

Tárraco (Spain)

No 875rev

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The archaeological ensemble of Tárraco
<i>Location</i>	Autonomous Community of Catalonia, Province of Tarragona
<i>State Party</i>	Spain
<i>Date</i>	1 July 1997

Justification by State Party

The town of Tárraco is the first and oldest Roman settlement on the Iberian peninsula, and it became the capital of most of the land on the peninsula, the Province of *Hispania Citerior*, during the reign of Augustus (1st century BC). The surviving remains of Tárraco make it possible to study the spread of Roman rule from the 3rd/2nd century BC, when the Roman town was founded, until the early Christian period. The unique Roman plan of the town is also exceptional, since it adapted to the configuration of the land by means of a series of artificial terraces, which are to be seen around the provincial forum as well as in the residential quarter. The town is rich in important buried architectural and archaeological remains, among them buildings that are completely preserved, as in the case of the group of vaults in the Calle Méndez Núñez.

The originality of the defensive system of walls built in the 3rd-2nd centuries BC is also remarkable, creating a monument that is unique because of the different phases of the Republican walls and the special elements of Roman work that it brings together and its antiquity, together with the extent of the walls that survive. The walls of Tárraco are one of the earliest examples of Roman military engineering on the Iberian peninsula and the most substantial surviving evidence of the Republican town. They are one of the most important symbols of the town, defining its form from antiquity up to the 19th century. They illustrate the construction technique known as *opus siliceum* that was characteristic of Italy and was used in Etruria and Latium from the 6th century BC. They are one of the earliest examples of public works that survive anywhere on the Iberian peninsula. The walls provide one of the rare surviving examples of Republican defensive works, in which a great deal of the structure survives - sections of wall with internal and external decoration, cyclopean gates, defensive bastions such as the Minerva, Capiscol, and Archbishop's Towers - in a good state of conservation.

The architectural ensemble known as the Provincial Forum is considered to be one of the largest and best documented fora of the Roman world. This large group of buildings, the seat of the *Concilium provinciae Hispaniae citerioris*, determined the layout of the existing old town, where most of the architectural elements survive, some to a height of up to 11m. It was a large complex (7.5ha) spread over three terraces used for high-level political purposes and to bring the communities of *Hispania Citerior* into the Roman Empire, as shown by the iconography of sculptural and decorative finds. The architectural details and the use of imported materials are taken as evidence of its architects and craftsmen having been brought in from Rome.

The work of these Italian specialists is also to be seen in the three Roman structures used for public performances: the theatre, amphitheatre, and circus. The theatre, the only one known in Catalonia, is linked with the Forum, and together they formed the centre of the Imperial cult in the Augustan and Julio-Claudian periods.

Much of the Basilica (courthouse) survives in the Colonial (Town) Forum, together with other buildings, such as a temple. Archaeological excavations in this area have revealed the layout of the administrative centre, and also the street pattern in the adjacent residential area.

The construction of the amphitheatre is somewhat unusual, since it is partly set into the natural rock and partly constructed on vaults in *opus caementicium*. It is noteworthy because of the two religious edifices in the area, built following the martyrdom there of Bishop Fructuosus and his deacons Augurius and Eulogius.

The circus is integrated into the town, which is unusual; its relationship with the Provincial Forum is comparable with that between the Palatine and the Circus Maximus in Rome. The circus of Leptis Magna is the only example in the Western Empire comparable in size and conservation with that of Tárraco, which survives in places to a height of 7m.

The Palaeochristian cemetery is the best preserved in the Western Empire, containing examples of different types of Late Roman and early Christian funerary architecture, along with an important epigraphic assemblage and decorated sarcophagi. The earlier suburban villas that are accessible give a picture over time of the settlement around Tárraco: in the 3rd century AD these were abandoned and the area became a cemetery.

The surrounding landscape contains many remains, attributable to the fact that Tárraco was a provincial capital. An example is the aqueduct that brought water over more than 40km, the first on the Iberian peninsula to be built on superimposed arches. The monument known as the Tower of the Scipios testifies to the existence of a high social class wishing to demonstrate its prestige by erecting a funerary monument on one of the main access roads into Tárraco.

