Roma y las provincias:
modelo y difusión

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Trinidad Nogales
Isabel Rodà
Editoras

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Metropolitan artistic models in Lusitania: the examples of the domestic architecture of Conimbriga (Portugal)

Virgílio Hipólito Correia

Abstract

Around twenty residential buildings have been excavated in Conimbriga (Condeixa, Portugal), currently known in 17% of its total extension; this paper presents the more relevant examples of the use of erudite artistic models, copied from properly Roman and generally Italiot buildings amongst them. To be noted are the use of criptoporticoes in the first domestic constructions of clearly roman building technique and design; the popularity of the constructions of garden boxes in *impluvia* pools, with their origin in the *domus aurea*, and the connected aspect of the complex perystiles articulating large swaths of the aristocratic residences, with their Pompeian models; and lastly the influence of the villa Adriana in the more relevant achievements of the domestic architecture of Conimbriga in the post-flavian period.

All these elements have already been published, but the progress in current knowledge about the models themselves in the *urbs* and in Italy in general, on the one hand, and the continuing analysis of Conimbriga's constructions, allows for a new joint presentation, bringing forth new aspects and an important lesson to be learned about the development of the urban structure of the town and of its Romanization itself.

Introduction

Excavated just at 17% of its total extension, Conimbriga (Condeixa, Portugal) offers nevertheless a large and significant sample of domestic architecture of the province of Lusitania stretching al the imperial period, both in its erudite aspect and in its popular aspect, of indigenous origin.

Amongst the residential buildings presently known (around twenty), the more relevant examples of the use of erudite artistic models in their planning were selected. To be noted are hence the use of criptoporticoes in the first domestic constructions of clearly roman building technique and design; the popularity of the constructions of garden boxes in *impluvia* pools, with their origin in the *domus aurea*, and the connected aspect of the complex perystiles articulating large swaths of the aristocratic residences, with their Pompeian models; and lastly the influence of the villa Adriana in the more relevant achievements of the domestic architecture of Conimbriga in the post-flavian period.

All these elements have already been published, but the progress in current knowledge about the models themselves in the *urbs*, on the one hand, and the continuing analysis of Conimbriga's constructions allows for a new joint presentation, bringing forth new aspects and an important lesson to be learned about the development of the urban structure of the town and of its Romanization itself.

The cases here presented, namely about their chronology, are part of the larger rhythms of the evolution of the urban centre and contextualize the social evolution of local élites, inasmuch as they represent the effect of a purpose of emulation, essential for an understanding of the process of Romanization as it occurs in Conimbriga.

The criptoporticoes

The first instance of an artistic model adopted in Conimbriga in the overall conditions of the town having been completely Romanized in its urban and architectural aspects is the use of criptoporticoes lightened

Fig. 1. Distribution of criptoporticoes in the centre of Conimbriga. A, forum; B, insula of the aqueduct; C, House of the water jets; D, Building of shops south of the road (extracted from Correia & Alarcão 2008).

by openings usually called "bocca di lupo", of which three examples are known to date: the house of the water jets in its first phase, the insula of the aqueduct and the shops' building south of the main road[1].

The most remarkable model for these domestic criptoporticoes is perhaps the one in Vicenza[2], but it appears unlikely it was that one to have directly inspired the builders in Conimbriga, among other questions for its chronology, somewhat loosely determined (first half of the 1st. c. AD)[3].

The role model for Conimbriga could better be attributed to the criptoportico under the *domus tiberiana* on the Palatine, but the dating problem (usually indicated as being neronian[4]) subsists. The same chronology is pointed to the criptoportico of the substantial *domus* on the Velia[5].

One must then look for the Pompeian houses to find possible models for Conimbriga at a convenient chronology, namely the "casa di Championnet" (reg. VIII, 2, 1)[6] or the "casa del criptopórtico" (reg. I, 6, 2)[7], dated around the third quarter of the 1st. c. BC[8].

The physical connection between the insula of the aqueduct and the public building from which it gains its name suggests it dates back to 10 AD[9], if not even earlier, and from the other buildings there is nothing that points against it. The coherent group that use this architectonic device suggests an urban

1 For the house of the water jets Oleiro 1992, 143-58. The domestic criptoporticoes of Conimbriga were first jointly presented in Correia 2004, 270-3.

