

## THE FIRST YEARS OF EMERITA AUGUSTA

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Few great towns of the Roman Empire still exhibit so many remains as Mérida (*Emerita Augusta*), the colony which Augustus founded<sup>1</sup> about 25 B.C., to be the capital of Lusitania and the home for retired soldiers of Legions V Alaudae and X. The crowded museum contains not only much of the commonplace sculpture which filled Roman Spain, but one or two first-class products of vigorous art. A traveller from Seville (*Hispalis*) may still cross the river Anas, 'viridante rapax gurgite,'<sup>2</sup> by a bridge of sixty arches, and gaze at the same time upon an embankment-wall of sixty-four bays. The drainage-system of the town which he reached is known, and fits a chess-board town-plan. Two great aqueducts, and yet another perfect bridge, cross the Rio Albarregas. And even then there remain to see an Arch, an Amphitheatre, a Theatre, a Circus, two Temples, the Town-wall and another Aqueduct. Over all this straggles the modern town, holding ten thousand inhabitants and dull with the heavy silence of Estremadura.

(a) THE SITE. The town occupies a long, low hill (Fig. 1), at the junction of the Guadiana and the Rio Albarregas. There is a fine aspect to south and east, and the Guadiana runs broad and shallow, divided by an island suitable for bridging. The place is a natural junction, for here the river ceases to be navigable, even to Roman craft; and railways now follow the general direction of the ancient roads, eastwards towards *Toletum* (Toledo), west to *Evora* (Eborac) and *Olisipo* (Lisbon), south to *Hispalis* (Seville), and north to

<sup>1</sup> *Coins of R.E. in B.M.*, i, p. cix, late in 25 B.C. to 24 or 23 B.C. Cassius Dio, liii, 26; 'At the end of this war Augustus dismissed the older soldiers

and gave them a city to possess in Lusitania, called Augusta Emerita.' cf. Isidore, *Orig.* xv. 1, 69.

<sup>2</sup> Prudentius, *Peristeph.* iii 18.

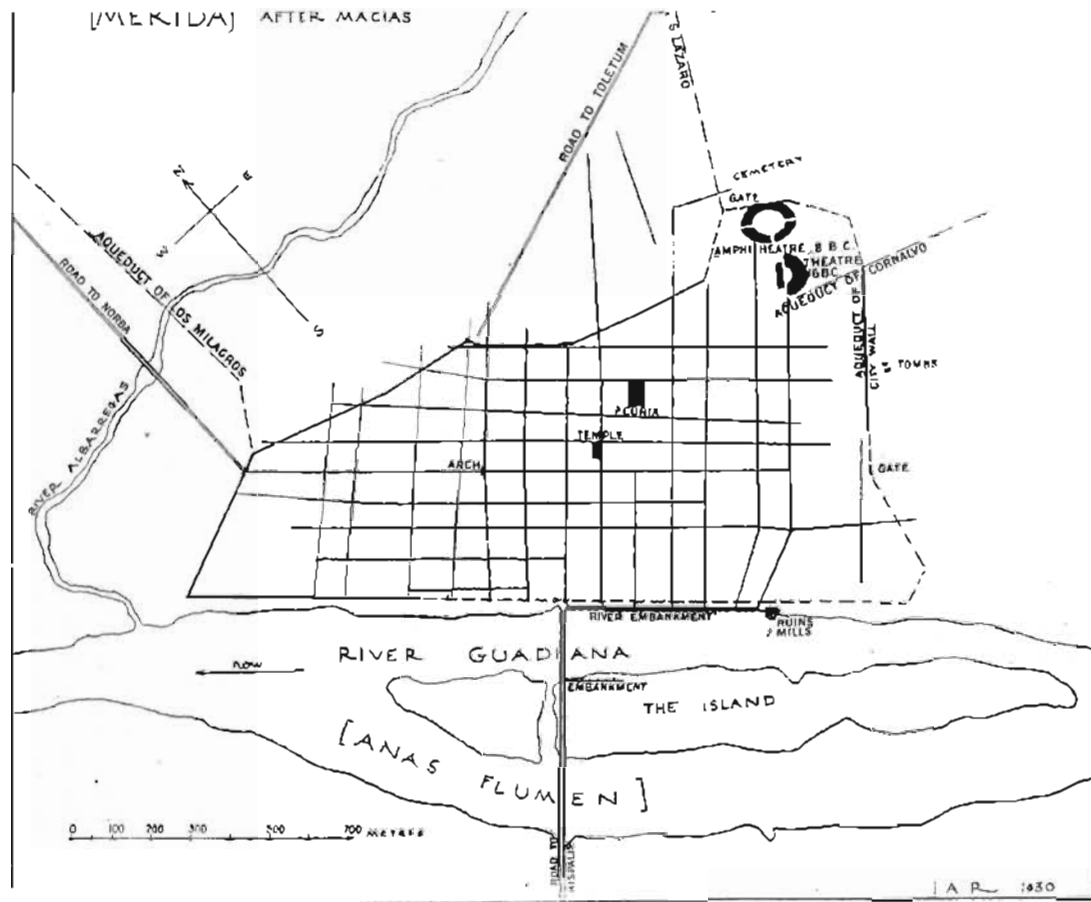


FIG. 1. SKETCH-PLAN OF MÉRIDA

*Norba* (Cáceres). Just as León in the north was the key-fortress to rough Gallaecia, so Emerita dominated the entry to prosperous Lusitania. The two foundations were a contrast in conditions, but not in method.

