

CHORAL
RESEARCH PROJECT *(max. 5 pages)*
FOR JOINTLY SUPERVISED DOCTORAL THESIS

APPLICATION FORM TO REQUEST FOR FUNDING

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Written culture and literacy in Northeastern Hispania and Northern Italy (2nd BCE-2ndCE): a comparative study based on epigraphy

SUPERVISORS

From recruiting University	First name	LAST NAME	University	Department
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5 main KEYWORDS

Roman epigraphy
 Palaeoeuropean epigraphy (Iberian, Celtiberian, Cisalpine Celtic, Venetic, Camunic)
 Daily writing and publicly displayed inscriptions
 Women and rural literacy
 Western Roman Empire

ABSTRACT (250 words max.)

The research project is based on the epigraphic documents of two well-studied regions (Northern Italy — Gallia Cisalpina— and northeastern Hispania), with which the two co-directors of the thesis are familiar. It aims to delve from a comparative perspective into the transformations that written culture and literacy experienced—with different rhythms and notable local particularities—in these two regions between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE. During this period both regions were integrated into the Roman Empire and became urbanized areas (although with rural spaces linked to them —especially in mountain areas) with an early integration into the Roman civic community. The research therefore starts from the incipient writing practices of local cultures such as Iberian and Celtiberian in Hispania, or Celtic and Venetic in Cisalpina —using their own writing systems and languages—, and it ends with the phase of maximum intensity of Roman epigraphic culture in the 2nd century CE. This century is unanimously acknowledged as the period of Antiquity in which literacy reached a greater development, although the degree of literacy of the ancient Roman population—and especially of women and inhabitants of rural areas—is a debated issue, particularly since the underestimating study of this phenomenon by W. Harris, *Ancient literacy*, 1989.

Research aims and methodology

The main objective of the project is to evaluate the uses of writing and the implications that are deduced from them regarding the level of literacy of the population, using for that purpose epigraphic documentation mainly, but also taking into account writing instruments and references to school education.

With this goal, some well-documented areas of Northeastern Hispania and Cisalpine Gaul will be selected in order to analyzing from a comparative perspective five main topics of their written cultures:

1. Transformations in the local communities linked to the process of conquest and Romanization
2. Transformations linked to the integration process in the Roman civic community
3. The roles of everyday writing and publicly displayed inscriptions
4. Urban and rural patterns of written culture
5. Participation of women in written culture

For this purpose, a census of inscriptions, writing instruments and references to school education will be carried out, paying particular attention to the cultural affiliation and the chronology of the documentation, to the monumental inscriptions exhibited in public, to the graffiti on ceramics, walls or rock, to the presence of women as authors or recipients of the inscriptions and to the documentation coming from rural and mountainous areas.

Additionally, the study of inscriptions in rural areas (for example, rock inscriptions in mountain areas such as Peñalba de Villastar or Val Camonica) can serve as a basis for the creation of interpretation centers that contribute to the development of these rural areas.

Relevance and added-value of the proposed research in relation to the current state of knowledge

As noted above, studies on written culture and literacy in the Roman Empire are highly mediated by lines of research such as that defended by W. Harris, in whose opinion only 15% of the population—in the best case scenario—would be able to read in the Roman world, particularly the urban male population. Although multiple studies have qualified this perspective (see references in F. Beltrán Lloris, “Más allá de epígrafes y monedas. Reflexiones sobre la cultura escrita de la Hispania Citerior”, en E. Ferrer et alii (eds.), *Arqueología y numismática. Estudios en homenaje a la profesora Francisca Chaves Tristán*, Sevilla 2021, 661-677), there is a lack of specific studies that address this problem using not only publicly displayed inscriptions, but also private ones (especially graffiti) and paying particular attention to rural areas and feminine literacy which have been traditionally undervalued.

The interest of the proposed research has the added value of addressing this problem from a new comparative perspective (see the recent conference on *Comparative Epigraphy. First International Colloquium*, Barcelona, September 2023, <https://www.aiegl.org/newsreader/comparative-epigraphyprogram.html>) in two regions of the Roman West with a rich indigenous epigraphy, an early — but not contemporary— process of integration into the Roman civic community and a relevant development of imperial Roman epigraphic culture.

Interdisciplinary nature of the research together with the alignment with the CHORAL programme and complementarity expertise of the teams

This study is necessarily interdisciplinary since it requires epigraphic, linguistic, archaeological and historical approaches, with attention also to the creation of museographic spaces or interpretation centers. It affects two very relevant areas of ancient European cultural heritage, such as pre-Roman languages (now called Paleo-European) and ancient inscriptions.

It also aims to influence rural and mountainous areas, favoring the preservation and enhancement of their epigraphic heritage.

Output plan including publication and dissemination activities

The results of the research will be presented at specialized conferences and in international scientific journals in the field of epigraphy and ancient history (Palaeohispanica, Athenaeum, Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphic,...), and will be published in a final monograph.

Estimated schedule

First year. Identification and study of Hispanic epigraphic documentation. University of Zaragoza.

Second year. Identification and study of cisalpine epigraphic documentation. University of Torino

Third year. Comparative study of materials and writing of the thesis report. University of Zaragoza & another UNITA university (UPPA)