

New Evidence for the Study of the Urbanism of Tarraco

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A DISCUSSION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT is not entirely appropriate in a symposium whose principal objective is the study of urbanism. However, it is true that adequate management of the archaeological heritage is a necessary precondition for progress in research into urbanism, particularly in the case of important ancient towns which have to co-exist with contemporary centres.¹ Tarragona during the 1980's provides a good example of how the management of the historic heritage of the Roman period yielded important results for archaeological research. This paper explores the relationship between these two aspects. That much new data is available for the study of Tarraco is the result of the special care taken to ensure that the protection of its archaeological fabric was undertaken within a research framework (Dupré 1992).²

The Republican Town (Figure 1)

The very limited information about the Iberian settlement which preceded the Roman town of Tarraco was greatly increased in recent years by excavations undertaken in the lower part of the town. This research has revealed the existence of an Iberian settlement, to be identified with *Kissa*, *Kese* or *Cissis*, which was first inhabited in the fifth century BC and continued in occupation until the arrival of the Romans. Even so, the scarcity of information about the third century BC occupation means that the Roman impact upon the native settlement is ill understood (Miró 1988, 3–9; Adserias, Burés, Miró and Ramón 1993, 34). The *oppidum* was situated on a promontory close to the sea near the mouth of the river Francolí, a location typical of Iberian settlements of the Mediterranean littoral.

Until recently knowledge of Tarraco during the Second Punic War, given prominence by such classical sources as Livy and Polybius, was

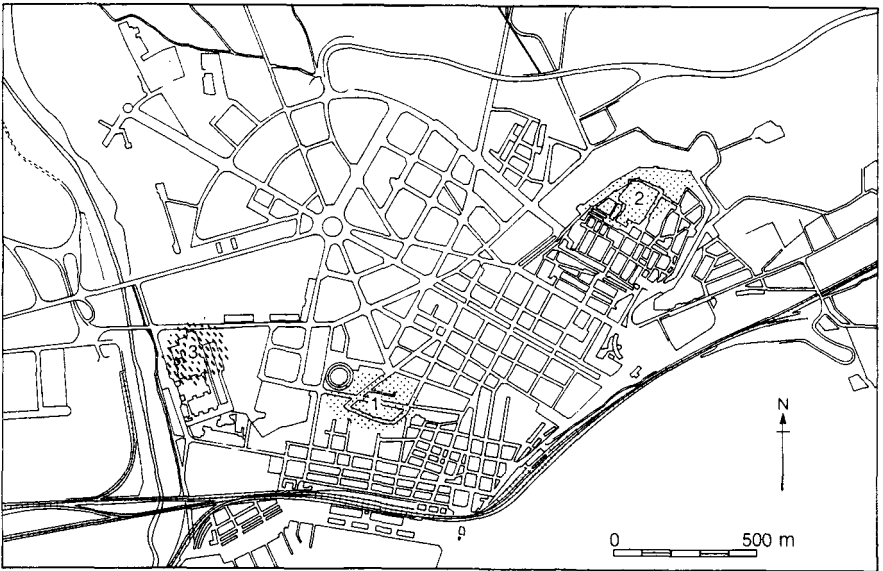


Figure 1. Plan of Tarragona indicating its perimeter in the early imperial period. 1. Iberian nucleus; 2. Roman *praesidium*; 3. Cemetery of Republican date.

limited by the paucity of archaeological evidence for this crucial phase of the town's history. The available evidence consisted, basically, of the town wall, which the work of Serra Vilaró (1949) and Theodor Hauschild (1979; 1985) confirmed as being of Roman construction in two well-defined phases. The first comprised a *praesidium* dating to the period of the Scipios while the second represented a substantial enlargement of the enclosed area and was dated to the beginning of the second century BC. An important study by Alberto Balil (1983, 231–6) demonstrated that the famous masons' marks on the stones of the wall, which had traditionally been taken to reflect the participation of native labour in its construction, were in reality Roman quarry marks with good parallels in other late Republican Italic military structures (Figure 2). This is an important discovery which has not always been taken into account in recent scholarship, some writers continuing to attribute the megalithic footings to a pre-Roman phase (Curchin 1991, 112–13).

