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ABSTRACT

The harsh and rocky nature of the so-called Costa Brava provides a suitable habitat for many species, especially bluefish such as sardines and anchovies. The Greeks founded Ampurias around 600 BC; the Romans installed a camp nearby in the 2nd century BC, then built a new city and eventually unified the entire area under Augustus around the turn of the era: probably the former, and definitely the latter, were producing salted fish in the region. The fishing and fish-salting traditions were kept over the centuries, spurring the development of the present-day village of L'Escala ("port" in Latin) as a fishing settlement in the 16th century. The construction of a salt warehouse in the 17th century and the royal monopoly of this indispensable good gave some prominence to the village. Today, this intangible heritage lives on in its fine anchovies.

KEYWORDS

Ampurias, Greeks, Phocaeans, anchovy, salted fish, *garum*, *cetaria*, Alfolí de la Sal, Mediterranean diet

THE LEGACY OF AMPURIAS IN MODERN L'ESCALA

ANCHOVIES, THE LIVING TRADITION OF SALTED FISH FROM ANTIQUITY

MIXED HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPE

In 2004 the Mediterranean Facet of the Pyrenees was submitted jointly by Spain and France to the UNESCO Tentative List of Mixed Heritage sites. The area on the side of the Iberian Peninsula stretches to the archaeological site of Ampurias (itself a candidate to the World Cultural Heritage List as a Greek Archaeological Ensemble for its uniqueness and its role as gateway to the Romanization of Hispania):

This is the cultural landscape comprising the area where the Pyrenean mountain chain meets the Mediterranean Sea. A rocky, steep coast (...), it is a natural landscape of exceptional quality, rich in biodiversity in both its marine and terrestrial environments. (...) A territory marked by the human presence and the Mediterranean exchanges since the most ancient times, with important historical remains (Greek, Roman, medieval and modern) and associated with the work of a number of the most prominent European artists of the twentieth century in search of light and colour.

In addition, in 2011 the Bay of Roses was accepted as a member of The Most Beautiful Bays in the World international club, a distinction which carries the endorsement of UNESCO. The bay is bordered to the north by the Cap de Creus Natural Park, to the south by the Montgrí Natural Park, and comprises the Parc Natural dels Aiguamolls de l'Empordà.

HISTORY: FROM AMPURIAS TO L'ESCALA

The Greeks became a regular presence in the Pyrenean region as part of a number of western settlements. Only the Phoenician and the Greeks from Phocaea (Asia Minor) had settled so far from their country, on the opposite extreme of the Mediterranean Sea. Underlying this phenomenon was the need to find products and natural resources in the widest possible area: especially minerals, but also wheat, fish sauces and salted fish – basic essential goods which were traded by the Phocaeans (Rouillard 1991).

The city of Emporion was established in the south of the Bay of Roses around 600 BC. It was located by a natural harbour, in an area of salt marshes, well connected to the inland territory by two rivers: Ter and Fluvià. Probably arriving from the foundation of Massalia (modern-day Marseilles), the Phocaeans settled in a small island or isthmus, Palaiapolis or "the old town" (nowadays mainland, where Sant Martí d'Empúries is located), and soon also more to the south, at the other side of the port (Miró 2006).

As the name states, Emporion was a commercial enclave, a meeting point for merchants coming from the sea, and the Iberians who were thriving in

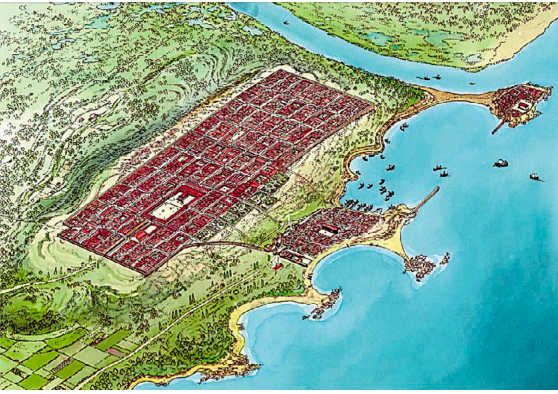


Figure 1 – Restitution of the *Municipium Emporiae* (1st century). Author: F. Riart. MAC – Empúries

the interior areas. The Phocaeans lived alongside indigenous populations that already inhabited that same place. According to the analysis of the ceramics studied, fish dishes were the most exquisite meals, most likely based on Greek recipes (Delgado and Ferrer 2013).

