Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series

eds. Janico Albrecht, Jeannine Bischoff, Sarah Dusend

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Alessandra Batty

Tracking Dependency in Late-Antique Roman Domestic Architecture: The Example of the *Domus del Ninfeo* at Ostia (III, VI, 1–3)

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1 Introduction

The aim of this short monograph is to set down in writing and expand on a lecture on slavery and slave spaces in the Domus del Ninfeo at Ostia that I gave as part of the Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series.[1]

The paper opens with a background section where I outline some basic information about slavery in Roman times (the slaves' legal status, value, issues of personal identity, factors impacting on their living standards). They are well-known concepts, but are repeated because they all point to the need for a history of Roman slavery that moves – when possible – from the general to the particular, from the macro- to the micro-historical approach.

The second section deals with a subtext of the lecture: the in/visibility of slaves and masters with special reference to body management: a topic closely tied to the upper class' anxiety to erect boundaries between social strata and avoid disruption of public order. On several occasions I point out differences or similarities in slavery practices throughout the republican, imperial and late-antique times. The topic is clearly too vast to be even outlined in a text of this nature, the focus of which, once again, is the architectural response to the issue of class distinction in a specific *domus* at Ostia. It is the long life of the building (spanning at least between second and fourth century AD) that allows for a wide perspective on slavery; hence the reference to sources that are not confined to late antiquity, but embrace a broader chronological spectrum. The architectural logic of the Domus del Ninfeo, when analysed diachronically rather than synchronically, calls for a viewpoint that must take into consideration the long historical trajectory and development of manage-

[1] I wish to thank Prof Dr Julia A.B. Hegewald, a Principal Investigator of the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS), for inviting me to deliver this lecture. Many distinguished scholars took part to the ensuing discussion, and the resulting lively round of questions and answers provided ground for further reflection and analysis upon my chosen subject. It is with gratitude that I wish to thank all those who attended my presentation and gave me food for thought; I hope I have been able to address at least some of their observations in these pages. I also wish to thank the anonymous reviewers who read the first draft of this paper for their valuable suggestions. Any shortcomings remain my own.

ment practices (some of which were rooted as far back as the Republican times). In doing this, my aim is neither to take sides in debates advocating sweeping historical generalisations (continuity *vs* rupture) in slave practices, nor to concoct a *pastiche* of selected quotations and anecdotes with/out weighing their contextual implications; more simply, I wish to underline how problematic and worthy of discussion some issues were perceived to be, as they continued to be disputed from contrasting points of view for centuries.

The topics outlined in both sections are brought together in the third part, which is the real focus of this short text. Here, the Domus del Ninfeo at Ostia is presented as a micro-historical case study of a high-class Roman dwelling where in/visibility was actively pursued. First built as a multi-storey building (*insula*), the structure was subsequently converted into an upmarket, ground-floor residence for a single household or *domus* which included, as was customary, blood relations, freed-persons (former slaves) and slaves. Whilst the individuation of slaves' spaces in the *insula* remains open to speculation, during the *domus* phase all three classes – the *dominus* with his extended family and guests, the freed-persons and the slaves – operated in distinct parts of the house, with varying degrees of visibility. Gaze craftsmanship and class distinction were thus central to the process of conversion from *insula* to *domus*.

Finally, since this text, in the spirit of BCDSS interdisciplinarity, is not specifically aimed at scholars or students in the classical field, I have not covered all available scholarship on Roman slavery in history and related fields of study (such as architecture, visual studies, epigraphy, sociology etc.), limiting myself to what is essential to the argument. Readers should also notice that in order to keep the text typographically uncluttered, the master will hereafter be identified as male (although there is ample evidence, both from literature and inscriptions, of women who owned or managed slaves). Unless otherwise specified, and for the same reason, freed-persons and slaves/servants (the term will be interchangeable) are also considered male.

2 Roman Slaves: Some Preliminary Questions

> […] I had lived among these people (i.e. the servants) for seventeen years and yet knew less about them than about strangers whom I had never seen: it had never once occurred to me that they had their affections, longing and sorrows just as I had.
>
> L. Tolstoy, *Happy Ever After*.

Slavery in Roman times was a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon that defies straightforward definitions.[2] Roman society was highly dependent on slavery: much of its economic fabric was based on the subjugation and exploitation of men, women and children. In a culture that emphasised political role over trade or manual labour (Max Weber's *homo politicus vs homo economicus* dichotomy), slaves were the gears that kept businesses going. The institution of slavery was deemed a necessary evil as well as one element of the order upon which society hinged.[3]

While some individuals were born into slavery (the *vernae*)[4], others passed from freedom into slavery: being captured in war, abandoned by their parents or kidnapped by bandits; as punishment for certain crimes or by self-enslavement to repay one's debts. In other words, and with a degree of simplification, slavery was not necessarily an inborn condition as much as the result of personal circumstances. Undoubtedly it was a flourishing business, as almost every Roman could afford to

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2 Comprehensive overviews on slavery can be found in Leonhard Schumacher, *Sklaverei in der Antike: Alltag und Schicksal der Unfreien* (München: C.H. Beck, 2001); Michael Zeuske, *Handbuch Geschichte der Sklaverei: Eine Globalgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013)*. For late antiquity, see Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, 275–425* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and the lemma "Sklave, Sklaverei, Sklavenrecht" in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum: Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1950–).

3 Charles R. Whittaker, "Do Theories of the Ancient City Matter?" in *Urban Society in Roman Italy*, ed. Tim J. Cornell and Kathryn Lomas (London: Routledge, 2005): esp. 10–12; for the "slave society" see Moses Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 1998 [1980]): 135–60.

4 For the *vernae* (the term can also identify a free person) see Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto, *Ex ancilla natus*: *Untersuchungen zu den 'hausgeborenen' Sklaven und Sklavinnen im Westen des römischen Kaiserreiches* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1994).

own at least one slave. Prices varied widely:[5] a slave's monetary value would depend on factors such as origin, age, sex, education, attitudes and behaviour. To an enlightened master such as Pomponius Atticus, his wide *familia* of highly educated, literate slaves was a valuable asset.[6] In profoundly different settings, however, slaves were considered merely expendable property. The kaleidoscope of personal circumstances in which the enslaved found themselves was as varied as can be imagined, ranging from powerful public servants to the abject condition of many prostitutes, such as the woman from Bulla Regia (modern-day Tunisia) who was described on the leaden collar she was made to wear as *adultera meretrix* ("Adultera the prostitute"): unsurprisingly, she had escaped at least once (the inscription on the collar urged to the reader to hold her; she was probably made to wear it as punishment for an earlier attempt at escape).[7] Notwithstanding its stubborn insistence on the over-simplistic concept of the slave as chattel, even Roman legislation acknowledged the impossibility of reducing slaves to a uniform category when it openly stated that food and garments should be dispensed according to their (different) ranks.[8] The differing degrees of intimacy that slaves enjoyed with their master's family added yet another hierarchical level, one invisible to the law but powerfully sensed within the household.[9]

Generally speaking, the slave's emotional landscape (his/her main anxiety) was dominated by fear. The use of coercive violence was as

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5 "Households with no slaves are rare in literature: even the poor peasant who staves off his hunger by mixing a vegetable mash in the pseudo-Virgilian poem *Moretum* (*App. Verg.* v. 117) has an aged African woman of servile origin": Jane F. Gardner and Thomas Wiedemann, *The Roman Household* (London: Routledge, 1991): 8.

6 Nep. *Att.* 13.

7 *ILS* 9455: *adultera meretrix: tene me quia fugivi de Bulla R(e)g(ia)* – "adulteress (and) prostitute: detain me as I have run from Bulla Regia". See Thomas A.J. McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004): 37; Trimble comments: "Adultera was either her assigned slave name or an adjective, which would change the sense to something like 'I am a slutty prostitute'": Jennifer Trimble, "The Zoninus Collar and the Archaeology of Roman Slavery," *American Journal of Archaeology* 120 (2016): 457.

8 *Dig.* 7. 1. 15. 2 (Ulp. 18 *Ad Sab.*) The law also acknowledged the existence of individuals with intermediate status: Fernanda Pirie, *Moral Dilemmas in Slave-Owning Societies: Evidence from Early Legal Texts* (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2021): 25.

9 John R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.–A.D. 250. Ritual, Space and Decoration* (London: University of California Press, 1991): 13.

normative as ubiquitous; so much connate to the slavery condition, reasoned Augustine, to mark out the behavioural difference between a free and a non-free.[10] Literary sources from the republican through to the imperial times, with their emphasis on brutality, discipline, threats and humiliation, provide an "extraordinary testimony to the use of violence as a mechanism of domination, […] allow[ing] us to explore [its] modes, strategies and limits […] in the slave system".[11] According to Harper, the anxiety experienced by slaves was so constitutive of their condition that in late antique literary sources there was no attribute more often associated with them than fear.[12]

Whilst the perspective of the slaves was fraught by the threat of (physical and/or psychological, suffered, feared or witnessed) violence, the masters' greatest source of anxiety was potential deception by his subjects – ranging from criminal actions such as theft and escape, to laziness and indolence at work. Slaves were considered untrustworthy agents, whether by nature or nurture, which made life under the same roof challenging. Acts of resistance did not need to take the form of open violence: Cato the Elder looked with apprehension even upon peaceful relationships between slaves, for fear that solidarity could form the basis for further action.[13] Meddling with the family's peace could also be perceived as a subversive act on part of the slaves, as in the case of Augustine's household.[14] It was the slaves' agency that was ultimately feared by the elite: their ability to think and act, to harbour feelings, to have memories and form bonds of affection and solidarity amongst themselves. The slaves' very humanity and its incompatibility with their legal status as chattels facilitated, over time, the implementation of a range of mitigation strate-

10 August. *Enarrat. Ps.* CXIX Teth. 62. Fear of punishment as the mark of the slave is also in *In Evang. Iohan.* 43.7.

11 Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*: 227.

12 Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*: 236.

13 Plut. *Cato* 21.4.

14 Gossiping slaves were instrumental in building tension between Monica (Augustine's mother) and her mother-in-law in the early stages of Monica's marriage, a situation that was addressed resorting to physical punishment: August. *Conf.* 9. 9. 20. See also Brent D. Shaw, "The Family in Late Antiquity: The Experience of Augustine," *Past & Present* 115, no. 1 (1987): 15.

gies to appease the elite's anxiety and curb potential risks.[15] The awareness that every slave might be a potential enemy is reflected in Livy's vivid quip that "every man would have an enemy in his own house"[16] or Seneca's pronouncement, "every slave is an enemy".[17]

[15] The topic of mitigation strategies is vast and can be touched on only cursorily. The slave willing to appease his master, whether of his own accord or for fear of violence, would seek to show obedience and co-operation. Among the tools at the masters' disposal was kindness (albeit paternalistic and hypocritical) and considerate measures like those discussed by Pliny (*Ep.* 8.16) and Seneca (*Ep. Luc.* 47), for which see Keith Bradley, "Seneca and Slavery," *Classica et mediaevalia* 37 (1986), and Brent D. Shaw, "The Divine Economy: Stoicism as Ideology," *Latomus* 44 (1985). Another pacifying practice was promoted by Columella, who employed his slaves according to their different skills: an attitude that supported the pretence of a human-to-human rather than human-to-chattel relationship (Col. *De Re Rust.*1.8.15). A crucial consequence of changes in slave legislation was the gradual removal from the power of the masters of both the ability to draw the boundaries between subjects and subjected, and the processes to control those boundaries. Scholars disagree over whether such modifications are indicative of benevolent attitudes or should be interpreted as little more than control mechanisms (see the contrasting views of Jérôme Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970]: 69–74, and Richard Gamauf, "*Cum aliter nulla domus tuta esse possit…*: Fear of Slaves and Roman Law," in *Fear of Slaves – Fear of Enslavement in the Ancient Mediterranean (Discourse, representations, practices). Actes des colloques du Groupe de recherche sur l'esclavage dans l'antiquité*, ed. Anastasia Serghido [Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2007]); according to Paul Veyne, *La vita privata nell'Impero romano* (Rome: Laterza, 2000): 62, legislative changes should be interpreted neither as a reflection of humanitarian concerns nor as pacifying mechanisms, but as an evolution of dominant morals. Proponents of the pacifying mechanism hold that it was the slaves' collective resentment that prompted legislators to enact measures in order to appease them (for example the first-century law banning masters from forcing their slaves to fight wild animals in the arena; the Claudian law forbidding the abandonment of sick slaves and so on), as well as, additionally, to alleviate the related concerns of the elite. Lawyers could apply a degree of interpretation if slaves were living in intolerable conditions, which could result in them being taken away from the master and resold. Roman legislation on slavery was thus an exercise in mediation between the needs of the elite and the threat – real, perceived or imagined – posed by the slaves: an institutionalised set of measures to curb the anxiety of the former and appease the latter. That the masters were progressively dispossessed of their power to inflict punishment and death, and that this power was instead transferred to the state, is indicative of the attempt at circumscribing the masters' powers (and perceived responsibility) by legal means.

[16] […] *suus cuique domi hostis*, Liv. 3.16.3 (trans. W.M. Roberts, 1912). Original Latin quotes are provided only when are deemed of importance for textual meaning. Unless otherwise specified, translations are by the author.

[17] […] *totidem hostes esse quot servos* (usually simplified in *tot hostes quot servi*, Sen. *Ep. Luc.* 47.5).

Unsurprisingly, slaves continued to be thought of as enemies in the household throughout late antiquity.[18]

Although violence and coercion were often employed systematically and even – at times – valued for their intrinsic educational aims,[19] the everyday reality of the relationship between a master and his slaves could be extremely varied. Literary sources show that it is possible to overcome the traditional narrative of the cruel master/subject *vs* the passive slave/object, and that a balanced appraisal – when possible – of the subtleties of the interrelation between the two helps us to move beyond static interpretations that obscure behavioural complexities. The recognition of micro-histories[20] is one of the approaches that the BCDSS actively promotes as a methodological tool to investigate asymmetrical dependencies.[21]

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18 Livy's motto is repeated by 5th century writer Macrobius (Macrob. *Sat.* I, 11, 13; Macrobius is then cited by 12th century John of Salisbury: Joh. Par. *Policr.* 8.12) along with the call for humanitarian treatment. So persistent is the link between slavery and enmity in popular perception, that the proverb has an almost word-to-word translation in modern English, German, French, Spanish and Italian: Augusto Arthaber, *Dizionario comparato di proverbi e modi proverbiali* (Milan: Hoepli, 1995): no. 1274. Other sources about the menacing presence within the household (for example fourth century Firmus of Caesarea, Themistius and the Pseudo-Ambrose) are quoted in Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*: 254–56.

