ARRC – Acculturation, Romanisation, Roman Culture: Processes of Integration Across the Roman Empire

Edited by László Borhy, Kata Dévai, Linda Dobosi, and Csilla Sáró

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Edited by
László Borhy – Kata Dévai – Linda Dobosi – Csilla Sáró

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Wine and power in Roman Lusitania

Production, epigraphy and the inland economy of the Alentejo

Pedro Trapero Fernández ✉
Institute for Wine and Agri-Food Research (IVAGRO), Department of History, Geography and Philosophy, University of Cádiz, Cádiz, Spain
pedro.trapero@uca.es

André Carneiro
Center for Art History and Artistic Research, Department of History, University of Évora, Évora, Portugal; Center for Classical and Humanistic Studies, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal
ampc@uevora.pt

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Abstract: This paper examines viticulture and *villa* organisation as structuring forces in the inland economies of Roman Lusitania, with regional focus on the Alentejo between Ammaia, Ebora Liberalitas Iulia, Pax Iulia, and Augusta Emerita. Integrating archaeological, ceramic, epigraphic, and landscape data, it argues for an interior market system of wine production centred on *villae* supplying nearby urban centres rather than maritime trade. The archaeological record of presses, *dolia*, and road infrastructure supports a terrestrial distribution network linked to Augusta Emerita. Epigraphic evidence of curial elites and freed persons indicates local investment in production and status display. The study combines ceramic typology and architectural analysis to reconstruct agrarian economies, hydrological management, and property patterns. The Alentejo case highlights a multiproduct system where viticulture coexisted with cereal, olive, and marble industries. Ultimately, it proposes that inland viticulture was a socio-economic subsystem embedded within provincial networks of landownership, infrastructure, and civic identity.

Keywords: Roman Lusitania, Alentejo, viticulture, *villae*, Augusta Emerita, *amphorae*, *dolia*, inland trade

Introduction

This study examines the role of viticulture and the organisation of the *villae* in shaping the inland economies of Roman Lusitania, focusing its analysis on the territory of Alentejo. This area, defined by the urban axis formed by Ammaia (near Marvão, Portugal), Ebora Liberalitas Iulia (Évora, Portugal), and Pax Iulia (Beja, Portugal), was profoundly integrated, both infrastructurally and politically, with the provincial capital Augusta Emerita (Mérida, Spain).[1] The central argument maintains that the archaeology of production (expressed in wine presses, *dolia*, and workspaces), the record of containers (with particular attention to the limited presence of wine *amphorae* in certain rural

1 Le Roux 1999, for the administrative context.

✉ Corresponding author

sites),[2] the documented road network of the western and southern routes from Mérida,[3] as well as the epigraphic footprint of curial elites and freedmen, jointly point toward a model of inland viticulture centred on large private rural estates known as *villae*. This model would have directed its production mainly toward nearby urban markets and the provincial capital, rather than integrating into the major maritime export circuits that dominated the estuaries of the Sado and the Tagus.[4]

The issue is framed within a broader debate concerning economic transformation in Hispania Ulterior, later divided into Lusitania and Baetica. Lusitania, subjected early to Roman occupation since the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE), experienced a sustained process of economic, social, and territorial reorganisation between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE. Imperial administration, the foundation of colonies, and civic promotion transformed the landscapes of land ownership, agricultural labour, and mechanisms of surplus extraction. Within this context, Alentejo becomes a particularly valuable analytical laboratory for three main reasons:

- it is an inland territory but endowed with a robust road network composed of three distinct routes leading to Mérida, allowing hypotheses of non-maritime supply chains to be tested;
- it preserves rural estates equipped with infrastructures suitable for wine production, such as pressing vats, batteries of *dolia*, and storage halls, which can be contrasted with ceramic consumption records from nearby cities;
- it is embedded in a provincial environment marked by imperial power, both ideological and material, where emperors of Italic origin, such as Trajan (98–117 CE) and Hadrian (117–138 CE) in Baetica, and curial networks channelled wealth toward urban and rural projects through euergetism, cultic offices, and municipal hierarchies.

From a physical and agronomic perspective, Alentejo presents a landscape of rolling plains, with high solar exposure and a Mediterranean rainfall regime that favours the cultivation of cereals, olives and vines. The geological composition of the soil, based on schists, marls and granites, produces edaphic differentiation that generates viticultural and agricultural microzones *lato sensu*. Water management, through streams, perched aquifers and hydraulic systems at the *villa* scale, such as cisterns, canals and ponds, constitutes both a limitation and an opportunity. *Villae* endowed with powerful hydraulic infrastructures for wine and oil production display parallel investments in water capture and distribution works, as evidenced at Pisões, near Beja,[5] but also in other renowned sites such as Santa Vitória do Ameixial.[6]

The territory of Estremoz/Vila Viçosa, with its marble district, adds another layer of complexity to the economic landscape by integrating extractive activities linked to the building programs of local elites around the marbles of the anticlinal. Likewise, the mining fields stretching from Vipasca, in Aljustrel, to São Domingos in Mértola, represent a landscape of managed exploitation.[7] The coexistence of these productive sectors underscores that the Alentejan interior was not a place of a single economic activity.[8]

