

# The Fragmentarily Attested Languages of Pre-Roman Italy: Interpreting, Reconstructing, Classifying

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## 1 Foreword<sup>1</sup>

The reference framework for fragmentarily attested languages dates back to the last two decades of the previous century; Jürgen Untermann<sup>2</sup> is credited with the classification of ‘dead’ languages documented from a written corpus, distinguished according to the different characteristics of their corpus:

- ‘Corpussprachen’: languages with an organic grammatical structure, based on a more or less extensive corpus (‘Grosscorpussprachen’, e.g. Sanskrit, Greek, Latin; ‘Kleincorpussprachen’: e.g. Biblical Gothic, Old Prussian);
- ‘Restsprachen’ i.e. ‘Resten von Sprachen’: already regressive languages at the time of their attestation;
- ‘Trümmersprachen’: functioning languages but of a scarce tradition due to an insufficient corpus, subdivided into ‘TS 1’ isolated languages (e.g. Etruscan, Iberian); ‘TS 2’ languages that can be genetically connected to others (e.g. Venetic); ‘TS 3’ languages close to a known linguistic corpus of another phase (e.g. Continental Celtic compared to Irish); and ‘TS 4’, ‘Sprachtrümmer’, the different phase of a language with a corpus (e.g. Crimean Gothic, Ogham).

However, compared to this precise classification, over time the term ‘Restsprachen’ became established—especially in Italy—often covering the category of ‘Trümmersprachen’, with the meaning of ‘fragmentarily attested lan-

1 This contribution is the result of a joint discussion; however, for the purpose of acknowledging individual contributions, it should be noted that sections 1 and 2 are by Anna Marinetti, section 3 is by Patrizia Solinas.

2 Untermann (1980); resumed and revised in Untermann (1983), with further interventions in Untermann (1989). However, the same scholar states that the formulation and initial application of the terms ‘Grosscorpussprachen’ and ‘Kleincorpussprachen’ is due to M. Mayrhofer (1980).

guages'<sup>3</sup> (and not, as originally assigned by Untermann, with that of 'residual languages').<sup>4</sup>

The special status of 'Restsprachen', thus has prompted reflection on their theoretical and methodological<sup>5</sup> framing, as well as the verification of individual, mostly Indo-European,<sup>6</sup> languages. But operations on 'Restsprachen' are not necessarily associated with Indo-Europeanism, i.e. linked to comparative perspectives; for an RS, the focus is on the nature of its documentation, and thus also 'isolated' languages such as Iberian and Etruscan<sup>7</sup> are wholly included. Untermann's focus on 'Restsprachen' (here = 'Trümmersprachen') derives from his experience of the pre-Roman languages of Italy and the Iberian Peninsula; and this with good reason, as these are areas that are attested almost exclusively by epigraphic documents.

The languages documented by epigraphy are characterised by a fragmentary corpus, but also by being susceptible to continuous increase, and therefore potentially and de facto expandable owing to new discoveries. The description of these languages is by definition unstable; this means that any result is valid at the moment it is declared, namely in the state corresponding to the corpus—but can hardly be considered definitive, since subject to revision as the corpus itself changes. In rendering such a 'Restsprache', there are more or less high margins of probability: some aspects can be considered acquired, particularly when dealing with phenomena that can be generalised on the basis of external contributions (e.g. phonetic laws by comparison with other languages); for other aspects, the data are so limited that it is usually difficult to have sufficient grounds for probabilistic projections.

We are therefore operating within a constant dialectic between 'notum' and 'novum', in an analogous procedure to the circularity of hermeneutics, i.e. a

3 This definition is also currently used in Italian, alongside 'Restsprachen'. On the other hand, despite Vittore Pisani's authoritative precedent of 1942 (cf. Poccetti 1997: 116 n. 1), the use of 'fragmentary languages' is erroneous in terms of definition: 'fragmentary' does not refer to languages—by definition always complete—but to their attestations.

4 We will continue the custom of using the term 'Restsprachen' in this work to define what are more precisely 'Trümmersprachen'.

5 In particular, see Prosdocimi (1989); also, Untermann (1980; 1983).

6 Reference is generally made to the contributions in the Proceedings of the Conference *Le lingue indoeuropee di frammentaria attestazione* (Vineis ed. 1983); among these in particular Schmidt (1983) for methodology, and Campanile (1983) on the reflections for Indo-European research; thereafter, Poccetti 1997 for the specifics of lexicography. For an up-to-date overview of European RS, both Indo-European and non-Indo-European, see Beltrán Lloris, Díaz Ariño, Estarán Tolosa & Jordán Cólera (eds.) (2020).

7 For an application to Etruscan, see Agostiniani (2003).

situation in which abstractly each ‘novum’ modifies the ‘notum’, which, once modified, in turn becomes a reference for the (future) ‘novum’.

Given such circumstance, the datum should be considered in its different systemic dimensions:<sup>8</sup>

- 1) The structural linguistic dimension. The new datum is confronted with a framework that is incomplete, not only quantitatively but often also qualitatively, namely it refers to a system that is itself to be reconstructed: finding in a ‘Restsprache’ an isolated formal ending of instrumental case does not authorise reconstructing a system of cases in which the instrumental is an autonomous case.
- 2) The historical linguistic dimension. The context is not always known to sufficiently place the data in its historical dimension, i.e. at the point intercepted (to simplify) by the intersection of the axes of diachrony, diatopy, diaphasia, etc.; the restitution of the structural level, of the ‘grammar’ (phonology, morphology, etc.) could therefore be based on non-homogeneous data. As an example, if we took the situation of a ‘Restsprache’ as a certain number of pieces within a jigsaw puzzle, it should also be considered that it is not a two- but a multi-dimensional puzzle.
- 3) The semantic-cultural dimension. The limits of contextual knowledge can condition the level of interpretation; even when—in the case of languages accessible to comparison, i.e. genetically related to others—etymology can provide a semantic basis, the specific meaning has to be defined in relation to the context and the specific cultural system.

In the case of a ‘Restsprache’ that is accessible to comparison, even its classification may be subject to verification on acquiring new data; the new datum must deal with a classificatory framework of relations with other languages that has already been pre-constituted on other bases, with different outcomes: the new datum confirms the previous framework, which remains virtually unchanged; or it expands it without substantially modifying it; or it invalidates it to the point of having to modify it; or again, the datum does not bring sufficient evidence and must therefore be left in epoché pending further confirmation/denial.

