

Interim Report, Theme 6 (*Unknown Forum Structures in Ostia: The Synthesis of Stratigraphy and Geo-Physical Excavation Data regarding the Development of the Forum's Area from the Republic to the early 2nd century CE (GIS)*)

The last Remains of the First Forum of Ostia

Introduction

In the attempt to define the first Forum of Ostia, which would be the initial step in this process, several locations in Ostia containing earlier structures in the city have been visited. The locations are, amongst others, the religious areas such as Quattro Tempietti, the Area Sacra Repubblicana and the Tempio sul Decumano. The city gates were also analysed and photographed. Furthermore, two horrea were visited, since they have phases from the 1st century BCE. The reason for visiting these locations has nothing to do with the development in the Forum's area as such, but is an attempt to obtain an overview of the development of the city from the late 3rd to the late 1st centuries BCE.

Setting the historical context

Recently, Cuyler has proposed that the Quattro Tempietti are to be dated to the early 1st century BCE, where they replaced some wooden temples.¹

The hitherto oldest known temple in Ostia would be the Tempio dell'Ara Rotonda, which has been dated to the late 3rd or early 2nd century BCE.²

The Tempio sul Decumano has been dated to around 100 BCE.³

It has been debated, when the city walls of Ostia were built. The initial hypothesis has been that they were built during the reign of Sulla around 80 BCE. However, Zevi has proposed a later date combining the construction of the city walls and gates with Cicero, and therefore setting the date around 60 BCE.⁴

At least two horrea have phases dating to the 1st century BCE, and probably dating to the period before or at the same time as the construction of the city walls and gates.⁵

¹ Cuyler 2015, 147-219.

² Zevi 2012, 560-563.

³ Pensabene 2007, 118-119.

⁴ Zevi 2004a.

⁵ Pers. comm. Simone Mulattieri.

Hence, from the late 2nd to the first half of the 1st centuries BCE, a major development can be traced in Ostia around the monumental centre, which is defined as the castrum area. It is therefore likely that something larger also happened in the monumental centre.

Comparing Ostia to other colonies is always a bit difficult, since many Roman colonies were founded on already existing settlements, villages or cities, such as Minturnae and Fregellae. These cities were conquered by the Romans, who then installed a Forum, which in most cases happened in the (end of the) 2nd century BCE.⁶ Other colonies, such as Cosa, were founded on virgin soil and shortly afterwards a Forum was installed. In the initial planning of Cosa in the 3rd century BCE, the Forum's area was already laid out, thus indicating that the architects and settlers were aware of the fact that Cosa potentially could develop into a city containing the majority of a city's components. Shortly after the first Punic war in 241 BCE, the first monumental version of the Comitium was built. In the end of the 3rd century BCE, the first structures of the Forum were standing, and the Forum had a representative function, thus indicating a controlled established city.⁷

For many, it is a well-known fact that Ostia was founded as a military fort on virgin soil. However, this has recently been questioned by the undersigned in two articles.⁸ Here it is proposed that the centre of the castrum already before the foundation, was a Late Archaic / Early Republican sanctuary, which was founded at a (sacred) spring and in the crossroad area of the (possible) predecessor of the Decumanus Maximus and the Via Laurentina. Whether this sanctuary was founded by the Romans, founded by the *Voturia* voting tribe or from a local Latin tribe is unknown, and due to the later building history of Ostia, it is also unknown whether the sanctuary was urban, sub-urban or extra-urban, using the definitions from Colonna.⁹

The material

Before going further with this interim report, the material will shortly be presented.

In the Forum's area, two walls have been the focal point. The first wall is the western wall of the Late Republican temple preserved under the western Hadrianic portico. The temple is referred to as Temple T5. The second wall is a predecessor wall of the so-called Curia. These two walls were documented using photogrammetry. Each wall was photographed with roughly 1.000 photos, which were processed in MetaShape. This created some very useful models of the two walls (Figs. 1-2).

⁶ Lackner 2008, 95-98 (Fregellae), 121-125 (Minturnae).

⁷ Brown 1980.

⁸ Damgaard 2019; Damgaard, forthcoming.

⁹ Colonna 1985.

The predecessor wall of the so-called Curia has not been giving much attention by Ostian scholars, and Patrizio Pensabene is only mentioning this wall as being part of earlier structures that was incorporated into the ‘Curia’, when that was built in the late 1st century CE.¹⁰ The wall, based on its building technique (*opus reticulatum*), can be dated to the middle or second half of the 1st century BCE.



Figure 1: The western wall of Temple T5.



