

# TYCHE

Supplementband 10



## Sprachen – Schriftkulturen – Identitäten der Antike

Beiträge des XV. Internationalen Kongresses für  
Griechische und Lateinische Epigraphik

Fest- und Plenarvorträge

herausgegeben von  
Petra Amann, Thomas Corsten, Fritz Mitthof, Hans Taeuber

Wien 2019

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Wien, 28. August bis 1. September 2017

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## Vorwort

Der vorliegende Band enthält die beiden Fest- und sieben Plenarvorträge, die auf dem XV. Internationalen Kongress für Griechische und Lateinische Epigraphik gehalten wurden. Veranstalter des Kongresses, der vom 28. August bis 1. September 2017 im Hauptgebäude der Universität Wien stattfand, waren zum einen das „Institut für Alte Geschichte und Altertumskunde, Papyrologie und Epigraphik“ der Historisch-Kulturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Wien, zum anderen das „Institut für Kulturgeschichte der Antike – Documenta Antiqua, Abteilung Epigraphik“ der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (ÖAW). Je eine Abendveranstaltung fand im Hauptgebäude der ÖAW und im Rathaus der Stadt Wien statt; die Kongress-Exkursion führte zur Römerstadt Carnuntum. Die Zahl der registrierten Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer betrug knapp 450 Personen.

Die Vorträge der beiden Plenarsitzungen waren dem Leitthema des Kongresses „Sprachen — Schriftkulturen — Identitäten der Antike“ gewidmet. Näheres hierzu ist der folgenden Einleitung zu entnehmen (siehe unten S. III–IV).

Die zwanzig thematischen Sektionen des Kongresses mit insgesamt 136 Vorträgen sowie die zusätzlich präsentierten 82 Poster boten einen allgemeinen Überblick über die laufenden Forschungen zur Griechischen und Lateinischen Epigraphik und den aktuellen Stand der beiden Disziplinen. Hierbei wurden gattungsspezifische Fragestellungen behandelt oder aber epigraphische Zeugnisse für ausgewählte Themen der Sozial-, Institutionen-, Militär-, Wirtschafts-, Religions- und Rechtsgeschichte ausgewertet. Besondere Würdigung fand die Vorstellung von Neufunden (darunter nicht wenige magische Texte) sowie die spätantik-byzantinische Epigraphik. Bei der Planung und Durchführung der Sektionen haben die jeweiligen Chairs wertvolle Unterstützung geleistet. Für das genaue Programm des Kongresses siehe unten S. V–XVI. Die Poster sind unter <https://epicongr2017.univie.ac.at/publikation-von-kongressbeitraegen/poster/abrufbar>

Die Großveranstaltung wäre ohne finanzielle Zuschüsse nicht möglich gewesen. Bedeutsame Subventionen kamen von den beiden veranstaltenden Institutionen, zum einen von der Universität Wien, vertreten durch die Historisch-Kulturwissenschaftliche Fakultät und das Institut für Alte Geschichte, zum anderen von der ÖAW, vertreten durch das Institut für Kulturgeschichte der Antike – Documenta Antiqua. Erhebliche Mittel haben ferner der Verlag Holzhausen, das Rathaus Wien und das Vienna Convention Bureau beigetragen. Die Exkursion wurde von der Römerstadt Carnuntum gefördert.

Die wissenschaftliche Abwicklung des Kongresses oblag den Mitgliedern des Organisationskomitees: Petra Amann, Franziska Beutler, Chiara Cenati, Thomas Corsten, Wolfgang Hameter, Fritz Mitthof, Christoph Samitz, Veronika Scheibelreiter-Gail und Hans Taeuber. Die mannigfaltigen Aufgaben des Kongressbüros, für mehrere Jahre die

zentrale Schaltstelle für die planerische und logistische Vorbereitung der Veranstaltung, wurden von Theresia Pantzer mit Bravour bewältigt. Für die professionelle Betreuung der Veranstaltung während der Kongress-Woche haben studentische Kräfte Sorge getragen: Birgit Ebmer, Victor Dumitru, Alexander Gangoly, Gabriele Gober, Tina Hobel, Patrizia Lütt, Katharina Michner, Niklas Rafetseder und Benjamin Schrott.

Der Blickfang unseres Kongresses, das Logo, das die Nymphe Kastalia darstellt, die im Arkadenhof der Universität Wien steht, basiert auf einem Entwurf von Olivier Gengler. Die Verbindung von Antike und Wien hätte keine schönere Idee finden können.

Der Druck des vorliegenden Bandes mit den Fest- und Plenarvorträgen wurde wiederum aus Mitteln des Instituts für Alte Geschichte und der Historisch-Kulturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Wien ermöglicht. Redaktion und Lektorat befanden sich bei Franziska Beutler und Theresia Pantzer wie stets in besten Händen. Der Verlag Holzhausen, langjähriger Partner unseres Instituts, hat das Projekt in bewährter Manier begleitet.

Was die Beiträge zu den Kongress-Sektionen betrifft, so haben wir den Vortragenden die Möglichkeit gegeben, diese in elektronischer Form im Rahmen der von unserem Institut neu begründeten Publikationsreihe „Wiener Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte online“ (WBAGon) auf der Internetseite <https://wbagon.univie.ac.at> zu publizieren. Die eingelangten Beiträge sind dort als freie Downloads verfügbar. Diese Initiative ist ganz wesentlich von Franziska Beutler und Theresia Pantzer entwickelt und umgesetzt worden.

Allen genannten Personen und Institutionen gilt unser aufrichtiger Dank!

Wien, im Jänner 2019

Die Herausgeber

# Einleitung

Der XV. Internationale Kongress für Griechische und Lateinische Epigraphik hat neuerlich die besondere Rolle deutlich gemacht, welche diesen beiden Schwesterdisziplinen im Kanon der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaften zukommt. Dank des beständigen Zuwachses an neugefundenen Inschriften, aber auch dank der inhaltlich wie methodisch immer feineren Möglichkeiten der Analyse der bekannten Zeugnisse sowie nicht zuletzt dank der fortschreitenden Nutzbarmachung der Informationstechnologie sind die Griechische und die Lateinische Epigraphik in prägnantem Sinn leistungsfähige Motoren für die Weiterentwicklung des Kenntnisstandes und der Forschungen zur griechisch-römischen Antike.

Die beiden Disziplinen definieren ihren Gegenstand, wie ihre Bezeichnung zeigt, über das Kriterium der Sprache. Sie erweisen sich damit als ein Produkt der neuzeitlichen Wissens- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte, die zu ihrer Institutionalisierung seit dem späten 19. Jh. führte, und letztlich sogar als ein direktes Erbe des Humanismus und der Renaissance. Der Primat der Sprache hat durchaus seine Berechtigung, wenn es darum geht, die einzelne Inschrift vor dem Hintergrund ihres unmittelbaren historisch-kulturellen Kontextes und im Vergleich zu verwandten Texten und Monumenten zu analysieren. Der sprachgebundene Zugang macht nicht nur übergreifende Muster, sondern auch räumlich-zeitliche Ausprägungen und Entwicklungsstufen von Gattungen und Formularen sichtbar. Auf diese Weise können auch die Grundlagen des Gebrauchs und der Inszenierung von Schriftlichkeit in ihren historisch gewachsenen, kulturell bedingten Ausdrucksformen, also dem, was gemeinhin als „epigraphische Kultur“ bezeichnet wird, herausgearbeitet werden.

Ein Problem dieses Zugangs besteht allerdings darin, dass der Sprachprimat ein modernes Konstrukt ist, welches die historische Wirklichkeit ganz wesentlich verzerrt. Die Sphären der beiden Leitsprachen Griechisch und Latein waren nur anfänglich voneinander getrennt; seit der Expansion Roms überlappten sie sich, von den Britischen Inseln im Westen bis an die Ufer von Nil und Euphrat im Osten. Mehr noch: Die antike Welt war in allen ihren Phasen nicht nur bi-, sondern multilingual. Im Mittelmeerraum der griechisch-römischen Zeit existierte eine große Zahl von teils verschriftlichten, teils aber auch nicht-verschriftlichten Sprachen, die vielfach von ein und denselben Sprecher- und Schreibergruppen räumlich und zeitlich parallelgebraucht wurden. Für viele antike Menschen war es vielfach geradezu selbstverständlich, sich in einem polyglotten Umfeld zu bewegen und sich daher bei jeder mündlichen oder schriftlichen Äußerung eines diversifizierten Angebots an Sprachen sowie gegebenenfalls auch an Schriftsystemen bedienen zu können. Die jeweilige Sprach- und Schriftwahl war durch Faktoren vor allem politischer, sozialer und kultureller Art beeinflusst; sie war gattungs-, kontext-, zeit- und milieubedingt; sie war aber auch ein zentrales Element im permanenten Prozess der Selbstdefinition, womit sie für uns moderne Betrachter zu einem wichtigen Indikator von Identität gerät.



Vor diesem Hintergrund haben sich in der antiken Mittelmeerwelt verschiedene Inschriftenkulturen herausgebildet, die teils voneinander unabhängig entstanden, teils aber auch direkt auseinander hervorgingen, sei es durch Übernahme, Nachahmung, Überlagerung oder aber Verdrängung. Dies impliziert, dass die verschiedenen Inschriftenkulturen der Alten Welt stets miteinander in Kontakt standen und sich wechselseitig beeinflusst haben. Diese Wechselwirkung gilt nicht nur für die beiden leitenden Inschriftenkulturen, die in der Wahrnehmung unserer beiden Disziplinen im Vordergrund stehen, der griechischen und römischen, sondern auch für eine Vielzahl weiterer verschriftlichter Sprachen der Alten Welt, so besonders in Vorderasien und Ägypten mit ihren wesentlich älteren Schrifttraditionen, aber auch im Westen, besonders im Alten Italien sowie in der Welt der Kelten und Iberer.

Die Altertumforschung hat die Dringlichkeit dieser Problemstellung bereits seit längerer Zeit erkannt. Es besteht mittlerweile Konsens, dass eine adäquate Erfassung des Phänomens der antiken Inschriftenkulturen nur dann möglich ist, wenn die diversen Ausdrucksformen von Sprache und Schriftlichkeit möglichst umfassend und vergleichend betrachtet werden. Erst auf diesem Weg wird die Kontextgebundenheit der Sprach- und Schriftwahl der Urheber eines antiken Textes genauer sichtbar und letztlich auch in seinem Charakter als historisch bedingtes kulturelles Konstrukt verständlich.

