

Roman Insulae Buildings

Residential Buildings for the lower class in ancient Roman Empire

Prepared by: Assistant Lecturer Nareen Riyadh

Ancient Roman residential buildings

In Roman architecture, an insula was a kind of apartment building that housed most of the urban citizen population of ancient Rome, including ordinary people of lower- or middle-class status and all but the wealthiest from the upper-middle class.

The traditional elite and the very wealthy lived in domus, large single-family residences, but the two kinds of housing were intermingled in the city and not segregated into separate neighborhoods.

Domus



- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| 1. Vestibulum | 7. Cubiculum |
| 2. Impluvium | 8. Culina |
| 3. Compluvium | 9. Tegulae |
| 4. Peristylum | 10. Opus musivum |
| 5. Latrinae | 11. Triclinium |
| 6. Tabernae | 12. Trabs. |

Insula



Insulae

Insula, (Latin: “island”), in architecture,

1. block of grouped but separate buildings (city block)
2. a single structure in ancient Rome.

The insulae were largely residences providing economically practical housing where land values were high and population dense.

Distinct from the domus, the upper-class private residence, they were inhabited primarily by the labouring class.



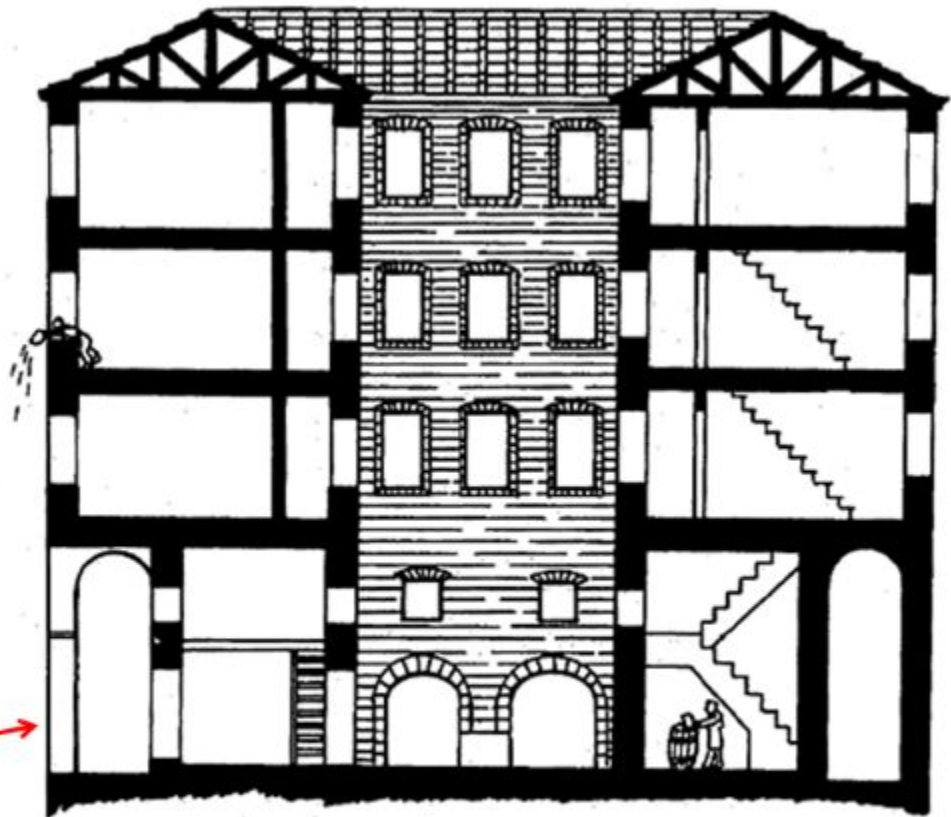
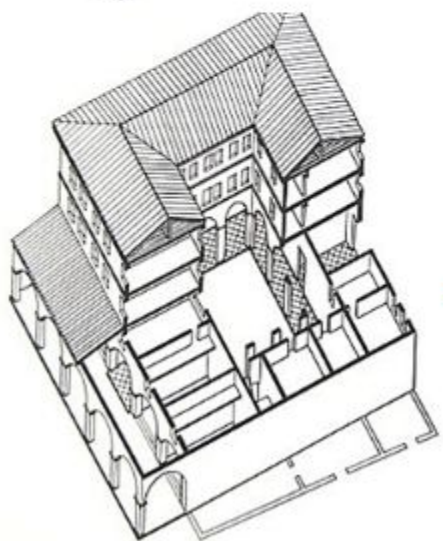
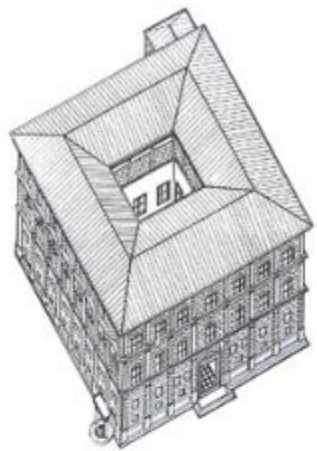
Insulae



The street level (ground floor) characteristically housed artisans' workshops and commercial establishments.

