

Urban Transformations in the Roman Town of *Baetulo* from the Flavian Period

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Abstract

The roman town of *Baetulo* is placed in the underground of the actual city of Badalona, and is located 10 km north from Barcelona in the east bank of *Besos* river. Although more than ninety years of preventive archaeological excavations give us an important amount of information, the results are sometimes an incomplete view of the evolution of the Roman site. The purpose of this paper is to expose some historical reflection about the urban transformations of the roman town, by analysing the most important data from the archaeological interventions and reviewing some of the traditional interpretations for the *Baetulo*'s urban development from the 2nd century to the 4th century AD.

Baetulo was in the Roman province of *Hipania Tarraconensis*. The town was an ex novo foundation and it could be part of the programme of urban foundations promoted from Rome at the end of the 2nd century-beginning of the 1st century BC. Pliny classifies it as an *oppidum civium Romanorum*, which means an urban settlement with a consolidated presence of Roman citizens. Its location had the specific purpose to be one of the main structures of the new territorial organisation of the *Laietania*. We establish the foundational chronology on 80–70 BC by the context of the early levels inside its urban limits. The sequence of occupation lasts until the 7th century AD.

At the time of the foundation of *Baetulo*, the town was surrounded by a wall that delimited an area about 11 hectares,¹ with an interior urban planning that responded to an orthogonal system with NW–SE orientation.² The Republican city experienced a first transformation in the Augustan and Julio-Claudian period, when part of the sewer system was built and different private houses as the Dolphins and Ivy *domus* (fig. 1.6), public buildings as *tabernae* complex (fig. 3), and also possibly the public bath (fig. 3) were remodelled.

At the end of the 1st century AD and the beginning of the 2nd century, archaeological evidence documents the erasure of some public and private buildings. An example case is the water conduct (fig. 2) built in barrel vault with about 1,5 m. max. width and located in the NE of the town, probably under one of the *cardines*.³ The lining level that collapses the conduction has been dated by the pottery documented⁴ and gives us a chronological date at the beginning of the Flavian period⁵. Another structure is the sewer of the *cardo minor* II in Fluvià Street 12–16 (fig. 1.2) where the materials documented in the abandonment and erasure lining levels⁶ allow a data for the same period.⁷ Finally, in the lower terrace next to the *forum*, at the *decumanus* and *cardo maximus* intersection, a commercial public building was abandoned. It is formed by five *tabernae* (fig. 3), each one divided into two areas that were



Fig. 1: Urban plan of *Beatulo* with the localisation of the archaeological intervention mentioned in the text. 1: Water conduct, Pujol Street. – 2: *cardo minor* II collector, Fluvià Street 12–16. – 3: archaeological area of *Thermae* and *Decumanus*, Museu de Badalona. – 4: private *balnea* complex, rectoria of Santa Maria's church. – 5: Theatre, Eres Street 13–17. – 6: *domus* and *cardo maximus*, Lladó Street. – 7: *decumanus* I collector, Via Augusta Street, Jungfrau old school. – 8: *Via Augusta* and hinges of the main entrance town's door. – 9: *domus* of *Quintus Licinius*, Termes Romanes Street 2. – 10: *domus* of *Quintus Licinius*, Eastern sector, Assemblea Catalunya plaza, 8. – 11: *domus*, Temple Street.



Fig. 2: Water conduct. Pujol Street.

built at the time of Augustus and were repaired during the reign of Domitian.⁸ Regarding the private sphere we underline the archaeological excavation at the Rectory of Santa Maria's church located behind the area of the *forum*⁹ (fig. 1.4). There, a *domus* with a private *balnea* and an exedra pool built in Augustan times and abandoned in Flavian period based on the materials of its abandonment levels was found.¹⁰

