

THE LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS
OF VENAL SEX

BROTHELS PER CAPITA

A major concern of scholars arguing for a small number of brothels at Pompeii might be styled economic or demographic rather than moral or aesthetic.¹ How might Pompeii, with a population of 10,000 (or 12,000) support as many as 34 (or 35) brothels, when the city of Rome with a population of 1,000,000 (or 500,000) supported only 45 (or 46) in the fourth century?

The question is based on a number of dubious premises, as is already plain enough. The population of Pompeii is unknown and unknowable. Estimates range from as low as ca. 7,000 to as high as ca. 20,000, though the range of figures given in the preceding paragraph is now more in vogue.² We are no better informed for classical Rome, where the longstanding preference for the figure of 1,000,000 has recently been challenged with a controversial proposal

1. See Jacobelli, *Terme Suburbane* (1995) 65 n. 119; Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking* (1998) 195 (using a population estimate of 10,000 and the figure of 35 brothels, he comes up with a ratio of one brothel for every 71 [adult] males). DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality* (2001) 11, takes Clarke's analysis one step further, estimating a "minimum [his emphasis] of one 'waitress-prostitute' for every seven men in Pompeii." These estimates appear to assume gender-parity in the adult population of Pompeii, which is just one problem with them.

2. See Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society* (1994) 74–75, 95–103, for a useful discussion. See also Jongman, *Economy* (1988) 267–68, which includes a breakdown by age, sex, and so on, as well as the recent summary in Scheidel, "Progress and Problems" (2001) 59–61.

that cuts that figure in half.³ Half a million might at first glance seem more plausible for the fourth century, the era of the Regionary Catalogs, with their 45/46 brothels.⁴ But there has been great controversy over the size of the late-antique population.⁵ The current consensus is, to say the least, cautious about assuming a decline in the capital's population in that period, at least as early as the fourth century.⁶

The late-antique figures for Roman brothels are misleading and perhaps refer only to large purpose-built brothels, if they mean anything at all.⁷ Other theories explaining the low numbers of brothels recorded are difficult to rule out, however. Perhaps only those brothels large and conspicuous enough to qualify as tourist attractions are given, most or all of which would be purpose-built. Or, just as the numbers of some buildings, especially in the city center, are inflated to add luster to the late-antique capital city, so the number of brothels may be downplayed for the same motive.

The fifth-century *Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae* notably omits mention of brothels altogether, even the one allegedly founded by Constantine himself.⁸ It is tempting to attribute this reticence to Christian ideology, but we might reasonably conclude that it is not the absence of brothels from the Constantinopolitan *Notitia* that is odd, but rather their inclusion in the Roman Regionaries. None of the literary accounts of the marvels of Rome that have

3. Storey, "Population" (1997). Cf. Coarelli, "Consistenza" (1997) 107; Coarelli, "Roma" (2000) 292–96, which resurrects Guido Calza's estimate of 1,200,000; Tantillo, "Uomini" (2000) 91, which gives an estimate of between 700,000 and 1,000,000 at a minimum; Bustany and Gérardouet, *Rome* (2001) 64–69, who give 800,000 to 1,000,000 under Augustus. See also Lo Cascio, "Population" (2001) 185–86; Scheidel, "Progress and Problems" (2001) 51–52, 63, in criticism of Storey.

4. For these, see Nordh, *Libellus* (1949) 105.10.

5. See Hermansen, "Population" (1978) esp. 146–48; Purcell, "Populace of Rome" (1999) esp. 138–40.

6. See Tantillo, "Uomini" (2000) 92; Guidobaldi, "Abitazioni" (2000) 153; Lo Cascio, "Population" (2001) 185–87; Scheidel, "Progress and Problems" (2001) 37–44, 69. See also Lo Cascio, "Crisi" (1999).

7. Hermansen, "Population" (1978) shows that many of the figures given in the fourth-century Regionary Catalogs are unreliable. Purcell, "City of Rome" (1992) 425, argues that they form a part of the city's marvel-literature, a long tradition enumerating and often exaggerating Rome's wonders. See also Arce, "Inventario" (1999).

