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Language contact and the spread of epigraphic cultures in the Western Mediterranean, 3rd to 1st c. BCE

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In 1995, F. Beltrán Lloris edited the proceedings of a pathbreaking conference that had taken place in Zaragoza three years previously on the theme of Rome and the birth of epigraphic culture in the Roman West.[1] The title of the volume heralded an interesting change compared to that of the 1992 conference; the multifaceted "epigraphic cultures" of the conference had become more monolithic in the publication, with its allusion to the birth of an allegedly single "epigraphic culture." More than two decades later, as the fruit of an ongoing international research project funded by the Spanish government, a European Research Council COST initiative on Ancient European Languages and Writings, and, more generally, the HESPERIA project on Palaeohispanic languages, the emphasis has once again returned to exploring the multiplicity of epigraphic cultures that grew up in the western Mediterranean from the 3rd to 1st c. BCE.[2]

This renewed emphasis on plurality comes as no surprise. Many Spanish scholars whose work appears in the volume have been key players in the development of Palaeohispanic studies as a discipline. Their research on the many local languages and

[1] Beltrán Lloris 1995.

[2] For another more recent collected volume emerging from the research project, Moncunill Martí and Ramírez Sánchez 2021. For the HESPERIA project, see http://hesperia.ucm.es/, developed by colleagues from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Universidad del País Vasco, Universitat de Barcelona, and Universidad de Zaragoza.

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epigraphies of the Iberian peninsula – Iberian, Celtiberian, Lusitanian, Vasconic, as well as the more enigmatic language inscribed in "south-western script" – has been stimulated not only by a series of ongoing conferences involving mainly Spanish, Portuguese, German, Italian, and French colleagues, but also by the development of a specialist journal *Palaeohispanica* and a splendid web-based resource, *HESPERIA*, a digital database of Palaeohispanic languages that is the main fruit of the eponymous research project.[3] The German linguist Jürgen Untermann (1928–2013) and Spanish philologist Javier de Hoz (1940–2019) were major figures in establishing and inspiring Palaeohispanic studies as a discipline, and the volume under review provides a fitting tribute to all that they achieved as scholars during their important careers.[4] Most importantly, in the last decade it has become clear that it is more fruitful to discuss these Palaeohispanic languages in the broader context of other "fragmentary" ancient languages of the western Mediterranean: notably Italic languages such as Etruscan, Umbrian, or Oscan, or others from Cisalpine Gaul and Gaul itself such as Lepontic, Camunic, Raetic, Venetic, or Gaulish.[5] For Italic (i.e., Sabellic) epigraphy excluding Etruscan, Messapic (on the grounds that it was more akin to Illyrian), and Faliscan (because of its close connection to Latin), scholars have for the last decade benefited from the monumental three-volume corpus *Imagines Italicae (ImIt*), prepared by Michael H. Crawford and a team of collaborators and published in 2011, with its ca. 1,000 entries. Regrettably, if understandably, it omits the Iguvine Tablets, the jewel-in-the-crown of Osco-Umbrian epigraphy, while Helmut Rix's corpus *Sabellische Texte*, first published in 2002, still needs to be consulted for certain linguistic issues of individual texts not tackled in *ImIt*.[6] For Palaeohispanic inscriptions, we have the authoritative corpus *Monumenta Linguarum Hispanicarum*, edited until his death by J. Untermann (six volumes so far published).[7]

The volume under review originated in a conference held in 2016 at the Escuela Española de Historia y Arqueología in Rome, where the first results of the international project were presented and debated. It comprises 15 main chapters, plus an introduction written by the co-editors, which sketches the aims of the project and highlights some of the main issues raised at the conference in Rome and in the resultant volume. Only two papers from the conference do not appear in the volume: one on public epigraphy in

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3 http://hesperia.ucm.es/en/proyecto_hesperia.php (last consulted, 28 August 2022). See further, Estarán Tolosa et al. 2018. For an important recent overview of Palaeohispanic languages and epigraphies, see Sinner and Velaza 2019 (now available in a Spanish translation: Sinner and Velaza 2022).

