

Second Interim Report: Theme 2 (Sophie Menge)

PhD-Project: The recently discovered Sanctuary on the Forum of Ostia. Ceramics in Context: The Development of the Sacred Area from the Middle Republic to the Hadrianic Period

In the course of the Hadrianic building programme which changed the face of Ostia's main forum significantly, the sanctuary in the north-east of the forum was abandoned and the precinct was transformed into a profane building complex consisting of a portico and a taberna complex. Once the cultic and topographical centre the sanctuary, the altar area was transformed into an open-air courtyard surrounded by walls (TFR2) which partly covered the altar structures. This interim report will focus on the analysis of the built structures of those phases, specifically on the architectural transformation of the altar area (phases 6 and 7, see Tab 1).

Phase	Altar phase	Altar level	Pavement level TFR2 (ASL)	Pavement	Date
1	A1b1 (?) (green)	> 1,15 m (?)	(1,14 m)	Beaten-earth floor	Middle Republican: Middle – end of 3 rd c BCE (?)
2	A1b2 (yellow)	1,35 m	1,30 m	Tile pavement	Middle Republican: End of 3 rd c BCE
3	A1b3 (orange)	1,54 m	1,54–1,60 m	Tile pavement	Late Republican: Beginning of 2 nd c – 1 st half of 2 nd c BCE
4	A1b4 (blue)	1,75 m	1,70–1,75 m	Tuff slab pavement	Late Republican: 2 nd half of 2 nd c – middle of 1 st c BCE
5	A1c1 (white)	1,90 m	1,87–1,90 m	Beaten-earth floor	Late Republican: Middle of 1 st c BCE
5a	A1c2 (white)	1,90 m	1,96 m	Repair of beaten-earth floor (5)	Late Republican – Imperial: After the middle of 1 st c BCE – 119–121 CE (coins)
6	A1d1 (red)	2,22 m	2,07 m	Beaten-earth floor	Imperial: 119–121 CE – 130 CE (brick stamps)
7	A1d2 (purple)	2,22 m	2,22 m (intermediate) 2,43 m	Mortar Beaten-earth floor	Imperial: <i>T. a quo</i> : 130 CE

Tab. 1 Phases of the area TFR2

The closing and abandonment of a sacred area was a complex act: It was of utmost importance not to displease the deities worshipped in the sanctuary. The transformation of the area took place in several steps and could have taken up to eleven years. (119–130 CE: Several coins from these layers date to 119–121 CE, while the north-western forum portico's latest brick stamps date to 130 CE.)

The Sequence of the Walls of the Area TFR2 and of their Fundaments

The varying fundament levels of the walls covering the former altar area as well as the varying building techniques of the fundaments themselves indicate that they were not built at the exact same time. To understand the progress of the area's transformation, it is key to regard the walls separately from their fundaments, as it becomes evident quite quickly that they were not necessarily always built in the same step of the process. In the area north-east of the forum, there are two main fundament levels: The first, lower level is at around 2,43 m ASL, while the second fundament level is raised to around 2,86 m ASL. Certainly, the lower fundament level is to be attributed to an earlier building phase. This level is for instance found in the fundaments of the walls east of the area TFR2, for example in the *opus mixtum* walls of the area TFR3 and the eastern wall of the area TFR2 which continues towards north.

