



AUGUSTA RAURICA



Sven Straumann
Peter-Andrew Schwarz

Insulae in Context

Proceedings of the International Conference
in Basel and Augusta Raurica,
25th–28th September 2019

SCHWABE VERLAG

Forschungen in Augst 57

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Printed with support from the
Berta Hess-Cohn Stiftung, Basel

For their financial assistance to the conference and the publication of this book we would like to thank:
Arbeitsgemeinschaft für die provinzialrömische Forschung in der Schweiz (ARS)
Kanton Basel-Landschaft
Vindonissa-Professur der Universität Basel
Stiftung Pro Augusta Raurica (PAR)



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mit Unterstützung des Bundes und der Kantone Aargau und Basel-Stadt



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AUGUSTA RAURICA

Sven Straumann and Peter-Andrew Schwarz

Contributions by Jesús Bermejo Tirado, Pierre Blanc, Antony Carbone, Benjamin Clément, Antonella Coralini, Janet DeLaine, Simone Dilaria, Domenico Esposito, Francesc Florensa, Beatrice Fochetti, Clara Forn, Axel Gering, Andrea Raffaele Ghiotto, Mark A. Locicero, Iñaki Moreno, Caterina Previato, J. Michael Rainer, Capucine Sartre, Peter-Andrew Schwarz, Sven Straumann, Hans Sütterlin and Paula Uribe

Insulae in Context

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August 2023

Forschungen in August 57

Front cover:

Detail of a bronze model of Augusta Raurica
and its central *insulae*.

Based on an idea by Sven Straumann,
designed by Michael Vock.

Page 2:

Logo of the international conference
"Insulae in Context".

Idea and design Michael Vock.

Back cover:

The *insula* grid in the Upper Town of Augusta Raurica
during the heyday of the town c. AD 200.

Reconstruction Markus Schaub.

Layout and digitalisation:

Sven Straumann and Michael Vock

Published by: Augusta Raurica

Archaeological editing: Sven Straumann (with support
from Hans Sütterlin)

English translations: Sandy Hämmerle

French translations: Catherine Leuzinger-Piccand

Italian translations: Cheyenne Peverelli

German translations: Peter-Andrew Schwarz

Editing and desktop publishing: Mirjam T. Jenny

Proofreading: Sandy Hämmerle, Rudolf Känel

Picture editing: Sven Straumann

Printing: Gremp AG, CH-4133 Pratteln

Publisher's address: Museum Augusta Raurica,
CH-4302 Augst

Distribution: Schwabe AG Verlag,

Grellingerstrasse 11,

CH-4052 Basel,

vertrieb@schwabe.ch

© 2023 Augusta Raurica

ISBN 978-3-7965-4848-2

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Insula Studies. From Evidence to Agency. The Making of the Pompeii Sample

Antonella Coralini

Summary

It is well known, and accepted by all, that the basic unit of the Roman city is the block. This is the smallest cell that generates the urban fabric, and it is from this that research on ancient urban organisms has to start. This awareness has, however, always struggled to translate itself into research and scientific edition: even in cases in which material evidence would have allowed an insula-based approach, due also to the richness and quality of the data, the approach by single building unit, public or private, has ended up dominating. However, there are some important exceptions. Starting from these, the paper strives to trace a history of insula studies, looking for good practices and sustainable models. The inevitable sample is the principal Vesuvian site, Pompeii.

Résumé

On s'accorde pour définir l'élément de base d'une ville romaine comme étant le pâté de maison. Il s'agit de la plus petite unité urbaine et c'est de là que doit partir la recherche sur les organismes urbains antiques. Toutefois, il s'est toujours avéré ardu de concrétiser cette volonté au niveau de la recherche et des études scientifiques. Même dans les cas où les structures matérielles auraient permis une approche basée sur l'insula, l'approche par unité de bâtiment individuel, qu'il soit public ou privé, s'est imposée, notamment en raison de la quantité et de la qualité des données disponibles. On recense toutefois quelques exceptions. À partir de celles-ci, l'article retrace l'histoire des études sur l'insula et tente de définir les méthodes les plus probantes et les modèles durables. L'exemple incontournable à cet égard est bien entendu le célèbre site qui se dressait dans l'ombre du Vésuve: Pompéi.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of *insula* and *insula*-type studies in one of the most famous examples in the discourse on Roman cities¹. Its subject is not only *insula* excavations, previously examined by Henry Hurst², but also, in a wider sense, all research projects (with or without excavations, stratigraphic or otherwise) whose focus is a city block (i. e. an urban space surrounded by streets) or indeed any morphologically homogeneous area such as the sector of a necropolis³.

What has been – and indeed what could be – the role played by the *insula*-based approach in understanding Roman cities? What directions have *insula* studies taken? What have been their results? In an attempt to answer these questions, this paper will review the most important contributions during the last century highlighting not only the results of specific research projects that have en-

Zusammenfassung

Der Häuserblock wird allgemein als das Grundelement der römischen Stadt anerkannt und akzeptiert. Er ist die kleinste städtische Einheit, und von ihr muss die Forschung über antike Stadtorganismen ausgehen. Diese Erkenntnis hat sich jedoch stets nur schwer in Forschung und wissenschaftliche Bearbeitung umsetzen lassen. Selbst in Fällen, in denen die materiellen Befunde einen Insula-basierten Ansatz erlaubt hätten, hat sich deshalb – nicht zuletzt auch aufgrund der Menge und Qualität der vorhandenen Daten – der Ansatz nach einzelnen Gebäudeeinheiten, ob öffentlich oder privat, durchgesetzt. Es gibt jedoch einige wichtige Ausnahmen. Ausgehend von diesen zeichnet der Beitrag die Geschichte der Insula-Studien nach und sucht nach bewährten Verfahren und nachhaltigen Modellen. Das unumgängliche Beispiel dabei ist natürlich die wichtigste Stätte in unmittelbarer Nähe des Vesuvus: Pompeji.

Riassunto

Il ruolo dell'isolato nella città romana, quale unità base dell'organismo urbano, è universalmente noto e accettato. È l'insula, indipendentemente dalla sua forma, più o meno regolare, la cellula minima della griglia urbana ed è quindi dall'insula che dovrebbe partire l'analisi della città. Questa consapevolezza ha, tuttavia, spesso incontrato molte difficoltà nel trovare applicazione nella prassi della ricerca e della pubblicazione dei risultati: anche nei casi in cui l'evidenza materiale meglio si sarebbe prestata ad un approccio a scala di insula, anche in ragione della ricchezza e qualità dei dati, l'approccio a scala di singolo edificio, pubblico o privato, ha finito per dominare. Non sono mancate, tuttavia, importanti eccezioni. Prendendo le mosse da queste l'articolo intende tracciare una storia degli studi a scala di insula, alla ricerca di buone pratiche e modelli sostenibili. Campione inevitabile, il più importante fra i siti vesuviani, Pompei.

riched archaeological archives and interpretations, but also metadata and paradata, such as methodological preferences, operational strategies and forms of publication. The Pompeii sample was selected for multiple reasons: primarily, the high incidence of *insula* studies at this site, as well as its highly distinctive evidence, as rich as it is problematic.

1 I would like to thank Sven Straumann for his invitation to the conference and for including this paper in the publication. I am indebted to George Metcalf for his careful reading and language revision of the text. Regarding the content, the responsibility for any errors is mine.

2 Hurst 2013.

3 Hurst 2013, 63. For the ancient meanings of the term "insula" see Storey 1984 and Dubouloz 2011, 539–570.

The most significant experiences acquired at other sites helped to contextualise the Pompeii case studies. In the archaeology of the Roman city, the choice of the *insula* as the unit of analysis appears to have been determined by the need to adopt a more comprehensive approach, as opposed to the more common practice of tackling individual buildings, which almost always ignored the smaller and less glamorous units⁴. For studies of Roman town planning (and life), the *insula* (or any morphologically homogeneous urban area) represents the medium scale, the "local neighbourhood", bridging the gap between the city as a whole and individual buildings⁵.

This *insula*-based approach has seen many variations, influenced by their physical and cultural contexts and by the nature of the evidence. At archaeological sites with a long history, above all Pompeii, stratigraphic excavations may not be as necessary or as fruitful as "excavations" of archives, storage spaces and libraries. As the main tool of *alibi* archaeologies, these excavations *extra situm* are aimed at rediscovering archaeological evidence that has already been brought to light, but for which published studies are incomplete or non-existent, in an attempt to assess its whole life, modern and ancient⁶.

In the last century, the scientific literature on the Roman World underwent a transition from the analysis of a city block primarily (or exclusively) in terms of its architectural forms to a reading of the *insula* (and the urban settlement to which it belonged) in accordance with a multi-dimensional approach, combining social, cultural and economic perspectives⁷.

The richest season for *insula* studies started in the 1980s, when an increasing number of *insula*-based publications began to appear, in the form of both preliminary reports and monographs, as a result of research projects that had been started in the previous two decades. In these studies the city block is not always the actual unit of analysis: in many cases, now as then, it plays the role of topographical unit, a "container" for smaller-scale investigations⁸ or transversal research into specific topics⁹. Even when it has been the unit of analysis, the *insula* has rarely been examined as a whole in accordance with a comprehensive approach. Indeed, much more frequently, the holistic strategy seems to have remained in the research agenda without being translated into operational practice. Very rarely has the city block been read as an episode of urban history in its fullest sense, with reference to its social, cultural and economic aspects: not merely as a more or less internally consistent set of spaces (built, decorated, furnished), but above all as a system of inhabited spaces and objects in use, and in turn the result of multiple entanglements between humans and things¹⁰. Finally, even when the research has been extensive, holistic and complete, it has often taken so long to be published as to jeopardise the adequate communication of the results. The *insula*-based projects that have been most successful at producing a de-

finite scientific edition within a reasonable timeframe have been those focusing on specific topics and lines of enquiry, due either to the nature of the case study, or more often to contingent factors such as economic reasons. In these cases, narrowing the focus made it possible to present data and interpretations fairly promptly and thereby to avoid the risk of leaving research unpublished. Beyond Pompeii, where there are more long-term *insula*-based projects than anywhere else, a good example of an *insula* study that was published within an acceptable period is the Dutch Project on *Insula V II* at Ostia¹¹. In the 1970s this city block was selected as a case study by a team headed by Johannes S. Boersma, focusing on its structural and functional evolution and architectural and urban planning. From 1973 to 1976, the *insula* was the subject of a programme of documentation and analysis of its standing structures, with two main purposes: (i) "preserving them for future generations, at least on paper", given the impossibility of preserving "indefinitely the ruins in their restored state", and (ii), "the tentative reconstruction of their earlier construction history"¹². The year 1985 saw the publication of the monograph with the project's results. Two decades after the start of the Boersma Project, a similar research strategy was proposed by the Reading Ostia Project for *Insula I IV*, with a stronger integration between excavation and survey¹³.

During the 1970s, in a growing number of research projects, the city block itself, no longer a simple container of individual buildings, began to become the main object of interest. At the same time, alongside the new excavations, interest in archaeological evidence already brought to light (but not published, or only partially so) began to grow. However, the shift from mono-dimensional studies to holistic analyses would take another twenty years. To date, the largest and most complete experiences, in terms of both methods and results, can be found in the archaeology of Roman Britain, in the Silchester case study. Since the late 1990s, the "Silchester *Insula IX* Town Life Project (1997-2006)" has adopted a global approach, encompass-

4 As, but programmatically, the "Häuser in Pompeji" project (Zevi/Strocka 1980; Strocka 1981; Strocka 2008).

5 Yrnilä 2011.

6 For the integrated excavation at *insula* scale on the *Herculaneum* and Pompeii samples see Coralini 2017 (*Herculaneum*) and Coralini 2018a (Pompeii).

7 For a similar process in the research on dwellings see Wallace-Hadrill 2001.

8 Lepore et al. 2019 (*Agrigentum, Insula III*).

9 Braconi/Lanzi 2020.

10 On the entanglement between humans and things see Hodder 2011; Hodder 2016.

11 Boersma 1985.

12 Boersma 1985, 1.

13 DeLaine/Wilkinson 1999.

ing large-scale stratigraphic excavations (covering one third of the city block) and archaeometry. Equal importance was given to structural evidence, material culture and biological and environmental data, with the support of geochemistry and studies of micromorphology¹⁴. The publication strategy is two-pronged: on the one hand, articles in refereed journals focusing on particular themes arising from the project; on the other, a series of period-based monographs, the first of which dealt with the final phase of occupation¹⁵.

With due consideration of the differences between the two case studies (one, *Calleia Atrebatum*/Silchester, a city with a continuous life, the other, Pompeii, an *urbs interrupta*), the Silchester *Insula IX* Project also represents a useful benchmark for the Pompeii sample. Indeed, it has helped both to evaluate past experiences and to enrich the agenda of those scholars who seek to address Pompeii (and other Vesuvian sites) with new questions and new methods, in accordance with more recent theoretical reflections and operational practice in archaeology, classical and otherwise. The Silchester Project has some affinity with *insula* studies in Pompeii: one of its directors, Michael Fulford, also worked on the project on Pompeii's *Insula I 9*, and the main aim of both initiatives was to reveal the history of human occupation of the selected site in every possible detail¹⁶.

Rethinking the Pompeii sample

It is difficult to deny the role that the most famous *urbs interrupta*, Pompeii, still plays in classical archaeology, and especially in the discourse on Roman town planning, where it continues to be one of the most important points of reference. "Pompeii reminds us of the reality of urban life in Roman times"¹⁷. What Roger Ling wrote in 1997 is still valid today. Pompeii remains the most complete sample for understanding the Roman city, despite the difficulties created by the circumstances of its rediscovery and the great gaps in its published scientific record (which perhaps will never be filled, considering the sheer size of the site). The Pompeii sample still has the same value and the same drawbacks that the authors of the monograph on *Insulae VI 3 and VI 4* (1990) highlighted thirty years ago. By qualifying Pompeii as "una realtà monumentale e culturale di straordinaria importanza, da sempre al centro del dibattito scientifico ..., che paradossalmente risulta sconosciuta in maniera sistematica"¹⁸, they underscored one of its biggest problems: an increasing amount of excavations and studies for which there is no published record. Thus, fifteen years later, the same problem was once again emphatically highlighted by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill: "No archaeological site has been so tormented as Pompeii not only by failure to publish, but more specifically by failure to publish

the evidence upon which far-reaching conclusions have been based"¹⁹. The need to invest resources not only in conservation, but also in systematic studies and analytical publications, is an increasingly urgent one, despite the progress achieved, especially in documentation, in the last few decades. It is undeniable that thanks to the great city-wide campaigns carried out since the 1970s (such as the "Campagna Speciale di Rilevamento e Documentazione", 1977-1980, the "Consorzio Neapolis", 1987-1990, the Piano della Conoscenza (2015-2016) of the "Grande Progetto Pompei")²⁰, much progress has been made, but much more remains to be done, especially in the post-recording phases, from analysis and interpretation to publication. The site's wealth itself poses particular challenges for recording, in the service of both archival documentation and scientific understanding, as well as for the maintenance and preservation of the physical remains themselves and the provision of public information²¹.

Since the 1980s, excavations and studies carried out by various international teams have investigated more and more of the material evidence pertaining to the phases prior to AD 79. However, the stratigraphically analysed area of Pompeii, although larger than before, is still very small in comparison to the part brought to light by non-stratigraphic excavations.

Taken as a whole, the archaeological evidence from Pompeii is undoubtedly *not* the most meticulously excavated, inventoried, preserved, displayed and published from the ancient Roman world: this is the essence of the "Pompeii premises"²².

The "Pompeii premise" (in the singular form) was introduced in 1961 by Robert Ascher to refer to the "erroneous notion" that what the archaeologist discovers is "the remains of a once living community, stopped as it were, at a point in time"²³. The subject of much discussion from the 1960s to the 1990s²⁴, it is still cited, but clearly the debate has moved on. Indeed, it is now widely accepted that it is futile to seek in the Pompeii sample an image *frozen in time* of the everyday life of the city at the moment of its traumatic interruption, and hence highly reliable data

14 Fulford et al. 2006; Fulford/Clarke 2011.

15 Fulford et al. 2006, XVII.

16 Wallace-Hadrill/Fulford 1995-1996; Fulford/Wallace-Hadrill 1999; Wallace-Hadrill 2005, 101.

17 Ling 1997, 253.

18 Caracci et al. 1990, 7.

19 Wallace-Hadrill 2005, 101.

20 Sampaolo 2008; Neapolis 1994; Osanna 2018.

21 Bon 1997, 8.

22 Corolini 2020c, 53-58.

23 Ascher 1961, 325.

24 Schiffer 1985; Binford 1981; Murray 1999. For a review of the state of the art see Bermejo Tirado 2007-2008, 233 f.; Lohmann 2016.

with which to reconstruct its ancient use contexts²⁵. As other researchers have recently pointed out, Pompeii was a "city in flux", just like any other²⁶.

Today, the premises are thus quite different. First and foremost, the archaeological evidence previously brought to light is the result of a long history of hybridisation between ancient and modern²⁷. As pointed out by Sara Bon, Pompeii represents a complicated network, a result of its development both in antiquity and since its first rediscovery, considering that the site has been subject to salvage and looting during almost three centuries of interest in its remains²⁸. In other words, its history can be considered the product of an ancient and modern entanglement of human and material agency²⁹. Moreover, its archaeological contexts do not directly reflect the ancient use contexts, of which the former are a distant, and often distorted, echo. This misalignment between archaeological settings and ancient lives is due to several factors, ancient and modern. The current state of the Pompeii evidence, in terms of structures and artefact assemblages, is the result not only of a long occupation before AD 79, but also of a number of influences affecting the site since its volcanic burial. The city came to an end under extraordinary and highly complex circumstances, which the frequently inadequate methods of recovery and documentation have made difficult to understand³⁰. This problem is seen even in the best cases, where volcanic sediments were investigated by means of stratigraphic excavation (as in the southern *insulae* of *Regio* I, *Insula* IX 12, and more recently *Regio* V)³¹. As a result, the reliability of the archaeological contexts and their artefact assemblages is very limited both at Pompeii and at other Vesuvian sites.

