

Interdisciplinary Studies on Ancient Stone

Proceedings of the IX ASMOSIA Conference

(Tarragona 2009)

Edited by
Anna Gutiérrez García-M., Pilar Lapuente and Isabel Rodà

Institut Català d'Arqueologia Clàssica

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Anna Gutiérrez Garcia-M.
Pilar Lapuente Mercadal
Isabel Rodà de Llanza

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MARMORA AT THE TARRACO OF THE ANTONINES: THE ASSEMBLAGE OF SANT PAU AND SANTA TECLA HOSPITAL (TARRAGONA, SPAIN)¹

A. Gutiérrez García-M. and J. López Vilar

Abstract

This paper presents an assemblage of *marmora* found during the archaeological excavation undertaken in 1992, a small part of the site where the Hospital of Sant Pau and Santa Tecla stands today, at Rambla Vella of Tarragona (Spain). Most of them are coloured *marmora* from a wide range of quarries: not only local (Santa Tecla stone, Alcover stone) and regional (broccatello) but also imported, such as giallo antico, pavonazzetto, africano, portasanta, porfido rosso, serpentino, breccia di Settebasi. Even though some fine-grained, white marble fragments were also found, they are not being discussed here. Despite the small number of fragments recovered, this set is highly interesting as they were found in a clear, well-dated stratigraphical context: a soil from 125-150 AD that filled up some sort of building from Augustan times. The location of the site, on the limits of the upper part of the town, which was devoted to public areas (mainly related to the imperial worship, the provincial government and public), and the lower part of Tarraco, where the other activities (residential, colonial govern, etc) took place, is also significant. Therefore, both its location and its date are significant, as during this period the upper part of Roman Tarraco underwent major urban modifications which gave it the magnificence worthy of the capital of the largest province of the western part of Roman Empire.

Keywords

Coloured *marmora*, local stone, column reuse, stratigraphic context, Tarraco, Flavian times.

Brief background: *marmora* finds from ancient Tarraco

The discovery of imported ancient marbles at the archaeological excavations of Tarragona is common. This is not surprising given the importance of the town in Roman times as capital of the provincia Tarraconensis as well as its excellent location in terms of maritime communications, which made Tarraco the arrival point of many goods, both from the eastern and western Mediterranean² (Fig. 1).

The exploitation in Roman times of a local golden-yellow to pinkish limestone called 'Santa Tecla Stone' that, thanks to its decorative properties can be included among the *marmora*, is well known³. However, imported marbles were also employed at Tarraco. Among them, the white marble of Luni-Carrara hold a preeminent place as it was the main material used to embellish the upper part of the ancient town as it was largely employed at the *forum provincialis* and the imperial worship area⁴. Nevertheless, other *marmora* have been also found as being part of the ornamental programme of the town but on a smaller ratio. Indeed, both other white marbles and some of the most prized ornamental stones of the entire Mediterranean basin, have been identified. Among them, four types stand out since they have been identified all the archaeological excavations with *marmora* fragments: cipollino or *marmor Caristium*, africano or *marmor luculleum*, pavonazzetto or *marmor Docimium*, and giallo antico or *marmor Numidicum*⁵.

However, most of the marbles fragments found at Tarraco appeared out of context, pulled off the monu-

1. This work has been undertaken within the framework of the "Explotación, uso e intercambio de materias primas inorgánicas entre el norte de Hispania y el sur de la Galia y los puertos de Roma" (code HAR2008-04600/HIST) and "La explotación y comercio de los recursos naturales en el norte de la Hispania romana: lapis, metalla, aqua" (code HAR2011-25011) research projects, funded by *Secretaría de Estado de Investigación* (Dirección General de Investigación y Gestión del Plan Nacional de I+D+I) of the Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación of the Spanish Government as well as the project "Territori, ciutat i port: El comerç entre Roma i Hispània septentrional a partir de les àmfores i els marbres" (code 2010 PBR 0020), funded by the Agència de Gestió d'Ajuts Universitaris i de Recerca (AGAUR) of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

2. For a global vision of Roman Tarraco see Alföldy 1978 and Aquilué *et al.* 1991; all the archaeological excavations undertaken during the recent decades at Tarragona have been compiled and published as the number 5 volume of the *Documenta* Series of the ICAC (Macías *et al.* 2007).

