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IN SEARCH OF SOCIAL VISIBILITY IN ROMAN CORDUBA: IDENTITY AND SOCIAL PROMOTION OF *PUBLICIUS VALERIUS FORTUNATUS*

EN BUSCA DE LA VISIBILIDAD SOCIAL EN LA CORDUBA ROMANA: IDENTIDAD Y PROMOCIÓN SOCIAL DE *PUBLICIUS VALERIUS FORTUNATUS*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study¹ is to explore the profile of a promoted individual from the Capital of *Baetica, Colonia Patricia Corduba*, within the context of a prosopography from below approach. Firstly, an examination of the individual's onomastic profile will be undertaken in greater detail. From a purely superficial perspective and solely based on his *nomen gentilicium*, this individual has traditionally been considered as a freedman. Although I endorse this hypothesis, it is necessary to provide an explanation given that conventional views regarding one mere onomastic marker are insufficient. An exhaustive study will be conducted of his onomastic structure and its variation in the two inscriptions he dedicated in *Corduba*, in order to consistently support this servile origin. Subsequently, this study will address certain questions raised by his onomastics that lead to the possible identification of his social circle. In conclusion, I will conduct a review of his quest for social visibility within the context of freedman euergetism in Hispania.

Keywords: Corduba; Hispania; Epigraphy; Freedpersons; Public Freedmen; Oriental Cults; Cybele; Magna Mater; Euergetism; Social Promotion; Prosopography

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este estudio es tratar a un individuo promocionado de la Capital de la Bética, *Colonia Patricia Corduba*, en una línea de *prosopography from below*. En primer lugar, profundizaré

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en su estudio onomástico. Este individuo, de una manera superficial y tan sólo por su *nomen* se ha considerado tradicionalmente como liberto. Si bien, apoyo esta teoría, es necesario explicar por qué, pues convencionalismos con relación a un solo marcador onomástico no son suficientes. Se realizará un profundo estudio de su estructura onomástica y su variación en los dos epígrafes que dedica en *Corduba*, para consistentemente apoyar ese origen servil. En segundo lugar, y en relación con lo anterior, resolver ciertos interrogantes que presenta dicha onomástica y que conducen al análisis de su posible círculo social. Finalmente, procederé al estudio de su búsqueda de visibilidad social dentro del contexto del evergetismo liberto en Hispania.

Palabras clave: Corduba; Córdoba; Hispania; Epigrafía; Libertos; Libertos públicos; Cultos Orientales; Cibeles; Magna Mater; Evergetismo; Promoción social; Prosopografía

SUMMARY

1. Introduction 2. Analysis and context of the inscriptions. 3. *Publicius Valerius Fortunatus* ¿public freedman? 4. ¿*Publicius Fortunatus* or *Publicius Valerius Fortunatus Thalamas*? 5. *Publicius Valerius Fortunatus* and his social circle. 6. Euergetism and freedpersons' social mobility 7. Bibliography

1. INTRODUCTION

We shall direct our attention towards *Colonia Patricia Corduba*, the capital of the Roman province of *Baetica*. Away from the political Pompeian loyalties and the turbulent years prior to the Principate, we find ourselves in the third century CE., in a vast city of 83 ha. (Márquez 2017, 212), with extensive public areas. First, the republican forum or forum of the Colony that will be in use until the fourth century CE. Additionally, the *Forum Novum* or *Adiectum* emulates the *Forum* of Augustus, featuring a magnificent octastyle temple richly decorated (Márquez 2009, 112-114). This structure was employed until the first *spolia* of the 3rd-4th century CE.

A third forum, the so-called enclosure of *Claudius Marcellus* constructed on three terraces adjacent to the Circus and close to the majestic theatre, was surrounded by altars, possibly linked to the Imperial cult (Márquez 2017, 218). This space was abandoned in the last quarter of the third century CE. after a violent earthquake. The colossal amphitheatre remained in use until the fourth century CE., when the first structures interpreted as possible Christian centres were erected.

This overview of the richness and monumentality of the capital of *Baetica* shows a wealthy city in continuous transformation up to the fourth century CE. This will be the geographical and chronological context in which the subject of this study lived.

The sources to be analysed form part of the epigraphic corpus of *Colonia Patricia*, which comprises 354 inscriptions and records a total of 661 individuals connected to the urban centre (Torres-González, Sánchez de la Parra-Pérez, and Melchor Gil Forthcoming). The epigraphy of slaves and freedpersons in *Corduba* is mainly funerary, following the trend of the corpus of *Corduba* as a whole, where 73% of the individuals are known from funerary epigraphy. Freedpersons will have a great impact on the epigraphic commemoration in the first century CE., due to the display of slaves and freedpersons of the same *gens* in lists of deceased. This commitment in epigraphic commemoration decreased drastically from the third century CE. onwards.

In this funerary landscape, in which the total number of votive and honorific inscriptions represents a quarter of the number of funerary inscriptions, our subject of study is featured commemorating two *taurobolia*

which would provide him with a clear visibility in the epigraphic corpus of the capital (Torres-González, Sánchez de la Parra-Pérez, and Melchor Gil Forthcoming).

This individual has been identified as a freedman based on the analysis of his *nomen gentilicium*. In this prosopographical study, I will conduct a review of the historiographic approach in order to provide further evidence in support of the classification of this individual as a freedman. Furthermore, I will examine the issues that arose from the analysis of his onomastics, which resulted in the identification of multiple individuals. Subsequently, a possible prosopographical tracking of his origin will be presented, specifically linked to the research on the dissemination of the cult of Magna Mater. I will also discuss how this cult could have been used by him to acquire epigraphic visibility in *Corduba* by making him exceed the funerary epigraphy, the natural landscape of the freedpersons' representation, in a clear quest for the visibility of his socio-economic promotion.

2. ANALYSIS AND CONTEXT OF THE INSCRIPTIONS.

The subject of the study is found on two marble altars. They will be analysed chronologically as they display the precise date. The first, *CIL* II²/7, 233, was found in 1921 together with *CIL* II²/7, 235 (mentioned below). It is reported to have been found in Calle Sevilla 9 with Calle Siete Rincones (now Calle Málaga). It is an altar made of white marble, possibly from Almadén de la Plata. It measures 0.90 m in height, 0.44 m in width and 0.35m in depth and features a *focus* and two *cornua* in very good condition². On the right side there is the profile silhouette of a ram and on the left side a *patera ansata* (Fig. 1). The epigraphic field measures 43 x 30.5 cm and features this text inscribed in fine actuary script:



Fig. 1. *CIL* II²/7, 233: (photo: Jennifer Cruz) The image is reproduced with the kind permission of the Museo Arqueológico de Córdoba - Consejería de Cultura y Deporte - Junta de Andalucía. Inv. DO000005

*Pro salute / Imp(eratoris) domini
n(ostri) [[M(arci) Aureli]] / [[Severi
Alexandri]] Pii Felicis / Aug(usti) /
tauribolium fecit Publicius / Fortunatus
t(h)alamas suscepit / chrionis Coelia
Ianuaria / adstante Ulpio Heliade
sacerdo[te] / aram sacris suis d(ederunt)
d(dedicaverunt) / (vac. v. 1) / Maximo
Urbano co(n)s(ulibus)*

For the the well-being of the emperor, our master Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander Pius Felix Augustus. Publicius Fortunatus conducted the *taurobolium*, while Coelia Ianuaria

² For further formal analysis of this altar and the second one, see Beltrán Fortes (1992, 181-190).

gathered the ram's testicles, in the presence of the priest Ulpus Helias. They delivered and dedicated the altar of their sacred rite during the consulship of Maximus and Urbanus.

