

## XXI. The Numeral Praenomina of the Romans

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Of the praenomina which the Romans used frequently, three are nothing but ordinal numerals. They are *Quintus*, *Sextus*, and *Decimus*, and their common occurrence explains why they appear regularly in the abbreviated forms *Q.*, *Sex.*, and *D.* These three names are attested abundantly both by literary texts and by inscriptions. The Latin praenomen *Septimus* seems to occur only in three literary passages,<sup>1</sup> but *Sepis*, which appears to be the corresponding Oscan praenomen, is attested by two Oscan inscriptions.<sup>2</sup> The praenomen *Octavus* is apparently not attested anywhere, while *Nonus*, which does not occur as a name in Latin, may have been used as such in Sicel.<sup>3</sup> Yet at one time the Romans must have used the names *Septimus*, *Octavus*, and *Nonus*

<sup>1</sup> In Liv. 25.37.2 the Roman knight L. Marcius is called *Septimi filius*. In the following passages of Livy's history the same person is referred to as merely L. Marcius: 25.37.6; 26.2.1; 26.17.3 (praenomen original?); 26.37.8; 28.42.5. In 28.28.13 Livy refers to the same knight as *Septimus Marcius*: Livy remembered the rare praenomen, but forgot that it was the father's, not the son's. And in a later book (32.2.5) the knight is called *L. Marcius Septimus*: good examples of how an ancient historian would rely on his memory. The anonymous *Liber de praenominibus* (Valer. Max. ed. Kempf<sup>2</sup> [Lipsiae 1888] 587-91) 1 (page 588, line 7) gives the name *Septimus Modius* to the first king of the Aequiculi. Whatever the date of this anonymous treatise, much of its material derives from Varro, who is mentioned by name four times: twice in 1 (page 587, line 17; page 588, line 8), and once each in 3 (page 589, line 5) and 4 (page 589, line 24). But Varro does not seem to have been the direct source, since there are in the anonymous treatise a number of statements which differ from Varro's doctrine; see Chase (below, note 7) 161. For *Septimus* used as the only name (but not necessarily as praenomen) see *CIL* iii.1937 = *ILS* 3263; *CIL* x.3346 = *ILS* 2906; *ILS* 9422.

<sup>2</sup> R. S. Conway, *The Italic Dialects* (Cambridge 1897) 1.113-14, Nos. 106 and 107 (cf. 2.655) = E. Vetter, *Handbuch der italischen Dialekte* 1 (Heidelberg 1953) 76-77, Nos. 82 and 83 (cf. page 432). Similarly the Latin praenomen *Decimus* corresponds to Oscan *Dekis* (the latter name occurs unabbreviated in the following Oscan inscriptions: Conway 1.63-64, No. 48; 1.134, No. 137c, lines 3, 4, 7, and 9; No. 137f, line 7 = Vetter 1.51-52, No. 16; 1.33-37, No. 5). The Oscan name *Dekis* is used as a praenomen, even though in formation it corresponds to the Latin gentilicium *Decius* rather than to the praenomen *Decimus*.

<sup>3</sup> The Sicel inscription concerned (of Centuripe) has been published fully by J. Whatmough, *The Prae-Italic dialects of Italy* 2 (Cambridge [Mass.] 1933) 444-49, No.

as commonly as the names *Quintus*, *Sextus*, and *Decimus*. For from these numeral names, as from other praenomina, were derived, by means of the adjectival suffix *-ius*, gentilician names; and the series *Quin(c)tius*, *Sextius*, *Septimius* or *Septimius*, *Octavius*, and *Decumius* or *Decimius* is well established. The frequency of these gentilician names implies that the praenomina from which they were derived had been equally frequent among the Romans. Gentilician names derived from numerals occur also in the Italic dialects, and from this one would likewise conclude that such names were spread widely.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, at an early period of Roman history there existed a system of names which utilized as praenomina the ordinal numerals from *quintus* to *decimus*, inclusive, but excluded the ordinals "first" to "fourth" and the ones following "tenth." From these praenomina were derived gentilician names; but, whereas all six of the gentilician names continued to be used at Rome, three of the numeral praenomina, namely *Septimius*, *Octavius*, and *Nonus*, fell into desuetude, as did so many others of the older Roman praenomina.<sup>5</sup>

