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WATER PLACE NAMES IN THE PRE-LATIN LIGURIAN CONTEXT. A STUDY IN PREHISTORIC TOPONOMASTICS AND SEMANTICS*

This paper outlines a new applied epistemological aspect of the so-called *Convergence Theory* that is aimed to develop a potentially “homogeneous” vision between the different approaches in the field of Indo-European linguistics. This work tries to reconstruct an Italian and European toponymic area characterized by place names linked to the root **alb-*, with a delineation of the “semantic steps” produced, over the centuries, by the same root, following a potential all-embracing approach. It seems that paleo-Ligurian place names of the type *Alba*, Old European river names *Albis* and the like, as well as their ablauting forms *Olb-* (> *Orb-* in Romance Ligurian), do not directly reflect the proto-Indo-European adjective **albho-* ‘white’; but rather they all seem to continue a pre-proto-Indo-European extended root **Hal-bh-* ‘water’, cognate with the Sumerian *halbia* (> Akkadian *halpium* ‘spring’, ‘well’, ‘water mass’, ‘water hole’). A further analysis of this **Hal-bh-*, moreover, leads to a comparison with the proto-Indo-European root **Hal-* ‘nourish’. The proto-Indo-European suffixed form **HwaH-r-* ‘water’, then, demonstrates a similar diffusion.

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Key words: Italian language, Romance Ligurian, substrate toponymy, pre-Latin substrate, Convergence Theory, prehistoric European toponomastics, proto-Indo-European, pre-Indo-European, Ligurians.

To my mother

This paper outlines a new applied epistemological aspect of the so-called *Convergence Theory* and aims to reconstruct a toponymic area related to the root *alb- and to the “semantic steps” linked to the same root, with regard, especially, to Northern Italy (and, secondarily, to Europe), developing — remaining in the specific case of pre-Latin (pre-Indo-European, proto-Indo-European, and Indo-European) toponymy — this onomastic aspect of the *Convergence Theory* in relation to the different approaches of Indo-European linguistics (the Indo-European / Glottological, the pre-Indo-European, the pan-Indo-European, the pan-Semitic, the Paleolithic Continuity Paradigm / Paleolithic Continuity Theory / *Teoria della Continuità*, for example). The *Convergence Theory*, in fact, is mainly aimed at developing a potentially “homogeneous” vision between the different above mentioned approaches in the field of Indo-European linguistics, without emphasizing any one in particular, but trying to outline an all-embracing reconstruction that takes into account each of the scientific achievements of the other considered theories.

This paper, therefore, is a theoretical work with applied implications both in the area of toponymy / toponomastics, and in the field of semantics, with a specific focus on the delineation of an “ideal map” related to the notion of “water” and on the identification of “water places” in the analyzed area.

There are extremely ancient toponymic designations that not always can be reconstructed from roots directly highlighted in historically attested languages belonging to the Indo-European language family. In the context of Indo-European, it is plausible to conjecture the existence of “double roots”, where the first type includes properly Indo-European toponymic roots, while the second type is made up by toponymic roots which are hypothetically derived from other linguistic families. The factual means may have been made up both by contacts and “osmotic movements” (in both directions, to Indo-European from non-Indo-European and *vice versa*), and by common genealogical heritage (with all the reserves required by the discussion of the relations between the different languages within the Indo-European language family, of course). Such cases are found especially within groups of words in the field of onomastics and, perhaps in a greater percentage, in the area of toponymy (toponomastics), as a privileged sector of “substratistic” recognitions.

The issue we would like to address concerns the place names *Olbicella*. Olbicella is a suburb of Molare (municipality located in North-Western Italy, in Piedmont, now in the Province of Alessandria, near the city of Ovada, on the road that leads from Southern Piedmont to Genoa, the chief town of Liguria) situated along the Orba River, next to Lake Ortiglieto.

Dante Olivieri, in his *Dizionario di Toponomastica piemontese*, wrote about Olbicella: «Olbicella, fr. Molare, Aless. Forse forma in parte dialett. equival. ad un *Albicella, dal n. pers. germ. ALBIZO?» [Olivieri, 1965, 241].

The derivation proposed by the Italian scholar, *Olbicella* </= **Albicella* < *Albizo*, is part of the traditional practice that enhances, for etymological purposes, the observation — widely seen in micro-toponomastics — of the use of anthroponyms in order to coin local denominations, but in this case it is — because not accompanied by equally or even more sustainable alternatives — too much apodictic. So are almost all the toponymic reconstructions that trace back the origin of a place name (of bigger “size” than one individual or gentilial property) to a proper name of a person of any origin, according to the possibilities offered by the historical and linguistic local stratigraphy, without even an attempt of comparison with names that, being verifiable — or falsifiable — on both “levels” of the “sign” (thus — even within the limits of explicability of a geographical name — also on the semantic level, by definition excluded in the deonomastic formations, where etymology is not relevant), would set the hypothesis at a higher epistemological level. It provides, however, interesting information about the ancient reconstructed form of the place name, *Olbicella*: **Albicella*.

The root of the etymon of the place name is precisely **alb-*. Now we are going to explain why, trying to provide a linguistic contribution to the exact reconstruction of the original meaning of some place names and hydronyms of the Ligurian area (the cultural and linguistic area of formation of such toponyms as *Olbicella*, in the North-West of Italy) and outlining the existence of a “family” of place names that we like to call “water towns” (on the basis of the fact that not only an Indo-European root lies at the origin of their development).

