

Research Report

The Antequera (Spain) Slate: an undetermined writing found in a Roman-type Villa and the need of revision of Iberia history, anthropology and archaeology

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Abstract - The Antequera Slate is a striking scripted finding in the Roman “Villa de la Estacion” (Railway Station Villa) archaeological site which was in use in its Roman known period approximately between 100 years BC and 450 AD. Some of the slate incised signs were familiar to us because they were similar to the so-called pre-Iberian-Tartessian scripted incise or picketed signs found in a Megalithic context or not in rocks and stones in Iberia, Canary Islands and Algerian Sahara. The antiquity of these signs may vary depending the place but some may have been done thousands of years BC. We have put forward that these Antequera Slate signs may be pre-Iberian-Tartessian that had remained in Iberian autochthonous rural or aristocratic people during centuries, but a firm conclusion is premature. Otherwise, the scripts are not done in Roman or any other standard writing. Visigoth scripted slates were started to be performed in Central West Iberia when Visigoths appeared in Iberia, together with Suebi, Vandals and Alans. The Antequera Slate incise signs may have been originated by these new cultures, but no Visigoth tables signs have been found with similar signs to Antequera Slate signs. Taking into account that we do not now either the language/symbols or writing of many Visigothic slates (5th - 8th century AD) nor the Antequera Slate, we also agree with other scholars that *this is an important enigma which does not fit with archaeology, anthropology and history of Iberian Peninsula and that all these disciplines should be revised in the context detailed in this and others work.*

Keywords: Antequera, Slate, Visigoth Slate, Iberian Tartessian, Latin, Megaliths, Canary Islands, Lineal Megalithic Script, Iberia, Roman, Lineal Megalithic Script, Basque-Iberism

Introduction

Antequera (Malaga, Spain) (**Fig. 1**) is an Andalusia crossway between North/South and East/West in the southern Iberian Peninsula. An important Roman-style archaeological site had been suggested in 1908 AD by Amador de los Rios; a rigorous archaeological study has been directed by Manuel Romero and some of the results were published about it in 2006 ([Romero et al. 2006](#)) (**Figs. 2a** and **2b**). The site is compound of all the typical elements of rich and luxurious *Villa Romana* in Hispania (Spain) constructed by locals. One of the relevant spaces for this study included in the *Villa* is the *Tablinum* beside the *Triclinium* or eating room. The *Tablinum* room in Hispania was the *pater familias* (owner) of the *Villa* office, reception to business visitors and working space. In this *Tablinum* space, a *tabula cerulae*, in this case with no wax traces, but a scripted all made slate was found. Scripts do not belong to a clearly recognized Iberian, African or Roman signary. Also, several bronze *stilum* (engraving tool) were found. Unexpectedly, we observed in July 2023 that the slate scripts were full of non-Roman or Iberian-Tartessian scripts done in an apparent messy way that may be lines and, in some parts, the Antequera Slate seems to be written in boustrophedon or in a spiral writing mode (**Figs 3, 4** and **5**).

Since this tablet was almost certainly scripted in Iberia not later than the first half of 4th century of our Era (when this *Villa Romana* of ‘La Estación’ broke down), we have to consider that it could be written in: 1) pre-Iberian ([Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2022a](#)); 2) Iberian ([Gómez-Moreno 1949; 1962](#)); 3) Phoenician; or 4) in the so-called “Visigoth slates” writings which is not yet an identified kind of writing ([Velazquez-Soriano 1989; Fernández-Cárdenas 2020](#)), and are found in Middle Age Iberia and North Africa about Roman-Visigoth transition and scripted by people of high and lower social classes They are found both in archaeological and rural dump sites.

In the present paper we aim to preliminary analyze the scripts contained in this “The Antequera Slate”, approach their possible meaning and give them a temporary context: 1) pre-Iberian ([Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2022a](#)); 2) Iberian ([Gómez-Moreno 1949; 1962](#)); 3) Phoenician (not used this slate support); or 4) in the so-called “Visigoth slates” writing/symbols: which bear a not yet identified kind of writing ([Velazquez-Soriano 1989; Fernández-Cárdenas 2020](#)), and are found in Middle Age Iberia and North Africa (Albertini Tablet, Algeria/Tunisia border) about Iberia Roman-Visigoth transition.



