

Hercules' Sanctuary in the Quarter of St Theodore, Pula

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Preface

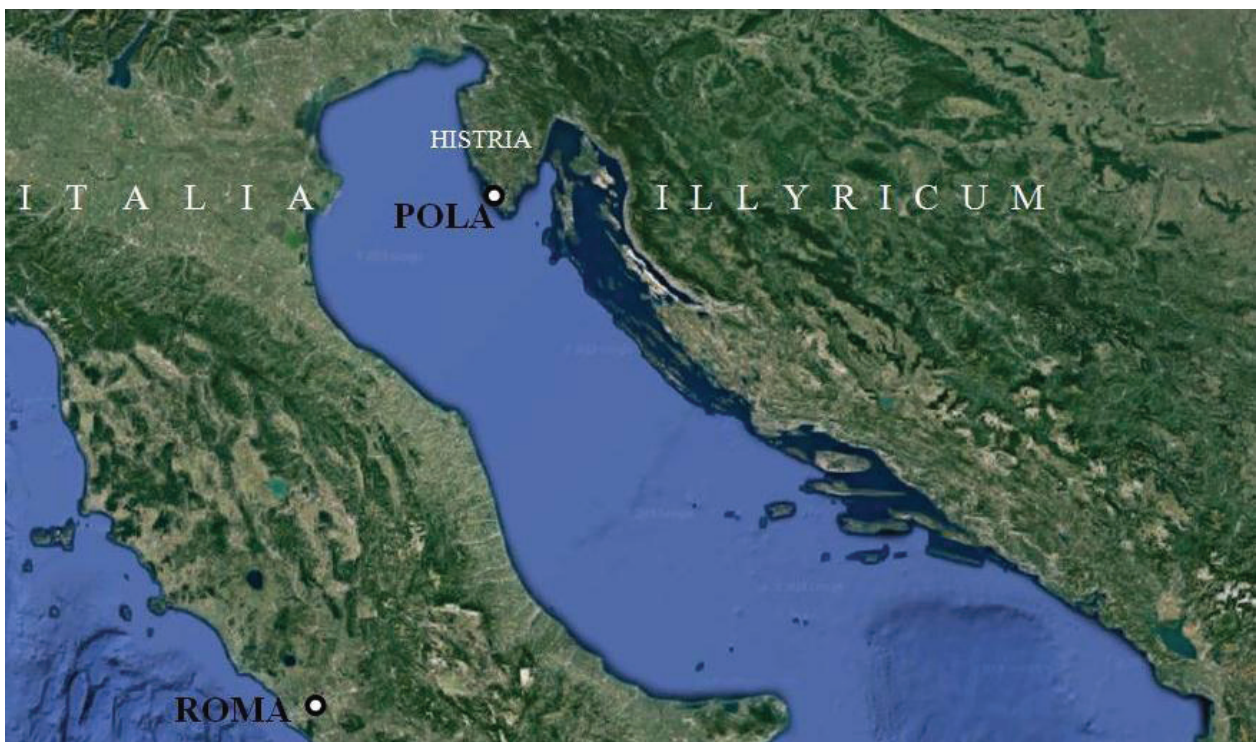
The Roman colony of *Iulia Pola Pollentia Herculanea* (IIt X/1 85) (present-day Pula-Pola, Croatia), the largest and the most important town of Roman Histria, was founded during Caesar's dictatorship at the site of an older Histrian hillfort in the middle of the spacious bay at the southern coast of the Istrian peninsula. During the rule of Augustus, Histria was detached from the province of Illyricum (DIO C. 53, 12) and included into Italy, *Regio X* (STRAB. 7, 5, 3-4; PLIN. NH 3, 127; 3, 129; 3, 150).