This conclusion serves to differentiate from the above group of numeral names two other groups of similar names. The first of these distinct series comprises the masculine names *Primus*, *Secundus*, *Tertius*, and *Quartus*. That these names are, in fact, a group distinct from the group of the numeral praenomina (and the gentilician names derived from the latter), is beyond

578, who refers to the previous discussions. Whatmough with some hesitation inclines to consider the form to be *Nunus*, and seems to accept the equation with Latin *Nonus* (see his *Prae-Italic dialects* 2.578–79 and 3.33), though apparently he does not consider the equation certain (or important) enough so as to merit mention in his summary *The Foundations of Roman Italy* (London 1937) 365–66.

<sup>4</sup> The Latin *Quin(c)tius* corresponds to the Oscan name *Pūntiis* (Conway [above, note 2] 1.58–59, No. 39 = Vetter [above, note 2] 1.47–49, No. 8) and to the Paelignian form *Pontius* (Conway 1.239, No. 210 = Vetter 1.140–41, No. 202); cf. also *Πομπύτιος* in the Mamertine inscription from Messana (Conway 1.1–2, No. 1 = Vetter 1.130–31, No. 196). This Oscan name was Latinized as *Pontius*. Latin *Octavius* corresponds to Oscan *Vhtavis* (Conway 1.128–29, No. 131; 1.208, No. 190 = Vetter 1.31–33, No. 4; 1.115, No. 168). Latin *Nonius* corresponds to Paelignian *Noumis* (Conway 1.248, No. 239 = Vetter 1.151–52, No. 216), and the Umbrian proper name *Noniar* (genitive singular), which occurs in the Iguvine tablet 6.14 (Conway 1.422, No. 365 = Vetter 1.235, No. 239) may also be derived from the numeral (J. W. Poultney, *The Bronze Tables of Iguvium* [Baltimore 1959] 87 [§ 68e]; 106 [§ 105g]; 236 [commentary on 6.14]; 313 s.v.).

<sup>5</sup> On the gradually diminishing number of praenomina used by the Romans see Th. Mommsen, "Die römischen Eigennamen der republikanischen und augusteischen Zeit," *Röm. Forsch.* 1 (Berlin 1864) 15–22. Cf. below, note 13.

doubt: in the first place, the names *Primus*, *Secundus*, *Tertius*, and *Quartus* became common only during the Imperial period; secondly, they were used only as cognomina; and finally, they comprise the ordinals "first" to "fourth," inclusive, and are thus a precise complement to the older series which utilizes "fifth" to "tenth."<sup>6</sup> The second distinct group of similar names consists of the feminine names *Prima*, *Secunda*, *Tertia*, *Quarta*, and *Quinta*. These feminine names appear already in the Republican period and are used both as praenomina and as cognomina, in accordance with the less rigid system of female nomenclature.<sup>7</sup> Clearly the male cognomina *Primus*, *Secundus*, *Tertius*, and *Quartus* indicated the order of birth among brothers and perhaps other near relatives.<sup>8</sup> Such names, as did names in general, tended to become hereditary in certain families and thus lose their meaning as appellatives, even though at the same time other families would still employ these names in their original meaning. The female names *Prima*, *Secunda*, *Tertia*, *Quarta*, and *Quinta* originally also indicated, as far as can be ascertained, the order of birth.<sup>9</sup> During the Republican period daughters were considered less important than sons in matters such as inheritance and other legal procedures, the maintenance of the family's political influence, and the preservation of the religious worship peculiar to the family; consequently daughters could receive names which would not be distinctive outside the family, but were useful enough to determine precedence within the household. Since these female names were common in Republican times and were used also as cognomina, it may be surmised that they served as model for the similar male cognomina of the

<sup>6</sup> One can find abundant proof for the above statements by consulting the indices of the epigraphical collections. From the simple numeral cognomina other cognomina were derived by means of various suffixes: *Primanus*, *Primianus*, *Primio*, *Primulus*, *Primillianus*; *Secundianus*, *Secundinus*, *Secundio*; *Tertiolus*, *Tertullus*, *Tertullinus*, *Tertullianus*; *Quartinus*, *Quartio*, *Quartulo*. Only in a very few cases are the names *Secundus*, *Tertius*, and *Quartus* used during the Imperial period as apparent praenomina, but these exceptions are all of them provincial and due, it seems, to a Celtic substratum.

