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ROMAN EPIGRAPHY AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS: A VIEW FROM NORTHWESTERN IBERIA (FIRST–SECOND CENTURIES CE)

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Abstract: This paper presents a study of epigraphy as a cultural practice in a case study focused on the northwestern Iberian Peninsula. The main goal is to identify the emergence of divergent dynamics in the adoption and dissemination of epigraphy as a practice, establishing a relationship between the epigraph and its social and territorial context. Therefore, we propose an analysis focused on the study of anthroponymy and theonymy, aiming to find out what practices were carried out, in what environments, and what was the origin of those who practiced them. This information on names and gods will be used to discover the origin of dedicators and divinities, and then related to different attributes, introducing a geospatial and statistical study of the epigraphic record. Accordingly, different trends to approach epigraphic records will be explored, the final step contrasting differences between rural and urban environments and whether that reflects in cultural expressions.

Keywords: *Roman epigraphy, northwestern Iberia, cultural change, colonialism, funerary, religion.*

INTRODUCTION

Roman epigraphy provides a huge amount of information for studying cultural dynamics. It not only embodies a specific way of performing symbolic activities, but also allows us to differentiate how different people related with different cultural experiences. Epigraphy is a cultural phenomenon that allows us to go beyond textuality: ideas, cultural identities, and power relations can be transmitted and measured through the textual record. Although epigraphic studies are usually focused on reading and analyzing the epigraphic text, some works have explored epigraphy as a cultural and polyhedral activity[1]. Mainly built on post-colonialism and Bourdieu's theory of practice, it has been acknowledged the potential of epigraphic record to unveil cultural trends and identitarian choices.

Following this point of view, this work aims to explore Roman epigraphy in order to express different cultural choices and regional patterns. As it is not set as a traditional epigraphic study, the focus will not only be on the text, but on the subject: anthroponyms and theonyms, as well as their relations within the social landscape will be our main arena. The epigraph is understood as a source of information that shows data concerning the origin of each individual, their social context, the origin of the divinities worshiped,

[1] See MATTINGLY 2007; JIMÉNEZ DÍAZ 2008.

or their cultural orientation. These data will be related with a landscape-archaeology focus, aiming to understand why some practices are present (or absent) according to different social and territorial contexts.

The work has chosen a case study in the province of A Coruña during the first and the second centuries CE. It is true that using a contemporary region might be troubling: however, this decision was a consequence of the uncertainty of current epigraphic record. Although robust epigraphic catalogs are available[2], they do not cover the whole region, nor have standardized data. Still, there is a recent epigraphic database specifically developed for the region of A Coruña[3]. To avoid distorting the results and over-representing those regions with more up-to-date records, the study is focused on a specific area that provides data with the same level of reliability and certainty. Logically, we are completely conscious that some trends may have been of influence on border regions and, therefore, the scope of our results may change if a broader focus is applied.

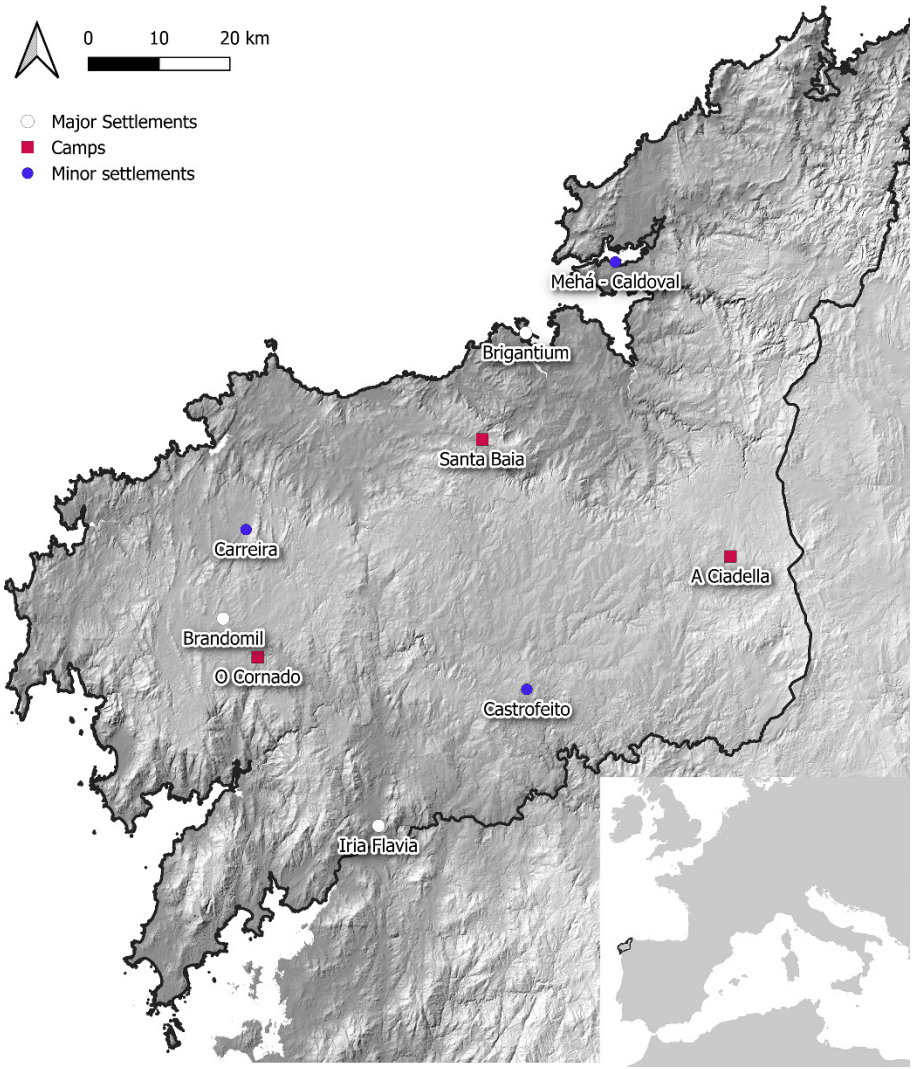

Fig. 1. Area of study and Roman settlements.

A BRIEF REVIEW ON NORTHWESTERN IBERIA ROMAN TERRITORIAL STRUCTURE

There is extensive research of the Roman world in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, ranging from the point of view of material culture[4], strategies of economic exploitation[5], the process of conquest and territorial implantation[6], among others. Nevertheless, studies on settlement and territorial structuring have not been as common[7]. This fact contrasts, paradoxically, with a long tradition of settlement and landscape studies for the Iron Age[8]. In this regard, two factors might have influenced this scarcity of studies: the chronological uncertainty of most Roman findings and the lack of rural contexts. The former has led to a lack of precision on High Imperial settlement studies. Most of the archaeological Roman contexts is largely dominated by *villae* built on Late Roman periods, which responds to completely different realities and processes[9]. Nevertheless, great part of traditional research has taken part for the whole and, faced with an absence of reliable rural contexts, have usually related any trace of Roman world with high imperial chronologies and the "romanization" process. This process has given rise to a plethora of interpretative issues, as archaeological evidence was representative of different social, political, and territorial contexts[10].