Different hypotheses were pointed about urban transformations during the Flavian period. In the mid-70s of the last century, it was suggested that this process may be related to the concession of *ius Latii*.¹¹ Subsequently, other authors maintained this hypothesis, although they ruled out the disappearance of the town¹² and suggested that this abandonment process responded to a period of economic weakness and decline based on the rise of the Augustan colonies like *Barcino*.¹³ Later data from archaeological interventions allowed to propose a new hypothesis that related the process of abandonments documented in the town with the development of the *villae* over the *territorium*, in which, at this moment of time, we found some buildings with a certain level of wealth and probably them could be the residence of the wealthy families coming from the old urban *nuclei*.¹⁴ These hypotheses had remained until the present, but the results obtained in new excavations have allowed to document from the end of the 1st century to the beginning of the 2nd century AD, a new building momentum. This new constructive impetus has been evidenced in several points of the city

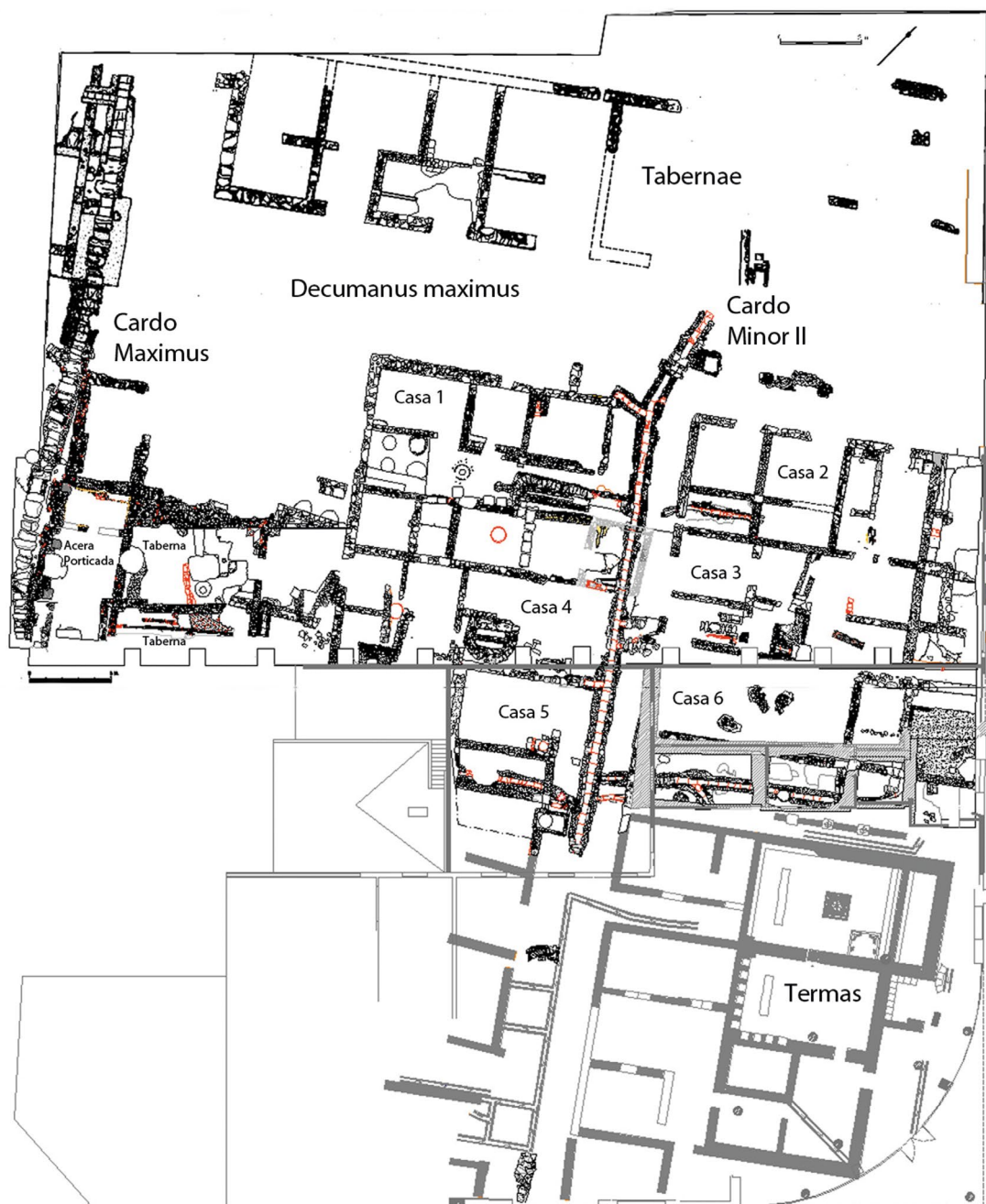


Fig. 3: Plan of the archaeological área of Thermae and Decumanus, Museu de Badalona.

in both the private and public buildings, at the same time and opposed to the process of abandonment and depreciation documented.¹⁵

The most representative public building of this new impulse is the construction of the theatre (fig. 1.5).¹⁶ The building was placed in an *insula* at the SW angle of the *forum*, which



Fig. 4: Theatre. Eres Street 13–17.

is delimited to the E by the *cardo minor* V and to the S by the *decumanus maximus*. Prior to the theatre, we documented an open area with a metal workshop in the 1st century BC, and a house during the 1st half of the 1st century AD.¹⁷

Above the abandonment levels of the house, a new constructive phase of the *insula* was documented. The new building would maintain the same orientation as the urban fabric, which demonstrates a willingness to integrate the new structure into the pre-existing urban space. And also it shows an important transformation, which involved the occupation of spaces already built. The theatre was built upon their foundations and did not take advantage of existing topographic elements. From this public building a semicircular wall with an *opus signinum* pavement preserved more than 3,50 m. height, and several sections of radial walls adjoining the semicircular wall (fig. 5), five of which have been documented as a substructions for the *summa cavea*, is conserved. All these elements formed a building of 44 m. in diameter located near the *forum*. The theatre could be seen from the *Via Augusta*, from the outskirts of *Baetulo*, and also from the sea.¹⁸

The presence of TSA A as well as African common ceramics in the foundation trenches in the radial walls as well as in the constructive levels¹⁹ of regularisation and the levels of circulation of the theatre, places the construction of this building in the 2nd century AD.

This new impulse of public buildings also affects, and importantly, the town's sewer system that was reformed and in some cases also expanded. At the middle of the 2nd century we documented the construction of a scupper in the intersection of *decumanus maximus* and *cardo minor* II, in order to drain the upper part of the town and lead wastewaters from the main street to the sewer (fig. 1.3). It was made with double ashlar of sandstone with a hole of 30 cm of diameter that lies directly on the walls of the collector. The reform of this structure would partially affect a section of the collector, and also, the plumbing that had to be reconstructed in part by making a constructive trench that cut the previous pavements of both streets and a part of the portico's foundations of the House 2 (fig. 3). The levels that



Fig. 5: *Via Augusta* and the hinges of the main entrance of *Baetulo*, Clos de la Torre nowadays Assemblea Catalunya plaza.

were filling the constructive trench²⁰ give us a chronological range at least at the beginning of the 2nd century AD.²¹

Another example is in the *cardo maximus*, at the upper part of the town between the Dolphins and the Ivy *domus*, on *Lladó* Street (fig. 1.6). The reforms consisted in a new circulation pavement and a new collector that replaced the original with a different path. The residual waters from the street were driven into the sewage through a scupper that emerges from one of the pillars of the eastern portico of the *cardo maximus*. The levels²² associated with this reform are dated at the end of the 1st century AD.²³

Finally, an example of a new collector construction was located in the *decumanus* I, in the *intra muros* section of the *Via Augusta* (fig. 1.7).