19 The *paterfamilias* enforcing peace in the household through corporal punishment is discussed in Shaw, "The Family in Late Antiquity": 11–12.

20 For micro-histories as "an analysis of several smaller cases which together form the basis for a broader understanding of the issue at hand [… that] facilitates a 'history of relations' […], and emphasizes 'the centrality of historical agents, their practices and their strategies," see Julia Winnebeck, Ove Sutter Adrian Hermann, Christoph Antweiler and Stephan Conermann. "On Asymmetrical Dependency," *Concept Paper* 1, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (2021), https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/images/pdf-files/concept-papers/bcdss_cp_1-_on-asymmetrical-dependency.pdf [accessed 25.08.2022]: 6–7.

21 The reasons why an appraisal of slavery in Roman times must proceed through a collection of micro-histories, confined within discrete geographical and chronological boundaries, need little justification. The breadth of slave portraits in literature does not allow us to turn any given relationship of asymmetrical dependency into a paradigm: Sandra R. Joshel, "Slavery and Roman Literary Culture," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1, *The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Caldelli's study of selected funerary inscriptions from Ostia highlights the ambivalent relationship between master and slaves and the impossibility of reducing it to a universal parameter: Maria Letizia Caldelli, "Schiavi e padroni ad Ostia: alcune riflessioni su un rapporto sociale ambivalente," in *Esclaves et maîtres dans le monde romain: Expressions épigraphiques de*

Several factors, in fact, impacted on the slaves' living conditions. Of the slaves belonging to private owners, a distinction is often made between those living and working on the land and those in closer contact with their masters.[22] The latter are thought to have been in a much better position than the former: in a rural environment the slave could be reduced to being a tool in a production system completely alien to him, while the urban slave was more autonomous and may have been entrusted by the master with managing his business interests. An added benefit for the urban (or house) slave was a sense of belonging, of being a part of and witnessing the human dimension of a family, especially when he lived alongside his master.[23] Close contact, however, did not automatically translate into fair, almost family-like treatment. Recounting the story of Larcius Macedo, a cruel master savagely killed by his own slaves, Pliny contextualised Larcius' brutality in light of his family history, with a psychological nuance worth keeping in mind: he was cruel because either he did not really remember what it meant for his father to be a slave or, conversely, because he remembered it too well.[24]

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leurs relations, ed. Monique Dondin-Payre and Nicolas Tran (Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2016), http://books.openedition.org/efr/3226 [accessed 28.08.2024]. Evidence from Roman art is problematic: Clarke has called for case studies (or micro-histories) supported by contextual analysis, challenging the assumption that it is possible to identify a "freedman art, slave art or plebeian art": John R. Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans. Visual Representation and Non-Elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C.–A.D. 315* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006): 7.

22 Generally speaking, scholars believe that the *servi publici* (slaves belonging to the municipalities and employed in administrative offices) fared better than those in private hands: Alexander Weiss, *Sklave der Stadt: Untersuchungen zur öffentlichen Sklaverei in den Städten des römischen Reiches* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004): 175–79; Bronisław Sitek, "*Servus publicus* and *servus privatus* in Ancient Rome: Legal Status and Social Status," *Studia Iuridica Lublinensia* 30, no. 1 (2021). In terms of household slave-ownership, Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*: 40–42 differentiates between slaves belonging to 1) illustrious families, 2) elite families, 3) bourgeois families and 4) agricultural settings, noting that category no. 2) became much larger from the fourth century onwards. For late antiquity, see also Istvan Hahn, "Freie Arbeit und Sklavenarbeit in der spätantiken Stadt," *Annales Universitatis Scientiarum Budapestinensis, Sectio Historica* 3 (1961): 23–39 and Istvan Hahn, "Sklaven und Sklavenfrage im politischen Denken der Spätantike," *Klio* 58 (1976): 459–70.

23 Yvon Thébert, "Lo schiavo," in *L'uomo romano*, ed. Andrea Giardina (Roma: Editori Laterza, 1989).

24 Plin. *Ep.* 3.14: […] *superbus alioqui dominus et saevus, et qui servisse patrem suum parum, immo nimium meminisse.*

Another risk of co-habitation was the improper enmeshing between social classes, involving either (or both) *dominus* and *domina* and their slaves. Whilst within the strict setting of Roman society the contempt shown by the upper classes towards the slaves was as ubiquitous as proverbial, everyday interaction had the potential of overthrowing deep-set prejudices. The law dutifully sanctioned socially inappropriate sexual encounters – though with an unsurprising male-centred bias: whilst for the culprit wife such misdemeanours could translate into public shame, it was the husband's "prerogative to have sexual access to females other than his wife in his own household".[25] Liaisons between master and slaves could even put lives at risk (and for reasons outside the law): according to Tacitus, the motive for the murder of Pedanius Secundus by one of his slaves was either a refused act of *manumissio* or rivalry over the same boy slave.[26]

Irrespective of their personal circumstances, slaves shared a number of features which, ultimately, depended on their position before the law. The Roman legislative corpus seems to have been endlessly concerned with slaves, with the earliest mention in the Twelve Tables (fifth century BC).[27] This insistence betrays the difficulty of setting into a definite, universal norm the relationship between a proprietor and his property: the gap between the master's fantasy of owning a speaking tool (*instrumentum vocale*) and the unquestionable nature of the slave *as a human being* proved a strain for legislators.[28] The ethical justification for slavery posed a similar dilemma: the effort at conceptualising the existence of slavery in a form that exonerated the Romans, who thought of themselves as civilised people, from the moral responsibility

25 Shaw, "The Family in Late Antiquity": 29. For a discussion of sex as "a domestic service" in the context of the Christian household see Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*: 295.

26 Tac. *Ann.* 14.42–45.

27 Tiziana J. Chiusi, Johanna Filip-Froeschl and J. Michael Rainer, *Corpus der römischen Rechtsquellen zur antiken Sklaverei (CRRS)*, 10 vols. (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999–2005).

28 The slave as *instrumentum vocale* is a famous definition by Varro, *Rust.* 1. 17; for a challenge to this notion see Juan P. Lewis, "Did Varro Think that Slaves Were Talking Tools?" *Mnemosyne* 66 (2013). An example of slave-chattel in a legal discussion is Cic. *QRosc.*

attached to it, proved problematic.[29] Notwithstanding these issues, the institution of slavery was never called into question: juridical treatises insisted on the status of slaves as property, "an idea that the Romans maintained until their empire collapsed many centuries later".[30] Even the rise of Christianity did not substantially impact on the long-acquired distinction between free and enslaved: early Christian writers neither condemned nor forbade slaveholding but reiterated conventional Roman representations, attitudes and practices – including the use of violence.[31]

The most momentous implication of the slaves' legal status as chattel was the loss of personal and social identity: it was the master's prerogative to shape it according to his wish. Slaves were not allowed the proper, tripartite name that was prerogative of Roman citizens; they could not legally marry; were forbidden to enter into law, politics and the army; they could not own property (the *peculium* they were given could be eventually used to buy freedom, but legally speaking the *paterfamilias* was the sole owner of the whole *familia*'s property and could dispose of it as he desired). In fact, slaves had no legal rights whatsoever. They were at the mercy of their master, who might have no regard for their origin (and related cultural backgrounds) or existing family or friendship ties, being completely free, at any moment, to punish, sell, or move them, disrupting the social fabric they felt part of.[32]

Since a slave was at no point in control of his life, the fragile world surrounding him being in a state of endless flux, his existence attained neither safety nor certainty.[33] Becoming master of his own destiny and (re)gaining that humanity that the law denied them was the slave's

29 Pirie, *Moral Dilemmas*: 26.

30 Finley, *Ancient Slavery*: 145; Pirie, *Moral Dilemmas*: 22.

31 Pieter J.J. Botha, "Masters and Slaves in Early Christian Discourse," in *Slavery in the Late Antique World, 150–700,* ed. Chris Len De Wet, Maijastina Kahlos and Ville Vuolanto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022): 16–22.

32 On the slaves' social death see Sandra R. Joshel, "Roman Slavery and the Question of Race," *BlackPast.org,* 04.01.2009, https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/perspectives-global-african-history/roman-slavery-and-question-race/ [accessed 28.08.2024].

33 Thébert, "Lo schiavo": 152.

ultimate desire:[34] *manumissio* was, thus, both the most coveted reward and most powerful control mechanism in the master/slave relation. The prospect of enfranchisement transformed the slaves' horizon of expectations for themselves (as they would become freedmen) and even more for their children, who would acquire citizenship. Notwithstanding the stigma that might still linger after libertination (as testified, for example, by Horace),[35] there is overwhelming evidence for *manumissio* as the slaves' main goal.

Although conceptualising Roman slaves as a homogeneous class may be relatively (though not un-problematically) useful in legal terms, when we move on to their living conditions, self-determination, freedom of choice and prospects, it was only the relationship master/slave that determined the horizon of possibilities for each and every individual. Notwithstanding the difficulties, the focus must be on micro-history, on the investigation – wherever possible – of the personal rapport, the dynamics of negotiations and interrelations between the two agents, which are never reducible to one another. The critique of the meta-narrative of master/subject vs slave/object is based on the awareness that "mutual accountability and susceptibility" are not only foundational to all human interactions, but the very preconditions of an "archaeology of ethics".[36] Treating archaeological evidence not as a record of past events but as evidence for particular social practices is central to such an enquiry.[37]

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34 On the legal ways to gain personal freedom, see Ingomar Weiler, *Die Beendigung des Sklavenstatus im Altertum: Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Sozialgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2003).

35 Hor. *Sat.* I.6.65: "The more praise is due to him, and from me a greater degree of gratitude. As long as I am in my senses, I can never be ashamed of such a father as this [a freedman], and therefore shall not apologize [for my birth]" (trans. C. Smart 1863).

36 Henrietta L. Moore, "Ethics and Ontology: Why Agents and Agency Matters," in *Agency in Archaeology*, ed. Marcia-Anne Dobres and John Robb (London: Routledge, 2000); Stephanie Koerner, "Agency and Views beyond Meta-Narratives that Privatise Ethics and Globalise Indifference," in *Agency Uncovered: Archaeological Perspectives on Social Agency Power and Being Human*, ed. Andrew Gardner (London: Routledge, 2016).

37 John C. Barrett, "Fields of Discourse. Reconstituting a Social Archaeology," *Critique of Anthropology* 7 (1988): 6.

3 (In)Visible Bodies

Keeping slaves under control both in the private and public sphere was an exercise involving invisibilisation and marginalisation and related closely to issues of social distinction and public order. A few notes about external appearance with reference to body and clothing should suffice to exemplify how and why.

As John Clarke observed, the expectation that a person's being in all its constituents (status, position, age, wealth, gender) was mirrored in the outer appearance, made it an object of close scrutiny: "[F]or the elite as well as the non-elite, what you were depended on how people perceived you in public spaces. Everyone noted your dress, your walk, your gestures and your speech – and from these markers understood your place in society".[38] The interdependence between status and perception might undermine a construction of the self rooted in moral values (such as honesty, probity…), to the advantage of features deemed central to one's identity. The nature of this kind of identity construction was transversal, being applicable to both the upper and lower classes thanks to a shared system of signs: dress, walk, speech and gestures stood for one's status, and their use presupposed the explicit will to engage in an act of communication.

Control over one's own body was central to such an operation and remained a notable differentiator between free and slaves for centuries. The unblemished, untouched, unmarked body deprived of the telling signs of coercive violence was the ostensible mark of the free.[39] The brutality that was as normative as ubiquitous in many a master/slave relationship left unmistakable marks on the skin, as a slave in Plautus' *Asinaria* laments to his fellow servant.[40] Branding the undisciplined and fugitive slaves with a tattoo became eventually forbidden by law; the many references in literary sources to effective recipes for tat-

38 Clarke, *Art in the Lives*: 69. Physical integrity, as already said, was another crucial indicator.

39 Deborah Kamen, "A Corpus of Inscriptions: Representing Slave Marks in Antiquity," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 55 (2010).

40 Plaut. *Asin.* 3.2.

toos removal are telling of the degrading connotation attached to body marks.[41] Even everyday language bore witness of a punishment able to mark the body, possibly forever: the term *furcifer* (yoke-bearer), an insult reserved for slaves, cannot be conceptualised simply as a metaphor.

A horrific story such as the mass-punishment following the murder of the city prefect Pedanius Secundus (61 AD), with the execution of four hundred human beings and the roads lined by soldiers to prevent further public disruption (the relevant senatorial debate had already taken place against a backdrop of threats of insurrection)[42] is a powerful reminder of the boundless disposal of the *dominus* over the bodies of his chattels, and resonates with Michel Foucault's comment on eighteenth-century public executions:

> Although redress of the private injury occasioned by the offence must be proportionate, although the sequence must be equitable, the punishment is carried out in such a way as to give a spectacle not of measure, but of imbalance and excess; in this liturgy of punishment, there must be an emphatic affirmation of power and of its intrinsic superiority. And this superiority is not simply that of right, but that of the physical strength of the sovereign beating down upon the body of his adversary and mastering it: by breaking the law, the offender has touched the very person of the prince; and it is the prince […] who seizes upon the body of the condemned man and displays it marked, beaten, broken.[43]

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41 The classic starting point on tattooing in antiquity is Christopher P. Jones, "*Stigma*: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987): 147–50. More recently, see Mark Gustafson, "The Tattoo in the Later Roman Empire and Beyond," in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

42 The story is in Tac. *Ann.* 14, 42–45.

43 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1991): 49. An incident somewhat comparable to Pedanius' occurred in 105 AD, when the Senate split into three factions (acquittal, banishment and death) over the destiny of the freedmen of the consul Afranius Dexter, "who had come to a violent end, but it was not clear whether he had met his death at the hands of his own people, and, even supposing he had, no one knows whether they had foully murdered him, or whether he had commanded them to kill him" (Plin. Ep. 8.14.12, trans. J.B. Firth, 1900). The unclear circumstances surrounding Afranius' death spared the freedmen from death.

