

Two *ornamenta* are better than one:
The supra-municipal role of the **Augustales* in the Roman empire

The colleges of the **Augustales*, under their various local titles (e.g., *Seviri*, *Seviri Augustales*), occupied a crucial position in the “associative order” of Roman towns. It was mostly formerly enslaved men who filled their ranks, and since they were prohibited from joining the freeborn elite in the council of decurions and holding municipal office, the *Augustalitas* approximated a public career path for the richest and most upwardly mobile freedmen. Their high-profile role bestowed enhanced social capital and benefits like special seating at public events, the second-highest portion of cash-gifts from civic patrons, and the *ornamenta Augustalitis*. Town councils frequently had to rely on the civic euergetism of the *Augustales* to ensure the smooth functioning of the local economy and therefore courted the wealthiest candidates who could pay the substantial *summa honoraria*, or entry fees.

The *Augustales* were eager participants in the Roman epigraphic habit, and the catalogue of more than two thousand inscriptions recording their activities continues to reward new research. This paper is rooted in two observations on the epigraphic evidence. First, I have catalogued more than two dozen examples where one records receiving the *Augustalitas* in more than one town. This phenomenon sometimes occurs in geographical proximity, as in the case of C. Lucretius Erasmus who joined the colleges in Brixia and Tridentum (*CIL* V 4439). In many cases, however, a man served in sites far removed, like C. Birrius Primigenius who was *sevir et Augustalis* in Aquileia and Placentia (*AE* 1935, 9). The second observation focuses on the language of these inscriptions mentioning the entry into a second college by an *Augustalis* away from his hometown. The language echoes the broader category of texts describing the recruitment of *Augustales* in the context only of one’s town of origin, while at the same time, our

texts recording “double-*Augustales*” often emphasize that one was already a (reliable) member elsewhere.

Earlier research has explained this phenomenon as a reflection of *Augustales* actively collecting social capital (Häussler 2011); the outcome of successful commercial links between two communities (Garnsey 1998; Trevisiol 1999); or the strengthening of regional religious networks (McIntyre 2016). While these interpretations may be in play, I propose another explanation of this evidence for “double-*Augustales*,” one where the initiative lies with the towns themselves. The evidence suggests that some Roman communities, often smaller ones with limited local recruiting pools, were actively courting wealthy individuals based on already established credentials as successful *Augustales* elsewhere. As evidence shows from cities like Ostia (*CIL* XIV 4558) and Municipium Suelitanum in Baetica (*CIL* II 1944), the local decurions, surely along with input from the local college of *Augustales*, had to put their legal stamp of approval (*decreto decurionum*) on the recruitment of new members, including those with origins in other towns, who would join their college and, most importantly, contribute their wealth. This conclusion adds an intriguing dimension to our understanding of the *Augustales*’ impact above the local level and the diverse profiles of patrons, in this case a group largely comprised of freedmen, who were sought after by communities in the Roman empire.

Select bibliography

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