

THE “SPADA DI VERONA”

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Abstract

The Maniscalchi - Erizzo Museum in Verona (Veneto, IT) hosts an interesting collection of Roman, Venetic and Rhaetic antiquities among which a copy of the so called “Spada di Verona” i.e. *Sword of Verona*. The inscription is redacted in the alphabet, closely resembling the Venetic, in which the Magrè inscriptions are written. The use of the Magrè alphabet would indicate a Rhaetic origin of the inscription. The inscription appears to be written from right to left in continuo and no indication is provided in it for indicating a possible separations between the words. A possible method of separating the words is to directly recognize in the inscription similar or corresponding Slavic language elements like name and verbs. However, in applying this method two alternative word separations and consequently two alternative interpretations of the inscription emerged.

Alternative A (by G. Tomezzoli): **faniniufikuremieshiitifasuvakhikvelisunes** → **fanin i ufik u remieshi i itifas u vakh ik velis u nes**. Translation: *War and mutilation are to the Romans and the fury is to their god Bacchus, Velis is with us.*

Alternative B (from V. Chudeenov): **raniniufikuremleshiipivauvakhikvelisunes** → **rani ni ufik u remleshi i piva u vakh ik velis unes**. Translation: *The wounds are not the mutilations among the Romans; when you are drinking together with Bacchus, Veles has them (already) carried away.*

The similarities between the words in the inscription and the words of present Slavic languages offer a tool for approximating the possible meaning of the inscription. Anyway the existence of two possible and concurrent interpretations let the space open for further studies on the inscription on the “Spada of Verona”.

1. Introduction

The Maniscalchi - Erizzo Museum in Verona (Veneto, IT) hosts an interesting collection of Roman, Venetic and Rhaetic antiquities. In the Museum, a first storecase (Fig. 1, left portion) hosts Roman and Venetic little bronze figures. The second storecase (Fig. 1, right portion) hosts Venetic little bronze figures, a situla, a metallic belt and a copy of the so called “Spada di Verona” or Sword of Verona (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1: Museum Maniscalchi – Erizzo (Verona, IT) , the collection of Venetic and Rhaetic antiquities.

The small white board near the copy of the Sword (Fig. 2) in Italian recites:

Spit of bronze from Ca' dei Cavri (VR)
Engraved inscription of the Rhaetic oriental group. Vth century BC.



Fig. 2: the Sword of Verona

2. History and previous spelling of the inscription on the sword

The inscription on the Sword is classified as N. 38 by Pauli (1), see Annex A, who reports the following spelling: φανiniuφικuremieshiisφasuvakhikvepisines, and also the spelling of Mommsen and Fabretti: δανinioδικoremieshiisδasovakhikvepisones, but provides no interpretation of the inscription.

The history of the Sword of Verona is reported by Wathmough (2), see Annex B.

Summarizing, Wathmough (2) classifies the inscription as PID 247, mentions that it is impossible now to arrive at certainty of the text of the inscription engraved on the strip of metal 1m. long which is generally described as ‘Spada di Verona’, because the original sword or spit has long been lost and all the existing copies descend from the drawing of one Lodovico Moscardo its discoverer. Wathmough (2) provides the following spelling: φανiniiuφικuremiieshirafasuvakhikvelisanes and provides a review of the problems linked to the interpretations of the letters in the inscription. He reports also that according to Pellegrini the inscription is redacted in the alphabet, closely resembling the Venetic, in which the Magrè inscriptions are written., but no interpretation is provided. Wathmough (2) defines the possible Celtic translation by Guillemand as arbitrary.

The use of the Magrè alphabet would indicate a Rhaetic origin of the inscription, however, the writers of the present paper share the wish set out in ref. (2) of the rediscovery of the original sword or spit, so as to settle all the disputed points.

Fig. 3 shows, among the other, the alphabet of Magrè, which will be used, according to Wathmough (2), for spelling the inscription.

