

*CETERVM CENSEMVS CARTHAGINEM NOVAM ESSE  
LEGENDAM: ROMAN POETRY AS CULTURAL HISTORY\**

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ABSTRACT

This paper updates the *carmina Latina epigraphica* corpus of Carthago Nova (Hispania Citerior). The beginning of the arrival of families of Italic origin around the middle of the first century B.C. seems to be of crucial importance, as it definitely influenced the development of both trade and mining in the region and verse epigraphy. The study of the onomastics of these texts allows us to trace their origins and social positions, as well as to provide key elements of the social and cultural history of Carthago Nova.

KEYWORDS

Latin epigraphy; *carmina Latina epigraphica*; Carthago Nova.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo actualiza el corpus de *carmina Latina epigraphica* de Carthago Nova (Hispania Citerior). El inicio de la llegada de familias de origen itálico hacia mediados del siglo I a.C. parece haber sido de gran importancia, ya que influyó definitivamente en el desarrollo tanto del comercio y la minería en la región como de la epigrafía en verso. El estudio de la onomástica de estos textos permite rastrear orígenes y posiciones sociales, así como aportar elementos clave de la historia social y cultural de Cartago Nova.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Epigrafía latina; *carmina Latina epigraphica*; Carthago Nova.

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## 1. A NEW-ISH ART FOR A NEW-ISH TOWN: TAKING STOCK

Around the year 220 B.C., the Punic general Hasdrubal appears to have re-invented an old Iberian settlement whose original name may or may not have been Mastia.<sup>1</sup> Whatever its original name, under Hasdrubal's leadership the harbour town in question was transformed into a whole 'New Town', a Qart Hadasht, as it would have been called in Punic – incidentally the word that underlies the name of Carthago. Carthage, the Old New Town, so to speak, became the adoptive mother, the metropolis, of this 'New New Town' on the Iberian peninsula:<sup>2</sup> 'New New Town', Carthago Nova was the very name by which the Romans chose to refer to the place after they conquered it in 209 B.C. under the leadership of the Roman general Scipio Africanus.<sup>3</sup>

Approximately one century and a half later, Carthago Nova obtained the status of a colony under Julius Caesar, receiving its Roman Rights around 44 B.C., in recognition of its efforts, and for its support of Julius Caesar in his war against Pompey the Great.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the town took the title of Colonia Urbs Iulia Nova Carthago and, eventually, that of Colonia Victrix Iulia Nova Carthago.<sup>5</sup> In A.D. 298, under Diocletian's territorial reforms, Carthago Nova became the capital of a newly established Roman province, Hispania Carthaginensis. In the Roman period, Carthago Nova was especially well known for feeding three things into

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of the vexed question of this identification see P. Moret, "«Mastia Tarseion» y el problema geográfico del segundo tratado entre Cartago y Roma", *Mainake: Estudios de Arqueología Malagueña* 24, 2002, 257-76.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview on the history of the city see, in addition to *RE* III.2, 1899, s.v. *Carthago Nova*, 1620-6 (Hübner), e.g. S.F. Ramallo Asensio, *La ciudad romana de Carthago Nova: La documentación arqueológica*, Murcia 1989, 27-62; J.M. Abascal Palazón, S.F. Ramallo Asensio, *La ciudad de Carthago Nova: La documentación epigráfica*, Murcia 1997, 11-19, and S.F. Ramallo, "Carthago Nova: fragments d'une histoire en construction à travers les vestiges archéologiques et les documents épigraphiques", *RA* n.s. 1, 2018, 154-62. Cf. also the essays collected in E. Ruiz Valderas, ed., *Cartagena, Colonia Urbs Iulia Nova Carthago*, Roma 2017.

<sup>3</sup> On the presentation of the Roman conquest under Scipio Africanus in contemporary historiography see J.H. Richardson, "P. Cornelius Scipio and the Capture of New Carthage: the Tide, the Wind and Other Fantasies", *CQ* n.s. 68, 2018, 458-74.

<sup>4</sup> The date of the promotion to colonia is still debated. For the reconstruction presented here, see J.M. Abascal Palazón, "La fecha de la promoción colonial de Carthago Nova y sus repercusiones edilicias", *Mastia* 1, 2002, 21-44. On Carthago Nova's position during the civil war see also P. Berdowski, "Was Carthago Nova captured by Gnaeus Pompeius in 46 B.C. E. and Sextus Pompeius in 44 B.C. E.?", *Aevum* 93, 2018, 175-90; for a broader overview of the chronology see M.C. de la Escosura Balbás, "Epigrafía y onomástica en la colonia latina de Carthago Nova", *Gerión* 36/2, 2018, 428-32 (doi: 10.5209/GERI.61888).

<sup>5</sup> On the urban transformations of Carthago Nova during the Augustan period see S.F. Ramallo Asensio, M.M. Ros Sala, "Planificación y transformaciones urbanas de época augustea en Carthago Nova", *Gerión* 35, 2017, 655-78 (doi: 10.5209/GERI.56167).

the global Roman economy:<sup>6</sup> metal,<sup>7</sup> garum, and esparto grass.<sup>8</sup> In A.D. 435, the city was sacked by the Vandals, before it became part of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>9</sup>

A centre of some political, administrative, and economic importance in the region in Roman times, across several centuries, Carthago Nova – unsurprisingly – boasts a substantial corpus of Latin inscriptions from the Roman and post-Roman periods, comprising over five hundred items in total.<sup>10</sup>

On a general level, the proliferation of writing in Latin, and the Roman epigraphic habit on the Iberian peninsula following the Roman conquest is hardly surprising: by the time Roman rule arrived, writing systems had already been in use, both in the context of the original local populations of the Iberian peninsula (even though in the geographical context of Carthago Nova no evidence from its pre-Roman period has come to light so far)<sup>11</sup> and, as an additional import, by the Carthaginians. Both elements left the local population, however heterogeneous it was in its composition at the time, primed for what was to arrive in the knapsacks of the Roman troops.

In the specific case of Carthago Nova, only very little writing in languages that had already been present prior to the Roman conquest appears to have survived. None of the surviving non-Latin epigraphic evidence that has come to light is monumental in nature: much rather, virtually everything that has been found so far, in addition to some graffiti on ceramics, is related to imported goods from North Africa.<sup>12</sup> Absence (or scarcity) of evidence must not be (mis-)construed as evidence for absence (or scarcity), however. Local finds of Hispano-Punic

<sup>6</sup> See esp. Str. 3.2.10, and 3.4.6 as well as Plin. *nat.* 19.7.26.

<sup>7</sup> On Carthago Nova and the Roman mining industry generally see e.g. C. Domergue, *Les mines de la Péninsule Iberique dans l'Antiquité Romaine*, Roma 1990, A.M. Hirt, *Imperial Mines and Quarries in the Roman World: Organizational Aspects 27 BC – AD 235*, Oxford 2010, and recently C. Rico, J.A. Antolinos Marín, “La minería romana en Carthago Nova a la luz de las investigaciones recientes”, *MDAI(M)* 61, 2020, 340–71, on organisational aspects cf. also B. Díaz Ariño, J.A. Antolinos Marín, “Roman Mining Companies in Spain”, *ZPE* 210, 2019, 291–303.

<sup>8</sup> Further on the production of esparto grass, esparto grass baskets, and their relevance to ancient mining industries see L.R. Gosner, “Esparto Crafting under Empire: Local Technology and Imperial Industry in Roman Iberia”, *Journal of Social Archaeology* 21/3, 2021, 329–52 (doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/14696053211016628>).

<sup>9</sup> On Carthago Nova specifically between the fourth and seventh centuries A.D. see S.F. Ramallo, F. Cerezo Andreo, “*Carthago Spartaria*, declive y recuperación de una *civitas* romana en la Spania bizantina”, in I. Sánchez Ramos, P. Mateos Cruz, eds., *Territorio, topografía y arquitectura de poder durante la Antigüedad tardía*, Mérida 2018, 155–94.

<sup>10</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova* list under 230 inscriptions from Carthago Nova. The Clauss – Slaby Epigraphic Database reports some 530 items (last accessed: February 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. J.M. Abascal Palazón, “La temprana epigrafía latina de Carthago Nova”, in F. Beltrán Lloris, ed., *Roma y el nacimiento de la cultura epigráfica en occidente*, Zaragoza 1995, 140 ff.

