

Research Report

The Rock of the Dead: new “Latin” or “Iberian-Guanche” Inscriptions found in Tenerife (Canary Islands, Spain)

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Abstract - A new panel of “Latin” or Iberian-Guanche rock inscriptions has been found in Tenerife, a transcription and translation hypotheses have been put forward based on a methodology involving semantics and phonology of Basque and ancient Iberian language (used during the 1st millennium BC in Iberia and France). Both Iberian-Guanche (at Canary Is) and Iberian (at France and Iberia) rock scripts are sometimes found together with naviform lines. These incise lineal rock scripts have been found in all Canary Islands and it supports the existence of a prehistoric Guanche common culture before Punic/Roman influence could arrive to the Archipelago and postulated Guanche incapacity to navigate is doubtful. This common writing in Canary Islands together with the finding of big rock carved (“Quesera”/Cheeseboard, Lanzarote) and other ancient calendars (Telde, Gran Canaria), cart-ruts and possible pyramids could put Canarian prehistory back much earlier. Origin of these incise linear rock scripts could be found comparing them with European Runes, Iberian, Etruscan and other Old Italian writings (Raetian, Venetian, Lepontic) and also with Sitovo and Gradeshnitsa inscriptions (Bulgaria, dated at least 5,000 years BP). Similar African scripts have also been found in Tunisia. Whether Canarian Iberian-Guanche incise lineal script is origin of any or some of the above mentioned similar scripts or vice versa is open. Finally, population genetics is not a tool to draw absolute conclusions to define origin or population relatedness (i.e.: Canarians) , if it is not used in conjunction with other Anthropology branches , like Archaeology, Language, writing systems, paleo-Anatomy and other Culture traits.

Keywords: Rock Scripts, Inscriptions, Canary Islands, Iberian, Guanche, Lybic, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Quesera, Cheeseboard, Pyramids, Berber, Africa, Punic, Roman, Western Sahara, Tunissia, Sitovo, Gradeshnitsa, Runes, Iberian, Etruscan, Venetian, Lepontic, Raetic, Lybic, The Rock of the Dead, Calendar. Gran Canaria, Tenerife, La Palma, El Hierro, La Gomera, letreros, Roca del Muerto , Basque-Iberian, Vascoiberismo.

Introduction

The Canary Islands form an Atlantic volcanic archipelago, composed of 7 main islands that started to emerge around 25 million years ago from the Atlantic Ocean seabed. Tenerife emerged about 12 million years ago (Fig. 1), and homes the highest volcano in the Canaries which also is the highest peak in Spain (Teide, 3,718 meters, 12,198 feet high).

Iberian inscriptions have been found throughout Iberia, southern France and a few ones in Sardinia on different supports like: stone, lead and clay (Arnaiz-Villena 2000; Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2001). They are thought to have been used during the 1st millennium B.C. and probably were written until 2nd century A.D. (Arribas 1976). The same Iberian scripts were found in engraved rocks of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote, the Canaries' easternmost islands (Ulbricht 1990; Pichler 1995; 2003). They were thought to be Latin but the inscriptions lack the following letters: C, Q, H, P, T, which are fundamental for the Latin writing (Ulbricht 1990; Pichler 2003; Arnaiz-Villena et al. 1999, 2001, 2019b). In addition, no translation has been possible from Latin, except when Iberian semi-syllabary was used (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2001; 2019b);

https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File%3AIberian-Guanche_inscriptions.pdf&page=1). On the other hand, Latin inscriptions have also been found in El Hierro (Nowak 1994) and all other main 4 islands (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2019b): Tenerife (Gonzalez-Anton et al, 2009) Island, Gran Canaria (Cuenca-Sanabria 1996), La Gomera (Navarro 1996) and La Palma (Pais 2008, 2010 in <http://www.cabildodelanzarote.com/patrimonio/VIIcongreso/ponencias/jueves/Las%20intervenciones%20rupestres%20de%20los%20benahoritas.%20Jorge%20Pais.pdf>). They have been named Iberian-Guanche inscriptions for the first time in Arnaiz-Villena et al. (2001).

