

Placing Individuals: Pompeian Epigraphy in Context

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Abstract

In both popular and scholarly literature, Pompeii is viewed as a typical Roman town reflecting the social and cultural conditions of the capital, a perception now so embedded in Pompeian studies that it is often assumed to be part of the actual data. This paper questions that perception and explores alternative readings for broadening our approaches to Pompeian society through examination of the material contexts of the epigraphical texts from Pompeii. In particular, it investigates how the names of individual Pompeians have been used to provide evidence on Pompeian households and on the interrelationships and statuses of their members, in four particular houses. It considers the contribution of Greek-dominated Magna Graecia to the development of this town and its inhabitants. It concludes that more contextualised investigations of the material evidence from Pompeii can lead to more informed approaches to its social and cultural relationships, and those between this region, the Roman capital, and the wider Mediterranean region in the first century AD.

Introduction

Within current Pompeian research three interdependent approaches are having an unwarranted impact on its interpretations. Firstly, in the traditions of Classical Archaeology (Snodgrass 1991), Pompeian research frequently uses the agenda of historical research, and hence textual data, to set agenda for investigations of this site's material culture. Because Pompeii was mentioned only extremely rarely in the ancient written sources (for references, see Castrén 1975: 25-26), these sources can in reality only provide analogies, rather than specific evidence on life in this town. Such analogies have often been drawn on without rigorous investigation of the Pompeian material evidence within its own social and cultural milieu. Secondly, and as a consequence, studies of Roman social history generally emphasize distinctions between Rome and South Italy, but Pompeii in the first centuries BC/AD is often presented as being under heavy influence from the capital, mirroring its social and cultural structure. While the former occupation of the area by Greek and indigenous populations is acknowledged and the varied processes and implementations

of enfranchisement are given consideration in other studies of the region (e.g. Frederiksen 1984; Lomas 1993: 161-87), the material remains of Pompeii are frequently treated as if they are not part of these local traditions. For example, Simon Ellis surmised (2000: 6) that '[i]t is to be expected that new designs [of houses] in Pompeii were preceded by similar designs in the capital, Rome, which probably took the lead on cultural matters...' Finally, past uncontextualised interpretations of Pompeian remains also often form the knowledge base of many researchers, as if they were part of the primary data. As a result, and with Pompeii's long history of exploration, a body of interpretative material has been built up and continues to be utilised, often without a critical awareness of the processes by which it has itself been formed. These approaches are especially relevant to interpretations of Pompeian epigraphical evidence.

As well as providing modern scholarship with an enormous database of material remains, the site of Pompeii has provided a large database of inscriptional evidence. Few other sites from the pre-modern world have produced such a wealth and diversity of closely associated and well-preserved material and written evidence concerned with the everyday affairs of its population. This epigraphical evidence has played a particularly important role in studies of Pompeii's political life (e.g. Castrén 1975; Franklin 1980; Mouritsen 1988). From the earliest excavations, it has also led Pompeian scholars to attempt to reconstruct the social lives of individual Pompeians named in these inscriptions, the results of which have had widespread popular appeal. However, such reconstructions have involved a particularly strong use of analogical inference, without adequate regard for context.

This paper examines epigraphical remains from Pompeian domestic contexts and critiques current uses of this evidence to elucidate two aspects of Pompeii's social history that form the basis for our understandings of its social and economic life. These are: (1) the manner in which the names in these inscriptions are used to identify home ownership; and (2) the manner in which epigraphical studies fail to give full consideration to the earlier social and ethnic history of this site, and particularly to the role of Greek colonisation in this region. This paper thus analyses the contexts of these Pompeian inscriptions to question current interpretations of them and to offer some new perspectives.

Pompeian Epigraphy

Four main classes of epigraphical material found within Pompeian domestic contexts provide the names of individuals, and sometimes their political or social status and their interrelationships.

These inscriptions, their contents and their contexts have been fundamental to the construction of current perceptions of Pompeian society.

The Types of Evidence

One of the largest classes is that of electoral advertisements, or *programmata*, usually painted on the street façades of houses. While most of these are no longer extant, many have been recorded in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL IV and supplements). They had a fairly standard format (Franklin 1980: 18-24; Mouritsen 1988: 31-32), which, briefly, could include the following: the name of a candidate for magisterial office, in the accusative; the specific office for which he is standing; the name of the supporter, in the nominative (i.e. the person who wrote or commissioned the advertisement); and either of the verbs '*rogare*' (to offer or nominate) or '*facere*' (to choose or appoint). Any or all of these parts of the inscription were often abbreviated, and the inscriptions themselves were often incompletely preserved when recorded. Typical examples are: '*Polybium aed. vicini civem bonum fa...*' (CIL IV suppl. 3: no. 7925), being the *cognomen* (or surname) of a candidate, Polybius, for the office of aedile whose supporters were neighbours; or '*...Sabinum aed...Restitutus rog*' (CIL IV suppl. 2: no. 3509) being the *cognomen* of a supporter, Restitutus, who claimed to support Sabinus (the candidate's *cognomen*) as aedile. These *programmata* are the principal evidence for what have been described as the '*dramatis personae*' of Pompeii (see Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 40). They provide much information on the magisterial candidates in this town and are believed to provide information on their domiciles and those of their supporters.

Another group of inscriptions associated with Pompeian houses consists of graffiti which had been scratched, painted, or scribbled (in ink or charcoal) on the walls, often on their plastered and painted decoration. For example, a graffito commencing '*Successus textor amat Coponias ancilla[m] nomine Hiredem(sic)...*' was scratched on the right door jamb of house I 10, 2-3 (Della Corte 1929: 457-58, nos 152-53), and announced the weaver Successus' love for Iris, seemingly the servant of a female innkeeper. It is generally assumed that the people who wrote these kinds of graffiti, and those mentioned in them, lived in the vicinity and were of a lower social and economic status than those documented in the electoral advertisements.

Stamp seals are another important group of Pompeian epigraphical material found in domestic contexts. These are relatively large bronze seals, measuring 10-20mm x 30-50mm, and bearing a name in the genitive indicating possession. Their precise purposes are unclear, but they bear witness to a need for those named on them to identify certain items—perhaps produce or consumables—as their own or their households' (Mommsen 1883: 915; Andraeu 1974: 18;

Mouritsen 1988: 15-16). They are often assumed to record the name of the owner of the house in which they were found.