Alphabet	Phonetic	a	b	g	d	e	v	s	k	θ	i	h	l
Bolzano*		Λ Λ Λ Λ (A) Λ Λ (v rare)				⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ (⊗) ⊗	⊗ ⊗	?	(H, N] rare)	..	l	⊗ ⊗	⊗
Magrè*		Λ Λ Λ Λ (Λ Λ Λ rare) [Λ]				⊗ (⊗) ⊗ ⊗ (⊗)	⊗ (⊗) (⊗ rare) (⊗ ?)	(⊗ ?) see v	⊗	[⊗]	l	⊗ (⊗ ?)	⊗
Este*		Λ Λ Λ (A)	(see φ)	(see χ)	(see s)	⊗	⊗	⊗ (= d ?)	⊗ (⊗)	⊗ ⊗	l	⊗	⊗

Alphabet	Values:	m	n	samekh ⊞	o	p	san transcribed f	q	r	s	t	v	x	
Bolzano*	M	⊞ ⊞ (N once) ⊞ (M)			(see u?)	⊞ ⊞ ⊞ (? q sec φ)	M (M M)		⊞ (Q)	⊞ ⊞ ⊞ (? ? S)	X ⊞ ?	V	(φ) (φ φ, ? q)	ψ (ψ A)
Magrè*	(M N) M (VM)	⊞ (q) ⊞ N ⊞				..	M (M) (w ?) [M ?]		(⊞ ⊞ ⊞) ⊞ (Q)	⊞ ⊞ ?	X ⊞ ⊞ (1 ? ?)	^ (V) [V]	φ (φ) (φ φ)	ψ
Este*	⊞	⊞	perigram: ⊞ ψ	[φ]	⊞ ⊞	M			⊞ Q	⊞ ⊞	X	^	φ φ (= b ?)	ψ (= g ?)

Fig. 3: Bolzano, Magrè, Este alphabets (ref. (1)).

J. Rhys (3), cf. Annex C, in dealing with Celtic inscriptions reports the spelling of the inscription on the Sword of Verona provided by Dr. Stockes: *Quaninio Quikoremies hisa quasova khik Vepisones*, but admit that he had no success in treating the inscription as Celtic.

M. Bor (4) in dealing with Rhaetians and their language wrote: “..., Pallottino considers the Rhaetian language and the Etruscans as non-Europeans, whereas the Veneti were in his opinion Indo-Europeans and linguistically close to the Italic group. As is well known, my views about the Venetic language are different, and also I disagree about the Rhaetians and their language”. M. Bor used the similarities between the Rhaetian, Slovenian, old and modern Slavic languages, for translating Rhaethian inscriptions (cf. (4), pages 397- 408).

3. The inscription

The drawing of the inscription Pauli N. 38 on Table II of (1) – cf. fig. 4 – will be assumed as basis for translating the inscription.



Fig. 4: inscription on the Sword of Verona – Pauli N. 38.

The inscription appears to be written from right to left in continuo and no indication is provided in it for indicating a possible separations between the words. A possible method of separating the words in the inscription is to directly recognize similar or corresponding Slavic language elements, like: conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, negations, names and verbs. However, in applying this method, taking also into account possible changes due to the evolution of the words from the time of the inscription to today and possible imprecisions in the letters composing the words, two alternative word separations and consequent two alternative interpretations of the inscription emerged.

4. Alternative A (by G. Tomezzoli)

Reading the inscription from right to left by using the Magrè alphabet (ref. 1, fig. 3) it is possible to arrive to the following spelling:

faniniufikuremieshiitifasuvakhikvelisunes

The possible word separation is:

fanin i ufik u remieshi i itifas u vakh ik velis u nes

Note that the composite character IXI in the middle of the inscription results from the fusion of the characters I X I = iti (cf. fig. 3).

Explanation:

fanin:	Slove.: vojna; Russ.: война; Engl.: war (changement b->v due to betatism);
i:	Slove.: in; Russ.: и; Engl.: and, and also;
ufik:	Slove.: okrnitev; Russ.: увечье; Engl.: mutilation;
u:	Slove.: od; Russ.: у, Engl.: (belongs) to;
remieshi:	Slove.: Rimljani; Russ.: Римляне; Engl.: Romans;
i:	Slove.: in; Russ.: и; Engl.: and, and also;
itifas	this word seems to be linked to the Slov. dialectal word: ihtn, ihtou; Engl.: furious, rageous, and would mean fury;
u:	Slove.: od; Russ.: у; Engl.: (belongs) to;
vakh:	Slove.: Bakh; Russ.: Вакх; Engl.: Bacchus - latin god of wine;
ik:	Slove.: jih; Russ.: их; Engl.: their;
velis	Slove.: Velis; Russ.: Велес(Волос); Engl.: Veles (Volos) – slavic god of music, art, poetry, animals, flocks and herds, death and underworld;
u:	Slove.: od; Russ.: у; Engl.: (belongs) to;
nes :	Slove.: nas; Russ.: нас; Engl.: us.

