

The epigraphic environment of the Tarraco forum in the Augustan and Julio-Claudian Periods

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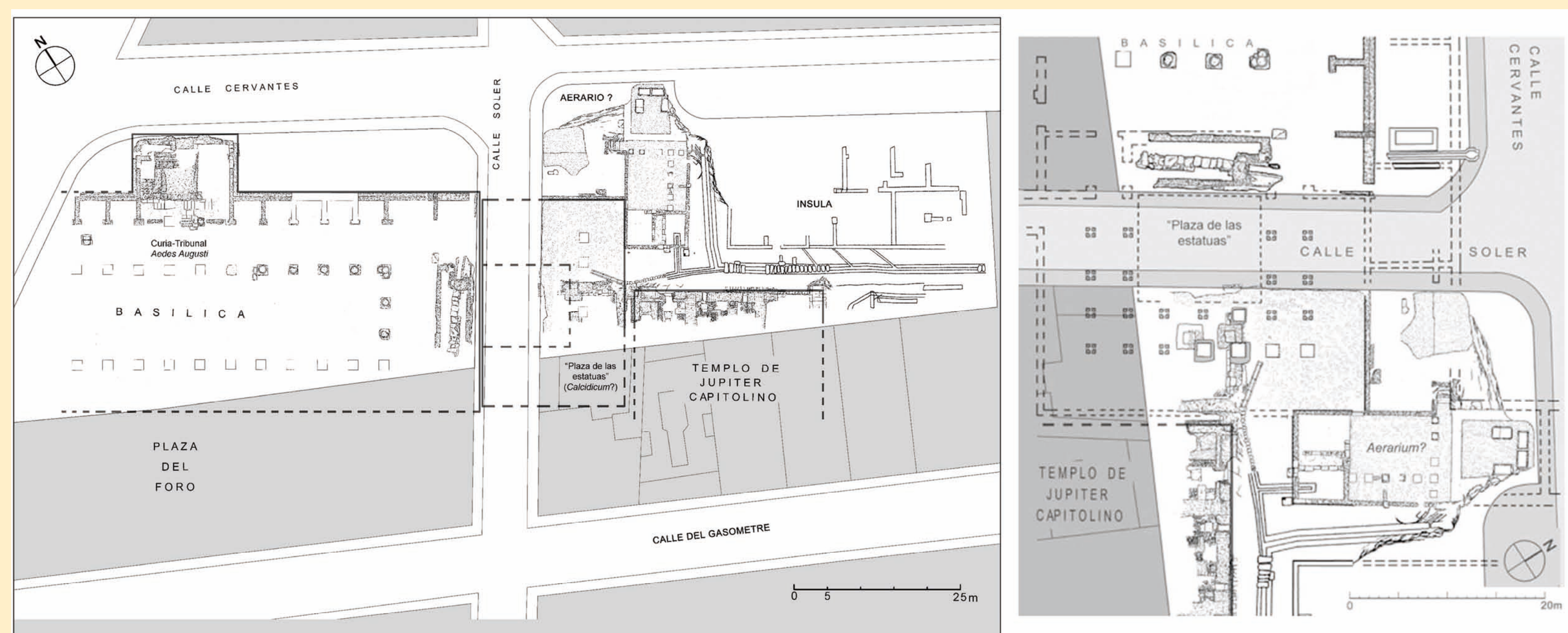


Fig. 1. Forum of Tarraco. Left: general planimetry (after Mar et alii 2015, fig. 3); right: detail of the so-called 'square of the statues' (after Mar et alii 2012, 270).

Presentation

The recent updating of the Tarraco epigraphic *corpus* by Géza Alföldy (CIL II²/14) is an excellent starting point for developing this proposal. It is based on an analysis of the inscriptions, paying special attention to their original topographic contexts and the manufacture of their monumental supports, following G. C. Susini's original hypothesis (cf. DONATI 2016).

