2

Spaces of Incarceration

A Typology of Prisons in Antiquity

Since incarceration is a constellation of practices that take place in physical space, we are well served to pay close attention to such spaces, when possible—understanding the architecture of ancient carceral facilities sheds new light on old debates and raises previously unforeseen questions. As architectural historian Norman Johnston (2000) argues, "A realistic history of prisons—as opposed to a theoretical one that mistakes the rhetoric of the state and of educated elites for administrative practice—must document actual prisons, their goals, their methods, and their successes" (2). Yet, when it comes to ancient incarceration, the architectural aspects of prisons have been too easily dismissed. Take Mommsen's *Roman Criminal Law* (1899), for example: in the 1,078 pages of his tome, a physical prison is discussed only once—the famous Tullian Prison in Rome—and even then only in support of an etymological argument (301–2). Mommsen was surely aware of reports from Pompeii, and he even mentions carceral mining facilities in Sicily (the Lautumiae). Yet the archaeological material was of scant interest to Mommsen, who intended to understand legal ideals more than on-the-ground practices. A century later, Yann Rivière (1999) came to a similar position, though in his account archaeology—or the lack thereof—played a significantly expanded role. "The archaeological argument serves as my point of departure: the cramped conditions of the *carcer* and its internal organization leave no room for the correction of the individual and make the prison a space of abandonment where people die, sometimes strangled by the executioner" (57). In Rivière's estimation, punishment in prison was illegitimate as a matter of law and impractical as a matter of space; the Tullian Prison in Rome is simply too small for it to function as a true prison. Rivière's conception of Rome evokes an early second century stereotype

of an imagined mythical past; "you'll consider lucky those generations who, once upon a time under kings and tribunes, saw Rome satisfied with a single prison," as Juvenal put it (*Satires* 3.299–314, L132 [early second century CE]). If the Tullian Prison were the only facility in Rome, the argument might hold; but it was not—not by a long shot. As we detail below, prisons of varying sizes dotted the landscape. At least three existed in Rome during the late republic, including a sprawling facility directly adjacent to the Tullian Prison. Exploring their spatial features will help us to understand their social functions.

Ancient carceral facilities took a variety of forms. From the Ptolemaic period to the Byzantine, and from the Levant to Hispania, we find remarkable architectural and technological diversity, and every prison is singular when considered in sufficient detail. Yet archaeological, documentary, and literary evidence allow us to group carceral spaces broadly into categories, which in turn illuminate family resemblances within categories and differences between prison types. We build on the pioneering work of Pilar Pavón Torrejón, who looked systematically at four sites of ancient incarceration—Athens, Rome, Cosa, and Paestum (2003, 33–39, 89–100, 118). Our list of archaeologically attested prisons began here, and over the past years it has grown to include several dozen sites—some securely identified, and some potential ones. We expect that more still will be added in coming years. With this chapter we add a number of new facilities to the conversation and sketch a typology of ancient carceral spaces in broad strokes.

Our typology distinguishes between two broad categories of carceral facilities in the ancient Mediterranean world: those that were purpose-built, and those that were not. Among purpose-built facilities, we discuss five further subcategories: civic prisons, military prisons, prisons attached to treasuries, prisons inside amphitheaters, and workers' prisons. The category of prisons that are not purpose-built can be further subdivided into two groupings: preexisting spaces that were permanently repurposed as prisons, and ad hoc prisons, or spaces used temporarily. Repurposed prisons in particular reveal general patterns that in turn provide unique insights into the logics of ancient carceral architecture because they allow us to pinpoint changes required to transform a space into a prison. We begin with purpose-built prisons.

PURPOSE-BUILT PRISONS

Civic Prisons

In cities, municipalities, colonies, and settlements, the Greek agora and the Roman forum and their associated public buildings served as a central crossroads organizing commerce, politics, law, and social endeavors. These centers were customarily equipped with civic prisons—that is, public carceral architecture purpose-built to serve local communal needs—with Roman archaeological sources providing the earliest secure material evidence. In his famous handbook of the first century

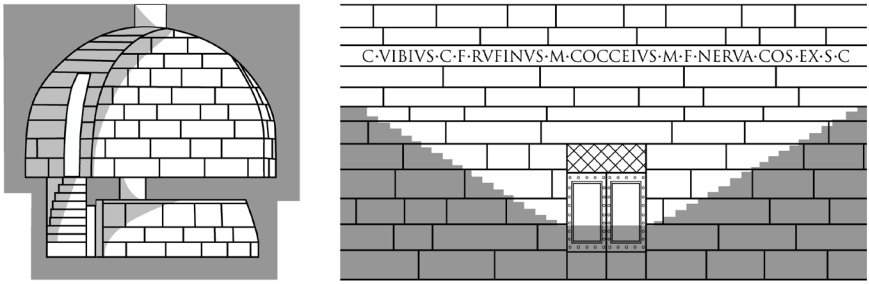

FIGURE 1. The Tullian Prison, before renovation in the early first century CE (A1; Rome, Italy). Inscription CIL 6.1539, 21–22 CE (Cerrone 2022). Drawing by Evan Levine, after Canina 1838, fig. 10.

BCE, the architect Vitruvius spoke at once descriptively about how the forum in Rome had been for centuries and prescriptively about how other forums around the Mediterranean should be built. Every forum should have three public facilities immediately in its vicinity, he writes: a treasury (*aerarium*), a meeting house (*curia*), and a prison (*carcer*), each in proportion to the size of the forum (*On Architecture* 5.2, L152 [ca. 30–20 BCE]).

For Vitruvius the ideal city center should imitate Rome, where the Tullian Prison stood directly next to the new meeting house of the Roman senate (*curia Julia*), on a narrow passageway between the older Roman Forum and the new Forum of Julius Caesar, directly across from the Temple of Saturn, which housed a particularly important treasury (*aerarium*) (Plutarch, *Life of Publicola* 12; Richardson 1980, 51–62) (fig. 1). Ancient historical (and in many ways mythical) accounts claim that Rome's fourth king, Ancus Marcius (r. 640–616 BCE), established "a prison at the center of the city, above the forum, in order to deter increasing lawlessness," and that a lower dungeon was added by the sixth king, Servius Tullius, after whom the entire facility was named (Livy, *From the Founding of the City* 1.33.8, L49 [31–17 BCE]; Varro, *Latin Language* 5.151, L187 [47–45 BCE]). Luckily, the Tullian Prison never needed to be rediscovered—its location and function has been known continuously since antiquity, and to this day it remains visible and accessible on the Roman forum, preserved underneath a sixteenth-century church built atop the prison where later Christians believed that the apostles Peter and Paul had been incarcerated.

We are lucky, too, that the space has been subjected to recent, detailed archaeological investigation under the direction of Patrizia Fortini, who argues that before it was converted into a prison in the fourth century BCE, the lower chamber was used for worship for underworld deities (Russo 2022). At least three significant phases of the prison are visible in the archaeological record, during all of which the facility was fully underground. In the fourth century BCE, a circular room serving a sacred well appears to have been covered over, transformed into a prison facility called the Tullianum that was built into defensive walls around Rome's Capitoline

Hill. In the third century BCE, the Tullianum was shortened, and another room added above it known as the Carcer (Susanna 2022a). Major renovations of the facility occurred in the mid-second century BCE and again in the early first century CE, including newly placed votive deposits to underworld deities, apparently intended to "keep intact its binding with the sphere of the sacred" (Susanna 2022b, 88). In its initial phase, the Tullianum stood on a major road through the nascent city, and in later phases the upper room of the Carcer-Tullianum opened toward the senate chambers in one direction and offered access to the lower chamber through a small manhole in the floor. The prison, as renovated in the early imperial period, is still visible today: it is a small, dark, wet, cold underground complex, with direct access to the forum but little light or air movement, a structure immediately recognizable even from historical descriptions like that of the Roman historian Sallust. "In the prison, when you have gone up a little way toward the left, there is a place called the Tullianum, about twelve feet below the surface of the ground. It is enclosed on all sides by walls, and overhead is a vaulted ceiling formed by stone arches; but neglect, darkness, and stench give it a hideous and terrifying appearance" (Sallust, *Catiline's War* 55, L48 [44–40 BCE]). The Carcer-Tullianum was hardly Rome's only prison; as we detail below, many other facilities dotted the cityscape that were used as prisons during the Republican period, including the much larger Lautumiae directly adjacent to the Tullian Prison, the Temple of Saturn, and the municipal archives (somewhat ironically) called the House of Freedom (*atrium libertatis*) (Pavón Torrejón 2003b, 109–12). Beginning in the late first century BCE under the reign of Augustus, a number of new carceral facilities under the command of prefects and the military were strewn across the city (Pavón Torrejón 2003a, 112–13; Zamora Manzano 2015, 40–50).

Outside the city of Rome, the earliest identifiable Roman civic prison imitates the form of the Tullian Prison. In the mid-third century BCE, the Roman Republic established a military veteran's colony at Cosa north of Rome, on the Etruscan coast. Among the first public buildings was a squat, stout structure just off the corner of the forum, a few steps from the meeting house (*curia*), with walls twice as thick as those of other public buildings constructed at the same time. The structure looks remarkably like a version of the Tullian Prison adapted to the local topography, and it is now widely accepted to have been the civic prison of Cosa (A20). Not only is this prison the earliest identifiable civic prison outside of Rome, it was also among the earliest to be identified by scholars: excavators in the 1950s initially considered the space to be a treasury, a cistern, or a cellar, and they later arrived at its carceral function, when in 1993 they wrote that "oddly enough, Cosa's Carcer, if that is what it was, seems to be the only one so far identified outside of Rome" (Brown et al. 1993, 41; cf. Brown 1951, 81). Of course, Albert Ballu had already identified the civic prison of Cuicul (Djemila, Algeria) seven decades earlier, but Cosa's facility has received more scholarly attention and the identification has been widely accepted as convincing (even by Rivière himself) such that

FIGURE 2. Civic prison of Cosa (A20; Ansedonia, Italy). Reconstruction by Niels Bargfeldt.

today the identification is made on public signage at the archaeological site (Pavón Torrejón 2003b, 118–19; Rivière 2004a, 56).

Cosa's civic prison stands just off the northeast corner of the forum, and comprises a large room above ground that opens to a public street (fig. 2). Two chambers communicate with the entry: an inner chamber at street level and secured through an internal door, and a second room underground, accessible only through a small manhole that was secured with a heavy lid (0.78 long x 0.70 wide), which would have been clamped down to prevent it from being dislodged from below. The lower chamber is partly cut into the bedrock and partly built in stone, and it was not plastered in a way that might suggest its design or use as a cistern. The double-thickness of the walls throughout suggest that security was a design priority, and the presence of two different chambers, one upper and one lower, suggests perhaps that separating people into different classes was an ideological aim with an architectural expression. We return to this theme below (p. 85–87).

A similar structure appears at the Roman colony of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (Sarmizegetusa, Romania), established in the early second century CE. In figure 3 the *curia* stands imposing on the south edge of the forum, and two tribunals (*tribunalia*) flank it to the east and west—platforms from which two local administrators (*duoviri*) heard petitions and handed down decisions. Underneath the eastern tribunal excavators found a now-familiar structure: two underground rooms, with an antechamber and secure inner chamber. Archaeologists at the site offered a firm identification for the chambers underneath the western tribunal—"it is certain that underneath the eastern tribunal is the prison, based on

the underground Roman Tullianum, and no area in Sarmizegetusa is more suited to this function" (Étienne et al. 1990, 279; fig. 3). In 1990, it was the fourth such Roman civic prison plausibly identified, and one that shows clear similarities with Cuicul, Cosa, and Rome. The prison at Sarmizegetusa was a later addition to the tribunal, constructed by doubling the width of the walls, blocking up an old, insecure door, and installing a new, thicker door secured by two bolts a meter in length that prevented it from being opened by someone locked inside. In the words of the site's most recent excavators, the architectural changes implemented "signify that a number of precautions were taken against a danger that was not found on the outside, but rather on the inside" of the prison (Étienne et al. 2002, 141).

Intriguingly, another space at Sarmizegetusa shares features with a number of prisons discussed here; it is possible that a second, significantly larger civic prison stood just steps away underneath the civic *curia* dedicated to the goddess Concord. These two, parallel chambers are four meters deep, with one access point—through a door communicating directly with the forum, and high, narrow windows that open directly to the public street behind the forum. Étienne and others (1990) identify this space as the civic treasury of Sarmizegetusa (285). We propose here that its features intriguingly evoke other prisons explored below, including direct forum access, windows opening to the public, separate cells that do not communicate with one another, and a cultic space appearing above a carceral facility, each of which are widely attested. It is possible that these two parallel cells likewise served a carceral function. Cities with multiple carceral facilities are well-attested, too: documentary evidence explored below demonstrates that even a midsize city like Oxyrhynchus had at least three active prisons during the Roman period, and by the time it served as an occasional imperial capital in the late fourth century, Antioch had at least two large public prisons, with prisoners regularly transferring back and forth between the facilities (Matter 2004, 64).

Placing civic prisons directly adjacent to the city's economic, social, and political center is not a uniquely Roman architectural choice—these locations at the center of the city have antecedents, and the trend endured well into the early modern period. Plato and Demosthenes, for example, both remark on the placement of the state prison of classical Athens in the agora (Plato, *Laws* 907d–910d, L18 [360–347 BCE]; Demosthenes, *Against Timocrates* 24.146, 151, L27 [353 BCE]; Athens Civic Prison A23; Vanderpool 1980; Hunter 1997). Likewise, during the same period when the prison at Cosa was in use, the Achaean general Philopoemen was imprisoned in the municipal prison of Messene, in the Greek Peloponnese (Messene Civic Prison, A16). In his account of the general's life, Plutarch described the civic prison of Messene, to which the locals had given a darkly ironic nickname: they called their prison "the Treasury." Plutarch narrates the course of Philopoemen's incarceration and ultimately his death within the dreadful space, which admitted neither air nor light and had no door, and "it is shut by a stone that is dragged over" (*Life of Philopoemen* 19–20, L148 [early second century CE]).