That these practices took place publicly, under everybody's eyes, betrays an awareness of the importance of the visual component in administering violence. Publicity served the double objective of chastising the culprit and warning future, potential culprits of their fate to come, with an all too obvious psychological outcome (the sobering effect touching all who witnessed, heard or had knowledge of the violence). The added value of visibility, far from being confined to high-profile cases such as Pedanius', was understood and implemented as an effective management tool in private contexts as well. Plutarch, for example, says of Cato the Elder that "he had those who were suspected of some capital offence brought to trial before all their fellow servants, and, if convicted, put to death".[44] Notwithstanding the ethical and moral drift imparted by Christianity, which condemned excessive punishment, there are examples such as Chrysostom's, who praised the rebound effect of fear on those whose behaviour the master wished to improve: acting in a manner similar to God, "when [masters] chastise one slave, they cause the rest to be more careful through fear".[45]

Similarly, Christian new ethics did not overturn the fundamental rights of the masters over the body of his chattel, continuing to make of it a battlefield in discourses over management, education and repression.[46] Thus, it should not be surprising that the Augustine who champions the whip as the only corrective measure to chastise slaves is the same who recounted of a civic notable whose main anxiety at the trial he was involved in was the defence of his bodily integrity from the dishonour of flogging.[47] Augustine's contemporary Chrysostom made clear that it was precisely the fear of bodily pain, of the countless lashings suffered on the skin, to persuade slaves to amend their behaviour in a simultane-

44 Plut. *Cato* 21.4 (trans. B. Perrin 1914).

45 Chrys. *Laz*. 3.7 (trans. F. Allen, 1869).

46 Kyle Harper, "La schiavitù nella tarda antichità e l'impatto del Cristianesimo," in *Spartaco. Schiavi e padroni a Roma*, ed. Claudio Parisi Presicce and Orietta Rossini (Rome: De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2017): 31.

47 For this letter to Alypius by Augustine (Ep. 9*, 1–2) see Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992): 52–53. For Augustine see also Richard Klein, *Die Sklaverei in der Sicht der Bischöfe Ambrosius und Augustinus* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1988).

ous unmaking of the slaves' body and world. De Wet's research on the view of some Church Fathers about the role of pain and fear in relation to slave punishment highlights once again that, far from being settled, slavery management remained a "pervasive" topic of discussion in early Christianity.[48]

The exemption from corporal punishment was strenuously defended by the upper-classes, even by its lowest members, as a non-negotiable privilege (the plea of the citizen beaten by rods who would only cry "*civis Romanus sum!*" is echoed, almost one hundred years later, by the question that tent-maker Paul of Tarsus asked his torturer: "are you allowed to flog a Roman citizen, and one who has not been judged yet?").[49] In a world in which visual discourse underpinned how an individual wished to relate to society, the untarnished body was a crucial, manifest mark of being masters of themselves. Class distinction was imprinted on and by the body.

How this body was clothed in the public sphere was equally a mark to flag. Cumbersome and awkward enough to require assistance with draping and advance preparation for the folds to fall properly whilst wearing it, the traditional toga was at once a statement of social condition (it could only be worn by citizens), age and position in the public administration. Extravagancies aside (imported textiles and dyes could attract only extremely wealthy purchasers), the toga was a claim of legitimacy at a glance. When Horace wanted to meet the married woman he fancied, he disguised himself by throwing away his citizen's *insignia* (the knight's ring and his clothes) and wore only the slaves' rough *lacerna*.[50] Notoriously over-the-top Trimalchio – the freedman anti-hero of Petronius' *Satyricon* – sought to construct his new identity by appropriating the visual code of the elite: a scarlet cloak, the napkin with the senato-

48 Chris Len De Wet, "The Punishment of Slaves in Early Christianity: The Views of Some Selected Church Fathers," *Acta Theologica* 36 (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v23i1S.13. Chrysostom is discussed by de Wet in *Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

49 Cic. *Verr.* II, 5, 162; Acts 22, 22–29.

50 Hor. *Sat.* II.7.51–54.

rial stripe, the signet ring,[51] all in the context of a luxurious banquet that deliberately mimicked the customs of the elite.[52] Petronius' literary fable was of course produced by and for the elite, but that slaves and freedmen attempted to affirm their dignity and cross the boundaries separating them from the free citizens is amply attested by funerary monuments. Allowing for the visual conveyance of those aspects that the deceased considered worthy of commemoration and foundational to his/her status and identity, monuments perpetuate the psychological pride in the momentous transition between chattel and human being. Not surprisingly, among Trimalchio's *desiderata* is for a grand monument with him sat on his official seat, wearing the toga, parading five golden rings and in the act of distributing coins to the public.[53] A telling story about the message embedded in clothing comes from Suetonius, who opened his almost completely lost treatise on rhetoricians with a fictional – but not entirely implausible, as he stated – case he found in a training textbook for prospective orators: some slave merchants who sought to avoid custom charges dressed a handsome and valuable young slave with the toga and the amulet (*bulla*) of the free-born – a fraud that easily (*facile*) escaped detection. Once in Rome the boy had to be taken to court, as he defended the claim that those were signs of his master's will to *manumissio*.[54] Christian writer Tertullian hands an important testimony that the *toga* was as much a piece of garment to keep warm and cover the body (toga comes from *tegere* or protect) as a sign revealing of the soul, when

51 On jewelry as status marker see Richard Hawley, "Lords of the Rings: Ring-Wearing, Status and Identity in the Age of Pliny the Elder," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, Supplement* 100 (2007).

52 Elke Stein-Hölkeskamp, *Das römische Gastmahl. Eine Kulturgeschichte* (München: C.H. Beck, 2005): 63.

53 Petron. *Sat.* LXXI.

54 Suet. *Rhet.* I. Another instance of deception is in Macrobius (Macrob. *Sat.* I, 11, 16) whereby a slave disguised himself wearing the master's ring (*anulus*) and garment (*vestis*) to be killed in his place. Macrobius remembers a further deception by disguise (*Sat.* I, XI, 35–41) taking place at the venerable time of the Gauls' sack (390 BC) by some women slaves who were rewarded with *manumission*, a dowry and permission to keep on using the attire they had once worn to confound the enemy (*ornatum quo tunc erant usae gestare*).

calling for its demise in favour of the humble *pallium* because it had – by his standards – come to signify moral decline.[55]

Strictly related to the elite's anxiety to be visually conspicuous was the attempt at invisibilising slaves in the public arena. This measure was considered so consequential as to involve legal discussions about its merits and deficiencies. Already at the time of Caesar it had become customary for slaves to be dressed like free citizens (the attire of the senatorial and equestrian rank being, of course, precluded).[56] Seneca reflected upon the inappropriate class confusion endorsed by this practice, recalling that "a proposal was once made in the Senate to distinguish slaves from free men by their dress: it was then discovered how dangerous it would be for our slaves to be able to count our numbers".[57] The psychological nuance is the anxiety of the upper class about a potentially risky situation deriving from the high number of slaves who, once made visible by a dress-code, would be able to recognise each other, co-operate and possibly create disorders more easily, and target non-slaves with higher efficacy.

The problem hinted at by Seneca (class distinction) was extremely important. The division into ranks was believed to go back to none other than the myth-historical founder of Rome, Romulus: it was foundational, etymologically speaking, to Roman society.[58] Class distinction was considered natural to Rome's social order, not an artificial construction: everyone's status was no more than the faithful reflection of innate differences between man and man (a denial of agency that was not much different in its effects – if not in its premises – from the implausible attempts at justifying slavery by claiming it was an imported practice).[59] The watertight partition that separated humans from semi-humans had to be, in all respects, above and beyond suspicion.[60]

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55 See the discussion in Caroline Vout, "The Myth of the Toga: Understanding the History of Roman Dress," *Greece & Rome* 43, 2 (1996).
56 App. *BCiv.* II.120.
57 Sen. *De Clem.* 24 (trans. A. Stuart, 1900).
58 See for example Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* II, 8, 1–3 or Plut. *Rom.* 13.
59 Pirie, *Moral Dilemmas*: 26.
60 Veyne, *La vita privata*: 51.

External appearance was thus analogous to a complex communication system entailing a range of messages that were presented, understood and reacted upon.[61] Augustus' attempt to force the citizens to wear the toga in the Forum and surroundings, whilst illustrative of the relaxed attitude later noted by Seneca, stresses the importance that was attached to the appropriate dress code in the public arena.[62] Seneca's dilemma works on the conflicting anxieties of the elite (the desire for self-enhancement and personal safety), or how to be visually preeminent without turning into potential targets. The want of a solution underpinned a renewed attempt at colour-coding slaves in late antiquity, under Alexander Severus:

> [I]t was his [the Emperor's] intention to assign a peculiar type of clothing to each imperial staff, not only to the various ranks – in order that they might be distinguished by their garments – but also to the slaves as a class – that they might be easily recognized when among the populace and held in check in case of disorder, and also that they might be prevented from mingling with the free-born. This measure, however, was regarded with disapproval by Ulpian and Paulus, who declared that it would cause much brawling in case the men were at all quick to quarrel. Thereupon it was held to be sufficient to make a distinction between Roman knights and senators by means of the width of the purple stripe.[63]

The solution arrived at was unsatisfactory because it left the need for an ostensible class distinction unresolved: the different width of the purple

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61 Visual code in clothing went beyond the 'mere' statement of status and identity and entered the realm of intentionality: military cloaks were used in response to external threats; mourning could be marked by smearing clothes with ash and dirt or "wearing clothes more appropriate to people of a lower rank" (Aerynn Dighton, "Mutatio Vestis: Clothing and Political Protest in the Late Roman Republic," *Phoenix* 71, no. 3–4 [2017]: 345, and sources quoted within). Ják Elsner highlights how marked is the visual denotation of class when slaves are involved, as their social status is defined visually by nudity (not to be confused, of course, with divine or heroic nudity): *The Art of the Roman Empire AD 100–450* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 87–88.

62 Suet. *Aug.* 40.5.

63 S.H.A. *Alex. Sev.* 27.1–3 (trans. D. Magie, 1924).

stripe had, after all, already been in place. More importantly, it did not do anything for the most crucial distinction that was to be addressed: that between free and enslaved. The conundrum remained unsolved: the so-much-coveted visibility might indeed be a trap.

Moving from public to private sphere, the usual concerns for in/visibility underpinned efforts at creating separate spaces for different social classes in the intimacy of the family house. The next section will present the Domus del Ninfeo at Ostia as a mansion that embodied the desire for self-exaltation and class distinction of its *dominus*, with special attention to the relationship between ideas about the body and the shape and experience of domestic space.

4 The Domus del Ninfeo at Ostia

4.1 The Town

The town of Ostia enjoyed a special, unique relationship with the city of Rome since its foundation. It was Rome's first colony (legendarily attributed to king Ancus Marcius but more likely a venture of the fourth century BC), and after embedding the early role of strategic military outpost on the mouth of the river Tiber, it successfully turned into the repository of goods that from every corner of the Mediterranean were shipped to the City. Nearby harbour facilities supplementing the small river dock were crucial to this development: a first, partially unsuccessful attempt under Claudius was followed by the magnificent hexagonal structure implemented by Trajan that went to be known as Portus. Second century AD Ostia was a successful and thriving commercial town, with streets lined by apartment blocks (*insulae*), elegant infrastructures serving the needs of its residents and a large number of commercial premises (the often-repeated estimate in excess of eight hundred must be only a fraction of the total amount).[64]

[64] The earliest account of Ostian shops is by Giancarla Girri, *La taberna nel quadro urbanistico e sociale di Ostia* (Rome: L'"Erma" di Bretschneider, 1956); more recently see Janet DeLaine, "The Commercial Landscape of Ostia," in *Roman Working Lives and*

The town must have felt the repercussions of challenges such as the crisis of the third century and the establishment of Portus as *Civitas Flavia Constantiniana* (314 AD) – sealing the independence of Ostia from its harbour facility of Portus – although a period of (albeit transient) prosperity followed throughout the fourth century. A defined picture of Ostia from the fifth century onwards is yet to come notwithstanding promising, recent investigations that are shedding light on selected areas of the town. Our understanding of Ostia's late history, in fact, is still impacted by the ideologically-motivated excavations of the 1940s (known as E42), when more than two thirds of the town were abruptly brought to light and restored, often with little supporting documentation, in an attempt at displaying an urban model of roman-ness.[65] The vestiges of Ostia's long late antiquity are among the high-profile victims of the E42; it is thanks to archaeological investigations such as those by Danner, David, Gering, Heinzelmann, Lavan and Pavolini (to name a few) that we are starting to understand some of its dynamics.[66] There

Urban Living, ed. Ardle MacMahon and Jennifer Price (Oxford: Oxbow, 2005); Miko Flohr, "Tabernae and Commercial Investment Along the Western decumanus in Ostia," in *Ostia Antica. Nouvelles études et recherches sur les quartiers occidentaux de la cité*, ed. Claire De Ruyt, Thomas Morard and Françoise Van Haeperen (Brussels: Belgisch Historisch Instituut te Rome, 2018).

65 Valnea S.M. Scrinari, "Gli scavi di Ostia e l'E42," in *E42. Utopia e scenario del regime 2. Urbanistica, architettura, arte e decorazione*, ed. Maurizio Calvesi, Enrico Guidoni and Simonetta Lux (Venezia: Marsilio, 1987); Massimiliano David, Gian Piero Milani, Roberto Cassanelli, "Aerial Ostia Before and After E42," *Archeomatica*, special issue – supplement 3 (2017).

