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Prosperity and Inequality: Imperial Hegemony and Neighbourhood Formation in the Cities of Roman Italy

Abstract: This chapter explores how urban landscapes in Late Republican Roman Italy came to accommodate increasing levels of socioeconomic inequality, and what that meant for processes of neighbourhood formation. Starting from the idea that inequality can be physically expressed through urban housing stocks, the paper analyses the impact of the increasing wealth inequality brought about by Roman hegemonic prosperity at the micro-level. It starts by identifying the mechanisms of urban development through which inequality could accumulate in urban space, and then proceeds to analyse the actual developments in Roman Italy, contrasting the nature of neighbourhood formation in mid-Republican Italy with that in Late Republican Italy. The paper argues that, in the decades that followed the Roman conquest of large parts of the Mediterranean, cities at the heart of Rome's imperial network increasingly developed urban landscapes defined by inequality, and that this had immediate consequences for the ways in which these quarters could function in everyday practice, entrenching socioeconomic distinction and hierarchy permanently in the urban landscape.

Introduction

Cardo IV in Herculaneum was a narrow street that connected what seems to have been the town's main road with the southwest edge of the city, which overlooked the Bay of Naples. On both sides, the road was surrounded predominantly by houses (Fig. 1). Originally, most of the houses that opened off the street were fairly modest in size: the city blocks around the street had been divided in narrow strips on which only houses could be constructed that consisted of a central front hall, and a small number of domestic rooms (Fig. 2, left). Some houses may have had a shop next to the entrance, others only had one entrance in an otherwise closed façade. A few houses, such as the Casa del Tramezzo di Legno (III 11), already from the start were a little bit bigger than the others, while others, such as the Casa del Papiro Dipinto (IV 8), were a bit smaller. In general, however, differences between the households along the street initially remained relatively limited. Yet from the Augustan period onwards, as the urban community became more economically differentiated, the houses around the street began to change (Fig. 2, right). Several houses merged: in A.D. 79, the Casa dell'Alcova (IV 3) occupied the space of two predecessors; the wall that originally divided them still can be recognised in the house plan¹. The Casa del Tramezzo di Legno (III 11) was, in several steps, extended, incorporating its neighbours to the northeast and northwest². At the same time, multiple houses were equipped with rental apartments³. These were accessible through staircases directly from the street, and without exception appear to date from the Early Imperial period. Moreover, around the same time, the houses on the seaside end of both city blocks were extended on top of the original city wall and transformed from rather modest urban houses to lush seaside villas with huge peristyle gardens and luxurious rooms overlooking the Bay of Naples – their modest origins are only still reflected in their tiny front

1 De Kind 1998, 142 f.

2 De Kind 1998, 109–111.

3 Along Cardo IV, rental apartments can be found at entrance III 12, III 13, IV 3, IV 5, IV 9 and V 2.

Article note: The ideas underlying this chapter were first developed and tested in the interdisciplinary context of a fellowship at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in the spring of 2020. The discussion of the houses of Paestum in this chapter was based on fieldwork done in the context of the Leiden University Paestum Project, which made a full inventory of the Roman houses of the city. This project was funded by a grant of the Byvanck Fund.



Fig. 1: Herculaneum. Cardo IV.

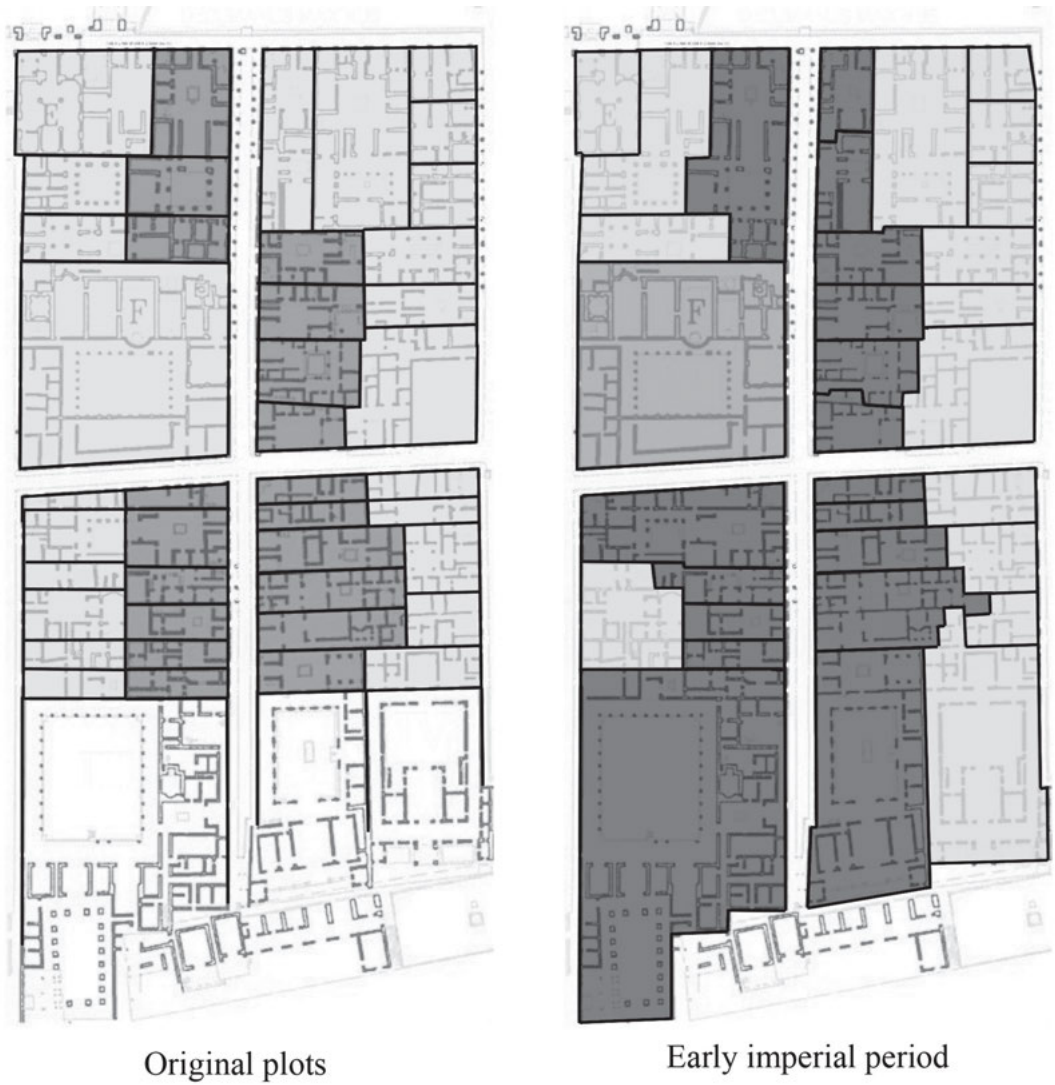


Fig. 2: Herculaneum. Cardo IV and its environs: original allotments (left); property boundaries in A.D. 79 (right).

