SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE HISPANIC PROVINCES IN THE REPUBLICAN PERIOD

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It would be pleasant, in offering a paper on social mobility within a programme on the impact of the Roman empire, to be able to set out before you a substantial quantity of data, from which the truth about the effects of the Roman presence in the Iberian peninsula during the period of the republic might emerge, pure, simple and instantly recognisable. Such a pleasure, however, must be forgone. That is not only because, in the well-known observation of Oscar Wilde, the truth is rarely pure and never simple, though it is the case that this observation is peculiarly apt to the situation I am about to describe; but also because what counts as social mobility in the particular case of the Hispanic provinces in the period of the Roman republic is rather less clear than in some of the other areas and periods that will be considered in this volume. What follows is better described as murky, complex and of doubtful recognisability.

Some of the difficulties of this subject are common to a study of social mobility in other areas and periods. Foremost is the lack of appropriate evidence, a lack which is notably acute in the case of the Spanish provinces in the republican period, for which there is not only very little literary evidence but also, compared with the later periods, hardly any epigraphic material either. One effect of this, as will shortly appear, is the temptation to exploit to an excessive extent such evidence as there is. A further problem, and again one not exclusive to this time and place, is that of identifying the status of individuals, once those individuals have been found. There are, as again will be seen, particular twists to this problem that apply to the period under consideration, but it is of course common enough in one form or another in all such investigations.

There is one matter, however, which presents itself more sharply in the case of these provinces in the republican period than in other times and places, and that is just what is meant by social mobility, and in particular which society and what sort of mobility we are talking about. The parameters of the questions involved are fairly easily sketched: Is the society within which mobility is observed Roman society or indigenous? Is the locale (and I mean

purely in geographic terms) Iberian or Italian? Are those who are involved Roman, Italian or local?

The first category to consider is that of the indigenous inhabitants and their relationship with Rome. As will become clear is the case in many of the groups we shall be looking at, there are uncertainties of status here, which immediately complicate even the small amount of evidence we can use. The immediate complication is that the use of Roman names does not necessarily indicate the possession of Roman citizenship. This is clearest in the case of the famous inscription, in which Cn. Pompeius Strabo announces the enfranchisement in his camp at Asculum of a number Spanish cavalrymen in the course of the Social War.¹ Here, it would seem, is a straightforward case of a group of indigenous Spaniards gaining social prestige through the acquisition of citizenship; and no doubt that is so. It must also be noted, however, that the group of those gaining citizenship is not completely homogenous. From the point of view of this paper, the most obvious variant lies in the names of the *turma Salluitana* (as the cavalry squadron is called). They are listed on the inscription according to the town or region from which they have come, and the names consist of a name and a filiation. The places and names of tribes, where they can be identified, seem to come from the central Ebro valley.² In the case of the three soldiers described as *Ilerdenses*, however, the names given are [Q.] Otacilius Suisetarten f., Cn. Cornelius Nesille f. and P. [F]abius Enasagin f. It seems not improbable that these three men took their Latinate names from Romans serving with Cn. Pompeius, since a M'. and a L. Otacilius appear on a list of the *consilium* that Strabo consulted before making this decree, as do a Cn. Cornelius and a M. Fabius. The puzzle is why they alone should be bearing Roman names on this bronze tablet. Although a number of explanations have been given, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that these three had already been using these names before they were granted citizenship, since their change in status is what is recorded in the inscription. This is confirmed by the fact that, unlike the undoubted Roman citizens listed in the *consilium*, the *Ilerdenses* are given no Roman tribal designation, which certainly suggests that (like the other members of the *turma Salluitana*) they were not members of a voting

¹ ILS 8888; ILLRP 515

² See the notes in N. Criniti, *L'eprigrafe di Asculum di Gn. Pompeo Strabone* (Milan 1970; additional notes in a mantissa, published in Milan in 1980). Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 3.24, records that the *colonia* of Caesaraugusta (modern Zaragoza) was previously called Salduba, and lists several of the tribal names among those attached to it.

tribe, and not *cives Romani*. If so, three of the thirty whose names are recorded had already availed themselves of the benefits of the Roman nomenclature, and presumably had done so because of the social benefits that this would bring, either during their military service, or, more probably in view of the fact that all three are from the one town of Ilerda, in their local context. This shows that the expectation of improvement of social and perhaps political status was seen to depend not only on the reality of identification with the city of Rome through citizenship but also the appearance of that identification through the use of Roman names.

