

Villae, Fundi, Peasant Agriculture and Wine Production in the Ager Barcinonensis

Oriol Olesti

Any historical community establishes relationships with its environment, generating a particular historical landscape. Such a landscape may be called “social”, since it is the result of the dialectical relationship between a community (in this case, a Roman *civitas*) and their territory. Traditionally, the so-called *villa* system has been considered the essence of the Roman rural landscape; in such a reconstruction, this type of settlement was considered the backbone of the territory. In fact, the *villae* were just part of this landscape, and other elements, such as the structure of landownership, the existence of workshops and modest farms, and the network of roads and resources, affected the particular social landscape. This phenomenon can be properly evaluated only with a holistic approach that takes into account cities, their territory, *villae*, farms, elites, peasants, producers, amphorae, markets, commerce, and consumption.¹

In this paper, I discuss the case study of the *Ager Barcinonensis* (*Hispania Tarraconensis*), the territory including the Roman colony of Barcino. I also include several neighbouring cities of the region of Laetania,² such as Iluro, Baetulo, Egara, and Aquae Calidae. Modern Layetania includes the regions of Barcelonés, Maresme, Vallès, and Baix Llobregat (fig. 1).³

Villas and the Start of the Laietanian Wine Production

The diffusion of *villae*, with their recognizable social and architectural characteristics, started in Laetania from the Augustan period onwards. This development needs to be connected to start of the Layetanian wine production in the area and to the region’s juridical and historical changes.

In fact, there are few examples of *villae* in north-east *Hispania citerior* dating back to the middle of the 1st century BC. These should be connected with the presence of some Roman urban foundations, such as Gerunda or Emporion.⁴ Only when the first urban elites of these two Pompeian-Caesarean foundations formed do we see the appearance in the territory of some rural settlements. These displayed architectural features that we readily associate with a “*villa*” (courtyards, residential rooms with a certain level of décor, bath suites with hypocausts).

This is not the case in the Layetanian region and in Barcino. From the mid-1st century BC, there was an important increase of wine-producing centres and amphora workshops in this region,⁵ which occupied some key areas, like the lowlands of the Llobregat River or the Maresme coast. These new production centres were not in relation to any *villae*. At some sites (e.g. Sant Boi de Llobregat, Torre Llauder) it is possible to observe the

