

# Ostia Antica

## Tourist Guide



This guide is provided for free by the Internet Group Ostia.  
For more information: [www.ostia-antica.org](http://www.ostia-antica.org).

April 2011 (version 1.4)

## General information

Visiting Ostia is like visiting Tivoli and Hadrian's villa: a relaxing trip, that takes you away from the noise and incessant police-sirens of Rome. Reserve a whole day for your visit - not just to relax, but also because Ostia deserves it. The site is quite big, so don't spend too much time visiting the first buildings you encounter.

### *What to wear*

Dress "onion-skin" style, that is using layers that can be removed. Ostia Antica is fairly close to the sea, but it can also be quite hot in the ruins even on a cloudy day. Fine hot weather is generally guaranteed from mid-May to late September. Extra-comfortable shoes! And a sun hat!

### *How to get there*

The best way to reach Ostia is by using the metro. Trains leave at station Piramide. Get off the regular metro at Piramide, go up the escalator, turn immediately left and down the steps into the Roma-Lido station. A normal metro ticket will suffice for the entire journey. Get out at the stop Ostia Antica. Next cross the highway using the pedestrian bridge. To reach the site from the pedestrian bridge, keep walking straight ahead, cross a busy road (please be careful!) and after 100 metres turn left to get to the entrance (two minutes).

If you arrive by car, you can use a parking lot in front of the entrance of the excavations.

### *Food and drink, money*

Outside the station is a small bar. There is a restaurant with warm food on the site (not cheap and sometimes quite busy), but it may be a good idea to get some food and drink in the modern village Ostia Antica, only two minutes away. To get there, turn right towards the mediaeval fortress after crossing the pedestrian bridge. In the village you will find a good alimentari. You can have a bread roll filled with something (ham etcetera) prepared for you there. They also have soft drinks and mineral water sold from cold cabinets. Nearby you will find ATM machines.

### *Entrance fee*

Various discounts are given to EU residents, but you will have to take the initiative. In order to get a discount you must show your passport. Full price ticket: 6.50 euro. Half price ticket: youths between the ages of 18 and 25. Free ticket: adults above the age of 64; youths below the age of 18; school groups (with list of student names). Tickets are valid for the entire day, so you can leave the site and return if you wish.

### *Opening hours*

Open every day 8.30 to 19.30.

The Ticket Office closes at 18.00.

**The site is closed on Mondays, December 25 and May 1.**

### *Address*

Via dei Romagnoli, 717, Rome RM, Lazio, Italy.

## **A short history of Ostia**

The ancient Roman city of Ostia was in antiquity situated at the mouth of the river Tiber, some 30 kilometres to the west of Rome. The shoreline moved seawards, due to silting, from the Middle Ages until the 19th century. Therefore Ostia is today still lying next to the Tiber, but at a distance of some three kilometres from the beach. Ostia is Latin for "mouth", the mouth of the Tiber. The river was used as harbour, but in the Imperial period two harbour basins were added to the north, near Leonardo da Vinci airport. That harbour district was called Portus, Latin for "harbour".

### *Early Ostia*

To the east of Ostia were salt-pans, where salt was probably already extracted in the Middle and Late Bronze Age (1400-1000 BC). According to ancient tradition Ostia was founded by the fourth king of Rome, Ancus Marcius, who was thought to have ruled in the late seventh century BC. This settlement was near Portus. In the late fifth century BC the Tiber changed its course and the people moved with it. They built the oldest ruins that have been found in Ostia, the so-called Castrum. It was a rectangular, military fortress (194 x 125.7 metres), with walls of large tuff blocks. Remains of the walls have been found around the later Forum. The Castrum seems to have been built in the early third century BC.

In the second century BC Ostia gradually changed to a commercial harbour. The population of the city of Rome was growing after military successes. Grain was imported from Sicily and Sardinia, later also from Africa, that became a province in 146 BC. Little is known about the settlement in this period, because Ostia was almost entirely rebuilt in the second century AD. There must have been many shops, where food and beverages were sold, necessary for the voyage from Ostia to other harbours.

### *The early Imperial period*

Under Domitian (81-96 AD) the level of Ostia was raised about one metre whenever new buildings were erected, probably to protect them from Tiber floods. In this period Ostia was ruled by a small number of "aristocratic" merchant families. They lived in houses near the centre of town. Few remains of these houses have been found, because they were razed to the ground in the first half of the second century AD, when the city was largely rebuilt.

Many officials, such as the governors of provinces, now departed from and arrived in Ostia. In 2 AD Lucius Caesar, grandson of Augustus, died in Massilia (Marseille). The body arrived in Ostia, and was carried through the city, accompanied by officials carrying torches. After the death of Tiberius, Caligula took the ashes of his mother and brother to Rome, via Ostia.

Ostia was essential for the supplying of Rome, and therefore for the Emperor. Imperial slaves and freedmen worked in the harbour. Eventually Ostia would become the main harbour of Rome, but this took some time. The reason for this was, that the shore-line near Ostia did not offer natural protection to ships. Small boats could sail up the Tiber to Rome. Large ships unloaded at the Tiber quays of Ostia, very large ships out at sea. For these large ships Ostia was a dangerous place.

### *The harbour district*

In 42 AD Claudius - a frequent visitor of Ostia - started the construction of an artificial harbour, Portus, a few kilometres to the north of Ostia. A huge basin was dug out, protected by two curved moles and with a lighthouse. The lighthouse may have been 130 metres high. Channels connected the basin with the Tiber, and created an artificial island between Ostia and the harbour basins. The completion of the work was celebrated in 64 AD, during the reign of Nero.

