

SECTION 7

COSMOPOLITANISM.

AN INTERNATIONAL CITY, WITH ALL KINDS OF EXOTIC GOODS AND PEOPLE FROM OVERSEAS

Ancient port cities were always cosmopolitan spaces, points of arrival for news, goods, and people from the most remote places, both within and beyond the Empire.

The naval potential of Gades and its skill in navigating the seas and unexplored markets led them to open new oceanic routes, to places such as the *Fortunatae Insulae*, where we know they established settlements for commercial purposes during the time of Augustus.

They must also have had ties with eastern *mercatores*, with whom they surely shared tables in Rome, gaining access to Egyptian, Near Eastern, and even distant Indian exotica, all embraced by Rome as well.

Slaves from faraway lands, exiles fleeing justice or expelled from their homes, politicians at different stages of their career (*cursus honorum*), translators, and many other fortune seekers must have found their way to the gates of the Ocean. We know of them through Greco-Latin sources, inscriptions, their belongings, or the merchandise they brought from overseas.

This makes the archaeological record of Gades, in a certain way, special. Exotic objects reached its port, dazzling local magistrates or enchanting the wealthiest women of the municipal elites.



VRBS IVLIA GADITANA

Desempolvando su pasado

Foreigners also found unique things in Gades, such as its famous dragon trees (*dracaena*), centuries-old trees linked to the myth of Geryon. Knowledge of these trees is also centuries-old: represented since at least the 7th century BC in Samos, and later present in the *Heracleum* of Cádiz, as Philostratus reminds us, or Strabo in his *Geography*. Even today, they form part of the everyday landscape of the city of Cádiz.

Did you know that without archaeological context we are nothing...?

To properly understand discoveries, it is essential to know where they appeared and what other objects they are associated with. It is somewhat like trying to interpret a person's photo on its own, or the same photo inside a wallet with identity documents and cards.

Objects without provenance, decontextualized from old excavations or chance finds, lose 90% of their scientific and historical potential. One of the pending tasks for the study of Gades is the future contextualized analysis of finds—by deposits, by structures, or by historical phases. The significance of many discoveries has encouraged the publication of studies on isolated “pieces,” depriving us of a comprehensive historical interpretation.

Some of the remarkable objects displayed here form part of Roman funerary assemblages meticulously excavated over the last two decades. This allows them to be precisely dated and, therefore, properly interpreted. This is the case, for example, with blue-paste amulets (known as *faïence*), of Egyptian origin, which, used in Cádiz since the Phoenician-Punic period, continued to be part of daily life in Roman times—raising many questions, which is exactly what historians should aspire to.

