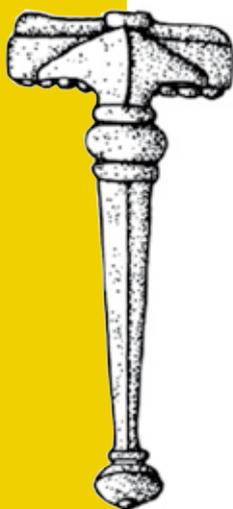




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CARACA: A ROMAN CITY IN CENTRAL SPAIN

Emilio *GAMO PAZOS*, Javier *FERNÁNDEZ ORTEA*, Saúl *MARTÍN GONZÁLEZ*
David *ALVAREZ JIMÉNEZ*

INTRODUCTION

The archaeological site of Cerro de la Virgen de la Muela, the ancient Roman city of *Caraca*, is placed on Driebes, a village located in the Spanish province of Guadalajara which is included in the autonomous community of Castilla-La Mancha.

This city was strategically based on central Spain, in a hill alongside Tagus river surrounded by two streams running eastwards, Arroyo del Barranco, and westwards, Arroyo Salobre. Also, there is evidence of river navigation at the Tagus river as some amphorae were found associated to a hypothetic Roman pier in the nearby northern village of Trillo ¹.

In this paper we want to summarize the publications of the multidisciplinary research team involved in the study of this archaeological site ².

The existence of relevant archaeological remains at the Cerro Virgen de la Muela encouraged the need to study in depth to know its magnitude. First, as a consequence of the construction of the Canal of Estremera in 1945, the Driebes Hoard was found there and is now at the Museo Arqueológico Nacional. It dates back at the end of the third century BC and whose weight is 13.8 Kg. It consists of fragments of bullion silver, ingots, vessels, jewellery and coins ³. Following this, an interesting scholar debate ⁴ findings. However discussing the chronology and purpose of these findings after this period, in the 1980s there was no deep interest, until some archaeological surface surveys were done by Abascal ⁵ and Sánchez-Lafuente ⁶, who proposed the location of the ancient city of *Caraca* on the hill. This was a new step on an old historiographical discussion originated in the 16th century ⁷. In fact several location proposals for this Roman city have been made as Almoquera ⁸, Carabaña ⁹, Córcoles ¹⁰, Guadalajara ¹¹, Risco de las Cuevas de Perales de Tajuña ¹², Taracena ¹³ and Tarancón ¹⁴.

Following these reasons, as a preliminary step towards a deeper research on this place, we decided to study the materials from the site that nowadays are preserved at the Museo de Guadalajara.

A MAP OF THE ANCIENT ROMAN CITY OF *CARACA*

In 2016, after an intense work of reviewing the cartographic, toponymic and bibliographic documentation, we designed a field research project (File number research: 16.1448) in two phases. The first phase, an intensive field survey on the site's core (8 hectares). Secondly, an aerial and geophysical survey was carried out. The surface survey concerned three main areas. Firstly, the one that lies to the north west of the Roman city in a place called Cerro Esporteadado, where the oldest materials were found: lithic material as well as Bronze Age, Iron Age I and Carpetanian pottery (painted, *jaspeada* pottery and also stamped pottery). The second area, which is placed immediately on



Fig. 1. The Cerro de la Virgen de la Muela according to the 2016 geophysical survey (Caraca Archaeological Team -CAI-Archeometry-U.C.M.).

