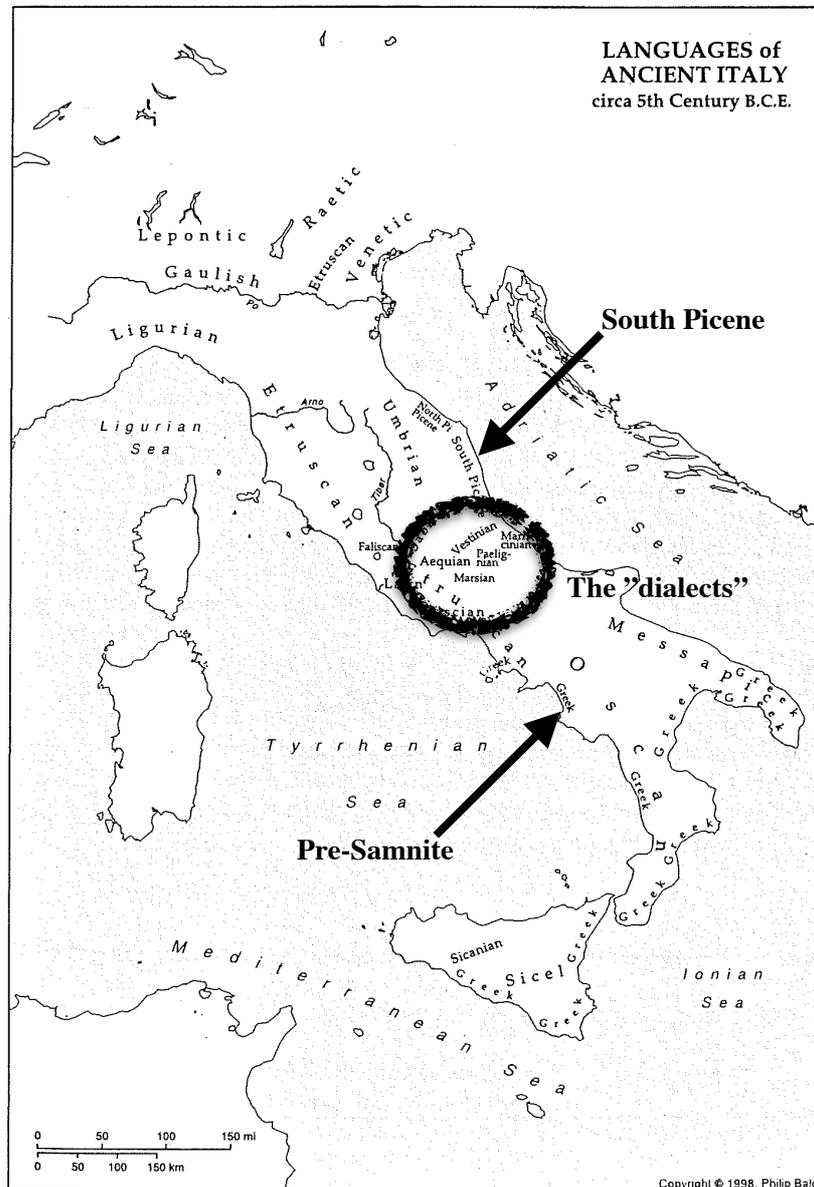


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South Picene, Pre-Samnite and the Dialects



Map 5. Languages of ancient Italy

The Foundations of Latin, Philip Baldi (1991)

SOUTH PICENE

The oldest Sabellian texts originate from the provinces along the mid-Adriatic coast. According to the ancient sources, this region was inhabited by a tribe called *Picentini* (Strabo 5,4,3; Fest. p.150 (Li); Dion. Hal. 1,16; Plin. *nat.* 3,18,110). Inscriptions from the area however fall into two distinct groups, who are labelled according to their geographical location: **South Picene** (Indo-European language, part of the Sabellian language group),

attested in 23 inscriptions, and North Picene, or Novilara (non-Indo-European), attested in only one.

1. South Picene orthography

South Picene is written in a **South Picene national alphabet**, derived from the southern Etruscan signary, with similar Greek influence as the Oscan and Umbrian alphabets.

