

# The housing evolution of Braga between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

A significant amount of data was collected as part of the ‘Bracara Augusta Rescue Project’ enabling the analysis of the domestic architecture evolution in Braga in Late Antiquity. Previously existing residential areas witnessed the disappearance of the peristyle model house and the emergence of a new type of residence resulting from the fragmentation of the *domus* areas. On the other hand, the area located on the western part of the forum, where the most charismatic Roman public buildings located, namely the theatre and the annexed public thermal complex, saw these structures deactivated and the emerging of new types of constructions with residential and artisanal functions between the fifth and seventh centuries.

Based upon the analysis of a group of case studies we will attempt to establish the main features related with the housing evolution in Braga between the Low Empire and the Early Middle Ages, analysing the structure of the new domestic units, highlighting their influence within the urban changes and articulating the new construction techniques within the wider political, economic and social context.

## 1 Introduction

The study of the domestic architecture evolution in Late Antiquity performs a fairly recent research subject within Hispanic historiography and represents one of the most significant results emerging from urban archaeology that has uncovered a relevant and innovative group of data related with the occupation of cities with Roman foundation between the fourth and eight centuries.

In Braga the excavations conducted since 1976 identified remains of several *domus* that have been the object of systematic research studies in the past decade.<sup>6</sup> In

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<sup>6</sup> Fernanda Magalhães, *Arquitetura doméstica em Bracara Augusta*, (unpublished master thesis, Braga: Universidade do Minho, 2010); Fernanda Magalhães, ‘Arquitetura doméstica em Bracara Augusta’, *Interconexões*, 1, (2013), 13-30; Juliana Silva, *A domus da Zona Arqueológica das Antigas Cavaliarias de Braga. Contributo para o estudo da arquitetura doméstica em Bracara Augusta*, (unpublished master thesis, Braga: Universidade do Minho, 2013); Ana Catarina Torres, *Sequência de ocupação da Zona Arqueológica do Ex. Albergue Distrital. Contributo para a análise evolutiva e funcional de uma unidade doméstica em Bracara Augusta*, (unpublished master thesis, Braga: Universidade do Minho, 2014).

reality, the vast majority of the city Late Antiquity occupation continued to privilege areas where the previous *domus* of High Empire foundation were located. They were object of important reforms between the late third/early fourth centuries in a time when *Bracara Augusta* was elevated to capital of the new *Callaecia* province and endured an important urban renovation.<sup>7</sup>

However, the nature of the urban archaeological record, mainly in the areas where the Roman town was overlapped by the medieval and modern cities doesn't facilitate the interpretation of Late Antiquity constructions, almost invariably represented by very poor and destroyed remains. This fact hinders the understanding of changes occurred on the *domus* areas after the fifth century and prevents the restitution of the new buildings' plans. Despite these circumstances a significant effort has been made in the past years to systematize and interpret data related with the occupation of different city blocks, which starts to result in a renewed knowledge over the architectural transformations of Low Empire *domus* contributing towards a better understanding of the changes occurring in the forthcoming centuries.

In this sense, the interpretation of the Late Antiquity domestic space in Braga and the suggestions made in terms of its evolution are largely dependant on available data analysing of the features of fourth century *domus*. Therefore our approach to the evolution of the domestic architecture in Braga between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages needs to value the Low Empire urban contexts that remain key to understand the different forms of space occupation.

Two types of space occupation seemed to have occurred within the inner city walls. One is clearly associated with the continuous occupation the residential blocks where the *domus* existed that kept being structured around the orthogonal layout.<sup>8</sup> From the fifth century onwards these *domus* lost their status as elite's residences and their spaces witnessed a new internal organization suggestive of the new architectonic expressions that were predominately residential. The second type of occupation is linked with the emergence of new domestic and artisanal constructions organized around areas previously associated with Roman public buildings, although only so far identified around the theatre area. They were characterized by their imminently organic character and by the use of new construction materials and technical solutions.<sup>9</sup>

Taking into consideration the available archaeological data we will approach on the present paper some domestic architectural features of Braga between the fourth and eighth centuries, referred to houses located inside the city walls. They will be contextualized according to data related with urbanism and compared with other peninsular contexts.

### Figure 1 – Map of Hispania in the fourth century with reference to *Callaecia* province

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<sup>7</sup> Manuela Martins, 'Bracara Augusta a roman town in Northwest of Iberia. Recent archaeological research', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, (Oxford, 2006), pp.213-222; Manuela Martins, J. Ribeiro, F. Magalhães and C. Braga, 'Urbanismo e arquitetura de *Bracara Augusta*: Sociedade, economia e lazer', in *Evolução da paisagem urbana: sociedade e economia*, coord. by M. C. Ribeiro and A. Melo, (Braga: CITCEM, 2012), pp.34-67.

<sup>8</sup> Manuela Martins, 'Bracara Augusta. Panorama e estado da questão sobre o seu urbanismo', in *Do Castro á Cidade. A romanización na Gallaecia e na Hispânia indoeuropea*, ed. by D. Dopico Caínzos, M. Villanueva Acuña and Rodríguez Alvarez (Lugo, 2009), pp.181-211; Manuela Martins and Helena Carvalho, 'As transformações do território: Bracara Augusta e o seu cadastro', in *Colóquio Internacional Las Ciudades del Poder*, (Lugo, in press).

