

VENETIC

1. Geographical origin

Venetic is the name given to the language of some 350 inscriptions found in the region known from the ancient sources to have been inhabited by the Veneti. The principal archaeological site is Este; other sites that have yielded large number of texts are Padua and Vicenza.

The beginning of the Este culture can be dated to 950 BCE, and the culture persists until the onset of Romanisation, c. 175 BCE. The Venetic culture is often divided into shorter time periods: Este I (c.950-800), II (c.800-500), III (c.500-300) and IV (c. 350-175). The heyday of Venetic culture is recognized in the later stages of II and III, when Este was a major centre for decorative bronze-work. The oldest attested inscriptions stem from the middle period of Este II, i.e. mid-6th century.

2. Orthography

The inscriptions are mainly written in the Venetic alphabet, a script derived from the northern Etruscan alphabet. There are also some late inscriptions, c.150-100, written in the Latin alphabet.

Although the Venetic script was derived from the Etruscan alphabet, there are some local variations, particularly with regard to the writing of dentals. The alphabetic row found at Este looks as follows:

a, e, v, z, h, θ, <i>, k, l, m, <n>, p, ś, r, s, t, u, φ, χ, o

Characteristic features that betray an Etruscan origin (apart from the letter-forms) include: the absence of *beta*, *gamma* and *delta*; the adoption of *kappa* to write the simple velar, and the presence of two signs for sibilants, <s> and <ś>. The sign <o> has been introduced, probably under Greek influence, and added at the end of the alphabet. Note also the use of <vh> for /f/, i.e. the original Etruscan digraph, from the 5th century onwards this function was simplified to <f>.

Comparisons with inscriptions written in the Latin alphabet show that <z> corresponds to <D>, <φ> to , and <χ> to <G>. These signs thus compensate for the lack of *beta*, *delta* and *gamma*, in the writing of voiced stops.

3. Types of inscriptions

There are very few possible public inscriptions. Most of the inscriptions are either funerary or dedications.

Dedications to deities are widespread, but there are two important deposits; at the sanctuary of Trumusiatis at Lågole, and at the sanctuary of Reitia at Este. In Este the objects dedicated have to do with writing - bronze alphabetic tablet, or bronze writing styli.



Es 23 (bronze writing tablet from Este)

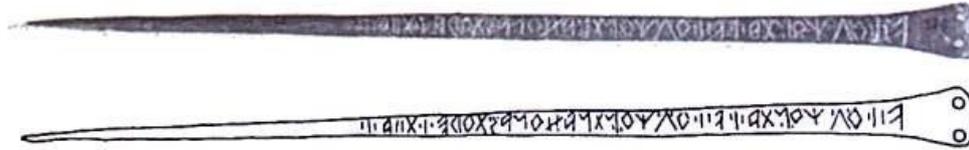
mego dona.s.to va.n.t.s. mo.l.do.n.ke/o. kara.n.mn.s. re.i.tia.i.
mego donasto Vants Moldonkeo Karamns Reitiiai

va.n.t.s A name with suffix *-nt-*, possibly the participle suffix. Alternatively an onomastic suffix also found in Illyrian and Celtic (in somewhat different shape).

mo.l.do.n.ke/o Evidently part of the naming formula, but is this a genitive of a father's name or some sort of nom. sg. adjective? (If the latter, it should end in *-s*.)

kara.n.mn.s. Appears also on Pa 2 as the third member of an onomastic formula. Could be a grandfather's name (Lejeune) or a cognomen (Pellegrini and Prosdocimi).

re.i.tia.i Dative of the divine name Reitia, apparently the goddess of writing.



Es 40 (bronze writing stylus from Este)

vho.u.χo.n.ta.i. vho.u.χo.n.tnazona.s.tore.i.tia.i
Fougontai Fougontna donasto Reitia

donasto = 3 sg. past tense form of the verb **dō-* "give". (Perhaps in the middle?)

4. Syllabic punctuation

With the exception of three very early texts, the Venetic inscriptions show syllabic punctuation; any letter that does not form part of an open syllable with consonantal onset, either simple or complex, is written with punctuation marks usually small vertical lines - on either side of it.



5. Brief overview of the language system

Some notes of caution:

- fragmentary texts
- limited range of genres
- syntax far from clear

- Nouns and adjectives

(a) Gender

Three genders: masculine (-*os* and -*ios* forms), feminine (-*a* and -*ia*) and neuter (-*oN*).

(b) Number

Singular and plural. Perhaps remnants of a dual.

(c) Cases

Five attested cases: nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, ?ablative/instrumental?

- Verbal morphology

There are no more than 11 verbal forms attested. Several appear with variant spelling.