There are some disadvantages to record. Water is not readily available, except from the river in condition unsuitable for a town. The western defensive outlook is poor, since rolling hillocks connect the town-site with the hinterland. The Guadiana is liable to flood, as Prudentius notes,<sup>1</sup> and this contingency had to be met by spreading the lands of the colony over an unusually wide area, filling the outskirts first. So much the *agrimensores*<sup>2</sup> tell us, and boundary-stones<sup>3</sup> corroborate their statement.

But for a capital, a colony which was to be at once '*specula populi Romani ac propugnaculum*'<sup>4</sup> and a centre of culture, the real need was good communication. This granted, most disadvantages could be eliminated, by aqueducts for water, and a strong city-wall for defence. And, provided with these benefits, the town justified the choice of Carisius,<sup>5</sup> its immediate founder, by its prosperity. Seven centuries later Rasis the Moor was to write 'Man could not number the marvels of Mereda.'

(b) THE EARLY TOWN-PLAN. From the first, the town was laid out upon a lavish scale. It has been thought<sup>6</sup> that the early town covered only a small area, roughly marked by a quadrangle, of which the north-south axis is the Guadiana bridge, the eastern limit the so-called '*Arco de Traiano*,' the western a vanished arch which was considered to match it. But these grounds alone do not suffice to support a case for an early lay-out, and the hypothesis is based upon two further assumptions: first, that the town was modelled upon Turin and Aosta; secondly, that the existing

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Frontinus, *de contr. agr.*, l. 51 (Lachmann).

<sup>3</sup> C.I.L. ii. 656; found at 16 leagues from Merida.

<sup>4</sup> Cicero, *pro Fonteio*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> See n. 1. The coins are of Carisius.

<sup>6</sup> Schulten, *Merida*, *Deutsche Zeitung fuer Spanien*, 1922; in off-print, pp. 9-10.

defensive Wall was not built until the town had long out-grown its earlier limits.

The first assumption is doubtful. Emerita was always meant to play a greater part than the Alpine colonies, and two legions, not one, shared in its foundation. Again, as at Colchester,<sup>1</sup> the analogous *Colonia Victricensis Camuloduni*, there were local folk (in this case the Vettones), to be fitted in, and that is why the town received the *ius Italicum*.<sup>2</sup> Thus the scope and purpose of the foundation bring it into line with the great Gallic colonies of Autun, Saintes or Fréjus, and

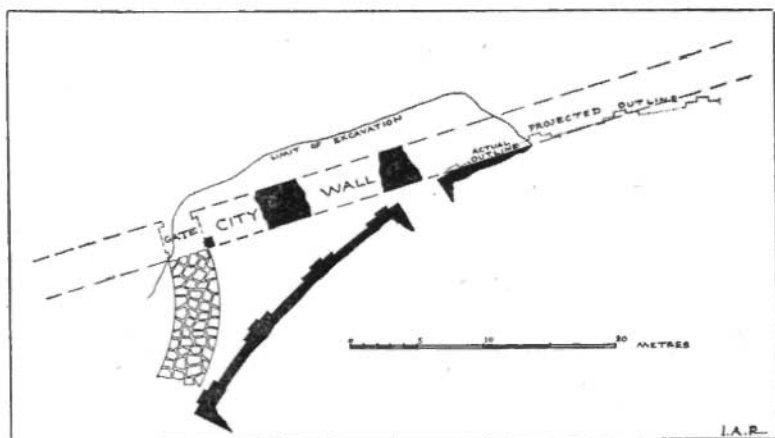


FIG. 2. THE CITY-WALL AND AMPHITHEATRE, MERIDA

it differs essentially from Turin, Aosta, or Lubljana. Precisely in this difference emerges the statecraft of Augustus.

The second argument is more important. It states that the Town-wall embodies the Amphitheatre, as at Trier,<sup>3</sup> Solin<sup>4</sup> or Tours.<sup>5</sup> Actually, the reverse is true. The Town-wall originally ran free, and the Amphitheatre was built up against it, as its plan (Fig. 2) and impressions (Pl. i) in its unfaced concrete prove. But the Amphitheatre was complete, as the inscription<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Camulodunum, Tac. *Ann.* xiv, 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Digest*, L. 15, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Krencker, *Das römische Trier*, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Salonae, *Recherches à Salone*, plan B, pp. 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> Tours, Blanchet, *Enceintes de la Gaule Romaine*, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Macias, *Mérida monumental y artística*, p. 110; not given in *Eph. Epigr.* ix.

on its front seats proves, by 8 B.C., and the extensive Town-wall must be at least as old as this. Another consideration may make it even older. The largest and simplest of the aqueducts (from the Pantano de Cornalvo), which supplies the great bulk of the town, stands in the same relation to the Wall as does the Amphitheatre, being built against the back of the Wall as soon as it enters the town. This is proved by impressions in the concrete, although the wall itself is now gone. Now the water-supply, a primary concern of a growing town, is likely to be older than the Amphitheatre, and so the Town-wall seems to be pushed back further still. On the other hand, time must be allowed between the laying out of the town and its equipment with this irregularly-planned Wall, built round a pre-existing street-plan, like the Walls of London<sup>1</sup> or of Autun.<sup>2</sup> A clue to the length of this interval, not necessarily at all long, may some day be given by the drainage-system. This is all of the same type, and its plan has been recovered through the watchfulness of the town's engineer, Sr. Galván; its outlying parts are not extensions, but are connected with the homogeneous set of sewer-mouths in the great river-embankment. On the other hand, they are older than the Theatre, dated<sup>3</sup> to 16 B.C., and thus it becomes clear that the large town was laid out at once, between 25 and 16 B.C., and that by the latter date the Wall could have been erected. Finally, it is evident that, when the Wall came, the area originally planned was not quite full, since the corner of one *insula* at least goes outside the fortified area. This is, however, a very small modification, and the city as walled certainly comes into line with the other great towns of the Augustan world, Arelate, Augustodunum and Nemausus.