Figure 2: The eastern wall of the so-called Curia

The written sources

The hitherto earliest mentioning of a forum in Ostia can be found in an inscription mentioning an Ostian personality, Lucilius Gamala, sponsoring the renovation and erection of several temples, paving a street from gate to gate (scholars assume it is the *Cardo*), and building a marble tribunal in the *Forum*.¹¹ The word *foro* is mentioned two times in the inscription. Firstly in the connection with the paving of the street and secondly, in connection with the marble tribunal. Hence, we know that at the time of Gamala, a forum already existed.

Questions are still being asked regarding the period, in which Gamala lived. It has been suggested that he lived in the Augustan period and even in the Trajanic period.¹² However, the majority of

¹⁰ Pensabene 2007, 219.

¹¹ CIL XIV 375.

¹² Cuyler 2019, 131-5.

scholars believe that he was politically active in the period between 70 and 40 BCE. Thus, the deeds mentioned in the inscription are to be found in that period. In this study, we can therefore assume that the first Forum of Ostia has to be found in the period preceding Gamala, if not in the same period. We cannot know, whether his additions were part of the creation of the Forum and if they therefore were important components of the newly established Forum or alternatively, if the Forum already had existed for some decades and that he then “just” added a paved street and a marble tribunal.

In the attempt to get closer to not only defining the first Forum of Ostia, but also to attempt to reconstruct the layout, it has to be defined exactly what a marble tribunal is and what it looks like. With this is meant the size of it, and if it was located inside a structure or outside in the open, or if both were possible. These questions will have to be answered, and in the attempt to answer them, a look towards the Forum Romanum would make sense as a start. A marble tribunal in the Forum Romanum would without doubt be of greater size and grandeur, but would nonetheless assist in identifying the possible location within the Forum of Ostia. However, other cities and colonies will also have to be scrutinised.¹³

The practice of one-to-one correlations between literary sources and archaeological remains – the so-called ‘positivist fallacy’ – is methodologically erroneous. It is therefore important that the abovementioned inscription does not control the search for the first Forum of Ostia, but that the inscription instead is being utilised as a means to describe events in Ostia, and that it at least can be used as a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the Forum. The difficulty is as already mentioned the dating of the inscription, but not only that. Fausto Zevi has proposed that the inscription itself could be of an Antonine date, but still refer to a person living between 70 and 40 BCE.¹⁴ His arguments is to be found with CIL XIV 376, which refers to the deeds of another Lucilius Gamala, but who lived in the 2nd century CE. Zevi proposes that the two inscriptions were set up next to each other in this period commemorating a present and former Gamala. Hence, the dating of the inscription is not necessarily of any help. During the last century, several scholars have discussed the events mentioned in CIL XIV 375, and in which period they could have or most likely would have happened. Some argue that 217 *triclinia*, which Gamala sponsored for an event, could not have happened before Caesar, and they therefore label it an *imitatio Caesaris*. I will not go into further detail with what the

¹³ This is presently work-in-progress, which is why the comparisons with the Forum Romanum is yet to be made.

¹⁴ Zevi 2004b, 49.

different scholars have stated and why, but will rely on the majority of scholars, who believe in the proposed dating by Zevi, which would be 70-40 BCE.¹⁵

In continuations to this, another inscription could be of interest. However, this inscription is certainly from the Augustan period, and would therefore not assist in the search for the first Forum. Nevertheless, the inscription mentions a woman by the name of Terentia, who sponsored the construction of a *cryptam ed chalcidii*. That is some sort of porticoed public square, maybe in connection with a basilica. The *cryptam ed chalcidii* has been suggested to have been located just west of the Flavian/Trajanic Basilica and under the later and present Tempio Rotondo. It would thus have opened towards a small street, which we know exist under the Flavian/Trajanic Basilica, and thus onto the Forum's plaza. Our geo-physics have also shown that there is no predecessor of the Flavian/Trajanic basilica in that same location. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the street running below was in use until the Basilica was built. The location of the *cryptam ed chalcidii* is unknown and its existence is only known through the abovementioned inscription. We do know, however, that the Tempio Rotondo has several predecessor phases, and it is possible, based on the geo-physics conducted by the Ostia-Forum-Project, that one of them could be that of a porticoed square.