This is generally true for all the ‘Restsprachen’, although it is evident that the conditions can vary greatly, again depending on the size of the corpus: for example, even if they can be placed within the same category (Untermann) of ‘Restsprachen’ (‘Ts z’ = languages that can be genetically linked to others), the level of ascertained acquisitions will be much higher for ‘Restsprachen’-‘Ts z’

8 Here, we intend the naive use of the adjective ‘systemic’, because this allows referring to different interpretative perspectives: the internal system of the language (phonology, morphology etc.) but also the semantic-cultural system in which the data is to be framed.

with a large corpus, such as, for example, Umbrian and Oscan among the Sabellic languages; much lower in the case of ‘Restsprachen’-‘TS 2’ with a (relatively) limited corpus, such as Venetic.

After this brief premise, to exemplify the above we offer here some case studies from two ancient Italian languages of epigraphic tradition, both with a fairly limited corpus of documents, namely Venetic and Celtic of Italy. Venetic<sup>9</sup> is documented by more than 500 inscriptions from the mid-6th century BCE to the Roman era in north-eastern Italy; from a classification viewpoint—although still the subject of debate—it can be broadly referred to as an Italic group of Indo-European, albeit with a more pronounced proximity to Latin. The Celtic language of Italy<sup>10</sup> is attested by more than 400 inscriptions in a chronological span from the end of the 7th century BCE to the Roman era, with a geographic range that includes mostly north-western Italy; the language undoubtedly fits into the Celtic group, though certain characteristics, at least initially, have made its classification problematic. Both languages are attested through locally elaborated alphabets, hence with the further limitation of access through the filter of alphabets in which values are not always fully definable.

## 2 Venetic

### 2.1 *The New Datum as Confirmation of Previous Hypotheses*

In the aforementioned dialectic between ‘notum’ and ‘novum’, the new datum can find a match with reconstructions that have already been hypothesised. As an example, we may take the issue of ancient place names referring to the city of Padua (Italian *Pádova*), treated at length by G.B. Pellegrini,<sup>11</sup> summarising, Pellegrini outlines the situation in the following terms. The Latin toponym is *Pătāvium* (as in all sources: literary, epigraphic, etc.), in which the form in *-ium* can have two possible explanations: a) *-ium* as genitive plural of a poleonym (adjective) *\*Pataves* (‘(civitas) Patavium’) derived in turn from a toponym *\*Patava* not attested but to be reconstructed; b) continuation of a pre-Roman (= Venetic) toponym also to be reconstructed, *\*Pataviom* (/ *\*Patavion*). In the Romance phase, the toponym appears as *Padova*, *Padua*, *Pava*, but none of these can be derived directly from the Latin *Patavium*.

9 Marinetti (2020).

10 Stifter (2020).

11 On several occasions: for all, see Pellegrini (1980).

TABLE 6.1 Derivations of place names referring to the city of Padua as proposed by Pellegrini

[* <i>Pataviom</i> /n Venetic]	* <i>Patava</i> (Venetic? vulgar)	* <i>Patua</i> (vulgar)
↓	↓	↓
<i>Patavium</i> (Latin)	<i>Pava</i> (Paduan)	<i>Padua</i> (a. 952 and later Latin texts)
		↓
		<i>Padova</i> (Venetian and Italian)

Pellegrini therefore states: “it must now be admitted with certainty that it [= the form *Patavium*] has been joined in the spoken language by a \**Patava*”<sup>12</sup> and cites in support of this an High German outcome *Bazzoua* (9th–10th century CE), from a \**Patava*/\**Patova*; it has to be assumed prior to the 6th century CE due to the application of the second Lautverschiebung on the form without lenition (/VtV/ and not the former /VdV/).

To outline, Pellegrini proposes three distinct derivations, positing three reconstructed forms:

Even assuming the existence of an original allomorphy, resorting to three distinct forms seems more of an ad hoc solution than an explanation. I would propose a first simplification possible by reducing to two, removing \**Patua*, although *Pádua* and *Pádova* < \**Patua* would be supported by comparisons such as *Mantua* > *Mantova*, *Genua* > *Genova*. But for the hypothesized \**Patua*, one can think of a derivation from \**Pátava* (necessary to explain the Paduan—‘pavano’—*Pava*) with a dissimilation [awa] > [owa] due to the position before a velar vocal: \**Pátava* > \**Pátova* (consistent with the Old High German *Bazzo-ua*) > *Pádova* and \**Pátava* > \**Pát(o)va* > \**Pátua* > *Pádua*. Alternatively, *Padua* may have been a learned remake in the notarial sphere, precisely on the ‘classic’ model of *Mantua* > *Mantova*, *Genua* > *Genova*.

However, this has little bearing on our interest here, namely the contribution of a new Venetic datum. The documented ‘novum’ comes from two votive Venetic inscriptions from Altino (Venice),<sup>13</sup> which attest to a poleonym with adjectival formation in *-no-*; both inscriptions are datable with reasonable approximation: ?] *Voltieś Tursanis patavnos do[nasto ...* (late 6th century BCE); (with integration, therefore uncertain although very probable) *pat]avinovos* [(5th century BCE).

12 “bisogna ormai ammettere con certezza che essa [= la forma *Patavium*] è stata affiancata nel linguaggio parlato da un \**Patava*” (Pellegrini 1980: 293).

13 Edition and commentary in Marinetti (2009); see also Marinetti & Prosdociami (2005: 38–41).

The inscriptions thus reconstruct a toponym that is ascertained in the segment *patav-*; but faced with the two forms *patavno-* and *pat]avino-* the problem arises of the different derivation in *-no-* and in *-ino-*: is this an internal alternation, by phonetics or morphonology, or do the two forms derive from two toponyms with the same root but morphologically distinct?

If the derivation is from two distinct toponyms, these should be *Patava*, from which *\*patav(a)-no-* > *patavno-*, and *Pataviom/n* from which *patavi(o)-no-* > *pat]avino-*. One should therefore assume an allotropy was already present for the name of Padua in the pre-Roman phase.