8. *Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae* Seeck. On this document, see Unger, *Quellen* (1878/1970) 102–9. For what it is worth, the *Notitia Urbis Alexandrinae*, a Syriac document presumably based on a Greek original that dates perhaps to the early to mid-fourth century, also mentions no brothels: see Fraser, "Notitia" (1951). A late sixth-century Syriac *Notitia* for Rome has 45 brothels: Nordh, *Libellus* (1949) 43.

come down to us sees fit to mention the city's brothels.⁹ For example, in the relatively lengthy exposition of Rome's wonders that we owe to Pliny the Elder, not one word is spoken on this subject, though the author has a lot to say in praise of the city's sewers, which he regards as its most noteworthy feature.¹⁰ A comparison with the experience of cities in the mid-nineteenth-century United States may be relevant here. The decennial national census taken in that period invited local police departments to register the numbers of brothels in their districts. Some reported none at all or certainly seem to have underreported them; this appears to have occurred even in cities like St. Paul, Minnesota, where brothels were subject to informal regulation and so enjoyed a measure of legitimacy.¹¹

There may well be an administrative interest reflected in the numerations of brothels given in the Regionaries, but it is difficult to know exactly how this interest might have affected the tallies.¹² One possibility, not utterly at odds with the Purpose-Built thesis just advanced, is that these brothels had come into the patrimony of the state by the usual means of acquisition, purchase, gift, bequest, and so forth.¹³ As such they would have operated not as state or municipal brothels on the model that we see in a number of cultures, such as medieval France, Germany, and Italy, but as privately-owned brothels did in the city of Rome. Nor need we imagine any more experiments in the style of Caligula, which despite the evidence for them, remain doubtful.¹⁴ The phe-

9. For some of these passages, see the brief mention in André and Baslez, *Voyager* (1993) 156–59.

10. Plin. *NH* 36.101–25, which includes the remarks about the sewer-system at 104. It is worth noting that both the Roman Regionaries, which mention brothels, and the Alexandrian *Notitia*, which does not, appear to derive from a pagan cultural context: see Arce, "Inventario" (1999) for the first and Fraser, "Notitia" (1951) 106–7 for the second. The Syriac *Notitia* for Rome (A.D. 596), which mentions brothels, may depend on both pagan and Christian traditions: see Nordh, *Libellus* (1949) 42–46.

11. In 1880 in St. Paul, Minn., fourteen brothels were reported for a population of 41, 473: see Best, *Controlling Vice* (1998) 26.

12. Wallace-Hadrill, "Emperors and Houses" (2001) 138–39, reasonably suggests that a state interest in taxing and registering prostitutes was a possible motive behind the listing of brothels. If so, we might expect a more aggressive attempt at defining "brothel" and a much longer list of places. More generally, on the question of the state's interest, as it is reflected in the Regionaries, see Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics* (1991) 196–97; Wallace-Hadrill, "Case" (2000) 199. Arce, "Inventario" (1999) denies this interest and argues that the numbers of buildings given in the Catalogs are drawn from fantasy. For criticism of Arce, see Storey, "Insulae 1" (2001); Storey, "Insulae 2" (2002).

13. On the increasing state ownership of economic assets and enterprises over the first two centuries A.D., see Lo Cascio, "Introduzione" (2000) 8.

14. See McGinn, "Caligula's Brothel" (1998).

nomenon would seem to be a logical outgrowth of the lease of public space to prostitutes or their exploiters by municipal officials, which was postulated in chapter 5. Unfortunately, we cannot be certain of this.

To draw another comparison with Pompeii, the Regionaries (*Notitia* and *Curiosum*), when corrected, show a total of 1,790 *domus* for Rome,¹⁵ while a rough count of the listings in Eschebach's index yields 504 examples.¹⁶ Some of these may be dismissed as duplicate entries or misidentifications, but will anyone believe that there were, say, one-fourth as many *domus* at Pompeii as at Rome?¹⁷ We may object that building styles, and therefore the definition of *domus*, changed between the first and fourth centuries, but that is precisely the problem. The concept not only changed over time, but so too did the physical plant of many *domus*.¹⁸ We may compare this with the much-vexed question of how to understand *insula* in the Regionaries.¹⁹

We can be no more sure of what *domus* meant to the compilers of the Catalogues than we can be certain of their concept of *lupanar*. Was "domus" as given the Regionary Catalogs built in the classic Pompeian style, or was it of the fourth-century type, an intermediate type, or a combination of two or more of these?²⁰ Or did it function in the usage of the Regionaries as a social marker rather than as an architectural type, used to designate the dwellings of persons of rank, whatever their form? Even here, size may have mattered, to judge from the evidence of Pompeii and perhaps Rome as well.²¹

Another difficulty in the matter of linking numbers of brothels with

15. Eck, "Cum Dignitate Otium" (1997) 165; Guidobaldi, "Domus" (1999) 55; Purcell, "Population of Rome" (1999) 150.

16. Eschebach, *Entwicklung* (1970) 166–72. I have attempted to eliminate the more obvious duplicate entries. Cf. Jongman, *Economy* (1988) 274, who estimates the number of Pompeian *domus* as not many more than six hundred.

17. Olympiodorus famously implies that there were 10,000 *domus* in fifth-century Rome, meaning simply "a lot": fr. 41 Blockley, with Guidobaldi, "Domus" (1999) 55. Compare the listing of 4388 *domus* in the fifth-century *Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae* (243 Seeck).