The bay of *Pola*, being suitable as a port, was well known among ancient seamen. The circumstance that it was placed on the west coast of Histria facing the ports of Italy, was a decisive factor in the choice of a convenient place for the foundation of the new colony of Roman citizens. The walls of the Roman colony surrounded the town hill mostly ashore. The main building material for the construction of walls and all other edifices was the Istrian limestone and lime mortar. Roman colony inherited the hillfort topography and adapted to it so that concentric or spiral streets took over the role of main communications (*decumani*), and transversal, radially placed streets (*clivi*) climbed up meeting the upper part of the spiral street which curled up to the top.

The main square, forum, was placed in the middle of the semicircular decumanus, quite close to the ramparts near the port. The first, Late Republican forum of the colony had a temple on the north side. The forum was renewed in the Late Augustan period and two symmetrical temples were built, the west one being dedicated to Roma and Augustus.

Pola had two theatres. An amphitheatre, placed near the road north out of the town was under construction during the entire 1st century AD. It contains an underground corridor beneath the arena. A powerful natural source that supplied the town with water is situated between town ramparts and amphitheatre. The Nymphaeum was built on it, containing semicircular marble stairs above the basin at the source.

During the entire Roman period *Pola* was under special protection of Hercules. Findings of altars and other inscriptions dedicated to Hercules were concentrated at the northeastern brink of the town, in the area between the Gate of Hercules and Nymphaeum, along the road leading towards the amphitheatre.



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Chapter 1

Introduction

Urban characteristics of the sanctuary

The sanctuary complex of Hercules in *Pola* was located near the city walls in the north-eastern area of the city, next to the city Gate of St John of Nympeum, and next to the main street (*decumanus*) of the Roman colony of which used to lead to the rear sides of the forum temples (today Kandler Street)¹ (Figure 1). The sanctuary consisted of the dominant and elevated temple surrounded by an open, enclosed sacred courtyard (*area sacra*, *temenos*), over 600 square metres of which was explored, and portico. The sacred complex was originally larger than the explored area and covered a total of 900 square metres: just the courtyard occupied 700 square metres. The full length of the courtyard was 25 metres and the documented width 24 metres, but this was not the entire width due to the limitations of today's cadastral division. According to the central axis of the temple pedestal, the presumed complete width of the courtyard exceeded 29 metres. The floor level of the open courtyard of the sanctuary (absolute altitude 310-380 cm, average 340 cm), was located a little below the level of the adjacent communication route to the forum. The rectangular temple foundations (8x16m) were extremely solid and laid on bedrock. The square courtyard was bounded by porticoes in front and to the side of the temple and contained a Roman well built at the natural spring beside the temple staircase. Porticoes are documented on the north and west sides from the temple, while the rear side of the sacred area was enclosed by a wall on the same line as the back wall of the temple. A south portico could only be assumed, being outside the explored area. The distance between the portico foundation walls measures 5.4 metres, in both explored porticoes. The full sanctuary complex measures 33m in length by 31m in width in the explored area, and possibly 45 m in hypothetical reconstruction (Figure 2).

The name of *Pola* itself in ancient literary tradition refers to a stream of water.² So the sacred spring around which the sanctuary was built up could represent the mythical river mentioned by Hellenistic writers *Lycophron* and *Callimachus*, cited by Strabo. The connection with Roman Hercules is attested by the discovery of the large relief

sculpture of Hercules' club inside the sacred courtyard³ and by the old find of an inscription nearby related to the building or renovation of a certain sanctuary of Hercules (Ilt X/1 5). Hercules was at the same time the patron of the colony and, among other things, a healer associated with springs and baths.⁴

The entire urban quarter in the north-eastern corner of the Roman colony of *Pola* was planned and built simultaneously with the sanctuary and contained a luxurious urban *domus* with a dedication to the goddess *Salus* in mosaic. Adjacent to this were public baths (*thermae*) and a complete drainage, sewerage and water supply infrastructure. The central part of this quarter, measuring 84 x 46 metres was archeologically explored 2005-2009.

Chronology

The chronology of the sanctuary was established according to the archaeological stratigraphy and ¹⁴C data compared to historical events. The Roman sanctuary of Hercules was preceded by an indigenous cult place of the Histri tribe, located at a natural spring in the Iron Age settlement dating back to the tenth century BC. A cult place could be recognized in a specially large square firing place 180x130 cm (S.U. Ognjište 9-09) next to the spring; there was a deposit of bronze fibulae nearby (Figure 3).