<sup>9</sup> Manuela Martins, J. Ribeiro, F. Magalhães and R. Peñin, 'Urban changes in Braga in Late Antiquity: the area of the Roman Theater', (Lérida: Universidade Lérida/UAUM: Lérida, in press).

Figure 2 - Urban layout of *Bracara Augusta*. 1. 'Albergue Distrital' *domus*; 2. 'Cavalariças' *domus*; 3. 'Escola Velha da Sé' *domus*; 4. Built units of theater.

## 2. The *domus* of the centuries IV/V

Although remains from several *domus* have been found in Braga located in different quarters of the Roman city the reality is that only one has been fully excavated. It's the 'Carvalheiras' *domus* built in the late first century<sup>10</sup> and disarticulated in the second century with the construction of a public *balneum*.<sup>11</sup> The fragmented character of available data, together with the circumstance that these residences represent the constructed urban spaces that changed the most during their always long occupational timeframe do not facilitate synthetic approaches to be made as each house has their own history and encompassed multiple and gradual transformation sometimes occurring in short periods of time. Thus, we can only refer the features that are recognised as being common and that can be understood from the archaeological record analysis, although the data here presented shouldn't be considered definite as it emerged from sectorial interpretations of the residences' plans.

Albeit the fragmented character of the known *domus* spaces it is possible to acknowledge the persistence of the peristyle residential model mainly also represented by the High Empire *domus* and corresponding to a type of space organization that was typical of the elites' houses located on the Roman western provinces.<sup>12</sup> In this category, we can safely include the 'ex Albergue Distrital' *domus* (Figure 4.1), the 'Cavalariças' *domus* (Figure 4.2), the 'Santiago' *domus* and the 'S. Paulo' *domus*, despite the remains from the latter sites being rather scarce, hence preventing its detailed typological classification.

The 'Albergue Distrital' *domus* seems to be the only one presenting an axial spatial organisation already existing at the High Empire period, which enabled a direct visual relationship to be established between the vestibule, located on the eastern part of the house and the main representation room that we presume was located on the western part (Figure 4.1.). The interpretation of the 'Cavalariças' *domus* is more challenging since a northern entrance can only be suggested by the building plan, whereby the position of the main representation room, located eastwards, seems to be visually decentred in relation to the *vestibulum*. However, the *domus* has a centralized structure with different areas distributed around the peristyle space (Figure 4.1). In the 'Escola Velha da Sé' *domus*, from which we only know the southern part it has been impossible to identify a fourth century peristyle, although it existed in the High Empire phase.<sup>13</sup> In reality, the excavated part of this *domus* revealed a profound restructuration of the internal spaces associated with the installation of a private *balneum* apparently annexed to a representation room that was located in the alignment of the entrance vestibule and

<sup>10</sup> Manuela Martins, 'A zona arqueológica das Carvalheiras. Balanço das escavações e interpretação do conjunto', *Cadernos de Arqueologia*, 14 /15, (1997/1998), 23-45.

<sup>11</sup> Manuela Martins, J. Meireles and M. C. Ribeiro, 'As termas públicas de *Bracara Augusta* e o abastecimento de água da cidade romana', in *Atas do Seminário Internacional Aquae Sacrae. Agua e sacralidad en época antigua*, (Girona: Universidade de Girona, 2011), pp. 69-102.

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Gros, *L'Architecture romaine. Du début du IIIe siècle av. J.-C. à la fin du Haut-Empire. Vol. 2: Maisons, palais, villas et tombeaux* (Paris: 2006), p. 148-196.

<sup>13</sup> Fernanda Magalhães, *Arquitetura doméstica em Bracara Augusta*, p.52-54

contiguous to a space that could be opened however lacking the morphology of a peristyle (Figure 3).

The 'Escola Velha da Sé' *domus* revealed one of most typical features in fourth century's houses in Braga characterized by the presence of a *balneum* also occurring in the 'Santiago' *domus* and in other less known houses across the city. Other than the generalization of private bathing structures, the renovations of the late third century / beginning of IV represent a strong investment in the sophistication of houses through extensive decoration programmes as corroborated by the stucco covering the walls and the general use of *opus tessellatum* on the pavements (i.e. 'Escola Velha da Sé' *domus*). This investment is also visible in the ornamentation of the peristyles themselves, as it occurred in the 'Santiago' *domus*, where the peristyle colonnade had marble capitals and bases and a central tank with a mosaic paved with maritime themes.<sup>14</sup> In the 'Cavaliariças' *domus*, there was a remodelling of a *viridarium* changed in an open space ornamented by an *opus alexandrinum* pavement. The eastern side of this space with an exedra, suggested the existence of a *nymphaeum* (Figure 5).

