

10 : Archaeological section of the Civic Museum



You have now entered the archaeological section of the museum. The display still awaits the finishing touches but on completion will permit the visitor to journey through the history of the city from its origins to the Middle Ages. At present, the exhibition deals only with the Rimini of the Imperial Age between the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

Ariminum and its territory enjoyed economic prosperity promoted by workshops and other production systems and supported by its thriving agriculture.

The stamps impressed on the bricks found in the Rimini collection are indicative of both a lively trade and the presence of kilns, located in particular in the area around Santarcangelo, which was also an artisan centre for the production of wine amphorae typical of the area. These Romagnol amphorae, with their characteristic flat bottoms, were used for transporting wine, which was produced in abundance in the area. They made their appearance around the middle of the 1st century AD and were in use until the 3rd century. There were two basic sizes: the largest could hold about 16 litres, and the other about 12.

Among the several activities, there is evidence of the various stages in the carving of the bones of large animals for the manufacture of small caskets, hairpins and combs, needles and writing implements.

In the showcase at the side there is a display of signacula, bronze rings with a stamp used for marking food, such as bread, and containers for the home. The coins in circulation at the time also provide evidence of the dynamic trade of the period as well as being an instrument of Imperial propaganda thanks to their iconography.

On the left as you move on, you will come across a number of objects linked to the amphitheatre of Ariminum. Situated on the outskirts of the city, its massive brick structure was intended to present an impressive image of the city as seen from the sea. The remains of the building in Via Roma are still open to the public and represent the most reliable archaeological documentation of this kind of building in the region.

Next to graphic reconstructions drawn up in the wake of archaeological digs since the 19th century, you will see a stone step with the number 13 engraved on it to indicate the division of the terraces. The coin found in the mortar showing the head of the Emperor Hadrian is of considerable, historical significance as it dates the construction around the middle of the 2nd century AD.

The atmosphere of gladiator fights is evoked by objects inspired by the world of the arena: a small bronze statue and a lamp bearing the image of a gladiator. The little bronze sculpture, possibly part of a scale model or of the decoration of a chariot, links the popularity of the amphitheatre games to the people, who were fond of buying souvenirs of the fights. The gladiator is wearing a high-crested, wide-brimmed helmet with a large visor, a special protection sleeve on his right arm, and greaves. Entrance tickets to the show consisted of chits made of bone and glazed paste indicating seat numbers.

Now, go back and turn into the first room on the right, dedicated to daily life.

This little room recreates a household setting thanks to objects unearthed in the numerous domus explored since the war.

On the basis of documentation offered by the excavations at Palazzo Arpesella, it has been possible to reconstruct the cross-section of a room; the floor is made up of brick and tile fragments held together by mortar into which are inserted mosaic parts. The walls and ceiling are covered with patterned plaster known as "wallpaper"; they are originals dating from the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Some suggestion of the furnishings is offered by the tintinnabula, the little bells that kept the bad spirits away, by the amulets, the

10 : Archaeological section of the Civic Museum



lanterns and the oscilla, the marble discs with bas-relief mythological images, usually hung between the columns of the porticos, in the belief that they had the power of averting bad luck. One of these, in the shape of a pelta, the shield preferred by the Amazons and by Dionysus, shows a theatre mask on one side and on the other a hare eating grapes. The Dionysian themes that we can find on the second oscillum, too, with its mask and satyr are well fitted to the “magic” purpose and the nature of the gardens.

The crockery gives us an idea of the kitchen and the refectory, just as the needles and other tools used for spinning and weaving indicate the women’s activities in the home. Other objects give us a more intimate picture: spatulas, hairpins, combs, small bone caskets and ointment jars for cosmetics and body care; personal ornaments such as jewels, gems and rings; and then pawns, dice and astragals showing a passion for games.

If you go back into the corridor and turn left, you will reach the Doctor’s Surgery (taberna medica).

This is the beginning of your visit to the extraordinary archaeological context of Piazza Ferrari, which has its natural complement in the nearby site, open to the public since December 2007.