<sup>12</sup> On the ‘epigraphic invisibility’ of the Carthaginians and the Iberians see M.C. de la Escosura Balbás, *La población de Carthago Nova de la conquista al principado. Epigrafía y onomástica*, Barcelona 2021, 54–60, esp. 54.

coins,<sup>13</sup> as well as other finds,<sup>14</sup> do unambiguously attest to a local presence – and an at least passive use – of writing before the Romans came. In other words, as far as Carthago Nova is concerned, Rome's epigraphic habit poured in an environment that was already, at least to an extent, literate (and this is a distinctive feature for the Iberian peninsula more generally). There are many other geographical contexts that fell under Roman rule, across the ancient world, that were not equally prepared for the incoming epigraphic habit, and it would seem reasonable to argue that this was, in many (if not in all) cases, an important factor in the development and dynamics of local writing habits in Latin during Roman times.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, Roman writing made a somewhat hesitant arrival at Carthago Nova. Certainly, with a view to the early stages of the epigraphic record, one must recognise that the town has yielded some scattered evidence for – informal, non-monumental – Roman inscriptions from a period as early as the third century B.C.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, it was not until the first century B.C. that the production of monumental inscriptions finally gained some traction, resulting, eventually, in those over five-hundred Roman inscriptions from Carthago Nova that have been documented.<sup>17</sup> Compared to the rest of the cities of Hispania, of course, this represents a fairly early beginning of an epigraphic practice in Latin, which comprises all forms, including the poetic one. At any rate, all of this results in a scenario in which, starting with the Roman conquest in 209 B.C. and with A.D. 435, the date of the Vandals' sacking of Cartagena, as a rough and ultimately somewhat arbitrary end point, there were some 650+ years during which the 500+ surviving, in addition to an unquantifiable number of now lost, Roman inscriptions were produced at Carthago Nova.

All this leads us to one crucial question: how does this overall historical and socio-economic picture relate specifically to the production of inscribed poetry, the so-called *carmina epigraphica*?

<sup>13</sup> On the numismatic evidence of Punic presence in Cartagena see M. Lechuga Galindo, "La presencia púnica en Cartagena. Testimonios numismáticos", *Acta Numismática* 21-23, 1993, 155-65 and, more recently, L. Arias Ferrer, "La circulación monetaria de los ejemplares hispano-púnicos en la región de Murcia. Su perduración en el registro arqueológico", *Numisma* 250, 2006, 102-8.

<sup>14</sup> See *IGEP* 282, a brief inscription in Greek characters on a bone tessera dated on Punic times (S. García Lorca, F. Giménez López, "Una vivienda del siglo III a.C. en Cartagena", *Mastia* 6, 2007, 111: the item was unearthed during excavations in a third-century house, where, in addition to that, a ceramic vessel with a seal in Punic characters was found; cf. García Lorca, Giménez López, "Una Vivienda del siglo III", 114).

<sup>15</sup> Further on this aspect see e.g. A.E. Cooley, ed., *Becoming Roman, Writing Latin? Literacy and Epigraphy in the Roman West* (*JRA* suppl. 48), Portsmouth, RI 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Abascal Palazón, "La temprana epigrafía", 140 mentions a number of black ceramic vases with graffiti indicating the ownership of the inscribed pieces, dating to the second half of the third century B.C.

<sup>17</sup> See above, n. 10.

Of course, already at this stage, and without going any deeper into the subject, it must be said that the availability of a script and even an existing epigraphic habit alone are not the only factors that determine and drive the production of *carmina epigraphica* in any given environment. Much rather, these two factors are only two of the important coordinates in our field. Vitally, however, a basic cultural practice of inscribing surfaces must also be met by a local desire, leisure, and inclination to create art, and to do so in durable materials: a need for intellectual and mental space, and an appetite to write and to inscribe poetry.

The epigraphic documentation for Carthago Nova that was edited by Juan Manuel Abascal Palazón and Sebastián Ramallo Asensio in 1997 lists a mere nine verse inscriptions in its index. The edition of verse inscriptions from Carthago Nova that was produced by Ricardo Hernández and Xavier Gómez in 2006, some ten years after Abascal's and Ramallo's edition, discusses ten inscriptions for Carthago Nova. Paolo Cugusi's *CLE Hispaniae* (2012) lists seven items from Bücheler – Lommatzsch and another four that the author identified as pertaining: a total of eleven. A search that combined the search terms "carmina" and "Carthago Nova" in the Epigraphic Database Claus – Slaby returned a total of eighteen items,<sup>18</sup> doubling the number of pieces identified by Abascal Palazón and Ramallo Asensio. Two of these, however, it turned out, were graffiti from the nearby Cueva Negra, so they will remain excluded from our present considerations – initially bringing the total down to sixteen:<sup>19</sup> an expansion of our search beyond these easily accessible tools allowed us to add one further item, however, resulting in a grand total of *seventeen* texts for us to consider. All of these seventeen inscriptions are monumental in nature, and, from a rhythmical point of view, elegiac distichs abound.<sup>20</sup>

Seventeen epigraphic poems over a period of 650 years may seem a relatively poor ratio at first: after all, this scenario amounts to the production of just one poem per every 38.2 years' period. Compare the absolute number of seventeen poetic pieces from Carthago Nova alone to the overall poetic output of Roman Britain (a mere two dozen verse inscriptions over some 450 years of Roman occupation),<sup>21</sup> however, then Carthago Nova would seem to fare reasonably well. And, of course, we must always bear in mind that this is only what we get to see on the basis of what has actually been preserved, excavated, and published: the

<sup>18</sup> Last accessed: April 2023.

<sup>19</sup> *CLEHis* 90ad = *HEp* 1997.450 and *CLEHis* 90af = *HEp* 1997.451. See R. Hernández Pérez, "Los *tituli picti* métricos de la Cueva Negra de Fortuna (Murcia)", *Epigraphica* 69, 2007, 287-320 for a complete study of the metrical inscriptions from the Cueva Negra.

<sup>20</sup> The epigraphic dossier presented here focuses on the production of poems in the urban centre only. The search for forms and traces of epigraphic art in the *ager* and in the mining areas might aid to understand the broader picture and may be addressed in future research.

<sup>21</sup> See P. Kruschwitz, "Poetry on the Advance: The Emergence and Formation of a Poetic Culture in Roman Britain", *G&R* 67, 2020, 177-202.

number is not, by any standard, an accurate description of what may actually have been produced at the time.

## 2. THE POETIC FINGERPRINT OF CARTHAGO NOVA

If one accepts that there is evidence for some seventeen verse inscriptions from Carthago Nova, one might simply content oneself with the insight that this is the overall volume of the place's (surviving) poetic output, with an average of approximately one poem for every 38 years over 650 years of Roman history. (The actual ratio is a bit worse still, because one of the pieces that has to be included would seem to post-date the Vandals' sacking of the city<sup>22</sup> – but, for the sake of this exercise, we shall keep it simple: it makes no significant statistical difference.) The biggest problem with this approach is not, of course, that a notional poem-per-year ratio results in an almost completely meaningless proxy value: a much more significant problem still is the fact that it actually distorts, and thus obscures, what was really going on at Carthago Nova, poetically speaking: for the dates of production of this evidence do not at all spread out evenly across 650 years. This is where matters get interesting.

Reverting (albeit briefly) to Carthago Nova's political history, it must be noted, first of all, that, not a single poem has come to light whose date with absolute certainty would fall into the time period from the city's Roman takeover in 209 B.C. and its eventual becoming a Roman *colonia* in the mid-first century: in a small number of cases, a date to the first half of the first century has been proposed, yet these proposals are anything but certain. From a modern perspective, the Roman city of Carthago Nova appears to have remained poetically silent for almost 170 years. In other words, Rome may already have been the ruling power, but it certainly was not an inspiration of verbal art during the early stages.

Matters changed dramatically in the mid-first century B.C. Of our overall body of seventeen texts, no fewer than seven can be dated with sufficient certainty to the first fifty years of the colony or, arguably, even shortly before that time.<sup>23</sup> We list the texts in no particular order, as we cannot commit to any absolute or relative chronology:

(1) *CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 3449g = Zarker 99 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 69 = *CLECarthNov* 2 = *CLEHispan* 86 = *CLEO* MU13 (Image: Museo Arqueológico Municipal de Cartagena, inv. no. 114). – Necropolis of Torre Ciega.<sup>24</sup> Mid-first century B.C.<sup>25</sup>

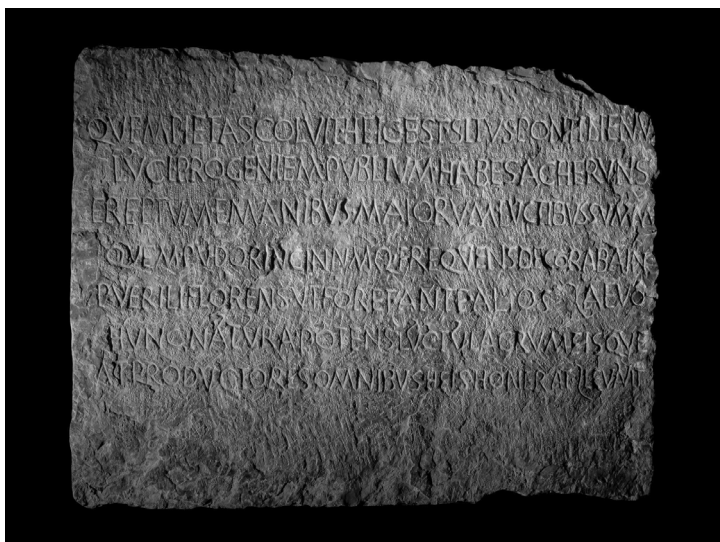
<sup>22</sup> Cf. item (17) below.