At the urban level, Ammaia was consolidated as a *civitas* by the mid-1st century CE, later acquiring municipal rank (166 CE). Geophysical surveys of the site have yielded a high-resolution plan

2 Berni *et al.* 2014.

3 Mantas 2012; Carneiro 2014a, vol. 1. 157–194.

4 Alarcão 1988, 123–153.

5 Caldeira *et al.* 2019; Oliveira *et al.* 2023.

6 Chaves 1956.

7 Taelman *et al.* 2013.

8 Salido Domínguez 2020, 570.

of the *forum*, *insulae*, and extra-urban elements, contributing to an understanding of how a medium-scale Lusitanian city structured its territory.[9] Ebora (nowadays Évora), in turn, functioned as a nodal point of articulation toward Salacia (Alcácer do Sal, Portugal) and Pax Iulia, with a remarkable epigraphic corpus that highlights senatorial careers and female cultic offices, signs of integration into broader provincial networks.[10] Pax Iulia, a colony and conventual capital, anchored the southern end of the axis. Its early imperial ceramic assemblages document the presence of imported *amphorae*, especially those destined for fish products and Baetican oils, alongside local and regional productions, in which Lusitanian wine *amphorae*, although present, did not play a dominant role.[11]

The infrastructure connecting these cities with Augusta Emerita reinforces the hypothesis of an efficient inland supply network.[12] Mérida was not only the symbolic capital of Lusitania but also a major consumption centre, equipped with two *fora*, one urban and one provincial, entertainment venues, and administrative headquarters that concentrated population and purchasing power. The routes described in the Itinerarium Antonini toward the west and southwest, particularly those crossing Évora toward the Atlantic and Beja, have been corroborated archaeologically through the identification of road segments, bridges, and milestones.[13] This road system had direct consequences for the wine economy: on the one hand, it reduced overland transport costs, making short- and medium-distance shipment of liquids feasible through skins, barrels, or large jars;[14] and on the other, it enabled the *villae* surpluses to be channelled toward Mérida without requiring standardised containers typical of maritime commerce.[15]

From a methodological standpoint, the study is based on the functional reconstruction of Roman wine-producing complexes, taking the *Cella Vinaria* model as a comparative reference—known from Catalan examples, while recognising the material and functional particularities of the Lusitanian context.

On these bases, five interrelated research questions are posed:

1. Geography of production: Where are the wine-producing facilities of the Alentejan interior located, and what do their architectural structures reveal about the scale, seasonal productivity and organisation of labour on the estate?
2. Containers and circulation: How do the profiles of ceramic containers and the presence of *dolia* in rural and urban contexts constrain hypotheses about short- or long-distance wine transport?[16]
3. Roads and markets: Which terrestrial corridors facilitated the circulation of wine toward Évora, Beja, and Mérida, and how did the friction of distance affect the capture of the inland market?
4. Elites and property: Which social agents, decurions, *duoviri*, priests of the imperial cult, elite women, and freedmen, are visible in the epigraphic record, and to what degree can they be plausibly linked to the management or ownership of *villae*?[17]

9 Vermeulen – Taelman 2010, 314–315.

10 Carneiro 2021b.

11 Lopes 2003, 107–118

12 Edmondson 2011.

13 In particular the Route XII: Carneiro 2008, 49–57.

14 Marlière 2001.

15 Pereira 2017, 179–193.

16 Cheung 2024; Mataix Ferrándiz 2024; Pereira 2017, 147–153.

17 See several perspectives in the collective volume by Erdkamp *et al.* 2015.

5. Continuity and change: To what extent did pre-Roman winemaking practices and the use of large containers persist or transform under Roman rule, and how are these traditions related to the contemporary survival of *vinho de talha* in the region?

Overall, this article does not aim to answer these questions but to establish the path toward their resolution. It proposes that Roman Alentejan viticulture, although technically capable of generating surpluses, was organised primarily as an inland supply system oriented toward nearby cities and, particularly, toward Augusta Emerita via overland routes. Maritime exportation existed on a secondary scale, contrasting with the maritime prominence of fishery products from the Sado and the Tagus rivers. The social agents who drove this system were curial elites and economically capable freedmen possessing symbolic capital, who invested in rural infrastructures and reinforced their social standing through civic, cultic and funerary inscriptions.

For all these reasons, the present study focuses on establishing the research problem through a state of the question, analysing the known and yet-to-be-studied components or indicators of wine production. All this information is combined with that concerning the elites and dominant groups to discuss how this productive and distributive system functioned.

State of the art

Research on viticulture in Roman Lusitania and in particular on the inland region of Alentejo, has undergone a profound evolution over the last decades.[18] Initially dominated by general studies on wine in Hispania, scholarly attention has progressively shifted toward micro-regional approaches that combine the archaeology of production, container ceramics, civic-cultic epigraphy and archaeometric techniques.[19] This shift has made it possible to move beyond linear interpretations focused on the great export harbours, to recognise the existence of complex, integrated, and functional inland economies.