Since 2006, the archaeological sector has included a reconstruction of the doctor’s surgery in the domus of Piazza Ferrari. It is an introduction to the presentation and exhibition of objects from the excavations, projecting the visitor into the study-surgery where the doctor, who lived there in the 3rd century, practised his profession. The taberna consists of two rooms on a slightly smaller scale than the original: the study with the Orpheus mosaic and the room used for the everyday treatment of patients. It is a striking setting, true to archaeological data, which restores the plaster decorations of the walls and ceilings, as well as the furniture, fittings and instruments used by the doctor for his operations and for concocting his drugs.

When you leave the surgery, turn right into the section concerning the surgeon’s house.

The reconstruction, stratigraphy and building materials involved in the organisation of the room refer back to the archaeological context of the taberna medica, enabling us to grasp and interpret the data that has emerged from the excavations in Piazza Ferrari.

The area excavated involves a domus that takes its name from the last master of the house who practised his profession there. The discovery, of exceptional importance, shows the structural evolution from the Roman Republic to the Middle Ages. The Imperial domus was destroyed by fire in the second half of the 3rd century during the barbarian invasions. Furnishings and fittings have emerged from the rubble, as well as walls, mosaics and plasterwork, mostly preserved on site and here documented by few, but significant, remains. Among the frescos there is a fragment of almost Impressionist painting, that depicts the harbour: on one of the quays there are two people, while the background is filled with a colonnaded building (a temple, maybe), a ship at sea and a sandbank.

Move on to the next room that deals with life in the domus and the medical profession.

This room brings together the most significant finds unearthed in the domus among the rubble caused by the collapse of the building after the fire. On your left as you go in, you will see the remarkable glass panel that decorated one wall of the triclinium (dining room). A very natural looking bream, mackerel and dolphin are depicted in mosaic in the central disc and inserted into a slab of carved glass. The rare and very precious little picture

10 : Archaeological section of the Civic Museum



(pinax in Greek) of Hellenistic tradition, is very similar to an example from Corinth, also of about the middle of the 3rd century AD.

The exceptional surgical-pharmaceutical equipment is displayed in the showcases; among the over 150 bronze instruments there are lumps of them that have been soldered together by the heat of the fire. Alongside dental pincers, scalpels, probes, tweezers and forceps, there are pincers for bone surgery, tools for removing bladder stones, a drill with a mobile arm, orthopaedic levers and the bronze cover of a small medicine case showing the huntress Diana.

Next to these there is a collection of large stone mortars and pestles, fundamental for preparing drugs. The difference in form and material indicate the specialisation needed in grinding herbs and various other substances. In the showcase on the right, among the various objects displayed, attention is drawn to a hollow, foot-shaped vessel (a sort of hot-water bottle or ice-bag according to the need) and two recipients with the contents indicated in Greek and Latin. A bronze votive hand linked to the cult of Jove Dolichenus, organised in Rimini in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, also comes from the taberna.

Inside a low showcase a marble foot can be seen that belongs to a statue of the philosopher Ermarcus, disciple of Epicurus: confirmation of the Greek-Hellenistic culture of the doctor, who the inscription engraved on a fragment of plaster from the wall of the cubiculum (bedroom) permits us to identify as Eutyches.

Further on, it is interesting to pause by the showcase in which a hoard of more than eighty coins is displayed, small change for everyday expenses, kept on the upper floor of the domus, and the weapons (a spearhead and a javelin point) that were lying on the floor of the doctor's study, evidence of the wartime events that caused the destruction of the house.

Now go into the next room: the domus of Palazzo Diotallevi. The Comforts of Middle-Class Homes.

This well-known domus was situated north of the forum, next to the Roman theatre, where Palazzo Diotallevi now stands. The objects on show belong mainly to the reconstruction phase of the 2nd century AD which saw elegant rooms giving on to a spacious courtyard and a large room opening up with striking decorations focussed on the mosaic of a harbour scene.

