

# The Inscription on the Miniature Shield from Fernpass (A) and the Plural Suffixes in Rhaetic

## L'iscrizione sullo scudo miniaturistico del Fernpass (A) e i suffissi plurali in Retico

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**Abstract:** *The publication of a Rhaetic inscription on a miniaturized bronze shield from Fliess (A) allows detecting a new grammatical feature of this language, which is related to the so-called Tyrsenic linguistic family, including Etruscan, Lemnian and Rhaetic. The new grammatical form, the plural -va suffix, perfectly matches with the Etruscan situation, where two different suffixes are known for marking the plural in common nouns. The paper presents another small step in the reconstruction of the linguistic features of Rhaetic, which can be implemented thanks to the use of the comparative approach.*

**Riassunto:** *La pubblicazione di un'iscrizione retica su uno scudo di bronzo miniaturizzato di Fliess (A) permette di rilevare una nuova caratteristica grammaticale di questa lingua, che è imparentata con la cosiddetta famiglia linguistica Tirsenica, comprendente l'etrusco, il lemniano e il retico. La nuova forma grammaticale, il suffisso plurale -va, corrisponde perfettamente alla situazione etrusca, dove sono noti due diversi suffissi per marcare il plurale nei nomi comuni. L'articolo presenta un altro piccolo passo nella ricostruzione delle caratteristiche linguistiche del Retico, che può essere realizzato grazie all'uso dell'approccio comparativo.*

**Keywords:** *Rhaetic, Etruscan, Epigraphy, Bronze shield, Plural Ending*

**Parole chiave:** *retico, etrusco, epigrafia, scudo miniaturistico, terminazioni plurali*

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## 1. Introduction

An inscription on a miniature bronze shield from Fernpass (fig. 1), nearby the imperial Roman route via Claudia Augusta (Gemeinde Biberwier, Bezirk Reutte in Austria) has recently been published by M. Kirchmayr and S. Schumacher in the Festschrift Gerhard Tomedi<sup>1</sup>.

The discovery of this shield goes back to Robert Klotz, a local erudite who twenty years ago unveiled, together with the shield, also several coins, three fibulae, and two contiguous bronze leaf fragments. The objects are all preserved at the Institut für Archäologien der Universität Innsbruck.

The two fragments belong to an incomplete miniature shield, which nevertheless displays an inscription of 9 letters, plus traces of further letters on the lower end. The object is similar to other miniature shields from the Fritzens-Sanzeno culture, as M. Kirchmayr points out<sup>2</sup>, where other five examples can be listed, precisely coming from Tarrenz-Dollinger, Fließ-Pillerhöhe, Pfaffenhofen-Trappeleacker, Innsbruck-Ferrariwiese, Ampass-Demfeld, and Cles Valemporga.

The two coincident holes on the upper part of the shield prove that the object was hanging or was installed on a wall or a pile, as it is supposed to have happened with other inscribed bronze objects such as the «Lamina di Demfeld», coming from a Brandopferplatz (votive pyre)<sup>3</sup>.

Among the six shields from the Fritzens-Sanzeno area, only another one displays an inscription: the one from Mechel, Valemporga (Cles, Trento), which has been included in the *Monumenta Linguae Raeticae* (MLM) with the number (MLR 37 = TLR NO-3)<sup>4</sup>. Here, the shield is well preserved and has a hole on the upper edge too. The inscription here is characterized by the verbal adjective *u{i}iku*, probably to be amended as *upiku* or *utiku*, meaning ‘given’, ‘gift’ followed by the case pertinentive (here used as a sort of *dativus dedicationis*) of the other two words written on the lower edge of the object: *øelurie-siøelvinu-ale*. The sense of the text allows recognising the dedication of the object to a private person, *øelurie øelvinu*, addressed in an onomastic formula made up by praenomen and father’s name.

## 2. Epigraphic features

The original length of the Fernpass shield’s inscription is difficult to reconstruct because of the fragmentary state of the bronze foil. The text is written from right to left on the backside so that the ductus appears from left to right on the front side.

1. HYE, TÖCHTERLE 2019.

2. KIRCHMAYR, SCHUMACHER 2019, p. 259.

3. DE SIMONE, MARCHESINI 2013.

4. TLR corresponds to the online *Thesaurus Linguae Raetica* (<https://www.univie.ac.at/raetica/wiki>). The Sigla RI refers to SCHUMACHER 1999.