Translation: War and mutilation are to the Romans and the fury is to their god Bacchus, Velis is with us.

Comment:

The inscription is a slogan evidentiating the bad behavioural aptitudes of the Romans, i.e. their aptitude to make war and mutilation, and of their god Bacchus, i.e. his fury, and in opposition affirming the confidence of the writer of the inscription in the Slavic god Velis, the god of animals, the meat of which were roasted on the spit.

5. Alternative B (by V. Chudeenov)

Reading the inscription from right to left by using the Magrè alphabet (ref. 1, fig. 3) it is possible to arrive to the following spelling:

raniniufikuremleshiipivauvakhikvelisunes.

The word separation would be:

rani ni ufik u remleshi i piva u vakh ik velis unes.

Note that the composite character IXI in the middle of the inscription results would represent the characters PI.

Explanation:

rani:	Slove.: rani; Russ.: раны; Engl.: wounds;
ni:	Slove.: ne; Russ.: не; Engl.: not;
ufik:	Slove.: okrnitev; Russ.: увечье; Engl.: mutilation;
u:	Slove.: od; Russ.: у, Engl.: (belongs) to;
remleshi:	Slove.: Rimljani; Russ.: Римляне; Engl.: Romans;

i:	Slove.: in; Russ.: и; Engl.: and, and also;
piva	Slove.: pijača; Russ.: пить, Engl: (you are) drinking;
u:	Slove.: od; Russ.: y; Engl.: together with;
vakh:	Slove.: Bakh; Russ.: Вакх; Engl.: Bacchus - latin god of wine;
ik:	Slove.: jih; Russ.: их; Engl.: their;
velis	Slove.: Velis; Russ. Велес (Волос); Engl.: Veles (Volos) – slavic god of music, art, poetry, animals, flocks and herds, death and underworld;
unes:	Slove.: odnesti; Russ.: унести; Engl.: carry away.

Translation: The wounds are not the mutilations among the Romans; when you are drinking together with Bacchus, Veles has them (already) carried away.

Comment:

The slogan on the sword proclaims that its owner is free from the fear of mutilations and the best remedy after being wounded is to drink, as it is common among the Slavic people. The owner is in no doubt a Slavic Roman; he worships the Roman god Bacchus and the Slavic god Veles. The text of the inscription sounds as south-Slavic.

6. Conclusion

In spite of the facts that imprecisions in the letters of the inscriptions could exist due to the fact that it is a copy based on an handmade drawing, that the inscription is written in continuo and no specific rule is provided about its subdivision in words, and that the ancient words in the inscription have surely evolved and are no longer identical to modern corresponding ones, the similarities between the words in the inscription and the words of present Slavic languages offer a tool for approximating the possible meaning of the inscription. Anyway the existence of two possible and concurrent interpretations let the space open for further studies on the inscription on the "Spada of Verona".

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Povzetek

"Veronski meč"

Muzej Maniscalchi - Erizzo v Veroni (Veneto, IT) gosti zanimivo zbirko rimskih, venetskih in retijskih starin, med njimi kopijo takozvanega Veronskega meča. Napis na njem je v črkopisu, ki je zelo podoben venetskemu, v katerem so pisane magrèjski napisi. Uporaba magrèjskega črkopisa kaže na retijski izvor napisa. Napisan je zvezno, z desne na levo, in nobenega znamenja ni, kako ga razdeliti na besede. Možen pristop bi bil v napisu prepoznati podobne ali ustrezne slovanske značilnosti kot npr. imena in glagole. Pri tem pa sta nastali dve različni razlagi napisa.

Možnost A (G. Tomezzoli): **faniniufikuremieshiitifasuvakhikvelisunes** → **fanin i ufik u remieshi i itifas u vakh ik velis u nes**. Prevod: *Vojno in pohabljenje Rimljanom in bes njihovemu bogu Bakhu, Veles je z nami*.

Možnost B (V. Čudinov): **raniniufikuremleshiipivauvakhikvelisunes** → **rani ni ufik u remleshi i piva u vakh ik velis unes**. Prevod: *Rane Rimljanov ne pohabijo; če piješ z Bakhom, jih Veles odnese*.

