

Raetic Epigraphic Documents as Landmarks of Waterway Transit in the Eastern Alps

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Abstract: In the eastern Alps, inscription finds belonging to the pre-Roman North Italic writing cultures of the Iron age are clustered around the main river valleys. The article discusses the distribution of epigraphic documents of Raetic – the most northerly group – in the Trentino, South and North Tyrol with regard to its connection to riverine transalpine trade routes. Particular attention is given to the following questions: Can the lack of inscription finds in areas which are associated with the historical Raetians in the classical literature be explained by considering the main trade trajectories in relation to settlement areas? What can the position of the Val di Non as a hub for the spread of literacy tell us about the use of river routes in the Trentino?

Keywords: Raetic, Raetians, Etruscans, Fritzens-Sanzeno, eastern Alps, Alpine Rhine valley, Val di Non, alpine transit, North Italic alphabets

Introduction

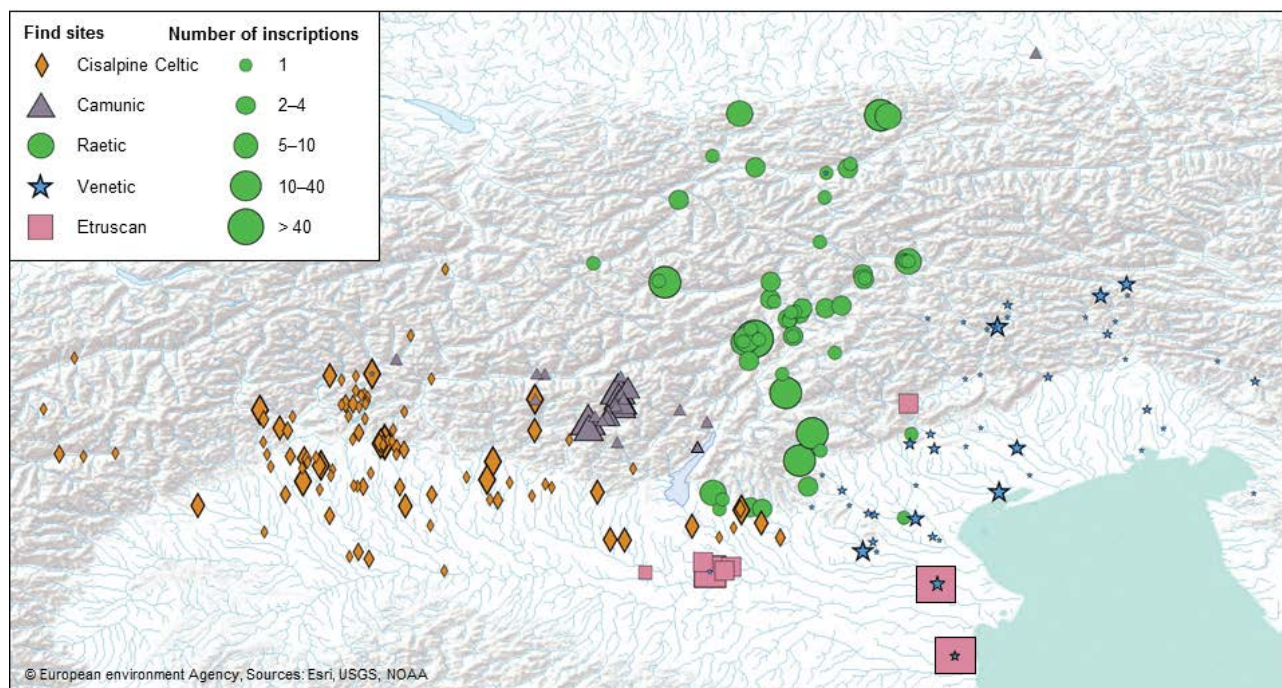
In mountainous regions such as the Alps, the passages which are constituted by river valleys represent the main lines of traffic and paths of communication, the routes of access for migration and mobility of people(s), objects, and ideas, and consequently the spread of cultural assets, innovations and technology. They are of prime importance both for internal contacts and for the connection of the mountain-dwelling societies to the surrounding areas. In prehistory, the main factor of mobility along these passages is trade, involving alpine societies directly as trade partners (especially in phases when they can profit from their richness in metal ore) or indirectly as intermediaries in long-distance trade through their territories.

The details of who and what went where by what means and in what manner in and over the Alps in antiquity are largely unclear, particularly before the establishment of Roman rule and consequent building of Roman roads – our sources for the Bronze and Iron age are sparse. Archaeological evidence for external long distance trade can be direct or indirect (cf. Stjernquist 1985, 66–78). Direct evidence is constituted by the trade goods themselves, their type, origin and distribution. Indirect evidence can be gained mainly from the examination of the economic and/or cultural effects of trade relations on the target regions and along the trade routes, as well as from the analysis of possible motivations for and mechanisms of such relations. Even when archaeological evidence is supplemented by external historical sources, a detailed understanding of how such transactions played out is usually ultimately a matter of interpretation – beside the general unrepresentativeness of archaeological

remains due to perishability, restricted find contexts and irregular excavation activities, it is difficult to determine with certainty for any one “foreign” object whether it was found in the place for which it was destined or left behind along the way, and whether it was imported through trade in the narrow sense, as a gift, or as personal property. It is equally hard to distinguish between developments in material culture which are caused by trade relations/mobility or migration (cf. Metzner-Nebelsick et al. 2017, 3 ff.).

The study of epigraphy can complement the archaeological data with those obtained through the methods of palaeography and linguistics. Inscriptions, through their support, have a material dimension which ties them in with the archaeological evidence; in addition to being inscribed on an object, they are written with a particular script and encode a particular language. Thereby, they supply additional levels on which a find can be analysed and contextualised, creating additional networks of distribution, development and meaning. Always minding caveats concerning writer identity and the reuse of objects, inscriptions allow us to draw inferences about the person who owned or used the artefact, yielding information about their language and writing community, and provide insight into person as well as object mobility; they can also elucidate the object’s history and its purpose at its find place, and thus its significance for mobility and exchange. The distribution and nature of inscription finds in the alpine area can tell us something about the exact course of transit routes, their functions, and the ways in which the tribes who inhabited the Alps interacted with the cultures of Italy and central Europe along the waterways.

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Map 1. Find places of North Italic inscriptions (including Etruscan inscriptions north of the river Po).¹

Conversely, heuristic value can be gained for pre-Roman epigraphy from the study of alpine transit routes. An understanding of how and by whom the waterways in the mountains may have been used and the role played by individual archaeological find places in this system can inform our analyses of inscriptions as well as our arguments about the spread of writing and the identity of the writers. The exploration of the interrelations of river routes and vernacular alpine epigraphy represents an effort to reach a better appreciation of both routes of alpine transit and their effects on the society of alpine dwellers in the Iron age.

Raetic Inscriptions

Raetic is a pre-Roman language which is fragmentarily attested in an epigraphic corpus in parts of what is today Italy, Austria and Switzerland. The Raetic writing culture is one of four epichoric writing cultures of Iron Age northern Italy and the eastern alpine region, which are subsumed under the term *North Italic*. North Italic literacy is based on Etruscan literacy; various local alphabets derived from the Etruscan one around the sixth century BC write – beside Raetic – the Italic language Venetic, the Celtic languages Lepontic and Cisalpine Gaulish, and Camunic of unknown affiliation (map 1). Raetic is a member of the Tyrsenian language family, and thus related to Etruscan.²

¹ Map by Egress Tiri. Not on the map: the inscriptions on helmets found in Slovenia SL-1, SL-2.1, 2.2, 2.4, PD-1, the Montmorot inscription JU-1, and the Todi bilingua PG-1.