Three lines of research have been decisive in redefining the wine economy of Roman Alentejo: first, the study of *villae* endowed with specialised installations such as wine presses, *dolia*, hydraulic systems, and storage areas, which offer a direct reading of production and transformation processes; second, the analysis of consumption patterns in inland cities, especially in Pax Iulia and Ebora, where the *amphora* record shows a marked asymmetry between the abundance of fish sauce or oil containers and the lesser presence of wine containers; and finally, the reinterpretation of epigraphic documentation as an indicator of networks of elites and freedmen who acted as economic agents in the terrestrial supply circuits.[20]

The contemporary debate no longer revolves around the mere existence of vineyards or wine in Lusitania, a question accepted by historiographical tradition, but rather around the specific modalities of production, the recipients of consumption, and the scale of exchanges. Current inquiries focus on how viticulture was organised in the interior, what links it established with urban centres and what role local elites played in its articulation. In synthetic studies on wine in Hispania, the coastal regions and major river valleys, the Guadalquivir, Bay of Cádiz, Sado, Tagus and Catalan coast, monopolised academic attention for a long time. The visible prominence of *amphorae* in the archaeological record generated an interpretative hierarchy that relegated inland areas to marginal positions. However, advances in the archaeology of production have changed that paradigm. The systematic identification

18 Brun 1997; Brun 2000.

19 Tchernia 1986; Brun 2003; Dodd 2022.

20 A project called VITALENTEJO is currently being carried out as part of the multi-year archaeological projects on this issue.

of wine presses and *cellae vinariae* with batteries of *dolia defossa* has made it possible to recognise the existence of organised wine production for regional and local consumption.[21]

Epigraphy, for its part, has ceased to be read solely as an instrument of civic or religious representation and has come to be interpreted also as indirect evidence of economic circuits. Texts recording offerings, banquets or religious dedications reveal a stable consumption of wine in ritual and convivial contexts, while mentions of offices such as *flamines*, *flaminicae* or *seviri Augustales* indicate the existence of hierarchical networks capable of managing and redistributing products. These phenomena, observable in the principal cities of Alentejo, show that the wine economy formed part of an interdependent system linking the *villa*, the city, and the province.

The analysis of the urban ceramic record, especially in Pax Iulia,[22] has been fundamental for measuring the intensity and the nature of exchanges. Early Imperial assemblages show an abundance of *amphorae* destined for oil and fish sauces, in contrast to a more discreet presence of wine containers.[23] This contrast should not be interpreted as a scarcity of wine, but rather as evidence of a different logistics: inland wine would have circulated mainly in organic containers, skins, and wooden barrels, or in large local ceramic vessels, whose archaeology is less visible.[24] The *villae* would thus have functioned as nodes of production and storage, supplying nearby urban markets without the need to employ standardised containers.

In recent years, the study of *dolia* found in Tourega and in the area of Cabeço de Vide has confirmed the importance of these large vessels in the Alentejan wine system.[25] The volumetric capacities recorded, ranging between 800 and 1,600 litres, together with evidence of local manufacture, reinforce the idea of a technically self-sufficient economy.

These findings corroborate the existence of specialised regional workshops and short-distance exchange networks that supplied containers to rural estates. On the other hand, evidence of production is beginning to accumulate in increasing numbers. The olive press weights identified in Alto Alentejo indicate a dual scale of production: near smaller settlements, we find weights that are recognised in isolation and are more modest in size, while near monumental *villae*, we find weights that are significant in size, sometimes in numbers greater than a single isolated find.[26] Therefore, there is a scale of self-sufficiency that complements the existence of large production units that could have larger scales in mind. It is certain, however, that for large land units, the poor or non-existent knowledge of the *partes rusticae* prevents a clearer reading of the process.[27]

On the social level, the epigraphic documentation from Pax Iulia, Evora, and Ammaia provides a coherent image of the hierarchical structure of local communities. The *curiales* and *duoviri* represented the political and economic capital that financed urban and rural infrastructure; the *flamines* and *flaminicae* embodied the religious legitimacy that sustained the ritual consumption of wine; while the *Augustales* and freedmen constituted the intermediate stratum responsible for daily management and supply logistics. This network of roles reveals a model of society in which the agricultural economy and civic life were deeply intertwined. This issue will be revisited later.

