

Fernández Corral, M. (2023). Roman Voting Tribes, Citizenship, and Epigraphic Habit: The Case Study of Hispania Citerior. En R. Benefiel & C. Keesling (Eds.), *Inscriptions and the Epigraphic Habit*, Brill. Brill Studies in Greek and Roman Epigraphy, 81-94.

https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004683129_005

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Roman Voting Tribes, Citizenship, and Epigraphic Habit: The Case Study of Hispania Citerior

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Abstract: This paper analyses the epigraphic evidence from Hispania Citerior that mentions Roman voting tribe and its connection to the epigraphic habit. Provincial elites used it in their public self-representation in different epigraphic contexts but, particularly, in honorific inscriptions. As a result, Roman citizenship could be epigraphically underrepresented in regions where the honorific epigraphic habit was uncommon. A good example of this epigraphic bias is found in the public dedications to provincial priests in Tarraco, since these inscriptions make visible Roman citizens from the NW of Hispania Citerior, where information about social promotion is otherwise limited.

The mention of a *tribus* is decisive proof of Roman citizenship and one of the best resources for epigraphists to identify Roman citizens in the provinces.¹ Indeed, although the *tribus* had limited impact outside Rome and it lost most of its political significance in imperial times,² it remained as an element of the nomenclature of Roman citizens - an undeniable proof of their legal status. However, it was not generally mandatory to mention it.³ There are plenty of examples of confirmed Roman citizens, such as veterans or local magistrates, who did not deem it necessary to include it as part of their name.⁴ This raises several questions regarding the value of the *tribus* in the nomenclature of citizens and, particularly, about the motivation to show it explicitly in epigraphy. If not everyone considered it necessary or convenient to mention their Roman voting tribe, was the decision motivated by personal reasons, context, or, perhaps, the epigraphic habit of the area?

¹ This paper was possible thanks to the funding of the Basque Government for the postdoctoral project “Escritura, conmemoración epigráfica y representatividad social de la epigrafía de época romana del Conventus Cluniensis”, the research project “PGC2018-097703-B-I00 (MCIU/AEI/, FEDER, UE): La construcción política de Hispania Citerior: las formas de organización cívica y no cívica de la población I” and the research group “IT1344-19: Historia de la Lengua Vasca y Lingüística Histórico-Comparada”.

² Taylor 2013 (1960): 16.

³ The *tribus* is usually mentioned only as part of the nomenclature of men, although there are some exceptional examples of women indicating their *tribus*, such as *Cretonia Maxima Pap(iria) Pacensis* (AE 1971, 147). Other examples in Hemelrijk 2015: 63, n. 98.

⁴ In Hispania Citerior the *tribus* was mentioned in approximately two-thirds of the inscriptions dedicated to magistrates, excluding coins, in Curchin 1990; 2015.

A previous study on the epigraphic record of the *tribus* Quirina in the province of Hispania Citerior⁵ suggested that public representation and the specific epigraphic context might have played an important role in this sense.⁶ The *tribus* Quirina was primarily mentioned in the context of honorific epigraphy and in funerary inscriptions carved on supports that could have been displayed in especially visible contexts such as mausoleums or on stone blocks that would probably have been part of a larger monument. The paper also exposed the necessity of expanding the analysis to all the *tribus* of the province and raised the question of how the epigraphic habit and its different expression in Hispania Citerior could have affected the representation of the Roman voting tribe in epigraphy. It is therefore the aim of this paper to address the study of all the inscriptions mentioning the Roman voting tribe in Hispania Citerior and explore how the context of the inscriptions and how the epigraphic habit might have affected its presence or absence in epigraphy.

The province of Hispania Citerior is certainly an especially fertile area for studying the expansion of Roman citizenship and its epigraphic indication because two predominant Roman tribes appear across the province, each corresponding to a significant historical moment.⁷ The *tribus* Galeria was assigned to most of the *civitates* promoted to the status of

⁵ Fernández Corral 2019.

