

archaeological site

GADES

Columbaria
Roman Theatre
Salting Factory



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In the final days of the Roman Republic and the early years of Augustus' rule, the city of Gades experienced a period of economic and political splendour that was reflected in its urban planning and the monumental grandeur of its buildings.

The *Gades* route invites you to explore the archaeological remnants of that ancient glory in the modern-day city of Cádiz and discover what everyday life was like in this important Roman *municipium*: funerary customs and beliefs about the afterlife, the urban world, entertainment and its bustling port and industrial activity.

THE COLUMBARIA

The Columbaria were found during the 1985 excavation of a plot outside the historic quarter of the city of Cádiz. In previous years, it had already been determined that this area contained a large sector of a Roman necropolis with high burial density which had been used over an extensive period of time.

The excavation yielded evidence of both cremation and inhumation interments, which varied widely in the materials and types of grave construction as well as in the different media used to manufacture vessels for storing the ashes of the deceased. Among the grave goods are glass unguentaria, oil lamps, common pottery bowls, thin-walled cups and pitchers, and personal ornaments belonging to the deceased, primarily precious metalwork.

The ruins preserved *in situ* correspond to three of the five collective underground burial sites discovered. The largest, measuring approximately 2.50 x 3.75 m, is a structure of irregularly dressed calcarenite stones with a lime mortar bond that has been partially destroyed by looting since Antiquity, although significant portions of its basic components are still recognisable.

View of a columbarium, with traces of stucco





View of one of the funerary niche chambers

The shaft for accessing the burial chamber is located on one of the longer sides, and within are nine 0.35 x 0.45-metre niches for funerary urns. These openings are arranged as follows: one on each side of the entry shaft, three in front, and two on the shorter sides of the chamber. The entire structure had a white stucco finish, and there are no traces of pictorial decoration. Atop the smaller side walls we see the base of a modest barrel vault that once covered the burial chamber.

This type of underground tomb was marked and identified on the surface by an enclosure delimiting the area of the subterranean chamber. This enclosure contained a small altar and a roof over the entrance to the underground burial vault, although these elements have disappeared as a result of plundering over the years.

The other columbaria present differences in orientation, the interior distribution of the niches and size, and are essentially less sophisticated copies of the one described above.

THE ROMAN THEATRE

This structure stands at the south-east end of what is now the Pópulo district. It was found in 1980 and has since been partially recovered in a long string of interventions which, from the time of its discovery to the present day, have made it possible to bring a considerable portion of this monumental Roman building to light, although an equally significant part still lies buried beneath the modern buildings of that neighbourhood.

Today we can see a large section of the seating area, which had a diameter of nearly 120 m, making it one of the largest theatres in all Hispania. The building stands on a natural cliff that was cut and prepared for its construction. The basic infrastructure consists of radial and ring walls that form a network of large cells or boxes. These helped anchor the structure to the ground and retain the fill, allowing the builders to achieve the desired incline of the seating area while also supporting its weight. A large terraced concrete surface was laid over these filled areas, and on it rested the oyster-rich limestone blocks that served as seats for theatre spectators.

A ring-shaped gallery runs beneath the seating area, 3 metres wide and 4.70 metres tall at its highest point. Two different types of masonry were used: concrete (*opus caementicium*) for the gallery's outer wall and the vaulted roof, made by repeatedly pouring concrete (five times in total) over wooden centrings whose impressions are still visible today; and ten even courses of squared stone blocks (*opus quadratum*) for the inner wall, with the bottom course resting on the soil and the topmost row supporting the vault.

Four corridors opened in the gallery's inner wall at 20-metre intervals led from this tunnel to the seating area. Between each pair of vomitoria are two light wells, set into the uppermost course of the stone wall to let sunlight into the gallery.

Overhead view of the excavated section of the theatre





General view of the seating area

Surveys conducted inside the Reception Centre have made it possible to locate and inspect part of the *orchestra*, the stage structure and the lower seating area.

Around the mid-2nd century CE the building fell into disuse and was stripped of its finest decorative materials (marble and bronze) by looters. By the middle of the 5th century CE, sediment had begun to fill in the orchestra area, and in later years other less valuable constructive elements, mainly ashlar, were also plundered.

Seats beneath the Reception Centre



THE FACTORY

The archaeological ruins of this industrial site stand on a plot previously occupied by Teatro Andalucía on Calle Sacramento. After the theatre was demolished, a new block of flats with three underground car park levels was going to be built here, but before works commenced archaeologists surveyed the site in 1995 and discovered these vestiges of the ancient past. They were able to document up to eight different occupation phases of the same space. The most significant, given its condition, its potential as a visitor attraction and its historical importance, is the phase corresponding to the fish salting factory, which occupies a surface area of 330 square metres, although a presumably large portion of the industrial complex actually lies outside the excavated plot, beneath the modern-day streets of Sacramento, Barrié and Jiménez Guerra.

The ruins reveal a structure built during a boom period in the Roman city's history, in the 1st century BCE, which remained in use until it was definitively abandoned in the 5th century CE. The industrial facilities are organised around a central courtyard that was probably square in shape. Vestiges of the courtyard's lime pavement, laid directly over the sand dunes that formed the bank of a sea inlet, have been preserved. In some areas it shows clear signs of layers added to patch and repair the original paving. The floor is slightly sloped towards the centre of the courtyard, a deliberate design for draining off rainwater that would have flowed through various channels into a two-chamber cistern situated lower than the courtyard.

General view of the factory facilities





Detail of the tanks

In addition to these channels, other structures stood on the pavement: a hemispherical tub with lime mortar rendering and a small central drain to facilitate cleaning; and a structure of squared limestone blocks framing the pipes of a well, made out of the same type of rock, for extracting the water stored in the cistern.

The north side of the courtyard is bounded by a 14 x 19 m room on an east-west axis, in which a series of large tanks are more or less regularly arranged. There are two groups inside the bay, divided by a wide central corridor. The first consisted of two large tanks flanked by four smaller ones on both the north and south sides. The second group appears to have comprised a capacious tank on the east side, with three other tanks to the north and south and two more on the west side. The entire space occupied by tanks was originally covered by a pitched roof sloping down to the courtyard, which facilitated the collection of rainwater to fill the cistern. On the west side of the courtyard, another room measuring 6 x 9.5 m, perpendicular to the former, had eight more tanks arranged in two clusters of four. The design, layout and construction of these tanks are less orderly than the first group, and the structures have been practically obliterated.

Tools exhibited at the site



RECA

RED DE ESPACIOS CULTURALES DE ANDALUCÍA

LOCATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

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Roman Theatre

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FREE ADMISSION

