

**TOPONYMIC CONVERGENCE:
PLACE NAMES AND THE ROOT *ALB- IN PREHISTORIC
LIGURIA**

UDC 811.1/.2'01'373.21(450.42)

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Abstract. *This paper outlines a new epistemological aspect of the so-called Convergence Theory. Its aim is to develop a unified theory which would comprise all the different theories of Indo-European Linguistics. This analysis tries to "reconstruct" a sort of Italian and European "macro-area" (or "micro-area", depending on the point of view), characterized by place names related to the word-root *alb-, with a delineation of the "semantic steps" made over the centuries by this word-root. It seems that Paleo-Ligurian place names of the Alba type, together with Old European river names Albis and their later forms Olb- (> Orb- in Romance Ligurian), do not directly reflect the proto-Indo-European adjective *albho-, 'white'. On the contrary, they all seem to contain a pre-Indo-European extended root *Hal-bh-, 'water', a cognate with the Sumerian ḫalbia (> Akkadian ḫalpium, 'spring', 'well', 'water mass', 'water hole'). Further analysis of the same *Hal-bh- calls for a comparison with the proto-Indo-European root *Hal-, 'nourish'. The proto-Indo-European suffixed form *HwaH-r-, 'water', exhibits a similar diffusion.*

Key words: *Convergence Theory; *alb-; *Hal-bh-; Liguria; Olbicella; European Prehistoric Toponymy*

To my mother

The paper *Toponymic Convergence: Place Names and the Root *alb- in Prehistoric Liguria* outlines a new epistemological aspect of the so-called *Convergence Theory* (in Italian *Teoria della Conciliazione*). This analysis is aimed at the "reconstruction" of a toponymic "macro-area" (or "micro-area", depending on the point of view) concerned with the word-root *alb- and with its semantics, especially with regard to Northern Italy (and, secondarily, to Europe). Furthermore, it seeks to develop, in the context 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 in 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 unified overview of the above mentioned different 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 all the other theories. This paper, therefore, is a theoretical work with potential practical application, both in the ambit 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 the identification of "water places" in the analyzed area.

There are extremely ancient toponymic designations that cannot always be reconstructed from roots directly attested in historical languages belonging to the Indo-European linguistic family. Thus, we should consider the possibility of the existence of "double roots", explained from Indo-European traditions properly called, in one case, and integrated, instead, from the documentation of different families of languages, in the other case.

The factual means may have been made up both by contacts and "osmotic movements" (in both directions, to the Indo-European from the non-Indo-European and *vice versa*), and by common genealogical heritage (with all the reserves required by the discussion of the relations of "kinship" of the Indo-European 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 ambit of Toponymy (Toponomastics), as a privileged sector of the "substratistic" recognitions.

The issue we would like to address here concerns the *nomen loci Olbicella*. Olbicella is a suburb of Molare (municipality located in the North-Western Italy, Piemonte, now in the Province of Alessandria, near the city of Ovada)¹, situated along the Orba river, next to the Ortiglieto's lake.

Dante Olivieri, in his *Dizionario di Toponomastica piemontese*², wrote, about Olbicella: «Olbicella, fr. Molare, Aless. Forse forma in parte dialett. equival. ad un *Albicella, dal n. pers. germ. ALBIZO?». 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 the micro-Toponomastics – of the use of anthroponyms for the purpose of coining local denominations, but in this case it is – because not accompanied by equally or even more sustainable alternatives – too apodictic, as well as almost all the toponymic reconstructions that trace back the origin of a *nomen loci* (of higher "size" than one individual or gentilitial 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 ambit, by definition excluded in the deonomastic formations, where the etymology is not relevant), would set the hypothesis at a higher epistemological level. It provides, however, an interesting indication about the ancient reconstructed form of the place name, *Olbicella*: **Albicella*.

The root of the etymon of the *nomen loci*, in fact, is precisely **alb-*. We shall now explain why, and try to provide a linguistic contribution to the correct return of the original

¹ Cf. Perono Cacciafoco 2003a: 15.

² Cf. Olivieri 1965: 241, s. v. *Olbicella*.

meaning of some place names and hydronyms of the Ligurian area (the exact cultural and linguistic area of the formation of *nomina locorum* such as *Olbicella*, in the North-West of Italy) and outline the existence of a "family" of place names that we like to call (not only because of the Indo-European root that they originated from) "Water Towns".