We aim to present a perspective of the epigraphic monuments erected in the forum of the *colonia Tarraco* in the Augustan era, a transcendental period in the configuration of the town's public image. The main objective of this contribution is to determine the typologies; who was responsible for commissioning the pieces, and who were the users of forum epigraphy in the town at the beginning of the 1st century AD.

The monumentalisation of the forum and the first official epigraphic programmes

Following the town's promotion to the legal status of *colonia* with Roman rights around 45 BC, Tarraco's forum underwent a monumentalisation process that lasted until the time of Augustus. The public space –until then a square presided over by a Capitoline temple– was expanded to include a second square overlooked by a judicial basilica (Fig. 1).

The monumentalisation was accompanied by an exponential increase in the number of contemporary inscriptions (Fig. 2). Most of the preserved epigraphs correspond to plaques with honorary inscriptions made to be placed on the front of the statuary monuments. Among them we find the following: a plaque in local limestone dedicated jointly to Augustus, Drusus and Tiberius from 16-14 BC; another in *bardiglio* for a local magistrate of the equestrian order, dated to the late-Augustan period or the beginning of the reign of Tiberius; and a plaque, perhaps also in local limestone, dedicated to an unknown senator from the Julio-Claudian period. Another of the plaques bears an inscription dedicated to the celebration of the *Victoria Augusta* following the end of the Cantabrian Wars. The list of honorary monuments is completed with a pedestal made up of several stone blocks dedicated to an equestrian-order magistrate from the Julio-Claudian period. Finally, of particular note is a *mensa ponderaria* in white Luni-Carrara marble dated to the time of Augustus and placed in the forum by an *aedilis*.

Regarding the possibility of an *Augusteum* in the Tarraco forum

The quality of the supports and execution of the rest of the inscriptions can be confined to an area and recipients from within the small circle of the imperial household. Their location in the political centre of the town, together with the conservation of an interesting sculptural *corpus* of members of the Julio-Claudian household, leads us to hypothesise that there was a single public exhibition context.

G. Alföldy (2012) and D. Fishwick (2014) were the first to suggest the possibility of an *Augusteum* in the Tarraco forum. This imperial cult temple appears to have been situated in an area adjacent to the basilica. The only evidence is the sparse remains of the building's framework, referred to in the early bibliography as the "square of the statues". A more recent theory is that this space was a *chalcidicum* and the archaeological evidence appears to indicate a dating early in the reign of Tiberius, coinciding chronologically with an early reform of the basilica.

Our proposal rules out the *chalcidicum* designation to accept that of *Augusteum*, based on the abundant epigraphic and sculptural evidence found almost in situ in that area.

As far as the inscriptions are concerned, they are all engraved on plaques of *marmora* imported from the imperial quarries located at various points around the Mediterranean (Fig. 3). It is possible to identify a monument dedicated to Drusus Minor (15-20 AD); another two are perhaps related to Tiberius and Claudius during their respective reigns. For the time being, the poor state of conservation of the rest of the epigraphs prevents any precise identification.

In terms of the statues, those from the same location make it possible to complete the list of Julio-Claudian figures represented in the *Augusteum* (Fig. 3). Among the portraits, we can definitely identify Tiberius and Nero Caesar, both dated to the reign of Caligula; another portrait, less well preserved, has been identified as Augustus and dated to the time of Claudius. The headless female torsos are probably of Livia and Agrippina Minor. Also preserved is a headless statue of a prince adopted in the reign of Claudius, possibly Britannicus or Nero before his ascent to the throne.

In conclusion, we can state that the assemblage displayed here is the first joint exhibition of the Julio-Claudian imperial family inscriptions and statues found in the colonial forum. It allows us to confirm that there was in fact a place for the worship of the *domus Augusta* in the *colonia Tarraco*, a specific space we suggest was an *Augusteum*.

References

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Fig. 2. Augustan and Julio-Claudian inscriptions from the forum of Tarraco.



Fig. 3. Epigraphy from the *Augusteum*.



Fig. 4. Julio-Claudian statues from the *Augusteum*. Photos by author with permission of MNAT.

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