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Regiones, *Vici* and Grassroots Dynamics at Roman Ostia

Abstract: This paper focuses on the organisation of urban space in Roman Ostia by analysing both epigraphic and archaeological evidence. Starting with a top-down perspective on urban space by means of epigraphic sources, especially regarding the *magistri vici*, districts (*regiones*) and quarters (*vici*) appear as possible forms of local organisation and administration. However, concrete evidence is surprisingly scarce and only covers the period before Ostia's expansion during the 2nd century A.D. This lack of evidence is one additional reason that a change of perspective from the top-down view to a bottom-up approach focusing on neighbourhoods is appropriate. At Ostia, places of encounter like *balnea*, *thermae* and taverns come into focus as focal points of neighbourhoods. Also, different religious identities, *collegia* and *insulae* seem to be factors when neighbourhoods are formed at the grassroots level. Here, for individual inhabitants the administrative division of urban space in districts (*regiones*) or quarters (*vici*) is of less relevance.

Introduction: The Special Nature of Roman Ostia

Ostia, Rome's harbour town, underwent a remarkable development during a period of three centuries following the founding of the Principate. Two events were of crucial importance for the town's growth: the construction of a deep-water harbour begun almost as soon as Claudius became emperor in A.D. 41, and the addition of a large and safe inner harbour basin during the latter part of the reign of the emperor Trajan, who died in A.D. 117. The harbour zone became known as Portus and was situated some three kilometres north of the walled centre of Ostia. The urban centre and the harbour were separated (or joined) by land that technically speaking constituted an island and today is known as the 'Isola Sacra'. A road connected centre and harbour zone, and so did an artificial canal, the latter was discovered by archaeologists only a few years ago. During the Principate the population of Ostia increased several times over as the town became the main harbour of the largest metropolis in the Mediterranean. By the early 2nd century, it was the largest town in Italy after Rome, with a population that can be estimated to have reached 35,000 inhabitants[1].

With a population of that size, and with rich evidence both from thousands of inscriptions and from archaeological excavations, Ostia can be expected to provide fertile ground for the study of socio-spatial patterning and related forms of interaction in the Roman world. Pompeii, which vies with Ostia for the rank of most important Roman site in Italy after Rome itself, shows us what to expect. In fact, Ostia holds out the hope of providing even more interesting and relevant insights than Pompeii, due to the fact that the town thrived for several centuries, well into the 3rd century, while the history of Pompeii came to an abrupt end in A.D. 79 Pompeii presents us with *vici*, *regiones*, neighbourhood activists (*vicini*) engaged in election campaigns, crossroads cults and more; but what about Ostia?

It is something of a paradox that the pattern which has been identified at Pompeii does not seem to be replicated, regardless of the wealth of information found at Ostia. Following a survey of the evidence, the reason(s) for this situation will be discussed. Are there some crucial gaps in the source material which condition the result, or can we take the evidence at face value and use it for conclusions about the situation in Rome's harbour town? Also, for any identifiable features it will be important to consider whether we are dealing with the results of a top-down or a bottom-up process.

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[1] Meiggs (1973) is still fundamental for the history of Ostia during the Principate, but his estimate of a population of 50,000 or even 60,000 (Meiggs 1973, 533 f.) remains unconvincing; see further Bruun, in press, Chapter II. Recent work on the Isola Sacra: Keay et al. 2020.

As the harbour zone was developed, Ostia grew rapidly thanks to the influx of immigrants from other regions of Italy and from abroad. Urban newcomers tend to settle close by others who have the same geographical origin. Therefore, this development can be expected to have created districts and quarters with specific characteristics; whether this outcome can be documented is another matter.

Large Administrative Units: The *Regiones* of Ostia

The importance of the control of 'space' in the Roman world has been recognised in modern historical scholarship at least since the appearance of Claude Nicolet's seminal 'L'inventaire du monde' (1988). The long reign of Augustus was seen as a turning point and Nicolet stressed the importance of the reforms carried out by the first *princeps* in regard to the spatial division of Italy and Rome. At a certain point during his reign, eleven *regiones* numbering from I to XI were created on the territory of the Italian peninsula, while the city of Rome in 7 B.C. was divided into fourteen administrative districts likewise known as *regiones*. Each urban *regio* was still a very large administrative unit, on average comprising some 60,000 inhabitants or more, and therefore Augustus took his concern with urban space and its organisation one step further. Undoubtedly building on an earlier grassroots organisation centred on crossroads shrines (*compitalia*), a network of *vici* was created in the capital. Every *vicus* had its own local leaders, the *magistri vici.* According to the Elder Pliny, during the census of Vespasian in A.D. 73, there were 265 *vici* in Rome (Plin. HN 3, 66).

