

# A LETTER TO GOD THE ALMIGHTY PUJOL DE CASTELLÓN

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RESUMEN: Una tira de plomo, fue hallada en Pujol de Gasset (provincia de Castellón). El texto revela una carta dirigida a Dios el Todopoderoso. Un rey, vasallo de los romanos, mandó escribirla pidiéndole que le recuperara su salud y prometiéndole ofrendas. El documento está redactado en escritura ibérica y principalmente, en lengua semítica del noroeste.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Escritura ibérica. Lenguaje semítico del noroeste. Carta dirigida a Dios. Historia y Religión del siglo I a.C.

ABSTRACT: A strip of lead has been found in Pujol de Gasset, Castellón. The text reveals a letter addressed to God the Almighty. A king ordered to write it, asking to restore his health and offering many gifts. The document is written in Iberian script and meanly in a Semitic language from the North-west.

KEY WORDS: Iberian script, Semitic language, Letter addressed to God, History and Religion of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.

The strip of lead has been found in 1851 on the Pujol de Gasset, a place between the town of Castellón de la Plana and the harbour, El Grao. Nothing is known about the circumstances and there are no other objects found in the neighbourhood.

## 1. THE TEXT

The strip measures: 44,5 cm. to 4,5 cm., and is conserved in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, where it is registered by the inv. n.º 16 743. It contents four lines of script and at the right hand one separate letter at the height of the first line. The script is in excellent state of conservation. A dozen publications exist without any convincing reading or translation. I follow the photograph of the Museo Arqueológico Nacional and the design of Gómez-Moreno, M.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I classify the document as B 2.2 (B = lead / Blei, 2 = letter). S. also MLH (= Untermann J., *Monumenta Linguarum Hispani-carum*), F. 6.1. I note in all cases the geographical classification.

The place, where the strip has been found in 1851, brought not forward any other object of Iberian script. Moreover the town of Castellón de la Plana has been founded only in the 13<sup>th</sup> century A. C. Other places in the neighbourhood, s. map MLH, 1990, 356, brought only little objects, which are written meanly in the South-west Semitic language. In this situation, dating the text is only possible by the palaeographic criterions. Based on all inscriptions, published up to now, the text has been written approximately at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B. C. This statement can be reinforced by the language, which is meanly North-west Semitic. The early legends on coins, found in the region of Catalonia, use this type of language, while later the same legends underwent alterations of letters, turning the words difficult to understand. Another strip of lead, B 1.1, C. 17.1, a judgment pronounced by the priest, *k h n*, of a temple, *b t*, found in Sant Just Desvern, Barcelona, shows the same criterions. But our knowledge of the Iberian Peninsula at the time of the inscription is poor, even with some thousands items. There were evidently more temples of various cultic groups, which we do not know any more. A third argument is the fact that the laryngeal phonemes are not always written. These phonemes were lost by influence of native and Latin Language; a process, which started already during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B. C. Finally, the use of the preposition *d / de*, at the end of the fourth line, is a proof of the evolution, about one century after the Roman invasion and occupation.

The text presents four lines bound at the left side. The reading in sinistrorse sense is the most often found in Iberian script. Dextrorse reading, influenced by Roman and Greek script, occurs, but rarely. As the four lines are bound at the left, all previous publications accepted a dextrorse reading, using a system of transcription, which is not proved at all. There is a conclusive explication for the fourth line, which does not fill the whole line, but is also bound at the left. A scribe, a priest of the temple, composed obviously the text on another support, where he could eventually apply corrections. Those supports are lost, as for instance papyrus, or the common Roman tablets of wax. Another scribe, specialised in chiselling on lead, made the clear and final copy. He did not necessary understand the text, but copied letter by letter. A right handed man starts from the left, so that he can see the already performed writing. From the inverted letters of this last line, we can judge, that there was little time to achieve the text. Nearly all inscriptions on lead present the last lines in the same way. The text is only understandable in sinistrorse reading.

The text uses three points to indicate words pronounced together and a sign, which is the reversed letter *s*<sup>2</sup>, to indicate the conclusion of sentences. I write a slash for the points and the § sign, *signum sectionis*, for the second one.

