

## Bracara Augusta: a Roman town in the Atlantic area

M. Martins

This chapter focuses on the foundation and development of Bracara Augusta (Braga), using information provided by the urban rescue excavations carried out since 1976 by the Archaeology Unit of Minho University. I will consider the importance of Bracara Augusta as an administrative, religious, economic, and cultural centre, and will treat the planning and layout of the town and the characteristics of its public and domestic architecture for their contribution to our knowledge of Roman towns of the northwest. The relationship of Bracara Augusta to the surrounding countryside and its influence on changing patterns of regional settlement will also be analysed. Archaeological research carried out over the last 25 years in Bracara Augusta and its region provides the opportunity to describe some of the main trends in the cultural development of this part of the empire within the province of *Hispania Citerior Tarraconensis*. Systematic research has changed many old assumptions and ideas about the level of urban development of towns in NW Iberia, assumed by scholars in the past to have enjoyed a low level of 'Romanisation'.

Today it is possible to offer a new interpretation of Bracara Augusta, one which shows that it was planned with all the infrastructure and buildings necessary for urban life (Martins 1999 and 2004). Its long occupation ensured that the town was of administrative importance, an importance further enhanced under Diocletian when it became capital of Gallaecia (Tranoy 1981), while its central position between the Entre-Douro and Minho regions ensured that it was an important focus of trade (Morais 1998). Equally, research into the pre-Roman occupation has shown that the socio-economic and cultural development of the indigenous communities in the territory of the Bracari (Martins 1990; 1995; 1996a; 1996b and 1997) was related to the emergence of a hierarchical settlement structure and the establishment of a strong ruling élite (Martins *et al.* 2005). By the time of the Augustan administrative organisation of Iberia, the ruling indigenous élites were the best allies of Roman *legati*, which made it easier for hillfort populations to integrate into the new administrative structure. This in turn sheds light on the cultural processes connected with the foundation of the town.

### The cultural context of the foundation of Bracara Augusta: the indigenous background

Our understanding of the socio-cultural evolution of pre-Roman communities in the area is provided by both archaeological evidence and historical sources. Considerable economic development took place amongst the indigenous communities during the century of the region's integration. It was characterised by increased cereal farming, more widespread use of metal tools, technological innovation, and increased inter-regional interaction (Silva 1986; Martins *et al.* 2005). These trends seem to have favoured greater social complexity at a local and regional level, probably with intra- and inter-site horizontal and vertical differentiation. These changes were traditionally considered to be the result of the punitive military expedition to the northwest by Decimus Junius Brutus in 138-136 B.C. (Silva 1986). According to the sources, after crossing the Lima river and reaching the Minho, Roman troops retreated south, fighting the Bracari whose territory lay between the Douro and Cavado rivers. Subsequently, the region between the Minho and the Douro was pacified and opened up to increasing influence from communities to the south. Cultural and economic interaction between the north of the country and the more Romanised territories to the south seems to have become greater after Caesar's coastal expedition to Brigantium in the mid-1st c. B.C. Yet historical explanations for the region's development based on military events must also take into account the archaeological record, which provides a picture of the social, economic, and cultural changes that occurred during the last two centuries B.C. in an indigenous context. Some changes in settlement point to

the emergence of a hierarchical organization. The foundation of new specialized hillforts along the valleys relates to the spread of agriculture. Other major trends include the reinforcement of some hillforts' visibility by constructing complex systems of fortifications, the reorganization of space within settlements, and the concentration of population in *oppida*. Other changes were important too, such as developments in masonry construction, pottery production, bronze working, and iron metallurgy, all of which can be related to influences from the south (Silva 1986; Martins 1997). The increased circulation of raw materials and products at regional and inter-regional levels points to more human mobility and a greater degree of cultural interaction. All these features distinguished the development of the region of Bracara from that of Lucus or Asturica (Sastre Prats 1998; Martins *et al.* 2005).

These developments created for the area of the Bracari a particular historical and cultural background against which the impact of the foundation of Bracara Augusta and its subsequent development can be understood. If Brutus's punitive expedition of 138-136 B.C. was responsible for the early pacification of the region, it can also be seen to have encouraged the building of regional solidarities and to have reinforced the power of the indigenous élites. The existence of central places and a hierarchical settlement organization in Bracaran territory during the 1st c. B.C. was an indigenous cultural and social development that established special conditions for the integration of the region into the Roman administrative structure.

