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ЖЕНСКИЕ ПОСВЯЩЕНИЯ В ЭПИГРАФИКЕ РИМСКОЙ ЛУЗИТАНИИ

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Несмотря на наличие многочисленных изданий, посвященных римскому религиозному миру, в настоящее время наблюдается нехватка научных работ, интерпретирующих женские верования в Лузитании. С точки зрения гендерной проблематики это направление исследований стало особенно актуальным в последние десятилетия и заинтересовало ученых, которые обновили корпуса памятников эпиграфики, а также глубоко проанализировали данную тему. Эпиграфические памятники дают ряд конкретных указаний на географическую область, в которой были основаны лузитанские женские культы. Именно по votivным надписям можно проследить, как женщины с юго-запада Пиренейского полуострова сознательно или бессознательно воспользовались культурными изменениями, чтобы более заинтересованно подойти к своим культовым требованиям как в религиозной, так и в личной сфере. Следует добавить, что прототип благочестивой лузитанской женщины характеризовался ее поклонением определенным богам, покровителям личного и семейного окружения, что в некоторой степени влияло на выбор ею религиозных практик. Большинство этих ритуальных практик проводились в святилищах или местах поклонения, расположенных в сельской местности, что свидетельствует о распространении доримских верований, которые сосуществовали с римскими культами, и их постоянстве. Фактически отсутствие археологической документации препятствует более детальному изучению религиозной эпиграфики сельского мира, что позволяет провести глобальный анализ его социокультурного контекста.

Ключевые слова: верования; божественность; эпиграфика; Лузитания; римская религия; женские культы.

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ЖАНОЧЫЯ ПАСВЯЧЭННІ Ў ЭПІГРАФІЦЫ РЫМСКАЙ ЛУЗІТАНІІ

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Нягледзячы на наяўнасць шматлікіх выданняў, прысвечаных рымскаму рэлігійнаму свету, назіраецца недахоп навуковых прац, якія інтэрпрэтуюць жаночыя вераванні ў Лузітаніі. З пункту гледжання гендарнай праблематыкі гэты напрамак даследаванняў стаў асабліва актуальным у апошнія дзесяцігоддзі і зацікавіў навукоўцаў, якія абнавілі карпусы эпіграфічных помнікаў і глыбока прааналізавалі гэту тэму. Эпіграфічныя помнікі даюць шэраг канкрэтных указанняў на геаграфічную вобласць, у якой былі заснаваны лузітанскія жаночыя культуры. Менавіта па ватыўных надпісах можна прасачыць, як жанчыны з паўднёвага захаду Пірынейскага паўвострава свядома ці несвядома выкарысталі культурныя змены, каб больш зацікаўлена падысці да сваіх культурных патрабаванняў як у рэлігійнай, так і ў асабістай сферы. Варта дадаць, што прататып набожнай лузітанскай жанчыны характарызаваўся яе пакланеннем пэўным багам, заступнікам асабістага і сямейнага асяроддзя, што ў некаторай ступені вызначала выбар ёй рэлігійных практык. Большасць гэтых рытуальных практык праводзіліся ў свяцілішчах ці месцах пакланення ў сельскай мясцовасці, што сведчыць аб распаўсюджанасці дарымскіх вераванняў, якія суіснавалі з рымскімі культурамі, і іх пастаянстве. Фактычна адсутнасць археалагічнай дакументацыі з'яўляецца перашкодай для больш дэталёвага вывучэння рэлігійнай эпіграфікі сельскага свету, што дазваляе правесці глабальны аналіз яго сацыякультурнага кантэксту.

Ключавыя словы: вераванні; боскасць; эпіграфіка; Лузітанія; рымская рэлігія; жаночыя культуры.

