

PhD THEME 3: COINS AND METALS IN CONTEXT

The metals from TFR and the coins from TDV

- INTRODUCTION

The theme of small-finds and coins aims to study the huge numismatic material found during the excavations of the Forum area of Ostia Antica, in the context of the "Ostia Forum Projekt", in particular the coins of the Late Antique period. The study of the last coins found in sealed contexts, allows to analyze and to date with greater accuracy the last phase of use of a determined building or a determined area. Part of the project will include a comparison with numismatic materials from Late Antique contexts found in other areas of Ostia Antica¹ and from neighboring cities². From these cross comparisons it will be possible to better define the role of Ostia in the Late Antique Mediterranean trade, in a period during which nearby Portus takes over. In this phase the comparison with the other classes of Late Antique materials, found not only in the Forum will be essential, to determine which goods circulated in the city. The study of fractioned and sheared coins is a numismatic topic which, in recent years, has been of great interest to the academic community³, we will see the conspicuous number of fragmented coins found during the OFP excavations, in particular in the so-called Taberna della Venere (from now on abbreviated in TDV).

- THE FIRST MONTHS

The first year of doctorate linked to the theme of coins and metals, included work to be carried out almost exclusively in the deposits of Ostia Antica, so that numismatic materials could be cleaned and restored. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, until September it had not been possible to see the metal findings directly, for the closure of the Ostia Antica deposits. After a continuous exchange of emails in previous months, waiting for news from the deposits, in July, Dr. Panariti was contacted by telephone. She expressed her regret for the situation and announced the intention of the Parco Archeologico staff to call a meeting to discuss the reopening of the deposits for researchers. Once the study group had gathered together for the last week of August, Dr. Paola Germoni, currently in charge of managing the deposits, was contacted to make an appointment.

¹ Spagnoli 1993, pp. 247-266; Williams 2015, pp. 245-273; VV.AA. 2014, pp. 173-186.

² Spagnoli 2011, pp. 211-230; Cepeda Ocampo 1991, pp. 7-199; Kent 1988, pp. 281-285; Marani 2011, pp. 1191-1197; Ceci, Cancellieri 2003, pp. 243-254.

³ Single-issue conference on 16-17 September 2019. Blondeau, Doyen, Duchemin 2011, pp. 283-287; Luciano 2017, pp. 269-276.

- THE MATERIALS

As far as the theme of metal findings is concerned, the work started with the finds preserved in the shack inside the Parco Archeologico. Inside the shack were kept numerous iron, lead and bronze objects from two specific areas of the Forum, the Taberna Forum Rooms (TFR, *Fig.1*) and the Taberna della Venere (TDV, *Fig.2*). In particular there were 74 bronze coins coming from the two rooms of the TDV.

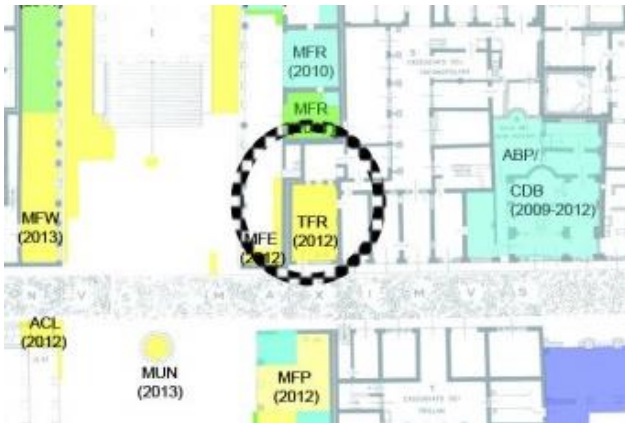


Fig.1: The TFR rooms.

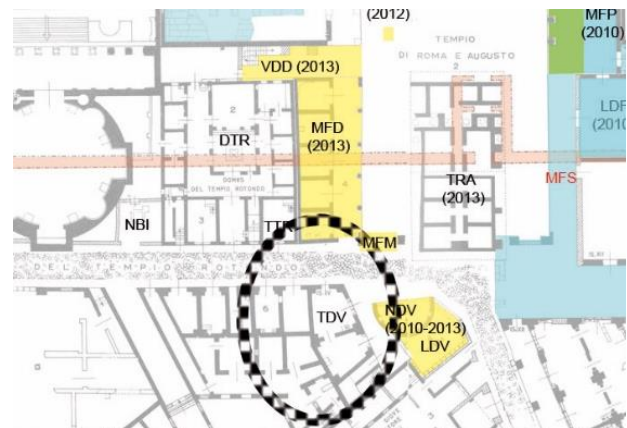


Fig.2: The TDV rooms.