Modern maps of the ancient town divide the area inside Ostia's town walls in five *regiones*. There is an obvious reason to assume a spatial division of the area inside the walls, for administrative purposes if nothing else (and further districts would have existed at Portus and on the Isola Sacra), but we do not know where any of Ostia's ancient *regiones* were located or what their borders were. In fact, even the number of *regiones* is, strictly speaking, unknown. The modern division is conjectural, although it is practical for purposes of orientation. One single source for the division of Ostian urban space in *regiones* has determined the scholarly view thus far. In an inscription dating to A.D. 251, erected by initiative of an Isiacus (a worshipper of Isis) and honouring one D. Fabius Florus Veranus, a priest of the goddess, we find the following positions of trust (all in the dative case) held by the latter in various Ostian associations[2]:

> [...] *naviculario V (quinque) corporum lenunculariorum Ostiensium honoribus ac muneribus omnibus functo sodali corp(oris?/um?)* **V (quinque?/quintae?)** *region(um?/is?) coloniae Ostiensis* [...]
> '[...] to Fabius Veranus the shipper, member of the five associations of Ostian owners of lenunculus boats who has handled all honours and duties well, fellow of the association(s?) **of five regions/the fifth region** of the town of Ostia'.

Previous scholars have consistently interpreted the second numeral '*V*' as *quinque*, '**five**', concluding that Ostia had five regions. It makes more sense to interpret the number as an ordinal, *quintae*, '**fifth**': Fabius Veranus was a '*sodalis* of a corpus **of the fifth region**', not a '*sodalis* of the corpus **of five regions**'. The inscription merely provides a reference to the *quinta regio*, the 'fifth region', of Ostia, and leaves us in the dark about the total number of regions[3].

For comparison, a division in *regiones* is found in several other towns in Campania and Latium: Beneventum, Capua, Neapolis, Nola, Puteoli and Praeneste. The earliest reference is dated to ca. A.D. 250. In particular, Puteoli, the rich Campanian harbour town which had many features in common with Ostia, stands out. Seven *regiones* are known within the town proper, carrying names like *regio Arae Lucullianae* (AE 1977, 198); *regio Clivi Vitriari sive Vici Turari* (ILS 1224b = AE 1977, 199); and *regio*

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2 CIL XIV 352 = ILS 6149. To facilitate reading, abbreviated words have been expanded, except the crucial phrase referring to *regiones*.
3 This argument is discussed in more detail in Bruun, in press.

Vici Vestoriani et Calpurniani (CIL X 1631 = ILS 6322)[4]. Also in light of this comparative evidence, the silence of the Ostian sources is remarkable and puzzling.

Small Administrative Units: *Vici*

Several inscriptions from Puteoli, just cited in the context of the larger districts or *regiones*, contain references to named *vici*, that is to say, smaller urban/spatial units. Such *vici* would seem to constitute the physical context in which much of the social life of the Ostians played out. The city of Rome with its hundreds of *vici* was undoubtedly the model for the inner-urban division in *vici* in Italian towns during the Principate. These streets/urban quarters of Rome all carried a particular name, such as *vicus Honoris et Virtutis*, *vicus Huiusce Diei* or *vicus Fortunae Respicientis* (all in CIL VI 975; the epithets refer to temples). Most names are known thanks to a series of inscriptions erected by the annual *magistri vici*, who first took up office in 7 B.C. or shortly before.

Vici which carry distinct names are known from over twenty towns in Italy and in the provinces, especially in the west[5]. For instance, at Ariminum, five named *vici* are known, three of which were named after topographical features in Rome: *vicus Aventinus* (CIL XI 421), *vicus Cermalus* (CIL XI 419) and *vicus Velab[rus]* (CIL XI 417 = ILS 6661). At Pompeii, the epigraphic evidence has given scholars reason to postulate the presence of *vici* called *Campaniensis*, *Forensis*, *Saliniensis* and *Urbulanensis*[6].

Against this fairly substantial amount of evidence for named *vici* in Rome, Italy and elsewhere, it may again come as a surprise that we know practically nothing about Ostian *vici*, although, as we shall see, a few neighbourhood leaders (*magistri vici*) appear during the early Principate. Otherwise, the closest we get to an explicit reference is a fragmentary notice in the Fasti Ostienses (Ostia's annual chronicle engraved on marble slabs) for 1st January A.D. 115, reporting a fire in which many properties went up in flames: *K(alendis) Ianuar(iis) incendium ortum in v[ico? ---]/et praedia complura deusta sun[t]*[7]. The fire began in a location, the name of which begins with the letter 'v', but it is impossible to determine whether the text refers to, for instance, *via*, *vicus*, *ustrinum*, or villa, among a number of possible words.

