


Epigraphy and Literacy in the Iberian Peninsula: Echoes of the Past, Challenges of the Present

Epigrafía y alfabetización en la península ibérica: ecos del pasado, retos del presente

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Abstract: This article pays homage to the international cooperation and interdisciplinarity that have characterised the first 50 years of the Palaeohispanic congresses. It presents some of the highlights and lessons learnt from working on the epigraphy and writing equipment of the Iberian peninsula in the context of a recent project, *LatinNow*, which explored Latinization, local languages, and literacies. We acknowledge the gap between ‘historical grand narratives’ and the realities on the ground, and the importance of controlling multiple scales of analysis and appreciating the local voices and communities in recovering ‘regionality’. New projects focused on the Peninsula exploiting so-called ‘épigraphie mineure’ and writing equipment, and the implementation of FAIR principles in our datasets, should assist us in recovering the local communities, complex epigraphic practices, shifting linguistic landscapes, and regional varieties of Latin in more detail. We sound a note of optimism for the future of our shared endeavours over the next fifty years.

Key words: Data; Epigraphic habit; International cooperation; Literacy; Non-lapidary epigraphy; Writing equipment; Iberian Peninsula

Resumen: Este artículo rinde homenaje a la cooperación internacional y a la interdisciplinaria que han caracterizado los primeros cincuenta años de los congresos paleohispánicos. Presenta algunos de los principales hitos y lecciones aprendidas a partir del trabajo sobre la epigrafía y los instrumentos de escritura de la península ibérica en el marco del reciente proyecto *LatinNow*, que exploró la latinización, las lenguas locales y las prácticas de escritura. Se reconoce la distancia existente entre las “grandes narrativas históricas” y las realidades concretas, así como la importancia de controlar múltiples escalas de análisis y de valorar las voces y comunidades locales para recuperar la “regionalidad”. Los nuevos proyectos centrados en la Península, que explotan la llamada “épigraphie mineure” y los instrumentos de escritura, junto con la aplicación de los principios FAIR a nuestros conjuntos de datos, deberían contribuir a recuperar con mayor detalle las comunidades locales, las complejas prácticas epigráficas, los paisajes lingüísticos cambiantes y las variedades regionales del latín. Concluimos con una nota de optimismo respecto al futuro de nuestros esfuerzos compartidos en los próximos cincuenta años.

Palabras clave: Alfabetización; Cooperación internacional; Datos; Epigrafía no lapidaria; Hábito epigráfico; Instrumentos de escritura; Península Ibérica

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With around a dozen scripts and attested languages, ‘colonial’ and local, some still poorly understood, it is hard to imagine many more joyous playgrounds for epigraphists and linguists than the Iberian Peninsula. At the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Palaeohispanic congress in Madrid in 2024, following the inaugural conference in Salamanca in 1974,¹ the range and vibrancy of the field were on display, reflected also in this resultant volume. This article pays homage to the wide impact and reach of the field, and its welcoming spirit of cooperation, something that Jürgen Untermann highlighted in his review of the very first two colloquia.

Ich habe nur selten so intensive, von gemeinsamem fachlichen Interesse und von aufrichtiger persönlicher Verbundenheit der Teilnehmer getragene Zusammenkünfte erlebt, wie es diese Beiden Kolloquien waren. [...] Unseren spanischen und portugiesischen Kollegen kann nicht hoch genug angerechnet werden, dass sie ihren durch eine grosse Pionierarbeit bewährten Kreis ohne alle Reserven für internationale Zusammenarbeit geöffnet haben.²

I am the custodian of the offprints of publications relating to the Iberian Peninsula once owned by David Ellis Evans, Professor of Celtic at the University of Oxford from 1978 until he retired in 1996. Amongst them are articles from the proceedings of the congresses, signed with warm salutations from a range of scholars, not only the aforementioned stalwart, Jürgen Untermann, but also María Lourdes Albertos Firmat, Javier de Hoz, Antonio Tovar, Francisco Villar, amongst many others. This collection offers a glimpse of what must have been a regular international correspondence humming across Europe, and sometimes beyond, which shared research and greetings in the periods between conferences and ensured the dissemination of the latest epigraphic finds across national boundaries. This open, international collaboration was again on display at the Madrid congress in 2024.

1 The congresses have been held in the following locations (in order of occurrence): Salamanca, Tübingen, Lisbon, Vitoria, Cologne, Coimbra, Zaragoza, Salamanca, Barcelona, Lisbon, Valencia, Giessen, Loulé, Burdeos, Madrid. For an overview of the evolution of the field by a doyen of the subject, see de Hoz 2019.

2 Untermann 1977, 359.

1. Collaboration and Interdisciplinarity

In this flourishing international scholarship, Palaeohispanic languages and scripts have always been central. This means epigraphy takes centre stage at every congress, though in a way that is sensitive to historical perspectives and archaeological information and research. Indeed interdisciplinarity is a feature of the field, as underlined by Paco Beltrán in his presentation of the first volume, produced in 2001, of the journal *Palaeohispanica*, a vehicle for contributions for the furtherment of Palaeohispanic studies and for the proceedings of the congresses.³

Entre las fuentes de información de las que dispone la Paleo-hispanística, son sin duda las inscripciones las que encierran mayor interés, sin que ello suponga menosprecio alguno para las restantes, cuyo concurso es de todo punto indispensable no sólo para comprender a las sociedades que las produjeron, sino incluso para extraer de los epígrafes todo su caudal informativo.⁴

Following closely this tone set more than twenty years ago, every one of the chapters of this volume are dedicated to language, epigraphies, and/or scripts, and, where appropriate, take careful account of the societies producing them.