In the present paper, we describe another panel of Iberian-Guanche rock scripts found in Tenerife on an apparently polished rock before to performing the inscriptions. A proposal of transcription and translation is hypothesized. It is pointed out that these inscriptions are most likely widespread throughout Canary Archipelago and not only located in the easternmost islands (Lanzarote and Fuerteventura); they may have been unnoticed by archaeologists or independent field researchers since these linear rock incisions may have been taken as accidental rock scratches. In the westernmost Canary Islands, especially at the North coast, where is wet and cloudy, most rocks are covered with a thick patina formed by lichens and moss hindering their visual detection / recognition. In Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, which are much dryer islands, these marks are easier to locate (Arnaiz-Villena & Alonso-Garcia 2001; Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2019b).

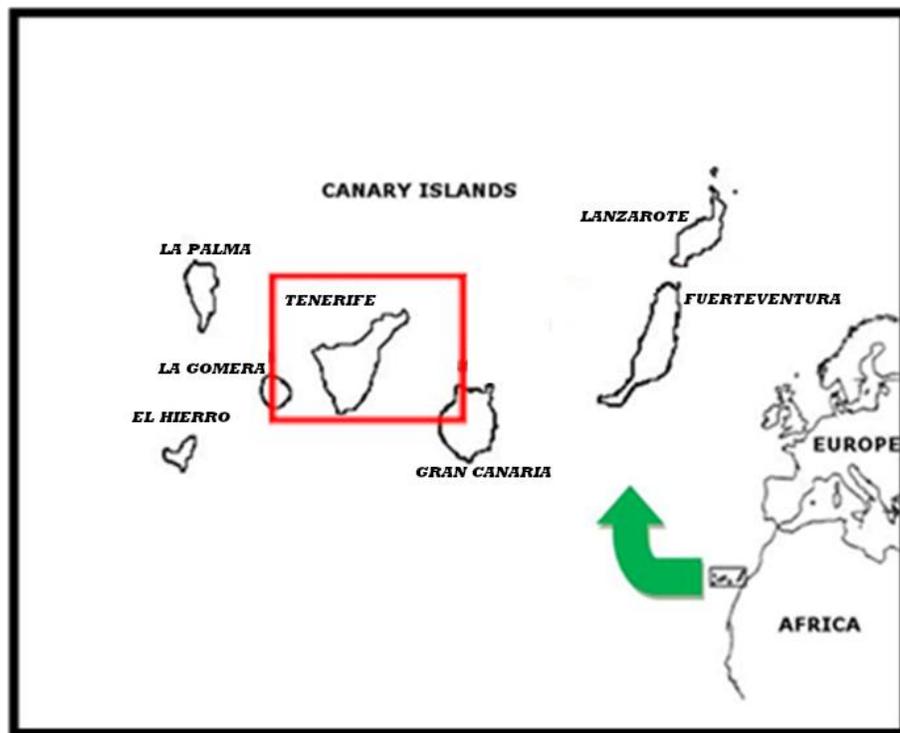


Fig. 1 Map of Canary Islands.

Lanzarote Island is 125 km (78 miles) apart off African Coast. Fuerteventura Island is at 97 km (60.27 miles) off Africa coast.

Material and Methods

Discovery

The inscriptions are located on an isolated rock protruding from the soil (1.95 cm wide x 80 cm high; 0.06 x 2.62 feet) probably a part of a bigger and deeper portion of bed rock. It was found by Abel Bello, Gustavo Sanchez and Juan Carlos Gonzalez in June 2019, in the municipality of San Juan de la Rambla (Tenerife's North West). The stone was located in a leafy portion of laurel forest (Fig. 2). It was observed that one face was apparently polished, covered in part by lichens and showing engraved lineal characters. Apparent rock polishing / flattening had been performed in the stone face that was going to be inscribed remarking the social / personal importance of this inscription (Figs. 2 and 3).

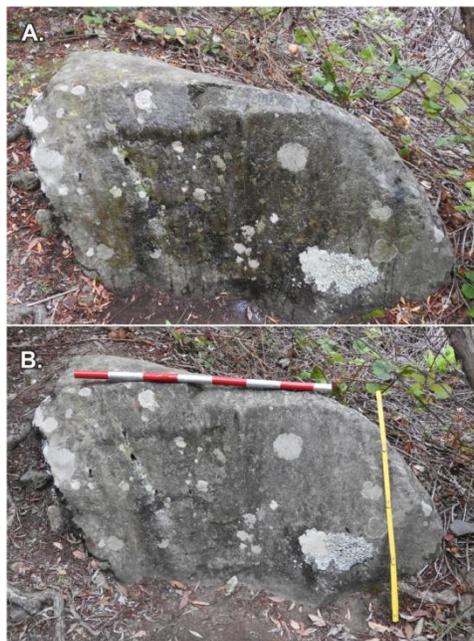


Fig. 2

A. Rock with lineal inscriptions panel. Front view. **B.** Measuring rode 1 m (39.3 inches). Yellow tape 80 cm (31.4 inches) (Photographs by G. Sanchez Romero).