⁶ As it is much more common to be recorded in epigraphic sources than in numismatics, papyri, or literary sources: Forni 1977.

⁷ Hispania is also the area where more municipal chapters have been found than anywhere else, notably the *Lex Irnitana*, which provide crucial information about the municipal organisation and social promotion of local elites. See Lamberti 1993.

colonia or *municipium* in the time of Caesar and Augustus,⁸ while the *tribus* Quirina was assigned to new Roman citizens in the *municipia* created after Vespasian's grant of the *ius Latii* or Latin right to all the Hispanic provinces.⁹ In addition to these dominant *tribus*, other cities present specific *tribus*, as is the case of the Aniensis in Caesaraugusta or the Velina in Palma and Pollentia.¹⁰ Apart from these ones, other geographically dispersed *tribus* are related to migrants from outside Hispania, mainly in important cities such as Tarraco, Barcino, Carthago Nova, and Asturica Augusta.

The geographical distribution of the inscriptions with a tribe is not uniform (Fig. 1).¹¹ The approximately 484 inscriptions¹² are especially concentrated in cities of the *conventus Tarraconensis*, on the Mediterranean coast, whereas the northern and interior areas of the

⁸ The Roman voting tribe of adscription in provincial cities, especially Hispania, was addressed in: Kubitscheck 1882; McElderry 1918; Wiegels 1985; Castillo 1988; Stylow 1995 and more recently in Andreu Pintado 2004; Fasolini 2009; 2012b; 2012a.

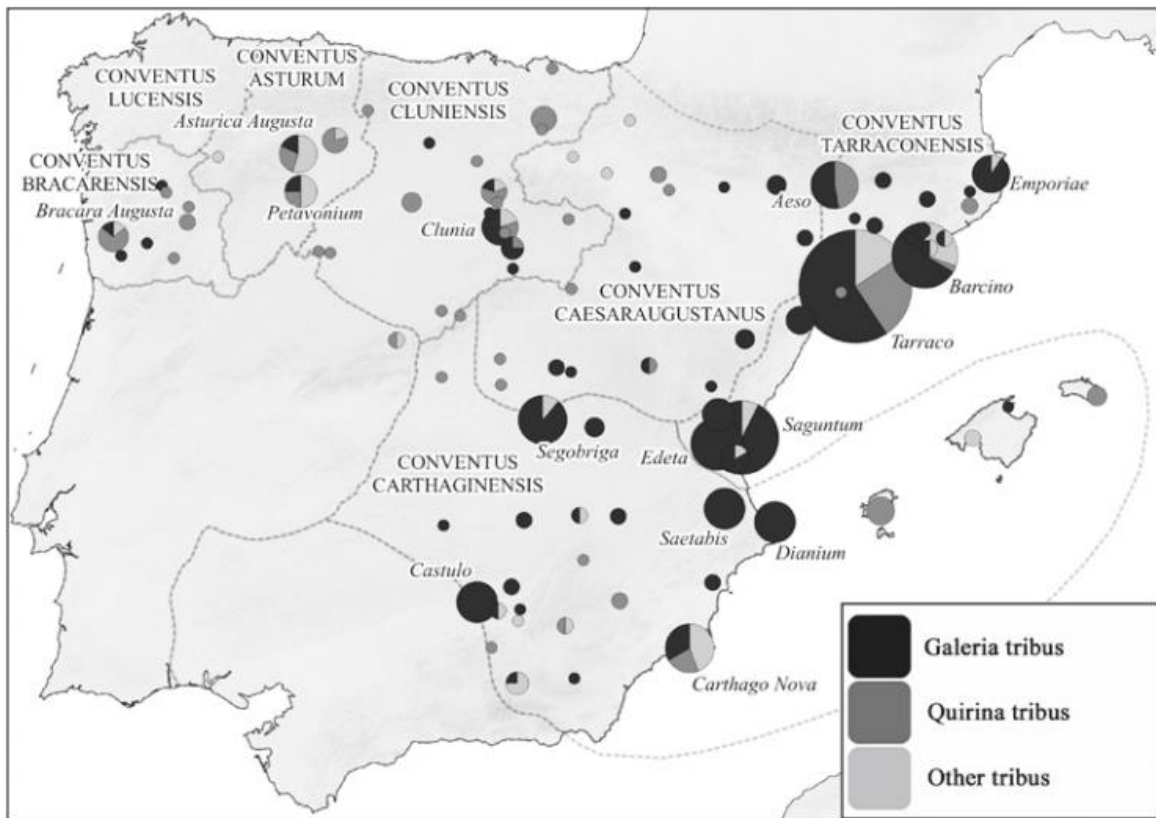
⁹ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* III, 30. Ortiz de Urbina Álava 2000; 2012.