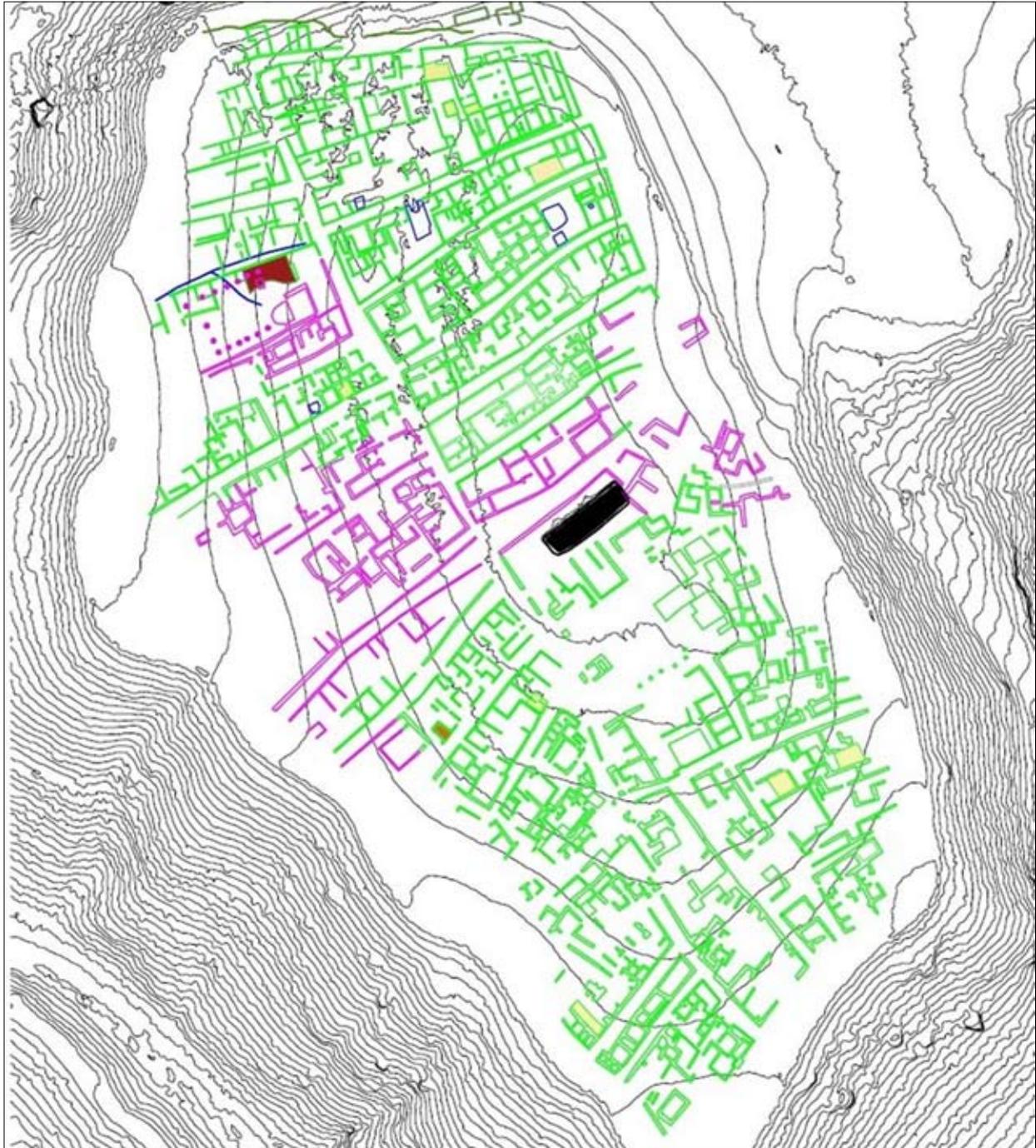


Fig. 2. Planimetry obtained because of the 2016 and 2018 geophysical surveys and aerial photographs of Spanish Instituto Geográfico Nacional (Caraca Archaeological Team - CAI-Archeometry-U.C.M.).

the Southern plateau, revealed Carpetanian and Roman Republican pottery (black-glazed pottery and Dressel 1 amphorae) and as well as diverse Roman Early Imperial materials (Roman common-ware and Roman painted pottery of indigenous tradition, Hispano-Roman Samian ware, *dolia*, *tegulae* and *imbrices*).