Trajan built a second, hexagonal basin behind the basin of Claudius. The work was carried out in the years 106-113 AD. The harbour district was controlled by an Imperial official. Specialized procurators were in charge of the import of grain, oil, lead, wine, marble, wild animals etcetera. Cranes must

have been used for unloading heavy cargoes. Most of the harbour district has not yet been excavated.

#### *The second century AD*

The addition of the harbour district led to a building boom and great prosperity in Ostia. Most of the buildings that have been excavated were built in the first half of the second century, during the reign of Trajan, Hadrian, and Antoninus Pius. The prosperity lasted until the Severan period, that is the early third century.

In the second half of the second century and in the Severan period building activity was restricted to repairs and modifications. Commodus refounded the colony as Colonia Felix Commodiana ("Happy Colony of Commodus"), but that name was not used anymore after he was murdered.

Ostia and Portus were more than safe harbours and quays, they were also complete cities. Many goods for Rome were stored in store-buildings in the harbour cities and transported to Rome along the Tiber in tow-boats, pulled by oxen. Various guilds became increasingly important. These were associations of craftsmen and merchants, but also burial clubs. These guilds may not be compared with mediaeval guilds, if only because membership was not obligatory.

#### *The people*

Through immigration and the import of slaves the population rose to fifty thousand, including some seventeen thousand slaves. Most slaves were taken to Ostia from Egypt, the Middle East, and Turkey. Many must have been foundlings, but the breeding of slaves must also have been a profitable trade. Most families had at least one slave, and there were many Imperial slaves, working in the harbour and store-buildings. Many slaves were manual labourers, others were clerks and accountants. The most frequent slave-name is Felix, "Happy". Freed slaves were often active in the trade of their patron.

Many people who worked in Portus lived in Ostia. They crossed the Tiber with ferries (there was no bridge) and walked to the harbour district. Later, apartments were also built near the harbour basins. The famous physician Galenus lived in Ostia from 169 until 175 AD. He wrote: "All the doctors in these places (Ostia and Portus) are my friends, and both are populous centres".

#### *The decline of Ostia*

After the Severan dynasty there was political chaos in Rome. The reign of many Emperors was now ended by revolt or assassination after a few months or years. The economy collapsed. In Ostia building activity was minimal, and the number of inscriptions dropped dramatically. Old bricks and inscriptions were reused. The population shrunk. In the second half of the third and in the fourth century Ostia and Portus were struck by earthquakes and tsunamis. The first seem to have taken place in 238 AD (in Portus corpses were found below collapsed masonry), other evidence points to the reign of Probus (276-282 AD; several buildings collapsed), and an earthquake documented in Rome in 346 AD may also have damaged the harbours. Often the ruins were not cleared. Apparently it was not economical to rebuild them. And other tensions were building up: in 269 AD eighteen Christians were executed in front of the theatre, on the main road (Decumanus).

Constantine made Portus an independent city, called Civitas Flavia Constantiniana. Portus had been and was growing at the expense of Ostia. On the other hand Constantine donated a Christian basilica to Ostia and from 336 AD (until the present day) the bishop of Ostia consecrated the new pope.

#### *Ostia in late antiquity*

Ostia was from now on primarily a pleasant living environment. Many expensive habitations were built from the later third until the first quarter of the fifth century. These houses were probably owned by merchants who lived in Ostia and worked in Portus. In 387 AD Saint Augustine stayed in Ostia with his mother Monica, who died there: "... she and I stood alone, leaning in a certain window, from which the garden of the house we occupied at Ostia could be seen; at which place, removed

from the crowd, we were resting ourselves for the voyage (to Africa), after the fatigues of a long journey".

The area along the Tiber had been abandoned, and here rubble was dumped on the streets, to create a barrier (in places four metres high), to protect the southern part of the city from Tiber floods. An inscription on the Forum, from the late fourth century, mentions the transfer of a statue "from sordid places" (*ex sordentibus locis*).

In 410 AD Alaric with Goths, Huns and Alans sacked Rome. He also captured Portus, but ignored Ostia. In 455 AD Gaeseric and the Vandals sacked Portus. Perhaps they also plundered Ostia. Many Ostians now lived and were buried in ruins. At the same time Portus was a thriving harbour. In 537 Vitigis and the Goths laid siege to Portus. Belisarius defended Portus and Ostia. The last inhabitants of Roman Ostia had retreated to the theatre, that was turned into a little fortress.

#### *From the eleventh to the eighteenth century*

Ostian marble was reused in the cathedrals of Pisa, Florence, Amalfi and Orvieto. A document from 1191 mentions a spot in Ostia called *calcaria*. This is a reference to a lime-kiln, in which marble (inscriptions, statues etcetera) was burned to be used as mortar. Several lime-kilns have been excavated. The search for marble was easy, because Ostia was not entirely buried. Richard Coeur de Lion landed at the mouth of the Tiber and saw "immense ruins of ancient walls" (August 26, 1190).

In 1557 there was a major inundation. The meandering Tiber to the north of Ostia changed its course. The branch of the Tiber to the north-east of Ostia was cut off. The old branch is now filled with earth and known as Fiume Morto ("Dead River").

From the fifteenth to eighteenth century promising ruins were searched by foreign visitors for inscriptions and statues. These ended up in private collections in England, France, Portugal, Spain, the USA and Russia (now mostly in national museums).

#### *The excavations*

The random searching of the ruins was forbidden by Carlo Fea, director general of antiquities, in the early nineteenth century. More or less structural activities began in 1855, under the auspices of pope Pius IX.

