Port professions: organization and working processes of a Roman harbor

Profesiones portuarias: organización y procesos de trabajo de un puerto romano

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Abstract: The aim of this poster is to show an introduction to the PhD called *Portus Tarraconis. The harbour of Tarraco during the Late Republic and the Early Empire. Literary sources, historiography and archaeology* (Universidad Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona). The poster is focused on a legal and economic framework, whose final aim is to extract a reliable but ideal image of the working processes of harbours in the roman period. We present through an image selection, the itinerary of the goods on a commercial ship from its arrival in the harbour to its distribution to shops or warehouses. We specially take into account the harbour professions and we represent the harbour management thanks to the documentation of classics, epigraphy and iconography. This theoretical tour is documented in many harbours of antiquity; thus, we will select the most representative samples to display this part of the trade.

Key words: Roman harbour, epigraphy, iconography, trade, harbour management.

Resumen: el objetivo de este póster es mostrar parte de la tesis doctoral *Portus Tarraconis. El puerto de Tarraco en época tardorrepublicana y altoimperial. Fuentes, historiografía y arqueología* (Universidad Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona). El póster se centra en el marco económico y jurídico y el objetivo final es extraer una imagen ideal pero fidedigna de los procesos de trabajo que se llevaban a cabo en los puertos en época romana. Presentamos a través de una selección de imágenes, el itinerario que recorrían las mercancías desde que llegaban a puerto hasta su distribución en los almacenes o tiendas. Se hace hincapié en las profesiones portuarias y en la representación de la gestión de las mercancías en las fuentes clásicas, la epigrafía y la iconografía. Este tour teórico se encuentra documentado en muchos puertos de la Antigüedad y, por consiguiente, se han seleccionado los ejemplos más representativos para mostrar esta parte del proceso comercial.

Palabras clave: puerto romano, epigrafía, comercio, iconografía, gestión portuaria.

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Objective

The aim of this poster is to show an introduction to the PhD thesis developed at Universitat Rovira i Virgili (Tarragona) named *Portus Tarraconensis. An approach to the port of Tarraco during the roman period. Literary and archaeological sources.* The thesis is focused on the study of three aspects of the harbour of Tarragona during the late-republican and imperial period. The project studies the archaeology remains, legal and economic framework, ancient sources and epigraphy in order to establish an approach to its economic and physical infrastructure. The project is inscribed in the project HAR2012- 37405- C04 – 01 *Roma, las capitales provinciales y las ciudades de Hispania: difusión de modelos en la arquitectura y el urbanismo romanos. Subproyecto Tarraco* (Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad).

Development

We present thorough an image selection the itinerary of the goods on a commercial ship from its arrival in the harbour to its distribution to shops or warehouses. We specially take into account the harbour professions and we represent the harbour management thanks to the documentation of classics, epigraphy and relief iconography.
We deal here with the organization and working processes of a Roman harbour together with its definition and main architectural structures. A part of the thesis is focused on a legal and economic framework, whose final aim is to extract a reliable but ideal image of the working processes of harbours in the roman period. In this way, the trade patterns, the commercial management and the economic function will be explained and understood.

1) Harbour arrival

When a merchant ship arrived to a harbour, there were two cargo unloading options. Goods could be offloaded directly from the ship by dockers such *saccarii* (Fig.1) or *phalangarii* or by using engineering machines like cranes or tackles.



Fig.1.Relief in the cathedral of Salerno. III A.D.
A small cargo vessel is being offloaded by a saccarius (Casson 1994: 126), who carries heavy sacs.
Source: http://www.romaeterna.org/

2) Transfer boats

If the seabed was insufficiently deep, the bargeman had the duty of cargo transport between the vessel, which remained anchored near the harbour and the boats (Fig. 2). Plenty of documentation about these professional figures hereby referred to can be found through epigraphy thanks to their belonging to a guild, especially in river zones such the Tiber (CIL XIV, 309, 252, 409).
These professional boatmen were the *scapharii* (people in charge of a skiff), *pleromarii* (they perfomed a function in the operation of ferries), *lenuncularii* (ferrymen or watermen) and *caudicarii* (lightermen) (Rougé 1966: 192 - 200).
In other river zones like in Marseilles, there were specific hauling river-boats to upstream the goods to the river harbour (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2. Mosaic in Foro delle Corporazioni, Ostia. Ca. A.D. 200.
A saccarius transfers a cargo of amphoras from a sea-going vessel (right) to a navis caudicariae (left).
Source: http://www.spp-haefen.de/de/die-projekte/der-flusshafen-von-ostia/



Fig. 3. Relief at Cabrières-d'Aigues, Musée Calvet, Avignon. III A.D.
A navis caudicariae is being hauled by a towline. Three man are hauling the barge loaded with wine-casks up a river, probably the Durance (Johnstone 2004: 158).
Source: http://www.marine-antique.net/

3) Maritime customs payment and storage

Once the ship entered the harbour, a maritime custom called *portorium* had to be paid. The tax was not only applied to goods transported in maritime routes (Ulp. D. 50.16.59), but also taxed the good transport by land.
The *publicani* (tax collerctors) collected the portorium thanks to a tax declaration (Zamora Manzano 2009). In the harbours, this goods's declaration had to be verified by state functionaries. These people were the *tabularii* (Fig. 4) and their assistants or *auditores*.



