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Changing Landscapes

The impact of Roman towns in the Western Mediterranean

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AB OPPIDO AD URBEM: ALGARVE'S URBAN LANDSCAPE VARIATIONS THROUGHOUT THE ROMAN AGE

João Pedro Bernardes

RESUMO: As descrições literárias clássicas que se referem ao sul da Lusitânia, de que são exemplo Estrabão (III, 2.4.), Pompónio Mela (III, 7), ou Plínio (IV, 116), descrevem a região como que estruturada em povoados centrais localizados no litoral, sobretudo junto aos estuários dos grandes rios, e que globalmente designam por *oppida*. Esta imagem do território algarvio da época republicana ou de inícios do Império radica numa estruturação do espaço assente em diferentes lugares centrais com origem na Idade do Ferro, ou mesmo antes, que, aliás, é globalmente confirmada pela arqueologia. A sua implantação na paisagem, ocupando pontos geoestratégicos de características similares, corresponde a um modelo de povoamento que se verifica também na vizinha Andaluzia e que, de resto, é muito comum dos *oppida* pré-romanos. Com o avanço da romanização, concretamente a partir da reforma administrativa de Augusto e com o dinamismo económico a partir de meados do século I d.C., esta realidade tende a alterar-se profundamente. Os *oppida*, de uma forma geral, começam paulatinamente a perder importância e, com ela, cada vez mais o estatuto de lugares centrais, exceptuando, obviamente, os que são escolhidos pela administração romana para continuarem a desempenhar funções de centralidade no contexto da nova ordem.

Perante estas constatações e ao contrário do que é comum na bibliografia, defende-se que, relativamente ao litoral algarvio, só é possível falar-se de várias “cidades” – enquanto sinónimos de *oppida* – durante a época republicana, uma vez que em plena época imperial os únicos núcleos merecedores de tal estatuto seriam *Balsa* e *Ossonoba*.

KEYWORDS: Coastal *Oppida*, Urban Landscape, *Lusitania*.

FROM THE REPUBLIC TO THE EMPIRE: THE URBAN LANDSCAPE OF ALGARVE'S COASTLINE

South *Lusitania*, representative of the modern Portuguese region of Algarve, is a peripheral extremity of the Roman Empire corresponding to the maritime *Baetica* area of influence, namely *Gades* (Cadiz). Seen from the Mediterranean Sea, the area reveals itself as *finis terrae*, in which, according to Avienus (*Ora mar.* v. 204), an Ocean full of monsters commences. Therefore, it is a privileged subject of worship, for which *Sacrum Promunturium* (Str. III, 1-2; Mela III, 7; Plin. IV, 35, 116) is the main term of reference. Strabo (III, 2, 4) considers that the whole coastal area extending from the sacred cape to the columns of Hercules is *Turdetania*, and that Cadiz is the great regional and commercial centre (III, 5, 3). As the Ocean, which extends from the Mediterranean Sea, is the main line of communication common to both coastal *Baetica* and *Lusitania*, one must acknowledge the narrow and archaeologically certified (Lagóstena Barrios, 2001, p. 72) connections between the two regions. Furthermore, when observing a regional map, one can readily perceive that the eastern part of the Algarve – between the river *Anas* and Santa Maria cape, perchance the *promunturium Cuneus* of ancient authors (Alarcão, 2005b) – is an element of the Gaditan Bay. However, the western side, extending from Santa Maria cape to *Sacrum promunturium* (Sagres), is the most inhospitable and peripheral zone – a veritable *finis orbis* – that Pliny (IV, 35, 116) and Pomponius Mela (III, 1, 7) somehow seem to trace out of Algarve's eastern side. The differences between the two areas of the Algarve are otherwise conveniently distinguished in the shoreline configuration. The first is formed by beaches of extensive sands and lagoon systems which extend along the low coast of southern Andalusia. In contrast, Algarve's western side is marked and differentiated by a high and rocky coast. The eastern part of the Algarve reflects the cultural and economic influence of the Gaditan Bay. However, one cannot neglect the fact that the two locations integrate a single region: the south coast of *Lusitania* or the Portuguese region of Algarve. The different characteristics of the region influenced the way the urban landscape evolved as the Romanization process grew stronger.

Greek-Latin literary sources do specify several nuclei of population – *oppida* or towns – located in this particular area of *Lusitania*; some registered in epigraphic and numismatic sources. However, the archaeological vestiges only allow us to confirm the existence of two urban nuclei of classical features. There is

a general tendency to acknowledge them all as Roman towns, but can it be that all the places revealed in literary sources are urban nuclei within the classic meaning? That is, can they all be Roman towns, secondary or not, *strictu sensu*? Keay (1998, p. 60) has already called attention to the fact that literary references concerning the existence of *urbes*, *civitates*, *oppida* and *poleis* in southern Iberia during the Republican period are not to be taken literally: classical authors, writing during the Imperial period but using much older sources, anachronistically applied the concepts of their own times to the pre-Roman past.

