

# Etruscan *lautun*: a (very old) Italic loanword?

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**Epigraphical and linguistic evidence.** It is well known that Etruscan is not an Indo-European language. Its some 10.000 inscriptions depict it as an originally agglutinative language, showing signs of a gradual change into a fusive one. It has only been proven to have genealogical connections with Raetic and Lemnian, two ancient poorly attested languages. Nonetheless, the fact of being spoken for over eight centuries in Central Italy, in contact with several Indo-European languages, mainly from the Italic branch, led it to

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1. The bilingual inscription ET Cl 1.219, now lost (here in a diplomatic transcription, the only one known), showing correspondence between Etr. *lautni* and Lat. *libertus*.

borrow some linguistic features from them, above all loanwords. One of them, maybe the most intriguing one, might be *lautun/lavtun* (rec. *lautn/lavtn*), and its derivation *lautni* (and the compound *lautneteri*, whose meaning, still disputed, will not be taken into account; s. Facchetti 2012: 245–50). First F. Gamurrini (1874) noticed that *lautni* (and f. *lautniθa*), attested in nearly 200 inscriptions, in a bilingual (Etruscan-Latin) text was translated as *libertus* (1.). C. Pauli (1880: 98–9) argued that this was to be meant only as a factual translation, not as a real connection expressing for *lautni* the same linguistic values already known for Lat. *libertus*. In fact, he suggested that it was clearly related to *lautn*, which in turn had to be meant as lat. *familia*, *gens*, since its attestations in some longer texts, as the *Cippus Perusinus* (2.) and the S. Manno inscription (3.), led towards such a meaning. Following this assumption, for *lautni* he set a connection with lat. *familiāris* (*servus*), *famulus*. Pauli's



2. The *Cippus Perusinus* (ET Pe 8.4), concerning a deal among the *Velθina* family (*lautn velθinas*) and the *Afuna* one (*estla afunas*).

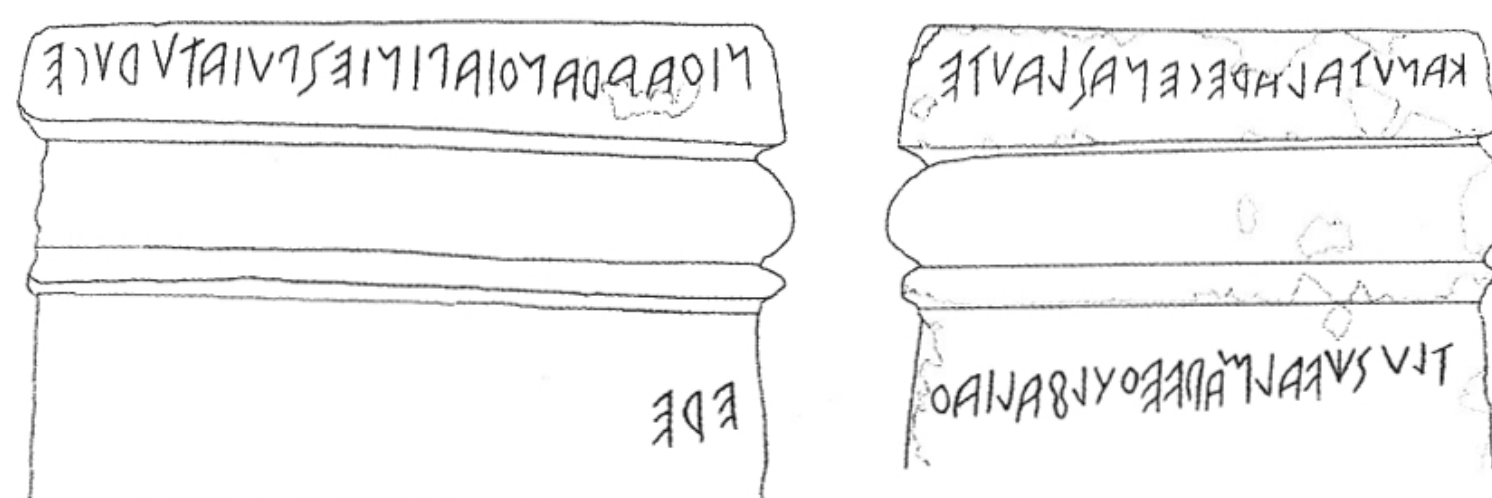
statement proved to be successful, and was followed by most scholars, such as A. Torp (1905: 47–8), S.P. Cortsen (1925: 3–6), F. Leifer (1931: 145–6), E. Vetter (1948) and many others. **Etymological hypotheses.** F. Ribezzo (1929: 64; 1932: 32) first proposed an etymology of *lautn*, in the frame of the hypothesis of an “Ausonic” linguistic layer in the Italian peninsula: he suggested that it recalled the Indo-European *\*leudh-* (now PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh-* ‘grow, raise’, s. LIV<sup>2</sup>: 248–9), giving the original meaning of ‘people’; the “Ausonic” assumption was meant to be particularly responsible of the treatment of PIE *mediae aspiratae* (*-d<sup>h</sup>-* > *-t-*), unknown to Italic (Latin-Faliscan and Sabellian) languages (s. also Devoto 1972: 460). K. Olzscha (1968), though independently, followed a similar path, only suggesting that, according to OCS *ljudinъ* (‘freeman’), Lat. *liber* (LEW I: 791–2, s.v. *liber*<sup>2</sup>) and Gk. *ἐλεύθερος*, Etr. *lautn* must have meant ‘free’. H. Rix (1994: 96–116) tried to merge both hypotheses into one. Surveying all attestations, he argued that Pauli's idea, born on combinatorial grounds, according to which *lautn* is Lat. *familia* and *lautni* stands for *familiāris*, seems to have no counterexamples. On the other hand, Ribezzo and Olzscha's assumption of a connection with PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh-* could be recovered in terms of a loan. As Rix states, PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh-* is well attested in Indo-European languages, with both an *o-* and an *i-* stem (OBulg. *ljudo*, Lit. *liáu-dis*, OHG *liut*, OIce. *ljóðr* ‘people’, Latv. *ļaudis* and pl. *ļaudis*, OHG *liuti* ‘folks’, Burg. *leudis* ‘freeman’; the already mentioned Gk. *ἐλεύθερος*, Lat. *liber*, Paelignan *loufir* and Venetic *LO.UZEROΦO.S.* [louðeroβos], all from a *-ero-* construction; s. also IEW: 684–5, s.v. 1. *leudh-*). All of them tend to represent people as a growing community made of freemen; this semantic feature can be a good frame for a loan like the one envisaged for *lautn* ‘family’ → *lautni* ‘freed man’. According to Rix, the source of such a loan must be searched into the Italic context, for reasons of geographical contact and linguistic factors: he sets an *n-* stem *\*louðon*, from PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>on*, which would be the best candidate, though this derivation seems unattested in Italic languages (Umbrian dat.sg. *vofione* is presumably from *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>-i-ōno-*, ‘Lord of the people’, s. Meiser 1986: 155).