¹⁰ Except from Palma and Pollentia (Balearic Islands), the cities ascribed to tribes other than Galeria and Quirina in Hispania were Roman colonies: Castillo 1988: 234.

¹¹ For the purposes of this paper, the map represents the place where the inscriptions were found, not the *origo* of the men with a tribe.

¹² This number includes the inscriptions with a tribe found in the province of Hispania Citerior, but not the ones referring to men from Hispania Citerior found in a different province. The exact number depends on how some poorly preserved inscriptions and ambiguous abbreviations are interpreted. Some examples in Fernández Corral 2019: 78–82.

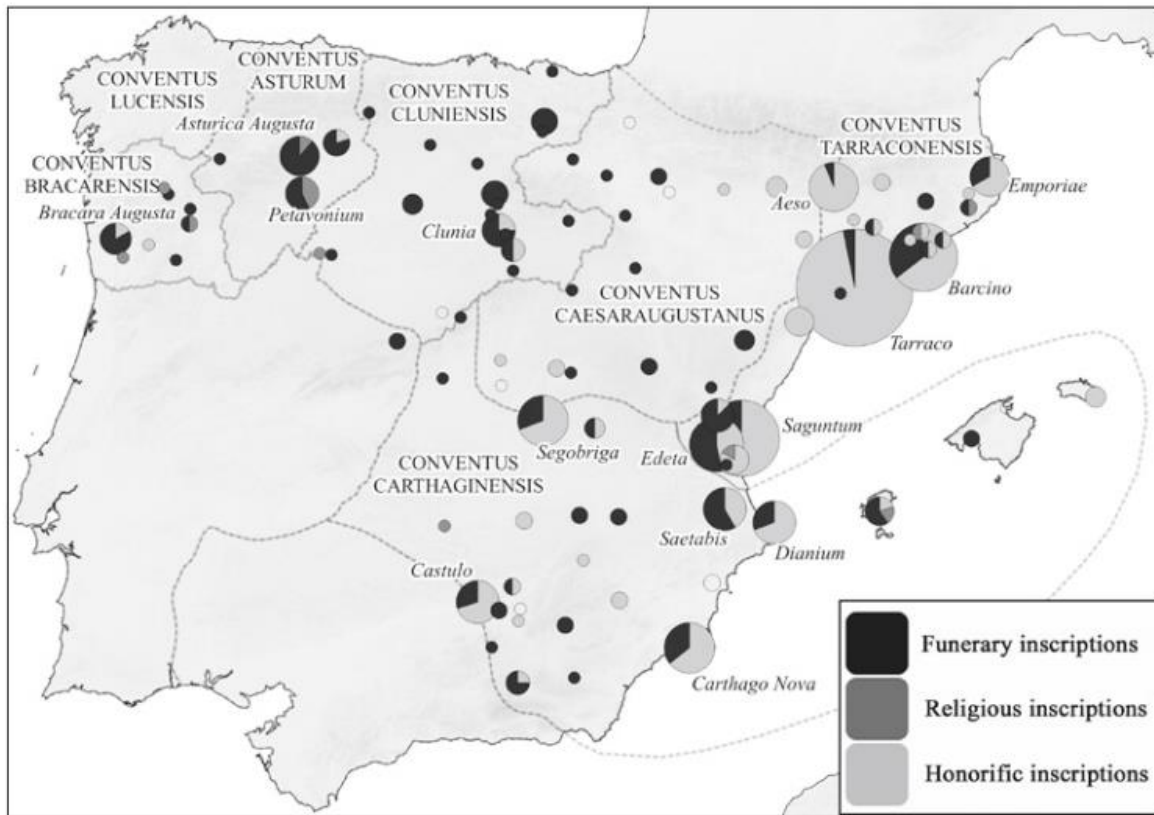
province clearly have fewer cases.¹³ Unsurprisingly, the capital of the province, Tarraco, is where most inscriptions which include a tribe have been found (ninety-six), followed by Saguntum (forty-one), Barcino (thirty-three), and Edeta (twenty-one). Segobriga is the only city in the interior of the province that shows a remarkable number (eighteen) of inscriptions with a tribe. In the north of the province only some of the capitals of the *conventus* show a concentration of inscriptions with a tribe: Asturica Augusta (eleven), Clunia (ten) and Bracara Augusta (seven).