Despite these objective difficulties, reconstructing ancient use contexts remains a feasible task and above all a necessary one. In order to achieve this goal, Pompeii studies have recently turned their attention to material culture as a record of ancient everyday life, including evidence of consumption. The focus of study has shifted from the architectural remains towards the spatial distribution of artefacts and the activity patterns they represent, in search of the effective use of space, potentially different from its intended function. Architecture, indeed, can only present the raw setting in which human activity took place, without representing the living conditions of the inhabitants³². This new interest in materiality and contextual reading has proceeded hand in hand with the rediscovery of legacy data and their informative potential, indispensable for the study of the older excavations³³. Notwithstanding its importance, this avenue of enquiry, first introduced by Vincenzina Castiglione Morelli in a seminal paper on *Insula* II 8³⁴ and developed – from different points of view – since the mid-1990s by Penelope M. Allison, Joanne Berry and Ria Berg³⁵, still has few followers. Indeed, in Pompeii studies, the taxonomic approach continues to prevail, as confirmed by the latest publications, including the proceed-

ings of the "Fecisti cretaria" colloquium in Pompeii in 2016, which show that the core interest is still material evidence rather than material culture, let alone material agency³⁶. The "material-cultural turn" that has also affected classical archaeology in the last twenty years has barely even touched upon the Vesuvian sites³⁷.

Despite these considerations, Pompeii can still be a good sample. If the as-yet unpublished evidence, starting with the older excavations, is subject to systematic analysis and publication in scientific editions, it will be possible to expand the archives with high-quality data, acquired with the necessary attention to their contexts of both rediscovery and use in ancient times. In this way, step by step, the Pompeii sample can be fully deconstructed, reassembled and recontextualised, in accordance with its true nature, from both the modern and the ancient points of view. Concerning the former, this site is an exceptional document, the result of the way in which its first life came to an end and its second life has unfolded, in terms of its rediscovery, conservation and presentation to the outside world, including the wealth and complexity of its archives. Concerning the latter, Pompeii can be considered an example

25 Dyson 1997, esp. 153. On formation processes at Pompeii see Allison 1995a; Bon 1997; Allison 2010; Ynnilä 2013a.

26 Ynnilä 2013a, with previous bibliography.

27 Corralini 2021, 387 f.

28 Bon 1997, 12.

29 Corralini 2021. Agency is used here in its broadest sense, both social and individual, cultural and material. For agency in archaeology see Dobres/Robb 2000; Dornan 2002; Johnson 2004; Robb 2010; Van Oyen 2015, and, with a focus on "Other-Than-Human Agency", Kehoe 2017; Harrison-Buck/Hendon 2018. On material agency see Hicks 2010, 73–79; Jones/Boivin 2010.

30 Allison 1992; Allison 1995a; Allison 1995b; Murray 1999; Allison 2004; Allison 2007; Allison 2009; Allison 2010.

31 Amadio 1988 (*Insula* II 1); De Simone 1988 (*Insula* II 8); Nappo 1988 (*Insula* I 20); Sodo 1988 (*Insula* II 1); Varone 2008 (*Insula* IX 12); Osanna/Fabbri 2019; Osanna/Muscolino 2021 (*Regio* V).

32 For a general overview, with a focus on the individual house, see Bermejo Tirado 2007–2008; Bermejo Tirado 2015. "Material spatiality" (cf. Lavan/Swift/Putzeys 2007, with bibliography), with an emphasis, alongside the built space, on the portable artefacts (Kroll/Price 1991; Hingley/Willis 2007), goes a step further with respect to the "spatial analysis", as applied to Pompeii in a case study by Laurence 1994; Laurence 1997; Laurence 2007; Grahame 2000. On the interrelationship of spatial practices and social values see also George 1997; Gardner 2007; Dickmann 2010.

33 On the role of the legacy data see Allison 2008 and Ellis 2008. Laidlaw 2007 with a focus on the Pompeii sample and its published sources. For some good practices, where a reevaluation of the legacy data has made it possible to reconstruct the second life of an archaeological context, see Parslow 1995 and Zanella 2019.

34 Castiglione Morelli del Franco/Vitale 1989.

35 Allison 1995b; Allison 1996; Allison 1997; Allison 2004; Allison 2006; Berry 1997a; Berry 1997b; Berg 2016a; Berg 2019.

36 Osanna/Toniolo 2020. On material culture and material agency see above, fn. 32.

37 On the "material-cultural turn" see Hicks 2010; on New Materialism see Witmore 2014.

of the evolution of an Italic town into a Roman city, from the 6th century BC to AD 79.

This process of re-examination provides a better basis for a goal that has been pursued by the scientific community for over a century, i.e. the reintegration of Pompeii into the framework of the urban process in the Roman world, in which it represents not a paradigm, but an exceptionally complex case study. A leading role in this process has been played by *insula*-based projects. Indeed, by analysing individual episodes in a city's history, these studies have made an important contribution to the replacement of the abstract Pompeii of the *domus* with the more real image of a city in continuous flux. *Insula* studies have proven to be an essential tool in the attempt to go beyond a simple "survey picture" of urban development, in a search for a deeper understanding³⁸. This paper looks at projects targeting various urban areas of Pompeii that have been selected as case studies due to both the strategy they adopt with regard to data collection, analysis and interpretation and their results. The aim is to demonstrate the variety of approaches that currently characterise the field of *insula* studies, with a focus on Pompeii. The expected result is to highlight not so much a specific model of intervention as a collection of possible paradigms relating to a range of situations. To achieve this goal, the first step must be a chronological review of the scientific publications, with a view to identifying best practices.

***Insula* studies in Pompeii: an ongoing story**

In the past half century, *insula* studies have rapidly developed into one of the most prominent areas of scholarly research into Pompeii. Tracing their multifaceted history allows us not only to recognise a number of models, but also to verify the response to demands for a "holistic" archaeology, i.e. one based on a multi-dimensional approach to all aspects of ancient evidence. The scientific community seems to agree on the need to adopt a similar strategy for the study of Pompeii³⁹. Judging by the results, however, translating this methodological stance into action is no easy task. In order for these good intentions to succeed, a number of logistical and financial conditions must be met.

The comprehensive study of an entire *insula* takes a long time, as does the execution and publication of the research, even in the most felicitous cases. As a result, the works published to date give only a partial idea of the wealth, in terms of research and studies, of the Pompeii sample: for almost all *insula*-based projects the process of scientific publication is ongoing⁴⁰.

The intellectual agenda underlying *insula* studies began to take shape in the early decades of the 20th century, when Ferdinand Noack and Karl Lehmann-Hartleben

sought to reassess the Pompeii sample in terms of its broader historical framework⁴¹. The first season of *insula* studies in Pompeii started with the two scholars' documentation and study of the multi-level houses along the southern city walls. Since this first chapter of its history, the city block-based approach has proved to be an excellent counterpoint to the purely monument-based approach to surveying urban history, making it possible to focus instead on the circumstances, historical, cultural and social, behind the city's development. Over the past century, this intellectual agenda has evolved in accordance with the cultural context and the intellectual, methodological and technological frameworks. For example, excavation is now exclusively of the stratigraphic type; the focus on material evidence has been accompanied by a growing interest in material culture; recording, documentation and rendering techniques have been refined; and the contribution of archaeometry has become increasingly important. The common objective has remained the same: to base the reconstruction of sections of the social, cultural and economic history of this Italic and Roman city on the detailed analysis of material evidence. Aside from the distinctive features of the case studies, the difference lies in the strategies adopted, and the results achieved, from data collection to interpretations. Some projects have focused on the situation in AD 79⁴². Others have chosen to investigate the settlement's older stages⁴³. Still others have adopted a long-term perspective, opting for a complete study of "their" *insulae*⁴⁴.

All the researchers have sought to overcome the tendency of Pompeii studies towards isolation and self-referentiality that was denounced as early as 1916 by Franz Winter⁴⁵ and highlighted as recently as 2005 by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, when he wrote that "Pompeian archaeology need not remain trapped in its own very curious bubble of isolation"⁴⁶.

Documentation is the key to understanding the history of *insula*-based research in Pompeii, partly as a direct consequence of the nature of the site, characterised by an exceptional amount of material evidence, generally brought to light by old (i.e. non-stratigraphic) excavations.

38 Hurst 2013, 73 f.

39 Corralini 2018a, esp. 474–492.

40 For more detail see below.

41 Seiler 2001.

42 E.g. the projects on *Insulae* VI 3–4 (Carocci et al. 1990) and I 10 (Ling 2008).

43 E.g., the investigations carried out by the University of Rome "La Sapienza" in Regions VII and VIII, Carafa 2002; Carafa 2007.

44 E.g. the "Pompeii. *Insula* del Centenario (IX 8)" project of the University of Bologna (Corralini 2018a, esp. 492–516; Corralini 2018b, 17–40; Corralini 2020b).

45 Seiler 2001, 63.

46 Wallace-Hadrill 2005, 108.

Rather than conducting new excavations *in situ*, the best way to preserve Pompeii for posterity (if not in all its materiality, at least in the form of a partial reconstruction, as enabled by documentation and scientific research) is to record and study these previously unearthed remains.

Acta (1912–). Looking for standards and best practices

Unlike what may be read in some publications, the *insula*-based approach in Pompeii was not introduced by the *Regio VI* Project in the late 1990s and early 2000s⁴⁷. Its origins are in fact much more remote, coinciding with the work of Ferdinand Noack and Karl Lehmann-Hartleben on *Insula VIII 2*. Conceived by F. Noack in 1912 and executed by K. Lehmann-Hartleben, who in 1936 published a monograph that is still a valid reference work today, the project involved the diachronic study of the architecture of the terraced houses in the southern area of the city. This goal was pursued by means of a new analytical and rational method for the documentation of the structural remains and by systematically analysing verifiable data sequences⁴⁸. The main innovation was the interaction between the focus on the historical-topographical aspects and the attempt at a historical-social reading, based on the belief that the organisation of space – then as now – was a means of creating social relationships⁴⁹. This study remained an isolated episode for a long time: it was not until the 1970s that its legacy, in terms of data collection, interpretation and publication, was taken up again⁵⁰, after which the *insula*-based approach began to enjoy growing success (fig. 1).

During the past five decades, two main seasons of *insula* studies can be identified: the first in the 1970s and 1980s and the second in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

In both periods, the research was characterised by a renewed interest in investigating the earlier occupation phases as well as the 1st-century-AD contexts, employing innovative methods to gain new information from all the evidence, both above and below ground.

The 1970s saw the birth of projects on *Insulae VI 5* and *I 10*, which focused on stratigraphic excavations below the AD-79 level and on the documentation of the structural evidence.

The British Pompeii Project (1978–1986), conducted on *Insula I 10*, can also be regarded as pioneering, being one of the first *insula* studies on the Pompeii sample after that of Ferdinand Noack and Karl Lehmann-Hartleben. In many ways, despite the absence of stratigraphic excavations, the work on *Insula I 10* was, and still is, the main point of reference for the *insula* studies undertaken since then. This project confirmed the relevance of the detailed examination of building sequences, especially when based on the painstaking stratigraphic analysis of standing structures, to studies of the changes unfolding in cities over time. Moreover, it also showed the potential of the contextual study of the artefacts, demonstrating that the study of

a complete *insula* rather than a single house can provide a better basis for interpreting social dynamics. Last but not least, it showed that the detailed examination of a complete *insula* is not only an extremely time-consuming activity, but also requires a major commitment from a large multidisciplinary team, in all its phases, from fieldwork to analysis and publication.

Completely absent in the British Project, which was centred on the study of previously unearthed evidence, were stratigraphic excavations in the levels prior to AD 79. They were, however, the main pillar of another project conducted in the same period on *Insula VI 5*. Between 1976 and 1979 the University of Milan carried out stratigraphic excavations on this city block with the aim of providing “un tassello, quanto più possibile completo anche nei dettagli, per la futura ricostruzione storica”⁵¹. The final goal was the publication of a complete scientific edition of the excavations, “dall’ultima fase alle più antiche presenze archeologicamente documentate”⁵², which entailed publication building by building (rather than by phase), although to date only one such monograph has been published⁵³.

In the 1980s, large-scale excavation campaigns in eruptive deposits were undertaken by the *Soprintendenza* in southern *insulae* in *Regio I* and *Insula IX 12*⁵⁴, while a study of structural evidence was performed on *Insulae VI 3* and *VI 4* by a team from Perugia University⁵⁵. In the same period, the “Consorzio Neapolis” (1987–1990) carried out its ambitious programme of computer data storage and access, which was also designed to rediscover the data from older excavations and to enhance their informative potential⁵⁶. Based on the resulting archives, Vincenzina Castiglione Morelli del Franco proposed the first *insula*-scale socio-economic reading, with *Insula I 8* as a case study⁵⁷.

The early 1990s saw the birth of many other *insula*-based research projects. In 1991 *Insula VII 12* was selected by the Japan Institute of Palaeological Studies as a case study for its research into the formation of city blocks in Pompeii. As in the projects on *Insulae I 10* and *VI 3–4*, the Japanese initiative did not include stratigraphic excava-

47 For example, Osanna 2017, 7; Zaccaria Ruggia/Maratini 2017, 13, and, more recently, Zanella 2020a, 688 fn. 1.

48 Seiler 2001, 65 f.

49 Seiler 2001, 66; 68.

50 Seiler 2001, 68 f.; Wallace-Hadrill 2001; Coralini 2018a.

51 Bonghi Jovino 1984, 22.

52 Bonghi Jovino 1984, 23.

53 Bonghi Jovino 1984.

54 Varone 2008.

55 Carocci et al. 1990.

56 Neapolis 1994.

57 Castiglione Morelli del Franco/Vitale 1989. On the same theme and the same *insula* see Borgard/Carre/Fontaine 2007, with some methodological guidelines.

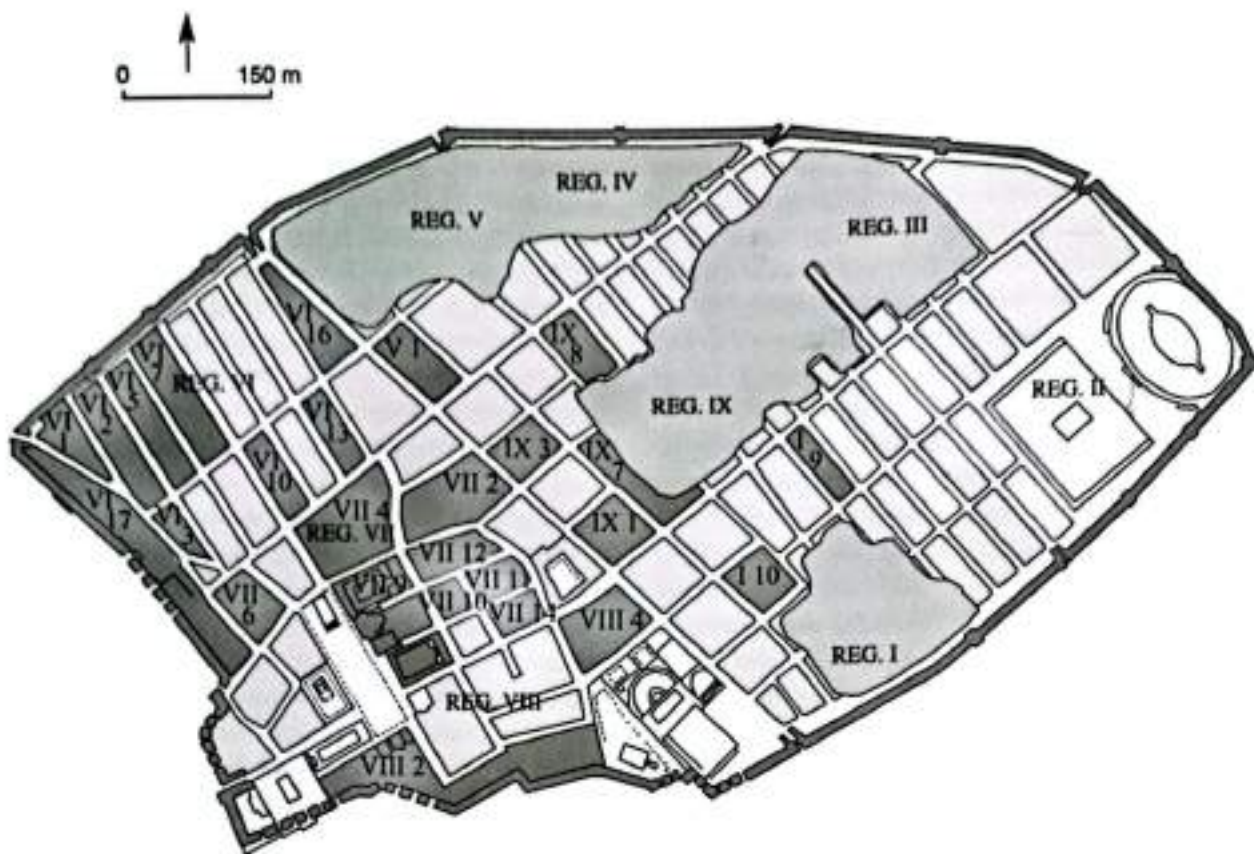


Fig. 1: Pompeii, map. In evidence, the city-blocks selected as a case study by research projects. The state of the art in 2019.

tions below the AD-79 level, its work being mainly focused on recording the material evidence *in situ* and the detailed study of extant structures⁵⁸.

A few years later, an integrated approach, combining stratigraphic excavations and architectural and structural analysis, was adopted by two new projects concerning *Insulae* I 9 and VI 1.

Starting in 1994, the first, on *Insula* I 9, was conducted jointly by the British School at Rome and the University of Reading with the goal of "comprehensive study and publication". Its research agenda was inspired by both Roger Ling's work on the *Insula* of the Menander (I 10) and the general lack of stratigraphic testing in Pompeii⁵⁹. The project aimed not only to determine the chronology of the built evidence, considered as a means and not as a final goal, but also to retrace the city block's first life. Excavations below the AD-79 level, a survey of the structural evidence and the contextual study of the finds were the main lines of enquiry⁶⁰.

In 1995, *Insula* VI 1 was chosen by the Anglo-American Project in Pompeii (AAPP) as part of a project that would seek to understand a complete city block. It was to be guided by a range of complementary approaches and activities (large-scale sub-surface excavations, close examination of extant remains, detailed stratigraphic recording of standing walls, extensive recovery of artefacts and ecofacts),

without neglecting the evidence of the second life of the *insula*⁶¹.

In the 1990s, *insula* studies saw a shift from a narrow range of activities (such as excavations or structural surveys) towards a multi-dimensional and integrated approach. An important role in this development was played by the *Soprintendenza*.