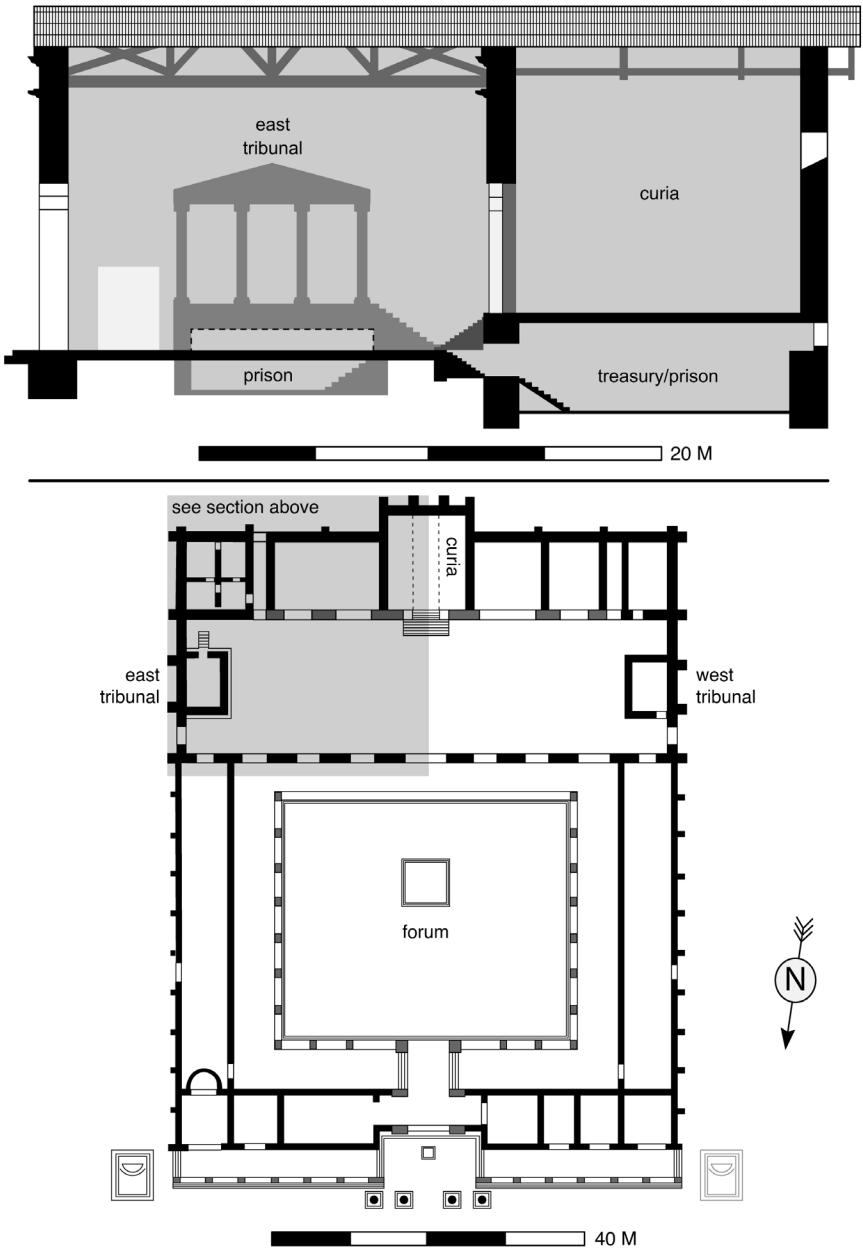

FIGURE 3. Reconstructed elevation of curia and east tribunal in the old forum at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (A27; Sarmizegetusa, Romania). Plan and reconstruction by Evan Levine, based on Étienne et al. 2002, 99, 144.

Astonishingly, the space that Plutarch describes remains intact to this day. It comprises two underground chambers directly adjacent to the city's agora, accessible only through a manhole covered by a stone lid that weighs 1,500 kilograms. A hole is visible at the center of the stone, used to attach a hook and a hoisting device to move the cover and allow entrance to, or exit from "the Treasury." Archaeologist Petros Themelis (2010) identified the space as the treasury of Messene, arguing that shortly after Philopoemen's death the space was intentionally filled with earth and at least two curse tablets, having become "an object of superstition and magic" (122–24). By time of the geographer Pausanias's visit in the second century CE, the prison where Philopoemen died had been buried.

There are a number of striking things about this space: its description by Plutarch as the civic prison (*desmōtērion*) of Messene that locals had taken to calling "The Treasury" (*ton kaloumenon Thēsauron*), its placement directly on the agora—like a Roman forum, the economic, political, and social center of the city—and its material aspects as a small, underground space accessible only through a hole, covered by a stone that secured prisoners inside, and kept the public out. While Themelis identifies the site as Messene's treasury, the language of Plutarch implies that the site was not a treasury briefly used to imprison but was in fact the civic prison that was nicknamed the "Treasury." All these aspects overlap with what we have seen both in Rome and Cosa during the same period in the second century BCE. These correspondences suggest that such practices are not peculiarly Roman and that Romans took part in practices and ideologies of incarceration attested across the ancient Mediterranean. We will encounter ample further evidence of this point across the pages that follow.

The civic prison of the Roman city of Cuicul shares many similarities with the three prisons already discussed, and it presents a few interesting differences (Cuicul Prison, A5; Ballu 1921, 1926; Leschi 1953). The city's municipal forum was constructed as part of its founding, around 97 CE, while a number of adjacent buildings were constructed somewhat later. A man named Gaius Julius Crescens Didius Crescentianus sponsored the city's courthouse, dedicating a structure in 169 CE with judicial chambers above and a civic prison below (*ILAlg* 2.7793–94; Cagnat 1920). The prison comprises two large underground rooms, with gates which restrict movement between them. The entire complex has a single entrance, opening to an antechamber (a) that itself has gates on either side—one gate opens to the first chamber of the prison, and the other opens directly to the *cardo*, one of two main roads through the heart of the city (fig. 4).

Not only does this space directly adjoin the forum, as we might expect given Vitruvius's famous pronouncement, but the prison lies directly underneath the civic basilica. A rear stairwell (d) provided easy access between the courtroom above and the prison below, on the shortest possible route. Inside, two rooms held prisoners, each built in large blocks of local limestone with pillars at the center holding a vaulted concrete ceiling. Stone benches line two sides of the first room (b);

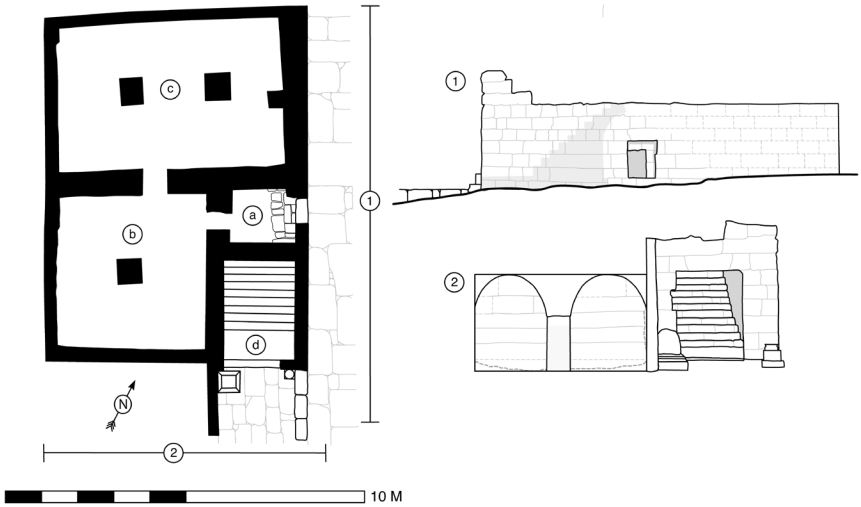

FIGURE 4. Cuicul civic prison complex, underneath the civic basilica (A5; Djemila, Algeria). Plan by Gina Tibbott and Evan Levine. A 3D model of the archaeological remains and a reconstruction of the space are available in the Ancient Mediterranean Incarceration Database.

if the doors were barred rather than solid, then a small amount of natural light would have passed through the entrance and antechamber to reach prisoners. An internal door controlled access between chambers—the innermost chamber (c) is the larger of the two, and received no natural light whatsoever.

The architect leading excavations at Cuicul was among the few scholars working in the wake of Mommsen who rejected the trend by which prisons were disappearing from the archaeological record. In 1926, Albert Ballu (1926) concluded definitively that the subterranean structure underneath the civic basilica "was none other than the prison necessary for any establishment of justice" (65). Perhaps Ballu was uniquely primed to see the connection between courts and prisons; some thirty years earlier he had collaborated with another architect to design the sprawling Palace of Justice in Bucharest, complete with magnificent courtrooms in French Renaissance style and, at its back, a prison.

Since the first excavation report in 1827, a two-room structure in Pompeii (18 square meters and 25 square meters), set slightly below ground level and next to the public latrines, has been identified as either the civic prison, or the city treasury. The rooms communicate with the forum: the first opened directly up to the forum through a small iron-barred door, while a small skylight allowed some minimal amount of light to enter and air to exchange from outside (Mau 1899, 91). Like at Cuicul, the inner chamber was yet more bleak: an internal door controlled movement between rooms, and the chamber farthest from the entrance was likely bathed in continual darkness. As we noted in the introduction, the first excavator recalled finding an underground facility whose narrow doors were fitted

with iron bars and contained human remains, apparently locked inside during the eruption (Bonucci 1827, 151). In 1884, Johannes Overbeck repeated the conclusion and in 1900, Antonio Sogliano dismissed suggestions that the site could possibly have served as a treasury because the conclusion was based on the faulty assumption that the municipal offices above had anything to do with the vaulted chambers below; there is no stair or passage connecting them, and no reason to think their functions related (Overbeck and Mau 1884, 73; Sogliano 1900, 236–38; Rivière 2004a, 591). Scholars have returned to the question repeatedly in the intervening years, with recent opinion trending toward the identification of the rooms as the prison of Pompeii rather than a treasury (Pavón Torrejón 2003b, 146). Without clarifying inscriptions or literary accounts it is difficult to arrive at a firm conclusion; given the state of the evidence along with the parallels discussed here, it is probable that the space served as one of Pompeii's civic prisons. In fact, a number of other strong candidates appear in the archaeological record at Pompeii, including barrel-vaulted chambers directly under the tribunal in the civic basilica, accessible only through a set of stairs that lead directly to the tribunal platform; this was identified tentatively as a civic prison already in 1877 (Nissen 1877, 311–12). Likewise, a set of vaulted chambers underneath the Capitoline Temple on the forum are suited to a carceral function; similarly to the structure at Sufetula discussed below (p. 76–80), they stand directly underneath a tribunal intended for legal proceedings and are accessible by a single gated entrance on the podium's eastern face (Ulrich 1994, 236–38).

One further space bears mentioning here, not because it is extraordinary but because it is ordinary. A pair of small cells underneath a large building in Tiberias, on the Sea of Galilee in Syria Palaestina, has recently been identified as the late Roman civic prison underneath an administrative palace (*praetorium*) boasting some thirty above-ground rooms and intended to host an imperial governor's assize court. The identification coheres with other data presented here, and the parallels support the excavator's suspicion that the facility was built to serve as the civic prison of Tiberias. The compound was constructed shortly after 363 CE and "in the northernmost wing are the unique remains of two small underground cells, each with a plaster floor and a bench. Low, narrow slot-like windows open to the outside (two windows in the eastern cell, one in the western), excluding the possibility that these were storage spaces" (Patrich et al. 2022, 82).

The two underground rooms are two by three meters and appear directly underneath the place of judicial proceedings in Tiberias, with walls 1.23 meters thick—just wide enough for outstretched hands from either side to touch in the middle—and boasting two small windows allowing direct access to the public street outside of the structure. As one of the excavators points out, "The slits in the walls allow small items to be transferred to the cells by those outside the building as well as to and from them, but do not allow exit from them. The entrance to the cells is possible only from above, from inside the [*praetorium*]" (Meir 2012,

99). Similar to the civic prisons at Rome and at Cosa, a small manhole in the upper floor would have provided the only access point to the cells, and prisoners were left to wait for their trial, or perhaps serve their sentence of incarceration, on small benches built in stone and still intact on the site, reminiscent of the benches at Cuicul.

Doubtless, more prisons will be unearthed in the archaeological record—perhaps even in cities already treated here. Underground, vaulted chambers appear directly underneath the tribunal platform in both the basilica of Pompeii and the Curia of Cosa—is it possible that these are further carceral spaces, and not treasuries (*aeraria*) or record halls (*tabularia*), as is most commonly assumed? (David 1983, 223–25). Time, we hope, will tell.

We have argued that it is ill advised to read literary accounts of what ancient societies should look like as if they were descriptions of how ancient cities functioned. And yet, in the civic prisons of Cosa and Cuicul, we see that Vitruvius's prescription was also broadly descriptive of practices on the ground. Relying on Libanius's orations, Alberto De Simoni (2022) has recently proposed a carceral topography of fourth-century Antioch "with certain precision," arguing that the forum featured "on one side, the *bouleuterion* [political center of Antioch], the general's quarters, and a prison, and on the other side the *dikasterion* [courthouse]" (199). Byzantine Egypt presents another parallel: based on papyrological sources in Greek and Coptic, Sofía Torallas Tovar concluded that "there were public prisons in every city and even in towns. They were supported by a special tax, called *desmofulakia*, which had existed since the Ptolemaic period" (Torallas Tovar 1999, 48). The identification of the civic prison of Messene in early second-century BCE Achaia further suggests that Vitruvius's text reflects a wider Mediterranean cultural practice, in which purpose-built public prisons appeared at the center of the city, as well as underground. In other words, we need not understand the Tullian Prison as the architectural progenitor of civic prisons throughout the Roman empire, much less throughout the Mediterranean. In this and in many other aspects of ancient carceral practice, Romans were inheritors of a long-standing tradition.

Military Prisons

Civic prisons are one type of purpose-built carceral space among many. In the Roman period, an often blurry line separated what we might today consider "purely military" duties from general policing and civil service functions undertaken by legionaries. Nevertheless, we can distinguish between military and civic prisons: Roman military bases were outfitted with at least one proprietary carceral facility (*carcer castrensis*), employed by the legion for a number of functions, but primarily as part of local policing operations. In some cases, residences (particularly of magistrates) or other domestic spaces were also used for military incarceration (Hillner 2015, 129–30).