If we attend exclusively to the High Empire, the Galaico-Roman settlement is characterized by a wide dispersion of units of occupation in which truly urban spaces are practically non-existent. Only the three capitals of their respective *conventus* (*Lucus, Bracara, and Asturica*) and maybe *Aquae Flavie* (currently Chaves) may fit the label of what is considered urban properly. These towns were the only with enough population, architectural expressions and political power to be considered as a real city. The scarcity of proper urban spaces gave rise to different considerations on the strategies of Roman political articulation in *Gallaecia*[11], although the most widespread explanation is based on the "secondary agglomerate structuring system" developed by Pérez Losada. This proposal suggests the existence of overlapping

[2] PEREIRA MENAUT 1994; SERRANO LOZANO 2023.
[3] ABASCAL PALAZÓN/LÓPEZ FERNÁNDEZ 2023.
[4] NAVEIRO LÓPEZ 1991; ALCORTA IRASTORZA 2001; LÓPEZ PÉREZ 2004; FERNÁNDEZ FERNÁNDEZ 2013.
[5] FONTE *et al.* 2017; FONTE *et al.* 2021.
[6] COSTA-GARCÍA *et al.* 2019; GARCÍA-SÁNCHEZ *et al.* 2022.
[7] Despite some examples: PÉREZ LOSADA 2002; SÁNCHEZ PARDO 2008; CARLSSON-BRANDT FONTÁN 2021.
[8] See PARCERO-OUBIÑA 2002; GONZÁLEZ-RUIBAL 2006–7; AYÁN-VILA 2012.
[9] CARLSSON-BRANDT FONTÁN 2021, 32.
[10] NIÓN-ÁLVAREZ 2021, 656.
[11] PEREIRA MENAUT 1983; FERNÁNDEZ OCHOA 1988.

areas of influence with different levels of hierarchy that depend on the political and administrative capacity of each settlement[12]. In this sense, in the absence of cities, other secondary nuclei in an intermediate level ended up acting as cities in terms of sociopolitical influence and management. This model allows us to assess the capacity of agency of these nuclei on a smaller territorial scale, even though they were ultimately controlled by the aforementioned conventual capitals. Some authors[13] have pointed out the "capillary" character of this organization: decision-making would have been generated from the neuralgic centers, continuing down to the most relevant areas in terms of economic exploitation and communication routes, while rural and peripheral areas would remain in the background.

The context of the study area fits perfectly into this territorial model. There are three semiurban settlements that stand out in terms of architecture and political centrality: *Brigantium* (A Coruña), Brandomil (Zas), and Iria Flavia (Padrón) (see Fig. 1). *Brigantium* was a settlement with administrative and tax functions, probably related to the control of the transit of goods, shipping supply, and political and fiscal management[14]. Aspects such as the epigraphic presence of imperial servants (mostly slaves and freedmen) arriving from other regions, evidence related to the port infrastructure, or the construction of a large lighthouse seem to point to this issue[15]. Iria Flavia and Brandomil have not received comparable archaeological attention, but both seem to have a comparable political weight to *Brigantium*. Iria presents evidence of a remarkable commercial activity[16], perhaps also industrial[17]. The epigraphic evidence of Roman magistrates in the settlement also indicates the relevance of the settlement[18], as it is not common to find them in the local epigraphic record. Brandomil presents a higher degree of uncertainty due to fewer archaeological studies; however, some nearby mining exploitations, as well as its relationship with Via XX, highlight some of its core activities[19].

Along with these three settlements, military presence should also be acknowledged as non-rural evidence in terms of political and administrative structure. Military camps generated a context influenced by different cultural dynamics that were undoubtedly detached from the organic processes of rural settlement[20]. In this regard, it is relevant to consider these kinds of contexts closer to urban ones, as both could have operated as nuclei of power and territorial control[21]. In this region, the most relevant settlement is the military camp of A Ciadella (Sobrado). A Ciadella was occupied between the beginning of the second c. and the end of the fourth c. CE[22]. It was a stable camp for the *Cohors I Celtiberorum*, an auxiliary cohort of the *Legio VII Gemina*, based in León[23]. Possibly, other campsites, such as O Cornado (Negreira)[24] or Santa Baia (A Laracha)[25], could have had similar attributes, although archaeological data are still scarce.

These semi-urban areas contrast with very reduced evidence of rural settlements during the High Empire. In a recent catalog[26], from a total of 51 sites defined as "rural", only 9 have chronologies between the first and the third centuries CE, and not all of them present reliable data. Of these 9, only 3 (Caldoval, Castrofeito and Carreira, see Fig. 1) were found in the region of study, and both of them present certain doubts in chronological terms[27]. Some authors[28] have proposed that rural spaces were developed, albeit only at an initial stage, around the hillforts. In northwest Iberian Iron Age, the hillfort was the exclusive model of settlement[29], composing a widely dispersed occupation[30] within a fragmented social and political context[31]. However, the continuity of the hillforts as rural villages during the High Empire might have not been a generalized phenomenon, as expected. In those areas with continued occupation for a longer period, percentages range between 40 per cent[32] and 60 per cent[33]. In other regions, however, continuity is much lower: in the study are, the percentage of occupied hillforts during the High-Imperial period is around 30 per cent[34], with no cases of hillforts that were not abandoned after the second third of the first c. CE[35]. In addition, some sites with Roman material of unclear chronologies, such as *tegulae*, have been usually understood as "unequivocal evidence of Romanization"[36], assuming a hypothetical continuity and disregarding the wide chronological range of these objects and the eventual reoccupation of fortified places after third-fourth c. BCE[37]. In any case, even assuming the highest percentages in the surroundings of the hillforts, this archaeological void related to rural settlement is certainly not explained, or not exclusively, by the continuity of the traditional model.

In conclusion, the High-Imperial landscape of the region of study shows a small number of semi-urban settlements that operated as nuclei of a dispersed and fragmented rural habitat in terms of territorial structuring. In this sense, there is a clear dichotomy between rural and urban spaces: the former is shown in a context of greater continuity with local traditions and dynamics, while the latter represents a new model of political control and structuring of the landscape, with an increasing presence of foreign people and expressing a new lifestyle. As we shall see, these differences between rural and urban spaces will prove key to understanding

[12] PÉREZ LOSADA 2002, 343–348.
[13] GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA/BRAÑAS ABAD 1995, 223–225.
[14] NAVEIRO LÓPEZ 1994, 5–8; NIÓN-ÁLVAREZ 2019, 65–66.
[15] BELLO DIÉGUEZ 2008, 61–62; MAROTO 2016, 148.
[16] LÓPEZ PÉREZ *et al*. 1999, 252–253.
[17] PÉREZ LOSADA 2002, 135.
[18] PEREIRA MENAUT 1994, 50.
[19] COSTA-GARCÍA *et al*. 2019, 31.
[20] DERKS 2009, 251–253.
[21] MATTINGLY 2011, 221.
[22] CAAMAÑO GESTO/FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ 2000.
[23] COSTA-GARCÍA 2013.
[24] GAGO MARIÑO/FERNÁNDEZ MALDE 2015.
[25] COSTA-GARCÍA *et al.* 2019, 29–30.
[26] CARLSSON-BRANDT FONTÁN 2021, 263–543.
[27] LOIRA 2019, 378.
[28] GONZÁLEZ-RUIBAL 2006–7, 618–25; SÁNCHEZ PARDO 2008, 380; AYÁN-VILA 2012, 785–787.
[29] NIÓN-ÁLVAREZ 2023, 255.
[30] FÁBREGA ÁLVAREZ 2005.
[31] GARCÍA QUINTELA 2002, 97–98.
[32] See the case of the central-eastern area of Lugo: RODRÍGUEZ FERNÁNDEZ 1994, 175–80.
[33] See the case of the region of Lemos: ARIZAGA CASTRO/AYÁN-VILA 2007, 499. This study, however, was based on the continued existence of occupation from the Iron Age to the present.
[34] SÁNCHEZ PARDO 2010, 144–145.
[35] NIÓN-ÁLVAREZ 2021, 671–672.
[36] SÁNCHEZ PARDO 2008, 378.
[37] QUIRÓS CASTILLO 2012.

differences in epigraphic practices, cultural choices, and their dissemination across the landscape.

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

This work has been based on an anthroponymic and theonymic study of the epigraphic record in the region of A Coruña, combined later with a geospatial and statistical analysis. People's names and deities represented on the epigraphic record have been studied individually and geographically referenced within their territorial context. Information has been recorded within a unified network, aiming for an analysis that permits a correlation between attributes. For instance, an epigraph without text that formally corresponds to a votive altar would be recorded as an example of a votive epigraph and accounted on the overall sampling, but its attributes will not be recorded in other fields. Thus, different samples are established according to different study categories, providing a greater number of connections between phenomena that facilitate the identification of regional patterns. Finally, the resulting data and trends are integrated into the population and social context from a geospatial analysis.