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WOMEN'S DEVOTIONS IN THE EPIGRAPHY OF ROMAN LUSITANIA

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The main motivation for this research is the lack of works on the history of Lusitanian women. Despite the numerous studies on the Roman religious world, there is a significant lack of research on the interpretation of women's beliefs in Lusitania. From a gender perspective, this line of research has been particularly innovative in recent decades and has been taken up by various researchers who have updated the epigraphic corpora and subjected the subject to a profound process of debate and reflection. The epigraphic documentation provides a series of specific references to the geographical area in which the Lusitanian women's cults were established. It is precisely through the votive inscriptions that we can see how the women of the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula, consciously or unconsciously, took advantage of the cultural change to take a more interested approach to their cultic demands, both in their religious and personal spheres. It should be added that the prototype of the devout Lusitanian woman is defined by her predilection for certain gods, protectors of her personal and family environment, which to some extent determined her choice of religious practices. Most of these ritual practices took place in sanctuaries or places of worship located in rural areas, with a clear diffusion and permanence of pre-Roman beliefs that coexisted with Roman cults. In fact, the lack of archaeological documentation is an obstacle to a more detailed knowledge of the religious epigraphy of a rural world, allowing to make a global analysis of its socio-cultural context.

Keywords: beliefs; divinity; epigraphy; Lusitania; Roman religion; women's cults.

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Introduction

The sphere of female devotion in Lusitania, based on the so-called gender archaeology, has cleared up some doubts about the female religious universe [1]. However, the lack of available material does not allow us to present an analysis of the beliefs of Roman women in His-

pania from a strictly archaeological and epigraphic approach. The religious cults that we are analysing in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula are attested to by dedicators or recipients, women who make an offering to a divinity. The epigraphs contain valuable historical and

cultural information, and their correct interpretation requires the consideration of a wide range of contextual factors. These factors help researchers to piece together the puzzle of the past and to gain a fuller understanding of the meaning and significance of the inscriptions.

This process of assimilation of new religious ideas and the persistence of local beliefs in Roman Hispania offers a fascinating insight into how ancient communities adapted and maintained their traditions in the context of cultural and religious change [2]. The study of votive and honorary epigraphy provides a unique window into the complex cultural and religious dynamics of the Hispanic world. In many cases we know the original spatial location of the inscription, be it an urban site or a rural context. However, it is mainly in rural areas that we find a strong devotion to cults of local origin. To this must be added the existence of inscriptions dedicated to Roman gods, Roman abstractions and virtues, and mystery deities [3].

In this sense, there is evidence that indigenous, mystery and Roman deities shared the same territory. However, if pre-Roman and Roman beliefs in Lusitania clearly became a differentiated object of worship, there was also a selective assimilation of cultic practices that must have been established unequally in rural and urban

areas [4]. The coexistence of different deities and religious practices is common in ancient societies and can be observed in many regions of the ancient world. This harmonisation often reflects the cultural and religious diversity of a region. It can also be the result of the assimilation of beliefs and practices over time. It is true that autochthonous and purely Roman deities were established, giving rise to an innovative religious landscape characterised by its uneven territorial distribution.

It is therefore possible to confirm that each community had its own socio-religious expression [5]. The coexistence of Roman cults related to political or civil life and indigenous cults based on traditional religiosity could certainly have given rise to a rich and complex religious scene in the second half of the 1st century AD and the end of the 2nd century AD. The persistence of certain local cults in the private sphere suggests a strong emotional and cultural attachment to these deities and highlights the diversity and richness of religious experience in antiquity. Therefore, the cultic context of Lusitania during this period reveals the complexity of religion in people's lives and how religious beliefs and practices could be influenced by cultural, political, and personal factors [6].

Women's devotion in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula

Although the devout Hispano-Roman women shared a cultural background with their Roman contemporaries, they did not experience a similar cultic reality. Their religiosity kept them faithfully attached to their own beliefs which they considered more important to maintain their traditions and the stability of their religious sphere. It is necessarily these differences in the adoption of new cultic forms and the progressive adaptation of the cults introduced by Rome that enrich the religious panorama of Hispania. It is possible that some Hispano-Roman devotees may have practiced selective religious syncretism, where they incorporated elements of Roman religion into their local beliefs without completely abandoning their own traditions [7]. These differences in the adoption of new cultic forms and the selective adaptation of Roman cults enriched the religious landscape of Hispania and reflect the complexity of religion in antiquity. They also highlight the importance of culture and identity in the way people practiced and maintained their religious beliefs in a context of cultural and religious change [8].