We have evidence of common elements — albeit remote (in Indo-European) — in the cultural and linguistic area, between the ancient Ligurians (*Ligures*) and the (contemporaneous) inhabitants of Western Europe, historically known at least in part, as the Celts [De Bernardo Stempel, 2008]. A macroscopic toponymic isogloss concerns Britannia (perhaps only in the Southern area, in origin)¹: it is believed (and the hypothesis is very convincing) that *Albiōn*, the name of the ancestral origin of Britannia, is connected with the Ligurian toponymic forms *Albium* and *Album* [Petracco Sicardi, Caprini, 1981, 33]. The toponymic root of the name is common, being, in fact, **alb-* < Indo-European **albh-*. From *Albium* and *Album* derive — in the ancient and also “contemporary” Ligurian toponymy — among others, the homologous (homophone and homograph compared to the second lemma) forms *Album*, *Album Inganum*, *Album Ingaunum*, *Albingaunum*, 'Albenga', *Albium* (homologous, homophone, and homograph compared to the first lemma), *Albintimilium*, *Album Intimilium*, 'Ventimiglia'² (with this kind of toponymic

¹ Cf. [Rivet, Smith, 1979, 247–248]. In a non-Indo-European perspective see also [Semerano, 2001, 310].

² Cf. Strabo, *Γεωγραφικά* IV, 6, 1–2 and, on *Albingaunum* and *Albintimilium*, see [Gianattasio, 2007, 136].

reconstruction), *Albuca*, in Gaul and in Aquitaine³, *Alba*, in Italy, Piedmont, now in the Province of Cuneo, *Alba Heluorum*, in Provence, *Alba*, now *Arjona*, in Spain [DTI, 14]. Giacomo Devoto also reports as plausibly Ligurian (or conditioned in the onomastic formation), the place name *Albona*, Istrian town located a few kilometers away from the sea [Devoto, 1974, 36]. All of these names are attributable directly to the root **alb-* and to a *simplex* form that is *Album*. But *Album* is not primarily linked (we will ascertain later as it is a “shift” of meaning compared to the original) to the Latin *albus* 'white'. It derives, instead, from the root **albh-*, that is the basis, for example, of the Germanic hydronym *Albis*, the name of the *Elbe* River. All these names indicate settlements on waterways, on rivers, lakes, and seas, in practice places situated near water (and even hydronyms, names — in fact — of referrals that coincide with the iconym: waterways, watercourses).

What interests us here is that as the root **albh-* is the basis of the hydronym *Albis*, name of ancestral origin (as a paleo-European hydronym) of the *Elbe* river, so it is the generative component of some of the many names (ancient and “contemporary”) *Olbia* that denote, like all the other names derived from the root **albh-*, places located on canals, rivers, or seas. *Olbia*, the oldest colony of Miletus, on the Black Sea, for example, had, as an epichoric name, *Olbia* (without variants), derived from the root **albh-* with vocalic ablaut (apophony) of the initial [a-] in [o-] (the root **olbh-* is equivalent, on the lexical level, and it is derived, in the morphological point of view, from the base **albh-*)⁴. *Olbia* is attested, as a place name, in Britain, on the right bank of the Bug River (in Ukraine), in Provence⁵, in Italy (in Sardinia), and elsewhere — in very different latitudes — in Lycia and in Hellespont; especially in the case of the Hellenic colonies, of course, a motivational coincidence with the auspicious Greek adjective *ólbios* (*ὄλβιος*, female *ólbía*, *ὄλβία*) [DTI, 451; Pellegrini, 2008, 85] was normal.

If we remain within the range of names linked to the root **albh-* and to the meaning of “water”, it may be interesting to remember that *Albula* was the ancient name of the Italian river *Tevere* (Tiber, Latin *Tiberis*). *Albiōn*, the name of ancestral origin of Britain — from which we started in this reasoning — denotes, therefore, the largest island on the English Channel, a place situated on the water and surrounded by water⁶.

The reconstruction **albh-* (with **/bh/* required by the Germanic **/b/* in **Albiz* 'Elbe', 'Elba') is, however, not the only considered in the doxography. Giovanni Semerano, among the other supporters of the origin of the root **alb-* from a non-Indo-European linguistic “family” (in the theory of this author this “fact” is postulated by definition,

³ On *Albuca*, in Gaul and in Aquitaine, see [Villar, 2001, 217].

⁴ The Greek “reception” *Olbia* in relation to the antecedent Indo-European **Olbhīyā* presents the same characteristics (in the use of the vocalism /o/ and of the occlusive /b/) of the “near” *Borysthēnēs* < Indo-European **Bhoru-stenēs* 'murmuring among spruces' (personal comment by Prof. Dr. Guido Borghi).

⁵ See, on *Olbia* in Provence, [Gianattasio, 2007, 159].

⁶ It is necessary to remember that the name *Albiōn* is also generally taken to refer to the coastal white chalk cliffs (with, however, a close link to the notion of “water” and to the “white” colour, cf. [Perono Cacciafoco, 2008]), although alternative interpretations include 'hill' (Pokorny), 'world', 'light' (Meid) and 'white metal land', 'tin land' (Broderick).

since he denies the existence of Indo-European itself), proposes a derivation from the ancient Akkadian *halpium* (from the Sumerian *halbia*⁷), ‘well’, ‘spring’, ‘mass of water’, ‘water hole’ [Semerano, 2001, 310]. This form, then, would have been transferred to the toponymic system of the Indo-European languages, on the one hand remaining unchanged in the root **alb-* (in Semerano's perspective with the two variants, without [-l-], **ab-* and **ap-*)⁸ and, on the other hand, with the additional homologous stem derived from the vocalic replacement of [a-] with [o-], **olb-*, and with the modified lemma, originating from **olb-*, **orb-*, with [-r-] from [-l-] as a result of rhotacism (linguistic phenomenon peculiar, *inter alia*, in the Ligurian area).