3. The exploitation, use and chronology of extraction and employment of this limestone has been object of a thorough study, presented during the IX ASMOSIA Conference, held in Tarragona in June 2009, and included on the exhibition *Marbles and Stones from Spain* organized in occasion of this same Conference (Álvarez *et al.* 2009a, 2009b); its existence and use, however, was already known thanks to being mentioned in several previous works (see Gutiérrez García-M. 2009, 208).

4. During the second half of the 1st century AD, the upper town of Tarraco was reorganized in three terraces; the upper one was destined to the imperial cult with the erection of a temple surrounded by a portico while the middle one hosted the forum of the province and associated buildings and the lower one was the Circus. The several finds on marble show that the first two terraces were largely decorated with ornamental elements elaborated on marble from Luni (Pensabene 1993; Mar 1993; Pensabene and Mar, 2004; Macías *et al.* 2007, 776-778; Pensabene 2004, 436; Álvarez *et al.* in press).

5. It is worth noting that the last three of these *marmora* were largely used in the architectural programmes related to the imperial figure in the time of Augustus (and that the quarries that supplied all of them, as well as the white marble of Luni, were of imperial property since very early (Pensabene 2002, 46; Rodà 2004, 405).

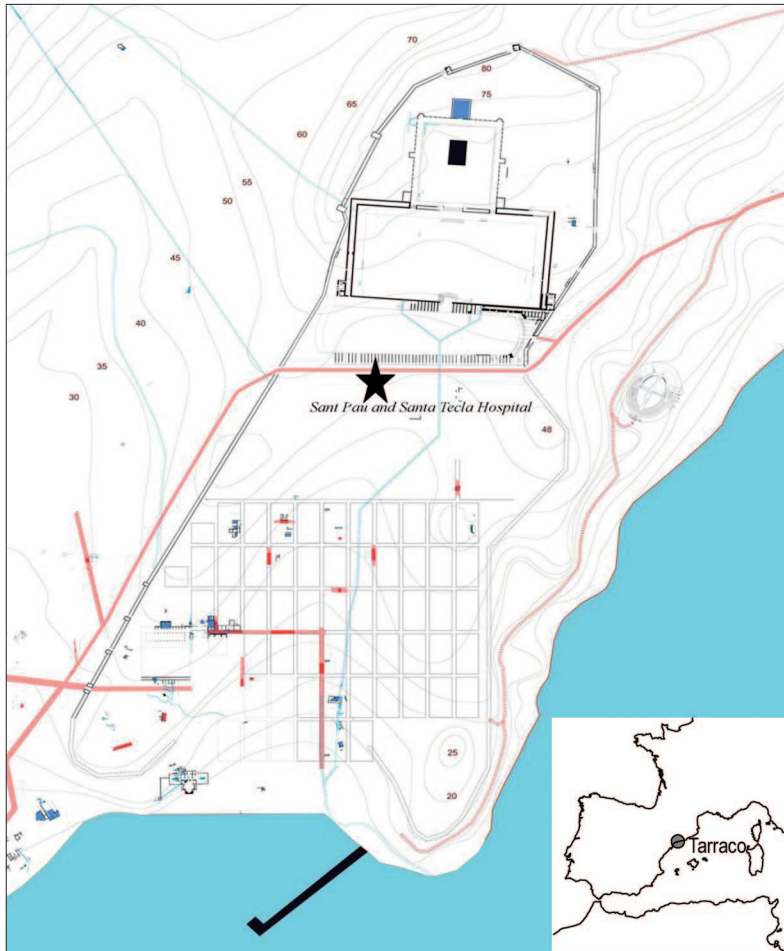


FIG. 1. Location of Sant Pau and Santa Tecla Hospital archaeological site (star).

ments that they decorated and in secondary use, either within waste contexts, reused as building material or re-laborated in later periods⁶. Hence the importance of an assemblage of marbles, even of small quantity, when it comes from a clear, well-dated stratigraphical position, either when it is found still decorating the original monument and/or when it comes from the contexts of a possible workshop.

The assemblage from Sant Pau and Santa Tecla Hospital

In fact, the case of the marble assemblage from Sant Pau and Santa Tecla Hospital is quite uncommon on the framework of the archaeological excavations undertaken in Tarragona. This assemblage was uncovered in 1992, during the rescue excavation of a small part of the lot where the Hospital of Sant Pau i Santa Tecla stands today, at Rambla Vella of Tarragona, at the south limit of the lower terrace of the upper part of Tarraco (Fig. 1)⁷.