Case study: Temple T5

Before going into a discussion about the Forum of Ostia, it would ease the process with a presentation of a known temple in the Forum. The temple is still preserved under the northwestern portico, MFW. Since this temple is from the Late Republican period, this temple might lead us on track when tracing the first Forum of Ostia. In this section, I will present my ideas of the temple. As one will experience with many major structures in the Forum of Ostia, most of them do not have their own thorough and intensive analysis. The only temple, which has been blessed with such an intensive analysis, is the Temple of Roma and Augustus.¹⁶ Indeed, the Capitolium has also been thoroughly analysed as a single monument by Carlo Albo, but a major monograph and a deeper and more intensive analysis have not yet been made, in which the Capitolium and its phases, context and usage are being analysed, and where it is put in its historical context.¹⁷ The (Imperial) Basilica, so-called Curia and the two Late

¹⁵ For a thorough discussion on the inscription and dating and references to the different opinions, see latest Cuyler 2019.

¹⁶ Geremia Nucci 2013; Gering 2016; 2017; 2018; 2020.

¹⁷ Johannes Trockels is conducting such an analysis. His ph.d. project is Theme 1 in the Graduate College, see <https://ostiagraduiertenkolleg.com/research/theme-1.html>. For the already published work on the Capitolium, see Albo 2002.

Republican temples, Temples T4 and T5, have not yet been analysed thoroughly in which phases and contexts are being highlighted.

Hitherto, the dating of Temple T5 has been set in the second half of the 1st century BCE, and more precisely between 40-30 BCE or in the early Augustan (30-20 BCE) period.¹⁸ After analysing the podium profiles of the temple, they could as well be from the first half of the 1st century BCE and not 40-20 BCE, which has been proposed by Mar. I am first to discuss the podium profiles of Temple T5, and not the first to propose a date in the period 100-50 BCE, since Pensabene has already discussed this topic.¹⁹

When analysing and finding comparisons to Temple T5 concerning dating, it makes sense to initiate such a study in Ostia, where structures built in *opus quadrata* with a core of *opus caementicium* are of interest. Firstly, there are several temples built with an *opus caementicium* core, such as the Temple of Hercules in the Area Sacra Republicana and the Tempio sul Decumano located directly outside of the eastern Castrum gate. Personally analysing the fundament of Temple T5 in August-September 2020, I found out that the temple is standing on an *opus caementicium* fundament. Hitherto, I have not been able to find other sources describing this aspect of Temple T5. In *Ostiensium Marmorum Decus et Decor. Studi architettonici, decorativi e archeometrici* by Patrizio Pensabene, Temple T5, together with the older Capitolium (Temple T4), have been dedicated five pages including large figures. These pages mostly consist of theories concerning the hitherto hypothesis that the first Forum of Ostia was built in early Augustan times, and that these temples belong to that phase.²⁰ As it was seen with Mar, the architectural elements – some cornices and capitals along with the *opus reticulatum* cella wall – are the evidence of this phase.²¹ However, there are also architectural elements from earlier periods. One Corinthian tuff capital was found in the magazine under the Hadrianic Capitolium. It has been suggested that this capital could belong to Temple T5 or that it at least could represent the capitals belonging to the temple. The capital contains parts of an acanthus

¹⁸ Mar 2002, 115-117

¹⁹ Pensabene 2007, 125-126, fig. 63.

²⁰ Pensabene 2007, 123-128.

²¹ Pensabene 2007, 125-128; Mar 2002.

leaf with foliole from the *ima folia*.²² The dating of the capital is set in the late 2nd or early 1st century BCE. This is based on a comparison with a capital found at the Tempio Tetrastilo.²³

Even though Pensabene notices that the podium of Temple T5 has similarities in Tivoli, Paestum and Rome, and that those similarities could be dated to 100-50 BCE, much more is unfortunately not interpreted or analysed, let alone the fact that the temple is built on an *opus caementicium* core. In the remainder of Ostian scholarship, the temples as a whole are being used in discussions about architecture and urban development, but the temples themselves as individual buildings have been neglected, and thus deprived from individual analyses.²⁴

The podium consists of six courses of tuff. The base consists of two courses, where the lower course is cut in a simple orthogonal profile and the course above is orthogonal half way up from where it is moulded with a simple cyma recta towards the dado (Figs. 3-4). Above the base, three blocks of tuff, each being roughly 55 cm high, comprise the dado. They are topped by a roughly 30 cm high crowning with a flat moulded cyma reversa. Above the crowning, the cella wall made in *opus reticulatum* begins (Fig. 1 and 5).²⁵ It does seem as if Temple T5 still has two phases preserved. The podium in *opus quadratum* with its profiles should be dated to the period 100-50 BCE, whereas the partly preserved cella in *opus reticulatum* should be dated to around 40-20 BCE, which is also the official dating of the temple. The temple's lowest orthogonal profile is standing on a level measured to 1.37 m. ASL. The lower podium's profile with a cyma recta is standing on 1.52 m. ASL (Fig. 5).

