





The rebasification of the Roman theatre in mediaeval Zaragoza

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Abstract

This study aims to illustrate the formation of the urban tissue over the Roman theatre in the walled core of Zaragoza. Within the scope of the study, the typological plan of the city was prepared using the building surveys taken in 1911, and the plan was interpreted as a historical organism. The basic types in the city are determined, and methods of the process-based typology are used to reveal the formation process of a selected urban tissue that is an example of the rebasification of a specialized building. In this example, a Roman theatre was repurposed as a foundation for constructing residential buildings and affected the formation process of the urban block until its discovery.

Keywords: typological process, building typology, typological plan, rebasification, Caesar Augusta.

1. Introduction

Describing the processual development of the urban form of Zaragoza is the main objective of this work. It hypothesizes that the tissue of the walled centre of Zaragoza shows a continuous transition from the Roman settlement following a subdivision of the original plots, and some of the characteristics of building types come from the transformation of the previously built environment. It describes the territory as a historically identified organism (Strappa, Carlotti & Camiz, 2016), and by mounting the individual building surveys, it prepares Caesaraugusta's typological plan. For the preparation of the typological plan, the building surveys prepared by a team led by topographer Dionisio Casañal y Zapatero in 1911 for the Geographic and Cadastral Institute of Zaragoza were used.

1.1. Methodology

The studies in process-based typology focus on categorizing building types and their synchronic and diachronic variants to interpret the formation process of urban tissues. In this study, the methodological framework developed by Saverio Muratori, Gianfranco Caniggia, and Gian Luigi Maffei (1979) is adopted to reveal the formation process of a selected urban tissue that is an example of the rebasification of a specialized building. Although building typology research has a long history, it appeared as a form of classification focused only on formal features until the 20th century. In the 1950s, it came to the fore with the idea that the modern understanding of architecture was insufficient to produce solutions integrated with the existing urban textures. The research field was further developed under the leadership of Saverio Muratori, with the aim of producing new design proposals that would allow the continuity of the urban texture (Strappa,

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2016). The typo-morphology approach accepts that the built environment emerged as the result of a historical process. Caniggia and Maffei use the term typological process to describe the gradual differentiation between building types in the same cultural area (Caniggia & Maffei, 1979). Defining synchronic and diachronic variants of building type allows for making inferences that are in harmony with the development process of the city.

1.2. Substratum and Rebasification

Over time, due to migrations and changes in social structure, the man-made environment loses its social context. After their significance for the settlers is lost, they become a second nature to men, and he starts transforming and adapting them to his living requirements. Often, pieces from the historical buildings (spolia) were reused as building materials, and the old structures were repurposed as foundations for new constructions. The continuity between the different phases of change and development transfers particular characteristics to these new constructions that arise in that foundation. Particularly in the Middle Ages, the re-functioning of public buildings, the use of spolia as building materials, and the invasion of open spaces for construction transformed the existing texture but ensured that features such as orientation and plot size survived to the present day. The substratum can be a base type, such as in the formation of courtyard houses from the Roman Domus substrata in contemporary Naples (Caniggia & Maffei, 1979) or the transition from Roman Domus to medianum house in Ostia Antica (Barbera, 2018). Substratum can also be a specialized type, such as the Roman theatre that became a foundation for row houses and pseudo-row houses in Zaragoza. The examples of rebasification, the repurposing of a specialized building for constructing an urban tissue of basic types, present themselves as forms that interrupt the uniformity of the urban tissue. These interruptions, when investigated, help to illustrate a fragment of the history of the city.

2. Formation of the urban tissue

The Roman colony Caesaraugusta was built following the Roman Empire's victory in the Cantabrian wars in 14 BC on the site of the Iberian city Saldube (Salduie, Salduba), under the rule of Caesar Augustus. At first Romans considered this culturally mixed city as their ally. Towards the end of the 1st century BC with the settling of Roman military forces to establish Colonia Caesar Augusta, the Sedetani people of Salduie joined the Roman population. The most valuable information about the establishment of the Roman colony on the site of Saldube comes from two epigraphic documents written in Latin. Respectively, Tabula Contrebiensis contains the agreement between Sostenians and those from Saldube that are intended to build a water channel likely for agricultural use. The Bronze of Ascoli contains the names of Iberian horsemen of the Turma (cavalry unit in the Roman army of the Republic and Empire) Salluitana, who received Roman citizenship in 89 BCE after they participated in the siege of Asculum (modern Ascoli Piceno). The Roman colony was an obligatory point for passage for those traveling from Asturica Augusta to Tarraco or Emerita Augusta from the north (Pina Polo, 2005).

