


# Iberian


## *Ibérico*

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**Abstract:** Iberian is the best documented of all Palaeohispanic languages — it has the richest and most varied corpus, the longest chronology of attestation and largest territorial extension —, and yet it also remains one of the most enigmatic. As for its typological classification, it is considered to be an agglutinative language which may present ergative features; however, its hypothetical relationship with other languages, ancient or modern, is still uncertain. This paper presents the main ongoing lines of research and the most widely accepted hypotheses on the Iberian language and its written culture, placing special emphasis on current problems of interpretation and the main challenges ahead.

**Keywords:** Iberian language. Iberian epigraphy. Palaeohispanic languages. Iron Age. Hispania. Epigraphy.

**Resumen:** El ibérico es la mejor documentada de las lenguas paleohispánicas —posee el corpus epigráfico más rico y variado, la cronología de atestación más extensa y la extensión territorial más amplia— y aún así sigue siendo una de las más enigmáticas. Según su clasificación tipológica, se considera que es una lengua aglutinante pero que puede presentar rasgos ergativos; sin embargo, su hipotética relación con otras lenguas, antiguas o modernas, sigue siendo incierta. Este trabajo presenta las principales líneas de investigación actuales y las hipótesis más ampliamente aceptadas sobre la lengua ibérica y su cultura escrita, con especial énfasis en los problemas vigentes y los retos para el futuro.

**Palabras clave:** Lengua ibérica. Epigrafía ibérica. Lenguas paleohispánicas. Edad del Hierro. Hispania. Epigrafía.

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## **1. Overview and state of the art**

### **1.1. Language definition and classification**

Between the late 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, different indigenous languages of the Iberian Peninsula were put into writing by means of at least five epichoric writing systems, in addition to the Greek and Latin alphabets. The so-called Palaeohispanic languages that has been possible to identify so far are: Tartessian or the language from the south-west, Iberian, Celtiberian, Lusitanian and maybe Turdetanian and Palaeobasque.<sup>1</sup> In total, over three thousand inscriptions are preserved in what is certainly one of the richest epigraphic corpora for this period in the western Mediterranean. Nevertheless, the linguistic situation of some parts of the Iberian Peninsula can only be understood through toponyms and anthroponyms recorded by indirect sources, namely in Latin inscriptions and literary texts, which also provide valuable linguistic information.<sup>2</sup>

The current knowledge of these Palaeohispanic languages remains unequal. In some cases — as with Tartessian — the writing system is not yet fully decoded, which makes it impossible to determine its linguistic family. In other cases, our comprehension of the writing system is much greater — as with Celtiberian — or even total — as in the case of Lusitanian, always written by means of the Latin alphabet —; moreover, since these two languages belong to the Indo-European family, they can be studied with the tools and techniques of comparative linguistics.

Iberian stands somewhere between these two extremes: as a language, it is non-Indo-European, and, although we are competent to read Iberian inscriptions, we have serious problems when it comes to decode the meaning of the texts. Iberian is, as a matter of fact, an undeciphered language whose study is hampered by the lack of well-understood close relatives, and by the scarcity of bilingual inscriptions. Put in this way, the situation might appear disappointing; yet, in last few decades there have been modest but unquestionable advances that enable us to understand better the uses of writing amongst Iberians and to go deeper on the analysis of Iberian epigraphic texts. In this chapter we will focus on the description of this language and its written

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1 An overview on the different Palaeohispanic languages and epigraphy can be found in Sinner & Velaza 2019.

2 On this material, see Gorrochategui & Vallejo 2019.

culture, with special emphasis on the current problems of interpretation and main future challenges.

## 1.2. Location and chronology of the inscriptions

Iberian inscriptions are found in an extensive area along the Mediterranean coast, from the River Hérault in Languedoc (France) to the north as far as the province of Almería (Spain) to the south, with a certain degree of penetration towards the hinterland, which is particularly intense in the River Ebro valley (fig. 1).

Regarding the chronology of the inscriptions, the oldest that can be dated from their archaeological context or the material they are written on date back to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Examples belonging to this first epigraphic horizon include a *graffito* on an Attic *kylix* in the style of the “Little master of Athens”, found at Ullastret (*MLH* C.2.30), and some other instances also on Attic pottery from Pontós.<sup>3</sup> The latest inscriptions generally date from the Augustan period, when Roman funerary and public epigraphic habits became dominant and were widely adopted as a form of epigraphic expression. Although in the course of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE some isolated instances of public epigraphy can still be found,<sup>4</sup> the latest examples seem to be restricted to private life, witnessing the final decline of the Palaeohispanic writing system.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.3. Historiography and state-of-the-art. Main linguistic literature; printed and online corpora

Our current knowledge of Iberian fundamentally relies on the approximately 2,300 extant inscriptions written in this language, which are easily accessible to scholarship thanks to two main corpora: the *Monumenta Linguarum Hispanicarum* (*MLH*) by J. Untermann, where the combinatorial method was first systematically applied to the study of this language, and the Hesperia Databank (*BDH*), an open access online database which gathers all Palaeohispanic inscriptions and related documents (open access at <<http://hesperia.ucm.es>>). New finds are published principally in *Palaeohispanica. Revista sobre lenguas y culturas de la Hispania antigua*, which also regularly publishes

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3 Ferrer *et al.* 2016.

4 For instance, *BDH* V.04.31.

5 For the final stages of the Palaeohispanic scripts, see Simón 2013a.

a *Chronica Epigraphica*, collating inscriptions which have been circulated in other publications.<sup>6</sup>

Although the corpus of Iberian inscriptions has grown exponentially since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the study of the Iberian language, like that of the other Palaeohispanic languages, goes back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Antonio Agustín studied the first monetary inscriptions and identified the Palaeohispanic script.<sup>7</sup> He was followed by the works of other numismatists, such as L. J. Velázquez (1752), A. Heiss (1870), A. Delgado (1871) or J. Zóbel de Zangróniz (1880), who managed to find the correct value for some of the characters. However, when E. Hübner published the first corpus of pre-Roman Hispanian inscriptions, the *Monumenta Linguae Ibericae*, in 1893, the system of transcription was still very deficient and did not even serve to reveal that these inscriptions were in fact evidence of various languages that are very different to one another.

The first major step towards decoding the Iberian script was the work of M. Gómez Moreno at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1922, 1949): he discovered its semi-syllabic structure and decoded the value of most characters. Later works,<sup>8</sup> nevertheless, have contributed to refining many transcriptions, and even today there are still some poorly-understood aspects, which makes us think that a definitive decipherment remains to be achieved.<sup>9</sup>

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6 Further bibliographic references organized thematically can be found in Moncunill & Velaza 2016, 43-44.