In 1995, on the basis of work conducted previously, the *Soprintendente*, Pier Giovanni Guzzo invited the international scientific community to contribute to the study and conservation of Pompeii⁶². The first result was, in the following year, a conference entitled "Per un'edizione moderna di Pompeii" in 1996 in Ravello. This led to the establishment of the principle, subsequently applied in various forms by many projects, that researchers should no longer select individual building units as case studies, as was still happening in the 1980s, for example in the "Häuser in

58 Nishida/Hori 1992; Nishida 1993.

59 Wallace-Hadrill 2005, 101.

60 Wallace-Hadrill 1998.

61 Bon et al. 1997; Jones/Robinson 2005; Jones 2008; Robinson et al. 2018.

62 Carandini et al. 1996; Corralini 2018b, 18.

Pompeii” project⁶³, but *insulae*, as basic urban-architectural units. The Ravello conference marked the start of a new season, in which the analysis of standing structures and stratigraphic excavations below the AD-79 level were the main lines of research. In the same year, a seminal paper by Andrea Carandini and others presented an agenda for *insula*-based research projects, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach, echoed a few years later by Emidio De Albentis, with even greater emphasis on the rediscovery of legacy data⁶⁴.

“What methodology for the study of the *insulae* of Pompeii?” Seeking to answer this question, Andrea Carandini and his co-authors identified the lack of stratigraphic analyses, of both the subsoil and standing structures, as the most serious gap in Pompeii studies⁶⁵. Starting from this observation, they proposed a comprehensive approach, with an agenda focused precisely on those two lines of enquiry, i. e. structural remains analysis and stratigraphic excavations in levels prior to AD 79. According to their guidelines, the first investigation phase should aim to retrace the history of the older excavations and to conduct a careful examination of all the material evidence, including loose finds and modern restorations, proceeding where possible by room or by area⁶⁶. A fundamental role was assigned to the documentation and characterisation of the evidence *in situ* and to the stages of publication, which was to be in accordance with sequences of activities and phases, rather than room by room, as had been and would subsequently continue to be the case with many other projects⁶⁷. This strategy can be summarised in a three-level formula: reading of elevations, stratigraphic tests, integral excavation of the *insula*. The difficulty in putting this workplan into practice within large-scale projects is clearly illustrated by the history of the projects undertaken to date by the team from La Sapienza University Rome, especially those on *Insulae* VII 9 and VII II⁶⁸, and on *Insula* VIII 2, where the excavations in the *Casa di Giuseppe II* (VIII 2, 38,39) are still without a scientific edition, despite starting in 1994⁶⁹. At the present time, the most significant work is Angelo Amoroso’s monograph on *Insula* VII 10, which focuses on vertical stratigraphic analysis⁷⁰.

More generally, from a city-wide and long-term perspective, the 1990s saw stratigraphic excavations play an increasingly important role, together with the detailed recording of the structures, reflecting a more complex agenda. Other projects, in the same period and subsequently, confirmed this trend. Examples include the work on *Insula* VI 16 (conducted since 1997 by the German Archaeological Institute of Rome in accordance with a multidisciplinary approach) and *Insula* IX 8, a case study of Bologna University since 1998⁷¹.

In 2000, a group of Italian Universities launched the *Regio VI* Project, focusing on the study of early Pompeii and proceeding *insula* by *insula*. As already seen in the projects on *Insulae* I 9 and VI 5, its strategy combined surveys and

analysis of the standing remains with stratigraphic excavation⁷². In the same year a Swedish team began work on *Insula* V 1, with the aim of analysing a complete city block, recording and publishing house by house⁷³. To date, its fieldwork has consisted mainly of studying the standing walls and cleared floor levels, with comprehensive documentation and data management by means of a 3D GIS⁷⁴.

The year 2002 saw the beginning of a Finnish project on *Insula* IX 3, the “*Expositio Pompeiana Universitatis Helsingiensis*” (EPUH), with a workplan based on an integrated approach, encompassing structural analysis, small-scale stratigraphic excavations, the recovery of loose finds from older excavations and archaeometric analysis. Its primary goal was to produce a corpus of data for the structures and finds pertaining to this city block in AD 79 and its previous phases, in order to investigate the development of its material and socio-economic life⁷⁵.

In 2004 it was the turn of the University of Alicante, whose “*Pompeya. Regio VIII, Insula III*”⁷⁶ project adopted the same multidisciplinary approach that had already been tested in many previous endeavours, such as those of *Insulae* I 9 (British School at Rome, University of Reading), VI 16 (German Archaeological Institute) and IX 8 (University of Bologna)⁷⁷.

In 2005 the *Via Consolare* Project began research into the history of the development of *Insula* VII 6. Its legacy has been continued by a project on the area around the *Villa delle Colonne a Mosaico*, adopting the same comprehensive approach, including geophysical investigations, 3D topographical surveys, photography, analysis of standing structures, surface cleaning of the preserved AD-79 levels and targeted sub-surface excavations⁷⁸.

This long and dynamic second season of *insula* studies is part of the so-called “revolution” in Pompeii studies. Indeed, the last fifty years have seen a rejuvenation of sorts, shifting away from the antiquarianism prevailing in the

63 Strocka 2008.

64 Carandini et al. 1996; De Albentis 2001.

65 Carandini et al. 1996, 322 f.

66 Carandini et al. 1996, 323 f.

67 Carandini et al. 1996, 325; Carandini 2007.

68 Carafa 2005, 19 fn. 1.

69 Carafa 2005.

70 Amoroso 2007.

71 Seiler et al. 2005; Seiler/Beste 2008.

72 Cosarelli/Pesando 2006, 15 f.

73 Staub Gierow 2005, 144.

74 Leander Touati 2008; Leander Touati 2010. On the GIS see Landeschi et al. 2015; Landeschi et al. 2016.

75 Castrén et al. 2008; Berg/Kuivalainen 2019, 10–15.

76 Uroz Saez/Poveda Navarro/Uroz Rodríguez 2008.

77 *Insula* I 9: Wallace-Hadrill 1998; Wallace-Hadrill 2005; *Insula* VI 16: Seiler/Beste 2008; *Insula* IX 8: Santoro 2007b; Corralini 2018b.

78 Anderson 2015–2016.

first two centuries of Pompeii's second life towards a more holistic approach. To this renaissance, significant contributions have been made by the detailed publications covering individual buildings and city blocks, as well as the application of digital technologies and new excavations. A leading role in this process has been played by the integration of the traditional historical and archaeological approaches typical of classical scholarship with the cross-cultural and theoretical methods of modern anthropology and sociology. Such an approach, subordinating the traditional historical and literary framework to material culture, has produced results that take unfamiliar forms, challenging perceptions and assumptions about life in the ancient world, in Pompeii and beyond. The current state of Pompeii studies represents a chapter in the evolution of classical archaeology into a modern discipline that is able to look at old materials and subjects from new perspectives. In this re-reading of the Pompeii sample, upcoming challenges include the holistic approach to material culture, in all its aspects and from a range of perspectives, and implementation of the principles of New Materialism⁷⁹. In the last half century, more studies, especially those of Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Christopher Parslow and Paul Zanker⁸⁰, have highlighted the true nature of Pompeii and its role in contemporary archaeology: a unique case study, owing its exceptionality to the way in which it came to an end and thus the wealth of its material evidence, and a potential model with which to better understand the nature of many other cities across the Roman World, at least in the early Empire. In the same period, the archaeology of Pompeii has been dominated by field activities aimed at both filling out the picture of early Pompeii and reviewing, via a new examination of the finds and material remains, the history of the city in its final years, after the earthquake of AD 62.

While the *insula* studies that have come to life in the last half century share the same unit of analysis (the city block), research interests and agenda, they have adopted various strategies and methods for recording, processing and reporting. This heterogeneity, as well as being the result of the participation of different schools, has also arisen from the distinctive features and specific circumstances of the individual case studies. The variegated results of the adaptation of that shared agenda are evident in the scientific publications, whose forms differ from case to case.

Throughout their century of life, *insula* studies in Pompeii have been accompanied by studies at single-building scale, represented from the 1980s to the 2000s by the "Häuser in Pompeji" project and more recently by the work on the *Casa di Sallustio* (VI 2, 4)⁸¹.

In some cases, the intersection between the two approaches has produced a hybrid strategy, affecting both recording and reporting⁸². This has been the case, for example, in *insula*-based projects which, having chosen to proceed building by building, have focused to date only on a single house, such as the German "Casa dei Postumii und

ihre *Insula*" (VIII 4) project⁸³, the Swedish Project on *Insula V* 1⁴⁴ and the Anglo-American Project in Pompeii (AAPP) on *Insula VI* 1⁸⁵. The last of these began in 1995 with a comprehensive agenda to study a complete *insula*, by "recording its above- and below-ground remains in close detail in order better to understand the spatial and chronological contexts in which the city developed"⁸⁶. For recording it opted for a house-by-house approach, while for reporting it adopted a hybrid formula, thematic *insula*-wide monographs (on coins, botanic ecofacts, small finds, glass)⁸⁷ alternating with publications focusing on the excavation of individual buildings⁸⁸.

Many other *insula*-based projects, conducted either by teams or by a single individual, have had similarly mixed results. Examples include *Insulae* I 9, selected as a case study by the British School at Rome and the University of Reading with a view to conducting a comprehensive study, although in fact the work has been limited to the *Casa di Amaranthus* (I 9, 11-12)⁸⁹; IX 1, where Alessandro Gallo focused on the richest *domus* (*Casa di Epidio Sabino*, IX 1, 30)⁹⁰; VI 17, the so-called *Insula Occidentalis*, for which the monograph on decorations in the *Casa di M. Fabius Rufus* was supplemented by another on stratigraphic excavations (VI 17, 32-36)⁹¹; and VII 6, where the focus was on the *Casa della Diana Arcaizzante* (VII 6, 3)⁹².

From theory to practice:

agendas, strategies, achievements

In the Pompeii sample, the *insula*-based work has been, and still is, mostly conducted on city blocks that have already been unearthed, while new excavations, when carried out, are limited to levels below AD 79. No project has yet chosen to excavate and study a city block or urban area without a special monumental or other character, proceeding with a detailed stratigraphic analysis down to the

79 See above, fn. 40.

80 Wallace-Hadrill 1994; Parslow 1995; Zanker 1998.

81 Stročka 2008; Laidlaw/Stella 2014.

82 For an overview of studies concerning houses (as individual buildings) and *insulae* in Pompeii see Amoroso 2007, 13-22.

83 Dickmann/Parson 2005, 157.

84 Staub-Gierow 2005; Leander Touati 2008.

85 Jones 2008; Robinson et al. 2018.

86 Bon et al. 1997, 32.

87 Hobbs 2013; Murphy 2015; Cool 2016.

88 Anderson/Robinson 2018.

89 Wallace-Hadrill 1998; Wallace-Hadrill 2005; Wallace-Hadrill 2013, 76 f.

90 Gallo 2001; Gallo 2008; Gallo 2010; Gallo 2013.

91 Aoyagi/Pappalardo 2006; Grimaldi 2014. On the *Insula Occidentalis* see more recently also Greco/Osanna/Picone 2020, focused on conservation and restoration.

92 Luzón/del Carmen Alonso 2017.

natural. As highlighted by Henry Hurst for other sites, this preference for large-scale stratigraphic excavations in urban contexts is due not only to the research interests of the archaeologists, but also to the specific nature of the archaeological deposits themselves, as well as various other factors⁹³. What lies behind the decision in the case of the Pompeii sample?

First, as already pointed out, Pompeii has not actually been extensively explored, despite what some may still believe⁹⁴. Moreover, its material and documentary evidence requires a series of measures besides excavation, including a painstaking survey of the *status quo* in terms of the physical remains and the previous literature. Its ancient and modern history must be carefully studied before planning any research activities, including (but not limited to) new excavations. Excavation is not essential, although it is a good way to investigate urban dynamics, especially when it consists of "ground-truthing", that is, of small excavations carried out at strategic points to obtain key details about buildings and dates⁹⁵. The optimal solution lies in combining a large- or medium-scale approach with attention to detail, as seen beyond Pompeii in the excavations of *Insula XIV in Verulamium* and *Insula IX in Calleva Atrebatum* (Silchester)⁹⁶. Where, as is the case in Pompeii, most of the area unearthed to date is not covered by published scientific editions, researchers need to think even more carefully about what can be gained from excavation, and when and how it must be executed. At other sites, excavating an internally consistent section of a Roman town in accordance with sound methodological principles can produce a more dynamic picture than would result from either document-based research or archaeological study alone: up to a point, without wishing to over-generalise, data obtained from the stratigraphic sequence of a city block, or any part thereof, can shed light on the developments in the town it belonged to⁹⁷.

The main problem lies in the question of how to evaluate the local (i. e. site-specific) and broader (i. e. city-wide) significance of the results, even when the *insula* belongs to a town about which there is a relatively high level of pre-existing knowledge⁹⁸. In Pompeii, due to its distinctive factors (the Pompeii premises), the best results are achieved by combining the three main lines of research, i. e. document-based investigation, field surveys and excavations, in the same project.

The methodological proposal advanced by Andrea Carandini and others in the mid-1990s, i. e. to study Pompeii at *insula* scale, was based on the informative potential of this approach to the study of the changes affecting a city over time, although it was also prompted by the specific characteristics of Pompeii itself. In this research agenda, large-scale stratigraphic excavations of a city block were just one of the main lines of research, an element of a more complex strategy, starting with various forms of non-intrusive survey and ending with the final publication⁹⁹.

Nearly three decades after the Carandini proposal, the outlook is not particularly positive. *Insula* studies in Pompeii (of which there are about 20¹⁰⁰) have not yet developed a unified methodology, nor are there shared protocols and procedures. Despite points of convergence between the various projects in terms of integrated approaches and overall strategies, each initiative has followed its own path, shaped by the specific characteristics of the case, the research interests of the team, and the availability of resources.

On the plus side, we now have some answers to the initial question of what we want from *insula*-based studies of Pompeii. These highlight a convergence towards two main objectives (to obtain better knowledge of the site and hence to contribute to better conservation), although they are widely divergent in their results.

Despite the heterogeneity of practices, it is possible to recognise general trends and patterns in the activities.

Some projects have prioritised the investigation of urban dynamics, with greater attention being paid in some cases to the development phases, in others to chronology and dating. These include the so-called "Progetto Regio VI", which proceeded by sampling a large area of the site by *insula*, making extensive use of small-scale stratigraphic excavations (over 100 separate digs). Among the *insula*-based case studies, it represents a good example of the integrated research strategy, combining analysis of the standing structures brought to light by older excavations with targeted stratigraphic interventions in levels prior to AD 79, in an attempt to reconstruct the life of a built complex from its beginnings up to the most recent restoration and conservation measures¹⁰¹.

In contrast, other projects have focused on the integral investigation of a single *insula*, selected as a case study for both scientific and operational reasons. For example, when in 1994 the British School at Rome and Reading University, interested in acquiring knowledge of urban development, set out to examine a block of houses in Pompeii,

93 Hurst 2013, *passim*.

94 Hurst 2013, 65.

95 Hurst 2013, 64.

96 Hurst 2013, 66 f.

97 On *Calleva Atrebatum* and the Silchester Project see Fulford et al. 2006, 5-7.

98 Hurst 2013, 67 f. (on the issue of extrapolation).

99 Carandini et al. 1996.

100 Or 18, according to Zanella 2020a, 688 fn. 1. This information (which reproduces the same data already presented in Corralini 2018a) can only be approximate: only the *Soprintendenza* (since 2016 "Parco Archeologico di Pompei") could, through its archives, make a detailed list of the projects completed or in progress. Defining this state of the art was the aim of the international conferences of 2002 and 2007, promoted by the *Soprintendenza* (Guzzo/Guidobaldi 2005; Guzzo/Guidobaldi 2008).

101 Pesando 2005, 73.

Insula I 9 was chosen not only for its suitability for exploration beneath the AD-79 levels, but also for its topographical position, standing at the junction of two separate systems of urban organisation¹⁰².

In some projects, the *insula* itself was not the unit of analysis, but merely a topographical framework, the physical context for the study of an individual building. An example is the research into *Insula Occidentalis*, in which the University of Naples Suor Orsola Benincasa focused on the *Casa di M. Fabius Rufus* (VII 16, 22), conducting an architectural survey and undertaking excavations in its extramural garden¹⁰³. Further examples include *Insulae* VI 5, with excavations in the *Casa dei Fiori* (VI 5, 19), VIII 4, with an integrated analysis of the *Casa dei Postumii* (VIII 4, 4.49),¹⁰⁴ and VII 2 and VII 4, studied by the Institute for Archaeology of Innsbruck University as part of its research on the building history of this urban area¹⁰⁵. A special case is that of the *Casa del Fauno* (VI 2), a residential building occupying an entire *insula*, where between 1961 and 1963 the German Archaeological Institute conducted stratigraphic surveys to investigate earlier phases of occupation, whose results were not published until 2009¹⁰⁶.

In some cases, although the *insula* was the unit of analysis, publication was based not on the *insula* but on specific buildings. An example is the AAPP project, whose results were presented both at *insula* scale, regarding coins and small finds, and for individual buildings, such as the *Casa del Chirurgo* (VI 1 9-10.23), regarding the stratigraphic analysis¹⁰⁷.

The first monographs arising from this season of *insula* studies appeared in the mid-1980s, with the publication of the results of the stratigraphic excavations carried out in *Insula* VI 5¹⁰⁸. In 1990 a multi-author monograph presented the study of the standing remains of *Insulae* VI 3 and VI 4, while in 1997 it was the turn of Roger Ling's book on the structural analysis and building history of *Insula* I 10¹⁰⁹. As already noted by others, the publications of the latter project, centred on a single *insula* treated as a whole, established a potential standard for other *insula*-based projects, via its "serial publication of individual volumes in a set over a considerable length of time"¹¹⁰. Once completed, this multi-volume edition will constitute the most comprehensive work of documentation, analysis and reading of a whole *insula* in Pompeii¹¹¹.

In the mid-2000s, the scientific literature on Pompeii began to be enriched by two other projects inspired by the *Insula* I 10 model, i. e. the *Regio* VI Project (with its single-volume editions)¹¹² and the research programme of the University of Rome La Sapienza¹¹³.

To date, no *insula* in Pompeii can be said to be fully covered by an exhaustive scientific edition, not even the above-mentioned *Insula* I 10, which has not been the subject of stratigraphic excavations or archaeometric investigations, and for which there is still no scientific publication covering its epigraphical evidence¹¹⁴.

The length of time necessary for post-processing and publication confirms that providing anything like adequate documentation of an entire Pompeii *insula* is no easy task: extremely time-consuming and shockingly expensive in terms of both human and financial resources.

