

The Roman *forum* of Los Bañales (Uncastillo, Zaragoza): Building, Remodelling and Reuse of a *forum* from the *Conuentus Caesaraugustanus* at the End of the High-Empire*

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Abstract

The Roman city of Los Bañales shows a *forum* complex that was built, at the latest, during the early Augustan Age. The site suffered a series of remodellings, one of which can be linked to the Flavian promotion of the city into a *municipium*. It was reused early, between the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd century AD, as can be seen from the pottery found at the reutilisation levels in the east cryptoporticus and the southern area. We will study the techniques applied to transform the old public spaces of the *forum* into spaces with different purposes, by means of compartmentalising areas, adapting it to these new usages. In this process, ashlar as well as architectural decorations from the previous stages were reused.

The Building of the *forum*

The *forum* (fig. 1) of the Roman city of Los Bañales's was built during the early Augustan age, according to the material found under the public square, and to its first assembly of sculptures, which dates to this period.¹ The unit under the *forum*'s area consists of a significant level of fill, which made the reutilisation of the preexisting pre-Roman structures possible. It also served to unify the layer beneath the open area. The first epigraphic programme consists of equestrian statues dedicated to Gaius² and Lucius Caesar,³ grandsons and adoptive sons of the *Princeps*. Their respective equestrian statue-bases have been found; Lucius Caesar's was unearthed from the basilica's cryptoporticus, and Gaius Caesar's was discovered some years ago in the nearby town of Rivas. Both must have been presided by quite a larger statue of Augustus himself, as can be deduced by the foundations of these monuments, which are placed in the *antae* that give access to the northern *porticus duplex*.⁴ This first enclosure was articulated around a limited open area, of 13.5 × 22 m, which means that it is one of the smallest public squares of Hispania, together with the forums of *Iuliobriga* and *Munigua*.⁵ It displayed a double *porticus* at the north and west flanks, and the latter was taken up by the judicial basilica,⁶ erected over a deep cryptoporticus, with a two-aisle floor and dimensions of 7.5 × 26 m. The south of the *forum*, of greater slope, shows a considerably large terracing wall, built as a potent *opus quadratum*. The city's curia was placed at the end of the western *porticus*, and had also modest dimensions, of 4 × 7 m indoors.