<sup>7</sup> G. D. Chase, "The Origin of Roman Praenomina," *HSCP* 8 (1897) 168-74; 180. For the use of these names as praenomina see conveniently *ILS* index 17 (3.2.924-25), as opposed to their use as cognomina registered in *ILS* index 2.

<sup>8</sup> These numeral cognomina belong to the large class of cognomina which describe the circumstances of birth.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Plutarch. *Romul.* 14.8 (where the explanation is addressed to the Greek reader) and Chase (above, note 7) 168-69. A *pater familias* would hardly recognize more than five daughters.

Imperial period, which latter names had, after all, similar meaning.<sup>10</sup>

Now, according to the commonly received interpretation, the male praenomina *Quintus*, *Sextus*, and *Decimus*, although admittedly they later became hereditary in many families, yet originally referred likewise to order of birth.<sup>11</sup> This interpretation cannot be maintained. No ancient author gives this explanation, even though popular exegesis might easily have suggested it.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the onomastic series concerned comprises the ordinals from five to ten. If the series were really based on the order of birth, one would not only expect the first four ordinals to be used alongside the others, but would indeed expect the first four ordinals to occur much more frequently as names than the following six, since families with one, two, three, or four sons must always have been more numerous than families with five, six, seven, eight, nine, or ten sons. Yet throughout the Republican period the first four ordinals do not appear as praenomina.<sup>13</sup>

The true interpretation suggests itself when one tries to explain

<sup>10</sup> This explanation may be considered all the more likely because in a few cases the male numeral cognomina have been found employed as praenomina (above, note 6), just as the corresponding female names could be used in both ways.

<sup>11</sup> This was already the view of Carolus Sigonius in his book *De nominibus Romanorum*, and of Onuphrius Panvinus in his *De antiquis Romanorum nominibus*. The passages can be read in J. G. Graevius, *Thesaurus antiquitatum Romanarum* 2 (Venetiis 1732) 960B (Sigonius) and 1031E–1032B (Panvinus). Both Sigonius and Panvinus alleged as proof a passage of Varro (quoted below, note 12) which they misinterpreted. The same erroneous view is held now, it seems, without exception. So Chase (above, note 7) 151. R. Hirtzel, "Der Name—ein Beitrag zu seiner Geschichte im Altertum und besonders bei den Griechen," *Abh. Sächs. Ges. Wiss., Philol.-hist. Kl.*, 36.2 (1918) 36; F. Solmsen–E. Fraenkel, *Indo-germanische Eigennamen als Spiegel der Kulturgeschichte* (Heidelberg 1922) 150; E. Fraenkel, *RE* 16 (1935) 1669.

<sup>12</sup> Nothing of the sort is implied by the statement of Varro, *De ling. Lat.* 9.60: "in praenominibus ideo non fit item, quod haec instituta ad usum singularia, quibus discernerentur nomina gentilicia, ut ab numero Secunda Tertia Quarta, in uiris ut Quintus Sextus Decimus, sic ab aliis rebus." R. G. Kent, in his Loeb edition (Cambridge [Mass.] 1938) 2.485, translates correctly: "From the numerals came Secunda, Tertia, Quarta for women, Quintus, Sextus, Decimus for men, and similarly other names from other things." Nothing should be supplied in the Latin text.