Roman soldiers performed a wide variety of duties, from hydraulic engineering and road construction to arresting people for petty theft (P. Oslo 2.21, D89 [71 CE]) and roughing up the local population (P. Wisc. 2.48, D97 [154–59 CE]; Bowman 1994, 42–49). They were sometimes detailed to oversee civic prisons in their jurisdiction, as Pliny the Younger's letters suggest, and literary sources regularly attest to dedicated carceral spaces and prison staff on military bases themselves (*Letters* 10.19–20, L24 [109–10 CE]). Soldiers, of course, often found themselves as prisoners, both in civic and military contexts (Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 1.79.1–2, L65 [mid-first century BCE], *D* 48.19.38.11, L123 [early third century CE]). Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that military prisons were not used solely to detain members of the military or even war captives—the prisons are "military" insofar as they are placed on army bases and staffed by soldiers, even while they often held civilian prisoners. For instance, the civilian Perpetua and her companions were depicted moving between a number of different types of carceral facility in the early third century CE: they were first held under house arrest, then transferred to a civic prison, and only thereafter transferred to a military prison before finally being placed in an amphitheater prison, where they awaited death (*Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity*, L15 [ca. third or fourth century CE]). Movement between carceral facilities reflected neither their alleged crime nor their identity but rather the identity of their incarcerators and the stage of their prosecution and sentencing process. One trend visible throughout the corpus of literary and documentary evidence is that in the ancient world, different prisons did not typically pertain to different types of prisoners but to different classes of imprisoner; even military prisons were used for public purposes, both in the city of Rome and on the imperial frontier (Pavón Torrejón 2003a).

We should expect that at least in the Roman period, nearly every military base had some carceral facility, although to date only one such dedicated military prison has been securely identified: at Lambaesis, in modern-day Tazoult, Algeria (fig. 5).

The prison at Lambaesis sits in the legionary *principia*—the central administrative complex where speeches and trainings were held, associations of soldiers met, and the legion's standards were kept safe alongside their pay. In the upper diagram of figure 5, the Temple of the Standards (*aedes signorum*, 1) appears at the center, a religious space where flags and symbols of the legion are kept, and meeting rooms flank the temple to the east (2, 3) and west (II, III). While the fifth-century CE military historian Vegetius suggests that the area underneath the Temple of the Standards was typically used as a treasury, at Lambaesis we find five parallel cells, each secured with a gate, opening to a common antechamber (*Epitome of Military Science* 2.20). The antechamber was itself connected, through another locking door, to the portico in front of the temple's entrance. Each cell contains a significant amount of graffiti; some are single letters or fragments of words, but most are small tables for games or for keeping track of days and weeks, scratched into the wall by people with ample time, poor light, and rudimentary tools. Each cell has a

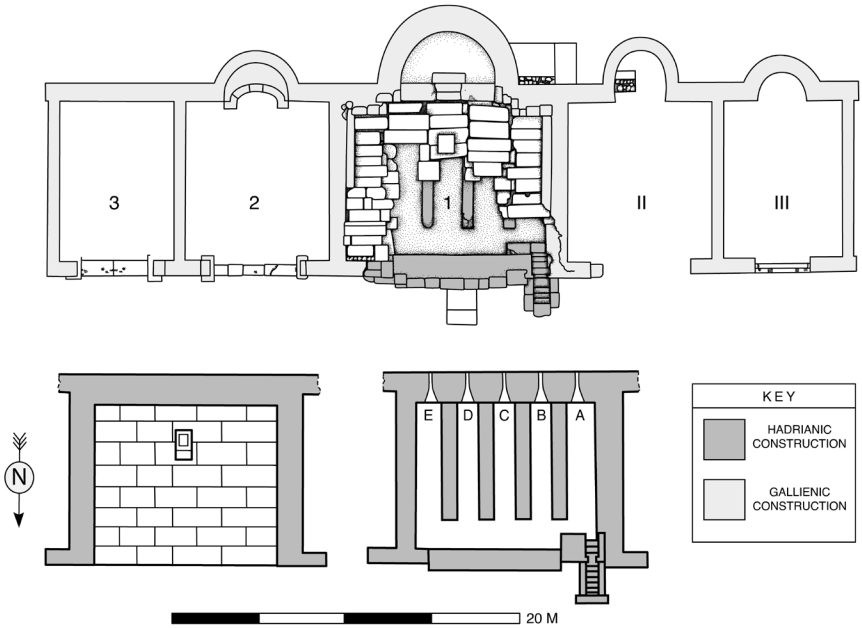

FIGURE 5. Military prison at Lambaesis, current status above, and initial Hadrianic phase below (A7; Tazoult, Algeria; Letteney and Larsen 2019). Drawings by Gina Tibbott and Evan Levine, after Besnier 1899, 230.

window, opening high above the floor of the prison onto the public street through the center of the military camp. This architecture, commended in a different context by the agricultural writer Columella for underground *ergastula* (slave prisons) for its healthsome effects, also allowed people outside to pass small objects like food, water, lamps, and clothing from the (semi)public street to the people incarcerated below (*On Agriculture* 1.6.3, L47 [mid-first century CE]). It is clear that the windows were used this way, as well: they are visibly worn down from many years of arms and objects passing through to those incarcerated within (Letteney and Larsen 2019, 76–77). Typologically similar spaces were recently discovered in the Roman military base at Vindobona (Vienna, Austria), which the excavators propose as a prison for use by legions stationed there, and Apulum (Alba Iulia, Romania), where an underground space with nearly identical windows has recently been identified on analogy with Lambaesis and aided by additional epigraphic evidence (Mosser 2024; Cupcea 2024).

While few military prisons have been identified archaeologically, documentary and literary sources make clear that during the Ptolemaic and Roman period, a primary function of military outposts was to coordinate police activity and facilitate incarceration for a wide variety of offenses and offenders, restraining both soldiers and civilians alike (Bauschatz 2013, 99–159; Fuhrmann 2012, 203–38).

In this respect, the ancient Mediterranean is not unique. In the contemporary world, the military industrial complex and the prison industrial complex are co-constituting, and both are implicated with the broader economy, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore taught us in *Golden Gulag* (2007). This interplay between the military, civic, and economic is a critical facet of our typology—the prison was bound up in all three. We see the connection between economic production and carcerality already in the Ptolemaic period, to which we now turn.

Treasury Prisons

In Ptolemaic Egypt, civic prisons were often attached to local municipal treasuries, and overseen by the office of the tax collector (*praktor*) or treasurer. In documentary papyri, people are regularly held in a treasury prison (*praktoreion*) for both public and private debts, often until they could secure bail money, a guarantor for their debt, or full payment (Muhs 2018).

Still, the treasury prison was not the only carceral facility available in the Ptolemaic period, as we see in a complaint from February of 221 BCE, in which a woman traveling in Oxyrhynchus complained directly to the king that she had been attacked by another woman in the bath house, robbed, and thrown in a local jail (*fulakē*) under the jurisdiction of the village leader (*kōmarchēs*), only to be released four days later on bail paid in the form of her own clothing (P. Enteux. 83, D71). A note appended to her complaint, apparently from the royal administration, commands the local administrator (*epistatēs*) to reconcile the women and, if he is unable, to send their case for adjudication before the local court for native appellants (*laokritēs*).

In other words, a variety of carceral facilities formed the infrastructure of society in Ptolemaic Egypt, and a notice from 228 CE about a prisoner who died in custody in the *praktoreion* of Oxyrhynchus shows that prisons attached to treasuries continued to be used for centuries after the Roman conquest, functioning as a type of civic prison (P. Oxy. 43.3104, D15). Nevertheless, an edict from 68 CE, discussed in a different context above, explicitly distinguishes the tax collector's prison (*praktoreion*) from civic prisons (*fulakas*), and urges that civic prisoners ought not to be held in prisons intended for debtors. To this day, the inscription appears on the north jamb of the outer gateway of the temple of Hibis in Kharga, Egypt, reading: "In accordance with the will of the divine Augustus, I command that no one under cover of the public treasury shall have debts transferred to himself which he did not contract originally, nor shall he in any way hold any free man in any prison whatsoever unless he is a criminal, nor shall anyone except a debtor of the public treasury be confined in a tax collector's prison [*praktoreion*]" (OGIS 669, D185 [68 CE]; second copy Temple of Hibis 2.4, D177). The edict assumes that imprisoning public debtors inside a treasury prison was both common and proper procedure in Roman Egypt—so much so that the term for public treasury,

dēmosios, became another term for prison, such as we find in the Yakto Mosaic (V5) from late Roman Antioch, discussed below (Pavón Torrejón 2003b, 30–31; p. 141). Documentary sources like this suggest that in both the Ptolemaic and Roman period, Egyptian treasury prisons were conceptually distinct from civic prisons, and that both remained in use.

To date, no plausible identification of such a facility's archaeological remains has been made, and it is not currently clear how such a structure would differ architecturally from other known civic or military prisons. The remaining two types of purpose-built prisons, however, have more distinctive features.

Amphitheater Prisons

Ancient Mediterranean civic prisoners were exemplary, and confinement at the center of cities rendered their deviance visible. Amphitheater prisons present an even more spectacular form of carcerality, in which gladiators and prisoners condemned to die in the ring were confined within the space of their pending execution, and paraded out to live their final moments before a crowd of onlookers. In the middle of the second century the jurist Gaius remarked on long-term detention of condemned criminals, stipulating that they lose both their citizenship and their freedom, a fate that "anticipates their death, sometimes by a long period, as happens in the persons of those who are condemned to the beasts"—adding that it is customary that they be kept secure and alive for a significant period so that they could be interrogated under torture against others, and, as Kathleen Coleman points out, so that gladiators and beasts could be sourced and arrangements made for a properly spectacular public execution (D 48.19.29, L169 [mid-second century CE]; Coleman 1990, 57).

Surviving archaeological evidence suggests that some amphitheaters had dedicated carceral spaces for each actor in this drama: prisons for condemned people, prisons for gladiators, and even cages for animals who battled prisoners (which in Latin are also referred to as *carceres*). Some spaces, like a subterranean cross-vaulted chamber in the Carthage amphitheater identified by David Bomgardner (1989) as a *spoliarium* (used to strip bodies of the deceased), in fact appear more consistent with an identification as one of that facility's prisons (100). Roman amphitheaters are carceral spaces in the fullest sense, designed to hold people condemned to spectacular death for a significant length of time. The amphitheater at Carales (Cagliari, Italy) presents the clearest example of these three different spaces, all visible in one remarkably well preserved site—though only two of these types of *carceres* were purpose-built, and the third will be discussed further in a subsequent section (p. 68–71).

Figure 6 presents a schematic drawing of the site. The amphitheater center appears at the right, with its bedrock-cut features outlined. The square room on the right (A) is the gladiator prison (fig. 7). This space is cut directly into the bedrock,

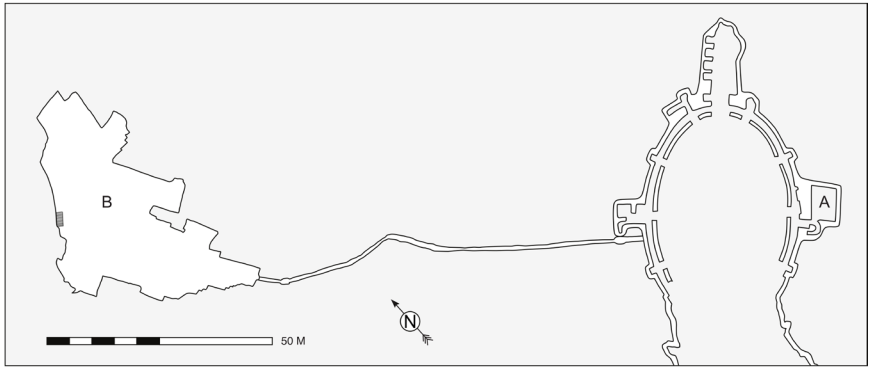

FIGURE 6. Amphitheater of Carales with Gladiator Prison (label A, A33) and Prison for the Condemned (label B, A24) (Cagliari, Italy). Drawing by Gina Tibbott.

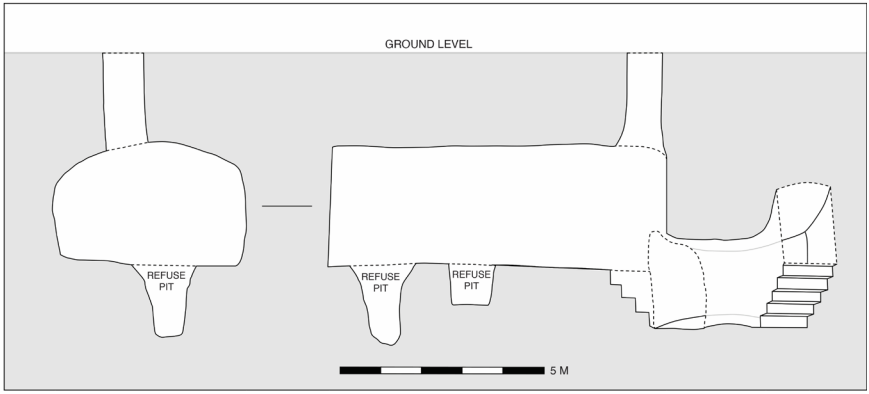

FIGURE 7. Gladiator Prison within the Carales amphitheater (A33). Drawing by Gina Tibbott.

including a vaulted ceiling and two pits in the floor serviced by small canals, apparently intended as toilets for the people locked inside (Pala 1994, 136). A skylight to the south rises some five meters from the floor of the prison to the surface, far above, allowing fresh air and light into the space without sacrificing security. Such features indicate a (rudimentary) concern for the health of the imprisoned gladiators. Eleven anchor points are cut into the walls approximately one meter above the floor with a regular distance between them of 0.7 meters, interspersed with niches for oil lamps, eight in all, cut into walls that were originally plastered and painted (Dadea 2006, 52–53; Spano 1868, 28). All the anchors show signs of wear from chains or ropes being passed through them to secure prisoners to the walls, and are identical to those in the Prison for the Condemned discussed below (fig. 6 label B, fig. 10 below). A gated door secured the space, opening to a small shrine

dedicated to the god Nemesis and two stairwells: one leading into the arena and another to the seating area, through a second locking gate (Dadea 2006, 53–57).

Workers' Prisons

The final type of purpose-built carceral facility for which we have clear evidence is the workers' prison, designed to secure condemned prisoners, often alongside enslaved workers, in locations where their labor could be exploited. Some literary sources speak to smaller quarters in elite houses for enslaved workers, along with incarcerated individuals being sent to work in bakeries within the city of Rome, which Hillner (2015) discussed as places of confinement along with brothels, factories, and mills (201–10). Here we will focus on the workers' prison at the mines of Simitthus (Chemtou, Tunisia) as an example of an expansive carceral facility with architectural features apparently intended to keep incarcerated and enslaved workers securely within, separated into groups, and, with the help of a wall separating the quarries from the town, perhaps also apart from the local population (Röder 1993, 21).

