

🌀 Chapter Eight 🌀

THE BEST OF ALL
POSSIBLE BROTHELS

OUT OF POMPEII

The uniqueness, not to say the utility, of the Purpose-Built Brothel at Pompeii can be appreciated best through comparison not just with other brothels in Pompeii, but with evidence from elsewhere in the Roman world. We can safely conclude that the practice of prostitution was widespread in that world, though its extent was doubtless exaggerated by moralists.¹ Sex, a point that cannot adequately be emphasized, does not require a brothel to be sold. And yet it is greatly disappointing how little good evidence we have for brothels beyond the false archetype from Pompeii. If I have missed any identifications launched by enterprising archaeologists on the Internet, in the media, or even in the scholarship, I beg pardon, but doubt that much of consequence has been omitted all the same.²

Given the state of the evidence, it must seem ungrateful to reject any

1. Herter, "Soziologie" (1960) 71–75, provides a useful overview of the wide extent of venal sex in classical antiquity, including a list of cities and regions where it is attested. For an example of moralizing exaggeration, see Clem. Al. *Paed.* 3.3.22.2 SC 158.52, who declares that the whole world is full of *porneia* and *anomia* (*porneia* here can refer to all forms of illicit sex, not just prostitution; *anomia* has the sense of "iniquity"). Clement must be thinking mainly of cities, though even there it would be unwise to take his remark as gospel.

2. For an example of an "Internet Brothel," see the one allegedly uncovered at a temple of Aphrodite fifteen kilometers southeast of central Athens in connection with preparations for the 2004 Olympics: Website/Ananova (see list of abbreviations). I am skeptical of the identification as a brothel of the House of the Trifolium at Dougga (Thugga), despite its popularity on the Internet.

brothel nominations out of hand. And yet, some of these are not at all well-supported except by the sort of bare conjecture or wishful thinking that can find no place in a post-Wallace-Hadrill world of brothel-identification. So I exclude the recently reported first-century B.C. “brothel” in Thessalonica, an identification that appears to depend on a functionalist confusion between bath and brothel.³ The same holds for the proposed late-antique bath/brothel complex in Ascalon, which seems based more on mere assertion than on actual evidence and falls well beyond our time frame.⁴ Even later is a sixth-century complex identified as a brothel in Palestinian Bet She’an-Scythopolis.⁵

The natural focus of curiosity is the capital, so we begin with Rome and then proceed alphabetically, starting with Catania.

Rome

For all of the information we possess about the practice of venal sex in the capital city, that regarding the number and location of brothels must rank among the aspects most weakly attested. Statistics naturally are lacking, aside from those of a very rudimentary kind. For fourth-century Rome, the Regionary Catalogs give a total of 45/46 brothels, a figure which is not very telling in itself.⁶ They suggest for only one of the city’s sections, the Caelian hill area (*Regio 4*),⁷ how brothels were distributed in the city. Otherwise we must depend on literary evidence for this sort of information.⁸

Of course we cannot know what the criteria were for selection and identification in the Catalogs. For example, were brothels associated with commercial establishments included? In other words, would a *caupona* with a small brothel upstairs show up on this list? Nor can we be certain that the compilers of the list did not lower the numbers out of a sense of discretion. In any case, the number is not likely to be accurate, given most estimates of the size of Rome in this period. These numbers perhaps reflect the presence of large, purpose-built brothels on the order of the Purpose-Built Brothel at Pompeii and ignore much else besides. If these Roman brothels were on average

3. See Stavrakakis, “Brothel” (1998).

4. See chap. 7.

5. See Dauphin, “Brothels” (1996); Dauphin, “Bordels” (1998) 183–84.

6. The *Curiosum* gives forty-six, the *Notitia*, forty-five: Nordh, *Libellus* (1949) 105.10.

7. Nordh, *Libellus* (1949) 75.4. The brothels were in proximity to the *macellum magnum* (large food-market), the *castra peregrina* (camp for soldiers from the provincial armies on detached duty at Rome), and the station of the fifth cohort of *vigiles* (the police/fire service). The presence of such installations is sufficient to explain the location of these brothels.

8. On prostitution in the Subura, see chap. 2.

the same size as our Purpose-Built Brothel, they would include a total of 450 (or 460) *cellae*. At a postulated two professionals each, this yields fewer than 1,000 brothel prostitutes for Rome, which must represent only a fraction of the number of prostitutes working in the city.⁹

Of course, the brothels listed in the Regionary Catalogs are only brothels on paper and so are of very limited use to us. For brick-and-mortar examples, we know of precisely three possibilities, all of which were identified as such by Giuseppe Lugli in the middle of the twentieth century and since then have been fairly well ignored, aside from a few instances when his identifications have been rejected out of hand.¹⁰ Lugli identified one brothel in the Roman Forum, another just outside of it, and a third in the area of the Forum Boarium. All three would qualify as purpose-built brothels, though not a single one of them is absolutely certain to be a brothel, as we shall see below in this chapter. The same lack of certainty holds for the upper floors of the *Casa di Via Giulio Romano* on the lower reaches of the Capitoline Hill, which at minimum might qualify as a *deversorium*.¹¹

Catania

A rectangular room (m. 3.27 x 2.80) decorated with stucco decorations, wall paintings, and graffiti has been dated to the first century A.D. Paolo Orsi envisioned this as a sort of “love-among-the-ruins” venue, an underground chamber turned into a trysting place in a later period after it was partly destroyed by earthquakes.¹² More recently, Giacomo Manganaro has suggested that the room functioned aboveground in the first century as the dining hall of a *hospitium* or *caupona* or, as he puts it, “. . . one of those places that used to operate as a hotel and restaurant and at the same time as a brothel, and particularly close by to bathing establishments.”¹³ Manganaro justifies the aspect of this identification regarding the brothel by referring to wall paintings of Eros and Mercury, as well as to graffiti that may be described as amorous in nature, though not explicitly erotic.

9. The problems and possibilities presented by the lists of brothels included in the Regionary Catalogs are discussed further in chap. 6.