66 Marcel Danner, *Wohnkultur im spätantiken Ostia* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2017); among the many contributions by David see at least Massimiliano David, Mauro Carinci, Stella Maria Graziano, Stefano De Togni, Angelo Pellegrino and Marcello Turci, "Nuovi dati e argomenti per Ostia tardoantica dal Progetto Ostia Marina," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome – Antiquité (MEFRA)* 126 (2014); Axel Gering, *Ostias vergessene Spätantike: Eine urbanistische Deutung zur Bewältigung von Verfall* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2018); Heinzelmann's longstanding research on the unexcavated areas of the town has provided crucial evidence for its life throughout the centuries: a first summary is Michael Heinzelmann, *Ostia I. Forma Urbis Ostiae. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung der Hafenstadt Roms von der Zeit der Republik bis ins frühe Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 2021); Luke Lavan, "Public Space in Late Antique Ostia: Excavation and Survey in 2008–2011," *American Journal of Archaeology* 116, no. 4 (2012); Carlo Pavolini, "La trasformazione del ruolo di Ostia nel III sec. d.C.," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome – Antiquité (MEFRA)* 114, no. 1 (2002), http://www.persee.fr/doc/mefr_0223-5102_2002_num_114_1_10699 [accessed 28.08.2024]; Carlo Pavolini, "Per un riesame

are large-scale refurbishment projects (much more common than new enterprises) and care is taken of some areas within the town; the luxury of the *domus*-style houses, after all, is an original aspect of the third and fourth centuries. However, there are also undisputable signs of impoverishment, contraction and economic recession: rupture and continuity coexisted until, in the sixth century, a progressive and unstoppable decline marked the long end of the town (the site will be definitely abandoned in the ninth century).[67]

The wealth of historical studies on Ostia has highlighted some features worthy of notice about slavery and slave condition.[68] For example, whilst the uncommon proportion between urban and rural slaves may be explained by a surrounding territory unsuitable for farming, the amount of *servi publici* or *familia Caesaris* (the highest number outside Rome, in fact) was due to the need of maintaining a healthy administrative system for the provision of the capital. As proved by an extraordinary inscription listing eighty-one members of the *familia* with a space left for a (prospective) family name in case of *manumissio* (CIL XIV 255, unfortunately lost), the outlook of the public slaves of Ostia seems to have been geared towards the real possibility of freedom.[69] As for the

del problema di Ostia nella tarda antichità: indice degli argomenti," in *Le regole del gioco. Tracce, archeologi, racconti. Studi in onore di Clementina Panella*, ed. Antonio F. Ferrandes and Giacomo Pardini (Rome: Quasar, 2016).

67 The most comprehensive accounts of Ostia's history are still those of Calza (Guido Calza et al., *Scavi di Ostia I. Topografia generale* [Rome: La Libreria dello Stato, 1953]) and Meiggs (Russell Meiggs, *Roman Ostia* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973]); indispensable up-dates are Carlo Pavolini, "A Survey of Excavations and Studies on Ostia (2004–2014)," *Journal of Roman Studies* 106 (2016) and Janet DeLaine, "Ostia," in *A Companion to Roman Italy*, ed. Alison E. Cooley (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118993125.ch21

68 The close interest by the authority even in time of stress, exceptional administrative functions and large-scale building projects sponsored by the central power we observe at Ostia, should be understood as a mirror of the special role it performed for Rome; one that was not replicated elsewhere. Among Bruun's articles on the administration of Ostia see his 2002 contribution with appraisal of past research: Christer Bruun, "L'amministrazione imperiale di Ostia e Portus," in *Ostia e Portus nelle loro relazioni con Roma*, ed. Christer Bruun and Fausto Zevi (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2002).

69 Mireille Cébeillac-Gervasoni, Maria Letizia Caldelli and Fausto Zevi, *Epigrafia Latina. Ostia: cento iscrizioni in contesto* (Rome: Quasar, 2006): 173–75.

former slaves (or freedmen) from influential families,[70] many went to fill the ranks of the college of the *seviri Augustales*: a priesthood for the imperial cult whose prestige was second only to the *ordo decurionum* (the council of the town, made by free members). From Ostia comes one of the infamous collars worn by runaway slaves (among the over forty known to us) with the inscription "hold me so that I do not run away. I am running away"; instruments of coercion that became popular after branding and tattooing were forbidden in the fourth century AD.[71] It may also be interesting to notice that despite being the last stocking post for all sorts of merchandise to be shipped to Rome, at Ostia there are no traces of a slave-market.

Whilst the individuation of slave areas in the apartment-blocks remains challenging, as will be pointed out, the late-antique *domus*-style houses show a higher potential; and yet, as Bruun noted, not a single *ergastulum* (or private prison) has been found.[72] It is against this background that we will be discussing the Domus del Ninfeo (III, VI, 1–3).

4.2 General Overview of the Domus del Ninfeo

The Domus del Ninfeo (III, VI, 1–3) stands along the western section of the *decumanus maximus* by the sea-gate of Porta Marina, in a quarter that

70 Olli Salomies, "Prominent Families of Ostia," in *Life and Death in a Multicultural Harbour City: Ostia Antica from the Republic through Late Antiquity*, ed. Arja Karivieri (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2020).

71 *Tene me ne fugia(m) fugio.* Sanna Joska and Ville Vuolanto, "Slavery in the Roman World," in *Life and Death in a Multicultural Harbour City: Ostia Antica from the Republic through Late Antiquity*, ed. Arja Karivieri (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2020): 243; Trimble, "The Zoninus Collar."

72 Christer Bruun, "La schiavitù a Ostia," in *Spartaco. Schiavi e padroni a Roma*, ed. Claudio Parisi Presicce and Orietta Rossini (Rome: De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2017): 134–37. The absence of *ergastula* has been noted for both houses and commercial establishments: Carlo Pavolini, *La vita quotidiana ad Ostia* (Roma: Laterza, 1986): 40. See also Christer Bruun, "La *familia publica* di Ostia antica," in *Epigrafia 2006. Atti della XIVe rencontre sur l'epigraphie in onore di Silvio Panciera con altri contributi di colleghi, allievi e collaboratori*, ed. Maria Letizia Caldelli, Gian Luca Gregori and Silvia Orlandi (Rome: Quasar, 2008).

enjoyed apparent prosperity well into late antiquity (fig. 1).[73] Originally erected as an attractive multi-storey apartment block around 123–124 AD, it was converted into a large, single-storey residence serving one family (*domus*) no earlier than the third century.[74] The house was still inhabited throughout the fourth century.[75]

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73 The long-standing practice of treating the stretch of the *decumanus* facing the Domus del Ninfeo as running east-west, had a rebound effect on the conventional orientation I adopted for the building and its surroundings. Thus, the façade on the *decumanus* will be treated as a south wall, and all other walls and partitions are dealt with accordingly. As briefly explained in Alessandra Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo at Ostia (III, VI, 1–3). Structure, Function and Social Context* (Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2018): 3, and references within, the label "late antiquity" has been varily applied to the history of the town from the third to the ninth centuries – and various sub-periods within that span. Among the evidence for the late-antique vitality of the sea-side quarter is the refurbishment of thermal complexes, the construction of new baths, signs of traffic along the Via Severiana, the existence of the late antique *domus*-style houses and various hints in literary and epigraphical sources: bibliographical references can be found in Carlo Pavolini, "A Survey of Excavations."

74 Dispensing with the *querelle* about the meaning of the term *insula* – for which one can briefly refer to James C. Anderson, *Roman Architecture and Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997): 306 – I will employ it for a multi-storey (thus exploiting the vertical dimension) building with either shops or apartments or a combination of both on the ground floor and private flats on the upper floors. *Domus* is here intended as a dwelling exploiting mainly the horizontal dimension; generally speaking the *domus*-style house is a single (extended) family residence organized around one or more open spaces. Ostia's evidence of *domus* is meagre compared to Pompeii, and limited to two periods: approximately from the second century BC to end of the first century AD, and from the third century AD onwards.

75 Becatti published the first account of these houses in 1948; a monographic version of his two articles dates to 1949: Giovanni Becatti, *Case ostiensi del tardo impero* (Rome: La Libreria dello Stato, 1949). Other accounts followed, among them: Theresa L. Heres, *Paries. A Proposal for a Dating System of Late-Antique Masonry Structures in Rome and Ostia (A.D. 235–600)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982); Carlo Pavolini, "Un gruppo di ricche case ostiensi del tardo impero: trasformazioni architettoniche e cambiamenti sociali," in *Marmoribus vestita. Miscellanea in onore di Federico Guidobaldi*, ed. Olof Brandt and Philippe Pergola (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2011); Carlo Pavolini, "I costruttori delle domus tardoantiche di Ostia: stato degli studi e nuove ipotesi," *Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 92 (2020). The recent studies on late antique Ostian houses by Danner are especially important: Marcel Danner, Emanuela Spagnoli and Paola Vivacqua, "Untersuchungen zur Chronologie der spätantiken Wohnhäuser in Ostia – Vorbericht zu einem Kurzprojekt im Oktober 2012," *Kölner und Bonner Archaeologica* 3 (2013); Marcel Danner, "Wege ins Haus – Wege im Haus. Zur Gestaltung des Weges in spätantiken Häusern am Beispiel von Ostia," in *Die Architektur des Weges. Gestaltete Bewegung im gebauten Raum*, ed. Dietmar Kurapkat, Peter I. Schneider and Ulrike Wulf-Rheidt (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2014); the comprehensive monograph *Wohnkultur im spätantiken Ostia*, and

Among the Ostian late-antique *domus*-style houses, the Domus del Ninfeo lends to some interesting observations. Although these dwellings share a number of features in terms of decorative patterns and architectural trends (i.e. a renewed focus on water displays, the use of elements such as columns, apsidal rooms, the optional presence of heated rooms, a progressive rigidity in the organisation of the internal space, the specialisation of routes), they should not be considered as variants of a supposed, untraceable ideal model, but be studied individually: in fact, they were erected within the constraints of the more ancient buildings they replaced, and not as unimpeded structures.[76] Since there is enough standing evidence for both Hadrianic and late-antique phases, the Domus del Ninfeo allows to analyse changes in the use of the internal space diachronically, with obvious reverberations on discourses over the master/slave relationship. Additionally, this is the only Ostian mansion where a dedicated slave area has been detected.[77]

"Approvvigionamento e messa in scena dell'acqua nelle case tardo antiche: il caso di Ostia Antica, Regioni III e IV," in *Ostia Antica. Nouvelles études et recherches sur les quartiers occidentaux de la cité*, ed. Claire De Ruyt, Thomas Morard and Françoise Van Haeperen (Brussels: Belgisch Historisch Instituut te Rome, 2018). For the late antique chronology of the Domus del Ninfeo (fourth century, possibly stretching into the fifth), see Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 98–99, and references within.

76 The only exception being the Domus dei Pesci. See Carlo Pavolini, "Rileggendo le *domus* delle Colonne e dei Pesci," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome – Antiquité (MEFRA)* 126, no. 1 (2014), https://journals.openedition.org/mefra/1989 [accessed 28.08.2024].

77 Single rooms (as opposed to areas/quarters) for servants have been presented by Eugenia Salza Prina Ricotti, "Cucine e quartieri servili in epoca romana," *Rendiconti. Atti della Pontificia accademia romana di archeologia*, 51–52 (1978–1980).

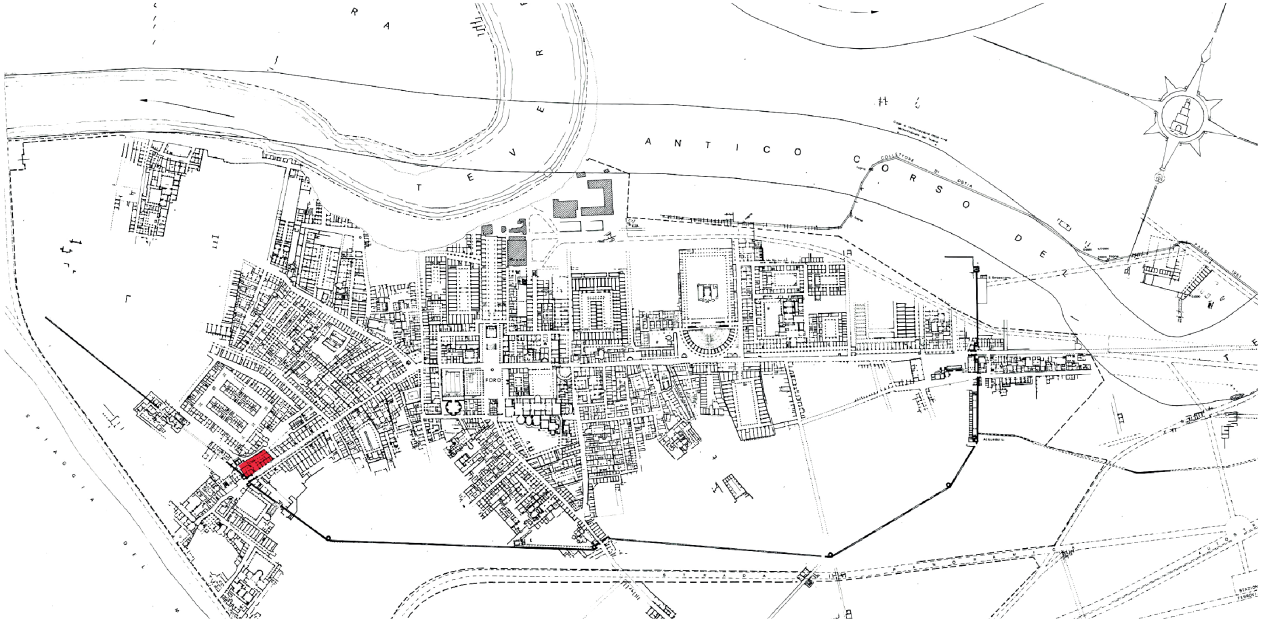

Fig. 1: Location of the Domus del Ninfeo, in red
(author after A.S.A.O., reproduced with permission of BAR Publishing).

Within the life-time of the building, my study identified three structural macro-phases, which must be understood as no more than the conventional grouping of a series of interventions (at times correlated, at times disjointed) that illustrate the complexity of the building's life: Hadrianic (I), intermediate (II) and late-antique (III).[78] The Hadrianic phase (itself subdivided into three sub-phases) entailed the construction of the building as an *insula* with shops facing the *decumanus*, two apartments and adjoining green areas at the back, and (two or three) upper floors with further apartments above.[79] Whilst the intermediate phase saw a series of relatively minor modifications, in late antiquity there was a radical and thorough redevelopment following the acquisition of the whole building by a single proprietor. He demolished the upper floors almost completely, reserving a portion on the western side for the sole use of his close family and guests, and converting one of the apartments into a luxury showcase of wealth. Multi-coloured *opus-sectile* floors and marble slabs on the walls, columns, a charming *nymphaeum* and a small marble fountain created a secluded yet lavish retreat for the *dominus* and his high-status guests. The other apartment, which was smaller and had been left apparently untouched since the second century apart from a couple of slight modifications, served his *familia*: the servants. With his efforts to set up class separation in bricks and mortar, the late-antique owner of the Domus del Ninfeo calls to mind Vitruvius' concern that houses should match the character and means of those who inhabit them, particularly those who hold a political or professional position.[80]

As the Domus del Ninfeo is largely a product of the E42 excavation, it is impossible to underestimate the impact this had on the structure and on our possibilities to reach plausible historical reconstructions. The evidence for material records in domestic contexts as an aid to room

78 There is evidence for pre-second century buildings in the area where the Domus would be erected. This pre-Hadrianic phase and the intermediate phase will not be discussed here because of their fragmentary nature (see Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 25–26 and 68–71).