On the other hand, if the derivation is from a single base, one must explain *-no-* vs. *-ino-*; a purely phonetic motivation (syncope) is not particularly satisfactory here because *patavnos* is older than *patavinus*; there is in the Venetic language an alternation *-na* ~ *-ina*, which is still not clearly explained, but which concerns feminine nouns; indeed, in the Venetic inscriptions of Altino there is an alternation *-ino-* ~ *-Øno-*, in the allotropes of the theonym *Altino-* ~ *Altno-*:<sup>14</sup> the two forms seem rather to realise diatopic varieties, one from Padova, the other local.<sup>15</sup> In the event that *patavno-* and *pat]avino-* can also be considered two diatopic variants deriving from the same base, the toponym is (Venetic) *Pátava*. From *Pátava* the adjectival derivation *patav(a)-no-* duly leads to *patavno-*, while the form *pat]avino-* may be the result of adaptation along the lines of derivation from bases in *-o-*, *\*-io-* + *-no-* > *\*-i(o)-no-* > *-ino-*. For the Latin *Patavium*, one can maintain the explanation of an original genitive plural of a poleonym, namely assuming that from the same toponym *Pátava* a second poleonym alternative to *patav(i)no-* was produced, i.e. (as formerly done by Pellegrini) a (plural) *\*pataves*.

Assuming the existence of only the toponym *Patavio-* (*\*Pataviom/n*) seems instead to pose greater difficulties; it would explain both *pat]avino-* and the Latin toponym *Patavium*, of which it would be the direct predecessor, and for *patavno-* the use of the diatopic variant would remain. But a *\*Patavio-* cannot justify the Romance forms *Pava* and *Pádova*, so a *\*Pátava* must be postulated anyway.

In conclusion, the new data from the Venetic confirms the existence of the reconstructed *\*Patava*; moreover, even without completely excluding an allomorphic variant, it is a cue to trace both the Latin and the Romance forms back to a single original base.

14 Marinetti (2009: 105). On the theonym *Alt(i)no-*, see also below.

15 Padua's relations with Altino between the 6th and 5th centuries are confirmed by numerous data (Marinetti 2009: 111–112).

## 2.2 *The New Datum and the Identification of Historical Dimensions*

In the Venetic language, phenomena of variation are only observed to a limited extent; the reasons are: the limitations and fragmentary nature of the documentation; the rendering of texts by means of fixed and repetitive formulas, which tend to be preserved over time; the difficulty or impossibility, in many cases, of dating the finds. A phenomenon of diachronic phonetic change can, for example, be derived from the alphabet: the absence of the sign for *h* after the 5th/early 4th century seems to indicate the loss of the spirant (*Hosti-/Osti-*); other observable phonetic changes are syncope with (eventual) assimilation (*Ebfa/Effa/Efa*, with *eb(V)f-* > *eff-* > *ef-*; *Uposedioi/VPSEIDIA/VSEIDICA*, with *upos-* > *ups-* > *us-/us-*), and little else. The issue is sometimes complicated by the fact that diachronic variation is intertwined with geographic variation. In some cases the distribution on a geographic basis seems clear: central Veneto and eastern-northern Veneto are distinguished by the different formant of the appositive in the onomastic formula (*-io- ~ -ko-*), by formulaic choices such as the selection of the verb or formulae in votive inscriptions (*toler* is exclusive to the Alpine area; *Este op voltio leno ~ Lagole per volterkon vontar*). In other cases, the explanation by geographic area is not enough: the final nasal *-m* of northern Veneto (Alpine area) versus *-n* of central Veneto (Este, Padua, etc.) was traditionally ascribed to a phenomenon of local interference with other languages (Celtic? Latin?),<sup>16</sup> but now the presence of *-m* in a 5th century BCE<sup>17</sup> Padua inscription compels us to consider the diachronic component of the phenomenon as well.

A significant case of the difficulty of attributing variation to a parameter (diachrony, diatopy, diastraty) is the inscription from Isola Vicentina (Vicenza),<sup>18</sup> a locality close to the western border of Veneto territory. The inscription is on a stone block, which cannot be dated; the finding is sporadic, lacking a context that would furnish information on the inscription's function (religious? public? funerary? etc.). The text, in transliteration,<sup>19</sup> is *iats venetkens osts ke enogenes laions +meufasto*.

Relevant here is not so much the content of the text<sup>20</sup> as the last sequence left undivided, *+meufasto*; the ending in *-to* indicates a 3rd pers. sing. preterite

16 Lejeune (1951).

17 Gambacurta & Marinetti (2019).

18 Marinetti (1999).

19 The diplomatic transcription is *iat.s.vene.t.k/e.n.s.o.st.s.ke.e.no/χenes.laions./me.u.vhas-to*; the transliteration assigns the (presumed) phonetic values and the possible division of the *scriptio continua*.

20 The text consists, for the part preceding *+meufasto*, of two onomastic formulas in the nominative, co-ordinated by *ke*, attributable, however, to a single individual because of the emerging of the singular ending of the verb; for interpretation see Marinetti (1999).

of the verb *\*d<sup>h</sup>h<sub>1</sub>-k* ‘to do’; possible divisions are *meu fasto*, or *me ufasto*, in this case a compound with a preverb. In Venetic, the verb ‘to do’ is attested, again in the 3rd person singular preterite, as *fagsto*, literally ‘did’, in Paduan inscriptions from sanctuaries, in which ‘to do’ has the votive value of ‘to offer, to dedicate’;<sup>21</sup> the 1st person pronoun *me<sup>go</sup>* ‘me’ is also widely known in votive inscriptions from Este, made according to the ‘speaking’<sup>22</sup> formula, in the syntagmas *me<sup>go</sup> donasto* ‘(he/she) donated me’, *me<sup>go</sup> doto* ‘(he/she) gave me’.

If in the text the division is *meu fasto*, we would have *meu* ~ *me<sup>go</sup>* and *fasto* ~ *fagsto*, in both cases with the loss of (graphic) *-g-*. The loss of *-g-* is found in Venetic *maisteratorbos* (1st century BCE?), loaned from Latin *magister*, although it is not certain whether it is to be attributed to Venetic, or borrowed from Latin already on its way to the Romance form.

