What are mansiones and mutationes?

Why they were so important for roman travellers that their names from the ancient itineraries are preserved to the day?
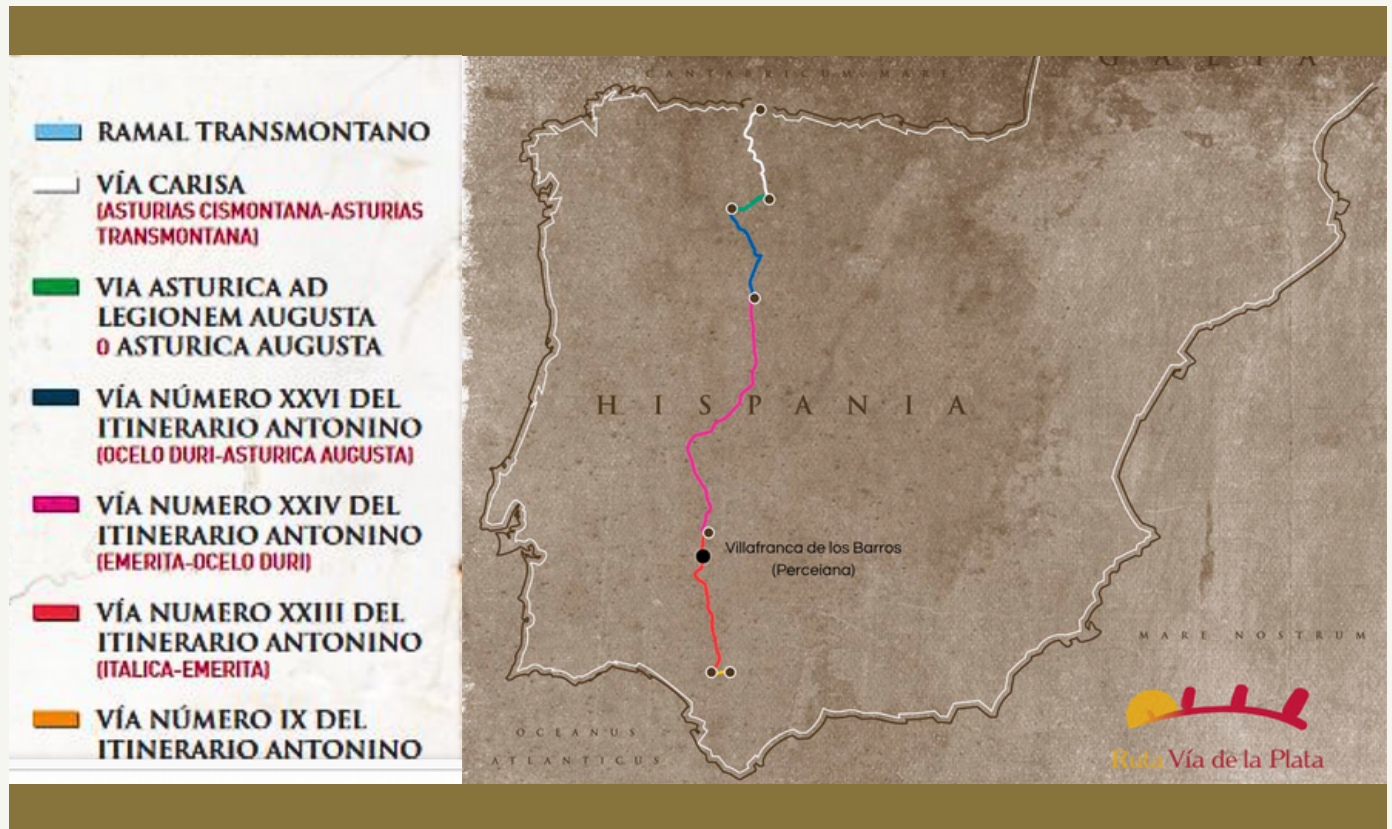

If you were planning to travel in the ancient Roman times, you would realize that the locations of mansiones (mansiones) and mutationes (mutationes) were very important data and that you should be familiar with them.

Mansios were facilities promoted by the Roman State, serving as inns to meet the needs for rest and provisioning of travellers of the vias. They were distributed in a planned manner at approximately regular intervals along the roads, ensuring service throughout the road network.

On the other hand, **mutationes** were service stations also associated with road networks, specifically intended to provide food for horses and assistance to carriages.

RAMAL TRANSMONTANO

VÍA CARISA
(ASTURIAS CISMONTANA-ASTURIAS TRANSMONTANA)

VIA ASTURICA AD LEGIONEM AUGUSTA O ASTURICA AUGUSTA

VÍA NÚMERO XXVI DEL ITINERARIO ANTONINO
(OCELO DURI-ASTURICA AUGUSTA)

VÍA NUMERO XXIV DEL ITINERARIO ANTONINO
(EMERITA-OCELO DURI)

VÍA NUMERO XXIII DEL ITINERARIO ANTONINO
(ITALICA-EMERITA)

VÍA NÚMERO IX DEL ITINERARIO ANTONINO

Ruta Vía de la Plata

SPAIN

ITER ROMANVM
Heritage & Cities

VILLAFRANCA DE LOS BARROS

Naturally, the **Ruta Via de la Plata**, due to its original nature as a Roman road, is not exempt from the presence of such facilities.

