# The Archaeology of Roman Portugal in its Western Mediterranean Context

*edited by*

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# Shifting landscapes: change and adaptation in the Lusitanian territory during the first globalisation

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**Abstract**

The Roman province of Lusitania was integrated into the Roman Empire at the end of the 1st century BC (25 BC has been estimated as the date of the foundation of *Augusta Emerita*, the provincial capital). However, processes of integration began earlier, when the first Mediterranean globalisation during the 1st millennium BC led to interaction between the indigenous communities and the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Punics. This eventually caused severe changes within the indigenous communities.

These processes were increased through contact with the Romans and Lusitania's subsequent integration into the Empire, causing the phenomena of hybridisation, assimilation, peripherialisation, and exclusion to occur. Using archaeological data and literary references, I present in this article an overview of the diversity of processes that took place.

**Keywords:** Roman Lusitania, change and adaptation, centres and peripheries, material culture

> There is of course a great deal we don't know, and much of what we think we know we haven't known, or thought we've known, for long.
> Bill Bryson, *A Short History of Nearly Everything: Special Illustrated Edition*, p. 3

## The integration of the peninsular south-west into the Mediterranean sphere

During the 1st millennium BC, the south-western part of the Iberian Peninsula went through a series of deep transformations and adaptations. This was a result of the ongoing contact with and integration into the Mediterranean world that lasted nearly

a thousand years, culminating in the creation of the province of *Lusitania* as an integral part of the Roman Empire (Fig. 6.1).

It is necessary to recognise that this large, varied territory underwent a long period of interaction with Mediterranean agents, particularly with the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Carthaginians prior to Roman contact. During this extended interaction, dynamics focused on the exploitation of several natural resources, causing different impacts within the local communities. As exemplified by the archaeological data, these processes caused *stimuli* in some areas, which led to the creation of proto-urban settlements through negotiation and trade. Other areas either benefited from various types of contact with these external agents, or remained uninvolved and apart from the integration process. Thus, we are able to identify different dynamics behind the interactions that occurred throughout the entire 1st millennium BC. These unequal dynamics are exemplified by the mixture of different cultural identities that persisted in the area and the ability to maintain cultural autonomy and individual characteristics. This likely led to tensions and pressures within interactions, as well as isolation and/or peripheries to occur. With these findings the traditional image of 'two blocks' – the coast and inland – as very dissimilar and separate culture areas (as stated in the traditional research) begins to crumble, and we can recognise the complex mosaic of situations that existed, even between neighbouring territories (Armada and Grau Mira 2018).

It is necessary to consider that this traditional perspective is based on the dualistic point of view outlined in the available classical literature (Fabião 1998,



*Fig. 6.1. South-western Lusitania in the Iberian Peninsula (Source: author).*

51–71), which can be identified by a cultural *topos*, characterised as 'civilised friends' facing 'hostile' and 'uncivilised' foes. This pronounced duality marks a strong set of cultural preconceptions belonging to the Hellenic mindset, which also includes other ideological dualities, such as 'agrarian societies' facing 'pastoral communities', and the view that the Lusitanians were a 'wandering' agglomerate of tribes. These dualities are still echoed in contemporary analyses, creating paradigms that are still firmly anchored in modern scholarship.

In recent years, new contributions have put forth a richer and more diverse outlook, based on regional variations that can be found in the archaeological record. The Roman conquest caused a larger variation in the types of local interactions which occurred, reinforced by the long duration of the military events in the area (from 218 BC to 19 BC) and the different idiosyncrasies that occurred as a result of this integration process. The excavated archaeological sites cannot give us a complete understanding of the course of events during the intermediate stages of integration, given the lack of available stratified sequences and/or published excavations. Moreover, the remaining literary texts present a perspective which is in agreement with the 'Roman side', and there is no indigenous literature to challenge this perspective. The total absence of local perspectives means that the Lusitanians are often seen as a 'people without history', as presented in many post-colonial points of view (Gardner 2013, 3–9). However, new analyses primarily based on archaeological excavations conducted using strict methodological paradigms have enabled us to perceive multi-directional processes of evolution, as in other regions (Mattingly 1997, 9). These different directions are visible within the indigenous populations through the examination of different cultural reactions and varying materialities. Through this we were able to identify processes of adaptation and assimilation, hybrid patterns, or populations that maintained their own distinctive autonomies. Additionally, sites from the Republican Roman period exemplified several strategies (Mayoral Herrera 2018, 303–321), which we were not able to clearly assess without additional excavation contexts.