10. Lugli, *Monumenti* (1947) 139–64. For further discussion of this point, see chap. 9.

11. See Packer, “Casa” (1968/1969) esp. 136–48.

12. Orsi, “Catania” (1918) 61.

13. Manganaro, “Graffiti e iscrizioni funerarie” (1962) 487.

Dura-Europos

The remains of a private house show that part of it in the period A.D. 250–56 was converted into the headquarters of a troupe of performers, some of whom may have been prostitutes.¹⁴ For what it is worth, this establishment apparently meets all three criteria developed at Pompeii for the identification of brothels: design, erotic art, and graffiti.¹⁵ To take them in order of usefulness, the art consists of a small, painted plaster relief of Aphrodite that was evidently affixed to an interior wall. The graffiti are not of the casual, client-generated kind, but are rather an official register painted within a relatively brief span of time that identifies the members of the group not exactly as prostitutes, but as performers, many of whom were slaves.¹⁶ Finally, we come to the design of the building: there is perhaps only one room that might have served as a venue for sex, which means we would identify it as a crib.¹⁷ So if the criteria are met, they are met in a weak manner, which has encouraged scholars to be cautious about identifying this structure as a brothel.¹⁸

Without doubt, the ancients would have regarded females in the group of performers as prostitutes, and there is some reason in this case for moderns to concur.¹⁹ The justification lies in their legal status, their professional role, and the nature of the clientele they served. Because many if not most members of the group were slaves, they were completely at the disposition of their masters.²⁰ Some of the men have specific job designations (e.g., *skēnikos* [actor])

14. G5 House C: see Brown, “Houses” (1944) 116–17; Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 204–5, 210, 246.

15. See Brown, “Houses” (1944) 116–17; Brown, “Sculpture” (1944) 166–67; Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 205, 224–25.

16. One woman is called *hē paleopor<nē>*, “the old prostitute”: Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 213, 225. This is a joke and/or an insult, as opposed to a job description. On the relative chronology of the graffiti, see Immerwahr, 209–10.

17. Room C3. See chap. 7 for the criteria for defining cribs. Room C4 was blocked off at this time, while C1 and C2 appear unsuitable as venues for sexual relations: see Brown, “Houses” (1944) 116–17.

18. Brown, “Houses” (1944) 116 (“headquarters of a guild of entertainers and prostitutes”); Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 261 (“it is not an organized brothel of the kind known from Greece and Italy”); Pollard, “Army” (1996) 225 (“brothel or guild centre for prostitutes and entertainers”).

19. So Brown, “Houses” (1944) 116–17; Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 242, 257–62 (with great sensitivity to the difficulty in simply assuming such an identification); Pollard, “Army” (1996) 225. Immerwahr makes a valid connection (258) with Horace’s *ambubaiae* (*Serm.* 1.2.1; see also Suet. *Nero* 27.2) and further draws a useful comparison (264) with the *fahrendes Volk* of the Middle Ages.

20. Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 238, 250, 255; Pollard, “Army” (1996) 225.

but not the women, who tend to be described in terms of physical appearance, for better or for worse.²¹ The performers seem to have formed two subgroups, one of which was based in Dura-Europos, the other in Zeugma.²² Both of these frontier towns sported major military installations.²³ Mention of an army official (*optio*) in the painted register appears to signify that the performers were under military supervision,²⁴ and it has been plausibly suggested that they were owned by the army.²⁵ If so, it must be stressed that this establishment ill corresponds to the modern concept of the military brothel.²⁶ It may, moreover, have been a far from universal phenomenon even in antiquity. Such arrangements, operating under the supervision of very junior officers, seem especially appropriate for relatively isolated frontier areas. High-ranking officers, of course, would have wanted to avoid the opprobrium of identification as pimps.²⁷ But surely the ambitious, upwardly mobile soldiers among the lower ranks would also have had this concern, leading one to surmise that their role in organizing prostitution for the troops may have been hampered by social constraints. When the opportunity presented itself and willing impresarios could be found, as at Dura-Europos, perhaps adopting as the thinnest of veils the theory that they were simply making arrangements for a troupe of “entertainers,” commanders doubtless tended to turn a blind eye.

The number of performers—as many as sixty-three names are listed—suggests that they must have been broken up into smaller groups that lived in other dwellings.²⁸ They presumably gave performances mainly in private houses and were hired out for short periods.²⁹ The army base was only a couple of blocks away from their “headquarters.”³⁰ These details suggest that most of the prostitution taking place must have occurred off-site as well. If true, this

21. Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 224–25, 230, 255; Pollard, “Army” (1996) 225. I note in passing that no one has suggested that any of the male members of the troupe acted as prostitutes.

22. Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 250–60. There is no evidence that they served other towns, as Immerwahr speculates (258).

23. As Pollard, “Army” (1996) 225, points out.

24. Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 245, 252, 261 (also a *stathmouchos*).

25. Pollard, “Army” (1996) 225. Immerwahr’s notion that the performers were bad for morale seems to reflect his own mentality rather than that of the Roman soldier: “Dipinti” (1944) 264.

26. Phang, *Marriage of Soldiers* (2001) 249.

27. Phang, *Marriage of Soldiers* (2001) 251.

28. Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 254, 259, who suggests (261) their quarters were provided by the military.

29. Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 257, 259.

30. Immerwahr, “Dipinti” (1944) 260.

does not inevitably mean that the headquarters was not in some sense a brothel. Rather, it suggests that our efforts to identify brothels are liable to constant challenge not only from the inadequacy of physical evidence but also its apparently wide variety.³¹

Ephesus

Anyone wanting a sense of the absurd difficulties confronting the search for brothels in the ancient world would do well to contemplate the situation at Roman Ephesus, where an inscription that appears to mention a brothel has been found, while the brothel itself remains impossible to locate. The fragmentary inscription, carved on an architrave,³² mentions a latrine, in connection with *paĩdiskēia* (scil. “brothel facilities”). The inscription was in fact found in a latrine adjacent to an important bath complex called after two of its benefactors, the Varius or Scholastica Baths.

No certain brothel can be identified here, however. The structure located behind the latrine, which was once thought to be a brothel, is almost certainly a Roman peristyle house and not the purpose-built brothel that the inscription seems to imply. In fact, the inscription may have been taken from another, unknown location for reuse in its findspot.³³ The formal commemoration of a brothel or the like in an elaborate inscription of this kind is a singular, not to say strange, phenomenon, and it may well be that we simply do not understand this reference.³⁴ At Pompeii, for example, we would not expect to find an ancient inscription identifying a building as a *lupanar*. In fact, such a find might seem automatically to disqualify such an identification, falling as it does under the rubric “too good to be true.”

