



TOWER OF HERCULES

Ancient Times

The Tower of Hercules in Roman Times

From the 2nd century B.C. onwards in Hispania there is a growing development of trade exchanges with the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula. The expedition of Decimus Junius Brutus who penetrated the Galician region from the south, through Portugal, irrefutably evidences these trade exchanges from an early time. In 61 B.C., according to Dión Casio, it was Julius Caesar himself, who was in Cadiz, who commanded the expedition that reached Brigantium, (currently A Coruña) by sea with the purpose of establishing trade relationships which could have come to fruition in the founding of a small colonial outpost of strategic importance at the limits of the Empire.

Obviously enough, Brigantium became an important rearguard port during the Cantabrian Wars (29-19 B.C.), playing a relevant role in the distribution of men and supplies for the war. Later on, during the peace of Augustus, there was a significant increase in trade exchanges that resulted in a development of a road structure and an increase in maritime traffic. This, in turn, favoured a process of deep Romanisation. It is in this context that the northwest of the Peninsula proved an essential ground for the conquest of Britannia and the port of Brigantium became one of the main ports of arrival of *via XX*, better known as authentic *per loca maritima* where Roman navies sought refuge on their way toward the conquest of Brittany. This military relevance would account for the building of a large proportion lighthouse at the mouth of the Gulf of Artrabo as from Gibartar to Fisterra ships navigated parallel to the coast just a few miles off it following the *per loca maritima*, but upon reaching Brigantium they must orient their bows toward the English channel and the northern territories, thus sailing into an open and rough sea where they lost any reference of the coast until they reached the French Brittany.

In the 5th century A.D., the lighthouse continued to play a very relevant role. Chronicler Paulo Orosio, a disciple of Saint Augustine, noted in his book entitled the *Cosmografía* that "the second angle of Hispania was oriented north, where the Galician city of Brigantia boasts a very high lighthouse for observation [of the sea] which deserves a mention as very few things do".

Dating of the building

We do not know the exact date of the building of the Tower, which must have happened sometime between the 1st century and early 2nd century A.D. The different scholars who have tackled the issue favour two different dates: the time immediately following the Cantabrian Wars (29-19 B.C.) or the time of Trajan (98-117 A.D.), when investment in civil works in Hispania was truly important.

The Latin inscription that has survived at the foot of the monument might contribute to its dating. It is dedicated to Mars, the god of war, and it is likely that this dedication is motivated by a wish to thank his intercession during the war. The northwest of the Iberian Peninsula did not suffer any war except the Cantabrian Wars, and it is for this reason that the legend might be referring to this episode. Furthermore, according to Rodríguez Colmenero, the fact that Mars is described as August would allow us to date the inscription in the time of Emperor Octavius Augustus, thus strengthening the argument that it was during the first century A.D. when the lighthouse was built.

Archaeological prospecting made in the plain and at the foot of the Tower proves that there was a settling dating back to this time.

The second hypothesis and the one most favoured by experts links its construction to the times of emperor Trajan (98-117 A.D.). It was Cornide Saavedra who first proposed this chronology, arguing that the lighthouse was a support system for the navy squadrons on their way to Brittany, and therefore, it would not be until the second century that its construction would be required. He also holds that should the Tower had been build prior to the second century there would have been some mention of it in the works of Estrabon, Pompeio Mela and Pliny the Elder, who described in detail the coast of Brigantium and mentioned other lighthouses such as that of Chipiona at Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz-Spain) but not that of the Tower of Hercules.

This view has been echoed by **Urgorri Casado, and Laredo Verdejo (1992-1993, 161-176)** who, approaching the issue from such different fields as mathematics and nautical astronomy, postulate that the construction of the Tower dates back to the early years of the 2nd century A.D.

To these two datings we can add a third one proposed by Bello Diéguez who, on the basis of his latest archaeological finds, dates the construction of the lighthouse in the times of Emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.).



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Possible builder of the lighthouse

The builder behind the Tower of Hercules remains a controversial issue. At the foot of the lighthouse there is a votive inscription dedicated to the god Mars by architect Caio Sevio Lupo. As it is a individual vote to Mars and there is not a clear connection with the work of the Tower, some scholars have suggested that the mound where the lighthouse rises could have been a sacred place consecrated in earlier times to the god of war. This position, however, which was held by such scholars as Ocampo and Father Mariana has been questioned on the basis of latest research.

Most writers hold that everything points a connection between the inscription and the Tower. Its immediate proximity and the fact that the person making it is an architect and that he hails from Aeminium, currently Coimbra (Portugal), a city close to Bracara Augusta, located on the via XIX, known as Via Nova, seem to be arguments strong enough to acknowledge Caio Sevio Lupo as the mind behind the construction of the Tower.

This does not mean that the architect is dedicating to Mars Augustus the Tower proper. Rather, it is more likely that he is dedicating a statue. The existence of such a statue has been suggested on the basis of the holes found at the upper part of the rock and on the remains of golden bronze found around the inscription during the 1992 excavations.

It is not habitual that we get to know the names of the builders behind constructions such as these, but Sostratos of Cnidos seems to be the architect who built the lighthouse of Alexandria while Cares of Lindos and Lachus are the builders of the bronze figure of the Colossus of Rhodes. Bearing this in mind, it is conceivable that Caio Sevio Lupo makes an inscription at the foot of the Tower of Hercules where his name is mentioned.