The cleaning of the metal items then started to mechanically remove the earth using a scalpel and dry brush.

The materials have been quite satisfying since the first days, allowing the identification of two groups of bronze hooks, from TFR2, context 002.

Because of the delicate state of conservation in which they were in, the two packets of hooks were initially roughened from the earth using a scalpel, then, when the excessive fragility of the bronze risked compromising, a specific treatment was chosen to consolidate the metal (*Fig.3*).



Figure 3: The first hooks group before the consolidation.

The hooks, in the parts uncovered from the earth, have been treated with cotton wraps soaked in Inccral 44, a consolidating agent with Paraloid and Benzotriazole dissolved in benzene, so as to avoid the crushing of the parts already cleaned. Once dried from the mixture, I was able to remove the remaining earthen encrustations, without the risk of making the whole item crumble. I then reintegrated the parts that had come off, using an epoxy glue. As a final treatment I also distributed Inccral 44 on the areas that were earthy at the time of the first application.



Figure 3: The first hook pack after the restoration.

44, a consolidating agent with Paraloid and Benzotriazole dissolved in benzene, so as to avoid the crushing of the parts already cleaned. Once dried from the mixture, I was able to remove the remaining earthen encrustations, without the risk of making the whole item crumble. I then reintegrated the parts that had come off, using an epoxy glue. As a final treatment I also distributed Inccral 44 on the areas that were earthy at the time of the first application.

The same treatment was given to the second group of bronze hooks (Fig. 4-5).



Figures 4-5: The second hooks group before and after the restoration.

Another interesting find consists of an iron arrowhead (5,1 cm length) coming from TFR1, 001. The area of discovery and the rarity of weapons in the site of Ostia Antica make it an important item.

At the time of discovery, the iron of the arrowhead had a surface with numerous ferrous concretions, due to the oxidation of the underlying metal (Fig.6).



Figure 6: The Iron arrowhead before the cleaning with the EDTA.

For this reason, after an initial mechanical cleaning using a scalpel, it was decided to clean the metal below using EDTA, an acid with chelating properties. Given the considerable amount of oxides, it was decided to avoid the EDTA wrap phase, a procedure necessary to see the reactivity of the metal in the case of low-oxidised objects. A bath was then performed by immersion in EDTA solution at saturation point (around 7%) in distilled water, continuously checking the object. After about ten minutes, the arrowhead was rinsed and the action of the acid was cancelled

immersion in EDTA solution at saturation point (around 7%) in distilled water, continuously checking the object. After about ten minutes, the arrowhead was rinsed and the action of the acid was cancelled

with bicarbonate. The incrustations, weakened by the action of EDTA, were largely removed using a scalpel. After complete drying, the iron was treated with Incral 44 to consolidate the surface and block the corrosion process (*Fig.7-8*).



Figure 7-8: The two sides of the arrowhead after the treatment.

After a few days spent working on the metals stored in the shack, following the positive meeting with Dr. Germoni, I was granted permission to count the coins from the excavation present in the deposits of the Parco Archeologico.

This operation involved the opening of all the bags used to contain the finds, the transcription of the area of discovery and the contexts on a tag, which was then inserted with the corresponding coin inside a smaller bag.



Figure 9: Just a part of the coins coming from TDV.

The total number of coins discovered during the excavations of the OFP are about 906 (the number varies, depending on whether or not we consider the coins coming from research through metal detector in the ground stack), with a great prevalence of coins coming from the TDV rooms excavation of 2018, about 451 (*Fig.9*).

Having assessed the importance of numismatic and metallic materials in general, coming from the Taberna, it was decided to focus the cleaning work on the finds preserved in the shack and coming from this specific area.

- THE TABERNA DELLA VENERE ROOMS

The archaeological surveys in TDV 1 started in the summer campaign in 2014. The initial situation presented an accumulation of marble fragments in the south corner of the room (*Fig.10*).



