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Urbs Salvia: the city walls and their significance

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Abstract

The city walls of Urbs Salvia were a visually-striking symbol of the power, wealth and importance of this Roman colony. They formed an impressive and dominant frame to the urban centre, appropriate to the city's monumentality and prosperity. This paper examines the material evidence of the walls, towers and gateways of Urbs Salvia and considers the historical, political and social context within which the walls were constructed and experienced. It suggests that an analysis of the city walls can move the debate forward on difficult questions of Urbs Salvia's status and title, investigating the disputed date of the colony's foundation and the issue of its refoundation or reorganisation, and discussing whether and why the city changed its name. The paper looks at the purpose and significance of the city walls and puts forward an interpretation of the walls which goes beyond their physical functionality to reveal their wider meaning.

Introduction and context



Figure 1: location of Urbs Salvia

Located towards the east of central Italy, the Roman city of Urbs Salvia was a colony in Picenum, about 35 kilometres (km) inland from the Adriatic coast (Figure 1). The city became a rich and important urban centre, with a suite of public buildings and amenities appropriate to its status and position including a theatre, amphitheatre, forum and temples. Its prosperity has been underlined by a recent analysis of coloured stones and white marbles

from the site, which were found to originate from across the Mediterranean provinces, from Egypt and North Africa to Asia Minor and Iberia.¹

There was a substantial settlement on the site by at least the late second century BC, which may have occupied only the flatter, eastern part of the urban area with the Via Salaria Gallica running through its centre. The early imperial period saw significant development and construction at the city. Major infrastructure works can be dated to the Augustan period, while the development of a coherent complex of monumental structures, including a temple and sanctuary dedicated to the cult of Salus Augusta, is rather later, in the Tiberian and Claudian periods.² A plan of the site is at Figure 2.

