

# The Oscans in Greek and Roman Tradition: Some Notes

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1. The term Ὀπικός and its Latin equivalent *Opicus* have a double meaning in the ancient tradition: on the one hand it refers to a specific ethnic group, on the other hand it becomes a way of indicating a person or, more generally, a people incapable of speaking Greek correctly, with a meaning similar to that of βάρβαρος<sup>1</sup>. What makes the issue still more complex is the fact that in Latin the relationship between *Opicus* and the related term *Oscus* is not only lexical, but also semantic since the ethnonym *Oscus* early takes on a negative meaning different from *Opicus*.

The primary use of the Greek ethnonym Ὀπικός had an exclusively ethno - geographical sense: the first level of the tradition is represented by Antiochos of Syracuse since he is the best known example in the Greek evolution of knowledge about the Italic populations<sup>2</sup>.

Besides the peoples already known from the preceding tradition (Enotres, Ausones, etc.), Antiochos introduces in the ethnic system of ancient Italy the notion of *Opikoi*, which was unknown up to that level of the tradition<sup>3</sup>. After Antiochos, the term *Opikoi* appears in Thucydides (5.2.4) with the comprehensive meaning of the Lucans and without distinction from the former *Ausones*<sup>4</sup>. As a rule, the ethnonym *Opikoi* has a wide and unsteady geographic extension since the *Opikoi* superimposed on the *Ausones* of the previous or coeval tradition<sup>5</sup>. Yet, superimposition does not mean “confusion”: ethnography of the 5<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Dubuisson, *Barbares et barbarie dans le monde gréco-romain: du concept au slogan*, «AC» 70, 2001, pp. 1-16.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo 5. 4. 3 (*FGrHist* 555 F 7); Dion. Halic. 1. 11, 4. See D. Musti, s. v. *Italia* in *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, vol. III, Roma 1987, pp. 35-49; F. Prontera, *Imagines Italiae. Sulle più antiche visualizzazioni e rappresentazioni geografiche dell'Italia*, «Athenaeum» 75, 1986 pp. 295-320. For an overview on the Greek perspective on the Italian populations, see G. R. Cardona, *Nomi propri e nomi di popoli: una prospettiva etnolinguistica*, «CISL» 119, 1982, pp. 1-15 and A. L. Prosdocimi, *Gli etnici, in Picensi. Popolo d'Europa*, Roma 1999, pp. 13-18.

<sup>3</sup> According to Musti, the innovation by Antiochos compared to the position of Hecataeus of Miletus corresponds to the course of events in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century in the Oscan area. Remember the “oscanization” of Capua (between 438 BC and 423 BC) and of Cuma (about 421 BC). Antiochos knew about similar movements for the southern area of the peninsula as well, but it seems that he had only a vague idea of the latter, consequently giving a vague description in terms of ethnic successions. According to Musti, *Opici* is almost certainly the same as *Osci* (< \*Ops-ci), and the *Campani* defined themselves as *Osci*: probably the Greeks, in contact with these barbarians in Campania, invented (or accepted) a new ethnonym to indicate populations of similar origin and language which occupied the inland areas. See Musti (1988), in particular p. 279. For the concept of *Oscus* as a residual ethnonym, see D. Musti, *Per una valutazione delle fonti classiche sulla storia della Campania tra IV e III secolo a. C.*, in *La Campania tra IV e III secolo a. C.*, Atti del XIV Convegno di Studi Etruschi e Italici, Benevento 1981, Galatina 1992, pp. 31-46. For an analysis of the synchronic use of *Oscus* and *Campanus*, see B. D'Agostino, *Greci, Campani e Sanniti: città e campagna nella regione campana*, in *La Campania tra IV e III secolo a. C.*, Atti del XIV Convegno di Studi Etruschi e Italici, Benevento 1981, Galatina 1992, pp. 73-83.