The Palaeohispanic epigraphic texts are commonly fragmentary, frequently short, often in languages that are not fully understood, and in some cases not even of clear linguistic affiliation. We think particularly of the lengthy debates on the linguistic affiliation of Lusitanian and Tartessian (the largely debunked case for the Celticity of the latter would have benefited from earlier and deeper collaboration with the Palaeohispanic community—Dagmar Wodtko's cautionary words did not perhaps receive the attention they deserved),⁵ and of the prominent voices on the relationships between Basque, Iberian, 'Vasconic' and Aquitanian, a subject covered in this volume.⁶ These questions of linguistic affiliation have to be constantly reconsidered as new finds come to light, perhaps most significantly the recently published 'hand of

3 For a recent bibliometric and historiographical analysis of the journal *Palaeohispanica*, see Ramírez-Sánchez 2022.

4 Beltrán 2001, 8.

5 See Cunliffe and Koch 2010; Koch and Cunliffe 2013, and the critical reviews by Zeidler 2011 and Eska 2013. See Wodtko's chapter in the second volume (Wodtko 2013).

6 For discussions, see Ballester 2005; Gorrochategui 2022; Michelena 1985, 334–340; Orduña 2019.

Irulegi.⁷ This epigraphic research demands that scholars be attentive to the specificity of local context to uncover every possible clue to aid the interpretation of these difficult texts, fostering close engagement with the archaeology which can often be overlooked by those studying better-known ‘Classical’ epigraphies. The work also requires deep engagement with a wide range of languages and linguistic training, something that has made the Palaeohispanic crew especially adept at reaching beyond the borders of the Iberian Peninsula. One result was the EU-COST network AELAW ‘*Ancient European Languages and Writings*’, led by Paco Beltrán and Simona Marchesini, which drew together specialists in the twenty or so epichoric languages and epigraphies of ancient Europe, and produced a successful series of short introductory books and a double-volume *Palaeohispanica* issue with articles on each language.⁸ Consequently, the group has encouraged the use of a new term—Palaeoeuropean (*not* in the sense of *Alteuropäisch*)—which ought to lend further coherence to that field.⁹

The ability for Palaeohispanists to juggle multiple ancient and modern languages—the congresses themselves are profoundly multilingual affairs—has engendered a significant sensitivity to the multilingualism of the ancient world, and allowed collaboration across unhelpful national boundaries, tapping into research perspectives from different scholarly traditions, and seeing connections where others might not. Palaeohispanic communities did not follow modern borders, and south-western France is as much Palaeohispanic territory as are Spain and Portugal.¹⁰ Coline Ruiz Darasse’s 2024 publication on the Iron Age *oppidum* of Ensérune—a site with nearly 400 texts in Iberian script, a handful in Latin, Greek and Etruscan script, and a mix of Gaulish, Iberian and other personal names—is the latest in a long engagement of French scholars with the Palaeohispanic community.¹¹ The first *Palaeohispanica* opened with an obituary for the renowned French linguist Michel Lejeune, and these fiftieth anniversary *actas* feature a homage from Ruiz Darasse to the same. His several publications on Celtiberian began in 1952 with the publica-

7 Aiestaran, Gorrochategui and Velaza 2023.

8 The series AELAW Booklets and *Palaeohispanica* 20. Other related projects have had a pedagogical focus, including the Erasmus+ project *SELECT Self-Learning Atlas of Ancient European Cultures*: selecteplus.eu, and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie RISE project *xFORMAL Informal and non-formal e-learning for cultural heritage*: xformal.eu.

9 See Beltrán Lloris 2020, 14–18.

10 As a case in point, the fascinating rock inscriptions of the Cerdanya region, discussed in this volume by Lambert, naturally pay no heed to modern national boundaries.

11 Ruiz Darasse 2024. See also Boissinot and Ruiz Darasse 2023.

tion of the *tessera* in the form of a hand from the Parisian Froehner collection, followed by his *Celtiberica*.¹² Ruiz Darasse's own project, a digitization of the *Recueil des inscriptions gauloises*,¹³ the publication of Gaulish texts which began with Lejeune's first volume in 1985, has itself brought together several Palaeohispanists within the team.¹⁴

The interest of Palaeohispanists in collaborating internationally, and in the movement and connections of people, of multilingualism and cultural entanglements, can be exemplified by Javier de Hoz's numerous insights across his research, for example in his article 'the Greek man in the Iberian street', or his identification of the Celtic personal name in Etruscan script from En-sérune, which had previously been considered Iberian.¹⁵ It has also been a feature of the work of María José Estarán Tolosa, with her doctoral collection of bilingual texts from around the Mediterranean and subsequent projects on multilingualism in religious contexts, and of Noemí Moncunill in her focus on scripts and onomastics in contact, leading to international conferences in Paris in 2017 and Las Palmas in 2018.¹⁶ Both colleagues collaborated on the interdisciplinary European Research Council-funded project on Latinization, local languages and literacies in the western provinces from the Iberian Peninsula to Britannia (*LatinNow*), which benefited from the dynamic research landscape and connections created by the Palaeohispanic community.¹⁷

2. Databases and digital tools: future standards

The *LatinNow* project relied on the collaboration of several Palaeohispanic scholars and on existing databases and digital tools to form part of its empirical basis. Though the project's centre of gravity lies more to the north and later than the focus of many Palaeohispanists, the experiences of working with large datasets reveal important lessons that might help to inform future practices.