Only part of the site consisting of about 50 m² was object of archaeological works due to the fact that the rest of it had been lowered previously without archaeological control; as a result, the existing Roman remains were destroyed.

Nevertheless, the results of this small dig were rather interesting. It revealed the remains of a wall and a pavement of beaten soil dating from Augustus' times; they probably belonged to a building of domestic purposes, which was demolished during the second quarter of the 2nd century AD after which a big cistern paved with *opus signinum* was build. A small but remarkable set of marble fragments was found among the soil that filled in the structure of Augustan times. The date of this context is precise enough: it ranges among 125-150 AD, and in this lies an important part of the interest of the assemblage.

A total of number of 46 marbles fragments was uncovered at Sant Pau and Santa Tecla Hospital site (Table 1). As already stated, even though this set is quite restricted in size when compared with other marble assemblages

6. See the identification of marbles by A. Àlvarez of the pieces of *marmora* and other stones found at a 5th century waste pit excavated by the TED'A (Àlvarez 1989) as well as the latest finds, also from late Roman contexts, which are presented at this same volume (Àlvarez *et al.*; Arola *et al.*).

7. The excavation was first presented at the XIV International Conference of Classical Archaeology held in Tarragona in the following year (Foguet and López 1994) and has been also included at the *Planimetria Arqueològica de Tarraco* (Macias *et al.* 2007, 88-90, fitxa 264).

Num.	Stratigraphic context n°	Marble type	Type of object / thickness
1	216	Giallo antico	veneer (15 mm)
2	212	Giallo antico	moulding
3	112	Giallo antico	fragment
4	112	Giallo antico	veneer (17,5 mm)
5	112	Portasanta	veneer (11,5 mm)
6	215	Portasanta	veneer (17 mm)
7	112	Pavonazzetto	veneer (8 mm)
8	216	Pavonazzetto brecciatto	veneer (10 mm)
9	112	Santa Tecla stone	veneer (26,5 mm)
10	112	Santa Tecla stone	veneer (24,5)
11	112	Santa Tecla stone	veneer (23,5 mm) // burnt
12	216	Santa Tecla stone	veneer (22 mm)
13	112	Santa Tecla stone	veneer (9,5 mm)
14	112	Santa Tecla stone	veneer (indet.)
15	112	Santa Tecla stone	veneer (indet.)
16	112	Alcover stone	veneer (12 mm)
17	112	Broccatello	veneer (9,5 mm)
18	112	Rosso antico	veneer (16 mm)
19	112	Breccia di Settebasi	veneer (6 mm)
20	112	Africano	veneer (13 mm)
21	112	Greco scritto	veneer (11 mm)
22	216	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	veneer (12 mm)
23	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	fragment
24	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	fragment
25	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	veneer ?
26	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	fragment
27	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	fragment
28	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	fragment
29	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	fragment
30	112	Cipollino?	veneer (23 mm)
31	112	Pavonazzetto	fluted column fragm. (edge:16 mm)
32	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	veneer (31 mm)
33	116	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	fragment
34	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	fragment
35	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	fragment
36	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	veneer (19 mm)
37	112	Fine-grained, white marble (Carrara?)	veneer (21 mm)
38	112	Indeterminate	veneer (32,5 mm)
39	112	Portasanta	fluted column fragm. (edge: 17 mm)
40	112	Giallo antico	fluted column fragm. (edge: 18 mm)
41	112	Giallo antico	fluted column fragm. ?
42	112	Pavonazzetto	veneer (5 mm)
43	112	Pavonazzetto	veneer (18 mm)
44	112	Pavonazzetto	veneer (18 mm)
45	112	Porfido rosso	veneer (8 mm)
46	112	Porfido verde di Grecia	veneer (8 mm)

TABLE I. Table showing the entire assemblage of *marmora* found at Sant Pau and Santa Tecla Hospital archaeological site.

