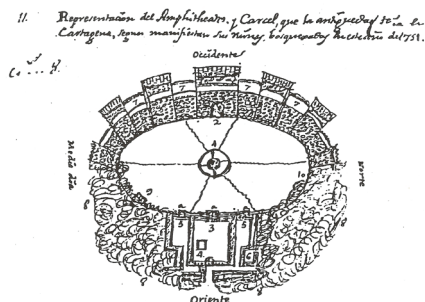


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A Building in Six Times. The Feast of Death in Cartagena

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Cities can be perceived as an accumulation of built-up layers that are related through their superimposition over time. Each of these layers offers data of historical memory recognisable in their constructions. The building which was an amphitheatre in Carthago Nova, a quarry in Carthago Spartaria, a cemetery and bullring in Cartagena, which was almost an art space and which can become a city museum or archive, is one of these cases where the coexistence of forms and uses can be reconstructed in a panoramic view of more than two thousand years.



ROMAN AMPHITHEATRE 1ST CENTURY AD

The first traces of the amphitheatre were made in the Republican period, to be extended and reach its monumental phase in the last quarter of the 1st century AD¹.

The amphitheatre was built on the hill of La Concepción, on the outskirts of the city, on

schist, taking advantage of the slope of the hillside to support the north-west *ima* and *media cavea* and only having to raise, on vaults and buttresses, the south-east *cavea* (fig. 01). Its plan is elliptical, as befits its function as a circus space according to the type used by the Roman builders. It measures 110 m long by 77 m wide on the outer sides, similar to the amphitheatre of Tarragona, with a perimeter of 942 Roman feet, and it is thought that it could hold around 11,000 spectators, five times less than the amphitheatre in Rome and two-thirds of the one in Mérida. The arena measures 60m x 37m².

The amphitheatre is a key part of Roman urbanity because of its enormous size, together with the theatre, with a capacity of up to seven thousand spectators in Cartagena³, the forum and other smaller buildings such as the baths, the palestra, the curia and various temples for different gods⁴ (fig. 02).

In the year 298, a large part of the eastern sector of the city was transformed, due to the strong political and economic changes, using materials from the buildings constructed during the Roman monumental period, as happened with the colonnaded⁵ market built over the Roman theatre, taking advantage of its rich materials to build foundations and walls. At this time the amphitheatre had probably already lost its function and a process of slow degradation and reuse of its materials had begun, which was

reinforced at key moments in its history: in 425, the city was sacked by the Vandals⁶, in 622 the Visigoths destroyed it, in 1245 it was conquered by Fernando III the Saint after a hard siege...

QUARRY

A la falda del castillo sobre la parte de Levante ay grandísimos fragmentos de edificios donde estava la Chancillería o convento lurídico de Cartagena en un famoso Coliseo no de menor grandeza que el Romano. De aquí los vezinos sin orden han sacado lindas piedras, figuras antiguallas y columnas y sobre quatro destas está fundada la Yglesia Matriz desta ciudad que admira su grandor y altura siendo piedras vivas de una pieza cada

qual. Hasta en nuestro tiempo se llevó de aquí Vespesiano Gonçaga bellísimas ymágenes de piedra para honrar con el desecho desta ciudad su principado. Y aquellos pedaços por allí derramados llaman aora Antiguones.

Discurso de la Ciudad de Cartagena, Francisco Cascales (1598)⁷

A building with several thousand square metres of façade requires an enormous economic, material and human effort for its construction, which must be planned, balanced, firm and beautiful. Its dismantling, progressive and anarchic, only requires abandonment over time. About a thousand years after its construction, the Arab geographer Al Idrisi⁸, who travelled around the Iberian Peninsula describing its cities in the 12th century, is reported to have spoken of Cartagena, describing the "house of lions", a volume that was to be silhouetted against the horizon and would continue to show an imposing presence to travellers.

For a long period of time, the building is simply a place without use, an abandoned object that gradually falls apart. Where its most superficial elements, decorations and finishes, are dispersed and reused in other constructions in visible noble areas, other times, they are only mass and filler in walls and foundations. All that remains is the geometric outline of its supporting walls and foundations, with the memory of what happened there now erased.

