

Sabine Ladstätter – Walter Prochaska – Vasiliki Anevlavi (Eds.)

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SABINE LADSTÄTTER – WALTER PROCHASKA – VASILIKI ANEVLAVI (EDS.)

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DIANA GOROSTIDI PI – ISABEL RODÀ DE LLANZA –
ANDREA COLLADO PADILLA

THE USE OF ALCOVER STONE IN ROMAN TIMES (TARRACO, HISPANIA CITERIOR)

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE *OFFICINA LAPIDARIA TARRACONENSIS* II: EVIDENCE OF EARLY SUPPLIES OF EPIGRAPHIC MATERIALS BEYOND THE CITY OF TARRACO

Abstract

Roman inscriptions on Alcover stone found in Baetulo and dated to the Augustan period have made it possible to document for the first time the use of this stone for epigraphic supports outside Tarraco, where it was well known for honorific purposes about the same time.

INTRODUCTION

An important inscription related to M. Porcius (fig. 1), a well-known wine trader recorded in several amphora stamps from the Augustan period (fig. 2), has recently been discovered in Baetulo (modern Badalona, Barcelona)¹. The inscription also stands out for its material, the »Pedra d'Alcover« (Alcover stone, from the ancient quarry near the homonymous village, close to Tarragona) (fig. 3), a sedimentary carbonate rock used only in Tarraco as an epigraphic support in the late Republican – early Imperial period². By contrast, this type of stone is not documented in



1 [M(arcus)?] Porcius' inscription from Baetulo. Augustan period (from Rodà de Llanza – Forn – Moreno 2020, fig. 3)



2 M. Porcius stamp on a Pascual 1 amphora (photo: Badalona Museum, C. Forn)

¹ Rodà de Llanza – Forn – Moreno 2020.

² The present study is a follow-up of the paper published in the ASMOSIA XI proceedings. For epigraphic workshops and stone-cutters in early Tarraco using Alcover stone, see Alföldy 2012; Gorostidi Pi 2020.



3 Map of the Alcover quarries, near Tarraco (modern Tarragona) and Baetulo (modern Badalona) (graphics: A. Collado)

the surroundings of Baetulo, as shown in the geological map (fig. 4). For this reason, a review of the materials in the collection of the Badalona Museum has been carried out and has led to the identification of three more inscriptions in Alcover stone (fig. 5).

The use of such characteristic brown, grey or cream-coloured stone is in line with the first epigraphic honorific inscriptions dating back to the foundation times of the Colonia Tarraco and Augustus' stay in the city during the Cantabrian Wars (29–19 BC)³. Baetulo on the other hand, was founded by the Romans at the end of the Republican period. It underwent a massive urban development under Augustus thanks to a prospering wine industry for which the Laetanian coastal zone was renowned. Nevertheless, the city has yielded no inscriptions from that period until now⁴.

DISCUSSION

Given their morphology, content, and palaeography, the four inscriptions from Baetulo belong to the series of private monuments found in Tarraco in the Augustan and Tiberian periods (fig. 6). In those years, local stone workshops were producing a considerable number of public honorary monuments (fig. 6 a–b), mainly for wealthy freedmen and freeborn individuals (fig. 6 c–d).

The earliest chronology of Alcover stone workshops in Tarraco coincides with that of M. Porcius' inscription in Baetulo. Therefore, the Badalona inscriptions must date to the same period, as they may have all been commissioned in Tarraco to then be displayed in the city of destination. Such evidence allows us to document the first case of epigraphic media distribution outside of the capital of Hispania citerior, a phenomenon previously documented only for the »Pedra de Santa Tecla« (Santa Tecla stone), a pale pink or yellow-coloured stone also known as Tarraco marmor. This micritic calcite was also profusely widespread in the neighbouring cities⁵. This phenomenon was driven by the intense development of stone workshops that provided magnificence to the provincial capital's new buildings and public spaces under Vespasian.