Simitthus was the single source for *giallo antico*: a fine yellow marble prized throughout the Mediterranean world. During the Roman period, it was quarried under imperial monopoly and overseen by the army, which had a significant permanent outpost on the site. Both literary and documentary sources suggest that mines were typically staffed by a mix of local overseers and centrally dispatched specialists, but that manual labor was provided by incarcerated and enslaved workers who were housed in a purpose-built carceral facility (Hirt 2010, 332–36). Archaeologist Friedrich Rakob identified one such facility at Simitthus, arguing that it was built sometime after 154 CE, and in its first two phases it was designed and used to hold prisoners and enslaved workers some 250 meters northwest of the mine where they labored. At 80 meters by 37 meters, the workers' prison was more than twice the size of any other courtyard or building in the camp, and it stood under direct military supervision in three distinct zones sealed off from one another. Not only were the prison's external walls significantly wider and stronger than the internal walls separating the six cells, but the outer walls significantly "exceeded their static function," according to Rakob (1994)—that is, they were built to withstand internal horizontal forces related to escape (66).

Latrines were added to the north end of each cell in a second phase that was constructed around 190 CE, complementing a small bathing facility already inside the secure area to the east (fig. 8; Rakob 1994, 82; Mackensen 2000, 492–23). En suite lavatories were a rarity in carceral facilities, and as we discuss below, prisoners were commonly forced to relieve themselves in their cells and, at times, to sit in the filth (p. 106). Nevertheless, the Gladiator Prison at Cagliari included two pits and a trough for prisoners to relieve themselves, and a facility underneath the Julian Basilica at Corinth, which has been identified as either the civic prison or municipal treasury, also included a small bathroom facility in the gated

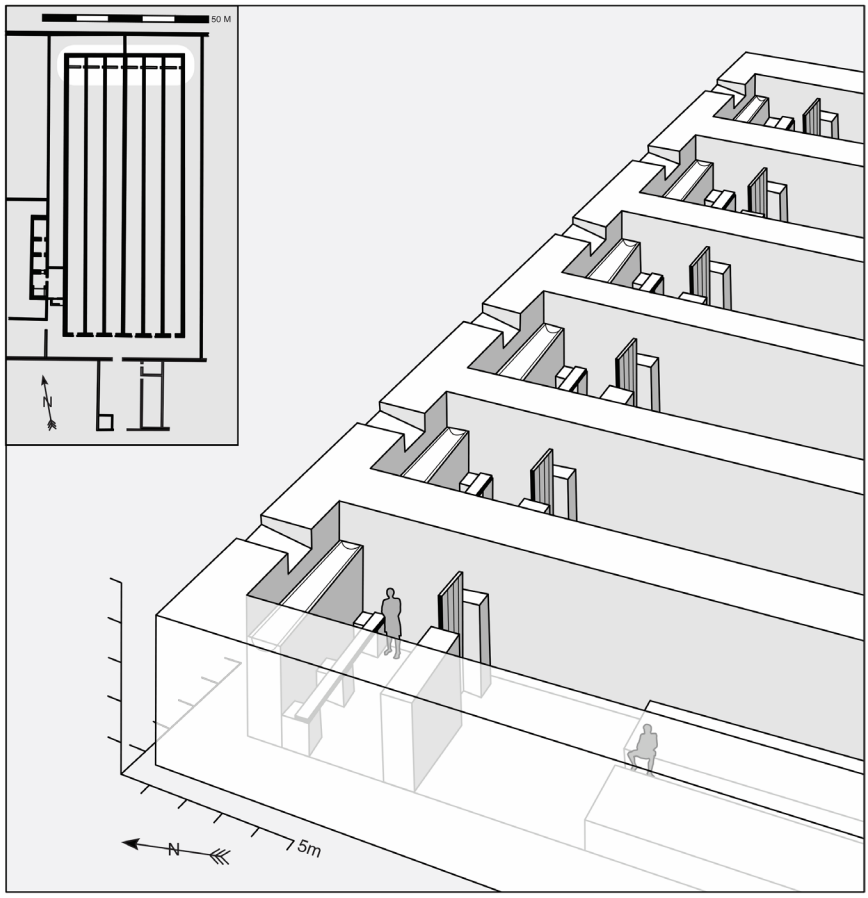

FIGURE 8. Second phase of the incarcerated and enslaved workers' quarters at Simitthus, showing separate cells with benches along the length, latrines at the north end of each cell, and a small bath facility to the east, inside the complex (A13; Chemtou, Tunisia). Illustration by Gina Tibbott after Rakob 1994, 93, fig. 94, and 72, fig. 67.

antechamber (Gladiator Prison, A33; Corinth Basilica, A14; Scotton 2020, 218; Larsen 2024, 370–71). At Simitthus, a lead pressure line supplied water through the wall of each latrine, allowing the facilities to be used both as a toilet and bath. Rather than constructing a single sewer for the toilet facility in each cell (which would have been a more straightforward and efficient solution), engineers at Simitthus designed and built six separate sewers—one for each toilet—which pass through two minuscule apertures before connecting with the common sewer to the north, increasing expense and compromising functionality but adding to the main aim of the facility: both security and separation between prisoners held in each cell. Some sixteen hundred years later, the architect of Eastern State Penitentiary

in Philadelphia employed an identical tactic with the explicit aim of preventing prisoner communication through empty pipes (Johnston 2000, 71). The inclusion of a latrine within the facility at Simitthus points further toward a carceral function for the space, allowing for people to be held in moderately sanitary conditions for long periods of time. In the words of Rakob (1994), the peculiar techniques of construction and their stark difference from other toilets in the facility are "indications of the different quality of their users"—they are prison toilets, designed with security in mind rather than efficiency (101).

Each of the six cells each had a strong, locking door and communicated only with an outer corridor which was itself accessed through two gated entrances. Today the doorframe is visibly worn by repeated use over the hundred or so active years of the facility (Rakob 1994, 70). A guard tower oversaw the outer corridor, controlling access to the facility. As Rakob notes, the facility's watchtowers do not look out toward the valley but inward—these vantage points were intended to oversee people locked inside (53). Each cell measures nearly eighty meters in length and six meters in width, with benches installed along both sides. In its earliest phase, a wall separated the entrance to the three eastern cells from the entrance to the three western cells, but this subdivision was removed when latrines were installed in each cell, perhaps indicating that the facility was initially subdivided by sex, with common latrines serving the three eastern and three western cells.

Rakob estimated that each cell could house approximately 180 people, meaning that the facility had the capacity to hold over one thousand people in segregated, secure compartments. Many ancient civic prisons would have had a maximum capacity of roughly twenty-five to seventy-five people; given its size, separate cells, communal bathing facilities, and entrance guarded by towers, workers' prisons like Simitthus appear to be a facility of a different type—a type that resonates most clearly with the large, industrialized prisons in the modern US criminal justice system. For reference, Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia was initially designed to incarcerate 250 prisoners, though in subsequent decades it would far exceed its design capacity (Rubin 2021, 23). Around 230 CE the prison camp at Simitthus was converted into workshops, and it remains the only such workers' prison identified in the archaeological record to date, though as Alfred Michael Hirt (2010) points out, Roman imperial mining facilities in Egypt's eastern desert include watchtowers that may have been used to guard convict labor (15, 225). Hirt also notes that it is unclear *who* was condemned to spaces like these—literary sources widely attest the use of prisoner labor in imperial mines and legal materials suggest that sentences were often intended to be limited term—but they do not appear in the epigraphic record (185).

As Wendy Warren remarks in this book's afterword, "the *mass* of our own era's 'mass incarceration' is certainly historically distinct"—the first well-attested instance of widespread carceral control at a scale similar to that in the contemporary United States only appeared in Germany in the fifteenth century (p. 198;

Weinreich 2023). Additionally, the term "mass incarceration" speaks not only to scale but to the insidious interimplication of state profit, labor, economics, and carcerality typified by the modern "prison industrial complex" (McLennan 2018, 151). The prisons of the ancient world were undoubtedly different from their modern counterparts. Nevertheless, the scale of the workers' prison at Simitthus, and its relationship with the market economy, suggests pausing to rethink claims that some of the core features of mass incarceration are wholly unprecedented.

Writing in the second century CE, the physician Galen recorded his impression of a visit to a mining camp in Cyprus that sounds strikingly similar to Simitthus—noting specifically that the space had both mine shafts where prisoners labored and a warehouse where they slept nearby (*Simple Remedies* 9.3.11–34, L160 [late second century CE]; Mattern 2013, 99–103). Such evidence raises another important question, sticky, but not intractable: what spaces count as a prison? No simple answer will be universally satisfying, but in this case documentary evidence offers some insight. A quarry overseer's report from the mid-third century BCE records that ten men worked in the mines over a sixty-eight-day period while during that same period, another 130 prisoners sat idle, waiting for their turn to work (PSI 4.423, D58; p. 126). At this Ptolemaic mine, the scenario in which an idle prisoner was activated as a forced laborer appears to have been rather circumscribed: either one of the ten current workers had died, or if limited-term sentences in the mines existed in the Ptolemaic period as they did during the Roman period, perhaps when the worker's sentence had been served. It is possible that some of the men waiting to work were sent there as slaves while others were transferred to the miner's prison as convicts, but the papyrus labels them all as prisoners (*desmōtai*). The report makes clear that over the course of two months, more than *ninety percent* of these prisoners sat idle, detained in a carceral facility. In so doing, it illustrates that a strong distinction between convict labor and other forms of penal incarceration can be a distinction without a difference, as we also saw in the legal record; facilities for holding condemned miners were prisons and, in at least some instances, they were likely filled with bodies waiting for their turn to work rather than simply acting as secure facilities for rest between shifts. Even though it dates centuries before the construction of the workers prison at Simitthus, documentary evidence like PSI 4.423 helps us to understand such sprawling carceral facilities and suggests the possibility that at any given time, only a select number of laborers worked in the mines, while the great majority lingered inside the prison for months or years, awaiting their turn underground.

Seen together, purpose-built prisons suggest a number of family resemblances, both in their design and in their archaeological remains. With the exception of the incarcerated workers' quarters at Simitthus, every purpose-built prison surveyed here is underground, and many were built directly underneath places of judicial or religious authority. What the Simitthus facility lacked in subterranean security, however, it more than made up for with a guarded entry corridor surveilled by a

watchtower above. Every prison surveyed had the capacity to separate prisoners into cells either through stone-built walls, as at Lambaesis and Cuicul, or through upper and lower chambers, like at Rome and Cosa. Most often these spaces were constructed in the immediate vicinity of the city's civic, economic, and social center (forum/agora), and the great majority boasted small windows opening to the public street, rendering the space simultaneously secure and porous to visitors.

The other branch of our taxonomy concerns spaces designed for other purposes that nevertheless came to be used as sites of incarceration. Repurposing spaces for confinement often involved significant architectural interventions, though in some cases it did not. Paying attention to these non-purpose-built prisons allows us another glimpse at carceral logics: by tracking the architectural changes involved in outfitting a facility to serve a carceral function, we are able to trace what features incarcerators deemed necessary to the prison's function. We will argue that these repurposed spaces also shared several features with purpose-built prisons, and that together they suggest that ancient incarcerators applied models from public prison architecture to guide their selection of and intervention in repurposed carceral spaces.

OTHER PRISONS: REPURPOSED, AD HOC, AND PRIVATE

Our second category distinguishes between repurposed prisons and ad hoc prisons. Repurposed prisons are spaces that have been modified from their initial use in order to secure people for an indefinite period of time. Ad hoc prisons, on the other hand, often involve only minimal renovation and serve a carceral purpose only for a limited period, after which the space may conceivably revert to its initial function. Put differently, repurposed prisons were outfitted to become formal sites of incarceration; ad hoc prisons merely functioned as such for a limited period. Both categories reveal important aspects of carcerality.

By the imperial period, the city of Rome had multiple civic prisons. Pilar Pavón Torrejón (2003) counts at least seven: the Tullian Prison (A1), the nearby Lautumiae, a prison in the Forum Holitorium on the banks of the Tiber, and four others (89–110; cf. Juvenal, *Satires* 3.299–314, L132 [early second century CE]). It is striking to note that the two most commonly discussed civic prisons in Rome are, in fact, both repurposed spaces. As discussed above, archaeological evidence suggests that the Tullian Prison initially served as a site of cultic activity associated with underworld deities, and continued to be used for this function even during its tenure as the iconic civic prison of Rome.

Literary materials suggest that another civic prison of Rome was even more dramatically repurposed: the Lautumiae, quarries for local stone modeled on similar carceral facilities in Sicily (A12). As T. J. Cadoux (2008) argues, by the second century BCE, large underground caverns in Rome had been repurposed to serve

as a site of long-term incarceration for common, "non-prestige" prisoners (203–8). Cadoux explains this as follows: "Why should the Romans require two places of detention, the *carcer* and the *lautumiae*? The answer is obvious: the *carcer* was a solid building in which criminals awaiting trial or execution could be securely held; the *lautumiae* provided hollows or caves, where a considerable number of people could be hindered from escaping by a few sentries, and if a few did escape it was no great disaster" (203). Remains of the Lautumiae have not yet been securely identified, but archaeologists agree on their general location: Cadoux argues that the facility was north of the Tullian Prison, while Filippo Coarelli (2014) suggests that it was an adjacent part of the same complex (68). These carceral facilities at the foot of the Capitoline Hill in Rome remained in use throughout the imperial period.

A repurposed prison in late ancient Corinth (Greece) allows us to track the renovations involved in transforming a space into a prison (fig. 9). In the late first or early second century CE, a row of shops were built on the northwest side of Corinth's forum, itself established as the center of a new Roman colony more than a hundred years prior. At some point between the late second and late fourth century CE, however, several of the shops were remodeled into a new prison space, opening directly onto the forum. Why remodel shops to serve as a prison? Some evidence suggests that the initial civic prison of Roman Corinth was located directly underneath the Julian Basilica, following a pattern known from other first- and second-century Roman cities like Cuicul, discussed above (Scotton et al. 2020, 217–18). The city's basilica collapsed in the late fourth century, however; if the civic prison was underneath, a new facility would be needed, and in a hurry (Larsen 2024, 369–76). Prison graffiti dated between the fifth and sixth centuries indicate the city repurposed an existing space—the Northwest Shops—into a prison shortly after the collapse of the basilica (Sironen 2016, 11–17).

