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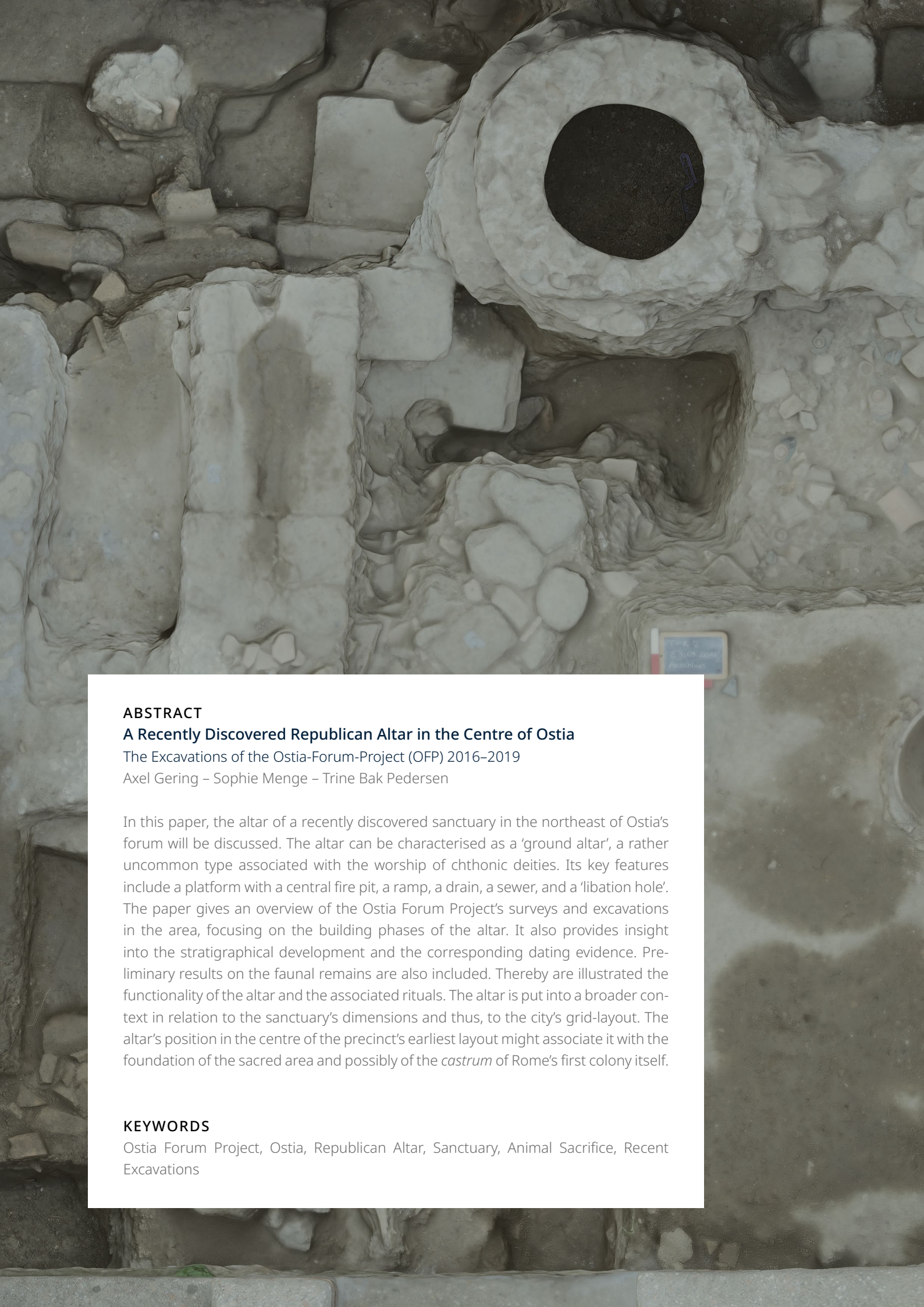
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The background image is a photograph of an archaeological excavation site. It shows various stone structures, including a large circular feature with a dark interior, possibly a well or a large pit. The stones are light-colored and weathered. In the lower right, there is a small blue and white label with text that reads "TPR 2", "23.09.2019", and "Abschluss".

ABSTRACT

A Recently Discovered Republican Altar in the Centre of Ostia

The Excavations of the Ostia-Forum-Project (OFP) 2016–2019

Axel Gering – Sophie Menge – Trine Bak Pedersen

In this paper, the altar of a recently discovered sanctuary in the northeast of Ostia's forum will be discussed. The altar can be characterised as a 'ground altar', a rather uncommon type associated with the worship of chthonic deities. Its key features include a platform with a central fire pit, a ramp, a drain, a sewer, and a 'libation hole'. The paper gives an overview of the Ostia Forum Project's surveys and excavations in the area, focusing on the building phases of the altar. It also provides insight into the stratigraphical development and the corresponding dating evidence. Preliminary results on the faunal remains are also included. Thereby are illustrated the functionality of the altar and the associated rituals. The altar is put into a broader context in relation to the sanctuary's dimensions and thus, to the city's grid-layout. The altar's position in the centre of the precinct's earliest layout might associate it with the foundation of the sacred area and possibly of the *castrum* of Rome's first colony itself.

KEYWORDS

Ostia Forum Project, Ostia, Republican Altar, Sanctuary, Animal Sacrifice, Recent Excavations

A Recently Discovered Republican Altar in the Centre of Ostia

The Excavations of the Ostia-Forum- Project (OFP) 2016–2019

I. Introduction

¹ This paper aims to provide a first overview of the central altar of a sanctuary which was recently discovered in the northeast of the *Forum* of *Ostia Antica*. It reflects the results of the survey and excavation campaigns 2016–2019, in which a substantial part of the sanctuary's altar area, however only a minute part of the sanctuary itself was excavated. Additional information on the precinct's temples and the general layout were gained through small test trenches and geophysical analysis. For the next years, a more comprehensive excavation of the site is planned.

² Section II summarises the Ostia Forum Project's recent excavations (Axel Gering and Sophie Menge), while section III provides an overview of the altar area's main structures. Section IV presents the phases of the altar area and section V their interpretation. The focus lies on one hand on the architectural structures and the building phases of the altar (Axel Gering) and on the other hand on the stratigraphical phases and the dating evidence, focussing on the ceramic finds (Sophie Menge). As the interpretation of the area and the sacrificial rites also relies on the large amount of animal bones, a preliminary report on the faunal remains will be included (Trine Bak Pedersen).

³ As mentioned above, this paper will solely deal with the sanctuary's presumed main altar, while the precinct's layout and its temples as well as its urbanistic implementation will be discussed in detail in separate publications¹.

¹ Articles: Gering 2022; Gering (forthcoming); Gering – Menge (in preparation); Gering – Menge – Pedersen (in preparation) – Monographs: Gering (in preparation); Menge (in preparation); Pedersen (in preparation); Jensen (in preparation); Damgaard (in preparation); Trockels (in preparation); Daviddi (in preparation).



1

Fig. 1: Ostia, city centre.
3D-orthoplan

II. Overview of the Ostia-Forum-Project's Recent Excavations

4 Ostia's Forum has been a centre of robbing activities from the early Middle Ages until the 19th c., as the 17 m high Capitolium ruin was never completely buried. Until the mid-20th c., the entire Forum's plaza was continuously excavated and refilled, leading to a non-cohesive and thus hard to trace excavation history. This resulted in a necessity for an archaeology of already previously excavated areas². Fortunately, there

2 See <www.ostiaforumproject.com> (22.01.2022). Gering 2013; Gering 2018b, 14–18. 188–191.

were and still are a few areas in Ostia's city centre that are yet to be excavated, especially in and around the forum porticoes.

5 The north-eastern part of the Forum consists of a portico and several adjoining rooms (fig. 1). The portico (MFE)³ was initially excavated in 1913 until a sand layer at 0,80–1,00 m ASL was reached, while the adjoining rooms (TFR1–3) hitherto only have been excavated superficially (fig. 2)⁴. None of these rooms were excavated below their Hadrianic floor levels. The three-room group (MFR) was re-excavated and published by the OFP in 2012⁵. Since 2016, the area TFR2, an approximately square room (ca. 4,90 × 5,60 m) located south of MFR, has been the focal point of the Ostia Forum Project's research (fig. 2. 3).

Excavation History (1912–1916) and the Area TFR2 as a Stone Deposit

6 Until recently, the area TFR2 contained a stone deposit covering its entire floor up to the windows with a maximum height of 3,60 m ASL. Most of the stone fragments were plain pavement slabs, some were decorated architectural fragments. The latter mostly stem from the marble-clad buildings surrounding the Forum: The Capitolium, the porticoes, the Forum's Basilica, the so-called Curia, the Temple of Roma and Augustus, and other smaller marble temples and buildings, even including finds from a now lost Isis- and Serapis sanctuary at Ostia's former Tiber docks.

7 In cooperation with the Parco Archeologico di Ostia Antica, the marble-, travertine-, and other stone fragments from the area TFR2 were measured, drawn, and systematically catalogued (fig. 3). Initiated in the summer campaign 2016, this task is carried on as a subproject of the OFP⁶.

8 Not only the stone fragments, but also the formation of the deposit has been analysed thoroughly. Most of the marble fragments were added to the deposit after the 1912 and 1913 excavations of Dante Vaglieri and Raffaele Finelli, which took place in the northern half of the Forum. These first scientific excavations have been documented in an unexpectedly detailed fashion but remained mostly unpublished⁷. After the excavation was extended to the portico (MFE), additional slabs from its pavement were stored in the area TFR2. Other stone fragments found in the TFR2 deposit stem from a different excavation deposit which used to be below the Capitolium, inside its podium. The 'Capitolium cellar' was used as a storage area until the stored material was moved to the area TFR2.

9 In 1913⁸, Vaglieri reports the discovery of an unusually well preserved, not yet lit lime kiln in the immediate surrounding⁹ of the area TFR2. This material was evidently added to the TFR2 deposit. Several other lime kilns around the Capitolium were already documented by archaeologists before Finelli¹⁰. Ostia has always been subject to intense spoliation, still in 1915, Finelli discusses the phenomenon of radical spoliation of the marble pavement, not only of the portico MFE but the entire area¹¹. In 1916,

3 The abbreviations used for each building always consist of three letters: TFR (Taberna Forum Rooms), MFE (Main Forum East), and MFR (Main Forum Rooms).

4 While the north-eastern part of the forum has only been excavated superficially in the past, the areas marked in red in the plan indicate the recent excavation trenches of the OFP since 2011 as well as the areas analysed with georadar (GPR).

5 Gering 2011, 476–487.

6 Originally, the architectural elements were analysed and partly published in a series of articles by the author: Gering 2017a; Gering 2018a; Gering 2020. A PhD project is continuing the work on the marble finds (Jensen, in preparation).

7 Finelli 1912; Finelli 1913, published in Vaglieri 1913, 237–239.

8 Vaglieri 1913, 237.

9 Finelli 1913, 195: "Verso l'angolo sud-est del portico presso il Capitolium".

10 Lenzi 1998 "sito 12": "...fornaci simili furono scoperte da Robert Fagan non lontano dal Tempio".

11 Finelli 1915, 127. The infamous lime kilns of the early 19th century after the excavations of 1801–1805 run by a "Signore Vitelli" were already known in 1819.

Roberto Paribeni commented on encountering this issue in the publication of his nearby excavation¹².

The Situation 100 Years Later. A 'Marble Deposit' Rediscovered in 2016

¹⁰ Within two campaigns (2016–2017), the stone deposit in the area TFR2 was completely emptied and systematically documented in several photogrammetric 3D models. The deposit itself had a stratigraphy of three layers: The first superficial layer consisted of material stored in the area in the 1980s. The core of the marble deposit, the 'middle layer' was deposited during the excavations of 1912–1916. It consisted of material that Finelli had partially photographed before he commenced clearing the Forum's plaza in front of the Capitolium, emptying the above-mentioned lime kiln, and excavating the portico. At the end of the excavation, the finds from these trenches were moved into the area TFR2, as well.

¹¹ In contrast to the upper strata, the deposit's lowest layer mainly consisted of marble cut-offs and fist-size marble fragments embedded in ancient debris, most probably stemming from ancient lime kiln activity in the area. This lower layer was not excavated during the 1913–1916 excavations, hence, the ancient stratigraphy had been preserved. The stratum contained a number of interesting architectural fragments: e.g. large decorated and inscribed blocks and fragments of *Cipollino*-marble columns, which were intentionally laid down in an L-shaped corridor granting access to both entrances of the area TFR2. Next to this corridor, a pile of pre-sorted material intended for lime burning consisting of thin revetment slabs was found. Such deposits often included ready-to-fire marble fragments and other recyclable materials, i.e. pieces of lead removed from the dowel holes of marble blocks¹³. Additionally, burned and calcinated marble fragments, a common by-product of lime burning, were found in the TFR2 deposit.

¹² In Late Antiquity, the room's surface was partly dug away, thus, the stone deposit rested on top of an irregular layer of building debris comprised of roof tiles, bricks, window glass, small ceramic fragments and burned mortar (fig. 3). The room itself finally collapsed after the end of the 6th c. CE or even later, preventing further stone-robbing in this area¹⁴.

¹³ To summarise, until 2016, the area TFR2 was covered by several tons of marbles deposited from Late Antiquity until the more recent excavation period, concealing the only unexcavated part of Ostia's Forum.

¹⁴ Beneath the marble deposit, dug into the surface of the area, numerous open pits filled with ceramic finds and faunal remains were visible. These deposits also contained a few Republican ceramic finds, even though the pits were dug into a much later pavement level. The unusual number of residuals within the deposits and the surface layers resulted in many questions concerning the dating and the function of the area.

¹⁵ In agreement with the direction of the Parco, the superficially visible ceramics were documented and analysed during the campaigns of 2016 and 2017. This commenced the initiative of conducting a deep excavation in the area TFR2 (fig. 2). The two main goals of the excavation were:

¹² Paribeni 1916, 322.

¹³ A direct parallel is the stone deposit TDV in the south-western corner of the Forum, which is close to the lime kiln and workshop in MFD and was not excavated by former excavators as TFR. Since 2012, this deposit has been excavated in several campaigns by OFP. The roof of TDV collapsed in the mid-5th c. CE and the stone deposit was put in place sometime after this collapse, but still before the final collapse of the entire insula in the 6th c. CE: Cf. Gering 2020. This phenomenon is further analysed within the PhD project by Niccolò Daviddi.

¹⁴ The latest find from the area TFR2 is the upper half of a Keay 61 / Bonifay 49 amphora, dating to the end of the 6th to the 1st half of the 7th c. CE.

- Getting insight into the unknown structures that were visible in the geophysical analysis of the areas TFR1, 2 and MFE.
- Gaining an understanding of the previous excavations (1913) during which the entire adjacent portico (MFE) was excavated, but not stratigraphically documented. We aimed to get further insight into the “lost” MFE-strata by excavating the area TFR2 and 3D-documenting its stratigraphy carefully to then compare it with the inconclusive data provided by Finelli.

The area TFR2 was excavated between August and October 2019¹⁵. Geophysical surveys helped to define the most logical starting point: These surveys were conducted by Hungarian cooperation partners in the entire insula in 2016, 2017, and 2018 (fig. 2)¹⁶.

¹⁶ The uncommon development of the area TFR2 became increasingly apparent: About 1 m below the Hadrianic surface, at an unusually high level of 1,00 m ASL, layers dating to the Middle Republican period were attested. In the very centre of ancient Ostia, at the crossing of the *Cardo* and the *Decumanus*, apparently, compared to the rest of the city, a completely different urbanistic development has taken place – the stratigraphy seems ‘condensed’. In contrast to the surrounding area, which mainly exhibits house- or shop structures with different shapes and orientations, the area TFR2 encompasses very few structures, most of them built in tuff. Instead of stone or tile pavements, there were mostly beaten-earth floors and, as mentioned above, an unusual number of pottery- and animal bone deposits.

This demonstrates an uncommon functional continuity with remarkably few level raises, especially considering the at least four centuries of intraurban development in this important location in the city centre.

¹⁷ In contrast to the area TFR2, the adjoining rooms TFR1 and TFR3 were excavated superficially in 1913–1916. These old trenches were partly re-excavated, cleaned, and documented during the 2019–2021 campaigns (fig. 2)¹⁷.

¹⁸ In the area TFR1, this surface cleaning revealed an *opus spicatum* pavement, a cluster of *Late Antique* coins as well as some marble fragments of inscriptions and sarcophagi from the Necropolis. Apparently, in 1913, the excavation of the floor was not completed, which is evidenced by the discovery of a slightly over-life-sized portrait of the emperor Hadrian, discovered a few centimetres below the surface of a Late Antique repair of the taberna floor¹⁸.

¹⁹ The lower layers of TFR1 were analysed through geophysics; only limited excavation took place, verifying the geophysical surveys. So far, two major structures were identified:

- A sewer that ran 1 m below the Hadrianic surface, and
- a deep pit below the level of 1,87 m ASL, filled with large quantities of animal bones interspersed with a variety of interesting finds, i.e. decorated bronze objects, ivory hairpins, black gloss bowls, fragments of Hellenistic braziers and miniature-vessels. This could indicate the existence of pits filled with ‘sacred waste’ in this area. The hitherto initial test excavations also showed that there were apparent pavement

¹⁵ In three of the quadrants in the area TFR2, the excavation was carried out up to 1,50 m below the surface. For static reasons, the excavations were carried out in several steps respecting a certain safety-distance from the foundations of the surrounding walls, which are about 3 m high.

¹⁶ Cf. Gering 2022, chapter 32.3.4.

¹⁷ Since 2020, these pursuits have been limited by the restrictions caused by Covid-19.

¹⁸ The portrait was retrieved in the presence of the staff of the Parco Archeologico in early September 2019 and was transferred to the well protected facilities of the archaeological park. For security reasons, it was initially omitted to publish this find, while the 2019 excavation campaign was still in progress; since then, it has remained so due to the pandemic. A separate publication about this portrait is planned.