3. The S. Manno inscription (ET Pe 5.2), a *lex sepulcralis* that rules the conditions of use of a tomb by its owners, the *Pre-cu* family (*lautn precus*).

**Proto-Indo-European.** A Pit. *\*louðon* could be the result of several patterns. Rix thinks of a construction with individualizing *-on*, from an original adjective *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>-o-* ‘adult, free’. The problem here is that individualizing noun endings seem to lose their nasal element very early in nom.sg. (*\*-on-s* > *\*-ōn* > *\*-ō* > *-ō*, such as in Lat. *Catō*, *-ōnis*, and several examples by other IE languages; probably this is already a late PIE feature, s. Harðarson 2005: 218–24). The *-n* in OEtr. *lautun* could be explained as a recovering of the nasal feature of the preceding vowel (Etruscan had no nasal vowels), or simply as a restoration due to paradigmatic pressure.

Another weak point concerns the ending vowel before *-n-*. Due to a shift from melodic to tonic, first syllable accent occurred around V sec. B.C., Etruscan words tend to lose post-tonic vowels by syncope (as in OEtr. *turuce* > REtr. *turce* ‘(he) gave’); this accounts for the shift from OEtr. *lavtun* to REtr. *lautn*, with the form *lauteniθa*, in a recently discovered inscription from Orvieto (fourth quarter of VI sec. B.C., Stopponi 2009: 441–9; 4.), encoding the transition step of a processes of vowel lenition and finally dele-



4. An archaic inscription on a stone base from Orvieto, Campo della Fiera (the Etruscan *Fanum Voltumnae*), dedicated by *Kanuta*, *lauteniθa* of *Larecena* and wife of *Aranθ Pinie*, to the *Thusva* deities (s. Stopponi 2009).

tion. However, assuming a Pit. *\*louðon* as the source for the loanword OEtr. *lavtun*, it would be difficult to explain such a deletion. If it is true that Etruscan does not seem to have vowel length opposition, on the other hand syncope seems not to affect those vowels that we can reconstruct as long, either by loan or by original diphthong (e.g. Gk. *Κάστωρ* → REtr. ET Ta S.13 *kastur*, Umbr. *\*nehtuns* (s. Lat. *Neptūnus*) → REtr. *nehtuns*; OEtr. ET Cr 4.4 *tes'iameitale* → REtr. LL XI.5 *tesamitn*). We should then think of some kind of vowel shortening, or simply a different perception of vowel length between Italic languages and Old Etruscan. Finally, semantics seem not linear: *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>-on-* must be meant as, strictly speaking, ‘the one who grows’ > ‘the adult’ > ‘the free man’. One wonders how this could lead to OEtr. *lautun* ‘family’, of which REtr. *lautni* (= Lat. *familiāris*) seems a genuine Etruscan derivation.