CEMETERY

Carlos III's project for the "enlightened development" of the city drew up a new defensive wall inside which the amphitheatre remained, and two new buildings were erected around it: the Royal Hospital and the Antiguones Barracks⁹. In

addition, an "Amphitheatre of Autopsies" was built, separate from the Hospital and adjacent to the remains of the amphitheatre, which was used as an unregulated cemetery.

In the stratigraphic sections, from the level of the sand of the amphitheatre, the human remains appear about 1m below the level of the sand of the bullring, occupying a layer of dark earth. It gives the impression that the bodies had been carelessly dumped, deaths resulting from epidemics, the bodies of soldiers and sailors with no family to care for their corpses, which were cut open and chopped up in the amphitheatre and then abandoned in a disorderly fashion on the abandoned ground of the adjoining building.

BULLRING

In 1854 it was decided to take advantage of the site of Antiguones to build a bullring. The level of the arena of the bullring was 4 m above the level of the amphitheatre and the remains that remained above this 4 m were razed to the ground. These remains

were used as fill to fill in the vaulted spaces of the "carcieri" and other rooms below the level of the arena. The inner perimeter of the arena lies within the minor axis of the ancient amphitheatre, with an inner diameter of 44m and an outer diameter of 70m (fig. 03).

Building, razing and clogging, eliminates all vestiges and, in this way, erases the memory that remains buried. A few years later, in 1868, the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann came to the Dardanelles to search for the remains of the city of Troy¹⁰. This new spirit signalled a cultural change in the reading of history

and its traces that had not yet reached Cartagena¹¹, where progress eliminated the old amphitheatre and founded a new one, with a similar use, the feast of death, but with a different geometry.

The new bullring, instead of being an autonomous object on the outside of the city, completes an urban ensemble formed by the cylinder of the bullring and the two large parallelepipeds that form the barracks and the hospital¹², defining a public urban space with the potential to become one of the monumental spaces of the city.

The bullring was renovated and enlarged in 1911, adding a façade with Arabic decoration in keeping with the taste of the time. In contrast to the clarity and simplicity of the previous circular volume, the aim was to make it more representative and attractive to the public. In addition, the capacity of the stands was increased by raising a light cast-iron structure on two levels above the stone stands, and a series of service parts were built to improve its operation.

The Ortega Cano bullring was closed in 1986, probably due to the progressive decrease in its economic profitability, but also because of the annoying coexistence with Roman remains that began to be protected by means of preventive actions in 1960, carried out by Pedro Sanmartín, 100 years after they had been buried and forgotten. The severe industrial crisis of the 1980s forced the city to change its sensitivity towards archaeological remains, remains that surface every time a new building is erected. The transformation of one of the most polluted industrial cities in Spain into an environment where the enhancement of the cultural heritage took centre stage in a process of urban regeneration that offers a new way of living.

CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE OF THE REGION OF MURCIA / UNCOVERED AUDITORIUM

The abandonment of the bullring and its decay allowed the city council to buy the building from its owners, in order to proceed with the excavation and recovery of the amphitheatre (fig. 04).

Various localised interventions were carried out with the aim of confirming the supposed geometries, consolidating the discovered factories and allowing visits to the archaeological remains. At the same time, a debate began on the appropriateness of preserving the square, coexisting with the remains of the amphitheatre, or demolishing the square and bringing to the surface, without interference, the traces and walls that would allow the amphitheatre to be appreciated.

Reflection on how to excavate in a living city, on how to make archaeological remains compatible with functioning urban uses, is a permanent and critical discussion in Cartagena. After intense debates and meetings of experts¹³, it was decided to conserve the external volume of the square as a configurator of the urban space, contributing new uses to the building, and to bring to the surface the structures of the amphitheatre inside and outside the double stone ring that shapes the square.

The first task was to dismantle in an orderly fashion the stands of the bullring, taking advantage of the fact that the minor ellipse of the amphitheatre is almost completely circumscribed by the inner circle of the arena. Next, the upper arcades, affected by aluminosis, were dismantled, as well as the elements added at the beginning of the 20th century, which disfigure the original state and make excavation difficult, as they are located on areas of the major axis of the ellipse.

