Unveiling Cultural Identities through Indigenous Religiosity: 
**Olisipo, a case study of the Western Roman Empire**

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**Introduction**

The study of the Hispanic-roman religious world remains a field open to investigation. Therefore, it is proposed to analyse the Lusitanian inscriptions identified in the municipium Olisipo, from the 1st century A.D., to the 7th century A.D., some monuments may be from later on, based on paleographic characteristics. Nevertheless, an internal chronology, the dating process is essentially based on paleographic characteristics. Nevertheless, although some authors accept that the indigenous inscriptions date back, approximately, to the first century A.D., some monuments may be from later on, dating from the 2nd or 3rd centuries (Encarnação and Guerra, 2010; 96-97).

**Methodological Problems**

This small group of sources, although written in Latin characters, represents an indigenous language (and culture). The following are the main methodological difficulties:

- **Onomastics**: against the limitations in the knowledge of the language, many specific problems arise in the field of linguistics when it comes to reading and interpreting the theonyms. Therefore, insecurity is the predominant emphasis in etymological analysis.
- **Lexicon**: local deities vs. “indigenous deities”
- **Chronology**: due to the lack of contextualization of the monuments and the fact that it is not feasible to apply an internal chronology, the dating process is essentially based on paleographic characteristics. Nevertheless, although some authors accept that the indigenous inscriptions date back, approximately, to the first century A.D., some monuments may be from later on, dating from the 2nd or 3rd centuries (Encarnação and Guerra, 2010; 96-97).

**Historiographical analysis**

We benefit from a long knowledge of the indigenous deities of Olisipo, emerging since the end of the eleventh century in the works Religiones de la Lusitania of J. Leite de Vasconcellos (1897-1913); in the monograph Epigrafia de Olisipo. Subsídios para a História da Lusiba Romana (1944) of A. Vieira da Silva, in the thesis Os divindades indígenas sob o domínio romano em Portugal (Subsíbios para o estudo de) of J. Encarnação (1975); and in the last corpus of votive inscriptions Religiões Antigas de Portugal – Adjuntos e observações à Religião da Lusitânia, of J. M. Garcia (RAP, 1991). Despite the fact that these great corpora remain valid as indispensable references, because they built the foundations of the current research, today they are understandably obsolete, lacking a rigorous revision. In this sense, “because the data that we dispose are not unique, but rather complementary” (Encarnação, 1993: 323) it is imperative, as future perspectives, to (1) initiate a peninsular union in the search for new epigraphs and in “the return to the stone”; and to (2) apply new interdisciplinary approaches that result from an alliance between Epigraphy, Archaeology and Linguistics, allowing the (re)inscription of the original in its historical-archaeological context.

**Olisipo through the voice of ancient authors**

When the Romans reached the Tagus estuary, Olisipo was not a lost village on the threshold of the finis orbis but, due to an easily navigable coast, fertility of the land, and due to the security of the fields (Var. Res Rust. 2.1.19; Plin. Nat. Hist. IV, 21-22, 116; idem, VIII, 67, 166) and to the auxiliar Tagus (Stat. 3.3.10), it constituted a privileged commercial port and, over time, a point of contact between peoples and cultures.

**Indigenous deities worshiped in Olisipo**

**Ager Olisipo**

**Group I: panHispanic religious background**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deity</th>
<th>Worshipers</th>
<th>Onomastics</th>
<th>Abbr. BibL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band -</td>
<td>L(*) Olisipa</td>
<td>uncertain</td>
<td>RAP 33; HEP 11, 2001, 684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triborvani</td>
<td>T. Caritatis Rufus</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>RAP 19B; FE 14 (1985): 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barberae</td>
<td>anonymous</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>RAP 157; HEP 6, 1996, 106a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemaco</td>
<td>M. Cecillius Caeno</td>
<td>indigenous</td>
<td>RAP 206; HEP 9, 1999, 751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arno Araxonomico</td>
<td>Iulia Sertorius</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>RAP 10; HEP 10, 2000, 731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memuadae</td>
<td>Cross</td>
<td>indigenous</td>
<td>RAP 167; BUA, GUERRA, 2011, 407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Municipium Olisipo**

**Group II: local religious background**

Kasouve Araxo-Aractonico Memundacto

**Group III: controversial sources**

Cifico et Muo

**Geographical distribution of the cult**

In resemblance to the large onomastic conservation of the rural space (see below), there is also a greater conservatism in the religious manifestations, characterized by the considerable indigenous theological repertoire (85,71% of the votes to indigenous deities takes place in the ager), against a weak representation in the urban area, where only the ara dedicated to Cinteri et Muo emerged. Thereby, these testimonies reveal a territory of deep rural cultural marker by a tradition where the pre-Roman cultural elements could subsist until later. Two indigenous religious groups can be distinguished in the ager: one made by Band-, Barbera and Triborvani, associated with social migration and allowing a connection between the Lisbon Peninsula and the areas of Beira Interior and the provinces of Cáceres and Salamanca; and another, by Kasouve, Araxo-Aractonico and Memundacto, that have in common the evident linguistic relation with Hispanic personal names (Guerra, 2003: 142-47).

The most frequent reality in the indigenous cults of Lusitania consists of unique testimonies in all empire, this being the case when occurring in the city. They emerge as the owners of the villa rusticae around Olisipo: T. Caritatis Rufus, owner of a villa in Freira (Cáceres) that consecrates a vote to Triborvani; and M. Cecillius Caeno to Kasouve.

**Final Considerations**

The Lusitanian identity retained its uniqueness through a mix of influences between indigenous, Latin and oriental beliefs, being the religious tolerance and the conscious permeability to the various influences the basic characteristics of Romanisation. The analyzed inscriptions reveal the fulfilment of private votes, being about the public and official religious acts, which predominantly took place in the urban area. Olisipo is thus shown as a clear example of the dichotomy:

- **ager** / private cults / indigenous deities / indigenous onomastics
- **Uber** / official cults / classic deities / latin onomastics.

To conclude, the rural world is, however, characterized as a world where traditional values have remained rooted for a longer time, since Roman acculturation was later and less profound, allowing the previous cultural marks to be maintained, but also as a world that was letting itself, little by little, become shaped by diversified cultural nuances.