The Visigoths settled in the city in the fifth century AD. In 711, Tariq ibn Ziyad's army crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and entered the Iberian Peninsula. After a few years, they capitulated Caesaraugusta, the most important of the three Visigothic episcopal cities without resistance (Betrán Abadía, 2005), and the town became a part of the Umayyad caliphate. The Umayyads of Córdoba controlled the city from 756 to 1013, the Taifa Kingdom of Zaragoza from 1013 to 1110, the Almoravids from 1085 to 1145, and the Second Taifa era from 1140 to 1203.

Since then, a mixture of these societies has populated the city: those converted to Islam, Mozarabes, Jews, and minorities from North Africa and the Middle East (Betrán Abadía, 2005) and the impact of this diversity in culture of the populations that lived in Zaragoza is still visible in the urban form of the city. Considering the Roman town Caesaraugusta underneath the Muslim Saraqusta and contemporary Zaragoza, this city is a valuable ground for typological studies.

2.1. Rebasification of the block

In 1972, fragments of a Roman theatre were discovered during the construction of a new building on Veronica Street. The Caja de Ahorros de Zaragoza, Aragón y Rioja (Savings Bank of Zaragoza, Aragón and Rioja) had the intention of building its new headquarters on the site between San Jorge and La Verónica, and the discovery of a Roman theatre made it unwise to maintain the construction project. The Roman theatre of Caesar Augusta dates to the 1st century. Construction started during the era of Tiberius (14-37 AD) and was completed in Claudius (41-54 AD). It has 7,000 square meters and seats 6,000 spectators on approximately 30 rows of seating.

The block formed in the same place where the theatre was located is represented differently in maps drawn from 1712 to 1911 (Figure 1). While the map from 1712 shows Zaporta Street as dividing the block, the same street is represented as a short road and a small space in the plan of 1769. While plans of 1769 and 1809 show two short cul-de-sacs connected to San Andres Street, they depict Zaporta Street as a very short cul-de-sac. There is no visible trace of the Roman theatre other than the round corner where Veronica Street and San Pedro Nolasco Street meet.

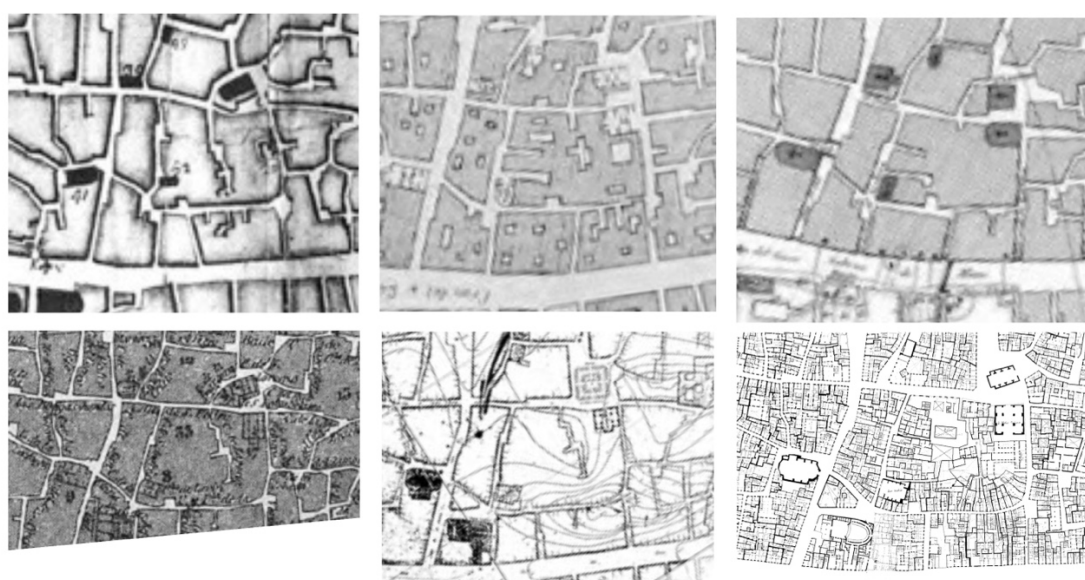


Figure 1 Block 11 in different plans. First row: Parcellation plan of Zaragoza in 1712, Plan of Zaragoza by Carlos Casanova in 1769, Central plan by Ambroise Tardieu h. in 1809. Second row: Plan of Zaragoza by Dionisio Casañal in 1880, Plan of Zaragoza by Dionisio Casañal in 1879, typological plan prepared by the author with surveys derived from Geographic and Cadastral Institute of Zaragoza done in 1911 by Dionisio Casañal y Zapatero.

