

## HEILIGTÜMER IN OSTIA

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Recently, there has been a steadily increasing interest in religious studies within the field of archaeology. This current work is devoted to the religious buildings of Rome's harbor city from the Late Republic until the fourth century C.E. However, one should not be deceived by the unspecific title, *Sanctuaries in Ostia*, nor by the author's somewhat prosaic aim of compiling a "sacral topography" of the site. Rather, the study presents a complex and multilayered analysis of the religious life of a city. Urbanistic, social, and cultural questions and processes are addressed not only diachronically but also from myriad perspectives.

The choice of Ostia could not be more apt for this kind of broad-based study. Only a handful of Roman sites can match the town's density of archaeological finds, coupled with a good state of preservation as well as many inscriptions. These circumstances form an excellent foundation on which to address social and historical questions. No less than 50 urban sanctuaries are known in Ostia, most of them yielding comprehensive archaeological data.

The city's appeal lies in its dynamic historical development: starting out as a slowly growing town in the Late Republic and Early Principate and possessing a stable social framework, it then turned into a large urban metropolis during a Middle Principate susceptible to social unrest. The third century C.E. saw the town's rapid decline. It subsequently became a seaside town for the Roman aristocracy. It is against this backdrop that the author poses the questions of the social role of the sanctuaries and cults in Ostia as well as how the city and its inhabitants reacted to turmoil and upheaval during its development. The study addresses the urban integration of the sanctuaries, their architectural layout, their building and use phases, their dedications and inscriptions, and

the social structure of the dedicators and users, not to mention specific cultic-ritual aspects. Previous studies on Roman religion have tended to focus on formalistic sacred-law definitions. The author eschews this perspective and makes a conscious effort not to fall into an outdated categorization of old Roman, oriental, and imperial cults, favoring rather a more holistic approach. It does seem that the traditional separation of various cults—often practiced by the same people at the same time—does not do city life any justice.

The study at hand has a clear design: after its methods and aims, there follows an overview of the city's history from its foundation in the fourth century B.C.E. until late antiquity. The core of the study is made up of three detailed case studies: the sanctuary of the Quattro Tempietti, the cult area of the Magna Mater, and the so-called Tempio Rotondo in the forum. A final chapter gives an overview of further cults or sanctuaries and offers general thoughts on social context, the role of the cults within the city, and its sacral topography.

The best parts of the work are without a doubt the three case studies. Each is composed of a systematic analysis of the archaeological framework, a history of the sanctuary's use, and a catalogue of the inscriptions and dedications found therein. Detailed discussion of archaeological and epigraphic evidence shows that the choice of these three sanctuaries was deft. Their differing urban situation, architectural design, phases of usage, the provenance of the dedicators, and the cults practiced in each sanctuary complement the other exempla.

The Quattro Tempietti is the oldest of the cult areas at hand. It was probably erected on a joint platform in the middle of the first century B.C.E. for the goddesses Venus, Ceres, Spes, and Fortuna and for whom the author

was able to establish a close connection with waterways and trade. Unlike the other sanctuaries, this specific example is the result of a private dedication by an important local gens, the Lucilii Gamalae. However, despite their repeated interventions, the Lucilii Gamalae were unable to halt the decline of the sanctuary, and it lost its association with the gens. The author illustrates convincingly how the complex also gradually came to lose its importance within the city and how its function was then transferred to the later neighboring Piazzale delle Corporazioni.

Here, as well as in the second case study of the cult area of the Magna Mater, the various activities of corporations were concentrated. Corporations gained ever-increasing dominance within the city's social life. Indeed, it is the sanctuary of the Magna Mater with its cults of Attis and Bellona that was frequented until late antiquity and fitted out with several dedications. A startling connection to the imperial house can be traced back via the inscriptions.

The so-called Tempio Rotondo just east of the forum basilica must be viewed in a different light. It was probably built over an older preceding structure in Severan times and, due to its layout and fittings, can be regarded as a temple for the imperial cult, financed directly by the imperial family themselves. Despite its monumentality and its sumptuous fittings, the populace never gave the complex its full backing, and it remained a conspicuously empty space within the city confines. This comparison of three sanctuaries provides many interesting insights into their different functions over time.

The overview that follows on a selection of other sanctuaries (Castor and Pollux, Vulcanus, Hercules Victor, Bona Dea, Pater Tiburinus) is, however, somewhat weaker. There are still plenty of interesting observations (e.g., the importance of the cult of the Bona Dea for Ostian women). Taken as a whole, the overview nicely rounds off the author's tour d'horizon, so that at the end a vivid picture of Ostia's "sacred topography" results.

To conclude, a few critical observations should be mentioned. From a methodical point of view, the author unfortunately often falls into the trap of turning difficult archaeological findings into hard facts. Even if these have been discussed critically in the analytical part of the study, the author builds further theses upon this weak evidence. The reader should thus not just rely on the summary; this study requires each chapter to be read individually. One ought also to be cautious of accepting every detail put forward by the author. For example, the proposed new reconstruction of the Quattro Tempietti with its continuous facade is unconvincing, and its deliberate role as *limen* between water and land ways is somewhat overemphasized. Thoughts on the early phases of the sanctuary of the Magna Mater are also hypothetical, since the results of recent Spanish excavations are still unpublished and could not be included. Furthermore, there are ongoing discussions regarding the predecessor of the Tempio Rotondo and the reidentification of the temple on the Piazzale delle Corporazioni as a sanctuary for the Pater Tiburinus and as a central sanctuary of the collegia.

Although many details need work, the author manages to deliver a convincing and multifaceted overall picture of the harbor city's religious life, with all of its links to the everyday. This is where the study really comes into its own: an analysis of the functions of sanctuaries as social and communicative spaces, as well as a general study of religion as a provider of identity within a city and society caught up in constant flux. These defining moments allow the study at hand to transcend stale disciplinary and genre boundaries. It is thus a new and stimulating approach that deserves to be repeated.

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