The first criterion of classification distinguishes between *funerary* and *votive* epigraphs, aiming to differentiate the cultural practice involved in each one. Then, the individuals represented on the epigraphs are studied in order to define its origins. It is worth mentioning that there is no intention of defining the precise *origo* of each one, but to conclude if they are *local* (that is, native from the region of study) or *foreign* (coming for any other part of the Roman Empire). In order to analyze this, an individualized and exhaustive study of each anthroponym has been carried out, contrasting the etymology of each name with other information available (formal characteristics of the epigraph, particularities and/or specific formulae on the writing, related data about other individuals, etc.)[38]. Those cases which could not be defined were classified as *unclear*. In the case of votive epigraphs, in addition to the anthroponymic study, a theonymic one was already included. The classification is rather simple: deities have been classified as *local* and *foreign* gods, being the latter those linked to the Roman pantheon[39].

Naturally, this study may raise some uncertainties that need to be addressed. There is no doubt that the analysis of the origin of a specific individual could be partial and conflictive. In some ideal cases, some individuals express their origins explicitly (e.g., "*Gaius Sevius Lupus architectus aeminiensis*") or present a very clear etymology (e.g., *Caeleo, Cadraiolo* or *Caesarus*). However, the information is often less accurate. In some examples, the origin can be precised according to the epigraphical context (e.g., common Roman anthroponyms with dedications of origin placed in rural areas, or strange anthroponyms without parallels in nearby regions or present in unusual epigraphic formats) and, in some cases, its origin has to be labeled as unclear in the absence of solid evidence. In any case, the binary differentiation between local or foreign makes an operative and easier classification with less degree of error[40].

With regard to the theonymic study, the classification between local and foreign gods does not respond to a hypothetical pre-Roman origin. The *lari viali* provide a very insightful case in this regard: it is a cult practically exclusive of northwestern Iberia or even the *conventus lucensis*[41], but

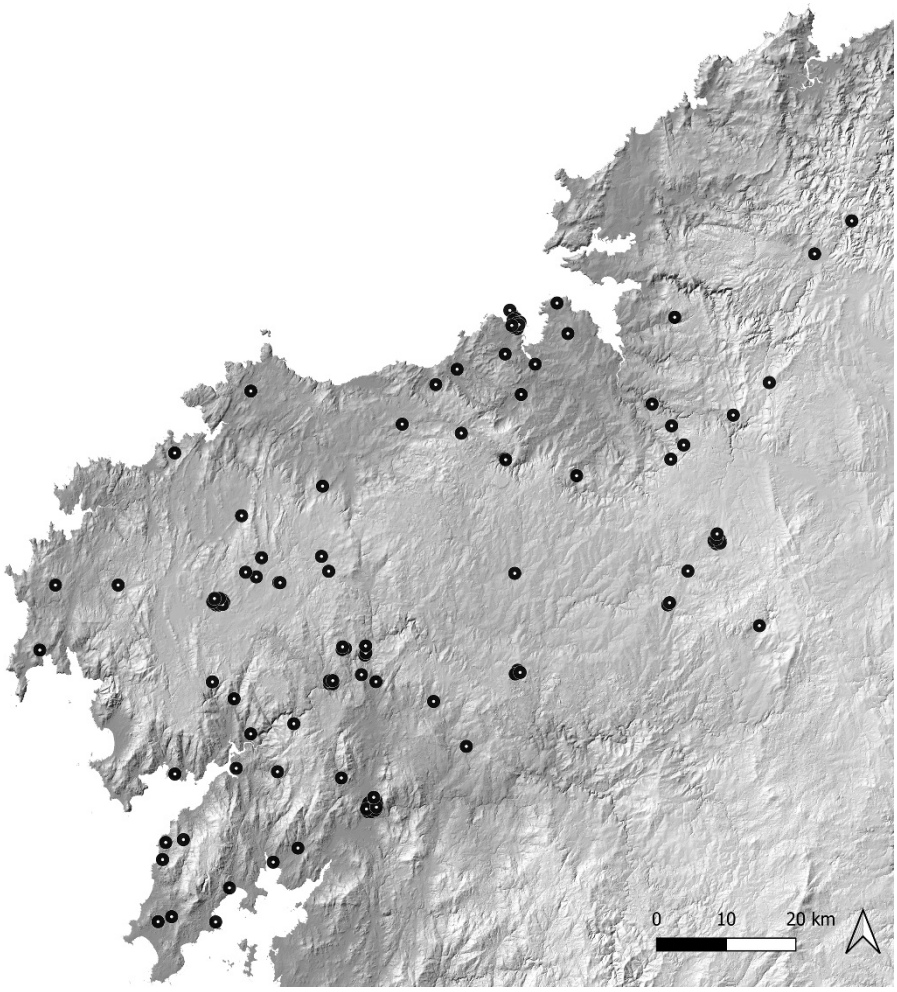

Fig. 2. Epigraphs in the area of study.

[38] For the study of anthroponymy of Latin names, we have mainly used the works of KAJANTO 1965; LASSERE 1977; ABASCAL PALAZÓN 1994; as well as Epigraphik Datenbank (https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/epi.php?s_sprache=es), crlas (Universities of Zürich and Bërn) and Hispania Epigraphica (https://eda-bea.es/pub/search_select.php) (University of Alcalá) databases.
For the study of non-Latin names, the works of ALBERTOS 1966; 1984 and VALLEJO RUIZ 2005; 2009 were the most relevant ones.

[39] Considering that the study only aims to identify the origin of each god, the theonymic study has only analyzed those deities alien to the Roman pantheon, as they are the ones that require a correct identification. In this regard, the works of OLIVARES PEDREÑO 2000; 2006; ALFAYÉ 2009 and GONZÁLEZ-RODRÍGUEZ 2021 shall be mentioned.

[40] In any case, it has been considered to provide the information collected of the whole so that the reader can assess each case individually.

[41] ABASCAL PALAZÓN 2019, 257.

it is not possible to define whether it has a pre-Roman origin or it was part of a cultural process engendered after the Roman conquest. Irrespective of both possibilities, there is no doubt about its local origin, and it should be considered as such.

Another source of uncertainty is chronological. The period of study (first-second c. CE) was chosen to contextualize the peak period of the epigraphic practices, whose relevance gradually declined from the third c. CE onwards[42]. As is common, most epigraphs do not contain precise chronological information, a fact that raises two questions in analytical terms. On the one hand, it is not possible to correlate cultural trends with their temporalities, which may lead to understanding different practices as High-Imperial phenomena, disregarding any chronological variation. On the other hand, seeking to avoid any chronological distortion, those examples clearly related to later dates have been initially recorded, but excluded in the final analysis.

A final note is the contingent nature of these categories in cultural terms. We are aware that a division between foreign and native may constitute a partial vision that may disregard other expressions embedded in collective identity[43]. However, it should be noted that the aim is not to differentiate between identitarian strategies, but cultural choices: it is about understanding a range of cultural choices and their relationship with the landscape, not to identify how ethnic identities were expressed. It is somewhat a preceding step: identifying specific cultural practices may lead to defining a framework of study to break through standard models of cultural change. In addition to that, we should not disregard binary classifications, as several identitarian expressions operated in terms of opposition, especially in colonial contexts[44], as it has already been proposed in the Roman world[45].