<sup>23</sup> See below, item (7).

<sup>24</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 221-3 on this necropolis. The monuments from this necropolis show similarities with the necropolis of central Italy and Campania in the first century B.C.

<sup>25</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, *ad loc.* suggest that the item pertains to the second half of the first century B.C. M.J. Pena, "Algunas consideraciones sobre la epigrafía funeraria de Carthago Nova", in *XI Congreso Internazionale di Epigrafia Greca e Latina, Roma, 18-24*





*Quem pietas coluit heic est situs Pontilienus.*

*Luci progeniem Publium habes, Acheruns,*

*ereptum e manibus maiorum luctibus summ[is],*

*quem pudor inginiumq(ue) frequens decorabât in || aevo ||*

5 *puerili, florens ut foret ante alios.*

*hunc natura potens luctu lacrumisque || levâvit, ||*

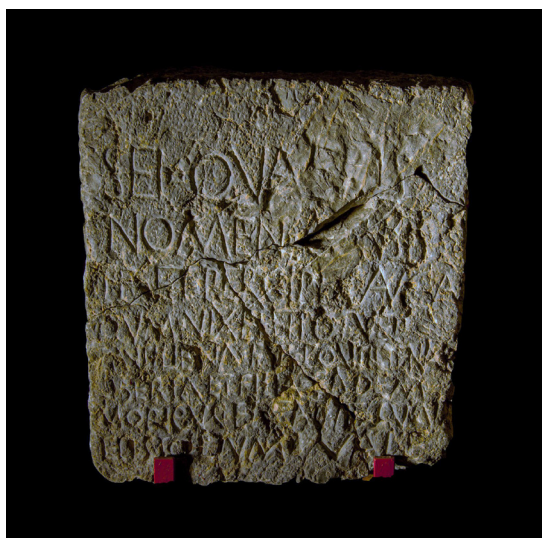
*at productores omnibus heis honerat (!).*

He whom a sense of filial duty favoured – Pontilienus –, he is buried here. Acheron, you now possess Publius, Lucius' offspring, snatched from the hands of his ancestors, with their greatest sadness – a man who was frequently and continuously distinguished by his modesty and character while still a young boy, so that he would outshine everyone else. A powerful nature freed him from mourning and tears, charging his begetters with all of those.

settembre 1997, Roma 1999, I, 464-75, 467 dated this piece to the first half of the century (without compelling reasons). J. Gómez Pallarès, “*Carmina Latina Epigraphica de la Hispania republicana*”, in P. Kruschwitz, ed., *Die metrischen Inschriften der römischen Republik*, Berlin 2007, 231-5 proposed interpreting the extra hexameter that breaks the succession of distichs in l. 4 as a resource to express the age of the deceased through the number of verses (seven verses = seven years); on such ‘irregular’ formations of elegiac distichs more generally see P. Kruschwitz, “Five Feet Under: Exhuming the Uses of the Pentameter in Roman Folk Poetry”, *Tyche* 35, 2020 (2021), 71-98. Cf. also M. Massaro, *Epigrafia metrica latina di età repubblicana*, Bari 1992, 48-50.

— Four elegiac distichs, with no pentameter after the second and before the third hexameter.

(2) Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 167 = R. Hernández Pérez, “Propuesta de interpretación filológica de un nuevo *carmen epigraphicum* de Carthago Noua: el epitafio de Pontiliena”, *Habis* 32, 2001, 203-15 = *CLECarthNov* 4 = *CLEHisp* 87 = S. M. Marengo, “«Pontiliena Epistolium» in una iscrizione di Carthago Nova”, *SEBarc* 12, 2014, 193-6 = *CLEO* MU13B (Image: Museo Arqueológico Municipal de Cartagena, Inv. No. 136).<sup>26</sup> – Castillo de la Concepción, in secondary use. Second half of the first century B.C.<sup>27</sup>



*Sei quaeris  
nomen consis-  
te et percipe pauca:  
dum vixei et potui*  
5 *[P]ontiliena et Pontilieni  
liberta et filia eadem,  
moriens et fui et sum  
epistolium. Vale.*

<sup>26</sup> Hernández Pérez, “Propuesta de interpretación filológica”, 205 defends that Pontiliena’s father would be a freedman of the *gens* Pontiliena, who, in turn, would have freed his kin after being freed himself. Marengo, “«Pontiliena Epistolium»” explored the possibility of understanding *epistolium* as the *nomen* of the deceased.

<sup>27</sup> Thus Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, *ad loc.* on the basis that the linguistic and epigraphic evidence does not seem to contradict the general trend for the appearance of verse inscriptions at Carthago Nova (which is, of course, dangerously close to circular reasoning).



If you ask the name, stop and hear a few words: as I was alive and in possession of my capabilities, I was Pontiliena, both the freedwoman of Pontilienus and also his daughter. In my death I was, and still am, but a short note. Farewell.

— Dactylic *commaticum*.

(3) *CIL* II 3475 = *CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 3449d = *CLE* 980 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 144 = *CLECarthNov* 3 = Gómez Pallarès, “*CLE* de la Hispania republicana”, 230-231 = *CLEO* MU7 (Image: Museo Arqueológico Municipal de Cartagena, Inv. No. 94). From one of the necropoleis *extra muros*, reused in the construction of the Cerro del Molinete. Second half of the first century B.C.<sup>28</sup>



*C(aius) Licinius C(ai) f(ilius) Torax.*  
*Hospes consiste et Thoracis perlege nomen.*  
*inmatura iacent ossa relata mea.*  
*saeva parentibus eripuit fortuna m[eis]*  
 5 *me nec iu(v)enem passast ulteriora frui.*  
*nih(i)l simile aspicias: timeant ventura*  
*parentes neu nimium matres*  
*concupiant parere.*

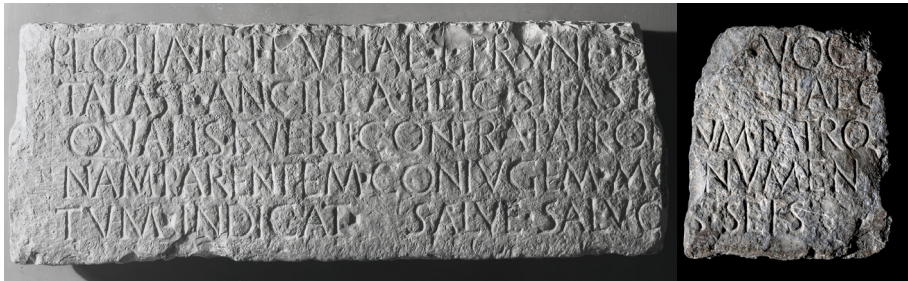
<sup>28</sup> Thus Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, *ad loc.* based on earlier scholarship on this text and their assessment of the linguistic and epigraphic evidence.

Gaius Licinius Thorax, son of Gaius.

Stranger, stop and peruse Thorax's name. Prematurely my bones lie gathered here. Savage Fate snatched me away from my parents, and she did not tolerate me, still a young man, to enjoy life any further. You will see nothing similar. Parents must fear what comes, and mothers should not overly desire to give birth.

— Three elegiac distichs after a prose praescriptum.

(4) *CIL* II 3495 (cf. p. 952) = *CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 2273 (cf. p. 1105) = *CLE* 58 adn. = ILS 8417 = Engström 410 = ILLRP 981 = *Imagines* 333 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 163 = *CLECarthNov* 1 = M.J. Pena, “Plotia Prune (Φρόνη): de Delos a Carthago Nova”, *Faventia* 31, 2009, 9-23 = *CLEHisp* 157 = *CLEO* MU12 (Image: Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Inv. No. 16500 [left]; Museo Arqueológico Municipal de Cartagena, Inv. No. 89 [right]). Findspot unknown. Mid-first century B.C.? <sup>29</sup>



*Plotia L(uci) et Fufiae I(iberta). Prune haec vocitast ancilla, heic sitast. (vac.) haec qualis fuerit contra patronum patronam parentem coniugem monumentum indicat. (vac.) salve: salvos seis.*

Plotia, freedwoman of Lucius and Fufia.

<sup>29</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, *ad loc.* place the text into the second half of the first century B.C., based on linguistic features as well as epigraphic elements (such as e.g. the punctuation used in this text). Pena, “Algunas consideraciones”, 466-8 suggests a rather earlier date, placing the piece at the beginning of the first century B.C., and in Pena, “Plotia Prune”, 11-13 she defended a date prior to 70 B.C. Though Pena’s arguments are not implausible in and of themselves, none of them are compelling in the positive: it remains impossible to rule out a date from the mid-first century onwards with any level of certainty. – On the *ordinatio* of the text, see Gómez Pallarès, “*CLE de la Hispania republicana*”, 235-6.

Prune she used to be called as a slave, she is buried here. How she was towards her patron, patroness, parent, husband: the monument is a reminder of that. Greetings: may you be well.

— Iambic *commaticum* after a prose praescriptum.

