

The Novilara Stele Revisited

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Poultney's suggestion that the first word of the Novilara inscription, *mimnis*, meant 'monument' can now be confirmed based on the parallel Oscan form *memnis* with the same meaning. In the next line, *rotnem* can reasonably be related to Latin *rota* and other Indo-European words for 'wheel,' especially considering the very prominent wheels on the stone. The second word, *erut*, matches an expected neuter form of the Sabellic root for 'this'; compare Umbrian *erek*. Together these connections suggest that the inscription is in a Sabellic dialect.

Thirty some years after James W. Poultney's important article in this journal on the inscriptions of northeast Italy (Poultney 1979), the most important inscription he examined, the Novilara stele, remains un-translated—discussions of it use phrases such as “not a single word in this inscription can be confidently translated” (Mallory 1989: 92). No substantial contribution has been made in this direction in the intervening thirty years. The aim of this article is to refocus scholarly attention on this important inscription, to reaffirm some of Poultney's tentative etymologies, and to point to some further connections and interpretations. Specifically, Poultney noted that the very first word of the text, *mimnis*, could be “very easily...analyzed as a noun meaning ‘monument’ consisting of a reduplicated and zero-grade stem from the root *men-* ‘think’ plus *-is*” (60). Surprisingly, Poultney, an accomplished scholar of Italic dialects and of Indo-European linguistics, missed a clear etymology connecting this first word, *mimnis*, with a form attested in Oscan, *memnim*, “monument, memorial” a self-referential word we would fully expect to find at the beginning of such a monumental inscription. A full examination of this word—one whose root at least can in fact be quite confidently

connected to an attested word in an Italic dialect—and a review of Poultney’s insights lead to conclusions about the root etymologies of other connected words and a tentative translation of the opening phrase *mimnis erut...rotnem* as ‘[as a] memorial, this...wheel-monument.’



Figure 1. The Novilara inscription (PID 343).

The text (PID 343; Fig. 1), on a sandstone stele from an ancient necropolis just south of Ravenna on the northeast coast of Italy, dating from the sixth or fifth century BCE, in Poultney’s transliteration, follows:

- 1 *mimnis . erut . gaarestades*
- 2 *rotnem . úvlin . parten . ús*
- 3 *polem . isairon . tet*
- 4 *sút . trat . neši . krúš*
- 5 *tenag . trút . ípiem . rotněš*
- 6 *lútuis . θalú . isperion . vúl*
- 7 *tes . rotem . teú . aiten . tašúr*
- 8 *soter . merpon . kalatne*
- 9 *nis . vilatos . paten . arn*

- 10 *úis . balestenag . ands . et*
 11 *šút . i . akút . treten . teletaú*
 12 *nem . polem . tišú . sotris . eús*

Poultney found that the phonological inventory, phonotactics and many apparent endings in the text were at least compatible with Indo-European, but that none of the roots could be convincingly identified, though many were suggestive. The range of vowels (*a, e, i, o, u*) and consonants (*p, t, k, b, d, g, s, θ, r, l, m, n, v*) that are generally transliterated for this text certainly look similar to those of other Indo-European languages, though also to those of many non-IE languages. Also, a language's phonological inventory can be as strongly influenced by areal pressures as by genetic relationship, so this criterion alone is not a particularly strong basis for such an identification. The same could be said for phonotactics—a limited number of final consonants such as *s, t, m, n* and consonant clusters fit well an Indo-European profile, but again these patterns alone cannot exclude the possibility that this is a non-Indo-European language (Poultney 1979: 57).

If the language of the text *could* be firmly identified as Indo-European from other evidence, then some other phonotactic patterns could be probative in excluding certain possibilities, such as which branch the language may belong to. For example, the fact that final *-m* and *-n* are clearly distinguished would, as Poultney points out, exclude from consideration those branches that have collapsed these two nasals in final position, notably Greek and Messapic, which permit only final *-n* (59). While the most frequent apparent endings—*-s, -m, -n, -t*—all look very Indo-European, the stems are less familiar: *-es* and *-em* could be connected with consonant stems or Latin fifth declension endings, but their high frequency in the text would seem odd at best. A more likely explanation, as Poultney points out, is that there was a change from *-ios* or *-yos* to *-es* (and perhaps of *-yom* to *-em*) for at least some of these forms, though this possibility raises questions of its own, as will be discussed below (Poultney 1979: 59-60). Poultney also notes that some final *-t's* could represent a

