

## The Indigenous Role in the Romanization of Hispania Following the Augustan Conquests

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Hispania, the term given by the Romans to the area of the Iberian Peninsula, has received a great deal of scholarly attention in the past seventy years due to the fact that its Romanization is uniquely traceable among Roman provinces. While opinions on specific aspects have changed, the standard view of the process has remained largely the same. It is generally accepted that Hispanic Romanization was, as C. H. V. Sutherland described in an early scholarly work on Roman Hispania, “the result of a rigorous central government directed by the enlightened policy and the unquestioned power of one supreme statesman – the Princeps.”<sup>1</sup> This strongly top-down view has remained popular among some scholars since Sutherland was published in 1939. As a result, the effect of the indigenous Hispanics in the acculturation to the increasingly Roman socioeconomic climate has been generally ignored. While it is true that the Principate did make an active policy of culturally assimilating Hispania during and following the Augustan conquests,<sup>2</sup> the indigenous population played a much larger role than previously thought in the process of Hispanic political Romanization. The process was in fact more characteristic of a native culture adapting itself to Roman ways than of Roman customs actively superseding those of the indigenous Hispanics.

The Augustan conquests of Hispania followed a long tradition of Roman conflict with the peninsula. In the late third century BCE, Rome fought fierce battles against Hannibal’s forces made up of Carthaginian soldiers, African mercenaries, and indigenous Iberians who were sympathetic to Hannibal’s cause.<sup>3</sup> The Lusitanian and Celtiberian Wars of the latter half of the second century BCE, a series of wars of resistance between indigenous tribes and the increasingly imperialist Romans, demonstrate that Rome exerted influence on Spain long before the major phase of Romanization began.<sup>4</sup> However, it was not until after Augustus completed the conquest begun by Caesar that the peninsula came fully under Roman control and the process of Hispanic Romanization truly began.<sup>5</sup> The fact that Augustus thought it necessary to assign his trusted second-in-command Marcus Agrippa to subjugate the final pockets of resistance and the mention of the colonies he established in “each Spain”<sup>6</sup> (i.e., both Hispania Citerior and Hispania Ulterior) in the *Res Gestae* illustrates the high priority Hispania was

<sup>1</sup> C. H. V. Sutherland, *The Romans in Spain: 217 B.C. – A.D. 117* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1939), 152.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the “conquest” referred to here is often instead labelled the “pacification,” “restoration,” etc. of Hispania; there is no real difference between the terms in this context.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Keay, *Roman Spain* (London: British Museum Publications, 1988), 27-29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 33-42.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 46.

<sup>6</sup> *Res Gestae*. 28.

given by the Principate.<sup>7</sup>

Following Augustus' conquest, the peninsula underwent a significant geographical reorganization. Appian of Alexandria explains that "since [the Augustan conquests] the Romans have divided Iberia, which they now call Hispania, into three."<sup>8</sup> Augustus separated the peninsula into three provinces: Baetica in the South (most of modern day Andalusia), Lusitania to the West, and Hispania Tarraconensis to the Northeast. The common argument as to the purpose of the reorganization was that "it [...] served as a unifying mechanism to make people feel part of a common, great empire"<sup>9</sup> by imposing the same divisions that were already in place in the rest of the Empire. Once the conquered peoples began seeing themselves as members of a province and city in the same way as the illustrious Romans or the peoples in lands as far away as Syria and Egypt, the task of the Principate to assimilate the indigenous populations became much easier. Here, the active policy of Hispanic Romanization can clearly be seen.

The evidence for the imposition of typically "Roman" geographic and political designs is not as clear beyond the level of the province, however. An investigation of the urban topography of Hispanic cities reveals that, while the political layout did in fact change to reflect the new geographical organization, many structural aspects did not become as Romanized as they did in other areas. For example, the possible Forum square identified by Sheila Gibson<sup>10</sup> at the recently excavated site of Celti Peñafior does not conform to the standard Roman layout of the Forum. The typical Roman Forum was a long, rectangular courtyard surrounded by both civic and religious buildings as well as shops and marketplaces, with a shrine to a patron god (or, later, deified emperor) at each end. This form was common both to Rome itself and other cities such as Pompeii<sup>11</sup> and Ostia.<sup>12</sup> The Forum of Celti Peñafior, on the other hand, is a square courtyard flanked on three sides by shops, a basilica, and other standard Forum buildings, and on the fourth side by a road.<sup>13</sup> The irregularity of this structural layout, particularly the use of a local road as a boundary, is evidence that the Romanized Forum was built atop what had already been an indigenous civic centre.

