

Sophie Menge: PhD project „*Pottery in context. Archive material and new finds from the Forum and the Foro della statua eroica in Ostia*” (working title)

This PhD project is covering four different trenches in the city centre: Three late antique find complexes (TDV1: *Taberna della Venere*, TFR1: *Taberna forum rooms* and the FSE: *Foro della statua eroica*), as well as imperial age and republican contexts from the area TFR2: *Taberna forum rooms*. The focus of the dissertation will lie on the area TFR2 which is, at least from Hadrianic times onwards, to be characterised as an open yard or a backroom belonging to a taberna facing the Decumanus (TFR1). Before the Hadrianic building programme changed the whole appearance of the forum and the area around it, the TFR area belonged to a so far undiscovered sanctuary that can be ascribed to Volcanus.¹ The contexts in the area TFR2 vary from construction pits to levelling layers to various kinds of depositions (i. e. building sacrifices and obliteration deposits, containing mainly pottery, building material and animal bones). While the deposits and the related rituals will be analysed by Trine Bak Pedersen, this thesis will focus on the development of the sanctuary and the area in general and thus on the contexts with all of their chronological and stratigraphical aspects.

The late antique complexes belong to the latest-built structures in Ostia. They show similar, possibly simultaneous depositions of ceramic material that is a lot older than the creation of the respective contexts. In late antiquity, this use of older material for levelling layers, fillings and repairs is widespread in the centre of Ostia and may be connected to the same 5th c. AD catastrophe. Quite possibly, the old material used for filling or levelling derives from rubbish dumps that existed in the city centre from the 3rd c. AD onwards. This phenomenon will be examined further in the thesis.

Pottery is an important source for interpreting life in the ancient world as it reflects on cultural activity in antiquity, whether as transport or storage vessels, as dining, drinking or cooking utensils or otherwise in secondary use. In addition to the typological identification and, thus, the answer to questions of provenance and chronology, it is to be investigated to what extent these cultural practices are reflected in the respective findings. Consequently, the aim of this PhD thesis is not only a contribution to ceramic research, but particularly a contribution to the research into Ostia's settlement history and its cultural practices in the course of the centuries. The emphasis, thus, lies on the analysis of the contexts (involving mainly the pottery but also all the other finds

¹ Forthcoming: A. Gering, Geophysics and archaeological surface documentation in Ostia, in: Springer-Handbook of Cultural Heritage Analysis (2021); A. Gering, Ostia Forum Project Vol. 1. The first temples of the colony and the 'lost' precinct of Volcanus discovered.

belonging to the respective context), the taphonomic analysis of the material² and the interpretation of the results. The aim is not to create a new 'OFP typology' but to determine the various types with the help of already existing typologies and to then examine the composition of each context regarding the stratigraphy, the origin and dating of the material, as well as the taphonomic processes. The relative chronology resulting from this analysis will be supported by drawing comparisons with local, regional and supra-regional find complexes and by considering supporting dating evidence from the respective context (i. e. coins) and the stratigraphy.

Concerning the ceramic finds themselves, a broad range of pottery will be examined: From republican to late antique material and from so-called fineware to 'Gebrauchskeramik', every find will be included. Due to the excavation history of Ostia antica, republican and late antique pottery is not nearly as well represented in scientific research as their imperial counterparts. Most of the late antique material has been discarded during the excavations in the 19th c. and the first half of the 20th c. and only a few excavation projects were able to explore republican levels and material in Ostia antica. Hence, the in-depth documentation and publication of such material is crucial.

² Archaeological taphonomy examines all processes that a find goes through, from the manufacturing to the usage (pre-depositional), from its disposal (depositional) to the changes an object can undergo after its deposition (post-depositional). Human actions as well as natural processes will be considered.