

## **THE IDENTIFICATION IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCIENCES**

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### **Abstract**

In the archaeological activity, the just classification of the artefact is the right keyword to understand the whole monument in study. Therefore, classification tables of ceramics, for example, were early established. In other side, exhaustive coins' catalogues – specially of the Roman Empire – are indispensable. In the epigraphic studies identify gods and persons is one of the most important jobs of the researcher.

### **Keywords**

Identification; Archaeology; Numismatics; Epigraphy; Catalogues; identifying tables.

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*Heródoto, Unifesp, Guarulhos*, v.7, n.2 - 2022.2. p. 162-180.  
DOI: 10.34024/herodoto.2022.v7.15482

## **Resumo**

Procura mostrar-se como a correcta identificação dos artefactos exumados duma escavação é preocupação fundamental do arqueólogo. Daí a existência, desde muito cedo, de tabelas classificativas em relação aos vários tipos de cerâmicas. Na Numismática, a identificação das moedas é fundamental para se documentar uma cronologia adequada; nos estudos epigráficos, por seu turno, os elementos identificativos de divindades e das personagens referidas nas epígrafes constituem o primeiro passo da investigação epigráfica.

## **Palavras-chave**

Identificação; Arqueologia; Numismática; Epigrafia; tabelas classificativas.

## Introduction

In this new issue of *Heródoto*, especially dedicated to Roman Archaeology, the organizers propose “to reach a current and comprehensive view on the scientific challenges underlying the study of Roman Antiquity from the material culture”.

- What is your name?

- How old are you?

Those are questions usually made by a two/three years old child, who is already starting to talk, and his friends think the answer and the childish pronunciation are funny.

In a police raid, these are also the first elements to be requested, and woe betide those who do not have an identification element with them! In these times of the war we are going through and in those that we have already gone through, the need to erect monuments "to the unknown soldier" intends to fill the pain felt for not having been able to identify so many bodies found.

If we look closely, these two are also the essential questions that the archaeologist asks when he finds an object or even an architectural structure: what are we going to call it? What time are we going to assign it to?

## The identification in Archaeology

### Ceramics, graffiti and potter's marks

We found a brick. Generally speaking, it is possible for us to distinguish it from a tile, by shape and dimensions. The tile presupposes the existence of a covered building and, therefore, it is important to see, before removing it, what position it is in and, for example, if it has vestiges of a fire. There will be the clues to know if the roof has collapsed, because the wooden beams have rotted, if there was a fire or, if other significant clues are found, if it was an earthquake that ruined everything.

The brick could have been used for paving a road or to be used in a wall. Thus, there was a construction nearby.

The bricks and the tiles can have graffiti. Deciphering them will allow us to penetrate into another plane, that of the workers who were its  
*Heródoto*, Unifesp, Guarulhos, v.7, n.2 - 2022.2. p. 162-180.  
DOI: 10.34024/herodoto.2022.v7.15482

manufacturers. Without letters, we will imagine a common, impersonal worker; some letters, however few, immediately make us think of who engraved them, sometimes on clay that was still soft, sometimes on clay that had just come out of the oven and the message lacked a sharp object.

In a quadrant of a column found in the Roman city of Conimbriga we found the phrase *Ex officina Maelonis. Diarias rogatas solvi* (Figure 01). And we imagine the worker, at the end of his hard day, sweat beading his forehead, in an outburst: «That's it! I have done what was asked of me for today!».