The sewer construction trench crosses the lower layouts of the street pavements. The sewer had 0.23 m width and depth, and was made of masonry and the base and the covert of *tegulae*. In the SW edge of the sewer, a scupper made of ashlar with a hole of 20 cm of diameter was found. The chronology for this construction was given by a coin of Trajan located in the penultimate of the street levels, and for the pavement level of the new collector cover.²⁴ In the *Via Augusta* (fig. 1.8) at *extra muros* but next to the NE door entrance of *Baetulo* (fig. 5), a *Nerva* as embedded in one of the repaired pavements could be found. The coin, dated in the



Fig. 6: *Domus* of *Quintus Licinius*. General view of the archaeological excavation at the Termes Romanes Street, on top the western area of the *domus* and on the bottom the garden pond in the central peristyle.

97 AD, is low-wear, a fact that shows that it would have been short-lived and therefore, we can think that the refectio would have occurred at a time not far from this date.

This building activity is documented also in private buildings. A significant example is the construction of a vast *domus* with a 1000 sqm *perystilum*, in an *insula* bounded in the N by the *decumanus maximus* and on the S by the *Via Augusta*. In the archaeological excavations of the 30s and 50s of the last century the house was largely discovered.²⁵ In the 70s, Guitart proposed a compositional scheme of the *domus*,²⁶ which was extended to the S within the *Via Augusta* as a limit. In the excavation campaign carried out in 2011 the remains of the rooms that formed the western boundary of this large building were found. The eastern limit was found on the other site of the same block (fig. 1.10) located at the opposite corner.²⁷ With the new data, a building with 80 m long and more than 3000 square m could be revealed. The portico of the peristylum, with almost 5 meters width, was built elevated from the garden, in which there was a 13 m. long pond with two apses at its edges. At the centre of the axial line, in the western part, there is a room with more than 9 m. in width, probably an *oecus* (fig. 6).²⁸ In one of the rooms, in the southern part of the house, the *tabula hospitalis* was found,²⁹ a bronze plate dated the 9th June 98 AD. with an inscription that documents the hospitality agreement established between *Quintus Licinius* and the *Baetulonenses* who accept him as a *patronus* (fig. 7).³⁰ The importance of this personality, the place where it was found the *tabula*, and the monumental building, makes us think that the *domus* could be property of *Quintus Licinius* or his family. The fact that *Quintus Licinius* was the *patronus* of the *Baetulo* does not demonstrate euergetism actions but it makes it highly probable.

Parallel to the constructive process associate to the elites, some examples of new urban development in the houses were also documented that were built in the 1st half of the 1st century BC, which were located on the southern slope of the city and opened to the *cardo minor* II, in Font i Cussó Square. One of these cases is at the House 1, a rectangular building articulated around a yard and with two *tabernae* that open to the *cardo minor* II. At the end of the 1st century AD, several rooms and the central courtyard were paved in *opus signinum* and, furthermore, the *tabernae*, which open to the street, were expanded. The chronology for this moment is given by the ceramic used in the *opus signinum* pavement of one of the rooms³¹. On the other hand, at House 1 and House 2, located at the south of the *decumanus maximus* that opened to the *cardo minor* II (fig. 3), six rebuilding ritual offerings in ware containers two of them with a lid (fig. 7) were found. The material associated with the levels,³² in which they were inserted, allow a chronology of these offerings at the end of the 1st century AD.³³

In addition, there is epigraphic evidence that shows the municipal activity (fig. 8). It is an honorary inscription on a pedestal dedicated to Antoninus Pius and dated between 140 and 144 AD, in which the *decreto decurionum* formula appears.³⁴ It is the first testimony of the existence of municipal organisation in *Baetulo* and is since this moment when their magistrates are documented epigraphically.

We also know two more inscriptions, in which the municipal government is quoted. In the first place, a pedestal dated at the 1st half of the 2nd century AD. (98–138 AD.) dedicated to *Quintus Licinius Silvanus Granianus Quadronius Proculus* (fig. 8).³⁵ The second inscription,

dated at the 1st half or middle of the 2nd century AD is a pedestal dedicated to *Marcus Fabius Nepos*, a member of a family from *Iesso* (Guissona, Lleida). He was *aedil*, *duumvir* and *curator balinei novi* and it is the only testimony of the municipal career in *Baetulo*.³⁶ Other inscriptions that are also dated at the same period, one very fragmented³⁷ and another votive inscription dedicated to the divinity *Lupae Augustae*, by *Tertius*, a *libertus* who was *sevir augustalis* could be uncovered.³⁸ Finally, there is an inscription engraved on a rock, dated at the 2nd century AD and that perhaps it could be related to the cult of *Mitras*.³⁹

All this impulse in private and public buildings and personalities associated to the municipality and its government, give us an image of a flourishing town in the 2nd century AD.

