 'qui' per 'q' litteram censent scribendum.

Likewise, whether *cui* ought to be written with 'q' or 'c', because a number of people can be found who maintain the letter 'q', on the general rule that in no word does declension take place by changing the first letter. So, since it is *quis*, they think one should write *quius* and *qui*, with the letter 'q'. (Velius Longus, *De orthographia* 9.3 = GL 7.72.8–11)

quasdam uero scriptiones antiquis relinquamus, ut in eo quod est 'cur'. illi enim per 'quor' scribebant, ut supra dixi, nam et ipsum 'cui' per 'quoi', quo pinguius sonaret. <nos> contenti sumus per 'cur' scribere . . .

But let us leave certain spellings to the ancients, as in the case of *cur*. Because they used to spell it *quor*, as I have said above, and even *cui* as *quoi*, so that it might have a fuller sound. We are content to write *cur* . . . (Velius Longus, *De orthographia* 13.7 = GL 7.77.9–12)

'cur' alii per *c* scribendum putauerunt dicentes non posse *q* litteram poni, ubi *u* esset sine alia uocale, secundum regulam supradictam; alii per *q*, eo quod

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originem trahat ab interrogatiuis aduerbiis, quae sunt 'quando', 'quorsum'. usus autem obtinuit ut 'cur' per *c* scribatur.

Some have thought that *cur* ought to be written with *c* on the grounds that *q* should not be used when it is followed by *u* but no other vowel, according to the rule I have previously discussed; others that it should be written with *q*, on the grounds that it has the same origin as the interrogative adverbs, such as *quando* and *quorsum*. But usage has won out, so that *cur* is written with *c*.[4] (Curtius Valerianus in in Cassiodorus, *De orthographia* 3.10–12 = GL 7.156.12–15)

However, Curtius Valerianus (in Cassiodorus, *De orthographia* 3.3–4) and Marius Victorinus make an exception for *cum* as a temporal adverb, recommending a (rather artificial) spelling *quum*. But the spelling *quom* (unmentioned by Curtius Valerius) is too old-fashioned for Marius Victorinus:

'cum' aduerbium temporis antiqui quattuor litteris scribebant [in] his, Q U U M; apud Catonem 'quum' rursus per O, 'quom' … item 'cuius' per Q U O I U S litteras scribebant. de quibus ne plura scribam, hoc custodite, ut, cum fuerit aduerbium temporis, per Q U siue unum siue duo scribatis, ut 'qum primum' et 'quum hoc facerem'.

The ancients used to write *cum* as a temporal adverb with four letters, as *quum*; Cato even took the spelling further back in time with *o*: *quom* … Likewise they used to write *cuius* as *quoius*. So as not to say anything more about these words, take care that when it is a temporal adverb, you write it with *qu* or *quu*, as in *qum primum* 'when first' and *quum hoc facerem* 'when I was doing this'. (Marius Victorinus *Ars grammatica* 4.31–32 = GL 7.13.11–12)

Terentius Scaurus, however, does not rule out *quom* as old-fashioned:

'cum' quidam per 'cum', nonnulli per 'quom'. quidam etiam esse differentiam putant, quod praepositio quidem per 'c': '<cum> illo', 'cum Claudio', 'cum Camillo'; aduerbium autem per 'q' debeat scribi, ut 'quom legissem', 'quom fecissem', quoniam antiqui pro hoc aduerbio †cuine† dicebant …

For *cum* some people write *cum*, others *quom*. There are even some who think that the difference is that the preposition should be spelt with *c*, as in *cum illo* 'with him', *cum Claudio* 'with Claudius', *cum Camillo* 'with Camillus'; but the adverb should be spelt *quom*, as in *quom legissem* 'when I had read', *quom fecissem* 'when I had done', since the ancients used to say †cuine† for this adverb … (Terentius Scaurus, *De orthographia* 8.6.3 = GL 7.28.6–9)

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[4] Of course, this information about usage would be more helpful if we knew the period to which it applied, since the date at which Curtius Valerianus was writing is uncertain.

Caesellius Vindex recommends not only *quum* but also *quiusque* for *cuiusque*:

'cum' praepositio per *c* scribenda est; 'quum' aduerbium temporis, quod significat 'quando', per *q* scribendum est discretionis causa ... 'quuiusque' non per *c* scribitur, sed per *q* ...

The preposition *cum* ought to be spelt with *c*; the temporal adverb *quum*, which means 'when', ought to be written with *q* in order to distinguish it from *cum* ... *quuiusque* ought not to be written with *c* but with *q* ... (Caesellius Vindex in Cassiodorus, *De orthographia* 10.7–9 = GL 7.207.1–4)

In line with most of the writers on language, spellings with <qu> are infrequent in the corpora. Although *cum* is a common word across these texts, we find *quom* 'when, since' only in a letter written by a scribe at Vindolanda (Tab. Vindol. 248) and *qu[u]m* or *qu[o]m* in a Claudius Tiberianus letter (P. Mich. VIII 472/CEL 147).[5] At Vindolanda we also find *quu̯r* (Tab. Vindol. 652) for *cūr* 'why' in a fragmentary letter whose writer is unidentifiable, although as they use an *apex* they are likely to be a scribe (see pp. 226–32).

There appears to be a hypercorrect use of <qu> in *laqu̯onecoru* (CEL 225), presumably for *lacōnicōrum* 'steam baths', in a papyrus letter of the fourth century AD from Karanis in Egypt, apparently a petition of some sort whose writer shows some substandard features.[6] Curiously, there are also hypercorrect examples before <a> in a pair of curse tablets from Baetica in the first century BC: *omut[e]sq[ua]nt* (Kropp 2.2.3/4), *[om]utesquant*, *[omut]esquant* (2.2.3/5) for *obmūtescant* 'may they become dumb'.

This evidence suggests that while use of <qu> in these contexts was old-fashioned and uncommon, it did survive within some educational traditions for quite some time, although its restriction to words in which it was etymologically correct was not necessarily well learnt or taught.[7]

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[5] The damaged context does not allow us to be sure whether this means 'when' or 'with', but the 'with' form is spelt as *qum* in *mequm* 'with me'.

[6] Absence of final <m> and <e> for /i/ in *laqu̯onecoru*, *domni* for *dominī* 'master' (gen. sg. or nom. pl.).

[7] Cf. *quo̯mitatu* for *comitātū* 'escort, company' (EDCS-73700030, AD 301 to 500; published in *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 1975, 229, which was not available to me).