² Raetic inscription sigla (type AV-1) refer to TIR; Cisalpine Celtic inscription sigla (type AO-1) refer to LexLep; Etruscan inscription sigla (type Fe 1.1) refer to ET. Further informations about the Raetic inscriptions cited in the text can be found open access in TIR.

The Raetic epigraphic corpus currently comprises ca. 330 inscriptions, of which a little less than a half are certainly language-encoding, while at least a third are para-script marks. Raetic inscriptions are written mainly on bronze, antler, bone, stone and ceramic objects; the prevalent text type of language-encoding inscriptions is the dedication. The texts are mostly short with one to three words, and record the personal names of the donors of votive gifts. Raetic inscriptions have been found mainly in the Trentino and in South and North Tyrol, where they are associated with the archaeological Fritzens-Sanzeno culture. Raetic literacy developed in the late sixth century BC and came to an end, like the other North Italic writing cultures, as a consequence of Romanisation at the end of the first century BC.

Map 1 shows that the distribution of North Italic inscriptions in the mountainous regions beyond the Padan plain – most noticeable in the northerly Raetic corpus – largely correlates with the courses of the major river valleys in northern Lombardy, Veneto and Friuli, Ticino, Grisons, Trentino, Tyrol and Carinthia. This distribution is unsurprising considering that the North Italic writing cultures depend on influence from the south, and contact with the technologically advanced communities of Italy must be expected to have primarily happened along the main inlets into the mountain regions, among which the river valleys dominate for obvious reasons.³ We assume that a) the larger valleys and immediately adjacent plateaus were more densely

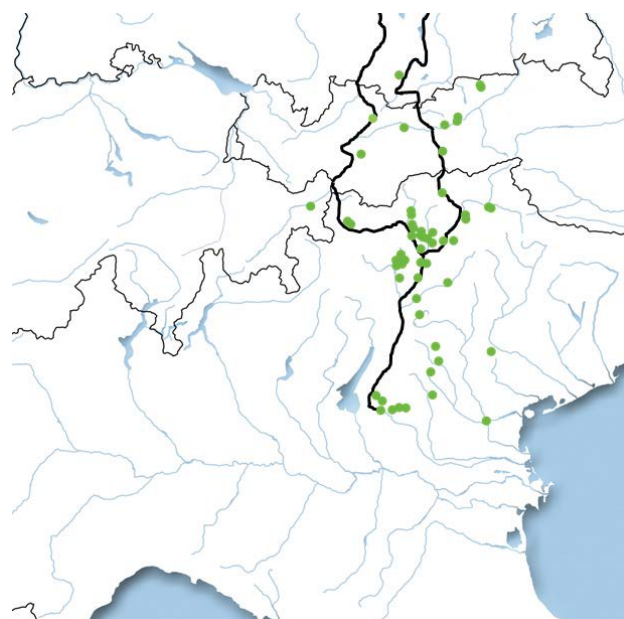
³ Cf. Rutz 1969, 9 f. on the concept of the *Gebirgsquerung*, i.e. the optimal route across a mountain range.

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populated than the smaller tributary valleys and higher altitudes, and b) that cultural innovations which are introduced along routes of primary access may not spread to more remote areas.

Leaving aside two easterly outliers in the Venetic area at Padova and Castelciès, Raetic inscriptions in the Padan plain have been found at five sites in the area of Verona. The Vallagarina (the Adige valley between the Chiusa di Ceraino and Besenello) has as yet not yielded any finds; instead, inscriptions come from four sites in the Agno, Leogra and Astico valleys as well as the Altopiano di Asiago of the Vicentine alpine foreland. The site Serso in the Fersina valley (Valle dei Mocheni) is situated where the latter opens into the Valsugana at the source of the Brenta before meeting the Adige at Trento. Two confluents of the Adige north of Trento connect the river with find sites: only two in the Avisio valley (Val di Fiemme/Val di Cembra) in the east, but a large number of sites and inscription finds in the Val di Non, a basin crossed by the Noce in the west. The only inscriptions from the Adige valley itself below Bolzano come from Pfatten, which is connected via the Kreither Sattel – another find site – with the hilly terrain Überetsch, which in the north also contains two find sites. Numerous inscriptions from various sites come from the Bolzano basin north of the confluence of Adige and Eisack. In the upper Adige valley, inscriptions have been found at two sites in the Burggrafenamt and at Meran, as well as at two sites in the Vinschgau. The lower Eisack valley (Eisacktal) itself is findless, but inscriptions come from the Ritten plateau in the west. Numerous inscriptions were found at sites around Brixen, and also in the valley of the Rienz (Pustertal) which flows into the Eisack there. Further north, there are inscription sites in the upper Eisack and Sill valley (Wipptal) before the Sill meets the Inn. Apart from a single find in the Lower Engadine, inscription finds in the Inn valley come only from the section between Prutz and Schwaz. Beyond the Inn valley, an inscription was found near the Fern pass; petrographs are known at three sites in the Unterammergau and in the Rofan mountains east above the Achental.⁴

From this short survey, it is evident that Raetic inscription finds occur predominantly along river valleys which constitute two major transalpine trade routes⁵ connecting the eastern Padan plain with the Bavarian alpine foreland via the Reschen and Brenner passes (map 2). From Verona, both routes follow the Adige to Bolzano, where they separate. The Reschen route, which emerged in Roman times as the Via Claudia Augusta connecting Altino with Augusta Vindelicorum (Augsburg) and the limes at Donauwörth (Grabherr 2006, 64–71), stays with the Adige up to its source near the Reschen pass and



Map 2. Raetic inscription finds along the Reschen and Brenner routes.

crosses the latter into the Inn valley at Landeck. After a stretch down the Inn, it leaves the valley at Imst to cross the Fern pass, then turns north-west to reach the Lech, which can be followed to Augsburg.⁶ The Brenner route, which was upgraded to a Roman *via publica* (Via Raetia) under Septimius Severus, branches off into the valley of the Eisack, which bears more water than the Adige at the confluence. The route carries on along the Wipptal over the Brenner pass to reach the Inn valley at Innsbruck (Roman Veldidena), and follows it upward to the Zirler Berg, where it turns north over the Seefelder Sattel to follow the Isar out of the mountains, then west to reach the Loisach valley. These routes were in use as early as the Mesolithic for inneralpine mobility and migration between the northern and southern range, and for transalpine contacts at least since the Neolithic (Metzner-Nebelsick et al. 2017, 4–16; Marzatico 2002, 26–34; Gleirscher 1993b, 70–7).

It is reasonable to assume that the distribution of Raetic inscriptions is connected to the courses of these riverine trade routes. The present article will discuss two questions regarding how this correlation – or absence of correlation – can inform our understanding of both trade routes and the spread of Raetic literacy:

1. Why do we not have evidence for Raetic literacy from the entire settlement area of Raetians as it is indicated by ancient sources?
2. Why is the Val di Non a centre of Raetic literacy despite its apparent cul-de-sac situation from the perspective of the Adige valley?

⁴ A zoomable map with tagged inscription find sites is available in TIR (see n. 2). Not included in this survey are the Slovenian helmet inscriptions (SL-1, SL-2.1, 2 and 4) and the Camuno-Raetic AV-1 from Nußdorf in Bavaria.

⁵ General observations on transalpine trade in Pauli 1992, 612–4 and Schmid-Sikimić 2000, 216–9.

⁶ The exact trail of the Roman Via Claudia in North Tyrol is described in Grabherr 2006, 73–155.

