

Latin Inscriptions of Ireland

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1. Overview

- I. Inscriptions in Roman Spain, 218-18 BCE
- II. Inscriptions in Ireland, 1750-present
- III. Conclusions and next steps

2. 'Roman' Spain, 218-18 BCE

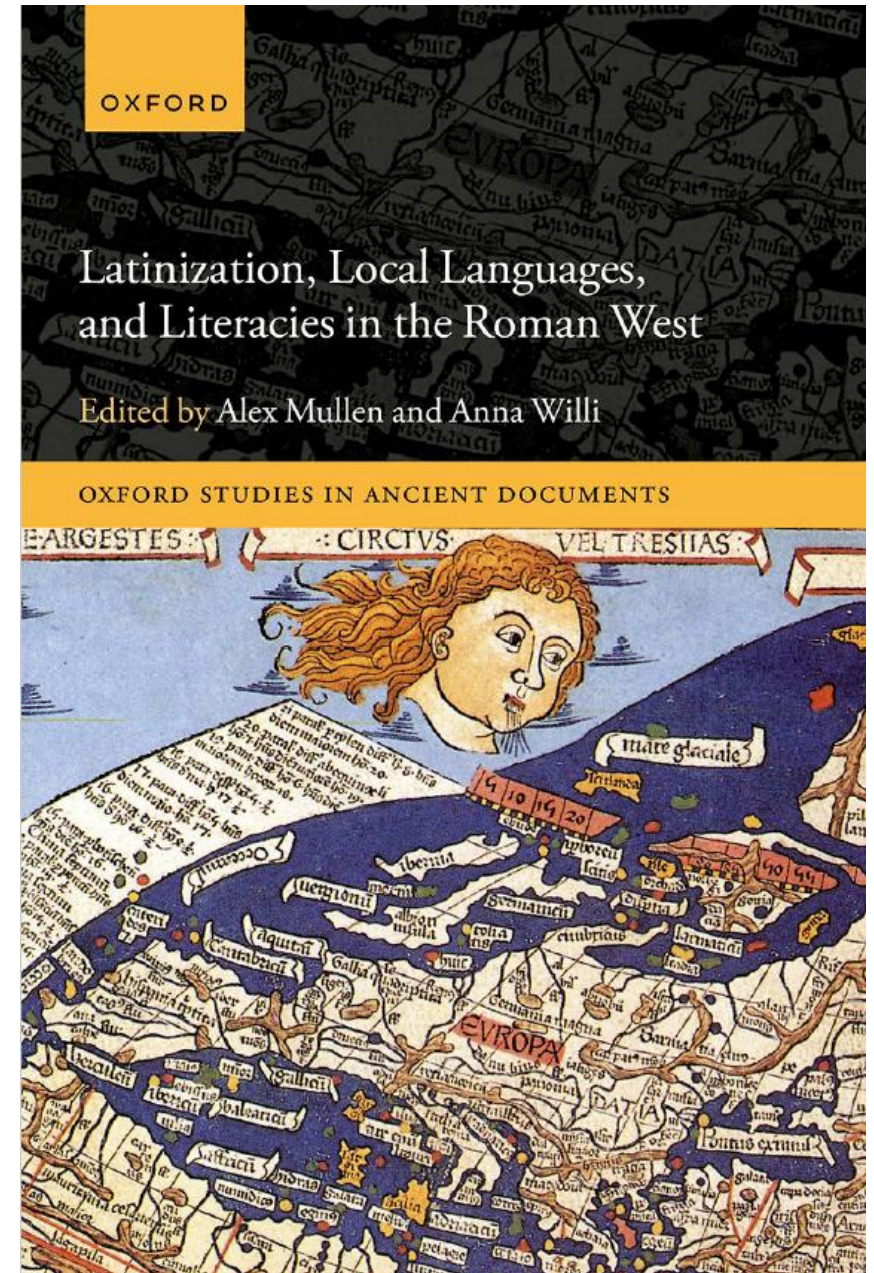


Map taken from Moncunill (2024) 51.

‘Iberian, a non-Indo-European language ... must be considered mostly undeciphered; our knowledge of Celtiberian is somewhat better, as it belongs to the Celtic group, although the longer texts also remain partly impenetrable; and, lastly, the evidence in Vasconic or Aquitanian, despite its manifest kinship with modern Basque, is too sparse for a full description of the language. These epigraphic documents show, in any case, contexts of language contact, as well as the sustained coexistence of speakers of different origins, which also must have undoubtedly involved situations of bilingualism, whether between indigenous languages, or with the first exogenous or colonial languages – that is, Phoenician and Greek.’

