

Double Letters to Write Long Vowels

In the second half of the second century BC, the Romans adopted the practice of writing long vowels with double letters from the Oscan alphabet (Oliver 1966: 151–5; Vine 1993: 267–86; Wallace 2011: 18; Weiss 2020: 32). However, it did not remain a standard part of Latin orthography past the end of the Republic. According to Oliver, Wallace and Weiss, the double spelling of long vowels can be found as late as the early fourth century AD. Oliver points out *uui* (CIL 3.4121) = *uī* ‘by force’ from AD 312–323,¹ *exercituus* (CIL 6.230) for *exercitūs* ‘of the army’, from AD 222–235, and *aara* (Lemerle 1937 no. 12) for *ārās*,² fourth century according to Oliver, third century according to Lemerle.

It is difficult to find really plausible examples for the first to fourth centuries AD, partly because the possibility of false positives when searching the EDCS is very high, and partly because it is hard to be sure that a particular instance is not a mistake in the writing. Searches for <aa>, <ee>, <oo> and <uu> provide a small number of at all plausible examples:³ *Spees* (CIL 4.5127, prior to AD 79), *[I]uunia* (CIL 4.8029, prior to AD 79), *lacuus* (CIL

¹ Although Wallace expresses doubt about this example; it is true that the following word, *ignis* also begins with <i>, so dittography resulting in a sequence III rather than II, is possible (there is no division between these words in the inscription). Leumann (1977: 13) identifies an example in ‘later’ (später) [i.e. than the Republic] *Ursioo(is)* (CIL 3.12009).

² Oliver also wrongly attributes *aaram* to this inscription; in fact *aram* is read.

³ In EDCS I searched for ‘aa’ and ‘oo’ in the ‘wrong spelling’ search, with the date range set to 01–400 (in the case of ‘o’ I also used ‘and not’ ‘coop’), and then manually checked the results (20/01/2021). Since searching for the strings ‘ee’, ‘uu’ and ‘ii’ on the EDCS produces far too many results (mostly false positives) to check, in LLDB I searched for ‘i: > II’, ‘e: > EE’, ‘u: > VV’, with a date range of 1–400, counting ‘a hit even if the date is of a narrower interval than the interval given (even only a year)’ and ‘a hit even if the date is of a wider interval than the interval given (in either directions or in both)’ on 24/08/2021. I also searched for ‘i: > II’, which produced 90 results. However, many of these are actually cases of <ii> for /ji/, and some of the others could be instances of old-fashioned <e> with the shape II for /i:/. Since dittography is particularly likely across a line boundary, I disregarded examples where the sequence crossed a line.

Old-fashioned Spellings

12.2606, 2607, first century AD), *domuus* (CIL 9.4794; first century AD, Dessau 1892–1916, 7332), *Iuulius* (AE 1976.700, AD 201), *porticiuus* (ILA 531, AD 298), *Ianuariaas* (CIL 11.4033, AD 345, but note a mistake in *palcis* for *pacis*), *Erclaanuus* (ICUR 10.26742 = EDB18026, AD 301–349), *uoot(a)* (AE 1977.540), *feceerunt* (AE 1972.709), *dieebus* (CIL 14.1212), *duouiratuus* (CIL 3.9768).

The writers on language who mention this feature at all consider it old-fashioned. Quintilian mentions it in passing:

at, quae ut uocales iunguntur, aut unam longam faciunt, ut ueteres scripserunt, qui geminatione earum uelut apice utebantur . . .

When letters which are vowels are joined together, they either make one long vowel, as the ancients wrote, who used this gemination as though it were an apex . . . (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.4.10)

usque ad Accium et ultra porrectas syllabas geminis, ut dixi, uocalibus scripserunt.

Down to the time of Accius and beyond they [i.e. ‘the ancients’] wrote long syllables with double vowels, as I have mentioned. (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.7.14)

Unsurprisingly, therefore, use of double letters to write long vowels in the corpora is extremely rare, if not non-existent. The curse tablets provide two possible examples: *uoos* for *uōs* ‘you’ (Kropp 11.1.1/26) from Carthage, dated to the second century AD, and *ceernis* (Kropp 6.1/1) for *cernis*, from Noricum, mid-second century AD. In neither case can a mere dittography be ruled out. In the case of 6.1/1, additional letters are also written in *siuem* for *sīue* (due to anticipation of the following word *Iouem?*), *oporno/tet* for *oportet* and *quom/modi* for *quōmodo* (dittography across a line divide). It seems unlikely that *ceernis* is an intentional use of double letters. In 11.1.1/26 *uos* is written thus several more times, and no other long vowel is written with double vowels. We also find in this tablet the old-fashioned spelling *iodicauerunt* for *iūdicāuērunt* (see p. 74). The spelling on this tablet is substandard, but mostly reflects the spoken language. However, there is an unmotivated geminate spelling in *coggens* for *cōgēns* ‘forcing’, and a scrambled spelling in

Atsurio for *Asturiō*. I do not think we can be sure that *uoos* reflects an old-fashioned spelling rather than an accidental dittography.

In addition, we find an instance of *quur* (Tab. Vindol. 652) for *cūr* at Vindolanda between AD 104 and 120. However, while a possible analysis here is that <q> represents /k/ before /u/ and that <uu> represents /u:/, it is more likely that this is a quasi-etymological spelling whereby /qu/ represents **k^w* (cf. the spellings *quom* and *quum* for *cum*; pp. 165–8). In the Vindonissa tablets, we have the dative *Secundi{i}na<e>* (T. Vindon. 41). Again, dittography seems more likely than intentional double writing of the vowel.