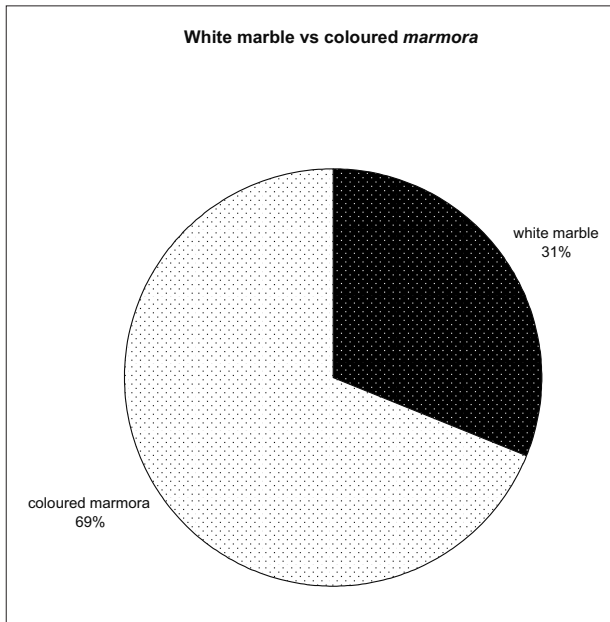


FIG. 2. Pie chart showing the ratio of white marbles versus coloured *marmora* found at Sant Pau and Santa Tecla Hospital archaeological site.

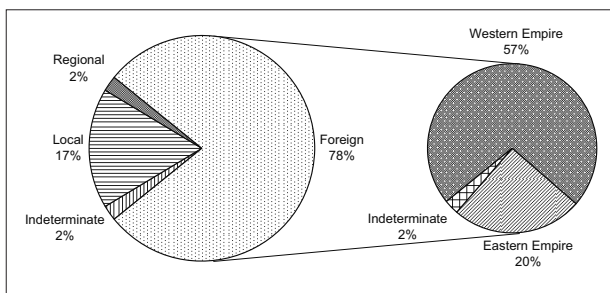


FIG. 3. Pie chart showing the ratio of imported, regional and local marbles found at Sant Pau and Santa Tecla Hospital archaeological site.

from other excavations nearby (i.e. at the Part Alta of Tarragona)⁸, its significance is nevertheless high.

First of all, it is entirely composed by stones intended for ornamental purposes and it includes both white marbles and coloured *marmora* (Fig. 2). Also, despite the restricted number of fragments, it is representative of a wide range of ornamental stones used in ancient times. Thus, the only type of white marble found at Sant Pau

and Santa Tecla Hospital is most likely the almost omnipresent at Tarraco white marble from Luni-Carrara⁹; yet the variety of coloured *marmora* is significant.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that not only *marmora* from all the Mediterranean basin but also from local and regional provenance have been identified as part of this set (Fig. 3). Indeed, the count indicates a significant presence of local marble in Santa Tecla, from the local quarries opened at the area of La Budallera, only a few kilometers north from the town of Tarraco¹⁰. Yet there is also one example of another local stone, Alcover stone, which, even though it cannot be counted among the *marmora*, it has been identified in other sites of around Tarraco as being used for ornamental purposes¹¹.

Broccatello, or Jaspi de la Cinta, from the quarries near Dertosa (modern Tortosa, about 80 kilometers south from Tarragona), is also represented at this assemblage with only one fragment. Although this stone cannot be considered of foreign provenance due to the proximity of its point of extraction to the point of use, i.e. Tarraco, broccatello was used undoubtedly as ornamental stone as it was used not only in Hispania but also in other places of the western and central empire next to the most highly prized *marmora*¹².

Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of the fragments belong to imported marbles. Among them, the (probable) white marble from Luni-Carrara stands out as the most numerous. Second in number are giallo antico (*marmor Numidicum*) and pavonazzetto (*marmor Docimium*), from the African and oriental territories of the Roman Empire, respectively. The other marbles from the farthest side of the Mediterranean basin that were documented at Sant Pau and Santa Tecla Hospital are three fragments of portasanta (*marmor Chium*), one single fragment of several other *marmora*, i.e. africano (*marmor luculleum*), breccia di Settebasi, rosso antico, porfido verde (*lapis Lacedemonius*), and porfido rosso (or *lapis Porphirites*) (Table 1).

Besides its provenance, some other considerations can be made on these marbles. They all are small fragments, mostly from thin veneers of below 2 cm of thickness but a few of them are 2,3 to 3,2 cm thick. Nevertheless, some of them are tiny parts of fluted column shafts (Fig. 4). Their characteristics indicate that in the vicinity of the site could an *officina marmoraria* might have existed. Indeed, the small size of the fragments recovered showed

8. See footnote 6.

9. All them are fine-grained marble and very alike; despite they have not been object of analysis yet, the overwhelming use of Luni-Carrara marble at the upper part of ancient Tarraco strongly points at this provenance for our fragments.