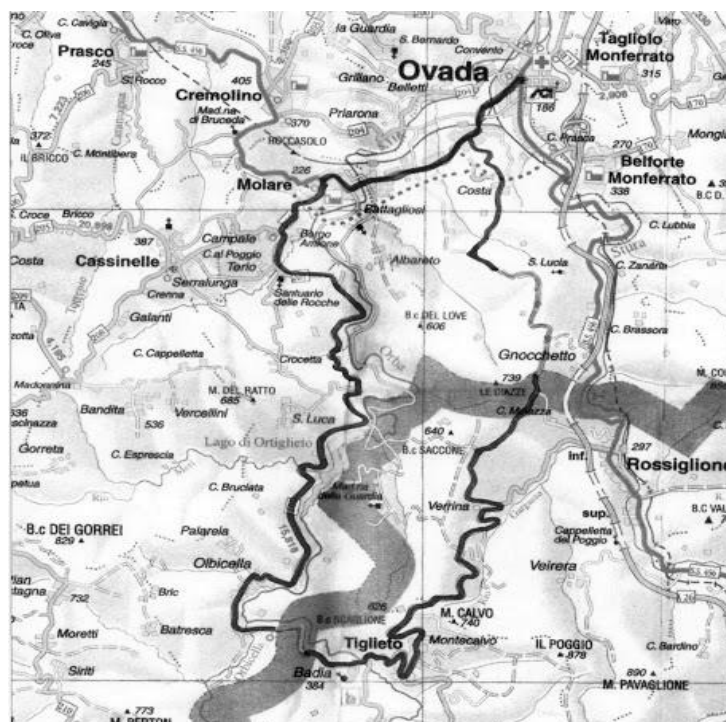


Fig. 1 Olbicella and the surrounding area

We have evidence of common elements – albeit remote – in the cultural and linguistic ambit, shared between the ancient Ligurians (*Ligures*) and the (contemporaneous) inhabitants of Western Europe, historically known as the Celts³. A macroscopic toponymic isogloss concerns the Britannia (perhaps only in the Southern area)⁴: it is believed (and the hypothesis is very convincing) that *Albiōn*, the *nomen* of ancestral origin of Britannia, is connected with the Ligurian toponymic forms *Albium* and *Album*⁵. The toponymic root of the name is common, being, in fact, **alb-* < Indo-European **albh-*. From *Albium* and *Album* we have derivatives in ancient, as well as "contemporary" Ligurian Toponymy, which include 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*,

3 Cf. De Bernardo Stempel 2008: *passim*.

4 Cf. Rivet / Smith 1979: 247-248. In a non-Indo-European perspective see also Giovanni Semerano, *Gli influssi delle antiche civiltà del Medio Oriente sulla prima formazione culturale dell'Europa*, in AA.VV. 2001: 307-317 and, especially, 310.

5 Cf. Petracco Sicardi / Caprini 1981: 33.

Album Intimilium, 'Ventimiglia'⁶ (with this kind of toponymic reconstruction), *Albuca* (in Gaul and in Aquitaine)⁷, *Alba*, in Italy, Piemonte, now in the Province of Cuneo, *Alba Heluorum*, in Provence, *Alba*, now *Arjona*, in Spain⁸

Giacomo Devoto also reports⁹ on the possible Ligurian matrix (or influence in the onomastic formation), in the place name *Albona*, an Istrian town located a few kilometers from the sea. All of these names are attributable directly to the root **alb-* and to a *simplex* form *Album*. But *Album* is not primarily linked (we will verify this later as there is a "shift" of meaning compared to the original) to the Latin *albus*, 'white'. It derives, instead, from the root **albh-*, which is the basis, for example, of the Germanic hydronym *Albis*, the *nomen* of the *Elbe* river. All these *nomina* indicate settlements on waterways, on rivers, lakes, and seas, i.e. *loci* situated near water (and even hydronyms, names of referrals that coincide with the iconym: waterways, watercourses).

What interests us here is the fact that the root **albh-* is the basis of the hydronym *Albis*, the ancestral *nomen* (as a paleo-European hydronym) of the *Elbe* river, which makes it the generative component of some of the many *Olbia* names (ancient and "contemporary") that denote, like all the other *nomina* 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 epichoric *nomen*, *Olbia* (without variants), derived from the root **albh-* with vocalic development of the initial [a-] in [o-] (the root **olbh-* is equivalent, on the lexical level, and it is derived, in the morpho-phonological ambit, from the base **albh-*)¹⁰. *Olbia* as a place name can be found in Britain, on the right side of the Bug River (in Ukraine), in Provence¹¹, in Italy (in Sardegna), and elsewhere, in what used to be the ancient regions of Lycia and Hellespont. In the case of the Hellenic colonies, a motivational overlap with the auspicious Greek adjective *ólbios* (*ὄλβιος*, female *olbía*, *ὄλβια*)¹² was inevitable. If we remain within the ambit of *nomina* 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 ancestral *nomen* of Britain from which we started, denotes, therefore, the largest island on the English Channel, a *locus*, situated on the water and surrounded by water¹³.

⁶ Cf. Strabo, *Γεωγραφικά* IV, 6, 1-2 and, on *Albingaunum* and *Albintimilium*, see Gianattasio 2007: 136.

⁷ On *Albuca*, in Gaul and in Aquitaine, see Francisco Villar, *La complessità dei livelli di stratificazione indoeuropea nell'Europa occidentale*, in AA.VV. 2001: 217.

⁸ Cf. Alda Rossebastiano, in *DTI* 1990: 14, s. v. *Alba*.

⁹ Cf. Devoto 1974: 36.

