

A CASE FOR TARTESSIAN AS A CELTIC LANGUAGE

John T. Koch

For Celtic studies in Britain and Ireland, and the wider ‘English-speaking world’, ancient Portugal and Spain do not often figure as part of the field’s primary subject matter. There is a long-established idea that the Celts and the Celtic languages originated in central Europe and that they spread from there with the Hallstatt and La Tène archaeological cultures during the Iron Age (VIIIth-1st centuries BC), movements that have usually been envisioned as progressing overland until they reached the English Channel (Collis 2003, 93-132). Therefore, the Celts of the Iberian Peninsula would belong to a separate line of development from those of Britain and Ireland. Whether one believes in a Celtic family tree with an Insular Celtic or a Gallo-Brittonic, Hispano-Celtic would thus not be a particularly close relative of Brittonic and Goidelic (Koch 1992a; De Bernardo 2006).

However, more recently, archaeologists have taken an interest in the Atlantic Late Bronze Age of the XIIIth to VIIIth centuries BC (e.g. Ruiz-Gálvez 1998). At this earlier horizon, Britain, Ireland, and Armorica were in direct and intense contact by sea with the western Iberian Peninsula, as can be seen in shared types of feasting equipment and weapons, reflected, for example, in the contents of the mid Xth-century Huelva deposition (Ruiz-Gálvez 1995; Needham & Bowman 2005; Burgess & O’Connor 2008) and the iconography of the ‘warrior stelae’ (Celestino 2001; Harrison 2004). Against this background, Barry Cunliffe, 2001, 261-310, has proposed the origins of the Celtic languages should be sought in the maritime networks of the Atlantic Zone, which reached their peak of intensity in the Late Bronze Age and then fell off sharply at the Bronze-Iron Transition (IXth-VIIIth centuries BC).

After reviewing some of the earliest linguistic evidence from the Iberian Peninsula—viewing this from my accustomed perspective based in the early Insular Celtic languages and, to a lesser extent, Gaulish—I have concluded that there is also case to be made from the philological side in favour of an origin of the Celtic languages in the Atlantic west (2009). It should be explained at the outset that an Atlantic hypothesis of Celtic origins does not require a rejection or minimizing of the Indo-European character of

Celtic (cf. Meid 2008), nor a relocation of the Indo-European homeland to the west. However, once we recognize evidence for Celtic in the western Peninsula as early as the Orientalizing Period of the Early Iron Age (VIIIth–VIth centuries BC), then we confront the likelihood that the Atlantic Late Bronze Age had already been a largely or wholly Celtic-speaking phenomenon and that the subsequent penetration of the region by Urnfield, Hallstatt, and La Tène influences would not be relevant or only relevant as a matter of inter-Celtic dialectology.

In December 2008, the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies launched a research project called ‘Ancient Britain and the Atlantic Zone’ (Prydain Hynafol a Pharthau Môr Iwerydd), or ABRaZo for short. The goal is to bring together linguistic, archaeological, isotope, and genetic evidence to see whether it might now be possible to synthesize a new account of the Celts, a narrative which would embrace the Atlantic Zone as its core rather than as its periphery. We have a growing list of collaborators and correspondents. In the primary research team, I am joined by Professor Sir Barry Cunliffe (Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford), Dr Dagmar S. Wodtke, Dr Catriona Gibson, and Professor Raimund Karl (Bangor University).

The impetus to begin such a project now followed my focus on the south-western inscriptions in 2007–8. The remainder of this article provides a selective overview of these preliminary findings. After reviewing this corpus, my conclusion is that several of the previously proposed Celtic explanations for Tartessian forms—primarily in the work of Correa 1989; 1992 and Untermann 1995; 1997—are plausible. Considering comparanda from Goidelic, Brittonic, Gaulish, and Lepontic, as well as Hispano-Celtic, many further Celtic etymologies for Tartessian can now be set out as worth consideration. The overall density of more-or-less probably Celtic forms within the corpus thus increases significantly. This observation is particularly the case for the longer and best-preserved epigraphic texts. Therefore, it now appears that the more promising working hypothesis is that Tartessian is simply an Indo-European language, specifically a Celtic one. Alternative hypotheses have less in their favour: that the south-western inscriptions are entirely in a non-Indo-European language (e.g. Rodríguez 2002) or that they contain a relatively small proportion of Celtic elements (primarily proper names) embedded in some non-Celtic, probably non-Indo-European, matrix language (Villar 2004).

