

## Recent excavations and sculptural finds in the colony of *Astigi* (Baetica)

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The city of Écija (province of Sevilla), the ancient *Colonia Augusta Firma Astigi*, was one of the most flourishing cities of Baetica.<sup>1</sup> Its situation on the banks of the Genil (the Roman *Singili*), a navigable artery<sup>2</sup> and one of the chief tributaries of the Guadalquivir, made it the capital of the *Conventus iuridicus Astigitanus*, an extensive and fertile territory, and one of the main focal points for the export of oil through the 2nd and 3rd c. A.D., as is shown by the numerous amphora potteries which mark its banks<sup>3</sup> as well as by the important evidence of *tituli picti* from Monte Testaccio.<sup>4</sup> Its strong agricultural potential was reinforced by its strategic position with respect to river traffic, being the last navigable point towards the interior of the country and with a possible port having been detected at the nearby pottery centre of Las Delicias.<sup>5</sup> By land it was likewise the nodal point of communications because of the *Via Augusta* and because it lay halfway between *Corduba* (Córdoba) and *Hispalis* (Sevilla).<sup>6</sup> It also stands in a region that saw many historical events and contains other sites.<sup>7</sup>

The settlement sequence begins around the 7th c. B.C. on the hill of the Alcázar, the possible location of *Astigi vetus* which is mentioned by Pliny,<sup>8</sup> to judge by the stratigraphy found on calle Merced at no. 5<sup>9</sup> and at no. 37,<sup>10</sup> as well as the most recent excavations which have been conducted in the area known as Plaza de Armas or El Picadero, where habitation levels running from the protohistoric period to modern times have been detected.<sup>11</sup>

Although most research so far has concentrated on epigraphic studies,<sup>12</sup> the different archaeological interventions since the 1980s make it possible to begin to understand the urban evolution and different areas of this ancient nucleus,<sup>13</sup> as well as the factors determining its historical development.<sup>14</sup> In this way for the High Imperial period an area connected to the forum has begun to be delineated (figs. 1-2). The forum lay to the south of the Plaza de España and according to old hypotheses it extended up to that plaza.<sup>15</sup> The particular signposts which led to this idea were the podium of the public building that appeared at calle Miguel de Cervantes

1 Pomp. Mela 2.88.

2 Plin., *NH* 3.3.12.

3 G. Chic, *Epigrafía anfórica de la Bética* vol. I (Seville 1985) 31-52.

4 J. M. Blázquez, J. Remesal and E. Rodríguez, *Excavaciones arqueológicas en el Monte Testaccio* (Madrid 1994) 38-129.

5 Chic (supra n.3) 32-36.

6 It is mentioned on the Vicarello vases and on the *Antonine Itinerary* (413.3 and 414.4).

7 Among these, *Munda* (Consuegra), *Carruca* (Cortijo de Cosmes), *Colonia Iulia Genetiva Urso* (Osuna), *Tucci* (Martos) stand out, as well as other *oppida* such as Cerro de las Cabezas and Alamillo. See J. M. Vargas and A. Romo, "El territorio de Osuna en la antigüedad," in F. Chávez (ed.), *Urso. A la búsqueda de su pasado* (Seville 2002) 147-86.

8 *NH* 3.12.

9 I. Rodríguez and E. Núñez, "Arqueología urbana de urgencia en Écija (Sevilla), 1985," *Anuario Arqueológico de Andalucía III, 1985* (Seville 1987) 318.

10 F. Collantes, J. Hernández and A. Sancho, *Catálogo arqueológico y artístico de Sevilla y su provincia* vol. III (Seville 1951) 66.

11 S. García-Dils, *Intervención arqueológica puntual en Plaza de Armas del Alcázar de Écija. Memoria anual. Campaña 2001-2002* (unpublished; Écija 2003) 164-68.

12 A. U. Stylow et al., *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. Inscriptiones Hispaniae Latinae Pars V. Conventus Astigitanus* (CIL II<sup>2</sup>/5) (Berlin 1998).

13 I. Rodríguez, "Notas acerca del urbanismo de la Colonia Augusta Firma Astigi," *I Congreso sobre Historia de Écija* (Seville 1988) 101-24.

14 S. Ordóñez, *Colonia Augusta Firma Astigi* (Seville 1988).

15 Collantes, Hernández and Sancho (supra n.10) 69-70; Rodríguez (supra n.13) 119.