¹⁰ The Greek "reception" *Olbía* in relation to the antecedent Indo-European **Olbhiyā* presents the same characteristics (in the rendering of the vocalism /o/ and of the occlusive /b/) of the "near" *Borysthénēs* < Indo-European **Bhoru-stenēs*, 'murmuring among the spruces' (personal comment by Prof. Dr. Guido Borghi).

¹¹ See, on *Olbia* in Provence, Gianattasio 2007: 159.

¹² Cf. *DTI* 1990: 451 and Pellegrini 2008: 85.

¹³ 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" color, see Perono Cacciafoco 2008: *passim*), although alternative interpretations include 'hill' (Pokorny), 'world', 'light' (Meid) and 'white metal land', 'tin land' (Broderick). See, about these interpretations, Perono Cacciafoco 2008, 2009: *passim*.

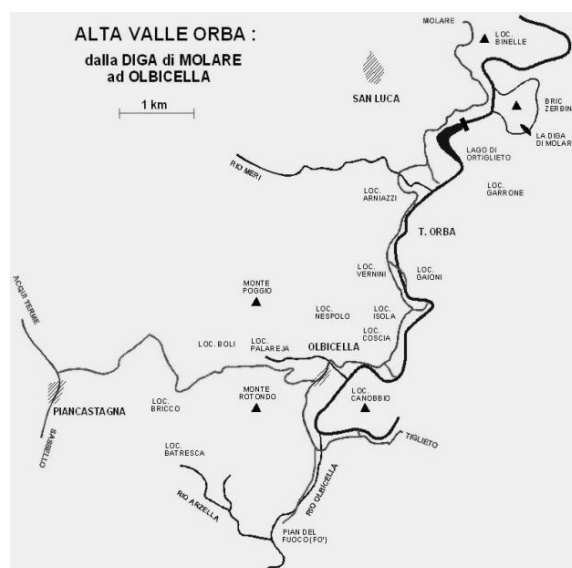


Fig. 2 The Upper Orba Valley, from the Molare dam to Olbicella

The reconstruction **albh-* (with **bh/* required by the Germanic **b/* in **Albiz*, 'Elbe', 'Elba') is, however, not the only one considered in the doxography. Giovanni Semerano, among other supporters of the claim that the origin of the root **alb-* can be traced to a non-Indo-European linguistic "family" (in the theory of this Author this "fact" is postulated in the form of a definition), proposes a derivation from the ancient Akkadian *ḫalpium* (from the Sumerian *ḫalbia*¹⁴), 'well', 'spring', 'mass of water', 'water hole'¹⁵. This form, then, would

¹⁴ The Sumerian *ḫalbia* and the Akkadian *ḫalpium* 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 reuse of specific word-roots in the Indo-European from other linguistic "families" (like the Semitic). Very important, in this context, can be the work *The Semantics of Colour. A Historical Approach* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2012 = biggam 2012), by C. P. Biggam. I'm not a "supporter" of the Giovanni Semerano's Theory, but in the Convergence Theory some Semerano's etymologies are important in the explanation process of 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 (Cf. Beretta 2007: *passim*). The Convergence Theory mitigates the "pan-Semitic" view of Giovanni Semerano and, on the other hand, the "pan-Indo-European" view and applies the Historical Phonetics to the semantic etymological reconstructions, taking into account different positions and epistemological approaches.

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-*)¹⁶ and on the other hand, with the additional homologous basis, being derived from the vocalic replacement of [a-] with [o-], **olb-*.

Setting aside the *a priori* negation of Indo-European languages and the consequent lack of justification for the connection between **alb-* and **ab- / *ap-*, the comparison established by Semerano – especially with the Sumerian *halbia* – imposes a broadening of perspective. A root partly specialized in chromatic meaning, which became an integral part of the toponymic and hydronymic Indo-European system, seems to have even more remote origins. This consideration could explain, thus, the formation of *nomina* – like those listed above – for places located in proximity to watercourses, water canals, rivers, lakes, or near the sea. Thanks to this linguistic "fact" it is possible to effectively overcome the simplification (sometimes misused by the scholars in the ambit of Toponymy and Toponomastics) that connects almost all the *nomina locorum* formed by the **alb-* root to the Ligurian-Roman radical (the same definition is ambiguous) *alba*¹⁷, meaning 'city', 'town', which is 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-*, meaning 'city', 'town'. Our discussion, however, should take a step back. The **h_aalbh-* root, originally meaning 'water', is used to indicate – when applied to a place name – a *locus*, a "locality" close to water. In Indo-European, then, we can also witness a semantic transition. **h_aalbh-*, from the meaning 'water' and, in Toponomastics, 'place located near water', takes, in fact, the extensive and generic meaning of 'place', 'city', 'town'. In the transition from an onomastic system associated with the first anthropization to the later ones, all the way to the proto-urban phase, the semantic characterization related to the concept of 'water' has been lost. The characterization seems to be coming back, however, in the places located in the adjacency of the watercourses (*loci* that constitute the numerical preponderance, considering the fact that the proximity of the same *loci* to the waterways is fundamental to the birth and development of a village or a town), such as Olbicella. Their names contain the old and not exclusively Indo-European (*stricto sensu*) root **h_aalbh-*, which has preserved the original meaning.¹⁸

¹⁵ Cf. Giovanni Semerano, *Gli influssi delle antiche civiltà del Medio Oriente sulla prima formazione culturale dell'europa*, cit., in AA.VV. 2001: 310.

