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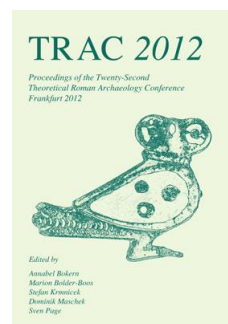
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Understanding Neighbourhood Relations through Shared Structures: Reappraising the Value of Insula-Based Studies

Heini Ynnilä

Introduction

The Latin term *insula* has several meanings. In addition to being the primary word for island (*OLD; TLL*), Roman authors frequently used it to refer to tenement blocks (Tacitus *Ann.* 6.45.1, 15.41.1; Suetonius *Nero* 16.1, 38.2, 44.2; Cicero *Off.* 3.66). More rarely they used it to signify units of ownership (Pomponius *dig.* 7.8.16.1; Labeo *dig.* 19.2.58; Scaevola *dig.* 33.7.7) and in a few instances they referred to city blocks as *insulae* (Festus L 98; Vitruvius 1.6.8, 2.9.16). What is common to all these meanings in urban contexts is, however, that they are physical entities: parts of the whole are physically attached to each other. Because of this physicality, investigating the borderlines between the parts is a means in understanding neighbourhood relations.

The intent of this paper is to deepen our understanding of urban living conditions by paying attention to neighbourhood relations. By defining the legal, social and economic relations between residents that inhabited adjacent units we come closer to understanding the importance and impact of the immediate neighbourhood in the lives of its inhabitants. This highlights the importance of studying larger architectonic entities, such as city blocks, instead of individual houses, in the study of urban environments.

This paper focuses on a Pompeian city block called *insula* IX.3. Indeed, according to a modern convention all Pompeian city blocks are called *insulae* regardless of whether Roman authors would have agreed. The city block is located at the geographic centre of the city (Fig. 1), and in A.D. 79 when the city was destroyed the block contained 19 units that were not connected to each other by internal doorways and were presumably thus separate entities (Fig. 2). They ranged from one room shops to large elite houses. In addition to four presumably residential units (IX.3.5/24, 15, 23 and 25) and an unoccupied plot (IX.3.21–22), the city block contained a dye-workshop (IX.3.1–2), two mills-bakeries (IX.3.10–12 and 19–20) and a range of units involved in production and retail on a smaller scale (IX.3.3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 16, 17 and 18).

The city block was excavated between the 1840s and the 1870s, and because of poor initial documentation and later neglect, the block has been re-studied since 2002 by the *Expeditio Pompeiana Universitatis Helsingiensis* (the Pompeii Project of the University of Helsinki). The aim of the team is to produce a corpus of structures and finds in the *insula* in A.D. 79, as well as to carry out small-scale excavations below the last occupation level in order to understand its architectonic and socio-economic development (Castrén 2008; Castrén *et al.* 2008).