2 Moneti 1993, 46-49; George 1997, 63-64.

3 George 1997, 63-64; Donderer 1986, 183-184.

4 Staccioli 1979, 75 and 80; Coarelli 1980, 170-173; Krause 1985, 170-175; Cecamore 2002, 202.

5 Sartorio 1983, 157-168.

6 Noto 2003, 308.

7 La Rocca *et al.* 1994, 205-210. Pesando 1997, 36.

8 But it must be mentioned the chronology proposed for Vicenza by Noto 2003, 320-1 (end of the 1st c. BC) accordingly with the general dating for the gallery criptoporticoes model (Noto 2003, 334 n. 14).

9 Alarcão , Etienne 1977, 182-185.

Fig. 2. Central perystile of the house of Cantaber (©MMC/IMC, photo Danilo Pavone).

program that went beyond the mere sum of three private decisions that happened to coincide (Fig. 1), and it raises a possibility for these parts of the private buildings playing a public or mixed part in their daily life[10], something that would sit well with the placement of the houses in what appears to be a *vicus novus* in the town[11].

It must be pointed out that the typology of these constructions coincides rather well with what is known in the rest of the Empire – the disposition in gallery or the U-shape, being absent only the angled disposition[12] – but, from a technical standpoint, there is a highly original characteristic, apparently exclusive of Conimbriga, which is the preference for a level covering of the criptoportico, in detriment of the vaulted solution which is more commonly found elsewhere[13].

The impact of the *domus aurea* in the architecture of Conimbriga

The second element of great significance in the adoption, at Conimbriga, of erudite artistic models are the gardens grown in boxes built as islands in the middle of the large ponds which occupy the *impluvia*, decorated with water jets, of the large central perystiles of major houses[14]. Current interpretation states that the model for this has its origin in the *domus augustana*[15]. Yet, discoveries in the *urbs* allow a correction: the origin of this scenographic element is to be found in the *domus aurea*'s pavilion on the Esquiline hill, in small courtyards placed on both sides of the structure crowning the octagon room; they are of obvious neronian chronology[16].

10 Gros 2001, 99.

11 Correia 2004, 272-275.

12 Noto 2003, 307.

13 The preference for flat, beam-supported, coverings for the criptoporticoes must be dependent on some technical or artistic particularity of the practice of Conimbriga's builders, because it happens also with the forum (Alarcão & Etienne 1973, 371-406, *id.* 1977, 95-96). On this issue, and after the reconstructions proposed by the original excavators, an alternative proposal for the reconstruction of the forum's criptoportico emerged (Olivier 1983, 937-59; cf. Scetti 1996, 5-16) which, however, can not be accepted by a large number of reasons (Cf. Correia 2009, 96-97). Hence one must assume as a proper character of subterranean construction in Conimbriga the preference for a flat roof, although the vault was known and used with expertise (as, for instance, in the amphitheatre, cf. Correia 1995, 327-44).

14 Alarcão & Etienne 1981, 69-74; Reis & Correia 2006, 293-305.

15 An idea first offered by R. Monturet: Alarcão & Etienne 1981, 2; *id*. 1986, 129-131.

16 Fabrini 1982, 5-24; *id*. 1983, 169-185, specially tav. I

Fig. 3. Central perystile of the house of the water jets (©MMC/IMC, photo Danilo Pavone).

The two main instances of the use of this device in Conimbriga are the central perystiles of the house of Cantaber (Fig. 2) and of the house of the water jets (Fig. 3). The house of Cantaber is dated generally in the flavian period[17]; the refashioning of the central area of the house of the water jets can be dated under Hadrian[18]. The time lapse corresponds to the elaborate features of the latter compared with the former. But both creations respect the principle of elegant design of the neronian model, and provide a more coherent genetic explanation than the *domus augustana*'s example that, in this line of interpretation, is just another baroque exercise performed by Rabirius on the same precedent that inspired the unknown architect in Conimbriga[19]. However, the example of the *domus aurea* might have been appreciated *de visu*, until as late as 104 AD, when the construction of the baths of Trajan began[20], so, the chronology of the transmission of these elements might have been extended in time.