The remodelling of houses was at times accompanied by an increase of the overall construction area by integrating the porticos spaces. In addition, there was an integration of the areas normally reserved for the *tabernae*, being possible that the new division recorded in contiguous spaces to the streets were destined to house new shops (Figures 3 and 4). This process is well documented in different *domus* reforms, although the advance of constructions over the porticos has only been registered in some cases. This fact suggests that this was not a natural process in the occupation of the public space but rather an initiative on behalf of some private owners that would have to be authorized and eventually paid to the city.<sup>15</sup>

### Figure 3 – 'Escola Velha da Sé' *domus* (centuries IV/V).

Based upon available data we can consider that the urban morphology of the fourth century city maintained the main High Empire features with the streets still straight and the houses settled in the limits of the square blocks structured according with the foundational urban layout. If it is certain that some porticos started to be annexed to the houses and their façades advance up to the street limits it is important to refer that the maintenance of the street network and the square shape of the *domus* did contribute towards the persistence of a relatively uniform urban landscape. Transformations mainly occurred within residences performing an investment in the houses symbolic capital through the increase of wealth signs and the exhibition of power and unequal fortunes on behalf of their owners. Nevertheless, the vast majority of fourth century *domus* inherited the traits of their High Empire predecessors being dominant the peristyle type of house, where in some cases a wider complexity of space is registered namely through the construction of areas reserved for new thermal and reception rooms. The introduction of these new spaces may explain the need for broader construction areas, although it can be admitted that houses may equally have increased in height as is suggested by the Moreria *domus* 5 (Marbled House) in Mérida.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Fernanda Magalhães, *Arquitetura doméstica em Bracara Augusta*, p. 90-91.

<sup>15</sup> Miguel Alba Calzado, 'La vivienda en Emerita durante la Antigüedad Tardía: Propuesta de un modelo para Hispania', in *VI Reunion de Arqueologia Cristiana Hispanica. Las ciudades tardoantiguas de Hispania: cristianizacion y topografia*, ed. by J. M. Gurt and A. Ribera (Barcelona, 2005), p. 125-126.

<sup>16</sup> Miguel Alba Calzado, 'La vivienda en Emerita durante la Antigüedad Tardía: Propuesta de un modelo para Hispania', p. 125-126.

The vast majority of reforms conducted in the *domus* occurred in the late third/early fourth centuries in a time when the city was promoted to capital of *Callaecia*, a circumstance that justified the permanence within the city of an elite connected with the new political demands emerging from the management of a vast territory. On the other hand, and as a province capital the city naturally performed an attractive location to all those seeking to compete for high administrative positions within the Roman state and expected to ensure, by the end of their careers, the access to the privileged senatorial order that was exempt of high tax rates imposed by fourth century reforms. This context may justify the general remodelling of practically all known *domus* and the great investment that the urban aristocracy conducted on their residences, a process equally acknowledged to have occurred in other Hispanic cities.<sup>17</sup> This refers to a clear monumentalizing of the domestic space through the construction of private thermal structures, the renovation of stuccos and pavements, the use of marble and the construction of wide reception and banquet rooms. The recurrent investment in architecture and in the elaborated decorative programmes of *domus* seemed to define a common and specific language on behalf of the urban aristocracy<sup>18</sup> reflecting also a new economic and social order associated with the emergence of a more hierarchized society, the one that survived the third century crisis and the subsequent fourth century reforms. This was a society where different types of elites formed after the Diocletian reform were involved in a fierce competition for the highest state administrative positions using their rich residences for the representation of their aspirations for social mobility.<sup>19</sup>

In light of available archaeological data it is difficult to establish the end of the present scenario clearly marked by the leading role of the city elites and by the highly favourable context coming from its status as a province capital. The same context can also explain the investment in the mid fourth century in the renovation of the public thermal buildings known to have existed in Braga,<sup>20</sup> despite a significant part of the fourth century public investment being directed towards the construction of the city wall surrounding an area of around 40 hectares.<sup>21</sup>

Archaeology documents that the city economic prosperity seemed to be maintained throughout the fifth century, despite the important political changes emerging from the setting of the Suebi kingdom within the *Callaecia* region.<sup>22</sup> In reality, the economic and social indicators emerging from excavations data revealed a perfect continuity of the urban life also evident through the persistence of long distance

<sup>17</sup> Arnau Perich i Roca, *Arquitectura residencial urbana d'època tardoantiga a Hispania (segles IV- VIII dC)*, (unpublished PHD dissertation, Tarragona: ICAC/Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> N. Duval, 'Les maisons d'Apamée et l'architecture 'palatiale' de l'antiquité tardive', in *Apamée de Syrie: bilan des recherches archéologiques, 1973-1979: aspects de l'architecture domestique d'Apamée*, ed. by Ch. J. Balty, (Bruxelles: 1984), pp. 469-470.

<sup>19</sup> K. Bowes, *Houses and Society in the Later Roman Empire* (London, 2010), p. 95-99.

