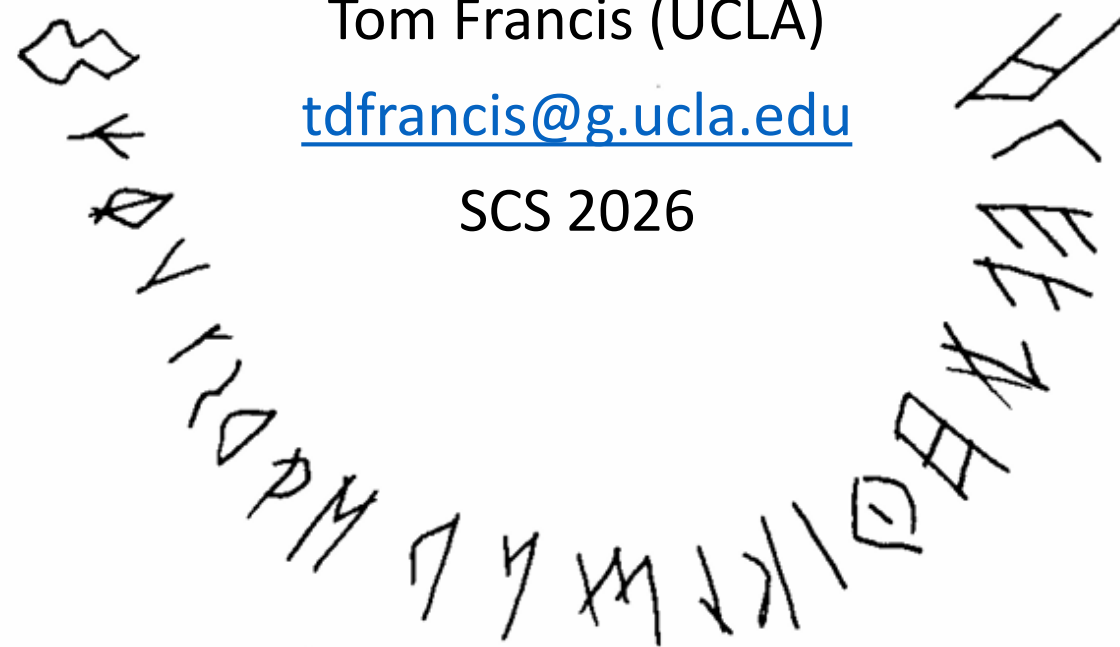


Alphabets and Language Erasure: The Continuation of Roman Conquest in Modern Editions of Italic Languages

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a c e v z h θ i k l m n p s q r s t u φ χ f

Drawing and transliteration of 5th century BCE Etruscan abecedarium (Pandolfini and Prosdocimi 1990:51)

Alphabets and Socio-cultural and Socio-political Differentiation, Organization, and Power (cf. King 2001, Sebba 2009, Albury-Garcés 2024, etc.)

Delhi: Gurmukhi road signs littered with errors

By [Paras Singh](#), New Delhi

Updated on: Oct 26, 2023 06:12 am IST



The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has been criticized for misspelling road names in Gurmukhi, the Punjabi script, on signage in the city.



Signage on Jai Singh Road. In Gurmukhi, the road's name is spelled as "Jai Saghi Road". (Arvind Yadav/HT Photo)

Hindustan Times (October 26, 2023)



A road sign reads 'Kirkenes' in both Norwegian and Russian (Cyrillic) in Kirkenes, Norway on July 6, 2023. On the Pasvik River, Norwegian soldiers guard NATO's northernmost border, the only one still officially open between Russia and Europe. Agence France-Presse

"Norway says will close border to Russia tourists"
(Inquirer.net May 23, 2024)

Roadmap

- Discuss standard historical linguistic transliteration practices for the languages of ancient Italy
- Consider how these conventions, when adopted by Classicists, contribute to the field's privileging of Greco-Roman material and silencing of other voices in ancient Italy
- Reevaluate a handful of Etruscan and Umbrian inscriptions to demonstrate narratives of agency that are present when not interpreted through a Greco-Roman lens and when alphabets are brought to the forefront

Transliteration Standards, Revisited

“The conventions used in the book to represent [alphabet variation] are, as far as possible, those used as standard in the fields of historical linguistics and phonology.