The alphabet is transcribed:

a b g d e v h i j k l m n o p q r s t u f í ú

There are no preserved South Picene *abecedaria*, and the order of the signs is therefore hypothetical. "New" signs are traditionally placed at the end of the alphabetic row.

Note the presence of signs for voiced stops /b/, /g/ and /d/; the two vowel signs <í> and <ú> for middle front and back vowels (see comments in Phonology handout). Inscriptions in South Picene have the simple sign <8> for /f/.

2. The South Picene language

The language displays some obvious Sabellian characteristics in terms of phonology and morphology, and there are some features which suggest a closer connection with Umbrian. Some kind of contact between the two peoples is also attested in inscriptions, by way of a reference to the "*agre ... piquier martier*" ("the *ager* of the Picus Martius") in the Umbrian sources.¹

There are only around 23 preserved South Picene inscriptions, the oldest of which is the so-called Warrior of Castrano, dated to the mid-6th century. The youngest texts are inscribed on two bronze helmets from the late 4th century.



Pre-Samnite

Pre-Samnite, on the other hand, is found on the other side of the peninsula. This is the name given to the language used in around 20 early inscriptions from Campania, Lucania and Bruttium, ranging from the mid-6th to the third quarter of the 5th century. The name refers to the fact that these texts are older than the Samnite expansion, and represent the language spoken by an earlier population in the region.

In the 5th century, the **Samnites** moved down from the Apennine Mountains. By the end of the century practically all of Campania was Oscan-speaking. In this process the "Opikoi" (who might have been the Pre-Samnites; see HO Day 2: Sabellian I) came to be

¹ For evidence on a mutual connection between the two peoples, cf. South Picene inscription, CH2 **ombriēn akren** "in Umbrian land" (HO Day 2).

absorbed and eventually disappeared without a trace, though their name came to be applied to language of the new arrivals.

The transition was not one of natural linguistic development, but rather that of a new language being implanted in a region where a variant of the same linguistic origin was already spoken.

Pre-Samnite may be considered a **South Picene dialect**, though it displays several features that make it closer to **Oscan** than to Umbrian.

Most of the Pre-Samnite inscriptions are brief ownership inscriptions, and consist of little more than a name. The only longer text, the *Cippus Tortora* (Ps1) is very fragmentary, and does not reveal much about the syntactic structure of the language.

Pre-Samnite inscriptions are written in the **unmodified Etruscan alphabet**, the **Achaic Greek** alphabet, or in a native **Pre-Samnite** signary



DIALECTS

The inscriptions from the central parts of the peninsula represent a younger addition to the Apennine inscriptional corpus. These tribes only acquired writing through contact with the growing Roman empire. Inscriptions from this area assert the existence of a range of different tongues, attributed to the various tribes said to have dwelt in the region in ancient times.

The texts of all of these are written in the **Latin alphabet**, and date from c. 250 BCE down to around the Social War.

The remnant material is scarce and it is often impossible to determine whether a group of inscriptions reflect the presence of a separate language in the area or a dialectal diversification. There is clear evidence that these tongues did belong to the Sabellian language continuum, though the relative affinity with Oscan or Umbrian remains debated, given the scant records and the early Latinisation.

I. The Oscan dialects

Three of the dialects attested in these central inscriptions, **Paelignian**, **Marrucinian** and **Vestinian**, are classified as **closer to Oscan**. The classification is based on a number of Proto-Sabellian features to the exclusion of Umbrian, such as lack of rhotacism and (partial) preservation of diphthongs, along with Oscan innovative changes such as anaptyxis and the *t*-perfect, and Latinisms, particularly monophthongisation. Some isoglosses suggest early cohabitation with the South Picenes.

Inscriptions come from the area to the east of Rome, near the Adriatic coast.

The **Paeligni** region lay in the Abruzzi, east of Rome and the Fucine Lake. The language is recorded from the mid-2nd century down to around 50, in 30 odd inscriptions that range from building inscriptions and dedications to funerary epitaphs, mostly all very short. The only longer text, the so-called *herentas* inscription (Pg9), with in total 36 words, contains a number of oddities, and may be written in an artificial “mixed” dialect. The Paelignian data is all the same substantial enough to be considered as closer to Oscan.