‘It has often been argued that the Romans did not develop a linguistic policy *stricto sensu* that imposed Latin on its people. What also seems irrefutable is that language change did not occur naturally and spontaneously. Rather, it was determined by the socio-political context, which was not free from impositions, especially military control, and social pressure in relation to the prestige, or lack thereof, of languages and the need to know Latin in order fully to participate and progress in society.’

Noemí Moncunill, in Mullen and Willi 2024, pp. 46, 49.

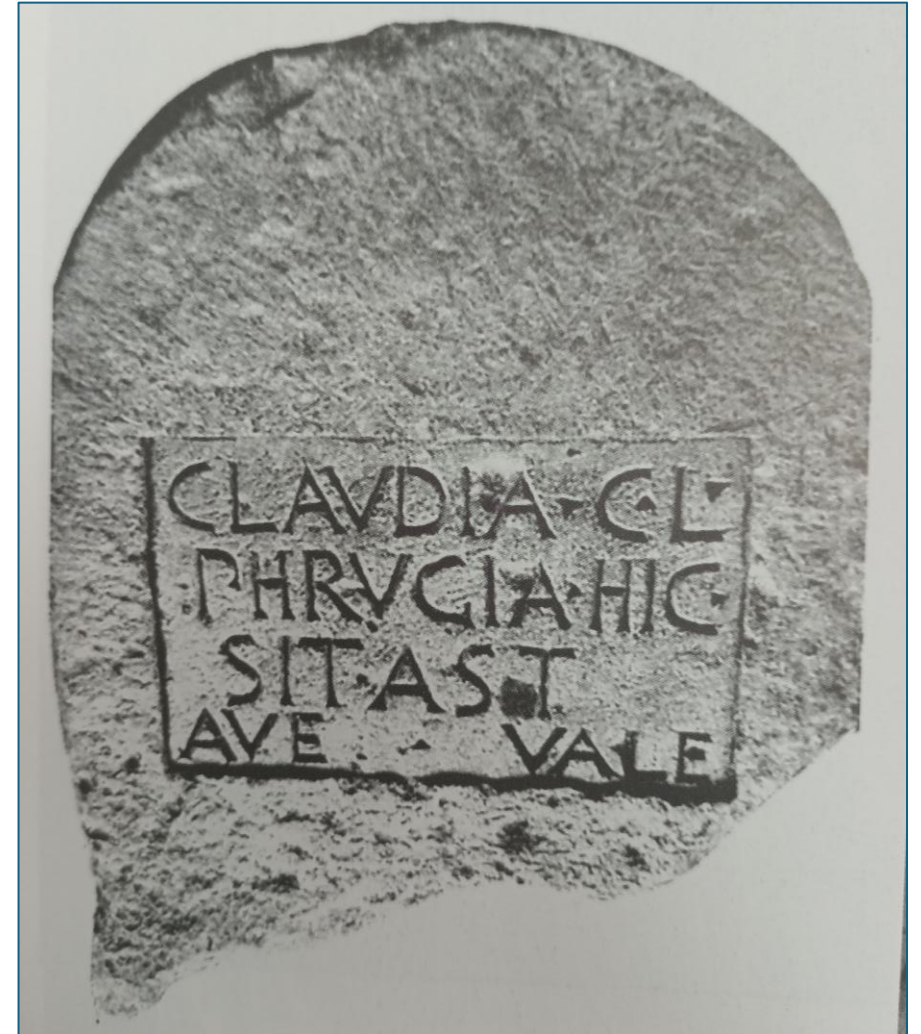


3. Claudia

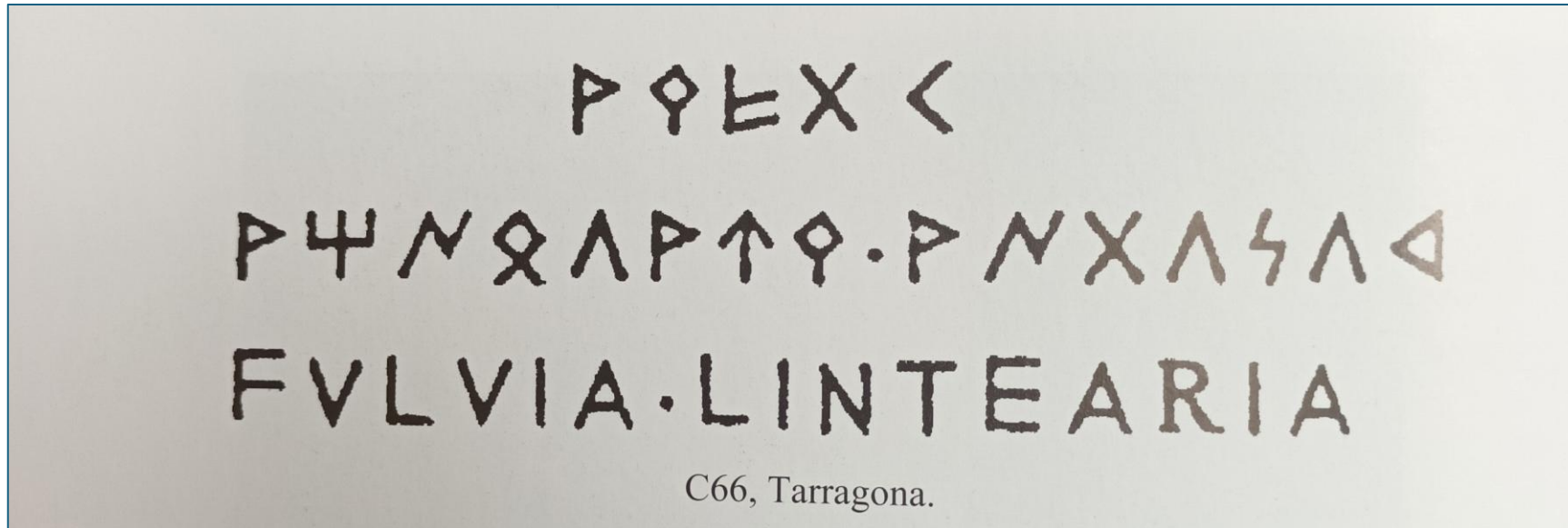
Claudia Phrygia, freedwoman of Gaius, lies here.