These processes ended with the complete integration of the local communities into the Roman interaction sphere. This implied a combination of transformations in practices and interactions based on the interests of the imperial superstructure. Rome's colonisation approach in *Hispania* was through a lengthy conquest, which similarly to other regions also allowed for an 'inventory of the world' (Nicolet 1996) in order to locate and consolidate the resources that were of interest to the metropolis.

This paper focuses on three concepts of Lusitania's integration: the general absence of urban centres, which can be correlated with the dispersion of and intense activity within rural settlements, creating a rich and complex rural landscape; the exploitation of local resources within the perspective of their value to the Empire and the *magna urbs*; and the religious sphere as a relevant agent that can enable us to pinpoint major trends in data.

## The geography of urban settlements *versus* dynamics in the rural landscape

By looking at the archaeological data, we are able to see how discrepancies can occur: rather than a clearly defined and organised 'Roman provincial landscape', we can detect a plethora of variation within these areas.

For example, one of the main characteristics of the Roman settlements in modern-day Alentejo is the absence of the *urbs* as a symbol of power, as 'the cities were the instruments and symbols of Roman power which Augustus immediately transferred to the provinces' (Whittaker 1997, 144). The city as a symbol of *mater polis*, based on the Roman model for *emulatio* (Jiménez Díez 2010, 49–50) is absent in most of the territory, creating a different and original model in the *civitates* pattern (see Houten in this volume, although for another region).

The urban settlements in the Iberian south-west illustrate different methods of evolution and integration into the Roman world, although a thorough review of these processes is unattainable due to the constraints of urban archaeology. Most of the settlements seem to have been previously founded as a result of the dynamics of change brought on by interaction with the Mediterranean world. This pre-existing geography limited Roman planning, as the strategy for development took into consideration the pre-existing powers – although the previously built structures were not integrated into the new urban plan. While some existing urban centres were maintained and expanded (like *Pax Iulia*-Beja, for instance), others were founded *ex novo*, seemingly adopting a *synoicistic* process by gathering communities that were previously dispersed within the surrounding territory (like in *Ebora Liberalitas Iulia*, present-day Évora). The new *urbes* did not integrate features of the pre-existing urban settlements, so the Roman management created entirely new cities, with distinct and clear urban designs. In specific situations, urban restructuring seems to be even more radical, as it did not integrate and/or leave many traces of previous settlements. Changes in the site known as *Mirobriga* (near Santiago do Cacém) were so decisive that even the raw materials chosen were different. The local schist, a characteristic of indigenous constructions, was replaced by limestone in the new city (Fabião 1998, 232–253, esp. 242) as a building element that characterised Roman construction.

In this perspective, the Roman approach varied, without a unified policy. This is exemplified in many cases: changes in name expressed the impact of Roman power, as with *Beuipo* – located in a central position that connected the Atlantic coast and the Mediterranean trade networks (Gomes 2012, 92), had its name changed to *Salacia Urbs Imperatoria* (Alcácer do Sal). However, designations remained the same in other cases, even when the *urbes* were founded *ex novo* – although they were often located close to their previous positions. This is the case with the already mentioned *Ebora Liberalitas Iulia*, where repeated excavations have not yet enabled us to verify previous occupation sites that could give insight into the roots of its place name.

There is often a significant distance between assumed Roman settlements, especially in the inland Alentejo areas (Fig. 6.2). The entire Central Alentejo is only occupied by two established *urbes*, *Ebora Liberalitas Iulia* and *Pax Iulia*. There was most likely one additional *urbs* along the Tagus River – the city known as *Ammaia* in the valley near Marvão (Mantas 2018). Instead of a consolidated urban network, big empty spaces dominate in the area further from the coast. In this view, the new Roman settlement patterns maintain an obvious difference between the 'coast' and 'inland' areas. These differences are exemplified by the findings of a *Turdetani* region with Mediterranean connections that contained proto-urban settlements with either Semitic or Hellenic roots, and a continental *Celtic* space with a more dispersed settlement pattern. The nearby rivers served as 'routes of penetration' that helped blur this dual status. However, distinct regional developments occurred, depending on accessibility, local resources, and intra-regional connections. One constant remained in the 'inland' area: urban centres are located at large distances from each other and with major gaps in between, with the focus of activity largely at rural sites.