The shops comprise a series of fifteen rooms, each approximately four by five meters, with a larger central chamber referred to as the Boudroumi (a Turkish loanword for dungeon) that had at least two floors: one at ground level and a second suspended above, supported by wood beams. We are sure that at least the Boudroumi and the adjacent chambers to the west were used for incarceration in the late ancient period because over two dozen prisoner graffiti remain scratched into the floors of the facility, excavated by a team of archaeologists in 1901 (*IG* 4.2.3.1270–94: D236–60 [fifth through sixth centuries CE]; Larsen 2024). Some graffiti speak to the conditions of confinement or call down divine curses on the prisoners' captors, while others are simple drawings and even tables for gaming or keeping track of time. A number of graffiti contain game boards, offering glimpses of how incarcerated people developed tactics to pass time. Some of these prisoner graffiti even appear on floor tiles immediately outside the facility, suggesting that prisoners were kept under guard in the forum's colonnade, likely in order that they could beg from passersby, a practice that attested in a

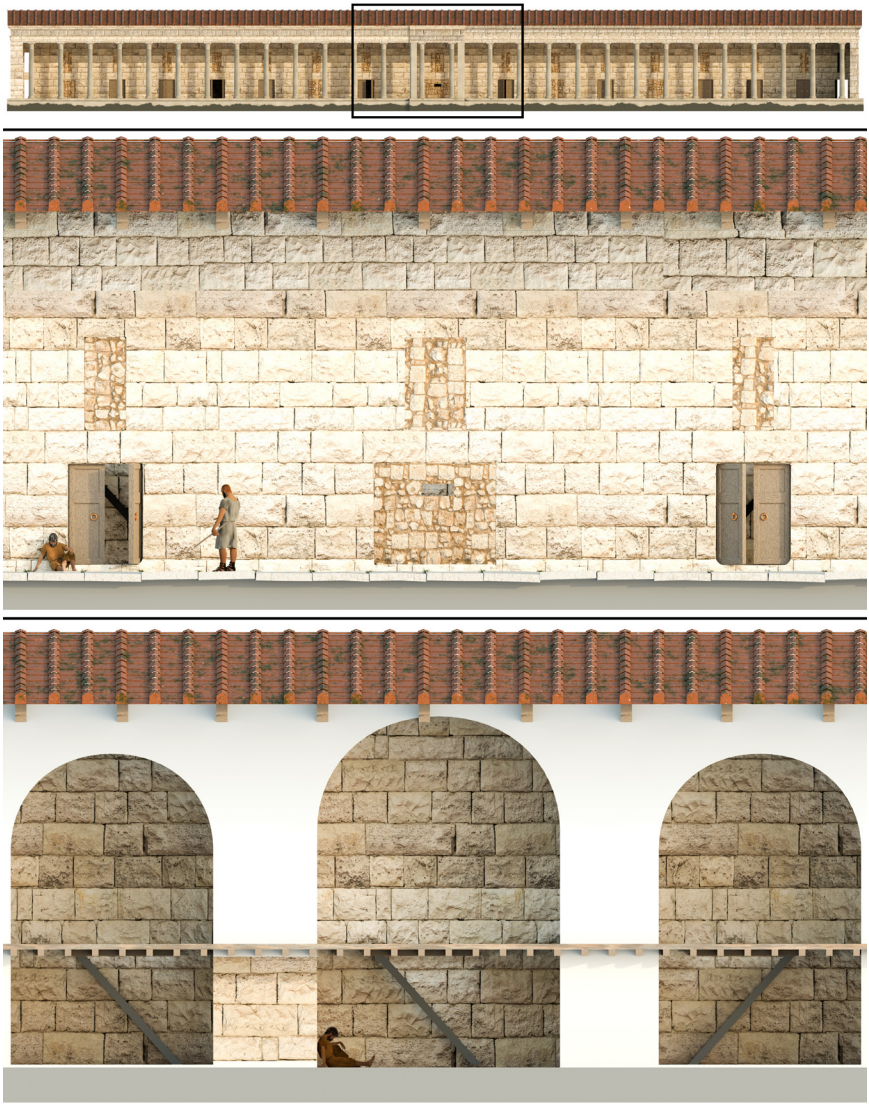

FIGURE 9. Late Roman prison at Corinth (A15; Corinth, Greece; Larsen 2024). Top: elevation of the Northwest shops as seen from the Forum. Middle: cutaway elevation of the prison entrances, with upper windows blocked up and a small window appearing in the center chamber (Boudroumi), opening to the forum. A passageway connects the room to the left and the center chamber. Bottom: cutaway elevation of prison interior. Reconstruction by Niels Bargfeldt. A 3D model of the archaeological remains and a reconstruction of the space are available in the Ancient Mediterranean Incarceration Database.

roughly contemporary source from Antioch (Antakya, Turkey; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 60, L158 [ca. 390 CE]).

Renovations of the shops allow us to see what architects prioritized in repurposing the site as a prison, offering essential insight into what features render a space carceral. First, they installed a wall between the Boudroumi and the forum, making the largest chamber also the most secure, and they created a window in the new wall to allow communication between those inside the prison and those outside, mirroring civic prison architecture known across the Mediterranean. Second, a small passageway was built to connect the Boudroumi with the chamber immediately to its west, creating the now-familiar multi-celled structure well attested elsewhere. Graffiti appear on the floor of both chambers. Finally, the second story of the Boudroumi appears to have been left intact, rendering the ground floor a cramped 1.6 meters in from floor to ceiling, while graffiti on the walls suggests that the second floor was also used to detain prisoners high above the ground. Architects in late ancient Corinth took features common to purpose-built Roman prisons and implemented them in this repurposed space: location on the forum; multiple communicating chambers; ability to separate prisoners within the same facility; and windows connecting public space outside the prison with its largest chamber. The most striking divergence from the established pattern is that the Corinth prison is not underground. Nevertheless, the space retains the common feature of including an upper and lower prison, as is known from Cosa and Rome, the difference being that in this case, Corinth's upper prison was further from the entrance, unlike in subterranean examples.

We previously discussed the amphitheater in Carales and its two separate prison facilities: one purpose-built prison for gladiators included in the amphitheater's initial design (fig. 6, A), and a second prison for people condemned to die in spectacles, which was constructed subsequently in a repurposed quarry (Prison for the Condemned, A24; Dadea 2006, 79–87). The amphitheater sits at the center of an extensive complex where tunnels connect facilities above the ground with those underneath. It was built into the end of a deep limestone valley, with tunnels dug out of the bedrock on three sides and seating placed on top, while on the remaining end the oval shape was completed with seating built in large limestone blocks that were quarried in a small mine one hundred meters to the northwest. When the project was complete, an underground aqueduct was cut to channel rainwater from the newly built amphitheater into the cavity left by mining blocks for the facility (fig. 6, B). Walls of the disused quarry were covered in a thick layer of hydraulic plaster, preparing it for use as a cistern which stored winter rains and increased hydraulic capacity in a city with a ballooning population but no significant source of spring or groundwater. The space is as oppressive as it is astonishing; it is ten meters from floor to ceiling, and over fifty at its widest point. When in use as a cistern, it was capable of holding more than a million liters of water.

FIGURE 10. Inscribed wall in the Prison for the Condemned at Carales, with a worn anchor cut through hydraulic plaster visible in the upper left. Facing Northeast (A24; Cagliari, Italy). Author image.

At some point prior to the fourth century CE, the quarry-turned-cistern was repurposed yet again, this time into a prison for people condemned to die in the arena. It is unclear exactly when this cistern was transformed into a prison, but mineral buildup on the hydraulic plaster proves that the cavern held water for a significant period of time. The relative chronology is absolutely clear because of one more fact about the space: dozens of anchors were cut through the plaster into the bedrock, letting water escape but allowing prisoners to be affixed directly to the bedrock, so that they could not. The anchors are worn from use, having been threaded with ropes or chains, and numerous graffiti remain scratched into the walls throughout the space (fig. 10). Many graffiti appear directly beneath anchors, while post holes in the wall suggest some of the condemned received the barest of final comforts: a wooden platform on which to sit and wait.

An entrance gate at the northwest opened onto steep stairs cut into the bedrock, descending five meters from the surface outside to the floor of the prison. A wooden scaffold opposite the entrance was its only exit, allowing prisoners to climb eight meters into the aqueduct that led to the center of the amphitheater. Two skylights illuminated the aqueduct, allowing prisoner's eyes to adjust over the

one-hundred-meter walk from darkness into the light of the arena. Not far from this exit is another curious feature: a series of nonsequential Roman numerals cut into the wall underneath anchors—these may relate to staging, perhaps allowing the order of prisoners to be set before the games began. At one point, water flowed from the sky to the arena to a long aqueduct before it splashed down into the cistern at Carales. Eventually, bodies flowed in the opposite direction, ascending a wooden scaffold and walking the same path backward, to meet their death in the arena.

Compared with the extensive renovations required at Corinth, the cistern in Carales began as a relatively secure space. Renovations were less extensive as a consequence: water was drained; anchors were cut through the hydraulic plaster into the walls for stocks; wooden platforms were constructed for sitting; and a scaffold rose to the aqueduct to ferry people out. It appears that people confined in the space, or perhaps their captors, outfitted the facility themselves, as well: cutting footholds into the wall that allowed access to high niches created during quarrying—niches that would have supplied access to less damp and rancid air than that below, along with a degree of privacy, albeit a paltry one. Prisoners scratched in their own touches, too, in the form of countless small crosses, lines, and at least one early Christian graffito carved with poor tools in limited light by someone sitting directly below an anchor point—likely attached to the wall, with little hope left for deliverance (fig. 11). The Christogram atop the ship's mast did not become a significant symbol before the reign of Constantine, suggesting that imperial pronouncements outlawing gladiator games in 325 and again in 357 may have been either specific to the city of Rome, or not widely heeded (*CTh* 15.12.1–2).

While worker's prisons like Simitthus were often purpose-built to warehouse convicted and enslaved laborers, literary sources regularly consider mine shafts themselves one species of the genus "prison," as they were used to detain those working underground—often for weeks or even months on end (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 33.70, L159 [ca. 77 CE]). The copper mines at Phaino (Wadi Feynan, Jordan) were among the most famous carceral facilities in the ancient world, regularly and graphically described as facilities teeming with overworked and brutally mutilated convict laborers, a place "where even a condemned murderer is hardly able to live a few days" (Athanasius, *History of the Arians* 60; Hillner 2015, 202–3). At Phaino, cavernous galleries were carved out of the bedrock in order to maximize surveillance capabilities, allowing a skeleton staff of guards to detain a large number of laborers extracting copper, and sleeping, inside (Friedman 2009).

The mining facility at Wadi Khalid, near the ruins of ancient Phaino, gives a sense of the experience to which miners were subjected and the architectural interventions necessary to keep these facilities productive. The mine comprises three shafts, with surface openings one meter across leading to tunnels that plunge a hundred meters into the earth. Two of the shafts were opened already in the Iron Age, with a third added during the Roman period, as evidenced by late

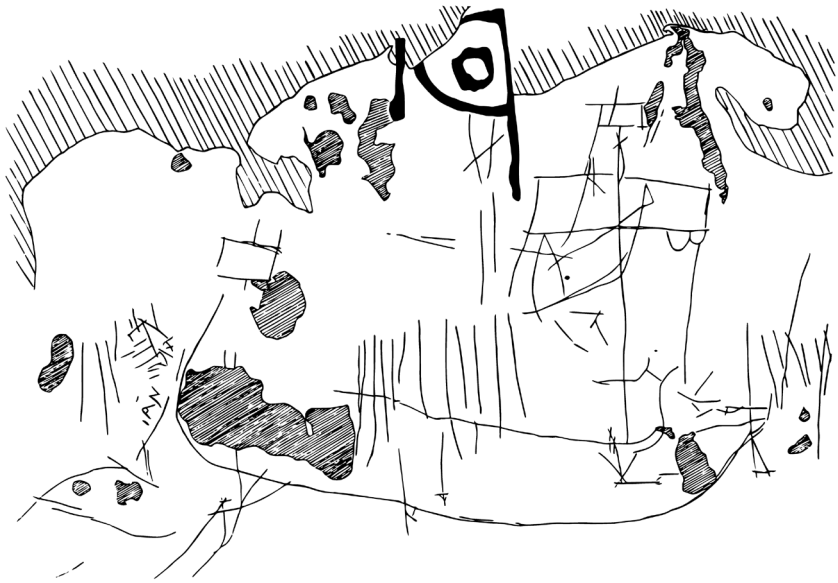

FIGURE 11. Drawing of early Christian graffito of ship with Christogram on top of the mast and alpha and omega hanging from the sail, twelve oars, and a small Greek inscription reading *ian*. Image by Evan Levine after Dadea 2006, 85, fig. 37.

first-century coins in the newer shaft and Roman masonry in the older shafts, apparently added to shore up the aging underground infrastructure (A37; Hauptmann 2007, 121). Footholds cut into the walls aided miners as they descended, where literary sources suggest that they would be left for weeks or even months on end, sustenance lowered down in baskets and hard-earned copper ore lifted up to the surface above. The air was toxic deep underground; minimal ventilation allowed heavy metals to lodge in laborers' lungs, as Strabo notes: "Air in the mines is both deadly and hard to endure on account of the grievous odor of the ore, so that the workmen are doomed to a quick death" (Strabo, *Geography* 12.3.40, L167 [early first century CE]). Enslaved and incarcerated miners crawled on hands and knees through underground galleries and, inevitably, felt their bodies deteriorate over time. As Pliny the Elder reports, "in every mine, the legs are injured" (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 36.28 [ca. 77 CE]).

Roman phases of a copper mine at nearby Wadi Amram (Israel) give a sense both of the scale and discomfort of daily life in and within these kinds of sites. Beno Rothenberg has mapped out an entire constellation of mine shafts, each with an average diameter of just seventy centimeters and occasionally opening into wide arcades, where shafts were cut to allow an exchange of air, ore, and bodies from above. Niches in the wall were made for accommodated small oil lamps,

offering "the only source of light in these complex dark workings," though at the expense of the oxygen that they consumed as prisoners crawled through underground galleries, following veins of copper nodules. A basket made from reed and rope, roughly the size "of a modern shopping basket," used for hauling ore to the surface above, was found in one of the lowest areas of the mines (Rothenberg 1999, 164–65, see esp. fig. 22). The mining complex at Wadi Amram offers us a glimpse into a warren of carcerality, forced labor, and terror.