Recent excavations along some stretches of the wall and re-analysis of finds from early excavations have revealed that the wall was heightened, broadened and substantially extended in the third quarter of the second century BC (Aquilué, Dupré, Massó and Ruiz De Arbulo 1991, 271–301). This was the period when Tarraco was converted into a bridgehead for the arrival of numerous troops who participated in Rome's wars in the

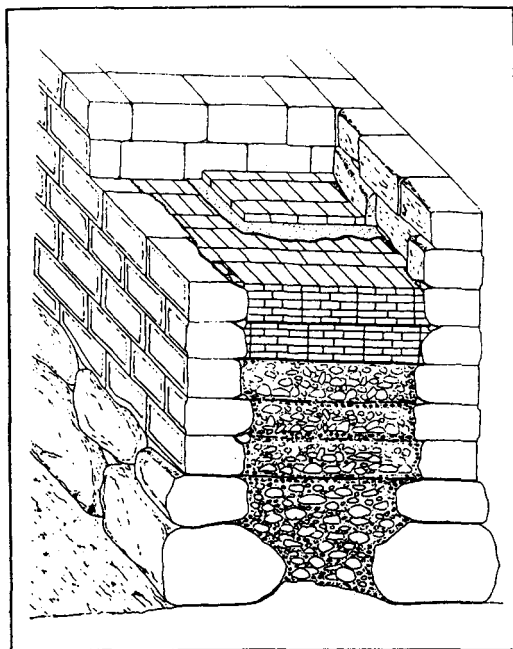


Figure 2. Reconstruction of the second phase of the Roman wall, showing the construction technique employed — a double facing of ashlar blocks, on top of megalithic footings, with a filling of small stones and earth below and mudbricks above.

interior of the Peninsula. Indeed this begins to suggest that this may have been the moment when the Roman *praesidium* was converted into a true town, enclosing within its perimeter the settlement which had developed around the early Iberian settlement (Aquilué and Dupré 1986). Research within the territory of the town (Keay, Millett and Carreté 1989), has shown that it was at precisely this moment that the systematic occupation of the hinterland began.

All of this evidence has shown that the urban development of Tarraco did not spread outwards from the acropolis — the highest point of the town, coinciding approximately with the location of the Cathedral, and the site of the early Roman fortress. There were, in reality, two hills, the acropolis and the small hill at the junction of the sea-shore and the mouth of the river Francolí. It was the latter which conditioned the topography of the later settlement. Around this Iberian nucleus a small residential and trading centre had already developed by the second century BC, while the acropolis remained purely military in character. This explains the location of the Republican forum adjacent to the Iberian centre and the existence of houses in this area by the middle of the second century BC. It also accounts for the total absence of structures of Republican date in the upper part of the town (Aquilué and Dupré 1986) which would have been the area where the military infrastructure was located and where the soldiers would have lodged during their albeit brief stay at Tarraco (Aquilué 1993, 76–8). Other authors are inclined to think that the town,

free or federate, occupied the port area and that in the upper area there would have been only the Roman *castrum* (Ruiz de Arbulo 1991, 459–94).

There is little evidence for the identity of the structures which would have been built in the lower part of the town. Nevertheless it seems unquestionable that in the region of the forum — documented from 71 BC (RIT 1) — the primitive capitolium would have been constructed, possibly in addition to other temples which are known from evidence provided by inscriptions.

The Augustan Town (Figure 3)

The study of Augustan Tarraco has been the subject of great changes in recent years. The traditional view which dated the upper part of the town to the Augustan period has been discarded in favour of a Flavian chronology (Dupré 1990). Thus, the so-called temple of Augustus, the palace of Augustus and the *praetorium*³ can no longer be attributed to this period in the life of the town, though there was substantial building activity in other zones.

The so-called forum of the *colonia*, excavated during the 1920's, has been re-examined and correctly identified as being *part* of the same — the basilica with appended *aedes augusti* (Mar and Ruiz De Arbulo 1988).

