

ARCHAEOLOGY

Two archaeological sites in the north of Spain are giving experts remarkable insights into highly contrasting periods in the country's history. In the former Roman town of Clunia, excavators are sifting through an ancient theater's sewage system as they try to unlock its past, while in Tarragona, historians hope to restore the place where a famous Civil War battle took place.

The glory of Rome lies beneath Clunia's mud

Archaeologists excavate an ancient theater in the hope of revealing its startling history

EMIKE ELKIN, Burgos merging from the darkness of the shaft, Rosa and Javi looked as if they had been slaving in a chocolate mine. Decked in miners' helmets, Neoprene diving suits and workers' overalls, the pair stripped off their uniforms — saturated with 2,000-year-old sludge. Both are archaeology students, and for the past five months the pair and others have spent countless hours cleaning out the subterranean sewer tunnel that serviced the theater of the Roman city of Clunia.

The archaeological team excavating the theater found the maintenance shaft to the sewer in September 2003. Once inside, the group discovered a vaulted tunnel just tall enough to traverse if you hunched down. The sewer stretched in two directions from the shaft — west toward the theater seats and northeast toward the edge of the plateau on which the city stands.

Rosa, a doctoral student at the University of Burgos, led the excavation of the sewer this year. Each day she and a lucky assistant would don their protective gear and squeeze themselves into the tunnels. The task was to scoop out as much mud from the as possible (they called it mud in an attempt to ignore what else might be down there). The diggers could never place the tunnel's ripe, musky smell. But neither claustrophobia, filth nor stench could stop them. To date, Rosa and her fellow moles have accomplished a feat worthy of *The Great Escape*, cleaning 50 meters of tunnel heading northeast and about 24 meters heading west... and the sewer continues far below the seats. But that can wait for another year.



The international archaeological team at Clunia uncovers the orchestra area of the Roman city's theater in hopes to learn how the ancient architects built it. / MIKE ELKIN

spans 130 hectares across a dry plateau in southern Burgos, 1,023 meters above sea level and the theater, estimated to hold between 9,000 and 11,000 people, is the largest in the whole of Iberia.

At any given time there are hundreds of archaeological excavations going on throughout Spain and Portugal — both public and private. The peninsula boasts remains dating back 3 mil-

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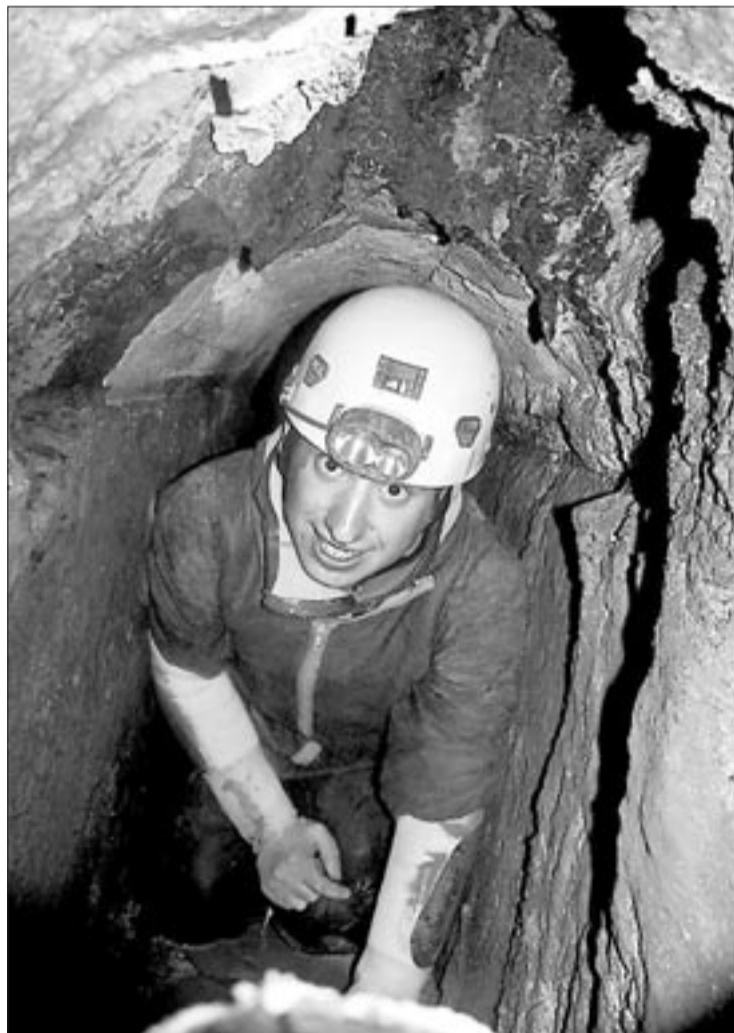
Not only did the theater stage the works of Roman playwrights, but also Roman spectacles, games and battles that often ended in death

The sewer-cleaning forms part of an archaeological project under the auspices of the Burgos regional government and several Spanish universities. For the past four years, archaeological teams led by co-directors Francesc Tuset and Miguel Angel de la Iglesia have excavated the Roman theater with the double aim of understanding how it was built and restoring it. The objective is to give visitors an idea of what Clunia's theater was like between the 1st and 4th centuries.