A number of quarries are known around the town from which stone was extracted to build the Roman structures. There are also several luxurious villas, such as the Villa dels Munts, with its wealth of pavements and sculpture and its two sets of baths. The 4th century Villa Centelles was converted into a Palaeochristian funerary monument not long after its construction, possibly intended to receive the remains of the Emperor Constans I.

The Triumphal Arch of Berá is further evidence of the importance of the provincial capital. It was built during the reign of Augustus to commemorate the rerouting of the ancient Via Heraclea and its renaming after the Emperor.

Notes by ICOMOS

1. The State Party does not make any proposals in the nomination dossier concerning the criteria under which it considers the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List.
2. The text above is a slightly abridged version of that in the nomination dossier.

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

There was possibly a trading settlement here, founded by Ionian Greeks, in the early 1st millennium BC. Recent research has proved that by the end of the 5th century BC the indigenous Iberians had created a settlement, called Kesse. It was seized and fortified by the Roman proconsul Scipio Africanus in 218 BC during the Second Punic War in order to cut off the flow of reinforcements from Carthage to Hannibal, then campaigning in Italy. Roman control over this part of the Iberian peninsula was strengthened when a Carthaginian fleet was destroyed in 217 BC at the mouth of the Ebro.

After serving as one of the bases for the Roman conquest of the entire peninsula, Tàrraco became the seat of Roman power. It supported Julius Caesar against Pompey and was rewarded with *colonia* status for its loyalty with the impressive title *Colonia Iulia Urbs Triumphalis Tarraco*. It later became the capital of the imperial province of *Hispania Citerior (Tarraconensis)*, which covered much of the Iberian peninsula, following the reorganization by Augustus in 27 BC. As such it was suitably endowed with imposing public buildings, as a demonstration of Roman power. It was visited by several Roman emperors, among them Augustus and Hadrian, and was the site of many councils bringing together officials and worthies from all the Iberian provinces.

Christianity was early in reaching Tàrraco (according to legend brought by St Paul himself), and it became the see of a bishop. The prosperous city was ravaged by marauding Franks during the barbarian raids of the 250s, but it quickly recovered. The city came under Visigothic rule in the 5th century and continued in existence until 469, when Euric razed much of it to the ground.

It became part of the Moorish territories in 714, but its location on the frontier with the Christian world led to Tàrraco being the scene of many bloody conflicts in the following centuries. Twice recaptured for short periods, the largely ruinous and depopulated town did not return to the Christian realms until 1148, following the decisive defeat of the Moors at Tortosa by Raymond Berenguer IV. It was resettled by Normans, and became Catalan in 1220 after

Alfonso the Warrior drove the Moors permanently out of Catalonia.

Description

The Roman town, like its Iberian predecessor, was sited on a hill, with the seat of the provincial government, the *Concilium provinciae Hispaniae citerioris*, at its crest and on two terraces created below. At the top was a colonnaded open space with the temple of the Imperial cult at one of its ends. There was also a colonnaded open space, known as the Provincial Forum, on the second terrace, measuring 150m by 300m. Inscriptions found here suggest that this was where the government buildings were located. The lowest of the three terraces was occupied by the circus.

Between this governmental and cult enclave and the port there were quarters in commercial and residential use, along with public buildings such as baths, schools, libraries, other temples, the commercial forum, and the theatre.

- The ramparts

The defences built by Scipio consisted of two curtain walls 6m high and 4.5m thick lined with square bastions, all built using large undressed stone blocks (*opus siliceum*). In the mid 2nd century BC the perimeter was extended and the walls were thickened and raised (to 12m high by 6m thick), using *opus quadratum* (dressed stone) on the original megalithic foundations; the facings of the walls were rusticated. These walls remained largely intact, with slight modifications in the Late Roman period and the Middle Ages and some additions in the 16th-18th centuries, to the present day, and 1.3km are now accessible for visitors.