A further group of epigraphical items from Pompeian houses consists of inscriptions, written in paint or charcoal, on amphorae and other ceramic vessels; such inscribed vessels were numerous (e.g. Maiuri 1933: 474-88). While many of the inscriptions have been recorded in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL IV suppl. 1-3), the vessels and their precise provenance have not: few of those now stored in the Pompeian storerooms carry any remaining legible traces of inscriptions or can be positively identified with those recorded in the excavation reports (see Manacorda 1977). This limits the use of these inscriptions for studies which require information on, for example, vessel types, uses and provenances, or artefact assemblages and associations. The recorded inscriptions indicate that some of them documented the contents or gave a date. About half of them included names of individuals (Mouritsen 1988: 16).

The electoral *programmata* and stamp seals provide the names of individuals, who were most probably Pompeian residents. Graffiti scratched on walls often named individuals who were also very likely to have been Pompeians, although not invariably. Amphorae and other inscribed vessels, however, provide names of individuals who either produced the amphorae (i.e. on stamped handles); produced their contents; had been responsible for the distribution of the contents; or were the recipients of those contents. While the recipients may well have been Pompeian residents, this is less certain for the producers and distributors. Claims to be able to distinguish between producers, distributors or potential consumers of the amphorae contents (e.g. Day 1932) have been made on the basis of whether the name in the inscription is in the genitive or has a preposition 'ab' (meaning 'from') indicating the producer, or was in the dative indicating the recipient. Such distinctions are extremely useful for identifying the names of individuals involved, for example, in wine production, as well as for identifying the end-users who were most likely Pompeian residents. While this is indeed possible in a few cases, these inscriptions also often present the names in abbreviated form and therefore without the case endings. Even if the ending is visible, it is not always possible to distinguish a genitive from a dative ending (see Andraeu 1974: 223-71; Mouritsen 1988: 16). More than a quarter of a century ago, Andraeu called for a more systematic study of these inscriptions, but there is still nothing adequate.

(Another group of inscriptional material, not discussed here, is a unique find of waxed wooden tablets from the Casa di Caecilius Iucundus (Mau and Zangemeister 1898 [CIL IV suppl. 1]; Andraeu 1974; Dexter 1974). These provide a large body of names of individuals who were either selling property or acting as witnesses to these sales, and they include many names documented in other epigraphical contexts in Pompeii.)

Pompeians and Their Names

Pompeian epigraphical evidence thus provides us with the actual names of individuals who either lived in the town or were associated with it—generally through their political and economic activities (e.g. electoral candidacy, wine production and distribution, retail trade, prostitution), but sometimes also through their role as consumers or through their personal musings. These names consisted of some version of the three names of a Roman citizen—*praenomen* (first name), *nomen* (family name), *cognomen* (personal name or surname)—for example, Caius Iulius Polybius, C. Iulius Polybius, or simply Polybius, or even C I P. Most Pompeian citizens probably acquired Roman citizenship, and therefore a Roman name, at the establishment of the Colonia Veneria Pompeiana by Sulla in 80 BC, although for some it could have been earlier and for others conceivably later.

In the Roman world more broadly, *cognomina* were generally reserved for the aristocracy and ex-slaves in the republican period. Slaves, upon manumission, usually took their owner's *praenomen* and *nomen* and kept their slave names as *cognomina* (see Duff 1928: 50-58; Treggiari 1969: 7); but *cognomina* became more widespread among the free citizens by the first century BC, well before most of the extant inscriptions in Pompeii were written. Greek *cognomina* in Italy, however, are widely believed to be associated with slavery. It has traditionally been argued that if an individual in Italy had a Greek *cognomen* then this person was either from the eastern Mediterranean, an ex-slave, or the descendant of ex-slaves from this region, although it has also been noted that non-Greek slaves could also be given a Greek *cognomen* (e.g. Duff 1928: 56-57; Treggiari 1969: 7-8; for discussion and further references, see Kajanto 1968: 519-21). Treggiari (1969: 6) noted that 70% of the freedmen in Rome had Greek *cognomina*. Kajanto (1968) attempted to investigate the 'respectability of Greek *cognomina*' by statistically analysing the Latin and non-Latin (i.e. Greek) *cognomina* documented at Italian towns, mostly those to the north of Campania, but also in the port of Puteoli and inland Beneventum. He concluded that Greek *cognomina* were uncommon among the upper classes and, when they occurred among the free-born, they suggested 'foreign' influence.

Andreau (1974: 150) observed that, of the 1216 *cognomina* which have been noted in the Pompeian inscriptions, 50% were Greek, 37% were Latin and 13% were other. He drew attention to the Greek traditions of the Campanian cities and to the proximity of provinces like Sicily, but stated that, in the absence of a systematic study, he would follow the researches of Solin regarding the use of Greek names in Rome by freedmen, and thus estimated that the greater part of those with Greek *cognomina* in Pompeii were freedmen or the sons of freedmen (1974: 149). Mouritsen (1988: 62) also argued, on the basis of Solin's research (1971: 137), that

'...despite Pompeii's profound Hellenization and the Greek influence from Neapolis in particular, there is nothing to suggest that the Greek names current in Pompeii should have had a wider use. Bearers of Greek names must thus be considered slaves, freedmen, or children of freedmen'.

He consequently observed of the names on Pompeian stamp seals (1988: 14-15) that 'over one-third of the obviously free citizens' *cognomina* are Greek, which is a certain sign of servile origin in the first or second generation'. The prevalence of Greek *cognomina* in the Pompeian epigraphical record has consequently been used to argue for the prominent social, political and economic position of freedmen in Pompeii (Mouritsen 1996: esp. 141-42).

In this, Mouritsen and subsequent Pompeian scholars have viewed Pompeii as a typical Roman town with the name of each of its citizens providing a reliable key to the social status of its owner. But such an approach ignores Pompeii's cultural history, as well as the range of markedly different inscription types found in Pompeii. At Rome, and at other Roman sites, epigraphical remains tend to be in the form of epitaphs or dedications, carved into stone.