12 Lejeune 1952, 1955. See also Beltrán Lloris 2004. For a conspectus of the *tesserae*, see Beltrán Lloris et al. 2020.

13 *Recueil informatisé des inscriptions gauloises*: riig.huma-num.fr.

14 The volume resulting from the project is Ruiz Darasse 2025.

15 De Hoz 2004, 2008.

16 Estarán Tolosa 2016, 2019; Moncunill and Ramírez Sánchez 2021; Coltelloni-Trannoy and Moncunill 2022.

17 latinnow.eu.

In exploring the complexities of linguistic and cultural change from the Iron Age to the post-imperial period across the western provinces, the *Latin-Now* team collated and harmonized numerous existing resources to create a many-million-datapoint dataset, which could be visualized and interrogated using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This involved the coordination of both epigraphic data, 180,000 records deduplicated to around 130,000, plus what we called ‘social factors’ data.¹⁸ These are available in an open access GIS which can be found at gis.latinnow.eu. It is problematic thanks to the ‘characterful’ nature of the data with which we had to work, but is nevertheless a useful support for big-picture analysis and for identifying potential patterns, areas of overlap of certain data, gaps which need exploring, and for deploying both the powerful analytical and cartographic tools of GIS.¹⁹ The *LatinNow* GIS must be approached with appreciation of its pitfalls and limitations. It should be read alongside Mullen (2024a), and using the online guidance and the information buttons beside each layer.

What this dataset offers is the most comprehensive all-language dataset for any multi-province area. The languages include: British Celtic, Celtiberian, Coptic, Etruscan, Gaulish, Greek, Hebrew, Iberian, Latin, Lusitanian, Palmyrene, Phoenicio-Punic, ‘South-western’, Tartessian, and Turdetanian. The bulk, the Latin inscriptions, came from a download from the Europeana *EAGLE* project in 2017, itself the result of the aggregation of many digital epigraphic ‘feeder’ datasets (particularly, for the Iberian Peninsula, Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby (*EDCS*), Epigraphic Database Heidelberg (*EDH*), and Hispania Epigraphica Online (*HEpOI*)).²⁰ It was coordinated with non-Latin epigraphic records from numerous colleagues.²¹ To these epigraphic data were added layers of non-epigraphic data, for example records concerning writing equipment, settlements, roads, mines, quarries, mints etc., which again relied on numerous colleagues and required cooperation as we tried to understand

18 For details, see Mullen 2024a.

19 For ‘characterful data’, see Cooper et al. 2021. The web-version of the GIS cannot offer the same extensive functionality as the QGIS software the team used. The data themselves can be downloaded (github.com/latinnow), including shape files which can then be used by researchers in their own GIS.

20 eagle-network.eu; db.edcs.eu; edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de; hepol.uah.es.

21 For the Iberian Peninsula dataset we are grateful to Joaquín Gorrochategui, Eduardo Orduña, and colleagues for the Hesperia data (hesperia.ucm.es); to María Hoz de Paz for Greek; José Angel Zamora for Phoenician; and to Noemí Moncunill, María José Estáran Tolosa, Javier Herrera, and especially Pieter Houten, for their work on the data.

the character of all those datasets, and to what uses they could, and could not, be put.

An easy task was integrating the non-Latin materials, as these had been well curated by the various feeder projects, and the relatively small numbers meant we could do record-by-record harmonization and analysis. The Latin-language dataset was more problematic. The *EAGLE* project had made great strides in the harmonization of this material but had uncovered issues with the data,²² created by the contributing projects, and these multiplied as we scrutinized the data. Projects such as the indispensable *EDCS* were designed to provide access to a comprehensive set of Latin inscriptions and focused primarily on disseminating the texts,²³ understandably resulting in inadequate quality or missing information on the materiality/context of inscribed objects, with the non-lapidary material poorly treated. Traditionally catch-all terms such *instrumentum domesticum* have been used, and this can cover anything from spoons to barrels, and even mosaics and wall plaster.²⁴ The Palaeohispanic files recorded better information in these fields, thanks in part to the value that has historically been placed on this information in a context where so much of the material is not on stone. However, some of the *Hesperia* data was in the form of descriptive text entries and not easily machine-readable or straightforward to map onto existing vocabularies.²⁵

The practices of recording attribute values across many of the major digital epigraphic offerings have improved substantially in the past decade. The dataset we received from *EAGLE*, and on which we began to work in 2017, would look quite different from an export we might receive from the same online epigraphic data sources today. But there is much work still to do as we pursue the goal of linked open data (LOD). We should follow the FAIR principles, making data *findable*, *accessible*, *interoperable*, and *reusable*. It is crucial that the Palaeohispanists, with their deep experience of treating com-

22 Liuzzo 2015, 2018. The *FAIR epigraphy* project run by Jonathan Prag and Marietta Horster has been continuing the pioneering work of the *EAGLE* team by developing epigraphic ontologies and standard vocabularies: ontology.inscriptiones.org.

