

archaeological site

MUNIGUA



Agencia Andaluza de Instituciones Culturales
CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA



General view of the Sanctuary of Terraces from the access road

HISTORY

At [Munigua](#), evidence of human occupation extends from the mid-4th century BCE to the 8th century CE. A highlight on this timeline was the founding of the Roman town of Munigua in the late 1st century BCE. The older pre-Roman settlement on this same site, as yet unidentified, may also have been called Munigua as the name is of Iberian origin. The town's history can be divided into the following phases:

Pre-Roman phase: 4th century BCE–2nd/1st century BCE. The Iberian village stood on the hilltop and undoubtedly owed its existence to the mining and metallurgy activities that have long characterised the Sierra Morena, mountains rich in copper and iron ore.

First Roman phase: 1st century BCE–mid-1st century CE. The Iberian village was razed in order to build the Sanctuary of Terraces. The forum, baths and dwellings were also constructed during this period.

Second Roman phase: mid-1st century–late 2nd century. Nearly all of the town's structures were completed in this phase: the Sanctuary of Terraces, forum and houses (1, 5 and 6). Construction activity was boosted by Emperor Vespasian's decision to grant Munigua the Latin right circa 73/74 CE, promoting it to *municipium* status, and by the fact that at the time it was the most important urban centre of a vast region.

Third Roman phase: 3rd–4th century. This phase is marked by the destruction attributed to an earthquake that hit the town in the 3rd century.

Post-Roman phase: 5th/6th–8th century. Another earthquake in late Antiquity brought an end to Munigua's heyday, although today we know that the site was continuously occupied at least until the Almohad period.

TOUR

The best way to visit the town is to begin at the top of the hill, where the Sanctuary of Terraces is located, and work your way down.

The Sanctuary of Terraces

This structure stands on several tiered terraces and is characterised by its architectural symmetry, with access ramps and stairs neatly paired on either side of the building's axis. The older Iberian settlement, a few traces of which are still visible, was demolished to make room for this shrine, using the rubble as fill for the artificial terraces. With steep slopes on all sides, the outer retaining walls are reinforced by 13 buttresses. The sanctuary walls were originally clad in marble of various tones. Extensive work was done to restore and preserve this building in the 1980s.

The Podium Temple

This square block structure is supported by four buttresses on its eastern side. It underwent an intervention in the early 1960s. The walls rest on a podium supporting another smaller podium, the base of the *aedes* or temple proper. It was embellished with marble slabs and reached by a flight of steps preserved in situ. The temple was built in the early 2nd century.

The Forum

The open space on an artificial terrace was identified as the forum thanks to two inscriptions and column bases referring to L. Quintius Rufinus and his son, both town magistrates. It consisted of: 1) The Forum Temple, dedicated to an unknown deity; 2) the Curia, where the municipal senate met, although no material evidence to support this theory has yet come to light; 3) the Shrine of Dis Pater, god of miners, whose representative

Cella in the Sanctuary of the Terraces





General view, from left to right, of the Podium Temple, forum and houses 2, 3 and 7

statue (a bronze horse) is no longer extant; 4) the *Tabularium* or municipal archives; and 5) the Basilica, a multi-purpose building added to the forum at a later date.

The Temple of Mercury

This small temple is part of the double-height portico, although its dating is more recent and it has been rebuilt. It has two parts: the plinth or podium and the *aedicula* or *cella*, with two frontal columns supporting the architraves and pediment. The pedestal inside this space would have held a statue, now missing. The god to whom this temple was dedicated is named in two inscriptions: one by a freedman named Ferronius, found on a votive altar preserved in its original location, and another by one Lucius Fulvius Genialis, an Augustan priest or *flamen*. The entire building was rendered in stucco and probably painted.

General view of the Temple of Mercury





Double-height portico

A large, roughly dressed granite table looms up beside the *aedicula* (not its original location). It is believed to have been used as a portico between the late 1st and late 3rd centuries.

