

Ostia Antica

Tourist Guide

November 2022 (version 2.1)



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For more information: www.ostia-antica.org.

Feedback can be sent to: ostia@casema.nl.

Questions can also be asked in our Facebook group:

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/Ostia/>

General information

Address

Ostia Antica, Viale dei Romagnoli 717, Rome RM, Lazio, Italy.

Visiting Ostia is like visiting Tivoli and Hadrian's villa: a relaxing trip that takes you away from the noise and incessant police-sirens of Rome. Reserve a whole day for your visit: Ostia deserves it. The site is quite big, so don't spend too much time visiting the first buildings you encounter.

What to wear

Dress "onion-skin" style, that is using layers that can be removed. Ostia Antica is fairly close to the sea and can be chilly, but it can also be quite hot in the ruins even on a cloudy day. Fine hot weather is generally guaranteed from mid-May to late September. Extra-comfortable shoes! And a sun hat!

How to get there

The best way to reach Ostia is by using the metro. Trains leave at station Magliana, in weekends also at station Piramide / Porta San Paolo. After about 30 minutes, get out at the stop Ostia Antica. Next cross the highway using the pedestrian bridge. To reach the site from the pedestrian bridge, keep walking straight ahead, cross a busy road (please be careful!) and after 100 metres turn left to get to the entrance (five minutes).

If you arrive by car, you can use a parking lot in front of the entrance of the excavations. It may be wise to have a look at Google Maps or Bing Maps beforehand.

Food and drink, money

Outside the station is a small bar where you can also buy some food to take with you. Alternatively you can get some food and drink in the modern village Ostia Antica, only a few minutes away. To get there, turn right towards the mediaeval fortress after crossing the pedestrian bridge. It is also a short walk from the car park. There is a restaurant near the museum, with restrooms.

The museum is currently closed (expected to re-open in the summer of 2023).

Caution

Do not pick up loose bricks in dark and damp areas. A little scorpion may be hiding there. Do not climb on and jump off walls. You will damage the wall and may sprain your ankle.

Disclaimer

Due to COVID-restrictions, public works and so on the situation may be different. Please always check the official website of the Parco Archeologico di Ostia Antica:

<https://www.ostiaantica.beniculturali.it/en/>

Please note that the excavations are always **closed on Mondays**, December 25 and January 1.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO OSTIA

Location

Ostia is Latin for "mouth", the mouth of the river Tiber. In the Republican period the river entrance was used as harbour, and in the Imperial period two huge harbour basins were added to the north, near Leonardo da Vinci airport. The harbour district was called Portus, Latin for "harbour".

The ancient Roman city of Ostia was in antiquity situated at the mouth of the river Tiber, some 30 kilometres to the west of Rome, and on the Mediterranean sea. However, the shoreline moved seawards from the Middle Ages until the 19th century, due to the deposition of sediments transported by the Tiber. The current beach is three kilometres away, in Lido di Ostia. Ostia is today still lying next to the Tiber, but the river runs along part of Ostia only. It is a meandering river, and in 1557 a branch was cut off by a major inundation of the river. This branch gradually filled in, and is now called Dead River (Fiume Morto). This old meander can still be seen as a wide dip in the terrain, to the right of the modern road that leads from the ticket office to the museum.

Early Ostia

To the east of Ostia were salt-pans, where salt was probably already extracted in the Middle and Late Bronze Age (1400-1000 BC). There may have been a small village near the salt-pans in the Early Iron Age (1000-700 BC). Livius mentions Ostia twice in his accounts of the fifth century (and exceptional floods of the Tiber in 414 and 363 BC). However, according to ancient tradition (authors such as Ennius, Livius, Cicero and Dionysius of Halicarnassus) Ostia was founded as a colony of Rome earlier, by the fourth king of Rome, Ancus Marcius, who was thought to have ruled in the late seventh century BC. Even the year is mentioned: 620 BC. So far no remains of buildings have been found in or near Ostia dating from this period. If a settlement existed, then it must have been a small outpost, not even a village.

The oldest settlement that has been found is the so-called Castrum. It was a rectangular military fortress (194 x 125.7 meters), with walls of very large tufa blocks. The current Forum is in the centre, and a few remains of the Castrum walls can still be seen around the Forum. The two main streets, leading to four gates, were called *Cardo* and *Decumanus*. These would create regularity in the street pattern of Ostia when the city grew. However, there is also a great irregularity in the lay-out of parts of Imperial Ostia. This must be the result of a very old road, perhaps from the sixth or fifth century BC, that started at the mouth of the Tiber and continued towards the south-east.

From some historical events can be deduced that the Castrum was built in the fourth or early third century BC. Most modern historians have suggested that it was erected in either 349/8 or 338 BC, a period when Rome had to battle pirates and was at war with its neighbours. The oldest pottery found in the Castrum has been dated to the period 380-340 BC. More recently other proposals have been made: the late fifth century BC, in view of the origin of the tufa blocks (from Fidenae); the year 311 BC, because two *duumviri navales*, officials in charge of ships, were appointed (but they may also have been active in the harbour district in Rome itself); 300-275 BC, because pottery found next to the foundation of the walls belongs to that period (with the suggestion that the older pottery could be the remains of votive offerings from an older temple, curiously isolated however). According to the most convincing hypothesis the Castrum belongs to the period 292/1 BC (when the god Aesculapius was taken to Rome, but Ostia is not mentioned) to 278 BC (when a Carthaginian fleet is said to have reached Ostia).

The Republican period

In the third century BC Ostia was primarily a naval base. In 267 BC it became the seat of one of the *quaestores classici* (officials taking care of the fleet), the *quaestor Ostiensis*. The office was related to the Punic wars, with Carthago. Ostia now played an important role as military harbour, and for that reason the inhabitants were freed from military duties, so that they could remain at work in the harbour. In the second century BC Ostia gradually changed to a commercial harbour. The population of the city of Rome was growing after military successes. Grain was imported from Sicily and Sardinia, later also from Africa Proconsularis, modern Tunisia, that became a province in 146 BC. The *quaestor's* main duty was now the supervision of the import of grain.

In the second or early first century BC the north-east part of Ostia, along the Tiber, was marked as public ground (reserved for Rome) by Caius Caninius, *praetor urbanus* (from Rome). Little is known about the settlement in this period, because Ostia was almost entirely rebuilt in the second century AD. In the lower levels remains of *domus*, rich houses, were found, comparable to those in Pompeii and Herculaneum.

In 87 BC, during the civil war between the supporters of Sulla and Marius, the city was occupied and plundered by Marius. In 69/8 BC the city was plundered again, this time by pirates, who also destroyed a fleet in the river harbour. Not long afterwards Pompeius dealt with these pirates. It is probably the latter invasion that led to the building of new town walls by Marcus Tullius Cicero, in 63 BC. The work was finished in 58 BC by Publius Clodius Pulcher, a political rival of Cicero. The new walls enclosed an area that extended far beyond the walls of the Castrum. Until the first century BC Ostia was governed from Rome, but from now on, possibly from the time of the building of the new walls, Ostia had its own government. The oldest fragment of the town records (*fasti*) is dated to 49 BC, but it is clear that this is not the start of the list.

Important monuments from the first century BC are the Four Small Temples and the Temple of Hercules. These were built by members of the local aristocracy: Publius Lucilius Gamala, four times *duovir* ("mayor"), and Caius Cartilius Poplicola, eight times *duovir*. Gamala seems to have sided with Cicero. His career has to be dated to the years 90-60 BC, or 70-35 BC. Poplicola was a supporter of Octavianus, and together with Agrippa he ensured the loyalty of the harbour to the later Augustus. Gamala and Poplicola were honoured by the Ostians for military deeds, including the repelling of an attack by Sextus Pompeius (son of the Pompeius who had fought the pirates), during the civil war in the years 40-36 BC. The ties of these men with Rome were not an exception: in this period the leading families of Ostia were also influential in Rome.

The early Imperial period

Marcus Agrippa, right-hand man of Octavianus-Augustus, built a theatre in Ostia for approximately 3000 spectators, in the period 18-12 BC. The growing importance of Ostia is here reflected by the use of marble, still exceptional in this period. Marble was also used for the decoration of the monumental tomb of Agrippa's collaborator Poplicola. It is not clear when the Forum, the central square, was laid out, but during the reign of Augustus, at the end of the first century BC, two temples were built at its north side, possibly a Capitulum and a Temple of Jupiter. In the early first century AD a Temple of Roma and Augustus was added at the south side of the Forum by Tiberius (14-37 AD). Claudius (41-54 AD) sent urban cohorts to Ostia to fight fires. An aqueduct was built, and during the reign of Vespasian (69-79 AD) the city wall was converted to an aqueduct, taking water to the southern part of the city. Under Domitian (81-96 AD) the level of Ostia was raised approximately one meter whenever new buildings were erected, probably to protect them from Tiber flooding. During his reign or a little later the present meeting hall of the town council and the main basilica were built

to the west of the Forum. The Jewish community in Ostia built a synagogue near the beach in the middle of the first century.