23 See Bodel, Prag and Roueché 2024 for a robust discussion of the limitations of the *EDCS*, and indeed our digital epigraphic datasets more broadly, including in the presentation of texts.

24 For the issues with the use of the term, see Feugère and Willi 2024.

25 Crucially important for the Palaeohispanic material is the digitally consistent representation of complex graphic forms. Work with the Unicode consortium has been essential in establishing standards for digital representation, see Ferrer, Moncunill and Velaza 2015 and the more recent documents on the Unicode website (unicode.org).

plex epigraphies, assist in the creation of the epigraphic standards necessary for interoperability. There is no need for us all to use the same vocabularies or even to document the same types of data, but a shared ontology and the ability to align differing vocabularies will allow us to coordinate our labour and to use our energy most efficiently. No-one in the current digital era should be retyping, scraping, needlessly cleaning, or reformatting data. Were we to start the *LatinNow* project again today in a completely LOD context (something not technically possible until all the digital epigraphic offerings are aligned), we would be able to share effortlessly across multiple datasets and to refresh our data based on updates made in the linked datasets, rather than having to import updates at intervals. Static data dumps of epigraphic material, which is constantly being refreshed by the source projects with new finds, corrections, or enhanced metadata, quickly becomes out-of-step.

3. Regionality: the Roman epigraphic habit in the Hispaniae

As we have seen, classical scholars have long been interested in lapidary texts. They were the focus of early collections such as the *Corpus Inscriptio-num Latinarum (CIL)*, and the inscriptions on stone have been more systematically recorded and digitized across the provinces than is the case for other inscribed objects, contributing to their outsized role in our vision of epigraphic practices. The common refrain regarding the ‘epigraphic habit’—that is a particularly Roman form of epigraphic output, encompassing stone and monumental metal objects,²⁶ through which inhabitants of the Roman world expressed themselves in a public mode—concerns its *ubiquity*. The term for this apparently coherent phenomenon, ‘epigraphic habit’, was coined by historian Ramsay MacMullen in 1982, who described it as expanding from the time of Augustus to a peak in the early third century before a decline thereafter. His work, like the work by Harris on literacy, has more than a grain of truth and has been widely cited ever since, and sparked voluminous debate, particularly concerning the reasons for the rise and fall of lapidary inscription.²⁷ But those who work on regional epigraphies are well aware of the gap between these *historical grand narratives* and the *realities on the ground*. John Bodel talks of

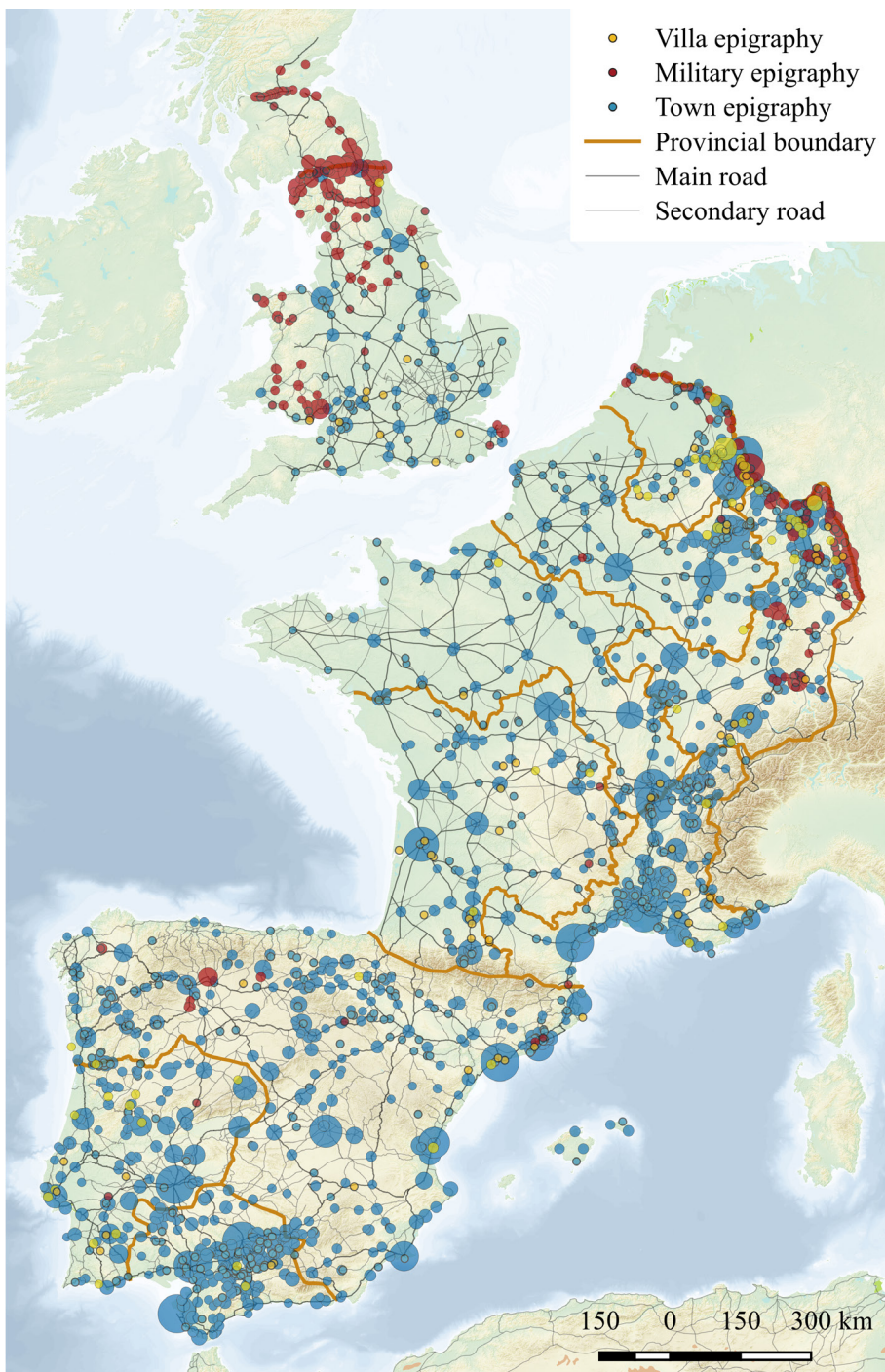
26 Note that simply filtering by ‘stone’ on the epigraphic datasets would mean that incised stone counters or documentary texts on slate, for example, would be unhelpfully included. We created a specifically curated dataset that took into account the type of object and text type in making a determination as to whether it should be included as part of the ‘epigraphic habit’ set.