Of the three surviving bastions, the Minerva Tower (which formed part of the original enceinte) is the most complete. Five heads sculpted on the outer wall had a protective function; in the interior there is a dedicatory inscription to the goddess Minerva.

- The Imperial cult enclosure

A first attempt to create this ensemble in the Julio-Claudian period was abandoned, and it was not brought to fruition until around AD 70, by Vespasian; the final component, the circus, was added by Domitian more than a decade later.

The portico enclosed an area of 153m by 136m, roughly coincidental with the site of the present-day Cathedral. Part of the portico and the Imperial cult temple are preserved within the Cathedral complex.

- The Provincial Forum

This terraced open space measured 175 by 320m and was closed at one end by another temple. The portico that surrounded it was 14m wide and roofed with shingles. A series of semi-circular vaults (*cryptoportici*) opened out of it, and these can be seen incorporated into later buildings in several places in the town; in some cases they were cut into the rock and in others they are stone-built structures.

An imposing building, rising to three storeys, served as the *praetorium* (seat of the provincial council); it was considerably altered during the Middle Ages to serve as the residence of princely or episcopal notables. However, considerable portions of the Roman fabric are still clearly visible.

- The circus

The third and lowest of the terraces is 325m long and 100-115m wide, and on it sits the circus, covering much of its surface. The central spina is 190m long. The seating was raised on series of vaults in Roman concrete (*opus caementicium*), the facade of the podium and the steps being more decorative, faced with small square stones (*opus reticulatum*).

The largest visible portion is in the south-western sector (the Caves of Saint Hermengildo), but many other parts are incorporated in later buildings. A section of its facade survives as part of the inner face of the 14th century defensive work known as La Muraleta. As a result it is possible to reconstruct its original appearance in its entirety.

- The Colonial Forum

In the centre of the town are to be found the remains of the Lower or Colonial Forum. This can be dated at least to the 1st century BC on the basis of a dedication to Pompey the Great, who received Spain as part of his responsibilities when the First Triumvirate was formed in 56 BC.

What has come to light is a group comprising the basilica (courthouse), a temple, and some houses and streets. Column bases give an indication of the form of the basilica, with main rooms on the interior and shops or taverns on the outside. The other features of this centre of urban life are known from fragmentary remains in the basements and walls of existing houses.

- The theatre

The theatre was built at the beginning of the 1st century AD when the town underwent extensive modifications. It was erected on the site of large cisterns from the 2nd century BC and a harbour market from the mid 1st century BC. It is located outside the defensive walls and makes use of the natural slope of the ground as the base of the rows of seats (*cavea*). Part of the stage (*scena*) has been brought to light, but nothing is known of the elaborate architectural structure (*scenae frons*) that would have risen behind the stage proper, beyond a number of architectural and sculptural pieces.

- The amphitheatre, the Visigothic basilica, and the Romanesque church

The amphitheatre, with its seating for some 14,000 spectators, lies to the south-east of the town, outside the walls and near the coast. Built in the early 2nd century AD, during the reign of Trajan or Hadrian, it has the characteristic elliptical ground plan, measuring 130m by 102m.

The arena is surrounded by the rows of seating, supported on superimposed vaults made of *opus caementicium* and *opus reticulatum* on all save the north side, where the lower rows of seats are cut into the natural rock. Access to the arena is by two large entrances at the ends of the long axis. The *podium*, used by officials, is over 3m high and was originally covered with painted stone blocks; when the structure was enlarged and reconstructed in AD 218 the *podium* was clad with sheets of white marble.

It was used for spectacles until the mid 4th century and then abandoned, not to be in use again until the 6th century, when a Visigothic basilica was built. This was a three-aisled structure dedicated to the martyrs Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius, who died in the amphitheatre on 21 January 259,

with a chancel on the longitudinal axis, a sanctuary for celebrating the Eucharist, and a small room that may have been a vestry.

This building was demolished in the 12th century to permit the construction of a Romanesque church in the traditional Latin cross form. Most of the lower parts of this structure survive, and the decoration that has been studied indicates Cistercian connections.