The phenomenon *-g- > -∅-* in *meu* and *fasto* occurs in different phonetic contexts (*-V\_V-* ~ *-V\_C-*), so caution is needed in seeing its solidarity; however, it could be triggered by similar premises even if in different contexts.<sup>23</sup> The pronoun (*me<sup>go</sup>* in Este) here has the ending *-u*; *-ō > -u* could be the outcome of a diachronic change within the Venetic as we assume for the disappearance of *-g-* here and in *fasto*. But there is in Venetic language (sporadic) phenomenon *ō > u* in areas where the presence of Celts is historically proven, and that it is a Celtic trait is proved by the systematic presence in the Celtic of Italy (Lepontic) of nominatives in *-u* from *-ō(n)*;<sup>24</sup> as mentioned, Isola Vicentina is located on the border between Veneto and areas of Celtic settlement.<sup>25</sup> However, if the hypothesis of interference with Celtic arises, *fasto* could also be explained in the same way, if only as an imperfect knowledge of Venetic on the part of the writer of the text.

For the sake of completeness, let us also consider the hypothesis of a division *me ufasto*; in this case it is a compound verb with the preverb *u-* < *\*ud-*, whose semantic value in relation to the verb ‘to do’ is not apparent here. A pronoun *me* must be compared with the Venetic attestation *me<sup>go</sup>*, which is evidently a

21 Marinetti (2024).

22 In the ‘speaking’ formula there is a textual simulation according to which it is the inscribed object that ‘speaks’, e.g. *me<sup>go</sup> donasto Vants Moldonkeo Karamnns Reitiai* ‘Vants Moldonkeo Karamnns donated me to Reitia’ on a foil with a votive function (Este).

23 The phone(ma)tic qualification of (written) *g*, as well as of *b* and *d*, will also have to be studied in relation to its original value in the Etruscan alphabet; with this perspective, it has been proposed to attribute it the value of a voiced occlusive in initial position ([*b*], *g*, [*d*]) with allophonic variant within words, where the realisation would be of a voiced aspirant ([*β*] [*ɣ*] [*ð*]): Rix (1997).

24 On this theme, see Solinas (2004–2005).

25 Gambacurta & Ruta Serafini (2017).



reworking on *ego* (as in Germanic: Gothic *ik/mik*); a diachronic outcome *mego* > *me* for purely phonetic reasons is unlikely. The possibility remains that it is a continuation of the hereditary form, but in this case *mego*, which only occurs in Este inscriptions, would not be Pan-Venetic; *mego* would have to be considered a neo-formation of the Este Venetic. For a continuation of Indo-European \**mē* > *me*, however, the influence of Celtic, which has in *ē* > *ī* one of its most characteristic features, should be excluded. The division <sup>+</sup>*me ufasto* poses too many problems, and therefore seems to be ruled out.

Returning to a more probable *meu fagsto*, this would correspond to the 'standard' Venetic *mego fagsto*. But a further question arises: in the Venetic corpus the word *mego* is found only in the Este inscriptions, *fagsto* only in the Padua inscriptions; in other words, where there is *mego* there is no *fagsto*, and vice versa: there are no attestations of a \**mego fagsto* formula. Here, too, there is more than one possible explanation. A phrase *mego fagsto* is not only allowed by the language, but is probably quite normal; its absence in the votive formula could suggest that here the verb *fagsto* > *fasto* is not in the votive value of the Padua inscriptions, 'to do = to dedicate, to offer', but in the value 'to do = to build, to realise', and therefore that the Isola Vicentina inscription does not have a votive function, but refers to realising something material; a formula that the Venetic language does not know, but that could have been produced for the specific occasion. Or again, it is a votive inscription, and whoever devised the text has crossed two votive formulas, that of Este and that of Padua; what has resulted is not the continuation of a formula tradition but an extemporaneous choice of idiolect by the writer.

Summing up, this short text presents us with numerous alternatives; the almost complete lack of material context (function, chronology) does not allow excluding a priori any explanation for its diversity from the 'standard' Venetic already documented. The variants can be attributed to diachrony, given the absence of dating; to diatopy, due to interference with other linguistic varieties from the neighbouring area; to diastraty, owing to the possible formula choices of the individual writer, outside of known patterns. This is a not uncommon situation in a 'Restsprache' such as Venetic, which can only be answered with a probability ranking, based on the greater or lesser verisimilitude of the explanation of the language data associated with the greater or lesser verisimilitude of the text's function in the specific context.

### 2.3 *The New Datum, Formal Etymology and Cultural-Historical Context*

Regarding deity names transmitted by epigraphic Restsprachen, Aldo Prodocimi recalled the limits of formal etymologies; access to the theonym via

etymology does not reconstruct the ideological content carried by the theonym, which is determined by the historical-cultural and institutional context;<sup>26</sup> an example is the name of a deity from Este, *Reitia*, which appears in the votive inscriptions of an important place of worship.

The theonym *Reitia* has been variously etymologised, starting with the proposal of a derivation from (*\*reg-* >) *\*rekt-*, cf. Latin *rectus*, with the meaning of ‘goddess of law’<sup>27</sup> or an attribute of a salutary goddess ‘who straightens up (new-borns at the moment of birth)’;<sup>28</sup> or derived from *\*reito-* < *\*uer-* (cf. Old English *writan*) as ‘goddess of writing’;<sup>29</sup> or again, from *\*reito-* ‘river’ < *\*rej-* (cf. Latin *rei-vo-* > *rivus*) as ‘river goddess’.<sup>30</sup> Three etymologies are all formally correct,<sup>31</sup> but their basic meanings are also wholly acceptable in relation to the material context of the sanctuary: there are votive offerings in reference to health, writing is an activity closely linked to this sanctuary, and it stands along the course of the main river of ancient Este. For the definition of the value of *Reitia*, neither linguistic analysis nor what is known of the context therefore seems sufficient.

