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The linguistic position of Lepontic

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1. Introductory matters. Lepontic is a fragmentarily attested language which was spoken in a restricted area ca. 100 km. in diameter centred on the alpine town of Lugano in the northern Italian lake district; see Frey (1995: 516) for an excellent map. The corpus is composed of ca. 140 mostly short inscriptions; the principal modern collections and analyses are Lejeune (1971), Tibiletti Bruno (1981), and Solinas (1995). The datings of the Lepontic inscriptions range from ca. 600 BCE to the first century BCE. Many of them can be dated to a fairly narrow period on the basis of epigraphic and archeological grounds. There are two primary groups of inscriptions; a smaller one from the sixth and fifth centuries, and a larger one from the second and first centuries. Few inscriptions can be reliably dated to the fourth and third centuries; on the dating of the Lepontic corpus, see De Marinis (1981, 1988, 1991). Virtually the entire corpus is engraved in the Lugano script, a segmental script derived from the northern Etruscan script;¹ see Lejeune (1971: 8–27) for a general discussion of the conventions of the script and De Marinis (1991: 94–95) for an illustration of its diachronic variation.

In the early days of the study of the corpus of Lepontic inscriptions, scholars were divided as to the classification of the language in which they are written. It was identified as Ligurian (e.g. Kretschmer 1905), Celticised Ligurian (e.g. Rhys 1906, 1913), Celtic — but discrete from Gaulish (e.g. Danielsson 1909, Krahe 1936), somewhere between Celtic and Italic (e.g. Whatmough 1933, Pulgram 1978), and western Indo-European mixed with non-Indo-European elements (Kretschmer 1943). Herbig (1911) was agnostic beyond identifying it as an Indo-European language. See Hirunuma (1986) and Solinas (1992–93) for reviews of scholarship on Lepontic, the latter up to ca. 1950.

Today the communis opinio is that Lepontic is a variety of Celtic laid over one or more substrata (e.g. Lejeune 1971: 121–23).

Celtic features attested in the Lepontic corpus include the following (see Krahe 1936: 244–47, Lejeune 1971: 67–70 & 116–21, Uhlich 1997):

1. IE **ō* > Celt. *ū* / C₀#, e.g. thematic dat. sg. *-ūi* < **-ōi*, e.g. **Teromui** (S 29).²
2. IE **g^w* > Celt. *b*, e.g. **Piuo-** (e.g. S 39) < **g^wih₃uō-*.
3. IE **ē* > Celt. *ī*, e.g. **siTeś** (S 65) < **sēd-*.
4. IE **p* > Celt. *Ø* (eventually),³ e.g. **laTu-** (S 128) < **p|h₂-tu-*.
5. IE **i* > Celt. *e* (tendency in unstressed position), e.g. *n*-stem dat. pl. **-onePos** (S 65) < **-on-i-bos* (after *i*-stems).
6. IE **st* > nuclear Celtic proximate [θ-:]⁴ (written <ś> or <z>), e.g. **Kozis** (S 65) < **g^host-i-s*.
7. The Celtic etymon *uindo-* 'white' is attested in **alKouinos** (S 21).

2. Lejeune's classification. Employing the diagnostic criteria of the Celtic *k^w/p* dichotomy and the resolution of the Indo-European syllabic nasals as either

aN or *eN*, Lejeune (1978: 118–20) set Lepontic up as a discrete, fourth branch of Celtic:

1. Goidelic	<i>k^w</i>	<i>eN</i>
2. Gallo-Brittonic	<i>p</i>	<i>aN</i>
3. Hispano-Celtic	<i>k^w</i>	<i>aN</i>
4. Lepontic	<i>p</i>	<i>eN</i>

However, the *k^w/p* dichotomy is well known to be phonologically trivial (e.g. Hamp 1958), and it is now widely believed that the pan-Celtic resolution of the Indo-European syllabic nasals was *aN* (e.g. McCone 1996: 50–51): resolution as *eN*, which is found sporadically in Gaulish and Hispano-Celtic, as well as commonly in Goidelic, is the result of subsequent raising. Furthermore, Lejeune's classification of Lepontic as an *eN* language rests upon a single form, acc. pl. **siTeš** (S 65), which he derives from **sēd-ns* (1971: 105). The analysis of this form, however, is much disputed.⁵ And Lejeune, as well as many others, seems to have failed to notice the unambiguous evidence provided by **uvamo-** (S 65), which clearly continues **h₁up-m^mo-*, and characterises Lepontic, like the rest of Celtic, as an *aN* language.