Therefore, a man, *Publicius Fortunatus*, is depicted as having undertaken a *taurobolium* ceremony, with *Coelia Ianuaria* who possibly acted as a *cernophora*. It is noted that *Ulpus Helias* was the priest of the cult at that time, and the precise date, as indicated by the 'consulibus' formula, establishes that the inscription was placed in the year 234 CE.

The second altar is of a similar style and made of the same material as the aforementioned example. The dimensions are as follows: 0.86 m in height, 0.50 m in width and 0.20 m in depth. On the left side, there is a relief with a ram's head, while on the right side, there is a *patera* and an *urceus*. The inscription field measures 46.5 x 43 cm. The text indicates:

Ex iussu Matris Deum / pro salute imperii / tauribolium fecit Publicius / Valerius Fortunatus thalamas / suscepti c(h)rionis Porcia Bassemia / sacerdote Aurelio Stephano / dedicata VIII Kal(endas) April(es) / Pio Proculo co(n) s(ulibus)

By command of the Mother of the Gods and for the well-being of the empire. Publicius Fortunatus conducted the *taurobolium*, while Porcia Bassemia gathered the ram's testicles, in the presence of the priest Aurelius Stephanus. (This inscription) was dedicated on the eighth kalends of April (25th of March) during the consulship of Pius and Proculus.

The text is similarly structured and records the ceremony of another *taurobolium* conducted by *Publicius Valerius Fortunatus*, with *Porcia Bassemia* acting as *cernophora*. Likewise, it is observed that *Aurelius Stephanus* was a priest at that time, and the date is notably exact: 25th March 238, the date on which the

feast of *Hilaria Matris Deum* is celebrated (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. CIL II²/7, 234: (photo: Darío Muñoz) The image is reproduced with the kind permission of the Museo Arqueológico de Córdoba - Consejería de Cultura y Deporte - Junta de Andalucía. Inv. CE000042

It is significant to consider not only the chronology of these monuments but also the insight they offer into the immediate political realities of the empire. The dedication 'pro salute' to Severus Alexander is subsequently subjected to a *damnatio memoriae*, accompanied by a significant loss of the material from the epigraphic field. In the second inscription, the emperor is no longer referenced. Although the formula 'pro salute' is a common feature of votive inscriptions and oriental cults, the change may be attributed to the fact that the dating brings us to a crucial month in the year of the six emperors³. I

3 In late February-early March 235, Maximinus Thrax

believe that it reveals a 'real time' perception of the political instability, which may avoid the need for personal dedication⁴. Hence, the commemoration remains associated with the political establishment, which promotes greater social visibility and overlooks the affective or familial networks of the participants⁵.

3. *PUBLICIUS VALERIUS FORTUNATUS* ¿PUBLIC FREEDMAN?

One of the central topics addressed in the analysis of these inscriptions concerns the onomastics of the individual who performs both *taurobolia*. Three issues are approached. Firstly, the identification of his legal status as a public freedman, assumed purely on the basis of his *nomen*, *Publicius*⁶. Secondly, the onomastic study itself, derived from the addition of a second *nomen* in the last inscription. In conclusion, I address the proposition advanced by certain scholars who, with regard to onomastics, have defended the existence of one or two individuals.

is proclaimed emperor at *Moguntiacum* and will remain in power until mid-April 238, when he is assassinated by his soldiers at *Aquileia*. On the 23th of January 238, Gordian I was proclaimed emperor at *Thysdus*. Approximately twenty days later, he committed suicide following the defeat of his son, Capellianus. Gordian II was proclaimed Augustus alongside his father at the beginning of the year and also died in the same battle. In late January or early February of the same year, the Senate designated Pupienus and Balbinus as *Augusti*. Both were killed by the Praetorian Guard 99 days after their designation in mid-May. At that precise time, Gordian III is designated as *Augustus*, having already been proclaimed *Caesar* at the end of January-early February. See Kienast, Eck, and Heil (2017, 176-187).

4 By comparison, the stability achieved by the reign of Severus Alexander, with the support of the Senate and the prefecture and imperial chancery is evidenced by the jurisprudence issued. In this context, 18% of the norms specifically address slavery. See Rodríguez Garrido (2023, 360, 363 ff.)

5 Ubiña (1996, 420) posits that from the second and third centuries onwards, metroac cults were no longer a spiritual option. Instead, they became expressions of 'urban paganism', serving primarily as avenues for political participation.

6 Mangas Manjarrés 1971, 262; Camacho Cruz 1997, 77; Morales Cara 2005, 340-341.

Accordingly, an initial analysis of the onomastic survey will be conducted in relation to the first two issues. It is indeed the case that the *nomen Publicius* points to a context related to the manumission of public slaves. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily indicate that this individual was a freedman. In other words, the *ingenui* descendants of the *Publicii*, if legitimate, would inherit their *nomen* from their father, and even if illegitimate, could inherit it from their mother if she was a *liberta publica*.

In Hispania, a large number of *Publicii* can be found⁷. Of the 85 individuals analysed, only 14 make their status explicit by using libertination, displaying onomastic particles linked to the name of the city or using other formulas⁸.

We can reasonably infer a possible freed status if an individual held the **Augustalitas*⁹. We can also infer possible freed status if the subject is in a marital union with a possible slave, if they married an explicit freedperson, or if both members of the couple share a *nomen*. This is due to the status endogamy in marriage of the slave milieu¹⁰. In other cases, freed status should be considered possible if the individual is located within a social or family context comprising people of a servile origin, even if they do not bear libertination¹¹.

7 It is worth mentioning the catalogue by Crespo Ortiz de Zárate (1998). I have included some new epigraphic evidence and discarded the author's reconstructions that could be misleading, such as the nine cases in which the visible *nomen* is *Pub(---)*, because in my view, this could be a reference to other names, such as *Publilii*.

8 For instance: *CIL* II²/14, 378: '*Municipii lib(-)*'; *AE* 1998, 747: '*Coloniae lib(-)*'; *CIL* II²/7, 2a '*Populi lib(-)*'.

9 For the approach to the **Augustalitas* I follow Duthoy (1978, 1260-1261) and his classification of the various denominations of priesthoods dedicated to the imperial cult under the term **augustales*. In Hispania I refer to the well-known case of *Caius Publicius Melissus*: *CIL* II, 415; *CIL* II, 4497 and *CIL* II, 4527, in which the *sevir Caius Publicius Hermes* is also depicted.

10 With reference to Hispanic *Publicii*: a possible mixed marriage is found in Gimeno 2021, 63; the marriage with a freedwoman of the *Cornelii* is displayed in *CIL* II, 3642 and a couple of *Publicii* is presented in *CIL* II²/14, 75a.

11 Some examples would be *CIL* II²/7, 11, in which

However, out of the whole of the *Publicii*, five individuals are presented as *ingenui*. The records are from the first and second centuries CE., prior to the decline in the mid-second century CE. of the practice of displaying filiation¹². Thus, Crespo Ortiz de Zárate's (1999, 86) rejection of the use of *Publicius* in the second generation is nuanced by this occurrence of *ingenui*. In this author's view, the *nomen Publicius* represented a form of pride for those public slaves who had obtained manumission. However, it also symbolised a 'slaveholding *gentilicium*' that revealed the servile origins of the already *ingenui* descendants. Although I concur with this assertion, its absoluteness must be tempered, not only in light of these *ingenui*, but also in consideration of other *Publicii* descendants depicted as *incerti*¹³.