Ostia had been property of the Vatican, but from 1870 it was owned by the new Italian state. Truly scientific research started in 1907 by Dante Vaglieri. The north-east part of the city was now excavated systematically. Vaglieri died in 1913 and was succeeded by Guido Calza. Slowly more ruins were unearthed, and in 1938 one-third of the city had been excavated. Then extensive, hurried excavations began, lasting until 1942. The initiator was Mussolini, who wanted to present Ostia during a world-fair, the Esposizione Universale di Roma (EUR). The excavated area was more than doubled. More than 600.000 cubic metres of earth were removed, that had reached a height of 4 to 12 metres above the ancient street level. Needless to say that much information was not recorded during these five years. The world-fair never took place. Calza died in 1946.

After the Second World War excavations continued on a very small scale. In 1960 a monumental, historical study about Ostia was published, "Roman Ostia", by Russell Meiggs, a professor from Oxford. A detailed archaeological guide was written in Italian by Carlo Pavolini (updated in 2006).

## **Itinerary**

**(see the plan of Ostia at the end)**

### *Roman Gate [1]*

After entering the site, continue to the place where the ancient street is narrowed by a metal fence. It protects the scant remains of a city gate. The city gates and city wall were built in the first century BC by the famous orator Marcus Tullius Cicero and completed by his arch-enemy Publius Clodius Pulcher. To the south of the gate an aqueduct reached Ostia [2].

After passing through the gate you are on the main street of Ostia, the Decumanus Maximus. It is the continuation of the road that led from Rome to Ostia. The street is paved with basalt blocks. A few very shallow wheel-ruts can be seen between the gate and the theatre, the only wheel-ruts in Ostia. This indicates that further transport of goods was done by slaves or pack-animals, not with wagons.

### *Square of Victory [3]*

Behind the gate, to the left, is a square where a large statue of the winged Minerva-Victory was found. A plaster cast of the statue is today on the square. Originally it decorated the city gate. On the square copies can be seen of two identical dedicatory inscriptions of the gate. Lines 3 and 4 began with the names of Cicero and Clodius, that were read for the first time not long ago, when fragments in the store-rooms of the museum could be assigned to the inscriptions.

### *Baths of the Coachmen [4]*

On the other side of the street are baths named after a mosaic with cabs that were drawn by mules. These transported passengers between Ostia and Rome. It is best viewed from the modern road behind the baths, where there is a metal fence. The names of some of the mules can be read, for example Pudes, "Modest", and Barosus, "Silly". On the other side of the modern road is a depression in the terrain. This is the so-called Fiume Morto (Dead River), the ancient course of the Tiber [5]. The meandering river changed its course in the sixteenth century. Continuing along the Decumanus you see largely unexcavated buildings.

### *Baths of Neptune [6]*

To the right of the Decumanus, behind a long row of shops, are large baths. These can best be viewed from a terrace with a modern fence. An inscription informs us that they were built by the Emperors Hadrian (117-138 AD) and Antoninus Pius (138-161 AD). The baths are famous because of black-and-white mosaics of Neptune and his wife Amphitrite. Neptune is depicted in a chariot drawn by hippocampi. He is surrounded by marine creatures: dolphins, tritons, and Nereids on sea-monsters. In an adjacent room is a mosaic with Neptune's wife, Amphitrite, on a hippocampus. She is accompanied by Hymenaeus (a winged Eros with a torch, referring to marriage) and tritons. To the north-west is the large *palaestra*, an open area that was used for sports. It is surrounded on three sides by a portico with marble columns. In a room to the south-east of the *palaestra* is a mosaic with naked athletes. Two boxers with spiked gloves, two pancratiasts (boxers-wrestlers) and a wrestler have been preserved.

### *Road of the Fountain*

A bit further on, a side-street branches off from the Decumanus to the right. It is now blocked by a room with a mosaic [7]. The mosaic consists of a vessel and a damaged text: "[... dicit] FORTVNATVS [vinum e cr]ATERA QVOD SITIS BIBE", "... Fortunatus says: drink wine from the vessel because you are thirsty". Apparently this was a bar. Niches in an adjacent room belong to an elaborate marble fountain.

Halfway down the road is a public, covered water-basin [8]. In the long side are two holes from which water flowed continuously. The holes were decorated with bronze water-spouts in the shape of heads of dolphins. On the ground is a gutter with depressions in which buckets were placed. In one

of the short sides is a large hole, through which buckets were lowered. In the bottom of the hole is a smooth groove made by ropes.

### ***Barracks of the Fire Brigade [9]***

Turn right and enter the building to your left. You are now in the barracks of the fire brigade. About three hundred firemen (*vigiles*) lived here, in rooms around a courtyard. They came from Rome and stayed in Ostia for periods of three months. At one end of the courtyard is a chapel for the cult of the Emperors. In and near the chapel are many altars and bases for statues, with inscriptions mentioning Emperors. On the floor of the vestibule of the shrine is a mosaic depicting the sacrifice of a bull.

To the equipment of the *vigiles* belonged hooks, pick-axes, ladders and ropes. The *vigiles* brought water to a fire using buckets, but powerful pumps were also used, operated by five or six *siphonarii*. At high pressure the water from the pumps could reach a height of 20 to 30 metres. Water was drawn from public fountains and basins, and from wells inside buildings, under the supervision of *aquarii*. Cloth soaked in water or acid was thrown on the flames. As a last resort walls and buildings were torn down.

The work of the *vigiles* included patrols during the night, when the risk of fire was greater, due to the use of oil-lamps and torches. They made sure that fire was used in a responsible way, and that a quantity of water was present in all buildings and apartments. If people were careless they could be punished with a whip. The *vigiles* also acted against thieves and burglars, and kept an eye on the slaves who guarded the clothes of the visitors of baths. They returned runaway slaves to their owners.