Fig. 1 Map showing the Iberian Peninsula, South France and North Africa. Antequera city is placed in Andalucía, southern Spain, and near other important cities like Malaga, Seville and Granada. The archaeological site “Villa de la Estacion” (Antequera old train station Villa) is the place where this tablet was found (Romero *et al.* ,2006)



Fig. 2a Aerial view of “Villa de la Estación” located in Antequera, Málaga, Spain excavated by archaeologist Dr Manuel Romero (Romero *et al.* 2006). Railway and main Antequera roads may have spoiled a part of it.



Fig. 2b Reconstruction of Villa de la Estación room where The Antequera Slate (analysed in this work) was found.

It is supposed that in this place were kept old family souvenirs: portraits, paintings and documents also, since another slate piece was found. The photograph is part of a panel of an exhibition at the Villa de la Estacion itself to visit the archaeological discoveries that will open to the public on December 2023.

Material and Methods

The Antequera Slate is a 20 cm x 25 cm slate that was found in 1997 at the probable *Scriptum*- room space, and it is now exposed at the Antequera City Municipal Museum. Photographs were taken with a Sony Xperia G3112 cellular phone camera. This table magnification of photographs and computational color changes for better uncover the inscription have been performed with Adobe Illustrator 2020 and Mac OS images visualizer. All photographs may be used under complete citation of paper and permission, as law permits. AAV observed this slate at the exhibition in Antequera Municipal Museum on July 2023, photographed and study started. A better photograph was obtained by MR (**Fig. 3**).



Fig. 3 The Antequera Slate plane photograph showing its dimension and signs incised on it. (Photograph by MR).

It is presently exposed at the Antequera Municipal Museum (Antequera City Town Museum,). This museum is at the Najera Palace (Coso Viejo Sq), It also contains the famous and finest World statue of Roman style human in bronze: “The Antequera Efebus” (1st Century BC, found earthed by a peasant in Antequera surroundings in 20th century).

Results

These tablet signs are repeated (**Figs. 3, 4 and 5**). Some of them have provisionally been identified by us as Lineal Megalithic scripts than are found in a megalithic and in a non-megalithic context. Many rocks and stones from Iberia and Canary Islands have them but chronology may be very different in different rocks and / or places. These findings comprise a big area including Algerian Sahara, Canary Islands and southern Iberia ([Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2022a](#), [2022c](#), [2022d](#)). In addition, it is not discarded that a figure (animal or other) might be or may have been represented at table.

Discussion

Chronology

The Roman “Villa de la Estación” building collapse occurred about 400-450 AD and could occur even some years before. It means that the Antequera Slate had to be engraved and its form carefully sculpted in an **uncertain time before**. The writing is not neither fully developed Iberian-Tartessian nor Roman. The building may have started to be used between 50-100 AD. It is a type of rich and luxurious construction (Romero *et al.*, 2006) and in fact, there exist Roman thermal baths close to the building. Slates are easy to obtain in flat pieces from a metamorphic rock which are abundant in Iberia, being Spain in year 2,000 AD the first state exporting country in World (Cárdenes *et al.* 2019). All Iberian slate beds are in the half western part of Iberia. This is documented in the very ancient occulated slate idols found in Southwest Iberia shown in Huelva and other Spanish and Portuguese museums (5,550-1,750 years BC in the Coper Age and often within a Megalithic context) (Fig. 6). 4,000 of such plaques have been recollected now and many of them from Megalithic tombs (Negro *et al.* 2022). They may represent female divinities and also the Mother Goddess (Gimbutas 1991). Other more trivial uses than funeral/ritual/religious ones have also been postulated (Negro *et al.* 2022).



Fig. 4 A part of the repetitive signs were decided to be studied at present and are remarked on the Antequera Slate for better identification. They have been partially studied in present work (see Fig. 5).