The aerial photos taken before the partial demolition of the block show the curvature on the corner of the block and the roofs of the narrow houses that accumulated there (Figure 2). The inner part of the block has a similar orientation to the rest of the urban tissue, but the road on the west of the block is slightly angled. The photos taken after demolition reveal that the fragments of the Roman theatre are partially under the street, and the orientation of the narrow houses accumulated along the curvature matches the shape of the Roman theatre (Figure 3).

Illustrating the development phases of the block requires the identification of the block components in the building scale. The building types inside the historical core of the city were defined by analysis of the typological plan. The buildings were categorized based on common characteristics and progressive development phases. The analysis of the typological plan shows that Figure 4 most of the urban tissue of Zaragoza consisted of mature diachronic variants of row houses, in-line houses, and a particular type of large house with an ornamented courtyard in 1911. There are two kinds of row houses in the city. The narrow row houses are approximately 3,5 meters wide (Figure 4), and the wide row houses have 5 meters width (Figure 5). The narrow row house type has the following formal characteristics: an entrance hall, a room without any windows but connected to the entrance and the corridor, and a staircase behind that room, which is connected

to the entrance through a corridor on the side. In examples with more plot depth, it is observed that another room, which has a window to the backyard, is formed behind the staircase. This study is limited to the types that existed in the selected block for the purpose of the research.



Figure 2 Block 11 before demolition for a new construction. Source: GAZA, Gran Archivo Zaragoza Antigua



Figure 3 Block 11 before demolition for a new construction. Source: GAZA, Gran Archivo Zaragoza Antigua

The row houses in the block this study focuses on have a different form than the rest of the urban tissue. It consists of a particular synchronic variant of row houses, inline houses, pseudo-row houses, and patio houses that form the urban tissue of Zaragoza. Overlapping the archaeological plan of the Roman theatre with the typological plan reveals that the block was partially formed under the impact of the newly discovered Roman theatre. These recurring characteristics differentiate them from the rest of the urban tissue. The new type of row houses has an approximately 5-meter-wide front façade, and their facades to the backyard are 3,5 meters wide. The inline houses aligned with the walls are aggregations of this synchronic variant of the type. In contrast, the inline houses on the west part of the block, which are not affected by the substratum, are aggregations of the typical row houses.

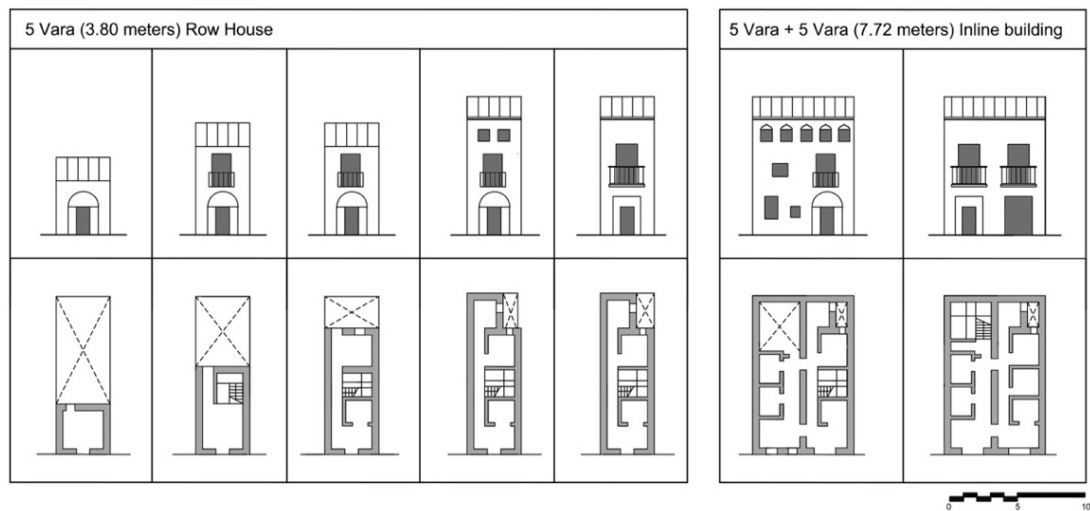


Figure 4 Formation process of narrow (approximately 3.80 meters front width) variant of row and inline house type, author's drawing.