Ostia belongs in the same category as some Italian towns, in which local *vici* are not specifically named in any source, but the existence of *magistri vici* or *magistri vicorum* reveals such a local quarter organisation[8].

Magistri of Ostian City Quarters

In Ostia the office of *magister vici* occurs a few times during the early Principate. Three inscriptions, one of which was discovered fairly recently, allow us to gain some insight into the organisation of districts in *vici*, which however, against expectations, seem to have been short-lived. The first and most extensive of these texts belonged to a crossroads shrine, a *compitum* (from *competere*, 'come together'). It dates to the late triumvirate or the early Augustan period and names three Ostian *magistri vici* and a fourth individual, all freedmen (CIL XIV 4710 = ILS 5395):

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4 Camodeca 2018, 40–59.

5 Tarpin 2002, 326–380.

6 Laurence 2007, 40; Pesando 2016.

7 Bargagli – Grosso 1997, 40 or Vidman 1982, 48 for the text.

8 This situation applies, e. g., to Aquileia (CIL V 8211), Pisaurum (CIL XI 6367) and Spoletium (CIL XI 4815).

Po[st]umus Plotius M. f. quarto /A. Genucius A. f. iter(um) duoviri / locum dederunt compiti aedificandi / C. Cartilius C. f. Poplicola duovir VII / (5) *cens(or) III compitum transtulit / D. Caecilius DD. l. Nicia medicus / L. Marcius L. l. Stephanus / P. Naevius P. l. Heraclida / mag(istri) vici maceriem /* (10) *et columnam de suo fecerunt / C. Cartilius C. l. Hera[cleo].*

'Postumus Plotius M. f. duovir for the fourth time and A. Genucius A. f. duovir for the second time assigned the space for building a crossroads shrine. C. Cartilius C. f. Poplicola duovir for the seventh time and censor for the third time moved the crossroads shrine. The magistri vici D. Caecilius Nicia, physician, freedman of two Decimi, L. Marcius Stephanus freedman of Lucius, P. Naevius Heraclida freedman of Publius built the surrounding wall and the column with their own funds. C. Cartilius Hera[cleo], freedman of Gaius [...]'.

The structure to which the text refers has not survived, but the wording provides some clues through the mention of an enclosing wall (*maceria*) and a column. This represents one of the few ancient descriptions we have of crossroads shrines in Roman Italy. The reason for moving the crossroads shrine (*compitum*), probably soon after permission to establish it had been given, remains unknown. Likewise, unknown is where the *compitum*, after being moved, was located. Some scholars have suggested that it was located at the central intersection west of the *castrum* where the main street, the *decumanus maximus*, veers off to the southwest and the Via della Foce continues in a northwesterly direction towards the river mouth. There is no certainty, but this location seems ideal for a *compitum* at which the neighbourhood gathered for cultic events.

Thinking of the character of this neighbourhood, it is noteworthy that all three *magistri vici* declare themselves to be ex-slaves. Equally interesting is the conspicuous involvement by the highest freeborn leadership of the *colonia* (i. e., three *duoviri*, holders of Ostia's highest magistracy) in this process of establishing a meeting point for the neighbourhood. One of them was the most highly decorated local leader of his generation, C. Cartilius Poplicola, and the same family name is borne by the person named on the last line, *C. Cartilius C. l(ibertus) Hera[cleo]*, who surely was a freedman of the *duovir* Cartilius Poplicola himself. Because the text breaks off, we cannot say whether he too carried the title *magister vici*, but we now know that he did occupy that position at some point in his life.

The second example and a recent epigraphic discovery underlines the contribution by freedmen serving as *magistri vici* to Ostian urban development during the Augustan age, and C. Cartilius C. l. Heracleo, who was cited last in the *compitum* inscription, appears also in this new text. Inscribed on a block of marble, the text celebrates his donation of a *horologium* (a sundial or waterclock) to the town while holding the office of *magister vici*: *[C. Car]tilius C. l. / [He]racleo / [mag.] veici / [horo]logium / [de suo?] posuit*[9]. The stone was found in the Tempio dei Fabri Navales (III.ii.2), reused in a layer dating to the Flavian period. By then the memory of the donation of the *horologium* had evidently been obliterated; a sign of urban change in Ostia during the early Principate.

