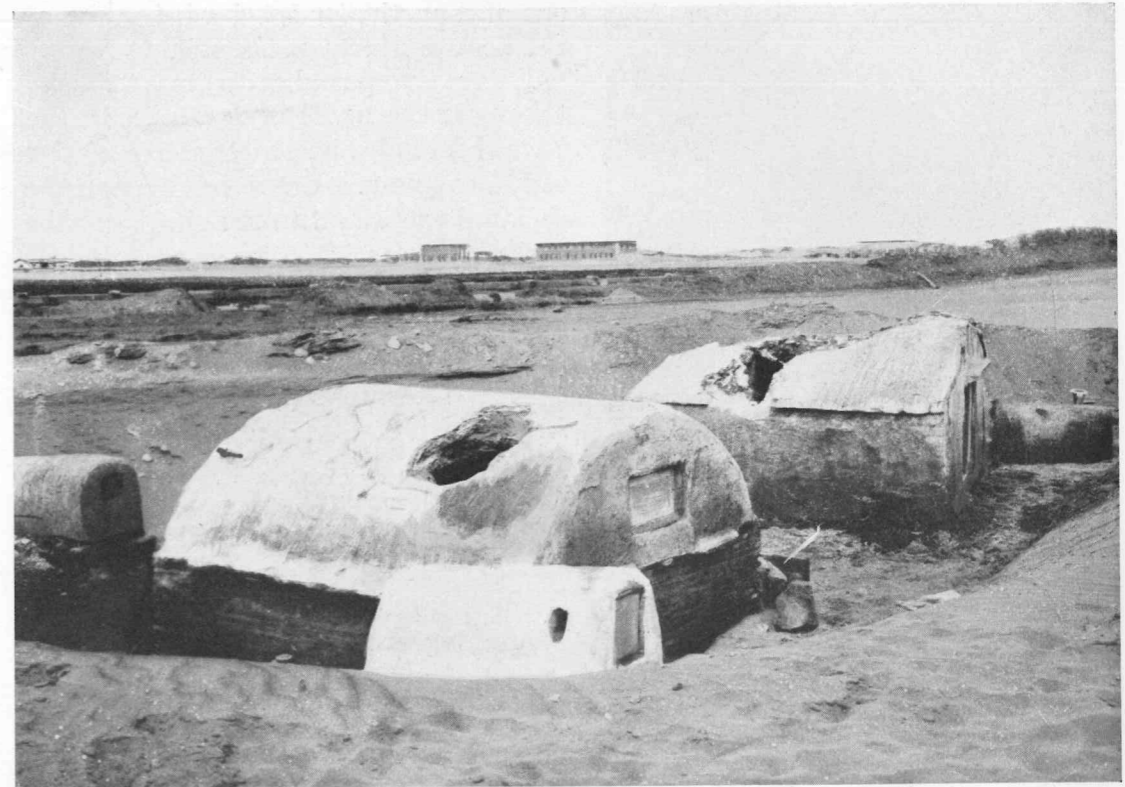


THE TOMB OF VIRGIL NOW STANDS CLEAR AND IS READILY ACCESSIBLE.



A GROUP OF BURIAL PLACES, SHOWING THE DOME-SHAPED TOMBS, SIMILAR TO THOSE OF THE MOHAMMEDANS IN THE EAST.

