III

PERFORMING CIVIC COMMUNITY IN THE EMPIRE
CIVIC RITUALS IN IMPERIAL OSTIA

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This study of ‘civic rituals’ belongs to a larger investigation of the ‘civic identity’ of Roman Ostia. The overall objective requires a thorough exploration of questions such as to what extent inhabitants identified with the town, or to what extent they felt that they lived in a suburb of Rome,¹ and how Ostia’s function as Rome’s main port made an impact on its civic life.

Towns like Oenoanda and Ephesus in Asia Minor, which have been the object of studies of ‘civic identity’ in the past, handsomely repaid the efforts of their authors,² and it seems warranted to harbour similar expectations with regard to Ostia.³ Ostia was one of the most important towns in the Roman world, with perhaps 50,000

¹ For instance, in N. Morley, Metropolis and Hinterland. The City of Rome and the Italian Economy, 200 B.C. - A.D. 200 (Cambridge 1996), 83 f., Ostia is included in the “immediate hinterland” of Rome, while A.-K. Rieger, Heiligtümer in Ostia (München 2004), 22, considers Ostia to have been a “Vorstadt” of Rome during the Republic, yet not without its own character.


³ Another major Italian port was recently the subject of a similar study, see C. Sotinel, Identité civique et Christianisme. Aquilée du IIIe au VIe siècle (Rome 2005), although here the sources were mainly literary ones from Late Antiquity.