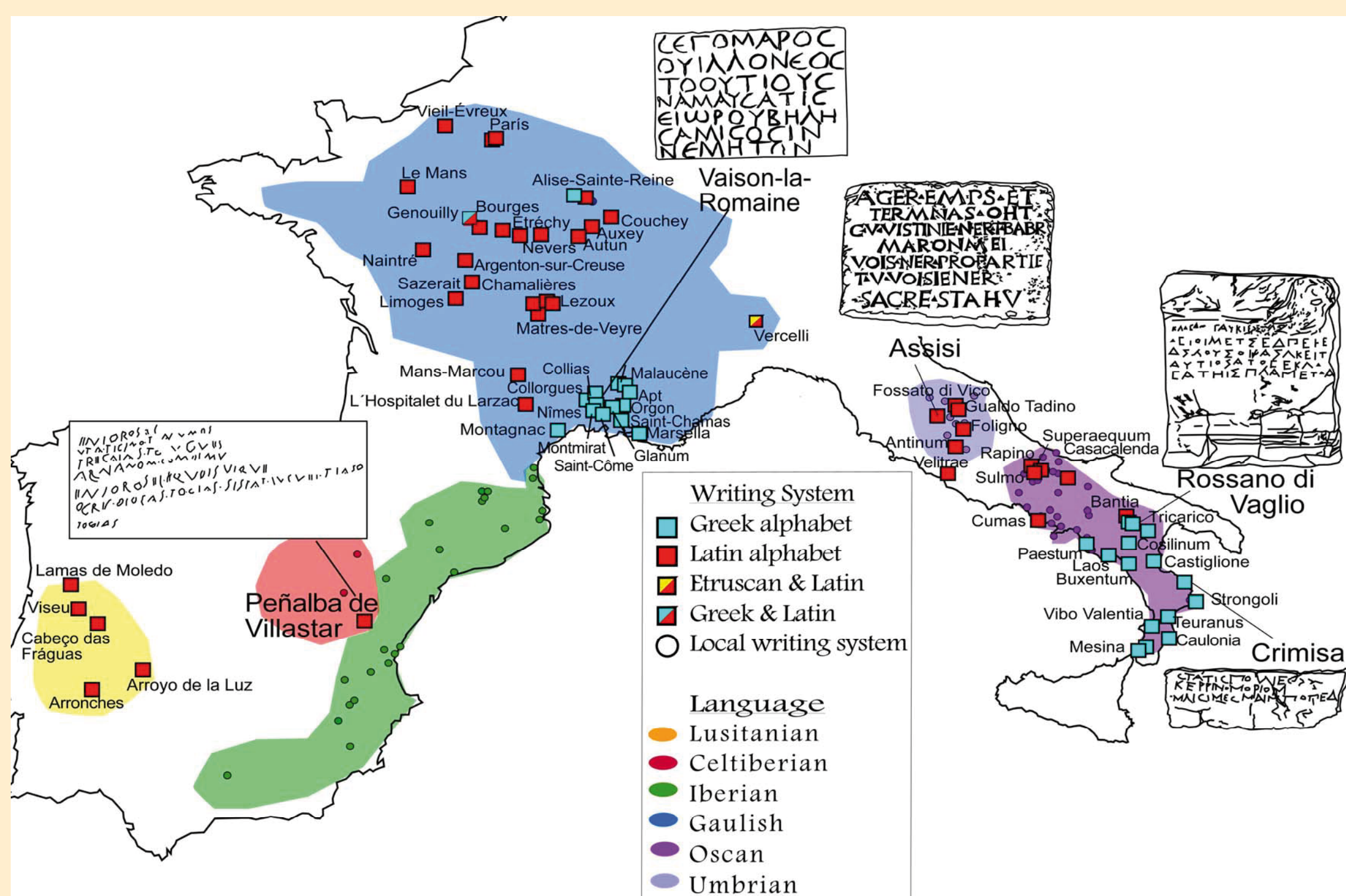


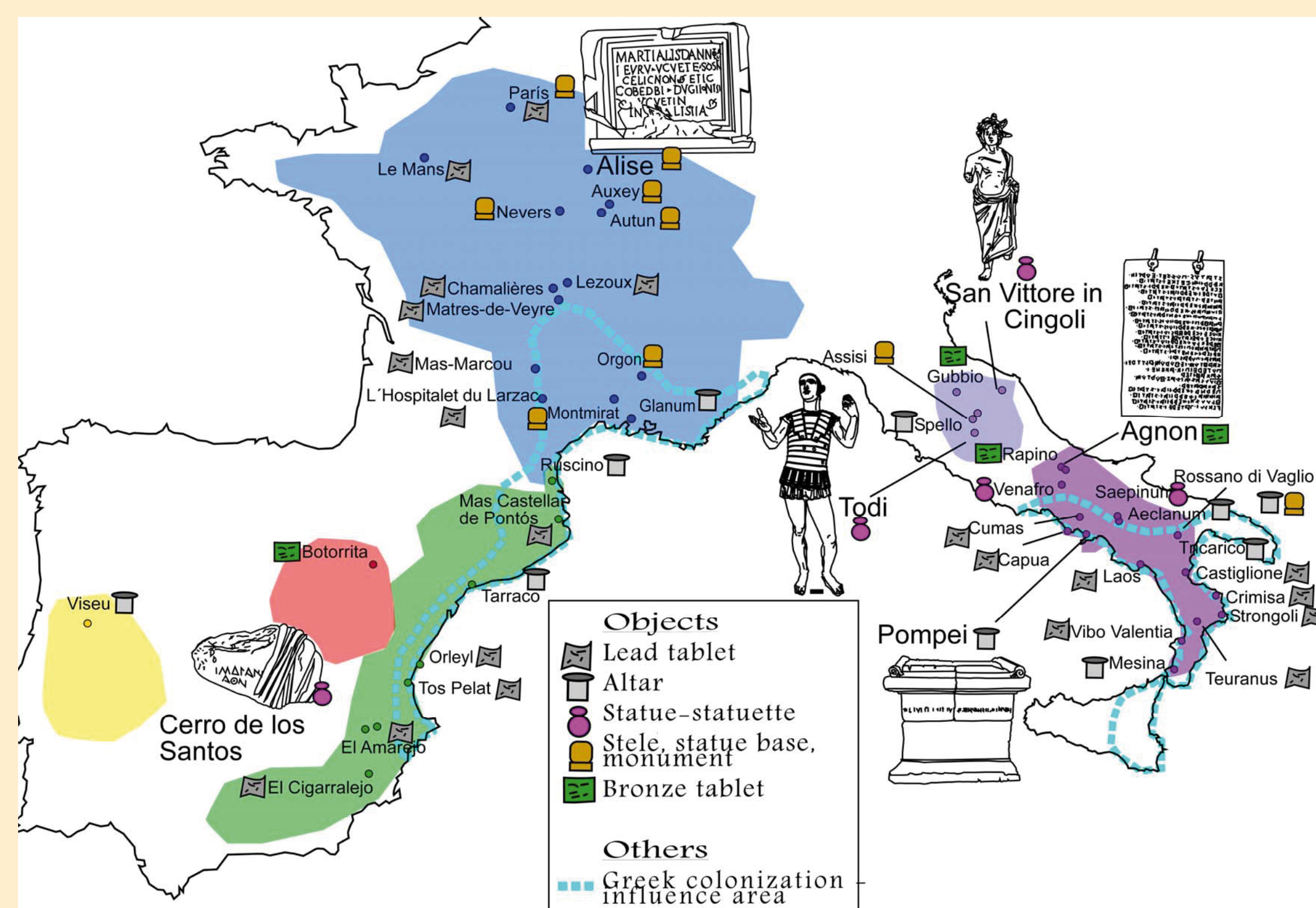
# Influence of Greek and Roman epigraphy on religious inscriptions in epichoric languages.