ROMAN NECROPOLIS BROUGHT TO LIGHT NEAR OSTIA

By GUIDO CALZA

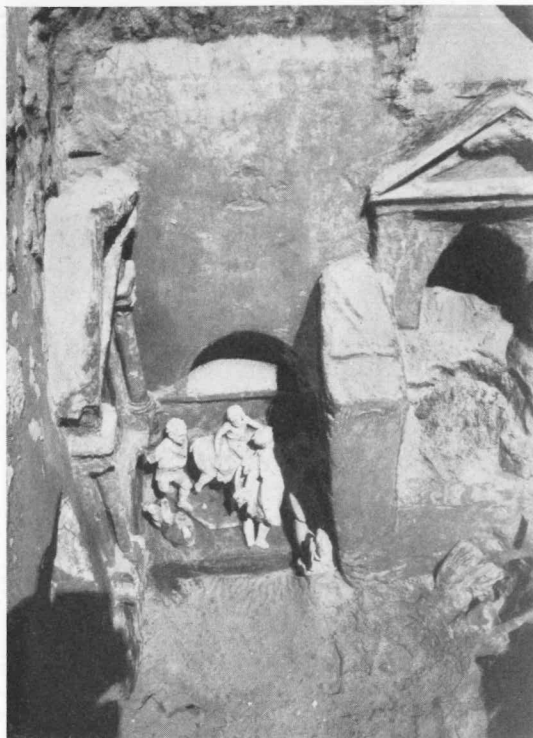
Director of the Excavations

A FEW months ago, in a stretch of land lying between Rome and the sea, workmen casually struck upon what has since proven to be a Roman necropolis, dating back to the II^d and III^d centuries of the Empire.

For many hundreds of years the "Isola Sacra", this expanse of land extending within the two arms of the Tiber and the sea, had remained uncultured and uninhabited, and it is only within the last year that the War Veterans' Association has undertaken

to bonify and irrigate this section of the Roman Campagna. People passing along the road that leads from Ostia to Fiumicino had noticed that in this district, unlike the rest of the land lying between Rome and the sea, the country was filled with sand dunes, some of them rising to a noticeable height, but it had never occurred to archaeologists and students that these dunes might enclose an entire city of the dead.

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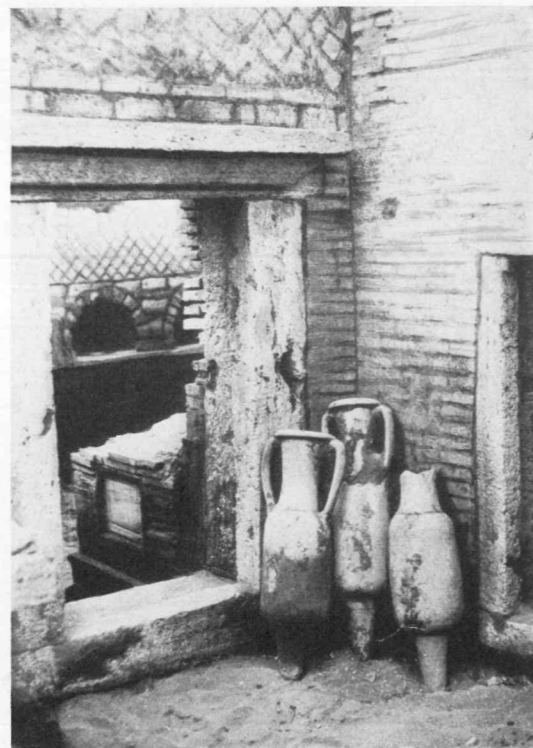
A SMALL GROUP OF FIGURES SHOWING GREEK INFLUENCE, FOUND IN ONE OF THE CELLS.

After a first vaulted roof came to light, when workmen were leveling out the soil in order to build a road, excavations were organized systematically, and have revealed the existence of what will soon be the largest Roman necropolis ever unearthed. This cemetery, built to receive the remains of the inhabitants of the port of Ostia, nearby, lies on a so-called island, shaped like a triangle, two sides of which are formed by the arms of the Tiber, one of which is an artificial canal, dug by order of Trajan, at the time of the construction of the port, in 102 B. C. Ancient historians had called this island the paradise of Venus, *Libanus Almae Veneris*, because of its wonderful vegetation and climate. Tradition says that flowers and fruit were to be had there throughout the entire year, mel-

ons of a particular species being one of the best products of the soil.

Later the paradise seems to have taken on the name of *Isola Sacra*, the Sacred Island, but exactly why no one seems to know. Emperor Constantine donated the island to the church of the Holy Apostles in Rome, and this was believed to be the origin of the name. The recent unhoped-for discoveries bring out a new theory, for it is possible that the term "sacred" was derived from the fact that the inhabitants of the port of Ostia had set it aside for their burial ground.