It is common to assume that the present-day Algarve had three *civitates* as its respective capital towns: *Balsa* and *Ossonoba* in the eastern part – for which there is literary and archaeological evidence – and one other capital on the western side. This last capital has been identified as *Laccobriga* (Mantas, 1997, p. 291) or *Cilpes* (Alarcão, 1990, p. 21, Id., 2005, p. 294), despite, in contrast to the two other capitals, there being no archaeological site on the occidental side of the Algarve that presents unequivocal and consistent similarities with a Roman town. However, if neither the archaeology nor the documentation confirms the existence of any privileged town, the vastness of the western territory of the Algarve seems to justify, *a priori*, a *civitas* capital in that part of the region. Furthermore, even though Pliny's list of towns in the Algarve (IV, 35, 116) consists only of *Ossonoba* and *Balsa*, Pliny mentions in passing (IV, 35, 117) the collective name *cilibitani*, frequently read as *cibilitani*, which has been identified with *Cilpes* (Guerra, 1995, pp. 34, 107; Id., 1998, pp. 397-398; Alarcão, 2005, pp. 294-297; Faria, 2006, pp. 219-220). The established relation between Pliny's *oppida* and *civitates* of Augustan foundation (Andreu Pintado, 2004, p. 245) has been material in ascribing the status of Algarve's western capital town to *Cilpes/Cilpis*. The reference to *Cilibe*, a variant grapheme of *Cilpes*, as an important nucleus of this region in the papyrus assigned to Artemidorus, indicates the importance of the place (*ibidem*). Even so, the localization of *Cilibe* and *Ipsa* in the Algarve is not settled (Kramer, 2005, p. 27; Gallazzi, Kramer & Settis, 2008). Nevertheless, it is known for a fact that even though coastal Algarve has been subject to enormous building construction pressures for the last few decades and, in recent years, to careful archaeological scrutiny, none of the archaeological sites found are susceptible to being ascribed the status of town.

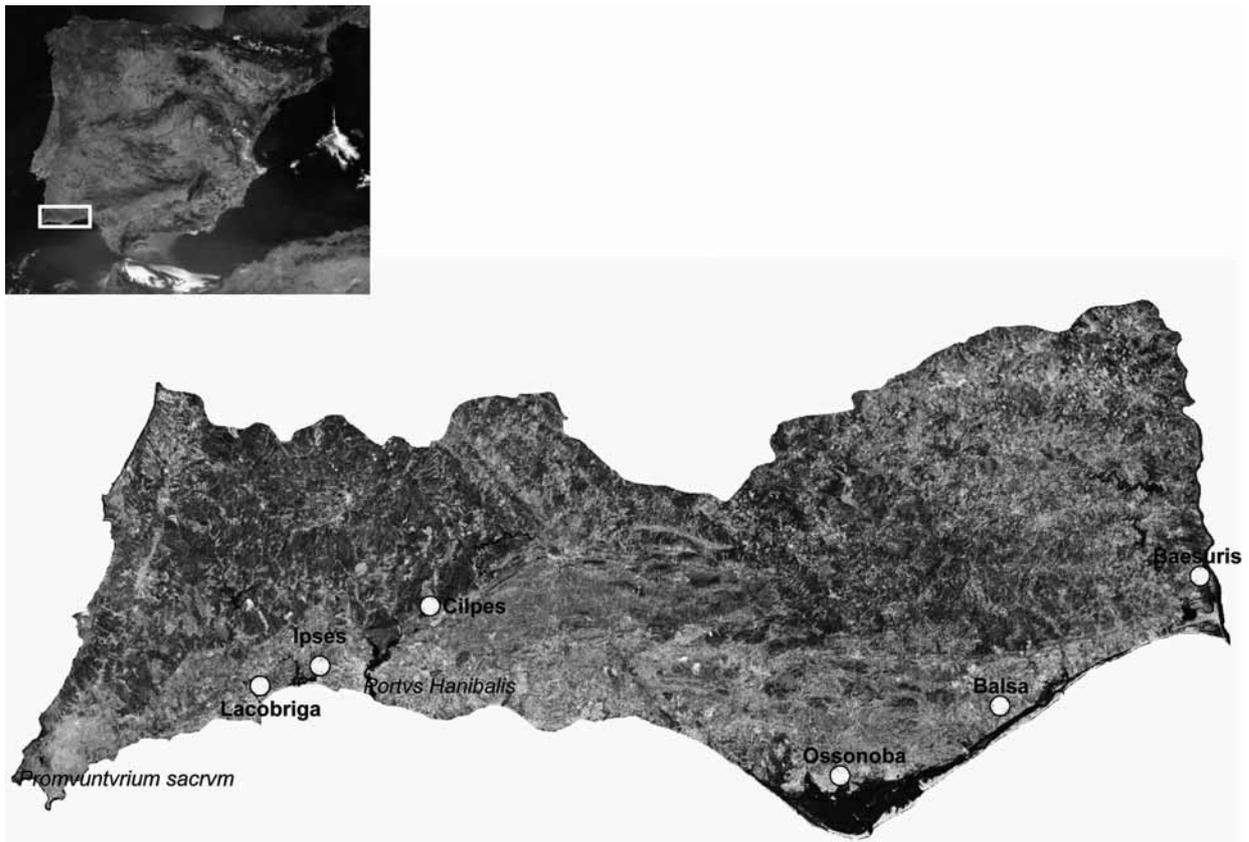
Equally, for the remaining urban sites in the Algarve that are acknowledged by sources other than Pliny, namely *Baesuri* or *Ipsa*, there is no archaeological data concerning anything more than small agglomerates of pre-Roman features. Therefore, these should be regarded, similarly to *Laccobriga* and *Cilpes*, as central nuclei with territorial influence during the Republican period (Iron Age tradition). Nevertheless, these *parva oppida*, as Pomponius Mela (III, 1, 6) would call them, experienced no continuity after the establishment of the *pax augustana* and in the ensuing new Roman order, unless they were chosen for central places (Fig. 1).