In Ostia as a whole, it is difficult to date structures based on the level alone, but using a methodological approach of neighbourhood-scale, it is possible. In the Forum's area and towards the Decumanus, the level of 1.37-1.52 m. ASL would be in the period spanning from the late 2nd century BCE until at least the late 1st century CE, where the Basilica and the Curia were built. It is a fact that Temples T4 and T5 were in use until the Hadrianic Capitulum was constructed, which indicates that the walking level of at least the Decumanus and Cardo would have remained at 1.50 m. ASL until 120 CE. The Tempio sul Decumano has been dated to 100-50 BCE, and is standing on level 1.54 m.

²² Pensabene 1973, 87, fragment no. 184; Pensabene 2007, 125-126, inv. no. 17372. In the attempt to trace the exact find location, the *Giornale degli Scavi* will be scrutinised. On the other hand, it could also be case that this capital was found in the magazine under the Hadrianic Capitulum, because it was used there as part of the construction of the temple in Hadrianic times.

²³ Pensabene 1973, 52: 198, pl. XVIII, LXXIX

²⁴ It is likely that the temples could have been analysed individually through an unpublished dissertation, e.g. Carlo Albo, who wrote about the Hadrianic Capitulum.

²⁵ See also Pensabene 2007, fig. 63.

ASL, with its lower podium's profile just below 1.84 m. ASL.²⁶ The corresponding measurement of Temple T5 is 1.79 m. ASL, thus the same level. We can therefore assume that the two temples were constructed in the same period. Furthermore, they are both placed on an *opus caementicium* fundament.

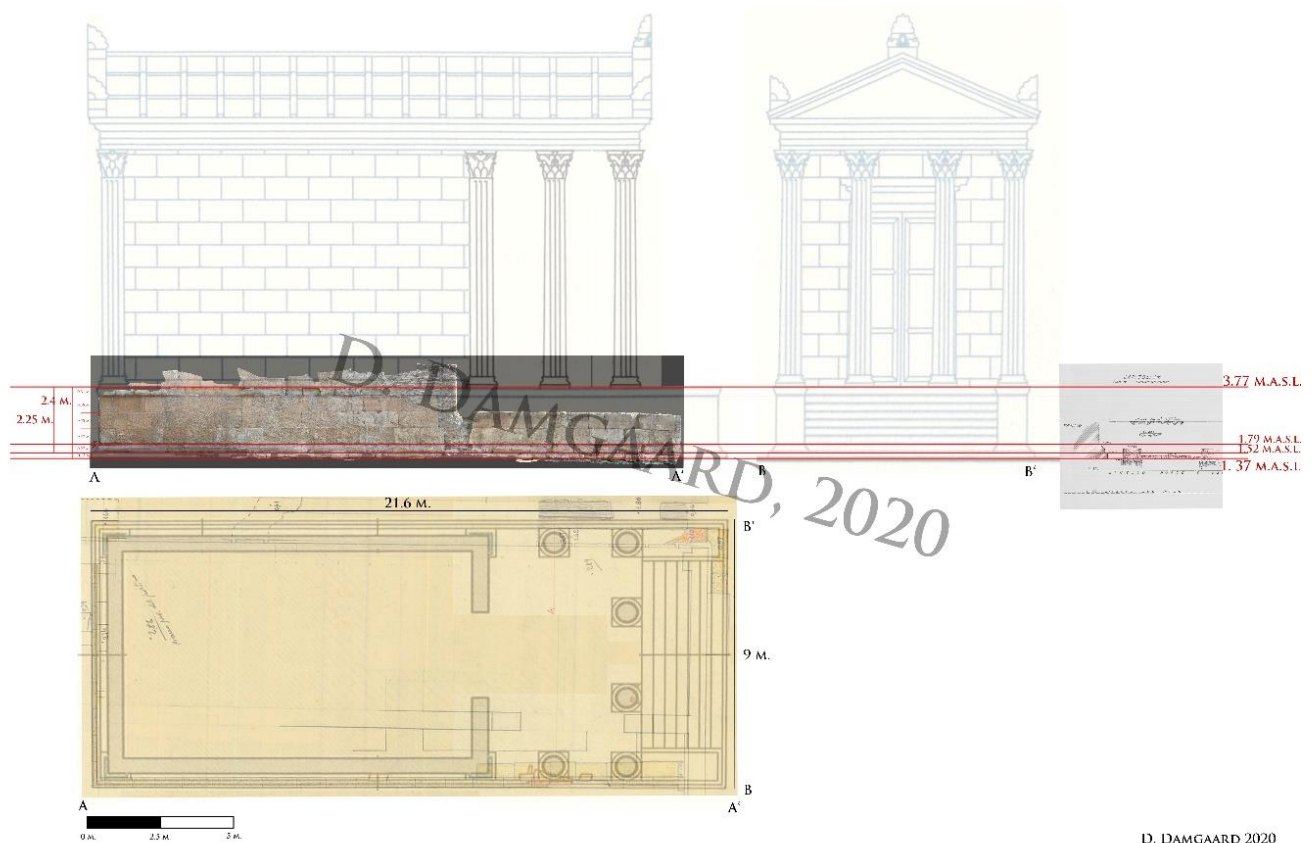


Figure 3: A cut of the lower podium profile.



