

# Sacrifices and Ritual Deposits

## **Aims and introduction**

This project focuses on examining sacrifices, feasts and ritual deposits on the forum of Ostia and Foro della Statua Eroica. The thesis will contain a contextual examination of the ceramic material found on the fora of the city, focusing on material found in the campaigns between 2008 and 2020. This analysis of the pottery will seek to examine the religious landscape of Ostia and examine the fora as a communal religious space.

The city of Ostia is today one of the most well-preserved Roman cities in mainland Italy, and therefore offers a perfect opportunity to study religious practices in an urban setting. As in all Roman cities, cult and religion was a prominent part of the cityscape. Especially the forum was a center for religious practices, because it housed temples and alters to an array of deities. Because the forum housed so many deities it was also the preferred location for many festivals and feasts.

Religion was an integrated part of most public affairs in the Roman World, feasting and cult are therefore often connected. The forum of Ostia is no exception in this regard. Previously, the understanding of religion on the Forum of Ostia has mostly been based on accounts by ancient writers such as Livy and Vergil. Because of these written accounts and inscriptions found on the forum, we know a fair amount of which deities were worshiped on the forum, however, when where and how is not always as clear. Because the Romans were polytheistic, many different deities were worshiped on the forum and could change as one became more popular. In the Republic and Early Imperial Period the more traditional Roman cults seem to have dominated religious Ostia. One of the main gods of Ostia were Vulcan, who's high priest received the title *pontifex Volcani aedium sacrarum* and functioned as a supervisor for all the temples in the city. Gods such as Jupiter, Hercules, and Castor and Pollux were also worshiped at the forum. Around the second century CE several oriental cults also became popular in Ostia. As one god is favored more than another, the placement and size of their cult was changed. Temples would be rebuilt, renovated, rededicated or removed to give way to new structures. Because of these continuous changes to the religious space on the fora, it is difficult to contribute the temples and altars to one specific god.

## **Method and Material**

The purpose of the project is to examine the fora of Ostia as a communal religious space. This specific study will strive to do this through the ceramic material found on the fora and which can be related to religious, sacrificial or feasting practice. One of the primary groups of ceramic material will be from a group of religious deposits found on the Forum of Ostia during the excavation campaign of 2017. This material consists largely of what is known as black-gloss pottery, which was produced from the middle of the fourth century BCE through the second half of the first century BCE. Vessels with a connection to feasts could be cooking ware and table ware, which was used in the preparation and consumption of food.

A part of this study will be a catalog presenting the pottery. The catalog will aim to produce the best possible level of information in order to allow detailed and informed interpretations, while reflecting the aim of the project. It will contain an introduction to the assemblage, including the total number of vessels and a description of the recording system used. The catalog will also describe any sampling strategy, or any method used for recovery as well as a description of the methods of analysis and quantification employed in the project. In the catalog the pottery will be presented in groups based on their shapes and types. Giving the measurements, color code, decoration and date for each sherd/vessel. Due to the context being an important part of the study, the pottery's find spot within the fora's physical boundaries will also be noted, and an overview of the different contexts and the potteries distribution on the fora will also be included.

The starting point of the study will be a classification of the vessels, which is essential when working with the material in a cultural capacity. The classification and study of the black-gloss pottery will be based on previous research of scholars such as Lamboglia and Morel, as well as more recent studies such as those carried out by Olcese. Following the classification, the study will make a comparative analysis of the pottery, relating it to material previously found in Ostia and from other excavations in mainland Italian. However, this will not only be a comparison of the pottery but also the context. The purpose of this is to compare the development of cult practices on other Roman fora to that of Ostia. Next, the study will have a contextual analysis of the material looking at the context of the find spot and what this indicates. With the analysis of the pottery this thesis seeks to reconstruct religious practices and feasts conducted on the fora and follow the development of these practices over time.