31. See Pollard, “Army” (1996) 225, who rightly emphasizes that the distinction between guild headquarters and place of employment is far from clear.

32. SEG 16 (1959) 719 = IK 12 (Ephesos 2) 455. The text and a photograph are in Jobst, “Freudenhaus” (1976/7) 63–64, who dates the inscription (65) to the period following the reign of Domitian. The inscription is ambitiously reconstructed by Fagan, *Bathing in Public* (1999) 335–36, who risks making a functionalist confusion of bath with brothel.

33. So argues Jobst, “Freudenhaus” (1976/7) 65, 69. The plural *paĩdiskēia* may suggest an informal arrangement, not something identifiable as a “brothel,” though it is difficult to see why such an establishment should receive epigraphic commemoration: see the text below.

34. In the end, sadly, the agnosticism of LSJ Suppl. s.v. “*paĩdiskēios*” (“with uncertain significance”) may have to be preferred.

Ostia

It is worth observing that no certain brothels are known among the extensive remains of the main port for the city of Rome at its height.³⁵ We have only to do with possibilities. Perhaps the likeliest candidate for brothel-status at Ostia is the House of Jupiter and Ganymede (1.4.2, Casa 3). Guido Calza some time ago identified this establishment as a hotel for homosexuals and was followed in this opinion, at least for a time, by John Clarke after he conducted a detailed study.³⁶

These scholars employ the very criteria adopted first by Matteo Della Corte and later by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill for identifying brothels at Pompeii. First, there is design, effected by a remodeling accomplished between A.D. 184–92 that articulates a series of rooms. Next is erotic graffiti, which here exclusively relates to sex between males. Third is erotic art, here in the form of paintings of Flora, Bacchus, and Jupiter with Ganymede.³⁷

Despite seeing all three criteria fulfilled, both Calza and Clarke prefer to identify the establishment as a hotel rather than as a brothel, persuaded as they are that the size of the rooms is too large and the quality both of the construction and of the wall paintings is too high for a brothel.³⁸ Such caution seems too extreme, however. Calza and Clarke imply that there must be a fundamental difference between the design and appointments of a hotel and those of a brothel, which is unlikely to be true for the Romans.

Worth noting is the fact that there are some examples of hotels in Pompeii that are indeed relatively well-appointed. It is established in fact that both inns and restaurants at Pompeii commonly featured elements associated with the high-end *domus*, such as *atria* with *impluvia* (water-basins embedded in the floor), or were simply converted from such dwellings.³⁹ Given the elite prejudice against patronizing such places, it is difficult to conclude that their client

35. Meiggs, *Ostia*² (1973) 229, has a nice statement of the problem. See also Dierichs, *Erotik* (1997) 72. Kleberg, *Hôtels* (1957) 45–48, notes an apparent scarcity of other service establishments such as hotels and eating places; his explanations for this phenomenon do not convince, however: 55–56. The precise significance of the reference with regard to prostitution to the *statio cummulgiorum* (“meeting place of the cunt-lickers”) in the mosaic inscription from the Baths of Trinacria is difficult to establish: see chap. 7.

36. Calza, “Scavi” (1920) 334–75, 384–410; Clarke, “Decor” (1991). On the painting of Jupiter, Ganymede, and Leda, see also Clarke, “New Light” (1991).

37. Clarke, “Decor” (1991) 91, summarizes the criteria. See Clarke, 92, for the date; 94, for the graffiti.

38. Calza, “Scavi” (1920) 373–75; Clarke, “Decor” (1991) 94–95, 101.

39. See Packer, “Inns at Pompeii” (1978) 12, 18, 24, 26, 44, 46–47; Jashemski, *Gardens of Pompeii I* (1979) esp. 167–68.

base was exclusively or even mainly upper-class. They may have been designed instead to appeal to members of the sub-elite who had the cash to enjoy a faux elite atmosphere, on a short-term basis at any rate. The same point holds for brothels as for hotels, in that any attempt to create a elite ambience, whether successful or not, might bring in more profit.⁴⁰ The crux is that the distinction between hotels and brothels is functionally and formally impossible to maintain for the Romans.⁴¹

If this reasoning is correct, it suggests that not all Roman brothels were decorated in the same fashion. The contrast is stark, for example, between the luxurious atmospherics of the Ostian example and the austerity of the Purpose-Built Brothel at Pompeii, where the only glimpse of high living was afforded by the erotic *tabellae* on the walls (chapter 4). Luxury, or the appearance of it, is for similar reasons a component of some modern brothels. The following description of the parlor of a Nevada brothel is worth quoting in full, to try to get a sense of what the owners and operators of the establishment in the House of Jupiter and Ganymede were setting out to accomplish with their decorative scheme:⁴²

During the line-up, the customer lounges in one of several plump leather chairs in the enormous red-carpeted parlor. The sumptuous room bulges with sizzling crimson sofas, enhanced by a scattering of virginal-white love seats, glass-and-brass tables, lush floral arrangements, and marble statuary. Luxuriant scarlet-velvet draperies fall into folds over windows and in corners, adding a sense of voluptuousness. The thick noise-absorbing carpet dulls sounds, while the sparkle of marble and glass creates a visual spectacle. The soft chairs in which customers sit, anticipating pleasure to come, face a raised alcove lighted by an enormous crystal chandelier. And beneath it, in solitary splendor, gleams the *pièce de résistance*—a highly polished, snow-white, baby grand piano.

The alert reader will note that the language is deliberately designed to sexualize the space being described; in fact, it is no accident that descriptions of extravagant appointments have been an important part of popularizing works

40. For a classical Athenian example, see Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (1998) 94.

41. Clarke, "Decor" (1991) 95, points out that the location of the House of Jupiter and Ganymede near the Forum and its baths and across the street from a tavern serving food and drink is conducive to the operation of a hotel. The same holds for a brothel, of course.