third person singular ending, and *-n* could be a third plural verb ending (60). The ending *-ag* in *krúš/tenag* (lines 4-5, if this is a single word as seems probable) and *balestenag* (line 10) is reminiscent of Latin nomina agentis ending as in *remex, -igis* ‘rower’ (Poultney 1979: 59). Notably lacking is the *-al* ending ubiquitous in Etruscan as a genitive singular (Poultney 1979: 56 citing Rosenkranz 1935: 113). One might additionally note the lack of final *-ehhi*, the genitive singular ending so distinctive of the Messapic language, further evidence that the text as a whole is not in this language.

On the other hand, the apparent alternation between *et/šút* and *tet/sút* in lines 10-11 and 3-4 (and perhaps *us* and *eus* at the ends of the second and last lines) presents what looks like a morphological variation at the beginning of words that would seem quite non-Indo-European, and has been taken to be evidence of just that (H. Eichner, personal communication; I am indebted to Professor Eichner for first bringing this fascinating inscription to my attention). Of course, other explanations are possible: On the one hand, the line break may well correspond to a word boundary in one or both cases, so the alternation may simply represent two different words *et* and *tet*; and of course the second parts of the words, *šút* and *sút*, may be different words, especially if, as Poultney suggests, the distinction between *š* and *s* is phonemic in this text (53). On the other hand, this one apparent case of non-Indo-European morphology must be taken together with the other cases of apparent morphological alternations at the ends of words — *soter/sotris* in lines 8 and 12 (and perhaps *kesoteri* in PID 345), *rotnem/rotnes* in lines 2 and 5 — that would be consistent with an Indo-European identification. There are also alternations that look as though they may have derived from ablaut variations—*trat/trut/treten* in lines 4, 5 and 11—that also would speak in favor of an Indo-European origin.

The suggestions by Poultney (1979: 54-56) and others (those cited by Poultney, and more recently, Eichner 1993) that the text is metrical are intriguing, and a reliable metrical analysis would doubtless be helpful for interpretation. But, as Poultney himself points out, we do not in fact know whether the text is metrical, and if it is,

what kind of meter it employs, syllable counting, foot counting, or something else. Nor can we be sure of the length of vowels or syllables, the status of diphthongs and hiatus...too many unknowns to be of much use in shedding light on the main unknowns of the text at this point—its meaning, structure and linguistic connections. Going from unknown to unknown is not the best starting place in approaching a text that has resisted translation for over one hundred years. So a consideration of the metrical possibilities of the text will be set aside for now.

For clarity's sake, it is worth making a few obvious points here: Anyone with any familiarity with the very well attested languages Greek and Latin can see in an instant that the language of this inscription is not any known variety of either of those two languages. Messapic and Etruscan, though not as well known as Greek and Latin, are also well enough attested that they can fairly safely be excluded for reasons given and others. This is not to rule out borrowing of roots, endings, or entire words from (or into) any of these languages; borrowing may be involved, for example, in the word *isperion* on line six if it is connected, as Durante suggests, with Greek *ἑσπέριον*; and, as pointed out below, the first word in the text, *mimnis*, which we discuss here, could also be a loan. It is more difficult to rule out the possibility that the language is a Sabellic dialect (the term used here, following Rix, Meiser, Wallace and others, for the non-Latino-Faliscan Indo-European Italic dialects, the branch traditionally known as Osco-Umbrian) since these vary widely from each other and from Latin, and many are only scantily attested and are still poorly understood. It could also represent a new, separate branch of Italic, distinct from Latino-Faliscan and Sabellic. And, of course, it could be some other language, known or unknown, Indo-European or non-