It is ascertained that this cemetery spread over a vast area, shaped like a triangle, and measuring about half a mile along each side, and, although it



INTERIOR OF A CELL IN ONE OF THE TOMBS, SHOWING AN INSCRIPTION IN ITS ORIGINAL POSITION.

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will not be possible to unearth it entirely, some fifty tombs which lie close to the spot where the first one was found, will be brought to light and restored sufficiently to give an exact idea of what the necropolis was like originally.

The twenty odd burial places which can now be seen, hold great artistic as well as archaeological interest, for they prove that even the poorer classes of citizens of the great Empire had an inborn sense of art, revealed even in the most primitive and pathetic of these monuments. This necropolis was only intended to receive the bodies of sailors, fishermen and humble tradesmen who earned their living in the port. One cannot, therefore, hope to find here treasures such as might have adorned

the tombs of senators, magistrates and wealthy citizens of the Eternal City.

The tombs rise in groups of five or six, and seem to have been erected without any regard to symmetrical topography. Around the larger structures are found small burial places, dome-shaped like the sepulchres of the Mohammedans in the East, but all are built of bricks, disposed with the same astonishing skill that was typical of the great architectural feats of the epoch of Trajan, such as the Colosseum, the Trajan Forum, the Market, etc. In the interior of some of the cells a network of bricks and a species of cement makes an effective decoration, while in others mural paintings lend a note of color, that has come down to us admirably preserved.

On the outside of each tomb is seen a marble tablet with a simple inscription; the mere name and age of the dead. One door, found in place, shows that the entrance to the cells was closed by a solid piece of wood, lined with lead, turning upon iron pivots. Small windows are cut in the frontage of the larger structures, and the architraves over the doors, of very fine style, are often decorated with motifs in relief, unfortunately wrought in perishable material, and therefore very much spoiled.

The niches in the inside walls of the cells were used to receive the ashes of slaves and poorer people, but even most of these are embellished with mural paintings, similar to those found at Pompeii, and always depicting mythological subjects. Some of the cinerary urns, or rather earthenware jars containing ashes and bones, were found tightly closed by a round piece of glass, over which was placed a primitive lid.



A MARBLE PEDESTAL WITH INSCRIPTIONS AND RELIEFS, AS IT WAS FOUND WHEN THE TOMB WAS OPENED.



TERRA-COTTA AMPHORE, STILL IN THEIR ORIGINAL PLACES. THEY WERE USED TO HOLD FOOD AND DRINK FOR THE DECEASED.

Several sarcophagi have been found in the cells, some of them with marble reliefs and beautiful decorative motifs. Smaller reliefs were placed on the outside of the tombs, and were used to describe the occupation of the dead persons during their lifetime. Thus, a boat with three oarsmen marks the tomb of a sailor; a tablet with a surgical operation and a first-aid case with primitive instruments is seen on the burial place of a doctor; a horse, harnessed to a wheat-grinder, marks that of a miller.

The brick benches, used for the funeral banquets, built against the outside walls of the cells, on either side of the door, are nearly all intact, while dozens of reddish earthenware amphorae, in which food and drink were

provided for the dead, are seen all over the area, still half-buried in the sand. Mosaic pavements and panels have been found in almost every cell, some of them fairly well preserved. They are mostly black and white, with a mythological subject in the centre and a decorative motif running along the border. Fragments of glass and small pottery, as well as a few coins have been found, but are not of particular interest. In some of the larger tombs there is a sort of oven, probably used to bake the bricks.