The intra-urban overview shows a reduction that is visible on many levels. The urban area is generally small; *Pax Iulia* is the largest settlement at 24 hectares (59 acres), much larger than the next biggest settlement, *Ebora* with approximately 14 hectares (34 acres). This still dominated an area where most *urbes* measured approximately 6 to 8 hectares of urban area. These measurements are usually taken from the late Imperial area within the walls, which is easier to detect in topography and archaeological works (despite the fact that information from excavations is extremely scarce).



*Fig. 6.2. Urban distribution in Alentejo (map by Pedro Trapero Fernandez).*

The absence of urban equipment is also noteworthy: a circus was found at the site currently named *Mirobriga*, non-confirmed theatres in *Ebora* and *Ammaia*, an aqueduct in *Ebora* and possibly also in *Ammaia*, and an amphitheatre in *Ammaia*. These few findings may reflect the difficulties of urban magistrates to invest or offer private munificence. For this reason, the effective implementation of the concept of *valida urbs* might not have been fully supported by the local elites in south-western *Lusitania*, since they did not generate urban dynamics based on everyday life or use an administrative system based on the strength of urban centres (Carneiro 2020). This could be the cause for the lack of generous donations in this territory. Seeing the city as scenery, used to stage occasional displays of power – as likely occurred at other places in the Peninsula (Blazquez 1991, 226–228) – might have been the dominant pattern in the south-west. The city as 'a symbol of integration and scenarios of oblivion of past identities' (Woolf 1996) and *mimesis* of the metropolis is not a typical part of the peninsular south-western landscape. It is therefore no surprise that apparently more than half of the urban settlements were abandoned as early as the beginning of the 4th century, possibly even earlier, in a slow and ongoing process of atrophy.

In contrast, we find a vibrant rural landscape, filled with several classes of sites, ranging from small buildings of bricks to monumental *villae*, that are distributed all over the territory. In the roughly 150 km between *Ebora* and *Ammaia*, only one urban centre can be dubiously identified: *Abelterium* (modern Alter do Chão) mentioned in the 14th Roman itinerary. However, more than 92 *villae* were identified in the region surrounding *Ammaia*, in the current region of Alto Alentejo. In general, there is one *villa* per each 52 km$^2$ (Carneiro 2014). In the central areas, the distribution pattern is even denser, with *villae* in short distance from each other, contradicting the traditional perspective of large *latifundia* as the basis for landed property. This pattern is evident in the central part of the territory, where monumental *villae* are found everywhere in the landscape, with impressive structures and decoration, as well as large structures for agriculture and animal husbandry. These sites were dominant in the 3rd and 4th century AD, and served as 'hotspots' for cultural and economic activity, spreading cultural archetypes and prestige (Fig. 6.3).