<sup>13</sup> Chase (above, note 7) 182–83 claims that the first four ordinals were not used as praenomina because "every pater familias had the free choice of at least four praenomina." This assertion conflicts with everything which we can know or surmise. Chase' explanation implies that there were *only* four praenomina which could be used without restriction in every family. Yet the number of praenomina in common use had constantly decreased as time went on (above, note 5), and Varro still knew of thirty praenomina (inc. auct. *De praenom.* 3 [page 589, line 6 Kempf<sup>2</sup>]).

the distribution of the numeral praenomina. One must find some other object or institution or procedure concerning which the numerals from five to ten were used, to the exclusion of the first four and the ones after ten. Only the old Roman year of ten months meets this prerequisite. In this year the last six months were called *Quin(c)tilis*, *Sextilis*, *September*, *October*, *November*, and *December*, while the names of the first four months were not derived from numerals and the tenth month was the last of the series.<sup>14</sup> Thus, *Quintus* would mean "born in the month *Quin(c)tilis*"; *Sextus* "born in the month *Sextilis*"; *Septimus* "born in September"; *Octavus* "born in October"; *Nonus* "born in November"; and *Decimus* "born in December". Even if there were no other evidence to corroborate this interpretation, it would have to be accepted as the most probable; for only among the numeral praenomina and in the old ten-month year do we find the same distribution of numerals. But corroborative evidence is not wanting.

If praenomina were derived from the names of the last six months of the old Roman year, we should expect praenomina to have been derived also from the names of the first four months *Martius*, *Aprilis*, *Maius*, and *Iunius*. There is sufficient evidence to bear out our expectation. According to ancient testimony, *Marcus* means "born in March";<sup>15</sup> from it is derived the gentilician

<sup>14</sup> Varro, *De ling. Lat.* 6.33–34 with the testimonia collected in the edition of G. Goetz and Fr. Schoell (Lipsiae 1910) 70–71.

<sup>15</sup> Inc. auct. *De praenom.* 5 (page 590, lines 15–16 Kempf<sup>2</sup>): "Marci Martio mense geniti." The etymology, though attacked by Chase (above, note 7) 158–59, is obviously correct (A. Ernout–A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*<sup>4</sup> [Paris 1959/60] 388); and the interpretation, though dismissed summarily by W. Schulze, "Zur Geschichte lateinischer Eigennamen," *Abh. Ges. Wiss. Göttingen*, Philol.-hist. Kl., 5.5, N.F., (1904) 464, is assured because this interpretation makes the name fit into a larger series and because the ancient grammarians, who did not know the original meaning of the numeral praenomina, could not have fabricated the explanation by analogy. The name *Marcus* occurs in Faliscan inscriptions; see the references in Vetter (above, note 2) 1, index page 412, and E. Stolte, "Die faliskischen Personennamen," *Glotta* 16 (1928) 295 and 302. Since the Samnite name for Mars was *Mamers*, the corresponding Oscan name for March was *Mamertiais* (ablative plural feminine), as attested in the following Oscan inscriptions: (1–3) Conway (above, note 2) 1.117–19, Nos. 113, 115, 116 = Vetter 1.77–79, Nos. 84–86; (4) Conway 1.123, No. 123 = Vetter 1.83, No. 90; (5) Conway 1.112, No. 104 = Vetter 1.74, No. 79; (6–9) four small terracotta fragments probably of different inscriptions, Conway 1.123–24, Nos. 124, 126, 127, 129 = Vetter 1.84, No. 92*b, d, c* (Vetter's No. 92*f* is Conway's No. 128; I suspect that Vetter's No. 92*e*, which he repeats from R. v. Planta, *Grammatik der oskisch-umbrischen Dialekte* 2 [Strassburg 1897] 525, No. 154, never existed, but is merely Conway's No. 126 = Vetter's No. 92*d* misread; neither

name *Marcius*.<sup>16</sup> Therefore *Maius* means "born in May"; this name is found as a praenomen<sup>17</sup> and also, necessarily in the same form, as a gentilician name.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, *Iunius*, meaning "born in June," is used not only as a gentilician name, but also as a praenomen.<sup>19</sup>

April is the only month of the old ten-month year which seems not to have given rise to a praenomen. This situation merely reflects the uncertain etymology of the word *Aprilis*. Varro hesitated concerning this problem,<sup>20</sup> and modern scholars do not find it any easier. In any case, the exception does not weigh heavily, since it concerns only one month out of ten, and since that month is neither the first nor the last of the year.