EPIGRAPHIC DATA AND ANALYSIS

It has been analyzed a total of one hundred twenty-six examples: sixty-two of these are votive, fifty-four are funerary and the rest are related to road infrastructure (*miliaria* and other) (Fig. 2). As mentioned above, some of them were discarded from the final study, either for exceeding the time span or for not having a reliable content or location. One interesting aspect at this level of research is that there is a greater presence of votive epigraphs than funerary ones: only 42.9 per cent of funerary epigraphs in contrast to 49.2 per cent of votive ones. This is consistent with the main dynamics of the *conventus lucensis*[46], but it is particularly eccentric in relation to the common dynamics of the Roman Empire, in which 75–80 per cent of the epigraphic samples are funerary, as it also happens to the whole Iberian Peninsula[47]. We will endorse these trends at a later stage.

As mentioned above, a total of one hundred and twenty individuals were analyzed: fifty-four (45 per cent) were classified as foreign, forty (33.3 per cent) as locals, and twenty-six (21.7 per cent) have an unclear origin (Fig. 3). As stated above, there might be some degree of uncertainty in some cases, but only those with a reasonable degree of reliability have been classified.

Regarding the votive epigraphs, a total of forty-six gods were analyzed: twenty-two of them (48.9 per cent) are local deities and twenty-one (46.8 per cent) belong to the Roman Pantheon. The remaining three (4.3 per cent) are syncretic deities or advocations (Fig. 3). According to their mixed identity, they were accounted for in both categories (local

Table 1. Scheme with epigraphic data (conceptualization and design by Tamara Barreiro).

EPIGRAPHS 126	VOTIVE 62 (49.2%): *22 (48.9%) LOCAL GODS* *21 (46.8%) FOREIGN GODS* *3 (4.3%) SYNCRETIC ADVOCATIONS*	IN URBAN / MILITARY AREAS 32 (59.2%)		
		IN RURAL AREAS 22 (40.8%)		
	FUNERARY 54 (42.9%)	IN URBAN / MILITARY AREAS 32 (59.2%)		
		IN RURAL AREAS 22 (40.8%)		
	OTHER 10 (7.9%)			
INDIVIDUALS 120	54 (45%) FOREIGN 40 (33.3%) LOCAL 26 (21.7%) NOT IDENTIFIED	IN VOTIVE EPIGRAPHS 39	FOREIGN 6 (15.4%)	
			LOCAL 26 (66.7%)	WORSHIPPED LOCAL GODS 20 (76.9%)
				WORSHIPPED ROMAN GODS 6 (23.1%)
			NOT IDENTIFIED 7 (17.9%)	
		IN FUNERARY EPIGRAPHS 81	FOREIGN 48 (59.3%)	
			LOCAL 14 (17.3%)	
			NOT IDENTIFIED 19 (23.5%)	
GODS 51	30 (58.8%) IN RURAL AREAS	LOCAL GODS 20 (66.7%)		
		FOREIGN GODS 10 (33.3%)		
	21 (42.2%) IN URBAN/ MILITARY AREAS	LOCAL GODS 5 (23.8%)		
		FOREIGN GODS 16 (76.2%)		

[42] Especially in the funerary field, see PHILPOTT 1991; BLAIZOT *et al.* 2007.
[43] JONES 1997, 130.
[44] JEDREJ 2004, 720; SCOTT 2009, 243–244.
[45] DERKS 2009, 253; MATTINGLY 2011, 210.
[46] ABASCAL PALAZÓN 2016, 199; SERRANO LOZANO 2023.
[47] ABASCAL PALAZÓN 2003, 265.

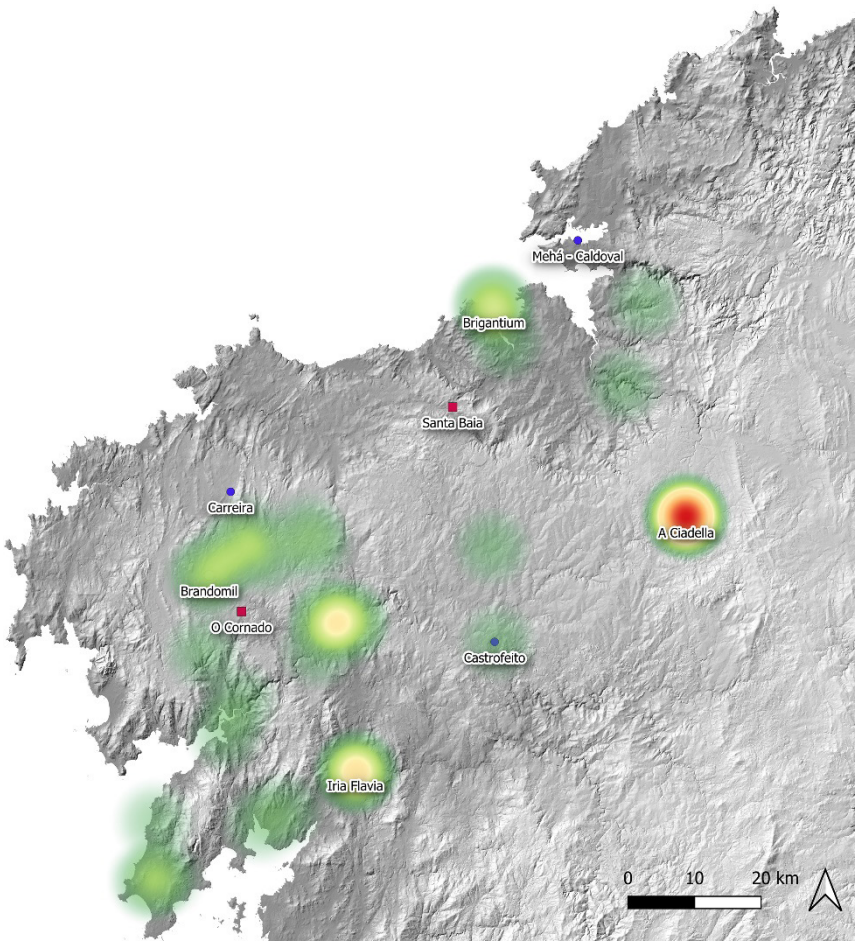

Fig. 3. Density of funerary epigraphs.

and foreign) in their respective analysis. In addition, two religious' dedications to emperor cults were also included as "Roman gods", since we are not assessing the cult but their cultural origin.

If we analyze the data collected from funerary epigraphy, most of the epigraphs were found in urban or military contexts (32 – 59.2 per cent, see also Fig. 4)[48]. They are mostly related to military, *veteri* or freedman. It is also worth mentioning the percentage of individuals represented. From a total number of eighty-one, forty-eight (59.3 per cent) came from outside *Gallaecia*, and only fourteen (17.3 per cent) had a local origin; the provenance of the remainder 19–23.5 per cent – was impossible to trace (Fig. 5). Regarding these fourteen natives, seven of them came from urban or military areas, and two have Latin citizenship.

Votive epigraphy shows a different portrait (Fig. 6). Only twenty-two (35.4 per cent) epigraphs came from urban and military contexts, and the remainder forty (65.6 per cent) came from rural environments. If we classify the location according to whether they are Roman or native dedications, twenty (80 per cent) of the twenty-five local gods are worshiped in rural areas. The dissemination of Roman gods is more balanced: twelve (46.2 per cent) were found in urban areas and fourteen (53.8 per cent) in rural areas. From these fourteen, eight (57.1 per cent) were dedicated to IOM and two have a foreign dedicator.

From a total of fifty-one gods analyzed, thirty (58.8 per cent) were found in rural areas and twenty-one (42.2 per cent) in urban/military areas (Fig. 7). Regarding gods analyzed in rural environments, twenty (66.7 per cent) are local gods and ten (33.3 per cent) are Roman (almost all of them, devoted to IOM). In urban areas, only five (23.8 per cent) are local gods, while sixteen (76.2 per cent) are of Roman origin.