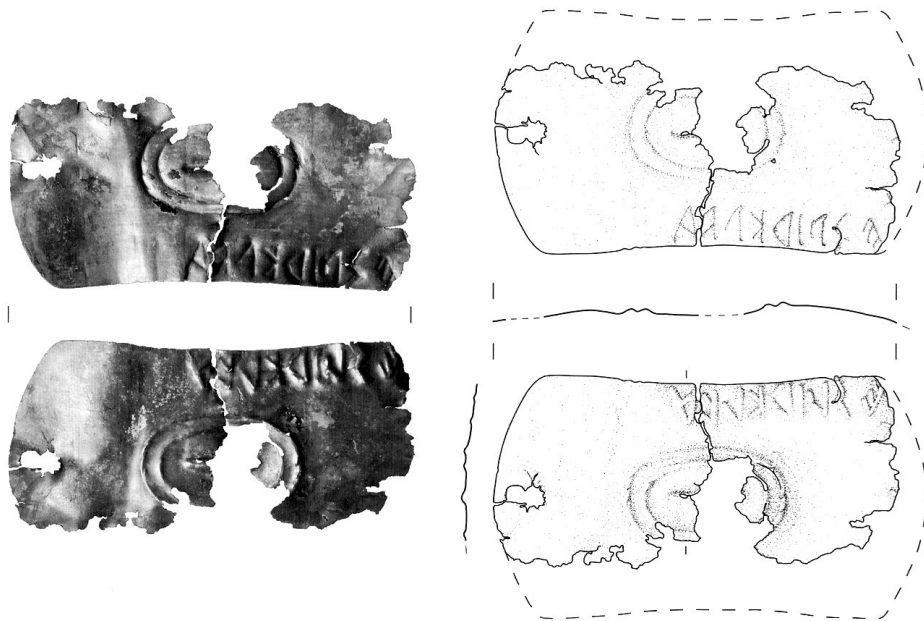


Fig. 1. The inscription on the bronze shield from Fernpass (A). Photos and drawings from KIRCHMAYR, SCHUMACHER 2019, fig. 2

The dextroverse ductus is an exceptional fact in itself, as usually in the Rhaetic epigraphy.

As in the Mechel example, the remains of two letters (a *ny* and an *epsilon*) engraved on the lower edge of the foil, allow hypothesizing that another part of the inscription was engraved, belonging to the first part of the inscription, which is not preserved. The letters, engraved on the object from the back, are well readable. Schumacher proposes the reading *??](?)?nespirkuva*.

Let's review the letters, to possibly define the chronological span in which the inscription can be framed, considering that generic stylistic considerations for the whole group of miniature shields on the Fritzens-Sanzeno territory allow a chronology for the appearing of this kind of manufactures on the art of the *situlae* of Vače and Certosa-Bologna around the 500 BC, as Kirchmayr points out.

The comparison with the older inscription on another shield of Cles, Melemporga (MLR 37a), which has been epigraphically dated from the end of the 6th to the mid of the 5th c. might confirm a generic attribution of the class to this chronological framework.

But a deeper analysis of the letters of our inscription allows further chronological consideration.

The letters of the Rhaetic alphabet have been analysed and typologically sorted on the occasion of the *Monumenta Linguae Raeticae* edition in 2015, and the epigraphic

## Tav. II. Seriazione epigrafica.

**Avvertenza.** Per i riferimenti cronologici di carattere archeologico ("Cronologia in sec. a.C.") si rimanda alla bibliografia di ogni singola scheda.