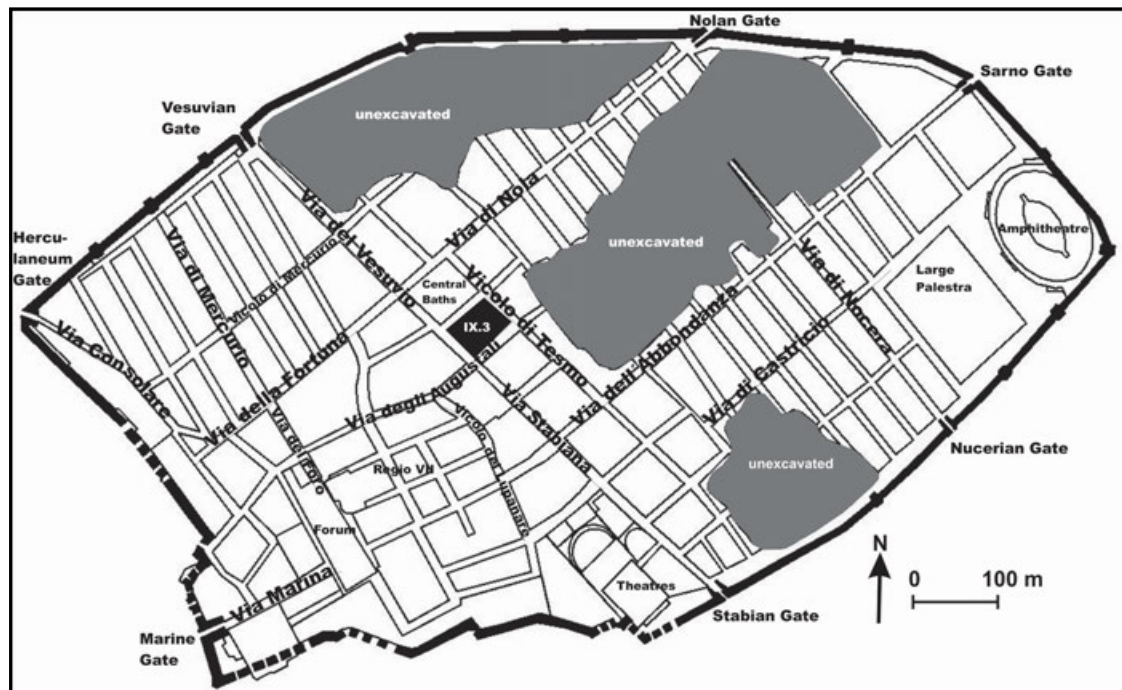


Figure 1: The location of insula IX.3 in Pompeii. Modified from the Soprintendenza archeologica di Pompei plan by H. Ynnilä

Defining ownership and servitudes

Although composed of architectonically separate entities, it does not necessarily mean that the city block contained 19 individually owned properties. In Pompeii the famous inscription found in the so-called *Insula Arriana Polliana*, in which units within the city block were advertised for rent, shows that the entire city block belonged to one proprietor although it contained at least 12 individual units (Pirson 1999: 23–47). These units included *tabernae cum pergulis*, *cenacula equestria* and *domus*:

'Insula Arriana Polliana (C)n Al(le)i Nigidi Mai locantur ex [k(alendis)] Iulis primis tabernae cum pergulis suis et c(e)nacula equestria et domus conductor convenito Primum (C)n Al(le)i Nigidi Mai ser(vum)' (CIL IV 138).

It is highly unlikely that the common ownership of all units in the *Insula Arriana Polliana* is paralleled in all other Pompeian city blocks. Because we have no such straightforward evidence concerning the ownership of *insula IX.3*, we need to resort to architectonic clues that can be interpreted with the help of Roman property law. Although physical remains and written sources are not equivalent or direct reflections of the society that created them (e.g. Johnston 1999: 24–8 on law; Wallace-Hadrill 1994: 60 on archaeological remains), we can use them to approximate the social and economic realities of the inhabitants.

There is evidence that some units in *insula IX.3* shared structures that crossed their boundaries and thus indicate co-operation among adjacent units. These include upper



Figure 2: *Insula IX.3* consists of 19 units. Individual unit numbers are based on the numbers given to their front doorways. The borders of units are highlighted in grey. Plan: EPUH/M. Holappa, H. Ynnilä

floors, windows, water pipes, drainage channels and cess pools at least (Fig. 3). There are two ways of interpreting these arrangements. Firstly, they can indicate the common ownership of the given properties. Alternatively, they indicate a servitudinal relationship between the two units. Indeed, although Roman lawyers were not preoccupied with what people did inside their houses as such, they were concerned of the integrity of the borderlines between neighbouring units (Van Binnebeke 2000: 144). In theory at least the borderlines could only be violated if there were legitimate, well-established reasons for such actions. Servitudes allowed the dominant owner to profit from the neighbouring land or structures built on it if this was necessary for securing the availability of basic utilities and it did not cause an unreasonable burden to the servient owner. Roman lawyers frequently discussed the limits of servitudes, that is, what kind of actions required a servitude, what did a servitude allow in practice, and which actions were beyond it (Rainer 1987; Saliou 1994; Möller 2010).

