

# Xavier Delamarre's Work on Gaulish Language

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Gaulish language is by far the best attested Continental Celtic dialect to date. X. Delamarre's works constitute an invaluable source of information on Gaulish mechanisms of morphology, onomastics, and word-formation. In the following lines, I will examine the most recent of his publications, paying particular attention to linguistic, formational, and phonetic aspects, as well as to purely methodological details.

The study of the fragmentary languages or *Trümmersprachen* of western Europe is at all times a challenge for modern researchers. This is because, on the one hand, the indigenous material that has survived to the present day is often very scarce in quantitative terms, and, on the other hand, the material transmitted by indirect sources presents no less complex difficulties and linguistic adaptations. In this regard, one could mention the use of foreign alphabets that were deficient when it came to satisfying the phonological needs of the indigenous language, or the transmission of proper and common names distorted by the language of reception, mostly Latin and Ancient Greek.

Gaulish, a Celtic language spoken for about a thousand years in present-day France, Belgium, Austria, and northern Italy, is undoubtedly the best-known Continental Celtic dialect. In recent decades, several works have been devoted to the systematization and analysis of the Gaulish material. X. Delamarre's present book, *Dictionnaire des Thèmes Nominaux du Gaulois, II. Lab- / Xantus* (2023), can be regarded as the culmination of an exhaustive series of works begun in 2003 with his first *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*, continued by his study

of Gaulish onomastics in 2017 (*Les noms des gaulois*) and by the first volume of this very book in 2019 (*Dictionnaire des Thèmes Nominaux du Gaulois, I Ab- / Ixs(o)-*). Thanks to the strenuous efforts of this author, it seems undeniable that our knowledge of Gaulish material has considerably increased, and that the extant documentation of this diminished language is now more accessible and easier to handle.

This book is the second volume of Delamarre's dictionary of Gaulish nominal morphology. It is very intuitively articulated in three general blocks: the first comprises the ten remaining letters (*L, M, N, O, P, R, S, T, U, X*), whose entries are organised as in the preceding volume: 1) lemma; 2) translation into French and English; 3) alphabetical exposition of the common and proper derivatives subdivided according to their onomastics classification; and 4) etymology, if any.

The second section contains various annexes and *indices verborum*, which are extremely useful from the point of view of comparative linguistics and onomastic studies, as well as some brief theoretical notes on Gaulish and Indo-European name-formation. Interestingly, among the aforementioned annexes, one finds an introduction to Gaulish patterns of name formation and derivational mechanisms (pp. 453-470), a survey of the instances of homophony between Celtic and Latin or Greek proper and common names that are not etymologically related (pp. 471-480), a list of semantic interpretation of each proper name encompassing all onomastic categories (pp. 481-528), and a list of Gaulish personal names attested in non-Indo-European areas, like Africa or Syria (pp. 529-532).

As for the *indices verborum*, these sections are divided into 1) Indo-European; 2) Celtic languages; and 3) all other historical Indo-European dialects (pp. 533-564). Each word is conveniently followed by the Gaulish stem to which it was compared, facilitating one's search in the book.

Finally, the third and last section comprises *addenda et corrigenda* of the previous volume (pp. 565-570). Here, the author has enriched some of the entries with recently found or formerly ignored Celtic material.

The interest and value of this work for documentary purposes is therefore more than evident. After a careful reading of the text, I have detected some aspects that could benefit from

a more detailed analysis, in the same way that other methodological and formal aspects need to be revised. I would like to point out some of these problems with the aim of making a positive contribution to a work of such proportions.

The first point that strikes me is the usual tendency to favour analysis of proper names as compounds by default, ignoring well-attested derivational mechanisms on countless occasions. As can be inferred from Delamarre's own theoretical introduction at the beginning of Annex I (p. 435), there is a long-standing conviction about Indo-European name formation which holds that the creation of aristocratic proper names through composition was the norm. Nevertheless, this can be regarded as an instance of aprioristic reasoning since it does not always fit the situation attested in the daughter languages.