halls⁴. Between the mid-1st century B.C. and the mid-1st century A.D., the neighbourhood that lived together around *Cardo IV* was transformed from a community of, roughly, equals to a much more diverse and unequal neighbourhood, in which very rich and relatively deprived lived in each other's direct environment.

The transformation of *Cardo IV* in Herculaneum shows how emerging socioeconomic differences would, over time, accumulate in the urban landscape. This accumulation is not simply an abstract socioeconomic fact: it had profound implications for the everyday lived experience in the area, and for the ways in which the people in the area could construct and conceptualise their living environment. In the repeated, spontaneous encounters between the more and less wealthy inhabitants of the zone – and their more and less wealthy visitors – there was ample opportunity to translate differences in prosperity into social difference: once it had become inscribed in the physical urban landscape through the city's housing stock, inequality came to construct social distinctions within the neighbourhood. Of course, the patterns are complex: servants living in the wealthier residences near the seaside had a socioeconomic status that differed profoundly from the members of the core family who owned the house. As slaves or freedmen, they may have been of a lower social status than many people inhabiting the smaller houses, though at the same time they enjoyed a close proximity to the elite. Yet this complexity is precisely the point: what once had been a relatively homogeneous community changed into something much more heterogeneous and complex – and this changed the ways in which the neighbourhood could (re)produce itself at the everyday level.

Neighbourhood and Difference

The history of the *Cardo* at Herculaneum is not unique, and this chapter starts from the idea that in studying neighbourhoods in antiquity, understanding their history of socioeconomic differentiation is indispensable: if neighbourhoods – as a social constellation – are shaped by and performed through everyday interactions in the urban environment, it cannot be doubted that the socioeconomic makeup of a street, a block, or a quarter was crucial to their functioning. At a very basic level, in situations where a socially diverse group of people enjoys structural physical proximity in a neighbourhood-like constellation, their diversity will impact on the formation of social knowledge: if the relatively wealthy and the relatively deprived encounter each other every day again and again, they will develop an acute awareness of each other's existence, and of the existence and meaning of socioeconomic difference within their community⁵. Additionally, in everyday interactions within a neighbourhood community, diversity in wealth may translate into differences in social power, and thus contribute to the development of relationships with a more strongly hierarchical character, including bonds of patronage between the wealthier and less wealthy residents of an area; patronage, of course, became a key feature of Roman society in the Late Republican and Early Imperial periods⁶. Moreover, the accumulation of social difference in the urban topography can result in clustering, meaning that certain social groups become disproportionately concentrated in certain locations. This, of course, may contribute significantly to the formation of neighbourhood identities: areas where larger houses cluster may develop, in the perception of the urban community, an 'elite' character, while zones with a lot of smaller houses may be seen as more everyday or even deprived – and the people inhabiting them may come to think of themselves as a neighbourhood of 'common people'. It is of course impossible to read such perceptions directly from the archaeological material, but the

⁴ By A.D. 79, the Casa dell'Albergo occupied more than half of *Insula III*; it had its main entrance on *Cardo III*, but two secondary entrances on *Cardo IV* (De Kind 1998, 93 f.). The seaside part of *Insula IV* was divided between the Casa dell'Atorio a Mosaico, opening off *Cardo IV*, and the Casa dei Cervi, opening off *Cardo V* (De Kind 1998, 131–158. 176–183).

⁵ Cf. Mumford 1954, 257, cited by Haug, this volume.

⁶ Wallace-Hadrill 1989; Saller 2000.

excavated archaeological remains of urban quarters give a clear indication of the possibilities for such neighbourhood identities to develop. Thus, even if inequality, in Roman scholarship, has been most strongly associated with economic history, the present chapter argues that, in fact, inequality plays a critical role in social and cultural history too – as it shapes the lived experience of people in their everyday environment.

Connecting the study of urban neighbourhoods to the study of inequality also is important for a different reason. Emerging inequality in local urban communities, almost without exception, is a product of broader socioeconomic developments, and it shows how these could impact on the everyday lived experience in specific locations. In the case of *Cardo IV* at Herculaneum, the emergence of inequality should be seen against the background of a gradually increasing inequality in the Roman Mediterranean at large⁷. The unification of the Mediterranean under Roman rule created an enormous pool of agricultural surplus that could be tapped into, and most of it was, in some way or another, controlled by the Roman elite, which overwhelmingly spent it in and around the place(s) where they lived. Particularly in parts of central Italy, this led to the emergence of a consumer economy that had no precedent, and which generated an unprecedented demand for labour⁸. This, in turn, results in sustained flows of migration (both voluntary and forced) leading, in some places, to the emergence of groups of urban inhabitants who did not have the means to buy their own house, and came to be accommodated in rental apartments. At the geographical heart of this imperial consumer economy was the Bay of Naples, and, with it, Herculaneum⁹. In other words: what we are seeing along *Cardo IV* at Herculaneum is not some isolated local phenomenon, but a local expression of a global development – increasing inequality in the Mediterranean – which was a direct product of political change: the emergence of the Roman Empire. Thus, through the emergence of socioeconomic inequality, the story of neighbourhoods is intimately linked to the story of Roman imperial hegemony: it is in this everyday urban environment that the various groups of relative ‘winners’ and relative ‘losers’ of Roman imperial hegemony negotiated their position in their local community. No history of urban neighbourhoods can be written without understanding how they were shaped and transformed by these larger-scale political and economic developments, but the point is that the reverse is also true: a key reason to study urban neighbourhoods in the Roman world is that their transformation can help us to understand what Roman imperial hegemony meant at the level of everyday urban practices, and inequality offers a key vantage point to explore precisely this issue. The following pages will therefore analyse the impact of empire formation on urban neighbourhoods in Roman Italy, and they will use socioeconomic inequality as the central interpretative perspective. The argument will develop in three steps. First, I will briefly explore the relation between socioeconomic inequality and urban development, and the way in which this may be expressed in the archaeological record; subsequently, I will contrast two periods. The second section will focus on what can perhaps be seen as the ‘pre-hegemonic phase’ of Roman urbanism – before Rome became a Mediterranean power; the third section will discuss the ‘early hegemonic phase’ that followed the defeat of Carthage and the conquest of Greece and Asia Minor in the middle of the 2nd century B.C. Chronologically, thus, the focus in what follows will be on the last three centuries B.C., but the developmental trajectories that will be highlighted were not restricted to this period – or to these places. The point of this chapter is not to present a full account of the impact of imperial inequality on the Roman city, but rather to sketch how the increased inequality brought about by a global development like Roman imperial hegemony had a significant impact on neighbourhood formation at the local level in many cities. Neighbourhoods, here, are thus thought of as socio-spatial constellations that were, to a considerable extent, shaped by processes of ‘glocalization’¹⁰.