Fig. 3a

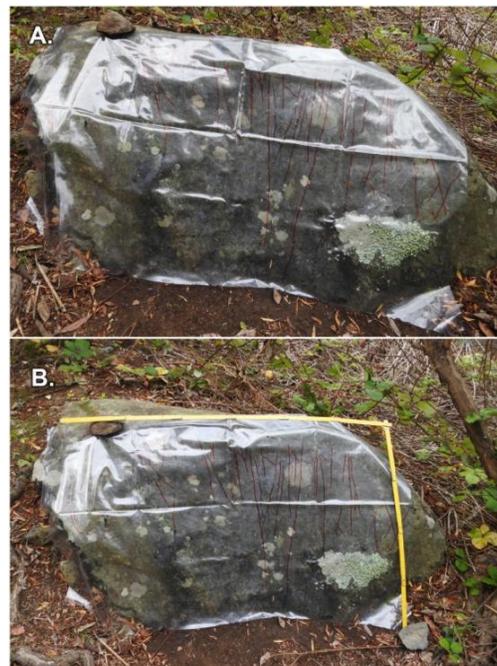


Fig. 3b

Fig. 3a. The Rock of the Dead. **A.** side views, the inscriptions are on the side where the measuring tape leans. **B.** Back view. **C.** Top view. **D.** Back / top view (Photographs by G. Sanchez-Romero).

Fig. 3b. **A.** Stone covered by plastic in order to trace the inscriptions (red); **B.** Upper ruler: 120 cm (47.24 inches) Lower: 80 cm (31.4 inches) (Photographs by G. Sanchez Romero).

This stone is merging above soil and is part of a basaltic bed rock which is earthed and strongly rooted. Authors have named it as “Roca del Muerto” or “The Rock of the Dead” (see Discussion section for name choice; in summary, it is because the proposed meaning of scripts is funerary and contains the word “Dead”).

Inscriptions panel

Figure 3 shows the inscriptions after covering the rock with a thick transparent plastic and tracing them with a permanent ink marker for further study. Images were also subsequently traced to a rigid piece of acrylic plastic, photographed with a Nikon P900 camera and later transferred to a computer. This allows working with Photoshop Software and JPG formats. Inscriptions of panel were also digitally transformed into white lines with black background and vice versa.

Location and Measurement

Inscriptions had been performed by incision and size varies between 5 and 40 cm long-vertical (1.9 – 15.7 inches). Location script panel is facing west: 235 ° azimuth. Altitude above sea level is 450 meters (1,476 feet). GPS coordinates were also recorded but not yet shown in order to protect the site.

Incisions are approximately of 2 mm wide 0.5 mm deep (0.07 in. wide 0.02 in. deep), the surface patina shows a very dark color and identical to underlying rock, so it seems they are ancient. No sign of recent lighter incisions were seen. Lichens are growing on areas of this rock due to high humidity and mist. Incised rock scripts are popularly named as “letreros” in Spanish at Canary Islands and some other places.

In addition, a Celestron Handheld Digital Microscope Pro 200x 5MP (Celestron Global, 2835 Columbia Street Torrance, CA 90503, U.S.A) was used to study the script signs incisions.

Transcription and translation hypothesis

See Arnaiz-Villena 2000; Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2019b.

A comparison of phonology and semantics was carried out by using the Iberian semi-syllabary; this method has been implemented with Basque and Iberian language equivalences that have been obtained by comparing several live and dead Mediterranean languages (Arnaiz-Villena 2000; Arnaiz-Villena & Alonso-Garcia 2001, 2007).

Results

A general impression of panel inscriptions is that writer wanted to inscribe more than (s)he could in the limited space: big size differences are observed and in Iberian signs and they do not follow a single line. It was apparent that a cross (X = TA in Iberian, see Appendix I) was observed after careful magnification instead of a short line, and that two long incisions had been done, hypothetically with aim of separation. Thus, we have divided the panel scripts in three parts (Fig. 4). Otherwise, the 2 lines could converge within earthed rock and form a big “V” (Iberian)=M=(A)M(A)=Mother Goddess (see below).

