

Chapter 10

The buildings and the people

§ 1 Introduction

In this first concluding chapter the kinds of buildings discussed in chapters 2 to 5 and the people involved with them are evaluated. Some other remains and buildings, such as the guild-seats, have been drawn into the discussion. Data without annotation has been presented in the preceding chapters or is to be found in the studies mentioned in chapter 1, § 3B.

§ 2 Dates

Little is known about pre-Trajanic Ostia: not many visible remains have survived - notable exceptions being some temples - and the investigations of the older strata have not yet yielded a general picture. The original Ostia was a small, rectangular fortress, built in the fourth century BC. In the Republican period the settlement expanded and developed from a defensive fortress and naval base into a commercial port. A new town wall was built, presumably by Sulla, enveloping a much larger area than the Castrum-wall. Republican and early Imperial Ostia contained a considerable number of *domus* (fig. 2), and in this respect the city must have been reminiscent of Pompeii. Few remains of apartments and commercial premises - the buildings dealt with in chapters 3 to 5 (figs. 2, 7) - date back to these centuries.

The construction by Claudius and Trajan of Portus - a large and safe artificial harbour complex a few kilometres to the north, and a district of Ostia - hastened the economic growth. A boom in the construction of new buildings is documented in the first half of the second century AD, setting in under Trajan, and reaching a peak during the reign of his successor, Hadrian. Up to the period of Septimius Severus the activities were less intense, but it must be remembered that in the excavated part of town little space for new buildings was left. During this summit of prosperity the houses of the wealthiest were - at least in the excavated part of town: the centre and part of the outer districts - mostly demolished and rebuilt as "caseggiati" and the like. Four older *domus* and the Palazzo Imperiale were kept in use. Only two new *domus* were built and both may well have been

let out.

In the Severan period and the following decades a fair amount of repairs and modifications is documented. However, the second half of the third century was a turning-point. Ostia lost its administrative independence somewhere after 251 AD, to be governed from Rome henceforth. After the middle of the third century AD the depots were no longer protected by fire-brigades, and after c. 300 AD hardly any building activity is documented in the workshops and depots. As early as the end of the third century a *medianum*-apartment - the Casa delle Ierodule - and a workshop -the Caseggiato dei Molini - collapsed, and neither building was properly rebuilt. Apparently the volume of the imported goods diminished in this period, a development which must be seen against the background of economic decline in the period of the Soldier Emperors, and the decreased population of Rome. The silting up of the Tiber mouth may have played a part as well.

Nonetheless in later antiquity Rome was still in need of large-scale imports. Whereas Ostia's services to Rome gradually became less important, Portus developed into Rome's main harbour. It was made an independent city by Constantine and called Civitas Flavia Constantiniana Portuensis. Ostia changed into a more pleasant living-environment, witness the installation of *domus*. Two new ones were built in the Severan period, six in the years c. 230-300, the earliest of these in the period c. 230-240. The numbers are not spectacular, but if they are contrasted with the figures from the second century AD a clear picture emerges: during Ostia's hey-day there were few *domus*, the increase coincides with the economic decline.

A too negative view of Ostia's economic situation in late antiquity is not justified: commercial activity must have continued on a local level. Thus in Insula V,II, investigated in detail by Boersma, the rooms (including shops) and areas certainly or possibly used for commercial and industrial purposes in the fourth century amounted to 44% of the total ground floor area.¹ That the city retained a considerable population for some time can be deduced from a late peak in building activity in the baths, in the period c. 300-450 AD. This peak is however partly the result of the detailed investigations by Heres. The building activities in the later fifth century and afterwards were negligible.

¹ Boersma 1985, 227, fig. 206.