Examining the Evidence: Four Pompeian Houses

The types of epigraphical evidence and the approach to Pompeian nomenclature outlined above have provided the bases for investigations into Pompeian household structure. At the same time they have contributed to the perception of Pompeii as essentially a Roman town.

Matteo Della Corte has done the most extensive study of the named individuals in Pompeian inscriptions, and his work (1965; first published 1914) has dominated the study of Pompeian epigraphy for most of this century. He used the provenances of these inscriptions to provide information on the social structure of the town, specifically to identify the owners of Pompeian houses. For the electoral *programmata*, he argued that, when 'the supporter of a political candidate was named...this supporter is nearly always the owner of, or intimately connected with, the house on the façade of which the electoral inscriptions appears' (1965: 9-23, quoted in Franklin 1980: 19). Essentially Della Corte used a particular body of evidence, with its own specific agenda, to interpret other bodies of evidence (see Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 4). Indeed, Mouritsen (1988: 18-19, 61) has convincingly demonstrated that a high proportion of electoral inscriptions feature on houses which cannot have been owned by the supporter mentioned in them, because appeals by the same supporters are often painted in different locations. He argued (1988: 19-27) that Della Corte's methodology involved a positivist and an extremely unscholarly approach to these inscriptions.

Mouritsen further asserted (1988: 19) that house ownership cannot be safely identified by use of only one of these four inscriptional types (*programmata*, graffiti, seals, or inscribed amphorae), but needs to be corroborated by the presence of others. At the same time, he noted (1988: 16) that names on amphorae in the dative (i.e. recipients) make up a smaller group than those in the genitive, implying that the names on amphorae generally referred to the supplier or distributor, who is less likely to be an occupant of the house in which such amphorae are found. However, as noted above, few of these endings are actually legible.

Despite Mouritsen's exposé of over a decade ago (see also Mouritsen 1990: 38-39) and despite acknowledgement of the unreliability of Della Corte's system (e.g. Wallace-Hadrill 1994: 108), the assumed residences and social statuses of these individuals not only colour the perceptions of the Pompeian tourists, but are entrenched in the minds of Pompeian scholars and, perhaps more importantly, of those who use the Pompeian evidence to write Roman social history. Essentially, Della Corte's interpretations have continued to provide a basis for current views of Pompeian social history, with little evidence of a rigorous critique of theoretical frameworks. Also fundamental to current perceptions of the social status of Pompeian individuals is the notion that Pompeians with Greek *cognomina* acquired these through slavery and manumission, either their own or their parents. No free-born Pompeian citizen without slave forebears was likely to have had a Greek *cognomen* because it has been demonstrated that this was unlikely to happen in Rome.

In what follows, I examine the inscriptions from four Pompeian houses, in order to highlight aspects of household composition and ethnic/social origins which I feel continue to be misrepresented (for further references to these houses and more detail of their material culture, see Allison, forthcoming a). I will commence with the house that I have studied in the most detail (Allison, forthcoming b).

The Casa del Menandro (I 10, 4)

Della Corte (1965: nos. 592-93) identified the owner of the Casa del Menandro, one of the largest houses in Pompeii (Fig. 1), as Quintus Poppaeus Sabinus, a member of the *gens Poppaea*—an identification still accepted in recent scholarship (e.g. Armitt 1993: 240; Koloski-Ostrow 1997: 252-53; Pesando 1997: 53). The *gens Poppaea*, that of the emperor Nero's second wife, is believed to have been an aristocratic Campanian family who owned the lavish villa at Oplontis, near Pompeii (De Franciscis 1975: 15-16). Della Corte's attribution (1965: nos. 592-93) was based on some of the epigraphical material associated with this house (see Della Corte 1933: 282-96). The first is a seal ring found in one of the rooms of the house, with '*Q. Poppaei*' embossed

on the seal and '*Erotis*' on the ring itself; it has thus been identified as that of Q. Poppaeus Eros, a freedman of one Q. Poppaeus (Maiuri 1933: 20). The second inscription is a graffito outside the main entrance that Della Corte (1933: 282 nos. 56-57) read as: '*quam ex mesa m ... quam pecuniam Quintus ... cn ... Pontio Silano ... s ... locavit*' and that seems to record a loan which Quintus made to Pontius Silanus. Della Corte identified this Quintus as the owner of the house—Quintus Poppaeus Sabinus. While a patron may be referred to by his *praenomen*, it seems unlikely, however, that a financial transaction involving the owner of such a large establishment would be scratched on the front of his house. Two other graffiti in room 19, a large decorated room off the colonnaded garden of this house, provide the *cognomen* '*Sabinus*' (Della Corte 1933: 290 nos. 133-34), as did several more outside this house and the smaller neighbouring houses, I 10,1 and I 10, 2-3 (Della Corte 1929: 455-63, nos. 139, 140, 154, 155, 158 and 192). In his recent publication of this house, Ling (1997: 142-44) has rightly seen the identification of the owner of the house on the basis of this graffiti and bronze seal as circumstantial. He concluded that the owner could not be identified, although he did suggest that it was a male and a member of the decurion class.

<<[Insert Figure 1 about here](#)>>

In many recent studies concerning Pompeian houses there is a noted preoccupation with identifying the 'man of the house'. For example, such studies often include sections on 'ownership', but pay scant attention to 'occupancy' (e.g. Seiler 1992: 136; Ehrhardt 1998: 159-62; Ling 1997: 142-46, although see 142 n. 241). While these scholars have generally been critical of Della Corte's approach, they still take a lead from him in this objective, which is based on specifically situated perceptions of household structure and 'home-ownership'. Such perceptions are based on 19th- and early 20th-century analogy, rather than on critical and engendered readings of ancient sources for an understanding of household structure in the Roman world. A consideration of the contexts of these specific inscriptions and also of other substantial inscriptional material from these houses, particularly that on the amphorae and other containers, might reveal interesting and alternative ways of looking at life in these houses.