It happens to be true that this type of analysis gives rise to more semantically attractive etymologies, but very often these etymologies are completely lacking in formational and/or morphophonological logic. Such is the case of an alleged stem *\*tano-* 'fire' (p. 324). The French author identifies it in multiple proper names, even though it is most probable that it never existed at all. On the one hand, the first problem concerns the very derivation of the presumed stem *\*tano-*: the stem from which OW./OCo. *tan* 'fire' comes is *\*teqnet-* —ultimately this can be traced back to an *s*-stem *\*tepnēs-* —, which most likely would have evolved into Gaulish *\*tenV-*, after total loss of /p/ following /e/ in the sequence *-epn-* (OIr. *tene*, cf. Kortlandt 2007: 54; Matasović 2009: 375).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, several of these names may be given an alternative, much more satisfactory etymology: e.g. the DN CORIOTANA[E] could be understood as a possible Italic deinstrumental derivative of the *aegrōtus* type (*\*-oh<sub>1</sub>-to-*) starting from the stem *\*korjō-* 'army, people in arms', later suffixed by *\*-ānā-*. Thus, we could posit that we are dealing here with a tutelary goddess of war;<sup>2</sup> the PN AVITANVS is simply a derivative of Latin cognomen AVITVS (Lat. *avītus* 'grandfather');

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<sup>1</sup>In any case, the unexpected vocalism of the Brythonic forms has not been successfully explained to date (cf. Wodtko, Irslinger & Schneider [NIL] 699-700).

<sup>2</sup>The geographical factor militates against an Italic origin, although one should also consider the option that the dedicant is a Roman citizen stating his *tria nomina*. On onomastic compounds with *\*korjō-*, see Kaczyńska (2007) and Medrano Duque (2023: 97-100).

the PNs MAGITANVS and NERITANVS are mere mentions of origin derived via the complex suffix *\*-īt-āno-* of obscure ultimate origin.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the PN †TANICIVS found in Lusitania is nothing but an erroneous reading for TANCINVS (a well-documented PN spread all over the western façade of the Iberian Peninsula, especially in Lusitania), *et ita porro*.

Another clear example of this propensity for composition is the DN SILGINA, understood by Delamarre as a *tatpuruṣa* compound *\*Sili-cēnā-* ‘daughter of the lineage’ or ‘(goddess that procures a) long future’ (p. 279). However, this analysis involves diverse formal shortcomings that are entirely insurmountable: Namely, the syncopation of *-i-*, the unexpected treatment of the labiovelar in *\*kʷēno-* ‘long’ (unattested outside the Goidelic branch, OIr. *cían*), and the contextual sonorization of /k/ (cf. Medrano Duque forthcoming 1). Still, a derivation from the PC noun *\*selgā* ‘hunting’ (OIr. *selg*, OW. *helgha*, Co. *helghya*) seems perfectly plausible, and it requires no additional special pleadings.<sup>4</sup>

In the same vein, a parallel fate seems to befall the DN SOVCONNAE (> RN *Saône*), parsed by Delamarre as a compound formed by the prefix *\*h<sub>1</sub>su-* ‘good’ and *\*peuk-* ‘pine’ (the latter is only attested in MIr. *ochtach* ‘pine’), thus ‘(goddess) of the pines’ or ‘(river) of pines’ (pp. 304, 486). However, a derivation starting from the verbal root *\*seu-k-/ \*seu-g-* ‘to suck’ (already formulated by Pokorny in 1940: 122-123) or else from the root *\*seuh<sub>1</sub>-k-* ‘to press, to push’ and a frequent nasal suffix which was later feminised (*Motionsfeminina*) *\*-ōnā-/-ōnnā-* proves significantly more convincing in morphological terms.

Secondly, with regard to the palaeographical and epigraphical aspects, the author generally offers the reconstruction of the name in the nominative case or else its dissected morphological structure, thus altering the reality of the

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<sup>3</sup>Even if the identification of *\*-āno-* poses no difficulty, the first element *\*-īt-* remains a mystery. Derivations from Gk. *-ίτης* [*Ἀρβανίτης*, *Συβαρίτης*, etc.] or from an unknown substrate language had already been rejected by Leumann, Hofmann, and Szantyr (1977: 324, with references).

<sup>4</sup>Surprisingly, this stem *\*selgā* has been introduced in passing in the dictionary (s.v. *selgouo-* ‘hunter’, p. 265), despite displaying several derivatives in Celtic, cf. Medrano Duque (2024).

transmitted documentation and sometimes hindering its search.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this problem appears to be magnified due to the absence of epigraphical and literary references to the original sources. This causes misunderstandings or even confusion on multiple occasions, as can be seen in a so-called collective theonym *Vocontii* (p. 488), which, to our knowledge, is only registered as the ethnonym for the well-known people in Gallia Narbonensis, or in a British DN †ARVALO (Devon, Collingwood et al. 1965: 369), an uncertain reading, which, since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, has been rejected in favour of <ALO>, the only visible letters in the inscription.<sup>6</sup>