21 Rueda Prunell – Járrega Domínguez 2024.

22 Lopes *et al.* 2022.

23 For a comparison regarding the evolution of the studies, see Alarcão – Mayet 1990; Pinto *et al.* 2016.

24 Raepsaet 2008, 591.

25 Viegas – Pinto 2000; Viegas *et al.* 2024 for Tourega; Bombico *et al.* 2024 for the sites in Cabeço de Vide.

26 Carneiro 2021a, 56–57.

27 Carneiro 2010.

Epigraphic analysis also makes it possible to reconstruct territorial links. Inscriptions mentioning offerings to local deities or the dedication of public buildings show the existence of active communities bound by networks of patronage and dependency.[28]

The road corridors that connected Alentejo with Augusta Emerita played a fundamental role in this system. Milestones and remnants of roads confirm the existence of well-maintained routes toward the west and southwest, with infrastructure that reduced the friction of terrestrial transport.[29] These routes facilitated the regular shipment of perishable products, among them wine, in containers alternative to *amphorae*. Mérida, with its great concentration of population and purchasing power, acted as a magnet for consumption for the neighbouring territories, explaining why the inland *villae* could sustain surpluses without depending on a secure maritime market. The application of geospatial analysis techniques has made it possible to model the dynamics of accessibility and cost-distance more precisely. Geographic Information Systems, which weigh factors such as slope, solar exposure, hydrology, and road density, have demonstrated that much of the Alentejan territory lay within reasonable transport radii toward Mérida and the principal Lusitanian cities.[30] This reinforces the plausibility of the model of inland circulation of goods, in contrast to long-distance maritime routes.

Archaeometry, for its part, has provided objective tools for identifying the original content of containers.[31] Analyses of organic residues in *dolia* and coarse ceramics have detected the presence of tartaric and malic acids, characteristic components of wine. These results confirm that the inland wine installations were effectively devoted to the processing and storage of must, and not to other activities. Petrographic and geochemical studies have also identified local ceramic production, reinforcing the hypothesis of an integrated and self-sufficient economy.[32]

Archaeobotanical analyses, focused on the study of carbonised grape pips and vegetal remains, have corroborated the existence of vine cultivation in inland Lusitania. The combination of these data with productive architecture and epigraphy provides a coherent picture of an inland viticulture adapted to its environment and oriented toward regional consumption.[33]

Despite these advances, significant gaps remain. The spatial distribution of archaeometric analyses continues to be discontinuous, which limits possibilities for global quantification.[34] Likewise, the attribution of ownership based on epigraphy requires caution: many inscriptions do not specify direct links with particular estates. On the other hand, the bias of research toward monumental contexts leaves the smaller rural establishments still to be explored, which may have played a relevant role in the production network.[35] Finally, the urban *amphora* record of Pax Iulia and Evora requires systematic audits to assess the real proportions of the different products and the possible underrepresentation of non-amphoric wine.

Altogether, the current state of knowledge presents a solid evidentiary basis: well-documented wine infrastructures in the *villae* of Alentejo, local production of containers, urban assemblages with differentiated consumption patterns, an active civic elite, and an efficient road network linking rural centres with Mérida. This set of evidence supports the idea of a dynamic inland economy, ar-

28 A *corpus* for the deities in Alto Alentejo in Carneiro 2009.

29 Edmondson 2011.

30 Carneiro – Trapero Fernández 2023.

31 Case study in Bombico *et al.* 2024.

32 Pecci *et al.* 2013; Pecci *et al.* 2018.

33 Coradeschi *et al.* 2023, 353.

34 Pecci *et al.* 2018.

35 Carneiro 2014b.

ticulated through the combination of technical, social, and territorial factors, which allowed Roman Alentejo to play a relevant role in the regional supply of wine.

Production indicators

The analysis of wine production in inland Alentejo requires a methodological approach that combines architectural, ceramic, technological, and analytical evidence. Unlike maritime export models, where *amphorae* constitute the principal marker of volume and commercial reach, in inland economies information must be extracted from other indicators: the operational architecture of wine presses and *cellae vinariae*, the large ceramic containers *(dolia)*, workshop or *officina* stamps, archaeometric evidence of use, and the relationship between *villae* installations and urban supply systems.[36]

The *villae* of inland Alentejo display remarkable diversity in their productive infrastructure, reflecting different scales of production and degrees of investment. In the best-preserved wine presses, the architectural layout reveals advanced technical knowledge: sloped pressing platforms, reception and decantation basins connected by gravity, and rooms with alignments of *dolia defossa* embedded in the floor, arranged to facilitate winemaking and storage.[37]

These spaces were not simple agricultural annexes, but carefully planned structures designed with ergonomic and functional criteria. The flow of must from the press to the basins or *cellae* was achieved by exploiting the natural slope of the terrain, reducing human effort and improving process efficiency. In some *villae*, the separation between 'clean' and 'dirty' areas, one for initial production and another for storage and decantation, suggests a conscious differentiation of functions, a sign of technical standardisation similar to that observed in other regions of the Empire.

The issue becomes more complex when other indicators are considered, such as *lacus* or *calcatoria*, hydraulic structures associated with grape treading or wine deposition. In this respect, water management played a crucial role in the wine economy of Alentejo.[38] The *villae* with higher productive capacity, such as Pisões, display complex hydraulic systems combining cisterns, ponds, and distribution channels. These infrastructures ensured the necessary water supply for washing grapes, cleaning the presses, and maintaining temperature during fermentation.