Though many scholars continue to regard Lepontic as a Continental Celtic language separate and distinct from Gaulish (e.g. de Hoz 1992, Motta 1992), there is a growing number who suspect that Lepontic is not a discrete language, but a somewhat divergent member of the Gaulish dialect continuum (e.g. McCone 1996: 68–69). The time seems ripe, then, to make a detailed case, which has not been attempted hitherto.

3. De Hoz's inventory. De Hoz (1992: 228) provides the most complete list of the features which are presumed to be diagnostic of the status of Lepontic and Gaulish as discrete languages. The features said to be diagnostic of Lepontic are the following:

1. [+nasal] > Ø / [+plosive], e.g. **PiuoTialui** (S 3) (= putative /birwōtialui:/, save **nd* > *nn*, e.g. **alKouinos** (S 21), while in Gaulish nasal + plosive groups are retained.
2. The specific combination of the pronominal stems *i-* + *to-* attested in nom. sg. **išos** (S 119), which is said not to exist outside of Lepontic.
3. The affixation of 3. sg. perf. *-e* to the inherited imperfect to form an innovatory *t*-preterite, e.g. **KariTe** (S 119) < inherited impf. **kr₁ie-t* + *-e*, while Gaulish affixes *-u*, e.g. **KarniTu** (RIG *E-5).
4. The existence of the clitic connective =**Pe** (S 128) < **=k^we* in comparison to incorporated *-c* in Gaul. ETIC (e.g. RIG L-13) < **h₁eti=k^we*.
5. Different personal names are attested in the Lepontic and Gaulish speech areas.

To these can be added:

6. Lepontic has a thematic gen. sg. in *-oiso*, e.g. **Plioiso** (e.g. S 80) < **-ošjo* (see Eska 1995: 42) beside *-i*, e.g. **ašKoneTi** (S 21),⁶ which Gaulish does not.
7. Inherited final **-m* is continued in Lepontic, e.g. acc. sg. **Palam** (S 119), but generally becomes *-n* in Gaulish, e.g. acc. sg. **loKan** (RIG

*E-5).

8. The group **ks* > *ss* in Lepontic, written <*s*>, e.g. *es-* (S 127) < **eks/-* < **h₁eg^h-s-*, but generally is preserved in Gaulish; cf. the numerous anthroponyms in *-rtx* /*ri:ks*/ < **h₃rēg-s*, e.g. *εσκιγγορειξ* (RIG G-207).

De Hoz (1992: 228–29) also lists a variety of innovations which are said to be characteristic of Gaulish to the exclusion of the rest of Continental Celtic, some of which include the following:

1. The group **lj* > *ll* in *al(l)os* (GLG 8), but not in Lep. **alios** (S 60).
2. The *ā*-stem paradigm in Gaulish adopts some of the flexional desinences of the *ī*-stem paradigm, but Lepontic does not; cf. acc. sg. Gaul. *-im*, e.g. *seuerim* (Larzac; to nom. sg. *seuera*) vs. Lep. *-am*, e.g. **Palam** (S 119).
3. Thematic dat. sg. *-ūi* syncretises with instr. sg. *-ū* in later Gaulish, e.g. *MAGALV* (Séraucourt), but Lepontic always has inherited *-ūi*, e.g. **meTelui** (S 122).
4. Gaulish has the suffix *-ā-* as an exponent of the subjunctive mood, e.g. 2. sg. pres. *lubijas* (La Graufesenque), but it is not attested in Lepontic.
5. Gaulish has *-oi* as the thematic nominative plural desinence, e.g. **TanoTaliKnoi** (RIG E-1), but it is not attested in Lepontic.
6. Gaulish has an uninflected relative enclitic =*io*, e.g. *DVGIIJONTI=JO* (RIG L-13), but it is not attested in Lepontic.
7. The basic word order in Gaulish is *SVÖ*, e.g.