7 For the contributions of this author to the decipherment of the Iberian writing, see Velaza 2016.

8 Maluquer 1968; De Hoz 1985; Correa 1992; Quintanilla 1993; Villar 1993; Ferrer 2005; 2010a.

9 See for instance Ferrer 2013a; 2015.

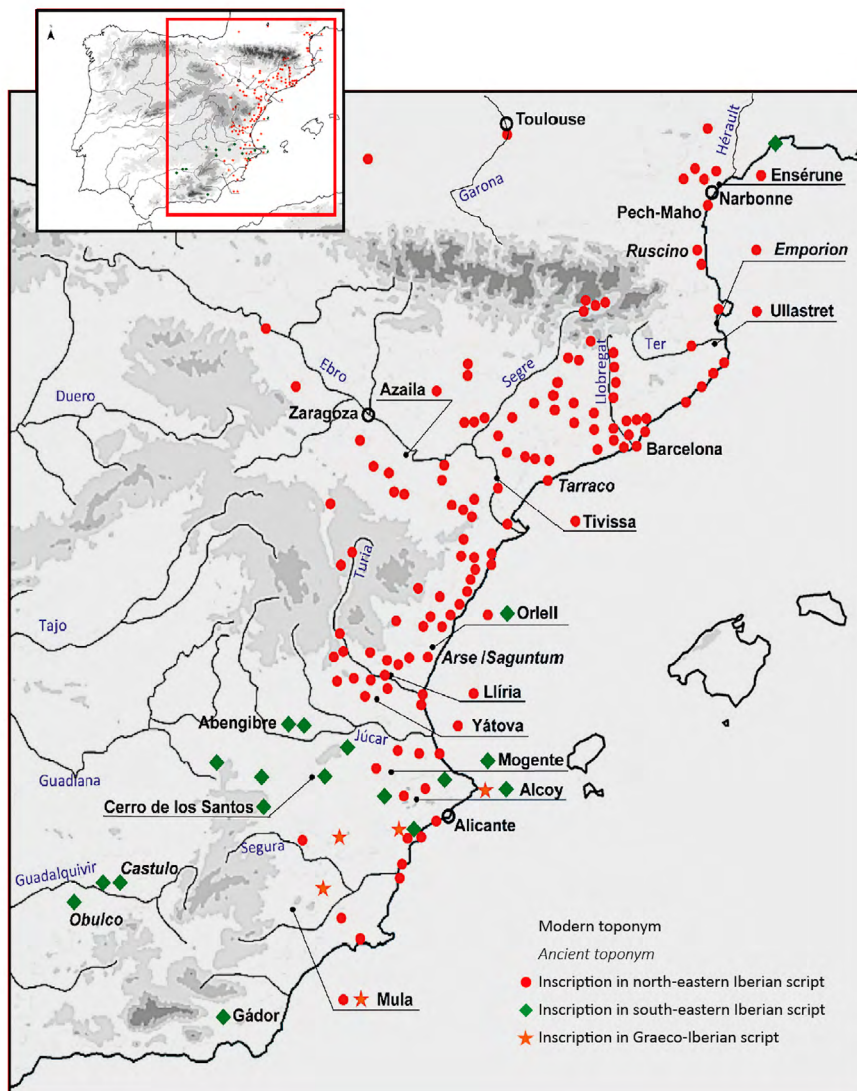


Fig. 1. Map showing the main sites where Iberian inscriptions have been found (Moncunill & Velaza 2016).

#### 1.4. The language. Phonetics, morphology, lexicon and syntactic features

The most commonly accepted methodology for studying Iberian inscriptions is the internal analysis of texts as established in J. Untermann's works, which however involves strong limitations, particularly when any attempt is made to analyse the language at a lexical, morphological and syntactical level. In the following sections we will summarize the aspects that have aroused the greatest consensus among specialists regarding the definition and analysis of the Iberian language.

##### 1.4.1. Phonetics and phonology

The description of the phonetics and phonology of the Iberian language has traditionally been based on different types of evidence:<sup>10</sup>

1. The Iberian inscriptions themselves and their internal analysis.
2. The adaptation of Iberian personal and place names in Latin and Greek.
3. The adaptation of foreign names, above all the Gaulish ones from southern France, to Iberian.<sup>11</sup>
4. The accuracy of the Graeco-Iberian alphabet to render the Iberian language.

Each of these sources of information has its own limitations: data coming from internal comparison are always limited by the inadequacy of the Palaeohispanic semi-syllabic script to write the Iberian language and by the uncertainties that still accompany the transcription of some characters; on the other hand, external evidence leaves open the question of to what extent it records a distinctive feature of the Iberian language, a process of adaptation, or even a phenomenon that is characteristic of the language receiving the term.

Taking all the data as a whole, it is possible to postulate that Iberian had a pentavocalic system which seem to correspond to /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/ and /u/.<sup>12</sup> Bearing in mind that in the Graeco-Iberian system the omega and the epsilon were ignored, we could deduce that there was no opposition of quantity;

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10 Tovar 1962; Mariner 1979; *MLH* III.1, 152-155; Quintanilla 1998; 1999.

11 For these names, Untermann 1969; Correa 1993; Ruiz-Darrasse 2010; Faria 2015.

12 Nevertheless, J. de Hoz 1979, 264; 2011, 355, has proposed the existence of a sixth vowel with a sound between /e/ and /i/ in the case of the south-eastern inscriptions. For a general description of Iberian vocalism, see Quintanilla 1993, 43-146; De Hoz 2011, 252-257.

however, this question should perhaps be reconsidered if the existence is confirmed of a dual system for vowel signs as well. It is also usually accepted that the diphthongs /ai/, /ei/, /oi/, /au/, and, although less well documented, /eu/, /ou/, and /ui/ also existed. The remaining vowel groups recorded can be explained as secondary.

The description of the consonant system of Iberian comes up against even more doubts than that of the vowel system.<sup>13</sup> It seems to be incontrovertible that Iberian had three series of stops: labial, dental, and velar. In addition, the dental and velar series seem to present a voiced/voiceless: in the Graeco-Iberian alphabet this is represented by the letters Δ/T and Γ/K, and in the epichoric signaries by the existence of dual graphic variants, that is of marked and unmarked characters. It is, however, uncertain whether this opposition was really a sound contrast, or whether it was of another nature, as might arise from a *fortis-lenis* distinction. As regards the labial series, it is generally considered that only one consonant was in existence, since in Graeco-Iberian only *beta* appears and never *pi*; nevertheless, in forms recorded in Greek inscriptions, such as Βασπεδ[, or Latin ones, such as *Estopeles* or *Luspangibas*, the use of an unvoiced labial is recorded, and in some labial syllabograms a diacritic stroke that might suggest that the aim was to mark an unvoiced sound can be seen. The unsystematic nature of this feature could be explained by the fact that the hypothetical unvoiced labial was not in fact a phoneme, but rather only an allophone, perhaps motivated by a previously-occurring sibilant, or because it was a very low-frequency sound.

The existence of aspirated consonants is normally ruled out. The forms *Chadar*, *Vrchail*, or *Vrchatetel*, which appear in Latin sources, can be explained by language contact or by reasons that have nothing to do with the Iberian language.

Both the Graeco-Iberian alphabet and the epichoric semi-syllabaries have at least two different trill consonants,<sup>14</sup> which are usually transcribed as *r* and *í*. The type of opposition they expressed is however unclear: the fact that the Celtiberians took the second to write the only vibrant in their language would speak in favour of that one being the unmarked one, and, in fact, that is the same vibrant that appears written without a diacritic in the Graeco-Iberian script, and the one used for the transcription of Gaulish names into Iberian.

13 General descriptions of Iberian consonantism can be found in Quintanilla 1999, 189-282; Ballester 2001; De Hoz 2011, 224-252.

14 Correa 1993-1994; Quintanilla 1998, 219-244; 1999; Rodríguez Ramos 2003.

Furthermore, neither of them appears in the initial position in a word, and incoherent cases that we do not know how to interpret, such as the case of **isker** / **iskeŕ**, can be found at the end of words. In some cases, Latin transcriptions opt for a double trill (*Tannegiscerris*, *Arranes*), but the recorded examples are not very clear and sometimes contradictory, with the result that they cannot be used to formulate a rule.

Similarly, there are two characters for sibilants<sup>15</sup> in both the Graeco-Iberian alphabet and the Iberian scripts, which we transcribe as **s** and **ś**. Their phonetic definition is, however, highly controversial: perhaps one of them could have been fricative and the other palatal or affricate — in possible adaptations of Gaulish names ending in *-rix* to Iberian, the use of the marked sibilant could be significant here — but the question remains open, as not all the evidence points in the same way. It is not impossible, even, for there to have been procedures to mark the existence of more sibilants in the south-eastern script, which obliges us to maximize our caution as regards this point.