<sup>4</sup> A. Peretti, *Il periplo dello Pseudo Scilace*, Pisa 1978, 187. On this problem see specifically M. Barbera, F. Russo, *Da Ὀπικός a Oscus: osmosi semantica ed evoluzione lessicale*, «SSL» 42, 2005, pp. 89-120.

<sup>5</sup> For this aspect, see Prontera, *Imagines Italiae*.

century BC was replacing or at least superimposing the “new” *Opici* on the ancient *Ausones*, distinguishing them from both the *Iapyges* and the *Enotres*, as well as from the *Siculi*, as evidence of Antiochos in Thucydides (6.2.4) and in Strabo (6.1.6) testifies<sup>6</sup>. From a diachronic point of view, the analysis of the sources undoubtedly shows that there is a precise historical succession in the use of these ethnonyms which corresponds to a lexical evolution, in both the Greek and the Latin forms. The most ancient level, in which the term *Ausones* was used, was followed by several stages in which ancient sources began to adopt new ethnonyms until the Latin terms *Opici* and *Osci* were established. The most meaningful feature of the use of the term *Opikoi* in Latin is the semantic and lexical equivalence of *Opici* (Latin loan from the Greek *Opikoi*), *Osci* and *Samnites*, though with important differences of meaning: in the Latin perspective, the term *Oscus*, apart from the negative acceptation we will point out later, takes on a more “cultural” rather than an ethnic or geographical meaning, since sources very rarely mention *Osci* as a separate people, and nearly always in reference to the past.

As sources show, in the passage to Latin the Greek term *Opikos* nearly completely lost any ethnic or geographical meaning since it was replaced by the terms *Oscus* (more rarely and with an acceptation valid mainly on the cultural level) and *Samnis*, as far as the ethnic or geographical indication is concerned<sup>7</sup>.

Festus’ evidence offers further important information concerning the semantic evolution of *osculus* and *opicus* in the early Latin tradition and their mutual relationship: *Oscos quos dicimus ait Verrius Opscos antea dictos, teste Ennio, cum dicat “de muris rem gerit Opscus”* (p. 218 L); *Opicum quoque invenimus pro Osco* (Paul. p. 205 L); *in omnibus fere antiquis commentariis scribitur Opicum pro Obsco, ut in Tit[n]i fabula Quinto*<sup>8</sup>: *“Qui Obsce et Volsce fabulantur, nam Latine nesciunt”* (p. 204 L). First of all, it is necessary to point out the sequence provided by Festus (*Opicus* – *Obscus* / *Opscus* – *Oscus*), which assures that the form *Opicus* had also been used as an ethnonym (or correlated adjective) on a very ancient level of the tradition<sup>9</sup>.

The adjective *Oscus*, on the other hand, indicates what is Samnite, in particular the language, and only in some rare examples does it take on the function of an ethnonym<sup>10</sup>. For

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<sup>6</sup> According to Antiochos (F 2), Enotrian people originally lived in a small region called Italy. The *Opikoi*, called also *Ausones*, were placed in Campania (F 7; Arist., *Pol.* 1329b, 18). For Antiochos’ image of Italy, see N. Luraghi, *Antiocho di Siracusa*, in R. Vattuone, ed., *Gli storici greci d’occidente*, Bologna 2002, pp. 52-91. For the ideological evolution of the concept of Italy, mostly in Roman perspective, see specifically F. Russo, *Il concetto di Italia nelle relazioni di Roma con Cartagine e Pirro*, «Historia» 59, 2010, pp. 74-105 and F. Russo *L’Italia nella prospettiva romana (III-II secolo a. C.)*, Pisa 2012.

<sup>7</sup> In the Roman perspective, the ethnonym *Samnis* is used to refer to a rather vast ethnic reality, covering before most of central and southern Italy and then a specific area. Prontera, *Imagines Italiae*.

<sup>8</sup> Titinius, v. 104 Ribbeck.

<sup>9</sup> Strabo, too, assures a similar succession: *Opici* – *Osci* – *Samnites*, which apart from reflecting a probable historical situation, indicates also the parallel succession of ethnonyms, progressively more precise and specific.

