

Pia Kastenmeier, **I luoghi del lavoro domestico nella casa pompeiana**. Studi della Soprintendenza archeologica di Pompei 23. Publisher L'Erma di Bretschneider, Rome 2007. 188 pages, 100 figures.

There have been many studies on the Roman house in the past twenty years, the majority based on a study of decorative and architectural features, with close attention to the spatial articulation of the Pompeian domus and the cultural factors that influenced it. Pia Kastenmeier's monograph on the location of domestic work within the Pompeian house is a timely addition to these studies, reminding us that there was another side to the house that also responded to complex socio-cultural needs. Its separation into formal and functional parts corresponded to social stratification among its inhabitants, and the desire to keep the world of domestic work out of sight.

As the author points out in her introduction (Part 1: *L'altra faccia della casa pompeiana*), service areas do not have the features that were used in other parts of the house to indicate social status or aesthetic values, but they were essential to its functioning. The aim of the monograph is primarily to describe the form and function of service areas, and to examine how they were inserted into the Pompeian house. The study is thus an empirical one, based on the close analysis of the physical remains of service areas in a sample of houses in twelve Pompeian insulae. Any systematic study of a large sample of houses from Pompeii is a vast undertaking, and the author should be commended on the thoroughness of her work. In addition, the study raises some extremely interesting questions and makes many valuable observations, and will be a fundamental resource for anyone studying the Roman house and the organisation of domestic life.

A major part of the book is concerned with defining and categorising the different spaces and their uses. Part 2 (*L'identificazione dei vani: L'architettura e l'arredo fisso*) starts by establishing the criteria for identifying the parts of the house that were used for domestic work. The permanent physical remains are important here. Fixed features such as cooking banks, ovens, masonry basins, troughs (for feeding animals), small stone supports for wooden furniture (that has perished), holes in the walls for shelves, niches and latrines are key characteristics of service areas because they relate to specific activities. Decoration is rare; instead the areas are usually roughly plastered with a high socle rich in brick dust (giving a red or pink shade), which was water resistant and fairly easy to clean. Floors are paved simply, often in *cocciopesto* or *lavapesto*, or sometimes tiled for practical purposes. Here the author acknowledges the problem that these areas and features are not easy to study or examine today because of their poor preservation. In addition to lack of conservation, they often lie beneath accumulated (post-excavations) layers of dirt, and there are undoubtedly features that have crumbled away, partly or entirely, making correct identification tricky.

A further issue that is considered is how to identify domestic as opposed to commercial use of a house. In some cases the fixed features of a dwelling, such as the unusual circular hearth and series of basins found in the House of the Postumii, are clearly suggestive of a commercial use, in this case being similar to the facilities needed for the working and dyeing of cloth. In other cases attribution of use is less clear-cut, but is usually established according to the size of the service area and the equipment found within it.

Once the identification criteria are established, the discussion moves to the different categories of service areas:

Cellars (intentionally built to provide extra space) are small and dark with no fixed features, and were probably used for storage. They were accessed from service areas above them. Basements (integral parts of houses built on slopes) were larger, but also poorly lit with few fixed features and little decoration. Latrines, kitchens, heating equipment for baths, and sometimes stables, have been found in these subterranean spaces, but most likely they were used as storage spaces, since amphorae have commonly been found in them. Both cellars and basements can be categorised as non-specific service areas due to their general lack of fixed features.

Stables can be identified from the remains of mangers or the animals themselves. Although some stables were accessed directly from the street (via wide entrances and sloping paving stones to allow carts to enter, and suggesting commercial use of the premises), there is evidence that many stables were located deeper inside the premises, sometimes making it necessary for animals to be brought through the atrium or kitchen. Here some interesting observations are made about the role of animals in the city. Only the largest houses, such as the House of the Menander, had the sloping paving stones and wide entrance that suggest that a cart or wagon could enter. Given the traffic restrictions in place in Pompeii, it is suggested that travel by cart or carriage was a symbol of social status that only the wealthiest had the means to use. Carts and wagons could not have been used habitually for commercial purposes; instead beasts of burden would have been used to transport goods around the city. Indeed, in most houses the presence of a stable probably related to the commercial use of the property.