<sup>20</sup> Manuela Martins, *As termas romanas do Alto da Cividade. Um exemplo de arquitectura pública de Bracara Augusta*, Bracara Augusta. Escavações Arqueológicas 1, (Braga: UAUM/Narq, 2005; Manuela Martins, A. Cunha, F. Magalhães, J. Ribeiro, C. Braga and R. Peñin, 'Metamorfoses de um espaço urbano. A sequência de ocupação da Zona Arqueológica da R. Afonso Henriques, Braga', *Oppidum*, 7, 95-111.

<sup>21</sup> Francisco S. Lemos, J. M. Freitas Leite and Armandino Cunha, 'A muralha romana (Baixo Império) de Bracara Augusta', in *Actas del Congreso Internacional Murallas de ciudades romanas en el Occidente del Imperio. Lucus Augusti como paradigma*, ed. by A. Rodríguez Colmenero and I. Rodá de Llanza, (Lugo: 2007), pp. 329-341.

<sup>22</sup> Luís Fontes, M. Martins, M. C. Ribeiro and H. Carvalho, 'A cidade de Braga e o seu território nos séculos V-VII', in Toletum Visigodo, *Actas del Congreso Espacios Urbanos en el Occidente Mediterráneo (s. VI-VIII)* (Toledo: Toletum Visigodo, 2010), pp. 255-262; Pablo Díaz, *El reino suevo (411-585)*. (Madrid: Akal, 2011).

trade, the intense artisanal activity, or the maintenance of some necropolis, where the existence of luxurious graves asserted the permanence of part of the elites in the city.<sup>23</sup> We admit that the known fourth century *domus* could still be occupied in the following century and were gradually abandoned and/or altered as a consequence of the social transformations operated within the new political and administrative framework of Hispania in the fifth century.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 4 - 1. 'Albergue Distrital' *domus* (centuries IV/V); 2. Centuries V/VII.

Figure 5 – 'Cavalariças' *domus* (centuries IV/V); 2. Centuries V/VII.

### 3. The end of the *domus* and the emergence of a new concept of residence (centuries V/VI)

Despite all the difficulty in establishing the exact moment when the *domus* were no longer in use as aristocratic residences and a new type of occupation emerged we may consider that this functional and social transformation process probably occurred throughout the fifth century. The reasons behind this process may be varied and articulated with the political changes affecting the fifth century alongside with a new emerging social framework. This new context seemed to have decreased the economic power of the urban elites and their ability in maintaining fully functional luxurious residences being equally not very stimulating for domestic spaces continuing to be used as self-representation and competition scenarios between the elites.

The nature of the fifth and sixth century's archaeological records, conditioned by the precariousness of the new structures erected and by the difficulties in assigning a precise date for the production of fifth-seventh century's ceramics, makes it difficult to chronologically locate the disarticulation process of the *domus* spaces and to identify their end as urban aristocratic residences. We believe that this was a gradual process, yet irreversible, that led to significant changes within the urban landscape.

Available data contributing towards the understanding of the *domus* architectonic changes seem very conclusive in terms of the general use of previously existing areas with a different functional logic, associated to a clear use of some pre-existing structures, although new walls have been constructed dividing circulation spaces or wide rooms and spaces (Figures 4.2 and 5.2). Those new walls revealed a small construction investment in terms of foundations and present irregular masonry, reusing granite stones and architectural elements that were joined by mortar. The old

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<sup>23</sup> Cristina Braga, *Rituais funerários em Bracara Augusta: o novo núcleo de necrópole da Via XVII*, (unpublished master thesis, Braga: Universidade do Minho, 2010), p. 58; Manuela Martins, L. Fontes, C. Braga, J. Braga, F. Magalhães, J. Sendas, 'Relatório final dos trabalhos arqueológicos realizados no Quarteirão dos CTT – Avenida da Liberdade'. *Trabalhos Arqueológicos da Unidade de Arqueologia da Universidade do Minho - TAUAUM*, 1, (Braga: UAUM, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Luís Fontes, 'O período suévico e visigótico e o papel da igreja na organização do território', *Minho. Traços de Identidade*, (Braga: UMinho, 2009), pp. 272-295.



mosaic pavements tended to disappear giving place to new brick pavements or earthen floors, a process also well documented in Mérida.<sup>25</sup>

We are dealing with construction techniques based on pragmatic solutions, where the general reuse of structures and materials seemed to be a common practice without any clear model of space construction/reconstruction (Figure 5). Adaptations of pre-existing spaces and rooms developed organically both inside and outside often surpassing the construction areas of the quarters. The gradual advance of the new constructions over previously existing streets contributed towards their disappearance, a circumstance that greatly determined key morphological changes within the city.<sup>26</sup> If this process entailed the absence of a strong municipal power it also catered for changes to occur within the street network, although there is still no relevant data to generalize this process within the city.