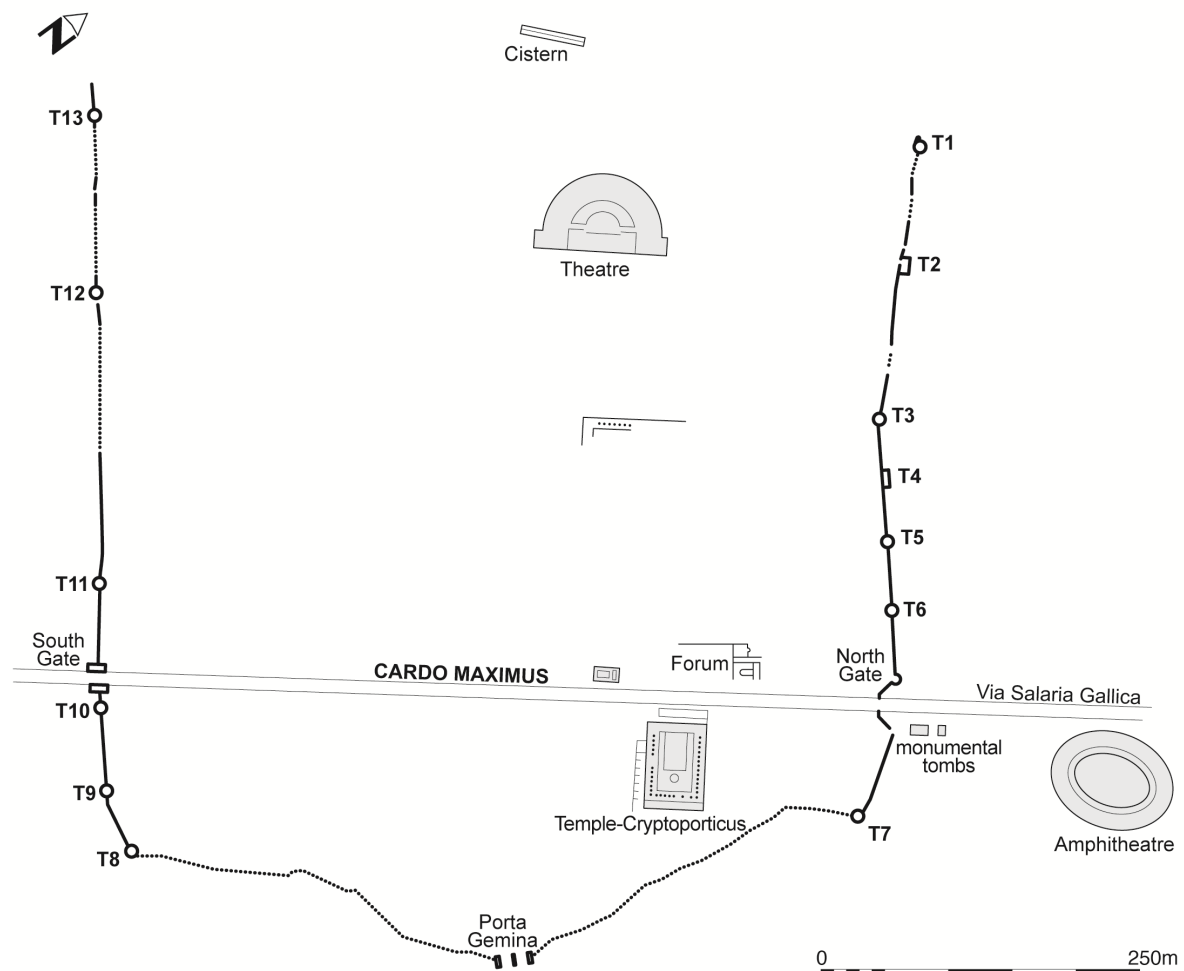


Figure 2: plan of Urbs Salvia. © Isobel Pinder

¹ Antonelli and Lazzarini 2013.

² Fabrini 2014 offers a full discussion of the urban development of Urbs Salvia.

The city walls of Urbs Salvia - evidence

The city walls enclose an area of about 45 hectares, roughly square in outline and adapted to the contours of the sloping site on which the urban area developed.³ Considerable stretches of the wall survive on the north side (Figure 3). It is less well preserved on the east and south sides and there are no traces of a wall on the west side. As the western boundary of the city followed the ridge of a hill, it may be that a wall was never built on this side.⁴ The perimeter of the wall, including the putative western section, is about 2.7 km.



Figure 3: internal façade of city walls of Urbs Salvia, northern perimeter. © Isobel Pinder

The walls and towers

The wall is homogenous in construction, being built entirely of *opus testaceum* (cement core with brick facing), and is similar on the outside and inside faces (Figure 4). Its uniformity suggests that it was built synchronously, although there are a few stretches which show signs of later repair. The walls are consistently about 1.5-1.6m wide, both at ground level and higher up, and the width does not change whether the

³ Detailed investigations of the walls of Urbs Salvia were published by Perna 2006: 14-45, 2007: 14-33 (the texts are substantially the same). I draw on Perna's work as well as that of Delplace 1983, 1993, and on my own observations in the discussion that follows.

⁴ Perna considered this unlikely (2006: 18). However, the absence of a wall along the crest of a hill forming one side of a circuit would not be unprecedented; this was the case, for example, at Aveia and Bovianum. The absence of a continuous wall was common where a city's boundary was defined in part by the topographical feature of a river (for example, at Verona or Florentia) or coastline (for example, at Fanum Fortunae or Ariminum). See Pinder 2015.

wall is on the slopes of the hill (north and south sides) or along the valley bottom (east side). The foundations of the walls are visible in many places (Figure 5), projecting some 20cm out from the face of the wall and constructed in steps to deal with the slope. The highest extant section of the wall is some 6m. Not enough of the wall survives to be able to make a sensible estimate of the original height, although it has been suggested that the towers may have reached 14m high.⁵



Figure 4: internal facing of wall, north section. Image © Isobel Pinder



Figure 5: external wall section showing foundation plinth, northeast corner of circuit. © Isobel Pinder

Fourteen towers can still be identified, seven on the north side of the wall, one on the east side, five on the south side and one flanking the north gate (it is assumed that there was a matching tower on the other side of the north gate). There may have been more towers than the fourteen now identifiable. For example, a plan of 1881 included a rectangular tower towards the southeast whose existence cannot now be verified. The towers were situated at irregular intervals along the length of the circuit, suggesting that there was no correlation with the street plan internally.

⁵ This estimate by Perna was based on a ratio between base and height first proposed by Trevisanato (1999: 65). It would not be out of keeping with the estimated height of the towers of Augustan walled circuits at nearby Fanum Fortunae (12m) or the walls of Hispellum (13m) (Pinder 2016; Fontaine 1990).

