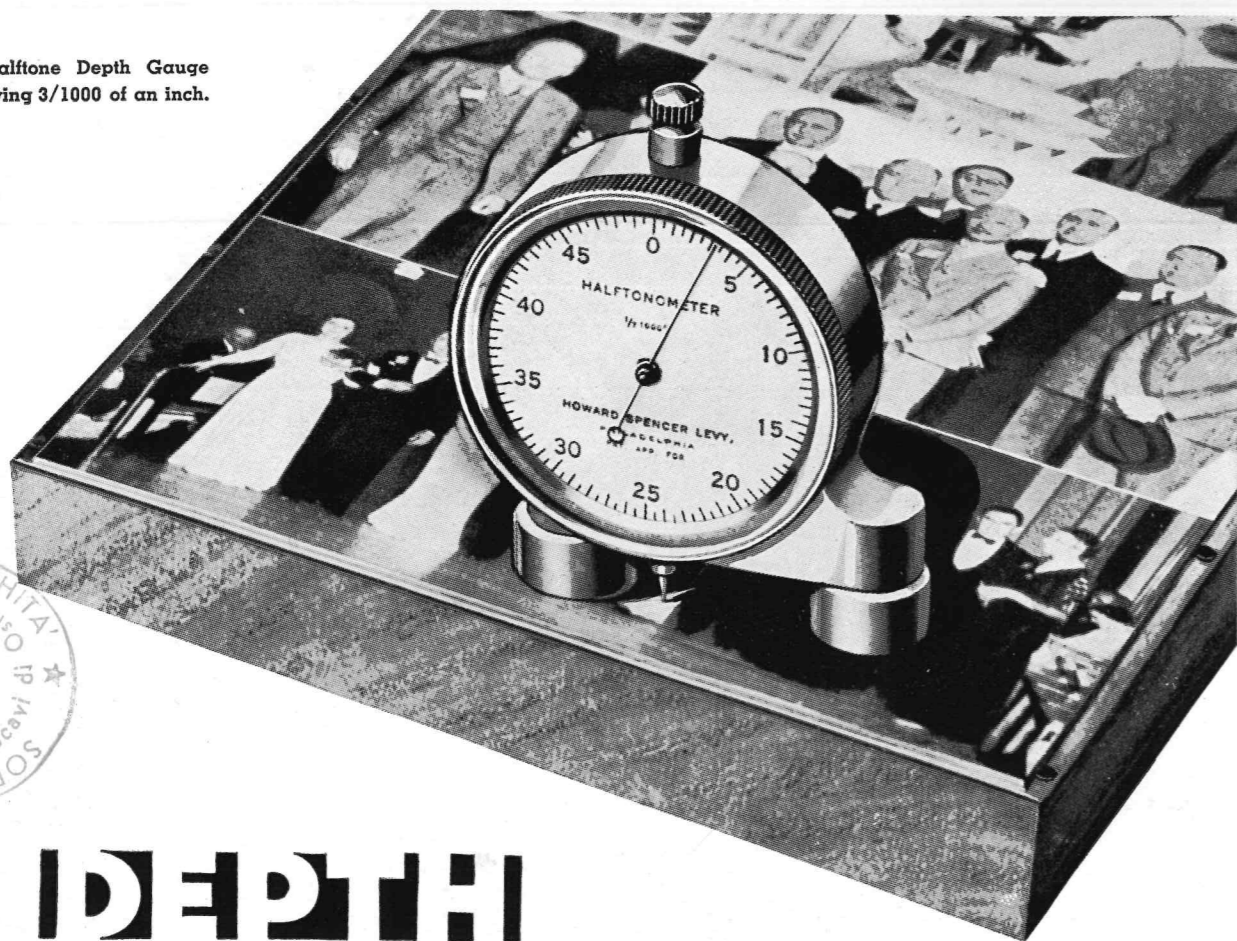


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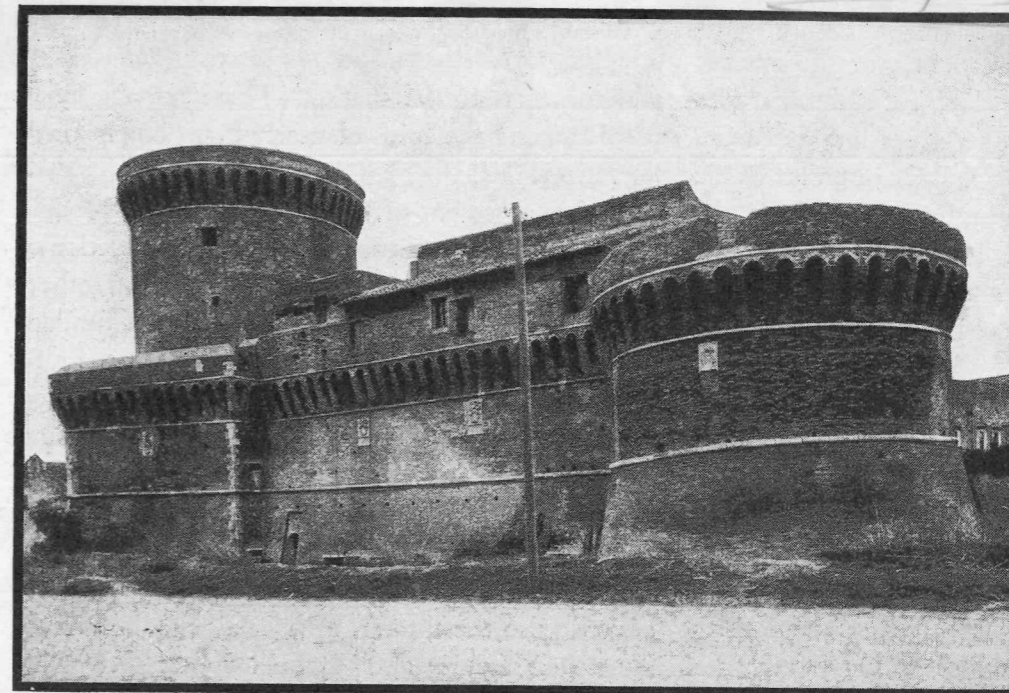
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This pitted and decaying castle, built by Pope Julius II in 1475, overlooks the Tiber valley and the site of Ostia, military port, resort, and commercial center of ancient Rome.

Ostia needs no Sinclair Lewis to immortalize its Main Street. To the eye of an archaeologist these travel-worn stones tell more than could a shelf of one hundred books.



Uncovering Ancient Ostia

By Guido Calza

Director of the Excavations

TO GO to Ostia, ancient Rome's military port, commercial center, and resort, is a matter now of half an hour from modern Rome. It is reached by following the Tiber River nearly the entire distance, driving on the same road the ancients traversed, for the routing of the automobile highway and the electric railway is practically the same as the ancient Via Ostiense. The landscape is very much like that seen by the first navigators of Rome who launched forth in conquest of the Mediterranean Sea.

One may enjoy a full vision of this classical and simple landscape from the castle of Pope Julius II, built in 1475 near the ruins of ancient Ostia, to defend the Tiber, and as a guardian of the medieval

town which sprang up in the year 800, four centuries after the end of the old Roman city. From the terrace one can admire the profile of the Alban and Sabine Mounts which enclose the Roman plain on the western side. Looking east lies the sea which seems to have mercy for this coast where no rock ever resisted it, and which, rather than marking the limit of the countryside, appears almost as its continuation. With a deep breath one feels the musical silence of the Argo over which three ancient muses—poetry, legend, and history—guide us.