26 For the theonym the issue is different, since—at least in certain cultures, as is the case in ancient Italy—as a motivated and often still active ‘speaking’ epithet (except in cases of manifest borrowing), the ease of ‘etymology’ and, therefore, the assignment to the lexical heritage of the corresponding bases should be easier if not automatic. But formal etymologies are shaky and, for our case, the case of *Reitia* (*rekto-* ‘rectus’; *reit-* ‘to write’; *reito-* ‘river’ [...]) is enough to show the fragility, as a negative condition occurs: we do not know the ideological content of the deity by historical-institutional knowledge [...]. The institutional context, however, cannot be supported—except in part and/or rarely—by archaeological verisimilitude; the *Reitia* case is paradigmatic: *all three etymologies are well-founded on the material basis of the cult.* (“Per il teonimo la problematica è diversa, in quanto—almeno in certe culture, come è il caso dell’Italia antica—come motivato e spesso epiteto ‘parlante’ ancora vitale (salvo casi di manifesto prestito), la facilità di ‘etimologia’ e, quindi, l’assegnazione al patrimonio lessicale delle basi corrispondenti dovrebbe essere più agevole se non automatica. Ma *le etimologie formali sono labili e*, per il nostro caso, basta il caso *Reitia* (*rekto-* ‘rectus’; *reit-* ‘scrivere’; *reito-* ‘fiume’ [...]) per mostrare la fragilità, in quanto si verifica una condizione negativa: noi non conosciamo il contenuto ideologico della divinità per conoscenza storico-istituzionale [...]. Il contesto istituzionale non può però essere suffragato—se non in parte e/o raramente—da verosimiglianze archeologiche; il caso *Reitia* è paradigmatico: *tutte e tre le etimologie sono ben fondate sulla base materiale del culto*”): Prosdocimi (1989: 161; 2004: 527) (our emphasis).

27 Pauli (1891).

28 Vetter (1931).

29 Lejeune (1971).

30 Prosdocimi (1988).

31 In fact, a *\*rekto-* > *reito-* poses the problem of a *-kt-* > *-it-* outcome in Venetic, which is not impossible but lacks internal comparisons.

A possible solution came from the revival of an ancient question when new data was acquired. The new votive inscriptions from Altino<sup>32</sup> bear the theonym *Altino-/Altno-*; the local deity thus has the same name as the city, known in Latin sources as *Altinum*; *Altino-/Altno-* is associated with the attribute *Śainati-*, already known as an epithet both of *Reitia* and of another deity from northern Veneto, the god *Trumusiati-* from Lagole di Cadore. For the name *Trumusiati-*, a meaning had already been proposed in reference to the location of the sanctuary, hypothesising a toponym *\*Trumusio-* (roughly ‘the place of many waters’).<sup>33</sup> It could not be overlooked that in two cases the epithet *Śainati-* would be assigned to a deity whose name coincides with the place (*Śainati Altino-/Altno-*; *Śainati Trumusiati-*). This led to resuming the etymology of *Śainati-*. This form was traditionally compared with the Latin *sanare*; but besides the formal impossibility of a Latin correspondence *sana-* = Venetic *śaina-*,<sup>34</sup> the same hypothetical meaning of ‘healer’, which is acceptable in the case of *Reitia* of Este and *Trumusiati-* of Lagole, is wholly inconsistent with the characteristics of the sanctuary of Altino and the prerogatives of its deity. The new proposal is that it is instead a continuation of the root *\*kpei-* ‘to settle, take up residence’ (Pokorny 1959: 626), and therefore *Śainati-* would mean ‘(deity) of the settlement, of the place, polyad divinity’, entirely consistent with two theonyms representing, in the name itself, the place, the city.<sup>35</sup>

In this reconstruction, it would appear that *Reitia* itself is left out, to which the epithet *Śainati-* is besides assigned: its name does not correspond to that of ancient Este, known from Latin sources as *Ateste*. But *Ateste* derives from *Atesis*, the river running through it, and is therefore the ‘city of the river’; on this basis, of the possible etymologies of the theonym, selecting *\*rej-* > *\*reito-* ‘river’ would seem apt; the name of the place and the name of the deity, *Reitia* the ‘goddess of the city of the river’, would thus coincide, albeit through a different lexical basis.

### 3 Celtic of Italy. The New Datum and the Previous Classificatory Framework

The dialectic between ‘notum’ and ‘novum’ in the Celtic of Italy can be objectified in a couple of questions that exemplify, above all, the relationship between

32 Previously cited: Marinetti (2009).

33 Marinetti (2001).

34 The sign *ś* indicates, unlike *s*, a marked sibilant, for which the most probable explanation is the outcome of an original consonant cluster.

35 Marinetti & Prosdocimi (2006).

the datum coming from the 'Restsprachen' and the previous classificatory framework.

The first exemplification focuses on a phonetic datum that (in as far as 'novum') was able to trigger a revision of the previously established framework even for the definition of linguistic Celticity (moreover, with repercussions even outside the domains already identified as Celtic). In particular, the datum from the Celtic of Italy must be inserted in the dossier concerning the phonetic trait considered pan-Celtic and defining of Celticity itself, which is Indo-European *\*p > Ø*.<sup>36</sup>

The second example instead takes into consideration a lexical aspect and, precisely, the recognition in the Italian epigraphic Celticity of Indo-European *\*ghosti*. The form was not contemplated in the framework of the linguistic Celticity and instead now, after some initial perplexity and still with some limitations, it is included there.

Both these data came, around the mid-1960s, from the inscription found in Prestino (Como). The document has a complex interpretative history:<sup>37</sup> initially, it was dated (2nd century BCE) and interpreted because of a non-Celtic bias, while it was later taken up by Lejeune<sup>38</sup> as a starting point to show precisely the Celticity of the Lepontic language. The last interpretative turning point came at the end of the 1980s and was determined by a renewed chronology that placed the inscription around ±500 BCE.<sup>39</sup> With this dating, the Prestino document opened the way to verifying a Celtic language in Italy at a time well before the post quem of the historical sources that place the coming of the Gauls from the transalpine settlements in the 4th century BCE. The text of the inscription is *uvamokozis: plialeθu : uvltauuopos : ariuonepos : siteś : tetu*.<sup>40</sup> The importance of the document is paramount in terms of its writing,

36 For the sake of expediency and clarity, I will outline complex issues of which I will omit not only details, but also central aspects not directly related to what I wish to focus on. There are two phonetic traits considered common and defining for the Celtic linguistic domain: Indo-European *\*p > Ø* and the labialisation of *\*g<sup>w</sup> > b-* (the bibliography is limitless from Holder 1896–1914 to Pedersen 1909–1913 to Matasović 2009).