The **Antonine Itinerary** lists 16 stations between Mérida and Astorga, some of which later developed into urban settlements, such as Cáceres and Salamanca.

During Roman times, the current municipality of Villafranca de los Barros became part of the boundaries of the city of **Augusta Emerita (Mérida)**, the capital of Lusitania.
Several villae associated with the patricians of Emerita, such as **Villagordo** or **Perceiana**, were established near the road.

The **Antonine Itinerary** mentions **Perceiana** as a **mansio** on the road *Itera b ostio fluminis Anae Emeritam usque*, which led from *Italica* to *Augusta Emerita* and was therefore located in Villafranca de los Barros, in the province of Badajoz.

Fig 1. Map illustrating the north road from Aquileia to Sirmium registered in the Itinerarium Burdigalense (Hierosolymitanum), produced by Sara Zanni within the RecRoad project

Sirmium

SERBIA

PANNONIAN ROADS

Some of the most important terrestrial roads which connected the West, and the East of the Roman Empire were running through **Sirmium**, late antiquity seat, crossroad and one of the most populous towns of *Illyricum*. The largest number of ancient Roman travellers had to stop on the journey from the West to the East in *Aquileia*, a picturesque North Italian town, one of the most important Adriatic ports. From here you had to decide which one of the two main Pannonian roads you will choose.

As we know that the Romans were tracing their roads following natural topography of the area – valleys, ravines and rivers, these two roads followed the Sava and the Drava courses. They were built for military purposes during the reign of the emperors **Augustus** and **Tiberius** and finally were finished by the times of the **Flavians**.

During the later period the infrastructure along them developed. These main routes enabled the foundation of the towns and the other stopping places (*mansiones*) and stations for changing horses or carriages (*mutationes*) which were built on the regular intervals.

The most useful data about the position of the stations along the roads are given by ancient itineraries **Tabula Peutingeriana, Itinerarium Antonini Augusti or Itinerarium Burdigalense** (Hierosolymitanum) which have been preserved until the day thanks to the later manuscripts. They give us information about the distances between each station which was useful when you wanted to plan the dynamics of your journey weather you were travelling by foot, on the horse back or in the chariot.

The biggest amount of data is given in the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* („Jerusalem itinerary") which is the

oldest known Christian itinerary written by an anonymous pilgrim from the city of Burdigala (now Bordeaux in France, former Gallia Aquitania) to the Holly Land (Fig. 3).

Fig 3. Overview of the pilgrim route from Itinerarium Burdigalense, produced by Sara Zanni within the RecRoad project

Fig. 2 List of the stops from Itinerarium Burdigalense (Hierosolymitanum)

The itinerary, as well as *Itinerarium Antonini,* chooses the northern road (Fig. 1) passing through the following towns: *Emona, Cleia, Petovione, Iovia, Musa, Cibalis,* **14 mansiones and 38 mutationes** (Fig. 2). It provides us data about distance between *Aquileia* and *Sirmium* of 390 miles (577,2 km) which can be considered as accurate.[1]

Modern Google Maps data provides the distance of 596 km between the two places and indicates that it takes 5 hours and 51 minutes by car to cross it, or 135 hours by foot.

[1] The distance between Aquileia and Sirmium in Itinerarium Antonini using the same road is 380 miles or 562,4 km.

Fig 4. Map illustrating the south road from Aquileia to Sirmium registered in Tabula Peutingeriana, produced by Sara Zanni within the RecRoad project

It was certainly the time the pilgrim would spend walking. It would take almost 20 days if they travelled 30 kilometres per day.

If we assume that a regular ancient Roman traveller would require this time frame to spend on the road from *Aquileia* to *Sirmium,* it means that they had to use almost every mansio from the ancient itinerary if they wanted to sleepover, rest and provide supplies.

If you were travelling using carriage or on the horseback or you could pass the average distance of 80 km per day changing the horses each 15 km in the mutationes.

The southern road from *Aquileia* to *Sirmium* registered in *Tabula Peutingeriana*, which was following the course of the Sava River, was a little bit shorter (335 miles/495,8 km). It mentions the following stops: *Ponte Sonti, Fl Frigi, in Alpe Iulia, Longatico, Nauporto, Emona* (town), *Aceruone, Ad Protoriu, Crucio, Noviodunum, Romula, Quadrata, Ad Fines, Siscia* (town), *Ad Praetorium, Servitio, Urbate, Marsonie, Ad Basante, Saldis, Drinum* fl. (Fig. 4).

Link to the 3D Reconstruction of the Roman bridge across the River Sonzo/ Soča in Mainizza/Majnica and mansio next to it on the road from *Aquileia* to *Sirmium*, video produced within the ARCHEST project: https://vimeo.com/240070954