The analysis of the types of inscriptions which include a tribe also reveals clear differences between the Mediterranean and the north-interior territories of the province. In cities on the Mediterranean coast, the voting tribe appears especially in honorific inscriptions often on

¹³ Knapp 1992: 343 already noted the lack of habit of mentioning the Roman voting tribe in central Spain.

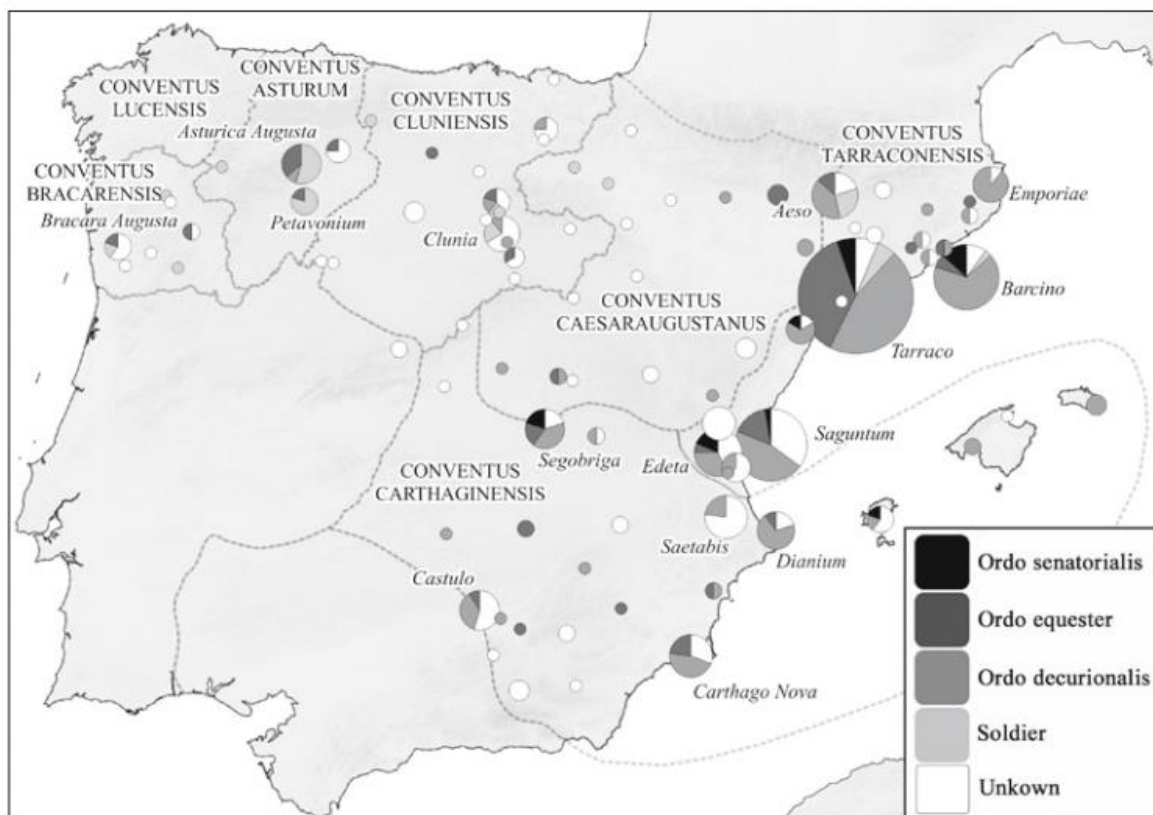
statue-bases and pedestals connected to the public representation of members of the provincial elite.¹⁴ However, cities of the northern-interior areas have few if any honorific inscriptions; rather, most are funerary or religious dedications (Fig. 2).



