

The Greek Character of Ancient Iberian Inscriptions*

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1. Pre-Roman, non-Celtic Iberian inscriptions, dating from the fifth to the first centuries, B.C. and written in a semi-syllabic orthography of Eastern Mediterranean origins, remain generally undeciphered. That some of the Iberian funeral inscriptions would have been recorded in the Greek language, however, seems logical, certainly after the fact, as Greek trading settlements occupied areas of the Western Mediterranean coasts from the Rhone river to Gibraltar for nearly two centuries before the appearance of the first Iberian inscriptions.¹

The Greek element in Iberian appears to be in an Iberian dialect of Ionic written in the Iberian script.² This script, partly syllabic and based upon early Aegean writing systems, underwent some local adaptations, compare, for example:

Iberian	𐤀	𐤁	𐤂	𐤃	𐤄	𐤅	𐤆	𐤇	𐤈	𐤉	𐤊
Transliteration	a	i	u	n	i	{ba pa	i	s	e	a	{ke ge
Classical Greek	α	ι	ο	ν		πα	ι	σ		α	κη

2. The following funeral inscriptions from the Spanish *Levante* show strong Greek influence in vocabulary but the morphology appears to be somewhat simplified.

kalunseltar (from Cretas, Teruel)

The Greek word *kalumma* 'covering, hood or veil', also has the meaning 'grave'. Occurring here with *seltar* which appears to be a personal name, the inscription seems to mean 'grave of Seltar'.³

ikonükeiüi ildubeles eban (from Iglesuela del Cid)

The Iberian sequence *iko* corresponds to Greek *ikō* (imperfect *ikon*) 'to come, arrive, reach a place or point in time, age'; metaphorically 'to reach manhood or old age', and is followed by the word *nü* which occurs in Greek as *nu* an earlier (epic) form of the Greek enclitic *nun*, adverb, 'now, at this time'. It may also denote the immediate following of one thing upon another, i.e., 'then', cf. Latin *nunc*.

The sequence *kei* appears to relate to the Greek stem from *kei* in the word *keimai* 'to lie still, lie dead', frequently in epitaphs 'lie buried', while the word *üi* in Iberian inscriptions appears to have a counterpart in Greek *ui* 'whither' (variant of the relative adverb *oi*).⁴ However, the word could be derived from Greek *uiós* 'son' (Latin *filius*).⁵

The part of the inscription referring to *ildubeles* is clearly a personal name in two parts: *ildu* and *beles*.⁶

The final word in the sequence *eban* has been interpreted in various

ways ranging from 'wife' to 'stone', i.e., 'gravestone', but there is no particular reason to suppose that *eban* is a noun, or, indeed, as others have thought, a suffix.⁷ Both *eban* and *ban* occur in the Iberian inscriptions and both are found in Greek, *eban* as a second aorist form of *bainō* 'to go (away), to proceed', and *ban* (epic form) sometimes used in place of *eban* or as a participle.

The Iberian sequence then appears to read

<i>iko</i>	<i>nū</i>	<i>kei</i>	<i>ūi</i>
reaching	now (the time)	to die	to which place?
			the son of?

Ildubeles eban

went (away)

or, to the effect that 'Having reached old age, it was time to die and Ildubeles passed away'.

aretakeaiunibaiseaketebane...

The Ionic and Homeric word *arē*, a form of prayer in supplication, perhaps to *Ares*, begins the sequence although the first word could also be Greek *ará* 'then, therefore, so then' or even the exclamatory *ara* 'to draw attention to something as in "Mark you!"'.

The next sequence *take* is recorded again as *aket* but in the second the *t* may go with *eban* (*teban*). The first can be analysed as *ta* plus *ekei* an adverb 'at, in that place, there'. The word *ta*, a form of the demonstrative pronoun or definite article undergoes crasis in Greek to become *takei* (*ta ekei*). With adverbs of time and place in Greek the article serves to strengthen the adverbial function, compare *ta nun* 'now'.

aion, a variant *aiun* found on other Iberian funeral inscriptions occurs in Greek as *áion*, the imperfect of *aíō* 'to breathe, breath out, to expire', compare *áemi*. The phrase *phílon áion etór* 'I breathed out my life', (literally 'my heart') is found in Homeric Greek. The form appears to be from Proto Indo European **aiu* 'Lebenskraft' and related to Sanskrit *ayu*, locative *ayuni*. Compare also Greek *aíōn* 'lasting, eternal life, one's age or time of life, a period of time, a lifetime, a life, eternity'.

In the funeral inscriptions the meaning is probably 'expired'.

If the reference to *áion* is correct, then the inscription from Yecla *aionikabiur* translates 'died, or expired Ikabiur'.⁸

The word *baise* seems to be Iberian and a personal name although we do find Greek *pais* 'a son or daughter, a descendent'.