<sup>10</sup> This is the most attested use. See for instance Varro, *De lingua latina* 7.284 (*oscam linguam*); Livy 10.20.8 (*oscae linguae*). The term *Oscus* recurs with this acceptation also in the famous passage from Ennius, quoted by Aulus Gellius (*Noctes Atticae* 17.7): *Quintus Ennius tria corda habere sese dicebat, quod loqui Graece et Osce*

instance, Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* 3.56.1), talking about *Latium*, says *tenuere Osci, Graeci, Umbri, Tusci, Campani*. This is an example of a rather rare and surely ancient use, not only because more recent Latin sources nearly always speak in terms of *Samnites* or other Italic peoples (*Campani*), but also because some sources explicitly put the use of *Oscus* as an ethnonym on a particularly archaic level of the tradition<sup>11</sup>.

As in the case of *Oscus*, the term *Opicus* (transparent loan from the Greek *Opikoi*) used both as a noun and as an adjective, almost never has an ethnic - geographical sense as it always takes on a secondary meaning indicating a person who does not know the Greek language well. The most ancient evidence of the use of *Opicus* in this specific sense, i.e. without any hint of the ethnic meaning of the Greek correspondent, is from the grammarian Tiro (quoted by Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 13.9.4), according to whom an *opicus* is a Roman who does not know the Greek language<sup>12</sup>: *veteres Romani litteras Graecas nesciverunt et rudes Graecae linguae fuerunt...sed ὁμάδες οὐκ ἀπὸ τῶν ὕψων id est non a subus ita ut nostri opici putaverunt, sed ab eo quod est ὕειν*.

In another passage, Aulus Gellius defines as *opicus* anyone who is unable to understand Greek and Latin (*Noctes Atticae* 11.16.7): *qui et litterarum et vocum graecarum expers fuit, cuisnam liber et qua de re sumptus esset*. Fronto writes to Marcus Aurelius, asking him to correct any mistakes in the letter (which he calls “barbarisms”) since he does not want to appear to Domitia Lucilla as an *opicus*: *nolo enim me mater tua ut opicum contemnat*. Also Marcus Aurelius, in another letter (*Ad Front.*, p. 31 Naber), describes himself as *paene opicus* (nearly *opicus*) because of his problems in understanding Greek<sup>13</sup>. It is, therefore, interesting to note that *Opicus* is never used with an ethnic - geographical meaning, whereas it is well documented in the sense of a person who does not know Greek and how to pronounce it. It is precisely this fact which leads one to think that this particular Latin use is actually not originally Latin, but rather Greek, as is also shown by Iohannes Lydus (*De mensibus* 1.13), ἐξ ἧς καὶ ὀπικίζειν, καὶ ὡς τὸ πλῆθος, ὀφρικίζειν τὸ βαρβαρίζειν Ἰταλοὶ λέγουσιν. Since the concept of barbarization in the sense of cultural decay is typically Greek, it is probable that these Ἰταλοὶ are not the Italians (Romans) but rather the Greeks of *Magna Graecia*.

As Dubuisson has pointed out, the term βάρβαρος originally referred to people unable to speak and pronounce Greek correctly<sup>14</sup>. The semantic equivalent *barbarus* - *opicus* is

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*et Latine sciret*. On the Samnites' language see A. L. Prosdocimi, *Il sannita*, in *Studi sull'Italia dei Sanniti*, Roma, pp. 208-14.

<sup>11</sup> Virgil (*Aen.* 7. 730) speaks of a *Oscorum manus*. Livy, 7.2.12 states that the *Atellane* were learnt by the *Osci*. Also in Strabo (5.3.6; 5.4.8) the term *Osci* is close to the Greek and generic use of *Opici*, but placed on a very distant chronological level.