To the east of the Paeligni, bordering on the Adriatic Sea in the region of modern Pescara, was the territory of the **Marrucini**, with the chief settlement of Teate (mod. Chieti). There is only one inscription of any substantial length, a *lex sacra* (MV1) dated to the mid-3rd century. The data is meagre, though some characteristics still emerge, of which most can be attributed to a Sabellian continuum.

On the eastern Adriatic coast lived the tribe of the **Vestini**. There are very few Vestinian specimens, from a period between the mid-3rd down to the late 2nd century, and the scarcity itself attests to the Romans having conquered the area already in the fourth century.

II. The Umbrian dialects

The Umbrian dialectal corpus, **Volscian**, **Aequian** and **Marsian**, is even smaller than that of the Oscanoid dialects. The classification of these inscriptions as more closely related to Umbrian is primarily founded on Volscian evidence, since the remaining dialects are only very scarcely attested.

The **Volsci** lived in close proximity with the Romans, in southern Latium, in a large and never all that unified area. The language is known through a handful of glosses and through some inscriptions, most of which are very short. The only more substantial text is a *lex sacra*, the so-called *Tabula Veliterna* (VM2) written in the Latin alphabet, dated to the late 4th or early 3rd century.

The land of the **Aequi** was in the Alban Hills around Rome, and the tribe was probably Latinised very early on, considering the foundation of the Latin colonies Alba Fucens and Carsioli on Aequian land, both around the year 300. The degree of Latin influence is evident from the scant remaining linguistic material, though the inscriptions cannot be dated with absolute certainty, and some scholars even group it as a dialect of Latin.

The ancient sources also mention the tribe of the **Marsi**, said to have lived in the central Apennines. There is only very scant evidence of the Marsian language, and the close geographical proximity between the Volsci and the Marsi renders the exact definition of the regional boundaries difficult. There is also little linguistic evidence for the establishing of dialectal characteristics. In any case, Latinization seems to have taken place very early, perhaps as early as around 300, and the structure of the alphabet dates most of the extant inscriptions to the early 3rd down to the mid-2nd century.

The **Sabine** language is also classified as an Umbrian dialect, though there are no certain Sabine inscriptions, and the language is only known through a number of glosses in Roman authors (cf. Vetter 1953: 362-378). The Sabines are therefore referred to more in an archaeological or historiographical context rather than as speakers of a particular language.

**SAMPLE TEXTS:
SOUTH PICENE**

TE 4 (Campovelano) **ASIES ESUM**

Inscription on small *pyxis* (c. 600-575).

TE 2 (Bellante) **POSTIN VIAM VIDETAS TETIS TOKAM ALIES
ESMEN VEPSES VEPETEN**

Inscription on sandstone stele. Note the alliteration, along with the heavy rhythm in the text.

Translation:

”Along the way you see the ’monument’(?) of the princely (?) Allius? (who has been) left(?) in this tomb(?)”

postin = compound consisting of **post-**”after” and postposition **-in** for direction, ”along”. Governs the accusative.

videtas = 2.plur. of a verb ”to see”, cf. Lat. *video*.

Tetis Alies = gen. sg. of personal name

esmen vepeten = locative phrase where the case ending has blended with postposition **-en** ”in”, in both the deictic pronoun *esme-* ”this”, and the noun *vepete-* (”tomb?”).

AQ 2 (Capestrano) **makuprí koram opsút Aninis raki Nevíi Pomp[- - -]í**

”Annius Rakinelius made me as (a beautiful?) statue for Pompo”

Inscription on honorary statue, near life-sized, the so-called Warrior of Capestrano (c. 550 BCE).

ma- ”me”

kuprí ?

koram = ”image”

opsut = 3 pers. sg., probably perfect form, ”make, put up”. Cf. **úpsannam** (Oscan Po 3)

Aninis = nom. sg of name of the giver

raki = dat. sg. of ”king”?