But, at the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd century AD, evidences of abandonment are partly documented in the urban layout, especially at the part near the forum and in the lower part of the city, which is closer to the coastline.

In the excavations of the area of Font i Cussó square (fig. 3), a large dump placed at the N edge of the *cardo maximus* portico sidewalk was documented. Its chronology gives us a range at the beginning of the 3rd century. The layouts of the dump were filling with domestic waste, the most common were African common ware, bones, marine malacology and waste.⁴⁰ The homogeneity on these types of material and the equality of the different layouts that conform this deposit, make us think that it could be used for a short period of time and evidences some kind of habitat.⁴¹ It is an example of occupation of the public space, the sidewalk of the *cardo maximus*, at the beginning of the 3rd century. At the same time the *domus* located at the south of the *cardo maximus* and the *cardo minor* were abandoned too. This important evidence indicates the contraction of the town of *Baetulo*. Maybe the population left for a sort of time the S part of the town, near the seafront.

Besides the abandonment evidence that we just related, we also documented some urban development at this period of time. The most important evidence is the reform of the *Via Augusta* at the 2nd half of 3rd century (fig. 5). It was found an Antoninianus of Gaius (ca. 226 AD) in the last pavement of the *Via Augusta* at the part next to the enter of the town. At this point the bronze hinges of the wall door were removed, but the street was still in use without the door.⁴²

In addition, the existence of archaeological layouts and some epigraphy document an occupation sequence of the town during this period. The pedestals dedicated to the emperors Gordianus III (238–244 AD),⁴³ to his wife Sabinia Tranquilina (238–244 AD)⁴⁴ and, finally, to Philipus I (244–249 AD),⁴⁵ by *decuriones Baetulonenses*, that probe the power of the city council are remarkable.

As a final conclusion, we can say that the occupation of the town of *Baetulo* from its late republican origins until at least the 2nd half of the 3rd century AD was continuous. It is evident that this occupation was not linear in time, since the city had successive transformations that would begin at the time of Augustus and would end at the reign of Philipus the Arab. During the Flavian period, a process of abandonment and depreciation that affected both the upper and the lower SE slopes was documented, and could be interpreted as a very



Fig. 7: Group of offerings related with foundational ritual vessels in houses and 2 in the archaeological area of *thermae* and *decumanus*.

specific event that could possibly respond to a transformation period of the town but not a widespread abandonment. This hypothesis would be confirmed by the fact that in the same chronological period at the beginning of 2nd century AD or shortly thereafter, the town began an important urban transformation with the construction of the theatre, the reform of the sewer system and an important private reforms, one of the most outstanding example is the so-called *domus* of *Quintus Licinius*. Although the role played by this personality, *patronus* of *Baetulo*, has not been able to confirm it, is also logical to point as a very likely hypothesis, the direct connection of this flourishing moment that can be promoted by him or his descendants.

This building impulse was truncated at the end of the 2nd century or at the beginning of the 3rd century AD, when public and private buildings are abandoned and erased, both in the southern slope and in the upper part of the town. Besides of this important abandonment process, it was not total or general, so in the middle of the 3rd century AD there is a constructive recovery, especially in the public sphere, materialised in the repaving of some streets and, in addition, the activity of the city government is confirmed epigraphically by dedicating pedestals to the emperors.

Notes

¹ Meanwhile this article is been writing the plan of the roman town is under revision. AN.

² Guitart et al. 1994, 188–191.

³ Padrós 1985, 20–22.

