SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE TRIPARTITE FORUMS
OF THE ROMAN CITIES IN ANCIENT LUSITANIA
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Resumo: Neste artigo procuramos realizar uma análise comparativa das cidades romanas da Lusitânia, onde, no estado atual dos estudos, as escavações arqueológicas trouxeram à luz o mesmo tipo de centro monumental, que é o chamado “fórum tripartido” ou “bloco-fórum”. Iremos focar a atenção em seis cidades: Augusta Emerita, Ebora Liberalitas Iulia, Ammaia, Pax Julia, Bobadela e Sellium. Embora o conhecimento fragmentário e incompleto que ainda caracteriza os centros monumentais da Lusitânia não permita uma visão global do tema, analisaremos a comparação entre os fóruns aqui descritos, a fim de compreender quais são os elementos comuns e quais os diferentes. As recentes escavações realizadas no sítio arqueológico de Ammaia, em particular, prestaram novos dados relevantes, que contribuirão para aumentar o nosso conhecimento sobre este assunto. Graças a uma abordagem comparativa, podemos traçar a evolução comum no projeto arquitetónico e na ordem cronológica progressiva.

Palavras-chave: Lusitânia romana; urbanismo romano; forum.

Abstract: This paper attempts to undertake a comparative analyse of the Roman cities of Lusitania where, at the current state of studies, the archaeological excavations have brought to light the same kind of monumental centre, which is the so called “tripartite forum” or “block-forum”. We will focus the attention upon six towns: Augusta Emerita, Ebora Liberalitas Iulia, Ammaia, Pax Julia,

Conimbriga, 51 (2012) 35-74
Bobadela and Sellium. Although the fragmentary and incomplete knowledge that still characterizes the monumental centres of Lusitania does not allow a global view of the topic, we will examine the comparison between the forums here described in order to understand what are the common elements and what the different ones. The recent excavations carried out in the archaeological site of Ammaia, in particular, provided new relevant data, which contribute to enhance our knowledge about this issue. Thanks to a comparative approach, we can delineate common developments in the architectural project and in the chronological phasing.

**KEY-WORDS:** Lusitania; Roman urbanism; forum.
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Introduction

The topic that will be discussed in this paper is part of an on-going research project, started in March 2010, concerning the Roman monumental centres of the Iberian Peninsula. Thus, the considerations expressed in the article are the results of investigations in progress: the

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Conimbriga, 51 (2012) 35-74
first phase of the research, regarding the ancient province of *Lusitania*, has been completed, while the other provinces of ancient *Hispania* are currently under examination. The central topic of this contribution is the type of monumental centre usually defined as a “tripartite forum” or a “forum block” and all the towns analysed belong to *Lusitania*, whose history and boundaries represent quite well-known elements (2) (Fig. 1).

Since the late republican age, especially in connection with the building of the *Forum Caesaris* or *Forum Iulium* in Rome (perhaps started in 51 BC), a new typology of monumental centre began to develop. The complex was characterized by the combination of three sectors with different functions: a temple or a aedes, often raised on a terrace, a central courtyard and a basilica hall (Gros, 1996: 212–213). This plan, characterized by the temple facing the basilica from the opposite end of an elongated rectangular forum enclosure, was called the “basilica-type forum” by Ward-Perkins (1970: 1-19). Thus, this basic model, regulated by strict symmetry, had a long period of elaboration, probably starting with the Augustan age, which led to a lot of different adaptations. It spread throughout the Roman Empire, including also *Lusitania*, but unfortunately here knowledge about the Roman monumental centres is still poor, especially as several ancient towns have remained in occupation, removing much of the old evidence or burying it under modern structures. However, if we consider that it is less than 30 years since great progress began to be made in acquiring knowledge of the *forums* (in the 1970s *Conimbriga* represented the pioneer investigation for its high quality and relevance), we understand the reasons why this kind of research is still at an embryonic stage.

Although this analysis is strongly conditioned by vast gaps in our knowledge, also due to the fact that only some cities have been excavated and publicised, we think that the complexes which, at the present stage of the studies, can be identified as tripartite *forums* (or *basilica-type forums*) in *Lusitania* are the following: *Augusta Emerita, Ebora Liberalitas Iulia, Ammaia, Pax Iulia, Bobadela* and probably *Sellium*. This does not mean that they are the unique identifiable cases of tripartite *forums* in *Lusitania*, but only that, among the centres till being investigated in that province, they have provided more archaeological

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2 See, among others, Richardson, 1996; Osland, 2006.