2

Fig. 2: Ostia, city centre. Position and dimensions of the sanctuary's hypothetical first parcel (marked in green) with the central altar (green) and the position of the OFP's excavation trenches (marked in red)

levels at 1,54–1,60 m and 1,87 m ASL in the area TFR1. These correspond exactly with the two main pavement levels of the adjacent TFR2 (see below).

20 Not only the pavement levels of the areas TFR1 and TFR2 coincided – the thorough lecture of Finelli's excavation diaries (GdS / *Giornale dello Scavo*) led to an interesting result: his stratigraphical observations paralleled the newly excavated stratigraphy in the area TFR perfectly¹⁹. This, in consequence, proves that since the beginnings of the Middle Republican castrum, both areas (TFR and the portico MFE) had formed a joint space before they were separated during the Hadrianic building programme. The architectural structures as well as the finds from the various trenches imply a public sacred area. Hence, the potential for future excavations is apparent, especially in the so-far mostly unexcavated area TFR1.



3

III. The Area TFR2. The Architectural Structures and the Development of the Area

Fig. 3: Ostia, Forum, Room TFR2. Orthophoto 2016–2017

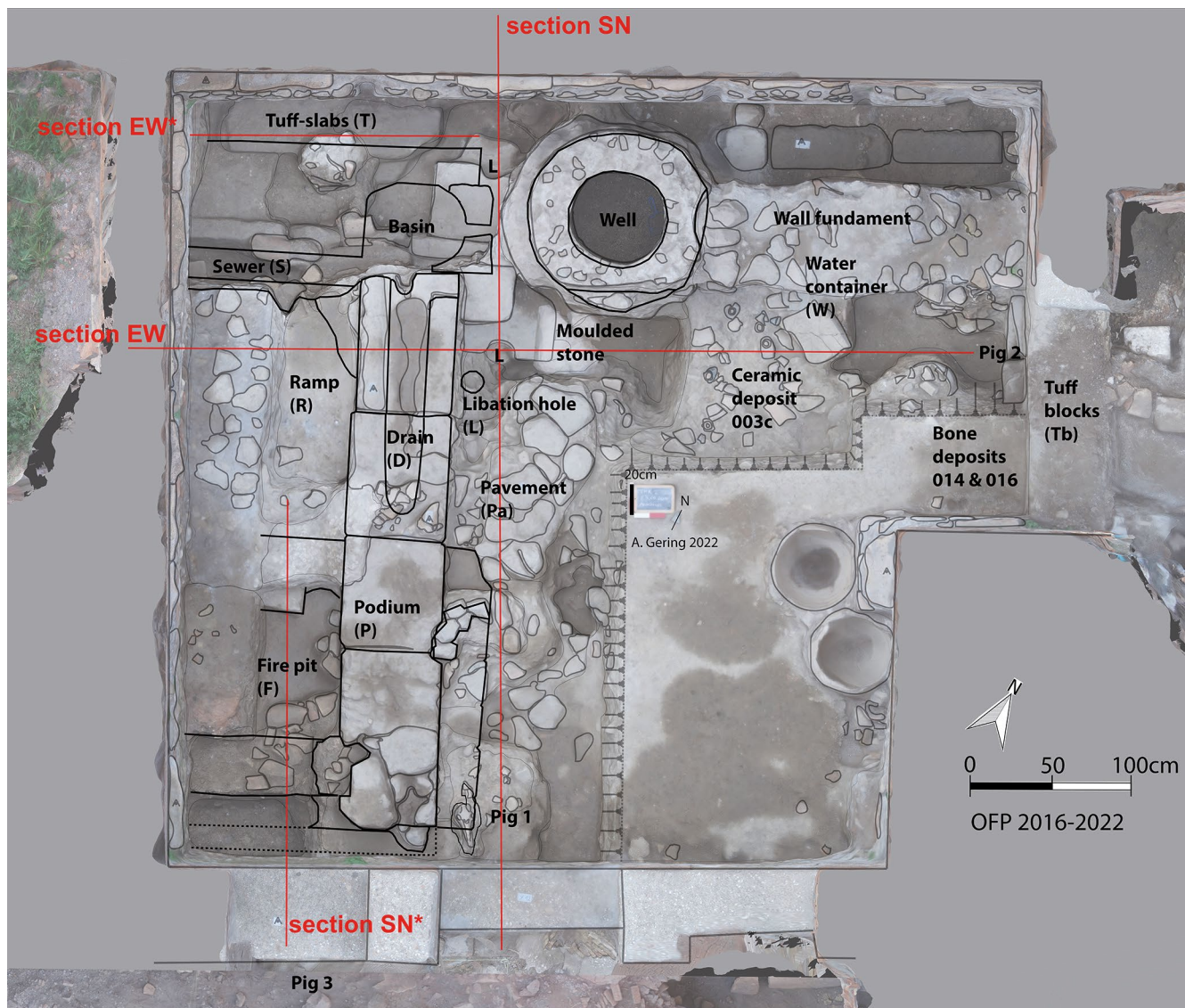
21 Several solid structures were found in the area underneath the Hadrianic levels of the area TFR2. Some of these structures previously extended below the Hadrianic walls and had been demolished or covered when the walls were built. Their original size can be sufficiently reconstructed due to the additional information gained from archive plans as well as geophysics and building analysis.

The Sealed Well and Its Fill

22 Below of the marble-deposit, at the surface of the area TFR2, a circular structure built in *opus incertum* (close to *opus quasi-reticulatum*) appeared (fig. 4). It was easily identifiable as a well. The well had been intentionally cut, filled, and 'sealed' at the level of 2,22 m ASL, using mortar, a roof tile, and ceramic fragments. The closed-off well was then integrated into a Trajanic *opus reticulatum*-wall fundament²⁰.

23 The well was filled with ceramics, building debris, and charcoal. This seems to have been the result of a single depositional process, filled in from the top at 1,75 m ASL down to the bottom at 0,30 m ASL. The two best-preserved finds are the upper half of a Republican transport amphora and several large fragments of a richly decorated Hellenistic terracotta brazier (fig. 5). This object is an import from the eastern

20 The wall itself probably served as a last precinct wall. As mentioned above, this paper focusses on the altar itself, while the overall layout and development of the precinct is subject to separate studies.



4

Fig. 4: Ostia, Forum, Room TFR2. Orthophoto and -plan showing the area at the end of the 2019 – excavation and the altar's key features

Mediterranean, which is typical for sacred contexts and dates between the 2nd c. and mid-1st c. BCE²¹. The specific type is dated to the 2nd half of the 2nd c. BCE²². The deposition of the brazier and the other objects can be dated to the time of the obliteration of the sacred area between 121–130 CE.

24 The construction of the well can be dated around the mid-1st c. BCE, as its fundament level of 1,87 m ASL corresponds to the pavement level of this phase (see below, phase 5). The finds from the well's building pit confirm this date and the building-technique in *opus incertum* close to *opus quasi-reticulatum* does not contradict it.

25 About 1 m to its east, on a lower pavement level (1,29 m ASL; phase 2), a terracotta water container (W2) was found. The vessel probably served as a water container until it was replaced by a proper well with access to groundwater.

The Tuff Podia. The Key Features and Their Proposed Function

26 In the western half of the area TFR2 a rectangular tuff structure emerged. The structure was covered entirely by a layer of mortar and ceramics (fig. 3). Henceforth, it

21 The only comparison in Ostia itself was found in the area of the *Quattro tempietti*, see Paribeni 1915.

22 Şahin 2003, 14 tab. 7, Type EHek.



Fig. 5: Hellenistic Brazier found in the sealed well of the area TFR2 in 2016

will be referred to as '(tuff-) podium' (P). Apart from the well, it was the only substantial architectural structure in the area TFR2 (fig. 4).

27 Further excavations of this structure revealed a series of further podia from previous construction phases, all of which were composed in a similar layout. Each of the podia consisted of a different type of tuff and varied slightly in dimensions and orientation, while still sharing the same functional features. These features are:

- a platform with a central fire pit (F);
- a drain (D);
- a ramp (R) and
- a sewer (S) at the lowest point of the ramp (fig. 4).

28 East of the ramp, another key structure was discovered, consisting of a subterranean cavity and an opening with a diameter of about 15 cm (1/2 Roman foot). The opening was surrounded either by stone blocks or, in some phases, defined by ceramic sherds. The connection to the cavity was kept up throughout all building phases as its opening was consecutively adapted to the area's level raises. This feature will be treated in detail in chapter IV, while its functional interpretation will be discussed in chapter V: It was most probably connected to libation rites, the pouring of liquid offerings. It will henceforth be referred to as 'libation hole' (L)²³.

23 Many of the ritual deposits which will be discussed in Pedersen (in preparation) were located surrounding this structure.

29 The general layout of the features (podium, fire pit, ramp, and sewer) underwent only slight structural changes throughout the consecutive building phases.

30 In agreement with the superintendency, the tuff podia were excavated with a minimally invasive excavation technique. Thus, only the highest podia were excavated completely, while their predecessors remain incorporated within the upper podia. Some of the earlier building phases were not entirely covered by the later altar structures. Hence, it was possible to gain at least limited insight into their layout. Merely for the earliest podia the evidence is sparse, there is no proof for the earliest fire pit or any of the earliest phases' architectural decoration. Regarding the decorative aspect, all phases of the podia seem to exhibit a rather plain design. This might be connected to the poor quality of the tuff, especially in the earliest phases. Nevertheless, with every successive phase, more sustainable tuff types were used. From the Late Republican period onwards, there is the issue of massive reuse of decorated tuff elements. Many of the worked tuff-elements were not found in situ, as they had been reused in a later construction phase of the podia, mostly as fill material for the building phases in *opus incertum*.

31 The tuff podia with their key features were part of an area that had remained open air for several centuries. Based on a series of structural and contextual indications, these tuff structures can be attributed to the function of an altar. The specific type of this altar is characterised by a fire pit dug into the earth, instead of the more usual raised position on more common altar types. The altar's type and its function will be further discussed in section V.

32 Regardless of the abovementioned indicators (open-air area, specific altar type), the basic function of the tuff podia as fire altars is sufficiently supported by the existence of the fire pits²⁴. This interpretation is further evidenced by calcinated faunal remains most probably belonging to sacrificial animals. The uppermost fire pits have a diameter of ca. 70–90 cm and were recognisable as darker-coloured areas embedded in the lighter-coloured clayey soil. The pit itself was surrounded by the tuff blocks of the podium. It contained an abundance of silty ash and calcinated animal bones. Around the pit, innumerable pieces of charcoal were found.

IV. The Phases of the Altar Area

33 In the following, to comprehend the functionality of the area and the configuration of its key features, they will be described phase by phase based on the phase plans²⁵ (fig. 11. 13. 15. 18. 20) and the section drawings (fig. 8. 9. 10)²⁶. To comprehend the individual phases and their proposed date, the strata and their dating evidence will be discussed, as well.

34 The stratigraphy of the area TFR2 (fig. 6)²⁷ is extremely complex due to several issues:

- Its deepest layers have only been excavated in a small section of the area, thus there is not a lot of finds and general information on especially the first two phases.

24 The fire pits and their corresponding level in each building phase is visible in the section plan (fig. 8, a: 'fire pits' F1?–5. For the darker-coloured area of the fire-pits cf. fig. 7).

25 The phase plans are based on orthophotos of high-resolution 3D-models and digitally drawn stone plans.

26 The very last stages of the development of the sacred area will be subject of separate publications, as the transition of the area from a sanctuary to a profane building complex are highly complex. In this article, the main changes in the altar's layout up until the most extensive changes in phase 5 will be discussed.

27 The colour-codes mentioned below the phase number refer to the building phase's colour shown in fig. 8, a. Phases 6 and 7 (red and purple) will be treated in separate publications due to the complexity and the massive amount of finds from these phases.

Phase	Altar level	Pavement level TFR2 (ASL)	Pavement	Date
1 (green)	> 1,15 m (?)	(1,14 m)	Beaten-earth floor	Middle Republican: Middle – end of 3 rd c. BCE (?)
2 (yellow)	1,35 m	1,30 m	Tile pavement	Middle Republican: End of 3 rd c. BCE (?)
3 (orange)	1,54 m	1,54–1,60 m	Tile pavement	Late Republican: Beginning of 2 nd c. – 1 st half of 2 nd c. BCE
4 (blue)	1,75 m	1,70–1,75 m	Tuff slab pavement	Late Republican: 2 nd half of 2 nd c. – middle of 1 st c. BCE
5 (white)	1,90 m	1,87–1,90 m	Beaten-earth floor	Late Republican: Middle of 1 st c. BCE
5a (white)	1,90 m	1,96 m	Repair of beaten-earth floor (5)	Late Republican – Trajanic / Early Hadrianic: After the middle of 1 st c. BCE – 119–121 CE (coins)
6 (red)	2,22 m	2,07 m	Beaten-earth floor	Early Hadrianic: 119–121 CE (coins) – 130 CE (brick stamps)
7 (purple)	2,22 m	2,22 m (intermediate) 2,43 m	Mortar Beaten-earth floor	Imperial: <i>T. a quo</i> : 130 CE (brick stamps)

6

- Some of the pavements seem to have been used for long periods of time to then be followed by a sudden level raise, which makes it difficult to retrace every phase in a detailed fashion.
- The pavement levels around the altar are sloping toward the northern end of the structure. This phenomenon is most probably connected to the sloping of the ramp and drainage system of the altar as well as the position of the libation hole in several of the phases.
- The stratigraphy is disturbed by multiple foundation trenches, especially for walls but also for the well.
- The stratigraphy shows other disturbances due to the ritual deposits in form of (mostly circular) pits dug in the ground.

Fig. 6: TFR2: The phases of the altar area TFR2

35 In the following, the discussion of each building phase will not only include the architectural and stratigraphic development but also an overview on the ceramic finds from the strata associated with the level raises. Additionally, a preliminary overview of the faunal remains will be provided.

36 The amount of animal bones found in the area TFR2 distinguishes it from excavations in other parts of the forum, where animal bones were among the rarest and most fragmented finds. Proper quantification of animal bones requires a sampling approach that enables all the species present on the site to have equal opportunity to be recovered²⁸. However, it was unfortunately not possible to get an equal sample group of the faunal remains in TFR2 for several reasons: Firstly, although sieving was done in 2016, 2017, and 2019, smaller bones from animals such as fish, bird, and younger animals are usually underrepresented. Secondly, it was not possible to excavate an equal amount of material from all phases of the sanctuary, since only small sections of the sacred area were excavated, especially regarding the lowest layers. The dataset from the lower layers is therefore not of equal size to the upper layers, skewing the comparison of the bone quantity from the different phases of the sanctuary. However, the data from the lower layers will still be included in the presented dataset since it

28 Reitz – Wing 2008, 148.



7

Fig. 7: Ostia, Room TFR2. View to the southwest showing the remains of the altar A1

provides exclusive information on animal consumption and possible animal sacrifice in the earliest phases of the sanctuary.

³⁷ The statistics representing the quantity of the different species present in the sanctuary have been created with the assumption “one bone equals one animal”²⁹. In total 1438 faunal remains were found in TFR2. This number accounts for both complete and fragmented bones. Due to their state of preservation, a large amount of the remains could not be identified by species. On average only 22% of the remains’ species could be identified and were thus included in the statistics.

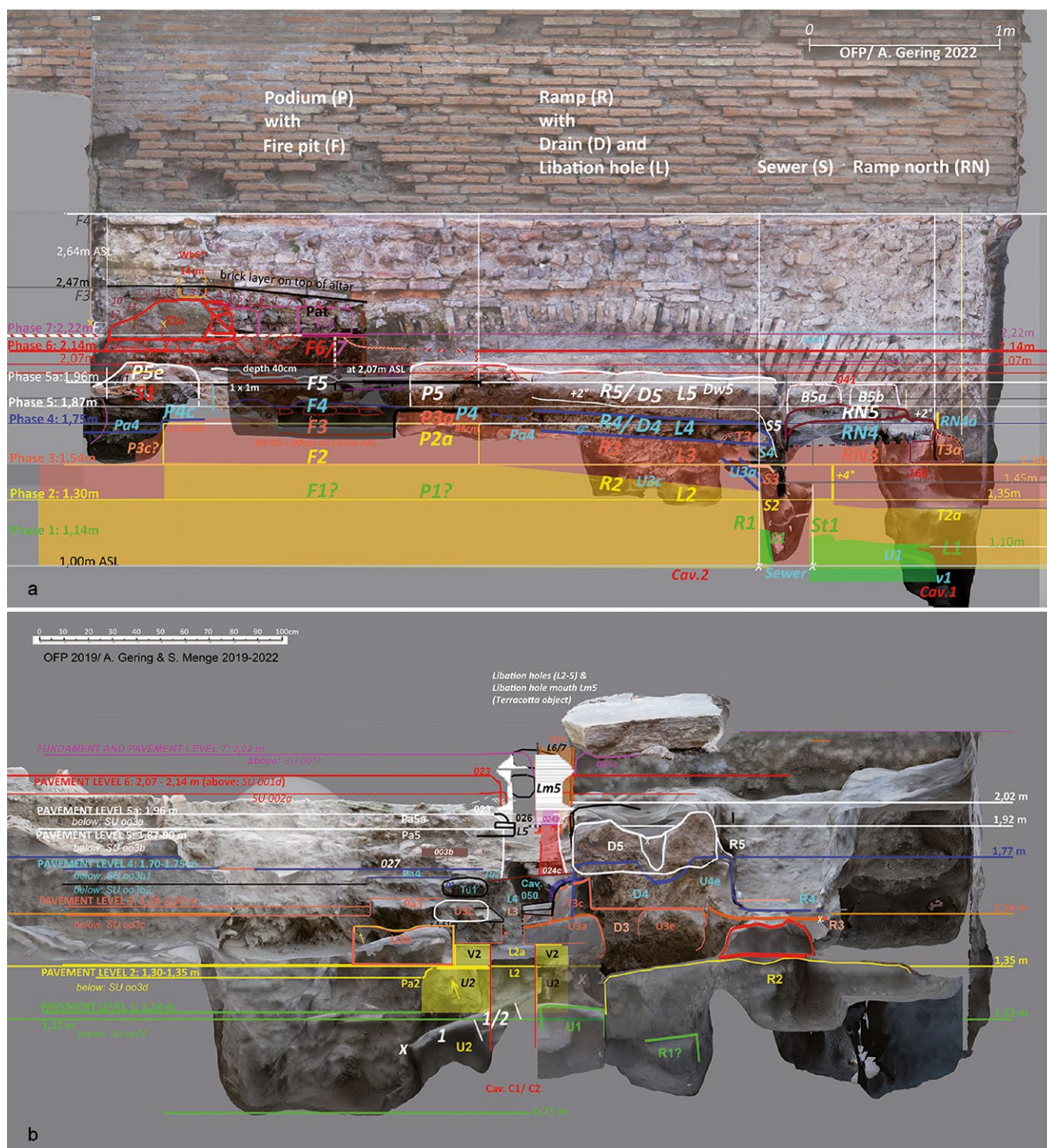
Building-Phase 1

³⁸ The oldest and lowest structure in the area TFR2 is the sewer (S1). It extends along the entire northern side of the first tuff ramp (R1?), which had been built at the same time³⁰. The lowest level of the sewer is at 0,90 m ASL, while its highest point is preserved at 1,15–1,18 m ASL. The sewer is bordered an upright-standing slab (St1) made of grey *Cappellaccio*-tuff. The outlet of the first ramp was on a level just above 1,18 m ASL, leading directly into the open sewer.