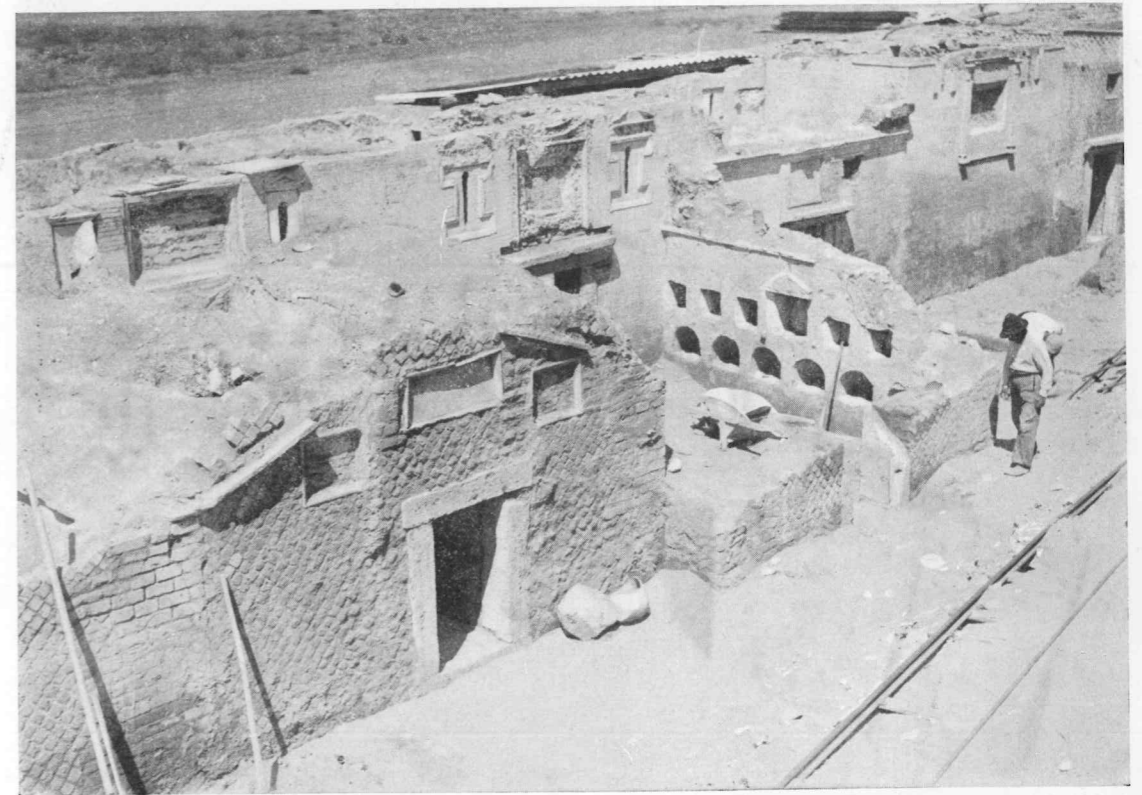
One of the most interesting features of the necropolis is the astonishing variety of architectural and decorative motifs, and the many different qualities of material employed for the construction.

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It is probable that the necropolis was abandoned when the port of Ostia fell into disuse, and the tombs were soon buried by sand carried over by sea-winds. This explains why there is no trace of devastation, although we know that the barbarians came along the Ostia road, and, in the year 455 A. D. pillaged and burned down the church of St. Hippolytus which rose near by, and of which we see the remains to this day.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OSTIA AND THE INSULA SACRA

OSTIA'S ruins lie some fourteen miles southwest of Rome, and are reached today not only by the ancient road, which still shows traces of its original paving and bridges, but by railway and the fine new automobile speedway reserved for fast traffic only. The old city, dating from no one knows how early a time, was Rome's first colony. It was named because of its position at the *ostium* (mouth) of the Tiber, and was the seaport of the Eternal City. Its harbor, however, was always unsatisfactory, because it was exposed to the southwest winds, which frequently did



A GENERAL VIEW OF THE SITE OF THE FIRST EXCAVATIONS.

