Block Analysis: Regio VII, Insula xii

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The structures established in VII.xii at Pompeii represent a variety of functions and lifestyles while exhibiting some of the common themes present throughout the city. Though no single structure type or purpose defines the block, examined here in particular are the bakeries and residences which dominate the space if not the character of insula xii. Also discussed briefly is the brothel. The types and locations of these structures tells us much about the function of city blocks close to the heart of town (the Forum) and even a bit about flow of people traveling along its bordering streets.

The Setting

Insula xii in region VII is a medium-sized block in the Altstadt centered between the two east-west thoroughfares of the city. It is bounded to the north by the Via Degli Augustali, to the south by the Vicolo Del Balcone Pensile, to the east by the Vicolo Del Lupanare, and to the west by the Vicolo Di Eumachia. Within Pompeii as a whole, it is located just below the middle of the city’s western half. This position places it within a short walking distance of most public features of the city, with the exception of the amphitheater and palestra in region II.

The insula’s neighbors include a large block to the west, divided into three parts by dead-end roads (VII ix), two smaller blocks to the south (VII x, VII xi), and large blocks to the north and east (VII ii, VII i). Being located in the Altstadt, the insula has a rather irregular shape. Its north, south and west edges are mostly straight and nearly orthogonal, but its eastern boundary makes a noticeable angle, becoming orthogonal to the new direction taken by the Via Degli Augustali as it continues east. The roads bounding the block to the north and east are slightly larger than those to the south and west, and the one to the south in particular (the Vicolo Del Balcone Pensile) has little to no sidewalk and meets a dead end in block ix. One block to the east lies the nearest major road, the Strada Stabiana, a 50-meter walk from the eastern edge of the insula. Also nearby are the Via Dell Abbondanza 70 meters to the south and the Via Della Fortuna 80 meters to the north. Thus, while the block does not have direct access to any of the major commercial roads, it is far closer to them than many blocks in region I, for example.

The nearest gate is the Porta Marina 300 meters to the west, but as the Via Marina is interrupted by the Forum, this route would not be an option to vehicular traffic. The next closest gates are the Porta Di Stabia and the Porta Vesuvio, about 355 meters to the south and north respectively. The insula also had excellent access to water after the completion of the Augustan aqueduct. Public fountains were located only a few meters both to the south and northwest, and one of the aqueduct’s standpipe water towers was right at the southwest corner of the block. Before the aqueduct, drinking water would have come from the deep well at the Stabian baths (VII i 49), 25 meters southeast of the insula. According to a study by A. Maiuri, this well was constructed back in the second century BCE and continued to serve the surrounding blocks even after the aqueduct was in place. Thus, this well would probably have provided insula xii with water between the years of the earthquake and the eruption, when the aqueduct was out of service. Other nearby wells appear to have been located in private houses in insula ii to the north.

The insula itself does not appear to house any quick food or drink shops of its own. However, there are several quite nearby, in VII ii to the north and VII ix to the southwest. The block is a mere 70-meter walk from the Forum and all of the public buildings in the nearby area. The nearest baths are the Stabian Baths a mere 30 meters to the southeast, but the block is also no great distance from the newer Forum Baths or the Central Baths, being located almost at the center of all three. It is a more significant walk to the theaters in the southeast of block VIII, though it is still closer than blocks in the northern and western regions. The only public buildings at a great distance are the palestra and amphitheater at about 0.7 kilometers, but otherwise the block is extremely well centered with regard to Pompeii’s major public structures.