- The Palaeochristian cemetery

The first use of this extra-mural area was for suburban villas, in the late Republican period. In the 3rd century AD, however, it became converted into a cemetery, associated with the cult of the three martyrs, over whose tomb a basilica was built (destroyed in the 8th century). Excavations have revealed over two thousand tombs of different types, some of which are on display. The Palaeochristian Museum on the site houses much of the material resulting from these excavations.

- The aqueduct

Three aqueducts brought water to Tàrraco, two from the River Francoli and the third from the Gaià, and their routes have been traced in detail. A 217m stretch of one of the Francoli aqueducts, known as Les Ferreres, has been preserved where it traverses a shallow valley. It is built in *opus quadratum* and consists of two courses of arches, rising to a height of 27m.

- The Tower of the Scipios

The attribution of this funerary monument to the Scipios is very doubtful, since it is dated to the first half of the 1st century AD. It consists of a sturdy podium, a central section representing the Phrygian deity Attis, and an upper section with reliefs of two men in oriental costume.

- The Médol quarry

This large quarry was worked to obtain the limestone used in the construction of many of the buildings in Tàrraco; it has been estimated that some 50,000m³ were extracted during the period of exploitation.

- The "Centelles" villa-mausoleum

The first structure on this site was a modest *villa rustica* built in the 2nd century AD. This was greatly enlarged in the 4th century, and later in that century it was converted into a mausoleum.

The two principal rooms of the villa were quadrilobate and circular in plan respectively, both probably domed. The latter was converted into a mausoleum, the interior of the dome being covered with mosaics and a crypt created beneath it. The lower range of mosaics represent hunting scenes and the upper biblical scenes. The apex of the dome has lost its mosaics. Some fragments of mural paintings also survive.

The building became a chapel dedicated to St Bernard in the Middle Ages and in the 19th century it was reused as a farmhouse.

- The "Dels Munts" Villa

The excavated remains of this suburban villa are situated on a slope running gently down to the sea. It was probably built in the early 1st century AD and renovated and extended in the late 3rd century after the Frankish incursion, probably

servicing as the residence of a high Roman official. It was a large and luxurious establishment, with elaborately decorated main rooms, two suites of baths, and large cisterns.

- The Triumphal Arch of Berá

This monument is considered to be a territorial marker, indicating the boundary of the territory of Tàrraco. It consists of a single arch with relatively simple decoration. There is an inscription on the entablature recording the name of the consul who commissioned its construction.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The archaeological ensemble of Tàrraco is covered by various designations under Spanish Law No 16/1985 on the Spanish Historic Heritage and Catalan Law No 9/1993 on the Catalan Cultural Heritage (the dates in parentheses relate to the official decree; earlier designations are covered in the legislation currently in force):

- The historic centre of Tarragona: historic ensemble 1966;
- The Roman walls: historic monument 1984;
- Les Ferreres aqueduct: historic monument 1905;
- Cathedral: historic monument 1905;
- Amphitheatre and church: historic monument 1924;
- Provincial Forum: historic monument 1926, 1931;
- Tower of the Scipios: historic monument 1926;
- Palaeochristian cemetery: archaeological zone 1931;
- Médol quarry: archaeological zone 1931;
- Forum: archaeological zone 1954;
- Vaults of circus: historic monument 1963;
- Roman theatre: archaeological zone 1977;
- Les Munts villa: archaeological zone 1979;
- Arc de Berá: historic monument 1926;
- Centcelles villa-mausoleum 1931.

This legislation imposes restraints on all forms of intervention on the designated monument or site and its immediate surroundings, and is supported by a number of Decrees of the Catalan Parliament from 1990 onwards relating to specific aspects of protection and conservation.

Management

Ownership of the properties covered in the nomination is spread over public institutions and private institutions and individuals.

The Generalitat of Catalonia has overall responsibility for the protection and management of the monuments and sites through the Cultural Heritage General Directorate, part of the Cultural Secretariat. Certain monuments are managed by the Municipality of Tarragona.

