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## Urban Enceintes and Roman Identities: an Example from Toulouse

Toulouse, ideally situated for trade and communication, lies midway between the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and sits on the banks of the Garonne river, which runs to the Bay of Biscay. It is about 40 km from the Naurouze gap, the low pass between the Massif Central and the Pyrenees, which allows relatively easy overland access to the Aude river and the Gulf of Lion.

There are numerous archaeological sites dating from the Lower and Middle Paleolithic eras around Toulouse, indicating a long history of human habitation in the region. By the tenth century BCE, there was some habitation on the east bank of the Garonne; There is abundant evidence for significant Iron age settlements at the sites of Le Cluzel and Vieille-Toulouse, rocky outcroppings on the east bank of the river 6 and 7 km from modern Toulouse.<sup>1</sup> There are two distinct periods of settlement at these sites, known as the first and second Iron age; they last 800-425 and 350-100 BCE, and are associated with Hallstatt and La Tene cultures, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

A marked increase in population in Vieille-Toulouse took place near the end of the second Iron Age, around the beginning of the second century BCE, possibly due to the arrival of another Celtic group called the Tolosates. Their ethnogenesis is not clearly understood, but linguistic evidence suggests they were a sept of the Volcae, a Celtic tribal group.<sup>3</sup> By the time the Romans began to establish themselves along the southern coast of Gaul after the conquest of Spain in 134, Vieille-Toulouse was a large *oppidum*--a native, defended settlement of some density.<sup>4</sup> The foundation of Narbonne in 118 BCE. provided an outpost for Roman access to the Toulousain via the Aude. During the war with the Cimbri and Teutons in the late first century BCE, Vieille-Toulouse allied itself with the tribes over the Romans. After Marius annihilated the two tribes around 102, Toulouse lost its independent status, became stipendiary to Rome and hosted a Roman garrison.<sup>5</sup>

Near the end of the reign of Augustus, Toulouse was re-founded 7 km downstream of the *oppidum* of Vieille-Toulouse. Excavations in modern Toulouse have shown that there was essentially no human presence in the city before this re-establishment.<sup>6</sup> This is further supported by the latest objects recovered from burial pits at Vieille-Toulouse which date from the last decades of the first century BCE.<sup>7</sup> The impetus for moving the city is unknown, as there is no surviving written evidence about this move. There is still scholarly debate if the movement of the city coincided with the settlement of a legion, making it a colony, or the elevation of the city to a new rank, like Latin rights.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Labrousse 1968, 63-4.

<sup>2</sup> Milcent 2006, 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 53-54

<sup>4</sup> Besides fortifications, these 'proto-towns' varied considerably. For a brief, but complete tour, see Woolf 1998, 108-11.

<sup>5</sup> Ebel 1976, 93. Although it is of little difference here, King (1990, 39-40) and others, argue that the garrison was established before the Germanic invasion.

<sup>6</sup> Domergue et al. (2002, 78) report only a few shafts have been found at one site (Saint-Roch) in the first-century B.C.E.

<sup>7</sup> Labrousse 1968, 225.

<sup>8</sup> Toulouse's legal standing, like that of much of early imperial Gaul, in this period is unclear. Rivet (1988,

The earliest datable monuments from Roman Toulouse include several sections of the *cardo maximus* and a small part of a portico in the forum. These have both been dated archaeologically to the same period, the first decade or two CE.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, excavations have revealed a portion of a theater inside the city and an aqueduct that runs into the city from a source 5-6 km to the west.<sup>10</sup> Neither of these projects has been definitively dated, but the construction method and materials seems to suggest a date near the first wave of building in Toulouse.

The city wall, however, is a critically significant monument from the new city. This early Roman wall at Toulouse is reasonably well known and researched. Its course is known from at least 35 different portions of towers or curtain wall, preserved to varying degrees, scattered around the city. Many of these have long been destroyed, and today there are only eight clearly visible sections, three sections of curtain and five remnants of towers. In general, a lunate wall enclosed the Roman city, starting and ending on the Garonne at points 790 m apart (Figure 1). The wall stretched about 3 km in length and enclosed an area of 90 ha.