42. From Shaner, *Madam* (2001) 44.

on brothels. There is, for example, an entire subgenre of literature devoted to mythologizing the Victorian brothel.⁴³

The aim of this discourse obviously is to titillate.⁴⁴ The author of this passage takes the theme one step further when she writes in the next paragraph, "In short, the parlor at Sheri's is a very sexy room, vulval in the billowing of its smooth scarlet cushions and the soft folds of its 'stroke-me' velvet draperies."⁴⁵

It is worth noting that the room described at Sheri's Ranch is found in a building haphazardly constructed around the original nucleus of a double-wide trailer. Despite that fact, as well as the self-consciously literary aspects of the presentation, the description of the parlor does seem to capture the actual ambience of the establishment, itself so self-consciously a brothel as to sport an actual red light, said to be visible for miles around.⁴⁶ A Victorian brothel that burned down in nineteenth-century St. Paul, Minnesota makes the same odd connection between life and literature in the items it featured. A list of these items was made for the purposes of an insurance claim and published in the local newspapers; it included a piano valued at one thousand dollars. Evidently pianos were standard equipment even in relatively humble St. Paul brothels of that time.⁴⁷

Such luxury, or the appearance of it, is not of course an inevitable feature of brothels in every culture. An example is the municipal brothel of medieval Germany, a visit to which might in some places almost itself be construed as an act of penance. Though local authorities in some places realized that for many visitors the municipal brothel was the public face of the town and thus sought to impress them with the installation of glass windows and ovens, in many other places they furnished the brothels in a spare manner and allowed only limited sexual options.⁴⁸ The familiar comparison of brothel with sewer perhaps makes more sense here than in many other settings. The institution was no luxury for the town in which it was located, in that there was little or no interest in turning a profit on the part of local authorities.⁴⁹ For all that, the

43. See Best, *Controlling Vice* (1998) 2, 14.

44. On conventions in brothel literature (a much understudied topic), see Best, *Controlling Vice* (1998) 2.

45. For a more "realistic," but still unsatisfactory, description of the quondam Mustang Ranch, see Albert, *Brothel* (2001) 11–13, 42, 53, 98–99.

46. Shaner, *Madam* (2001) 140–41.

47. Best, *Controlling Vice* (1998) 68–89.

48. P. Schuster, *Frauenhaus* (1992) 58–59, 64. On the lack of sexual freedom in the German medieval brothel, see also B. Schuster, *Freien Frauen* (1995) 26, 130–31.

49. P. Schuster, *Frauenhaus* (1992) 47; B. Schuster, *Freien Frauen* (1995) 95. Of course the authorities did at times succeed in raising revenue, which they might divert to a special use, for example, maintenance of the poor: see Schuster, *Freien Frauen* 261, 364. The interests of the brothel-manager were of course quite different: B. Schuster, *Freien Frauen*, 112–13.

atmosphere, aided in part by the availability of alcohol, might still be described as erotically charged, at least given the cultural context of the day.⁵⁰ Of course it was so in the eyes of the Reformers.⁵¹

More recently, John Clarke has rejected his cautious argument regarding the House of Jupiter and Ganymede, and withdrawn his identification of the establishment as a hotel for homosexuals, evidently out of concerns grounded in orthodox social constructionism.⁵² It may be, however, that it is easier simply to accept the presence of a brothel, rather than a hotel catering to persons of a given "sexuality." On the basis of the evidence that is available to us, we can be certain neither of the gender of all of the prostitutes nor of the sexuality of the clients. In other words, the fact that the graffiti refer exclusively to same-sex relations does not inevitably mean women did not sell sex there as well, any more than the presence of all-heterosexual graffiti at a brothel means that male prostitutes did not work there.

The evidence from Pompeii tends to support this argument. There are at least a couple of brothels where we know both male and female prostitutes worked.⁵³ There were surely others, though it is perhaps safe to conclude that most of the Pompeian brothels had only female prostitutes. Was this single-sex configuration a local phenomenon? A text by the dream-specialist Artemidorus suggests that all-female brothels were the norm elsewhere as well.⁵⁴ Dreams about the mouth represent the household, he writes, with the teeth signifying the inhabitants. Those on the right stand for the men, those on the left for the women, except for some rare cases where, for example, all the teeth represent women (a brothel-keeper with only women) or men (a farmer with only men). Artemidorus here contrasts the typical or ideal configuration of the *oikos* containing both male and female members with examples that violate this norm. Here he seems to be implying that brothels, for example, were typically unisex rather than that such arrangements were rare for brothels. Even if we accept the latter interpretation, however, we cannot cite this passage as evidence for male brothels.

Of course such brothels did exist in antiquity. An imperial constitution of A.D. 390, for example, orders the repression at Rome of all male brothels (*virorum lupanaria*).⁵⁵ The possibility of such brothels in Pompeii merits further

50. See Schuster, *Frauenhaus* (1992) 67.

51. See Schuster, *Freien Frauen* (1995) 236–37.

52. Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking* (1998) 88 with n. 79.

53. See cat. nos. 10 and 14.

54. Artemid. 1.31.

55. Valent., Theod., Arcad. *Coll.* 5.3 (a. 390). See chap. 3.

study, in my view. But even if we could be certain that all the prostitutes in the House of Jupiter and Ganymede at Ostia were male, few scholars, given that we are mostly social constructionists of one stripe or another, would accept that this means the clients were exclusively homosexual or, to give the radical constructionist view its full weight, “homosexual” at all. In other words, we can reasonably try to separate the problem of sexuality from that of brothel-identification. This is not to say that characterization of the establishment as one that catered to same-sex preferences is unfounded or impossible, but that it cannot be strictly proven. This idea pays tribute to the careful considerations of Calza and Clarke, but is perhaps a bit more optimistic. Identification of the House of Jupiter and Ganymede as a brothel remains merely possible and far from certain. The same holds for the theory that, as a brothel, it specialized in selling sex between males.