79 For a discussion on the division of the upper floors see Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 49–52.

80 Vitr. *De Arch.* I. 2. 9. See also Marden Fitzpatrick Nichols, *Author and Audience in Vitruvius' De architectura* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 83–129.

identification is a case in point. Any discussion involving the Domus del Ninfeo must exclude movable records: Becatti's implausible statement that "there were no archaeological finds during the excavation [of the *domus*]" can only be explained with the rushed excavation of the early 1940s,[81] leaving us with no alternative but to rely only on the remaining architectural evidence. Many other building complexes at Ostia share the same *status quo*. Elsewhere, the perspective may be entirely different: in the Insula of the Menander at Pompeii, for example, the array of artefacts recorded during the excavations has been thoroughly analysed by Allison, allowing for a study of their distribution and contextualisation. One important *caveat* of her results addresses the danger of assigning the artefacts with fixed labels and functions,[82] confining them to specific activities and/or treating them as "evidence" for the identification of spaces or the presence of slaves[83] (or any other member of the household).

Another significant research topic in domestic architecture, and one that can be successfully investigated in our complex, involves the social function of space and decoration, and the understanding of their potential impact on guests and visitors.[84] Vitruvius' comment about *propria* and *communia* spaces within the Roman house (which do not map onto

81 Becatti, *Case ostiensi*: 13. It is unclear whether some scattered finds came from the shops in front (Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 9).

82 Penelope M. Allison, *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii*, vol. 3, *The Finds. A Contextual Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006). See also Penelope M. Allison, "Labels for Ladles: Interpreting the Material Culture of Roman Households," in *The Archaeology of Household Activities*, ed. Penelope M. Allison (London: Routledge, 1999).

83 The difficulty in identifying slave quarters from archaeological remains has been pointed out, among others, by Michele George, "Servus and Domus: The Slave in the Roman House," in *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*, ed. Ray Laurence and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1997): 16–19.

84 See for example Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Social Structure of the Roman House," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 56 (1988); Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Annapaola Zaccaria Ruggiu, *Spazio privato e spazio pubblico nella città romana* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1995); Jens-Arne Dickmann, *Domus frequentata. Anspruchsvolles Wohnen im pompejanischen Stadthaus* (Munich: Pfeil, 1999); Kaius Tuori and Laura Nissin, *Public and Private in the Roman House and Society* (Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2015).

modern notions of private and public) points to a distinction between the two, insofar as we do not superimpose current standards of perception but bear in mind that the "contrast is not between space for visitors and space for family, but between space for uninvited and invited visitors".[85] Accordingly, the Roman house lacks the separation between spaces for work and spaces for leisure: houses were designed for both, argues Griffith, "with a time but not necessarily a space for each".[86] The example of the *cubiculum* for entertaining friends no doubt goes beyond our traditional perspective about the privacy appropriate for a bedroom.[87] The dichotomy public/private has also to be understood within the context of gradations of interiors in ancient dwellings. Thresholds are often absent from the archaeological record, and not only that: the whole partitioning system at work in Roman houses – doors, fixed or movable wooden partitions and curtains – was made of perishable materials and is no longer there for us to see. These partitions marked liminal areas, off-limit spaces, and served to direct the visitors' gaze: the rhetoric of the transparent Roman house has to be set against the desire of its owner who could disclose or hide as much as he wished. As "living partitions", slaves were also part of this choreography: according to Clarke, they "often functioned like doors […] forming living buffers between the visitors and the members of the household".[88] That this hierarchy of boundaries has completely disappeared is yet another important element we need to bear in mind.

4.3 The Hadrianic Phase

The division of the ground floor in the Hadrianic phase of the building complex was very efficient and can be conceptualized according to both

85 Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society*: 44. The same observation is in Wallace-Hadrill, "The Social Structure of the Roman House": 79.

86 Alison B. Griffith, "Reappraising the Roman House," *Scholia* 13 (2004): 137.

87 Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society*: 17 and 58. For sleeping arrangements: Laura Nissin, *Roman Sleep. Sleeping areas and Sleeping Arrangements in the Roman House* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2016).

88 Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*: 13.

ranges and blocks; the ranges defining the function of the units (commercial, living, green/open) and the blocks emphasising the difference in size (the big and the small apartments and annexed units, plus a narrow block in the middle which functioned as internal connector) (fig. 2 and 3).

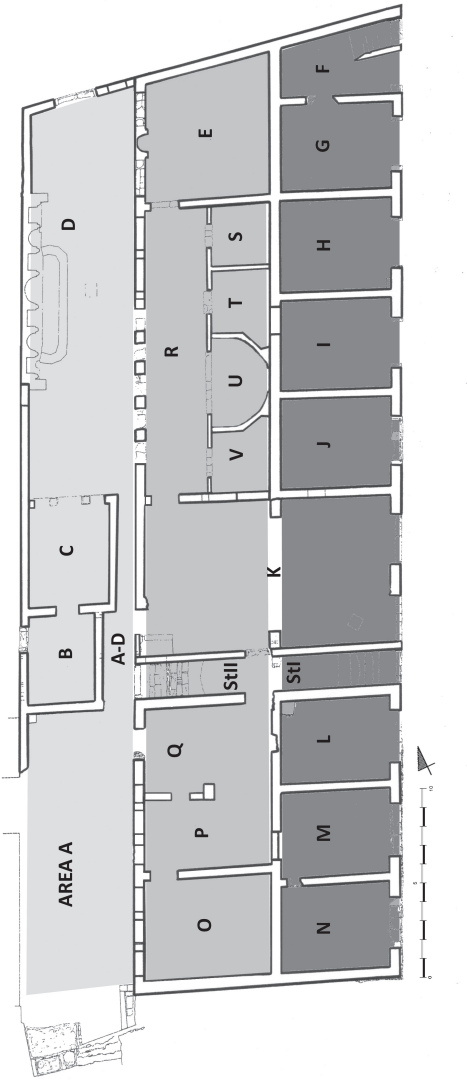

Fig. 2: The range division in the second century Domus del Ninfeo. From top to bottom: open areas (light grey), apartments (medium grey), shops facing the *decumanus* (dark grey) (author).

Fig. 3: Articulation of the second century Domus del Ninfeo in three blocks: small and large apartments (dark grey), distributive area separating the two (light grey). Room B and C belong to the late antique (*domus*) phase; in the second century here was a corridor linking the front and back of the complex (author).

Along the front of the complex, facing the *decumanus maximus*, was a row of nine shops and a set of stairs to access the apartments above them (St I). The shops or *tabernae* were simple rectangular spaces with a wide entrance on the main road; all of them hosted a set of steps for a ladder

leading to the internal mezzanine, which is generally thought to have been occupied by those who cared for the shop. A different situation (and one not particularly common) is seen in shop F with its flight of steps leading from the *decumanus* to the mezzanine: here, the shopkeeper was not the same person as the one living above.[89] It has been noted that the *tabernae* of III, VI, 1–3 are much smaller compared to those in the immediate surroundings, and this is likely to have mirrored the clientele that was able to afford them and the spread of different kinds of businesses along this busy stretch of the *decumanus*.[90]

At the back of our shops lay the ground-floor apartments: a large one on the eastern side (occupying part of K and rooms R, E, V, U, T and S) and a smaller one on the western side (O, P and Q). Both enjoyed control over a shop facing the main road: I for the large apartment, M for the other. The three upper floors housed apartments as well, but there is no evidence over their internal layout.

The open areas at the back (area A and C + D) were not solely the privilege of those living in the ground-floor apartments but a commodity to be enjoyed by all those living in the complex.[91] As the frenzied building activity of the second century lined the roads with house blocks to cater for the demand for accommodation, the facility for rest and leisure afforded by a private garden must have been a rare commodity at the disposal of a few, privileged people who could pay for it.[92] The open areas must have thus acted as a differentiator from the majority of other *insulae* of the town.

It is in multi-storey complexes similar to ours that the majority of Ostians lived: the streets of the town, at least from the second century AD onwards, became dominated by *insulae* with commercial or dwelling

89 Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 67–68.

90 Flohr, "Tabernae and Commercial Investment": 151–52. It is also true, however, that the ground floors of the surrounding complexes are occupied solely by commercial premises, whilst the core of our *insula* are the living premises – and everything else has been arranged around them.

91 Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 59–67.

92 Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 105. The same observation for the Insula di Giove e Ganimede (I, IV, 2) is in Janet DeLaine, "High Status *Insula* Apartments in Early Imperial Ostia: a Reading," *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome* 58 (1999): 184.

units on the ground floor and apartments on the upper floors. The architectural model of the *insula*, with its internal flexibility and adaptability, is suggestive of the assortment of social and economic classes that could be accommodated in a single structure:[93] the typological variety of dwellings (ranging from luxurious *medianum*-type flats to more humble apartments of two or three rooms) ensured that a wide range of owners or tenants could be catered for.

From the most to the least prestigious, our *insula* featured five different types of accommodation: the large eastern apartment (I), the small western apartment (II), the upper-floors apartments (III), the independent unit above shop F (IV) and the mezzanines within the shops (V). The overall dimension of the large apartment (approx. 200 m^2) would fit DeLaine's criteria for a unit at the upper end of the rental market, designed to target a specific class of businessmen (perhaps gaining income from several shops within the town, on top of shop I). The small apartment (100 m^2) stands at a lower level, but the engagement in commerce is once again attested by the connection with a shop. As per the "rule of the vertical zoning" in Roman houses (the poorer the dweller, the higher in the structure his flat was), the inhabitants of the upper floor apartments should have been of lesser means. At the bottom of the scale were those living in the units above the shops, whether independent (IV) or mezzanines (V): literary sources shedding light on the poverty of the *tabernarii* and their dwellings are consistent throughout the centuries.[94]

The apartment on the eastern side was likely organised as a *medianum*-type dwelling (fig. 4). There are many variants on the basic scheme, but all such flats feature an elongated room facing windows (the *medianum* itself) flanked by two major rooms and connected to other,

[93] Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 101–3, and bibliography quoted within; Axel Gering, "Habiter a Ostie: la fonction et l'histoire de l'espace 'prive'," in *Ostia, port et porte de la Rome antique*, ed. Jean-Paul Descoeudres (Genève: Musée Rath, 2001).

[94] An overview of literary sources up to late antiquity is in Alessandra Pompili, "Qualche nota sul termine *taberna*," *Appunti Romani di Filologia* 3 (2001). For rental market and vertical zoning see the classic Bruce Woodward Frier, "The Rental Market in Early Imperial Rome," *Journal of Roman Studies* 67 (1977); for the vertical zoning in our *insula* see Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 101–3 (with previous bibliography).

smaller rooms at its back.[95] In our apartment the *medianum* is flanked by the entrance room and room E; four additional, smaller rooms are accessible from the *medianum*, one of which gives access to shop I. A distinctive feature of this apartment is the unusual permeability of the rooms: only room E, the largest of the complex and certainly reserved for the master and his guests, was mono-directional; all others featured a minimum of two access points. This arrangement, with its apparent lack of transparency (no hidden spaces, no predetermined routes that we can detect from the remains), makes it difficult to shed light on the relationship between master and slaves and the degree of compartmentalisation the latter was subject to. Indeed, as DeLaine has noted, the potential for segregation in the customary *medianum*-apartment is lacking;[96] this is even more so in our instance, where all rooms are linked with the *medianum* and at least another one (room 3 being the most permeable space, with four possible access points). Whilst research into the *medianum*-apartment at Ostia reveals that such a freedom of circulation must have been an attractive feature for the potential buyer, it further undermines static approaches to room labels and functions. The lack of architectural perspicuity should not, however, lend to the impression that all rooms were accessible to anybody, or that the slaves were granted indiscriminate access: as Augustine's *Confessions* make clear, "although there is a single dwelling (*habitaculum*) and one family (*una familia*), not everyone is allowed to go everywhere in it".[97] This architectural form, where internal routes could be altered by means of doors, curtains or other light partitions at the master's discretion, without a pre-constituted emphasis on channel views or marginalised areas, stands in no contrast to the

[95] On the architecture of the *medianum* see Gustav Hermansen, "The *medianum* and the Roman Apartment," *Phoenix* 24 (1970); Gustav Hermansen, *Ostia. Aspects of Roman City Life* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1982): 18–25. More recently, see Axel Gering, "Medianum-Apartments: Konzepte von Wohnen in der Insula im 2. Jh. n. Chr.," *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome* 58 (1999); DeLaine, "High Status *Insula* Apartments," and "Designing for a Market: 'Medianum' Apartments at Ostia," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 17 (2004).

[96] DeLaine, "Designing for a Market": 161.

[97] Shaw, "The Family in Late Antiquity": 14.

existence of forbidden spaces where the boundaries between the social spheres must have been effectively enacted.

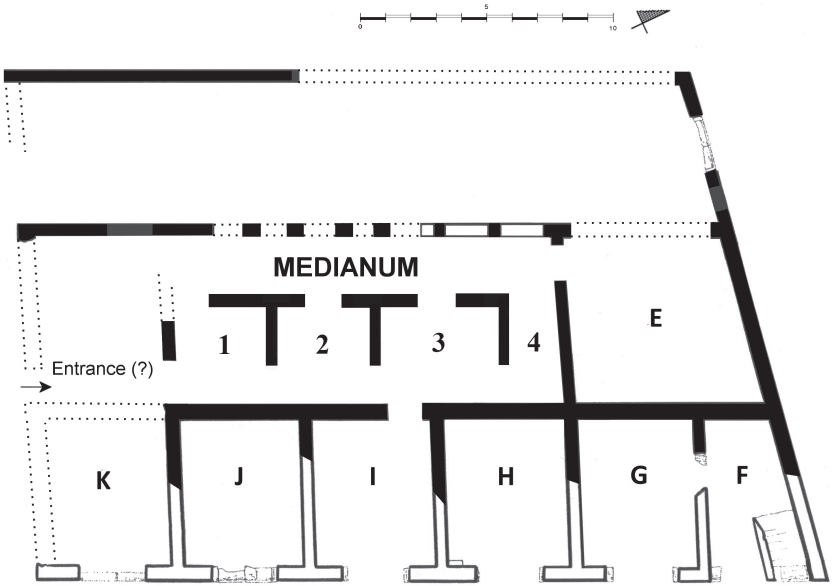

Fig. 4: Proposed articulation of the large apartment during the second century. Two large rooms at the opposite ends of a *medianum* with four rooms (1–4) on its southern side. The exact position of the main entrance to the apartment cannot be ascertained (author).