The Ilerdenses of the Asculum tablet are not the only examples of this pattern of a Romanising tendency which did not depend directly on a grant of *civitas*. When, during the Sertorian war in the 70s BC, L. Cornelius Balbus was enfranchised by Pompey and the Fabii of Saguntum by Q. Metellus Pius³, they did not take their *tria nomina* from the generals who gave them their citizenship, and the most probable explanation of this is that even before their enfranchisement they used the names by which they were subsequently known. The pattern seems to continue into the period of the Caesarian wars. After the battle of Munda, the Pompeians in Hispalis, looking for aid from Lusitania, approached a certain Caecilius Niger, who is called *hominem barbarum* by the author of the *Bellum Hispaniense*⁴, and who, despite his name, is unlikely to have been a Roman citizen at this date.

Although the use of a Roman name without the citizenship represents a form of social mobility, potential or actual, it is hardly surprising that in the cases we know of, the use of the names was followed by the more concrete indication of such mobility, represented by the acquisition of citizenship. Indeed in all the cases we have considered, with the exception of Caecilius Niger, the contexts in which we meet them relate to the fact (disputed in the case of Balbus) that a Roman commander has, on the basis of his *imperium*, admitted them to the Roman citizen body. What we cannot know, of course, is the extent to which this was a frequent progression, nor just how many non-Roman members of the indigenous population were, during the republican period, using Roman names. It is unlikely, however, that Caecilius Niger was unique; and the fact that the author of the *Bellum Hispaniense* makes no comment about the oddity of his status (unless one

³ Cicero, *pro Balbo* 3.6 and 22.50-51; R. C. Knapp, 'The origins of provincial prosopography in the west', *Ancient Society* 9 (1978), 187-222 at 192-3

⁴ *De bello hispaniensi* 35

counts calling him *barbarus*) suggests that his case was not particularly unusual. Nor, indeed, would one expect it to be. This unacknowledged appropriation of “Roman-ness” is parallel to another phenomenon to be observed in the urban settlements in Iberia in the same period. Several towns which had no status in Roman terms had by the end of the Caesarian wars built public buildings which echoed the Roman style. To mention only two from the same area from which the *turma Salluitana* itself was drawn, Botorrita (ancient Contrebia Belaisca) had a large public building, face with a set of classicising columns, and Azaila, also in the Ebro valley, possessed baths and a Roman-style temple, and in each case these pre-dated the desruction of these settlements in the course of the Ilerda camapaign.⁵ A parallel may also be found in the use at Contrebia of the Roman formulary process to provide the structure for the resolution of a water dispute for a case which involved no Roman citizens other than the proconsul, C. Valerius Flaccus, who issued the *formula*, and was not an application of *ius civile*, since it did not concern *cives Romani*. The bronze which contains this remarkable case is dated to 87 BC, just two years after the Asculum inscription.⁶ In these cases (and there are of course other instances which might be cited from elsewhere in the peninsula), there are clear signs of the acquisition and acceptance of things Roman which are not related directly to obtaining citizenship. It is highly probable that in many of these instances the evidence is reflecting the intervention of the Romans in support of one group among others in a local context. This is most evident in the case of the *tabula Contrebiensis*, where the conflict over water supplies between various groups is the basis of the dispute, and it can hardly be a coincidence that the group which are successful in this instance are the Salluienses, whose name provided the title for the *turma Salluitana* who were admitted to citizenship by Pompeius Strabo. The pattern is the same as that seen from the opposite point of view in Cicero’s attacks on Verres, who, it is clear, had been supporting his Sicilian clients to the detriment of those who subsequently complained to Cicero. This set of relationships with the Roman authorities on the spot was evidently intended to bring about forms of social mobility (and succeeded in doing so), but within a context that was

⁵ Botorrita: A. Beltrán and A. Tovar, *Contrebia Belaisca I: El bronce con alfabeto “iberico” de Botorrita* (Zaragoza 1982), pp 15-33. Azaila: M. Beltrán, *Arqueología y historia de las ciudades antiguas de Cabezo de Alcalá de Azaila (Teruel)* (Zaragoza 1976).

