

# The restoration of the *Domus* of the *Mithraeum* of the *Painted Walls*: a methodological approach

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## Historical and archaeological data

The *Domus* of the *Mithraeum* of the *Painted Walls* is situated in Ostia (building III I, 6), on Via della Foce, at the point where the latter crosses the *Decumanus Maximus*, in front of the sacred complex dedicated to Hercules, whose cult is linked to the presence of this important road junction. The site, a rare example of aristocratic architecture at Ostia, was excavated towards the end of the 1930s and was generally dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, due to the presence of *opus incertum*. Thanks to our revision of the documents and of former studies, the first evidence of the *Domus* could be moved to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC or even to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

The masonry structures in *opus incertum* of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC could instead be interpreted as the remains of a building, probably with infrastructure functions, linked to the presence of the sacred area of the Temple of Hercules in front of it.

The *Domus* contains large portions of refined masonry in *opus incertum* and palimpsest walls, where stratified masonry structures of different periods can be found (1<sup>st</sup> century BC – 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD). During the reign of Marcus Aurelius or Commodus, the northern room and part of the peristyle were transformed into a *mithraeum*.

The restoration work started in 2010 and was preceded by the analysis of the masonry, laser scanner documentation and the study of archival document. In particular, the data acquired in the 1939 excavations the 1950-51 excavation reports by Italo Gismondi and the publications of Giovanni Becatti have been correlated with the modern stratigraphic analysis of the surfaces that had emerged and have all been re-examined from a critical viewpoint.

## The methodological approach

The ISCR restoration project was inspired by the principle of minimal intervention to improve the legibility of the structures and to better understand their consistency.

The restoration of the *Domus* attempts to follow the conservation methodology indicated by Cesare Brandi's *Teoria del Restauro* as the problem of the conservation of ruins as the "limite estremo" which, lacking "una sua implicita vitalità", draws its only significance from the past. For the ruin intervention should be limited to "la salvaguardia dello status quo", to "quel primario grado di restauro", which virtually implies "mera conservazione".

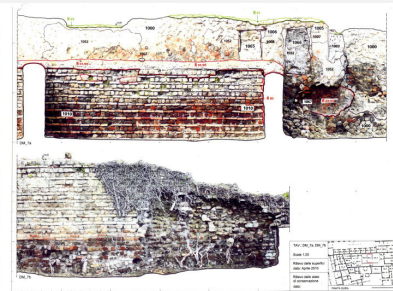
## The methodology: documentation and studies



### The laser scanner model of the Domus

The survey methodology adopted included: a 3D Photogrammetric system ZScan, Zmap laser – Menci Software s.r.l. - Canon camera Eos 5D MarkII 21.1 Mp with calibrated lens; a Leica Geosystems Total Station Ag Type Tcrn1205; and a GPS Leica Geosystems model 1250.

The survey carried out with these instruments is useful to reproduce the surfaces of the walls in greater detail and with higher photographic texture quality.



A detail of the stratigraphic study on the masonry palimpsest of the wall in *opus incertum* positioned along the west side



A view of west side before restoration work



A view of east side before restoration works



Stems wood of ivy plants, climbing with adventitious roots, are one of the main conservative problems in the site. The restoring treatment included its gradual cutting and removal

The utmost attention has been devoted to technical procedures, and recognized and tested technologies and products - improved during a pilot restoration project - have been utilized, in order to achieve both minimal intervention, as indicated by Brandi, and maximum reversibility. The restoration works which ended in June 2013, consolidated and strengthened the ancient walls and improved their resistance to atmospheric agents through the use of protective masonry capping. The decision to limit reintegration work to the minimum, made it possible to identify the ancient phases of the palimpsest walls, as well as the numerous former and mostly preserved restoration interventions. Every action has been carried out without ever concealing what is in existence, and without altering the information destined for subsequent specialized research into the complicated historical events and restorations. This methodological approach of extreme care and respect has proved to be much more necessary in the presence of fragile and delicate elements such as the archaeological walls; neither exaggerated nor inadequate nor burdensome, the commitment of the experts has found expression in a new moment of care towards cultural properties of inestimable value, until now often treated as objects of no value.

## Views of the Domus after restoration works

