

Javier Andreu / Aitor Blanco-Pérez (ed.)

**Signs of weakness and crisis in
the Western cities of the
Roman Empire (c. II–III AD)**



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The cities that never were (?)
*Connectivity between urban settlements and the rural
landscape in Lusitania during Late Antiquity*¹

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1. Introduction

From the sixteenth century onwards, Western paintings were replete with images of urban landscapes in ruins. It is impossible to account for the total number of pictures depicting urban scenarios with abandoned, decaying monumental structures, standing in stark contrast to the minuscule men who can be spotted in the midst of them, looking at the wreckage in astonishment and admiration, or simply ignoring them, because these ruins are part of their daily lives. The ruins are always disproportionately large, serving as a measure of a civilization of giants who left a permanent mark of their entrepreneurship, though the inexorable passage of time has led the men who created these masterpieces into oblivion. To name all of those who bore witnesses would be virtually impossible, first example being an engraving consisting of an anatomical study, *De humani corporis fabrica* (Andreas Vesalius, 1543, Book II, page 174), where an image of the human muscle system is coupled with ruins that are visible in the background. An analysis would then incorporate *A capriccio of roman ruins* by Marco Ricci (1720) and lead all the way up to *The Roman Theatre at Taormina* by Louise-Joséphine de Belmont (1828). Some authors specialised in this type of portrait of decadent urban landscapes, and provided important graphic documents such as the well-known case of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778). Others, however, would explore these images, using them as an allegorical symbol of the transience of all powers, as portrayed by Hubert Robert, nicknamed *Robert des ruines* (1733–1808).

1 CHAIA/UE – Ref. UID/EAT/00112/2013, This project was funded by the FCT/Foundation for Science and Technology.

This scenic imaginary, which was dense and extraordinarily rich in content, has helped us build a prototypical reality that corresponds to the *ideal of a classical city* (that is to say, both the Greek materialisation of *polis* and Roman *urbs*). The monumentality of the public spaces and buildings that lined their streets, the magnificence of the building and monumental devices, the grandeur of the scale that lead people to believe they were *built by giants* left a very strong impression that shaped the stereotype of what would become a *model city*; a model that Europe would continually seek to replicate from the sixteenth century onwards. At the same time, the paradigm of a *centralised city*, an organic unit that is central to and manages the surrounding territory, was also consolidated as an ideal archetype, which would remain in the state and popular imaginary (i.e. as a model for the elite and the administration to follow, but also as a standard expected by the population) from the nineteenth century onwards as well as in Developmentalist models.

This live, active urban model characterized the idea of a classic city, which was made up of an infrastructure designed to provide the means by which the *social body* could undertake tasks planned to lead to their correct functioning. In many of the provincial urban settlements, this reality worked, and was taken on as an ideal model. In fact, if we look at the urban dynamics that allowed for the uninterrupted continuity of the status of major cities right up to the present day, we start to understand the relevance of these life-generating poles. On the contrary, *urbes extinctae* can be found in vast stretches of land, fields of ruins that were abandoned and bear no trace of having been (re) occupied later on, although their remains mark the imaginary of the population.

However, the heart of the matter lies in us trying to understand if this classic model was actually fulfilled, and whether the cities behaved like cities *built by giants*, assuming the role of urban centres and as poles of connectivity between the surrounding land, or if the abandonment of several cities shows that the model did not live up to what was expected of it, after all. To this end, we will look at *Lusitania* as a whole, and will try to understand if we can distinguish how imperial centrality was taken on when urban centres were abandoned².

2. The urban model in the Southwest of *Lusitania*

The territory under analysis focuses on the region in the south-west of the Iberian peninsula, comprising the Atlantic coast of what is now Portugal, and the in-land area of the Alentejo, that is, the entire area west of the former provincial capital of *Augusta Emerita*, present-day Mérida. It is a region with good infrastructural links, given the

2 This text makes reference to several considerations contained in A. Carneiro's "Non uno itinere. Urban and rural landscapes: Connectivity during late antique Lusitania". Thanks are owed to Pilar Diarte Blasco and Neil Christie for being present at the beginning of the research and for providing access to various pieces of published information.

presence of a dense road network (including three connecting roads between *Augusta Emerita* and its Atlantic port, *Olisipo* – present-day Lisbon –, consisting of routes XII, XIV and XV of the *Antonine Itinerary*), as well as an exceptional concentration of monumental *villae*, that were placed naturally and spaciouly in particularly attractive areas³.