18. See Guidobaldi, "Abitazioni" (2000) 150, 155.

19. See Lo Cascio, "Recensus" (1997) 58–63; Guidobaldi, "Domus" (1999) 58 with n. 36; Coarelli, "Roma" (2000) 296; Tantillo "Uomini" (2000) 88–89; De Kleijn, *Water Supply* (2001) 253–55; Wallace-Hadrill, "Case" (2000) 199; Wallace-Hadrill, "Emperors and Houses" (2001) 139–40; Lo Cascio, "Population" (2001) 184; Storey, "Insulae 1" (2001); Storey, "Insulae 2" (2002).

20. See Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*² (1973) 252–62, for a sense of the possibilities.

21. See Frier, "Pompeii's Economy" (1991) 246, on the notably larger dimensions of houses known to have belonged to municipal magistrates at Pompeii. Cf. Hermansen, "Population" (1978) 156, who identifies *domus* in the Catalogues precisely as the late-antique variety in an unpersuasive attempt to explain the apparent *domus*-gap in that period between Rome and Constantinople; Guilhemet, "Densité" (1996) 8–9 with n. 5, who recognizes that size may have varied significantly at Rome.

demography lies in the attempt to reason from the population of Pompeii. The problem is not just that we really have no idea how many people lived in Pompeii and that these figures are just educated guesses, but that the number, even if known, would be by and large irrelevant.²² The clients of Pompeian brothels all but certainly hailed not only from the town but from the surrounding territory, other towns in the area, and the entire Mediterranean world. With respect to the economy of venal sex, as well as in other matters, the city of Pompeii, like other Roman towns, was “epiphenomenal.”²³

In other words, “Pompeii,” far from being an island in a rural sea, is really just an expression for a microregion lying adjacent to it (that is, its “immediate hinterland”) as well as a dispersed hinterland that ranged as far as the distant shores across the Mediterranean Sea.²⁴ The town, like other Roman towns, would drive, and be driven by, a broader economy.²⁵ And similar to other urban centers, it had services to provide—including, of course, the sexual ones that are our concern—and might support itself reasonably well by attracting visitors from various points of departure with money to spend.²⁶ “Pompeii” was a convenient place to install a brothel, and more generally a convenient place for prostitutes and clients to meet, but the town itself does not exhaust the geographical implications of its own sexual economy.

Pompeii was a recognized commercial center from an early period. Cato the Elder names it as an important source of oil presses; Strabo describes it as the port city of a local trading network embracing Nola, Nuceria, and Acher-

22. Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* (2000) 382, argue forcefully that it is theoretically impossible to talk about the population of a city. For ancient Pompeii’s population, all we really have to rely on is theory. Partly for this reason, cross-cultural comparisons are highly suspect in this regard (see below), but we may note all the same that mid-nineteenth-century New York City had over 600 brothels with a population of over 500,000: Gilfoyle, *City of Eros* (1992) 163. The now-fashionable figure of 10,000 for Pompeii is the number used as a crude demographic criterion defining the minimum for an urban system to justify study as such: Horden and Purcell, 93.

23. For a discussion of this idea, see Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* (2000) 90–91.

24. See Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* (2000) 95 (see also 102, 363, 436); Erdkamp, “Beyond the Limits” (2001) 342–45. On the immediate hinterland of Pompeii, see now Mastroberto, “Pompeii” (2000). On the connections between the Roman city and its microregion, see, in particular, Hopkins, “Models, Ships and Staples” (1983) esp. 94–96; Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply* (1988) 56–58; De Ligt, “Demand, Supply, Distribution 2” (1991) 42–58; Wallace-Hadrill, “Elites and Trade” (1991); Purcell, “Villa” (1995). For connections between cities and different regions in the Roman world, see Hopkins, esp. 88–93, 96–105; Fulford, “Economic Interdependence” (1987); several of the essays in Parkins and Smith, *Trade, Traders and the Ancient City* (1998); Hopkins, “Rents, Taxes, Trade” (2000) esp. 260–62. For medieval evidence on the mobility of traders and craftsmen, see Jacoby, “Migration” (1994/1997).

25. Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* (2000) 107.