Um dieses noch junge Forschungsfeld weiter zu stärken, vor allem aber auch, weil Wien sich als Standort interdisziplinärer Grundlagenforschung zum griechisch-römischen Altertum der Forderung, etablierte Zugänge zu hinterfragen und neue Zugänge zu erschließen, in besonderer Weise verpflichtet fühlt, haben wir beschlossen, den Kongress unter das Leitthema „Sprachen — Schriften — Identitäten“ zu stellen und die beiden Plenarsitzungen dieser Thematik zu widmen. Auf unsere Einladung hin haben ausgewählte Experten es auf sich genommen, jeweils über eine räumlich und/oder zeitlich definierte epigraphische Kontaktzone, in welcher eine oder mehrere ausgeprägte epichorische Inschriftenkulturen im Umfeld und Wirkungsbereich der übergreifenden griechischen und/oder römischen Inschriftenkulturen zu beobachten sind, auf der Basis des aktuellen Forschungsstands zusammenfassend zu berichten. Für die genauere Ausgestaltung der Beiträge haben wir keine Vorgaben gemacht; lediglich eine Übersichtsbibliographie zum jeweiligen Thema sollte beigefügt werden. Dies hat den Vorteil, dass jeder Beitrag Aspekte des Leitthemas exemplarisch unter einer anderen Perspektive betrachtet und auf diese Weise dem Benutzer des Bandes in der verbindenden Lektüre gewissermaßen ein Panorama geboten, zugleich aber auch die Komplexität der Fragestellung deutlich gemacht wird. Hingegen ist eine systematische Behandlung der Thematik in allen ihren Aspekten und für alle in Frage kommenden Zonen der Alten Welt in diesem Band nicht intendiert.

Am Beginn des Bandes stehen die beiden Festvorträge, die zu Anfang und Ende des Kongresses gehalten wurden. In ihnen werden, dem Anlass entsprechend, im Sinne einer Zwischenbilanz grundsätzliche Reflektionen zum aktuellen Stand unserer beiden Disziplinen und ihrer künftigen Entwicklung thematisiert.

DAVID STIFTER

## Ancient Celtic Epigraphy and its Interface with Classical Epigraphy\*

*In memory of  
Kurt Tomaschitz*

### 1. Introduction

It is perhaps not a gross overgeneralisation to state that knowledge about and familiarity with the languages of the Celtic populations of antiquity lie on the margins or outside of the traditional horizons of ancient historians and of scholars of classical philology. When the cultural remains of Celtic peoples come under the scrutiny of scholars in these fields, it is through the lens of an outsider who is looking at the material and immaterial artefacts of these societies as if it were from a colonial perspective. This is particularly true when the Celtic languages of the ancient period, a subject where few people at all can claim any expertise, are the object of study. However, even though the linguistic study of ancient Celtic requires very special knowledge, this is less so the case with regard to the material and formal aspects of ancient Celtic epigraphy. In general, they follow the models and types of Mediterranean epigraphy, and, from a particular point of time onwards, especially those of Roman epigraphy. Still, compared with the almost innumerable epigraphic remains of the classical languages, what has come down to us from the contemporaneous Celtic languages must seem negligibly small. Even when this material is compared with that of other non-classical vernacular traditions, such as Etruscan or Iberian, it is not impressive in quantitative terms.

The perspective of ancient Celtic epigraphy from within Celtic studies is the reverse, one that in fashionable terminology can be called postcolonial. In the case of the classical languages the inscriptions provide evidence for details to languages otherwise very well understood through an abundance of sources. However, in the case of Gaulish, Celtiberian or Lepontic those few, often annoyingly fragmentary texts are actually the only direct sources that exist. I am speaking primarily from the point of view of a historical linguist, but *mutatis mutandis* the same would be equally true for other aspects of historical research in ancient Celtic studies.

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\* This article was written as part of the ISCH COST Action IS1407 *Ancient European Languages and Writings* (AELAW) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme.

It is the primary aim of this article to provide a survey of the epigraphic traditions of Celtic languages in antiquity, from their dawn to dusk, and in particular to look at the adoption, the creation and the development of the medium of literacy, i.e. of the writing system as such, in those traditions. The sections on further reading provide references to the most important collections and databases of inscriptions. Discussions of linguistic aspects of the languages will be kept to a minimum unless specific points are relevant to the understanding of the writing systems. For all Celtic writing traditions, it is important to remember that all information about the extent and the numbers of inscriptions only reflects what is known to date. In all regions new inscriptions are constantly being discovered through excavations or sometimes through illegitimate paths. Though most new discoveries tend to be short and usually do not alter the overall picture very much, there is always the chance that a new find will contain crucial new data that overthrows previous scholarship.

The use, and often misuse, of the term ‘Celtic’ to refer to a large group of ancient, medieval and modern communities, evokes a common, if not a unitary culture that links those communities closer with each other, than any individual of those communities would be connected with their contemporary and geographical neighbours. But such a notion cannot be farther from historical reality. From the earliest attestations of the languages that are accessible to modern scholarship, the picture that we get is very diverse; the many cultural, political, and spiritual differences between the various groups have to be passed over completely in this article.

This diversity is mirrored in the linguistic differentiation of the Celtic languages. Celtic is one of the twelve well-attested branches of the Indo-European language family, taking their place, in Western and Central Europe, beside the equally well-attested Italic and Germanic branches of Indo-European, and the only fragmentarily known Lusitanian and Venetic branches,<sup>1</sup> and doubtlessly many others that have disappeared without leaving a trace in the historical record. The Celtic languages of antiquity in turn represent only a subset of the known subbranches within Celtic. Unlike Greek, where we have broadly speaking one language with dialectal variation, Celtic is more like the ancient Italic branch of Indo-European in that it is internally strongly differentiated linguistically, as well as palaeographically. Already the earliest attested languages are at a remove from the reconstructed Proto-Celtic ancestor language (datable perhaps to sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC), and there is no uniform writing system that could have served as a mediating tie between the idioms; nor would a single system have been able to cater for them all. We are dealing with a series of separate, geographically dis-

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<sup>1</sup> On the question whether Venetic is a separate branch among western Indo-European languages (the position adopted here) or forms part of the Italic branch, see the literature cited in R. Wallace, *Venetic*, in: R. D. Woodard (ed.), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages*, Cambridge 2004, 842.

connected writing traditions, each subject to its own external and internal factors without any appreciable interaction amongst them. Each tradition has to be studied on its own terms.

The ancient Celtic languages can be broadly characterised as being of an old-Indo-European type that would be immediately familiar to scholars acquainted with classical languages. ‘Old-Indo-European’ character means that we are looking at inflectional languages where the endings of nouns, verbs and other word classes are still recognisable (under the guise, of course, of the effects of Celtic sound changes).<sup>2</sup> These endings are significant for expressing syntactic relationships in sentences. As a consequence, the word order is relatively free. The phonology of ancient Celtic languages distinguishes vowel length and contrasts two series of stops. Traditionally this contrast is analysed as one of voice, i.e. voiced vs. voiceless stops, but it could also be a fortis-lenis opposition.<sup>3</sup> It is widely accepted that intervocalic voiced (or lenis) stops underwent allophonic fricativisation, also known as lenition. Some languages maintain a contrast between final *-m* and *-n*, while others have neutralised it. This cluster of ancient Celtic grammatical features stands in stark typological contrast to their younger Insular Celtic sister languages, attested in the medieval and modern period, which underwent massive and far-reaching phonological and morphological transformations during the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD. As a consequence, these languages have acquired a fixed, verb-initial word order, and the inflection of nouns has moved away considerably from overt endings to one of a much more complex type where word-initial and word-internal alternations play an important role.

Scattered across the ancient Celtic-speaking world, at least five very different writing systems were used, and we find vacillation between two or three different writing systems within each single language. The study of ancient Celtic epigraphy therefore really means studying three separate cultural and linguistic groups, or probably rather four, if the earliest Irish material is included, as it rightly should be. Singular, very particular historical and cultural conditions apply to every one of them. It is not

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<sup>2</sup> Basic linguistic and epigraphic information about the ancient Celtic languages are found in J. F. Eska, *Continental Celtic*, in: Woodard (ed.), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia* (fn. 1) 857–880, and J. F. Eska, D. Ellis Evans, *Continental Celtic*, in: M. J. Ball, N. Müller, *The Celtic Languages*, London, New York 2009, 28–54, as well as in the thematic chapters on Celtic in J. S. Klein, B. Joseph, J. S. M. Fritz (eds.), *Handbook of Comparative and Historical Indo-European Linguistics. An International Handbook II*, Berlin, New York 2017, namely B. Vath, S. Ziegler, 67. *The documentation of Celtic*, 1168–1188; D. Stifter, 68. *The phonology of Celtic*, 1188–1202; K. Stüber, 69. *The morphology of Celtic*, 1203–1218; J. F. Eska, 70. *The syntax of Celtic*, 1218–1249; D. Wodtko, 71. *The lexicon of Celtic*, 1250–1264; J. F. Eska, 72. *The dialectology of Celtic*, 1264–1274; P. Russell, 73. *The evolution of Celtic*, 1274–1297.

The handouts of my lectures in May 2012 at the University of Copenhagen on *Old Celtic (Celtic Spring in Copenhagen, Roots of Europe – Language, Culture, and Migrations)*; URL: [http://rootsofeurope.ku.dk/english/calendar/archive\\_2012/celtic\\_spring/](http://rootsofeurope.ku.dk/english/calendar/archive_2012/celtic_spring/)) contain a comprehensive collection of primary material and references to important secondary literature, but are by necessity brief.

<sup>3</sup> On this latter question see J. F. Eska, *Phonological contrasts and character reduction in the alphabet of Lugano*, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 64 (2017) 59–80.

possible to speak about ancient Celtic in general terms. Only two factors emerge as common to all, when we look at the internal history of those traditions of which sufficient written evidence survives: first, all arose under the influence of dominant neighbouring cultures, the Greek, the Latin, but also the Etruscan and Iberian cultures which themselves were ultimately submerged in history; and second, with the sole exception of Irish, their fate was ultimately sealed by the suffocating dominance of Latinate culture.

The written tradition of ancient Continental Celtic languages begins at least as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, if not even a few generations earlier, and it disappears on the European Continent by late antiquity. The three literate Celtic groups of classical antiquity are Italo-Celtic (or Lepontic), Celtiberian and Gaulish. The fourth, as it were, post-classical, but still pre-medieval tradition is that of the Irish Ogam inscriptions, particularly strong in the south of Ireland, but also well represented in Britain. In the following sections, these four ancient Celtic epigraphic cultures will be introduced one after the other and their unique features will be sketched. At the end, several doubtful traditions that have been claimed to be ancient Celtic will receive brief treatment.

It is very probable that more Celtic languages than those four were spoken in antiquity, but they are mostly lost in the mist of unrecorded history (after all, it is the very fact of writing that creates history). One well-known Celtic population group that is noticeably absent from the list of societies literate in their vernacular are the Galatians in Central Anatolia, even though they were in contact with the Greek cultural sphere since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. But we need not look any further than the territory of modern Austria to be confronted with the possibility of lost languages. Maybe the tribes of the Boii in Lower Austria and Northern Burgenland had their own distinct variety of Gaulish, just as the Celtic inhabitants of the kingdom of Noricum may have spoken a recognisably Noric dialect (in view of the fact that several separate tribes made up the kingdom of Noricum, stretching across a markedly mountainous region, it is likely that there would have been even further linguistic differentiation among them). Alas, we know next to nothing about it! The virtual silence of inscribed objects suggests that no true written vernacular tradition emerged among these populations, even though each of them had started to embrace literacy for the limited purpose of coinage already before becoming part of the Roman Empire. In the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, rulers in or around the relatively recently established kingdom of Noricum had started to issue silver coinage after Greek models. The earliest Noric coins do not make use of the Latin script, even though Noricum had close relationships with Rome, but they used the neighbouring Venetic script, a sister of the Lepontic and Raetic scripts which will be presented in more detail below. Only a few coins were minted in this fashion, and they carry only a few letters. To those coin legends, we can add a few other stray objects with graffiti in the Venetic script from the southern part of Noricum.<sup>4</sup> However, these texts are so short or fragmentary that it is not possible to even identify their language with any certainty. What these pieces demonstrate, however, is that there was at least an aspiration towards literacy as

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<sup>4</sup> The entire material, small in number, is discussed in D. Stifter, *Neue Inschriften in norditalischer Schrift aus Österreich*, in: R. Nedoma, D. Stifter (eds.), *\*h<sub>2</sub>nr. Festschrift für Heiner Eichner* (Die Sprache 48 [2009]), Wiesbaden 2010, 233–240.

a prestige cultural technique in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC in the central Alps, even though it fell short of turning the population into a literate society. Perhaps the necessary infrastructure in the form of centralised proto-urban settlements was lacking in order to set the process in motion. By the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the Venetic script had given way to Roman letters on Noric coins.

