

NEW CISALPINE CELTIC INSCRIPTIONS FROM CANTON TICINO (CH)

ABSTRACT

A presentation of two hitherto unpublished Cisalpine Celtic graffiti from Ticino, Switzerland (*LexLep* TI·55 and TI·56).

During an autopsy trip to Ticino, Switzerland, for the research project *Celtic Language and Identity in Northern Italy and the Alpine Region* in October 2023,¹ I was shown two unpublished graffiti, written in the Lepontic alphabet, from find places in the canton – one in storage at the Ufficio cantonale dei beni culturali in Bellinzona, one on exhibition in the Museo Castello di Montebello.² The present short paper presents the inscriptions, which have also been included in the digital edition *Lexicon Leponticum* (*LexLep*) with the sigla TI·55 and TI·56.

1. TI·55 (TREMONA-PIASA).

UFFICIO CANTONALE DEI BENI CULTURALI (BELLINZONA), INV. NO. 240.006.13.

The object is a ceramic plate (max. diam. 17 cm, max. height 4.5 cm, foot diam. 6 cm), broken into multiple fragments, but complete (and reassembled). It was found in 2006 in tomb 2 of the late Iron-age and early Roman necropolis of Tremona-Piasa³ together with one iron and three bronze fibulae, an iron knife, assorted ceramics (one pot, one bowl, one beaker, one vaso a trottola, and one cup filled with fibulae and bearing a single character on the foot), and burned human and animal bones and ashes, which were also on the plate and in the bowl. The tomb appears to have been reused already in pre-Roman times, as the rectangular cist (40 x 25 cm) built of stone slabs of a type which belongs to the last pre-Roman phase of the necropolis is set into the round pit of an earlier burial representing the oldest layer (see Cardani Vergani & Mosetti 2007: 175).

The sinistroverse inscription $\text{VX}\mathring{\text{A}}\text{X}$ **katu** is written after firing on the outside bottom of the plate near the rim of the foot; it is upside-down, as typical for late (La Tène C2/D) Cisalpine Celtic graffiti on open ceramic vessels.⁴ It is ca. 4.5 cm long; the letter height varies between 1.5 cm (kappa) and 2.5 cm (upsilon). The lines are not carved deeply, but neatly; a break runs through alpha and damages the upper tips of St Andrew's cross and upsilon. The letter shapes are the standard forms of the Lepontic alphabet; the hasta of alpha extends beyond the upper bar.⁵

The sequence **katu** can be analysed as a Celtic *on*-stem personal name in the nominative. Due to the orthographical ambiguities of the Lepontic alphabet, viz. the non-distinction of voiced and voiceless stops and the non-notation of /n/ before /t/ and of geminates, the base could

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² My thanks is due to Moira Morinini Pè of the Ufficio cantonale dei beni culturali Bellinzona for hosting me, organising access to museums and sites and assisting with my work, and for permitting me to publish the inscriptions. I am also grateful to David Stifter and an anonymous reviewer for valuable observations.

³ See Cardani Vergani 2007: 29, Cardani Vergani & Mosetti 2007 and Cardani Vergani 2008: 26–7 on the necropolis, where 37 cremation tombs were excavated in 2006 and 2007 in addition to four which had been found sporadically in the 20th century (42 tombs altogether according to Bianchi 2017).

⁴ E.g. TI·2, TI·5, TI·8, VA·8, VA·13, VA·19, VA·21, VA·27, MI·1.

⁵ Cf. e.g. VB·4, TI·21, VA·8, BG·24.