But a new light is now thrown on poetry and legend as a result of the excavations which have made it possible to determine the history of Ostia

from its very beginning until the last days of its existence, and to bridge the silence of the ancient authors regarding this city which for eight centuries led the same life and had the same story as Rome.

Ostia was founded about 330 B.C., just after Rome had conquered the Latium, having subdued the Etruscans and the Anziati. In fact, I was fortunate enough to discover, under the imperial city, the walls, gates, streets and some buildings of the original Ostia which was an essentially military city, the first colony of Rome. Whoever visits Ostia today, lives again eight centuries of Roman legend and life, namely the periods of the Republic, Empire, and Decadence.

THE primitive constructions made of tufa rest on the sand at low level; slightly farther above them lies the pre-imperial city which had certainly risen on a general plane in accordance with the slow self-rising of the bed of the Tiber. And when, under Augustus (27 B. C. to 14 A. D.), it enjoyed the peace that followed the conquests which had been carried out, and when, under the imperial régime, each province gave its tribute, Ostia's importance grew infinitely. Its stores and shops as well as its dwellings and public buildings became numerous as befitted the mart of the capital of the world.

The larger part of Rome's victual stores and offices was concentrated in Ostia, so that there everything arrived that served to feed the Romans, both plebs and patricians; and I do not mean wheat only. Inasmuch as the mouth of the Tiber was no longer sufficient to contain the ships of a world trade, under Augustus' reign Rome contemplated the construction of an adequate harbor, which was inaugurated by Emperor Claudius and enlarged by means of an ampler basin through the influence of Trajan.