Large urban centres were located within this area and, in certain cases, had taken on their role long before Roman conquest, already being involved in contacting and exchanging with the Mediterranean circles. There is no doubt about the roles of *Olisipo* and *Salacia* as Atlantic ports that served as points of contact with the Mediterranean, a factor that boosted their growth and reinforced a dynamic that the Romans would know how to increase, supported by the entrepreneurial capacity of the cities' local elites. Moving inland, it is easy to perceive the dynamic of a city like *Pax Iulia*, and how it anchors the surrounding land, while clusters like *Ebora* or *Ammaia* – both apparently of *ex novo* foundation – leave no doubt as to how they took on their urban role (although they would have different destinies), benefitting from the existence of a *forma urbis*, which was endowed with central spaces and monumental devices.

However, a quick glance at the map (Fig. 1) reveals the existence of huge voids, consisting of land where urban settlements could have existed in Roman times⁴, but that have not been located as of yet.

One hundred twenty kilometres separate *Ammaia* and *Ebora*. We can be sure that the *mansio* of *Abelterium*, which was referred to in the itinerary of road XIV and corresponds to the present-day town of Alter do Chão, could have functioned as an urban centre, but even then, the sheer size of the empty space is too conspicuous. Similarly, there are no records of possible cities between *Ebora* and the present-day border with Spain, and this emptiness extends to the provincial capital. It is therefore paradoxical that, although dotted with monumental *villae* and crossed by several roads, these more than 150km do not appear to have had a distinctive settlement that carried out the functions of an urban centre. Further south, the 80km-long empty stretch between *Ebora* and *Pax Iulia* seems to have been empty, just as further inland the only settlement found is the port city of *Myrtilis*.

There is the possibility that there are more urban settlements waiting to be discovered. Examples are the cases of *Concordia*, referred to as the capital of the Concordians and with the legal status of *civitas stipendiaria*⁵, and *Aritiense oppido veteri*⁶, which is

3 For the Upper Alentejo, see A. Carneiro, *Lugares, tempos e pessoas. Povoamento rural romano no Alto Alentejo*, Coimbra 2014 (Accessible at: https://digitalis.uc.pt/ptpt/livro/lugares_tempos_e_pessoas_povoamento_rural_romano_no_alto_alentejo_vol_i; https://digitalis.uc.pt/ptpt/livro/lugares_tempos_e_pessoas_povoamento_rural_romano_no_alto_alentejo_vol_ii).

4 *Versus*: “the Spanish landscape, unlike that of much of Gaul, really was defined by its network of cities. [...] Spaniards, in other words, had internalized the desire to live together in towns”. M. Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and its cities*, Baltimore 2004: 18

5 Plin. *Nat.* 4, 118; Ptol. 2, 5, 6.

6 *CIL* II, 172.

ROMAN CITIES IN *LUSITANIA*

- 1 – *Eburobritium*
- 2 – *Scallabis*
- 3 – *Olisipo*
- 4 – *Aritium Vetus?*
- 5 – *Ammaia*
- 6 – *Caetobriga*
- 7 – *Salacia*
- 8? – *Abelterium*
- 9 – *Ebora*
- 10 – *Pax Iulia*
- 11 – *Mirobriga*
- 12? – *Vipasca*
- 13? – *Myrtilis*
- 14 – *Baesuris*
- 15 – *Balsa*
- 16? – *Ossonoba*
- 17? – *Cilpes*
- 18 – *Laccobriga*

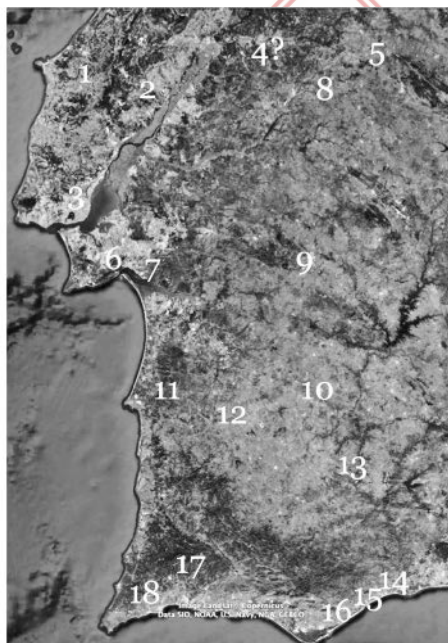


Fig. 01 Roman cities in *Lusitania*

possibly related to the *Aritium Praetorio*, a constant feature of the roads of the *Antonine Itinerary*. However, the problem persists inasmuch as there are no prospective areas that serve as possible locations in which these urban settlements might be found, and this *invisibility* in current archaeological records also tells us a lot about the lower monumentality given to urban systems and their specific devices⁷.