27 See, for example, Beltrán Lloris 2015; Meyer 1990, 2011; Woolf 1996.

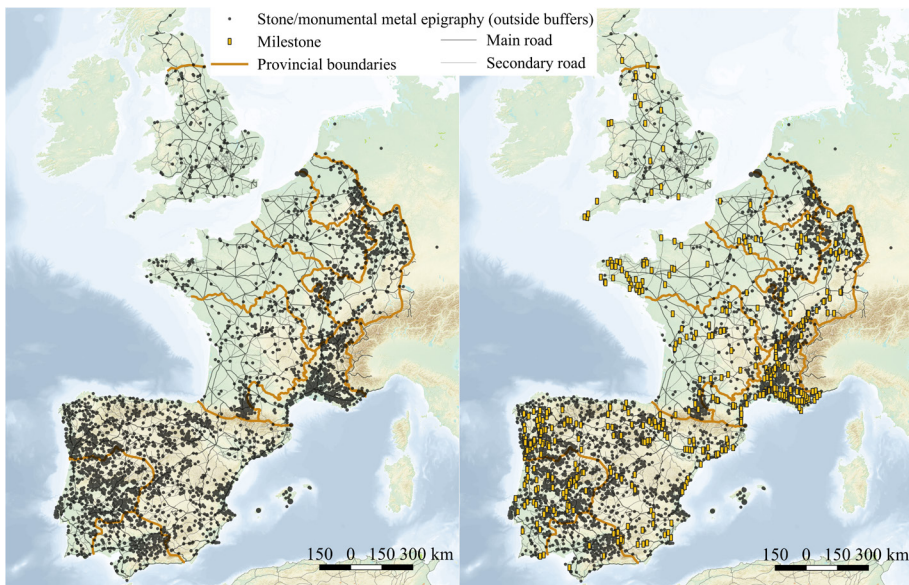
the ‘deception’ of this lapidary evidence which looks uniform when viewed from a distance, but is actually ‘micro-cosmically variegated’.²⁸ To grasp the full extent of regionality we need to control the evidence at different scales, the intense focus, the big picture, and everything in between.

The differences of uptake, contexts, and motivations of the epigraphic habit in the western provinces can be demonstrated in broad terms by showing lapidary/monumental metal inscriptions found within buffers around villas, military installations and towns, i.e. those which fall within a defined kilometrage from each settlement of these types. Immediately the urban and civilian nature of the output can be seen in the Iberian Peninsula, particularly in Baetica, the lands bordering the Mediterranean and the Rhone valley, and the military nature of much of the epigraphy comes to the fore in the Highland zone of Britannia and the Germanic frontier. Indeed in Britain the local population rarely seem to take up the epigraphic habit which is tightly associated with the military and foreigners. Map 1 illustrates with enhanced data what is well-known. Maps 2 a and b take us further. Black dots represent stone and monumental metal inscriptions which are not found within the buffer zones around known towns, military installations, and villas. Our information about settlement in the ancient world is clearly not complete, but this map gives us some idea about where a more widespread penetration of the epigraphic habit, reaching into the rural hinterlands, has occurred, namely much of western and southern Hispania, the lower Rhone valley, the Haute Garonne region, the eastern parts of Belgica and Germania Inferior, and northern and western Germania superior. Elsewhere, in western Gaul and Britannia there are many fewer instances, and when milestones are highlighted (Map 2b), these account for most of the examples for north-western Gaul and Highland Britannia; these are regions in which the local communities do not generally engage with the Roman epigraphic habit.

28 Bodel 2001, 7.



Map 1: Distribution of Roman-period lapidary and monumental metal inscriptions ('epigraphic habit subset') with known military, civilian and villa site associations, from Mullen 2024a, fig. 1.7.