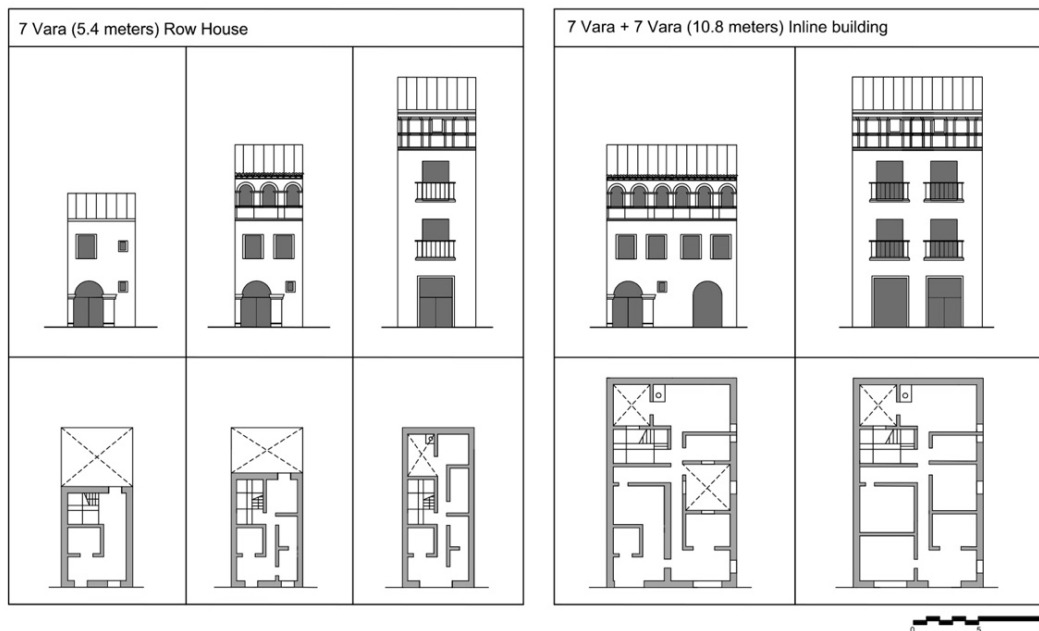


Figure 5 Formation process of wide (approximately 5.40 meters front width) variant of row and inline house type, author's drawing.

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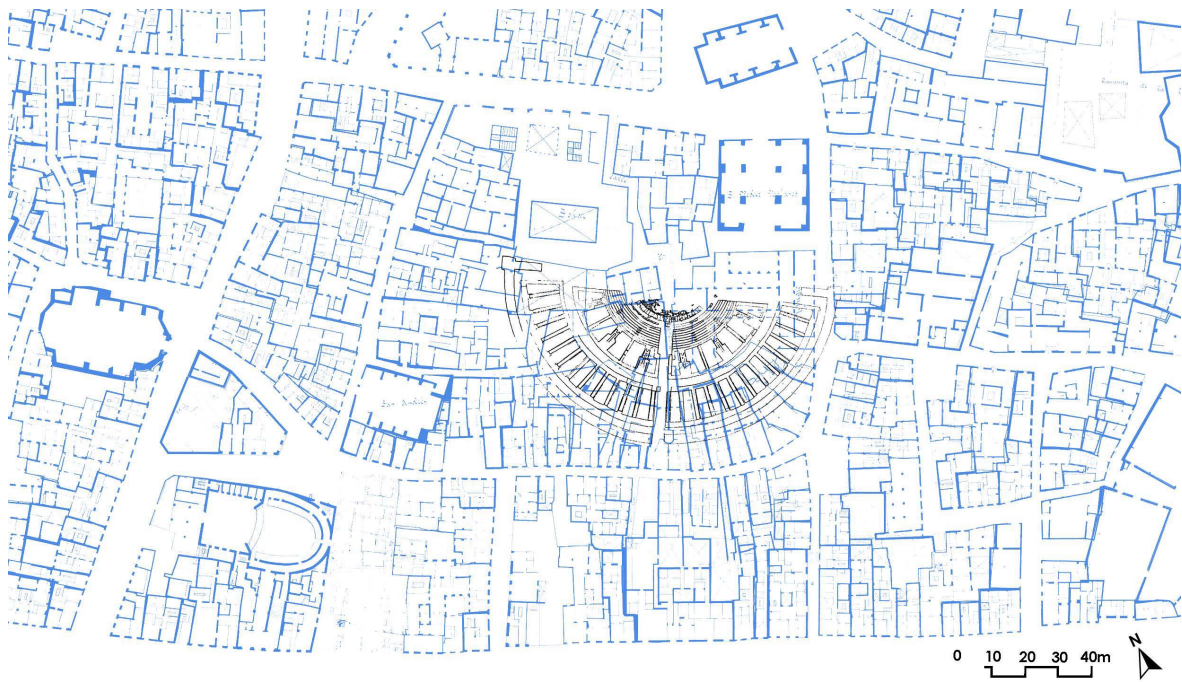