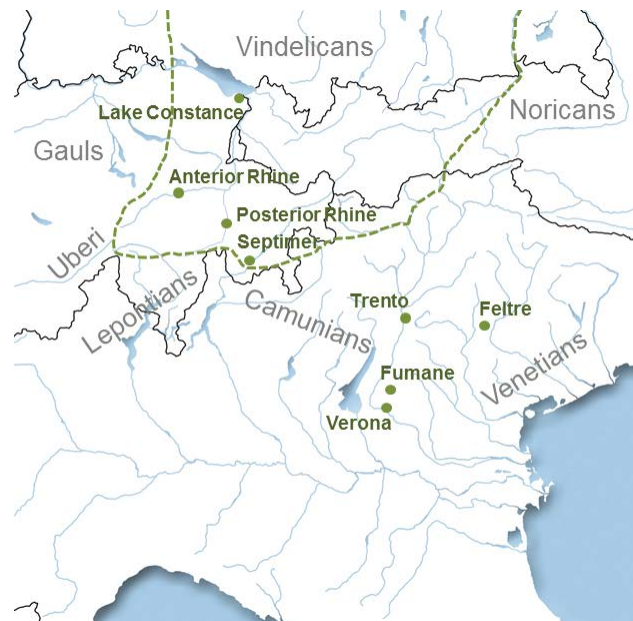
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The Absence of Inscriptions in the Alpine Rhine valley

The term *Raetic* is taken from classical geography and historiography, in which a group of alpine dwellers called Lat. *raeti*, Gk. ῥαῖτοι is sporadically referred to during the time in which the areas beyond the Po came into the focus of Roman interest. The Raetians are located between two Celtic groups, the Noricans in the east and the Gauls in the west (Cass. Dio. LIV.22). The earliest literary reference dates back to Cato the Elder, who praises Raetic wine (via Servius *Virgil Georg. comm.* II 95), which, as remarks by Pliny (*HN* XIV.16.67) and Strabo (IV 6, 8) tell us, was grown in the area of Verona. Pliny calls Verona an *oppidum raetorum et euganeorum* and informs us that the tribes of the Feltrini and Tridentini inhabit *raetica oppida*, viz. Feltre and Trento (III 130); he further locates two Raetic tribes at the sources of the Rhine (III 135). Strabo also has Raetians settling at Lake Constance (*Geogr.* IV 3, 3). Polybios in his list of alpine passes (XXXIV 10, 18) refers to the easternmost one – probably the Septimer pass in Grisons (Lunz 1981, 24; Heuberger 1932, 3 ff.) – as leading ‘via the Raetians’.

Evidence for the localisation of the Raetians also comes from epigraphic sources. A Latin Imperial-age inscription from Fumane in the Valpolicella (*CIL* V, 3927) refers to a *pontifex sacrorum raeticorum*; the inscription on the mausoleum of L. Munatius Plancus (*CIL* X, 6087) mentions that, as governor of Gallia Comata, the man defeated a Raetic incursion around the middle of the first century BC – this corroborates the accounts of a Raetic presence around Lake Constance and/or in the northern Grison Alps (cf. Gleirscher 1991, 6; Frei-Stolba 1992, 662 ff.).⁷

The evidence for the localisation of the Raetians in, on the one hand, the alpine foreland between Adige and Piave and, on the other hand, the Alpine Rhine valleys is, all in all, surprisingly coherent.⁸ That these two territories were part of a large cohesive settlement area is indicated by the extension of the Roman province Raetia et Vindelicia, which was created around the middle of the first century AD. The province included modern Grisons and the cantons to its north up to Lake Constance (with the Alpine Rhine valley and the sources of the Rhine, the Engadine and Münster valley), the Vinschgau, Passeier and Wipp valley, the Inn valley down to about Wörgl, and the alpine foreland west of the Inn to the Danube (map 3). Its northern border was originally constituted by the Donau and the limes, from the middle of the third century AD by the Donau-Iller-Rhein limes (Lunz 1981, 22). The province appears to include the lands of the Celtic Vindelicans in the northern alpine foreland and those of the eastern alpine (predominantly) Raetic tribes which were subdued by force during the Roman alpine campaign of 15/14



Map 3. Localities associated with the Raetians in ancient sources.

BC, while the southern parts of the Raetic area (south of Merano) became part of Italy proper (regio X Venetia).

Of course, the data provided by the classical authors has to be taken *cum grano salis*. Apart from the fact that their information, even when they drew from somewhat older sources, refers to the situation of the last centuries BC, we cannot be certain in how far the ancients’ (or any individual author’s) concept of Raetians coincides with our modern, archaeologically, epigraphically or linguistically determined one (Lunz 1981, 26–32; Gleirscher 1991, 8; Frei-Stolba 1992, 659; Marzatico 2019). Marzatico (2001, 484) also raises the question of the “livello di omogeneità e di autoidentificazione” of a Raetic people. Pliny calls the Raetians *omnes in multas civitates divisi* (III 133), an observation which is supported by the fact that the Raetic tribes could be defeated successively during the alpine campaign (Gleirscher 1991, 60); they are referred to as a single ἔθνος ῥαῖτων in an inscription in the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias, but not in the Tropaeum Alpium inscription (*CIL* V, p. 906), which only lists individual tribes (valley communities) conquered in the course of the campaign.

The Romans were aware, however, of a relationship between Raetians and Etruscans – this is demonstrated by Pompeius Trogus (via Justin XX 5) and Pliny (III 133), who considered the Raetians descendants of the Etruscans. Whether there were any phenotypical or cultural similarities which could be discerned in the younger Iron Age is unknown,⁹ but Livy (V 33, 11) remarks that the language of the Raetians was barbarised Etruscan –

⁷ See Frei-Stolba 1992 and Marzatico 2001, 384–492 for exhaustive collections and discussions of the Raetians in ancient sources.

⁸ The dubious testimony of Strabo concerning the identification of the inhabitants of the foothills beyond Lago di Garda and Lago d’Isèo as Raetians (Frei-Stolba 1992, 660–2) and the uncertain relationship between Raetians and Camunians will not be discussed here.

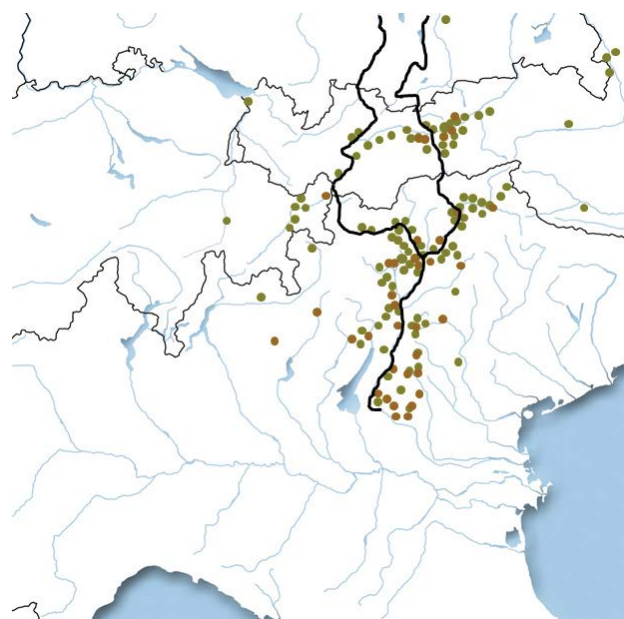
⁹ The results of a recent archaeogenetical study, which finds no evidence for a discrete Etruscan gene pool in the Iron Age (Posth et al. 2021, 7), makes the former unlikely.

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this tells us that Raetic was recognisable as non-Indo-European to the Romans as late as the first century BC, and it is likely that their language was at least one of the distinguishing characteristics by which Raetians were identified (cf. Marzatico 2019, 79).