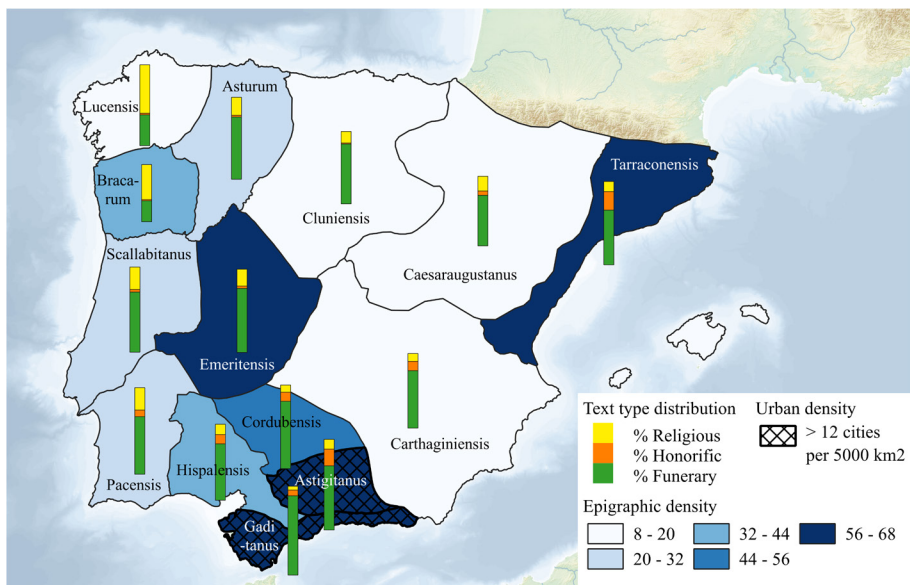
Maps 2 a and b: Locations of Roman-period lapidary and monumental metal inscriptions ('epigraphic habit subset') without military-, civilian- and villa-site associations; all instances (left), and all with milestones highlighted (right), from Mullen 2024a, fig. 1.8.

Zooming in further, and based on calculations from *LatinNow's* GIS, Map 3 presents the density of the 'epigraphic habit' for the Iberian Peninsula by *conventus*. We calculated this using the same method deployed in Harris' seminal, but controversial, *Ancient Literacy* for ease of comparison.²⁹ This breakdown by *conventus* reflects the differential uptake of the epigraphic habit across the Peninsula, indicating the role of 'Mediterraneanization', and the importance of early urbanization for example.³⁰ But it is also, as discussed by Pieter Houten, unavoidably affected by the coverage provided by the on-going by-region revision of *CIL* for the Hispaniae and its subsequent digitization, and therefore the impact that publication and digitizing practices have on the densities.³¹

29 The density figure is based on examples per 1000km², see Harris 1989, whose divisions are by province. For details, see Mullen 2024a, 14–24.

30 For recent discussions, see Moncunill 2024; Estarán Tolosa and Herrera 2024; Houten 2023, 2024.

31 Houten 2024, 117–127.



Map 3: Densities of Roman-period lapidary and monumental metal inscriptions (‘epigraphic habit subset’) by Iberian *conventus*, with data on text type and urban density, from Houten 2024, fig. 4.16.

One of the overwhelming findings of working across vast areas through a large dataset was the significant variation, not just in levels of uptake, whose quantitative results can so easily be skewed, but in the choices of monument and iconography, in text type, locations of inscribed monument, sections of the society involved, or the formulae deployed.³² At least some of the differences are attributable to the indigenous communities, practices, and languages of the various regions. As illustrated on Map 3, the individual *conventus* of the Hispaniae offer differing levels of engagement with religious, honorific, and funerary lapidary epigraphy, information which can then provide a backdrop for exploring in detail the specific facets and drivers of the varied, or sometimes strikingly similar, outputs within or across regions, for example inter-city rivalries.³³

The preliminary work on the chronology of the epigraphic habit, undertaken by selecting only dated inscriptions, indicates that few provinces—including Baetica—seemed to follow the rise and fall of MacMullen’s temporal arc closely.³⁴ Understanding the details of the differing modalities of the

32 Discussed across the volume Mullen and Willi 2024.

33 See Houten 2024, 127–140.

34 For the temporal arcs of all the north-western provinces, see the discussion of regionality in Mullen 2024b, 171–179.

epigraphic habit across the Hispaniae might entail the examination of the temporal dimension of the practices within the key urban centres of each province, and of the Palaeohispanic context, particularly the latest epichoric texts of all types and the engagement, or not, of local communities in the Roman mode of expression. The detailed work of Palaeohispanists on the onomastics of the Peninsula, examples of which can be found across the current volume, will continue to be of vital importance in recovering the social basis for the epigraphic habit and its precise rhythms across time and space.³⁵

4. Regionality: everyday writing and literacy

As commentators on the ancient world, we are constantly trying to amass evidence to improve our understanding and to account for, or fill, the gaps in our knowledge. There are aspects of life and languages in the provinces—for example socio-literacy—that we are able to recover for the first time thanks to sustained interest in non-lapidary epigraphy, and the co-ordination of wider archaeological datasets, such as those on writing equipment.

Province	Area Km ²	All inscribed objects	
		No.	Density (Inscriptions / 1000km ²)
Gallia Narbonensis	94536.97	20299	214.72
Gallia Belgica	83265.30	15717	188.76
Germania Inferior	47004.28	6095	129.67
Germania Superior	96947.01	12463	128.55
Britannia	146709.24	15899	108.37
Gallia Aquitania	166318.13	14713	88.46
Ulterior Baetica	76764.59	6063	78.98
Gallia Lugdunensis	171904.09	12247	71.24
Ulterior Lusitania	119801.42	6882	57.45
Citerior Tarraconensis	394741.41	18426	46.68

Table 1: All inscriptions in the *LatinNow* dataset and ‘density’ per province, from Mullen 2024, Table 1.2.