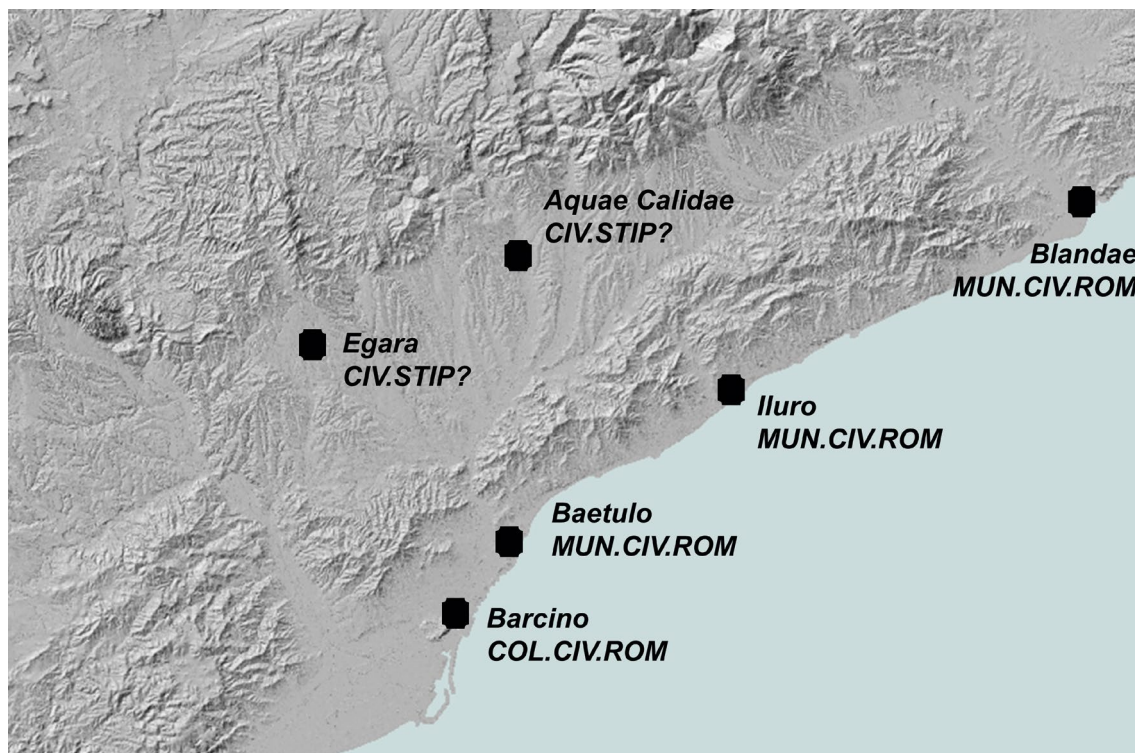


Fig. 1: Roman cities in the Laetania region (pre-Flavian period).

stratigraphic superposition of the *villa* over the amphora kiln structures; in other words, the diffusion of wine production predated the presence of *villae*.⁶

The growth of the Layetanian wine production was the result of a previous phenomenon, which included the integration and Romanisation of local communities, as well as the activity of some Italian families, probably acting as agents or traders.⁷ This initial production was not developed within the frame of the *villa*, but other forms of settlements, including Romano-Iberian farms and proto-industrial ateliers.

A turning point in the evolution of the Layetanian territory was the foundation of the colony of Barcino in 15–10 BC.⁸ This *deductio* took place in the coastal territory south of the Baetulo River and impacted the previous communities of the area, probably belonging to the *civitas* of Baetulo. We do not know the exact extension of the *ager* of the new colony, but in addition to the coastal area it is likely that inland zones were also impacted.⁹

Augustan activity in Laetania was not limited to the foundation of Barcino: in the same period Baetulo and Iluro acquired the status of Roman *municipia*. The new civic status had important consequences for the territory. First of these was the creation of local elites, whether colonial or municipal. Second was the deployment of the Roman legal landownership structure, which implied a real *dominium* over the land. Both of these developments explain the emergence of the *villa* as the main type of rural

settlement pursued by these elites, and the inversion in one of the most profitable production: the **Layetanian** wine.¹⁰

The Territorial Model: *Civitas (urbs/ager)*

As mentioned, the legal consolidation of the ‘urban model’ in Laetania in the Augustan age implies the genesis of local / colonial elites, together with the emergence of the *villa* in the landscape. In fact, however, the key piece of the Roman territorial structure was the *fundus* or *praedium*, the rural property, a direct consequence of *dominium*. These *fundi* were the ‘core’ of the *census*, the inventory of the citizens and their properties; the *census*, in turn, was the base for the political, social, and economic life of the city.

The *fundi* were delimited and assigned at the moment of the foundation of the new city. In the case of a colony like Barcino, this possibly followed the centuriation system (*ager divisus et adsignatus*). In other cases, the system of the *ager arcifinius* was followed, in which natural boundaries or former land division markers were used for the delimitation of the properties. The land was then organized according to the respective form of ownership (*dominium*), which was declared by *professio* at the *census*, as is well known from documents such as the *tabula* of Velleia¹¹.

Is it possible to identify these changes at the archaeological level? How can we analyse the landownership structure? Can the mapping of *villae* represent the ‘social landscape’ of the Layetanian region?

The Consolidation of the *dominium*

From the juridical point of view, the promotion of these cities (and their rural territories) to Roman rights presupposes the establishment of the *dominium ex iure Quiritum* as well as and the full property rights on their estates. The land precariously possessed by landowners (*possessio*) was transformed in *dominium*, and for the first time it was included in a real *census* (the colonial *census* in Barcino, and municipal *census* in Baetulo, Iluro, and Aquae Calidae). From the agrimensorial point of view, it is possible that the elaboration of the new *forma* (i.e. the mapping of these properties), was combined with a new delimitation or marking of the boundaries of these estates. Further definition of boundaries is sure in the case of Barcino, where the colonists’ new plots had to be marked in the fields, perhaps by using the *centuriatio* system.