³⁹ Attached to the sewer slab, a perforated stone block (U1) was found (fig. 8, a. b. 11). Its surface is at 1,12–1,15 m ASL and it exhibits a half-round hole with a reconstructed diameter of ca. 15 cm on its southern side. To its north, its counterpart (V1) was found, a slightly more damaged tuff block, which is also characterised by a half-round

²⁹ This is can of course be an issue in the quantification, since larger animals automatically will have a higher probability to be present in the material.

³⁰ The sewer S1 does not continue towards the east, so it was connected only to the ramp R1? of the podium-structure. Thus, a direct connection of both elements is clear regarding the building process and their common function. The sewer went straight towards the Cardo in the west.



8

perforation. Below the level of 0,90 m ASL there was a cavity (C1) connected to this structure, which was cut when the later Hadrianic wall was constructed. To the west of the cavity, on a level of 1,07 m ASL, another tuff block (T1) was found, its function remains unclear.

40 It is noteworthy that the aforementioned elements, i.e. the outlet of the ramp, the corresponding sewer, and the perforated blocks, seem to have been laid out as a functional unit. These architectural elements define the first ('green') building phase of the altar.

41 Even though it was not possible to excavate the space below the later fire pits without destroying parts of the altar structures, a first fire pit (F1?) can be assumed to

Fig. 8: Ostia, Room TFR2.

a) N-S section of the altar phases;
b) E-W section of the libation hole and the ramp and drain of the altar A1

Fig. 9: An east-west section showing phases 1–4 based on a 3D-orthophoto (OFP 2021)

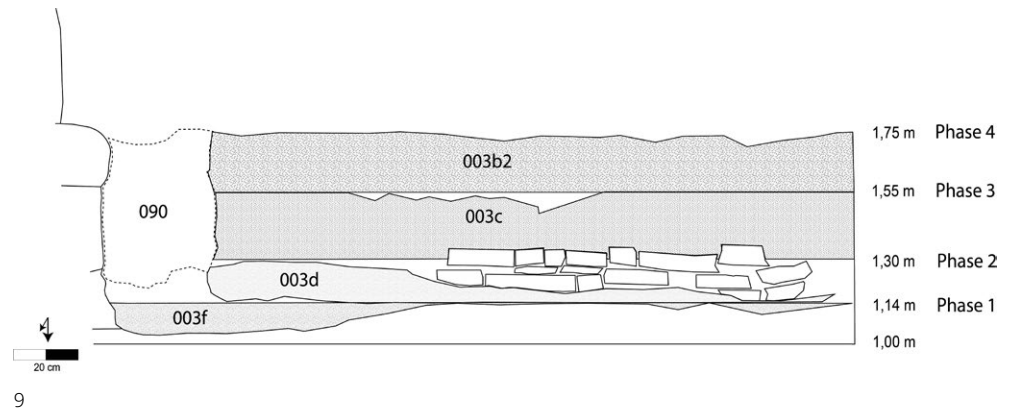
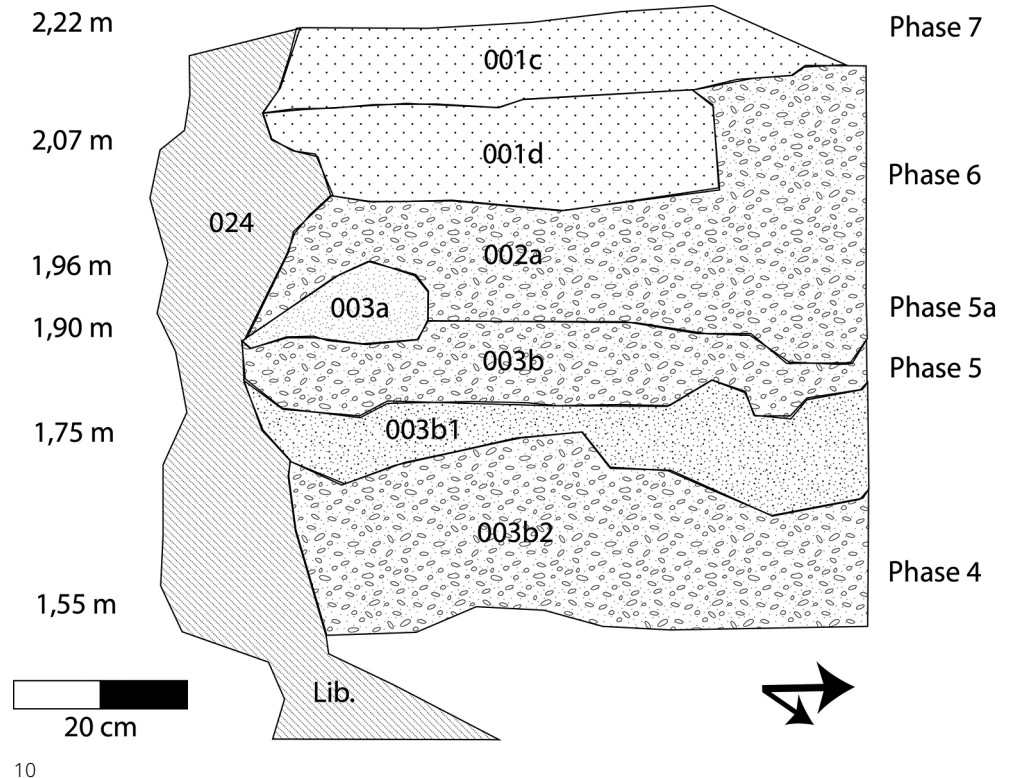


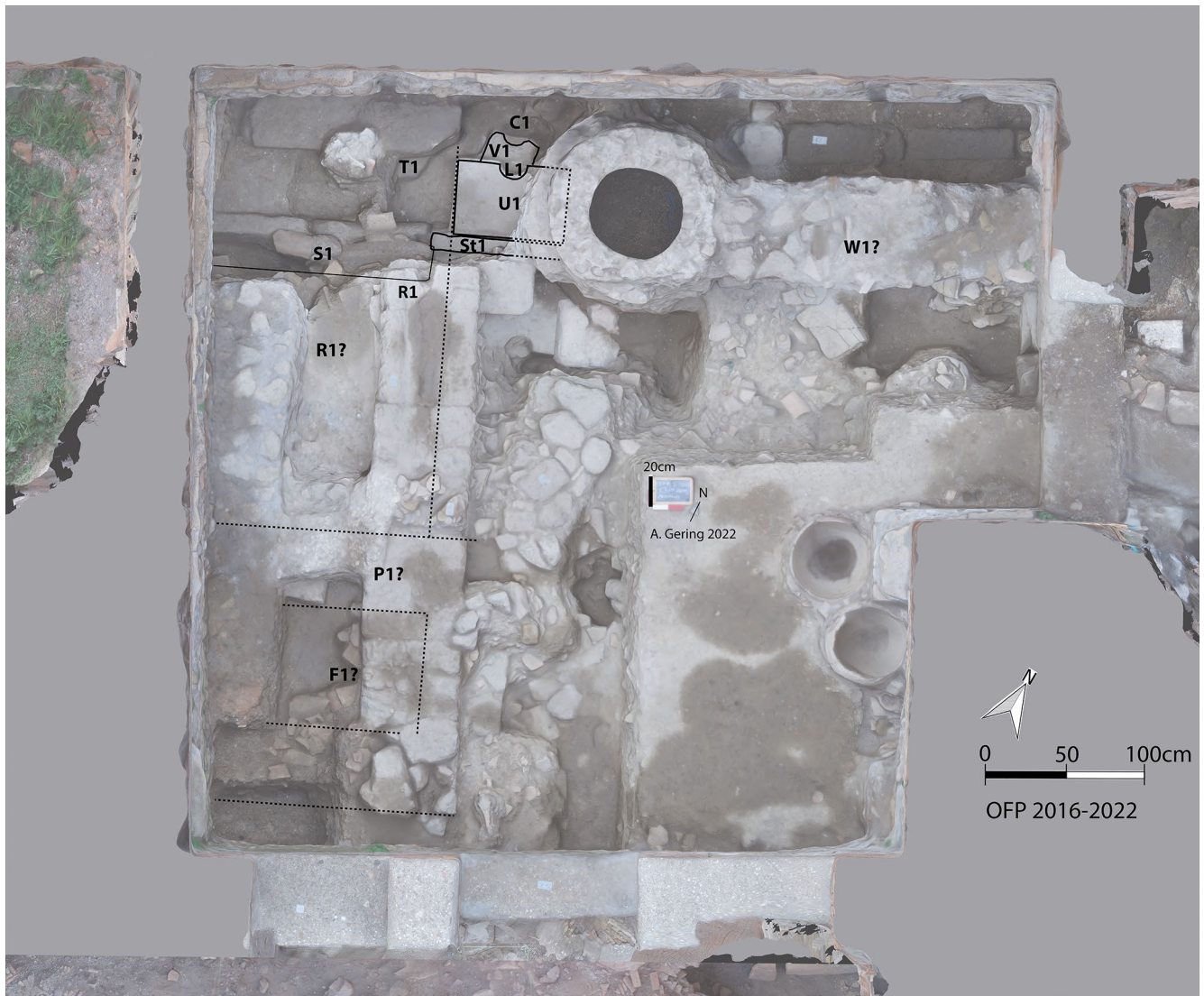
Fig. 10: A north-south section showing phases 4–7 and the libation hole on the left



have been situated in that general area. Even though there is no evidence for the layout of the first podium (P1?) and its fire pit, there are several indicators for its function as a fire altar. As mentioned above, all other elements of the later altar phases are present in the first phase, already. In addition, the earliest traces of charcoal and burned animal bones can be attributed to this phase, a strong indicator of fire-induced activities in the area.

42 The first possible level to be attributed to the architectural features of phase 1 is at 1,14 m ASL. It rests on an averagely 14 cm thick layer of clayey soil interspersed with small charcoal pieces (SU 003f). This layer sits on top of a so-far not further excavated sand layer situated below 1,00 m ASL.

43 A secure dating of the first phase based on the finds is not possible, as there are only very few ceramic finds (fig. 12). These finds date mainly to the 2nd half of the 4th c. – 1st half of the 3rd c. BCE. There is only one fragment of a find with a possible later initial production date, i.e. from the end of the 3rd c. BCE onwards (Jug Bertoldi Tipo 6).



11

Yet, Gloria Olcese dates this type to “possibly before” the middle of the 3rd c. – 2nd half of the 3rd c. BCE³¹.

Almost all ceramic finds are in small fragments and can be considered residuals. The dating of the phase is more so related to the date of the successor phase, as it chronologically has to date before phase 2. Taking into account all of the dating evidence, phase 1 probably dates in between the middle and the end of the 3rd c. BCE³².

44 An interesting observation concerning the black gloss ceramics from this phase is, that almost all of them were seemingly intentionally broken, at least their very sharp breaks suggest so. This would indicate an intentional act of taking the objects ‘out of use’ which is common in sacred contexts.

45 Phases 1 and 2 contained as little as 26 bones. These bones were all calcinated by prolonged exposure to direct fire, suggesting meat offered to the deities by burning it in the altar fire. Most of the bones are too fragmented to identify the animal species. There are, however, fragments from both larger and smaller animals present.

Fig. 11: TFR2. Ground plan of building phase 1

31 Olcese 2018, 104 f. cat. 27.

32 Due to the only very small section that has been excavated down to these deepest strata (phases 1 and 2), it is difficult to conclude if they could possibly be attributed to one level raising event. This has to be analysed through future excavations.

Type	Date	Quantity	Reference
Red-figured pottery		1	
Genucilia-plate (<i>Morel 1111</i>)	End of the 4 th c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 81; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 245 cat. 3
Black gloss pottery		15	
Plate <i>Morel 1561</i> (stamped with two palmettes)	End of 4 th c. – 1 st half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 124; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 261 cat. 8, stamp 25
Cup <i>Morel 3211</i>	1 st half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 255; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 286 cat. 50
Cup <i>Morel 2787</i>	2 nd quarter of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 225; Ceccarelli – Di Mento 2005, 208 tipo 10; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 281 f.
Skyphos <i>Morel 4373</i>	End of 4 th c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 311; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 315 f. cat. 161
Base stamped with four stars (<i>petites estampilles</i>)	280/270 – 265/260 BCE	1	Ferrandes 2016, 104 f.
Base stamped with four small volute palmettes (<i>petites estampilles</i>)	End of 4 th c. – beginning of 3 rd c. BCE	2	Martin 1996, 22; Stanco 2004, 36 fase 1
Other skyphos fragments	--	4	
Other bowl fragments	--	3	
Other plate rim fragments	--	1	
Storage ware		1	
Jug Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 6</i>	End of 3 rd c. – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE (mostly 2 nd c. BCE) / before the mid-3 rd c. – 2 nd half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Bertoldi 2011, 72 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 424 f.; Olcese 2018, 104 f. cat. 27
Cooking ware		4	
Lids	--	4	

Fig. 12: Ceramic finds from phase 1 (SU 003f)

12

Interpretation

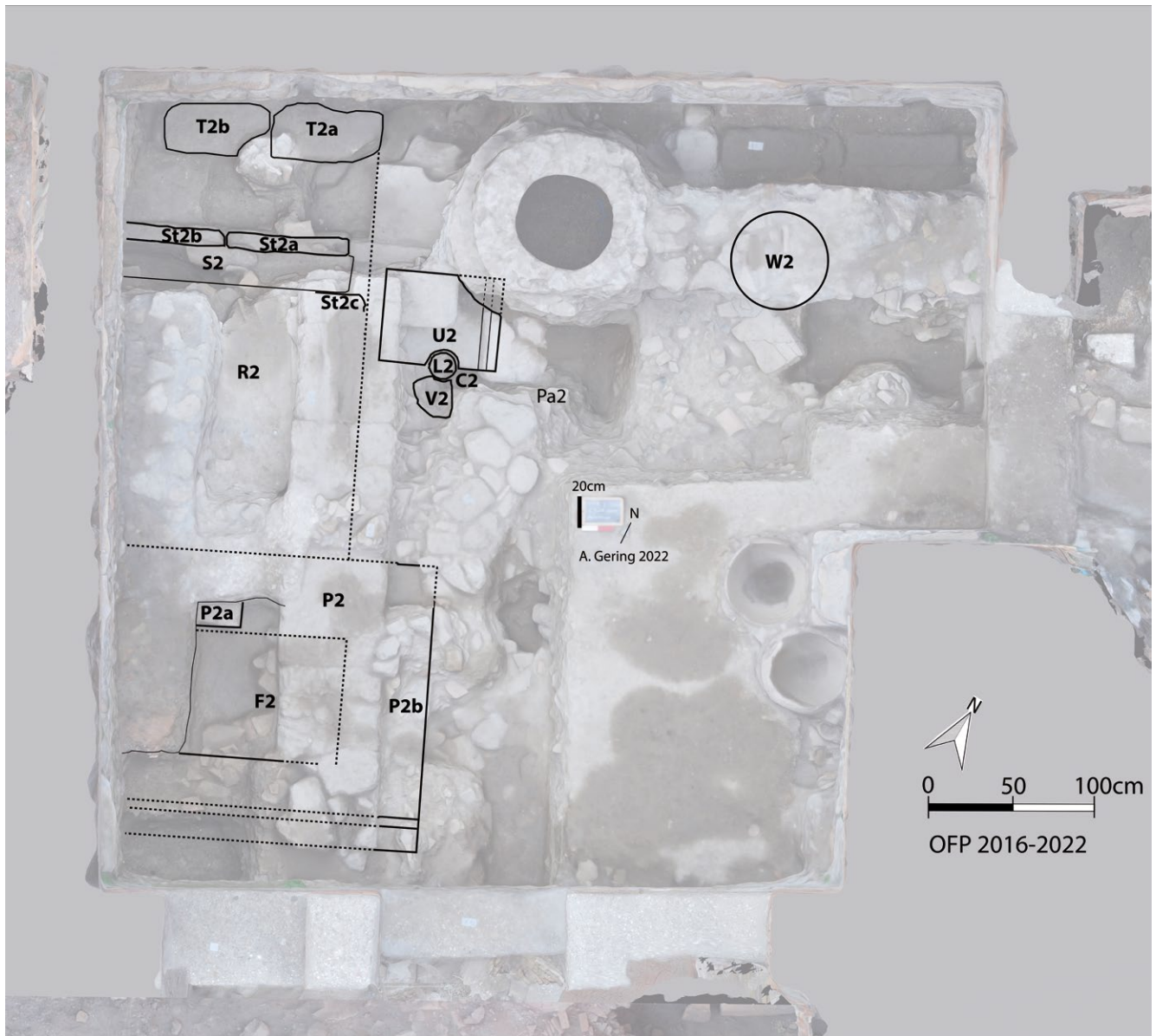
⁴⁶ Assuming the interpretation of the above discussed elements as a fire altar and their dating before the middle – the end of the 3rd c. BCE is correct, it would have been the hitherto earliest known monumental altar in Ostia³³. Considering its position, extraordinary size and unusual type, this altar would have undeniably played a central cultic role in Rome's 'first' colony. However, it is noteworthy that this altar and its successors were not built on the walking levels of the castrum on 0,20–0,85 m ASL, but on a remarkably higher level of ca. 1 m above the first crossing of Cardo and Decumanus.

