6

Housing and Households

Introduction

That people had to live somewhere is a seemingly simple observation, but one not always heeded in classical archaeology's past emphasis on monumental urban spaces and public central places. The detailed study of ancient housing began only in the latter part of the twentieth century; evolving profoundly since then, it is now one of the more flourishing subfields in the discipline.

In its early stages, not surprisingly, the analysis of domestic structures (from *domus*, Latin for "house") relied greatly on issues and clues provided by textual evidence. In the Greek world, for example, this led to focused attempts to identify and delimit separate "male" and "female" spaces in the home (an expectation based on ancient testimony, notably from fourth-century B.C. law court speeches). The interest of ancient philosophers in the link between city plan and social structure also led to an emphasis on the degree to which Classical house plans appeared identical and egalitarian. In the Roman world, the preserved writings of the first-century B.C. architect, Vitruvius, dictated a largely uniform interpretation of house composition and organization. Modern preconceptions, such as the assumption of an unambiguous division of public versus private, also held sway.

Such initial approaches have rapidly been outgrown or expanded, not least thanks to the realization that ancient written sources—while they can "re-people" the past in lively fashion—are not the surest representative of the diversity of house design, let alone human behavior, over time. Instead, the material evidence of house construction and organization is today taken more seriously in its own right. This development has been strengthened by the growing theoretical sophistication of "domestic archaeology" in the study of other parts of the world and time periods. The expansion of our available sample, in the Greek world especially, also helps,

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although excavation of domestic architecture still lags woefully behind that of more major, public structures.

The issue of sample size and quality, of course, marks a significant difference in the study of Greek and Roman houses. In the Greek world, the best evidence comes from the city of Olynthos, abandoned in the fourth century B.C., but here the departing inhabitants seem to have taken most movable items with them. By contrast, the eruption of Vesuvius, near the Bay of Naples, captured and preserved an astonishing range of domestic architecture and artifacts in communities such as Pompeii and Herculaneum. The combination of standing architecture, wall paintings, and interior furnishings allows us to envision the experience of living and moving through these spaces, generating a richness of interpretation that is well-nigh impossible elsewhere. Pompeii, however, does not answer all questions about Roman-period housing: it cannot represent the entire empire, or all social classes, or all periods. How to employ most wisely the evidence of these "lost cities" is a major question today in studies of Roman domestic architecture.

What makes the study of *houses* most compelling, perhaps, is that it is just as much a study of *households*. The physical space and furnishings of any house—its potential combination of domestic artifacts, doors, courtyards, corridors, furniture, hearths, mosaics, rooms, wall paintings, and windows—shape and reflect the behavior of the full range of its inhabitants, their internal relationships as well as their points of contact with "outsiders." The sheer variety of ancient household formations, and their sensitivity to the broader social and political formations in which they subsisted, emerges clearly in this chapter. The household becomes an ever more provocative unit to consider, as house studies continue to reveal its continuing transformations in the ancient Mediterranean world.

6 (a)

Housing and Households in Ancient Greece

The Greek World

Lisa Nevett

Today the word "house" carries with it assumptions about the architectural form of a building, the range of activities taking place inside, and the relationships between its different occupants. But a closer look at individual examples of houses, even within a single culture, reveals almost infinite variation in the structures themselves, in the range of functions they perform, and in the identities of their inhabitants. In the context of the ancient world there has been a tendency for scholars to generalize about the appearance of houses and about the ways in which they were used. Yet here, too, more detailed examination reveals great variety in the form taken by individual dwellings, and in the ways in which they served as settings for social life. This chapter discusses some specific examples of Greek houses from different periods in order to explore some of the ways in which both their symbolic and their functional roles were defined and re-defined through time. By highlighting similarities and differences between buildings and taking a long-term perspective, it becomes clear that the influence on domestic life of various cultural dimensions such as wealth, status, and gender, waxes and wanes through time, changing in response to external social and political factors.

Domestic Space in the Early Iron Age: Defining a "House"

A first step in our investigation is to explore what we mean by a house in the ancient Greek context, and this is less straightforward than it might at first appear. Archaeological evidence shows that the architecture of the small, relatively egalitarian

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communities of the pre-literate Early Iron Age was comparatively unsophisticated in construction materials and techniques, and in plan. In southern mainland Greece a common form of structure was the apsidal building, which had an elongated rectangular shape but with one curved end (Figure 6.1a). The walls were unfired mud brick on a shallow stone footing, with a timber and thatch roof. Inside, the floor consisted of earth packed down, sometimes with a top layer of clay to give a hard, flat surface. Because these materials are not very durable, such buildings are frequently poorly preserved, so that elements of the organization of individual examples, and the range of functions they served, are sometimes open to debate. For example, one such building, Unit IV.5 at Nichoria in Messenia, occupied during the ninth century, has been interpreted in two alternative ways, either with a small roofed area and adjoining open enclosure (Coulson 1983:51), or as a larger, fully roofed building (Mazarakis-Ainian 1992:82).

Even where such buildings are relatively well preserved, they contain few of the kinds of fixtures and fittings which would give visitors to a modern western house some ideas about what kinds of activities took place inside, and about how those activities might have been organized. In a similar, slightly earlier, building from Nichoria, Unit IV.1 (Figure 6.1a), the only surviving architectural features to give away anything about the activities taking place are a pit containing ashes which is likely to have served as a hearth, and a round, masonry platform. A closer look can, nevertheless, tell us something about what people did in such buildings: in a similar structure, Unit IV, some of the objects found show that storage, preparation, and consumption of foodstuffs (including lentils, meat, and drink), and weaving of cloth took place. Space would have been relatively cramped, and instead of being divided up into separate rooms, the only partition walls were used to create a porch at the front and a small room at the rear, in the apse. Despite this, there seems to have been some orderliness in the way in which the inhabitants used their space: an assortment of utensils, together with some foodstuffs, were stored in the apse room. Broken crockery in the area around the masonry platform suggests that this was where eating and drinking took place. Further storage and cooking implements in the porch seem to indicate the use of this area for preparing meals. Lack of technology suitable for producing translucent materials during this period must have meant that any "windows" would have been simple openings in the walls and were probably small and high up, serving for ventilation rather than to let in light. Nevertheless the absence of partitions would have enabled daylight to penetrate much of the interior from the doorway and perhaps also from an opening in the roof above the hearth. The large interior space could also have been heated and lit from the hearth. Members of such households would have had to share such spaces day and night, achieving little privacy from their fellows. But how many people would have lived in this kind of building? What was their relationship to each other? And what was the full range of activities carried out here? In short, how similar was the role of this structure to what we think of as a "house" today?

Despite careful analysis of the objects found at Nichoria (Fagerström 1988; Mazarakis-Ainian 1992), these questions are difficult to answer. In an effort to count the occupants we could try to calculate how many people could be supported

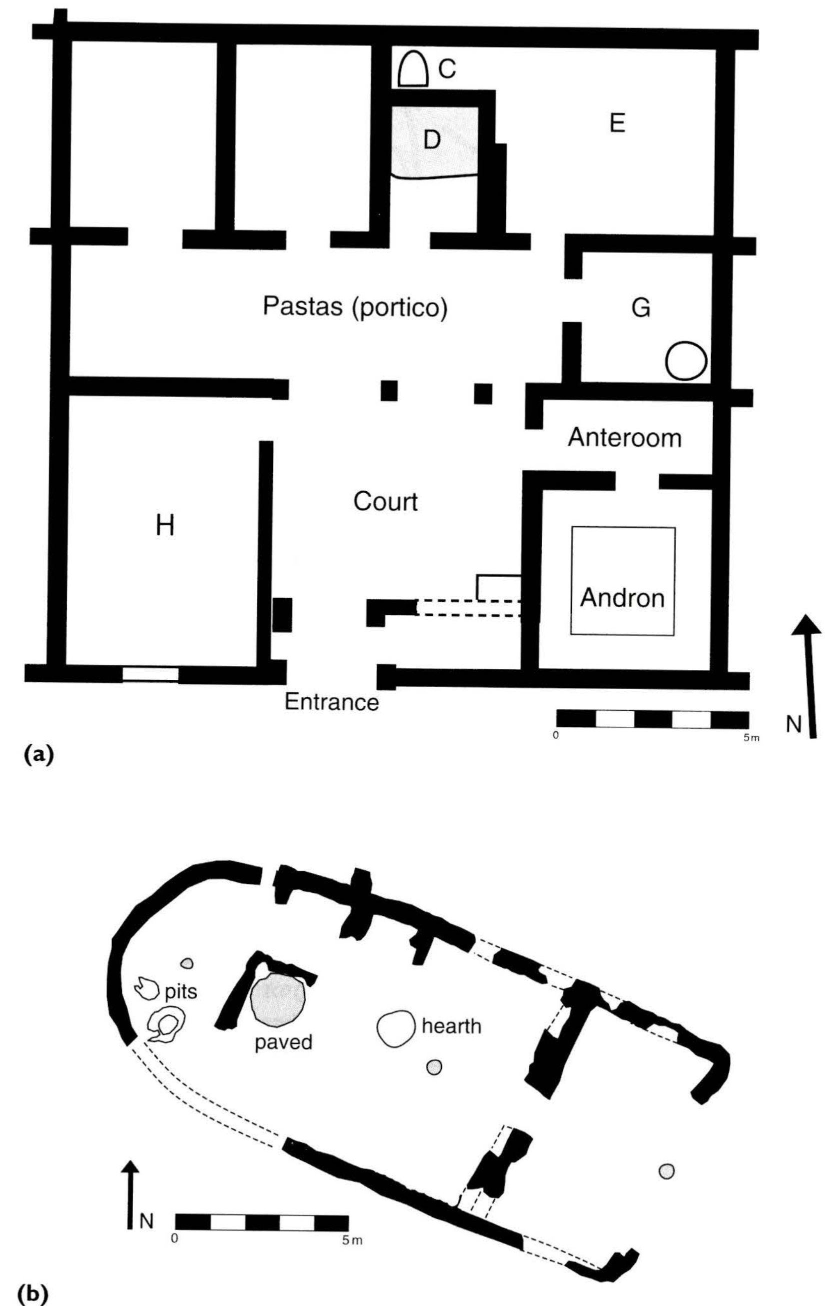
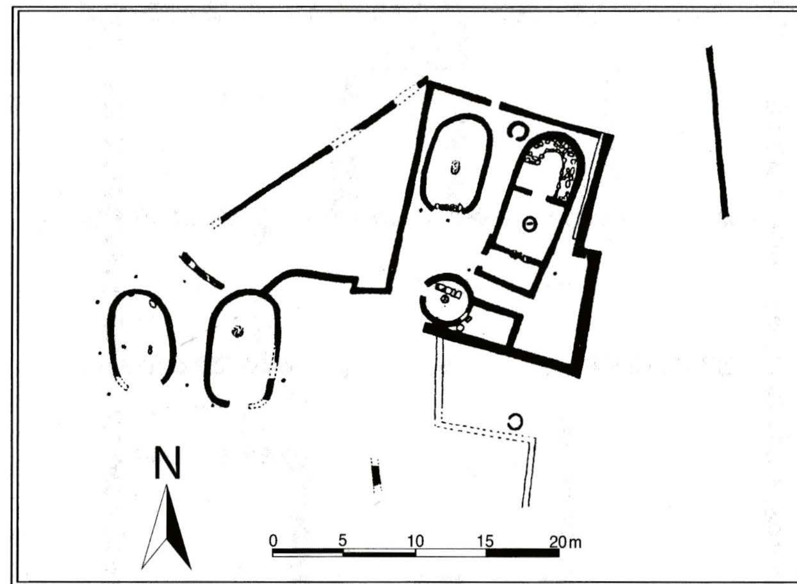


Figure 6.1 (a) Unit IV.1, Nichoria, Phase 1 (adapted from Mazarakis-Ainian, OpAth 19, 1992, Figure 2b). With the permission of Alexander Mazarakis-Ainian and the Editorial Committee of the Swedish Institutes at Athens and Rome; (b) Toumba building, Lefkandi, Euboea. After Popham and Sackett 1993, Plate 5. Reproduced with the permission of the British School at Athens. 1993, Plate 5); (c) Skala Oropos, Attica, central sector. After Mazarakis-Ainian 2002: Figure 68, Phase 5. With the permission of Alexander Mazarakis-Ainian.