Figure 6 Typological plan of Zaragoza based on surveys of Dionisio Casañal, 1898, superposed with the survey of remains of Roman theatre (El Teatro De Caesaraugusta, Estado Actual De Conocimiento, Miguel Beltrán Lloris, 1993), author's drawing.

Zaporta Street, starting after no.12 and 14 on San Jorge Street, reaches the location of the orchestra. At the end of this street, two angled row houses share a semi-circular courtyard, which corresponds to the symmetrical axis of the theatre. The wall covering the backyard of row houses on the right overlaps with the walls of the gate under the seats of the theatre (Figure 6).

The pseudo-row houses located parallel to the stage of the theatre point out the existence of a road perpendicular to Calle de Zaporta. Two other elements follow that indication in the same direction. One of those elements is the alley of house no. 16 on Calle de San Andres, which is occupied by this patio house in later stages. Another element is the outer wall of the patio belonging to San Pedro Nolasco in no. 15 on Calle de San Pedro Nolasco. The other group of pseudo-row houses, in conjunction with Calle de la Veronica and Calle de San Andres, are built on the former border of the block. An empty area follows this same line, the inner walls of row houses, and the back wall of a pseudo-row house in between row houses.

In the current situation, Veronica Street looks as if it is the matrix route for block 11, and San Pedro Nolasco Street and San Andres Street are acting as the planned construction route. Most likely, the pseudo-row houses next to San Andres Church occupied that part of the street in later stages. There are three pseudo-row houses located on the south of the block on the left side, and their wall on the north follows the same line as the wall of San Andres Church. The area between the conjunction of Veronica Street with Don Jaime I Street (so-called *cardo*) and the street on the north of San Andres Church is the limit where the regularity of the block starts to end. The distortion of the urban tissue in this corner and the form of the triangular building block could be the result of the invasion of the street to build pseudo-row houses. If the limit of block 11 overlapped with the outer wall of the Roman theatre in the first century, the parts of the block on the south that do not overlap with the theatre could be later additions as well. The triangular pseudo-row house located on the southeast limit of the theatre supports this assumption.

The west part of the block consisted of houses that had multiple courtyards and backyards; they were wider than the rest of the buildings in the block, and their orientation followed the rest of the urban tissue. Andre Bazzana (1992) identified two different types of patio houses in the Iberian Peninsula; the first one he named "block-like" and the second "attached." According to Bazzana,

this difference between the two types can be answered with the economies of families: the exterior courtyard was used by semi-nomads; the interior courtyard, patterned after the ksar of the Sahara was originally inhabited by sedentary farmers. Petruccioli (2008) states, “such a schematic analysis is doubtful since it is conducted at an insufficiently low level of typological specificity”. In Zaragoza, it is possible to find both types, whether the building plot is regular or irregular; there are houses with two side patios, two central patios, or both with a side and a central patio. The typological plan revealed that some houses in Zaragoza have a central or a side patio, regardless of the shape or position of the building plot, which can also be observed in block 11. A close look at the room dimensions and inner plan organization of these patio houses reveals their similarities with the row houses. Because of this similarity, this study considers these large structures a synchronic variant of the inline house type.

The roads on the western side of the block most likely follow the streets of the Roman urban tissue. These inline houses on the left expanded and occupied the streets in time, but the limits of streets are still visible as long corridors belong to their interior plan.

3. Conclusions

The excavations in the area revealed that Roman theatre lost significance around the 5th century. During the medievalization process of the block, row houses aggregated on the border of the cavea around the space of the orchestra, and their walls were aligned with the bearing walls of the theatre. The Roman theatre affected the formation of this urban block in a larger area than the theatre itself. This situation shows that besides repurposing the substrata as a foundation for new constructions, the existence of the Roman theatre had an impact on the legal land division and building permissions in the previous centuries. Identifying the components of the urban form in the building scale and exploring irregularities of the urban form based on these assumptions provide a route to light up a small fragment of the long history of cities.

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Resume

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