The situation is no simpler when it comes to describing the nasals:<sup>16</sup> in the south-eastern and Graeco-Iberian scripts there does not appear to have been more than one sign for nasals, whereas in the north-eastern script there are three, whose opposition is obscure. Two of those could correspond to /n/ and /m/, although the latter is infrequent and inconsistently recorded. This is the one adopted by the Celtiberians to denote their labial nasal sound. The third one, which is usually transcribed as **ń**, appears in contexts in which its value is more debatable: this is the case with the common element **-ńi** — which in Graeco-Iberian seems to correspond to *-nai* — and in inter- or pre-consonant sequences such as **-ńkei**, **ńlbe-** — transcribed into Latin as *NALBE* — or **ńbaŕ** — adapted in Latin as *VMAR* — which could correspond to a nasal sound formed with a vocalic element.

In some Iberian personal names transcribed into Latin there is a gemination of the dental nasal: *Enneges*, *Belennes*, *Bennabels*, *Tannepaeseri*, *Tannegadinia*, *Albennes*, *Ordennas*. However, there is no trace of gemination in epichoric inscriptions, so that the most likely explanation is that it is a case of adaptation or alternatively of an exogenous influence (in this context the frequent occurrence of gemination in the Aquitanian language should be remembered).

15 Siles 1979; Mariner 1985; Quintanilla 1998, 255-260; Rodríguez Ramos 2004b; De Hoz 2003.

16 Valeri 1993; Quintanilla 1998, 189-218; Correa 1999; Rodríguez Ramos 2000b; Orduña 2017.



Traditionally, the existence of a liquid consonant /l/ has been accepted;<sup>17</sup> this sound is consistently recorded in initial and mid positions, although it is rare in final positions. The possibility that a second strong liquid consonant /L/ existed has been proposed by some scholars, largely on the basis of the existence of an Iberian element *ildu(r/n)*, which in Latin texts seems to be associated with spellings such as ILLVRTIBAS or ILVRO. In addition, the existence of an Iberian character similar to the one that is used for [l] but with what seems to be a diacritic stroke should perhaps be added to this evidence, although this sign only appears on a very few occasions and in contexts that are somewhat unclear.

#### 1.4.2. Morphology

Iberian morphology is still poorly understood, although the identification of personal names has to a certain extent assisted the analysis of sequences and the isolation of recurring morphological and lexical elements.<sup>18</sup>

There are, for example, a series of morphs that usually accompany anthroponyms and whose value can be deduced from the context and the epigraphic media where they appear.<sup>19</sup> For instance, the suffix *-ar* and *-en* are found in texts whose content seems to indicate possession (fig. 2). The element *-rni* is usually associated with them, although it can also appear alone, or in more complex sequences; it may perhaps have a pronominal or verbal value associated to the first person. The endings in *-e* seem to indicate the recipient of the text. The suffix *-te* has been interpreted as an ergativity mark and *-ka* is found after names and before numerals, probably indicating the people who have lent or owe some quantity. In addition, other nominal suffixes whose function is less clear can also be isolated: elements such as *-ai*, *-(i)ke*, *-(i)ta*, *-(i)u* occasionally appear after personal names, but sometimes also together with elements whose nominal category is uncertain. Bearing in mind that the Palaeohispanic semi-syllabary is somewhat defective for writing the Iberian language, we must consider the possibility that some of these morphs hide cases of homography.

17 A synthesis on the current state of knowledge in De Hoz 2011, 235-239.

18 In the following lexicographical works all the words and lexical segments that can be identified in the Iberian inscriptions are collected and commented on: Tovar 1951; Siles 1985; Velaza 1991; Silgo 1994; Moncunill 2007a; Moncunill & Velaza 2019.

19 Besides the lexicographical works quoted in the previous note, for nominal morphology, see Untermann 1996; 2001; 2014; Rodríguez Ramos 2002b; 2004a; Orduña 2006; Ferrer 2006; De Hoz 2011, 257-282.



Figs. 2a and 2b. Ownership *graffiti*: the one on the left, found in Empúries (MLH C.1.12), bears the Iberian personal name **tuřšbiur** followed by the suffix **-ar**; the one on the right, found in Ensérune (MLH B.1.53), reads **kobakie nmi**, where a Gaulish personal name *Comagius* complemented by the Iberian ending to express possession **-(e)n-mi** can be identified.



Other morphs can be related to place names, although it should be noted that it is not always possible to determine whether they are true suffixes or derivative elements added to a root as part of the word-formation process. This is perceptible, for example, in the case of place names formed with the word *ildir*, for which a meaning close to that of ‘city’ is generally defended: in *iltir-ta*, it is possible to isolate an element *-ta*.<sup>20</sup> The Latinized form of the city as *Ilerda* encourages one to consider this element as a derivative formative morph of place names rather than a functional suffix. It is likely that something similar also occurs with the elements *-o*, which can be deduced from forms such as *iltur-o*, *laur-o*,<sup>21</sup> and *-e*, perhaps present in *ars-e*, *ořos-e*. On the

20 Luján 2005, 483; De Hoz 2011, 259.

21 Velaza 2011a.

other hand, other morphs have a different behaviour: in some Iberian coinage, for instance, the suffix **-ken** or **-(e)sken** is documented after toponyms (**neron-ken** (*MLH* A.1), **auśes-ken** (*MLH* A.7), **untikes-ken** (*MLH* A.96), **laieś-ken** (*MLH* A.13), etc).<sup>22</sup> These forms have been interpreted as ethnonyms. Other suffixes associated to place names are also **-ku** and **-r**.

In other cases, we are able to identify prefixes: for instance, an initial element **t(i)-** is found in a series of personal and place names elements,<sup>23</sup> such as **olor / t-olor**, **ortin / t-ortin**, **ořtin / t-ořtin**, **aun / t-aun**, **unti / t-unti**, **uřki / t-uřki** y **leis / ti-leis**, **lauř / ti-lauř**, **baś / ti-baś**, **ban / ti-ban**, **bilos / ti-bilos**, **beři / ti-beři**. As regards its meaning, caution should still be exercised, but it cannot be ruled out that it was a way of constructing the feminine form, if, as will be mentioned below, that was the function that it fulfilled in the word pair **eban / t-eban**.<sup>24</sup>

### 1.4.3. Lexicon

The aspect of Iberian language best known to modern scholarship is that of onomastics, and especially of anthroponomy, which will be specifically addressed later on (§ 1.7).

Coin legends are especially relevant for the identification of place names,<sup>25</sup> as are the geographic descriptions of the territory by Greek and Roman authors. Broadly speaking, it must be reminded that place names do not necessarily have to belong to the language in which they are recorded, and in many cases they are fossilized forms dating back to previous linguistic substrates.

Iberian place names have in general terms a different structure than personal names and follow other compositional rules: as a matter of fact there are very few place names that can be analysed as two-part compounds, which is the classical structure of personal names (perhaps **use-kerće**, **ařke-tuřki**, **SOSON·TIGI**, **SAL·TIGI**, **ILI·TVRGI**, **ILVR·CO**, **bařke-no**). In other cases, formative elements such as **-o** (**laur-o**, **iltur-o**),<sup>26</sup> **-ta/-da** (**iltiř-ta**, **EDE-TA**)<sup>27</sup>

22 De Hoz 2002; 2011, 267-269; Pérez Almodguera 2008.

23 Rodríguez Ramos 2001a; Velaza 2006b.

24 Velaza 1994; 2004.

25 On Iberian place names, one may consult Luján 2005; 2007; De Hoz 2011, 338-43; *MLH* VI.

26 Velaza 2011a.

27 Luján 2005, 483; De Hoz 2011, 259.

or **-ki** (ILI-CI, AIVN-GI-TANVS) can be detected, but many place names exhibit forms that resist systematization.