Hail, Farewell.

Stele found in a courtyard in Úbeda, northern Andalusia [Hispania Ulterior], in 1983. Late Republic or Principate. See Díaz Ariño 2008, 239-40 (Image, right = p. 348).

‘Epitaphs account for perhaps two-thirds of all surviving Greek and Latin inscriptions and provide our most informative epigraphic evidence – indeed ... our best ancient evidence – for the lives of persons below the upper levels of society.’ Bodel 2001, 30.



4. Fulvia



‘Fulvia Linen-Weaver’

Bilingual funerary inscription in Iberian and Latin.

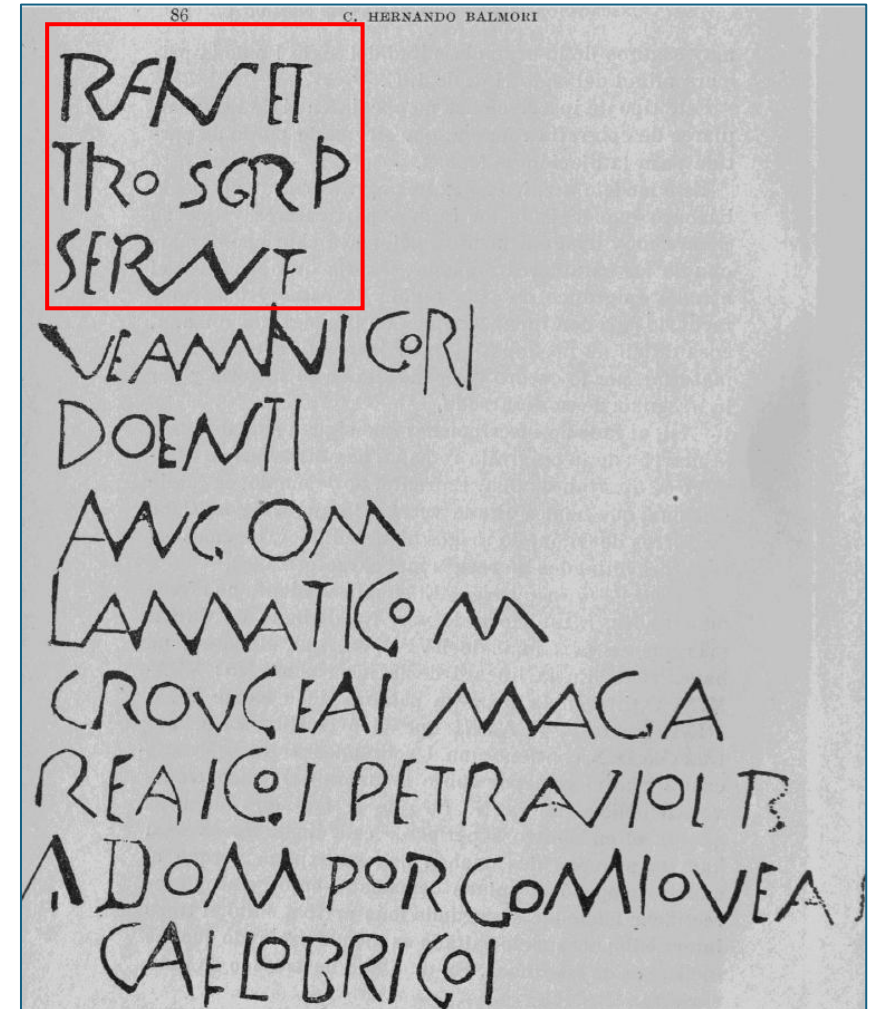
‘A stele of small dimensions. Discovered in 1801 during works at the port in Tarragona, in the garden of the Capuchin monastery. Lost.’