The third element of great relevance in the genesis and development of the specificity of Conimbriga's domestic architecture is show-cased in the southwest perystile of the house of Cantaber and the lobulated *impluvium* created in its centre (Fig. 4, A). The four rooms that surround it opened outwards by a number of doors and windows, certainly giving the impression of garden pavilion that justifies its classification as *diaetae*[21]. Their artistic parallel is Pompeian: the imperial age refashioning of the perystile nº 32 and the *oeci* nºs 33 and 34 of the "casa di Salústio" (reg. VI, 2, 4)[22], and it is likely that the origin of the model

17 Correia 2001, 123-124.

18 More recently Correia 2004, 54-55.

19 Fabrini 1983, 181 and specially 184, n. 37.

20 Fabrini 1983, 169.

21 Zanker 1993, 182-183.

22 Maiuri 1959, 43; La Rocca *et al*. 1994, 340-344; Pesando 1997, 183-190 e 196 (plan). See also Laidlaw 1994, 217-231; cf. Gros 2001, 40.

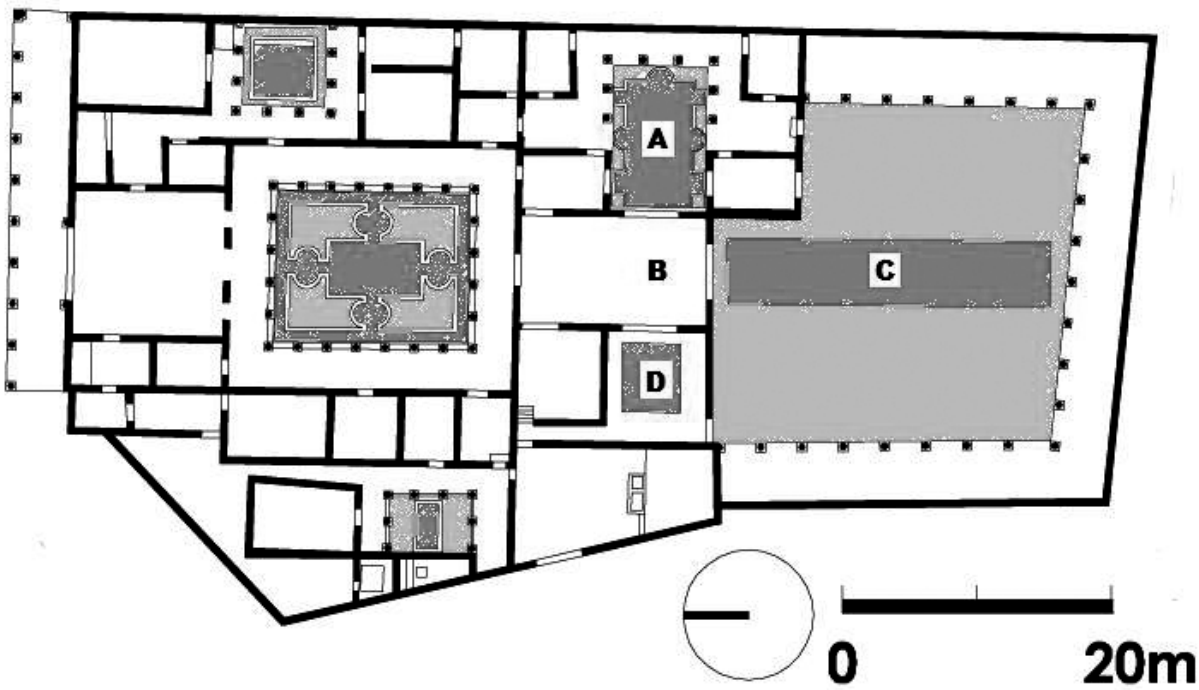

Fig. 4. Plan of the house of Cantaber (extracted from Correia & Alarcão 2008). A, lobulated *impluvium* with *diaetae*; B, *triclinium*; C, "*Canopus*" in the garden; D, courtyard with basin.

can be traced to the *oecus* at the top of an aisle of the inner perystile of the "casa di Trebius Valens" (reg. III, 2, 1)[23].