The architecture of these *cellae vinariae* also reflects the importance of thermal control. The insertion of *dolia* into the ground allowed relatively stable temperatures to be maintained during fermentation and storage, while the partial underground location of some spaces, in semi-basements or partially excavated crypts, reinforced this function. The capacity of such facilities indicates that, at least in certain *villae*, production exceeded domestic consumption and was oriented toward regional distribution circuits.

The *dolia* are the most eloquent material testimony for assessing the scale of wine production in inland Lusitania. These vessels, with globular bodies and wide rims, served both for fermentation and for the storage of wine. Their size and spatial distribution within the *villae* allow volumetric capacities to be estimated and, therefore, to approach the magnitude of production.[39] Although this inference is problematic, it can be deducted that a significant proportion of these small-sized containers are linked to this type of production, especially in *villae* where pressing rooms or *cellae vinariae* are known.

36 Berni – Miró 2013, 72.

37 Teichner 2008, 93–448 for the 'cluster' of cases in Algarve.

38 Trapero Fernández – Carneiro in press.

39 See several cases studies in Quaresma *et al.* 2024; and for sites in Cabeço de Vide, Bombico *et al.* 2024.

Field studies have documented *dolia* with rim diameters generally ranging between 50 and 70 cm, corresponding to average capacities of between 1,000 and 1,600 litres.[40] In *cellae vinariae*, as observed in Catalonia, where traces of several dozen *dolia defossa* are preserved, the combined volumes could reach between 20,000 and 30,000 l, enough to supply nearby urban centres such as Évora or Beja for a year.

Petrographic and geochemical characterisation of coarse ceramics has made it possible to identify the local origin of many *dolia*. In several sites in Upper and Lower Alentejo, the ceramic fabrics exhibit mineral compositions consistent with the geological outcrops of the region, indicating the existence of specialised production workshops, possibly linked to the same *villae* that used them.[41]

Ideally, fragments preserve stamps or *ex officina* inscriptions, which would suggest quality control or an indication of origin. These marks could be interpreted as evidence of a semi-artisanal system of ceramic production organised at the local level, where workshops supplied nearby rural estates. However, such evidence is extremely scarce, which may indicate either its absence or the current lack of systematic research. The study of these marks, although still incipient, opens a path for tracing distribution networks and economic relationships among different productive units.

At the same time, the scarcity of wine *amphorae* in inland cities such as Évora or Beja should not be interpreted as an absence of wine, but rather as the result of a different logistical rationale.[42] Unlike maritime export products, which required standardised containers resistant to sea transport, wine intended for regional consumption could be transported in organic containers such as skins or wooden barrels.[43] These vessels, leaving no durable archaeological trace, explain the apparent 'silence' of the *amphora* record.[44]

The *dolia* functioned in this context as fermentation and storage tanks within the *villae*, while transport to urban markets was carried out using lighter containers. This duality between production container and transport container is characteristic of Roman inland economies, where short-distance trade reduced the need for standardisation.[45]

The assessment of urban ceramic assemblages must therefore include not only *amphorae* but also local coarse ware, fragmentary *dolia* and possible evidence of cooperage or waterproof coatings in storage buildings. These elements constitute the material basis for reconstructing the logistical circuits of wine in inland Lusitania.

Comparative analysis with other regions of the Empire allows the degree of specialisation in Alentejo to be evaluated. In Baetica, maritime trade stimulated the production of standardised *amphorae* such as the Dressel 7–11 or Haltern 70; in Tarraconensis, wine exportation relied on Dressel 2–4 *amphorae*. In contrast, inland Lusitania developed different solutions, based on local containers and short-distance terrestrial circuits.[46]

This divergence should not be interpreted as a deficiency, but rather as an adaptation to the context. While ports required strong and standardised containers, inland markets demanded flexibility and economy of means. The absence of *amphora* standardisation in Alentejo therefore reflects a distinct economic rationality oriented toward efficiency and regional provisioning.

40 Rueda Prunell – Járrega Domínguez 2024.

41 As an example of this kind of studies: Tremoleda Trilla – Rueda Prunell 2024.

42 Holleran 2012.

43 Marlière 2001.

44 Raepsaet 2008, 599.

45 Cheung 2024; Pereira 2017, 179–194.

46 Berni 2011, 86–96; Járrega Domínguez 2018; Mataix Ferrándiz 2024.

Elites and Epigraphy

The study of local elites and their epigraphic projection along the axis formed by Pax Iulia, Ebora and Ammaia makes it possible to understand the social and economic mechanisms that sustained the viticulture of inland Alentejo. Epigraphy constitutes an essential source for reconstructing the hierarchical structure of Lusitanian communities and their forms of integration within the Roman political system.[47] In this context, *curiales*, priests of the imperial cult, *Augustales* and *liberti* appear as key actors in the organisation of production, the redistribution of goods and the articulation of the territory.[48]

The *coloniae* and *municipia* of Lusitania, among them Pax Iulia and Ebora, were characterised by well-structured civic institutions that concentrated political and economic power in the hands of the *curiales*. These members of the *ordo decurionum* performed administrative and judicial functions, financed public works and sponsored religious or festive activities, shaping a sphere of prestige in which political capital was translated into symbolic capital and, frequently, into agricultural investment.