The residences above were reached by an interior common staircase, receiving light and air from the street and an inner court (light well).

Like modern apartment buildings, an insula might have a name, usually referring to the owner of the building.



An insula dating from the early 2nd century A.D. in Ostia neighborhood in Rome





Insulae-Construction

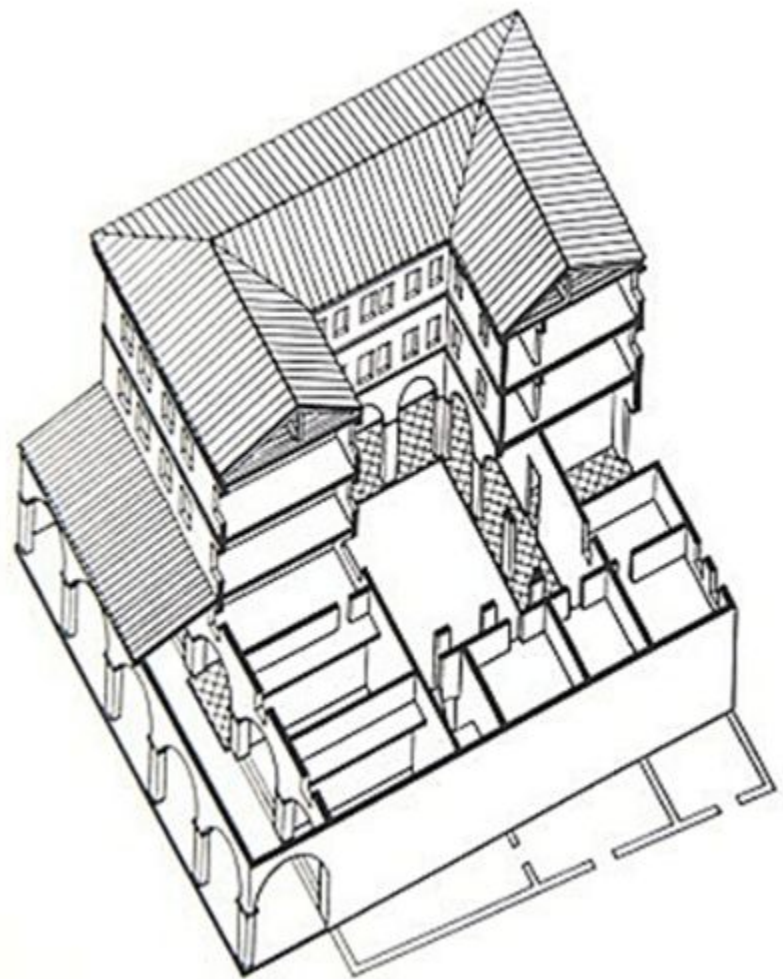
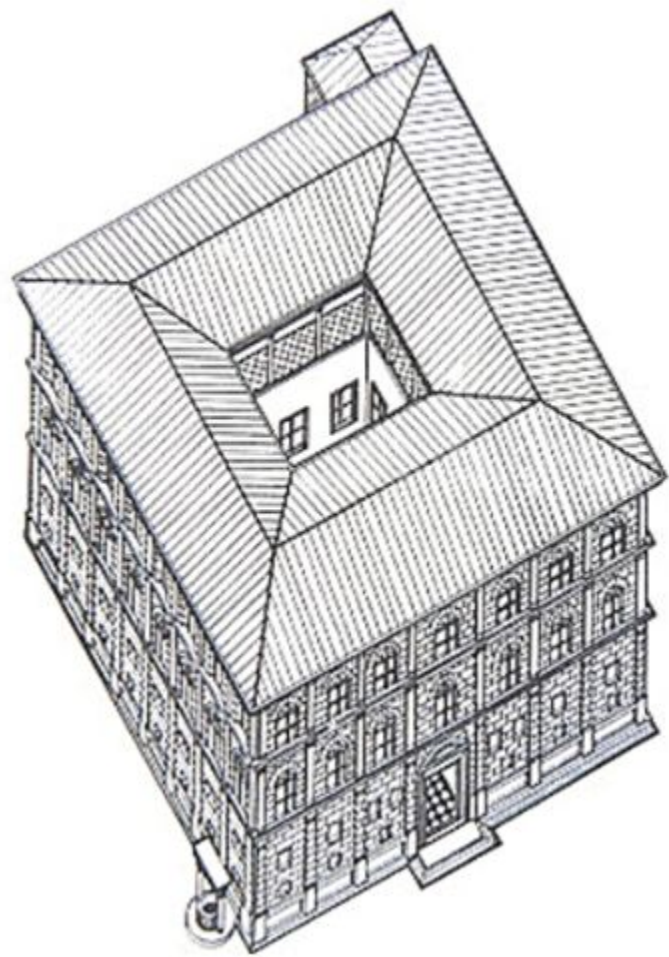
Insulae were constructed of concrete covered with brick