7 Scheidel 2017; Scheidel – Friesen 2009; Kron 2011; 2014.

8 Cf. Temin 2013.

9 Flohr – Wilson 2017; see also D’Arms 1970.

10 On ‘glocalization’ as a concept in Roman studies see now Montoya Gonzalez 2021.

Inequality and the Archaeological Record

It is important to begin with a note of caution: the relationship between socioeconomic inequality and the archaeological record is not straightforward. In the first place, and obviously, many aspects of inequality are not directly expressed in the archaeological record. This is particularly true for the inequalities that may exist within households – both within the core family, between male and female members of the households, or between age groups, and between the core family and their entourage of servants, slaves and freedmen. One can say that it is more likely that larger houses, particularly elite villas, were constructed with larger, more diversified households in mind, but once these houses had been built, the composition of the households occupying them can fluctuate¹¹: the fortune of families could develop over time. People who are socially mobile in an upwards direction may live in a house that is a bit smaller than their wealth and status, while households or families in decline may continue to live in a house that is (much) bigger than their actual wealth and status¹². Thus, even if Roman (elite) culture attached considerable ideological weight to people being housed appropriately¹³, differences in house size should not be taken directly at face value, though, on average and in the long run, wealth status and house quality may be likely to roughly converge.

Emerging inequality can become expressed in the archaeological record through construction activity: it begins to appear when people decide that existing available houses in a place are unable to satisfy their needs or ambitions, and resort to constructing new buildings or adapting existing buildings so that they become more suitable. This construction always takes place in a certain place at a certain moment, and thus is dictated by the specific needs of that moment – but the resulting building continues to dictate housing possibilities long after that moment has passed, as long as it is not adapted or replaced. Moreover, construction processes were always in some way or another constrained. They were constrained by availability – the quality and quantity of land or pre-existing housing that is available for purchase – and by possibility – what people can afford to buy. In practice, these constraints meant that urban construction tended to be conservative: once a city block was divided into allotments, the original boundaries of these allotments often stayed in place unless something special happened, though neighbouring properties could and did occasionally merge¹⁴. Thus, initial allotments tended to have a profound impact on the way in which inequality could become expressed in the urban landscape. In practice, development of urban housing stocks seems to be dominated by three scenarios. The first is the least complicated: a family buys (or owns) a house, and redevelops it according to their needs, potentially carving out independent units like *tabernae* and upper-floor apartments, and using the available space more effectively. Second, house-owners can buy up property adjacent to their house – another house, or land that is not being used – and incorporate it into their house – by merging, or by building an extension of the house in a zone that used to be empty. The extension of houses over the city wall in Herculaneum is a good example; in Pompeii, some houses over time were extended deeper into city blocks: initially, only the street side had been divided into plots, and the inner parts of the city blocks had been left open¹⁵. More ambitious still – and in practical terms also more complicated – was the third scenario, in which people would buy up larger numbers of houses in order to destroy them and build a large elite villa in their stead. This must be seen as the ‘nuclear option’ of urban development, and while some examples of it will be discussed later in this chapter, it has to be stressed that they very much remained exceptional:

11 Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 91–103.

12 For instance, the Casa del Poeta Tragico at Pompeii is so richly decorated for its size that there seems a clear imbalance between wealth and house size (cf. Flohr 2019, 121).

13 Wallace-Hadrill 1994; Zanker 1998; Hales 2003.

14 See Busen, this volume.

15 This is e. g., true at Pompeii, Insula V 2 and VI 14.

throughout antiquity, the development of inequality in urban space generally took place in relatively small steps, property by property¹⁶.

Neighbourhood Inequality in the Middle Republic

For the period before Rome became a Mediterranean power, neighbourhood inequality can be studied in a limited number of cities in the Italian Peninsula, and the evidence is fragmented and biased everywhere. At Fregellae, the excavations by Coarelli and others in the 1980s and 1990s exposed only one street, just northeast of the forum¹⁷; at Norba, the excavations by Stefania Quilici Gigli and her team have revealed parts of an urban quarter¹⁸; at Pompeii, a number of houses can be dated to the 3rd or early 2nd century on the grounds of building materials and techniques used¹⁹. Fregellae and Norba have an urban landscape dating back to the 4th or 3rd century, but they were destroyed by the Romans, in 123 B.C. and 80 B.C. respectively. Pompeii, of course, continued to evolve substantially after the mid-Republican period, but the number of houses from before 150 B.C. is such that some understanding of local urban inequality can be based upon it. Thus, while in each of the four cities our understanding of neighbourhood inequality leaves a lot to be desired, taken together, the picture they suggest is relatively coherent.