¹⁶ **Ab- / *ap-* (cf. 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" (cf. Alinei 2000: 539). In Gallic, for example, the root **ab-*, **ap-* (this latter from **ak-*) means "river". It is witnessed, *inter alia*, in the Gallic form *Abona* (cf. Lewis / Pedersen 1961: 38). It is also known a Bastetic town called *Abula* (Southern Spain).

¹⁷ See, for example, on the name *Albera Ligure*, Italian place located in Piemonte, now in the Province of Alessandria, Lamboglia 1946: 79-81 and Giulia Petracco Sicardi, *Liguri e Celti nell'Italia settentrionale*, in AA.VV. 1981: 71-96 and Petracco Sicardi / Caprini 1981: 12 and 33.

¹⁸ On the other hand, it is recognized, for example, the almost sure paleo-Ligurian origin of the place name *Alba* of the town of Alba, located in Italy (Piemonte), now in the Province of Cuneo, Roman *municipium* in the Augustan age, colony in the II century, parish in the V century (cf. Giulia Petracco Sicardi, in Petracco Sicardi / Caprini 1981: 33), *Alba Pompeia* after 89 BC, probably in honor of the consul Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo. Nino Lamboglia (in Lamboglia 1946: 79-81) and Giulia Petracco Sicardi (in Petracco Sicardi / Caprini 1981: 12 and 33) attribute to the place name the meaning of "capital city" / "administrative centre" (*città capoluogo*). This *sema* is plausible, however, only as a further development of a different onomastic origin linked directly to the pre-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

It should also be pointed out that the *nomina locorum* 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'¹⁹. In the common Indo-European, then, in addition to these roots, the radicals **ab-* and **ap-* always express the concept of 'water'²⁰. 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 basis **albho-* thus derives from the root **h_aalbh-* which is not strictly Indo-European, and which means 'water'. It, therefore, outlines 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 the Indo-European to the late-Indo-European, i.e. the pre-proto-Indo-European **h_aalbh-* = 'water' and, extensively, 'place situated near the water' → Indo-European **[h_a]albho-*, 'white' (both meanings derive from 'water')²¹, originally indicating the 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-* along with the *sema* 'place situated near water'. It should be noted, in this regard, that the original *nomen* of the Italian Tevere (Tiber, Latin *Tiberis*) river was *Albula* and, as a variant of the manuscripts in Dionysius Periegetes (and in the related commentary by Eustathius) and in Stephanus Byzantinus, *Alba*.

Tanaro river and there is no doubt about the atavistic link between the town and the same Tanaro river. Alba was inhabited in remote age, 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, and 250-251 and Bietti Sestieri 2010: 39 and 42-43), and it was precisely in this chronological ambit that the place name "took shape", *nomen* 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 founded often 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. Nothing to do, thus, with the 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. It will be analyzed here, therefore, marginally), Latin *Alpēs*, singular (especially poetic) *Alpis*, Greek *Ἄλβια*, a derivation from a root **alp-*, perhaps a variant of a radical **alb-* meaning "mountain", "hill", "stone", is controversial. **Alb-* indicates "water" 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 the most of the 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*, 1979 ff.: 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).

¹⁹ Cf. Villar 1991 / 1996: 117.

²⁰ Cf. Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 23, 51, 79, 80, Devoto 1962: 329, 331, 528, 529, 708, and Alinei 1996: 505.

²¹ An excellent recent book on the historical color semantics is Biggam 2012 (particularly relevant is Chapter 11, *Prehistoric Colour Studies*: 169-183). It is also interesting to note that IE **albh-* > proto-Slavic **olbqdb* > Serbian *labud*, 'swan', i.e. 'the white bird' (and other Slavic variants of the same word), and IE **albh-* > Germanic *albutis* > OHG *albiz*, *alfiz* = *elbiz*, *elfiz*.

Indo-European, on the other hand, has not completely lost the meaning of the root **h₄albh-* and has preserved it in different variants. The Hittite lexeme *alpa-s*, 'cloud'²², whose connection with the Indo-European **albhos*, 'white' (formally possible in the hypothesis of an antecedent **h₄albh_o-s*), was rejected for semantic reasons (since «*alpa-* is predominantly associated with rain and thunder»²³), finds an unexceptionable etymology in the iconym 'water'²⁴. Furthermore, if we analyze **h₄albh-* as an "extending root" **h₄al-bh-*, we can also recognize the equivalent of this in **h₄al-eu-*, 'disorderly wander'²⁵, the root referring to hydronyms, which also indicates the hydromel (mead) and the beer²⁶ in its appellative meaning.