Two interesting documents from the Laetanian region refer to this process. The first is a property boundary excavated on a slope near Iluro, which was set up with the upper part of seven Pascual 1 amphorae placed upside down in a ditch (fig. 2).¹² This kind of property boundary was also identified at Sept Fonts, Baeterrae (Béziers), and was easily connected with the procedure indicated by Siculus Flaccus¹³ as a way to delimitate neighbouring

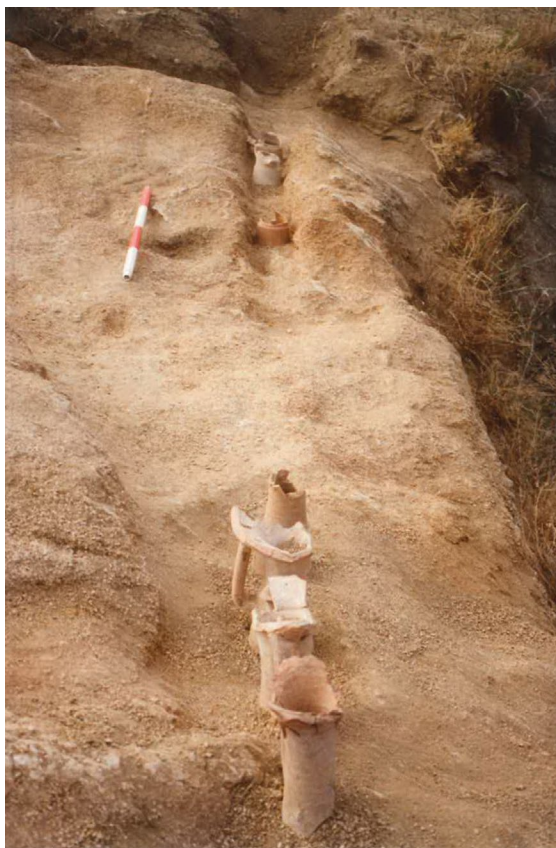


Fig. 2: Property boundary, Can Soleret (Iluro).

estates. The Augustan chronology of both property boundaries has to be connected with the implementation, at that time, of the *dominium* in their *civitates*.

The second document is a *terminus augustalis* found in Montornés that also dates to the Augustan period and delimits the boundary of two unknown cities, maybe Baetulo or Barcino.¹⁴ This *terminus* is one of the markers pertaining to the procedure of delimitation of the *civitas* perimeter (*depalatio*) that had to be carried out when the community started to use Roman law.¹⁵

The Origin of Colonial *fundi*: Towards a Landownership Map?

What about the *fundi*? Attempting to study forms of landownership in the Roman period through archaeological evidence is often considered a fanciful aim. Field survey studies and diachronic analyses of settlement patterns on the basis of archaeological databases (e.g. the distribution of *villae*), have permitted only a general approach to this question. This type of data cannot provide specific information on the type of

ownership. Amphorae and ceramic epigraphy may give more specific information, but they lack a firm territorial connection. In this context, place names and landscape morphology preserved in the early-medieval documentation are important sources. Toponyms ending in *-anum* or *-ana* are especially useful since they derive from Latin adjectival forms denoting the name, and are derived from the owner's name of *praedia* and *fundi*.¹⁶ Their use is, however, not straightforward, particularly in the case of place names identified in medieval or modern documentation. Place names are difficult to date, and etymologies are also prone to error. Sometimes minor changes in the location associated with a particular toponym may have occurred. However, the voluminous documentation of the 9th-11th centuries offers a good approach to landscape morphology of this period. Of course, a chronological jump from the early Middle Ages to the Roman period needs to be justified critically. Despite some doubts amongst researchers, the information gleaned from toponyms has been very useful when combined with field surveys and archaeological investigations. The study of Veleia's territory is a good example of this methodology.¹⁷