A small rectangular walled sanctuary, with a drainage system, was constructed over the Histrian cult firing place during the Late Roman Republic (Figure 4). It was built about 216BC according to ¹⁴C data, in the period of the first conflicts between Romans and Histrians that broke out 221BC (LIV. 20) and it was used continuously following the conquest of the Histrian capital Nesactium 177BC (LIV. 41, 2) until the foundation of the Roman colony of *Pola* 46-45BC.⁵ It was burnt and buried about 41BC according to ¹⁴C data, just before and because of the beginning of extensive construction works on the terrace of the sanctuary.

Construction of the Roman sanctuary terrace with sacred well, foundations of temple and surrounding portico started at the beginning of the third quarter of the 1st century BC, immediately after the foundation of

¹ Starac 2006a: 135-140; 2006b: 23-238; 2007: 263-265; 2008b: 121-129; 2008a: 301-313; 2009b: 379-389; 2009c: 271-290; 2009a: 123-168; 2011: 17-22.

² STRAB. 1, 2, 39; 5, 1, 9; LYCOPHR. 1020-1026.

³ Starac 2009a: 140, sl. 20.

⁴ Jaczynowska 1981: 658; Jeličić-Radonić 2001-2002: 39.

⁵ Fraschetti 1983: 99; Starac 1999: 133-135.