Unlike the wall itself, which appears to have been built as a single project, the archaeological evidence indicates that not all the towers were built at the same time, nor are they all contemporary with the wall. Moreover, while the wall itself was reasonably homogenous throughout its length, the towers at Urbs Salvia were not similar in design or size. Excluding the towers flanking the north gate, four towers appear to be quadrilateral; six, probably seven, were octagonal, one was hexagonal and one pentagonal. Almost all of the towers were irregular: for example, the sides of the octagonal Tower 5 varied in length between 1.3m and 2.9m. The overall dimensions of the towers also varied markedly, their internal diameter ranging from 4.3m to 6.4m and the width of their external-facing walls varying from 1m to 1.6m (where verifiable). One of the better preserved towers, Tower 3, was octagonal in design and sat astride the wall on a square foundation (Figures 6 and 7). It still stands sufficiently high to show traces of the window slits and the slots into which the upper flooring was fitted. Tower 3 appears to postdate the wall itself (it has brick facing on the exterior but is built in *opus mixtum* on the interior) and may have replaced an earlier structure. On the other hand, Tower 4, which was only 40m apart from Tower 3, was pentagonal in form and abutted the wall externally, thus not forming part of the wall structurally.



Figure 6: Tower 3, view from inside the city.
Image © Isobel Pinder



Figure 7: Tower 3 from outside the city.
Image © Isobel Pinder

The gates

Three gates have been identified in the city walls, although very little of them remains visible today. The north gate, at the northern end of the *cardo maximus*, was of a distinctive and unusual concave design. The entrance was set back from the line of the wall and the gate itself was flanked by angled walls leading to two pentagonal towers, one on each side, placed on the line of the main walled circuit. Sometimes called 'Fréjus-type' gates, gates of this design are known in southern Gaul from Forum Iulii, Arelate and Aquae Sextiae in the Augustan period.⁶ Unlike the gates in southern Gaul, however, the flanking walls at Urbs Salvia were straight rather than curved.

Only minimal traces remain of what is thought to be the south gate at the other end of the *cardo maximus*, where the Via Salaria Gallica entered the city from the south. Currently incorporated within the fabric of a local church, the structure was interpreted by Perna as part of the vault of an archway.⁷ There is insufficient material evidence to be confident of the identification or draw any more detailed conclusions.

The east gate, Porta Gemina, was a double-arched gateway located about halfway along the eastern side of the walled circuit. The gateway is now subsumed into farm buildings and is in poor condition. But partly thanks to the work of Pallotta in the nineteenth century, its plan is reasonably well understood.⁸ The gateway was characterised by an abnormally long spine (11.5m deep) and had no flanking towers. Also, unusually, the double arches were not quite parallel, with a slight splay at the side of the gateway facing into the city so that the overall width of the gateway was 20m on the exterior side and 23m on the interior side. No trace of decoration survives on the gate but Pallotta's drawings indicate that there may have been an inscription which would have been placed on the centre between the arches, of which only the final 'S' was then extant and is now lost.

⁶ Johnson 1983: 15.

⁷ Perna 2006: 38.

⁸ There is uncertainty about its composition, however. According to Delplace, the gateway was built in *opus testaceum* (1993: 260). Perna assessed the construction technique as *opus vittatum* but both Perna and Delplace agreed that work in *opus spicatum* is also identifiable, as shown in Pallotta's drawings (which is surprising, given that *opus spicatum* is usually associated with flooring. I was unable to verify this on site).

The city walls of Urbs Salvia – analysis and discussion

When were the walls built?

There is no precise evidence available for the date of the city walls, almost no relevant material evidence having come to light from recent archaeological investigations of the walls and virtually no reference to the city walls being made in contemporary literary or epigraphic sources. Excavations of the interior of Tower 6 produced material dating from the first century BC to the fifth century AD, but this is more useful for indicating continuing use of the structure rather than pinpointing the date of its construction.

The construction technique of the walls suggests that they were built in the Augustan period and this fits well with work to the infrastructure of the city which is known to date from this period. It is noticeable, however, that no other city walls in Picenum are known in *opus testaceum* – the (earlier) city walls of neighbouring colonies were built in *opus quadratum*. Walls of a similar *opus testaceum* construction to those of Urbs Salvia are found at Ariminum, Aquileia, Concordia, Alba Pompeia, Augusta Taurinorum and Verona, and these are all dated to the second half of the first century BC and Augustan periods. Features of Urbs Salvia's walls which support an Augustan date include the relatively narrow width of the wall (1.5-1.6m), which is common to walls of this period.⁹

On the other hand, the towers and gateways of Urbs Salvia's walled circuit are something of an anomaly among Augustan city walls in Roman Italy and suggest that the circuit cannot unequivocally be classed as Augustan in date, pending more detailed archaeological work. The north gate, as we have seen, was of an unusual concave design, unique among gateways in Augustan walled circuits in Roman Italy. Similar gates in southern Gaul are known from the Augustan period, but the only identified gateway of a similar design in central Italy, at Septempeda only 25 km from

⁹ For example, the Augustan walls of Tridentum at 1.2m wide, Alba Pompeia (1.5m), Saepinum (1.75-1.9m) and nearby Fanum Fortunae (1.8m) are comparable. For Tridentum, see Ciurletti 2000: 299; for Alba Pompeia see Filippi 1997; for Fanum Fortunae, see Luni 1992: 107; for Saepinum, see Ferrarato 1982: 53. The dimensions of all known walled circuits of Augustan date are discussed in detail in Pinder 2015, with an acknowledgement that the available data are limited.