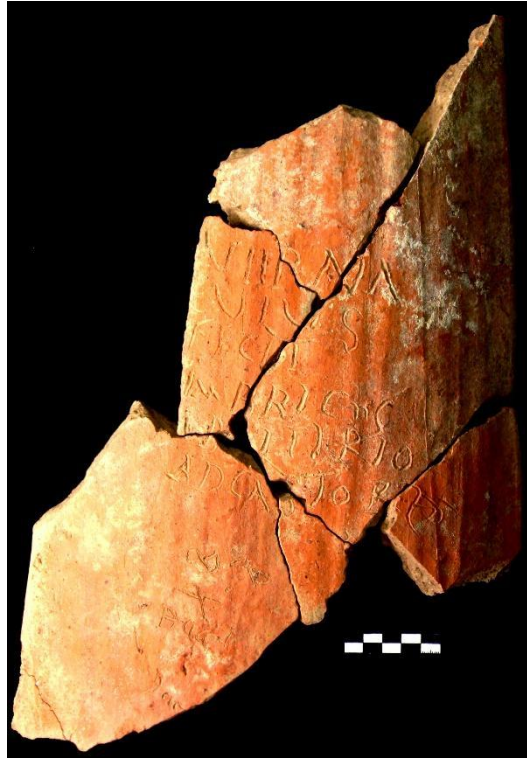
**Figure 01:** Graffiti from *Conimbriga* in a brick.

In a brick from *Eburobrittium*, another worker didn't want to make a mistake and recorded *usque hic CCC*; i.e., he was counting and, so that he wouldn't forget, he decided to point «So far, it's 300» (Figure 02).



**Figure 02:** Graffiti from *Eburobrittium*.

In a tile from Castor's *officina*, in *Abelterium*, the craftsman *Vernaculus* pointed out the number of *imbrices* as he made them... (Figure 03).



**Figure 03:** Graffiti from *Abelterium*.

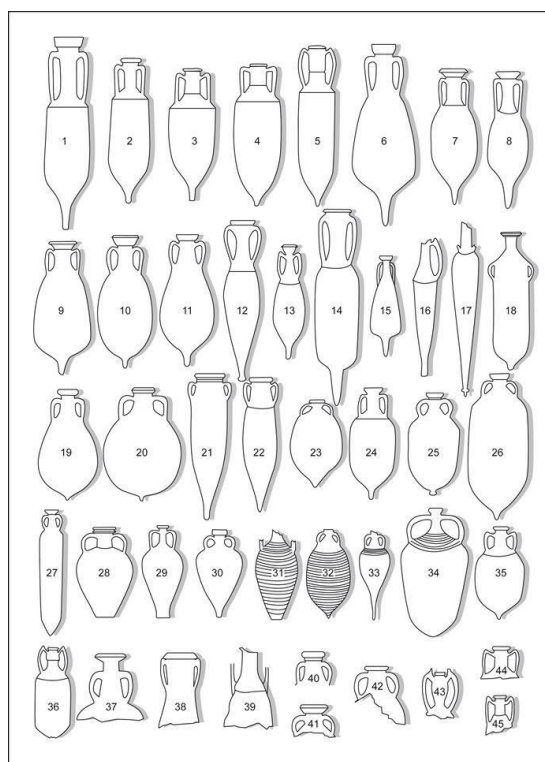
Graffiti are a possible way of identifying not only the objects found, but also those who were directly connected with their manufacture and use. These are exceptional cases, the ones indicated; but we wish we had many more, so that more we could deal with the man who is – who was – behind those cold artifacts.

There are, however, other ways to get there. Just as earthenware in common use, especially if of some singularity, currently bears the identification of the manufacturer, so Roman potters did not want to leave their credits in the hands of others. That is why we talk about «potters' marks» and researchers in this area of ceramics are very pleased to decipher these marks and establish catalogues with them, especially since it has already been discovered that there were famous potters in certain areas. This discovery has in particular allowed the possibility of tracing marketing routes, which, together with other factors, results in tracing the economic panorama here and beyond, and the establishment of comparisons.

## The amphorae

In the scope of ceramics, there are objects that deserved closer attention, either because of the relative abundance of finds, or because of the economic and cultural significance that their analysis makes possible.

Amphorae, as privileged containers for garum, oil and wine, although the model can be considered universal, vary a lot: whether they have feet or not; if they are too bulky or slender, if the wings stick to the neck or almost to the mouth... Heinrich Dressel (1845-1920) spent his life in the *Monte Testaccio*, in Rome, examining thousands of fragments; from then on, he was able to establish a typology, which, despite having been adjusted and refined by other researchers – remember Maurice Henry Callender (*Roman amphorae*, London, 1965), Michel Ponsich (cf. *Conimbriga XIII* 1974 167-170), Martín Almagro (in *Las necrópolis de Ampurias*, I 1953 and II 1955), among others – today it is used to detect provenances, models, circuits (Figure 04), along with the database *Roman Amphorae a digital resource*.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 04:** Dressel's Table. Typology of *amphorae*.