Figure 4: The lower podium profile of Temple T5 in a single MetaShape file.

²⁶ PAOst, AF, B912. Parco Archeologico di Ostia Antica has released the majority of the drawings. They can all be found here: <https://gisnadis.parcoarcheologicostiantica.it/>



D. DAMGAARD 2020

Figure 5: The hypothetical reconstruction of Temple T5 in phase I (100-50 BCE) using the 3D-model of the western podium wall. The hypothetical reconstruction is inspired by the Temple of Neptune in Rome.²⁷

Defining a forum

Since the major point in this dissertation is to define the first Forum of Ostia, it is important to determine what a forum is and what it comprises. In the attempt to define the first layout of the forum, we have to consider when we are dealing with a forum, and ask questions such as “*What does a forum comprise?*” and “*What kind of political monuments and institutions does a forum require, if this is definable?*” We have to assume that a forum was not just an open plaza, but a plaza surrounded by or laid out in connection with certain public buildings. This is an important step towards understanding the early phases of Ostia’s Forum and city centre.

Paul Zanker has already defined a forum. He suggests that a forum contains a major temple, often a Capitulum, an official building such a basilica and lastly an open plaza, which would be the Forum’s square. Furthermore, the major temple has to face one of the main streets in the city, which eventually would lead to Rome.²⁸

²⁷ Carandini & Carafa 2012, pl. 215a.

²⁸ Zanker 2000, 26-7.

The first Forum of Ostia

These so-called ingredients could be present in Ostia already in the first half of the 1st century BCE, if we assume that the predecessor wall of the ‘Curia’ in fact is part of a predecessor Curia (or Comitium?). In continuations to this, it is possible to include another structure. This structure could be identified as some kind of proto-basilica and is located in the southern part of the Forum. The structure is built in *opus caementicium*.²⁹ It is today buried under the Forum’s plaza and directly in front of the Temple of Roma and Augustus.³⁰ The structure has been identified as a porticoed boundary of the south side of the first Forum’s plaza by Ricardo Mar. It is possible to identify the southern structure as a basilica, when comparing to Fanum, Cosa and even the Market Basilica in Ephesos.³¹ Therefore, if the structure in the southern part of the Forum is that of a basilica, we are presented with the structures and institutions comprising a forum: curia (or comitium), (proto-) basilica, a Capitolium (Temple T4) and a minor temple (Temple T5). With the construction of the proposed proto-basilica, the southern Cardo was blocked. This signifies that already during the 1st century BCE, traffic towards the south on the Forum’s plaza was made impossible. Traffic was instead re-directed through the street running west of the proposed proto-basilica. Another street has been discovered by the Ostia-Forum-Project during excavations in 2012. This street runs under the southeastern portico, MFP. The street is preserved at level 1.20-1.40 m. ASL.³² The Cardo located directly east of Temple T4 is at level 1.40-1.50 m. ASL.³³ It is therefore likely that this newly discovered street was laid out at the same time as the Cardo and the street running below the Imperial Basilica during the 1st century BCE. The two newly constructed streets could therefore be part of the creation of the first Forum in Ostia together with the two temples, T4 and T5, the proposed proto-basilica and a possible curia (or comitium). The streets are flanking the proto-basilica and their position entails that the Capitolium is placed in the central axis of the Forum (Fig. 6). We know that the two temples and the proposed proto-basilica are made in the same material – *opus quadratum* and *opus caementicium*. This does of course not necessarily mean that they are constructed at the same time.

²⁹ According to the plan, *PAOst, AD, B478*, the structure is built in *opus quadrata* and *opus caementicium*. The same as the two temples, T4 and T5.

³⁰ The structure consists of walls x, y and z, see Calza et al. 1953, 73-74, fig. 21.

³¹ Alzinger 1989.

³² The southeastern portico, MFP, is at level 2.20-2.40 m. ASL. The street was found 0.8-1.00 metres below. See Gering 2014, 214 compared to fig. 3.

³³ *PAOst, AD, B480*.