Moreover, the social rank of men with a tribe mentioning local administrative positions is common among the samples from the Mediterranean coastal areas, but there are only a few examples in the north-interior part of the province (Fig. 3). The inscriptions which mention a tribe found in this area are more often dedicated to soldiers and members of the *ordo equester* connected to army positions. The presence of the Roman army in this area is especially linked to the sites of Legio and Petavonium - the camps of the legions VII Gemina

¹⁴ For the display of statues in public space in Hispania see: Stylow 2001; Abascal Palazón 2016a; Melchor Gil 2018.

and X Gemina - and the city of Asturica Augusta, which was likewise founded as an army camp and later, in the Tiberian period, transformed into a civil settlement with important administrative functions.¹⁵ It is worth mentioning that the objective of the Roman army in this territory was not to defend any *limes* – the conquest of Hispania was completed by Augustus - but to ensure the control and administration of the rich mineral resources of the area. Consequently, the members of the *ordo equester* mentioned in epigraphy are in most cases part of the imperial administration, *legati* and *procurators*, who oversaw the exploitation of the mines.¹⁶



The lack of local magistrates mentioning their tribe among the inscriptions found in the

¹⁵ See Cerdan Morillo 2005.

¹⁶ Orejas Saco del Valle and Morillo Cerdán 2013.

conventus of the NW and the few people who did it in the *conventus Cluniensis* and *Caesaraugustanus* is shocking. It is notable not only because these territories include capitals of the *conventus* and colonies such as Caesaraugusta, but also because they are cities of relative importance where municipal rank has been confirmed by several sources. This is especially relevant because promotion to Roman citizenship was guaranteed to local magistrates after Vespasian's grant of Latin rights to Hispania in 73-74 CE. As the *Lex Iritana* indicates, it was granted to magistrates after holding their office and extended to a magistrate's parents, wife, and descendants.¹⁷ Moreover, citizenship could be transmitted to the next generation as long as the marriages were celebrated in accordance with the *ius conubium*.¹⁸ Therefore, although magistracies and, as a consequence, Roman citizenship, might have been in the hands of a limited number of influential families,¹⁹ we should expect more Roman citizens among the inhabitants of the province than are revealed in the epigraphic record.

As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, epigraphic context probably played a major role in the decision to indicate the complete Roman nomenclature, including the tribe.²⁰ Indeed,

¹⁷ In chapter 21: Gonzalez 1986: 154.

¹⁸ Cherry 1990.

¹⁹ Melchor Gil 2013.

²⁰ There are some specific examples of how nomenclature could be expressed differently depending on the context. For instance, in the city of Labitolosa, the tribe of *Marcus Clodius Flaccus* was mentioned as part of his nomenclature in three statue pedestals dedicated by his fellow citizens (*CIL* II, 3008=5837, *AE* 1995, 890-

the fact that honorific dedications represent more than half of the inscriptions with a tribe found in the province suggests that a high number of inscriptions with a tribe could be connected not only to higher numbers of Roman citizens, but also to the epigraphic habit of the territory.²¹ A comparative view of the epigraphic record reveals not only that this epigraphic habit was stronger in the coastal Mediterranean areas than in the north and interior of the province, but also that there were different choices and circumstances with respect to the use of funerary, religious, and honorific epigraphy.²²