If Greek *akē* can be equated with the sequence *ake* the only logical one of the several meanings would be 'silent'. The following *t* is somewhat problematic and could be one of several things but a good possibility

is that it is the enclitic *te* 'and' which in the epic language and Ionic is joined to relatives including relative adverbs without a change in meaning. The vowel in *te* would simply elide with the following vowel in *eban* (or *te* plus *ban*). If this is the case, then *ake* would not be the same adverb *ake* earlier in the inscription.

The presence or absence of *te* in inscriptions, and the alternation between *ban* and *eban* then accounts for the various forms of this word, i.e. *ban*, *eban*, *teban*.

A tentative translation of the Iberian inscription might read somewhat as follows:⁹

<i>are</i>	<i>take</i>	<i>aiuni</i>	<i>baise</i>
Oh God!	here	died	Baise
	in this place	lies	(possibly a son, a descendent)
<i>ake</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>eban</i>	...
silently and		he departed	

Note that the Greek adverb *ekei* was frequently employed as an euphemism to mean 'in another world', and *oi ekei* served as an epithet for the dead. Also, in conjunction with verbs of motion *ekei* (above *ake*) meant 'thither'. An alternative translation of the inscription could be that *Baise* departed for another world.

The inscription, however, is incomplete, leaving some doubts about the sequence *Baise* as a personal name. The name could have appeared in the part that was lost.

From Azaila, an inscription on ceramic reads: *baštartineaiuneskeřtar*.

The resemblance of certain sequences to words in Greek is clear. The stem form from Greek *bastázō* 'lift up, carry off, take away', and metaphorically 'exalt' corresponds to the initial part of the inscription *basta*. Compare *bastaktós*, a verbal adjective 'to be borne'.

Greek *arti*, adverb 'just (now) what has just happened, straight away', corresponds to *arti* in the text above, while *ne* in Greek is a participle of strong affirmation (cf. Latin *ne*).

The inscription appears to translate:

<i>bašta</i>	<i>arti</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>aiun</i>	<i>Eskerřtar</i>
borne away	recently	indeed	(in)	death	personal name ¹⁰
exalted					

A funeral inscription from Tarragona contains the Iberian personal name *Atin Belaur* and the Latin name *Fulvia Lintearia*.

ar'etake atinbelaur' antalskar Fulvia Lintearia

The connection between the names consists of the Iberian Greek words *antalskar* or *ant als kar* which states that *Atin B.* was also known as *Fulvia L.* Greek *allássō* 'to change, alter, to make other than it is' preceded by *ant* (from *anta*) adverb 'against, face to face', etc. becomes *ant-allássō* 'to give or take in exchange, to take one thing in exchange for another'. (Compare also the substantive form *állos* and Latin *alius*).¹¹

The apparent suffix *kar* is equivalent to Greek *gar*¹² a conjunction 'for' and the words translate,

<i>ant</i>	<i>als</i>	<i>kar</i>
in exchange		for
	alias	

The entire inscription reads:

<i>ar'e</i>	<i>take</i>	<i>Atin Belaur'</i>	<i>ant als kar Fulvia</i>
supplication	here (is)		alias <i>Lintearia</i>
Oh God!	(lies)		

3. There are, to be sure, many problems with the interpretation of the Iberian Greek. Indeed, some sequences such as *ikonükeiüi ildubeles eban*, given above, might be interpreted (if *üi* is thought to be from Greek *uiós* 'son') as 'Ildu Beles, son of Ikonükei,' much as an inscription from Benasal, *sakar'betaniüi*, might be interpreted as 'son of Sakar' Betan'.

On the other hand, while *Sakar'* seems to be a personal name, the sequence *betan* can be considered to consist of the Greek forms *bē*, poetic for *ebē*, a third person singular aorist of *bainō* plus *toi* and enclitic particle of inference 'therefore, accordingly', and *an*, an assertive particle expressing in conjunction with the aorist, what might have been. The sequences *toi* plus *an* in Greek undergo contraction to *tan*.¹³

Note that *an* in Greek never begins a sentence and follows the word whose significance it limits; but when words dependent on the verb (here, *toi*) precede it, *an* may follow. Thus:

Greek	-----	<i>bē</i>	<i>toi</i>	<i>tan</i>	<i>an</i>	<i>ui</i>
Ib. Greek		<i>Sakar</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>tan</i>		<i>üi</i>

The Iberian grave marking thus seems to read (if *üi* is taken as Greek 'whither') 'Sakar would have therefore gone whither, or to that place, heaven?'

There seems to be little question that the language of some of the Iberian inscriptions is a form of Greek. Phonological sequences, semantic congruence as expected of funeral inscriptions, and syntactic relations all point to the same conclusion.

Prior to the Romanization of the Iberian Peninsula, then, there appear to have been at least two languages used along the eastern Mediterranean coastal area. One of these, the elusive Iberian, recorded in numerous documents, still defies decipherment; the other, previously thought to have been also Iberian, as both employed the same writing system, was an Iberian dialect of Greek. Accurate and convincing translations are now a matter of application.