Thirdly, it seems pertinent to mention the treatment of the Celtic onomastic material found in the Aquitania province, which, because of the inherent problems regarding its location and coexistence with a non-Indo-European language, is frequently omitted in this kind of work, despite sometimes displaying a transparent Indo-European etymology. This is the case of the DNs EXP(E)RCENNIO (absent in *\*perc-*, pp. 177-178) and SVBREMI (absent in *\*su-*, p. 304-307 [but present in his previous work of 2019: 145, s.v. *brem-*]). Simultaneously, other DNs of Aquitania included in this book (TELON[I], STANNA[E], ALARDOSTO, ODRITO, etc.) are being thoroughly studied in a parallel ongoing research (Medrano Duque forthcoming 2), so here I will simply warn of the need for their linguistic revision.

As far as the use of recent specialised literature is concerned, several works refuting some of the traditional etymologies offered in this work and others have not been taken into account. Some examples are the proper names ECOVERVS (p. 404) or ECOINI (p. 419) that have been consistently analysed as derivatives of PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>ékʷos* 'horse', even though the assumption that the sequence *-kʷ-* did not evolve to /p/ in Gallo-Brythonic in some contexts, due to linguistic conservatism, has been proven wrong and implausible on phonetic grounds (see Prósper & Medrano Duque 2022). Other examples include the derivation of the epithet CNABETIO from

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<sup>5</sup>For this reason, we have included here the original forms following the current academic convention of epigraphic and palaeographic transcriptions.

<sup>6</sup>Moreover, subsequent palaeographic and epigraphic studies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century revealed that its engraving was not ancient or even Roman (cf. Collingwood et al. 1965 with bibliography).

the root *\*h<sub>3</sub>ṛb<sup>h</sup>*- ‘navel’ (p. 123) (< *\*k<sub>ṛ</sub>h<sub>2</sub>-b<sup>h</sup>*- ‘to rub, to scrape off’, see Lambert 2012: 121, but already proposed in Pokorny 1959: 559-563), the relationship between the second member of the compound in the DN ANDARTAE with the PC stem *\*arto-* ‘bear’ (p. 480) (< *\*h<sub>2</sub>r-tó-* ‘fixed, composed’, *vid.* Prósper 2018a: 12),<sup>7</sup> and that of a Galatian EN *Ambitouti* –also documented as a PN in western provinces– with a stem *\*outu-* ‘terror’ (pp. 168-169) (< *\*teutā-* ‘people, tribe’, see Wodtko 2013: 222).

Unfortunately, most aspects of Indo-European and, more concretely, Celtic dialectology are often neglected in works of this nature. For instance, the dialectal adscription of Galatian forms remains many times unspecified, as in the ENs Πηγόσαγες (p. 230) and the already mentioned *Ambitouti* (pp. 168-169) or the PNs with *\*-rīg-* as the second member of the compound: Ἀδιατόριξ, ΑΛΒΙΟΡΙΞ, ΑΤΕΠΟΡΕΙΓΟΣ, ΒΟΥΔΟΡΙΞ, and Γαιζατόριγος (pp. 207-208).<sup>8</sup> I also consider it relevant to point out the author’s inconsistency in referring to proper names transmitted by Greek sources since he alternates with no apparent justification between the original alphabet and the Latin transcription, thus affecting overall coherence.

In a similar way, Celtiberian and Hispano-Celtic testimonies are not at all differentiated throughout the whole dictionary; they are equally labelled with the generic glottonym ‘Celtic of Hispania’ so that the phonetic reality and morphological patterns of these Celtic dialects are to some extent ignored: e.g. PNs PENTIVS (p. 177) and *teiuoreikis* (p. 208);<sup>9</sup> PINs

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<sup>7</sup>The same scholar, in her review of Delamarre’s 2017 work (2018b: 17-18), casts doubt on the Celtic etymology proposed by Delamarre for the DN SVNVSALI (Mommsen et al. XIII, 8248 et al., limited to Germania inferior), thus arguing for a Germanic genesis, although it was not included in the discussed volume as a possibility either.

<sup>8</sup>Indeed, despite the fact that Galatian is the most poorly documented Celtic dialect on the continent, we can give a good account of some phonetic features that separate it from its western counterparts (see Eska 2013, with bibliography).