Even if the south-western inscriptions did not exist, or if we had no idea how to decode their script, there would be reason to think that Celtic was spoken in Tartessos. According to Herodotus (1.163), a very rich king ruled Tartessos between about 625 and 545 BC. He was named Ἀργαθῶμιος. This name, or title, is clearly Celtic based on the word for silver and money *arganto-*: cf. Celtiberian **arkanta**, Old Irish *airget*, Middle Welsh *aryant* ‘silver’, Latin *argentum*, Sanskrit *rajatām* ‘silver’ < Indo-European **h₂erǵntom* ‘silver’. Note also the north-western divine epithet in LVGGONI

ARGANTICAENI (Villaviciosa, Oviedo [Búa 2000, 274]) and the family name of [T]OVTONI ARGANTIOQ[VM] AMBATI F[ILIVS] (Palencia [Vallejo 2005, 186-7]). A grave stone for FLACCVS | ARGANTONI [FILIVS] | MAGILANICVM | MIROBRIG|ENSIS in Vettonian territory (Alconétar, Cáceres) shows the continuing use of the personal name *Argantonios*, in or near former Tartessian territory, during the Roman Period (Vallejo 2005, 186-7). For the first suffix, compare the Celtic divine names *Maponos* and *Epona*. *Argantonios* ‘agent of divine silver’ is closely comparable to the title ARGANTODANNOS found on Gaulish silver coinage. There could hardly be a more appropriate title for the ruler of the silver-based polity of Tartessos during the Orientalizing Period of the First Iron Age.¹

Several Greek and Roman references locate the Κυνητες in the Algarve (e.g. Herodotus 4.49, Justin/Trogus 44.4 *Cu[n]etes*). This name closely resembles the Ancient British place-name *Cunētio*, which corresponds to Medieval Welsh *Kynwydion* (< **Cunētionēs*), the name of the war band of Dark Age Strathclyde (Charles-Edwards 1978, 66-8). The root of these names is apparently Celtic **kū*, **kuno-*, which literally means ‘dog’, but also metaphorically ‘warrior, hero’. So I suggest that *Kunētes* in the south-west means, like *Kynwydion* in north Britain, ‘band of warriors’.

There is Almagro-Gorbea’s 2002 proposal concerning a graffito in Greek script on a Greek bowl found at Huelva, which he dates to 590-560 BC and reads NIEΘΩΙ ‘to [the war god] Nētos’, comparable to the Hispano-Celtic deity *Nētos* (e.g. western NETONI DEO ... [CIL II 5278, Trujillo, Cáceres]) and the Old Irish mythological name *Níoth*. Although this derivation is not without complexities, as Javier de Hoz has emphasized to me, NIEΘΩΙ could represent a phonetic form [n’ētōi] or [n’ētūi], the dative of the Celtic theonym proposed.

Gargoris is the name of the legendary savage first king of the *Cunētes* and Tartessians in the myth of the culture hero Habis preserved in Justin’s epitome of Trogus Pompeius (44.4). This form can be interpreted as corresponding precisely to Old Irish *garg* ‘fierce, savage’ and *ri* ‘king’, Gaulish and British *rix*.

Turning now to the south-western inscriptions, José Antonio Correa and Jürgen Untermann, in their pioneering publications, have already recognized that these contain some elements that appear Celtic, mostly proper names. A list follows in which a few identifications of my own are added.²

¹ In this light and view of relative priority, it is unlikely that Herodotus had been influenced unduly, if at all, by the similar name Ἀργανθωειών attested in Hellenistic sources for a mountain in north-west Asia Minor near Byzantium (cf. Moret 2006).

² The texts are numbered following the system of Untermann 1997 (*MLH* 4).

aarkuui 𐌰𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌰 [J.7.6] ‘for Argos’, **arko**[o-] 𐌰𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌺 (J.7.7), cf. Celtiberian **arkailikos**, ARGAILO, Hispano-Celtic ARCO. MANCI F. commemorated at Oliveira do Hospital, Coimbra, Portugal (Búa 2000, 481), ARCVIVS at Barcelos, Braga, Portugal (Búa 2000, 359), the place-name *Arcobriga*, Gaulish *Com-argus*, Old Irish *arg* ‘warrior, hero’, Greek ἀρχός ‘guide, leader’.