In the Casa del Menandro, for example, a substantial, two-handled jar ([Fig. 2](#)) was discovered in the southeast corridor (corridor L). When found, it had an inscription in black carbon on the shoulder and neck. Maiuri (1933: 478 no. 16) and Della Corte (1933: 298 no. 193) gave slightly different readings of the text: '*Q Pompej mellis, Pompeio, Pr.....Coeli (?), Galliulli, Li.....*' (Maiuri) and '*Q. Pompei mellis; Pompeio Prisco Sal(utem?) Flos Gall(ici?) mellis desp(umati)*' (Della Corte). The first two lines clearly indicate that the vessel had at one time

contained honey which was the property of Q. Pompeius and which was destined for Pompeius Pr(iscus?). The latter two lines of the inscription indicate that this was Gallic honey, probably of high quality. The vessel may have been of North African manufacture (David Peacock, pers. comm.) and was therefore unlikely to have been used for the transport of this product from the point of production, but rather re-used for its distribution, possibly within Pompeii. This jar and its inscription would seem to document a relationship between Q. Pompeius, Pompeius Pr(iscus?) and this house. It is likely that Pompeius Pr(iscus?) had entered this part of the house, but it is not possible to ascertain whether he was an occupant.

<<[Insert Figure 2 about here](#)>>

Another recipient named on an amphora found in this house was Coelia Procula, a woman who was receiving wine destined for domestic use (Maiuri 1933: 477). On yet another amphora, a P. Coelius Gallus seems to have been the producer, or perhaps the distributor, of wine which came from Rhodes (Maiuri 1933: 485). Maiuri's reading of the inscription on the honey-jar identified the recipient as also being a Coelii, a family attested elsewhere in Pompeii (see Castrén 1975: 155-56).

An amphora, found in a corridor off the peristyle of the Casa del Menandro had a handle-stamp 'EUMACH', documenting the producers of this vessel as the Eumachia family, one well known in Pompeii and probably of Greek origin (Castrén 1975: 71, 95, 165). Several other amphorae with inscriptions, reputedly referring to Tiberius Claudius An[thus] and Tiberius Claudius Ar[istoteles] (Della Corte 1933: 296-97 nos. 185-86, 188), were found in this house, a number together in room 20. Della Corte (1933: 296 no. 185) read the inscription on one side of one of these as '*Ti. Claud. An*' and Maiuri (1933: 476-77 no. 13) read the other side as '*sur[rentinum] ... met[ellianum] ... ner[onianum] ... mario et gallo co[n]s[ulibus] ... acet[um] ... alex[andrinum]*'. Della Corte's reading of this latter side differed slightly from Maiuri's, in that he read the second line as '*M.C.T*' and identified this as the Muttia family, known in the region of Pompeii, being the wine producers. A number of the other amphorae found in this room (e.g. Della Corte 1933: nos. 186, 188-90) also had inscriptions which consisted of various versions with these names and of Surrentum, suggesting that they formed a group that had been used to transport wine from there, conceivably that of the Muttia family. The third inscription on the amphora discussed above implies that it had been reused for Alexandrian vinegar.

Andreau (1974: 211, 249) observed that there were numerous Ti. Claudii in Pompeii who were likely to have been imperial freedmen, or the freedmen of such (see also Kajanto 1968: 525 n. 3). Interestingly, the inscriptions on the amphorae in the Casa del Menandro were sometimes

in Greek and sometimes in Latin. Ti. Claud. Ar[istoteles?] and Ti Claud. An[thus?] were very probably the distributors of wine used by the occupants of the Casa del Menandro. That a number of vessels in room 20 had similar inscriptions hints at a regular business association between the occupants of this house, the Ti. Claudii and perhaps the Muttia family. This contrasts with the inscriptions on the amphorae in courtyard 34 of the house, in which a great range of people were named (Maiuri 1933: 193 fig. 88, 195 fig. 90; for inscriptions, see Maiuri 1933: 479-83 nos. 17-29, 485 no. 33; Della Corte 1933: 299-301 nos 201-22). These latter amphorae were possibly being recycled, since they seem to have been empty at the time of the eruption (Ward-Perkins and Claridge 1980: no. 88).

At this stage of research it is not possible to draw any conclusions about the inscriptional remains in the Casa del Menandro, but some observations can be made about the precise contexts of some of these inscriptions and their role in the identification of the occupants of this house. Firstly, the seal of Q. Poppaeus Eros was found associated with two skeletons (one reputedly male and the other a young female), a large collection of bronze vessels, one of the larger coin hoards in Pompeii, one of the largest collections of iron tools in Pompeii (at least one of which was broken before deposition), and unexplained slabs of marble (Allison 1997: fig. 13.5). The tools and the marble slabs, and perhaps also the vessels, seem to have been suspended from nails stuck into the very late wall-painting in this room. This would have defaced the room's decoration, suggesting haphazard occupancy and hoarding under straitened circumstances, perhaps during ongoing seismic activity (see Allison 1992: 53-54; forthcoming a: 202). It is by no means certain that one of the skeletons was the owner of the seal, rather than its salvager. Even if he was Q. Poppaeus Eros, this does not indicate that he was a freedman and a trusted servant of the owner of the house—the identification that Maiuri gave him.

The inscriptions on the pottery from this house document mainly the producers and the distributors of these vessels and their contents. Such people may have been business associates of the occupants. These inscriptions also record members of the Pompeia and Coelia families as recipients of the contents. Unless the honey-jar was being re-used by someone else, Pompeius Pr(iscus?) is likely to have been an occupant of the house, receiving goods from Q. Pompeius, to whom he was conceivably related. The two Coelii—Coelia Procula, a consumer of wine for home use, and P. Coelius Gallus, a distributor of wine—may also have been closely connected with this house. If Maiuri's reading of the inscription on the honey-jar were correct, then its recipient was also connected with the Coelia family.

Sabinus, and possibly Quintus, whose respective *cognomen* and *praenomen* appear in graffiti associated with this house, could have been either occupants or visitors to the house, although Quintus is not directly attested in the recorded graffiti inside the house. As Mouritsen

(1988: 17) pointed out, there is no reason to assume that all the people who scratched their names into the wall-paintings of a house would have been its occupants, let alone its owners. Rather, such graffiti would be testimony to the people who may have visited the house, sometimes penetrating into the innermost rooms around the colonnaded garden. This might give us insights into patron/client relationships, or alternatively into occupants' treatment of their household furnishings. It also draws attention to Pompeian attitudes to the defacing of wall-paintings, even in some of the most inner, and seemingly most private, decorated rooms of the house that are generally considered to have been reserved for specially invited guests (Vitruvius 6.5.1). These inscriptions may not assist in identifying the owner or even the residents of this house, but they provide a wealth of information on the range of people who had dealings with it.