⁴⁷ Some important questions remain unanswered: What lies beneath the so far excavated altar-structures? Was the position of the altar and of the castrum centre deliberately chosen at the location of the earliest sacred area? If so, could it be connected to the foundation of the castrum itself?

⁴⁸ In preparation for a future excavation of the remaining 90% of the sanctuary (fig. 2), geophysical survey, core drilling, and archaeological test sondages are planned for 2023–2026³⁴.

³³ Geophysics in 2019 showed clear echoes of the altar (A2) in front of the main temple of Jupiter (T2). Cf. Gering 2022, 940 fig. 32.2. However, this altar A2 had smaller dimensions than A1bc, even if it could have been older due to its lower walking level of 0,20 m ASL.

³⁴ Several campaigns conducting professional core drilling are planned in cooperation with Ferreol Salomon (Université de Strasbourg) to analyse the geological nature of the sand-layer (natural dunes?) and possible traces of previous human activity below the area TFR2. Another PhD-project focuses on the phases of the Forum including possible predecessor-buildings: <<http://www.ostiagraduiertenkolleg.com>> (05.08.2022) (Theme 6, Daniel Damgaard).



13

Building-Phase 2

49 The second (yellow) building phase of the altar already exhibits the layout and the dimensions of the later altar phases including an almost quadratric podium (P2) designed to surround the fire pit (fig. 8a. 13).

50 The new sewer's enclosure consisted of larger slabs (St2a-c) made of a different, brown tuff (probably *Fidenae*-tuff) in contrast to the *Cappellaccio*-tuff of the predecessor sewer. The new sewer slabs' surface is at 1,29 m ASL, which corresponds to the preserved end of the ramp (R2) at 1,35 m ASL. Hence, they can be attributed to the second altar phase, whose features had the exact same orientation as the predecessor phase, but on a higher level. The ramp inclines from 1,35 m ASL upwards and assuming an average angle as seen in the later phases, the ramp would lead up to a level of the platform with the fire pit around 1,55–1,67 m ASL.

51 The layout of the podium with the fire pit (F2) was repeated with minor alterations in the subsequent altar phases (3/orange and 4/blue) (fig. 8), both on 1,75 m ASL. Thus, a certain functional continuity can be assumed.

Fig. 13: TFR2. Ground plan of building phase 2

Type	Date	Quantity	Reference
Black gloss pottery		11	
Patera <i>Morel 1532</i>	(1 st half of?) 3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 120; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 301 cat. 117
Plate <i>Morel 1534d</i>	2 nd half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 120 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, stamp 128; Bertoldi 2011, 18; Stanco 2004, 34 fig. 10
Plate <i>Morel 1534h2</i> (<i>Herakles-schale</i> with figural stamp)	240–210 BCE	1	see above
Bowl <i>Morel 2672h</i>	1 st half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 203 f.; Ceccarelli – Di Mento 2005, 213 tipo 20; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 269 cat. 26
Bowl <i>Morel 2734d</i>	Mid-3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 213; Ceccarelli – Di Mento 2005, 211 type 13; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 270 cat. 28
Bowl <i>Morel 2784</i> (with central rosette stamp)	Mid-3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 223 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 279–281 cat. 40. The type <i>Morel 2784</i> can be dated to the first half of the 3 rd c. BCE, while the central rosette stamps start appearing from then middle of the 3 rd c. BCE to the 2 nd half of the 3 rd c. BCE. For the dating of the type, see Ceccarelli – Di Mento 2005, 206 tipo 8. For the dating of the stamp, see Stanco 2004, 37 fig. 13, no. 35
Bowl <i>Morel 2847b</i>	1 st half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 232; Ceccarelli – Di Mento 2005, 215 tipo 2a
Bowl base <i>Morel 211b2</i> with concentric rouletting (Ferrandes 2016, 108 fig. 34.c)	Mid-3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 462; Ferrandes 2016, 108 fig. 34.c
Cup <i>Morel 3171</i>	End of 3 rd c. – middle of 2 nd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 254 f.; Di Giuseppe 2005, 68 f.
Chalice (?) <i>Morel 3751d</i>	Around 300 BCE	1	Morel 1981, 285 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 286 f. cat. 52
Overpainted skyphos with figural decoration	1 st half of 3 rd c. BCE (?)	1	Possibly attributable to the Pocola-group. Close comparisons are found in Gabii (Ballester 1981, 51 f.), Cosa (Scott 2008, 20 f. cat. A1) and Ostia itself (Squarciapino 1950, 93. 96 f.)
Storage ware		3	
Jug Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 4</i>	End of 4 th – 3 rd c. BCE	2	Bertoldi 2011, 71 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 425 f. cat. 258.2
Jug Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 6</i>	End of 3 rd c. – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE (mostly 2 nd c. BCE) / before the mid-3 rd c. – 2 nd half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Bertoldi 2011, 72–73; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 424–425; Olcese 2018, 104–105 cat. 27
Cooking ware		4	
Lid Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 243</i>	3 rd c. – 1 st c. BCE	2	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 410
Clibanus Olcese 2018 <i>cat. 15</i>	2 nd half of 4 th c. – 1 st half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Olcese 2018, 102 f.
Tegame Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 232.1</i>	End of 4 th – 3 rd c. BCE	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 403
Basins		1	
Basin Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 293.4</i>	4 th c. – 3 rd c. BCE	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 447
Amphorae		1	
Amphora base <i>Greco-Italic van der Mersch V / V/VI</i>	2 nd half of 4 th c. – 3 rd c. BCE	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 464–475 cat. 311
Unguentaria		1	
Unguentarium (fusiform with triangular rim and overpainted stripes in black gloss)	Middle – Late Republican	1	

14

Fig. 14: Ceramic finds from phase 2 (SU 003d)

52 Unfortunately, it is not possible to attribute specific tuff fragments with architectural decoration or any profiles to this phase's altar structures with certainty, as the same brown tuff was also used in the following building phase 3.

53 The only profiled element that can certainly be assigned to this phase is the perforated stone block (U2) (fig. 4. 7. 8), characterised by a half-round cut-out with a 15 cm

diameter. Also ascribable to this phase is the *Cappellaccio*-tuff block (V2) with a half-round cut out to match the perforated stone block. This structure consisting of the two stone blocks and a subterranean cavity located in the immediate vicinity of the altar's drainage area is assumed to be connected to libation rites. The functionality of the altar's key features will be discussed below. The similarity of this structure to the perforated stone blocks of the prior phase (U1 and V1) indicates a functional analogy. Hence, is possible that already in the previous phase, next to the ramp, there was a structure dedicated to libations.

54 For this phase, in the north-east quarter of the area TFR2, the first water container (W2) can be traced.

55 The second building phase of the altar structure corresponds to the pavement level 2 at 1,30 m ASL. In general, the ceramic finds found in SU 003d date from the 2nd half of the 4th to the 2nd half of the 3rd c. BCE. Most of them can be considered residuals due to their state of preservation. The few less fragmented or almost complete vessels date to the middle and/or the 2nd half of the 3rd c. BCE. The latest finds date to the 2nd half and to the end of the 3rd c. BCE, proposing a date of the end of the 3rd c. BCE. As with phase 1, the small number of finds limits the available dating evidence of phase 2, although it chronologically and stratigraphically has to date before phase 3 (beginning of 2nd c. BCE), which is the first context with a substantial amount of datable material.

56 The stratum 003d can be interpreted as a level raise consisting of sand interspersed with charcoal and 'sacred waste'³⁵: ceramics and animal bones from the sacred area. The residual ceramic finds dating to the 2nd half of the 4th c. – 1st half of the 3rd c. BCE show the same dating spectrum and the same traces of intentional breakage as observed in the finds from phase 1. These residuals could indicate earlier not yet excavated phases of the sanctuary. Interestingly enough, there are no finds to be attributed to even earlier periods: The earliest finds date to the 2nd half or to the end of the 4th c. BCE and can be traced throughout almost all phases documented in the area TFR2. Thus, the earliest, so far unexcavated phases of the sanctuary quite probably date to that period.

Building-Phase 3

57 The third (orange) building phase of the altar is the first phase for which several fragments of the architectural decoration of the altar are preserved, i.e. tuff profiles with a cyma. While the predecessor phases' ramps were not profiled, apparently, this phase's podium (P3) and its ramp (R3) were monumentalised. This could be an indicator that compared to the previous phases, in relation to the surrounding pavement, the altar was raised. This elevated podium (1,70–1,75 m ASL) had a profiled edge in the south (P3c), while other preserved edge in the east was plain (P3b) (fig. 8, a; 15).

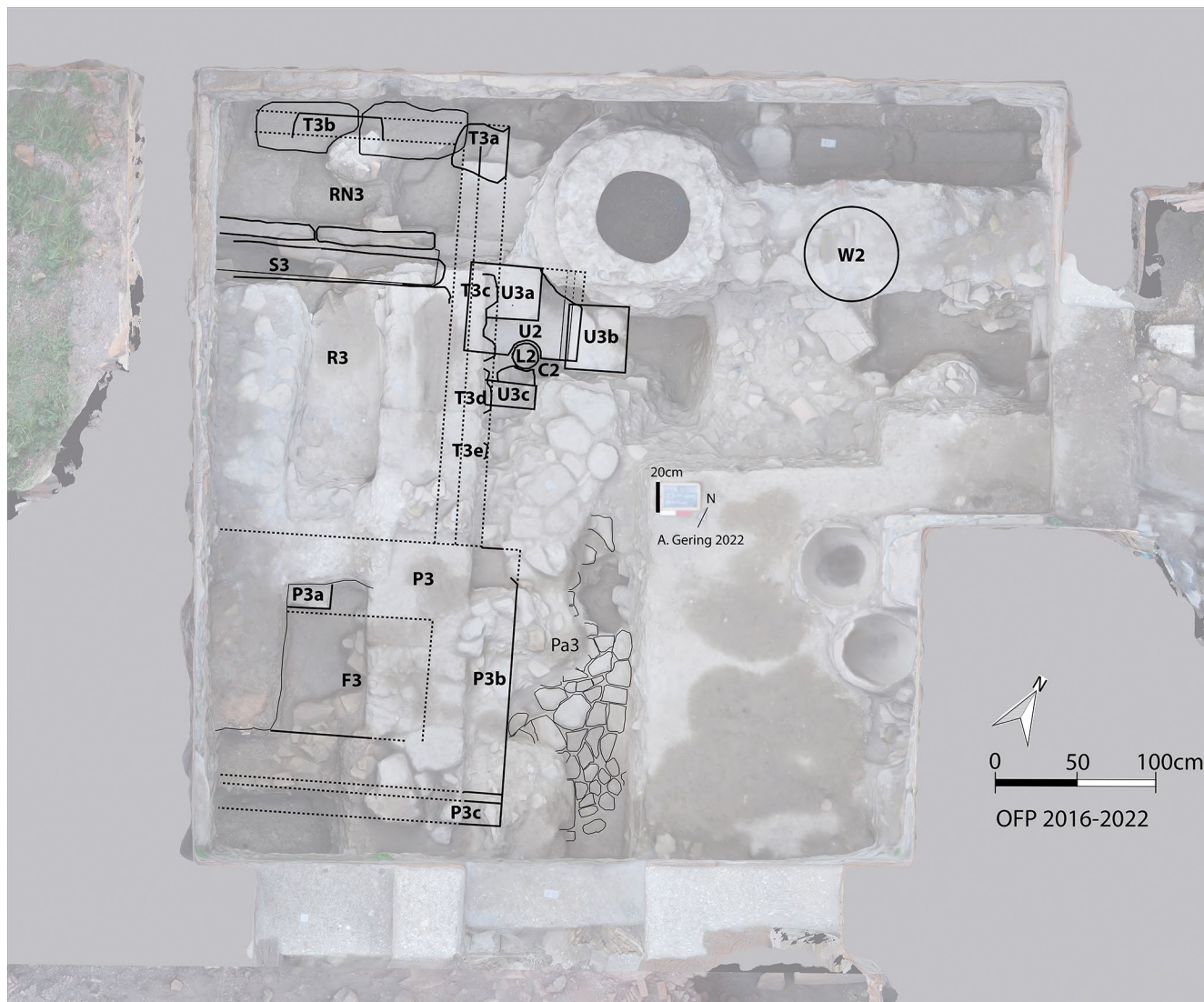
The main part of the ramp itself was raised to a level of 1,80 m ASL near the fire pit, declining and leading into the open sewer (S3) at 1,54 m ASL. Roof tiles were added at the northern end of the ramp, serving as an outlet.

58 Another substantial addition to the altar is the extension of the ramp (RN3) to ca. 1 m north of the sewer³⁶. The ramp's dimensions are defined by several tuff blocks bordering the structure (T3a–e). The tuff blocks' rounded profile was cut in a later phase, adapting it to a changed orientation.

59 The layout of the libation hole was slightly changed in this phase: Its opening above the cavity was broadened and bordered by two *Cappellaccio*-tuff blocks (U3a and U3b). Two small stone slabs (U3c) were set to mark the opening.

35 Although the term 'sacred waste' falls short in many regards, it does describe a very particular circumstance: The disposal of objects and other material used in a sacred space, deposited within the precinct's borders. For a critical analysis of the term 'sacred waste' particularly concerning pottery in Greco-Roman sacred space, cf. Rieger 2016.

36 A building sacrifice in the shape of a deposit containing an animal bone and the lower part of a black gloss plate was found in the fundament of this extended section of the ramp.



15

Fig. 15: TFR2. Ground plan of building phase 3

60 The pavement level of 1,54–1,60 m is defined by a beaten-earth floor with a compressed surface of clayey soil and mortar. Along the eastern side of the altar, a pavement comprised of reused roof tiles was laid out (Pa3). In the north-eastern quarter of the area TFR2, below the beaten-earth floor, a dense layer of ceramics, roof tiles, tuff stones, and animal bones was deposited (SU 003c). The most prominent feature of this layer were five upside-down deposited black gloss bowls and a large completely preserved roof tile (fig. 4, Ceramic deposit).

61 Breaking vessels and placing them upside-down to defunctionalize them is a common practice when depositing sacred rubbish. Close comparisons of layers consisting of upside-down turned bowls, other ceramics, animal bones, and building material (especially roof tiles and tuff stones) can be found in several sanctuaries, especially in those venerating deities with a chthonic connotation³⁷.

62 The ceramic finds stemming from SU 003c date between the end of the 4th c. to the 2nd c. BCE (fig. 16)³⁸. The latest pottery-types present have initial production dates

37 This specific phenomenon will be discussed further in the last section of this paper ("The Quest for the Venerated Deities").

38 As the final evaluation of this stratigraphical unit is not completed yet, these results are to be considered preliminary.

Type	Date	Quantity	Reference
Black gloss pottery		27	
Bowl <i>Morel 2534</i>	End of 3 rd – 3 rd quarter of 2 nd c. BCE	3	Morel 1981, 179 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 264 f. cat. 17
Bowl <i>Morel 2538</i>	3 rd c. BCE	2	Morel 1981, 180 f.; Ceccarelli – Di Mento 2005, 212 tipo 23; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 265 cat. 18
Bowl <i>Morel 2732</i>	2 nd half of the 4 th – mid-2 nd c. BCE (Olcese) 300 – 200 BCE (Di Giuseppe)	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 252; Di Giuseppe 2005, 64
Bowl <i>Morel 2764</i>	Mid-3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 219; Ceccarelli – Di Mento 2011, 201 tipo 1
Bowl <i>Morel 2780</i>	1 st half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 222; Ceccarelli – Di Mento 2011, 207; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 272 f. cat. 34
Bowl <i>Morel 2783</i>	1 st half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 223; Ceccarelli – Di Mento 2011, 207; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 275–279 cat. 38
Bowl <i>Morel 2788</i>	3 rd – 2 nd c. BCE	2	Morel 1981, 225 f.; Ceccarelli – Di Mento 2011, 207; see also Olcese – Coletti 2016, 282 cat. 42
Base <i>Morel 170</i>	--	1	Morel 1981, 459 f.
Unidentified black gloss fragments	--	15	
Thin-walled ware		2	
Storage ware		29	
Jug Bertoldi 2011 tipo 2	End of 3 rd – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE	1	Bertoldi 2011, 70 f. See also Olcese – Coletti 2016, 424 f. cat. 256.2: 4 th c. – 1 st c. BCE, with a prevalence in the Mid-Republican contexts
Jug Bertoldi 2011 tipo 4	End of 4 th – 3 rd c. BCE	1	Bertoldi 2011, 71 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 425 f. cat. 258.2
Jug Bertoldi 2011 tipo 6	End of 3 rd c. – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE (mostly 2 nd c. BCE) / before the mid-3 rd c. – 2 nd half of 3 rd c. BCE	3	Bertoldi 2011, 72–73; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 424–425; Olcese 2018, 104–105 cat. 27
Jug bases (<i>impasto chiaro sab-bioso</i>)	--	24	
Cooking ware		28	
Olla Olcese 2016 cat. 223	Mostly 4 th and 3 rd c. BCE	3	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 394
Tegame Olcese 2016 cat. 233.2	2 nd half of 3 rd – 1 st c. BCE (mostly 2 nd c. BCE)	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 404
Lid Olcese 2016 cat. 243	3 rd – 1 st c. BCE	3	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 410
Tegami (unidentified types)	--	3	
Casseroles (unidentified types)	--	6	
Ollae (unidentified types)	--	4	
Lids (unidentified types)	--	8	
Unguentaria		2	
Amphorae		4	
Amphora <i>Van der Werff 1</i>	2 nd c. BCE	1	Van der Werff 1977/1978, type Uzita 1
Amphorae (unidentified types)	--	3	
Roof tiles		13	
Roof tile (decorated) / architectural terracotta	End of 4 th – beginning of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Martin 1996, 24
Other roof tiles (<i>coppi</i> and <i>tegulae</i>)	--	12	

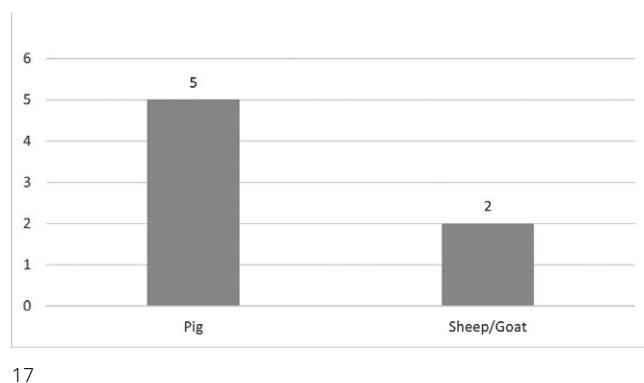
16

of the end of the 3rd c. and the beginning of the 2nd c. BCE. Hence, this phase cannot be dated before the beginning of the 2nd c. BCE.