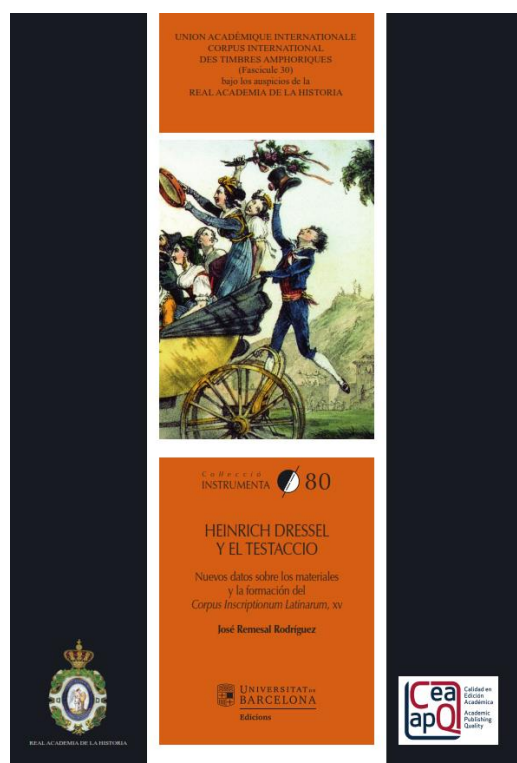
<sup>2</sup> Available at:

<[https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/amphora\\_ahrb\\_2005/index.cfm](https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/amphora_ahrb_2005/index.cfm)>.

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Boats arrived laden on the Tiber, coming from the most varied regions; the amphorae were emptied and thrown into this pile, where, later, José María Blázquez Martínez and, now, José Remesal Rodríguez and his team continue to unravel mysteries. In this year of 2022, the extraordinary repository of the meticulous notes left by Dressel was published – and honour be paid to the editors (Figure 05).



**Figure 05:** The book about Dressel and the *Testaccio*.

There were also amphorae ovens in Hispania; in the *Sado* estuary, in particular, there was the possibility of finding ovens almost intact; in *Peniche*, this 'industry' also flourished, as well as on the banks of the Tagus. So-called Lusitanian-made *amphorae* – due to their unique characteristics – would come to be detected in the *Monte Testaccio*. And many of these, in *Testaccio*, have a potter's mark on the handle and, on the edge, in graffiti or painted, information about the content, the capacity, the recipient... A world!

### *The lucernae*

Another object that attracted early attention were the *lucernae*.

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Yes, basically, they all obeyed the same model: handle, deposit, spillway. Being an object that could even be said to be personal, not that each person had a lamp, but because of the atmosphere it created around them, in the heart of the house, in the family environment, it would be an object that deserves particular attention, not least because it quickly began to decorate the upper part of the warehouse with scenes from everyday life, with mythological motifs, the faces of divinities...

Notable in this regard is the so-called “votive deposit of Santa Bárbara de Padrões” (Ourique), in the Lower Alentejo region: hundreds of *lucernae* were found there, with the most diverse figures, especially of deities, which induced the researchers to consider, with reason, that this was a place that was attributed a sacred character and the lamps constituted offerings to the deities venerated there (Figure 06).



**Figure 06:** *Lucernae* from S. Bárbara de Padrões.

For this reason, given the variety of forms, the Italian archaeologist Nino Lamboglia (1912-1977) created a classification table, commonly used to also define cultural and economic influences.



## *Terra sigillata*

Still in the scope of ceramics, the *terra sigillata* deserves a special word.

“*Terra*” means it means clay, the raw material from which pottery is made; «*sigillata*», although this explanation is not always accepted, derives from the fact that this type of pottery, polished, attractive in appearance, pleasant to the touch, subject to greater attention by the potter, often presents – also due to these factors – the mark, the seal, *sigillum* (in Latin), with the name of the owner of the workshop that had produced it.