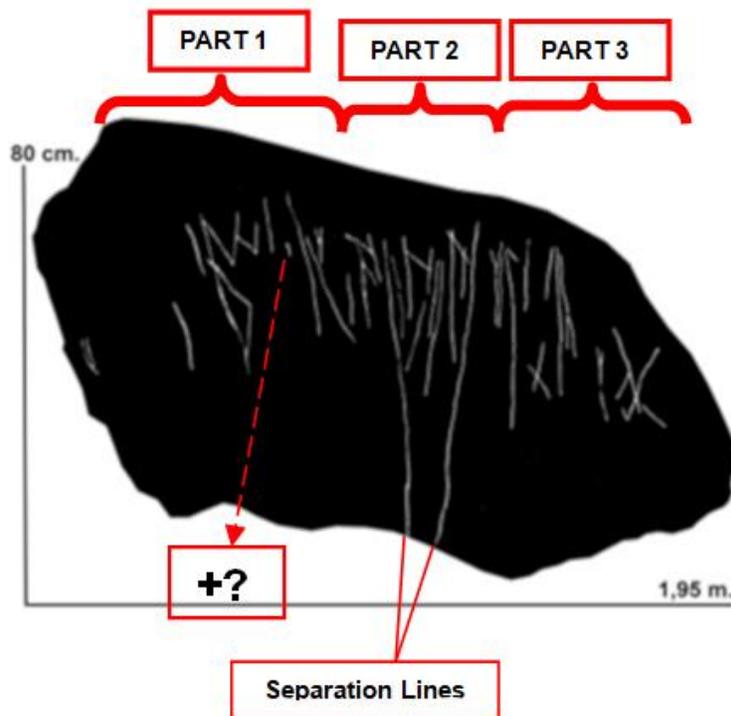


Fig. 4 Parts which divide Ibero-Guanche Inscription

Subsequently magnified characters were numbered in order to more easily analyze them (Fig. 5) by following the Iberian semi-syllabary of equivalences to phonetic Spanish sounds described by Gomez-Moreno (1949; 1962), see Appendix I.

Proposed transcriptions were achieved by taking into account that Canarian rock scripts (both “Latin” or Iberian-Guanche and Lybic) tend to join signs and some other specific characters. (Springer-Bunk 2001; Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2001, 2002).