(5) *CIL* II 3501 = *CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 3449h = *CLE* 1070 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 171 = *CLECarthNov* 5 = *CLEO* MU5 (Image: Museo Arqueológico Municipal de Cartagena, Inv. No. 74).<sup>30</sup> Findspot unknown. Second half of the first century B.C.<sup>31</sup>



*Filiola*  
*amisit pat[rem],*  
*materque*  
*sequat ipsa.*  
 5 *huius nomen Salviol(ae).*  
*fuerat M(arci) Maesti*  
*Lucrionis verna*  
*annorum XXI.*

As a little daughter, she lost her father, and when she had become a mother, she herself followed (*sc.* his fate). Her name was that of Salviola.

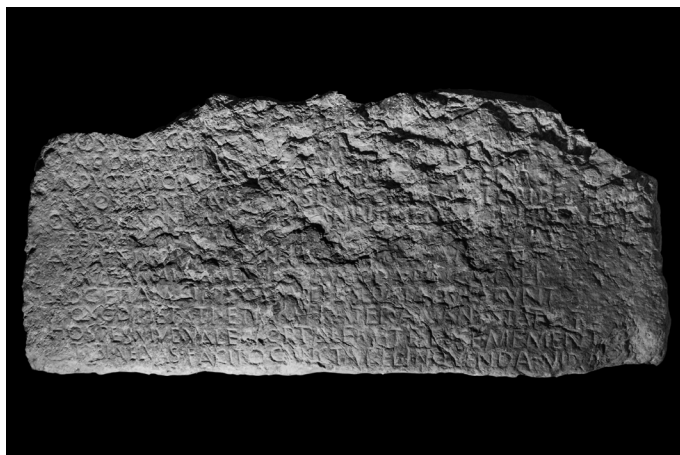
She had been the home-born slave of Marcus Maestius Lucrio, and she was aged 21.

<sup>30</sup> Further on this piece see also Gómez Pallarès, “*CLE* de la Hispania republicana”, 231.

<sup>31</sup> E. Hübner, *CIL* II *ad loc.* suggested that this item pre-dates Caesarian times.

— Elegiac distich, with a prose postscriptum. Here we follow the edition by Hernández Pérez and Gómez Font in *CLECarthNov*.

(6) J.M. Abascal Palazón, S.F. Ramallo Asensio, M.G. Schmidt, “*Carmen epigráfico funerario de Carthago Nova*”, *ZPE* 201, 2017, 72-6 = C. Fernández Martínez, R. Hernández Pérez, “*Tibi vivas facito*. Nueva lectura e interpretación de un epigrama sepulcral de Carthago Nova”, *ZPE* 205, 2018, 102-6 = *CLEO* MU21 (Image: José Inchaurrendieta, Archivo Fotográfico del Museo del Teatro Romano de Cartagena [in depot]). Roman theatre. Second half of the first century B.C.<sup>32</sup>



praescriptum:

-----?  
[- - -]BI[- - -] + ER[- - -].

carmen:

*Hospes cons[is]te [- - -]++ et [- - -]  
ne dubita in[- - -]am [- - -]R[- - -].  
inducta pompa [- - -]N[- - -]T[- - -] iu(v)entus,*

<sup>32</sup> Thus the date proposed by Fernández Martínez, Hernández Pérez, “*Tibi vivas facito*”, bringing it in line with other early pieces (which is, of course, dangerously close to circular reasoning in the same way that was suggested, above, for item (2), cf. n. 27). Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, Schmidt, “*Carmen epigráfico funerario de Carthago Nova*”, the original editors, favoured a date in the Augustan period.

- nos contra offensi conc[imul]s lapide.  
 5 quod quoniam [- - -]m nihil ++M[- - -]IB[- - -]  
 ferre [- - -] et m[- - -]ne]queas .  
 aetate in pr[ima - - -]ORNA[- - -]AM[- - -]  
 multa mala amenti, commoda pauca tuli.  
 hoc etiam cinis ossa pie sedata quiescunt,  
 10 quod pietati etiam frater amans statuit.  
 hospes, vive vale: mortalem te esse memento.  
 tibi veivas facito: cuncta relinquenda vid[e].

Stranger, stop . . . and . . . , do not hesitate to . . . conducted the procession . . . the youth; we, in turn, were killed when hit by a stone. But since . . . nothing . . . you cannot . . . bear . . . At the beginning of my life . . . I suffered many evils, driving me crazy, and only a few positives. My ashes, my bones find their rest, dutifully buried, through what my loving brother placed also for as a monument for familial duty. Stranger, live well, farewell: remember that you are mortal. You shall ensure to live for yourself: see – everything else must be relinquished.

— Six elegiac distichs. Here we follow the edition by Fernández Martínez, Hernández Pérez (2018).

(7) *CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 3449k = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 192 = *CLEHisp* 158 (image: Museo Arqueológico Municipal de Cartagena, Inv. No. 118).<sup>33</sup> – Reused as threshold, found together with Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 191 during construction works. First half of the first century B.C.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See also Gómez Pallarès, “*CLE* de la Hispania republicana”, 230, on the way the *ordinatio* is used here to differentiate prose and verse. Another *libertus* of the family of the Vinuleii is known from an inscription to L. Vinuleius L.l. Philogenus of the same date (Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 191).

<sup>34</sup> The somewhat uneven lettering of this piece gives the impression of relative antiquity, and it has led several scholars to propose a date in the first quarter of the first century B.C.: cf. e.g. M. Stefanile, *Dalla Campania alle Hispaniae. L'emigrazione dalla Campania romana alle coste mediterranee della Penisola Iberica in età tardo-repubblicana e proto-imperiale*, Napoli 2017, 324. While this is possible, certainty cannot be reached, especially as the letter forms used in this inscription remain in use for several decades after the proposed hypothetical date.



*Vinuleia L(uci) l(iberta)*

*Calena heic*

*sitast.*

*Filia ut potuit,*

5 *non ut vo[lu]it.*

Vinuleia Calena, freedwoman of Lucius, is buried here.

Her daughter to the best of her ability, not how she wanted it.

— Dactylic *commaticum*.

Most, if not all of the texts that have been presented so far appear to date to the late Republic rather than the Augustan age, and especially items (4) and (7) show traces, in terms of its lettering as well as of its spelling, that suggest a (comparatively) early date among this material.<sup>35</sup> The original editors thought of an Augustan date for item (6), but this was challenged – rightly, to our mind – by Concepción Fernández and Ricardo Hernández (2018).

Moving somewhat more firmly, though in most instances still not necessarily even safely, into the Augustan period, another three texts must be mentioned (one of which may be what Matteo Massaro called ‘affective prose’ rather than a *carmen*).<sup>36</sup> This places a total of ten of all seventeen texts, i.e. significantly more than half of all poetic inscriptions from Carthago Nova, into the same 50-70 years bracket.

Once again, we list the relevant texts in no especial order:

<sup>35</sup> Cf. above, nn. 29 and 34.

<sup>36</sup> On the notion of ‘affective prose’ see M. Massaro, “Fra poesia e prosa affettiva in iscrizioni sepolcrali (a proposito di nuove raccolte territoriali Iberiche di *CLE*)”, *Epigraphica* 74, 2012, 277-308, 289.



(8) *CIL* II 3479 (= 5928) = *CLE* 979 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 224 = *CLECarthNov* 7 = *CLEO* MU20 (image: Museo Arqueológico Municipal de Cartagena, Inv. No. 127). Built in the wall of the church of La Pinilla. Augustan period.<sup>37</sup>



- Q(uinto) Lu(sio) L(uci) f(ilio) Seni[cae].*  
*[moll]em robusteis nondum formata iu(v)ent[us]*  
*[ae]tatem Lusi viribus induerat,*  
*[cum] carae exoptans complexum saepe soror[is],*  
 5 *[mul]ta viae dum volt millia conficere,*  
*[caeditu]r infesto concur[s]u forte latronum.*  
*[sic ra]pit hoc [cla]des corpus acerba nimis*  
*[illa a]etas, credo, hoc tribuit tempore m[ortis],*  
*[ut b]ona non meminit, seic mala ne timeat.*

Quintus Lusius Senica, son of Lucius. The beautiful youth of Lusius had not yet equipped his tender age with strength robust enough, when, hoping for many an embrace from his sister, he wished to complete a travel of many miles: he was killed, at random, in a hostile stick-up by bandits: this disaster, all too bitter, snatches his body. His age, I believe, added something to the time of his death, for just as he did not yet have a concept of the good, he was not afraid of evil.

— Four elegiac distichs. (Others have restored the texts slightly differently, but this is of no great importance for the argument here. Here we followed the edition by Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio with some modifications).

<sup>37</sup> E. Hübner, *CIL* II *ad loc.* suggested an earlier date, arguably as early as the Sullan period.