<sup>12</sup> F 13 (= G. Funaioli, *Grammaticae Romanae Fragmenta*, Teubner, Leipzig 1907, p. 402). Elsewhere Aulus Gellius confirms this specific feature of *opicus* (*Noctes Atticae* 11.6.7): *qui et litterarum et vocum graecarum expers fuit, cuisnam liber et qua de re sumptus esset*.

<sup>13</sup> The same meaning, i.e. with a linguistic character, occurs in Terentius Scaurus (*De orthographia* 7.23.1 Keil.), Iuvenalis (*Sat.* 3. 203-211; 6. 455), Ausonius (*Epigr.*, 79) and Sidonius Apollinaris (*Ep.* 7.3.1).

<sup>14</sup> As Dubuisson, *Barbares*, pp. 4 ff., stresses, from the original linguistic meaning, *barbaros* assumed early a wider cultural and ethnic connotation.

confirmed by Iuvenalis' evidence: (6. 55), *nec curanda viris opicae castigat amicae / verba*, specifying *imperitae, male pronuntiantis*<sup>15</sup>. A *scholium* on Iuvenalis (3.207) clarifies the linguistic reference as well: *iamque vetus Graecos servabat cista libellos / et divina opici rodebant carmina mures ... Graeci dicunt de his, qui imperite locuntur, alii opicos dicunt eos, qui foedam vocem habent*<sup>16</sup>.

Consistent with this use, another *scholium* on Iuvenalis (3.207) clarifies that *Graeci dicunt de his, qui imperite locuntur, alii opicos dicunt eos, qui foedam vocem habent*<sup>17</sup>.

Thus, the semantic equivalents *Opicus* – *barbarus* shows that *Opicus*, indicating someone who does not speak Greek, is not a codification of the Roman but of the Greek tradition, which had stigmatized the inability to speak Greek of this specific Italian population<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, it is extremely interesting to observe that the linguistic meaning is expressed only by the term *Opicus*, and not by *Oscus*: clearly, the former Greek tradition determined the semantic specialization of this ethnonym in Latin usage as well.

A fragment of Titinius (v. 104 Ribbeck) provides us with further data on the use of *Opicus* with the meaning of “unable to speak correctly”: those who speak Oscan do not know Latin and just as the *Opici* do not know Greek, the *Osci* speak only Oscan; in the first case the negative feature is stressed (inability to speak Greek), in the second case the positive one (Oscan is the language spoken by those who belong to the race of the *Osci*)<sup>19</sup>. It is not accidental that both cases assume the linguistic point of view, probably because the Greek use of ὀπικὸς, widely accepted in Latin, influenced the primary use of *oscus*, which was used above all to indicate a fact of language.

Two passages by Ausonius associate the meaning of “obscure, illegible” with *opicus*, which obviously is an expansion of the main definition “uncultured”. In the following two cases, *opicae papyri* and *opicae chartae* are mentioned to indicate precisely documents which, for different reasons, are illegible: in the first case (*Ep. 4, nil quaero, nisi quod libris tenetur / et quod non opicae tegunt papyri*), since *tego* means “to hide”, we can presume that the expression *opicae papyri* refers to something hidden, and hence illegible; in the second case (*Comm. Prof. Burdig., 23, v. 1-4, Victori studiose, memor, celer, ignoratis /*

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<sup>15</sup> It is extremely interesting to observe how the connection *opicus* (*oscus*) – *barbarus* survives in the late antiquity through the Middle Age. See for instance Tertullianus, *Policraticus*, 7.19, where *opicus* is synonymous of *barbarous*. On this equivalence in the Middle Age see M. Feo, *Il nome di Opizzino*, in F. Forner, C. M. Monti, P. G. Schmidt, edd., *Margarita amicorum. Studi di cultura europea per Agostino Sottili*, Milano 2005, pp. 255-282, in part. pp. 260 ff.

<sup>16</sup> This passage recalls another *scholium* (6.455) concerning problems of pronounce. P. 102 Wessner.