⁶ G. Fatás, *Contrebia Belaisca II: Tabula Contrebiensis* (Zaragoza 1980); P. Birks, A. Rodger and J. S. Richardson, ‘Further aspects of the *tabula Contrebiensis*’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 74 (1984), 45-73.

essentially local, not Roman, both in terms of geography and of social structure.

If we consider the same category of indigenous inhabitants, but shift the geographical context to Rome, the evidence becomes even more scanty. The first person described in the literary sources as a Spaniard active in Rome is Q. Varius, the tribune of 90 BC, who introduced the notorious *lex Varia*, intended to allow the prosecution of those who had aided the Italian allies at the outset of the Social War, and who was condemned under that very law in the following year and committed suicide by hanging himself.⁷ It is in the context of the accusation of the *princeps senatus*, M. Aemilius Scaurus, that the matter of Varius' origins emerge most sharply. Scaurus, an old, sick man, attends the tribunal, and, in response to the charge, answers (in slightly different terms in the various sources): "Varius, the Spaniard, accuses Aemilius Scaurus, the *princeps senatus*, of calling the allies to arms; Scaurus denies it. Who, citizens, would you rather believe?" Scaurus, needless to say, was acquitted. For our purposes, it is notable that some of the sources have Scaurus describe Varius as *Hispanus*, while others call him *Sucronensis*, that is from a town in the region of the river Sucro, the modern Júcar.⁸ The significance of this is further underlined by a remark of Valerius Maximus, who states that he had the *cognomen* Hybrida, because of his doubtful claim to citizenship.⁹ Doubtful or not (and it must be admitted that this story sounds as though it has been influenced by Scaurus' *bon mot*), Varius reached the tribunate, and was recognised by Cicero as a powerful and effective orator, even if an undesirable person.¹⁰ Of the route by which Varius reached the citizenship, we know nothing.

The second individual in this category we have met already. It is, of course, L. Cornelius L.f. Balbus, who reached the consulship in 40 BC as suffect, and is recorded by the elder Pliny as being the first of those from outside Italy to hold the office. Pliny indeed describes him as born *in oceano*, which makes the point exactly.¹¹ His nephew, L. Cornelius P.f. Balbus, served with

⁷ Cicero, *Brutus* 305; *De natura deorum* 3.81; Valerius Maximus 8.6.4.

⁸ *Hispanus*: Asconius, *In Scaurianam* 19-20 (C); *Sucronensis*: Valerius Maximus 3.7.8; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 5.12.10; [Victor], *De viris illustribus* 72.11.

⁹ Valerius Maximus 8.6.4: *propter obscurum ius ciuitatis Hybrida cognominatus*.

¹⁰ Cicero, *De oratore* 1.117; *Brutus* 221.

¹¹ Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 7.136: *primus externorum atque etiam in oceano genitorum usus illo honore, quem maiores Latio quoque negaverint*. See T. P. Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate* (Oxford 1971), no. 137.

his uncle with the Caesarian forces in Spain, and went on to consular rank and to hold the pontificate under Augustus. Velleius Paterculus describes him correctly as a Spaniard, and not an immigrant to Spain, *non Hispaniensis natus, sed Hispanus*.¹² The Balbi were clearly native Spaniards who “got on” in Rome at the end of the republic and the beginning of the empire; but they were equally clearly exceptional. The extent of their exceptionality can be seen from the way in which Spanish origin is used in the same period as an insult, whether by the poet Catullus, in his assaults on Lesbia’s lover, Egnatius, wit his unnaturally white teeth¹³, or on L. Decidius Saxa, pejoratively described by Cicero as being a Celtiberian, but almost certainly of Italian descent.¹⁴