For instance, a water servitude (*servitus aquae ductus*) would have allowed the dominant owner to have a connection through the servient owner who would not have been allowed to tap into the pipes (Ulpian *dig.* 8.3.1, 8.4.2, 43.20.1.11; Paul *dig.* 39.3.17.1). Moreover, although Roman law recognized an arrangement in which a mains water connection was shared (Julian *dig.* 43.20.4; also Frontinus *Aq.* 27), we



Figure 3: Shared structures between units in insula IX.3. Windows piercing walls between units are in white, a shared cess pool between Units IX.3.3 and 5/24 is striped, a shared water pipe between Units IX.3.18 and 19–20 is shown as a black line and a drain shared by them is marked with broken black lines. The extension of upper floors in each unit is indicated in light grey and the borders of units on upper floor level are indicated in mid-grey (compare Fig. 2 showing the borders of units on ground floor level). Unit clusters indicating common ownership are bordered in dark grey. The common ownership of Units IX.3.14 and 15 is not clear which is indicated with a broken line. Plan: EPUH/M. Holappa, H. Ynnilä

have no mention of the possibility that it would have, by default, allowed the connection to cross the property of one stakeholder to another. Instead, the Edict of Augustus on the Aqueduct at *Venafrum* (CIL X 4842: 46–47) specifies a need of consent if a water pipe connection is brought in through a third party. In a similar vein, although drainage servitude (*servitus cloacae*) might have applied to toilet downpipes (Pirson 1999: 68), it seems that the servitude would not have allowed the use of a neighbouring cess pool (Ulpian *dig.* 43.23.1). Therefore, shared water pipes and cess pools between units result more likely from common ownership than other arrangements. Furthermore, according to the principles of Roman jurisdiction, *superficies solo cedit* (Pomponius *dig.* 41.1.28), meaning that which stands on the land goes with it, and hence the proprietor of the ground floor owned the upper floors too (Crook 1967: 143). It follows that if a house extended over its neighbour, they must have been owned in common. Because the borders of units in the upper floor level are somewhat different from those of ground floors (Figs. 2–3; Andrews 2011), this immediately indicates the common ownership of certain units.

The ownership of insula IX.3

As a result of examining different shared structures in *insula IX.3* as a whole, we can generate an aggregate understanding of possible property boundaries and thus neighbourhood relations in A.D. 79. The resulting picture remains however hypothetical, especially because changes in property ownership did not necessitate manifestations in architecture. Indeed, although these architectonic clues outlined so far may be informative about building histories, they may not reflect the situation in A.D. 79. Some arrangements that were made possible by common ownership may nonetheless have remained in use by mutual agreement after the separation of ownership, and units may have been owned in common even when there are no architectonic clues for it.

Nonetheless, looking at the evidence as a whole, we begin to see how certain units shared structures frequently (Fig. 3) while others had none of them. This patterning speaks for the meaningfulness of these architectonic clues. As a result, the city block seems to have contained four clusters of units.

The first cluster consists of Units IX.3.3, 4, 5/24 and 6. Units IX.3.3 and 5/24 shared a window and a cess pool. Moreover, their upper floors extended above the ground floor of Unit IX.3.4, and Unit IX.3.5/24 upper floor extended above the ground floor of Unit IX.3.6. This strongly suggests their common ownership.

In a similar manner, Units IX.3.17, 18 and 19–20 had several shared utilities in A.D. 79. Firstly, the upper floor of Unit IX.3.19–20 extended over Unit IX.3.17. Secondly, light was shared between these two units. Thirdly, all three units probably shared a connection to the mains water supply and drainage. Therefore, common ownership instead of a complex servitudinal relationship seems a more probable explanation for such numerous connections.

Units IX.3.14, 15 and 16 had once probably belonged together. This is indicated by their location ‘inside each other’ and a number of closed doorways in their partition walls. In A.D. 79 Unit IX.3.16 probably extended above Unit IX.3.15 which suggests their continued common ownership.

Likewise, although Units IX.3.7, 8 and 9 were ‘carved out’ of Unit IX.3.10–12, there is not enough evidence to confirm that they were all under common ownership in A.D. 79. Only Unit IX.3.9 probably belonged to Unit IX.3.10–12 which extended above it. Instead, only a window was definitely shared between Units IX.3.7 and 10–12 but this may have been due to a light servitude (*servitus lumen*) between the two. Indeed, windows between two units that had no other structures to indicate further connections are common in *insula IX.3* (between Units IX.3.1–2 and 25, Units IX.3.5/24 and 10–12, and Units IX.3.5/24, 13 and 15) and best explained as a result of servitudinal relationship.

