



TOWER OF HERCULES

Archeological Excavation

The first archaeological excavations were made in the early 90s as a consequence of the project for the restoration of the Tower and the surrounding area which was put for bid by the Ministry of Public Works and was awarded to the team led by Pablo Latorre. The objective of this project was the restoration of the lighthouse with the occasion of the celebration of the bicentenary of the reconstruction made by Eustaquio Giannini and its re-opening to the public. In spite of the fact that until that time the foundations of the Tower had not been excavated, this had been often demanded by both Luis Monteagudo, director of the Archaeological and Historical Museum of A Coruña and Theodor Hauschild, an architect and director of Lisbon's German Archaeological Institute as this was the only way of documenting the structure of the lighthouse from Roman times.

Finally, in 1991 a number of coincidences made it possible that excavations under the stone platform of the Tower were conducted. Works began in June 1992, under the supervision of archaeologist Luis Caballero Zoreda, a member of the restoration project of the Tower and José M. Bello Diéguez, endorsed by the Archaeological Museum of Castillo de San Antón.

As soon as the excavation began, the stratigraphic complexity of the subsoil became apparent. This called for an extension of the excavation area which led from the initial trial excavation to an area excavation. Deliberately, a 90° section was preserved from intervention with the idea of doing so when more sophisticated technical means than those available then may be used. The archaeological excavation could not be completed because all the money had been used up by the time the Roman level was reached at the main facade of the monument.

The relevance of the remains found justified the in situ consolidation of part of the structures and their later musealization. Since 1994 visitors may visit the excavation and see all these testimonies, silent witnesses of history.

Excavation was done on the basis of stratigraphic units. At the contemporary levels, i.e. those on the upper layers, remains of a succession of road surfaces and electrical conduits were found.

At the levels corresponding to Giannini's restoration (1788-1791) fillings were documented the purpose of which was to level the platform as well as areas for cutting stone and mortar preparation and negatives of scaffolding laying, etc.

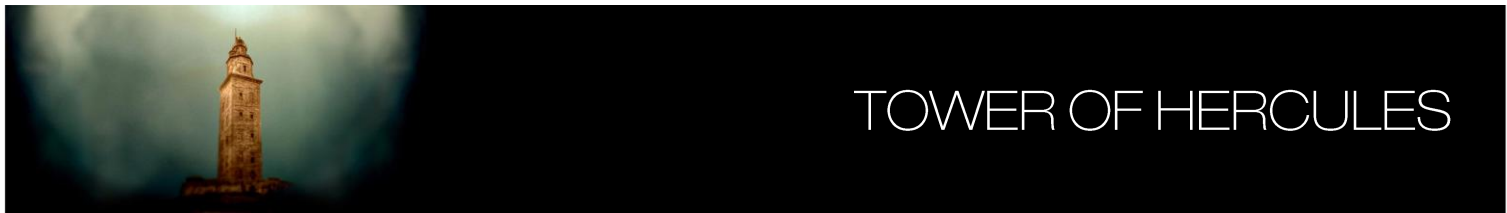
The remains from the Modern time – between the 16th -18 century – correspond to the time when the Tower was used again as a lighthouse and its name and drawing began to appear in navigation charts. Archaeological finds tell us that the building was surrounded by a defensive structure (ditch and parapet), which made access to the inside of the lighthouse difficult as the gates were at an approximate height of 2.50m from the ground. So as to overcome this gap, a wooden ladder was used which could be removed in the event of a siege. Protecting the Tower or the Ancient Castle, as it was then known, was the task of the keepers who were in charge of the system of aids to navigation. These men had long hours ahead of them and one of the forms of whiling their time away was to relish in smoking their pipes at the foot of the Tower as they scanned the horizon or to line the buttons of the attire of the time. Evidence of this are the fragments of pottery pipes that have been found at this level and the bone plates used to line buttons.

At the medieval levels found over late Roman times, the remains of great ashlar were unearthed, presumably from the outer wall. They had traces of cramp irons to reinforce them, as well as fragments of a monumental cornice which probable was originally used at the capping of the Tower. Along with all these materials, numerous Roman ashlar were found. They suffered from weathering and were discarded in the 13th century as they could not be used for other buildings. Also among the finds were the remains of a construction which was attached to the outer wall of the Tower, on the south, which probably serviced the building when it played the role of watchtower to warn of possible raids by Normans and Muslim navies. In this construction the remains of a stove and fragments of ceramics from vessels used on the stove were found.

Although budgetary constraints have prevented us from reaching the Roman levels of the Tower, the remaining excavated area has allowed us to document the existence of Roman foundations which have survived in spite of all the aggressions suffered throughout their 2,000 years of history, including the systematic plundering of ashlar during the 13-16th century period, and the reparation of the foundations by Giannini when he restored the tower and which affected the remains; the construction of the tunnel in the 50s for lighthouse keepers or even the deep hole dug in 1974 in this area without any archaeological supervision.

Roman time foundations consist of great granite ashlar, remains of lime mortars and living rock on which the construction lies. The furrows made on the bedding rock to fir the ashlar have also survived. This has allowed us to know the primitive laying of the outer wall. This wall, which protected the ramp giving access to the beacon, was lost to time and plundering.





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Currently, visitors have access the lighthouse through the excavated area. So the first contact visitors have is through the archaeological testimonies that have been unearthed under the platform of the Tower. In the near future, there will be a Visitors Welcome Centre, which has already been built next to a car park and a Visitor's Information Centre which will start to operate early next year so that visitors may truly appreciate the outstanding value of this site.