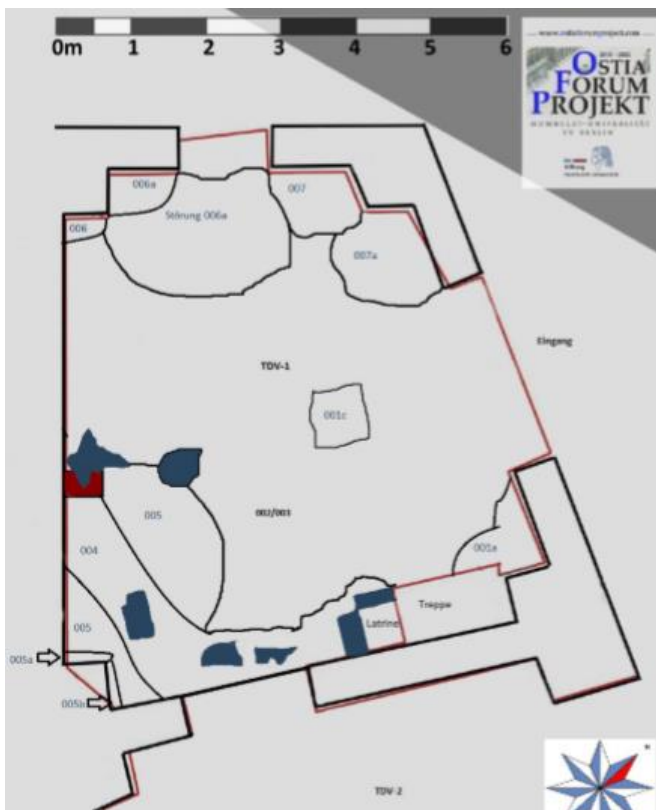
Figure 10: view from inside TDV 1 in the direction of the entrance of TDV 2 in 2014.



Figure 11: the removal of the marble deposit in 2015.

The following year it was decided to remove the accumulation of marble and to excavate an area of 30 centimetres by 100 centimetres, about twenty centimetres deep (*Fig.11*). In total 101 individual finds were recorded, among which there were 73 coins.

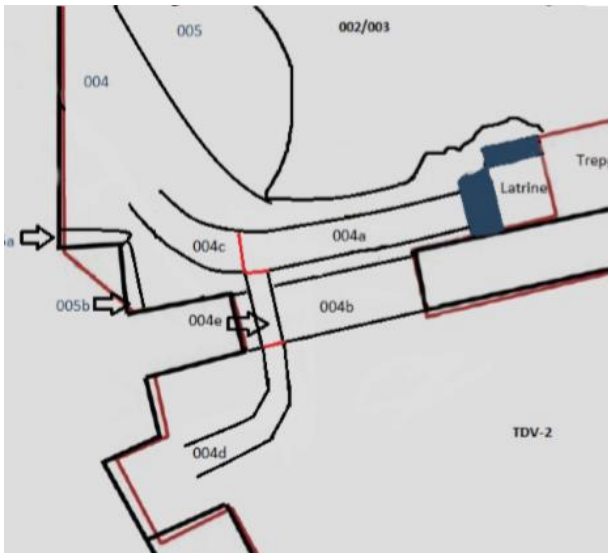
Despite the initial, encouraging discoveries made in 2015, it was not until 2018 that systematic excavation of this area was planned.



A preliminary work on the coins coming from the TDV rooms was carried out in the master thesis phase by Alexander Dorn. Of particular importance was, in order to reconstruct the stratigraphic sections, its analysis of the contexts of discovery (having excavated them directly). Dorn's work involved a selection of coins, while those kept in the shack are another group. These will be examined here and will be cross-referenced with the data from Dorn's selection only later.

Figure 12: Dorn drawing of the TDV1 with the main stratigraphic units indicated.

The TDV is very important in the research concerning the late antique phase of the shops overlooking the Forum square. The room apparently presents a situation very similar to that attested by the excavations of the Ostia Marina Project of the University of Bologna, with the same prevalence of coins from the end of the IV - beginning of the V century A.D., with a sequence that seems to be interrupted around the 440s. In the case of the Ostia Marina Project, the sequences of clay and silt levels suggest that the burial of the site would have occurred following flooding of the Tiber.⁴



In the TDV, along the south-east wall, runs a gutter, used as a latrine for the Taberna, the reference context of this gutter is 004a. At the South corner of the door on the TDV2, a second gutter, coming from this last room, is crossed, the context for the gutter in TDV1 after this connection is 004c. This is a very important aspect, as only thanks to this division is it possible to divide the monetary findings from TDV1 or TDV2.

Figure 13: Dorn drawing of the cross of the channel coming from TDV2 with that one of TDV1.

From the area where the *Taberna* counter was to be located comes what has been identified as a lead scale weight. The shape is that of a globe with a flat side, on which is soldered what must have been an iron hook, thanks to which the weight could slide on a steelyard (*Figg.14-15*).



Figures 14-15: The lead weight before and after the cleaning and identification.

⁴ VV.AA. 2017, pp. 66-68.