In fact, if *lucernae*, *amphorae* and even common pottery provide identifying elements through their forms and finishes, it is the *terra sigillata* that takes the lead over all the others. There is the italic *terra sigillata*, the sudgalic, the hispanic, the *clara* (a, c and d), the late focean, the african D, the gray...

Hence, there have been several attempts to create a classification of typologies as comprehensive as possible. The best-known tables are those by Christian Goudineau (1939-2018), a leading French ceramologist, and those by the Englishman John Walter Hayes, whose most notable work is *Late Roman Pottery* (London, 1972), which was thoroughly reviewed in *Conimbriga* XII 1973 223-227.

## Fine-ware Ceramics

Another group of ceramics is the “Fine-ware” one.

They are also delicate, like the *terra sigillata*, however, the potters have perfected the thickness of its wall, which gives them a special delicacy and, for this reason, they also attracted the attention of researchers.

As an example, Françoise Mayet's work on this type of ceramics in Hispania (*Les Céramiques à Parois Fines dans la Péninsule Ibérique*), dated 1975 and on which Jeannette U. Smit Nolen studied in detail (*Conimbriga* XV 1976 189-197).

## Mortars

Of course, there is a whole range of publications on what is called “common ceramics”, the kind commonly used in the kitchen and on the table in everyday life.

Its importance, mainly due to the number of finds, led Jorge Alarcão to write his doctoral thesis on this type of ceramics found in the excavations of *Conimbriga*. Volume V (*La Céramique Commune Locale et Régionale* – Paris 1975) of the *Fouilles de Conimbriga* series was dedicated to him, as volume IV published in the same year (*Les Sigillées*) was dedicated to the ‘*sigillatas*’. Incidentally, in another excavation carried out by the same team, the one from the Roman *villa* of *S. Cucufate*, this type of ceramics also got attention, on the part of Inês Vaz Pinto, who also chose it for the subject of her doctoral thesis (*A Cerâmica Comum das Villae Romanas de São Cucufate – Beja*, Lisbon 2003).

Due to its dimensions and typology, there was, among these ceramics, a type that ended up attracting attention, the mortar, certainly also due to the fact that a shipwrecked Roman ship was identified near Cape Dramont, in Provence, in the middle of the 1st century d. C., with a large load of mortars of different types, which led to the adoption of the classification proposed at the time of their study for the study of these kitchen objects: mortar Dramont D1, Dramont D2...

It should be added that, if ceramologists are interested in shapes and manufacturing centers and even analyse pastes in detail, it is certain that color assumes a primordial role in this type of artefact. And there is also a guide for this, which is often cited in works in this field: it is the color system proposed by the American Albert Henry Munsell (1858-1918).

## The glass

The glasses also deserve particular mention.

If the shapes of glass objects only very recently gained another refinement in the eager search for originality on the part of designers, in relation to Roman times, we have to agree that the shapes of glass objects in our daily lives at home are not that different from those the Romans used.

Also in this domain, however, it was necessary to opt for nomenclatures and establish typologies, especially in view, as has been said, of commercial circuits and cultural influences.

The pioneering attempt in this domain is due to the Dutch archaeologist Clasina Isings (1919-2018), with the work *Roman Glass from Dated Finds* (Groningen, 1957), still today the primer reference in studies on Roman glass.

## The identification in Numismatics

It goes without saying that, of all that is found in archaeological excavations, coins occupy a primordial place. Either because one immediately thinks of their eventual market value or because they constitute, in fact, an irreplaceable means of dating, as the inscriptions and motifs present on the reverse and obverse allow this.

Occasionally lost or jealously guarded in “hoards”, as in Archaeology, a significant set of coins resulting from deliberate concealment (Figure 07). Of the hundreds and sometimes thousands of hoards, the oldest and most recent numisms are most significant, as they are known, as they define the terms *post quem* and *ante quem* in which they were kept. That is why it is recommended not to dismember a hoard before all of them have been observed.