#### The origins of Bracara Augusta and its settlement

Bracara Augusta was one of the three urban centres created by Augustus after his military campaigns in the region of Asturia and Cantabria which ended in 27-24 B.C. Their establishment was justified by the need to create major administrative centres in NW Iberia having authority over the indigenous *oppida* (Martins 1990). The exact date of Bracara's foundation is unknown, although several scholars (Le Roux 1994; Rodríguez Colmenero 1996a and 1996b) suggest 16-15 B.C. for the consecration of the three NW towns, a period during which Augustus was in Spain. However, epigraphic sources suggest an earlier chronology. The oldest inscription, dated between 4 and 2 B.C., refers to Paulus Fabius Maximus, probably patron of the town. It is inscribed on a monument dedicated to him by the *Bracaraugustani* (Tranoy 1980) and suggests that a new community able to express civic and ideological ideas had already been created (Tranoy 1980).

The archaeological data does not suggest that Bracara Augusta had pre-Roman origins,<sup>1</sup> but it is important to note that it was surrounded by hillforts which ensured that the new settlement would have the necessary protection (Martins 1990). The town was founded at a strategic point in the centre of the present-day province of Entre-Douro e Minho. Its location was well considered for it sits at a natural crossroads through which it became the focus of a regional network of Roman roads (Lemos 1999). The rich epigraphic collection dating to the foundation of the town suggests an ideological and religious context for its creation based on the cult of Augustus, for inscriptions always refer to the emperor and his family (Le Roux 1975; Tranoy 1980 and 1981) (fig. 16.1). Inscriptions imply the general acceptance by the indigenous élites both of the imperial cult and of the emperor's dynastic policy, evident in dedications to Caius and Lucius (*CIL* II 2422) and Agrippa Postumus (Le Roux 1975).

It is clear that from the outset the new community may have acquired juridical, religious and economic functions characteristic of a *conventus iuridicus*, although an Augustan creation of these administrative entities remains controversial (Dopico Cainzos 1998; Rodríguez Colmenero 1996b; Fernández Ochoa and Morillo 1999). In view of the importance of the town's administrative and economic functions, it has been suggested (Le Roux 1994) that Augustus granted it Latin rights, which would mean that native élites would have been able to gain promotion and become Roman citizens through participation in politics.

<sup>1</sup> Tranoy (1981) has suggested that it was an indigenous market place or a political meeting point for tribes of the region.

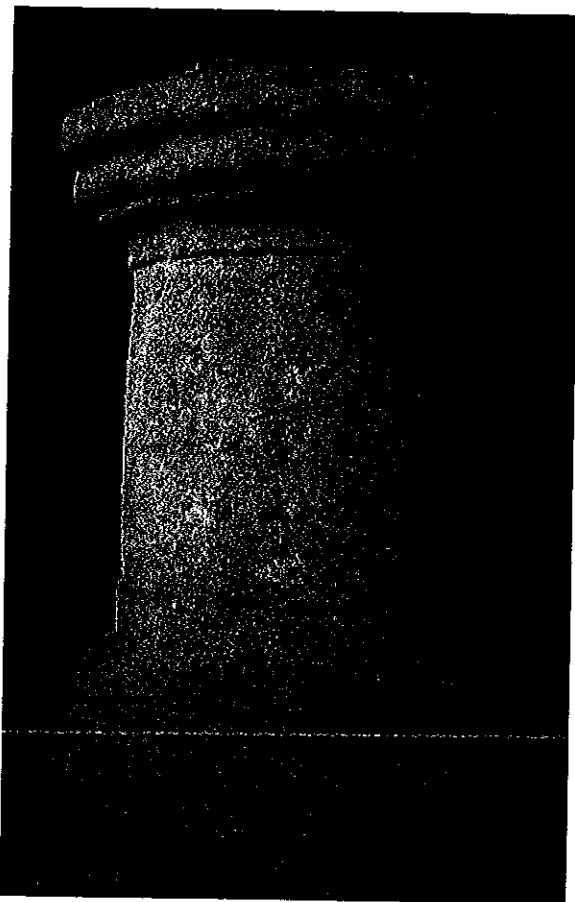


Fig. 16.1 (above). Monument consecrated to Paulus Fabius Maximus by the *baracaraugustani*, dated to 4-2 B.C.

