Among the Oscan epigraphic data from Pompeii there is a group of texts commonly known as ‘eítuns inscriptions’ after the keyword they contain. All of these were painted in red on the wall of buildings, usually at a certain height from the ground (c. 1.8–3m) and close to a street corner, so as to be easily visible and readable. In each case, the basic structure is the same: an ablatival phrase eksuk amvíanud is followed by the word eítuns and then an indication of place; the latter is further specified by a locatival relative clause introduced by puf ‘where’ and containing the finite 3sg. verb faamat (or in one case, 3pl. faamant) as well as the verb’s subject in the form of one (or for faamant, two) personal name(s) in the nominative. A typical example – and the one that was first discovered, in 1780 – thus reads, according to the latest edition in the Imagines Italicae (POMPEI 2 = Vetter 23, Rix Po 34; cf. also POMPEI 3–7 = Vetter 24–28, Rix Po 35–39):

eksuk· amvíanud· eítuns
anter· tiurrí· XII· ín(í)· ver(u)
sarínú· puf· faamat
m(a)r(as)· aadiríis· v(ibiéís)

In Crawford’s translation ‘The eítuns from this quarter, between Tower 12 and the veru sarinu [sc. ‘the Sarine gate’, A.W.], where Mr. Adirius, son of V., commands’, the rendering of faamat by ‘commands’ (or: ‘gives orders’) is nowadays uncontroversial; and most scholars will also accept that amvía-nud is the ablative of a noun corresponding to Gr. ἄμφοδον ‘street, block of houses, town quarter’ (i.e., *amviā-(ā)no-, possibly a calque of ἄμφοδον), perhaps rather than an adverbalised ablatival gerundive ('by this route [~ going around]'). Truly disputed, by contrast, remains the meaning and function of eítuns, and it is the origin and explanation of this lexical item on which we shall focus here.
Given the recurrent reference in all of the eítuns inscriptions to specific locations between or by landmarks such as towers and gates, but also public and even private buildings, it was quickly suggested that these texts may have served as signposts of one type or another, for example pointing to the nearest pub, taxi-stand, or ATM (cf. below). Accordingly, the main question was always what to make of eítuns.

To begin with, scholars thought of a verbal form connected with the root *(h₁)ei- ‘go’, be it a 3pl. ind. (‘they go’) or a somehow remodelled equivalent of Umbr. 3pl. ipv. etuta/etutu ‘they shall go’ (i.e., 3sg. ipv. *eitō(d) + 3pl. (secondary) -ns). This approach, which posed unsurmountable formal problems anyway, was however decisively disproved by the discovery of POMPEI 7 = Vetter 28, Rix Po 39, in which eítuns itself is missing from the extant part of the inscription, but in which no other supplement is conceivable between the formulaic start eksuk amví[an(n)ud and the 3pl. pres. set ‘they are’ that immediately follows a gap of the right size. In the absence of any other plausible subject of set, [eítuns] has to fill this role, and a consonant-stem nom. pl. is of course also perfectly suitable for a sequence that ends in Oscan -Cs (< *-C-es).

This being so, and since there is no reason why for example a participial form *ei-t-ont-es should have yielded eítuns and not †eitú(n)z (cf. e.g. húrz ‘enclosure’ < *gʰort-os), the only acceptable starting point now appears to be a nom. pl. in *-ōn-’es, which parallels Osc. humuns ‘men’ (< *hom-ōn-’es) but excludes any direct insertion into the verbal paradigm of *ei-.[7] Instead, *eitōn- might be “a noun of action like Grk. ἄγων or denote persons like most of the Latin nouns in -ō, -ōnis”. The latter option would still point strongly towards a nominal basis such as *eito-, perhaps with the meaning ‘going, march’ (vel sim.), making *eitōnes ‘march-men’ or ‘marchers’.[10] Although this is impossible to disprove, the absence of independent evidence for the missing link *eito- in either Sabellic or indeed Italic and Indo-European more generally does not inspire confidence; a possible nominal derivative in *-to- of *h₁ei- is in fact found at least in Germanic and Celtic, with the meaning ‘oath’ (Goth. aips, OHG eid, OIr. óeth etc.; cf. also Gr. ὀίτος ‘fate, doom’?), but it there displays an incompatible o-grade in the root – a fact which in turn undermines a further theory according to which eítuns would designate ‘enrolled soldiers’ who had sworn an oath of allegiance (i.e., *eitōn- ‘oath-man’).[11] Meanwhile, the comparison with ἄγων and similar non-neuter n-stem nouns, and the assumption of a “technical military sense […] ‘goings’ = ‘mobilization’”[12] leads
onto even more slippery territory because the few apparently deverbal nouns that would be comparable with this in Latin are concrete nouns (e.g. *carbōn-* ‘piece of charcoal’), not abstract *nomina actionis*.