The origin of the name of the *fundi* is clear in Roman law: it was derived from the first owner's name, the person who first registered the property in the *census*. In the case of Barcino, this was when the Augustan *deductio* occurred. The name of the first owner was used chiefly for fiscal and administrative purposes, with the aim of maintaining control over that land despite changes in ownership: it was referred to as the *vocabulum fundi*.¹⁸ Any *fundus* or *praedium* could be transferred into other hands over time, via marriage, inheritance, purchase, or sale. However, the original name of the *fundus* was retained while the *census* and ownership system remained in function. Therefore, despite some logical changes, these names would have survived until the start of late antiquity, when the taxation model changed dramatically.

In sum, it is believed that the names of *fundi* from the medieval documentation of the *Ager Barcinonensis* refer to the original proprietors of the Roman estates. These names survived during late antiquity and the medieval period due to the continuity in the agricultural exploitation of the territory. Even if not for all estates, the names of at least the main ones were preserved as toponyms, since they were useful indicators for defining and articulating the medieval landscape.

The *fundi* of the *Ager Barcinonensis*

Recent studies have shown the potential for such a method applied to the *ager Barcinonensis*.¹⁹ This area has an important number of medieval toponyms related to Roman names, generally identified in the early-medieval landscape as *locus*, *terminus*, or *territorium* (fig. 3; fig. 4). These place names were identified in the most important medieval archives of the region (e.g. ACB, SCC, and the CODOLCAT database), and later we located them on maps. Most of the names documented in this way also appear

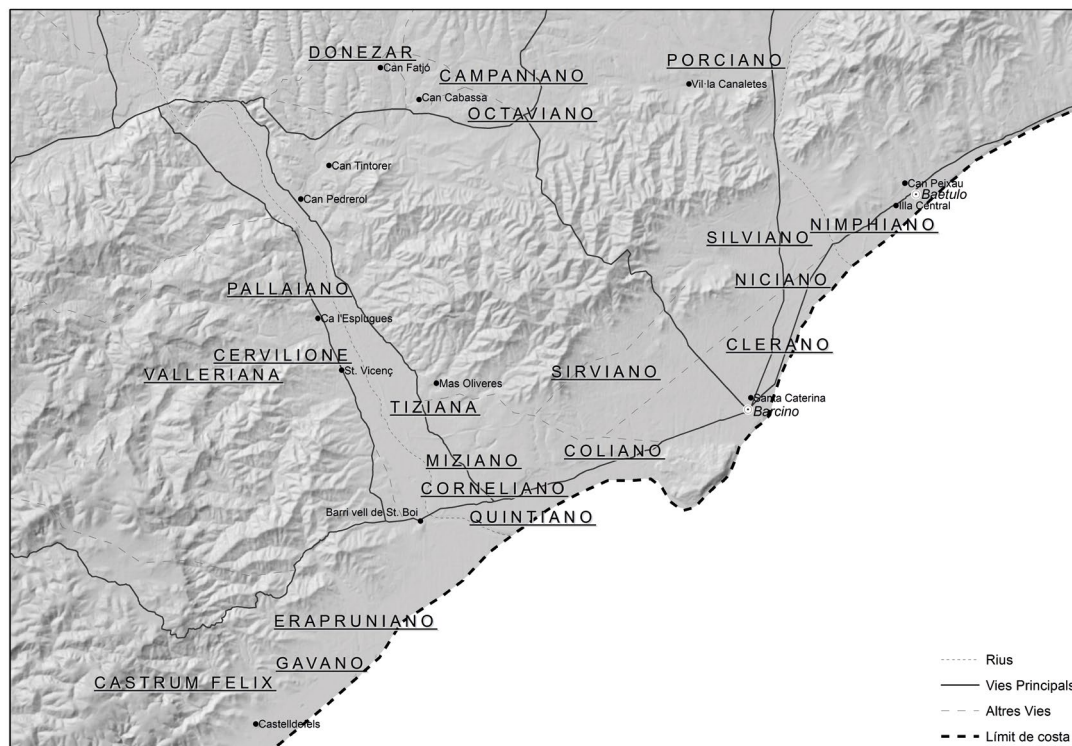


Fig. 3: Roman *fundi* in the *Ager Barcinonensis*: southern sector.