26. See Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* (2000) 108, 114–15; Erdkamp, “Beyond the Limits” (2001) 340.

rae.²⁷ Imports and exports—the latter including especially wine and *garum*—ranged across the Mediterranean.²⁸ A further and more significant sign of the city's economic vitality and connectivity is the fact that a wine-producing region as rich as the Vesuvian also imported wine from as far away as Crete.²⁹

The city had its own economic microregion, whose population, inclusive of the urban center, has been estimated to be as high as 36,000.³⁰ This is once again only a guess,³¹ but I should point out here that most of the rural surplus probably consisted of unmarried male agricultural workers, even if they did not number as many as 26,000.³² These men, unless they were slaves in chains, were prime candidates as clients of Pompeian prostitutes. We cannot be certain, as a matter of fact, that the city of Pompeii supplied either the majority, or the overwhelming majority at any rate, of its prostitutes or their customers.³³ This is not necessarily true only of Pompeii. Whether Las Vegas or Atlantic City, Pompeii or Baiae, Nuceria or Puteoli have more prostitutes is—other things being equal—less likely to be function of how many people live there than of how many visitors each city receives. Pompeii was a node in a complex network of people and goods moving throughout the Roman Mediterranean, a network that linked city with city and region with region.³⁴ This connectivity, scholars have argued well, was more a function of human mobility than of physical geography.³⁵

It is worth asking whether Pompeii enjoyed a privileged status in this network in that it was linked to a number of other areas and thus served as a “gateway settlement.” The question is an important one since if Pompeii was a gateway settlement, the number of prostitutes working there would conceiv-

27. Cato Agr. 22.3–4, 135.2; Strabo 5.4.8. See Morley, “Cities in Context” (1997) 51–53.

28. See Kleberg, *Hôtels* (1957) 108; Gassner, *Kaufläden* (1986) 20; Frier, “Pompeii's Economy” (1991) 244; Morley, “Cities in Context” (1997) 48.

29. See Andreau, “Economia” (2001) 109.

30. Jongman, *Economy* (1988) 112, 135.

31. Jongman's notion of Pompeii's “economic territory” has been strongly criticized by Frier, “Pompeii's Economy” (1991) 244. On a town's economic relationship with its surrounding territory, see also Morley, “Cities in Context” (1997) 51–53.

32. Even some urban crafts may have had an imbalance in favor of male workers: Jongman, *Economy* (1988) 162.

33. Cf. the study by Finnegan, *Poverty* (1979) 133, of prostitution in York between 1837 and 1887: 43 percent of all recorded prostitutes' clients were visitors to the city.

34. See Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* (2000) 295, 354, 358.

35. See Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* (2000) 395, 407. On the importance of the transient population of the city of Rome in particular, see Purcell, “*Plebs Urbana*” (1994) 649–50, with a dissent by Lo Cascio, “Population” (2001) 192–94.

ably have been well above any number we might postulate as typical (it is impossible to speak of “average”) for a Roman city of its size and location. This question is taken up below. For now, I hope to have weakened the assumption that Pompeii or other Roman towns, including the capital itself, had a “carrying capacity” for prostitutes that was directly linked to the populations of those towns, whatever their numbers might have been.³⁶

PROSTITUTES PER CAPITA

For demographic purposes, to be sure, the real source of our interest is not the number of brothels Pompeii might have supported, but the number of prostitutes. If, for example, we eliminate roughly half of the brothels cataloged in the first appendix, and then assume a generous average of four prostitutes per brothel,³⁷ plus a dozen more or so in the *cellae meretriciae* and just as many “independent” streetwalkers, we arrive at just over one hundred prostitutes for Pompeii.³⁸ This estimate does not attempt to account for part-time or seasonal prostitutes and so is intended to be conservative in nature.

For what it is worth, comparative evidence tends to show relatively modest-sized brothels:³⁹

36. For a more general attack on the idea of “carrying capacity” as a putative measure of maximum population, see Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* (2000) 388. The population of a town or region, of course, is not static: see Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society* (1994) 97–98, on Pompeii and, more broadly, Horden and Purcell, 95.

37. One of the largest, if not the largest, establishments, the Purpose-Built Brothel, yields the names of more than a dozen women identifiable as prostitutes: *CIL* 4.2166–2306. Not all of these women necessarily worked contemporaneously. They probably worked more or less in the same period, however, given that the owner had the walls of the brothel repainted not long before the city was destroyed: Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking* (1998) 199, who cites the imprint of a coin from A.D. 72 that was found on one wall. Comparative evidence shows high physical mobility for prostitutes and much turnover in brothels: Symanski, “Prostitution in Nevada” (1974) 368–70; Best, *Controlling Vice* (1998) 48–51. This would be mitigated in the Roman context by the presence of slavery. In any case, given the presence of ten *cellae*, the figure is not implausible and might even be viewed as a bit low, especially if some or all of the women working there lived off-site. Most Pompeian brothels, however, were small, like Pompeian hotels. On the size of the latter, see Casson, *Travel* (1994) 208.

38. The list of names offered in the third appendix provides, given the uncertainties, an unreliable guide to the total number of prostitutes working in Pompeii at any one time.

39. An important exception is the medieval municipal brothel, which often sought to monopolize the prostitutes working in a town and so sometimes tended to be on the large side: see Otis, *Prostitution* (1985) 64.