On the opposite side of the complex lies a smaller apartment which, in its earliest form, consisted of two rooms only: P and O (fig. 5). Its decentred access with internal locking system makes it likely that the westernmost room (O) was designated for privacy: perhaps the secluded nest of the owner. The large size of the adjacent room made it subject to a number of modifications that cannot be chronologically determined. The most crucial change was the acquisition of the facing open area and its redevelopment into a living quarter: a decision possibly prompted by the need for more rooms in addition to only O and P, and one that almost doubled the living space at the owner's disposal. The new development occupied a previously open area and entailed the construction of three

or four rooms opening onto a corridor that separated the two halves of the apartment. The floors of the central section were laid with *opus spicatum* (contrasting with the mosaics of the other rooms). There was also a well, which makes this space a good candidate for a service area where the slaves could work and, possibly, live.[98] Once again, however, the openness of the plan, combined with our inability to create a definite reconstruction, compromises the identification of slaves' quarters.

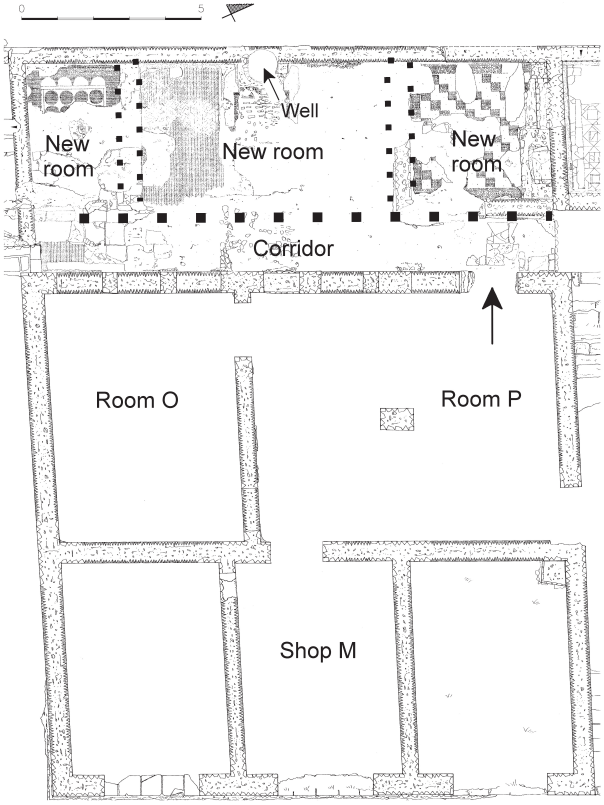

Fig. 5: After acquisition by the owner of apartment O-P, area A was subdivided in at least three rooms (the largest, at the centre, features a well) with a corridor on the southern side to afford light to both O-P and the new development. The arrow marks the access between P and A, with a door cut from an original window (author).

98 This area is discussed in Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 59–64; the mosaics were first described in Angelo Pellegrino and Alessandra Pompili, "Il complesso della Domus del Ninfeo ad Ostia: una rilettura sulla base dei pavimenti noti, poco noti e di nuova acquisizione," *Atti del XXII colloquio dell'associazione per lo studio e la conservazione del mosaico (AISCOM)*, ed. Claudia Angelelli, Daniela Massara and Andrea Paribeni (Tivoli: Edizioni Scripta Manent, 2017): 561–62.

The recent discoveries at the villa of Civita Giuliana, just outside of Pompeii, are proof of the slaves' gruelling conditions, but also of the existence of a hierarchy between them that translated into different living arrangements (against the homogenising picture of servants as equals).[99] The analysis of the bed models recovered in two rooms of the villa highlighted differences both in terms of expenditure and comfort: one room excavated in 2021 (which also served as storage) contained three beds of different sizes without mattresses in the poorly-lit, "meagre space" of 16 m^2. A second space, similar in size, was investigated in 2023 and featured one bed without mattress similar to the others and another, more comfortable and furnished with a mattress: possibly, the alcove of an overseer. Both rooms were deprived of decoration, the walls left in bare *reticulatum*. "The image of simplicity and intimacy offered by the […] slave quarters of the villa" is highlighted by the connection between the rooms, which not only fostered the creation of bonds of friendship but also established forms of mutual control.[100]

The location of the slave quarter/room in the ground floor apartments of III, VI, 1–3 is completely open to speculation. According to Meiggs, most of the second century AD traders and businessmen of Ostia lived in apartments that had five to twelve rooms and could accommodate probably no more than twenty slaves.[101] The cramped conditions of the slave rooms in Civita Giuliana, with their flimsy beds accosted back-to-back to use the space as sparingly as possible, are reproducible in both our apartments: the spacious area with well and *opus spicatum* (if it was really used by the servants) of the western apartment could have been further subdivided by light partitions in *opus craticium* to maximize the space; on the eastern side, any of rooms 1–4 at the back of the *medianum* could have been theirs (although room 4 is probably the best candidate for ease of compartmentalisation without detriment to the internal traffic).

99 Parco Archeologico di Pompei, press release: http://pompeiisites.org/en/comunicati/pompeii-the-life-of-slaves-in-civita-giuliana/ [accessed 28.08.2024].

100 Gabriel Zuchtriegel and Chiara A. Corbino, "Of Mice and Men. New Discoveries in the Servants' Quarters of the Roman Villa of Civita Giuliana near Pompeii," *E-Journal Scavi di Pompei*, http://pompeiisites.org/wp-content/uploads/E-Journal_5-1.pdf [accessed 28.08.2024].

101 Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*: 226.

As an alternative, the slaves could be housed outside the apartment proper. Both flats were connected with a shop that opened onto the *decumanus maximus*: they constituted part (at least) of the owners' income.[102] The business in the hands of O-P, in particular, must have been successful, as it expanded over adjoining properties.[103] These *tabernae* could have been rented out, but nothing goes against the hypothesis that they were run by the family's slaves under the direct control of their master. Enterprises such as bakeries, tanneries and ceramic workshops (not to mention the docks and related warehouses) needed slave labourers in large numbers who would live on the premises,[104] but also the smaller *taberna* would serve the purpose, either on the ground-floor or on the mezzanine above.[105] Contemporary jurist Gaius emphasised how important was the bondage of trust forged by the slave in running and managing commercial premises in the master's name; so important, in fact, as to be worthy of *manumissio*.[106]

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[102] Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 103: as for the eastern apartment, its "overall dimension […] would fit DeLaine's criteria for a 'large *medianum* apartment' at the upper end of the rental market […] it is difficult to believe that the occupier was a modest retailer gaining income from Shop I alone; much easier to imagine that he controlled other premises within the town". See also the discussion about *mediana* and owners in DeLaine, "Designing for a Market": 147–48 and 171.

[103] The involvement of the owner of the western apartment with the commercial premises on the *decumanus* varied over time: he started with shop M, later acquiring shop N. At some point the two must have been sold; he then acquired shop L. It seems likely that he did not possess all three shops at the same time. In late antiquity, all connections between house and shops were severed.

[104] Living conditions in these establishments could be abysmal: recent excavations in Pompeii unearthed a bakery with small, iron-barred windows where the slaves worked side to side with blind-folded animals in so cramped a space that human and animal movement had to be carefully co-ordinated to avoid clashes: Gennaro Iovino, Alessandra Marchello, Ausilia Trapani and Gabriel Zuchtriegel, "La disciplina dell'odiosa baracca: la casa con il panificio di Rustio Vero a Pompei (IX 10,1)," *E-Journal Scavi di Pompei*: http://pompeiisites.org/wp-content/uploads/E-Journal_8_08122023.pdf [accessed 28.08.2024]. The Metamorphoses of Apuleius (IX, 11–13) are a reminder of the toil of the work in mills and bakeries.

[105] The *tabernae* used as dwellings are amply attested in literature (Pompili, "Qualche nota"), but there is also the scattered archaeological evidence of latrines (the corner shop of the Insula di Giove e Ganimede, I, IV, 2 or one of the shops attached to the Domus del Tempio Rotondo, I, XI, 2–3).

[106] Gai. *Inst.* I, 19. An example of such trust is the inscription of Iunia Libertas, who bequeathed the usufruct of her buildings and shops to her extended family: Ulrike Babusiaux, "Zum Testament der Iunia Libertas aus Ostia (AE 1940, 94)," *Klauselgestaltungen in Römis-*

Having the slaves working and living in the shop was an added security element and would have left the apartments of III, VI, 1–3 to the master and his family in their entirety. Compartmentalising the servants in a dedicated space guaranteed a higher degree of separation and was crucial to enacting a strategy of invisibility: in the micro-context of the Hadrianic phase of the Domus del Ninfeo, the privileged connection with the shops gives reason to this assumption.

4.4 The Late Antique Phase

No earlier than the third century, a single owner acquired the complex and dramatically re-worked the ground floor in such a way to facilitate an enhanced separation between the master and his slaves. Space availability does not touch upon room size only, but is the cornerstone of an overt class differentiation able to shed light on issues of dependency, inclusion and exclusion: "[I]t is only in the richest houses that the slave/master distinction could and needed to be fully expressed".[107] In a closely-watched household[108] such as the Domus del Ninfeo, members of the various classes were now allocated their own place and did not need to intrude in another's world. The second century distinction between a large and a small apartment becomes here pregnant with social meaning.

Notwithstanding the well-known flexibility in the use of space in the Roman house, it is possible to single out three main tools at the master's disposal to successfully achieve his aim:

chen Testamenten: Akten einer Internationale Tagung zum Römischen Testamentsrecht, ed. Lisa Isola (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022), https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/217107/1/Babusiaux_Ulrike_Testament_Iunia_Libertas_in_Isola_Lisa_%28Hrsg.%29%2C_Klauselgestaltungen_in_Romischen_Testamenten_2022_S._45-77.pdf [accessed 28.08.2024].

107 Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society*: 39.

108 I have borrowed this expression from Kate Cooper, "Closely Watched Households: Visibility, Exposure and Private Power in the Roman 'Domus'," *Past & Present* 197 (2007).

1) Compartmentalisation (areas devoted to some domestic activities, marginalisation of service areas; in general, the proximity of areas characterised by similar functions).
2) Accessibility (proximity of the rooms to each other, internal routes that can make a room or area more or less directly accessible from the outside and/or the core of the house, narrowness of doorways and/or passages). The assessment of the visual landscape that the master wished to provide for his household and/or visitors, and how this landscape was differentiated along the spectrum of possibilities offered by the interplay of architecture and decoration, is an important by-product of the research on accessibility.
3) Decoration was the most tangible marker of the master's efforts, often interacting alongside or amplifying the other two, while its absence helped to discriminate between spaces with different objectives (especially when architecture did not fully succeed in marginalising service areas). Decorations stress the vital role that visual elements played in the creation of spaces for the elite:[109] in the private sphere they acted as markers of status (just like dress, walk, gesture and speech), signalling an explicit will to communicate a shared meaning.

In the late antique Domus del Ninfeo, the availability of space called for an increased and more efficient compartmentalisation and separation between social classes. This factor, along with decoration and accessibility, allows for the identification of spaces devoted to each set of residents/visitors and for the degree of visibility and invisibility that was deemed suitable for each (fig. 6).[110]

[109] Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 107–12.

[110] Alternative reconstructions for the internal routes in the *domus* are presented by Pavolini, "Un gruppo di ricche case": 1034–36, and again in "Trasformazioni di spazi e cambiamenti di funzioni nella Domus del Ninfeo dalla media età imperiale alla tarda antichità," in *Ostia Antica. Nouvelles études et recherches sur les quartiers occidentaux de la cité*, ed. Claire De Ruyt, Thomas Morard and Françoise Van Haeperen (Brussels: Belgisch Historisch Instituut te Rome, 2018): 220–21, and Danner, "Wege ins Haus – Wege im Haus."

Fig. 6: Areas in the late antique Domus del Ninfeo. White (B, C, D, R, U, T, S and E. The status of room V remains, in my opinion, uncertain. Perhaps it was a service room): the world of the *dominus*. The arrows indicate the two exits (from D to the side alley and from B to the back alley) and the opening onto the staircase leading to the upper floor above O, P and Q, also part of the *dominus*' space (diagonal shading). Light grey: the world of the servants: working area (A) and sleeping/living rooms (O, P and Q). In the oval is the threshold of the door giving access to K. Medium grey: the large room K, for the freedmen and *clientes*. At this stage, room K enjoyed only one access to/from the *decumanus*, the other being closed by a blocking now disappeared: this was the main entrance to the complex. The length of the screening wall to the north of room K is, of course, speculative. All shops, at this stage, are independent from the residence (author).

4.4.1 Strategies to Create In/Visibility: The World of the Master

The master reserved for himself the whole of the eastern wing which, because of its original size, had the highest potential for redevelopment. The decorative effort that went into the eastern side of the complex is

remarkable: apart from corridor R and room V (which might have been used as a service), all other rooms had marble on the floor or walls (or both). Some of the flooring of courtyard D was also paved in marble, although its most striking feature was a decorative *nymphaeum* with alternating square and semi-circular niches, and a smaller semi-circular fountain – both revetted in marble. The *opus sectile* of room E has long been studied for its originality and complexity, but apse U and rooms B and C also featured multi-coloured *opus sectile* floors (fig. 7). The widespread use of second-hand material does not detract from what must have been extravagant expenditure, which was only employed in this wing of the house. The master's world was one where guests could be entertained according to the season, the desired degree of intimacy or the impact he wished to impress upon them, thanks to a policy of multiplication of spaces: there were two or three *triclinia* (U and E, perhaps C) and three rooms for intimate meetings (S, T and B).[111]

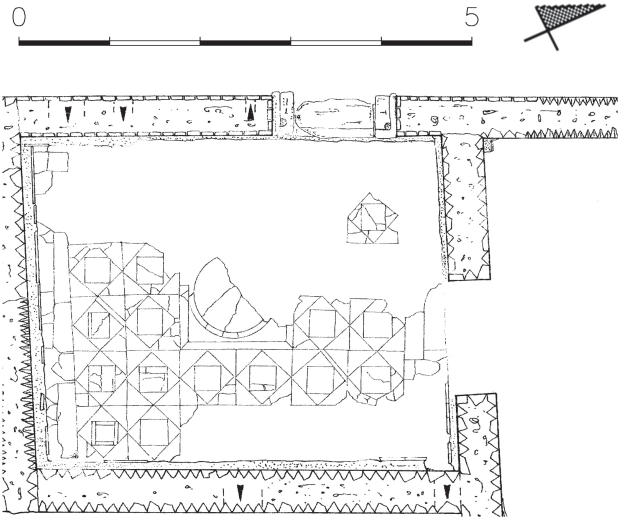

Fig. 7: The *opus sectile* of room B (author, reproduced with permission of BAR Publishing).