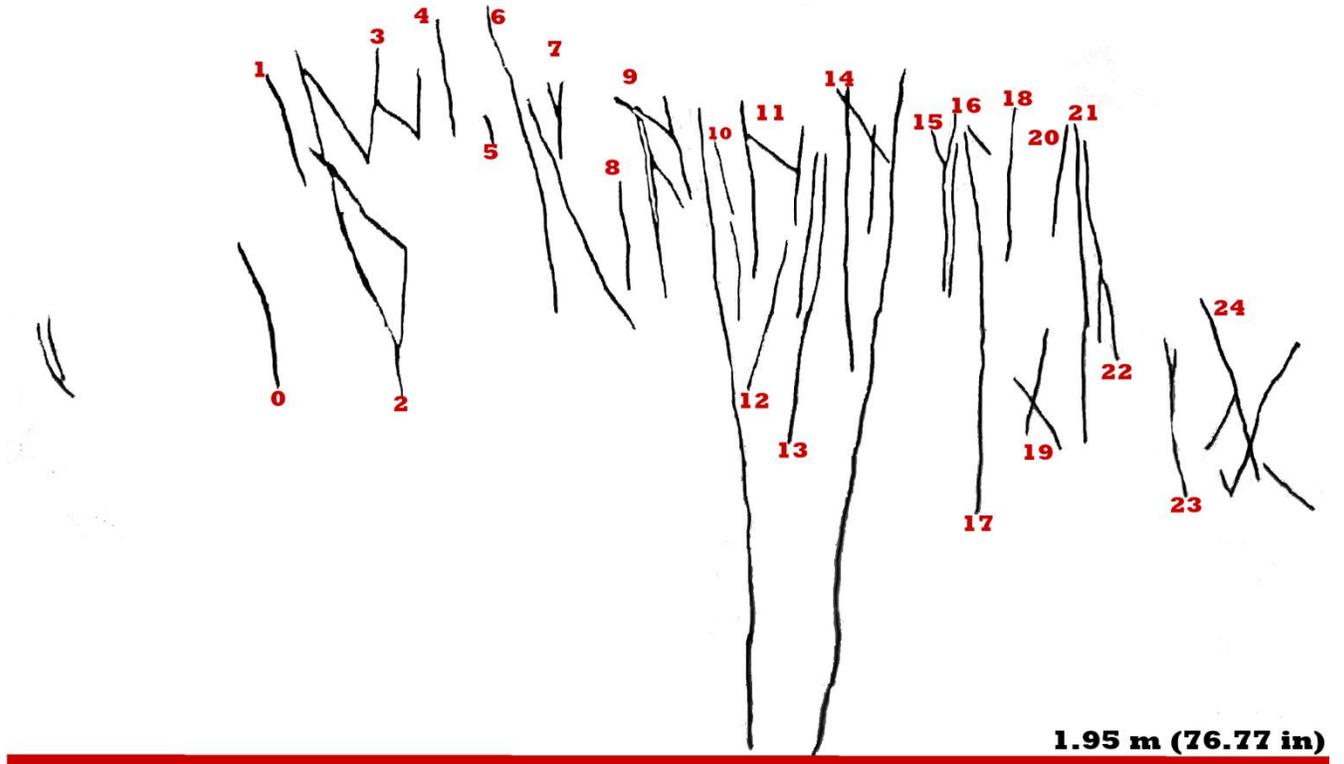


Fig. 5

Signs that may be distinguish by using Iberian semi-syllabary (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2019b; Gómez-Moreno 1949; 1962).

PART 1

1 | = BA 2 ▷ = A 3 \mathcal{M} = I 4 | = BA 5 X = TA 6 λ = M↓
 7 γ = M 8 | = B 9 Linked scripts, similar to 6+7 λ = M ; γ = M

PART 2

10 | = BA 11 H = O 12 | = BA 13 γ = M 14 λ = KA

PART 3

15 γ = M 16 | = BA 17 \uparrow = L 18 | = BA 19 X = TA 20 | = BA

21 + 22 = Linked scripts like: 6+7 y 9 λ = M, M

23 γ = M 24 = Linked: λ = M↓ ; X = TA

Fig. 6

Transcription hypothesis by using ancient Iberian semi-syllabary (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2019b; Gomez-Moreno 1949; 1962).

Also, a translation taking into account that Iberian and Basque languages are similar and their methodology was already carried out and detailed (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iberian-Guanche_inscriptions.pdf) (Arnaiz-Villena 2000 chapter 9; Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2001; Arnaiz-Villena & Alonso-Garcia 2007). Again, nowadays most Spanish academics accept Basque and Iberian close relationships since Basque and ancient Iberian numerals are identical (Ferrer i Jane 2009; Orduña-Aznar 2005; 2013). Also, ancient Iberian stop to be scripted or written by II century AD after being used at least one millennium before (Arribas 1976).

Discussion

Translation proposal of the Rock of the Dead ("La Roca del Muerto")

The following words meaning in Basque language is: AKA=the dead. AMA=mother, Mother Goddess, ATA=door (to the other World), BA=bai, yes (see Materials and Methods section, Arnaiz-Villena 2000, chapter 9). Both right and left side lines of the panel have been disregarded for transcription because they seemed to be damaged.

Part 1- Comments:

Iberian (Ib.) sign equivalent to "I" (3) is not written in exactly the same as it has been found represented until now in Iberian semi-syllabary and reported Iberian scripts. Scripts 6 + 7 and 9 (Ib.) seem to be linked, i.e.: M = (A)(MA), (A)M(A) (Arnaiz-Villena 2000). It would seem a repeated exclamation calling to AMA, Mother Goddess, the Ancient Goddess (Arnaiz-Villena & Alonso-Garcia 2001). Sign N° 6 = M is written upside down as indicated by arrow ↓. Other signs may have a meaning that we will study further to propose a complete translation in another study.