The comfortable standard of living can be seen through the floor mosaics like the ones with a geometric design in the room identified as the winter bedroom, the only polychrome mosaic in the house; also by plasterwork, glasswork, pottery, sculptures and bronze objects. First among the sculptures is the fragmentary marble statue, probably a copy of the famous discus thrower by Polycleetus, found near the ornamental bath at the centre of the courtyard-cum-garden; next to that is the stone pedestal with scenes from daily life including a figure, that might be a teacher, sitting on a high chair with a roll (volumen) in his hand, and in front of him a boy (maybe a pupil) intent on fixing a lamp.

The next room is the one with the Hercules mosaic.

Your attention will be drawn to the imposing mosaic from the Diotallevi domus, at the centre of which stands Hercules in the act of raising his cup for a toast. Around the god, recognisable for his club and lion skin, radiates a complex geometrically-patterned decoration enclosed on three sides by a broad white band. The banquets, for which this elegant room were intended, are revealed by the "karantos" motif, a large wine cup marking the threshold. The picture of the ships entering the harbour that the guests could admire from their tricliniari couches (the originals are on show in the room dedicated to the sea), alluded to the prosperous sea trade accomplished by the dominus.

10 : Archaeological section of the Civic Museum



In the show case opposite, the splendour of the dining room is made apparent, by the bronze dinner service originally kept in a wooden cupboard reduced to ashes in the fire, of which only the hinges and the complex lock remain. The service is composed of jugs, pots, a pan, a pail, a bucket, a lamp stand, large iron shears and a dancing lar (household god).

Now go into the next room, the one concerning the Imperial Roman cults.

As if in a pantheon, the little room contains gods and heroes from Ariminum: Eros, Dionysus, Priapus, Silenus, Venus, Minerva, Fortuna, Orpheus and, once more, the mythical Hercules..., the most representative divinities of public and private life. From among the sculptures, two are worthy of note for their excellent artistic quality: the Double-faced herm of Dionysus, with the complementary faces of the young Eros and the mature, bearded Priapus, inspired by models of Greek art, and the Herm of Priapus, valuable example of neoattic art. Priapus looks like an old Silenus, with a moustache, a beard, sensual lips, a demon expression, pointed ears, a receding hairline, and long hair tied by a ribbon. His richly pleated robe emphasises the feminine form of his body, drawing attention to the bisexual character of the divinity. Next to them stand the Egyptian gods, following a craze for the exotic; so, in a mosaic with a Nilotic environment, we find the god Anubi, among tigers, giraffes and panthers, and, represented in a military scene, the warrior god Ammon associated with the Roman Jupiter. Then there are cults of oriental origin that exercised great fascination in western regions of the Empire, too, like Attis and Jupiter Dolichenus.

A group of small bronze statues, unearthed in Rimini about the mid-20th century, is on show in a cabinet near the way out. Somewhat compromised by the heat and corrosion, the bronze statues of Venus-Fortuna, Mercury and Priapus were crafted with care in the first centuries of the Roman Empire to be destined to a niche for the household gods.

Now proceed to the last room dedicated to the section on Rimini and the sea.

This room is dedicated to the sea and connected activities, an aspect of vital importance for Rimini. Emblematic of this relationship is the mosaic border in the great triclinio (dining room) at Palazzo Diotallevi, the so-called boat mosaic, that represents a convoy of cargo ships landing. The frieze portrays two ships, with sails unfurled, preceded by a rowing boat and entering the harbour, a tower structure on which a man is lighting a fire. It is not waves that evoke the sea but darting fish, among which, species from the Adriatic are easily recognisable. The picture is inverted compared with the Hercules placed in the centre of the mosaic we have already seen, in order to be visible from the main part of the room.

If you would like to complete the archaeological itinerary, you can go out into the inside courtyard of the museum where the Roman Lapidary has had its home since 1981. This is file number eleven. Or you can continue your visit at the archaeological site in Piazza Ferrari. When you reach the entrance to the excavations, listen to file number thirteen. For the visit to the Mediaeval and Modern sections, listen to file number twelve.