[111] Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 115–21.

The positioning of high-impact decorative elements was not random, but dictated by pre-determined visual axes: even the placement of the *nymphaeum* was arranged to maximise its visibility to those dining in room U.[112] While the *nymphaeum* acted as the visual focus for those in rooms E and U, the guests in C primarily enjoyed the sight of a small, semi-circular marble fountain which must have been built as a function of this room, being optically framed by its two columns. An archival plan (fig. 8) shows that the fountain had once been connected to northern wall D by a wall drawn in solid black as per the basin, and which may have been similarly made of masonry revetted with marble. Despite our lack of information, we can speculate that its purpose was to make the small basin the sole focal point for those looking towards the courtyard from rooms B or C, barring the view of the *nymphaeum* with its emphatic placement at the end of a sight-line.

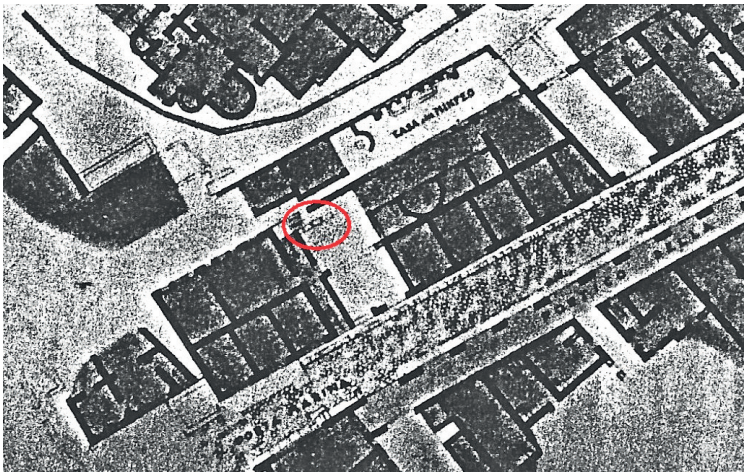

Fig. 8: Notice the black outline of the semi-circular structure in courtyard D: a small decorative fountain in line with room C, now disappeared. Circled in red is a late wall (also disappeared) in room K, screening the passage between A-D and K and the stairs used by the *dominus* to access the upper floor (author after plan in mobile C, letto 11, cartella 10. Courtesy: Archivio Cartografico del Parco Archeologico di Ostia Antica).

[112] On the *nymphaeum* see Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 84–85, and (also for the late antique water at Ostia in Regions III and IV) Danner, "Approvvigionamento e messa in scena": 129–41.

There is thus a close symbiosis between architecture and decoration in the Domus del Ninfeo, as each was made for the other. The guest found himself surrounded by a homogeneous landscape, conceived to exercise an immersive effect from any of the three privileged vantage points: room E, C or U (fig. 9). This visual experience was the prerogative and marker of the master: the inhabitable and *visible* projection of his persona.

Fig. 9: View from room C: the piers dividing area D from corridor R (right) and the elegant window with columns of room E (right, background). The *nymphaeum* (left) would have been screened by the semi-circular fountain of fig. 8 (author).

The *dominus'* visibility to his valued guests, however, was counterbalanced by the desire to keep the outside world at a distance: to ensure personal *invisibility* from it and affirm the freedom to choose who was

allowed to partake in his world. The two concerns might seem at odds but are, in fact, complementary, as Jameson explains:

> Privacy […] dramatically enacts its relation with private property in the form of great estates, enormous wood tracts into which outsiders cannot penetrate uninvited. There is a dual dialectic of the senses, of seeing and hearing: no one is to be allowed to see me […] and my money buys me the freedom from hearing anyone else: sound also violates, and my submission to other people's sound is a symbolic index of powerlessness and vulnerability. All of this suggests some deeper drive to repress the social and sociability as such: my reward for acquiring a fortune is my possibility of withdrawing from everything that might remind me of the existence of other people in the first place.[113]

The ability to create seclusion by erecting a series of thresholds between the self and the lower classes was a status privilege. The literary *topos* of escaping the city and its nuisances (business, traffic, noise, smells, dangers, clients) is prominent in Latin literature and testifies to the elite's desire to set firm boundaries around oneself. In one of his letters, Pliny articulated the desire to retreat into a secluded world where "neither the voices of the servants nor the murmur of the sea, not even the fury of storms […] nor lightning, nor even daylight" could reach him. "When I retire to this apartment", he explained, "I fancy myself far away even from my own villa".[114] For city dwellers who could not escape to the countryside like Pliny, this distancing required a series of mechanisms capable of satisfying both the need to keep one's profile and to take a step back from the hassle; hence the practical and symbolic value of the threshold as a partition, a point of discontinuity, of interruption of movement between social spheres. A transitional element embodying

[113] Fredric Jameson, "Is Space Political?" in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge): 250–51.

[114] Plin. *Ep.* II. 17: *non illud (i.e. cubiculum) voces servolorum, non maris murmur, non tempestatum motus non fulgurum lumen, ac ne diem quidem sentit, nisi fenestris apertis* […] *In hanc ego diaetam cum me recepi, abesse mihi etiam a villa mea videor*; trans. Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, *Roman Civilization*, vol. 2, *The Empire: Selected Readings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990): 162.

the dialectic between inside and outside (so much so as to embed an almost ritual meaning across time and cultures), the threshold is a prelude to the process, by the guest, of penetrating the physical space of the host and his confidence.[115]

Once again, the crucial role played by textiles and curtains in setting permeable (but no less effective) boundaries completely escapes us. More flexible than doors in blocking or allowing light, in concealing or revealing recesses of the house, textiles were not only employed to conceal furniture, subdivide rooms and close the arcades of a peristyle allowing the space to be used simultaneously for various purposes at no detriment to its architectural unity, but added an element of colour and luxury that was especially appreciated. According to Stephenson, the textiles used in the house mirrored the late Roman dress fashion with their bright and deep colours, concealing and creating barriers between the individual and the world outside.[116] Augustine is a witness of the explicit correlation between rank and use of textiles, as the higher a man's rank, the more his house was adorned with hangings.[117]

Maximising visibility to his chosen peers whilst enacting invisibility to the world at large were the two aims pursued in the domestic sphere. In the Domus del Ninfeo, the latter aim was accomplished by de-emphasising entrances (between K and R), erecting filters (between K and corridor A-D) and avoiding direct sightlines (corridor A-D towards D).

4.4.2 The World of the Freedmen

The freedmen/clients attached to the master of the Domus del Ninfeo had their dedicated area in a large room, K, that opened directly onto the *decumanus maximus* (fig. 6). This was the largest roofed space in the complex and enjoyed a central position: almost a physical watershed, a social filter between the world of the master and the slaves.

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115 Bachelard poetically asked: "Why not sense that, incarnated in the door, there is a little threshold god?": Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1958]): 223.

116 John W. Stephenson, "Veiling the Late Roman House," *Textile History* 45, no. 1 (2014): 6.

117 August. *Sermon* LI, 5; Yvon Thébert, "Private Life and Domestic Architecture in Roman Africa," in *A History of Private Life*, ed. Paul Veyne (Cambridge: Harvard University Press): 387–89.

Today, the monument gives the mistaken impression that K afforded unimpeded access to both the master's and the servile wings, but in fact there was a noticeable attempt at disguising all points of communication.

The nearest access point to the slaves' quarter on the west was through a door; the original threshold for a double-leaf door opening inwards is still in place. The second access point, through an opening onto corridor A-D and partially obstructed by a platform, was screened by a late antique wall that has now completely disappeared: this wall concealed both the platform (which gave the master a private access to his bedroom on the first floor) and the opening to the corridor and will be discussed later. On the master's side, the opening onto corridor R effectively concealed the core of the house: the width of less than 1.50 m (a shrinkage maintained throughout late antiquity) and the off-centered position made it impossible to get a glimpse of the eastern wing: the inner rooms with the *nymphaeum*, the wide opening of rooms U and E and the small fountain facing C would only be revealed when this threshold was crossed.

The freedmen and client area was therefore surrounded on all sides by the boundaries of the room, blind to any of the activities carried out in the house. The visual landscape was one carefully chosen by the master and expressed in a series of frescoes. The three panels, today largely fragmentary, bear evidence of at least seven different scenes representing either still-life *xenia* motifs[118] or moments from rural life. The latter have been unanimously interpreted as the peasants' homage to their master: a depiction of the "owner's business interests [… and] the solicitude for his tenants: messages that spoke of a serene and balanced social relationship" (fig. 10 a, b and c).[119] The subtext that the owner chose for his freedmen and *clientes* to see was intended to reinforce visually the message that a relationship of mutual assistance (the scantily-clad *vilici* giving to the master in the paintings, the master giving back through protection in real life) benefited their lives. Communication was always

[118] A *xenium (-a)* is a painting representing food (Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*: 378).
[119] Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 115–16, and sources quoted within.

one-sided from master to subjects, but was positioned in the context of shared practices. The dress-code and the difference in size of the subjects represented signalled that everyone's social status was respected: it was a message of persuasive rhetoric that maintained that the social peace enjoyed by the peasants (or rural slaves?) in the frescoes would be perpetuated in real life even after the bonds of servitude had been severed.

Fig. 10 a–c: Paintings no. 10086, 10085 and 10087 in room K (courtesy: Archivio Fotografico del Parco Archeologico di Ostia Antica).

In addition to functioning as the freedmen's antechamber, K was accessible by anybody, even passers-by unattached to the master. Vitruvius states clearly that the *vestibulum* was considered to be, to all intents and purposes, a public space.[120] It is important to stress the publicity of K, because the message of *concordia* and social harmony put forward by the master of the domus was thus meant to be shared in the widest sense of the term, for everyone to see. This is even more remarkable when we consider that the creation of its grand opening on the *decumanus* was not, in any way, either conditioned by the topography or the older structure of the *insula*. It was a free choice, as the three existing entrances could not, apparently, fulfil the requirement for a display status of the *dominus*. The Republican and early-imperial tradition for self-promotion is here emphatically reaffirmed.[121]

The invisible *dominus*, unapproachable by the *hoi polloi* (a judgmental expression at once suited to his education and viewpoint) in the luxurious privacy of the house, not only made himself visible to the world via the frescoes representing his care and concern towards his subjects, but also through the freedmen and clients crowding the room and waiting to be cared for. These were an index of wealth and power: in the intricate web of relationships informing Roman society, their number was directly proportional to the influence exercised by the patron in the political arena of the town.[122] Freedmen and clients *had* to be visible in their physicality: their bodies, conspicuous to everyone from the large opening onto one of the main street arteries, were a mechanism to sustain by proxy the presence of the invisible *dominus* in the town. They were the living testimony of a continuing relationship: one that transcended legal bonds because based on a man-to-man (not man-to-chattel) rapport. It was a powerful message, where the painted representation echoed and reinforced reality and vice-versa: the interplay of

120 Vitr. *De Arch.* VI. 5. 1.

121 Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 115–16, with parallels.

122 Among the many possible references on the topic, see at least third century AD Athenaeus (*Deip.* 272d-273b) recounting about the unmoderated Romans of his times keeping a large number of slaves not for the sake of income but only to function as an entourage as they went out.

frescoes and living clients conveyed messages of wealth, power, serenity and *concordia* to the eyes of anybody passing-by.

4.4.3 The World of the Slaves

The slaves had an entire wing of the house: the former second-century small apartment and facing area (rooms O-P/Q and A). During the last phase of the complex, this nucleus became completely enclosed: the connections with the shops facing the *decumanus* were severed (both the second-century connection with M and the later one with L), and with them the degree of freedom that had perhaps existed in the past. To exit the house in late antiquity, there was no other alternative but to enter either the space of the freedmen (through the doorway giving onto K, or the opening from corridor A-D towards the *decumanus*) or that of the master (through courtyard D or room B towards the alley running along the eastern and northern sides of the complex).

The slaves' working space was the large area (approximately 120 square metres) that at some point after the construction of the *insula* had been bought by the owner of the small apartment and rebuilt by the construction of additional living units. These units were demolished in late antiquity and their walls pulled down. Along the perimeter of the area, at least six utilitarian basins of various dimensions have been found; those on the north-west corner used the channel of the aqueduct running on top of the so-called Sullan walls. This was a working space that probably served the needs of the house and its inhabitants.

Accommodation for the slaves may have been the purpose of rooms P (Q) and O. Apart from some minor changes concerning the internal division of room P, which was re-sized to accommodate the smaller unit Q via partitions in *opus listatum* and cut off from access to and from the shops and area A, no other modifications are detectable.[123] It may be worth noting that the locking system in O, original to the Hadrianic

[123] It is unclear whether the creation of room Q is linked with the wide opening to area A or if we are dealing with independent modifications (Batty, *The Domus del Ninfeo*: 91–92).

phase, was apparently retained: a useful device in a slave quarter.[124] Whereas the slaves in service of the master might have slept at his bedroom's door upstairs, to be always within earshot, all others – instead of being scattered all over the house, as it was apparently common – could have been accommodated and controlled in room O.[125] Nissin further notes that the many references to doors and closing in Latin texts points to a special interest in the degree of seclusion and privacy of the sleeping areas; although a space like room O would provide slaves with some privacy, its mono-directional design also stresses control.