This question is relevant, because one of the fundamental elements for the characterization of these cities in the southwest of *Lusitania* lies precisely in the distinctively scarce monumentality of urban devices that characterize an *urbs*. That is, if we analyse the existing examples, we can see a remarkable absence of cities endowed with spaces that actually fulfilled the attributes that *urban dignitas* presupposed. The cartography of these devices is symptomatic (Fig. 2) and, while it is true that most of these agglomerates have not yet been extensively excavated, the fact that no traces of urban devices have been found is very relevant, showing precisely the precariousness and size of the structures, or even the complete absence of them. This suggests that when they were founded, these settlements were not endowed with the whole set of operational and functional infrastructures required for the effective fulfilment of the urban functions

7 In general terms, the list was provided by J. Alarcão, *Investigação das cidades da Lusitânia portuguesa e dos seus territórios*, in: Gorges, J.-G. (ed.), *Les villes de la Lusitanie Romaine. Hiérarchies et territoires*, Paris 1990: 32–34, and is still valid.

- ROMAN CITIES IN *LUSITANIA***
- 1 – *Eburobritium*
 - 2 – *Scallabis*
 - 3 – *Olisipo*
 - 4 – *Aruium Vetus?*
 - 5 – *Ammaia*
 - 6 – *Caetobriga*
 - 7 – *Salacia*
 - 8? – *Abelterium*
 - 9 – *Ebora*
 - 10 – *Pax Iulia*
 - 11 – *Mirobriga*
 - 12? – *Vipasca*
 - 13? – *Myrtilis*
 - 14 – *Baesusuris*
 - 15 – *Balsa*
 - 16? – *Ossonoba*
 - 17? – *Cilpes*
 - 18 – *Laccobriga*
- (Continuity during Late Antiquity)
(No continuity at all)

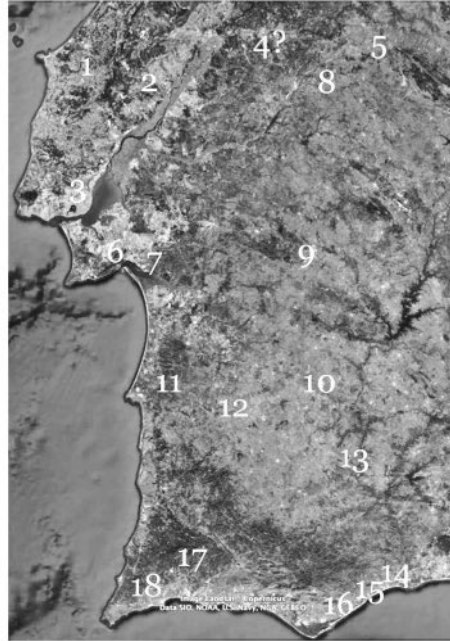


Fig. 02 Roman cities in *Lusitania*: continuities/discontinuities during Late Antiquity

assigned to them. This led to them functioning more as a space of transference for pre-existing identity connections, to which the elites adhered with obvious enthusiasm, albeit with a possibly slow, phased process of urban promotion⁸. The city should be seen as a scenario set rather than as an effective organ of vitality and centralizing action, showing how the *valida urbs* took on various forms due to several changing factors: previous dynamics, connections with external agents who gave them the necessary *stimuli*, their own resources and use of the land, internal connectivity and/or positioning within the context of the Empire's geographical strategy.

However, the internal protagonists also played their part. In this regard, the improvements made in certain urban settlements by some notable local people should be recognised, who in the context of euergetism endowed their cities with devices that ennobled them, and would thus preserve the name of their benefactors. Some of the (few) examples of this in the province of *Lusitania* are the case of *Olisipo*, the founding

⁸ I make reference to the case of *Ammaia*, studied in detail by Vasco Gil Mantas, where the onomastics of the magistrates demonstrate their integration into classical codes; in particular, see V.G. Matas, *Ammaia e Civitas Igaeditanorum. Dois espaços forenses lusitanos*, in: Nogales, T. (ed.), *Ciudad y foro en Lusitania romana*, Mérida 2010: 167–188, esp. 172–174.

inscription of the *Cassios*⁹ thermal baths, the improvements made by *Caius Heius Primus* in the theatre¹⁰, the equipment given to the *Balsa*¹¹ circus, the temple of Minerva consecrated by *Alfidian[us]* in *Colippo*¹² and *C. Cantius Modestinus*'s¹³ accomplishments. Further examples of collective donations in agglomerates located north of the area (for example Bobadela, with its interesting collection), can be added to this limited list, although these do not prevent *Lusitania* from being the least represented province of *Hispania*¹⁴, which demonstrates the weak civic ties of their elites, as well as the lack of availability of means of investment, especially when compared with other provinces.