As for other possible brothels in Ostia, the first of the difficulties raised by Calza and Clarke seems the more intractable. The lack of a fine line between brothels on the one hand and hotels and, as we shall see below, lower-class housing in general on the other means that almost any of the structures in Ostia identified by modern scholars as *deversoria* might have been used as brothels. The lack of certainty here is too great to name more than a couple of the more likely examples. The House of Diana (1.3.3–4) shows evidence of partitioning on its upper level into small, perhaps makeshift spaces, ideal for the Roman hotel/residence/brothel.⁵⁶ An even better candidate, given its third-century erotic wall paintings, two of which adorn a single room, is the *Casa delle Volte Dipinte* (3.5.1), which has been identified both as a hotel and a brothel, owing also to a ground-floor layout featuring two rows of simple rooms divided by a corridor and evidently sharing a kitchen and latrine.⁵⁷

56. The House of Diana, at least on the upper stories, is commonly understood to be a *deversorium*: Hermansen, *Ostia* (1981) 127. For a recent study of the ground floor, see Marinucci, “Maison” (2001). On housing in Ostia, see also Gering, “Habiter” (2001); Heres, “Cherche” (2001). On the evidently widespread use of partitions in lower-class housing in Ostia, see Frier, *Landlords* (1980) 4–5; Scobie, “Slums” (1986) 428. Note the room divisions of the *Casa di Via Giulio Romano* at Rome: Packer, “Casa” (1968–1969) esp. 136–48.

57. See Kleberg, *Hôtels* (1957) 46; Calza and Nash, *Ostia* (1959) 29–30, 80; Pavolini, *Vita* (1986) 233–37; Scarano Ussani, “Lenocinium” (2000) 257; Guzzo and Scarano Ussani, *Veneris figurae* (2001) 74 n. 216; Heres, “Cherche” (2001) 225; both identifications are tepidly accepted by Packer, “Inns at Pompeii” (1978) 12, 170, who lists other Ostian buildings with a similar plan. The northwest corner shows a bar connecting with the house: Girri, *Taberna* (1956) 26; Hermansen, *Ostia* (1981) 151–52. Hermansen (at 193) argues against identification as a brothel on the basis of the kitchen. Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking* (1998) 265–74, as ever must be recommended for reproductions and discussion of the wall paintings (in this case poorly preserved). He is skeptical (at 271) of the brothel-identification here too because of the high quality of the art. On the paintings and the building, see also Felletti Maj, “Ostia” (1960); Felletti Maj, *Ostia* (1961).

Other possible candidates worth mentioning are the large bars/restaurants that show multiple rooms in back and/or upstairs suitable for lodging as well as for the sale of sex.⁵⁸

Finally, we note that as bleak as the situation is in regard to Ostian brothels, that concerning Ostian prostitutes is not one bit better. The graffiti preserved in the House of Jupiter and Ganymede do not allow us to distinguish with certainty the customer from the prostitute, if we can indeed correctly assume that this was a brothel. Despite the evidence for the status and role of women in ancient Ostia at various social levels, not a single name has come down to us of a female who might with any reason be conjectured to be a prostitute.⁵⁹

Sayala (Lower Nubia)

A tavern district dating to the end of the third century A.D. was located very near the southern edge of Egypt, in close proximity to the Roman border garrison at Hiera Sycaminos.⁶⁰ A number of these taverns, whose remains, including ovens, show that food as well as drink was for sale, are equipped with a small side room that appears to have functioned as a *cella* or crib, that is, a venue for private parties that may have featured the sale of sex.⁶¹ One building, connected through a stone walkway with one of the taverns, seems to have functioned precisely as a kind of—relatively well-appointed—crib.⁶² These are perhaps not brothels in a strict technical sense, since it is far from clear either that two or more prostitutes worked in them at the same time or that the sale of sex was the chief or even a major component of business. All the same, they demonstrate once more the futility of insisting that the “classic” profile of the Purpose-Built Brothel at Pompeii serve as the model for brothels elsewhere.

58. See Girri, *Taberna* (1956) 9, 14–15, 32; Rowell, “*Satyricon*” (1957) 223; Hermansen, *Ostia* (1981) 147–50, 152, 167–68, 175, 193–94; Scarano Ussani, “*Lenocinium*” (2000) 257.

59. On Ostian women, see Kampen, *Image and Status* (1981); Herzig, “Frauen in Ostia” (1983).

60. Kromer, *Weinstuben* (1967) dates (at 128) the complex to A.D. 274–98.

61. Lamps, animal bones, drinking cups, and a hearth were all found in these rooms, suggesting at minimum that food and drink were consumed there: see Kromer, *Weinstuben* (1967) 21–22, 30–31, 50, 54, 59–60, 62, 65, 67, 72–76. Kromer (72) appears to believe these spaces were used for storage, which would not obviate other uses.

62. Objekt 4: Kromer, *Weinstuben* (1967) 41–47, 76, who cites as criteria for identification design and graffiti (the latter consisting of obscene doodling on potsherds).

THE NAME OF THE ROSE

The Purpose-Built Brothel is almost too good to be true. One element that adds to its cachet is its elusive name. The various names proposed for this brothel include *Lupanare nuovo*, *Lupanare grande*, and *Lupanar* of Africanus (and Victor). None of these seem suitable. The brothel was “new” only at the time of its discovery in 1862. It is indeed large, if only by the standards of other Pompeian brothels, but, confusingly, *Lupanare grande* or a variant of it is attached to another building that is almost certainly not a brothel, the *gran lupanare* or *lupanare grande* (6.14.43).⁶³ It may not in fact stand as the largest brothel in Pompeii,⁶⁴ nor can we ascribe it with confidence to proprietors named Africanus and Victor.⁶⁵

Some authors refer to this brothel simply as (the) *lupanar*, a piece of Pompeianist slang that would be accurate if it were indeed the only brothel in town. “Forum Brothel” is not strictly accurate either, since the brothel is not in the Forum, but two or three blocks away. I thus propose to rename it the Purpose-Built Brothel, which I will be the first to admit is not the most elegant of attributions, in the hope that my argument that it was the only one of its kind at Pompeii gains favor.

LOVE SHACK

Located on a narrow, winding street not far from the town Forum, the Purpose-Built Brothel conforms nicely to the Roman literary cliché that brothels were located on winding, secluded back streets (figs. 4–11).⁶⁶ It contains five simple small rooms on the ground floor, each of which features a masonry bed which almost certainly would have sported some sort of mattress or cushions in antiquity. On the upper walls of the passageway that connects the rooms are a series of erotic paintings. Five more rooms are upstairs, accessible by a separate entrance stairway and a balcony.⁶⁷ The whole is complemented by a painting of Priapus located downstairs (fig. 11), which sports two phalluses no less (as though to confirm the brothel-hunter’s good fortune);⁶⁸ a latrine under

63. See the first appendix.

64. See no. 6 in the catalog (appendix 1).

65. The attribution of various properties to “proprietors” whose names are included in the graffiti is highly dubious: see the notes to appendix 1.