- 2–3 prostitutes in small, private medieval French brothels.⁴⁰
- an average of 5–7 prostitutes in early 1970s Nevada⁴¹
- 2–3 prostitutes in a mid-twentieth-century United States brothel⁴²
- 4–6 prostitutes in late nineteenth-century St. Paul, Minnesota, brothels informally tolerated by the local authorities⁴³
- ca. 5 prostitutes in “unofficial” brothels in medieval Germany⁴⁴

In any event, it is unclear to me why scholars might think the number of one hundred prostitutes, which amounts to just over 1 percent of the (postulated) population, was too high for a city of 10,000, unless they are relying on assumptions left unexamined or at any rate unstated. This is to say that at least some of those protesting against what they regard as a large number of brothels at Pompeii have overlooked the fact that prostitution, like many other aspects of human sexuality, though it is found in a wide number of cultures, configures itself differently in different societies.⁴⁵ In other words, they appear to assume that there is something fixed about the need for prostitution and adjust the numbers of brothels and/or prostitutes downward in response to this assumption. The historical experience of prostitution, however, suggests this procedure is problematic. Let us consider some figures reported from early twentieth-century Shanghai. A 1921 study showed that one in 137 residents was a licensed prostitute.⁴⁶ The qualification “licensed” deserves emphasis, since on the common estimate there were many more unlicensed prostitutes working in the city at that time.⁴⁷ An estimate dating from the mid-1930s suggests that at this time approximately one out of every thirteen women in Shanghai was a prostitute. This ratio increases if children and older women are excluded from consideration.⁴⁸

Contemporary Japan shows a similar picture. In 1925 one out of every

40. Rossiaud, “Prostitution, Youth, and Society” (1978) 4.

41. Symanski, “Prostitution in Nevada” (1974) 365, gives the figure of five as the average for town brothels and seven for rural brothels, with the now-defunct Mustang Ranch as the great exception. The ranch boasted over fifty prostitutes.

42. Heyl, *Madam* (1979) 91–94.

43. Best, *Controlling Vice* (1998) 41.

44. Schuster, *Frauenhaus* (1992) 123.

45. For example, Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking* (1998) professes to adopt a strict cultural-constructionist approach but unguardedly allows what appear to be biologically based assumptions about the demand for prostitution creep into his analysis.

46. Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures* (1997) 421 n. 31; in contemporary Beijing, one in every 258 residents was a prostitute.

47. Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures* (1997) 39 (see also 40).

48. Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures* (1997) 422 n. 39 (see also nn. 40 and 42).

thirty-one young women, that is, women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine, were prostitutes, a ratio that included licensed prostitutes, registered barmaids, and geisha.⁴⁹ Similarly in Calcutta in 1911 nearly 25 percent of working women were prostitutes, and the total number in that year was second only to that recorded for domestic servants.⁵⁰

The experience of many cities in nineteenth-century Europe and the United States suggests that the numbers of working prostitutes were vast in comparison with recent experience. Mid-nineteenth-century New York City had an estimated (by William Sanger) 6,000 prostitutes for just over 500,000 inhabitants.⁵¹ This estimate, amounting to “5 percent of all young females” or a ratio of approximately 1 to 83 for the entire population, is probably too low.⁵² The experience of Chinese immigrants to the United States in this period, a population with a strong gender-imbalance in favor of males, offers an even more striking picture. Census figures reveal, for example, that in 1860 San Francisco the nearly 600 women engaged in prostitution constituted 85.6 percent of the Chinese female population and 96 percent of Chinese women employed in a money-earning capacity.⁵³

The demography of prostitution in more recent times shows a dramatic contrast, at least in the developed world. For example, a 1970s survey of a small Midwestern city found a ratio of 1.39 prostitutes per 1,000 inhabitants, a minimum estimate to be sure, but much lower than one would expect to find a half-century or so before.⁵⁴ The situation in less-developed countries is far different, a phenomenon in part influenced by the development of sex tourism. In such places as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, it is estimated that between .25 percent and 1.5 percent of the female population are prostitutes and that selling sex amounts to somewhere between 2 percent and 14 percent of the gross domestic product.⁵⁵

Some of the factors that played a role in this phenomenon of high proportions of female prostitutes in Europe and the United States from the mid- to

49. Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds* (1997) 94.

50. Sleightholme and Sinha, *Guilt Without Trial* (1996) 9. For the observation that unlicensed prostitutes outnumbered registered ones, see 66–67.

51. See Gilfoyle, *City of Eros* (1992) 184.

52. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros* (1992) 344 n. 7. See also Hill, *Their Sisters' Keepers* (1993) 26–33 (an 1831 estimate that prostitutes comprised 10 percent of females of all ages was criticized by Sanger, who was perhaps too conservative), 345 n. 51 (in the year 1897 a higher estimate was given of the percent of females engaged in prostitution).