§ 3 Appearance, lay-out, size, and distribution

An Ostian who left his home or work found himself amongst shops: over 800 have been identified in the excavated part of town, and the facades of most buildings are taken up by them. In and behind the facades he could enter an abundance of communal rooms and areas: porticos, corridors, *mediana* around which several families lived, courtyards, and gardens. Upon entering a building he would sometimes undergo the influence of architectural and decorative arrangements in part aimed at him. The richly decorated axis of a *domus*, from the elaborate entrance to the accentuated room behind the courtyard, would inform him about the social status of the inhabitants. A room or area on the axis would be used for his reception, depending on his relation to the owner. The prominent location of the reception area would tell him that this relation was much appreciated by the owner, who awarded a low priority to his private rooms. In a *medianum*-apartment on the other hand the communication via the building with our Ostian would be restricted to one or two representative rooms, the *exedrae* on either side of the *medianum*. In one depot - the Horrea Epagathiana et Epaphroditiana -, and also in many seats of guilds and in the Caserma dei Vigili (II,V,1) he would be confronted with a lay-out similar to that of the majority of the *domus*.

The Ostian *domus* from the second century AD and later are fairly small. The ground floor of most does not exceed 1000 m². Either the inhabitants were not exceptionally rich, or these houses were minor dwellings of very wealthy people. Several *medianum*-apartments on the other hand are surprisingly large. The ground floor area fluctuates between c. 100 and a little over 300 m², the largest had a total size of over 600 m². The size of many Ostian workshops and depots is considerable. The former sometimes have a ground floor area of over 1000 m² (for example Molino I,XIII,4). Some Ostian bakeries had more millstones than the largest Pompeian bakeries, and the output of these bakeries was at least two or two-and-a-half times that of the average Pompeian bakery. One of the largest depots, the Grandi Horrea, covers an area of almost 7000 m².

A problem that has been somewhat neglected by archaeologists is that of the distribution of the buildings. Before embarking upon this matter the chronological problems involved with it must be mentioned. Because of the lack of publications - it has to be repeated - the city as a whole cannot as yet be reconstructed with reliability for any given period. Sometimes parts are known well in one or more periods - for example the Case a Giardino, Insula dei Dipinti, and Insula V,II -, but these are exceptions. It is however fair to say that the situation visible today concurs with that in the first half

of the third century, if the late antique masonry is left out of consideration, which can be done with relative ease after Heres' studies.

The distribution was determined primarily by forces exerted by the city's infrastructure - the Forum, streets, intersections, and gates -, and by two natural features - the sea-shore and the Tiber -.

The sea-shore was apparently regarded as attractive, because rich and monumental buildings were positioned nearby.² To the south of the Porta Marina two honorary funerary monuments were erected in the second half of the first century BC, the Monumento Funerario (III,VII,2) and the Sepolcro di Cartilio Poplicola (IV,IX,2). To the latter monument the Loggia di Cartilio (IV,IX,1) - a large, roofed square - was added in the period of Hadrian. Noteworthy are furthermore the Hadrianic Foro di Porta Marina (IV,VIII,1) - a huge courtyard surrounded by a colonnade and a few rooms, possibly a sanctuary -, the Trajanic-Hadrianic Terme Marittime ("Terme di Porta Marina") - an Imperial bath -, and the Edificio con Opus Sectile (III,VII,8), the home of some wealthy organization, begun in the late fourth century, but never finished.³ Just inside the Porta Marina a large cluster of expensive apartments -the Case a Giardino - was built, later partly taken up by two *domus*.

A completely different kind of influence was exerted by the Tiber. This was Ostia's main economic artery. Not surprisingly many large depots were built behind the - unexcavated and partly destroyed - quays, their main entrances facing the river. Also near the Tiber the Caserma dei Vigili was located, close to the depots, which were of course fire hazards.⁴ Few *domus* from the second century AD and later are found in this economically important, but unattractive area.⁵ *Medianum*-apartments were somewhat more common in the northern part of Ostia: ten ground floor-apartments are found there.