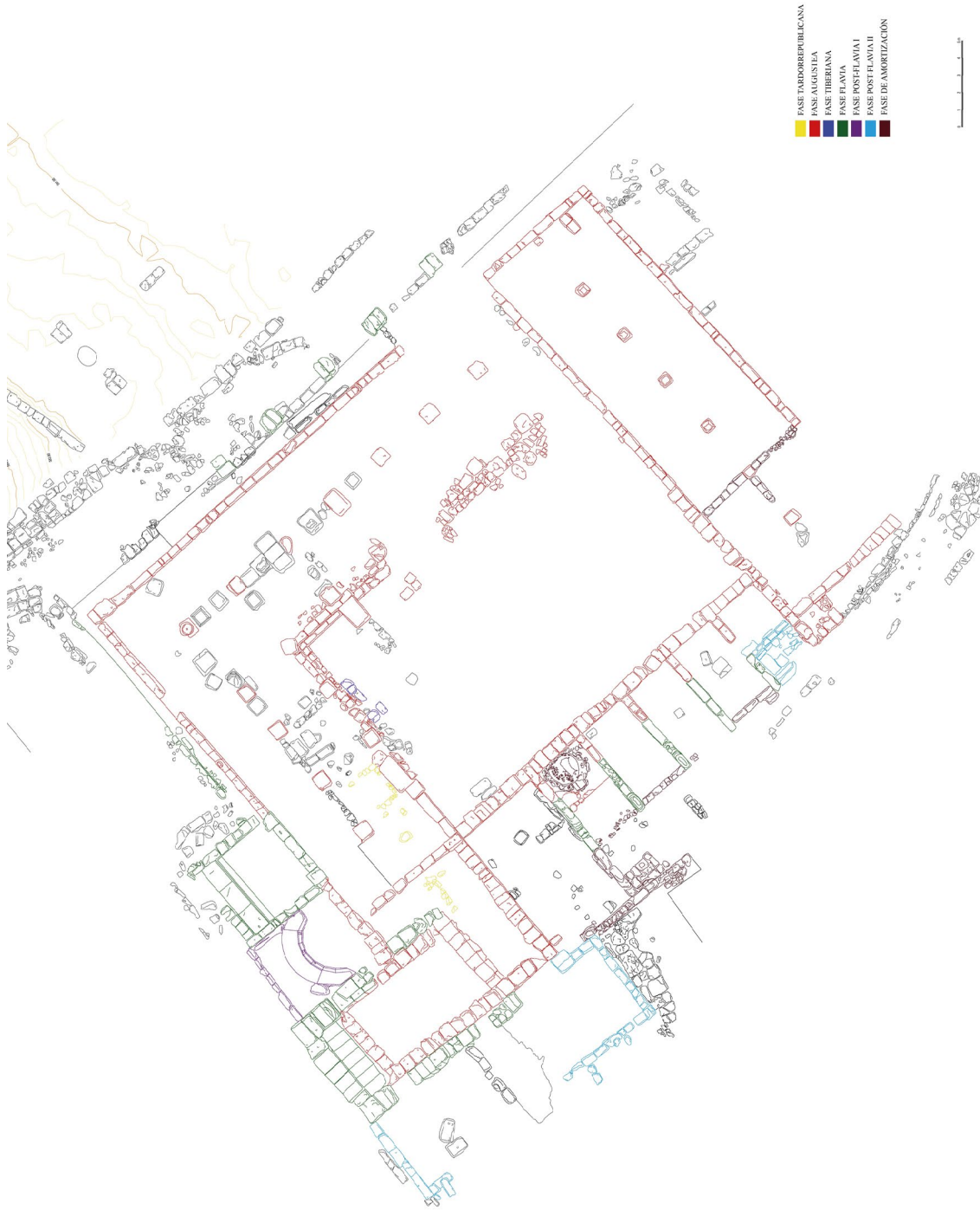


Fig. 1: Plan of the forum.



Fig. 2: Reutilisation processes of the forum's structures.

The Remodellings of the Complex

By the time of Tiberius, the sculptural decoration of the square's open area was completed, with the addition of another triple equestrian cycle. It consisted of a statue of Tiberius⁷ and two statues dedicated to *Sempronius Vitulus*, *subpraefectus cohortis*. The first two had been erected through a testamentary disposition of *Sempronius Vitulus* himself,⁸ while the third one was promoted by his freedman *Aesopus*.⁹ This phase only equipped the *forum* with a new equestrian group, and did not modify the floor or the decorative programmes of the complex by means of any construction works.

During the Flavian period, the whole set was altered through significant works (fig. 1), which coincide with the historic moment in which the city was judicially promoted into a *municipium*.¹⁰ In the *forum*, a cult enclosure was built, dedicated to the Victoria Augusta, and promoted by *Marcus Fabius Novus* and *Porcia Faventina*.¹¹ Recently, through the revision of architectural material, it has been verified that a small Tuscan capital – very possibly from the forum's earliest phase – was reworked as a cylindrical altar dedicated to the Victoria Augusta, for this very place of worship.¹² Also during this phase, the monumentalisation of the curia took place. Its walls and height doubled in size, although its indoor dimensions remained unaltered. In the southern area, taking advantage of the large terracing wall from the Augustan period and of the slope level, a series of *tabernae* were built. They face a *decumanus*, which surrounds the *forum* by its southern flank. Structures like these must have existed in the public square at its height, following a pattern similar to the one at the colonial *forum* of Tarraco, where there are *tabernae* at the street level, and enclosures at the