53. See Tong, *Unsubmissive Women* (1994) 94.

54. See Decker, *Prostitution* (1979) 12 (see also 18).

55. See Edlund and Korn, “Theory” (2002) 182.

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as industrialization, rapid urbanization, and mass immigration, were foreign to the Roman experience, but other factors, such as poor opportunities for female employment and dim prospects for marriage for many lower-status males, were not and may have been worse for Rome. Indeed, we might very well expect to find a similar ratio of female prostitutes for the medieval and early modern periods as well.⁵⁶ The available statistics from cities in southern France and Germany, when viewed in light of the strong possibility that they underreport (by a factor that cannot be recovered) suggests the ratio of prostitutes to inhabitants corresponds closely to that offered here for Pompeii, closer than the nineteenth-century ratios in fact.⁵⁷

One peculiarity of the Roman situation, that is, slavery, may have led to both an increased demand for, and supply of, prostitutes. I do not argue here that this was necessarily true, and the comparative data can, of course, only offer a range of possibilities and not proof.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, I invite my colleagues to consider such factors before they decide how many brothels, or how many prostitutes, were too many for Pompeii.

We are now in a position to try to estimate the economic value of prostitution for Pompeii. To take the most common price charged for sex (chapter 2), two *asses*, and to multiply this first by the number of prostitutes, which I estimate to be about one hundred, and then by the average number of clients per prostitute per day, which I postulate to be five, gives us a gross total of at least 1,000 *asses* or HS 250 (i.e., 250 sesterces) each day. Although this estimate is rough at best, it seems on the low end, especially when the costs of purchasing slave prostitutes, of maintaining these prostitutes, of renting or purchasing the brothels, and other miscellaneous expenses are factored in, and these amounts are deducted from that total. Given the level of exploitation we saw was characteristic of Roman prostitution in chapter 2, we might prefer to postulate an average of ten customers per day, which would raise the gross income to a minimum of HS 500 each day, or over HS 180,000 each year for Pompeii. The estimate of ten customers per day, for each prostitute means an

56. Though counting every laundress in the sixteenth-century Parisian census is almost certainly a flawed approach, the result, that one in five women were prostitutes, is not as absurd as asserted by DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality* (2001) 9, in criticism of Jean Delumeau.

57. Otis, *Prostitution* (1985) 210 n. 2; cf. Schuster, *Frauenhaus* (1992) 122–23. Schuster in criticizing Otis overlooks his own concession that the estimates he reports from four German cities almost certainly underrepresent the actual numbers of prostitutes.

58. We should not in any case simply assume that prostitution in Pompeii was more or less diffuse than in a modern city of the same population; for the former assumption, see Cantilena, “Vizi” (1998) 53.

average of 1,000 tricks per day for Pompeii, which seems like a high number in itself, though perhaps not impossible.

The state's profit is easier to calculate. At the Caligulan rate of the price of one sexual act per day, the revenue generated by the tax on prostitutes in Pompeii should have been a minimum of HS 50 each day, or over HS 18,250 each year.⁵⁹ This estimate is based on the price of two *asses*, though as seen in chapter 2, some Pompeian prostitutes charged more than this for their services (and a very few less) and would have been taxed accordingly.

If the numbers given above seem too low, we might use for our calculations the number of fifteen to twenty clients per day, which we postulated for low-priced prostitutes in chapter 2. That would increase the overall level of revenue for private exploiters, but not for the state, since the Caligulan tax was based on the price of one sexual encounter per day, without respect to the number of clients. It may well be, however, that the rough estimates employed here of twenty brothels and one hundred prostitutes are simply too low for ancient Pompeii. The uncertainties over the total population of Pompeii and the numbers of visitors discourage further attempts at speculation, however.

SYBARIS ON THE SARNO

Before concluding first that brothels were widely diffused in Pompeii and next that this evidence is significant for Rome and elsewhere, we must confront one other difficulty. This concerns a peculiar set, or rather sets, of conditions prevailing in Pompeii, which may discourage drawing generalizations from evidence coming from that city. Even if we accept the idea of the broad diffusion of brothels at Pompeii, it is of little value to us if circumstances there were so particular that the result cannot be generalized. The problem of the "typicality" of Pompeii is a traditional one in the scholarship, with particular resonance for the economy.⁶⁰ No attempt is made here to address that question in general terms, though the hope is that an examination of the particular

59. On the rate of the tax, see McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (1998) chap. 7.

60. See the recent remarks of Andreau, "Economia" (2001). On the question of generalizing from cultural developments at Pompeii, especially in regard to house design, see Grahame, "Material Culture" (1998) 157. Allison, "Placing Individuals" (2001) argues that Pompeii's ethnic makeup, in particular the alleged presence of a longstanding Greek community, renders it different from other Roman towns. While reasonable on the face of it, this point is far from proven. And if it were, I suspect this cultural diversity might make Pompeii more like other nodes of Mediterranean connectivity, rather than less like them.

aspects relating to prostitution might help facilitate a more nuanced treatment of it.