On the other hand, it must be made clear that the epigraphs analysed respond to a specific need, namely the selection of Lusitanian women associated with a deity, either because of a particular devotion or because of state obligations. This situation leaves no doubt that the fact of worshipping a deity in an honorary or votive

inscription is not necessarily related to a personal belief, but that the sacrifice may be contaminated by the obligatory fidelity to the established official order, which detracts from the quality of the inscriptions intended to show gratitude for obtaining a divine favour. However, the possibilities offered by this research are very limited, as the number of inscriptions of women associated with a divinity or virtue and holding priestly offices is small. Similarly, although there is no explanation for such a scarcity of material, what is surprising are the numerous titles of the provincial flaminica *Flavia Rufina* related to the cult of *Jupiter Optimus Maximus* in the *conventus Pacensis*, and the cult of *Pietas* of the flaminica *Iulia Modesta* in the *conventus Scallabitanus*, both epigraphs dating from the 2nd century AD. These testimonies show the clear intention of the Lusitanian faithful to present their cultic practices in a context far removed from the civil cults¹. The honour of holding a priesthood at the provincial level must have been the most prestigious public office that a matron of a province could have aspired to [9]. In principle, it is customary for ruling families belonging to the *Ordo Decurionum* to monopolise the cultic competences of the places from which they come [10]. But if we look at the object of worship in the inscription and the fact that she was a perpetual flaminica in *Emerita* and a provincial flaminica, we might think that *Flavia* was not originally from the capital of

¹These examples refer to the provincial flaminica, *Flavia Rufina* in Alcácer do Sal (see: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (hereinafter – CIL). Vol. 2. P. 32), and to the flaminica, *Iulia Modesta* in Oliveira do Hospital (see: CIL. Vol. 2. P. 396, 397 ; *L'Année épigraphique* (hereinafter – AE). 2004. No. 693).

Lusitania, but that her roots were in *Salacia* where the altar consecrated to *Jupiter Optimus Maximus* was found and where she began her priestly career [11–13].



Fig. 1. Devotion by *Licinius Severianus* and *Varinia Flaccina* to *Juno Regina*.
Source: CIL. Vol. 2. P. 1024

However, the Lusitanian believer may have considered her religious beliefs and practices to be intimate and personal, not intended for the public sphere. By performing her rituals in secluded places or in private contexts, she may have sought to maintain the privacy and authenticity of her beliefs without the influence of social or political expectations. Similarly, the separation of her cultic practices from civic worship may indicate her desire to preserve local or indigenous religious traditions, which may have been in danger of being suppressed or diluted by more dominant Roman religious beliefs and practices. By separating her cultic practices, the Lusita-

nian worshipper may have asserted a distinct religious identity. This may have been important to her in order to maintain her religious autonomy and to express her beliefs authentically. It is interesting to note that, despite their geographical proximity to *Baetica*, the worshippers of Lusitania showed a discreet attraction to the goddesses of the Greco-Roman pantheon, such as Juno and Venus, and mystery deities such as Cybele [14]. These cultic patterns suggest a diversity of religious beliefs and practices in the Lusitanian region. Although Lusitania and *Baetica* were close regions, they may have experienced slightly different cultural influences. The attraction to Greco-Roman and mystery deities may have been the result of cultural interaction with other areas, or the selective adoption of beliefs from outside the region.

As a whole, these cults are an illustration of the complexity and diversity of religious beliefs in the Lusitania region [15]. Each deity had its own meaning and purpose, and female worshippers may have invoked them according to their individual needs and beliefs. Epigraphic evidence suggests that women of different social status, who were not distinguished by the richness of their tributes, did so because of their strong symbolic content. An example of this is an inscription from the *conventus Emeritensis* found in the baths of *Alange*, dedicated by two high social figures, *Licinius Severianus*, *vir clarissimus*, and *Varinia Flaccina*, *clarissima femina*, in gratitude to Juno for the cure of their daughter in the 3rd century AD (fig. 1). In this context, the degree of devotion was determined by individual religious beliefs, which could be shaped by upbringing, family tradition and personal experience, meaning that some people felt a stronger connection to certain deities in relation to these circumstances [16].