4 Untermann 1975; Untermann 1980; Untermann 1990; Untermann 1997; Untermann and Simón Cornago 2018; Hoz and Michelena 1974; Hoz 1976; Hoz 1986; Hoz 2010–11.

5 The "Ancient European Languages and Writing" project has published, in partnership with the "Latin Now" project directed by Alex Mullen (University of Nottingham), a number of very well-illustrated introductions to Celtiberian, Raetic, Iberian, Lusitanian, Etruscan, Gaulish, Faliscan, Cisalpine Celtic, and Aquitanian-Vasconic, under the editorship of F. Beltrán Lloris and B. Díaz Ariño: http://aelaw.unizar.es/publications (partial list to 2018, last consulted 3 March 2022). For brief introductions to a range of "languages of fragmentary attestation," see Klein et al. 2018.

6 Crawford et al. 2011. For Etruscan texts, see now Rix 2014; for Messapic texts, De Simone and Marchesini 2002; for Faliscan, Bakkum 2009; Rigobianco 2019. For the Iguvine tablets, Prosdocimi 1984. Corpus of Sabellic texts: Rix 2002, significantly updating Vedder 1953.

7 See the volumes edited by J. Untermann cited in n. 4; Wodtko 2000; Moncunill Martí and Velaza 2019.

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Magna Graecia and the interaction between Greek and Latin epigraphic cultures in that key region, by the renowned Italian epigrapher Maria Letizia Lazzarini, and another that presented the database ENCEOM, bringing together public epigraphy from western Europe in the 2nd and 1st c. BCE in all languages, which will eventually be made available via the HESPERIA website.[8] Even without those important contributions, it is a rich, well-illustrated volume that raises many important questions and provides a stimulating discussion of how best to explain the appearance and development of epigraphic cultures in the western Mediterranean as important means of communication in a pivotal period of social, political, and cultural change.

It is divided into five interconnected sections: (i) Chapters 2–4 (by D. Nonnis, B. Díaz Ariño, and D. Gorostidi Pi) explore Latin epigraphic cultures in archaic and Republican Rome and Latium; (ii) Chapters 5–7 (by P. Poccetti, E. Benelli, and S. Marchesini) focus on a variety of epichoric epigraphies in Italy: Sabellic, late Etruscan, and the *mélange* of local languages that were in use and in contact across Cisalpine Gaul (especially Lepontic, Camunic, Raetic, and Venetic); (iii) Chapters 8 and 9 (by F. Briquel Chatonnet and J. Prag respectively) treat Phoenician and Punic epigraphy and the epigraphic cultures of Sicily, which lay at the cultural crossroads of the Mediterranean; (iv) Chapters 10–14 focus on the epigraphic cultures of Gaul and the Iberian Peninsula in the late Republic: Chapter 10 by P.-Y. Lambert examines Gaulish public inscriptions; Chapter 11 by F. Beltrán Lloris reflects on the birth of public epigraphy in Hispania; in Chapter 12, J. Velaza explores the development of Iberian epigraphy on stone; in Chapter 13, C. Ruiz Darasse discusses the emergence of public epigraphy in the neighboring zones of Catalonia and Languedoc; Chapter 14 by C. Jordán Cólera provides a very useful corpus of Celtiberian inscriptions on bronze plaques, with detailed textual commentary, although unfortunately there is only passing mention of the important new Celtiberian bronze from Novallas (prov. Zaragoza);[9] (v) the final two chapters offer wide-ranging comparative studies of *tituli sacri* in Italy, Gaul, and Hispania (by M. J. Estarán Tolosa)[10] and inscriptions on mosaics in Italy and the western Mediterranean from the 3rd to 1st c. BCE (by I. Simón Cornago).

The chronological parameters included in the volume's title are not strictly adhered to in every chapter. Justifiably, it often proves necessary to start the analysis deeper into the past to bring the key changes of the 3rd to 1st c. BCE into sharper relief: for instance, in Ch. 2 on the birth of Latin public epigraphy, which Nonnis rightly claims occurred in the 6th c. BCE, with the sacred law on the so-called Lapis Niger from the Forum the earliest surviving inscribed text from Rome (*CIL* I^2 1); or in Ch. 8, where F. Briquel Chatonnet argues that Punic public epigraphy needs to be set into the context of Phoenician public epigraphy,

8 The second of these papers was published in 2018 in the journal *Palaeohispanica*: Herrera Rando and De Tord Basterra 2018.