A region that may have acted as an early hub for bringing even Germanic people into direct contact with the art of writing, is the area around the Danube between Vienna and Bratislava, the area where the Celtic Boii settled at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. Since the beginning of the century, Boian rulers had been issuing silver coins, using exclusively the Roman alphabet for about a dozen emissions. We can hardly find a clearer sign for the political and cultural dominance of Roman power than this absence of an alternative writing system, several generations before the region was formally integrated into the Empire, and quite a distance from where the formal boundaries of the Empire lay at the time. Most of the names on the Boian coins are of a typical Celtic formation, but at least two names stick out because they look Germanic in sound. These are *Ainorix* and *Fariarix* which have been interpreted as ‘one/single king’, comparable to Icelandic *Érikr*, and ‘king of the ferrymen’.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the precise political constellations were, these coins demonstrate that Germanic people north of the Danube were able to make, at least small, use of writing for propagandistic purposes as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. Apart from the tokenism of coin legends, however, in both regions no real local literacy emerged.

### 2.1. Italo-Celtic (Leponitic, Cisalpine Gaulish)<sup>6</sup>

The earliest known written tradition in a Celtic language is that of the Italo-Celtic inscriptions in the Leponitic language. Italo-Celtic is a linguistic-epigraphic term that refers to any inscription in an ancient Celtic language in Northern Italy, without specifying the language or the type of script used. The view maintained in this survey article is that the Italo-Celtic corpus consists of texts in two different, albeit apparently closely related languages, namely first Leponitic and then Cisalpine Gaulish — the transmission of the latter starting a few centuries later. Like all ancient Celtic languages, the names used here are exonyms, namely modern coinages. It is not known how the native speakers themselves referred to their idioms. The alternative position is that the language that is referred to as Leponitic in this article “is just an early offshoot of Gaulish”.<sup>7</sup> It is even conceivable that the very fragmentary state of the two languages merely creates the

<sup>5</sup> D. Stifter, *Über die germanischen Namen auf den boischen Grosssilbern*, in: H. Reichert, C. Scheungraber (eds.), *Germanische Altertumskunde: Quellen, Methoden, Ergebnisse. Akten des Symposiums anlässlich des 150. Geburtstags von Rudolf Much*. Wien, 28.–30. September 2012, Wien 2015, 349–354.

<sup>6</sup> Italo-Celtic inscriptions are cited with sigla of the type AB·1 after *Lexicon Leponticum* ([https://www.univie.ac.at/lexlep/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://www.univie.ac.at/lexlep/wiki/Main_Page)).

<sup>7</sup> R. Matasović, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic* (Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series 9), Leiden, Boston 2009, 16. Similar views are expressed, for instance, by K. McCone, *Towards a Relative Chronology of Ancient and Medieval Celtic Sound Change* (Maynooth Studies in Celtic Linguistics 1), Maynooth 1996, 5; or Eska, *Continental Celtic* (fn. 2) 857.

impression of their close similarity. By necessity, scholars of Celtic tend to fill the gaps in the grammatical and lexical knowledge of these languages with their expectations of what ancient Celtic languages should look like. Since our gaps in the knowledge of Italo-Celtic languages are very large, the blend of actual evidence and expert expectations may cause a psychological impression of affinity akin to an optical illusion.

In any case, it is often impossible to assign a given text with any confidence to one of the two languages. Chronological and geographical criteria are therefore drawn upon to make at least a rough distinction between them. Inscriptions from before the Gaulish invasion into Northern Italy, which occurred in the late 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, are believed to belong to the Lepontic language in the proper sense. That period can be called Early Lepontic. Likewise, inscriptions from the Alpine Valleys in a 50km radius around the Swiss town of Lugano, the shores of Lago di Como and Lago Maggiore are also included into the Lepontic corpus. Everything else, especially texts that originate from the Valley of the River Po south to the core Lepontic area, are considered to be Cisalpine Gaulish. There are also a few more solidly morphological and lexical indicators for the one or the other language, but given our extremely limited knowledge of the languages, most of this rests on shaky foundations. For instance, there seems to be a correlation between an early age of a text and its origin from the small Lepontic core area around the North Italian lakes. Also, the word *pala* for the ‘tombstone’ or some morphological features such as the ending *-oiso* of the genitive singular of *o*-stems are concentrated in this area. More research is needed to identify further distinctive linguistic criteria.

Lepontic is the language of the Lepontians, one of many peoples who in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC inhabited the valleys of the Southern Alps north of the Apennine Peninsula. Their name is mentioned by ancient authors, e.g. Caesar BG IV 10,3 *ex Lepontiis*; Pliny nat. hist. III 134 *Lepontios*; or Strabo IV 3,3 Ληπόντιοι. They seem to have been native to that region from at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC; at least, no archaeological disruption is visible in the material record from that area until the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD.<sup>8</sup> The earliest attested phase of Lepontic coincides with the final periods of the archaeologically defined Golasecca culture. The extent of inscriptions found in Early Lepontic coincides to a large degree with the extent of the Golasecca Culture.

The other language is Gaulish, brought into the region by invaders from Gaul who, according to classical historians, entered Northern Italy in the course of the 5<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, bringing the archaeological La-Tène style with them, and settling the fertile plains around the river Po, south of the Lepontian area. The Gauls adopted the use of the script from those speakers of a Celtic language who they already encountered in the region. The Gaulish arrival ushers in the Middle Lepontic (or rather Middle Italo-Celtic) phase. In order to distinguish for practical purposes the Gaulish language in

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<sup>8</sup> J. Uhlich, *Zur sprachlichen Einordnung des Lepontischen*, in: St. Zimmer, R. Ködderitzsch, A. Wigger (eds.), *Akten des zweiten deutschen Keltologensymposiums (Bonn, 2.–4. April 1997)*, Tübingen 1999, 277–304 (repr. as: 62. *On the linguistic classification of Lepontic*, in: R. Karl, D. Stifter [eds.], *The Celtic World. Critical Concepts in Historical Studies IV: Celtic Linguistics*, London, New York 2007, 45–73).

Northern Italy from the much better attested variety in Gaul proper, the one in Italy is called Cisalpine Gaulish, i.e. ‘Gaulish on this side of the Alps’ from the Roman point of view, as opposed to Transalpine Gaulish in Gaul itself, the variant that stayed behind, i.e. ‘Gaulish on the far side of the Alps’. Linguistically there does not seem to be a big difference between these two variants, which are only distinguished geographically and by their alphabet and orthography.

The vast majority of Italo-Celtic texts is written in the local Lepontic script<sup>9</sup> (also called ‘alphabet of Lugano’), one of the daughter scripts of the northern variety of the Etruscan alphabet. The *Schriftprovinz*, or ‘scriptorial territory’, of Lepontic writing is confined to a narrowly circumscribed area in the Northern Italian lake region and in the Po Valley. The two sisters of the Lepontic script are the very similar Venetic and the Raetic<sup>10</sup> scripts, used for their respective languages in well-defined regions to the east of Italo-Celtic. As regards letter shape, ductus and orthographic usage, the North Italic alphabets are in many respects more similar to each other than the individual modern local variants of the Roman alphabet. The distinctions between the three sibling *Schriftprovinzen* reside mostly in the relative frequency of individual letters. In the final phase of the vernacular Celtic languages in northern Italy, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, the Roman script gradually encroaches upon and replaces the vernacular script.

The Lepontic script is very deficiently suited for the purpose of rendering the sounds of an Old Celtic language. Like most Mediterranean writing systems, vowel length cannot be indicated, and, because its North Etruscan ‘mother’ had discarded all characters for voiced stops (*b* ‘beta’, *d* ‘delta’, *g* ‘gamma’), the script lacks the distinction between letters for voiced and voiceless consonants. Occasionally spelling variation can be observed that indicates experimentation on the side of the scribes to make up for the latter shortcoming.<sup>11</sup> Because of its failure of expressing these phonologically crucial distinctions, the Lepontic script has been described as a ‘hypocharacterised’ alphabet.<sup>12</sup> In its most commonly found form, it utilises only 14 letters (*a, e, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, ś, t, u*). A few more letters are rare or doubtful, and may be either restricted to the earliest period of experimentation (*v, z, θ, χ*), or may just be modern misreadings (*c, q, φ*). Both Celtic languages had around 24 phonemes (not counting allophones). Perhaps the small number of graphemes indicates that writing was only in use in conventionalised contexts and no higher degree of graphematic precision was required.

A graphic shibboleth of the Lepontic script, and therefore of Italo-Celtic in general, is the almost exclusive use of one particular glyph of the letter *ś* ‘san’, the so-called

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<sup>9</sup> Note that the use of the expression ‘Lepontic inscription’ is potentially ambiguous. Depending on the context, it can mean ‘an inscription in the Lepontic language’ (but, for instance, written with Roman letters) or ‘an inscription in Lepontic letters’ (which could be either in the Lepontic or the Cisalpine Gaulish language).

<sup>10</sup> A compact introduction to Raetic is C. Salomon, *Raetic. Language, writing, epigraphy* (AELAW Booklet 2), Zaragoza 2017. The standard edition of Raetic inscriptions is St. Schumacher, *Die rätischen Inschriften. Geschichte und heutiger Stand der Forschung*, Innsbruck 2004.

<sup>11</sup> D. Stifter, *Keltische Schriftsysteme*, HSF 128 (2015) 244–247.

<sup>12</sup> Eska, *Phonological contrasts* (fn. 3) 59.



butterfly sign  $\bowtie$ . Although it can also be found in early South Etruscan inscriptions, it is completely absent from Lepontic's sister scripts Venetic and Raetic, and paradoxically also from North Etruscan, where instead the double pennant sign  $\mathfrak{P}$  is used for this letter. On the other hand, Italo-Celtic inscriptions exhibit a complete lack of the inherited letters *h* 'heta', *ϕ* 'phi' and *q* 'qoppa', which are common in the related scripts, and only the rare occurrence of *z* 'zeta' as a real letter, except as a sort of tokenistic character. As for its sister scripts, the most eye-catching unique feature of Venetic script is its use of syllable punctuation, a practice not shared by its neighbours. The Raetic script, finally, has developed a special sign for a dental sound,<sup>13</sup> but it lacks the letter, and the sound, *o* 'omikron'. Like in most ancient scripts of the Western Mediterranean, but unlike standard Latin writing practices, regular use is made in Italo-Celtic inscriptions of word dividers, usually dots between the words, ranging from 1 to 4, e.g.  $\cdot : \cdot$ . Their presence is an indicator of a carefully considered textual layout especially for texts that are meant for public display, whereas in informal graffiti word separation can be absent, replaced by a plain space or by a change of line.