The changes of the plan structure of the *domus* seemed to define a new way of living. Consequently new domestic realities emerged characterized by the abandonment of the peristyle as the house central area. The new residential units were more compacted and exhibited the dominance of square or rectangular rooms functionally poorly differentiated, probably privileging vertical growth, although this circumstance is not yet clear in Braga, but merely suggested by some narrow spaces that may have included staircases. However, this vertical growth process is well documented for Late Antiquity constructions in other peninsular cities, namely in Mérida, where the specialization of the different floor spaces seem to have occurred.<sup>27</sup>

The changing processes of the *domus* spaces from the fifth century onwards seems to reflect a new political, social and economical framework emerging from the setting of the Suebi kingdom in the *Callaecia* region and with the end of the Roman domain over the region, although the disappearance of the *domus* performed a common fact in other urban contexts of the same period.<sup>28</sup>

In the beginning of the fifth century missing the careers linked to state management that created a rich aristocracy in Braga the environment supporting the emulation between different aristocratic segments also disappeared. The most ambitious had now the option of abandoning the city, reorienting themselves towards religious positions associated with the new episcopal functions, or compromise with the city's new masters: the Suebi elite. In this context it would be expected that new elite residences emerged associated with both the episcopal power and the new Suebi elites. However, archaeological record is quite silent about any other type of urban elite's residences.

Still unknown are the features of the new episcopal complex in Braga dating back to the early fifth century a time when the first Christian basilica was erected by reusing the structure of a previously existing Roman building, located in the northeast

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<sup>25</sup> Miguel Alba, 'Los espacios domésticos en la ciudad visigoda de Emerita (ss. V-VIII)', in *Actas Congreso Internacional 1910-2010: el yacimiento emeritense*, ed. by J. M. Álvarez and P. Mateos, (Mérida, 2011), pp. 521-546 (p. 529).

<sup>26</sup> Manuela Martins and M. C. Ribeiro, 'Em torno da Rua Verde. A evolução urbana de Braga na longa duração', in *Evolução da Paisagem Urbana. Transformação morfológica dos Tecidos Históricos*, coord. by M. C. Ribeiro and A. Melo (Braga, CITCEM/IEM: 2013), pp. 11-44.

<sup>27</sup> Miguel Alba Calzado, 'La vivienda en Emerita durante la Antigüedad Tardía: Propuesta de un modelo para Hispania', p. 147.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and its cities*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004); Josep Gurt Esparraguera and Isabel Sánchez Ramos, 'Topografía cristiana en Hispania durante los siglos V y VI', in *El Tiempo de los 'Barbaros'. Pervivencia y transformación en Gallia e Hispania (ss. V-VI d. C.)*, Zona Arqueológica, nº 11, (Alcalá de Henares: Museo Arqueológico Regional, 2010), pp. 331-345; Arnau Perich i Roca, *Arquitectura residencial urbana d'època tardoantiga a Hispania (segles IV-VIII dC)*, p. 229.

suburban inner-walled area.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, the new Suebi elites seemed to clearly privilege the rural settlement, as suggested by the Germanic onomastic associated with the owners of several *villae* and by the archaeological evidence related with the *villa* of 'Dume' and the 'Falperra' palatial complex. In the case of Dume we are dealing with a Roman *villa* that was transformed into a monastery and where a sixth century basilica was erected under the order of S. Martinho de Dume.<sup>30</sup> This was a building clearly associated with Suebi monarchy actions and with the conversion to Christianity of the Charrarico King. In the case of 'Falperra', located 3km away from Braga on a hill overlooking the city, we have clear indications related with a construction of a palatial complex with an annexed basilica, which may represent one of the main residences of the Suebi court.<sup>31</sup>

From available data we may consider that the establishment of the Suebi in the region had an essential rural character leaving the management of the city to the emerging religious elites and to the existing civil powers. In fact, the social structure resulting from the end of the western Empire seemed unaltered, which implies that the old elites compromised with the new power. Certainly that will have disappeared the aristocracy that was dependent on the state linked with administrative and military careers, alongside the competition existing for those positions. The reflection of these facts is expressed in the loss of meaning of self-representation spaces characterizing fourth century *domus* that will determine its transformation into another constructive reality.

As much as it is possible to assert the *domus* spaces were segmented giving place to different houses without any type of construction refinement, largely reusing previous walls and construction materials. Regardless, this doesn't perform an indicator of poverty on behalf of their occupants. In truth and as oppose to the previous period the new social and economic context featuring the fifth-seventh centuries period seemed to be globally less favourable for a competitive emulation between elites focused on their houses. The competition seemed to favour now the investment in new public buildings, be they basilicas or monasteries, which would enable the urban elites to compete in a new scenario more associated with the times logic and the affirmation of positions and powers connected with the church.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the reinforcement and the consolidation of the church in Braga between the sixth and seventh centuries due to the actions of São Martinho de Dume and São Frutuoso were accompanied by a construction outbreak of new religious centres, mainly located in the city outskirts documenting evergetic practices of church members.<sup>33</sup>

The new residential architecture emerging from the *domus* transformations may have been indiscriminately occupied by the members of the urban elite or by other segments of the population, ensuring the continuity of the city occupation that was still

<sup>29</sup> Luís Fontes, F. S. Lemos and M. Cruz, "'Mais velho" que a Sé de Braga: intervenção arqueológica na catedral bracarense: notícia preliminar', *Cadernos de Arqueologia*, 14-15, (1997/98), 137-164.

