

Cicero and Clodius at Ostia? Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on the Porta Romana inscriptions

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In recent years Cicero's name has begun to appear in studies of late Republican Ostia. Yet the proposed connection between Cicero and Ostia is attested nowhere in any historical record; in fact, the entire theory rests on a questionable reading of epigraphic fragments of uncertain provenance. My research casts doubt on Cicero's involvement in Ostian civic affairs.

In the late first century C.E., a pair of identical inscriptions (*CIL* 14, 4707) were erected above Ostia's Porta Romana. These inscriptions, which are highly fragmentary, commemorated a substantial renovation of the gate as well as the original construction of the Late Republican wall circuit. The gate, stretches of the walls, and fragments of the inscriptions were discovered in 1910 and subsequently excavated.

Constructed in rough reticulate and incertum tuff blocks, the Republican walls became known as *le mura Sillane* because they were thought to have been built by Sulla after Marius captured Ostia. Although the Sullan attribution always remained somewhat tentative, an early first-century date for the walls was generally accepted until the 1990s, when Fausto Zevi discovered new epigraphic fragments which he attributed to the Porta Romana inscriptions.

With the addition of the new fragments, Zevi traced out the name of the famous orator M. Tullius Cicero. The scholar argued that the walls were not built in the early first century B.C.E. Instead, it was Cicero who undertook the initial work arranging the construction of Ostia's walls during his consulship in 63 B.C.E. Clodius Pulcher finished the project in 58 as tribune of the plebs. This theory has become the *communis opinio*, yet it deserves closer inspection.

A careful examination of photographs and drawings of the inscriptions confirms that a Clodius Pulcher is almost certainly named, but the ubiquity of this name hinders attempts at identifying *which* Clodius Pulcher. The presence of Cicero's name is more difficult to determine, and is a question that must be approached from both an archaeological and historical perspective. Cicero mentions Ostia only a couple of times in all of his copious letters and speeches. As historians, is fragmentary epigraphic evidence sufficient to revise our knowledge of Cicero's patronage of cities in general, and his relationship to Ostia in particular, given how much we already know of this famous figure? From an archaeological standpoint, we must also consider the fact that the reconstruction of Cicero's name depends on the new fragments, which are uncertain in reading. We must therefore determine the provenance of these fragments and carefully evaluate how they are used in the new reading of the Porta Romana inscriptions.

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