a. [_S MARTIALIS DANNOTALI] [_V IEVRV] ... [_O SOSIN CELICNON]
(RIG L-13)

unlike the rest of Continental Celtic, which is *SOV*; cf. the following Lepontic example:

b. [_S uvamoKozis Plialeθu] ... [_O siTeś] [_V TeTu] (S 65)

To these can be added:

8. Gaulish has both *-bo* < **-b^hos*, e.g. *ATREBO* (RIG L-15), and *-bi* < instr. pl. **-b^his*, e.g. *GOBEDBI* (RIG L-13), as dative plural desinences, but Lepontic only has *-bos*, e.g. **ariuonePos** (S 65).

4. Crucial temporal and locative factors. Owing to recent epigraphic work on various northern Etruscan scripts, it has recently become possible to combine paleographic information with archeological information, etc., to provide more accurate datings for Cisalpine Celtic texts than previously possible. Whereas it was previously thought that the entire Lepontic corpus was engraved during the last third of the first millennium BCE (e.g. Lejeune 1978: 109), it is now clear that some texts go back to the sixth century BCE, and it is possible that at least one dates from the seventh century BCE (Prosdocimi 1991a: 52–53). In fact, it appears that the Lepontic corpus can be roughly divided into two divisions: a smaller division dating from the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, and a larger divi-

sion dating from the second and first centuries BCE. Very few, if any, texts can be dated to the fourth and third centuries BCE (De Marinis 1991: 94–95).

To the older Lepontic epigraphic stratum belong the several times attested thematic gen. sg. desinence *-oiso* < — **-osjo*, which is replaced in the younger stratum by familiar *-i*, and some characters of the script which — though employed in several textual inscriptions in the older stratum — are later attested only as potters' marks.

In comparison, Cisalpine texts said to be Gaulish date from no earlier than ca. 150 BCE (Lejeune 1988: 4–5), and the earliest Transalpine Gaulish text dates from ca. 225 BCE (Lejeune 1985: 3), though most are later in date. Hence, when considering the nature of the relationship between Gaulish and Lepontic, it is important to bear in mind the relative chronologies of their attestations (and not to forget the restricted area within which Lepontic is attested).

5. Lepontic and Cisalpine Gaulish. The small corpus of so-called Cisalpine Gaulish inscriptions are all engraved in the same version of the Lugano script as the later-attested Lepontic inscriptions with the exception of one, which is engraved in the closely related Sondrio script.⁷

These share some features with the Lepontic inscriptions:

1. Nasals are not (usually) noted before plosives, e.g. Gaul. **KuiTos** (RIG E-1) (= Lat. *Quintus*), Lep. **PiuoTialui** (S 3) (with **-ont-*).
2. The group **nd* > *nn*, e.g. Gaul. **anoKoPoKios** (RIG E-1) (< **ando-*), Lep. **alKouinos** (S 21) (< **yindo-*).
3. The prefix **eks-* > *ess-*, e.g. Gaul. **esaneKoTi** (RIG E-1), Lep. **esoPnio** (S 127).
4. Patronymics can be indicated with the genitive singular, the suffix *-jo-*, *-eo-*, or the suffix *-kno-*.
5. An innovatory *t*-preterite based upon the inherited imperfect has developed, e.g. Gaul. **KarniTu** (RIG *E-5) < **karne-je-t* + *-u*, Lep. **KariTe** (S 119) < **kr-je-t* + *-e*.