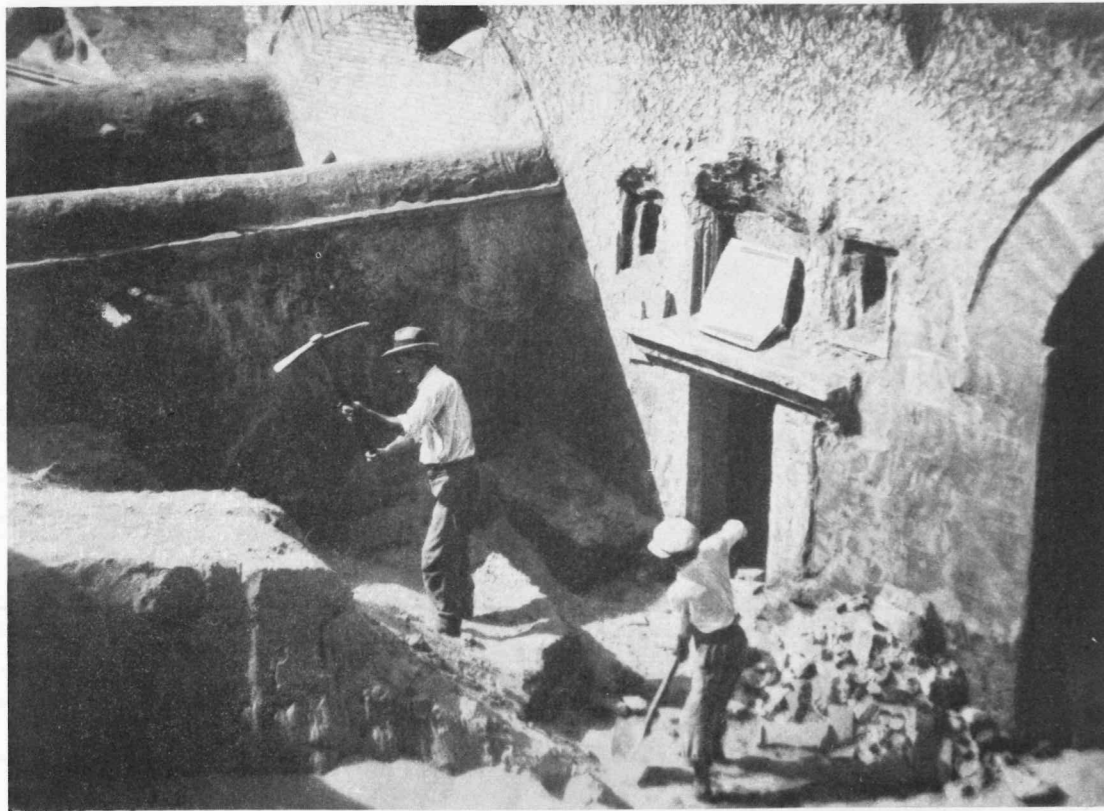
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heavy damage to the shipping there. In view of this it is easy to understand the importance of the *urinatores*, or guild of divers. In addition to the mischief done by the winds, further damage was wrought by the tremendous amount of silt brought down by the Tiber, with the result that as the river-mouth grew shallower, many of

the key post, as for example during the trying days of 87 B. C., and the years 409 and 537 A. D.

The silting up of the harbor made Ostia dangerous even in Strabo's time and he wrote of it as a "city without a harbor owing to the silting up brought about by the Tiber."

Time after time various remedies



DIGGERS AT WORK ON THE SITE OF THE FIRST EXCAVATIONS.