In this period Ostia was ruled by a small number of "aristocratic" merchant families of free descent. They lived in atrium-houses near the centre of town. Officials from Rome ensured the food supply of the Urbs. In 23 BC Tiberius was *quaestor Ostiensis*, the first step in his career. In 44 AD Claudius withdrew the quaestor from Ostia and created a new office, that of *procurator annonae Ostiensis* ("procurator of the food supply"), who worked for the *praefectus annonae* ("prefect of the grain-supply") in Rome, who had been introduced by Augustus in the period 8-14 AD. These procurators were not senators, but belonged to the equestrian order. They were supported by clerks called for example *tabularii*, "keepers of archives", and *dispensatores*, "treasurers". Many officials, such as the governors of provinces, now departed from and arrived in Ostia. In 2 AD Lucius Caesar, grandson of Augustus, died in Massilia (Marseille). His corpse was taken to Rome, and the local calendar says that "his body was carried through Ostia by magistrates clothed in black, followed by a crowd carrying burning tallow-candles, while the buildings were decorated fittingly".

Ostia was essential for the supplying of Rome, and therefore for the Emperor. Imperial slaves and freedmen worked in the harbour. Eventually Ostia would become the main harbour of Rome, taking the place of Puteoli in the Bay of Naples, but this took some time. The reason for this was that the shoreline near Ostia did not offer natural protection to ships. Small boats could sail up the Tiber to Rome. Large ships unloaded at the Tiber quays of Ostia, very large ships out at sea. For these large ships Ostia was a dangerous place.

In 42 AD Claudius - a frequent visitor of Ostia - started the construction of an artificial harbour, a few kilometres to the north of Ostia. A huge basin was dug out, protected by two curved moles and with a very tall lighthouse, a copy and improvement of the famous Pharos of Alexandria. Channels connected the basin with the Tiber and created an artificial island between Ostia and Portus, called *Isola Sacra* ("Sacred Island"). The completion of the work was celebrated in 64 AD, during the reign of Nero. But already in 62 AD the harbour was in use: in that year 200 ships in the basin perished during a storm, perhaps a tsunami (in the same year Pompeii was struck by an earthquake). From now on Ostia was the main harbour of Rome for goods from the western half of the Empire. Puteoli remained important, perhaps as Rome's harbour for the eastern, Greek-speaking half of the Empire.

Trajan built a second, hexagonal basin behind the basin of Claudius. The work was carried out in the years 106-113 AD and included improvements of the Claudian harbour. In the course of the second century the grain fleet from Alexandria in Egypt sailed to Ostia instead of Puteoli. The harbour district was controlled by an Imperial official, the *procurator Portus Ostiensis*, called *procurator Portus Utriusque* ("of both harbours") after the construction of the second harbour basin. The buildings surrounding the harbour basins still lie largely unexcavated next to and below the airport. The area is very promising and exceptional discoveries have been made. It was and partly still is private property of the Torlonia family.

Ostia's golden years: the second and early third century

During its hey-day Ostia was a densely populated city, with a large variety of buildings, and a mixed and "international" population. But first and foremost it was a harbour city, serving the needs of Rome, characterized by warehouses and the seats of guilds. Ostia was much smaller than harbour cities such as Alexandria and Carthage. Not only was Ostia smaller, it was also more functional. Porticos flanking the streets are found throughout the city, but identical porticos facing each other are exceptional. There were only a few squares. There was no amphitheatre, no circus (Puteoli, formerly the main harbour of Rome, had a theatre, two amphitheatres and a circus). The sudden

commercial opportunities that arose after the construction of Trajan's harbour were seized by entrepreneurs, who were interested in profit, not in developing Ostia's non-functional infrastructure.

The Emperors and Ostia

The addition of the harbour district was followed by a building boom and great prosperity in Ostia. The overwhelming majority of the buildings that have been excavated was built in the first three quarters of the second century, especially during the reigns of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius. The prosperity lasted until the Severan period, that is the early third century.

When the work on Trajan's harbour was finished, the builders turned their attention to Ostia and started rebuilding the city, supervised by Hadrian (how they were able to take over the properties of the local aristocracy remains a mystery). Hadrian was twice *duovir* of Ostia, and in an inscription he was honoured because he had "preserved and enlarged the colony with all his indulgence and liberality" (*colonia conservata et aucta omni indulgentia et liberalitate eius*). It was not self-evident that Ostia would flourish: it was the Emperor who ensured that it would be the organisational and financial centre. During the reign of Hadrian the north-east part of the city (including the area that had been reserved by Caius Caninius) was rebuilt with a rectangular plan. Fire-fighters (*vigiles*) from Rome were stationed in new barracks in this area. A huge Capitolium was erected to the north of the Forum. Large baths were donated by Hadrian and his successor Antoninus Pius, and by Gavius Maximus, an official in Rome. Warships from Misenum, a military naval base, were stationed at Ostia. The sailors may have taken governors and Emperors to the provinces. They were also in charge of the awnings of the Colosseum in Rome.

Commodus enlarged the theatre and refounded the colony as Colonia Felix Commodiana ("Happy Colony of Commodus"), a name that would be forgotten however after he was killed in 192 AD. In the Severan period building activity was mostly restricted to repairs and modifications. Septimius Severus also improved a road along the beach, connecting the mouth of the Tiber and Terracina. Probably during the reign of Alexander Severus, the last Emperor of the Severan dynasty (222-235 AD), a large round temple was built to the west of the Forum. It resembles the Pantheon in Rome. Inscriptions testify to the existence of an Imperial palace in Ostia.

The local government

The most important magistrates were two *duoviri*. They were appointed for a period of one year and presided over the city council. They acted as judges, but could not pass sentence of death, which could only be done in Rome. Therefore the symbols of their power were not *fasces*, a bundle of rods and an axe, but *bacilli*, rods without an axe. The *duoviri* were supported by two *aediles*, who supervised the markets, the standard weights and measures, and public facilities. Finances were in the hands of two *quaestores aerarii*. The *aerarium*, the city treasury, was presumably stored in the basement of the Capitolium. A *curator operum publicorum et aquarum* oversaw public buildings and the water supply. From the period of Trajan the *quaestor alimentorum* took care of poor children.

The city council had 100 (later 110) members called *decuriones*. In order to be admitted one had to be freeborn (which was also true for the sons of freed slaves), at least 25 years old, and wealthy enough to pay an entrance fee. The council itself chose new members. It was supported by secretaries (*scribae*), attendants (*lictors*), messengers (*viatores*), town criers (*praecones*), and public slaves and freedmen. The latter were organized in a guild. In the early Imperial period the people could elect the *duoviri*, but by the beginning of the second century AD this was no longer the case. Elections had ceased, and the city council appointed the *duoviri*.

Religious offices also formed part of a public career (*cursus honorum*). Vulcanus was the protective deity of Ostia, and his main priest, the *pontifex Volcani*, had general control over all temples in the city. He was assisted by *praetores* and *aediles*. He may be compared with the *pontifex maximus* in Rome, an office that was always held by the Emperor. In Ostia this office was the summit of a political career. It was held for life. Minor religious offices were the priesthood of Roma and Augustus, related to the temple to the south of the Forum, and the priesthood of a deified emperor.

Ostia also needed patrons, who could stand up for the interests of the city in Rome. Therefore *patroni* were elected who had been successful in Rome. If possible, men of Ostian descent were selected.

Trade and commerce

Skippers from many provinces transported goods to the harbours, for example wine from France, olive oil from southern Spain, grain from Tunisia and Egypt, marble from Tunisia, Greece and Turkey, and metal. Upon arrival the goods were stored in *horrea* (warehouses), and transported later to Rome along the Tiber in tow-boats pulled by men (*codicarii*), in late antiquity by oxen. The skippers (*navicularii*) and some local craftsmen and merchants were organized in guilds called *collegia*. The "control room" for this complex organization was the Square of the Corporations, behind the theatre. Here representatives of the guilds and of the administration had small offices, identified by mosaics with inscriptions and depictions of ships, the lighthouse of Portus, grain measures, and dolphins. It was the Roman alternative for email and the mobile phone.

Both free and freed people could join the guilds. The presidents of the guilds were called *quinquennales*. They held the office for a period of five years. The treasurers were called *quaestores*, the ordinary members formed the *plebs*. And, like the colony, the guilds could have patrons. The largest local guilds were those of the builders and ship carpenters (*fabri tignuarii* and *fabri navales*), with hundreds of members. The ship carpenters repaired ships, which was an ongoing activity, and most likely also built new ones. The guilds cannot be compared with mediaeval guilds, if only because membership was not obligatory. They were of social importance, remembering for example deceased members. If the economic role was crucial, the guild was given the status of "body" (*corpus*). The members then had to perform duties in the public interest, but in return received exemptions from public duties, comparable to our tax exemptions.

The people

Through immigration and the import of slaves the population rose to perhaps forty thousand, including many slaves. Most slaves were taken to Ostia from the Greek-speaking East. Many must have been foundlings, but the breeding of slaves must also have been a profitable trade. Most families had at least one slave, and there were many Imperial slaves, working in the harbour and warehouses. Many slaves were manual labourers, others were clerks and accountants. The most frequent slave-name is Felix: "Happy".

In this period we witness a rise in society of a middle class of traders and merchants, often not of Ostian origin. Some were free immigrants, others freedmen. If we believe the inscriptions, then the vast majority of the population of Ostia in the later second century was made up of freedmen and their children. It is possible however that freedmen felt the need to self-advertise their newly acquired status, and that, as a result, they are over-represented in the epigraphic record. Especially people from North Africa started to play a dominant role, but France, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Syria and Egypt are also documented. We encounter the new arrivals as *procuratores annonae*, in the city council, and involved in all phases of the grain-supply: as owners and skippers of ships transporting

grain over the sea and the Tiber, as grain merchants (*mercatores frumentarii*), and as grain weighers (*mensores frumentarii*).