Leaving aside Semerano's *a priori* negation of Indo-European and the consequent lack of justification for the connection between **alb-* and **ab- / *ap-*, the comparison established by the same Semerano — especially with the Sumerian *halbia* — imposes a broadening of perspective. A root partly bearing a chromatic meaning and, then, becoming an integral part of Indo-European toponyms and hydronyms, turns out to have even more remote origins. This consideration could explain, thus, the formation of names — like those listed above — of places located in the closeness of water-courses, water canals, rivers, lakes, sea. Thanks to this linguistic “fact” it is possible to effectively overcome the simplification (sometimes misused by the scholars in the field

⁷ The Sumerian *halbia* and the Akkadian *halpium* have also (if not primarily, originally) the meaning of ‘water’, that is an ‘all-embracing’ meaning linked also to the sema of ‘frost’ — water freezes — fact attested — at different latitudes — in several composed place names of the semantic type ‘cold / iced-water’, in Italian, for example, *Acquafredda*. The Sumerian and Akkadian forms have also a chromatic meaning that is not only linked to ‘white’, but also to ‘greyish’, and that is also related to the notion of ‘water’, as the colour of the ‘bed of a river washed away by the water’ or, indeed, of ‘ice’, ‘frost’ (in Italian *brina*). So, we have some semantic steps always attributable to the original notion of ‘water’. In the *Convergence Theory* system, that is the “foundation” of this paper, the semantic “passages” linked to the same root are fundamental in order to explain the dynamics of the re-use of specific roots in the Indo-European from other linguistic ‘families’ (like the Semitic). Very important, in this context, can be the work [Biggam, 2012]. I am not a “supporter” of Giovanni Semerano's theory, but in the *Convergence Theory* some Semerano's etymologies are important in the explanation process of the possible contacts between different linguistic “families” in remote ages (equally relevant is the *Paleolithic Continuity Paradigm*, in Italian *Teoria della Continuità*, by Prof. Mario Alinei and his teamwork). The “passage” from non-Indo-European linguistic “families” to the Indo-European concerns not only the roots and the derived words or place names, but also the semantics of the same words and place names, also in rapport to the geo-morphological context of the analyzed place names. Inherently in the semantic step ‘water’ — ‘white’, it is attested, in this area, also from the series of the composed place names of the type *Acquabianca* (‘white water’), a sort of “alternative” form compared to *Acquafredda* (‘cold / frozen water’), studied, among others (but without the contribution of historical phonetics), by Claudio Beretta [Beretta, 2007]. The *Convergence Theory* mitigates the “pan-Semitic” view of Giovanni Semerano and, on the other hand, the “pan-Indo-European” view and applies historical phonetics to the semantic etymological reconstructions, taking into account different positions and epistemological approaches.

⁸ **Ab- / *ap-* [Pokorny, 1959–1969, I, 51] is a proto-Indo-European root more ancient than the radical forms leading to *alba* in the meaning of ‘city’, ‘town’, and equivalent to the root **alb-*, that expresses the notion of ‘water’ [Alinei, 2000, 539]. In Gallic, for example, the root **ab-*, **ap-* (this latter from **akw-*) means ‘river’. It is witnessed, *inter alia*, in the Gallic form *Abona* [Lewis, Pedersen, 1961, 38]. We also know a Bastetanian town named *Abula* (Southern Spain).

of toponomastics) that combines almost all the toponyms formed by the **alb-* root to the Ligurian-Roman radical (the definition itself is ambiguous) *alba*⁹ ‘city’, ‘town’, surely applicable in some cases (and we will explain why), but not connectable, in the context now outlined, with the place names we have mentioned. The Ligurian bases from which the form *alba* would be derived, in fact, would be **albo-*, **albio-*, and **alba-*, in the meaning, exactly, of ‘city’, ‘town’. Our discussion, however, requires a step back. The **h_aalbh-* root, originally ‘water’, is used to indicate — applied to a place name — a place, a “locality” situated in the closeness of water. In this connection, in the field of Indo-European, we are also able to highlight a semantic transition. **H_aalbh-*, from ‘water’ and, therefore, in toponomastics, from ‘place located in the closeness of water’, takes, in fact, the extensive and generic meaning of ‘place’, ‘city’, ‘town’. In the transition from an onomastic system connected to the first anthropization to the later ones, until the proto-urban phase, over the centuries, the semantic peculiarity related to the concept of ‘water’ has been lost. Peculiarity attested, however, in the places located in the adjacency of watercourses (places that constitute the numerical preponderance, due to the proximity of these places to waterways, which is fundamental to the birth and development of a village or a town), places like Olbicella. Their names are composed by the old and not exclusively Indo-European (*stricto sensu*) root **h_aalbh-*, that has preserved the original meaning¹⁰.

⁹ On the name *Albera Ligure*, Italian place located in Piedmont, now in the Province of Alessandria, see [Lamboglia, 1946, 79–81; Petracco Sicardi, 1981; Petracco Sicardi, Caprini, 1981, 12, 33].

¹⁰ On the other hand, the paleo-Ligurian origin of the place name *Alba* of the town of Alba is acknowledged as plausibly sure, the place being located in Italy (Piedmont), now in the Province of Cuneo, Roman *municipium* in the Augustan age, colony in the II century, parish in the V century [Petracco Sicardi, Caprini, 1981, 33], *Alba Pompeia* after 89 BC, probably in honor of the consul Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo. Nino Lamboglia [Lamboglia, 1946, 79–81] and Giulia Petracco Sicardi [Petracco Sicardi, Caprini, 1981, 12, 33] attribute the meaning of ‘capital city’ / ‘administrative centre’ (*città capoluogo*) to the place name. This seme is plausible, however, only as a further development of a different onomastic origin linked directly to the pre-Proto-Indo-European root **h_aalbh-*, connected to the meaning of ‘water’ and, specifically, of ‘place situated in close proximity of water’. Alba, in fact, is located for the most part of its extension on the right bank of the Tanaro River and there is no doubt about the atavistic link between the town and the Tanaro River. Alba was inhabited in remote times, already in the Neolithic, at least from the VI millennium BC (and grew further during the Copper Age — Eneolithic — and the Bronze and Iron Ages, cf. [Pessina, Tiné, 2008, 47, 56, 99, 119, 130, 132, 143, 148, 231–232, 250–251; Bietti Sestieri, 2010, 39, 42–43]), and it was precisely in this chronological period that the place name “took shape”, the name derived from the root **albh-* and showing a ‘town built near water’, on the Tanaro River, in this case. Strabo (cf. *Γεωγραφικά* IV, 6, 2) associated the place name *Alba* to the oronym *Alpes*, pointing out — very loosely and too roughly — that the Ligurian cities were often founded on the heights. In this case (and in many others), however, the assertion of Strabo does not seem to make sense, because Alba is located 172 meters above sea level, in a broad flat valley now surrounded by the splendid hills covered by vineyards of the Langhe and Roero. Thus, it has nothing to do with heights, while the fact of being located along the Tanaro River reports, however, the undying bond of the city with water. About the origin of the oronym *Alpi* (that is not the subject of this work; here, I will marginally analyze the Latin *Alpēs*, singular (especially poetic) *Alpis*, Greek *Ἄλβια*, a derivation from the root **alp-*, perhaps a variant of the radical **alb-* meaning ‘mountain’, ‘hill’, ‘stone’, is controversial. **Alb-* indicates ‘water’