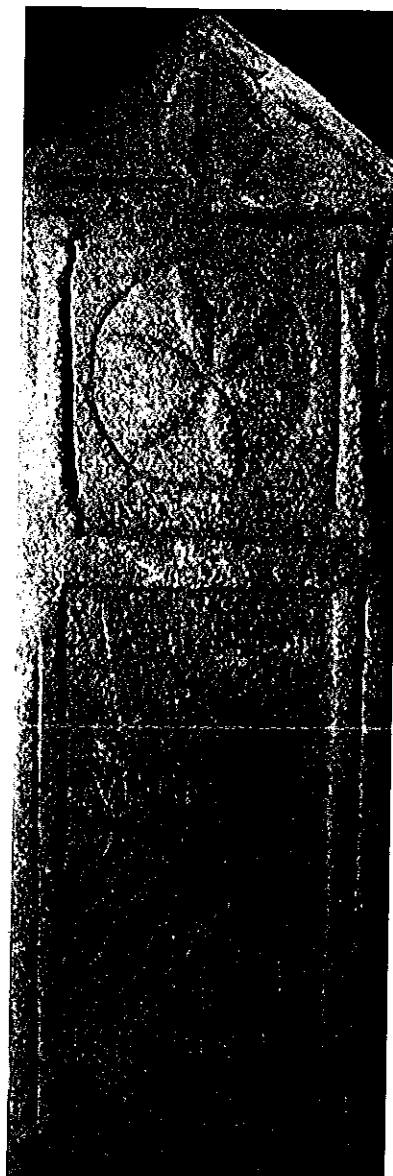


Fig. 16.2 (right). Funerary inscription (dated to between A.D. 75 and 96) dedicated by Sempronius Graecinus to Marcus Antonius Augustanus, son of Marcus, of the Galeria tribe, born at Pax Iulia, soldier of *Legio VII Gemina Felix*, who died at the age of 45, after 18 years' service.

Both epigraphic and archaeological evidence indicates that the town was occupied from the period of Augustus onwards. The main archaeological data for that period is concentrated on the hilltop of Alto of Cividade, the highest part of the Roman town, where we find the oldest coins (Zabaleta Estévez 2000) and Roman pottery (Morais 1997-98). In the Julio-Claudian period, the distribution of artefacts points to a more extensive occupation of the urban area, though most of the known public and private buildings date to the Flavian and early Antonine periods (Martins 2004). According to epigraphic evidence, the population was mainly of native extraction. From among an important community of Roman citizens attested in the town in the Claudian period, some merchants engaged in trade dedicated an inscription in A.D. 42 to C. Caetronius Miccio, governor of Citerior (Alföldy 1966). The town will also have attracted a Romanised population, mainly artisans, administrative workers and military personnel, from other areas. The military will have performed an important rôle in the establishment of the town and creation of its urban infrastructure (water supply, drains, quarries, street grid?) and it was the main agent in building the network of roads that connected Bracara Augusta to other towns (milestones from the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius are known). Explicit epigraphic references to the military, however, are few and of a later date (Tranoy and Le Roux 1989-90) (fig. 16.2). Tombstones show that the town's population included a considerable number of natives who came mainly from local hillforts. The deceased were named with reference to their *castella* (hillforts) of origin, examples including the *castellum*