In summary, therefore, *Lusitania* appears to have been an imbalanced expanse of land from the point of view of urban flourishing. While some *urbes* were able to take on a central role of gathering resources (often benefiting from external *stimuli*), they were few and far between, leaving large stretches of land with no recognized urban settlements. Due to this specific situation, caution must be exercised with regard to making hasty generalizations that advocate for sudden changes or, conversely, continuity, since archaeological records display specific and variable patterns, even within the same regional areas. This view should be recognized as the starting point, since different dynamics will require specific processes.

3. *Lacrimabile tempus*¹⁵

There are no known archaeological contexts in the Southwest of *Lusitania* that validate the literary accounts of constant destruction, slaughter and looting promoted by barbarian besiegers, which can be noted particularly in Hydacio's¹⁶ texts. It should be noted, however, that the stratigraphic levels of the late-ancient period were generally ignored in urban archaeological excavations carried out using traditional methodologies. Even in more recent excavations they are systematically lacking descriptions. It

9 So-named in an inscription at a later date. See *CIL* II and the considerations in J. d' Encarnação, *As termas dos Cássios em Lisboa – ficção ou realidade?*, in: Gorges, J.-G. / Encarnação, J. d' / Nogales, T. / Carvalho, P. (eds.), *Lusitânia romana: entre o mito e a realidade*. Actas da VI mesa-redonda internacional sobre a Lusitânia Romana, Cascais 2009: 481–494.

10 *CIL* II, 183; *AE* 997, 773.

11 *CIL* II, 5165; *CIL* II, 5166.

12 *AE* 1993, 884.

13 V. G. Mantas, *C. Cantius Modestinus e seus templos*, in: Cardim, J. (ed.), *Religiões da Lusitania*. *Lonquuntur Saxa*, Lisboa 2002: 231–234.

14 E. Melchor, *La construcción pública en Hispania romana: iniciativa imperial, municipal y privada*, *MHA* 13–14 (1992–1993): 129–170.

15 *Jer. Ep.* 123 *Ad Geruchiam*; so used by *Hyd. Praef.* 5–7.

16 In particular the description of his arrival in Lisbon: R. W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana: two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1993: 111 (457, Ol. 309, 1).

should be noted, for example, that cases of the enigmatic *terra nigra* or *black land*¹⁷ are not generally known and published, although some of this has already been informally documented, with the omission of the nature of its presence and what can be interpreted from it.

It is true that the strength of historical accounts has largely conditioned the reading of archaeological reality, as exemplified by the emblematic case of the *domus* attributed to *Cantaber* in *Conimbriga*¹⁸. However, it is necessary to note that the weight placed on ancient texts is unequal: if Hydacio's account was prioritized by modern research, attracted by a picture of destruction and chaos, mention of the siege mounted by Almansor on the walls of *Conimbriga*, in 986, would have to be forgotten, as it was a sign that the city still maintained its strategic relevance and the monumentality of some spaces¹⁹. In short, some texts are taken into account more often than others, thus distorting possible interpretations.

The perception of the processes that took place in the urban settlements of the southwest of the peninsular during the Roman Empire and in Late Antiquity is inevitably conditioned by investigation, which in turn is limited by the different possibilities offered by archaeological research. The largest urban centres of antiquity are cities that have been inhabited *in continuum* to the present day, such as *Olisipo*/Lisboa, *Ebora*/Évora, *Pax Iulia*/Beja, *Myrtilis*/Mértola or *Ossonoba*/Faro. Naturally, there are many constraints to archaeological digs in these locations, and the readings are exacerbated by the inevitable phenomena of *spolia*, destruction and erasure, or by the difficulty of getting insight in large areas, given the constraints of the urban landscape that has developed in the locations. In other occasions, cities were abandoned and have crystallized into ruins in the landscape, but there is a recurrent inability to build solid and time-bound research projects that provide sufficiently stable reference frameworks. Apart from the example of *Conimbriga*, which was exemplarily excavated and published, but had severe constraints in the interpretative framework in terms of the levels of Late Antiquity, the results obtained in *urbes extinctae* such as *Eburobritium*, *Ammaia*, *Balsa* or *Mirobriga* are not sufficiently clear, either because of a lack of continuity of the projects or due to scarcity of published results.