Saxa brings us to another group who experienced geographical mobility, and in some cases social mobility also, as a result of the Roman presence in the peninsula, those who emigrated from Italy to the provinces. A considerable number of names are known from the literary sources, especially from the accounts in the Caesarian corpus of the wars in Spain in the 40s BC, and others emerge from numismatic and epigraphic evidence.¹⁵ Such people will have come to the peninsula for a variety of reasons, no doubt often because of involvement with the military activities or because of trading links. That they stay there, however, is interesting, and must often be because they reckoned to improve their position from that which they left in Italy as a result. In some cases at least, this had led to an interesting example of social mobility. When Caesar left Spain in 49 BC in order to pursue the Pompeian forces into Greece, he left in charge of *Hispania Ulterior* Q. Cassius Longinus. Cassius made himself very unpopular in the province by extorting money from the wealthier classes by means of fraud, and by enrolling a further legion, which not only resulted in some being recruited but also to additional costs being levied on province as a whole.¹⁶ This led to an attempted assassination at Corduba in 48, which was master-minded by some of his own staff. The author of the *Bellum Alexandrinum* makes it

¹² Velleius Paterculus 2.51.3. See Wiseman 1971, op.cit. (n. 11) no. 138.

¹³ Catullus 37 and 39.

¹⁴ Cicero, *Philippicae* 11.5.12, 13.13.27. See R. Syme, ‘Who was Decidius Saxa?’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 27 (1937), 127-37 (= *Roman Papers* 1 (Oxford 1979), 31-41).

¹⁵ Ma. Amalia Marin Díaz, *Emigración, colonización y municilaización en la Hispania republicana* (Granada 1988), 171-2, lists forty-one examples from literary sources, though it is not clear that all are *Hispanienses*. Epigraphic evidence continues to provide new instances, such as M. Stlaccius from Úbeda, bearing a name which originates in Campania (*HEp* 6.624 (= *HEp* 5.524); cf. *ILLRP* 801).

¹⁶ *De bello alexandrino* 48-50.

clear that the central group among the conspirators was made up of men from the town of Italica.¹⁷ In the confusion that followed, one of the conspirators, L. Laterensis, convinced that Cassius was indeed dead, ran to the camp near-by, which contained a legion of soldiers born in Spain (the *legio vernacula*) and the second legion. These, Laterensis knew, particularly hated Cassius, and indeed he had a rapturous reception, being hoisted to the platform and declared praetor by the mob; for (as the author of the *Bellum Alexandrinum* observes, “no one who was born in the province, as was the case with the *legio vernacula*, or had become *provincialis* as a result of being there a long time, which included those in the second legion, felt differently from the whole of the province in their hatred of Cassius.”¹⁸ He further clarifies this point by mentioning that the twenty-first and thirtieth legions, which came to Corduba to help the wounded Cassius, had only recently been recruited in Italy by Caesar and sent to bolster the troops under Cassius’ command.

The precise make-up of the *legio vernacula* has been a matter of dispute¹⁹, but it would appear that the writer is here drawing a distinction between two sets of Roman citizens, those who had by birth or by prolonged stay become *provinciales*, and those who had only recently arrived from Italy. The attitude of the first group showed a primary loyalty to the area in which they were born or with which they had become identified; that of the second, to Rome and their Roman commanding officer. It would not be surprising to find similar views to those of the first group among the Roman citizen inhabitants of towns such as Italica, and also in Hispalis (modern Sevilla) or Corduba, which although not at that date Roman *coloniae* or *municipia* had substantial numbers of Roman citizens, comprising a *conventus civium Romanorum*.²⁰

The picture of social mobility in the Roman provinces in Iberia at the end of the republic is, then, a mixed one. On the one hand, indigenous inhabitants

¹⁷ *De bello alexandrino* 52.4: erant enim omnes Italicenses.

¹⁸ *De bello alexandrino* 53.5: nemo enim aut in provincia natus, ut vernaculae legionis milites, aut diuturnitate iam factus provincialis, quo in numero erat secunda legio, non cum omni provincia consenserat in odio Cassii.

