

# A Shakespearean Sonnet in Cimbrian

## – or Perpetuating the Old Mystery

by Remigius Geiser

Among all kinds of German languages still spoken, Cimbrian<sup>1</sup> is undoubtedly the oldest one.

Its origin is lost in the mystery of history. Some think it derives from Bavarians and Tyrolians, who settled in Northern Italy during the 11<sup>th</sup> and/or 12<sup>th</sup> century. Others derive it from the last remainder of the Langobards, who spoke a language very similar to medieval Bavarian or Tyrolian. There are also scholars connecting it to the last Goths ...

Cimbrian is nowadays still spoken by a few hundred people – nobody has counted their exact number so far – all of them Italian citizens nowadays in three provinces of Northern Italy: Vicenza, Verona and Trentino. They all speak Italian as well, and two hundred years ago Cimbrian was already said to be dying out before the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but has now reached the third millennium.

There are still three communities speaking Cimbrian today. The one we are dealing with in particular is the so-called “Sette Comuni”, the “Siban Komàüne” on the Plateau of Asiago, the Altopiano di Asiago, which is situated between Vicenza and Trent in the province Vicenza. In contrast to all other Cimbrian communities, they were a politically autonomous Alpine rural republic, comparable to Switzerland, from about 1200 AD until the times of Napoleon. Such a status of considerable political independence enabled the Sette Comuni to develop their variant of Old High German into a standard literary language that was applied to various functions, especially religion and literature. From here, Cimbrian literature started flourishing in the Baroque period (see bibliography) and has continued to be alive and kicking to our days, as is humbly instanced by the Shakespearean translation presented here.

It was in the times of Baroque, too, that the poets of the Altopiano di Asiago began taking an interest in composing sonnets. Self-possessed as ever, they did not translate any sonnets from other languages into Cimbrian (as for instance such of the Petrarchan tradition), but wrote their own ones. The particular form they adopted in this was the Italian sonnet, i. e. fourteen hendecasyllables distributed in two quatrains and two tercets, the rhyme pattern of the quatrains being the Italian one, too.

The present Cimbrian translation of Shakespeare's sonnet number 151 was not done by a Cimbrian native speaker, but by a long-standing connoisseur of the language as a labour of love for this book and especially for the beloved Cimbrian language. It is, however, fully in line with the rich and varied Cimbrian tradition of sonnet-writing, notwithstanding the fact that it is based on a foreign text. It is the only Cimbrian Shakespeare sonnet so far.

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<sup>1</sup> “Cimbrian” here should not be confused with the Germanic tribe of the “Cimbri” from Denmark (“Kimbern” in German), who, with other tribes, invaded the Roman Empire after 120 BC. The word “Cimbrian” serves as an adjective and noun for both the old Germanic invaders “Kimbern” and our present “Zimbarn” in Italy. It remains a further mystery of history, why the latter are named this way, four possible conjections being disputed among scholars.

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An jungar puular hòrret nia de sünte,  
Ma hòrran sünte büürtet von dar liibe;  
Asò vüar nèt asbèkh mich, hòoga diibe,  
Az daina sünte nèt main lüst ankhünte.

Ambìa do lòochest mich, ich èersinkh zünte  
Main pézzorz tòal, zoa az de mòatte skliibe,  
De seela khüt z me laibe, beelm' ich ghibe  
Zo hòttaran: Ar paitet mintzikh stünte.

Dain naamo macht en sléchtarn au vraan dain,  
Gabünnet hat ar dich, vòlla gahälte  
Is ar gafròant, dain armar hiart zo sain.

Da steet ar in dain diinost, saighet bìdar.  
Und hòrr' ich sünte, nètte mich inthälte  
Zo rüüfan liibe daü, denàu, deniidar.

( *Remigius Geiser* )

*Source:*

The translation appears here for the first time.

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