The comparison of maps 2 and 3 shows that the distribution of Raetic inscription finds coincides roughly with the area indicated by the ancient accounts of the Raetians – as well it should, since the area of attestation is one of the main factors for the choice of this ancient ethnonym in the mid-nineteenth century to refer to the documents, the first having been found in the Val di Cembra (CE-1) and in the Wipptal (WE-1). The inscription finds made since then have conformed quite well to our idea of where the Raetians – i.e. speakers of Raetic – settled. A notable exception is one of the best-supported ancient settlement areas: the Alpine Rhine valley with those of the Anterior and Posterior Rhine and their catchment areas, which so far have not yielded Raetic epigraphic finds. Unambiguously Raetic inscriptions are not known from west of Landeck; a single fragmentary two-character inscription on a potsherd from Ardez in the Lower Engadine (EN-1) is of uncertain alphabetic and linguistic status. This gap becomes understandable when looking at the spread of cultural assets – including writing – as reflected in the material cultures of the area.

In the Bronze and early Iron Age, the archaeological Laugen-Melaun culture extended over the southern eastern Alps between East Tyrol, Rovereto and the Engadine. In earlier phases, the characteristic ceramics are found regularly also in the Alpine Rhine valleys, which are otherwise oriented toward the northern Urnfield cultures, but this connection weakens already between the late eighth and the early sixth century BC (Gleirscher 1991, 12). In the late sixth century BC, a new archaeological horizon called *Fritzens-Sanzeno* emerges in South Tyrol and the Trentino, extending over the core area of Laugen-Melaun, but eventually including also North Tyrol and the southern alpine foreland (map 4). The Fritzens-Sanzeno culture, characterised by its typical ceramics as well as features pertaining to dress, buildings, armament, and cult,¹⁰ is identified as the material culture of the ancient Raetians particularly among Italian and Swiss scholars because of its appropriate geographical and chronological distribution (Nothdurfter 1992, 45 ff.; Marzatico 2001, 483). It spans the late Iron age, but flourished especially in the fifth to fourth century BC (Marzatico 2001, 493), before the Gaulish immigration into northern Italy. Its emergence was triggered by increased influence from the Etruscan culture to the south (Gleirscher 1993b, 77–95). The dependence of the Fritzens-Sanzeno culture on Etruscan input is manifest on various levels, particularly in the cultic sphere, in the ornamentation and imagery on situlae and other luxury items (Gleirscher 1991, 51 ff.; De Marinis 1999, 648 ff.), in cultic practices and their implements, but also



Map 4. Find places of Fritzens-Sanzeno ceramics and *case retiche*, based on Marzatico 2001, 481, fig. 1 and 504, fig. 8.

in kitchenware and various tools and equipment made locally based on Etruscan models (Nothdurfter 1992; Gleirscher 1993b, 81–95). Not least, the use of script, modelled on a Mediterranean alphabet and used mainly in cultic context, is a central feature which distinguishes the Fritzens-Sanzeno culture (Gleirscher et al. 2002, 202–7). The distribution of Raetic inscription finds corresponds to that of archaeological Fritzens-Sanzeno finds; the association is equally clear when considering the archaeological classifications of the inscription supports.

From an archaeological perspective, it is therefore not surprising that Raetic literacy is absent in the Alpine Rhine valleys – the knowledge of writing spread with the Fritzens-Sanzeno culture and its assets, which did not extend its influence that far west. Fritzens-Sanzeno artefacts are only sporadically found in the Alpine Rhine valleys; there are some connections in the form of burnt offering sites and figurines (Gleirscher 1993a, 64), but the trend of weakening connections with the east continues. This is due to the fact that Fritzens-Sanzeno owes its existence to the intensification of transalpine trade along the Reschen and Brenner routes to the northern alpine foreland initiated by the Etruscans in the Padan plain. These routes ultimately remained of secondary importance for long-distance contacts in the Iron age in comparison to the routes in western Europe – prominently the Rhône and Saône, as well as the Swiss passes –, which constituted more direct connections to the market provided by the Hallstatt proto-urban centres in western Germany and eastern France (Lang 2002, 54; Marzatico 2002, 34).¹¹ Still, despite the lack of Etruscan import goods found in

¹⁰ Details in Marzatico 2001, 493–555.

¹¹ Nothdurfter 1992, 49 argues that the larger width of the alpine range in the east discouraged transit, because more separate dominions had to

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Bavaria, there can be little doubt that the Etruscan efforts did not primarily target an inneralpine market (cf. Dal Ri 1987, 170; Gleirscher 1993b, 95; Gebhard & Wagner 1992, 285; Irlinger 2002, 188; pace Nothdurfter 1992, 52¹²) – possibly western Germany was the main target region also for the somewhat more easterly routes. In any case, the possibly quite weak cohesion of a Raetic-speaking population between Lake Constance and Feltre may have been subordinate to the south-north trajectory along which Fritzens-Sanzeno extended the realm of the more east-west-oriented Laugen-Melaun south into the alpine foreland and across the main ridge of the Alps into the Inn valley (cf. Marzatico 2002, 33). There are of course numerous passes between the Engadine and the catchment area of the Posterior Rhine, but these were connections of only local relevance; even the Lower Engadine, which played no part in the south-north connection, remained largely illiterate despite being an archaeologically unambiguous Fritzens-Sanzeno area.¹³

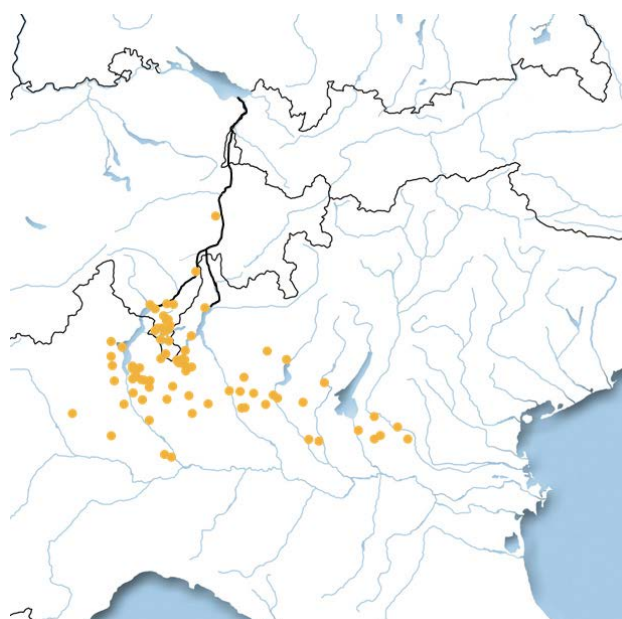
Meanwhile, the Alpine Rhine valleys in the sixth century BC became part of another emerging cultural association, namely that formed by long-distance trade via the Golasecca culture (Gleirscher 1993a, 63–6; Rageth 2000, 140), which is associated with Celtic groups in the lake area and the Lepontians in the Ticino. Beginning in the seventh century BC, the richness of burials in Golaseccan context shows that the Lepontians made the most of their position as intermediaries and gatekeepers on a trade route that went from the North Italian lakes over the San Bernardino and Splügen passes and the Posterior Rhine to the central European Western Hallstatt culture (map 5; Frey 1987 and 1990; Schmid-Sikimić 2000; Piana Agostinetti 2004, 44–56). In the course of this development, the Golasecca culture received its own Mediterranean alphabet, used to write Lepontic and later also Cisalpine Gaulish as spoken by Gauls moving into the Padan plain. Despite the Alpine Rhine valleys' re-orientation toward the south in this phase, the Lepontic alphabet did not spread this far north. The only potential inscription find from the Alpine Rhine valleys so far is a putative gravestone from Präz (today part of Cazis) in the valley of the Posterior Rhine. Funerary inscriptions are common especially among the Lepontic finds from Switzerland, and the eroded grooves have been interpreted to show the appropriate Celtic dative endings (Simonett 1959, 5) – however, they are very probably not writing (see LexLep GR·2). Apart from this unserviceable document, the most northerly find is a comparatively young¹⁴ gravestone with Celtic inscription

be dealt with by the trading parties than along the routes over narrower sections.