in Roman monumental or funerary epigraphy, confirming that the families owning the estates were present in the cities. These were mostly wealthy families, whose members were local magistrates engaged in euergetism, and who reached the equestrian, or even senatorial class.

However, this was only the first step of the research. As the Layetania region has undergone many transformations, we have a rich archaeological heritage in most areas and an impressive number of Roman sites excavated, especially in the last 25 years. Not only do we have an important overview of Roman settlements (e.g. *villae*, farms, pottery kilns), but also an intense documentation of the *gentes* present in the territory, preserved in the names on amphorae, *dolia*, or brick stamps. All this information was combined into a single map, trying to connect the *fundi* (preserved in the medieval toponyms), the Roman sites, and the *nomina* of the *gentes* documented from the *instrumentum domesticum* and stamps.

Below I briefly give some examples of *fundi* identified in this research. To start, there is the *gens Minicia*, that seems to be connected to the medieval place-name *Miziano* (CSC 382, 1002), and has two senators amongst its members identified in *Barcino* (IRC IV 30-32). An excavated Roman site close to *Miziano* recently produced the stamp *MIN. CEL* (a possible *Minicius Celsius*). The stamp came from a discarded local wine amphora, which confirms the presence of this *gens* in the area.

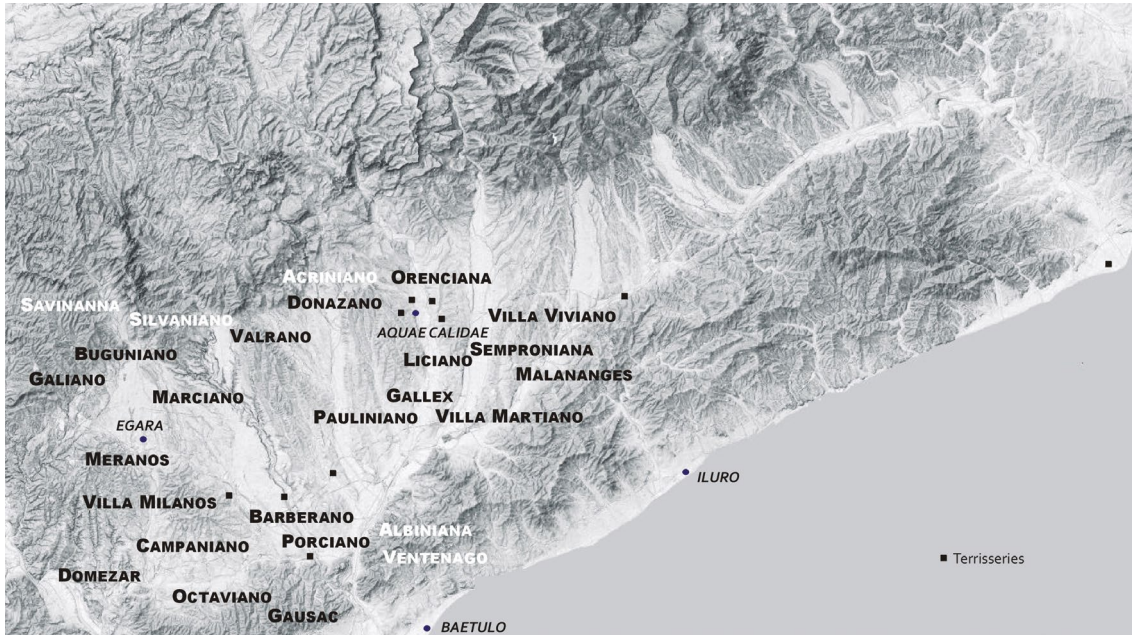


Fig. 4: Roman *fundi* in the *Ager Barcinonensis*: northern sector.