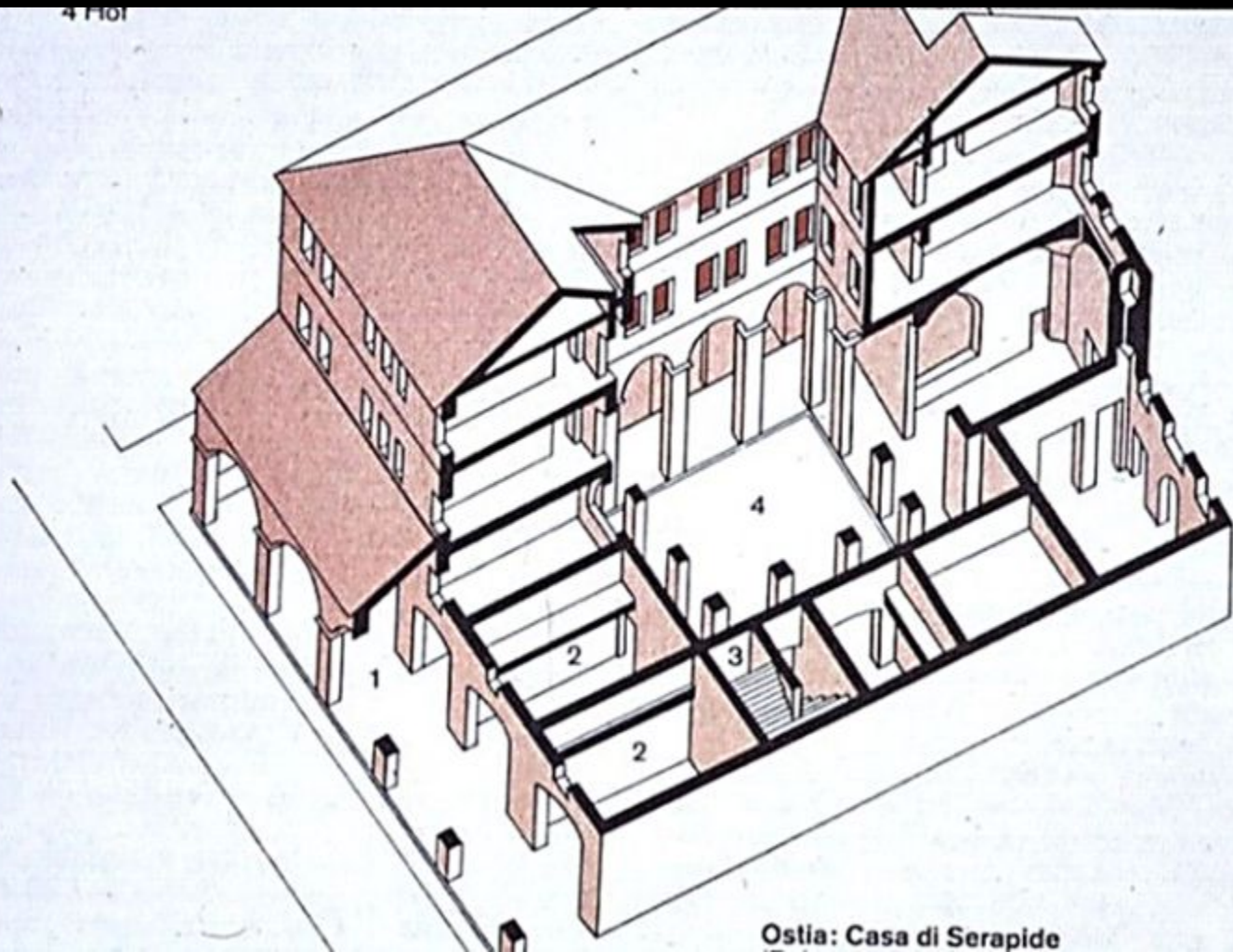
Many insulae were encircled with open or enclosed balconies of wood or concrete.