9 On this Celtiberian inscription written in Latin script, see Beltrán Lloris et al. 2013; Beltrán Lloris et al. 2021a; Beltrán Lloris et al. 2021b. It provides important evidence for the use of the Latin loan-word *publicus* three times in the preserved fragment and for a new letter Ś (a marked S) in the Celtiberian alphabet, which has in turn allowed this sign to be recognized in two Celtiberian/Latin texts from Peñalba de Villastar (prov. Teruel) and in several Latin inscriptions from the area once occupied by the Celtiberians: see Simón Cornago and Jordán Cólera 2018, with distribution map (Map 1, p. 204) and references.

10 For some of the problems of the term *tituli sacri*, see Bodel 2009.

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which had begun in the late-9th or early 8th c. BCE; or in Ch. 9, where J. Prag convincingly demonstrates that one needs to trace epigraphic traditions on the island of Sicily from the 7th c. onwards to understand its epigraphic culture during the Hellenistic period.

The three chapters on Latin epigraphic culture that open the volume provide well-illustrated accounts of the emergence of public epigraphy in Rome and Latium. Both Nonnis and Díaz Ariño emphasize that public epigraphy began with the sacred. Nonnis includes discussion of several texts published since A. Degrassi's *Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae* (*ILLRP*) (1957–1963, 2nd ed., 1965). These include the small bronze sheet discovered in excavations at Sibari in 1991 and dedicated to Jupiter, Apollo, Minerva, and Hercules at Copia-Thurii arguably just after the foundation of the Latin colony there in 193 BCE (*AE* 2004, 451); the text of the name of a *prai*[*fectus*] sent from Rome that was incised on the wall of a *hypogeum* at Caere soon after the community's incorporation into the Roman state in 273 BCE (that is, if we accept Torelli's restoration of the text, as Nonnis does, rather than *prai*[*tor*], previously proposed by Cristofani and Gregori);[11] and the inscribed ships' *rostra* recovered from the sea near the site of the battle of the Aegates islands of 241 BCE, which record that they had been manufactured under the supervision of various Roman quaestors (*AE* 2011, 439–440; *AE* 2012, 635–636).[12]

Nonnis and especially Díaz Ariño use literary and numismatic sources to good effect to supplement the epigraphic data they discuss, as does Gorostidi Pi (Ch. 4) in the fascinating picture that she reconstructs of the evolving epigraphic landscape of Tusculum. Here, a series of public statues, with inscribed bases, were set up in the Late Republic to commemorate Tusculum's *summi viri* from the Early and Middle Republic, when the *municipium antiquissimum*, to borrow Cicero's phrase (*Planc*. 19–21), provided Rome with several key members of the plebeian aristocracy. Among them were Ti. Coruncanius, consul in 280 BCE, dictator in 246, and the first plebeian *pontifex maximus*, and various members of the *gens Fulvia* and *gens Mamilia*, with the latter tracing their ancestry to Telegonus, Tusculum's mythical founder. This gallery of *summi viri* included a pedestal of M. Fulvius Nobilior, consul in 189, which recalled his exploits in Aetolia (*CIL* I^2 616 = XIV 2601: *M. Fulvius M. f. Ser. n. cos. Aetolia cepit*, here 64, fig. 12a; cf. Liv. 38.3–10). This was very closely parallel in form to a pedestal set up in Rome, even if the texts were slightly divergent (*CIL* I^2 615 = VI 1307, here 64, fig. 12b, which adds his cognomen, omitted at Tusculum, and more specifically refers to his capturing of spoils at Ambracia). More intriguing still is the presence of an equestrian statue of a certain Brixus Amonius, described as "the first flamen Dialis at Tusculum" (*preimus flamen Dialis Tusculei*) (*AE* 2015, 289; here 65, fig. 14).[13] It would have been fascinating to have a parallel chapter on the rich Republican epigraphy of Praeneste, another important town of Latium with its famous sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia, to stand alongside Gorostidi's study of Tusculum.[14]

The volume raises several key issues in the study of language contact and the emergence of public epigraphy in the western Mediterranean in the last three centuries BCE.