Freedmen were often active in the trade of their former master, now their patron. The guild of the *Seviri Augustales*, focusing on the cult of the Emperors, was entirely made up of freedmen. It resembled the trade guilds. And as *magistri vici* ("ward masters") freedmen were in charge of the cult of the *Lares Compitales*, deities worshipped at crossroads.

The vast majority of the population lived in rented apartments, some luxurious, others quite simple. Most of the apartments were on the upper floors of high-rising buildings made of thick concrete walls faced with bricks and sometimes small tufa stones. The expensive apartments were decorated with excellent paintings and mosaics, and had their own kitchen and latrine. Less fortunate people used communal latrines and public water basins. All inhabitants took good care of their bodies: the number of public baths in Ostia is astonishing.

A large necropolis on the *Isola Sacra*, near *Portus*, shows that apartments must also have been built near the harbour basins. The famous physician *Galenus* worked in Ostia in the later third century. He wrote: "All the doctors in these places [Ostia and *Portus*] are my friends, and both are populous centres". Still, *Portus* does not seem to have had a very large residential area, and many people who worked in *Portus* must have lived in Ostia. They crossed the Tiber with ferries (there does not seem to have been a bridge) and could be taken all the way to *Portus* on a canal dug through the *Isola Sacra*.

Decline, late antiquity, and Middle Ages

The decline of Ostia

After the Severan dynasty there was political chaos in Rome. The reign of many Emperors was now ended by revolt or assassination after a few months or years. The economy collapsed. In Ostia building activity was minimal, and the number of inscriptions dropped dramatically. The population shrunk. In the second half of the third and in the fourth century Ostia and *Portus* were struck by earthquakes and tsunamis. The first seismic events seem to have taken place in 238 AD (in *Portus* corpses were found below collapsed masonry), other evidence points to the reign of *Probus* (276-282 AD; several buildings collapsed), and an earthquake documented in Rome in 346 AD may also have damaged the harbours. Often the ruins were not even cleared. Apparently it was not economical to rebuild them. The warehouses in Ostia were not used anymore, contrary to those in *Portus*. Eventually the fire-brigade left Ostia. And other tensions were building up: in 269 AD eighteen Christians were executed in front of the theatre, on the street.

The local calendar was maintained until at least 175 AD. The last *duovir* is documented in 251 AD. *Aurelian* (270-275 AD), says a late historian, "began to construct a Forum, named after himself, in Ostia on the sea, in the place where later the public magistrates' office was built". Imperial generosity focused on the area near the beach, not on the harbour district along the Tiber. Rome now once more took over the control of Ostia. The city came under the authority of the prefect of the grain-supply (*praefectus annonae*), who was curator of the harbours.

Late antiquity

In 308/309 AD *Maxentius* opened a mint in Ostia, but this was a short-lived event. The mint was closed in 313 AD. *Constantine* made a small part of *Portus* an independent "city", called *Civitas Flavia Constantiniana*. But the Alexandrian grain-fleet now took the Egyptian grain to Constantinople; Rome was supplied by North Africa. On the other hand, *Constantine* donated a Christian basilica to Ostia,

perhaps identified in the 1990's through geophysical research. And from 336 AD the bishop of Ostia consecrated the new pope. There are indications that the economy of Ostia was recovering somewhat in the fourth century. Many inscriptions from this period have been preserved and the building activity increased, albeit with reused material. The marble slabs of the *fasti* were used as thresholds, and funerary inscriptions can be seen in the pavement of houses.

But Ostia was from now on primarily a pleasant living environment. Many expensive habitations (*domus*) were installed in older buildings, from the later third until the first quarter of the fifth century. Unfortunately it is not clear who were the inhabitants. The houses may have been used by wealthy people from Rome, as a second house near the beach, or by merchants whose interests lay in Portus. In 387 AD Saint Augustine stayed in Ostia with his mother Monica, who died there: "... she and I stood alone, leaning in a certain window, from which the garden of the house we occupied at Ostia could be seen; at which place, removed from the crowd, we were resting ourselves for the voyage [to North Africa], after the fatigues of a long journey". The area along the Tiber had been abandoned, and here rubble was dumped on the streets, to create a barrier, in places four metres high, to protect the southern part of the city from Tiber flooding. An inscription from the late fourth century mentions the transfer of a statue "from sordid places" (*ex sordentibus locis*) to the Forum.

In the early fifth century Ostia was no more than an average Italian city, contrary to Portus, that remained important as harbour: from now on the *praefectus annonae* governed Portus, but not Ostia. In 409 AD Alaric with Goths captured Portus, but ignored Ostia. In 455 AD Gaeseric and the Vandals sacked Portus. An inscription informs us that they burned the church of Saint Hippolytus on the Isola Sacra. Perhaps they also plundered Ostia. At the end of the fifth century the Ostian aqueduct stopped functioning. Many Ostians now lived and were buried in ruins. At the same time Portus was a thriving harbour. In 537 AD Vitigis and the Goths laid siege to Portus. The Roman general Belisarius defended Portus and Ostia. The last inhabitants of Roman Ostia had retreated to the theatre, that was turned into a little fortress.

The Middle Ages

In the early ninth century Ostia was captured by the Saracens. In response pope Gregory IV (827-844) built a new town to the east of Roman Ostia: Gregoriopolis, at the spot of the modern village Ostia Antica. Here the church of Saint Aurea, a martyr from the third century AD, had been built. In the middle of the ninth century the Saracens returned, and took the fortress and Portus. Pope Nicholas I (858-867) reinforced the town. For a long time there had been marshes to the east of Ostia, in which rubble from Rome had been dumped after the great fire under Nero, in 64 AD. The marshes now became a lake, and the area was infested by malaria. As late as 1162 AD the people of Gregoriopolis visited a little chapel near the theatre, where Christians had been executed centuries ago, in a procession along the Via Ostiensis and Decumanus Maximus. But by now the tombs and buildings flanking the road were half-buried ruins.

From the eleventh century to the present day

From the eleventh to the fourteenth century Ostian marble was reused in the cathedrals of Pisa, Florence, Amalfi and Orvieto. A document from 1191 mentions a spot in Ostia called *calcaria*. This is a reference to a lime-kiln, in which marble (floors, statues, inscriptions) was burned to be used as mortar. Several lime-kilns have been excavated. The search for marble was easy, because Ostia was not entirely buried. In August 1190 Richard Coeur de Lion landed at the mouth of the Tiber. He saw "immense ruins of ancient walls", and a place called "Le Far de Rume" - the remains of the lighthouse (Pharos) of Portus. Vast amounts of bricks must also have been dug up, to be used in Rome.

In the fifteenth century the castle of Gregoriopolis was rebuilt by cardinal Giuliano della Rovere (this is the present castle). It had to protect Rome from incursions by raiders. In 1557 there was a major inundation. The meandering Tiber changed its course. The branch of the Tiber along the castle was cut off, so that the castle became useless. The old branch is now filled with earth and known as Fiume Morto ("Dead River"). The inundation of 1557 also destroyed a large stretch of the ancient Tiber quays.

From the fifteenth to eighteenth century promising ruins were searched by foreign visitors for inscriptions and statues. These ended up in private collections in England, France, Portugal, Spain and Russia (now mostly in national museums). The random searching of the ruins was forbidden by Carlo Fea, director general of antiquities, in the early nineteenth century. The first excavations, initiated by pope Pius VII (Ostia belonged to the Vatican), were carried out by Giuseppe Pettrini in the years 1801-1805. Between 1824 and 1834 there was a renewed hunt for treasure. More or less structural activities began once more in 1855, under the auspices of pope Pius IX. The excavators were uncle and nephew Pietro Ercole and Carlo Ludovico Visconti. They too focused on inscriptions, statues, mosaics, and paintings, that were taken to the Vatican museums. Sometimes marble and granite was taken to Rome as building material. From 1870 Ostia was no longer a papal domain, but owned by the new Italian state. The excavations were continued by Pietro Rosa and Rodolfo Lanciani. In 1887 Hermann Dessau published the Ostian inscriptions in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL), volume XIV.

Wealthy foreigners started to visit Ostia as tourists in the 19th century. The site was reached with some difficulty with carriages. The railway between Rome and Ostia was opened in 1924. The present-day museum was built. Starting in the late nineteenth century the marshes were drained and restored to agriculture. This was the work of colonists from Ravenna. The malaria was completely eradicated after the Second World War by the Americans, who sprayed DDT.

Truly scientific research started in 1907 by Dante Vaglieri. The north-east part of the city was now excavated systematically. Vaglieri died in 1913. The year before, the first monograph about Ostia had been published: "Ostia, Colonia Romana", by Ludovico Paschetto. Important work was also done by the French archaeologist Jérôme Carcopino.

Vaglieri was succeeded by Guido Calza, who was supported by architect Italo Gismondi and inspector Raffaele Finelli. Slowly more ruins were unearthed. In 1930 a supplement to the CIL appeared. In 1938 one-third of the city had been excavated. But then extensive, hurried excavations began, lasting until 1942. The initiator was Mussolini, who wanted to present Ostia during a world-fair, the "Esposizione Universale di Roma" (EUR). The excavated area was more than doubled. More than 600.000 cubic metres of earth were removed, that had reached a height of 4 to 12 metres above the ancient street level. Needless to say that much information was not recorded during these five years. The world-fair never took place. Calza died in 1946.