## The geography of the rural and endogenous resources

One of the main characteristics of the imperial superstructures in the Ancient world – given the Roman geostrategic perspective – is their highly non-programmatic and homogenising flexibility, which fits the 'pre-existing socio-economic situation, the strategic or economic value of a region under domination, and the resources available to the agents of an empire' for which a 'broad range of practices and strategies can be put to use and these can change dynamically' (During and Stek 2018, 4). This allows us to distinguish a 'variable geometry' based on local resources and assets, implying an added 'experimentalism' (During and Stek 2018, 10) that is partly determined by the feedback of agents and local resources, which were highly variable according to the territory.
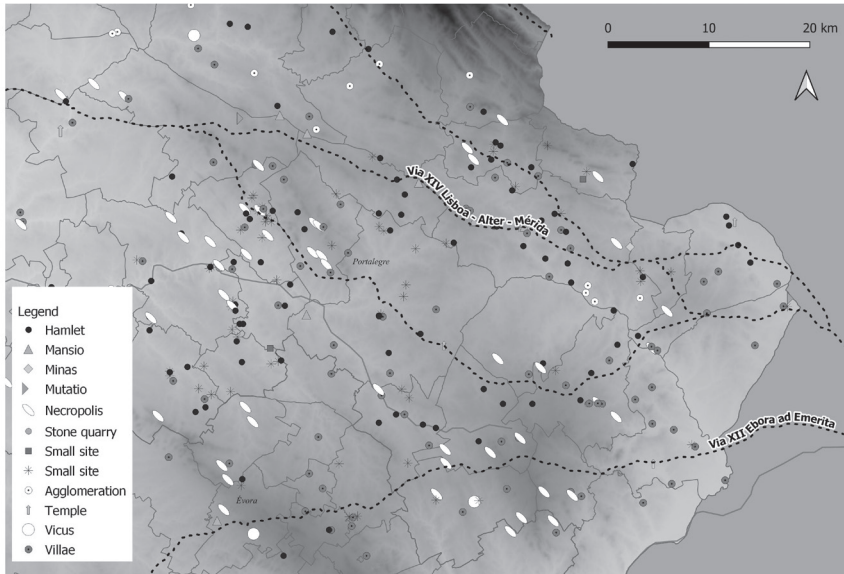
*Fig. 6.3. Rural sites in Alto Alentejo (Map by Jesús García Sánchez).*

We can see in Lusitania that the scale of investment and interaction with the indigenous communities greatly exemplifies this 'variable geometry', which is applicable to the most relevant resources from the perspective of the metropolis. There are two exceptional documents that illustrate this, due to their relevance and rareness within the scope of the Empire. Two copies of hospitality tablets – or *tabula patronatus* – were recovered at the borders of the Alto Alentejo region. IRCP 647 tablet was found in Alvega do Tejo on the shore of the Tagus, one of the most important rivers in the peninsula, and documents an oath between *Gaius Ummidius Quadratus*, praetorian legate of *Germanicus*, and the people of *Aritium*. In the IRCP 479 hospitality tablet, *Lucius Fulcinius Trio*, legate of Emperor *Tiberius*, formalised an oath of patronage with local representatives, celebrated in the surroundings of present-day Juromenha near the Guadiana River. It is not a coincidence that these tablets were recovered from these areas. The first document is strategically positioned by potential ports on the greatest river in the region, in proximity to the gold mining resources of the Tagus. The second document was found on the nearby Estremoz anticline and its marble quarries. These served as geostrategic constraints, which should be secured from an Imperial perspective. Negotiation with local communities by involving them in the process was the preferred solution of Rome.

The two most valuable regional resources in which Rome was interested were gold and marble. Roman gold-mining is well known in the *aurifer Tagus*, and gaining control of the river during the conquest was a priority, leading to the construction of a set of camps and secondary fortifications which created a strategic supervision

along the Tagus River (Fabião 2014). The Estremoz anticline marble was essential for the iconographic programmes in the main cities of *Lusitania*, and the resources were of sufficient importance to Rome that the Imperial house wanted to take control of the quarry, according to an inscription dedicated by *Hermes, servus marmorarius*, to *Aurelia Vibia Sabina* (IRCP 497), likely one of the daughters of *Marcus Aurelius* (dated to 166/170).

The third economic pillar of the region was agricultural production and raising livestock, which is clear from the concentration of the *villae* settlement pattern in the most suitable agricultural areas. Agricultural production and raising livestock were at the heart of the business dynamics in the area. The horse figures in the mosaics found in the Torre de Palma *villa* (Monforte) exemplifies the relevance of this activity. This economic environment, based on agriculture and animal breeding, may also justify the previously mentioned scarcity of urban centres: the *villae* could have filled this void. Farming the land was the major resource for private entrepreneurship; on the map of *villae* distribution, extended territories empty of sites are visible, which coincide with landscapes of lower agricultural capacities ('thin soils' close to Guadiana and 'sandy soils' in the Tagus basin).