<sup>30</sup> Luís Fontes, 'A Igreja Sueva de Dume', in *Actas da IV Reunião de Arqueologia Cristã Hispânica*. (Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1995), pp. 415-27; Luís Fontes 'A Igreja sueva de São Martinho de Dume - Arquitectura cristã antiga de Braga e na Antiguidade Tardia do Noroeste de Portugal', *Revista de História da Arte*, 6, (2008), 163-181.

<sup>31</sup> J. J. R. Sousa, 'A Estação Arqueológica da Falperra. Notas para a sua História', *Arquivo de Beja*, XXV-XXVII, (1970), 57-64; Luís Fontes, 'O período suévico e visigótico e o papel da igreja na organização do território', p. 134; Manuel Real, 'Portugal: cultura visigoda e cultura moçárabe', *Anejos de AEspA*, XXIII (2000), 21-75 (p. 33).

<sup>32</sup> Luís Fontes, 'Powers, Territories and Christian Architecture in Northwest Portugal: An approach to the landscape of Braga between 5th and 11th centuries', in *Churches and social power in early medieval Europe*, ed. by M. Shapland and J. C. Sánchez Pardo (London: Brepols, in press).

<sup>33</sup> Luís Fontes, 'O reino Suevo e o papel da Igreja na organização do território', in *A História no Eixo Atlântico*, ed. by X. M. S. González (Vigo: Eixo Atlântico do Noroeste Peninsular, 1999), p. 134.



densely populated at the time of the Visigoth invasion in 585, which put an end to the Suebi domain. On the other hand, when the Arabs invaded Braga in 711 the city fourth century wall was still fully functioning and the general inner city spaces remained occupied as is documented by archaeology. However, the urban morphology would be very different from the one characterizing the fourth-fifth century's city as a result of the disappearance of the Roman quarter's structure and of the emergence of a new street organization.<sup>34</sup>

Figure 6 - Plan of the theater with location of the built units of Late Antiquity.

#### 4. New residential spaces and new architectures (centuries V/VII)

Excavations conducted in the surrounding area of the Roman theatre under study since 2004<sup>35</sup> enabled the identification of a group of Late Antiquity structures presenting very different features from the ones identified in other city sectors for the same period. In fact, the abandonment and subsequent partial dismantling of the theatre together with the decommissioning of the adjoined public thermal building in the early fifth century converted this monumental area of the ancient Roman city into a peripheral one, where residential constructions gradually emerged and reused or overlapped pre-existing Roman infrastructures.<sup>36</sup>

As opposed to what happened in other sectors of the city, where an urban structure based on High Empire standards still persisted, the surrounding theatre area met a rather particular urban and constructive dynamic throughout Late Antiquity with the particular dominant feature being its imminently organic character. In reality, the orthogonal foundational layout had been corrupted in this particular sector with the construction of the theatre itself and the annexed thermal complex. Once the major public buildings were no longer in use after the beginning of the fifth century they provided abundant raw materials for new constructions and performed contention structures. Simultaneously, some theatre areas were reoccupied with very different functionalities. We are dealing with an area where new construction processes were practised documenting the emergence of a new urban dynamic in Braga between the fifth and seventh centuries.

Up to present day three built units with Late Antiquity chronology have been identified in this particular city sector. One of them is located in the northern theatre *parascaenium* (BU1), being the remaining two (BU2 and BU3) located in the upper platform nearby the building perimeter wall (Figure 6).

BU1 may be classified as a residential unit occupying the totality of the area corresponding to the northern theatre *parascaenium*. The new construction reused a large part of the structure located in that area, with new walls being erected. One of them closed the previous passage connecting the *aditus* with the *parascaenium*, on the staircase area, overlapping several steps. The other was erected in the space between the central ashlar defining the basilica aisles having integrated part of an arch reused from

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<sup>34</sup> Manuela Martins and Maria do Carmo Ribeiro, 'Em torno da Rua Verde, 'A evolução urbana de Braga na longa duração', p. 11-44.

<sup>35</sup> Manuela Martins, Ricardo Mar, Jorge Ribeiro and Fernanda Magalhães, 'A construção do teatro romano de Bracara Augusta', in *História da Construção. Arquiteturas e técnicas Construtivas*, coord. by A. Melo and M. C. Ribeiro (Braga: CITCEM/LAMOP/UAUM, 2013), pp.41-76.

<sup>36</sup> Manuela Martins, J. Ribeiro, F. Magalhães and R. Peñin (2014) 'Urban changes in Braga in Late Antiquity: the area of the Roman Theater', figure 3.

a previous structure and outlined by an irregular masonry wall that was clogged with mortar.

The formalization of the new built unit also implied the dismantling of the ashlar row defining the southern wing of the *parascaenium* suggesting that the new space extended itself up to this limit integrating part of the *hyposcaenium*. Available data suggests that the new residential area was structured around two continuous areas (1 and 2) with earthen floors. Over the soil on area 1 several architectural elements have been identified presumed to come from the theatre scenic front. Within the same compartment several large dolia fragments were uncovered. On the southern part of area 2 several fragments of shafts were also found and they must have performed the supporting structure of a porch roof.