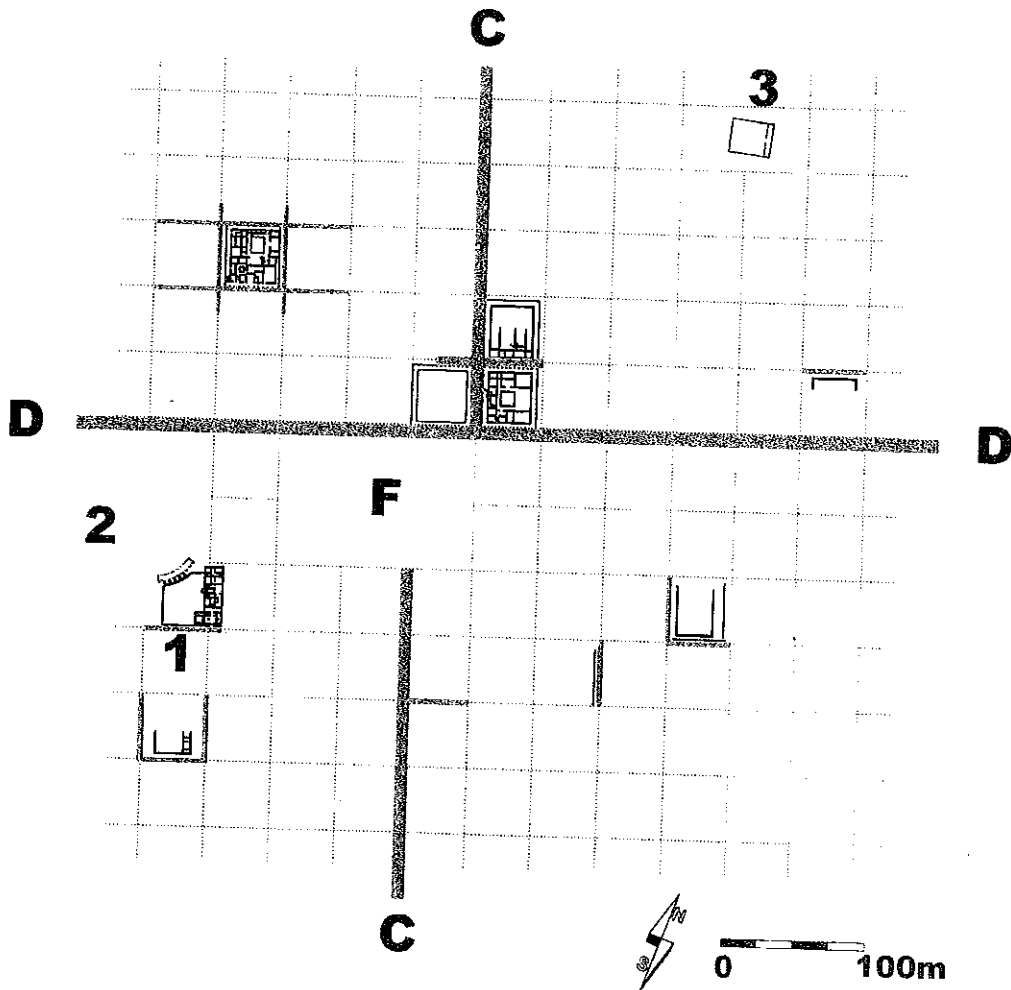


Fig. 16.3. Urban plan of Bracara Augusta with buildings discovered by excavation: F – Forum area, C – Cardo, D – Decumanus, 1 – Thermae, 2 – Theatre, 3 – Market.

*Agripia*, whence came Arquius, son of Viriatus, Apilus son of Arquius, and Adronus and Tarquinius, sons of Caturus; the *castellum Letiober* was the place of origin of Albura, daughter of Caturus. We know that some indigenous people obtained Roman citizenship since they were enrolled in the Quirina voting tribe. Some of them even held prestigious offices, as in the case of Q. Pontius Severus who was *flamen* in *Tarraco* (CIL II 4237), and P. Iulius Pintamus who was a member of the *ordo decurionum* in *Aelium Antoninum Augusta Unidelicorum* (CIL II 2424) in the 2nd c. A.D. Some Flavian names on votive inscriptions from Bracara provide indirect evidence to suggest the promotion of individuals to Roman citizenship, at least in the last decades of 1st c. A.D. One can view their religious dedications as recognition of such promotions, as may have been the case with Flavius Urbicius who worshipped the *Genius Macelii* (CIL II 2413), and Flavius Fronto who erected a monument to *Eventus* (CIL II 2412).

Compared to the other two Augustan urban foundations in NW Iberia, Bracara's social composition is distinctive. The material available suggests that there were few immigrants or Roman citizens (Tranoy and Le Roux 1989-90), and the town does not seem to have been occupied by a significant number of officials or military agents (Tranoy 1981) except in the period just after its foundation, when their expertise will have been necessary (Martins 2004). Instead, it was occupied mainly by natives and the ruling élites of the pre-Roman hillforts, making them the natural beneficiaries of its new social and political organization as they were promoted to hold the town's main honorific offices. The epigraphic evidence even shows that some of the priests of the imperial cult were of indigenous origin (e.g., Camalo, son of Melgeçò [CIL II 2426], and Lucrecia Fida [CIL II 2416]).