Eusebius, writing in the fourth century CE, speaks regularly of "the mines at Phaino," "the mines in Palestine," "the mines at Cilicia," or "the mines of Thebais" as landscapes of incarceration to which Christians were sent for punishment (*Martyrs of Palestine* 7, 8, 13, L54 [early fourth century CE]). Even so, while condemned prisoners were used as some of the labor force in places like Phaino, particularly for the more brutal and body-destroying aspects of work, we must remember that "the mines in Faynan were not normally run as a large-scale penal colony with a big military garrison"; rather, convict laborers were one cog in a much larger ecosystem of imperial power and extraction (Mattingly 2013, 190). To borrow a phrase from geographer Dominique Moran, Phaino itself was a "carceral geography," insofar as the whole region—the mining town, shafts, surveilled roads, and the surrounding landscape—was bound up in its carceral function, rather than incarceration being localized in a single prison structure (2015). Today, the region remains largely as it was in antiquity: harsh and remote, with exceedingly rugged and barren terrain that rendered escape without notice nearly impossible. Narrow exits from mines were distant enough from any population center that an escaped convict would perhaps find a harsher reality outside the mine than inside, even if they could evade guards above and checkpoints securing the landscape. The typical miner's appearance—mostly naked, with half-shaved heads, shackles, and often tattoos—would make them easy to spot and hard to mistake, incorporating the landscape itself into the carceral infrastructure rather than simply serving as its host (Millar 1984, 128; Larsen 2019, 561; Cyprian, *Letters* 77.3, L141 [250–58 CE]; Petronius, *Satyricon* 103, L185 [late first century CE]).

For the most part, ancient prisoners were kept underground, but a few sources speak to the use of towers as sites of incarceration. In the late sixth century CE, Gregory of Tours told a story about a hermit named Hospicius living in chains in an old tower, whom the invading Lombard army had mistaken for a prisoner (*Histories* 6.6, L162 [late sixth century CE]; Hillner 2015, 271). The story's logic relies on a durable association across the Mediterranean between towers and long-term incarceration, an association backed up by archaeological evidence. Sarah Morris and John Papadopoulos (2005) have argued that dozens of towers from both urban and rural Greece in the classical and Hellenistic periods exhibit features associated with incarceration: designed apparently to keep people in rather than out, "as places for temporary incarceration of unfree labor" and, unsubtly, the spatial inverse of a mineshaft, exploited for similar ends (193).

Incarceration often occurred outside formal prisons, in existing structures, with little or no renovation, that were used to detain people for a period of time. We refer to such sites as ad hoc prisons. Here we discuss an exemplary, but not exhaustive, series of examples: cisterns, temples, baths, markets, and rooms in private homes. As we have seen, Roman prisons especially share structural similarities with cisterns—they are mostly underground spaces, often at the center of settlements and connected to other municipal infrastructure—and a number of Roman- and Byzantine-era prisons were structurally repurposed from their initial use as a cistern (Herodian Palace Prison, A8; Dara Prison, A11; Prison for the Condemned, A24; cf. Philippi Prison, A19; Mentzos 2005, 152). Around 238 CE, a large Roman estate outside the ancient capital of Tarraco (Tarragona, Spain) was sacked and many of the buildings were destroyed. A large kitchen facility servicing the main house was lost in the attack, including a cistern that had been repurposed by doubling the wall width on three sides, and tripling the wall that opened into the villa. When excavators unearthed the facility in the late 1960s, there were a few "notable surprises, since in the lower stratum, destroyed and burned, we found *in situ* some iron shackles, one of them containing within the rusty metal the heel bones of a person and, next to it, fragments of a burned skull; without a doubt it was the prison or cell for punishment, perhaps intended for the villa's rebellious slaves" (Berges 1969–70, 142; Els Munts, A28).

The space was renovated to double the width of the walls, apparently in relation to its use as a prison. As such, it could be categorized as a private prison, repurposed from cistern, rather than an ad hoc prison in a strict sense. Even so, the cistern at Els Munts differs in important ways from other repurposed prisons like the Prison for the Condemned at Carales; apart from reinforcing the walls and adding shackles, there do not appear to have been any significant architectural changes implemented to turn the space into a private prison. Such ad hoc use of cisterns for temporary incarceration follows a wider pattern across the Mediterranean which stretches beyond the parameters of this book. Sources as distant as the biblical book of Jeremiah, set in Jerusalem in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, envisions disused cisterns used to hold prisoners (37:11–38:13, L43 [sixth/fifth centuries BCE]), and in the medieval period a cistern on the acropolis at Cosa was apparently converted into a prison, as evidenced by the dense attestation of graffiti in the space. One composition at Cosa from 1210 CE is eerily similar to the fourth-century prisoner graffito at Carales, comprising "two boats painted with dark brown pigment, one larger than the other, both sailing toward the north . . . To the south of the ships is a series of six simple crosses" (Hobart 2003, 126; cf. fig. 11).

Documentary and literary sources often attest the use of temples as ad hoc sites for temporary incarceration. For instance, in the fourth century CE, a man from Oxyrhynchus wrote a letter to his brother Heras, asking him to bring a significant amount of money that he apparently owed. Unable to repay his debt, he complains: "by heaven I am locked up in the temple of Hadrian!" (*P. Oxy*. 17.2154, D18 [fourth

century CE]). As discussed below, the prisoner may indicate that he was incarcerated in a formal prison structure like the one underneath the central temple at Sufetula, but more likely we have here evidence of the temple treasury being used to detain a prisoner temporarily; Cassius Dio apparently reported that the treasury inside the Temple of Saturn on the Roman forum was used to detain inhabitants of Praeneste during a war against Pirro (A39; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* [Zonaras Annales 8, 3 (D)], L60 [ca. 230 CE]; Pavón Torrejón 2003b, 30, 109). Prisons connected to temples are attested across the ancient world, including Neo-Babylonian legal sources, to which we can add the Lambaesis military prison complex, discussed above (Joannès 2023, 533–39).

Any secure room could conceivably function as a temporary carceral space, and in addition to their common central location in cities, temples were uniquely equipped with such rooms. They were an obvious choice for temporary incarceration, and a choice taken from time to time, it seems. With the civic prison at Messene nicknamed "The Treasury" and treasuries used as prisons, our data point to an intertwined relationship between these two civic structures: two of the three structures the Vitruvius prescribes for every Roman forum. Both respond to criminality within society, the only fundamental difference being that prisons are intended to keep people in, while treasuries keep people out.

Some sources suggest that in times when cities had an unexpected influx of prisoners, baths could be used as ad hoc prisons. In a fifth- or sixth-century hagiography about Demetrios, the patron saint of Thessaloniki (Greece), the emperor Maximian is depicted temporarily requisitioning baths near the city's forum to incarcerate large numbers of Christians (*Martyrdom of Demetrios of Thessalonike* 4–7, L164). The holy man was eventually killed in his cell at the baths, the narrative reports: a detail which his martyrdom account deploys to explain why, already in late antiquity, the city's Roman baths doubled as a cultic site associated with Demetrios. Today, the martyr is celebrated in the Church of Holy Demetrios at Thessaloniki, and excavations in the 1930s and 1940s underneath the church established that there is, in fact, a Roman bathhouse underneath the church (Bakirtzis 1988, 11).

Macella, or food markets, are also attested as ad hoc sites of incarceration. In a letter from 335 CE, a man named Callistos complains that Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, colluded with a group of drunken local soldiers to incarcerate Christians in a variety of places, including "in the store chambers [*en tais kellais*]" and "among the standards [*en tois signois*]" of the military camp, "in the shops [*en tōi malekkōi*]," "in the military camp prison," and even "in the biggest prison [*en tēi megistēi foilakēi*]" (*P. Lond*. 6.1914, D118). While most of these appear to refer to purpose-built or repurposed prisons, the *cella* and the *macella*—both of which have their Latin name preserved in this Greek letter—are ad hoc sites, and both fit the criteria of secure, easily guardable rooms which could be used to detain prisoners in a pinch. This source reports that Athanasius and his Roman military henchmen were in precisely such a pinch.

Private prisons had capacious uses. Essentially, they could be used for all kinds of nonpublic bodily immobilization: domestic confinement of family members to correct or chastise; punitive incarceration of slaves in domestic or rural contexts; even debt management and monastic confinement (Hillner 2015, 151–93). Although regularly outlawed, private prisons are attested and used in every period covered by this book, eventually being coopted into the Byzantine Egyptian carceral system as semipublic prisons (Torallas Tovar 1999, 50–53; 2003, 221–23; Berkes 2015; Hillner 2015, 177–85).

Many larger villas had a place that could function to incarcerate, and documentary evidence indicates that individuals used underground strongrooms or basements to detain people through both lawful and extrajudicial means. As Torallas Tovar has argued, "A city with meager finances preferred to keep prisoners in the estate owners' prison, because it was expensive to maintain [public prisons]." Doing so required close coordination between municipal magistrates and estate staff, for instance in the case of *Stud. Pal.* 10.252, where public and private officials teamed up to arrest and imprison men for a robbery in the sixth century CE (D296 [6th c CE]; Torallas Tovar 1999, 53). As an example of the extrajudicial use of such private prisons, a fourth-century woman's affidavit against her husband reports that among his many outrages, he "shut up his own slaves and mine with my foster-daughters and his agent and son for seven whole days in his basement" (P. Oxy. 6.903, D85; Hillner 2015, 162–69).

Archaeological evidence perhaps offers further insight into such private prisons even in an earlier period. When Mount Vesuvius erupted and destroyed the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 CE, a significant portion of the city fled, though an unlucky segment remained in the city and were buried under ash and pyroclastic flow. One victim of the eruption was not given the option to evacuate: they were fettered and attached to the wall in an underground room at the Villa of the Mosaic Columns. On October 17, 1905, excavators found two human tibia in that underground room, a cellar attached to the elite villa's kitchen, still detained in the shackles that affixed them to the wall (*Notizie degli scavi* 1910, 259–60). As in the case of the cistern at Els Munts discussed above, it is possible to classify the space at the Villa of the Mosaic Columns as a repurposed rather than ad hoc prison, given that the shackles were affixed to the wall. We include it here because affixing shackles represents a comparatively minimal update to the cellar's architecture. The villa's initial excavators did not complete their removal of ash from the room, stopping just inside the threshold where the prisoner's legs were found. The space is still visible today, and still today the majority of it remains filled to the brim with ancient ash. Only future archaeological work will reveal what remains below the surface; it is possible that the remains of more victims remain buried.

This cellar in the Villa of the Mosaic Columns, as well as the Els Munts cistern discussed above, are typically understood as *ergastula*: holding cells where enslaved workers rested after performing chained work during the day (Étienne 1974; Joshel

and Petersen 2014, 96). What precisely counts as an *ergastulum* is debated. The term applies to spaces for confining exploited involuntary laborers, often with a punitive purpose (Hillner 2015, 169–70). The fact is, we do not know if these individuals were enslaved; it is impossible to make the distinction based on their remains alone. All we know is that they were shackled. Archaeologically attested cases of private incarceration are slippery, because enslaved and non-enslaved people were bound using identical technologies, but for divergent reasons. The material is illuminating nevertheless, suggesting that when Romans considered where and how to bind bodies in their private homes, they did so in spaces that mirrored the public facilities designed for the same: they are deep underground, with a single entrance and anchors on the wall for affixing shackles, and yet the spaces remain accessible, such that slaves or prisoners could be cared for and retrieved.

The preceding typology is a rough sketch—a series of broad categories pieced together from fragmentary evidence that can help us to think spatially and materially about the literary, documentary, and visual evidence engaged in subsequent chapters. More work is required. Nevertheless, even a tentative typology can help to identify other spaces that have broadly carceral features. We conclude by applying our typology to one such site.

Little can be said for certain about the foundation of Sufetula (Sbeitla, Tunisia), though Roman inhabitation is evidenced from the middle of the first century CE forward, and the city's forum was heavily renovated in the middle of the second century (Duval 1990, 501–12). At the northwest side of Sufetula's forum lies a spectacular cultic complex: three temples stand side by side, perhaps dedicated to each of the three gods worshiped in the Capitoline Temple at Rome, or to the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius and his two adoptive sons, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (fig. 12; Naddari 2018). The forum complex was built in 156/57 CE, and each temple at its western end stands high on an imposing pediment. The two outer structures sit on top of narrow architectural arcades, with doors on the north and south leading from inside the adjacent buildings into the long windowless corridors underneath the outer temples.

Above, the central temple looks similar to those on its south and north—marginally larger and lacking stairs connecting the porch to the forum but otherwise similar in style and grandeur (fig. 13). Underneath, however, the central temple could hardly be more different. Wide alleyways run along either side, connecting the forum to the public street running behind the temples and past narrow windows, allowing light and small objects to pass into two parallel chambers that run underneath the temple's central cultic area (*cella*) (B and C, fig. 14). An antechamber (A) stands underneath the temple's porch and directly behind a platform that likely served as the city's tribunal. This underground complex had a single access point: an antechamber accessible through a large door, with its own narrow windows opening to the north alley. Thresholds for further doors stand between

FIGURE 12. Temple complex at Sufetula (Sbeitla, Tunisia). Author photo.

the antechamber and chambers B and C, and a wall divides chamber B into two. Another threshold for a door divides chambers C and D.

The function of the secure complex underneath Sufetula's central temple is unclear, but its design betrays a purpose distinct from the areas underneath the outer temples, which were not publicly accessible and have neither windows nor secure antechambers. It is possible that at Sufetula, similar to the military prison at Lambaesis, we have an instance of a temple built for cultic devotion above and storage of prisoners below. In analogy with the site of Timgad, 240 kilometers west, the excavators of Sufetula suggest that the municipal *curia*, where criminal court cases were heard, must have stood on the southwest corner of the forum, directly adjacent to the southern temple, and a number of architectural elements suggest this identification is likely correct (Duval and Baratte 1973, 23).