¹⁹ See, for example, A. T. Fear, ‘The Vernacular Legion of Hispania Ulterior’, *Latomus* 50 (1991), 808–21, who argues that it consisted on native non-citizen Spaniards; but this makes the interpretation of this passage difficult.

²⁰ Hispalis: Caesar, *De bello civile* 2.20.5. Corduba: Caesar, *De bello civile* 2.19.2; *De bello alexandrino* 57.5.

can be seen to be becoming more “Roman” in a variety of ways, which often did not involve any formal change of status on their side. This often resulted from contact with Roman authorities in a military context (which is not surprising, given the predominant part played by military activity in the working out of the Roman presence in the peninsula); and always was designed to advance the social as well as the economic and political position of those concerned. Of Spaniards (*Hispani* as opposed to *Hispanienses*) in Rome itself, the little we know suggests that substantial advancement was possible but rare. Meanwhile, back in the two *provinciae*, there are signs of the emergence of a local culture of immigrant Roman citizens from Italy, who are adopting an attitude which the author of the *Bellum Alexandrinum* refers to as *provincialis*.

Two last points remain to be made, to add a little more context to this mixed picture. The first is that the acquisition of Roman status was always not regarded by the inhabitants of the peninsula with unalloyed pleasure. After the end of the Caesarian wars, a number of Roman *coloniae* were set up in Spain, as elsewhere. Seven can be identified with reasonable certainty: Tarraco (modern Tarragona) and Carthago Nova (Cartagena) in *Hispania citerior*; and Hasta (Mesa de Este), Hispalis (Sevilla), Urso (Osuna), Ucubi (Espejo) and Itucci in *Hispania ulterior*.²¹ Whatever may link these settlements together as Roman colonies, the motivation behind their being chosen to be such seems disparate. Both Tarraco and Carthago Nova had been major centres of Roman influence since the time of the Hannibalic war; while what links together at least four of the five colonies in *Ultrior* is that they are known to have supported the Pompeians during the Caesarian wars.²² In the case of the two cities in *Citerior*, the assignment of colonial status might well be a reward; but in *Ultrior*, it looks very like a punishment and a precaution. Given the variable significance of the award of status to settlements, there is perhaps still a question to be asked about the way in which Roman-ness was regarded in general.

The second (and final) point relates to the way in which the inhabitants of the Spanish provinces were seen from Rome. Again the picture is mixed. In many ways the Civil Wars made both the *Hispani* and the *Hispanienses* aware of themselves as participants in the events of the Roman world. When

²¹ See P. A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower, 225 BC - AD 14* (2nd edition, Oxford 1987), appendix 15.

²² Hispalis: *De bello hispaniensi*. 35-6. Hasta: *De bello hispaniensi* 36. Urso: *De bello hispaniensi* 41. Ucubi: *De bello hispaniensi* 27.

Caesar spoke in praise of the inhabitants of Corduba in 49 and in rebuke to the inhabitants of Hispalis after the battle of Munda in 45, he did so (so we are told) in terms which congratulated or upbraided his hearers as loyal or ungrateful towards him; that is to say, as members of the Roman world. On the other hand, when Asinius Pollio writes to Cicero in 43 about the shortcomings of the younger Cornelius Balbus, who was acting a quaestor under him in *Hispania ulterior*, he complains not only that he copies Caesar in appointing himself to the chief magistracy in his home town of Gades, but also for burning alive a former Pompeian soldier, ignoring his protests that he was a Roman citizen, and forcing other Roman citizens to fight wild beasts at Hispalis.²³ Spain and its inhabitants were still strange and barbarous, and when the author of the *Bellum Alexandrinum* described the Italian and Roman inhabitants of the province as “going provincial”, he was not writing only about an old-fashioned style of speech or dress. There was still a long way to go before social mobility in the Iberian peninsula was to result in any form of social coherence between Rome and the provinces.

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²³ Asinius Pollio at Cicero, *Ad familiares* 10.32.3.