### ***Square of the Guilds [10]***

Returning to the fountain you can cross the road and walk through a corridor between buildings. You have now reached a vast square behind the theatre. In the centre of the square are the remains of a temple. The square is surrounded on three sides by a porticus behind which are many small rooms with mosaics. In these rooms traders and travellers could meet captains and shippers from all around the Mediterranean sea.

Inscriptions in the mosaics mention guilds (*collegia* and *corpora*), shippers (*navicularii*) and traders (*negotiantes*). There are also many depictions of dolphins, ships and the lighthouse at Portus. Grain-measures (large round bins) refer to the grain trade. Many harbour cities are mentioned. Several were in modern Tunisia, a main supplier of grain. The Karalitani were from Cagliari on Sardinia, the Narbonenses came from Narbonne in France.

This unique square shows the "international" character that Ostia must have had. The streets of the city were crowded by people from all over the known world. On the walls of the city not only Latin, but also Greek graffiti are found.

### ***Theatre [11]***

The theatre was built in the late first century BC by Agrippa, the right-hand man of Augustus. It was enlarged at the end of the second century AD, during the reign of Commodus (176-192 AD) and Septimius Severus (193-211 AD), and could hold 4000 spectators. One ancient text probably refers to the Ostian theatre. In 197 AD Septimius Severus addressed the Senate in Rome and said: "For if it was disgraceful for him [Commodus] with his own hands to slay wild beasts, yet at Ostia only the other day one of your number, an old man who had been consul, was publicly sporting with a prostitute who imitated a leopard".

The lower level of the seating area (*cavea*) could be entered from the Decumanus through a central corridor, and through two lateral entrances. Four staircases led to the second and third level. The seating area could be shaded by an awning, suspended from poles inserted in travertine blocks. The area in front of the seating area (*orchestra*) had a marble floor. The high back wall of the stage has disappeared almost completely. In late antiquity the *orchestra* could be flooded for aquatic displays. The pool was not very deep, 1.40 metres at most. Naval battles were of course not re-enacted. We

should imagine a choreography of the gods and goddesses of the sea and lakes, of nymphs and Nereids, presumably scarcely dressed.

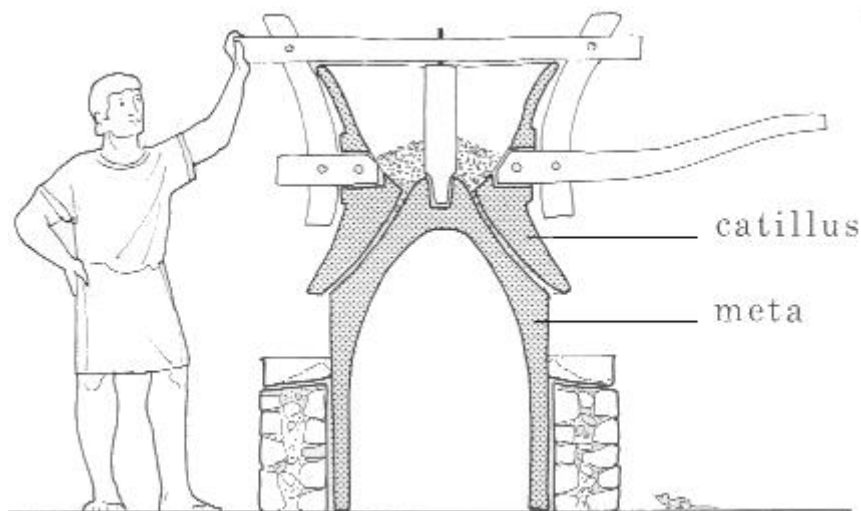
#### *Christian chapel [12]*

In front of the theatre Christian martyrs were executed in 269 AD. On this spot a tiny chapel was later erected at a very high level. On the few remains of the chapel are modern commemorative inscriptions.

#### *House of the Millstones*

Continue along the Decumanus and turn right after 200 metres. To your left you will notice a wall of large tuff blocks [13]. It belongs to the oldest settlement, dated to the early third century BC. A bit further, to your left, is a famous view towards a huge temple, the Capitolium. The buildings on either side of the road may have been 15 metres high. The walls are 60 centimetres thick. They have a concrete core and a facing of bricks or a combination of bricks and small blocks of tuff. Before taking this road we can visit the building a bit further on, to the left. This was a mill-bakery [14].

Huge halls contain the remains of many millstones. A millstone consisted of two parts: an immobile, conical base (*meta*) and on top of that a stone that was shaped like an hour-glass (*catillus*). Mules or horses were attached to a wooden frame over the *catillus*. They walked in circles and rotated the *catillus* over the *meta*. The grinding took place between the two parts, that were at a very small, fixed distance. If the distance was too small, the grain would have been burnt, and if it was too large, too much bran would have remained. Specialist carpenters maintained the machines.



**Reconstruction drawing of a millstone.**

In an adjacent room are machines that were used for the kneading. Like the millstones they were made of porous volcanic stone. These are bowls in which the dough was kneaded by a combination of fixed and rotating blades. A few blades were inserted in the side of the bowl, and a few were attached to a vertical bar. Slaves or animals turned the vertical bar.

The floors suffered a lot, and were therefore covered with basalt blocks, in which imprints of hooves remain. Several basins are present, because water was needed in very large quantities, for the kneading, as drinking water for the animals, for moistening the grain before milling and so on. The bread was baked in a huge oven behind the room with the kneading machines. It can be reached through a narrow corridor in the back part of the building. The lower part of the cupola has been preserved. Wood was burned inside the cupola, as in modern pizza ovens. The bread was placed on a grate that could be rotated.



Several bakeries have been identified in this part of town. They were supplied with grain from a huge store building to the east of the House of the Millstones. Most of the bread that was made here was sold at a reduced price, by order of the Emperor.

#### *Museum [15]*

If you wish you can now continue to the small but delightful museum, next to which are a bookshop and a restaurant.