The isolated letter at the right side is the initial of a name, explained at the end of line 2: *m r k<sup>2</sup> m*, “king M.”. The whole text runs as follows<sup>2</sup>:

Writer: *m*

1: *m r l m § m n t p t r / h<sup>2</sup> p h<sup>2</sup> p l l p t / n t<sup>2</sup> § h<sup>2</sup> n m § / s i m h<sup>2</sup> m  
p w<sup>2</sup> r / § i m r h p w<sup>2</sup> y 2: / t p t r n m § z<sup>3</sup> § / t § h<sup>2</sup> / i § ? m w<sup>2</sup> / m h<sup>2</sup> r  
a<sup>4</sup> / t m n d r / t m p s<sup>2</sup> h<sup>2</sup> / h<sup>2</sup> m r k<sup>2</sup> m § ? § r 3: h<sup>2</sup> § k<sup>2</sup> m r p l<sup>2</sup> g t / t  
§ n h<sup>2</sup> § p t m p § i § m w<sup>2</sup> t m n § z<sup>2</sup> t m n z<sup>3</sup> p § p a<sup>4</sup> 4: h<sup>2</sup> § p s<sup>2</sup> h<sup>2</sup> m n  
w<sup>2</sup> § m w<sup>2</sup> / § h<sup>2</sup> m r p t r w<sup>2</sup> l g w<sup>2</sup> / § h<sup>2</sup> m r / d l<sup>2</sup> z p r*

“M. 1: Lord of the gods! He is the one, who made the provisions of offerings for the altar stone, the one who underwent the washing at the purification vessel of the death. Be benevolent for the donation, come out you the best of the glorious, decide the healing. 2: These are the offerings for the altar-stone and for the life, which you wish. They will bring a life offer tomorrow. Votive offerings, offerings for the Pesach, for the life of king M., the one, who 3: considers you, oh! Lord of the miracle. You have a second offering for the goodwill, and other offerings, and they will bring the offerings of our offerings. So be rapidly with the word of 4: favour. He brought the provisions for the Pesach. They brought wine for the altar-stone, gallons of wine, to make the glory more beautiful.”

Philological commentary:

The abbreviation, nws., refers to the dictionary of Hoftijzer, J., Jongeling, K; sws. refers to the dictionary of Kazimirski, de Biberstein, A. I have to use an Arab dictionary, because the early alphabetic inscriptions of the Old Arab languages have not yet been collected in one volume. I use this dictionary following the counsel of A. Sidarus, professor of Arab languages at the University of Évora.

As the text is meanly nws., I do not note the common Semitic words of sws. language.

1: *m r l m*, nws.: *m r l h<sup>2</sup>*, “< *m r* ? (= Sing. constr. of *m r<sup>2</sup>*, “lord, master, title of a god”, ‘*l h<sup>2</sup>*’, (= pl. empf. of ‘*l h<sub>p</sub>*’, “god, goddess”); the Iberian script does not have any sign for the *hamza*, older inscriptions use the letter *a<sup>2</sup>*, younger and meanly sws. inscriptions use the sign for ‘*ayin*, here follows the ending of the pl, *-m*, cfr. Hebrew: – *îm*. – § – *m n*, “he provisioned”, perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> p. sing. from sws.<sup>3</sup> *mâna*, root: *M W N*, “to

<sup>2</sup> I do not refer to the previous readings and transcriptions which are generally wrong. The transliteration system, which I adopt notes letter by letter, as used for Semitic languages. The indication number above notes different signs with the same phonetic value. The evolution of the writing, regional differences and habitudes of various Semitic people caused the forms.

<sup>3</sup> The language used by the documents written in Iberian script is often mixed up by several dialects. The letter, published here is mainly in north-west Semitic language (languages) but some south-west Semitic, sws., words occur. I use in those cases the dictionary of Kazimirsky, A. de Biberstein.