Having said that, there is one element that unites all the interpretations just outlined, namely that the *eítuns* inscriptions had a military function. This was first suggested by G. Fiorelli, who also already connected the texts with L. Cornelius Sulla’s siege of Pompeii during the Social War (89 B.C.), and it was subsequently elaborated on by H. Nissen. Following a suggestion by H. Bücheler, Nissen adduced a clinching argument in favour of Fiorelli’s contextualisation in the form of a directly comparable text from Hellenistic Smyrna whose military background is guaranteed and where the phrase τοὺς ἐν τῷ ἀνφόδῳ is strikingly reminiscent of *eksuk amvianud eítuns* in Pompeii (*ISmyrna* 613a; cf. *ISmyrna* 613b, 613c, *IStratonikeia* 1003, 1004):

τοὺς ἐν τῷ ἀνφόδῳ τετάχθαι ἀπὸ τοῦ πύργου τοῦ τῆς Ἀγαθῆς Τύχης ἕως τῆς Εὐετηρίας.

‘The (men/soldiers) in the quarter are to be positioned [along the stretch of the wall] from the Tower of Good Fortune up to the Tower of Prosperity’.

While Nissen himself had little to say on *eítuns*, and even openly challenged the natural inference that the defense of Pompeii must have been organised in a similar way as that of Smyrna, by assigning the men from each quarter an assembly place or part of the town’s walls to hold, Fiorelli’s hypothesis thus remains by far the most attractive way of making sense of our dossier. In particular, it is distinctly preferable to a later suggestion by F. Skutsch, who thought of advertisements for nearby *mensae argentariae* or ‘banks’, with the final *pf faamat* clause in each case referring to the bank’s owner in his role as an ‘auctioneer’ ("hac via (mensae) argentariae inter turrim XII et portam Sarinam (u.dgl.), ubi praedicat praeco NN"). Not only is a purely directional ‘this way’ difficult to read into *eksuk amvianud*, but it also remains unclear why private ads of this kind should have been presented
in such a formulaic as well as cumbersome way: which modern bank would put up signs saying, for example, ‘To the bank, where Credit Suisse is offering its services’?

And yet, Skutsch’s idea had one advantage over its competitors, relating to the term eítuns on which it was all based. In order to explain eítuns, we need not postulate any unattested *eito- or the like; for, as Skutsch noted, in the lexeme “klingt eins der bekanntesten oskischen Wörter an: bantin. eίτuā = pompejan. eίτiuvā- ‘Geld’”. Given the way in which the frequent Latin denominatives of the type praedō ‘robber’ (cf. praeda ‘booty’), linteō ‘linen-weaver’ (cf. linteum ‘linen’), epulō ‘banqueter’ (cf. epulae ‘banquet’) etc. are formed – by designating a person after a thing with which he/she is especially associated –,17 it makes perfect sense to derive eítuns, via *eitū̯ōnes, from *eit(u)uā ‘money’, no matter what the ultimate origin of the latter word is.18 The only reservation concerns Skutsch’s next step, his conclusion that ‘money-men’ have to be (something like) ‘bankers’ (argentāriī) and that the military theory therefore has to be abandoned.