Fregellae

Fregellae was entirely organised around the Via Latina, which served as the city's central thoroughfare; on both sides, it had perpendicular sideroads at regular distances. The excavated houses were situated along one of these sideroads, but immediately next to the forum – in the heart of the city (Fig. 3). The houses differ a bit in size, but they are roughly equal in structure: they have the usual entrance corridor that led to a front hall with some rooms around it; around the entrance corridor were *cubicula* rather than *tabernae* – but no more than one on each side; the larger houses (1–7) have a *tablinum* in front of the entrance, and *cubicula* and *alae* around the sides of the atrium; smaller houses further down the road (9, 11, 13) lacked the side rooms. While the larger atrium houses had an atrium complex of around 350 m², the smaller houses were constructed with a surface of ca. 200–300 m²²⁰. In general, very little seems to have been happening behind the *tablina*: some houses had a small backyard, but there were no more rooms. Essentially, these are all small- to medium-sized atrium houses of the kind that would typically house just one family; they did not include any rental units like upper-floor apartments or independent *tabernae*. While the houses on average appear to be a little bit bigger, the excavated street at Fregellae resembled *Cardo IV* at Herculaneum before its early imperial transformation: there was a relative equality between the households.

Norba

The excavated section of Norba is situated in the southeastern part of the city, in the depression between the forum and the so-called minor acropolis, where an important urban sanctuary was

¹⁶ On the complexity involved in buying up land occupied by others see, in the context of the construction of the forum of Augustus, Flohr 2020a, 208–216.

¹⁷ Battaglini – Diosono 2010; Coarelli – Monti 1998.

¹⁸ Quilici Gigli 2015; 2016; 2018.

¹⁹ Peterse 1999.

²⁰ Battaglini – Diosono 2010, 219.

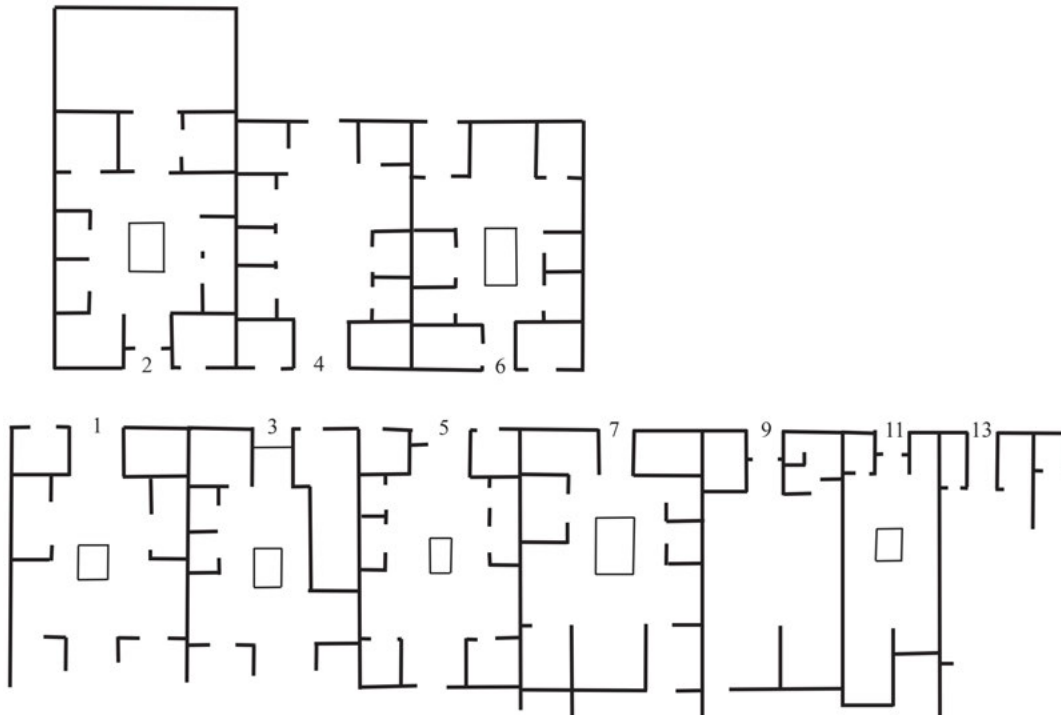


Fig. 3: Fregellae, series of mid-Republican atrium houses.

situated. The excavated houses are situated in three house-blocks around a major road that crossed the settlement at its heart and ran in a straight line from the city's west gate towards the temple on the minor acropolis²¹. While we do not fully understand the dynamics of urban traffic at Norba, it is clear that this was an artery of key importance, used both for internal traffic and for traffic entering and leaving the city – the west gate offered a connection to Cora and, eventually, Rome. The houses resemble those at Fregellae, both in their size and in their layout: they are basically all canonical, medium-sized atrium houses, with *cubicula* alongside the entrance corridor and along the sides of the atrium; most had a *tablinum*. While the houses vary a little bit in size, the basic domestic facilities that they had at their disposal were roughly equal: there is a strong emphasis on the atrium and the rooms surrounding it. One of the houses (Domus X) had a small secondary courtyard, but without any rooms attached to it (Fig. 4)²²; two houses south of the main road overlooked the edge of the city and seem to have had a terrace behind the *tablinum* (Fig. 5)²³. There is very little evidence for dependent units: there are no upper-floor apartments, and while Domus X had several *tabernae* in its final phase, they had not originally been present²⁴. Again, this quarter appears to have been an environment where people lived among their approximate social equals. This does not mean that there were no differences at all, but the differences between the households of the neighbourhood remained limited.

Pompeii

In Pompeii, no city quarter from before the mid-2nd century B.C. has been preserved, but a substantial number of individual houses are known from this period, and many houses, throughout the city, incorporate wall sections or walls constructed in the technique associated with this earlier period,

²¹ Cf. Quilici – Quilici Gigli 1988, 251.

²² Quilici Gigli 2015, 59–115.

²³ Carfora et al. 2010, 234–236.

²⁴ Quilici Gigli 2015, 84 f.



Fig. 4: Norba, 'Domus X', overview.



Fig. 5: Norba. Two atrium houses on the SW edge of the city.