In the adjacent area to the theatre perimeter wall, on the north-eastern sector, two built units (BU2 and BU3) have been identified revealing distinctive technical and functional features when compared the BU1 case.

The BU2 was represented by a construction with a trapezoidal shape attached to the theatre façade reused as the foundation of its western wall (Figure 6). The building occupied an area with around 67 m<sup>2</sup> formalized by low walls with around 0.60 m maximum height, offering a weak foundational consistency, resting on the ground and composed by irregular blocks of schist joined with clay mortar. These stony basements would support walls constructed with wood and mortar as suggested by the thick coating of yellowish clay mortar covering them, a technique recognized in new construction expressions of domestic and artisanal character within other peninsular cities in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages contexts.<sup>37</sup> We know that the BU2 had earthen floors being possible to identify two with around 0.30 meters of thickness. The reduced quantity of *tegulae* fragments suggests the roof was made of perishable materials.

The functionality of this construction is suggested by the presence of a kiln on the southern corner denouncing an artisanal activity. The remains preserved correspond to its circular base with around 2 meters diameter and made of bricks. The cover was not preserved but it was likely made from the same material and covered with clay mortar found in a deposit over the structure ballast. Conducted analysis on the bricks and mortars indicated high levels of lead and tin suggesting the use of this kiln for the fusion of lead and/or bronze materials in order to get new metal.<sup>38</sup>

The BU3 was only partially excavated being its functionality still unknown. Only three walls were identified defining two different spaces (Figure 6). One was apparently square and was adjacent to another one with a more irregular shape resulting from its adaptation to the wall of the Roman aqueduct. Its construction features were similar to the ones referred to the built unit BU2. The walls have around 0,45 meters and were made with schist slabs. A thick layer of mortar covered the stony basement suggesting the walls used this material to cover some internal wood structure.

The presence of these new constructions of residential and artisanal character clearly appropriating previous public spaces and partially using dismantled pre-existing structures define a new logic of occupation and organizing the peripheral areas inside the city wall. In Late Antiquity the old spaces and buildings associated with leisure lost their purpose, alongside the constructions that defined the infrastructures supplying and

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<sup>37</sup> A. Azkarate Garai-Olaun and José Bustinza, 'Tipologías domésticas y técnicas constructivas en la primitiva Gasteiz (País Vasco) durante los siglos VIII al XII d.C.', *Arqueología de la Arquitectura*, 9, (2012), 103-128 (p. 120); Arnau Perich i Roca, *Arquitectura residencial urbana d'època tardoantiga a Hispania (segles IV- VIII dC)*, p. 229.

<sup>38</sup> Analyses carried out by Carla Martins, whose results will be the subject of forthcoming publication.

evacuating water from the city. This is a well-documented process across other coeval urban contexts<sup>39</sup> that also affected the forum areas that started to be occupied with residential, artisanal and funerary functions.<sup>40</sup>

Available data demonstrates that the wide public buildings in Braga were likely dismantled from the fifth century onwards being the spaces appropriated alongside their respective surrounding areas to erect new residential and artisanal constructions whose common features are its organic nature, a clear logic reuse of previous materials and the use of different construction solutions. In some cases previous spaces and materials were also used and adapted, whereas in others the new materials employed were unknown to the Roman context and to the areas where the *domus* were transformed into new residential units.

The occupation of the inner city wall by new constructions revealing an artisanal function and also clearly connected with subsistence activities, such as milling represented in the BU1, seemed to encompass the installation of new population groups within the urban space. With a relatively humble social origin these groups may have originated in the region or even in the city outskirts with a highlight towards farmers and artisans announcing a movement associated with the protection of a less favoured segment of population that gathered inside the fortified city during the fifth century.

## 5. Final considerations

As several other cities of Roman foundation, Braga was occupied throughout Late Antiquity a period during which the city witnessed significant changes affecting its topography and resulting from the fragmentation of the old *domus* and the deactivation of pre-existing public spaces and structures with new building areas emerging.

Available and previously analysed archaeological data demonstrates that in the period between the fifth and seventh centuries the city saw the emergence of new domestic architectures located across different sectors of the city. In the old residential spaces the peristyle *domus* disappear and a new type of house emerged resulting from the fragmentation of the previous built spaces. The new constructions seem to assume a more compacted character and likely developed vertically instead of horizontally. On the other hand in the area located on the western part of the forum, where the most charismatic city public buildings used to be located new types of residential and artisanal constructions emerged between the fifth and seventh centuries. Although available data needed to characterize the evolution of the city domestic architecture is still restricted it is also rather enlightening with regards to the constructive dynamism impacting the city together with the emergence of new architectonic expressions associated with new construction processes and based upon the intense reuse of pre-existing spaces and materials alongside new ones.

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<sup>39</sup> J. Arce Martínez, *Bárbaros y romanos en Hispania (400-507 A.D)*, (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2005), p. 228; Michael Kulikowski, 'The urban landscape in Hispania in the fifth century', in *El Tiempo de los 'Barbaros'. Pervivencia y transformación en Gallia e Hispania (ss. V-VI d. C.)*, Zona Arqueológica, nº 11, (Alcalá de Henares: Museo Arqueológico Regional, 2010), pp. 311-318.