There are only two temple complexes of this type extant from the ancient world, and the differences between them are illuminating. At the site of Baelo Claudia just north of the Strait of Gibraltar, three temples dating from the first century CE adjoin the forum, parallel to each other. They are similarly interpreted as a Triple Capitolium, though the identification is debated. The temples at Baelo Claudia have one major difference with their sibling at Sufetula—they have no windowed, underground complex, but rather a small crypt underneath one of the outer

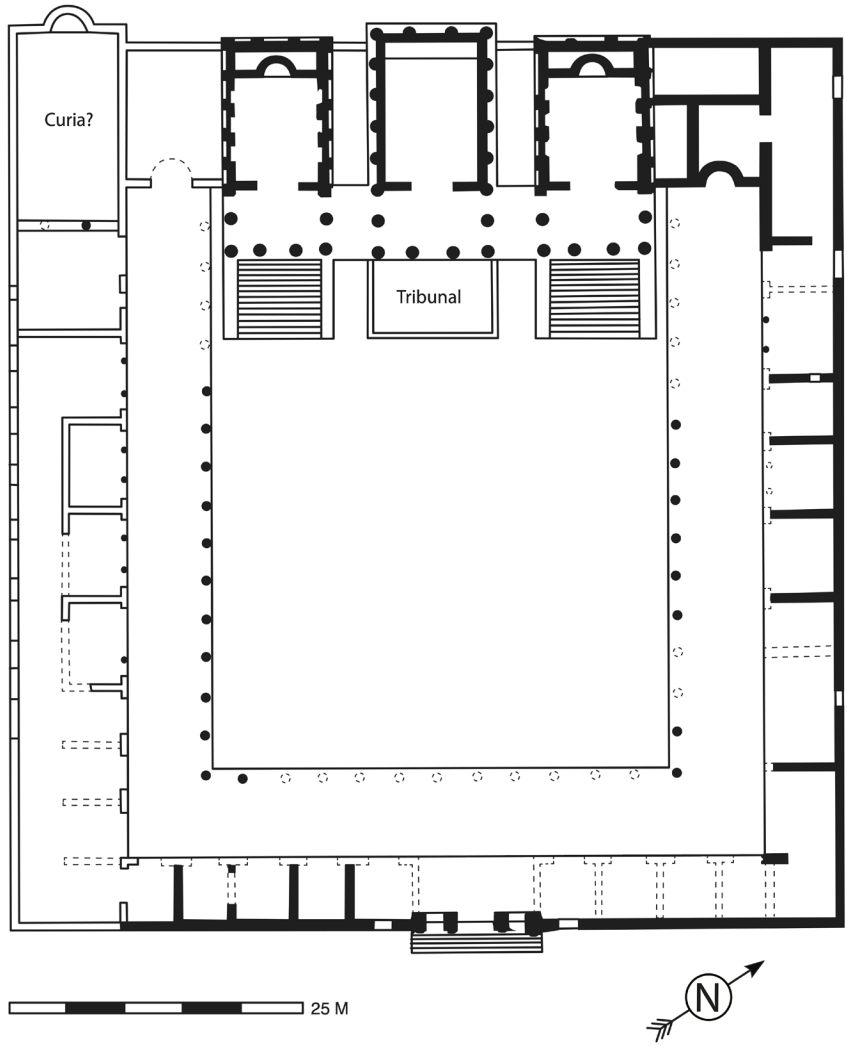

FIGURE 13. Sufetula, forum baseplan. Plan by Gina Tibbott after Duval and Baratte 1973, 18, fig. 8. Duval and Baratte propose an apsidal building on the northwest corner of the forum as the Curia.

temples, with no public access, antechamber, or other signs of carceral design or use (Bonneville et al. 2000, 103; 189–90).

Slit windows underneath temple podia are not uncommon, and no single feature of this space points to a carceral intention or use in itself. Nevertheless, the space underneath the central temple at Sufetula is stunning because it presents a collocation of features that suggest it was perhaps designed to be the municipal

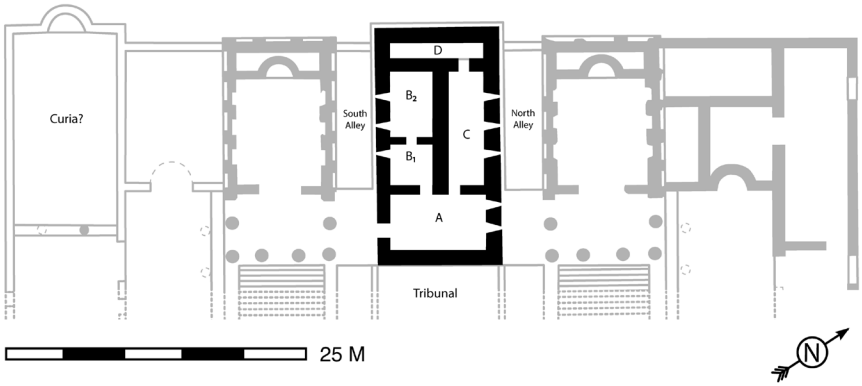

FIGURE 14. Sufetula, proposed civic prison underneath the central temple (A24; Sbeitla, Tunisia). Plan by Gina Tibbott.

carcer: the space sits directly on the forum, as Vitruvius prescribes, and with close, direct access to the municipal *curia*, like we see in Cuicul, which was established at around the same time 325 kilometers to the northwest. Unlike Cuicul, where the prison lies directly underneath the *curia*, at Sufetula the proposed prison sits directly underneath a temple dedicated to the gods—and political domination—of Rome, like we see two hundred kilometers west at Lambaesis. The placement of a carceral space underneath the tribunal resembles the identical setup at Sarmizegetusa, and echoes the civic basilica at Tipasa six hundred kilometers northwest on the Mediterranean coast, where the bodies of captives decorate the basilica's apse and illustrate materially the power of Roman political officials *over* the bodies of prisoners (p. 83–84, 136–138). Similar tribunals with chambers underneath are preserved nearby at Timgad and a particularly striking example at Leptis Magna, apparently built in imitation of the Temple of the Divine Julius in Rome and including two stairwells that lead directly from the chambers underneath the temple to the tribunal platform above (Ulrich 1994, 253–66, 283–301).

In the absence of inscriptions, graffiti, anchors, shackles, or literary sources indicating the precise use of the space, we cannot make a secure identification of the facility at Sufetula. Nevertheless, no other explanation has been forwarded—in fact, Noël Duval and François Baratte's 1973 plan of the forum remains the standard depiction of the temple complex, omitting the underground facility altogether (fig. 13). Our typology helps us to see the striking parallels to this space among broader North African and Roman civic architecture of the second century CE, and suggests reappraisal of other parallel and contemporary sites like the tribunals at Leptis Magna, Sabratha, and Timgad. In fact, Albert Ballu, the excavator of the prison in Cuicul, made a similar suggestion about Timgad already in 1910, suggesting that a pair of stout, two-chambered subterranean rooms may have served

as the city's prison. Like at parallel sites, the facility is accessible only from above, and is directly adjacent to the *curia* (Ballu 1910, 46–47, 54).

Each of the spaces detailed above had diverse functions: some were used to hold defendants in custody before trial or execution while some undoubtedly held debt prisoners or political detainees with a coercive aim. Other prisoners sat in these prisons as punishment. These spaces were multipurpose and, as we have shown, multifaceted. Still, carceral architecture encodes ideologies of imprisonment, and we must see spaces of incarceration before we can understand the practices undertaken inside them. The history of prison architecture matters, in other words: it presents a key to understanding carceral ideologies, practices, and experiences. Having investigated places of confinement, we turn now to the relationship between ancient ideologies of incarceration and their material expressions.

IDEOLOGY READ FROM SPACES OF INCARCERATION

Archaeological remains do not speak for themselves, and ideologies mobilized in architecture are hardly self-evident. Nevertheless, as Caroline Humphrey (2005) has argued, "ideology is found not only in texts and speeches; it is a political practice that is also manifest in constructing material objects" (39). By paying close attention to the material aspects of a space, historians may speculate about its use—speculations that are rendered more plausible when corroborated by other forms of evidence trending in the same direction. Architecture offers us one more avenue for understanding ideologies of incarceration as they morph and grow, as Norman Johnston (2000) showed regarding early modern and modern prisons: "Throughout the evolution of prison architecture, competing philosophies of punishment and theories of prison design resulted in a preferred type of layout that was thought capable of accomplishing the goals of imprisonment, only to change in the next" (1). A panoptic prison, for instance, encodes an ideology of surveillance and order as a corrective to criminality. What might ancient infrastructure have communicated about conceptions of law, order, and social deviance? Broad correspondences between ancient carceral sites are suggestive of an underlying set of practices, lived experiences, and perhaps even intentions expressed by engineers or builders in the spaces that they created. In this section we situate spaces of incarceration alongside a broader archive, attempting to understand the ideologies that the spaces encoded. We attend to five ideals that recur across the built environment of the ancient Mediterranean: centrality, surveillance, separation, depth, and punitive variability.

As a starting point, venues of incarceration indicate one aspect of the prison's role in society. Contemporary US mega-prisons like the famous Pelican Bay Prison in California or the New York State correctional facility at Attica are located far from metropolitan centers, in areas of low-population density; while local jails hold the accused close to courthouses, most convicts are "locked *away*" (Reiter

2016, 99–102). Quite the opposite was the case in antiquity; archaeological, documentary, and literary evidence uniformly reveal that civic prisons were situated at the center of cities. Vitruvius's proposal that Roman civic prisons should be built immediately adjacent to the municipal forum appears to reflect common practice; more often than not, they were built directly on the forum. The proximity of civic prisons to other central public architecture, and their apparent construction as part and parcel of outfitting new cities with civic infrastructure, suggests that city planners understood the prison to be a key part of the cityscape, one integral to the social functioning of a city. In the words of Christopher J. Fuhrmann, "the state's punishment of crime and disorder was a public highlight of Rome's most central topography," and as Guy Geltner has demonstrated, the centrality of Italian prisons within cities continued through the Middle Ages down to modernity (Fuhrmann 2016, 299; Geltner 2008, 29). Far from being a normal or obvious outcome, the thoroughgoing ruralization of penal and correctional facilities is a contemporary anomaly.

Without exception these spaces were built to be simultaneously physically secure and socially permeable, accessible directly from the forum through small windows or doors, sometimes with purpose-built antechambers overseen by a guard. Their regular placement at the city center is not haphazard but intentional, and it appears that part of that intention was for prisons to be readily accessible to the public at large—especially to family and friends who often bore the burden of care for prisoners, but perhaps also to advertise their deviance. Finally, civic prisons were uniformly proximate to courtrooms, and at times directly underneath them: civic basilicas, *curiae*, and *tribunalia*, often with direct passage between, perhaps indicating a security concern in moving prisoners to their place of judgment, or a practical one, keeping them close by for ease of access.

Even the placement of prisons near temples may be understood within the matrix of Roman judicial ideology. As Richard Neudecker (2010) argues, both in the Roman republic and in the empire, "divine presence—be it by way of statues or by altars—was necessary to give validity to legal acts," and while we argue below that incarceration was never solely a judicial act, the prominent colocation of sacred, judicial, and carceral infrastructure across the Roman world was unsurprising, but meaningful (161). The prominence of prisons within the urban landscape communicates architecturally what documentary and literary evidence reveals to have been the case: prisons were a fully integrated feature of the political and social structure of the ancient world. Libanius reports on a conversation with a municipal prison warden, who claimed that even the atmosphere of New Year celebrations penetrated the prison and brought a modicum of joy to prisoners, "sometimes even causing a smile" (*Oration* 9.12 [ca. 390 CE]). The relationship between a carceral society and its prisoners was, in other words, multidirectional; in the words of Jens-Uwe Krause, "Every inhabitant of a city was more or less directly confronted with the prison, and with the condition of the prisoners.

Prisons did not have the function of hiding prisoners away. Instead, their presence in the center of the city served as a deterrent" (1996, 272).

The facility in Cuicul is paradigmatic: it is underground, directly adjacent to the forum, and part of the initial design of the forum complex itself, opening to an adjacent public street. The prison is built into the foundation of the civic basilica, and the courtroom has two points of access: one monumental entrance allowed access from Cuicul's forum, while a second set of doors allowed access from the prison below. Judges and lawyers, it seems, entered through the front door while prisoners were ferried in from the back, five meters along the *cardo* and up the stairs, under guard. Most of the civic prisons identified to date have a single point of entrance and exit, and communicate not the forum itself but rather with an adjacent public street. The prison in the praetorian palace in Caesarea Maritima (Israel) adds complexity to this pattern, but the same themes recur: it has a narrow, winding entrance leading down from the prison guard offices to the eastern chamber of the prison, below. A second chamber allows prisoners to move from the prison, up a set of stairs, to the trial chambers above. (Herodian Palace Prison, A8; CIIP 2.1273, D206 [second century CE]). Prisons were often centrally located, but in comparison to other public buildings their presence was veiled; the prison lies just down an alley, through a gate, or underneath a temple—accessible, but requiring mediation of a guard or a gate or a window wide enough only for a hand and a voice.

Second, nearly all carceral sites were underground. This pattern holds across the entirety of the Mediterranean and the time period under discussion in this book, for both purpose-built and repurposed facilities. It is not surprising, then, that visual, documentary, and literary sources overwhelmingly depict prisons as dark, wet, cold places (p. 106–110). Subterranean spaces may be more secure than those built above ground by making escape more difficult, but literary and visual sources allow us to understand other ideological resonances implicated in the uniform decision to bury prisoners underground. In what follows, we discuss two further aspects of ideology encoded in prison architecture: first, ancient prisons are frequently described as liminal spaces, connecting the world of the living to that of the dead; second, sources from the Roman imperial period almost uniformly depict prisoners as low and diminutive, cowering beneath symbols of governmental power.

Before it was a carceral facility, the Tullian Prison in Rome was a space devoted to the worship of underworld deities, and recent excavations show that even after its transformation into a prison that cultic connection remained—during renovations in the early first century CE, a fresh dedication to underworld deities was placed underneath floor pavers in the lower prison (Susanna 2022b). This material practice reflects a common theme: from the earliest surviving material and into the Byzantine period, literary sources regularly portray prisons as shallow parts of the underworld (Reid 2022, 28; Hesiod, *Theogony* 720–820 [late eighth

to early seventh century BCE]; John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent* 4 [early seventh century CE]). Pliny the Elder explicitly understands mines as a type of carceral space, and in the first century CE he described mining practices as a form of stealing from the earth, a sacred parent. "We penetrate her inner parts and seek for riches in the abode of the spirits of the underworld [*manes*]," he laments, "as though the part where we tread upon her were not sufficiently bountiful and fertile" (*Natural History* 33.1, L165 [ca. 77 CE]; trans. LCL 294). The connection is not solely literary; three laws of Constantine speak to condemned prisoners being "thrown into the mines [*in metallum detrudetur*]"—in the words of Hervé Huntzinger, "these three constitutions evoke the image of the condemned thrown from the surface of the earth (the world of the living), into underground mines (the world of the dead)" (2005, 28; *CTh* 12.1.6 [318/9 CE]; 1.5.3 [331 CE]; 4.8.8 [332 CE]). Early Christian sources in particular stress both the subterranean aspect of prisons and the relationship between depth and the underworld and, as Meghan Henning (2021) has shown, a stunning variety of early Christian materials describe hell using peculiarly carceral language and imagery (38–43, 99–100).