35 This includes the data collection on anthroponymy undertaken by researchers for the *Hesperia* database and the researchers of the ADOPIA group (adopia.huma-num.fr). For important studies, see, for example, Albertos Firmat 1966, 1983; Moncunill 2010, 2019, 2021; Vallejo 2005.

Table 1 presents the density of *all* inscribed objects per 1000km². It represents a dataset which is severely affected by differential patterns of preservation, and a range of modern biases to the point that it is hazardous to publish it, since it must be viewed with the explanation of its compilation,³⁶ and there is a risk that it may become decontextualized from this crucial information. It should stand out, for example, that Britannia is in the middle of the list. This is a direct result of a long history of widespread excavation of both rural and urban locations, and collection and systematic publication of inscribed small finds, which can be found on *Roman Inscriptions of Britain Online* (romaninscriptionsofbritain.org).³⁷ It undoubtedly skews upwards its position in the provincial table. Meanwhile, since the Iberian Peninsula offers considerably more lapidary inscriptions than some of its provincial counterparts, there has, over the centuries, been less concerted interest in 'épigraphie mineure' than in the northern part of what was the Roman Empire. However, projects on Roman everyday writing for the Iberian Peninsula have begun to address this situation, for example *Escritura cotidiana. Alfabetización, contacto cultural y transformación social en Hispania Citerior entre la conquista romana y el final de la Antigüedad* and *Del Ebro al Rubicón: la cultura escrita de la Hispania Citerior en el contexto del Mediterráneo noroccidental (III a.n.e. - III d.n.e.)*. With experts in Palaeohispanic materials integrated into their teams, there is optimism that these will generate excellent results and meaningful impact, allowing a reassessment of the densities of non-lapidary inscribed materials and in a decade's time a revised Table 1 which more accurately reflects ancient practices.³⁸

One of the crucial benefits that the increased interest in everyday writing can have is in our access to reflections of local varieties of Latin, for example what we might call Iberian Latin, and our understanding of the fates of local languages. Clues to the ongoing oral use of Palaeohispanic local languages may appear in subtle features in Latin such as changes in expected syntax, misspellings based on the transfer of phonological patterns from L1 to L2, and the transfer of morphological endings, to more obvious features such as full-blown code-switches.³⁹ These might well assist the conversations about

36 Mullen 2024a.

37 Mullen 2024c.

38 An in-progress doctoral thesis by Adela Duclos will present a corpus of the graffiti of Hispania Citerior.

39 See, for example, Estarán Tolosa 2019. For details of a schema, now adopted by the *FAIR epigraphy* project, to encode features of bilingualism and language contact in epigraphy,

the persistence of some Palaeohispanic languages in certain domains. As commentators of the ancient world, we are accustomed to reading the gaps in our sources and data, and the partial uptake of literacy for local varieties of course creates silences that did not *necessarily* exist orally. We can sometimes be too unquestioning of the standard, neat narratives of Latin's rise and the Palaeohispanic languages' fall in the Augustan period.⁴⁰

Writing equipment is a crucial complementary set of evidence for tracking literacy and engagement in epigraphic practices, and, depending on the province and time period, Latinization. However, Map 4, from Willi (2024), indicates that we are in no position to undertake detailed cross-provincial comparative studies yet, due to skewing of the available data. The map shows high levels of finds in Britain thanks to province-wide datasets of writing equipment, that is of styluses, spatulas, writing tablets, ink wells etc. which can be collected from, amongst other datasets, the national *Portable Antiquities Scheme* (PAS), which largely concerns rural metal-detected finds, and the *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain* project which worked on all excavated rural sites and collected writing equipment as one of its evidence types.⁴¹ The Netherlands too has relatively created a Dutch equivalent to the PAS, the PAN (*Portable Antiquities Netherlands*), which means their data are also disproportionately rich.⁴² Conversely for Gaul and the Iberian Peninsula, and for most other provinces of the Roman world, there are no nationally supported datasets of this type, and in Map 4 one can even detect the influence of individual colleagues such as Javier Alonso, Ignacio Simón Cornago, and Oriol Olesti Vila through high levels of finds in Mérida and Catalonia.⁴³ In locations with fine-grained data, important conversations can already be had about literacy in different settlement types, in different languages, and over time,⁴⁴ but further interdisciplinary and international collaboration will be essential to ensure that this is possible across the wider region.

see Mullen and Willi 2024, Appendix 1, and ontology.inscriptiones.org/bilingualism.