Porciano is a toponym in Montcada (SCC 128, 220, 237, 288), and there is a Roman site in the area that produces amphorae (Can Canaletes). It should be the original *fundus* of the *gens Porcia*, well documented in *Barcino* with nine members, one of which dates to the Augustan period (IRC-IV, 173). But it is also interesting to point out that a workshop of the *gens* has been documented in Baetulo following the course of the *Baetulo* river. It produced Pascual 1 amphorae, as shown by the presence at the site of the stamp *M.POR.FIG* (*Figlina*).

Another example concerns the *gens Licinia*, identified in the place-names *Liciano subteriore* (SCC 233, 989) and *Lizano superiore* (SCC 383, 1002), modern Lliçà (Vallès Oriental).²⁰ Close to Lliçà there is a magnificent Roman *villa* that has been connected with the senator L. Licinius Sura and his freedman, L. Licinius Secundus, honoured in *Barcino*.²¹ In the area, several *L. Licini* are documented by *dolia* and amphorae stamps.

However, not all the names of the *fundi* came from the owner's *nomen*. We know from the literary sources also of the use of *cognomina* as *vocabulum fundi*. We have an interesting example from our region: *Pauliniano* (CSC 516, 103), modern Polinyà (Vallès Oriental), is a place-name derived from the *cognomen* Paullinus. In the area of *Pauliniano* we have the site of Can Bodada, an early-imperial farm where a *tegula* was found bearing the stamp: *[TEG]JULA PAULI EX FUN(do) [---]PERIANO* (IRC V 139). It is possible to connect this *Paulus*, probably a freedman that produced tiles, with the existence of his *fundus*, or perhaps his *officina*, in the surroundings. It is possible to identify the existence of a *figlina* belonging to one owner in the literary and epigraphic sources, while the property belonged to another person.²² However, what is striking in this case is the existence in *Barcino* of a Roman inscription, in which a M. Paullus



Fig. 5: Roman *fundi* connected to wine production.

Paullinus honoured L. Licinius Secundus as *amicus* (IRC IV 98). *Liciniano* and *Pauliniano* are two properties very close to each other, at a distance of 4 km, and their owners were probably neighbours and *amici*.

Conclusions

As a brief conclusion, some of the preliminary results of our research can be summarized. The two maps reproduced in figs. 3 and 4 (the South and North of Layetania) show the localization of the identified Roman place names preserved in the early-medieval documentation. Out of a total of 50 *fundi* documented, 30 appear in the epigraphic records of the region, confirming the relationship between urban elites and *fundi*. There is an evident correlation between the main families documented in the cities (particularly in the colony of Barcino) and the *fundi* documented in Laetania.

Out of the 30 *fundi* confirmed by epigraphic evidence, 13 were owned by *gentes* documented through the amphora or *dolia* stamps identified in the area as wine producers (fig. 5). Archaeological evidence for wine production is present in at least 20 of the other *fundi* documented. The connection between urban elites, *fundi*, and wine production is not in any doubt.

From the epigraphy related to production (e.g. stamps on amphorae, *dolia*, tiles, lead *signacula*, etc.), it is possible to identify a significant number of slaves and freedmen involved in the production of wine. Some were in the group of owners, in some cases as owners of *figlinae* (e.g. *O.GAVIDIENI*, *O. IULI ANTER*); in other cases they were the owners of *fundi* (e.g. see the toponyms *Nymphiano*, *Primiliano*, or the estate of *Synecdemus*).²³

It can also be suggested that there was a significant level of mobility of craftsmen (probably individuals of freed status) all over the Layetanian region, as suggested by the presence of exactly the same stamps on amphorae and *dolia* produced at different workshops and kilns (e.g. *C. IULIUS LAETI*, *ACAS*, *HILARI*, *AEMULI*, *L.LICINIUS CHRESIMUS*). In many of these cases, we suppose that they were *institores*, probably acting on behalf of the main *gentes* of the region. Some of them, following a typical path in social advancement for individuals of freed status, became *Seviri augustales*, positions that are well documented in the epigraphy of the colony.