Provenienza	Supporto	MLR	V 1	R 4	P 2	H 14	U 6	P 4	A 7	R 1	C 1	P H	K 3	K 1	A 1	A 3	H 4	R 2	Z 2	U 1	P 3	H 2	A 2	Fasi epigrafiche	Cronologia in sec. a.C.
Terlano, Settequerce	Lamina di bronzo	273						X	X	X															VI-V
Sanzeno, Casalini	Placchetta di bronzo	144a)	X	X				X	X			X													V/IV; V
Sanzeno	Placchetta di bronzo	146b)	X	X				X	X																V/IV; V
Cles, Campi Neri	Statuetta cavaliere bronzo	29						X	X																V-II
Terlano, Settequerce	Stele di porfido	271a)				X					X	X													
Terlano, Settequerce	Attingitoio di bronzo	272a)				X			X	X															V/IV
Sanzeno	Verga di bronzo	162	X						X																
Cembra	Situla Giovannelli	26b)2	X				X	X																	
Cembra	Situla Giovannelli	26b)1	X					X	X																
Cembra	Situla Giovannelli	26c)	X			X		X																	
Sanzeno, Casalini	Placchetta di bronzo	154				X		X	X	X	X														V/IV; V
Sanzeno, Casalini	Placchetta di bronzo	150	X					X	X																V/IV; V
Collalbo, Piperbuhel	Lituo di betulla	39						X	X																
Cles, Campi Neri	Bronzetto di cavaliere	29a)						X	X																V-II
Sanzeno	Fr di osso di cervo	165a)						X	X																
Sanzeno, Casalini	Placchetta di bronzo	146a)						X	X																V/IV; V
Terlano, Settequerce	Blocco di porfido	271b)				X			X																
Terlano, Settequerce	Attingitoio di bronzo	272b)	X				X	X	X	X															V/IV
Incerta	Statuetta di cavallo	306						X	X	X															V
Sanzeno, Casalini	Placchetta di bronzo	151				X	X	X	X																V/IV; V
Cles, Mechel	Fr. di corno di cervo	35						X				X													
Cles, Mechel	Lamina di bronzo	37a						X	X	X		X													V/IV
Sluderno, Ganglegg	Osso animale	249					X	X	X																
Sanzeno, Casalini	Placchetta di bronzo	145						X	X	X	X														V/IV; V
Sanzeno, Casalini	Placchetta di bronzo	147a)				X		X	X	X															V/IV; V
Sanzeno, Casalini	Placchetta di bronzo	148						X	X																V/IV; V
Sanzeno	Attingitoio di bronzo	168						X	X																V/IV
Sanzeno	Statuetta di guerriero	160						X	X	X															V
Vadena	Chiave di ferro	288						X	X	X															
Sanzeno, Casalini	Placchetta di bronzo	153						X	X	X															V/IV; V
Sanzeno, Casalini	Placchetta di bronzo	147b)						X	X																V/IV; V
Cles, Campi Neri	Astina di bronzo	30						X	X				X												V
Cles, Campi Neri	Ago di osso	31						X					X												
Sanzeno	Fr. di lamina di bronzo	164						X	X	X															
Campodenno, Dercolo	Placchetta di bronzo	20						X	X				X												V-IV
Sconosciuta	Fr. di vaso di ceramica	301					X								X										
Sanzeno	Supporto per falce	200b)						X	X	X			X												
Sanzeno, Casalini	Placchetta di bronzo	152a)						X	X	X															V/IV
Sluderno, Ganglegg	Osso animale	251								X				X				X							
Vadena, Stadthof	Blocco di porfido	289					X							X											
Cembra	Situla Giovannelli	26b)3							X						X										
Tesero, Sottopedonda	Corno di cervo	275							X						X	X	X	X							metà V-inizi IV
Ampass, Demilfeld	Lamina di bronzo	1					X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X							metà V
Bressanone, Stufles	Olla di argilla	16						X	X						X				X						
Collalbo, Piperbühel	Stele di porfido	40													X			X	X						
Coredo, Tavon	Stele di porfido	41						X	X					X						X	X	X			
Cles, Mechel	Lamina di bronzo	37b												X						X	X	X			
Campolino/Lothen	Cinturone di bronzo	22						X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X							V-IV
Vače (Slovenia)	Elmo di bronzo	285																		X	X	X			V/IV
Verona, Ca' de Cavri	Asta di bronzo	290											X							X	X	X			metà V-IV
Lavagno, S. Briccio	Fr. di corno di cervo	44													X					X	X	X			IV
S. Lorenzo di Sebato	Barretta di micascisto	138												X							X	X			V-IV/III
Monte Ozol, Ciaslir	Astragalo	75																			X	X			VI-IV
Volders, Himmelreich	Ceramica tipo Fritzens	295																		X	X	X			VI-IV
Campodenno, Dercolo	Tazza tipo Sanzeno	21																		X	X	X			III-II
Steinberg am Rofan	Inscrizione rupestre	268													X						X	X			
Sanzeno	Fr. di situla di bronzo	194							X	X	X									X	X	X			
S. Giorgio Valpolicella	Placchetta di bronzo	122a)													X					X					fine II-inizi I
S. Giorgio Valpolicella	Placchetta di bronzo	120a)																	X	X					fine II-inizi I
Cles, Mechel	Fibula Almgren 65	34													X					X	X				prima metà I
Fritzens	Elemento di osso (arpa)	43																		X	X	X			fine I

Fig. 2. Seriation Chart of the Rhaetic inscriptions. From MLR, Tav. II

seriation, based on the co-occurrence of the same letter types for each period, has allowed identifying the chronological development of the alphabet, with the relative and absolute chronology of each inscription<sup>5</sup>.

The methodology combines archaeological and epigraphic data to obtain an overall chronology (fig. 2). It can happen that the two chronologies do not match, especially when between the production of the object and the realisation of the inscription a period may elapse.