The situation of women in religious cults

So far, it seems to have been demonstrated that the religious ceremonies of women belonging to the oligarchies had little to do with the religious ceremonies of women belonging to the oligarchies in comparison with believers devoted to their private cults and which, practically discriminated against by historiography [17], form an interesting line of research for our work. In fact, an approximate idea of the scant attention paid by researchers to this subject can be gleaned from the obstacles and problems they face in obtaining less abundant and less accurate information that would allow us to make solid assumptions and reconstruct their domestic religious world [18]. It is clear, then, that Roman women chose their places of religious expression, which did not necessarily have to be in an official setting. In essence, women gave a social content to their religious practices, since one of the main themes of these gatherings was the treatment of women's issues. In this sense, the social content of the *Matronalia* made this female celebration a reference point for marriage and motherhood, and consequently

for the virtues that a Roman matron reinforced through these social acts [19].

Hence their interest in beliefs that confirm the values that society expects of them. Indeed, virginity, marriage and fertility are virtues that exalt the dignity of women [20]. In fact, these virtues, in contrast to the masculine virtues, also contrast the spheres of action of men and women, thus establishing a clear distinction between the festivals of the Roman calendar. In this sense, it is striking to note the time frame that concentrated most of the female celebrations, which took place from spring to summer [21], officially beginning on 1 March with the feast of the *Matronalia*. Moreover, whether by coincidence or not, this date marking the beginning of the year coincided with the month of the cult of Mars and clearly established an opposition between female and male cultic tasks. It is obvious that the social organisation of these liturgies creates inequalities between the sexes by pigeonholing the women as mothers and the men as soldiers [22]. It should also be made clear that, despite the worship of certain deities, we have no

evidence that the Hispano-Roman matrons had exclusive celebrations differentiated by sex, in the style of the *Matronalia*, *Bona Dea*, *Fortuna Muliebris*, characteristic of the Romans.

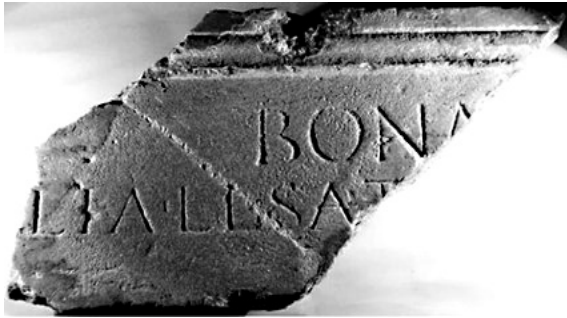


Fig. 2. Inscription from the *conventus Pacensis* to *Bona Dea*.
Source: Hispania Epigraphica database (hereinafter – HEp). 2008. Vol. 17. No. 212

On the other hand, a small fragment of a lintel was found in *Beja*. It is inscribed with the dedication of a freedwoman, *Iulia Saturnina*, to *Bona Dea* and could have been part of a temple dedicated to the goddess, suggesting that this cult was practiced in Hispania [23]. Nevertheless, and without drawing any categorical conclusions, it would be risky to raise this possibility and use it to justify the presence of a cult of *Bona Dea* in Lusitania, and therefore of a place of worship dedicated to the goddess (fig. 2). Indeed, the existence and development of certain liturgies confirm that female cults were not disadvantaged in relation to male religion, on the contrary. This was the case of the matrons who met to celebrate a festival in honour of the goddess *Bona Dea*, where the presence of

men was strictly forbidden [24]. This ceremony, characterised by an air of ambiguity and secrecy, involved contact with substances that were unhealthy for women, such as wine, which was only to be consumed by men [25]. In fact, the interpretations of their ritual forms are, in my opinion, a distorted version of the interests and values that the female devotees tried to share.

Be that as it may, when Ovid describes a respectable group of aristocrats celebrating the *Matronalia*, we should not be surprised that the cult of *Juno Lucina* was seen as a mechanism of sociability and religiosity exclusively for women [26–28]. Apparently, the matrons received gifts from their husbands in the private sphere and later went to the sacred precinct of the goddess to lay flowers in gratitude for the protection they had received in their maternal role. It seems, therefore, that one of the functions of the festival calendar was precisely to link the public ritual with the domestic cult [29]. Indeed, we can imagine that these matronal organisations, as devotees, facilitated and also reinforced the defense of a role attributed to a particular *ordo matronarum*. In any case, we know that these religious performances were restricted to privileged female citizens who practiced religious rites specific to their social category. In this way, the spread of a matriarchal cult in a public space favoured the consolidation of a model of social organisation which up to now has been essentially masculine [30]. Certainly, I believe that these ritual practices reinforced the importance of their own feminine beliefs, while at the same time demonstrating that the configuration of a ceremony was not necessarily regulated according to gender.