The third area occupies a wide plateau divided into two sub-sectors. The Northern is characterised by a quantity of storage equipment (*dolia*), kitchen ware (Roman common-ware) and building materials (*tegulae* and *imbrices*), while the Southern shows numerous high-quality remains: Samian ware (Italic, Gallic and Hispanic), Roman com-

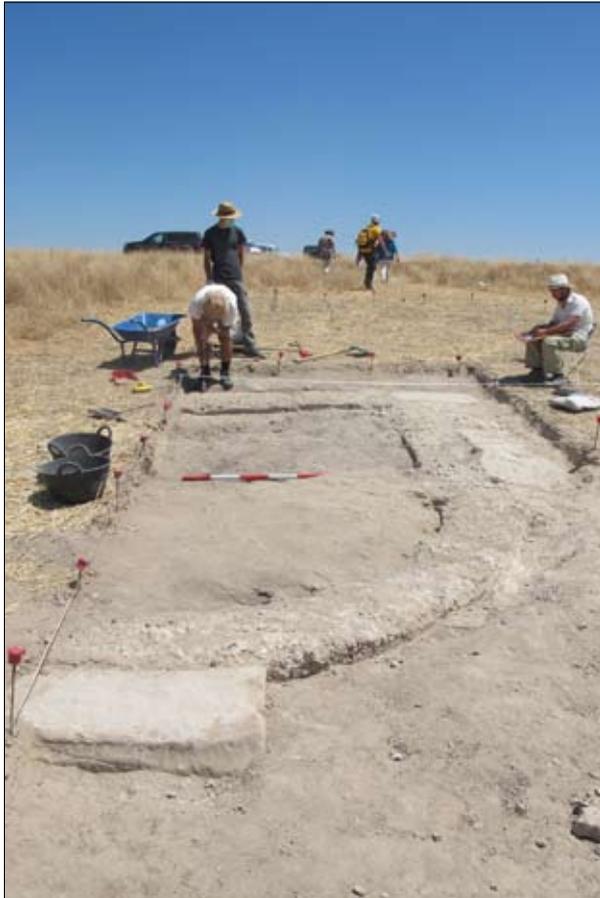


Fig. 3. Archaeological excavations in the Roman city of Caraca.

mon-ware, glass, *stucco* (red, black, yellow and blue) and remainders of *opus signinum*. Likewise some pottery sherds of black-glazed pottery and Carpetanian pottery. The ruins of a 16th century shrine, built with reused Roman ashlar and columns, marks the borders of both areas.

The geophysical survey was done by Univ. Complutense's Archaeometry and Archaeological Analysis Centre of Madrid. They first created an aerial digital model with a drone and later surveyed a surface of 10322 m² with a 600 Mhz 3D multi-channel array system Stream X Georadar. Their work resulted into non-invasive horizontal and vertical stratigraphies which permitted to know the plan of a Roman city with a *forum*, a *kardo maximus*, a *decumanus maximus*, a hypothetical *macellum*, a *domus*, several *insulae* and baths. The existence of a *forum* surpassed our previous expectations as this site, in opposition to some previous scholar opinions, definitively was not a *mansio* or a *vicus* but a city.

With this data we deduced that this site was the Carpetanian city of *Caraca* cited both by Ptolemy

(*Geog.* 2.6.56) and the Ravenna Cosmography (313.10) and placed at the *Complutum-Carthago Nova* Roman road, being located practically equidistant to the cities of *Complutum* and *Segobriga* which are the first and the third milestones of this road according to the sources. During the Early Roman Empire this city belonged to the *Hispania Tarraconensis* province. Furthermore, the highly probable presence of a Late Roman military camp to the city's Southeast¹⁵ helps to identify this city with the *Caraca* besieged by Sertorius in 77 BC (Plutarchus, *Sert.* 17.1-13). Likewise, at the nearby necropolis of Dehesa de la Algarga (Illana, Guadalajara) was found a funerary inscription from the second century AD¹⁶ of a public servant who was born in *Caraca*¹⁷.