Colonia Sulpicia Clunia was the largest Roman city in the region and acted as the administrative capital of its area. The city

lion years, and later provided settlements for various forms of early humans. Following the creation of the world's first civilizations, Iberia housed Celts, Iberians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Visigoths, Muslims, Christians and Jews, to name a few. History is no stranger here.

Clunia is one of many cities that the Romans founded during their conquest of the Iberian peninsula. The battles for supremacy began in 197 BC, following the Roman victory over Carthage in the Punic Wars. Primarily, the Romans wanted to ensure that the Carthaginians could not rebuild their coastal strongholds, but the



One of Clunia's dedicated diggers maneuvers through a Roman sewer. / ROSA CUESTA

newcomers soon learned that Spain teemed with natural resources such as metals and grains.

However, taking Spain would not be so easy. During the entire second century BC, Rome sent hundreds of thousands of sol-

diers to fight the indigenous Celtiberians, and the locals held their ground. The natives enjoyed fame throughout the ancient world as possessing the fiercest mercenaries and bodyguards. The major fighting ended with the conquest of Numantia (near the city of Soria) in 133 BC. But many tribes and cities — such as Clunia to the west and Tiermes to the southeast — continued the resistance for about a century longer. In the end, Rome prevailed and extended its network of foreign enclaves throughout Iberia: Italica (Seville), Gades (Cádiz), Toletum (Toledo), Segovia, Legio (León), Valentia (Valencia), Caesaraugusta (Pamplona) and Tarraco (Tarragona), among many, many others.

The next time you visit a *pueblo* near a former Roman enclave, examine the local architecture — you're sure to spy a few pieces of Roman column or capital mixed with the mud-brick and stone.

Clunia was the legal and religious center of the region that stretched from modern-day Gijón in the north, east to the Navarre/French border, south to Calatayud and west along the mountains north of Madrid to Valladolid. In Roman times, the northern Roman province of Hispania was called Tarraconensis, with Tarraco as its capital. Within the province were seven judicial regions, of which Clunia was the largest.

Roman historian Livy wrote that Pompey besieged Clunia during the war against rebellious Ro-

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man soldier Sertorius in 75 BC. The city fell completely into Roman hands in 55 BC, during the triumvirate of Julius Caesar, Pompey and Crassus. The indigenous Celtiberian race had been resisting Roman swords for decades, but one by one they eventually fell.

The site became a national monument in 1932, and Clunia underwent excavation from 1958 to 1994 headed by archaeologist Pedro de Palol. Aside from the theater, the archaeologists uncovered a mansion, a handful of houses bearing some incredible mosaics, two public baths and half the forum — with the foundations of the central temple to Jupiter. Tuset, from the University of Barcelona, and De la Iglesia, from the University of Valladolid, took over in 1995.

Archaeologically, Clunia differs from many other sites in Spain because it is purely Roman — there are no prior or subsequent settlements. Usually, the Romans conquered a city and built a newer one on its ruins, but

we know why, and it's because everything was taken away when they made the transformation from theater to a place for spectacles... more like an amphitheater.

"This means that Clunia is different from the normal Roman model," he continues. "In other cities at that time, they were building both theaters and amphitheaters, but the beautiful and unusual thing about Clunia is that they did everything at the same place."

Go to Mérida, or Emerita Augusta as the Romans called it, and you'll see what he means. Side by side sit a huge theater and an amphitheater. But the Clunians apparently prided their architecture more on practicality than ostentation.

Foreign Diggers

In 2002, the previously Spanish group of archaeologists and students enlarged its numbers with the arrival of university students from the United States, Canada,

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"In other cities at that time, they were building both theaters and amphitheaters, but in Clunia they did everything at the same place"

the Romans chose to build Clunia on the plateau adjacent to the Celtiberian's hilltop city. After Rome abandoned the city around the 5th century, it sat dormant, save for a 12th-century Christian chapel near the forum that was enlarged in the 16th century. The Spanish village of Peñalba de Castro stands at the foot of the plateau.

And this past year in the theater, archaeologists found further proof of Clunia's individuality. Not only did the theater stage the works of the Greek and Roman playwrights, but also Roman spectacles, games and battles that often ended in death.

The layout of a typical Roman theater diverges little from a modern example: rows of semi-circular seats converge onto a small semi-circular orchestra. Behind that stand the stage and the façade — back then they were decorated with columns, capitals and other architectural marvels. Tuset and De la Iglesia's problem was the orchestra — they couldn't find it.

