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Unde venisti? The Prehistory of Italic through its Loanword Lexicon

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UNDE VENISTI

The Prehistory of Italic through its Loanword Lexicon

Andrew Wigman

Latin is one of the most important Indo-European languages in European history. Between the dissolution of Proto-Indo-European on the Pontic-Caspian steppe and the first attestation of written Latin on the Italian Peninsula, the ancestors of Latin-speakers had more than two millennia to migrate across Europe. The Europe that they entered was not empty however. It had been populated by farmers for three thousand years, and by hunter-gatherers for nearly ten thousand years before that. This dissertation investigates the lexemes in Latin that may have been borrowed from the languages that these populations spoke and combines the insights gained with lines of evidence from genetics and archaeology to hypothesize on the route that brought the ancestors of Latin-speakers into Italy.

A large portion of the prehistoric loanwords in Latin attests to its presence in the Mediterranean. But older strata from its ancestors' travels north of the Alps are also preserved, albeit in smaller quantities. They attest to contact with a language or group of languages with which the Germanic and Celtic language subgroups also had contact, suggesting they were taken up during the time of the early steppe migrations to the Northwest. Other loanwords that are present beside Latin in several other languages of Europe point to their having been borrowed from a widespread language family, perhaps that of the European farmers. Several lines of evidence point to the spread of the Italic language family into the Italian Peninsula from the Northeast, around the end of the transition of the Bronze Age into the Iron Age.