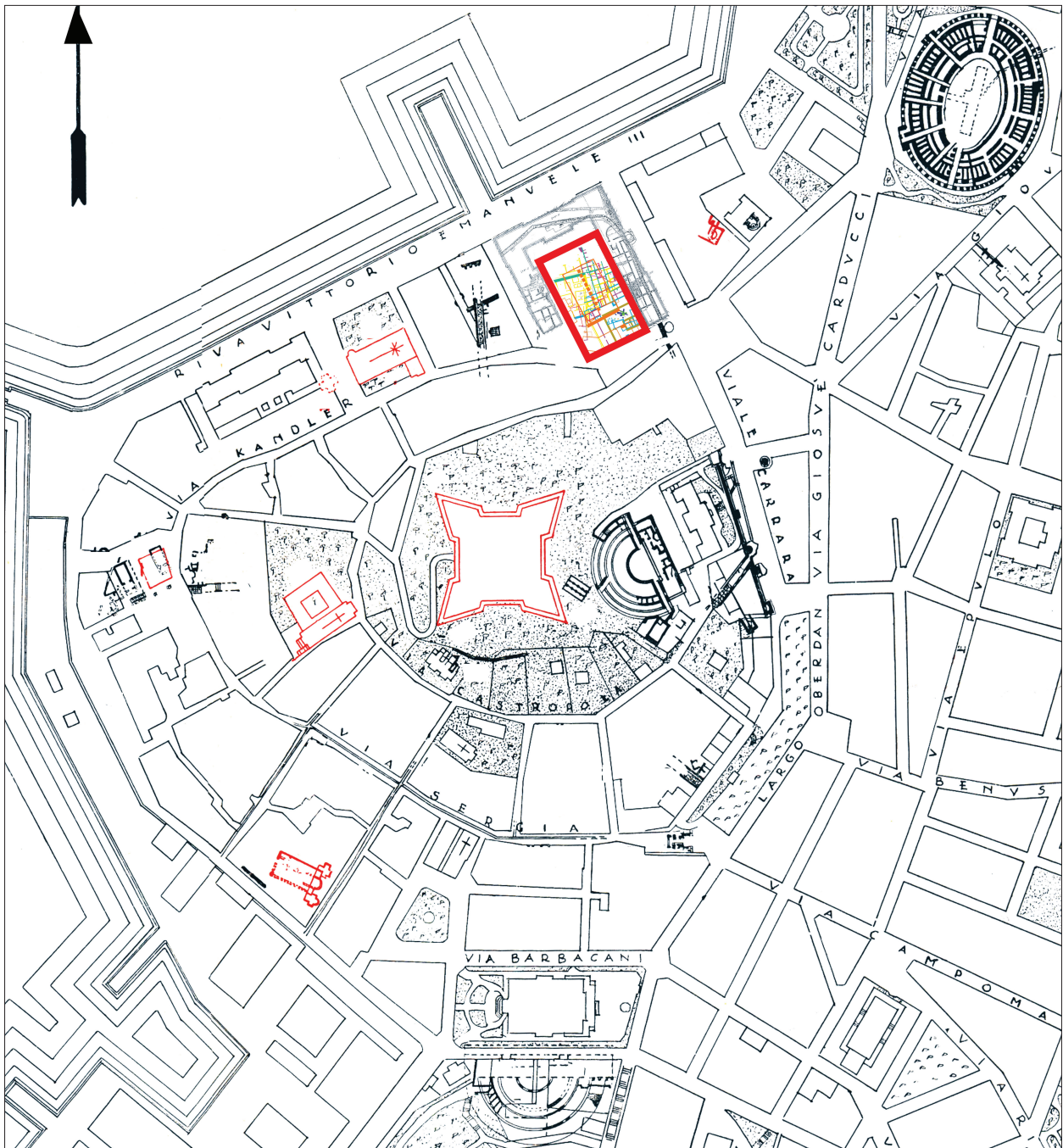


Figure 1. Area of the quarter of St Theodore in Pula excavated 2005-2009

Caesar's colony. Terrace and foundation walls of temple and portico were started and completed in the rather short period of fifteen years, 46/45-30BC. The lower chronological limit for the occurrence of the deposit, confirmed by ¹⁴C analysis of samples from archaeological layers, coincides to the year of establishment of the Roman colony of *Pola* (46-45 BC) that represents *terminus post quem*. The absolute absence of Dressel 6A amphorae recognizable by stamps and terra sigillata in stratigraphical layers containing amphorae deposits testifies to the upper chronological limit, therefore the beginning of the Augustan principate could be

designated as *terminus ante quem* for the setting of deposit of amphorae. Amphorae Dressel 6A in classical form were produced only after 30 BC.⁶ Terra sigillata in standardized forms do not appear before the twenties of the first century BC. Initially, production of sigillata in the period 40 - 20 BC was characterized by non-standardized forms.⁷ Certain interruption in works, attested by a carbon and ashes layer with fragments of brindisine amphorae and Lamboglia 2 (S.U. 48-P33-O4)

⁶ Cipriano, Carre 1989: 79; Pesavento Mattioli 1992: 41.

⁷ Oxé, Comfort, Kenrick 2000: 36.



Figure 2. Location of the sanctuary of Hercules in the quarter of St Theodore

and by rejected pieces of architectural decoration (architrave cat. no. 1, relief block with a club cat. no. 17), occurred before the beginning of Augustus' principate in 27 BC.⁸ Short term interruption in building activities possibly was caused by the Roman civil wars 44 - 31 BC.

The temple with surrounding portico was completed late in Augustus' rule, at the beginning of the 1st century AD, according to architectural decoration style, stratigraphical finds and ¹⁴C data. It could be remarked that the construction works lasted for about 50 years.

The temple with portico was burnt and completely destroyed to ground level in the late 5th century AD, at the latest immediately after the fall of the Western Roman Empire in AD 476. During demolition, the floor level in the terrace area of the sacred complex was raised by about 90 cm (430 cm average absolute altitude). Elements of the architectural decoration were reutilized in the building of a Late Antique church and monastery complex raised on the foundations of the sanctuary and adjoining thermae. Only these reutilised fragments remained from all the architectural decoration of the sanctuary.

⁸ Starac 2009a: 142.



Figure 3. Histrian square hearth (S.U. Ognjište 9-09), a view to the north



Figure 4. Hellenistic rectangular paved sanctuary with drain installation, a view to the northwest