It is also worth noting that we cannot be completely certain that the inscription is in just one language, though nothing in the language or orthography suggests otherwise. Also unknown is whether there are any abbreviations, a common practice in later Latin and Sabellic inscriptions, though no single letters are isolated in such a way as to suggest that they are abbreviations or

initials except . *i* . in line 11 (which could possibly be an abbreviation of a cognate of Oscan *íním*, Umbrian *enem*, Latin *enim* ‘and’ especially given the parallel forms of the apparent words immediately following and preceding it—*et/šút . i . akút*). The interpuncts are mostly quite clear and undoubtedly mostly accurately reflect word boundaries, but there may be some that have worn off and they may not all mark word boundaries—clitics may not be set off, compounds may be inconsistently treated. In at least one early transliteration, an interpunct was included between the -s- and -t- of *gaarestades* (Jacobsohn 26). Also, line ends may suggest word boundaries where none exists, as has been suggested for *krúš/tenag*, *et/sut*, and *tet/sut*. Of course, the interpuncts could have an entirely different function, but this seems doubtful.

Any serious approach to interpretation of parts of the text must lean heavily on what we do know for certain or with reasonable certainty. In this case, things known with reasonable certainty include: 1) the *script*; 2) the strong probability that we are dealing with a *monument*; 3) the curious *markings* on the monument; and 4) the *location* of the monument in time and place. The *script* is mostly a fairly straightforward type of northern Italic, Etruscan-based script with some innovations familiar from other north Italic inscriptions. (Some specific orthographic problems and possible ambiguities will be discussed below.) We also can be quite confident that it is some kind of *monument*—carefully crafted in stone and set in a necropolis as it is, it is highly unlikely to be ephemeral graffiti intended for only casual observers. This evident care of preparation, choice of durable material and location in a cemetery strongly suggest a funerary or commemorative function. We also have the other *markings* on the stone, most notably the very prominent *wheels* at the top of both sides of the monument. A most significant fact here is that there exists another monument, fragmentary in this case, with exactly the same wheel carving, again at the center of the top of the inscription—PID 344 (see Fig. 2)—suggesting that this is a special type of monument in this region (more on this below). The relevance of the awkwardly carved figures on the side of the stele opposite the inscription is a bit less certain. They

are certainly in a less artful hand than are the figures on the inscription side of the stele, and they could have been made earlier or later than the writing—perhaps even about a completely different subject, though this seems unlikely. Finally, the larger *geographic* (and *linguistic*) *location* of the inscription is clearly known: at the northern end of the attested Indo-European Italic dialect area, only some forty miles north of the site of the longest inscription in any Sabellic tongue—the Umbrian Iguvine Tablets—and a similar distance from the closest South Picene inscriptions. Its *location in time*, while less clearly fixed, is likely on archeological and orthographic grounds to be the sixth to fifth century BCE. It is the longest non-Etruscan text from north Italy dated to this early period.



Figure 2. PID 344 with image of wheel.

What is needed for a solid approach to the translation of this text is a strong connection between some of these known elements and specific forms in the text. A careful review of these elements shows there are two apparent lexical roots and a pronoun at the beginning of the inscription that seem to have both solid etymologies in Italic and clear connections to the immediate known context just described.

As mentioned, Poultney's conclusion that the language of the text (which he calls 'northern Picene') is "probably ... Indo-European" (1979: 49) is based: on its phonological structure (57-8), on some apparent endings (58), and on some possible root etymologies (58-61). Of

the latter, he found the first word in the text, *mimnis*, to be “very easily...analyzed as a noun meaning ‘monument’ consisting of a reduplicated and zero-grade stem from the [Indo-European] root *men-* ‘think’ plus *-is*” (60). Given the funerary context of the stele (it is in an ancient necropolis), it is inherently likely that it would open with a self-referential word like “monument.” Such self-reference is common in inscriptions on durable objects. Compare the Runic inscription in Proto-Norse on the Gallehus horn from about 400 CE Denmark: *ek hlewgastiz holtijaz horna tawido* “I H. H. made [this] horn.” Closer to the neighborhood of our text, the Oscan *iovila* inscriptions regularly refer to themselves: *ekas : iúvilas : iuvei : flagiuí : stahínt* “these Iovilas (memorials) are set up for Juppiter Flagiús” (Osc Cp 25, translation from Wallace 2007: 58). And then there are the items that refer to themselves touchingly with first personal pronouns as in this sixth century BCE Umbrian inscription on a ceramic vase: **setums : míom | face** “Septimus made me” (Um 4, translation again by Wallace 2007: 62, following Rix 2002). So on these general contextual grounds, and on the broad etymological grounds spelled out by Poultney, it would seem quite likely that this first word of the inscription does in fact mean something like “monument.”

