

Urbanism on the Iberian Peninsula during the High Empire

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The title paints an image of ancient Roman cities, possibly similar to what we know. The amphitheatre of Tarragona, the theatre of Sagunto, the temple of Évora or the aqueduct of Segovia might have popped up in our minds when thinking about Roman urbanism on the Iberian Peninsula. These cities were studied among 430 others in the sub-project 'Civitates Hispaniae' focused on the Iberian Peninsula within the framework of the ERC-funded project 'An Empire of 2,000 cities'.¹ This paper is based on the research done within the sub-project Civitates Hispaniae, defended as a PhD-thesis December 2018.²

The principal aim of the thesis is to investigate the urban systems of the Iberian Peninsula. In addition to establishing the nature of the urban system, the thesis also aims to explain continuities and discontinuities between the pre-Roman and Roman settlement system. Furthermore, the geographical distribution of the cities has been studied, taking into consideration size, geographical and climatological factors and the networks created by roads and maritime connections. Obviously, this surpasses the possibilities of this paper. Therefore, the paper will only provide a broad overview of the urban settlement pattern and how this has been researched.

First the definition of what can be considered urban has to be established. A lengthy debate has been and is held on this subject. Even when only looking at the debate on the definition of the ancient city a multitude of books can be filled. Rather than boring the reader with yet another historiography we can sum up the debate held since Fustel de Coulanges.³ Within the research the definition of a city has not followed the classical path, covering the existent debate and then come to a new definition. Rather than defining the city beforehand the decision has been made to use a threefold bottom-up approach.

Firstly, we look at the civic autonomy of cities.⁴ Put differently, it has to be established whether a settlement was considered self-governing within the Roman Empire. The evidence for this self-governing nature has been found in epigraphy mentioning a juridical status, magistracies or voting tribes. In addition, the literary sources have been used to find evidence for possible privileges granted or evidence for acceptance of a territory by the Roman state. In the case of the Iberian Peninsula this approach is very fruitful due to the grant of *ius Latii* by Vespasian.⁵

Secondly, archaeological evidence was collected to define the functions of settlements that might have given them a central role within the settlement system. The first step taken here is to regard monumentality, following the standard approach in defining urban centres.⁶ Within the research the focus has been on *fora*, spectacle buildings and to a lesser degree *thermae*. As the focus on monumentality only includes settlements of self-governing communities and does not take other possible functions in account the scope had to be broadened. In order to include possible central settlements the research also focussed on

port, mining and garrison settlements, as well as *mansiones* and *mutationes* to establish whether these functions could have led to the development of urban centres.

Lastly, the size of settlements has been investigated.⁷ The idea of the investigation of sizes was to establish whether we could use this as a definiens for the city on the Iberian Peninsula. However, quite quickly it became apparent that the cities of the Iberian Peninsula are small, especially in Baetica, where cities are found that barely reach 5 hectares. As such this third element, which is often used as a definiens⁸, has been dropped. Nonetheless, the data has been collected and is used to understand the hierarchical and geographical dispersion of the cities. Due to the aim of this paper size and monumentality will not be treated, this can be found in the doctoral thesis.

The starting point for the collection of the self-governing communities of the Iberian Peninsula has been the *Historia Naturalis* by Pliny. Obviously, the Plinian lists have to be scrutinised before accepting these as cities. One great advantage of Pliny for the Iberian Peninsula is the fact he has been a governor of Hispania Citerior, and as such he knows this specific province quite well.⁹ Pliny mentions the number of *populi*, *civitates* and/or *oppida* per province: Baetica 175 *oppida*, Citerior 293 *civitates* and 179 *oppida* – I will return to this later – and Lusitania 45 *populi*. Unfortunately Pliny decides not to bother his reader with all the barbaric names of the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁰ Moreover, for those places he does mention by name, he often does not refer to its juridical status or even if it was a self-governing community at all.