After the Second World War the series "Scavi di Ostia" was published. Excavations continued on a very small scale. In 1960 a monumental, historical study about Ostia was published: "Roman Ostia", by Russell Meiggs, working in Oxford (an updated edition appeared in 1973). A detailed archaeological guide, written by Carlo Pavolini, was published in 1983 (updated in 2006). Geophysical research by the German Archaeological Institute and the American Academy in Rome provided a wealth of information about the unexcavated area, and led to several important discoveries, such as that of a Christian basilica, and of a small harbour in the north-west part of the city. Similar geophysical research also took place in Portus and on the Isola Sacra by the University of Southampton. The University of London contributed to investigations of the area to the south of Ostia.

Itinerary

(see the plan of Ostia at the end)

Roman Gate (Porta Romana) [1] and aqueduct [2]

After entering the site, continue to the place where the ancient street is narrowed by a metal fence. It protects the scant remains of a city gate [1]. It has been called Porta Romana, because the road from Rome arrived here. The city gates and city wall were built in the first century BC by the famous orator Marcus Tullius Cicero and completed by his arch-enemy Publius Clodius Pulcher. To the south of the gate an aqueduct reached Ostia [2].

After passing through the gate you are on the main street of Ostia, the Decumanus Maximus. It is the continuation of the road that led from Rome to Ostia. The street is paved with basalt blocks. A few very shallow wheel-ruts can be seen between the gate and the theatre, the only wheel-ruts in Ostia. This suggests that further transport of goods was done by slaves or pack-animals, not with wagons.

Square of Victory (Piazzale della Vittoria) [3]

Behind the gate, to the left, is a square where a large statue of the winged Minerva-Victory was found. A plaster cast of the statue is today on the square. Originally it decorated the city gate. On the square a copy can be seen of two identical dedicatory inscriptions of the gate. Lines 3 and 4 began with the names of Cicero and Clodius that were read for the first time not long ago, when fragments in the store-rooms of the museum could be assigned to the inscriptions. Also on the left side is a long drinking-basin for the horses and mules that took people and carts to the city.

Baths of the Coachmen (Terme dei Cisiarii) [4] and Dead River (Fiume Morto) [5]

On the other side of the street are baths named after a mosaic with depictions of taxis that were drawn by mules [4]. These transported passengers between Ostia and Rome. It is best viewed from the modern road behind the baths, where there is a metal fence. The names of some of the mules can be read, for example Pudes, "Modest", and Barosus, "Silly". On the other side of the modern road is a depression in the terrain. This is the so-called *Dead River (Fiume Morto)*, the ancient course of the Tiber [5]. The meandering river changed its course in 1557 during a major flood.

Continuing along the Decumanus you see shops that form the facade of largely unexcavated buildings. In the middle of the road is a well that blocks the road. It was made at the very end of the history of Ostia, in the sixth or seventh century. Next to it, metal grates cover big, lead pipes through which the water of the aqueduct was distributed.

Baths of Neptune (Terme di Nettuno) [6]

To the right of the well, behind a long porticus and shops, are large baths. These can best be viewed from a terrace with a modern fence. They were built during the reign of Hadrian (117-138 AD). The baths are famous because of black-and-white mosaics of Neptune and his wife Amphitrite. Neptune is depicted in a chariot drawn by hippocampi. He is surrounded by marine creatures: dolphins, tritons, and Nereids on sea-monsters. In an adjacent room is a mosaic with Neptune's wife, Amphitrite, on a hippocampus. She is accompanied by Hymenaeus (a winged Eros with a torch, referring to marriage) and tritons. To the north-west is the large *palaestra*, an open area that was used for sports. It is surrounded on three sides by a portico with marble columns. In a room to the south-east of the *palaestra* is a mosaic with naked athletes. Two boxers with spiked gloves, two pancratiasts (boxers-wrestlers) and a wrestler have been preserved.

Bar of Fortunatus (Caupona di Fortunato) [7]

A bit further on a side-street branches off from the Decumanus to the right: the Road of the Fountain (Via della Fontana). It is now blocked by a room with a mosaic, the Bar of Fortunatus. The mosaic consists of a vessel and a damaged text: "[... dicit] FORTVNATVS [vinum e cr]ATERA QVOD SITIS BIBE", "... Fortunatus says: drink wine from the vessel because you are thirsty". Apparently this was a

bar, but there may also be a Christian reference. Niches in an adjacent room belong to an elaborate marble fountain.

Now follow the Road of the Fountain. To the left are luxurious apartments. The northernmost building has a large hall. Here a bakery was installed. Only a few fragments of the machinery remain.

Public fountain [8]

On the right side, halfway down the road, is a public, covered water-basin. In the long side are two holes from which water flowed continuously. The holes were decorated with bronze water-spouts of heads of dolphins. On the ground is a gutter with depressions in which buckets were placed. In one of the short sides is a large hole through which buckets were lowered. In the bottom of the hole is a smooth groove created by ropes.

Barracks of the Fire Brigade (Caserma dei Vigili) [9]

Now turn right and enter the building to your left. You are now in the barracks of the fire brigade. About three hundred firemen (*vigiles*) lived here, in rooms around a courtyard. They came from Rome and stayed in Ostia for periods of three months. At one end of the courtyard is a chapel for the cult of the Emperors. In and near the chapel are many altars and bases for statues, with inscriptions mentioning Emperors. On the floor of the vestibule is a large black-and-white mosaic, made shortly after 200 AD, depicting three phases of the sacrifice of a bull. To the left are a dead bull and a man with an axe. In the centre a man is leading a bull to an altar with a burning fire. To the left of the altar is a junior priest with a long axe, to the right are two more men. One is playing a double flute, the other seems to hold a dish in his hand. The right part of the mosaic is very similar to the left part.

To the equipment of the *vigiles* belonged hooks, pick-axes, ladders and ropes. The *vigiles* brought water to a fire using buckets, but powerful pumps were also used, operated by five or six *siphonarii*. At high pressure the water from the pumps could reach a great height. Water was drawn from public fountains and basins, and from wells inside buildings, under the supervision of *aquarii*. Cloth soaked in water or acid was thrown on the flames.

The work of the *vigiles* included patrols during the night, when the risk of fire was greater, due to the use of oil-lamps and torches. They made sure that fire was used in a responsible way, and that a quantity of water was present in all buildings and apartments. If people were careless they could be punished with a whip. The *vigiles* also acted against thieves and burglars, and kept an eye on the slaves who guarded the clothes of the visitors of baths. They returned runaway slaves to their owners.

Square of the Guilds (Piazzale delle Corporazioni) [10]

After returning to the public fountain you can cross the road and walk through a corridor between buildings. You have now reached a vast square behind the theatre. In the centre of the square are the remains of a temple. Around the temple are inscribed bases of statues of Imperial officials and of leading Ostian citizens.

The square is surrounded on three sides by a porticus behind which are many small rooms with mosaics. In these rooms representatives of shipping and trading guilds (*corpora*) from all around the Mediterranean sea were present. Mosaic inscriptions give us the names of the cities where the guilds of shippers (*navicularii*) and traders (*negotiantes*) resided. The texts are accompanied by depictions of dolphins, ships and the lighthouse at Portus. Grain-measures (large round bins) refer to the grain trade.

Many harbour cities are mentioned. Several were in modern Tunisia, a main supplier of grain. The Karalitani were from Cagliari on Sardinia, the Narbonenses came from Narbonne in France, etcetera. In the north-east corner is the office of Alexandria in Egypt. The Nile delta is shown here, with three branches spanned by a ship-bridge. In the adjacent room are depictions of wild animals.

This unique square shows the "international" character that Ostia must have had. The streets of the city were crowded by people from all over the known world. On the walls of the city not only Latin, but also Greek graffiti are found.

Theatre (Teatro) [11]

The theatre was built in the late first century BC by Agrippa, the right-hand man of Augustus. It was enlarged at the end of the second century AD, during the reign of Commodus (176-192 AD) and Septimius Severus (193-211 AD), and could hold 4000 spectators. One ancient text probably refers to the Ostian theatre. In 197 AD Septimius Severus addressed the Senate in Rome and said: "For if it was disgraceful for him [Commodus] with his own hands to slay wild beasts, yet at Ostia only the other day one of your number, an old man who had been consul, was publicly sporting with a prostitute who imitated a leopard".

The lower level of the seating area (*cavea*) could be entered from the Decumanus through a central corridor, and through two lateral entrances. Four staircases led to the second and third level. The seating area could be shaded by an awning, suspended from poles inserted in travertine blocks. The area in front of the seating area (*orchestra*) had a marble floor. The high back wall of the stage has disappeared almost completely. In late antiquity the *orchestra* could be flooded for aquatic displays. The pool was not very deep, 1.40 metres at most. Naval battles were of course not re-enacted. We should imagine a choreography of the gods and goddesses of the sea and lakes, of nymphs and Nereids, presumably scarcely dressed.

Christian chapel (Oratorio Cristiano) [12]

In front of the theatre Christian martyrs were executed in 269 AD. On this spot a tiny chapel was later erected at a very high level. Attached to the few remains of the chapel are modern commemorative inscriptions. The chapel was still visited in the 12th century by clergymen living in the mediaeval borgo.

Castrum wall [13]

Continue along the Decumanus and turn right after 200 metres. To your left you will notice a wall of very large tuff blocks. It belongs to the oldest settlement, a military camp (Castrum) that has been dated to the early third century BC.