Finally, regarding the origin of the people represented in votive epigraphs, from a total of thirty-nine, twenty-six (66.7 per cent) are local and only six (15.4 per cent) are foreigners (the remainder seven, 17.9 per cent, have an unclear origin) (Fig. 8). If we cross the information about the origin of each individual with the worshiped god, from a total of twenty-five epigraphs dedicated to local deities, nineteen were dedicated by local people and only one was dedicated by a foreigner (the remainder five has no people represented on the epigraph). Finally, of the previously mentioned twenty-six epigraphs dedicated by natives, twenty (76.9 per cent) worshiped a local god and only six (23.1 per cent) were represented with a god of the Roman Pantheon.

DISCUSSION

Dissecting Practices: Tracing Patterns on Cultural Epigraphy

The links between practices, individuals, and spatial distribution raise several interesting trends. Regarding funerary epigraphy, the evidence points to its limited diffusion as a cultural practice among the native population. As mentioned above, an initial clue pointing to this issue is a particularly low percentage of funerary epigraphs (42.9 per cent) in comparison to the usual ranges throughout the empire (75–80 per cent). This anomalous trend is endorsed by the fact that this practice does not transcend the rural world (only a few examples, exclusively in the southern area) and it was mainly practiced by foreign people. Indeed, some of the local people represented in funerary epigraphy are located in urban areas and/or present names with *tria nomina*, a fact that points to a greater degree of integration in the administrative policies of the Empire and, therefore, a different cultural context from that of rural areas.

At this point, a brief reflection should be introduced: it may be striking that more foreign than local individuals were identified. This may be due to a number of factors, and we can also think about some hypothetical methodological flaws. However, it is worth noting that the methodology should does not raise many issues in this regard: the identification of foreign individuals has been carried out on the basis of town names, names originated or typical from other territories, links with other groups of foreign origin (either military or freedmen), or elements representative of practices which

[48] Another semiurban location in the region of Negreira-A Baña may also be considered, but archaeological data are particularly scarce and there is no possibility to set an insightful interpretation in this regard.

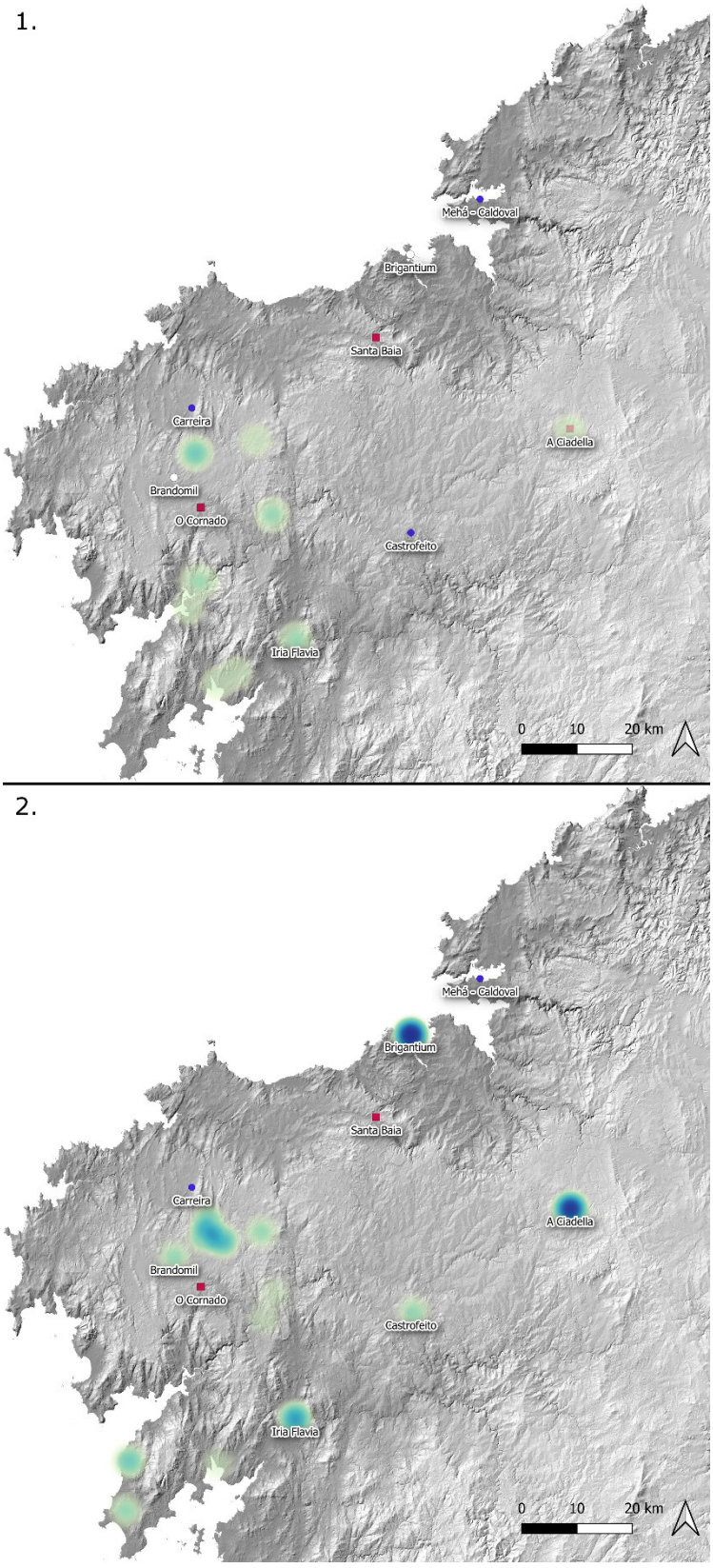

Fig. 4. Individuals represented in funerary epigraphy, classified by origin: 1. Locals. 2. Foreign.

are accredited as alien to the *conventus lucensis*. The possible flaws that may arise from this classification do not come so much from the identification of foreign individuals as in that of locals, whose onomastics are not always clear (especially in those who chose Latin anthroponyms). In this regard, the information about foreign people shall be more robust and, if there has been any mistake, it will only provoke an increase in the individuals classified as unclear.

In this sense, we consider that this apparent over-representation is not the result of a contextual error nor an exceptional immigrational increase. In my opinion, it seems to support the data previously presented: this over-representation seems to indicate that foreign individuals are prone to use funerary epigraphy as a practice, but not the locals, a fact that resulted in a greater epigraphic representation of the former. It is not unusual to have a conjunctural over-representation of some social groups due to a greater dissemination of certain cultural practices, as it is the case with freedmen[49]. In this sense, particularly representative data can be noted: forty-eight (89.9 per cent) of the fifty-five individuals classified as foreign are related to funerary contexts, a fact that is not only coherent with the usual dynamics of the Roman Empire, but that also points to the reduced level of diffusion of this practice and, perhaps, also the root of this overrepresentation of foreign people.

On the other hand, votive epigraphy shows a much more outstanding cultural transmission throughout the region of study: almost two thirds of the sample come from rural areas, and two out of three individuals represented on funerary epigraphy are of local origin. These data, in contrast to the previous ones, show how votive epigraphy was truly disseminated across the landscape.

Nevertheless, the permeability of this practice only offers a partial view of the process. Apart from IOM, the gods of the Roman Pantheon are practically absent in rural environments and are circumscribed exclusively to urban contexts and worshiped by foreign citizens. Local people disregarded foreign gods in favor of local ones: 76 per cent of local people represented in votive epigraphy worshiped local deities. Similarly, local divinities also predominate in rural areas: 70 per cent of the votive epigraphs are dedicated to local gods, and the remaining 30 per cent represent IOM almost exclusively. As a final remark, and in spite of exceeding the boundaries of this work, it is worth mentioning the presence of Jupiter in rural areas: it is somewhat curious that the sovereign deity of the Roman Pantheon, the one who embodies and represents the power of Rome[50], was spread in an environment reluctant to other Roman gods.