In the chart obtained through seriation (Ihm's algorithm) (fig. 2), the different epigraphical phases can be easily recognised through deletion of some letter types on the left of the graph and insertion of new letter types on the right of the chart. Caesuras can be detected on the graph, corresponding to significant changes in the letter set. The dating of a few elements based on assured archaeological features (both stylistic and contextual) can allow dating the whole phase. In the Rhaetic area, three main phases have been recognised so far: Sanzeno I is dated from the end of the 6th c. to the mid of the 5th c. BC; Sanzeno II is dated from the mid of the 5th c. to the end of the 3rd c BC; Sanzeno III, the last — poor — phase of the Rhaetic epigraphy is dated to the 2nd-1st c. BC.

The epigraphic evidence from the contiguous Magrè area on the East shows a clear development of writing competence starting with the 4th c., in coincidence with the decline of the production of writing in the Sanzeno area. In Magrè the signs repertoire shows a slight modification in the use of a few signs, as we can see from the table (fig. 3).

Let's analyse the letters of the inscription from Fernpass.

— 1<sup>st</sup> sign: the sign before the first well readable letter, on the lower edge of the shield, might be a grapheme <n>, as suggested by Schumacher, but I cannot exclude that it might be the upper-left part of a <k> or a <χ>. As we shall see, a verb ending in *-ke* / *-χe* might be represented in this case, a feature that would match with the next word. Let's analyse the single letters of the remaining text:

— 2nd sign: E1, with parallel strokes pointing downwards.

— 3rd sign: S2, three-strokes retroflex sigma.

— 4th sign: similar to P3, but with a two-segment-oblique-stroke, unusual in the Rhaetic epigraphy. Schumacher points out that two more cases of a similar P are attested within the Rhaetic epigraphy: one on the rest of a harp from Fritzens, Pirchboden (Austria) IT-3 (= MLR 43) and the other on the handle of a so-called 'Henkelbecker' from Fliess (A) IT-8<sup>6</sup>. In both cases, the sign appears to be rather a letter rho, in which the half-circle trait becomes slightly larger at the basis and does not touch the vertical hasta. Additionally, the reading *ritie* in both cases — instead

5. For the methodology on epigraphic seriation, see IHM 1978 and 1983; COWGILL 1972; BIETTI 1982; ANDERSEN, MADSEN, SCOLLAR 1992; MLM; MARCHESINI 2004; MARCHESINI 2010 and 2012a; for the Rhaetic seriation with the chronology of inscriptions, see MLR, p. 297.

6. SALOMON 2018.

**Avvertenza.** Il *ductus* regolare dell'alfabeto retico è sinistrorso; i casi di lettere contrarie al *ductus* dell'iscrizione (verso retrogrado) vengono evidenziati con una freccia soprastante. La successione dei tipi di lettere in senso orizzontale indica sviluppo temporale. La successione verticale indica concomitanza. La numerazione delle lettere non rispetta alcun ordinamento.

<b>Alpha /a/ [α]</b>	<b>Iota /i/ [i]</b>	<b>Tau /t/ [t]</b>
A <sub>1</sub> A A <sub>11</sub> Λ <sub>7</sub> A <sub>9</sub> V <sub>4</sub> AA <sub>12</sub> AA <sub>2</sub>	I <sub>1</sub> I <sub>2</sub>	X X <sub>2</sub> ††† <sub>3</sub>
<b>Epsilon /e/ [ε]</b>	<b>Lambda /l/ [l]</b>	<b>Ypsilon /y/ [y]</b>
Ε <sub>1</sub> ≡≡≡ <sub>7</sub>	↓ <sub>3</sub> T T <sub>1</sub> (unico a Magré)	V <sub>6</sub> V <sub>3</sub> Λ <sub>1</sub> (Λ <sub>2</sub> ) (ΥΥ <sub>4</sub> )
<b>Digamma /v/ [v]</b>	<b>Mu /m/ [m]</b>	<b>Phi /ph/ [o]</b>
f <sub>1</sub> f f <sub>2</sub>	M <sub>2</sub> M <sub>1</sub>	Φ <sub>4</sub> Φ <sub>1</sub> Φ <sub>2</sub> (unico a Magré)
<b>Zeta /z/?/[z] (assente a Magré)</b>	<b>Nu /n/ [n]</b>	<b>Chi /ch/ [ç]</b>
#(#) <sub>1</sub> I <sub>2</sub>	(N <sub>3</sub> ) N <sub>5</sub> (N <sub>4</sub> )	V <sub>3</sub> Υ <sub>1</sub> (unico a Magré)
<b>Heta /h/ [h]</b>	<b>Pi /p/ [p]</b>	<b>Segno a freccia /f/ [↑] (solo a Zanzeno)</b>
H <sub>2</sub> H H <sub>4</sub> (unico a Magré)	T̄ <sub>4</sub> T <sub>3</sub> (unico a Magré)	↑
<b>Segno a scala /th/ [θ] (solo a Magré)</b>	<b>Rho /r/ [r]</b>	<b>Interpunzione [:]</b>
B̂ <sub>1</sub> (B̂ <sub>2</sub> ) (B̂ <sub>3</sub> )	T̂ <sub>4</sub> D <sub>1</sub> R <sub>2</sub> C <sub>3</sub>	• <sub>2</sub> ⋮ <sub>1</sub> (\_3)
<b>Kappa /k/ [k]</b>	<b>San /š/ [š]</b>	<b>Lettere come numerali/contrassegni</b>
K <sub>1</sub> (assente a Magré) K <sub>2</sub> (K <sub>4</sub> ) K <sub>3</sub>	M <sub>1</sub> (unico a Magré)  (M <sub>2</sub> )	AA > HH X I K TJ YN DD VAY VYU ↑
<b>Simboli</b>	<b>Altri segni comuni</b>	<b>Nessi frequenti</b>
[S01] [S02] [S03] [S04]	1 + // \/\	XX XX X\
<b>Letture diacriticate</b>		
X X *		
v v		
φ ψ		