In summary, it is not at all the case that the inscriptional material from the *Casa del Menandro* serves to identify the owner of the house as a member of the Poppaea family; rather, it documents the comings and goings of a number of people who were not necessarily closely related personally, but who either lived in or had access to the various parts of this establishment. One hopes that more detailed study of all the inscriptional evidence and its precise contexts (Varone *et al.*, forthcoming; Allison, forthcoming b) will provide more contextualised perspectives on the occupancy of this house, and on household relationships in Pompeii more generally.

The Casa dei Vettii (VI 15, 1)

The Casa dei Vettii ([Figs. 3-4](#)) takes its name from two bronze stamp seals and a bronze signet ring, found near large chests in the front hall of this house, and from two electoral *programmata*, one on the south side of the insula and one on the east. The seals read '*A Vettius Restitutus*' and '*A Vettius Conviva*', and the ring '*A V Co*' (Sogliano 1898: 252; Della Corte 1965: no. 89). The *programmata* read, respectively, '*Vetti Con..va Augusta..i*' and '*...Sabinum aed...Restitutus rog*' (CIL IV suppl. 2: nos 3509 and 3522). These led Della Corte (1965: 67) to identify the owners of this house as A. Vettius Restitutus and A. Vettius Conviva. The discovery of a third seal with the legend '*P. Crusi Fausti*', found in the upper levels to the north of the main garden, has prompted the suggestion that the upper storey must have been let to a tenant (Sogliano 1898: 338; Della Corte 1965: no. 94).

<<[Insert Figures 3 and 4 about here](#)>>

From the splendid Fourth-Style decoration and garden sculpture of this house, Sogliano concluded that these two Vettii were wealthy merchants (1898:388). Della Corte (1965: 68-71) surmised that they were most probably involved in the production of wine in the vicinity of Pompeii, also arguing that, as there was no specific onomastic evidence to the contrary, they were free-born. However, most recent literature, both scholarly and popular, has identified A. Vettius Restitutus and A. Vettius Conviva as two freedman brothers who owned this house and who must have been successful businessmen, judging by the opulence of their residence (e.g. Jashemski 1979: 21; Mouritsen 1988:14; 1997b; Clarke 1991: 208; Nappo 1998: 130; Ellis 2000: 1-4). The rich and varied iconography of the wall paintings has been considered the *nouveau riche* taste of upwardly mobile freedmen. Consequently, this house has been used to exemplify the potential affluence of freedmen who could turn the inheritance from their patrons into commercial success, sufficient to own a house such as this. It must be noted, firstly, that perceptions that this house epitomized the *nouveau riche* are based on contemporary attitudes to taste (see Bartman 1991: esp. 78; Richardson 2000: 412) and, secondly, that the owners of this house and their status are by no means established.

One of these Vettii was probably an Augustalis. The Augustales were members of a *collegium*, or organised group, established in many cities to carry out the rituals of the cult of the emperor (see Lomas 1993: 164); they were usually rich freedmen. At least one of these Vettii, therefore, is likely to have been a freedman, but this is not absolutely certain. Leaving aside the fact that the full word 'Augustalis' is not visible in the inscription, Castrén observed that 'in some municipalities the Augustales were recruited from among the highest municipal aristocracy' (1975: 73). Furthermore, the presence of the names of the Vettii on seals within the house and among the electoral *programmata* in the vicinity seem insufficient evidence to establish that they actually owned this house. No amphorae inscribed with these names, in the dative, have been found here to add further weight to this identification (Anon. 1895: 33; Della Corte 1965: 69-70). It does seem highly likely that these two men were associated with this house, and that they played a role in the stamping of either in-coming or out-going goods. To assume, however, that they were also the owners of this house, and hence that it bears witness to the wealth of these particular individuals and to their artistic tastes, is again to ignore the potential range of people who might constitute such a Pompeian household and the potential spheres of control and influence of its members, both male and female.

Roman social historians (e.g. Gardner and Wiedemann 1991: esp. 3; Ellis 2000: 174-79) have emphasised that household composition in the Roman period was very different from our modern household. While it might have consisted of a nuclear family with a *pater familias* and a principal or biological family, the *familia* often included freedmen and freedwomen, as well as

male and female slaves, particularly in larger households such as may have occupied the Casa dei Vettii. The assumption that the Vettii were both brothers and the owners of this house throws into question the widely accepted presentation of a Roman household as having a single head (Gardner and Wiedemann 1991: 3; Clarke 1991: 4; George 1997: 301). If this proposed ownership of the house is accepted, then it should cause us to rethink our understanding of Roman household structure. There is certainly nothing in the inscriptional evidence from the Casa dei Vettii that should cause us to believe it identifies a *pater familias*. For example, the identification of house ownership here is based on the names on stamp seals, whereas the name on the seal in the Casa del Menandro has been used to identify a servant. More rigorous research into the epigraphical and literary evidence for household structure is needed (for a similar approach to Greek households, see Spencer-Wood 1999). Moreover, a better understanding of the purposes of such seals and their role in household activities can lead us to appreciate more clearly the role and status of the individuals named on them. To my knowledge, investigations of these seals have concentrated on the names represented on them and not on the artefact itself (e.g. their range of shapes, their size, their precise findspots) or any other inscriptional information on them. Andreau thought that some may have been bread stamps, because carbonised bread remains have been found in Herculaneum with a stamp from a seal ('*Celer Q. Grani... veri ser.*'; *CIL* X: no. 8058 no. 18), but it seems improbable that such heavy bronze stamps would have been used for unbaked bread.