Honorary inscriptions and public dedications from these cities reflect the existence of stable local careers, with magistracies such as *duoviri* or *aediles*, which required personal expenditure and active participation in urban administration. This pattern of euergetism, the voluntary financing of public works and celebrations—strengthened the bond between the elite and the community, while simultaneously consolidating the legitimacy of local power.

From an economic perspective, the *curiales* were owners or administrators of rural *villae* located in territories dependent upon their cities. The interdependence between urban and rural space was manifested both in investments in agricultural infrastructure and in the circulation of goods toward local markets. Within the *villae*, the *dominus fundi* reproduced, in miniature, the hierarchies of the *ordo*, exercising paternalistic control over slave and free labour and projecting his influence across the territory.

The presence of priesthoods of the imperial cult in Lusitania constitutes direct evidence of the degree of Romanisation achieved by the province. The *flamines* and *flaminicae* played an essential role in promoting loyalty to the emperor and in organising public ceremonies, banquets and sacrifices. These practices required significant economic resources and a regular supply of wine, an indispensable element in both religious and convivial rituals.[49]

In cities such as Évora and Beja, inscriptions mentioning *flamines* and *flaminicae* suggest active participation of local families in imperial cults. The performance of these offices entailed high costs but also conferred prestige and social visibility. The *flaminicae*, in particular, represent a noteworthy phenomenon within inland Lusitania, where high-ranking women attained prominent positions in public life through official religion.

The institutionalisation of the imperial cult also generated a continuous demand for wine to be used in libations, banquets, and acts of public beneficence. This ritual consumption reinforced the local wine economy by guaranteeing a stable and socially prestigious market, independent of the fluctuations of interregional trade.

Below the *curiales* and priests, the *seviri Augustales* and *liberti* occupied a key position in the economic and social articulation of Roman Alentejo. The *Augustales* were mostly wealthy freedmen who, after obtaining manumission, gained access to positions of responsibility within the cities, organising festivals, administering resources, and participating in supply networks.

47 Edmondson 2015; Edmondson 2016; Edmondson 2022.

48 Fishwick 2004, 41–70.

49 Fishwick 2004, 351–370.

In the epigraphic record, these figures are frequently associated with donations, public works, or votive dedications. Their role in the inland economy may have been decisive, as they were often responsible for the logistical management of wine and other agricultural products. Their intermediate position, between the curial elite and the popular classes, made them effective mediators between the countryside and the city.

The *liberti* fulfilled functions related to storage, accounting and transport. The social mobility afforded by the Roman system allowed them to accumulate wealth and prestige, transforming them into an essential group for the administration of *villae* and the commercialisation of their products. Their economic activity, documented through funerary and honorary inscriptions, illustrates the existence of a managerial 'middle class', vital for the circulation of goods within inland Lusitania.

Epigraphic evidence can be analysed by city.

In the colony of Pax Iulia, the inscriptions reflect a social fabric dominated by *curiales* with economic liquidity and managerial capacity, able to intervene both in urban administration and in collective provisioning. The inscription, which honours C. Iulius Pedo,[50] *duumvir* and *flamen*, explicitly refers to the financial assistance he provided to the *annona*, indicating his involvement in the urban supply of essential goods. Although the term *annona* usually refers to grain, the reference more broadly denotes logistical capacity, availability of liquid capital, and control over networks of transport and storage, applicable to cereals as well as to other products, including wine. This same profile of economic and organisational power explains the existence of agro-industrial infrastructures in the Pax Iulia hinterland, with presses, *cellae*, and *dolia* identified in *villae* such as São Cucufate or Pisões.

The *Augustales* and *liberti* played a fundamental role as intermediate managers within these networks. The inscription dedicated to L. Marcius Pierus,[51] *Augustalis* of the *colonia* Pacensis and of the *municipium* Eborense, evidences the existence of an interurban network of sociability and business between Beja and Évora. These individuals, often wealthy freedmen, acted as mediators between rural production and urban consumption, managing transport, storage, contracts, and accounting. Likewise, in an inscription attests to C. Iulius C. l. Niger and Iulia C. l. Prima,[52] qualified freedmen and *Augustales*, who represent that professional stratum linked to the technical management of wineries and workshops that historiography associates with a semi-entrepreneurial economy.

Ritual use of wine is also evidenced by mentions of *craterae sacratae* dedicated to deities.[53] These mixing vessels demonstrate public or ritual wine consumption in the context of banquets or libations, implying a constant supply and stable urban demand. Furthermore, the cults of Mithras and Serapis, epigraphically documented,[54] reflect civic sociability expressed through collective banquets.

Lastly, the inscription *ex officina Vincinti*[55] demonstrates the existence of ceramic workshops capable of producing large and functional containers, showing that Beja possessed local technical capacity for manufacturing storage vessels, thereby complementing production from rural *villae*.