63 Phase 3 is the first phase for which the species of the faunal remains can be identified. Most of them stem from the deposit 003c which contained 29 bone fragments.

Fig. 16: Ceramic finds from phase 3 (SU 003c)

Fig. 17: The faunal remains from phase 3



The bones from this context are quite fragmented and show traces of heat exposure (cooking and burning in direct fire) as well as butchering, i.e. chopping and cutting marks.³⁹ Among the finds from the SU 003c were three pig tusks as well as teeth/jaws from sheep or goats⁴⁰. Animal teeth are found continuously throughout most of the sanctuary's phases. While the pig tusks found in this context vary in size, one of them was extraordinarily large, 6 cm long and 2,3 cm wide, and must have belonged to a fully grown pig.

While most of the bones from phase 3 belonged to pigs, sheep or goat bones are represented, as well (fig. 17).

Building-Phase 4

⁶⁴ In building phase 4 (blue), the podium of the prior phase was reused without any major changes, merely the fire pit was raised slightly (F4). The focal point of this building phase was the addition of the drain (D4) leading into the sewer (S4) as well as the modification of the ramp (R4) (fig. 8, a. b; 18). Due to a new orientation of the structure related to changes in Ostia's grid layout, the prior ramp's eastern tuff-profile had been partly cut off to adjust it to the new orientation. The cut-offs were found within the filling of the new ramp's *opus incertum* fundament which is still preserved at the northern and southern ends of the altar. As part of the original façade of the altar, a layer of plaster is preserved at the northern end of the ramp (RN4a).

⁶⁵ In this phase, the libation hole remains to be surrounded and marked by the same stone elements as in the prior phase. In the following phases, the openings of the libation hole are plain circular pits dug into the ground. Nevertheless, those pits were easily recognisable due the discolouration of the soil caused by the pouring of liquid offerings into the libation hole.

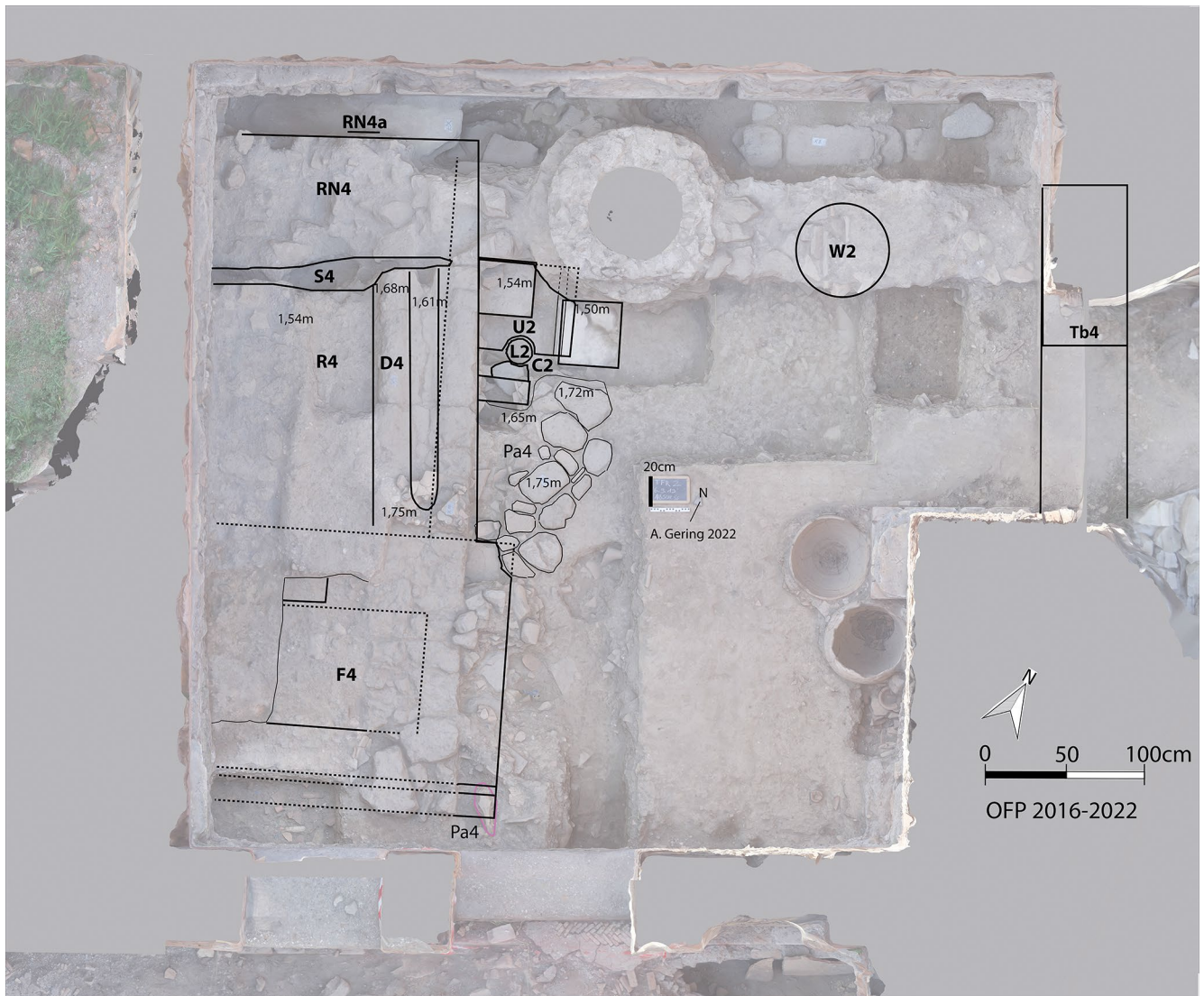
⁶⁶ In the east of the area TFR2, three rows of tuff blocks in *opus quadratum* were built (Tb4) (fig. 18), suggesting the construction of a new boundary wall of the sacred area⁴¹.

⁶⁷ This altar phase corresponds to the pavement 4 (Pa4) on 1,70–1,75 m ASL. It consists of a pavement of tuff slabs laid-out around the eastern side of the altar, above the tile pavement of the predecessor phase. The remainder of the area is paved with a beaten-earth floor. The beaten-earth floor (SU 003b2) consisted of clayey soil and was interspersed with a few ceramic fragments, charcoal pieces, and fragmented burned

³⁹ Noe-Nygaard 1989, 471–478.

⁴⁰ There were two jaws from sheep or goat, both with two teeth, one jaw from a pig with two teeth, and one loose pig tooth.

⁴¹ This tuff structure is parallel to the orientation of the ramp and the drain of this building phase, suggesting them to belong to the same planning unit. As mentioned above, the general layout of the precinct is subject to separate studies: Gering (forthcoming).



18

animal bones⁴². The latest amphora types from this layer date between the 2nd half of 2nd c. BCE to the 1st c. BCE. Thus, phase 4 cannot be dated before the 2nd half of the 2nd c. BCE. As the few occurring ceramic types bridge a long dating span, it is impossible to propose a more precise date (fig. 19)⁴³.

Building-Phase 5

68 The fifth building phase (white) of the altar area entails the most drastic transformation of the altar's elements, the main feature being a series of new high-quality tuff blocks for the podium, ramp, and drains. This specific monumentalised layout stayed in use until the early Hadrianic period when the transition of the sacred area to a profane one began.

69 Another important addition to the area was the well which replaced the terracotta water container (W2) used in previous phases. The new well was connected to the groundwater and situated closer to the altar. West of the well, a small half-round basin

Fig. 18: TFR2. Ground plan of building phase 4

42 Finelli noted a similar "strato di terra argillosa con traccia di carbone, alt di questo 0,42 m" (cf. Finelli 1913, 210). This 42 cm thick layer is probably comparable to our strata 003a, 003b and 003b2. An article on Finelli's excavations in the north-eastern forum portico is forthcoming.

43 As the final evaluation of this phase is not completed yet, these results are to be considered preliminary.

Type	Date	Quantity	Reference
Amphorae		9	
Amphora <i>Van der Werff 1</i>	2 nd c. BCE	4	Van der Werff 1977/1978, type Uzita 1; Keay – Williams 2005, ‚van der Werff 1‘
Amphora <i>Van der Werff 2</i>	2 nd half of 2 nd c. – 1 st c. BCE	2	Van der Werff 1977/1978, type Uzita 2; Keay – Williams 2005, ‚van der Werff 2‘
Amphora <i>Dressel 1A</i>	2 nd half of 2 nd c. – mid-1 st c. BCE	3	Keay – Williams 2005, ‚Dressel 1‘
Cooking ware		21	
Olla Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 3</i>	End of 3 rd c. – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE (with a prevalence in the 2 nd c. BCE)	2	Bertoldi 2011, 93. For Ostia, this type is attested in a context of the end of the 2 nd c. – beginning of the 1 st c. BCE in the Taberna dell’Individioso (Zevi et al. 1978, 72 fig. 82 cat. 101)
Olla Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 4</i>	Mid-3 rd c. – 2 nd c. BCE	7	Bertoldi 2011, 94 f. Some later subtypes are found until the Augustan period: Olcese – Coletti 2016, 399 f. cat. 226. In the Taberna dell’Individioso in Ostia, it is attested in the Middle Republican contexts (Zevi et al. 1978, 47 fig. 59)
Olla Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 5</i>	2 nd c. – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE	11	Bertoldi 2011, 95–97; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 398 f. cat. 225. In the Taberna dell’Individioso in Ostia, it is attested in contexts of the 2 nd half of the 3 rd c. BCE (Zevi et al. 1978, 58 f. fig. 71. 72)
Storage ware		5	
Jug Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 2</i>	End of 3 rd – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE	5	Bertoldi 2011, 70 f. See also Olcese – Coletti 2016, 424 f. cat. 256.2: 4 th c. – 1 st c. BCE, with a prevalence in the Mid-Republican contexts

Fig. 19: Ceramic finds from phase 4 (SU 003b2)

19

was carved into the northern section of the ramp (RN5). It was further defined by two tuff elements (B5a–b). This approximately 20 cm deep basin was a new addition which none of the predecessor phases entailed. It had a direct outlet into the sewer (S5) (fig. 8, a. b. 20).

70 This phase’s tuff podium (P5) with its new fire pit (F5) was located approximately 30 cm further west than in the prior phases. Hence, the new fire pit covered part of the pits of the predecessor phases (F1?–4). In this phase, for the first time, the tuff podium was perfectly aligned with the drain and thus, with the eastern edge of the ramp⁴⁴. This phase’s ramp (R5) and drainage area is characterised by a well-preserved tuff drain (D5). The latter was connected to the drain via its own outlet (D5a), while the ramp was connected to the sewer by several reused amphora sherds (R5a) and *imbrices* (half-round roof tiles)⁴⁵.

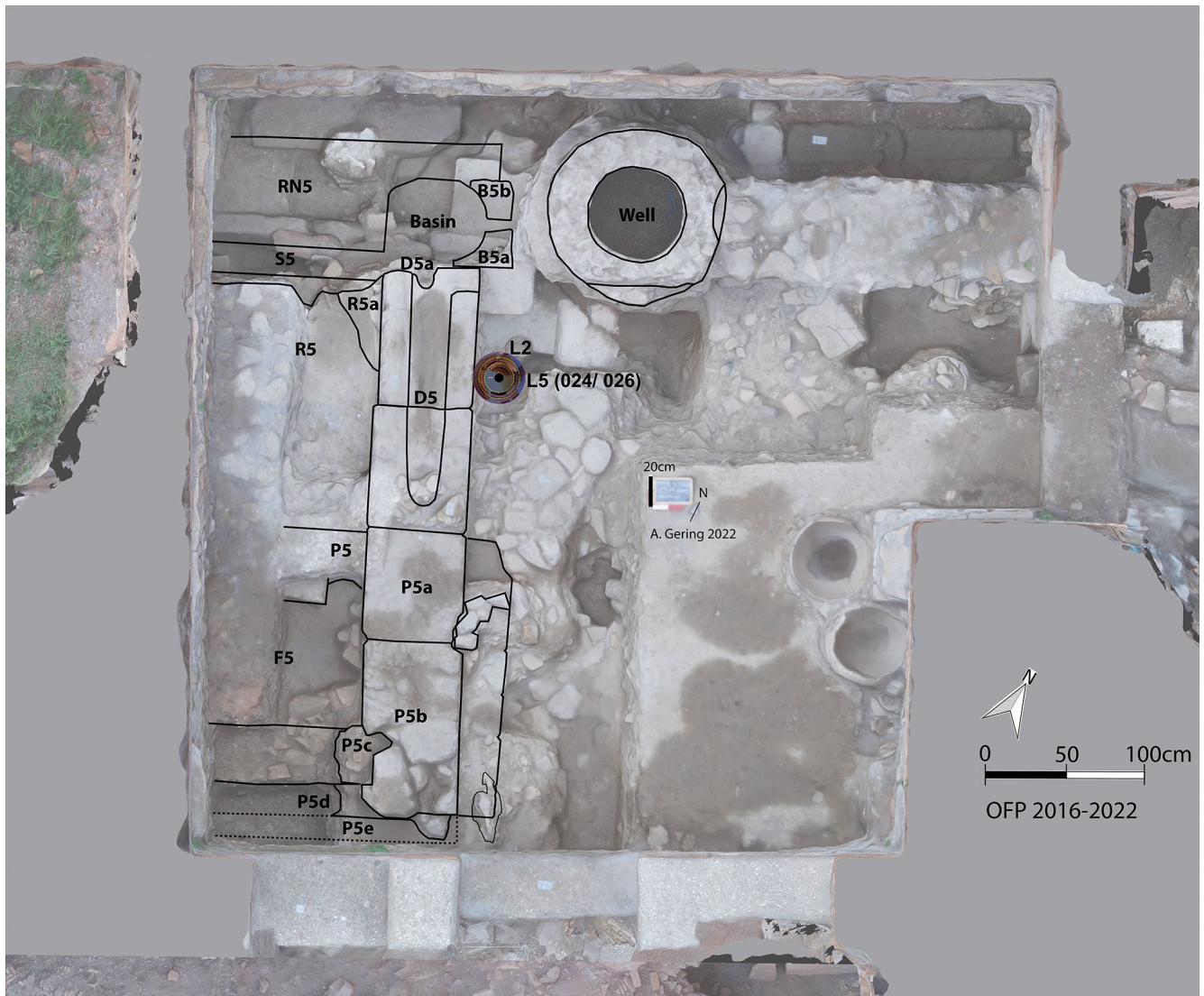
71 The fire pit of this phase has a quadratic shape and rests on a solid layer of roof tiles (*imbrices* and *tegulae*). Similar roof tiles were placed around the only preserved west side of the fire pit, probably as heat protection for the tuff structure. Additionally, the fire pit itself was surrounded by a clay layer serving as isolation with a similar purpose.

72 The layout of the altar podium of this phase with its quadratic fire pit compares to the layout of the latest phase of the altar in the Portonaccio sanctuary in *Veii* with its *fossa dei sacrifici*⁴⁶.

44 This alignment corresponds to the older orientation and thus to the prior grid-layout associated with phase 1–3.

45 One of the *imbrices* is large enough to quite probably be part of the roof of an earlier temple, reused as a spout in building phase 5 of the altar.

46 Stefani 1953, 40.



20

73 As mentioned above, from this phase onwards, the libation hole was not marked by stone blocks anymore, at least no such elements are preserved. It was still connected to the same subterranean cavity, although its opening was re-located slightly southwards. In this phase, the opening of the libation hole (L5, Fig. 20) was marked by a large terracotta object showing similarities to terracotta arulae, well heads and cistern mouths (Lm5, Fig. 8b). This opening of the libation hole was used continuously until the very last phase of the sanctuary.

74 The fifth building phase corresponds to a pavement level of 1,87 m ASL consisting of a beaten-earth floor (5). A slightly modified altar phase corresponds to a repair and slight raising of said beaten-earth floor at 1,96 m ASL (5a). As the repair of the pavement is not always easily distinguishable from the original beaten-earth floor, the correct separation of the ceramic finds from each phase is also not guaranteed. The finds attributed to phase 5 could thus also contain finds belonging to the repair phase 5a and vice versa. Hence, the suggestion of a date especially for the small floor repair patches that constitute phase 5a is complicated.

75 The stratum 003b, the pavement's preparation layer, contained among other middle to Late Republican and Early Imperial cooking ware, storage ware, and amphora types (fig. 21). Regarding the cooking ware, a change in cooking habits can be observed: For the first time, a larger number of frying pans (tegami) and their lids occur.