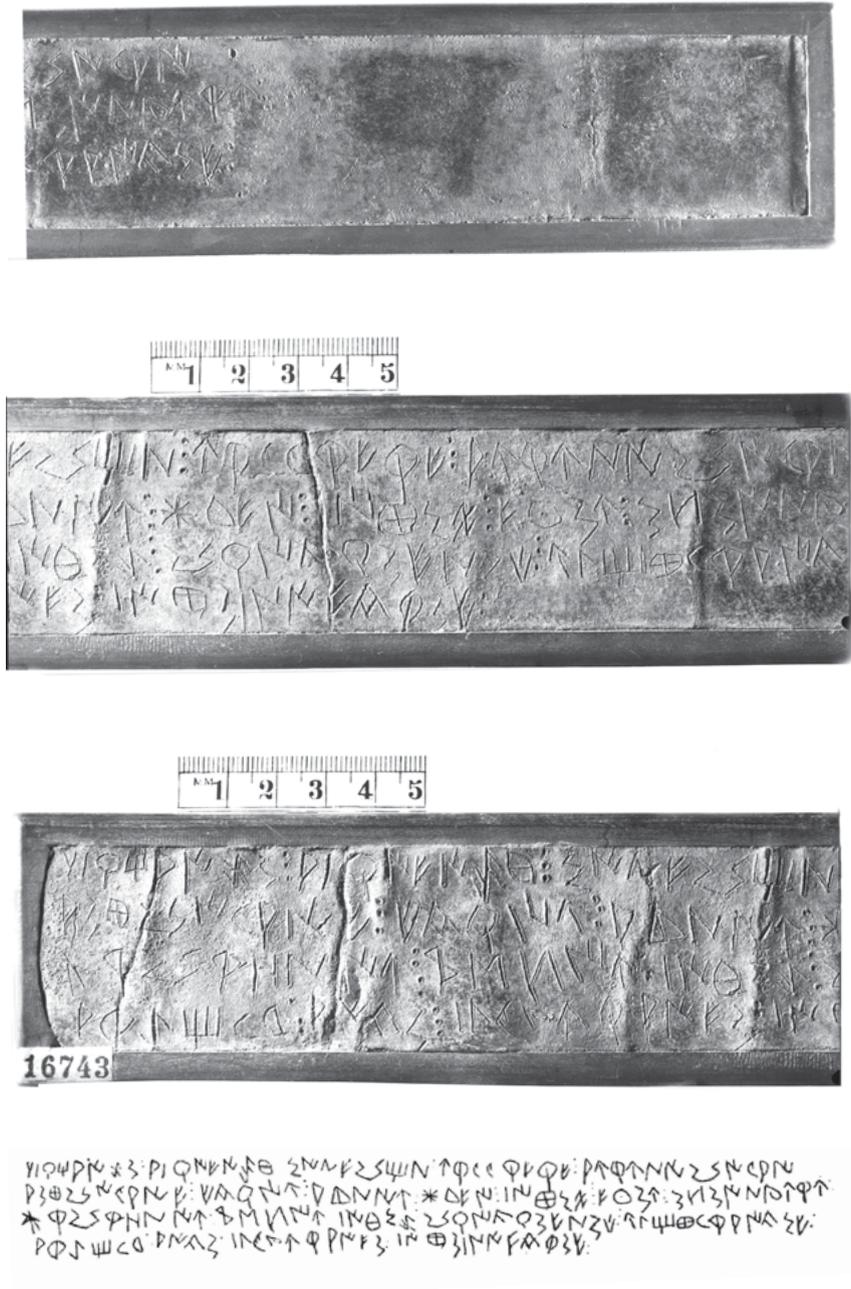


Figure 1: B 2.2., Photo MAN, Drawing of Gomez-Moreno, M.