#### *House of the Wine-bar [16]*

Take the street leading to the Capitolium. Just before you reach the temple there is a wine-bar to your left. The L-shaped bar counter has a water basin in the lower part of both sides. A mortar that was found in the room has been fastened on top. Near the counter are three stepped shelves for beakers or glasses. Behind the bar is a courtyard. It contains a marble basin on a foot. In the centre of the floor a square marble basin was set, with a lead pipe for a vertical water jet. Along one of the walls is a bench, where visitors could enjoy their wine. Among the finds from the building is a metal slave collar, that was worn by a runaway slave. It carries the inscription: "Hold me so that I do not run away; I am a runaway slave".

#### *Forum*

The Forum, the main square of Ostia, is dominated by the huge Capitolium [17], a temple dedicated to the main Roman deities, the Capitoline triad (Jupiter, Juno and Minerva). Capitolia could be found in many cities in the western half of the Empire, following the example of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus on the Capitoline hill in Rome. The temple in Ostia was built by Hadrian. Opposite the temple is another temple, dedicated to Rome and Augustus [18]. On top of its substructure is a statue of Roma Victrix (Victorious Rome), dressed as amazon. Her left foot is resting on the globe. Two other buildings near the Forum have not been preserved very well. These are the Curia, the meeting place of the 100 members of the city council [19], and a Basilica, that was used for economic transactions and as courthouse [20]. A small round building on the centre of the Forum was a fountain, not (as the sign says) a shrine [21]. It was decorated with statues that were facing inwards.

#### *House of the Cult-niche [22]*

Continue along the Decumanus. You will now reach a small shopping-mall, to your right. It was named after a polychrome niche for a statue of a deity. The ground floor of the building is made up of shops, some facing the street, others around a courtyard. Travertine blocks supported the wooden floors of the upper floor. Other blocks were used for locking and bolting the doors. The upper floor of the individual shops was reached with a ladder, resting on a small platform with a few treads.

#### *Round Temple [23]*

Opposite the House of the Cult-niche is the Round Temple. It is the last major temple that was built in Ostia, in the second quarter of the third century AD. In front of the temple is a large square. The temple is on a podium, 3.80 metres higher than the square. It was reached with a wide, marble staircase. At the front of the vestibule were ten marble columns. The round *cella* has a diameter of 18.30 metres, less than half the diameter of the Pantheon in Rome. The walls are two metres thick. Next to the entrance is a spiral staircase, that led to the cupola. It spirals upwards around a thick travertine column.

In the *cella* are seven niches. Three are rectangular and may have contained up to three statues each. Four semicircular niches contained four more statues. Between the niches are the bases of eight columns. Remains of a channel in the *cella* indicate that there was an opening in the centre of the dome, as in the Pantheon.

Many portraits of Emperors were found in this area. These finds and, of course, the resemblance to the Pantheon in Rome, have led to the identification of the Round Temple as a temple dedicated to all official Roman gods, or a temple dedicated to deified Emperors (*Augusteum*). It has been pointed

out that, whereas the temple in Rome was dedicated to all gods (in view of its name), it was nevertheless primarily an *Augusteum*, in which the Emperor presided over the gods as *primus inter pares*.

#### *House of the Fishmongers [24]*

You now reach an intersection of five streets. On this busy spot fish could be bought in two shops. In the centre of both rooms is a marble table, and against the back wall a fish-basin revetted with marble, supporting small columns. In the eastern shop is a black-and-white mosaic, with marine motifs. We see a triton, and a dolphin with an octopus in its beak. Above and below the dolphin is the text INBIDE CALCO TE, "Envious one, I tread on you". It is an apotropaic text, that either refers to the dolphin, who scares away the fish, or to the octopus, an animal that is traditionally hostile to man, contrary to the dolphin.

#### *House of Amor and Psyche*

Take the road that leads towards the north-west. To your right are old, republican temples [25]. The largest one was dedicated to Hercules. Behind the temples is a house [26]. It was built in the fourth century AD. It was named after a statuary group of Cupid and Psyche on a pedestal, that stood in the centre of one of the rooms. Opposite this room was a tiny garden, behind marble and granite columns, supporting arches made of brick and travertine. There was no roof over the garden. Behind the garden a monumental fountain was built. The lower part consists of five semicircular niches. The upper part has five semicircular and rectangular niches, between which are marble columns. Between the bases of the columns are small marble steps, over which the water flowed. Water also emerged from holes in the front of the lower part, between the niches. The garden was the main source of light in the building. A hall in the back part of the building has a beautiful marble, polychrome floor.

#### *Baths of Mithras [27]*

Not far away are the Baths of Mithras. In the south part of the building is a narrow corridor, to the south of which is a room for a waterwheel. Wear-marks are visible on the side walls. The wheel had a diameter of 7.25 metres. It was operated by a slave and lifted ground water to a cistern. The output was 1000 litres per hour. In the north part of the building is a staircase leading to the service area, that has been preserved very well. An exploration is recommended. But before getting there you will reach an underground shrine of Mithras. The cult statue of Mithras, about to kill the bull, was found *in situ*, and a plaster cast has been placed in the shrine. Light falls on the statue in a dramatic way, through an opening in the ceiling, as it did in antiquity.

In the excavated part of Ostia were 16 shrines of Mithras. Several have mosaics and paintings with symbols and figures referring to the grades of initiation. Only men were allowed to participate in this mystery cult.

#### *Guild-seat of the Grain Measurers [28]*

Next to the baths is the guild-seat of the grain measurers. There were three sections within this guild: *nauticarii*, *acceptores* and *adiutores*. The first checked the grain on its arrival in the harbour, the second on arrival at the storehouses, the third when it was sent to Rome.

