In 1897, near the commune of Coligny in eastern France, a certain Monsieur Roux discovered more than 150 fragments that comprise roughly half of what was once a single bronze tablet. Because the tablet, now known as the Coligny calendar, gives the months of a five-year cycle, including two intercalary months, rather than a single year, the missing parts of the inscription may be reconstructed with some confidence. Nor is it surprising that the language of the document is Gaulish, given that it was discovered in what was once a part of Roman Gaul. That being said, it is somewhat unexpected that the calendar appears to have been engraved in the last quarter of the second century CE.

Since its discovery in the late nineteenth century, the bronze fragments of the Coligny calendar have attracted the attention of Celticists, who have used this document to reconstruct the language and calendar of ancient Gaul, or

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1 The lacunae in the calendar do, however, allow for the possibility of variable lengths for some months. MacNeil 1926: 28–30 suggests that the month of *equos* had varying lengths throughout the five-year cycle in order to make the calendar reflect the length of five solar years more accurately.

2 In their discussion of the date of the calendar, Duval and Pinault 1986: 23–30 conclude (apparently in consultation with M. Richard Marichal) that its letter forms do not permit a date before the end of the second century CE. The fragments of a classicizing statue that were found with the calendar date between 50 and 150 CE.

3 Because the text of the calendar consists of abbreviations for the most part, interpreting the language of the calendar is especially hazardous. Duval and Pinault 1986: 335–395 provide an extensive month by month commentary on the text of the calendar and 1986: 421–427 a separate discussion of the meanings of individual lexemes, including a list of words that defy interpretation. Zavaroni 2007 makes suggestions for almost every single sequence of letters by means of the etymological method. Because, Zavaroni’s discussion is part of a synoptic interpretation of the calendar, however, many of his interpretations are polemical and sometimes idiosyncratic. Lambert 2003: 111–117 discusses the calendar more briefly than
even the calendar of the ancient Celtic ancestors of the Gauls. More recently, however, Roman historians have noted that the form of the calendar is demonstrably Roman and therefore indicative of pervasive Romanization.

As different as the nature of these studies may be, the overwhelming majority of them share an implicit assumption that the content of the calendar is, on the one hand, Gaulish, including its use of lunar months in contrast to the Julian calendar, but that the material form of the calendar is “wholly Roman” as asserted by Greg Woolf. For example, Sacha Stern, who understands the Coligny calendar as a form of local resistance to the official Roman calendar, recognizes that its material form appears to have been influenced by Roman fasti. Conversely, Garrett Olmsted assumes the content of the calendar was passed down orally. With the exception of Cathy Swift, who still argues that there is a relationship between the Coligny Calendar and Old Irish parallels, these assumptions consistently inform all of the previous studies that I have been able to find.

Although these suggestions about the nature of the Coligny calendar are all correct on a superficial level, they mask a complex dialogue between Latin and the Gaulish language, literacy and orality, and Roman and provincial identity that cannot be easily separated into different and independent voices. Even on the most basic level of language, there are spellings that reflect the influence of Latin on Gaulish, a result, I suggest, of an imperfect knowledge of Gaulish in an era when Latin was the first language in the Gallic provinces. In other words, Gaulish is here serving as “an emblem of groupness” or a “psychosocial rallying

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4 MacNeil 1928: 4–7 argues that it is unlikely that a Gaulish calendar would have been inscribed and displayed after Augustus and the Romanization of Gaul, an argument that was still accepted by some authorities as late as the 1990’s as Swift 2001: 84 has observed. MacNeil arrived at his conclusion, however, before anyone who was knowledgeable of Roman epigraphy appears to have examined the orthography of the calendar closely. Although Olmsted 1992: 71–74 is forced to acknowledge the inscription is a product of the late second century CE, he dates the calendar as it appears in the inscription to the first century BCE and then proceeds to argue that the Coligny calendar was derived from an earlier form that may be dated to the fourth century BCE or earlier.

6 Stern 2010: 311.
7 Olmsted 1992: 73.