Among the most frequent forms are found:

- **doto** (3 sg., root aorist) and **donasto** (3 sg., sigmatic aorist, ?middle/passive?) "[X] gave (this)"

- **donasan** (3 pl., sigmatic aorist, active), all from the verb **dō-* "give".

- **vha.g.s.to** (3 sg.) "[X] did (this)", a sigmatic aorist, from the stem **fac-* (cf. Lat. *facio, feci* (root aorist with e-grade of the vowel)).

(a) Persons: Only third person forms are preserved. There must have been more.

(b) Moods: Only the indicative is attested, although there *might* have been an optative.

(c) Voices: There are forms that correspond formally to what we would expect from an Indo-European system of active-middle-passive, but there seems to be no difference in how these are used, e.g. apparently passive verbal forms used in dedications/offerings. Had the semantic difference been lost?

Select bibliography:

Beeler, M. S. (1949). 'The Venetic Language.' *University of California Publications in Linguistics* 4. 1-60.

MLV = Lejeune, M. (1974). *Manuel de la langue vénète*. Heidelberg.

Pellegrini, G. B., & Prosdocimi, A L. (1967). *La lingua venetica. Vol. I-II*. Padova.

Venetic inscriptions

Inscriptions are cited using the standard reference system in Pellegrini & Prosdocimi, *La lingua venetica* (1976).

Inscriptions from Este

Es 44 (bronze writing stylus with dedication)

mego doto vhu.g.siiia votna.śa.i.n/ate. re.i.tiia.i. o.p vo.l.tiio leno

mego donasto Fugsia Votna Śainate Reitiiai op voltiio leno

mego = acc. of **ego**, 1 sg. personal pronoun

doto = 3 sg. past tense form of the verb **dō-* 'give' (semantic equivalent of **donasto**, above). Active voice.

o.p = preposition (Lat. *ob*, Osc. *op*) 'because of'

vo.l.tiio leno = is this the instrumental form (governed by preposition **op**)? Lejeune suggests a derivation **leno** from **wlēno-* 'voluntary act'. This instrumental formula appears also in Es 27, which carries a Latin dedication: ...LIBENSMERITO. Are these equivalents?

Es 45 (bronze writing stylus with dedication)

mego dona.s.to śa.i./nate.i. re.i.tiia.i. pora.i./e.getora.r.i.mo.i. ke lo/.u.derobo.s.

mego donasto Śainate Reitiiai Porai Egetora Rimoi ke louderobos

pora.i. Dative of a female divine name or epithet. It usually appears with **re.i.tiia.i.** or another epithet of hers.

.e.getora Seems to be the nom sg. of a female who dedicates the stylus.

.r.i.mo.i. Dat. sg. masc. Possibly the name of the husband of the dedicator. The punctuation suggests an initial vowel, so perhaps the reading **.a.i.mo.i.**, a name attested elsewhere.

ke Proclitic 'and', cf. Lat. *-que*.

lo/.u.derobo.s. Dat. pl. masc. 'liberīs' < **leudher-o-bhos*.

On the "Ekupetaris" problem**Pa 1** (MLV 130)**pupone.i. eg.o rako/i. e.kupetari.s**

"I (am) the ekupetaris
for Pupo Rakos (?)"

**Pa 2** (MLV 131)**plede.i. ve.i.gno.i. kara.n.mniio.i. e.kupetari.s. e.go**

"I (am) the ekupetaris of Pled- Veignos Karamnios"

BI 1 (MLV 236) (on a bronze situla, now lost)

ENONI. ONTEI. APPIOI. SSELBOISSELBOI. ANDETICOBOS ECUPETARIS

"(This is the) ekupetaris of Enon(ios)
for (his brothers) Onths and Appios
for themselves (all three?), the sons of Andet(ios)."

There are in total 12 attestations of the Venetic word *ekupetaris*, although the environment is incoherent, which does not allow for a deduction of meaning.

The inscriptions appear on stone and bronze, and the objects include *stela*e, a tripod, *situlae* and *ciottoloni*.

The imagery includes images of horses, wagons, a rider, an anchor (?).

The first part, **ekvo/eku-**, is highly reminiscent of the stem "horse", < *ekwo-.

The second part can be explained as:

**pet-* 'to fly/move rapidly': "Rossefliegend" (cf. L. *prae-pes*, *-etis* 'swift, winged')

-pet-aris : *πετρα*: 'tomb of horse(men)'

-pet/peti- (*-pot(i)-*): '(monument of a) horse master/lord'.

The only certain conclusion one can make it is some kind of Grabdenken/funerary gifts.