Consequently, if the city block contained four clusters of units owned in common (i.e. Units IX.3.3, 4, 5/24 and 6; Units IX.3.9 and 10–12; Units IX.3.14, 15 and 16; and Units IX.3.17, 18 and 19–20), and all other units were separately owned, the city block would have contained eleven properties. Assuming that the ownership of Units IX.3.14 and 15 was also separate in A.D. 79, the number would grow to twelve. Despite remaining

uncertainties, it has been shown that the city block probably contained fewer properties than the number of its architectonically separate units. Consequently, we have learned something fundamental about the legal relations in this immediate neighbourhood. These legal ties probably had further significance in the social interaction and everyday life of the residents.

Shared utilities in daily life

What the arrangements would have meant on the level of everyday life is that in the units owned in common people had to agree on the maintenance of shared structures. For instance, it has been estimated that even the smallest diameter pipe could have delivered some forty cubic meters of water per day (Hodge 2008: 327), which is a large amount in comparison to cistern capacities which in Pompeian households are rarely above the forty cubic meters (Jansen 2002: 77 no. 88) and may therefore have sufficed to fulfill the requirements of several units. However, the network of pipes inside units may have been built in such a way that opening one tap or stopcock necessitated its closure in some other parts of the network (compare Jansen 2005: 279). Had there been such a system, it required close co-operation between all parties.

Because no stopcocks or taps in the network of Units IX.3.17, 18 and 19–20 have been found *in situ*, the arrangement remains unknown, but it is striking how common these fixtures are in units where the system has been well-preserved, suggesting their overall importance. For instance, in the near-by House of the Bull (V.I.3/7), its complex fountain system was operated with the help of at least 16 stopcocks (Thomas Staub, pers. comm.). While the fountains undoubtedly belonged to the realm of aesthetics, they seemingly had practical functions too (Andersson 1990).

Secondly, the sharing of utilities between units owned in common would be a way to explain the lack of archaeological evidence for particular utilities in certain units. Of course there are other possibilities too, but it is worth pointing out that within the units of common ownership there is evidence for the availability of nearly all basic utilities including water supply, cooking facilities and toilets even if the evidence is lacking in some individual units. For instance, the residents of Units IX.3.4 and 6 which did not have a cistern may have used the cistern in Unit IX.3.5/24 next door, and the residents of Unit IX.3.19–20 which seems to have lacked toilet facilities may have used that in Unit IX.3.18 next door. The interaction in this case would have been regular and everyday. One would have physically crossed the borders of adjacent units on a regular basis. The residents of the units in common ownership were thus closely connected not only in legal terms but social too.

Neighbourhood and social relations

The properties presumably owned in common in *insula* IX.3 composed of the largest houses which were surrounded by smaller units. The large houses were either bakeries with living quarters or units that were well-appointed residences and had no obvious

commercial functions. The smaller units surrounding them were shops and workshops. They were probably rented out, as in the *Insula Arriana Polliana*, or occupied by people who were closely connected to the owning family, such as their slaves or ex-slaves, and whose enterprises were carried out under the supervision or direct mandate of the owner (compare Pirson 2007: 470 on the *Insula Arriana Polliana*). The benefits of this arrangement were that the owner received the profits of the given trade, which were presumably higher than rental income although involving greater risks (Aubert 2001).

Even though much has been written concerning the negative attitude of the elite towards business enterprises (see Wallace-Hadrill 1991), it has been shown that in reality the Pompeian upper class was actively involved in commercial ventures (Wallace-Hadrill 1994: 135–141; Robinson 2005). Their regime of economic control, which undoubtedly equated with social power, extended beyond the front doorways of the largest units.

This social and economic power was needed to win elections for *aedilship* and other public offices, and to maintain certain lifestyle that involved expenditure in public and in private sphere. Political power in turn could have been used for economic success and social advancement. This socio-economic structure underpinned Pompeian society and therefore it is not surprising that the city blocks (Fig.4) are strongly characterized by the mosaic of large units surrounded by smaller ones (Robinson 2005: 101–102).