In the centre of the complex are the remains of a temple that was dedicated to Ceres Augusta, a combination of the goddess of grain and the Imperial cult. To the left of the temple is a large hall with a mosaic of a group of grain measurers. The first person from the left is rather damaged. The second is carrying a sack with grain. Next comes a small figure (a slave?). His right hand is raised. With his hand and fingers he is indicating the number 9. In his left hand is a rope with nine tickets, presumably of wood, used to count the number of sacks that had arrived from the harbour. The right half of the mosaic is taken up by three people around a grain measure. To the left is the actual measurer (*ensor*). In his right hand is a stick (*rutellum*), the function of which is not clear. In the

centre is a porter who has just emptied a sack, or is about to take the contents of the measure to a store building. The person at the far right is indicating the number 5000 with his right hand. The measure contained 25-27 *modii*, i.e. 214-234 litres or 400-432 *sextarii*. The sack contained 24.5-26.5 litres, or 44.5-48.5 *sextarii*. The relation between the sack and the measure is 1:8.8, which means that the measure was filled with nine sacks. This number coincides with the number 9, indicated by the small figure, and the nine tickets. Presumably a ticket was given to the porters in the harbour, and attached to the rope when the porter had reached the grain measure. The number 5000 must be a reference to 5000 *sextarii*, the contents of twelve grain measures, that had been handled by this team in one day. Above the figures is the inscription *V [milia] SEX(tariorum) H(odie) AGI(tata) HI(c)*, "Five thousand *sextarii* were handled here today".

#### *House of Serapis - Baths of the Seven Sages – House of the Charioteers*

On the opposite side of the road is a complex consisting of three units. The ground floor of the first unit consists of shops around a courtyard [29]. On the upper floors were apartments - the large majority of the population of Ostia lived on upper floors. Next to the passage to the next unit, the Baths of the Seven Sages, is a small shrine with a stucco relief of Serapis. A temple of this Egyptian deity is not far away.

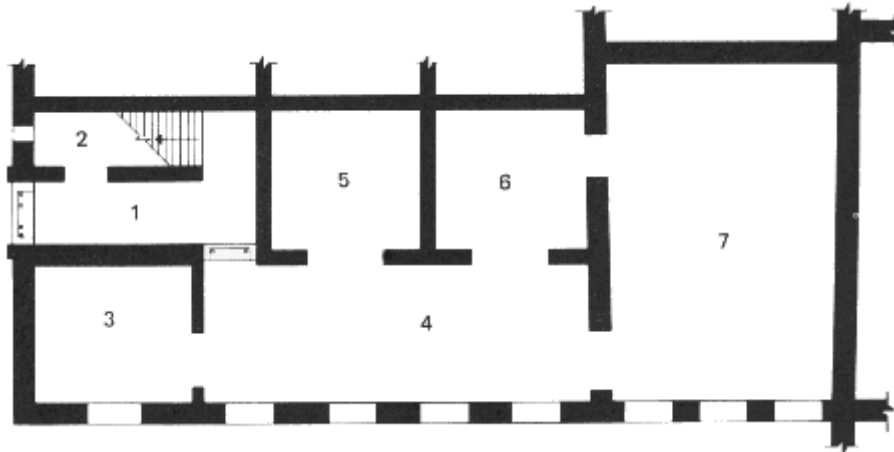
In the baths [30] you will first see a large, round hall to your left. In antiquity it was covered by a cupola. On the floor is a black-and-white mosaic with a diameter of 12 metres. Depicted are vegetative elements and hunting scenes with fifteen hunters. Behind the hall is a small room with paintings of the "seven Greek sages", who all lived around 600 BC. Their names and city of origin are painted in Greek next to them, for example "Solon of Athens", "Thales of Milete", "Chilon of Sparta". Humorous, ironic texts in Latin refer to activity in the latrine: "Solon rubbed his belly to defecate well", "Thales recommended that those who defecate with difficulty should strain", "The cunning Chilon taught how to flatulate unnoticed". Further on, behind a basin, is a painting of Venus Anadiomene (emerging from the water), between amorini, fishes, and crustaceans.

The third unit was named after paintings of victorious charioteers [31]. In this unit and in the first unit are staircases leading to terraces from which you will have a good view of this part of Ostia.

#### *Garden Houses [32]*

The Garden Houses were built during the reign of Hadrian. It is a luxurious residential complex, with expensive apartments. It is located near the ancient shore-line. The ground floor consisted of 16 apartments, a mansion, and many shops. The apartments were shielded from the busy streets by open spaces and rows of shops. In the centre of the complex is a pair of two times four apartments, back-to-back. The apartments have a ground floor area of c. 220 square metres.

The central apartments were surrounded by an unpaved court, probably a garden. In the garden are six large water-basins. Presumably they were originally covered. Water came from two spouts. Around the basins were gutters with depressions, in which buckets were placed. On all four sides of the garden are further apartments. The thickness of the walls is 60 centimetres, suggesting a total of four storeys and perhaps 1200 inhabitants.



**A typical apartment.**

Seen from outside the apartments appear as rectangular buildings, with many windows in at least one of the long outer walls. The main entrance is fairly unobtrusive. The lay-out of the interior is asymmetrical, and characterized by rooms arranged around three sides of a central hall, the *medianum*. The entrance sometimes opens directly onto the central hall, but often leads to a corridor or small vestibule (1). The central connecting hall (4) has a ceiling and receives light through windows in one of the long walls. On either end of this organizing area is a main room, the one (7) larger than the other (3). Sometimes these rooms are two stories high. They too have windows in one of the walls. Behind the central hall and sometimes behind the main rooms as well are small rooms, usually receiving indirect light (5-6), a latrine and a staircase (2). The furnishing of the interior is characterized by good-quality paintings and mosaics.