Urbs Salvia, is not securely dated and may belong to the earlier part of the first century BC.¹⁰

The date of Porta Gemina is also disputed. While there are many double-arched gateways in Roman Italy of the Augustan period, Porta Gemina is unusually deep and asymmetrical. Perna saw a similarity between Porta Gemina and fortified cities and military camps of the second and third centuries AD on the northern frontiers of the empire. He himself, however, subscribed to the near-universal view that the walled circuit dates from the Augustan period and there is no archaeological evidence to suggest that Porta Gemina replaced an earlier structure. A more convincing interpretation was offered by Delplace, who noted that Porta Gemina is stylistically similar to late republican and early imperial double gateways in north and central Italy, and therefore placed Porta Gemina as contemporary with the city walls in the Augustan period.¹¹

Likewise, the towers at Urbs Salvia are problematic. Unlike most Augustan walled circuits, the towers at Urbs Salvia are not coherent in size or design. Octagonal, hexagonal, pentagonal and rectangular towers have all been identified and many are irregular in plan. Some of the towers sit astride the wall while others abut it. Some appear to be contemporary with the wall while others are later in date. The towers are not situated at regular intervals along the circuit. This lack of uniformity is very different from most other Augustan walled circuits in Roman Italy. Precise planning is most apparent at orthogonally-designed walled circuits such as the Augustan circuits of Augusta Praetoria, Alba Pompeia and Emona, where identical towers are placed at regular intervals and carefully matched to the internal street grid. But even at Augustan walled circuits which are more irregular in plan, such as Fanum Fortunae and Saepinum, the design and size of the towers are similar and their placement along the walled circuit carefully regulated.¹²

In short, then, the material evidence of the walls points on the whole to an Augustan date, and while the contextual evidence is mixed (see below), a good but not

¹⁰ Perna 2012a: 80.

¹¹ For Perna's view, see Perna 2006: 34-37, 2012a: 89-90. For Delplace's view, see Delplace 1993: 265.

¹² For details of Augustan walled circuits in Roman Italy, see Pinder 2015.

indisputable case can be made for the city walls of Urbs Salvia to date from the early Augustan period, at the same time as this phase of its monumental development.¹³

How much of a defensive function did the walls serve?

If it is correct to assign the city walls of Urbs Salvia to the Augustan period, then they should be viewed as walls of prestige rather than functional fortifications. The importance of the defensive properties of city walls varied significantly over time, and the Augustan period in Roman Italy, while perhaps not as peaceful as Augustus liked to suggest, was more settled than previous centuries. There was no need for cities to invest heavily in city walls for reasons of self-protection, particularly in Picenum which had been under Roman control since the third century BC. The defensive value of city walls in this period was much less significant than their symbolic value and representational image.

This view is not universally shared. Perna argued strongly that the city walls of Urbs Salvia were conceived of, and acted as, a principally defensive asset.¹⁴ In summary, Perna's position is that a number of features of the city walls and towers of Urbs Salvia conform to the principles for defences which were outlined by Vitruvius. For example, he argued that the towers display military and defensive characteristics, contending that the walls of the towers on the flatter ground towards the eastern end of the site were thicker because they were more exposed to attack.¹⁵ He also argued that the irregular intervals between the towers should be explained by differing topographical features and thus differing tactical imperatives, noting that a number of the towers are placed where the wall changes direction and therefore at potentially exposed points. He commented that the towers on the flatter, and more vulnerable, part of the site were between 40m and 54m apart, and therefore fell within the range advised by Vitruvius.¹⁶ Taking all these things together, Perna argued that Urbs Salvia's city walls were designed by a military architect of local origin who worked on

¹³ This is the conclusion reached by most commentators including Perna, who argued that the walls were built at the turn of the millennium (1987: 203), and Delplace, who in the absence of precise evidence dated the walls to between 40/30 BC and 20/10 BC (1993: 266).

¹⁴ See, for example, Perna 2006: 14-45, 2012b: 386.

¹⁵ The wall itself is, however, of a consistent, and consistently narrow, width.