URBAN NUCLEUS

Both archaeology and a heedful insight into the literary sources allow us to trace a scheme for each existing urban nucleus or regional *oppida* (cfr. Table I).

Baesuri:

In the location commonly identified as Castro Marim, Ana M. Arruda (2002, pp. 36-53) proceeded with several excavation campaigns inside the mediaeval castle, having verified Bronze Age occupation there. The site sustained a crucial occupation during the Republican era, according to the Iron Age traditions. The Imperial age is of little significance, and during this period the hill was progressively abandoned and new sites in the surroundings were developed. Coins were issued during the Republic (Faria, 1997, pp. 361-362; García-Bellido & Blázquez, II, 2001, p. 50). The site served both as a port and as an important road station, hence it is marked on several road itineraries like the *Antonini Itinerarium* (425, 6; 431, 4) and that of the *Anonimus Ravennatis* (306, 9). Beyond these *itineraria*, and a medal issued with the legend BAESURI, there are no other sources proving the existence of "*Baesuri*". Moreover, there is no epigraphy or architectonic elements pointing to any Roman towns erected in the vicinity. The vestiges at Castro Marim present a suspiciously small area for a town of the Imperial era. Considering that the *Anonimus Ravennatis* is based on the *Itinerarium Antonini*, and that the local cur-



1. Algarve's oppida in literary sources

rency was issued in the first century BC, these references all date from between the first century BC and the third century AD. The third-century itinerary is established on rather older sources, eventually from the Augustan period. Hence, the third century AD is above all the epoch in which the sources concerning the first centuries BC and AD were compiled and not so much the factual period when the events took place. Nonetheless, and as *Baesuris* is a *caput viae*, it is only natural that notwithstanding its untimely decline it still remains as a reference from the first century AD onward.

Balsa:

Orthographical evidence proves there was pre-Roman nucleus located at Luz de Tavira. Its pre-Roman origins are scantily clarified and there are authors who propound a removal of the primal nucleus from Tavira – where the excavation of various levels is clearly documented – to Luz de Tavira, which presents a more propitious topography for the foundation and development of a Roman town. This proposed transfer, which would have occurred around the middle of the first century BC or a little after, cannot be accepted until there is verification from archaeological excavation. There isn't conclusive evidence that there are no archaeological traces at Quinta de Torre de Ares – *Balsa's* core – previous to the first century BC. Topographically, the abovementioned hill is listed on the same geographical level as the remaining *oppida* in the Algarve. *Balsa* issued its own currency during the Republic period, namely during the first century BC. In comparison with the remnant existing *cecas* in the Algarve (Faria, 1997, p. 362), coining there achieved great profusion. Coins of the *oppidum* are those that are found most frequently in local excavations by far.

Balsa is repeatedly mentioned in literary sources, not only on road itineraries but also by Pomponius Mela (III, 7), Pliny (IV, 35, 116), Ptolemy (II, 5, 2) and Marcian of Heraclea (II, 13). Plentiful epigraphy testifies its status of *civitas* capital as well as municipality, to which it ascended under Claudius or, most likely, Vespasian (Encarnação, 1984, pp. 123-149). The considerable area of scattered remains, namely of architectural and epigraphic elements, testifies to the existence of urban structures and a special monumentalization, bearing two inscriptions alluding to a *circus* (CIL II, 5165-5166). Literary, epigraphic or numismatic

references are found between the first century BC and the third/fourth centuries AD, even though the archaeology testifies to an occupation until the seventh century (Maciel, 2003; Viegas, 2006, p. 14).