Storage spaces may be niches with shelves, cupboards, stairwells, or, most commonly, storerooms. Wooden furniture has been preserved only rarely, but these were usually placed in visible locations, such as in atria or peristyles. In contrast, most other storage areas were located out of sight, and most contained a variety of domestic items including items of furniture, but were not generally used to store food. Storerooms were located where they were needed, either with other service areas or in atria and peristyles. Only fourteen percent of houses in the sample lacked all types of storage area, and these were all small units. The larger the property, the greater the number of storage spaces.

Rooms for domestic servants are actually very difficult to distinguish from storerooms, and thus their identification is difficult. In the few dwellings that may have had such rooms, such as the House of Menander, this undoubtedly related to differences in rank and role among the slaves of the household.

Latrines emptied into cesspits, which eventually would need to be dug out. Apart from the obvious function, they were used to get rid of water used in the kitchen or elsewhere in the house, and were usually located in or adjacent to kitchen areas. However, the author considers it unlikely that latrines would have been used by all members of the household. Literary sources suggest the use of chamber pots, then emptied into the latrine, which means that the patron of the house, his immediate family and his guests would never have had to enter the service areas of the house to relieve themselves.

Much of the monograph is devoted to discussion of kitchens, unsurprisingly since these are the easiest type of service area to identify. Eighty percent of the houses studied had a kitchen, making this area a fundamental part of the Pompeian house, and the focus of service areas. Often it consisted of just a cooking bank and latrine, to which a variable number of rooms, with or without fixed features, might be added, depending on the size of the house. Interestingly, the study reveals that most cooking took place in the interior of the house, meaning that smoke, heat and odours would have been problematic, and solutions had to be found, such as high windows or small openings in the roof. Kitchens usually had cooking banks, but only rarely small ovens, and very little storage space. Most were small, which means that cooking banks were probably also used as work surfaces, or that food preparation – according to the author – also took place in other parts of the house. The lack of storage space is also used to suggest that only limited supplies of food were kept in the house, and that ingredients were bought daily.

Part 3 (*Il lavoro domestico: pianificazione ed uso degli spazi*) of the study discusses what the examination of different types of service area reveals about the organisation and use of space for domestic work. Here some interesting observations are made about kitchens and cooking-related topics, but there is little discussion of other types of service area. Cooking activities were indeed central to domestic life, and the focus of service areas in every houses, but the previous section highlighted that interesting observations can be made about other types of service area too, and these might have featured more in this section of the monograph.

Initially this part of the book diverges to consider the question of food in more general terms. What was consumed by the people of Pompeii in the period before the eruption of Vesuvius? Although an interesting summary of current research on this topic, concluding that diet was similar in all houses, this section does not seem strictly relevant to the overall theme of the monograph. The discussion of the utensils and vessels used in kitchens is more useful, although appears to be based on typolo-

gies of artefact that would have been used for cooking activities rather than a detailed analysis and comparison of what was actually found in the sampled houses. The archival research needed to compile this information would have been time-consuming and difficult, but it is frustrating that only general observations can be made without more than a couple of specific and detailed examples to support them.

The section moves on to more general observations and conclusions. Numerical analysis of the different houses in the sample produces fairly predictable results: the number of service areas in a dwelling depends on its surface area. The larger the house, the greater the number of service areas, and also the greater specialisation of activity. The larger number of inhabitants reflects the different structure of the families in large and small units, and the different uses of the home by the different social classes. Only the very smallest properties did not have a kitchen, and in small ones with a kitchen this was the only service area. Larger domiciles are more likely to have multiple storerooms.

More interesting observations derive from architectural analysis of the sampled houses. Service areas were not planned as an integral part of the structure. Instead they were inserted, or rather squeezed into, parts of it that were not used for residential purposes, that is, into less important areas. There was no preferred layout, and they were clearly subordinate parts of the house, in contrast to the formal reception and residential areas which were carefully planned. Often their location was inconvenient in terms of access, as they often did not have separate entrances from the street, and facilities, lacking, for example, direct access to water. They were mostly small, low, and irregular in plan, commonly found in stairwells, often grouped together and usually reduced to the absolute minimum required. There were few true »service quarters«, such as those found in the House of Menander or the House of the Faun, that are completely separated from residential areas by corridors and passageways. Instead, in most properties service areas were unconnected rooms that clustered in a particular part of the house. Exceptions were storerooms located around the atrium or peristyle that were probably used to store objects used in these areas.