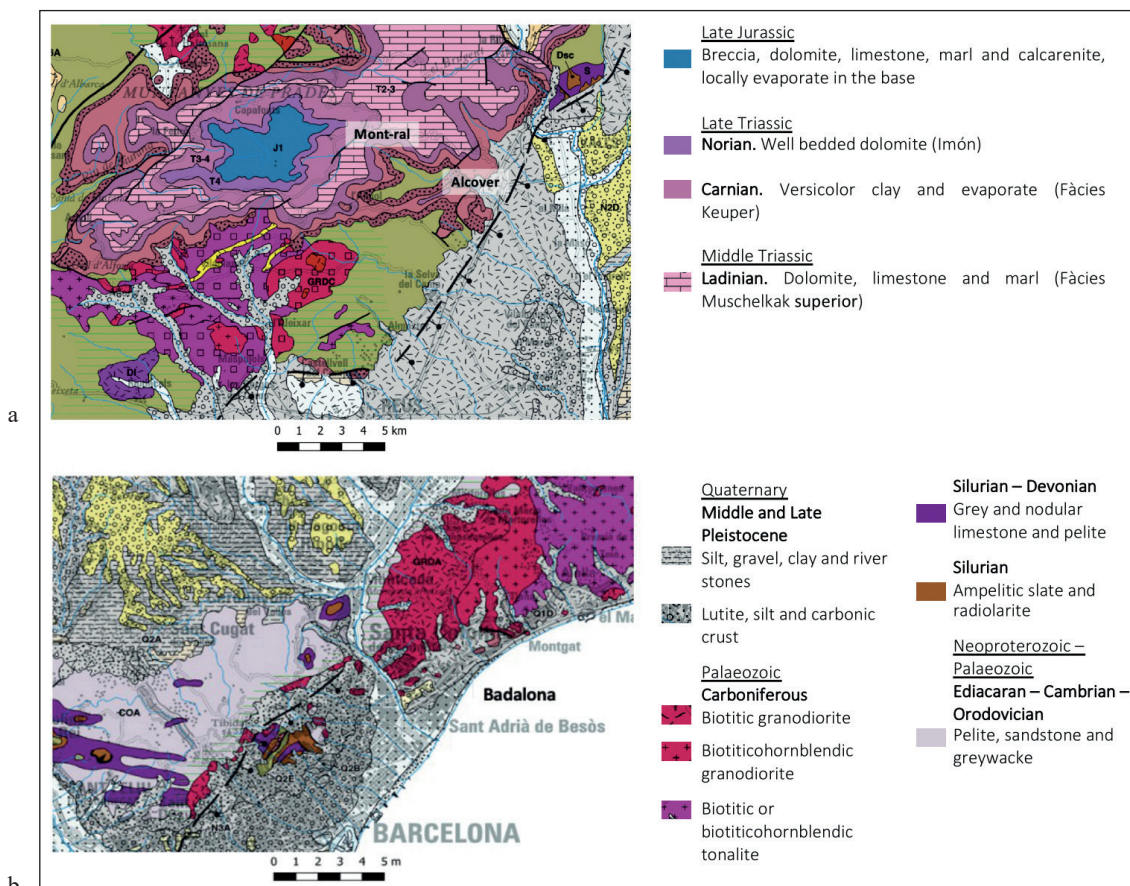
ALCOVER STONE

Alcover stone is a compact calcareous mudstone from the Prades mountain chain (Serra de Prades), between the cities of Alcover and Mont-ral (Alt Camp, Tarragona, Spain). Macroscopically, Alcover stone can be identified as a homogeneous stone with very fine grains and a light-

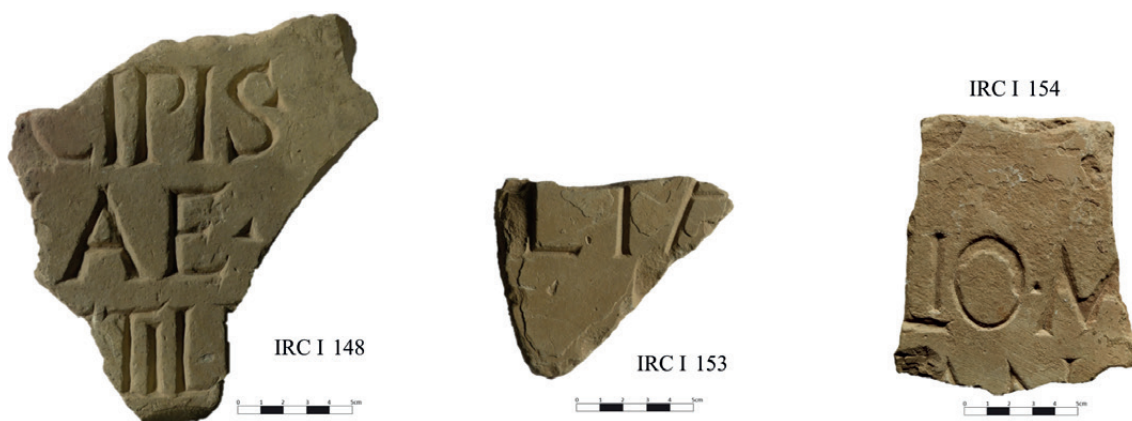
³ Alföldy 2012; Gorostidi Pi 2020.