(c)

Figure 6.1 *Continued*

by the amount of food stored here, but how long were those stores supposed to last? Alternatively, we could look at the number of broken vessels in order to assess how many people would have been served at one time. But how often did such breakages happen? And did individuals customarily share a single communal vessel, or did they use different ones for different purposes? We might guess that a family group was accommodated here, but even this assumption raises further questions: was this a nuclear family (just parents and children) or an extended one (including grandparents, uncles and aunts and other, more distant, relations)? Might there even have been some other form of "family," perhaps comprising one man with several wives and their offspring? Exploring the full range of activities taking place in this building is also a challenging task, since the archaeology preserves only a selection of the less perishable items with which it was once furnished. At the same time, activities may have taken place here which required little or no specialized equipment and which therefore left no trace.

There is, then, a limit to the conclusions which can be drawn on the basis of a single structure. But if we broaden the scope of our inquiry, comparing different buildings, we can improve our understanding of the way in which they were used, and gain an insight into the nature of the society which constructed and occupied these houses. The famous tenth-century apsidal building at Lefkandi in Euboea used similar materials to the Nichoria houses, but it is more carefully built and is on a much larger scale, covering an area of around 500 m^2 and comprising several separate rooms as well as a colonnade around the exterior (Figure 6.1b: the central

section was not preserved). The precise function of the building, and the exact circumstances of its construction and destruction are debated (it may never have been completed). The same area was also used for numerous burials, including those of a man and woman found in a shaft under the floor of the building itself, and further tombs dug into a mound which was raised over the top of the building's remains (Popham 1993). At nearby Eretria, a cluster of similar apsidal buildings, on the site of the later Apollo sanctuary, and dating to the eighth century, seem to have a variety of functions: while one of these was later replaced by a rectangular hekatompedon, a "hundred foot" long temple, and may therefore have served as a cult building, the finds from buildings nearby reveal that iron-working took place in one, while domestic activities were carried out in several others (Mazarakis-Ainian 1987).

By comparing the evidence from Nichoria, Lefkandi, and Eretria it becomes possible to identify certain trends and distinctions. If the Lefkandi building was a house at all, its size suggests that it may have been occupied by an extended family group. The comparatively large scale and careful construction may indicate that it functioned as a marker of the high status of the man and woman buried under its floor, and it may have also have served as a relatively luxurious dwelling for them during their lifetime, and/or as a commemorative monument dedicated to them after their deaths. Despite its relatively early date and the limitations of the building materials, architecture was being used here in a specific manner which drew a distinction between this and other contemporary structures and marked it out as different from, or at least more than an ordinary house. Thus, while the form is similar to Nichoria Unit IV.5 and buildings like it, the function of the building was probably somewhat different. This can also be seen at Eretria, where distinctions between the types of objects found inside the various structures show that there may have been some specialization, with different buildings serving domestic, craft, or perhaps also religious functions.

In sum, while the identification of a house might at first seem to be straightforward, the reality is actually more complex. The range of roles potentially performed by a domestic structure is broader than we may assume based on modern, western practice, and buildings may share a single form while fulfilling contrasting purposes. Nevertheless, comparison between different structures and their associated furnishings demonstrates the way in which a single, relatively straightforward architectural form was already starting to be adapted to a range of specialized purposes, and also to serve as a symbolic marker.

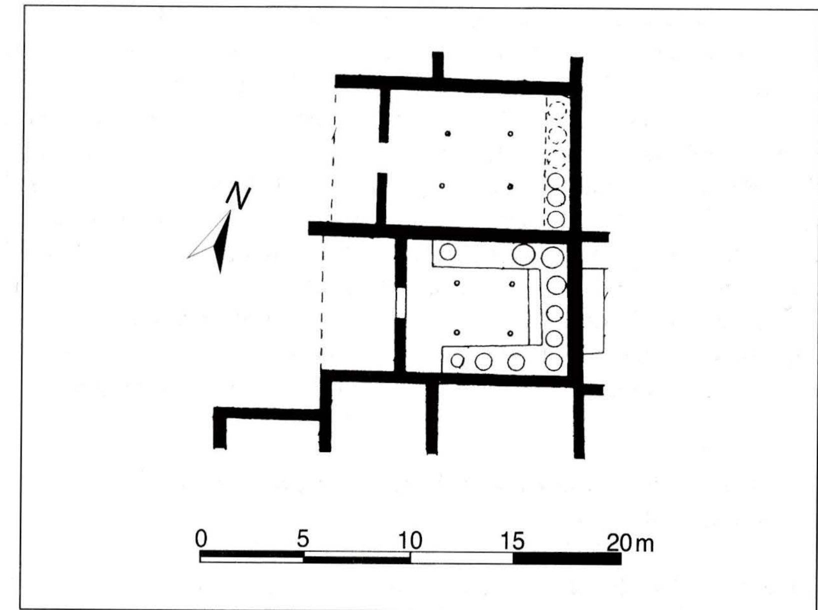
Eighth-century Housing: Social Revolution?

A different way of organizing space can be seen at Skala Oropos on the Attic coast opposite Euboea, and at Zagora on the Cycladic island of Andros, both of which were occupied during the eighth century B.C. At Skala Oropos, a cluster of buildings is built in a similar technique to the Nichoria houses. The group sits within an enclosure wall which seems to define them as belonging together as a complex

(Figure 6.1c). Whereas the scale of a building like Nichoria Unit IV.5 suggests that it may have been home to a nuclear family, it has been suggested that the complex of Oropos buildings should be interpreted as representing a single composite dwelling belonging to some form of extended family group (Mazarakis-Ainian 2002: 220–223). Whatever the reason, it seems that here, rather than a single large space like that at Nichoria—what was required was a set of separate, smaller "rooms," probably to provide different locations for various people and/or activities.

A similar development can be seen at the settlement of Zagora in the Cycladic islands (Cambitoglou et al. 1971; Cambitoglou et al. 1988) (Figure 6.2a, showing two, apparently separate, domestic units). Like many excavated ancient Greek houses, these were lived in for a long period, perhaps as much as one hundred years. During this time families may have come and gone, or a house may have been occupied by several generations of a single family. The archaeological evidence shows two phases of use, indicating how, through time, small houses were expanded to provide more living space. Superficially, the Zagora structures look quite different from those we have seen so far: they are built completely of stone slabs forming small, rectilinear rooms, and complexes that are apparently independent units share party walls with their neighbors. These differences may well result from the use of stone as the principal building material (a necessity in the island environment where timber to support a mud brick structure would have been in short supply). If we look at the organization of space, the constructions of the earlier phase bears some resemblance in plan to Nichoria Unit IV.5, with a large interior room and smaller porch area, although the space available in each of the Zagora units is more limited (around 60 m^2). During the second phase the original large room was subdivided in each case, and a further unit was built on the other side of an open space (Figure 6.2b). The organization of these different parts suggests that they functioned together as a single unit, while the addition of specific features which repeat from unit to unit suggests that they played a relatively standardized role: stone benches in the original nucleus of each one seem to have served as stands for storage vessels, and a hearth was included in the newly-constructed area. Again, a range of domestic functions seems to be represented.

In this case, the organization of space has led to the development of more detailed hypotheses about one particular aspect of the lives of the inhabitants of the site, namely relations between male and female family members. Athenian textual sources of the fifth century give the impression that within a single house men and women would have led largely separate lives, and this has often been interpreted literally as implying that different living quarters were provided for each (for example, Walker 1983). The binary structure of the Zagora houses, together with the central open area at the center, which resembles the courtyard of the later, Classical, house (see below), has been taken as evidence of a conceptual differentiation between male and female activities and areas at this early date (Morris 2000:280–286). Such a distinction is difficult to prove convincingly, however, and Zagora is, as far as we know, unique. It therefore seems preferable to see the layout of these buildings as resulting from the way in which living space was expanded through time, rather than as indicating such social ideals.



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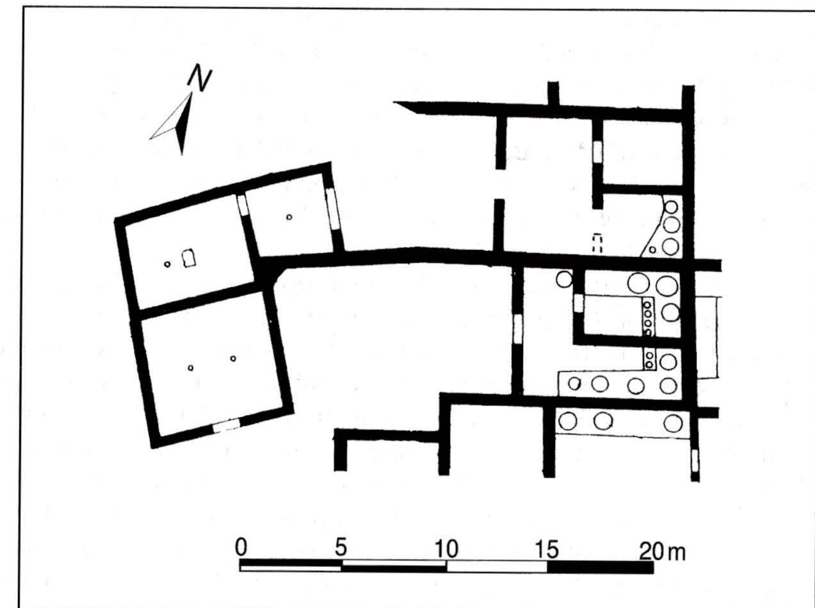


(b)

Figure 6.2 (a) Zagora, Andros, units H24/25/32, phase 1; (b) Zagora, Andros, units H24/25/32, phase 2. Both after Cambitoglou et al. 1988: plate 11. With the permission of Alexander Cambitoglou.

Nevertheless, what we can see clearly at Zagora, and perhaps also at Skala Oropos, is a trend towards the partitioning off of spaces serving different purposes. This movement towards functional specialization in architecture is characteristic of the period in general and can also be seen at a larger scale in the increasing creation of a variety of buildings for specific uses: in particular, those serving a more communal function, for example, temples, began to look different from domestic buildings (Mazarakis-Ainian 1997). Both trends suggest a new conception of architectural space as a means of providing separate areas for different activities. This kind of specialization becomes more pronounced through the Archaic and into the Classical periods when we see both an increased variety of structures, and deliberate differentiation between them by using specific constructional and decorative features (such as exterior columns), which act as visual clues as to their purpose.

The Fifth and Fourth Centuries: Spatial Organization and Social Control

The later sixth and earlier fifth centuries B.C. seem to have been a time of rapid change in the organization of domestic space in Greece. The exact timing and the detailed progression of that change are difficult to examine in detail because excavated houses of this period are relatively rare. Many small settlements like Zagora had failed and were abandoned by this time. Others, like Athens, went on to flourish, becoming *poleis* or city-states, with larger populations and complex social and political institutions. Where such expansion took place, later structures tend to have obscured or destroyed much of the evidence of the earlier housing. From the later fifth century onwards, however, examples of domestic buildings are more plentiful, and they highlight some of the radical changes in individual households that accompanied these larger-scale social developments.