### Urban layout and architecture

The archaeological remains indicate that the planning of the town had its origins in the Augustan period. It was built on a rectilinear plan with the streets aligned NW–SE. The full extent of the original planned area is as yet unknown, since excavations have not yet sampled the whole area occupied by the town and in any event have not yet discovered the early buildings (Martins 2004). It almost certainly reached its maximum size in the 2nd c., enclosing an area of at least 48 ha. The plan of the Early Imperial town will have survived until the late 3rd or early 4th c., when the construction of the late-antique wall necessitated important changes to the arrangement of streets and areas occupied by houses (Martins 2004) (fig. 16.3).

Archaeological evidence from some of the *insulae* shows that the town had predominantly square lots, some 150 feet square (nearly 44.4 m between the axes of the streets) with buildable areas of about 120 feet (1 *actus*) (Martins 1997-98). This grid was not applied systematically but adapted to the hilly topography. The area around the forum consisted mainly of rectangular lots, though there is insufficient data at present to reconstruct any more than a theoretical grid. Clearly identified streets suggest they had relatively uniform widths (10-12 feet), though some may have been slightly wider (the one 25 feet wide is assumed to be the N stretch of the *kardo maximus* that led to the forum (Lemos and Leite 2000). Despite the difficulties in dating the streets, since they were frequently repaired, the chronology of the northern part of the *kardo maximus* can be placed in the early 1st c. A.D., the date matching the construction of a massive drainage system beneath it (4.5 feet high, roofed with flat stones, more than 50 m long) (Martins 2004). A key feature of the streets is the widespread presence of porticoes on at least one side of the street, to shelter pedestrians and provide space for commercial and artisanal activities. These public spaces have been recognized in different parts of the town (e.g., in the Carvalheiras *insula*: Martins 1997-98).

The forum has not been excavated but one may assume that it was situated in the highest part of the town, beneath modern buildings around Largo Paulo Orosio. The evidence consists of a 16th-c. map in which the 'forum Romanorum' is drawn, along with some major architectural remains (mainly column bases) found in nearby buildings. With its central position the forum area will have been fixed by the planners as the administrative and religious centre.

The architecture of the town during the Augustan and Julio-Claudian periods is largely unknown; it is possible that later buildings could have destroyed earlier ones. Almost all the architectural evidence, both public and private, is of Flavian or Trajanic date, suggesting that the late 1st and early 2nd c. was a period of general improvement, presumably as part of a municipal renewal programme (fig. 16.4). The most important public buildings known are public baths and a theatre, both of the early 2nd c. A.D. and close to the forum area (Martins and Silva 2000). They will have completely destroyed an older structure partly integrated as the baths. Another public building of the Flavian period is located beneath the cathedral on the edge of the town; although not fully understood, it could prove to be a *macellum*, which may have formed part of a commercial *forum*. The Flavian and Antonine periods seem to represent the height of the town's aspirations (Martins 1999). Roman standards of measurement are employed and good masonry work made extensive use of *opus vittatum*; domestic architecture (fig. 16.5) involved the same standards of building.

The construction of prestigious buildings (theatre, baths, probably also amphitheatre: Morais 2001; Martins 2004) for the urban élite to reinforce their personal power reveals the fidelity of the provincials to imperial policy (cf. Keay 1995 and 1997). Yet only two inscriptions seem to illustrate patronage. The first relates to the construction of an unusual monument, the 'Idol Fountain', a rock sanctuary dedicated to an indigenous river deity, Tongoenabiago, by the citizen Celico Fronto from the town of Arcobriga. Carved on a vertical rocky surface it consists of dedications and carved reliefs: one represents a human figure wearing a *toga*, probably Celico Fronto himself, while a sculpted bust within a small niche in the wall may symbolise the deity. The presence of columns and altars in the vicinity suggests that the fountain was part of a