It should also be pointed out that the toponyms derived from the root **albh-* are part of a series of place names known on the basis of common names of various historical Indo-European languages, both in relation to water, such as **war-* ‘water’, ‘river’, ‘rain’, **pal-* ‘stagnant water’, ‘puddle’, ‘backwater’, **mar-* ‘lagoon’, ‘sea’, and indicating characteristics or qualities of water or of water currents, such as, for example, **tar-* ‘strong’, ‘penetrating’, **ais-* ‘fast’, and, indeed, **albho-* ‘light’, ‘white’ [Villar, 1996, 117]. In the common Indo-European language, then, in addition to these roots, the radicals **ab-* and **ap-* always express, originally, the concept of “water” [Pokorny, 1959–1969, I, 23, 51, 79, 80; Devoto, 1962, 329, 331, 528, 529, 708; Alinei, 1996, 505].

So, the Latin *albus* derives from **albho-*, but the origin of this color name descends from a characteristic related to water, to the water “color”, precisely. The late Indo-European stem **albho-*, thus, derives from the root not only strictly Indo-European **h_aalbh-*, that means ‘water’. Hereby we are able to outline the semantic transition that leads to the stratification of different meanings for the same root in the passage from the ancient and remote phases of Indo-European to late-Indo-European; *id est* pre-Proto-Indo-European **h_aalbh-* = ‘water’ and, extensively, ‘place situated near water’ → Indo-European **[h_a]albho-* ‘white’¹¹, originally indicating light / clear color of water and, then, ‘white’, considered as a generic color, Latin *albus* ~ **albhā* (late-Indo-European form), understood as ‘city’, ‘town’, simplified meaning derived from the pre-Proto-Indo-European **h_aalbh-* in the ‘place situated near water’ seme. It should be noted, in this regard, as mentioned above, that the original name of the Italian Tevere (Tiber, Latin *Tiberis*) River was *Albula*, and its variant can be found in the manuscripts of Dionysius Periegetes (and in the related commentary by Eustathius) and of Stephanus Byzantinus in the form of *Alba*.

Indo-European, on the other hand, has not drastically and totally lost the meaning of the root **h_aalbh-* and, on the contrary, it has preserved this in different variants. The Hittite lexeme *alpa-s* ‘cloud’¹², whose connection with the Indo-European **albhos* ‘white’ (formally possible in the hypothesis of an antecedent **h_aalbhos*), was rejected for semantic reasons (since «*alpa-* is predominantly associated with rain and thunder» [Kloekhorst, 2008, 169]), finds an unexceptionable etymology¹³ in the iconym ‘water’. If, then, we analyze **h_aalbh-* as an “extending root” **h_aal-bh-*, we can also recognize

and it is difficult to connect this form to the meaning of ‘mountain’; it is, however, plausible to derive the oronym *Alpi* from another lemma (in all probability wrongly discarded by most scholars), the Gallic form **alpis*, **alpā*, ‘mountain pasture’, nominal lemma with the Central Celtic suffix **-pi*, **-pā*, derived from the pre-Proto-Indo-European root **h_aal-* ‘nourish’ (cf. [LEI, II, 210 ff]); the root **h_aal-*, peculiarly, is connected, in turn, with water and with the fish that is nourishment for men obtained from the same water).

¹¹ An excellent recent book on historical colour semantics is [Biggam, 2012] (particularly relevant is the Chapter 11, *Prehistoric Colour Studies*, pp. 169–183).

¹² This is not the only meaning that has been proposed. Melchert suggests also ‘faintness’, ‘weakness’ [Melchert, 2003, 285 *et passim*].

¹³ Personal comment by Prof. Dr. Guido Borghi.

an “equable” of this in **h_aal-eu-* ‘disorderly wander’ [Borghi, 2008, 836–837], a root of hydronymic use and, in the appellative meaning, started to indicate hydromel (mead) and beer [Pokorny, 1959, 33–34].

In addition, according to Mario Alinei (as part of the Paleolithic Continuity Paradigm / Paleolithic Continuity Theory / *Teoria della Continuità*, cf. [Alinei, 1996, 581]), the root **alb-* can be connected to the proto-Indo-European radical **al-*, which is evidenced by the meaning of ‘feed’, ‘nourish’ in the Italic (Latin *alō* ‘feed’, ‘nourish’), in the Celtic (Old Irish *alim*, ‘I nourish’), and in the Germanic (Old Icelandic *ala* ‘feed’) areas respectively. This semantic feature inherent in the notion of ‘feed’, ‘nourish’, however, is closely linked to the concept of water, because (always according to Alinei and in the context of the Paleolithic Continuity Paradigm) this root would be easily connectable with the Germanic name of the eel, German *Aal*, English *eel*, Old High German and Old Saxon *āl*, Old Frisian *ēl*, Netherlandish *aal*, Old Icelandic *āl*, Danish and Swedish *ål*. Apparently devoid of etymology in the traditional reconstruction, in the Paleolithic Continuity Paradigm it is, instead, directly connected to the introduction of fish in the nutrition of the Upper Paleolithic and, therefore, to the aforementioned root **al-* in the meaning of ‘feeding’, ‘nourish’, in this case related to the concept of ‘feeding / nourishment with fish’, the kind of food evidently derived from water and plausible, in such a remote age, as a new element of diet only in places located in close proximity to watercourses or to the sea.