REASSEMBLING PRACTICES: CULTURE, POWER AND EPIGRAPHY

This analysis has shown a particularly diverse portrait of the adoption of the epigraphic habitus. The dissemination of certain practices (or lack thereof) shows that the process of cultural conquest and cultural

[49] A similar example has been noticed in Gaul: WOOLF 1998, 99.
[50] WHITTAKER 1997, 151–152.

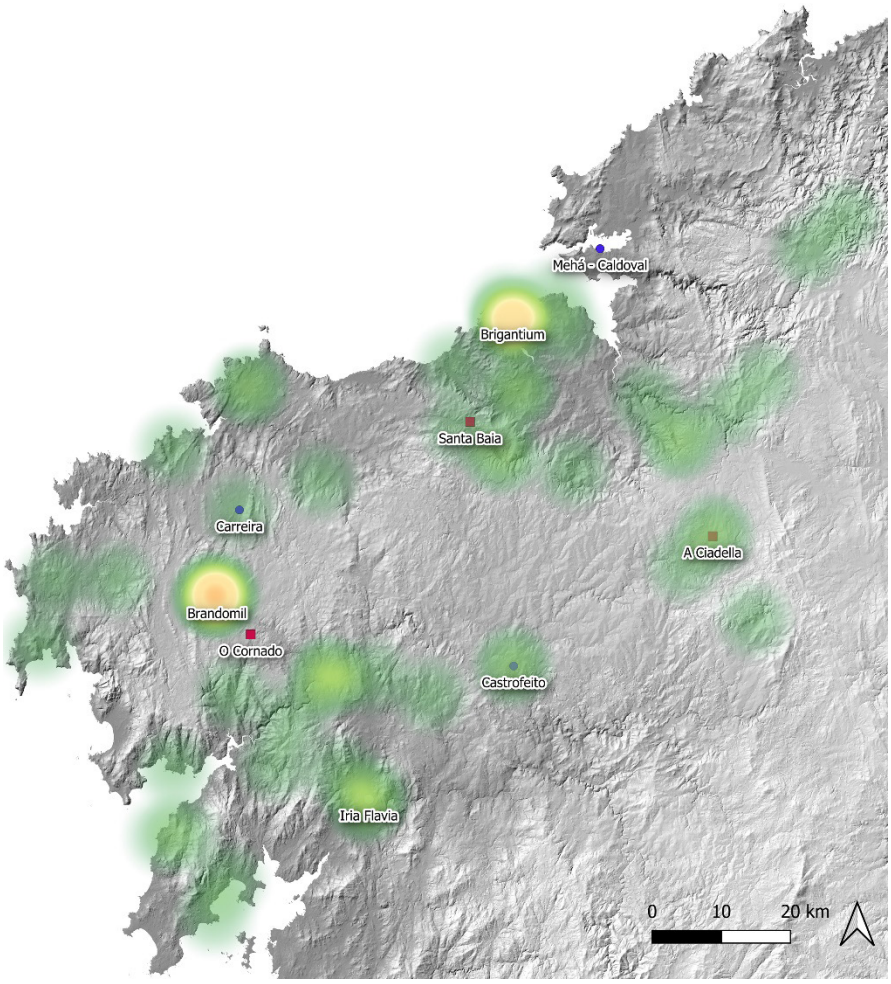

Fig. 5. Density of votive epigraphs.

transformation[51] was not linear and cannot be understood according to predefined models. The transmission of different cultural structures manifests different dynamics and multifaceted realities, and some elements that are usually taken as generalized may not even have become part of the cultural background. In some way, as Alicia Jiménez stated[52], this kind of experience shall be understood in a twofold way: not only how the indigenous culture changed, but also how the Roman. These processes involved significant modifications of one's own identity through a new scale of values, a consequence of a power dynamic that conquered populations assumed and reproduced in different ways.

These experiences, labeled as "discrepant" by authors such as David Mattingly[53], have been reflected in other epigraphic contexts. In the case of Euskadi, Pilar Ciprés[54] has identified a completely opposite dynamic in terms of administrative integration through an onomastic analysis: while in the south several epigraphic evidence of individuals with Latin and Roman citizenship (and cognomen) have been found, in the north there are hardly any Roman anthroponyms, and even epigraphs are scarce. Through the study of religion, Mattingly[55] has pointed out remarkable differences in the transmission of Romano-British religious practices between rural and urban/military environments. One interesting example is the common presence of inscribed altars in military contexts, while rural Romano-Celtic temples hardly had any kind of inscription[56]. Other aspects such as origin, gender and social class may also be key to understanding the emergence of striking cultural differences. Ursula Rothe's works on German borders[57] highlight the existence of iconographic patterns that replicate in some ways Roman clothing in urban areas. However, it is possible to observe, from a gender perspective, how these patterns are much more widespread in female representation, while male tend to preserve traditional aesthetics in these expressions[58].

These contexts remark two main questions. On the one hand, the adoption of foreign practices, especially in colonial contexts, does not define *per se* the assumption of foreign identities, especially if it is related to a significant alteration of the meanings of these cultural symbols[59]. Epigraphy is not a ubiquitous element on which to write an acculturation tale, but rather the ways of molding the local point of view of the new cultural paradigm. This became particularly clear in our case study: votive expressions fit well in native cosmovision, but not funerary ones, a very simple example of how epigraphy can be reshaped.

On the other hand, all these cases make clear the eventual emergence of a social dichotomy between rural and urban. Undoubtedly, the differences between the forms of settlement and between the urban/military and rural nuclei are clearly reflected in the epigraphic habitus. Funerary epigraphy is concentrated in around 4–5 settlements and there are only a few cases in rural areas. In this sense, it is worth remembering the difficulties in identifying local settlements. Perhaps this search of rural areas was overshadowed by a greater continuity of pre-Roman family structures,

[51] It is true that we could also employ "Romanization", but our intention is to move this discussion away from the present work in order to analyze these cultural transformations without the weight of 150 years of historiography shifting the debate to somehow less original and relevant.

[52] JIMENEZ DÍAZ 2008, 355.

[53] Mattingly's concept of "cultural discrepancy" (MATTINGLY 2011, 213–218), as anarchist anthropology has proposed subtly different uses of the term. Mattingly's "discrepancy" is based more on Edward W. Said (1995) approaches rather than J.C. Scott's (1990). In this sense, Scott's "discrepancies" materialize a position of certain rejection of the dominant culture expressed in an ambiguous or hidden way. Mattingly, however, refers to "discrepant" as these expressions that do not fit the expected expressions or uses of some cultural items. As Gardner suggests (GARDNER 2021, 316), Mattingly's discrepancies are focused on making clear that empires are not harmonious contexts and that there are many areas in which archaeological evidence is much more plural and contradictory than expected, but that does not necessarily have to imply rejection or disagreement.

[54] CIPRÉS TORRES 2006; CIPRÉS TORRES 2018.

[55] MATTINGLY 2007, 455–460.

[56] MATTINGLY 2011, 223–228.

[57] ROTHE 2012; ROTHE 2013.

[58] ROTHE 2013, 258.

[59] JIMÉNEZ DÍAZ 2008, 49.

