

The Tower of Centum Cellas (also known as the “Tower of St. Cornelius”), located in the municipality of Colmeal da Torre in Portugal, is one of the most enigmatic monuments from the Roman period to be found in the country. These majestic ruins were part of a large Roman villa from the first century AD, situated on the road that linked *Augusta Emerita* (Mérida) to *Bracara Augusta* (Braga).



*Roman tower of Centum Cellas, Belmonte, Portugal*

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This rectangular building, made of pink granite blocks, appears to have had three levels with openings of various dimensions. It was thought that it was once a temple, a prison with a hundred cells (hence the name), or possibly a *praetorium* (the headquarters of a Roman camp), and a building part of Roman villa.



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The IPPAR's excavations at the Centum Cellas Tower, undertaken between 1993 and 1998, revealed that it was not a single isolated building but part of a larger and more complex group of structures, including rooms, corridors, staircases, cellars and courtyards.

The tower appears to be the best-preserved part of what was the villa of Lucius Caecilius (according to a dedicatory altar found on the site), a wealthy Roman citizen and tin trader who built his villa here at the beginning of the first century AD, under the supervision of a qualified architect who knew [Vitruvius'](#) building techniques.



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According to archaeological evidence, the tower was destroyed in the mid-third century by a great fire and was later rebuilt.





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