Footnotes

*This paper was aided by a Canada Council grant. The inscriptional material used here has been recorded by a number of investigators such as Gomez-Moreno, Motes, Tovar, Siles et al. The Greek dictionaries used for comparison and translation were: Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford University Press: 1968) and Berry, *The Classic Greek Dictionary* (New York: Follett Publishing Company, 1958).

¹The earliest Greek finds in Spain date to about 630 B.C. See Arribas (1964:52).

Emporion (Ampurias) on the coast north of Barcelona was founded by the Greeks about 580 B.C. and linked to Massalia (Marseilles) by trade.

During the fourth and fifth centuries, B.C., fresh impetus from the east gave new life to Greek ventures in the western Mediterranean and old entrepôts such as Alonai (Benidorm) and Akra Leuke (Alicante) were revitalized. Attic and Southern Italic pottery attest to much importation during this period.

Iberian settlements and cemeteries of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. with strong Hellenic influences mark the inland trade route into southern Spain from the north. The Phoenicians were in control of the sea lanes.

²The word *keila* appears on the base of a Greek *kelix* from Enserune and as such appears to be unique among the Iberian inscriptions. The word has been thought to be an indigenous adaptation of the Greek word *kelix*. See Motes (1968:112).

³A. Tovar read this inscription as 'tomb of kalun'. My reading is the opposite.

⁴The symbol γ in the Iberian script given the value of \ddot{u} is problematical. A. Tovar (1961:65) transcribes the sign as \tilde{m} and transliterates the sequence written here as $\ddot{u}i$ as $\tilde{m}-i$. He then tentatively translated the sequence as the first person singular pronoun *I*. In early (epic) Greek, one finds the forms *uis* Nom., *uios* Gen., *ui* Dat. etc. equivalent to *filius* 'son'.

⁵The reading 'son', seems to fit a number of inscriptions, many of just one word. Compare *auetirišani* and *kaiui* ('son of Gaio-Caio?') and *uiisanui* ('son of U, son of San? Grandson?') all from Enserune. In the inscription above, however, $\ddot{u}i$ seems syntactically out of place and here may be the word for 'whither'.

⁶The word *beles* as a personal name is found elsewhere, for example on the celebrated Bronze of Ascoli, discovered in Rome, bearing the names of a contingent of Iberian soldiers. One of the names is *beles umarbeles f(i)lius*. Similarly, *illu-*, no doubt, a later form of *ildu*, is inscribed on the plaque.

⁷See, for example, Toyar (1961) for the interpretation of 'stone' based on Hamitic-Semitic comparisons. For 'wife' see I. W. Fry (1977:96) primarily on Old Irish *ban*.

Others have translated the word as 'son' based upon Basque *-ba* which indicates a *relación de parentesco* and Michelena treats it as a suffix. The opinion of Caro Baroja that *eban* and *ban* are variants coincides with my own.

For various views concerning this word, see Siles.

⁸Recorded by Motes (1968) no. 274.

⁹The sequence *baise* appears in several inscriptions, for example, from Ampurias comes the word *baisebilos* and on a funeral inscription from Sinarcas *baisetaś*. That *bilos* is a personal name is clear from *bilustibas* (there is a fair amount of interchange between *o* and *u* in Iberian) inscribed on the Ascoli Bronze.

As Greek used two words for 'son', *uiós* and *pais* both could be expected to be employed in Spain, perhaps with the latter meaning 'dependent' or 'child' in accordance with Greek usage, cf. *oi Ludōn paides* 'sons of Lydians', (i.e., the Lydians themselves).

If sequences such as *baisebilos* are interpreted in this way, we must assume that the son or descendent had the same name as the father. Epic Greek preferred the disyllabic nominative *páis* (vocative *paī*). 'a child', *paīs paidus* 'a child's child or grandson'.

¹⁰Greek *aiō* (imperfect *aion*) also means 'time' or 'age'. Could the inscription on an Iberian coin *aiubas* refer to the time of *Bas*? Greek *ikō* (imperfect *ikon*) means 'to honor'. On an Iberian coin is the inscription *ikorbeles*. *Beles* is a personal name. Does the legend mean 'in honor of Beles'? For these recordings from Sagunto see Siles.

¹¹The syncopation of the vowel is evident in Iberian Greek but a reduction of *ll* > *l* may not have occurred since the earlier form of *allos* was *alyos*. Cf. also Cypr. *ailos*. See Liddell and Scott.

¹²*Gar* in Greek is often used to introduce the reason or cause of what precedes or explain what was implied in the previous clause. It stood generally after the first word of the clause.

¹³Other possibilities also exist but perhaps with less syntactic and semantic feasibility such as *ta* plus *an* which becomes *tan* in Greek.

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