It may be added that the coinage<sup>4</sup> of Emerita supports this reading of the evidence. As is well-known, Augustus took immediate advantage of the

<sup>1</sup> R. *Comm. Anc. Mon, London* iii, p. 68.

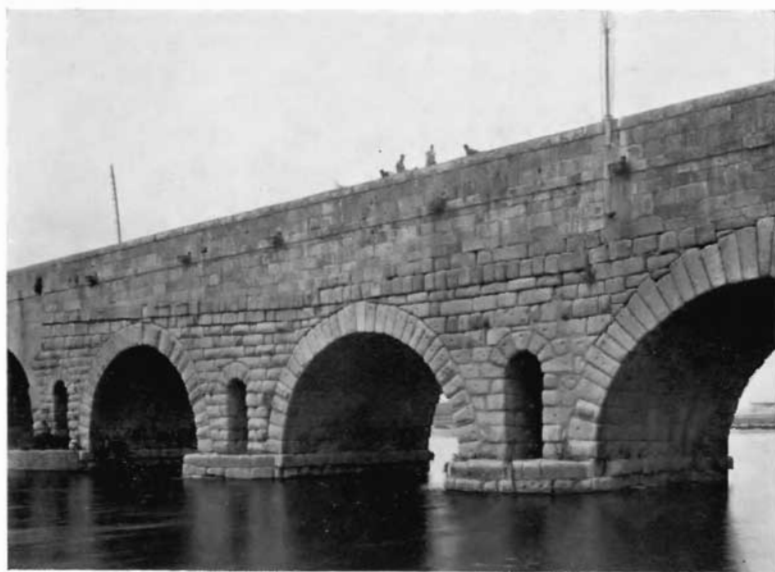
<sup>2</sup> Blanchet, p. 16; Haverfield, *Anc. Town-planning*, fig. 29, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Macias, p. 78, gives date wrongly. *C.I.L.* ii, 474.

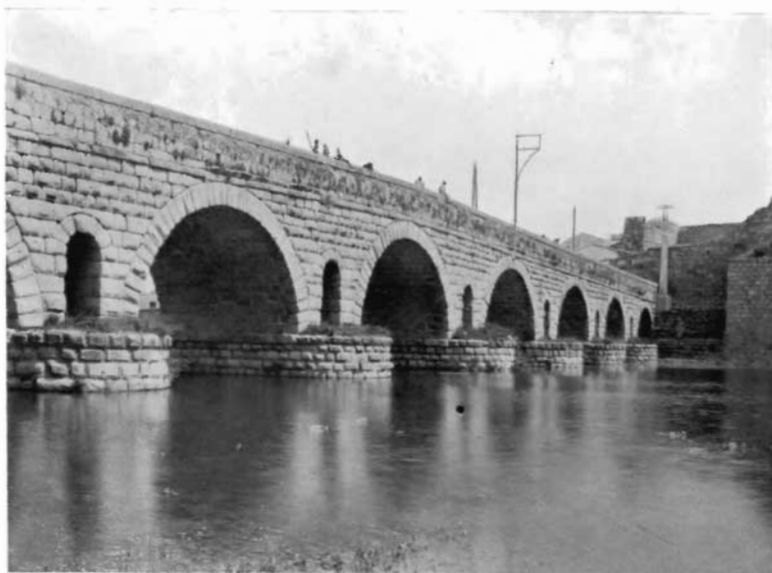
<sup>4</sup> See n. 1 = Donaldson, *Architectura Numismatica*, 86.



MÉRIDA : ROMAN CITY-WALL (A-A) AND AMPHITHEATRE (B-B)  
(The line of the city-wall here cuts across the curve of the  
amphitheatre)



A. THE GUADIANA BRIDGE, MERIDA, LOOKING DOWNSTREAM  
Note the sloping road and holes in the stones for shears.



B. THE GUADIANA BRIDGE, APPROACHING MÉRIDA  
The concrete telegraph-pole stands on the embankment-wall, built  
in turn against the bridge. The tower is Visigothic.

foundation of this colony, and of his organisation of metalliferous Spain, to establish there a mint, striking coins of all denominations. At first, this was done by Imperial right through the legate, P. Carisius, later by Imperial promotion. Now the first coins of Carisius, dating before 23 B.C., have the reverse of the City gate, labelled EMERITA, and still used by Mérida as its coat of arms. There can be no doubt that this Gate, of typically Augustan type, is a copy of the actual gateways with which the town was provided. But the theory of an earlier circuit of walls is based upon the acceptance of the '*Arco de Traiano*' as the east Gate of the colony; and this Arch (see Fig. 3) has nothing in common with the gate shown on the coins, or, indeed, with any defensive gateway, though many affinities with early triumphal Arches.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the one main Gate of the extended Wall, in the grounds of Sr. Galván, though much reduced and rebuilt, is of the type shown on the coin, a double gate-way, flanked by circular towers. So it becomes evident that there is indeed a connexion between the coins and actuality, and that the defensive scheme of Carisius, as published before 23 B.C., was carried out in connexion with the Wall of wide extent, and not in connexion with a wall of small perimeter, for the existence of which there is no foundation.

Once the supposed early colony is rejected, there is room for a fresh examination of Mérida's initial aspect. And this is worth while because its monuments, of which several are dated, are linked by correspondences in material and technique. They form a rare picture of the scene of building activity at the foundation of a colony, such as is quite unrivalled in the Augustan world. The monuments themselves are also interesting for the technique employed in their erection, since they were being erected just when concrete building was ousting stone-work as the skeletal medium in monumental construction.