Fig. 20: TFR2. Ground plan of building phase 5

Type	Date	Quantity	Reference
Black gloss pottery		105	
Plate <i>Morel 1312</i>	2 nd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 103 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 298 cat. 111
Plate <i>Morel 1313b/c</i>	2 nd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 104; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 299 cat. 110
Plate <i>Morel 1443</i>	2 nd c. – beginning of 1 st c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 114 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 300 cat. 113
Bowl <i>Morel 1561</i>	End of 4 th – 1 st half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 124; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 261 cat. 8
Plate <i>Morel 1642</i>	Mid-3 rd – beginning of 2 nd c. BCE	2	Morel 1981, 129; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 302 cat. 119
Bowl <i>Morel 2252</i>	3 rd – 2 nd c. BCE	2	Morel 1981, 153; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 306 cat. 128
Bowl <i>Morel 2534</i>	End of 3 rd – 3 rd quarter of 2 nd c. BCE	5	Morel 1981, 179 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 264 f. cat. 17
Bowl <i>Morel 2538</i>	3 rd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 180 f.; Ceccarelli – Di Mento 2005, 212 tipo 23; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 265 cat. 18
Bowl <i>Morel 2640</i>	3 rd – 2 nd c. BCE	5	Morel 1982, 197 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 291 cat. 73
Bowl <i>Morel 2812d</i>	2 nd half of 3 rd – beginning of 2 nd c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 227; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 282 cat. 43. There are late 2nd c. BCE variants of local or Latial production attested in Gabii, see Pérez Ballester 2003, 44
Bowl <i>Morel 2980</i>	3 rd c. – mid-1 st c. BCE	1	Morel 1981, 243 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 293 cat. 92
Other plate fragments	--	27	
Other bowl fragments	--	43	
Other skyphos fragments	--	2	
Other kylix fragments	--	2	
Other guttus fragments	--	5	
Other jug fragments	--	2	
Stamped fragments (palmettes)	--	3	
Hellenistic relief black gloss		2	
Decorated body sherds	2 nd half of 3 rd c. – 1 st c. BCE	2	
Thin-walled ware		14	
Cup <i>Marabini Form I cat. 23</i>	2nd half of 2nd c. – 1st c. BCE	1	Marabini Moevs 1973, 53–58. 263 no. 23; Leone 2021, 73
Cup <i>Marabini Form III cat. 31</i>	Mid-2 nd c. – mid-1 st c. BCE	1	Marabini Moevs 1973, 58 f. 264 no. 31; Leone 2021 Pl. VI, rim shape 14, 77–96 type 2–4.
Cup <i>Marabini Form XVI cat. 107</i>	1 st c. BCE	1	Marabini Moevs 1973, 76–77; 271 no. 107
Cup <i>Mayet Forme XV cat. 177</i>	Augustan	1	Mayet 1975, 52 f.
Cup <i>Ricci I/9</i>	Mid-2 nd c. – beginning of 1 st c. BCE	1	Approsio – Pizzo 2003, 169 f. cat. PS IX.7.3
Other cup fragments	--	9	
Terra Sigillata		2	
Cup <i>Cosa cat. BNWI.39</i>	Augustan	1	Marabini Moevs 2006, 49 cat. BNWI.39
Bowl <i>Conspectus 36.4.2</i>	Mainly Tiberian (Tiberian – end of 1 st c. CE)	1	Ettlinger et al. 1990, 114
Amphorae		32	The dating of the amphora types is in this case taken from the database of Roman amphorae: A digital resource provided by the University of Southampton (Keay – Williams 2005)
Greco-Italic Amphora (<i>van der Mersch V/VI</i>)	Mid-3 rd c. – 2 nd half of 3 rd c. BCE	1	
Amphora <i>Van der Werff 1</i>	2 nd c. BCE	5	

Type	Date	Quantity	Reference
Amphora <i>Van der Werff 2</i>	2 nd half of 2 nd c. – 1 st c. BCE	1	
Amphora <i>Dressel 1A</i>	2 nd half of 2 nd c. – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE	1	
Amphora <i>Dressel 1B</i>	Last quarter of 2 nd c. – end of 1 st c. BCE	5	
Amphora <i>Dressel 1C</i>	Late 2 nd c. – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE	7	
Amphora <i>Lamboglia 2</i>	2 nd c. – mid-1 st c. BCE	1	
Brindisi Amphora	Late 2 nd c. – late 1 st c. BCE	1	
Amphora <i>Haltern 70</i>	2 nd quarter of 1 st c. BCE – <u>Antonine</u> period	1	
Amphora <i>Dressel 2–4 Ager Cosa-nus</i>	2 nd quarter of 1 st c. BCE – 3 rd c. CE	2	
Amphora <i>Dressel 2–4 Campania</i>	2 nd quarter of 1 st c. BCE – 3 rd c. CE	1	
Other amphora fragments	--	6	
Cooking ware		113	
Olla Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 3</i>	End of 3 rd c. – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE	3	
Olla Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 4</i>	Mid-3 rd c. – 2 nd c. BCE	16	
Olla Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 5</i>	2 nd c. – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE	6	
Olla Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 223.15</i>	Middle – Late Republican	4	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 393–396
Unidentified olla type	--	3	
Tegame Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 232.2/4</i>	4 th – 3 rd / 2 nd c. BCE	5	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 403
Tegame Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 233.2/3</i>	2 nd half of 3 rd – 1 st c. BCE (mainly 2 nd c. BCE)	5	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 404
Tegame Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 237</i>	Middle – Late Republican	1	
Tegame Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 239</i>	Mid-1 st c. BCE – 2 nd c. CE	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 407
Tegame Ostia II 308	End of 2 nd c. BCE – 1 st c. CE	2	Ostia II, 84–86 tab. XVIII
Other tegame fragments	--	3	
Lid Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 243</i>	3 rd c. – 1 st c. BCE	33	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 410
Lid Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 244</i>	3 rd c. – 1 st c. BCE	5	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 411
Lid Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 247</i>	1 st c. BCE – 2 nd c. CE	17	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 412
Clibanus Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 2</i>	3 rd – 2 nd c. BCE	1	Bertoldi 2011, 108 f.
Other lid fragments	--	9	
Internal red slip cooking ware		1	
Tegame Olcese 2003 <i>tipo 3</i>	1 st c. BCE	1	Olcese 2003, 27
African cooking ware		5	
Casserole lid Ostia II 302	End of 1 st c. BCE – 2 nd half of 2 nd c. CE	3	Ostia VI, 50 tab. 2
Casserole Ostia II 303	Tiberian – 1 st half of 2 nd c. CE	1	Ostia VI, 50 tab. 2
Tegame Ostia II 306	Tiberian – mid-2 nd c. CE	1	Ostia VI, 49 tab. 1
Storage ware		108	
Jug Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 2</i>	End of 3 rd – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE	23	Bertoldi 2011, 70 f. See also Olcese – Coletti 2016, 424 f. cat. 256.2: 4 th c. – 1 st c. BCE, with a prevalence in the Mid-Republican contexts

Type	Date	Quantity	Reference
Jug Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 4</i>	End of 4 th – 3 rd c. BCE	5	Bertoldi 2011, 71 f.; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 425 f. cat. 258.2
Jug Bertoldi 2011 <i>tipo 6</i>	End of 3 rd c. – 1 st half of 1 st c. BCE (mostly 2 nd c. BCE) / before the mid-3 rd c. – 2 nd half of 3 rd c. BCE	14	Bertoldi 2011, 72–73; Olcese – Coletti 2016, 424–425; Olcese 2018, 104–105 cat. 27
Jug bases and handles	--	54	
Olla Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 273</i>	2 nd c. – beginning of 1 st c. BCE	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 433
Basin Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 293.4</i>	4 th c. – 3 rd c. BCE	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 447 f.
Basin Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 294.5</i>	4 th c. – 3 rd c. BCE	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 448 f.
Basin Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 298.2</i>	Late Republican – 1 st c. CE	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 451
Basin Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 300</i>	Middle – Late Republican	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 299
Bottle fragments	--	7	
Unguentaria		10	
Unguentarium fusiform <i>Camilli tipo B.62</i>	3 rd c. – 1 st half of 2 nd c. BCE	1	Camilli 1999, 32
Unguentarium piriform <i>Camilli tipo C</i>	Mid-1 st c. BCE – beginning of 2 nd c. CE	8	Camilli 1999, 33
Black gloss unguentarium fragment	--	1	
Incense burners		1	
Miniatures		14	
Miniature jugs (<i>impasto chiaro sabbioso</i>)	--	11	
Miniature olla Olcese 2016 <i>cat. 267</i>	4 th – 3 rd c. BCE	1	Olcese – Coletti 2016, 431 cat. 267
Miniature sim. Ostia 13 <i>cat. 145</i>	(Ostia 13 <i>cat. 145</i> : 2 nd – 4 th c. CE)	1	Pavolini 2000, 268–270 cat. 245
Miniature lid	--	1	
Lamps		11	
Black gloss lamp <i>Tevere 1c/d</i>	Middle – end of 2 nd c. BCE	2	Borgia 1998, 306
Black gloss lamp <i>Cnidian type, sim. Bailey Q272/273 / Howland 40a</i>	2 nd c. – 1 st quarter of 1 st c. BCE	1	Bailey 1975, 136 Q273; Howland 1958, 126 type 40a
Lamp Dressel 2 / <i>Warzenlampe</i> (black)	2 nd c. BCE – Augustan (mainly 1 st c. BCE)	2	There are varying suggestions for this lamp type's date, most of them revolving around the 1st c. BCE. For an overview on the typology and the proposed dating, see Celis Betriu 2005, 44. This of course excludes the Late Antique 'Late Warzenlampen'
Other black gloss lamp fragments	--	4	
Terra Sigillata lamp fragments	--	2	
Amphora stoppers	--	2	
Figurine fragments	--	1	
Loom weights	--	1	
Architectural elements		4	
Imbrices	--	3	
Architectural terracotta	--	1	

On the other hand, phase 5 confirms a certain ritual continuity: The occurrence of jugs (in depurated ware) throughout all phases points to a ritual connected to the act of pouring liquids. In correlation with the near exclusiveness of wine amphorae amongst the amphora finds from the altar area, the jugs could of course be associated with feasting and drinking. On the other hand, the immediate surroundings of the altar were rather used in a ritualistic context. The most probable feature connected to the act of pouring liquids is the libation hole, especially as it was kept accessible throughout all building phases of the altar.

76 Phase 5 also includes 14 miniatures (jugs, ollae, a lid), the only fragment of a figurine and the only inscribed ceramic fragments. An important addition to the find spectrum is the fragments of thin-walled ware cups dating from the mid-2nd c. to the 1st c. BCE as well as several amphora types dating to the same time period. At the same time, the SU 003b contained a large amount of very fragmented black gloss ceramics from the 3rd to the 1st c. BCE, most of which can certainly be considered residuals.

77 Most of the later-dating finds date to the 1st c. BCE, some with an initial production date of the mid-1st c. BCE. The ceramic fragments with the latest initial production date (Tiberian) within the context are two fragments of African cooking ware (a casserole and a tegame) and a fragment of a Terra Sigillata bowl. With the bulk of the dating spectrum of phase 5 ending within the 1st c. BCE, it is quite possible that the latter mentioned fragments do belong to the repair of the pavement, though, resulting in a suggested date of the mid-1st c. BCE for phase 5.

78 A very similar ceramic spectrum is documented for the foundation fill of the *Domus dei Bucrani* in Ostia Antica in the parcel of the *Schola del Traiano* (IV, V, 15, 16). The fill is dated to around 60 BCE and contains many of the same pottery types as the stratum SU 003b⁴⁷. Certainly, the context of the ceramics is entirely different: The SU 003b contains material from a sanctuary, while the origin of the ceramics found in the fundament of the *Domus dei Bucrani* remains uncertain. Nevertheless, it is an important mid-1st c. BCE *comparandum* from Ostia supporting the suggested date for phase 5.

79 The dataset available for the faunal remains from phase 5 is more substantial than that of the previous phases. The majority of the 573 animal bones originate from the SU 003b. As in previous phases, the bones from phase 5 show signs of burning, cooking, and butchering. In contrast to the strata of the preceding phases, the SU 003b also contained some better-preserved bones from larger animals, like adult pigs and ox.

80 Again, pig bones are the largest group among the faunal finds: there are several tusks, teeth, and jawbones. In addition, fragments of sheep or goat jaws and the first identifiable remains of an ox are attested (fig. 22).

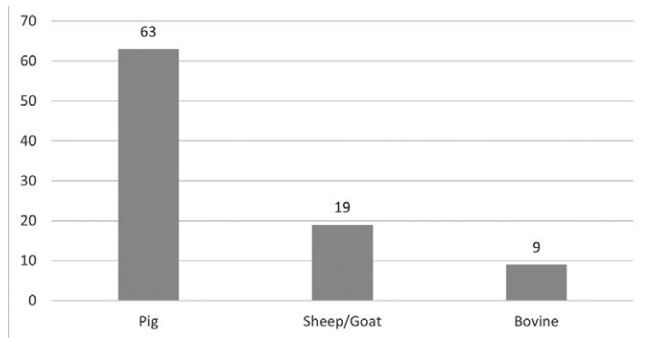
81 The bones from phase 5a derive mainly from the layer SU 003a, the repair of the beaten-earth floor laid out in phase 5 (fig. 23). This stratum contains fewer but better-preserved animal bones (52 bones) than the predecessor phase's stratum SU 003b. The same animal species as in the previous phases can be attested for phase 5a.

The Final Phases of the Sanctuary

82 The final phases (6–7) of the sacred area are the subject of separate studies⁴⁸. Nevertheless, in the following, the key elements of the altar's demolition process will be described shortly.

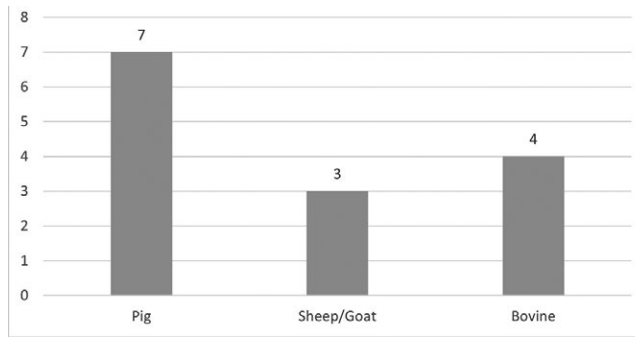
47 Deru et. al. 2018; Motta 2019, 226–234.

48 The phases 6 and 7 are extremely rich in material evidence and on top of that highly complex regarding the architectural development of the area. Therefore, these phases will be explained in detail in the dissertation by S. Menge and the publication of the architectural development by A. Gering (in preparation).



22

Fig. 22: The faunal remains from phase 5



23

Fig. 23: The faunal remains from phase 5a

83 After the altar had been dismantled, its western third was incorporated into the Hadrianic wall foundation, while some other remaining architectural elements were placed on top of the former altar in two layers and 'ritually buried'⁴⁹. The respect with which the altar structure was 'sealed' into the later construction of the eastern portico of the Hadrianic Forum is underlined by a bricklayer that was placed on top of it when the altar was covered. It is also reflected through the construction of a relieving arch within the fundament of the Hadrianic wall (fig. 7. 8), which precisely spares and thus protects the buried altar structures.

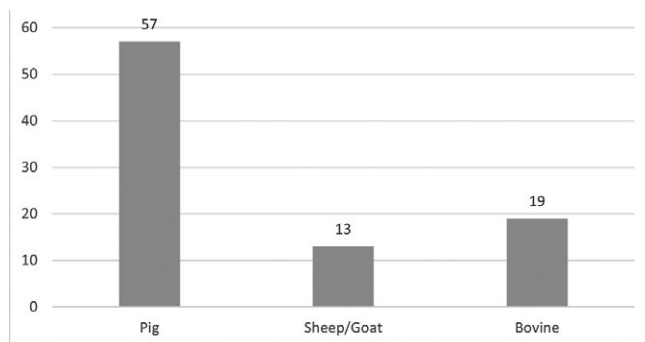
84 By the time of the grand Hadrianic building programme, which changed the face of the entire Forum, Ostia's oldest sacrificial area had become anachronistic. It is possible, that the constant fire hazard within the city centre was an issue the Hadrianic city planners wanted to eliminate.

85 As the Republican altar-area is exceptionally well-preserved, including traces of ritual activity, among others its ritual deposits containing ceramics and animal bones, an excavation of the sacred area, including TFR1–6, and the portico MFE with the temple-podia is one of the central aims for the future of the Ostia-Forum-Project after 2023 (fig. 2)⁵⁰. This excavation could unearth the material culture and the layout of the entire sanctuary, which is the most prominently positioned and probably also the oldest – and so far, the least well-known in Ostia's sacred topography.

86 As the final phases of the sanctuary contained the highest number of preserved bone deposits, in the following, a short summary of the preliminary results on the faunal remains of these phases will be presented. In total, 662 bones were recovered from the stratigraphical units belonging to phase 6 (fig. 24). They stem mainly from the levelling layer SU 002 and from two deposits containing the remains of cattle and pig (SU 014 and 016). The bones were buried in two pits in the north-eastern corner of the sanctuary (fig. 4, Bone deposits). Both deposits contained almost exclusively faunal remains and were found immediately underneath the lowest layer of the marble deposit. The deposits were closed-off in a very particular way: SU 016 was dug in right next to the Trajanic Niche-wall and bordered on its western side by several bricks, which had been stuck into the ground at equal distance. After the animal bones were placed into the pit, cooking ware lids were used to cover it. Some of the lids were found complete and placed leaning against the wall.

49 The ritual aspect is underlined by the deposition of a much older black gloss patera from the early 3rd c. BC among the travertine blocks that used to belong to the altar.

50 The Ostia-Project I (Excavation) and II (Graduate-school) are both financed by Bettina Schwarz and the Stiftung Humboldt-University (SHU) until February 2023. A new Ostia-Project I b is planned.



24



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87 The bones recovered from the deposits 014 and 016 were better-preserved than those found in other contexts. Most of them belonged to larger animals, i.e. an atlas and a shoulder blade from an ox with a length of 40 cm. Several near-complete jaws of pigs were also found in these deposits. As mentioned above, both the SU 014 and 016 consist of the remains of some of the last sacrifices made in the sanctuary.

Fig. 24: The faunal remains from phase 6

Fig. 25: Sow skull buried near the southern wall of TFR2 (pig 1)

The Burial of Three Pig Skulls. A Closing Ritual?