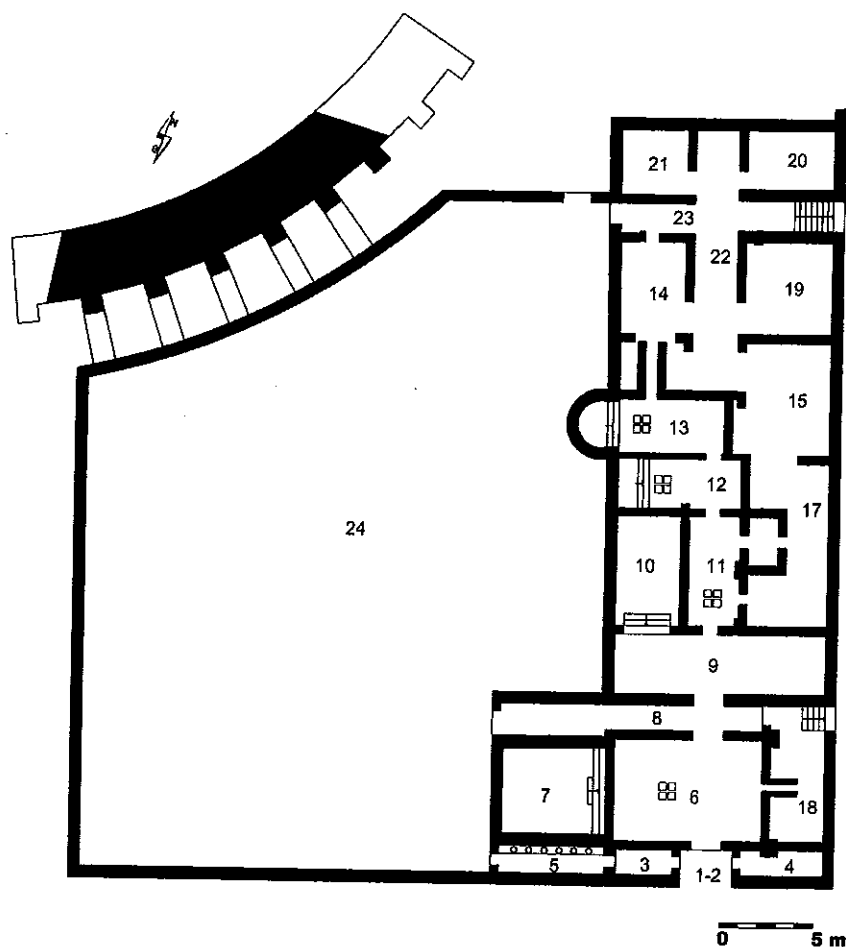


Fig. 16.4. Phase 1 of the Alto da Cividade baths at the beginning of the 2nd c. A.D.: 1-2 - atrium, 3-4 - cubicula, 5 - latrine, 6 - apodyterium, 7 - piscina, 8 - corridor, 9-10 - frigidaria, 11-12 - tepidaria, 13 - caldarium, 14-23 - service areas, 24 - palaestra.

larger sacred area (Martins 2000). The second is an altar dedicated to the *Genius Macelli*; it was found near the Cathedral, where excavations have revealed the remains of a possible market (see above). The name of the dedicator, Flavius Urbicius, may indicate the acquisition of Roman citizenship by an individual of native origin in the Flavian period. Possibly this new citizen was also responsible for the construction of the market, since its chronology is Flavian (fig. 16.3).

#### Bracara Augusta and the surrounding countryside

The emergence of Roman towns in NW Iberia had a strong impact on the evolution and development of indigenous communities. In the case of Bracara Augusta, the establishment of a road network played an important rôle in changing the settlement patterns. Although most of the indigenous population continued to live in hillforts, some, mainly those linked with farming, were abandoned (Martins 1995 and 1996a). There followed an early and rapid spread of villas linked to new forms of owning and working the land. Some who held important urban offices were buried in their country villas. The creation of villas had a strong impact on the economic organization of the area and on a new rural landscape. Closely associated with the town, villa-owners could act at the same time as a rural and an urban aristocracy. In the 1st-2nd c. A.D. the organization of villas seems to be linked to the road network itself. Only at a later stage would villas spread along the rivers, occupying all the land able to support cereal farming. The topography suggests that the *fundi* of villas may not have been continuous (Martins 1995).