The comparison between areas of the province is not easy; the available epigraphic corpora use different geographic limits (modern and antique) and organise the inscriptions by type differently.²³ Yet, it is possible to observe some general trends on the epigraphic habit with the data at our disposal. First, the corpora from the coastal Mediterranean territories of Hispania Citerior show a major concentration of honorific inscriptions, especially in the

891), but his name was simplified in the religious dedication he offered to the municipal Genius (*AE* 1995, 892). Navarro Caballero and Magallón Botaya 2013.

²¹ The importance of this proportion is emphasized when we take into account that funerary epigraphy generally represents three-quarters of the inscriptions in provinces of the Roman Empire: Saller and Shaw 1984: 124. With the exception of Britain: Biró 1975: 72 (with data from Collingwood–Wright, *RIB*).

²² About the spread of the epigraphic culture in Hispania see, among others: Beltrán Lloris 1995; Alföldy 2011; Abascal Palazón 2003.

²³ To avoid this problem, only the most common types of epigraphy (funerary, religious, and honorific) have been considered to calculate the proportion of honorific inscriptions in each of the corpora.

northern cities of *conventus Tarraconensis*,²⁴ but also, although to a smaller degree, in the cities of the south and on the coast of the *conventus Carthaginensis*.²⁵ In contrast, the honorific inscriptions decrease drastically in number and proportion as we travel to the west of the province. In the *conventus Caesaraugustanus* honorific epigraphy is 7% of the total²⁶ and only 5 honorific inscriptions, 0.5%, have been found in the *conventus Cluniensis*.²⁷ In the NW of Hispania Citerior, in the modern province of León (*conventus Asturum*) honorific

²⁴ The volumes of *Inscriptions romaines de Catalogne (IRC, I-V)* show a proportion of 30-45%. The importance of honorific inscriptions in the *conventus Tarraconensis* is also evident from the high number of statue pedestals found in this territory: Alföldy 1979: 184.

²⁵ In the corpora *Inscripcions romanes del País Valencià (IRPV, I-VI)* and the city of Carthago Nova (Martínez Sánchez 2017), 10-21% of the inscriptions are honorific.

²⁶ According to Jordán Lorenzo 2013. The preservation of the epigraphy in the *conventus Caesaraugustanus* could have been affected by the geological characteristics of the area. As pointed out by some authors (Jordán Lorenzo 2013: 155; Beltrán Lloris 1993: 237–238), the Ebro river bank has limited availability of stone for construction and engraving inscriptions, causing the intense reuse of available stone over time. This could be one of the reasons for the meagre epigraphic record of the colony of Caesaraugusta – an intensely occupied urban space- where only forty inscriptions have been found. Among them are twenty-three inscriptions corresponding to the *oppidum* and seventeen to the *territorium* of the city: Jordán Lorenzo 2013: 156.

²⁷ As suggested by Palol and Vilella 1987: 95, the small fragments of inscriptions recovered from the excavations carried out in the forum of Clunia could have been part of votive and/or honorific inscriptions. In addition to their location, this idea is based on the quality of the letters and the use of plaques made of Espejón stone, a local limestone of vivid colours that would have had a high ornamental value (Álvarez Pérez *et al.* 2009: 54–59). Unfortunately, the inscriptions are too fragmentary, just two or three letters, to come up with a solid interpretation of their text, but it seems plausible that they could have been connected to the public representation of the local elites in the forum of the city.

inscriptions are 2% of epigraphy in the area,²⁸ in the region of Braganza they comprise 2.5%,²⁹ and in the western area of the *conventus Bracaraugustanus*, 2%.³⁰ The *conventus Lucensis* is particularly interesting, as more than half of the inscriptions are religious and so far there is no evidence of honorific epigraphy.³¹