(c) THE FORMATION OF THE NEW COMMUNITY. We have seen that the drainage-system is the earliest

<sup>1</sup> cf. Curtis, *Suppl. Pap. Amer. Acad. Rome*, ii, nos. 1-25.



recognisable feature in the lay-out of the town. But at least two monuments precede it, the bridge which carries the main road to Seville across the Guadiana, and the great river-embankment into which the drains are made to run. Of these two, the Guadiana bridge is the older, since the embankment is built up against its abutment; and thus the bridge emerges as the oldest monument in Emerita, connecting the town with Baetica and the mining regions which supplied its mint. Its position is determined by the convenient island in the river, and it governs in turn the whole lay-out of the City. The road to *Norba*, on the other hand, which crosses Rio Albarregas by a smaller bridge, is aligned on the north-west gate of the City, and not on the great bridge-head. Thus it comes after the foundation of the City, unlike the southern road, though it cannot be much later in date. The order is, therefore, first the great bridge, then the lay-out of the new town and the control of the water up-stream by a great river-embankment, with which is connected half of the new drainage-system. Finally, there follows rapidly the great frontier road to *Norba*, *Salamantica* and *Asturica*.

The great bridge (Pl. ii, A and B) is remarkable for its length rather than for any other feature in its construction. It may be compared with the great viaduct across the Cervaro valley on the Via Traiana in central Italy.<sup>1</sup> Its cut-waters are round and the piece which exhibits pointed cut-waters is a later reconstruction. Only about half of the bridge crosses the river bed, the rest is an arched embankment crossing the low ground on the south side of the river; and even the river-bed section has a convenient island in the middle of it. The spanning of the Guadiana was thus a much less formidable task than might be supposed from the size of the bridge. Rather than one bridge, there are three separate bridges, on which the levels are different and not related to one another. Each of the stones used has been swung into position by a crane with shears, as the holes in the stones demonstrate. The first bridge, of nine piers, spans the main stream of the

<sup>1</sup> Ashby and Gardner, *P.B.S.R.* viii, p. 144.

river, between the town and the island, rising towards the centre from each side. The piers have large flood arches, and the road-way, marked by a simple mould, is placed only two thin courses above the top of the arch-rings, thus reducing to the minimum the weight which they have to support. On the west side the bridge continues straight on; on the east, up-stream, it is linked with an embankment which prevents the island from being washed away; but this has relieving arches in it, with a double row of tiles on their extrados, and does not look so early as the bridge. The next section, also rising gently to a peak, has been rebuilt for the space of ten piers, and spans a narrower, swifter-running arm of the river; it had about thirty piers. The third section is twenty-one piers long, with very close-set arches, unprovided with cut-waters, and the road descends to it on an embankment cut by three small arches.

The size of the bridge testifies, however, to the potential turbulence of the river which it crosses. The city was therefore protected<sup>1</sup> from the flood waters by a great Embankment (Pl. iii, A), sixty-four bays long. Each of these bays was marked by an external buttress, 0.90 metres long, by 0.60 in projection, built of blocks 0.60 by 0.30 in size, and 0.60 and 0.65 high. The bays themselves were 4.75 metres long. Thus the whole structure measured, by computation, 361.60 metres long, to which have to be added 2.95 metres from the west end; thus 364.55 metres in all. Each bay was also divided by an internal buttress, arranged, like the external buttresses, in headers and stretchers, and these internal buttresses continued right up to the top of the structure through four courses, or layers, of concrete, measuring 0.60, 0.60, 0.60, 0.70 in height, each set back 0.10 behind the other. The water-level was reckoned at nine courses of blocks down, for here were provided the sewer-mouths, which came at external piers 1, 14, 21, 35, 54 and 63. External piers 1, 8, 9, 25, 28, 29 and 55 are missing, and at the position of 9 there was some special feature in the wall, like a sluice-gate, perhaps the outlet of a stream; and the east end of the

<sup>1</sup> Such quays as the town possessed seem to have lain on the island.

embankment seems to have had a similar feature. Both lie opposite breaks in the contours of the site, but both are too much ruined for their purpose to be apparent.

The sewer mouths were, with the exception of the westernmost, rectangular openings in the embankment wall, 1.20 high by 0.70 wide. The ducts behind them were of the same dimensions, with an arched top turned in tiles, and sides built up in *opus incertum*. The westernmost sewer-mouth had the arched top continued to the face of the embankment wall by an arcuate lintel. All the mouths were barred across by iron gratings, set in lead, for which the holes remain (see Pl. iii, A). For this may be compared the iron gratings at the entry of streams into Roman London in Blomfield Street.<sup>1</sup>

The northern bridge, across Rio Albarregas (*Alba regia*) is a small viaduct of four arches (Pl. iii, B). The whole is built in smaller blocks than the Guadiana bridge, and these are much weathered, so as not to show everywhere the holes for the shears that lifted them into place. Two courses above the keystone comes the roadway, marked by a string-mould, which is pierced, above the centre of each arch, by a drain spout. The parapet is modern. The only other feature of interest is the embankment which leads down to the bridge from the town. This is sloping, and the levelling off does not begin until the crown of the first great arch is reached, an unexpected and rare feature. Just before reaching the bridge, two small flood-arches have been inserted in the embankment, for Rio Albarregas is a turbulent little stream: on the other hand, there are no cut-waters.

The next stage in the evolution of the City is marked by the erection of the city wall. The course of this is reasonably certain, and the position of some Gates is known. Gates must have existed at each end of both the *kardo* and *decumanus*. Another main Gate exists in the grounds of Sr. Galván, where the main road from Toledo entered the City. A single gate lies next to the Amphitheatre, giving access to the Circus

<sup>1</sup> *R. Comm. Anc. Mon.*, London iii, p. 87.