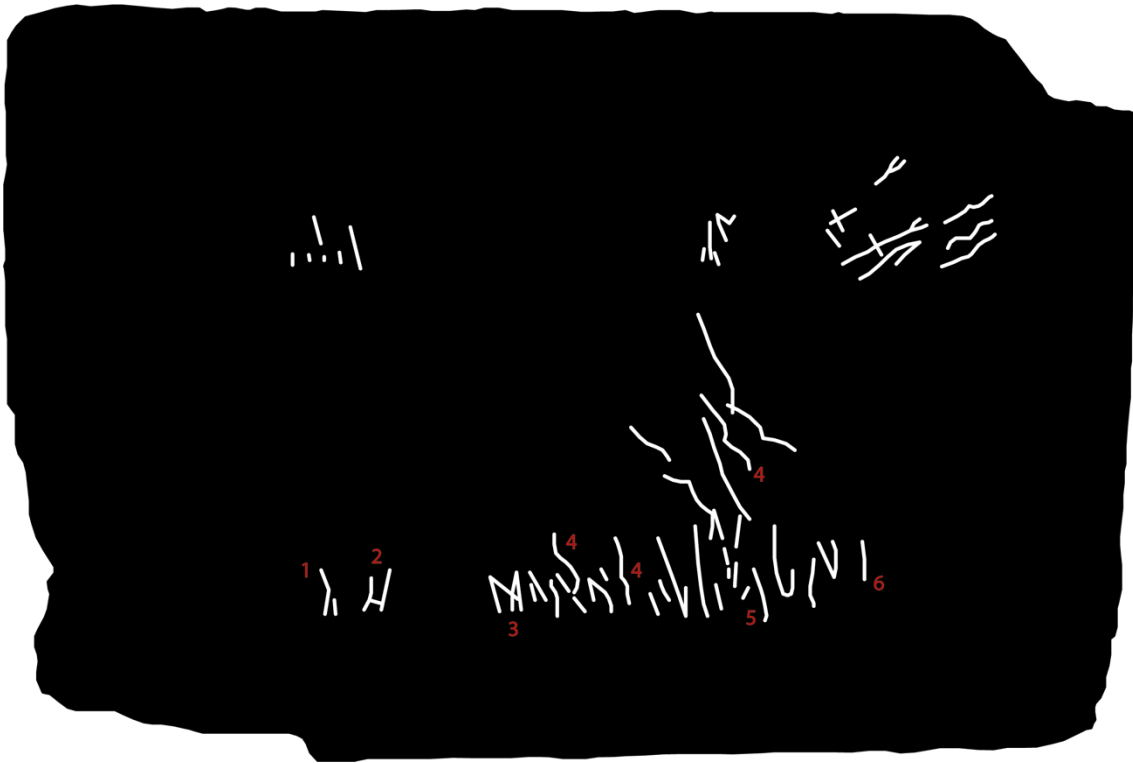


Fig. 5 Signs found on the Antequera Slate remarked in black and white. Numbered signs have been studied and a interpretation proposed is below. Signs are repeated all over the slate, which may be scripted by a right-handed person in a spiral or boustrophedon way. It is not likely that several people wrote in this slate, since signs are not crossed or half deleted by others. See [Arnaiz-Villena et al, 1999](#), [Arnaiz-Villena and Alonso-Garcia 2012](#). These signs are in the Ibero-Tartessian signary (Appendix **I**) and may represent funerary and religious simple words in a pre-Iberian signary by using Basque-Iberian transcription and translations. These signs are present both in Megaliths and rock and stones of ancient but undefined dating ([Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2022a](#); [Arnaiz-Villena and Juarez 2023a](#)). At present, assertion that the Antequera Slate contains Iberian or pre-Iberian signs is yet premature.

LAST LINE	1.- = KE Smoke	2.- = O = BO? Slept	3.- = S(U) Fire	4.- = = = S(U) Fire	5.- = (I)L Dead
ALL TABLET (REPEATED)	6.- = BA / (A)BA Yes (emphasis) / Priest / Forest				

The singularity that this studied scripted slate appeared in a Roman type village in Iberia led us to search a possible more ancient time for it, even hundred years BC, because of the Lineal Megalithic –like scrips which are postulated to have given origin to Eurafrika Mediterranean/Atlantic lineal scripts, including Iberian Tartessian. [Arnaiz-](#)

Villena *et al.* 1999, Arnaiz-Villena and Alonso-Garcia 2012, Arnaiz-Villena 2000 (Appendix I).



Fig. 6 3,500 years old owl oculated idol from a Dolmen Chamber of Los Gabrieles (Valverde del Camino, Huelva, Spain). Huelva Archaeological Museum. Photograph taken by AAV.