In Évora, the social structure was of higher rank than in Beja. The epigraphs reflect a senatorial or curial elite with imperial offices and interprovincial connections, complemented by a notable female presence in priesthoods and a solid network of domestic clienteles. The inscription dedicated

50 CIL II, 53 = IRCP 239.

51 EE 08-02, 00006 = IRCP 241.

52 IRCP 246.

53 CIL II, 101.

54 IRCP 339; CIL II, 46.

55 HEp 1995, 948.

to Q. Iulius Maximus, *quaestor Siciliae*, *tribunus plebis*, *legatus provinciae Narbonensis* and *praetor designatus*,[56] reveals large landholdings whose rental base explains the existence of peri-urban *villae* such as Tourega, with pressing structures and *dolia*.

Similarly, we have the mention of Canidia Albina,[57] a woman of high social rank whose family played a central role in sustaining local cults and civic celebrations. Female priesthoods, such as those of Laberia Galla (municipal or provincial *flaminica)*, and Iunia Verecunda (*flaminica perpetua*),[58] confirm the existence of aristocratic households with sufficient resources to finance banquets and *epulae* where wine was an essential element of ritual and conviviality. Moreover, the inscription of *Laribus domus Q. Sertori*,[59] referring to the *compitalia* and domestic *ludi*, attests to the role of the *domus* in organizing banquets financed with private resources and assisted by freedmen.

In the region of Ammaia, the epigraphic panorama is more discreet yet highly revealing.[60] The inscriptions demonstrate the consolidation of an *ordo decurionalis* and the presence of magistracies and provincial priesthoods that linked the community with imperial administration. One refers to the *municipes Ammaienses* dedicating a monument to L. Verus,[61] while another mentions P. Cornelius Macro,[62] who, after obtaining Roman citizenship, became *quaestor* and *duovir*, an example of social mobility typical of the provincial elites. A further inscription records the name of G. Iulius Vegeto, *flamen provinciae Lusitaniae*,[63] a regional office evidencing wider connections that facilitated inland trade.

Civic cult testimonies such as *Genio oppidi constituti* and annual vow of the *civitas Ammaiensis*[64] confirm the existence of mixed, Romanised elites who regularly spent resources on offerings and banquets, which also implies the consumption of wine in public and religious contexts.

Discussion and conclusion

The conjunction of these indicators of viticulture with the role of the elites constitutes a complex process. The purpose of this study is to clarify what is currently known and to outline the lines of research that remain pending. In any case, it can be stated that a complex network of wine production existed, probably associated with other agricultural or extractive activities such as marble exploitation, whose market focus was not primarily oriented toward export or long-distance distribution beyond the province, but rather toward a pattern of consumption connected to the elites examined in the preceding sections.

In this sense, the *villae* located in Upper Alentejo combined luxurious residential areas with extensive productive sectors, thus constituting true centres of local power. Investments in monumental architecture, baths, mosaics and peristyles coexisted with agricultural complexes equipped with presses, *dolia*, and canalisation systems. This dualism between luxury and functionality epitomises the logic of the Roman elites: to produce wealth in the countryside and to display it in the city.[65]

56 CIL II, 112 = IRCP 382.
57 CIL II, 111 = IRCP 381.
58 CIL II, 114 = IRCP 373[a]; CIL II, 115 = IRCP 373b.
59 CIL II, *00012.
60 Corsi – Vermeulen 2012.
61 CIL II, 158.
62 CIL II, 159.
63 CIL II, 160.
64 IRCP 604; IRCP 615.
65 Carneiro 2014a, vol. 1, 144–152; Carneiro 2014b.

Archaeological excavations in complexes such as Pisões and Horta da Torre have demonstrated that these were not mere leisure estates, but rather multifunctional establishments containing elaborate productive infrastructures. These complexes not only supplied domestic consumption but also generated surpluses capable of sustaining inland commercial exchange.[66]

Following this interpretation, the *villae* were not simply units that organised the territory, but the true focal points of production. By contrast, the cities functioned as the principal centres of consumption. In this respect, the importance of Augusta Emerita, capital of Lusitania, must be reconsidered, as it exerted a decisive influence over the Alentejan territory. As the administrative seat and political centre, it concentrated population, institutions, and a steady demand for essential commodities, including wine. The gravitational pull of Mérida created a hierarchical system of consumption in which intermediate cities such as Évora and Beja acted as logistical intermediaries.[67]

The layout of the overland routes, documented by milestones and ancient descriptions, confirms the existence of western and southern corridors that directly connected the productive regions with the provincial capital. These roads reduced transportation costs and facilitated the regular movement of goods. Within this context, the wine produced in inland Alentejo found a stable market, sustained by urban concentration and the purchasing power of the imperial administration.[68]

The economic model emerging from this territorial configuration corresponds to an internal supply economy, in which the proximity between producing *villae* and consuming centres permitted efficient distribution without the need for major investment in maritime transport or specialised packaging.