One area where Latin influence manifests itself strongly is the direction of writing. The direction of writing was never absolutely codified, but from the beginning of Lepontic writing, the orientation was preponderantly sinistroverse, i.e. running from right to left.<sup>14</sup> In the first two phases of Italo-Celtic, from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC, sinistroverse texts occur with an average frequency of over 80% (ignoring statistically insignificant outliers from times when the overall documentation is thin). From the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, coinciding with the Roman conquest of Northern Italy, the ratio changes drastically and the proportion of sinistroverse inscriptions drops continuously and fast. Two centuries later the Lepontic writing tradition, which at that time is exclusively dextroverse, ceases completely.

Currently, around 450 Italo-Celtic texts are known (see *LexLep*), most of them either in a very fragmentary state or very short. As regards content and purpose of the texts that have survived, there is nothing out of the ordinary range of early literacy. Most have been discovered in funerary contexts. Typically, the very short graffiti, often just a single word, can be identified as names in various inflectional forms (nominative, genitive, dative). They record the names of the proprietors or producers of the pottery — or other items — on which they are written, or they give the names of the deceased or of persons who made offerings to the deceased. Where text is written on gravestones (*pala* in Lepontic), the naming formulas can be more elaborate. They usually consist of an individual name followed by the name of the father. The latter can be expressed through the use of a patronymic suffix (e.g., Lep. *-alo-*, Gaul. *-ikno-*, *-io-*), or in the later Gaulish material by putting the name of the father into the genitive. The variation in the naming formulas reflects the fact that different languages are involved, and that these in turn were subject to external influence over time.

Aside from the epitaphs, relatively few inscriptions can be classified as public. They furnish the longest texts in the Italo-Celtic corpus, but long only in a very relative sense.

<sup>13</sup> Schumacher, *Rätische Inschriften* (fn. 10) 319.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.univie.ac.at/lexlep/wiki/Property:direction>.

The longest inscription in Lepontic has seven words, in Cisalpine Gaulish around a dozen, but even in these texts anthroponyms preponderate, either as agents or recipients of dedications. In a nutshell, Italo-Celtic epigraphy can be characterised as onymocentric. Only about six verbs are found in the corpus, allowing very little insight into verbal morphology. The situation regarding nominal morphology is only a tiny bit better.

The oldest graffiti are traditionally assigned to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, but more recently earlier dates in the last quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century have been proposed.<sup>15</sup> The chief evidence for this are two inscriptions from Sesto Calende, at the effluence of Lago Maggiore and therefore in the core Lepontic area. One is a cup with the acephalous graffito *jiunθanaxa* (VA·3), the other one is a beaker (VA·4) whose partially damaged text could contain the two words *amkouvi?ri* and *viχu* or *ziχu*. Notwithstanding the valid palaeographic arguments which situate the two inscriptions in an early period, I am hesitant to draw far-reaching conclusions for Italo-Celtic literacy from them. Although explanations based on Celtic have been suggested for the graffiti, mostly on the basis of strings of signs that can be superficially compared with ancient Celtic morphemes, their linguistic affiliation is far from clear. Apart from *viχu*,<sup>16</sup> which, if it stands for \**uikū* ‘fighter’, could conceivably be a Celtic name, nothing in the phonology and morphology of these words strikes me as compellingly Celtic, unless one operates with a range of *ad hoc* assumptions. Even for hypothetical \**uikū* the question can be asked if it should not rather be \**ueikū* in an Old Celtic language instead.<sup>17</sup> Traditionally, the goblet from Castelletto Ticino (NO·1) with the unspectacular graffito *χosioiso* ‘of Gostios (?)’ (the single s probably masks the Proto-Celtic cluster \*st or a variant thereof) is regarded as the earliest evidence of Lepontic, and consequently, Celtic writing.

In the third and final phase in which vernacular Celtic languages are attested in northern Italy, Italo-Celtic literacy was increasingly influenced by Latin literacy. This period begins around the turn from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and is heralded by the Roman conquest of the area and the ensuing tightening grip of Roman control after the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Punic War. As a consequence of these political developments and of the concomitant spread of the Latin language, with which the local population was confronted in administration, the dominant Latin writing practices started to exert cultural pressure on the local practices. The Roman influence is subtle at the beginning. Several letters in the Lepontic and Roman alphabet always had identical shapes because they both were derived from a variant of the Greek alphabet and therefore are distant cousins. But in several cases where differences existed, the Lepontic letters gradually assimilated to the Roman ones and the Roman script gradually replaced the vernacular script. This

<sup>15</sup> R. C. De Marinis, *Sesto Calende, loc. cascina Presualdo: coppa con iscrizione*, in: R. C. De Marinis, S. Massa, M. Pizzo (eds.), *Alle origini di Varese e del suo territorio: le collezioni del sistema archeologico provinciale*, Rome 2009, 157–159; D. F. Maras, *Breve storia della scrittura celtica d’Italia*, *Ziχu. Studi sulla cultura di Golasecca* 1 (2014) 73–93.

<sup>16</sup> Note, however, that the recently founded journal *Ziχu* (Rome 2014) dedicated to Golasecca studies, has taken its name from an alternative reading of this graffito.

<sup>17</sup> St. Schaffner, *Zu den alikeltischen Flussnamen mit n-Suffix*, in: P. Anreiter, H. Weinberger (eds.), *Tagungsakten des internationalen namenkundlichen Symposiums in Kals am Großglockner (12.–15. Juni 2014)* (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Onomastik 14), Wien 2015, 221–222.

leads to a situation where occasionally we are no longer able to tell if a given graffito is in the Lepontic or in the Roman script.

Roman influence makes itself felt in many ways. The only known Latin-Celtic bilingual texts, the Cisalpine Gaulish inscriptions from Vercelli (VC·1) and from Todi (PG·1) are from this period. Despite its great distance from the core area, the Todi stone is a genuine part of the corpus. It must have been brought to Umbria by emigrants from Northern Italy who, in a foreign linguistic environment, still felt the need to make a statement about their linguistic heritage. Interaction with Latin, and romanisation, is also seen in a third long monolingual Gaulish text, namely from Briona (NO·21). One of the persons mentioned in the text carries the Latin name *kuitos* ‘Quintus’ and the Roman title *lekatos* ‘legate’.<sup>18</sup> A particularly learned interaction with the classical world can perhaps be observed on a vase from Ornavasso (VB·3.1). With some uncontroversial assumptions, the line *latumarui : sapsutai : pe : uinom : našom* ‘for Latumaros and Sapsuta – Naxian (?) wine’ can be analysed as a trochaic tetrametre.<sup>19</sup> As far as we know, ancient Celtic poetry does not employ quantitative metrics, so this isolated example may be influenced by Roman metrical practices.

There is no sharply defined end to Italo-Celtic literacy, but the tradition seems to peter out in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. Some graves with graffiti in Canton Ticino have been dated to the end of the Augustan period, making it likely that they are among the latest texts in the vernacular language or writing system.

The Italo-Celtic corpus is an instructive example for the caution that needs to be exerted when working with fragmentary or ill-understood material. Without a proper palaeographic and philological assessment one runs the risk of adopting data into the corpus which does not properly belong here, either because, albeit being Celtic in language, it is the product of a neighbouring writing tradition, or because it actually belongs to a different, perhaps unknown language. Such examples are interesting in their own right, but they distort the picture of what constitutes the Italo-Celtic corpus as such.

The fragment from Montmorot (JU·1) in the French Jura region is not geographically contiguous to Italo-Celtic inscriptions, from which it is separated by the Alps. The potsherd that bears the text *pris* allows no archaeological identification or connection with the Lepontic zone either. The letters are manifestly North Etruscan characters which could belong to any of the North Italic writing traditions. However, it contains the letter *ś* ‘san’ in a form that is similar to our modern M. This feature removes it from the Italo-Celtic writing tradition, where this particular shape of *san* is not otherwise attested with any certainty.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> For the bilingual and mixed texts see M. J. Estarán Tolosa, *Epigrafía bilingüe del Occidente romano. El latín y las lenguas locales en las inscripciones bilingües y mixtas*, Zaragoza 2016.

<sup>19</sup> D. Stifter, *Metrical systems of Celtic traditions*, in: R. Nedoma, M. Schulte (eds.), *Grammarians, Skalds and Rune Carvers I* (North-Western European Language Evolution 69/1), Amsterdam 2016, 52.

<sup>20</sup> D. Stifter, *Lepontische Studien: Lexicon Leponticum und die Funktion von san im Lepontischen*, in: K. Stüber et al. (eds.), *Akten des 5. Deutschsprachigen Keltologensymposiums, Zürich, 7.–10. September 2009* (Keltische Forschungen · Allgemeine Buchreihe A1), Wien 2010, 359–374.

In the notorious bilingual inscription from Voltino (BS·3) and on the beak-spouted ewer from Castaneda (GR·3), there occur characters that do not form part of any known writing system. Some of the characters have a superficial similarity with letters of established alphabets, but this is no guarantee that identical sound values are meant. One need only look at the Iberian (see next section) or Cherokee syllabary<sup>21</sup> for glaring examples of scripts that partially resemble the Latin alphabet, but encode completely unrelated sounds. There is, in fact, no good reason to assign these two texts to the corpus of writing in Lepontic letters. Some of the characters rather resemble letters of the Camunic script, the very peculiar local writing tradition of the Val Camonica which developed in a very idiosyncratic way from Greek writing.<sup>22</sup> Despite the many attempts at interpreting the texts, their alleged Celtic character is not convincing.

Further reading:

Practical overviews of Italo-Celtic are Lejeune 1971, Motta 2000, Morandi 2004 and Stifter forthcoming. All Italo-Celtic inscriptions are collected with discussion and extensive bibliography in the database *LexLep*. The long Cisalpine Gaulish texts are edited in *RIG* II-1, 1–54. The Lepontic script receives a discussion in Stifter 2016; it is documented at [http://www.univie.ac.at/lexlep/wiki/North\\_Italic\\_Script](http://www.univie.ac.at/lexlep/wiki/North_Italic_Script).

a		n	
e		p	
v		ś	
z		r	
g		s	
i		t	
k		u	
l		χ	
m		o	

Table 1: The Lepontic alphabet

<sup>21</sup> C. Faulmann, *Das Buch der Schrift enthaltend die Schriftzeichen und Alphabete aller Zeiten und aller Völker des Erdkreises*, Wien 1880, 13.

<sup>22</sup> St. Schumacher, *Val Camonica, Inschriften*, RGA 35 (2007) 334–337.