In addition to Pliny, other classical sources have been examined for references to cities. The Geography by Ptolemy seems the most promising source to get a better understanding of Pliny's list of cities. Both sources have often been used in tandem to get to a more precise list of possible cities on the Iberian Peninsula.¹¹ However, Ptolemy is even more problematic than Pliny. Not only because his promising coordinate system falters but especially because his list includes a multitude of hapaxes. In addition to these problems, his list clearly includes settlements that must be considered secondary agglomerations. However, combining Pliny, Ptolemy and other classical literary sources (among others: Mela, Strabo and Livy) will lead to a list of places that were deemed important enough to be mentioned.

To test the relevance of places mentioned in the classical sources, epigraphy and numismatics has been taken into account. Epigraphic evidence has been the most useful and trustworthy source for many of the self-governing statuses. First and foremost, they often refer to the granted privileges such as *colonia* or *municipium*. In some cases, we cannot establish the granted privilege but clear evidence for a self-governing community can be found, such as reference to a *res publica*. Other clear evidence is the *termini* of the communities, indicating that the Roman state accepted their claims on a territory and as a self-governing community. In addition to this clear proof, we find magistracies (e.g. *duovir*, *aedil*, *quaestor*) indicating that communities had a juridical status. Lastly, we can add the voting tribes as indicators of a possible privileged community. Numismatic evidence only added evidence to already established self-governing communities.

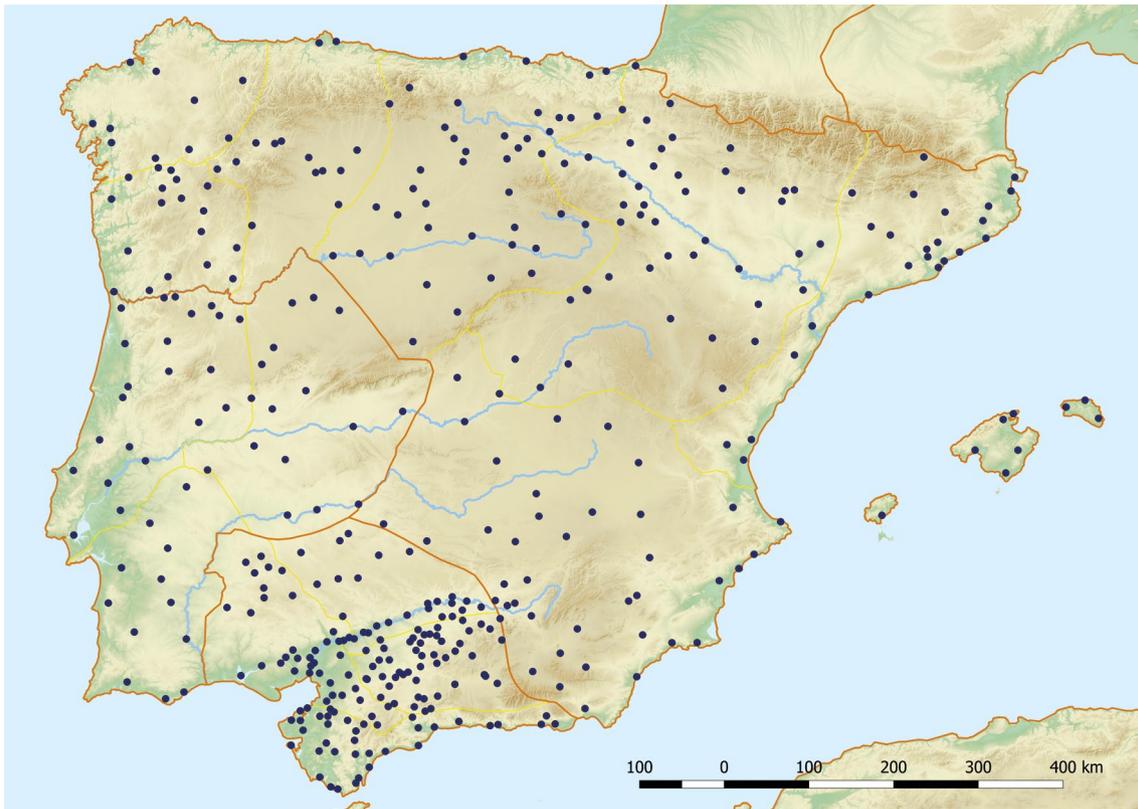


Fig. 1: Located self-governing communities of the Iberian Peninsula.