Constructing prisons underground also extends a political ideology of domination, at least in Roman sources. North African evidence is particularly illuminating. The civic prison in Cuicul and the military prison in Lambaesis are both underground, though the former is under the civic basilica while the latter was built under a sanctuary that housed the standards of the Roman army's Third Legion (Cuicul A5, Lambaesis A7). Nevertheless, both are situated under symbols of Roman imperial rule and military domination: in the case of Cuicul, the civic basilica where trials were held, and in the case of Lambaesis, under the symbols of the Roman army's military might. Prisoners were quite literally detained beneath the feet of Roman administrators and beneath the objects that they chose to symbolize military domination. Placing prisons underground further reinforced the visual cliché of incarceration as a form of state dominance and social disappearance—a combined function that continues in modern carceral practices and that deserves further comparative consideration (Zarrugh 2020). A similar ideological impetus may have been present in Greek spaces and sources as well, but we simply have much less evidence and are unwilling to make a strong claim regarding this possibility; the one plausibly identified prison from the Hellenistic period discussed here—the civic prison of Messene—is certainly underground, though perhaps simply to enhance security. Likewise, a site that has been identified as the state prison of classical Athens stands at ground level, though that identification is contested (Messene A16, Athens A23; Vanderpool 1980; Hunter 1997).

Political dominion over captive bodies is one of the most common themes across Roman-period sources, though as we see at Cuicul and Lambaesis, the theme is often played in subtly different keys. A third site in Roman North Africa clarifies this commonality: the civic basilica in the colony of Tipasa on the Mediterranean coast, used as a courthouse in the same period when the Cuicul and

Lambaesis prisons were in use inland. No civic prison lies underneath the basilica at Tipasa. Instead, the floor of the civic basilica was decorated with a mosaic depicting the bodies of prisoners, again placing Roman imperial power, in the form of judges, above incarcerated bodies. The Mosaic of the Captives at Tipasa depicts portraits of thirteen individuals surrounding a central scene of an incarcerated family, including a man, woman, and child—apparently native Berbers (fig. 15; V8 [late second century CE]). In the absence of a prison underneath the civic basilica, however, artisans and image makers in service of the city of Tipasa chose to decorate the courthouse floor with the bodies of captives, depicted not only as subdued but as indigenous, further assimilating a Roman ideology of carcerality with its identity as a colonizing state.

Taken together, these first two points—the centrality of carceral spaces and their placement underneath the society responsible for their captivity—gesture toward a tension in carceral ideology. Incarceration was proximate to the public life of cities, yet it was also a form of disappearance. Prisoners were not physically removed from civic life but carefully hidden from the eye. Prisons were built in such a way that the spaces were accessible, while prisoners themselves were harder to see than to hear, to touch, or to smell. They were, to use Michael T. Taussig's (1999) phrase, avatars of a public secret (49–55).

The third aspect of carceral ideology that can be read from these spaces is perhaps unsurprising, at least to modern audiences, but it nevertheless bears pause: archaeological remains of prisons point to an ideology of surveillance. In addition to letting food and other necessities to be passed to people inside, prison windows allowed for oversight of prisoners without the need to open doors and jeopardize the security of the facility. Some visual sources corroborate this surveillance function. For instance, a fresco found in a house on Via Stabiae in Pompeii depicts the myth of Pero and Micon—an ancient story about the virtue of filial piety that appears in a variety of literary sources, in addition to frescoes and statues (fig. 16, Naples Archaeological Museum 115398, V12 [first century CE]). Details shift from telling to telling, but at its core the story is about a young mother visiting her parent who was condemned to death by starvation in prison. On regular visits she nurses the parent at her breast until a guard discovers the scheme and, instead of punishing the daughter, allows both to go free on account of the daughter's *pietas*—faithfulness. This fresco makes explicit a matter left ambiguous in the literary accounts: how did the guard know about the arrangement? The answer is that the prison had a window, through which the guard is depicted outside the prison peering down into the cell at the moment of discovery. Windows opening to public spaces remained part of prison architecture long after the Pompeii fresco was buried in the late first century CE: the late antique prison at Corinth had a similar window opening to the forum, presumably with a dual function of access and surveillance; a similar arrangement appears in the remains of the prison underneath a late Roman administrative building at Tiberias in the province of Palestine (Corinth, A15; Tiberias, A40).

We can glimpse an aspect of surveillance in the architectural features of mining camps, as well. By the Roman period, the arched galleries of Umm al-Amad mine at Phaino had lain fallow for many centuries. When Romans reopened the mines, they widened galleries inside but not the entrances, which remained accessible through minuscule entrances passable only on hands and knees. As archaeologist Hannah Friedman (2009) argues, "Entrances were purposefully kept small. The difficulty in exiting the mine is so great that it suggests that individuals rarely if ever left" (6). Adding to the restrictive entrances, which are common features of mines across the empire, Friedman notes that towers on the landscape fulfill the conditions of panoptic surveillance in a squarely Foucauldian sense, in which "individuals are under surveillance and know that they are being watched" (8). In many important aspects, these mining facilities look and function differently than civic prisons discussed above. Nevertheless, we see striking ideological correspondences between the two types of facility, especially regarding the importance of surveillance.

Fourth, archaeological evidence suggests a prevalent ideology of separation that literary sources corroborate. Significant expense and effort were deployed at Lambaesis and Simitthus to construct facilities where people could be segregated from one another within the prison complex, and if the space identified at Sufetula is indeed a civic prison of the city, we have yet another example of parallel cells opening to a common antechamber. Cuicul, Cosa, and Pompeii likewise have multiple chambers conceivably used to separate prisoners of different sorts, though the architecture alone does not betray the operative lines of difference. Some materials distinguish between prisoners kept in fetters and those in looser custody, like Diodorus Siculus's first-century BCE account of the civic prison at Alba Fucens in which King Perseus of Macedon was kept "in free custody [*eis eleutheran . . . fulakēn*]" as a favor, or an official letter on papyrus from the second or third century CE reporting on the names of prisoners under transport, some of whom were "in chains [*en desmois*]" while others were "under free guard [*eleutherai tērēsei*]" (*Library of History* 31.8.2, L57 [ca. 60 BCE]; P. Bagnall 29, D101 [175–225 CE]). In fact, Diodorus speaks of at least three different types of custody, including one prison at Alba Fucens reserved for people awaiting execution. He clarifies that "this prison is a pit deep underground [*esti de ho karkaros orugma katageion bathu*]"—a practice of separation that Diodorus notes was common "in that period," perhaps implying that categories or practices had changed between the time of the events, in the mid-second century BCE, and his recounting of them one hundred years later (31.9.2).

The phenomenon of prisoner separation is corroborated in the city of Rome by the second-century CE historian Suetonius, who records an attempt to control prisoners through punitive isolation. In what is perhaps the earliest extant evidence for punitive solitary confinement, Suetonius notes that certain prisoners in Rome were detained in such a way that guards could prevent them from reading or even interacting with other prisoners (*Life of Tiberius* 61, L19

[ca. 120 CE]). It is unclear how such solitary confinement was accomplished; there are no obvious architectural elements in the Tullian Prison that would readily allow for installation of barriers (and we do not know what the other prisons of Rome looked like), though this does not preclude the possibility that wooden dividers were installed in the lower chamber. In fact, in his epitome of Verrius Flaccus's first-century BCE work, Festus indicates that the Tullian Prison had a secure housing unit referred to as the *robus*, where prisoners were segregated, named after the hard oak boxes (*arcis robusteis*) to which criminals were once condemned, though Calpurnius Flaccus uses the term *robus* to refer simply to the Tullianum's lower, darker room (*On the Meanings of Words* 17 s.v. Robum [second century CE]; Calpurnius Flaccus, *Declamation* 4, L46 [second century CE]). Cicero, too, wrote of prisoners being separated "incommunicado" into cells—literally boxes (*arcae*); interestingly, hanging wooden boxes or cages continued in European use through the late medieval and early modern period, for instance at the prison in Mont St. Michel, Normandy (*On Behalf of Milo* 60 [52 BCE]; Cadoux 2008, 219; Johnston 2000, 8–9). Perhaps this is what Suetonius had in mind when speaking of punitive isolation within the civic prison at Rome. It is worth noting that the Latin word at issue here—*arca*—is also used to denote a coffin. Even if not intended, the double entendre would be hard for a native speaker to miss.

A further, gendered aspect of prisoner separation appears in a law of the emperor Constantius from 340 CE. The law provides that both males and females should be confined as punishment for the crimes for which they had been convicted but that they should be detained in separate facilities (*CTh* 9.3.3, L72). This evidence is admittedly late, more likely coinciding with use of the prisons at Corinth, Rome, and Tiberias than some of the other facilities that underlie our analysis; moreover, it is of course possible that in different periods and locations, the operative lines of separation differed. We note, however, that the evidence for one particular type of separation is later still: our first evidence for a *jail*—a purpose-built facility explicitly intended solely for pretrial detention—is from 539 or 540 CE, when a bishop named Paul consecrated a "holy detention center" in Gerasa (Jerash, Jordan). According to its dedicatory inscription, the gleaming new facility was built precisely to keep different types of prisoners separate, "and in the name of the lord he blessed this [detention center] to be for all the accused [*hupaitiōn*] apart from the condemned, so that no person found guilty [*katadikon*] could be put there with impunity, nor anyone could be transferred from the detention center to the prison of the condemned [*eis tēn tōn katakritōn fulakēn*]" (*SEG* 35.1571, D168 [539–40 CE]; Hillner 2015, 287). One facility, in other words, was a jail, while the other was a prison—in the modern sense of both terms. It has been repeated over and again that the jail has always existed since time immemorial, while the prison only came along much later. So far as the evidence suggests, the opposite is true.

Finally, prisons were architecturally designed as spaces of punishment. On the one hand, it was, and still is, rather obvious—both to ancients and moderns

alike—that these spaces were unpleasant; they were, at base, a dark, dank, cold, feces-filled pit. The punitive aspect of this displeasure influenced even the language that people use to describe carceral spaces—numerous sites carry a name which highlights their punitive nature—names like "Dark Hole" and "Prison of Oblivion" (*Acts of Shmona and Gurya* 30, L1 [310 CE]; Procopius, *History of the Wars* 1.5, L157 [event 496, account 533 CE]). In this, they follow a long tradition. Already in 400/399 BCE, we hear of limited-term incarceration used as a formal punishment (Lysias, *Against Andocides* 20–25, L219). Later in the same century, Plato imagined an ideal city having three prisons: "one that is public, in the area of the agora, for general offenders," a second similarly within the city's administrative district called "The Reformatory," and a third outside the city, "having as its name some word for punishment [*timōrias echōn epōnumian fēmēn tina*]" (*Laws* 908, L18 [360–347 BCE]). Centuries later, a man named Zebatus wrote a petition from a prison in Seleucid Maresha, claiming that he was writing "from The Punishments" (*ek tōn timō*[*riōn*])—apparently a name for the facility where he had been incarcerated for three years already (*CIIP* 4.3.3689, D170 [second century BCE]). We return to Zebatus below; for now, it is sufficient to note that the idea of prisons as punitive spaces endures across much of Mediterranean antiquity.

Woven together, these strands suggest an ideology of punitive variability: prisons were designed so that incarcerators could increase or decrease punitive aspects through material changes in the time, location, and nature of detention. Put another way, the ability to dial up the degree of punishment through variable forms and spaces of incarceration, often taken as an innovative hallmark of the modern prison, is in fact quite ancient. Archaeological evidence from civic, military, worker, and amphitheater prisons show separation into more and less harsh venues, and literary sources speak to their effects. For instance, in the third- or fourth-century CE *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, Christians bribe prison guards to move the martyr and her companions to a less taxing part of the civic prison, with cleaner air and readier access to light (1, L15 [third to fourth centuries CE]). Variable conditions are not simply a fantasy of martyrdom accounts, either—around the turn of the third century CE, the jurist Paul prescribed that wardens should be punished if they accepted a bribe to allow prisoners to be held in better conditions (D. 48.3.8, L108 [late second to early third century CE]). A Syriac text from Edessa speaks to some of the built features of prisons in 310 CE, along with the tactics that prison staff used to coerce those within. Guards "stopped up the doors and windows before them, so that they could not see the light at all; and they were three days in the month of August in the summer, and no one brought them bread and they drank no water," remaining in such conditions from August to November (*Acts of Shmona and Gurya* 27–36, L1). When the literary and archaeological material are placed in conversation with each other, we see that windows and doors did more than mediate access to prisoners inside—they also allowed administrators to control the modality and degree of punishment within a carceral space.

Worker prisons show similar features related to punitive variability. In his treatise *On Agriculture*, Columella expresses a concern similar to Constantine's about the need for additional security measures after sunset in secure rooms used to contain enslaved workers. Columella distinguishes between two different types of spaces: small rooms (*cellae*), which were appropriate to lock enslaved people who were not typically held in chains during the day, and slaves who typically wore chains during the day should ideally be kept "in an underground workers prison (*subterraneum ergastulum*), as wholesome as possible, receiving light through a number of narrow windows built so high from the ground that they cannot be reached with the hand" (1.6.3, L47 [first century CE]). The idealized space, in other words, looked like a real one: it sounds like a rather precise description of the military prison at Lambaesis. Columella's business was teaching enslavers how to ply their despotic task with efficiency, and along the way to put a positive spin on dire and inhuman practices of mastery (Howley 2025). From the position of the enslaved worker, on the other hand, it is hard to imagine much comfort in the notion that, after each day of body-destroying labor, the subterranean facility where they spent the night was "as wholesome as possible." Enslaved and imprisoned people were bound for divergent ideological reasons, but they were often bound using identical technologies. In Columella's despotic prescriptions we see the cross-fertilization of enslaver tactics and carceral technologies.

The architecture of carceral spaces can be interpreted fruitfully in light of literary, documentary, and visual materials, allowing glimpses at broader ideologies of incarceration across Mediterranean antiquity. The five features outlined here are distinct but mutually reinforcing: centrality, surveillance, separation, depth, and punitive variability. Together, they corroborate evidence indicating that the prison was a state-sponsored good—a fundamental, ubiquitous, yet carefully hidden aspect of civic life—and that incarceration was often conceived of in punitive terms.

While there is not yet relevant archaeological evidence from Ptolemaic Egypt, as we shall see, each of these themes are articulated similarly in documentary sources, the other broad archive that forms a basis for this project. Having investigated spaces of incarceration and the ideologies that they appear to encode, we now turn to sources that document what they might have felt like to inhabit, often in the words of prisoners themselves.