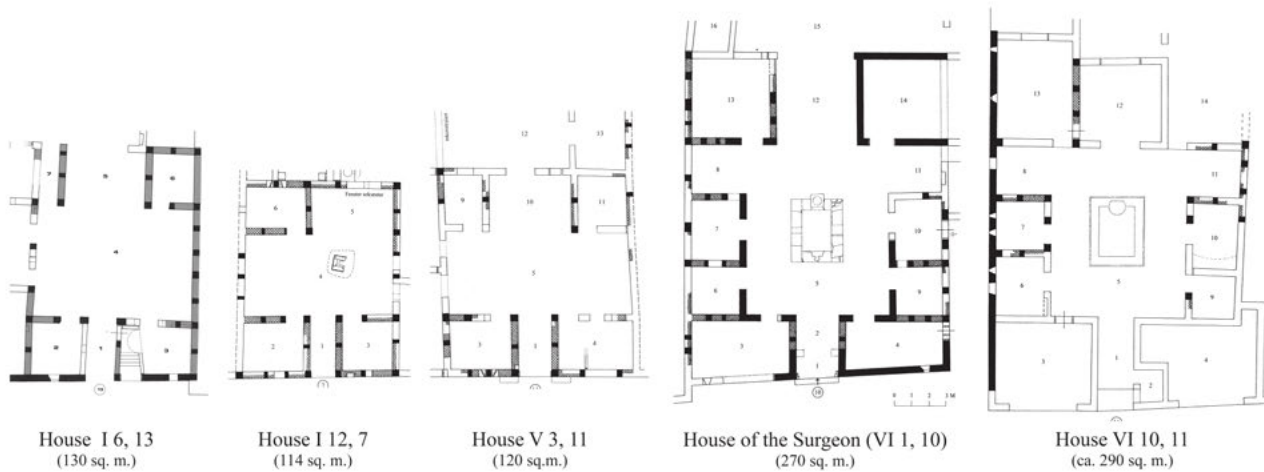


Fig. 6: Plans of five Pompeian houses from the 4th and 3rd century B.C.

which is known as *opus africanum* or 'limestone framework'²⁵. Based on this scattered evidence, the nature of domestic architecture in 3rd and early 2nd century B.C. Pompeii is broadly understood (Fig. 6). As is well known, Pompeian houses in this period did not yet have peristyles: the largest houses in the city consisted of an atrium surrounded on two sides by *cubicula* and *alae*, and with a *tablinum* surrounded by two larger rooms separating the atrium from some kind of backyard. The largest houses at Pompeii were actually slightly smaller than their counterparts at Norba and Fregellae: buildings like the Casa del Chirurgo (VI 1,10, cf. Fig. 6) and House VI 10,11 had an atrium-*tablinum* complex of less than 300 m²²⁶; however, most houses were smaller still and would lack *cubicula* on one or both sides of the atrium²⁷. While some houses had one or two *tabernae*, large numbers of rental units did not exist – and there is no evidence for the existence of independent upper-floor apartments. Thus, even though we do not really know Pompeian city quarters from before 150 B.C., enough of the city is known to estimate they are unlikely to have been very unequal: in this early period, neighbourhood formation took place on the basis of relative socioeconomic equality. It is possible that houses of above-average size were already disproportionately clustered around the through roads in the north-western part of the city: the largest known houses were all situated in this zone, while elsewhere in

²⁵ Peterse 1999.

²⁶ Peterse 1999, 109–116.

²⁷ Peterse 1999, 117–136.

the city, 3rd century B.C. houses appear to be a bit smaller. However, the overall picture of the division of larger and smaller houses over the urban area remains too fragmentary to tell, and it will not have made a big difference.

Late Republican Urban Transformations

It would be misleading to think of urban neighbourhoods in mid-Republican Italy as fully egalitarian: there were clear differences between households, and domestic architecture had developed several ways of accommodating these differences, such as the presence or absence of *cubicula* and *alae* around the atrium, and the presence or absence of a *tablinum*: there are differences between simpler and more elaborate houses in each of the cities discussed in the previous section. These differences, of course, will have found their way into social practices within the neighbourhood. However, in all cases, social differences were playing out between family-based households that each occupied their own domestic building: in the end, everyone in these neighbourhoods was essentially in the same socioeconomic league. This was to change dramatically in the 2nd century B.C.

The transition of Rome from an Italian to a Mediterranean power radically transformed the economic foundations of urban life in Roman Italy. Several economic historians have emphasised the consequences of the unprecedented influx of wealth from booty and predation²⁸. As Peter Bang put it some time ago: ‘both the sale and consumption of the spoils of empire began to spawn the formation of new markets that developed to service the process of predatory mobilization’²⁹.

This ‘predatory mobilization’ started from the Roman senatorial and equestrian elites, but as these groups began to use their wealth to buy themselves lives of luxury, other parts of society began to be affected as well. The result was a sharp increase in the differences between rich and poor³⁰. However, what this meant at the micro level of urban neighbourhoods – and how it affected processes of neighbourhood formation – has not been part of the debate: discourse on inequality in antiquity has to a large extent taken place on the macro level of the entire ancient Mediterranean. Thus, to understand what is going on, the following pages will compare Late Republican developments in everyday living environments in three cities that are archaeologically well-known: Pompeii, Ostia and Paestum. Each of these cities felt the impact of empire in a different way, though an increase in socioeconomic diversity can be seen everywhere.

Pompeii

Of the three cities, developments at Pompeii appear to have been the most radical. Part of this story is well-known, and well-studied: in several parts of the city, particularly to the north of the forum – in Region VI – and east of the forum in Regions VII and VIII – a new category of houses emerged that was much larger than the largest houses of earlier periods and included, alongside the often grand atrium, at least a peristyle or a second atrium, and occasionally both³¹. Textbook examples include the famous Casa del Fauno (VI 12,2.5), constructed with two atria and a peristyle, and later extended with a second peristyle³², and the Casa del Labirinto (VI 11,8–10) (Fig. 7). Several of these complexes, such as the Insula Arriana Polliana, included independent rental apartments³³. Much more so than

²⁸ Hopkins 1978, 1–96; Harris 2007.

²⁹ Bang 2012, 203.

³⁰ Hopkins 1978, 40; Scheidel 2012, 13.

³¹ Dickmann 1997; 1999.

³² Faber – Hofmann 2009.