Thus, there is a close relationship — that is a sort of formal priority of the one and of semantic necessity of the other — between the radicals **al-* and **albh-*, up to the point where these two forms are variants of a single root referable to the notion of water and, for what concerns toponomastics, to the toponymic indication of a place situated close to a watercourse or to the sea. The root **alb-* regains, in this reconstruction, two fundamental aspects, the pre-Proto-Indo-European origin (that corroborates the recovery of Semerano's comparative hypothesis, with the inclusion of Sumerian) and the ancient and direct link with the ancestral notion of ‘water’. The origins of the root seem, thus, with valid plausibility, pre-Proto-Indo-European and can be placed in a macro-genealogical linguistic “axis” of a probably Nostratic radical¹⁴, as regards the antiquity, and coming, therefore, in the final analysis (with an adequate areal coincidence between the theories on Indo-European prehistory and the role of Akkadian according to Semerano), from the Near and the Middle East. Indo-European, then, has retained in its own onomastic system the root, producing the same radical in the above listed variants and giving rise, over the centuries, to the transformation of the original meaning of the root that still is reflected, by the way, in many place names, especially — in Italy — in the Ligurian area, as *Olbicella* (< **Olbikellā*).

¹⁴ Aharon Dolgopolsky reconstructs an ancestor for the pre-Indo-European **albho-* as **halbs* or **χalbs* (where *χ* indicates an unknown vowel), meaning ‘white’. The scholar gives more cognates, including Hamitic and Semitic words for ‘milk’, and a Dravidian root meaning ‘clear (of liquids)’ [Dolgopolsky, 1998].

The **alb-* root, moreover, is yet expressed — as outlined above — in the **olb-* variant (from which many of the place names *Olbia* in the ancient and also in the “contemporary” world derive and from which the toponym *Olbicella* descends). As mentioned above, the transformation of [-l-] into [-r-] (rhotacism) is a linguistic phenomenon typical of the Ligurian area, here — precisely — in post-vocalic context and before a bilabial consonant, and, therefore, the root **olb-* is equivalent, in this case, to the Romance (Ligurian) radical **orb-*. This consideration leads us to an interesting observation inherent in the name of the *Orba* river¹⁵, that flows (among many other places, before debouching, at the end of its course, in the Bormida River) precisely in the territory of *Olbicella* and close to the lake of Ortiglieto. The first known attestation of the hydronym dates back to 1137 and the handed down form is *Urba* [BSSS, CXIII, 38, 53], then replicated in 1176 by the wording «*super fluvium Urbae*» [BSSS, XXIX, 74, 94]. Concerning the etymological explanation of the hydronym, the proposed derivation from the Latin *urbs* appears simplistic and meaningless. Already Serra considered the pre-Latin origin of this name and held it close to other equivalent hydronyms of the Ligurian and Gallic territories (e. g. *Orba*, *Orge*, *Orbs*) [Serra, 1931, 126]. Also, Serra had the right intuition (although he did not arrive at the proper deduction, leaving the explanation of the hydronym in the vagueness of the pre-Latin substrate), because the river name *Orba* precisely derives from the root **olb-*, apophonic / ablauting variant of the root **alb-* 'water', with the transformation — typical, as mentioned, of the Ligurian-Romance linguistic area where the torrent flows — of the [-l-] into [-r-] in **orb-*.

So, the root **alb-* is the stem not only of the place name *Olbicella*, but also of the hydronym *Orba*. Moreover, there is a sort of “point of union” between the place name and the hydronym, represented by another hydronym, *Orbicella*, an affluent of the *Orba* River which flows precisely near *Olbicella*. The form *Orbicella*, variant of *Olbicella* and the name of the affluent of the *Orba* River, is a linguistic trace of the equivalence of the root **olb-* > Romance **orb-* in the place name *Olbicella* and in the hydronym *Orba* and is evidence of the rhotacism phenomenon typical of the Ligurian area. Thus, there is a very close relationship, from the point of view of onomastic affinity (when not of direct equivalence), between the names *Olbicella* (with preservation of // from the chancery tradition), *Orbicella* (with receipt of rhotacism, made official later, because of the lesser importance of the referent), and *Orba*; additionally, a close morphological relationship exists between the pre-Proto-Indo-European radical apophonic variants (dating back to a possible Nostratic origin and ancestrally sourced from the Near / Middle East), which then become Indo-European toponymic formations, **h_aalbh-* → **h_aolbh-* (> **olb-*).

The Medieval form *Urba* in the *Orba* hydronym attests a “change” from the initial [o-] to [u-] that indicates, *inter alia*, the loss (occurred in much later centuries),

¹⁵ This is the «*Orba selvosa*» in the celebrated ode *Marzo 1821* by the famous Italian poet Alessandro Manzoni (v. 19).

in the speaking — and writing — subjects, of the ancestral meaning of the name, dating back, plausibly, to a pre-proto-Indo-European appellative source, then transferred in the toponymic use by the local Indo-European. Due to a coincidence, however, the form *Urba*, that recalls the Latin *urbs* ‘city’, ‘town’, has the same meaning of the above mentioned Indo-European stem **albhā*, derived from the root **alb-*, when the same, by that time, started to indicate (from ‘place on the water’, ‘water town’ = **albh-*) the simplified and generic notion of ‘city’, ‘town’ (> **albā*).

