

# Unknown Forum Structures

## **Aim of project and introduction**

In this project, more than seven centuries of urban development from the Republican period to the large Hadrianic development programme in Ostia's city centre will be presented by analysing the orientation and planning symmetries of different building-layouts based on the newest 3-D-measuring techniques and geo-physics applied to Ostia by OFP in the period from 2010-2019 and ongoing. The aim of this project is to interpret the genesis of the layouts and visualize their function and sequence as a "Harris Matrix". "Harris Matrix" is used to analyse the different levels of stratigraphy, in which it is possible to distinguish the different (building-) sequences. The results will be used to analyse the urban space in its complex interactions using the large body of work on Roman urbanism. By studying the urban space of the city centre, we come to understand the social structure of the centre – also in a period previously thought to be a shortfall compared to Pompeii. The city centre was the centre of political, commercial and social activity and all the major roads crossed this area.

Ostia is ancient Rome's harbour-city and, together with Pompeii, one of the largest excavation sites in the world. Nowhere else is it possible to analyse and interpret urban development of an ancient metropolis. Ostia is almost completely excavated, and is thus an ideal subject of studies in urbanism. There has been a lack of focus on the city centre considered as a coherent context. A focus on individual building histories has hindered a more complete picture of the city centre. This is not an isolated Ostian phenomenon. For decades, archaeologists and historians have focused on building activities as evidence for an interpretation of certain political and economic trends, rather than focusing on its built environment. The approach of this study is to perceive the city centre as an inhabited and functional space rather than a collection of different individual buildings.

A quick look at Ostia's city plan makes it clear that Ostia did not benefit from ancient town planning, which was put into work in many other cities in Greece and Italy. The only areas, where there seem to be an overall idea of the town planning are the city centre (the old Castrum area) and the area east of the city centre between the Decumanus and the Tiber river – this area is also known as *ager publicus* (public land).

The study of Roman cities has often focused on the overall urban layout. However, in the attempt to gain the most of this study, an approach of subdivisions into neighbourhoods is utilised instead of looking at Ostia as an entity, because the neighbourhood scale of cities, segments, residences and

commercial premises was the primary area of interaction between the inhabitants. Hence, the focus of this project will be on the city centre considered as coherent unit – a neighbourhood.

Through excavations, photogrammetry, geophysical analyses and archival studies, evidence of several hitherto unknown Forum phases has emerged. Before this comprehensive undertaking, no new excavations have been conducted in the city centre since the unscientific excavations in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Methodological approach**

To complete this project, all previous data will be analysed and used to reconstruct the original planning concepts of the diverse predecessors of the visible Hadrianic/late antique shape of the Forum. This will be done in the attempt to trace analogies between several axis symmetries in the city centre, based on the previous and actual surveys of 3-D-measurements and geophysics. The 3-D-measuring is created in specific programmes where point clouds are used.

### **Theoretical approach**

This project will focus on the relationship between the physical cityscape and societal issues taking place. Thus, it will distance itself from earlier approaches dominating the discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the economic/consumer city and its counterpart, the producer city, because these approaches reduce the complexity of the social activities of a city to its economic function. The study will draw on aspects of Roman urbanism conducted by e.g. Paul Zanker. Zanker has provided a framework known as ‘townscapes (Stadtbilder)’, in which he treats the aspects between the physical cityscape and the societal issues taking place, and how the built environment is seen as a reflection of the society.

In order to identify the underlying social structures, the layout of the different Forum phases are vital. The underlying social structures can be hinted at by the access to buildings, areas etc. by some members of the society and the denied access to buildings, areas etc. by other members. Thus, the spatial privileges held by some members of the society and denied to other members provide some hints on the social hierarchy of a city. Therefore, through the configuration of space, space becomes a medium for social significance and thus the accompanied social consequences. The way, in which spaces are linked, affects the movement of and usage by people living within. Thus, this study will identify, compare and interpret the patterns of spatial configuration in the city centre of Ostia in a diachronic perspective through the centuries of Roman expansion.