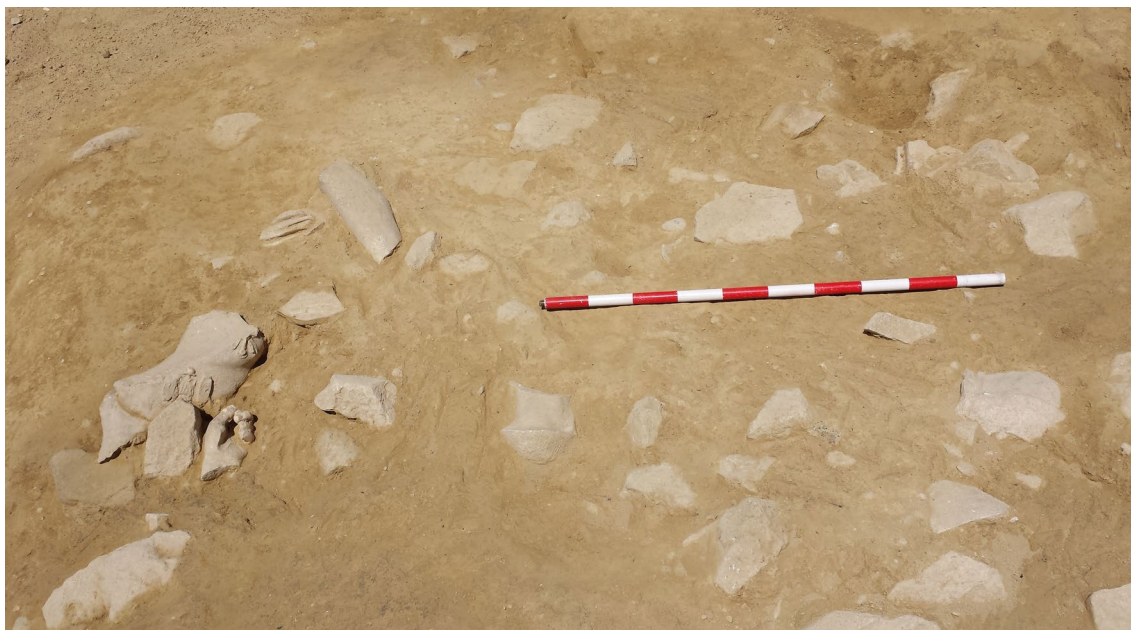


Fig. 3: Recycling of sculptures program.

area level.¹³ In addition, during this phase we also have a refurbishment, which gives more monumentality to the forum's north access through the *porticus duplex*.

In the post-Flavian period, we encounter a series of remodellings, which affect two areas of the *forum* (fig. 1). A space between the *Victoria Augusta* enclosure and the curia is used to build a second worship enclosure. It was erected through *Pompeia Paulla's* testamentary disposition, and dedicated to a number of deities.¹⁴ The other refurbishment affects the southern part of the *forum*, where one of the *tabernae* is reused to build an access from the *decumanus* that surrounds the *forum* from the south, up to the square's level. In order to make it possible, a monumental staircase was built, of which only the first three steps remain.

The Reutilisation of the Enclosure

In the southern part, we can observe reutilisation processes of the forum's structures through the compartmentalisation of spaces for purposes different to the original ones. For instance, the wall that divides the first and second *tabernae* is an actual witness of the different architectural phases of this part of the *forum*, as it shows the Augustan terracing wall, the vertical buttresses from the Flavian enlargement, and the final compartmentalisation of the wall, when it did not have a public function anymore.¹⁵ Also in this area, facing the *tabernae* n° 2 –and invading what used to be a *decumanus*– remains a wall, in which an architectural acroterion was reused (fig. 2).¹⁶ It is similar to another pair of acroteria unearthed from the *forum*, and



Fig. 4: Compartmentation of the substruction in the basilica's cryptoporticus.

which might have belonged to the curia. Furthermore, a considerable stratigraphic unit from the forum's reutilisation phase was located, placed over the first two *tabernae*. In the mentioned level, numerous sculpture fragments appeared,¹⁷ carved from fine-grained white marble (fig. 3). All of the pieces had been intentionally cut, very likely to be turned into lime, although the kiln linked to this process has not been found. However, above the *tabernae* n° 2 two ovens were built, but with different purposes, one of them associated with baking processes.¹⁸ Among the sculpture fragments, a series of portraits stand out. Some of them are linkable to Julio-Claudian princes,¹⁹ from which we can highlight a bust of Germanicus.²⁰ There are also some outstanding pieces made from *marmor Lunense*, which belong with each other, reconstructing part of an Imperial *thoracatus*, linkable to a portrayal of Domitian.²¹ Other fitting fragments show a second *thoracatus*,²² a number of robed figures,²³ and dressed feminine portrayals.²⁴

In the basilica's cryptoporticus there is also a wall, which divides part of the substruction for different purposes from those originally public that the building had. Specifically, an uneven brick wall was built over the fifth central pillar of the cryptoporticus (fig. 4).²⁵ The choice of place indicates an intention to save as much structural material as possible, taking advantage of the area originally occupied by the pillar, which supported the building's upper floor. In this cryptoporticus, plenty of bronze appeared over the building's pavement. Apparently, they are what remains of some of the *forum's* bronze statues. A number of fragments have been identified as linkable to Imperial portrayals, such as the ones that decorated the square and of which we know both cycles mentioned earlier. The remains of three other equestrian monument's foundations, which were located at the north *porticus duplex*, are still in place as well, so we do not know where

exactly these very fragmentary pieces came from. Above this level, we encounter once again proof of reutilisation processes: four equestrian pedestals mentioned earlier were unearthed from this unit, as well as the architectural decoration of the judicial basilica,²⁶ which used to be located in the building's first floor. Both elements had been introduced inside the cryptoporticus on purpose, and had nothing to do with the structure's first floor collapse. Although the architectural decoration is believed to have belonged to the basilica, the equestrian pedestals must have been placed outdoors, on top of the foundations preserved at the antae which give access to the north and west porticos, or else, inside the north *porticus duplex*.