10. For an account of the quarries where Santa Tecla stone was exploited see Álvarez *et al.* 2009a, 40-52 and Gutiérrez García-M. 2009, 208-222.

11. Alcover stone has been mostly identified as epigraphic medium in plaques and other flat-plaques purposes such as pavement slabs or tombstones due to its strong bedding, it has been also found employed as wall veneers at the 'lower' baths of the Roman villa of Els Munts (Altafulla) and at the Roman villa of La Llosa (Cambrils), at the *territorium* of Tarraco (Gutiérrez García-M. 2009, 224-225). Despite this stone lacks a colourful pattern as it is of light brown colour, once polished shows an homogeneity and fine finish that supports the assumption that in some cases it was used as ornamental stone, even of moderate richness if compared with other materials.

12. Broccatello is one of the best-known *marmora* from Spain as it has been object of attention of several scholars and researchers (Álvarez 1985, Álvarez *et al.* 2009b, 74-79; in press; Falcone and Lazzarini 1998; Mayer and Rodà 1999); for an updated compendium of the places where broccatello has been identified and its use, see Gutiérrez García-M. 2009, 234-237.



FIG. 4. Three fragments of fluted column shafts found during the excavations of the site. Foto: J. López Vilar.

that they are the residual parts of cutting larger pieces, i.e. cutting waste.

Conclusions

As already mentioned, despite the restricted number of fragments of recovered at Sant Pau and Santa Tecla Hospital site, the variety of *marmora* is significant. This is especially true in the case of the coloured *marmora*; indeed, when compared with other marble assemblages from the upper area of Tarraco¹³, the range of *marmora* represented at our assemblage compares favourably with

the other assemblages, which are, in contrast, considerably larger in number of fragments. Focusing on the proportions of marble types of our assemblage, it is also worth noting that the proportions of each marble type within the assemblage match with what has been observed overall for the use of ornamental marbles at Tarraco. Thus, it reflects the significantly higher presence of white marble (probably) from Luni-Carrara in comparison with the rest of the set. The next most represented marbles are two of those also recorded as largely employed not only at other contexts of Tarraco, pavonazzetto and giallo antico; africano, which together with the previous ones and cipollino forms the group of *marmor* mostly employed in decorative programmes related to the imperial power in Augustan times, was also found but with only one single fragment.

Next to the imported marbles, regional and local stones should be not forgotten. As for most of the imported *marmora*, only one piece of broccatello has been recovered. Santa Tecla stone is more common, as it is usual in the context of Tarraco since it is the decorative stone par excellence of the town. Nevertheless, the absence of llisós, a Jurassic stone with relative ornamental qualities that crops out at the same spots where Santa Tecla appears¹⁴, is quite noteworthy, especially if we take into account that another local stone with relative ornamental qualities but from further away, Alcover stone, was found at the site.

On the other hand, these fluted column fragments implies the presence at Tarraco of this type of columns made of pavonazzetto, portasanta and giallo antico may be erected at some point of the upper part of the town, where the representation and worship areas were. How-



FIG. 5. Fragment of veneer in pavonazzetto with evidence of its cut by using a coping saw. Foto: J. López Vilar.

13. See above, footnote 6.

14. An account of the macroscopic, microscopic, exploitation use and chronology of this stone is included at the monograph on Santa Tecla stone (Álvarez *et al.* 2009a, 16, 30, 37-52, 66-71, 95-96).

ever, the fact that fragments of fluted columns as well as relatively thin plaques, some of which still keep the lower break that indicates it was produced with a coping saw, in those same marbles indicate that these columns were actually cut down in plaques (Fig. 5). Thus, at this point or at least nearby, there was a workshop whose activity was to put in new uses abandoned or unused materials.

Therefore, this assemblage not only confirms the presence of such valued materials, some of them in form of large columns, in the second quarter of the 2nd century AD at the capital town of the *Hispania Tarraconensis* but also points to the existence of possible workshop in a quite central location of the town.

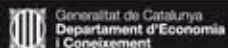
Therefore, we believe that this new assemblage makes a small but significant contribution to the understanding not only of the monumental area of the upper Tarraco but also of the management and reuse of these materials once in the provincial capital.

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