aibuuris [𐌰𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌺] [J.3.1], cf. CRISSVS TALABVRI F. AEBOSO-CELENSIS (*AE* 1952, 42-43, Cáceres); Celtic *-rīχs* (< Indo-European **h₃rēg-s* ‘king, leader’).

albooroi 𐌰𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌺 [J.24.1], cf. Hispano-Celtic³ ALBVRVS, ALBVRA (Albertos 1985, 263; Luján 2007, 248).

alkuu 𐌰𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺 [J.12.1], cf. Hispano-Celtic *Alce*, Lepontic *Alko-uinos*, Gaulish *Alco-uindos*, *Alcus*, *Alcius*, place-names *Alcena*, *Alciacum*, Ἰαλκιομοιεύς (Delamarre 2003, 38).

alisné 𐌰𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌰 [J.11.5.], cf. Gaulish *Alesia*, ALISIIA, ALISANV ‘to the god of Alesia’ (Indo-European **h_aéliso-* ‘alder’); Celtiberian **alizos** (K.0.1), family name **alizokum** (K.0.1) are now less certain for this root (Wodtko 2000, 21).

anbaatia 𐌰𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌺 [J.16.2], cf. Gaulish *ambactus* (e.g. Caesar, *De bello Gallico* 6.15), *ambaxtus* ‘servant of high rank, envoy, representative’ (Hoz 2007), Welsh *amaeth* ‘farmer’, as a personal name Celtiberian, North-west Hispano-Celtic, Lusitanian AMBATVS, also North-west Hispano-Celtic AMBATIO (Albertos 1985, 264), based on the past passive particle of a Celtic compound verb **ambi-ag-tó-s* ‘one sent around’, Indo-European *h₂entbhi-* ‘around’ + **h_aeǵ-* ‘drive, send’.

ariariše 𐌰𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌺 [J.10.1] ‘for Ariorīχs’, cf. North-west Hispano-Celtic ARIOVNIS MINCOSEGAEIGIS (A Porqueira, Ourense [Búa 2000, 303-4]); Gaulish *Ario-manus* attested five times in Roman inscriptions from Austria (Raybould & Sims-Williams 2007, 37), *Ario-uistus*, *Ario-gaisus*, simplex *Ariios* (St-Germaine-Source-Seine).

t̥caiona [𐌰𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌺] [J.4.3] < Celtic **/deiwonā/* ‘goddess’ or **t̥caionkaa** [𐌰𐌹𐌺𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌺] < **/deiwonka-/*, cf. Celtiberian **teiuoreikis**, family name **teiuantikum** (K.1.3), Gaulish *Deuonia* (Delamarre 2003, 142-3), *Diiona* (Jufer & Luginbühl 2001, 37).

³ Owing to the unresolved questions relating to the indigenous pre-Roman languages of the Iberian Peninsula, the term ‘Hispano-Celtic’ as used here may be understood as the more open-ended ‘Hispanic Indo-European’ where the comparanda do not also include forms from Celtiberian and/or another Celtic language to confirm the specifically Celtic affinities of the Tartessian.

k̄inbaai ↑ī ʷ↑ ʷΔʷʷ [J.3.1] ?= /*kimbaiti(s)*/ ?‘a man of the Cemps/Cimbii’, *Ora Maritima* (lines 179, 192-8, 251-5, 297-8), cf. Old Irish *cimbid* ‘captive’ (< Celtic **kimbiatis* ‘giver of tribute’ ~ Old Irish *cimb* ‘tribute’).

leoine ʷʷʷ#ʷ [J.10.1] < Celtic */*l̄iwonāi*/ ‘to L̄iuonā [the goddess of beauty]’, cf. Gaulish *Liona*, *Liuni* (in Noricum), *Lioni*.

l̄irnestaakun ʷʷʷΔX#ʷʷʷʷ [J.19.1] ?‘of the people near(er) the ocean’, Hispano-Celtic family name (genitive plural with adjectival *k*-suffix), preceding **baane** ‘to the woman/wife’; cf. Old Irish *ler*, Middle Welsh *llyr* ‘sea’; Gaulish (Banassac) *neddamon* ‘of the nearest ones’, Old Irish *nessam* ‘nearest’.

meleśae ʷʷʷʷʷ [J.15.1], cf. Gaulish *Meliddus*, Old Irish *milis*, Welsh *melys* ‘sweet’.