Unfortunately this type of weights have been used for centuries and do not have a precise chronological horizon, but the presence of a large gastropod shell (*Fig. 17*) and the hundreds of shells and shell fragments suggest that the Taberna's main activity was the sale of shellfish, probably raw.



Figure 16: example of a roman steelyard, sold at Christie's.



Figure 17: the big gastropod shell discovered close to the lead weight

From the surface layers, close to the lead weight (001, 001a) come two other noteworthy objects; a fragment of pipe and what appears to be a guide for hinges, both made of lead (*Fig. 18-19*).



Figures 18-19: Fragment of water pipe and the guide for hinges.

Other objects worth mentioning are the lead slugs found in various areas and contexts of the TDV, some of which are considerable in size and weight (well over 200g) (*Fig. 20*). Such a quantity of molten metal slag could make one think of the processing waste of a factory dedicated to the production of limestone, using ancient marble, in this case lead could be the claws that could join parts of marble.

If we exclude coins, apparently the room did not return bronze materials, if we exclude a small perforated sheet, perhaps pertinent to the decoration of a small wooden artefact (TDV1, 002) (*Fig. 21*). In addition, at least 24 iron nails were found scattered in various contexts inside the room (nail fragments that do not retain at least part of the head were discarded as they could distort the count).

As far as iron materials are concerned, a wall ring is of interest, of which the graft that had to be fixed to the wall is also preserved, so that the ring is parallel to the wall, an element that is absolutely compatible with the use of the room as a taberna (*Fig.22*).



Figure 20: Lead slag from TDV1, topsoil, 115x92 mm.



Figure 22: Iron wall ring.



Figure 21: Bronze perforated sheet.

As far as the iron finds are concerned, at least 34 nails of various sizes come from the whole area of the room, perhaps pertinent to the door that from the Taberna had to face the external street. These nails were found in almost all the layers, as if they had been dispersed as a result of a powerful infiltration of water, together with coins and other materials that had to be found on the ancient trampling floor.



Figure 23: TDV 1 001, 2018-19- Nail 1, 44 mm., 21,02 g. (mosaic piece included).



Figure 24: TDV 1 004, 2018-336- Nail 4, 60 mm., 30,29 g.

- BIBLIOGRAPHY

VV.AA., *Nuovi dati e argomenti per Ostia tardoantica dal Progetto Ostia Marina*, «MEFRA 126/1», 2014, pp. 173-186.

Blondeau R. - Doyen J. M. - Duchemin J. P., *Les Rues-des-Vignes (Nord)*, «Chronique Numismatique XXIX», 2011, p. 283-287.

Ceci F., Cancellieri M., *Tra età romana e tardoantico: il riutilizzo delle domus romane di Priverno (Latina, Italia) come aree funerarie tardoantiche e altomedievali*, «Histria Antiqua 11», 2003, pp. 243-254.

Cepeda Ocampo J.J., *Due ripostigli monetali di V secolo d.C. rinvenuti a Roma. Villa Giulia, 1922 – Pratica di Mare*, 1967, «BdN 16-17», pp. 7-199.

Kent J.P.C., *The Fifth Century Coinage of Honorius in Italy and Gaul*, «RIN 90», 1988a, pp. 281-294.

Luciano A., *Le monete dall'insediamento romano presso San Vincenzo al Volturno (IS)*, «RIN 118», 2017, pp. 269-276.

Marani F., *Note sulla circolazione monetaria tardoantica nel Lazio meridionale: i reperti di S. Ilario ad bivium*, in Holmes N. (ed.) *Proceedings of the XIV International Numismatic Congress (Glasgow, 2009)*, II, Glasgow 2011, pp. 1191-1197.

RIC X: Carson R.A.G. – Kent J.P.C. – Burnett A.M., *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume X, The divided Empire and the fall of the Western Parts A.D. 395-491*, London, 1994.

Spagnoli E., *Alcune riflessioni sulla circolazione monetaria in epoca tardoantica a Ostia (Pianabella) e a Porto. I rinvenimenti degli scavi 1988-1991*, in *La storia economica di Roma nell'alto Medioevo alla luce dei recenti scavi archeologici*, Firenze, 1993, pp. 247-266.

Spagnoli E., *Materiali numismatici da contesti portuensi in Recent research at Portus and in its hinterland: recent archaeological research*, Archaeological Monographs of The British School at Rome, 2011, p. 211-230.

Williams D., *Gaetano Marini e Joseph Eckhel tra numismatica ed epigrafia*, in Bonocore M. (ed.), *Gaetano Marini (1742-1815) protagonista della cultura europea. Scritti per il bicentenario della morte*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2015.