Regarding the identification of Iberian divinity names, it has been done mainly in consideration of two different kinds of evidence:

1. The mention of indigenous divinities in Latin votive inscriptions, which is in principle the most reliable data at our disposal. In practice, however, the dearth of documented Iberian theonyms in Latin texts means that it is barely possible to ascertain their formation process. The instances so far identified are, indeed, very scarce: for the theonym *Betatum*,<sup>28</sup> a connection with the terms **betan** and **atun** has been proposed, but the hypothesis leaves several points unanswered.<sup>29</sup> The interpretation of *Salaeco*<sup>30</sup> as a compound deriving from **salai·ko**, whose two elements also appear as constitutive elements of personal names, seems more likely. A similar case would be *Sertundo*,<sup>31</sup> formed by the elements **seřtun·do**, and *Lacubegi* (*HEp* 7, 1997, 480), whose lexical segmentation in Iberian could be **laku·biki**, although its origin (Navarra) does not preclude an interpretation as an Aquitanian form. In all these cases, the evidence points to a formation process similar to that of personal names.

2. The recurring presence of seemingly onomastic forms in Iberian inscriptions found in votive and religious contexts, such as in cave sanctuaries.<sup>32</sup> For instance, **urtal**, **artiunan**, **okal**, **egibal**, **idar** and **uřmmis** have been interpreted as divinity names according to morphological and contextual criteria. Some of them have parallels with Basque-Aquitania theonymy, but their compositional structure differs from the Iberian theonyms identified in Latin epigraphy.

There are few Iberian words that have been interpreted as common nouns, taking into account their morphology and context of appearance.<sup>33</sup> The word **eban**, which recurs after two personal names, may perhaps mean 'son' and its feminine form could be **teban**.<sup>34</sup> The word **seltar**<sup>35</sup> could have a

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28 Corzo *et al.* 2007.

29 See the comment by E. Luján in *HEp* 16, 2007 (2010), 446, p. 149; Velaza 2015, 291 n. 16.

30 Velaza 2015.

31 Vidal 2016.

32 Ferrer 2018.

33 See Moncunill 2017b, with the previous bibliography.

34 Velaza 1994; 2004; Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 240.

35 *MLH* III.1 §586; Moncunill 2007a, 278; De Hoz 2011, 321-323; Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 408.

similar meaning to ‘tomb’ and the terms **iltir**<sup>36</sup> and **arfs**<sup>37</sup> have been interpreted with a meaning close to that of ‘city’. Other words seem closely related to a particular semantic field, which is determined by the object or material on which they are habitually recorded: for example, the word **kaštaun** on spindle whorls;<sup>38</sup> **eriar** on painted ceramic vases from Lliria;<sup>39</sup> **baikar**<sup>40</sup> on certain vessels, perhaps with a ritual function; **bitiar/betiar** on votive inscriptions;<sup>41</sup> **salir**,<sup>42</sup> whose meaning could be ‘coin’ or ‘silver’, on monetary legends etc.

Verb morphology remains a little-explored field.<sup>43</sup> A verbal character could possibly be attributed to the form **egiar**, which is found in authorship inscriptions.<sup>44</sup> This has led to the assumption that it could mean ‘make or do’. There may also be a verb in the expression **aré teki / aré take**, which in bilingual inscriptions seems to be translating the Latin formula *hic situs(-a) est* (fig. 3).<sup>45</sup> The sequence most commonly agreed to possess a verbal character, however, is represented by a complex paradigm comprising forms such as ] **dinbaś-te-éroke** (*MLH* C.17.1, A-1); **baštubarer-te-řokan-utur** (*MLH* D.0.1, A); **basikor-te-ř[oka]n-sba** (*MLH* H.0.1, B.b-1); **šalaiarřkis-te-řokan** (*MLH* C.21.10, 2) ] **kaul-te-biteřokan** (*MLH* H.0.1, B.b-3), and others like them.<sup>46</sup>

Occasionally, a “structural extrapolation” procedure has been applied to recognise verbal forms.<sup>47</sup> This consists of attributing a verbal nature to a

36 *MLH* III.1 §573; Pérez Almoguera 2001; De Hoz 2011, 313-316; Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 323.

37 De Hoz 1995a; 2011, 329-330, 339-341; Rodríguez Ramos 2002c; Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 107.

38 Ferrer 2008; Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 280.

39 Silgo 2002, 53; Ferrer & Escrivà 2013; Moncunill 2017b; Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 257.

40 Panosa 1993a, 8.2; Gorrochategui 2002; Moncunill 2007a, 97; Ferrer 2011; Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 123.

41 Rodríguez Ramos 2005, 93; Ferrer 2011, 213; De Hoz 2011, 349-350; Moncunill 2017b; Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 158.

42 *MLH* III.1 §579; Moncunill 2007a, 274; Silgo 2007; De Hoz 2011, 319-321; Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 426.

43 See Quintanilla 2005; Velaza 2011b.

44 *MLH* III.1 §570; Correa 1994, 282; Untermann 1994, 127; De Hoz 2001c, 353-357, 2011, 296-313; Rodríguez Ramos 2004a, 274-276; Quintanilla 2005, 513; Ferrer 2006, 154-155; Moncunill 2007a, 156-158; Orduña 2009, 501-503; Velaza 2011b, 300; Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 248.

45 *MLH* III.1 §583; Untermann 1999; Moncunill 2007a, 83; De Hoz 2011, 276-277; Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 103.

46 See Moncunill & Velaza 2019, 258, with the previous bibliography.

47 See Velaza 2011b.



Figs. 3a and 3b. Funerary bilingual inscriptions from Tarragona (MLH C.18.5 and C.18.6), according to A. de Laborde's drawings in *Voyage pittoresque et historique de l'Espagne* (Paris 1806).

word that occupies the same position as another word which has previously been accepted as being in a verb in a comparable syntactical structure. Thus, if it is accepted that there is a syntactical structure of the type **PN-te + verb** represented, among other examples, by **śalaiařkis-te-řokan** or by **likine-te ekiar**, one should count on the possibility of other words that follow an **PN-te** structure also being verbs. This would open the doors to the possibility that words such as **iunstir** or even **śalir** could also have, at least in some contexts, this character.

The existence of pronominal paradigms has been postulated for generally brief elements<sup>48</sup> such as **aré**, **ban**, **baí**, **baś**, **eta**, **if**, and **bin**, but, although such forms can undeniably be isolated, their value has yet to be confirmed.

In recent years, E. Orduña 2005; 2011; 2013a and J. Ferrer 2009; 2010b, have proposed a relationship between a series of elements from the Iberian lexicon and forms of Basque numerals: **ban** / *bat* would be 1; **bi(n)** / *bi* 2; **lau(r)** / *lau(r)* 4; **bors(te)** / *bortz* 5; **śei** / *sei* 6; **sisbi** / *zazpi* 7; **sorse** / *zortzi* 8; **(a)baí** / *(h)amar* 10; **orkei** *(h)ogei* 20. These elements are also documented in apparent composition, in forms such as **orkeikelaur** (*MLH D.12.1*). Other values that are recorded on coins should be added to these: **eta** ‘the unit of value of the bronze coin’, **erter** ‘half’, **śerkir** ‘a sixth’, **sešte** ‘a sixth’ (a loan from Latin). The hypothesis is still under discussion, but, without anticipating the consequences for linguistic history that may result, it is certain that the formal similarities cannot be random. In any case, this will undoubtedly constitute a very important line of research and debate over the next few years.

#### 1.4.4. Syntactic features

Efforts to identify syntactic phenomena, such as word order, group flexion or coordination, can only be considered so far as working hypotheses.<sup>49</sup> Paradoxically, detecting syntactic structures becomes more difficult the longer the text in question, to the point that we are only able to identify the syntactic relationship between the elements of the sentence in very simple and formulaic inscriptions.

Thus, for example, in the case of brief nominal syntagmata such as **il-tírtaśalir**, on coin legends from the city of **iltírta**, or **kalunseltar** (*BDH TE.15.01*), a funerary inscription probably with the meaning of ‘Kalu’s tomb’, it seems that the head of genitive constructions occupies the second position. In addition, it is possible to observe that the modifier may bear a morphological mark, similar to that of the genitive (*cf.* **kalu-n seltar**), or it may not bear any mark at all (**iltírta śalir**). Another interesting example can be found in a recurrent structure in funerary texts, **PN + PN + eban**, which can be understood as an expression containing the name and the patronymic followed by the word ‘son’, that is, as ‘PN1, son of PN2’. In this structure, PN2 does not bear a suffix, so that we would have to understand that the filiation formula is

48 *MLH* III.1 §555-556.