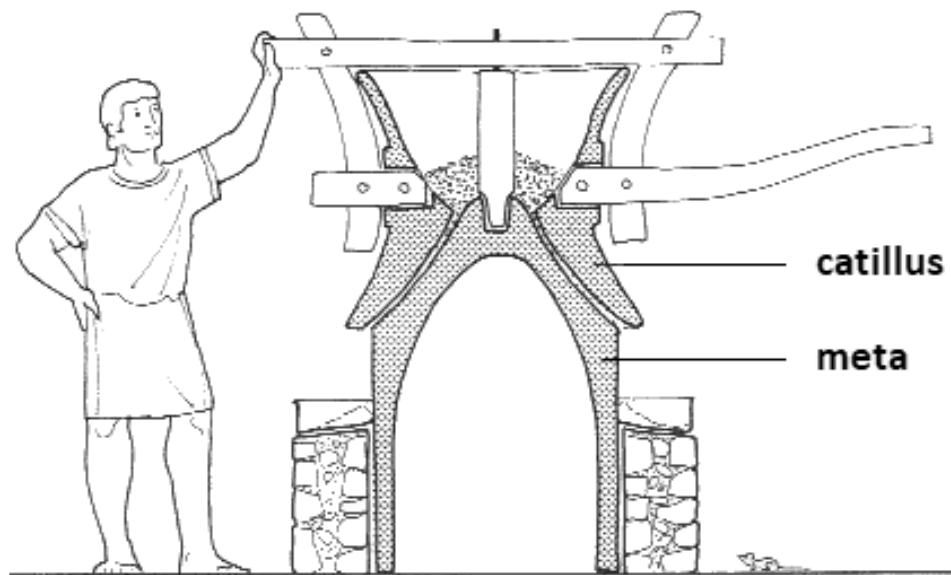
A bit further, to your left, is a famous view towards a huge temple, the Capitolium. The buildings on either side of the road may have been 15 metres high. The walls are 60 centimetres thick. They have a concrete core and a facing of bricks or a combination of bricks and small blocks of tuff.

House of the Millstones (Caseggiato dei Molini) [14]

Before taking this road you can visit the building a bit further on, to the left. This was a grain mill and bakery. Huge halls contain the remains of many millstones. A millstone consisted of two parts: an immobile, conical base (*meta*) and on top of that a stone that was shaped like an hour-glass (*catillus*). Mules or horses were attached to a wooden frame over the *catillus*. They walked in circles and rotated the *catillus* over the *meta*. The grinding took place between the two parts that were at a very small, fixed distance. If the distance was too small, the grain would have been burnt, and if it was too large, too much bran would have remained. Specialist carpenters maintained the machines.

In an adjacent room are machines that were used for the kneading. Like the millstones they were made of porous volcanic stone. These are bowls in which the dough was kneaded by a combination of fixed and rotating blades. A few blades were inserted in the side of the bowl, and a few were attached to a vertical bar in the centre. Slaves or animals turned the vertical bar.

The floors suffered a lot and were therefore covered with basalt blocks, in which imprints of hooves remain. Several basins are present, because water was needed in very large quantities, for the kneading, as drinking water for the animals, and for moistening the grain before milling. The bread was baked in a huge oven behind the room with the kneading machines. It can be reached through a narrow corridor in the back part of the building. The lower part of the cupola has been preserved. Wood was burned inside the cupola, as in modern pizza ovens. The bread was placed on a metal grate that could be rotated, witness grooves in the cupola of the oven.



Reconstruction drawing of a millstone.

Several bakeries have been identified in this part of town. They were supplied with grain from a huge warehouse to the east of the House of the Millstones. Back on the street you can see five pairs of brick piers. These once supported arches, in their turn carrying a roof over which the grain was taken to the bakery. In the facade of the bakery are two terracotta reliefs. One has a standing male figure: the *Genius loci*, the Genius of the place. On the other are carpenter's tools, testifying to the presence of the carpenters who took care of the maintenance of the millstones.

Museum (Museo) [15]

If you wish you can now continue to the small but delightful museum. Behind the museum are the bookshop and restaurant.

House of the Wine-bar (Caseggiato del Termopolio) [16]

Take the street leading to the Capitolium. Just before you reach the temple there is a wine-bar to your left. The L-shaped bar counter has a water basin in the lower part of both sides. Near the counter are three stepped shelves for beakers or glasses, and above that a painting of food and musical instruments. Behind the bar is a courtyard. It contains a round marble basin on a foot. In the centre of the floor a square marble basin was set, with a lead pipe for a vertical water jet. Along one of the walls is a bench, where visitors could enjoy their wine. A staircase in the courtyard leads to a small cellar that must have been a shrine, in view of a large niche in one of the walls.

Among the finds from the building is a metal slave collar that was worn by a slave inclined to run away. It carries the inscription: "Hold me so that I do not run away; I am a runaway slave".

Forum and surrounding buildings [17-21, 38]

The Forum, the main square of Ostia, is dominated by the huge *Capitolium* [17], a temple dedicated to the main Roman deities, the Capitoline triad (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva). Capitolia could be found in many cities in the western half of the Empire, following the example of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus on the Capitoline hill in Rome. The temple in Ostia was built by Hadrian. The walls were once entirely covered with marble.

To the south-east of the Forum is the *House of the Triclinia (Caseggiato dei Triclini)* [38]. It has been identified as the guild seat of the builders (*fabri tignuarii*). In the courtyard is the base of a statue, with a dedication to Septimius Severus (198 AD) and, on one of the sides, a list of around 350 members of the guild. To the left of the courtyard are rooms with masonry reclining couches (*triclinia*), used during communal meals of the leading members of the guild.

Opposite the Capitolium are the scant remains of another *temple, dedicated to Rome and Augustus (Tempio di Roma e Augusto) [18]*. Amongst the ruins the excavators found a statue of Roma Victrix (Victorious Rome), dressed as amazon. Her left foot is resting on the globe.

To the west of the Forum are two important public buildings. To the north-west is the *Curia*, the meeting place of the 100 members of the city council [19]. It is quite small, reminiscent of the British House of Commons. To the south-west is the *Basilica*, used for economic transactions and as courthouse [20]. The podium on which the judges sat can be seen in the back part (south part). A *small round building* on the centre of the Forum was a fountain, not (as the sign says) a shrine [21]. It was decorated with statues that were facing inwards.

House of the Cult-niche (Caseggiato del Larario) [22]

Continue along the Decumanus. You will now reach a small shopping-mall, to your right. The ground floor of the building is made up of shops, some facing the street, others around a courtyard. In the courtyard is the polychrome niche for a statue of a deity after which the building was named. Travertine blocks supported the wooden floors of the first upper floor. Other blocks were used for locking and bolting the doors. The upper floor of the individual shops was reached with a ladder, resting on a small brick platform with a few treads.

Round Temple (Tempio Rotondo) [23]

Opposite the House of the Cult-niche is the Round Temple. It is the last major temple that was built in Ostia, in the second quarter of the third century AD. In front of the temple is a large square. The temple is on a podium, 3.80 metres higher than the square. It was reached with a wide, marble staircase. At the front of the vestibule were ten marble columns. The round *cella* has a diameter of 18.30 metres, less than half the diameter of the Pantheon in Rome. The walls are two metres thick. Next to the entrance is a spiral staircase that led to the cupola. It spirals upwards around a thick travertine column.

In the *cella* are seven niches. Three are rectangular and may have contained up to three statues each. Four semicircular niches contained four more statues. Between the niches are the bases of eight columns. Remains of a channel in the *cella* indicate that there was an opening in the centre of the dome, as in the Pantheon.

Many portraits of Emperors were found in this area. These finds and, of course, the resemblance to the Pantheon in Rome, have led to the identification of the Round Temple as a temple dedicated to all official Roman gods, or a temple dedicated to deified Emperors (*Augusteum*). It has been pointed out that, whereas the temple in Rome was dedicated to all gods (in view of its name), it was nevertheless primarily an *Augusteum*, in which the Emperor presided over the gods as *primus inter pares*.

Shops of the Fishmongers (Taberne dei Pescivendoli) [24]

You now reach an intersection of five streets. On this busy spot fish could be bought in two shops. In the centre of both rooms is a marble table, and against the back wall a fish-basin revetted with marble, supporting small columns. In the eastern shop is a black-and-white mosaic with marine motifs. We see a triton and a dolphin with an octopus in its beak. Above and below the dolphin is the text INBIDE CALCO TE, "Envious one, I tread on you". It is an apotropaic text that either refers to the dolphin, which scares away the fish, or to the octopus, an animal that is traditionally hostile to man, contrary to the dolphin. To the south, behind the shops, is the meat-market (*macellum*).

Republican Temples (Templi Republican) [25]

Take the road that leads towards the north-west. To your right is a group of old, Republican temples. The largest one was dedicated to Hercules. At the top of the staircase is a statue of an important Ostian from the first century BC, Caius Cartilius Poplicola. A large temple to the right was probably dedicated to Aesculapius and Hygieia, deities of health.

House of Cupid and Psyche (Domus di Amore e Psiche) [26]

Behind the temples is a house that was built in the fourth century AD. It is reached from an alley that branches off from the north-south road behind the Temple of Hercules. It was named after a statuary group of Cupid and Psyche on a pedestal that stood in the centre of one of the rooms. Opposite this room was a tiny garden, behind marble and granite columns supporting arches made of brick and travertine. There was no roof over the garden. The back wall is a monumental fountain. The lower part of this nymphaeum has a row of five semi-circular niches. The upper part has five semicircular and rectangular niches, between which are marble columns. Between the bases of the columns are small marble steps, over which the water flowed. Water also emerged from holes in the front of the lower part, between the niches. The garden was the main source of light in the building. A hall in the back part of the building has a beautiful marble, polychrome floor.