**Figure 07:** A hoard of coins.

Catalogues and numismatists' bedside books are also available for coin identification. A classic, the *Roman Coins*, by Harold Mattingly, whose 1st edition, in London, dates from 1928, with successive updated re-editions. In 1984, Sutherland and Carson began publishing *The Roman Imperial Coinage* in London; in 1992 it was the turn of Burnett, Amandri and Ripollès

to start the *Roman Provincial Coinage*. Today, OCRE, Online Coins of the Roman Empire.<sup>3</sup>

### **The identification in Epigraphy**

In epigraphic monuments, the question of identification arises in relation to theonyms and anthroponyms.

If the identification of the so-called 'classic' theonyms – Jupiter, Venus, Mercury... – does not cause problems, mostly because, in addition to mythological narratives, there are sculptural representations, the question arises in relation to the deities that we classify as “indigenous”, because they are only documented in certain regions and because they have names that, although Latinized, are strange. For these, researchers, in order to try to discover what divine characteristics they assume, try to analyse the name, on the presumption that the etymological similarity with concrete words from the pre-Roman (Indo-European) substratum can shed some light.

The way in which people are identified has also been the focus of attention, as it is assumed that it reveals their social status and, sometimes, their geographical origin.

Even at present, that etymological study is not negligible.

Nuno is nicknamed Sucá. He was never interested in knowing where that name came from, because his grandfather already had it. Now it turns out that the family was rooted in Mozambique for a long time. His grandfather was Cardoso; the natives called him Sor Cardoso, Senhor Cardoso; in the current pronunciation he gave it, therefore, Sucá and, from there, Sucá passed to family name.

In Brazil, there is an enormous spirit of openness to the introduction of names foreign to the Portuguese tradition. Names of characters from Classical Antiquity can, of course, be chosen – and this is undoubtedly an echo of a culture. Brazil received European refugees from the 2nd World War; hence the abundance of nicknames linked to European regions: Theml, Musco, Cuoco... It may surprise us, at first glance, to learn that a Brazilian lady is called Daiane; If we pay attention, however, to the

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: <<https://numismatics.org/ocre/>>.

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popularity of the disgraced Princess Diana, we will easily understand that the name was spelled as her name was pronounced, in English.

With regard to onomastics that we find, for example, in Roman inscriptions from Hispania, there are rules that are already practically accepted by everyone:

- a man who uses three names (*praenomen*, *nomen* and *cognomen*), indicates affiliation and the tribe in which he was inscribed, is a Roman citizen;
- the presence of affiliation is a symptom of being *ingenuus*, that is, a legitimate child;
- an identification with three names, without affiliation and etymologically Greek cognomen immediately suggests that we are in the presence of a freedman;
- anyone who identifies with a name and patronymic, whether they are Latin names or those drawn from the pre-Roman substratum, belongs to the indigenous world that the Romans came to find;
- if someone identifies himself only with a name and etymologically Greek, he is most likely a slave;
- there are, however, slaves and freedmen who, because the family is not ashamed of their condition (it should be remembered that, often, being a slave is not a label among the Romans, contrary to what it may seem), and, therefore, the epigraphist's task is facilitated because after the name comes the information SER(*vus*), LIB(*ertus*) of someone.

It should be noted, however, that the presence of an etymologically Greek name does not in itself mean that its bearer was born in the eastern part of the Empire, where Greek was the dominant language. The name was assigned to the slave by his master, the dominus; for this reason, whether due to possible physical characteristics or the desire for ostentation on the part of the master (it is quite enticing to have a slave *Agatamera...*), high-sounding Greek names were often chosen. Also in Antiquity there were fashions, as there are today in relation to the attribution of names taken from the identification of ideologues, artists, football players... And in all of this we are careful to make history!

Let us, by way of example, serve two epigraphic monuments of Lusitania.

## The Epitaph of *Firmanus*

In *Idanha-a-Velha*, former *civitas Igaeditanorum*, the elegantly decorated plaque of a family tomb was found, as shown in figure 08. Its sign says the following:

C(aio) CVRIO PVLLI F(ilio) / QVIR(ina) FIRMANO / ANN(orum) LXIII CVRIA  
/ VITALIS MARITO / OPTIMO ET SIBI F(aciendum) C(uravit)

To Gaius Curius Firmanus, son of Pullus, from the tribe Quirina, aged 63 years. Curia Vital did it to the great husband and herself.