Despite the difficulties of achieving such an ambitious objective, the *insula*-based strategy continues to be valid, as recently confirmed by the University of Pisa with its *Praedia* Project, which since 2017 has focused on *Regio* II and especially on *Insula* II a (the so-called *Praedia Iuliae Felicis*)¹¹⁵. A further example is the work of Domenico Esposito on a multi-*insulae* scale (I 11, 13, 15; II 8)¹¹⁶.

To date, among the *insula* studies in Pompeii, the leading role belongs to the British Pompeii Project on *Insula* I 10 (1978-1986), which still constitutes a model of how to conduct research and present the results, with four thematic monographs (structures, decorations, finds, silver treasure) covering almost all of its main lines of enquiry¹¹⁷. In all of these works, analysis of the evidence has always been contextual, on several levels, from room to building to *insula*. All that is missing is the last stage, the monograph on inscriptions¹¹⁸. Four decades may seem a very long time to complete the final publishing phase of a research project, but the complexity of its case study and workplan should not be forgotten: not all Pompeii *insulae* have such a wealth of material evidence as *Insula* I 10, with a large amount of well-preserved decorations and mobile finds from older excavations, not to mention its highly complex building history¹¹⁹.

"One of the most important aspects of our study of the *Insula* of the Menander is that we are analysing the whole city block and not (as many other studies have done) isolated houses"¹²⁰. With these words, thirty years after the birth of the British Pompeii Project, Roger Ling empha-

102 Wallace-Hadrill 2013, 76.

103 Aoyagi/Pappalardo 2006; Grimaldi 2014.

104 Dickmann/Pirson 2008.

105 Pedroni 2008.

106 Faber/Hoffmann 2009 (about which Moormann 2011).

107 Cool 2016; Hobbs 2013; Anderson/Robinson 2018.

108 Bonghi Jovino 1984.

109 Carocci et al. 1990; Ling 1997.

110 Curtis 2007; Geysen 2007.

111 Curtis 2008.

112 For a synthesis see Ling 2008.

113 Carafa 2002; Carafa 2007; Amoroso 2007, 11.

114 About these, in a synthetic paper, Mouritsen 2011.

115 Anguissola/Olivito 2020. The same *insula* has been researched since the 1980s (including recording, excavations, documentation and architectural analysis) by Christopher Parslow (Parslow 1988; Parslow 1998b; Parslow 2000; Parslow 2013; Parslow 2017).

116 D. Esposito, p. 159-180 (in this volume).

117 Ling 1997; Painter 2001; Ling/Ling 2005; Allison 2006.

118 On this subject see a first synthetic presentation in Mouritsen 2011.

119 Allison 2006, 39.

120 Ling/Ling 2005, 1.

sised the key feature of its "in-depth analysis of one city block at Pompeii", a "long-term programme of recording and documentation". The project was part of a wider framework, marked by a renewed focus on the documentation of the site, coordinated by the *Soprintendenza* and implemented by endeavours such as the Campagna Speciale di Rilevamento e Documentazione and the Consorzio Neapolis¹²¹.

At around the same time as Roger Ling's British Project began work on *Insula I 10* in Pompeii, the site of Ostia saw the application of a similar approach. Here, from 1973 to 1976, *Insula V II* was the subject of a programme of documentation and analysis of its architectural structures, aiming at "the tentative reconstruction of [their] earlier building history" and "with the purpose of preserving them for future generations, at least on paper", given the impossibility of preserving "indefinitely the ruins in their restored state"¹²². Two decades later, researchers in Pompeii and Ostia found themselves once more proceeding in parallel. An integrated approach, combining excavations and surveys, was adopted by the Reading Ostia Project for *Insula I IV*, during approximately the same period as the projects on *Insulae I 9* and *VI 5* were progressing in Pompeii¹²³.

For Roger Ling's project, the study of *Insula I 10* was the basis for a more ambitious goal, i. e. a "programme of interpretation and analysis, directed towards working out, so far as is possible, the structural history of the *insula* and using this, together with the evidence of decorations and loose finds, to enlarge our understanding of social life in the city"¹²⁴.

In 1997, presenting his first monograph, Roger Ling could rightly affirm that "no Pompeian *insula*, at least no *insula* as large and well preserved, has been subjected to such detailed scrutiny"¹²⁵. Affirming the innovative nature of his work, he pointed out that "the study of *VI 3* and *VI 4* ... though adopting a broader perspective" was "concerned with a pair of *insulae* which are badly preserved and almost completely devoid of decorations and concentrates more on description than on historical analysis", while the study of *VIII 2* attempted a more thorough historical analysis, but "concentrated almost exclusively on the architectural evidence"¹²⁶. R. Ling's work confirmed the importance of Pompeii to our knowledge of the Roman world, as a window into the actual everyday life of a "normal" city. R. Ling also points out that the city was subject to a continuous process of change, the classification into phases being "merely a convenient way of trying to impose some kind of chronological pattern on the chain of events", "in all probability as dynamic in Pompeii as it is in modern cities", with changes which took place more frequently and in a more piecemeal fashion than is normally realised¹²⁷.

Pompeii, Insula I 10: a long-term recording and documentation programme (1978-1986)

Beginning under the directorship of John B. Ward-Perkins in 1978 and continuing under the leadership of Roger Ling,

the project's aim was to provide a full analysis of one city block in Pompeii (*I 10*) in order to contribute to a better understanding of the social life of the city. After seven two-month seasons of fieldwork by a large multidisciplinary team of researchers who recorded and studied the material evidence, the main task was to draw together the enormous amount of data and shape it into a consistent, coherent account¹²⁸.

Notwithstanding the absence of stratigraphic investigations, this multi-volume work, with all four monographs published between 1997 and 2006, is the most exhaustive and detailed series of publications on any *insula* in the ancient city of Pompeii (and, to my knowledge, the entire Roman world)¹²⁹.

In the first monograph, on the built spaces, Roger Ling's aim was to trace the history of this block from the earliest times to the eruption of AD 79, in order to redress the main problem in the archaeology of Pompeii, i. e. the large quantity of evidence, both material and documentary, resulting from excavations aimed at uncovering and restoring structures not for future archaeologists, but for a public eager to see Pompeii as it was at the time of its destruction. To address the lack of documentation (the result of older methods of excavation, recording and publication), the British Pompeii Project founded its study on new archives.

As a result, the work on *Insula I 10* is now a cornerstone of the scientific literature on Pompeii, going far beyond the pre-existing studies. The magisterial 1936 study of *Insula VIII 2*, by Ferdinand Noack and Karl Lehmann-Hartleben, focused entirely on the unusual multi-story architectural structures to the exclusion of their decoration; in the "Häuser in Pompeii" series, all the attention was on individual houses and their decoration, with little interest in the buildings' history and loose finds; the University of Perugia's study of *Insulae VI 3* and *VI 4* established the stratigraphy of the structures, but the *insulae* were poorly preserved and lacked decoration, and the study did not take account of the loose finds.

In short, the British Pompeii Project was launched at a time when no previous study had looked thoroughly at the interrelationships between different buildings and properties over time, how the decorations related to architecture

121 Ling 1997, 1.

122 Boersma 1985, 1.

123 DeLaine/Wilkinson 1999.

124 Ling 1997, 2. For a good demonstration of the value of Roger Ling's work for any further research see Dickmann 2015.

125 Ling 1997, 2.

126 Ling 1997, 2.

127 Ling 1997, 238.

128 Clarke 1998.

129 Geysen 2007.

and what could be learned from the distribution and location of loose finds. In terms of publication, these three approaches were combined with each other, making it possible "to draw some general conclusions about the social structure of the *insula*, both in its historical evolution and its final form"¹³⁰.

Roger Ling's account of the changes to *Insula* I 10 over time demonstrates how careful observation (room by room, building by building) can provide a detailed history of a city block, even without stratigraphic excavations. However, as the author admits, this chronological accuracy has its limits precisely in the very nature of the evidence on which the dating is based: without digging up and dismantling the existing structures, the structural history will continue to pose unanswered questions¹³¹.

Roger Ling's work is based on the belief that by scrutinising every detail of the physical evidence one can construct a more accurate history of the *insula* than what was provided by the original excavators. As pointed out by John R. Clarke in his review, the first monograph on *Insula* I 10 was the product of an entirely "scientific", i. e. positivist, strategy of gathering hard information and analysing it with rigour. The result was "a refinement of chronology and accurate reconstructions of built forms, but little sense of the lives of the inhabitants let alone their tastes, culture, and beliefs"¹³².

The hope expressed at the end of that review (that the subsequent volumes would make a greater contribution to the "most interesting goal of the project ... a better understanding of the social life of the city", by studying the evolution of a specific urban district over time)¹³³ was fulfilled in the three subsequent monographs, on the silver treasure, decorations and loose finds¹³⁴.

Like the first volume, each of these was characterised by a contextual approach, attention to previous scholarship and painstaking analysis and presentation of the evidence. Offering a carefully presented and visually well documented corpus of data, each monograph made an important contribution to rectifying the original defect of the Pompeii studies, i. e. the lack of complete scientific publications covering the urban components of the city's archaeology.

The work of Penelope M. Allison on loose finds, seen as both artefacts and contextual evidence, marked an important turning point (not only for Pompeii but for classical archaeology as a whole)¹³⁵. Her research showed the potential, in terms of enriching the picture of the ancient city, of incorporating small finds into the analysis of archaeological evidence, even in cases such as Pompeii, characterised by careless past excavations and a conspicuous lack of scientific publications.

As Penelope Allison herself asserts in the introduction to her book, unlike more standard editions covering the loose finds, with catalogues consisting of artefact typologies, her study of the artefacts from Amedeo Maiuri's exca-

vations (1928–1932) was contextual. Methodologically, this was consistent with the goal of providing a practical tool for the main lines of archaeological research in the late 1990s and early 2000s, particularly the study of artefact assemblages¹³⁶.

As a consequence, the object of interest regarding the loose finds of *Insula* I 10 was the items' place of consumption rather than their place of production. This is because the classification into production-oriented categories enables neither functional analysis nor the accurate reconstruction of cultural behaviour in their site of rediscovery, which, in contrast, was Penelope Allison's chief purpose. In other words, the traditional presentation of the artefacts, based on typological and chronological criteria, was no longer considered "the most appropriate tool for ... anyone ... wishing to use material culture to interpret past activity"¹³⁷. In her work on the loose finds of *Insula* I 10, interest in consumption prevailed over production and thus it lacked a careful typological and chronological study by artefact. An alternative strategy – integrating morphological and functional analysis, considering both production and consumption, evaluating the finds both as individual artefacts and components of an assemblage – was adopted by other projects: for example, those on *Insulae* VI 5 (AAPP), regarding the finds from stratigraphic investigations of levels prior to AD 79, and on *Insulae* XI 3 (EPUH) and IX 8 (University of Bologna), especially concerning the material from older excavations¹³⁸.

At the medium and small scales:

the insula and the individual building

In the Anglo-American Project in Pompeii (AAPP), the monographs on classes of finds at the *insula* scale preceded those on the new excavations, which started in 2018 with that of the *Casa del Chirurgo* (VI 1 9–10.23), a key case for the *vexata quaestio* regarding the process of formation of Roman *atrium* houses¹³⁹. The most interesting work regarding the analysis of the finds and their contexts is by Hilary E. M. Cool¹⁴⁰, who, despite focusing on small finds and glass vessels, provides a useful resource for anyone conducting research into mobile finds in a stratigraphic sequence in Pompeii. H. E. M. Cool adopted a functional

130 Ling 1997, 2.

131 Ling 1997, 223.

132 Clarke 1998.

133 Clarke 1998.

134 Painter 2001; Ling/Ling 2005; Allison 2006.

135 Allison 2006 (about which Laurence 2008).

136 For classical archaeology see esp. Allison 1999; Ault/Neveitt 1999; Cahill 2002.

137 Allison 2006, 4.

138 Cool 2016; Berg 2019; Corallini 2018b, 161–174.

139 Anderson/Robinson 2018 (reviewed by Zanella 2020a).

140 Cool 2016.

classification system rather than one based on materials. This approach proved to be highly informative, because it enabled her to associate, by means of a contextual study, a fuller range of materials with each activity type examined, highlighting the mixed nature of Roman assemblages. In this function-oriented framework, a detailed discussion of typology and *comparanda* accompanies a well-illustrated catalogue of selected objects, with the other items in each category referenced in footnotes by database numbers. Each chapter concludes with an "Overview" section discussing the chronological and geographical distribution of the finds, along with a commentary on the social and behavioural implications of these distributions. The last chapter, "Changing Patterns at Pompeii", addresses four major issues: deposition patterns within the *insula*; the significance of chronological changes in the assemblages; patterns of activity within public and private spaces; and lastly the position of H. E. M. Cool's report with respect to the scholarly tradition. The book shows how the loose finds from an *insula* can be used, with due caution, to interpret activity in individual properties. This is consistent with Penelope M. Allison's objective concerning the loose finds of *Insula* I 10, although there are significant differences between the two scholars in terms of the evidence examined and the approach adopted. P. M. Allison worked on materials from older, non-stratigraphic excavations and typological analysis was not her priority. In contrast, H. E. M. Cool sought to combine taxonomy, chronology and functional analysis. In this specific case, the finds from the stratigraphic sequence prior to AD 79 in *Insula* VI 1 come largely from secondary deposits (especially construction levelling fills). Their patterns differ significantly from one property to the next, suggesting that the infill material was often composed of earth and rubbish from the immediate surroundings. H. E. M. Cool provides an *insula*-wide summary of the major trends in production and consumption (including Pompeii's long participation in Mediterranean trade and the rise of conspicuous consumption beginning in the Augustan period), as revealed by the finds and their distribution, with significant changes in the artefact assemblage occurring shortly before the eruption. However, she also considers behaviours in individual buildings within the *insula*. For example, the study of the *Casa delle Vestali* (VI 1, 7) assemblage highlights the role of its inhabitants as "early adopters" of both luxury artefacts (*opus sectile* flooring) and utilitarian items (glass storage bottles and jugs)¹⁴¹. To summarise, despite being limited to a selection of the finds from the new excavations, H. E. M. Cool's report makes an important contribution to the correction of a deficiency in the archaeological literature (the lack of interest in small finds seen in reports of stratigraphic excavations), which hampers the interpretation of the material past in Pompeii and beyond.

The need to select the most significant finds does not apply in the case of the older excavations, where the selec-

tion has already been made by others, from the first discovery onwards, as in the cases of *Insulae* I 10 and, especially, IX 3 and IX 8.

Research and fieldwork without new excavations

The absence of new excavations was not exclusive to the British Pompeii Project on *Insula* I 10, since in the same years it also characterised the University of Perugia's project on *Insulae* VI 3 and VI 4, albeit for different reasons. In the former, that absence was deliberate and was partly justified by the nature of the case study, characterised by the excellent preservation of the floor decorations¹⁴². In the latter, which originally envisaged the execution of targeted stratigraphic investigations based on the analysis of standing structures, the absence was due to the failure of the *Soprintendenza* to authorise them¹⁴³.

The objectives of the University of Perugia study were to reconstruct the building history of the two blocks, investigate their role in the urban fabric, and imagine their social dimension. The first step was documentation, whose purpose was also to contribute to the protection of historical heritage, "da lungo tempo esistente e fruibile, ma da lungo tempo dimenticato e destinato ad un lento ed inesorabile declino con la conseguente perdita di dati conoscitivi"¹⁴⁴. As in other coeval projects conducted at site scale (Campagna Speciale di Rilevamento e Documentazione) or building scale ("Häuser in Pompeji"), documenting the existing evidence was seen as one of the most urgent tasks, especially in the Pompeii sample.

Sampling city blocks in search of Archaic Pompeii

To date, the most extensive stratigraphic excavations on a single city block are those conducted by the Anglo-American Project in Pompeii (AAPP) on *Insula* VI 1 in the northern area of the city. Triangular in shape, with functional units encompassing the full range of life in Pompeii, from *atrium* houses to bars, workshops and shrines, this city block was investigated by trench by the Universities of Oxford and Bradford from 1995 to 2006 through a summer field school¹⁴⁵.

Having become in practice the only line of enquiry in the *Insula* VI 5 project, stratigraphic investigations in levels prior to AD 79 also became the main activity of the largest and most ambitious programme ever seen in Pompeii, the "Progetto *Regio* VI", which brought together scholars from several Italian universities (Perugia, Naples "L'Orientale",

141 Sterrett-Krause 2018.

142 Ling 1997, 17.

143 Carocci et al. 1990, 8.

144 Carocci et al. 1990, 7.

145 Anderson/Robinson 2018.

Venice, Trieste, Siena)¹⁴⁶. Its main goal was to unearth and study Archaic Pompeii, and, to date, its *insula*-based projects have presented their results in four monographs. Appearing from 2006 to 2017, these can be considered exemplars of a specific publication strategy, which can be defined as inclusive, with single-volume works each covering one *insula*: all lines of enquiry, together with all phases from methods to results, are presented in one book.

Despite the variations arising from the case studies' distinctive characteristics and the specific work strategies chosen by the relative teams, the format was the same for the first two volumes, on *Insulae* VI 10 (2006) and VI 13 (2009): an introduction, with a summary of the *status quaestionis* of the *insula* and a proposal regarding the phases of its evolution; the main section, proceeding by individual building, each subsection containing a brief account of the history of the excavations, followed by a descriptive analysis of structures, decorations and architectural phases; and finally, remarks on the epigraphical evidence and an appendix covering the stratigraphic investigations¹⁴⁷. Ten years later, the other two *insula*-based monographs, on *Insulae* VI 7 (2017) and IX 7 (2017), adopted a different layout. Although the volume on *Insula* VI 7 contains a specific section dedicated to the stratigraphic excavations and their finds, with the latter classified by category, the most substantial section in both books is the building-by-building architectural analysis¹⁴⁸. As highlighted by Filippo Coarelli and Fabrizio Pesando in their introduction to the first monograph (2006), the "Progetto Regio VI" represented a significant step forward for the work on Pompeii by the University of Perugia, especially if compared to the previous projects on *Insulae* VI 5 and VI 3–4 which had used only one research method (analysis of standing structures and stratigraphic excavations respectively)¹⁴⁹. The Regio VI Project pursued its objective ("lo studio analitico e integrale delle *insulae*") by conducting an extensive stratigraphic analysis of the standing remains and digging targeted trenches for the levels prior to AD 79. This integrated approach, however, was not reflected in the ensuing monographs, partly due to the absence of many important lines of enquiry, such as archaeometry (for buried and standing structures and artefacts) and alibi archaeologies. Indeed, the older excavations and their loose finds are either not taken into consideration (as in *Insula* VI 10) or are only mentioned in passing (as in *Insulae* VI 13 and VI 7)¹⁵⁰. Moreover, no attention is paid to the second lives of the *insulae* examined.