saruneea ʷʷʷʷʷ# [J.22.1, 2] ?‘Star-goddess’ genitive singular, cf. Gaulish *Serona*, *Serana* (Jufer & Luginbühl 2001: 62); the accusative may now be attested as **saruʷan** #Δʷʷʷʷʷ (Mesas do Castelinho).

tarnekuun ʷʷʷʷʷʷʷ [J.26.1] Hispano-Celtic family name with **baane** ‘to the woman/wife’, cf. the Celtiberian family name **turanikum**, possibly related to Gaulish *Taranos* (the thunder god), Old Irish *torann* ‘thunder’, Welsh *aran*.

tirtōos #Δʷʷʷ [J.1.2], cf. Celtiberian **tirtouios**, **tirtunos**, **tirtano**, **tirtalicum**, **tirtu**, family name **tirtanikum**, **tirtotulu** ‘triple’ (Prósper 2007, 24-6), North-west Hispano-Celtic personal names TRITIA, TRITIVS, TRITEVS, Gaulish *Trito[s]*, *Tritus*, *Triti*, Old Welsh *triti(d)* ‘third’, Latin *tertius*.

uarbōiir ʷʷʷʷʷʷʷ [J.22.1] < **u(p)er̄m̄mo-wiros* ‘highest man/hero/ husband’, cf. Celtiberian VIROS VERAMOS.

omuṛika*[#mʷʷʷΔ*[[J.16.2] < **u(p)omorikā* ‘the under-sea world’, cf. Gaulish *Aremorica* ‘the land by the sea’, Welsh *arfor-dir* ‘coast’.

uśnee ʷʷʷʷʷ [J.23.1] /*uxsm̄mai*/ ‘in Uxama, the highest/most important place’.

juultina Δʷʷʷʷʷ [J.12.3], cf. Celtiberian **ultinos**, **ultia**, **ultu**, **ultatunos** (Wodtko 2000, 456-8), Lepontic *Uvltiauiopos* (Prestino).

We may now add the *o*-stem dative compound name that begins the text from Mesas do Castelinho: **t̄ilekʷulkʷu** ʷʷʷʷʷʷʷʷ, cf. TILLEGVS AMBATI F SVSARRVS ʷ AIOB[R]IGIAECO on a tessera from Folgoso del Caurel, Lugo, Galicia, AD 28 (Búa 2004, 387), with *Tillegus* probably reflecting an earlier **Tillekos*. For **-ulkʷu**, cf. Ogam Irish ULCAGNI =

Romano-British VLCAGNI < Indo-European *w^hlk^wo- ‘wolf, predator’ (McCone 1985).

The preceding names confirm that speakers of a Hispanic variety of Indo-European, in many instances showing itself to be specifically Celtic, were an influential group in the extreme south-west of Europe, in and around Tartessos, by the VIIIth century BC. If we now examine longer extracts and some complete inscriptional texts, it is possible to argue that Celtic was the principal language of the south-western inscriptions, i.e., that they are probably not written in some other language with only a relatively small proportion of Celtic proper names. The readings here are usually as published by Correa and Untermann, or very similar, apart from the suggested word divisions. The continuous translations are of course highly provisional.

[J.1.1] ‘Fonte Velha 6’ **lok^oob^o niirab^o t^o a^raiai kaalte^e lok^o|n
ane narkee kaakiⁱsiin|koolob^o|o ii te’-e-ro-baar|e(b^e)e tea|siioonii**

‘invoking the Lugoues of the Neri people, for a nobleman of the Celtæ/Galatai: he rests still within; invoking every hero, the grave of Ta^siioonos has received him.’

lok^oob^o niirab^o t^o a^raiai $\forall \Delta \forall \Delta \exists \Delta \neq \square \neq \square \forall \forall \forall \neq \square \neq \times \neq \neq 1$: the similarity to Celtiberian TO-LVGVEI ARAIANOM [K.3.3] points to a common Hispano-Celtic religious vocabulary linking Celtiberia and the south-west as implied by Pliny (*NH* 3.13): *Celticos a celtiberis. . . aduenisse manifestum est sacris, lingua, oppidorum uocabulis* . . . Cf. North-west Hispano-Celtic theonyms LVCVBO ARQVIENOBO (Sober, Lugo), LV-COVBV[S] ARQVIENI[S] (Outeiro do Rei, Lugo; Búa 2000, 266-267), and DIBVS M[.] LVCVBO from Peña Amaya, north of Burgos (Marco 2005, 301), LVCOBO AROVSA[-] (Lugo). Compare also Gaulish and Celtiberian *Lugus*, Old Irish *Lug*, Welsh *Lleu* (Marco 2005).