Hence, with the exception of these 20 individuals, the remaining 65 *Publicii* are *incerti*. While some of them can be identified with greater or lesser certainty as individuals of servile origin, it is not possible to make a definitive determination in all cases. This is why it is important to provide further evidence in order to sustain the status of *Fortunatus*.

Indeed, another marker is his *cognomen* itself. *Fortunatus* was a 'wish-name' (Kajanto 1965, 30, 134), which also suggests a possible servile context. It is sufficient to observe that six of the *Publicii* from Hispania are found to bear the *cognomen* '*Fortunatus/a*' or derivatives¹⁴.

Publicii incerti are depicted alongside explicit private freedmen or *CIL* II, 1386 in which a *Publicia* appears alongside *incerti* who bear Oriental names and single names.

12 *HEp* 1996, 108; *CIL* II, 823; *CIL* II²/5, 658; *CIL* II²/14, 1029; *CIL* II²/14, 1009. Serrano Delgado (1988, 78) identified only two individuals, so the catalogue has been updated.

13 *Incerti*: *HEp* 2009, 41, *CIL* II²/14, 1305 depict *Publicii* children acting as commemorators. In *HEp* 2014/15, 723 the son is commemorated by his mother.

14 *Fortunata*: *CIL* II, 1871; *CIL* II, 4983. *Fortunatus*: *CIL* II²/7, 301; *CIL* II²/14, 233; *CIL* II²/14, 234. *Fortunalis*: *CIL* II²/7, 25.

4. *PUBLICIUS FORTUNATUS* OR *PUBLICIUS VALERIUS FORTUNATUS THALAMAS*?

With respect to the onomastic field, it is essential to consider the onomastic addition made by the subject in the second inscription. This modification has resulted in the hypothesis that two individuals should be identified, which I consider to be highly improbable. However, it seems pertinent at the outset to discuss the role of the term '*thalamas*' in his onomastics.

The hypothesis that '*Thalamas*' was adopted as the second *cognomen* was first proposed by Fidel Fita and later endorsed by a significant number of scholars¹⁵. It is noteworthy that a considerable number of slaves were purchased from private owners and subsequently incorporated into the public administration. By adding a second *cognomen* or *agnomen*, these individuals were able to refer to their former family¹⁶. The resemblance to the *cognomen* '*Thalamus*' (Solin 1982, 1165) with a total of 110 occurrences in Latin epigraphy may also have contributed to the confusion¹⁷.

Dubosson-Sbrigliani (2018, 206-207) proposed that the term '*thalamas*' should be translated as chamberlain, thereby establishing a new office within the cult. Similarly, the term '*chrionis*' was suggested as a female office with an oracular function, similar to that of a

15 Fita 1875, 635-636; A. García Bellido 1967, 46-48; Vermaseren 1977, 131; Bendala Galán 1986, 390; Serrano Delgado 1988, 78-79; Bayer 2015, 17.

16 (Luciani 2020, 8-9). The Corduban inscription *CIL* II²/7, 315 represents an exceptional case of such a sale, whereby a *servus empticius* displays his acquisition by taking his second *cognomen* from his former master. For a monographic approach, see Easton (2023b). The Hispanic cases of *Publicius Alexander Laetilianus*: *CIL* II, 4989 = *CIL* II, 5161 or *Marcus Publicius Victor Cippianus*: *CIL* II, 1874 may appear to align with this practice.

17 A request for further information on this *cognomen* was submitted via *EDCS* on 27/08/2024. In addition to the 110 instances in which the term '*thalamus*' is used as a *cognomen*, the term appears in 17 inscriptions, in which it is almost entirely linked to its connotation as a litter. The term's prevalent in Rome (55 instances) vs. the provinces (54) and it is clearly used in a servile context. A total of 44% of individuals bearing this name were explicit slaves or freedmen, while over 28% were possible freedmen or slaves.

prophetess. In a refutation of this proposal, Van Haepere (2018) established the equivalence of the Greek term *'thalamas'* and the Latin *'vires'*, which refers to the testicles of the sacrificed animal. Therefore, the term *'suscepit'* in both inscriptions can be interpreted as a reference to the burial of these *vires*, a practice that is attested in other inscriptions.

While the approach taken by Van Haepere is appropriate and well-founded, questions remain regarding *Fortunatus'* onomastics. In the second inscription, *Fortunatus* includes a second *nomen*: *Valerius*. Although less frequent than the addition of a second *cognomen*, it is not uncommon for some public freedmen to include a second *nomen* taken from that of their former owner in the event of a sale. Moreover, Varro (VIII.82-83) notes a growing tendency for some public freedmen to adopt the *nomina* directly from the magistrates who manumitted them¹⁸. Both possibilities are viable, given that *Fortunatus* would gain a higher onomastic and social influence in the second inscription. This practice may be considered as part of the onomastic habit of *Corduba*, which reveals a significant decline in the use of *praenomina* from the second century CE. onwards (also absent in the case of *Fortunatus*) in comparison to the increasing cases of polynomia observed in the capital during the 2nd-3rd centuries CE. (Torres-González, Sánchez de la Parra-Pérez, and Melchor Gil Forthcoming).

This proposal is more plausible than the possible link to an adoption. This hypothesis was proposed for the son of the public freedman with the largest epigraphic representation in Hispania, *Caius Publicius Melissus*. His son,

18 Torres-González (2023, 135, 137) points out that it was the responsibility of the *duumvir* to propose the manumission of public slaves before the *ordo decurionum*. The proposal was only deemed to be valid if it received the approval of a minimum of two parts of the decurions who were present. It can be reasonably deduced that those slaves in close proximity to the *duumviri*, *quatorviri*, *aediles* and *quaestores* (to whom public slaves were designated while in office) were the most likely to have had access to such manumission. For further details on the Latin/Roman status of these *liberti publici* in Italy and the provinces, see Torres-González (2023).

Caius Iulius Silvanus died after becoming an *aedil* in *Barcino*¹⁹. The proposal by Crespo and Serrano Delgado posited a connection between the rejection of the name *Publicius* and its subsequent adoption by a wealthy family from *Barcino*²⁰. It is highly improbable that this possibility would apply in the case of a freedman, although Crespo Ortiz de Zárate (1999, 89-90) highlighted this option on several occasions. Although it was possible for a freedman to be adopted (Gell. NA. 5.19.11-14), this was not a common practice due to the legal complexities involved. Moreover, the right to do so was granted only to the patron of the freedman himself (*Dig.* 1.7.15.2-3)²¹. In the case of a public freedman whose *operae* are owed not to an owner but to the administration itself, the issue is likely to be even more complex²².

As previously stated, this onomastic revision is connected with the identification of this person as one or two different individuals. The process of identifying him with namesakes can be traced as early as 1875, when Fidel Fita identified him with a *Valerius Fortunatus*, who

19 CIL II 4527: *D(is) M(anibus) / C(aio) Iulio C(ai) f(ilio) Pal(atina) Silvano ann(or)um XVIII mens(ium) IIII / aedil(i) Barcin(onensi) C(aius) Publicius Melissus pater fil(io) / karissimo et C(aio) Publicio Hermeti IIIIvir(o) Aug(ustali) / Aurelia Nigella marito karissimo et sibi / h(oc) m(onumentum) h(eredem) n(on) s(equetur)*.