Conway nor v. Planta saw the alleged fragment). Accordingly the Oscan praenomen appears in the (Latinized) form *Mamercus* (see the passages collected by Vetter 1.369): so an Oscan inscription of Messana gives, in Greek letters, [μ]αμερεκς (Vetter 1.131, No. 197); a plate from Cumae gives, in Etruscan letters, *mamercos* (wrong reading in Conway 2.526, No. 16\*; right reading in Vetter 1.95, No. 119).

<sup>16</sup> *Marcius* appears in Latin inscriptions only as a gentilicium, which it is; but in a Faliscan inscription (Conway [above, note 2] 1.377–78, No. 325b = Vetter [above, note 2] 1.311, No. 322bB) it seems to be used as a praenomen.

<sup>17</sup> *Maius* appears as a praenomen on a grave stele from Praeneste (*CIL* 1<sup>2</sup>.193 = xiv.3165 = *ILS* 7819f: *Tr. Mamio Mai f.*). On another stele from Praeneste (*CIL* 1<sup>2</sup>.126; page 718 = xiv.3100: *Mino Colonia Artoro Mai*) the form *Mai* may either be a praenomen (so Schulze [above, note 15] 338) or a gentilicium (so G. Herbig, "Falisca," *Glotta* 2 [1910] 98). The Oscan form of the praenomen is *Mais*; it occurs in the following Oscan inscriptions: on the Cippus Abellanus (Conway [above, note 2] 1.90–93, No. 95 = Vetter [above, note 2] 1.8–13, No. 1, lines 1 [twice], 3, 4); on another inscription from Abella (Conway 1.94, No. 96 = Vetter 1.100–1, No. 137); scratched on an earthenware cup from Capua (Conway 1.136, No. 139 = Vetter 1.87, No. 100); and in the censorial inscription of Bovianum Vetus (Conway 1.186–88, No. 169 = Vetter 1.108–9, No. 149).

<sup>18</sup> *Maius* occurs as a gentilician name in three Latin inscriptions of the Republican period, two of them found at Capua: (1) *CIL* 1<sup>2</sup>.674 = x.3775 (truncated in *ILS* 3770), of 110 B.C.; (2) *CIL* 1<sup>2</sup>.677 = x.3779 (truncated in *ILS* 3340); (3) found at Rocca S. Felice, *CIL* 1<sup>2</sup>.1719 = ix.1027 = *ILS* 5621. For an example dating from the Imperial period see *CIL* m.14588 = *ILS* 8510. It is not quite certain whether the Oscan form *μαμες* on a Campanian coin (Conway [above, note 2] 1.148, No. 152 = Vetter [above, note 2] 1.135, No. 200, 12) and *Mahiis* on a fragmentary stone from Aufidena (Conway 1.195, No. 179 = Vetter 1.104, No. 145) are used as gentilician names, but the spelling makes it likely. The name *Magius*, which is identical with *Maius*, since the latter stands for an original \**Magios* (Ernout–Meillet<sup>4</sup> [above, note 15] 379), is common as a gentilician name. Another gentilician name with identical meaning is *Maesius*, since this form was the (or an) Oscan name for the month May (Paul. *exc. ex Festo*, page 121 Lindsay<sup>1</sup> = page 259 Lindsay<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>19</sup> Attested as a praenomen on a mirror found at Praeneste: *CIL* 1<sup>2</sup>.559 = xiv.4104 = *ILS* 8564.

<sup>20</sup> Varro, *De ling. Lat.* 6.33: "cuius [sc. Aphrodites] nomen ego antiquis litteris quod numquam inueni, magis puto dictum, quod uer omnia aperit, Aprilem."

