



## CULTURE AND WRITING

The inhabitants of the city that existed in El Forau de la Tuta very soon adopted the habit of writing in Latin. Among the remains discovered, there are various bone styles or stiletos with which everyday texts were written on the *tabulae ceratae* or waxed tablets on which texts deprived of any condition were written. But, in addition, we know that the inhabitants of the city carved texts on stone supports, almost from the very beginning of the existence of the city in Roman imperial times, and they did so at least until the 3rd century, when their Latin began to transform into Vulgar Latin. The use of epigraphy in the urban sphere was an important Roman custom: all the significant elements of life deserved to be remembered forever through a text written on a perennial support, such as stone. This was also done in the city of El Forau de la Tuta.

Although there are only four Roman inscriptions discovered in El Forau de la Tuta, the information that contains is very important because it allows us to know a small mosaic of its population from the end of the 1st century BC until the third century AD. They are all funeral, that is, they were placed in the graves of the deceased. They are all also plaques that were placed on important architectural monuments, indicating that the deceased and their families had enough financial resources to afford a beautiful mausoleum.

Of the four known inscriptions, two are presented here. Reused in later constructions, they were found thanks to the agricultural work carried out in El Forau de la Tuta. Its fragmentation makes a complete interpretation difficult, but it does not prevent us from proposing some interpretations about the identity of its protagonists.

N. 1. first plate dated between 1 and 75 AD, the following text can be read:

[ . . . . ]GESIQ [---]  
[---]F AN XVII[---]  
[ . . . . . ]E HYAHEN[ . . . ]  
[ . . ]TER D S [ . . ]  
[ . uac] S uac. [ . ]

We can interpret it as follows:

[Ausa?]gesiq [---]-  
[---]f(ilio), an(norum) XVII[---],  
[Ander?]e Hyahen[is f(ilia)],  
[ma]ter, d(e) s(ua) [p(ecunia) f(ecit)],



[h(ic)] s(itus) [e(st)].

This translation can be proposed: *For [Ausa?]gesius son of [---], deceased at the age of XVII (or XVIII or XVIII), his mother [Ander?] and daughter of Hyahenis, made [the monument] at his own expense]; here he lies.*

Ausagesius, the deceased, was a local youth, as evidenced by his name, of Basque-Aquitania origin. The inscription also indicated the name of his father, but this has not been preserved. The structure of his name indicates that he was not yet a Roman citizen. He died very young, before reaching the age of twenty. It was his mother who paid for his burial. The breaking of the stone destroyed part of the maternal name, although it is possible to restore it as *Andere*, again a Basque-Aquitania name, as was also the name of his father, *Hyahenis*. Like his son, he retained his local status, without acquiring Roman citizenship.

No. 2. Left part of an architectural plate intended to be embedded in a funerary monument dated between the middle of the 1st century AD and early 2nd century AD. The text can be read as follows:

AVSAGES[ . . ]

AGIRN[ . . . ]

FIRM[ . ]

FRONTO[ . . . . ]

S<sup>o</sup>uac [ . uac . ]

Due to only the beginning of the lines is preserved, its interpretation is very difficult. The most plausible is the following:

Ausages[io ?]

Agirn[es f(ilio) ?],

Firm[a?]

Fronto[nis f.]

s(ua) [p(ecunia) f(ecit)]

It could be translated like this: *For Ausagesio (or Ausagesato?) son of Agirnes, Firma? daughter of Fronton, made (the monument) at his expense.*

The deceased was probably called *Ausegius* son of *Agirnes*. It was therefore a person from the place with a denomination that showed that he was not yet a Roman citizen. Both his name and his father's name came from the Basque-Aquitania language that had to be spoken in the place. However, the person who dedicated the grave had Latin



names. It can be imagined that it was his wife, Firma, daughter of Fronto, also belonging to a local but more Romanized family, in which Latin names were frequent.

## RELIGION

From a religious point of view, we do not know if the inhabitants of the city of El Forau de la Tuta practiced the autochthonous cults of the Basque deities (*Abellio, Aherbelste, Erriapus, Elhe, Herauscorritze, Selatse*, etc.), often assimilated to gods or demigods of the Roman pantheon (*Hercules Ilun Andos*), known to us thanks to numerous inscriptions coming mainly from Navarra and the central and western Pyrenean areas of France. However, it is very likely that the temples and the main religious rites of the city were related to the imperial cult in the context of the so-called “civic religion” or community.