Ossonoba:

The location has been identified with the modern city of Faro since the mid twentieth century, due to epigraphic and monumental finds there (Viana, 1952, pp. 250-285). Nowadays, in the present town of Faro, it is common to find ruins of the Roman town scattered over a considerably spacious area. The monumental counterpart of the town equals the walled side, where pre-Roman ruins have been identified. *Ossonoba* presents several similarities to *Balsa*, even though it remained vigorous during the collapse of the Western Empire when *Balsa*, following several Andalusian towns, was declining. It enjoyed great investments, namely under the Flavian emperors. Its prosperity was owed to merchant activities, partially related to the exploitation and export of salt-fish products (Lagóstena Barrios, 2001, pp. 78-82).

Similarly to *Balsa*, *Ossonoba* is mentioned on road itineraries by Mela, Pliny, Ptolemy and Marcian of Heraclea. It issued currency in the mid first century BC (Faria, 1997, pp. 368-369). Epigraphy and urban elements exist until the fourth century AD even though the town was sustained as a relevant centre in the following ages.

Ipses:

Alvor has been identified as the site of *Ipses* ever since Teresa Júdice Gamito conducted the excavations there, in which three coins with the legend IPSES were found (Faria, 1987-1988; Gamito, 1994; Id., 1997). These coins, which are found at other locations in the western Algarve, are made of lead and bronze and date from the first century BC (Faria, 1997, pp. 365-367; García-Bellido & Blázquez, 2001, II, p. 211).

The only literary sources mentioning this settlement are extremely dubious. One is the alleged Papyrus of Artemidorus, dated from late second century BC (Faria, 2006, p. 220); the other is the *Divisio Wambae*, forged during the late eleventh or early twelfth century, containing information regarding the Visigothic era and containing a toponym which can be dubiously reconstituted as *Ipsa* (Alarcão, 2005, p. 301).

Given the limited area excavated, little is known about the site. Nonetheless, the quarter containing scattered remains is relatively small and presents no relevant epigraphic or architectonic elements. Above all, the archaeological materials date from the Iron Age and Republican period (Gamito, 1994; Id., 1997).

Cilpes/Cilpis:

The site is often identified as Cerro da Rocha Branca, a partially excavated settlement near Silves (Gomes, 1993; Arruda, 2002, pp. 53-56). *Cilpes* issued currency during late 2nd century BC and first century BC (Faria, 1997, pp. 363-365). Scant archaeological remains date from the Imperial period and are located in an area of scattering in accord with an *oppidum* but not with a *urbs*. Thus, several authors have suggested that *Cilpes* or *Cilpis* was located beneath the modern town of Silves, a town which experienced great development during the Islamic period (8th to 13th centuries AD). However, in recent years Silves has been widely explored and the only significant remains found here and on the nearby locations are those of Roman *villae*. Even at Portimão, where remains are numerous, there is no evidence whatsoever confirming the past existence of a town, in spite of the recent suggestions made about this location (Alarcão, 2005, pp. 295-297). Relevant epigraphy or architectonic elements issuing from Silves are scant and do not present urban features.

Like *Ipses*, the literary references are extremely vague and uncertain, given that they are limited to the Papyrus of Artemidorus and, perhaps, to Pliny, if one accepts the identification between “*cilibitani*” and “inhabitants of *Cilpes*”. Given that Pliny’s research was based on Augustan documentation, the most recent references are of this period.

Laccobriga:

This is commonly identified as Monte Molião and located near Lagos, even though this location has not always been universally accepted (Mantas, 1997, pp. 289-291; Alarcão, 2005, pp. 297-300), due to the Ptolemaic co-ordinates (Ptol. II, 5, 5) locating it near Setubal. This *oppidum* is mentioned by Pomponius Mela (III, 1, 7) and Plutarch (*Sertorius*, 13), on the subject of a siege on the occasion of the Sertorian wars in which the Lusitanian general succoured the *oppidum* of *Laccobriga* from Metelo’s assault.

In recent years Monte Molião has been the subject of an orderly excavation programme testifying a solid occupation from the fourth century BC until the second century AD. At that point the location was practically abandoned and the site where is located the modern city of Lagos – on the other side of the estuary that once existed – was increasingly populated with a considerable development of villas and industrial units for fish processing (Arruda *et alii*, 2008). All the same, Monte Molião represents a rather small area to be considered as what once may have been a Roman town, even though its extent, topography and finds are suitable for a place’s central role during the Republican period, especially if one deems that these functions were primarily and frequently accomplished by native settlements (Keay, 2003, p. 157). Recent excavations have revealed an assemblage of structures, some of them dating from the Imperial era, but they do not reveal any unmistakably urban or public qualities (Arruda *et alii*, 2008). No relevant epigraphy or architectonic elements were found. In spite of Roman edifices dating from the first century, the topographic features and the *oppidum’s aedificandi* from the Roman Imperial period still preserve traditional traits.