But some features differ between them:

1. Inherited final **-m* is continued in Lepontic, e.g. acc. sg. **Palam** (S 119), but has become *-n* in Gaulish, e.g. acc. sg. **loKan** (RIG *E-5).
2. Lepontic can form patronymics with the suffix *-alo-*, e.g. dat. sg. **maešilalui** (S 122), and perhaps with the suffix *-ū* < **-ō* (Eska 1995: 36 & 43–44), but both of these are unknown in Gaulish.
3. The 3. singular ending of the innovatory *t*-preterite is *-e* in Lepontic, e.g. **KaliTe** (S 119), but normally *-u* in Gaulish, e.g. **KarniTu** (RIG *E-5).
4. Lepontic has a prefix *aš-* (S 122), apparently < **ad-s-*, but it is not known in Gaulish.

Scholars who prefer to see Lepontic and Cisalpine Gaulish as discrete languages claim that the features that the two share either issue from their shared ancestry (subsequent to the departure of the Celts who eventually settled in the Iberian Peninsula) or were adopted by the Gauls from speakers of Lepontic, and emphasise the differences between them (e.g. Lejeune 1971, 1988, de Hoz

1992, Motta 1992). This is certainly possible in some cases, but probably not in the cases of phonological developments, which are always shared between them.

In considering their differences, one must bear in mind the sometimes substantial difference in time of attestation between Lepontic and Cisalpine Gaulish and the restricted area in which Lepontic was spoken.⁸ Thus:

1. Lep. final *-m* can merely be regarded as an archaism beside Gaul. *-n*. Cf. acc. sg. *δεκαντεμ* (e.g. RIG G-27) beside *δεκαντεν* (e.g. RIG G-64) in Transalpine Gaulish.
2. It must be borne in mind that Lepontic, in the restricted area in which it was spoken, surely was in close and prolonged contact with various substratal languages. So may be explained the patronymic in *-alo-*, which is usually considered to have its ultimate source in the Etruscoid language known as Raetic (e.g. Pedersen 1921: 38-48, Lejeune 1971: 52; cf. Prosdocimi 1991b: 163-76). This is no surprise. Likewise, the patronymic in *-ū*, if it is so correctly analysed, might have a substratal source, or, indeed, even be an innovation of its own (cf. Hom. Gk. *Κρονίων* 'son of Kronos', *Πηλείων* 'son of Peleus'; see Risch 1974: 56-57), though hardly an important one for establishing degrees of linguistic relationship given the wide variability in naming practices.
3. The variation between Lep. and Gaul. 3. sg. pret. *-e* and *-u*, respectively, could, in fact, simply reflect a variation present across the Gaulish dialect continuum. Cf. 3. sg. pret. *toberte* (Lezoux) < **to-ber-s-t* + *-e* beside *καρνιτου*⁹ (RIG G-151) < **karne-je-t* + *-u* in Transalpine Gaulish.
4. In view of the fact that the so-called Cisalpine Gaulish corpus is so slight, the absence of the prefix *aš-* may merely be an accident of attestation.

In view of the phonological innovations that Lepontic and Cisalpine Gaulish share and the lack of clear diagnostic value of their few differences, at our present state of knowledge it seems preferable to argue that Lepontic is not a discrete Continental Celtic language, but merely a peripheral and somewhat divergent (owing to substratal effects) member of the Gaulish dialect continuum.

But given these shared innovations, perhaps a more intriguing question is whether a wider cleavage exists between Cisalpine Celtic and Transalpine Celtic.

6. Cisalpine Celtic and Transalpine Celtic. An examination of de Hoz's inventory of diagnostic features specific to Lepontic and Gaulish given in section 3 supra reveals that there is not much differentiation between Gaulish on either side of the Alps.