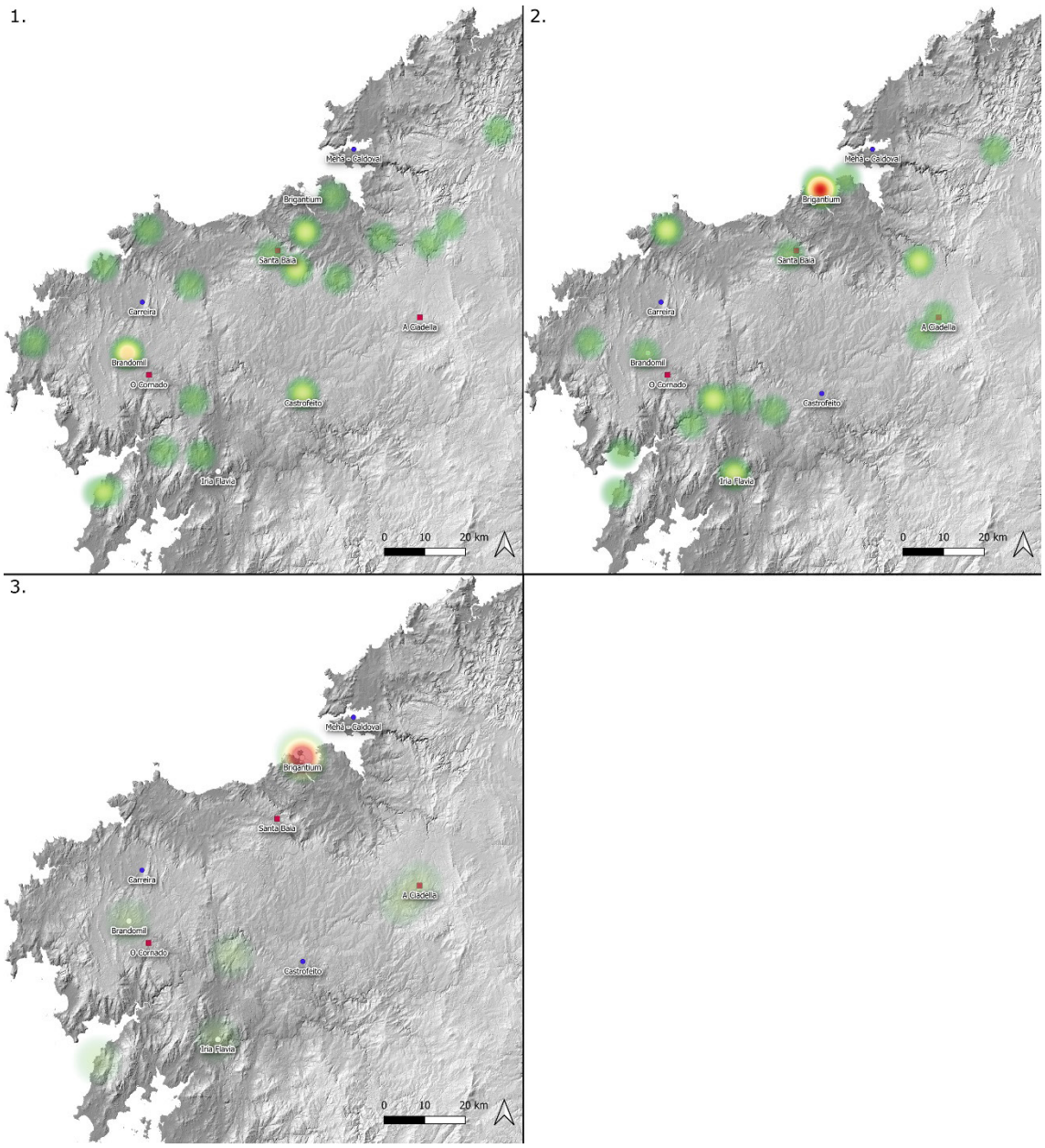

Fig. 6. Dispersion of epigraphs by origin of the worshiped gods: 1. Local gods. 2. Roman pantheon gods. 3. Roman pantheon gods (excluding Jupiter).

regardless of the habitat model chosen. Even despite the "municipalizing impulse" generated under Vespasian's Edict of Latinity[60], it is not clear to what extent its implementation was generalized[61], nor to what extent (and until when) organizational units such as the *castella* have survived. In this sense, perhaps a population dispersed in a socio-political context inherited from the dynamics of the Iron Age, choosing a settlement model different from the usual one in other peripheral territories of the Empire, may explain this striking context.

Along the same lines, it is worth reflecting to what extent this dichotomy between urban and rural embodies an even deeper dichotomy between colonizers and natives. There is not only a clear polarization in terms of territorial structure, but also of culture. The epigraphy of the urban/military settlements contrast with those of rural environments, in which funerary practice is completely absent and votive epigraphy diverges clearly from the norm. Epigraphy, in this sense, is clearly reflecting the "capillary model of secondary agglomerates": one the one hand, we have an urban/military environment with an outstanding presence of foreign inhabitants (imperial servants, magistrates, militaries, etc.) that performs a more culturally orthodox pattern; on the other hand, we have a rural environment in which cultural continuity is still apparent. This dichotomy becomes evident in the peri-urban environment, in which a greater presence of local people is noticed. In these contexts (Brandomil and A Ciadella are particularly representative), it is possible to identify some expressions of local people carrying out

[60] ESPINOSA ESPINOSA 2009.

[61] We are not referring to the direct influence of municipalization of the region after the Edicts of Latinity, as their articulation did not imply a direct assumption of imperial cultural models (GARCÍA FERNÁNDEZ 2001, 124), but rather to structuring their relations according to the interests of the *civitas* (BALBÍN CHAMORRO 2006, 41). However, we will tackle the indirect influences of these strategies later on.

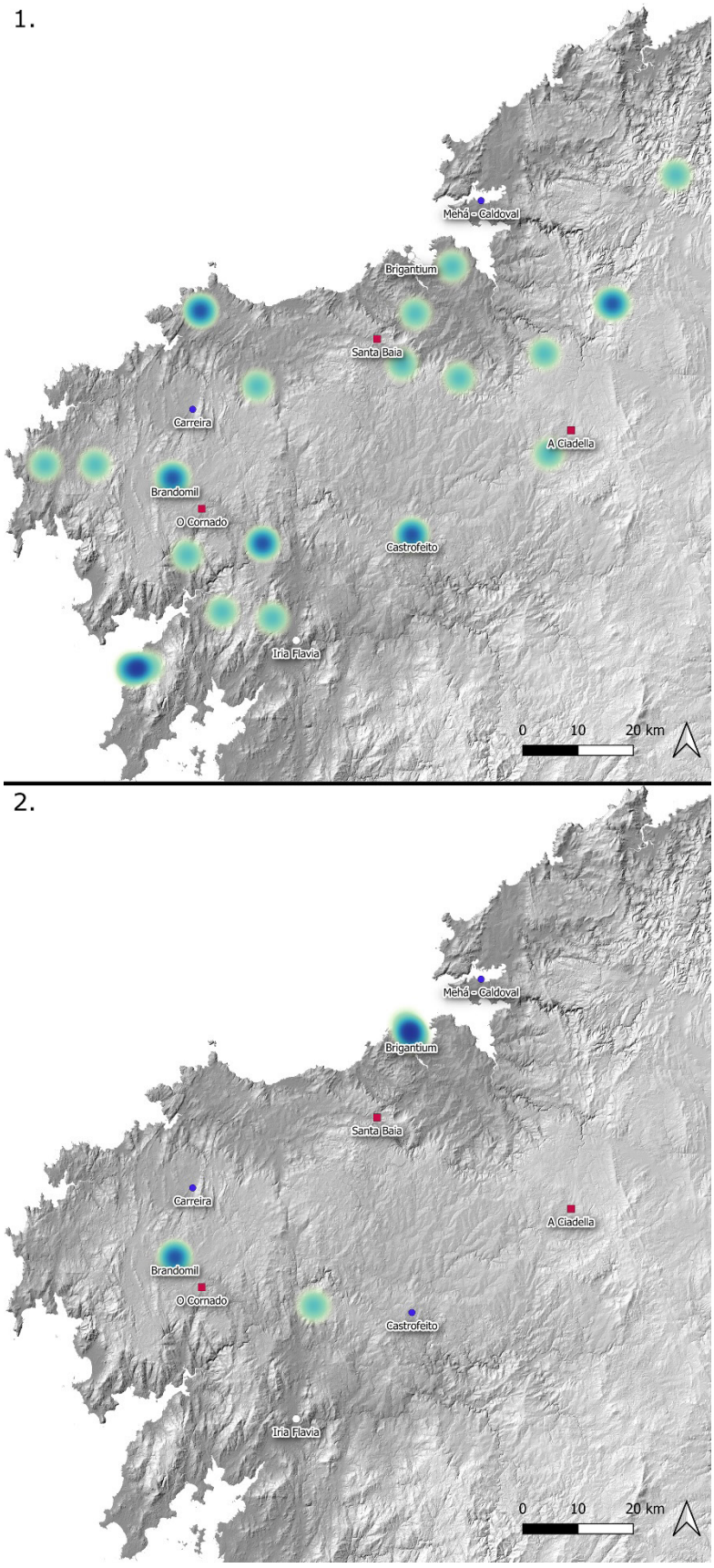

Fig. 7. Individuals represented in votive epigraphs, classified by origin: 1. Local. 2. Foreign.

