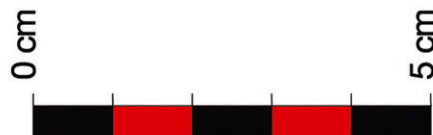


Words on bronze hand may rewrite past of Basque language

November 16 2022, by Joseph Wilson



In this undated photo provided by Sociedad de Ciencias Aranzadi, a flat piece of bronze shaped like a human hand is displayed in the Navarra region. Investigators in northern Spain believe they have discovered the oldest written record of a precursor of the Basque language, pushing back its earliest evidence to the first century B.C. The Aranzadi Science Society revealed the inscription found on a flat piece of bronze shaped like a human hand that archaeologists unearthed last

year. Investigators believe it is the earliest known evidence of a written Vasconic language, the precursor of modern Basque, a minority language still spoken in parts of northern Spain and southwest France. It challenges the wide-held belief the Vascones started writing in their language after the introduction of the Latin script by Roman invaders. Credit: Sociedad de Ciencias Aranzadi via AP

The discovery of five words inscribed on a 2,000-year-old bronze hand may help rewrite the history of the Basque language, one of Europe's most mysterious tongues.

Investigators in northern Spain said this week they discovered what they believe to be the oldest written record of a precursor to modern Basque, pushing back its earliest evidence to the first century B.C.

The Aranzadi Science Society, a Basque research institute, said the inscription was found on a flat piece of bronze shaped like a human [hand](#) that archaeologists unearthed last year. Researchers think it is the earliest known evidence of a written Vasconic language, a precursor to the Basque still spoken in parts of northern Spain and southwest France.

The discovery could challenge [linguists'](#) wide-held belief that the Vascones, an Iron Age tribe centered on territory that makes up Spain's modern Navarra region, only started writing in their language after the introduction of the Latin script by Roman invaders.

"This piece completely changes what we thought until now about the Vascones and their writing," said Joaquín Gorrochategui, professor of Indo-European Linguistics at the University of the Basque Country. "We were convinced that the Vascones didn't know how to read or write in antiquity and only used script for minting coins."



In this undated photo provided by Sociedad de Ciencias Aranzadi, a flat piece of bronze shaped like a human hand is held in the Navarra region. Investigators in northern Spain believe they have discovered the oldest written record of a precursor of the Basque language, pushing back its earliest evidence to the first century B.C. The Aranzadi Science Society revealed the inscription found on a flat piece of bronze shaped like a human hand that archaeologists unearthed last year. Investigators believe it is the earliest known evidence of a written Vasconic language, the precursor of modern Basque, a minority language still spoken in parts of northern Spain and southwest France. It challenges the wide-held belief the Vascones started writing in their language after the introduction of the Latin script by Roman invaders. Credit: Juntxo Egana/Sociedad de Ciencias Aranzadi via AP

Archaeologists believe the hand, which they call "the hand of Irulegi" after the site where it was found at the foot of a medieval castle, was designed to hang on a door, likely as a amulet of protection.

So far, linguists have been able to translate only one of the words inscribed on it: "sorioneku," which corresponds to the Basque word "zorioneku," or "fortunate."

Basque has survived for centuries despite ceding ground to Spanish and French. Several hundred thousand people are estimated to speak the language, also known as Euskara, mostly in the Spanish Basque Country and Navarra regions and across the Pyrenees in a small area of France.

It is considered by linguists to be a "language isolate," meaning it has no known roots in other [language](#) groups.

© 2022 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Words on bronze hand may rewrite past of Basque language (2022, November 16) retrieved 28 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2022-11-words-bronze-rewrite-basque-language.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--