In addition, according to Mario Alinei (as part of the Paleolithic Continuity Paradigm/Paleolithic Continuity Theory/*Teoria della Continuità*)²⁷, the root **alb-* can be connected to the proto-Indo-European radical **al-*, which is supported by evidenced of it having the meaning "feed" and "nourish" in the Italic area (Latin *alō*, 'feed', 'nourish'), in the Celtic ambit (Old Irish *alim*, 'I nourish'), and in the Germanic area (Old Icelandic *ala*, 'feed'). This semantic feature inherent in the notion of "feed" and "nourish", however, is closely linked to the concept of water, because (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 *áll*, 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 into the nutrition of the Upper Paleolithic and, therefore, to the aforementioned root **al-* meaning "feed", "nourish", in this case related to the concept of "feeding/nourishing with fish", a nourishment evidently derived from the water and plausible 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 between the radicals **al-* and **albh-*, up to the point where these two forms, variants of a single root referable to the notion of water and 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 Semerano's comparative hypothesis, which includes Sumerian) and the direct link with the ancestral notion of 'water'. It is thus plausible that the origins of the root are pre-Proto-Indo-European and can be placed in a macro-genealogical linguistic "axis" of what is probably a Nostratic²⁸ radical (with an adequate areal coincidence between the theories on the Indo-European Prehistory and the *iter* of the Akkadian according to Semerano), from the Near and 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 is still reflected in many place names (such as *Olbicella* (< **Olbikellā*)), especially in the Ligurian area in Italy.

²² This is not the only meaning that has been proposed. Melchert (cf. Harold Craig Melchert, *Hittite antaka- "loins" and an Overlooked Myth about Fire*, in AA.VV. 2003: 281-288 and, especially, 285) suggests also "faintness", "weakness".

²³ Cf. Kloekhorst 2008: 169, with bibliography.

²⁴ Personal comment by Prof. Dr. Guido Borghi.

²⁵ Cf. Borghi 2009: 836-837.

²⁶ Cf. Pokorny 1959-1969: 33-34.

²⁷ Cf. Alinei 1996: 581.

²⁸ Aharon Dolgopolsky reconstructed an ancestor for the pre-Indo-European **albh_o-* as **halbs* or **χalbs* (the "triangle" 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)". Cf. Dolgopolsky 1998: *passim*.



Fig. 3 The analyzed territory between Southern Piemonte and Liguria

Moreover, the **alb-* root is expressed in the **olb-* variant (from which many of the place names *Olbia* in the ancient, as well as in the "contemporary" world derive, and from which the *nomen loci Olbicella* descends). It is a linguistic phenomenon typical of the Ligurian area - the transformation of [-l-] into [-r-] (shift), here found in post-vocalic context and before a bilabial consonant, which leads to conclusion that 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 *nomen* of the *Orba* river²⁹, which flows precisely through 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*³⁰, replicated in 1176 by the wording «[...] *super fluvium Urbae* [...]»³¹. Concerning the etymological explanation of the hydronym, the proposed derivation from the Latin *urbs* appears simplistic and meaningless. Serra³² already considered the pre-Latin origin of this *nomen* and compared it to other equivalent hydronyms of the Ligurian and Gallic territories (e.g. *Orba*, *Orge*, *Orbs*). Serra was right to do so (even though he did not arrive at the proper deduction, leaving the explanation of the hydronym in the vagueness of the

²⁹ This is the «[...] *Orba selvosa* [...]» in the celebrated ode *Marzo 1821* by the famous Italian poet Alessandro Manzoni. Cf. Alessandro Manzoni, *Marzo 1821*, v. 19.

³⁰ Cf. AA. VV. 1899-: CXIII, 38, 53.

³¹ Cf. AA. VV. 1899-: XXIX, 74, 94.

³² Cf. Serra 1931: 126.

pre-Latin substrate), because the *nomen fluminis Orba* precisely derives from the root **olb-*, a variant and/or development of the root **alb-*, 'water', with the transformation of the [-l-] into [-r-] in **orb-*, which is typical of the Ligurian-Romance linguistic area.

The root **alb-*, therefore, is the basis not only of the place name *Olbicella*, but also of the hydronym *Orba*. Moreover, there is a sort of a "point of union" between the place name and the hydronym, represented by another hydronym, *Orbicella*, an affluent of the Orba river. The form *Orbicella*, variant of *Olbicella* and the *nomen* of the affluent of the Orba river, is the 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 phenomenon of transformation of the [-l-] into [-r-], typical of the Ligurian area. Thus, there is a very close relationship, in the ambit of the onomastic affinity (when not of direct equivalence), between the names *Olbicella* (with preservation of /l/ from the chancery tradition), *Orbicella* (with receipt of the shift [-l-] / [-r-], having been made official later, because of the lesser importance of the referent), and *Orba*, as well as a close morpho-phonological relationship between the pre-proto-Indo-European radical variants (dating back to a possible Nostratic origin and ancestrally sourced from Near/Middle East), which became Indo-European toponymic formations, **h₂albh-* → **h₃albh-* (> **olb-*).