Excavations have revealed foundations, on average 1 m deep, which consisted of large stones laid in regular levels surrounded by rubble and concrete.<sup>11</sup> Above the ground, the early wall was constructed in the *opus vittatum mixtum* style in the lower sections and crowned by *opus testaceum* (Figure 2). The height of the lower sections, from the foundations to the tiles, measured just over a meter. The upper section of the walls was constructed of tile faced concrete separated into regularly sized caissons or blocks, framed by vertical leveling courses and horizontal transversal tile walls.<sup>12</sup> The overall height of the wall is unknown. The tallest section ever discovered *in situ*, at the Hôpital Larrey, stood 6.45 m in height, which was probably near to the maximum elevation.<sup>13</sup> The thickness of the base of the wall, on average, was 2.5 m.

The towers had an average interior diameter of about 7.5 m and average exterior diameter around 10 m (Figure 3). The majority of towers were fully round and projected about two-thirds in front of the line of the walls. There is some evidence for polygonal towers, but their frequency compared to circular towers is unclear.<sup>14</sup> The number is towers is open to some debate, with numbers ranging from 49 to 60 towers, depending on the spacing along the curtain.

Only two gates are known with any certainty. At the south end of the *cardo*, the Porte Narbonnaise stood near the modern Place du Parlement. This gate is only known from medieval accounts. At the north end, the remains of the monumental gate were discovered beneath the Place du Capitole and excavated in the 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Similar examples suggest that there should have been a gate at the east end of the *decumanus maximus* as

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117) mentions that the title *colonia* is only used to describe Toulouse in Ptolemy and nowhere else until much later. And there is no direct evidence of a block grant of this status to any part of Gaul, as is known from elsewhere. See Woolf 1998, 66-7.

<sup>9</sup> de Filippo 2002, 207-8

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> de Filippo 1993, 189.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 194.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Labrousse 1968, 266-7.

<sup>15</sup> Labrousse 1974.

well as any number of smaller postern openings, but no traces of these have ever been found.

Before the 1990s, this enceinte had been dated around the reign of Domitian based on circumstantial evidence.<sup>16</sup> However, recent research, especially Raphael De Filippo's excavation at the Hôpital Larrey, suggests otherwise.<sup>17</sup> The well-documented stratigraphy includes sigillata pottery in the foundation layers, which provide a date of 20 to 60 CE. Two samples from the wall, moreover, were subjected to archaeomagnetic testing. The first sample returned a date from 0-40 CE and the second from 0-30 CE. Taking all the evidence together, it seems very likely that the early wall at Toulouse was constructed around 20-30 CE.

Between the forum, main street grid and walls, there is a clear urban project for this Roman city, which was founded *ex nihilo*. The similar time frame and construction methods for these structures strongly suggest a unified urban program for Toulouse during the first three decades CE. While the archaeology and the historical circumstances concerning the foundation of Toulouse are important, the focus here is how the early imperial enceinte shaped the identity of those who interacted with it. The study of ancient fortifications has no need to be confined to archaeological or architectural analyses. This field has recently reached a point where we can move beyond the physical remains to look at how the structures affected and transformed the city and the people in the city.<sup>18</sup>

The first way that circuit walls form identity is through their presence on the visual landscape. A large town would have been hard to miss, but these walls, standing probably up to or above 7 m tall, topped with crenellations and embellished with towers, would have been impossible not to see. Toulouse stands in a wide plane and the hinterland around the city was agricultural if occupied at all, all of which would have afforded a clear view from a distance. While the banks of the Garonne were not fortified, the massive termini of the lunate wall would have been clearly visible by those approaching from the river. One only needs to look at the better-preserved walls of neighboring Carcassonne for the visual experience of approaching the city (Figure 4). The wall was the first and last thing someone coming or going to the city would see. It was its first impression, the first message to friends or foes.

The visual dominance of urban defenses becomes clear looking at depictions of cities as well. The best examples of illustrated cities come from several late antique manuscripts. In the Peutinger Table, the Notitia Dignitatum and the Vienna genesis, we can see that a city is the walls.<sup>19</sup> There are occasionally bits of other buildings that pop up above the fortifications, but very few, and none well-defined. For the greatest part, the city is the gate and towers, the essential parts of a wall. In other media, this mode of representation goes back to early Imperial period. Reliefs of Roman camps on Trajan's column show the visual dominance of walls in representing a settlement. The Romans conceived their cities externally and the outer projecting face could be the city by proxy.

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<sup>16</sup> Labrousse 1968, 275; Wolff 1961, 32-3.