(9) *EE* VIII 2.194 = *CLE* 1076 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 175 = *CLECarthNov* 8 = *CLEO* MU3<sup>38</sup> (no image available: monument not preserved). – Calle San Roque. Late first century B.C. or early first century A.D.<sup>39</sup>

*Sicinia C(ai) f(ilia) Secunda.*  
*filia cum matre est, hospes, sei forte requiris,*  
*heic sita, quas rapuit mortis acerba dies.*  
*sed prius eripuit matri qui in omnia pollet*  
 5 *crudelis cassus filiolum e manibus. paene inmaturo*  
*morte ereptam sibi gnatum heu quantum mater [fleverit]*  
*indiciost, nam postquam [fletu] et monumento hoc conde-*  
*coravit gnatam, per luctus reddidit ipsa animam.*

Sicinia Secunda, daughter of Gaius.

It is a daughter with her mother who is buried here (should you happen to wonder, stranger): a bitter day of death snatched them away. But first grim fate, ruling in all matters, took the little girl away from her mother, straight from her hands. Woe, there is proof for just how much the mother cried when her daughter was taken away from her by death, well before her time was up: for after she had adorned her daughter with mourning and this monument, she herself passed away in her grief.

— Four elegiac distichs.

(10) *CIL* II 3504 (cf. p. XLVI, 952) = *CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 2274 (cf. p. 1106) = *CLE* 363 = *ILLRP* 979 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 180<sup>40</sup> (image: Museo Arqueológico Municipal de Cartagena, Inv. No. 101). Findspot unknown. Augustan period.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Another Sicinia, member of the same *gens*, is known from Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 176. Presumably, the inscription was part of the same family monument.

<sup>39</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, *ad loc.* based on literary criteria.

<sup>40</sup> See also See also Gómez Pallarès, “*CLE* de la Hispania republicana”, Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 237. AL. Sulpicius Heliodorus Vivir Augustalis of Carthago Nova is known from a first century inscription (*CIL* II 3436 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 110).

<sup>41</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, *ad loc.* based on the structure of the text and on the palaeography.



*L(ucius) Sulpicius Q(uinti) f(ilius) Q(uinti) n(epos)  
Col(lina) hic situs est.  
ille probatus iudiciis  
multeis cognatis atque  
propinqueis.*

Lucius Sulpicius, son of Quintus, grandson of Quintus, of the *tribus Collina* is buried here.  
He was much accepted in the opinion of many, of his family, and his relatives.

— Dactylic *commaticum* (?) (deliberately omitted as affective prose by R. Hernández and X. Gómez in *CLECarthNov*).

With the arrival of the first century A.D., the tune of the poems of Carthago Nova begins to change rather dramatically, in terms of frequency, length, and quality of these manifestations of locally produced verbal art. Whereas in those fifty-odd years, from the mid-first century B.C. to the turn of the eras, no fewer than ten verse inscriptions have survived, the next one hundred years have yielded only a meagre six pieces to-date, increasing the total of texts thus far to sixteen.

Only one of those five items is a composition of notable length that comes even close to what was the common standard in the earlier phase – a poem that exhibits a number of Ovidian references:

(11) Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 102 = *CLECarthNov* 9 = *CLEHisp* 89 = *CLEO* MU13D (image: Museo Arqueológico Municipal de Cartagena, Inv. No. 4005). Barrio de la Concepción. Beginning of the first century A.D.<sup>42</sup>



*Argentaria C(ai) f(ilia) Faustil(la).*

*Octavos cum iterum aetatis*

*mihi curreret annus, rapta e*

*complexu coniugis hic iaceo.*

5 *cura quibus ius fasque fuit sola-*

*cia mortis haec habeo vitae*

*praemia quae tuleram. hunc*

*mihi defunctae monimenti in-*

*pendit honorem mater et in cu-*

10 *ras ipsa Nigella suas.*

Argentaria Faustilla, daughter of Gaius.

As for the second time an eighth year of age had begun to run for me, I was snatched away from my husband's embrace – and now here I lie. For those who cared for me, bound by laws human and divine, I have, as a consolation for my death, this (*sc.* monument) to show as what I received as a reward for my life. Nigella, my mother herself, has paid me the honour that is this very monument, for me in my death as well as for her own worries.

<sup>42</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, *ad loc.* because of the prosopography of the Argentarii, the literary features, and the palaeography.

— Three elegiac distichs after a prose praescriptum. Here we follow the edition by Hernández Pérez and Gómez Font in *CLECarthNov*.

The inscription for the lawyer Marcus Oppius displays an iambic rhythm, but it is unclear whether or not this is intended (the view that this is an instance of deliberate rhythmisation was favoured by Ricardo Hernández and Xavier Gómez as well as by Paolo Cugusi):<sup>43</sup>

(12) *CIL* II 3493 (cf. p. 952) = *CLE* 224 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 161 = R. Hernández Pérez, “El epitafio poético del abogado Marco Oppio (*CIL* II 3493, ad *CLE* 224: *Carthago Noua*)”, *Faventia*, 19, 1997, 97-103 = *CLECarthNov* 6 = *CLEHisp* 88 = *CLEO* MU13C (image: Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Inv. No. 14486). Findspot unknown. First half of the first century A.D.<sup>44</sup>



*M(arcus) Oppius M(arci) f(ilius).*  
*Fore(n)sis ars hic est sita:*  
*flet titulus se relictum.*

Marcus Oppius, son of Marcus.

The art of the forum is buried here: the inscription mourns its being abandoned.

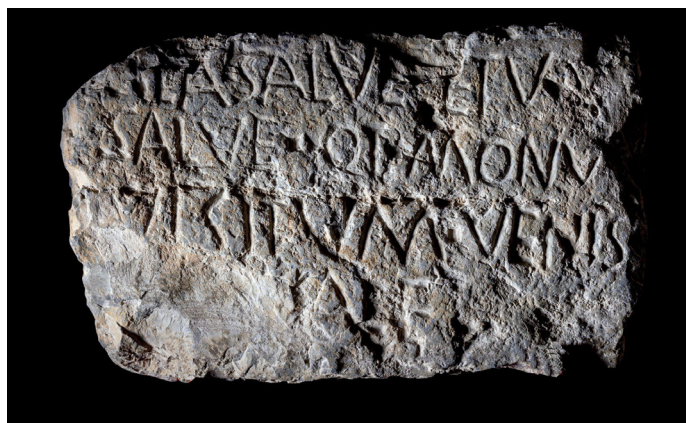
— Iambic septenarius?

<sup>43</sup> *CLECarthNov* 9 ad loc.; *CLEHisp* 89, ad loc.

<sup>44</sup> Cugusi in *CLEHisp* p. 163.

Three very short pieces remain, all of them *commatica* (and optimistically so, in at least one case):

(13) Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 114 = R. Hernández Pérez, “Sobre una antigua inscripción dialogada de Carthago Nova con un “hapax” morfosintáctico (uisitum uenisti)”, *Studia Philologica Valentina* 5, 2001, 103-10 = *CLEHis* 159 (image: Museo Arqueológico Municipal de Cartagena, Inv. No. 129). Findspot unknown. First quarter of the first century A.D.<sup>45</sup>



*Cila, salve et va[le].*  
*Salve q(u)i monu[mentum]*  
*visitum venis[ti]:*  
*vale.*

Cila, greetings and farewell.  
 – Greetings to you, who you came to visit the monument: fare thee well!

— *Commaticum* (?).

(14) *CIL* II 3497 = *CLE* 1792 adn. = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 99 (lost). Malecón. Mid-first century A.D.<sup>46</sup>

*Primill[a]*  
*matri op[se]-*

<sup>45</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, *ad loc.* based on the formulae.

<sup>46</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, *ad loc.* based on the use of the nominative, the formulae, and the other inscriptions found during the construction works of the Malecón de Cartagena in 1739, all dated not later than the age of Claudius (see also *ibid.* p. 285).



quens pl[aci]-  
 ta omni[bus]  
 5 hic sita  
 est anno[rum]  
 VII.

Primilla, obedient to her mother, liked by everyone, is buried here at the age of 7.

— Iambic *commaticum*.

(15) *CIL* II 3476 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 98 (lost). Malecón. Beginning of the first century A.D.<sup>47</sup>

*P(ublius) Lollius*  
*P(ubli) l(ibertus) Philemo.*  
*probus*  
*probis probat(us?).*<sup>48</sup>  
 5 *Uxor monum(entum)*  
*fecit. Salve.*

Publius Lollius Philemo, son of Publius. He lived as an honest man, esteemed among the honest people. His wife erected this monument. May you be well.

— Iambic *commaticum*.

There is one more poem to be discussed, bringing up the total of items for the first one-hundred and fifty years, more or less, to sixteen. This piece has tentatively been dated to the first century A.D., but based on the text's formulaic expressions some scholars have argued that a date in the early second century A.D. would also be plausible. The piece in question is the following one:

(16) *CIL* II 3453 = *CLE* 1194 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 96 = *CLECarthNov* 10 = *CLEO* MU8 (lost). Malecón. Third quarter of the first century A.D.<sup>49</sup>

*Mater, si poss[em]*  
*fili(i) vice mortis s[ubire].*

<sup>47</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, *ad loc.*

<sup>48</sup> *Probat(a) | uxor* would also be possible. We tentatively lean towards the text presented above, however, to contain the wordplay in a single phrase.