Quoted forms from ancient languages are given in Roman font when in the Etruscan alphabet, in **bold** when written in an alphabet derived from the Etruscan alphabet..., in *italics* when written in the Latin alphabet, and in the Greek alphabet when written in the Greek alphabet.”

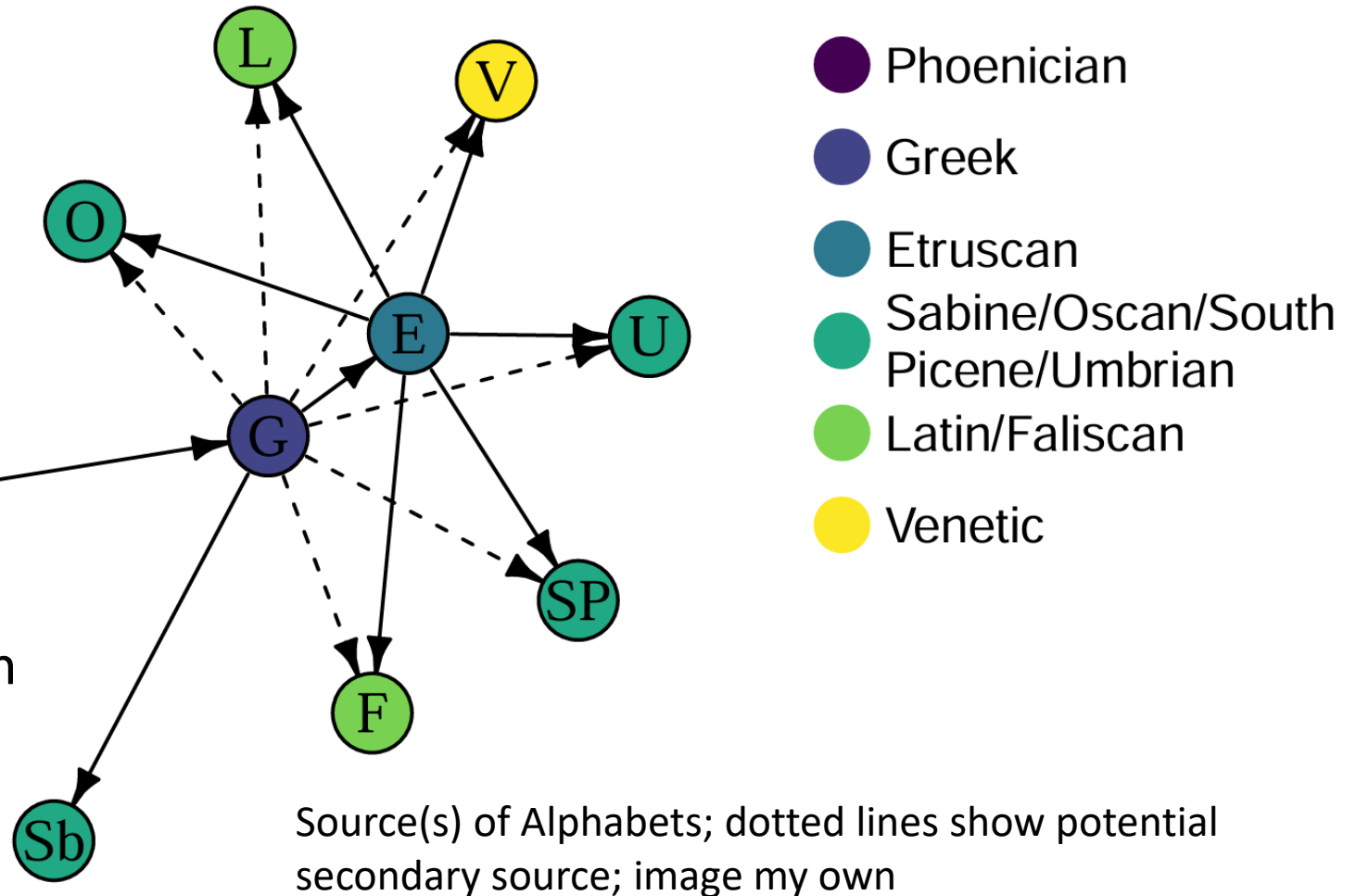
(Zair 2016:xi)