Both rooms P(Q) and O are virtually bare of decorations; only scanty remnants of the primitive second-century wall and floor decoration (black and white mosaic, apparently geometric) are visible. Here there is no sequence of thresholds to mark exclusion, no filtering of guests or visitors. The slaves' world was as undifferentiated as it could possibly be, with a working area and two (or three) rooms to serve as accommodation – nothing else can be inferred from the monument.[126] Although it is impossible to identify a separate quarter for a slave supervisor as in other mansions (for example the Insula of the Menander at Pompeii, see below), the thorough invisibility of the service area implies that there must have been one: the increased separation between master and slaves did not allow the former to exert direct surveillance over his slaves. The dichotomy at work here (the need for the seclusion and invisibility of the servile areas *vs* the need for surveillance) underpins the requirement for an extension of the master's eye wherever he could not be physically.[127]

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[124] Further security measures may have included night guards, as mentioned in relation to Pedanius' murder (Tac. *Ann.* 14, 42–45).

[125] Nissin, *Roman Sleep*: 17, and sources quoted within.

[126] The bareness of the servile quarter makes it unlikely that these rooms could additionally work as guest-rooms, as was sometimes the case: Pliny's Laurentine villa had a wing "reserved for the use of the slaves and freedmen, most of the rooms being elegant enough to accommodate guests" – [*reliqua pars lateris huius] servorum libertorumque usibus detinetur, plerisque tam mundis, ut accipere hospites possint*, Plin. *Ep.* II.17, in Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, *Roman Civilization*: 161.

[127] Sandra R. Joshel has written extensively about slave surveillance, for example in "Geographies of Slave Containment and Movement," in *Roman Slavery and Roman Material Culture*, ed. Michele George (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). For the quality of a good overseer see Cato. *Agr*. I. 5, Plin. *HN* XVIII.7 and Col. *De Re Rust.* Fifth century AD writer Salvian (*De gub. Dei* 4.3) recounts the hostility towards the

5 Conclusion

Whether a servile area was planned as such from the beginning or its existence owes to later modifications, the investigation on the relationship between master and slaves – however challenging[128] – should form an important part of the enquiry. On the one hand there is scanty – and not undisputed – archaeological evidence for the infamous *ergastulum* mentioned by Columella (I.VI, 3);[129] on the other, we have an array of Roman domestic buildings where the interaction between master and slave is not clearly expressed in the architectural form. In general, the approach should be based on structural analysis, as there is no universal paradigm that can be applied successfully to such a vast field as Roman private architecture.

In the late antique Domus del Ninfeo, slaves appear to have been effectively contained in the western wing of the complex, unable to exit the house without intruding either into the freedmen's or the master's space. They were the only ones subjected to movement discipline: the freedmen could come and go via the exit onto the *decumanus*, while the master was at leisure to leave the building complex unseen by either freedmen or slaves through the gate in courtyard D, or by the back exit of room B (fig. 6, arrows). The degree of control exercised upon the slaves was thus high, almost reminiscent of the prescription in Trimalchio's house for those making a bid for freedom without permission: "[W]e came […] to the door. A notice was fastened on the doorpost: 'No

overseer and those who could whistle to the master: *Pavent quippe actores, pavent silentiarios, pavent procuratores: prope ut inter istos omnes nullorum minus servi sint quam dominorum suorum: ab omnibus caeduntur, ab omnibus conteruntur* – "they fear the accusers [among their fellow slaves], the informants, the overseers. Indeed, slaves are slaves to these almost as much as to their actual masters: any of them can kill them, any can grind them down"; quoted in Gabriel Zuchtriegel and Chiara A. Corbino, "Of Mice and Men."

128 Joshel, "Geographies of Slave Containment"; George, "Servus and Domus."

129 Col. *De Re Rust.* I.VI, 3; for a hypothetical *ergastulum* see Jaime Molina Vidal, Ignasi Grau Mira and Francisco Llidó López, "Housing Slaves on Estates: A Proposed *ergastulum* at the Villa of Rufio (Giano dell'Umbria)," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 30 (2017). Carandini reconstructed an *ergastulum* at the rural villa of Settefinestre: Andrea Carandini, *Settefinestre. Una villa schiavista nell'Etruria romana. La villa nelle sue parti* (Modena: Edizioni Panini, 1985): 174.

slave to go out of doors except by the master's orders. Penalty, one hundred stripes'".[130] Movement control remained, unsurprisingly, a pressing topic in slave surveillance throughout Roman times.[131]

The arrangement of other large houses at Ostia and Pompeii highlights the degree of compartmentalisation that the slaves of the Domus del Ninfeo were subject to. In the House of Menander at Pompeii, for example, the eastern part of the complex (I.10.15–17: unadorned, relatively cramped and poorly lit) was the servile quarter.[132] The marginalisation of this wing was successfully achieved by a long, narrow corridor at a lower level than the master's quarter that made it effectively invisible. One of the rooms was reserved for a "specially favoured slave or freedman: Maiuri's procurator":[133] he functioned as the conduit between the master and his fellow slaves, observing and disciplining them: an embodied extension of the master's eye. And yet the slaves of this complex theoretically had a good degree of mobility outside the house, to judge from the multiple access points to their quarter that were not in the master's (or his procurator's) view (fig. 11).[134]

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130 Petron. *Sat.* XXVIII: *ad ianuam pervenimus, in cuius poste libellus erat cum hac inscriptione fixus: quisquis servis sine dominico iussu foras exierit accipiet plagas centum* (trans. M. Heseltine, 1913). Compare our arrangement with that of the Pompeian bakery mentioned above (IX, 10, 1), where the only entrance/exit of the prison-factory was through the elegant *atrium* of the house.

131 Joshel, "Geographies of Slave Containment": 102–7.

132 The structure of this sumptuous Pompeian house has been thoroughly analysed by Roger Ling, *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii*, vol. 1, *The Structures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Obvious differences aside, the House of the Menander is 800 square metres larger.

133 Ling, *The Insula of the Menander*: 117, 144.

134 Similarly, in the Ostian Casa della Fortuna Annonaria (V.II.8) the service quarter (poorly lit, with simple whitewashed walls that were later plastered) was also accessible from the road: a situation apparently persisting through the centuries: compare the house plans in the Antonine and the late antique periods (AD 400): Johannes S. Boersma, *Amoenissima Civitas. Block V.ii at Ostia: description and analysis of its visible remains* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985): fig. 154 and 155. A description of the servile quarter is at 146–47. Even in smaller houses with an identifiable servile quarter like the House of the Surgeon at Pompeii (VI.I.10), the slave area had a separate exit onto the road. The arrangement of these (and many other) houses featured a separate area for the slaves to live and work, recognisable (as per the three criteria outlined above) because of its marginalised location, discreet access and/or lack of decoration: the slaves were effectively made invisible by compartmentalisation.

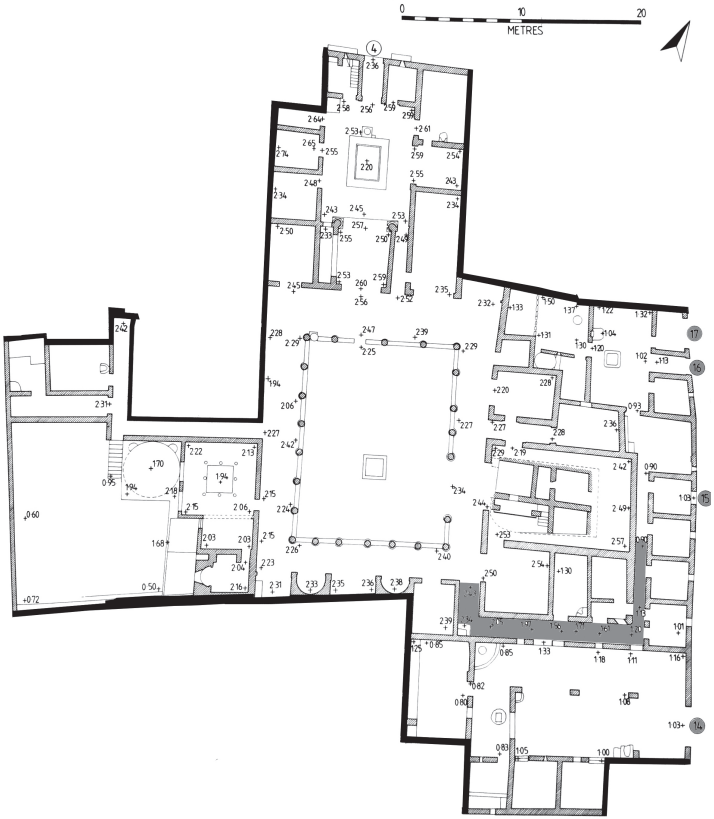

Fig. 11: The corridor leading to the servants' quarter in the House of the Menander at Pompeii (shaded). Note that the corridor is at a lower level than the rest of the house. The four entrances to the same quarter (nos. 14–17) are highlighted in grey (author after Ling, *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii*, fig. 24. Courtesy: Prof. Roger Ling. Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei).

Assessing the quality and quantity of the modifications in the transition from *insula* to *domus* and how they impacted on the creation of the slave quarter is the most interesting aspect of the analysis. The complete lack of decorative effort that went into the western wing of the Domus del Ninfeo is unsurprising, given its ultimate purpose. The slaves' accommodation was as bare as possible, deprived even of the rough landscapes

and Cupids in the room of the master's favourite slave (Maiuri's procurator) in the Insula of the Menander.[135] This may of course just be due to an accident in preservation.

The effort that went into the concealment of the servile wing, on the other hand, is remarkable. The construction of room B made use of some second-century walls, as was customary, and completely obliterated a distributive area that had served, in the *insula* phase, as access to the upper floors and provided a pedestrian passage between the front and back of the complex (the light grey area in fig. 3). A new corridor was then devised to bridge the master's and slaves' areas: A-D. As room C is wider than B (and its south wall is not even parallel to the south wall of A-D, but convergent towards the access to D), it screened a view between the two wings: the width of A-D at the entrance to D is only 0.90 m wide.[136] The measure was very effective: even today one can appreciate the invisibility of area A from courtyard D. Of course it is entirely possible that a further concealing mechanism was in place at this very point, either in the form of a movable screen or a curtain.

The passage between A-D and room K was also hidden by a late antique wall which was, according to the archival plan where this detail is reproduced, much longer than the passage itself, to ensure complete screening (fig. 8, circled red). That this structural element has completely disappeared and has not been represented on the plan by a thick black line is likely to indicate a late date, possibly combined with poor masonry and/or craftsmanship; a built element of no static value.

Another element that I wish to draw attention to is the western passage from the slave area to the freedmen's room: the door in the west wall of K (fig. 6, circled). Interestingly, this is the sole surviving second-century threshold from the apartment: a block of travertine marble for a double-leaf door that opened inwards. Everywhere else the thresholds have been removed or replaced by plain slabs; the sense of compartmentalisation is conveyed through the location of the access point (K to R)

[135] Ling, *The Insula of the Menander*: 117.

[136] Compare this with the width of the corridor serving the easternmost rooms in the Insula of the Menander, which was less than one metre wide (Ling, *The Insula of the Menander*: 108).

and/or strategies for concealment (K to A/D and A/D to D): a series of partitions that acted psychologically more than physically. Only in this case (access from the slave area to room K, which was also the nearest to a road) do we have an almost complete threshold: a physical, built element for a door. How should we imagine this door? Open to allow the passage to and fro of slaves, or closed to contain them in their world of invisible bodies? Does this door suggest access or control?

It seems evident that in this late antique *domus* the slave was segregated: his otherness from the free is embedded in the architecture of exclusion that made his world. The servants' quarter was unseen: its existence was known to those who inhabited it, as well as to the master and his family. Perhaps it was also known to some of the freedmen, if they had come from the household itself. If seeing is believing, the master of the Domus del Ninfeo managed to achieve the elite's ultimate desire: to live in a world where the necessary evil was undetectable and tamed. One does not sense trust between master and slaves but coercion: the slaves were strictly disciplined and invisibilised.

The frescoes from room K are too fragmentary to allow us to comment on how they might fit into this scenario of seclusion, but it is tempting to think that a latent ambiguity may have been at play in this mansion: a tension between embodiment and perception, reality and propaganda. Whereas the everyday life of the slaves was one of seclusion, the propaganda on their lives as seen, interpreted and staged by the master in the frescoes, sought to convey to the viewers serenity and harmony.

Finally, this house worked at the same time as a metaphor *and* an embodiment of the relationships entertained by the *dominus*: the connection between stone and body is inscribed in the architecture itself. The "clothing" covering the walls (either permanent in the form of frescoes and marble revetment, or mobile such as textiles) mirrored the elegant, hieratical, togate body of the master at once untouched and detached from the mass. In room K, the paintings reminded to the "more-the-better" clients that they existed as a function of the master in an exchange of favours that was visually perpetuated and proposed as a model of social harmony. To the slaves, whose appropriate attire was (at best) nothing

more than a tunic, was left the bareness of an area isolated from the outside world, unseen and undifferentiated.

In order to best implement the metaphor proposed by the *dominus* of this mansion, where both the body and the inhabited space become texts to be read into and deciphered, the dynamics of the gaze were as essential as necessary. The gaze of the master and his guests, the gaze of the freedmen, even that of outsiders was carefully guided or diverted, as he thought desirable: the Domus del Ninfeo was an exercise in the art of directing and channelling scrutiny.

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Vitr. *De Arch.* ..... Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, *De Architectura*

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This short text focuses on the Domus del Ninfeo at Ostia as a case study of how built structures can be read as a powerful metaphor for the in/visibility of social classes within Roman society. The structural transformations undergone by the Domus del Ninfeo were more than mere architectural changes; rather, they can be seen as a testament to the evolving practices of class distinction and gaze craftsmanship. The spaces within the house reveal a microcosm of Roman society where social boundaries were both erected and eroded, offering a unique lens through which to investigate the relationship between master and slaves, and provide an example of the subtle yet powerful architectural cues that dictated the lives of its inhabitants.

THE AUTHOR

Alessandra Batty holds a degree (BA hons) and a postgraduate degree (*Specializzazione*) in Archaeology from the University "La Sapienza" (Rome), and an MA in Archaeology and a PhD in Art History from the University of Manchester. Her main research interests are Greek and Roman art, the history of archaeological studies and the structural analysis of monuments. She has published a large monograph on the Domus del Ninfeo at Ostia (BAR), and the English edition and translation of Giuseppe Maggi's book on the history of Herculaneum (*Herculaneum. End of an Ancient Town*, Kairós edizioni).