Comments on features said to distinguish Lepontic from all of Gaulish:

1. Latin-Gaulish bilingual inscriptions and Cisalpine Gaulish glosses attested in Latin writers clearly demonstrate that nasals did not completely fall before plosives; an example of the former is Lat. ARGANTO- = Cis. Gaul. **arKaTo-** (RIG *E-2) and examples of the latter include

- ambactus* 'servus', *cimbri* 'latrones', and *ambrones* 'turpis vitae homines' (see Whatmough 1933: 178–202 passim). This is also indicated by epigraphic examples such as Lep. **anTešilu** (S 25) and **PiuonTa** (S 39) in which nasals are noted (exceptionally) before plosives. This leads me to agree with Uhlich (1997, 1998) that in inherited sequences of vowel + nasal before plosive the nasality was transferred to the vowel and hence the nasal consonant symbol was not (usually) written in the native script, but that in the Roman script a nasal consonant was written because nasalised vowels were foreign to Latin.
2. The combination of *is* + *to-* may, in fact, be attested in Trans. Gaul. *ison* and *isoc* (Chamalières), and perhaps also (with apheresis) *Hisp.-Celt. šTena* (MLH K.1.1) and *šTarn* (MLH K.6.1); see Eska (1991).
 3. As mentioned supra, both *-e* and *-u* are attested as the 3. singular desinence of the innovatory *t*-preterite in Transalpine Gaulish.
 4. Lepontic clitic =**Pe** (S 128) vs. Transalpine Gaulish incorporated **-C** (RIG L-13) < **=k^we* is a significant difference, but could simply be the result of the fragmentary nature of the corpora with which we are dealing and the chronological difference between the attestation of Lepontic and Transalpine Gaulish.
 5. It is true that different names are attested in the Lepontic and Transalpine speech areas, and it has been noted supra that Lepontic has at least one method of forming patronymics unknown elsewhere in Celtic. But naming patterns are a regional matter, and in as large a geographical area as the Gaulish dialect continuum must have encompassed, from Asia Minor to the low countries, considerable variation in naming practices can hardly be considered to be surprising.

Comments on features said to be diagnostic of Gaulish:

1. In fact, **li* does not assimilate to *ll* in Transalpine Gaulish; cf. *δουγίλιος* (RIG G-4) and *VIRILIOS* (RIG *L-4). Trans. Gaul. *allos* continues **alno-*.
2. Transalpine Gaulish still preserves examples of the inherited *ā*-stem flexion, mostly from the earlier period, e.g. acc. sg. *ματικαν* (RIG G-151) < **-ām*, gen. sg. *αλισοντεας* (RIG G-224) < **-ās*, dat. sg. *εσκεγγαι* (RIG G-146) < **-āi*, acc. pl. *mnas* (Larzac) < **-āns*, dat. pl. *ανδοουνναβο* (RIG G-183) < **-āb^hos*. The adoption of some of the flexional desinences of the *t*-stem paradigm is an innovation not attested in Cisalpine Celtic. Owing to the chronological disparity in period of attestation, we do not know whether Cisalpine Celtic shared in this innovation.
3. The thematic dat. sg. in *-ūi* is attested in the earlier period of Transalpine Gaulish, e.g. *ουερετομαρεου* (RIG G-147), *ατεγλουουεσιου* (RIG G-163), *αδγεννου* (RIG G-208). It is often assumed that later Gaulish thematic dat. sg. *-ū* reflects the syncretism of the dative singular desinence with instr. sg. *-ū* < **-oh₁*, but this is by no means certain. Later Gaulish may have simply lost the glide, as occurred in both Latin and Greek (see Sihler 1995: 258). If this is the case, the absence of thematic dat. sg. *-ū* in Cisalpine Celtic is diagnostic of nothing, since its

corpus is attested earlier than the appearance of dat. sg. *-ū* in Transalpine Gaulish.

4. Owing to the fact that only seven verbs are attested in the Cisalpine Celtic corpora, it may simply be due to accident of attestation that no example of an *ā*-subjunctive can be exemplified. N.B. that Hispano-Celtic appears to have an example of an *ā*-subjunctive in 3. sg. pres. **ašeCaTi** (MLH K.1.1).
5. In fact, the desinence *-oi*, probably a thematic nominative plural, is attested in a Cisalpine Celtic coin legend, viz. **riKoi** (see Lejeune 1971: 127). It also occurs once in an obscure form in Hispano-Celtic, viz. **oPoi** (MLH K.0.7).
6. Again, owing to the small number of verbal sequences attested in the Cisalpine Celtic corpora, it may simply be due to accident of attestation that no example of the subordinating enclitic *=jo* can be exemplified.
7. Though, as mentioned supra, Lepontic does exhibit one archetypal SOV clause, this may be due to its early attestation. A good case can be made that a somewhat later attested inscription with two verbal sequences may be underlyingly SVO, despite the fact that considerable movement has occurred at s-structure in the first clause, viz.