⁴ TSS Drag. 27 and Drag. 37, TSH Ritt. 8 and Drag. 27 and African common ware Lamb. 10B, Ostia II:312 and Ostia III:332.

⁵ Guitart 1976, 132–134.

⁶ TSH Drag. 37, African common ceramic ware Lamb. 10, thin walls Mayet XXXVII, XXXVIII and Marabini LXVIII and TSS Drag. 18.

⁷ Comas et al. 1986.

⁸ In the amortization levels was documented TSS Drag. 27c, Drag. 33, Drag. 35/36, Dra. 29, Drag. 37 and Dechelet 67, TSH Drag. 27, Drag. 29, Drag. 37, Hispanic 2, Hispanic 4 and Hermet 13, the first closed forms of TSA A and African common ware of Lamb. 10B, Ostia II:312 and Ostia III:332. Aquilué 1987, 16–71; Madrid 1999, 162.

⁹ Guitart 1976, 89–112.

¹⁰ TSH Drag. 37 and African common ware as Lamb 10B, Ostia II:312 and Ostia III:332.

¹¹ Guitart 1976, 244 f.

¹² Padrós 1985, 83 f.

¹³ Aquilué 1987, 207 f.

¹⁴ Guitart 1984, 38; id, 1987, 150; Guitart et al. 1991, 46.

¹⁵ Padrós & Sánchez Gil de Montes 2014.

¹⁶ Padrós 2001, 15–31; 2002; Muñoz 2003.

¹⁷ Muñoz 2003.

¹⁸ Padrós – Moranta 2001, 15–31; Padrós – Moranta 2006, 205–222.

¹⁹ TSA A Lamb. 7b, Lamb. 2nd and Lamb. 19, TSS Drag. 18, Drag. 27b, Drag. 29 and Drag. 37a, African common ware Ostia I: 270, Ostia III: 267, Ostia III: 332, Lamb. 10A and Lamb.10B and TSH (Muñoz 2003).

²⁰ TSA A Hayes 34 and Hayes 20, abundant African common ware Ostia I:261 and Ostia III:267

²¹ Ferrer – Sánchez Gil de Montes 2012.

²² TSS Drag. 24/25, Drag. 27b, Drag. 29b and Drag. 37, TSH Drag. 27, Drag. 37 and Hermet 13, thin walls Mayet XXXVIII and XL / XLII and African common ware Ostia II: 306, Ostia II:303 and Lamb. 10.

²³ Comas et al. 1985; Madrid 1991, 157–158; Bosch de Doria – Padrós 1999.

²⁴ TSS Drag. 24 f. and Ritt. 8, TSA A and African common ware Lamb. 10A.

²⁵ Serra Ràfols 1939, 268–289; Cuyas 1977, 281–293.

²⁶ Guitart 1976, 139–142.

²⁷ Caballero 2005.

²⁸ Sánchez Gil de Montes 2011.

²⁹ Font i Cussó 1980, 58–67.

³⁰ IRC 139.

³¹ TSS Drag. 29 and African Common ware Ostia III: 332.

³² African common ware of Lamb. 10B, Ostia II: 314, Ostia III:332. One of the lids was an African common ware Ostia III: 332 and one of the ritual vessels was a ceramic of thin walls Mayet XXIV.

³³ Comas – Padrós 2004, 221–225.

³⁴ IRC 134.

³⁵ IRC 138.

³⁶ IRC 141.

³⁷ IRC 142.

³⁸ IRC 132.

³⁹ IRC 133.

⁴⁰ TSA A Hayes 2, Hayes 6b, Hayes 8, Hayes 34, Lamb. 4, and African common ware Ostia I: 261, Ostia III: 267, Ostia III: 332, OstiaII: 302, Ostia II:312, Lamb. 10A, Lamb. 10B and Bonifay 21.

⁴¹ Padrós – Sánchez Gil de Montes 2011, 229.

⁴² Comas et al. 1998, 45.

⁴³ IRC 135.

⁴⁴ IRC 136.

⁴⁵ IRC 137.

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