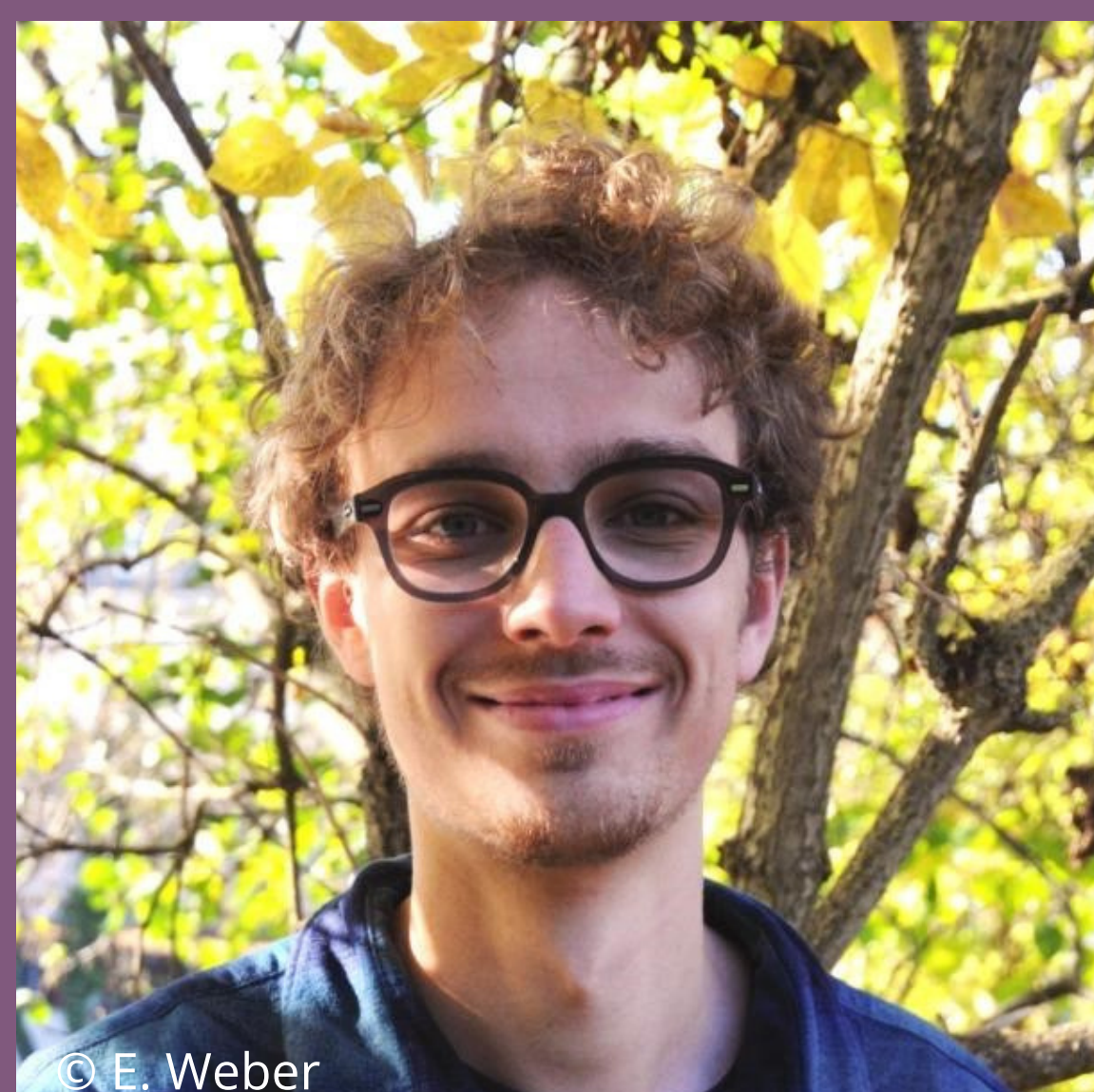


LINGUISTIC FEATURES



In contrast to well-known historical sources on the religion of the pre-Roman peoples of western Europe (e.g., Caesar, BG), we do not have much direct evidence from the speakers of Celtic and Italic languages themselves. What we have, however, are rituals attested in inscriptions in the vernacular pre-Roman languages like Gaulish and Umbrian. These inscriptions contain ritual instructions or even ritual speech, which can tell us important details about the structure and function of these rituals.



Matthias Donners
Historical-Comparative Linguistics

supervisors:
Theresa Roth
Emmanuel Dupraz

mentors:
Dennis Pausch
Constantin Willems

© from top:
Public domain.
Public domain.
Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY 2.5



CELTIC AND ITALIC

Understanding the Celtic and Italic ritual texts poses quite a challenge to scholars since the languages are only attested fragmentarily. One has to carefully choose from a handful of possible linguistic interpretations to make sense of a text. Comparison with similar inscriptions in Latin can be helpful in some cases: Certain genres of ritual texts, like defixiones, are attested throughout the whole Mediterranean, which enables an assessment of features of Gaulish defixiones in regard to their function and originality.

RITUALS

We define religion (and rituals) as a system of communication with supernatural agents. However, this communication is not face-to-face and requires specific settings and practices (both physical and linguistic) to ensure success. The conscious and elaborate enactment of these settings and practices can be understood as “staging”. The sacred nature of a setting or practice itself, however, cannot be presupposed, only indirectly inferred from the context.

ATMOSPHERE

Since every inscription reflects a real-life situation, conclusions about the nature of these situations can be drawn from examining the texts closely, considering also their material context. Ritual parameters, regarding setting and practices, are closely interrelated with the linguistic register and the structure of the text. The interplay of these parameters, which are constitutive for ritual success, can be understood as atmosphere, perceivable to participants with the necessary pre-disposal.