Fig. 4. Relief of the tabularii of the Trajan harbour, Ostia. Torlonia collection, Rome. 2nd/3rd Century A.D.
The relief shows the control of offloading amphoras by saccarii (left). The three seated figures on the right may be a tabularius with two adiutores. They are located behind a desk recording the cargo on wax tablets in the form of a book (Basch 1987; Pomey 1997; Meiggs 1973).
Source: http://www2.rgzm.de/Navis/Musea/Ostia/Homepage/Tabularii.htm

Jobs related to storage are well-known. We can identify the *horrearii* or people responsible responsible for guarding the warehouses and the *mensores* (Fig. 5), who guaranteed the volume and weights of the goods.



Fig. 5. Roman paint of the Isis Giminiana. Vatican Museums. 2nd/3rd Century A.D.
The ship, named Isis Giminiana, has on board the captain or magister called Farnaces; the owner Arascantus; and two saccarii carrying sacks. In the middle there is a mensor measuring the grain with a rute-llum.
Source:http://www.ostia-antica.org/dict/plnec/plnec.htm

4) Administration staff and surveillance personnel of harbours

Each harbour needed functionaries' corpora in order to control, administrate and maintain the harbour. Both sources and epigraphy show different professional categories in Ostia. Dio Cassius (55.4.4.) describes the figures of *quaestores Ostienses* during the Augustan period with military and financial duties (Rougé 1966: 201) and maybe judicial responsibilities (CIL XIV, 3603). During Claudius's time, these *quaestores* are replaced by the figure of the *procurator* (*procurator portus Ostiensis* (CIL XIV, 163) and other inferior staff assistants (Houston 1980: 157). Harbour security was also very important in order to avoid piracy attacks and other exceptional problems. Well-known are also the *stationarii*, who supervised the coast and the entrance to the harbour, or the *custodes litorum* (Rougé 1966: 210). In our study case of Tarraco, there was the figure of *praefectus orae maritimae*, who was responsible to look after the coast among enemies (RIT 164, 166, 169, 165, 301, 289, 288, 171, 316, 162).

5) Repairing vessels

Shipbuilding was a high specialised job, so it needed personnel only for this duty: the *faber navalis* or *architectus navalis* (Fig. 6). Thanks to the *Edictum de Pretiis* of emperor Diocletian, we know his loan (Diosono 2008) as well as the fact that his job was one of the most well-paid. Furthermore, epigraphy shows architects related to the navy of Misenum and Ravenna (CIL XII, 723; X, 5371, 3392). The *stuppatores* were responsible of caulking the ship. They were organised in corporations in Ostia (CIL XIV, 44) in relationship with the *fabri navales* and the boatmen *caudicarii* (CIL VI, 1649). On the other hand, Vegetius relates in his work *Epitoma rei militaris* (II, 3) that the *unctores* were people who caulked the outer side of the vessel in order to protect it (Rougé 1966: 188 - 191).



Fig. 6. Funerary stele of Longidienus, faber navalis. National Archaeological Museum, Ravenna. 2nd/3rd Century A.D.
Publius Longidienus (CIL XI, 139) was a shipwright. The relief shows him working with the ascia in a ship. On the right we can read: Longidienus pushes on with his work.
Source: http://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=4899

Livy (44. 10. 3) explains that king Perseus threw his treasure to the sea to hide it from his enemy. Time after, he asked the *urinatores* (fig. 7) to recover it from the bottom of the sea. These scuba divers were people who worked in harbours in order to recover the goods that accidentally fell off from the ship during the offloading. Moreover they could repair some leaks. Some inscriptions show that they were organized in guilds in the Tiber zone (CIL VI, 1872, 1080, 29700 and 29701) and in Ostia (CIL XIV, 303), although they were supposed to exist along all the ports of the Roman Empire.



Fig. 7. CIL XIV, 303. Corpus urinatorum. Roman inscription located in Ostia.
Source: Epigraphik Datenbank Clauss/ Slaby

6) Traders

The last step of the goods was its sale and distribution in shops. The people who did business es were the *mercatores*, *negotiatores* and the ones related to ships, the *navicularii* (Fig. 8). A *mercator* was a trader who sold and bought products not for profit but also to obtain benefits. The *negotiator* was the one who dedicated himself to the negotia, big enterprises both maritime and terrestrial. (Tac. Ann. 12.51.). The *navicularius* was a person who developed any maritime activity. There were two categories: the *navicularii amnici*, who sailed in rivers or the *navicularii marini* or shipowners (Casson 1960). Thanks to epigraphy we know they organised themselves in guilds (de Salvo 1992).



Fig. 8. Funerary stele in Salona, Museum Spalato. I A.D.
The funerary stele shows the bust of the deceased. The man, called C. Ulius, was a trader or a navicularius, because the inscription talk about his travels in the sea and the relief shows a commercial ship. (Rostovtzeff 1937: Plate XLIV, II,fig-03, 02203).
Source: Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss / Slaby



Fig. 9. Mosaic of the statio 18. Foro delle Corporazioni, Ostia. 2nd/3rd Century A.D.
In this forum were located fifty eight offices or stationes were the traders and navicularii worked. Every floor of the statio is decorated with marine scenes. Almost all stations had a poster with the name of the company, for example the navicularii Turritani, Misenenses, etc.
Source: http://www.ostia-antica.org/piazzale/corp.htm

7) Transport and sale

The final arrivals of the goods were the, located near the port area. In other cases, when the final distribution shop was in a city inland, road transport was necessary. There were a lot of different types of carriage and professionals who drove them: muliones, iumentarii, carrucarii, cisarii and *vecturanii* (Pisani Sartorio 1988: 23).



Fig. 10. Relief of a trader selling fabric in its shop. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. I A.D.
(Liberati & Bourbon 2005; Rostovtzeff 1937: Plate XXXII (2))
Source:
http://www.sofiaoriginals.com/ma12232.jpg

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