The lobulated *impluvium* at the centre of this apartment in the house of Cantaber demonstrates what is perhaps one of the most successful devices in this decorative architecture. It has good Pompeian examples[24], it was very popular in all of the West, both in the Peninsula[25] and somewhat more modestly in Italy itself[26], and most of all in Northern Africa[27], and its success was such that it was transposed to other architectural devices[28] and even to the *ars topiaria*[29].

We owe to I. Morand the association of this particular element with the gardened boxes in the centre of ponds[30] and its joint attribution to the diffusion of a model for giving rhythm to volumes and plans to the original model of the "bagni di Livia" in the Palatine[31]. But, here also, the advancement of research

23 Gros 2001, 29.

24 "Casa di Meleagro" (reg. VI, 9, 2) – Maiuri 1959, 46-47; La Rocca *et al.* 1994, 300-301 - and "*villa* di Diomede" – Maiuri 1959, 93-94; La Rocca *et al.* 1994, 349-354; Basso 2003, 519-557.

25 For instance at *Illici*, cf. Ramos 1991, 69-78.

26 For instance at Ostia, at the "domus del tempio rotondo" (I, xi, 2, 3), cf. Packer 1971, 99 and 155-157.

27 Like the six examples at Volubillis ("Maison du portique", Etienne 1960, 75-77; "Maison du bassin trifolié", *id. ibid.*, 72-75; "Maison des Neréides", *id. ibid.*, 68-70; "Maison aux deux pressoirs", *id. ibid.*, 60-63; "Maison de la monnaie d'or", *id. ibid.*, 50-54 e "Maison aux travaux d' Hércule", *id. ibid.*, 31-34) dated from the Antonines to the third quarter of the III c. AD.

28 "Maison des colonnes" at Saint-Romain-en-Gal, cf. Brissard *et al.* 1996, *apud* Prisset 1999, 38.

29 At Pompeii in the "casa dei casti amanti" (IX, 12, 6-7) - La Rocca *et a*l. 1994, 224-228; Ciarallo *et al*. 1993, 110-116 – but most remarkably at Fishbourne – Cunliffe 1971, vol. I 120-132.

30 Morand 2005, 86-89.

31 Morand 2005, 90-91. Which is indeed also an element of the *domus aurea*, cf. Coarelli 1980, 178.

on that hill brings new and better imperial examples that may have been the true artistic model for Conimbriga's creations in the *domus Gaii*[32], at the same time demonstrating the long survival of these specific styles of architectural design[33].

One other significant element of the erudite residential architecture at Conimbriga, the *triclinia* open by large windows onto water tanks or perystiles, shares the characteristics mentioned to the *impluvia*: both items have a palatin model, Pompeian examples and a not very large bur qualitatively remarkable diffusion in Iberia and Northern Africa, albeit an element that mainly concerns the elevation of walls has a more difficult survival in the archaeological record, due to the insufficient conservation of the structures in most cases where one can suspect it has existed.

The two examples from Conimbriga come also from the house of Cantaber (Fig. 4, B-D) and the house of the water jets (Fig. 5, A-B). In the first of these the main *triclinium* opened by three windows onto as many water surfaces; in the second one, only one window is assured, placed at the bottom wall, giving views to the peripheral, U shaped basin and the garden beyond.

The suggested palatial model is the main *triclinium* of the *domus flavia*[34], surrounded by two small open courtyards (where the gardens boxes were again used). The solution, which is rife with potential, has its best creations around Pompeii, namely the exedra of the "villa dei misteri"[35] and alcove nº 7 of the "villa di Diomede"[36], and will have still some echoes in Tibur[37]. Quite clearly, the potential of the solution is diminished in the absence of vast expansions of surrounding grounds, hence its rarity in confined urban spaces, to which the *vicus novus* of Conimbriga can be assumed to be a remarkable exception. But the model is also known at Ampúrias[38], in an Iberian urban environment, or at Abicada[39], environment also Iberian, but rural; it is found also in Northern Africa, like at Hadrumetum[40].