The reason for putting the earlier mentioned porticoed square, *cryptam ed chalcidii*, in connection with a basilica is only due to a chronological problem. If we assume that the proposed proto-basilica is that of a basilica, we create a problem. We know that it is at the latest demolished with the construction of the Temple of Roma and Augustus in 6 CE, since it is located directly in front of the temple and due to the level of the remains, which are preserved at 1,00 m. ASL. – thus some 40 cm below the level of the temple.³⁴ The present Basilica was constructed in the late 1st or early 2nd century CE. Hence, if the proto-basilica was demolished in 6 CE and the present Basilica was built some 90 years later, where would the basilica have been located in the intermediate period? It is an unlikely event that the city would demolish a basilica without having a plan to re-erect it elsewhere. Would the city still function without a basilica in this period? It can also be, as stated by Kockel, that Ostia was not in need of any basilica before the late 1st or early 2nd century CE, and it is therefore fruitless to search for a former basilica.³⁵ These are questions, which need to be answered. The question is therefore if the answer can be found through Terentia or not. As it is now, it is unlikely, since the inscription directly mentions *cryptam ed chalcidii*, which does not have anything directly connected to a basilica. Alternatively, the search for a 1st century CE basilica has to be found on the other side of the Forum's plaza below the present Caseggiato dei Triclini, which was built in 120 CE. Until geophysics and/or excavations can be conducted in that area, this will however remain unknown. Ricardo Mar, however, has identified Structure A, which faces the Decumanus from the southern Forum's plaza, as a basilica, but not a basilica as part of any forum.³⁶ He maintains a date of the first Forum in the early Augustan period. His arguments are based on the theory that Ostia, supposedly, got a first Forum in the same time as Octavian (Augustus) was named emperor.³⁷ This is not based on much evidence, except for the fact that Augustus sent his veterans to Ostia, where they were giving some land. This, combined with the erection of the first theatre, sponsored by Marcus Agrippa, has let scholars to suggest that the first Forum is to be found in the early Augustan period. Nevertheless, Structure A is more likely part of a Late Archaic / Early Republican temple constructed in the area before the construction of the castrum, where the pro-naos of the temple was rebuilt and reused as part of a *principia* or *praetorium*, when the castrum was constructed (Fig. 7).³⁸

³⁴ PAOst, AD, B480, B481; Calza et al. 1953, fig. 21. For the level of the Temple of Roma and Augustus and other levels in the Forum, see PAOst, AD, B652.

³⁵ Kockel 1992, 104, 107.

³⁶ Mar 2002, 113-114.

³⁷ Mar 2002, 114-115, fig. 3.

³⁸ Damgaard, forthcoming.