We also found an aqueduct (File number research: 161742-P1), a structure which emphasizes this site's importance. The *caput aquae* is placed three kilometres away from the city at the Lucos stream. This toponym comes from the Latin noun *lucus* (according to the Oxford Latin Dictionary *lucus* means 'sacred grove, or just "grove"'). At the place called "El Canalejo" we located thirteen fragments of a channel spread across 112.9 meters of the aqueduct route. This was constructed using an *opus caementicium*'s formwork and a *specus* recoated by *opus signinum*. The canal was possibly covered by tiles, that is, an aqueduct similar to the one found at the nearby city of *Segobriga*¹⁸. Precisely its likeness and proximity to this city make possible that both aqueducts were contemporary and were built in the second half of 1st century AD, the very moment of *Caraca*'s monumentalization process. Even more, it's probable that both constructions were designed and created by the same work team¹⁹.

Regarding the ancient transportation network, the Roman road has been identified at the Camino de la Meseguera, a path used until recently by coaches. The road reaches the city from the south across an artificial slope on the eastern hillside where some remains of the old pavement have been found. The importance of the road *Complutum-Carthago Nova* was remarkable as *Carthago Nova* was the capital of a *conventus iuridicus* and later of the *Carthaginensis* province. To sketch the itinerary of the road we know several nearby ancient milestones as the one erected by Maximinus Thrax in Uclés²⁰ and the nearer three found in Huelves and placed by the emperors Tiberius and Trajan²¹.

It's remarkable to emphasize both popular support and the media impact of the research. Not only regional and Spanish media spread the find but also international broadcast and print journalism. For example, "The New York Times" dedicat-

ed an article (April 23rd, 2018) as well as Chinese “People’s Daily” (February 21st, 2017), Vatican’s “L’Osservatore Romano” (February 22nd, 2017) or the Argentinian daily “La Nación” (March 8th, 2017).

Because of an agreement signed by Guadalajara’s provincial government and the Council of Driebes on 2018, we did a new Georadar survey (File number research: 18.2054-P1) on the Western and Northern hill’s areas with the Univ. Complutense’s Archaeometry and Archaeological Analysis Centre. On account of this together with the study of the aerial crop and soil marks provided by the Spanish Instituto Geográfico Nacional’s aerial pictures we have a complete picture of the city’s layout. The Georadar results imply changes on the urbanisation process according to two occupation phases: Republican and Early Imperial. The urban layout was influenced by the former Carpetanian *oppidum*, and that’s the reason why the city design doesn’t fit into the Roman traditional square grid.

The city was based on a key thoroughfare, the *kardo maximus*, running Northwest-Southeast, although at the South of the *Forum* there are several streets that run parallel to the civic square and compartmentalise the housing blocks. To the North of the *Forum* arise several streets running Northeast-Southwest perpendicular to the *kardo maximus* that can be deemed as diverse *Decumani* that delimit huge blocks. On the Northeast we have observed a big *domus* with peristyle. The entrance to this part of the city was carried out through the North and the East, where an empty space focused on the traffic reorganisation is placed. On the other hand, at the West of the *Forum* we have noticed a probable 25 m² altar or shrine. The Geo-radar survey didn’t find the remains of the wall but on the North-Eastern sector appeared a structure possibly connected with the water distribution and that can be identified as a *castellum aquae*.

THE FORUM OF CARACA

We dug out in 2017 three trenches (File number research: 170734 P1) to check the 2016 Geo-radar results. Two of them at the very *forum*, a central open space with some circular points on the South interpreted as column bases and as well several buildings to the North and East. The structures were located at the same height and we considered they were erected on an Early Imperial date. The presence of such civic space verifies that *Caraca* was a *municipium*. This is very important in itself as *Caraca* is the first promoted Roman city known in the current province of Guadalajara.