<sup>17</sup> P. 43, Wessner. In the same passage we find also that *iamque vetus Graecos servabat cista libellos / et divina opici rodebant carmina mures*; according to this metaphor, the *opici* mice “gnaw” *divina carmina*. Once again the idea of *opicus* is opposed to something concerning the correct use of the language. See also M. Dubuisson, *Remarques sur le vocabulaire grec de l'acculturation*, «RBPh» 60, 1983, pp. 5-32.

<sup>18</sup> See Barbera, Russo, *Osmosi semantica*, pp. 91 ff.

<sup>19</sup> See Festus, p. 204 L: *in omnibus fere antiquis commentariis scribitur Opicum pro Obsco, ut in Tit[us]i fabula Quinto: “Qui Obsce et Volsce fabulantur, nam Latine nesciunt”*.

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*adsidue in libris nec nisi operta legens / exesas tineis opicasque evolvere chartas / maior quam promptis cura tibi in studiis*), once again the author refers to something illegible<sup>20</sup>.

The same can be assumed in the case of *opicus* in the sense of illegible: Festus (p. 189 Lindsay) says that *obscum* means “holy”, and Cloatius, quoted in the comment, mentions in this connection the *leges obscatae*, i.e. “holy”, “sacred”. If it is true that *obscus* has the same value as *opicus*, as is claimed by Festus, the sense we can give to the first term can be reconstructed on the basis of *opicus*: if *opicus* means illegible in the sense that something cannot “be read physically” for various reasons, the same meaning would occur also for *obscus*, which would mean that the *leges obscatae* are called that because they are not legible to everyone<sup>21</sup>.

The connection between this use and the meaning of *opicus* as person unable to speak Greek correctly is clear and indubitable, because of the common linguistic reference. In both cases, *Opicus* indicates a linguistic (or widely cultural) problem: something could be illegible either because it was forbidden or it was because incomprehensible.

2. Ausonius (*Ep.* 79.1-3) also attributes to *opicus* a moral sense, which the ancient sources more often connect to *oscus*: *Eunus Syrisus, inguinum ligurritor, / opicus magister (sic eum docet Phyllis), / muliebre membrum quadriangulum cernit*. In v. 12 of the same epigram, a *magister* who earlier was *opicus*, is now defined *obsc(a)enus*, with the specific correspondence of the terms we also find in Festus (p. 204 L) *s.v. oscus: A quo (= Obsco) etiam verba impudentia elata appellantur obscena, quia frequentissimus fui usus Oscis libidinum spurcarum*), which suggests a link (etymological as well as semantic) between *oscus* and *obsc(a)enus*. This paraetymology is not entirely unwarranted, not only because the adjective *obsc(a)enus* can actually be traced back to *oscus*, but also because the connection between *oscus* and the idea of “dirty”, in both the physical and the moral sense, often occurs in Latin sources, as Porphyrius’ comment to Horace (*serm.* I, 5, 62) confirms<sup>22</sup>: *Campani, qui Oscī dicebantur, ore immundi habiti sunt. Unde etiam obscenos dictos putant quasi oscenos*. Porphyrius confirms that the term *Oscī* was used as an ethnonym only in very ancient times (this is also demonstrated by the tense of the verb, *dicebantur*); besides that, we notice the

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<sup>20</sup> Consistently with this use, Sidonius Apollinaris (*Ep.* 3.1) defines a translation *opica* if *turbida*, once again “unclear”.