The primary concern of insula vii appears to be the baking industry. Large ovens are visible in doorways 1, 7, 11, and 13, though Eschebach notes that these bakeries lack built-in mills. Additionally, there are a number of windows facing the Via Degli Augustali for selling cakes, indicating that this road probably received the most human traffic. There are also several other shops in the block, including what may be a tavern, and there is an inn to the southwest. The southeast corner houses a brothel. A few modest houses are present in the block and appear to be connected with shops facing the street, and several shops are mentioned to have beds in the back. The northeast corner is home to a grammar school. To the west, insula ix serves as the center of the wool trade and provides a meat market. This proximity to the center of the wool trade explains why several structures related to that trade are found in insula xii. Given the large number of bakeries and shops compared to residential facilities, insula xii and its surrounding area appear to be primarily commercial in character.
Building Identifications

Listed below are the names by which the various structures in the block are identified. English names are listed first when available, followed by alternate names found in Eschebach, Jashemski, and PPM. When alternate names are not listed, they are either identical to the given name up to translations of basic words (Eschebach), are not given a name (PPM), or are not discussed (Jashemski).

A detailed map of the insula as a whole is shown in Figure 2, with individual structures separated by color. Note that different plans and interpretations merge several of these structures (such as the bakery at 1 and the house at 3). This coloration keeps such structures separate.

- VII. xii. 1–2, 37
  - Bakery of Donatus / L. Caecilius Capella
  - Pistrinum (panificio) des Donatus (libertus des L. Caecilius Capella?) [Eschebach]
- VII. xii. 3–4
  - House of L. Caecilius Capella / Casa del Principe Enrico di Olanda
- VII. xii. 5
  - Shop of Rutellius (Rutullius)
- VII. xii. 6
  - Shop
- VII. xii. 7
  - Bakery and Shop / Pistor Dulciarius
- VII. xii. 8–9
  - Taberna Olearia
- VII. xii. 10
  - Shop and Officina of Festus
- VII. xii. 11
  - Commercial Firm with Shop / Casa del Forno
  - Ehemalige Großbäckerei [Eschebach]
- VII. xii. 12
  - Commercial Firm
  - Schenke (?) mit Laden [Eschebach]
Overview

Insula xii in Region VII is composed of a variety of structures, both residential and commercial. With four bakeries and numerous shops, it may have been the center of the city’s baking industry. It also houses a place of cloth production, as well as multiple inns, a brothel, and a school. Though it contains no deep wells to provide the public with water, it does feature a public latrine. The block is well centered in the city, so residents of houses in the block as well as guests in the inns are quite close to both the baths and the forum, not to mention their immediate access to the food and pleasure for sale here.
The plan for the block is shown in Figure 3. (Note that entrance 37 is called entrance 36 in the original Eschebach plan, which lacks the entrance numbered 36 shown here.) At first glance, two properties of the block stand out. Firstly, it is rather irregularly shaped, with only the south and west edges straight and parallel to the axes of the city. Secondly, four ovens are visible in sharp contrast to the prevailing maze of walls, immediately giving away the baking character of this block.

The Bakeries

The city of Pompeii contains 31 bakeries – so many that early excavators believed bread to be the economic backbone of the city. However, bread was such an important part of the Roman diet that this density of baking facilities is probably representative of the rest of the classical world at that time. The bakers and millers (pistores) chose Vesta as their patron deity, who is often depicted accompanied by the donkey who turned the bakers’ mills. About two-thirds of the bakeries in Pompeii possessed their own mills, which were powered primarily by animals, as evidenced by the stables within many of these bakeries. Six bakeries were connected to the home of their owner, including one in VII.xii. The lack of millstones in this block indicates that most of these bakeries were pastry shops.

The identifying feature of a bakery or pastry shop is its oven. Simple classical ovens were often in the shape of a beehive, but only two are present in Pompeii – one at VII.xii.13. Pompeii instead relied on more sophisticated enclosed ovens. The oven was faced with brick and sometimes covered by sand to help retain heat. Chimneys provided an escape for smoke. Ovens were located in a work room at the back of a bakery shop, along with the milling apparatus if present. At the front is where the baker’s products were likely sold, possibly at a wooden counter, as very few bakeries possess permanent counters.

Bakery of Donatus / L. Caecilius Capella
(VII.xii.1-2,37)

This is a pastry shop (pistrinum) possibly connected to the house of L. Caecilius Capella. Its former name comes from the words Donatus rog(at) found outside of the shop [Mayeske]. It is located in an ideal position at the intersection of the Via degli Augustali and the Vico Eumachio, and takes advantage of this position by being open to both streets.