After the collection of all the data, a total list of 430 possible self-governing *civitates* has been established (fig. 1). Obviously, this is far from a final number, if we take the total number of *populi*, *civitates* and/or *oppida* mentioned by Pliny as the definite number, only 83% of all self-governing communities have been found within this study. Nonetheless, it has become clear that the grant of *ius Latii* by the Flavians has led to the inclusion of a plethora of communities. Not only did we find cities as one has in mind when thinking about Roman cities but also communities for which no clear centre can be established, which were definitely considered self-governing by the Roman state.

In 1873 Detlefsen already recognised that Pliny's account for Citerior had some discrepancies:¹²

“[...] the province has 293 *civitates* besides those dependent on others; 179 *oppida*, of these, twelve are colonies, thirteen, towns with the rights of Roman citizens, eighteen with the old Latin rights, one confederate, and 135 tributary.”¹³

Pliny mentions 293 *civitates* for the province and then continues that it had 179 *oppida*. Since he also mentions that some communities were dependent on others the standard interpretation is that Citerior had 179 cities to which 293 were made dependent.¹⁴ Only

few scholars have realised that Pliny did not refer to 293 dependent *civitates* but to the total of *civitates* in the province being 293.¹⁵ This can be proven rather simply, in his detailed account for each of the separate *conventus* the *civitates* add up to 293.¹⁶

However, this less standard interpretation of 293 *civitates* leads to another discrepancy. We find 293 *civitates* of which only 179 appear to have an *oppidum*. What follows is that the remaining 114 *civitates* had no *oppidum* or simply put a central place. These 114 *civitates* are referred to as *ländliche Gemeinden* or as rural *civitates*.¹⁷ Not only did Detlefsen recognise the discrepancy in Pliny and the fault in the standard interpretation, he also found evidence for this non-urban *civitas* in Ptolemy. Detlefsen recognised that several of the Plinian *populi* mentioned for Citerior reoccurred in Ptolemy with *Fora* and *Aquae* as the ‘polis’ in Ptolemy. For example: Βιβαλῶν – Φόρος Βιβαλῶν; Λιμικῶν – Φόρος Λιμικῶν; Ναρβασῶν – Φόρος Ναρβασῶν; Τουροδῶν – Ὑδατα Φλαουία; Κουακερνῶν – Ὑδατα Κουακερνῶν.

Detlefsen argues that these places were indeed not cities, and thus not included in the list of *oppida* by Pliny, but were rural settlements that functioned as places to gather when needed. Logically these would be places with a regional function, such as natural springs or market places.¹⁸ It is interesting that these non-nucleated *civitates* are mostly found in the northwestern regions of the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁹ For this region Pereira Menaut has argued that the Roman state enfranchised tribes as *civitates*.²⁰ As these tribes consisted of a group of heterarchical *castros* these *civitates* had no clear urban centre.²¹

Spanish scholars such as Oller Guzmán and Pérez Losada have developed this idea of a *civitas* without an *oppidum* or *urbs* separately from Detlefsen.²² Oller has dubbed this *civitas sine urbe*, a very clear name for the concept. However, the use of Latin might lead to the idea that this is a concept that can be found in classical literature. Therefore, I propose to use the term “dispersed *civitas*”. I consider this a better term as it also allows for the inclusion of different forms of *civitates*, which do not conform to the classical *territorium et urbs* model.²³ Interestingly, the Spanish debate on this concept of dispersed *civitates* has been linked to the debate on the Anglo-Saxon debate on ‘small towns’. However, this debate is not focused on the smaller cities, it focuses mostly on smaller secondary cities and their role within the larger urban settlement pattern. The use of ‘small towns’ is therefore somewhat confusing and one should link this with the Francophone debate on *agglomérations secondaires*.