A cluster of fifth-century houses from the Areopagos at Athens (Thompson 1972: 178) reveals variation in living conditions between Athenian families during this period (Figure 6.3). Like the earlier buildings, the main construction material is mud brick, supported on a stone base or socle, although the roof is now covered with tile rather than with thatch or clay. Inside, most of the floors are still simply beaten earth. The shape and size of the small houses on the western side of the block follow a pattern which is seen from the sixth century onwards, with individual units of only a few rooms leading from an open, outer courtyard, space. But those on the eastern side show that among some households there had been a radical change in the conception of what a house should be, and how it should be organized to fulfill the needs of its occupants. These two houses are comparable in scale to Nichoria Unit IV.5, but the organization of interior space is very different. In each case, a single entrance leads into a central open courtyard, surrounded by a number of separate rooms which can only be reached from the courtyard itself and which, in most cases, do not interconnect. What are the implications of this new pattern of organization? How were the lives of the families occupying this house

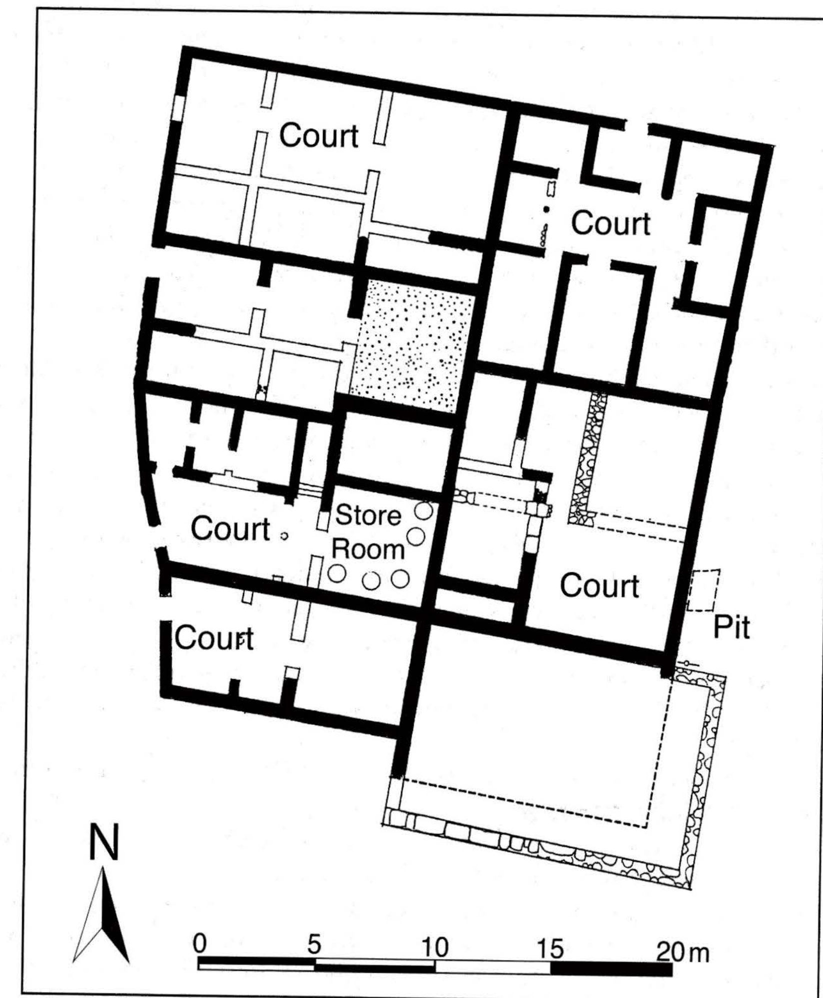


Figure 6.3 North shoulder of Areopagos group. After Thompson and Wycherley 1972: figure 42. Courtesy of the Trustees of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

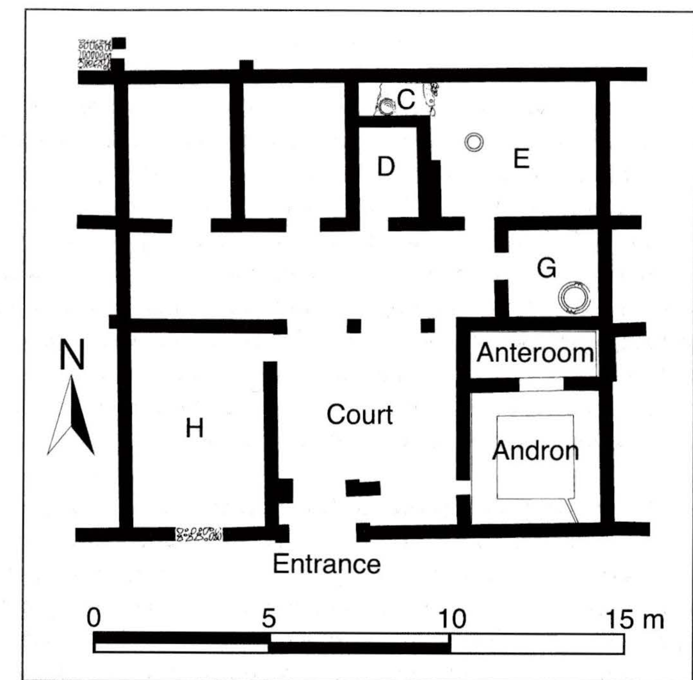
different from those of their predecessors? What kind of lifestyle were these, and houses like them, designed to facilitate?

Most obviously, the subdivision of the interior into separate rooms must have meant that in these houses a range of spaces was available for use by different members of the household and for different tasks. A possibility exists here for a kind of privacy which is not seen in a house like those at Nichoria, and at first sight this might seem to support the idea, mentioned above, that men and women occupied separate areas. But are these rooms quite as private as they first appear? And do they really suggest a binary division of space? In fact, the house is not divided into two halves which might accommodate male and female family members.

Instead, a variety of rooms radiate from the central space of the courtyard suggesting somewhat different conclusions about relationships between the inhabitants (Nevett 1999:70–73). Such an arrangement would have meant that there could not have been too many secrets in these houses: while individuals occupying different rooms were out of sight of each other, as soon as they wanted to move between rooms, they would have had to pass through the court, and their movements must therefore have been very clear to anyone sitting or standing there, or looking into here from one of the rooms. The same is also true of anyone entering or leaving the house itself: again, any visitor would have had to pass through the single street door and into the courtyard in order to reach one of the interior spaces, and would therefore also have been exposed to view.

In practice, therefore, there would have been great potential for individuals to keep an eye on each other, and to be involved in each others' business. Some of the Athenian texts of this period suggest that there was a strong obligation on individuals to demonstrate their legitimate parentage in order to avoid challenges to their right to inherit property and claim citizenship. The pattern of spatial organization in these houses, and others like them, may have been a response to such social pressures, keeping outsiders separate from female family members and ensuring that surveillance of individual family members was relatively easy. It is possible that the families of citizens were under more pressure to conform to ideal patterns of behavior than those of non-citizens, and this, as well as inequalities in wealth, may help to explain the disparity between houses seen in this block (compare Nevett 1999:167).

We do not know much about what the rooms of the Areopagos houses were used for, since we lack information on the objects found in them, and—like the earlier structures—there seem to have been few substantial architectural features which would have dictated the use of different spaces. Nevertheless, there are similar houses for which we do have such information. An example is an early fourth-century house, Avii 4, from the city of Olynthos in northern Greece, which is representative of some of the main features found in around one hundred houses partially or fully excavated at the site (Robinson and Graham 1938: 118–121; Cahill 2002:103–108) (Figure 6.4a: Avii). Again, an entrance leads from the street into a central open court which gives access to the different rooms. The building may once have boasted an upper storey, although the superstructure of unfired mud bricks and timber did not survive and its arrangement and function are unknown. But the rooms of the lower storey reveal much about the lives of the people who once occupied it. Fragments of table vessels and loom weights from the court may be the residue of activities taking place in the open air, or alternatively could be rubbish, moved here for disposal. To the north of the courtyard, a covered portico, or *pastas*, shelters the entrances to the largest of the rooms. Objects found in this space include fragments of bronze and terracotta table vessels, storage jars, and weights from scales, suggesting that the pastas was used for a variety of household chores or, at least, for storing items used for those activities. Indeed, a collection of metal bosses which are probably from a piece of wooden furniture, long since decayed, may suggest that some of these items were kept here in some sort of



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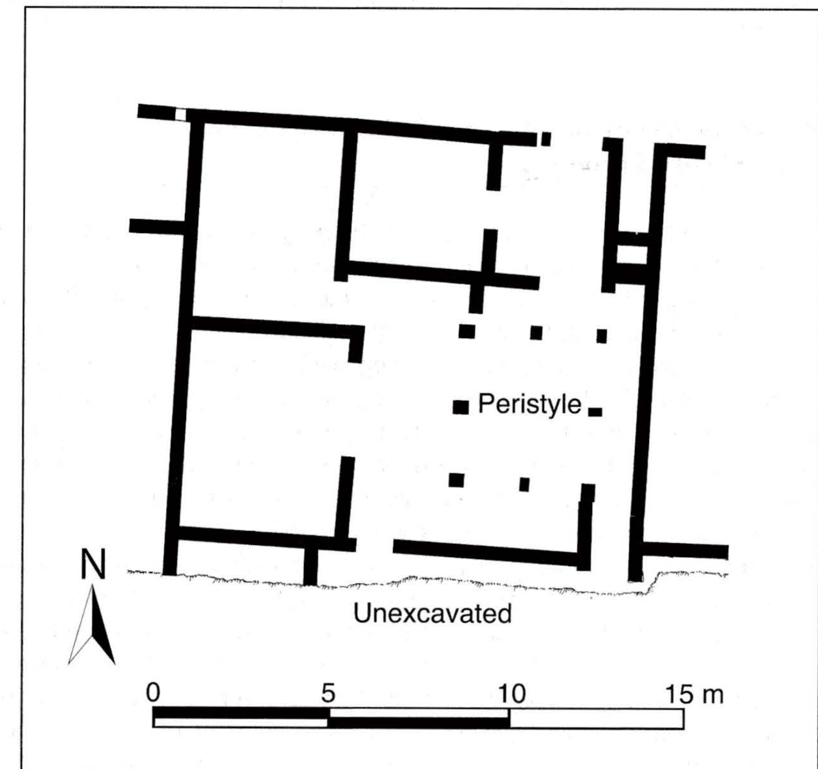

(b)

Figure 6.4 (a) Olynthos Avii 4; (b) Olynthos A3. For both, after Robinson, David Moore and Graham, J. Walter. *Excavations at Olynthus: Part VIII: The Hellenic House: A Study of the Houses Found at Olynthus. With a Detailed Account of those Excavated in 1931 and 1934*. Plate 89, Plate 99. © 1938 The Johns Hopkins Press. Reprinted with permission of The Johns Hopkins University Press.

wooden chest or cupboard. In the north east corner, a three-room complex (rooms C, D and E) seems to have served a combination of functions. Traces of ashy, burned material may indicate that a tall narrow space (D) may once have been occupied by a fire, which is likely to have been used both for cooking and for heating water. Room C is one of the few rooms which was given a hard, water-resistant floor, made of cement. A gap in the floor marks the position where a small, terracotta hip-bath once stood, although no plumbing was provided: instead, the bather had to bring (or ask someone else to bring) water to the bath, jar by jar, perhaps heated on the fire in the adjacent space. Room E seems to have been one of the main domestic areas: here, a stone mortarium would have assisted in the production of flour, and a variety of table-wares also associate the room with serving food.

Houses like this were not only places to live, but also centers for processing and manufacturing the essentials on which the household depended, and so shop or workshop areas were sometimes included. This is likely to have been the function of room H, which has its own separate entrance from the street. Fragments of large storage jars found in room G and in the space to its east, show that agricultural produce such as grain, olives, and grapes, would be brought here from the fields to be stored. At the same time, terracotta weights from looms show that essentials, such as textiles for clothes and furnishings, would also have been produced within the household.

From the Later Classical into the Hellenistic Period: Housing as Status Symbol

A number of the other areas of the Olynthos house provide only limited evidence to suggest how they were used. But one further space (labeled "andron" in Figure 6.4a) has characteristic features which indicate that it served a very specific purpose (although of course, other activities may have taken place there as well). In the southeast corner there is a square chamber, approached through a small outer room or antechamber. In both, the walls show traces of plaster colored with red, white, black and yellow pigments. Unlike the other rooms in the house, the doorway is not placed centrally but instead sits to one side. There are other unusual features, too: the floor is a durable and waterproof mortar surface, with a raised border once colored yellow. In some houses the floors of comparable rooms are set with small, black and white, or occasionally colored, pebbles forming geometric patterns or even figured scenes—an early form of mosaic. The hardness of the floor surface made it easy to clean, so that few objects have been recorded, either from this room, or from the many like it that are known at Olynthos and at other contemporary Greek settlements. But a variety of texts and images surviving from this period suggest what its purpose may have been: a central element of the social lives of Greek men during this period seems to have been the *symposium*, at which the man of the house entertained his male friends at home. Together the participants would have reclined on couches placed along the walls of the room and drunk wine.