49 See De Hoz 2011, 282-289.

expressed by means of parataxical juxtaposition. In this same formula, nevertheless, it is usual for the term **eban** to appear marked with the suffix **-en**, in what seems to be a clear reflection of the group: ‘Of PN1, son (of) PN2’.

The existence of other group inflections can be glimpsed in examples such as the following: **anbošiltun-u baiseltun-u-te**, **aurunibeike-ai astebeaike-ai-e**, **banmlirbaituran-e kaisanmlirbaituran-e-i**. Unfortunately, their meaning escapes us. The same situation occurs in hypothetical cases of concordance, such as those that can be detected in **atilebei-u sekenius-u**, **bašbaner-ai šani-ai**, **]+baser-te bonanti-te nūmbar-te bor-te-bara kašesir-te-ekiar ban-ite**, **ed-agardalbetes-šu begeberekilie-šu**, **bototaš-eai selke-ai-bartun-eai unibeike-ai aner-ai unibeike-ai**; **ekar-iu atu-niu**.

Regarding sentence syntax, there are very few cases that allow us to make some hypothesis in this field. The formula **PN-te ekiar** occurs frequently, for example, in instances such as **kašesir-te-ekiar** (*MLH* F.13.3,1); **šaleibeki-t(e)-ekiar** (*MLH* F.13.4); **neršetikan-t(e)-ekiar-mi** [*MLH* F.15.1); **unskel-t(e)-ekiar** (*MLH* F.13.21); **iltubokon-t(e)-ekiar** (*MLH* F.11.28); **aršbikis-te-ekiar** (*MLH* A.33-2). In all these cases, the epigraphic context indicates that the personal name corresponds to someone who does something, or who ensures that something is done. The formula **PN-te** can also be detected followed by other elements like **iuštir** (**betukine-te iuštir** (*MLH* F.17.2, B.a); **sakaratin-te iuštir** (*MLH* F.17.2, A-1); **saltutibai-te iumstir** (*MLH* F.13.5)), like **šalir** (**bilosiun-te-šalir** [*MLH* F.17.1, A-1); **aiunortin-ite šalir-otanai** (*MLH* C.21.6, B-2); **jultibeika-te šalir** (*MLH* C.21.6, B-3), or like the amalgam of a verbal character, mentioned above (**šalairkis-te-řokan** (*MLH* C.21.10, 2), among many others). All these examples seem to suggest that in such phrases, the subject is the element marked with a suffix which may perhaps have a value approaching that of the ergative, or of an anti-passive structure, as some authors propose.<sup>50</sup>

In terms of phrase structure, it had been believed that some indications pointed to an SOV typology,<sup>51</sup> but some inscriptions discovered more recently seem to fit an OSV structure, in some cases, and an SVO structure in others.<sup>52</sup> In any case, there remains much exploration to be done in this field.

50 See Orduña 2008.

51 De Hoz 2001, 349-350; Orduña 2008, 281.

52 Moncunill 2017b.



### 1.5. The texts: number of inscriptions, main epigraphic genres, evolution of the writing practices and coexistence with inscriptions written in other languages

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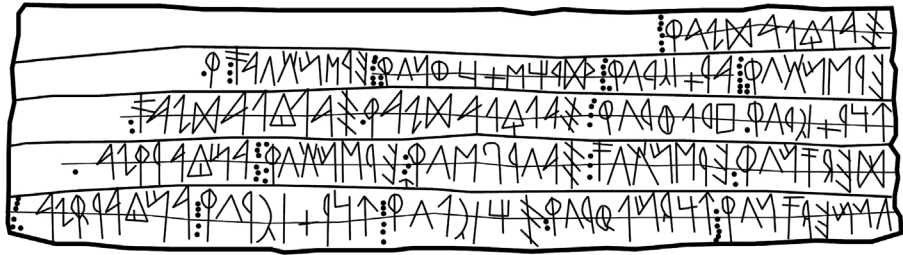
As already mentioned, the corpus of Iberian inscriptions currently amounts to some 2,300 items on very different media, including, for instance, a good number of graffiti on pottery, the largest preserved collection of lead tablets in the Iberian Peninsula, and a remarkable set of inscriptions on stone.<sup>53</sup>

The development of an epigraphic culture amongst Iberians can be defined as a process that went from a use primarily restricted to trade activities in the colonial context to a very widespread level of literacy, both in the public and the private sphere.<sup>54</sup> It is broadly accepted that the adoption of writing in the Iberian world took place within the framework of commercial and cultural contacts with the Phoenicians, whose writing system inspired the Palaeohispanic ones, and with the Greeks, to whom Iberians borrowed their first writing practices. Indeed, the earliest extant inscriptions, datable to the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, are scratched *graffiti* on Attic pottery coming from the area around Empúries and southern France, as well as some Graeco-Iberian *graffiti* from ancient Contestania. From this period, there is also direct evidence of commercial interactions between Greeks and Iberians: some Greek lead tablets found in Pech Maho and Empúries mention individuals bearing Iberian names, and in the following centuries, lead was also largely used by Iberian merchants for their commercial correspondence and account-keeping (fig. 4).

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53 For an exhaustive survey of inscriptions, see Moncunill & Velaza 2016, 33-37.

54 See Mayer & Velaza 1993; Panosa 1993b; 1993c; 1999; De Hoz 1995b; 2005; Rodríguez Ramos 2001b; Velaza 2002; Beltrán 2005; 2012; 2015; Beltrán & Estarán 2011; Simón 2013b; Moncunill i. p.



Figs. 4a, 4b and 4c. Iberian lead tablets written in different writing systems: the south-eastern Iberian script (*MLH G.7.2*, from Moixent), the Graeco-Iberian alphabet (*MLH G.1.1*, from Alcoi) and the north-eastern Iberian script (*BDH HER.02.373*, from Ensérune).

As a matter of fact, during the fourth and third centuries BCE, the use of writing appears to be restricted to precisely this commercial class and does not extend to other epigraphic functions. In addition to the above mentioned lead tablets with probably accounts records, contracts and/or epistolary content (in some, the name of the sender or recipient is clearly preserved separately), to this period should be attributed stamped inscriptions on *dolia* and amphorae related to the production and distribution of goods, and a large number of *graffiti* on pottery which documents, at the very least, a certain spread of the habit of writing. To the Greek model should likewise be attributed a small number of *ostraka* whose precise function cannot be, however, determined.

Within this first epigraphic horizon, the scarcity of inscriptions on stone is particularly noteworthy.<sup>55</sup> Considering this, it seems clear that during the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE, and with very few exceptions, the Iberians did not broaden the scope of writing to the public sphere, namely funerary or votive functions, inscriptions on buildings or coinage. In fact, it is symptomatic that the large areas with funerary monuments, such as the cemeteries in the south-east and south of the Iberian Peninsula, did not display inscriptions in their messages of memory and self-representation.

At the end of the third century this situation started to change, and a certain expansion of writing practices to other contexts can be observed: for example, at least some of the rock *graffiti* found recently in the area of La Cerdanya,<sup>56</sup> which probably had a votive function, seem to date to this period, and from the close of that century the oldest coin inscribed in Iberian script was minted — surely not by chance — in *Arse*, Sagunto, one of the most prosperous cities of the time.