The Casa della Venere in Bikini (I 11, 6-7)

If we follow Della Corte's thesis, then the Casa della Venere in Bikini (Fig. 5) must have had a plethora of seemingly unrelated owners. Six electoral *programmata* were recorded on the façade of this house (*CIL* IV suppl. 3: nos 7419-24). On the basis of two of them—'*Maxim ... L Popid[ium] ... vs r[og] ... aed*' (*CIL* IV suppl. 3: no. 7419), and '*A[m]pliatum...aed Maximus rog*' (*CIL* IV suppl. 3: no. 7423)—Della Corte identified the house owner as Maximus. In a cupboard in the front hall of this house were found two bronze seals inscribed '*Cissus Pithius Communis*' and '*C. Poppaeus Idrus*' (Della Corte 1965: no. 737). Armitt (1993: 237, 240) argued that the *programmata*, having been dated to AD 75, mentioned a previous occupant and that the two individuals named on these seals were the occupants of this house in AD 79. She also concluded that the latter was a freedman, presumably because his *cognomen* was Greek, and that he was of the same *Poppaea* family who reputedly owned the Casa del Menandro and also the Casa degli Amorini Dorati (Della Corte 1965: 76-83; but see Seiler 1992: 136).

<<[Insert Figure 5 about here](#)>>

The evidence for the association of this relatively small house with three seemingly unrelated individuals—one a member of the Pithia family with a non-Latin *praenomen*, one a member of the Poppaea family, and someone called Maximus—seems again to highlight the potential complexity of the connections of these inscribed names with the occupants and/or owners of this house, and the need for a better understanding of the functions of stamp seals. Linking the occupants of this house with owners of other Pompeian houses is an attempt to build a picture of inter-household relationships on the basis of unsubstantiated interpretations.

The Casa di Julius Polybius (IX 13, 1-3)

When Ling (1997: 142) conjectured that the owner of the Casa del Menandro was of the decurion class, he compared this house to the less grand house—IX 13, 1-3—that Della Corte (1965: 334) deduced was owned by C. Julius Polybius ([Figs 6-7](#)). This individual has been identified through different *programmata* in various parts of the city as a candidate for *aedile* and *duovir* during the Flavian period (Franklin 1980: 100; see also Della Corte 1965: 334; Mouritsen 1988: 110). The identification of C. Julius Polybius as the owner of house IX 13, 1-3 has received widespread acceptance in both popular and recent scholarly literature (e.g. Jashemski 1979: 26; Leach 1993: esp. 27; Ling 1997: 142).

<<[Insert Figures 6 and 7 about here](#)>>

The façade of this house was excavated in 1913. Of the 32 electoral *programmata* recorded there (*CIL* IV suppl. 3: nos. 7927-58), four referred to a Polybius (Della Corte 1965: no. 708): '*Severum aed Polybius rogat* (*CIL* IV suppl. 3 no. 7945); '*A Rustium Verum d i d Polybi.. collega fac*' (*CIL* IV suppl. 3 no. 7942); '*Rustium V...Ivir i d Polybiu..*' (*CIL* IV suppl. 3 no. 7954); and '*Polybium...aed v a s p...of...et Ivir*' (*CIL* IV suppl. 3 no. 7958). In the first three inscriptions, Polybius was probably a supporter of two candidates, one for aedile and one for duovir; in the fourth inscription, he was himself a candidate for aedile. Della Corte identified this Polybius as C. Julius Polybius. Three more inscriptions on this façade (*CIL* IV suppl. 3: nos. 7941, 7955, 7956) refer to a '*CIP*', one as a candidate for aedile. Della Corte (1965: no. 710) therefore identified this as an abbreviation for C. Julius Polybius. Interestingly, '*CIP*' was also inscribed on two amphorae (*CIL* IV suppl. 3 no. 9365; *CIL* IV suppl. 2 no. 5997) and identified as the consumer. However, Andreau (1974: 238) concluded that in these cases this was not

necessarily an abbreviation for C. Julius Polybius, presumably because one of these amphorae was found in the Casa dei Quattro Stili (II 8, 17), whereas Andreau assumed that C. Julius Polybius lived in house IX 13, 1-3.

The remainder of the house IX 13,1-3 was completely excavated between 1966 and 1978, and a number of graffiti were found inside it, including '*c iulium aed*', recorded near the entranceway, and '*c iulium polybium d. vir. d. ...o v f*', above the roof of the kitchen Nk (Giordano 1974: nos 11-12). In addition, '*Pro salutem reditum (sic) et victoria C Iuli Philippi votum h[ic] fecit Laribus P. Cornelius Felix et Vitalis Cuspi*' was scratched into the wall of courtyard N, near the kitchen, thus offering a greeting to C. Iulius Philippus (Giordano 1974: 25 no. 6). Inside a cupboard in the ambulatory of the garden there was found a stamp seal inscribed '*C Iuli Philippi*' (Giordano 1974: 26 no. 8; De Franciscis 1988: 20).

On the basis of the inscriptional evidence on the façade, Spinazzola had believed that this house originally belonged to an old Pompeian family of the *gens Iulia* (1953: 317). De Franciscis, director of the 1960s and 1970s excavations of the house, suggested (1988: 30) that this family could have had a Greek origin, but that it was more likely that C. Julius Polybius had been an imperial freedman. From the more recently discovered internal inscriptions he concluded that the house had been in the hands of C. Iulius Philippus at the time of the eruption (see Nappo 1998: 52).

The so-called Casa di Julius Polybius has an interesting combination of electoral *programmata*, graffiti scratched into the walls of the house, and a seal stamp pointing to an association with both a Polybius, conceivably C. Julius Polybius, and C. Julius Philippus. Mouritsen remarked (1988: 194 n. 224) that, because 'Greek names occur extremely rarely among members of the freeborn upper class', C. Julius Polybius must have been an imperial freedman, or the descendant of one (see also Castrén 1975: 178-79; Pesando 1997: 137). Solin (1996: 252, 260) noted that Philippus and Polybius both occurred as slave names in Rome; Jashemski (1979: 26) suggested that Philippus had been a freedman of Polybius; and Castiglione Morelli di Franco (1982: 799) proposed that Philippus and Polybius had been related.

There seems little demonstrable reason to assume that the relationship between these two individuals had been different from that of those named in the seals found in the Casa dei Vettii. Some scholars may have made a distinction because this situation seems to involve someone who had been a magistral candidate, probably two individuals with an imperial *nomen* (that of the family of Julius Caesar), and Greek *cognomina*. The lack of agreement on house ownership, individual status and relationship indicates that the range of identities and relationships of these two people is so large that we need more evidence to be able to use these inscriptions for information on these issues.