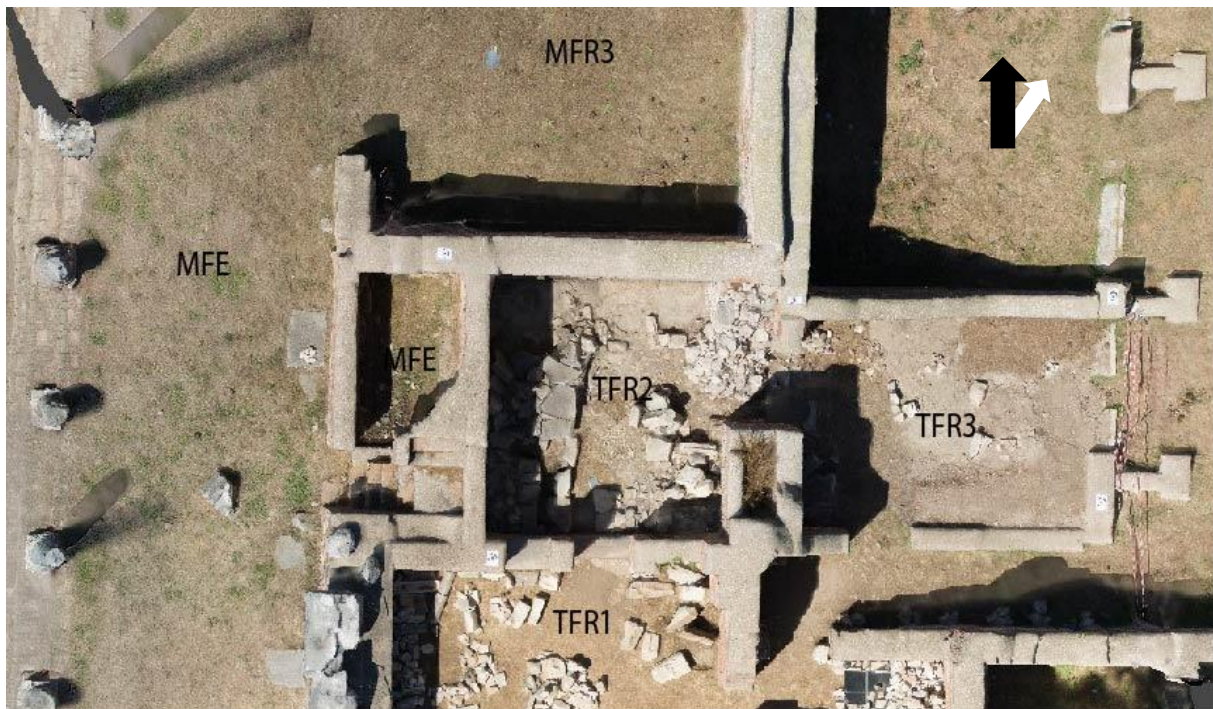


Fig. 1 The area TFR2 and the surrounding buildings

The raised fundament level of 2,86 m ASL is directly connected to the Hadrianic building programme and thus with the construction of the north-eastern forum portico (MFE) and its adjoining rooms (MFR1–3). Interestingly enough, the area TFR2 shows both of these fundament levels, sometimes it is even possible to see the sequence of both levels in the very same fundament, thus making the slow transformation of the altar area, the centre of the sanctuary, quite evident.

Not only the building techniques and the fundament levels of the walls, but also the stratigraphy of their building pits helps to understand the sequence of the construction of the walls and their fundaments as well as the process of covering the altar itself. A stratigraphical unit which is key to understand this

transformational period is the SU 002, a dense ceramic layer covering the last solidly built altar structures. This layer, datable with a *terminus a quo* of 119–121 CE, covers the northern building pit (SU 060). The latter contains the same find spectrum as SU 002, there are even joining fragments from the same vessels spread throughout both contexts. This means, that the ceramic layer SU 002 was laid out after the building pit for the fundamentals of the northern wall were filled and thus, after the *opus caementitium* fundamentals of the northern wall were poured. On the other side of the area, the building pit for the southern wall's fundament cut through the SU 002, meaning this fundament was constructed after the laying of the SU 002 (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 The ceramic layer 002 and the surface of the building pit 070 (on the left) in the south-western corner of the area TFR2