A plan of this shop and connected house is shown in Figure 4. The most prominent feature of the structure is the collapsed oven at (c), which may once have had an arched brick opening. The remains of this oven are shown in Figure 5. This bakery was excavated under Della Corte in 1822 and 1844.

Bakery and Shop / Pistor Dulciarius (VII.xii.7)

The plan of this shop is shown in Figure 6. The shop features a large display room (a) open to the Via Degli Augustali. Behind it is a room (b) with niches for beds and decorated walls, which probably served as the living quarters for the shop’s workers [Eschebach, Mayeske]. The oval oven at (f) is shown in Figure 7 and opposite...
the oven is a large painting. The remaining rooms (d & e) appear to have been used for storage. This structure was excavated in 1845.

**Commercial Firm with Shop / Casa del Forno (VII.xii.11)**

Shown in Figure 8, this pastry shop features a wide opening onto the Via Degli Augustali. The large room (b) was used to store the products baked in the back room, accessed via the fauces (c). According to Fiorelli, mills were once present in this back area, but had been removed before the eruption of 79 CE. Further evidence for rotary mills is found in the earthen floor of (k) and the irregular shape of the room to its south, which may have been used as a stable [Mayeske]. The extremely large arched oven gives away the purpose of this building, and is shown in its current state in Figure 9. A lead duct...
FIG. 9: Large arched brick oven at VII.xii.11 [Mayeske]

near the oven transported rain water from the roof into a cistern. Finally, a staircase in the front of the structure indicates that it, like most in the block, possessed a second story whose purpose was lost with the surges and flows of Vesuvius. Excavation of this structure took place in 1846 and 1863.

Bakery and Caupona of Sabinus (VII.xii.13)

The plan for this pastry shop is shown in Figure [10]. The announcement *Sabinus cupit* by the entrance on the Via Degli Augustali lends the structure its name. Despite being identified as a shop, there are no signs of counters ever being present in (a). Two couches lead to the identification of (b) as a triclinium. However, the structure lacks a garden to look into from this room, as is present in VII.iv.29, so the eating environment would not have been as pleasant as could be found elsewhere in the city. Alongside the *fauces* is a staircase providing access to the second story. At the back of the building is a large room with a beehive oven, shown in Figure [11] and next to it a store room (e). Though not found in any plan, this bakery did possess its own mill and mortar, and the structure at (f) possibly once served as a stable for the animals needed to turn the mill. It was excavated under Della Corte in 1845. [Mayeske, Eschebach]
The Residences

The block is not primarily residential, but it does contain five or six buildings identifiable as houses. Due to the irregular shapes of surrounding structures and the block itself, none of these homes adheres strictly to the Vitruvian model. Several houses have multiple front entrances, and only two are truly atriocentric. Gardens are a common feature, however, and the architecture reflects the gardens’ presence by providing views of the garden to neighboring rooms.

House of L. Caecilius Capella / Casa del Principe Enrico di Olanda (VII.xii.3)

The plan of the structure as a whole is shown in Figure 4, while Jashemski’s plan of the residence portion is shown in Figure 12 (room letters refer to the PPM plan unless otherwise specified). The notice Capella facit at door 3 indicates that L. Caecilius Capella was running for some public office [Mayeski]. A hearth once existed in the fauces at (a), while a staircase in the Tuscan atrium at (b) led to a cenacolo.

It is likely that the residents of this house owned and operated the bakery to the west (doors 1–2, 37), as the two structures may have been connected between 2.d and 3.c. They certainly managed the cake shop taberna at door 4, which opens directly into the atrium. The back room at 4.a contained a latrine for the shop’s workers. As it was the trend later in Pompeian society for the tabernae to be independent of the house they flanked, the fact that the residents of this structure probably owned and operated both tabernae is consistent with the older age of the block.