Podobnosti med besedami v napisu in besedami v sedanjih slovanskih jezikih omogočajo približati se morebitnemu pomenu napisa. Možnost dveh razlag kliče po dodatnem razvozlavanju napisa na "Veronskem meču".

und sind denen auf dem Krieger von Ravenna im Typus ähnlich. Dagegen ist der Schlüssel von Dambel, dessen Echtheit Deecke gleichfalls anzweifelt, in der That, wie soeben schon gesagt, eine grobe und plumpe Fälschung.

38. Inschrift eines Metallstreifens, gefunden bei Verona.

ϕaniniuϕikuremieshiisϕasovahlivϕepisines ←

Mommsen n. A. 210. no. 19. tab. II; Fabretti no. 14. tab. II.

Tafel II. nach Mommsen, und dieser nach Maffei, oss. lett. V, 303. tav. II. no. 2.

Mommsen und nach ihm Fabretti geben in der Umschrift *ϑaninioϑihoremieshiisϑasovahlivϕepisōnes*. Mommsen fasst also das Zeichen ϕ als ϑ, Λ als o. Unten bei der Betrachtung der Alphabete wird sich ergeben, dass erstens = ϕ, (denn von einem q, woran man der Form nach sonst denken könnte, findet sich in keinem der nordetruskischen Alphabete eine Spur), letzteres = u. Der viertletzte Buchstabe wird von Mommsen selbst nur zweifelnd durch o umschrieben, aber die Zeichnung lässt deutlich den schwachen Seitenstrich nach links als zufällig erkennen. Der Buchstabe ist daher ein i, und es ist *pisines* zu lesen.

It is impossible now to arrive at certainty in the transcription of the text of the well-known insc., engraved on a strip of metal about 1 m. long, which has now come to be generally described as the 'spada di Verona', though it may be doubted whether it was really a sword. The original has long been lost, and all the existing copies seem to be descended from the drawing of one Ludovico Moscardo of Verona, its discoverer, in whose museum it was for a time preserved. Only its rediscovery could settle the disputed points. It was found at the *Cà* (i.e. *Casa*) *dei Cavri*, to the south of Verona, before 1672, the year in which it was first published. Pellegrini was the first to see, after the discovery of the Magrè insc. in 1912, that the script of the *Cà dei Cavri* insc. was not identical with the Bolzano $a\beta$, as Pauli had supposed, but with the $a\beta$, closely resembling the Venetic, in which the Magrè insc. are written. My transcription agrees with Pellegrini's in every particular save one.

$\phi a n i n i \phi i k u r e m i e s h i r \underline{g} \phi a s u v a k h i k v e l l s g n e s$

Probably, but not certainly, complete; written r. to l. Copies made from Moscardo's drawing, which I have not been able to see, vary with regard to four letters: the seventh is given variously as Λu (Maffei, and after him by Mommsen and Pauli) or Λa (de Stefani, who is followed by Pellegrini); but Cipolla, who saw Moscardo's apograph, gives Λ . The fourth letter from the end is given by Maffei (Mommsen, Pauli) as Λ (with the right-hand limb very heavy, the other

¹ The alternative *N. d. Sc.* references appear on p. 53.

fainter, whereas in the other examples of *u* the reverse is the case), which Pauli thought was really *i*, the mark on the left being merely accidental; Maffei and Mommsen both took the letter as Λ (which they transcribed *o* not *u*); de Stefani and Cipolla, however, agree in giving \mathbf{A} (from Moscardo), so *a* may be taken here as almost certain (while *u* in the seventh place is doubtful). In the middle of the inscription I have written *ra*, somewhat doubtfully, after Cipolla and de Stefani who have $\mathbf{A}\mathbf{Q}$ just as clearly as Maffei had $\mathbf{X}\mathbf{I}$, transcribed *iš*; but Cipolla asserts that Maffei's copy was an inaccurate representation of Moscardo's drawing.

The forms of the following letters are noteworthy: $\mathbf{A}\mathbf{V}$ (for the usual \mathbf{A}), $\mathbf{H}\mathbf{H}$ *h*—perhaps rather *samekh*?—(Cipolla, for the usual \mathbf{H} , which is what Maffei had), $\mathbf{P}\mathbf{P}$ (transcribed by Mommsen as θ , hardly *q*?). The rest are normal. Regularly *e* is \mathbf{E} , but once \mathbf{E} ; *k* is \mathbf{K} , *m* \mathbf{M} , *r* \mathbf{R} . Cipolla's copy does at least raise doubts about the fifth and fourteenth letters (\mathbf{N} *n* and \mathbf{M} *m*), but apparently only as a result of typographical difficulties; I do not think that he meant to suggest \mathbf{M} *m* and \mathbf{M} *s* respectively, and since he is alone even in the appearance of doing so, I have followed the balance of authority in reading *n* and *m*.