Our square room fits perfectly the requirements of a space used for such an occasion, known in the texts as an *andron*: if wine were drunk, and spilled, here, the cement floor would have been easy to clean, and was even furnished with a drain so that it could be washed down, while the raised borders mark the position of the couches. The antechamber would have isolated this room from the rest of the house: its door was at right angles to that of the inner room, so that even when it was open, the occupants could not see out into the courtyard, and no-one elsewhere in the house could see in. In many of these houses the andron preserves a stone threshold, showing that such rooms were often fitted with solid doors which would have acted as a barrier to sound. These features suggest that particular care was taken here to ensure that activities taking place in the andron were kept separate from what was going on elsewhere in the house. It seems that one of the aims of this design was to provide privacy for visitors from the members of the household not actively entertaining them, and vice versa. There is probably some degree of distinction being drawn here between men and women, given that the room was probably used for drinking parties from which—surviving texts suggest—respectable women are likely to have been excluded. Nevertheless, more importantly there is a differentiation between members of the household and visitors coming from outside: it is these outsiders who are being kept separate from the rest of the household, isolated and contained within this room.

The andron would have provided an enclosed setting to entertain visitors, but the relatively elaborate decoration here suggests that it also played another role, as a place which could be more gracious or pleasing to spend time in than the other, undecorated, rooms of the house. Perhaps the colored walls and floor simply contributed to the comfort of the space and to the overall atmosphere of the occasions taking place here. But it seems likely that the decoration was also a way for the house owner to convey a message to his visitors: their sparing use suggests that these were relatively costly, but their presence in one room may have indicated that the family could afford to spend money on elements which were not strictly functional. Other houses of this date feature additional architectural elements which are also decorative. In another example from Olynthos, house A3 (Figure 6.4b), the pastas has been extended so that it surrounds the open court on all four sides, making a peristyle. The colonnaded effect must have been reminiscent of the public buildings of Greek cities during this period, such as the elongated stoas of the agora or the sanctuary, and perhaps they even evoked the colonnades of temple façades. Again, the result may have been to give a sense of importance and luxury to visitors entering the house, who would have had to pass through this area. What we appear to see here, therefore, is the use of the house as a symbol, to convey something about the wealth and status—or aspirations—of the family living inside. Such features are likely to have been intended as indications of their owners' good taste, elegance, and wealth.

These relatively spacious houses appear to provide generous accommodation both for the necessary activities of daily living and also for relaxation and entertainment. If the open courtyard space is included, with a ground area of nearly 300 m^2 each, the houses from Olynthos offer more living space than many families have

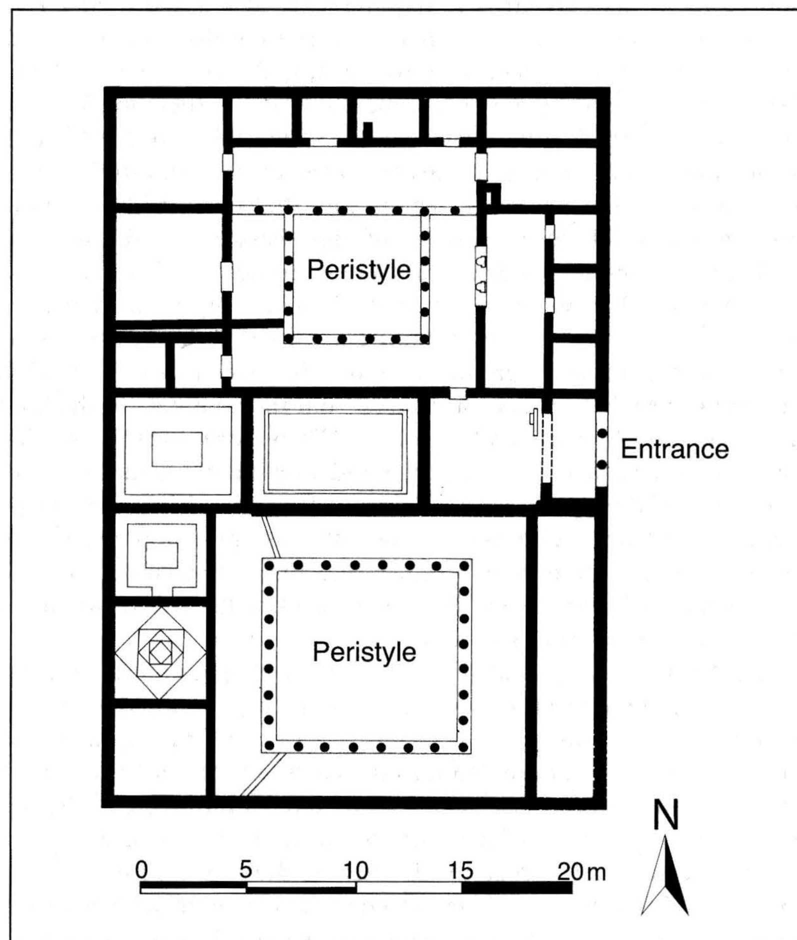

Figure 6.5 Pella, house of Dionysos. After Makaronas and Giouri 1989: Figure 142.

today, even in affluent western European towns. Nevertheless, these are not by any means the largest Greek houses known. An example of a late-fourth-century house from the northern Greek city of Pella is constructed on a different scale and with an entirely different pattern of organization, taking this trend towards display and symbolism to a new level. The house of Dionysos occupied more than 3000 m^2 in ground area, and the interior space is arranged around two separate open courtyard spaces (Makaronas and Giorgi 1989) (Figure 6.5). Why did the residents of this house require ten times more space than the families whose houses we have seen at Olynthos, and how was that space used? Aspects of the architecture provide some clues. Both of the courtyards are colonnaded peristyles, but the rooms surrounding each court are different in character. Most of those around the larger peristyle to the south are relatively large and square in shape and several clearly had mosaic floors. In contrast, the rooms to the north tend to be smaller and some are organized in clusters, with an antechamber leading to several spaces behind. Remains of

a staircase in the northeast corner of the house suggest that there was an upper storey, at least in this area.

On analogy with the houses at Olynthos it seems likely that at least some of the rooms in the southern court represent comfortable areas for living and entertaining. The reason why a variety of different rooms were needed for this purpose is less clear: were they occupied simultaneously by different groups? Or were different rooms used for different social occasions or at different stages during a single occasion? Alternatively, perhaps owning a number of decorated rooms was more a matter of making an impression on visitors than it was a practical necessity. By organizing their living space around two separate courtyards, the inhabitants of the Pella house ensured that, despite the large scale of the house, some light and air reached all of the interior rooms and patterns of access did not become too labyrinthine. But this same division would also have meant that the entertaining guests and domestic activities were now spatially separated. The two activities could take place independently and the participants would not have been within sight or earshot of each other. Furthermore, the arrangement of the rooms of the northern court into suites would probably have meant that, within an individual suite, the inhabitants would have been able to pass from room to room without being observed from the court or from other suites. The fact that this northern peristyle occupied a relatively large amount of space suggests that the domestic activities which it probably accommodated were an important aspect of the overall function of the house. A similar balance between these two priorities is seen in a handful of smaller, fourth- and third-century houses which have a comparable double courtyard layout (for example, the house of the mosaics at Eretria: Ducrey 1993; the excavated house at Maroneia: Karadedos 1990).

If the size and layout of the Olynthos houses make them suitable for occupation by a single family, then the scale, lavish decoration, and pattern of organization of the Pella house may suggest something else. Here the separate courtyards and discrete suites of rooms would have provided a variety of self-contained areas of different scales where groups of people could move about unobserved from other parts of the building. The implication is perhaps that the house was occupied, or at least frequented, by larger numbers of people who were less closely connected with each other, and who required greater separation from each other. In particular, the various elaborate rooms around the southern peristyle suggest the possibility that many guests were entertained here. The entrance to this house is at the center of the eastern side and leads into a lobby and only indirectly into either of the courts. This layout may have enabled guests to enter and leave without passing through, or even catching sight of, the domestic quarters, while at the same time members of the household could still enter and leave the domestic areas without being observed themselves. Thus whereas the Olynthos houses are essentially still intimate spaces, the Pella house seems designed to support a more "public" function, with larger numbers of people operating more independently of each other.

Both the scale and opulence of this house, and the fact that Pella is known to have been home to the Macedonian royal family, have been taken as evidence that this and other comparable houses at the site were once occupied by companions

of the Macedonian monarch (Makaronas and Giorgi 1989: 10). Whether or not this is the case, it is clear that the owner was able to mobilize considerable wealth, which also implies that he had a certain amount of power. Providing a place to receive and entertain visitors in appropriate surroundings therefore seems to have been an important aspect of the house's function. This is a pronounced trend in housing of this period and may point to some degree of withdrawal from public life by wealthy individuals (Walter-Karydi 1998).

The Second and First Centuries B.C.: Housing and Cultural Identity

The house of Dionysos at Pella, with its separate domestic and recreational courtyards, may seem to follow a significantly different pattern of organization from the smaller, single-courtyard houses. Nevertheless, if we set aside the double-courtyard layout, in some ways the house exhibits similar priorities to those seen at Olynthos, balancing the need for display against the provision of a comfortable working environment in the domestic quarters. This shows that in order to understand a house fully, it is necessary to think about the way in which it functioned as a living space, as well as simply looking at its architecture and layout. Housing from one final settlement, on the Cycladic island of Delos, will reinforce this point, and also add an extra dimension to the discussion, providing a link with the topic of Roman housing, the subject of the next section of this chapter. Here we see houses which look superficially similar to the courtyard house from Olynthos (Trümper 1998 with previous references). Upon closer inspection, however, a number of features emerge which may have something to say about a new aspect of the families who once lived here: namely, their cultural identity.

Although the island has a long history of occupation, the surviving houses date from a relatively late period, the second century B.C. and later. Stone was used for many of the walls, and the individual structures retain a number of architectural features which are often lost elsewhere. One house, the House of the Dolphins, will serve as an example (Figure 6.6). The principal entrance is through a narrow corridor to the south. The domestic quarters are formed by a series of small rooms (B, B^{I}, B^{II} and B^{III}) in the southeast corner, and could be reached from the entrance corridor without the need to pass through the court. But the majority of the interior space is organized around a single large, decorated peristyle, featuring a mosaic pool at the center with images of the dolphins which prompted its French excavators to give the house its name. Like the Pella house, there seem to have been a variety of different decorated apartments, including a large living room to the north (H) and smaller one on the east side (F), and there were further comparable spaces in an upper storey, detectable only from fallen mosaic fragments which once adorned the floors of the upstairs rooms. Although any of these areas might possibly have served for entertaining visitors, none of the ground floor rooms is configured like a typical andron: room H features a series of three doors on its south side, while F has a single broad opening on the west. In both cases the aim seems to have been to maximize the amount of light entering and to create a pleasing vista out into the

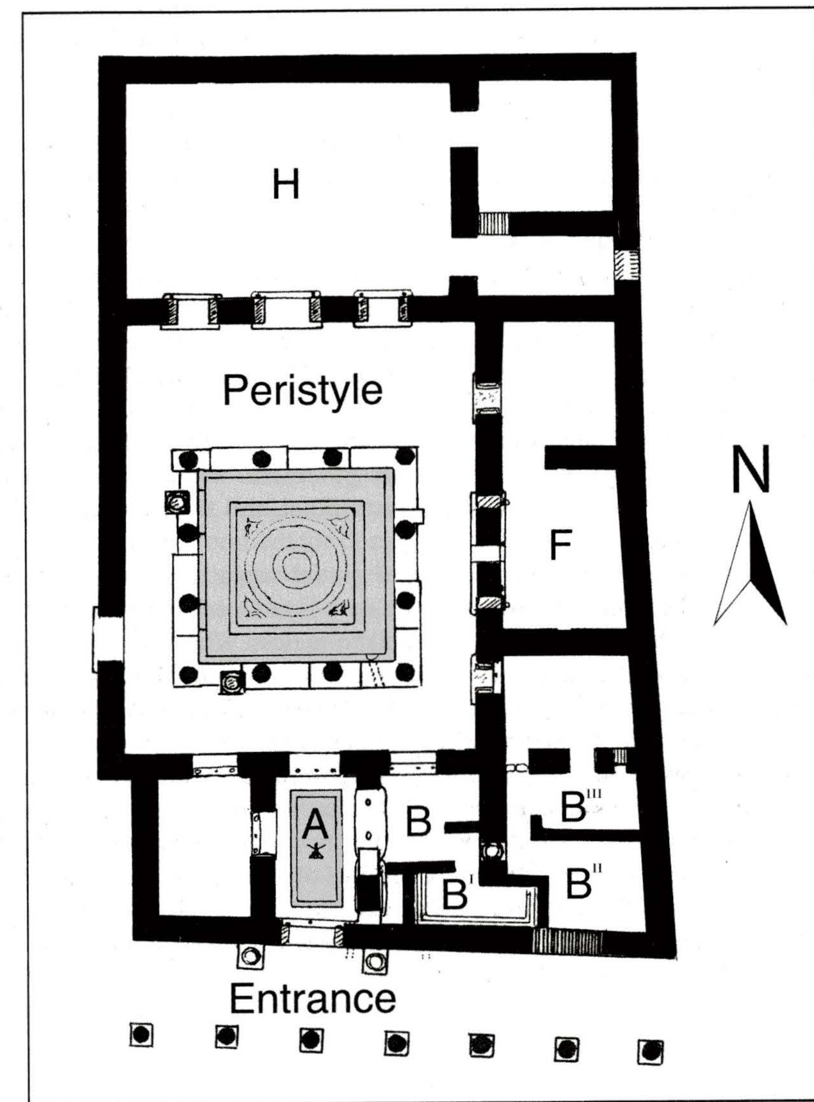

Figure 6.6 Delos, House of the Dolphins, phase 2. After Trümper 1998: figure 35. With the permission of Monica Trümper.

peristyle. Furthermore, both of these rooms feature doorways leading directly into neighboring rooms, as well as into the courtyard. The number and width of the doorways in these rooms appear unsuited to the traditional square arrangement of couches, while their close connection with the rest of the house must have given a very different feel from the isolated and enclosed andron seen at Olynthos. Both of these features suggest that the rooms in this house were designed to host a rather different kind of social occasion.