¹⁶ Vitruvius *De Architectura*, I,5,4

a number of city walls locally (including Septempeda)¹⁷ in order to provide the communities with a solid defence.

But several factors militate against the walls of Urbs Salvia being primarily defensive in purpose. It is possible that the wall was never a complete circuit (there is no firm trace of walling on the western side of the city, although this is the only part of the Roman city that has subsequently been built over). The western perimeter of the city followed the crest of the hill and without protection would have left the city vulnerable to a threat from the other side of the hill. Further, the width of the wall at around 1.5m-1.6m is too narrow to have functioned effectively as a defensive asset. Vitruvius mandated that the width of a defensive wall should be wide enough for two armed men to pass each other with ease;¹⁸ it is possible that a cantilevered walkway was fixed to Urbs Salvia's wall to provide passageway for a sentry patrol¹⁹ but there is no evidence to support this.

Moreover, it is notable that the average width of city walls in Roman Italy as set out in comparative catalogues, such as those compiled by Conventi and Bonetto,²⁰ declined steadily from the mid-republican into the Augustan periods, in line with the reduced level of perceived threat and a lower need for defensive protection, and increased again towards the late antique period.²¹ The relatively narrow walls of Urbs Salvia fit within this pattern of reduced width walls at a time of relative peace. Next, the towers are not uniform in design, shape or date and do not appear to be built as part of a coherent strategic plan. They are not placed at regular intervals round the circuit and do not correspond to a street grid. Finally, while there might have been reason for a republican colony to surround itself with defensive walls in view of the hostile environment and defensive requirements of the time, this was no longer necessary in the Augustan period when serious unrest was far away. Urbs Salvia's city walls are much better seen as part of a programme of monumentalisation and

¹⁷ This idea sits uneasily with Perna's assessment elsewhere that the walls and gates of Septempeda, which are not reliably dated, belong to the earlier part of the first century BC. See Perna 2012a: 80-84.

¹⁸ Vitruvius *De Architectura* 1,5,3.

¹⁹ As argued by Perna 2006: 27.

²⁰ Conventi 2004; Bonetto 1998.

²¹ Latimer noted that the late antique walls of northern Italy averaged 3m-4m in width, compared to the 1m-2m of their Augustan predecessors (2010: 35-36).

aggrandisement of the city in the early imperial period, important for their symbolic and status value.

When did Urbs Salvia become a colony, and what can the walls add to the debate?

One of the most vexed questions relating to the Roman city of Urbs Salvia concerns the date at which it received the status of colony. The view of academics at the University of Macerata, who have been excavating on the site of Urbs Salvia for several decades, is that the colonial foundation should be dated to the last third of the second century BC.²² They further hold that the city was refounded or reorganised as an Augustan colony, with additional veteran settlement. This challenged a long-held view that the city was first founded as a colony under Augustus, having initially been a prefecture and then a *municipium* after the Social War, or during the triumvirate.²³ A *terminus ante quem* for the foundation of the colony is provided by an inscription recording Fufius Geminus as *patronus coloniae* in AD 23.²⁴

There are three key pieces of evidence which support the idea of a second century BC colonial foundation: the epigraphic evidence of the *fasti triumphales* and *fasti consulares* from the city; the literary evidence of Strabo; and archaeological evidence from the site itself. A number of fragments of the *fasti* have now been found at Urbs Salvia. The earlier fragments, which provide lists of magistrates up to 158 BC, do not include the names of local magistrates. The later fragments, from 104 BC, list two local magistrates, which Paci argued refer to the high-ranking office of praetor. Paci and his colleagues are convinced that this demonstrates that Urbs Salvia was founded as a colony in the second century BC within the window of 158 BC and 104 BC. They point out that only colonies founded in the second century BC or earlier were governed by praetors and it is known that praetors administered the nearby colonies of Castrum Novum, Potentia and Auximum.

²² See, for example, Fabrini 2014; Paci 2014.

²³ See, for example, Delplace 1983, 1993.

²⁴ *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL)* 09, 05815, with new fragments, published by Gasperini 1982. This would seem to rule out an even later, Flavian, date for the foundation of the colony which was put forward as recently as 1995 by Eck and supported by Campbell 2000: 411.

Secondly, Strabo lists a settlement called 'Pollentia',²⁵ whose location between Septempeda and Potentia matches the geographical location of Urbs Salvia. At this point of the text, Strabo's source is held to be Artemidorus, whose information related to the last quarter of the second century BC.²⁶

Thirdly, ongoing excavations on site have revealed archaeological evidence for significant settlement at Urbs Salvia dating back to the end of the second century BC.²⁷ These are substantial structures including a forum, portico and possibly a *capitolium* which would not be incompatible with a colonial city. The archaeological evidence therefore corroborates the information from Strabo that there was a Roman settlement in this location by the late second century BC.