The data demonstrate that the inhabitants of the province used inscriptions with different frequency, but also in different preferred contexts. The combination of the analysis of the epigraphic habit and the presence of the *tribus* in the epigraphic record in the province of Hispania Citerior suggests that the reason that the majority of inscriptions which include a tribe are found in the coastal Mediterranean cities - in contrast to the rest of the province - could not be caused only by the presence of a greater number of families with Roman citizenship, but also because of a more efficient representation of it, particularly in honorific epigraphy. In the same way, confirmed Roman citizens could be underrepresented in the inscriptions of the north and interior areas because of the inverse process. Consequently, the fact that cities with more confirmed Roman citizens with a tribe are the same areas in which the use of honorific epigraphy was more intense could point not only to a higher level of urbanisation, social promotion, and acquisition of Roman culture, but also to a bias in the epigraphic record.

²⁸ Rabanal Alonso and García Martínez 2001.

²⁹ Redentor 2002.

³⁰ Redentor 2017 only covers the *pars occidentalis* of the *conventus Bracaraugustanus*.

³¹ Abascal 2016b.

The epigraphy of the city of Tarraco offers a good example of how local elites with Roman citizenship from all around Hispania Citerior emerge in the right epigraphic context. As the capital of Hispania Citerior, Tarraco was also the epicentre of the provincial imperial cult, in charge of an annually appointed provincial priests. Among the prerogatives of these priests was the dedication of an honorific statue at the end of their office.³² In Tarraco, they were located at the monumental provincial forum in the upper area of the city, where an extensive iconographic and epigraphic program was developed.³³ The statues have unfortunately disappeared, but certain pedestals have been preserved, providing exceptional information about the provincial imperial cult and the priests who held the office.³⁴ Most inscriptions on the pedestals share the same information: name of the priest, his father's name, his city of origin, previous magistracies and offices and the abbreviation PHC, indicating that the dedicator was the *Provincia Hispania Citerior*. Apart from these official dedications, some provincial priests were also mentioned in Tarraco in other honorific pedestals dedicated by their city of origin or by particulars, and some were named together with their wives on a

³² As indicated in the *Lex de Flamonio Provinciae Narbonensis: CIL XII, 6038*. This law dates from the time of Vespasian and regulates the imperial cult in the province Narbonensis. However, according to Fishwick 2002 it is likely that the same or similar rules applied to the provinces of Hispania.

³³ The archaeological excavations carried out show a space of great monumentality dedicated to the imperial cult that included a temple dedicated to Augustus located under the current cathedral of Tarragona. A summary of the archaeological interventions in this place in Macias Solé *et al.* 2009.

³⁴ They are dated from Vespasian's principate to the dynasty of the Antonines. They were extensively studied by Alföldy 1973 and more recently by Fishwick 2002; Ortiz de Urbina Álava 2006: 72–137; Gorostidi 2017; 2020.

few pedestals built to honor provincial priestesses.³⁵ Most of the inscriptions on these statue bases, fifty-eight of the total number, indicate the tribe of the priest, suggesting that this was an especially appropriate epigraphic context in which to do so.³⁶

Thanks to the mention of their *origo* it has been possible to confirm that the annual office of provincial priest was held by men coming from different areas of Hispania Citerior. They arrived in the capital mainly from important *civitates* of the *conventus Tarraconensis* (eighteen) and *Carthaginensis* (nineteen) but also from the *conventus Caesaraugustanus* (eleven), *Cluniensis* (three), *Asturum* (two), *Bracaraugustanus* (six) and *Lucensis* (two) (Fig. 4).³⁷ Consequently, these pedestals are especially relevant not only because they provide an example of honorific epigraphic culture - and, of course, information about the imperial cult in the provinces - but also, because it brings to light members of the local elites from areas of the province where information about social promotion is limited.³⁸

³⁵ *CIL* II²/14, 992, 1109-1175, 1177, 1183, 1186-1187. Provincial priests were also mentioned in few inscriptions found in other cities of Hispania Citerior (Fishwick 2002: 104-123, no. 3, 6, 8, 9, 31, 37, 38, and 73).