This year, the two archaeologists discovered why. Cleaning an area on one of the theater's sides, archaeologists found large dressed stones that formed a semi-circular ring far larger than what had been expected. The Romans, the theory now goes, had built a traditional theater, but then amplified the area in front of the stage about 50 to 100 years afterwards, creating something akin to a bullfighting ring sliced in half that could accommodate gladiator fights, animal spectacles and — using a wooden, dismountable structure to create more seating and an orchestra — a theater. Clunia in effect built Spain's first multi-use arena.

"We were trying to recover and find floor levels of the theater, for example, the orchestra and the stage, but we couldn't figure it out," Tuset says. "Now

Norway, Scotland and Brazil. The US-based archaeology firm ArchaeoSpain formed a partnership with Tuset that year to provide the team with about 10 international students each July.

"The unique nature of the site made the excavations interesting," says Emily Cole, 18, one of the Canadian students that excavated this past July. "The theories concerning the theater's structure changed everyday."

Especially when diggers found the stone, she said. Earlier this year, a puzzlingly large, square stone appeared in the middle of the orchestra area. Centered on the top of the block was a circular niche carved into the stone. Embedded inside the niche was a small bronze cylinder — as if there had been a metal ring that fit inside and could swivel in and out of the niche. Although the diggers have no idea what this was used for, you can't help but think of the rings on the floor of the Coliseum in the movie *Gladiator* that helped control the tigers.

Don't let the ring distract you, though, from the Roman inscription surrounding it on all four sides. It named the person who financed the transformation of the theater into the multi-use arena, as well as listing the names of the two Roman consuls at the time. Because scholars have accurate lists of consuls, archaeologists were able to pinpoint the year that the new arena opened: 169.

In August, excavators and construction workers finished a reconstruction of the theater that covers most of what was excavated this summer. Next year, however, the diggers will return to probe the unexcavated southern side of the theater. That area should mirror the excavated northern side due to the Roman penchant for symmetry. But that kind of thinking often gets archaeologists into trouble.



An excavation site at La Fatarella, Tarragona, where the Battle of the Ebro took place. / ORIOL GARCÍA

Remembering one of the Civil War's bloodiest conflicts

A historical group in Catalonia is renovating the site of the Battle of the Ebro, where 100,000 men died

ORIOL AYMÍ, Tarragona Travel around Spain and you can find countless excavations uncovering Roman villas, prehistoric necropolises. But locating an archaeological site for a more recent event may be difficult. According to Spanish heritage law, an area less than 100 years old does not fall under the government's jurisdiction. And therefore nor does every single piece of land linked to the Spanish Civil War. However, some new developments in Catalonia could spark a change.

The Comebe group hopes to create a tourist zone, including several small museums and tours of the trenches and bombed houses in the area

Francisco Franco's Nationalist planes and artillery wreaked so much destruction that the locals refer to the area as the Catalan Gernika

The Battle of the Ebro, one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, is undergoing an archaeological facelift. This past August, a team of archaeologists spent 10 days cleaning and restoring the Republican army trenches of La Fatarella, near Gandesa in the province of Tarragona.

With the objective of creating a tourist zone, including several small museums and tours of the trenches and bombed houses in the area, the Comebe historical group petitioned Catalonia's regional government — which over-

sees heritage in the autonomous region — for the corresponding archaeological permits. When Comebe received a positive reply, it was a first for Catalan archaeology.

"We wanted to create a precedent," said David Tormo, the director of the project. "And our file is on the books."

The entire historical plan is expected to be finished in four years, Tormo said. The launch of the first phase of the project — originally scheduled for November — had to be postponed until early

same time," Tormo says. "The soldiers arrived exhausted. We don't think there was any fighting here because we haven't found any signs of battle conditions. The Nationalist army took the trench on November 7, after the Republicans retreated the night before."

In all, about 100,000 men died during the Battle of the Ebro. In the towns of Corbera d'Ebre and El Pinell de Brai, the Nationalists planes and artillery left so much destruction in their wake that the locals refer to the towns as the Catalan Gernika. On a larger scale, the defeat was not only the turning point in the battle for control of Catalonia, but it devastated the Republican army to such an extent that it never recovered.

An archaeological and historical memorial to the battle is one of many initiatives focused on the Spanish Civil War. A taboo subject not long ago, this year various groups have called for more investigation into the War's historical records and also into its physical records; for instance, the mass graves of executed soldiers. So far, about 300 people have been exhumed and identified using DNA from family members. However, there is still no law to regulate the exhumation of Franco's victims.

Comebe consists of historians and the city halls of El Pinell de Brai, Caseres, La Faratella, Vilalba dels Arcs, Corbera y Batea and the Catalan regional government. The latter is financing about 90 percent of the project, with the towns contributing to the remainder.

"The trench was built by men who were fighting at the