The third inscription potentially belonging to the context of the Ostian *magistri vici* can be read on a round marble altar decorated with mythological figures, found in the so-called 'Piazza dei Lari' in the immediate vicinity of the Casa di Diana (I.iii.3–4). The surviving part of the text reads: *[---] / [m] ag. d(e) s(ua) p(ecunia) f(aciundum) c(urav.) / Laribus / vicin(alibus) sacr(um) // aram marmoream*[10]. The author(s) of the monument remain anonymous, and another uncertainty concerns their number; it is not clear whether we are dealing with one or more *magistri*[11]. A stylistic analysis of the altar and its decorative frieze has led to the conclusion that the ensemble predates the Augustan reform of Rome's *vici* and possibly also the Ostian instances of *magistri vici*[12]. Still, we are undoubtedly dealing with the cult of the *lares* of the quarter, although there is no trace of a *compitum* and the marble altar is not located at a crossroads.

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9 Van Haeperen 2019, 124 with earlier bibliography.
10 CIL XIV 4298.
11 Van Haeperen 2019, 122 f.
12 Pensabene (2007, 177) in his authoritative study of Ostian marble suggested 30–10 B.C., a period earlier than most previous estimates.

Magistri of the Lares Augusti in A.D. 51: Another Top-Down Initiative

In A.D. 51, well over half a century after the Ostian *compitum* referred to above was moved and refurbished by the *magistri vici* overseen by Cartilius Poplicola, a series of inscriptions containing dedications to the Lares Augusti was erected by a group of three *liberti* who called themselves *magistri primi* ('the first *magistri*'). We are dealing with a dossier of seven inscriptions considered to derive from two or three small buildings, one of them a round structure in the forum of Ostia[13].

Evidently these three freedmen were not *magistri vici*, since they state that they were acting in the first year (*anni primi*) of the office they held. It strains belief that the Ostian community could have forgotten that *magistri vici* had been in office a few decades earlier (and possibly more recently than what the now available evidence indicates), and therefore here we are dealing with a different situation. Moreover, although the city-quarter officials in Rome often venerated the Lares Augusti, they were always explicit about their own titles being *magister* (sometimes *minister*) *vici*. The three freedmen active in A.D. 51, all bearing the family name Seius, were *magistri larum augustorum* and are the only such officials known at Ostia[14]. The strong presence of these Seii makes one suspect that a member of the Ostian elite by that name, residing nearby, was involved in this organisation of the quarter. But one draws a blank when studying the names of the known magistrates and decurions of Ostia: no Seii can be found[15].

Neither is any continuation of the institution of *magistri* catering to the cult of the Lares Augusti known, regardless of the fact that the Ostian epigraphic patrimony comprises some 8,000 published inscriptions. Only seven later inscriptions mention the *lares* at Ostia (twice with the epithet *augusti* added: CIL XIV 367 = ILS 6164, 2041). Most of them belong in the private sphere and therefore do not contribute to the present investigation[16].

It seems justified to characterise the forms of spatial organisation surveyed thus far as top-down phenomena. We lack most of the information that would be necessary for a full understanding – What is the precise chronology of the various initiatives? Where in the urban fabric of Ostia could these structures be found? Which layers of the population participated? – but the information we have points to initiatives from above. In the background there is the model of Augustan Rome, we see an involvement of Ostian chief magistrates in the case of the *magistri vici*, and also the *magistri larum augustorum* seem to fit a similar top-down pattern[17].

Religious Activities and Grassroot Dynamics: Approaches to a Spatially Rooted Neighbourhood?

While the crossroads cult of the Lares Augusti does not seem to have caught on at Ostia, although it remained popular elsewhere[18], other cultic and religious activities must have constituted a form of

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13 AE 1964, 151–156 for the inscriptions. For the archaeological context, see Mar 2002, 130–133, supported by Pensabene 2007, 178.

14 The inscription CIL XIV 26 may have referred to a similar shrine, but it is incomplete, only known from a manuscript, and carries no date.

15 Meiggs 1973, 511–517; Bruun, in press, Chapter VII.

16 The other inscriptions are CIL XIV 20; 4293; 4309; 4570; IPO A 19.

17 Irrespectively of whether the emperor Claudius, whose government at the time was intensely engaged in building the harbour at Portus, was involved in the establishment of the Ostian cult of the Lares Augusti, as some have suggested.

18 See, e. g., CIL II/7 938; III 8673; XI 7726; XII 2807, mostly from the 2nd century A.D.

social activity that created bonds among inhabitants and within neighbourhoods[19]. Three inscriptions with religious connotations may provide some information about neighbourhood activity.

