



## **Imperial Rome and Ostia**

### *Feeding the Roman Empire*

#### **COLIN CHANT:**

During the six centuries and more which separated the building of the Servian and Aurelian walls, the city had expanded to an unprecedented size. Rome was a magnet for the peoples of its empire, who crammed into the areas between its great public buildings and spaces. Somehow all these people had to be housed and fed. To meet the gargantuan appetite of the capital, shiploads of grain, the main staple of the Roman diet, were bought in from the provinces. The grain was brought into the capital by barges which had to be towed up the river Tiber. Some of the grain was stored in purpose-built, vaulted warehouses, or horrea, in the riverside area known as the Emporium.

The Tiber could not be navigated by the large seagoing cargo ships laden with grain from Sicily, Sardinia and North Africa. As a result, Ostia, some 30 kilometres down the Tiber, became the capital's main port from the time of the late republic onwards.