These three different sources of evidence are supported by more circumstantial material relating to colonisation of the region more generally. Successive waves of colonisation from the republican period are known in this part of Roman Italy.²⁸ Having argued on the basis of the *fasti* that the window for the foundation of Urbs Salvia is between 158 BC and 104 BC, Paci noted that – other than the problematic case of Auximum – no colonies are known to have been founded in Italy between 177 BC and 131 BC.²⁹ Paci therefore associated the foundation of Urbs Salvia with the period of Gracchan colonisation between 133 BC and 119 BC, pointing out that the Gracchans are known to have been active in the area.³⁰

²⁵ Strabo *Geographica* v,4,2.

²⁶ Bertrand 2013. It should be noted that the reading of Pollentia depends on accepting a correction to a possibly corrupt text. The manuscript reads Π V Ε U Ε V T I Α, which the editors corrected to Π Ο Λ Ε Ν Τ Ι Α.

²⁷ Fabrini 2014:16, 56.

²⁸ The first followed the battle of Sentinum and the establishment of the Ager Picenus in the first half of the third century BC. There was further colonisation in the second century BC including the founding of Pisaurum and Potentia in 184 BC.

²⁹ Velleius Paterculus in the *History of Rome* (1.15,3) assigned the foundation of Auximum to 157 BC. Laffi argued for an earlier date (2007: 24, 41) which would be compatible with a passage of Livy which mentions the city and construction of its walls in the context of 174-172 BC. Salmon preferred a later date of 128 BC (1969: 112-114). Patterson commented that some caution was appropriate in accepting too readily a hiatus in the sequence of colonial foundations, which may simply be because there is a gap in our sources (2006: 202).

³⁰ The *Cippo Graccano* (CIL 11, 06331), found near Fanum Fortunae, relates to reorganisation of the *ager publicus* while the *Fontes Gromatici* refer to Gracchan activity near Auximum.

A number of difficulties remain with the premise of a second century date for the colonial foundation which, in my view, have yet to be completely resolved. One issue relates to the existence of *quattuorviri*, who are attested epigraphically at Urbs Salvia.³¹ *Quattuorviri* are typically found at cities with the status of *municipia* in the first century BC but not at colonies.³² Furthermore, evidence from centuriation of Urbs Salvia's territory is inconclusive. In a survey of the territory of Urbs Salvia, Vettorazzi identified two phases of centuriation based on differing plot sizes, associating one with the triumviral period and the other with the Augustan period.³³ But these conclusions were disputed by Perna and Capponi who argued that the earlier phase of centuriation fits better with a colonial foundation of the late second century BC.³⁴ Campbell was also unconvinced: despite the reference to Urbs Salvia and the triumvirate in the *Liber Coloniarum*, his commentary noted no evidence of settlement by the triumvirs at Urbs Salvia, although it was possible that virital grants of land took place.³⁵

One issue, which in my view has received insufficient attention in the debate over the date of Urbs Salvia's foundation as a colony, is the apparent lack of a republican-era walled circuit. I consider this to be highly significant. The general consensus that the walls of Urbs Salvia should be dated to the Augustan period does not sit well with the theory that that the city was originally founded as a colony in the second century BC. It is almost unprecedented for colonies of the third and second centuries BC not to be surrounded by city walls either at or shortly after their foundation. Colonies of this period wanted walls as a means of marking their status and meeting juridical and religious expectations. They needed walls as a way of defending themselves in unsettled times. Sena Gallica, Ancona, Firmum, Potentia, Pisaurum and Auximum, all colonies in Picenum of the third and second centuries BC, were surrounded by contemporary walls in *opus quadratum* which were linked to their foundation.³⁶ It seems highly unlikely that if a colony had been founded at Urbs Salvia in the second

³¹ See, for example, *CIL* 09, 05538, 05540.

³² Paci 1995: 95 noted however that magistrates of *municipia* in areas organised as prefectures, such as many parts of Picenum, seem to have been *duoviri* and there were many exceptions to the norm (Laffi, 2007: 49-81).

³³ Vettorazzi 1990.

³⁴ Perna and Capponi 2012.

³⁵ *Liber Coloniarum* 226, 6-7: *Ager Urbis Salviensis limitibus maritimis et montanis lege triumvirale*. Discussed in Campbell 2000: 411.