A marble plaque found in the harbour district Portus contains the text *Diana iobens iub. Traianensium* (CIL XIV 4 = IPO B 287). It seems that the goddess Diana 'Iobens' (?) was being venerated, apparently by the *iuv(enes) Traianenses*[20]. There is no direct evidence for who the *Traianenses* were, but a similar term occurs in a second, Greek, inscription, also from Portus, in which a *speira Traianesion* (σπείρης Τραιανησίων) is mentioned (I.Porto 8 = IG XIV 925). *Spira* is a Greek loanword frequently found in Latin, and the 'Oxford English Dictionary' gives as one of its meanings 'A sodality in some mystery cults'. This is indeed borne out by a handful of inscriptions from Rome and Italy[21]. Trajan was the emperor who had the inner harbour basin at Portus built, and conceivably some quarters of the port might have adopted an Imperial epithet such as *vicus Traianensis* or *vicus Traiani*. This may explain also the name of the *spira* of *Traianenses*. Alternatively, the *iuvenes Traianenses* adopted the name because they were involved in the Imperial cult; a purpose which would not prevent them from also venerating Diana. The second interpretation finds support in other inscriptions from Italy, which show that associations of *iuvenes* often used epithets with religious connotations. Most frequently the *iuvenes* refer to the cult of Hercules, but we also find the *iuvenes Nepesini Dianenses* at Nepet (CIL XI 3210) and the *iuvenes colleg(ii) Mart(is) Salut(aris)* at Aricia (AE 1912, 92 = ILS 9421)[22].

The third relevant Ostian inscription is a dedication to Silvanus Sanctus, also found at Portus. The author is a man who was *sacerdos Dei Liberis (!) Patris Bonadiensium* (CIL XIV 4328 = IPO B 306). Here we encounter a group called *Bonadienses*, clearly named after the goddess Bona Dea. Even more than the epithet *Traianensis*, *Bonadiensis* could be given a specific spatial or topographical meaning. An ancient sanctuary of the 'Good Goddess' may have been the most distinctive building in its neighbourhood, giving origin to the toponym 'vicus Bonae Deae'. We may further assume that the local residents, the *Bonadienses*, gathered around a shrine to Liber Pater and chose a priest (*sacerdos*). This would explain the inscription just cited. The scenario may appear persuasive, but it is difficult to find support in our knowledge of Ostian topography. Two temples of Bona Dea are known at Ostia, one inside the walls in Regio V and one outside the Porta Marina in Regio IV. Unfortunately, no cult site of Liber Pater (the Greek Dionysos) has yet been securely identified in Ostia's Regio V or anywhere inside the walls, although the existence of a cult of Liber is attested already in the 3rd/2nd century B.C.[23].

Thus, the hypothesis that there were two quarters at Ostia, perhaps called *vici* or at least comparable to such districts elsewhere in Roman towns, named *Traianensis* and *Bonadiensis*, presents itself naturally, and there is much support for this idea in previous scholarship. A closer look at the evidence and the inclusion of comparative material warns against hasty conclusions. *Traianensis* might equally well fit as the epithet of a cultic association, or even as a general reference to inhabitants of the settlement at Portus. The epithet *Bonadiensis* seems more likely to be the name of a *vicus*, and the probability increases if a city quarter of the walled town centre was intended.

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19 See Haug, this volume.

20 Other texts from Italy show that *iuvenes* ('young people') is sometimes written *iubenes*. The word '*IOBENS*' which seems to accompany the name of the goddess is enigmatic.

21 See, e. g., CIL VI 76 = ILS 3515 = AE 2009, 159; CIL X 6510 = ILS 3367.

22 See the extensive list of sources in Ginestet 1991, 214–250. Tabs. I. IVa.

23 Van Haeperen 2019, 276 f. 294 f.

Places of Encounter and the Physical Realities of Neighbourhoods

It will be useful to change perspective, from the study of epigraphic evidence of institutionalised quarters and of local associations, the former more of a top-down and the latter more of a bottom-up phenomenon, to a focus on physical realities that may constitute evidence for the social experience of neighbourhoods.

First, to start with cult sites at crossroads, a survey by Jan-Theo Bakker of the Ostian archaeological evidence some decades ago optimistically listed seven so-called *compita*, but the evidence is very uneven and basically restricted to four sites; the clearest evidence was discussed in the section above[24].

Second, the notion that human beings congregate around sources of water provides the starting point for a search for other ways in which the spatial division and neighbourhood formation of the Ostian population may have occurred. But we shall see that although this approach has produced results in some other Roman towns, due to some special local features matters do not seem to play out the same way at Ostia. To be sure, to the extent that water for household purposes was fetched from a public source, this particular location very likely became a meeting point for residents of a particular neighbourhood[25]. The fountain could be instrumental in creating a feeling of community and belonging, or in other words, of local identity[26]. In Pompeii, where the archaeological record obviously was frozen at a certain point in time, contrary to what we find in Ostia, Ray Laurence suggested that 'the establishment of public fountains may have altered the existing pattern of social activity at a local level within the city'[27]. The Pompeian fountains are often found at crossroads and most of the population lived within a radius of 80 m from one of them[28]. A similar situation can be identified at Rome, based on Frontinus' information in his *De aquaeductu urbis Romae* that almost 600 *lacus* were at the disposal of the population: most Romans would have lived within 70 m of a fountain or some other source of running water[29].