In the organization of the house as a whole, different priorities also seem to be followed from those we have seen previously. Here, the majority of space is devoted to comfortable rooms for living and entertaining, which clearly take precedence over other functions. What does this apparent imbalance tell us about the family who once lived here? It seems that the daily chores such as food preparation and cooking were being done in small side-rooms, and that the comfort of the members of the household who were carrying out these tasks was not important. Such a pattern of organization suggests a different kind of social life from what we have seen before. We know from inscriptions that during this period the island of Delos was occupied by a range of merchants from different parts of the Mediterranean, including Italy and the eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, the influence of both of these areas can be seen in the decoration of the House of the Dolphins. At the time of excavation the south façade of the house featured paintings of religious rituals of a kind traditionally associated with the Roman festival of the *compitalia* (Bruneau 1970: 613–614), while the mosaic pavement of the entrance hall (A) featured an image of Tanit, another religious symbol, this time originating in the eastern Mediterranean.

It seems possible, then, that the pattern of spatial organization we are seeing in this house is an indication of influences from new, non-Greek patterns of domestic life which brought different priorities and social practices. Whether we can associate specific motifs, such as the Tanit mosaic, with individual house owners is less clear. Such features could have a relatively long life—longer, perhaps, than the ownership of a single person; and as the juxtaposition of the Tanit symbol with the compitalia painting shows, a house may have elements suggesting the influence of more than one culture. It therefore seems possible that what we are seeing at Delos is the process of "cultural fusion"—the creation of a new culture (for example, Woolf 1997), which brought with it a fresh conception of what a house should be and how its occupants should live, and one which was only partly influenced by the conventions developed in the earlier Greek houses discussed above (for further discussion, see Nevett 2010: 63–88).

Conclusion

The houses discussed here are just a few of the numerous excavated examples from different periods, but they show how closely individual households were involved in the broader social and political changes taking place in the communities in which they were located. Between the Early Iron Age and the second century B.C., it is possible to see profound shifts, not only in the kinds of structures being built, but also in the ways in which domestic life was conceptualized and in the social priorities driving the organization of household space. During the ninth and eighth centuries we see the beginning of a transformation of a single, multi-functional space into physically separate, functionally specific areas used for storage and living. By the fifth century, although some households were still occupying small dwellings with few rooms, others had come to inhabit larger houses divided into a variety of

different rooms. This type of structure seems to express a new requirement of domestic space: to provide visual and aural separation, both for the household as a whole from the wider community, and for its occupants from each other. The possibility for social control offered by the dominance of the courtyard as a circulation space suggests that the emergence of this form of house is connected with the gradual crystallization of the concept of citizenship, and thereby, perhaps, with the formation of the *polis* or city-state itself (Nevett 2004; Westgate 2007).

From the late fifth century and especially the fourth century, the increasing use of architectural decoration points to another trend, namely towards more explicit manipulation of private houses as symbols of the wealth and status of their occupants. This becomes particularly pronounced in the mid-fourth century when it is expressed in a proliferation of decorated reception and living-rooms. The growing number and lavishness of these facilities may correspond to the loss of political independence of individual poleis, expressing a decline in the importance of public life and civic institutions and an increase in the use of the house as a location for conducting business. At first, such structures seem to maintain the ideal of providing a comfortable environment for domestic activities, by arranging reception rooms and service quarters in separate suites, sometimes with their own courtyards. With some of the elite residences at Delos, however, we see a marked change: decorated display and living-rooms take priority, while the domestic areas are relegated to small, cramped rooms, often close to the entrance or with separate access. This change suggests the introduction of new cultural norms and social practices accompanying the influx of merchants from the western and eastern Mediterranean during the second century B.C. It is less clear whether we can identify the influences of specific cultural groups from these new patterns of domestic spatial organization, or whether we can interpret the use of particular motifs used in wall and floor decorations as expressions of cultural affiliations, religious identity, or other personal statements being made by individual house owners. Such issues can best be addressed by viewing the organization and decoration of the houses at Delos in a wider Mediterranean context and looking at how housing generally was being manipulated by the elites of the expanding Roman Empire. These themes are taken up in Chapter 6(b).

NOTE

The references for this chapter are on pp. 244–8.

6 (b)

Housing and Households

The Roman World

Bettina Bergmann

To the Romans, the house was a powerful symbol, a sign of man's social rank and a tool for learning. Educated Romans trained their memories by mentally constructing domestic interiors and placing cues at certain points to serve as visual triggers upon subsequent returns. No wonder that ancient writers portray the house as an extension of the self, signaling piety to divine protectors and social and genealogical status to the outside world. For this reason, when an important man suffered a *damnatio memoriae*, his house, along with his portraits and inscriptions, was wiped out of existence as a systematic eradication of his memory (*Ad C. Herennium* 3.16–24; Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.86.351–354; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 11.2.17–22; Bodel 1997).

The metaphorical meanings of the Roman house distinguish it fundamentally from the Greek house. But we must remember that there was no single Roman house. The notion of "the" Roman house is a construct, based upon passages from elite Latin authors together with a few buildings in Republican Italy. Textbooks often illustrate a static ground plan with a canonical arrangement that, along with Roman law, language, and other social forms, conveys a view of cultural uniformity. In other accounts, the Italic house evolves along with Rome's territorial expansion in the Mediterranean: the small, introspective square building gradually spreads wings and opens out into light, air, and nature to include a spacious, colonnaded courtyard at the back. A microcosm of this evolution resides at the very place of Rome's origins on the Palatine Hill, where the post-holes of Romulus's Iron Age hut survive beside aristocratic, multilevel mansions and the massive terraces of later imperial palaces.

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While this picture may hold truth for some parts of central Italy during the Republic, the story of Roman housing is far more complex. During the empire, between the first and fourth centuries A.D., peoples under Roman rule occupied areas extending from Scotland to Africa to Syria, and factors like climate, terrain, and local customs greatly influenced how they lived. So too did social class. While the elite could own several townhouses and country villas and fashion them as they wished, the majority inhabited cramped quarters in cities or rustic wooden shacks in the countryside. By the first century A.D., Roman cities featured row houses and high-rise apartment buildings (*insulae*), forerunners of the apartment blocks seen in many western cities today.

This chapter takes up a few contemporary issues concerning the Roman house. In contrast to the scarce evidence for Greek houses, information abounds about Roman dwellings. There survive ancient descriptions and relatively well-preserved buildings, replete with decorations, furniture, and, on the Bay of Naples, even the actual bodies of inhabitants and their pets (Guzzo 2005). Yet despite this abundance, the same basic questions raised for early Greek houses pertain to the Roman: how many people lived in a dwelling? What was their relationship to each other? And what was the full range of activities carried out there? In short, how similar was the role of this structure to what we think of as a "house" today? It is a curious fact that we still know very little about the actual goings-on in Roman homes, and recent research has thrown into doubt that which we thought we knew. Even structures that archaeologists have identified as dwellings in Pompeii were not exclusively residential, but incorporated shops, rental units, bakeries, fulleries, clubhouses, and restaurants. Indeed, the Latin word for house, *domus*, signifies not just the dwelling but the household or family unit, and that unit was not the nuclear family we know; it comprised a wide network of relationships including in-laws, distant relatives, slaves, and ex-slaves (Gardner and Wiedemann 1991; Nevett 1997; Rawson 2011).

This discussion thus addresses questions similar to those aimed at Greek houses, but it follows a typological and thematic order rather than a chronological one. The goal is for the reader to get a sense of the range of evidence for Roman housing at various times and places, and within that range to discern certain features and patterns in the ways space was constructed, not just for the universal requisites of shelter, water, and light, but also to meet individual needs and desires. A word should be said about the evidence for Roman housing, because the accidents of survival produce an unbalanced picture. In many provincial areas, such as Roman Britain, the scattered archaeological remains are difficult to identify, and, without ancillary texts, invite speculation and inevitable comparison with the small town of Pompeii, so well preserved from the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79. What, then, makes houses across the Roman domain alike, and how do they differ? We shall see that, despite its variety, Roman domestic architecture shares a few basic elements in plan and décor. Especially in wealthier homes across the empire, one finds the same prestigious architectural elements and costly materials, especially marble. Indeed, great expense was taken to import marble into the densely forested northern provinces, where its presence as columns and inlay conveyed an owner's

wealth and status, just as did splashing jet fountains in domestic gardens planted in the dry terrain of North Africa.

The Atrium House

We begin with the atrium house, the perceived norm of Roman housing. Here one point must be stressed. The basic design of a central space with a partly open roof surrounded by small rooms had been a hallmark of domestic space in the Mediterranean since the Bronze Age. Roman atrium houses can be seen as variations on this form, which was widespread in the ancient world long before Romulus's hut arose on the Palatine hill in the eighth century B.C. In Italy, the earliest remains of the atrium were discovered in Rome and at Roselle and date to the sixth century B.C.; painted Etruscan chamber tombs of the same date simulate an analogous layout (Gros 2001:35–37). By this time, Greek influence was pervasive in Italy and may well account for the adoption of a central open hearth ringed by small rooms. Whatever its origins in Italy, the atrium house reached its apogee in Republican Rome as the model residence for aristocrats, many of whom lived near the Forum Romanum. Two large, sixth-century B.C. dwellings found on the slopes of the Palatine, each with shops opening on to the street and an interior courtyard, remained relatively unchanged for 400 years, after which they were subdivided into multiple dwellings. One, perhaps the sumptuous residence of Aemilius Scaurus, contained a basement with baths and small cells (for slaves?) (Claridge 1998:111–112). By the first century B.C., as Cicero relates, homeowners in Rome had become highly competitive (*De domo sua*). Properties were bought and sold at a quick pace, and status accrued through a house's grand scale, imported materials, and unobstructed views; façades bore the spoils of battle and atria displayed extensive family genealogies (Wiseman 1987).