Civic life and local cults

From this perspective, it is clear that Roman women had access to religion as a means of actively participating in the daily life of their communities. However, in addition to these beliefs, there was also a preference for those male gods that suited the religious needs of female believers. This meant that they had a certain predilection for healing gods associated with a promise of health for a loved one. To this end, they preferred to preserve their local customs, which were linked to their traditional sphere and therefore close to their private habits. An example of this is the cult of the god *Endovellicus*, who concentrated his ritual practices in a sanctuary or cultic space located in a rural context of the *conventus Pacensis* [31; 32]. This local divinity shows the devotion of women to gods that were familiar to them and that they worshipped according to their daily concerns.

In fact, it is mainly in rural areas that there is a significant devotion to local cults, which have as their reference point a collective meeting place in sacred open-air precincts. Moreover, the worship of the pre-Roman god, with its clearly masculine connotations, does not

prevent the concentration of a considerable number of female devotees in a collective cult, as evidenced by the density of altars found in his honour, made by a plural representation of social groups (fig. 3). Although the lack of archaeological documentation makes it difficult to analyse religious manifestations in the rural world and, therefore, its geographical limits, we do know the remains of a sanctuary dedicated to the cult of the god *Endovellicus* [33; 34] in Sao Miguel da Mota (Alandroal, Portugal), dating from the 1st century AD. In addition to these cultic references, the salutary and supernatural character was a claim made by its main devotees, mainly mothers praying for the health of their sons and husbands, daughters thanking for the appearance of a deceased relative in their sleep, and husbands expressing hope for the speedy recovery of their wives and daughters.

Against this epigraphic wealth, it is not unusual to find isolated elements of private worship. The most eloquent case is that of the Roman goddess *Proserpina* and the indigenous goddess *Ataecina*, to whom an infernal



Fig. 3. Altar dedicated to the god *Endovellicus*.
Sanctuary of Sao Miguel da Mota.
Source: CIL. Vol. 2. P. 6267



Fig. 4. Dedication to *Ataecina*.
Source: HEp. 2000. Vol. 10. No. 124

character is attributed, without excluding the virtue of maintaining the good functioning of agriculture and protecting health². It is precisely the appellations that the latter bears, linking her to the town of *Turobriga*, that indicate that most of the sanctuaries dedicated to the goddess were located in this area. The pre-Roman worship of *Dea Sancta Ataecina* in the *conventus Emeritensis*, dated between the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, indicates the possible existence of other places of worship in *Emerita* and the surrounding area that we cannot physically connect [35]. Therefore, and despite the dispersion of the testimonies, its cultic context in Hispania would be mainly an ancient place of worship located in the church of Santa Lucía del Trampal [36]. It should be noted that, despite being a female deity, the sacrifices made by women are not the most numerous.

So, once again, we have a sacred reference point for believers to worship their gods. It seems that indigenous cultic traditions were difficult to maintain in urban areas [37], but it would be inappropriate to think that domestic altars, characterised by their lack of public presence, were necessarily located in rural areas, basically isolated from the general ensemble. In relation to these beliefs, in a colony such as *Norba Caesarina*, *Victorinus*, a slave of *Cocceia Severa*, appears next to his mistress on a rustic bronze votive with the statuette of a goat related to the cult of *Ataecina*³. Not only does the special relationship that seems to exist between the two perhaps reflect a close religious affiliation, but the crude workmanship of the piece is further evidence that its place of origin was a private home (fig. 4). Another example of *Amia*'s closeness to her master, *Ispanus*, is the small arula, which she personally dedicated to the god *Uriloucus*, perhaps in gratitude for her manumission. If so, this belief would indirectly link owner and freed-woman in an atmosphere of prayer [38].

More important is the Lusitanian votive documentation, which clearly shows a peculiar cult of *Jupiter Optimus Maximus*. The considerable number of altars dedicated to this cult offers a particular view of this religious phenomenon in a delimited area of the *conventus Emeritensis*. Curiously, the indigenous elements in the onomastics of the worshippers lead us to believe that the private worship of the Capitoline god concealed an offering to an indigenous deity. Indeed, it is worth remembering that its spread was more pronounced in areas with a clear indigenous substratum, although it is difficult to explain why its cult seems to have been confined to very limited areas close to the main cities [39].