As in the work on *Insulae* VI 3–4, the in-depth architectural analysis and phasing of the standing structures is the key element of the first (and so far the only) monograph (on *Insula* VI 10) produced by Angelo Amoroso in the framework of the Pompeii projects conducted by the University of Rome La Sapienza¹⁵¹. While the theme is the same, the approach is very different with respect not only to the Progetto Regio VI, as highlighted by Andrea Carand-

ini in his preface to A. Amoroso's book, but also to the first monograph by the British Pompeii Project on *Insula* I 10 (1997) and to the volume on *Insulae* VI 3–4 (1990). In accordance with the first point of the methodological proposal of 1996, the unit of analysis and data presentation is the whole city block and not the individual building, as it is in the Regio VI Project. Moreover, the proposed reconstructions, all on the *insula* scale, play a leading role, including in the graphics. Lastly, although it focuses on the architectural component, A. Amoroso's work neglects neither the history of restoration nor the contextualisation of the loose finds from the older excavations¹⁵². To these in particular, a painstaking review is dedicated, focusing on the excavation diaries, inventories and shipment registers, this documentation forming the indispensable basis for the subsequent steps, from the physical recovery of the artefacts to their analytical study. These steps were not taken by A. Amoroso however, although in the same years, they were the subject of an entire monograph (on *Insula* I 10) by the British Pompeii Project¹⁵³. This publication proved that the archaeology of archaeology can be very fruitful at Pompeii. In other words, alibi archaeologies are an excellent tool with which to revisit the older excavations and increase our knowledge of the contexts they brought to light, as well as the ancient use contexts.

Reconsidering old excavations: legacy data and finds

With few exceptions, alibi excavations, conducted not *in situ*, but in archives, libraries and storage spaces, represent one of the least successful of the possible lines of enquiry in *insula* studies, at least until now. A leading role in this direction has been played by the British Pompeii Project, in which Penelope M. Allison's work on the loose finds from old excavations of *Insula* I 10 confirmed the potential of the contextual study of such objects, as was also demonstrated by Joanne Berry, Bernhard Sigges and Ria Berg¹⁵⁴. Interest in loose finds and their assemblages, seen as reflecting the uses of spaces and social practices, is also an important element of the monographs on *Insulae* IX 8 (2017¹⁵⁵) and IX 3 (2019¹⁵⁶), in the belief that "in any survey of the social and economic aspects of houses in Pompeii and Herculaneum, study of the finds should play a

146 Pesando 2005, 73.

147 Coarelli/Pesando 2006; Verzár Bass/Oriolo 2009.

148 Pesando/Giglio 2017; Zaccaria Ruggiu/Maratini 2017.

149 Bonghi Jovino 1984; Canocci et al. 1990.

150 Zaccaria Ruggiu/Maratini 2017 (*Insula* VI 10); Verzár Bass/Oriolo 2009 (*Insula* VI 13); Coarelli/Pesando 2006 (*Insula* VI 10).

151 Amoroso 2007.

152 Amoroso 2007, 30–36.

153 Allison 2004.

154 Berry 1997b; Sigges 2002; Allison 2004; Berg 2019.

155 Coralini 2018b, 161–374.

156 Berg 2019.

crucial, perhaps the crucial, part"¹⁵⁷. As highlighted by R. Berg, "objects form a dynamic interface between architectural spaces and the activities of their inhabitants"¹⁵⁸. The location, structure and decoration of a built space can provide information about its function, at least regarding the moment when those choices were made. The objects found inside it represent a source of data concerning everyday life there in its final phase of use. Both projects, on *Insulae* IX 8 and IX 3, chose to present the finds from the old and new excavations in a single volume, combining the research on the "catene inventariali" (the reconstruction of the historic sequence of inventory numbering schemes) and the analysis of distribution patterns with the detailed functional, typological and chronological study of the identified and recovered artefacts (for *Insula* IX 3, only 67 of the 503 finds from the original excavation)¹⁵⁹. This meant that both projects went further than their model, P. M. Allison's work on *Insula* I 10, together with which they are the only cases of systematic and comprehensive study of the artefact assemblages in a city block, an approach owing much of its methodology to anthropological and sociological studies of consumption¹⁶⁰.

In search of a feasible (and sustainable) research agenda

Research carried out in the last century has confirmed that the *insula* is the best unit of analysis in terms of understanding the evolution of both the urban layout and built spaces: proceeding block by block, it is possible to collect a large amount of data, resulting in greater knowledge of the settlement's life and rhythms and the changes it experienced.

The best strategy seems to be the integrated approach: the adoption of a range of complementary methods and investigation techniques, both invasive (excavation) and non-invasive, on the ground (geophysical prospecting, recording, documentation) and "alibi", i. e. *extra situm*, in archives, storage spaces and libraries.

Shifting from theory to practice, the *insula* is the container and organisational principle, consisting of individual buildings, rooms and components (walls, floors, ceilings, mobile finds), unified by the context¹⁶¹.

The fertility of the *insula*-based approach in terms of its contribution to the research can be more fully evaluated over the coming decades, via not only the bibliography directly produced by the various *insula*-based projects, but also works using that literature as a basis for further research. Indeed, thanks to *insula* studies, and the new season of documentation and study they have promoted, the way is now open for wide-ranging, multidisciplinary research based on verified and validated records. In this way, the ground has been laid for overcoming the gap – which

has characterised the literature on Pompeii for two centuries – between detailed specific studies (rare) and general works (more numerous, but almost always based on secondary data and interpretations rather than primary data of sufficient reliability)¹⁶².

As convincingly demonstrated by Heini Ynnilä for *Insula* IX 3, the *insula*-based studies make it possible to bridge the gap between large and small scales¹⁶³. However, in order to fulfil this potential, it is necessary to integrate the analytical description (of the material evidence as well as of the historical documentation) with the reconstruction of the buildings' structural and decorative biography¹⁶⁴, the analysis of the artefacts and the investigation of these spaces as use contexts and indicators of the social segmentation of their inhabitants¹⁶⁵. However, despite these advances, in the Pompeii sample there are still very few "*insula* biographies" (understood as the totality of events and developments affecting a city block during its lifetime) that have been the subject of detailed studies, which provide the scientific community with new data and perspectives. To date, no *insula* can be said to have been extensively and completely investigated, studied and reported in a scientific edition. Some projects lack stratigraphic investigations, others an interpretative summary, still others the reassessment of the older excavations or archaeometric analyses.

In some projects the prevalent interest is in chronology, seemingly the ultimate purpose of all activities. In others however, chronology has served as a useful tool to achieve the true objective, namely the comprehensive understanding of the *insula*'s history, including both the material features, objectively verifiable, and the immaterial aspects, which can only be hypothetical.

In retrospect, it is possible to recognise some trends and groups in the research strategies adopted by *insula* studies. The main distinction concerns stratigraphic excavations, present in most cases and absent in others, such as the projects on *Insulae* VIII 2, VI 3–4 and I 10¹⁶⁶.

Aside from the differences in terms of case studies, strategies, methods and results, all the *insula*-based re-

157 Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 87, cited by Berg 2019, 58.

158 Berg 2019, 67.

159 Berg 2019, 45–165.

160 On the evidence of consumption see Allison 1996.

161 Zanker 1998, 30; Wallace-Hadrill 2005, 102.

162 For the first group, the "Häuser in Pompeji" series is exemplary (Strocka 1981; Strocka 2008).

163 Ynnilä 2011, 55.

164 Bonghi Jovino 1984; Carocci et al. 1990; Ling 1997; Gallo 2001; Ling/Ling 2005; Allison 2006; Aoyagi/Pappalardo 2006; Coarelli/Pesando 2006; Amoroso 2007; Vezzà Bass/Oriolo 2009; Pesando/Giglio 2017; Zaccaria Ruggiu/Maratini 2017.

165 Ling 1997, 238–253.

166 Noack/Lehmann-Hartleben 1936; Carocci et al. 1990; Ling 1997.

search projects have been extremely time-consuming, requiring long-term commitment. From the start of activities to the definitive publication, on average, at least a decade is needed, the post-recording phase usually taking longer than the fieldwork.

Obviously, a key role in the project's biography is played not only by its objectives and strategies, but also by the nature of the available evidence and developments in methodology, which can increase the volume and range of the information arising from the research.

In the last thirty years, regardless of the differences determined by the distinctive characteristics of the particular *insula* selected as a case study, it is possible to recognise an ideal model of intervention, in line with the proposals advanced by Andrea Carandini in 1996, based on the experience so far gained.

This agenda can be divided into three phases: documentation (I) analysis (II) and scientific publication (III).

Phase I (data collection), in most cases the longest and most complex, consists of several stages:

- 1.1. data verification, by means of a careful examination of both the scientific literature concerning the case study and material evidence¹⁶⁷;
- 1.2. recovery and analysis of the "legacy data", from textual to iconographic archival documentation¹⁶⁸;
- 1.3. survey and documentation of material evidence *in situ* (structures, decorations), including the recognition of modern intervention and alibi archaeology (loose finds)¹⁶⁹;
- 1.4. archaeology of the building, with the stratigraphic analysis of standing structures;
- 1.5. archaeometry of the building: characterisation of materials, structural analysis¹⁷⁰;
- 1.6. archaeometry of the subsoil: geophysical surveys;
- 1.7. planning and execution of stratigraphic excavations, more or less extensive, from the verification of working hypotheses to the complete investigation¹⁷¹;
- 1.8. classification and study of finds, from old and new excavations.

Phase II (data analysis) aims (i) to propose a reconstruction of the building and the functional history of the *insula* from its origins until AD 79 and (ii) to determine the history of the city block's "second life", from the earliest excavations to the present, a fundamental component of the study of the *insula* as a whole¹⁷².

In terms of data management, GIS applications have not been used frequently, although they were deployed for *Insulae* VI 7 by the University of Venezia and *Insula* V 1 by the Swedish Pompeii Project¹⁷³.

In Phase III (data communication and scientific publication), there appear to be two main approaches: on the one hand, there are single-volume works offering a summary of

the full project, as in the four *insula*-based monographs produced by the *Regio* VI Project; on the other, there are the multi-volume publications, as adopted by the British Pompeii Project for *Insula* I 10 and by the *Insula del Centenario* Project for *Insula* IX 8¹⁷⁴. The latter strategy, which entails publication by line of enquiry, serves to ensure that there is adequate space for aspects of the research that might have been treated more superficially in a single volume oriented primarily towards architectural and decorative analysis. Such aspects include above all the reconstruction of the second life of the case study and the reassessment of the older excavations, based on the archaeology of archives and storage facilities, and the rediscovery of data and finds. The *insula*-based scientific literature does not universally encompass the study of old excavations and conservation. Where present, these themes tend to play a merely ancillary role, in support of the archaeology of the buildings, which is the main focus of both the fieldwork and the publications. Against this trend, with its own distinctive interpretation of *insula*-based comprehensive analysis, the Bologna University project treated the history of conservation and older excavations as at least equal in importance to surface and subsoil archaeology. This unusual stance was based on two assumptions: first, that the reassessment of the older excavations is the new frontier in the field of Pompeii studies; second, that in order to investigate Pompeii, with its entanglement of ancient realities and modern perceptions, alibi archaeologies, with their "excavations" in archives, storage facilities and libraries, have a fundamental role to play¹⁷⁵. Indeed, by exploring the various chapters and protagonists of the rediscoveries and studies,

167 For this approach see Ellis 2008, on the "retail outlets" in Pompeii as a case study. On the informative potential of primary sources and their use see Laidlaw 2007.

168 De Albentis 2001, 152. On the "nightmare of omissions and disasters" in the Pompeii research and studies see Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 65: "Each generation discovers with horrors the extent to which information has been ignored, neglected, destroyed, and (the most wanton damage of all) left unreported and unpublished"; Wallace-Hadrill 1995, 40-41.

169 Carandini et al. 1996, 322-324. On the need to "return to the available archaeological data - drawn from on-site surveys and integrated with the legacy dataset extracted from the excavation" see Ellis 2008.

170 For *Insula* IX 8 see Sassi 2007; Custodi et al. 2007; Custodi/Sciortino 2009.

171 Carandini et al. 1996, 322 f.

172 De Albentis 1998, 125.

173 *Insula* VI 7: Zaccaria Ruggiu/Maratini 2017; *Insula* V 1: Dell'Unto et al. 2016.

174 For the first formula, with single-volume publications by several authors, see Coarelli/Pesando 2006; Verzè Bass/Oriolo 2009; Pesando/Giglio 2017; for the second, with a multi-volume work consisting of a series of monographs on a single theme by one or two authors, see Ling 1997; Painter 2001; Ling/Ling 2005; Allison 2006.

175 Corralini 2020a; Corralini 2020b.

they give voice to the older excavations, enriching the substratum on which to base the data from new on-site research.

In search of agency: the *insula* as a whole, from second to first lives

Since its beginnings in 1998, the University of Bologna project has sought to analyse its case study, *Insula IX 8*, not as a single-phase site, but as a complex palimpsest in perpetual motion, seeking in this way to fulfil its great potential for diachronic understanding.

Like others in the same period, this project opted for a multidisciplinary and multi-dimensional approach¹⁷⁶ with several innovative aspects, foremost among which is the important role of alibi archaeologies and archaeometry¹⁷⁷. Both of these dimensions were present in the main axes of investigation, as a result of a deliberate decision to conduct a new reading of the imperfect Pompeii sample, paying special attention to agency and materiality, in order to move from materials to activities and from activities to persons and things¹⁷⁸.

Conceived from the outset as a long-term endeavour, the "*Insula del Centenario*" project had two main aims: firstly, to investigate in detail the physical evidence and history of a Pompeii city block, analysed as a whole, from its origins to today; secondly, to identify traces of the changing lives of its inhabitants, from both a diachronic and a synchronic, phase-by-phase perspective. The expected result was better knowledge of both the first and second lives of the case study, in all their components, material and immaterial. To write this long history it was necessary to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the urban lot in accordance with an interdisciplinary and experimental approach¹⁷⁹.

The choice of *Insula IX 8* as a case study was determined by several factors. Firstly, although some of its individual components already had a certain profile in the archaeological literature, the *insula* as a whole had never been studied. Secondly, with its southern sector completely unexcavated, this city block had great potential in terms of stratigraphic investigation, not only of the levels preceding AD 79, but also of the eruptive deposits. Lastly, the *Soprintendenza* had expressed its intention to carry out safety and restoration measures and to reopen the area to the public, requiring a detailed study¹⁸⁰.

The research was structured in accordance with a multi-axial and multi-level strategy, implementing traditional and innovative approaches, in a logic of cross-fertilisation: alibi archaeologies; geophysical investigation of the subsoil; stratigraphic excavations; building analyses (techniques and materials); archaeometry; and Digital Archaeology (3D imaging, photogrammetry, modelling)¹⁸¹.

Over two decades later, the *insula* could be said to have been rediscovered, following its original discovery in 1879¹⁸², by means of comprehensive excavations, both *in situ* (stratigraphic) and alibi, in storage facilities, museums, archives and libraries¹⁸³, the objective being to go back in time from the current situation to the initial rediscovery.

Given their importance to the construction of the *insula* as an archaeological object, great attention was paid to its rediscovery and study, as well as the decisions concerning conservation and presentation¹⁸⁴.

This approach arose from the conviction that in archaeology, especially in historical sites such as Pompeii, the investigation cannot be limited to the material evidence brought to light by excavations but must be extended to the events that have affected those remains since their rediscovery. Those events, with respect to both the material evidence and the literature, have contributed to the formation of our case study, via the hybridisation of ancient and modern.

Due to its long and complex life, Pompeii represents an excellent case study for the archaeology of agency applied to a Roman town, from the past to the present, involving things and persons¹⁸⁵. In order to exploit the potential of this multi-layered evidence, the Bologna project adopted a global approach with a multidisciplinary and inclusive strategy. The result was a more in-depth dialogue between complementary views and academic disciplines, from human to "hard" sciences, and a plurality of topics and tools, with the *insula* as the common denominator and unifying element.

The key lines of research in the project concerned not only architecture, urban design, decorations and material culture, but also archaeometric investigations (geophysics, characterisation of materials), the archaeology of restoration (i.e. the reconstruction of the *insula's* conservation history), three-dimensional modelling and data management by means of a Geographical Information System. Last but not least, the project analysed the success of this *insula* and its components among the scientific communi-

176 For a similar approach cf. the Forum Pompeii Project see Dobbins/Ball 2005.

177 Santoro 2007b (archaeometry); Coralini 2018b (alibi archaeologies).

178 On the term "agency" and its use in this paper see above, fn. 32.

179 Coralini 2018b, 17–40.

180 On the scientific biography of *Insula IX 8* see Coralini 2018b, 79–100.

181 Coralini 2018b, 17–40.

182 For the history of the older excavations see Coralini 2018b, 45–56.

183 For a similar approach see the *Dura-Europos* case study, Baird 2011; Baird 2012a; Baird 2012b; Baird 2012c; Baird 2014; Baird/McFadyen 2014.

184 Coralini 2018b, 101–140 (P. Rispoli, D. Esposito).

185 Coralini 2021.

ty, as reflected in scholarly publications, in order to assess its cultural biography¹⁸⁶.

The excavation programme (21 stratigraphic trenches) was based on a review of earlier discoveries on the site and more recent surveys, both geophysical and structural (fig. 2)¹⁸⁷.

Material culture, in all its aspects, was the main subject of the project, with a particular emphasis on the loose finds from the older excavations. The study of artefacts as the contents of built (and sometimes decorated) spaces was modelled on the methodological approach adopted by other scholars to finds and artefact assemblages in Pompeii and beyond (Penelope M. Allison in particular)¹⁸⁸, but with an important difference: in the Bologna project the contextual reading was based on an extensive and detailed catalogue of all traceable objects recovered in 1879 and 1880, with a complete examination of the finds' contexts divided into general zones within the *insula* (fig. 3). The analysis of the artefact assemblages covered not only the location and probable function of the items, but also their typology, chronology and decoration; equal attention was paid to production and consumption. For the objects recovered in the 19th-century excavations, the work was based on a painstaking examination of diaries, inventories and storage facilities, a process that made it possible to track down the finds to their modern locations¹⁸⁹.