nourish, to bring alimentation, provisions". The Iberian script does not write neither the vowels, neither the semi-vowels *w*, *y*. – *t*, nws.: *t<sub>p</sub>*, "as abbrev. of *tr(w)mh* (= heave-offering, contribution for the sanctuary)". – *p t r*, nws.: *p t r<sub>p</sub>*, "altar-table". – *l – h<sup>2</sup> p*, nws.: *h p p<sub>p</sub>*, "to wash, to clean", perf. 3<sup>rd</sup> p. sing. followed by the inf. in the acc. form, the so called inner accusative or *figura etimologica*. – *l*, nws.: *l<sub>s</sub>*, "prep., with gen.", the preposition is inseparable from the following word. – *l p t*, nws.: *l p<sub>p</sub>*, "< Greek: *λοπάς*, "dish, plate", This word is indicated as uncertain, but here obviously the purification vessel of a temple. The text adds the final *–t*, as ending of female words. – *l – n t<sup>2</sup>*, sws.: *nayt*, "death". – *š – h<sup>2</sup> n*, nws.: *h n<sub>p</sub>*, "favour", *h n n*, "to be benevolent", imp. 2<sup>nd</sup> p. sing., the Iberian writing does not note the double letters of the geminated roots. – *m š*, nws.: *m' š*, "donation", the Iberian script considers the *hamza* as a vowel and does not write. – *š i*, nws.: *y š'*, "to go out", imp. 2<sup>nd</sup> p. sing., exceptionally the vowel is written, indicating how to pronounce. – *m h<sup>2</sup>*, sws.: *muhh*, "heart, the interior", ass.: *muhhu*, "the first", Iberian texts: "the best". – *m p w<sup>2</sup> r*, nws.: *p' r*, "to glorify, II part. pass.: glorified". – *š i m*, nws.: *š y m<sub>p</sub>*, "to place, to set up", imp. 2<sup>nd</sup> p. sing., the writing of the vowel avoids the confusion with the word *š m<sub>p</sub>*, "name". – *r h p w<sup>2</sup> y*, nws.: *r p'*, "to heal", *r p h*, *r p w y*, "healing", the text notes the orthography of Hebrew language, the letter *h* represents often the vowel *u*, we have to note, that the letter *h*, joined with diacritical strokes, represents the vowels in Ugaritic writing. – 2: *t p t r*, s. above. – *n m š*, nws.: *n m š*, s. *n p š*, "life". – *z<sup>3</sup> š*, nws.: *z y*, or: *š<sub>10</sub>* relative pronoun, the Iberian script uses the combination of both elements, sometimes in ligature. – *l – t š'*, sws.: *š ā*, "to wish, to will", imperf. 2<sup>nd</sup> p. sing. – *h<sup>2</sup>*, nws.: *h y<sub>p</sub>*, "life", we can not know, if he means an animal to slaughter or a human being. – *l – i š' m w<sup>2</sup>*, nws.: s. above *– y m<sub>p</sub>*, imperf. 3<sup>rd</sup> p. pl., the 3<sup>rd</sup> p. pl. is used for the impersonal, "they", in all Semitic languages as also in English, the evolution of the prefix, *ya- > i-*, is known from the Assyrian language. – *l – m h<sup>2</sup> r a<sup>t</sup>*, nws.: *m h r<sub>y</sub>*, "tomorrow", the Iberian text uses an adverbial ending *–a*, sws.: *–an*, the nasalization is not noted, cfr.: ass.: *mahāru*, "to be in front of". – *l – t m*, nws.: s. *t<sub>4</sub>* and ending of pl. above. – *n d r*, sws.: *nadirat*, "votive offerings". – *l – t m*, nws.: s. above. – *p s<sup>2</sup> h<sup>2</sup>*, nws.: *p s h<sub>p</sub>*, "Pesach, Easter". – *l – h<sup>2</sup>*, s. above. – *m r k<sup>2</sup>*, s. *m l k<sub>y</sub>*, "king", the changing *r / l*, e.g.: *Sur / Sul*, occurs in Semitic languages as in Spanish and Portuguese. – *m*, "M.", the abbreviation of names by the initial was current, e.g.: B 1.4, F. 13.2, a judgment to death, signed by seven judges. – *š – š r*, nws.: *' š r<sub>y</sub>*, relative pronoun. – 3: *h<sup>2</sup> š k<sup>2</sup>*, nws.: *h š š*, "to consider", followed by the personal suffix of the 2<sup>nd</sup> p. sing., this last letter is inverted. – *m r*, nws.: *m r'*, "lord". – *p l' w*, nws.: *p l' w*, "to be miraculous, wonder". – *t<sup>2</sup> g t*, sws.: *tāqa*, "to be able to do something", perf. 2<sup>nd</sup> p. sing. the sonorous sound instead the soundless or emphatic, here: *g / q*, occurs often in Iberian texts. – *l – t'*, s. above *t<sub>p</sub>*, the letter is inverted. – *š n*, nws.: *š n y<sub>p</sub>*, "second". – *h<sup>2</sup> š*, nws.: *h š<sub>p</sub>*, "goodwill, favour". – *p*, "and", conjunction at the beginning of a sentence. – *š – i š' m w<sup>2</sup>*, nws.: s. above. – *t m n*, nws.: s. above, here with suffix 1<sup>st</sup> p. pl. – *š z<sup>2</sup>*, nws.: s. above *š z<sup>3</sup>*. – *l – t m n*, nws.: s. above. – *z<sup>3</sup> p*, sws.: *zaffa*, "to go more