2.2. Celtiberian<sup>23</sup>

The Celtiberian epigraphic region encompasses the central region of Spain between Madrid and Zaragoza and along the Ebro Valley, where the Celtiberian language was spoken and written. Celtiberian is the only well-attested representative of Hispano-Celtic, i.e. varieties of Celtic on the Iberian Peninsula. The epigraphic tradition in Celtiberia lasted only for a comparatively short period of around 150 years. The first objects, coins, date to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. To judge from its most famous testimonies, the tradition had its heyday around the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, but must have declined soon afterwards. I am not aware of any finds that date later than the Augustan period. The use of epichoric Celtiberian writing seems to have vanished from the public sphere in tandem with the language itself. We know nothing about the fate of the language after this period. By convention, it is assumed that the speakers of the vernacular languages of Spain switched to Latin very soon after having become part of the Roman Empire. However, this is only an *argumentum ex silentio*.

Around a hundred inscribed objects have been discovered, with some containing texts of substantial length. Typical objects are coins, pottery with painted inscriptions and other domestic objects which carry very short texts, mostly names. Grave stones are not common. The so-called *tesserae hospitales*, or documents of hospitality, are typical objects unique to Celtiberian. These are small three-dimensional objects that come in a wide variety of shapes. Usually made of bronze, they appear in the most inventive and artistically appealing forms, ranging from the figural, depicting, for instance, boars (CU.00.01) or fish (BU.03.01) or hands (Z.00.01), to abstract geometrical objects. Their purpose is to document relationships of mutual hospitality between two partners, one or both of which are named in the inscription. The partners can be persons or communities. It is believed that usually there would have been two identical or interlocking copies of each *tessera*, one for each partner in the treaty, but usually only one survives. They have been found all over the Celtiberian territory, sometimes several hundred kilometres from the places mentioned on them.

Of particular interest are the longer texts of Celtiberian, which are often of an official or legal nature. Engraved on bronze plates, they are manifestly meant for public display. The prime examples appear to belong to the period around the second quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, of which Botorrita I (Z.09.01) and Botorrita III (Z.09.01) are most famous. The latter, containing over 500 words, is the longest known Old Celtic text. Unfortunately, almost all of the words on this massive text are personal names. It allows deep insights into the tripartite Celtiberian naming formula, consisting of individual name, gentile and patronym, but it tells us next to nothing about syntax, morphology and other things of interest to historical linguists. This deficiency is counterbalanced by several other bronze tablets with more interesting content. Botorrita I apparently regulates the agricultural use of land that belongs to a territory of religious significance.

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<sup>23</sup> Celtiberian inscriptions are cited with sigla of the type XX.01.01 after *Hesperia* (<http://hesperia.ucm.es/>). For inscriptions in the Iberian language, from whom Celtiberians borrowed their writing system, see Javier Velaza's contribution in this volume on 'Writing (and reading) in the pre-Roman Iberian Peninsula'.

Even if these texts still cannot be completely understood, the insights that they give into verbal morphology or syntax have provided a great boost to comparative Celtic linguistics in the past decades.

The surviving inscriptions are for the most part written in the Iberian semisyllabic script. This writing system had been devised several hundred years earlier for the Iberian language, a language isolate, perhaps ultimately related to Basque, which neighboured Celtiberian in the east and south. Objects bearing Iberian letters had been known and collected by antiquarians for many centuries, but the script resisted attempts at reading. Pre-20<sup>th</sup>-century readings like those in Faulmann's compendium of world writing systems<sup>24</sup> are mere guesswork, based on a superficial resemblance to Latin or Greek letters. The decipherment of the Celtiberian texts went hand in hand with the decipherment of the Iberian script as such by Manuel Gómez-Moreno in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but his discovery did not receive wide attention until after the Second World War. Once the texts could be read that it was discovered that the inscriptions known at the time contained two very different languages, one non-Indo-European (Iberian), the other one Celtic.

The traditional view is that the Celtiberians adopted the Iberian script to write their own language around the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. This coincides with the Numantine War (154–133 BC), one of the last great insurrections against Roman rule on the Iberian Peninsula. It is a mystery why this particular script was chosen, which, having been devised several centuries earlier for Iberian, was essentially unsuitable for rendering a Celtic language. The phonological structure of Iberian was very different from that of a Celtic language. The Roman alphabet, with which the Celtiberians must have been well acquainted at the time, would have been almost perfect for the sound system of Celtiberian. It is my suspicion that the choice of the autochthonous Iberian script, under these particular political circumstances, namely a war against Rome, was a deliberate political decision fraught with deep cultural symbolism.

Why is the script unsuited for Celtiberian? It is a semisyllabic script, which means that for vowels and resonants alphabetic letters are used, but for stops, only syllabic signs of the type CV are available. Consonant clusters, which are as common in Celtiberian as they are in any ancient Indo-European language, therefore cannot be directly expressed. The placename *Contrebia Belaesca*, a cultural centre of Celtiberia and today the village Botorrita, is a good illustration. The cluster *-ntr-* of *Contrebia* could not be directly expressed in the script. On one coin legend, it is rendered *konterbia* with a graphic metathesis, in another one it is simply *kontebia*, the liquid not written at all. A third possibility would be to insert an empty support vowel, i.e. *konterebia*, but this variant is not attested.

To complicate matters, most times the scribes make no voice distinction among stops, even though a system existed that would have allowed this. It has been observed

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<sup>24</sup> Faulmann, *Buch der Schrift* (fn. 21) 168.

for the Iberian script that in some variants a ‘dual system’ is used for the syllabic signs.<sup>25</sup> Some texts in the Iberian script are written in the so-called ‘dual system’ for the syllabic signs where a distinction is made between ‘simple’ signs, which stand for voiced consonants (*d* and *g*) + vowel, and more ‘complex’ signs (the complexity usually consisting in an additional stroke), which represent the voiceless counterparts, e.g.  $\Lambda$  for <ga> and  $\Delta$  for <du>, but  $\Delta$  for <ka> and  $\Delta$  <tu>). No distinction is made in the labial series, since Celtiberian did not possess the phoneme *p*. Unfortunately, the Celtiberians made only sparing use of this graphic distinction<sup>26</sup> which we would regard as so eminently important. Similar to the scribes who used the Lepontic alphabet, Celtiberians seem to have been satisfied with a rough representation of the phonemes of their language. Only in a small number of the preserved Celtiberian corpus, mainly dedicatory and commemorative graffiti on rocks, the Roman script is used. These probably belong to the late phase of Celtiberian literacy.

The choice of the writing code may have been a deliberate political statement, but the choice of the medium suggests otherwise. The practice of writing on bronze, that is so common in Celtiberia, is not typical of Iberian. Iberians wrote private texts on thin sheets of lead which was the equivalent of paper, or they left marks on pottery. Putting up bronze tablets for public notification is instead a perfect imitation of Roman administrative practices. While Celtiberians thus may have made an effort to use a writing system that was as un-Roman as possible, their writing culture mirrored the one they encountered in Roman colonial practice. So far only a single example of the common Iberian medium of writing has been found for Celtiberian, apparently a business letter on a lead sheet (Iniesta/La Manchuela lead sheet, CU.00.02).

Of all the ancient Celtic traditions, Celtiberian is the only one that has led to the creation of a small modern industry of forgeries. Because many inscriptions are found on artistically produced — and accordingly valuable — objects, something of a market has grown, especially for *tesserae hospitales*. In most cases, forged inscriptions are easy to identify. In the worst cases, the alleged texts are meaningless gobbledygook, in the better examples authentic inscriptions have been copied in part or in their entirety.

Further reading:

Beltrán Lloris, Jordán Cólera 2017 offer a compact overview of the Celtiberian writing tradition. The language and the inscriptions are discussed in great detail in Jordán Cólera 2004. The texts known until 1995 are edited in *MLH IV*: 349–722. New discoveries are annually reported in the journal *Palaeohispanica*. The online database *Hesperia* contains all texts.

<sup>25</sup> J. Ferrer i Jané, *Novetats sobre el sistema dual de diferenciació gràfica de les oclusives sordes i sonores*, in: F. Beltrán Lloris, C. Jordán Cólera, J. Velaza Frías (eds.), *Actas del IX Coloquio sobre lenguas y culturas paleohispánicas. Barcelona, 20–24 de octubre de 2004* (Palaeohispanica 4), Zaragoza 2005, 957–982.

<sup>26</sup> C. Jordán Cólera, *¿Sistema dual de escritura en celtibérico?*, in: Beltrán Lloris, Jordán Cólera, Velaza Frías (eds.), *Actas del IX Coloquio* (fn. 25) 1013–1030.

		G	K	B	D	T					
A	P	Λ	Λ	I	X	X	S	Ξ	M	Υ	
E	⊘	C	C	⊘	⊘	⊕	S'	M	N	Υ	
I	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	R	⊘	M'	V	
O	H	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	R'	⊘			
U	↑	⊘		⊘	⊘	⊘	L	↑			

Table 2: The Celtiberian semisyllabary

### 2.3. Gaulish<sup>27</sup>

Gaulish was probably the biggest ancient Celtic language, in respect to its numbers of speakers and to its geographic extent. It was spoken in the various parts of Gaul, i.e. modern France, and in the neighbouring areas to the east and north, in Central Europe, and, a result of Gaulish expansion in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, in various parts of southeast Europe and notably in Galatia, modern Central Anatolia in Asia Minor. Furthermore, it was also spoken in Britain, although it remains disputed whether Gaulish on the islands was only a recent import into Britain and was fundamentally a separate language beside British Celtic, the ancestor of Welsh, Cornish and Breton, or whether Gaulish and British are in fact the same or at least very closely related languages.

Of all ancient Celtic languages, Gaulish persisted longest as a spoken community language, apparently well into late antiquity, although its written use seems to have petered out one or two centuries before the spoken language disappeared. Even though, as regards the sheer numbers of speakers, it must have been the dominant language in Gaul at least in the first and second centuries AD, it ultimately succumbed to the sociolinguistic pressure of Latin. Latin as the language of administration, education, the military, supraregional trade, and, in the final phases of Gaulish's existence as a living idiom, the Church usurped all the prestige functions of language in society, and thus hastened the demise of the last great Continental Celtic language.

Gaulish is preserved in three writing traditions, Gallo-Etruscan, Gallo-Greek and Gallo-Latin. These names signify merely that the Gaulish language was written in an alphabet that is more commonly associated with another language. So we have Gaulish in Etruscan, or rather in Lepontic letters, that is, the Cisalpine Gaulish language mentioned earlier in the context of Italo-Celtic, and Gaulish in Greek and in Latin letters. The names do not refer to any linguistic influence of the respective idioms on Gaulish. In fact, Gallo-Etruscan and Gallo-Greek show some superstratal influence from Latin. Latin linguistic influence in Gallo-Latin literature is of course even more

<sup>27</sup> Gaulish inscriptions are cited with sigla of the type L-1 after *RIG* II-2.



pronounced. There is also a small *Nebenüberlieferung* of Gaulish names in the Iberian script from the oppidum of Ensérune in Southern France, but because of the very restricted body of evidence we do not speak of a Gallo-Iberian writing tradition in this case.

Some of the Gauls who invaded Northern Italy in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC took over the local variant of the North Etruscan script from the Lepontians in order to write their own language, Cisalpine Gaulish. In the handbooks, usually only six Gallo-Etruscan inscriptions, namely the longer ones, are mentioned, but the actual number amounts to several hundred, albeit most of them are very short and only record a name.