<sup>49</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, *ad loc.* based on the formulae and the finding context during the construction of the Malecón.

- nunc iacis hoc tumu-  
lo: sit tibi terra levis.*  
5 *Aucta Zenon(is) l(iberta) mater Phi-  
localo Adventa soror  
de suo.*

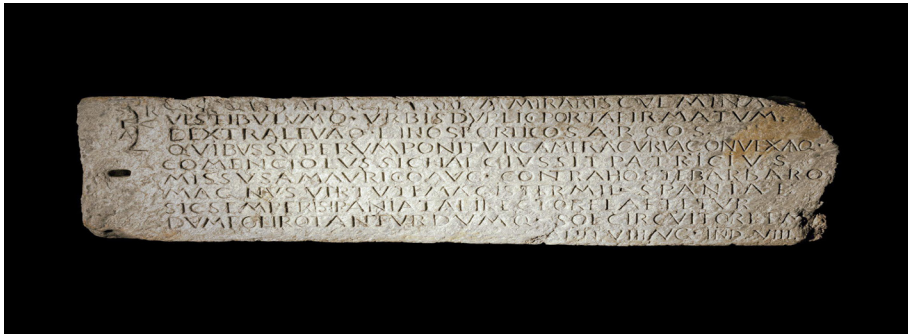
Mother, if I could, I would gladly submit myself to death, instead of your son. Now you lie here in this tomb: may earth rest lightly on you.

Aucta, freedwoman of Zeno, the mother, for Philocalus. Adventa, the sister, (sc. had this made) from her own (money).

— One elegiac distich, followed by a prose postscriptum. Here we follow the edition by Hernández Pérez and Gómez Font in *CLECarthNov* with Bücheler's restitutions.

This leaves us with just one single remaining text for the entire period from the late first (or early second) century A.D. onwards. This sole remaining inscription, however, incidentally also the only non-funerary poem from Carthago Nova, can safely be dated to the sixth century A.D., namely into the period of the Byzantine emperor Mauricius, who deployed one Comenciolus to Cartagena, in an effort to prepare the place's defences against the attacks of the Arian Goths:

(17) *CIL II 3420 = ILS 835 = ILCV 792 = IHC 176 = ICERV 362 = CLE 299*  
= Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, Carthago Nova, 208<sup>50</sup> (image: Museo Arqueológico Municipal de Cartagena, Inv. No. 2912). Fuente de Santa Catalina, harbour. A.D. 589/590.



<sup>50</sup> For further reading see D. Rico Camps, "Arquitectura y epigrafía en la Antigüedad tardía. Testimonios hispanos", *Pyrenae* 40/1, 2009, 30-1; M. Vallejo Girvés, "La epigrafía latina y la propaganda política bizantina en el mediterráneo occidental durante el siglo VI", *Veleia* 29, 2012, 79-81.

- Quisquis ardua turrium miraris culmina  
 uestibulumq(ue) urbis duplici porta firmatum  
 dextra leuaq(ue) binos porticos arcos  
 quibus superum ponitur camera curia conuexaq(ue)*  
 5 *Comenciolus sic haec iussit patricius  
 missus a Mauricio Aug(usto) contra hostes barbaros  
 magnus uirtute magister mil(itum) Spaniae  
 sic semper H̄spania tali rectore laetetur  
 dum poli rotantur dumq(ue) sol circuit orbem*  
 10 *ann(o) VIII Aug(usti) ind(ictione) VIII.*

Whoever you are, beholding the towers' high roof-tops and the city's entrance, fortified with a double gate and double porticoes and arches to the right and to the left, above which there is placed a vaulted assembly hall: these had thus commanded Commenciolus, the patrician, sent by orders of Mauricius Augustus against the barbarian enemies, the *magister militum* of Spania, great by his valiantness. May Hispania always be able to prosper under such a leader while the earth is spinning and while the sun is on its circuit. In the eighth year, in the eighth Augustan *indictio*.

— Dactylic rhythm, with hexameters in lines 8-9.

This concludes the material collection and overview for our establishing of what one might call the 'poetic fingerprint' of Carthago Nova.

### 3. TOWARDS AN INTERPRETATION OF THE POETIC FINGERPRINT

Abascal Palazón and Ramallo Asensio have collected approximately 230 inscriptions in total from Carthago Nova, spread out across the Roman period (and beyond). It is rather obvious that, when compared to, and contrasted with, the epigraphic habit more generally, the distribution of poetic items is highly peculiar. In their brief introduction to their edition of the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Carthaginis Novae*, Ricardo Hernández Pérez and Xavier Gómez Font wrote (p. 11):

'Los *carmina Latina epigraphica* de Carthago Nova (actual Cartagena, en la provincia de Murcia), capital del antiguo *conuentus Carthaginiensis* (*prouincia Tarraconensis*), merecen ser editados y comentados en una monografía tanto por su homogeneidad como porque, dentro de la epigrafía de la Hispania romana, forman el *corpus* más antiguo de poesía latina epigráfica y, por reunir un total de diez inscripciones, uno de los más numerosos (junto con los de las tres capitales de provincia: *Corduba*, *Tarraco* y *Emerita Augusta*). En cuanto a la cronología, casi todos (núms. 1-9) pertenecen a un período comprendido entre la primera mitad del siglo I a. C. y mediados del I d. C. (cuatro de ellos (...)) son los únicos *carmina*

*Latina epigraphica* hispanos que han sido registrados en el volumen I del CIL como republicanos), y sólo uno (núm. 10) parece ser posterior (puede datarse como de un período comprendido entre la segunda mitad del s. I y la primera del II d. C.).’

They added that:

‘En su conjunto, el *corpus* de *Carthago Nova* es, pues, mucho más antiguo que los de los otros tres principales centros de producción de poesía latina epigráfica de la Hispania romana: *Corduba* (casi todos sus *carmina* son del siglo I o del II d. C.), *Tarraco* (la mayoría son del siglo II o del III d. C.) y *Emerita Augusta* (casi todos son del siglo II d. C.).’

The picture that has now begun to form, based on an even broader evidence, a decade and a half after the publication of this precious volume, allows us to see and understand the situation in even greater detail and in an even clearer light. In particular, we may now more fully appreciate the internal dynamics of Cartagena’s poetic production in the public space – and we may dare to volunteer some explanations.

The first oddity that must be noted is that, from the surviving evidence, the desire to display poetry in the epigraphic sphere does not arrive in *Carthago Nova* at the same time as Roman rule did in the late third century B.C.: the place changed management, but it did not also change habits – at least not straight away. In fact, it is not before the mid-first century B.C. that poetry rears its head in *Carthago Nova* – and while with item (4) we may have an especially early example, it is most probably not until the elevation of *Carthago Nova* to the status of *colonia* and with the emergence of a new urban elite that this habit begins to flourish.

It is noteworthy that two of the earliest pieces (items (1) and (2)) are linked to the *gens Pontiliena* (*Pontulena*), a family among the major exporters of lead from *Carthago Nova*, whose name is also attested e.g. on lead ingots. This *gens* was thus clearly involved in the mining industry,<sup>51</sup> and its links with Asculum, Italy, have been amply demonstrated by María José Pena in an important article published in the *Mélanges de l’École Française de Rome*.<sup>52</sup> To us, there is no

<sup>51</sup> See Hernández Pérez, “Propuesta de interpretación filológica”, 206 for other examples. The Pontilieni are one of the best attested families in *Carthago Nova*, see A. Orejas, F.J. Sánchez-Palencia, “Mines, Territorial Organization, and Social Structure in Roman Iberia: *Carthago Noua* and the Peninsular Northwest”, *AJA* 106, 2002, 581-99. Mould marks on metal ingots (see Domergue, *Les mines de la Péninsule Iberique*, 258, C. Bigagli, “Il commercio del piombo iberico lungo le rotte attestate nel bacino occidentale del Mediterraneo”, *Empúries* 53, 2002, 167-8, Hirt, *Imperial Mines*, 274-84) attest that the Pontilieni were organised in a small family society. On the prosopography of this family see also de la Escosura Balbás, *La población de Carthago Nova*, 88-9.

<sup>52</sup> M.J. Pena, “La gens «Pontiliena / Pontulena», entre Asculum y *Carthago Nova*”, *MEFRA* 127, 2015, 187-99 (doi: 10.4000/mefra.2656; 10.4000/mefra.2709).

scope for reasonable doubt that this *gens* belonged to a wave of new arrivals to Carthago Nova in the first century – new arrivals from Italy, who, in the wake of Carthago Nova's transformation into a *colonia*, imported not only fresh blood and life, but also a locally hitherto unpractised cultural habit to their new home, both for themselves (1) and their *familia* (2).