The whole enclosure must have been reutilised early, around the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century AD,²⁷ after what can be deduced from the pottery found in the reutilisation levels, both from the east cryptoporticus and the southern area of the *forum*. This chronology, although very early, has a number of parallels in other forums through Hispania, such as the ones of *Carthago Nova*, *Clunia*, *Emporiae* or *Labitolosa*, *Lucentum*, *Saguntum* or *Valeria*.²⁸

In the household-artisanal district, new evidence of the forum's reutilisation has been found. A column's shaft, which probably came from the forum's *porticus duplex*, was reused as a bench. The proof of its origin is the shaft's diameter, similar to those preserved of the porticos, and its proximity to the *forum* itself, which would make easy the carrying of construction materials. The dating of this area is given by two *terra sigillata Hispanica* fragments. One of them had been cut in the shape of a game token, and both have an imprinted stamp of coins from the first issues of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. The final phase of this complex's dating is based on a bronze Antoninianus of Caracalla, from 214 AD, unearthed from the last inhabitancy level of what seems to be the main room of the said complex.²⁹ The dating of the earliest phases at this area is, therefore, concordant with the first evidences of the forum's early reutilisation since the end of the 2nd century AD.

Conclusions

The Roman *forum* of Los Bañales (Uncastillo) had quite a short life, as it was built during the early Augustan age, and by the end of the 2nd or the beginning of the 3rd century AD, it suffered the first signals of reutilisation, as it was being used for non-public purposes. This chronology is even shorter if we take into account that the enclosure suffered significant refurbishments during the Flavian period, in coincidence with the judicial promotion of the city into a *municipium*. Further post-Flavian remodellings also affected a number of areas in the *forum*.

The processes that have been mentioned imply the dismantlement of the epigraphic, sculptural and decorative programmes, the compartmentalisation of public spaces for different purposes, not always clear, and the presence of kilns and ovens invading

tabernae in the southern area. These changes do not mean that the city was abandoned, rather, they show the transformations that took place when structures were reutilised for purposes different from the original ones, following patterns well known and studied in Hispania. This new evidence sheds a new light over the transformation processes, which must have affected many communities throughout Hispania in very early times. All of this indicates the decay of the municipal institutions, and how buildings, which used to be fundamental for the civic organisation, such as the curia or the basilica, were no longer needed.

Notes

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¹ Romero – Andreu 2018, 366–368.

² *HEp* 5, 916; Andreu – Jordán 2003–2004, 558 n. 21.

³ Andreu 2016, 510–515.

⁴ Ventura et al. 2018, 43.

⁵ Romero 2014, 167–169.

⁶ Romero 2016a, 199 f.; Romero 2016b, 376–378; Romero 2017b

⁷ Andreu 2015, 296–302; Andreu – Felice 2016, 553–556.

⁸ Andreu 2015, 296–302; Andreu 2017, 230.

⁹ Andreu – Felice 2016, 553–556; Andreu 2017, 230.

¹⁰ Andreu 2003, 173.

¹¹ Jordán – Andreu 2014, 247–259.

¹² Andreu – Romero 2018.

¹³ Mar et al. 2015, 255–259.

¹⁴ Jordán 2012, 75–92.

¹⁵ Romero 2017a, 253; Romero 2016b, 375 f.

¹⁶ Romero 2016b, 375 f.

¹⁷ Andreu et al. 2014, 191 f.; Andreu 2014, 254 f.; Romero 2017a, 253.

¹⁸ Andreu – Delage 2017, 352.

¹⁹ Romero – Andreu 2018, 368–370 nos. 1–4; Andreu et al. 2015, 42–45 nos. 1–3.

²⁰ Romero – Andreu 2018, 368 f. n. 1; Andreu et al. 2015, 42 f. nos. 1.

²¹ Romero et al. 2014, 197–216; Romero – Andreu 2018, 370–372 n. 5.

²² Romero – Andreu 2018, 372 n. 6.

²³ Romero – Andreu 2018, 372–374 nos. 7–10.

²⁴ Romero – Andreu 2018, 374 n. 11.

²⁵ Romero 2017a, 253; Romero 2016b, 377 f.

²⁶ Romero 2017b, 117–123.

²⁷ Andreu – Delage 2017, 351–363.

²⁸ Diarte-Blasco 2012, 247–251; Romero 2017a, 258 f.

²⁹ Andreu 2011, 45 f.; Andreu et al. 2014, 181–183.

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Fig. 1: Arqueocad S. L. – Fig. 2–4: L. Romero.

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