At all periods, the fates of literacy in Gaul can be understood as a reaction to activities of the Roman Empire. The use of writing starts comparatively late, in the last quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century or the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, and for almost the entire following two centuries it is confined to a small region around the delta of the Rhône, west of the Greek city-state of Massalia. There is only scant evidence for Gaulish use of the Greek alphabet beyond this core area, in particular northwards along the Rhône valley, and in isolated places across Gaul, all places where the objects that bear the inscriptions could have been brought by trade. In Switzerland two short inscriptions in Greek letters were found, one of which is from the period of Roman provincial rule. In the oppidum of Manching, Bavaria, two short inscriptions in Greek letters from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (La Tène D) were found. Perhaps writing in Greek letters was about on the verge of becoming a pan-Gaulish cultural commodity in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. However, before this could become reality, the conquest of 'free Gaul' by Julius Caesar in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century put a stop to the production of inscriptions in the Greek alphabet. Only in a few pockets like Alesia the tradition lingered on until the Neronian period.

It is probably more than chance that the beginning of writing coincides with or follows an important event that affected Southern Gaul in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, namely the Second Punic War (218–201 BC). However, even though Southern Gaul moved into the sphere of Roman strategic interest as a result of the war, it was not Roman literacy that the southern Gauls adopted, but it was the Greek writing system which they encountered in overseas trade with the Mediterranean world and in the city of Massalia, a city that must have exerted some local power and cultural influence. The height of the production of Gaulish inscriptions in the Greek script was from ca. 125–25 BC, the century after the Roman conquest of southern Gaul and its integration into the empire as Gallia Narbonensis.

The body of texts, some 300 in total, consists of short funerary and dedicatory inscriptions with a public outlook, in addition to tiny fragments of more private graffiti on pottery that often contain no more than two or three letters. In addition to the surviving physical artefacts, a few literary accounts also give evidence of writing practiced by Gauls at that time. Poseidonius, transmitted in Diodorus' Βιβλιοθήκη V 28,6, arguably writes about the situation in the Provincia Narbonensis: διὸ καὶ κατὰ τὰς ταφὰς τῶν τετελευτηκότων ἐνίουσ ἐπιστολὰς γεγραμμένας τοῖς οἰκείοις τετελευτηκόσιν ἐμβάλλειν εἰς τὴν πυρᾶν, ὡς τῶν τετελευτηκότων ἀναγνωσομένων ταύτας. 'At the funerals of their deceased some therefore throw letters into the fire which they have written for their relatives assuming that the deceased will read them.' Such a practice would be meaningless if it did not presuppose literacy in a certain social

class. In his *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*, Julius Caesar gives additional information. On the one hand, he reports about literacy for bureaucratic purposes among the Helvetii, a people from outside Gallia Narbonensis: *in castris Heluetiorum tabulae repertae sunt litteris Graecis confectae [...] quibus in tabulis nominatim ratio confecta erat, qui numerus domo exisset, qui arma ferre possent, et item separatim pueri, senes mulieresque* ‘in the camp of the Helvetii tablets in Greek script were found [...] on these tablets lists by names had been made as to how many had left their homes, who was capable of bearing arms, and separately boys, old men and women’ (BG I 29,1); on the other hand, he speaks more generally about Gauls: *neque fas esse existimant eas litteris mandare, cum in reliquis fere rebus, publicis priuatisque rationibus, Graecis litteris utantur* ‘they [= the druids] consider it a sacrilege to give it [= their sacred knowledge] over to letters, while they use the Greek script for all other matters, public and private’ (BG VI 14,3). It remains unclear who precisely Caesar had in mind with these last remarks. Although he purports to be talking about the entirety of Gaul, he may in fact be just repeating earlier ethnographic information, perhaps by Poseidonius, about Gallia Narbonensis. There is so far no archaeological evidence of Caesar’s alleged widespread use of writing in ‘free Gaul’ before the Roman conquest.

The Caesarian conquest was a turning point, not only for literacy in Gaulish. In the aftermath of the catastrophe, something remarkable happened. It would have come as no surprise if the human losses suffered during the wars and the ensuing administration in the Latin language would have acted as a fast death nail to the Gaulish language. Instead, the richest phase of attestation of Gaulish was yet to come. In the Gallo-Greek period, that is, before Caesar’s conquest, almost all of the surviving texts belong to the public sphere, and are dedicatory or commemorative stones of an almost tediously formulaic nature. The establishment of Roman administration meant the demise of public vernacular writing. But Roman administration, which was inherently founded on literacy, meant also that the art of writing – in the Roman alphabet, of course, no longer in Greek – was suddenly spread to the entire country, and was not just confined to a small pocket in the south. As a consequence of this, instead of dying out, the practice of writing changed. Within one or two generations, the written Gaulish language receded from the public and retreated to the private sphere, not necessarily to the detriment of historical linguists. This shift meant that the range of written genres suddenly exploded, and with this the type of vocabulary, syntax, phonology that is attested, and the type of register of which the texts give testimony. The standard handbooks record around 150 Gallo-Latin inscriptions, but this relatively low-looking number is due to the counting method: only texts that contain more than two Gaulish words are included in the corpus, in contrast to Gallo-Greek, where every fragment with at least two letters counts.

We find almost everything, from the very sublime to the very mundane, from religion to business. Of all the ancient Celtic writing traditions, it is certainly the Gallo-Latin period that furnishes the most interesting and most exciting texts. We have a wide range of evidence, greatly varied in objects, content and types of texts that give us an insight how writing in the native language must have become part of the everyday life of a sizeable portion of Gaulish society especially in the first one or two centuries after the Roman conquest. I can only enumerate a tiny fraction of the overall number of

Gallo-Latin texts. Famous examples of Gaulish writing include several magical tablets, curse tablets as well as tablets with curative magic (lead plates of Chamalières (L-100), Larzac (L-98), Chartres<sup>28</sup>), invitations to erotic activities such as the spindle whorls (L-111–121), social-interactive graffiti such as summons to drinking games (bowl of Banassac, L-50), sales receipts (Rezéz)<sup>29</sup> or potters' accounts from the industrial centre at La Graufesenque (L-29–34). There are also documents that are completely private in character, where a father speaks with his son through the medium of writing (plate of Lezoux, L-66). These documents betray an advanced level of Romanisation, or rather, mutual convergence of the cultures, but still the vernacular language is resilient enough to cater to almost all communicative situations and registers.

Occasionally, objects occur in contexts that may give testimony to an oppositional use of Gaulish: the 5-year-cycle calendar from Coligny from the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (*RIG* III) could be the product of a Gaulish cultural resistance. But the exact opposite, Gaulish in an assertively pro-Roman context, is found as well: a remarkable inscription on tableware intended for soldiers, which I identified several years ago, celebrates the Roman military success against the last Dacian king Decibalus (L-143) and thus gives evidence of Gaulish identification with the Empire at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> The vernacular language thus had also a stabilising function within the Empire.

The Gallo-Latin texts and their language, which belongs to the linguistically defined Middle and Late Gaulish phases, displays a lot of influence from Latin that can only be sketched here.<sup>31</sup> In many cases the names of the persons involved are Roman, but often they are clearly first-generation Romans of Gaulish lineage, and the shapes of the objects follow Roman models. Inherited final *-m* had all become *-n* in Gaulish. One of the most important phonological innovations of Middle and Late Gaulish must have been the general loss of that word-final nasal, as well as of final *-s*. However, this is not always observable in the inscriptions. In the curse tablet from Larzac (L-98), for instance, all final nasals are retained, written as *m*! The best explanation is that this is due to Latinate school influence, that the scribe of Larzac transferred to the vernacular language a rule he or she had learnt in a Latin school, namely to write *-m* at the end of each word where in the living speech a nasalised vowel was pronounced.

The documents that have survived from the Middle and Late Gaulish phases do not convey the impression of half-competent speakers, but of a vital language that is still

<sup>28</sup> P.-Y. Lambert, J. Viret, K. Stüber, D. Stifter, L. Repanšek, *La défixion gauloise de Chartres*, EC 39 (2013) 123–192 (repr. Paris: CNRS Editions 2014).

<sup>29</sup> P.-Y. Lambert, D. Stifter, *Le plomb gaulois de Rezéz*, EC 38 (2012) 139–164.

<sup>30</sup> D. Stifter, *New early second-century Gaulish texts from La Graufesenque (L-143a–c)*, *Keltische Forschungen* 5 (2010–2011) 197–227. For the historical background, see F. Mitthof, *Decebals Tod als inszeniertes Spektakel? Bemerkungen zu einigen Reliefsigillaten des L. Cosius aus La Graufesenque*, in: B. Bastl, V. Gassner, U. Muss (eds.), *Zeitreisen: Syrien – Palmyra – Rom. Festschrift für Andreas Schmidt-Colinet zum 65. Geburtstag*, Wien 2010, 139–155.

<sup>31</sup> For the interaction of Gaulish and Latin, see K. Stüber, *Effects of Language Contact on Roman and Gaulish Personal Names*, in: H. L. C. Tristram (ed.), *The Celtic Languages in Contact. Papers from the Workshop at the XIII International Congress of Celtic Studies, Bonn, 26–27 July 2007*, Potsdam 2007, 81–92.

undergoing its own developments, albeit under influence from the Latin-Romance superstrate. A stray remark in the *Digesta* XXXII, 11 of Ulpian (222–228) sheds some light on the socially still significant position of Gaulish. The decree states that *fideicommissa* (testamentary provisions) may be composed in Gaulish: *Fideicommissa quocumque sermone relinqui possunt, non solum Latina uel Graeca, sed etiam Punica uel Gallicana uel alterius cuiuscumque gentis* ‘*Fideicommissa* may be left in any language, not only in Latin or Greek, but also in Punic or Gallican or of whatever other people.’ Nevertheless, from a sociolinguistic point of view we have to reckon with a steady retreat of the language from the urban centres into rural areas during the late antique period, accompanied by the loss of social prestige of its speakers.

Inscriptions in the Roman alphabet can be found in the entire territory of ancient Gaul and its neighbouring regions. The monumental stone inscriptions from Gaul in the imperial period, comparatively few in number, use Roman capital letters (e.g. Alise-Ste-Reine L-13). However, most Gaulish texts on other materials (mostly pottery or lead) are written in the Roman cursive script, which differs in a few substantial ways from the modern usage. One is the use of an over-long <I> (called *I longa*) beside normal <i>. Although no clear distribution emerges, there seems to be a predilection of its use for the glide /j/. A more substantial difference is found with the letter E which is written with two parallel hastae, i.e. <II>. That a consciousness for a national Gaulish script existed at some stage can be gleaned from the addition of supplementary letters to the traditional inventory of the Latin alphabet. These characters were inherited from Gallo-Greek writing and represented sounds for which no letters existed in the Roman script. Their actual use varies across time and space. Beside the Latin letter X which serves as a sign for /ks/ and, in Vulgar Latin practice, /s/, the identically shaped Greek letter *chi* had been borrowed to represent the sound /χ/ which is missing from genuinely Latin texts. Barred Gr. delta <δ̄> and theta <θ̄> can serve as signs for ‘*tau Gallicum*’, a peculiar sound comprising dental and sibilant features. Apparently influenced by this, barred double *ss* is also found in late inscriptions, e.g., in the long text on the tile from Châteaubleau (L-93), although this may have nothing to do with original *tau Gallicum*, but may rather represent a strident sibilant sound as opposed to a weakened *s*.