The Medieval form *Urba* in the *Orba* hydronym attests a "change" from the initial [o-] to [u-] that indicates, *inter alia*, the loss of the ancestral meaning of the *nomen* in both speech and writing, which probably dates back to a pre-proto-Indo-European appellative source, and was transferred to the toponymic use by the local Indo-European. However, the form *Urba*, that recalls the Latin *urbs*, 'city', 'town', has the same meaning as the above mentioned Indo-European basis **albhā* derived from the root **alb-*, when the *sema*, by that time, passed to indicate (from "place on the water", "water town" = **albh-*) the simplified and generic notion of 'city' or 'town' (> **albā*).

The same reasoning has to be applied to the name of the village of *Urbe*, which 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 the same place name and the hydronym³³. The oscillation of the radical form **olb-* > **orb-*, with the transformation of [-l-] into [-r-], is recognizable even in the *nomina* of two of the small hamlets that make up the municipality of *Urbe* (which is a "scattered" and "composite" village), *Martina d'Olba* and *San Pietro d'Olba* (here the graphic [-l-], either conservatively, or accidentally, takes precedence over the [-r-], in an alternation already found in the place name *Olbicella* and the hydronym *Orbicella*).

We have to note, moreover, that *Urbe*, as a municipality, comprises 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 the toponymic and hydronymic development of the *nomina* in the area under our consideration) and of Vara Inferiore and Vara Superiore. The onomastic basis of the two hamlets called *Vara* is **war-* (**wer-* / **uer-*, **wor-* / **uor-*), the root of the common Indo-European denoting 'water', 'river', 'rain'³⁴, which is also the radical of the *nomen* of the *Vara* river, the longest watercourse in Liguria, flowing in its entirety on the territory of the Province of La

³³ Cf. *DTI* 1990: 676.

³⁴ 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 1991 / 1996: 117, and Alinei, 1996: 505.

Spezia and lending its name to the homonymous valley (*Val di Vara*). The place name *Vara* (of *Vara Inferiore* and *Vara Superiore*) and the hydronym *Vara* have remote origin and are part of a "Mediterranean" onomastic system characterized *prima facie* by the phonetic sequence [-a-] [...] [-a-]³⁵. 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 of 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 syllabic core or adjacent to short vowel: **wārā* < **h_awah_a-rah_a*³⁶ or even, in Celtic, from *[*H*]woh₁-rah_a³⁷). Among the numerous examples of place names and hydronyms derived from the root **war-*, which support the system of double [-a-], we can mention again, for the sake of brevity, the *nomen* of the town of *Varallo*³⁸ (Italy – Piemonte –, now in the Province of Vercelli), in the Valsesia, situated at the confluence of the Mastellone torrent and the Sesia river, and the name of the *Varàita* torrent, which debouches into the Po river. The notion of 'water' is always present in these cases, especially the concept of 'river water' and 'rainwater', as they feed rivers and torrents and ensure the life of villages and towns near the watercourses. So, the meaning of 'water' is repeated throughout all the toponymic series of the *loci* that make up 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' in place names indicating 'towns/cities/hamlets/sites/villages located near water' and within the ambit of Toponomastics, we could mention numerous *nomina locorum* derived from the same radical and it might be interesting to make a distinction between the place names designating a "site located in close proximity to water" (in the original meaning of the root, therefore) and the *nomina* indicating a 'city'/town' (in the "new" generic and later *sema* of the same radical). It will be sufficient to list only one example here, i.e. *Albisola*³⁹, 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*⁴⁰ and independent from the centre of *Albisola Superiore*. Writing about *Albisola Superiore*, Giulia Petracco Sicardi⁴¹ declares the origin of the *nomen loci* as Roman, from *Alba Docilia*, where *alba* is interpreted as the aforementioned Ligurian-Roman form *alba* in the meaning of 'city' or 'town'. This approach, however, leaves out the fact that *Albisola* was founded, as mentioned, by the *Ligures Docilii* in prehistoric times and that the Romanization of the *locus*, therefore, occurred much later than the creation of the place name. In ancient times *Albisola* was named *Alba* by the *Ligures Docilii*⁴², but the name did not have the meaning

³⁵ Cf. Devoto 1974: 28.

³⁶ Cf. Wodtko / Irslinger / Schneider 2008: 356-357.

³⁷ Cf. Falileyev 2007: 30, with bibliography.

³⁸ Formed by a second Celtic element **allo-*, 'precipice' (< Indo-European **plso-*, cf. Matasović 2009: 120-21), in reference to the rocky outcrop of the Sacro Monte (personal comment by Prof. Dr. Guido Borghi).

³⁹ For a review of the toponymic issues relating to the place name *Albisola*, see Perono Cacciafoco 2003b: 22.

⁴⁰ The territory of the *Ligures Ingauni* had, as main centre, the town of Albenga, *Album Ingaunum*, *Alba Ingaunum*, *Albingaunum*.