It is in this non-elite environment that the earliest stages of Carthago Nova's public poetry begin to unfold: among the earliest recipients of inscribed verse, we see one Licinius T(h)orax (3), arguably a Roman citizen (whose *cognomen* would seem to suggest Grecian family roots of some sort, though it must be noted that *tria nomina* in this context do not always indicate Roman citizenship), a freedwoman called Plotia Prune (4), a homeborn slave called Salviola (5), and an anonymous long-suffering individual eventually killed by a stone or rock (6). Hardships continue to be the main poetic themes as the first century B.C. progresses, with the memorial for a young man killed by bandits (8), a mother of the *gens Sicinia* (a plebeian *gens* of Italic origin) who died immediately after the death of her newborn baby (9), and, eventually, a proud Roman citizen who does not only mention his patronym, but even the name of the grandfather, in conjunction with his tribe (10).

With the first century A.D. arrives a singular, yet absolutely remarkable highpoint in item (11), commemorating the death of a young (sixteen years old) married girl named Argentaria Faustilla in a poem that exhibits a number of Ovidian references, followed by a short piece for a lawyer and public orator (12). With that, arguably falling back to the aesthetics of the earliest stage (7), prior to the witnessed production of longer poems, texts become short, topical, and rhythmical *commatica* rather than fully developed poems (13-15) until, around the end of the first century A.D., there is a final long(ish) poem for a boy named Philocalus (16), who is mourned by his mother, a woman of libertine status, and the boy's sister, but no father. After that, Cartagena's deafening poetic silence returns, until after the Roman period, when an official erects fortifications and commemorates this act in a verse inscription (17).

It is obvious that the combination of an arrival of new settlers, following Carthago Nova's elevation to *colonia* in the mid-first century A.D., and a massive infrastructure programme in the Augustan period, transformed not merely the economic and social, but also the poetic and artistic fabric of the town. In this context, poetry began to find its place, to establish itself, and to develop a specific, local dynamic – in an environment and context in which a transformed, hopeful population began to form: a population that appreciated and desired this type of commemoration-*cum*-art more than any of the place's previous (and subsequent!) societies – a practice that was imported, and that began to catch on. This spirit is mirrored with precision in the length of some of the most significant poetic commemorations: items (1), (3), (6), (8-9), and, less substantial, (13) all pertain to this period of transformation.

It seems reasonable to assume, from the complete absence of relevant evidence to the contrary, that, by the third century A.D., Cartagena's economic downturn – most likely related to a disruption to water supplies and the silver mining industry – had left the place not only financially, but also poetically depleted. It is equally clear from the (lack of) evidence, that the short period of economic hope and artistic ambition linked to the status change and Augustus' infrastructure programme in the first century B.C., had come to an – initially slow, soon rather more visible – halt as early as the mid-to-late first century A.D.: society changed, ambitions changed, and so did the previously flourishing poetic habit, which appears to have died a slow and painful death at Carthago Nova after the mid-first century A.D., with only one late-antique re-appearance. The very milieu and the society that had initially contributed to Carthago Nova's poetic heyday appears to have been dwindling and eventually disappearing: the poetic environment dried out and was depleted, just like the place's natural resources that had originally contributed to a period of wealth and prosperity. Byzantine rule brought a short-term change, to which item (17) attests, but this change was, as we know, not lasting in nature nor a return to previous conditions: Latin poetry was now used as a one-off upper-class tool of self-representation.

#### 4. THE RISE AND FALL OF CARTHAGO NOVA'S POETIC PRODUCTION IN A ECONOMIC AND PROSOPOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Carthago Nova is not the only settlement on the west side of the Tarraconensis/Via Augusta that shows slow poetic beginnings. Overall, and unsurprisingly, the urban centres of that geographical context provide the largest number of poetic inscriptions, with only a few pieces otherwise scattered along the non-urban coast line. The overall number of verse inscriptions from Carthago Nova is roughly comparable with that of Tarraco and with that of Corduba. Preliminary search in the database CLEO suggests that some 28<sup>53</sup> *carmina epigraphica* have to be attributed to Tarraco, the most substantial part of which dates later than the third century.<sup>54</sup> They include many Christian pieces, and they display a broader variety in terms of the social status of the individuals involved when compared to Carthago Nova. Similarly, 15 verse inscriptions have been identified in Corduba,<sup>55</sup> 18 in Emerita,<sup>56</sup> and 11 in Gades.<sup>57</sup> In all these cases, the verse inscriptions appear

<sup>53</sup> The same search in the Epigraphic Database Claus – Slaby produces 32 results (last accessed April 2023).

<sup>54</sup> On the verse inscriptions from Tarraco see G. Alföldy, "Grabgedichte in Tarraco: Der sozial-geschichtliche Hintergrund", in P. Kruschwitz, *Die metrischen Inschriften der römischen Republik*, Berlin, New York 2007, 327–40.

<sup>55</sup> The same search in the Epigraphic Database Claus – Slaby produces 28 results (last accessed April 2023).

<sup>56</sup> The same search in the Epigraphic Database Claus – Slaby produces 17 results (last accessed April 2023).

<sup>57</sup> The same search in the Epigraphic Database Claus – Slaby produces 12 results (last accessed April 2023).



later than in Carthago Nova, the earliest examples typically dating to the second half of the first century A.D.

Historically, it is, of course, possible to compare and connect the population of Carthago Nova with that of Corduba, the capital of Baetica. In both centres, part of the elite was formed by private businessmen who farmed out the mines in their territories. Corduba was the administrative centre of the mining industry. Even if the evidence for this mining administration is scanty overall, inscriptions attest to the presence of *societates publicanorum*, their *liberti*, as well as private owners and their slaves.<sup>58</sup>

In Carthago Nova, the second most important city of Hispania citerior, on the other hand, trade and the mining industry were significantly aided by the availability of a harbour. Scholarly opinions on the exploitation of mines around Carthago Nova diverge.<sup>59</sup> The most plausible theory is that, from the first century B.C. onwards, a new elite, connected with the mining industry, was formed.<sup>60</sup> The mines around Carthago Nova were property of the Roman state until the late Republic and then passed down to private owners, most of them of Italic origin (as it is proved by the many ingots found around Cartagena), who became the new citizens of the Roman colony.<sup>61</sup> The members of this new mining elite were also frequently the authors and recipients of Carthago Nova's *carmina*.<sup>62</sup> The most prominent of these families that had settled in Cartagena is that of the Pontilienii, who appear in items (1)-(2).<sup>63</sup> The family of the Licinii, attested in item (3) that was dedicated to young Thorax after his premature death, appears on several inscriptions of Corduba and Gades,<sup>64</sup> on lead ingots (Cabrera 4), and in an inscription from a mine in Tres Minas in Lusitania.<sup>65</sup> Argentaria Faustilla of item (11) even bears a name that is pointedly connected with mining, as we know that

<sup>58</sup> The slave of the owner of a mining area close to Corduba, Sextus Marius, is also documented in CIL II<sup>2</sup>/7.441 = CIL II 2269: *Corinthius Sex(t)i Marii ser(vus) | annor(um) XX quem sui maiores | superaverunt pius in suos (!) | hic situs est s(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(evis)*. On the Mons Marianus see Hirt, *Imperial Mines*, 77.

<sup>59</sup> de la Escosura Balbás, *La población de Carthago Nova*, 43.

<sup>60</sup> de la Escosura Balbás, *La población de Carthago Nova*, 38-48 on the first families involved in the mining industry. Díaz Ariño, Antolinos Marín, "Roman Mining" on the presence of mining societies between the first century B.C. and the first century A.D.

<sup>61</sup> See Domergue, *Les mines de la Peninsule Iberique*, 229-34, Hirt, *Imperial Mines*, 90-1 and 275-8 on the private administration of mines in Southern Spain.

<sup>62</sup> On the society of Carthago Nova see M. Koch, "Die römische Gesellschaft von Carthago Nova nach den epigraphischen Quellen", in F. Heidermanns, ed., *Sprachen und Schriften des antiken Mittelmeerraums: Festschrift für J. Untermann zum 65. Geburtstag* (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft 78), Innsbruck 1993, 191-242 and M. Koch, "Noch einmal: die « Grossen Familien » in Carthago Nova", *MDAI(M)* 50, 2009, 158-71, and the most recent study by de la Escosura Balbás, *La población de Carthago Nova*, which provides a complete and updated analysis on the population of the colonia.

<sup>63</sup> de la Escosura Balbás, *La población de Carthago Nova*, 53.

<sup>64</sup> CIL II<sup>2</sup>/7.308, 448, 478, 479; AE 1996.883; AE 2014.649 in Corduba, many of these are *liberti*; CIL II 1840, 1842, 1843; HEP 1994, 340, IRPCadiz 383.