The western and the northern wall are interlocked (see Fig. 3) and have the same fundament level (2,86 m ASL) and were thus built at the same time, even though it is obvious, that their fundamentals were built in different stages: Almost the entire northern wall's fundament is pure *opus caementitium* poured into wooden scaffolding, while the upper part consists of cement and tuff cut-offs. The western wall's fundament is only partly visible: In the northern-most two thirds of the fundament, its lower half consists of an enormous relieving arch. In the southern third of the fundament, elements of the former altar structures are integrated into the fundament. Both the altar structures and the southern half of the relieving arch are topped-off by three rows of bricks. The remaining upper part of the fundament is created in the same way as the uppermost section of the northern fundament: a combination of mortar and tuff cut-offs (see Fig. 3). As mentioned above, the fundament level of 2,86 m ASL was the pavement level of the portico (MFE) and its adjoining rooms (MFR) with whom the area TFR2 shares its northern

and western walls. In the area TFR2, the pavement level of the Hadrianic building programme was at 2,43 m ASL, meaning that the upper 43 cm of the northern and western wall fundaments were exposed.



Fig. 3 *The fundaments of the northern wall (on the right) and the western wall (on the left)*

The Southern Wall: When was the Area TFR2 closed-off towards the area TFR1?

What at first glance seems to be a doorway connecting the areas TFR1 and 2 in fact used to be a closed gap, which was probably opened either in Late Antiquity when the area was used in connection with lime burning or during the excavations in the first half of the 20th century (see Fig. 4, middle).



Fig. 4 *The southern wall of the area TFR2 with the once closed-off wall towards the area TFR1*

It was common to construct the supporting pillars of a building in *opus latericium* and leave the gaps in between them open. That way, it could be decided later how the space was going to be used, i.e. by either closing off those gaps and creating a closed wall or by leaving them open as passageways or as windows ('modular construction'). It is possible, that as a former cultic centre of a sanctuary, the area TFR2 had been closed-off towards the taberna TFR1. As mentioned above, the other possibility would be a Late Antique closing-off. The building technique of filling those 'modular' gaps with cement and tuff cut-offs was used throughout the centuries and is thus unfortunately not dateable. Hence, we are dealing with a closing-off some time in between the first half of the 2nd century, when these walls were built and the 6th century, when the area was transformed into a lime kiln's storage area. It is possible that the area was closed-off initially to protect a former sacred space and was later opened so that it could serve as a backyard for one of the tabernae. This would mean, that the dolia and a basin located in the south-eastern corner of the area TFR2 (see Fig. 5) were set in place in connection to that functional phase of the structure, whether that took place immediately after the closing of the sanctuary in the Hadrianic period or later, is difficult to gather.