³⁶ Luni, 2003: 208-230; Perna, 2012a.

century BC it would not also have been enclosed by a city wall. But there is no trace of a pre-Augustan city wall at Urbs Salvia, either on the same line as the Augustan walled circuit or surrounding a smaller, early colony on the flatter part of the site. Of course, an *argumentum ex silentio* does not make the case, but it does underline the need for focused archaeological or survey investigation.³⁷

Given our current state of knowledge on the walls of Urbs Salvia, and the very close connection between the construction of city walls and the foundation of colonies, I therefore conclude that an Augustan rather than republican date for the original foundation of the colony should not be discounted and it continues to hold some support more widely.³⁸

Was the city refounded as a colony under Augustus, and can the city walls help?

Following on from the University of Macerata's position that Urbs Salvia was a second century BC colony, Fabrini argued that the republican colony was refounded or reorganised by Augustus.³⁹ Her view is supported by archaeological evidence, which shows that substantial infrastructure work, including the aqueduct, cistern, baths, streets, paving and drainage, was carried out in the Augustan period. Construction of the city walls, which as we have seen are very probably Augustan in date, is likely to have formed part of this urban infrastructure. This would be consistent with the designation of the city as a new colony, but leaves some difficult issues in the case of a refoundation.

Just as republican colonies were expected, and perhaps even required, to build city walls around their urban centre, so it was almost unheard of for triumviral or Augustan colonies not to surround their cities with walled circuits, as much for reasons of status as for religious or juridical imperatives. Four cities with Augustan city walls, for example - Augusta Praetoria, Augusta Taurinorum, Concordia Iulia and Emona - were founded as veteran colonies in the Augustan period⁴⁰ and were settled on greenfield sites, in other words where there is little or no evidence of an

³⁷ A position held by Esmonde Cleary, who found the link between colonies and city walls indisputable and urged further work in the case of 'missing' walls at colonies in the northwest provinces (2003).

³⁸ See, for example, Vermeulen, 2014: 144.

³⁹ Fabrini 2014.

⁴⁰ A little earlier in the case of Concordia Iulia, which was probably a triumviral foundation. See Croce da Villa 1998: 478.

earlier nucleated settlement or pre-existing urban infrastructure. At all these colonies established on greenfield sites, there is a close association between the foundation of the colony and the construction of city walls. A further four colonies, Brixia, Fanum Fortunae, Hispellum and Venafrum, were founded during the Augustan or triumviral period on the sites of existing settlements, none of which had previously had the status of colony nor is known to have had city walls before becoming a colony. These colonies also built city walls around their urban centre at or shortly after their designation as a colony. On the other hand, there are a number of Augustan or triumviral colonies which took the form of expanding or refounding an existing or earlier colony, including Ariminum, Venusia, Cremona and Hadria. All these colonies already possessed city walls, as would be expected for the original republican colonies, and while some chose to repair or rebuild the walls in the late republican or Augustan period, none constructed new city walls.⁴¹

Urbs Salvia is an exception to what we know about colonies and city walls in Roman Italy. If it is correct that Urbs Salvia is a second century BC colony, then it is extremely surprising that the original colony did not construct city walls. If the colony was a new foundation under Augustus settled on an existing urban area which did not have the status of a colony, then it would be entirely normal for the new colony to build city walls as a mark of its new status. The suggestion, however, that Urbs Salvia was an existing republican colony refounded by Augustus but which built walls for the first time in the Augustan period is problematic. It leaves Urbs Salvia an outlier among colonies in Roman Italy and an anomaly to the association we can widely observe between colonies and city walls.

Overall, the contextual evidence to support the idea of a refoundation of the colony is thin. Bertrand argued, for example, that Urbs Salvia could not be an Augustan refoundation, because praetors continued as city magistrates into imperial times, and an Augustan refoundation would have led to administrative reorganisation and thus to the appointment of *duoviri*.⁴² This was the case, for example, at neighbouring Pisaurum, originally founded as a colony in 184 BC but refounded by Octavian, while republican colonies in Picenum which did not receive new settlers retained the office

⁴¹ The evidence for the link between Augustan walled circuits and urban status is presented in Pinder 2015.

⁴² Bertrand 2013.

of praetor. It was also usual practice for a colony of this period to associate its name with that of its founder. Pisaurum changed its name to Colonia Iulia Felix Pisaurum on its refoundation by Octavian.

When did the city change its name to Urbs Salvia?