Part 2-Comments:

Smaller Iberian signs 10, 11, 12, and 13 will be studied for translation hypothesis in another paper. Sign 13 is M, or (A)M(A) another invocation to Mother Goddess of Ancient religion (Arnaiz-Villena & Alonso-Garcia 2001). Biggest character is K = (A)K(A) = The dead. Thus, this part is related to a funerary dedicatory in favour of a possible dead person (animal?) which may or may be not buried nearby. AKA = Dead, is the biggest character of this central part and this is because we have named it "The Rock of the Dead".

Part 3:

This is full of assertions I(Ib.) = BA(Ba.) = YES; (A)T(A) = door (of the other World).

In summary in the panel may be distinguished clearly three regions with repeated signs, which are religious words of the religion of AMA (THE MOTHER GODDESS), ATA = DOOR (entrance of other World). Sign I (Ib.) = BAI = YES is incised all over the panel; AKA = the dead is the biggest and only one non repeated word. The panel of scripts is likely to be an invocation to the Goddess (AMA), with many assertions and two

mentions to other world DOOR = ATA (Arnaiz-Villena 2000; Arnaiz-Villena & Alonso-Garcia 2001, 2007; Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2001, 2019b). Incised lines of scripts are very long and not straight: either person who made this panel was not fit or a harder stone (or metal, extant in Lanzarote in 1st millennium BC, Atoche Peña & Ramirez Rodriguez 2009) used to make incisions was not appropriate or both circumstances occurred. However, incisions, at small microscopically scale (signs), seem to be firm and deep (Fig. 7). It is more likely that longitude of some letters, letters position or writer fitness are to blame of lines not keeping a straight course. Assertions or repetitions (YES) were frequent when addressing to divinities in Mother Religion (Arnaiz-Villena 2000; Arnaiz-Villena & Alonso-Garcia, 2001). Otherwise, repetitions and other details may reflect that it was written as poetry or a standard prayer or epitaph for dead (like RIP, in Spanish tombs=Requiescat In Pace in Latin). Religious and funerary topics are the most common found by us at Fuerteventura inscriptions and many repetitions in different panels were found (Arnaiz-Villena & Alonso-Garcia 2001

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File%3A%20Iberian-Guanche inscriptions.pdf&page=1](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File%3A%20Iberian-Guanche%20inscriptions.pdf&page=1); Pichler 1995; 2003), but also found in other Iberian scripts in France and Iberia.

Context, Origin and Antiquity

These lineal incise inscriptions are found not only in Lanzarote and Fuerteventura Canary Islands but in all others. (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2019b) This reflects that a common culture for Canary Islands ancient inhabitants existed and it goes against that Guanches did not navigate among islands. Several strata on Canary Islands culture regarding time, peopling (different peoples) and languages may have existed. Lybic Inscriptions when being written mixed with Iberian-Guanche inscriptions are always found above “Latin” or Ibero-Guanche inscriptions in Lanzarote (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2019b); this finding is suggestive that Iberian-Guanche inscriptions are more ancient. As stated above, these incise inscriptions have been found in all other Canary Islands. It was found another rock incise lineal Iberian-Guanche inscription at “Cañada de Ovejeros”, **Tenerife** Island and it was recorded as “neo-Punic” by authors (Gonzalez-Anton et al. 2009). A wooden handle from **La Gomera** Island “El Cerrillal” site (Navarro 1996, page 266) is also scripted. Letters Y and V are repeated in

Iberian semi-syllabary (both signs are M) (see Appendix I). If vowels have been omitted as used to be in North Africa and Canary Islands ancient Lybic languages (Arnaiz-Villena & Alonso-Garcia 2001) a possible translation and be a repeated “(A) M (A) i.e.: invocation to “AMA”, Mother Goddess. (Gonzalez-Anton et al. 2009). Similar inscriptions and translations have been proposed in **Fuerteventura** and **Lanzarote** Ibero-Guanche scripts (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2001; Arnaiz-Villena & Alonso-Garcia 2001). A panel of drawings is depicted from, “Laja de la Mula”, an archaeological site at Mogan Village (South **Gran Canaria**). Again “Y”(Ib.) and “V”(Ib.) = M (Appendix I) may be seen (repeated invocation again to (A) M (A)?, Mother Goddess) (Cuenca-Sanabria 1996). Also, identical rock incise lineal signs to that of Lanzarote/Fuerteventura have been reported in **La Palma** Island (Pais 2008; Pais 2010 in <http://www.cabildodelanzarote.com/patrimonio/VIIcongreso/ponencias/jueves/Las%20intervenciones%20rupestres%20de%20los%20benahoritas.%20Jorge%20Pais.pdf>).

