

*La Basilica Portuense. Scavi 1991–2007.* (Biblioteca di Archeologia Medievale 22). Edited by Mauro Maiorano & Lidia Paroli. 21 × 29 cm. iii + 692 pp, 80 colour pls and figs, 403 b&w pls and figs, 47 tables, 1 end fold-out plan. Florence: All'Insegna del Giglio/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, 2013. ISBN 978-88-7814-571-9 (ISSN 2035-5319). Price: €70.00 (2 volume set) pb.

Clearance work in 1865 first identified a church close to the mouth of Trajan's famous hexagonal harbour at Portus (Rome's main port) and a rich array of epigraphic and sculptural pieces, glassware, sarcophagi and church fittings was duly carried off. Subsequently lost to vegetation, the exact location, plan and date range of this urban basilica came under scrutiny again with excavations in 1991–92 and principally across 1997–2007; these covered the whole history of the complex from Roman store to late-Roman house, early Christian basilica and medieval church, to medieval and modern robbing. As a result, the excavations offer a valuable long-term window into the Portus site which can, of course, be put alongside the major (ongoing) excavations of the port led by the British School at Rome (see their Archaeological Monographs 15 and 18, published 2005 and 2011).

The reviewed volumes are split between descriptions and discussions of the excavations, stratigraphy, walling types, decoration, burials and historical and graphical reconstructions (Volume I) and the finds (architectural, sculptural and epigraphic, coinage, tile stamps, ceramics, glass and small finds — Volume II). Seven main phases were reconstructed, with the first church erected between AD 430–500; as well as extensions, internal reconfigurations and a new facade c AD 550, 7th-century repairs and flooring are attested, followed by provision of a baptismal font c AD 800; intra-church burials begin then (with child burials sited around the font) and run into the 12th century. From the 13th century come partial dismantling and robbing of the church. Good wall survival enables close study of evolving building and bonding techniques (discussed by Panzieri). In Volume II, Spagnoli offers useful discussion of the 849 coins recovered, over 50% of which were 4th-/5th-century; there was just one coin for the 7th–12th centuries. From the 850 glass fragments Sternini shows how non-residual pieces might reveal church lamps, chalices and window glass. Reuse is strongly evident in the tiles (for blockings and tombs) and inscriptions (for flooring especially and tombs of different phases), many of the latter drawn from the early imperial and early Christian necropolis to the south.

A succinct summary ('microstoria') of the site and zone comes from Lidia Paroli, who sadly has since died. She has been instrumental in developing the late-Roman and early medieval archaeology of Portus, Ostia and Rome, with important studies on ceramics, churches and Lombards; she will be much missed, but this very informative publication reflects strongly on her ability and commitment.

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