¹² As the inneralpine regions after the heyday of copper mining in the Bronze age are generally not considered rich enough to constitute attractive trade partners for what is ultimately luxury goods, Nothdurfter (p. 53, 59; see n. 9) suggests that, beside agricultural produce, slaves were the main article of exchange.

¹³ In fact, the dearth of inscription finds in the entire Engadine may indicate a subordinate role of the Maloja pass which connects the Lago di Como with the Inn, despite the route being judged geographically advantageous by Rutz 1969, map 6e; cf. Lang 2002, 49.

¹⁴ Late second/early first century BC according to the chronology of De Marinis & Motta 1990–1991, 206, 211; third century BC according to



Map 5. Find places of Cisalpine Celtic inscriptions, and the San Bernardino and Splügen routes.

(GR·1) from Mesocco, the southern valley station of the San Bernardino pass which connects the Misox with the Posterior Rhine

The historical, cultural, linguistic and “ethnic” situation of the Iron age Alpine Rhine valleys has long been the subject of discussion (Rageth 1992, 196–200). If speakers of Celtic languages inhabited the Alpine Rhine valleys and received cultural stimuli along the Golaseccan trade routes in the sixth century BC, one may ask why the alphabet did not reach them (cf. Marzatico 2001, 544¹⁵). Of course it must be observed that, despite there being contacts in the material culture (Rageth 2000, 141–7) as well as evidence that Golaseccan women (were) married into settlements along the routes (Schmid-Sikimić 2000, 233; Casini 2000; Casini & Chaume 2014), the Golasecca culture did not outright spread to Grisons as it did into the Ticino and like Fritzens-Sanzeno did to North Tyrol. In the Alpine Rhine valleys, there emerged the aptly named Alpine Rhine valley group, which is characterised by its own ceramic styles – Tamins ware of uncertain derivation (Rageth 2000, 143) developing into the more Hallstatt-oriented Schneller ware in the fifth century BC (Gleirscher 1993a, 65 ff.). Whether any of these evolutions can be connected with a “Celticisation” of the Alpine Rhine valleys, and generally whether and how the changing archaeological horizons of the Alpine Rhine valleys relate to population movements is ultimately unclear (ibid.; Gleirscher 1991, 15 f.; Rageth 2000, 139). The presence of Laugen-Melaun material in the Alpine Rhine valley is sometimes explained with a presence of population parts from the east rather than import of foreign wares or

Motta 2000, 206.

¹⁵ The referenced article of De Marinis is not currently available to me.

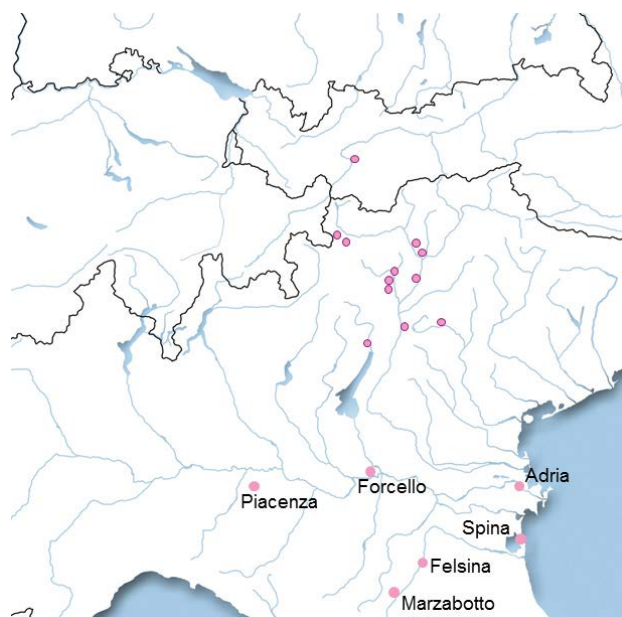
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styles (Sperber 1992, 72; Gleirscher 1992, 120), but the notion that the Grisons Raetians mentioned by Piny and Strabo are the descendants of these bearers of Laugen-Melaun culture, which should already be considered a “Raetic” horizon, as proposed by Frei 1970, is doubtful (cf. Lunz 1981, 40–2).¹⁶ Yet, the lack of written documents in the Alpine Rhine valleys may indicate the presence of speakers of non-Celtic languages, which formed a barrier for the northward spread of the Lepontic alphabet.¹⁷ If this population was in fact Raetic-speaking, as suggested by the ancient accounts, this separation between a literate East Raetic and a non-literate West Raetic area demonstrates the importance of the north-south transit routes as factors of cultural adhesion.

The Abundance of Inscriptions in the Val di Non

In the seventh and sixth century BC, exchange and trade relations between the Mediterranean world and western and central Europe were dominated by the Etruscans, who controlled the sea routes as well as the inland waterways of Rhône and Saône, Ticino and Rhine. In consequence of many factors including the Battle of Alalia (Aléria) and deteriorating relations with the Phocaeen Greek colony Marseille at the mouth of the Rhône, the Etruscans lost their hegemony in the western Mediterranean in the course of the sixth century BC (Gleirscher 1993b, 74; Schmidt-Sikimić 2000, 215). They reacted by focusing on the eastern Alps, intensifying the use of the Ticino route and around 530 BC expanding into the eastern Po valley, where they founded cities such as Felsina (Bologna), Marzabotto, Forcello and Spina, probably also Piacenza, and apparently took control of the old Veneto-Greek seaport Adria (map 6; Gleirscher 1993b, 77–79; De Marinis 1999, 624). The emporium Forcello, situated near the confluence of Mincio and Po, is thought to be the main Etruscan transit point for contact with and trade through the eastern Alps (Gleirscher 1993b, 80; De Marinis 1999, 628; De Marinis 2005, 226–8), which gained traction in the late sixth century BC and triggered the development of the Fritzens-Sanzeno culture.

Archaeological artefacts which serve as landmarks of contact routes and areas between the Padan Etruscans and the inhabitants of the Alps to their north include two objects of alpine make found at Forcello (De Marinis 1999, 624–626; De Marinis 2005, 217 f.) as well as Etruscan finds in



Map 6. Etruscan cities in the Padan plain and find places of Etruscan objects in Fritzens-Sanzeno context (sixth to fifth century BC).

Fritzens-Sanzeno context (map 6; Dal Ri 1987; Gleirscher 1993b, 92, 94; Sydow 1995; Marzatico 2002, 33). These latter objects, beside the fragments of a Vetulonia-type helmet from Siebeneich (Bolzano) and statuettes from Stilfs in the Vinschgau and Sanzeno in the Val di Non, are predominantly bronze and ceramic vessels and fragments of such (Nothdurfter 1992, 59–62). The main find areas are the Val di Non, the Bolzano area, and the settlement-cum-gravefield of Pfatten in the Adige valley. In absolute numbers, though, there are not many finds which can be called imports (somewhat over 30 from the sixth and fifth century BC in Nothdurfter’s 1992 list) – the Etruscan influence on Fritzens-Sanzeno is manifest in styles and forms of tools, situlae, votives, etc., but the items were mostly manufactured locally on Etruscan models. None of the Etruscan-made objects bear any inscriptions;¹⁸ the only (potentially) Etruscan document from beyond Forcello/Mantova is the inscription stone or rather stones from Feltre (Pa 4.1), whose original context and dating are uncertain.¹⁹

The Adige valley is the obvious main transit route in the Fritzens-Sanzeno area (cf. Marzatico 2002). Between the Vallagarina and the Adriatic, it traverses historically Venetic country, with a course which ran a little to the north of today’s (Marzoli & Wiel Marin 2013, 25 ff. with a map Abb. 20), passing ancient Ateste (Este), a centre of Venetic culture (the eponymous Este culture) and literacy.