In his treatise on architecture dedicated in the late first century B.C. to the first Roman emperor Augustus, Vitruvius codifies the basic elements of a Roman house in distinction to the Greek. The heart of the house, he claims, is the atrium with its open roof (*compluvium*) and square basin below it (*impluvium*). As the main source of light, air, and water, the atrium functioned as the primary circulation space for the inhabitants and for the reception of visitors and clients, who entered from the street through the *fauces* (throat), the numinous boundary between home and the outside world. The atrium was a vital site of memory, the *focus* of the ancestors, and contained familial busts and epitaphs as well as active shrines to the indwelling spirits, the *Lares* and the *Penates*. The *tablinum*, directly across from the entrance, had traditionally housed the marriage bed that had produced the *familia*, and here sat the prosperous *paterfamilias* to receive his morning clients in the daily greeting of clients, *salutatio.*

With Rome's spreading influence in the third century B.C., atrium houses begin to appear elsewhere in central Italy. Archaeological remains in Pompeii suggest that the representational and performative functions of the axially aligned reception spaces—the fauces, atrium, tablinum—encouraged the creation of carefully composed vistas into the house from the street. By the second century B.C., that view penetrated yet further to glimpse a new, secondary focus of the house, the peristyle, a colonnaded courtyard at the back of the house filled with plants and fountains, onto which opened *cubicula* and *triclinia* for intimate dining, leisure, and entertainment. But while such inviting prospects may have allowed ocular access to the interior, only a privileged few could actually enter and move along that axis, and much of domestic design catered to those high within the immediate social hierarchy. This is evident in the placement of more elaborate, figural frescoes and mosaics in particular rooms, as it is in the sculptural arrangements and gardens that tend to align with certain positions of reclining viewers in a room (Wallace-Hadrill 1994; Zanker 1998). Scholars have emphasized these views, shaped by geometric forms and planar recession, as paradigmatic of Roman vision, yet such a paradigm obviously excludes the multiple sightlines of those who were *not* standing at the front door or lying in a place of honor on a dining couch. In illustrating the house, we must allow for a variety of spatial arrangements that in turn complicate standard assumptions about Roman experience and house design.

Vitruvius's atrium house finds a few close parallels in first-century B.C. Italy; most townhouses, however, are rather loose variations on his plan. What is more, recent studies of texts and excavated contexts demonstrate that the uses of rooms are more ambiguous than Vitruvius infers. Rooms were multifunctional, as people and furniture moved around the house depending upon the season or the time of day. The atrium was used for mundane purposes like storage, cooking, and weaving by people of varying ranks, much like the central courtyard in classical Greek homes (Allison 2004; Dickmann 2011). *Triclinium* and *cubiculum*, routinely translated as dining room and bedroom, in fact rarely connote a specific function in ancient usage (Leach 1997; Riggsby 1997). Romans did not reserve spaces for sleeping or eating. Even those triclinia and cubicula in which interior decoration demarcates the placement for a bed or couches could be used for any number of activities, and some formed parts of larger suites designed for entertainment (Wallace-Hadrill 1994:52–57). It also appears that most Romans did not retreat for solitude, except for the amorous couple or the wealthy villa owner who might construct a special space for his own personal reflection (Pliny *Epistulae* 2.17.24; Riggsby 1997). Still, even if the kind of privacy so cherished in the current Western home was not desirable, we must remember that "privacy" simply means not being seen, and missing from the excavated shells of houses are not only upper stories but the wooden doors and curtains that once divided spaces of the interior, as did slaves, the "talking equipment" of the home. It is here that the newer investigations of human, animal, and plant remains, long overlooked by archaeologists, can add much to the picture of life in the household (Jashemski 1979; 1993; 2002; Guzzo 2005).

In order to understand the Roman house, then, we must abandon modern notions of domestic space as segregated by activity, gender, age, or status. In this regard, Roman houses do, in fact, differ from those of classical Greece, where the *andron* served as a space for male gatherings and separate quarters may have existed for women (on this problem: Nevett 1999:154–155). Even in the atrium, where the

paterfamilias received honors from the outside world, the *materfamilias* also held court, and household slaves would have been everywhere in the house, at night sleeping on the atrium floor or in a side room near the master or mistress.

The complexity of the Roman household with its diverse inhabitants, the mobility of furniture and objects, and the flexible uses of parts of buildings like upstairs quarters (which could serve short-term tenants and slaves alongside wealthy owners) can frustrate even the identification of "domestic space." It is clear that the presence of artisanal or commercial labor does not imply a lesser dwelling. What is more, the townhouse must be considered within its larger urban context, for its orientation, dimensions, and plan often arose from a preexistent street grid. The messier picture emerging from new research and excavations results from an oft overlooked dimension of Roman housing: change over time. While some homes remained within a family for several generations, others were frequently bought and sold or rented. Again, the houses in Pompeii are especially revealing, for some evolved over a span of four centuries, changed ownership, suffered fires and earthquakes, and in some cases were abandoned, subdivided, and transformed into something entirely new.

A recent project sheds light on the development of one house together with its city block. The House of the Vestals (VI.1,7) a small masonry house built in the late third century B.C., underwent a series of expansions over two and a half centuries, incorporating adjacent houses and shops and adding amenities like separate service quarters, a latrine, a cooking area, a bath with hypocaust heating, gardens with waterworks, and reception rooms with elaborate frescoes and floor mosaics. When Vesuvius erupted in A.D. 79, the House of the Vestals was again being refurbished but, unlike other houses damaged by earthquakes in the early 60s, showed no signs of decline. One significant change was that the house had become self-sufficient for its water; no longer dependent upon the town aqueduct, its splashing fountains and baths ceased to exist. This change reminds us of another critical factor in the appearance of a house, that of personal *choice*. For wealthy Romans, technology could be replaced by slave labor, in this case for lugging buckets of water (Jones and Robinson 2004).

Despite the numerous variations in layout, the atrium appears to have been standard in central Italy during the Republic and Early Empire, and a few atrium houses have been found in northern Italy and in Spain and southern France (George 1997; Gros 2001:144–145, 157–159). No atrium plan, in contrast, survives in North Africa. In Italy, the atrium began to go out of favor along with changes in land ownership in the Early Empire. In Rome, especially after the fire of 64 A.D. and Nero's vast appropriation of property for his Domus Aurea (Golden House), elite homeowners moved from the Palatine to other hills, where they resided among modest residences and shops. Apparently no new atrium houses were built after the first century A.D., but older atrium houses still survived in the capital city; as late as the third century A.D., the Severan Marble Plan records three on the Viminal Hill (Steinby 1995). By the fourth century, the atrium seems to have been replaced by the audience hall as the main room of a wealthy house (Patterson 2000).

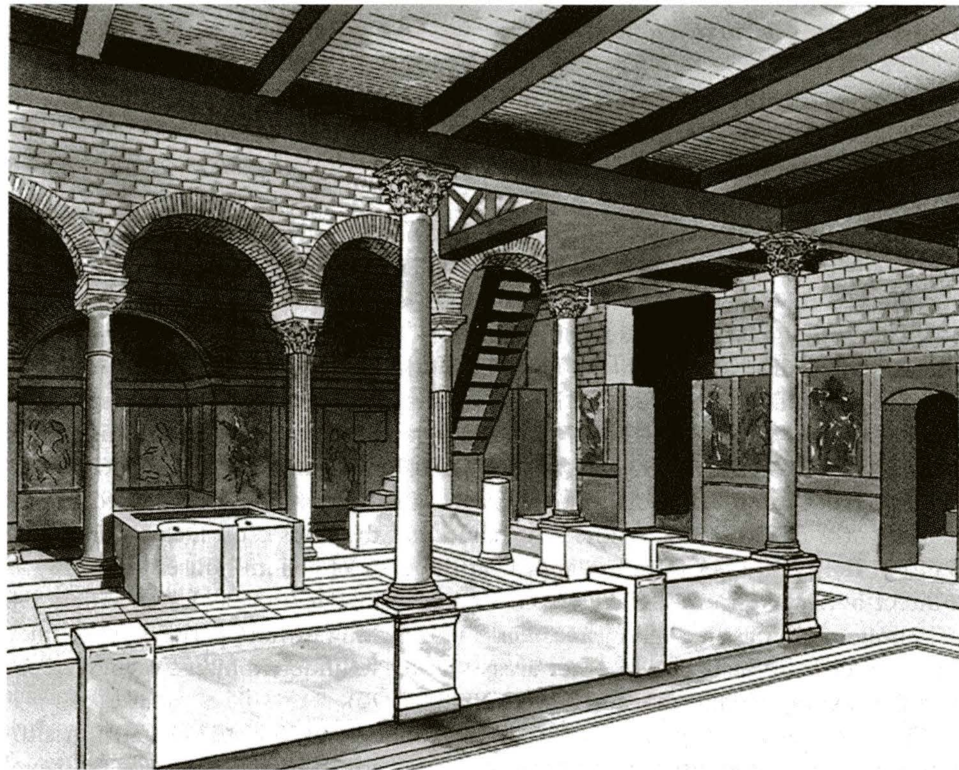
The Peristyle House

If we must identify a typical dwelling within the Roman world as a whole, it would have to be the peristyle, or courtyard, house. Thousands of peristyle houses survive throughout the empire; here a few general observations and examples must suffice.

Important evidence exists on the small island of Delos for the transition from the Greek to the Roman plan in the late Hellenistic period. Dwellings built during the second century B.C. to house foreign merchants correspond in form to other peristyle houses in Greece, but manifest a new emphasis on reception rooms, whose embellishment with floor mosaics, colorful murals, and fountains resemble wealthy Pompeian homes like the House of the Faun, itself apparently inspired by Hellenistic precedents. This cross-cultural development engendered a cosmopolitan vocabulary in which architectural features like columns and pediments served semiotic, non-structural functions, and frescoes and figural mosaics evoked earlier masterworks of Greek art. At the same time that the houses on Delos were being built, in Italy peristyles began to appear at the back of atrium houses, evidently as a direct borrowing from Hellenistic Greek houses, palaces or, as Latin writers tell us, public buildings like the *gymnasium*. The resulting atrium–peristyle plan finds close parallels in Sicily and in other areas that came under Roman sway in Greece and the eastern Mediterranean (Nevett 2002:91–94).

Most houses and villas in Roman territories, however, omitted the atrium altogether and instead focused rooms around one or more peristyles, thereby following early precursors in Greece and Turkey. In northern Italy and the northwestern provinces, the peristyle house was a new phenomenon that needed to be adapted to local conditions. Radiant heating, for example, was provided through the hypocaust system: floors were supported on stacks of tiles (*pilae*) and hot air circulated under the floor from a furnace, passing along channels and up through vents in the walls. Other traits of the new, Romanized houses were roofs made of terracotta tiles, lead pipes to carry water into interiors, and, in wealthier homes, glass windows for light and solar heat in large rooms and baths (Perring 2002). In general, it seems that even when an atrium was included, more important than any canonical layout of rooms was the sheer size of a house (Wallace-Hadrill 1994:91–103; Gros 2001:136–230).

By the second century A.D., the peristyle had become the primary hallmark of an affluent Roman's home throughout the provinces, both east and west. Of the myriad variations found across the empire, two can be discussed here. Both conform to the larger urban fabric of gridded streets, which limits their size and shape; in both, columns, frescoes, and mosaics follow fashions seen in other Roman provinces. But each complex uniquely adapts such standard features to the local climate and terrain. At Ephesus in modern Turkey, two blocks of wealthy houses, built in the Augustan period and renovated over several centuries, rose on ascending terraces up a hillside in the center of the city (Figure 6.7 a, b). Located between two main streets, inhabitants of the terraced complex looked onto the bustling city with

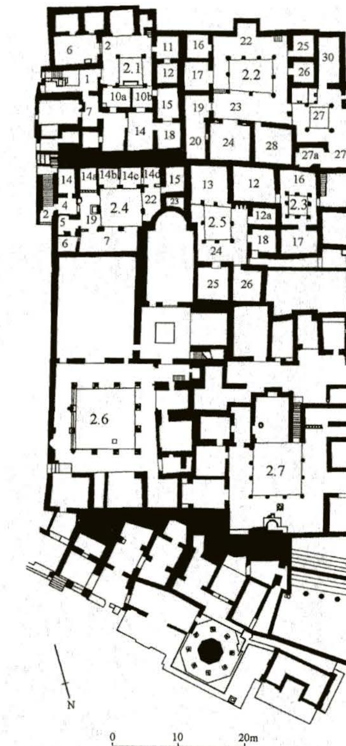


(a)

Figure 6.7 Terrace Houses, Ephesus. (a) View of peristyle of House II. After Özeren 1993:61; (b) Ground plan of terrace houses. After Özeren 1993:60.

its baths, temples, and agora (Gros 2001:218–223). Individually, the houses follow the local Hellenistic plan, with rooms grouped around a 25–50 m^2, light-filled peristyle with an impluvium. Together, they comprised an ingenious arrangement whereby the roof of one storey formed the terrace of the next above it; apartments shared baths, hypocaust heating, and water cisterns. A visitor reached a house's entry by ascending a narrow, stepped street. There, in contrast to Italian houses, the caller encountered no axial vista through the dwelling, but entered and approached the central peristyle from an angle. Nevertheless, shifting circulation patterns and new rooms added in the course of renovations do show Roman influence. For instance, the presence of a triclinium signals a shift in focus to the social ritual of the meal and its entertainments.