This pattern is not unique to Celti Peñafior; the Forum at Ostia, for example, was also superimposed onto an existing layout, evidenced by the fact that the city's main road runs straight through the centre of the courtyard. However, even in Ostia the Forum conforms to the standard rectangular design, a reflection of the thoroughly Roman political hierarchy, including the religious overtones ubiquitous in Roman government, of the city. Following this pattern, the Forum at Celti Peñafior reflects the persistence of indigenous political structure in the post-conquest Hispanic city. The construction of the Forum is undoubtedly a sign of intense Romanization. At the same time, the apparently indigenous layout of the new civic centre shows that the local elites in this instance adopted a Roman design that did not harshly conflict with pre-existing structures or institutions. This process makes sense from a Hispanic perspective as well, since adopting Roman ways (for example converting the civic centre to a Forum) would ingratiate the local elites to the Roman aristocracy, further cementing their elite status at home. Thus, the Forum of Celti Peñafior and those similarly unusually laid-out Forums at Saguntum,<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Keay, *Roman Spain*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Appian, *Wars of the Romans in Iberia*, trans. J. S. Richardson (Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 2000) 102.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard A. Curchin, *The Romanization of Central Spain: Complexity, Diversity and Change in Provincial Hinterland* (London: Routledge, 2004), 60.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Keay, John Creighton and José Remesal Rodríguez, *Celti Peñafior: The Archaeology of a Hispano-Roman Town in Baetica* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2000), 183.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Gates, *Ancient Cities: The Archaeology of Urban Life in the Ancient Near East and Egypt, Greece, and Rome* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 345.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 355.

<sup>13</sup> Keay, Creighton and Rodríguez, *Celti Peñafior*, 183-187.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Keay, "Innovation and Adaptation: The Contribution of Rome to Urbanism in Iberia," in *Social Complexity and the Development of Towns in Iberia: From the Copper Age to the Second Century AD*, ed. Barry Suncliff & Simon Keay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): 319.

Tarraco, and others,<sup>15</sup> demonstrate that the existing civic authorities of pre-conquest Hispanic cities readily adopted the cultural representation of Roman political hierarchy, but at the same time retained some of their indigenous political structures.

The Forum of Saguntum illustrates the willingness of the local aristocracies to adapt Roman institutions to the existing political structure. An inscription indicates that its construction had been financed by “Cn. Baebius Geminus,” evidently a member of an important local aristocratic family.<sup>16</sup> This seems to have been the standard process for post-conquest Romanized construction in cities which were not specifically founded or favoured by Augustus himself. Constructions financed by Augustus or other ultra-elite Roman aristocrats were concentrated in the newly founded colonies and cities of Hispania.<sup>17</sup> Though there is not a great deal of epigraphic evidence from established Hispanic cities, it seems likely based on the lack of Imperial inscriptions that the pattern exhibited in Saguntum also took place in those locations.<sup>18</sup> As J. S. Richardson explains,

the resulting commitment to a newly ‘Romanized’ urban environment meant that the local feeling of these important groups was focused on a structure which was simultaneously their own and part of the wider Roman empire.<sup>19</sup>

It is evident that the introduction of the Forum to Hispanic cities was not solely a premeditated imposition on Hispanic cities by the Principate in order to reduce the power of the local aristocrats or to demean indigenous culture. Instead, the Hispanic elites readily adopted the Roman-style Forum in admiration of and deference to Rome and Augustus while retaining their cities’ traditional topography.