*Gabriela de Tord Basterra*



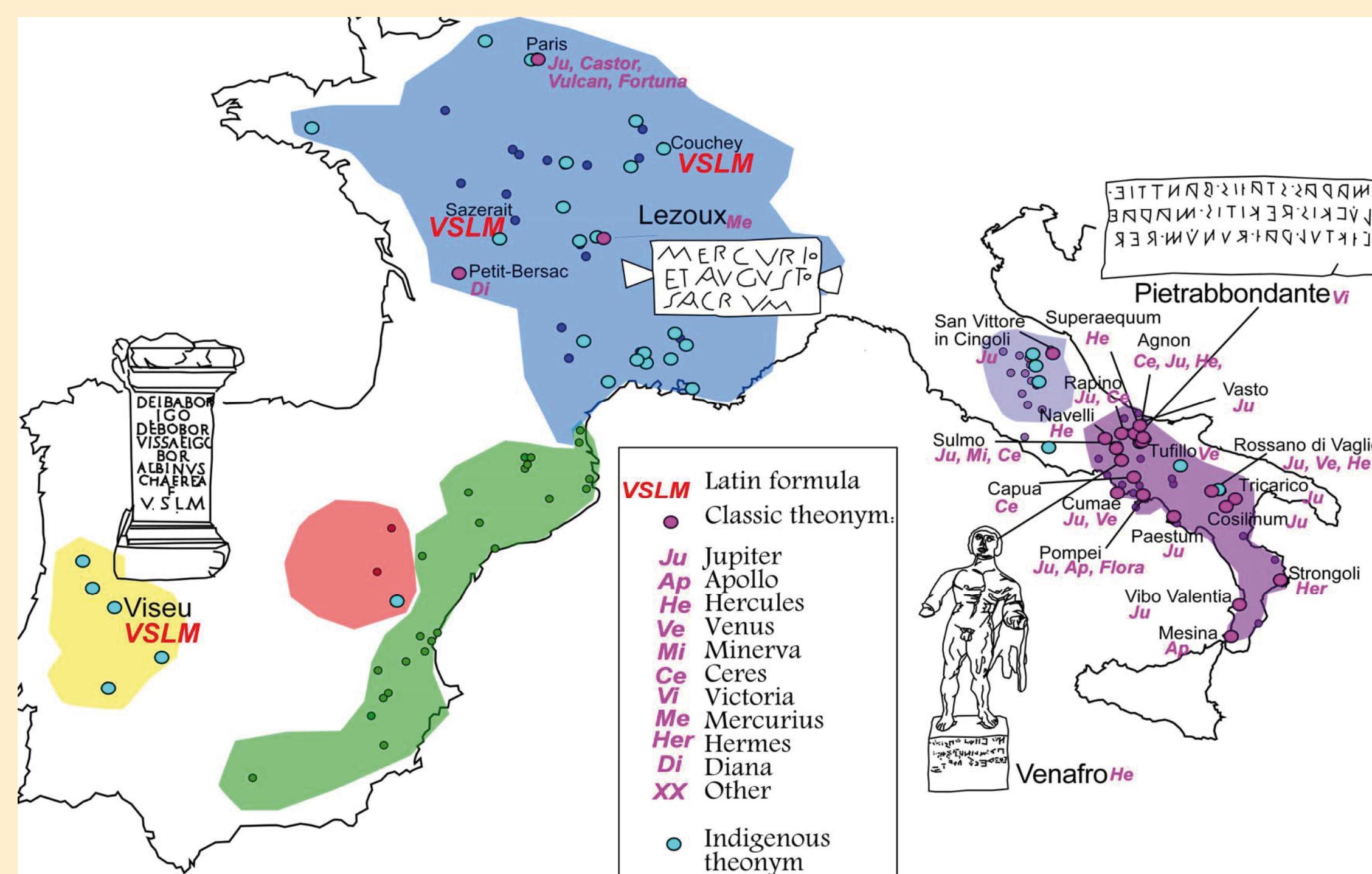
Map 1. Religious inscriptions in local languages written in Greek or Latin alphabets.

E.g.: "Gran Inscriptiön" from Peñalba de Villastar, plaque of Vaison, stele of Assisi, altar from Rossano di Vaglio and lead tablet from Crimisa. Credit: G. De Tord.



Map 2. Religious inscriptions in *media* influenced by Greek and Roman cultures.

E.g.: Cerro de los Santos *togati*, stele from *Alesia*, statuette from Todi and San Vittore in Cingoli, bronze tablet from Agnon and altar from Pompei. Credit: G. de Tord



Map 3. Latine votive formula and Classical theonyms in contrast with indigenous divinity names.

E.g: Formula *uslm* in Viseu, Lezoux dedication to *Mercurio et Augusto sacrum*, Venafro statuette to *Hercules* and Pietrabbondante inscription to *Victoria*. Credit: G. de Tord

This poster analyzes the influence of Greek and Roman epigraphic cultures on the development of Lusitanian, Celtiberian, Iberian, Gaulish, Oscan and Umbrian religious epigraphy by looking at some evidences of this contact: the use of the Greek and Latin alphabets, the adoption of certain objects as writing supports, the use of Latin votive formulas or the mention of Classical theonyms. The religious inscriptions have been selected according to these identification criteria: supports, finding spots or texts.

## Writing systems (map 1)

Gauls and Lusitanians did not create their own writing system and adopted Greek or Latin alphabets, while Celtiberians, Oscans and Umbrians used both Classical alphabets and their own writing systems. In contrast, Iberians never make use of Greek or Latin alphabets to write religious or votive inscriptions in their language.

Greek alphabet was used in the areas near the Greek colonies: the Oscan community was commercial and culturally connected with the Greek cities from Magna Grecia, while Southern Gauls were influenced by *Massalia*. The contacts between Iberians and Greeks were also frequent, specially near *Emporiae* but they never used the Greek alphabet for religious inscriptions.

The election of Latin alphabet in order to write an inscription stimulates some questions. Who made this election? Is the use of the Latin alphabet a sign of *Romanization* and adaptation? Or, on the contrary, is the use of their own language a sign of identity or resistance to the Roman culture?