Overlapping Oscan and Latin graffiti in trilingual room of the brothel in Pompeii (72-79 CE); the top, right-to-left Oscan word is represented as **margas** in *ST Po 66* (Latin *felicla* not included); *CIL* only includes Oscan word in note because a Latin *Marcus* is named in the same room;
Image Crawford et al. 2011

Transliteration Standards, Revisited: Latin and the Historical Spread of Alphabets

- Latin receives a privileged status that is inconsistent with its role in alphabet development in Italy
- Since the Latin alphabet was derived from the Etruscan alphabet:
 - Why is Etruscan Romanized?
 - Why is Latin not **bolded** along with the other alphabets derived from Etruscan?





Standard Representation of Roman Conquest of Italy (Wikipedia)



Linguistic Areas of Influence in Ancient Italy (Wallace 2008:xxii)

Postcolonialism, Classics, and Returning Voices to non-Greco-Roman Speakers

“Surrounded and absorbed, we tread like Etruscans
on the edge of the useless law; we pray
to the giver of prayer, we give the cane whistle
in ceremony, we swing the heavy silver chain
of incense burners. Migration makes
new citizens of Rome.”

(Cook-Lynn 1987: 61-63)

“The poem invites us to think more, not only about Natives and Euro-Americans on this continent but also about Etruscans and Romans (e.g., about the former as an indigenous people, “surrounded and absorbed” by the latter, whose much-vaunted legal systems were of little use to them), about citizenship and migration (e.g., about narratives of Roman origins from a blending of indigenous Italian and migrant Trojan), and more.”

(Williams 2025:123)

Losing the (Inscriptional) Voices of Ancient Italic Peoples in the Framing of the Discipline

“The Etruscan language remains something of an enigma today, even though we can sound out its words.”

(An Introductory Classics Textbook)

“Known texts of the seventh and sixth centuries now number in the many hundreds. Early documents in Latin are less common. The surviving texts of the eighth through the fifth centuries are generally short, difficult to interpret, hard to date, and not very informative.”

(Another Introductory Classics Textbook)

“The ancient historians had access to documentary evidence that has since been lost. They occasionally refer to old inscriptions, but surviving examples show that the archaic language used in such documents would have been hard to understand...The question really is, what information was available to those who began the literary tradition about early Rome?”

(Another Introductory Classics Textbook)

“The inscribed texts of the peoples of peninsular Italy conquered by the Romans provide almost the totality of our knowledge of what they had to say about themselves.”

(Crawford et al. 2011:1)

Etruscans outside the Greco-Roman Paradigm: Etruria and Africa



"I belong to Puine of Carthage..."
Etruscan hospitality token (ivory, Carthage,
Necropolis of S. Monica, 6th century BCE)
Image Naso 2017; cf. *ET Af* 3.1



Etruscan hospitality token with gentilic
"Silqetenas" based on Punic city of Sulcis in
Sardinia (ivory, S. Omobono Rome, 580-540 BCE)
Image Maggiani 2006; cf. *ET La* 2.3



Bilingual Phoenician/Etruscan Pyrgi Tablets (gold, Pyrgi, port of
Cerveteri, ca. 500 BCE);
Image: ETRU Museo Nazionale Etrusco

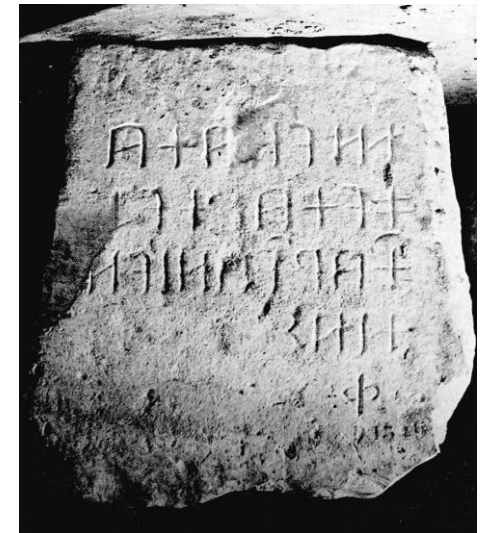
Etruscans outside the Greco-Roman Paradigm: Etruria and Africa