Poultney’s reasoning here is completely convincing, and surely only his scholarly reticence prevented him from stating unequivocally that this, at least, was a clearly Indo-European form, whether borrowed into the language of the text or inherited—the first clear indication that the language may be Indo-European in origin. But there is a further, very important piece of evidence that clinches and further narrows the argument in favor of Poultney’s translation and Indo-European interpretation, one that he overlooked: There exists in Oscan a word *memnim* in an inscription on a lead plate from Capua (Vetter 1953: #4) that is generally also translated ‘monument’ or ‘memorial.’ This word from a curse written on a lead plate and found in the same necropolis as the famous “Curse of Vibia” (Buck 1904: 246) provides a clear and solid Italic cognate for our form.

The text and Buck's Latin translation follow:

1	Streni Klum. Vírriis Tr. . apíu Vírriis Plasis Bivellis Úppiis Helleviis	Stenius Clum. Verrius Tr. — Verrius Plarius Bivellius Oppius Helvius
5	Lúvikis Úhtavis	Lucius Octavius
6	Statiis Gaviis nep fatíum nep deikum pútíans	Statius Gavius nec fari nec dicere possit.
7	Lúvikis Úhtavis Núvellum Velliam [see below]	Lucius Octavius Novellum Velliam (<i>reddat. Si non,</i>)
8	nep deikum nep fatíum pútíad	nec dicere nec fari possit,
9	nep <u>memnim</u> nep úlam sífeí heríiad.	nec <u>monumentum</u> nec ollam sibi capiat.

Though Untermann in his authoritative *Wörterbuch des Oskisch-Umbrischen* says the meaning of *memnim* is unknown on page 469, the only alternative given to the widely accepted meaning ‘monument’ is the infinitive ‘to remember’ proposed by Vetter (1953: 33; following him in this analysis were only Pisani 1964: 92 and Bottiglioni 1954: 214). This analysis is based on supposed coordination with the previous infinitives *deikum* and *fatíum*. But these infinitives are in a different clause from *memnim*, so structural parallelism with these forms would not necessarily be expected. The element immediately coordinated with *memnim* is the demonstrative pronoun *úlam*, perhaps referring back to *velliam* if this is taken to mean ‘claim, will’ (rather than being interpreted as a name as in the Buck translation above). Untermann says of Vetter’s interpretation, “angesichts der wortstellung wenig wahrscheinlich” (‘hardly likely given the syntax’). Of the proposed etymology equating Oscan *memnim* with the Latin infinitive *meminī*, Untermann concludes “formal unmöglich” (‘formally impossible’), *-im* not being an attested infinitive form in Sabellic (2000: 469).

On the other hand, Untermann expresses no such objections to the majority view that *memnim* means ‘monument’ and is: from *me-mn-iyō-*; or from **me-mn-yō-*, constructed like Latin *memoria* (perhaps with dissimilation of *n > r*; or from **me-men-yō-*); etymologies supported by the majority of scholars (469). By this analysis, *memnim* would be a member of the small group of Indo-European

reduplicated nouns whose most famous member, ironically, is **k^we-k^wl-o-* “wheel” (> OE *hwēol*, Gr. *kúklos*, Skt. *cakrá-*, etc.). Also in this group is **b^he-b^hr-* “beaver” which shows *-o-* stem in Latin *feber*, but *-u-* stems in Skt. *babhrú-* and Lith. *bebrùs* (Beekes 1995: 171).

So *mimnis* can be said to have a close cognate (or loan source) in an Italic dialect, Oscan *memnim*, the first clear Sabellic connection for this text that can be established strongly on multiple grounds: fit with the context (on a monument); fit with the expectation of self-reference; and fit with a clear, well established cognate in Italic, specifically Sabellic, the major language group closest to the geographic and temporal location of the inscription (following the dictum “Look for Latin cognates first along the Tiber”).