This kind of housing was sometimes constructed at minimal expense, resulting in Insulae of poor construction.









Ostia: Casa di Serapide

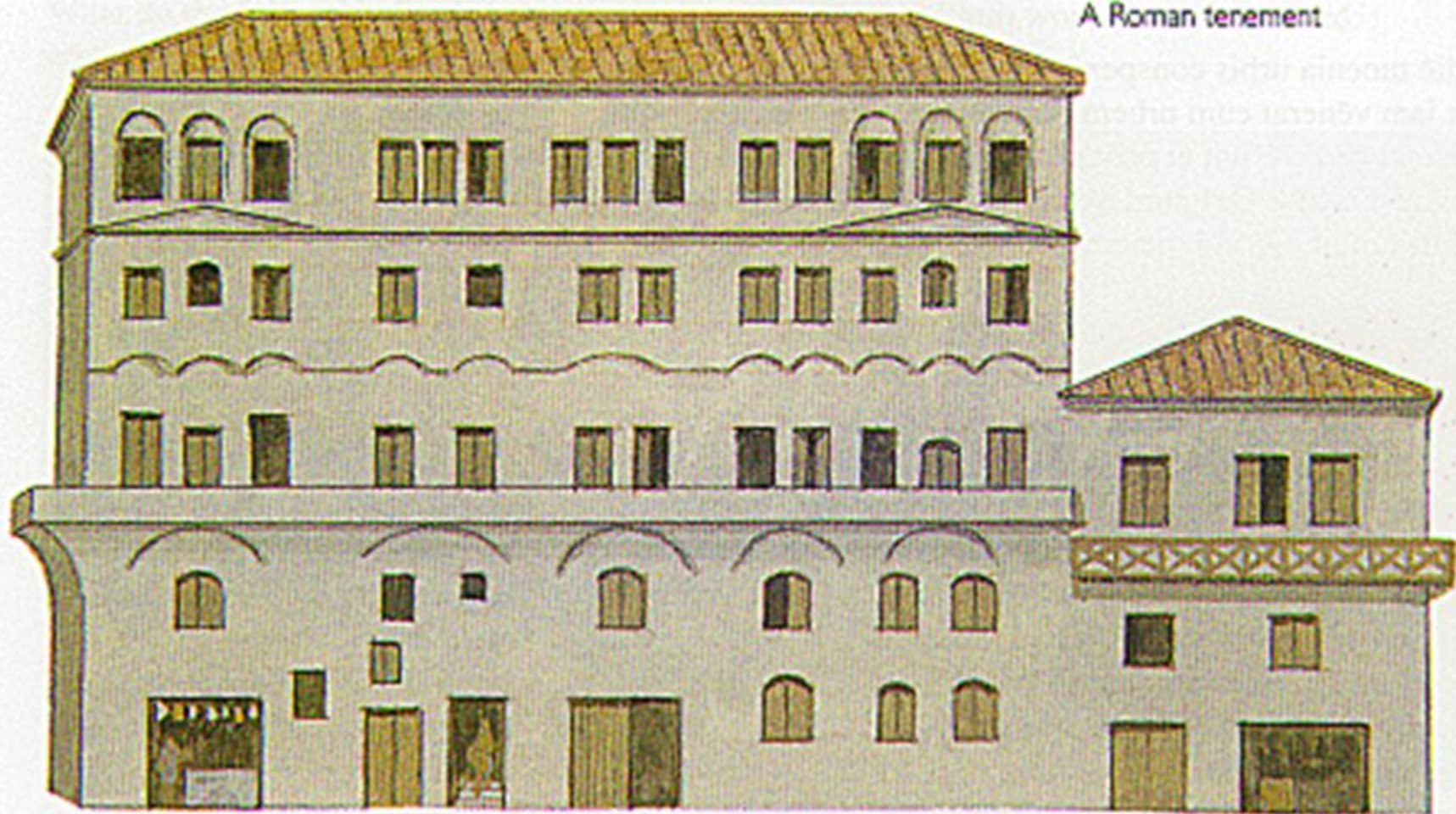
Insulae-Construction

Insulae, like domus, had running water and sanitation.

Pumping devices could raise water only to lower apartments; tenants of higher apartments had to use public water and sanitary facilities.

Cheap construction and a limited water supply caused frequent collapses and serious fires.