<sup>17</sup> de Filippo 1993.

<sup>18</sup> For example, see: Pinder 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Admittedly, the first two in this list are not authentic antique works, but somewhat later copies. Still, it is clear that the original versions were illustrated, so it seems a reasonably safe assumption that the originals contained roughly similar depictions.

The visibility of the wall is not the only significant aspect of its exterior appearance. This wall was constructed with Roman methods and materials. Many indigenous settlements in Gaul had been protected by walls, but they were nothing like the large, free standing city wall of Toulouse. Caesar describes native fortifications as constructed in timber and earth.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, the wall at Toulouse was built in concrete faced with stone and brick, the Roman *opus caementicum*. The use of brick as a facing material is seen in several city walls in north Italy from the late Republican or early Imperial periods, but this is the only example in Gaul.<sup>21</sup> The enceinte, a beacon on the visual landscape of the Toulousain, projected Roman-ness through not only its presence, but also its appearance. It marked Toulouse as a Roman city, externally and from a distance.

The second way that this enceinte helped form identity was as physical barrier to movement. The wall probably had three major gates, which would have served as the major arteries of traffic into and out of the city. There would have probably been a number of posterns, or other smaller openings, along the course, but these would not have facilitated movement to the same degree as the gateways. The three gateways would have been approximately 900 m apart. This is a considerable distance between major points of access and shows that the wall served as a very real barrier to access to both the interior and exterior of the city, depending on which side one was standing.

The restriction of movement created a sense of inside and outside. Two points on either side of the wall, instead of being only 10 m apart, became nearly a kilometer apart. These two polarities, inside and outside, are closely aligned with a significant dichotomy for Roman society, the *urbs* and the *rus*. The relationship between these two seemingly opposing concepts is hard to unravel, but as Revell explains, “the ideological relationship between *urbs* and *rus* existed on a number of different planes, at times contradictory, but always dependent upon their juxtaposition.”<sup>22</sup> In the Roman mind, *urbanus* “incorporated the positive qualities of elegance, refinement and intelligence; on the other hand, *rusticus* included the negative qualities of roughness, simpleness and boorishness.”<sup>23</sup> Roman culture was urban. The city, with its temples, markets and baths, was the focus of Roman society. Vitruvius, in his explanation of the evolution of architecture, explicitly equates living in cities to having civilization, something that, in the Roman mind, barbarians were largely lacking.<sup>24</sup> In this way the city, with its temples, markets and baths, was a mark of Roman-ness, of culture distinct from the native population. Even at the height of urbanism in Gaul, it seems that only 10-15% of the total population lived in cities.<sup>25</sup> And at such an early point, a large city would be an important marker for a Roman lifestyle. Indeed, as Woolf notes, “Roman cities in Gaul were [...] islands of civilization scattered over a world of villages.”<sup>26</sup> In this context, the highly visible walls of Toulouse projected everything that was civilized and Roman.

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<sup>20</sup> B. Gall. 7.23

<sup>21</sup> de Filippo 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Revell 2009, 47.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> De. Arch. 2

<sup>25</sup> Woolf 1998, 138.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 136.

Further connected to the *urbs/rus* polarities was the role of the rustic villa in relation to an urban context, often an important element in the discourse of elite power. There was very little building activity in the Augustan period in the hinterland around Toulouse.<sup>27</sup> Farms in the late first century BCE and early first century CE tended to be clustered, following a centuries old, native tradition. There was very little change in the countryside until the mid-first century CE when the number of Roman-style villas began to expand.<sup>28</sup> Instead of being closely interconnected with a thriving villa system, during the early first century CE, Toulouse was isolated. While this seclusion is not the case for the majority of Narbonensis, Toulouse was located at the western edge of the province. Beyond this is Aquitania, which was, relative to Narbonensis, later to be conquered and to adopt a Roman lifestyle. Toulouse and its wall could be seen as a sort of beacon of Romanization. Further, the isolation of the city altered the urban/rural relationship. If the city was associated with Roman civilization, the country around Toulouse would have seemed especially native because of its pre-Roman organization. This would have only reinforced the *Romanitas* of Toulouse, separated from its hinterland.