The integration of epigraphic evidence within this framework remains a complex and partial process, since it grants access only to a limited segment of society. Nevertheless, the aggregate of available data allows for the understanding that these groups articulated a productive and symbolic system wherein the *villa* functioned as the nucleus of the rural economy, the city as the space of redistribution and prestige and Augusta Emerita as the likely final market that absorbed surpluses. This social and economic model demonstrates that inland Lusitania was not a peripheral area dependent upon the Atlantic harbours,[69] but a territory with its own developmental logic, based on the integration of agricultural production, civic structure, and road networks.

Epigraphic interpretation, complemented by archaeology and historical geography, thus reveals a dense social landscape in which wine played a cohesive economic and cultural role. The inscriptions preserved in stone, the marks impressed on ceramics, and the architectural remains of the *villae* are the material testimonies of a society that transformed its environment into an articulated system of power, identity and prosperity. Caution is nonetheless required, first because of the uneven density of preserved data, which often depends more on the state of research than on actual historical realities. Likewise, the inherent research gaps hinder comprehensive interpretations. Nevertheless, certain hypotheses may be formulated based on the current evidence.

The examination of the offices mentioned in the epigraphic documentation of Pax Iulia, Évora, and Ammaia, and their relationship with Augusta Emerita, allows for discussion of the economic and social scope of wine production and distribution networks in Roman Lusitania. The offices of *duumviri*, *flamines*, *quaestors*, *flaminicae*, *liberti* and *Augustales* provide clear indications of both institutional and private organisation of agricultural production, even though the degree of commercialisation does not correspond to the classical model of an open Mediterranean market. Within this

66 Carneiro 2022; Conejo Delgado 2024, 191–199.

67 Edmondson 2015; Edmondson 2016; Edmondson 2022.

68 Mantas 2012.

69 Peacock – Williams 1986; Alarcão – Mayet 1990; Pinto *et al.* 2016.

context, the epigraphic record reveals a wine production system with a certain market orientation, insofar as surpluses, storage facilities, and interurban circulation existed, yet primarily devoted to regional supply. The absence of evidence for maritime export or long-distance commerce suggests a production system characterised by controlled surplus, regulated by local networks of curial elites and freedman managers who maintained a limited or closed-market economy.

Furthermore, the profile of the documented offices indicates that the administration of production and distribution fell mainly to municipal and provincial elites, rather than to a state bureaucracy of *annona* type. Inscriptions such as that of C. Iulius Pedo,[70] which mentions the *annona*, might suggest a link to public provisioning, but in reality, it represents an expression of civic euergetism, wherein prominent individuals contributed from their private wealth to guarantee urban supply. There is no evidence that Lusitania maintained a system of wine extraction intended for the army or for Rome, as is attested in other provinces more closely integrated into the maritime routes of the Empire.

The analysis of priesthoods, particularly female ones such as those of Laberia Galla (municipal or provincial *flaminica*) and Iunia Verecunda *(flaminica perpetua)*, as well as the role of the *Augustales* and *liberti*, demonstrates that much of the economic and symbolic activity related to wine was associated with ritual and prestige consumption. The *epulae*, civic banquets, and religious celebrations entailed the purchase, storage, and distribution of wine as a central element of Roman sociability. In this sense, wine possessed not only economic value but also cultural and political significance, serving as a vehicle of public visibility, an instrument of power, and a reinforcement of local hierarchies.

Altogether, the collection of offices and epigraphic evidence points to a mixed system in which wine production fulfilled economic, social, and symbolic functions simultaneously. The hierarchical structure of Lusitanian society, with *curiales* providing liquidity, *liberti* managing logistics and priests or *flaminicae* acting as ritual consumers, generated a closed circuit of production and redistribution. Wine was produced in large rural *villae* equipped with specialised infrastructure, but its circulation responded more to a logic of prestige and social redistribution than to an open market. The role of Augusta Emerita as a regional centre of consumption reinforces this interpretation: it acted as a destination for surpluses managed by local elites, not as a point of imperial export. Therefore, the Lusitanian wine system reflects a model of elite production with redistributive and ritual functions, in which wine was simultaneously a commodity, a political instrument, and a symbol of belonging to the Roman civic order.

Among the most promising perspectives is the possibility of establishing prosopographical links between the inscriptions of *curiales*, *flamines*, and *Augustales* and the *villae* identified archaeologically. If onomastic or territorial correspondences can be established between the names recorded in the epigraphy and the productive sites, it would be possible to construct an authentic social cartography of inland viticulture.[71]

Likewise, comparative study with other provinces, particularly Baetica and Tarraconensis, will make it possible to contextualise the Lusitanian model within the broader imperial typologies of regional economies. The peculiar combination of self-sufficiency, proximity, and civic representation that characterises Alentejo may offer interpretative keys applicable to other regions of the Roman West.[72]

Finally, the ethnographic continuity of *vinho de talha* in modern Alentejo poses a line of research that transcends the Roman chronological framework. Although the present technical forms are not

70 CIL II, 53.

71 Edmondson 2024.

72 Trapero Fernández – Carneiro 2023.

direct continuations, the persistence of the use of large, buried jars and a material culture centred on clay fermentation demonstrates the long-term durability of a model adapted to both environment and society.

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HEp: *Hispania Epigraphica.* Madrid.

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