³³ E. g., Pirson 1999, 23–46.

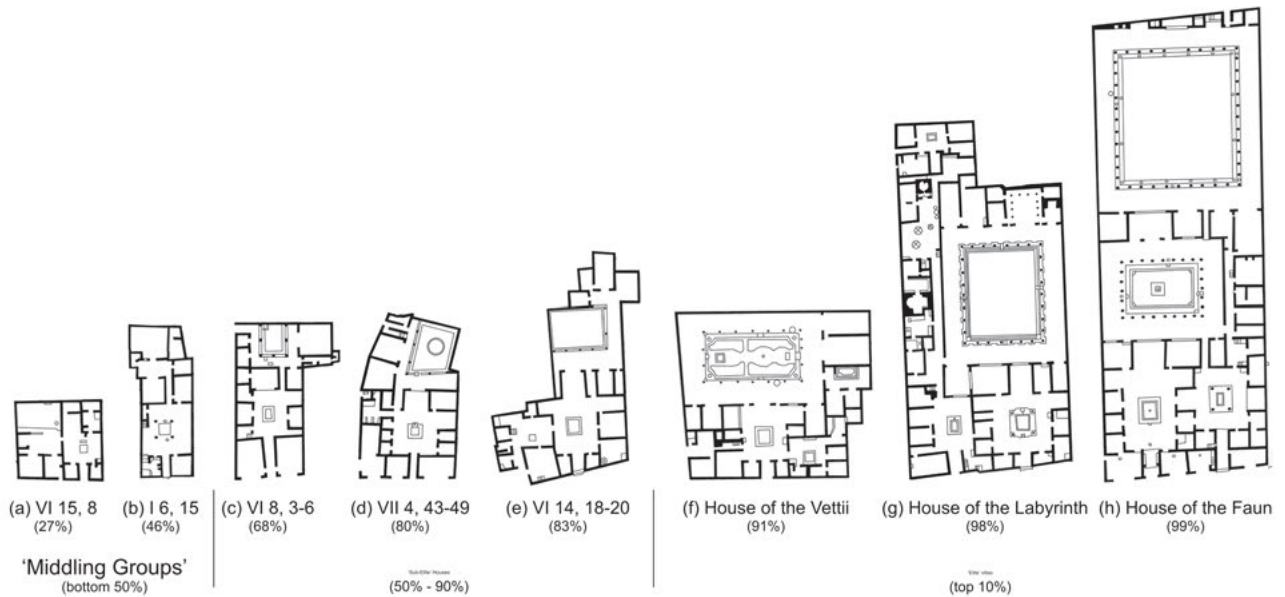


Fig. 7: Pompeii. Plans of eight Pompeian houses in their A.D. 79 state. House I 6,15 is in size similar to House I 6,13 on Fig. 6

was true for the largest houses of Early Imperial Herculaneum, these complexes thus accommodated a lot of inequality: they combined wealthy house-owners who lived in the central house and much less wealthy figures who lived in the dependent apartments. Moreover, these large houses were also constructed to contain households with a substantial amount of *internal* inequality: even if we do not know who lived in the Casa del Fauno, it is safe to assume that the house probably contained a household with, alongside the core family, a substantial number of slaves³⁴. Thus, the sudden emergence of these large-scale atrium-peristyle houses in the second half of the 2nd century B.C. transformed Pompeii, and made socioeconomic inequality a central element in neighbourhood formation in several places in the city.

At the same time, increasing socioeconomic heterogeneity impacted on neighbourhood formation in another way as well, as inequality did not spread evenly over the urban area: some locations were more desirable than others, and attracted higher levels of competition. The large Late Republican urban palaces were primarily concentrated north and east of the forum, along the city's major thoroughfares: very few can be found east of the Via Stabiana³⁵. What happened in 2nd century B.C. Pompeii was not only that certain neighbourhoods became more unequal, but also that the differences between different parts of the city increased. In some places in the city, particularly along through roads and in Region VI, north of the forum, elite families bought up and destroyed several more modestly sized houses to construct their peristyled palaces (Fig. 8); in other places, this did not happen, – and it is in these places that Pompeii's 'traditional' middling groups came to cluster: in Region V, and in Region I, in the east part of the city, but also along dead-end roads in Region VI, and along the central and southern section of Via Stabiana (Fig. 9). These were areas where the emerging inequality of the Late Republican period did not – or at least not yet – become entrenched in the urban landscape. These areas remained more socially homogeneous: they were characterised by the absence of both elites and of the people living in *tabernae* and upper-floor apartments. Both social extremes were relatively rare in these areas. At the same time, many of these regions were situated in what can be seen as a 'marginal' location: they were further away from the city centre and, partially, from through roads.

³⁴ Cf. George 1997, 22.

³⁵ For a list of these houses see Flohr 2022, 172.



Fig. 8: Pompeii. Façade of the Insula Arriana Polliana (VI 6) with *tabernae*.



Fig. 9: Pompeii. Map indicating the distribution of smaller (red) and larger houses (yellow) in A.D. 79.

Ostia

While our knowledge of Late Republican Ostia is not comparable to that of Pompeii, it seems that the city did not become as sharply unequal as Pompeii did: enormous urban palaces like the Casa del Fauno and the Casa del Labirinto cannot be found in Late Republican Ostia, and are unlikely to have existed. The largest known house of this period at Ostia is the Domus dei Bucrani³⁶, which had a medium-sized peristyle and covered an area of less than 800 m² – slightly more than a fourth of the Casa del Fauno. Judging from the 2nd century A.D. plot boundaries, many of which go back to the Republican period, most other houses were substantially smaller³⁷. Arguably, this points to a difference in economic development between Ostia and Pompeii. One explanation for that difference is that what was lacking at Ostia was a wealthy land-owning elite: while the territory of Pompeii was extremely fertile, and was involved in export-oriented wine-production on a large scale, Ostia was not surrounded by a

³⁶ Perrier et al. 2007.

³⁷ On the continuity of plot boundaries see Flohr 2018b, 153.