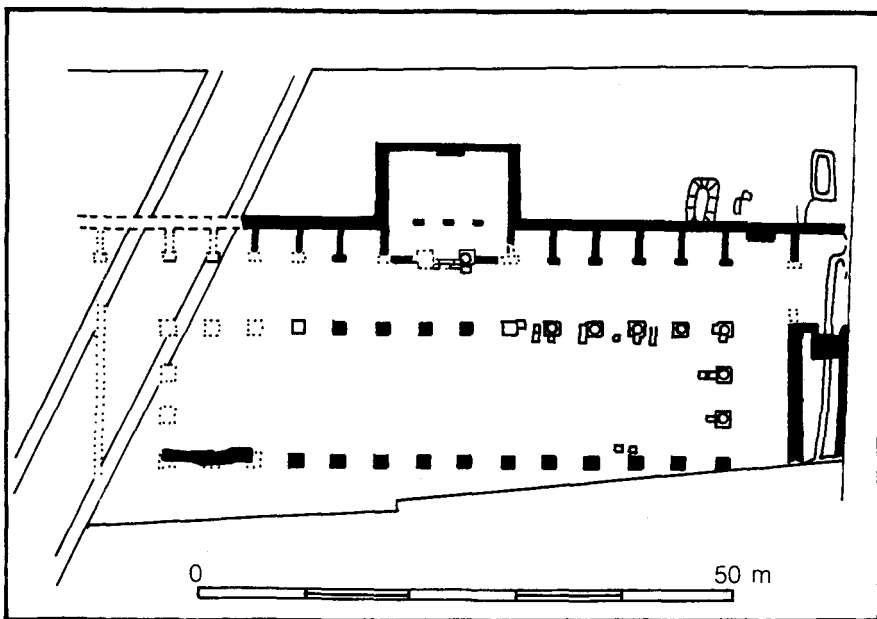


Figure 3. Plan of the basilica of the forum at Tarraco (after R. Mar and J. Ruiz de Arbulo).

As a result it can be deduced that the Republican forum, the location of which is implied by an inscription dedicated to Pompey in 71 BC (RIT 1), was the subject of an important remodelling in the Augustan period. Its extension to the south suggests that it was much larger than previously thought. No less important has been the identification of a series of architectural reliefs depicting barbarian captives, discovered in this part of the town, belonging to a triumphal arch which may have been erected on the occasion of Augustus' victory over the Cantabrians (Koppel 1990). As Fishwick (1982) has already suggested, the forum enclosure must have been the site of the altar dedicated to Augustus and the temple dedicated to Augustus (if it was constructed) which was authorized by Tiberius, and which appears on coins minted at Tarraco in AD 15 (Dupré 1988, 28). Having identified the forum complex of Tarraco in this area of the town, it is now clear that the forum and neighbouring theatre were planned as part of a single urban scheme. Excavations at the latter confirm that it was constructed in the Augustan period and that, curiously, it ceased to function as a theatre at the beginning of the third century AD (Roca 1983; Aquilué, Dupré, Massó and Ruiz De Arbulo 1992, 46–52).

To this same period belongs the construction of an arch (the Arch of Berà) on the *Via Augusta*, 13–14 Roman miles to the north-east of the town (Figure 4). It was initiated by Lucius Licinius Sura, praefectus of the Colonia Victrix Iulia Lepida, who emigrated to the capital during the reign of Augustus and was the ancestor of the Spanish senator of the same name who died during the reign of Trajan. The construction of this honorific arch, which was probably dedicated to Augustus himself and was, thus, a symbol of the *pietas* of a rich citizen towards the figure of the emperor, ought to be interpreted as an act of euergetism which aimed at monumentalizing access to the coastal plain dominated by Tarraco (the present day Camp de Tarragona) (Dupré 1994). Another significant advance is the new interpretation of the Augustan monument of Martorell (*Ad Fines*) as a territorial arch situated at the point where the *Via Augusta* crossed the boundary between the territoria of Tarraco and Barcino (Dupré 1993).

This new data allows us to suggest that all official building activity under Augustus took place in the lower part of the town, in the area of the Republican forum and not in the area which was probably at this time still occupied by the military *praesidium*. It has also been possible to show that the accesses of the *Via Augusta* to the town changed during this period (TED'A 1989c, 123–34),⁴ that new cemetery areas were established (TED'A 1987) and that below the so-called *praetorium* was a building which probably dates to the Augustan period. Even if the function of the latter building remains unknown, it is the only evidence