Baths of Mithras (Terme del Mitra) [27]

Not far away are the Baths of Mithras. In the south part of the building is a narrow corridor, to the south of which is a room for a waterwheel. Wear-marks are visible on the side walls. The wheel had a diameter of 7.25 metres. It was operated by slaves walking inside the wheel and lifted ground water to a cistern. The output was 1000 litres per hour. In the north-west part of the building is a staircase leading to an underground shrine of Mithras, installed in the service area of the baths. The cult statue of Mithras, about to kill the bull, was found *in situ*, and a plaster cast has been placed in the shrine. Light falls on the statue in a dramatic way, through an opening in the ceiling, as it did in antiquity.

In the excavated part of Ostia were 16 shrines of Mithras. Several have mosaics and paintings with symbols and figures referring to the grades of initiation. Only men were allowed to participate in this mystery cult. Unfortunately we know very little about the "liturgy" of the cult. It was a competitor of Christianity, and it may not be a coincidence that a small Christian chapel was installed in the north part of the baths. On small columns Christian monograms can be seen (alpha-omega, chi-rho).

Guild-seat and Temple of the Grain Measurers (Aula e Tempio dei Mensores) [28]

Next to the baths is the guild-seat of the grain measurers. There were three sections within this guild: *nauticarii*, *acceptores* and *adiutores*. The first checked the grain on its arrival in the harbour, the second on arrival at the warehouses, the third when it was sent to Rome.

In the centre of the complex, facing the street, are the remains of a temple that was dedicated to Ceres Augusta, a combination of the goddess of grain and the Imperial cult. To the left of the temple is a large hall with a mosaic of a group of grain measurers. The first person from the left is rather damaged. The second is carrying a sack with grain. Next comes a small figure (a slave?). His right hand is raised. With his hand and fingers he is indicating the number 9. In his left hand is a rope with nine tickets, presumably of wood, used to count the number of sacks that had arrived from the harbour. The right half of the mosaic is taken up by three people around a grain-measure. To the left is the actual measurer (*ensor*). In his right hand is a stick (*rutellum*), probably used to level the full measure. In the centre is a porter who has just emptied a sack, or is about to take the contents of the measure to a warehouse. The person at the far right is indicating the number 5000 with his right hand.

The measure contained 25-27 *modii*, i.e. 214-234 litres or 400-432 *sextarii*. The sack contained 24.5-26.5 litres, or 44.5-48.5 *sextarii*. The relation between the sack and the measure is 1:8.8, which means that the measure was filled with nine sacks. This number coincides with the number 9, indicated by the small person, and the nine tickets. Presumably a ticket was given to the porters in the harbour, and attached to the rope when the porter had reached the grain-measure. The number 5000 must be a reference to 5000 *sextarii*, the contents of twelve grain measures that had been handled by this team in one day. Above the figures is the inscription *V [milia] SEX(tariorum) H(odie) AGI(tata) HI[c]*, "Five thousand *sextarii* were handled here today".

House of Serapis - Baths of the Seven Sages – House of the Charioteers (Caseggiato del Serapide – Terme dei Sette Sapienti – Caseggiato degli Aurighi) [29-31]

On the opposite side of the road is a complex consisting of three units. The ground floor of the first unit consists of *shops around a courtyard* [29]. On the upper floors were apartments - the large majority of the population of Ostia lived on upper floors. Next to the passage to the next unit, the Baths of the Seven Sages, is a small shrine with a stucco relief of the Egyptian deity Serapis (a fusion of Osiris and Apis). On the side walls are vague traces of paintings of two more deities: on the right wall Isis with a rattle (*sistrum*), on the left wall Fortuna holding a horn of plenty (*cornucopiae*).

In the *baths* [30] you will first see a large, round hall to your left. In antiquity it was covered by a cupola. On the floor is a black-and-white mosaic with a diameter of 12 metres. It has depictions of hunting scenes with fifteen hunters. Behind the hall is a small room with paintings of the "seven Greek sages", who all lived around 600 BC. Their names and city of origin are painted in Greek next to them, for example "Solon of Athens", "Thales of Milete", "Chilon of Sparta". Humorous, ironic texts in Latin refer to activity in the latrine: "Solon rubbed his belly to defecate well", "Thales recommended that those who defecate with difficulty should strain", "The cunning Chilon taught how to flatulate unnoticed". Further on, behind a basin, is a painting of Venus Anadiomene (emerging from the water), between amorini, fishes, and crustaceans.

The *third unit* was named after paintings of victorious charioteers on the walls of a corridor [31]. In this unit and in the first unit are staircases leading to terraces from which you will have a good view of this part of Ostia.

Temple of Serapis (Serapeo) and House of Bacchus and Ariadne (Caseggiato di Bacco e Arianna) [5]

A temple of Serapis is not far away (marked **S** on the plan). If you wish to visit it, return to the road and follow it until the excavated area ends (there is a shed here on a small hill).

The temple is not far to the left (south). It contains a triangular inscription: IOVI SERAPI, "for Jupiter Serapis". Another inscription tells us that it was dedicated on 24 January 127 AD, birthday of the Emperor Hadrian.

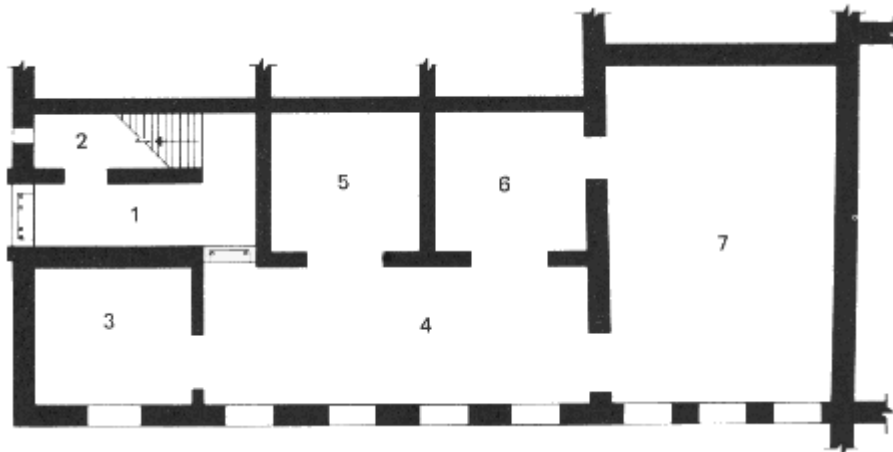
Between the road and the temple is the House of Bacchus and Ariadne, named after a depiction on a large black-and-white mosaic. The building seems to have been related to the temple. Here the members of a religious guild related to Serapis (*cultores*) may have met and dined.

Garden Houses (Case a Giardino) [32]

The Garden Houses were built during the reign of Hadrian. It is a luxurious residential complex, with expensive apartments. It is not by chance that we are now in the part of Ostia that was near the ancient shore-line. The ground floor had a total of 16 apartments and many shops. The thickness of the walls is 60 centimetres, suggesting a total of four storeys and perhaps 1200 inhabitants.

In the centre of the complex are eight apartments, back-to-back. These apartments were surrounded by an unpaved court, probably a garden. In the garden are six large water-basins. Presumably they were originally covered. Water came from two spouts. Around the basins were gutters with depressions, in which buckets were placed. On all four sides of the garden are further apartments. These outer apartments were shielded from the busy streets by open spaces and rows of shops.

Seen from outside the apartments appear as rectangular buildings, with many windows in at least one of the long outer walls. The main entrance is fairly unobtrusive. The apartments have a ground floor area of around 220 square metres, but inner staircases could lead to the first upper floor. The lay-out of the interior is asymmetrical, and characterized by rooms arranged around three sides of a central hall, the *medianum*. The entrance sometimes opens directly onto the central hall, but often leads to a corridor or small vestibule (1). The central connecting hall (4) has a ceiling and receives light through windows in one of the long walls. On either end of this organizing area is a main room for dining and receiving guests, one room (7) always larger than the other (3). Sometimes these rooms are two stories high. They too have windows in one of the walls. Behind the central hall are small bedrooms, receiving light indirectly (5-6). A latrine and a staircase (2) are next to the vestibule. The furnishing of the interior is characterized by good-quality paintings and mosaics.



A typical apartment.

Baths of the Marine Gate (Terme di Porta Marina) [A] and Synagogue (Sinagoga)

A Synagogue was found near the ancient shore-line. Those who wish to visit it should continue to the south, to the *Baths of the Marine Gate (Terme di Porta Marina)* (marked **A** on the plan) and then walk 200 metres in a south-easterly direction. The baths are recognized easily because of a very high masonry stump. In the baths is a large black-and-white mosaic of athletes around a table with prizes.

House of the Muses (Domus delle Muse) [33], House of the Painted Vaults (Casa delle Volte Dipinte) and stable

We now head back towards the area of the Forum. Walking from the Garden Houses to the east, to the main street, you will pass two houses in which many excellent paintings have been preserved (normally closed to the public). The House of the Muses is an integral part of the Garden Houses. Opposite this house are two isolated buildings. The southern one, the House of the Painted Vaults, was a hotel. In a corner of the ground floor a bar was installed. The building to the north was a stable for the horses used by the guests and perhaps also by the inhabitants of the apartments. On the outside, next to the entrance, is a manure pit. Riding on horseback in the city was forbidden.

