



Triumphal archway at Alcántara (CIL II, 760)

bridge_alcantara.jpg



[1]

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Honorific.

Original Location/Place: On side of the triumphal archway across the bridge at Alcántara, Spain.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): The triumphal arch still stands across the bridge, but the original inscription is now lost.

Date: 105 CE

Physical Characteristics:

The original marble panel is now lost; the text of *CIL* has been reproduced on a new plaque with the subscription 'Elisabeth regina ... restituit'. A drawing of the original, by Francisco de Holanda, survives in the Municipal Archive of Lisbon, inv. 1571.

Material: Marble.

Measurements: Unknown.

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications:

CIL II, 760

(Hispania Epigraphica: [21738](#) [2])

Commentary: The above inscription originally adorned the side of a triumphal archway that was constructed across a bridge that spanned the Tagus River at Alcántara in Extremadura, Spain. Also known as 'Trajan's Bridge,' it was built between 104 and 106 CE, in order to honour the emperor; the dedicatory inscription on the side of the archway lists the different Spanish tribes who had contributed funds towards the endeavour, offering evidence for the spread of Roman power and loyalty to the emperor in eastern Lusitania.

The bridge itself was a monumental feat of engineering; made up of six arches it spans the river at a length of almost 200m. It measures 8m wide and stands approximately 40-42m above the water level, depending on the tide (for more detailed measurements of the bridges individual arch spans, see O'Connor, *Roman Bridges*, p. 109). The triumphal arch is situated at pier 3, and a small votive temple was also built opposite the southern approach to the bridge. At the northern end the bridge connects to a road, which was one of several in the province that was restored under Trajan, and it is possible that the construction of the bridge formed part of this scheme (O'Connor, *Roman Bridges*, p. 108-109). Indeed, the inscription found on the attic of the triumphal arch states that the arch is dedicated to the emperor, giving his full titulature, from which it has been possible to date the construction to 103-106 CE (*C.I.L II, 759*; Gazzola, *Ponti Romani*, p. 133-134; Liz Guiral, "El Puente de Alcántara", p. 447). The architectural form of the bridge and triumphal arch are clearly Roman innovations, and the Roman presence in the region would have been immediately indicated by them, but the inscription on the votive temple opposite the end of the bridge also confirmed this in precise terms. That inscription (*C.I.L. II, 761*), honoured Trajan and the Gods for the successful building of the bridge, whilst also giving us the name of the architect who was responsible for it: Caius Iulius Lacer. He claimed to have built a bridge that would last forever (*pontem perpetui mansurum in saecula mundi*), emphasising the enduring nature of Rome's hegemony, which was reflected visually



in the monumental structure that faced the temple and its inscription.

However, the inscription from the side of the triumphal arch reveals that Rome was not solely responsible for the construction of the bridge; the inscription states that a certain group of *municipia provinciae Lusitaniae* ('municipal towns of the province of Lusitania') had contributed funds (*stipe conlata*) to this great work (*opus*). They even claim to have 'completed' the bridge (*perfecerunt*), with the names of the eleven '*municipia*' then listed below. It is clear from this inscription that the presence of Rome in the region was not one that was looked upon unfavourably; these eleven tribes committed themselves financially to the monumentalisation of the landscape, and did so in a thoroughly Roman way. Although it would appear likely from the inscription of the votive temple that the bridge was designed by a Roman citizen, the addition of the names of the eleven local communities to the triumphal arch was a sign of loyalty and support for the emperor here. The fact that the plaque with these names was put up on the side of the triumphal arch – the most visible and ideologically laden feature of the bridge – perhaps offers further indication of this.

The municipal status of the eleven communities that contributed funds to the building of the bridge is also worthy of note. In the inscription they are referred to as *municipia*, suggesting that they had each used the Latin Right (*ius Latii*) extended to them by Vespasian to apply for the right to a municipal charter (Fear, *Rome and Baetica*, p. 139). Although the grant was recorded by Pliny the Elder as applying to *universa Hispania* – all of Spain – the examples of such municipal charters are known only from Baetica; this inscription may therefore be evidence to support Pliny's statement that it extended across the entire peninsula. Halmut Galsterer denounced the inscription as a forgery on account of five of the communities named here – the Lancienses, the Medubricenses, the Tapoi, the Colarni and the Interamnienses – appearing in a list of stipendiary *civitates* by Pliny (Galsterer, *Untersuchungen*, p. 62-70. For further discussion of the chronological and judicial implications of this, see Bonnaud, "L'administration du territoire vetton," p. 29-35). However, Andrew Fear noted that the list given by Pliny the Elder dated to Vespasian's reign, and that the status of these towns may indeed have changed; he further states that the term *civitas* could be – and was – applied to any community within the Empire, even those of considerably higher rank (*Rome and Baetica*, p. 139). If this was the case, then the motivation for contributing funds to the building project may well have been in gratitude and celebration for their improved municipal status, which was further enhanced by the impressive nature of the bridge and its monumental architecture. The bridge and its arch asserted the permanent presence of Rome's power, and elevated the prominence and reputation of the emperor and his subjects alike.

Keywords in the original language:

- [municipium](#) [3]
- [provincia](#) [4]
- [Lusitania](#) [5]
- [confero](#) [6]
- [stips](#) [7]
- [perficio](#) [8]
- [pons](#) [9]

Thematic keywords:

- [bridge](#) [10]
- [Hispania](#) [11]
- [Lusitania](#) [12]
- [Roman infrastructures](#) [13]
- [Trajan](#) [14]
- [Roman power](#) [15]
- [Roman province](#) [16]
- [municipalisation](#) [17]
- [Municipal Charter](#) [18]
- [Flavian dynasty](#) [19]
- [civic life](#) [20]
- [civic council](#) [21]



- Bibliographical references:** Alarcão, Jorge, [On the civitates mentioned in the inscription on the bridge at Alcántara](#) [22], *Journal of Iberian Archaeology* (1998) : 143-157
- Bonnaud, Christophe, [L'administration du territoire vetton à l'époque romaine: statuts juridiques et institutions](#) [23], *Conimbriga* 40 (2001) : 5-35
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- O'Connor, Colin, [Roman Bridges](#) [30] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- Other sources connected with this document:** Inscription

[Chapters concerned with citizenship from the Lex Flavia Municipalis \(Flavian Municipal Law\)](#) [31]

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- [24] <http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/pons-traiani-qantara-es-saif-puente-de-alc%C3%A1ntara-problemas-de-epigraf%C3%ADa-filolog%C3%ADa-e-historia>
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