Notes

¹ Olesti – Carreras 2013; Olesti 2016.

² Plin. nat. 3, 3, 4.

³ Several researchers are working in this area; for a recent overview: Revilla et al. 2008; Jarrega – Berni 2016.

⁴ Palahí 2010.

⁵ Producing Tarraconense 1 and, mainly Pascual 1 amphorae.

⁶ Olesti 1998.

⁷ Olesti 2016. Some of the foreign agents come from the *Narbo Martius* area. Perhaps not by chance, at the same time Cicero (Cic. rep. 3, 9, 15) mentioned the prohibition against planting new vines and olive trees in Transalpine Gaul.

⁸ Ravotto – Rodà 2017

⁹ Scholars frequently forget that *Barcino* was not only a Roman colony, but also had fiscal *immunitas*, (Dig. 50, 15, 8). Compared to other provincial cities, the agricultural land and produce of the *Barcinonensis immunes* (as in IRC IV, 62) had a lower taxation level and, logically, more surplus. This was probably also an important feature of this “social landscape”.

¹⁰ The *villae* documented in Laetania were just part of a larger rural settlement system. In some regions, like inland Layetania, just 10 out of 35 excavated rural settlements were *villae*. The rest were mid- or small-sized farms and workshops (Olle 2015, 407). A similar percentage can be observed also in the Maresme area (Revilla et al. 2013).

¹¹ CIL XI 1147.

¹² Clavel-Léveque – Olesti 2009.

¹³ Thulin 1913, 105–106.

¹⁴ IRC I 200 suppl., Vallés, Layetania.

¹⁵ From Loupian, near Beziers in the south of France, two interesting private boundary stones are known. Dating to the first half of 1st century AD (probably the Augustan period), they mention private roads (*iter privato* and *iter privato prekario*; Bermond et al. 2017). Both inscriptions could be connected with the same historical process: the delimitation, for the first time, of the private properties (and in this case, also the adjacent roads) as well as the moment of the juridical promotion of the city.

¹⁶ Calzolari 1997; Olesti 2005.

¹⁷ Calzolari 1997; Braconi 2003.

¹⁸ Several examples from the *Digest* indicate the obligation to preserve the original owners' name that was linked to the *professio*, the declaration of landownership for taxation purposes (Dig. 50, 15, 4). The limited number of Roman *nomina* caused frequent confusion between homonymous *fundi* and owners: Siculus Flaccus (Thulin 1913, 126. 267) mentions a *controversia de modo* between two owners with the same name laying claim to the same plot of land. Therefore, when Hyginus Gromaticus (L.7-8) gives an example of how to declare the *fundi concessi* in the fiscal registry (*forma*), he quotes the case of a *fundus Seianus* given to L. Manilius. A similar case is reported by Varro, who also names a *fundus Seianus* (Varro rust. 3, 2, 7-8). Another paradigmatic case concerns the *Tabula* of Veleia, frequently attesting to large and medium landlords who owned diverse *fundi* and/or *praedia*. Most of these properties keep their original names and were not referred to by the name of the current owners (CIL XI 1147). Other examples may be documented in the gromatic maps, in which there are remarkable examples of estates that kept their original names despite changes in ownership, e.g. the *Dominus Faustianiani* (La. 185) belonging to a Publius Scipio or the *Dominus Manilianus* owned by the colony Iulia Constantia.

¹⁹ Olesti 2005; Olesti – Carreras 2013.

²⁰ Berni et al. 2005.

²¹ Mayer 1996.

²² Verboven 2002.

²³ Olesti – Carreras 2013.

Image Credits

Fig. 1. 3-5: by author. – Fig. 2: copyright Atics S.L. 1994.