Two formal problems remain, however: 1) in the first syllable, the difference between the *-i-* in the Novilara form *mimnis* versus the *-e-* in the Oscan form *memnim*; and 2) the final *-s* in the Novilara form versus the final *-m* in the Oscan. The first can be approached from two directions — phonological and morphological. Morphologically, the Indo-European reduplicated syllable may show either *-i-* or *-e-*, so the variation here may preserve an ancient morphophonological alternation (Beekes 1995: 171, 227). Phonologically, when a lexeme alternates between <e> and <i>, the sound value can be reconstructed as /I/ < PIE *i* (Meiser 1986: 42 ff. and thanks to the anonymous reviewer for bringing up this issue). This would suggest that the common Sabellic form inherited the *-i-* reduplication here, and Unterman’s reconstructions would then need to be adjusted accordingly, if it is indeed a common Sabellic form and not a borrowing. Alternatively, the *-i-* here may indicate that there was a special phonological rule in this particular language that raises an original *e* to *i* here, perhaps in this strongly nasal context, since nasalization often raises vowels—no other *e*’s in the inscription are similarly flanked by nasals, though the very small data base makes this solution rather ad hoc. On the other hand, umlaut-like influence from the *-i-* in the following syllable seemingly can be ruled out, since *neši* in line 4 and *isperion* in line 6 are apparent counterexamples.

This leaves the more difficult problem of the ending. Poultney's analysis of the root etymology is surely correct here, but his discussion of the ending is limited to the very brief "...plus *-is*." From an Indo-European/Italic perspective, three main possibilities for such an ending present themselves: 1) an *-i-* stem with the nominative masculine singular ending *-s*; 2) a *-yo-* stem with nom. masc. sing. *-s* and with the loss of short vowel in final syllables before *-s* seen elsewhere in Sabellic (see below); or 3) a nominative/accusative singular neuter *-s-* stem with a preceding vowel *-i-*.

To start with the third possibility, from the standpoint of Italic the apparent cognate in Oscan with its final *-im* seems to speak against an *s*-stem analysis. Furthermore, in Italic itself there are no such neuter *-s-* stems in *-is-* (though there *are* some neuter *-s-* stems in Italic preceded by *other* vowels, c.f. **-ēs-* in *Ceres*, **-ōs-* in Umbrian *vepurus*, **-ūs-* in Umbrian *erūs*—von Planta 1897: 71-72). Furthermore, all of the extant Sabellic dialects show a consistent loss of non-*u* short vowels before final *-s*, so a new rule or a variant of this rule would have to be proposed to admit this approach (Buck 1904: 59; Wallace 2000: 22; Meiser 1986: 59). The same rule poses a similar problem for the first proposal of a nominative *-i-* stem. This leaves the second proposal, that this is a *-yo-* stem, which we must accept for the time as the best of the three. Note too that this approach connects our form most closely with Untermann's reconstruction of the Oscan stem.

It must be admitted that the exact analysis of the stem remains the most problematic area for this and for other forms from this text. In general, we see here and in the forms discussed below that, as with other texts near the beginning of their accurate interpretation (and in contrast to Poultney's emphasis), the identification of certain roots poses fewer problems than the exact analysis of the stems and endings at this point. In any case, whether as an *-i-*, *-yo-* or *-is-* stem, the entire word should offer no major objections as an Indo-European—and, given the near-perfect Oscan match—Italic form. A reasonable working hypothesis, then, is either that the Northern Picene language itself is from the Italic branch of Indo-European, or that this word was borrowed from an Italic

language.

While the context of the *location of the stele* in an area adjacent to known Sabellic dialects and its identification as a monument helps confirm the identity of the first word, the more immediate context, the *carvings on the stele itself*, assists in the interpretation of the first word in the second line of this inscription: *rotnem*. The most prominent features on this stele are the large *wheels*, one strikingly carved at the middle of the top of each side. If one were to imagine that this was a certain category of inscription, one would guess that the name of the type of monument would be “wheel monument.” Indeed, there is another monument, fragmentary in this case, that also has a prominent wheel carved prominently at the top of the center of the stone, PID 344 (mentioned above).