The study of *villae* is one of the fields in which the entrepreneurship of private businessmen used different logic than the Imperial superstructure and public action. The preference of these *villae* for the central territories of Alto Alentejo (Carneiro 2014) shows how the Roman power created different dynamics in landscape organisation by enhancing certain territories based on the intended investments. The settlement patterns of the *villae* exemplify how the elites invested in land and obtained returns from livestock (Fig. 6.4).

The *villae* were the basis of this agro-pecuarian exploitation, but also served as tools for individual displays of power and influence, in accordance with archetypes that were dear to the elite's social and cultural imagination. Whether they were leisure or business *villae* – or more likely both – private investment was directed towards specific areas where dynamics were created that placed these sites at an advantage. These monumental *villae* were distributed along corridors or around specific resources; in the first case because accessibility was vital, and their distribution was therefore related to the main itineraries, and in the second case because they tended to be located near the most valuable and profitable agrarian resources. According to this pattern, sites in peripheral areas seem to have been left out of these dynamics, preserving their archaic traces.

The precise moment in which the acceleration in land exploitation of rural landscapes occurred and the subsequent economic integration of these landscapes into the Roman Empire is still unknown. In the Augustan period, the first *villae* appeared with Italic-style plans, with modules around an entrance *atrium*. These *villae* were modelled quite differently from the military-inspired, compact blocks called the south-western *castellae*, or the Republican farms with no distinct centres identified in Andalucía (Moret 1990). These new models may have become 'fossilised' in the
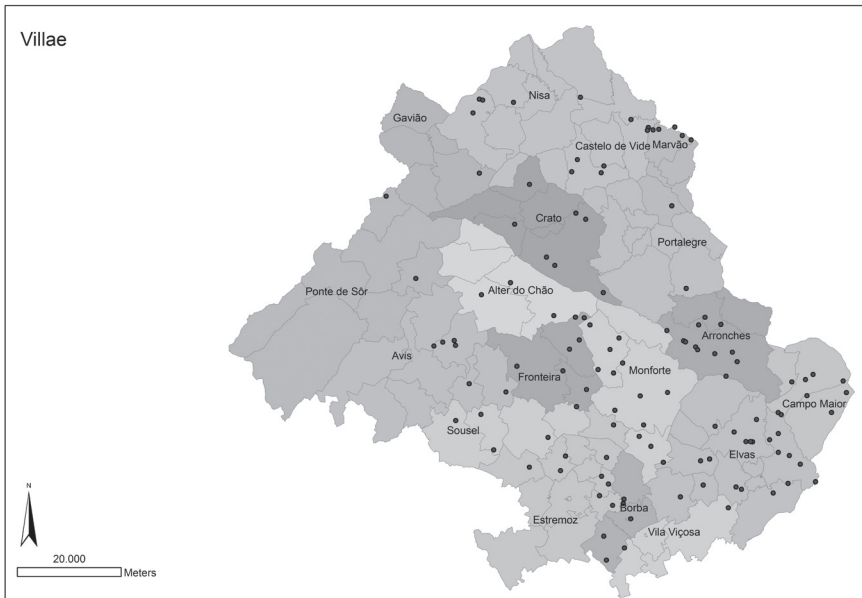
*Fig. 6.4. Villa distribution in Alto Alentejo (from Carneiro 2014, map by Joana Valdez-Tullett).*

construction, as seems to be the case with Torre de Palma, where the *atrium villa* remained annexed to a later monumental house with a *peristylium*, or in Pisões (Beja) where the small Italic *atrium* served as the residence's axial centre. In this problematic reading of the foundational moments, the case of Horta da Torre (Fronteira) is noteworthy: although all identified constructions during the excavations carried out since 2012 fit into the monumentalisation stage that took place in the late 3rd century, two Italic *terra sigillata* pottery marks were collected during field survey, which document the first occupation of this site around the start of the 1st century AD (Carneiro and Sepúlveda 2011). One stamp is from *C. Sertorivs Procvlvs* (15 BC to AD 5) and the other from *Cn. Ateivs Evhodvs* (5 BC to AD 25) (Fig. 6.5).

The case of Horta da Torre is even more significant because this *villa* is set in front of an indigenous fortified settlement, the Castelo do Mau Vizinho, although their relationship is somewhat complex to assess. Further to the south, the sites around S. Cucufate in Vidigueira (Mantas and Sillières 1990) show how a complex dynamic of abandonment and reformulation of the initial constructions followed these early stages, which may be related to changes in land ownership and the sale and purchase of original properties.