The Houses

Several residential zones have been identified at Munigua. On the hillside:

Houses 3 and 7 beside the Temple of Mercury and House 4 carved out of the rock, with 2-metre-high walls at the back. In House 2, the only completely excavated dwelling, the upper storey was a residence while the ground floor was given over to business and trade (*tabernae et thermopolium*).

And at the foot of the hill:

House 1, with 22 rooms and a surface area of nearly 500 m²; adjoining it is House 6, in poor condition, although the ground-level walls still rise to a height of 2 metres; and House 5, standing opposite the baths and only partially excavated. This structure was occupied from the late 1st to the early 5th century, with intermittent periods of disuse. In one of the rooms a hoard of 122 coins was discovered, nearly all of them minted in the second half of the 4th century.

The Baths

The baths currently have an L-shaped floor plan and seven different rooms, including the apsidal hall and the *nymphaeum*. The other five are the *apodyterium*, *caldarium*, *tepidarium*, *frigidarium* and, in a courtyard, the *praefurnium*. Judging by their small size (barely 280 m²) and the absence of a *palaestra*, these facilities were probably *balneae* rather than *thermae*. The complex was built early on, sometime in the second half of the 1st century CE. Later, at the end of that century, part of the baths were demolished to make room for the forum, and further



Partial view of the baths

alterations were made throughout the 2nd and 3rd centuries. A statue of a nymph was found in the *frigidarium*, suggesting that part of this building might have been a *nymphaeum*. If this theory is confirmed, it would increase the already considerable number of sacred monuments in the town.

More fragments of statues have been found in the baths than anywhere else at Munigua, and traces of murals can still be seen inside. After the 4th century CE it appears to have been used solely as a residence.

Necrópolis

Arranged in an unbroken ring around Munigua, the cemetery has two main sections, the East Necropolis and the South Necropolis. The former is located inside the perimeter of the town's defensive wall, while part of the latter lies beyond the wall. A total of 170 graves have been found in both, which are mainly of two types: cremation (1st and 2nd centuries) and inhumation (2nd century onwards). These were grouped by family or profession (*collegia*) to form funerary enclosures typical of Roman necropolises.

Detail of the mural paintings in the baths





The Mausoleum

One of the most striking discoveries at Munigua is the Mausoleum, parts of which still rise to a height of 2.7 m. It had a square plan and was originally covered by a barrel vault ceiling and a gabled roof. Five burials were found inside: 2 inhumations (Graves A and B), each with a sarcophagus, and 3 bustum cremations (Graves C, D and E). All of them are entirely underground except for Grave A, which was made at the same time the mausoleum was built.

The structure has been dated to the early or mid-2nd century. Numerous grave goods were found, although they are quite jumbled as the graves were looted in the 4th or 5th century.

The Wall

The defensive wall protects the town on three sides: east, south and north. It passes over the South Necropolis and has four open structures on the inner side which may have been towers. The wall was never completed. A building was added to it on the north side sometime before the 3rd century that must have been a workshop.

Important Finds

The town has yielded numerous archaeological artefacts: some 45 stone sculptures of good quality and approximately 160 terracotta pieces from the 2nd century, one of the most singular collections in Baetica along with those of *Sexi* (Almuñecar) and Córdoba. Other noteworthy discoveries include a considerable number of glass objects found in funerary contexts, nearly 1,500 metal artefacts and pieces of jewellery, mostly unearthed in the necropolises.

Finally, more than 80 inscriptions were found at Munigua, including two made of bronze, a *tessera hospitalis* or hospitality token, and a letter from Emperor Titus.

LOCATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

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FREE ADMISSION

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|--------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Outer walls | 5. Forum |
| 2. Sanctuary of Terraces | 6. Baths |
| 3. Podium Temple | 7. Roman houses |
| 4. Temple of Mercury | 8. Mausoleums |