Therefore, a constant in the cultic manifestations to this god will be the appearance of less Romanised votive offerings in this monastic area. In fact, we can confirm in these offerings that the dedicators, when they have one, do not express any public position, appearing expressly as devotees of the divinity. Despite this evidence, everything seems to indicate that the practice of the *votum* would imply a good knowledge of the complex Roman religious practices, as well as defining the spontaneous character of these beliefs, carried out in a domestic space. In the same way that the cult of Jupiter became part of indigenous religiosity, it is possible that a process of syncretism took place that is not clearly evident in the votive offerings. However, references to Jupiter with an indigenous appellative, such as *Solutorio*, do not necessarily denote an *interpretatio*, but rather a distinctive denomination of the Roman god in certain indigenous population contexts in Lusitania [40]. We can get an idea of the plurality of cultural manifestations, which include very different cultural traditions, from these private women's devotions.

²From the cult of *Proserpina*, we have only one epigraph. It emphasises the goddess' ability to restore the health of her worshippers (see: HEp. 2005. Vol. 14. No. 451 ; CIL. Vol. 2. P. 145). Similarly, in the case of *Ataecina*, two inscriptions from *Iulia Severa* and *Flavia Patricia* have survived in which they happily fulfil their vow (see: HEp. 1995. Vol. 5. No. 184, 185).

³Confer: CIL. Vol. 2. P. 5298 ; HEp. 2000. Vol. 10. No. 124 ; AE. 1946. No. 193 ; Ibid. 1947. No. 17 ; Ibid. 1950. No. 25. Another votive offering to the divinity by *Cocceius Modestinus* was also found in *Norba*, which leads us to think that the proximity between the two dedicators and their *nomina* allow for the possibility of relationship (see: CIL. Vol. 2. P. 5299).

Conclusions

It is clear from the above that the symbolic universe of a religious community could take on different characteristics in different regions [41]. For this reason, any attempt to explain the religious phenomenon in the Iberian Peninsula would confirm the strength that indigenous cults achieved among women. So far, it seems clear that in the process of adapting to Roman cultic patterns, the dedicators of votive epigraphs transmit aspects that are notoriously sensitive to their indigenous cultic tradition. In fact, it is clear that the fruits of syncretism only made sense if they were reproduced in the same historical context, which is evidenced by the fact that the local environment is impregnated with a pure and defined model that accentuates the unequal diffusion of their own beliefs [42]. As far as Lusitania is concerned, the introduction of the Roman religious model did not eliminate local religious practices [43]. People, including women, continued to participate in rituals and cults rooted in their everyday beliefs and local traditions. Although it is difficult to identify the specific motives behind each act of devotion, people turned to deities for a variety of purposes, such as protecting the health of their children [44]. Promises made to deities were common and were fulfilled as a way of expressing gratitude for favours received. The choice of a particular deity to worship could depend on a number of factors, including family tradition and the particular qualities of the deity in relation to the person's need or desire.

In this sense, cultural change, such as the introduction of Roman beliefs and practices, influenced women's religious and personal decisions and actions [45]. This

suggests that women made more conscious and active choices about their religious beliefs and practices. The introduction of the Roman religious model did not suppress local religious practices. People, especially Lusitanian women, continued to participate in rituals and cults rooted in their everyday beliefs and local traditions. This continuity demonstrates the importance of these practices in their lives [46]. Although it is difficult to determine the specific motives behind each devotion to a particular deity, people resorted to these practices to seek protection and help, especially for the health of their children. Promises and offerings to deities were common as a form of thanksgiving for favours received. Votive and tribute inscriptions thus provide evidence of where these women's cults took place. The places of worship studied reflect the traces left by women in their religious and personal choices [47]. In short, the epigraphic documentation analysed provides details about the specific places where cults and rituals were carried out. These places of worship can range from small personal altars to larger shrines or sacred places in the community [48]. Studying these places can help to reconstruct the religious geography of the region and how these practices were distributed. The diversity of religious practices and the worship of different deities, both Roman and local, underlines the complexity and richness of the religious landscape of the time. Lusitanian women not only maintained their local traditions, but also showed an interest in Roman and mystery deities, reflecting a selective adaptation to the surrounding cultural influences.

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