The work carried out on *Insula IX 8* is a clear example of how the older excavations, although incomplete and imperfect, can contribute to a social reading of the ancient city based on the careful use of legacy data.

Rediscoveries (1879–1880; 1912; 1999–2004)

The second life of *Insula IX 8* started on 21 April 1879, when the excavations intercepted two rooms of the *balneum* in the western sector of this city block¹⁹⁰. Between April 1879 and September 1880, most of the *insula* was unearthed, except for its southern area, unexplored even today. In addition to the ordinary excavations ("sterri") there were also special interventions ("scavi apposti", "superiormente ordinati"), dedicated to specific spaces, which were usually associated with visits to the worksite by illustrious personages. On these occasions, the amount and quality of the finds ("trovamenti") were much higher than the average of the other days, suggesting that these events were contrived. An exemplary case is that of the objects discovered during the eighteenth centenary celebrations of the eruption: in one single day, September 25, 1879, the excavations yielded a suspiciously large quantity of finds of particular interest. Workshop IX 8, 4 yielded 161 objects, mostly bronze, varying in function and quality: an artefact assemblage that could be interpreted as either ancient (an intentional and temporary deposit, possibly linked to work taking place nearby) or modern (the intention being to create a special set for illustrious guests?)¹⁹¹. On the same

day, in *cubiculum* 12 of the *Casa del Centenario*, the excavations brought to light two skeletons and one of the most notable finds ("trovamenti degni di nota") of this *insula*, a pseudo-emblem floor mosaic with a central polychrome *gorgoneion* and two figured panels, perhaps evocative of Egyptian topics, on the short sides¹⁹².

By the end of the excavations, the unearthed part of the city block consisted of some shops overlooking *Via di Nola*, together with three building units varying in size and complexity: from north to south, a large *domus* (with two *atrium* quarters, a *peristylum*, a western area including a service *atrium*, a *balneum* and an elegant *venereum*); in the southwestern sector, with an entrance from the west alley, a smaller building, identified as a *hospitium* thanks to the charcoal inscription (*hospitium Hygini Firmi*) on the south wall of the *fauces*; and the *pars postica* of a *domus* with a pseudo-peristylum, only partially investigated.

For structures and decorations, as well as for parietal inscriptions, *in situ* conservation was a well-established practice (except in a few cases of greater value or interest such as, in our *insula*, the pseudo-emblem with the *gorgoneion*, the *lararium* painting with Bacchus and Vesuvius from the small *atrium* 49 and the picture with Philoctetes from *ala* 20). In contrast, the mobile and movable finds were transferred to the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, a process that continued for the next fifteen years, until 1894¹⁹³.

The excavations in *Insula IX 8* yielded almost four hundred objects. The relative paucity of mobile finds (especially when considered in relation to the size of the unearthed area, almost 3000 square metres) can be interpreted in at least two ways: as a reflection of the reality of the *insula's* last phase of life, between AD 62 and AD 79; or, more plausibly, as the result of very selective methods of excavating, recovering and recording the finds¹⁹⁴. The latter hypothesis is supported by the nature of the findings

186 The recent monograph on the "Villa di Diomede" at Pompeii is based on the same methodological choices (Dessales 2020), and on those of the project on Villa A at Oplontis (Clarke/Muntasser 2014; Clarke/Muntasser 2019; Clarke/Muntasser forthcoming).

187 Santoro et al. 2005; Santoro 2007b.

188 For Pompeii see Berry 1997a; Berry 1997b; Allison 2004; Allison 2006; Berg 2016a; Berg 2019. For other sites see Cahill 2002 (*Olynthus*); Allison 2013 (Roman military bases of the *Limes Germanicus-Raeticus*); Baird 2012b; Baird 2014 (*Duna-Europos*).

189 Coralini 2018b, 185–188.

190 For the older excavations (1879–1880) in this *insula* see Coralini 2018b, 45–56.

191 Coralini 2018b, 49.

192 Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (MANN), inv. 112284. Coralini 2001a, 51; Coralini 2018b, 49; 52 f.; 80 f.

193 Coralini 2018b, 186–188.

194 On this possible double reading see Berry 1997a, 122 f. (case study, *Insulae* 19, 11 and 19, 12).

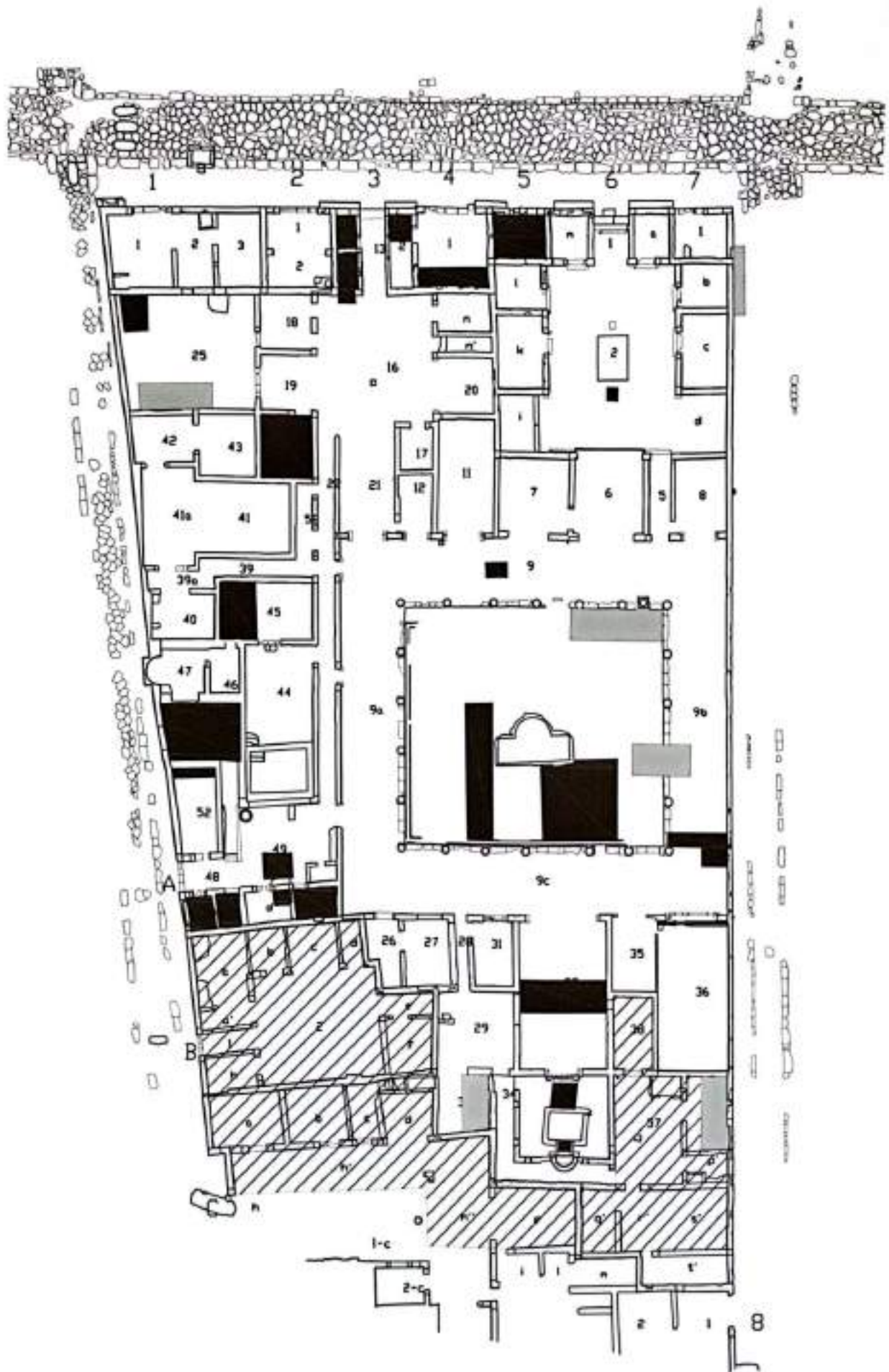


Fig. 2: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, plan. In evidence, the areas investigated by stratigraphic excavations (21 trenches, 1999-2004, dark gray) and the new interventions (right gray) that have been proposed, since 2016, to the Parco archeologico di Pompei.



Fig. 3: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, plan. In evidence, for the older excavations (1879-1880), mobile finds and inscriptions.

themselves: bronzes and glass prevail, while ceramics are scarce or completely absent¹⁹⁵.

Disregarding a brief episode, in 1912, when Francesco Roncicchi carried out excavations in the *peristylum*, looking for traces of the ancient garden, the second season of the excavations in the *insula* began with the University of Bologna project and consisted chiefly of small-scale stratigraphic investigations (1999–2004). The results have provided answers to many research questions, also concerning the chronology of the city block's earliest phases of occupation¹⁹⁶. However, some important problems remain to be settled, particularly the genesis of the large double-atrium *domus* and the formation of the *peristylum*: a small number of stratigraphic trenches could provide useful information (fig. 2)¹⁹⁷.

From recording to publication

Regarding data collection, in order to balance tradition (the recording and documentation of the evidence, excavations, the study of the finds) and innovation (geophysics, the archaeometry of buildings and materials, Digital Archaeology), there were three main lines of action: alibi archaeologies, the extensive use of archaeometry and Virtual and Augmented Reality.

Archaeometry was applied in various research areas: investigation of the subsoil made it possible to test the integration of geodiagnostic methods and techniques, such as georadar and microgravimetry, and supported the planning of stratigraphic excavations¹⁹⁸; the structural analysis of the evidence still *in situ*, as well as the physical and chemical characterisation of the materials, provided valuable data both for the archaeology of construction and for conservation and restoration projects¹⁹⁹.

Alibi archaeologies made an important contribution not only to our understanding of the *insula* in AD 79, but also to the reconstruction of its second life, from its discovery to its current state, via a long series of maintenance and restoration measures²⁰⁰.

Virtual Archaeology raised new questions and enabled the timely verification of the working hypotheses. The 3D modelling, aimed at reconstructing not only the *insula*'s ancient use contexts, but also its visual scapes, proceeded in parallel with the data gathering, supporting the study at every stage (figs. 4a–c)²⁰¹.

The publishing programme began with a monograph dedicated to archaeometry entitled *Indagini diagnostiche geofisiche e analisi archeometriche* (2007)²⁰², followed, ten years later, by a monograph covering the old and new excavations²⁰³. Both works represented a new path in publishing.

The first was entirely devoted to a research area which in other projects, where present, played a merely ancillary role²⁰⁴. The second chose to combine the presentation of recent excavations (the stratigraphic assays of the period

1999–2004) with that of the older excavations (1879–1880). The result was a work divided into two parts, each with its own specific organisation of content, consistent with the approach of the two research seasons. In 1879–1880, this consisted of ordinary and targeted excavations, with selective recovery of finds, focusing on the most valuable and interesting items²⁰⁵. In the early 2000s, 21 stratigraphic assays were conducted in levels prior to AD 79, to verify the city block's oldest phases²⁰⁶. The consistency of the second monograph was ensured not only by the unit of analysis, the *insula*, but also by the contextual approach to the study of the mobile finds, not only classified typologically and chronologically, but also evaluated in relation to their contexts, both of discovery and ancient use. Penelope M. Allison's work on the finds from the older excavations in *Insula I 10* (the first systematic analysis by city block of objects and contexts from non-stratigraphic investigations in Pompeii)²⁰⁷ was an important model, in terms of both the contextual approach and the systematic presentation of the material evidence. With respect to that model, however, the monograph on the old and new excavations of *Insula IX 8* differed in several ways: the decision to present in the same volume finds from excavations that were very different in purposes and methods, as well as period; the specific and detailed analysis, absent in P. M. Allison's work, of the finds from the older excavations; and the double reading, encompassing both the archaeology of production and the functional analysis of the artefacts in their contexts of rediscovery. Far from restricting itself to the presentation of the finds and their stratigraphy, the Bologna project's second volume adopted a comprehensive approach, seeking to add significantly to our understanding of the *insula*'s life, from the earliest occupation to recent years²⁰⁸.

The first two monographs published by the Bologna project represent an excavation report aimed not only at presenting and discussing methods, data, and interpretations, but also at contextualising information from one specific site (here, a city block) within its wider urban setting.

195 Coralini 2018b, 177–180.

196 Coralini 2018b, 495–508 (B. Sassi).

197 Coralini 2018b, 19.

198 Di Filippo/Di Nezza/Toro 2007; Piro 2007; Di Filippo et al. 2007.

199 Custodi/Sciortino 2006; Custodi et al. 2007; Custodi/Sciortino 2009.

200 Coralini 2018b, 101–140 (P. Ripoll, D. Esposito).

201 Wittur 2013, 53–78.

202 Santoro 2007b.

203 Coralini 2018b.

204 Santoro 2007a, 17.

205 Coralini 2018b, 45–56.

206 Santoro et al. 2005; Coralini 2018b, 495–508 (B. Sassi).

207 Allison 2006 (www.stoa.org/menanderinsula).

208 Coralini 2018b (on which Anderson 2020).



Fig. 4a: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), atrium 2, entrance side, north, seen from the interior: the situation at the beginning of the twentieth century.



Fig. 4b: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), atrium 2, entrance side, north, seen from the interior: virtual restoration.

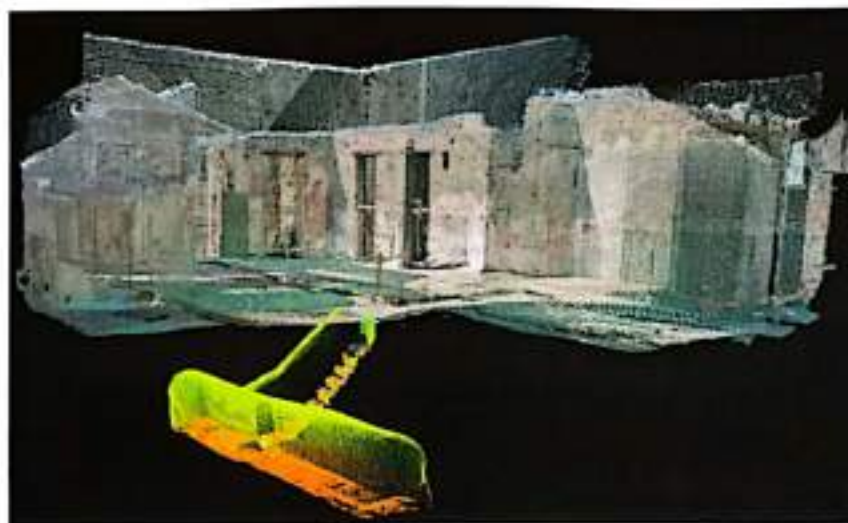


Fig. 4c: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), atrium 2, from north-east: tridimensional model, after recording with laser scanner.

The second lives of *Insula IX 8*

The insula's material life:

in situ, from conservation to restoration

The starting point for the reconstruction of the material second life of *Insula IX 8* was the unpublished excavation (and conservation) diaries from 1879 onwards, archival photographs and scattered publications. Due to the lack of documentation, in order to write the modern history of the *insula*, from the first excavations to more recent conservation measures, we are obliged to rely on a painstaking analysis of the unpublished data, combined with a thorough examination of the material evidence still *in situ*²⁰⁹.

For this city block, the history of conservation and restoration began very early, in 1879, when the structures that had just been brought to light were immediately restored and the main unit, the *Casa del Centenario*, was opened to the public²¹⁰. As was common in this phase of Pompeii's second life, the entire city block – from the very beginning of its second life – was extensively restored²¹¹. Indeed, in this period, abandoning “l'eccessivo scrupolo

del Fiorelli che rifuggiva da ogni aggiunta del nuovo sull'antico”, Michele Ruggiero began a new season of measures “di consolidamento e di protezione”²¹².

Significant confirmation of the work conducted since 1879 is also provided by the photographic documentation, starting from images of excavations in progress. In these, indeed, it is clear that the restoration of structures and decorations proceeded alongside their “liberation”, partly thanks to the excavation method introduced by Giuseppe Fiorelli, from above and in layers, which allowed the maintenance *in situ* of standing remains and their immediate consolidation²¹³. Historical photographs are very useful, for example by making it possible to follow the successive

209 Coralini 2018b, 101–140 (P. Rispoli, D. Esposito).

210 Coralini 2018b, 101–140 (P. Rispoli, D. Esposito), esp. 101–108.

211 Maiuri 1950, 14.

212 Coralini 2018b, 33.

213 De Caofis 2015–2016.



Fig. 5a: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), peristylum 9, from south-east: excavations in progress (at the right, the eruptive deposits) and the first restoration measures.



Fig. 5b: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), peristylum 9, from south-east: tridimensional model, after recording with laser scanner.



Fig. 5c: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), peristylum 9, from south-east: virtual restoration.

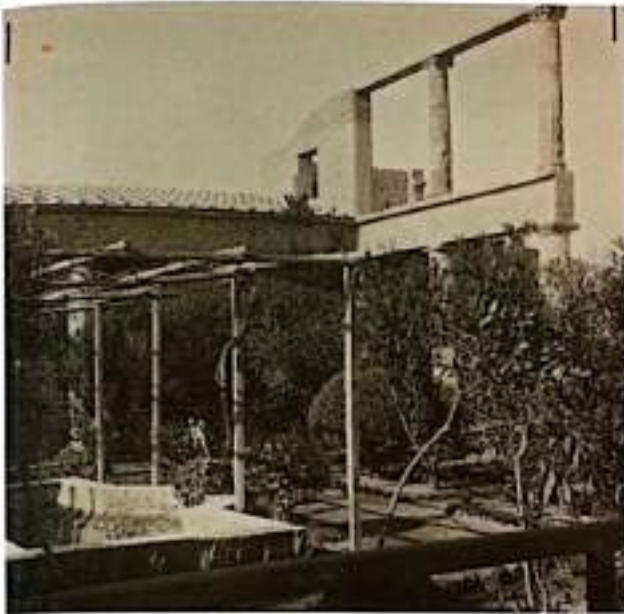


Fig. 6: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), peristylum 9, garden, from south-east.



Fig. 7: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), peristylum 9, north-west porticus: partial amastylis of the first floor, by A. Maiuri in 1928-1929.

arrangements of the *insula's* main space, the *peristylum* of the *Casa del Centenario*: its first arrangement as a garden took place in 1905, on the initiative of Antonio Sogliano perhaps on the basis of the results of the excavations carried out a few years before, in 1902 (figs. 5a-c)²¹⁴.

