

Sophie Menge, Theme 2:

The Volcanus precinct in Ostia: Ceramic finds and stratigraphy

This PhD project is focussing on the analysis of the stratigraphy and the (ceramic) finds from the area TFR2 (Taberna Forum Rooms) 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 transformed the entire 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 complex stratigraphy.

Needless to say, the earliest and the latest phases of the area are of great interest to us: When was the sanctuary founded? Has the area east of the forum always been used as a sanctuary? In which period were the earliest structures built? And when exactly were the sacred structures given up and the area reused as a taberna complex? Other key questions concern the development of the sanctuary and its structures, as it is obvious that not only the temples but also the associated altars had several building phases. In this PhD-project, these phases will be examined through analysis of the associated stratigraphy with a focus on the largest find group, the ceramic finds. With the room TFR2 being the only deep excavation trench conducted by the OFP (Ostia Forum Project) in that area, there is only limited insight into the sacred area. To gain further information about the part of the sanctuary situated below the north-eastern forum portico (MFE), an intense study of the excavation diaries from 1913 (*‘Giornale degli Scavi’*) is being conducted. In the report, Raffaele Finelli provides certain insight into the excavation activities, the finds and even into some stratigraphical aspects of the area. The goal is to find commonalities between Finelli’s stratigraphical observations and the TFR2 stratigraphy, resulting into a clearer picture of the development of the area east of the main forum.

The analysis of the finds from the trench TFR2 suggests a long utilisation period of the whole area from the late 4th / early 3rd c BC to late antiquity. The Volcanus precinct itself most probably existed in between those earliest phases of the late 4th c BC – 3rd c BC and the Hadrianic re-design

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.

of the forum around AD 120 – 130, when the sanctuary was torn down and transformed into the portico and taberna complex. Furthermore, the study of the composition of various contexts and strata gives further insight into the utilisation of the area.

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. The emphasis, thus, lies on the analysis of the contexts (involving mainly the pottery but also all the other finds belonging to the respective context), the taphonomic analysis of the material and the interpretation of the results. 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.