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11 Torelli 2000, 152; cf. Cristofani and Gregori 1987, 4, no. 1. See further, EDR159383.

12 Prag 2014; Prag 2017.

13 For a more recent edition, Gorostidi Pi 2020, 211–12, no. 78 (with photo and prior bibliography).

14 See, however, Coarelli 1992; Gatti and Onorati 1992. On the epigraphy and archaeology of Praeneste, see recently Horster and Granino Cecere 2021.

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Both Poccetti and Marchesini, in Chs. 5 and 7, discuss in some depth multilingualism and language contact in central Italy and Cisalpine Gaul respectively, as well as the problems inherent in trying to reconstruct those phenomena. Similarly, in their chapters on the Iberian Peninsula, Beltrán, Velaza, and Jordán (in Chs. 11, 12, and 14) examine in detail linguistic and epigraphic interactions traceable in texts inscribed in Celtiberian, Iberian, and Latin. Benelli, who has made a series of major contributions to our understanding of Etruscan,[15] argues in Ch. 6, on the "late-Etruscan epigraphic landscape between tradition and innovation," that in the 3rd to 1st c. BCE public epigraphy at Etruscan centers such as Perugia, Chiusi, Volsinii, Tarquinia, and Cerveteri comprised mainly funerary *cippi* identifying the name of the deceased, but these were essentially small monuments that were not particularly striking in visual terms. The only exception occurs at Cerveteri from the mid-1st c. BCE onwards, where inscribed epitaphs took on a much greater visibility. Benelli interprets this as a local response to the creation of inscribed funerary landscapes in the city of Rome in this same period.

The relationships among Cisalpine Gaulish (sometimes termed Gallo-Etruscan, i.e., inscriptions in Gaulish written in Etruscan script), Gallo-Latin, and Gallo-Greek are probed by Lambert in Ch. 10.[16] He argues that Gallo-Greek texts, modeled on monuments inscribed in Greek, opened the way for Gallo-Latin public epigraphy. After a flurry of use of Gallo-Latin in the 1st c. BCE, however, for the legends of locally minted coins modeled on the denarius, it was then mostly employed for graffiti and pottery stamps, most notably, some of the products of the *terra sigillata* workshops at La Graufesenque up to the Neronian period; it was quickly eclipsed by Latin for public inscriptions. It continued to be inscribed in central and northern Gaul in the Imperial period, where it appears, for example, on menhirs reused for funerary or euergetic purposes or for sacral texts such as the Coligny calendar in the 2nd c. CE, which provides evidence for the survival (or reassertion) of indigenous religious traditions in this period.

M. J. Estarán Tolosa, in her detailed comparative analysis of *tituli sacri* in Italy, Gaul, and Hispania as examples of public epigraphy (Ch. 15), covers a lot of ground in exploring the relative influence of Greek and then Roman epigraphic culture on votive monuments inscribed in Oscan, Gaulish, and the various Palaeohispanic languages. She shows that these sacred texts were the first types of inscribed texts to be set up in many parts of the western Mediterranean – a theme also raised in several other chapters (for example, Chs. 2 and 6) – and thus played a crucial role in the development of public epigraphy. Again, she emphasizes regional contrasts, as in Poccetti's chapter on Sabellic epigraphy (Ch. 5): Greek epigraphic practices seem to have influenced votive texts in the S. Oscan linguistic area in terms of their monumental form and linguistic formulae, whereas Roman influence was stronger in central Italy, most notably at the monumental upland Samnite sanctuary at Pietrabbondante. Again, the highly varied local responses to the development of epigraphic culture belie any overarching, macro-analysis. The view articulated by many epigraphers over the years that all epigraphy in the ancient world was essentially local is amply borne out in this chapter, as in many others in the volume.

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15 See among many Benelli 2007; Benelli 2009; Bellelli and Benelli 2018; Benelli 2020.

16 For useful brief introductions to Cisalpine Celtic and to Gaulish, see respectively Stifter 2020; Mullen and Ruiz Darasse 2018. For multilingualism in southern Gaul more generally, Mullen 2013.