From the first moment in which Rome stabilised its business dynamics, rural landscapes appear to have shifted into the 'Imperial mode', either due to a lack of evidence left from indigenous places, or due to the appearance of the first *villae*. The first *villae* did not yet possess the monumentality and decorative programmes of the following centuries; they had completely Italic construction philosophies and
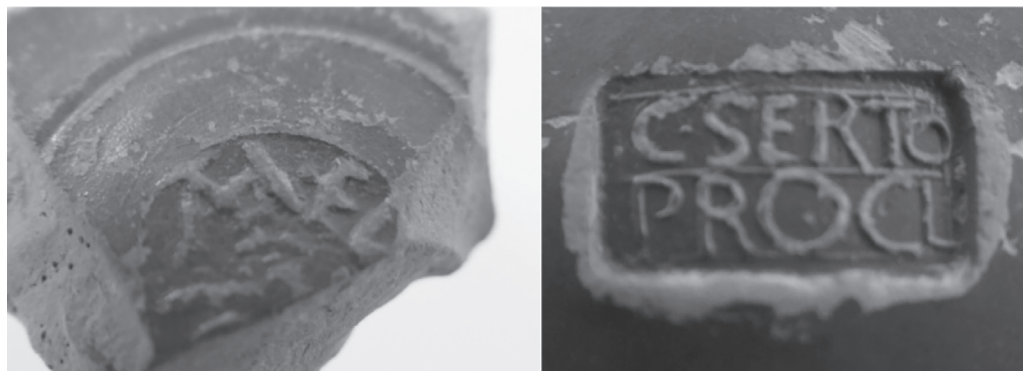
*Fig. 6.5. Stamps in Italic* terra sigillata *from Horta da Torre (photo by Eurico Sepúlveda).*

architectural prototypes, where nothing from the indigenous communities remained. However, it should be noted that these *villae* took a long time to spread throughout the entire territory, as in many regions there is no trace of them. On the contrary, other agents were clearly present in the territory throughout the first and second centuries, as seen from archaeological evidence or epigraphic records, where the survival of indigenous personal names is clear.

We can identify various dynamics and patterns as a result. The model proposed by Cunliffe (1988) for gradations between centres and peripheries – or even ultra-peripheries, as designated in Carneiro (2014) – fits extremely well within this scheme. The concept of 'glocalisation' can also be cited as the creation of hybrid or mixed identities, which are visible in the archaeological records (according to Scholte 2005, 224–255), since integration is a process that comes from elites adopting broader cultural patterns, which are disseminated to other social groups in an unbalanced and fragmented manner (Hingley 2005). Using this, we can understand the prompt adoption of cultural practices by some elites living within urban settlements, which led to Strabo's comment (3.2.15) that 'they have converted to Latin and there is not much left for them to be completely Roman'. In this respect, it is necessary to consider the interests of the local elites who acted according to what they thought best in the circumstances, in co-optation with the Roman agents (Terrenato 2014), as previously seen in both *tabulae patronatus*.

These different results and adaptations would have been the result of the (dis) integration of territories and communities that had previously been a part of the Mediterranean sphere of influence for a long time. By examining history, we can understand how these interactions gave rise to the adaptation and integration of local communities that coexisted with peripheries – or ultra-peripheries, although these were still occasionally neighbours of the more integrated communities – which were kept outside throughout the process. The rural landscape had different gradations that maintained distinct speeds and dynamics throughout the Imperial period, depending on the landscape's resources, accessibilities, and attractiveness.

Thus, the creation of local communities is not only the result of contact with Romans, but also of the earlier process of (dis)connecting with previous agents. It is important to highlight that this gradual view is in contrast to the reductionist vision of two separated worlds, the 'coast' and 'inland' in general terms, or the duality between vibrant urban life and a rural landscape filled with archaisms and pastoral transhumance. The existence of a rural settlement network of dispersed units with agricultural-pastoral features illustrates that the economic and land use model was more varied than previously considered. The presence of medium-sized sites, dispersed dwellings and 'open settlements' coexisting with *villae*, many of which were close to water and allowed for a 'broad-range economy' (Carneiro 2014, 141–156), exemplify their connection to the land and their use (and deep knowledge) of endogenous resources.