Knowledge about the transformation in Late Antique Lusitanian cities is therefore considerably scarcer than in other regions, especially when compared to the informa-

17 For the problem and its meanings, see N. Christie, *From Constantine to Charlemagne. An Archaeology of Italy AD 300–800*, Aldershot 2006: 262.

18 When the unburied corpse of an inhabitant was found inside the house's main cistern holding two Honorius coins (402–408), it was immediately interpreted as: "Fica seguramente provado que o ataque a esta casa e a morte do seu desditoso habitante ocorreu em 464": J. de Alarcão, *Conimbriga, o chão escutado*, Lisboa 1999: 75.

19 A. de Man, *Defesas urbanas tardias da Lusitânia*, Mérida 2011: 185, with references.

tion received recently from the province of *Baetica*²⁰. However, some power lines can be detected.

In general terms, the trend points to the progressive loss of the recognizable *forma urbis*, given the gradual occupation of public spaces by private agents. All the sectorial phenomena point to the growing difficulty in taking over the management and maintenance of daily life. It seems that municipal magistrates had difficulties not only in preventing private appropriation, but also became complicit in the process, since it took place in ostensibly visible spaces. This phenomenon is very evident in *Augusta Emerita*, where M. Alba draws a connection between the double interest of the public powers, that not only received revenue by collecting licenses, but who also dismissed the expenses inherent in the maintenance of the spaces²¹, a reason why the *ediles* were also interested in the process.

According to archaeological evidence, the progressive privatisation of public spaces was the most evident phenomenon in *Lusitania*, being particularly well documented in *Augusta Emerita*, where, for example, private thermal baths were constructed in the fringes of the colonial courthouse²². The urban fabric was coming undone where the privatisation of buildings would lead to a loss of the recognisable traditional markers, a phenomenon which also took place in cities like *Ebora*, *Conimbriga* and *Ammaia*. It is particularly interesting that, according to evidence, it is perceived that this process began around the middle of the 2nd century. A process of “ruralisation” also took place in the city, with the use of spaces to aid in agricultural practices or to keep livestock in²³. This phenomenon must be considered, given the well-documented existence of spaces and activities of this type in other cities that have nothing to do with later processes²⁴.

The process progressed on all levels of society, even within domestic spaces, where much larger units were compartmentalised, resulting in houses no larger than 20 to 40m². These couldn't have been further from the previous paradigms, as they also used the peristyles as common courtyards²⁵. In urban areas, these phenomena progressed in

20 M. Ruiz Bueno, *Topografía, imagen y evolución urbanística de la Córdoba clásica a la tardoantigua* (sec. II–VII d. C.). Tesis Doctoral en Arqueología presentada a la Universidad de Córdoba [poli-copiada], 2 vols, Córdoba 2016. For a broader picture, see his volume 2018, *Dinámicas topográficas urbanas en Hispania. El espacio intramuros entre los siglos II y VII d. C.* Bari 2018.

21 M. Alba, *Mérida visigoda: construcción y deconstrucción de una idea preconcebida*, in: Vaquerizo, D. / Garriguet, J. A. / León, A. (eds.), *Ciudad y territorio: transformaciones materiales e ideológicas entre época clásica y el Alto Medioevo*, Córdoba 2014: 383–414.

22 R. Ayerbe / T. Barrientos / T. Palma (eds.), *El foro de Augusta Emerita. Génesis y evolución de sus recintos monumentales*, Mérida 2009: 803.

23 M. Alba, *Evolución y final de los espacios romanos emeritenses a la luz de los datos arqueológicos (pautas de transformación de la ciudad tardoantigua y altomedieval)*, in: *Augusta Emerita, Territorios, espacios, imágenes y gentes en Lusitania romana*, Mérida 2004: 207–255.

24 The most iconic case is documented in W. Jashemski, *The gardens of Pompeii: Herculaneum and the villas destroyed by Vesuvius*, New Rochelle 1979.

25 M. Alba, op. Cit. (n. 23): 2014.

the same way. A progressive situation could be observed, where regular, defined lines made way for the appropriation of spaces, which would then be used for private purposes. In *Conimbriga*, a phenomenon of privatization was documented in which public spaces were privatised, especially in the area around the forum and theatres²⁶. The same pattern can also be detected in the compartmentalisation of spaces in the arches of the *vomitorium* in *Olisipo*, that at a certain point began to be used as private residences²⁷.