Schola of Trajan [34]

On the right hand side of the main road you will see a facade containing two enormous semi-circular fountain niches. The building was named after a statue of the Emperor Trajan. There are rooms in the back and front part only. In between is a large garden-courtyard. This was the office of the Procurator Annonae, the Imperial official in charge of the food-supply, especially grain from Tunisia and Egypt, wine from France, and olive oil from the south of Spain. The oil was used in lamps and as soap in the Ostia's many baths.

Temple of the Ship Carpenters (Tempio dei Fabri Navales) [35]

On the other side of the road is a temple erected by one of the largest guilds in the harbours: the ship carpenters. They repaired the sailing ships and presumably built new ones. Inside the building a large number of marble columns (from the Greek island Thasos) is lying on the ground. The columns must have been placed here around 400 AD, but were never used, probably due to the barbarian invasions of the fifth century.

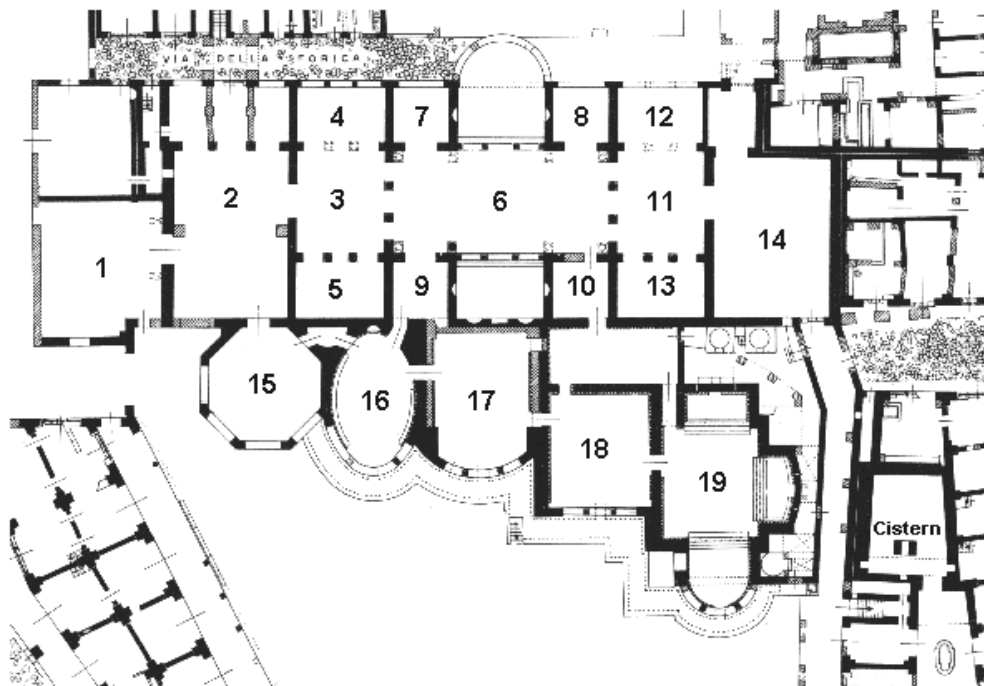
Christian basilica (Basilica cristiana) [36]

The next building, on the same side of the road, has been called a Christian basilica. In reality it must have been a guest house for pilgrims who came to Ostia to visit the tombs of martyrs. It was built in the early fifth century. In the back part of the building are fountain niches. An inscription on an architrave mentions the four rivers of paradise (Genesis 2, 10-14): IN XP GEON FISON TIGRIS EVFRATA, FL(uminum) CRI[ST]IANORVM SVMITE FONTES, "Geon, Fison, Tigris and Euphrates are in Christ. Take

the sources of the rivers of Christ". The interpretation of the building as "House of the Tigriniani" is based on a faulty reading of the inscription.

Forum Baths (Terme del Foro) [37]

We continue to the area of the Forum. Turn right after the Shops of the Fishmongers [24]. Take the first road to the left, running behind the Round Temple [23] and the Temple of Rome and Augustus [18]. You have now reached the impressive remains of the Forum Baths, one of the largest baths in Ostia.



The *baths* were entered through room 1, where you are now. In antiquity visitors would proceed to one of four changing-rooms (*apodyteria* 4, 5, 12 and 13). Between the changing-rooms is the cold bath (*frigidarium* 6). It was surrounded by large marble columns. The height of the room must have been 15-17 metres. The octagonal room 15 was used for sun-bathing (*heliocaminus*). It had relatively little artificial heating and the largest windows. Room 16 was a sweating room (*sudatorium*). Along the walls are marble seats. Rooms 17 and 18 were lukewarm (*tepidaria*). Holes in the square columns of room 18 were used to fasten the frames of large glass windows. Room 19 was a hot bath (*caldarium*) with three basins. In these basins many hairpins were found, proving that women also used the baths. In the early fourth century an apse was added to the southern basin. The apse has round columns. Vertical bands of mortar on the columns are all that remains of the glass windows (most windows in Ostia contained glass). To the east of the *caldarium* are the ovens (*praefurnia*) that heated the air that passed below the raised floors (hypocausts).

To the south of the warm rooms is the *palaestra* that was used for sports. From there you can inspect part of the underground service area.

Public latrine [38]

Opposite room 4 of the baths is a large public latrine. From pivot-holes in the thresholds can be deduced that the entrances had revolving doors. There are twenty marble seats. Water flowed through channels in front of the seats. With this water a sponge on a stick could be moistened. We leave the rest to your imagination. If you want to take a really original photo of your company that nobody has ever taken before, then this is the spot.

Bakery (Molino) [39]

Leave the baths at the point where you entered them and proceed to the south. To the right you will see a large nymphaeum decorated lavishly with marble (*Ninfeo degli Eroti*). In the niches were statues of Erotes and Venus. Further on, to the left, you will notice a large bakery. Inside are long rows of millstones and kneading machines. The oven and basins are in the south part.

House of the Gorgons (Domus delle Gorgoni) [40]

Next you will reach an intersection of three roads, meeting at a little square. Ahead lies another city gate, beyond which is a plain that was the vast necropolis of Ostia, of which only very small parts have been excavated. To the north of the square is a little building that was the office of the Ostian undertakers (*libitinarii*). Inside are mosaics of large heads of Medusa (Gorgons), one with the text GORGONI BITA (= *vita*), "Life for Gorgo!". Medusa protected the dead and ensured their eternal, blissful life. All inhabitants of Ostia were obliged to make use of the services of the undertakers, regardless of their religious conviction. The visitors were received in a vestibule and took place on a bench. Augustinus must have sat there, waiting to announce the death of his mother Monica.

Temple of the Magna Mater (Tempio della Magna Mater) [41]

To the west of the House of the Gorgons is the triangular Field of the Magna Mater. At the far end is the Temple of the Magna Mater: the Great Mother, Cybele. She was an eastern goddess of nature and fertility. The feast of Cybele was called Megalensia. Orgiastic rites took place, with torches, cymbals and double flutes. The celebration included self-flagellation and self-injury. Some adherents emasculated themselves and thus became priests of the goddess, called *galli*. Roman citizens were not allowed to do this. Therefore, this act could also be performed symbolically, through a cut in the arm. The emasculation is related to the cult of Attis, a shepherd, associated with the cult of Cybele. In frenzy he castrated himself, after breaking a promise to Cybele. He then died under a pine-tree, near the river Gallos, but was resuscitated.

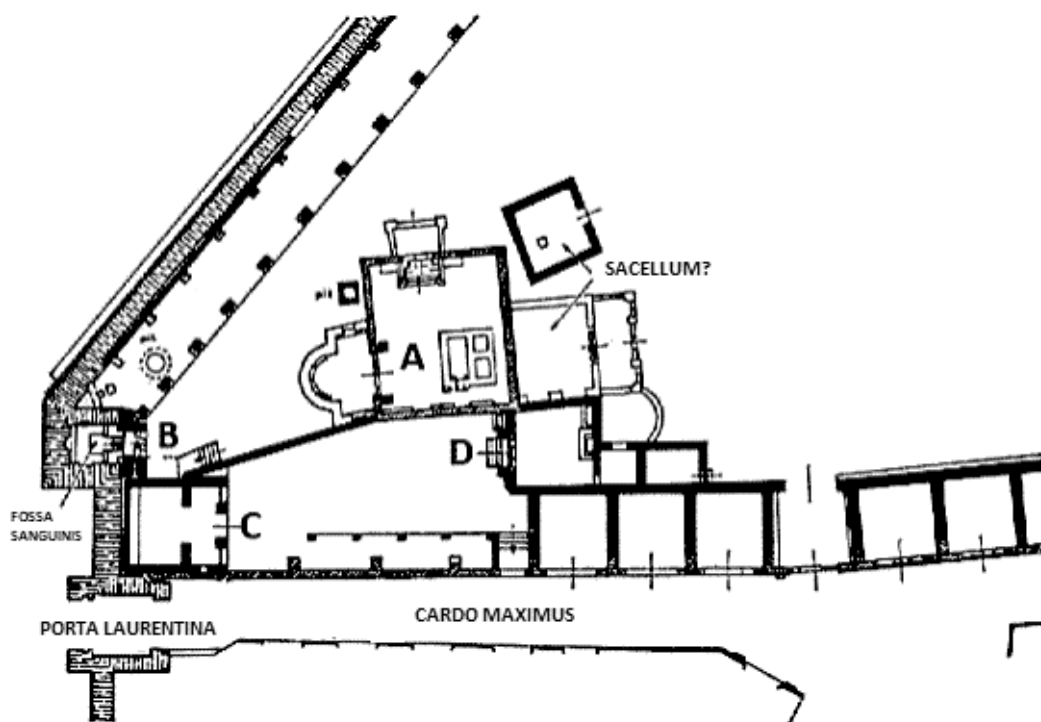


The blood baptism

Temple of Attis (Santuario di Attis) and Trench of the Blood (Fossa Sanguinis) [42]

The Temple of Attis is near the city gate. The entrance is flanked by two semi-columns with large, marble reliefs of Pan, each with a six-reeded shepherd's pipe and a shepherd's crook. In an apse is a plaster cast of a statue of a reclining Attis, after the emasculation. In his left hand is a shepherd's crook, in his right hand a pomegranate. His head is crowned with bronze rays of the sun and on his Phrygian cap is a crescent moon. He is leaning on a bust, probably the personification of the river Gallos, where he had died.