of *pitie* — would allow recognising a well-attested word, known from several occurrences from Magrè, namely *MLR* 48 (a horn from Magrè, Vicenza) — in which the *rho* is written in the form of a triangle —, *MLR* 63, still from Magrè — in which the *rho* presents a vertical hasta exceeding the triangle at the lower part — and *ri[ʀ>AJA]ie* in *MLR* 62 (from Magrè). For the reading as *pitie* we would rely only on derived forms, such as *pitamnuaie* (*MLR* 14), *pitiave* (*MLR* 26) and *pitame* (*MLR* 8). In both cases, reading *pitie* or *ritie*, the noun would be framed in the well-known class of *-ie* (personal?) names, represented also by *vepelie* (*MLR* 153), *philie* (*MLR* 305), *pipie* (*MLR* 151), *upie* (*MLR* 185), *aparie* (*MLR* 306), *lavisie* (*MLR* 26) and *rusie* (*MLR* 2). In this case, the letter is with no doubt a *pi*, but without any tight comparison in the Rhaetic epigraphy. Being an isolated case so far, it does not fit a specific typology and might represent the individual realisation of the letter.

— 5th sign: I3, a long *iota*.

— 6th sign: K1 with short traits and long haste.

— 7th sign: if we exclude a *pi*, which is already represented in the third sign, the letter is to read, as S. Schumacher proposes, as an asymmetrical *Ypsilon* (U2), with the apex on the top. Again, the better comparison for this not frequent kind of *ypsilon* comes from Magrè (*MLR* 57), where the sign occurs two times in the same inscription. The reading as an [u] is assured by the linguistic context, as the word is *putixinu*, a masculine patronymic name ending in *-nu*.

— 8th sign: digamma F2, with a larger distance between the two oblique strokes.

— 9th sign: A2, with the horizontal hasta which sinks obliquely from left to right.

Among all the graphemes, only a few of them allow a chronological attribution. Specifically, the forms of the K and the A are typical of the second phase of the Rhaetic epigraphy, which goes from the mid of the 5th c. to the end of the 3rd c. BC. The form of the letters allows assigning the inscription to the Sanzeno, rather than to the Magrè epigraphic area.

### 3. Linguistic analysis

A linguistic premise must be expressed regarding the reconstruction of the Tyrsenic linguistic family, to which Rhaetic, together with Etruscan and Lemnian (meaning with this label the inscriptions from the Island Lemnos in North Aegean of the 6th c. BC) belong. Similarities among the three languages have been already recognised:

- 1) phonological features: asymmetric vowel system with reduction of the /o/ sound to the velar /u/; lack of graphemes for the sounded series of the plosives<sup>7</sup>;

7. RIX 1998; SCHUMACHER 1999; DE SIMONE 2009; DE SIMONE 2013; MARCHESINI 2013; MARCHESINI 2014; MARCHESINI 2019.

- 2) morphological aspects: identification of suffixes for the dative, pertinive, genitive, probably locative<sup>8</sup>; agglutinating morphology on the right of the world;
- 3) verbal system: the suffix *-ra* for the plural; suffixes *-ke* / *-χe* for the past tense, the coincidence between 3rd person singular and plural;
- 4) deictic pronouns, such as Etruscan *eka*, *ca*: Rhaetic *ka*<sup>9</sup>;
- 5) Name system: the patronymic suffix *-na* in the name system<sup>10</sup>;
- 6) nominal stems recognisable in personal names<sup>11</sup>.