¹⁶ The identification of bearers of the Fritzens-Sanzeno culture with speakers of the Raetic language has, despite its methodological issues connected with such connotations, good support in South Tyrol and the northern Trentino. Since Fritzens-Sanzeno developed organically from Laugen-Melaun in terms of ceramics (Marzatico 2001, 511) and is not connected with large-scale immigration (Gleirscher 1993b, 95 ff.; Grupe et al. 2020), the same is likely to apply to Laugen-Melaun in that same area. Neither material culture, however, can be taken to indicate the presence of Raetic speakers beyond this core area without further argument.

¹⁷ Though it must be pointed out that, judging by the current find situation, the Lepontic alphabet also failed to spread far to the north-west, where Celtic tribes like the Helvetians settled – sporadic finds are only known from the Great St. Bernard route (Salassians in the Aosta valley) and the Valais (Uberi, Seduni and Veragri in the upper Rhône valley).

¹⁸ It may be observed that at least two inscribed objects in the Raetic corpus are classified as local imitations rather than imports primarily because they bear Raetic inscriptions (Egg 1992, 158 for the bronze vessel fragment with inscription BZ-4; Nothdurfter 1992, 60, no. 6h for the statuette with inscription SZ-16).

¹⁹ See TIR (https://www.univie.ac.at/raetica/wiki/The_Feltre_inscription_stones).

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The area of Verona, a city strategically situated at the point where the Adige leaves the mountains before turning east, is not rich in Etruscan imports – though it is unlikely that the Etruscans, who did take control of existing local centres, did not take advantage of Verona’s infrastructure. Salzani 1984, 792 ff. points to three Etruscan statuettes from the very south of the Vallagarina as evidence for Etruscan trade up the Adige; there are also types of Etruscan ceramics whose spread can be followed from Etruscan Marzabotto over the Veronese area (Castelrotto) to Pfatten (Nothdurfter 1992, 50), where the Adige could be crossed at a ford (Gleirscher 1993b, 74). The route was also used for Attic imports which came via Adria, reflected by finds of Attic ceramics in the Veronese area and in the Siebeneich sanctuary near Bolzano (Marzoli & Wiel Marin 2013, 26).²⁰

Based on our understanding of the transit vectors in the Trentino, it seems curious that one of the most important find areas of Raetic inscriptions is the Val di Non or Nonsberg, a basin west of the Adige between the Brenta and Ortler mountains and the Mendelkamm, which separates it from the Adige valley. The basin is crossed by the Noce, which flows through the Rochetta gorge into the Adige. The Val di Non has furnished almost a quarter of the Raetic epigraphic documents known today; even when factoring out the plethora of para-script marks from Sanzeno which were added to the corpus by Mancini 1975, this ratio holds with thirty-four certainly language-encoding inscriptions. One of the oldest documents in the corpus on an astragalos (NO-13)²¹ comes from the high-altitude burnt-offering site on the Monte Ozol (Revò). Inscriptions from two more sanctuary sites include dedications on a miniature shield (NO-3), a bronze rod (NO-15), a statuette (NO-16), a bone point (NO-17) and a bronze plaque (NO-19). Sanzeno alone has yielded twenty bronze objects and six antler pieces of votive character with language-encoding inscriptions. Another votive statuette (NO-11) was found as part of a ritual hoard near Dercolo, and a stray find, an inscribed stone slab (NO-10), comes from Tavòn. All the datable material belongs in the late sixth to fourth century BC.

Considering that Raetic literacy did not spread far beyond the major traffic routes, the richness of the Val di Non in inscriptions – apart from its evident role as an important centre of Fritzens-Sanzeno culture – is difficult to reconcile with the main transit route passing it by in the Adige valley, and suggests that the basin was not as out of the way as it may seem today (cf. Nothdurfter 1992, 51). As has been observed, it has evident relevance locally as a connection to the Valli Giudicarie and, through the Noce, to the Val di Sole and via the Tonale pass to the Valcamonica and Valtellina – i.e. Camunic country (Marzatico 2002, 23; Gleirscher 1993b, 80). This does not necessarily explain the intensity of literacy – the material culture of the Camunic area (Breno-Dos dell’Arca) is close to Fritzens-Sanzeno, but the graphically idiosyncratic Camunic



Map 7. The Adige and Mincio routes.

alphabets are a different matter altogether, and there is no clear indication of interference between Camunic writing and the alphabet used in the Val di Non. To integrate the Val di Non into the Etruscan trading routes, an alternative or probably rather parallel passage to the west of the Adige valley has been suggested (map 7; Nothdurfter 1979, 105; Nothdurfter 1992, 51; Gleirscher 1993b, 80; Gleirscher et al. 2002, 124). This route leads from Etruscan Forcello up the Mincio to the Lago di Garda and its influent, the Sarca, then crosses the plateau between the Adige and the Brenta mountains past the Lago di Molveno until it meets the Noce at the southern end of the Val di Non, just above the Rochetta gorge. From the Val di Non, the Mendel pass connects east to Überetsch and Bolzano, the Gampen pass north directly to the Burggrafenamt and Merano on the Reschen route (Marzatico 2002, 23).²²

This route entails considerably longer stretches of travelling over land between bodies of water than the Adige route. Its advantages are hard to judge today, but may have included the position of Forcello as a starting point; in fact, the situation of Forcello and later Mantova – the only Etruscan foundations north of the Po – itself indicates that the Mincio was important as a trade route.²³ An alternative route to the Adige may also have been needed due to the regular swamping of the valley – the Adige in antiquity could be used as a streamway all the way up to Bolzano (Lang 2002, 50, Abb. 1), but the valley floor – like that of most alpine valleys – was prone to flooding and probably impassable after heavy rains (Nothdurfter 1979, 105);

²² On possible direct connections to the Vinschgau see Gamper 2010, 154.

²³ The city was also base for the western trade, a route – the precursor of the Roman Via Postumia – leading along the foot of the mountains via Brescia and Bergamo to Como (Poggiani Keller 2007, 165; De Marinis 2005, 218–2; Poggiani Keller & Rondini 2020, 284 ff.).

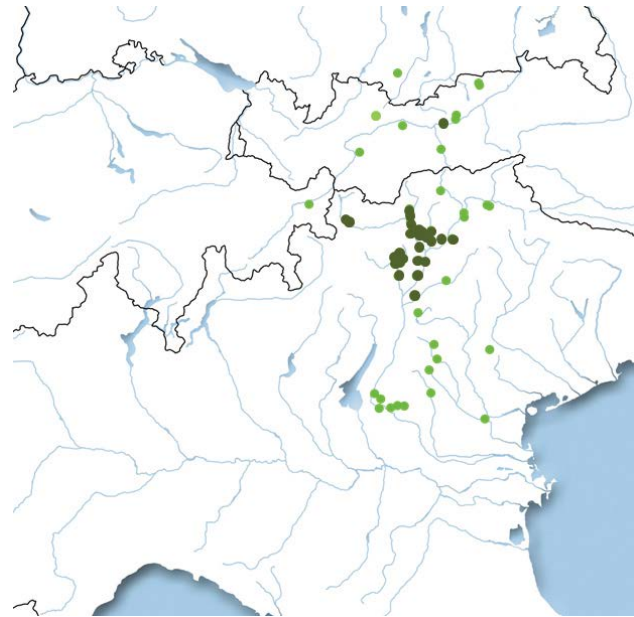
²⁰ On the Adige as a waterway in Roman times see Bassi 2002.

²¹ Possibly sixth century BC (Perini 2002, 767).