The heart of the city, the Forum, was connected with the Tiber by one

² Cf. Minucius Felix, Octavius 2, 4 (text: chapter 1, § 5D) and SHA, Aurelianus 45, 2: *Forum nominis sui in Ostiensi ad mare fundare coepit, in quo postea praetorium publicum constitutum est* (probably the seat of the *praefectus annonae*, the *curator rei publicae Ostiensium*; Meiggs 1973, 186). The relatively large number of nine bars along the western Decumanus Maximus may testify to the popularity of the sea-shore.

³ On this building: Becatti 1969.

⁴ The eccentric location of the barracks, in the northeast part of town, is surprising however. Possibly there were auxiliary barracks (*excubitoria*) towards the west.

⁵ I leave out of consideration the location of the Domus dell'Area Sacra, Domus di Amore e Psiche, Domus di Apuleio, and Domus del Serapeo, which may have been determined by nearby temples. These four and the Domus di Giove e Ganimede are in the northern part of the city.

of Ostia's widest streets, the northern *Cardo Maximus*, a monumental grand avenue, flanked by porticos and shops. It was presumably along this street that dignitaries left and entered the port. After disembarking they walked towards the impressive back wall of the Capitolium and only reached the main square after skirting the temple. On the opposite side of the square is the Tempio di Roma e Augusto. The surrounding area is clearly under the influence of the Forum and may be called the monumental centre of town. To the west are two public buildings (the Tempio Rotondo (I,XI,1) and the Basilica (I,XI,5)), and the Curia or the seat of the *Seviri Augustales* (building I,IX,4). To the north are two loggia's (I,V,2 and I,VI,1). To the east is the seat of one of Ostia's most important guilds, the *fabri tignuarii* (the Caseggiato dei Triclini (I,XII,1)). Not far away are two late antique monumental alterations (the Foro della Statua Eroica and Exedra I,XII,3).⁶ To the south is an Imperial bath (the Terme del Foro). The influence of the Forum may also have prompted the building of expensive houses: to the northeast of the Capitolium is the Insula dei Dipinti, made up of a *domus*, *medianum*-apartments and shops, around a large garden; concentrations of *domus* are found to the southwest and southeast of the Terme del Foro.

The Ostian street-grid basically coincides with that of the *Castrum* and of the roads leading away from its gates. The plan of the fortress can still be traced around the Forum, and some streets coincide with the original borders of the inner and outer *pomerium*. From the four gates of the *Castrum* roads led to the Tiber (now the northern *Cardo*), Rome (the eastern *Decumanus*), Laurentum (the southern *Cardo*), the sea-shore (the western *Decumanus*), and the mouth of the Tiber (Via della Foce). Some of these roads were at oblique angles to the *Cardo* and *Decumanus* of the fortress.⁷ In the Republican period buildings rose on either side. Later no attempts were made to achieve a chessboard-pattern: neither when the city was given a new town wall, nor when it was largely rebuilt in the first half of the second century AD.

Most guild-seats and -temples were entered from two of the city's main thoroughfares: the western *Decumanus* (two or three buildings), the eastern *Decumanus* (three to six), and Via della Foce (one).⁸ Three smaller ones

⁶ For the Forum in late antiquity see also CIL XIV S, 4721 with Meiggs 1973, 94.

⁷ One may also note the angle of Via dei Misuratori del Grano and its original continuation, the road to the north of Insulae I,III and IV (Van Essen 1957).

⁸ Along the eastern *Decumanus*: Caseggiato dei Triclini (I,XII,1), Sede degli Augustali (V,VII,2), Tempio Collegiale (V,XI,1), and the possible seats c.d. Basilica/Aula del Buon Pastore (I,II,3-4), building I,IX,4, Aula del Gruppo di Marte e Venere (II,IX,3). Along the western *Decumanus*: Tempio dei Fabri Navales (III,II,2), Schola del Traiano (IV,V,15), and the possible seat Domus Fulminata (III,VII,4). Along Via della Foce: Tempio and Aula dei Mensores (I,XIX,1-3). I leave out of consideration two seats of religious guilds: the Schola degli Hastiferi (IV,I,5) and the Caseggiato di Bacco e Arianna (III,XVII,5). Their position was determined by the Campo della Magna Mater (IV,I) and the Serapeum (III,XVII,4). On the guilds and guild-seats of Ostia: Meiggs