The new inscription, as we can see, sheds light on the plural suffixes. The comparative method, extended to the Rhaetic language, allows, together with the method of the internal reconstruction, to move forward in the hermeneutic of both languages and must be practised as a new, reliable tool.

The text reading, based on the previous analysis, coincides with the one proposed by S. Schumacher: *ɲnespirkuva*. The word division is given by the text itself, as a space between the epsilon and the following sigma is left.

S. Schumacher identifies in the word a final suffix *-a* at the end of the word, which he reconnects to a genitive in *-(a)l*, admitting that up to now only the form *-s* is attested as the genitive suffix in the Rhaetic language. He also quotes, as a possible comparison, the inscription on the miniature shovel from Padua (MLR 80 = BZ-2), in which the sequence *kaial* might present an *-al* suffix. The reading we proposed in MLR for the inscription on the ‘paletta di Padova’ sees at the end of the word a grapheme <n>, partially covered by the incrustation, so that the reading should be *kaian*. The proposal bases on the statistical frequency of the grapheme <l> in word end: in *val* (MLR 58), *↑al* (MLR 146), *stuatel* (MLR 55), *ahil* (MLR 22), *akvil* (MLR 80), *mul* (MLR 252), *tul* (MLR 90) we face mostly the evidence of mono- or disyllabic *-l* stems (*val*, *ahil*, *akvil*, *mul*, *tul*, *↑al*), and in *stuatel* the vocal preceding the grapheme <l> is an <e>, not an <a>. The proposal of *kaian* would instead confirm a usual formulary, in which an absolutive in *-Vn* (where V = vocal, as in *ritan*, *erikian*, *kusen*, *apanin*, *fanin*, *etunin*, *paniun*), appears, especially in votive or dedication formulas, characterised by the verbal noun ‘*utiku*’ or ‘*upiku*’ (‘given’, ‘gift’).

The linguistic analysis we propose here for *spirkuva* moves from the analogy of the word, ending in *-va*, with other words attested in the Rhaetic corpus with the same ending: *tuluva* and *ɲstuva*.

*Tuluva* is written on the external wall of a clay ‘bicchiere carenato’ (carinated mug) from Rotzo Bostel (MLR 100a), in the Magrè area, archaeologically dated to the end of the 4th-3rd c. BC. The text *esipapjaretuluva* appears together with

8. RIX 1998; DE SIMONE 2009; DE SIMONE 2013; MARCHESINI 2013; MARCHESINI 2014.

9. MARCHESINI 2012b.

10. RIX 1998.

11. MARCHESINI 2019.



another text (100b), scratched on the lower part of the vase: *esip[3.4]tanaka*. The vase comes from a dwelling complex (C2). Neither of the two words appears to belong to the typical name formula of the Rhaetic area, made by praenomen and a *-nu* / *-na* patronymic. It is uncertain whether the first sequence, *epipapiare* consists of one or two words.

Another case of a word ending *-va* in Rhaetic comes from *stuvva* in the inscription *stuvatinaxe* from Magrè, loc. Castello (MLR 65), which is to read as: *stuvatinaxe*, where the second word is the verbal form (*-xe*) of the third person (singular = plural) of the past tense. A possible meaning for ‘made’ for this verb is justified by the comparison with the Etruscan verb *zinace* ‘made’, ‘fashioned’<sup>12</sup>, even if H. Rix<sup>13</sup>, considering the structure of the sentences in which the verb occurs in Rhaetic, i.e. linked to personal names in the absolutive and the pertinentive, proposes the meaning ‘dedicated’. In Etruscan, the verb *zinace* is in several cases associated with artist’s names, meaning ‘made’. A similar meaning, with a broader sense, ‘has made’ or ‘made someone make’ related to a sacral, votive or dedication situation cannot be excluded for the Rhaetic language. This sense would retain a common, original semantic value for the verb in the two languages, developed then separately.

A switch between the /t/ of Rhaetic *tinake* and the /z/ of Etruscan *zinake* makes no difficulties in the complex dental grapheme repertoire of the Rhaetic language<sup>14</sup>.

In both cases, the *-va* suffix can be intended as a plural. In a further Rhaetic occurrence the possible *-va* suffix might be represented by the vocalisation of the labiodental /v/ into the vocal /u/ in contact with /h/: *ahua:huqr/l* (MLR 165 from Sanzeno). In the case of *kua*, written on a bone from S. Lorenzo di Sebato (MLR 135), a stem *k-* would be too short to justify that *-ua* is a plural suffix.