The debate on secondary agglomerations and the possibility of cities, or towns, within this category has a long history.²⁴ Within this history, a variety of terms has been used and proposed. Among others, the use of Latin terminology, such as *vicus* and *conciliabulum*. Similar to the case described above, the use of Latin is problematic as it supposes a clear classical origin of the concept. However, in this case the use of the specific terminology here is even more problematic as it is classical terminology that is used in a (slightly) different way. Therefore, the use of secondary agglomerations seems to be the most logical choice. It clarifies the concept, agglomerations which are

secondary to the primary centre (and not small primary towns). Moreover, the use of secondary agglomerations allows for the Anglophone debate to be included into the Romance debate which uses: agglomérations secondaires,²⁵ aglomerados secundarios²⁶ and aglomeraciones secundarias.²⁷

Despite the presence of terminology in Portuguese and Spanish for the secondary agglomerations the debate is, besides the publications mentioned here, inexistent. As a result, we have to turn to the Francophone and Anglophone debates in order to understand the nature of secondary agglomerations. Despite or because of the bottom-up approach of the different publications, within both debates there has not been any consensus on the nature of the secondary agglomeration. In 2006, Rust has compared the 127 sites of Britain considered a ‘small town’ by scholars and came to the conclusion that only on 14% of these sites is considered to be a ‘small town’ by all scholars.²⁸ The disparity of the Anglophone debate is contrasted to the Francophone debate where a consensus has been found in the categorisation presented by Mangin and Tassaux.²⁹

Based on the consideration of the three debates, here including the small debate on the Iberian Peninsula as one, a categorisation has been proposed (table 1).³⁰

Town-like settlements	Specialised settlements	Agricultural settlements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Street network • Urban Core defence • Distinctive zones • Range of building types; private and public • Range of workshop and craft industry • Large organised cemeteries • Various types of epigraphy • Elite housing • Forms of monumentality • Contributae, vici and castella 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialised functions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Spas/religious centres – Specialist extractive/manufacturing – Roadside settlements with imposed military/official functions – Ports – Large road stations • Strong point defences • Industrial activities • Often with street networks • Increased agricultural emphasis • Absence of zonation • No administrative function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of defences • Absence of specialised function • Buildings lack sophistication • Public buildings only of the religious type or small bathhouses • Ribbon development only • Focus on agriculture with only limited non-agriculture elements • Small road stations

Table 1: Categorisation of secondary agglomerations.³¹

Rather than using vague terminology for the categorisation, the choice has been made to refer to town-like settlements. Although, town-like can be considered vague in itself, the choice for this terminology is to allow for some room in drawing the line between 'real' cities and 'small' towns. This town-like category includes recognisable organised settlements with central place functions beside the *civitas* 'capital'. The secondary settlements recognised by the Romans, such as contributed *civitates*, *vici* and *castellae*, are included within the category.

Specialised settlements are those settlements that became a central place within a *civitas* due to their function, such as natural springs, ports or roadside settlements (*mansiones* and *mutationes*). These settlements have no clear organisation, but have grown in an organic manner. As these settlements have a clear non-agricultural function for a larger region, they must be included into the urban settlement system as the lowest order settlements.

The agricultural settlements are small conglomerations of houses where one might find little differentiation of labour. These could have had very small-scale production for a larger region, but the settlement itself is mainly aimed at agricultural output. These settlements should not be included into a research into the urban settlement system, as these settlements have no role as central places.

The secondary agglomerations of the Iberian Peninsula have not yet gotten the attention they deserve. Individual settlements have been studied and a few scholars have attempted to start the research into these settlements.³² However, so far no analysis of the secondary settlements in relation to their primary settlement has been done.

The urbanism on the Iberian Peninsula is not easily defined. Due to the grant of *ius Latii* the *civitates* of Hispania form a kaleidoscope of settlements systems. In addition to what one expects to find, the instantly recognisable Roman city with its monumentality, the self-governing communities of the Iberian Peninsula include non-urban communities. This non-urban category, here dubbed the dispersed *civitas*, was based on smaller settlements. Often multiple settlements that worked in tandem to control (religiously, economic or administrative) the territory of the whole community. It is interesting that these smaller settlements would have to be considered secondary agglomerations if they were located in the territories of the well-known large cities as Rome, Carthago and Antioch mentioned above or Tarraco, Italica and Augusta Emerita.