Other facts support the explanation given above of the numeral praenomina. Even when the year of twelve months had become fully established, children could still be named for the month in which they were born. Thus, in the Imperial period the cognomina *Ianuarius* or *Ianuarina*, *Aprilis*, *October*, and *December* were in use, and similar names existed in the Middle Ages and have come down to the present.<sup>21</sup> The gentilician name *Sehsimbrius* found in an Oscan inscription means probably "(descendant of someone) born in the sixth month" and thus would correspond to the Latin name *Sextius*.<sup>22</sup> The dialectal gentilicia Latinized as *Petronius* and *Pomponius* are almost certainly derived from the numerals four and five, respectively;<sup>23</sup> in that case they too may belong with the group of names indicating the month of birth.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, there are other old Roman praenomina that indicate the time of birth. Thus *Manius* means "born in the morning (*mane*)," and *Lucius* means "born at the light, i.e. dawn (*lux*)."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See Hirzel (above, note 11) 44–45. For *Ianuarius* and *Aprilis* as gentilicia see Schulze (above, note 15) 110 (misprinted as 101).

<sup>22</sup> Conway (above, note 2) 1.71, No. 63 = Vetter (above, note 2) 1.55–56, No. 25. For the interpretation see Conway 2.655, and the same author, "Oskisch eituns," *Idg. Forsch.* 3 (1894) 86, note 1.

<sup>23</sup> Poultney (above, note 4) page 106, §105*d* and *e*, with page 107, notes 2 and 3.

<sup>24</sup> This might be confirmed by some negative evidence: Latin, which called the fourth month *Iunius*, did not have an old gentilician name \**Quartius*. The name *Quadronius* is formed from an unattested \**quadro* "stone-cutter" derived from *quadrare*; cf. *praeconius* from *praeco* "herald" (*prae-uocare*), *praedonius* from *praedo* "robber" (*praedari*), and *erroneus* from *erro* "vagabond, straggler" (*errare*). The explanation given above of the name *Quadronius* might seem to be preferable also for the dialectic *Petronius*, were it not for the existence of the names *Pomponius* and *Pompilius*, two names which differ from one another only in their suffixes, not in meaning. Gentilicia of the Imperial period like *Quartius*, *Quartinius*, *Quartionius*, and *Quartilius* are derived from the cognomen *Quartus*. Similarly *Primius* from *Primus*; *Secundius*, *Secundinius* from *Secundus*; and *Tertinius* from *Tertius*. The custom of deriving a child's gentilicium from the father's cognomen was widespread in the Celtic regions of the Roman empire. There are a considerable number of other names that are perhaps derived from the numerals five to ten, but are of dubious significance; see Schulze (above, note 15) 229 and 271–72.

<sup>25</sup> Varro *De ling. Lat.* 6.5 and 9.60. Paul. *exc. ex Festo* pages 106 (*Lucius*) and 135 (*Manius*) Lindsay<sup>1</sup> = pages 245 and 268 Lindsay<sup>2</sup>. Inc. auct. *De praenom.* 5 (page 590, lines 1–2 and 3 Kempf<sup>2</sup>). These explanations are obviously correct. Chase (above, note 7) 157 objects to these etymologies of *Lucius* and *Manius*, names which he considers to be shortened forms of compound names (cf. *ibid.* 180–81). Such compound names, however, did not exist among the ancient Italians; Fraenkel, *RE* 16 (1935) 1651, though he admits the fact, still somehow considers Chase's view possible. Mommsen (above, note 5) 4 has *Lucius* mean "born at day-time"; this is not specific enough, and the author *De praenom.* (referred to above) says correctly: "Lucii coeperunt adpellari qui ipso initio lucis orti erant."

The above investigation leads to the following general conclusions. The Roman praenomina derived from numerals refer to the month in which the child was born. This system of nomenclature originated when the year had ten months, and is in fact important evidence for the actual existence of such a year. The original meaning of these praenomina came to be forgotten, a development surely connected with the definitive establishment of the twelve-month year. Moreover, of the six numeral praenomina which were employed at first, only three remained in common use; this development, as the gradually diminishing number of Roman praenomina in general, can be explained only by assuming that the number of praenomina was not reduced until the use of gentilician names had become common and a large number of distinctive "praenomina" was no longer needed. Finally, the above investigation should do its share in cautioning one not to reject statements of ancient grammarians except for good reason.