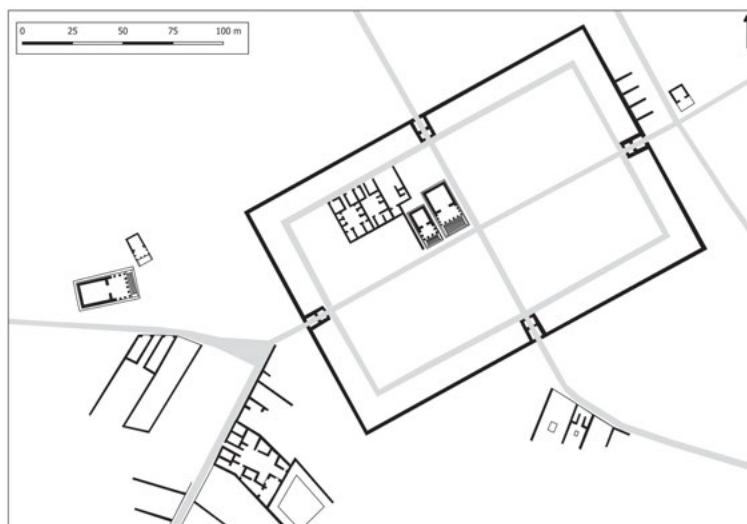


Fig. 10: Ostia. Map of the Late Republican city.

comparable quantity of agricultural land. Indeed, while some agriculture was taking place in the plain to the south of the city³⁸, there were large salt pans to the east, and urban growth in Late Republican Ostia was mostly based on trade. This trade was lucrative, but by no means as lucrative as Vesuvian agriculture. Thus, very wealthy families could not easily emerge at Ostia.

Nevertheless, while urban change in Late Republican Ostia was less extreme than it was at Pompeii, it is clear that the community became more heterogeneous. Several peristyle houses were constructed along the western *decumanus* – their remains were discovered underneath the Imperial-period structures³⁹; other elite houses emerged along the *cardo*⁴⁰. Contrary to Pompeii, where the peristyle houses were being constructed right in the heart of the city, Ostia's peristyle houses appear to have been built as an extension to the city, alongside the roads to and from the *castrum*, gradually expanding the city away from its original core (Fig. 10). As far as its Late Republican history is understood, the area of the *castrum* appears to have remained basically unchanged, and continued to consist of medium-sized houses, three of which have been found back along the Via delle Casette Republicane⁴¹. Thus, while differences remained more limited than at Pompeii, the overall result in terms of the diversification of the urban topography is comparable: we find the elite clustering in certain zones, creating a distinction between more heterogeneous parts of the city where the elite was a force to be reckoned with at the everyday level, and a more homogeneous quarter – the old *castrum* – where it was much less directly present in the private sphere.

Paestum

The urban development of Paestum in the Late Republican period differs both from Pompeii and Ostia. Over the course of the later 2nd and early 1st centuries B.C., a series of very large elite houses was constructed in the heart of the city, along the roads leading from the forum westward to the harbour

³⁸ Cf. Heinzelmann 1998.

³⁹ Flohr 2018b. The so-called Domus dei Bucrani, underneath the Schola del Traiano (IV 5,15), is the most prominent example.

⁴⁰ Flohr 2020b. The Domus di Giove Fulminatore, one of two remaining atrium houses, in its first phase had a vast area, perhaps a peristyle, behind the *tablinum*.

⁴¹ Calza et al. 1953, 103; Flohr 2018b, 145–147.

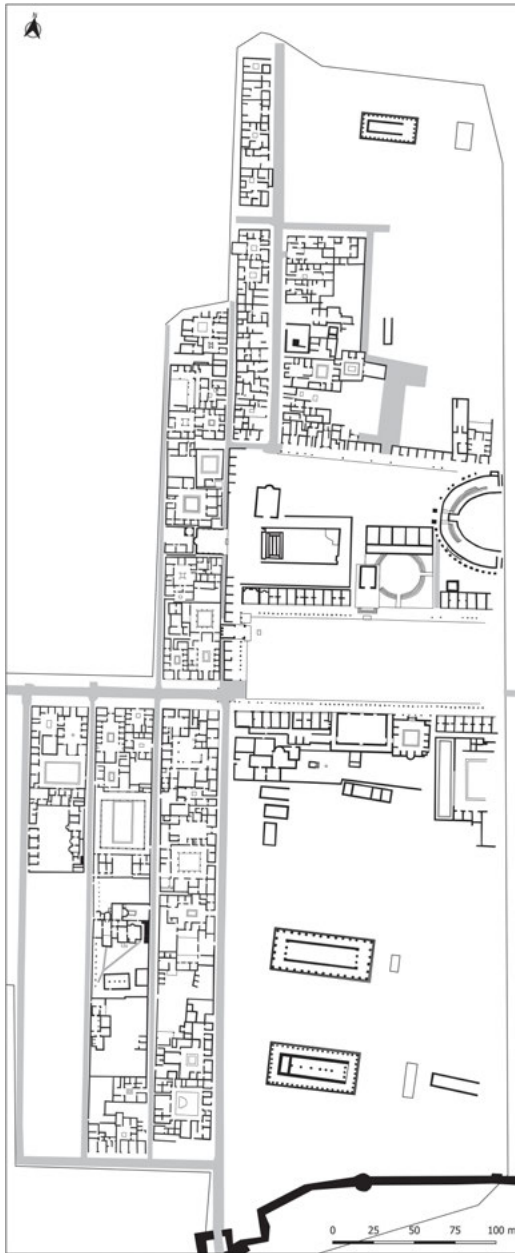


Fig. 11: Paestum.
Map of the Roman city.

and southward to the southern city gate (Fig. 11)⁴². These houses had large atria and vast peristyles, and they were about as large as the largest houses of contemporary Pompeii (Fig. 12). Given their scale, these houses were, probably, designed and constructed with comparably large and differentiated households in mind. However, contrary to their Pompeian counterparts, these houses did not have large numbers of *tabernae*. Some had a few, but most did not, and homeowners clearly were less interested in exploiting their street fronts: houses either had a closed façade, or a closed façade interrupted by one or two shops. This relative absence of commerce had an enormous impact on social dynamics along these roads: while at Pompeii, neighbourhood formation along thoroughfares was shaped both by elites and by the people living in the dependent units belonging to elite houses, at Paestum, the latter group would be much less present in urban space, so that neighbourhood

⁴² Flohr 2022, 163 f.