Article 44 of the General Urban Management Plan for Tarragona, approved in January 1995, relates to the

protection of the archaeological heritage. It provides for special protection zones around the amphitheatre, the circus, the theatre, and the aqueduct. There is in addition a detailed plan, the *Pla Especial Pilats* for the Praetorium and circus area. The Special Plan for the Upper Part of the town (*Pla Especial del Centre Històric-Part Alta* - PEHA), approved in 1990, is concerned with the rehabilitation of the historic centre, and makes special provision for the preservation of the historic townscape and its components.

The Cultural Secretariat of the Generalitat has a programme for urban archaeology throughout the Autonomous Community, in which Tarragona figures prominently. A programme of restoration projects has been carried out over the past two decades on individual monuments and sites. These projects are financed variously by the national, provincial, and municipal authorities.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The study of the monuments and sites of Tàrraco began as early as the 16th century, and important work was carried out in the 19th century, but systematic archaeological work did not begin until the late 1980s. This was begun by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, then taken over between 1987 and 1989 by the Workshop-School for Archaeology (TEDA), set up by the Municipality, and since that time by the Tarragona Urban Archaeology Centre (CAUT) and the Archaeological Service of the Generalitat, working closely with the Archaeological Laboratory of the Rovira i Virgili University of Tarragona (LAUT).

Scientific conservation and restoration projects began in the late 1950s, first under the direction of the Ministry of Culture and then the Archaeological Service of the Generalitat following its creation in 1980. A number of specific projects have been carried out or are in progress (see above), a number of them resulting from agreements concluded between the Service and other bodies, such as the Municipal Museum and the University.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the excavated sites is total. That of upstanding monuments such as the amphitheatre, the Arc de Berá, and the Tower of the Scipios is equally high, since they have not been subject to any form of reconstruction (although the amphitheatre has undergone modification of its form over the centuries since it ceased to be used for its original function). The remains of ancient structures incorporated in later buildings are also authentic, even though they are fragmentary and the current use of the buildings of which they form a part is different from the original function.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Tarragona in January 1998. A second mission visited the town in February 2000.

At the 22nd Session of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee, held in Paris in June 1998, it was agreed after discussions between the President, the State Party, and

ICOMOS that the original nomination should be revised and resubmitted. The State Party invited three leading experts in the archaeology and history of Roman towns, from France, Italy, and the United Kingdom respectively, who were nominated by ICOMOS, to visit Tarragona and submit independent reports on the cultural significance of Tàrraco. These reports have been taken into account by ICOMOS in preparing this evaluation, together with the report of a meeting of international experts in Roman archaeology held in February 1999 in Tarragona.

Qualities

Tàrraco was one of the most important provincial capitals in the Western Roman Empire and as such was endowed with many fine public buildings. It was also the site of an impressive symbolic complex devoted to the cult of the Imperial family.

Comparative analysis

The State Party included a short comparative study in the nomination dossier which concentrated on Tàrraco in relation principally to Mérida, the Roman monuments of which were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1993. This stresses the priority of the foundation of Tàrraco, its greater symbolic and political importance in the Roman Empire, and its relatively greater wealth of public buildings, as well as its defensive walls.

The reports referred to above all emphasized the exceptional significance of Tàrraco in the wider context of the Roman Empire. It was the first provincial capital to be established by Rome and as such served as the model for subsequent foundations, such as *Lugdunum* (Lyons). The surviving remains are remarkable in that they illustrate the entire history of the town in antiquity, from the 3rd century BC to the end of Roman rule; in this they are rivalled only by Rome itself.

Brief description

Tàrraco (modern Tarragona) was a major administrative and mercantile city in Roman Spain and the centre of the Imperial cult for all the Iberian provinces. It was endowed with many fine buildings, and parts of these have been revealed in a series of exceptional excavations. Although most of the remains are fragmentary, many preserved beneath more recent buildings, they present a vivid picture of the grandeur of this Roman provincial city.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iii*:

Criterion ii The Roman remains of Tàrraco are of exceptional importance in the development of Roman urban planning and design and served as the model for provincial capitals elsewhere in the Roman world.

Criterion iii Tàrraco provides eloquent and unparalleled testimony to a significant stage in the history of the Mediterranean lands in antiquity.