⁴¹ Cf. Giulia Petracco Sicardi, in *DTI* 1990: 17, s. v. *Albissola Marina - Albisola Superiore*.

⁴² The *Docilii* were a Ligurian tribe allocated, prior to the Roman conquest, in a territory between *Albisola* (Italy – Liguria –, now in the Province of Savona) and *Sassello* (Italy – Liguria –, now in the Province of Savona). Their lands bordered those of the *Sabazi* and of the *Statelli*.

of 'city'. The *sema* 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* originally indicated, 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*⁴³, a relatively late documentary source which is not reliable in determining the antiquity of the name and its original meaning.

So here we found 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 gentilitial (family name) *Dolcilius* (which she says is probably of Celtic origin), while it seems clear that *Docilia* in *Alba Docilia* was derived from the *nomen* of the *Docilii*, the Ligurian prehistoric inhabitants 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 *nomen alba* in the "free form" and that, despite the loss of the notion of the original meaning of the radical **alb-* (as well as the basis *alba*) in speaking and writing, it is, *de facto*, the constituent element of the remote origin of the place name. Petracco Sicardi⁴⁴ adds that the Medieval name of the *locus Albizola* or *Albuzola* was documented in the XII century. The name seems to be older, though. The *nomen* in the form *Albuzola*⁴⁵ is in fact mentioned in the *Charta* of foundation and donation of the St. Quentin's Abbey (Abbazia di San Quintino) in Spigno Monferrato (Italy, Piemonte, now in the Province of Alessandria). This document dates back to the May 4th 991. In this toponymic variant, the root **alb-* thus shows, even if lost and often misunderstood, its original meaning, and its onomastic strength and persistence in the structure of the *nomina* belonging to this toponymic and hydronymic family. So we have yet another place located on the water which takes the origin of its name from the Prehistory and the ancient pre-proto-Indo-European root **h_aalbh-*, 'water'.

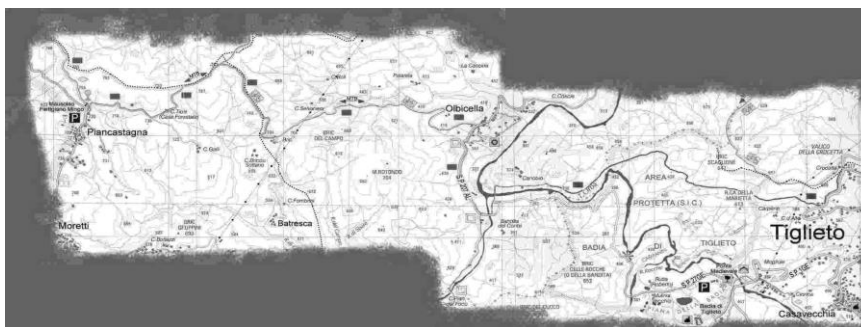


Fig. 4 Place-names in the area of Olbicella

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ Cf. again Giulia Petracco Sicardi, in *DTI* 1990: 17, s. v. *Albissola Marina - Albisola Superiore*.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bosio 1972: 19, 33 and 126-128 and, inherently in the issue of the effective presence of the place name in the *Charta*, see Perono Cacciafoco 2003b: 22.

In the Roman age, Liguria⁴⁶ had well established linguistic strata, Latin, Gallic (or, at least, ancient Central Celtic with the complete – and completed 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/), the paleo-European Hydronymic ("alteuropäisch"), and paleo-Ligurian linguistics. The nomina more easily "explainable" are, of course, the Latin names (and the names of Latin origin). But wanting to relate the Onomastics and the Toponomastics of the Ligurian area almost exclusively to the Roman age is a methodologically incorrect operation and leads to mistakes. Many *nomina* are inherently Celtic (Gallic or Lepontic), such as e.g. *Dunomarus*. Others, instead, do not provide reliable evidence, if we remain within the ambit of the lexicon attested by the historical Indo-European languages. For example, in *Albialus* the **albh-* basis (that is **halbh-*) presents lexical and derivational peculiarities that do not allow a specific attribution to none of the above mentioned strata. In addition, we also have to note the likely pre-proto-Indo-European origin of the root **albh-*, that is the radical **hal-bh-* in the ancestral meaning of 'water' (and, extensively, of 'place located near water') and then – in the common Indo-European – of 'white' (understood as the light/clear color of the water) and in the generic meaning, in **albhā*, of 'city'/town' (in the simplified notion derived from the extensive *sema* of the pre-proto-Indo-European basis **halbh-*). Francisco Villar says the following about the Indo-European setting and the extra-Indo-European comparability of the Ligurian *nomina locorum*⁴⁷: «[...] The Indo-European elements are quite abundant, both in the anthroponymy, and in the 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 [...]». It is precisely in this ambit that the hypothesis concerning the pre-proto-Indo-European origin of the root **halbh-* in the meanings, in the parallel forms, and in the derivations that we enucleated up to here takes heuristic significance.