A Roman tenement



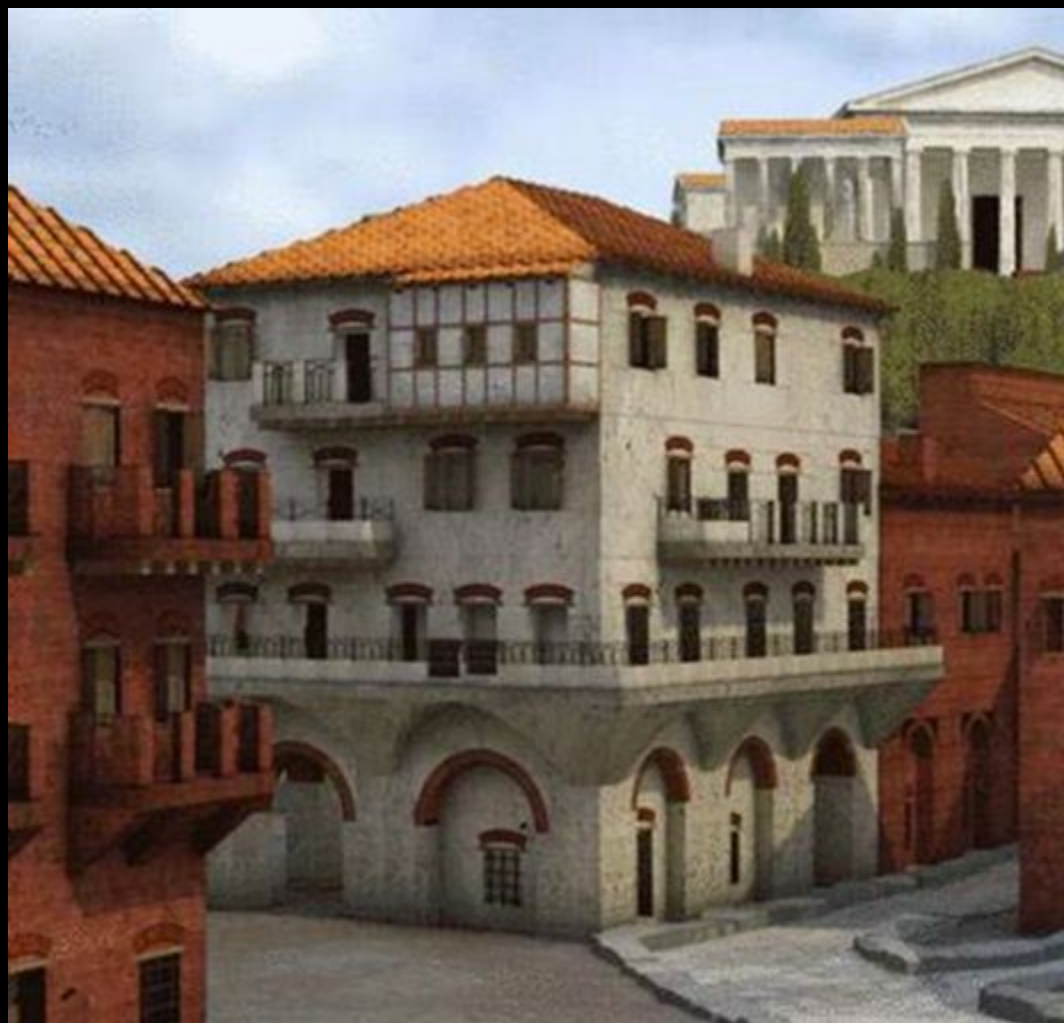
Insulae-Height

Augustus (63 BC – AD 14) instituted reforms aimed at increasing the safety of buildings in the city of Rome.

Because of the dangers of fire, and collapse, the height of the insulae were restricted by Augustus to 70 Roman feet called the pes (20.7 m), and again by Emperor Nero (37 – 68 AD) down to 60 Roman feet (17.75 m) after the Great Fire of Rome that took place in July of the year 64 AD.

The Insulae could be up to **six or seven storeys** high, and despite height restrictions in the Imperial era, a few reached eight or nine storeys.

A single *insula* could accommodate over 40 people in only 330 m²



Insulae-number

According to the 4th-century Regionary catalogues, there were about 42,000–46,000 insulae in the city, as compared to about 1,790 domus in the late 3rd century.

The city's population in the late 3rd century is thought to have fluctuated between 700,000–800,000, down from more than 1 million, based also on figures for the amount of grain required to feed the population in Rome and surrounding areas.

Thank You ...