Here in perhaps the second most prominent place in the text is a word *rotnem*—matching the most salient carved figure—that may very easily be analyzed as a noun or adjective meaning “wheel.” The most obvious and immediate cognate is Latin *rota*, but further afield we have Sanskrit *ratha*- “chariot” and Lithuanian *rātas* “wheel” from the well known Proto-Indo-European noun form generally reconstructed as **rot-H₂*- from the verbal root **ret-* ‘turn.’ Attractive as this root etymology seems, the ending, again, is a bit more problematic. The *-n-* in particular is unexpected and otherwise unattested for this root. But nominal and adjectival derivatives that include *-n-* are quite common both in Indo-European and Italic. For example, Palmer includes *-no-* as one of the derivational suffixes for forming material adjectives from substantives in Latin, e.g. *salignus* ‘willowy’, *ilignus* ‘oaky’ (1954: 238) and for forming substantives from substantives, e.g. *dominus* ‘lord’ owner’ (236). As for the apparent ending *-em*, Poultney cites it here and elsewhere in the text as morphology that points to Indo-European morphology, specifically accusative singular, though he leaves open the interpretation of these as accusatives: of consonant stems; of the equivalent of Latin fifth declension; or, more likely in at least some cases, from forms in *-yom*, with phonological changes seen in certain cases in the Italic dialects (1979: 59). Meiser, however, proposes a rule that short vowels in final syllables are lost in Sabellic after *y* and *w* and before *-m*, which would

require a special development here again (1986: 60). If it is an adjective or substantivized adjective, the *-m* could represent an accusative singular masculine ending, or a *nominative/accusative singular neuter ending*. The form *rotnes* at the end of the fifth line is presumably another form of the same word, presumably with a nominative singular masculine ending. The form *rotem* in line 7, on the other hand, seems to lack the problematic *-n-*, but this itself raises further problems: are these different forms of the same word? Or is one a derivation of the other? Or are we witnessing mere errors in writing? We may not be able to answer these questions, but the very fact that three apparent variations of this form occur on the monument, more than any other form, reinforces the claim that they are connected to the most prominent aspect of the carvings on the stele—the wheels.

If these etymologies can be accepted as connecting the inscription's language to its inscriptional context and its Italic environs (though, again, remembering the possibility of borrowing)—and since it is quite clearly not from the Latino-Faliscan side of that branch—it is a reasonable working hypothesis that the language is another of the Sabellic (or Osco-Umbrian) dialects (if not indeed an independent branch of Italic). As such, we can proceed to search out other roots with such connections, especially those that also connect with the immediate context of the monument or with the linguistic material we are beginning to establish. We can also start to look for sound patterns and sound changes (or variations thereof) familiar from these dialects.

One might expect a text beginning with the self-referential word *mimnis* “monument” to include an accompanying deictic demonstrative pronoun “this” next to this first word, as was seen in the Iovila inscription above. Can the second word *erut* be reasonably construed as such a word? Based on Latin and most Sabellic texts, we would expect the demonstrative to precede the noun; as Buck succinctly puts it in his section discussing Osco-Umbrian word order, “Demonstrative pronouns precede, possessives follow their nouns, as in Latin” (1904: 224). But in the second to last text included in Buck's work, the reverse order can be observed—Umbrian *cu^hbrar matrer bio*

eso = Bonae Matris *sacellum hoc* (810). (This is Buck's Latin translation; Umbrian *bio* is now considered to mean 'fountain,' so Untermann 2000: 148.) And Wallace notes, "it is possible to find noun phrases in which the pronominal modifier followed its head, e.g., **tríbum ekak** 'this building' (2007: 48; Vetter 1953: 11; Poccetti 1979: 3). Word order, then, is no great barrier to considering *erut* a possible demonstrative pronoun. The barrier comes from our earlier rejection of *minmis* as a neuter *-s* stem. But if *rotnem* is a nom/acc singular neuter substantivized adjective meaning 'wheel stele' or 'wheel monument' (just as Oscan *iovila* is a name for a type of monument, see above) *erut* may be agreeing with *it*, rather than with *mimnis*, the latter, then, perhaps serving as a predicate nominative, possibly after a verb such as "was made/erected/offered [as]."