37 On this interpretative history with the preceding bibliography, see Solinas (2017: 345–349).

38 Lejeune (1970).

39 The chronology is based on a review of the archaeological data carried out by R. De Marinis throughout northern Italy: De Marinis (2001) with previous references.

40 The reading and the attribution of phonetic values to the signs are essentially agreed upon by all interpreters (the only exception being *uvltauuopos*). The textual structure is that of a dedication by *uvamokozis plialeθu* (nominative of the dedicator) to *uvltauuopos ariuonepos* (dative plural of the dedicatees) in which *siteś* is accusative plural object of the verb *tetu* (3rd person singular past tense).

phonetics, morphology and multiple cultural-historical aspects in the broadest sense.<sup>41</sup> Here, we focus exclusively on the *uvamokozis* form.

*uvamokozis* has been interpreted as the notation in the Lepontic alphabet<sup>42</sup> of a compound whose first member is to be analysed as a ‘superlative’ in *-ḡHo-* on a *\*upo-* base that corresponds with the Greek ὑπό, Old Indian *upa-* etc. Greek ὑπό or Old Indian *upa* indicate ‘low’, as in Celtic for instance in the compound *\*upo-sth<sub>2</sub>-o-* ‘which stands, which is below’ > *\*uosso-* > *\*uasso-*.<sup>43</sup> However, in its use in Celtic onomastics, the variant *ve/v<sub>o</sub>-* < *\*upo*<sup>44</sup> has bivalent semantics between ‘high ~ low’ and, in the case of the superlative *\*up-ḡHo*, indicates the maximum an extremity between ‘high ~ low’.

*-kozis* is notation for a second member of the compound derived from *\*ghosti-*. The form *\*ghosti-* was widely attested in Western Indo-European varieties (Latin *hostis*, Gothic *gasts*, Old Saxon, Old High German *Gast* etc.) but, before the Prestino datum (later followed by others revised in the light of the ‘novum’), it was considered absent from the Celtic sphere.

Concerning our focus here, it is necessary to clarify a writing aspect: in the Prestino inscription the same sign V, which constitutes the absolute initial, is used in other phonetic contexts, i.e. in word endings (in *plialeḡu*) or in intervocalic contexts (in *ividiauiopos*). These occurrences of the sign show how, in the Lepontic alphabetic variety used in this inscription (as well as in all other known varieties), the same V sign was used for both vowel [u] and consonant [w]. In the Prestino inscription, however, there is also *v* (F),<sup>45</sup> the Etruscan sign for [w] that also appears in *uvamo-*, in sequence therefore with *u* at the beginning of a word.

41 Prosdocimi (1986; 1987; 1991), Solinas (2017).

42 The label ‘Lepontic alphabet’ has become established even if inadequate to identify the North-Etruscan alphabet also known as the ‘Lugano alphabet’, adapted/created to note the Celtic of Italy: on the history and reasons for the inadequacy of this label, see Solinas (1992–1993).

43 Cf. for example Old Irish *foss* ‘servant’ or, in Continental Celtic anthroponymy *Dago-uassus* or *Uassilus*; cf. also Sanskrit *upa-sthiv* ‘servant, subordinate’. For the transition *uosso-* > *uasso-* see previously cited Pedersen (1909–1913: I, 35); for the form *uassos* in Gallic, see Schmidt (1957: 285), Delamarre (2003: 306).

44 For this variant (already identified by Pedersen 1909: I, 35 as the result of a dissimilation phenomenon), see also Schmidt (1957: 285).

45 The sign must have been present in the so-called ‘doctrinal corpus’, i.e., the body of knowledge that is suitable for the implementation of writing and that includes, in the theoretical series, also signs that are not (any longer or at the moment) used. For the concept of the ‘doctrinal corpus’ and how important this has been in reconstructing the dynamics of the transmission of writing in general and of alphabetic writing in ancient Italy in particular, see Prosdocimi (1990).

If the same sign notates both [u] and [w] and if, as seems to be shown, *uvamo-* is the notation of the outcome in this Celtic of *\*up-ḡHo*, it follows that *uv-* is an expedient of notation of the vowel followed by the trace of *\*p* that has not yet transitioned to  $\emptyset$  and is in the process of disappearing (in this case in inter-vowel position). At this stage when the disappearance is not yet complete, the initial vowel is still such and is noted through *u*. Instead, *v* notes a consonantal transition that could be something like [u<sup>w</sup>a] though not yet [wa], but could also have other phonetic consistency<sup>46</sup> (which, however, is not pertinent to the present argument). What stands out is that the form and spelling in *uvamo-* < *\*up-ḡHo-* in the Prestino inscription of the late 6th/early 5th century BCE. These are indications that, at this time and in this area, Indo-European *\*p* >  $\emptyset$ , identified as one of the defining traits of Celtic linguistics, was not yet fully realised.<sup>47</sup> The gradual realisation of the trait as well as a transitional phase were also indicated by other data such as, for example, the name of the Ἐρκύνιας δρυμός or *Hercunia silva* which is from < *\*perk<sup>w</sup>u-nia* (derived from Indo-European *\*perk<sup>w</sup>us* ‘oak’). In the Greek form, the rough breathing shows that, at the time the Greeks acquired the form, *p* had not yet disappeared completely, and the residual trace was perceived by Greek ears to the extent that it was noted in the spelling. The fact remains that the ‘novum’ coming from a fragmentarily attested language was related to a previous framework that did not provide for it (or provided for it only in part) and was decisive in triggering a revision (which in this case is still in evolution).

In fact, the phonetic datum coming from the Prestino inscription is one of many that, in the last fifty years, have prompted reconsidering how Continental Celtic should contribute to the design of linguistic Celticity. This reconsideration is taking place in the light of A. Prosdocimi’s idea of a Celtic as “progressive construction”,<sup>48</sup> namely, as a linguistic entity that is not already defined but which, differently in terms of areas and chronologies, may or may not participate in phenomena of evolution or conservation. In this perspective, we consider not only those traits that identify a continuity within Celtic (and, at the

46 See, for instance, Dupraz (2015).

47 One could show how, in the systemic diachrony, it is plausible and expected that *\*p* >  $\emptyset$  is posterior compared to the pan-Celtic *\*g<sup>w</sup>* > *b* and this is connected with the relative recency of the *p*-Celtic and *kw*-Celtic partitions: *\*k<sup>w</sup>* switches to *p* where *\*p* has disappeared and the ‘empty box’ can be filled by a phone/phoneme that is by its nature prone to labialisation: I have posed in general and non-technical terms a question that clearly requires reasoning that is not applicable here.