<sup>9</sup>The restitution of the nom. sg. case, †*Devorix* (cf. Hispano-Celtic PN in the dat. sg. DEVORI, Gaulish DIORIX, and the insular DEVORIGI) is rooted in the Celtiberian *i*-stem adjective *teiuoreikis* (Luzaga, Guadalajara), universally understood as a predicative ‘king of gods’ until the works of Wodtko (2000: 371-372) and Villar and Prósper (2005: 237-240), where, among other things, a structure formed by *\*-rīg-* ‘king’ as the second member is denied and a

*Segobriga* (p. 261), *Albocela* (p. 517), *Contrebia* (p. 519), etc. In any case, stating the origins and linguistic filiation of every form ought to be regarded as a *conditio sine qua non* to reflect the geographical limits and linguistic reality of Gaulish material in relation to other historical dialects.

Another exceptional contribution by Delamarre is the inclusion of annexes in the second part of the book. Particularly interesting is the one devoted to the Gaulish proper names — ‘*ou probablement gaulois*’— found in African and Syrian territory (Annex 5, pp. 529-531), from which one can study the presence and impact of displaced Celtic peoples into areas of non-Indo-European populations. Annex 4 (pp. 517-528) deals with Gaulish (it would be better to say Celtic) hydrotoponymy and its meaning. Annex 1 (pp. 453-470) concerns the most frequent Gaulish derivational mechanisms in onomastic formations. Here some nuances are necessary: first of all, in Annex 5 we find it wise to cast doubts on the Celticity of these PNs, given that, for example, EVRVS and LEVCONOTVS (Dougga) cannot be respectively traced back to PC *\*eburo-* ‘yew’ and to PC *\*louko-* ‘white, bright’ (s.v. *leuco-* pp. 21-22 [*sic*]); rather they are to be analysed as Latinizations of the Greek proper names given to the personifications of the eastern wind, Εὐρος, and to that of the southern one, Λευκόνοτος.<sup>10</sup> MAVRVSIA (Alexandria, etc.) is to be understood as a clear derivative of Latin *maura* ‘black’ restricted to Africa and secondarily to Rome (and not from an alleged compound *\*magu-r(o)-u(χ)siā* ‘high servant’, p. 61); or LATONAE, found in a *titulus sacer* from Maktar (Tunisia), which should be regarded as the Roman goddess corresponding to Greek Titan Λητώ.

Furthermore, with regard to Annex 4, in addition to the fact that the linguistic label *Gaulish* cannot be systematically applied to every territory in the *Keltiké* (as the author does), there are

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*bahuvrīhi* compound nature *\*deīuo-reig-i-* ‘having a link with the god, bound to the god’ (< *\*reig-/reig-* ‘to unite’ [Rix 2001: 503]) is favoured, thus complementing the common name *kortika*.

<sup>10</sup>Apart from the insurmountable phonetic obstacles of the preceding hypotheses, the present analysis does not allow alternative interpretations, since the inscription is composed entirely of all the Graeco-Roman theonyms of wind divinities, as we see in other epigraphs in Hispania, Lusitania, or Venetia.

some forms that deserve a more in-depth revision, like the RN *Lambros* (Milan), which simply cannot be parsed as Celtic on phonetic grounds, given the labial result of the aspirated labiovelar (< PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>l̥ng<sup>uh</sup>-ro-* ‘quick, fast’, perhaps a Ligurian hydronym<sup>11</sup>), or the large series of PINs containing the well-known stem *\*uindo-* ‘white’ (pp. 417-419, 524-525), which is surprisingly translated at all times as ‘beautiful’ (e.g. *Vindolanda* ‘the beautiful meadow’, *Vindomagos* ‘the beautiful plain’, etc.<sup>12</sup>).

Finally, in the practical Annex 1, some morphological problems are detected, such as the identification of a derivative of PC *\*ausos-* ‘ear’ (or alternatively of ‘gold’, in this case necessarily being of Italic ancestry [< PIt *\*auzom*]) in the suffixation of names like the PIN *Nemausus* (Nîmes) or the PNs BACAVSVS and MEMAVSVS, but they are certainly not compounds. The idea that the obscure PIE suffix *\*-b<sup>h</sup>o-*, mostly found in zoonyms (Gk. ἔλαφος and ἔριφος, Skrt. *vṛṣabhā-*, with doubts Ga. *elembiu* [month name, Coligny], but not exclusively, cf. Risch 1974: 171),<sup>13</sup> was also productively employed in the creation of PNs like STRAMBVS (*Belgica*, *Germania superior*, *Moesia inferior*) is doubtful. No chronological dating is available (except for Mommsen et al. III, 14528: 151-300 CE), but the most plausible etymology derives it from Vulgar Latin adjective *strambus* ‘squint-eyed’, a parallel form to original *strabus* with epenthesis of a nasal (< Gk. στραβός; cf. It. *strambo*, Sp. *zambo*). Similarly, CORVMBVS (mainly restricted to Italic territory, cf.