Turning then from syntactic to formal considerations—the apparent root, *er-*, matches the demonstrative pronoun meaning 'this' in the geographically closest well-attested Sabellic dialect, Umbrian. The Oscan forms show the same root without rhotacism. Note that *er-* provides the root for most of the attested Umbrian forms in the paradigm (from Buck 1904: 141, italics indicate Latin rather than native alphabet).

Again, this is an exact root cognate in a neighboring dialect that also fits exactly what would be expected here in our text. And, again, what is apparently problematic is the stem and ending rather than the root. The origin generally accepted for these Sabellic forms is that it is a combination of the Indo-European pronominal root **ei-* and an *-s-* that spread from the genitive plural **ei-so:m*, seen in Sanskrit *eṣām* (fem. *āsām*) of the indefinite demonstrative *ayam* 'this' or 'that' (Whitney 1989: 192). (The same type of genitive plural ending with an *-s-* or *-s-* immediately after the root is also seen in the common Sanskrit demonstrative paradigm of *sas* 'that' which also serves as the third person pronoun: m./n. *teṣām*, f. *tāsām*. The variation in the quality of the medial *-s-* is due to the famous "ruki" rule that palatalizes the dental sibilant after the consonants *r*, *u*, *k*, and *i*—Sanskrit *e* is from **a + *i*.) From this genitive plural proto-form **ei-so:m* (preserved in the Oscan *eisun-k*), the new demonstrative root **eis-*

One might question whether we should expect rhotacism in such an early inscription—generally dated from the fifth or sixth century B.C. But rhotacism spread as an areal feature from the north, affecting Etruscan, as well as Umbrian and Latin, so one might expect to see some rhotacism particularly *early* in this far northern location. Note also again that Meiser (following others) reconstructs voicing of intervocalic PIE *-s-* already in Proto-Sabellic (1986: 38). There is only one apparent un-rhotacized intervocalic *-s-* in our text: in *isairon* in line 3. But there are apparent exceptions to rhotacism, even in late Umbrian texts. Buck, in a footnote on rhotacism, observes: “Nothing satisfactory can be said of **asa-**, *asa-* : O. *aasai*, L. *āra*. For *esono-* ‘sacer’, related to O. *aisusis* ‘sacrificiis’ etc., it is possible to assume an extension of an *s*-stem, i.e. **ais(e)s-ono-*” (1904: 74; for a more recent discussion of the form, see Meiser 1986: 252 ff.). Something similar may be going on here; in fact this last form may well be a related word. On the other hand, the *-s-* here could have been blocked from rhotacism by the following *-r-* (whatever *its* origin). The only other sibilants that occur between vowels are the distinctively written *ś*s that may derive, as Poultney suggests (1979: 53), “from *k* before a high front vowel” as it is sometimes written in Umbrian, and as such would not be eligible for rhotacism. Note also that a preceding morpheme boundary blocks rhotacism, if initial *i-* might represent some sort of prefix (Meiser 1986: 242).

The only other theory for the origin of this root is that it was generalized from the reduplicated genitive form **eis > eis-eis* (Untermann 2000: 357). While this cannot be safely ruled out entirely, it is notable that languages with reduplicated genitives in other pronominal paradigms, such as Sanskrit with first person singular personal pronoun *mama*, did not generalize an entire paradigm based on this form, such reduplications presumably being transparent enough to resist the reanalysis necessary for such spread.

Again, while a fairly solid root etymology can be established here—with the meaning expected at this location of the text matching the root with that meaning in a neighboring dialect of Italic—the ending remains somewhat problematic. Note, for example, that none of the Umbrian forms ends in *-t*. Two possibilities initially

present themselves. The Oscan has ablative singular **eisúd**, which would correspond to an Umbrian **erud*, presumably the form behind the attested *eru-ku*, *eru-com*. So we could be dealing with an ablative singular form here.