funerary practices or even building altars to Roman pantheon that were completely ignored in rural environments.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on why this process took place, how these dynamics were generated and, ultimately, why these cultural expressions were spread. While it is true that the root of cultural change has probably been one of the fiercest battlefields of Romanization studies[62], my intention is not to revisit and question old approaches, but rather suggest new ideas that may be of interest. With regard to cultural change in colonial contexts, it is worth recalling a phrase of Frantz Fanon[63]: "natives do not exist; they are created by the colonizer". In other words, the "otherness" of the indigenous is always defined by the prevailing culture that retains political power. Thus, any differentiation between locals and foreigners is caused and established by the profound influence of power in cultural dynamics, whatever the period[64]. Thus, it is not really relevant whether the Roman administration was passive or active in this process[65]. Possibly, a sort of active "civilizing" process existed within the framework of some conquest processes (Tacitus' *Agricola* or Strabo's *Geography* collect some examples), which is also compatible with some native elites being encouraged to approach Roman culture voluntarily. It is indeed a difficult question to unveil, as such initiatives depend on active decisions that changed over time; however, in substance, this issue does not really address how culture and identities changed within this context. In the end, it is not so much the local agency or civilising ethos that matters: what remains unalterable, however, is the culture of prestige, a hegemonic model of society and a view of the world[66]: that embodied and represented the values of the dominant culture and the identity of the empire, in this case, Roman Empire, distinguishing what is proper and civilized from what is barbaric and savage[67]. The relentless persistence of these values over time and their universal perception[68] makes it irrelevant to know who transmitted them: assuming the dominant culture, imitating it or masking your own culture from it is a matter that subalterns should do in order to avoid being perceived as inferior.

Such approaches are of interest, especially for overcoming some of the more naïve perspectives of post-colonialism, in which concepts such as "contact" or "entanglement" provide a neutral framework

[62] See WOOLF 1998, 142–146; WEBSTER 2001, 211–212; LO CASCIO 2007, 79; MATTINGLY 2011, 206.
[63] FANON 1986, 93.
[64] GOSDEN 2004, 36.
[65] A highly conflictive point during the last decades, *cf.* MILLETT 1990, 35–41; WOOLF 1998, 68–76; WEBSTER 2001, 220–3; HINGLEY 2005, 59–69; LO CASCIO 2007, 81.
[66] Maybe connectable through the concept of *humanitas*: WOOLF 1998, 54–60; HINGLEY 2005, 62–64.
[67] LAMPINEN 2021, 218–220.
[68] KAMINSKI-JONES/KAMINSKI-JONES 2020, 8.

for contacts neglecting the analysis of conflicts[69] and raising a "politically agnostic" vision of cultural interactions[70]. Although I agree with recovering the agency and the point of view of the native[71], this agency must be understood from the political context of an imperial conquest[72] and the darkest part of the brutality of the conquest[73]. Natives choose how to reconfigure their identities, but they do it from a new social and political context imposed on their territory by a larger and more powerful entity that redefined the narratives of power and prestige. Perhaps we have become used to taking cultural change for granted in colonial contexts, probably as part of a perspective eminently centered on progress and advancement towards civilization[74], understanding civilization as the contemporary socio-cultural model and progress as any experience that marks a step beyond towards them. Such perceptions stem from our own cosmovision, perceiving our social model as a teleological end towards the past has inevitably been directed[75], turning history into an account of our own genealogy[76]. For this reason, perhaps, studies of Roman colonialism have been less prolific and more contested than in other contexts: Western culture has been built on Greece and Rome, and those proposals that undermine the foundations of our current identity are not always welcome. However, in my personal opinion, the study of the past shall not be about endorsing our current identity, but about understanding how historical processes have taken place.

In this regard, it is essential to stop understanding cultural change as an ineluctable process and start approaching it as a process of strategic adaptability. Approaches such as Miguel Bartolomé's "ethnic transfiguration" [77] show that past identities must fit to the social and political contexts of the dominant culture. Although no explicit guideline existed, old identities only persists if they are not particularly conflictive[78]. If they are not of if you are shown as an uncivilized savage, you have to change or abandon them to become part of a new social body. To some extent, it takes the spirit of Clifford Geertz's strain theory[79], already considered when understanding the development of Roman imperialism[80], but placing the focus on the influence of political subordination. Therefore, cultural change is neither part of an "unstoppable attraction towards Rome" nor a propagandistic imposition: it is an organic and natural process caused by the influence of power dynamics.

These points provide new insights to understanding different expressions on epigraphic record. Rural populations do not replicate but reformulated epigraphy: they rejected funerary epigraphy and modified votive epigraphy under their own cult system. In contrast, urban environments were closer to the Roman *doxa*, whether foreign or local people. This accurately represents the need to "transfigure" their identity, to show a mask more similar to the cultural model of the dominant culture in order to be akin to the new value system. Adaptive resistance is not only expressed in order to survive, but also to improve one's status.

CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed an anthroponymic and theonymic revision of the epigraphic record of a small region in northwestern Iberian Peninsula. As shown, the combination of different elements and their study focused on settlement and landscape has made it possible to differentiate trends in regional terms. In this sense, the epigraphic record, can be a key element for analyzing cultural dynamics beyond its textual, legal and political value; we only need to ask the right questions.

A clear difference has been pointed out in the ways of approaching epigraphy in rural and urban/military areas: the latter performed funerary and votive practices in a more traditional way, with a greater diffusion of funerary epigraphy and a greater presence of Roman gods. However, these practices did not permeate rural areas, which: funerary epigraphy barely reached, and votive epigraphy underwent notable changes, being mostly focused on local gods rather than Roman ones.

To conclude, this paper has proposed an approach to cultural studies that avoids understanding epigraphy as a static and fixed framework. As with many other cultural practices, it does not matter the norms and the common habitus: any cultural expression can be profoundly shaped and modified according to its context. And this is not only applicable to epigraphy: the consumption of goods, dressing and ornaments or even writing are cultural phenomena whose dissemination cannot be taken for granted, since they can be adapted and molded from different contexts to make them coherent and operational with the local worldview. At the same time, however, this local agency is profoundly driven by power dynamics. Local communities were influence by a new political and cultural framework, a habitus if we prefer, in which its elements are deeply modified by new cultural schemes that influence decision-making. In this sense, we may need more studies of different cultural phenomena to encourage a broader view of these processes, so that we can better understand how cultural expressions changed in colonial contexts.

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[69] SILLIMAN 2005, 67–72.
[70] GONZÁLEZ-RUIBAL 2014, 7.
[71] WEBSTER 2001; GARDNER 2021.
[72] ROYMANS/FERNÁNDEZ-GÖTZ 2019; FERNÁNDEZ-GÖTZ *et al.* 2020.
[73] LAVAN 2020.
[74] SCOTT 2017, 5.
[75] CLASTRES 1981, 156–160.
[76] WOLF 1982, 4–5.
[77] BARTOLOMÉ/BARABAS 1996; BARTOLOMÉ 2006.
[78] BARTOLOMÉ 2006, 104.
[79] GEERTZ 1973, 201–205.
[80] See WHITTAKER 1997, 148–149.

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