In reality, there is a rather simple way of bringing together the loose ends. In English, as in other modern European languages, the most basic term for army personnel is derived from a word for ‘money’ paid for the discharge of military duties: Engl. soldier, Fr. soldat, Germ. Soldat, etc. all relate directly to Engl. sold (now obsolete for the ‘wages’ or ‘salary’ esp. of soldiers), Fr. solde, Germ. Sold, etc., thereby continuing the same relationship between Lat. *sol(i)dārius, *sol(i)dātus and the base noun sol(i)dus denoting the payment (orig. ‘gold-coin’) received by members of an armed force. The fundamental idea is easy to make out: a soldier is someone who, in contrast with ‘normal’ people who earn their living as artisans or farmers, has to be remunerated to make up for the unavailability of such ‘normal’ income. In societies that make use of professional soldiers – as opposed to general recruitment – this distinction may be particularly prominent, and terms like Lat. mercēnārius (cf. mercēs ‘pay, wages’) or Gr. μισθωτός (cf. μισθός ‘pay, wages’, incl. ‘pay, allowance for public services’), though also applicable to other kinds of hired servants’, therefore specifically denote ‘mercenaries’. But even in Latin, where the most generic noun for ‘soldier’ is of a different origin (mil-it-, perh. ‘the one going in a group of thousand’?), the usual way of referring to the performance of military service by citizens is stīpendia merēre/merērī (e.g. Cic. Cael. 11, de or. 2.258, etc.), highlighting the role played by the stīpendium ‘(soldier’s) pay, stipend’ no less than the term stīpendiārius as a rough
equivalent of mercēnārius for ‘mercenary’ troops does (cf. B.Afr. 43; contrast Liv. 8.8.3 stīpendiāriī factī sunt about the citizen army). Moreover, various sources indicate that payment for soldiers was instituted early in Ancient Italy, the historic event with which it was associated being the siege of Veii around 400 BC (cf. Liv. 4.59.11, Diod. Sic. 14.16.5); and it has been argued that this “represented [an] important point in the gradual shift away from gens-based warfare and toward a community-centered military force” as “the state viewed warfare as being beneficial to the community as a whole, and not just the individual combatants”.

In other words, for all that we know about the sociopolitical importance of Italic-speaking mercenary contingents in Southern Italy and Sicily throughout the second half of the first millennium BC, the semantic explanation of eītuns as ‘soldiers’ in the original sense of the word does not depend on the Pompeian inscriptions addressing mercenaries rather than ordinary people called to arms. In fact, the specification of each group of eītuns as eksuk amvianud speaks in favour of the latter view: ‘the soldiers from this quarter’, not soldiers brought in from outside, ‘[are to be positioned] between Tower X and Tower Y’ etc. Also, it is no doubt precisely because they were ordinary people with other everyday concerns that they needed clearly advertised information about their assembly points and assignments at a time of crisis.

By way of conclusion, one more point may be worth touching upon at least briefly. If the above account is accepted, we can still ask whether there is not ultimately also a connection between eītuns and the root *(h,)*eit- ‘go’. That the Oscan ‘money’ word, eītiua-/eitua-, may be somehow derived from this has long been suspected, and it is often assumed that the missing link must be the idea of ‘mobile goods’, perhaps mediated through a word for ‘cattle’ comparable with Gr. πρόβατα (to βαίνω ‘walk’). However, since eītiuva- appears to be an a-stem derivative based on an abstract noun *ei-tu-, such a theory presupposes a much more complex semantic evolution than the one we see in Lat. pecus ‘livestock’ → pecūnia ‘possessions consisting of livestock’ > ‘money’: viz., *eitu- ‘going’ > ‘the possessions that go’ > ‘livestock’ → *eity-ā- ‘possessions consisting of livestock’. By contrast, no such complication would arise if we could simply start from hypothetical *eitu- ‘going, march, journey’ and assume that *eity-ā- began life as a feminine adjective qualifying some other noun for ‘money’ (or ‘possessions’ more generally) as ‘money/provisions for a march/journey’ – which is exactly what the initial purpose of the Roman soldiers’ stīpendium was. When Diodorus talks about
the introduction of the *stipendium* in the context referred to above, he tellingly does so with the words τότε πρώτως ἐπεψηφίσαντο Ῥωμαῖοι τοῖς στρατιώταις καθ’ ἐκαστὸν ἐνιαυτὸν εἰς ἑρόδια διδόναι χρήματα ‘This is when the Romans decided for the first time to give to the soldiers each year money as a travelling allowance’ (Diod. Sic. 14.16.5). And just as ἑρόδια can then, in Greek, occasionally shade into a more general term for ‘financial resources’ (cf. e.g. Dem. 49.67 ἑρόδια τῷ γήρᾳ ικανά ‘sufficient means for his old age’, Ar. Plut. 1024 γραὸς καπρώσης τάφοδια κατεσθίειν ‘to eat up the possessions of a lecherous old woman’; LSJ s.v.), so Oscan *eitu-ā- may have become less specific over time, ending up as a synonym of *aragetú- (cf. Lat. *argentum*; Osc. abl. sg. *aragetúd múltas(ikúd)* in Nola [NOLA 2 = Vetter 116, Rix Cm 7] = *eítiuvad múltasíkad* ‘money from fines’ in Pompeii (POMPEI 21 = Vetter 12, Rix Po 4)). Given our regrettably limited knowledge of the Oscan language, this cannot of course be proved; but neither should it be ruled out merely because it would make the history of the Oscan word for ‘money’ slightly less colourful than is traditionally supposed.