A. THE EMBANKMENT-WALL, MÉRIDA, BAYS 54, 55  
Note the buttress-system and the sewer-mouth, with bar-holes.



B. ALBARREGAS BRIDGE, MÉRIDA  
The Aqueduct of Los Milagros is in the background.



STATUE OF AGRIPPA, MÉRIDA

and to a cemetery. Perhaps all the Gates that need be presumed in addition are posterns in the river-wall, to deal with water-borne traffic.

The wall itself is visible near the Amphitheatre (see Pl. i; Fig. 2), in very fragmentary condition. It was laid on the ground without levelling except on the immediate surface of its course. Its width is three metres, and it is faced with large *opus incertum*, resembling in this respect the earlier walls of Turin and Ostia, but it seems to have had no bonding-course and no offsets. As has already been noted, the Amphitheatre impinges upon it and is laid up against the back of it. The same thing happened at the southern branch of the Cornalvo aqueduct, for the outer face of the aqueduct retains the impressions of an *opus incertum* wall in its unfaced concrete, while the inner face is properly enclosed in *opus incertum*, and at one point contains a rectangular recess, 0.50 metres deep and 9.0 metres long, as if the back of a tower belonging to the wall had projected here. This is the only hint of a wall-tower now in existence on the circuit.

The area thus enclosed was rapidly filled with public buildings. One temple still stands, and the decorations of another were stolen to decorate the shrine of Sta. Eulalia, but only the standing temple belongs to the first years of the town. This is hexastyle peripteral, with octostyle sides, and the bold mouldings associated with its podium testify to its Augustan date. The order is Corinthian, stuccoed; the bases Attic, without a *scotia* between the two *tori*, resembling in this respect Augustan bases from the theatre, but rare enough outside Mérida.

Similar mouldings appeared on a great building associated with an extra large *insula* and measured by Laborde.<sup>1</sup> This had an apsidal end, backed by offices, and it yielded a statue of Diana, two statues of magistrates, and one of Agrippa<sup>2</sup> (Pl. iv) the town's great benefactor. The two magistrates were carved in one sculptor's workshop, and are marked<sup>3</sup> EX.

<sup>1</sup> Melida, *Monumentos romanos de España*, pl. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Macias, p. 186, fig. 64.

<sup>3</sup> *Eph. Epigr.* ix, p. 26 = viii, 21 = Macias, p. 194, fig. 69.

OFICINA . GAI AVLI. Thus, the building looks as if it were secular in purpose, perhaps a *curia*, or a *basilica* like those of Roman Africa, rather than the temple which Laborde restored, in the mentality of his age. From in front of it, in Calle Abalos, came in 1929 a magnificent keystone carved with a bull's torso (Pl. v, A) one of the most splendid sculptures in Spain. Clearly the official centre of the town was not far away.

Another noteworthy embellishment of the town was the '*Arco de Traiano*' (Fig. 3), spanning the *kardo* and obviously early in date. This comes into place not

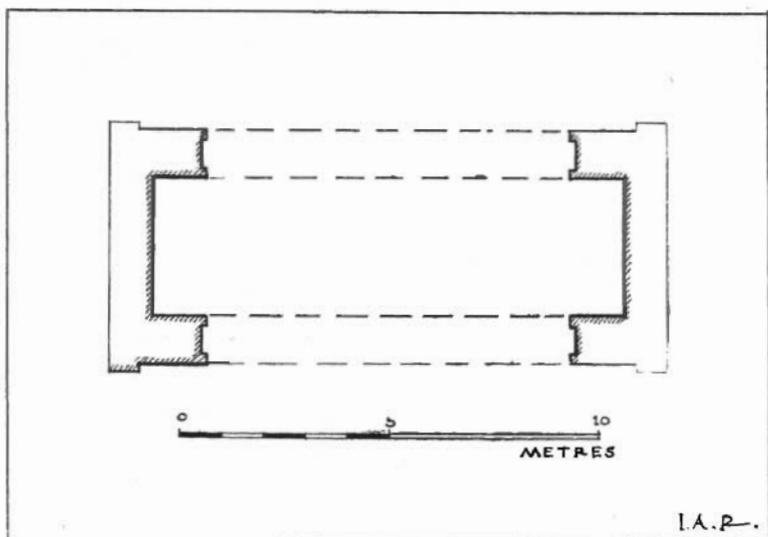


FIG. 3. '*ARCO DE TRAIANO*,' MÉRIDA

The thick hatched lines represent what can be seen.

as the East Gate of the city, but as a monumental arch, whose great monolithic voussoirs connect it with the entrance to the precinct in Tarraco's citadel,<sup>1</sup> and with the Augustan buildings<sup>2</sup> of Nimes. The whole monument was once covered with marble, and its vertical sides were cut in half by a moulding, making the decoration rather simple and small in scale, but beyond this no relic survives to indicate its character.

<sup>1</sup> Capdevila, *Tarragona*, p. 51. An excellent volume of photographs is published by the Sindicato de Iniciativa; of which this is no. 12.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Pont du Gard.



It is quite certain that this was never a defensive Gate. But it is just possible that it was associated with some precinct, since the modern Plaza de Santiago, in the *insula* westward, is cut by the second north-to-south main street, and covers a temple-site<sup>1</sup> of some importance, which produced three altars and a pedestal inscribed, in second-century lettering, CONCORDIAE AVGVSTI. On the other hand, the junction of this street with the *kardo* was a very suitable point to choose for a free-standing monumental arch.