The Gaulish texts, extending over a period of 500–600 years, give us snapshots of a language that was clearly changing over time. The late texts show unambiguous signs of a language that is developing in tandem with other languages of Western Europe, i.e. weakening of final syllables and perhaps a collapse of vowel quantities has set in. There are also signs for ongoing lenition of word-internal consonants. It is less clear how much diatopic variation is represented among the texts which, after all, come from a very large area. The numerous linguistic testimonies do not form a coherent picture, but display peculiarities that may reflect dialectal divisions. The Gaulish language, and with it the last representative of a Continental Celtic language, ultimately fades away around the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD. There is ample evidence for the continuing feeling of political and perhaps linguistic Gaulish self-consciousness throughout the Roman imperial period. Peasant revolts of the 3<sup>rd</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries are known under the native term of *bagaudes*, an independent Gaulish empire was set up in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century,

and a tradition of cultural identity in the 6<sup>th</sup> century can be gauged from the attempt to collect Gaulish vocabulary in a list now known as Endlicher's Glossary.<sup>32</sup>

Two literary testimonies, one very famous, the other less so, provide us with rare insights into Gaulish at its end. In his commentary on St. Paul's letter to the Galatians (*in Epistulam ad Galatas* II 3), written in the year 386/387, St. Jerome (331–420) notes that the language of the Galatians is similar to that of the Treveri in the Belgica: *Galatas excepto sermone Graeco, quo omnis oriens loquitur, propriam linguam eandem paene habere quam Treuiros* 'Apart from the Greek language, which is spoken throughout the entire East, the Galatians have their own language, almost the same as the Treveri'.<sup>33</sup> Despite having many problems, this passage carries some weight since St. Jerome had spent time both in the area of the Treveri (370) and of the Galatians (373/374). The last report we have about the Galatian language itself is from the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Cyril of Scythopolis who tells a story about a Galatian monk who was possessed by an evil spirit. He was unable to speak, but εἰ δὲ πάνυ ἐβιάζετο, Γαλατιστὶ ἐφθέγγετο 'If he was forced to, he spoke in Galatian' (*Vita S. Euthymii* 55). With this testimony caution is advisable, because in view of the isolated and late reference, it may not be excluded that it refers to a particularly incomprehensible dialect or local accent of Greek, instead of proving that a Celtic language was still spoken in the 5<sup>th</sup> or even 6<sup>th</sup> century AD in Galatia. It must not be forgotten that not a single shred of vernacularly written language exists.

Ironically, the disappearance of the ancient Celtic writing tradition, which now only survives in fragmentary form, coincides with the adoption of writing in the much better attested Insular Celtic world (Irish, British Celtic).

Further reading:

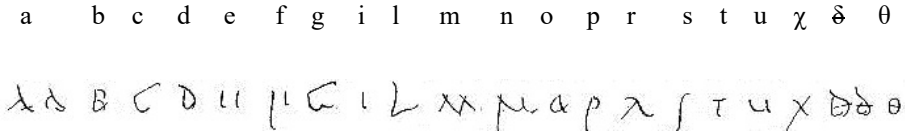
Ruiz Darasse, Mullen 2018 offer a compact overview of Transalpine Gaulish. The Gallo-Greek and Gallo-Latin inscriptions known until ca. 2000 are collected in the four volumes of *RIG*. The important texts are discussed in Lambert 2003 and are also accessible in Delamarre 2003. The most remarkable finds from after this time are Stifter 2010–11, Lambert, Stifter 2012 and Lambert et al. 2013. The Gallo-Etruscan inscriptions are collected in the database *LexLep*.

a b g d e ē θ i ī k l m n χ s o p r s t u χ ὀ  
A B Γ Δ Ε Η Θ Ι Κ Λ Μ Ν Ξ Ο Π Ρ Σ Τ ΟΥ Χ ὸ

Table 3: The Gallo-Greek alphabet

<sup>32</sup> A. Blom, *Endlicher's Glossary*, EC 37 (2011) 159–181.

<sup>33</sup> T. Meißner, *Das Hieronymuszeugnis und der Tod des Gallischen*, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 57 (2010) 107–112.

Table 4: The Gallo-Latin cursive script (after *RIG* II-1, 370)

#### 2.4. Ogam Irish<sup>34</sup>

The foregoing three traditions are traditionally subsumed under the term Old Celtic, but if we define everything before the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD as Old Celtic, a fourth tradition must be mentioned here as well, namely the Irish Ogam<sup>35</sup> script. This leads us away from the Continent to Insular Celtic. Unlike the ancient Continental Celtic languages, Irish did not die out, but from the state of the language captured on the Ogam stones, it developed into the well-attested medieval Old Irish language (ca. 650–900), and thence into the modern Gaelic languages that are still spoken in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man today. Still, the difference between the earliest forms of Ogam Irish and Old Irish, let alone modern Gaelic languages, not only in the writing system as such, can hardly be any greater. Ogam Irish, or, more correctly, Primitive Irish in Ogam script, is as akin to Old Irish as Latin is to French, even though in the case of Irish only two or three centuries separate the two stages of the language. The precise conditions that triggered the massive transformations in the short period are unknown; language contact and rapid shift from one language to another may be a factor, but it is worth noting that structurally very similar transformations affected languages in the entirety of North-West Europe during the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD, including Germanic and Romance languages. It is a fortunate coincidence that the Ogam script was devised shortly before the GUPS (Great Upheaval of Phonological Systems) in North-West Europe, at a stage when the language was still very close in phonology and morphology to the other ancient Celtic languages, and that this writing system remained in use during the transitional period when the language underwent the most decisive changes. Some of the changes are directly reflected on the Ogam stones, e.g. when the same name is attested, as if by snapshots, from a sequence of transitional stages. The following Primitive Irish variants, in chronological order, of the Proto-Celtic genitive \**Lugudikos* are found:

1. LUGUDECCAS (Ardmore, Waterford; *CIIC* 263) [vowel changes, lowering of *i* > *e* and *o* > *a*]
2. LUGUDECA (Kilgrovane, Waterford; *CIIC* 286) [loss of final *-s*]
3. LUGUDEC (Kilmannia, Monaghan; *CIIC* 4) [loss of final short syllables]
4. LUGUDUC (Kilcullen, Cork; *CIIC* 108) [loss of distinct vowel quality in unstressed syllables]

<sup>34</sup> Ogam inscriptions are cited with sigla of the type *CIIC* 1 after *CIIC*.

<sup>35</sup> As a scholar of Old Irish, I prefer the Old Irish spelling *Ogam* ['oɣəm] over the more commonly used Modern Irish spelling *Ogham* ['o:m].

This name finally appears in 8<sup>th</sup>-century Old Irish manuscript sources as *Luigdech*, the genitive of *Lugaid*, showing also the effects of syncope. However, a number of other important phonological developments, such as lenition or palatalisation, cannot be represented in this writing system, but can only be indirectly inferred.

Ogam is a curious and unique script consisting of strokes and notches engraved on the edges of standing stones. It is commonly assumed that Ogam was a deliberate invention by somebody familiar with Latin writing and Latin grammatical theory, possibly in the west of Roman Britain, an area that saw Irish settlements in the late antique period. The main period of Ogam production was from the 4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> centuries. The inscriptions especially of Britain give evidence of the multilingual milieu in which they were produced. They are usually bilingual and contain Latin or Old British versions of the Irish text. Outside of the antiquarian manuscript context of the later medieval period, Ogam inscriptions are exclusively commemorative, but they were sometimes secondarily re-interpreted as demarcations of land possession. They record the name of an individual, almost exclusively male, followed by the name of his father. Only very rarely do Ogams contain other elements. Many of the currently known 400 stones can still be encountered *in situ* in Ireland.

Ogam is an inherently monumental script. It requires big stones to write upon, but is not suited for the subtle medium of manuscripts. Nevertheless, in the medieval antiquarian tradition the odd examples can be found in manuscripts, quite obviously written by the scribes as a distraction from their tedious scribal tasks, such as the example in Old Irish *latheirt* ‘intoxication’ (Sg. 204b). Maybe Ogam was also used on wooden sticks but nothing of that sort has survived in the archaeological record and the odd references in Irish sagas to this practice could be antiquarian fiction. Due to its lack of suitability for the recording of longer texts, i.e. longer than three or four words, it is no surprise that the Roman alphabet was eventually picked up and adapted to write Irish, as soon as a real literate culture developed in Ireland as part of the cultural package of Christianity.

#### Further reading:

The stones known until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century are collected in *CIIC*. There are several online databases, the most ambitious is *Ogham in 3D*. McManus 1991 discusses Ogam in a wide cultural context, Ziegler 1994 concentrates on the language.

┐	Beith	/	Muin	⊥	Úath (H?)	-	Ailm
π	Luis	#	Gort	⊥	Dair	-	Onn
≡	Fern (V)	##	nGétal (G <sup>w</sup> ?)	≡	Tinne	≡	Úr
≡	Sail	###	Straif (St?)	≡	Coll	≡	Edad
≡	Nin	###	Ruis	≡	Ceirt (Q)	≡	Idad

Table 5: The Ogam alphabet

### 2.5. Marginal and imaginary writing traditions

Aside from the five main writing systems discussed in the previous sections, a number of more or less well attested marginal Celtic writing traditions must be mentioned. Reference has already been made in section 1 to the use of the Venetic script on early Celtic coin emissions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC in the region north of the Adria. The very medium, coin legends, indicates that the practice is part of the contemporary political configuration in the South-East Alpine region. Further west in the Alps, mysterious variants of the North Etruscan writing family occur on isolated objects. The two most prominent examples, the inscriptions from Voltino and Castaneda, have already been discussed in section 2.1. about Italo-Celtic.

Finally, there are two or three (the number is indeed not easy to define) entirely doubtful writing systems. The first is the so-called Glozel script, found around a village of that name in France. These inscriptions on clay tablets (!) were discovered under obscure circumstances in the late 1920s. So far, they have only been studied without the required scientific rigour and expertise.<sup>36</sup> While some of the objects themselves have indeed been dated by scientific methods into antiquity and the high middle ages, nothing certain can be said about the inscriptions, not even if they represent an authentic writing system that dates back to pre-Roman times.

Jürgen Zeidler<sup>37</sup> attempted to identify an Eastern Alpine La Tène script as a separate writing tradition. Both the brevity of the alleged texts, which consist almost exclusively of single signs of very basic shape, as well as the vagueness and variety of the glyphs are rather indicative of a pre- or paraliterate system of marking than of true literacy. Zeidler included in his corpus also material that had already been published by the archaeologist Rudolf Egger in the 1950s and 1960s as part of his excavation reports from the Magdalensberg in the Austrian province of Carinthia.<sup>38</sup> This ‘Noric script’ is a chimaera that was born out of Egger’s desire to discover writing of his own. The bulk of the material is either paraliterate potters’ marks or misread Latin letters. The only ‘long’ text, graffiti on the fragment of a terra-sigillata plate from the Magdalensberg, is a fake, perhaps part of a practical joke played on him by some members of his excavation team in 1957.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Aside a long list of privately printed publications by Hitz, the matter is most conveniently summarised in H.-R. Hitz, *Lassen sich die Inschriften von Glozel in Frankreich unter den Alt-keltischen Texten einordnen?*, in: H. Birkhan (ed.), *Kelten-Einfälle an der Donau. Akten des Vierten Symposiums deutschsprachiger Keltologinnen und Keltologen. (Linz/Donau, 17.–21. Juli 2005)*, Wien 2007, 279–305.