First, the sheer bulk of evidence for erotic life in general that has been recovered from Pompeii, especially when contrasted with the leaner yield from Herculaneum, prompts the suggestion that the situation there was unusual, more conducive to the experience of *amor* than elsewhere in the Roman world. This seems unlikely, however.⁶¹ Pompeii was no Baiae, if it is indeed correct to assume that Baiae actually lived up to its reputation. Pompeii was known as a port city, a good place to purchase an oil press, not as a hotbed for *la dolce vita*. We established above that Pompeii enjoyed a fairly high degree of “connectivity” with its own microregion and dispersed hinterland, the latter extending across the Mediterranean. The city moreover appears to have been a highly permeable place to judge from the concentration of doorways and graffiti along through routes leading to and from the city’s gates.⁶² Of course, information of this kind is not preserved elsewhere, so comparisons are out of the question. It seems possible that Pompeii functioned as a minor gateway settlement and so attracted more visitors perhaps than such places as Nola, Nuceria, and Acherrae.⁶³ Admittedly, certainty in this matter is impossible. The different levels of urbanization shown by Roman towns are many, complex, and often difficult to read.⁶⁴ The differences among Roman towns in terms of the numbers of brothels, prostitutes, and clients may not have been all that large in many cases. Pompeii was not only no Baiae, it was no Puteoli, a true gateway settlement, material knowledge of whose prostitutes and brothels is unfortunately forever lost to us. For this reason, it seems reasonably safe to generalize from the evidence of Pompeii in erotic matters, including venal sex.⁶⁵

The second set of conditions discouraging generalization is more intractable. It has been argued⁶⁶ that in the period following the devastating

61. For another view, see Della Valle, “Amore” (1937).

62. Laurence, “Organization of Space” (1995) 72.

63. On the concept of gateway settlements, see Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* (2000) 133, 399.

64. See Garnsey and Saller, *Roman Empire* (1987) 26–34.

65. See the comments of Gallo, “Eros” (1994) 209–10. There is no point here in discussing the argument that discourages generalization from almost any archaeological find: see Greene, *Archaeology* (1986) 10.

66. By La Torre, “Impianti” (1988) 78, building on a suggestion made by Andreau, “Histoire des séismes” (1973/1997) 280; Andreau, “Terremoto” (1984) 43, as well as Maiuri’s theory that a new business class replaced the old aristocracy to exploit fresh opportunities of commerce at this time: Maiuri, *Ultima fase* (1942). On this last point, see n. 70 below. On possible, though inconclusive, evidence for a housing squeeze, see Gassner, *Kaufläden* (1986) 57.

earthquake of 62 the need for housing at Pompeii was acute, because many residences were damaged and because a massive rebuilding campaign attracted a large transient population of workers from the countryside, most of whom would have been male. Aside from hotels, these workers patronized other service outlets, including *tabernae* and *lupanaria*. Pompeians were not, it would seem, slow to exploit their urban properties and so transformed many residences into hotels, taverns, and so forth in order to accommodate this increased need.⁶⁷

The problem is complicated by the strong possibility that seismic activity continued at Pompeii in the period A.D. 62–79.⁶⁸ Presumably such activity would have aggravated, and extended in time, the impact of the earthquake of 62 on the service sector of the Pompeian economy, including prostitution.

If we can correctly assume that a mass of transient workers was present in the period 62–79, then we should not be surprised to find the service sector responding, through an abrupt expansion, to the growth in demand for lodging, food, and sex.⁶⁹ It is not necessarily true, however, that the attested post-62 repairs, structural reinforcements, and remodellings prove by themselves that the service sector expanded dramatically in this period, unless it can be shown that the hotels, inns, taverns, and the like did not exist in the period before the earthquake (or existed only in a significantly smaller form).⁷⁰ A recent study has shown that there was much more rental property at Pompeii than previously thought, and much of this property appears to date from the period before 62.⁷¹ There is another difficulty as well. Presumably, such establishments were, like much else in Pompeii, in great need of repair after the dis-

67. See, for example, Meneghini, "Trasformazione" (1999) 17.

68. For consideration of the implications, see the collection of essays in *Archäologie und Seismologie* (1995).

69. This is not the place to address the question of the alleged biological basis for male sexual need, often advanced as an explanation, if not a pretext, for prostitution. We can simply postulate for the present that more men meant greater demand for the services of prostitutes, a demand that was in part at least possibly stimulated by cultural factors and social expectations. For an overall useful discussion of the issues, see McIntosh, "Who Needs Prostitutes?" (1978), who in an attempt to escape *aporia* settles in the end for a modified Freudian line of analysis that leaves much to be desired.