The Romans arrived at the end of the 2nd century BC. In the 1st century BC they established a military camp on a hill farther from the coast to control the Greek city, its port and territory. At the time of Augustus the whole region was unified under the name *Municipium Emporiae*. The former urban settlement, called Neapolis in the 20th century, became a district of merchants, artisans and fishermen (Aquilué 2005), with initially a fish-salting factory, and later also a fish shop (*taberna*) dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries AD, which was possibly run by a fisherman according to the excavation finds of a wide range of weights, used to hold nets on the seabed, as well as large hooks, probably used for big fish such as tuna (*El Punt Avui. Comarques Gironines*, 27 July 2012, page 17, seen online).



Figure 2 – Original Roman mosaic. MAC – Empúries

Mackerel, horse mackerel and clupeids such as sardines or anchovies were usually salted and sold in Roman towns. In Roman Lusitania their consumption was very high, and remains of salted anchovies have been preserved in some tanks, later abandoned by its manufacturers: from *Iulia Traducta* – current Algeciras – to the very *garum* workshop in Pompeii, we can find examples of these foods that most probably were at the basis of the population's daily consumption, and which show widespread habits of fish consumption in the old *Mare Nostrum*. (Bernal 2014, 23–24)

The first symptoms of the economic crisis that affected Ampurias began to emerge in Neapolis, and it seems that in the 1st century BC there would be already some abandoned areas, as can be deduced from the installation of some new water cisterns disrupting the previous structures (Tremoleda *et al.* 2014).

By the beginning of the 4th century the entire population lived in the old settlement of Palaïapolis. Despite this new urban reality, Ampurias retained its importance as a political and administrative centre, remaining an episcopal see until the arrival of the Arabs, and capital of the Carolingian county during the Frank conquest. In the 15th and 16th



Figure 3 – “Alfolí de la Sal”, National Cultural Heritage



Figure 4 – Houses with stones from Ampurias. Photos by the author

centuries the castle witnessed several occupations and battles, and in 1675 the town was abandoned and plundered (Badiá 1985).

The settlement of L'Escaló must have started with a few barracks next to the port. In 1660 the place had 20 houses, and 80 people lived there in 1680. Its origin was probably due to the fact that the ancient harbour of Sant Martí d'Empúries had become buried, which may have caused the progressive movement of the fishing population. Thus, Sant Martí d'Empúries must have developed into a farming village despite being by the sea, as it is still today (Badiá 1985).

THE “ALFOLÍ DE LA SAL” (SALT WAREHOUSE)

The lintel of the main door of this old storehouse bears the date of 1697. According to some studies, the original building was a 16th-century, two-storey construction which was expanded and refurbished to its current structure at the end of the 17th century. It must have been one of the first important buildings in the village, which at the time was still a small, scarcely-populated hamlet (Badiá 1985).

The salt warehouse is a “homestead” structure, with a basilica plan covered by a gable roof. The ground floor is covered by a thick barrel vault, while the others have wooden beams. The top floor is a *terra-bastall* (in some farmhouses, especially in the Ampurdan, a room just below the roof made of logs, often used to store straw or as a bedroom), which is connected to a beautiful gallery of three semi-circular arches topped by a horizontal moulding. The walls are made of unfinished stone, with ashlar quoins, and simple rectangular openings are framed by well-worked limestone. The lintels of the majority of the openings have discharging arches and one of the *patios* has a porch with basket-handle arches (ibid.).

In the village of L'Escaló there are 18th- and 19th-century houses (“casals”) built with ashlar limestone, possibly from the ruins of Ampurias, such as Can Maranges, near the old port (today the Platja: the beach par excellence in the village).