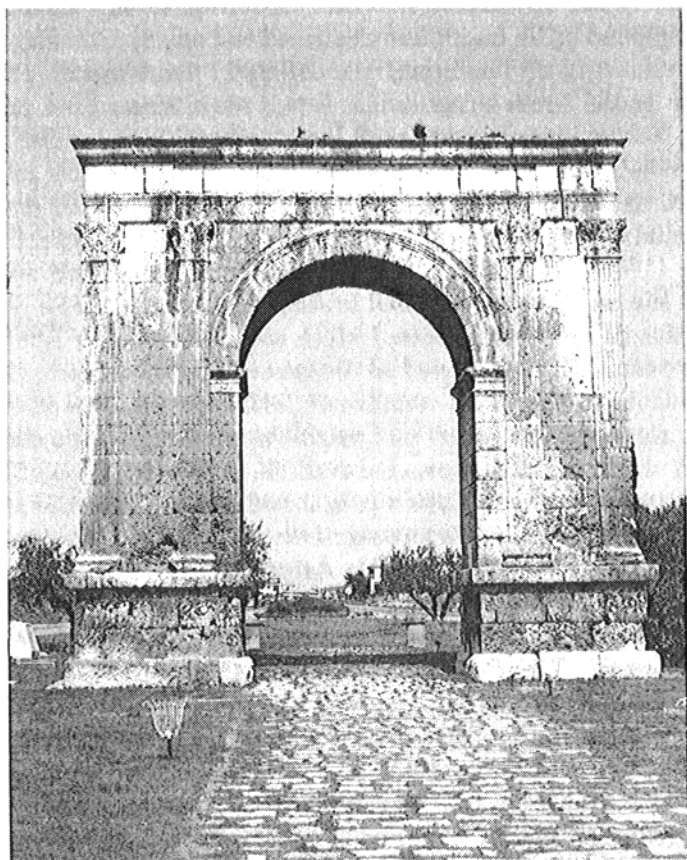


Figure 4. The Arch of Berà, built at the end of the first century BC in accordance with the will of Lucius Licinius Sura, ancestor of the Spanish senator of the same name.

for building activity in this more elevated sector of the town between the second century BC and the Flavian period (Dupré and Subias 1990, 603–9).

One of the least understood themes concerns those parts of the town in which the inhabitants of Tarraco resided in the Roman period. Amongst the slight evidence at present available for private architecture should be noted the identification of the *schola* of the *collegium fabrum*. This has been dated to the second century AD on the basis of sculptures (Koppel 1988). The general paucity of data is due to the fact that the residential area of the Roman town was intensely developed throughout the nineteenth century, causing large-scale destruction of the archaeological heritage and still creating problems for rescue excavations. Even so, it is known

that this sector of the town was subdivided by an orthogonal network of streets with *insulae* 35 m wide: their length is unknown.

The urban development of Tarraco under Augustus represents the first phase in the monumentalization of the town and, without doubt, is closely related to the administrative reform of the provinces of the Hispaniae. In this period Tarraco, which had only recently obtained the rank of *colonia* (*Colonia Iulia Urbs Triumphalis Tarraco*),⁵ assumed the role of capital of the largest province in the Empire. As a consequence it seems only logical to think that it would have adopted an urban layout suitable to its new juridical and administrative status. It is interesting to note, however, that a local limestone, the so-called Medol stone, was used for the buildings in the Augustan building programme. The decoration of the architectural elements of these buildings was finished in stucco, to make them appear like marble and to mask the porosity of the limestone. This is characteristic of the first phase of the monumentalization of the town.⁶ The generalized use of marble at Tarraco belongs to a subsequent phase.

Urbanism of the Flavian period (Figure 5)

The important research work undertaken in the upper part of the town during the 1980's, has brought about a significant reappraisal of the formal organization of this part of the town in the Roman period and of its historical development. This area had been the site of the early *praesidium* and, later, became the centre of medieval Tarragona presided over by the Cathedral.

We are now able to talk about the realization, in the Flavian period, of an ambitious urban project here, comprising a monumental terracing of the hillside destined for buildings associated with the *Concilium provinciae Hispaniae Citerioris*. The upper part of the complex was formed by a rectangular porticoed enclosure presided over by a temple, probably incorporated within the portico, dedicated to the imperial cult. Both the characteristics of the surviving architectural elements and reliefs belonging to the temple frieze leave little doubt in this respect. At a lower level, and connected by one central and two lateral staircases, there opened another enclosure which enclosed twice the area. This was flanked by corner towers which allowed access to different levels of the porticoes (Dupré 1988, 25–30; TED'A 1989b, 141–91; Dupré and Carreté 1993). Finally, at the lowest level the great complex, which covered some 11 ha, was completed by the provision of a circus (Dupré, Massó, Palanques and Verduchi 1988; Aquilué, Dupré, Massó and Ruiz de Arbulo 1994).