were accessible from Via del Pomerio, Via degli Aurighi, and Via della Fortuna Annonaria,⁹ which may be called secondary thoroughfares. The largest and richest seats are found along the Decumanus. This was one of Ostia's most prestigious streets: the continuation of the Via Ostiensis (the road to Rome), connecting the Porta Romana with the Porta Marina, adorned with the Exedra mentioned above and, over the centuries, with ten *nymphaea*.¹⁰ The location of the most important seats along this boulevard is commensurate with the importance and wealth of the guilds. This aspect was accentuated by the monumental facade of the Schola del Traiano (IV,V,15): a vestibule with a marble floor and two huge fountain-niches,¹¹ separated from the street by four columns.

Fifteen *domus* from the Republican period and the first century AD have been identified. Ten were accessible from main streets (from the western Decumanus (six), eastern Decumanus, Via della Foce, and southern Cardo (two)), five from secondary streets (three from Via delle Casette Repubblicane, two from Via della Fortuna Annonaria). Of the *domus* built in the second century AD and the Severan period four are found along secondary streets (Via dei Dipinti, Via del Hospitium, Via del Tempio Rotondo, Via della Fortuna Annonaria), one along a side street (Via delle Volte Dipinte). As to the *domus* from later antiquity, three were entered from main streets (two from the western Decumanus, one from the southern Cardo), four from secondary thoroughfares (Via del Tempio Rotondo, Via del Hospitium (two), Semita dei Cippi), and three from side-streets and inner courts (Domus del Viridario, Domus dell'Aquila, Domus dei Dioscuri).

Four ground floor-apartments were entered from secondary thoroughfares (Via dei Vigili (two), Via della Fontana, Via delle Corporazioni), but most from side streets and inner courts (Via dei Dipinti, Via della Casa della Cantina and the road to the south; Case a Giardino, Casette Tipo, Caseggiato del Temistocle).¹²

1973, chapter 14; Hermansen 1982(1), 61-123.

⁹ The Tempio Collegiale I,X,4, the Domus di Marte (III,II,5), and the Caseggiato dei Lottatori (V,III,1).

¹⁰ On the centre of the Forum; I,II,1; I,XIV,1; II,VI,2; II,VII,6; II,VII,7; II,IX,1; IV,VII,1; IV,VIII,4; V,XVII,2. Also the most important Ostians were buried outside Porta Romana along the Via Ostiensis. The majority of the population was laid to rest in the huge necropolis outside Porta Laurentina.

¹¹ Neuerburg 1965, 192-193 nr. 132, fig. 95.

¹² I have not considered the location of the Casa della Domus Fulminata, which may well have been determined by that of the adjacent "*domus*" (see chapter 6, § 2A, catalogue A, nr. 42).

The figures concerning the *domus* and apartments may partly be explained by the representative nature and attractive qualities of the *domus* on the one hand, and by the still considerable wealth of the inhabitants of the *medianum*-apartments on the other. Major streets, where many *domus* but few apartments are found, could offer the status befitting the wealthy. Side streets and inner squares offered the relative quiet and peace becoming to the dwellings of the wealthier people. The relation between main streets and the *domus* probably reflects the economic changes in the city. No *domus* are found along the Decumanus, Cardo, and Via della Foce in the second century AD and the Severan period, when these streets attracted commercial life and repelled rich houses (they were then the favourite location for the guild-seats). Before the second century AD many *domus* were entered from these streets, and in later antiquity some *domus* are found there again.