Finally, Nowak (Nowak, 1994) described very early another “Latin”, Ibero-Guanche writing in **El Hierro** Island. The fact that naviform lines are found both in Iberian-Guanche (Canary Is) and also in Iberian France and Iberian Peninsula rock inscriptions (La Cerdaña Region), makes both kind of writings culturally more similar (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2015).

In addition, the Lanzarote finding of a big lunisolar calendar carved in basaltic rock and similar to ancient Egyptian one at way of counting years and time. (Marcial-Medina & Arnaiz-Villena 2018a, 2018b); other calendars that have been found in Gran Canaria Island (“CuatroPuertas” and “Ermita de la Virgen”), Telde (Barrios-Garcia 2004; 2018). This suggests existence of a Guanche culture previous to a hypothetical pre-Punic/Roman cultural influence. In fact, 14 carbon isotope dating of some Lanzarote archaeological artifacts is calculated as old at 1st millennium BC (Atoche & Ramirez-Rodriguez 2009). Also pyramids exist in North Africa, including Western Sahara, only about a 97 km (60.27 miles) far from Fuerteventura (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2019b), that supports existence of **ancient pyramids at Güimar (Tenerife)**. Recently **cart-ruts** have been found on the top of several Lanzarote volcanoes (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2018; Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2019a): these cart-ruts are found throughout Mediterranean and also in Azores (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2019a; Ribeiro et al. 2015). In Malta have been dated at Bronze Age, but multiple time

strata of construction are possible. All this context of generalized prehistoric Iberian-Guanche scripts, calendars, cart-ruts and possible pyramids, support an ancient prehistoric Guanche common culture in all islands, probably long before than Punic or Roman influence may arrive.

Finally, this linear incise scripts as the Ibero-Guanche panel described in the present paper should be compared to very old and similar Gradeshnitsa

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gradeshnitsa_tablet and Sitovo

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitovo_inscription (Bulgaria) scripts dated at 4th - 5th millennium BC, and also with Etruscan and other old North Italian Scripts like (Raetian, Vnetian and Lepontic or Runes) (Arnaiz-Villena 2019b; Figs 9 and 10)

(<https://www.omniglot.com/writing/olditalic.htm>).

Also, similar inscriptions have been found in Tunisia (Bonifay 2004) and may be found in other parts of Sahara Dessert and even have a common origin with lineal ancient Berber (Hachid 2000; 2003). Thus, Canarian Ibero-Guanche script could be origin of Atlantic and Mediterranean, Europe and Africa incise lineal scripts or the opposite could be true. It may be that these lineal writing were invented in one or more places (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2001; 2015; 2017; 2019b).

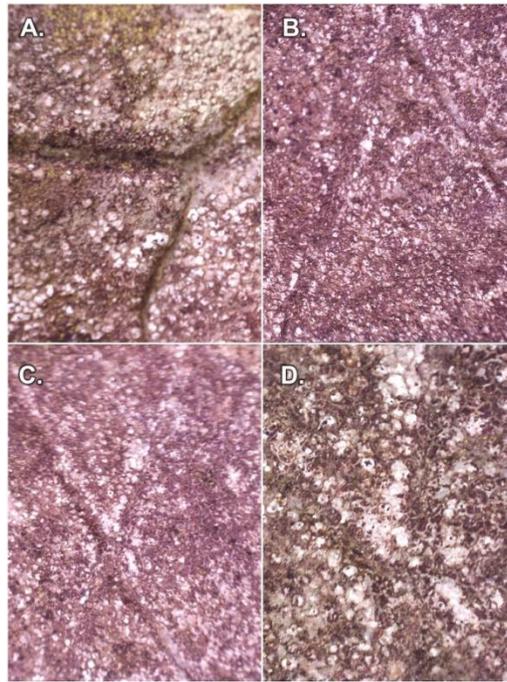


Fig. 7 A-D. Microscopic views of the letter's grooves. Photos taken with Celestron HDM Pro digital microscope (Photos by G. Sánchez Romero and Abel Bello).