In the first trench (named A, 5 x 14 m at NE to the *forum*), a couple of phases came to light. At the older one (1st century AD) this zone belonged to the Eastern sector of the *forum*, where the remains of a two floors building were unearthed. The lower one was a *cryptoporticus* identified as a *taberna* according to several pieces from *dolia* (even a *dolium* on primary position on the floor of this room) found here. The upper floor, on the other hand, had an undoubted public function, since the major presence of *stucco* (sometimes polychromed and/or depictions and/or carved graffiti) such as cornices and plasters, fragments of marble and some metallic elements used on a big gate were found. This upper floor collapsed (accidentally or not?) at mid-2nd century AD.

After the end of this area as a public building, a new East-West-oriented wall was erected here, partitioning the room over the fallen materials and remains of the lower floor. This shows the loss of every public function by the *forum* at mid-2nd century AD, although a certain squatter settlement, dated back on late 2nd-early 3rd centuries AD, actually still lived on.

The second trench (B, 7x 10 meters and even extended in 3 x 2 m to NE) was set by the Southern boundary of the *forum*. A couple of settlement phases were again documented. Here a couple. The older one, which dated on Roman Late-Republican period (2nd-1st centuries BC), showed the existence of several rectangular households following the Carpetanian (2nd Iron Age culture of Central Spain)-Roman tradition, thus stone plinths and remains of the former adobe walls. In addition, a noticeable ash layer came to light, related with a 1st century BC blaze, perhaps linked to the Sertorian War. Two stages came to light in this Roman Republican phase, closely related in time. One of the Carpetanian-Roman households presented a stone circular addition, interpreted as a storeroom containing many painted pottery sherds, an *oinochoe* lip, black-glazed pottery and pottery sherds of Dressel 1A amphorae. On the other hand, the second phase on this trench belongs to the erection of the city *forum* at Early Roman Empire age (1st century AD). From this period a portico was documented, limited to the South by the foundations of a long wall, while four bases of pillars (one almost completely lost) closed this space, 4 meters Northwards the wall (and 3m as intercolumniation). This covered porticoed area presented a poorly-conserved white lime-based pavement as a using surface. At this level, a glass unguent and several pieces of oil lamps came to light. Among these, it should be pointed out the finding of a derived Dressel 3 type, perhaps belonging to a pottery workshop



Fig. 4. Virtual reconstruction of the I century AD building in the Trench A (by Daniel Méndez).



Fig. 5. Virtual reconstruction of the Early Empire age portico in the Trench B (by Daniel Méndez).

from the *Isturji*'s productions (current Andújar, Andalusia) at Julio-Claudian age.

A third trench (C, 2 x 6 meters) was performed over a *decumanus maximus*' section. Pavement was composed of small pebbles, laying upon massive limestones. On both sides, two ditches were actually documented in order to drainage the road. Every ítem recovered on this trench came from the Early Roman Empire age.

THE PUBLIC BATHS

The summer 2018 campaign (File number research: 180358-P1) focused on the North-Western sector of the city, where a previous aerial photograph, taken from the Spanish Instituto Geográfico Nacional, provided the image of a massive building (ca. 900 m²) by the *kardo maximus*. Here we plan a new trench (D, 30 x 6 meters, even extended Northwards 3 x 5 additional meters), unveiling the existence of a public monumental baths complex on this sector. This is a new evidence for the identification of Cerro de la Virgen de la Muela = ancient *Caraca*, and also for the legal promotion of this *civitas*. The bath complex was erected in the mid-first century AD, so very much in the general pattern of the massive civic monumentalization process lived in *Caraca* as a result of the legal promotion of the city, as the archaeological record of both campaigns (2017 and 2018) actually testifies. On this very same historical context, the aqueduct to supply this *civitas* was also risen ²², as