Pauli, who at first (*Altital. Forsch.*, i, p. 52), held that the *aβ* of this inscr. was a variety of the Este *aβ* (with $\mathbf{1} = \mathbf{p}$, the seventh letter from the end, instead of the usual $\mathbf{1}$ of the Este inscc., which have $\mathbf{1} = \mathbf{1}$), subsequently (*Archivio Trentino*, 7, 1888, pp. 146 sqq.) assigned it to the Bolzano group, and therefore read every Λ of the older copies as \mathbf{A} *a* (since in the Bolzano *aβ* *u* is \mathbf{V}), while keeping $\mathbf{1}$ *p* (in the Bolzano *aβ*, *p* is \mathbf{P} or $\mathbf{1}$, *1* is \mathbf{V}). But, as Pellegrini justly pointed out, this is arbitrary, since in at least two instances Λ is quite certain and not to be confused with \mathbf{A} (even as regards this, indeed, note that in the Bolzano *aβ* *a* is usually Λ , not \mathbf{A} or \mathbf{A}), while the forms \mathbf{H} (or \mathbf{H} ?) *h*, and \mathbf{P} \mathbf{P} , are both strange to the Bolzano *aβ* (\mathbf{H} *h* twice only, cf. 203 *b*, \mathbf{H} and \mathbf{H} not at all, \mathbf{P} \mathbf{P} commonly, never \mathbf{P}). But the discovery of the Magrè inscc. has at once made clear the position of the 'spada di Verona', as Pauli would have been quick to see and acknowledge. In those inscc., however, it is important to observe that although *1* is $\mathbf{1}$, *p* is wanting, so that the reading *Isanes* ($\mathbf{1}$) is not absolutely certain; Pauli's *plsanēs* may just be right. But the *aβ* of the 'spada' is in all respects so clearly the Magrè *aβ*, that I prefer here also to take $\mathbf{1}$ as *1*.

Moscardo, *Museo* (Verona, 1672) p. 404, tav. a, p. 407, a reference which I take from Cipolla (who remarks that if the drawing of Moscardo was really of the actual size of the original, as it professed to be, the spada was *c.* 1 metre long); Maffei, *Osserv. Lett.*, 5, Verona, 1739, 303, tav. 2, p. 302, no. 2;

Mommsen, *Nord-Etr. Alphabete*, 1853, p. 210, no. 19, and Plate II; Fabretti, *Corp. Insc. Ital.*, 14; Pauli, *Allital. Forsch.*, i, p. 19, no. 38, and Plate II; Cipolla, *N. d. Sc.*, Jan. 1884, pp. 157 sq. (or pp. 9 sq.); de Stefani, with Pauli, *ap. L. de Campi, Arch. Trent.*, 7, 1888, pp. 146 sq.; Pellegrini, *N. d. Sc.*, 1918, p. 192, n. 2; Marstrander, *Avh. utg. av d. norske Vidensk.-Akad. in Oslo*, 1926, Hist.-filol. Klasse, Oslo, 1927, p. 24 (who strangely interprets φ as t); Guillemand, *Rev. Arch.*, sér. 3, x, 1887, p. 304, gave an arbitrary interpretation of this insc. as Keltic.

Annex C

On the other hand, certain inscriptions which have sometimes passed for Celtic are here omitted because I do not think that they are such. Two of them belong to Italy: the first is said by Dr. Stokes to be on a metal plate found near Verona. I refer to his work on *Celtic Declension*, where it forms his No. 4, being read by him as follows: *Qaninio Qikoremies hisa quasova khik Vepisones*, while Pauli in his *Inscriften nordetruskischen Alphabets*, p. 19, gives it, somewhat differently, as *faniniuφikuremieshüisφasuvakhikvepisines*. I have not seen it, and I am not certain where it is; but so far I have had no success in treating it as Celtic. The same may be said of the Este inscription, Dr. Stokes's No. 5, which he reads *Tarknovosseno*, and Pauli, p. 22, as *tu · r · knavas · seno*. The piece of pottery bearing