88 A total of three pig skulls were found in the TFR-area: two of them in the area TFR2 (fig. 4. 20, showing the position of pig 1–2; fig. 25, showing pig 1 in detail⁵¹) and one of them in the area TFR1 (pig 3). Both skulls found in the area TFR2 belonged to circa two-year old female pigs⁵². Pig 1 and 3 were buried close to the altar, while pig 2 was found in the north-eastern corner of the area TFR2. The burial of the pig skulls can be considered part of the rituals connected to the closing of the sanctuary in the Hadrianic period, either as a *piaculum* for closing-down a sacred area or as an initiation ritual for the new building complex. As the skulls' snouts are pointing towards the newly constructed walls, it is quite possible that we are dealing with the latter. On the other hand, it could have certainly served as both.

89 The use of pig skulls in connection to an initiation rite is documented in the sanctuary southwest of the Palatine in Rome⁵³. An example for the use of pig skulls in a closing ritual can be traced in the Piano di Comunità in Veii⁵⁴, where a well was ritually sealed by placing eight pig skulls inside before it was sealed.

V. Interpretation. Four Centuries of Structural and Ritual Continuity

90 As mentioned above, the altar A1 can be identified as a specific altar type, a 'ground altar'. A ground altar is a certain type of fire altar with a fire pit at ground level or dug into the earth, instead of the more usual raised position on more common altar types. This specific type of a ground altar is known in central Italy through its closest

51 Pig 1 could be identified as a sow, while the other two have yet to be excavated and analysed in depth.

52 Personal communication in September 2019 with Paola Francesca Rossi (Parco Archeologico di Ostia Antica).

53 Coletti – Pensabene 2017, 587.

54 Ambrosini – Marchesini 2009, 264.

parallel in the Etruscan city of Veii. However, it was not taken into consideration even in recent typologies of Roman altars⁵⁵.

91 Functionally, ground altars can be distinguished easily from the more usual altar types with a fire-zone on an elevated position. Even though the common U-shaped altars seem to have some similarities with the altar in the area TFR2, the functional differences are apparent: In the area TFR2, the altar's fire is situated in a pit in the centre of the podium, most probably surrounded by a U-shaped windbreak consisting of plain tuff slabs⁵⁶. U-shaped altar types, however, carried their fire on top of the solid U-structure, which was in most cases more architecturally elaborated than the structures found in the area TFR2.

92 The various levels of the altar's ramp contained residuals of ancient clearing processes, i.e. pieces of charcoal and bones in a more fragmented condition. Surrounding the altar, also the strata of level raises and new floorings contained smaller and larger pieces of charcoal⁵⁷.

Apparently, the fire pits were periodically cleared of the growing pile of igneous debris, so that the sacrificial remains and a large amount of charcoal pieces have been buried underneath the level raises of later altar phases, especially in the area of the ramp. As mentioned above, the regular cleansing is also archaeologically proven by the conspicuous quantity, widespread, and homogeneity of the burnt material in different layers from all phases as well as in single- or multiple-use ritual deposits in the vicinity of the altar⁵⁸.

93 In all phases of the fire-pits, fragments of bones from sacrificial animals are attested, proving a ritual continuity also in that regard. They were found in the fire pit itself and on the ramp, all of them heavily burned, and the majority in smaller fragments. Especially the bones from the ramp area were very fragmented and burned, which did not allow for identifying the animals' species with certainty. The bones from the latest fire pit had some larger, more well-preserved fragments, i.e. a part of a shoulder blade and a front tooth from a pig as well as two teeth from an ox. Additionally, some fragments of larger bones were recovered, probably belonging to larger animals, such as ox or adult pig.

94 The high number of bones found within the area is most likely because of religious practices within the sanctuary such as food preparation and animal sacrifice. As mentioned above, the altar in TFR2 in all its phases was most probably used for animal sacrifice. This is based not only on the shape of the altar but also on the state of preservation of the faunal remains.

55 Recent altar typologies include for instance Moser 2019 and Cavallero 2018. For the altar in the Portonaccio sanctuary of Veii, which is connected to Apollo and probably also other deities, i.e. Minerva due to the character of the votive figurines, cf. Stefani 1953. cf. Colonna 2002, tab. LVIII cat. 688–690. In many cases, a ground altar can be compared to the Hellenistic *eschàra*, an altar consisting of a rectangular or round pit at ground level collecting ash and sometimes (burned) offerings, at times bordered by solid structures marking and protecting the ash pit. Such altars are especially common in the worship of chthonic deities as well as hero cults.

56 In Veii, the windbreak is only verified via the imprints of its slabs in the tuff podium surrounding the fire pit which is characterised by a circular dark discolouration in the centre of the so-called 'fossa dei sacrifici'. The archaeological remains of the western windbreak were initially interpreted as an elevated altar by Stefani (Stefani 1953, Fig. 17. 18. "Altare"). After re-examining the structure, in our opinion, this specific element can only be interpreted as a simple step (52 cm wide) up to the central pit of the altar with an added narrow windbreak (18 cm wide). The width of this windbreak is not sufficient to be interpreted as an altar, as proposed by Stefani. The probable windbreak of the altar A1 is missing, as well. It was probably removed during one of the level-raises of the fire pits as it may have been too fragile to be built atop of.

57 Most of the charcoal samples can be characterised as 'branch charcoal' from thin branches with a diameter of 2–4 cm, which is ideal for altar fires.

58 The ritual deposits cannot be explained here, as a separate PhD-project is dedicated to this subject. For the creation of the plan of the deposits, which were concentrated around the sewer and the cavities, cf. Gering 2017b, 28 f.

95 A certain continuity can also be traced regarding the sacrificial animals. The majority of the faunal remains from this sanctuary stem from domestic animals: pig, sheep/goat and ox. In all phases, the most common animal was pig, constituting an average of 63% of the identified bones. Sheep/goat and cattle are somewhat evenly represented, at least in the phases that they occur in. In total, cattle only constitute 12% of the identified bones, while sheep/goat constitute 25%. Cattle is, however, not represented in the earliest phases of the sanctuary. This could indicate a change in the types of animals that were sacrificed in the sanctuary, or an issue of a small material group. Further excavation of the lower layers of the sanctuary is required to make proper conclusions on this theory.

96 The average age of the animals has yet to be determined. However, through this preliminary examination it is obvious that more than one age group is represented. This is especially apparent with the pigs as it is the most plentiful species in the sanctuary. Remains of both piglets and adult pigs have been attested in the various contexts. However, most bones seem to stem from adult or adolescent animals. The only animals whose age and sex has been determined are two of the pig skulls which were adult females of averagely two years of age.

97 The structural development of the ‘libation hole’ and its adaptation to the subsequent building-phases of the altar has been elaborated above in detail. Still, it is important to emphasise that over a span of over 400 years, the connection to the first subterranean cavity was kept up. Analogue series of perforated stones placed on top of each other are known from sanctuaries such as Veii, where a libation hole on top of an underground cavity was located next to the main altar – an altar of the same type as the one in Ostia⁵⁹. The cavities below the libation hole had been formed by the continuous inflow of fluids, like wine, milk, oil or sacrificial blood, as the libation hole is located next to the slaughtering area of the altar (see below)⁶⁰.

The Functionality of the Altar

98 Whereas the function of the fire pit and the libation hole is quite apparent, there are some elements of the altar that require further explanation. While the fire pit provided a space for burning offerings, and the libation hole a separate space for liquid offerings, most of the other functional features are concerned with cleaning the sacred structures off any debris occurring through sacrificial acts.

99 To summarise, already the oldest construction phase of the altar was connected to a sewer. This sewer remained open and in use until the last altar phase (fig. 4). The access to the sewer was subsequently adjusted to the increasing pavement levels.

100 The other constant denominator for all phases is the declining ramp, sometimes connected with a separate drain, leading into the sewer. The ramp itself was not only an easy accessway to the fire altar, it was also used to clear the fire pits from accumulated debris. Via the ramp and the sewer, debris could easily be washed away with water provided by the well⁶¹.

59 For the comparison to the Veii-altar cf. Colonna 2002, 148 fig. 6. Such a subterranean cavity has been a centre of veneration in many sanctuaries, especially in cases where sacrificial blood was collected in such cavities. Another comparison is building Beta in Tarquinia, cf. Bonghi Jovino 2010, 168–172.

60 Additionally, on a transitional level of 1,35 m ASL, a small tuff block (fig. 8b. 15. 18: U3b) with a profile and a concave moulding carved into its surface, characteristic for an altar, was attached to the libation-hole. It was kept in use during phases 3 and 4 and could have served to collect the abovementioned liquid offerings. An in-depth discussion of the libation hole and the associated ritual aspects will be presented in an upcoming publication by the authors (in preparation).

61 Similar sewer systems connected to altars have been found in several sanctuaries, f. ex.: Portonaccio in Veii, Colonna 2002. Potts 2015; *Tarquinia*, Edificio Beta, Bonghi Jovino – Bedini 1997; Bonghi Jovino 2010, 168–172.

101 An important question remains open, though: Where exactly did the sacrificial act of slaughtering an animal take place?

102 The drain on the eastern side of the altar, traceable for both the blue and white phase (4th and 5th building phase), however, seems to have had a different function than the clearing of the fire pit which was facilitated by the ramp. The drain is slightly elevated above the ramp and only starts halfway between the fire pit and the sewer. It, therefore, cannot be related to the cleaning of the fire pit, especially as the ramp shows such clear signs of being used for this exact purpose. The purpose of the drain was most probably for washing away the blood of sacrificial animals. Opposite of the drain's outlet is the abovementioned basin, which is connected to the well, providing access to water, so the sacrificial blood can easily be flushed into the sewer.

103 The question is where exactly the sacrificial animals would have been slaughtered. In other sanctuaries, hooks and fences for tying down the animal during the sacrifice have been attested. At this point, there is merely minor, debatable evidence for such implements attested for the altar A1a⁶².

It is quite probable, that the animal would have been slaughtered with its head held over the drain, simplifying the cleaning process⁶³. This would also be consistent with the location of the drain next to the libation hole, facilitating access to this feature for pouring blood offerings into the cavity.

104 Regardless of these hypotheses, cleaning the area off the sacrificial blood seemed to have been of great importance to the architects of the altar area: The system of ramps and drains was developed to a degree of sophistication rarely attested in other sanctuaries. Whether this is due to a ritual or cultic aspect or due to plain hygienic measures in a densely populated city-centre, is to be debated.

The Tuff Podia in Context. The Altar, Its Orientation and Ostia's Grid-Layout

105 It is essential to mention that most major construction phases of the tuff podia modified the podium's orientation by about 1–2° each. This circumstance is very useful when attempting to assign the individual elements to the respective construction phase, while not having to rely only on their elevation level. With about 4° of deviation from the orientation of the Hadrianic Forum, the lowest traceable podia are the most off-grid-axis. Apparently, over four centuries, there was a slow but continuous process of re-orienting the altar from 4° to 0° in relation to the Hadrianic grid of the city. The reasons for these adjustments are not entirely clear, they could be based on adaptations of the altar to changes in the grid layouts of Ostia or be related to other fixed points⁶⁴. The diachronic development of several grid-layouts is treated in detail in another article⁶⁵. Future archive studies and new excavation will have to deliver additional information regarding the development of the sanctuary over the centuries, also in relation to the first and the second castrum-grid (fig. 26. 27. 28. 29).

106 Currently, the dimensions of the sanctuary's parcel are proposed to be 90 × 90 Roman feet in its earliest layout. In later phases, the parcel was reduced to a size of 60 × 75 feet and 60 × 60 feet (fig. 26. 27. 28, Reconstruction of the smallest and

62 A possible dowel hole on the eastern side of the tuff drain (phase 5) would be the only possible trace of such an element for tying down animals.

63 Hooks or fences for tying animals have been found at the Juno Temple in Gabii (Almagro-Gorbea 1982) and in Cosa (Brown et al. 1960).

64 The altar is oriented to the south-east. Over time, the magnetic north pole increasingly deviates from the geographical north-pole.

65 Gering (forthcoming).

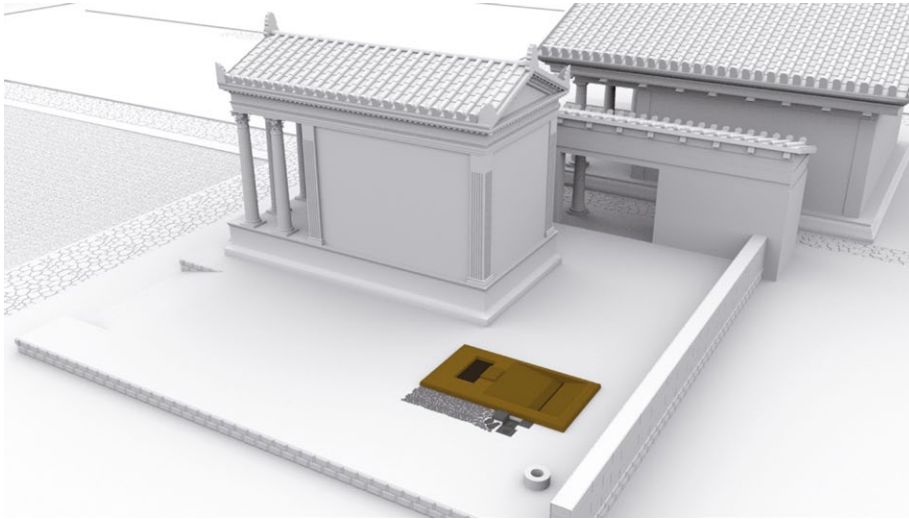


Fig. 26: 3D-reconstruction of the sanctuary in its reduced parcel size 60 × 60 feet with the altar A1

26

latest parcel (60 × 60 feet) of the precinct)⁶⁶. This assumption is supported through the results of geophysical analysis⁶⁷. As the largest parcels (public) of Ostia's first grid layout are proposed to be 90 × 90 feet, as well, the precinct would occupy an entire parcel in its earliest phase (fig. 29, The first grid in green, the second grid in blue). The altar A1 with its presumed dimensions (10 × 10 feet) would be in an exact 40 feet distance from all of the precinct's boundaries and thus in the exact centre of the first layout of 90 × 90 feet. This undeniable relation of the altar to the first grid-layout which is associated with the castrum foundation results in another question: Could the altar A1 be connected to the foundation rites of the castrum? The earliest finds from the areas TFR2–3 (2nd half – end of 4th c. BCE⁶⁸), even though they are considered residuals from so far unexcavated phases of the sanctuary, can suggest at least a dating span for the earlier phases and possibly even the foundation of the sacred area⁶⁹. The so far excavated phases of the altar can be dated earliest to the mid-3rd c. BCE (see phase 1).

¹⁰⁷ Hence, new archaeological data from this area will help gain further insight into the date of Ostia's foundation and thus, the most centrally located but so far archaeologically unknown cults of the city.

The Quest for the Venerated Deities

¹⁰⁸ Whilst the quest for the deities venerated at the large ground altar in the area TFR2 is still ongoing, a few clues have been presented in this paper, including several incised graffiti on ceramic finds. In total, only five fragments of inscribed pottery have been found in TFR2⁷⁰. The most remarkable find in this regard was a bowl bearing a dedication to Apollo (fig. 30. 31). The vessel is a *Morel 2534* bowl,

⁶⁶ The reduced parcels are discussed in the article mentioned in the prior footnote, as well.

⁶⁷ Cf. Gering 2022.

⁶⁸ For a few of the earliest finds from the area TFR2, see phases 1 and 2 below. Several finds from a small trench in the area TFR3 dated to the 2nd half of the 4th c. BCE, among others a few fragments of internal white slip cooking ware ollae, several palmette-stamped fragments attributable to the early production of the *Atelier des petites estampilles*, a fragment of a *Poculum*-plate, as well as several skyphos-fragments with painted palmette decoration.

⁶⁹ A context connected to the construction of the castrum walls is dated to the end of the 4th – beginning of the 3rd c. BCE (Martin 1996, 23). Earlier ceramic finds, i.e. Attic imports from the 1st half of the 4th c. BCE are also attested for the area of the castrum (cf. Adembri 1996, 42–45).

⁷⁰ The incised graffiti are the following: “APLONI” on a *Morel 2534* bowl, an “AL” on a large cooking ware lid, an “A” on a black gloss base, the letters “MII” on a rim fragment of a *Morel 1312* plate, and the letter “IO” on a black gloss body sherd. The latter two are broken, thus there might have been more letters originally.