Signs in the Antequera Slate

Relationship of Antequera Slate with Iberian or pre-Iberian signs are feasible but they are still being studied. We have postulated that the Lineal Megalithic Scripts are precursors of Iberian-Tartessian script (Arnaiz-Villena *et al.* 2022a) and may be of other lineal Mediterranean scripts (Arnaiz-Villena *et al.* 2021a; 2022a) that are found or not in a Megalithic context (Arnaiz-Villena *et al.* 2020a; 2020b; 2021a; 2021b; 2022b; 2022c; 2022d; 2023, Arnaiz-Villena and Juarez 2023a) (Fig. 7). They are found in rocks and stones of Iberia, Sahara and Canary Is in a megalithic context (thousand years BC) or not (Arnaiz-Villena *et al.* 2022a). Origin of such a lineal script may have been originated by the Saharan culture brought to Europe and Mediterranean Basin from Green Sahara

migrants when desertification started between 10,000 – 5,000 years BP (Arnaiz-Villena 2000; Suarez-Trujillo *et al.* 2023) (Fig. 8). The signs meaning could be religious/funeral/ritual referring to the religion of the Mother (Gimbutas 1991), the Fire, the Dead, etc. However, the text signs scripted in the slate may be letters or syllables that are repeated. Direction of writing is in unclear boustrophedon or spiral form since on the vertical sides (Figs 3, 4), some signs are almost perpendicular to the slate shorter sides (we do not know even if we are seeing the tablet upside down in comparison with scripted signs). Some of the signs are familiar with Lineal Megalithic Writing or pre-Iberian-Tartessian signs (see Appendix I) and that may have remained in the local Iberian ancestral uses of people at the Roman times cannot be discarded. This might be the origin of the Antequera Slate writings.