Díaz Ariño 2008, 153-4. Image, above = p. 320.

5. Rufinus and Tiro

‘Finally, there is a Lusitanian inscription from Portugal (the inscription of Lamas de Moledo) which is introduced in Latin with the words *Rufinus et Tiro scripserunt*. The writers must have been bilingual. They clearly wanted to identify themselves in Latin rather than the vernacular language, perhaps because they felt that Latin offered the better medium for drawing attention to their achievement. If so readers of Lusitanian might have been diminishing in number while those of Latin were anticipated to increase.’ - Adams 2003: 283.

Screenshot and text: Balmori (1935)



6. Virgil

A fragment of a Roman amphora used to carry olive oil, found in 2016 in the Guadalquivir Valley. González Tobar et al. (2023) read a phrase from Virgil's *Georgics* 1, 8-9:

*O Liber and bounteous Ceres, if by your grace
Earth changed Chaonia's acorn for the rich
corn ear, and blended draughts of Achelous
with the new-found grapes ... (Loeb).*

'... the presence of the graffito within the chain of production implies a significant level of literacy in the workshops for olive-oil amphorae in Baetica ...'.

González Tobar et al. 2023, 19.



7. Ireland

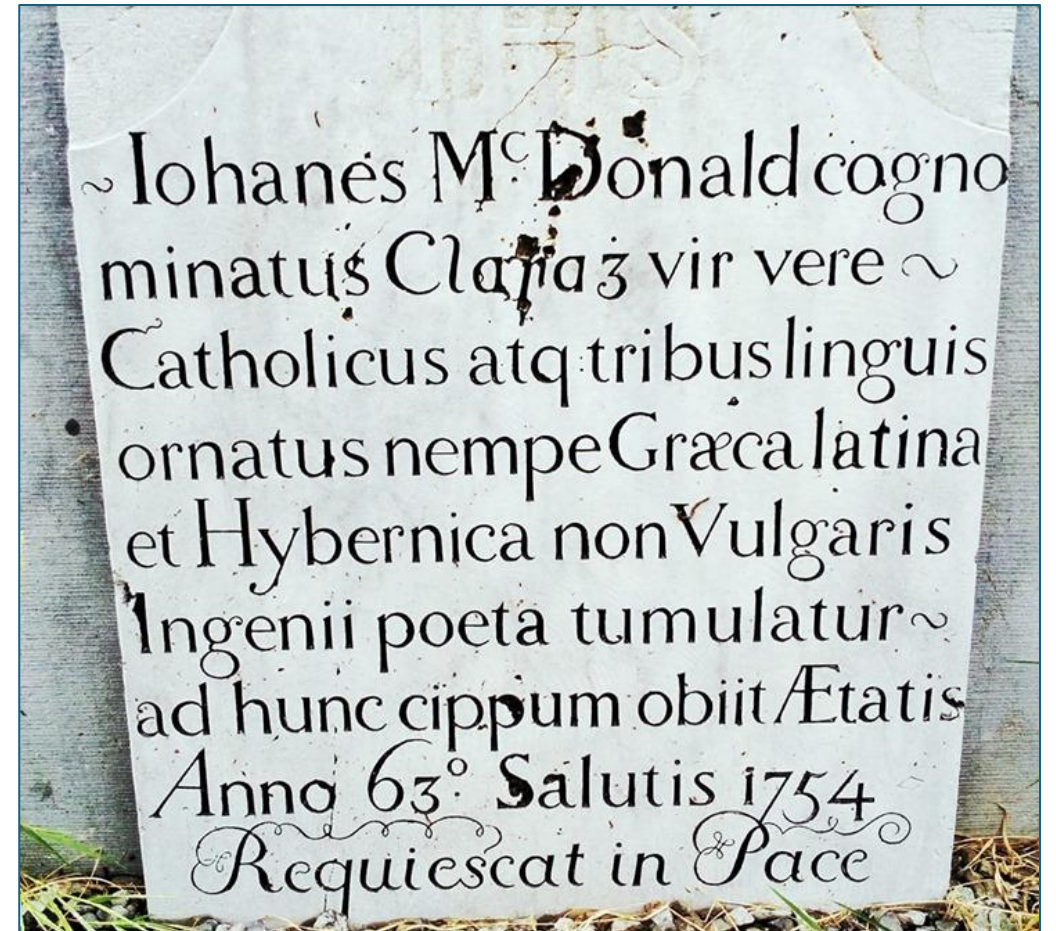
- No Roman occupation, but plenty of contact: cf. the ongoing excavations in Drumanagh in north Dublin.
- *But* centuries of engagement with Roman and Latin culture, including widespread adoption of ‘the epigraphic habit’.
- Three themes: multilingualism, colonisation, classicism.