<sup>65</sup> Domergue, *Les mines de la Peninsule Iberique*, 272, 340.

members of the *societas Sisaponensis*, the *societas publicanorum* of Cordoba, received the *gentilicium* Argentarius when they reached the status of *liberti*.<sup>66</sup> Incidentally, the presence of individuals named Argentarius/-a in Carthago Nova is not limited to the verse inscription of Faustilla: two further inscriptions document Argentarii, both bearing the *praenomen* Lucius.<sup>67</sup>

Migration from Italy to Hispania is a well-attested pattern in Republican times, as is the connection between settlement of people from Italy and the production of epigraphic poetry.<sup>68</sup> Both of these patterns are evident in Carthago Nova, where *carmina epigraphica* started being produced from the very period when the centre was being turned into a *colonia*. In addition to the Pontilienii, whose origin was already discussed above, links with central and south Italy are clearly shown by other families of Carthago Nova whose members chose to compose verse inscriptions. These include slaves and freedmen who moved here together or on behalf of their masters to manage the economic activities, demonstrating very clearly that this form of art was available to everyone, rich and poor.<sup>69</sup>

A good example for this is the verse inscription dedicated to Plotia Prune, freedwoman of Plotius and Fufia in item (4). Both the *gens* Fufia and the *gens* Plotia were originally from Campania.<sup>70</sup> The Fufii came from the area between Capua and Cales.<sup>71</sup> The Plotii were a family of businessmen from the same region. A branch of the *gens* Plotia had commercial interests on Delos:<sup>72</sup> they may well have expanded their trade to the coast of Hispania citerior, settling in Carthago Nova.<sup>73</sup> After moving here, the Plotii must then have become prestigious and influential in the city, as a further *libertus*, C. Plotius Princeps,<sup>74</sup> built a crypta and a porticus in the Roman theatre with his own money in the Augustan period.<sup>75</sup> The family of the Oppii (12),<sup>76</sup> too, appear to have been Italic tradesmen with

<sup>66</sup> CIL II<sup>2</sup>/7.415 and 415a, cf. Hirt, *Imperial Mines*, 163.

<sup>67</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 228 and AE 1987.658.

<sup>68</sup> In Republican times *carmina* from Carthago Nova were composed or sponsored by Italic immigrants who then settled here (de la Escosura Balbás, *La población de Carthago Nova*, 48).

<sup>69</sup> On this aspect see de la Escosura Balbás, *La población de Carthago Nova*, 48-54. On the *carmina* written by *liberti*, such as the one dedicated to Plotia Prune (4), see especially *ibid.* 52-3. The same phenomenon is attested in Tarraco (see Alföldy, “Grabgedichte in Tarraco”, 329). On the production of verse inscriptions by freedmen and businessmen at large see E. Galletier, *Étude sur la poésie funéraire romaine d'après les inscriptions*, Paris 1922, 149-88.

<sup>70</sup> On tradesmen and businessmen from Campania in Carthago Nova see M. Stefanile, “Mas-sae plumbeae da Carthago Nova. Alcune novità e alcune note prosopografiche”, in G. Baratta, ed., *Plumbum litteratum. Studia epigraphica Giovanni Mennella oblata* (Instrumenta inscripta VIII), Roma 2021, 37-48.

<sup>71</sup> Stefanile, “Mas-sae plumbeae”, 205-11.

<sup>72</sup> See also Pena, “Plotia Prune”.

<sup>73</sup> Stefanile, “Mas-sae plumbeae”, 283.

<sup>74</sup> CIL II 3428 = ILS 5558 = Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 24 = AE 1995.940.

<sup>75</sup> See A. Ceballos Hornero, *Los espectáculos en la Hispania romana: la documentación epigráfica*, Mérida 2002, II, 622-3 and Pena, “Plotia Prune”, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 383-4.

commercial interest in Delos, although it is clear that Oppius, as de la Escosura emphasises, was a citizen of Carthago Nova.<sup>77</sup> According to Stefanile,<sup>78</sup> the Vinuleii in Hispania were tradesmen from Campania. The freedwoman Vinuleia Cales of item (7) bears a very rare *nomen* with a *cognomen* that strongly hints to an Italic origin from Cales.<sup>79</sup> The Lolli, attested here through the funerary inscription of their *libertus* L. Lollius Philemo in (15) were of Italic origin, most likely, perhaps from Campania.<sup>80</sup> Finally, the Italic origin of L. Sulpicius (10) can be deduced from his belonging to the *tribus* Collina.<sup>81</sup> The name of the deceased, L. Sulpicius, is followed by the indication of his father and of his grandfather, clearly important members of the urban elite of Carthago Nova, who deserved to be invoked in the onomastic formula.

From this overview it becomes abundantly clear that freedmen of families of Italic businessmen were the main sponsors and recipients of epigraphic *carmina* in Late Republican and Early Imperial Carthago Nova (see items (2), (4), (7), (15), (16)). These were probably involved in the activities of their masters and shared with them literary interests. The overall and relative number of epitaphs dedicated by, and to, women is also impressive. These include texts to / by both freedwomen (see (2), (4), (7), (16)) and to / by little girls or women of servile status or of free birth ((5), (9), (11), (13), (14)). It is more than likely that these women played a very visible role in the city's life and trade, and that they were actively and emphatically involved in the commercial activities of their families, including perhaps even the mining industry in some shape or form.<sup>82</sup>

The provenance of most of the inscriptions is unknown, often because they were reused or entered in private properties at an early date. Of all of Carthago Nova's necropoleis, however, only one appears to have provided with certainty any verse inscriptions, *viz.* the necrópolis de la Concepción, where items (11), (14), (15), and (16) were found. Item (9) may also have to be attributed to that necropolis. Very little is known about this cemetery. It would seem, however, that it was mostly in use during Late Republican times, while the inscriptions from the area of the Malecón, whence several of our inscriptions come, are dated to the first decades of the first century A.D.<sup>83</sup>

It is, of course, interesting to see such a concentration of verse inscriptions in a specific sector of a specific necropolis, and one may wish to argue for an

<sup>77</sup> de la Escosura Balbás, *La población de Carthago Nova*, 70.

<sup>78</sup> Stefanile, "Massae plumbeae", 234.

<sup>79</sup> One Vinuleia M.I. Vassa from Cales is attested in *EE* VIII 557.

<sup>80</sup> See Stefanile, "Massae plumbeae", 231-8.

<sup>81</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 412-13.

<sup>82</sup> Pena, "Plotia Prune", 18 suggests that the abundance of early *carmina* dedicated to freedwomen (3 out of 5) shows that after earning their freedom they used to develop some kind of business (perfumes, cosmetics...) within the family of their patrons. This is to rule out in favour of the hypothesis presented above.

<sup>83</sup> On this necropolis see Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 283-5.

organic, sequential development – rather than a merely haphazard coincidence. Nevertheless, we know that at least two more necropoleis were in use exactly in the same period: Torre Ciega<sup>84</sup> and Santa Lucía, where the surviving inscriptions suggest a use of these burial grounds between the end of the first century B.C. and the Julio-Claudian age.<sup>85</sup> It is therefore entirely plausible to argue that people of a common background were familiar with this type of commemoration in this necropolis and that they were influenced by each other to self-represent in this manner in this particular geographical context.

## 5. BRIEF OUTLOOK

There is certainly more that one might wish to know about Carthago Nova's characteristic poetic fingerprint: specific local spreads, use of rhythms, intertextuality, the creation of poetic environments, and so forth. But the most significant point, already palpable from our considerations thus far, has to be this: poetry, and especially locally produced, inscribed poetry, is a cultural practice – and it has to be an important element, if not a cornerstone, in the study of the cultural history of geographical contexts. As that, the dynamics of production related to *carmina epigraphica* are inextricably linked to a locale's social, economic, and political history. These factors, though rooted and operating in a more global context, in turn are driven, to no small extent, by local realities and their transformation and changes over time.

The case of Carthago Nova, in many ways, may serve as a useful pilot for future research, allowing for similar comparisons in the area (e.g. when looking at the *ager*, mining areas and other settlements, whether they be in the immediate vicinity or further afield) and beyond. For Carthago Nova it is abundantly clear that its local production of epigraphic poems commences around the middle of the first century B.C., and that this development coincides with the foundation of the *colonia*, even if the precise date of this upgrade is still debated. The upturn in the local epigraphic production, with the addition of a poetic dimension, corresponds with the emergence of a new elite of Italic origin, which was involved in trade and in the mining activities in the south-eastern part of Hispania Citerior. The new trade possibilities in this big harbour city, due to the new administration of mines, which during the Late Republic passed to private owners or private leaseholders, and the newly founded colony attracted rich families and tradesmen from central-south Italy who were also active in the Baetica and in Lusitania. Once this entrepreneurial spirit begins to lose its drive, the production of inscribed poetry, too, begins to lessen. The local poetic fingerprint in the inscriptions is by no means an accurate mirror of the local social and ethnic transformation: yet it is a remarkably useful proxy for a more complex understanding of the changing face of a settlement.

<sup>84</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 221-3.

<sup>85</sup> Abascal Palazón, Ramallo Asensio, *Carthago Nova*, 263-4.

The study of Roman verse inscriptions, once it is carried out with a focus to its regional and local settings, becomes an important element of the study of cultural history – the history of the conditions in which individual and groups are capable of, and inclined to, produce art, verbal and otherwise, alongside all the other blessings of human civilisation. For, as soon as external factors change, local poetic production is also affected almost instantaneously. This matter, however, will require further study, on a much larger scale, across the Roman empire, in its entirety.