M(arce) Unata
zutas boundary marker
of Dardan
for Tin
1,000 paces

A+AH7H
L7+3A+7#
H7IHAT9AT

3H1+

m vnata² zvtaš tvl
³dardanivm ⁴tins⁵ M

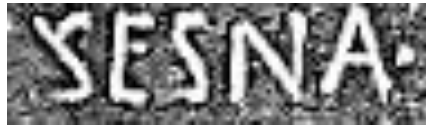


One of eight identical inscriptions on boundary stones
(1st century BCE, Tunisia)
Images from Heurgon 1969; transliteration from *ET* 8.1-8;
Underlining mine

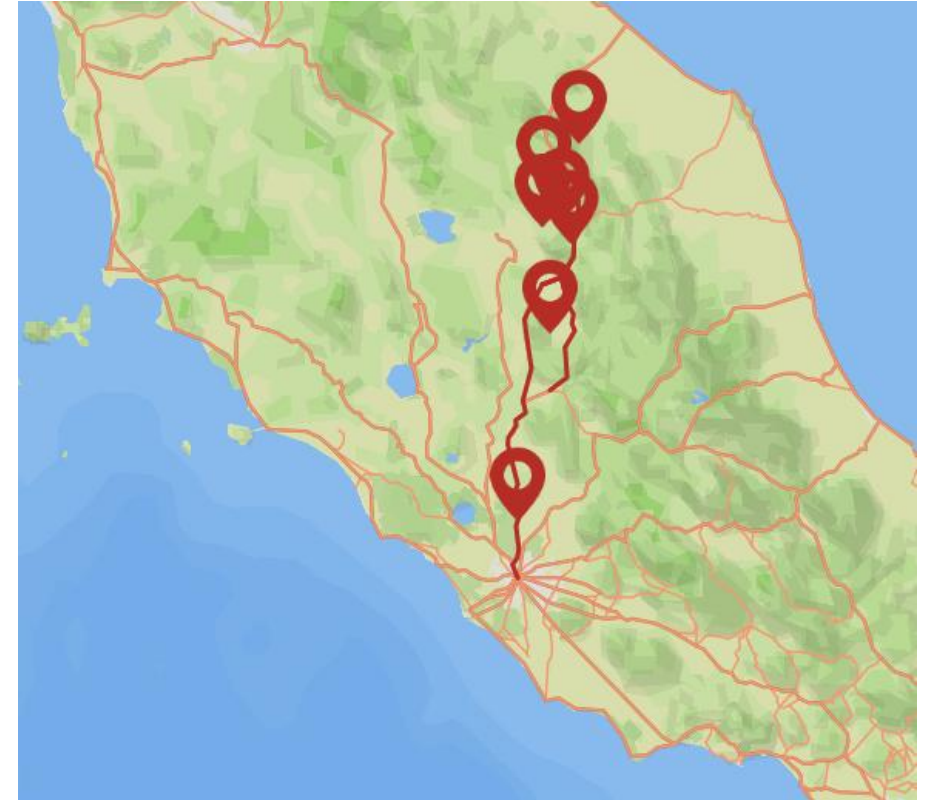
Reimagining Umbrian Agency during Roman Conquest



“I stand publicly” Umbrian boundary marker inscribed in Latin alphabet (Asisium ca. 100 BCE); image Crawford et al. 2011



Umbrian word ‘dinner’ in modified Latin alphabet represented as *šesna* (Iguvine Tables Vb 18); image Poultney 1959



Quickest Path from Rome to Findspots of Umbrian Inscriptions in Latin Alphabet According to Itiner-e. All on Via Flaminia or Via Flaminia Nova (Interamna Nahars)

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