<sup>21</sup> F. M. D’Ippolito, *Leges obscatae*, in «PP» 335, 2004, pp. 81-91. It is because of the connection between *opicus* and *obscus* (indicated by Festus) that I do not agree with Nettleship’s hypothesis; according to Nettleship, *obscus* should be connected to *opacus*. However, there is no lexical relationship between these two words. Nor is it possible to accept the second hypothesis of Nettleship, according to which *obscus* was connected to *obscures*. Aside from the lexical problem of these hypotheses, in this case we must also remember that Festus explicitly links *obscus* to *opicus*, and it is in *opicus* that the semantic explanation of *obscus* must be found. H. Nettleship, *Contributions to Latin Lexicography*, Cambridge 1889 (repr. 2010), p. 540. See also A. Thielfelder, *Obscaenus*, in *Navicula Chiloniensis. Studia philologa Felici Jacoby professori Chiloniensi emerito octogenario oblata*, Leiden 1956, pp. 98-106

<sup>22</sup> See also Tacitus, *Annales*. 4.14: *Oscum...ludicrum, levissimae apud vulgum oblectationis, eo flagitiorum et virium venisse ut auctoritate patrum coercendum sit*.

conceptual closeness and lexical similarity between *osci* / *obsceni* / *osceni*, as indicated by Festus and emphasized also by the use of the adjective *immundi*, which once again recalls the idea of “dirty”.

The same negative acceptation occurs in Titinius, as Festus (p. 390 L) indicates: ...*e sucerda* / ...*homo opicer*. Clearly, the *Osci* were said to be that immoral so as to enter the collective imagination as a symbol of immorality and to coin an adjective on the basis of their ethnicity, as other sources stress.

The connection to *obsc(a)enus* would hence be a minor fact (remember that the etymology of *obsc(a)enus* from *oscus* is only one of many usages in the ancient tradition) motivated by the assonance between *oscus* and *obsc(a)enus* and by the contiguity of meaning of the two terms.

Pliny's evidence provides us with further data concerning the evolution of the term *Opicus* in Latin and its semantic relationship with *Oscus*. In an attack on Greek medicine, Pliny quotes Cato (*Naturalis Historia* 29.7.14): *Nos quoque dictitant barbaros, et spurcius nos quam alios* Ὀπικῶν *appellatione foedant*. Why did the Greeks call the Romans *Opici*, and why did the Romans take offence at being confused with them<sup>23</sup>?

After what has been said above, I am inclined to exclude the possibility that the Greeks wanted to call the Romans immoral (like the Romans did with the *Osci*) mostly because this acceptation is completely Roman, unlike the linguistic one. It is, however, possible that the Romans interpreted the Greek use of the term in this sense, as indicated also by the use of *spurcius*, which once again refers to the semantic aspect of the secondary use of *oscus*. Moreover, although it is true that for the Greeks the *Opici* were a people widely diffused along the Tyrrhenian coast, I do not believe that at the time of Cato the ethnonym was used in such a generic way. It is, therefore, more probable that the Greeks voluntarily confounded the Romans with the *Opici* in order to associate the former with the latter, who were “the barbarians par excellence” of Italy<sup>24</sup>. We have seen that, except for some late examples, *Opici* has a linguistic-cultural meaning, while the interpretation of *Osci* - obviously apart from indicating everything that was Oscan - was moral.

Cato's passage, which uses the term Ὀπικῶν, can be explained as evidence of the Greek use (*appellation* Ὀπικῶν). The fragment of Titinius (Festus, p. 390 L) associates a term derived from the root *Opic-* (i.e. the form modelled on Greek) with the meaning connected to the

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<sup>23</sup> For this problem, see specifically Dubuisson, *Les opici*, pp. 532-34. According to Dubuisson, the Greeks confused Romans and Oscans. Yet, as we have seen above, Greek sources were able to distinguish several Italian peoples already in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Therefore, Dubuisson's hypothesis is not acceptable.

<sup>24</sup> Still in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD a passage from Aristides Quintilianus (*De musica*) confirms the barbarian nature of the Oscan people, comparing them to beasts: ἀνάισθετοί τέ εἰσι καὶ βοσκηματώδεις, ὡς οἱ τε περὶ τὴν Ὀπικίαν καὶ Λευκανίαν. For the barbarization of *Magna Graecia* in the Greek perspective, see recently F. Russo, *Ancora sulla barbarizzazione di Poseidonia*, «Aevum» 82, 2008 pp. 25-39.



root *Osc-* (see Festus paraetymology). Clearly, in the period in which Titinius<sup>25</sup> lived a specialization of the terms with their respective meanings had not yet taken place.

