

# Spain: The Roman Heritage in Aragon

Aragon, one of the 17 Spanish autonomous communities, is divided into three provinces, Zaragoza, Huesca and Teruel. However, in the Roman Age, this territory belonged first to the Hispania Citerior and later to the Provincia Tarraconensis. In addition, under Augustus' empire, Hispania was divided into *conventus iuridicus*, i.e. administrative districts. The capital city of one of them was **Caesaraugusta**, the modern Zaragoza.



The main city from the time of Augustus was Caesaraugusta, a strange and exceptional name in the Roman empire, because it contained the names of Iulius Caesar as well as Octavius Augustus. It was founded in 14 BC as a new city with a Hippodamic urban pattern near a pre-Roman city called Salduba.

Nowadays we can follow the trace of the Roman streets and the remains of its walls, theatre, baths, forum and its river port (there is four archaeological museums that belong to the town hall of Zaragoza and an archaeological section in the Provincial Museum of Fine Arts). There are also some paleochristian remains from the 4th century.

The Roman history of this territory is linked to the figure of Augustus in various ways. Modern scholars indicate that when Augustus came back ill from the Cantabric wars, he took a medicinal bath in the sanctuary of Silbis, a local deity of the Health, and he quickly recovered. He thus founded the sanctuary of Salus that eventually became the sanctuary of Minerva. This took place in the ancient **Turiaso**, a pre-roman city now called Tarazona. In the sanctuary the archaeologist discovered one of the most important busts of Augustus, made of a semi-precious stone, exposed in the Provincial Museum of Zaragoza. Also, there is a small archaeological museum in Tarazona, under the bishop palace.

Another important Roman city here was **Bilbilis Augusta**, where the poet Marcus Valerius Martialis was born. It was founded under a Celtiberian city and it is possible now to visit its archaeological sites including a theatre, forum, baths, some houses, walls, and the Archaeological Museum of Calatayud (Bilbilis was abandoned during the crisis of the Roman empire and it was re-founded by the Muslims with the new name of Calatayud, 5 km away from the Roman setting).



An important event that took place in this area were the Roman wars against the Celtiberians. The war against Numantia and the Numantines is quite well known, but many people are now aware that the modern calendar starts on the first of January thanks to a Roman war against Segeda and the Segedians, neighbours of the Celtiberian Bilbilis. In 154 BC it was necessary that the Romans elected their consules not on the normal date, the first day of every year, i.e. the Idus of March (March, 15th), but several days earlier. In this way one of the consules could take the command of the Roman army against the Segedians. Thus they were elected in the Kalendas of January (January, 1st). As the consules could be in charge only one year, in the following years they were always elected on January, 1st. Unfortunately, we only have a few remains of the Celtiberian city of Segeda, that extended on an area of 17 hectares.

In the Roman time, during the Civil Wars, a pre-Roman city, that later was re-founded by the Romans as **Osca** (in honour to the Oscan soldiers that served in the Roman Army), had an important role. Here Quintus Sertorius, the follower of Pompeius, had his headquarter for his operations against Iulius Caesar and his generals and army. In a similar way, only a few remains of the Roman time have been preserved in Huesca (the ancient Osca).





Finally, it is possible to visit one of the most important Roman dams in the western empire, in **Almonacid de la Cuba**. You can walk through an impressive aqueduct dug in the rocks between Albarracin and Cella (Teruel). You can find in Fabara the best Roman mausoleum preserved in Spain; the remains of a Roman city of unknown name (Tarraca?) in Los Bañales, near Uncastillo, with aqueduct, baths and mausoleums; and much more.

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