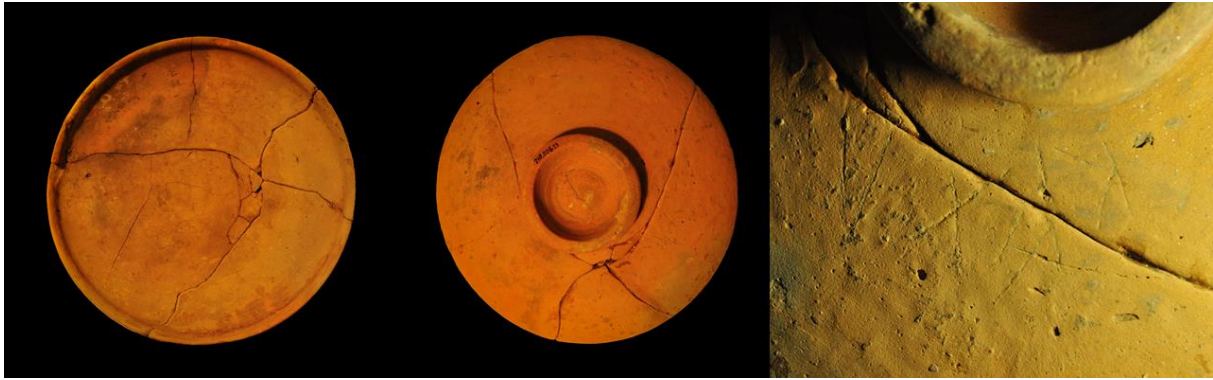


Fig. 1: TI-55 (Tremona-Piasa), object and inscription.

in theory have multiple shapes (*k/gǎ(n)t(t)/d(d)-*). We can largely exclude the variants with voiced stops, as they find only sparse comparanda in Transalpine Gaul; clear evidence for post-vocalic /d/ being spelled with St Andrew's cross in inscriptions after the fourth century BC being absent, it could also be argued (very tentatively) that intervocalic /d/ would be spelled with san in the present inscription (cf. Stifter 2010: 373). The most straight-forward analysis of the name is *katū* (or maybe *kattū* with hypocoristic gemination), a short name formed from a dithematic name with first element *katu-* 'battle, fight' (OIr. *cath* 'id.'),⁶ such as CIL XIII 11473 CATURICI (dat., Yverdon).⁷ *katu-* is also otherwise attested in Cisalpine Celtic in BG-41.19 **katutinios** (Carona),⁸ BG-15 **katua** *kat(t)uā* (Parre; uncertain reading), and repeatedly in abbreviation **kat** (VA-29, BG-11, VR-4.1, NM-12). Also possible (as for the abbreviations just mentioned) is *kantū* from a name in *kanto/i-*, e.g. CIL XIII 4547 CANTOGNATI (gen., Neufgrange), RIG M-291 CANTORIX (coin legend), for which multiple etymologies are feasible (see Delamarre 2003: 103–5 on *kanti-* 'together with', *kanto-* 'hundred' and *kantos* 'circle [of the wheel], rim').

The name is likely to be that of the buried person, either inscribed as an owner's inscription on a personal item which was used as an urn, or on occasion of the burial. It must be kept in mind, however, that not all inscriptions on grave furniture necessarily name the deceased; cases like TI-23 **setupokios** *se(n)tubog(i)ios* (m) and VA-13 **polios** (m) in the graves of women at Solduno and Arsago Seprio,⁹ or VA-7 **ateuloipitus** (m) and VA-8 **anisa** *an(n)is(s)ā* (f) in the same grave at Somma Lombardo indicate that (presumably) owner's inscriptions could find their way into other peoples' tombs, conceivably e.g. on (funerary) gifts or inherited items.

2. TI-56 (GIUBIASCO-PALASIO).

MUSEO CASTELLO DI MONTEBELLO (BELLINZONA), INV. NO. 113.2013.1.

The vaso a trottola was found in tomb 21 of the late Iron-age necropolis of Giubiasco-Palasio (located ca. 700 m south-west of the one near the train station, closer to the mountains), where 31 inhumations in 29 tombs, dated to the fourth to second century BC (La Tène B1–C2), were excavated before building work in 2013.¹⁰ The tombs are rectangular, with walls constructed out of small stone blocks, and covered with stone slabs. Tomb 21, dated to La Tène C2 (second century BC, cf. Tori et al. 2022: 745), is one of three which were chosen for immediate analysis

⁶ See Delamarre 2003: 111, Matasović 2009: 195, LEIA: C-47 f.

⁷ See Holder 1896–1907 I: 837–65, Schmidt 1957: 167–9, Evans 1967: 171–5, Delamarre 2007: 216 et passim.

⁸ See Eska 2024: 171.

⁹ Crivelli 1939: 199, Binaghi Leva 1990: 34, 52–4.

¹⁰ See Cardani Vergani 2014 and, in greater detail, Tori et al. 2022.