But the emergence of Iberian epigraphy in the public space only truly took place in the second century BCE, with the influence of the Roman presence: from this moment on, writing started to be used on previously infrequent materials, such as stone, and for hitherto almost unknown functions, in such areas as funerary,<sup>57</sup> monumental, and perhaps honorific inscriptions.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, inscriptions on coinage,<sup>59</sup> a widespread instrument of civic self-representation, became more frequent, and the elite integrated the use of writing as a demonstration of their power, as can be seen in sanctuaries such as those of Muntanya Frontera and Cerro de los Santos. In this way, it can be confirmed that the public usage of inscriptions was increased; yet, at the same time, writing also became more common in the private sphere and penetrated in very different layers of society — an important and quite unique collection of inscribed spindle whorls, for instance, suggests an interesting level of female literacy. All this should undoubtedly lead us to reassess the question of ancient literacy among the non-élite and in segments of society that had traditionally been

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55 On Palaeohispanic lapidary epigraphy, see Simón 2013b.

56 Campmajó & Ferrer 2010; Campmajó 2012; Ferrer 2010c; 2013c.

57 On Iberian funerary inscriptions, see Untermann 1984a; Velaza 1996b; Barrandon 2003; 2013; Velaza 2017.

58 Velaza 2018.

59 Moncunill 2007b; Ferrer 2012; Ripollès & Sinner 2019.

regarded as illiterate.<sup>60</sup> Recent research on the spread of *instrumenta scriptoria* in Iberian *oppida* during this period points out in the same direction.<sup>61</sup>

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BCE, Iberian literacy thus experienced a substantial quantitative growth: as a matter of fact, two-thirds of the extant corpus of Iberian inscriptions can be dated to this period.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, there were epigraphic and linguistic contacts with Latin inscriptions,<sup>63</sup> especially in coastal urban centres such as *Emporiae*, *Tarraco* and *Saguntum*, as can be seen from the technical aspects of the *ordinatio*, the lettering and cutting of inscriptions or the use of formulae — such as the introduction of the patronymic in the naming patterns, the regularization and imitation of Roman models in burial formulae, or even the production of bilingual inscriptions.<sup>64</sup> In some cities, like Empúries, Iberian inscriptions were even produced in the same epigraphic workshops as their contemporary Greek and Roman ones, and shared a common epigraphic landscape, such as the necropolis or the forum (fig. 5).<sup>65</sup>



Figs. 5a and 5b. Public Iberian inscriptions from Empúries (*BDH* Gl.10.7 and *MLH* C.1.1).

60 Moncunill & Velaza 2012, 59.

61 See Olesti 2019.

62 Moncunill & Velaza 2016, 33.

63 De Hoz 1995b; 2005; Untermann 1999; Ruiz Darasse & Simón 2012; Estarán 2016; Díaz *et al.* 2019.

64 Untermann 1999; Beltrán & Estarán 2011; Estarán 2012; 2016.

65 Velaza 2003.

Progressively, however, the same elites who had adapted the Roman epigraphic habit to the local language and culture began to use mainly Latin as their vehicular language, as shown by the fact that people bearing Iberian *cognomina* are mentioned in Latin funerary, votive and even honorific inscriptions. In this context, the public use of the Iberian script did not last beyond the end of the first century BCE and the early first century CE: the bilingual inscription on an architrave from *Saguntum* and the one found in the theatre of the same city, perhaps one of the *subsellia* from the *cavea*, can be considered as some of the latest examples of that kind. In the first century CE the Latin language and writing would be finally adopted as the only means of epigraphic expression in all Iberian lands, in an irreversible process that would lead to the death of the local language and the full Latinization of its native speakers.

### 1.6. Writing systems

Iberian was essentially written by means of three epichoric writing systems:<sup>66</sup> two variants of the so-called Palaeohispanic script and a local adaptation of the Greek alphabet, the Graeco-Iberian script (fig. 6). Moreover, there are also a few instances of inscriptions using the Greek and Latin alphabets with no trace of specific accommodation to the Iberian language, which are, however, very rare.

There is still no unanimous agreement about differentiated notation of texts written in different scripts. In this paper, we will use the following transcription conventions: bold for texts written in non-dual Iberian script (**neit-inke**), bold italics for texts in dual script (***baidesbi***), italics for Graeco-Iberian texts (*naltinge*), capitals for texts in Latin script (ESCRAD[]), and Greek letters for texts in Greek (Ναλβεαδιν).

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66 A recent synthesis on the degree of knowledge of the Palaeohispanic writing systems, their internal relationship and origin can be found in Ferrer & Moncunill 2019.

		NORTH-EASTERN IBERIAN		SOUTH-EASTERN IBERIAN		GRAECO-IBERIAN		
ALPHABETICAL CHARACTERS	VOWELS	a	𐤃 𐤃 𐤃 𐤃 𐤃	𐤀	VOWELS	𐤀	a	
		e	𐤇 𐤇 𐤇 𐤇 𐤇	𐤐		𐤁	e	
		i	𐤎	𐤑		𐤂	i	
		o	𐤏	𐤒		𐤃	o	
		u	𐤔	𐤕		𐤄	u	
	CONTINUOUS CONSONANTS	l	𐤕 𐤏	𐤑	CONTINUOUS CONSONANTS	𐤀	l	
		m	𐤙				m	
		m̃	𐤛 𐤜 𐤝				m̃	
		n	𐤙	𐤙		𐤎	n	
		r	𐤃 𐤃	𐤙		𐤒	r	
ř		𐤑 𐤑 𐤑	𐤑	𐤓		ř		
s		𐤑 𐤒 𐤓	𐤑 𐤒	𐤔		s		
ś		𐤑	𐤑	𐤕		ś		
SYLLABIC CHARACTERS	LABIAL PLOSIVES	ba	𐤁	𐤁	ALPHABETICAL CHARACTERS	PLOSIVES		
		be	𐤁 𐤑 𐤑	𐤁				
		bi	𐤑 𐤑 𐤑	𐤔				
		bo	𐤑 𐤑	𐤑				
		bu	𐤑	𐤑				
	VELAR PLOSIVES	ka	𐤀	𐤀			𐤀	k
		ga	𐤀	𐤀			𐤁	g
		ke	𐤃 𐤃 𐤃 𐤃	𐤃				
		ge	𐤃	𐤃				
		ki	𐤃	𐤃				
		gi	𐤃	𐤃				
		ko	𐤃 𐤃	𐤃 𐤃				
		go	𐤃 𐤃	𐤃 𐤃				
		ku	𐤃 𐤃					
	DENTAL PLOSIVES	ta	𐤃	𐤃			𐤃	t
		da	𐤃	𐤃			𐤃	d
		te	𐤃 𐤃	𐤃				
		de	𐤃 𐤃 𐤃 𐤃	𐤃				
		ti	𐤃	𐤃				
		di	𐤃 𐤃 𐤃	𐤃				
		to	𐤃					
		do	𐤃 𐤃					
		tu	𐤃	𐤃				
du		𐤃	𐤃					

Fig. 6. The epichoric scripts used for writing the Iberian language (Moncunill & Velaza 2016).

### 1.6.1. The north-eastern Iberian script

Most texts — about 2,000 — are written in the north-eastern variant of the Iberian script. Like all the scripts that belong to the Palaeohispanic family, it is not an alphabet, but a semi-syllabary, characterized by the coexistence of alphabetic and syllabic signs: it attributes a character to each phoneme in the series of vowels and continuous consonants, but behaves like a syllabary for the series of plosives (see fig. 6).

It has recently been confirmed that this system was originally dual, meaning that it offered the possibility to distinguish between the voiced and voiceless dental and velar plosives:<sup>67</sup> the procedure was to add an extra stroke to indicate voicelessness (for instance,  $\text{𐌃} = /di/$ , whereas  $\text{𐌄} = /ti/$ ). Labial plosives don't seem to display this graphic distinction, probably because voiceless labial did not exist in Iberian, which is apparently corroborated by its absence in Graeco-Iberian texts. Very recently, it has been proposed that these dualities could also concern other categories of sounds, like vowels and continuous consonants,<sup>68</sup> and even had a three-element variation for some characters,<sup>69</sup> possibilities which are still under discussion.<sup>70</sup>

The oldest inscriptions written in the north-eastern script date to the end of the fifth century and come from the Ullastret area,<sup>71</sup> but in the fourth century the system was already in use from southern France to Valencia. From the second century onwards, however, the variant of the script that cannot mark the opposition between voiced and voiceless became widespread;<sup>72</sup> the cause of this simplification is still unclear, but it might be related to the deep changes that the local written culture experienced after the Roman conquest.