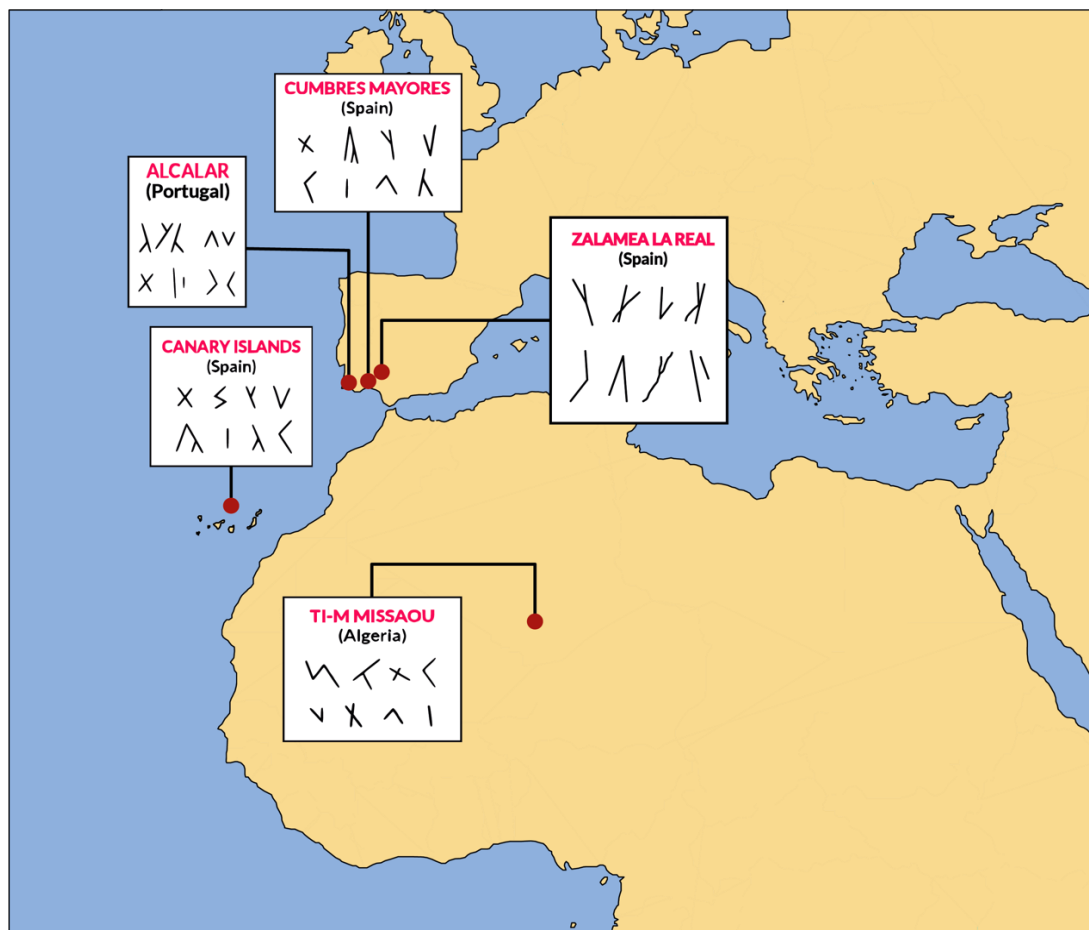


Fig. 7 Rock scripts included in Iberian-Tartessian semi-syllabary (Appendix I) are found in a wide extension area including Cumbres Mayores Dolmens (Huelva, Spain), Alcalar Dolmen (South Portugal), Canary Islands rocks (Spain) and Ti-m Missaou scripts (Algeria, Sahara Desert). These scripts which may be found in a megalithic context (5000-3000 years BC) or not. (Arnaiz-Villena *et al.* 2020a; 2020b; 2021a; 2021b; 2022b; 2022c; 2022d).

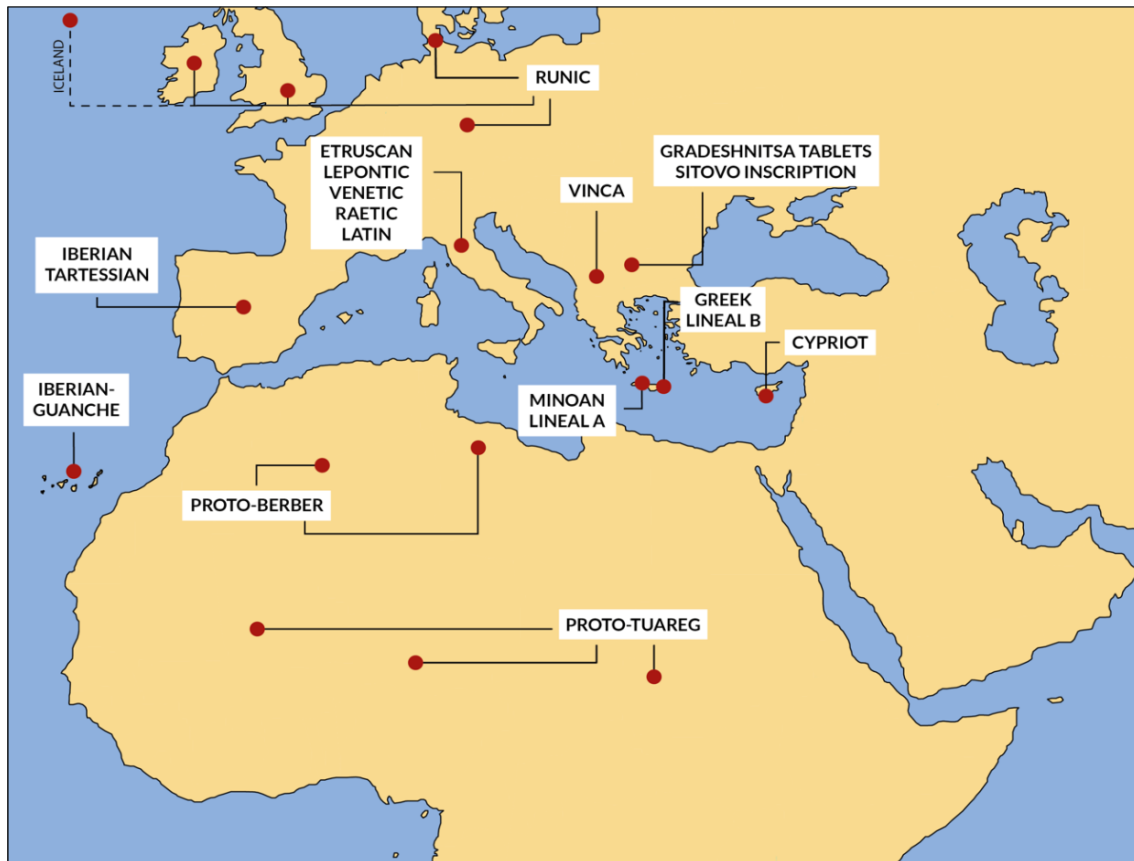


Fig. 8 Spread of lineal writing with probably Megalithic/Paleolithic origins of transmission of different ancient languages writing. The Paleolithic /Neolithic religion of the Mother (Gimbutas1991) may have been a cultural link in this big extension of Lineal Writing which may have been originated in the Saharo-Canarian culture cycle (Arnaiz-Villena *et al.* 2022a)