Once the town was laid out and building was proceeding, the water-supply must have commanded attention. The view has already been expressed that the aqueduct from Pantano de Cornalvo, which runs behind the Town-wall for part of its course, is the earliest of the three which supply the town (Fig. 1). This opinion is based upon the fact that most of the town can be served from this aqueduct, which has also the largest channel of the three. In addition, no high bridging was needed along its course, since it did not cross the Rio Albarregas. It follows the contours and took less time to build. The other two are really supplementary, the first supplying the western hill, from the Pantano de Carija: the second, from Rabo de Buey, looks as if it were aiming for a central public building, like Baths. Yet their erection cannot have been very long delayed, for they are both connected with the Amphitheatre, dated to 8 B.C. (see below), by their brickwork, measuring  $0.30-0.28 \times 0.40 \times 0.05$  metres, while the Acueducto de San Lázaro has a peculiar arrangement of the skew-backs in its main arch, in relation to the adjacent piers, which also appears at the Amphitheatre (Pl. v, B; cf. Pl. viii, A). As between the two aqueducts, it is not clear which came first, but it should be noted that the Acueducto de San Lázaro has less primitive tiled arches than Los Milagros. They may therefore be placed in this order; (1) Aqueduct from Pantano de Cornalvo; (2) Los Milagros, from Pantano de Carija; (3) Acueducto de San Lázaro, from Rabo de Buey. This building-programme went on for some time, but its last stages were associated with the

<sup>1</sup> Macias, p. 31 = Melida, *op. cit.* pp. 69-70.



Amphitheatre of 8 B.C. The early date is also supported by the primitive character of the masonry of the piers. This is built round a concrete core, as the accompanying plate (Pl. vi, A) shows, with a dangerously small amount of bonding, and there is no proper connexion between the lower halves of the buttresses and the piers, although the buttresses were clearly planned from the first. The whole structure shows an ignorance of the principles of concrete building which is only equalled by that of the Augustan Trophy at La Turbie.<sup>1</sup> In bonding the whole structure the tile courses, which go right through, have to do all the work, and even they only provide a source of horizontal cleavage. The structure owes its stability entirely to the excellence of the mortar which composes it, a factor in which the original builders probably put least trust.

Another feature in which the work seems to have reached only an experimental stage, is in the turning of arches in tiles. It was not difficult to do this at the top of the aqueducts, where a special seating was provided at the top of the piers from which a plain arch-ring might spring. But on the high piers of Los Milagros, there was an intermediate series of arches, guarding the structure against wind-strain. Much difficulty seems to have been experienced in providing a proper seating for these, and for the first few arches from the south, each set is executed in a different fashion. The work does not become uniform until the centre of the great series is reached.

Thus far, our concern has been with utilitarian buildings. But at an early date Agrippa marked the interest of the reigning House in the well-being of the new community, by presenting a Theatre to the town. This was ready by 16 B.C., with its stuccoed entablatures inscribed<sup>2</sup> M.AGRIPPA.L.F.COS.III.TRIB.POT.III. (see Appendix), and it still remains one of the most spectacular sights in Mérida. The stage has been largely restored, from plentiful fragments of sculpture,

<sup>1</sup> Personal observation. The main weight is taken by stone piers, mixed with rib-walls of faced concrete.

Between these is a concrete mass treated exactly like earth filling.

<sup>2</sup> *C.I.L.* ii, 478 = Macias, p. 78.



A. KEYSTONE WITH BULL'S TORSO, CALLE DE ABALOS, MÉRIDA



B. ACUEDUCTO DE SAN LÁZARO, MÉRIDA  
Note the bonding of voussoirs with coursed masonry



A. AQUEDUCT OF LOS MILAGROS, MÉRIDA  
Note relation of masonry to concrete and  
bonding-courses of tile



B. MAIN ENTRANCE TO ORCHESTRA, THEATRE, MÉRIDA  
 Note holes for bronze-lettered inscription of Agrippa.  
 The decoration was chiselled off later for the applica-  
 tion of stucco, associated with the column-base

and now has the form which it received in the second century, after a Hadrianic repair. But the auditorium still keeps its Augustan characteristics, primitive vaulting, with brick very sparsely used, and heavy mouldings (Pl. vi, B) strongly Tuscan in feeling.<sup>1</sup> The relation of this building to the town drainage-system has already been mentioned. One of the drains lies below it, on a different orientation, not adjusted to the building above. This is clearly older than the Theatre, and thus gives a clue to the early date of the drainage system, even on the widely extended plan. It is interesting to observe, throughout this building, the extreme distrust of concrete as a weight-bearing material, which is so characteristic a prejudice of Augustan builders. The main passages leading to the orchestra are both turned in stone barrel-vaults, of which the voussoirs at the right-angled turn are cut so that they interlock and turn the angle. At the level of the top of the first tier all the downward passages (Pl. vii, A) are vaulted in stone. In the upper ones, where there is less weight, concrete vaulting appears, sparsely used, and supported by frequent rings of stone, with transverse voussoirs arranged like stretchers, and designed to bond in with the ridiculously small panel of concrete; also, the side walls of the passage are stepped, so as to give the maximum amount of stone-work, and the minimum amount of concrete. Finally, on the upward passages at the very top of the building, where there is no longer any great weight to support, vaults turned in tiles appear. The whole use of concrete and tiles is evidently in a transitional stage, for, eight years later, bolder work in both materials is being done at the Amphitheatre, now to be considered.

The Amphitheatre is dated by a fragmentary inscription<sup>2</sup> of Augustus, which mentions his sixteenth *tribunicia potestas*, to 8 B.C., and, as this record came from a frieze attached to a front row of seats, the building was probably finished by that date. There

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Falerii, Porta di Giove: Rivoira, *Roman Architecture*, p. 58. It will be noted that the moulding of the Mérida extrados was once re-

turned in the same manner, as an impost moulding.