This leads to another valuable point, made several times during the study, that the use of space in houses was flexible and could alter according to different domestic strategies. The storerooms off atria and peristyles in larger domus, for example, appear to have been used to store various objects, including moveable pieces of furniture, such as candelabra. This relates to the need to rearrange furniture according to need: items would be used in different seasons, for particular occasions or according to the number of guests. Thus the use of space could vary as a normal part of domestic life. Similarly, the location of most service quarters in the interior of the house meant that they had to be accessed from the atrium or peristyle, and thus that slaves and domestic servants had to cross these residential areas in order to

perform tasks such as collecting water (since service areas did not usually have direct access to a supply of water), to bring in supplies, to lead animals to their stables and so on. How then were these tasks arranged so that they did not interfere with the activities and life of the master of the house? It is suggested that such activities were regulated according to the time of the day, so that the homeowner rarely had to see the chores that enabled his dwelling to function. Examination of the types and arrangement of service areas highlights the multi-functionality and flexibility of the house, and the competing needs of its inhabitants.

The conclusion summarises the many interesting observations and also comments on the structure of the domus. Architecturally, the Pompeian house was divided into two parts, the residential and the service-related. This leads to the suggestion that there was also a division between the inhabitants of the house, the master and his servants. Even if slaves were present throughout the house, the location of a discrete service area implies that at least some activities were segregated from view. (I wonder whether architectural separation here also symbolises social practice – that is, that slaves and servants going about their daily work were simply ignored by the residents of the house. We must also allow the possibility that different servants were allowed different levels of interaction with residents according to their status within the household.) Kastenmeier suggests that the physical separation of service areas can be used to discuss the lifestyle of the master of the house, and the extent to which domestic work was conditioned by his needs and timetable. It is doubtful, however, whether this discussion can be extended to the inhabitants of smaller properties where there is unlikely to have been such a formal division of master and servant, reflected in the smaller number of service areas.

The monograph ends with a detailed catalogue of the service areas in all the sampled houses, along with useful plans illustrating their location within each unit.

My criticisms of this work are fairly minor, particularly when held against the overall value of such an enormous undertaking. Firstly, although it is fair to say that there is no perfect sample of houses from Pompeii, the choice of insulae is surprising for the purpose of this study, since so many of the selected buildings were uncovered at an early date in the history of the excavations. This means that their structures have suffered from two hundred years of exposure to the elements, which clearly must have had an impact on their preservation. Service areas in particular rarely have any decoration, which means that they have not normally been the focus of conservation work. There may have been more service areas in these houses than the author identifies, or rooms that were not used for domestic work but which have decayed to such an extent that they might easily be mistaken for them. Also, some of the properties are arranged over the city walls to the south in multiple terraces, and thus are both larger and more unusual in plan than most houses within

the city. These were included to provide a comparison, but it is unclear to what extent they skew the results of the study. Finally, the categorisation and description of the different types of service area is based on close observation of the physical remains and on previously published accounts of the service areas of individual houses. The archival sources – the *Giornali degli Scavi* – have not been consulted, which seems a shame because they may have shed more light on the condition of individual service areas at the time of their excavation and the finds that were made in them. While I doubt they would have challenged the conclusions made in the study, the archival sources might have added valuable additional information.

These minor points aside, Kastenmeier has produced a careful study of a topic that has long been neglected at Pompeii, and her analysis raises some extremely interesting points about the organisation and arrangement of the Pompeian house in the years before the eruption in A. D. 79. She clearly reveals the social and economic factors that could have an impact on the nature of service spaces within the house, and the flexibility of approach that was taken towards them. In the final analysis, service quarters were not the most important part of the house, but they were still fundamental to its functioning, serving different needs and playing an essential role in the day-to-day domestic strategies of the household.