70. See Zanker, *Pompeii* (1998) 124. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society* (1994) 118–31, convincingly refutes Maiuri's theory that upstarts replaced the older elite, showing that it was the latter who profited from commercial ventures in the city's final period. See also the skepticism of Gassner, *Kaufläden* (1986) 24–26; Mouritsen, "Order and Disorder" (1996) 140–41; Pirson, *Mietwohnungen* (1999) 159. It seems far from certain, however, that upper-class resort to commerce was limited to this period: see below in the text.

71. Pirson, *Mietwohnungen* (1999) esp. 174–75.

aster, so that new construction may have aimed at filling in gaps rather than at exploiting fresh opportunities.⁷²

The hypothesis that the local service sector expanded dramatically in this period rests in part on the observed contrast between the great numbers of *popinae* at Pompeii and the small numbers at Ostia. This is puzzling, just as the apparent lack of brothels in Ostia is puzzling. But these disparities hardly describe an overall difference in the total service sector relative to each of these two cities. Ostia had its share of *deversoria*, like the *Casa di Diana*, and we know that Ostian *cenacula* could be split up in the fashion of Pompeian houses to provide accommodation for transients.⁷³ To be sure, both the port city of Ostia and the capital itself must at all times have had a significant transient population served by such lodgings. It is also true that we cannot be certain about how the needs of this population for food, drink, and sex were met.

To return to Pompeii, if we make the counterfactual assumption that no earthquake occurred in 62, it is difficult to conclude that most or many of the brothels and other venues where sex was sold would not exist. Care must be taken when making assumptions about conditions in the last period of the city's life, which is, of course, the best known. To invoke the earthquake as an explanation for these conditions is to risk arguing *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. And given the revolution now in progress over the criteria for dating the material remains of the city, caution is necessary over what really represents post-earthquake Pompeii.⁷⁴

By 79, seventeen years after the event, had Pompeii more or less recovered from the effects of the earthquake? This is a question archaeologists might one day be able to answer. Noteworthy in this connection are the indications of economic recovery in the area (they are much longer in coming, we may stipulate) that eventually followed the destruction of 79.⁷⁵ The earthquake itself may not have been quite the unmitigated disaster it has at times been portrayed as in the scholarship, but instead may be thought of as a challenge to

72. Even before A.D. 62, elements of the service sector appear to have been displaced by new public building on the east side of the Forum: see Gassner, *Kaufläden* (1986) 40, 60; Zanker, *Pompeii* (1998) 57. See also Guzzo and Scarano Ussani, *Veneris figurae* (2000) 68–69, for a caution against assuming too great a need for food service in the post-62 period.

73. For literary, legal, and archaeological evidence on dividing up Ostian *cenacula*, see Frier, "Rental Market" (1977). For Pompeian houses, see Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society* (1994) 103–16, 131–34. On a more general level, see Scobie, "Slums" (1986) 428. On the challenges in identifying specific buildings in Ostia as brothels, see chap. 8.

74. For the general point, see Fulford and Wallace-Hadrill, "Unpeeling Pompeii" (1998) 128–30; for skepticism about post-62 dating, see Grahame, "Recent Developments" (1999) 570, in part anticipated by Gassner, *Kaufläden* (1986) 25, 47–48.

75. See Jashemski, "Pompeii and Mount Vesuvius" (1979) 612–17.

the city that matured over time into an opportunity.⁷⁶ This raises one more question for archaeologists. Is it possible that Pompeii in A.D. 79 was a more populous and prosperous place than in 61?

In sum, while the “earthquake hypothesis” may well explain, in part, the evident diffusion of brothels in Pompeii, proof for this argument is not adequate at this point. Closer examination of these establishments at Pompeii may shed light on the extent to which the earthquake encouraged, indirectly, the practice of prostitution.⁷⁷ At present, we may cautiously conclude that it had some impact, however limited. In drawing this conclusion, we would also have to conclude there was a gender-imbalance, with more men, perhaps many more, than women. A higher percentage of the female population were perhaps prostitutes than in other Roman cities that did not experience Pompeii’s difficulties in this period.⁷⁸ Another result is that the Pompeian evidence suggests that brothels were a widespread feature of Roman urban life. To this extent, it does seem safe to generalize from the evidence of Pompeii. Most importantly, the precise number and location of Roman brothels were a function of economics and not of morality, or the result of a public policy directed at relegating prostitution to the back streets of Pompeii or other Roman cities.

76. See Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* (2000) 308 (cf. 311) on the baneful consequences of catastrophe-theory in the historiography of Mediterranean earthquakes.

77. See, for example, Meneghini, “Trasformazione” (1999) who traces the transformation of a residence into a *caupona* at 1.11.1–2.

78. In the early 1930s, the Chinese-governed sector of Shanghai showed a gender-ratio of 135 men to 100 women: Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures* (1997) 40.