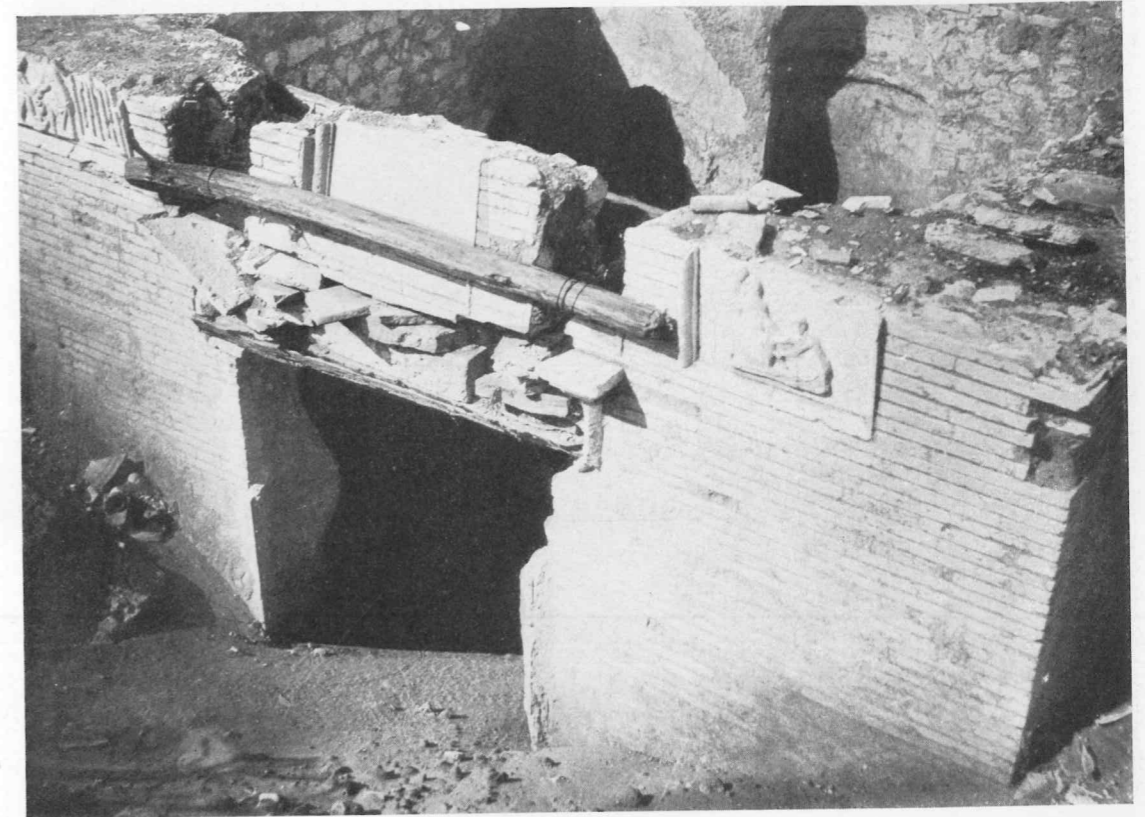
the larger craft either got into difficulties or had to have part of their cargoes lightened out by barges before they could ascend the river to Rome. Ostia's importance as the chief harbor of central Italy, and the grain-importing centre of the country, with a special quaestor in charge of the corn from 267 B. C. on, more than once made the city

were planned, but not until Claudius came to the throne was anything practical accomplished. The Claudian harbor and canal solved the problem for the moment, as well as freeing the capital from any danger of inundation by the Tiber. The new harbor was more than two miles north of Ostia proper, and was joined to the Tiber by

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a canal. In 103, however, the Tiber silted up this new Portus Augusti. The rapid growth of Rome, with the consequent increase in Ostia's sea-borne trade, made necessary immediate measures, and Trajan promptly constructed another port still farther inland, a generous hexagonal basin some 97 acres in area surrounded by huge magazines

V cleaned it out and reopened it in 1612, and it is still in use by small craft, forming what is practically the right or northern arm of the Tiber today. It bears the name of Fossa Traiana. The vast triangular wedge of land between the two arms of the river early received the name of Insula Sacra, as Professor Calza points out, which has been



TWO SMALL RELIEFS ON THE FRONT OF A CELL, USED TO DESCRIBE THE OCCUPATIONS OF THE PERSON BURIED THERE. A SURGICAL OPERATION (AT RIGHT), MARKS THIS AS THE TOMB OF A DOCTOR.

or warehouses. This was connected with the older Claudian port and with the river through the channel dug by Claudius, which in turn was lengthened so as to give direct access to the sea also. Although this channel was silted up during the Middle Ages, Pope Paul

Italianized into Isola Sacra in modern times. Archaeological research and excavation at and near Ostia, culminating in the present remarkable discoveries, were first initiated in haphazard fashion about the close of the XVIIIth century.