Hispanic town charters documenting the careers of local Hispanic magistrates provide direct evidence for persistent indigenous institutions in the cities. Even after the Augustan conquests a great number of political offices at the municipal level continued to be filled by members of the existing local ruling class rather than emigrating Romans. These local officials, over time, became deeply Romanized, to the extent that many left their hometowns for Rome in order to hold more prestigious imperial offices;<sup>20</sup> in the latter half of the first century CE three emperors, Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius would hail from Hispania. In the early years following the Augustan conquests, Romanization was already apparent as town charters reveal that magistrates generally went by the Roman-style *tria nomina* (three names),<sup>21</sup> even more significant as *duo nomina* (two names) was still the norm among average Romans; *tria nomina* in the Augustan reign was reserved for the nobility.<sup>22</sup>

There is no reason, however, to believe that Roman naming trends were adopted out of necessity or that only those with Roman names were permitted to hold such offices.<sup>23</sup> While *tria nomina* was apparently favoured by the majority of local magistrates,<sup>24</sup> there are nonetheless a wide variety of naming styles attested to in the charters of the period.<sup>25</sup> Roman names were evidently adopted based on personal preference; perhaps a Roman aristocrat was particularly generous in his patronage or, as S. L. Dyson has suggested, Roman names were linked to areas of especial gubernatorial activity.<sup>26</sup> Addition-

<sup>15</sup> Simon Keay, “Recent Archaeological Work in Roman Iberia (1990-2002),” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 93 (2003): 176.

<sup>16</sup> J. S. Richardson, *The Romans in Spain* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1996), 144.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Leonard A. Curchin, *The Local Magistrates of Roman Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 123-124.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 89-90.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 90.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 95-96.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 90.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 89-99.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 95, n. 15.

ally, it seems that there would have been no opposition from Rome to local families adopting Roman names, as the first written mention of a law forbidding such activity comes from Suetonius' biography of Claudius: "persons of non-citizen status [which would include early local Hispanic elites] he forbade to use Roman names."<sup>27</sup> This implies that non-citizens prior to Claudius did use Roman names, and that they did not necessarily have any real political or familial meaning since to forbid them once they had established sociopolitical functions would not make sound imperial sense.

These local political elites had the effect of allowing certain aspects of the indigenous political hierarchy to persist even as it was being superseded by Roman institutions. Many political offices found in town charters did not have equivalents in the political structure of Rome or most Roman cities. Of these, the majority were pre-Roman political offices given Latinized names. Examples include the elegantly simple title "*magistratus*," an all-purpose name for any number of pre-Roman positions that did not have equivalents in the Roman system.<sup>28</sup> "*Praetor*" is another such title, found on coins from Celsa and Calagurris and numerous inscriptions in the late first century BCE, during and following the Augustan conquests. Here again the position is Roman in name only, being an indigenous office with no close equivalent in the Roman system.<sup>29</sup> The most notable of these positions are the *principes*, translated as "chieftains" or "leaders," common in the pre-Roman period (though of course not with the Latin name) and appearing in a number of inscriptions from the Northern peninsula following the Augustan conquests and continuing in the two southern provinces through the second century CE.<sup>30</sup> These indigenous positions illustrate that Roman politics were not simply imposed immediately on Hispania by Rome in order to control the populace as the Principate saw fit. Rather, the aristocratic classes of the Hispanic cities adopted those Roman positions which did not conflict extraordinarily with the pre-existing structures, and superficially Romanized those positions which did.

The position of the *principes* reveals even more about the process of early Romanization in Hispania. The common definition of "chieftan" or "leader" belies the long Hispanic history of honouring individuals found to be worthy of the title, usually due to military prowess, known in the literature as *supra*.<sup>31</sup> The pre-Roman *principes* were the military leaders of each individual polity. Following this tradition, the Augustan conquests introduced a new, extremely powerful, overarching *princeps*: Augustus himself. Who else could have commanded such respect in the tradition of the *supra* as the man who conquered the entire peninsula, and indeed most of the known world? This contrasts with the common view of scholarship that Augustus was required to enforce loyalty and homage to him.<sup>32</sup> Rather than seeing Roman rule as only being accepted due to the concerted efforts of the central government to impose Imperial loyalty, it is simpler to interpret it at least partially as a progression in the existing tradition of prestige based particularly on military merit. The institution of *principes* found in the Latin charters of the first century CE is the remnant of the pre-Roman tradition of honouring *suprae*. Augustus himself, as the conqueror responsible for uniting the peninsula under the umbrella of Roman rule, can be seen as the highest stage in this tradition. The institution of the *supra* also helps explain why the Emperor was more or less accepted as divine,<sup>33</sup> since his glory fit well with the characteristics of the position and his accomplishments undoubtedly surpassed even the most illustrious indigenous *supra*.