THE FORUM OF OSTIA, 100 - 50 BCE

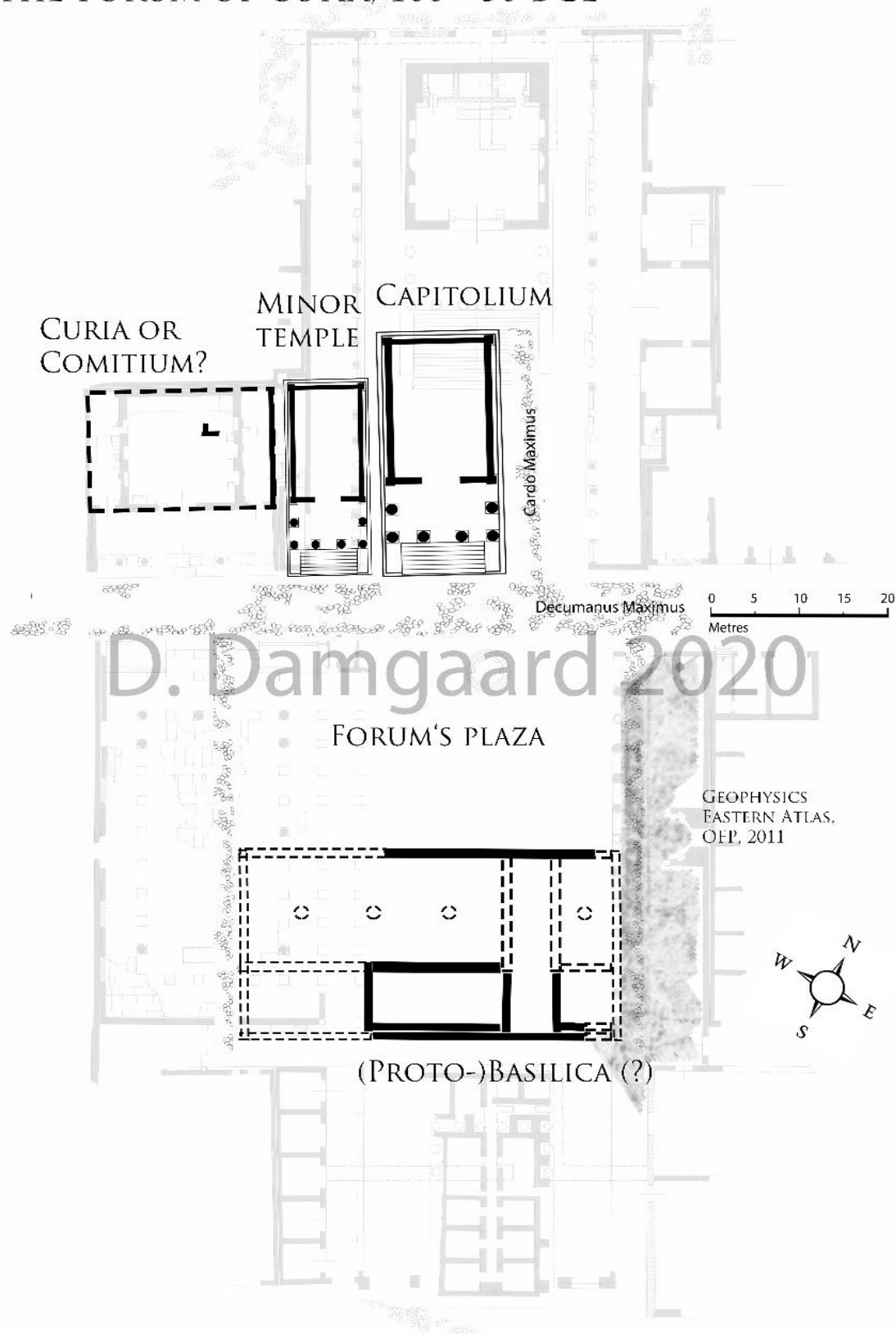


Figure 6: The first forum of Ostia. Inspired by Mar 2002, fig. 3.

As the research stands at this point, it is unlikely that a forum in Ostia can be found before the late 2nd century BCE. None of the structures buried beneath the southern Forum's plaza indicate any typical forum structures except the proposed proto-basilica built in *opus caementicium*. The first known building to be constructed in *opus caementicium* is the Porticus Aemilia in Rome, which was built in 193 BCE, but before that technique became every-day-use in the provinces, a century or so was needed. Indeed, Ostia is not located far from Rome, so there is a slight chance that buildings in Ostia could have been constructed in *opus caementicium* already in the middle of the 2nd century BCE. There are evidence of buildings being constructed in *opus incertum*, which is the first wall type using the newly invented *opus caementicium*, but this wall type was in use well into the 1st century BCE. The Temple of Hercules and Tempio Tetrastilo are both built around 100 BCE with a core constructed in *opus caementicium*.³⁹

If the focus is turned to the development of domestic architecture, we are unfortunately left with sparse remains. At least regarding what is hitherto known. The Domus di Giove Fulminatore located just outside of the southern Castrum gate has a first phase, Phase A, which dates to the 2nd century BCE.⁴⁰ Below the Casa Basilicale located just north of the so-called Curia and Temple T5, we find the remains of three smaller Republican atrium houses. Some of the walls are built in *opus incertum* and as already mentioned, this wall type was in use from the 2nd century BCE well into the 1st century BCE.⁴¹ It is therefore difficult to date these walls without further stratigraphic information.⁴² It is thus also possible that the predecessor wall of the so-called Curia has nothing to do with a public building, but is instead the remains of a house (Fig. 2). An earlier excavation conducted inside the so-called Curia did reveal two walls, also built in *opus reticulatum*, which would speak against a public building.⁴³ Much more cannot be said about the rate and extent of the development in the turnover between the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, due to the intensive development of the city in the 2nd century CE, which has covered a vast amount of earlier phases.

³⁹ Pensabene 2007, 66 (Temple of Hercules), 72 (Tempio Tetrastilo).

⁴⁰ Lorenzatti 1998, 84, 92. See also Calza et al. 1953, 107.

⁴¹ PAOst, AD, B364 bis.

⁴² I am currently going through the *Giornale degli Scavi* in the search for an answer.

⁴³ A drawing of this excavation can be found in the *Archivio Disegni*, see PAOst, AD, B648 and B649.