8. Seán 'Clárach' MacDomhnaill (d. 1754)

Seán MacDomhnaill, named 'Clárach', a truly Catholic man and learned in three languages, namely Greek, Latin, and Irish; a poet of uncommon talent, is buried in this grave. He died aged 63 in the year of our salvation 1754. May he rest in peace.

clárach, 'big or broad faced'
Ennius' 'three hearts' (Gell. 17.17.1)
Jerome's Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.



9. Nicholas Walsh (No dates)

Nicolao Walsh
Qui hujusce Comitatus juvenes tam
Litteris quam moribus bonis
instituens
Vitam consumpsit.
Propter plurimas [virtutes]
eximiasque artes
Ingeniumque quo pollebat maxime
Condiscipulorum [...]
Discipulorum [...]
Amicorum [...]
Hoc monumentum posuere
Natus [Clongeen] [...] heu
Mortuus [...]
Anno Domini [...]
Amen

*For Nicholas Walsh, who spent his
life instructing the youth of this
county in letters and good manners.*

*Because of his many [virtues] and
rare skills, as well as his remarkable
talent, his old schoolmates, his
students, and his friends, have set up
this monument.*

*Born in [Clongeen] ... alas ... died ... in
the year of Our Lord ... Amen.*

Partially legible gravestone in the
graveyard at Clongeen, co. Wexford.



10. Tadhg ‘Gaelach’ Ó Suilleabháin (d. 1795)

Here lies Tadhg, look this way, traveller,
A little earth covers a famous poet!
Alas, dead he lies, unswerving Fate has won;
His soaring spirit seeks the lofty stars.
Who will sing the praises of the Irish, the deeds of its heroes?
With Gaelach gone, the Irish Muse is silent.
Singing holy songs in learned metres he has passed on;
Victorious now, he has received his sure reward.
By praising the Lord he made beautiful poems,
And now he will sing sweet hymns with gusto.
Weep, ye Muses! Your adoptive son is no more,
Eochad’s son is no longer and all the fields are silent.
He hoped for peace, so let him rest in peace eternally;
He reaches now the blessed kingdoms of our heavenly Father.

Composed Donncha MacConnmara c. 1795; Latin elegiac couplets. Inscribed on a headstone for Ó Suilleabháin in the Old Graveyard at Ballylaneen, co. Waterford. A translation as Gaeilge later added in front by a local schoolteacher.



11. Charles Le Poer Trench (d. 1839)



DEATH OF THE ARCHDEACON OF ARDAGH.