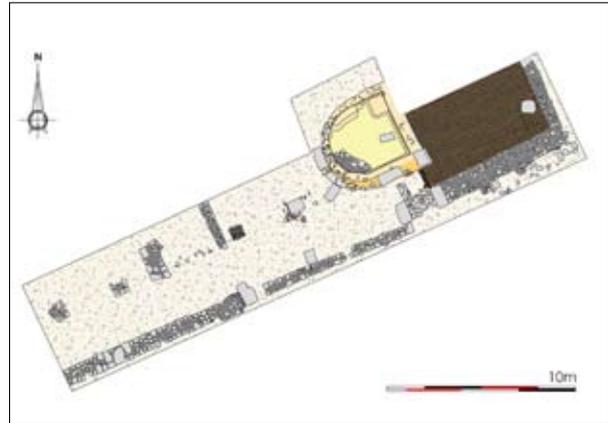


Fig. 6. Excavated area of the public baths in the 2018 campaign (By E. Martín).

the strong similarities with the one of *Segobriga* seems to underline ²³. Furthermore, not only the aqueduct but also the *Caraca*'s complex itself shows a certain noticeable parallel with the one of *Segobriga* ²⁴, dated at Flavian age (later 1st century AD). This would perhaps confirm the chronology of the *Caraca*'s baths, and even open an interesting discussion about the possible common authorship, in terms of specialized craftsmen and masons, for both complexes. Whatever the case, in order to erect the building, placed on an Eastern-Western slope of the hill, the Caracitani had to flatten the terrain. The final solution becomes especially visible on the *palaestra* (yard), where a big number of items from previous stages (Carpetanian *jaspeada*



Fig. 7. Corridor to access the baths building from the palaestra (Caraca Archaeological Team).

pottery, black-glazed pottery, etc... among others) were employed as leveling debris. Obviously, this construction process affected heavily to the previous phases structures.

Excavations of the public baths evidenced the existence of three different zones: the *palaestra* and the possible *frigidarium* and *tepidarium*. The first one consisted in a partially porticoed area for gymnastics, sports, meetings and chats. The remains of five bases for the portico, at different heights, have been evidenced. The slope was saved by successive terraces taking to the Eastern chambers. In general this *palaestra* has been badly spoiled by agricultural works, even destroyed beneath the using level of the chambers pavements. About these, they are almost completely lost on the non-porticoed area (a small pebbles-pavement seems to have existed there, though). On the other hand, a clear white lime pavement was evident on the porticoed spaces in the *palaestra*, leveled over a preparation of many previous *imbrices*, *tegulae* and pottery. South in the trench, inside the *palaestra*, a noticeably thick retaining wall appeared. This had been even reinforced with vertical pillars, cemented by ashlar, more than two meters long, appeared in North-Southern orientation.

Abandoning the *palaestra* Eastwards, upon entering the building, a threshold saves the slope using a step. Beyond it, was a corridor leading to an inner room, identified as the possible *frigidarium*. Pavements of both spaces, corridor and *frigidarium*, were decorated with a fantastically well preserved *opus reticulatum* (with wheat stalks shaped) made with small rhomboidal bricks. A heavy lime crust was documented covering this pavement, after several decades of been submerged beneath the waters. This room is limited Southwards by a massive wall enclosing the baths on their Southern limit. On the SW corner of the room, by the threshold accessing the *palaestra*, was a limestone ashlar with traces of a hole to be moved by a crane. Eastwards from this one, as a part of the Southern wall masonry, another massive limestone North-South oriented ashlar appeared also, surely to strengthen the wall acting as an external buttress. In fact, other two buttresses made on masonry have been documented on this same external face of this Southern enclosure wall.

The possible *frigidarium* is closed by a thinner Eastern enclosure wall. Eastwards this enclosure wall, the remains of the former *kardo maximus* actually appear. Westwards, the *frigidarium* was separated from the possible *tepidarium* by a thick wall, with a *opus signinum* hydraulic skirting board at its feet to waterproofing the interior angles of the chamber, the same as seen on all the known walls (in addition to this Western one, also on the Eastern

and Southern ones). The ceiling was represented by a tuff-based barrel-vault, collapsed and documented among the debris, due to its light weight.