quickly”, the evolution from the emphatic labial *p* to the Arabic fricative *f* occurred later. – § – *p a<sup>t</sup>*, nws.: *p y<sub>p</sub>*, “mouth”, sws.: *fih, fawhat*, “mouth, word”. – 4: *h<sup>2</sup> š*, nws., s. above. – *p s<sup>2</sup> h<sup>2</sup>*, nws.: s. above. – *m n*, sws.: s. above. – *w<sup>2</sup>*, nws.: *w<sub>2</sub>*, “and”. – *š m w<sup>2</sup>*, nws.: s. above *š y m<sub>p</sub>*, perf. 3. p. pl. – *l – š*, nws.: s. above *š<sub>10</sub> – h<sup>2</sup> m r*, nws.: *h m r<sub>5</sub>*, “wine”. – *p t r*, nws.: s. above. – *l g w<sup>2</sup>*, nws.: *l g*, “liquid measure, + *l – <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> l*”, here most probably “gallon”, with ending of pl. – *w / – ū* as in Assyrian language, loan-words by metathesis are common, e.g.: *lim / mil*, “thousand”, *li? m / mel*, “honey”. – *š*, nws.: s. above. – *h<sup>2</sup> m r*, nws.: s. above, the first letter is inverted. – *l – d*, see the post-latin, Spanish, Portuguese, etc.: *de*, prep. with gen. – *l*, nws.: s. above, here before inf., “in order to”. – *t<sup>2</sup> z*, sws.: *tāsa*, “to enlarge, to make more beautiful”. – *p r*, nws., s. above *p ? r*; here substantive “glory”.

## 2. THE LITERARY GENRE AND THE RELIGION

The letter addressed to god the almighty should be classified as a god’s letter. There are many examples of this literary genre and the oldest, I know, is a letter attributed to Gudea of Lagash, a priest and governor of the new Sumerian period about 2100 B. C.

A god’s letter is nearly always attributed to a person of a high social and political rang. We never can prove that this person really ordered to write the letter. The letter of Pujol de Castellón is different. The priest acts, writing the letter, ordered and pressed by offerings. It is the rite of an oracle. Even if we do not know so much about the temple rites in Iberian cult, we are aware of the *do ut des*, “I give and you, god, shall give”, common in the religions of the antiquity.

The religious group of the letter reveals the Jewish religion, as the Pesach feast proves. But it seems that this group was far from the reforms of Esra and Nehemia in Jerusalem at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B. C. Certainly, we know about ritual washings and offerings of animals, life offerings, in the temple of Jerusalem even in the time of the Christ. But the oracle and the fact, that this group accepts polytheism are difficult to understand. They name God, as the Master of all gods, so that God is considered only as the first between equals. The temple and the religion as medical centre of healing and the “gallons of wine”, look more as a Babylonian temple, described in the book of Daniel.

If we control the provenience of the words, following to the dictionary, we observe, that many of them are attested at Hatra, or in official Aramaic. Others are also attested in Assyrian, and some grammatical elements are of Assyrian language. It seems therefore more than possible to me, that those people came from the North of Syria or even from the Euphrates. We know that some Jewish people did not return after the Babylonian deportation and the liberation act of Kyros the Great. The

group of Jewish people, indicated by the letter and reigned by their king, came to the Iberian Peninsula generations before one of them became king under Roman superiority.

Documents attesting the present of Jewish people on the Iberian Peninsula at this time are scarce and they have not been collected yet. I note two grave stones, found in Portugal, Rel. Lus. (RELIGIÕES) 549, 290, MNA, Lisboa, E. 7265, 1<sup>st</sup> century A.C, and Rel. Lus. 561, 308, MNA, Lisboa, E. 6541, 2<sup>nd</sup> century A. C. The second is shaped like the *luchôt*, the tablets of the Ten Commandments, the first one shows the tablets, and both contain some names of the buried persons of Hebrew origin.

The religions on the Iberian Peninsula varied largely. The documents of Iberian script, invoke God by the titles also given to the governors: *m r a*, “Lord, Master”, *a<sup>2</sup> a n*, “Lord”.<sup>4</sup> Some early inscriptions name Allah, e.g.: S. 1.2, J. 7.2: *a l<sup>2</sup> a*. The rock inscription of Lamas de Moledo, F. 7.10, L. 2.1, which evidences early Christian missionaries about 100 A. C., reads at the end: *IOVE A l A EL OBRIGOI*, “they said the Eucharistic thanksgiving to Jupiter, Allah and El”. S. 5.2, G. 14.1, reads: *a m y n m l<sup>2</sup> g t r*, “Amun, king of Tyre”, cfr. above for the sonorous letter *g/k*. A 1.2, H 13.1, a drinking cup of silver has the inscription: *t g t w<sup>2</sup> t m n r*, “who saw ever the crown of Thot”. The Egyptian god of wisdom, Thot, does not have any crown. The cult of Venus, Ashtarte, was common, e.g.: S 5.5, C 8.1, S 5.6, C. 9.1. Some coins of the merchants from Carthago and later, represent the image of Melkart,

There were also native deities and the gods of the Romans and Greeks, cfr. for some examples Rel. Lus. The society was multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious.