20 Crespo (1999, 89-90). Indeed, Serrano (1988, 87-88) suggested that the *gens Iulia*, in conjunction with the *Pedania* and *Minicia*, constituted one of the most prominent *gentes* in *Barcino*, indicating a high level of social mobility.

21 Gardner (1989, 243) posits that the motivation behind this legal provision was to safeguard the rights of the patron of the freedman seeking adoption, although there would be certain exceptions: *'non debet quis plures adrogare nisi ex iusta causa, sed nec libertium alienum, nec maiorem minor'* (*Dig.* 1.7.15.3).

22 Although the *Lex Irnitana* does not explicitly stipulate the specific *operae* that the public freedmen were obliged to perform for their city, it has been assumed that these could be the same activities they had carried out as slaves (Luciani 2017, 55-56). Nevertheless, a rescript enacted by Severus Alexander (*Cod. Iust.* 11.37.1) protected a public freedman compelled against his will to perform tasks typically assigned to slaves. This suggests that this option may have been a voluntary one.

erected a votive altar in *Asido*²³. It should be noted, however, that the *gens Valeria* is the second most prevalent in the Iberian Peninsula (Abascal Palazón 1994, 29-30), and that the *cognomen Fortunatus* is a common one found among the slave population. As previously indicated, two additional male individuals bearing the *cognomen Fortunatus* are among the preserved *Publicii* from Hispania. One is an explicit freedman from *Nescania* in the 2nd century CE. (*CIL* II²/5, 841), while the other is identified as *Publius Publicius Fortunatus Baeticae Libertus* (*CIL* II²/7, 301). Indeed, in order to support the hypothesis of the slave origin of *Fortunatus*, Knapp (1983, 49) and Alvar (1994, 285) have identified him with the homonymous freedman from the province of *Baetica*, who was a *marmorarius signuarius* of the *familia publica* of *Corduba*. The dating of the funerary inscription to the mid-2nd century CE. makes it implausible, if not impossible, that it refers to the same individual²⁴.

An alternative hypothesis was based on the addition of the second *nomen*, which proposed that two different individuals were identified. In this manner, it was proposed that the father was *Publicius Fortunatus* and the son *Publicius Valerius Fortunatus*²⁵.

One might reasonably suggest that, if the dedicator of the second inscription was the son of the first and had assumed a different *nomen* (either by adoption or as an illegitimate son), it would be expected that he have removed any reference to the 'slave-holding' *nomen*. In fact, this is precisely what occurs in the case of the

forementioned son of *Publicius Melissus* in *Barcino*.

In light of the evidence presented, it seems plausible to suggest that the two dedications were offered by the same individual, who may have been a public freedman. The potential explanation for his polynomy is consistent with the onomastic context of public freedpersons, in which it would not be unusual to adopt a second *nomen* or extra *cognomina/agnomina*. Additionally, the growing polynomy of the capital of *Baetica* provides a plausible context for this phenomenon.

Two main possibilities may account for the onomastic addition in the second inscription and the absence of the second *nomen* in the first one. On the one hand, it could be the result of a haphazard selection of onomastic particles, such as the absence of a *praenomen* or *libertination*. Conversely, the subsequent inscription represents a necessity to enhance social standing within the colony, without forsaking the slave-owning *nomen gentilicium*. If we consider Varro's words, it appears that there was a tendency to adopt the *nomen* of the magistrate who proposed the manumission. However, this would result in the abandonment of the *nomen Publicius*, which is also evidenced in both inscriptions. As I mentioned above is not uncommon (although much less frequent) for some public freedmen to include a second *nomen* taken from that of their former owner in the event of a sale. Nevertheless, although I consider the latter option to be more probable, both possibilities remain viable, since if that individual was a preeminent figure (I will discuss the matter below) in both cases, it would be an effective way of gaining onomastic prestige.

In conclusion, rather than distancing him from the slave context, this onomastic practice serves to reinforce his connection to the administration.

23 Fita (1875, 635-636) in connection with *CIL* II 1312: 'J / Valerius Fortunatus / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)'.

24 Recently Alvar (2022, 80) has revisited the chronology presented by Stylow (*CIL* II²/7, 301) and Gimeno (1988, 26-27). He has suggested that Knapp's proposal may be erroneous but has emphasised the significance, aesthetic appeal, and quality of the inscription *CIL* II²/7, 233 together with the aforementioned marble worker, hinting at a possible relationship.

25 Blanco Freijeiro 1968, 94; Alvar 1994, 285; Santos Yanguas 2014, 323; Bayer 2015, 17; Hernández Guerra 2015, 189.

5. PUBLICIUS VALERIUS FORTUNATUS AND HIS SOCIAL CIRCLE.

In both inscriptions, *Fortunatus* is not acting alone but in conjunction with two women. In the first inscription, he is accompanied by *Coelia Ianuaria*, and in the second, by *Porcia Bassemia*. In both instances, the women are assuming responsibility for *criobolia*. However, the relationship between them remains undetermined. In the absence of data, the majority of interpretations do not consider the potential relationship between the individuals concerned.

It is widely acknowledged that in a significant number of cases where a man and a woman are depicted in isolation within an inscription, the two individuals are identified as a married couple. This is due to the fact that marriage is the most frequently represented family relationship in Latin epigraphy²⁶. In epigraphic inscriptions where *taurobolia* and *criobolia* are combined, there are numerous examples of couples of individuals of different gender and different *nomina* acting as dedicants. In other cases, the family sphere is explicitly referenced²⁷. Although not

implausible, the hypothesis of a marriage is not corroborated. However, the fact that he does not share any onomastic particle with them, while not excluding marriage or a paternal-filial relationship, does rule out the possibility of a *colliberti* relationship. It seems pertinent to offer a commentary on this matter, because if this *co-freedom* scenario was to exist, the probability of finding a marriage would be greater due to the homogeneity of *gens* and status in freedpersons' marriages. Despite the existence of socio-economic mobility, the breach of this rule is exceptionally rare, particularly among men who have been freed²⁸.

As previously stated, the evidence to identify both women as freedwomen is inconclusive. While some authors have proposed this identification, the onomastic markers to support it are not particularly convincing²⁹. The first woman, *Coelia Ianuaria*, bears a *cognomen* that is particularly common in Latin onomastics. Kajanto (1965, 60-61) posited that this was the most prevalent name derived from the calendar. In Hispania, Crespo (2012, 209-110) corroborates Kajanto's data. However, of the 65 instances in which it is recorded as a feminine name, 24 (37%) are used as a single name. Therefore, although not irrefutable, it can be stated that this is a common *cognomen* among those of humble or servile status.

26 Saller and Shaw (1984, 147-155). Indeed, Vermarens (1977, 131) explicitly identified *Bassemia* (as *Bassiana*) as the wife of *Fortunatus*.