### 1.6.2. The south-eastern Iberian script

Another set of inscriptions, about 70 in total, are written in the south-eastern variant of the Palaeohispanic script. This is also a semi-syllabary which presents an identical distribution of alphabetical and syllabogram signs as the

67 See Ferrer 2005, with previous literature.

68 Ferrer 2015

69 Ferrer 2017.

70 Ferrer & Moncunill 2019, 86-89.

71 Ferrer 2005, 967-970.

72 Ferrer 2005, 971-973.

north-eastern one. However, unlike the north-eastern variant, which is fully decoded, some characters in the south-eastern one are of unknown value.<sup>73</sup>

It has recently been demonstrated that it, too, had the ability to mark the opposition between voiced and voiceless in the velar and dental plosives, but in this case, the procedure was the inverse of the north-eastern script: the additional stroke appears in the voiced variants, and the non-marked characters are voiceless.<sup>74</sup>

The south-eastern script was in use from the fourth century to the first, in the south of the province of Valencia and in those of Alicante, Murcia, Albacete, Almería, and Jaén. Most of these inscriptions are written from right to left, although the most recent ones are written from left to right, perhaps influenced by Latin writing.

### 1.6.3. The Graeco-Iberian script

The third epichoric script used to write the Iberian language is the Graeco-Iberian alphabet,<sup>75</sup> only attested in just over 30 inscriptions. It was mostly used during the fourth century in a fairly small area across the provinces of Alicante and Murcia; the core zone matches the area known as Contestania in the classical literary sources, where this script coexisted with the north-eastern and south-eastern Iberian syllabaries.

It was in fact an alphabet, borrowed from the Phocaeen Greeks. The Iberians adapted it with minimal modifications: they employed the *omicron* for the Iberian o and the *eta* for the e; they assigned the *sampi* and the *sigma* to each of the two sibilants; and used a diacritic mark to differentiate between the two Iberian trills.

### 1.6.4. The Greek and Latin alphabets

As has been said, the Iberian language was written by means of the regular Greek alphabet only in very few occasions: a scratched *graffito* from Empúries (BDH GI.10.15) and two Attic *skyphoi* from Peyriac de Mer (BDH AUD.07.01 and 02) are the only examples known to date. Similarly, there is almost no evidence of the use of the Latin script to write Iberian, which contrasts with what

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73 See Ferrer *et al.* 2015, 25-29.

74 Ferrer 2010a.

75 Gómez Moreno 1922; Maluquer 1968, 89-94; *MLH* III.1, 133; De Hoz 1987; 1998; 2009b; 2010; Ferrer & Moncunill 2019, 104-105.



happens in other regions of Hispania, like Celtiberia or Lusitania, where this phenomenon is fairly common. The only possible examples are a mosaic from La Alcudia, Elche (*BDH A.10.04*), although it only records personal names, and two inscriptions from the modern-day province of Jaén whose linguistic attribution to the Iberian language remains uncertain: one of them is a mixed inscription in Latin on an ashlar from Castulo (*BDH J.03.01*), the other one is an engraved text on a silver vessel from Santisteban del Puerto (*BDH J.02.04*).

### 1.7. Personal onomastic formula: features and variants

The structure of Iberian personal names<sup>76</sup> was elucidated thanks to a Roman document known as the Ascoli Bronze, or *Turma Salluitana* (*CIL I<sup>2</sup> 709*), which records the granting of citizenship to a series of Hispanian soldiers who served under Pompey Strabo in the Social Wars (fig. 7). Analysis of these names and its application to the Iberian epigraphic corpus made it possible to determine the structure and the formation process of Iberian anthroponomy. These are the most important conclusions:

- Names such as *Sanibelser Adingibas f(i)lius* or *Vmargibas Luspangibas f(i)lius*, as recorded in the Ascoli Bronze, revealed that Iberian names were largely formed by two elements which, furthermore, could on occasions constitute the first or the second part of the compound (as may be observed from the pair *Balci-adin / Adin-gibas*).

- Examples of single-element personal names are less common, but an individual named *Beles Vmarbeles f(i)lius* is mentioned in the Ascoli bronze. The existence of personal names comprising three elements has also occasionally been proposed,<sup>77</sup> but the cases put forward are highly debatable.

- Currently the number of elements that can be identified in the formation of personal names is more than 150.<sup>78</sup> These elements are likely to be words taken from the common vocabulary —nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc.—, but it remains unknown to which particular category each of them should be assigned.

76 On Iberian personal names, see *MLH* III.1, 195-238; Untermann 1979; 1987; 1998; 2001; Rodríguez Ramos 2001a; 2002a; 2014; Moncunill 2010; 2016; 2017a.

77 See Faria's chronicles (2000-to present), and especially Faria 2016, 113-117.

78 A compilation of all these elements can be found at *MLH* III.1, 209-238; Rodríguez Ramos 2014. See also the periodic chronicles by A. M. de Faria, mainly published in *Revista Portuguesa de Arqueologia* from 2000 onwards.

- Most of these elements have a disyllabic structure, although there are also monosyllabic elements (**ban**, **neś**, **tař**, etc.), and others that have been interpreted as derivatives, such as **-ko**, **-to**, **-do**, **-no** (**śani-ko**, **laur-to**, *Ager-do*, *Biur-no*).

- Some elements might modify their form depending on the position in the compound that they occupy: thus, for example, it seems to be possible to detect variants such as **taker** / **teker** / **tiker** / **tiker** / **tikiř** / **tikirs**, **tikis**, **tiki** for some elements. The reason for this variation remains unknown: it could be due to the phonetic context of the compounds, or alternatively obey to some morphological phenomena, or even they could be simply different phonetically-similar elements.

- In some cases, it is possible to isolate some infixes (*cf.* for instance the words **oto-iltiř** / **oto-ke-iltiř**, recorded in the same text (*BDH* V.16.01) or the series **śorlaku-ń-iun**, **selki-ń-iltun**, **ete-ń-iltiř**) or even some prefixes (**is-betar-tiker**, **o-tikiř-teker**) in the formation of names. What these morphs bring to the compound remains, however, unknown.



Fig. 7. The Ascoli Bronze (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 709).

### 1.7.1. Feminine personal names

Our capacity to identify feminine personal names mainly relies as well on Latin inscriptions, where some individuals bearing Iberian *cognomina* are mentioned.<sup>79</sup> Thus, some women are known to have had *cognomina* of Iberian origin that were similar in form to the masculine ones, such as *Asterdumar* (CIL II 5840) or *Sillibor* (CIL II<sup>2</sup>/7, 5). However, in other cases, special procedures seem to be detectable: in such names as *Galduriaunin* (CIL II, 5922), *Socedeiaunin* (EE 8) and *Bastogaunin* (CIL II, 6144), the existence of a termination **-aunin** is recorded, which also appears in Iberian epigraphy (for instance, **aiunin**, **ankonaunin**, etc.). In the *cognomina* *Sergieton* (CIL II<sup>2</sup>/7, 91), *Bileseton* (CIL II 3537) and *Bilosoton* (AE 1998, 743), it seems to be possible to isolate another ending element **-eton** / **-oton**, although it lacks clear parallels in the Iberian corpus.