The plural suffix *-(χ)va* occurs in the Etruscan Language in complementary distribution to *-r(a)*. The distribution related to the opposition animate vs inanimate nouns is accepted by most scholars, even with some alternative proposals.

L. Agostiniani, observing the occurrences of the two suffixes in the epigraphic documentation, proposed for the first time a distribution in terms of animateness: *-r(a)* would be found in animated nouns (such as *aiser* ‘the Gods’, *clenar* ‘the sons’), and *-(χ)va*, with the variants *-cva*, *-va*, *-ua*, phonologically conditioned, would be used in inanimate nouns (such as *avilχva* ‘years’, *zulesva* ‘the offers’).

The distribution has been reviewed in later contributions<sup>15</sup>, but it has been substantially confirmed in its general features<sup>16</sup>.

In Rhaetic we had already observed the plural form *-ra* in the dedication of the bronze plate from Demlfeld<sup>17</sup>, where the plural form *Avaśuerasi*, to analyse as

12. AGOSTINIANI 1982, p. 202; WALLACE 2008, pp. 182-183; STEINBAUER 2000, p. 410.

13. RIX 1998, pp. 41-42.

14. RIX 1998, pp. 45-48.

15. ADIEGO 2009; RIGOBIANCO 2013.

16. BELFIORE 2020.

17. DE SIMONE, MARCHESINI 2013.

*Avaśue-ra-si* with the agglutination of [plural] + [pertinentive] suffixes, appears as the final word of the text, meaning the entities to which the dedication (*utiku*) was addressed. The text from Demlfeld is a votive dedication within an Alpine votive rogue (*Brandopferplatz*) and the plate registers the dedication made by *Kleimunte* of something (expressed in the first lost line) to the plural entity *Avaśuera*. The animateness of this plural entity (divine nouns? brotherhood?) is well compatible with the pragmatic of dedication in a sacred context.

We do not know whether the Rhaetic language had the same distribution of plural suffixes, given the high chronological distance between the two languages<sup>18</sup>, but the case of *Avaśuera* seems to attest at least the same use of the plural suffix *-ra* in combination with animated entities.

As for the meaning of the text, we can only suppose, similar to the Etruscan language, that *spirkuva* might be the plural of a noun *spirku*. At this point, we might hazard further isolation of a *-ku* suffix (\**spir-ku-va*), used in several nouns: in Rhaetic the words *utiku*, *uqiku*, *eluku* are known in this function, associated with dedication formulas. Usually the *-ku* suffix, which expresses in Rhaetic and Etruscan the past participle used a verbal noun, is linked to a verbal stem, which in this case, would be in *-r*. Possible comparisons with the Etruscan present an *-u-* as a stem vowel as in *spu-ra* ‘community, town’. Admitted a swing between /u/ and /i/ — in contact with liquid or nasal consonants — to explain *spira* instead of *spura*, a phonological trait common to several languages (besides the well-known case of Latin adjective *optime/optume*, or the Messapic theonym *Damatira/Damatura*, see also the doublet in the tradition of the Rhaetic personal name of Celtic origin *Esimnesi/Esumnesi*, respectively *MLR* 268 and 30)<sup>19</sup>, it should be explained the reason of the drop of the vowel /a/ in a linguistic situation, like the Rhaetic one, where the syncope characterising the Etruscan inscriptions of the ‘recent’ epigraphic phase starting with the 5th c. BC is not attested so far. This fact is not of scarce value, as it seems that the syncope, as well as other linguistic features (for example the *-i* motion suffix in deriving the feminine personal names from the masculine ones) might regard only the Etruscan language, as a consequence of something happened after the split between the two languages. We have to remember that the Rhaetic epigraphy underwent a heavy reduction during the 5th century, as a consequence of the spreading of Celtic presence in the Po plain.

It makes no difficulties that the suffix *-ku* is directly attached to the consonantal stem, as also the Etruscan language shows at the beginning of the 5th c. (a feature, which goes back to an older tradition: see for example the cases of the *Tabula Capuana*<sup>20</sup>, where forms such as *nunθcu*, *θuθcu*, or *θamcu* are attested (*ThLE*<sup>2</sup>).

18. MARCHESINI 2013.

19. See MARCHESINI 2014, pp. 134-134; MARCHESINI 2019, p. 127; MARCHESINI, ZAGHETTO 2019, p. 337; MARCHESINI 2020, p. 15.