Being ‘Greek’ in Pompeii

C. Julius Polybius and C. Julius Philippus have been assumed to have been imperial freedmen, not only because they had Greek *cognomina*, but also because *nomina* are generally acquired through one's biological family or one's patron after manumission. However, this is not exclusively the situation: many also took their *nomina* from the military officers who recruited them (Kearsley 1996: 132). When Lucius Cornelius Balbus from Cadiz acquired Roman citizenship he took his *nomen* from L. Cornelius Lentulus Crus, with whom he had special ties of friendship and loyalty (Cicero *ad Att.* 8, 15a, 2 and 9, 7b, 2; see Syme 1962: 44 n. 2). The poet Aulus Licinius Archias, from a family of high rank in Antioch, registered as a citizen of Heraclea in south Italy with the *praenomen* and *nomen* of his most committed literary patrons, the Licinii (Reid 1886: 5-10; Lomas 1993: 111, 182). He retained his Greek name as a *cognomen*, as did many free-born enfranchised Greeks in the eastern provinces, as well as those from places in the western provinces such as Marsalia and presumably from Greek cities of [south](#) Italy (e.g. Leiwo 1996: 86-87). In the same way, enfranchised citizens in Africa and the western provinces (e.g. Gaul) are known to have retained names of native origin as *cognomina*.

Praenomina and *cognomina* such as Tiberius Claudius and Gaius Julius are likely to be signs [that individuals so named were](#) imperial freedmen or freedwoman, or descendants thereof. However, enfranchised persons, including freeborn enfranchisees, who owed, or wished to be thought to owe, their enfranchisement to a member of an imperial family, could register as a citizen with these names. Most of these were likely to retain the personal names they already had. Examples of this among high-status individuals include Ti. Claudius Herodes Atticus, consul at Rome in 143 AD, and C. Julius Antiochus Epiphanes and C. Julius Alexander, who were members of the provincial élite. Imperial names could also exist long before the reign of the particular named emperor or family (Kearsley 1996: 146).

Thus *nomina* and *cognomina* could be acquired in a range of circumstances which did not require slavery and subsequent manumission (Kearsley 1996: esp. 144). This fact should serve as a warning against the use of these parts of the *tria nomina* of a Roman citizen as identifiers of the social status of particular individuals in south Italy, and particularly against the practice of assuming that Pompeians with Greek *cognomina* were freedmen and freedwomen or descendants of such. Mouritsen (1997: 78) has more recently claimed that Greek *cognomina* are ‘a dubious indicator of servile origins in southern Italy’, and I see no reason why this should not apply to Pompeii as well.

Greek colonies were being established in the Bay of Naples from the last quarter of the eighth century BC and for over three centuries Greeks controlled the western reaches of the Bay of Naples and probably the southern parts also (Frederiksen 1984: 54, 85-88). Excavations at the site of Pompeii have provided evidence of occupancy in the Bronze Age, but more substantial, indigeneous material dating to the eighth century BC (Bonghi Jovino 1984; Arthur 1986: 38). According to Strabo (5.4.8), Pompeii was held by the Osci, then the Tyrrheni (Etruscans), then the Pelasgi, and then the Samnites. Thus, the site is believed to have had a local, Oscan, foundation (Eschebach and Eschebach 1995: 15-21). Frederiksen (1984: 88) noted, however, that it has the physical characteristics of a Greek settlement, on a spur of Mt Vesuvius overlooking the mouth of the Sarnus River. He proposed (1984: 88, 135) that such a settlement would have been established in the mid-seventh century BC and may have been too small to rank as a colony. The earliest substantial structural evidence at Pompeii dates to the sixth century BC and is 'of Greek style' (Frederiksen 1984: 88); this includes the southeastern part of the city wall, which enclosed a seemingly urban area at this date (Kockel 1986: 453; Arthur 1986: 38). The Doric temple in the Triangular Forum, in the southern part of the city too, has been also dated around 560-530 BC. Its ornamentation has been used to establish its foundation as Greek (for references, see Kockel 1986: 462-64), although De Waele (1982; cf. Mertens 1981) has argued that it was in fact Etruscan. Finds under another early temple, that of Apollo to the west of the main forum, include architectural terracottas of Greek type, pottery from the Greek colony of Cumae, and inscribed Etruscan bucchero, dating to the mid-sixth century (Frederiksen 1984: 88, 123; Kockel 1986: 455; Arthur 1986: 38).

Strabo had reported Etruscan rule at Pompeii during their hegemony in Campania, dated 650-425 BC (Frederiksen 1984: 123). Frederiksen noted that the Etruscan language has been recorded in Pompeii, but also that 'relations between rulers and ruled differed from city to city' and that the 'Etruscan contribution is often overplayed' (1984: 124-25). Arthur (1986: 39), following Frederiksen, proposed that the Pompeian population at this time was a 'mixture of Greek, native and Etruscan', 'native' being the indigenous Campanians, often called Oscans, who occupied the area at the time of the arrival of the Greeks. However, he doubted that a 'strong Etruscan presence would have been welcomed in the Bay of Naples, where Greek interests more directly lay' (1986: 39). With regard to the ethnic origins of Pompeians, until the late fifth century BC, as Arthur (1986: 38) has observed, 'our state of knowledge is still very fluid'.

We know very little about Pompeii specifically in the fifth century, although from the mid-fifth century Oscan-speaking Samnites from inland Campania gradually took over Greek cities in the south and west (for references, see Frederiksen 1984: 134-57). Cumae fell to them in 421 BC, but Naples maintained its Greek hegemony. It is believed that Pompeii fell in ca. 400

BC and remained under Samnite domination for the next 300 years, until it became a Roman colony in 80 BC (e.g. Castrén 1975: 37). However, our precise knowledge of affairs in Pompeii during this period is again scant. It was reputedly part of a league of cities, along with Herculaneum, Surrentum and Stabiae, whose centre was at Nuceria, and was used by the Roman fleet in 310 BC to gain access to inland areas (for references, see Castrén 1975: 38; Frederiksen 1984: 141). Frederiksen (1984: 140) believed that a substratum of ‘Hellenized native communities’ remained in the areas of the south and east of Campania. We know very little about the relationships and possible intermarriages between these Samnites and the former inhabitants of Pompeii and any effect this might have had on the ethnic and cultural make-up of the town. Pompeii was a port town at the mouth of the Sarnus River in the Bay of Naples, a location not only important to inland towns (Castrén 1975: 38), but undoubtedly also of continuing significance to Greek interests in the region, not to mention overseas traders, particularly from the Greek East (compare Rauh 1993).