In contrast to the well-studied secondary agglomerations of Britain and Gaul, those of the Iberian Peninsula have never drawn much attention. As a result, there is no categorisation available nor a good idea of which settlements should be included in a research focusing on this settlement category. However, due to the function of these agglomerations as central places within the standard, but especially within the dispersed *civitates*, this category is in need of more research. After the study of the *civitates Hispaniae* it is time to start an extensive study of the secondary agglomerations in order to grasp the complete structure of urbanism on the Iberian Peninsula.

Notes

¹ de Ligt et al. 2014.

² Houten 2018. See also: Houten forthcoming; Houten 2017.

³ Fustel de Coulanges 1864; Weber 1922; Childe 1950; García y Bellido 1966; Finley 1977; Kolb 1984; Laurence et al. 2011.

⁴ This is the starting point for most research into the urban system of the Roman Iberian Peninsula. Here only the most relevant publications: McElderry 1918; Vittinghoff 1952; Galsterer 1971; Abascal Palazón – Espinosa 1989; González Fernández 1999.

⁵ Plin. NH 3, 30. See for the discussions on *ius Latii*: McElderry 1918; Braunert 1966; Montenegro 1975; d’Ors – d’Ors 1988; Morales Rodríguez 2000; Andreu Pintado 2004.

⁶ Already in Pausanias the idea of monumentality as proof for a *polis* can be found in his account on Panopeus: 10.4.1 Monumentality as a defining element can be found in: Salmon 1969, 27; Alföldy 1987, 120; Laurence et al. 2011.

⁷ General publications on sizes have been used to start the collection: Almagro-Gorbea 1987; Almagro-Gorbea – Dávila 1995; Carreras Monfort 1996; Keay 1998; Taracena 2007; Keay – Earl 2011; Carreras Monfort 2014.

⁸ Wirth 1964, 5; Mersch 1997; Cuco i Giner 2008.

⁹ Syme 1969, 215. 225.

¹⁰ Plin. NH 3, 28.

¹¹ McElderry 1918, 77; Abascal Palazón – Espinosa 1989, 73; Andreu Pintado 2004, 117.

¹² Detlefsen 1873, 604.

¹³ Plin. NH 3, 18.

¹⁴ Marquardt 1851; Carreras Monfort 1996, 102; Mangas Manjarrés 1996, 51; Marzano 2011, 207; Le Roux 2014, 179.

¹⁵ McElderry 1918, 77 and Detlefsen of course.

¹⁶ Houten 2018, 78.

¹⁷ Detlefsen 1873, 604; McElderry 1918, 73.

¹⁸ Detlefsen 1873, 608. See for a more extensive treaty of this idea: Houten 2017; Houten 2018, 109ff.

¹⁹ Houten forthcoming.

²⁰ Pereira Menaut 1990, 45.

²¹ Pereira Menaut 1982, 255. The enfranchisement of the tribes and their castros can be found in the Edict of Bierzo and the Tabula Lougeiorum. See also: Ortiz de Urbina 1996.

²² Pérez Losada 2002; Oller Guzmán 2011; Oller Guzmán 2014.

²³ For example the nomadic urbanism model see: Martínez Caballero 2010, 141; Poux 2014, 163.

²⁴ Amongst others: Oelmann 1922; Todd 1970; Mangin et al. 1986. For a complete treaty on this subject see: Houten 2018, 136 and Houten 2017, 691.

²⁵ Mangin et al. 1986; Maurin 1990; Mangin – Tassaux 1992.

²⁶ Alarcão et al. 1996; Pérez Losada 2002.

²⁷ Fernández Ochoa et al. 2003. The works by Oller Guzmán could be included as he aims at linking his work to the debate on small towns.

²⁸ Rust 2006, 12. See Houten 2018, 137 for the collection of the most common categorizations within the Anglophone debate.

²⁹ Mangin – Tassaux 1992.

³⁰ See Houten 2018, 142.

³¹ See Houten 2018, 142.

³² Alarcão et al. 1996; Pérez Losada 2002; Fernández Ochoa et al. 2003.

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Fig. 1: by the author.

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