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Roman Circus Praetorium




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Roman Circus: Decree of 16 May 1963 (R-I-51-1451)
Praetorium: Royal Order of 28 July 1926 (R-I-51-0325)

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE
(Cairns, 2nd December 2000)

Roman Circus Praetorium



From the seventies of the I century AD Tàrraco had lots of public buildings made up of two enormous squares with porches and a circus. The main square is considered to be one of the most extensive forums in the Empire.

The building that is now called *Pretori*, the King's castle or *Pilats tower*, forms part of one of the corners of this provincial forum, mainly built during the time of the emperor Vespasià (69-79). The Roman part of the building is made up of the entrance to the forum from the outside, with large doors to enter the area via wooden walkways and a part of the building that went round the square made of Roman concrete.

The current shape of the area is due to the changes made from medieval times, like the holes in the wall to shoot arrows, some arcade remains and a stoned interior patio. In the XII century the Norman nobleman Robert Bordet, also known as Robert d'Aguiló or of Colei, received the Archbishop Oleguer in the city in 1129 to re-inhabit it. He used the remains of the south-east wing of the provincial forum as a castle that then passed on to the counts-kings, called *King's castle*. In the XVII century it became an army warehouse and later on barracks. On the night of the 19th of August 1813, the imperial French army left Tarragona setting off large explosives which seriously damaged it. Towards 1822 reconstructions were made to make it into prison and it was used as such until 1953.

The *Roman Circus* was mainly used for chariot races. It was built at the end of the I century AD, and was probably used up till the end of the IV century AD. It is

long and one end has a semi-circular bend. Most of it is now covered by modern buildings even though the structure is well preserved within the urban area and it is considered to be one of the best preserved circuses in Western Europe.

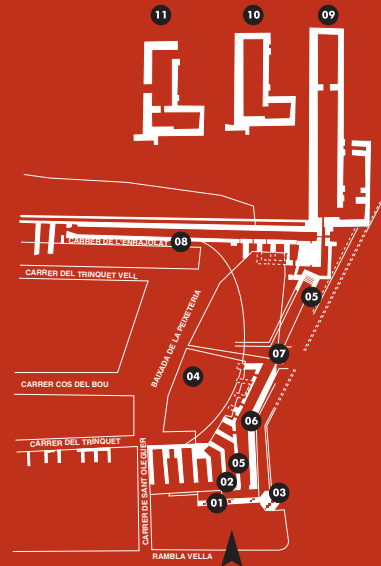
It became a suburb of the medieval city, with few buildings, and up till half way through the XIV century it wasn't part of the interior urban area until a wall was built in front of its old façade, known as *la Muralleta* (the little wall).

The bend has been subject to a real recuperation process. This section has three arcs that formed part of the monumental façade of the Circus. The central arc has a stairway that leads to the upper part of the Circus, from where you can enter an inside chamber of the Monges Tower.

The first arcade is totally intact and from here we can access the vaults that formed part of the access system and go around inside the building ending at the point where the longitudinal symmetrical axis of the Circus is, perpendicularly crossing and communicating the arena with the outside. Throughout the vault there are small areas covered by other vaults that support the stand inclination.

On the north side, there is a 97 metre long vault to support the upper part of the Circus in its longitudinal part. At the end, form a modern opening, we can see the remains of the stairs that communicated the arena with the stands.

Other parts of the longitudinal stand on the north of the building are being recuperated in Sedassos Square and in Trinquet vell Street.



01 The "Muralleta" ("Small Wall") (1368). **02** Circus façade. **03** Nuns' Tower (14th century). **04** Circus arena and podium. **05** Stairway leading to the stands. **06** St Hermenegild Vault. **07** Porta Triumphalis. **08** Circus longitudinal vault. **09** Ground Floor : (Provincial Forum lower vault). **10** First Floor : (Provincial Forum vault). **11** Second Floor : (Gothic Room. 14th century).