66. See chap. 9.

67. For a description of the Purpose-Built Brothel, see Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking* (1998) 196–206. We lack a really satisfactory account of the upstairs.

68. On the significance of the representation of Priapus in the context of the brothel, see appendix 1.

the stairway; and more than one hundred graffiti, many of them erotic, in and around the building.⁶⁹ It is worth emphasizing that this establishment stands as our most certain example of a brothel, not only in Pompeii, but in the entire Roman world.⁷⁰ This might suggest a lack of good evidence, or flaws in the application of our criteria for identifying brothels, or both.

The certainty of this identification, as well as its uniqueness, clearly rests on the status of this brothel as a structure made for the purpose of selling sex, which makes it precisely a purpose-built brothel.⁷¹ Such enterprises are rare not only in the Roman world.⁷² It is difficult to trace examples even in other societies, which, like the Roman, tolerate prostitution reasonably well. We might argue that it is even more difficult than in less tolerant cultures because in these societies, as in the Roman world, brothels are often not located in any one area (and can be very mobile at that).⁷³ An exception might be found in the institution of the municipal brothel in medieval Germany, though the evidence is ambiguous. In some cities, preexisting structures were leased or purchased by the authorities, while in others the town brothel was built from scratch.⁷⁴ In general, however, the acquisition and construction of these brothels is not directly documented.⁷⁵ A pattern of a series of small rooms arranged around larger “hospitality rooms” emerges from the descriptions of brothels in Würzburg and Munich, but even if typical, it is difficult to see how precisely this arrangement would differ from that of an inn, for example.⁷⁶

Remodeling, even extensive remodeling, of a structure to accommodate a brothel through partitioning and furnishing is unlikely to leave much of use for identification in the archaeological record.⁷⁷ Furthermore, a building is not

69. Barattolo and Romaldi, “Impianti igienici” (2000) 268 n. 36, record the presence of two latrines in this brothel.

70. See the comments of Guzzo, “Quadretti erotici di Pompei” (2000) 41.

71. The brothel’s uniqueness may also depend in part on its irregular shape. According to DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality* (2001) 103, there are only three other building lots similar to that of the Purpose-Built Brothel in all of Pompeii.

72. I should note the three examples identified at Rome by Lugli, *Monumenti* (1947) and discussed in the text above. There are differences among these examples. One was built from scratch, while the others are significant makeovers; they have differently constructed beds; and they apparently vary in regard to the presence or absence of an on-site *caupona*. Nevertheless, if their identification as brothels is accepted, we can argue in all three cases that they qualify as purpose-built brothels.

73. See Hill, *Their Sisters’ Keepers* (1993) 175–87. For examples of purpose-built brothels in other cultures, see Decker, *Prostitution* (1979) 138; Bernstein, *Sonia’s Daughters* (1995) 181; Her-shatter, *Dangerous Pleasures* (1997) 291.

74. Schuster, *Frauenhaus* (1992) 51, 54, 165.

75. See Schuster, *Freien Frauen* (1995) 92.

76. Schuster, *Frauenhaus* (1992) 58–60.

77. See Hill, *Their Sisters’ Keepers* (1993) 199, 221; Tong, *Unsubmissive Women* (1994) 75 (fabric partitions).

strictly required for the sale of sex.⁷⁸ All of this raises further difficulties in the matter of defining what a brothel is.

Defining, and in turn identifying, brothels has been as acute a problem for those living in past societies as it has been for historians.⁷⁹ An aspect of this is a tendency toward “brothel-bias,” that is, an overemphasis on obvious venues, which in recent years has been extreme for Pompeii.⁸⁰ Brothels tend to blend indiscriminately with the urban housing stock and/or are found in businesses that pursue some other more visible purpose such as the sale of food and drink.⁸¹ Hence, no brothel “type” can be distinguished apart from a hotel or motel “type.”⁸²

As for possible parallels in other cultures, one looks in vain to the classic study of building types by Nikolaus Pevsner.⁸³ Pevsner develops three rationales for the development of building-types in history: diversification of function, discovery of new materials or new uses of existing materials, and the emergence of new styles.⁸⁴ It is persuasive to view building types and their

78. See Mackey, *Red Lights Out* (1987) 204 n. 21, on nineteenth-century U.S. attempts to define tents and wagons as brothels.

79. See Decker, *Prostitution* (1979) 373 (defining brothels makes for bad law; cf. 404: problems with defining massage parlors as brothels), 345 n. 49, 361 n. 82; Harsin, *Policing Prostitution* (1985) 307–13 (problems in classifying brothels by type); Mackey, *Red Lights Out* (1987) 93–123 (problems with defining under the nuisance-abatement law), 152–57 (for some courts, the defendant’s character was crucial for identifying a brothel), 162 (no clear standard for a legal definition), 162–69 (formidable problems of evidence), 173–79 (much dissension and obscurity in defining brothels at law), 199 (a lack of confidence on the part of nineteenth-century U.S. legal authorities in defining and identifying brothels); Hill, *Their Sister’s Keepers* (1993) 132 (a mid-nineteenth-century New York City judge finds that prostitutes in residence do not a brothel make, since they must dwell somewhere after all). See also chap. 7.

80. On brothel-bias, see Hill, *Their Sisters’ Keepers* (1993) 184. For the lack of a Roman concept of “definite brothel,” see in the text below.

81. See Finnegan, *Poverty* (1979) 35, 39–45, 53, 55, 58, 66–69, 91–92, 97, 100–104, 107, 112, 134–35, 150; Pavan, “Police” (1980) 253; Walkowitz, *Prostitution* (1980) 24; Rosen, *Sisterhood* (1982) 70, 78; Harsin, *Policing Prostitution* (1985) 32–49; Stansell, *City of Women* (1987) 174; Corbin, *Women for Hire* (1990) 36–42, 116–18, 139–54; Mahood, *Magdalenes* (1990) 43, 121, 135; Gilfoyle, *City of Eros* (1992) 34, 39, 47, 52, 52, 120, 166–73, 177, 197–250, 265–69, 295, 394; Hill, *Their Sisters’ Keepers* (1993) 175–216; Bernstein, *Sonia’s Daughters* (1995) 153; Schuster, *Freien Frauen* (1995) 14, 72, 88–102, 120, 215–23; Karras, *Common Women* (1996) 71–72; Gibson, *Prostitution and the State*² (1999) 87. For the Roman evidence, see chap. 2.