All Lusitanian inscriptions are undoubtedly religious and were written in Latin alphabet, some of them even mixed both languages (code-switching). One might wonder if they are using their own language here because religion is a very conservative sphere, but altars dedicated to indigenous gods were written in Latin at the same time, some of them even with theonyms in Lusitanian. This can lead us to hypothesize that the use of their language to "speak" to their gods could have been a personal choice for some of them, specially the longer inscriptions possibly referring to collective ceremonies or sacrifices, while others were using Latin. The phenomenon is not the same in Gaul, because they adopted Greek and Latin alphabets to write all kind of inscriptions, not only religious, but the decision of using one language or the other might have been individual and personal too.

Why did Celtiberians, Umbrians and Oscans use Classic alphabets if they had their own writing systems? Is it a sign of adaptation? The chronology of these inscriptions demonstrates that the Greek colonisation and the Roman conquest increased significantly the number of inscriptions in Classical alphabets. For example, the Celtiberian "Gran Inscriptiön" from Peñalba de Villastar was written in the early Principate in Latin alphabet, while the earlier inscriptions used Celtiberian writing system.

In contrast, Iberians never used Latin alphabet to write religious inscriptions. One might wonder if this was caused by a rejection of writing religious texts in other language, or if they just adopted Latin for all kind of texts, including religious ones. Could the lack of Iberian theonyms in Latin inscriptions be interpreted as a sign that they adopted not only the new writing system, but also the Classical divinities? Did they abandon their language and gods at the same time? Many questions can be asked about Iberian religion, but the answers will have to wait until the decoding of their language.

## Supports (map 2)

The influence of Greek and Roman epigraphy can also be noticed in other aspects from their epigraphic culture, as the supports they used. The only *defixiones* written in indigenous languages have been found in Oscan, in Gaulish and maybe in Iberian, the three cultures who maintained deeper contacts with the Greeks. However, it is important to remark that all Gaulish lead tablets were written in Latin alphabet, during the imperial era and were not found in the area of direct Greek influence; therefore it is not possible to assume without doubts this connection, except in the case of Oscans, who clearly borrowed *defixiones* from the Greeks.

Latin epigraphy is absolutely connected with urbanism and monumentalization, and some objects suggest a clear Roman-Italic influence: altars, statue bases, bronze tablets and monumental inscriptions are a sign of the impact of *Romanization*, at least in Gaul and the Iberian Peninsula. For example, the *togati* statuette from Cerro de los Santos or the Gaulish inscription of *Alesia* with *haedera* and moulding were undoubtedly inspired by the Roman epigraphy. However, it is difficult to demonstrate if Oscans and Umbrians were inspired by or copied Roman models, or if there was an "Italic style" which should be considered "local" given the fact that Roman material culture was very influenced by Etruscan and other Italic peoples. We can ask ourselves if the altar from Pompeii might be considered a "Roman", an "Oscan" or an "Italic" object, or if the Mars from Todi was influenced by the Roman *panoplia*.

## Votive formulas and Classical theonyms (map.3)

The Latin formula *uotum soluit libens merito* can be found in one Lusitanian and two Gaulish inscriptions. Some languages had their own votive formulas and did not adopt this, while Gauls used this formula and their own. These inscriptions, bilingual or mixed, highlight the contacts between Romans and locals.

Classic theonyms appear in inscriptions from different parts of the Mediterranean area, but most of them were written in Latin or Greek. In the Iberian Peninsula and Gaul, dedications to Jupiter, Apollo or Venus were made, but never using their local languages, excluding the Latin-Gaulish bilingual inscriptions in the map. Instead, in these areas we found mostly Lusitanian and Celtic theonyms. On the other hand, the major presence of Classic theonyms in Oscan epigraphy could have been produced by the early contacts between them, the presence of Italic divinities in the Roman pantheon or the resemblance between their gods. Furthermore, they had their own divinities, as Mefitis.

## Conclusions

In sum, the influence of Greeks and Romans changed not only the epigraphic habit from these indigenous communities, but also their religious habits. While Latin was making progress in the Western Mediterranean area, not only the local languages started to disappear, but also their gods, who received many inscriptions in Latin at first, but had soon to compete with the Classical divinities and the Imperial cult. However, the survival of local cults lasted long after the Romanization, as is noticed in the dedications to indigenous theonyms in Latin in imperial era inscriptions.

## Kontakt | contact details:

Gabriela de Tord Basterra. Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain). Predoctoral research (FPI) granted by Spanish Ministry of Economy.

[gdetord@unizar.es](mailto:gdetord@unizar.es)

ACADEMIA Gabriela de Tord Basterra