<sup>2</sup> Macias, p. 110.

was no high external façade, since the bowl of the auditorium was deeply dug down into the hilly north-east corner of the town. The relation of the building to the town wall has been discussed already. In construction, the same tendency continues as was noted in the theatre, namely, to use stone wherever weight or pressure had to be carried. Thus all the archway piers are in stone, as well as the great arches, and many of the piers are arranged in headers and stretchers, so as to bond better with the panels of light facing between them, and to distribute and spread the weight (Pl. vii, B). This device was widely distributed in antiquity, and appears again in Mérida on the river-embankment, in Spain at the Temple of Vich,<sup>1</sup> in Provence in the Temple of Vernègues,<sup>2</sup> and in Africa in the Capitolium at Dougga.<sup>3</sup> For the first time, tiles are used for turning the vaults of the great entrance passage-ways, of which the outer doorways are crowned by magnificent segmental arches, and flanked by splendid piers of rusticated masonry (Pl. viii, A). The side walls are faced in *opus incertum*, and crowned by a little impost mould made with three specially cut tiles, arranged with that care which attaches to all early Roman tile-work.<sup>4</sup> Tile-facing is also much more extensively used than in the Theatre, for the whole of the face of the second tier of seats is faced with tiles, with frequent pilasters (Pl. ix): and the dimensions<sup>5</sup> of the tiles correspond exactly with those used on the aqueducts of Los Milagros and San Lázaro. This is not the only correspondence between the Amphitheatre and the Aqueducts: the special archway at San Lázaro, where the aqueduct of that name crossed the Toledo road, has the same kind of curious bonding of skewback and pilaster in its arches as appears at the main passages of the Amphitheatre (see Pl. v, B and viii, A). Finally, the large flat arches of stone should also be noted (see Pl. vii, B). These too are typical of their age: but the whole building sur-

<sup>1</sup> Melida, *op. cit.* pl. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Les villes romaines de la vallée du Rhône*, pp. 76-7. Better, Formige. Temple de Vernègues, *Bull. Antiqu. de France*, 1924, pp. 74-80.

<sup>3</sup> Dougga; Cagnat et Gauckler, *Mon. Hist. de la Tunisie*, i, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Rivoira, *Roman Architecture*, pp. 41-45. cf. *P.B.S.R.* x, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> i.e.  $0.45 \times 0.28 = 0.05$  metres.



A. THE THEATRE, MÉRIDA  
PASSAGE AT FIRST-FLOOR LEVEL, FROM  
STREET OUTSIDE



B. THE AMPHITHEATRE, MÉRIDA. WEST MAIN ENTRANCE,  
LONG AXIS

Note relation of concrete-coursing and stonework.





A. THE AMPHITHEATRE, MÉRIDA. ENTRANCE AT FIRST-FLOOR LEVEL,  
NORTH SIDE

Note segmental and flat stone arches ; rusticated masonry ; tile impost-mould ; vault turned in tiles ; coursing in *opus incertum*.



B. THE CIRCUS, MÉRIDA. INSCRIPTION COMMEMORATING RESTORATION  
OF A.D. 337-40

passes, in the boldness of its masonry, and in the frequent use of concrete and tiles, contemporary work in Rome.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is in this new field, unprovided with older buildings and therefore unhampered by tradition, that we should expect a new tradition to emerge rather than in the Capital, where conservatism had to be respected.

From the Amphitheatre it is an easy walk, by way of the San Lázaro aqueduct, to the Circus. The inhabitants of Roman Spain, which produced the fine Asturian<sup>2</sup> race-horses, seem to have been especially devoted to this form of entertainment. Their mosaics<sup>3</sup> reflect it, and the buildings themselves survive at Tarragona, Toledo, Sagunto and Calahorra; no doubt there are others which have yet to be recognised. The Circus of Mérida, faced throughout in *opus incertum*, is a very remarkable object-lesson in earth-and-concrete construction, from its elliptical vaulting, carried on earth-centring and stone piers, to its earth-packed cavity-walls. The best parallel in Spain is the Circus of Toledo, much less well preserved and equally rich in constructional detail. Both monuments are clearly Augustan in date. But the only inscription from either is the fourth-century stone (Pl. viii, B) from Mérida, recording the restoration of the Circus in the following terms<sup>4</sup>: FLORENTISSIMO ET BEATISSIMO SAECVLO FAVENTE FELICITATE ADVENTVS DOMINORVM IMPERATORVMQVE NOSTRORVM FLAVI CLAVDI CON- STANTINI VICTORIS ET FLAVI IVLI CONSTANTI ET FLAV.IVL.VICTORVM FORTISSIMORVMQVE SEMPER AVGSTORVM CIRCVM VETVSTATE CONLAPSVM TIBERIVS

<sup>1</sup> Resembling, in fact, much more closely the work of Claudius; cf. Rivoira, *Roman Architecture*, pp. 67-9.

<sup>2</sup> Asturian horses, *asturcones*; Martial, xiv, 99.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the mosaic in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, from Gerona.

<sup>4</sup> The restored portions are underlined. 'In the most prosperous and richest age, under favour of the happy Advent of Our Lords and Emperors Flavius Claudius Constantinus Victor

and Flavius Julius Constantius and Flavius Julius Constans, Victorious and Mightiest, perpetual Augusti: Tiberius Flavius Laetus, Consular and Count, disposed that the Circus, ruined through time, should be built with new columns, covered with new works of ornament, and flooded with water; thus, both the presence of His Excellency Julius Saturninus, Provincial Governor, and the aspect of the well-performed restoration gave to the Splendid Colony of Emeritans the very greatest joy.'