Do we, therefore, have sufficient information to conclude that Greek *cognomina* in Pompeii in the first century AD belonged only to individuals who had formerly been slaves to Roman citizens? Greek *nomina* such as *Eumachii* certainly occur in Pompeii (Andreau 1974: 181-82). However, Andreau has argued that there may have been Oscan and Etruscan communities in Pompeii in the first century AD, but that there would no longer have been a Greek community. Yet do individuals need a community to have Greek heritage, Greek social and cultural practices, and vestiges of Greek names as *cognomina*? For example could women of ‘good’ Greek ancestry marrying into Samnite or Roman families have provided their children with Greek *cognomina*? The population of Pompeii is generally thought to be heterogeneous—and yet the nature of that heterogeneity is never really explored or acknowledged in current studies of its social history (but see Lazer 1997).

Returning to C. Julius Polybius and C. Julius Philippus, would it not be reasonable to argue that a Pompeian of Greek origin and perhaps from one of the old Pompeian families, as originally suggested by De Franciscis, might have adopted, at the time of taking up Roman citizenship, the *nomen* of an imperial patron, associate or commanding officer, or had simply wanted to link himself with this family through his *praenomen* and *nomen* (Cébeillac-Gervasoni 1992: 99; Castrén 1983: 97)? Is it not conceivable that some of the descendants of the earlier inhabitants of Pompeii could have taken their Greek names as *cognomina*, without necessarily having been in slavery, and have handed these names down to their descendants? Considering the cultural context of this site, we need to reassess the methods that have been used to identify a slave past for its occupants, with that identification then providing the basis for information on the social and economic activities of the town.

Further rigorous contextualised epigraphic and archaeological investigations could still provide a more thorough understanding of the cultural and ethnic diversity of the inhabitants of Pompeii. Renewed interest in excavating below the AD 79 levels to recover information about the earlier history of Pompeii will hopefully also confront issues concerning community and ethnicity (e.g. The Anglo-American Pompeii Project [Bon and Jones 1997]; The Pompeii Forum Project [Dobbins *et al.* 1998]; excavations of the British School at Rome [Fulford and Wallace-Hadrill 1998]; and excavations of La Sapienza [Carafa and d'Alessio 1995-96]).

Conclusions

The Pompeian epigraphy discussed here serves to inform us on aspects of Pompeian society—for example, the names of many individuals; the names of some families; certain electoral activities and interrelationships; the business activities of some individuals; the identification of people involved in the production, distribution or consumption of wine and other commodities; and amorous desires of certain individuals. However, I know of only two cases where the identification of a property owner has been securely established—the Insula Arriana Polliana (*CIL* IV: no. 138), and the Praedia of Julia Felix (*CIL* IV: no. 1136)—and one of these owners was a woman. A more critical and holistic approach to both the written and the material remains is needed for establishing the domiciles of particular individuals and their social or business status, and to understand living standards and spatial distributions of various activities across the town. While it is frequently acknowledged that traditional perceptions, based on Della Corte's study, constitute a postivist and popularist approach to Pompeian epigraphy (e.g. Castrén 1975: 32-37), such an approach is still fundamental to Pompeian studies, and particularly to the use of Pompeian evidence in other studies of Roman urban behaviour.

The examples discussed here highlight the complexity of the relationships between house occupants, electoral *programmata*, owners of seal stamps, individuals recorded on ceramic vessels and scribblers on walls. While it is interesting to postulate their interrelationships, this cannot constitute contextualised knowledge on Pompeian society without more thorough and critical investigation of the provenances and associations of these classes of epigraphical evidence, both their specific contexts and their broader cultural frameworks.

Mouritsen (1988) has undertaken the most rigorous study of Pompeian epigraphy to date. This important work has been a foundation for more recent studies of Pompeian and Roman social and economic history. However, fragments of past, unreconstructed interpretations remain embedded in this research. There is needed an even more sophisticated and systematic approach

to each type of inscriptional evidence, and to the range of scenarios which may explain its context. This includes a deeper understanding of the cultural and social contexts of these inscriptions. Such an understanding requires a more rigorous approach to Pompeii's place in the society of the Bay of Naples in the first century AD—both through its textual and its material cultural evidence. For example, the opulent Casa del Fauno, with its rich Hellenistic floor mosaics and wall-decoration dating from the second century BC undoubtedly had wealthy and influential 'Hellenized', probably non-Roman, occupants. What is less easy to determine is the nature of its occupancy after Pompeii became a Roman colony. Scholars working on Pompeian material also need to pay heed to current perspectives on Greek *cognomina*. For example, which particular Greek names in Pompeii are verifiably of slave origin? How do Pompeian Greek *cognomina* compare with those from Naples? The perception of Pompeii as a typical Roman town and the division of Pompeian history into ethnic phases is reminiscent of 'nineteenth century racial theory' (compare Dench 1995: 2) and prevents a broader approach to the social, cultural and ethnic identities of its citizens.

The houses and households in Pompeii are indeed central to a growing area of Roman social history that uses material culture to explore the lives of the people who made up the Roman world (Laurence and Wallace-Hadrill 1997; Beard 2000; Allison 2001). Their good state of preservation and their wealth of material remains can be employed to encourage student interest in Roman studies, as Ellis has in his study of Roman housing. However, these remains should not be seen as central to that world. A greater acknowledgement of the social and cultural history of this particular region is needed in Pompeian studies. Greek communities continued to exist in the area and ties with Greek communities in the eastern Mediterranean were maintained. The inhabitants of a port town like Pompeii were surely also part of this world.

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Captions to Figures

1. Plan of the Casa del Menandro.
2. Jar once bearing an inscription identifying its contents as honey; corridor L of the Casa del Menandro (photo J. Agee).
3. Plan of the Casa dei Vettii.
4. View from entranceway of the Casa dei Vettii (photo J. Agee).
5. Plan of the Casa della Venere in Bikini.
6. Plan of the Casa di Julius Polybius.
7. Front hall O of the Casa di Julius Polybius (photo J. Agee).