We have already seen that a settlement called Pollentia was mentioned by Strabo. Pliny, however, refers to a city called 'Urbesalvia Pollentini'.⁴³ This suggests that at some point the city, which was originally called Pollentia, changed its name to Urbs Salvia. When and why did this change happen? The change in name is likely to mark a significant point in the city's governance and development. The change in name has been linked to a refoundation or reorganisation of the colony in the Augustan period.⁴⁴ However, the evidence is not clear-cut and there are a number of uncertainties.

The name of Urbs Salvia is generally held to relate to the cult of Salus Augusta.⁴⁵ At Urbs Salvia, the cult is attested at the sanctuary complex through tile fragments which are stamped 'Salus Aug(usta) Salvienis(is)' and through an inscription referring to a *flamini(ca) Salutis Aug(ustae)*.⁴⁶ However, a link with the cult of Salus Augusta would rule out an Augustan date for the change in name from Pollentia to Urbs Salvia and a corresponding association with an Augustan refoundation of the colony. This is because references to the cult of Salus Augusta, which is relatively rare in Italy, are known only from Tiberian times (Figure 8). The cult developed in response to the recovery of Livia, Tiberius' mother, from a serious illness in AD 22. The cult's introduction at Urbs Salvia has been associated with the agency of Fufius Geminus, the prominent local citizen and consul in AD 29, who owed his advancement to Livia.⁴⁷ Fufius Geminus would thereby have clearly demonstrated his loyalty and adherence to imperial values – particularly if he brought about a change in the city's name at the same time to underline the point. But the association with an Augustan refoundation is lost.

⁴³ Pliny *Historia Naturalis* 3,13,111.

⁴⁴ Fabrini 2014.

⁴⁵ This was, however, recently disputed by Mayer 2012.

⁴⁶ *CIL* 09, 05534.

⁴⁷ Bertrand 2013.

It is possible that the name of Urbs Salvia referred originally not to the cult of Salus Augusta but to the older and more widely-worshipped cult of Salus. It is believed that there was a cult of Salus and an association with healing waters close to the site of the urban settlement from the earliest times.⁴⁸ There are two pre-Tiberian structures in the urban centre associated with water which may be linked to an ancient water cult, perhaps identifiable with Salus.⁴⁹ But even if the name Urbs Salvia should be associated with the older cult of Salus rather than the Tiberian cult of Salus Augusta, the introduction of the city's new name cannot convincingly be linked to the Augustan period, because the cult of Salus was already in existence locally. In short, then, the change in name from Pollentia to Urbs Salvia – which is supported only by literary, not epigraphic or archaeological evidence – may indeed mark a key moment in the city's history, but it cannot convincingly be linked either with the foundation or refoundation of the city as a colony or with the construction of the city walls.



Figure 8: Tiberian coin of Salus Augusta (RIC 1 47).
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Conclusion

A careful analysis of the city walls of Urbs Salvia leads to a better understanding not only of the nature and meaning of the walls themselves, but also of the complex historical and social narrative of the city they surrounded. The archaeological and contextual evidence of the city walls supports a date for their construction in the early Augustan period. When considered alongside other city walls of the Augustan period

⁴⁸ See, for example, Fabrini 2014: 76; Gasperini 1998.

⁴⁹ Montali 2008.

in Roman Italy, however, this raises some important and difficult questions about the status and development of Urbs Salvia. It suggests that the theory that Urbs Salvia was a second century BC colony which underwent a refoundation or reorganisation under Augustus along with a concurrent change in name is problematic, pending further research. The decision to build impressive city walls in the Augustan period does indicate that this was an important point in the city's history and development. The walls showcase the city's wish to assert its position and prosperity, and enabled the city to represent and project an image of power and prestige. Built at a time and place of relative peace, the walls of Urbs Salvia should be interpreted for their symbolic and status value rather than as a functional asset. They were an icon of civic pride and collective identity, staking out the city's place within the wider political network of cities in Picenum and beyond.

Bibliography

List of figures

Figure 1: Location of Urbs Salvia

Figure 2: Plan of Urbs Salvia. © Isobel Pinder

Figure 3: Internal façade of city walls of Urbs Salvia, northern perimeter. © Isobel Pinder

Figure 4: Internal facing of wall, north section. Image © Isobel Pinder

Figure 5: External wall section showing foundation plinth, northeast corner of circuit. © Isobel Pinder

Figure 6: Tower 3, view from inside the city. Image © Isobel Pinder

Figure 7: Tower 3 from outside the city. Image © Isobel Pinder

Figure 8: Tiberian coin of Salus Augusta (RIC 1 47). Image © Trustees of the British Museum, publicly available under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence

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