27 The dedications of couples of different genders and *nomina* are predominantly found in Gallia Narbonensis, as evidenced by *CIL* XII, 131; 1569; 357 and *AE* 1973, 579 in Africa Proconsularis. Moreover, *CIL* XIII, 118 is noteworthy for displaying a woman with a single name and a man bearing *tria nomina*, which could indicate a mixed marriage relationship. The explicit paternal-filial relationship is exemplified by *AE* 1961, 201 in Narbonese Gaul and the nearby case of *Pax Iulia*, which was also carried out by two individuals of servile origin. *AE* 1956, 255a: 'M(atr) d(eum) s(acrum) / duo Irinaei(!) pater / et fil(ius) criobolati / natali suo sacer(dotibus) / L(ucio) Antist(io) Avito / C(aio) Antist(io) Felicis(sino)'. Alvar (2022, 41, 54, 74) posited that *Marcus Iulius Cassianus* and *Cassia Severa*, who dedicated a *tauro/criobolium* at *Olisippo*, were a marriage couple of individuals of servile origin. Although no explicit indication of the nature of the relationship is given in the sources, I believe it seems more plausible to suggest a maternal-filial bond based on the onomastics. *CIL* II 179: 'Matri de/um Mag(nae) Id(ae)/ae Phryg(iae) Fl(avia) / Tyche cerno/phor(a) per M(arcum) Iul(ium) / Cass(ianum) et Cass(iam) Sev(eram) / M(arco)

At(ilio) et Ann(io) co(n)ss(ulibus) Gal(lo)'. This inscription will be addressed later.

28 Taylor (1961, 113-114) found that 40% of Roman *sepulchrales* exhibited marriages between partners with the same *nomen*. Similarly, Weaver (1972, 180-181) posited that endogamy was maintained in 34% of marriages within the *familia Caesaris*. The review of the Ostian case demonstrates comparable figures. D'Arms (1981, 134) posited that *gens* endogamy in marriage was a prevalent practice among 40% of Ostian **augustales*. Also, López Barja de Quiroga (1991b, 253-254) proposed that when at least one of the spouses was an explicit freedperson, 49% of marriages exhibited status endogamy. Recently, Ramos-Taboada (i.p.) presented figures in which *gens* endogamy in marriage reached 53% in Ostia.

29 A probable slave status was suggested for *Coelia Ianuaria* (Camacho Cruz 1997, 77; Alvar 2022, 58). For *Porcia Bassemia*, a probable status as a freedwoman is posited in: Camacho Cruz 1997, 77; Morales Cara 2005, 194, 701; Alvar 2022, 58.

However, the *cognomen* of *Porcia Bassemia* has been the subject of considerable debate. Abascal (1994, 299) suggested an inversion of the *duo nomina*, proposing a variation of *Bassenia*. Solin (1983, 750) proposed that *Bassemia* could be understood as a derivation of a Semitic name. Similarly, García Bellido (1967, 42, 45-47) had previously suggested that the name may have been of Syrian origin.

Hence, the onomastic markers are insufficient and the absence of a family relationship, -which would help to ascertain a more convincing status- makes it challenging to determine the legal condition or status of both women. However, regardless of whether they were freedwomen of other *gentes* or *ingenuae* (without making it explicit), it is undeniable that *Fortunatus* achieved a social mobility beyond the *gens*, enabling him to participate in the epigraphic dedication alongside women who were not members of the *familia publica*³⁰.

Another social circle that can provide insights into *Fortunatus*' status is the one associated with the administration of the cult and its priests. Both inscriptions refer to the priests who officiated the cult during the *taurobolia*. With respect to the first inscription, the priest is identified as *Ulpius Helias*; the second inscription names *Aurelius Stephanus*. Alvar considered them to be public and imperial freedmen of Eastern Mediterranean origin on account of their ties to the cult and their Greek *cognomina*³¹.

30 Duthoy (1969, 93-95) emphasises that during the High Empire, the majority of *taurobolia* were conducted by 'mostly unsophisticated people'. This situation changed in the fourth century CE., when the commemorators became prominent individuals who presented themselves as 'patrons' of the Oriental cults (Duthoy 1969, 102-103).

31 Although I align with the argument that they could be possible freedmen, I do not necessarily perceive that, by bearing Oriental *cognomina*, they were from the Eastern territories of the empire, acting as agents of dissemination of these cults (Alvar 1994, 279). In fact, the same author proposes a Hispanic origin for the *cernophora Flavia Tyche* (Alvar 2022, 57-58) as well as for *Publicius Mysticus*, for whom he defends the adoption of his *cognomen* after becoming *archigallus* (Alvar 1994, 282). Concurrently, in his publication together with Pañeda Murcia (2018, 112 n. 55) they both dismiss the Greek-Eastern origin hypothesis,

Another intriguing hypothesis is that the cult is connected, either directly or indirectly, with the *familia Caesaris*. It would be unusual for imperial freedmen not to display their link to the Imperial administration as a means of enhancing their social standing. Consequently, it is more plausible that they were either freedmen or descendants of imperial freedpersons.

Moreover, the chronology is a key factor in this analysis. If *Ulpius Helias* was an imperial freedman, he should have been a freedman of Trajan. This would place him a century earlier than the date of the inscription. Therefore, he could not have been an imperial freedman of the Hispanic emperor. *Aurelius Stephanus* presents a broader range of possibilities than *Helias*, as he could have been a freedman of Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, or even Caracalla, the closest emperor in chronology.

This slave context, of freedmen connected to the administration, whether public or imperial, finds a parallel in another *taurobolium* undertaken in *Augusta Emerita*, the capital of *Lusitania*. This inscription, which dates to the Antonine period, suggests that the *archigallus* may have been a member of a circle associated with public administration, given his name: *Publicius Mysticus*³². As a result, it seems plausible that this connection to the Eastern cult of the Magna Mater could have been embraced by individuals of servile backgrounds, with either direct or indirect ties to the public and imperial administrations. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, it is possible that they may have used this path to achieve social promotion.

Yet, these social networks do not end there. There is a need to delve deeper into the potential connections that existed beyond the administration. It is notable that, despite the *gens Valeria* being the second most represented

opting simply to consider them as 'freedmen'.

32 CIL II 5260: '*M(atri) D(eum) s(acrum) / Val(eria) Avita / aram tauriboli / sui natalici red/ diti d(onum) d(edit) sacerdo-/te Docyrico Vale-/riano arc(h)igallo / Publicio Mysticus*'.

in Hispania, the dedicator of the *taurobolium* in the aforementioned inscription from *Emerita* was also from this *gens*, *Valeria Avita*.

This potential mere coincidence in the *nomen* is less plausible since the *sacerdos* is also related to the *gens Valeria*, given that he is *Docyricus Valerianus*. It is remarkable that this *gens* is found in three of the inscriptions dedicated to the cult of Magna Mater in the provincial capitals. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that these inscriptions can be attributed to very close chronological periods. These networks may result in the development of some form of interrelation, adhesion or even geographical expansion of the cult³³.

An additional social circle provides further consistency to the *Valerii* relationship with Magna Mater, while offering new insights into *Fortunatus*' potential social networks. In the present case, I am referring to an inscription from *Olisippo* that is connected to the *gens Coelia*. This particular *gens* does not appear with great frequency in Hispania and it is, in fact, the *gens* of the woman who dedicated the first inscription together with *Fortunatus: Coelia Ianuaria*³⁴. This inscription is a votive text, now lost, of which we still have a drawing³⁵.

33 For a brief analysis of the *Valerii* in relation to the Eastern cults in Lusitania, see Alvar (1993).

34 There are a total of 35 individuals from the *gens Coelia* in Hispania. The distribution of these individuals is not extensive, as many of them appear together in the same inscriptions. For example, in *AE* 1976, 319 in *Clunia*, four individuals are listed in the same inscription. A further three *Coelii* are identified in *CIL* II²/14, 1065 in *Tarraco*. In *Ujue*, *IRMusNav* 33 and *IRMusNav* 34, three further examples can be found. Beyond these locations, the *Coelii* are concentrated in *Barcino* and *Saguntum*. In addition to these individuals, the *nomen gentilium* appears on seven occasions in *tituli fabricationis*, with an outstanding appearance (5) in *Tarraco*. In Lusitania, there are seven cases concentrated in *Olisippo*, *Emerita* and *Capera*.