Thus, the two large cylindrical sandstone walls have been preserved, the outer one, 17 m high and 50 cm wide at the base, decreasing in vertical section, and the inner one, 14 m high and 1.10 m in constant vertical width. Interior wall that supported the base fill of the stands. The vision of the site that is achieved is that of two constructions, both historical, superimposed, amphitheatre, at ground level, and square, which retains its main geometry and

its autonomous position that maintains the urban image of a large cylindrical volume that defines limits in a complex space (fig. 08).

In 2006, at a time of economic prosperity and optimism, the cultural institutions of the Region of Murcia proposed the reuse of the structures of the square for the construction of an Art Museum, a proposal commissioned to Amann-Canovas-Maruri (fig. 05). The proposal, dreamy and daring, takes advantage of the space between the rings to insert small exhibition rooms, adds an adjoining service building and, resting on the cylindrical walls, crosses several hollow bars with semicircular rooms overhanging the arena (fig. 06). The aim was to offer a singular and renewed image that would coexist with the old elements and activate the interior space, with a reading of the form that added a contemporary layer to the place (fig. 07). Above the arena, reusing the empty space inside, it was proposed to build an open-air auditorium with a capacity for 1,200 people, allowing the stage to be assembled and dismantled without affecting the historical remains and thus recovering the space as a meeting place.

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The arrival of the economic crisis brought the museum project to a standstill. The interior of the square had been emptied and the scaffolding to support the rings, designed to last about six months, had been in place for years.

The project was taken up again in 2018. A master plan¹⁴ was drawn up and a procedure in small phases was established, as the available budget was reduced, and the intervention was transformed into a light and integrated action with the existing structures. The project becomes a flexible process, where the structures are first consolidated while the archaeological remains are excavated, without deciding precisely on their future use (fig. 09).

The aim is to allow the site to be visited and its traces appreciated at the same time as the excavation, so that it can become a visitable archaeological site accompanied by a small museum to help with its interpretation.

CODA

The circle is a type of ellipse with two coincident centres. Both geometric shapes are unique and are disconnected from the continuity with the urban layout. Their specificity is a consequence of the conditioning factors of their interior

function, which in this case are to provide the best visibility towards the arena and to offer a space without corners. Whether it is an amphitheatre or a bullring, in both cases they are spaces for death and collective celebration, a place for gatherings, noise and noise, with a marked presence in the city, both as a social activity and as a singular building.

Its cylindrical volume is a unique condition, different, recognisable, but in need of activity. The future of the building depends on its structural consolidation, which will safely allow the excavation of its buried structures and the emergence of new uses and occupations. New layers of material and history will continue to be superimposed on this hillside in Cartagena.

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Notes

Management team of the intervention project in the Roman Amphitheatre of Cartagena.

Archaeological scientific

direction: José Miguel Noguera, M. Carmen Berrocal Caparrós and Francisco Fernández Matallana.

Restoration scientific

direction: Izaskun Martínez.

Architects: Atxu Amann, Andrés Cánovas, Nicolás Maruri.

Technical architect:

Antonio Pérez.

Structures: Mecanismo Ingeniería.

01. PÉREZ BALLESTER, José. BERROCAL CAPARRÓS, M. Carmen. FERNÁNDEZ MATALLANA, Francisco. "El anfiteatro de Cartagena. Fases, construcción y estructuras a la luz de las últimas excavaciones", *ACTAS, XVIII Congreso Internacional de Arqueología Clásica*. Vol. I, pp. 865.

02. *Ibid.* p. 868 "This new amphitheatre or second phase of the previous one has external measurements of 100 x 77m, which increase to 110 x 77 if we take into account the possible existence of an advanced body in the major axis, now lost. The measurements of the arena are the same as those of the first amphitheatre: 60 x 37.5 m".

03. "After Abdera comes Cartago Nova, the foundation of Asdrubal, the successor of Barka, the father of Hannibal, which is by far the strongest of the cities of this region. For it has a strong position and a well-built wall and is provided with harbours and a lagoon and the silver mines we have described. And there is also much salting there and in the neighbouring region. And it is the largest emporium for the goods that come from the sea destined for the inhabitants of the interior and for the products of the interior destined for all the foreigners". The quotation is from Strabo, 3,4,6: and is taken up: ABASCAL, Juan Manuel. "La fecha de la promoción colonial de Carthago Noua y sus repercusiones edilicias". Mastia, 1, 2002, p. 21.