The Visigoth slates

Visigoths, Vandals, Sueves and Alans had come into Iberia before 400-450 AD. They may be taken into account for this work about Antequera Slate interpretation. In 456 AD, Visigoths had settled in most of the Iberian Peninsula

(https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispania_visigoda). The so-called “Visigoths Slates” have been attributed to this Epoch (5th-8th AD) as an Iberian people writing in a today undeciphered language in many of them, including some being written from right to left. Most of Visigoth slates are written on slate pieces or stones not in a elaborated or very elaborate slates and also mostly found in the Upper Mesa of Iberia (Castille and Extremadura) (Fernández-Cardenas 2020). They were discovered in 1877 and since the first moment they intrigued the Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno and the prehistorian Manuel Gómez-Moreno (see Appendix I) in the middle of XX century. Emil Hubner (Gómez-Moreno mentor and professor) thought that it was not Iberian language, but

another ancient Iberian language (Hubner 1893). These slates are not only found in palaces or rich houses, but on country land or discarded in an apparent dumping rural or isolated land places without any archaeological context. These signs or words were written not only by people leaders, but also by other society substrates classes like peasants or rural living peoples. They were thought to be Roman numerals and they have also been compared to “tally sticks” of prehistory that are found all over the world (i.e., calendars or counting of days or time in bones or wood). However, none of these theories can be universally applied to all Visigoth slate writing. These slates may be written in one or more different alphabets or languages. These slates in rural habitats may appear or not in archaeological contexts and the scripted signs were done by individuals belonging to different social groups whose level of literacy and knowledge was very varied. *This is an important enigma which does not fit with archaeology, anthropology and history of Iberian Peninsula.* (Fernández-Cárdenas 2020).

In the case of our Antequera Slate, signs do not belong to the any known Visigoth slates type of writing or known symbol but it could not be discarded that they could belong (Velázquez-Soriano 1989, Fernández-Cárdenas 2020). More detailed studies are ongoing to reach firm conclusions about the Antequera Slate incised signs characters.

Appendix I

Iberian →		Tartessian ←	Phoenician	Ancient Greek	Iberian →		Tartessian ←	Phoenician	Ancient Greek
R D P P	a	Δ Δ	κ Ϝ	Ϝ Α	ρ ρ	bi	γ)) ρ	γ ρ
Ε Ε Ε	e	Ϝ Ϝ (Ϝ Ϝ)	Ϝ	Ϝ	χ χ χ	bo	⊗ ⊗ ⊗		
Ν Ν	z	ϣ ϣ (ϣ ϣ)	ζ	ζ ι	□	bu	□ (ι ι)		
Η Η	o	ο ο ρ	ο	ο	χ	ka	+ χ +	+ χ +	τ ε
Α Α ↑	u	ϣ ↑ ü?	ϣ ϣ	ϣ ϣ	⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖	le	⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖	⊖ ϑ	⊖ ϑ
Λ Λ Λ	l	λ	λ	λ ι	ϣ ϣ ϣ ϣ	li	⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖	⊖ ϑ	⊖ ϑ
⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖	r	Ϝ Ϝ Ϝ	ρ	ρ ρ	ν ν ν	ro	⊖ ⊖ ⊖		
Μ Μ	s	Μ Μ Μ	ω ρ	Μ	⊖ Δ Δ Δ	tu	Δ Δ Δ (ϣ Α)	Δ Δ	Δ Δ
Ξ Ξ Ξ	ς	Ϝ Ϝ (Ϝ Ϝ)	Ϝ	Ϝ x	Α Α Α	ca	Λ (⊖)	ι ρ	ι Λ ρ
ϣ ϣ ϣ ϣ ϣ	m	ξ ξ	ξ ϣ	ϣ	< ⊖ Ϝ Ϝ Ϝ	ke	⊖ Ϝ Ϝ Ϝ Ϝ (⊖)	ϣ κ	ϣ κ
Ν Ν	n	ϣ ϣ ϣ (ϣ ϣ)	ν	ν	Ϝ Ϝ Ϝ Ϝ	ki	λ ζ (ζ Ν?)		
ι	ba	ι			⊗	co	⊗ ⊗		
ρ Ϝ Ϝ Ϝ	be	ρ Ϝ Ϝ			⊖ ⊖	cu	⊖ ⊖ (⊖)	⊖ Ϝ	⊖ Ϝ

Iberian -Tartessian signary (Gomez-Moreno 1949, 1962)

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest

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