82. See Ginouvès, *Dictionnaire méthodique* 3 (1998) 121–22. The ramshackle and improvisational structure of a Nevada brothel provides a useful modern parallel: see Shaner, *Madam* (2001) 140–41. See also Symanski, “Prostitution in Nevada” (1974) 365; Schuster, *Freien Frauen* (1995) 95–96.

83. Pevsner, *Building Types* (1976).

84. Pevsner, *Building Types* (1976) 289–90.

development as specific to a given culture, so that lack of evidence for purpose-built brothels by itself proves nothing for Rome.⁸⁵

Even so, the evidence, or the lack of it, leads me to make the following sweeping statement. None of Pevsner's criteria suit the Roman brothel, or brothels in most other cultures, as far as I can see. For that matter, I am not at all certain that the Romans knew a hotel or motel "type." The *deversorium* (by any other name) seems to have been a fairly elastic concept in terms of both form and function, though great labors have been expended by moderns in an effort to pin it down, distinguishing the *caupona* from the *hospitium* and so forth.⁸⁶ One word for lodgings in particular, *stabulum*, was often used to mean "brothel," a usage that indicates a high rate of interchangeability between the two concepts.⁸⁷ Mark Grahame's recent analysis of houses in Pompeii's *Regio 6* appears to bear this argument out. He finds that the specimens of the lowest-status type, that is, noncourtyard houses, show little regularity in their layouts, leading him to conclude that there existed no standard design for them. In fact, he describes their design pattern as "almost random" in nature.⁸⁸

These considerations suggest that for the purpose of defining and identifying brothels we cannot safely generalize from the example of the Purpose-Built Brothel.⁸⁹ We may compare this situation with medieval Germany, where the most commonly drawn distinction between the town brothel and the other

85. Purcell, "Town in Country" (1987) 197–98, usefully points out that the ambiguity between elements of the public and private in Roman villa design helped discourage the development of purpose-built government buildings in antiquity.

86. See Kleberg, *Hôtels* (1957) 12–14, 17, 19, 27; Packer, "Inns at Pompeii" (1978) 5, 12, 44–53; Hermansen, *Ostia* (1981) 192–93; DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality* (2001) 16–23. Cf. Frier, "Rental Market" (1977) 30–34. The older analysis in Rowell, "Satyricon 95–96" (1957) of a key piece of literary evidence for inns is still worth consulting. Finally, McDonald, "Villa or Pandokeion?" (1951) 366–67, observed long ago in regard to ancient Greek inns and so forth that "[p]robably there was little in location, general outward appearance, or even in ground plan to distinguish them from private houses, and the equipment and furnishings which would assist in the identification were doubtless almost all of a perishable nature" (note omitted). Further discussion in chap. 2.

87. See chap. 2.

88. Grahame, "Material Culture" (1998) esp. 171.

89. Wallace-Hadrill, "Public Honour and Private Shame" (1995) does this implicitly, in my view. DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality* (2001) 13, adopts the Purpose-Built Brothel "as a working model to delineate what features could be expected in suspected brothels throughout the city." Cf. 102, where he apparently contradicts himself by seeming to accuse Wallace-Hadrill of a *petitio principii*, stressing the brothel's "unique features." Clarke, "Laughing" (2002) 151–55 dismisses the possibility of a brothel at the Suburban Baths on the basis of a comparison with the Purpose-Built Brothel.

houses of the municipality turned on the status of the women who lived in each.⁹⁰ It would be just as rash, I believe, to posit any establishment in the late twentieth or early twenty-first century United States as a typical brothel. Worth emphasizing as a deterrent to facile generalization is the example of the brothel found in Barbara Heyl's classic study of the madam. This brothel was a modest-sized apartment of two and one-half bedrooms allowing two to three prostitutes to work at the same time.⁹¹

The only true difficulty we have in regard to identifying the Purpose-Built Brothel involves determining the relationship of the upstairs to the downstairs. The upstairs does not seem to have contained masonry beds or erotic art or graffiti.⁹² This would of course disqualify it as a brothel according to the severe criteria of the 1990s. It is, in fact, quite possible that the upstairs was the sleeping quarters of the women who worked downstairs. In a heavily stereotyped description of a brothel, Juvenal has a pimp send the prostitutes who work for him home at the end of the day.⁹³ The detail is necessary, in that Messalina in this fiction must be allowed a way back to the imperial palace, while at the same time her reluctance to stop working, in contrast to her colleagues, who evidently depart quite readily at the pimp's behest, allows the satirist to show her outwhoring the whores. This is very much a central concern of the passage. And yet the detail seems unlikely to be sheer invention. In other words, while the empress' participation in the life of the brothel should be regarded as utter fiction, the details of the establishment's structure and operation are supposed to be "realistic," at least in the sense that they conform to the literary conventions for representing brothels.

The bulk of the evidence, however, points in another direction, in favor of very limited freedom of movement for women who worked in brothels or none at all.⁹⁴ For example, both the would-be priestess denounced by Seneca the

90. See Schuster, *Freien Frauen* (1995) 88–89.

91. Heyl, *Madam* (1979) 91–94.

92. Della Corte, *Case*³ (1965) 203, states that the walls upstairs are also painted "though less unworthily" ("epperò meno ignobili"), whatever that means; cf. Guzzo, "Quadretti erotici" (2000) 40. Wallace-Hadrill, p.c., assures me there is no erotic art upstairs. DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality* (2001) 103, asserts that there are no masonry beds upstairs. See Nappo, *Pompeii* (1998) 74: no erotic art and "probably" wooden beds. For the inscriptions, see the editorial notation introducing *CIL* 4.2173. Varone, "Lupanare" (2002) 194 attributes the absence of erotic art and graffiti to the excavation techniques that prevailed in 1862, when the brothel was discovered.

93. *Iuv.* 6.127.

94. For Rome, see Flemming, "Quae Corpore" (1999) 43. Brothels in many cultures tend to confine prostitutes, even those who are in fact rather mobile. On the justification of the term "inmate" to describe prostitutes in Nevada brothels, see Symanski, "Prostitution in Nevada" (1974) 359.