NOTES


3 T. Mommsen, *Die unter-italischen Dialekte*, Leipzig 1850, 185 (“es scheinen Inschriften gewesen zu sein, die durch die Stadt vertheilt nach einem Hause, vielleicht Wirthshaus, wiesen”).


5 For references, see Gil, *op. cit.* (n. 2) 199-200, and Untermann, *op. cit.* (n. 2) 213.


‘Marschierer’,
‘Mobilisierte’
‘Greek οἵμφοδον, Oscar amvianud, and the Oscar eítuns-inscriptions’,
CPh 17 (1922) 111-118, at 117-118.

Deverbatives in -ōn- are rare and clearly secondary
in Latin (M. Leumann, Lateinische Laut- und Formenlehre, München 1977, 361-362), so that any
derivation from a verbal root *eit- (J. Vendryes, “Osque eituns et latin iter”, BSL 25 (1925)
44-48, at 46) or stem
*eitā- (‘frequentative’; cf. Umbr. 3pl. subj. etai(a)n ‘they shall go’) → *eitōn-
‘marcher’ is at best an ultima ratio.

Cf. V. Pisani, Le lingue dell’Italia antica oltre il latino, Torino 1964, 67-68 (“soldati di pattuglia”), though
with a better starting point *eitu- (on which see further below); E. Pulgram, Italic, Latin, Italian 600 B.C.

Thus A. L. Prosdocimi, “Osco ‘eituns.... puf....
faamat’”, AGI 60 (1975) 83-92, at 86-88.

Buck, op. cit. (n. 8) 365; contrast J. Whatmough, “Epigraphica”, Language 29 (1953) 297-300, at
298 (“*eitones” = “‘broad streets, avenues’”).

G. Fiorelli, Descrizione di Pompei, Napoli 1875, 153-154; H. Nissen, Pompeianische Studien zur
Städtetkunde des Altertums, Leipzig 1877, 492-510.

He quotes advice from H. Bücheler, who
implausibly saw in eítuns “ein Nomen = itunus”
equivalent with “itus oder itiner” (Nissen, op. cit. (n. 13) 499, followed by

Instead, he took the eítuns inscriptions to
signpost vici that were not barricaded, but through
which the city-walls could still be accessed during
the siege (Nissen, op. cit. (n. 13) 505-509).

F. Skutsch, “Vom pompejanischen
Strassenleben”, Glotta 1 (1909) 104-113, at 109-113; cf. also F. Muller Jzn, Altitalisches Wörterbuch,
Göttingen 1926, 161-162

(eítuns = sg. “eitū-no-s
‘Geldwechsler’”).

Cf. Leumann, op. cit. (n. 9) 361.

Note that the weak palatal glide (?) between the
dental and the following
-u- in eítuvā- (= eitua- in
the Latin alphabet) would
regularly fail to arise in
*eitūnes > *eitūnēs >
*eitūnes if this was formed
on the basis of *eitū
before the latter underwent
anaptyxis to *eitūnā; cf.
also e.g. the Oscar words
in -tur < *-tōr- and -tud
< *-tūd.


See especially
G. Tagliamonte, I figli di Marte: Mobilità, mercenari e mercenariato italici in Magna Grecia e Sicilia,

For references, see again
Untermann, op. cit. (n. 2)
212, s.v. eitiuvam.

Cf. similarly, it seems,
F. Heidermanns apud
Untermann, op. cit. (n. 2)
212 (“vielleicht urspr.
‘Weegeld’”).