- a. [_{O_{dat}} **PeIKui**] [_{O_{acc}} **Pruiam**] [_S **Teu**] [_V **KariTe**]
- b. [_S **išos**] [_V **KaliTe**] [_O **Palam**]

It must also be borne in mind that even Transalpine Gaulish has some examples of apparently SOV clauses, notably in the Larzac inscription (see Schmidt 1990: 18–19), which has been dated to ca. 100 CE.

It thus seems that while some variation does exist between Cisalpine Celtic and Transalpine Gaulish, much of it is probably due to the differential in the dating of the larger part of the respective corpora. There are no startling differences which demand that Lepontic be recognised as a discrete Continental Celtic language or even indicate that Cisalpine Celtic contemporaneous with the larger part of the Transalpine Gaulish corpus would have been very different from it.

A label such as ‘Lepontic’ is still useful, however, in that it clearly can be applied to a relatively small speech area. Labels such as ‘Cisalpine Celtic’, embracing both Lepontic and Cisalpine Gaulish, and ‘Transalpine Gaulish’, are useful, as well, for without them we would be reduced to treating Gaulish as a monolith, rather than recognise the variation that existed within the geographically wide-ranging Gaulish dialect continuum.

NOTES

1. As a script of Etruscan origin, the characters employed to denote plosives do not indicate voicing. They are transliterated as <P T K>, i.e. with upper case characters, to underscore this fact. Some inscriptions make use of the characters transcribed as <θ> and <χ> to introduce a voicing distinction into the dental and velar series, respectively. Whether <T> or <θ>, for example, indicates /t/, however, varies among inscriptions.

2. Textual references to collected corpora employ the following abbreviations: GLG = Marichal 1988; MLH K = Untermann 1997: 349–722; RIG E & L = Lejeune 1988; RIG G = Lejeune 1985; S = Solinas 1995. Inscriptions not yet included in a collected corpus are referred to by place of discovery.
3. In a forthcoming article, I argue that IE **p* is continued as /*ϕ*/, written < *v* >, in two instances in earliest-attested Lepontic, but that it was soon lost thereafter.
4. A flat denti-alveolar fricative (here a geminate), perhaps articulated much like the so-called slit-*t* fricative of southern Hiberno-English, on which see Pandeli et al. (1997). This phone(me) is identical to the tau Gallicum referred to by classical authors; see my forthcoming article on the subject.
5. In my view, the vocalism of this desinence is probably after that of nom. pl. **si*Tes < **sēd-es* (perhaps after the pattern of the *i*-stems).
6. De Hoz (1990) argues that a number of forms in *-ū* in the Lepontic corpus, which have traditionally been taken to be non-neut. *n*-stem nominative singulars < **-ō*, are, instead, also thematic genitive singulars, which continue abl. sg. **-ōd*. I find this view to be unsupportable (Eska 1995: 34–37).
7. N.B. that seven of the eight Cisalpine Gaulish inscriptions are attested close to the Lepontic speech area; Lejeune (1988: 5) provides a map which indicates the location of four to the south of the Lepontic speech area. Two others, from Cureggio and Oleggio, also lie just to the south of the Lepontic speech area, while one from Voltino lies to the east, and one is an outlier at Todi in Umbria.
8. The tendency for speech varieties spoken in geographically peripheral areas to be conservative is well known.
9. N.B. that Gaul. /*u*/, /*u*:/, and /*w*/ are written with the digraph < *ou* > in Hellenic characters.

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