<sup>11</sup>Moreover, s.v. *lambro-* (pp. 5-6) he ignores the existence of an extremely interesting theonym, ALAMBRIMAE (Narbonense, Mommsen et al. XII, 5848), which necessarily must be equally analysed as a non-Celtic DN that could be traced back to an ancient superlative prefixed *\*ad-lamb-r(o)-imā-* ‘the swiftest’ (< PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>l̥ng<sup>uh</sup>-ro-*).

<sup>12</sup>By contrast, in his 2003 work (320-321) we find without reservations the expected sense ‘white’ and not ‘beautiful’, whose semantic justification is based exclusively on medieval Brythonic derivatives, where ‘white’ developed a metaphorical meaning ‘good, fair, blessed’ (cf. Lat. *candidus*).

<sup>13</sup>However, as far as Greek forms are concerned, Beekes (2014, *passim*) analyses some zoonyms derived by means of the suffix *-(α)φ-* as pre-Greek (e.g. κίδαφος ‘fox’, ἄπαφος ‘hoopoe’, ἀσκάλαφος ‘type of bird’, θήραφος ‘spider’ etc.), so we could be dealing either with a situation of homophony between two suffixes of different linguistic origin or with the application of the suffix PIE to non-Indo-European stems. For a recent study of the possible origins of PIE *\*-b<sup>h</sup>o-* as a second member of compounds, see Pinault 2016.

too the more conservative variant CORYMBVS) is clearly a transcription of Greek PN Κόρυμβος (cf. κόρυμβος 'uppermost point (of a boat/hill)') and CACABVS (also documented as CACCABVS) is a PN coming from Lat. *cac(c)abus* 'cooking-pot', ultimately of non-Indo-European origin.<sup>14</sup> As we have seen, the above-mentioned derivations lack morphological logic and thus cannot be regarded as Celtic nouns anymore.

To conclude, I consider that it is also necessary to draw attention to the inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the author's notation of diacritics used in Indo-European, Latin, and general linguistics (glides, syllabic resonants and laryngeals, vowel quantity, etc.), as well as to some formal errors in the reconstruction methodology, where aspirated voiceless plosives are considered. For example on p. 172, *\*k<sup>w</sup>ent<sup>h</sup>-* [sic], /a/ is persistently employed as a potential phoneme in the proto-language reconstruction, the voiced allophone of /s/ is included before voiced consonants intermittently (e.g. *\*pezd-* and *\*nizdó-*, but *\*g<sup>w</sup>h̄islo-*), or different linguistic stages are superimposed without explanation (see the classification as 'indo-européen' of *\*al-*, *\*anko-*, *\*apo-* etc.).

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Delamarre's latest work makes a decisive contribution to the systematic compilation and structuring of Gaulish material, thus constituting a new reference work in the field. Thanks to the completion of this (second) volume, the nominal morphology of this fragmentary language will definitely shed new light on future research in Celtic and Indo-European linguistics. It also leaves the door open to possible formal comparisons between this Celtic dialect and other continental branches such as Celtiberian, Lepontic, and Galatian.

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<sup>14</sup>A fourth debatable example given by the author that has a different explanation is PN (†)CATTABVS, glossed by Whatmough also with a suffixation *-uus* (1970: 250). While the former, to our knowledge, is not attested, we have in Brescia a PN gen. sg. CATTAVI (Mommsen et al. V, 4762) which could support the presence of this second widely used suffix and again discredit a supposed Celtic denominative suffix *-bo-*. Even if, in any case, (†)CATTABVS did exist as PN, it should be unproblematically understood as a betacistic variant of the latter.

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### Abbreviations

DN = Divine name  
 EN = Ethnic name  
 PIN = Place name  
 PN = Personal name  
 RN = River name  
 Co. = Cornish  
 Ga. = Gaulish  
 Gk. = Greek  
 It. = Italian  
 Lat. = Latin  
 MIr. = Middle Irish  
 OCo. = Old Cornish  
 OIr. = Old Irish  
 OW. = Old Welsh  
 PC = Proto-Celtic  
 PIE = Proto-Indo-European  
 PIIt = Proto-Italic  
 Sp. = Spanish

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