El Mensaje del mármol: Prestigio, simbolismo y materiales locales en las provincias occidentales del imperio romano entre época antigua y alto-medieval a través del caso de Hispania y Aquitania. PGC2018-099851-A-I00. (MCIU/AEI/FEDER, UE)

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The MARMOR project is an interdisciplinary project that addresses the study of two concepts inherited from the classical world: the **importance of marble** as a symbol of strength and prestige, and the **significance of the message**, in form of the words engraved in stone or of sculptural elements, which endures for posterity. These two main ideas, **prestige and eternity**, are those which we intend to study though the inscriptions and sculptural elements in marble.
The emphasis falls on the complexity and chronology of these aspects in the West, and particularly in Roman Spain and Aquitaine, where the advances of the last decades have demonstrated the high degree of exploitation and use of local marbles. These advances have significantly modified the previous conception that relegated these stones simply to «substitution» materials.
On the one hand, our attention will focus in three areas distant from the Mediterranean Sea, and therefore far away from the main distribution networks: southern Gallia Aquitana, Mérida (Emerita Augusta) and the center of Lusitania, and the NW corner of the

Tarraconensis province (i.e. Galicia and adjacent territories). Their interest is threefold due to their epigraphic/sculptural landscape, the existence of marble outcrops exploited in antiquity, some of which came to be distributed beyond a purely local range, and the use of *spolia* in the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire.

On the other hand, besides white marbles we will also approach the grey and veined/banded varieties. Despite their abundant use in columns, epigraphy and other luxury elements, these varieties have been almost forgotten even though they can be quite similar chromatically and/or aesthetically to some of the main imperial marbles.

Thus, the aim is to identify what type of marble was chosen to produce inscriptions, sculptures, sarcophagi, capitals and other objects, and, at the same time, the reasons why and the mechanisms that led to the exploitation and use of the marbles from these territories; marbles that, while retaining a certain prestige, were not comparable to the Italian, Greek or north-African ones derived from the great Imperial quarries. To answer these questions, which encompass, at the same time, **economic** (the value of marble, market and demand, etc.) **and social issues** (the notoriety and memory of the protagonists of an inscription or monument, the architectural evergetism and the self-representation, etc.), we will proceed with an **integrated study** of each object, its context and the raw material (marble) used. Establishing its origin through **archeometry** is essential since there were numerous marble quarries in Hispania and Aquitania. Moreover, aside from the study using the standard analytical protocol for each item, we aim to create a unified database to compare the analytical data of the geological outcrops (located until the date and news), to complete it with new analytical data and to develop new methods in order to enhance the diagnostic features of each marble variety.

Once the origin of the marbles is established, it will be possible to define the distribution areas and, with them, the **commercial and human flows** that allowed for the engraving, sculpting and reuse in marble in Aquitaine and the Hispanic provinces since Roman times and throughout later centuries.