04. All these buildings have been excavated and can be visited in Cartagena, within the archaeological park of the Cerro del Molinete. One of the largest

archaeological parks in Europe with 26.000 m².

05. See the various reports that exist on the excavations in the theatre: RAMALLO ASENSIO, Sebastián F.; BERROCAL CAPARRÓS, María del Carmen; LAIZ REVERTE, María Dolores (1996). "Report on the archaeological excavations carried out in the plots around the Casa-Palacio de la Condesa de Peralta (Roman Theatre of Cartagena). 1990 Campaign". *Memorias de Arqueología (Murcia)* (5): pp. 171-182.

06. According to the Chronicle 86 of Hydatius. "Vandali Balearicas insulas depredantur. Quique Carthagine Spartaria euersa et Hispaniis depredatis Mauretanium inuadunt". RAMALLO ASENSIO, S.F., RUIZ VALDERAS, E., MURCIA MUÑOZ, A.J., GUILLERMO MARTÍNEZ, M. "Aproximación a las fases de ocupación de Cartagena desde el registro arqueológico obtenido en las excavaciones del teatro romano: breve síntesis de su evolución urbana". *AnMurcia*, 29. Murcia, 2013, p. 35.

07. CASCALES PAGAN, Francisco. "Discurso de la Ciudad de Cartagena", Molino de la Rovella, Valencia, 16th century (1598).

08. PIQUERAS HABA, Juan. "Cartografía islámica de Sharq Al-Andalus. Al-Idrisi and the precursors". *Cuadernos de Geografía*, 86. Valencia, 2009, pp. 137-164.

09. ROS MCDONNELLA, Diego. MESTRE MARTÍ, María, DE ANDRÉS RODRÍGUEZ, Enrique. *Las fortificaciones militares del S. XVIII en Cartagena* Defensive Architecture of the Mediterranean. XV to XVIII centuries / Vol. II / Rodríguez-Navarro (Ed.) 2015 Editorial Universitat Politècnica de València p. 298.

10. "...in 1871 he began a series of campaigns... with more determination than archaeological knowledge... in search of the lost city." GARCÍA, Oscar. "Prologue to the Iliad" Alianza ed. Madrid. 2021. p. 32.

11. In Cartagena there are records of excavations as early as 1876 carried out by Francisco de Paula Oliver in the cathedral of Santa María

la Mayor where a tessellated opus signinum pavement dated to the Republican period was documented (Oliver, 1883); GÓMEZ MARTÍN, Javier (2023). *La arquitectura doméstica en Carthago Nova (2nd century BC - 3rd century AD): síntesis de un problema arqueológico*. Lucentium, Online First. 2022. <https://doi.org/10.14198/LVCENTVM.22123> p. 2.

12. Both buildings are currently part of the Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena being rehabilitated by the architect Martín Lejárraga.

13. Meeting of Experts held in December 2015, in Cartagena, with the participation of professors, archaeologists, architects and technicians from the public administration, together with the scientific team directing the excavations: José Pérez Ballester, M. Carmen Berrocal Caparrós, Francisco Fernández Matallana. The participants agreed that, while respecting the integrity of the Amphitheatre, the current structure of the ring walls and the façade of the Bullring can be preserved. ...The directors of the project expressed that they have always supported a public utility and a social reversion, for example, as an auditorium, since the complex is located in the centre of a university campus.

14. Master Plan for the Roman Amphitheatre of Cartagena. 2018, prepared by TEMPERATURAS EXTREMAS ARQUITECTOS. AMANN, Atxu. CÁNOVAS, Andrés. MARURI, Nicolás. MATALLANA, Francisco. ORTIZ, Diego.

Images

01. (corresponds to the image that opens the article). Plan of the amphitheatre in the mid-18th century. Drawing by P. Juan Talamanco.

02. Plan of Carthago Nova during the High Imperial period —Noguera Celdrán—.

03. Bullring and Antigones barracks in the background. Prior to the opening of Gisbert street. Decade of 1860.

04. Bullring, 2005.

05. Model of the proposal for MUCAM, 2008.

06. Interior view of the MUCAM from the steps, 2008.

07. Diagram of the layout of the Roman amphitheatre, the bullring and the MUCAM superimposed on each other.

08. Aerial view of the bullring and its urban surroundings.

09. New structures within the consolidation and protection process.