### 3. THE HISTORICAL ASPECT

A king ordered to write the letter. The palaeographic research situated the text in the Roman republican period. From the beginning of the Roman occupation on, and proved by many coins, a Roman consul was responsible, governing the land. We have to accept that the Romans chose vassal kings, and there are more examples. I refer also to examples of the Near East, Herodes of Judea, Zenobia of Palmyra.

I note some legends of coins from the Roman republican period: GB<sup>5</sup>, 2, 171-175: *m l<sup>2</sup> g<sup>c</sup> h a<sup>2</sup> n*, “the king is the lord’s brother”. GB, 2, 190-195, the legends on the silver coins, with the value of a denarius, add at the

<sup>4</sup> Sauren, H, Sidarus, A., 2003, 89-101, for the oldest inscriptions.

<sup>5</sup> GB, s. García-Bellido. This work uses the traditional but erroneous transcription; older publications of Untermann, J. 1975, and Villaronga, L., 1994, 2002, are cited.

end: *M r g m d w<sup>2</sup> n*, “king of the cities”. The first letter is the Latin majuscule. I point attention to the change *r/l*, as in the letter, and to the sonorous writing.

More interesting seems an inscription on a vase dated into the 1<sup>st</sup> century B. C. and found in Edeta, Valencia.<sup>6</sup> The first line reads: [*m l k*] *w<sup>2</sup> p w<sup>2</sup> y ś r ś a r w<sup>2</sup>*, “[king,] in Assyrian: *šarru*”. The second line continues: *w<sup>2</sup> ˘ z t n w<sup>2</sup> m l<sup>2</sup>- h<sup>2</sup> a<sup>4</sup> p w<sup>2</sup> [y ś r ś a r a]*, “and the mighty one, *dannu*, and the queen, in Assyrian: [*šarratu*]”. Composing the whole picture by the various fragments, there are five persons: the mighty, ˘ z, sws.: ˘ azîz, the king and the queen, followed by a fat man, the *n w<sup>2</sup>*, “emir”, and at the end an ˘ n, “lord”. The dignitaries of the king’s entourage can be identified by the stone inscription of Civit.<sup>7</sup>

An example of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A. C. from Sabugal, Guarda, Portugal is a grave stone, Rel. Lus. 551, 293, MNA, E. 6175, which reads: (*H*) *A M S<sup>2</sup> / A T V S / M-A L G / E I N I F*(ilius). / *H. S. E.*, “(Kh)amsatus, the king, son of a lord, has been buried here”. The reading of the letter *S<sup>2</sup>*, a sign, which looks like the Latin majuscule *B*, is sure by inscriptions of the same word, using different types of letters for *s*. The laryngeals are already gone. The name is sws. and means: “the fifth”, cfr. the common Latin name: Quintus. Beside of *mal g*, “king”, partly with vowels, the title of the father in the gen. case, is a late orthography of *a<sup>2</sup> ˘ a n*, “lord”, cfr. the writing of some toponyms of the Near East, e.g.: Ein Gedi, Ein Shams.

The documents show, that Romans installed vassal kings to subdue the inhabitants. But as far as I know from the documents of Iberian script, they choose always Semitic people and never autochthones, Greeks or Celtic immigrants. At least, even in towns with Celt Iberian names, we find the governor or mayor, cited in the documents of tenth taxes, by titles in Semitic language. One of the reasons may be that the Romans entered on the east side of the Iberian Peninsula, conquering later the west. On this side lived more people of Semitic origin, but also Greeks. Another reason is the conquest of the Near East and moving people during the Roman occupation. At this state of the discovering of the script and the language, the historical questions are numerous and ask for many scholars to resolve them.

<sup>6</sup> Bonet Rosado, H., 1995, 188, fig. 94, 190, 84 a-D. 46; T. 5.21; MLH, F. 13.16.

<sup>7</sup> The inscription has been published by Velaza, J., who believes, that the stone was a grave stone, unfortunately his conviction is wrong. The inscription characterizes the dignitaries: the mighty, the emir and the lord. Many other inscriptions of this genre exist most of them concerning the emir, who is always described as a good man, an *eu-nu*, perhaps an eunuch. The correct translation is in press.

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