

PRE-ROMAN LANGUAGES ON THE APENNINE PENINSULA

My research area concerns the early languages on the Apennine peninsula, from around 800 BC, i.e. the very first period of writing, down to the early Imperial period, when most non-Latin languages (apart from Greek) slowly became extinct, Latin becoming the politically, socially and military dominant language. Attested pre-Roman languages on the Apennine peninsula have so far been rather neglected in terms of digitisation and other computational techniques. As a matter of fact, most of the work done on the Etruscan or on any of the Sabellic languages (Oscan and Umbrian, along with the South Picene and Pre-Samnite oldest layers, and also in conjunction with the related Paelignian, Marrucian and Volscian minor languages) is traditionally based on standard archival research and printed media.

My research focuses on the very earliest period of writing, and the introduction of the alphabet in the various regions of the peninsula. By beginning with the oldest written remains on the peninsula – the *Eulin* inscription from *Gabii*, from apr. 775 BC, and the Nestor's *kotyle* from *Praeneste*, dating back to the 2nd half of the 8th century and both written in Greek, and moving through the centuries into Etruscan writing and early Latin, Faliscan, South Picene and Oscan texts – I ask questions concerning the transmission of writing, the *formulae* used, and the development of the script itself.

The contextual approach involves considering potential areas of contact between the speakers of the different languages, and evidence for the transmission of other knowledge and/or techniques, such as pottery, metallurgy, etc. With these techniques there are evident steps of emulation, where native craftsmen mimic the operating procedures in creating imported objects (BLAKEWAY 1935; cfr. discussion in RIDGWAY 1990, 67). With the advent of writing one sees a similar process of emulation, first in the copying of the letter signs themselves (with very little adaptation), but also in the copying of a written formulaic repertoire, for example the practice of “speaking inscriptions” (“iscrizioni parlanti”: AGOSTINIANI 1982).

The alphabet also comes free from any ethnic or religious connotations, and could therefore be freely adopted and adapted to fit the requisites of the receiving language, an element that aided in the rapid spread of writing among the different linguistic regions.

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