New sections of the city walls were built from the middle of the 3rd century onwards, confirming the radical endurance of this process. Public and/or private spaces were sacrificed in favour of new defensive structures that, in certain cases, greatly modified the consciousness of the *forma urbis*. In this case, the *spolia* placed on the wall demonstrate the use of all available materials, implying the symbolic loss of the *dignitas* of certain elements that were now seen as merely functional. The most iconic example of this process in the southwest of the peninsula took place in *Pax Iulia* where the bishop of the city, Friar Manuel of the Cenacle (1724–1814, friar between 1770 and 1802), oversaw an important collection of materials. Along with *spolia* found during excavations of sites recognised by him, these make up the first pieces in the Museum of Évora's collection, which are still kept there today. It should be noted that this reuse of materials is unrelated to the dismantling of ornaments for iconoclastic reasons, which began between the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century. This practice targeted specific elements, which would then not be reused. This contrasted with the practice of collecting materials that were no longer useful, dismantling them and giving them a functional use in buildings constructed during the 3rd and early 4th centuries. This process would have been uncontrollable, reaching truly unprecedented scales, as demonstrated by some archaeological examples found in urban settings²⁸.

Spolia used for private purposes in *Lusitania* are efficiently documented in *Augusta Emerita*. This was even done in phases from the 5th century onwards, as looters began with noble materials such as marble, bronze and lead, then turned their attention and efforts to recognizable elements such as columns, capitals and other sculpted elements, finally pillaging indiscriminately²⁹. The use of heavy machinery suggests that this process, from its second phase at least, was conducted with the approval of local authorities, according to precepts documented for other areas of the Empire³⁰. This

26 J. Alarcão / R. Étienne, *Fouilles de Conímbriga I (L'Architecture)*, Paris 1977: 175.

27 A. M. Diogo, *O teatro romano de Lisboa: notícia sobre as actuais escavações*, *Cuadernos de Arquitectura Romana* 2 (1993): 222–224.

28 The most iconic case is the *Crypta Balbi* in Rome: D. Manacorda, *Crypta Balbi. Archeologia e storia di un paesaggio urbano*, Milan 2001.

29 M. Alba, op. Cit. (n. 23): 214.

30 See an order from Majorian to Aemilianus, then *praefectus urbi* of Rome (*Cod. Theod.* 4, 458), to put an end to the *spolia* of “public buildings, wherein consists the whole beauty of the Roman State, are on all sides being destroyed by the most deplorable connivance of the City administration”. Quoted in N. Christie: “From royalty to refugees: looking for the people in reconstructing

profound alteration of the urban landscape also led to another type of evidence found during archaeological excavations – areas where debris and residue were collected, large ash stains resulting from bonfires and dumps and scattered osteological remains can be found, all of which would lead to profound changes in the perception of space.

One of the consequences of this process of urban devitalisation was the atrophy of one of the most emblematic forms of management in the Roman world: basic sanitation and urban waste management. Once again, our knowledge about the process is very imbalanced, as the process in *Augusta Emerita* was particularly well studied by J. Acero³¹, but little is known about most other urban centres. In this particular case, the proliferation of areas where waste was dumped clearly shows the difficulty faced in dealing with the atrophy of sanitation systems, and although literary sources paint a picture of stability and prosperity, situations documented in archaeological excavations show how significant changes took place in the daily life of the city. In particular, the topography of spaces of power faced substantial changes in *Augusta Emerita*. Around a building called the Temple of Diana, there was a progressive accumulation of areas used for depositing sediment from the 5th century onwards. This created a “depositional continuum” that accumulated on the original demolished pavement³², along with an intentional dismantling of monumental structures³³. In this respect, the process that took place in front of the temple in the courthouse in *Ebora* was also eloquent, as what followed the *spolia* of the marble ornaments and pavements was a process of perforation of any *opus signinum* in sight, within which numerous silos were dug (generally thought to be from the period of Islamic rule, although they could have been from earlier) which would serve as dumping grounds for any waste³⁴.

The difficulty posed by waste management was evident in the provincial capital, largely as a result of the collapse of two of the four aqueducts that supplied the city at the end of the 4th century (followed by the destruction of yet another during the following century), which led to the city facing enormous constraints when it came to

urban change in late antique Italy”, text presented to the International Conference on Urban Transformations in the Late Antique West: From Materials to Models – Évora, 22–23 June 2017 and present in a forthcoming monograph (N. Christie, P. Diarte-Blasco, A. Carneiro, forthcoming). It should also be noted that this order was preceded by measures (*Cod. Theod.* 15, 1, 40, year 398) authorising private individuals to use property that was in ruins if they should request to do so, indicating that the process of *spolia* and abandonment had already long been taking place.