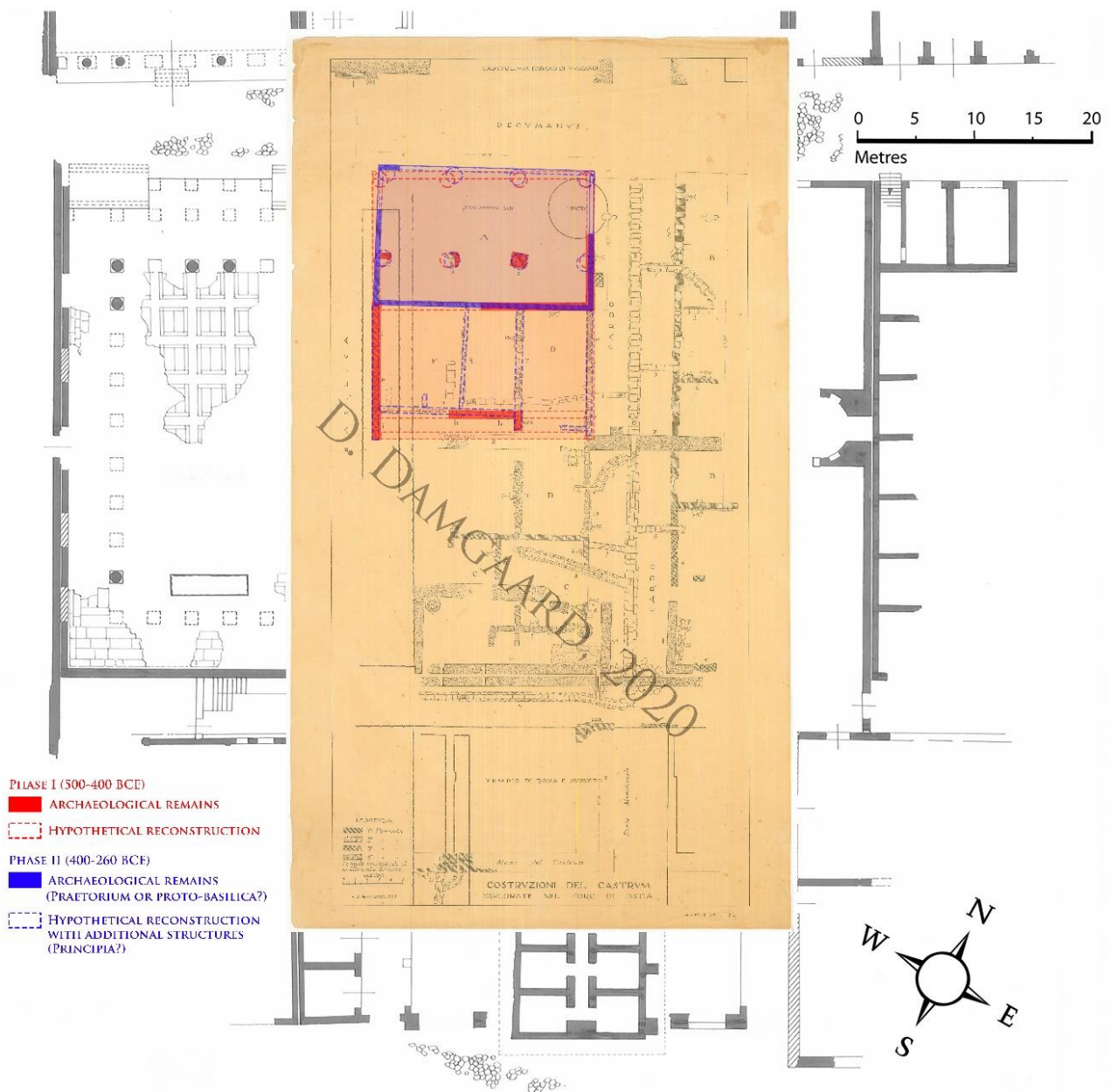


Figure 7: Two phases of Structure A. Phase I: 500-400 BCE. Phase II: 400-260 BCE.

Conclusion

The location of Temple T5, being constructed in the first half of the 1st century BCE, together with Temple T4 and the predecessor wall of the so-called Curia, could potentially be the last visible remnants of a possible first Forum in Ostia.

Ostia had at least two large horrea in the city in the 1st century BCE. Combining that with the fact that the first city wall was built sometime between 80 and 60 BCE clearly indicate some major

changes to the city. These changes could might as well include the creation of the Forum in Ostia. The major question is, whether a city would have a forum before it would have city walls.

Thus, the progress of the dissertation at this moment is that I am trying to gather information about Ostia in the 1st century BCE in the attempt to find the first Forum of Ostia. Thereafter, I will insert it into a citywide context and through these maybe find the explanation for creating the Forum in that period and not before or after. In continuations to this, a discussion on orientations will also be made, since it is clear that the Forum changes orientation several times.

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