Nevíi Pomp[- - -]í = dat. sg. of name of receiver

PRE-SAMNITE

(a) Two mid-6th century vase inscriptions in an alphabet similar to the South Picene script:

Ps 4 (Nocera) **bruties / esum**

Ps 5 (Vico Equense) **ievies / esum : p[-]les :adaries**

esum 'I am'

gen.sg. **-es** < —*eis* , cf. South Picene TE 4 a[-]**piesesum**

(b) Vase inscription in the Etruscan alphabet (with syllabic punctuation):

Ps 13 / Ve 117 (Nola) *lu.vcie.scna.ivie.ssu.m (=lucies cnaiviies sum)*

(c) Inscription on bronze vessel, c.500 BCE, in the Etruscan alphabet:

Ps 3 / Ve 101 (Capua) *vinuxs veneliis peracis estam tetet venilei viniciuu*

tetet = /deded/ 'gave', 3sg. pf.

estam : acc.sg. 'this' - demonstrative particle found in Umbrian and South Picene

vinuxs veneliis peracis - tripartite name in nom. (*praenomen* - patronymic adjective - *gentilicium*)

venilei viniciuu - dat.sg. Probably the son, with the same name as the grandfather.

PAELIGNIAN

Pg 9 / Ve. 213 (Pentima, near Corfinio)

*eite . uus . pritrome pacris puus . ecic**lexe lifar . dida . uus. deti. hanustu . herentas*

Lat. *Ite vos in laetitiam, benevoli quos hoc legisse libeat. Det vobis divitias honesta Herentas*

”Go forward in pleasure, you whom it pleases to have read this. May distinguished Venus give you riches.”

Discussion: There are several forms in this text on which most commentators agree. The first two words *eite . uus* are clearly equivalent to Lat. imp. pl. *ite vōs* ‘you go’; *dida* ‘may X give’ appears to be a present subjunctive of a reduplicated form of the verb, with loss of final *-d*; and *herentas* is generally recognized as being identified with *Venus*. But the inscription has more than a few disputed readings: *pritrome* may either reflect the construction seen in the first part of Skt. *prītim gacchata* ‘be pleased’ (lit. ‘go to pleasure’), with *ite vōs* equivalent to *gacchata*, or else it may represent a connection with Lat. *praeter* ‘beyond’, here in the sense of ‘forward’; *puus* may be a substitute for an original nom. pl. **quoi*, which parallels Lat. *quī*, though a more secure reading places it as a reflection of the acc. pl. (= Lat. *quōs*); *lexe* may be either an infinitive, morphologically equivalent to Gk. *λεξαι*, or it may correspond to the 2nd pl. Lat. *lēgistis* ‘you have read’, a reading which assumes an *s*-aorist in *lexe*; *lifar* is either an impersonal form (cf. Umbr. *ferar* ‘let one carry’), or, perhaps, a form of the name of the deity *Liber*; *hanustu* is probably equivalent to Lat. *honestus* ‘honorable, distinguished’. In light of these confusions, the translation above, after Pisani (1964), is not certain.

From *The Foundations of Latin*, Philip Baldi (1991), p.132-3.

MARRUCINIAN

*Aisos pacris toutai | maroucai lixs | asignas ferenter | auiatas toutai |
maroucai ioues | patres ocris tarinlcris iouias . agine.*

Latin *Dī propitiī. Cīvitātī Marrūcīnae lēx. Prōsiciae ferantur auspīcātae cīvitātī.
Marrūcīnae Iovis, patris ocris, Tarinlcris Ioviae pompā.*

From *The Foundations of Latin*, Philip Baldi (1991), p.127.

SABINE

1. <i>alpo-</i>	Lat. <i>albus</i>	'white'
2. <i>auso-</i>	Lat. <i>aurum</i>	'gold'
3. <i>casco-</i>	Lat. <i>vetus</i>	'old'
4. <i>cesna</i>	Lat. <i>cēna</i>	'dinner'
5. <i>cumba</i>	Lat. <i>lectīca</i>	'litter'
6. <i>cupenco-</i>	Lat. <i>sacerdōs</i>	'priest'
7. <i>curis</i>	Lat. <i>hasta</i>	'lance'
8. <i>fasēna</i>	Lat. <i>harēna</i>	'sand'
9. <i>fedo-</i>	Lat. <i>haedus</i>	'young goat'
10. <i>firco-</i>	Lat. <i>hircus</i>	'he-goat'
11. <i>hernae</i>	Lat. <i>saxa</i>	'rocks'
12. <i>tebae</i>	Lat. <i>collēs</i>	'hills'

From *The Foundations of Latin*, Philip Baldi (1991), p.134.

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