Especially in Rome, politics and religion were intimately connected in this period. Even before the popularization of the Imperial cult Roman political officials were often granted priesthoods, and

<sup>27</sup> Suet. *Claud.* 25.

<sup>28</sup> Curchin, *The Local Magistrates of Local Spain*, 36.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 37.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Keay, "Innovation and Adaptation: The Contribution of Rome to Urbanism in Iberia," 302.

<sup>32</sup> Sutherland, *The Romans in Spain*, 152-155.

<sup>33</sup> Leonard A. Curchin, *Roman Spain: Conquest and Assimilation* (London: Routledge, 1991), 61-66.

Hispania exhibits this pattern as well. Religion, therefore, was an important tool in maintaining loyalty to the ruling political class. Thus, one would expect that if Hispanic Romanization were the result only of a central government policy, the Roman pantheon and worship of the Augustus and the Deified Julius would appear almost immediately following the Augustan conquests and replace the existing religious practices, as was attempted in other religiously dissenting provinces such as Judea. However, as with Roman-financed Forums, most of the evidence for Roman pantheon or Emperor worship is found in the new colonies. Altars dedicated to Augustus from 26 BCE are known from coins at Tarraco and Emerita Augusta, the capital of Hispania Tarraconensis and an Augustan colony founded in 25 BCE respectively. The people of Tarraco also erected a temple to Augustus and Rome in 27 BCE.<sup>34</sup> Since these buildings have not survived, it is not possible to know who exactly was involved in their construction, but from their location in Augustan colonies it seems likely that Rome had much more involvement in these cities than in others.<sup>35</sup> The concentration of early worship of Augustus and Rome either in cities founded by Augustus himself, or strongly associated with the Roman central government, demonstrate that Roman religion was not immediately impressed upon the indigenous Hispanics.

However, the worship of Roman gods does appear in inscriptions dating to later than these altars and temples. Many sets of inscriptions have been found from Galicia documenting sacrifices and dedications to various gods, and the ratio of indigenous gods to Greco-Roman gods is striking. Almost half the inscriptions are to either a clearly indigenous deity or to a Roman deity with an indigenous "surname,"<sup>36</sup> which can be interpreted as the stage in Romanization in which the similarities between indigenous and Roman gods are being realized, and Roman associations are being given to traditional Hispanic gods. These findings demonstrate two important aspects in the Romanization process of Hispania. First, Roman religion never fully replaced indigenous cult practices. Evidence from other areas, including extramural cave shrines found in Hispania Tarraconensis and Valencia and the worship of the indigenous god Herotoragus which continued as late as the second century CE,<sup>37</sup> also illustrate this fact. Second, the persistence of local cults and the relative unimportance of Roman religion in the early period following the Augustan conquests illustrate that there was not in fact a great effort from the Principate to stamp out local religion and replace it with worship of either the Roman pantheon or of himself and his father. The introduction and incorporation of Roman gods into the indigenous culture can instead be interpreted as the gradual adoption of foreign gods into the local religious worldview. This would certainly not be a novel process, as indigenous peoples of the Iberian Peninsula had previously adopted gods from the colonizing Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Greeks.<sup>38</sup> As well, it is possible that even the unexpectedly low frequency of dedications to Roman gods is the result of biases in the evidence, as the inscriptions that have survived are Latin. The inscribers, obviously Romanized based on their language of choice, may simply have impressed Roman names of their own accord over indigenous deities. The worship of the indigenous healing god Endovellicus may very well have been recorded as a dedication to the very similar and popular Roman god Asclepius,<sup>39</sup> as Latin writers often did. Tacitus, for example, explains Germanic religion as follows: "Mercury is the one they principally worship. [...] Hercules and Mars they appease by animal offerings [...] Part of the Suebi sacrifice to Isis as well."<sup>40</sup> Clearly, Tacitus is here projecting gods and cults familiar to himself onto foreign peoples whose gods would have had many similarities to certain Roman deities.