Further references to the *oppidum* do not go beyond the first or second centuries AD; one must consider that the sources of Plutarch and Ptolemy were significantly previous to the period in which they wrote.

DISCUSSION

Upon analysing the available data, it is apparent that only *Balsa* and *Ossonoba* present obvious urban archaeological and historical features in a topographic, architectonic, political and cultural sense. If one overlooks *Baesuri* (which is attested as a road station on the Roman itineraries), the remaining references to urban nuclei are based on Republican or Imperial documentation and the sites themselves do not present any typical urban features.

All the evidence suggests that by the end of the Republic and, *grosso modo*, during the first century AD, urban and populated nuclei tended to disappear due to their inadequacy in the face of the new reality. *Balsa* and *Ossonoba* prevailed as exceptions. However, the existence or non-existence of a *civitas* in

	Literary Referees	Epigraphic Referees	Numismatic referees	Urban architectural elements	Cronology (from referees)
Baesuris	<i>Itin. Ant.</i> , 425.6, 431.4; <i>Ravenn.</i> , 306.9		X		I BC - III AD
Balsa	Mela III.7; Plin. IV.116 -118; Ptol. <i>Geog.</i> , II.5.2; <i>Itin. Ant.</i> , 426.1; Marcian. II, 13; <i>Ravenn.</i> , 306.10	<i>CIL</i> , II 105; <i>CIL</i> , II 5164; <i>CIL</i> , II 4898 = 5161; <i>CIL</i> , II 4990 = 5162	X	Big area of remains / public buildings / Monumental epigraphy	I BC - III AD
Ossonoba	Mela III.7; Plin. IV.116; Str. III. 2.5; Ptol. <i>Geog.</i> , II.5.2; <i>Itin. Ant.</i> , 418. 6, 426.2; Marcian. II, 13; <i>Ravenn.</i> , 306.12	<i>CIL</i> , II 1; <i>CIL</i> , II 5141; IRCP nº 4; IRCP nº 7; IRCP nº 64	X	Big area of remains / public buildings / Monumental epigraphy	I BC - IV AD
Ipses	Artem.		X		I BC
Cilpes / cilbitani	Plin. 4.118; Artem.		X		II BC - I AD (begin)
Laccobriga	Mela 3.7; Plut. <i>Sert.</i> , 13; Ptol. <i>Geog.</i> , 2.5.5				I BC - II AD

Tab. 1 Scheme of available ancient sources for southern Lusitanian urban centres

western Algarve during the Imperial period – *Laccobriga* (Mantas, 1997, p. 291) or *Cilpes* (Alarcão, 2005, pp. 294-297; Faria, 2006, pp. 219-220) – remains unsolved. *Cilpes* is often identified as Cerro da Rocha Branca or Silves, yet Silves and the nearby locations do not present any remains of urban nuclei. Cerro da Rocha Branca may have been an *oppidum* which survived from the Iron Age throughout the Roman period until its abandonment – as did many others in the Algarve (Arruda, 2002, pp. 53-56; Id., 2005). Silves, severely affected by recent urban improvements, is known by the great archaeological potency of its remains dating from the Islamic period. In contrast, Roman remains are so scarce that one cannot glimpse any significant Roman occupation. The town's surroundings present several Roman sites, however, none of them resembles any sort of urban town or agglomerate.

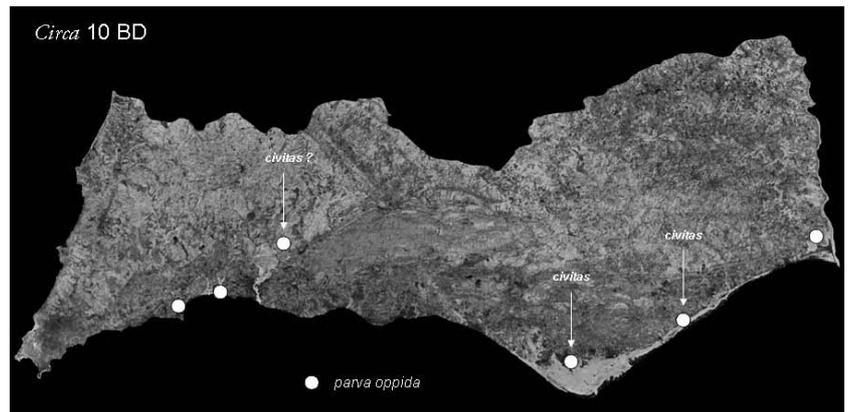
Although the arguments identifying the “*cilibitani*” with *Cilpes* are rather convincing, one could admit that *cilibitani* were settled in another region; or, in support of the first argument, one may conclude that *Cilpes* is neither Cerro da Rocha Branca nor the town of Silves, whose exact location in Algarve remains unknown. J. Alarcão, comparing these facts with the considerable development observed at the mouth of the river Arade during the Roman era, speculated whether *Cilpes* may have been located at Portimão (Alarcão, 2005, p. 296). However, the lack of archaeological evidence supporting this hypothesis is quite persistent, since the plentiful remains found at Portimão and Lagos seem to be closely related to marine and agrarian exploration and not so much to any other urban centre. Thus, one must concede the prospect that *Cilpes*, chosen to be the capital town of western Algarve, did not succeed in its newly attributed duties. It is acknowledged historically that not all proclaimed centres – chosen by decree or by other distinct circumstances – actually flourished. For several reasons, in the Roman era many indigenous *oppida* decayed until their utter abandonment. Altogether, there are quite a few grounds on which *Cilpes*' failure as a Roman town can be explained:

- Despite its proximity to the Arade River, *Cilpes* was an inland town with no significant roads or surrounding routes.
- The neighbouring hills did not topographically favour the town's development. Topography was often crucial for urban evolution based on ancient nuclei, such as *Sabora* (Canete la Real, Málaga), in the Roman era (*CIL* II, 1423).
- The lack of public works and appropriate monumentalization hindered the town's development as a regional centre.
- Geographical remoteness from coastal commercial routes, investors and merchants, as occurred at the mouth of the Arade and in Lagos bay.

All of the abovementioned causes most certainly contributed, so that local communities felt somehow less and less identified with an *oppidum* that did not reflect the new Roman values: the political, economic, social and cultural values those communities yearned both to experience and share in a genuine environment of *urbanitas*.

Accordingly, it looks as though *Cilpes* did not accomplish the capital functions for which it had been chosen during Augustus' reign. The selection did not present any practical consequences and, subsequently, the Iron Age nucleus at Rocha Branca – or even that erected at modern Silves – failed or was abandoned. The fact of unsuccessful capitalization concerning some of the chosen urban nuclei may have occurred to a number of *oppida*, such as *Talabriga* and *Arandis* (Bernardes, 2006; Mantas, 2004, p. 75), or to several of those *populi* urban centres, as represented in Alcântara Bridge (*CIL* II, 760). Even if *Cilpes*, similarly to *Balsa* and *Ossonoba*, had gained the status of *civitas stipendiaria* during the Augustan era – thus becoming one of the 36 *oppida stipendiaria* in Pliny's (IV, 35, 117) *Lusitania* – it never underwent monumentalization works, unlike those two towns. Though it may have achieved a *ius Latii* during Vespasian's reign – by that time extended throughout all of the territory of *Hispania* (Andreu Pintado, 2004) – it never benefited from it, as it offered no conditions, vital force or capable individuals to operate institutional *munera*. According to ancient authors of treatises, one of which is represented by Gellius (XVI, 13), the *municipium*, a citizens' community as it were, could only have prevailed if the citizens proved themselves capable of both claiming and developing it. *Cilpes* did not enable the given capability, and the entire community under its jurisdiction became *adtributa* or *contributa* to *Ossonoba* (Fig. 2).

One cannot regard as peculiar the non-existence of a genuine urban centre in the western Algarve and the existence of two reasonably contiguous centres in the eastern Algarve. The western side was regarded primarily as the *finis terrae* beyond the columns of Hercules, while the eastern side, comprehended between *Anas* (Guadiana river) and Santa Maria cape, was effortlessly considered the natural extension of ancient *Turdetania*. The dynamics between the two parts of the territory were



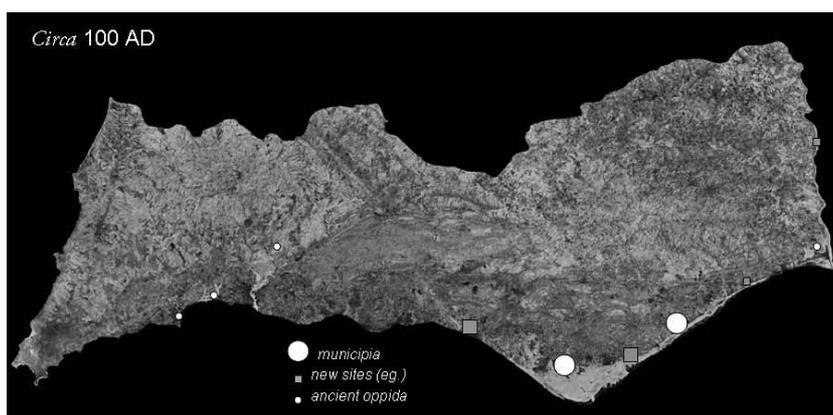
2. Algarve's urban landscape c. 10 BC

not necessarily equal (Mantas, 2004, p. 75) – there was similar inequality between the different fractions of southern *Baetica* (Keay, 1998, p. 62). As occurred in the neighbouring province, the processes of Romanization did not follow one exclusive pattern, rather they assumed plural expressions, due to urban fashion, or divergent local traditions, as remarked by Strabo (III, 1, 1-3).