35 *CIL* II, 259 = *AE* 2019, 659. *L'Année épigraphique* proposes a date of late 201 or early 202 based on the imperial sequence: *'Sol Aeterno / et Lunae / pro aeternitate im/peri(i) et salute Imp(eratoris) (C)ae<s=L>(aris) / L(uci) Septimi Severi Aug(usti) Pii fil(ii) / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) Aureli Antonini / Aug(usti) Pii [[et P(ubli) Septimi Getae nob(ilissimi)]] / Caes(aris) et [Iu]liae Aug(ustae) matris c[a]s[tr]orum) / D(ecimus) Iul(ius) Valer(ius) Coelianus / v(ir) [c]lari[ssim]us [l]eg(atus) Augustorum / cum V[---]a Vale[ria]na [ux(ore)] sua et / Q(uintus) Iulius*

Although the inscription is executed in a somewhat rough style, it is dedicated to the *Sol Aeternus* and the Moon. It employs the formula *pro aeternitate imperio* and *pro salute*' of the emperors Septimius Severus, Caracalla, Geta (with his associated *damnatio memoriae*) and Iulia Domna. This inscription once again takes us back to the same chronological context of *Fortunatus*, involving the same imperial dynasty and sharing some epigraphic formulas. The subsequent lines have been the subject of a discussion regarding their interpretation. The most common interpretative approach, as presented in *L'Année épigraphique*, identifies a *legatus Augustorum* with the polynominal onomastic structure *D. Iul(ius) Valer(ius) Coelianus*. While the exact relationship between this individual and the couple from *Corduba* remains unclear, it is noteworthy that after dedicating together with a woman of the *gens Coelia* in *Corduba*, *Fortunatus* added the *gentilicium Valerius* for his second dedication, acquiring also a polynominal onomastic structure in the process³⁶.

Satur Q(uintus) Val[er]ius Anto[ni]us []:

36 In *Cod. Iust.* 7.9.1, issued by Gordian III, it is specified that *'cum servus publicus esses, ab ordine consentiente etiam praeside provinciae manumissus es'*. In other words, this indicates that the consent of the *praeses*, at that time a generic term for provincial governors, would be necessary for the manumission of *servi publici*. I am aware that there is a hypothesis in which the *operae* could serve to 'anchor' the public freedman to their former tasks in the city, thereby potentially restricting *Fortunatus*' geographical mobility. However, it should be noted that this would depend on the will of the individual (see note 22 above). As Luciani (2024, 70) proposes, it is plausible that members of the *ordo* would be interested in favouring the manumission of public slaves with the intention of transforming them into clients, thereby increasing their networks and influence, which may also extend to geographical terms. This is one of the hypotheses put forth by Luciani (2015, 259-260) to interpret the intriguing inscription in which two *Publicii* commemorate their 'patronus' (*AE* 2015, 453). It is reasonable to conclude that the beneficiaries of the manumissions within the public administration would be those individuals who were most closely connected to these municipal elites. In contrast to the preceding argument, Easton (2019, 343) suggests that the absence of public freedmen among the **augustales* in Italy is indicative of the prioritisation of private freedmen of the *decurions* in these manumissions. However, I argue

The relationship between some *gentes* that can be traced in inscriptions from *Olisippo* provides a further illustrative and clarifying insight. In this city, we can ascertain the existence of individuals belonging to the *ordo* who were members of the *gens Coelia*. One such individual is the *Iivir* Q. *Coelius Cassianus*, who held office at the end of the second century CE³⁷. It is relevant to cite this individual, as he was connected with the *gens Cassia*. This *gens* was one of the most notable families in *Olisippo*, and through an euergetic act, donated the baths that became known as *Thermae Cassiorum*³⁸.

It is important to recall now an inscription previously cited, in which two members of the *gens Cassia*, *Marcus Iulius Cassianus* and *Cassia Severa*, engaged in a similar *taurobolium/criobolium* ceremony at the outset of the second century³⁹.

All these individuals show a distinct triad of privileged, interrelated *gentes* “*Coelia/Cassia/Valeria*”, involved in public life and the cult of the *Magna Mater*⁴⁰. In this context, there are

no intrinsic limitations preventing *Fortunatus*, a public member of the administration, from maintaining close contact with members of the *ordo decurionum*, which constitutes the natural circle of these wealthy *gentes*⁴¹.

It seems reasonable to posit that *Fortunatus* may have moved to *Corduba* in the company of a woman. She is also a pivotal figure in the social network, given that she exhibits onomastic links with these *gentes* linked to the *Magna Mater* cult. This suggests that she may have been a descendant or a freedwoman from their social circle.

The onomastic context of interrelated *gentes*, namely *Coelia/Cassia/Valeria*, who spread the cult of *Magna Mater*, provides a possible origin of *Fortunatus* and *Ianuaria*. While the precise identities of their ‘patrons’ or ‘benefactors’ remain uncertain, it seems reasonable to suggest that the couple may have been linked to *Olisippo* and those wealthy *gentes*. In addition, the social circle of these individuals was characterised by its connection to *Cybele*. This enabled freedmen and other dependants of these interconnected families to act as active disseminators of the cult in one (or maybe two) provincial capitals, while chronology provides additional insight into this aspect⁴². This circle of *Olisippo* could provide an explanation for *Fortunatus*’ polynomial onomastic structure, offer new data on his social circle, his probable

that these two theses are not mutually exclusive.

37 *CIL* II, 187 and *CIL* II, 284.

38 (Andreu Pintado 2001, 241, 243, 348). Of the twenty-six *Cassii* that have been identified in Hispania, thirteen are located within this city and its surroundings. Although it is not certain, the construction of the baths may have taken place during the Julio-Claudian period, a time of the highest number of euergetic acts and the greatest flourishing of the city. It is thanks to the inscription that reports their renovation that we have knowledge of these buildings. This is the only case in Hispania of an intervention of the provincial administration in a construction project from the late antiquity period. It can therefore be assumed that these structures were of a monumental scale. *CIL* II, 187: ‘*Thermae Cassiorum / renovatae a solo iuxta iussionem / Numeri Albani v(iri) c(larissimi) p(raesidis) p(rovinciae) L(usitaniae) / curante Aur(elio) Firmo / Nepotiano et Facundo co(n)s(ulibus)*’. For a monographic examination of the manuscript of this inscription, see Encarnação (2009).

39 *CIL* II, 179: ‘*Matri de(um) Mag(nae) Id(a)e/ae Phryg(iae) Fl(avia) / Tyche cerno/phor(a) per M(arcum) Iul(ium) / Cass(ianum) et Cass(iam) Sev(eram) / M(arco) At(ilio) et Ann(io) co(n)ss(ulibus) Gal(lo)*’.

40 Although Alvar (2016, 392-393) suggests a multifocal arrival of the cult of *Cybele* in *Lusitania*, he points to a port introduction. In particular, either by *Olisippo*, due to the aforementioned *criobolium* of

Iulius Cassianus and *Cassia Severa*, (108 CE) as it is the earliest record; or by *Ossonoba*, where an inscription of a *criobolium* is preserved (*IRCPacen*, 1).