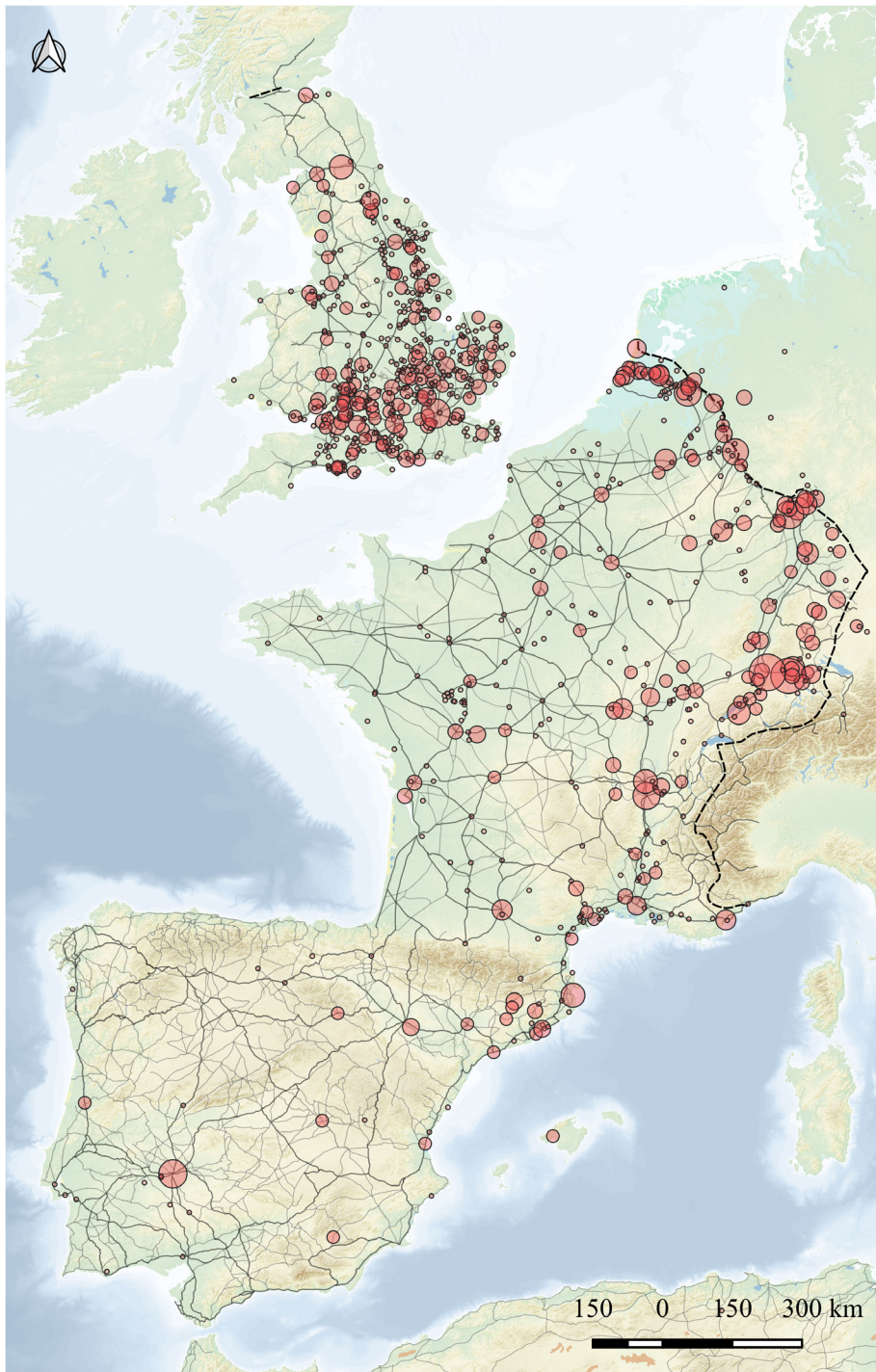
40 See the comments in Estarán Tolosa 2017; Estarán Tolosa and Herrera 2024; Moncunill 2024. I have made the argument for the possible vitality of Gaulish in certain domains, see Mullen 2024.

41 See Mullen 2024c, 371–384. PAS: finds.org.uk; RSRB: archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/romangl.

42 For discussion, see De Bruin 2024. PAN: portable-antiquities.nl.

43 Alonso 2013; Alonso et al. 2014, 2019; Olesti Vila 2019, 2021; Simón Cornago 2021.

44 Anna Willi has successfully taken a 'socio-literacy' approach to the material for Mainz, see Willi 2024. For 'socio-literacy' see Mullen 2021.



Map 4: Distribution of finds of writing equipment in the *LatinNow* webGIS, from Willi 2024, fig. 8.5.

5. Optimism: History from below

In our efforts to recover local voices, we create a ‘history from below’, a social history that has a broader and more diverse basis. This kind of provincial social history has a self-evident value, but it also allows us to take the historical narratives into the provinces and to ensure that the western provinces are not marginalized. Often it has seemed in ‘mainstream’ Roman history that the provinces are a colourless backdrop to the main activity of the centre, a featureless stage on which the political and military wranglings can be played out and the culture performed. By making the objects speak and grounding them in their own historical and cultural context, as the Palaeohispanists so commonly do, we offer some agency to the communities of the provinces.

As the Palaeohispanic congresses enter their next fifty years we can be optimistic. The numerous silences and gaps that need to be read or filled are receiving increasing focus with the projects on everyday writing and writing equipment. New research, driven by long-standing questions about the longevity of indigenous languages, varieties of Iberian Latin, and the roles of various languages as lingua francas for the Mediterranean, the Peninsula or the western provinces more broadly, will no doubt find inspiration from these new resources.

The networks and scholarly exchanges, which distinguished Palaeohispanic studies from the beginning, continue to thrive and to inform comparative research into script adaptations, epichoric epigraphies, the dynamics of language contact, colonial entanglements, and provincial cultures. A field that is inherently regional in focus already enjoys vibrant connections spanning ancient world studies. The development of interoperable digital resources following FAIR principles should in the future allow yet more integration across multiple disciplines.

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