The same reasoning has to be developed inherently in the place name of the village of *Urbe*, that is located (in Italy, Liguria, now in the Province of Savona) in the valley of the Orba River (in the upper basin of the watercourse). The place name coincides (with the variant of the initial [o-] / [u-]) with the hydronym *Orba* and derives from the same root, being equivalent to the same place name and the hydronym [DTI, 676]. The variation of the radical form **olb-* > **orb-*, with the rhotacistic transformation, is recognizable even in the names of two of the small hamlets that make up the municipality of *Urbe* (that is a “scattered” and “composite” village), *Martina d’Olba* and *San Pietro d’Olba* (here the graphic *-l-*, perhaps conservatively, for official use, perhaps accidentally, in the chancery stratifications, takes precedence over the *-r-*, in an alternation already found about the place name *Olbicella* and the hydronym *Orbicella*).

We have to note, moreover, that *Urbe*, as a municipality, is formed, apart from these two hamlets, by the small localities of *Acquabianca* (**albh-* ‘water’, **albho-* ‘white’ → **albh[o]-albhā* ‘light / clear water’, ‘limpid water’, ‘white water’, almost a “translation” of the radicals involved in a decisive way in the toponymic and hydronymic development of the names of the area under our consideration) and of *Vara Inferiore* and *Vara Superiore*. The onomastic stem of the two hamlets called *Vara* is **war-* (**wer-*/**uer-*, **wor-*/**uor-*), root of the common Indo-European meaning ‘water’, ‘river’, ‘rain’¹⁶ and that is, moreover, the radical of the name of the *Vara* River, the longest watercourse in Liguria, flowing entirely in the territory of the Province of La Spezia and giving the name to the homonymous valley (*Val di Vara*). The place name *Vara* (of *Vara Inferiore* and *Vara Superiore*) and the hydronym *Vara* have a remote origin and are part of a “Mediterranean” onomastic system characterized *prima facie* by the phonetic sequence [-a...-a-] [Devoto, 1974, 28]. Since the diffusion of this specific kind of names in [-a...-a-] is much more extensive than the Indo-European traditional and conventional areas, it seems plausible that these place names and hydronyms date back to an ancient period, and, thus, pre-late-Indo-European (in the case of the root **war-* in the form *Vara* and, in general, of the “Mediterranean” phonetic sequences [-a...-a-], we are witnessing a regular transformation starting from Indo-European laryngeals in the position of a syllabic core or adjacent to short vowels: **wārā* <

¹⁶ The root of the common Indo-European **war-* expresses the concept of ‘water’, as well as other equivalent bases, such as **ur-*, **wond-*, **und-*, **ak^w-*, **ap-* (not only Indo-European), **ab-* (not only Indo-European), **up-*. Cf. [Devoto, 1962, 329, 331, 528, 529, 708; Pokorny 1959–1969, I, 23, 51, 79, 80; Villar 1996, 117; Alinei, 1996, 505].

**h_awah_a-rah_a* [Wodtko, Irslinger, Schneider, 2008, 356–357] or even, in Celtic, from *[*H*]woh₁-rah_a [Falileyev, 2007, 30]). Among the numerous examples of place names and hydronyms derived from the root **war-*, proving the system of double [-a-], we can mention again, in order to be brief, the name of the town of *Varallo*¹⁷ (Italy, Piedmont, now in the Province of Vercelli), in the Valsesia, situated at the confluence of the Mastellone torrent with the Sesia River, and the name of the *Varàita* torrent, that debouches into the Po River. The notion of ‘water’, in these cases, is always present and, in particular, it is the concept of the ‘river water’ and of the ‘rainwater’ that feeds rivers and torrents and that allows the life of the villages and of the towns that arise near the watercourses. So, the meaning of ‘water’ is repeated throughout all the toponymic series of the places that contribute to form the municipality of Urbe, as well as in the hydronym *Orba* and in the place name *Olbicella*.

With reference to the root **alb-* meaning ‘water’ and, within the area of toponomastics, at the basis of place names indicating ‘towns / cities / hamlets / sites / villages located near water’, we could mention numerous toponyms derived from the same radical and it might be interesting (but it is not the subject of this study, also due to reasons of “extension”) to draw the distinction between the place names designating a ‘site located in close proximity to water’ (therefore, in the original meaning of the root) and the names indicating a ‘city’ / ‘town’ (in the “new” generic and later sense of the same radical). In this connection, only one example will suffice here concerning *Albisola*, a town located in Italy, Liguria, now in the Province of Savona. It is necessary to distinguish between *Albisola Superiore*, a place of prehistoric origin founded by the *Ligures Docilii*, and *Albissola Marina*, also founded in prehistoric times, but by the *Ligures Ingauni*¹⁸ and independent — already in ancient ages — from the centre of *Albisola Superiore*. Writing about the same *Albisola Superiore* Giulia Petracco Sicardi declares as Roman the origin of the place name, from *Alba Docilia* [DTI, 17], and *alba* would be, in this place name, evidence of the aforementioned Ligurian-Roman form *alba* in the meaning of ‘city’, ‘town’. This approach, however, leaves aside the fact that *Albisola* was founded, as mentioned, by the *Ligures Docilii* in prehistoric times and that the Romanization of the territory, therefore, could take place much later than the creation of the place name. *Albisola* had in ancient times, by the *Ligures Docilii*¹⁹, the name *Alba*, but not in the meaning of ‘city’. The sense of that prehistoric *Alba* was, instead, derived from the pre-proto-Indo-European root **albh-*, connected to the notion of ‘water’, and, therefore, the *Alba* of the *Docilii* wanted to

¹⁷ Formed by a second Celtic element **allo-* ‘precipice’ (< Indo-European **p/ʰlso-*, cf. [Matasović, 2009, 120–121]), in reference to the rocky outcrop of the Sacro Monte (personal comment by Prof. Dr. Guido Borghi).