THE FISH-SALTING FACTORY OF AMPURIAS

It is well known that numerous fisheries and tunny fisheries were regularly distributed over areas of Phoenician influence in the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula and around the Straits, where these products were manufactured and then exported at least to mainland Greece and Asia Minor. Nonetheless, also the Greeks excelled in the elaboration of these food preparations and, although no source states this explicitly, it is very likely that much of the Hispanic preserved fish arriving to Greece was not of Phoenician-Punic origin (as it is always assumed), but produced in the Greek (or clearly Greek-influenced) colonies and factories of southern Gaul and Catalonia's coast. We know that Marseille had a large number of fishing boats operating both in ponds and

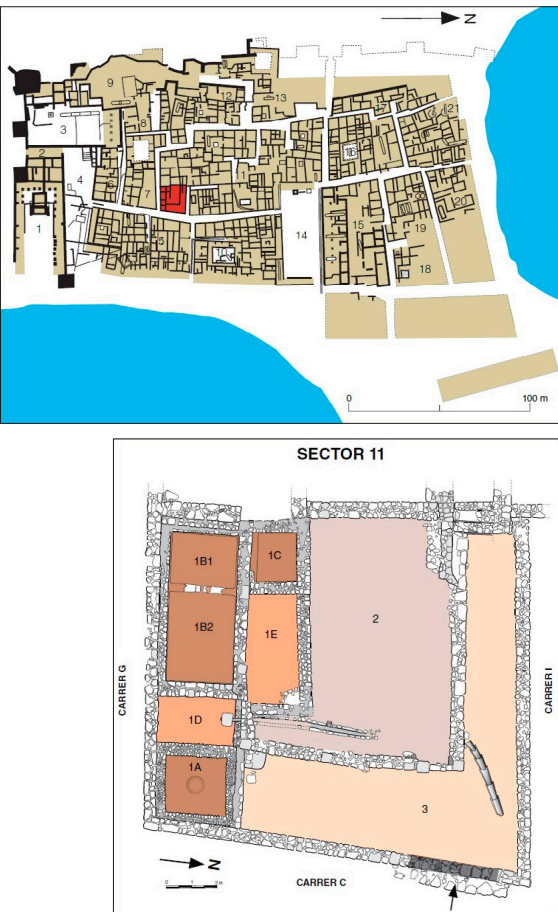


Figure 5 – Neapolis and the salted fish factory plan. MAC – Empúries.

inner lagoons and around the mouth of the Rhone, and that the catches of the fleet (including tuna) were the basis for preserved fish produced with the salt collected from the delta of the river; this was a relatively profitable activity, which employed quite a lot of labour. Strabo (VI 1, 1 [C 252]) also cites the salted products of Velia, another city founded by the Phocaeans (...). For all these reasons, one might imagine that Ampurias also was home to specialists in this industry and that this type of merchandise was often shipped from their docks. (Fernández Nieto 1999, 34–35)

In the Greek city of Emporion, from its very beginning, the salting technique was certainly used to preserve the surplus of fish for later consumption. However, no archaeological evidence of this activity, nor of the production of fish sauces, have been found until Roman times, when at an indeterminate moment during the 1st century BC or sometime in the 1st century AD, a fish-salting factory (*cetaria*) was built in Neapolis (Aquilué 2006). It was situated in the central insula (C, or sector 11), at the intersection of the main street and the street leading up to the high neighbourhood (Tremoleda *et al.* 2014).

A preceding structure was partially removed when the factory was built, as evidenced by the remains of a broken cistern in the NW angle and the razed walls visible under the plan. It was excavated by Emili Gandia in 1917 (SE angle), and the rest of the building in 1934, but there is no information from this excavation except its inclusion in the city plan of that year; therefore, there is no reliable scientific data available about its construction, its operation or the time of its abandonment. On the other side of the same bay, the factory in Rhode is a testimony of the survival of these activities in the region, dating to 4th–5th centuries AD (Mar and Ruiz de Arbulo 1993).

The building has an approximately square plan (15 × 14 m max) and a typical distribution. The entrance of the factory is located on the main street, and leads to an L-shaped porch room with an open courtyard. In the south part there are three tanks (one is double) of different dimensions and about 80-cm deep, as well as two other spaces (slightly lower than the patio level), all of them covered with *opus signinum* (hydraulic concrete), which ensured impermeability and cleanliness. The smallest room has a drainage system which passes beneath the pavement of the courtyard and the storage room until the street sewage. The L-shaped covered room would be a warehouse to keep the salt and utensils for the production of salted fish and derivative sauces, as well as the finished products for sale, probably in amphorae. The tanks or vats would contain fish pieces for maceration with salt and fresh water to create the semi-liquid sauce of *garum* (a process which usually took 2–3 months). The central courtyard would be reserved for the tasks of manipulating, washing and cutting the fish, and the upper spaces would facilitate the task of loading the tanks with fish, salt and water, as well as the final extraction of the finished product (Aquilué 2006).