#### *Synagogue*

A Synagogue was found near the ancient shore-line. Those who wish to visit it should continue to the south, to the Baths of the Marine Gate (marked A on the plan) and walk 200 metres in a south-easterly direction.

#### *Forum Baths*

We now return to the Forum. To the south-east are the Forum Baths, one of the largest baths in Ostia. Opposite room 4 is a large public latrine [33]. From pivot-holes in the thresholds can be deduced that the entrances had revolving doors. There are twenty marble seats. Water flowed through channels in front of the seats. With this water a sponge on a stick could be moistened.



The baths [34] were entered through room 1. Visitors would proceed to one of four changing-rooms (*apodyteria* 4, 5, 12 and 13). Between the changing-rooms is the cold bath (*frigidarium*), 6. It was

surrounded by large marble columns. The height of the room must have been 15-17 metres. The octagonal room 15 was used for sun-bathing (*heliocaminus*). It had relatively few artificial heating, and the largest windows. Room 16 was a sweating room (*sudatorium*). Along the walls are marble seats. Rooms 17 and 18 were lukewarm (*tepidaria*). Holes in the square columns of room 18 were used to fasten window-frames. Room 19 was a hot bath (*caldarium*), with three basins. In these basins many hairpins were found, proving that women also used the baths. In the early fourth century an apse was added to the southern basin. The apse has round columns. Vertical bands of mortar on the columns are all that remains of the windows (most windows in Ostia contained glass). To the east of the *caldarium* are the ovens (*praefurnia*), which heated the air that passed through the hollow floors (hypocausts). To the south of the warm rooms is the *palaestra*, that was used for sports.

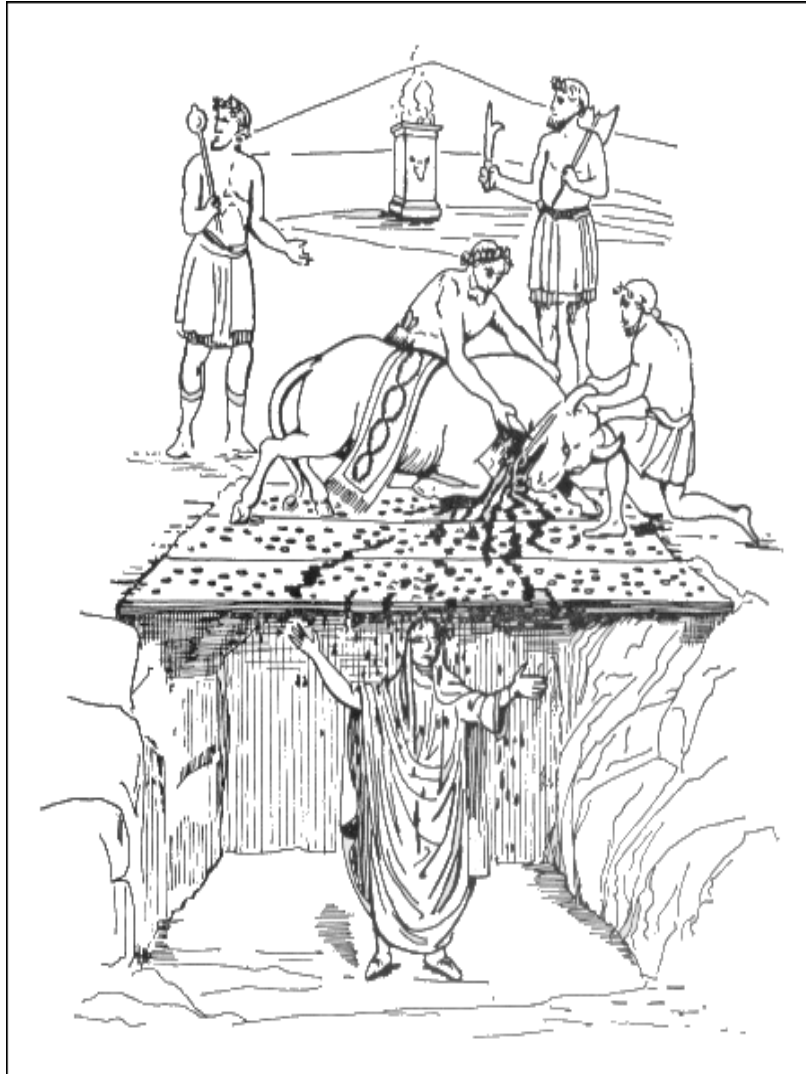
#### *Field of the Great Mother*

Next leave the baths at the south-west corner and proceed to a triangular field near one of the city gates. You will notice a large bakery on your left [35].

At the far end of the field is a temple of the Great Mother (Magna Mater), Cybele [36]. She was an eastern goddess of nature and fertility. The feast of Cybele was called Megalensia. Orgiastic rites took place, with torches, cymbals and double flutes. The celebration included self-flagellation and self-injury. Some adherents emasculated themselves and thus became priests of the goddess, called *galli*. Roman citizens were not allowed to do this. Therefore this act could also be performed in a symbolical way, by a cut in the arm. The emasculation is related to the cult of Attis, a shepherd, associated with the cult of Cybele. In frenzy he castrated himself, after breaking a promise to Cybele. He then died under a pine-tree, near the river Gallos, but was resuscitated.

The temple of Attis is near the city gate [37]. The entrance is flanked by two semi-columns with large, marble reliefs of Pan, each with a six-reeded shepherd's pipe and a shepherd's crook. In an apse is a plaster cast of a statue of a reclining Attis, after the emasculation. In his left hand is a shepherd's crook, in his right hand a pomegranate. His head is crowned with bronze rays of the sun and on his Phrygian cap is a crescent moon. He is leaning on a bust, probably the personification of the river Gallos, where he had died.