This building suffered a violent burning at mid-2nd century AD providing a relevant ash-layer containing numerous pottery sherds of Hispano-Roman Early Imperial Samian ware (1st-2nd century AD), some of them with *graffiti*. Some *tubuli laterici* (pottery pipes to distribute warm air into *concamerationes*, these ones still not documented) were also located, along with abundant *lateritia*. Probably part of all these elements come from a still unknown *caldarium* and *praefurnium*, perhaps placed Northwards of this chamber. In this room, after the blaze of mid-2nd century AD, a later phase of precarious resettlement is documented. It was noted at this time a badly conserved and almost lost rammed earth pavement in most of the chamber, along with a humble re-faction or repair of the Eastern wall of the chamber, near the *kardo maximus*. This precarious resettlement was ephemeral,



Fig. 8. Stairs to the possible *tepidarium* (Caraca Archaeological Team).



Fig. 9. Possible *tepidarium* seen from the North (Caraca Archaeological Team).

according to the attached materials short range: from 2nd half of 2nd century to the early 3rd century AD. Whatever the case, this re-occupation level was also destroyed by another major fire, that left a noticeable ash-layer. Certainly, on the brief precarious re-occupation settlement at late 2nd century AD this building had already lost its former public function.

The possible *tepidarium* is basically an apsidal structure based on thick *opus caementicium* walls, waterproofed with internal mortar render. On their external face, on Southern, Western and Northern sides, these walls were reinforced by massive limestone ashlars and one masonry wall, while a massive limestone ashlar acted as a buttress on the South-Western side of the apse, also. This apse is set to the West, so we could infer the existence of a span or opening from the yard of the *palaestra*, especially since the find of the collapsed remains in *lapis specularis* over the ground. This chamber tends to be rectangular, although it actually narrows on its Western half, preparing the apsidal enclosure. Pavement and inner face of the walls were covered in *opus signinum*, including the characteristic hydraulic skirting board at its feet to waterproofing the interior angles of the chamber. Here again was clearly documented the presence of the lime crust referred above, as a result of a long time underwater. The chamber was accessible from the North through a massive limestone blocks stair. Today two of them still maintain their original position, while a third one appeared moved to the chamber's centre. Also here is very noticeable the massive burning on mid-2nd century AD, leaving a thick layer of ashes. Among the materials found here, the highlights would be an *acus crinalis*, a token in bone, abundant pottery sherds of Early Imperial Spanish Samian ware (both decorated and not) or blue ribbed glass. On the other hand, many *lateritium* and *stucco* cornices, coming from the superior parts of the walls, were also documented. Finally, also here a precarious or squatter re-occupation settlement was detected over the burning traces of the mid-2nd century AD. Again, the construction of a heavily damaged level of rammed earth (mixed with lime to reinforce it) as a using surface, was documented. However, again on this chamber this later phase met a short life, being destroyed by a second fire, clearly documented in a relevant ash-layer.

CONCLUSIONS

Even if this is an incipient research project, the advance in the scientific knowledge of the city and its territory, we can assure, is undoubtedly

noticeable. We already know a significant proportion of its urban plan, demonstrating the civic and monumental entity this *civitas* held. Special relevance, on this sense, took the verification of the existence of a *forum*, providing by itself the category of *municipium* to this urban settlement. Equally, the presence of an aqueduct shows the need of supply to a highly populated settlement, in terms of cultivation, industry, leisure or human consumption, in addition of political and social prestige for the community in the Hispano-Roman context. Finally, this intervention means, in terms of methodology, an actual useful test with the archaeological excavation techniques of the Georadar survey results. There are still many challenges for the future, such as to know the territory of the Roman *Caraca*, its role on the Roman road *Complutum-Carthago Nova* or the exploitation of the natural resources. On the other hand, it is our aim to know the pre-Roman background and settlement and the causes of its enigmatic ending at late-2nd or early-3rd centuries AD. We hope to find new evidences on the years to come in order to solve all these open questions thanks to an interdisciplinary research. Finally, it is highly gratifying to feel the enthusiast support from the local community, who has assumed plenty the Heritage as a part of its own identity and Future. In this sense, the Driebes City Hall and local neighbours have already started to organize different events to divulgate the archaeological researching works.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