48 With “progressive construction” I tried to translate the original expression of Prosdocimi ‘Celtico come FARS’: Prosdocimi (1991); Prosdocimi & Solinas (2009).

same time, discontinuity with respect to something else that is Indo-European but not Celtic), but also those that can be said to be ‘non-Celtic’ or ‘not yet Celtic’.

The theme of Celtic and, more generally, the theme of language as ‘progressive construction’ has implications that go as far as the very model of Indo-European reconstruction, and we will not delve into them here. It is however this perspective that has made it possible to relate various realities to Celticity, which could not be done from the traditional perspective based on inclusive and exclusive criteria. Suffice it to recall the case of Lusitanian, another Indo-European variety attested mainly through epigraphy and with the characteristics of a Restsprachen.<sup>49</sup> The Celticity of Lusitanian has been and is still debated. The idea that it is a Western Indo-European variety is shared, but a classification in relation to a specific family is disputed. The positions of the various scholars range from that which, starting from a general indication of Western Indo-European membership,<sup>50</sup> arrive at suggesting a relationship with the Italic languages;<sup>51</sup> to that<sup>52</sup> attributing Lusitanian to a Celticity with particular traits (among which is precisely the preservation of Indo-European \**p*). The main argument against the Celticity of Lusitanian is still the preservation of \**p*-: from the perspective of language as ‘progressive construction’, Lusitanian has been viewed as a Celtic variety that has kept *p*, or rather, that has not developed the trait \**p*- > ∅.

A historiographical annotation arises here with the aim of exemplifying the relationship of the ‘novum’ from ‘Restsprachen’ with the pre-existing. In 1970, namely before the ascertainment of the Celticity of the Prestino inscription and the identification of *uvamo* in the terms just outlined, Warren Cowgill,<sup>53</sup> dealing with the theme of the superlative in relation to the concept

49 So-called ‘Lusitanian’ is attested not only, by a few inscriptions in the Latin alphabet but also by anthroponyms, toponyms and theonyms from the western area of the Iberian Peninsula between Portugal and Extremadura with chronologies after the 2nd century BCE. C. For an overview of the current state of knowledge and research on Lusitanian, see Vallejo (2013; 2021), Wodtko (2020).

50 Tovar (1966–1967).

51 Prosper (2010).

52 Prosdocimi (1987); Untermann (1997).

53 “8. With *-(m)mo-* are formed the Latin pair *summus* ‘highest’ < \**sup-(m)mo-* and *īnifimus* ‘lowest’ < \**ndh-mmo-*, beside the contrastive *superus* ‘upper’, *īnferus* ‘lower’. The first of these recurs in U *somo*; and Celtiberian *ueramos* appears to be a replacement of a corresponding Celtic \**u(p)amo-*, brought about by the fact that \**u(p)amo* agreed in meaning with \**u(p)er* ‘super’, not with \**u(p)o* ‘sub’. As Tovar kindly informs me, the original \**upm̄mo* may be preserved in the place name *Vama*, which Ptolemy 2.4.11 lists among the towns of the Celts of Betica” (Cowgill 1970: 132).

of Italo-Celtic, hypothesised an “original \**up̄m̄mo-*” for Celtic, in his opinion not attested but which—as his friend Tovar suggested to him—could be preserved in the toponym *Vama* that Ptolemy mentions among the Celtic cities of Baetica. Here is the ‘imagined’ \**up-ṛHo* form, or rather, in this case postulated for systemic coherence, which is confirmed by the fragmentarily attested language.

-*kozis* as a notation of the Celtic outcome of \**ghosti-* is excellent as far as formal etymology<sup>54</sup> is concerned and had been identified from the earliest interpretative approaches to the Prestino text;<sup>55</sup> it was not however accepted, and indeed had initially been considered precisely an impediment to the Celtic attribution of the inscription. Later, with the ascertainment of the Celticity of the inscription, the form \**ghosti-* still remained a difficulty since, according to the framework established at the time, it could not belong to Celticity (and therefore *kozis* could not be a notation of the Celtic outcome of \**ghosti-*!).<sup>56</sup>

The -*kozis* < \**ghosti-* from Prestino found support at the end of the 1980s by an inscription from the 6th century BCE from Castelletto Ticino (Novara) with the text *χosioiso*<sup>57</sup> in which G. Colonna recognised a singular genitive in -*oiso* on an onomastic basis in -*o*. Again, this is a document of major importance for the panorama of Celtic epigraphy in Italy; here, however, we dwell only on the onomastic base that Colonna had initially compared with Lat. *Co(s)sius/Cu(s)sius* and that Prosdocimi later related with \**ghosti-*.<sup>58</sup>

54 I will not go into graphical and phonetic details for which I refer to Prosdocimi (1986; 1987) and Solinas (2007). I will only point out that the sign *z* notes the \*-*st-* > -*t̄s-* nexus, i.e. the outcome of a process of affrication already identified in Celtic by Pedersen (1909: I, 78). The use of \*-*st-* > -*t̄s-* to refer to such a phonetic process is an established but conventional modality, as the actual phonetic outcomes may have varied by chronology, but also in synchrony (more or less advanced process of affrication with or without sonority outcomes for example) by area and social contexts. Moreover, it is possible that such variability, in some cases, is reflected in the variety of ancient notations. Indeed, the notation of this nexus is ‘unstable’ in Cisalpine Celtic epigraphy as well as in Transalpine epigraphy (with notations in Gallic fluctuating between *ḃ*, *ḃḃ*, *θ*, *s*, *ss*). In the three cases (see below) of the \**ghosti-* cisalpine, the nexus has three different but expected and justifiable notations: *z* at Prestino, *s* with several traits at Castelletto Ticino (6th century BCE), the butterfly sign in the 1st century BCE in the Verona area.

55 Tibiletti Bruno (1966).

56 Parallel and analogous is the vicissitude of the Gaulish form of the Indo-European name of the ‘daughter’ *dux̄tir* (cf. Greek *θυγάτηρ*, Sanskrit *duhitār*) identified in the Larzac lead (Lejeune 1985) but previously considered absent from the domain of Celticity: Solinas (2002).