The core of the house is the most atriocentric of any in the block, with the long fauces (a) leading directly into the large Tuscan atrium (b), which lacks an impluvium – evidence for earlier construction. (Eschebach reports a low marble impluvium and fountain in the atrium, but such items are absent from any plans and are not mentioned in other sources.) Small rooms like cubiculae (f) and alae (e) only line the east side of the atrium, however, as the west is occupied by a large summer triclinium (d). This triclinium features a wide opening on the south looking into the garden. The exedra or oecus at (p), accessible through the cubicula at (o), also offers a good view of the garden. The garden itself is bordered by a portico on two sides and is supported by two columns. In the center of the garden is a shallow pool with a fountain, beneath which lies a cistern. [Jashemski, Eschebach]

In the back of the house, along with several rooms for keeping track of business affairs (Wirtschaftsräume) (k, l, & m), is a kitchen located at (n). Among the decorations inside the house is the erotic wall painting shown in Figure 13 Quadro con Menade e Satiro. The subjects are a satyr and a Maenad (a female worshiper of the god Bacchus), exemplifying the mythological basis of much of the city’s wall decoration.

Even though the house potentially has access to streets to both the north and west, it opened exclusively onto the Via Degli Augustali. No evidence for a posticum leading to the Vicolo Di Eumachia has been found. These condi-
shop-house; Ludus of the Cornelii, Amandus and Proculus (VII.xii.14)

Shown in Figure 14, the small structure at door 14 is one of the more mysterious in the block. According to Jashemski, it is a shop-house with a garden (a) in the back [Jashemski]. Under this interpretation, the enclosure opening into the garden would be a summer triclinium with an excellent view of the formal planting [PPM]. However, Eschebach identifies this open area in the back as a grammar school large enough for about 30 students [Eschebach]. The large entrance to the Via Degli Augustali does seem to imply that at least the front of the building served as a shop, and stairs to the west could have led to a sleeping area regardless of the structure’s primary function. This residence was excavated under Della Corta in 1845.

The store at the front of the structure features construction in opus quadratum, again indicating the age of the block. Another example of opus quadratum can be found in a pilaster between structures 8 & 9 (Figure 15). This kind of construction was most common during the days before the Roman colony in 80 BCE and is thus consistent with the location of the block in the Altstadt.

Casa di Narcisso (VII.xii.17,21)

The structure at doors 17 & 21, shown in Figure 16, is the second single-entrance, atrio-centric house in the block. Its very long fauces (a) opens onto the Vicolo Del Balcone Pensile and leads into the large Tuscan atrium (b), complete with impluvium, shown in Figure 17.

It appears that this house may have been connected to the wool trading office at door 17 through a few steps in room (d). The south wall of 17.a seems to have been decorated with two engaged columns. To the west of the atrium is a triclinium (g) with a moderate sized opening into the atrium, while the room (f) to the south has a much wider view directly over the impluvium. Though its official identification is ambiguous, the size and view of this room suggests that it may be a large tablinum. To the east are a collection of three cubicula (c, d, & e). Portions of this structure exhibit opus mixtum, indicating renovation since the original opus quadratum construction of the block [PPM].
Under the entrance at 17 is a cistern leading to a pair of boilers which provided heat for a tub and a stove. However, the floor plan does not indicate the presence of a private bath complex. The water for this system eventually exited into a street gutter. A cistern was also present under the marble impluvium in the Tuscan atrium, and evidence for a table in the atrium was also found. The house and office were excavated in 1862. [Eschebach]

Casa del Camillo / Officina Lanificaria / Small Fullonica with Apartment / Officina Ungentuaria (VII.xii.22–24)

Possibly the largest structure in the block, this multifunction building, shown in Figure [18] opens onto the Vicolo Del Balcone Pensile in three locations (doors 22, 23, & 24). The fauces at 22 & 23 open into an ill-defined Tuscan atrium, but a few steps higher to the west is a large garden (e) with a pool, shown in Figure [19]. The garden is bordered by rooms on three sides, all of which have wide openings looking into it. In its walls are numerous niches, possibly for the exhibition of small statues.