¹⁸ The territory of the *Ligures Ingauni* had, as its main centre, the town of Albenga, *Album Ingaunum*, *Alba Ingaunum*, *Albingaunum*.

¹⁹ The *Docilii* were a Ligurian tribe allocated, prior to the Roman conquest, in a territory between *Albisola* and *Sassello* (Italy, Liguria, now in the Province of Savona). Their lands bordered those of *Sabazi* and of *Statielli*.

indicate, originally, a ‘place situated near water’, in this case near the sea (Ligurian Sea). On the other hand, Petracco Sicardi rightly points out how the Roman name *Alba Docilia* is mentioned, as the first attestation, only in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*²⁰, a relatively late documentary source that can suggest nothing, therefore, about the antiquity of the name and, even less, about its original meaning. So, we found here a very significant example of the semantic transition ‘water’ > ‘town situated on the water’ > ‘town’ sustained over the centuries by the pre-proto-Indo-European root **h_aalbh-*, merged in the onomastic system of the Indo-European languages (the paleo-Ligurian substrate of Latin, in this case). We note parenthetically that Petracco Sicardi derives the *Docilia* of *Alba Docilia* from a Roman *gentilicium* (family name) *Dolcilius* (that she says to be probably of Celtic origin), while it seems clear that the *Docilia* of *Alba Docilia* derives from the name of the *Docilii*, the Ligurian inhabitants — already in prehistoric times — of the original settlement of Albisola. The medieval place name *Albuzola* (or *Albizola*) shows how the root **alb-* has maintained, over the centuries, its strength, leaving out of consideration the name in the “free form” *alba* and that, despite the loss, in speaking — and writing — subjects, of the notion of the original meaning of the radical **alb-* (and, probably, also of the basis *alba*), it is, *de facto*, the constituent element of remote origin of the place name. Petracco Sicardi [DTI, 17] adds that the medieval name of the place, *Albizola* or *Albuzola*, is documented in the XII century. It seems to be, instead, older. In fact, the name is attested, for example, in the *Charta* of foundation and donation of St. Quentin's Abbey (Abbazia di San Quintino) in Spigno Monferrato (a place located in Italy, Piedmont, now in the Province of Alessandria), document dating back to the May 4th of the year 991, in the form *Albuzola* (and it seems well established, by now, that this name designates precisely Albisola)²¹. In this toponymic variant the root **alb-* shows, thus — even if lost and often misunderstood, in its original meaning, in the perception of the linguistic subjects — its onomastic strength and the persistence in the structure of the names being part of this toponymic and hydronymic “family”.

So, another place located on the water and, precisely, on the sea, takes the origin of its name from prehistory and from the ancient pre-proto-Indo-European root **h_aalbh-* ‘water’.

In the Roman age Liguria²² presents some well identified linguistic strata, Latin, Gallic (or, at least, an ancient Central Celtic with the complete — and completed —

²⁰ The *Tabula Peutingeriana* is a copy dating from the XII–XIII century of an ancient Roman map that showed the military roads of the Empire. This document derives the name from the humanist and classicist Konrad Peutinger, who inherited the *Tabula* from his friend Konrad Bickel.

²¹ Cf. [Bosio, 1972, 19, 33, 126–128], and inherently in the issue of the effective presence of the place name in the *Charta*, see [Perono Cacciafoco, 2003, 22].

²² In Antiquity Ligurians resided in a territory that included the Côte d'Azur and the Riviera. The land of this population stretched from the city of Pisa and from the Arno River (Italy, Toscana), to the east, to the Rhone River, to the west. We also have to consider the Ligurian populations of some islands, such as Corsica and Elba, mentioned by several authors. In a general way, we talk about Ligurians inhabiting the whole coast, also to the west of the Rhone River and up to the mouth of the Ebro River. Sometimes

dephonologization of */*φ*/ < */*p*/ and labialization of */*k^w*/ > */*p*/), the so-called Lepontic-Ligurian (Southern Celtic characterized by the residual traces of the phoneme */*φ*/ < */*p*/ in intervocalic position and by the sporadic persistence of */*k^w*/), paleo-European hydronymic (“alteuropäisch”), and Ligustic or paleo-Ligurian. The names more easily “explainable” are, of course, the Latin names (and the names of Latin origin). But the desire to bring back the onomastics and the toponomastics of the Ligurian area almost exclusively to the Roman age is a methodologically incorrect operation and also it is even a cause of obvious mistakes. In the origin, many names are inherently Celtic (Gallic or Lepontic), as e. g. *Dunomarus*. Others, instead, do not provide reliable evidence, if we remain within the lexicon attributed to the historical Indo-European languages. For example, in *Albialus* the */*albh-* stem (that is */*h_aalbh-*) presents lexical and derivational peculiarities that do not allow, concretely, a specific attribution to none of the above mentioned first three known strata. In addition, we also have to note the likely pre-*proto-Indo-European* origin of the root */*albh-*, that is the radical */*h_aal-bh-* in the ancestral meaning of ‘water’ (and, extensively, of ‘place located near water’) and then — in common Indo-European — of ‘white’ (understood as the light / clear color of water) and in the generic meaning, in */*albhā*, of ‘city’, ‘town’ (in the simplified notion derived from the extensive seme of the pre-*proto-Indo-European* stem */*h_aalbh-*). Francisco Villar says, about the Indo-European setting and on the extra-Indo-European comparability of the Ligurian toponyms: «The Indo-European elements are quite abundant, both in anthroponymy, and in toponymy. But we have no right to consider specifically Ligurian all the Indo-European names that do not belong to the other three historical Indo-European strata (Lepontic, Gallic, and Latin). Because nothing assures us that, in addition to those known, there has not been another or, even, others...» [Villar, 1996, 469]. It is precisely in this area that the hypothesis about the pre-*proto-Indo-European* origin of the root */*h_aalbh-* in the meanings, in the parallel forms, and in the derivations that we enucleated so far takes heuristic significance.