As regards the origin of the secondary meaning of *oscus*, I believe that a possible source may be found in the characteristics of the *fabula atellana* (Strabo 5.3.6)<sup>26</sup>.

The *fabula atellana* was a farce of Oscan origin (from Atella) which dealt with vulgar matters in coarse language and, most important of all, staged situations that might well have been considered immoral<sup>27</sup>. It is therefore plausible that the derogatory connotation in a moralistic sense which is called to mind by the adjective *obsc(a)enus* derives exactly from the genre of the Atellana, whose characteristics match perfectly with the secondary meaning of *oscus* as obscene and trivial.

For the lexical as well as the semantic point of view, the analysis we have carried out shows a certain degree of semantic and lexical continuity and contiguity between *opicus* and *oscus*. Starting from the material already examined by Dubuisson, which was duly confronted with other evidence and hypotheses, it is possible to deduce that, despite the divarication of their use, the two ethnonyms seem to maintain a basic referential homogeneity. On this basis an evolution concerning the level of secondary meanings needs to be added. The semantic evidence concentrates at times on one of the lexemes, at times on the other, even if the figurative sense is directly documentable only for *opicus*.

*Oscus*, which has a particular specialized use (with reference to the Oscan language), recovers semantic affinity with *opicus* indirectly (with reference to the Oscans' immoral behaviour) when the ancient tradition reconnects it paraetymologically to the adjective *obsc(a)enus*.

Under a wider cultural point of view, this study provides us with some important elements useful for understanding the Romans' concept of "barbarian" and its dependence on the previous Greek experience, where the capacity to understand a specific language represented the most important feature differing Greeks from barbarians.

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<sup>25</sup> M. Martina, *Sulla cronologia di Titinio*, in «Quaderni di Filologia Classica dell'Università di Trieste» 1, 1978, pp. 5-25. The alternative hypothesis collocates Titinius immediately before the period in which Cato lived.

<sup>26</sup> ἴδιον δὲ τι τοῖς Ὀσκοῖς καὶ τῷ τῶν Αὐσόνων ἔθνει συμβέβηκε· τῶν μὲν γὰρ Ὀσκων ἐκλελοιπόντων, ἡ διάλεκτος μένει παρὰ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις, ὥστε καὶ ποιήματα σκηνοβατεῖσθαι κατὰ τινὰ ἀγῶνα πάτριον καὶ μιμολογεῖσθαι. Strabo's evidence is important for two reasons: first of all, it confirms that the term *Oscus* as an ethnonym was used in connection with the past and not with the present; secondly, the use of *Oscus* as the name of a dialect confirms its linguistic reference.

<sup>27</sup> Livy, 7.2.12. On the *fabula atellana*, see P. Frassinetti, *Fabula atellana. Saggio sul teatro popolare latino*, Genova 1953, spec. pp. 15 ff. Recently, R. Raffaelli, *L'Atellana letteraria: temi, metri, modelli*, in R. Raffaelli, A. Tontini, ed., *L'Atellana letteraria*, Atti della Prima Giornata di Studi sull'Atellana, Succivo 2009, Urbino 2010, pp. 83-100. For the relationships between the *Atellana* and the comedy (most of all of Plautus), cfr. A. López, A. Pociña, *Comedia Romana*, Madrid 2007; for the most common characters of these plays, see S. Hurbánková, *Personae oscae delle Atellanae*, «SPFB(klas)» 13, 2008, pp. 67-79.

It is thus of great interest to observe how this distinction based mostly and originally on a linguistic skill endured throughout the Middle Ages, when a vulgar person who was even unable to speak correctly was called *Opizzinus*, clearly a derivative of *Opikos* / *Opicus*<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Feo, *Il nome Oppizinus*, pp. 256 ff.