Looking into the garden from the east is a small summer triclinium (c). This seems to imply that the room at (1) is tablinum, even though it lacks the picture windows granted to three other rooms in the house. A latrine was present under the staircase leading to the second story.

The structure as a whole was oriented strongly towards the wool trade, containing related offices and a clothmaking facility in addition to a kitchen and living quarters, mostly in the northeast portion of the house. The main workroom was located at (o), with a cubiculum present at (p). According to Eschebach, a kitchen and latrine for the workers was located on the other side of the house at 25.1 [Eschebach]. However, PPM links this door with the structure at 26 & 27. The style of mosaic decorating the floors of the structure can be seen in Figure [20] which was found in the large room (f) west of the garden, possibly an oecus. Similar mosaics were found in the even larger room (d) as well. The excavation work on this structure was conducted in 1863.
House of L. Cornelius Diadumenus (VII.xii.25–27)

The elongated *fauces* at 26 leads directly into the garden (b), which is surrounded by a portico with two free columns, an engaged column, and a low wall. It appears that only half of the garden was planted, while the other half was paved to serve as a passageway to the back of the house. The *triclinium* (h) has a wide south opening to provide a fine view of the garden. A window to the south of the garden allowed its light to illuminate the shop at 27.1. [Jashemski].

The *triclinium* (h) is decorated with a great amount and variety of wall art. Shown in Figure 22 is a single example—a well-preserved color wall painting exhibiting a synthesis of mythical beings and Roman citizens. Other rooms in the house are adorned with similar decoration. In Figure 23 are reconstructions of two other wall decorations, both found in room (o). On the left is another erotic scene between a satyr and a Maenad (*Quadro con Satiro e Menade*), similar to the color painting found in the House of L. Caecilius Capella (Figure 13). On the right is a depiction of a seated lady (*Quadro con figura femminale con pedume scrigno*).

To the rear of the house are a number of smaller rooms whose arrangement does not resemble the Vitruvian ideal in the least. Perhaps the room most similar to an atrium in this house is the open space around (i), with a large, open room at (n) – possibly a *diaeta* given its openness. The room at (g) could serve as a winter triclinium, as it is farther away from the garden and only open at a single small door. The *tablinum* is probably located at...
(o), given a partial view of the garden, but the room at (m) might also serve this purpose, open to the atrium and accompanied by cubiculae (k & l). The house as a whole was excavated under Della Corte in 1863.

Casa del Balcone Pensile (VII.xii.28)

The final residence in the block is located at door 28 and is shown in Figure 24. It is the structure that gives its street, the Vicolo Del Balcone Pensile, its name, due to the balcony accessible by a flight of stairs. The fauces (a) ends at the small garden (g), exhibiting the large fountain shown in Figure 25. Evidence of Roman plumbing exists in the form of pipes preserved in the garden area, shown in Figure 26. Elsewhere in the structure is another open area which may have also been planted. To the west of the garden is a narrow, rectangular atrium (f), and further to the west is the tablinum (h), open wide to look across the atrium and into the garden to the east. This configuration would probably have allowed sunlight to illuminate the tablinum in the morning hours, when the consultatio would take place. A cubicula lies to the north at (i) while what is likely a winter triclinium can be found to the south at (e), open only through a small door to the atrium facing parallel to the garden so as to minimize the impact of that outdoor area on the environment.

To the north of the garden is what appears to be an enormous summer triclinium, or else an oecus, whose floor is decorated with the brightly colored mosaic shown in Figure 27. It is wide open to the garden at its south entrance, and also narrowly open to the northwest portion of the house. In this back portion, a staircase to the second story can be found in (l), while room (n) has been identified as an apotheca. This site was excavated in 1863.

The Brothel: Lupanar of Africanus (VII.xii.18–20)

The southeast corner of the block is its most irregularly-shaped, jutting out to match the diagonal shape of neighboring block VII.i. The acuteness of this
corner can be seen in Figure 28. The flattened tip of the corner creates a spacious triangular intersection of the Vicolo Del Lupanare (which takes its name from this structure) and the Vicolo Del Balcone Pensile. Continuing further south on the Via Del Lupanare takes one to the Stabian baths.