### 1.7.2. Naming formula

In most Iberian texts the naming formula appears to be very simple, consisting in a single personal name. However, in funerary inscriptions dating to the Roman period, the naming patterns became a little bit more complex, with the introduction of the patronymic, and sometimes even with the mention of the *origo*, probably imitating the Roman tradition. The latest examples of Iberian names appear in Latin inscriptions from Hispania, mostly dating to the first century CE, where indigenous names tend to be used as *cognomina* of individuals bearing *duo* or *tria nomina*: e. g. *M(arcus) Licinius Neitinbeles* (CIL II 6144), on a Latin funerary inscription from Terrassa.

## 2. Current problems in the study of the language and the epigraphic culture, and main future challenges

### 2.1. Linguistic problems

As can be seen from the preceding sections, although our knowledge of Iberian has increased substantially in recent years, the language still remains largely undeciphered: in the current state of the art, we are able to interpret the meaning of the most formulaic inscriptions thanks to criteria of epigraphic typology and the identification of personal names, but longer texts remain

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79 A recent compilation of all these names together with a morphological analysis can be found in Moncunill 2018.

most times impenetrable.<sup>80</sup> This, of course, constitutes one of the most serious limitations for the description of the language and the full comprehension of its epigraphic corpus. On the other hand, given the scarcity of bilingual inscriptions and the difficulties in finding linguistic cognates, the chances of this situation changing in the near future are very limited.

That way, despite the fact that Iberian is the most intensively attested of all Palaeohispanic languages — it has the richest and most varied corpus, the longest chronology of attestation and the largest territorial extension —, it also remains one of the most enigmatic. Regarding its typological classification, it is considered to be an agglutinative language which may present ergative features.<sup>81</sup> However, its hypothetical relationship with other languages, ancient or modern, is still uncertain: although it is not impossible that it is genetically connected to ancient Basque or Aquitanian, at present there is no point in comparing the two languages in order to translate Iberian texts.<sup>82</sup> In any case, considering the apparent correspondences in the Basque and Iberian numerical systems, as explained above (§ 1.4.3), it is not impossible that future research may provide new interesting data on this subject.

At the present time, however, the ineffectiveness of comparative linguistics is one of the main obstacles for the description and interpretation of the language. This being the case, the method that is usually applied is that of internal combinatory comparison, as developed in Jürgen Untermann's works,<sup>83</sup> which, however, has obvious intrinsic limitations, especially when dealing with longer and less formulaic inscriptions. The difficulties of interpretation begin, in reality, in the very process of segmentation of the texts, particularly the longer ones, in order to isolate words or meaningful elements with lexical or morphological information: although some inscriptions appear to be coherently punctuated by means of punctuation marks and/or word separators, others only make an inconsistent and occasional use of them or are written in *scriptio continua*. Consequently, segmentation has to be carried out on the ba-

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80 Some works providing a general overview on the Iberian language are, in chronological order: Tovar 1961; Michelena 1979; Untermann 1983; 1984; 2005; Fletcher 1985; Siles 1986; *MLH* III.1, 150-238; Correa 1994; Velaza 1996a; Rodríguez Ramos 2000a; 2004a; 2005; Gorrochategui 2005; De Hoz 2011, 221-360; Moncunill & Velaza 2016; Velaza 2019.

81 De Hoz 2001; Orduña 2008.

82 For a synthesis on the so called “Vasco-Iberian theory”, see Orduña 2019.

83 See mainly the linguistic analysis of every inscription in the volumes devoted to the Iberian language of *Monumenta Linguarum Hispanicarum*.

sis of the above-mentioned comparative analysis of sequences that can often be no more than hypothetical.

## 2.2. Epigraphic problems

Another aspect for which there is not yet a univocal interpretation is that of the place of birth and the sense of dissemination in the territory of Iberian written culture: the distribution of epigraphic texts raises, indeed, a series of questions about the genesis and development of Iberian epigraphic culture, as well as about the process of expansion of the language and its dialectal diversification.

The fact that a single and internally consistent language is documented over a remarkably large territory during five centuries has been a source of confusion and controversy, in view of the fact that the ethnic, political and cultural situation in this space was far from homogeneous.<sup>84</sup> Classical sources mention the existence in this area of different peoples — *Cerretani*, *Indicetes*, *Laietani*, *Ausetani*, *Ilergetes*, *Laietani*, *Cessetani*, *Sedetani*, *Ilercavones*, *Edetani*, *Contestani*, *Oretani* and *Bastetani*, among others — whose customs and material culture seem to have been very different. To explain this situation, J. de Hoz proposed that Iberian was not, in fact, the vernacular language for the whole region described, but only of the northern part of Contestania and the southern part of Edetania, and that from there it would have spread to the rest of the territory as a *lingua franca*, that is, as an instrumental language used for trade activities.<sup>85</sup> From our point of view, however, this hypothesis does not account for some substantial features of the corpus:<sup>86</sup> in the first place, as we have seen, the use of the Iberian writing in Edetania and Contestania is not older than in the northernmost areas; secondly, the corpus of inscriptions seems to be too large and diverse to have been produced by a single social group (traders); thirdly, and most importantly, there does not seem to be any remains of other vernacular languages: the local anthroponymy is homogeneously Iberian, and coinage epigraphy, an official means of expression of cities, presents no significant linguistic variants across the territory.

Thus, in our opinion, the most likely hypothesis is that, at the time of the earliest written evidence, the Iberian language was the main written and

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84 See Lorrio & Sanmartí 2019.

85 De Hoz 1993a; 1993b; 2009a; 2011, 440-446; 2011a.

86 Velaza 2006a; Ferrer 2013b; Moncunill 2014; Mullen & Ruiz-Darasse 2019, 204-207.

spoken language throughout the whole geographical extension in which it is documented. It is however far more difficult to broach the subject of how and when and from where it had come to be dominant in these areas. In this respect, it should be pointed out that the possible examples of dialectalization that we are able to detect are very scarce,<sup>87</sup> which could suggest that the language must have been established in the area not long before the earliest inscriptions.

### 2.3. Writing system problems

Finally, the last but not least problem to be mentioned lies in our still uncertain knowledge of the writing systems in which Iberian texts were written. In spite of the progress made in this field in recent years, not just the interpretation of some characters continues to be under discussion — especially concerning the southern variant of the Iberian script —, but also the use of some writing conventions in order to distinguish close-related phonemes: this has direct repercussions on our knowledge of the phonetics and phonology of the language, but in addition it leads to difficulties when it comes to detecting possible homographs or homonyms. On the other hand, the relationship between the different Palaeohispanic scripts also has yet to be defined, as well as the manner of their expansion and the sociocultural context in which that expansion took place.<sup>88</sup>

### 2.4. Edition conventions and publication challenges

Our evolving knowledge of the different writing systems is in a certain way the reason why there are still different transcription criteria and the use of diacritics is not absolutely normalized, which is especially evident in certain aspects such as, for instance, the representation of the dual system. In other words, today slightly different conventions are applied by different authors and corpora. Although these different criteria only affect some specific variants of Iberian writing, in our view it is urgent to adopt a unified system of transcription of Palaeohispanic texts in general, and of Iberian in particular, in order to avoid confusion and inconsistency.

In this sense, the encoding of the Palaeohispanic scripts in Unicode that some members of the LITTERA group are carrying out will be of help, since

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87 Some possible examples could be, however, the variation *tagiar* / *tegiar* or *seltar* / *siltar*.

88 For a synthesis on the main proposals so far, see Ferrer & Moncunill 2019, 105-108.

this system will provide a tool for the digital treatment of the scripts, as well as a basic repertoire of graphemes and a proposal for their transliteration into Latin alphabet.<sup>89</sup> In a similar way, another positive aspect that will undoubtedly improve the possibilities of the formal-structural analysis of the Iberian language is the digitalization of the corpus carried out by the Hesperia project.

In general terms, therefore, the current state of critical edition and digitalization of the epigraphic corpus is satisfactory, and new studies and proposals for interpretation will surely emerge in the coming years, renewing the state of the art and opening new avenues of research and working methodologies for our understanding of the Iberian language.

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<sup>89</sup> See Ferrer *et al.* 2015.

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