The current state of *Insula IX 8* is the product of a long series of episodes of ordinary maintenance, conservation and refurbishment, guided by very different criteria and almost always lacking adequate documentation. The result is a hybrid of ancient and modern, in which the problem of recognisability is often difficult, if not impossible, to solve: research into the archaeology of restoration, like that undertaken for *Insula IX 8*, is inevitably hampered not only by the scarcity of written sources, but also by the tendency to camouflage the maintenance and restoration measures. Retracing that history, from 1879 to 2015, required diligent philological and stratigraphic work, combining the examination of textual and visual sources with the analysis of the evidence still *in situ*²¹⁵.

In 1924, Amedeo Maiuri introduced the practice of regularly recording "il rapporto dei maggiori lavori di protezione e restauro dei monumenti"²¹⁶ in the *Giornale dei Soprastanti*. However, there is little trace of ordinary maintenance by work teams with specific tasks (builders, mosaicists, painters) in the archives, including the *Giornale dei Lavori* and *Pratiche Estinte*. Even what we do have is mostly limited to references to measures conducted in a single building unit or room²¹⁷.

In addition to textual sources, in this case too, an important role is played by visual evidence, both graphic and photographic, distributed over several archives. The graph-

ic sources consist mainly of general views of individual rooms or detailed reproductions of decorations²¹⁸, while the photographs document almost exclusively the general situation, state of conservation, areas at risk and restoration measures (figs. 6; 7)²¹⁹.

Among the graphic sources, Jules-Léon Chifflet's work (1906), which includes both documentation and virtual restoration, stands out for its wealth of data and accuracy: the presentation of structures and decorations, with cross sections of the *insula* and a general plan framed by a sample of floor decorations, is followed by a proposal for integrative restoration (fig. 8)²²⁰. In the same period, Luigi Bazzani dedicated several watercolours to *Insula IX 8*,

214 Coralini 2018b, 55 f., for the excavations in 1902; Coralini 2020b, 113 f., for the arrangement of the garden (on which, previously, Ciarallo 2012, 659-661 no. 507).

215 Coralini 2018b, 301-140 (P. Ripoli, D. Esposito). On this method, still relevant, see De Albentis 2001, esp. 162; 167.

216 Maiuri 1978, 546 f.

217 De Albentis 1998, 126-128.

218 For *Insula IX 8*, the two largest groups of documents (focused on wall-paintings) are in the Archives of Drawings of the Archaeological Museum of Naples and the German Archaeological Institute.

219 To the largest archive resources (Archivio Fotografico del Parco archeologico di Pompei; Campagna Speciale di Rilevamento e Documentazione dell'Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione [ICCD]; Campagna del Genio dell'Esercito Italiano, after the 1980 earthquake) must be added personal archives (such as the Gusman fund of the Institut National de l'Histoire de l'Art; Zanella 2020b).

220 Pompei e gli architetti francesi dell'Ottocento 1981, 246-251.

POMPEI

ECHELLES

MAISON DV
CENTENAIRE
ETAT ACTUEL

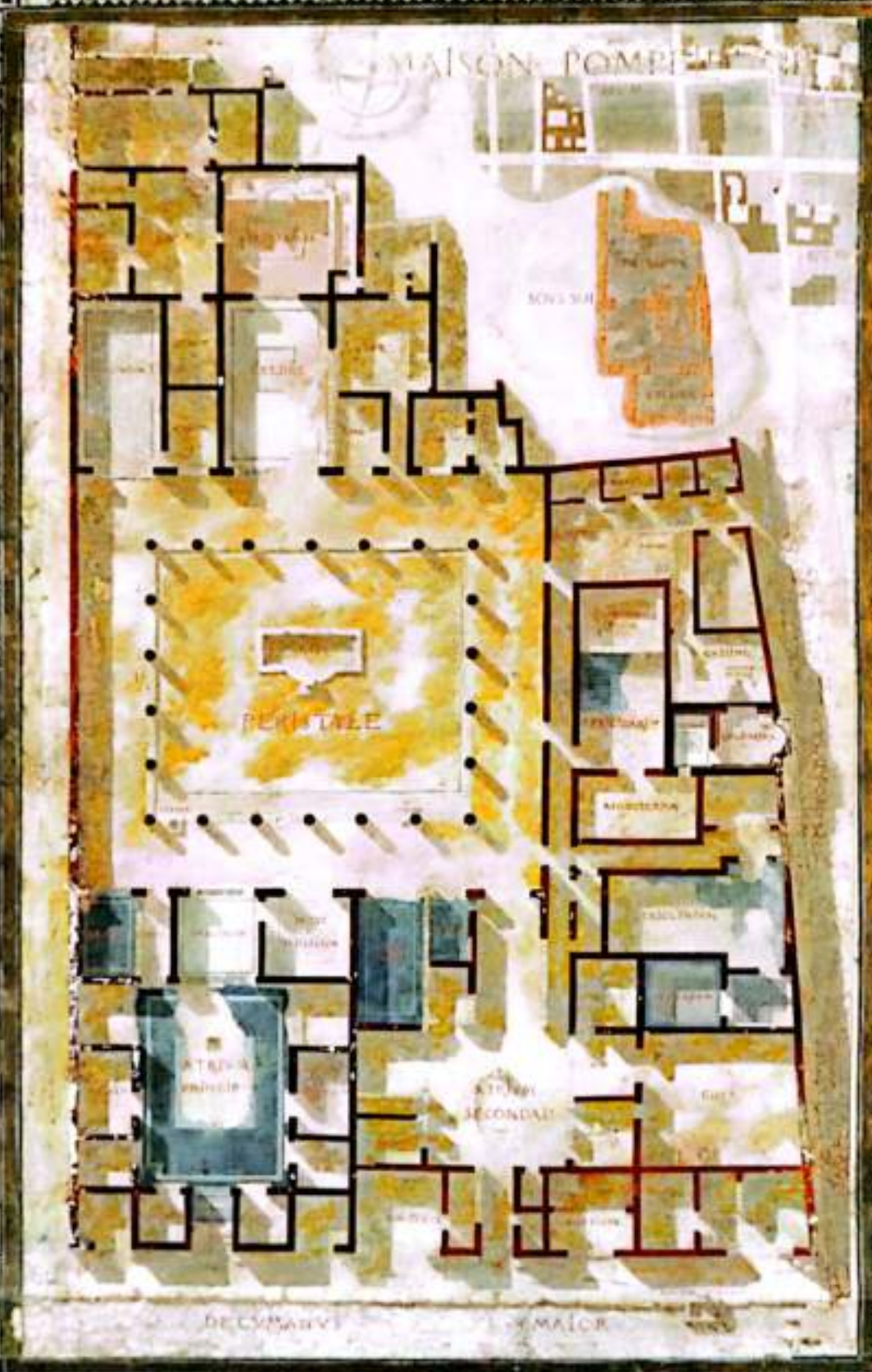




Fig. 9: Pompeii. Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), small atrium (49), lararium. A: current situation. B: state of the early 20th century. C: virtual restoration.

selecting the most interesting aspects of its main unit, the *Casa del Centenario*²²¹.

In the long second life of this *insula*, the most relevant developments are the rearrangements of the garden, starting with its earliest reconstruction in 1905, and the restoration of the north-western corner of the *peristylum* in 1927–1928. Here, in accordance with Amedeo Maiuri's new conservation strategy, a "recovery restoration" (*restauro di ripristino*) led to the partial anastylosis of the upper floor (fig. 7)²²².

On paper: Insula IX 8 in the scientific literature

This city block's immaterial second life is as rich as the physical: the presence of *Insula IX 8* in the archaeological literature began very early, with the rediscovery reports. It entered the history of archaeological studies in the early 1880s, shortly after the start of excavations.

The excavation reports, swiftly published by Antonio Sogliano in *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità* (1879, 1880), were quickly followed up by the description of the wall paintings by the same author (1879), August Mau's reports in the *Bullettino di Corrispondenza dell'Istituto Archeologico Germanico* (1881, 1882), which included detailed surveys of standing structures and decorated surfaces *in situ*, with interpretations of their evolution, and the comprehensive presentation of the *insula* by Emil Presuhn (1882)²²³.

After this initial phase, the scientific biography of *Insula IX 8* began to be dominated by its main building unit, the large *domus* called *Casa del Centenario*, along with a conspicuous amount of studies on individual or transversal themes, but lacking (until 2007) monographs devoted to the *insula* as a whole²²⁴.

By far the most popular subject is the *lararium* painting with Bacchus and Vesuvius (fig. 9)²²⁵. Second place goes to the *Aegyptiaca*, more or less clearly identifiable in

the unearthed evidence, and *cubiculum* 43, with its *figurae Veneris*²²⁶. These are followed by components of the rich decoration, especially the wall paintings, including the Candelabra Style of *triclinium* 41, the elegant Fourth Style of *oculus* 7, the sumptuous *viridarium pictum* with *nymphaeum* and, among the mobile finds, the bronze statuette of the "Drunken Satyr"²²⁷.

In search of ancient lives

Built and decorated spaces

Recognising and reconstructing the main phases of the city block's lives as an entity in flux, constantly being constructed, torn down, rebuilt and refurbished, was, and continues to be, one of the main issues in the *Insula IX 8* research project. Compared to other *insula*-based projects, however, the study and graphic reconstruction (following the model of the "Häuser in Pompeii" project) was accompanied by the hypothetical reconstruction of the ancient spaces, with their volumes and surfaces, by means of virtual restoration²²⁸.

221 Scagliarini/Coralini/Helg 2013, 113–115 nos. 37–39 (R. Helg).

222 Coralini 2018b, 1191. (P. Rispoli, D. Esposito).

223 Sogliano 1879, Sogliano 1880; Mau 1881; Mau 1882; Presuhn 1882, Abt. IX.

224 Coralini 2018b, 79–100.

225 Coralini 2018b, 91 f.

226 Coralini 2018b, 96; 99 f. (*Aegyptiaca*); 97 f. (*cubiculum* 43).

227 On the meaning of the term *Aegyptiaca* see Malaise 2005, 201–204, *sensu lato*; contra, Swetnam-Burland 2007, 113–118.

228 Coralini/Vecchiotti 2007; Scagliarini/Coralini/Helg 2013; Coralini/Limoncelli 2020.



Fig. 10a: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), triclinium 41: from southwest: the current state.



Fig. 10b: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), triclinium 41: the east wall, with, in filigree, the decorative schema.



Fig. 10c: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), triclinium 41: from southwest: the virtual restoration.

In this process of rediscovery, the integrated approach combined new documentation and autopsy campaigns with legacy data analysis, seeking to acquire as much information as possible concerning not only dimensions and shapes, but also images and colours²²⁹.

For the recording and analysis of the *in situ* remains (structures and surfaces), the project adopted a dual approach, seeking both to elucidate the *insula*'s structural history and to document a monument which is still in a state of change²³⁰.

As regards interpretation and dating, the problems are the same as those affecting other projects (e. g. Roger Ling in the first monograph on *Insula I 10*)²³¹: existing walls and pavements that prevent excavation beneath them; reused building materials that make newer walls look like older ones; the fact that the builders of Pompeii used *opus incertum* and *reticulatum* contemporaneously; and the reluctance of modern restorers to make sure that their interventions are recognisable. As a consequence, wall paintings and floor decorations continue to be the most "precise" dating tools. *Insula IX 8* has paintings in the Third and Fourth Styles and pavements in *opus signinum* (*cocciopesta*) and *lavapesta*, which were more common in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC (some decorated with grids of tesserae, frequently associated with the First Style). Other floors have black-and-white tessellated mosaics, which can be assigned to the Third and Fourth Styles, and, in *oecus* 7, a pavement with fragments of coloured marble dating from the late 1st century BC (fig. 8)²³².

One of the most difficult challenges concerns the phasing of the ancient interventions discernible in the material evidence, for example in the western quarters of the *insula*, where structural and decorative modifications attest to significant changes taking place during the 1st century AD. Here, in *trichinium* 41, the decoration underwent partial renovation (perhaps coeval with the creation of the adjacent *venereum*), which entailed the repainting of the central walls. This area proves the usefulness of legacy data for the reconstruction of ancient spaces: in *trichinium* 41 especially, due to its poor conservation, the new documentation alone would not have been sufficient to recognise the original patterns and figures, but the textual and visual sources made a decisive contribution. Via a patient process of re-composition, using the recent documentation as a basis and the detailed descriptions of the earliest modern viewers as a guide, the original appearance of the wall decorations has been restored (figs. 10a–c)²³³.

Empty spaces? Old finds reconsidered and new data

As promised by its subtitle (*Vecchi e nuovi scavi*), the second monograph examined, in its first section, both the older excavations carried out in 1879–1880 and the modern life of the unearched area, while the second section presented the results of the more recent stratigraphic investigations (1999–2004). The ways in which the mobile finds were

handled differed sharply: those of the older excavations were examined analytically, item by item, and contextually, with essays on the artefact assemblages and their "containers" (the spaces where they were found)²³⁴; those recovered during the stratigraphic investigations were subject to typological analysis and chronological assessment, on the basis of a painstaking examination, with essays dealing with their major categories, from artefacts to ecofacts, starting with pottery and concluding with archaeobotanical and archaeozoological remains²³⁵. In the first section, the discussion of the finds, from the perspective of the artefact assemblages, was followed by a catalogue organised by physical context. In the second section, presenting the artefactual, archaeobotanical and archaeozoological evidence from the recent stratigraphic trenches, the finds were catalogued by material and class, and the artefacts were discussed in relation to their implications for the chronology of the structures and, where possible, their provenance. The standard points of reference were primarily other Pompeii assemblages, but reference was also made to other sites, if necessary, in order to produce a coherent picture of the datable material in the context of the general picture from the city.

Of almost four hundred finds from the older excavations, only a third was recovered and identified by the Bologna project. These are mostly bronzes and glass, while ceramics were almost absent, as is usual with 19th-century excavations. The surviving objects include pieces of statuary of varying quality, from a very fine bronze Satyr to less refined marbles (Hermaphroditos, Venus Anadyomene, a monopodium with a Dionysian herm). Lastly, there are artefacts linked to cultic and religious activities, such as a *systemum* and applique with a bust of Africa respectively found in the largest *atrium*, 2, and *cubiculum* b²³⁶.

The most interesting data came from the contextual reading. The analysis of the spatial distribution of the recorded finds highlighted their concentration in certain areas and rooms (fig. 3): a building unit, maybe a shop (IX 8, 4), opening on to *Via di Nola* (161 items); the so-called *Hospitium Hygini Firmi* (84 items); the corridor, 39, between the sector with the *venereum* and the *peristylum* (50 items); the area of the largest *atrium* of the *Casa del Centenario* (46

229 For the process see Catalini 2020b, 116–119; for a case study (the black *trichinium* 41) see Loschi 2020.

230 A similar approach in the AAPP, the Anglo-American Project in Pompeii (Bon et al. 1997, 34; Bon 1997).

231 Ling 1997, 17–20.

232 Catalini 2001b.

233 Loschi 2020.

234 Catalini 2018b, 361–374.

235 Catalini 2018b, 495–765.

236 Catalini 2018b, 161–184.

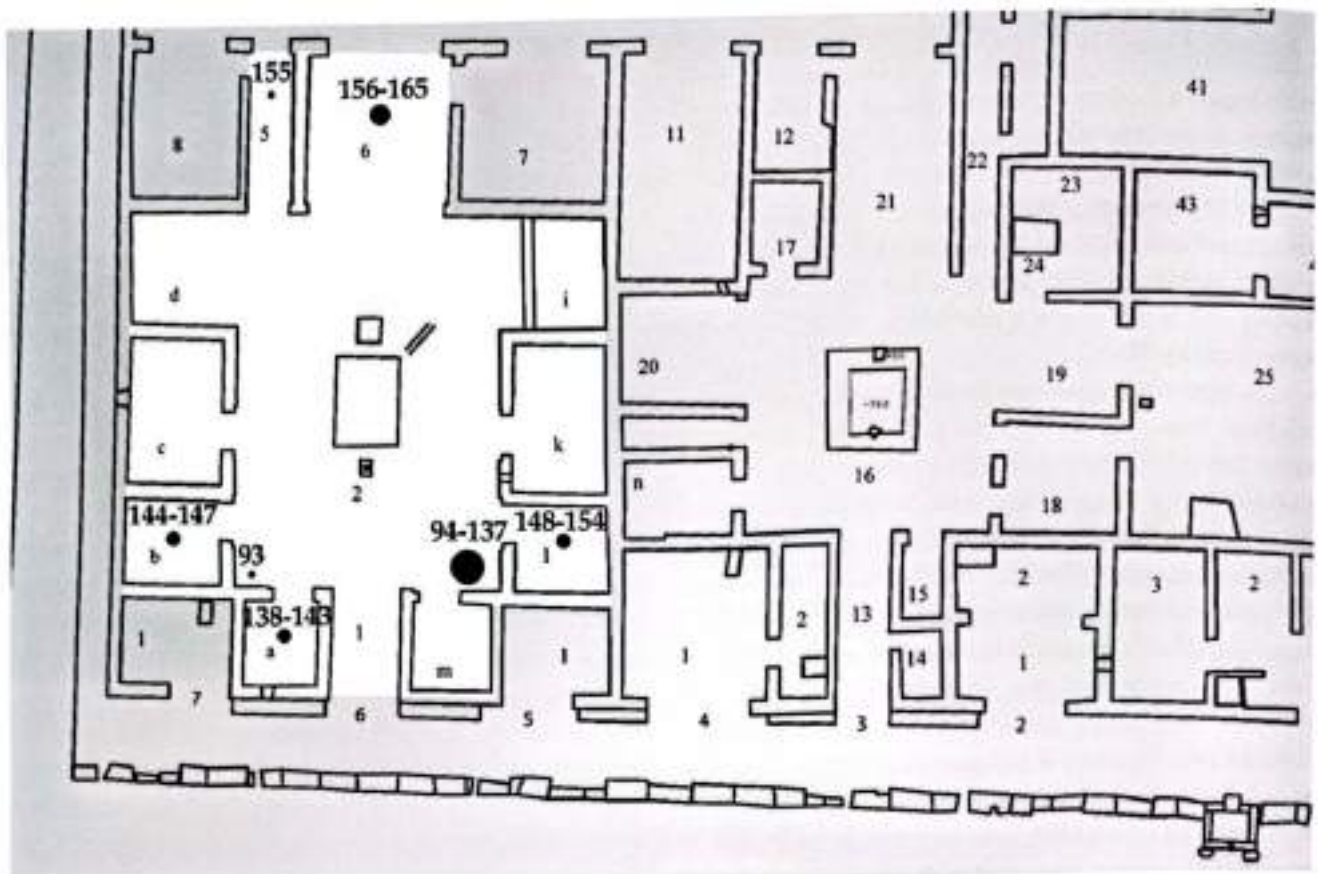


Fig. 11: Pompeii, Insula IX 8, Casa del Centenario (IX 8, 3.6.a), atrium 2, plan: artefact assemblages from the older excavations.

items); the south-eastern sector, near the *viridarium* with the *nymphaeum* (38 items)²³⁷.