It is with deep regret we have to announce the demise of the amiable and high minded Hon. Charles Le Poer Trench, which took place at his seat, Macknay, near Ballinasloe, at half-past twelve o'clock, on the morning of the 31st ult. Typhus fever was the disease which removed this excellent Christian from the scene of his usefulness, and carried him off in a very few days. He caught the infection during his spiritual vocation, while attending at the sick bed of one of his poor parishioners.—*Leinster Express*,



11a. Charles Le Poer Trench (d. 1839)

HON VEN VIRO CAROLO LE POER TRENCH D.D.

ARCHIDIACONO ARDACHENSI

Qui diu in hac regione versatus Sacerdotis sanctissimi
Iudicis incorrupti Amici fidi optimique Civis
Laudem perpetuam auferebat.

MONUMENTUM HOC

COGNATI IPSIUS VICINI OPPIDANIQUE

Ordinis cuiusque homines studiisque etiam diversi
Benevolentiae eius officiis libenter usi viventis
Eximiaeque virtutis haud immemores defuncti
STATUENDUM CURAVERE

OBIT. PRID. KAL. NOV. A.D. MDCCCXXXIX ANNOS NATUS

To the honourable and venerable Charles Le Power Trench D.D.
Archdeacon of Ardachan

Who through his long service in this area as a most holy minister,
fair magistrate, faithful friend, and excellent citizen,
garnered eternal praise.

His relatives, neighbours, and fellow townspeople – those of every
rank and profession –
set up this monument, having known gladly the works of his
kindness while he lived,
and not forgetting his outstanding virtue after his death.

He died 31 October 1839, aged 66.

12. Dan O'Connell (d. 1847)

To Daniel O'Connell

Famed deliverer of civil and religious liberties for his native Ireland.

Who, on his way to Rome, died in this building on 15th May 1847.

This monument made with money collected in the centenary of his birth 1875.

PECVNIA COLLATIT.

collaticius-a-um, 'that which is collected for public benefit'

See *TLL* 3.1577.34-36; also *CIL* 10.411 (a Roman bridge in Lucania):
ex pecunia publica et conlaticia.



13. Street Latin



14. Some conclusions

- The Roman 'epigraphic habit' widely adopted in Ireland for commemoration, showcasing the politics of language and colonialism on the island in different ways.
- The Irish inscriptions shown today recognisably and at times impeccably 'classical', demonstrating the (re)appropriation of a cultural form.
- But no sign (yet) of the commemoration of the less visible in society: are there (how many) memorials in Latin to women, labourers, people of colour in Ireland?
- Also a strain of modern, pop-cultural and political Latin in temporary signage, stickers, graffiti.

15. Next steps

- This project started this time last year as a ‘crowd-sourcing’ experiment, via a website and Instagram.
- Some previous work done separately by CAI, envisaging collection of inscriptions around Ireland.
- The feasibility of furthering the project; how best to source, advertise, etc. ‘Meaningful’ material vs. the rest.
- Thanks for listening! (ckerriga@tcd.ie)

<https://latin-inscriptions-ireland.squarespace.com/>

IG: @inscriptioneshibernicae

Works Cited

- Adams, J. N. (2003), *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Oxford).
- Bodel, J. (ed.) (2001), *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient history from inscriptions* (London).
- Díaz Ariño, Borja (2008), *Epigrafía latina republicana de Hispania* (Barcelona).
- González Tobar, Iván, Soler i Nicolau, Antonia, and Berni Millet, Piero (2023), ‘Las *Geórgicas* de Virgilio *in figlinis*: a propósito de un grafito *ante cocturam* sobre un ánfora olearica bética’, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 36: 1–22.
- Hernando Balmori, C. (1935), ‘Sobre la inscripción bilingüe de Lamas de Moredo’, *Emerita* 3, 77-119.
- Moncunill, Noemí (2024), ‘Indigenous Languages, Bilingualism, and Literacy in Hispania Citerior, Third Century BCE – First Century CE’, in A. Mullen and A. Willi (eds), *Latinization, Local Languages, and Literacies in the Roman West* (Oxford), 45–83.
- ‘News of the Day’, *Freeman’s Journal*, 4 November 1839, accessed via *British Library Newspapers* online database, 12 August 2025.

Further Reading

Biographies for Seán MacDomhnaill, Tadhg Ó Suilleabháin, and Daniel O’Connell can be found online at the Dictionary of Irish Biography. <https://www.dib.ie/>

Alex Mullen and Anna Willi’s edited volume *Latinization, Local Languages, and Literacies in the Roman West* (Oxford, 2024), is available via open-access at [this link](#).