Elder's declaimers and the unfortunate Tarsia in the *Story of Apollonius of Tyre* seem fairly well immured in their workplaces.⁹⁵ Eventually, consignment to the brothel served as a form of punishment, inflicted notably by the pagan authorities on Christian women, a practice that suggests working conditions were generally constraining even before this development took place.⁹⁶ The medieval German practice of interning in brothels women deemed unchaste reads almost as an ironic comment on the Roman practice with Christian women, and the latter was not tolerated, at least by the Christian emperor Theodosius I.⁹⁷

The mere fact that brothels blend indiscriminately with the residential housing stock of a city suggests that prostitutes lived as well as worked in the same place. In a famous anecdote, Cato the Censor praises a young man for resorting to a brothel, as an alternative, or antidote, to adultery. When he sees the same person exiting the same brothel rather often ("frequentius") he is moved to criticism: "Young man, I praised you on the basis that you paid an occasional visit here, not that you lived here."⁹⁸ Near the beginning of the *Satyricon* as preserved, Encolpius loses his way and asks directions to his lodgings from an old woman selling vegetables. She leads him to a brothel and declares, "Here . . . is where you ought to live."⁹⁹ This evidence suggests one or two conclusions. One is that brothels might have functioned as lodging houses (or vice versa), a point I have already made. The other is that prostitutes routinely lived in the same place where they worked. This much is strongly implied by both speakers, that is, Cato and the old woman; they are in effect saying that the addressee is a whore. The two conclusions do not contradict each other. In fact, the first almost assumes the second in the sense that if any persons at all lived in the brothel these were very likely to be the prostitutes who worked there.

95. Sen. *Contr.* 1.2; *Hist. Ap. Tyr.* 33–36

96. There is no firm evidence for this practice on the part of the state before the reign of Septimius Severus: see Tert. *Apol.* 50.12 CCSL 1.171. The practice seems to have had a history before this as a private punishment, to judge for example from Apul. *Met.* 7.9. See literature and discussion in McGinn, "SC" (1992) 277 with n. 20; McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law* (1998) 305–12. Cf. the Nye County, Nevada, rule that prostitutes must remain at the brothel except for closely supervised excursions outside: Shaner, *Madam* (2001) 279; more generally for Nevada, Albert, *Brothel* (2001) 5, 48.

97. See Schuster, *Frauenhaus* (1992) 145, 166, 168. For Theodosius, see chap. 3.

98. [Acro.] *ad Hor. Serm.* 1.2.31–32: ". . . adulescens, ego te laudavi, tamquam huc intervenires, non tamquam hic habitares." Neither Horace at *Serm.* 1.2.31–32 nor Porphyrio *ad loc.* preserves this part of the anecdote.

99. Petron. 6–7 (at 7): "Hic . . . debes habitare."

The allocation of a separate space designated for sleeping quarters on-site, or more or less on-site, seems difficult to accept. Such an arrangement would represent a gross diseconomy in a business that tended to exploit its workers to the greatest extent possible. In other words, I believe that Roman brothel-prostitutes, unless they lived absolutely off-site (an arrangement that would allow them to work in shifts), typically slept in the beds in which they worked, if they slept in beds at all.¹⁰⁰ What is more, the design, as reported, of the second story of the Purpose-Built Brothel added to the everlasting principle that in matters of real estate location (times three) is everything seems to guarantee its usage as a venue for the sale of sex. It does not, however, clarify the relationship between the two levels, namely whether the building consists of one brothel, as most scholars appear to assume, or two, as Giuseppe Fiorelli and Gioacchino La Torre appear to believe.¹⁰¹

Roman law stipulates that the owner of the ground floor also owns what lies above,¹⁰² and yet this fact does not resolve the issue as neatly as we would like. An owner of any status would presumably resort to a middleman to operate a brothel, and the idea of two separate operations run by two individual middlemen therefore remains possible, especially if we credit the modern tendency to attribute separate street entrances to different tenants/occupants,¹⁰³ keeping in mind that the building was evidently designed, as a brothel, precisely in this way. At the same time, we might argue that the separate entrance for the second story was intended to allow it to remain closed except as needed, for example, in times of expected high usage, such as festivals or games, so that the appearance of a separate operation on the upper level is illusory. Given the uncertainty, I allow separate entries in the catalog provided in the first appendix, but otherwise treat the “two” brothels as one.

Whatever the case, we can safely conclude that not only the Purpose-Built Brothel itself but the immediate neighborhood around it was an *unofficial* center of sexual activity. The presence of one crib virtually across the street,¹⁰⁴

100. For a parallel from a Nevada brothel, see Albert, *Brothel* (2001) 13, 98–99. For a similar argument about prostitutes in ancient Athenian brothels, see Cohen, “Economic Analysis” (forthcoming). For another view about sleeping arrangements in Roman brothels, see DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality* (2001) 101; in this brothel, Varone, “Lupanare” (2002) 194.

101. Fiorelli, *Scavi di Pompei* (1873) 20; La Torre, “Impianti” (1988) 93 n. 29.

102. On the principle *superficies solo cedit*: Gaius 2.73 with Kaser, *Privatrecht* 1² (1971) 375, 429.

103. See, for example, Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society* (1994) 108.

104. 7.11.12.

another down the block,¹⁰⁵ the largest hotel in town across the way,¹⁰⁶ a sizeable tavern facing one entrance,¹⁰⁷ and an important bath complex a few steps away¹⁰⁸ are all evidence of this. Sex might have been for sale in any or all of these places, and they might have helped generate business for the brothel. The tavern just across the street was potentially a source not only of customers but of food and drink as well. In the following chapter, we will examine the question of whether this situation was extraordinary or not.

105. 7.12.33.

106. 7.11.11, 14, so described by Jashemski, "Copa" (1963/4) 344.

107. 7.1.44-45a, which is sometimes identified by the man thought to be its owner, Sittius, or the painting of an elephant that graces its facade: Jashemski, "Copa" (1963/4) 346; Franklin, "Games and a *Lupanar*" (1985/6) 321.

108. The Stabian Baths, located at 7.1.8, 14-17, 48, 50-51.