Figure 08: The epitaph of *Firmanus*.

Following what has been highlighted above, the deceased was a Roman citizen: he has the three names and was assigned to a tribe, that of his city. It happens, however, that filiation is indicated not with the father's praenomen, in abbreviation, but in full: it is *Pullus*, a name that, although Latin, has a concrete meaning: "still young animal", "beloved boy". Therefore, his father, belonging to the indigenous stratum, was given a Latin name related to any of these concrete circumstances: being small, being loved... Now, this way in which *Firmanus* is identified denounces that, although he has acquired Roman citizenship, of which his wife is proud, she is no less proud of her husband's indigenous origin.

However, it is strange that the *Curia Vitalis* had the same family name as her husband, as we know that consanguineous marriages were not allowed. What happened then? The most viable hypothesis is that both were adopted – not necessarily from a legal point of view – by one of the families of the *civitas*, the *Curii*, who (we know this from other inscriptions that tell us about this) would have notoriety in the *civitas Igaeditanorum*... Incidentally, this mausoleum plaque – due to its grandeur (it measures 88 x 118 x 12 cm), for being made of marble in a region where granite is the dominant rock, and for displaying all this decoration in the classical manner – is a very eloquent symptom of abundance.

### The Cenotaph of Évora

The second example was exhumed in the Roman *villa* of *Tourega* (Figure 09), located on the outskirts of the city *Liberalitas Iulia Eborae*. On that plaque – also unique for its dimensions (60.5 x 118.5) – reads the following, in two faces:

D(is) M(anibus) S(acrum)

Q(uinto) IV(lio) MAXIMO C(larissimo) V(iro) / QVAESTORI PROV(inciae) SICI/LIAE TRIB(uno) PLEB(is) LEG(ato) / PROV(inciae) NARBONENS(is) / GALLIAE PRAET(ori) DES(ignato) / ANN(orum) XLVI / CALPVRNIA SABI/NA MARITO OPTIMO

Q(uinto) IVL(io) CLARO C(larissimo) I(uveni) IIIIVIRO / VIARVM CVRANDARVM / ANN(orum) XXI / Q(uinto) IVL(io) NEPOTIANO C(larissimo) I(uveni) / IIIIVIRO VIARVM CURAN/DARVM ANN(orum) XX / CALP(urnia) SABINA FILIIS

To the gods Manes.

To Quintus Julius Maximus, very distinguished man, quaestor of the province of Sicily, tribune of the plebs, legate of the Narbonense province of Gaul, appointed praetor, aged 46 years old – Calpurnia Sabina to her great husband.

To Quintus Julius Clarus, a very distinguished young man, four-year curator of roads, aged 21; to Quintus Julius Nepotianus, a very distinguished young man, four-year curator of the roads, aged 20 – Calpurnia Sabina to her sons.



**Figure 09:** The cenotaph of *Tourega*.

We classify this monument as a plaque of a cenotaph, that is, we are not looking at a family tomb in which relatives were deposited, but rather an evocation protected by the numen from the Beyond, the *Manes*.

The plaque would appear under the entrance to the tomb, empty of the mortal remains of the named ones, which would not prevent, for example, the bodies of the mother and other family members from being deposited there. At the moment, however, the absence of the formula here they lie or here they lie is revealing that *Sabina* wanted, fundamentally, to demonstrate her enormous pain, quite understandable, for the premature death of her husband and children. One could, as it seems natural, think that it was all a huge nightmare, due to an accident in which death claimed the three loved ones at once. *Sabina* did not want to explain in the epigraph what had really happened; it was enough for her, in this naked and raw way, to show what must have been her indescribable pain.

Most likely, the father and sons died in the exercise of their functions in Rome, since the young men had just entered one of the preliminary functions of the senatorial *cursus honorum*, the superintendence of the roads, which is, as it says, not only the good condition of the roads, but, above all, their security as important means for the circulation of products that the city lacked.