The various excavations undertaken in this part of the town have yielded good stratigraphic evidence and abundant archaeological material

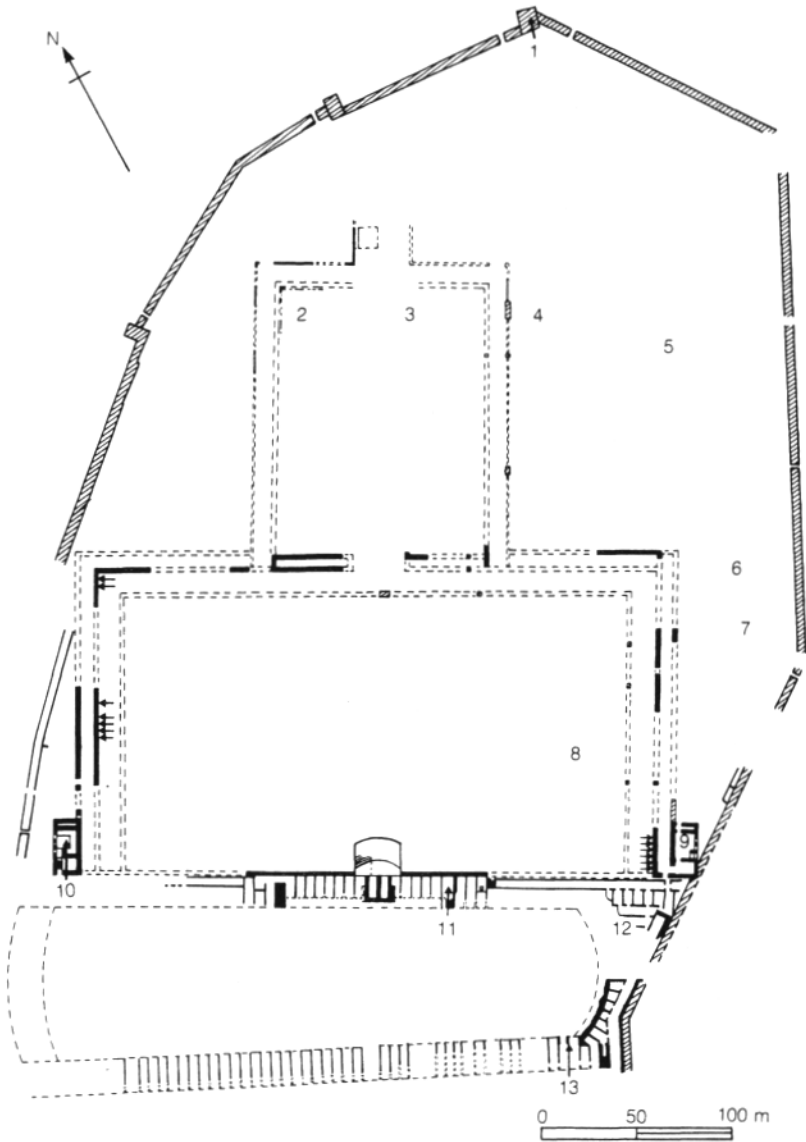


Figure 5. Plan of the walled enclosure of Republican date and the Flavian architectural complex, destined to be the seat of the *Concilium provinciae Hispaniae Citerioris*, showing those points where late Roman levels have been excavated and have revealed the process of transformation undergone by the town in the fifth century AD. 1. Torre de Minerva; 2. Cathedral cloister; 3. Cathedral garden; 4. New seat of the Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos of Catalunya; 5. Santes Creus; 6. Plaça Rovellat; 7. Placa dels Angels; 8. Vila-roma; 9. *Praetorium*; 10. Antiga Audiencia; 11. Circus vault in Trinet Vell nr. 12; 12. Circus vault CEN-D; 13. Vaults of the south-east sector of the circus (TED'A).

which makes it clear that this was a unitary architectural enterprise, the orientation of which was distinct to that of the earlier phase of urban planning. It was begun under Vespasian (the upper two terraces) and completed by Domitian, the last emperor of the Flavian dynasty (Dupré 1990, 319–25). This chronology means that the traditional theory, which identified the temple as that dedicated to Augustus during the reign of Tiberius (Tacitus, *Ann.*, 1,78) (represented on dupondii of AD 15) together with a temple to Jupiter, can now be discounted. If the temple to Augustus was really built, then it must have been located in the lower part of the town, probably in the forum. As Fishwick (1982, 222–33) appreciated, this was an area in which was located the famous altar of Augustus which was mentioned by Quintilian and depicted on coins issued during the reign of Tiberius. The temple of Jupiter was in the same area. The famous *clipei* with heads of Jupiter Ammon, found in the upper town, would not have belonged to this temple but instead would have decorated the porticoes of the Flavian enclosure.