³⁶ As Gorostidi (2017: 171) has mentioned.

³⁷ The place of origin of some priests remains unknown because of the omission of the *origo* in some inscriptions and the poor state of preservation of others.

³⁸ As the capital of the province, the *concilium provinciae* also dedicated other honorific dedications in Tarraco to men who held offices other than the provincial priesthood. There is a list of migrants from other cities of Hispania Citerior to Tarraco in: Ortiz de Urbina Álava 2016.



In fact, most of the known magistrates of the *conventus Lucensis*, *Bracaraugustanus* and *Asturum*, are known from honorific pedestals found in Tarraco: six in the *conventus Bracaraugustanus* (*CIL* II²/14, 1119, 1126, 1136, 1159, 1167, 1168), one in the *conventus Lucensis* (*CIL* II²/14, 1145) and three more in the *conventus Asturum* (*CIL* II²/14, 1135, 1146, 1194).³⁹ In most cases, their *cursus honorum* recount local careers that possibly culminated with the provincial priesthood. However, there is one known example of a man from the

³⁹ The rest of them are in inscriptions that show magistrates with varying degrees of certainty: two magistrates from Asturica Augusta dedicating a religious inscription on behalf of the city (*CIL* II 2636), one clear and two possible magistrates in a hospitium (*CIL* II 2633), three *legati* mentioned in *hospitia* (*AE* 1972, 282, *AE* 1984, 553), three men with the title of *princeps* (*CIL* II 2585 and *AE* 1946, 121) and an unclear case of a *curator* in a religious inscription (*AE* 1987, 611) Curchin 1990; 2015.

conventus Lucensis who reached the *ordo equester* before holding the office of provincial priest in Tarraco.⁴⁰ Hence, these pedestals offer a glimpse of the process of social promotion in *conventus* for men with a tribe, in particular magistrates, who are almost non-existent elsewhere in the epigraphic record. The epigraphic habit of Tarraco, specifically the honorific epigraphic habit, makes visible Roman citizens and magistrates who are almost invisible in the epigraphy of North Hispania.

It is necessary to clarify the bias that the presence or absence of honorific epigraphy could be creating in our perceptions of the spread of Roman citizenship should be considered in its fair measure. There are other factors proving that the spread of Roman citizenship was more intense in the Mediterranean area than anywhere else in the province. For instance, the presence of important urban centres with municipal or colonial status from an early date in contrast with the north-interior areas of the province. However, as noted, it is also reasonable to think that the extremely low number of confirmed Roman citizens in the epigraphy of the rest of the province could also not be a fair representation of the reality - especially considering that after the Vespasian's grant of Latin rights to all the provinces of Hispania, men holding civic offices would have gained Roman citizenship for themselves and their families.

Therefore, the unequal distribution of inscriptions with a tribe in Hispania Citerior cannot be understood solely as a faithful picture of the spread of Roman citizenship in the province. Understanding of epigraphic habits is also needed to interpret the disparity among territories.

⁴⁰ González Rodríguez and Ortiz de Urbina Álava 2014.

As noted, the important number of honorific inscriptions in which Roman citizens decided to mention their tribe indicates that this was an especially appropriate context to show their legal and social position. On the contrary, the low incidence of epigraphic habit in the honorific context might have negatively affected the representation of Roman citizenship confirmed by a tribe. This is particularly true in the NW of the province where the epigraphic production was high, although especially concentrated in religious inscriptions, a context in which the *tribus* seems to have been worthless. In contrast to the Mediterranean area, honorific inscriptions and dedications to local magistrates were uncommon in this area and, in their absence, the *tribus* appears predominantly in funerary inscriptions related to the army. However, as the epigraphy from Tarraco confirms, it cannot be concluded that this was the result of the lack of social promotion in the area. The mention of the Roman voting tribe is proof of citizenship, but the analysis of the diffusion of citizenship in the provinces must consider other elements than this – in particular the epigraphic habit of the territory, as it too can affect the visibility of citizens in the epigraphic record.

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