Considered from a broader perspective including Pompeii and beyond, the data seem to confirm that (i) the finds in private spaces were highly clustered, (ii) there were primary storage areas whose contents were superior in terms of quantity, and sometimes even quality, and (iii) these areas were often located in the entrance sector²³⁸. Given the small quantity of finds recovered from the *insula*'s "public" areas, such as the *tablinum*, *alae* and *triclinia*, the presence of these storage spaces can be seen as reflecting a logic of safekeeping, as suggested by Ria Berg: everyday objects were probably mostly kept in spaces other than the ones they were used in²³⁹.

In terms of artefacts, the assemblage of the area of the *atrium* was the most informative, as previously pointed out by Penelope M. Allison, Joanne Berry and Bernhard Sigges²⁴⁰. Here, as in other contexts, for example the *Casa del Menandro* (I 10, 4), the finds were distributed predominantly around the *fauces*: in the north-west corner of the *atrium*, probably in cupboards (46 items); and in the *cubicula* near the *fauces* (a, b, l; with 6, 4 and 7 items respectively)²⁴¹. On the opposite side of the *atrium*, around the *tablinum*, there were very few finds, although they were significant: a *candelabrum*, in the *oculus* to the east of the *tablinum*; various bronze items including locks, handles, a key, coins,

a vessel and two bases, in addition to fragments of a glass window, in the *tablinum* (18 items); and a sundial in the corridor between the two rooms (fig. 11)²⁴².

The area of the *peristylum*, including the court, *porticus* and annexes, appeared almost empty: here the excavations brought to light only the medium-sized bronze of the Drunken Satyr, in an undefined position in the garden, and the marble statuette of Hermaphroditos, maybe in the south *ambulacrum* near the *viridarium* with the *nymphaeum*²⁴³.

A similar dearth of finds was encountered in the kitchens, where even the imposing *lanarium* in the south-east corner of the small *atrium* 49 was found to be empty, and

237 Coralini 2018b, 174; 199-234 (IX 8, 4, shop, or storage space); 172 f.; 333-352 (so-called *Hospitium Hygini Firmi*); 171; 299-311 (corridor 39); 167-169; 239-256 (*atrium* 2); 171 f.; 319-332 (the south-eastern sector).

238 Berg 2016a.

239 Berg 2019, 61; 63.

240 Berry 1997b; Sigges 2002, 463-473; Allison 2004, 65-80 (front hall area); Allison 2007, 271-273.

241 Coralini 2018b, 239-266.

242 Coralini 2018b, 267-269; 285 (*candelabrum*).

243 Coralini 2018b, 169 f.; 286-297.

the excavation reports mention only three artefacts²⁴⁴. Considering the ways of recovering and recording the finds, it is hard to determine whether the data reflect the ancient context of use, i. e. a kitchen that was inactive at the time of the eruption, or if it is the product of drastic selection following the discovery.

Besides *atrium* 2, other storage areas, both permanent and temporary, can be recognised, the most evident being the corridor, 39, running between the area of the *venerium* and the *peristylum*, the rooms east of the *viridarium* with the *nymphaeum* and the shop at number 4²⁴⁵. It was the latter that contained the greatest number of items (161, almost all in bronze). A number of factors regarding this assemblage (quality, quantity, typology) suggest it functioned as a storage area in AD 79, although the circumstances of the discovery (during the celebrations of the 18th centenary of the eruption on 25 September 1879) call its reliability into question. Is this really where the assemblage was found? Or was part or all of it found in other places, being transferred here only later, in order to build a set worthy of the important anniversary²⁴⁶?

Clusters of artefacts, probably activity-related, if found outside the probable storage areas, can be considered potential indicators of ongoing activities at the time of the eruption²⁴⁷. In *Insula IX 8*, there is only one case where it is possible to recognise convergences between decorations and loose finds. In a *cubiculum*, b, of the largest *atrium*, 2, whose wall paintings depict Egyptian themes, or somewhere in its vicinity, the excavations recovered two items considered by many scholars to be evidence of a specific relationship with the cult of Isis, or at least of a particular interest in *Aegyptiaca*: a *system* and an applique with a bust of Africa²⁴⁸.

As in other private contexts, the nature, quality and distribution of the various artefacts recovered in *Insula IX 8* confirm three things: first, spaces could be adapted to various purposes; second, these (albeit preliminary) studies of artefacts can potentially identify rented properties and rental practices; third, there is undeniable evidence that whether rented or owner-occupied, private spaces as well as whole *insulae* were involved “in a constant symphony of change”²⁴⁹.

The case study of *Insula IX 8* proves that, despite the difficulties in reconstructing the records of the older excavations in Pompeii, caused by both the lack of precision in the fieldwork and the omission of less interesting finds such as ceramics or incomplete items, such work is not only possible, but also worth the considerable effort required.

“In any survey of the social and economic aspects of houses in Pompeii and *Herculaneum*, study of the finds should play a crucial, perhaps the crucial, part”: the work of the past three decades, not only *insula*-based, but also *domus*-based, confirmed Andrew Wallace-Hadrill’s words of 1994²⁵⁰, showing that this potential value concerns not

only artefact assemblages from stratigraphic investigations, but also loose finds from older, non-stratigraphic excavations. Indeed, it is the latter, having led to the rediscovery of most of the archaeological site of Pompeii, that have produced the richest record, at least in quantitative terms, a veritable gold mine still largely unexplored.

In order to make the best use of this resource, it is necessary to implement thorough alibi archaeologies, “digging” not in the ground but in the archives and storage facilities, with a view not only to the recovery of primary data and finds, but also to understanding how that sample was formed, from its first discovery until today²⁵¹.

The first step in this process is to recognise which specific season, in the modern history of Pompeii, the old excavations under examination belong to. In that history each season has its own distinctive practices, both in discovery and in documentation. Consequently, the earlier excavations of *Insula IX 8* (1879–1880) constitute a distinct sample with respect to those of *Insulae IX 3* (1847) and I 10 (1928–1932). The method of analysis is the same, but the strategies and tools must be adapted to the case study. The goal also remains the same: to add to our understanding of ancient use contexts via the re-composition of modern excavation contexts.

In this approach, the first problems to tackle are the quantification and classification of the finds. In the non-stratigraphic excavations, the reports, mostly from the 18th and 19th centuries, consist of little more than a list of finds, usually limited to intact or reasonably valuable items, as a result of selective practices in recovery²⁵². These samples were reduced in the field during excavation, and then underwent a second selection, less intentional but no less effective, while being transferred from the site to the places of conservation. For the 19th-century excavations, losses ranged from $\frac{1}{4}$ (as for *Insula IX 3*) to $\frac{1}{3}$ (for *Insula IX 8*)²⁵³.

Once the artefacts are accounted for, and, when recoverable, identified, the next step is classification, either reserved for surviving objects, or of all finds mentioned in excavation reports, as for *Insula IX 8*²⁵⁴. In both cases, it is possible to proceed by categories, based on material, mor-

244 Coralini 2018b, 170; 313–317.

245 See above, fn. 26.

246 Coralini 2018b, 49; 174; Coralini 2020c, 68–72.

247 On clusters of artefacts and activity patterns see Allison 2007; Cahill 2010, 477, cited by Berg 2019, 64.

248 Versluis 2002, 150–153 no. 065; Coralini 2018b, 169; 260–263; Coralini 2020b, 121–123.

249 Laurence 2007, 151.

250 Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 87.

251 Coralini 2020b.

252 Allison 2004, 30–33; Sigges 2002, 58–64; Berg 2019, 54 f.

253 *Insula IX 3*: Berg 2019, 53; *Insula IX 8*: Coralini 2020b, 117.

254 Coralini 2018b, 195–374.

phology or function. The last of these criteria is interpretative and therefore the most problematic: an object may have performed more than one function, besides the one that is most evident today, and ancient uses are not known for all objects²⁵⁵.

The representativeness of the loose finds from the older excavations, especially their potential as a document of everyday life in AD 79, is the greatest of the still-open questions, which can be answered only by expanding the sample, *insula* by *insula*. Even in contexts investigated stratigraphically, the largest “grey area” concerns the representativeness of artefact assemblages: to what degree do they reflect daily life at the time of the eruption in AD 79? To what degree were they contaminated by its traumatic end? Many factors, as suggested by Penelope M. Allison in her seminal studies of the contents of thirty *atrium* houses and *Insula* I 10, may have altered both artefact assemblages and their position of discovery: firstly, the series of earthquakes starting in AD 62 and the events of the city’s last days; secondly, building activities in progress in AD 79 and spoliation after the eruption²⁵⁶. These factors may have polluted artefact assemblages, reducing their informative potential, but do not necessarily prevent us from reading the use of built spaces with reference to their contents. It cannot be excluded that a placing or grouping of objects that may appear illogical to modern eyes was actually normal practice in ancient times²⁵⁷. If it is accepted that the discovery contexts are a reliable reflection of the ancient use contexts, the groups of finds can be read as markers of flexible and multifunctional scenarios. In other words, movable objects and furnishings could confer a function on a space that was quite different from what might be suggested by its location, form and decoration²⁵⁸. Consequently, clusters of activity-related objects may be the best source from which to learn about ancient inhabited spaces, even where daily life was interrupted quickly and traumatically. As pointed out by Ria Berg, objects form a dynamic interface between built spaces and activities: considering use, cleaning and storage, utensils were on the move, in accordance with principles that can be recognised by analysing areas of activity, rather than single, architecturally defined spaces. In the *insulae*, as well as in individual buildings, the archaeological contexts of Pompeii, “having survived multiple decimations” (in both ancient and modern times), “still offer unique and plentiful opportunities for the study of lived ancient artefact assemblages”²⁵⁹. The loose finds from old excavations, although preserved only partially, are an important resource, even for more recent lines of research such as “Spatial Analysis in Past Built Spaces”²⁶⁰.

The walls have voices: the epigraphical evidence

Even once the main phases of the *insula*’s second life have been reconstructed, ancient volumes and pathways have been recognised, new excavations (where applicable) have

been carried out, decorations have been restored, and the loose finds from old excavations have been retraced, the potential of the *insula* as a case study cannot be considered to have been completely fulfilled. The work cannot be said to have been completed without re-reading the inscriptions in context, both on mobile and movable items and on walls: this evidence gives voice, and sometimes even a name, to those who inhabited those spaces or moved around them²⁶¹.

While structures and decorations can tell us about the initial design and its revisions, the main witnesses to the everyday life of the final years of the *insula* are the artefact assemblages and epigraphical evidence, the reliability of which is dependent on the quality of the recovery and documentation.

Indeed, in the case of *Insula* IX 8, there is a shortage of useful information that might support a stratigraphic and diachronic reading even of the epigraphical documentation: in almost all cases, due to the incomplete excavation reports, the lack of studies attentive to the archaeological aspects and the precarious current condition of the surfaces, an unfounded synchronicity is imposed on the recorded *tituli picti* and *graffiti*, the only exception being a *graffito* in *ala* 20, which has a consular date²⁶².

Despite these limitations, it is still possible to attempt a mapping of the inscriptions (107, of which 61 are *tituli picti* and 46 *graffiti*), by means of a combined analysis of all the available sources, to the spaces and surfaces where they were first recorded during the 19th-century excavations. Their spatial distribution appears to have been consistent with their nature and destination: *tituli picti* were concentrated on the façades, especially the north one on *Via di Nola*, and consist mostly of electoral programmes (52 items); in contrast the *graffiti* were found in interiors, mostly in Unit IX 8, 2 (often identified as a *schola philosophica* in the literature), the *peristylum*, the *apodyterium* and the so-called “*latrina Marthae*”, probably the most heavily frequented spaces (fig. 2).

255 Sigges 2002, 553 f.; Berg 2019, 55.

256 Allison 2004, 21–24; 179–182; Berg 2019, 58.

257 Sigges 2002, 493 f.; Berg 2019, 60 f.

258 Berry 1997b, 194; Berry 2007; Berry 2016; Nevett 2010, 97–101.

259 Berg 2019, 67.

260 For an overview see Paliou/Lieberwirth/Polia 2014. About movement and interaction in a single city block (*Insula* IV II of Roman Ostia), considered as a single spatial entity, Stoeger 2011 (esp. chapters 5; 6); Kaiser 2014.

261 For the former, from the new excavations in the *insula*, see Coralini 2018b, 733–742 (D. Rigato, M. Mongardi); for the latter see Cerato 2000, with a first classification, and Coralini/Ortali 2021, for a contextual reading. For a similar approach see Allison 2001; Parslow 2017.

262 CIL IV 5214: *Officiosus fugit VIII idus novembres / Druso Caesare M Junio Silvano c(ons)ulibus*.

Work in progress: open questions and next steps

The scenario we propose for the *insula* in AD 79, given our present state of knowledge, appears to have been widespread in Pompeii at the time of the eruption, with an intermingling of “grand” houses and shops, mirroring “a world in which the rich lived in close contiguity with their dependents, slaves and freedmen, clients and tenants”²⁶³. The extensive excavations of 1879–1880 unearthed a city block occupied by a large architectural complex and many other functional units: in the northern part, four shops on *Via di Nola*; in the southern part, the so-called *Hospitium Hygini Firmi* and a partially explored building with a pseudo-peristylum. The main complex, the so-called *Casa del Centenario*, had previously been a *domus* with a double atrium and a peristylum (maybe between the early principate and the earthquake of AD 62), although in AD 79 it is believed to have partially or entirely lost its housing function. In the final years of Pompeii it may have become a mixed-use complex, functionally modelled and shaped by changing consumption and use patterns, at both local and whole-city scales²⁶⁴. This tentative working hypothesis poses a serious challenge for studies of property ownership in the Roman world: in our case, a private estate in the urban context of the last days of Pompeii, together with the social and personal constructs reflected in the materiality of the buildings²⁶⁵. The first problem consists of identifying the properties, with their components and furnishings, as present in legal sources (such as *res aedium, ornamentum, suppellex*) and the archaeological record, including structures, decorations and mobile finds. Another obstacle to overcome concerns the division and co-ownership of urban properties²⁶⁶. The readings of material remains by archaeologists are frequently a simplification, without adequate consideration of the fact that any given building could have had a complex history of single ownership, co-ownership, division and sub-division. For example, legal texts show that different members of an extended family could inherit or receive as a legacy the right to use a property in a variety of ways, in *domus* as well as in *insulae*, and that properties could be fragmented and re-united with the passing of time. Unfortunately, these movements, and consequently the practices and strategies underlying them, are not always visible in the material record, although the division of an urban property required the physical demarcation of the new boundaries²⁶⁷. Moreover, the legal sources themselves, first and foremost the *Digestum*, are a compilation of texts with many historical layers: as a result, the real nature of the evidence forces us to think in terms of very basic and general interpretative frameworks, rather than in terms of specific historical realities²⁶⁸. As suggested by Carlos Machado, the way to move forward in our understanding of how urban property was defined might be to look beyond the legal sources, and to conduct a more detailed analysis of the archaeological evidence, in all its components and aspects, starting, as with

the Bologna project, from old unpublished excavations, the skeletons in the cupboard of modern archaeology.

Conclusion: memoranda for an *insula*-based agenda, in Pompeii and beyond

A bidimensional palimpsest of the ancient and modern, Pompeii, like most of the Vesuvian sites, preserves the physical remains of ancient lives and bears witness to the decisions made and measures adopted following their re-discovery.

The actual evidence, *in situ et alibi*, is the product of a long history of research and excavations dominated by attention to the finds of greatest value²⁶⁹. The poorer ones, for example those relating to domestic contexts, have generally been neglected, if not completely ignored. Consequently, the analysis and understanding of ancient complexes are very difficult. The gap can be partially filled with a comparative analysis of all the components of the case study, from structural evidence to artefacts, but above all through the recovery of what Christopher Parslow called the “enormous backlog of archival records and unpublished finds all in need of their own type of careful excavation”²⁷⁰. This is made possible by means of a research approach that is still largely unexplored, that of *alibi* archaeologies, whose aim is a well-rounded contextualisation: an activity as important as it is time-consuming and inglorious, characteristics that are partly behind this archaeological neglect.

“The hard work of collating the great number of finds cataloged in these manuscripts with their original architectural contexts ... remains to be done”²⁷¹: this is how Christopher Parslow described the specificity of Vesuvian archaeology in 1998, highlighting a situation that is still broadly the case, despite the progress in studies and scientific publications. The recovery and re-reading of already-available data also remains an indispensable condition for following new research paths, especially in the Roman city

263 Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 141.

264 For the *locatio conductio* see du Pleissis 2012 (esp., for an immovable property in an urban setting, such as *cenaculum*, 153f.; *insula*, 155–170; *domus*, 170f.; *haberna*, 171f.; *balneum*, 172f.; and *horreum*, 173–189).

265 Dubouloz 2011; Machado 2013.

266 Pirson 1997; Pirson 1999; Ynnis 2013b. For the legal aspects see Dubouloz 2011.

267 Dubouloz 2011, esp. chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 (157–197; 213–265; 268–300; 301–378).

268 Machado 2013.

269 Berry 1997a, 104.

270 Parslow 1998a, 539.

271 Parslow 1998a, 541.

(Pompeii) with the highest number of *insulae* brought to light, but only rarely and at the small scale by means of stratigraphic excavations. The Pompeii sample has yet to be analysed with new questions and new methods that can first and foremost fulfil the scientific potential of the rich documentation produced so far, above all using new excavations only where truly necessary. Only in this way will it be possible to fully exploit the informative potential of what remains an unrivalled resource, especially in quantitative terms, for research into ancient urban contexts, including *insula* studies. Indeed, it is for *insulae*, in particular, that Pompeii has proven to be an excellent laboratory for the development of methods and practices.

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Credits

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Antonella Coralini
 Professore di ARCHEOLOGIA CLASSICA
 Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna
 Dipartimento di Storia Culture Civiltà
 Piazza S. Giovanni in Monte 2
 I-40124 Bologna
 antonella.coralini@unibo.it