This great urban building project was closely linked to the implantation of the provincial imperial cult and the reinforcement of the provincial council of Tarraconensis during the Flavian period. The instigation of this great landscaped, axial, complex must be seen in the context of Vespasian's political programmes. At Rome, for example, areas which had been appropriated by Nero (the *Domus Aurea*) were transformed into public spaces (*Amphitheatrum flavium*). Thus at Tarraco, in an area which had been free of large-scale building, was constructed a large enclosure destined to exalt the power of Rome and devotion to the restored State represented by the emperor.

The scale of the project (11 ha), which is without parallels in other provincial capitals, could perhaps be explained in terms of the role played by the governor of Hispania Citerior, Sulpicius Galba, who was based at Tarraco during the crisis of succession in AD 68–69. The new Emperor Vespasian would have needed to demonstrate the power of the Roman State at the town in a grandiose way.

Until recently, one of the least well-known buildings of Roman Tarragona was the amphitheatre (Figures 6 and 7). The programme of research and investigation undertaken at the monument by the TED'A, however, has allowed sufficient information to be recovered to discern the original form of the monument and its subsequent history. The amphitheatre of Tarraco was constructed in a cemetery area at the beginning of the second century AD by a *Flamen Romae Divorum et Augustorum*, or provincial high priest, in an act of personal benefaction which provided the capital of Hispania Citerior with a building in which to celebrate *munera* and *venationes*. The act of the *flamen* is known from the recent discovery of

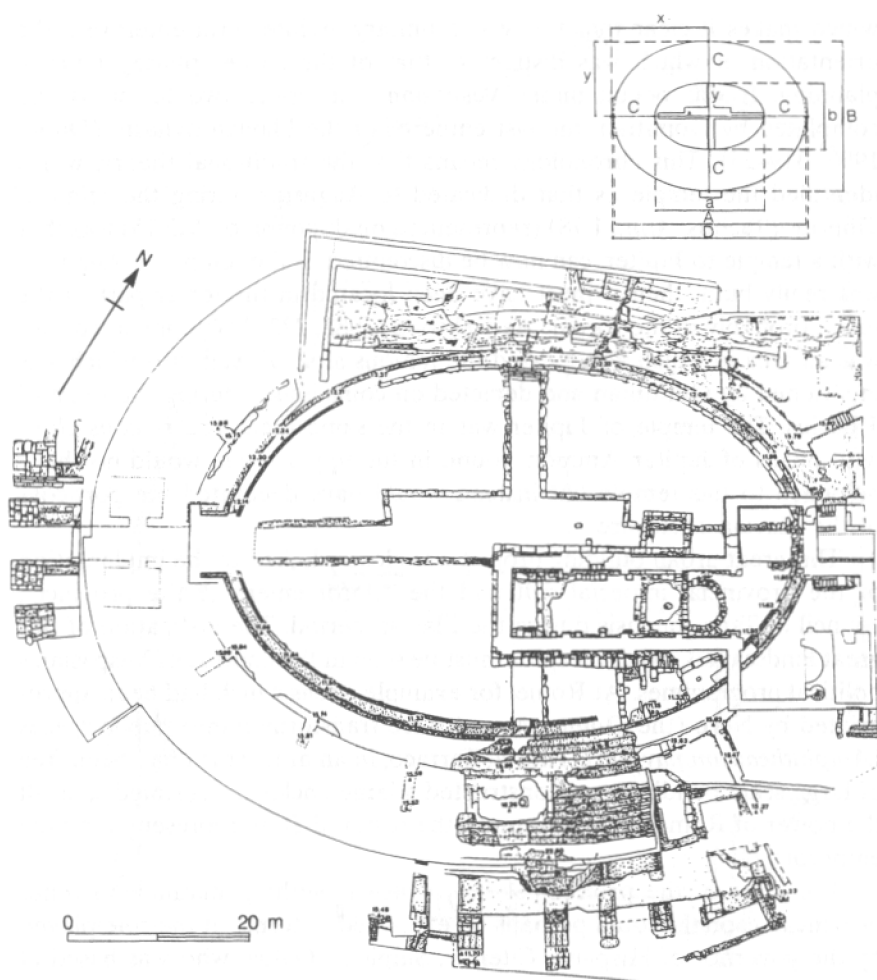


Figure 6. General plan of the amphitheatre and a sketch showing the principal dimensions of the reconstructed monument: a: 61.5 m; b: 38.5 m; A: 109.5 m; B: 86.5 m; C: 24 m; D: 111.5 m; x: 30.75 m; Y: 19.25 m; X: 54.75 m; Y: 43.25 m (TED'A).

part of a dedicatory inscription from the amphitheatre. Following this first phase of the building, an important reform was undertaken in AD 220. This is documented in a Latin inscription, the largest in the Iberian Peninsula, which adorned the stone blocks making up the *balteus* of the *podium* of the amphitheatre. The inscription, as analysed by Geza Alföldy, shows that the reform was undertaken by the Emperor Elagabalus and, thus, can be considered as an act of benefaction of the emperor himself (TED'A 1990; Alföldy 1990, 130–7).