Fig. 12: Paestum.
Large peristyle house
west of the forum.

formation was dominated by elites. Perhaps, like at Pompeii, the construction of these large houses reflects the emergence of an agricultural elite of large-scale landowners – and this could explain the difference with Ostia; indeed, as is suggested by traces of land-division north and east of the city⁴³, Paestum was surrounded by a large and fertile plain that could easily support the emergence of such an elite; in the later 2nd century B.C. these people also would increasingly easily have found markets interested in their produce. However, unlike Pompeii, Paestum was less-well integrated into regional and supra-regional networks: it was in a much more isolated position: the closest cities – Eboli, Picentia, Salernum and Velia – were all more than 20 km away, as the crow flies⁴⁴. The senatorial elite, which from the 2nd century B.C. onwards began to cluster around the Bay of Naples, did not come to Paestum or its environs in significant numbers. This meant that, overall, there was much less scope for the emergence of a flourishing regional consumer economy, and, thus, that there were fewer incentives to invest in dependent or commercial facilities.

Like at Pompeii and Ostia, thus, a landscape emerged in which the local urban elite of Paestum clustered in one part of the city, and were mostly absent from the others parts of the city. This can be seen very clearly north of the forum, where the city blocks mostly consisted of small- to medium-sized houses (Fig. 11). Many of these were comparable in size to the smallest mid-Republican houses at Pompeii and Herculaneum, having a surface between 150 and 300 m². Though it is hard to understand the topography of Paestum in its entirety, it seems that these smaller houses also were in a somewhat more marginal location than the elite houses west of the forum. In any case, they made up a neighbourhood where everyday social dynamics differed radically from those along the road between the forum and the sea.

Discussion

The previous sections have emphasised how the later 2nd century B.C. brought a significant transformation of urban environments in several cities of the Italian Peninsula. In Pompeii, Ostia and Paestum, we can see how increasing socioeconomic differentiation transformed urban housing stocks. Some quarters, in some cities, became extremely heterogeneous; in multiple cities inequality between quarters became permanently entrenched in the urban landscape, with the elites (and their dependents) clustering in one part of the city, and the people belonging to the middling groups in much

⁴³ Pelgrom 2008.

⁴⁴ Pompeii had five cities within a radius of 20 km: Herculaneum, Nuceria, Nola, Stabia and Surrentum.

more marginal positions. These developments changed the dynamics of neighbourhood formation everywhere: on the one hand, they increased possibilities for the elaboration of social hierarchies; on the other, they facilitated the development of certain forms of socioeconomic awareness at the neighbourhood level. Thus, even if the analysis of this chapter started from what in Roman scholarship has often been considered an ‘economic’ category – inequality – what emerges is an analysis of changing everyday social dynamics in urban communities.

It may be good to briefly reflect on the way in which the practical consequences of this increased socioeconomic differentiation may have played out on the ground. In that respect, it is first important to understand that increasing inequality had different consequences for different groups in society: it did not only mean that quarters within these cities began to diverge more sharply in character, but also that the lived experience of the urban elite and of the people living in the dependent facilities in elite houses could begin to diverge from that of people living in the topographically more marginal medium-sized houses: with their dependents and equals clustered around their houses along the main roads, elites had few incentives to penetrate into the areas that were dominated by the houses of people belonging to the middling groups; the same is true, in a different way, for the people living in *tabernae* and upper-floor apartments along the through roads, unless they had friends or professional contacts in these zones. Conversely, people living in households belonging to the middling groups of society – not the rich, not the poor, but those living around the median – would cross the diversified through-roads of the city on an everyday basis. As a result, they would have had the much more diverse urban experience, which included both their marginal middling-group quarters and the central zones in the city, where the elites lived. This experiential divergence is most clearly visible at Pompeii, but it shaped neighbourhood dynamics at Ostia and Paestum as well.

Thus, the increasing socioeconomic heterogeneity in this period redefined, but also diversified urban lifeworlds. This is of key relevance in understanding processes of neighbourhood formation in the cities of Roman Italy: for people living within the *castrum* at Ostia, or in one of the small houses north of the forum at Paestum, both their direct living environment and the position of that environment in the city was different than it was for people living in or around the peristyle houses elsewhere in the city. These differences were, in all probability, not neutral: they resulted in an (informal) hierarchy of place that, in turn, informed neighbourhood and identity formation on the ground. Hence, this diversification, in many cities, had relative winners and relative losers. It may be argued that the elite, logically, came out on top, able as it was to construct houses that dominated their surroundings; underneath the elite, however, it can be suggested that, from the perspective of neighbourhood formation and socio-spatial integration in the community, the people living in *tabernae* and upper-floor apartments were relatively better off than middling groups living in medium-sized houses: the former were materially more deprived, but, physically, had a much more central position in the urban landscape; the latter were materially more prosperous, and may have enjoyed a higher social status, but often became spatially marginalised in the urban community, and with that spatial marginalisation came a clear risk of social marginalisation: were they to end up without patronage ties, there were no elite households around in their direct environment to whom they could easily turn.

Finally, the keypoint of this chapter has been to argue that inequality deserves a place in the study of ancient neighbourhoods. It may be true that the material remains of cities do not offer many clear indications of the ways in which individuals and neighbourhood communities responded to the emergence and socio-spatial distribution of inequality. Perhaps a closer look at differences in place-making between more and less differentiated neighbourhoods in cities that we know well could offer some clue, and it is certainly interesting that, at Pompeii, some of the façade paintings that seem to be most explicitly oriented at a neighbourhood community can be found along the eastern stretch of the Via dell’Abbondanza, in an area characterised by a relative absence of elite houses and strongly dominated by people who seem to belong to ‘middling’ groups. The precise interpretation of these paintings, which combine religious scenes with reference to everyday work, is a subject of debate and remains beyond the scope of this chapter, but their socially peculiar context emphasises the need to see neighbourhood formation and the social practices associated with neighbourhood at the local

level in the context of larger scale, ‘global’, historical forces, like Roman imperial hegemony, and their impact on the social makeup of urban environments.

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