

Word inscribed on ancient bronze hand resembles modern Basque word

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Photograph of the Irulegi hand and drawing based on the photograph and a scanned image of the hand (figure by authors). Credit: *Antiquity* (2024). DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2023.199

A team of archaeologists with the Aranzadi Science Society has found a word inscribed on an ancient Basque bronze hand that resembles a

modern Basque word. Their [paper](#) is published in the journal *Antiquity*.

In 2021, a related team of archaeologists working at an Iron Age site called Irulegi, in northern Spain, unearthed a flat piece of bronze shaped like a human hand. After cleaning, they discovered that a series of words had been inscribed onto its surface representing text from a Vasconic language—one that includes Basque and several others that are now extinct.

In this more recent study, the research team worked to decipher the text. Thus far, they have found that the first word, if spelled using a Latin alphabet, would be "sorioneke" or "sorioneku"—either of which strongly resembles "zorioneko"—the Basque word for "good fortune."

The Basque people of today are a group that resides in the Basque Country, an autonomous region in Spain situated along the Pyrenees mountains, bordering France. Basque is the official language of the area, and its persistence has proven to be a puzzle for modern linguistics experts—as one of the last surviving members of the Paleo-European language family, many suggest, it should have disappeared along with most others of its kind after the arrival of Indo-European languages.

The bronze hand has been dated to approximately 2,100 years ago and the script etched into it now represents its longest example to date—the only other samples have been seen on a few coins. The research team is hoping the continued study of the text will help to better understand the Vasconic language that was spoken at Irulegi—and perhaps its link to modern Basque.

In addition to the text etched onto the hand, it also had a hole drilled where the palm would have met the wrist, which suggests the hand was meant for hanging. It was found near a door, suggesting it had once hung over the entrance to a room. This, the researchers suggest, hints at the

possibility that the hand was used for a ritualist purpose, offering [good fortune](#) to those who entered.

More information: Mattin Aiestaran et al, A Vasconic inscription on a bronze hand: writing and rituality in the Iron Age Irulegi settlement in the Ebro Valley, *Antiquity* (2024). [DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2023.199](https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2023.199)

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