A second possibility is an “Hoffman formation” *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>-h<sub>3</sub>on-*, that is a noun with a possessive suffix *-h<sub>3</sub>on-*, meaning ‘having ...’ (Hoffmann 1955). In fact, this formation would be as problematic as the previous one, for the same reasons (final *-n* deletion, final vowel length), and for the difficulty of explaining the semantic path: given *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>-* ‘grow’, we would have a noun *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>-o-* ‘growth (?)’, and a Hoffman-formation *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>-h<sub>3</sub>on-* ‘having growth (?)’: its final shift to Etr. *lavtun* ‘family’ seems anything but easy to conceive.

Another solution is to hypothesize a noun *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>-o-* ‘people’, originated as an internal derivation from *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>-ó-* ‘free’; Etr. *lautun* could be the result of a loan from acc. PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>-om* > Pit. *\*louðom*, with a shift from Pit. *-m* to Etr. *-n* (though only the opposite change, Gk. (acc.) *-ov* > Etr. *-um*, is attested in Etruscan, and motivated on morphological grounds, s. Agostiniani 1995: 19–23).

**From Proto-Italic to Etruscan.** Whatever its origin, a Pit. *\*louðon* would have yielded an OEtr. *lautun* only supposing several other processes. The original diphthong *-eu-* developed into *-ou-* at the time of common Proto-Italic (Meiser 1998: 57, 59), before undergoing further changes. Rix does not explain clearly how the diphthong *-ou-* would become *-au-* in OEtr. *lautun*; nonetheless, this would be far from being odd, since L. Agostiniani (1993: 27–8) showed that *-a-* in Old Etruscan (but not in Recent Etruscan) had a velar counterpart (something like [â]), which loans like gen. *lavcies* (REE 56, 73, from an Italic source which traces back to *\*loukjo-*) or the behavior of archaic genitive ending *-ia* (with deletion of final velar *-l*, recovered in rec. *-ial*) must be accounted for. This feature of *-a-* soon (probably by the end of VI sec. B.C.) disappeared, leading to later loans to have *\*-ou-* → *-u-*, such as REE 64, 38 *lucies* (genitive, from the same stem; Etruscan had no velar vowel opposition, [o] and [u] merge into *-u-*). On the other hand, it must have survived ([o] > [â] > [a]) in the archaic loans after they entered the lexicon: this would account for *lautn-* in recent attestations, as for rec. *laucane* (e.g. in ET Cl 1.1897, loan from a root with *\*louk<sup>o</sup>*), which seems to share the same conditions.

In PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>on-* > Pit. *\*louðon-* the PIE word-internal voiced aspirate *-d<sup>h</sup>-* underwent fricativization (*-ð-*) as suggested by Rix (1957: 139; a slightly different account in Stuart-Smith 2004, with no consequences for our purposes). In Etruscan, which had no voice opposition for obstruents, it must have been rearranged as *-t-*. Etruscan *-t-* would better be the result of a Pit. *-d-*; actually there is quite no Italic language which preserves word-internal *-d-* < *-d<sup>h</sup>-* except Latin (Lat. *medius* < PIE *méd<sup>h</sup>ios*, Weiss 2009: 75), which in turn could not be our source, because in fact in an environment such as Pit. *\*louðon-* (that is, following a *-u-*), it would have become *\*\*loubon-* (as in *iubeo* < OLat. *ioubeo* < *\*h<sub>1</sub>ouð<sup>h</sup>-éje-*, from PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>leudh<sup>h</sup>-*; s. Meiser 1998: 104). The fricativization *-d<sup>h</sup>-* > *-ð-* seems to occur very early in Proto-Italic, and soon it leads to further developments in Italic languages. This means that the potential loan in Etruscan must have occurred at a very early date, because otherwise we would have expected other solutions.

**Final remarks.** In the end, the suggestion of an Italic loan for Etr. *lautn* seems to find good grounds in historical-linguistic analysis, even if this is affected by several problems, often difficult to solve. Moreover, we cannot forget that what seems to be theoretically acceptable is a very ancient loan, at the time when the split inside the Italic branch was only at the beginning (approx. around the end of II millennium B.C.). Other Italic loanwords in Etruscan belong all in historical times, most of them in Recent Etruscan (such as *tular* ‘border’, *nefts* ‘nephew’ and so on, s. Meiser 2009: 138–9, and 155–6 for Etr. *lautn*). This means that *lautn*, if an Italic loan, would be isolated, besides compelling us to rethink chronology and dynamics of the formation of the Etruscan *ἔθνος*.

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