FLAV LAETVS V.C. COMES COLVMNIS ERIGI NOVIS ORNAMENTORVM FABRICIS CINGI AQVIS INVNDARI DISPOSVIT ADQVE ITA INSISTENTE V.P.IVLIO SATVRNINO P.P. ITA CONPETENTER RESTITVTA EIVS FACIES SPLENDIDISSIMAE COLONIAE EMERITENSIVM QVAM MAXIMAM TRIBVIT VOLVPTATEM. The inscription is especially interesting owing to the reference to the use of the Circus as a *naumachia*, doubtless supplied from the adjacent Aqueduct of San Lázaro. But the whole text is a magnificent example of fourth-century epigraphy, with its full information and its graceful compliment to the provincial Governor. It is to be dated between 337 and 340, and the erasures commemorate the assassinations which ruined the Constantinian House. The first erasure will belong to 340, the second<sup>1</sup> to the time of Magnentius (350-353).

This completes the list of the early monuments of Mérida. There is a good deal to add later; the so-called *casa-basilica*; the Mithraeum of San Alvin, discovered below the modern Bull-ring, which yielded an exceptionally interesting group of statuary; the decoration of the temple of Mars; and, above all, the theatre-stage and its statues. Nevertheless, the bulk of the monuments now visible fall early, as has been demonstrated, and the quantity thereof is perhaps unmatched in any other town of Western Europe.

The order of building seems to have been as follows:

- (1) The Guadiana bridge; road to Hispalis. 25-23 B.C.
- (2) The drains and *insulae*; with which connects,
- (3) The River-Embankment.
- (4) The Albarregas bridge; road to Salamantica and Asturica.
- (5) The City Wall and Gates. c. 23 B.C.
- (6) The Cornalvo Aqueduct.
- (7) Agrippa's Theatre. 16 B.C.
- (8) Los Milagros Aqueduct,  
structurally related to
- (9) San Lázaro Aqueduct.
- (10) The Amphitheatre. 8 B.C.
- (11) The Circus. ??

<sup>1</sup> cf. Dessau, 729—C.J.L. xiv, 3582.



THE AMPHITHEATRE, MÉRIDA  
PASSAGE AT FIRST-FLOOR LEVEL

Note brickwork and header and stretcher bonding  
of kerb.



It is not now possible to fit into their places in the scheme the public buildings inside the town ; but they should come between 23 and 16 B.C., since they are necessities rather than luxuries, and none is late in style, even for the Augustan age. But eleven early monuments is a formidable list. The Circus may well fit in earlier, perhaps before the Amphitheatre rather than after it.

The interest of the list is that it gives a criterion by which the rate of development, or formative period, in the life of a provincial capital can be gauged. Again, it provides a remarkable number of early Augustan monuments, built at a period when Roman constructional practice was about to undergo great changes. These buildings provide anticipations of some, but are especially far advanced in stone-mason's technique rather than in the use of concrete, where their affinities are with Turin and northern Italy. But this is a question which must be reserved for the wider study which the writer hopes to make.

#### APPENDIX

##### A NOTE ON THE INSCRIBED ENTABLATURES OF THE THEATRE, MÉRIDA

As Dessau (130) drily notes, the stuccoed entablatures have been published thrice in this century, but it has not been remarked that both their position and their composition are curious. It might be expected that the main record of such a gift would be in a more prominent position and that it would be carved in stone, not moulded in stucco. Now this was in fact so, for before the Theatre was re-organised, in connexion with the second-century re-building of the stage, the two fine arches to right and left of the stage were the main entrances to the *orchestra*, and their entablatures (see Pl. vi, B) were also inscribed, with a great inscription in letters of gilded bronze. One of these (the southern) has perished : just over half of the other remains. But

it is not difficult to read; and the restoration of the missing portion is certain, for there is just enough of it left to ensure that the numbers were written as words. The relation of the letters to the holes for the pins which held them, together with a restoration of the missing third, are shown in the accompanying figure (Fig. 4). The inscription reads M.AGRIPPA.L.F.COS. TERT. TRIB.POTEST.TERT, and was repaired at least once, as shown by new holes for the L and for the stop that follows.

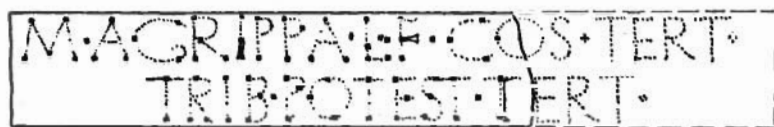


FIG. 4. INSCRIPTION OF AGRIPPA, IN BRONZE LETTERS, MÉRIDA

Later, the whole entablature was trimmed flush with the wall and covered with stucco in order to serve as the internal wall of a new room on this wing of the stage (see Pl. vi, B). The question then arises whether this may not have been the occasion when the text of the inscription was adapted to serve on the stuccoed entablatures facing the *orchestra*. These inscriptions are small, their position is not very suitable for wide advertisement, but they may well have been considered sufficient by a restorer to remind the public of the original donor when at least one of his dedicatory inscriptions had vanished from sight. Now this point fits well with the Hadrianic restoration of the building, already attested by an inscription (C.I.L. ii, 478). The statement of Spartian (*Vit. Hadr.* 19) on Hadrian's restorations in the Capital is well known: *ea omnia propriis auctorum nominibus consecravit*, and the classic case is the Pantheon. May we not see here the official policy at work in a provincial capital, and thus assign this particular change to its place among the other Hadrianic alterations in the theatre? In its way, it seems to attest their date as strikingly as the inscription which mentions his name.