On closing, an onomastic note. *Orba* is also attested as the personal name of a sovereign in the Medieval Ireland. In this case, however, the *nomen* 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 basis **orbho-*, that means "orphan", "forsaken", "abandoned"⁴⁸, which takes the *sema* of 'heir', 'legacy', 'heritage'⁴⁹ (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*,

⁴⁶ In Antiquity the Ligurians resided in a territory that included the Côte d'Azur and the Riviera. The land of these populations stretched from the city of Pisa and from the Arno river (Italy, Toscana), to the East, to the Rhone river, to the West. We have also to consider the Ligurian populations of some islands, as Corsica and Elba, mentioned by several Authors. In a general way, we talk about Ligurians inherently in the whole coast, also to the West of the Rhone river and until the mouth of the Ebro river. Due definitely to this Western "extension" of these populations, sometimes it is used the name of "Ibero-Ligurians". 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 1991 / 1996: 465 and 469 and Pallottino 1981: *passim*.

⁴⁷ Cf. Villar 1991 / 1996: 469.

⁴⁸ Cf. Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 781 and Alinei 1996: 668.

⁴⁹ Cf. Alinei 2000: 566.

Gothic and Old High German *arbi*)⁵⁰ in the Celtic and Germanic areas (and only in these areas). In this case, therefore, the regal Irish name *Orba* means 'heir', 'heir of the kingship', 'prince' and, in consequence, "king". The proto-Indo-European and then late-Indo-European root at the origin of this name is not **albh-*, but **orbho-*.

It seems, therefore, obvious that the name of the hamlet in the municipality of Molare (Italy, Piemonte, now in the Province of Alessandria), *Olbicella*, the *nomen* of the village of *Urbe* (and two areas which constitute it, *Martina d'Olba* and *San Pietro d'Olba*), as well as the hydronyms of the *Orba* river and of its affluent *Orbicella* derive from a common pre-Proto-Indo-European root of remote origin and persistent over the time *-*h_aalbh-*, which indicates the notion of 'water' and was applied in the formation of *nomina* of waterways/watercourses, or of areas located near the water (streams, torrents, rivers, lakes, and sea). The root discloses its morphology through the equivalent variant **h_aolbh-*, developed through the changing of [-l-] into [-r-] in the form */orb-/* typical of the ancient Romance Ligurian. Moreover, we have also found the persistence over time of the proto-Indo-European (of the common Indo-European) root **h_awah_a-r-*, indicating the notions of 'water', 'river', and 'rain', in the names of the *loci* of *Vara Superiore* and *Vara Inferiore*, hamlets of the "composite" village of *Urbe*, and in numerous other places situated in close proximity to watercourses, as well as in hydronyms which were part of the ancient Ligurian onomastic area. So this analysis presents a panorama of "Water Towns", all joined by the same toponymic origin derived from the pre-Proto-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"⁵¹ that descends from the common pre-Proto-Indo-European root **h_aalbh-* (later subjected to the dephologization of the laryngeal and morpho-phonologically transformed in the variants **albh-*, **olbh-* [$> *olb- > /orb-/$], **albhā*, **albhō-*, and, in terms of meaning [*sema*], in the sequences 'water' → 'place situated near water' → 'place located on the water' → 'town' and 'water' → 'clear/light water' → 'white water' → 'white'), which is incorporated in 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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⁵⁰ Cf. Hubert 1934: I, 66 and Buck 1949: n° 11.48.

⁵¹ 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 paleo-anthropology of those territories see Perono Cacciafoco 2008: *passim*, Perono Cacciafoco 2009: *passim*, Perono Cacciafoco 2011a: *passim*, Perono Cacciafoco 2011b: *passim*, Perono Cacciafoco 2011c: *passim*, Perono Cacciafoco 2012a: *passim*, Perono Cacciafoco 2012b: *passim*. Very interesting, in different contexts, are Kitson 1996: *passim* (especially pp. 83-86 on the different strata of river names in *Alb-* and *Arg-*), Untermann 2009: *passim* (especially p. 20 on **albhō- / -ā*), and Bichlmeier 2012: *passim*.

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TOPONIMSKA KONVERGENCIJA: NAZIVI MESTA I KOREN *ALB- U PRAISTORIJSKOJ LIGURIJI

*Ovaj rad bavi se novim epistemološkim aspektom takozvane Teorije konvergencije, i ima za cilj da predstavi jedinstvenu teoriju, sastavljenu od teorija različitih škola mišljenja iz oblasti Indo-Evropske lingvistike. Ovo istraživanje bilo je pokušaj da se rekonstruiše italijanska, kao i evropska "makro-oblast" (ili "mikro-oblast", zavisno od ugla posmatranja) koja se bavi nazivima mesta čiji je koren *alb-, kao i da se odrede semantičke faze kroz koje je ovaj koren prošao tokom vekova.*

Ključne reči: *teorija konvergencije, *alb-, *Hal-bh-, Ligurija, Olbicela, Evropska praistorijska toponimija*