The condominium-like complex in Ephesus contained richly embellished interiors with precious marble inlay, fine floor mosaics, and wall frescoes very similar to domestic spaces in the Western provinces. The largest, Terrace House II, boasted two peristyles with Corinthian columns, a long corridor covered end-to-end with



(b)

Figure 6.7 *Continued*

black-and-white geometric mosaics, and another with vibrant marine mosaics depicting Triton and a Nereid riding a sea horse, recalling floor mosaics found in North African peristyle houses. The wall paintings, the best preserved in the Roman east, exhibit pictorial modes including *faux marbre*, painted gardens, and mythological battles that belong to a *koine* of patterns and motifs with the rest of the empire. Thus, while local topography inspired an original architectural arrangement, room use and interior decor express tastes and values of Roman life that were disseminated far and wide. The recent finds of houses at Zeugma bear close affinities to Ephesus (Early et al. 2003).

Another unique variation on the courtyard house is seen at Bulla Regia in North Africa, where several dwellings within a city block evolved over time (Thébert 1987:334–339; Gros 2001:177–180). Because outward expansion was limited, in the early third century A.D. owners dug 6 meters down into the earth to create a new underground level, replicating the axial layout upstairs (Figure 6.8). Descending a deep flight of steps into the subterranean suite in the House of the Hunt, residents could find respite from the grueling heat of summer in rooms that were insulated by the surrounding soil and cooled by a remarkable system of air conditioning that directed air through vents in the earth. Light and air entered through

Figure 6.8 House of the Hunt, Bulla Regia, Tunisia, fourth century A.D. Photo: Rebecca Molholt

the above-ground windows, skylights, and open peristyle, which, although underground, otherwise resembles other Roman peristyles, with tall columns, vaults and arches, water pools and fountains, painted walls, and glittering mosaics.

The houses at Ephesus and Bulla Regia exemplify the immense adaptability of the peristyle scheme and the creative solutions made to suit local environmental conditions. A survey of the thousands of Roman houses in the provinces would show that in form, living spaces continued the tradition of the Hellenistic peristyle

house, but that—within that framework—the objects and surfaces it contained, and most likely the social activities that took place, constituted something new, a dynamic mix of indigenous and imported, Roman elements. In the past, scholars have assumed that Rome set the patterns for the elite living in provincial towns, but factors of topography and climate were just as formative in shaping individual dwellings, as well as regional identity, during the empire.

Insulae and Multiple Dwellings

Despite the predominance of the individual domus in discussions of Roman life, most people did not reside in a single home but rather in rental units alongside many neighbors. The city blocks in Pompeii and Herculaneum were far more than a simple collection of independent houses; even within a single house, exterior stairs, separate entries, and self-contained suites suggest rental units, especially in upper floors (Ling 1997; De Kind 1998; Jones and Robinson 2004). In fact, almost half the inhabitants in Pompeii did not own, but rented, their homes. When Vesuvius erupted, proprietors of larger houses were seeking tenants to rent living quarters (known as *cenacula* or *pergulae*) and had advertisements painted on exterior walls; one announcement in the Praedia of Julia Felix (II.4) reads: "FOR RENT/ from August 13, with a 5-year lease/ on the property of Julia Felix, daughter of Spurius/ the elegant Venus Baths/ street-front shops and booths/and second-storey apartments" (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 4.1136).

But by far the biggest demand for multi-dwelling housing was in the city of Rome, where roughly a million people lived by the Early Empire. While the poorest slept in the streets or wherever they could find shelter, as in theaters or tombs, a large cross-section of society occupied spaces in high-rise complexes (Hermansen 1981). Called *insula*, or island, because it was surrounded on all sides by streets or alleys, an apartment block was usually owned by a prosperous individual who rented to long-term tenants and to the less wealthy on short-term leases. Regionary catalogues state that in the fourth century A.D. Rome had 44,300 insulae compared with 1,790 domus! Of these, only a few remain. An apartment complex of five or more stories survives at the base of the Capitoline Hill in Rome (Figure 6.9). Constructed in brick-faced concrete in the early second century A.D., the multi-use building had single-shop units in the first three stories, cell-like rooms on the fourth story (possibly for slaves), and a large apartment on the fifth story (Claridge 1998:232–234).

Multi-unit housing structures followed two main spatial principles: adjacency and containment. As was the case in city blocks of Pompeii and the terraced complex at Ephesus, adjacent living quarters of insulae shared walls, and the ceiling of a lower dwelling served as the floor for the one above. The principle of containment can be seen in the enclosure of separate living units within a single city block, with each unit turned in toward a common courtyard or light well for illumination, air, water, and, possibly, for communal cooking pits. While house owners of Bulla Regia expanded down into the earth, in most cities, planners exploited the vertical

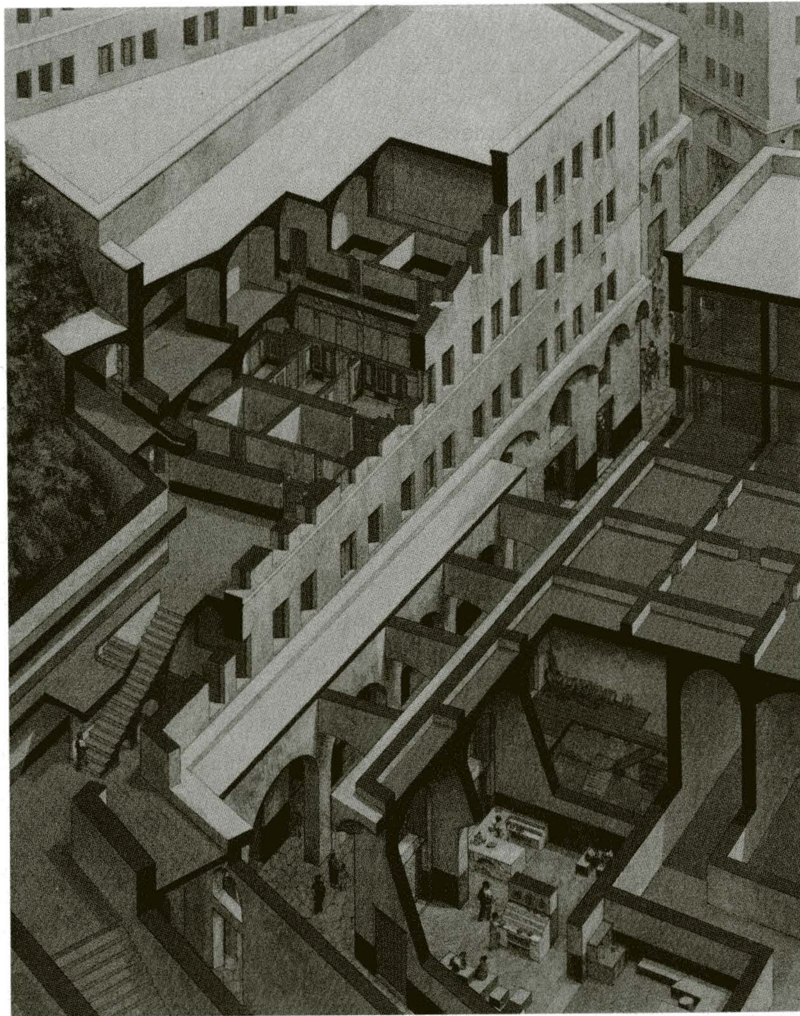


Figure 6.9 Watercolor reconstruction of apartment block at the foot of the Capitoline Hill, Rome. After Connolly 1998:142. Photo: akg-images London

dimension and built skyscrapers. From early on, the height of Roman insulae was a problem, and Augustus limited their street fronts to 70 Roman feet (21 meters), allowing for five to seven stories, and possibly more at the back if the building was terraced against a slope. While ground floors of most insulae featured shops (*tabernae*) with a room at the back for boarding, upper stories show a variety of arrangements, usually of three to five rooms. Some apartments, reached by external staircases, had no central circulation space; instead, rooms opened onto each other, so that people would have to pass through one room to arrive at another, and light and air entered through windows and balconies. Although one would expect that a

higher living unit would be less desirable due to the challenge of hauling goods and water, some luxury suites are located on the topmost floors, no doubt because of the benefits of exposure to daylight and views.

Similar patterns appear in apartment dwellings in other Roman cities: they take up entire city blocks, share walls and interior courtyards, and leave the lower floor for commercial and artisanal purposes. There are, of course, exceptions to these patterns. In Rome itself, old houses were converted, like a domus depicted on the *Forma Urbis* plan (Fragment 543; Najbjerg; n.d.). An important and rare survival of a multi-dwelling complex consisting of second-century houses and baths with their mosaics, murals, statues, and small objects *in situ* was found near Rome's Termini train station; called the Villa Negroni, the complex must be one of many creative solutions to housing in the congested capital city.

The best evidence for alternative apartment housing survives at Ostia, Rome's nearby port city. There, several blocks of insulae, called garden apartments, were grouped into a single complex and surrounded by green areas. Another complex, called *medianum* apartments, was more spacious and must have housed affluent renters; rooms grouped around three sides of a wide corridor (the *medianum*) that was lit through large external windows opened onto a court or the street (DeLaine 2004). A third type of multi-unit complex that became especially common in the northern and western provinces was the strip or row house; a long side faced the street, from which one or more wings extended behind, or, where frontage was expensive, the narrow end faced the street. Unlike the enclosed insula, this plan looked outward for light and air rather than onto an inner central court (Perring 2002).

In insulae, as in townhouses, wealthy and poor were close neighbors (Patterson 2000). Seneca lived above a bath complex in Rome and complained about the grunts of exercising bathers, the cries of hawkers, and splashes in the pools (*Epistulae* 56). With more people living in close proximity came more disease and crime, and other city-dwellers relate the dangers and squalor of apartment living. Fire was a constant threat in apartments built with timber because tenants cooked on open fires and used oil lamps for illumination, and some landlords invested in fire insurance, but it seems that conditions improved when the use of brick-faced concrete became the norm in the Early Empire (Juvenal, *Satires* 3.193–202; Martial, *Epigrams* 3.52; Gardner and Wiedemann 1991). At present, the extent of rental housing throughout the empire is still unknown, but it seems to have been much greater than was formerly thought. The atrium house was, indeed, far from the norm. This fact implies more dynamic social relations between landlords and tenants and among neighbors, as well as a more fluid use of space.

Villas

Romans in the countryside lived a dramatically different existence than those in the city. The term *villa* conveys the range of dwellings on the land, from a modest farmhouse to a sprawling estate with fantasy architecture and pleasure parks (Gros

2001:265–379). During the Republic most of the land in Italy was owned by a few wealthy families, whose estates were managed and worked by tenant freedmen or slaves living in shacks; at least from the fifth century B.C., a villa, together with its land (*ager*), was known as a farm (*fundus*). During the Middle to Late Republic, *villa rustica* could designate such a farmstead, complete with accommodation for the owner; by the second century B.C., the term also connoted large country homes and retreats with *atria*, peristyles, and unprecedented amenities. Thousands of farms and villas existed in Italy in the late Republic, and tens of thousands more in the provinces by mid-empire.