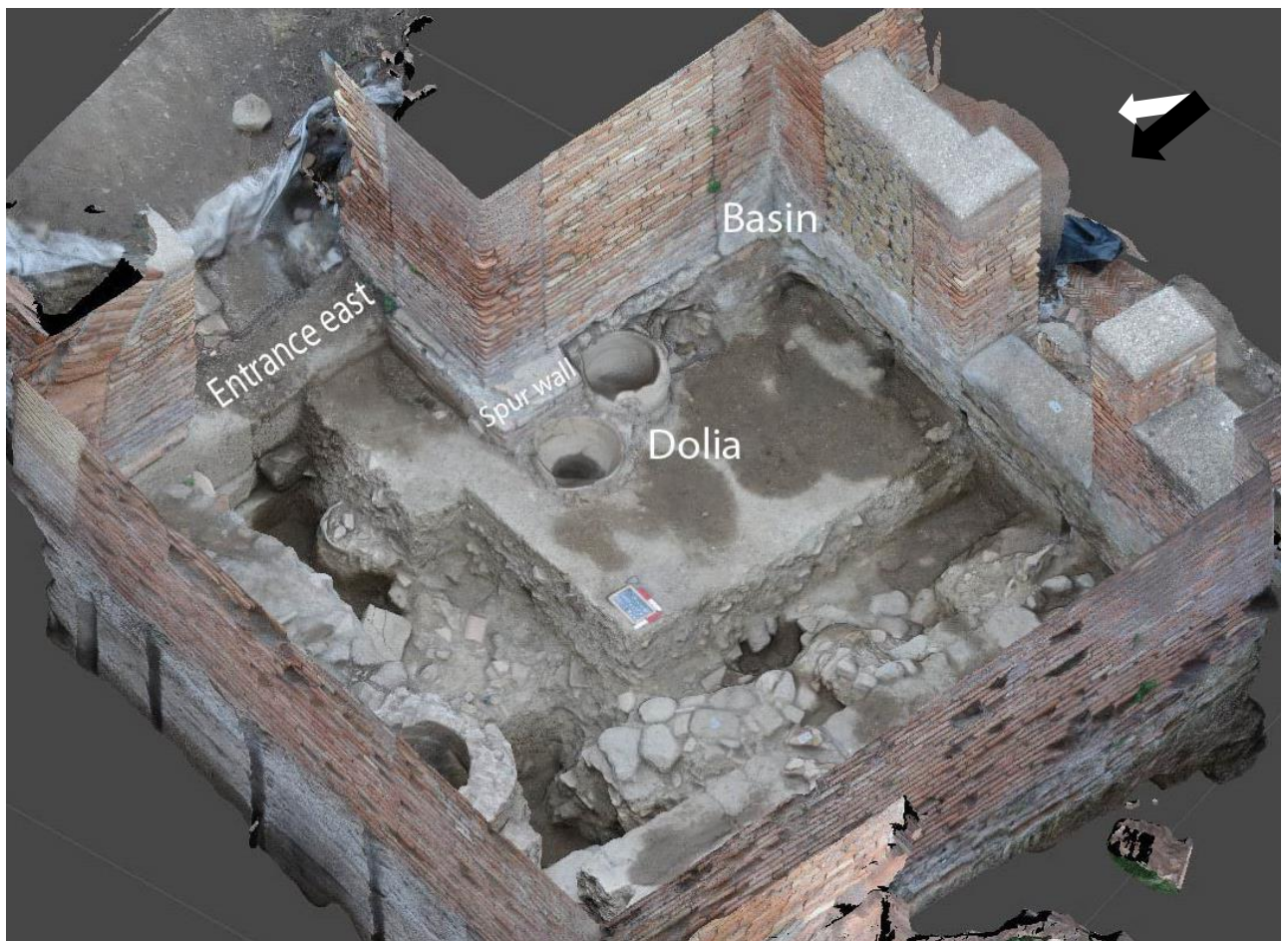


Fig. 5 The south-eastern corner of the area TFR2

It is obvious, that the dolia were set into the earth after the small spur wall next to the eastern entrance of the area TFR2 was built, as they are positioned within the former building pit of this walls (see Fig. 5).

The curious added wall segments in the south-eastern corner of the area TFR2

In the south-eastern corner of the area TFR2, a curious arrangement of three wall segments can be observed. They appear to be a later added construction in between the southern and the eastern wall which created a closed-off rectangular space which is nowadays filled with vegetation. Wall segment 1 sits on top of the aforementioned spur wall next to the eastern entrance of the area TFR2. Wall segment 3 is parallel to wall segment 1 but does not sit on top of a pre-existing spur wall. In between those two segments, wall segment 2 runs parallel to TFR2's eastern wall and seems to be the latest built segment which closes off the small area created in between the walls (see Fig. 6).



Fig. 6 The added corner wall segments in the south-eastern corner of the area TFR2

The dolia and the basin were set in place after all of the wall segments were constructed, meaning that the small space was most probably closed off before TFR2 was used as a taberna courtyard.

But what purpose does this curious arrangement serve? Is it protecting an important feature of the former sanctuary? It is highly debateable, as the main altar of the sanctuary itself did not get the same treatment. It was dismantled, partly buried, and partly built atop of – but it was not surrounded by dedicated walls and hidden away completely. Even if the southern wall used to be closed off, there

still used to be an entrance to the area from the adjoining area TFR3 in the east. At this point, the function of the 'corner wall segments' remains uncertain.