41 In line with Luciani’s thesis (see note 36 above), it is essential to recall that *servi publici* were ‘assigned’ to the magistrates. Even in the *Lex Irn. Ch. 78*, the assignment of their tasks appears to be the responsibility of the *duumvirs*, subject to the approval of the *ordo* (Rodríguez Neila 1997, 281). Consequently, their proximity to the *ordo* would be crucial to achieve manumission and potentially act as agents, since dependency cannot be limited solely to the freedpersons.

42 The dissemination of the *gens Cassia* towards *Baetica* is also reflected in the inscription, *AE* 1984, 526. Although unrelated to the Oriental cult, may be connected to the expansion of commercial activities of this wealthy Lusitanian family: ‘*M(arcus) Cassius M(arci) f(ilius) Gal(eria) / Sempronianus O(lisipon(ensis) diffusor / olearius a solo fec(it) / et dedicavit*’.

socio-economic origins and seeming mobility, and the social promotion of this man which will be addressed in the following section.

6. EUERGETISM AND FREEDPERSONS' SOCIAL MOBILITY

The self-representation of freedpersons in the epigraphic record can be seen as a quest for social visibility, which was largely concentrated in funerary commemorations. However, their insertion into honorific epigraphy was mainly achieved as a result of the dedication of pedestals and altars by the freedpersons themselves.

The honorific commemoration was largely monopolised by the *gentes* from the *ordo decurionum*, serving two primary functions: firstly, to facilitate access to honours and offices, and secondly, to prevent other members of society from obtaining positions or public rewards⁴³. Indeed, relatively few freedmen received statues in public spaces. Those who were honoured in this way were particularly concentrated in urban secondary centres (Melchor Gil 2009, 404).

The wealthy freedmen and the **augustales* sought in the euergetic activity a niche to represent themselves in the public space of their communities, becoming the principal dedicators of euergetic acts *ob honorem* once they had attained the *seviratus*⁴⁴. Indeed, 16%

of the acts of public munificence in Hispania were undertaken by freedpersons, a figure that far exceeds those carried out by *equites* and senatorial families, which together account for 7% of Hispanic donations (Melchor Gil 2009, 404).

Nevertheless, this public munificence will be monopolised by individuals of private origin. In other words, those who undertook the euergetic acts were private freedpersons and **augustales*. In Hispania, among the latter, only two cases are known of public freedmen who held the **augustalitas*⁴⁵. Similarly, there are no cases of imperial freedmen who record that they held this priesthood⁴⁶. Thus, the data confirm that the **augustales* in Hispania were predominantly private freedmen, a pattern consistent with that observed in other provinces of the empire⁴⁷.

In view of these findings, an examination of the seemingly lack of public munificence on the part of the public freedmen becomes necessary. One possible explanation is that they had no interest in pursuing social visibility⁴⁸. Alternatively, this may have been due to a real impediment to undertaking actions that would have benefited their public image and that of their descendants. It seems plausible that both this euergetism and the epigraphic activity

45 As previously mentioned, *Publicius Melissus* of *Barcino* is referenced in *CIL* II, 415; *CIL* II, 4497 and *CIL* II, 4527. The latter inscription also includes the second one, *Publicius Hermes*, potentially in relation to the first.

46 Vandevoorde (2017, 85) indicates that there are only ten documented instances of imperial freedmen who held the **augustalitas* in the Italian cities.

47 In Sudi-Giral's study (2013, 235), only twenty-one public freedmen (of whom eight are proposed as probable freedmen) were recorded as attaining to the *seviratus* for the entire empire, with the majority located in Italy. Easton (2023a, 120-122), in his analysis, includes thirty-one public freedmen (both certain and probable individuals) as **augustales*, representing less than 15% of the cases in his total sample for Italy.

48 The higher social status of the *familia Caesaris* has traditionally been argued, among other indicators, on the basis of their marriage patterns (Weaver 1972, 5). Nevertheless, the assumption that public freedmen, as their antecedents - who could not be interested in gaining social visibility -, held a high reputation is now being challenged. See the monograph by Luciani (2020).

43 (Melchor Gil 2017, 34). Melchor Gil (2009, 398) also notes that through euergetism, the local aristocracies would have prevented access to offices, not only for freedmen, but for other members of the decurional *ordo* as well. Therefore, the decurions sought visibility by funding 34% of sacred constructions through euergetic acts, in contrast to the 14% assumed by freedpersons (Melchor Gil 2022, 207).

44 Jordán (2003, 100-101, 111) suggests that the **augustales* were not regularly honoured in Hispania Citerior. Furthermore, they disregarded the building activities, focusing instead on religious inscriptions, thereby pursuing a visible representation in public areas. According to Melchor Gil (1994, 47) 35 of the 57 donations '*ob honorem*' that we have found in Hispanic inscriptions were made by freedmen who had been appointed to hold the *seviratus*. See the monograph by Rodà de Llanza (1993).

that referred to these acts of munificence were filled by freedmen of private origin, who may have had the direct support and connections with the *ordo decurionum* of the city⁴⁹. This leads us to the enduring question of the dependent/independent freedman and how such this situation would impact the granting of honours and the approval of acts of munificence, which would require the approval of the decurions⁵⁰. In other words, it is likely that private freedmen with direct contact with some magistrates would have been given priority in undertaking these euergetic actions, which had to be approved by the same *ordo*. In the background, despite being close to these elites, Fortunatus was still a public freedman (see note 36) (Melchor Gil 2017, 42)⁵¹.

Therefore, I propose that this *taurobolium*, performed in the capital of *Baetica*, constituted an alternative method of demonstrating to the population the socio-economic promotion achieved beyond the paths reserved for private freedmen. It is reasonable to posit that even those who were not direct beneficiaries from the ceremony were aware of the costly celebrations held for the benefit of the empire. Such displays of wealth and opulence would have served to highlight the desire for social visibility and to demonstrate political adhesion to the values held by the elites.

While acts such as *sportulae* would undoubtedly benefit the decurions and **augustales* to a greater extent by creating a wheel of favours, it is equally plausible that these ceremonies and offerings 'for the benefit

of the empire' were designed to gain the attention of the common people, rather than solely targeting the privileged classes⁵².

Although there is no archaeological evidence of a temple to Magna Mater, the close proximity of the locations where the inscriptions were discovered in *Corduba* may indicate the presence of a temple or site of religious significance linked to Magna Mater within the city walls. Its location points to a public place in one of the city's most prominent areas of representation⁵³. The perfect location for making such ceremonies public and immortalizing them for posterity⁵⁴. (Fig. 3)

The hypothesis that public freedmen of Oriental origin were involved in these Oriental cults, even on an institutionalised basis, as a means of promoting the cult of Cybele from the political sphere and encouraging its social advancement was put forth by Alvar (1994, 281)⁵⁵. Nevertheless, as Ubiña (1996, 412) observes, of the thirty people related to the cult in Hispania, any of them held a municipal

52 Melchor Gil (2009, 400) posits that in Hispanic public munificence, the group that benefited most from the euergetic acts was the *ordo decurionum*, which received higher amounts in most of the *sportulae*. For example, *CIL* II, 1276 of *Siarum* records that the decurions received three *denarii*, the **augustales* received two, and the *plebs* received one. The recent reflection of Keijwegt (2024, 90) on the interpretation of certain honours and privileges held by the freedmen and presented in their inscriptions is of interest. This is because these 'may even have created a hostile response that went unrecorded' rather than responding to a real integration.

