Gaulish SUIOREBE 'with two sisters'

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Traces of the dual number may be identified in the Gaulish language on the basis of the historical-comparative method. It is suggested that the Gaulish form SUIOREBE represents an instrumental dual with the sociative meaning 'with two sisters'. The conclusion is that the Gaulish SUIOREBE contains the dual base SUIORE- (< IE. *swesore 'two sisters') accompanied by the dual ending -BE (< IE. *-bhēm).

Keywords: Gaulish language, dual number, instrumental-sociative case.

1. Introduction

It was observed some years ago that the Gaulish language demonstrates a number of words with the ending *-bo*, which are commonly identified as dative plural forms, and some items with the ending *-bi*, which seem to represent the instrumental plural, e.g.

1.1. Gaul. *atrebo* dat. pl. 'to the fathers' = Lat. *patrĭbus* dat.-abl. pl. (Delamarre 2003: 58-59), e.g. ATREBO AGANNTOBO 'to the holy fathers' (Danka & Witczak 2010: 19);

1.2. Gaul. *matrebo* dat. pl. 'to the mothers' (= Lat. *mātrĭbus* dat.-abl. pl.), e.g. Gaul. ΜΑΤΡΕΒΟ ΝΕΜΑΥΣΙΚΑΒΟ 'to the Mothers of Nemausis' (Delamarre 2003: 220; Danka & Witczak 2010: 19);

1.3. Gaul. *gobedbi* instr.-soc. pl. 'with smiths' (Lambert 1994: 99-100; Lejeune 1996: 126; Stüber 1998: 172) or abl. pl. 'by the smiths' (Schrijver 1997: 182). See also Blažek (2008: 67-71; 2010: 45-48).

The Gaulish ending *-bo* derives from IE. *-bho(s)*, cf. Lat. *-bus*, whereas the Gaulish ending *-bi* seems to represent IE. *-bhi(s)*, cf. OInd. *-bhiḥ*, Myc. Gk. *-pi*, Hom. Gk. -φι. It is generally concluded that "le gaulois avait conserve un instrumental-sociatif pluriel en *-bi* distinct du datif pluriel en *-bo*" (Lambert 1994: 100).

There are at least two words in the preserved Gaulish inscriptions which demonstrate an unusual ending *-be*, e.g.

1.4. Gaul. SUIOREBE (an inscription from Néris-Les-Bains, Allier);

1.5. Gaul. GANDOBE (a plate from Lezoux).

The forms ending with -*be* can hardly be explained as representing the dative plural or the ablative-sociative plural. It is necessary to discuss the two forms afresh.

2. A new (dual) interpretation of Gaulish *SUIOREBE*

The Gaulish inscription from Néris-Les-Bains (Allier) runs as follows (Lejeune 1988: 1-6):

> BRATRONOS / NANTONTICN / ЕPAÐATEXTO / RICI . LEUCUTIO / SUIOREBE. TOGI / TOI
>
> "Bratronos fils de Nantonos a établi un *leucution* (bois sacré ?) pour Epadatextorix, en association avec ses sœurs" (Lambert 1994: 105; Delamarre 2003: 286).

According to Mihailova (2007: 93-94), the interpretation of the Gaulish text is completely uncertain. However, it is obvious that the agent was a Gaul called Bratronos (literally 'a little brother'), who dedicates a *leucution* (grove?) to Epaðatextorix together with his sisters. This is why the Gaulish term SUIOREBE is generally treated as an instrumental-sociative form with the meaning 'with his sisters / association avec ses sœurs / вместе с сестрами' (Lambert 1994: 106; Mihailova 2007: 92). The Gaulish form in question has been compared with OIr. *sethraib*, the dative plural of OIr. *siur* f. 'sister' (< IE. **swesōr* f. 'id'). However, OIr. *sethraib* derives from Common Celtic **swesri-bi* < IE. **swesr̥-bhis* (MᶜCᴏɴᴇ 1994: 170), cf. OInd. *svásr̥bhiḥ* 'with sisters'.

The Gaulish form SUIOREBE appears to be hardly identical with OIr. *sethraib*. The Gaulish form was created on the basis of the full grade of the *r*-stem **swesor-* (e.g. nom. pl. **swesor-es*), whereas the Old Irish equivalent seems to derive from the zero grade of the *r*-stem (IE. **swesr̥-*). What is more, the Gaulish form demonstrates an additional vowel -*e*- between the nominal stem *suior*- (< IE. **swesor*-) and the case ending -*be*, whereas the Old Irish form shows only -*ri*- (< IE. **-r̥-*). Thus, the suggested equivalence does not seem exact and complete. Is it possible to explain the divergence observed between the Gaulish and Old Irish forms?