The death of Attis was remembered on the Dies Sanguinis, "Day of Blood". Some of the faithful were baptized with blood: they stood in a pit, under a thick slab with holes, on top of which a bull was killed. It led to a rebirth lasting twenty years. The Fossa Sanguinis (Trench of the Blood) is found behind the temple, in the city gate.



**A: Temple of Attis - B: Trench of the Blood
C: Temple of Bellona - D: Seat of the Lance-bearers**

Temple of Bellona (Tempio di Bellona) and Seat of the Lance-bearers (Schola degli Hastiferi) [42]

In the south-west corner of the Field of the Magna Mater is a small courtyard with on one end the Temple of Bellona, goddess of war. On the other end is a hall that has been identified as the seat of the *hastiferi*, "lance-bearers". They were worshippers of Bellona and may have performed ritual war dances.

House of the Porch (Domus del Protiro) [43]

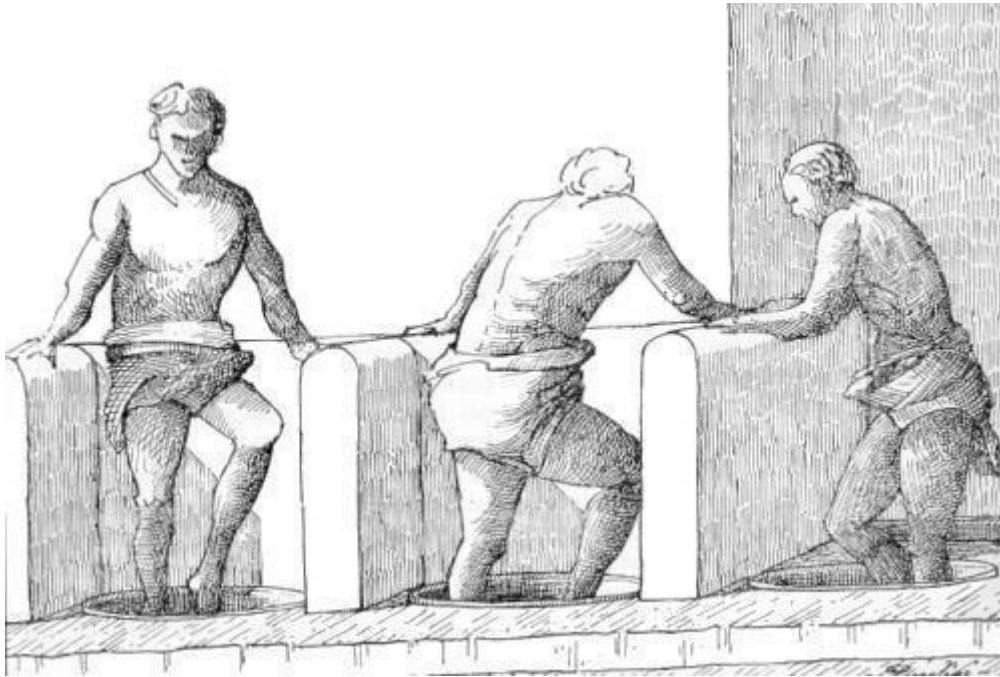
We now return in the direction of the ticket office, taking the road to the east of the bakery. To the right you will see a porch made of two columns supporting a triangular inscription. The inscription will have contained the name of the owners of this late-antique house, but unfortunately the central part has not been found. The rooms of the house are arranged around a courtyard with an elaborate nymphaeum. A staircase leads to an underground shrine with niches, connected by a corridor to a well surrounded by small niches for statuettes. For the marble floors of the house some funerary inscriptions were reused.

House of the Fortuna Annonaria (Domus della Fortuna Annonaria) [44]

After a right turn you will reach another late-antique house. It was named after a statue of a seated female deity, not Fortuna, but the personification of a city in view of her "turreted" head. To the right is a dining room with an apse for a semi-circular dining couch. In front of this room is a large nymphaeum, behind which is a single-seater toilet.

Fulling mill (Fullonica) [45]

Further on, after a left turn, you will find a large fulling mill, where clothes were cleaned and perhaps dyed. In the workshop are four very large basins, 0.90 deep and communicating with one another. In these basins clothes were put to soak. There were 35 pressing-bowls, with small walls (hand-rests) on either side. Here the material was cleaned further, by workers who "jumped" or "danced" on the clothes (the so-called *saltus fullonius*), while they leaned on the small walls on either side. Detergents were used, such as the *creta fullonica*, "fuller's earth". It helped remove the grease and enhanced the colours. Urine, collected in public urinals, was used for bleaching, and so was sulphur, which was burned under wooden frames over which the cloth was suspended. After the pressing, the material was taken to the basins again, for the removal of the detergents. The cleaning process ended with beating the cloth, which also made it more compact. Fulling mills were known for their stench, caused by the detergents. This must also have affected the health of the workers.



The *saltus fullonius* ("fullers' jump").

Necropolis [46]

A bit further on the Decumanus leads back to the entrance. Before leaving Ostia you can visit a few tombs, just in front and to the right of the ticket office. One tomb type that you will see is the *columbarium*. This is a rectangular building, with niches in the walls in which urns were placed. The funerary chamber was often preceded by a small courtyard, the walls of which could also contain urns. Sometimes the *columbaria* had an upper floor. Other tombs were used for inhumation. The bodies were placed in arched recesses in the walls of the funerary chamber, sometimes in sarcophagi made of marble or terracotta, or in *fossae* in the ground.

Legend of the plan

- [1] Roman Gate (Porta Romana)
- [2] Aqueduct
- [3] Square of Victory (Piazzale della Vittoria)
- [4] Baths of the Coachmen (Terme dei Cisiarii)
- [5] Dead river (Fiume Morto)
- [6] Baths of Neptune (Terme di Nettuno)
- [7] Bar of Fortunatus (Caupona di Fortunato)
- [8] Public fountain
- [9] Barracks of the Fire Brigade (Caserma dei Vigili)
- [10] Square of the Guilds (Piazzale delle Corporazioni)
- [11] Theatre (Teatro)
- [12] Christian chapel (Oratorio Cristiano)
- [13] Castrum wall
- [14] House of the Millstones (Caseggiato dei Molini)
- [15] Museum (Museo)
- [16] House of the Wine-bar (Caseggiato del Termopolio)
- [17] Capitolium
- [18] Temple of Rome and Augustus (Tempio di Roma e Augusto)
- [19] Curia
- [20] Basilica
- [21] Round fountain
- [22] House of the Cult-niche (Caseggiato del Larario)
- [23] Round Temple (Tempio Rotondo)
- [24] Shops of the Fishmongers (Taberne dei Pescivendoli)
- [25] Republican Temples (Templi Repubblicani)
- [26] House of Cupid and Psyche (Domus di Amore e Psiche)
- [27] Baths of Mithras (Terme del Mitra)
- [28] Guild seat and Temple of the Grain Measurers (Aula e Tempio dei Mensores)
- [29] House of Serapis (Caseggiato del Serapide)
- [30] Baths of the Seven Sages (Terme dei Sette Sapienti)
- [31] House of the Charioteers (Caseggiato del Serapide)
- [32] Garden Houses (Case a Giardino)
- [33] Houses of the Muses and of the Painted Vaults (Domus delle Muse, Casa delle Volte Dipinte)
- [34] Schola of Trajan
- [35] Temple of the Ship Carpenters (Tempio dei Fabri Navales)
- [36] Christian basilica (Basilica cristiana)
- [37] Forum Baths (Terme del Foro)
- [38] House of the Triclinia (Caseggiato dei Triclini) and Public latrine
- [39] Bakery (Molino)
- [40] House of the Gorgons (Domus delle Gorgoni)
- [41] Temple of the Magna Mater (Tempio della Magna Mater)
- [42] Temple of Attis (Santuario di Attis) and Trench of the Blood (Fossa Sanguinis)
- [42] Temple of Bellona (Tempio di Bellona) and Seat of the lance-bearers (Schola degli Hastiferi)
- [43] House of the Porch (Domus del Protiro)
- [44] House of the Fortuna Annonaria (Domus della Fortuna Annonaria)
- [45] Fulling mill (Fullonica)
- [46] Necropolis
- [A] Baths of the Marine Gate (Terme di Porta Marina) (towards Synagogue)
- [S] Temple of Serapis and House of Bacchus and Ariadne (Caseggiato di Bacco e Arianna)