<sup>40</sup> Pedro Mateos and Miguel Alba, 'De Emerita Augusta a Marida', in *Actas del Simposio Internacional Visigodos y Omeyas: Un debate entre la tardoantigüedad y la Alta Edad Media*, ed. by L. Caballero e P. Mateos, (Madrid: CSIC, 2001), pp. 143-168; Pedro Mateos, 'Los orígenes de la Cristianización urbana en Hispania', in *Actas de la VI Reunión de Arqueología Cristiana Hispánica*, coord. by J. M. Gurt and A. Rivera, (Barcelona: Universidad de Valencia, 2005), pp. 49-62; P. Diarte, 'La evolución de las ciudades romanas en Hispania entre los siglos IV y VI d.C.: los espacios públicos como factor de transformación', *Mainake*, XXXI, (2009), 71-84.

The underlying technological processes related with new architectonic expressions emerging in Late Antiquity seems to be articulated with the new political, economical and social context of the early fifth century, equally demonstrated by the economic and constructive dynamism of Braga throughout the Suebi domain, as well as with the persistence of a strong population density within the city wall. Thus, archaeology corroborates that the urban core of *Bracara* endured a dynamic transformation process in Late Antiquity during which the urban layout and the residential space were adapted to the demands of the new political, civil and religious power, to a new lifestyle, but also to new conceptions of households and new urban space use patterns.

Urban and constructive evolution of Braga is also related to the spread of Christianity and with the growing power of the bishops, who left their mark in both the city and the surrounding territory through new prestigious construction projects, such as the episcopal complex located inside the city wall, in the area where the cathedral is currently located and constructed in the early fifth century, or in the several basilicas erected in the city outskirts, alongside the roads and in emblematic sites revealing the Suebi power (i.e. Falperra or Dume).<sup>41</sup> However, the close relationship traditionally established between the urban changes and the Christianisation of cities considered as a prime catalyst agent for the evolution of Late Antiquity urbanism<sup>42</sup> must be relativized considering the role of the civil elites in the transforming of the urban topography before the affirmation of the episcopal power.<sup>43</sup> In reality, the status of urban elites was dramatically altered with the heavy tax burdens imposed on the *ordo decurionum* members and with the loss of economic capacity of the *curiae* that saw their revenue sources greatly diminished after the second half of the third century.<sup>44</sup> These economic constraints must have clearly influenced the evolution of cities and the overall management of investment that started to be oriented towards the construction of walls, considered by then a priority within the imperial policy.

Braga seemed to have benefited from a sound financial situation throughout the fourth century certainly emerging from its province capital status, which was translated not only in the construction of its robust wall but also in the remodelling works of public buildings, namely thermal infrastructures, that suffered reforms half way through that same century. On the other hand, conducted reforms on the *domus* documented the presence of a wealthy elite in the city, including officials connected with state administration. However, with the end of the Roman domain the city elites inevitably saw its economic capability diminished and had to reorient its investments. This situation fully impacted upon the deactivation of public buildings and their transformation into residential areas, where new constructive expressions emerged from the fifth century onwards. Simultaneously, and across other residential areas the *domus*

<sup>41</sup> Luís Fontes, 'O período suévico e visigótico e o papel da igreja na organização do território', *Minho. Traços de Identidade*, (Braga: UMinho, 2009), pp. 272-295.

<sup>42</sup> Josep Gurt Esparraguera and Isabel Sánchez Ramos, 'Topografía cristiana en Hispania durante los siglos V y VI', in *El Tiempo de los 'Barbaros'. Pervivencia y transformación en Gallia e Hispania (ss. V-VI d. C.)*, *Zona Arqueológica*, 11, (Alcalá de Henares: Museo Arqueológico Regional, 2010), pp. 331-345.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and its cities*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004); Michael Kulikowski 'The Late Roman City in Spain', in *Die Stadt in der Spätantike. Niedergang oder Wandel?*, ed. by J. U. Krause and Ch Witschell (Stuttgart, 2006), pp. 129-149 (p.141); P. Diarte 'The creation of Christian urban landscapes in Hispania: a rather late development', in *The Theodosian Age (A.D. 379-455). Power, place, belief and learning at the end of the Western Empire*, ed. by R. Garcia-Gasco, S. González and D. Hernández, (Oxford, 2013), pp. 37-43 (p.43); Arnau Perich i Roca, *Arquitectura residencial urbana d'època tardoantiga a Hispania (segles IV- VIII dC)*, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup> A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire (284-602)*, (Baltimore: 1964), p. 732.

were disarticulated and transformed into several houses advancing over the streets breaking the previous urban layout. Therefore, when the church power asserted itself over the civil power during the fifth century the city was already the object of topographical changes that would be consolidated in the forthcoming centuries giving origin to the Early Middle Ages urban morphology owing very little to the ancient Roman one.