At Ostia, the physical aspect of the water-distribution network is known in some detail. After the first aqueduct was inaugurated, probably not before the reign of Gaius (A.D. 37–41), fountains distributed water inside the walled town, and Portus had its own aqueduct[30]. The 'watering holes' thus represented natural points of encounter, but the large number of wellheads found in Ostian houses shows that some inhabitants continued to use groundwater, while certain privileged households benefited from piped aqueduct water[31]. Also some high-rise buildings, known as *insulae*, had their own water supply, an important feature to which we shall return. All in all, water fountains were unlikely to be visited by all nearby inhabitants (also because social hierarchies must have determined who fetched the water), and the time spent on this errand undoubtedly varied.

Third, if we are looking for a more substantial way in which the availability of hydraulic resources created the conditions for social neighbourhood interaction, we should undoubtedly focus on the public baths. In the many *thermae* and *balnea* of Ostia and Portus local residents spent hours together

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24 Bakker 1994, 118–133. 243–250. Van Haeperen (2019, 120–125) included four entries under *compitum*.

25 See Poehler, this volume; Lauritsen, this volume.

26 Such a situation was suggested for Herculaneum by Hartnett 2008.

27 Laurence 2007, 49.

28 Laurence 2007, 49; similarly, Lamare 2020, 35–37.

29 As noted in Bruun 1991, 101–104.

30 See Ricciardi – Scrinari (1996) for a thorough archaeological survey of hydraulic features inside the walls; more precise details in Schmölder-Veit 2009, 85–105 (but it is unlikely that the first aqueduct is Augustan). Keay – Millett (2005, 278 f.) for Portus' aqueduct; its distribution network is largely unknown.

31 Private wells and well heads: Ricciardi – Scrinari 1996, 13–88. Private lead pipes: Bruun 1991, 286–293; with an update in Bruun in press, Chapter VI.

(as did many visitors during the sailing season), and social networks were surely formed and maintained[32].

Fourth, taverns of various kinds represent another type of establishment in which one can expect at least part of the clientele to have consisted of people from the immediate vicinity, and also some of Ostia's many retail outlets may have served as focal points for the neighbourhood[33].

Religious Identities and Neighbourhoods

It is impossible in only a few pages even to attempt to identify how the numerous public baths and taverns may have been instrumental in forging a particular neighbourhood identity. Furthermore, Ostia's long history and the often complicated chronology of the ancient buildings create additional challenges, if one wants to determine the situation at any particular moment. Instead, this section will focus on the archaeological evidence from another viewpoint.

As mentioned at the outset, the construction of the harbours at Portus led to a massive influx of newcomers, in addition to the arrival of more or less permanent visitors from near and afar, which any port town would experience. It stands to reason that from the mid-1st century forward and throughout the 2nd century the many thousands of immigrants would have created ethnic, linguistic and/or cultural enclaves at Ostia. How this process worked out in actual practice is, however, unknown. What one can do is to return, once more, to the religious sphere. Several deities from the Near East were worshipped[34]; one can imagine that the faithful might have settled in the vicinity of the various cult buildings (many still not identified). In particular it is worth referring to the almost twenty Mithraic 'caves' which have been identified[35]. Although this cult required initiation and women were excluded, we can imagine that for some Ostians this cultic community represented an 'ideological neighbourhood' that intersected with other neighbourhoods, spatial and social.

The synagogue was situated outside the walls almost on the beach in a locality which used to be considered peripheric. Recent excavations have shown that the zone instead was a bustling thriving part of the urban fabric during Ostia's heyday[36]. There is no proof that the Jewish population lived nearby, but it is certainly not out of the question.

Perhaps similar is the context of the cult of the Egyptian god Serapis. Thanks to the sponsorship of an Ostian benefactor, the first Temple of Serapis was inaugurated in A.D. 127. The site of the temple in Regio III and its surroundings are well-known, including the nearby baths known as the Terme della Trinacria[37]. This ancient neighbourhood, characterised as 'middle class' in modern scholarship, may well have gravitated around the temple; several worshippers are named in inscriptions which refer to Serapis[38]. Some of them may have had an Egyptian background, we cannot tell; but clearly the cult of Serapis attracted wide general interest at Ostia, as shown also by the mention of the temple in the Fasti Ostienses chronicle.

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32 Bruun 2020a for public baths and social life. Public baths at Ostia: Nielsen 1990 II, 4–6 (the catalogue with seventeen items can be expanded).