Just as houses and insulae must be considered within their larger urban entity, productive villas belonged to a spatial and economic network, created by the Roman system of land-allotment (centuriation), combining town, suburb, and agricultural land. Such a landscape survives in the vicinity of Pompeii, where from the early first century B.C. land division linked villas with towns and main roads. The remains at Boscoreale give a good idea of the functioning villa rustica, with spaces for storage, wine- and olive-pressing, livestock, cooking, bathing, and a residential wing for the manager or landowner (Figure 6.10). Despite earlier divisions between rustic

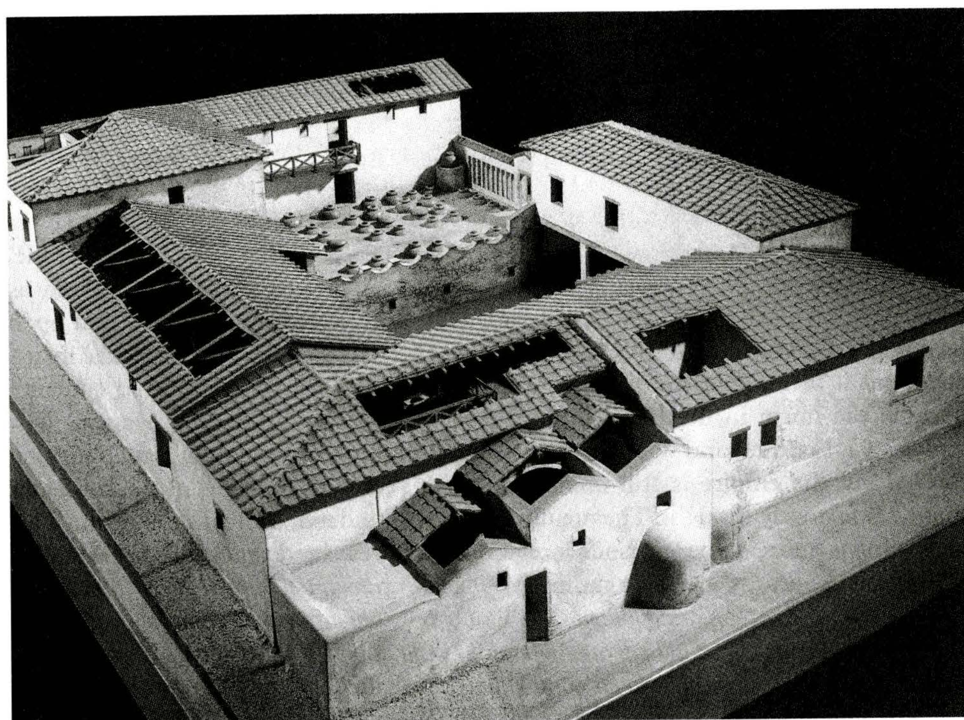


Figure 6.10 Model of Villa Pisanella, Boscoreale, Museo della Civiltà Romana, 1930 (Inv. M.C.R. no. 3507). After Ciarallo and De Carolis 1999: 138, figure 116. Reproduced with permission of Photoservice Electa

and urban villas, there was no strict separation between city and country. The central courtyard of the villa rustica, with its huge clay vessels boasting yields of wine and oil, seems to have been as aesthetically pleasing as the bright mosaics and frescoes of villa interiors (Purcell 1995; Bergmann 2002). Today the best preserved villa rustica, the Villa Regina, discovered at Boscoreale in 1988, stands reconstructed and surrounded by vines and fruit trees, planted just as they were in antiquity, thanks to advances in landscape archaeology (Jashemski 1993:288–291; 2002:24–26).

Beginning in the first century B.C., the basic Italian peristyle villa spread to the provinces, where remains show similar combinations of working and residential units, but in a range of architectural forms. A late development in the northern villas of the Netherlands and Britain is the rectangular, aisled building with two rows of posts dividing the inside into a nave and two aisles. As in Italy, these buildings housed productive agricultural or industrial operations alongside the amenities of hypocaust heating, baths, mosaics, and frescoes.

Rus in urbe, the country in the city, indeed was a popular slogan among Romans, and wealthier villas exemplify the artful synthesis of both worlds in their gardens and interior décor (Bergmann 2002). From the Republic onwards, prosperous men owned several villas throughout Italy, complete with residential suites similar to townhouses, game and fish preserves, and elaborate aviaries. Some lived in their *horti*, extensive park-like estates in the suburbium of Rome with impressive sculpture parks that, like Nero's Domus Aurea, were urban versions of wealthy country estates, which in turn incorporated urban elements. Others enjoyed owning *villae maritimae*, which arose along coastlines with the open seas of empire. In Italy, maritime villas feature extensive porticoes for strolling, spacious reception rooms with picture windows, Greek and Latin libraries, salt and sweet water baths, even isolated belvederes on artificial islands built of hydraulic concrete. The mid-second-century B.C. Villa Prato at Sperlonga rose up on a huge platform (*basis villae*); by the first century A.D. its famous sculptural ensemble, displayed in a natural grotto before an artificial dining island, offered diners one example of a recurring *topos* in villa design, the so-called cave of the Cyclops. A visitor could re-enact Ulysses' deeds by confronting Scylla on a small boat or approaching the sleeping giant Polyphemus on foot. Three centuries later, a guest to the inland, wooded estate at Piazza Armerina in central Sicily encountered the same scene of Ulysses and the inhospitable Polyphemus in the form of an apsidal mosaic (Wilson 1983).

Such luxury villas displayed eclectic sculpture collections, best preserved from the Villa of the Papyri outside Herculaneum (late first century B.C.), the Villa of El Ruedo at Cordoba in Spain, and at Chiragon in southern France. Others boasted continuous figural mosaics (Piazza Armerina), formal gardens (Fishbourne), private harbors and detached pavilions in man-made landscapes (Sorrento). Imperial estates demonstrate the extent to which a patron could fashion his villa as another world. Hadrian's extravaganza at Tivoli invoked famous places the emperor had visited; of these, two have been identified: the legendary Vale of Tempe and the symbolic Underworld, where Hadrian could reenact his nocturnal initiation at

Eleusis (*Historia Augusta* 26.5–6; MacDonald and Pinto 1985:58–59). The imaginary transportation to another place, most often into mythical and legendary Greece, was incited by visual stimuli in paintings, mosaics, statues, and architectural and landscape fantasies. From the modest farm to the lavish theme parks of emperors, the villa was a site where Romans engaged with the natural environment in ever novel ways.

Interior Décor

The Roman domestic interior was often a colorful, vibrant space, and it is here that we most easily recognize a common visual language in Roman housing (Gazda 1991; Zanker 1998). Poorer dwellings, of course, contained only the bare necessities: a lamp, a bed, a table. Whenever possible, however, a homeowner invested in the interior and in greenery, waterworks, and pleasurable views. Furniture was minimal, with niches, shelves, and cupboards built into the walls, and sometimes even beds and tables cut in masonry. Wooden, marble, and bronze furniture was portable, consisting of small tables, couches, chairs, lamp-stands, and strongboxes (McKay 1975:136–155; Allison 1999). Tapestries and curtains divided spaces and regulated light and ventilation. Sculpture, as a rule, animated outdoor garden settings, except for the portraits and religious statuettes displayed inside.

Best-preserved are the built surfaces of Roman dwellings, and these suggest that when designing their homes, Romans desired to alter the boundaries and segments of their daily experience. Indoors, all sides of a room–ceiling, floor, and four walls–presented lively designs. Floors were covered with slabs of marble (*opus sectile*) or mosaics composed of small cubes set in mortar (*tesserae*). Muralists painted pigments onto fresh plaster (*fresco*) or molded plaster into decorative relief (*stucco*); certain pigments, like cinnabar red and cobalt blue, signaled high investment (Taylor 2003). Through certain arrangements of colors, themes, and motifs, craftsmen expanded small rooms and reproduced the rhythms of corridors and colonnades. A striking aspect is the ambivalent treatment of solid walls and floors in a play with depth of field, whereby frescoes and mosaics blurred actual and illusionary spaces, "opening" walls and floors onto exotic worlds for different spectator positions within the room.

In the late nineteenth century, August Mau introduced the Four Styles of Pompeian painting as a chronological classification that developed sequentially between the third century B.C. and A.D. 79, when Vesuvius erupted. The First Style (ca. 200–80 B.C.) imitates in painted stucco relief the wall veneering of marble and other precious materials of wealthy palaces and public buildings; it remained popular throughout the empire for centuries. The Second, Architectural, Style (ca. 90–10 B.C.) offers spectacular *trompe l'œil* illusions of projecting architecture, extensive gardens, even of life-size human figures; this mode, too, continues outside Italy through the fourth century A.D., especially in the east. The Third Style (ca. 10 B.C.–40 A.D.) has been related to the onset of empire; more subdued in tone, it consists of large surfaces of red, yellow, and black, with pictures of myths, portraits, and landscapes in the center of each wall. The Fourth Style overlaps with the Third and draws upon the Second Style, producing infinite variations, with a primary focus on a central panel and fantastic architectural forms in the upper zone. Of late, Mau's chronology has proven problematic, even for Pompeii, and the situation is more difficult for paintings in the provinces or in contexts dating to the Middle and Late Empire. Yet despite changing fashions and uncertain dates, the ceilings, walls, and floors of Roman dwellings do adhere to the basic geometric grid derived from built architecture, with horizontal lines following dadoes, cornices and entablatures, and vertical columns or ornamental borders creating neat divisions for marble inlay, wall mosaic, stucco, or painted plaster (Clarke 1991; 2003; Ling 1991; Leach 2004).

The main development in the decor of Early to Late Imperial interiors is the shift of figural scenes from painted walls to the mosaic floor (Thébert 1987:392–405; Dunbabin 1999). Miles of floor mosaics survive in houses of North Africa, Sicily, Spain, and Turkey; many introduce new spatial dimensions and themes (marine scenes, muses, the hunt, and amphitheater), while others revive compositions of earlier, painted walls, at times in a veritable "painting in stone" as the central panel of a mosaic floor (*emblema*). We should remember that Romans often lay on their sides for business, repose, and entertaining, and it would have been natural for them to look down at such a picture or to lean back and gaze up at an intricately painted ceiling. The most frequent arrangement is of three to four framed scenes, one on each wall of a small room, in contrapuntal relationships that invite prolonged comparisons. Few scholars have considered the effects of different media, and multiple compositions, on six surfaces of a room, a complexity that increased with the constant shifting of the viewer's own position. Such interiors highlight a desire for optical and intellectual stimulation.

The most significant advance in scholarship on Roman housing and its decoration in the past 30 years has been the application of methods from the social sciences, specifically of spatial analysis (Wallace-Hadrill 1994; Bon and Jones 1997; Laurence and Wallace-Hadrill 1997; Allison 2001; Laurence 2004; Perring 2004). These studies examine space itself as an expressive entity, whereby its shape and contents constitute a system of signs within a social hierarchy. It is, of course, dangerous to impose rigid patterns upon archaeological remains. The vicissitudes of homes make it extremely difficult to determine the intention or agency behind building and décor, and whether these are due to individual, societal, or environmental factors. Who, for instance, was responsible for the appearance of a renovated interior—the patron, a beneficiary, an architect, a builder, the master of a fresco or mosaic workshop, a temporary renter? Nevertheless, the recent, holistic approach to the Roman house reveals new inter-relationships among structure, décor, and movement in certain sequences of spaces, circulation patterns, and charted sightlines. From these, one can begin to understand more than one can from a static layout of rooms, namely, the experience of being in a Roman dwelling.

Conclusion

A few conclusions may be drawn. Considered within the larger picture of Roman housing, the atrium house emerges as one regional variation on the basic scheme of the courtyard house and appears primarily in central Italy between the second century B.C. and late first century A.D. More typical of single dwellings in the Roman world is the peristyle house. However, individual ownership of a home was not as prevalent as has been thought. Most people lived in small quarters, either in multi-unit housing or in modest houses in the countryside. The prevalence of rental housing implies a different kind of power structure and set of social relations, and it has implications for the choices behind, and meaning of, the physical appearance of a dwelling.

Patterns and features do emerge as distinctive of Roman housing. With the exception of the country villa, most dwellings responded to a rational urban design, maximized the potential of a built structure by sharing walls and floors, and took advantage of space, light, and air by grouping rooms or separate dwellings around a communal open court. City blocks, buildings, and single rooms were multi-functional, and new finds affirm that mercantile and living areas, lavish and modest homes, often resided cheek by jowl. Visual experience played a paramount role in planning, so that architecture, views, and decoration were coordinated to enhance activities and engage inhabitants.

Today, the major constraints on research into Roman housing across the empire lie in the modern boundaries of nations and of disciplines. There are advances in both areas. With Romanization no longer discussed as a monolithic process, new attention is being given to the interactions among local and imported habits, styles, and materials. As a result, we can begin to detect the variety and complexity of living situations during Roman rule. At the same time that new analytical models are applied to ancient housing, traditional criteria come into question, placing us at a healthy turning point in our quest for a clearer picture of the ways that Romans, and those individuals inhabiting Roman territory, actually lived.

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