<sup>34</sup> Keay, *Roman Spain*, 157.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> John Nicols, "Indigenous Culture and the Process of Romanization in Iberian Galicia," *The American Journal of Philology* 108 (Spring 1987): 141.

<sup>37</sup> Richardson, *The Romans in Spain*, 161.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 145-152.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 161.

<sup>40</sup> Tac. *Germ.* 9.

The implication of the processes of religious acculturation for political Romanization becomes clear when it is realized that political positions were strongly associated with religious authority or duty in Hispanic political systems. Religious associations were possibly even stronger than in Rome, as priesthoods frequently appear in town charters as the final office held by an aristocrat in the *cursus honorum*.<sup>41</sup> A directed effort to replace Hispanic political systems with Roman institutions would have required a profound shift in the underlying Hispanic religious beliefs. If this did not occur, the Roman political positions would not have been able to wield the authority necessary for them to hold practical power over the population. Such a shift does not appear to have taken place. Rather, as both political structures and religious practices were remarkably preserved following the Augustan conquests, the adoption of Roman religious practices was a voluntary effort by certain members of the indigenous populations, most likely those aristocrats with close ties or economic interests in Rome or elsewhere in the established Empire.

The Romanization of Hispania following the Augustan conquests of the late first century BCE was not, as has often been assumed, chiefly the result of machinations from the central Roman government designed and calculated to impress Roman culture upon the indigenous population in order to facilitate the transition to Imperial rule. The process was in fact much more influenced by the efforts of the local populations themselves. A careful examination of the evidence reveals that most of what at first appears to be evidence for Roman cultural domination of the peninsula is in fact acculturation of pre-existing sociopolitical institutions. The apparent imposition of Roman Forums in certain Hispanic urban centres in fact resembles a familiar pattern of a new architectural style being superficially applied to what was already the civic centre. The fact that Forums in organic Hispanic cities such as Saguntum appear to have been financed by local aristocrats demonstrates this further. The persistence of political positions and hierarchy is revealed by the large number of locals who held prestigious offices, both political and religious and often the two combined. Furthermore, Latinized names for non-Roman political positions demonstrate that political Romanization was often only superficially realized: Latin names for offices with no clear Roman equivalents were given though the original purpose for the office remained. Religious acculturation demonstrates a similar pattern, with Roman gods and Imperial worship only slowly being introduced to the indigenous populations.

In a greater historical context, these findings demonstrate that modern historical scholarship tends to view cultural change as a necessarily “hostile” process,<sup>42</sup> as Sutherland envisioned, motivated by an aggressive desire for control over a population. In certain cases this model may be applicable, but it should also be remembered that cultural change requires a degree, albeit a variable one, of cooperation from the indigenous peoples. Sutherland’s view reflects an imposition of his own values, biases, and assumptions regarding mechanisms of power and cultural spread that is dangerous in historical scholarship, particularly when the topic under discussion is as potentially emotional and inflammatory as this. It is naïve to argue that the Principate did not actively intend cultural assimilation to be a means of establishing loyalty among the populace of Hispania. However, the local elites, the groups most likely to leave meaningful remains in the archaeological and historical records, were themselves willing to adopt Roman culture so long as it did not excessively conflict with their pre-existing institutions. Their motivations for this behaviour can not be known, though it is likely that by ingratiating themselves to Rome they sought to secure their own aristocratic positions. To disregard the influence of a population on its own cultural change, as has been done in much work on Romanization in Hispania, is to grossly misrepresent a process of great historical importance.

<sup>41</sup> Curchin, *The Local Magistrates of Roman Spain*, 43-44.

<sup>42</sup> Sutherland, *The Romans in Spain*, 152.

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