niirab^o ne^o a^raiai $\neq \square \neq \square \forall \forall \forall \forall$ ‘belonging to the Neri’, dative plural, cf. Welsh *ner* ‘lord’, Indo-European **h₂ner-* ‘man’. Note also **nira-kaalte^e** ? ‘for the Nerian Celt’ (Mesas do Castelinho).

lok^oon $\forall \neq \times \neq 1$, also **lok^oon** [J.57.1], ‘grave, funerary monument’, cf. Cisalpine *lok^on* ‘grave’ (Todi): Indo-European $\sqrt{*legh-}$ ‘lie down’. Alternatively, **lok^oon** could mean ‘oath’, cf. Old Irish *lugae* (Jordán 2006), or ‘Lugus’ as an accusative singular corresponding to **lok^oob^o**.

isiinkoolob^o ne^o a^raiai $\neq \square \neq \neq \neq \neq \forall \forall \forall \forall \forall \forall$ dative plural < **E_{xs}-kingo-lo-bo(s)*, cf. Gaulish $\text{E}\sigma\kappa\epsilon\gamma\gamma\omicron\lambda\alpha\tau\iota$ (genitive, Les Pennes-Mirabeau).

te’-e-ro-baare $\text{O}\forall\Delta\neq\neq\text{O}\exists$, also **te’-ee-ro-baare** [J.18.2] ‘[this grave] has received him/it’: preverb *tu* + pronoun *e(n)* + perfect *ro* + verb **ber-* ‘receive, carry’. All elements are well attested in Old Irish compound verbs, though *bāre* as the third-person singular perfect of **ber-* is unique to

[J.18.1] ‘Mealha Nova 1’: **booti**☉**ana keertoo** . . . **‡ΔϞΟ|ΑϞΑ☉ϞϞ‡**
 ‘Bōdiana, [daughter] of the artisan . . .’, cf. Western Hispano-Celtic names BOVTIVS, BODIVS, BOVDICA, BODECIVS (Albertos 1985, 271); the Gaulish personal name *Cerdo*, Old Irish *cerd* ‘artisan, bronze smith’, Early Welsh *kerδawr* ‘artisan, musician, poet’: Indo-European **kérdos* ‘craft’.

[J.53.1] Alcalá del Rio: **kotuaratee tun↑itesbaan orbaa setaa lakeentii ra**⊘**a kaa**setaana | **koor**beo . . . ‘The inherited resting place that is most ?auspicious has safely conveyed [her]. They lie down. Ra⊘a, the priestess/tin-magistrate || ?[daughter] of Korbos . . .’

kotuaratee **‡ΔϞΑΡΑϞΟ** ‘has run under, has delivered/rescued’ < Celtic **ko(m) tu u(p)o rāte*, cf. the Tartessian verbal noun **oretoo** [J.4.2] above, Old Irish *fu-rráith*, Old Welsh *guoraut*, *gwarawt* ‘rescued’ < ‘has run under’ **u(p)o rāte*.

tun↑itesbaan **ΔΥ↑ΥϞ‡‡ΑΥ**, cf. Hispano-Celtic TONCETAMVS ‘most auspicious man’ (occurring in Lusitanian territory with numerous variants), British TVNCETACE ‘Fortunatae’, Ogam Irish TOGITTAC, Old Irish *toccad* ‘fortune, chance’, Middle Welsh *tynghet* ‘destiny’, Breton *toñket* ‘luck’.

orbaa **‡P‡A**, cf. Old Irish *orba(e)*, *orb(b)* ‘heir, inheritance’, Gaulish personal names *Orbius*, *Orbia*, &c. (Delamarre 2003, 243), Gaulish and British ORBIOTALVS (Raybould & Sims-Williams 2007, 69) < Indo-European **h_{2/3}orbhos* ‘orphan’ (Hoz 2007, 197).

setaa **‡OXA**, cf. Old Irish *síd* ‘pagan tumulus, fairy mound; peace’ (based on a long grade of the root, see Ó Cathasaigh 1976/8), Welsh *sedd* ‘seat’, *hedd* ‘peace’, (*gor*)-*sedd* ‘pagan tumulus’, British AΘΘEDO- ‘war-chariot’: Indo-European **sedes-*, **sed-* ‘seat’ (Wodtko et al. 2008, 590-600).

kaasetaana **ΛΑΜΟΧΑΡΑ**, cf. Gaulish *cassidannos* ‘tin/bronze minister’ (La Graufesenque; see De Bernardo 1998), ARGANTODANNOS ‘silver minister, moneyer’, *platiodanni* ‘overseers of metal’ or ‘overseers of streets’ (Hoz 2007, 193, 196).

koorbeo **‡DϞ‡‡**, cf. Old Irish *Corb*, *Corb-macc* > *Cormac*.