References

Bermond et al. 2016

I. Bermond – M. Christol – M. Feugère – Ch. Pellecuer – C. Sanchez, Marinesque (Loupian, Hérault).
Un relais routier sur la voie Domitienne, Gallia 73, 2016, 41-69.

Berni et al. 2005

P. Berni – C. Carreras – O. Olesti, La Gens Licinia y el Nordeste Peninsular. Una aproximación al estudio de las formas de propiedad y gestión de un rico patrimonio familiar, AEspA 79, 2005, 167-187.

Braconi 2003

P. Braconi, Les premiers propriétaires de la villa de Pline le Jeune, *Histoire et Sociétés Rurales* 19, 2003, 37–50.

Calzolari 1997

M. Calzolari, I toponimi fondiari romani della regio VIII augustea. Il contributo della documentazioni medievale, in: M. Calzolari (ed.), *L'Emilia in età romana. Ricerche di topografia antica* (Modena 1997) 97–159.

Clavel-Leveque – Olesti 2009

M. Clavel-Leveque – O. Olesti, Regards croisés sur la viticulture en Catalogne et en Languedoc romains, in: A. Orejas – D. Mattingly – M. Clavel-Lévêque (eds.), *From Present to Past through Landscape* (Madrid 2009) 85–116.

Járrega – Berni 2016

R. Járrega – P. Berni (eds.), *Amphorae ex Hispania: paisajes de producción y consumo* (Tarragona 2016).

Mayer 1996.

M. Mayer, *Galla Placidia i la Barcelona del segle V* (Barcelona 1996).

Olesti 1998

O. Olesti, Els inicis de la producció vinícola a Catalunya: el paper del món indígena, in: *El vi a l'antiguitat: economia, producció i comerç al Mediterrani Occidental. II colloqui internacional d'Arqueologia romana* (Badalona 1998) 246–257.

Olesti 2005

O. Olesti, Propiedad de la tierra y élites locales. El ejemplo del ager barcinonensis, in: M. Garrido-Hory – A. Gonzales (eds.), *Histoire, Espaces et Marges de l'Antiquité, Hommages à Monique Clavel-Lévêque 4* (Besançon 2005) 175–200.

Olesti 2016

O. Olesti, El paisaje social de la producción vitivinícola Layetana: la génesis de un modelo de éxito, in: R. Járrega – P. Berni (eds.), *Amphorae ex Hispania: paisajes de producción y consumo* (Tarragona 2016) 153–162.

Olesti – Carreras 2013

O. Olesti – C. Carreras, Le paysage social de la production vitivinicole dans l'ager Barcinonensis: esclaves, affranchis et institores, *DialHistAnc* 39, 2, 2013, 75–90.

Oller 2015

J. Ollér, El territorio y poblamiento de la Layetania interior en época antigua (ss. IV a.C.- V d.C.) (Barcelona 2015).

Palahí 2010

Ll. Palahí, La romanització al nord-est peninsular i els orígens de la villa, in: O. Olesti – Ll. Palahí, *Time of Changes. In the Beginning of the Romanization* (Girona 2010) 61–88.

Ravotto – Rodà 2017

A. Ravotto – I. Rodà, La cronologia de les muralles romanes de Barcelona després d'un segle de recerques arqueològiques, *MUHBA Documents* 12, 2017, 42–65.

Revilla et al. 2013

V. Revilla, F. Busquets, A. Moreno, Hábitat, sistemas agrarios y organización del territorio en el

litoral central de la Laietania, in: Paysages ruraux et territoires dans les cités de l'Occident romain. Colloque Ager IX (Barcelona 2013) 233-244.

Revilla et al. 2008

V. Revilla, J.R., González, M., Prevosti (eds.), Actes del Simposi: les vil·les romanes a la Tarraconense (Barcelona 2008). 2 vols.

Thulin 1913

C. O. Thulin (ed.), Corpus agrimensorum Romanorum I (Leipzig 1913).

Verboven 2002

Verboven, K., The Economy of Friends. Economic Aspects of Amicitia and Patronage in the Late Republic (Brussels 2002).