53 Beltrán Fortes 1992, 189; Garriguet 2017, 269-270. See Fig. 3 for further details.

54 Besides the two inscriptions of *Publicius Valerius Fortunatus*, there were found, firstly *CIL* II²/7, 235: '] / III[---] / Clodia [---] / adstante Ul[pio Helia]/de sacerdote ar[am] / sacris suis d(ederunt) d(edicaverunt) Maximo Urbano co(n)s(ulibus)'. The priest referenced in this inscription is the same individual who is mentioned in the first inscription of *Fortunatus*, as the ceremony was celebrated in the same year. In second place was found the poorly preserved *CIL* II²/7, 236: 'Pro salute / Imp(eratoris) domi[ni] n(ostri)'.

55 This does not invalidate the political connotations of the ceremony. Indeed, as explained by Ubiña (1996, 418) from the intervention of Antoninus Pius onwards, the *taurobolium* became a sacrifice of public interest, thereby converting Cybele into one of the protective divinities of the empire.

49 In fact, as Melchor Gil (2017, 38) puts forward, an alternative to euergetic construction activities for 'non-privileged' benefactors could be testamentary bequests. These bequests would entail a concession in exchange of space, allowing the heirs to benefit publicly from such a donation.

50 For an analysis of the access to the **augustalitas* of private freedmen supported by their patron versus public freedmen of the colony in Ostia, see Bruun (2008, 552-553).

51 Luciani (2017, 56) identifies three instances of euergetic acts carried out by explicit public freedmen. Furthermore, he proposes that the euergetic acts of *liberti publici* served as a substitute for payment to the *ordo decurionum* that freed them (Luciani 2017, 64).



Fig. 3. The design by Alejandro Muñoz is based on the plans included in Manuel Ruiz Bueno's thesis (2016). Image kindly provided by Carlos Márquez Moreno. A) *Forum Coloniae* B) *Forum Novum* C) *Theatre complex* D) *Enclosure of Claudius Marcellus* 1) *CIL II²/7, 234*. Second inscription of *Publicius Valerius Fortunatus* 2) *CIL II²/7, 233*. First inscription of *Publicius Fortunatus* 3) *CIL II²/7, 235*: Metroac inscription of *Clodia* [...] 4) *CIL II²/7, 236*: Inscription 'Pro salute'

office or prominent public function. Therefore, it seems that the 'institutionalised' route is not visible in the epigraphic record. However, it is beyond doubt that sacred constructions and votive dedications constituted a method of achieving visibility for the benefactor, displaying not only personal devotion but also adhesion to Roman values⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ Maroto (2018, 164) proposes that public and imperial slaves in Hispania would have been integrated uniformly into the local pre-Roman and Roman cults, and to a lesser extent, into Eastern cults. However, Teixeira (2017, 1162) does indeed identify a uniform integration of private slaves and freedmen in those three types of cults in Lusitania. It should be noted that García Bellido (1991, 68-75) provided an explanation for the dissemination of the cult of Magna Mater in Lusitania, suggesting that

The significance of these two metroac inscriptions is further enhanced when we examine the evidence of freedpersons' euergetism in the provincial capitals of Hispania. Besides the honorific inscriptions, the overwhelming majority of constructions and euergetic acts carried out by freedpersons in Hispania took place in secondary urban centres or capitals of *conventus*. In contrast, only a small proportion of these activities took place in the provincial capitals. For instance, Melchor Gil (1993, 464-466) posits that of the three capitals, only in *Tarraco* is there a record of the construction and subsequent repair of some baths, as well as the donation of two chariots for the forum⁵⁷. Notably, none of these acts were undertaken by freedpersons⁵⁸.

In light of these circumstances, it becomes necessary to redefine the concept of social mobility among freedpersons in the provincial capitals of Hispania, not only in terms of access to the *seviratus*, but also in relation to the seemingly exclusion of public freedmen from this process⁵⁹. It thus appears that in the provincial capitals, there is a context of limited social promotion and scarce concession of public space for the representation of

this was due to the identification of the goddess with the autochthonous *Ataecina*. This hypothesis has been rejected due to the lack of compelling epigraphic evidence (Ubiña 1996, 413-414; Pañeda Murcia and Alvar 2018, 102-103).

⁵⁷ For the restoration of the baths: *CIL II²/14, 1004*; For the same benefactor who, along with baths and chariots, also donated hot-water fountains? *CIL II²/14, 1810*.

⁵⁸ Although it is not strictly a public donation, but a donation to a *collegium*, I would like to mention the donation of *Q. Murrius Thales*, probably a freedman, who donated a sundial or *horilegium* to the *collegium fabrum* in *Tarraco* at the end of the first century CE. (Koppel 1988, 33). It is noteworthy that this act of pursuing social visibility through the donation of a *horilegium* also occurs in the *Satyricon*, when *Trimalchio* (Petr. 71. 11) sets out his testamentary dispositions: '*Horologium in medio, ut quisquis horas inspiciet, velit nolit, nomen meum legat.*'

⁵⁹ The social promotion of freedmen in prominent urban centres is related to the distinction established by López Barja de Quiroga (1991a, 169) between 'individual promotion' and 'group promotion'. The latter is necessary for structural reasons, as evidenced by the example of Ostia. It may also apply to other locations in Hispania, including small cities on the eastern coast such as *Barcino*.

freedpersons. In this framework, religious ceremonies could serve as a clear mechanism for immediate public exhibition, open to freedpersons who were neither **augustales* neither from the private sphere.

In view of the above considerations, it seems reasonable to propose that this may have constituted the context in which *Publicius Valerius Fortunatus* undertook the *taurobolia* and their associated inscriptions in *Corduba* during the third century CE. In order to conclude this prosopographic analysis, it is essential to recall the multiple indicators that have been considered in order to defend his freed status and provide a new contextual framework for his social circle and background:

Firstly, his 'slaveholding' *gentilicium*. Secondly, a *cognomen* linked to the slave context. Thirdly, the acquisition of a second *nomen* from either one of the magistrates who proceeded to his manumission or from a previous owner, possibly a distinguished magistrate related to the administration. In my estimation, the latter hypothesis is more likely to be accurate, given *Fortunatus* retains the *nomen Publicius*. In this way, the second *nomen* will enhance his prestige and onomastic structure, without disregarding his public background and consequent manumission, which he can be proud of. It can be reasonably argued that the removal of the *Publicius gentilicium* is more closely aligned with the first option of manumission. Fourthly, in terms of the social context, it is notable that he had networks with ordinary women, potentially belonging to the 'lower classes'. In fifth place, I believe there is a strong argument for claiming that he was connected to *Olisippo*, as well as he may have played a role as a dependant of families involved in the cult of the Magna Mater (along with one of the women represented in the inscriptions). In sixth place stands a link to a cult that appears to have united individuals of servile background, particularly those of a public or imperial origin, as well as freedpersons of these individuals. Finally, his quest of social visibility, through the performance of not one,

but two *taurobolia*, along with the subsequent dedication of two opulent inscriptions created to commemorate them.

Indeed, this quest is, in and of itself, another indicator used to defend the status of this individual as a freedman. It is particularly pertinent in a city where, as in the majority of provincial capitals, there is a lack of visible promotion of freedmen and their incorporation into the colony's society through euergetic activities. Cases such as this should encourage us to consider an alternative approach to measuring social promotion and its epigraphic display in major cities where promotion appears to be reserved for decurions. In this case, *Fortunatus* circumvented these reservations by making political and civic use of the Oriental cult, at the same time he helped to spread it.

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