- ¹ SÁNCHEZ-LAFUENTE 1986, p. 181.
² GAMO *et alii* 2017; GAMO, FERNÁNDEZ 2017; GAMO *et alii* 2018.
³ SAN VALERO 1945.
⁴ OTERO 2002; GARCÍA-BELLIDO 2007, p. 220; BARRIL 2010; CHAVES, PLIEGO 2015, p. 122 and p. 155.
⁵ ABASCAL 1982, p. 80.
⁶ ABASCAL 1982.
⁷ GAMO 2018.
⁸ MONTERO 1991, p. 363.
⁹ SÁNCHEZ 2011, p. 29.
¹⁰ MÜLLER 1883, p. 175.
¹¹ MORALES 1575.
¹² PÉREZ 1990.
¹³ SCHULTEN 1937, p. 180.
¹⁴ SOLANA 1994.
¹⁵ BERNÁRDEZ, GUIADO 2016, p. 246.
¹⁶ *CIL* II. 5858; GAMO 2012, pp. 168-169, n. 77.
¹⁷ CRESPO 1998, p. 148, n. 48.
¹⁸ MORÍN 2014.
¹⁹ GAMO *et alii* 2017, p. 244.
²⁰ *CIL* XVII/1, 292.
²¹ *CIL* XVII/1, 293-294-295; VELAZA 2016, pp. 226-228, n. 20-23.
²² GAMO *et alii* 2017.
²³ MORÍN 2014.
²⁴ ABASCAL *et alii* 1997.

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Resumen

Caraca: Una ciudad romana en el centro de España

El presente artículo versa acerca de los trabajos arqueológicos desarrollados en el yacimiento del Cerro de la Virgen de la Muela (Driebes, Guadalajara, España Central) entre 2016 y 2018. Esta investigación demuestra el emplazamiento de la civitas romana de Caraca, finalizando así un debate académico que se remonta nada menos que al siglo XVI. La relevancia del yacimiento, un oppidum carpetano que se torna en civitas de la Hispania Tarraconensis en época tardorrepública y altoimperial, reside en proporcionar una información crucial para nuestro conocimiento del proceso de Romanización en España Central, y muy particularmente en la cuenca del Tajo.

Palabras clave: Romanización; Caraca; Guadalajara; Hispania romana; ciudades romanas.

Riassunto

Caraca: una città romana nella Spagna centrale

Con il presente articolo si presentano i risultati degli scavi condotti, tra 2016 e 2018, nel sito del Cerro de la Virgen de la Muela (Driebes, Guadalajara, Spagna Centrale), che hanno confermato come la *civitas* romana qui rinvenuta corrisponde a *Caraca*, portando a termine una discussione aperta già nel Cinquecento. La rilevanza di questo sito, un *oppidum* carpetano, poi divenuto una delle *civitas* dell'*Hispania Tarraconensis* in età tardo-repubblicana ed alto-imperiale la cui conoscenza diventa cruciale per la ricostruzione del processo di romanizzazione della Spagna Centrale, e più in particolare, della valle del fiume Tago.

Parole chiave: romanizzazione; Caraca; Guadalajara; Spagna romana; città romane.

Abstract

This paper deals with the different archaeological works carried out at the site of Cerro de la Virgen de la Muela (Driebes, Guadalajara, Central Spain) from 2016 to 2018. This research assets the location of the Roman civitas of Caraca, bringing an end to a scholar discussion from the 16th century onwards. The relevance of this site, a Carpetanian oppidum turned into a civitas of the Hispania Tarraconensis in the Later Republican and Early Imperial ages, lies in the crucial information it provides to improve our knowledge about the Romanization process of central Spain and particularly of the Tagus river basin.

Keywords: Romanization; Caraca; Guadalajara; Roman Hispania; Roman cities.

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