Shown in Figure 29, the structure here at the corner of the block is the Lupanar of Africanus, a brothel. It opens to two streets in three places (doors 18, 19, and 20) and possesses an ideal location for several reasons. It is one of only two structures in the block to take advantage of its corner location by being open to both streets (the other two corners are not taken advantage of in such a way).

It is nearest to the large public baths, and is also nearby the several inns in the block. This allowed it to capitalize on business provided by visitors to the city.

The interior of the structure is quite crowded and makes the most of its small, irregularly-shaped space. Its northeast wall was occupied by three small cella (b, c, & d) with tiny, easily-closed entrances, each containing a stone bed, such as that shown in Figure 30. Two larger, more irregular rooms (e & f), also with a small entrance, provided additional areas in which to conduct business. The latrine serving the structure was located at (g).

The center of the brothel consisted of a narrow atrium (a), whose walls were decorated with plentiful artwork of erotic scenes, such as that shown in Figure 31. Inside the individual rooms, the walls were covered with various forms of engraved graffiti, an example of which is shown.
Looking back to Figure 2, individual structures in the block are show isolated by color. Recall that more recent studies have shown the bakery at 1,37(36) and the house and shop at 2–4 to be connected between 1.d and 3.c and that the commercial firm at 17 seems to be connected to the house at 21. Taking this into account, there appear to have been 20 separate structures in the block at the time of the eruption.

This city block is highly commercial, with numerous structures dedicated to baking and wool in particular, among various other shops, sometimes attached to the few houses. In several cases, residence is closely linked to commerce, such as the clothmakers’ apartment in 22–25 and the bakery/house at 1–4, 37. The block’s location within the city, show previously in Figure 1, also makes it an ideal location for buildings such as brothels and inns. See Figure 33 for a visualization of the dominant “zoning” of the buildings in the block. Note how the north side of the block, facing the Via Degli Augustali, is entirely dominated by commerce. This suggests that this road experienced the greatest amount of traffic of the four surrounding the block. Considering that this road provides the quickest access to both the Forum and the Strada Stabiana, this conclusion is certainly consistent with evidence found outside of the block itself.

The block as a whole is not representative of any single purpose or ideal, and in that sense it is quite representative of Pompeii as a whole. It housed citizens of a variety of classes, from lower-class workers sleeping in their shops to city leaders running for office, living in moderately sized houses complete with atrium, triclinium, and garden. However, no house on its own encompasses the entire Vitruvian ideal – each is unique in its minor deviations necessary to accommodate its location, shape, and

Summary

FIG. 31: Wall painting in atrium (a) at VII.xii.18–20 [PPM]

FIG. 32: Graffiti in cella at VII.xii.18–20 [PPM]

FIG. 33: Regio VII, Insula xii, colored by primary “zoning” (coloration original, outline based on Eschebach) in Figure 32
purpose. Still, common design patterns are as clear here as elsewhere: entrances are larger to those rooms which look into the garden, for example.

The commercial atmosphere is as heterogeneous as the populace. Though at first glance baking appears to be the dominant industry, the wool trade also has a strong presence in the block, which has its fair share of inns as well. To complete the ensemble the block even contains a school and a brothel. Clearly, the block, if it is to be characterized at all, is characterized by the heterogeneity of that clustering of people we call a city. As with any city, the variety and irregularity increases moving towards the center of Pompeii, and insula xii, located right in the Altstadt, is no exception. This status is first given away by its irregular shape, in contrast to the uniform rectangles of regions I and VI. No doubt the cosmopolitan nature of the block was maintained by its continual contact with people from all over the city and beyond. Inns brought in visitors from other cities, carrying with them their culture and ideas. Traffic from the east to the Forum would also have passed by the block along the Via Degli Augustali, where hungry citizens would stop to buy bread and leave behind a bit of the talk of the town. The block’s proximity to the prominent public buildings of the city ensured its heterogeneous character, representative of the variety present throughout Pompeii and the Classical world as a whole.