THE EVOLUTION OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE THROUGHOUT THE IMPERIAL AGE

As previously noted, by the end of the Republic, the occupation of space was still strongly structured according to the existence of long-standing *oppida*. These central nuclei do not exhibit classical features; they are *oppida stipendiaria* or *parva oppida*. These central nuclei proceed from the Iron Age and they evolved with significant magnitude throughout the Republican era of the Roman occupation. Once the *pax Augusta* was installed, and with it economic development based on Roman standards of economic exploitation, remarkable amendments occurred. As ancient *oppida* languished, vigorous regional centres developed in connection with the Roman Empire, specifically at coastal *Baetica*.

With Augustus and the approval of central locations within the new Roman order, the prior state of affairs was soon altered. One can date the given adjustments between the fourth and sixth years AD, if one considers apportioning them in the same set of actions taken by the provincial governor Quintus Articuleis Regulus, who circumscribed a series of *civitates* – and the related selection of central locations – at the northern end of the Tejo River, according to the eight *termini augustales* dating from Augustus' era that were found at that location (Cortés Barcena, 2002-2003, pp. 115, 121-122; Alarcão, 2005, p. 269). Plainly, the selection of central locations was properly followed by an assemblage of works to be materialized at the nuclei in order to endow the necessary political and administrative apparatus, namely the construction of a *forum* and its monuments. It seems quite reasonable though that these works were not executed simultaneously throughout all of Lusitania's *civitas* capitals. Furthermore, it looks as if by that time a "priorities strategy" (Alarcão, 2005, p. 269) had been established and not all towns would be economically primed to undergo most of the urgent works as well as an immediate programme of renewal and monumentalization. Public works involved voluminous public investments and the collection of private donations. Thus, works firstly began in the nuclei which offered greater economic dynamism and where investments proved to be most easily feasible and urgent. A milestone found on the road from *Balsa* to *Ossonoba*, and apparently dating from the reign of Augustus (Encarnação, 1984, p. 720), suggests that major public works were then initiated in order to equip the new capitals with the necessary political and administrative infrastructures. This road seems to represent a branching of the *Via Augusta* – concluded around 1 AD and connecting Rome to Cadiz – which became crucial in order to improve economic activities regarding both Lusitanian towns, which were strongly influenced by the abovementioned Baetican town. Such dynamics are immediately noticeable due to archaeological traces: a tremendous progress in the course



3. Algarve's urban landscape c. 100 AD

of both coastal towns, which would permit them to undertake new public works. Furthermore, its activities and central functions were overwhelmed by the economic success that took place at *Balsa* and *Ossonoba*. Thus, the fate of *Cilpes* was not any different from those ancient central locations which had not been chosen as *civitas* capitals and, for that reason, slowly lost their status and declined.

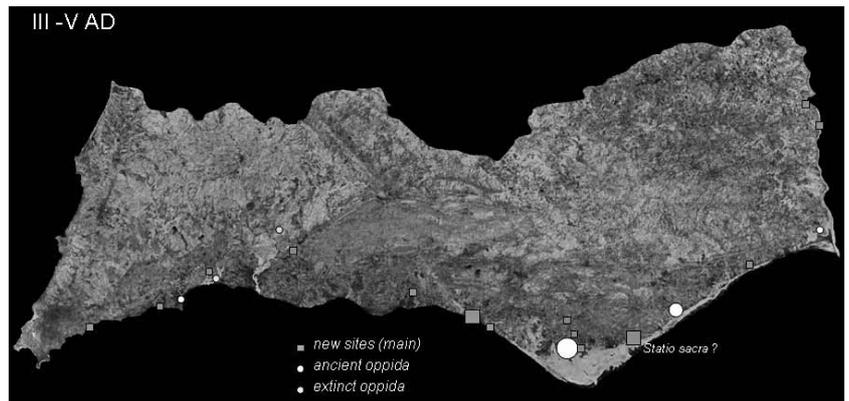
The attribution of *ius Latii* to both *Ossonoba* and *Balsa* served as a stimulus to new investments. Like many other Hispanic towns, they enjoyed significant works by reason of the attribution of the Latin law in the second half of the first century, which would come to greatly impel the progress and renewal of urban centres (Keay, 1998, p. 78; Andreu Pintado, 2004, pp. 169-180; Id., 2005, pp. 112-119). Urban monumentalization phenomena deepened the discrepancies between the regenerated spaces with their icons of loyalty, imperial power and progress, and the old and decrepit native nuclei.