Further, the physical barrier of the wall at Toulouse closely reflected the sacred barrier of the pomerium. While there is not always a correlation between the enceinte and the legal and religious boundary of the city, this was the case at Toulouse. The two major cemeteries, both in use from the first century BCE, were not far outside the two major ports at the north and south end of the *cardo*.<sup>29</sup> This would suggest that the enceinte follows the sacred boundary of the city. Excavations inside the city have shown that much of the area inside and up to the walls was empty in the first century.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, the wall must have served as a physical manifestation of the politico-religious boundary if it enclosed such a large empty area. Just as there is no historical evidence from Toulouse about the re-founding of the city, there is no evidence about the laying out of this pomerium. However, tradition would dictate that it was done with all the proper ceremonies of auspices and ploughing the line.<sup>31</sup> These ceremonies reinforced Roman identity, both through the particular rites, which would be completely foreign to non-Romans, and through the setting apart of the city from its surrounding country. The city as an independent, sacred entity, often with a personified deity or genius, is a Roman idea distinct from Celtic or native ideologies.<sup>32</sup> For these reasons, the laying out and constructing a wall would have resonated very clearly with Romans in a way that it may not have with others. This wall made implicit and explicit references to Roman beliefs, rituals and conceptions about the city, reinforcing the Roman identity of Toulouse. In this way, the wall stood on and served as a very clear representation of a boundary, which emphasized Roman beliefs, rituals and conceptions about the city.

Overall, the enceinte of Toulouse served as a barrier and boundary both physically and conceptually. As such, it defined those who came in contact with it through their relationship to it. It created a series of dichotomies, inside/outside, urban/rural, sacred/profane which all helped to create identity. In this context, it is

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<sup>27</sup> Labrousse 1968, 311-20.

<sup>28</sup> Woolf 1998, 152.

<sup>29</sup> Labrousse 1968, 458-84.

<sup>30</sup> de Filippo 1993.

<sup>31</sup> Revel 2009, 47.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

interesting then to look at the question of where the impetus for such a project originated. It seems clear that the foundation of Toulouse with its urban program was a deliberate push toward Romanization in the context of the early imperial colonization of Gaul. Augustus, who had a long-standing interest in the region, visited a number of times. During his second visit, in 27 BCE, he significantly reorganized the administration of the Gallic provinces. But he also took the first census, founded a number of new veterans colonies, granted privileges to many independent cities, built a large number of roads and laid down a more fixed government bureaucracy.<sup>33</sup> By setting up Roman administration in a region that had been conquered only a half century before, Augustus and his successors brought Roman civilization to Gaul.<sup>34</sup>

While there is no direct historical proof to connect the re-establishment of the city to Augustus or Tiberius, circumstances suggest some imperial role. Many scholars have argued that direct military or imperial assistance was necessary on an engineering work of such proportions. Further, the significant resources required to the urban program hint at outside assistance. Some have estimated the wall to have required 33,000 cubic meters of concrete and over 10 million bricks.<sup>35</sup> If nothing else, the construction of any urban enceinte, an ostensibly military structure, required the permission of the emperor, so the wall here was at least signed off by the emperor.<sup>36</sup> This wall demonstrates that there was an active administrative interest, possibly even imperial, in bringing Roman civilization to this part of Gaul, and with it Roman identity.

Past scholarship on Augustan walls in general and Toulouse in particular has chosen to look at the walls structurally, examining methods, materials and how they would have worked defensively.<sup>37</sup> It is important to understand the walls archaeologically, but this approach falls short. These walls were built during the *pax augustana*, a time of fairly widespread peace and security in the Roman world. It follows that they did not serve a pragmatic, defensive purpose, but rather were significant for their message. More recent scholarship has begun to approach fortifications symbolically, most often seeing them as marks of prestige granted by the Emperor. This method is useful, but limited. But by looking at questions of identity and the role that these enceintes played in the lives of those who came in contact with them, this field is opened up to a number of new directions. In this particular example, the wall at Toulouse was clearly significant for the establishment of *Romanitas* in first century Gaul. As a visible projection and a real and symbolic boundary, it was an important maker of identity both for those inside and outside its circuit.

Douglas Underwood,  
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<sup>33</sup> Drinkwater 1983.

<sup>34</sup> An oversimplification, to be sure. For a much more detailed study of the Romanization of the province, see Woolf 1998.

<sup>35</sup> de Filippo 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Johnson 1983, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Blanchet 1907; Johnson 1983.

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