New settlements also emerged in the countryside, but they were dependent on Bracara Augusta. These were open settlements (*vici*) along the roads, serving as markets and also servicing

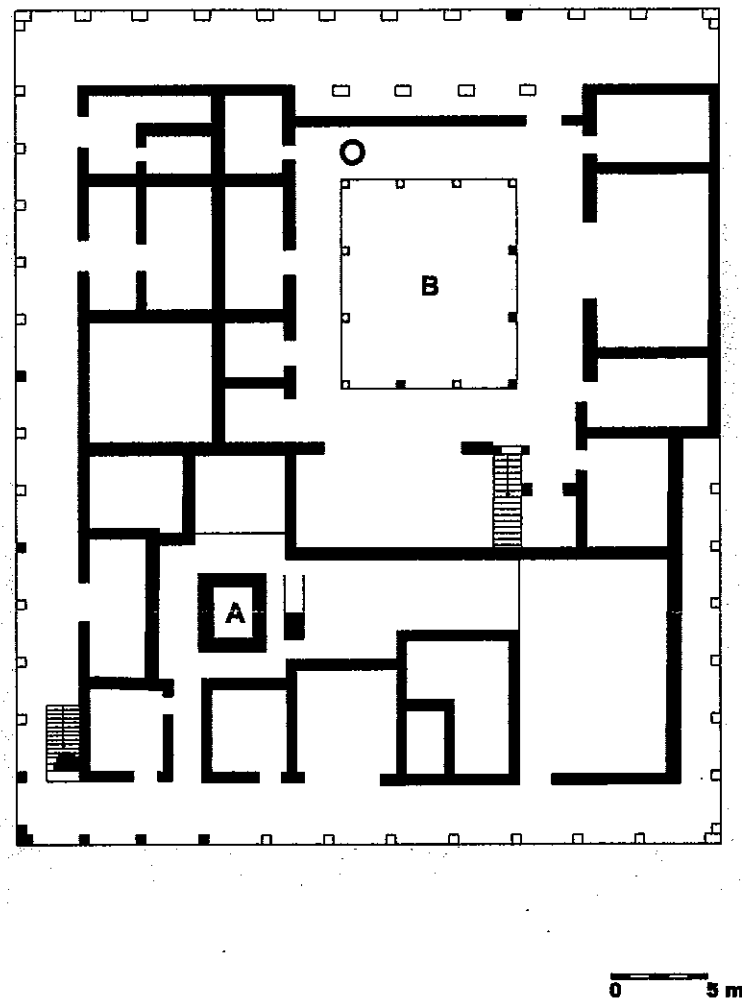


Fig. 16.5. Phase 1 (Flavian) of the Carvalheiras house: A - atrium, B - peristyle.

the needs of the transport system. Other *vici* emerged that were involved with healing waters, plentiful in the region (Martins 1996a). The territory of Bracara Augusta had no mineral resources of interest to the Roman state; changes in the economic organization of the area concerned the development of agriculture and craft activities to be channelled mainly to the town. The establishment of regional markets linked by the road network was the other side of the new economic system, in which both local and provincial products, such as wine, oil, pottery and luxury goods, were redistributed.

The epigraphic evidence from the countryside shows that the hierarchical model of urban social organization, involving citizens, foreigners and slaves, is repeated in rural contexts. From the time when the practice of referring to *castella* of origin became widespread for identifying indigenous folk, we can see the slow adoption by natives of the Roman system of affiliation, using the paternal name. The use of the *tria nomina* is present both in the urban and rural areas (Martins 1996a). This is part of the process whereby indigenous peoples were integrated into the Roman social system, some of them probably becoming owners of *fundi* in the town's territory.

The adoption of Italic-style country residences in the form of the villas is evidence for the assimilation of Roman economic, cultural and ideological patterns of life. The adoption of religious and funerary customs is also important for understanding cultural change in the area (Tranoy 1981). The introduction of classical cults into the territory was widespread and peace-