The three elements – gardened *impluvia*, perystiles arranging *diaetae* and rooms widely opened by windows – constitute, as we believe to have demonstrated, a *continuum* in which every one of them cannot be perfectly dissociated from the others on light of their consistent use as a unity by architects. Their historic and artistic origin is also remarkably coherent: they all share a fundamental belonging to the imagetic of the *domus aurea*, independently of the fact that our current state of knowledge of that building and of the process of artistic transmission leads us to put the bearings of the process rather close or at large intervals. But the notion of a true and close descent from an imperial model of great impact must be what is left to be retained as the essence of the pursuit of local builders when searching for a prestigious, erudite way of expression at the very heart of the empire.

The continuity of the imperial model

It must also be stressed that this search of an imperial model in domestic architecture was not, in the neronian period, anything unusual, as the domestic criptoporticoes demonstrate. It must further be added

32 Gros 2001, 242.

33 As can be seen in the domitianic interventions in the northern part of the *domus augustana*, cf. Villedieu 1994, 33-39; *id*. 1995, 719-740; Villedieu & Veltri 1999, 749-778; Cecamore & Villedieu 1995, 45. Plan in Cecamore 2002, tav. V (ref. p. 230-231). It is in this context that the supplementary perystiles of the lower level of the *domus augustana* are relevant, again as an evolved, baroque version of the model of *domus Gaii*.

34 Finsen 1969, 15; Gros 2001, 252-260.

35 Maiuri 1959, 94-96; La Rocca 1994 *et al*., 352-360.

36 Maiuri 1959, 93-95; La Rocca 1994 *et al*., 349-354.

37 Boëthius 1960, 11; the reference applies to the "edificio con tre esedre" annex to the "Piazza d'Oro", cf. VVAA 2000, xiv-xiv, u.