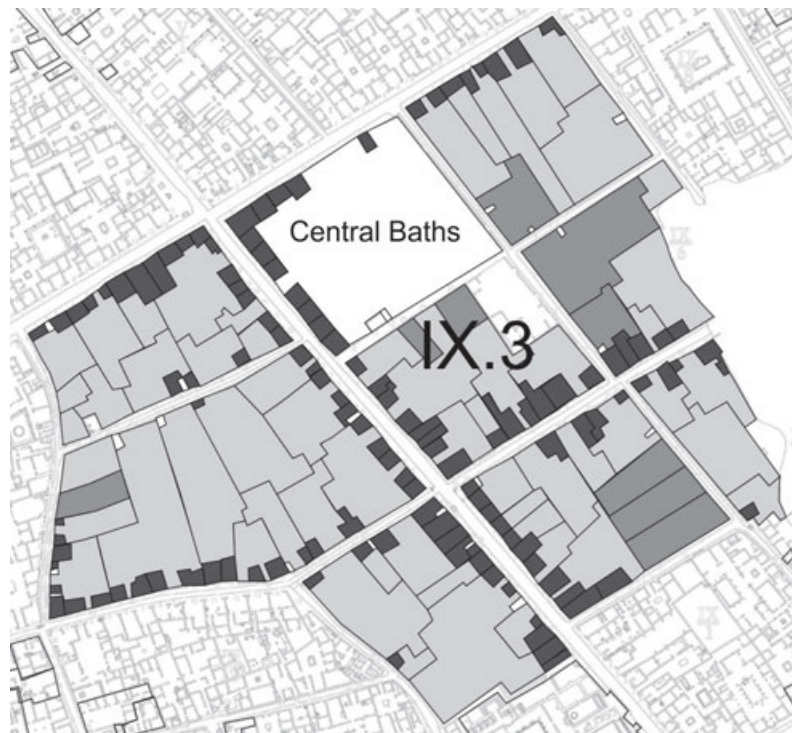


Figure 4: The shops and workshops in insula IX.3 as well as in other adjacent city blocks were concentrated along the main streets. Shops and workshops are indicated in black, domestic residences with no clear links to these commercial units are in dark grey and units that can be connected to these shops and workshops in a way or another are shown in light grey. Modified from the Soprintendenza archeologica di Pompei plan by H. Ynnilä.

The direct, visible control of the owner over his dependents would have been weaker if the tenants were spread out around the city in various locations. Purpose-built tenement blocks, such as those in later Ostia, brought significant income but were less relevant in the direct maintenance of social ties. In contrast, large houses and adjacent shops with a mixed population of family members, tenants and dependents generated social power together with more modest monetary profit (Wallace-Hadrill 1994: 117). Perhaps in first-century A.D. Pompeii the importance of social power outweighed the potential growth of income. Moreover, developments in the first century A.D. in *insula* IX.3 concentrated along its western and southern parts, which presumably already generated healthy profits through involvement in commerce. With all space available along the *Via Stabiana* and *Via degli Augustali* covered by upper floors (Fig. 3), the properties were put to efficient use.

It is interesting to note that the unit clusters in *insula* IX.3 were all located along these two busy streets that flank the city block and two of the clusters were centred around crossroads that were the busiest of all (Fig. 4). They were thus located at places of best visibility and the largest number of potential customers that increased the possibilities for economic success (compare Laurence 2007: 113–116; Ellis 2006: 380). An examination of the city block plan moreover explains why there were no more than four clusters of units owned in common. The most visible and profitable locations were largely taken over by the unit clusters and the city block could not accommodate further clusters.

Conclusion

Examining the arrangements made for basic utilities is a useful tool to deepen our understanding of ownership, thanks to the availability of a rich body of both archaeological and written evidence. Through examining the whole body of archaeological data we can generate an aggregate understanding of the relationship between adjacent units and give a well-grounded view on their connections as stemming from mutual agreement or ownership.

The resulting picture tells about neighbourhood relations on a small scale. It opens up possibilities for asking further questions about dependence in social, economic and political terms, and enables us to discuss the level of interaction between units that were owned in common.

Indeed, not only light, water and sewage may have been shared between units in common ownership but there might have been other arrangements too that meant close interaction on a daily basis. Social dependence connected the people who used these common facilities and made them directly accountable to each other. This undoubtedly lowered the risk of abuse of common resources and played out social capital which may have been as important for the owners as monetary profit. Thus the independency of units that may be assumed on the basis of looking at the ground plan of *insula* IX.3 alone is replaced by a picture of interconnections that underpinned neighbourhood relations.

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