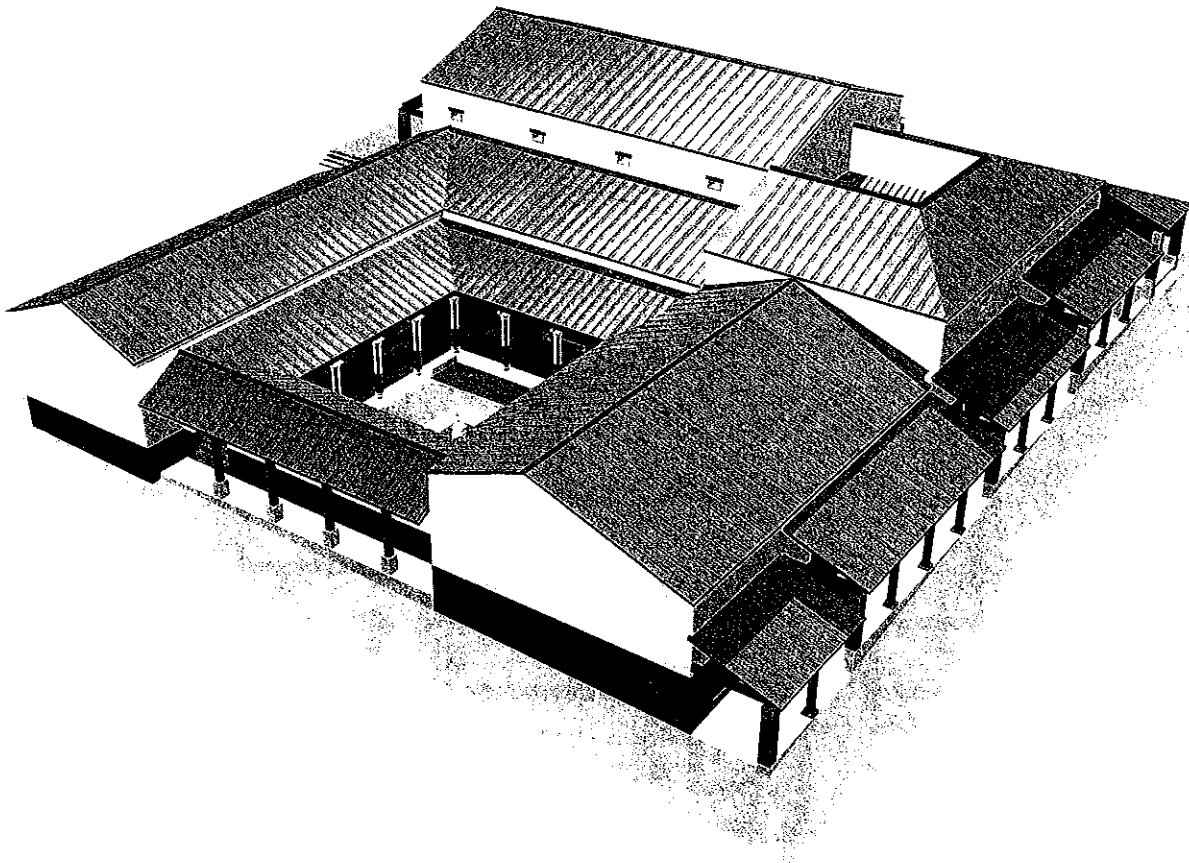


Fig. 16.6. A 3-D reconstruction of the Phase I (Flavian) Carvalheiras house (architect Rui Coelho).

ful. Of the dedicatory inscriptions known, 75% are addressed to Jupiter, with the epithets *Optimus* and *Maximus* representing 55% of all inscriptions (Martins 1995). Thermal *vici* mainly honoured the *Ninfae*. The *Lares* were present in villas and other settlements; other deities such as Mars, Mercury and Genius are also represented. The artistic styles seen in votive and funerary monuments in the countryside are similar to those found in the town, demonstrating the assimilation of Roman cultural patterns and the influence of the town over its territory.

#### Final comments

As a central focus of regional development and change, the town of Bracara Augusta contributed to the promotion and integration of indigenous populations by creating a rural landowning élite with legal privileges. It also promoted the diffusion of new settlements with new residential models, representing the new economic and cultural order. A landscape of private properties (*villas*) and open settlements (*vici*) emerged in the area around the town, co-existing with some Romanised hillforts. These kinds of settlements seem to have played a key rôle in the town's territorial organization, closely tied to the road system. While *villas* were associated with new ways of exploiting the resources of the land, *vici* developed crafts and trade and provided facilities such as baths, markets or temples, while hillforts kept watch over traffic.

New social relationships came with Roman control, completely changing the pre-Roman organization of the native population, although Roman citizenship was given to some indigenous élites, allowing them to become part of the urban and rural aristocracy. Changes also took place at an economic level, with the town's function of redistributing goods and as a market for regional produce. A monetary economy was introduced, helping to change social relationships. But perhaps the most important consequence of the new order were the cultural changes: the general adoption of new artistic, religious and funerary expressions, new ways of eating, dressing and speaking, writing and literacy, and the concept of *otium* helped create new representations of time and space and led to different cognitive and symbolic perceptions of the world.



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# EARLY ROMAN TOWNS IN *HISPANIA* *TARRACONENSIS*

edited by

**L. Abad Casal, S. Keay & S. Ramallo Asensio**

*with contributions by*

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