Figure 6 – “Casa de la Punxa” and terraces in the “Platja”



Figure 7 – A current factory of anchovies. Photos by the author



Figure 8 – Departure of sardine boats (sardinal) from the old port of L'Escaló. Author J. Esquirol. Historic Archive of l'Escaló.

According to Pliny (NH, 31, 93), the first *garum* was prepared only with *gáros* or *garus*, a small fish, difficult for us to identify, which could be anchovy or a similar species. Ordinary *garum* was produced from the entrails of fish, i.e., fish waste of many different species marinated in salt. Quality *garum*, however, was obtained exclusively from small fragments of fish (Tremoleda *et al.* 2014).

The large number of Roman fish-salting factories in the Iberian Peninsula shows the spectacular increase in production that took place especially in the first two centuries of our era, with more than one hundred cases confirmed. There were more tanks than in previous times, they already existed almost everywhere, and they also were larger than before (Bernal 2014).

PRESENT DAY

In the historic centre of L'Escaló, a tourist destination since the 1960s, around the area where the port used to be, one can still find old fishermen houses (one is open to the public as a local museum), a few buildings of salt depots in disuse, the building of the former ice factory (“Casa de la Punxa”) and the salt warehouse itself, under restoration for some years.

The Museum of Anchovy and Salt (MASLE) houses a comprehensive exhibition on traditional processing methods and organizes numerous touristic and cultural tours, as well as other events – such as, in particular, the Salt Feast (every September for the last two decades) – to keep the memory of the past. The MASLE shares both building and staff with the Municipal Archive, which houses a collection of pictures of historic value from the beginning of the 20th century, most of them by the local photographer Josep Esquirol, portraying fishermen and their activities as well as the first institutional excavations at the archaeological site of Ampurias.

Also from L'Escaló was Catalina Albert y Paradís, a contemporary writer known by the pseudonym of Víctor Català, who wrote about her village and rural life, and also followed the excavations with considerable interest.

The ancient remains have their own museum, which belongs to the Archaeological Museum of Catalonia (MAC), along with other sites in Girona and Barcelona.

And last but not least, at the other side of the village, in the present-day port, L'Escaló has a Fish Interpretation Centre, housing a permanent exhibition and other activities, such as group visits to the auctions at the fish market and boat tours to admire the coasts or even to fish.

Today, L'Escaló is well known for its anchovies, which are recognized with a seal of quality since 1987, a fact that shows that the tradition is still very much alive, keeping several companies and their factories in operation.



Figure 9 – Monument to the sea people, L'Escalà.
Photo by the author

THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

A millenary tradition, salted fish is part of the Mediterranean diet, which was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by Spain, Greece, Italy and Morocco in 2010, and also by Portugal, Croatia and Cyprus in 2013:

The Mediterranean diet involves a set of skills, knowledge, rituals, symbols and traditions concerning crops, harvesting, fishing, animal husbandry, conservation, processing, cooking, and particularly the sharing and consumption of food. Eating together is the foundation of the cultural identity and continuity of communities throughout the Mediterranean basin. It is a moment of social exchange and communication, an affirmation and renewal of family, group or community identity. The Mediterranean diet emphasizes values of hospitality, neighbourliness, intercultural dialogue and creativity, and a way of life guided by respect for diversity. It plays a vital role in cultural spaces, festivals and celebrations, bringing together people of all ages, conditions and social classes. It includes the craftsmanship and production of traditional receptacles for the transport, preservation and consumption of food, including ceramic plates and glasses. Women play an important role in transmitting knowledge of the Mediterranean diet: they safeguard its techniques, respect seasonal rhythms and festive events, and transmit the values of the element to new generations. Markets also play a key role as spaces for cultivating and transmitting the Mediterranean diet during the daily practice of exchange, agreement and mutual respect.

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