[J.12.1] ‘Abóbada 1’: **iru** **alkuu sieś** **na**rkeentii **mubaa te’-|e-ro-baare** **⊘ataaneatee** ‘for the man/hero (**wirūi*) Alkos or Walkos: these lie unmoving. . . [The grave] has received him, for the winged one.’

⊘ataaneatee **ΑΧΑΥΟΑϞΟ**, cf. Old Breton *attanoc* ‘winged creature’, Old Welsh *hataned* ‘wings’, Early Welsh (*Y Gododdin*): *aer edenawc*; *aer seirchyawc* ‘winged [= armed with spears] in battle, harnessed in battle’: Indo-European **ptn-*: **pet(e)r-* ‘wing, feather’. The central square of the inscribed stone shows a warrior girded in armour with both arms extended brandishing weapons, which appear to include short spears.

[J.7.2] ‘Vale dos Vermelhos 1’ **b0ot0o3ar ... kaárner-ion ire**
O9Y4#Y9OYKAAA*| 9A3#A#□

‘Bod(w)o3ar ... the man whose stone funerary monument is built’. Cf. Gaulish KARNITU ‘has built a stone funerary monument’. For **-ion** relative, cf. Celtiberian *iom*, Gaulish *-io* suffixed to the verb as in DVGIHONTIIO, similarly Old Irish *cantae* ‘(they) who sing’ < **kanonti-io*.

[J.1.4] ‘Fonte Velha 2’: **]sekuii uurke e oteerkaa ...** ‘... has made a grave for [??S]egos ...’

uurke O|944, cf. Old Welsh *guoreu* ‘(has) made’, Middle Breton *gueure* < Celtic **wewrāge*, Greek perfect third singular ἔοργε, Avestan *vauuarāza* ‘has made’ < Indo-European **weworǵe*.

oteerkaa A^90B#, cf. Gaulish *uodercos*, *uoderce* ‘grave’ (Larzac) (Delamarre 2003, 326, citing Fleuriot): Indo-European **derk-* ‘glance at, see’. Old Irish *derc*, also *deirc*, commonly means ‘cavity’ as well as ‘eye’.

A few general observations may be attempted in conclusion:

1. Most of the Celtic forms identifiable in the south-western inscriptions are well attested and belong to the core vocabulary of more than one Celtic language.

2. There are numerous Hispano-Celtic parallels, including comparanda from Celtiberian and the Lusitanian-Callaecian zone.

3. Particularly among the longer inscriptions, the complete ones, and those with few uncertain readings, the forms identified as specifically Celtic (or more generally an Indo-European that could be Celtic) are frequent and those that do not look Celtic are infrequent. It is sometimes possible to interpret these texts as continuous funerary statements in an Ancient Celtic language, favouring the conclusion that Celtic is the language of the south-western inscriptions, rather than another language with isolated Celtic names.

4. However, that distinction is only of limited significance because, in either case, Celtic was in use in the extreme south-west of Europe by the VIIth century BC.

5. That general conclusion could carry important implications for historians and archaeologists. It reinforces something we have known for some time, namely that the Celtic languages in the Iberian Peninsula—possibly unlike those of Gaul and Britain—cannot be explained as the result of the spread of the La Tène and Hallstatt archaeological cultures of the central European Iron Age. To find Celtic extensively used so far to the south-west at such an early date must also call into question the relevance of Hallstatt’s Late Bronze Age forerunner, the Urnfield cultures, in the Celticization of the Peninsula. The immediate background and context of the

earliest attested Celtic language appears, instead, to be the Atlantic Late Bronze Age, a conclusion broadly resonant with ideas expressed by Almagro (e.g. 1995), as well as the new theories concerning the origins of the Celtic languages of Cunliffe (2001) and Brun (2006).

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John T. Koch
University of Wales
Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies
email: jtk@cymru.ac.uk

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