Fig. 2: TI-56 (Giubiasco-Palasio), object and inscription.

and restauration due to its rich furniture, which is currently exhibited in its entirety in the Museo Castello di Montebello in Bellinzona. It includes three bronze fibulae, a pair of bronze earrings with amber beads, a silver spiral ring and an iron chain belt (all on the body of the deceased), as well as a ceramic bowl and goblet (De Marinis type H) placed, with the inscribed bottle, at the feet of the body.¹¹ The perfectly preserved vaso a trottola (max. diam. 13.5 cm, mouth diam. 3.5 cm, foot diam. 7.3 cm, height 13 cm), type 2 in the system of Tori et al. 2010: 215–16, is decorated with four concentric circles around the widest section and three around the neck, painted in reddish-brown colour (drawing in Tori et al. 2022: 746, fig. 1). On its foot is scratched a single character in the shape H (with one hasta and the upper bar prolonged) – this element, which joins a plethora of similar more or less script-like ‘marks’ on the Iron-age pottery of the North Italic region, is unlikely to represent writing, but may be a manufacturer’s sign.¹²

Sinistroverse IXX tati is inscribed in tall letters (height 3–4 cm, length of inscription 3.5 cm) on the bottom of the bottle. The letters feature a few prolonged lines, and some additional scratches disturb the inscription – a reviewer notes that, when factoring in one of these scratches, a reading of the last letter as *upsilon V* rather than *iota* seems possible. While it is not

¹¹ See Masetti 2016: 6–7 and Tori et al. 2022: 743 (with drawings of the objects p. 746) for details about the tomb.

¹² Pace Tori et al. 2022: 743, who read H ai .

admissible to summarily exclude this possibility, the scratch in question is considerably fainter than the others and crosses both lines of preceding St Andrew's cross. The letter shapes are the standard forms of the Lepontic alphabet, but the placement of the inscription on the bottom is untypical for inscriptions on vasi a trottola, which are more often placed on the shoulder;¹³ BS·19 (Remedello) and CO·66 (Como) on the undersides of vasi a trottola are both upside-down, while TI·56 is upright.

The sequence **tati** may be a personal name in the genitive *-ī*, though an abbreviation seems more likely, as clear genitive forms are not otherwise attested in the graffiti from the Ticino necropoleis.¹⁴ As in the case of **katu**, the ambiguous letters allow for multiple readings (*t/dā̃(n)t(t)/d(d)-*). The best candidates are *dāt-* (or, with hypocoristic gemination, *datt-*), cf. DATOS (potter's name, Bavay), DATUSIO (potter's name, Trèves), CIL XII 2770 DATTOUR (Laudun), and *tāt-* (*tatt-*), cf. RIG IV M-278 TATINOS (coin legend of the Ruteni), CIL XIII 8221 TATICENUS (Cologne), XIII 11978 TATICONI (dat., Urmitz), III 5350 TATUCAE (dat., Kaindorf), RIU V 1208 TATUNI[S] (gen., Dunaujvaros) (see Delamarre 2007: 219, 233–4 et passim).¹⁵ Both bases are etymologically obscure, but *tat-* is plausibly connected to the Lallwort for 'father' (OIr. *tata*, W *tad*, see Holder 1896–1907 II: 1751) by Meid 2005: 291–2. Theoretically, the name could of course also be non-Celtic and borrowed from a substrate language.

Concerning the inscription's function, what was said above about TI·55 also applies here. If **tati** is an *o*-stem name *dat(i)os** or *tat(i)os** uel sim. in the genitive, it is, like *se(n)tubog(i)ios* at Solduno, a masculine name on a piece of grave furniture in a woman's tomb, possibly the owner's inscription of a male relative; if it is an abbreviation, it may of course be that of a woman's name.

Abbreviations

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¹³ In the Ticino e.g. TI·12, 13, 14 at Giubiasco-Stazione and TI·21, 24 at Solduno.

¹⁴ Probable four-letter abbreviations of names are TI·14 **plai** (Giubiasco), TI·15 **riop** (Giubiasco) and TI·24 **šium** (Solduno). If the reading should indeed be **tatu**, an interpretation as an *on*-stem (as with **katu** above) would be possible.

¹⁵ TADIUS, TADIA are attested in a British inscription (RIB-369, Isca Silurum); a few forms in *tant-* are listed by Holder 1896–1907 II: 1723.

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CORINNA SALOMON

Department of Early Irish, Maynooth University