Around the year 100 there were two great and uncontested regional centres entirely controlling the Algarve region; the *municipia* of *Balsa* and *Ossonoba*. Ancient *oppida* nearly disappeared, dissolving into *villae* or into new yet secondary agglomerates which began to surface on the surrounding lowlands. *Laccobriga* serves as an example of paradigmatic nature: this old *oppidum* showed some vitality throughout the second half of the first century AD, only to become rapidly inert, losing all of its influence to the surrounding lowlands (Arruda *et alii*, 2008, pp.154-163). The evolution pioneered by both *Balsa* and *Ossonoba* from the second half of the century henceforth presented a double effect: while dimming ancient centres of indigenous tradition and instigating their rapid disappearance, both towns kindled the development and emergence of new agrarian, industrial or mercantile settings. If the first case refers only to *villae*, the second and third cases surface as an extension of the economic dynamics presented by urban nuclei which would come to establish genuine secondary agglomerates, as ensued at Cerro da Vila (Teichner, 2005; Id., 2007, pp. 119-122) (Fig. 4).

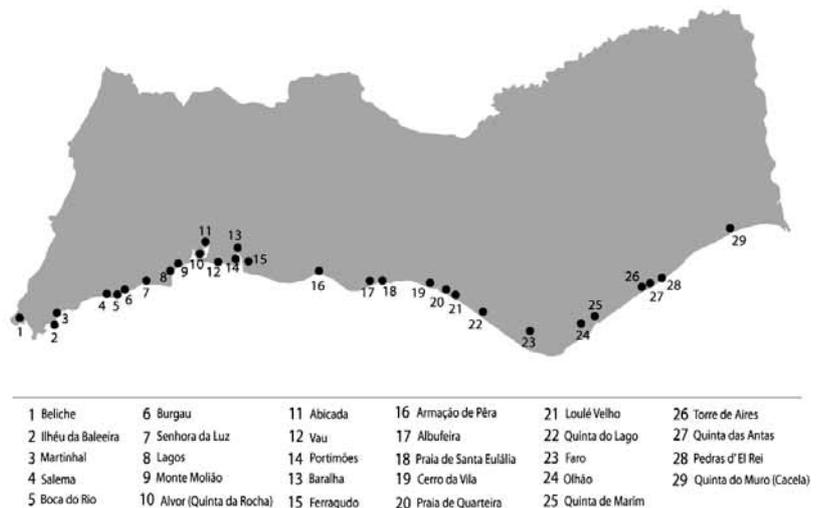
In the course of the third century AD these agglomerates gained more significance as they were interconnected with marine commerce and fish-processing industries; the *villae* grew equally richer as *Balsa* peaked and then decline. All through the fourth century, *Ossonoba* seemed to be the only great regional centre, sharing its influence with several *villae* and secondary agglomerates which enjoyed great progress in the nearby area of Lagos.

It is reasonable to assume that a considerable amount of the wealth engendered by *Ossonoba*, by all of the *villae* – of which Milreu is the finest example – and by western Algarve, proceeded from the exploitation of fishing activities. *Garum* factories multiplied in the western area adjoining Faro and date from the third, fourth and fifth centuries (Fabião, 2007). The presence of vats (*cetariae*) related to the exploitation of fish processing on the eastern side near Faro – *Balsa*'s area of influence – is well documented. Geomorphological transformations on the gravelly shoreline explain why these vats were not better preserved and are today few in number. Preserving complexes of fish processing was extremely expensive. As

well as the necessary industrial installations one must consider the resources for boat building and maintenance, framework and fishing-tackle, outfit for salt extraction, personnel expenses, containers for salting, fish sauce and fish paste, and transportation expenses to exporting harbours or consuming markets. Due to the exceedingly high investments, one may assume that only commercial investors – great landowners or urban capital holders, who were often one and the same – would seize the economic means to control coastal industrial complexes. Such investments were most certainly rewarding as well as costly: countless seasonally-occupied locations display archaeological wealth and high quality buildings. Thus, investment earnings justified the importance of *Ossonoba* throughout the fourth century, as well as the entire interrelated rural world. *Balsa* did not benefit from this late progress as it did not control the main fish-salting centres of western Algarve, the most peripheral area of the region (Fig. 5).



4. Algarve's urban landscape from middle third century AD



5. Sites in Algarve with vats of processing fish (*cetariae*)

CONCLUSION

Even though we know of several urban nuclei on the Algarve coast, only two Roman towns appear to qualify as classic *urbes*. Archaeological, epigraphic and literary data lead to a future rejection concerning the existence of any towns – settlements having *urbanitas* – other than *Balsa* and *Ossonoba* located in southern Lusitania. From the beginning of the Empire, all the enduring nuclei increasingly lost their functions as regional centres, as they did not prove appropriate for the new political, social and cultural dynamics. These centres, frequently referred to as *oppida*, must be seen as proceeding from the Iron Age and as having accomplished their centralizing practical functions in the first period of Romanization. Conversely, their topographic, architectonic and spatial organization features do not fit the classical town architecture.

The role of heads of *territoria* – which those *oppida* fulfilled up to the Imperial age – was increasingly and exclusively undertaken by *Balsa* and *Ossonoba* according to a new hierarchy appointed by the Roman rule, that gave place to a spatial reformation and monumentalization.

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