Alternatively, this could be an adverb similar to Umbrian **esuk** ‘thus’ at the beginning of the *A* side of the fifth Iguvine Tablet. Untermann derives this and related forms (**esu**, *esoc*, *eso*) from a nominative/accusative neuter singular demonstrative pronoun **eks-od-k* or plural **eks-ā-k* from the other root for ‘this,’ **ek-/eks-* Oscan, Umbrian, Paelignian, and Marrucian masculine nominative singular *ecuc*; nominative/accusative neuter singular Oscan **ekik**, Paelignian *ecic* (Untermann 2000: 216, 221). The meaning ‘thus,’ however, seems more appropriate for instructions for carrying out rites than for what appears to be a commemorative or funerary monument.

These forms lead us to a third possibility that would seem to more closely fit the context. In his discussion of the etymology of the nominative/accusative neuter singular Oscan **ekik** and Paelignian *ecic* forms just mentioned, Untermann presents the following: “O. **ekik** stat ***ekok** < **eko-d-ke* ist nach *idik* (→*izic*) umgestaltet” (2000: 217). Removing the deictic *-k* familiar from Latin *hic*, *haec*, *hoc* ..., we get a proto-Sabellic nom./acc. neuter sg. demonstrative pronominal form **ekod* ‘this.’ This form **ekod* could easily have influenced the other root for ‘this’ by extending the **-od* ending to the nom./acc. neuter sg. form of the root **eis-* (Umbrian **er-*) to yield exactly our form, *erut* (just as the *izic* form seems to have had an influence on the **ek-* pronouns).

This dental neuter singular nominative/accusative pronominal ending, is of course, widespread in Italic and Indo-European—seen in Latin *id*, *quid* and Sanskrit *id-am* (the nominative/accusative neuter singular form of the very demonstrative paradigm given above) and *tat* (the same form for the *sas* paradigm mentioned above), not to mention English *it* and *that*. Note also that in Oscan the nom./acc. singular neuter form is *ídik*, *idic* and that the parallel Umbrian forms *eřek*, *erse* are similarly from **idik*, *-ř-*/*-rs-* being the regular outcome of intervocalic *-d-* in Umbrian (Buck 1904: 82-3). So in these dialects, the *eis-/er*

root had not yet spread to the nominative/accusative singular neuter form. In the language of our text, it apparently has.

On the face of it, <u> in *erut* from **o* would seem to present no problem, since <u> is the regular representation of Sabellic **o* in the national alphabet (Meiser 1986: 27). But while the national alphabet has no separate letter <o>, our text does. So, if an <o> was available, why was a <u> used in this case? One approach to this dilemma would be to posit a sound change in our language that changes *o* > *u* in final syllables, a change seen, for example, in Latin. This would mean that the <o>'s that are documented in final syllables in the text would need special explanations, unless there was simply variation in representing this sound in writing in this position.

Finally there is the problem of the final voicing (thanks to Professor George Sheets for pointing out that this issue needed addressing and for help on many other points, small and large). While a full discussion of voicing in this text will require a separate article, note for now that <d> in this text is highly restricted in its occurrence and distribution, only occurring in medial position and only in two words *gaarestades* (if this is in fact one word) and *ands*. Also note that the letter that is represented in Poultney's transcription as 'd' <ϝ> is the letter whose value in this text is the least certain (1979: 52, 58). Since this early alphabet was clearly derived from an Etruscan alphabet, voicing distinctions may not have been completely sorted out at this early date (Etruscan lacked voicing distinctions in stops). Alternatively final devoicing of dentals (at least) may have occurred in this dialect. Also, note that *-s* does not seem to rhotacize finally in this text.

So it may be possible to construe the above-examined three words of this seemingly impenetrable text as a phrase or part of a phrase 'this wheel stele [as a] monument' with *mimnis* as the predicate nominative of some verb such as "was made," "was dedicated," "was offered," or simply "stands." The likelihood that the three words, particularly the function word *erut*, were all borrowed would seem rather low. If the etymologies can be accepted,

this part of the text, at least, could be declared to be a Sabellic language. Of course, if the etymology of ‘this’ proposed here is rejected, *rotnem* and *mimnis* could instead be borrowings from the neighboring languages. If these suggestions prompt a vigorous scholarly debate that brings more attention and illumination to this dark inscription, a central aim of this article will have been achieved. Perhaps then this long mute stone will start to speak.

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