57 Gambari & Colonna (1988).

58 The two different identifications depend on the different phonetic values assigned to the *χ* sign: the phonetic value [k] leads Colonna (1985) to posit an onomastic base connected



Some fifteen years later, again from the Celtic of Italy, a further confirmation of Celtic *\*ghosti-* came from an inscription from the Verona area (Casalandri di Isola Rizza) with a late chronology (mid-1st century BCE). The text, *kośio*, should be interpreted as a notation of an onomastic form *\*ghostio* < *\*ghosti* + *-yo-*.<sup>59</sup>

Data from the ‘Restsprachen’ show how in the Celtic of Italy, from the most archaic chronologies to those of full Romanisation, *\*ghosti-* is present at least in the formation of onomastics. It is clear that establishing in onomastics the presence of a form that, due to phonetic or other traits, must be internal to the language (i.e. not borrowed), entails ascertaining the presence of such lexeme in the genetic axis of that language, but does not necessarily verify a lexeme synchronously in place in the state of the language of attestation. In the case of *\*ghosti-* from the Celtic of Italy, after the initial resistance, the acceptance of the new datum has occurred at least for the onomastics of Continental Celtic, so much so that the form that is not present in the *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*<sup>60</sup> appears instead, for example, in the *Dictionnaire des thèmes nominaux du gaulois*,<sup>61</sup> where it is significantly commented on as follows: “Thème absent du reste du corpus et il est probable qu’il s’agit d’une forme archaïque régionale du vieux-celtique (nord de l’Italie) où il est fossilisé dans l’onomastique”.<sup>62</sup>

In a broader perspective, the potential continuations of *\*ghosti-* in areas contiguous to the Italian Celtic region and in areas that have been defined as ‘paraceltic’<sup>63</sup>—namely, contiguous to Celtic but only partly participating in the traits defining ‘proper’ Celticity—were examined (once again from the abovementioned perspective of Celtic like ‘progressive construction’). The revision, for example, considered relationships with forms such as *Velagosti/Velacosta/Vila-gostis*<sup>64</sup> found in Latin inscriptions from the Alpine area between Piedmont and Liguria (Maritime Alps). In the traditional analysis the label ‘Ligurian’ was used for these forms, although Scherer,<sup>65</sup> in a study on the correspondences between Celtic and Germanic onomastics, had already put forward the hypothesis of an analysis as Celtic compounds with the second

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with Lat. *Co(s)sius/Cu(s)sius*; Prosdocimi (1987; 1990; 1991) showed that the phonetic value is—or even alone can be—[g], so he posits *gosi-* < *\*ghosti-*.

59 Solinas (1998).

60 Delamarre (2003).

61 Delamarre (2019).

62 Delamarre (2019: 369).

63 Prosdocimi (1995: 119–127).

64 See e.g. *Velagostis* CIL V 7729; *Vilagosti* (dative) CIL V 7837; *Velacostai* CIL V 7853.

65 Scherer (1955).

member *\*ghosti-*, with a structure analogous to the Germanic *Arbo-gastes*. Similarly, M.G. Tibiletti Bruno, the first editor of the Prestino inscription, had identified *Velagosti* / *Velacosta* / *Vila-gostis* as Gallic forms, possible comparisons for *-kozis* < *\*ghosti-*, but she had then excluded them because “nelle lingue celtiche, tuttavia, il termine non è testimoniato”.<sup>66</sup> This is clearly not the place to delve into the complex and elusive subject of the concept of ‘Ligurian’, itself subject to ongoing review.<sup>67</sup> Leaving aside ancient and modern labels and contents, it is still worth noting that there is evidence of epigraphic and toponymic documentation with supportive traits that cannot be defined as Celtic but neither ‘anti-Celtic’ and that should be assessed from the perspective of Celtic like ‘progressive construction’. With more specific regard to the forms in *-gosti* from the Alpes-Maritimes, the obstacle of the absence of the term in Celtic has gone and that of the nexus *-st-* is non-existent (see above).<sup>68</sup> They can therefore be cross-referenced with the forms from epigraphic Celtic.

Up to here, the presence and correspondence of forms has been noted but, when seeking to broaden the perspective to semantic-institutional content,<sup>69</sup> difficulties arise that are introduced from working on forms that may have evolved differently from semantic-institutional contents. Furthermore, an analysis extending to the ‘contents’ that a term with the semantics of *\*ghosti-* presupposes, must be inserted within a renewed framing based on the idea of *\*ghosti-* as an institutional term. The analysis must therefore relate (and possibly systemise) data at least from Western Indo-Europeanism, thus from languages that differ not only in the consistency and quality of the corpora, but also in the scope of the sources. On this occasion, we once again choose an example in the sphere of ancient Italy: we asked ourselves whether the forms with *\*ghosti-* were pure onomastics or whether they were rather names with a socio-political function—possibly later onomastics—with a meaning of the type of Latin *hospet-* < *\*ghosti-pet-* ‘the one who is accountable for the foreigner’.<sup>70</sup> We thus started from Latin *hostis* in the older value of ‘foreigner’ (and later ‘enemy’) to arrive at the Venetic *hostihavos* (Pa 7). Pisani analyses this form as a compound with the first element *\*ghosti-* and the second member consisting of a verbal noun on the verbal root *\*ghau-* ‘to call’ (Pokorny 1959: 413)

66 Tibiletti Bruno (1966: 314).

67 Prosdocimi (1987; 1991), Solinas (1992–1993: 1293–1297).

68 The first member of the compounds has not yet found a satisfactory Celtic etymology, but an onomastic base in *-a* does not create any difficulties.

69 On this broad and complex subject, see Prosdocimi (1995).

70 Benveniste (1969: I, vii).

plus the thematic vowel: ‘the one who calls, evokes the enemy’.<sup>71</sup> The idea of the noun with a socio-political function led instead to an analysis of ‘he who says = guarantees the foreigner’;<sup>72</sup> in the same vein, within the Celtic of Italy, Prestino’s \**upomo-ghostis* could be ‘he who stands over the foreigner = who is his guarantor’. Even simple onomastic forms such as that of Castelletto Ticino and Casalndri would respond well to the meaning ‘foreigner’.

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72 Prosdocimi (2016: 187).

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