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Some intriguing contrasts are highlighted in Ruiz Darasse's comparative study of the use of Iberian in the neighboring regions of Catalonia and Languedoc (Ch. 13). In both zones, most examples of Iberian are to be found as owners' marks on ceramics, as well as in commercial texts inscribed on small lead sheets from such sites as Empúries and Ullastret in Catalonia and Pech-Maho and Ensérune in Languedoc.[17] However, public epigraphy in Iberian only seems to have developed in coastal Catalonia, in the form of a handful of what appear to be texts from public monuments set up in Tarraco, Saguntum, Ullastret, and Empúries, plus about 20 funerary monuments on stone. Whether manufacturers' signatures and stamps should be considered "public epigraphy" (as argued by Ruiz Darasse, 189) remains a moot point and illustrates the inherent difficulties of defining precisely what a "public inscription" was. The same problem arises in Simón Cornago's very useful chapter (Ch. 16) on inscriptions on mosaics in Italy and the western Mediterranean in the 3rd to 1st c. BCE, with its valuable appendix of 88 known texts in Greek, Latin, Oscan, Etruscan, Faliscan, Gaulish, and Iberian from Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Gaul, and Hispania, with full dating and references (282–87). He argues that these inscriptions should be treated as "public," even when found on mosaics inside aristocratic houses, since these examples, although from domestic contexts, all involved some kind of self-representation of the owner and hence were addressing a public audience.

Just as the dichotomy "public/private" has now been seen to be problematic for any nuanced reading of the Roman house, many types of inscriptions transcend an overly rigid division between the public and the private.[18] Should the epitaphs on the sarcophagi buried out of public view in the tomb of the Scipios on the outskirts of Rome be considered "public" inscriptions? Furthermore, as several contributors to the volume mention, it is often impossible to recover the precise physical contexts in which many inscriptions were originally displayed. This hinders any assessment of just how "public" they were and whether their setting "allowed their message to be diffused among an audience that was open and potentially numerous," which is how Beltrán defines "public inscriptions," in contrast to "private" texts that were aimed at a "restricted number of readers" (10).[19]

Another central issue that many of the chapters address is whether it was the spread of Roman power across the Mediterranean that stimulated the birth of public epigraphy or whether other factors were in play: either specifically local factors or more widespread changes at the level of what has been termed a Mediterranean cultural *koinē*. Most contributors to the volume place the greatest weight on the impact of Rome as the crucial catalyst. Beltrán himself has long held this position and makes the case once again in his elegantly argued chapter on the birth of public epigraphy in Hispania (Ch. 11).[20] In a similar vein, M. H. Crawford has long argued that it was the spread of Roman power in central Italy, and in particular the foundation of Latin colonies in the 3rd c. BCE, that led to the eclipse of Oscan as an epigraphic language in this region. Nevertheless, it dramatically burst back to life as a language of resistance used by the Italic insurgents during the Social War, as the Oscan legends on the coinage of the rival state of Italia minted in

[17] For a catalogue, with full commentary, Untermann 2015.

[18] Wallace-Hadrill 1988; Riggsby 1997; Tuori and Nissin 2015.

[19] For further developments of this argument, see inter alia Beltrán Lloris 2015.

[20] Earlier articles include Beltrán Lloris 1999; Beltrán Lloris and Jordán 2008; Beltrán Lloris 2012.

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90-89 BCE (*ImIt* Italia 1 Coinage = vol. I, pp. 67–74) and the cluster of several Oscan inscriptions from Pompeii (*ImIt* Pompeii 1–147) so graphically demonstrate.[21]

However, J. Prag in his chapter on Sicily trenchantly makes the opposite case, arguing on the basis of the numerous data now made accessible thanks to his cutting-edge digital corpus *I.Sicily* that epigraphic practices and the linguistic evidence of the surviving inscriptions suggest that Sicilian epigraphic culture was hardly influenced by Roman epigraphic practices until the Augustan age; prior to that, epigraphy in Sicily is more fruitfully to be viewed as part of a wider Hellenistic Mediterranean cultural *koinē*.[22]