In closing, an onomastic note. *Orba* is also attested as the personal name of a sovereign in Medieval Ireland. In this case, however, the name is not derived (although apparently homologous to that of the Orba River) from the root */*albh-* (*/*olbh-*), but it descends from the *proto-Indo-European* stem */*orbho-*, that means ‘orphan’, ‘forsaken’, ‘abandoned’ [Pokorny, 1959–1969, I, 781; Alinei 1996, 668], and that in the Celtic and Germanic areas (and only in these areas) takes the seme of ‘heir’, ‘legacy’, ‘heritage’ [Alinei, 2000, 566] (Old Irish *orbe* ‘legacy’, *orbam* ‘heir’, *comarbe* ‘co-heir’, Gothic *arbja*, Old Icelandic *arfi* and *arfr*, Old High German *arpeo*, *erbo*, Middle High German *Erbe* ‘heir’, Anglo-Saxon *ierfe*, Gothic and Old High German *arbi*) [Hubert, 1934, I, 66; Buck, 1949, 779–780]. In this case, therefore, the regal Irish name *Orba* means ‘heir’, ‘heir of the kingship’ and,

due to this western “extension” of this population, the name of “Ibero-Ligurians” is used. The Greek colony of Massilia, now Marseilles, moreover, was located in the middle of the territory of the *Ligures Saluvi*, one of the Ligurian tribes. Cf. [Villar, 1996, 465, 469; Pallottino, 1981].

then, ‘prince’ and, in consequence, ‘king’, and the proto-Indo-European and, then, late-Indo-European root at the origin of this name is not **albh-*, but **orbho-*.

It is, therefore, demonstrated that the name of the hamlet of the municipality of Molare *Olbicella*, the name of the village of *Urbe* (and of two of the localities that contribute to constitute it, *Martina d'Olba* and *San Pietro d'Olba*), and the hydronyms of the *Orba* River and of its affluent *Orbicella* derive from a common pre-Indo-European root of a remote origin and persistent over the time, **h_aalbh-*, indicating the notion of ‘water’ and applied, therefore, to the formation of names of waterways / watercourses, or of areas located near the water (streams, torrents, rivers, lakes, and sea), the root that discloses its morphology, in this case, through the equivalent apophonic / ablauting variant **h_aolbh-*, then developed through the passage — typical of the ancient Romance Ligurian area that “contains” the places designated by the analyzed place names — of [-l-] into [-r-] in the form **orb-*. So, we have also found the equal persistence over the time of proto-Indo-European (of common Indo-European) root **h_awah_a-r-*, indicating the notions of ‘water’, ‘river’, and ‘rain’, in the names of the places of *Vara Superiore* and *Vara Inferiore*, hamlets of the “composite” village of *Urbe*, and in numerous other places situated in close proximity to watercourses and in hydronyms always part of the ancient Ligurian onomastic area.

So, the analysis undertaken reveals a panorama of “water towns” all joined by the same toponymic origin derived from the pre-Indo-European root **h_aalbh-* or from the basis **h_awah_a-r-*, originally indicating the notion of “water”.

It is, therefore, possible to recognize the existence of a toponymic and hydronymic “family”²³ that descends from the common pre-Indo-European root **h_aalbh-* (then subjected to the dephonologization of the laryngeal and morphologically transformed in the variants **albh-*, **olbh-* [> **olb-* > /*orb-*/], **albhā*, **albho-*, and, in terms of meaning [seme], in the sequences ‘water’ → ‘place situated near water’ → ‘place located on the water’ → ‘town’ and ‘water’ → ‘clear / light water’ → ‘white water’ → ‘white’) and that incorporates the names of the villages of *Olbicella* and *Urbe* and the hydronyms of the River *Orba* and of the torrent *Orbicella*.

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²³ On the toponymic and hydronymic European “families” linked to the “water roots” and to the “water notion” (especially in the North-Western Italy) and on the paleoanthropology of those territories see [Perono Cacciafoco, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012]. Very interesting, in different contexts, are [Kitson, 1996, 83–86 *et passim*] (on the different strata of river names in *Alb-* and *Arg-*), [Untermann, 2009, 20 *et passim*] (on **albho-* / *-ā*), and [Bichlmeier, 2012].

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ГИДРОНИМИЯ ДОЛАТИНСКОЙ ЛИГУРИИ. ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ПО ДОИСТОРИЧЕСКОЙ ТОПОНИМИКЕ И СЕМАНТИКЕ

В статье рассматривается одна из новых возможностей приложения так называемой теории конвергенции, которая направлена на преодоление противоречий между различными подходами в области индоевропейского языкознания. Следуя потенциально всеобъемлющему подходу, автор пытается реконструировать итальянские и европейские топонимические ареалы, характеризующиеся географическими названиями, связанными с корнем **alb-*, очертить семантические сдвиги, произошедшие с течением времени в значении корня. Видимо, палеолигурийские топонимы типа *Alba*, старые европейские гидронимы *Albis* и т. п., а также их аблаутные формы *Olb-* (> *Orb-* в романском лигурийском) непосредственно не отражают пра-протоиндоевропейского прилагательного **albho-* ‘белый’, но все они являются продолжением пра-протоиндоевропейского расширенного корня **Hal-bh-* ‘вода’, родственного шумерскому *halbia* (> аккадское *halpium* ‘весна’, ‘процветание’, ‘водная масса’, ‘водный источник’). Дальнейший анализ этого корня **Hal-bh-* приводит к сравнению с протоиндоевропейским корнем **Hal-* ‘питать’. Протоиндоевропейская суффиксальная форма **HwaH-r-* ‘вода’ обнаруживает аналогичное распределение.

Ключевые слова: итальянский язык, романский лигурийский, субстратная топонимия, долатинский субстрат, теория конвергенции, доисторическая европейская топономастика, протоиндоевропейский, пра-протоиндоевропейский, лигурийский.