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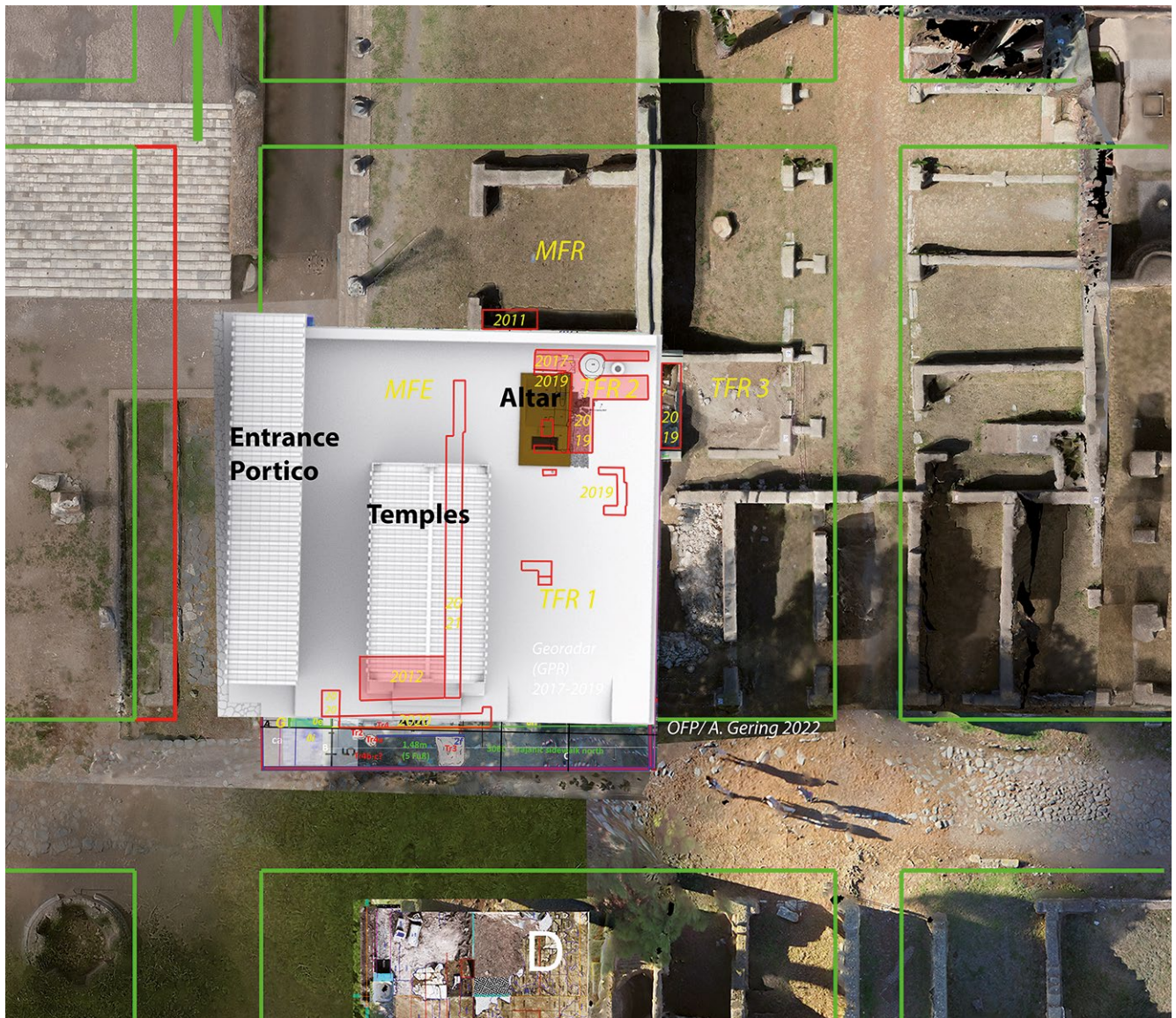
Fig. 27: Ostia, city centre. Position and dimensions of the sanctuary's parcel (marked in green) with geophysics' results and the position of the OFP's excavation trenches (marked in red)

produced between the late 3rd c. and the middle of the 2nd c. BCE. The inscription was incised near the base on the exterior of the vessel. The letters read “APLONI”, most probably the dative form of Apollon in Latin and a reference to the offering being made in the name of Apollon. Based on the letters and the production span of the vessel, the inscription can be dated to the late 3rd century BCE or the very early 2nd century BCE⁷¹. As mentioned above, the structural similarities to the Apollo-sanctuary in Veii are striking⁷². Yet, with its prominent location at the crossing of *Cardo* and *Decumanus* and its singular role as the hitherto only known and largest fire altar in Ostia's centre⁷³, it is quite probable that the altar area was not used for a single deity only. There is additional evidence for at least two other deities venerated in the sanctuary, one of whom is *Volcanus*, Ostia's main god in the Republican and Early Imperial era. An inscription recently discussed by Fausto Zevi underlines the significance of the deity in Ostia. The date, the dimensions and the

71 Personal communication with Dr. David Nonnis (La Sapienza).

72 In Veii, an oracle aspect is connected to Apollo, Minerva, and several other deities and nymphs. Cf. Colonna 2002, tab. LIII cat. 593. Tab. LIX cat. 691.

73 For an overview on Ostia's cults and sanctuaries, see Rieger 2004.

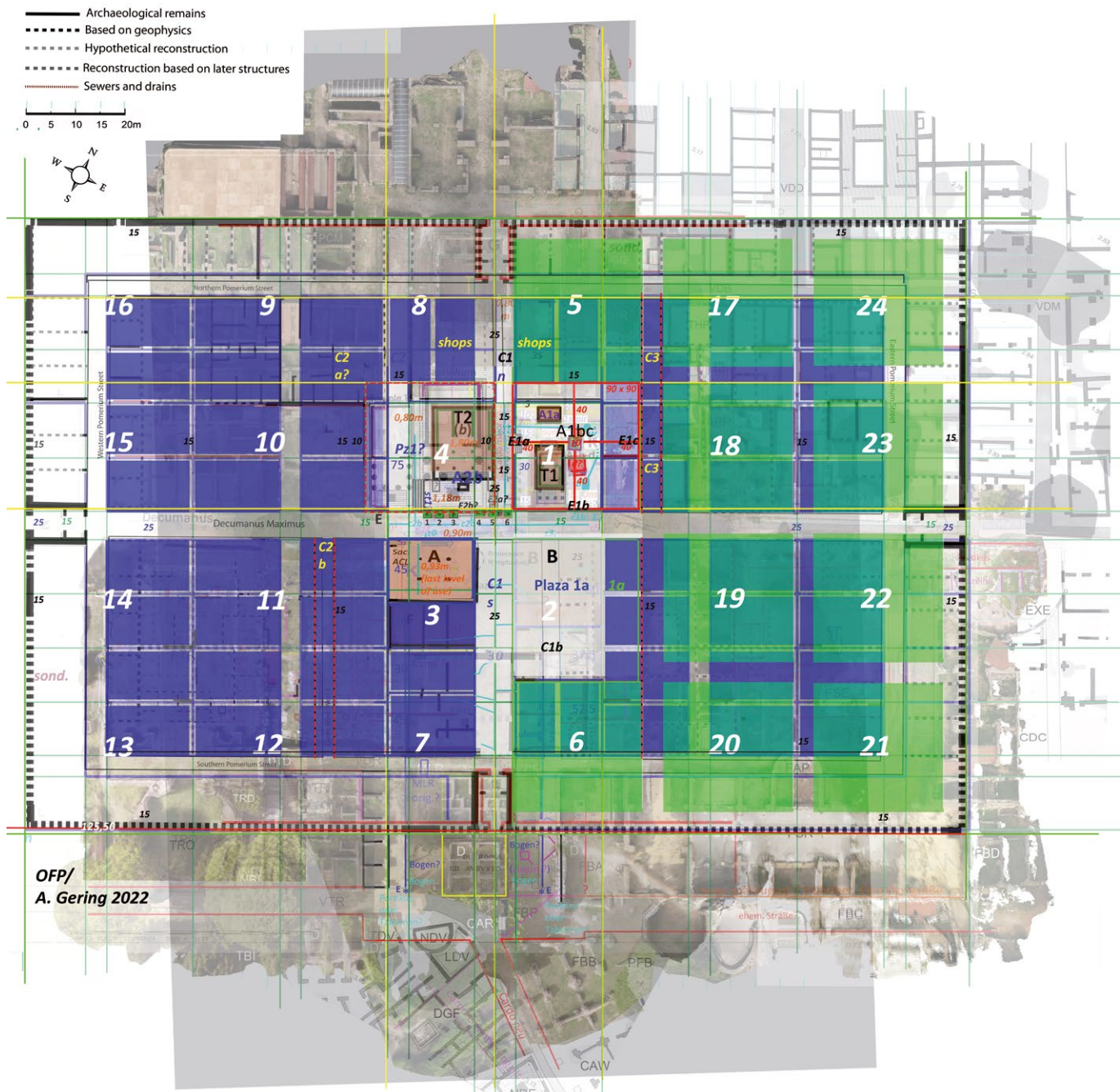


28

overall characteristics of the inscription fit those of the latest of the sanctuary's temples (T1d)⁷⁴. Whether Volcanus can be attested for the predecessor temples (T1a–c), as well, will be subject of further research. These temples were all built atop of each other, reusing the predecessor's podium. The earliest temple (T1a with a separate aligned altar A1a) was oriented north, while the latter temples (the temple T1b and its renovation phase T1c as well as the larger temple T1d) were oriented towards

Fig. 28: Ostia, city centre. Position and dimensions of the sanctuary's parcel (marked in green) including the reconstruction of the entrance portico, the temples, and the altar. (OFP's excavation trenches marked in red)

⁷⁴ Other cults, e.g. Ostia's main god, Volcanus, could have existed from the beginning of the cultic activities in the sanctuary, dated by the residuals in the lowest layers 003e-f to the 4th century BC. However, it could also have been introduced into an already existing sanctuary. Such a central sanctuary at the crossing of the *Cardo* and the *Decumanus*, directly in front of the Ostia's first Forum's plaza, would be a probable location for Ostia's main god and several clues indicate a possible connection between the sanctuary's latest temple (T1d) and Volcanus. The famous Vulcan-inscription, cf. Zevi 2018, can quite probably be attributed to the aforementioned temple T1d. Concerning the temple and the inscription, cf. Gering 2022, chapter 32.3.4. On the dating of the transfer of the Vulcan-cult to Ostia, compare Zevi 2009. A possible date for the introduction of Volcanus in Ostia around 190 BCE proposed by Zevi would correlate with the third (orange) phase with a *terminus a quo* in the beginning of the 2nd c. BCE. Vulcan is also the most frequently mentioned deity on Ostian inscriptions (Ceccarelli – Marroni 2011, 296–303).



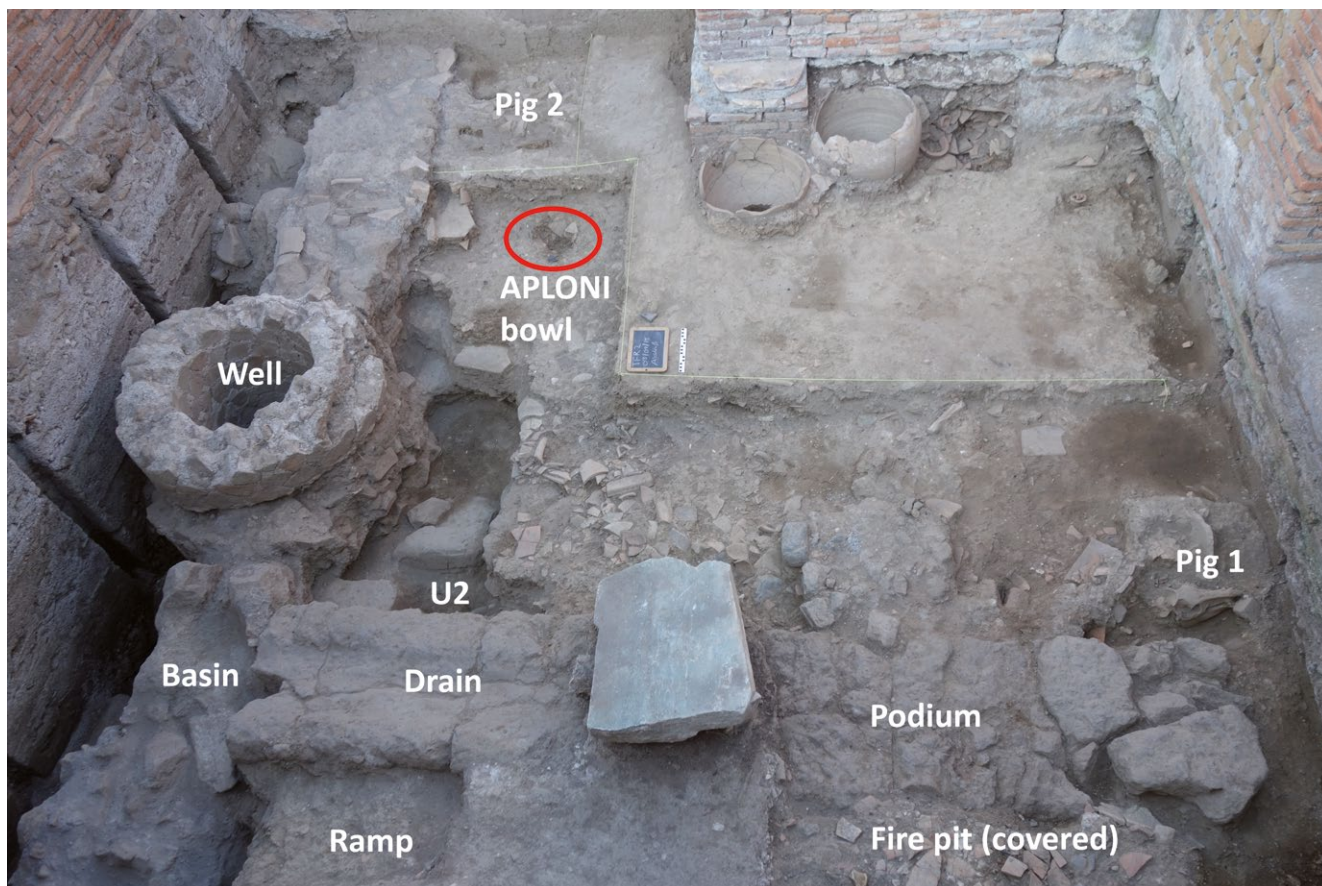
29

Fig. 29: Ostia. The grid-layouts of the castrum (first grid: green parcels; second grid: blue parcels)

the south. The drastic change in orientation could indicate the introduction of a new venerated deity or simply the new focus on a newly built plaza, the first Forum on top of the levelled building B.

109 There are also several chthonic aspects present in the altar area, the most obvious of which is the libation hole. Intended to facilitate libations or other offerings to penetrate the earth and function as a conduit into the soil or into the underworld⁷⁵, these structures can take various shapes and sizes. While such installations are found

⁷⁵ This means, either into the soil, which would suggest a connection to fertility, or into the underworld, suggesting a connection to underworld deities. Of course, Demeter and Persephone cults encompass both aspects.



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in most chthonic sanctuaries, their prevalence in Demeter sanctuaries is evident⁷⁶. Other characteristics present in the altar area which are connected to chthonic cults are:

- the upside-down deposition of offered vessels⁷⁷, and
- the clear preference for pigs⁷⁸, not only as sacrificial animals but also for the *piacula* connected to the obliteration rituals of the area.

Although the latter two phenomena also occur in non-chthonic sanctuaries, the amalgamation of all the abovementioned aspects is significant.

¹¹⁰ Pigs, and especially piglets and younger pigs, are also associated with Demeter in particular⁷⁹, as is the offering of lamps as votives, probably linked to the illumination

Fig. 30: TFR2. View into the room from west. The find spot of the 'APLONI'-bowl is circled in red

⁷⁶ Needless to say, most of the comparanda can be found in *Sicily* and *Magna Grecia*: *Locri*, Edificio E with 'altare con tubi' (Macrì 2014, 73–75); *Morgantina* (Sposito 2008, 231 fig. 26); S. Nicola di Albanella (Cipriani 1989); Vaste, Piazza Dante (Mastronuzzi 2008, 150), and many others. Nevertheless, there are examples of such installations to be found outside of Magna Grecia and Sicily, as well, i.e.: Volterra, Acropolis (Bonamici 2003, 528–530 tab. XXXIV fig. 1, 4); Gravisca, Santuario greco (Fiorini 2005, 148–157). A Demeter and Kore sanctuary closer to Ostia is located in the Valle Ariccia (Zevi 2012). In Rome, the trias of Demeter, Dionysus and Kore as Ceres, Liber and Libera holds a special position in relation to the Capitoline trias, see Ribichini 2008, 237.

⁷⁷ Comparable depositions are attested for many sites, i.e. S. Nicola, Albanella (Cipriani 1989, 154 f.), Pontecagnano (Modesti et. al. 2005, 587 tab. V fig. c), Satricum (Bouma 1996, 112–115 fig. 86. 89).

⁷⁸ Modesti et. al. 2005, 580.

⁷⁹ Vincenti – Silvestri 2020.



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Fig. 31: Bowl with 'APLONI'-inscription (3D-Orthophoto)

of nocturnal festivities⁸⁰. In the area TFR2, seven complete to near complete lamp offerings were found, and in 1913, Raffaele Finelli found a large amount of lamps, and even multi-nozzle lamps near the temple.

¹¹¹ As mentioned above, Apollo can possess chthonic facets, as well. In fact, in the Campanian site of Pontecagnano, two chthonic sanctuaries were found, one for Demeter, the other for Apollo. Both display several of the abovementioned chthonic aspects which are present in the area TFR2: upside-down turned vessels⁸¹, sows as sacrificial animals⁸², and installations for liquid offerings which provide access to the subterranean sphere⁸³. In this regard, similarities between Demeter and Apollo in Greek sites have been discussed in the past⁸⁴.

¹¹² Another aspect connected to Demeter and Apollo, as well as to Volcanus, is their function as foundation deities⁸⁵. The location of the altar in the very centre of the sacred area could propose a link to the foundation of the sanctuary. Respectively, the central position of the sanctuary within the earliest grid-layout of the castrum (in the size of an entire insula) could suggest that it had a key role in the foundation of the Roman colony itself. However, this is merely a theory at this point and must be treated with caution.

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¹¹⁴ We would also like to thank the director and staff of the Parco Archeologico, Alessandro D'Alessio, Paola Germoni, Claudia Tempesta, Cristina Genovese, Marina Lo Blundo, Susanna Melis and the former director Mariarosaria Barbera. For the discussion of our first results at the Ecole française at Rome in October 2021 we would like to thank Fausto Zevi, Carlo Pavolini, Patrizio Pensabene, Angelo Pellegrino, Ferreol Salomon and many others.

⁸⁰ Gela: Orlandini 2008, 178 fig. 1. 18. Gortis: Allegro et. al. 2008, 112–114. Vaste, Piazza Dante: Mastronuzzi 2008, 147. Contrada Petrano: Spatafora 2008, 277 fig. 12: showing a multi-nozzle lamp deposited upside-down. Gravisca: Torelli 1977, 437. Volterra: remains of torches were found (Bonamici 2003, 528).

⁸¹ Modesti et. al. 2005, 587. 585 tab. V fig. b.

⁸² Modesti et. al. 2005, 580.

⁸³ Modesti et. al. 2005, 580. 585 tab. V fig. c; 590 tab. VIII fig. e. d.

⁸⁴ Lambrinoudakis 2008, 93–97.

⁸⁵ Demma 2021. Demma also discussed the introduction of Greek chthonic cults in Rome, Gabii and Praeneste as a reaction to the famines in the Early Republic.

115 The excavation would not have been possible without our Humboldt-Team, our graduate-college at the Winckelmann-Institut or the constant support of Stephan G. Schmid.

116 Steven Götz delivered us with reconstructions of the sanctuary (Cinema 4D), and Marco Dehner provided many 3D-models of the trenches.

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