Emperor Trajan and the promotion of the Aquae Ypsitanae to the legal status of Forum Traiani in 111 AD.

Aquae Ypsitanae (*civitas*), Forum Traiani, Summary

Scholars date the Roman presence in *Aquae Ypsitanae* on the Tirso to as early as the era of the great revolts in the 2nd c. BC at the thermal water springs of Caddas, “the hot (springs)”, which are located at the base of an impressive layer of trachyte. The site was already known by Ptolemy (3, 3,7) as *Ydata Ypsitanà*. Regardless of the previous pre-Roman situation that can be traced in the town (religious or trading centre?) of the indigenous *populus* of the *Ypsitani*, the settlement had four functions: bath town, *vicus* main town for a *pagus* located on the other side of the Tirso, junction on the two roads *viae a Turre* and *a Karalis* and finally military base for the *cohors I Corsorum*. Regarding this *cohors* we know of one *praefectus*, *Sex. Iulius Sex. f. Pol(lia tribu) Rufus* (*CIL* XIV 2954), who was entrusted with this prefecture in the Augustan era along with that of the *civitates Barbariae*, the non-urbanised communities *ultra Thyrsum*, who paid homage to the (Augustus or Tiberius) precisely at *Aquae Ypsitanae* (*ILSard.* I 188).

A problem arises with *Aquae Ypsitanae* as to whether the settlement belonged to a territory of its own or the *pertica* of a nearby town. The original road network of the territory, before the founding of Forum Traiani, feature a road straight *a Karalis* through Uselisas far as *Aquae Ypsitanae*, which led to the town of Othoca, the statute of which we know nothing about, being excluded. This was connected with Forum Traiani by way of an 18-mile-long road, presumably in the era of

Trajan, and it would suggest instead that *Aquae Ypsitanae* be included in the *pertica* of the *colonia Iulia Augusta Uselis*, which was divided into *pagi*, already at the moment of its establishment, or in any case, that of the founding of the colony. Piero Meloni was the first to postulate that the *Ydata Ypsitanà* depended on the paganic organisation, hence on a **pagus Ypsitanus*.

Despite the absence of direct sources, it is not to be excluded that the bath town of *Aquae Ypsitanae* was established as a *vicus*, with its own limited juridical organisation, within the jurisdiction of the magistrates– the *IIviri* – of the *colonia* of *Uselis*. The record of two individuals, the *servus publicus* of the *Aquae Ypsitanae*, *[Fe]lix Ypsitan[orum servus]* (*ILSard..* I 194), author of a document relating to a *piscina*, and the sixty-year-old *Aquensis fisci (servus)* (*AE* 1992, 880) in an epitaph dating to the first half of the 2nd c. AD, but who had to take on the name *Aquensis* in the pre-Trajan era, reflect the existence of public administration at the *aquae*, relating to the *fiscus*, with *servi publici*, known as *Ypsitani* or *Aquenses*, presumably because they were the children of public slaves.

The analysis of the layout of *Aquae Ypsitanae* in thephase preceding the establishment of Forum Traiani by Trajan is relatively uncertain. *Aquae Ypsitanae* was about 17 miles from Uselisalong the aforementioned *a Karalis* road, which wasprovided with milestones in 46 AD, under Claudius, who presumably restructured the preceding road network already in the Late Republican era. The discovery of black varnish pottery (Campana A and local grey ware), Italic *sigillata*, and south-Gallic *sigillata* in the area of *Aquae Ypsitanae* indicates uninterrupted settlement of the site between the Late Republican era and the Flavian era, preceded by the monumentalisation of *Aquae* in the era of Trajan. The horizontal and volumetric expansion of the bath complex between the Augustan era and that of the Flavians is

uncertain, although it cannot be excluded that the main components that were centred around a stepped *natatio* with a portico may date to a pre-Trajan era. Without doubt, one *piscina* in the *Aquae* is attested by the cited inscription: *[Fe]lix Ypsitan[orum servus]*. This can be dated with certainty to the 1st c. AD.

The cult of the waters was extensively developed in the proto-Sardinian civilisation. This may suggest that the *Ypsitani* could have practised such rituals, albeit in undetermined forms, at the *aquae ferventes* that, according to Solinus (4,4,6), were not only therapeutic, but could also be used for ordalic practices.

It is possible that the indigenous cult of the waters was founded, syncretistically, in the Hellenistic era with the cult of salutary divinities, as would seem to suggest two small statues in trachyte that were found in the area of the *Aquae* in 1899. They represent the Egyptian god Bes, who was probably used by the Punic populations as their healer god, Eshmun, in the Graeco-Roman interpretation, *Asklepios-Aesculapius*.

A third statue, also in greyish trachyte, once held in the town hall of Fordongianus, was also from the bath complex. It represents a female divinity, but it is unfortunately headless.

We can hypothesise that cults relating to two divinities were practised at *Aquae Ypsitanae*: one was female, the other male, and nevertheless variably reinterpreted during the Imperial era.

A trachyte *arula* dedicated to *Aescul(apius)* (*AE* 1986, 272) is dated to the Augustan era on a palaeographic basis. It regards the resolution of a *votum* by a certain *L. Cornelius Sylla*, probably descendant of one of the dictator Sulla's freedmen, in the area of *Aquae Ypsitanae*.

Minimal Bibliography

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A. Mastino, *Sardinia in the Roman World until Constantine*, Cambridge Scholars Publihing limited, 2026, pp. 1-475

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