As the emperors were thus assured of a new source of vitality and riches, thanks to the harbor of Ostia, they themselves strove to develop and embellish Ostia. Domitian provided it with water; Trajan renovated the greatest part of the city; Septimius Severus and Caracalla widened the theater and enlarged the barracks of the guards; Antoninus Pius rebuilt the baths; Aurelius gave 100 numidic marble columns for the forum which bears his name; and even in the year 309 after Christ, Maxentius opened a mint at Ostia.

Likewise, opulent citizens contributed to the beautifying of the community. A certain Gamala, thanks

to the revenues secured from his commerce, restored temples, paved streets, and gave a system of weights and measures to the market. There remain today proofs among the ruins of nearly every one of these liberalities.

An improvement of the entire city was probably effected contemporaneously with the construction of the harbor. Old roads were widened and others restored. The city was provided with an abundant supply of water which was canalized in a large pipe of lead, which remained for a considerable period of time. Dwellings were arranged in ample and regular rooms, and the streets and houses were provided with a complete sewerage system.

During the imperial period, new and larger temples, such as that of the Capitoline Triade, were erected; also the theater, perhaps already built since Augustus' régime; also the bath houses and public monuments of the forum, unexplored for the most part. The city extended like an arc over the shore of the sea, which had already withdrawn itself on account of the gradual filling up by the deposits of the Tiber. The houses which were too small were renovated and heightened to three and four stories to shelter within them a population of various origins and languages, distinct clothes and classes of perhaps 80,000 inhabitants, among whom people of Italic, African, and Asiatic races were to be found.

Whoever visits Ostia today can contemplate a regularly built city, provided with wide and straight streets. There are two principal arteries. One is the great Decumano which separates the city from the east to the west in two long sections and reaches the ancient sea shore after a distance of about 1,500 meters, of which about 700 meters have been uncovered at the present time. The other artery is the Tiber which runs along the city and forms its boundary on the north side, and which is connected with the Decumano by streets running parallel with each other and which finally reach the eastern walls.

A RELATIVELY small part has been excavated on the north side of the city, which contains several temples, various stores, bath houses, the theater, the baths, the barracks of the guards, and a vast residential section with numerous and various types of houses and a street system. Although only a fraction of the total area of Ostia has been brought to light, the interest and importance of the discovery far exceed the extension which has taken place.

We cannot help thinking that a city of such construction and the home of employees and workers, must have been seething with life from morning to night, attending to the daily work of handling, shipping, and unloading on the banks of the Tiber which must have been filled up with boats going down to get the goods from the larger cargo ships, then returning up the river to Rome.

THUS, if among the ruins of the imperial *fora* or the imposing remains of the baths at Rome it is possible for us to determine the daily pleasures of any of the numerous members of the Latin patricians, at Ostia, on the other hand, we are enabled to understand the Roman labor.

On the magnificent square of the theater of Ostia are the remains of about seventy agency offices of the ship companies, which traded with Rome, from the remotest corners of the Latin world. Between the columns of the "quadriportico," which adorns the square, there are mosaics with signs which, by means of figures and epigraphs, indicate the type of trade represented there and its country of origin. It is, therefore, a sort of mart-of-the-world-trade that Ostia has conserved for us in a clearly illustrated language.

Since the height of the ruins exceeds nine meters in some streets, we can form a clear idea in Ostia of the elevation and the architectural outline of the buildings. We feel these Ostian dwellings are more

alive and closer to us than those of Pompeii, because the former, and no others, have given us the models for modern Italian residences. They were built in three or four stories, provided with street façades and inside courts with ample and symmetrical windows, arranged in divisible apartments. Stairways, embellished with simple but elegant decorations, lend a tone of refinement to the brick construction.

Roman art is revealed in Ostia by the grandeur of its marbles, the vivacity of its mosaics, the freshness of its paintings, and the natural appearance of its portraits. The iconic statues and sepulchral reliefs produce an impression of the actual life or death of meritorious citizens, and the mosaics and paintings offer, in the form of their simple figurative language, the motifs for the appealing decorations of the homes.

But the question will be [Continued on page 52]



To ancient Ostians, this beautiful mosaic was merely a sign, signifying: "Ship Companies and Merchants of Cagliari." Note the representation of the ancient vessel, in vogue when the pieces of this pattern were fitted together.



The theater in the foreground was faced by a square, around which have been found remains of seventy shipping agencies which carried on an extensive commerce with all parts of the great Roman world.