31 J. Acero, *La gestión de los residuos en Augusta Emerita. Siglos I a. C.–VII d. C.*, Madrid 2018: 310ss, with references.

32 J. Acero, *op. Cit.* (n. 31): 322.

33 M. Alba, *op. cit.* (n. 23): 217.

34 T. Hauschild, Some observations about the buildings that made up the courthouse in *Ebora Liberalitas Iulia*, in: Nogales, T. (ed.), *Ciudad y foro en Lusitania romana / Cidade e Foro na Lusitânia romana*, Mérida 2010: 27–36.

managing effective sanitation. These circumstances provoked some attempts to repair³⁵ the hydraulic systems, undertaken more by the local elites than because of any initiative shown by the Church. However, it seems that attempts were not successful, as the technical complexity of the structures meant that it took a long time to repair³⁶. The lack of maintenance of the *cura aquarum* systems was due to a lack of the very specific engineering knowledge required which, at the time, was no longer obtainable.

Another problem that greatly affected normal urban functioning was the occurrence of pests and epidemics, at least two episodes of which were documented in the *Vitae Sanctorum Patrum Emeritensium* concerning *Augusta Emerita*, although we are aware of more episodes³⁷ that took place during the 6th century, a rather troubled time in this respect. Such episodes took place in the provincial capital in both 571 and 586, which, combined with periods of drought, worsened the sanitary condition of the population³⁸.

URBAN EQUIPMENTS IN *LUSITANIA*

- Circus
- Theater
- Urban Walls
- ⤴ Aqueduct

(no Amphitheatre...?)



Fig. 03 Urban equipments in the Roman cities in *Lusitania*

- 35 M. Alba, Contribuciones al estudio de las infraestructuras hidráulicas de Augusta Emerita, in: Mangas, J./ Martínez, S. (eds.), *El agua y las ciudades romanas*, Madrid 2007: 147–182.
- 36 For the general frame, see E. Sánchez López / J. Martínez Jiménez, *Los acueductos de Hispania. Construcción y abandono*, Madrid 2016: 244–257.
- 37 J. Bicl. *Chronica* 573, 4; see K. B. Wolf (ed.), *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*. Second Edition. Liverpool 1999.
- 38 B. Curado, *La medicina en Mérida según la Vida de los Padres Emeritenses*, Mérida 2004: 233–274.

It is therefore not surprising that many settlements were simply extinguished. For more than half of the cases in the region, we can observe gradual and on-going abandonment from at least the 3rd century (Fig. 3). If we count the points of passage mentioned in the itineraries of the roads – some of which are yet to be physically located – we can see how many of them, despite the dynamic granted by the roads themselves, also disappeared without a trace. Furthermore, even in the *urbes* that remained, transformations took place.

All these phenomena show how cities became less urbanized and populated, although this factor is not always considered in research³⁹. However, the existence of areas of waste-disposal and accumulation demonstrates the de-functionalization of these spaces, creating a ‘leopard-skin pattern’ (to use Anglo-Saxon terminology). That is, areas that were in use alternated with abandoned areas that bordered on residential areas. This many-faceted design is difficult to perceive because of the difficulty of establishing open area floor plans, either because some urban settlements are now inhabited and urban archaeology is subjected to the constraints of everyday life in the twenty-first century, or because, although the cities are fossilized and abandoned, Urban Archaeology also has to submit to the constraints of a lack of investment for continued research and excavation projects, causing a limbo of funding that has strangled the possibility of obtaining new data.

*

In this brief overview, the processes of transformation undertaken by a new protagonist, the rising power of Christianity, were not considered. A focus was placed, above all, on the occurrence of *internal transformative phenomena*, which originated from the dynamics of a changing reality. It is important to take into account that these phenomena did not originate in conjunction with each other at a given time, and did not coincide with the traditional framework of the “end of the Empire”. These causes are the result of processes that had already begun in the previous centuries⁴⁰. These causes were recently detected by an attentive and uncompromising investigation, and feature

39 Referring to the compartmentalization of private spaces in *Augusta Emerita*, in the Morería area, where a *domus* was converted into several smaller residential units, Miguel Alba alludes to a “saturated” space that forced more families to be concentrated into smaller spaces. See M. Alba, op. Cit. (n. 23): 233.