Raetic Epigraphic Documents as Landmarks of Waterway Transit in the Eastern Alps

Table 6.1. Letter forms of the Magrè and Sanzeno alphabets.

	alpha	epsilon	waw	zeta	heta
Magrè	Λ	∩	∩	‡	∩
Sanzeno	Λ	∩	∩	—	∩
	<i>a</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>h</i>
	theta	iota	kappa	lambda	mu
Magrè	X		∩	∩	∩
Sanzeno	X		∩	∩	∩
	<i>θ</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>m</i>
	nu	pi	san	rho	sigma
Magrè	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩
Sanzeno	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩
	<i>n</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>s</i>
	tau	—	upsilon	phi	chi
Magrè	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩
Sanzeno	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩
	<i>t</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>φ</i>	<i>χ</i>



Map 8. The geographical distribution of the Magrè (light green) and Sanzeno (dark green) alphabets.

this excluded at least northward water transport, which required towing, though not land transport along paths on the valley’s side. Nothdurfter 1992, 49 considers the (prehistoric) Adige valley below Merano and Verona disadvantageous for both settlement and trade due to its low gradient and consequent tendency to meander, change its course and pond; indeed, the remains of Bronze-age attempts at regulating the river were discovered at Eppan and Pfatten (Gleirscher 1991, 21).

The issue of the exact courses of the transit routes in the Raetic area is at the same time informed and complicated by the fact that Raetic literacy, despite its seemingly clear historical context, is a somewhat inhomogeneous affair. The Raetic language is written with two alphabets, which are about as different from each other as the North Italic alphabets are in general – viz. not a whole lot, but systematically. Tab. 1 shows the letter forms of the two Raetic alphabets, called those of Sanzeno and of Magrè after the most important find places.

There are common characteristics in certain letter forms (mu) and orientation (alpha, sigma), but also systematic differences in letter forms (pi, lambda, upsilon, tau, heta, and the Raetic letters for the dental affricate transliterated *β*) and orthography (spelling of dentals, punctuation) (Salomon 2021, 189–91). It has long been observed that the Magrè alphabet has similarities with the Venetic

alphabets in the form of the shapes of pi, lambda and upsilon, the sporadic use of syllabic punctuation, and what appears to be orthographic interference from the Venetic Este alphabet. The Sanzeno alphabet, on the other hand, is graphically more similar to the Etruscan alphabet.

The two alphabets are distributed complementarily in terms of geography (map 8): the Magrè alphabet is used in the alpine foothills which border the Venetic area as well as in the north beyond Brixen; the Sanzeno alphabet is almost exclusively used in the fifth and fourth century BC in the central Raetic area, viz. the Val di Non and the *sacro angolo* of Bolzano.

It would be convenient to explain the existence of two seemingly separate writing traditions with different routes of entry into the Raetic area. Regarding the Sanzeno alphabet, there is certainly something to recommend this approach. The alphabet is employed in the exact area which we consider the core area of Fritzens-Sanzeno, and at the very time in which this culture was at its zenith in the fifth and fourth century BC, closely associated with the typical Fritzens-Sanzeno bronze votives and ritual implements. Though there is a lot of para-script material on ceramics and iron tools from later phases, the only language-encoding Sanzeno-alphabet inscriptions which are securely dated to later than the third century BC come from the somewhat outlying Ganglegg settlement in the Vinschgau. The Sanzeno alphabet is graphically and orthographically very homogeneous – apart from a few minor letter variants with longer or shorter bars and the fact that word separation is only performed in few inscriptions, there is no recognisable variation in letter forms and spelling rules. On the surface, the Sanzeno alphabet looks like an alphabet modelled on the Etruscan one, the density of inscription finds in the Val di Non indicating that it was

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borrowed via the more westerly Mincio route. The lack of internal variation may even suggest that it was a one-off creation. We have ample evidence from Etruscan and Venetic writing culture for local alphabet variants like those of Veii and Este having emanated from sanctuaries with appended writing schools; the existence of Raetic scriptoria is also assumed by Marzatico 2001, 541.

Though Sanzeno in the Val di Non was chosen for the alphabet's designation only to reflect the high number of finds (Mancini 1975, 306, n. 42), the site is in fact a good candidate for the location of such a sanctuary at which an alphabet could have been created. The interpretation of the structures found at Sanzeno-Casalini (planned settlement? administrative buildings? workshops? emporium? treasure houses? cult buildings?) is under discussion (Marzatico 2001, 496–501; Nothdurfter 2002, 1136; Gleirscher et al. 2002, 251, no. 155; Gamper 2006, 334–8), but the significance of Sanzeno as a supraregional centre of iron trade and probably production is beyond doubt (Nothdurfter 1979, 103). The site may have functioned as a gateway community (Burghardt 1971; Hirth 1978) / port of trade (Polanyi 1963), a neutral meeting point at a strategic site in a frontier area, where a sanctuary acts as safeguard for the trade parties. Apart from the Casalini, certain sanctuary sites in the basin, both with very long active phases, are found at Cles on the valley floor and the more elevated Meclò on the Noce's western bank²⁴ opposite of Sanzeno – the Campi Neri are interpreted as a burnt-offering site which was replaced by a Roman temple to Saturn; a similar analysis suggests itself for the Valemporga site, where an increase of finds from early phases of Fritzens-Sanzeno is noticeable (Gleirscher et al. 2002, 236, no.s 80 and 81). Any one or more of these sanctuaries, whose relation to each other is not clear, may have become the source of an Etruscan-based alphabet which then spread as wide as the cult with which it was associated.

Unlike the uniform Sanzeno alphabet, the Magrè alphabet shows a high number of local variants, which differ from each other in terms of letter forms, punctuation practices, and orthography (Salomon 2021, 196–202). The one feature that is common to all Magrè-type alphabet variants is that they show a clear affinity not to the Etruscan, but to the Venetic alphabet. The Venetic alphabet (in several local variants) is itself derived from the Etruscan alphabet, but partly borrowed, partly developed some idiosyncrasies concerning letter forms and punctuation (Prosdocimi 1988) which are also found in Raetic Magrè-alphabet inscriptions. In contrast to the consistent and institutional-looking writing tradition of Sanzeno, the Magrè-alphabet inscriptions seem to attest to the unsystematic employment of Venetic alphabets to write the Raetic language.

Venetic input into the development of Fritzens-Sanzeno in general is always to be reckoned with; for some archaeological find types, particularly orientalisising

elements like situla art, it is often impossible to determine whether any one feature entered the alpine area via contact with the Etruscans, or through Venetic mediation (of Etruscan or Greek styles). Certain elements of Raetic literacy, such as antler pieces as cult objects, show a particular affinity with the Venetic world. Magrè-type documents from the late sixth to the fourth century BC, written in subtly different Venetoid alphabet variants, include the Situla in Providence (HU-7, unfortunately with unknown find place), the Paletta di Padova (PA-1) and the Spada di Verona (VR-3, Ca dei Cavri), as well as two antler pieces from San Briccio near Verona (VR-1, 2) and twelve antler pieces from Serso in the Valsugana (SR). It is certainly conspicuous that Venetoid Raetic literacy sets in at the same time as putative Etruscan-based literacy, but specifically in the Vicentine alpine foreland (between Adige and Brenta), where Fritzens-Sanzeno only spread in the course of the fifth century BC over a Venetic substrate, forming the hybrid Magrè group (Salzani 1984, 799). Uncentralised, erratic Venetic-based literacy is not at all inexplicable – all the more so if, as assumed by Marzoli & Wiel Marin 2013, 26, the Adige trade was controlled by the Venetians, and direct Etruscan influence was exerted primarily via the Mincio route.