The death of Attis was remembered on the Dies Sanguinis, "Day of Blood". Some of the faithful were baptized with blood: they stood in a pit, under a thick slab with holes, on top of which a bull was killed. It led to a rebirth lasting twenty years. The Trench of the Blood is found behind the temple, in the city gate.

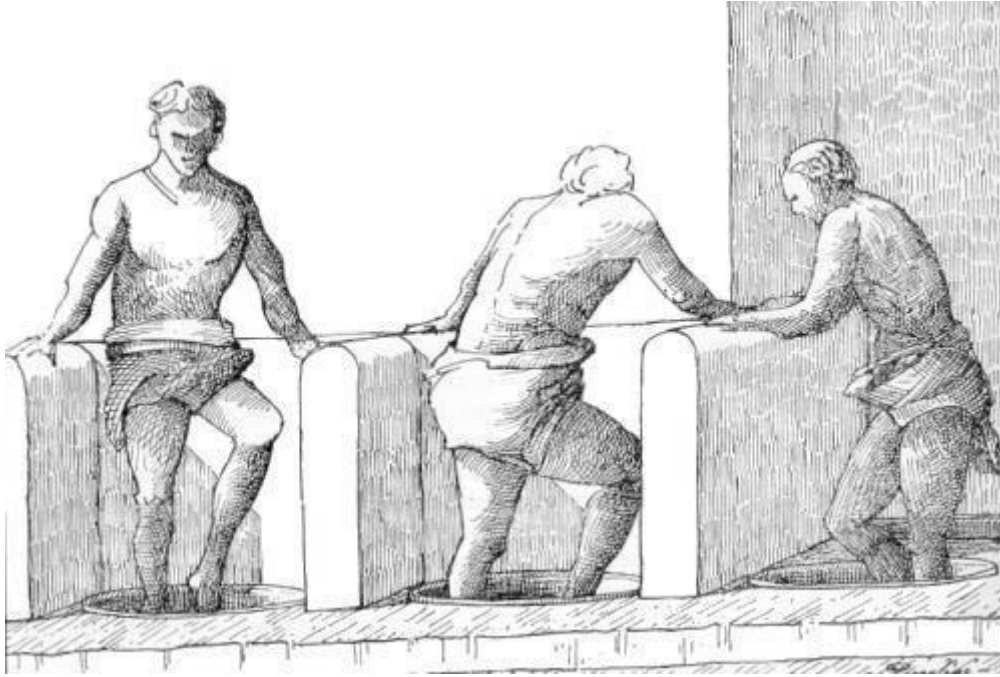


**The blood baptism.**

### *Fulling mill*

We now return in the direction of the ticket office. You will pass a house from late antiquity with statues and a fountain, the House of the Fortuna Annonaria [38].

A bit further on is a large fulling mill [39], where clothes were cleaned. In the workshop are four very large basins, 0.90 deep and communicating with one another. In these basins clothes were put to soak and cleaned. There were 35 pressing-bowls with small walls (hand-rests) on either side. Here the material was further cleaned, by workers who "jumped" or "danced" on the clothes (the so-called *saltus fullonicus*), while they leaned on small walls on either side. Detergents were used, such as the *creta fullonica* (fuller's earth). It helped remove the grease and enhanced the colours. Urine, collected in public urinals, was used for bleaching, and so was sulphur, that was burned under wooden frames over which the cloth was suspended. After the pressing, the material was taken to the basins again, for the removal of the detergents. The cleaning process ended with beating the cloth, which also made it more compact. Fulling mills were known for their stench, caused by the detergents. This must have affected also the health of the workers.



**The saltus fullonicus ("fullers' jump").**

***Necropolis* [40]**

Before leaving Ostia you can visit a few tombs, just in front and to the right of the ticket office. One tomb type that you will see is the *columbarium*. This is a rectangular building, with niches in the walls in which urns were placed. The funerary chamber was often preceded by a small courtyard, the walls of which could also contain urns. Sometimes the *columbaria* had an upper floor. Other tombs were used for inhumation. The bodies were usually placed in arched recesses in the walls of the funerary chamber, sometimes in sarcophagi made of marble or terracotta, or in *fossae* in the ground.

## Legend of the plan

- [1] Roman Gate
  - [2] Aqueduct
  - [3] Square of Victory
  - [4] Baths of the Coachmen
  - [5] Dead river
  - [6] Baths of Neptune
  - [7] Bar of Fortunatus
  - [8] Public fountain
  - [9] Barracks of the Fire Brigade
  - [10] Square of the Guilds
  - [11] Theatre
  - [12] Christian chapel
  - [13] Castrum wall
  - [14] House of the Millstones
  - [15] Museum
  - [16] House of the Wine-bar
  - [17] Capitolium
  - [18] Temple of Rome and Augustus
  - [19] Curia
  - [20] Basilica
  - [21] Round fountain
  - [22] House of the Cult-niche
  - [23] Round Temple
  - [24] House of the Fishmongers
  - [25] Republican Temples
  - [26] House of Amor and Psyche
  - [27] Baths of Mithras
  - [28] Guild seat of the Grain Measurers
  - [29] House of Serapis
  - [30] Baths of the Seven Sages
  - [31] House of the Charioteers
  - [32] Garden Houses
  - [33] Public latrine
  - [34] Forum Baths
  - [35] Bakery
  - [36] Temple of Cybele
  - [37] Temple of Attis
  - [38] House of the Fortuna Annonaria
  - [39] Fulling mill
  - [40] Necropolis
- [A] Baths of the Marine Gate (towards Synagogue)