Virtually all intersections were taken up by commercial buildings or rooms. Crossroads are by nature busy places, and it is presumably not by chance that eight bars were identified here, a number that may well have been much higher. The Macellum, a public commercial building, is on one of the city's main crossroads (the Bivio del Castrum), a fashionable busy spot. Like the intersections the area around a city-gate must have been a natural meeting-place. *Cisiarii* (taxi-drivers) could be found near the Porta Romana.¹³ Opposite the Porta Laurentina may have been a brothel (the Domus delle Gorgoni).

The buildings themselves also influenced the nature of a quarter. It is probably not a coincidence that the Domus del Ninfeo and Domus dei Dioscuri were installed in a wealthy residential quarter - the Case a Giardino - , nor that they are opposite each other. A row of four *domus* is found to the northwest of Via del Hospitium. Expensive hotels were built opposite this row and right outside the Case a Giardino: the Hospitium del Pavone and Hospitium delle Volte Dipinte. The establishment of bakeries in the Caseggiato dei Molini and Caseggiato delle Fornaci is probably to be explained by, respectively, the proximity of a depot for the storage of corn, and of the Caserma dei Vigili. A row of four depots is found to the south of the eastern Decumanus, a group of three and at least one workshop to the northwest of the Forum.¹⁴ A depot, a fulling-mill, a

¹³ In Pompeii *cisiarii* are documented near the Porta Stabiana (De Vos - De Vos 1982, 81).

¹⁴ To the south of the Decumanus: the Magazzino Annonario, Horrea dell'Artemide, Horrea di Hortensius, and Horrea V,XII,2. To the northwest of the Forum: the Piccolo Mercato, Horrea Epagathiana et Epaphroditiana, Horrea I,VIII,2, and Caseggiato I,IX,2.

bakery, a possible brothel, and some shops are grouped together to the south of the Terme del Foro.¹⁵ Further examples of the clustering of depots and workshops could be offered.

Nevertheless the clustering of buildings with the same or with a similar function only partly characterizes the distribution. Habitations could be found everywhere: groups of two, four, or more ground floor-apartments are scattered over the entire city; the even distribution of the baths indicates that the upper floor-apartments, where the large majority of the population lived, were also spread out evenly. Commercial and related activities took place almost everywhere: most of the seats of the guilds are positioned far away from each other; single and clustered depots and workshops were built throughout the city; shops are found not only along main streets, but also often along minor streets and around inner squares. Finally it is noteworthy that a number of depots and large industrial premises surrounds the monumental centre of town.¹⁶

§ 4 The owners, inhabitants, visitors, workers, and personnel

We may assume that the *domus* of the Republican period and of the first two centuries of the Imperial period were inhabited by the town's notables. However, the small total number in the second century AD indicates that the local elite now avoided the centre of town and at least those outer districts which have been excavated. The virtual disappearance of *domus* is presumably to be understood against the background of the paramount importance of commercial activities in this period. Apparently the primarily commercial city could not really offer the attractive locations befitting the houses of the wealthiest, who may have preferred to live in the area to the south of Ostia.¹⁷ In the same period the builders of the most expensive *medianum*-apartments perhaps noted a similar centrifugal inclination amongst their potential tenants: the Case a Giardino are on an attractive spot, but also in the outskirts of the city. Thus the wealthiest people in second century Ostia were, apart from the owners of a few *domus*, the inhabitants of the expensive *medianum*-apartments: presumably the "lower

¹⁵ Insula I,XIII.

¹⁶ The Caseggiato del Pantomimo Apolausto, Caseggiato del Balcone Ligneo, Caseggiato dei Molini, Caseggiato della Cisterna, Horrea I,XIII,1, Fullonica I,XIII,3, Molino I,XIII,4, Officina Stuppatoria, Caseggiato I,IX,2, Piccolo Mercato. The large number of bakeries and possible bakeries is noteworthy (list: chapter 4, § 4).

¹⁷ Cf. Meiggs 1973, 69.

upper class", often freedmen, drawing their wealth from commerce.

