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**Roman Ostia as a “harbour town” in the epigraphic evidence:
public display and civic interaction**

Roman Ostia is central to the study of social history and Roman urban environments, not least due to a total of some 6,500 Ostian inscriptions. The town was also a port, especially after the building of the deep-sea harbour at Portus under Claudius. That Ostia was a harbour town is sometimes almost forgotten in modern scholarship, because there are so many different facets of social and cultural life in the town to consider. Alternatively, this characteristic is repeated and taken for granted without paying due attention to what it really entails. This paper sets out from a study of the extent to which the character of “harbour town” is in fact reflected in Ostia’s epigraphic patrimony. The study surveys the preserved epigraphic evidence by categories: inscriptions pertaining to local or imperial administration, statue dedications, texts with a religious content, pertaining to festivals and spectacles, and relating to other cultural activities, as well as inscriptions relating to trade and commerce, and those which tie Ostia to other towns and peoples in the Mediterranean, inscriptions manifesting the activities and presence of guilds and trade associations, not least involving nautical activities – to give some examples.

This paper aims above all to assess the role played by the relevant texts in the urban cityscape: how much of an impact will texts relating to trade, shipping, sailing and connected activities have had through the ways in which they were publicly displayed? Can one detect any particular guiding principle or a particular mentality behind the way text and monument, text and text carrier interacted? What impact did the display of “maritime” texts, or texts relating to Ostia’s nature as a port, have on Ostia’s civic identity? The so-called Piazzale delle Corporazioni with its unique ensemble of offices of foreign trading firms is an obvious topic to consider, through its interplay of architecture, epigraphy and iconographic material (mosaics), but there is much more, in many other parts of the town, to consider.