Pursuant to the agreement between the Archaeological Superintendency of Ostia Antica and the Department of Archaeology of the University of Bologna, in 2007 an initial exploration of the suburban area known as Porta Marina was performed, resulting in the identification of a site of particular interest.

In addition, a campaign of documentation and research in the archives of the Superintendency was launched. Starting in 2008 attention was directed at an area that remained miraculously untouched by the systematic and extensive clearance excavations of the 1930s and 1940s carried out as part of the so-called “Operation E42” (Esposizione Universale di Roma 1942). As is well-known, the earth-moving operations associated with E42 were designed to highlight the phases of Ostia’s existence that reflect its greatest splendor (the Trajanic and Hadrianic periods AD 98-138), but in practice they resulted merely in the destruction of the deposits pertaining to the last phases of the city’s life (Late Antiquity).

The site is a low mound overlooking the ancient coastline, located between the famous “opus sectile domus” and the Baths of Marciana (a.k.a., Porta Marina Baths, Maritime Baths).
In September-October 2008, thanks to a “Young Scholars” scholarship created for the Department of Archaeology by the Carisbo Bank, a campaign of reconnaissance and geophysical prospection was performed to explore the site’s potential.

First, using a total station directed by Prof. Dario Giorgetti, the topographic layout of the site was established, including small-scale relief over 3,000 m2. Then a section was cut to verify and document the stratigraphy of the site, which preserves not only the Roman and Late Antique layers, but also the abandonment levels of the successive periods.

Two types of geophysical prospection were employed: ground-penetrating radar (Fondazione Carlo Maurilio Lerici, Milan) and magnetometry (Becker Archaeological Prospections, Beuerberg, Germany).

The encouraging results of the geophysical investigations confirm the presence of large structures of the middle Imperial period, verified also by the documentation and cleaning of the protruding architecture; in one section a brick-stamp bearing the consular date of AD 123 was observed.
Archival research

The Porta Marina neighborhood was brought to light during the E42 excavations, between 1940 and 1942.

Previously, undocumented excavations were carried out, on several occasions, on the lone standing ruin in the area, part of the frigidarium of the Porta Marina Baths (known at the time as Porta Marina), in 1774, 1930-1935, and (discontinuously) 1922-1928. The materials consulted in the offices of the Archaeological Superintendency of Ostia Antica document the systematic clearance of the streets (the continuation of the Decumanus Maximus beyond Porta Marina, the so-called “Street of Cartilius Poplicola,” and the so-called “Street of Marciana”) and the buildings facing onto them (the Porta Marina and the “opus sectile domus,” III. VII.8, known at the time as “the structure on the Decumanus with seafront view”). Once the streets were cleared, the investigations moved to the buildings on both the west side of the continuation of the Decumanus (funerary monument at III. VII.2, domus fulminata at III.VII.3-5, and the structure immediately to the south at III.VII.6) and to the east (“Forum of Porta Marina” at IV.VIII.1 and Bona Dea sanctuary at IV.VIII.2). The clearance excavations also affected the buildings facing onto the “Street of Cartilius Poplicola,” i.e., the series of rooms lining a long portico and interpreted as a horrea (IV.VIII.5); they also affected insula IX, albeit marginally, through the uncovering of the “loggia of Cartilius Poplicola” (IV. IX.1), the funerary monument of Cartilius Poplicola (IV.IX.2) in 1941, a room (IV.IX.3), and building constructed around a central courtyard (IV.X.4) at the corner of the “Street of Marciana.” The clearance excavations also uncovered the full extent of the Porta Marina Baths (IV.X.1).
The archival research has demonstrated that the excavation of the buildings facing onto the “Street of Marciana” (regio IV, insula IX) was carried out between July 19 and November 15, 1971 as part of a larger excavation and conservation project for insula X that concluded in 1975. The clearance excavations reached an arbitrary level corresponding to the level of the “Street of Marciana,” which did not correspond to any level of ancient use. It is nevertheless clear that the strata belonging to secondary phases of the life of the buildings were removed. The presence of a small bath building in opus vittatum (IV.IX.4) built into the pre-existing structures is evidence for the vitality of the neighborhood in Late Antiquity and for the concentration of contemporaneous bathing structures along the northern side of the Via Severiana.

In the Late Republic and Julio-Claudian periods – the age that saw the construction of the coastal barrier and breakwater excavated by Becatti – the area of insula IX lay immediately inside the shoreline. The construction of the eastern section of the “opus sectile domus” over 2nd-century AD structures documents a precocious advance of the coastline. The movement of the coastline created the conditions for the urbanization of insula IX, beginning in the Hadrianic period, as indicated by the brick-stamps discovered in the excavations of the north side of the block.

As for the raising of the ground level, in the area nearest to the city-walls an initial raising contemporary with the paving of the decumanus is documented in the Bona Dea sanctuary, which is located at the same level of the domus fulminata and dated approximately to the middle of the 1st century AD. A successive raising with the installation of the paving visible in situ is associated with the reorganization of the neighborhood’s layout.

**Topographic survey**

The topographic survey of the site was designed principally to satisfy several objectives:

a. positioning of the area of interest within the local reference system of the site of Ostia Antica;

b. creation of three permanent reference points with maximum visibility;
c. creation of a grid of stakes needed for the geophysical prospection;
d. creation of a digital terrain model (DTM) based on a grid of squares measuring 2 m on a side.

The survey was performed using a total station (Geotronics Geodimeter 506) and was preparatory in nature, designed to aid in understanding the potential (and relative limits) of the various strategies and instruments employed in the topographic description of the area under investigation, as well as to define a solid and reliable network of known points, an indispensable preliminary step for any future archaeological operation. The next stage will be the detailed recording of the entire block in which the hill is located so as to create an adequate cartographic base for the correct positioning, within the topographic reference system, of the structures and archaeological remains revealed by the upcoming excavations. In the 2009 campaign the entire area will be recorded systematically, starting with the visible walls. In this stage a GPS receiver, set to calculate and record solutions in kinematic mode, will aid in the completion of the DTM with the creation of an extremely dense network of points.

The 2009 campaign

The new investigations will take place between September 7 and November 7, 2009. On one hand, the work will be limited to the cleaning of the walls exposed in the 1960s; on the other hand, a stratigraphic trench of 400 m² will be opened to verify our supposition that the topmost layers are a dump of materials created
during the E42 excavations. This choice is intended, first of all, to provide the first reliable interpretation of the structure identified in the geophysical prospections, as well as a sample of the block’s layout and structure. Study of the protruding remains, in fact, suggests the presence of a monumental building of probable Hadrianic date, with walls preserved to a height of ca. 3 m.

The work area has been planned and certified according to current safety regulations with the contribution of the Department of Architecture of the University of Rome “La Sapienza.”

Staff

The work will be performed by teams of 8 students divided into 4 shifts. The students were selected from among ca. 110 applications sent from all of Europe.

The investigations are coordinated by dott. Angelo Pellegrino and Prof. Massimiliano David with the collaboration of Prof. Dario Giorgetti. The core staff is assisted by dott. Giacomo Orofino (topography), dott.ssa Maria Luisa Stoppioni with dott.sse Angelini, Masi, and Pari (artifacts), and dott. Marcello Turci (stratigraphic sequencing and documentation).
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