The father, in turn, after having exercised municipal functions in his hometown and undoubtedly having made himself famous in them – we assume that it was *Ebora* – was called to join the senatorial class, perhaps through direct intervention by the emperor or of their provincial representatives. It is not mentioned that he held any position in the preliminary functions, which is normal, inasmuch as he is said to have

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DOI: 10.34024/herodoto.2022.v7.15482



been *quaestor* (the quaestorship is the first position after this apprenticeship) in Sicily. He then took over the tribunate of the plebs, which – if we did not know it – indicated his non-noble origin; a position that looked after the rights of citizens and which, for that very reason, ended up introducing and starting its holder in the complex Roman administrative and judicial machinery. He therefore constituted the springboard to come to perform the functions of representative of the emperor in one of the most important provinces of the West: Gaul *Narbonensis*. Furthermore, he was appointed, but died before such functions were exercised. And, if it was mentioned earlier that *Maximus* entered the senatorial order only after some *curriculum* at local and provincial level, this can be deduced from the fact that, in a normal career, at the age of 46 one had already been at the top of one's career for a long time, in the consulship, for example, given that the usual age for becoming a *quaestor* was around 25 years old and from 33 onwards one could already be a consul.

With regard to the onomastics of the four characters mentioned here, it will be said that the choice of the gentilician *Iulius* is not surprising, as we find ourselves in a city that has *Iulia* in its name, due to having been founded by *Caius Iulius Caesar*. One or several could be the most prominent families in town with this courtship. The sons inherited from their father the *praenomen* *Quintus* and the family name, within which they were distinguished by the cognomens *Clarus* and *Nepotianus*.

In turn, the mother belonged to another family, the *Calpurnia*, and is identified, as is customary for ladies, with her family name and cognomen, *Sabina*, not necessarily implying that she had ancestry from the Sabine people of the Italian Peninsula. However, for having married a senator, she was naturally granted the status of a member of that class, which – by extension – leads us to state that there must have been another family of senators in *Évora*.

## Conclusion

The organizers of this volume, especially dedicated to Roman Archaeology, proposed that we address “the scientific challenges underlying the study of Roman Antiquity from the perspective of material culture”.

We took on one of these challenges: that of identifying archaeological objects, emphasizing that a good part, if not all, of the results obtained in

the investigation is rooted in the proper identification of what is found. If you cannot distinguish a marble from a limestone, a cup from a plate, a military from a column shaft, a coin from the time of Emperor Augustus from another from Diocletian, a slave owned by a Roman citizen, the story we propose to tell it will be riddled with many false perspectives.

Therefore, this opportunity was taken advantage of to show – namely to those who are not aware of this problem – that early on the concern of classifying artifacts was in the minds of researchers. There are, therefore, classification tables of the most varied ceramics (*lucernae*, table and kitchen objects, *amphorae*...) and coin catalogues...

With regard to the epigraphic monuments, we were interested not in the domain of typologies, but – as identification was privileged – the information that could be obtained about the people whose names appear in the Roman inscriptions, because in this way of identifying oneself it is possible to deduce the environment sociocultural to which these people belong – as, today, we deduce, even without wanting to, that the gentleman who is *Vasconcellos de Abreu e Alancastre* certainly has a noble background and that *Antônio José*, without a surname, remembered in a tomb in the cemetery of *Montemor-o-Novo*, was of gypsy ethnicity (Figure 10).



**Figure 10:** An epitaph from the cemetery of *Montemor-o-Novo*.

And if, most of the time, the choice of name for a child obeys criteria that only parents are concerned with, in relation to public figures, the choice of name by which they choose to be designated always has weighty reasons. The most significant testimony is undoubtedly that of the Popes: Francis chose this name because he wanted to always keep in mind the testimony of St. Francis of Assisi.

Correctly identifying the object that came out of an excavation is therefore an effective contribution to better understanding the men who lived there. To penetrate to the core of the mechanism that presided over the attribution of a name to a person in Roman times is to open the way to better communion with those who, so that their memory would not be lost, wanted their name immutably engraved in the hardness of marble or on a brass board.