Conclusions

1. One more Iberian-Guanche rock inscription panel is found in Tenerife Island, a hypothesis for a transcription and a translation is proposed.
2. The inscription rock has been named “The Rock of the Dead” (“Roca del Muerto”) because the biggest word written in panel may be “Dead” (AKA).
3. This Iberian-Guanche lineal inscriptions origin may be autochthonous or from Atlantic or Mediterranean areas of Europe and Africa. Some similar scripts found in Bulgaria are about 5,000 years old. The possibility of a Canarian origin is feasible and open.
4. If transcription and translation is correct, the repetition of the same scripts and the same ritual, funerary or religious meaning among Fuerteventura and other islands analyzed scripts, suggest that they are funerary/religious standard formulas, like that of present day RIP (“Requiescat in Pace” in Latin). This type of religious and funerary inscriptions have also been found in Iberia and France and together with Iberian Guanche scripts are written together with close naviform lines on panel (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2015). Thus, common cultural features are found in Iberia, Europe and Canary Islands in prehistoric times (1st millennium BC). Navigation among Canary Islands most likely existed in Prehistory.
5. The presence of this type of incise lineal inscriptions in all Canary Islands suggests that prehistoric Canarians had a common culture, although different peopling at different stages is very likely to have occurred (Farrujia de la Rosa et al. 2009).
6. The idea that Guanches did develop a lent and post-Punic/Roman culture is not feasible in the context of these prehistoric Canarian scripts, rock carved calendars and cart-ruts.
7. Population genetics by itself is subject to many different and equally valid interpretations about origin and relatedness of population: Archaeology, Paleo-Anatomy and Culture manifestations (i.e.: writing, language) are necessary to reach more solid conclusions. It is useless discussing, whether Canarians are more genetically related to North Africans or Iberians, since an ancient prehistoric flow is demonstrated between North Africa and Iberia and both genetic profiles are very similar (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2019b).

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Appendix I

Iberian →		Tartessian ←	Phoenician	Ancient Greek	Iberian →		Tartessian ←	Phoenician	Ancient Greek
R D P P	a	Δ Δ	κ Ϝ	α Α	ρ ϐ	bi	γ	⋈ ϐ	⋈ ϐ
Ε Ε Ε	e	Ϝ Ϝ (Ϝ Ϝ)	Ϝ	ε ϛ	χ χ χ	bo	⋈ Ϝ Ϝ		
Ν Ν	z	Ϸ Ϸ (Ϸ Ϸ)	ζ	ζ ι	□	bu	□ (ι ι)		
Η Η	o	ο ο ϑ	ο	ο	χ	ka	† χ †	† χ †	τ ε
Α Α ↑	u	Ϸ ↑ ü?	Ϸ Ϸ	Ϸ υ	⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖	ke	⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖	⊖ Ϝ	⊖ Ϝ
Λ Λ Λ	l	ι	λ	ι υ	Ϸ Ϸ Ϸ Ϸ	li	⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈	⋈ Ϝ	⋈ Ϝ
⊖ ⊖ ⊖ ⊖	r	ρ ϑ ϑ	ρ	ρ ϑ	Ϸ Ϸ Ϸ	lo	⋈ ⋈ ⋈		
Μ Μ	s	μ μ μ	ω Ϝ	μ	⊕ Δ Δ Δ	tu	Δ Δ Ϸ (Ϸ Δ)	Δ Δ	Δ Δ
Ξ Ξ Ξ	ς	Ϝ Ϝ (Ϝ Ϝ)	Ϝ	Ϝ x	Α Α Λ	ca	Λ (⊕)	ι ϑ	ι Λ ϑ
Υ Υ Ϸ Ϸ	m	Ϸ Ϸ	Ϸ Ϸ	μ	< ⊖ Ϸ Ϸ <	ke	⋈ Ϸ Ϸ Ϸ Ϸ	Ϸ Ϝ	Ϸ Ϝ
Ν Ν	n	Ϸ Ϸ Ϸ (Ϸ Ϸ)	ν	ν	Ϝ Ϸ Ϸ Ϸ	ki	ι Ϝ Ϸ (Ϸ Ϸ?)		
ι	ba	ι			⊗	co	⋈ ⊗		
ρ Ϸ Ϸ Ϸ	be	ρ Ϸ			⊖ ⊖	cu	⊖ ⊖ (⊖)	⊖ Ϝ	⊖ Ϝ

Iberian-Tartessian semi-syllabary (Gómez Moreno, 1949; 1962); comparison with other language scripts.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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