40 “Nuestro punto de partida ha sido la primera mitad del siglo II, cuando el arquetipo de ciudad clásica en *Hispania* se consolidó y llegó a su cénit. Dicha situación no se mantuvo mucho tiempo, puesto que *grosso modo* desde mediados de la segunda centuria se asistió a una desigual y heterogénea evolución de los esquemas de vida urbanos preexistentes, lo que en última instancia supuso la extinción de la urbe clásica y la configuración de la ciudad tardoantigua. En la península ibérica, el paso de un modelo urbano a otro se extendió a lo largo de un extenso período de cinco siglos en el que los distintos núcleos urbanos preexistentes participaron en tiempos, modos, ritmos e intensidades que distan de ser uniformes. Así, la fecha de arranque de determinados fenómenos varió

in scientific meetings and new analyses undertaken by researchers who are less subject to traditional paradigms. The growing – and recent – volume of publications resulting from collective contributions or syntheses⁴¹ shows how this is a subject that has stirred research seeking explanatory causes for phenomena of great social and historical importance, which are also unexpectedly contemporary.

The traditional perspective of powerful, centralizing classical *urbes* should be deconstructed, as it is believed that *urbes* such as these were variable and dependent on multiple factors, most of them of a social order. The Augustan paradigm, which was heavily used and a defining feature throughout the Empire, later reinforced by Flavian and/or later improvements, or by the localized action of private benefactors, may not have been fully accomplished in a social landscape that, to a great extent, had distinct behavioural codes and that never, truly, acquired classic experiential concepts. More than a city that collapses or faces sudden decline it will never recover from, many of the urban settlements in *Lusitania* had structural weaknesses, were equipped with expensive devices or technically difficult to maintain, which meant that they weighed on the population after the initial investment in their construction. In peripheral areas, these small settlements individually and progressively turned into either a *civitas intermortua* or *oppidum labens*⁴². This was in great part thanks to work carried out internally by its residents, more than as the result of *hordes of barbarians* or external factors. The immense “confederation of regions”⁴³ of the Roman Empire of the West, and more particularly of *Hispania*, over time returned to the axis that gave it power: a network of local connections that gained strength in its rural existence. Recording the changing behaviour of these populations is important, as it demonstrates how different populations reacted in times of profound change in the course of history: “[...] so that whether the people re-opened the drains, embellished façades, planted gardens, or

años, décadas, o incluso siglos, dependiendo de cada ciudad.” (M. Ruiz Bueno, op. Cit. (n. 20): 203).

- 41 The debate has resulted in a rich collection of literary works about Hispania, of which the following stand out: Diarte-Blasco, P., *La configuración urbana de la Hispania tardoantigua. Transformaciones y pervivencias de los espacios públicos romanos* (s. III–VI d. C.), Oxford 2012; D. Vaquerizo / J. A. Garriguet / A. León (eds.), *Ciudad y territorio: transformaciones materiales e ideológicas entre la época clásica y el Altomedievo*, Córdoba 2014; S. Ramallo / A. Quevedo, *Las ciudades de la Tarraconense oriental entre los siglos II–IVd.C.: evolución urbanística y contextos materiales*, Murcia 2014; L. Brassous / A. Quevedo (eds.), *Urbanisme civique en temps de crise. Les espaces publics d’Hispanie et de l’Occident romain entre le II^e et le IV^e siècle*, Madrid 2015; J. Andreu (ed.), *Oppida Labentia. Transformaciones, cambios y alteración en las ciudades hispanas entre el siglo II y la tardoantigüedad*, Uncastillo 2017; J. Martínez Jiménez / I. Sastre de Diego / C. Tejerizo, *The Iberian Peninsula between 300 and 850. An Archaeological perspective*, Amsterdam 2018. See also M. Ruiz Bueno, op. Cit. (n. 20), as well as the forthcoming work by N. Christie / P. Diarte-Blasco / A. Carneiro, op. Cit. (n. 30).
- 42 J. Andreu (ed.), op. Cit. (n. 41): 347–349.
- 43 P. Brown, *Through the eye of a needle: wealth, the fall of Rome, and the making of Christianity in the West. 350–550 AD*, Princeton 2012 (cap. 24).

walked away from the whole dysfunctional mess, is itself a message of political intent, a glimpse of an agenda”⁴⁴. It is not a question of political planning. The idealised city in Augustus’ complex plan was, in its essence and for large areas of the empire, an epiphenomenon that, over time, was extinguished. This must remind us that, no matter the external will for a location, the fate of a place is dictated by the will and resilience of the people who inhabit it.

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44 M. Carver, “Debating urbanism in Post-Roman Europe: some thoughts about objectives, in: D. Sami / G. Speed (eds.), *Debating urbanism within and beyond the walls A. D. 300–700*, Leicester 2010: 289–291 (290).