## Sacred geography and symbolic content

Some of my recent work has focused on the religious dynamics of the peninsular south-west by examining the distribution of votive inscriptions and cult testimonies (Carneiro 2009–2010) and the temple in Santana do Campo, Arraiolos (Carneiro 2017). For this reason, only a few general thoughts will be discussed in this section.

In spite of a general ignorance of structural materiality (explained as architectural planimetries and iconographic programmes of the temples in the region), votive inscriptions allow us to perceive the existence of two wide cultural areas. Despite this, it should be noted that the outline of these culture areas is still too tenuous, as not enough sites have been excavated. On the one hand, we can identify how votive inscriptions are clearly associated in terms of anthroponymy and theonomy to a cultural background where Roman influence was likely more superficial (with the exception of a relevant affiliation to Jupiter as a tutelary deity, albeit with specific features, which must be read within the process of *interpretatio*). On the other hand, there is evidence for a more multicultural block that was fully integrated within the Mediterranean sphere. This block was open to more distant influences, with oriental deities and devotees with Greek onomastics; whether that is because these names were popular or because they were of Greek origin remains unknown. This sample shows a cultural background that was soundly attached to the classical view of the world as lived in and around the provincial capital, and strengthened by the roads and circuits that allowed connectivity with the outer areas. This division does not seem to hold a strict geographical division, as was assumed in previous literature (Carneiro 2009–2010, 258–260), since even around the *urbs* of *Ebora* there are archaic indicators, as in the case of Santana do Campo. We should emphasise that the dynamics in both areas remained persistent, implying a stable sacred geography with specific symbolic elements, even if these fitted the general classical world. The main change identified is the architectural monumentalisation of pre-existing sacred spaces, as was also the case in other peninsular areas (see Grau Mira in this volume), creating a different

perception of the symbolic landscape, where these buildings serve as significant territorial landmarks.

In this respect, the cult of *Carneus Calanticensis* in Santana do Campo is revealing. The deity named in the inscriptions is designated as *Carneus.* Radical linguistic *\*KRN* has enabled us to identify Indo-European roots, which is consistent with the existence of a deity of an archaic background, which we find (with other forms and substances) in Indo-European geographical realities with the name *Karneios.* This deity was assimilated with Apollo in Classical times, earning the epithet of *Apollo Karneios*, and can be associated with the Doric world of Sparta and its colonial foundations, including sanctuaries in Knidos, Thera, and Cyrene (Carneiro 2017, 94). There is also a variant *Carneo* or *Karneios* that appears as *Cernunnos* in the Celtic pantheon. Although this deity is not well known and not often depicted, he is carved in a crude manner on the Pillar of the Boatmen (France), and has been identified in the centre of the famous Gundestrup cauldron (Denmark) among other figurations. His recurring iconography shows a man metamorphosing into an animal and living in harmony with animals; this depiction could be associated with shamanic or fertility rituals. One of the most interesting elements resides in the fact that, unlike some indigenous deities that were never depicted, this god was clearly depicted and defined well before the Roman occupation.

With regard to the massive structure that remains half hidden in the church of Santana do Campo, two main elements stand out. The monumentality of the structure and the area around it show its truly massive dimensions in comparison to the present church, and the cushioned ashlars were flawlessly carved, making clear the investment and value put into the building's construction. The sanctuary was likely an important pillar of the local community, with this grand structure functioning as a gathering place that strengthened the links between local people. In this case, an impressive structure was built in accordance to the Roman standards, showing additional Celtic roots of worship associated with pastoral cults. This brings forward a paradox: if there was a deity worshipped in communal rites in the open air, which celebrated pastoral and transhumant habits and brought together communities through informal group ceremonies, then why did they invest so much in building an architectural structure of such magnitude? It should be noted that the structure in Santana do Campo where *Carneo Calanticensi* was worshipped may be related to the Roman necropolis in Herdade do Cortiçal (Arraiolos), where 'a clay plate found in one of the graves' had the word *CALANTANI* (the TA are connected) found by José Leite de Vasconcelos in 1901 (Vasconcelos 1913, 377, note 1). This site may have been the centre of an urban settlement built in the central area to the south of Arraiolos. This settlement would have had a strong local identity, as shown by the persistence of indigenous names: inscriptions record *Apano*, son of *Cileus*, and *Erbeido*, son of *Balaio.*