33 The survey of taverns and retail outlets by Schoevaert (2018), who uses the term 'boutiques', is the most exhaustive to date; cf. Bruun 2020b on the terminology.

34 See Van Haeperen (2019, 295–297) on the cult of Marnas, a god from Gaza.

35 Most recently on the Mithraic cult sites, Van Haeperen 2019, 150–191.

36 Van Haeperen 2019, 194–198 (general). 194 (not peripheric).

37 The date is given by the Fasti Ostienses (Bargagli – Grosso 1997, 43). For the temple and the surrounding buildings: Mar 2001.

38 Zevi 2001.

How Did the Ostians Refer to their Neighbourhood?

The final section sets out from the perspective of the individual Ostian and asks a seemingly trivial question: in what terms did inhabitants of Ostia provide their address to acquaintances? This is something of a conundrum for us since, as seen above, we do not find references to *vici* (*vicus* can mean both 'neighbourhood' and 'street') and overall, mentions of topographical landmarks are scarce in Ostian epigraphy[39]. In other towns, and specifically in Rome, we find a number of 'addresses' in epitaphs erected for craftsmen and artisans, as in *aurifex de Sacra via* ('goldsmith from Via Sacra'; AE 1991, 106). Ostia was an economic hub, which makes it all the more surprising that inscriptions providing both the profession and the 'address' of the deceased are not found[40]. To explain this paradox, some thought needs to be devoted to the Ostian *corpora* and *collegia*, legally sanctioned professional associations which at Ostia had a stronger presence than anywhere else in Italy or the Roman world in general[41]. Perhaps they provided the main grassroots social interaction that bound together most Ostians, determined their social space, and constituted building blocks for individual identities?

First, large parts of the working population of Ostia were either members of a professional association (in the case of wealthier entrepreneurs) or worked for someone who was a *corporatus* (a more common situation). Conceivably, they primarily felt a relationship with their professional community. Perhaps a strictly geographical division of the urban environment in *regiones* or *vici* was felt to be of secondary importance? Still, this scenario may raise more questions than it answers. If the principal loyalty of a large and probably dominant portion of Ostia's free population lay with the professional associations, this would likely have resulted in certain districts primarily being inhabited by members of a particular *corpus* or *collegium*. Furthermore, one can expect that this easily identifiable character of a neighbourhood would have had an impact on Ostian toponyms. It should have become common to refer to, for instance, a *vicus fabrorum navalium*, a *vicus caudicariorum* or a *vicus lenunculariorum*. Such a process explains why Cicero in Rome used the 'address' *inter falcarios* (Cic. Cat. 1, 8; Cic. Sull. 52), 'in the scythemakers' quarter (or street)', and why Livy employed the topographical reference *inter lignarios* (Liv. 35, 41), 'in the joiners' quarter'. This is what happened at Rome, where we encounter toponyms such as *vicus Sandaliarius*, *vicus Unguentarius* and *vicus Vitrarius*. But in our Ostian sources there is no sign of such a pattern.

Second, the 'corporate topography' at Ostia needs to be taken into account. Each *corpus* and *collegium* had its own 'headquarters' (*schola*), and the location of many such establishments is known. These buildings tended to cluster along the major thoroughfares of the town, along the *decumanus maximus* and the Via della Foce[42]. Therefore, the location of the *scholae* is of little help when attempting to assign a particular character to the various neighbourhoods along these main routes through the town, since it is rare that a single profession would have been able to claim a certain vicinity for itself[43]. This fact does not preclude the existence, somewhere in the town, of quarters predominantly inhabited by certain professions, but we lack concrete information in this regard and the currently known written sources do not reflect such a situation.

Another particular aspect of Ostia's built-up space is the large number of high-rise buildings today known as *insulae*, which elsewhere in Italy are only found in Rome. One wonders what effect this feature of Ostian urbanism may have had on the formation of neighbourhoods. Or, to return to the question which began this section: what effect might the *insulae* have had on Ostian 'addresses'?