The urban transformation undergone by Tarraco from the Flavian

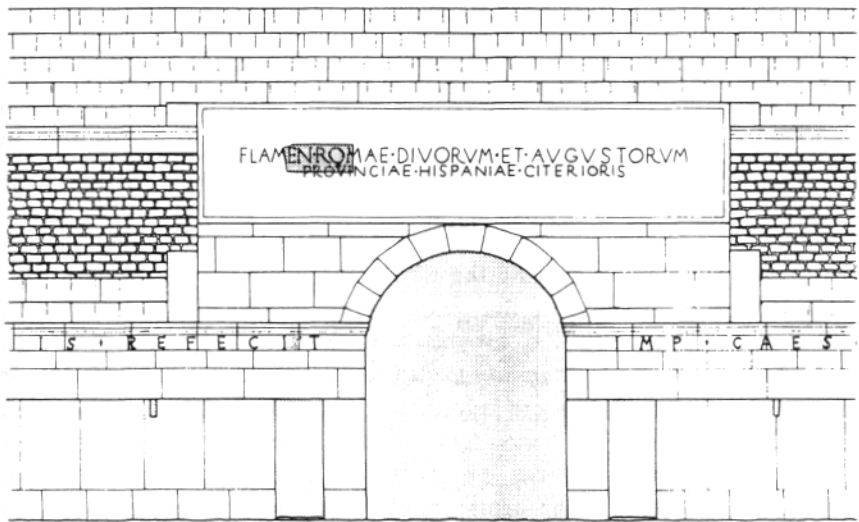


Figure 7. Frontal elevation from the arena of one of the principal accesses to the amphitheatre, showing the hypothetical location of the inscription which commemorates the construction of the building under the charge of a provincial *flamen*.

period onwards, represents a second phase in the monumentalization of the town. From this time marble began to be used extensively. At first it was used generally, although not exclusively, in the public architecture of Tarraco throughout the first century AD, particularly the second half. This is well reflected in the capitals from the town (Recasens 1985, 123–8). All capitals of Republican and Augustan date are cut from local limestone, while the first marble capitals are from Luni and date to the first century AD. The introduction of fine quality materials for use in capitals from the mid first century AD finds ready parallels in other decorative elements. While local limestone and *opus caementicium* were used in the construction of the walls of the great Flavian provincial enclosure, Luni marble is amply documented both in decorative schemes (columns, architrave and frieze) for the temple which presided over the complex and for the veneers or decoration *clipei* (with heads of Medusa and Jupiter Ammon) of the porticoes. By the side of this imported marble, high quality local limestone known as ‘Santa Tecla stone’ was also used, especially for paving and steps.

There is little new evidence concerning the late imperial period. Much of what is available has come from the excavation and study of new areas of the cemetery located to the west of the inhabited nucleus of the town, close to the well-known early Christian cemetery excavated by Serra Vilaró at the beginning of the century (TED’A 1987).

The transformations of the fifth century AD (Figure 5)

One of the most important contributions of archaeology to our understanding of the development of Tarraco has been to shed light on the urban transformations throughout the fifth century AD. Various excavations in recent years have demonstrated how throughout the century the town concentrated within the area which, hitherto, had been occupied by the seat of the *Concilium provinciae*, following the progressive abandonment of the old residential areas and the whole of the lower part of the town.

It is clear that some of the evidence points towards some kind of official building activity like, for example, the construction of what has been identified as the *episcopium tarraconense* (Aquilué 1993, 114–23), or the fact that inscriptions were being dedicated to the Emperors Leo and Anthemius between the years AD 468 and 472 (RIT 100). The most significant evidence, however, has been the discovery of a number of rubbish dumps, both in the centre of the porticoed enclosures, adjacent buildings, and in the circus itself. Worthy of mention in this respect are the rubbish dumps found in the Calle Vila-roma (AD 440–450) (TED'A 1989a), the 'Antiga Audiencia' (AD 450–475) (Dupré and Carreté 1993) and a number of abandonment levels of similar date which have been documented in different sectors of the circus (Aquilué, Dupré, Massó and Ruiz de Arbulo 1994).