Most of the habitations of the remaining and by far the largest part of the population were on the upper floors and have disappeared.¹⁸ The working environment of these people however has been preserved. There we must picture free-born people alongside slaves and freed slaves. Many of these people came from the eastern half of the Empire. Of the *cognomina* in the inscriptions from the second century 35% is non-Latin - mainly Greek -, in the third century the percentage is 44%. All in all the Latin *cognomina* account for 59%, the Greek ones for 40%. In Portus and Rome easterners were present on a larger scale. In Rome 63% of the *cognomina* is Greek.¹⁹ Most inscriptions from the Ostian Serapeum are in Latin, in the Serapeum of Portus Greek was the preferred language.²⁰

The economic boom of the second century, reflected by the disappearance of the *domus* and the prominent role of apartments and various commercial buildings, led to shifts in the pattern of social relations.

In the *domus* lived both the owners and slaves. Often slaves or freedmen working for the owner ran shops in the facade of the house. If we assume that in the second century the *domus* were replaced by suburban *villae*, then the houses of the *domini* on the one hand, and the sales-areas and living-quarters of their subordinates on the other may well have been separated.

The owner of the Domus della Fortuna Annonaria - one of the few remaining *domus* -, probably owned commercial buildings and habitations in the block containing his house, in the later second and early third century. Slaves and freedmen of his may have lived and worked there. In the second century the owner of the Domus di Apuleio may have built some workshops in the vicinity of his house. However, this proximity of upper and lower class was by now exceptional. When we hear that in mid-second century Ostia Iunia Libertas bequeathed the use and income of gardens, buildings, and shops to her freedmen and -women (who may already have lived and worked there),²¹ we may assume that she did not herself live near this property, and that there was no topographical linkage between this woman and her former slaves.

¹⁸ In the second century Ostia may have had some 40.000 inhabitants (Riemann 1975, 196). Cf. Meiggs 1973, appendix VIII (50.000 - 60.000).

¹⁹ Licordari 1977, 240. Greek names do not necessarily indicate a Greek origin: they may have been given to slaves by the traders or owners (Meiggs 1973, 225; H. Solin in Licordari 1977, 244).

²⁰ Floriani Squarciapino 1962(1), 24-25; Malaise 1972(1), Ostia nrs. 16, 19-23, 27, 29, 30 (7 in Latin, 2 in Greek), Portus p. 88-95. In general: Meiggs 1973, 216.

²¹ See chapter 3, § 4.

People of varying wealth paid visits to the owner of a *domus*: the *clientela* and people with a social status similar to that of the owner. In the second century, because the *domini-patroni* avoided the commercial environment and because of the disappearance of the *domus*, the wealthy and their *clientelae* were physically set apart more than before. The *medianum*-apartments did not compensate this development. The expensive ground floor apartments are not connected with workshops. They contain representative rooms where wealthy people could be received, but no large vestibules and other areas for the reception of *clientelae*. And as we have seen these habitations too may testify to a centrifugal inclination.

A conspicuous new focal point in second century Ostia was formed by the guilds. Most of their seats, erected in the wake of the increasing economic importance of the city, had a prominent place in town, along main streets. The members had meals together, and food and money were distributed among them by the wealthier members. They elected the officials of the guild, in contrast to local politics, where after c. 100 AD the local magistrates were elected by the senate instead of the people. The guilds could own apartments and shops, and we may assume that these were at least sometimes used by members or by some of their slaves and freedmen. The decline of Ostia, setting in in the third century, naturally affected the guilds. Few guild-inscriptions have been found which are later than the Severan period. Fourth century masonry is attested in one seat only.²² The scene was set for the return of the *domus*.

²² The Schola del Traiano (Heres 1982, 519-525: second quarter of fourth century). Masonry from the fourth century is also found in the Basilica/Aula del Buon Pastore and in the Aula del Gruppo di Marte e Venere (Heres 1982, 372-377, 458-463), which may have been guild-seats.