20. CRISTOFANI 1995.

Once isolated the *-ku* morpheme for a passive verbal noun, we remain with a verbal stem *spir-* (\**spi/ur-*?) common to the Tyrsenic family, with a possible meaning ‘to put in common’ (or similar) from which the deverbative Etruscan *spura*, ‘community’, ‘people’, might have been built.

The stem \**spur-* must be productive in Etruria, as a large attested onomastic theme, *Spurina*, origins from it, with subsequent developments in several directions (praenomen *Spurie*, gentile name *Spurina*, *Spuriena*, *Spuri(a)na*, etc.; records starting with the 7th c. BC for *Spurie* and the diminutive *Spuriazza*)<sup>21</sup>.

A remark on the explanation of *spir-* as the possible cognate to Etruscan *spura* (‘town’, ‘community’) must be made here. S. Schumacher proposes (RI: 301) that a cognate of Etr. *spura* can be identified in the word *spura*, attested in an inscription (RI, SR-2 = MLR 82) from a dwelling in Pergine Valsugana. The text is written on a polished deer antler, lengthwise cut. The inscription consists of two texts written on both sides of the bifurcation of the antler. The reading proposed by me after autoscopic observation is a) ]*hetinu* b) *spurasentus*. Schumacher’s reading is: ?]=*et<sup>2</sup>inu* / =*et<sup>2</sup>ina* (where = are unrecognisable letters and *t<sup>2</sup>* is the St. Andrews cross, sign for the dental) and *spura.sentus*. *Spuras* might be a noun for Etruscan *spura* in the genitive case and *entus* the genitive of a toponym. In conclusion, the inscription would mean «? *et<sup>2</sup>inu* (or ? *-et<sup>2</sup>ina*) für die Gemeinde Entu».

This explanation raises several issues. Firstly, the *divisio verborum* proposed by Schumacher is not justified by an interpunction between *spuras* and *entus*, which does not appear on the surface. Secondly: if the translation effectively matches the text, we should expect the indirect object, the community *spura*, expressed in the pertinentive case. As a comparison, we can quote the bronze foil from Anpass (Dem-lfeld)<sup>22</sup>, whose inscription displays the dedication to a plural entity in the pertinentive case: *Avaśuera-si*. Moreover, considering the text meaning, namely the community’s official dedication to a god, we would expect a more significant inscribed object than a simple animal bone.

Our analysis led to the interpretation of the sense of the word *spirkuva* as a plural form of a verbal noun, with a passive meaning, from the verbal stem \**spur-*. It is highly probable, reasoning in terms of comparison within the Tyrsenic linguistic family, that the here isolated suffix expresses the plural of inanimate entities and is at this regard complementary with the already known suffix *-ra* (in *Avaśue-ra-si*), used for animated entities. A possible translation of the word might be ‘the things ruled by the community’ = ‘the common goods’ or something similar. As the plural noun shows no further case attached to it to the right of the noun (as we would expect in the agglutinated Rhaetian language and as *Avaśue-ra-si* in the pertinentive case well proves), the noun must be considered an absolutive, i.e. possibly having both logic functions of subject or object. If we are right to see a possible letter <k> or

21. See MORANDI TARABELLA 2004, pp. 476-486.

22. DE SIMONE, MARCHESINI 2013.

<χ> in the fragmentary traits before the letter <e> at the beginning of the preserved part of the inscription, then we would expect a -ke or -χe verb ruling the following noun. Considering the Frame Semantics perspective of the dedication of a shield in a sacred place, we would argue that a subject X, probably expressed in the first and lost part of the text, ‘made something’ (i.e. ‘dedicated’, ‘offered’, etc.) to the objects Y, where Y means something expressed or made by or belonging to the community. This would be the sense of the text.

Another possible explanation for the word *spirkuva* might result from the analysis *spir-kuva*, where *kuva* might correspond to the Etruscan plural ending -cva / -χva, which appear with the r-stems like in *flerχva* (L.L. VIII, 3; *LTE*<sup>2</sup> s.v.) and *caperχva* (L.L. VII, 10; *LTE*<sup>2</sup> s.v.). We have no evidence that the Etruscan plural suffix -cva / -χva, attested since the 5th c. BCE already in this form might go back to a «full», unsynopated form -cuva / -χuva. Neither is the word *spir-* known elsewhere in Rhaetic. The first explanation seems preferable at the moment.

We are aware of the hermeneutical difficulty in reconstructing and proposing a sense for a sequence of 8-9 letters. The object in which the inscription was engraved, linked in most cases to a framework of a sacral environment, where dedications were expressed, reduces the possible solution for a sense of the text. It cannot be a coincidence, moreover, that also in another small bronze object such as the lamina from Demlfeld, a plural entity is expressed. Plurality is often a sign of community.

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