In the north of the region another significant pre-Roman cult persisted: that of *Endovelicus*, whose sanctuary was located in São Miguel da Mota (Alandroal), although archaeological research could not properly identify the sanctuary's structures

(see Schattner in this volume). The wide range of *spolia* of worship and sculptures can be determined from its 85 inscriptions, some of which were monumental, and almost 20 sculptural elements including caryatids attached to the massive structures. This full material record contrasts strongly with the invisibility of the structure itself, as its original place has not been identified. However, it also illustrates how an important sanctuary brought together many different worshippers from indigenous backgrounds, as well as people from different origins within the Empire. Sanctuaries and cult places were significant anchor places, gathering people from distinct provenances and creating links between communities.

These findings bring forth many possibilities: classical deities could be worshipped by Latin and indigenous peoples, and local deities could be worshipped by Latin and indigenous peoples (albeit with Latin imagery and language). This exemplifies the variety of situations, necessitating a flexible understanding of religious experiences within the ancient world.

## A general overview

One of the greatest paradoxes is that over the last 20 years 'Roman archaeology has struggled to find a coherent identity of its own since the collapse of 'Romanisation' as a framework commanding broad consensus' (Gardner 2013, 1). However, the progressive erosion of this theoretical support, intensified by post-colonial reading (Jiménez Díez 2010) has not allowed alternative frameworks to be brought forward which address the complexity of processes that happened through the integration of provincial territories into the Roman imperial system. This integration utilised multiple scales, which were more intricate than the integration processes that originated in later times, which limit our interpretations of events. Thus, the somewhat chaotic scholarly scene that emerged highly contrasts with the previous rigid interpretation of the 'two blocks'. The 'variable geometry' of the praxis of Roman power is the essence of this multitude of phenomena, but is also a consequence of the dynamics that originated from a long process of interaction with other agents. The extensive contacts with Mediterranean agents, for almost a millennium, along with other interactions – particularly with 'continental inflow' – created a set of various dynamics acting on several depths, depending on the local resources and responses within the societies of south-west Lusitania. The political and social fragmentation of this territory and the multiple agents that maintained their own self-identity are highlighted by the visible diversity in representation that varies from region to region.

Roman entrepreneurship, which created an impressive network of connected infrastructures with three itineraries between the province's capital, *Augusta Emerita*, and its Atlantic Sea port, *Felicitas Iulia Olisipo*, illustrate a desire to extend connections as an essential factor for regulating development (Scheidel 2014). However, the same investment was not made in using the *urbes* as elements of territorial cohesion and dissolution of local identities. Close to *Ebora* or *Ammaia* – two of the rare *urbes*

– archaic identity affirmations show how Imperial entrepreneurship had different impacts on the region, which homogenised over time. It is therefore necessary to analyse material culture, in all its forms, on multiple levels (Mac Sweeney 2009), so that we can understand the true scope of these processes rather than adopting rash interpretations. In the particular case of the peninsular south-west, we can see how the Roman presence caused ongoing dynamics to accelerate – albeit with different receptions by local communities – which, despite being close to one another, maintained their own stable identities. We can also understand how landscapes changed not just with the passing of time and history, but also with the transitions between territories. 'New landscapes' and 'hybrid landscapes' were created, as well as 'symbolic landscapes', which sometimes maintained previous models of self-identity. These landscapes coexisted in neighbouring territories, creating a mosaic of different identities that worked in a multipolar form. This can complicate our previous understanding, based on the assumption of linear and unambiguous processes, and make simple readings a more difficult task, but this also entices us to delve into the complexities of each case, allowing them to be multifaceted in their own right. If 'Rome was the mother of all nations', quoting Symmachus' famous assertion from the 4th century AD (3.11.3), we can see how the previous background has moulded and conditioned the 'Imperial landscape' in Lusitania.

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