There are, however, some issues with this seemingly clear-cut breakdown. Firstly, there are features of the Sanzeno alphabet which could not so far be explained but through Venetic mediacy of the alphabet. Raetic is related to Etruscan, and we have reason to assume that the phoneme systems of the two languages were quite similar at the time of their respective attestation – an adaptation of the Etruscan alphabet should have gone more smoothly than it apparently did. The fact that the Sanzeno alphabet, just like the Magrè alphabet(s), does not use zeta to denote the dental affricate /z/ and employ the letters for stops for phonemic spelling can be motivated by changes the Venetic alphabets introduced to write their Indo-European language and passed on to the Raetians (Rix 1998, 50–7). These features, which are detrimental to the accurate denotation of Raetic, are hard to explain when one assumes an Etruscan model or even a mixture of Etruscan and Venetic models – the Sanzeno alphabet looks graphically Etruscan, and its context of emergence is Etruscan, but orthographically it looks as if its presumptive creators had never been in contact with Etruscan writing at all. It is therefore hard to posit a completely separate derivation of the two traditions.

The second issue concerns the fact that inscriptions north of Brixen – in the Puster and Wipp valleys, in the Inn valley, and in the petrographs of the Northern Limestone Alps – are also written in Magrè-type alphabet variants. The next significant south-north route in the eastern Alps was the one via the Tagliamento and the Hoctor, i.e. through Venetic and Noric territory (Harl 2014); all convenient passages through Raetic country had to traverse the central Raetic area. There are not very many language-encoding Raetic inscriptions in the north, but they are attested throughout the late Iron Age and inscribed on quite typical Fritzens-

²⁴ The Lago di Santa Giustina, which fills the centre of the basin today, is a modern dam lake.

Sanzeno objects including bronze votives (FP-1, IT-9) and a situla handle (WE-1) dated to the fifth and fourth century BC. It is not clear why, instead of the Sanzeno alphabet spreading north, we find Magrè-type alphabet variants which made their way north without leaving any traces between the Valsugana and Brixen.

The most likely explanation for these Venetoid alphabet variants are contacts between Venetians and Raetians in the Dolomites, e.g. via the Kreuzberg pass which connects the Venetic Cadore with the Puster valley. All Raetic documents found in the Puster valley, at various sites in the section near St. Lorenzen (Roman Sebatum), whose alphabet can be classified are written in a Magrè-type alphabet, including the Lothen belt plaque (PU-1) dated to the fifth century BC. The settlement Stufels in the Brixen basin, where the Puster valley opens into the Eisack valley, is the only archaeological site to have yielded both Sanzeno- (WE-3) and Magrè-alphabet (WE-4) documents, and marks the border between the two alphabet “provinces” in the north. An association of (some of) the northern Magrè-alphabet variants with the Cadore is indicated by spellings that can be interpreted as Venetic orthography according to the Este-Cadore alphabet (Salomon 2021, 197, 201), and one of the two Raetic petrograph alphabets features a form of lambda which is typical specifically for the Venetic alphabet in the Cadore (Salomon 2018, 77–79). The details of this potential local connection are still awaiting closer investigation.

Future Research

The two issues discussed above have, hopefully, shown that mutual insights can be gained from the investigation of Raetic epigraphy in connection to river routes through the eastern Alps. While they are concerned with the rough distribution of inscriptions in relation to transit routes and the explanations for areas which are findless or rich in finds in terms of the spread of literacy, it will be interesting in a next step to see whether inscription finds can help to trace the course of traffic routes on a smaller scale. For this, it will be necessary to examine how the inscriptions themselves, rather than the phenomenon of literacy in general, relate to these routes, the people who travelled them, and the interactions that took place along them.

This may prove a tricky enterprise to a certain extent, as the texts of the Raetic inscriptions do not betray any connection with profane pursuits like commerce – a large part of the documents is written on votive objects (i.e. objects made for offering without a practical function, like statuettes, figurines and antler pieces) or objects associated with rituals (situlae, simpula, etc.), and the majority of find contexts beside and possibly even in settlements are ritual sites (burnt-offering sites, possible sanctuary buildings, hoards). All texts which can be securely interpreted are dedications (‘X donated’, ‘given by X’, or just ‘from X’); the number of certainly language-encoding texts with potentially different (funerary and owner’s inscriptions) or unclear function is negligible.

How closely the individual inscriptions are connected with traffic and trade along the river routes is therefore not at all clear. Is the their distribution along the trade routes merely due to the *Literarisierung* of the most easily accessible zones which came in the wake of mobility, or are there more immediate connections? The latter option is supported, at least for parts of the corpus, by the clear association of inscription finds with sanctuary sites at passes, crossroads and other significant places of passage. We have ample evidence for the existence of such sanctuaries, prominently e.g. on the Great St. Bernard pass, where a temple – now to Jupiter – was still relevant in Roman times, or on the Hochtor, where only sporadic finds attest to the existence of a sanctuary (Harl 2014). A connection between Raetic inscription find places and nodes of traffic is particularly evident in the north. For example, two inscriptions come from the Pillerhöhe sanctuary near Fliess, which marks the transition point between the upper Inn valley near Prutz and the Pitz valley, the latter forming a more direct connection to Imst in the Inn valley (where the route leaves the valley for the ascent to the Fern pass) than the course of the Inn via Landeck (Tschurtschenthaler & Wein 1998, 227 ff., 249–53) – evidence for the preference of this shortcut in prehistory? (Cf. Lang 2002, 52; Grabherr 2006, 171 ff.) A stray inscription (FP-1) on a miniature votive shield found near the old summit of the Fern pass itself documents the existence of a destroyed pass sanctuary on the pre-Roman Reschen route.

Inscriptions from sanctuaries visited by travellers can give clues about these travellers’ provenance; the same goes for sanctuaries which serve as or are connected with rest stops. Metzner-Nebelsick et al. 2017, 13–5 give a provisional list of find sites which are thought to be rest stops in the Inn valley; of these, language-encoding inscriptions have been found at Pfaffenhofen (settlement; IT-8) where a side route to the Fern pass branches off, on the Himmelreich above Volders (possibly burnt-offering site; IT-2), and on the Demlfeld above Ampass on the route taken from the Wipptal when intending to follow the Inn downstream. The sanctuary on the Demlfeld is particularly interesting not merely for its long active phase and evident importance (Tomedi 2013), but for two foreign votive inscriptions: a linguistically Raetic inscription on a bronze tablet (IT-5) written in the Sanzeno alphabet (Salomon 2018, 74), and the only Venetic inscription (*It 1; Schumacher 2009) found in the Raetic area. Both appear to be donations by travellers.

The Inn valley is particularly interesting in this regard, as it is not clear whether the spread of Fritzens-Sanzeno to North Tyrol was – as claimed e.g. by Lunz – the consequence of migration, or whether it was merely a cultural transfer (Nothdurfter 1992, 49). The communis opinio is inclined to assume that the local population in the Iron age was not Raetic-speaking (Heitmeier 2005, 35–44) – could Raetic literacy in North Tyrol be entirely due to mobile Raetians along the trade routes, or possibly a Raetic-speaking elite from south of the main ridge controlling trade (thus Heitmeier 2005, 42 ff.)? If this

should be the case, we must further consider the context of the Raetic petroglyphs in the Rofan mountains. Unlike the Unterammergau petroglyph site, which is fairly close to the Reschen route in the Loisach valley, the two sites in the Rofan are situated quite far from any known transit route at 1340 m a.s.l. (Achenkirch) and 1530 m a.s.l. (Steinberg), respectively. The linguistically transparent inscriptions at both sites can be interpreted as dedications (Schumacher & Salomon 2019, 170), so that we can identify the sites as cultic despite the absence of archaeological finds – if these petroglyphs are not considered to be local sanctuaries documenting vernacular Raetic literacy in North Tyrol, they could constitute evidence for a prehistorically important mountain route leading from the lower Inn valley to the Tegernsee.

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