<sup>37</sup> J. Zeidler, *A Celtic Script in the Eastern La Tène Culture?*, EC 35 (2003) 69–132.

<sup>38</sup> R. Egger, *Die Ausgrabungen auf dem Magdalensberg 1956 und 1957*, Carinthia 149 (1959) 3–143; R. Egger, *Zum vorlateinischen Alphabet der Noriker*, AArchSlov 19 (1968) 37–42.

<sup>39</sup> D. Stifter, *Vernacular Celtic Writing Traditions in the East-Alpine Region in the Iron-Age Period?*, in: R. Karl, J. Leskovar (eds.), *Interpretierte Eisenzeiten. Fallstudien, Methoden, Theorie. Tagungsbeiträge der 3. Linzer Gespräche zur interpretativen Eisenzeitarchäologie* (Studien zur Kulturgeschichte von Oberösterreich 22), Linz 2009, 363–367; D. Stifter, *Inscriptions Pseudocelticae. Wrong and premature ascriptions of inscriptions as Celtic*, in: R. Karl, J.



This is not the first time that such a thing had happened to Egger. More than thirty years previously, one of the workers, a member of an Alpine ranger regiment that had been dispatched to assist in the excavations excavating a Celtic hill-top settlement on the Maria Saaler Berg in Carinthia, had planted a faked bone awl into which random runic letters had been incised. Egger took the authenticity of the piece for granted and understood the text, which he read as *xsetoš*, as the name of the alleged pre-historic proprietor.<sup>40</sup> The inscription created a great amount of interest among runologists in the following years, for if genuine, the Maria Saaler Berg inscription would have been the earliest known runic text. Ultimately, the affair was not resolved because of scholarly doubts about the authenticity of the nonsensical inscription, but because his conscience drove the forger to confess his deed at the *Landesarchiv* (provincial archive) of Carinthia.<sup>41</sup> In any case, Egger was part of a tradition in which faked inscriptions were a way of playing practical jokes on archaeologists. It was well-known among his colleagues that Rudolf Egger wanted to discover unusual inscriptions, so some of his students evidently did him the favour. He was too ready to discover a local Celtic writing system of his own to be restrained by a sober assessment of the facts.

The following ancient epigraphic traditions are genuine, but do not belong to Celtic, despite occasional claims to that effect.

The language of the South-West-Iberian or ‘Tartessian’ corpus, around 100 inscriptions from the very South-West corner of the Iberian Peninsula,<sup>42</sup> are written in an unidentified language of unknown linguistic affiliation. Attempts to show that they are evidence for an early form of Celtic are misguided.<sup>43</sup>

In older literature, one may find references to Lusitanian, attested roughly in Central Portugal and to the east of it, as a Celtic or para-Celtic language. Neither term is appropriate. There is agreement today that it represents a separate branch of Indo-European, possibly genetically close to Italic or Italo-Celtic. Although with five or six

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Leskovar, St. Moser (eds.), *Interpretierte Eisenzeiten. Die erfundenen Kelten – Mythologie eines Begriffes und seine Verwendung in Archäologie, Tourismus und Esoterik. Tagungsbeiträge der 4. Gespräche zur interpretativen Eisenzeitarchäologie* (Studien zur Kulturgeschichte von Oberösterreich 31), Linz 2012, 298–300.

<sup>40</sup> R. Egger, *Ausgrabungen in Kärnten 1924–1926*, Carinthia 117 (1927) 1–4.

<sup>41</sup> R. Pittioni, *Zur Frage der Echtheit des Knochenpfriemens vom Maria-Saaler-Berg*, Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap 8 (1937) 460–466; the story is presented in a more favourable light in R. Egger, *Ausgrabungen auf dem Maria-Saaler Berge*, Carinthia 126 (1936) 87–92.

<sup>42</sup> Edited in J. Untermann, *Monumenta Linguarum Hispanicarum IV: Die tartessischen, keltiberischen und lusitanischen Inschriften*, Wiesbaden 1997, 1–348. See also Javier Velaza’s contribution in this volume on ‘Writing (and reading) in the pre-Roman Iberian Peninsula’.

<sup>43</sup> The claim, which was intended to bolster a much further-reaching hypothesis about the origins of Celtic, has been made notably by J. T. Koch, *Tartessian: Celtic in the South-west at the Dawn of History* (Celtic Studies Publications 13), Aberystwyth 2009 and J. T. Koch, *Tartessian II: The Inscription of Mesas do Castelinho. ro and the Verbal Complex. Preliminaries to Historical Phonology*, Aberystwyth 2011. The theory is soberly assessed in J. F. Eska’s review of Koch, *Tartessian* and Koch, *Tartessian II* in *Kratylos* 58 (2013) 58–73.

canonical inscriptions in the Latin alphabet the language is still poorly attested, its very slowly growing corpus has permitted better insight into its fundamental structure.<sup>44</sup>

### 3. Evaluation

As promised at the outset, it is not a uniform picture that emerges from this survey of ancient Celtic epigraphy. As a preliminary summary, it can be said that the adoption, development and spread of literacy in Celtic-speaking populations, and its social position, has recurrently been in reaction to external political and cultural influences from dominant Mediterranean civilisations, notably the Romans. But these reactions are not always of the nature that one might expect, but they reveal cultural and linguistic self-awareness in the native populations.

The fates of Italo-Celtic and Celtiberian on the one hand, and Gaulish on the other, are of a quite contrary character. Italo-Celtic, especially Lepontic literacy had a surprisingly long history, but it seems to have always stayed somewhat on the margins of public life. The Celtiberian experience, in contrast, was shorter, but much more profound. An attempt to raise literacy to a central position in the public life is clearly recognisable, but it could be sustained only for a few generations. The comparatively scanty sources for Italo-Celtic and Celtiberian suggest that native literacy came to an end in these regions around the Augustan period. The regional languages may have continued for a while ‘beneath the radar’, as it were, of public and posthumous visibility, but this is pure speculation.

Gaulish, on the other hand, shows a much more diverse picture. It is only around the Augustan period that it really starts to ‘take off’, as it were. After the sudden demise of native literacy in the Greek alphabet in the wake of Caesar’s conquest of Gaul, widespread use was made of writing for practical, everyday purposes. Gaulish illustrates that the integration into the Roman Empire does not automatically entail the disappearance of vernacular literacy, nor does the adoption of the Latin alphabet entail the abolishment of the native tongue.

It is difficult to assess if the different fates of the languages had anything to do with an active tolerance, or rather passive indifference, of the administration to the local languages. Nor can it be the insistence on a non-Roman script that hastened the demise of the epichoric epigraphic traditions of Italo-Celtic and Celtiberian. In both cases one can observe a switch to the Roman alphabet at the end, like in Gaulish. It probably must have been more crucial for a vernacular language to be sustainable under Roman rule to possess enough critical mass to be spoken in sufficiently varied social contexts. In this respect, the ancient Celtic languages must have differed significantly from each other. Whereas Italo-Celtic and Celtiberian are both confined to relatively small areas,

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<sup>44</sup> The Lusitanian texts known at the time are edited in Untermann, *Monumenta Linguarum Hispanicarum IV* (fn. 42) 723–758. For more information on Lusitanian, see D. Wodtko, *Lusitanian. Language, writing, epigraphy*, Zaragoza 2017; D. Stifter, 113. *Lusitanian*, in: J. S. Klein, B. Joseph, M. Fritz (eds.), *Handbook of Comparative and Historical Indo-European Linguistics* (Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft 41/2), Berlin, New York 2018.

Gaulish had currency over a much wider territory, and the number of speakers must have been proportionately higher.

In all likelihood, the attitude was equally depreciatory to all provincial languages. Compare the following episode from Aulus Gellius' (born between AD 110–130) collection *Noctes Atticae* XI 7,3–4 (composed ca. 180):<sup>45</sup> *ueluti Romae nobis praesentibus uetus celebratusque homo in causis, sed repentina et quasi tumultuaria doctrina praeditus, cum apud praefectum urbi uerba faceret et dicere uellet inopi quendam miseroque uictu uiuere et furfureum panem esitare uinumque eructum et feditum potare. 'hic', inquit, 'eques Romanus apludam edit et flocces bibit'. aspexerunt omnes qui aderant alius alium, primo tristiores turbato et requirente uoltu quidnam illud utriusque uerbi foret: post deinde, quasi nescio quid Tusce aut Gallice dixisset, uniuersi riserunt.* 'For instance in Rome in our presence, a man experienced and celebrated as a pleader, but furnished with a sudden and, as it were, hasty education, was speaking to the Prefect of the City, and wished to say that a certain man with a poor and wretched way of life ate bread from bran and drank bad and spoiled wine. "This Roman knight", he said, "eats *apluda* and drinks *flocces*." All who were present looked at each other, first seriously and with an inquiring expression, wondering what the two words meant; thereupon, as if he might have said something in, I don't know, Etruscan or Gaulish, all of them burst out laughing.' No matter whether this episode relates to Gellius' own time or is a literary anecdote from an earlier period, it shows that as soon as a certain level of the society was reached, vernacular languages became a matter of ridicule. 300 years later (after AD 471), the Gaul Sidonius Apollinaris from Lugdunum writes in a letter to his relative Ecdicius (*Epistulae* III 3, 2): *sermonis Celtici squamam depositura nobilitas nunc oratorio stilo, nunc etiam Camenalibus modis imbuebatur* 'the [Arvernian] nobility, wishing to cast off the scales of Celtic speech, will now be imbued [i.e., by Ecdicius] with oratorial style, even with tunes of the Muses'. Although this highly rhetorical, clichéd statement does not allow any inferences about the actual state of the language at the time, it says something about the status of the non-educated speech, and about the sociolinguistic pressure that Gaulish had to face over several centuries. In this light, it is remarkable that it was able to survive and thrive for so long in the first place.<sup>46</sup>

In the end, all ancient Celtic languages suffered the same fate. The local speech communities gave up on their local identity and adopted the supraregional code of communication. As soon as a written tradition is abandoned and a language is silent as a social medium for the community, it is gone and cannot see a resurrection from the dead.

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted after A. Blom, *lingua gallica, lingua celtica: Gaulish, Gallo-Latin, or Gallo-Romance?*, *Keltische Forschungen* 4 (2007) 7–54.

<sup>46</sup> On the question of linguistic variation in the Roman Empire in general, see the publications of J. N. Adams, especially *Bilingualism and the Latin Language*, Cambridge 2003, and *The Regional Diversification of Latin 200 BC–AD 600*, Cambridge 2007, and A. Mullen, P. James (eds.), *Multilingualism in the Graeco-Roman Worlds*, Cambridge 2012.

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