A document from Syrian Antioch provides food for thought. An often cited account from A.D. 73/74 concerning the upkeep of what is called a 'fuller's canal' refers to the quarters (*plinthia*) bordering

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39 For a collection of Ostian topographical references, see Bruun, in press, Appendix 3.
40 A few epitaphs providing the profession only do occur, see Bruun, in press.
41 Meiggs 1973, 311–336.
42 Bollmann 1998, 198 f. with Fig. 92.
43 See Poehler, this volume.

the canal by the name of the real estate owner[44]. As for Ostia, one can still today view the names of what must have been the owners on the façade of two buildings: in Regio III this applies to the Casa di Annio, while in Regio IV we find the Domus del Protiro[45]. If this was how addresses commonly were registered in Ostia too, two things follow: (1) Inhabitants (usually renters)[46] may have had little interest in making a declaration in the epigraphic medium of their living or having lived in someone's high-rise building. There can be little honour in inhabiting an *insula* belonging to a wealthy investor, and the dependence on a landlord is hardly such an important part of the renter's identity that he or she is keen to display it. (2) In several cases the *insulae* are known to have had their own piped water supply. This applies, for instance, to the Insula di Bacco e Arianna, situated next to the Temple of Serapis in Regio III, and the Casa di Diana in Regio I, the 'classic' Ostian multi-storey building. Possessing an inner courtyard with a fountain, and with a capacity to accommodate many scores of inhabitants, such *insulae* conceivably constituted primary spatial and social neighbourhoods. Also, the 'upper-middle-class' environment of the Case a Giardino (Regio III), where six fountains served the complex, fits this scenario[47].

Conclusion

Rome's harbour town Ostia offers a fertile field of study, but the town's long history during the Principate and the exceptionally rich epigraphic and archaeological sources represent a particular challenge when studying neighbourhood dynamics. Some of these challenges became evident at the outset, when charting what is known about attempts from the authorities to create administrative top-down structures of urban space in the form of *regiones* and, especially, *vici*. We are poorly informed, a paradoxical situation considering the richness of the epigraphic evidence. There seems to be little continuity and few signs that such administrative structures had much impact on the lives of the Ostians.

When instead looking for grassroots dynamics and neighbourhoods created by the inhabitants' daily experiences, the many public baths, rather more than the plain water fountains on the street-corners, may have been instrumental in forging a set of neighbourhoods. Also the importance of the religious sphere must be emphasised. The presence of cultic activities in the lives of the Ostians needs to be combined with the fact that from ca. A.D. 50 onwards for some two centuries Ostia was a major magnet of immigration. Some foreign cults were demonstrably introduced, and we can expect that newcomers formed various ethnic and cultural neighbourhoods, although we lack concrete evidence for this. To give an example, the surroundings of the Temple of Serapis conceivably constituted a special community and neighbourhood. The almost twenty Mithraic 'caves' formed a local network, the effect of which was reduced by the fact that women were excluded and initiation was required. We can expect 'Mithraic neighbourhoods' to have intersected with a number of other social networks to which the worshippers belonged.

When looking for other ways in which a bottom-up organisation of the population may have occurred, the importance of professions and work cannot be overlooked, especially because the role played by professional associations, *corpora* and *collegia*, was exceptionally strong at Ostia. However, to judge from where the seats (*scholae*) of the various 'guilds' were located – all sharing in a few central locations – this approach does not allow us to characterise any particular quarters as dominated by a certain trade or profession. This may still have been the case, but we lack the evidence.

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44 Translation by Sherk 1988, 231 no. 174: '[…] (the block) of Bargates […] (the block) of Pharnakes the former gymnasiarch […] (the block) of Artas the son of Thrasydemos'.

45 Pavolini 2006, 137. 215 f.

46 Scholars generally assume that Ostia after the inauguration of the two deep-water harbours became a town where many lived on rent in high-rise buildings.

47 Ricciardi – Scrinari 1996, 114 f. 128 f.; Marinucci 2013, 70–74 (Casa di Diana).

Thinking about other ways in which the individual Ostians may have conceived of their neighbourhoods, the significance of the large high-rise buildings, the *insulae*, should not be neglected. Chances are that the communities which formed in the inner courtyards and immediately around these buildings were of primary importance for the identity of the residents. But even for the resident of an *insula*, his or her neighbourhood was not restricted to that building (and not all Ostians lived in one). Especially in a town as vibrant as Rome's port, chances are that at any time an Ostian belonged to several intersecting neighbourhoods, of geographical, cultural, professional and ethnic character.

Setting out from the definition cited in the introduction to this volume – 'Neighbourhood designates a local community defined by spatial proximity as well as the social networks and relations which constitute neighbourhood'[48] – it is easy to imagine such a situation. Stepping out of their accommodation on a holiday, a couple crosses the street in order to have a bite in their local tavern together with the other regulars. Next, the woman turns left in order to visit her favourite baker, while the man goes to the right, intending to meet his fellow Mithraists in their sanctuary. They prefer different public baths, and in this regard opinions are divided also among their neighbours in the *insula* where they live. During a working day their routines differ even more. Therefore, if we tried to mark on a map the physical 'neighbourhood' in which each life played out, it would differ between people living in the same house, and each person's 'neighbourhood' could also change from one day to the other depending on where and with whom the person communicated and interacted on any given day.

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48 See Haug, this volume (n. 31).

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