⁴ Rodà de Llanza – Forn – Moreno 2020.

⁵ Álvarez et al. 2009.



4 Geological map. a: Alcover district. b: Baetulo (from Coca – Alcañiz – Salas [n. d.])



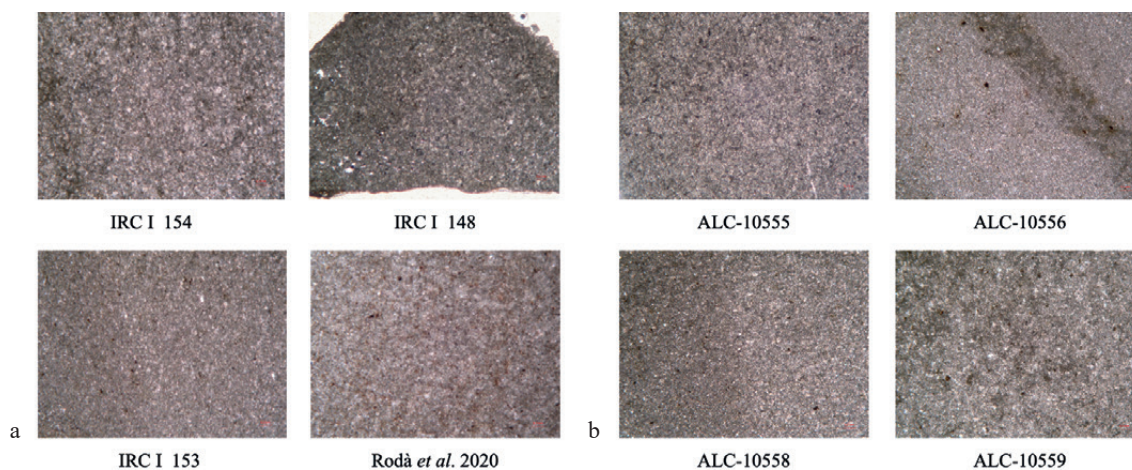
5 Inscriptions from Baetulo in Alcover stone: IRC I 148. 153. 154 (photos: Unitat d’Estudis Arqueomètrics – Institut Català d’Arqueologia Clàssica)

brown to grey colour, at times it can even present a red colour. Furthermore, this stone presents a strong bedding. The lamination contributes to the natural fracture of the rock into sheets between a few millimetres and 10 cm wide, which limited its use in Roman times as an epigraphic support, pavement slabs, wall veneers and tombstones⁶.

⁶ Coca – Alcañiz – Salas (n. d.); Gutiérrez Garcia-Moreno 2009.



6 Tarraco Latin inscriptions from the Augustan period on Alcover stone: CIL II² 14, 864. 1023. 1270. 1620 (photos: The National Archaeological Museum of Tarragona)



7 a: Microscopic appearance of Baetulo's inscriptions. b: Microscopic appearance of Alcover stone (random quarry samples) (photos: UEA)

On the microscopic level, the Alcover stone is characterised as a dolmicrite or dolomite mudstone of hypidiomorphic, euhedral (50–80 μm) crystals with detrital quartz silt (10–30 %) and mica components. It appears in strong bedding sheets with millimetric internal lamination, sometimes separated by marly mud strata⁷.

ALCOVER STONE IN BAETULO

Although the use of Alcover stone has previously only been documented in Tarraco and its close surroundings, the Baetulo inscriptions with this lithologic appearance that is so alike have allowed us to consider a common provenience, that is, that both types come from the same district quarry at Alcover. In order to confirm that hypothesis, samples of the inscriptions and Alcover quarry specimens have been examined under the microscope (fig. 7 a–b).

CONCLUSIONS

The result of the comparison between the samples examined allows the same origin to be established, which confirms the hypothesis. Accordingly, we can state that Alcover stone was used as a huge epigraphic medium for honorary monuments not only in the capital city itself but also for deliveries beyond Tarraco from the late Republican era onwards until the emergence and exploitation of Santa Tecla stone under the Flavians.

⁷ Gutiérrez García-Moreno 2009.

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