38 Santos 1991, 19-34.

39 Teichner 2008, 431-433.

40 Foucher 1995, *apud* Thébert 1989, 300-397.

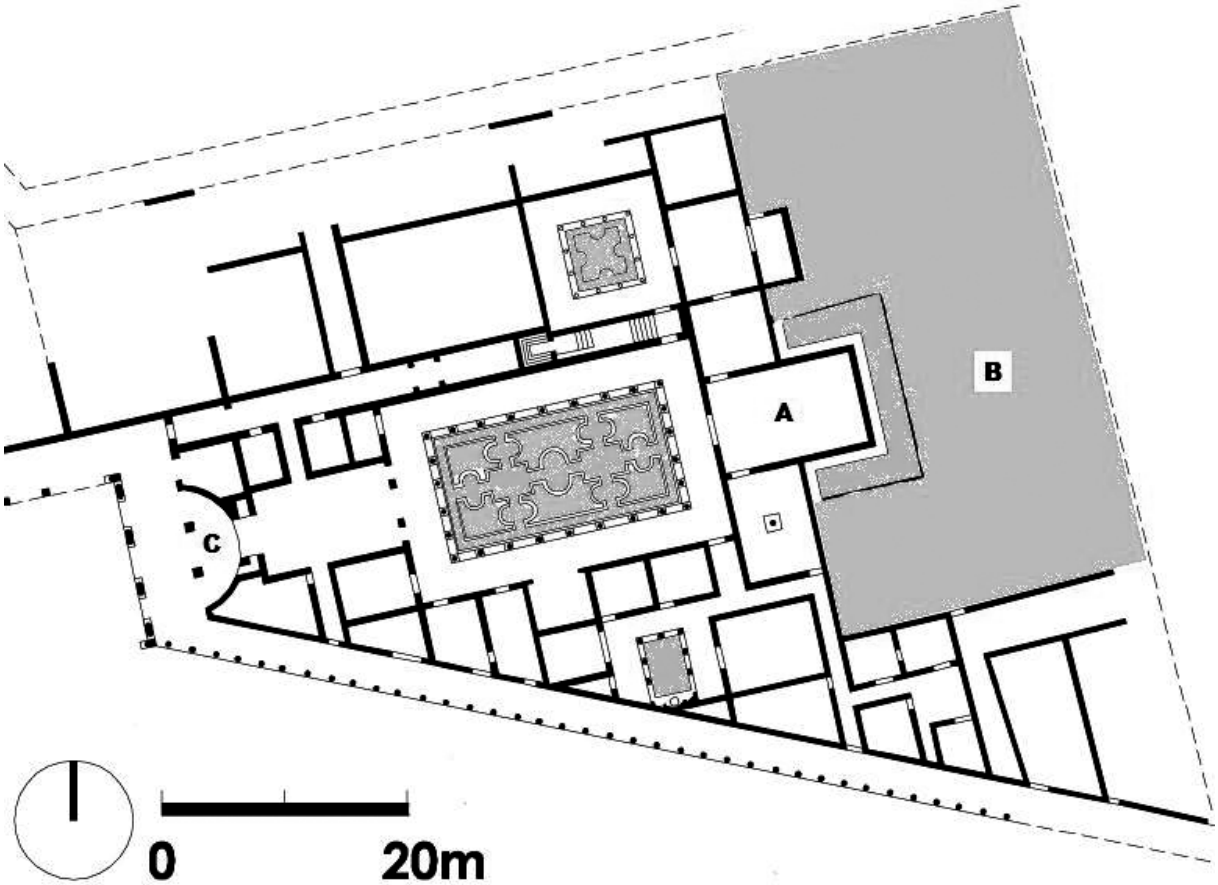

Fig. 5. Plan of the house of the water jets (extracted from Correia & Alarcão 2008). A, *triclinium*; B, *hortus*; C, apsidal entrance.

that it was neither an episode of short duration, because in fact, the use of scenographic elements in that architecture keeps searching for palatial models for decades, has the monumental entrance to the house of the water jets, associated with the large refashioning of the house in times of Hadrian, in our view, clearly shows.

The entrance to the house of the water jets in the late, hadrianic phase was made through a large door at the bottom of an absid, whose face was marked by a screen of columns, the basis of which have survived. The relevant artistic model is the *serapeum* of *villa adriana*[41], although the details of the elevation of this element vary in the various proposed reconstructions that have been published over time[42]. It appears especially significant the chronological coincidence between model and provincial copy. It is also to be mentioned the fact that the use of this model of an aulic space in the entrance of a private residence is not unique[43]: the same model was used in the entrance of the "casa de la exedra" in Itálica[44], but in a less brilliantly achieved manner, the half dome covering the exedra having certainly been lost and replaced by some other probably clumsy arrangement.

41 Tiberi 1961, 35-48; Grenier 1990, 925-1019; *id*. 2000, 73-76.

42 For a general reference we assumed the maquette by Gismondi, cf. VVAA 2000, 194-195, nº 15.

43 Also at Ostia at the "schola di Traiano", already mentioned by Oleiro 1992, 28.

44 Roldán 1993, 179-181; Rodríguez 1997, 87-114.

Conclusion

The domestic architecture of Conimbriga demonstrates a continuing concern with the search for models in the imperial architecture, and the way that search reaches its goals and the fidelity with which the models are followed (or adapted) confers to the architecture of the *oppidum* its more strikingly original character in the provincial art of Lusitania.

But the long lasting permanence of that search, reaching back to dates contemporaneous with the first public Roman constructions in the town, at the very beginning of the 1st c. AD and going as late as the middle of the 2nd c., does not dilute the most remarkable importance of "the moment" when the *domus aurea* had its major impact[45], inspiring a scenographic architecture, associating perspective, gardens and water in the centre of the most important houses and, from there onwards, to other less magnificent constructions in the town; less, perhaps, in dimension but probably not in pretension to the *rus in urbe* mentioned by Martial[46].

Consequently, there must be a valid line of inquiry into the possible interpretation of the social value of the phenomenon of reunion between the aspirations of a local élite and the projection of a carefully crafted imperial idea, phenomenon whose repercussion in our own idea of Conimbriga can be substantial, although going well beyond the scope of the present text.

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45 Apparently not realized by recent, otherwise brilliant, analyses; cf. Ball 2003, 258-275.

46 Martial XII, 57, 21 *apud* Boëthius 1960, 105. Apparently here resides the original concept later developed by P. Zanker (1979, 460-523; *id.* 1993) and subsequently by A. Wallace-Hadrill (1988, 64-68; *id.* 1994, *passim*).

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