It cannot be excluded that the Gaulish form SUIOREBE derives from the nominative dual **suiore* 'two sisters' (< Continental Celtic **swehore* < IE. **swesore* nom. du. 'two sisters'). In fact, the dual number, in addition to the singular and the plural, is securely attested in the Celtic languages (Fritz 2011: 171-185). If the dual interpretation were correct, one could interpret the form *suiorebe* as a dative or instrumental dual form, containing the dual ending -*be* (< IE. **-bhēm*, cf. the Old Indic dual ending -*bhyām*, Avestan -*bya*, e.g. OInd. *sūnúbhyām* dat.-abl.-instr. du. 'to [by, with] two sons', Avest. *nərəbya* dat.-abl.-instr. du. 'to [by, with] two men'). The preserved *e*-vocalism demonstrates clearly that the original long vowel (IE. $*\bar{e}$ < PIE. $*eh_1$) must have been regularly shortened in the final, unaccented position. Thus, the Gaulish form SUIOREBE (as if from IE. **swesore-bhēm*) can be securely interpreted as the instrumental-sociative dual with the meaning 'with two sisters'.

3. The *GANDOBE* question

A different form with the ending *-be*, namely GANDOBE, is attested in the plate from Lezoux (Fr. *Le plat de Lezoux*). Unfortunately, the interpretation of this Gaulish text is difficult and complicated, since the right hand part of the inscription is wholly damaged.

The incomplete text of the Gaulish inscription runs as follows:

1. NE REGU. NA[…
2. GANDOBE INTE NOVIIO[…
3. EXTINCON. PAPI. CORIIOSED EXA O[…
4. MESAMOBI MOLATUS CERTIOGNU <SVETI>CON[…
5. PAPE BOVDI. MACARNI. PAPON MAR[…
6. NANE DEVORBVETID LONCATE[…
7. NU GNATE NE DAMA GUSSOV N[…
8. VERRO NE CVRRI NE BOVDI NE TETV[…
9. BATORON VEIA SVEBRETO SV[…
10. CITBIO LEDGAMO BERTO

A fragment is preserved on the reverse of the same inscription:

NENE DEVV[…
BVIT… ON[…

This inscription has been analyzed by Fleuriot (1980: 127-144), Meid (1986: 36-55), McCone (1994) and Lambert (1994: 146-147). It contains one form demonstrating a case ending with *-bi* (line 4: MESAMOBI, instr. pl. of an adjective in the superlative form, cf. OIr. *messam* 'the worst') and another form ending with *-be* in line 2:

(line 2) GANDOBE INTE NOVIIO[…

According to Lambert (1994: 147) and Delamarre (2003: 175), the Gaulish term GANDOBE represents the instrumental plural of the Celtic adjective **gando-*, which is also attested in Old Irish *gann*, *gand* 'rare'. Gaulish NOVIIO[seems to represent an adjective denoting 'new', cf. OIr. *núae* adj. 'new', OW. *novid*, MW. *newydd*, Bret. *nevez*, *newez*, Corn. *newyth* 'id.' (< Celtic **nowyos* adj. 'new' < IE. **newyos*), Gaulish place name *Noviodunum* liter. 'a new city' (Elsie 1979: 115; Delamarre 2003: 236; Matasović 2009: 293). The other adjective form nearby makes it possible to reconstruct: NOVIIO[BE].

(line 2) GANDOBE INTE NOVIIO[BE] …

It is not impossible, however, that the Gaulish form NOVIIO[BE] should be explained by means of the Romance appellative **novius* m. 'a new married one, bridegroom' (Meyer-Lübke 1935: 491), cf. Prov. *novi*, Catal. *nuvi*, Port. *noivo*, Sp. *novio* m. 'bridegroom, fiancé; suitor, one new to some dignity or state', *novia* f. 'bride, fiancé; sweetheart'. This Romance appellative, not attested in the Latin literary and epigraphic texts, may represent a Continental Celtic (esp. Gaulish) borrowing in Vulgar Latin. If NOVIIO[represents a Gaulish noun denoting 'a new married person, bridegroom' (fem. 'bride'), then the suggested reading NOVIIO[BE] evidently refers to a newly married couple or a bridal pair (i.e. two people newly related by marriage – the bride and bridegroom). In this case the proposed dual interpretation seems acceptable as well.

4. Conclusions

It can finally be concluded that the Gaulish language preserved some traces of the dual number. The inscriptional evidence is scarce, but positive: the Gaulish noun SUIOREBE should be interpreted as the instrumental dual demonstrating the sociative sense ('with two sisters'), whereas the phrase GANDOBE … NOVIIO[BE] may be translated in a similar way as a dual (e.g. 'with the rare bridal pair').

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