All this evidence suggests that during the fifth century AD the urban area of the town shrank considerably. The lower sector was abandoned with the population concentrating in the upper town. Public and religious buildings and the rather modest abodes of the inhabitants of Tarraco clustered within what had been a great monumental complex. Worthy of note are the finds from the dumps themselves whose range and origin (from different regions of the Mediterranean) point to a not inconsiderable commercial activity at this time.

Conclusions

The Roman presence in Hispania, which was a consequence of the events related to the Second Punic War, was reflected in Tarragona by the installation of an initial military *praesidium* close to an Iberian settlement, which can be identified with Kese. This bipolar settlement determined both the topography of the later town as well as the characteristics of the Republican settlement, about which little is currently known.

There is little doubt that the first stage of urban reform, reflected in the process of the monumentalization, took place during the reign of Augustus, and that it was closely linked with the town's new-found juridical

and political functions. This phase was followed by a second reform on a grander scale. New open spaces were created accompanied by the use of imported constructional and decorative material, principally marble, transforming the appearance of the town. The urban revitalization was linked to the town's role as provincial capital and, as a result, must reflect the development of the provincial imperial cult by the Flavian emperors.

At the end of the imperial period, archaeological research has allowed an important process of urban recession to be documented. A complex, which had been the seat of the *Concilium provinciae Hispaniae Citerioris*, was transformed into an enclosure for the entire town, both the new episcopal buildings and the modest residences of those inhabitants who used different parts of the Flavian complex as rubbish dumps. Throughout the fifth century AD, Tarraco was transformed into a relatively small (11 ha) urban nucleus protected by architectural structures of the Flavian period and surrounded by various cemeteries which focused upon cult buildings. This process, whose beginning has yet to be pinpointed, conditioned the formal characteristics of the town throughout the sixth and seventh centuries AD and represents the last urban transformation of a town which had ceased to exist by the beginning of the eighth century AD.

NOTES

1 I would like to thank Professor B. Cunliffe and Dr. S. Keay for their kind invitation to participate at this meeting. The translation of my paper into English is due to the kindness of the latter.

2 Sadly the dynamism which developed in the 1980's was cut short at the beginning of the current decade.

3 In reality this is a monumental entrance to the 'provincial forum' from the circus which is the mirror image to another recently discovered in the 'Antiga Audiencia'.

4 One of the gates, probably of Augustan date and forming part of this reform of the road, has been identified adjacent to the eastern extremity of the circus facade which ran parallel to the urban stretch of the *Via Augusta*.

5 The current state of investigation does not allow an exact date to be proposed for the concession of colonial status, although it must be placed between 45 and 27 BC (Alföldy 1991, 35-6).

6 This monumentalization was generally documented in towns throughout the Hispaniae in the course of the second half of the first century BC. In the majority of cases it coincides with the foundation of new colonies and the concession of the municipal status to many towns. This is, therefore, a process of urbanization and monumentalization which appears to be linked to 'urbanization' in the juridical and political sense.

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New evidence for the study of the urbanism of Tarraco

This paper briefly presents the results of archaeological research undertaken in Tarraco during the 1980's, which allows the outlines of the urban development of the town to be traced. A first Republican phase (mid second century BC), which is still imperfectly known, is followed by a first monumentalization of the town in the reign of Augustus and related to its appointment as provincial capital. Once the Flavian dynasty attained power, there followed a new and ambitious phase of urban renovation. In the middle of the fifth century AD, the urban structure of the town underwent a new transformation, when large early Imperial residential areas were abandoned and the urban nucleus was concentrated in the highest part of the town. In this last phase of the town, the public buildings which had hitherto occupied this area had been completely taken out of use.

Nuevos datos para el estudio del urbanismo de Tarraco

Este artículo presenta brevemente los resultados de la investigación arqueológica llevada a cabo en Tarraco en los años 80, la cual permite perfilar el desarrollo urbano de la ciudad. A una primera fase republicana (mitad del siglo II a.C.), que todavía se conoce imperfectamente, sigue la primera monumentalización de la ciudad en el reinado de Augusto y en relación con su designación como capital provincial. Cuando la dinastía flavia llegó al poder, se produjo una nueva y ambiciosa fase de renovación urbana. A mediados del siglo V d.C., la estructura urbana de la ciudad sufrió una nueva transformación, cuando grandes áreas residenciales de época altoimperial fueron abandonadas y el núcleo urbano se concentró en la parte alta de la ciudad. En esta última fase de la ciudad, los edificios públicos existentes que habían ocupado ese área fueron completamente dejados fuera de uso.