This debate illustrates the danger of trying to impose a monocausal explanation on language change and the appearance of public epigraphy across such a culturally diverse area as the "western Mediterranean." A key need is to try to evaluate the balance between local (endogenous) factors and external (exogeneous) ones in the development of local epigraphic cultures. The picture is complicated by the fact that local epigraphies across the western Mediterranean developed according to different chronological rhythms, while the relationship between epichoric epigraphic cultures and Greek and/or Latin ones varied considerably from one region to the next. Poccetti demonstrates this very clearly in Ch. 5 when he compares the Sabellic epigraphy of 7th- to 5th-c. Campania, Lucania, and Bruttium to that of the Abruzzi, Marche, and Umbria in the same period. In each of these two broad regions, diverse choices were made about which scripts and which epigraphic supports to use in different periods. However, we also need to remain alert, Poccetti argues (76–77), to varied responses across micro-regions. The surviving evidence suggests that a radically different balance is observable between the types of objects used for N. Oscan inscriptions in the eastern zones facing the Adriatic as compared to those found in the western areas that looked towards the Tyrrhenian Sea.

The volume also rightly stresses the importance of probing more deeply the concepts of "borrowing" and "influence" in the process of the adoption, adaptation, and alteration of writing systems and their epigraphic display. A number of intriguing individual examples demonstrate the complexities of linguistic and epigraphic interchange in certain regions. In Cisalpine Gaul, for example, Marchesini discusses (Ch. 7) several mixed-language inscriptions that evidently used a combination of different scripts. These include the stele from Voltino di Tremosine (BS) on the western flank of Lake Garda (113 and fig. 5), which seems to be inscribed in the Celtic language, but in three different scripts: Latin, Camunic, and Celtic, with possible interference from other alphabets such as Raetic, Etruscan, or Venetic.[23]

In short, *El nacimiento de las culturas epigráficas en el Occidente mediterráneo* attests to the lively current state of research into the "fragmentarily preserved" languages of Italy and the western Mediterranean. It shows how various approaches taken from sociolinguistics can be fruitful for exploring the physical, social, and cultural contexts in which these languages were used and sometimes inscribed. Concepts such as language contact,

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21 Crawford in Crawford et al. 2011, 2–3. On the use of Oscan at Pompeii, Cooley 2002; McDonald 2012.

22 He here expands on the arguments he advanced in Prag 2013. On the *I.Sicily* project, accessible at http://sicily.classics.ox.ac.uk/, see Prag 2018. On language contact in ancient Sicily, see also Tribulato 2012.

23 See also Eska and Wallace 2011 (with earlier literature).

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contact-induced change, pidginization and creolization, borrowing, code-switching, bilingualism, and multilingualism are now frequently invoked as heuristic devices to advance our understanding of such languages and texts.[24] Several scholars of these ancient "fragmentarily preserved" languages have followed in the pathbreaking steps of J. N. Adams in probing such questions for particular zones of the ancient Mediterranean.[25] The theme of the XVth International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy in Vienna in 2017 was "Sprachen – Schriftkulturen – Identitäten der Antike" and plenary lectures were delivered inter alia by Enrico Benelli on "From Etruscans to Romans. Linguistic, epigraphic and identity choices in Etruria in the 2nd to 1st c. BCE," by Javier Velaza on writing and reading in the Iberian Peninsula in the pre-Roman period, and by David Stifter on the interface between Celtic epigraphy and "classical" (i.e., Graeco-Roman) epigraphy.[26] The recent panel at the XVIth Congress in Bordeaux (August 29–September 2, 2022) on "L'altérité linguistique. Les cultures épigraphiques dans les langues fragmentaires" demonstrated once again the potential of taking sociolinguistic approaches towards these "other" languages to advance our understanding of cultural contact and cultural change in the Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean.

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[24] Each of these concepts receives a separate chapter in a recent international handbook of language contact: Darquennes et al. 2019.

[25] Adams 2003; cf. Darasse and Luján 2011; Mullen and James 2012; Clackson 2012; Tribulato 2012; Mullen 2013; Clackson 2015; McDonald 2015; Estarán Tolosa 2016.

[26] Benelli 2019; Velaza 2019; Stifter 2019.

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More than a corpus of inscriptions

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