

T H E H O U S E S O F R O M A N I T A L Y

1 0 0 B. C. – A. D. 2 5 0

R I T U A L , S P A C E , A N D D E C O R A T I O N

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U N I V E R S I T Y O F C A L I F O R N I A P R E S S
Berkeley *Los Angeles* *Oxford*

C H A P T E R O N E

S P A C E A N D R I T U A L I N D O M U S , V I L L A ,
A N D I N S U L A , 1 0 0 B . C . – A . D . 2 5 0

The architecture of the Romans was, from first to last, an art of shaping space around ritual.”¹ This was as true for the Roman house as it was for the temple and the forum. Roman life was filled with rituals, no less so in the private sphere of the home than in the public arena. As might be expected, state religious and political ceremonies, documented not only by literature and inscriptions but also by scores of sculptural representations, are much better known than those of the home. Furthermore, the word “ritual” itself has extended meanings in the private sphere, because the Romans tended to think of each space in a house in terms of the ritual or activity that the space housed. For this reason, the meaning of “ritual”—in the context of the Roman house and as used in this book—is two-pronged. In its usual sense, it denotes formal, prescribed activity, often with religious purposes or rigidly ceremonial overtones. Its second sense is that of the habitual—yet not religiously prescribed—activity that took place in these spaces. Literary sources give us much information about the domestic rituals of worship of the household gods, ceremonies of coming-of-age, marriage, birth, and death; they describe secular rituals such as the visits of clients to the head of the house and the entertainment of guests at dinner parties. Still, we must interpret both prescribed and habitual rituals in terms of the spaces of the houses themselves. Here factors such as size, siting, and social class provide particulars. How, for instance, did a dining room in a small city house function—as opposed to that of a grand seaside villa?

One thing is certain from the analysis of the evidence. Literary sources and analysis of the houses themselves tell us that ancient Romans expended great care on the disposition and decoration of their domestic spaces because they valued spaces that were appropriately located and decorated to fit their assigned activity. Unlike our modern house, conceived as a refuge for the nuclear

1. Frank E. Brown, *Roman Architecture* (New York, 1961), 9.

family, located far from the factory or office, the Roman house was in no way private. It was the locus of the owner's social, political, and business activities, open both to invited and uninvited visitors. Because of this, the location, size, and decoration of each space formed codes that cued the behavior of every person under its roof, from intimates (the family, friends, and slaves) to distant clients.² This close connection between function and decoration reveals the minds of the ancient Romans as much as do their literature and great public art.

This chapter considers the types of houses that appear in Roman Italy in this creative period of the Late Republic and Early Empire, with special attention paid to the arrangement of their spaces and to the activities they housed. Examples have been chosen, where possible, from case-study houses included in later chapters, where the discussion expands to the particulars of how decoration was tied to function and to the viewer's perception of both individual rooms and suites of spaces.

SPACE AND RITUAL IN THE PATRICIAN DOMUS

Two sources allow us to reconstruct with some degree of certainty the patrician town house, or *domus*. One is Vitruvius's *De architectura*, written in the twenties B.C.³ The architect carefully names the rooms and prescribes the functions of those rooms. His systematic treatise emphasizes the role of the architect in ensuring that the house and all of its spaces have proper proportions. In spite of his great attention to details, Vitruvius never provides a clear plan for the *domus*. This has come from our second source, the excavated Roman houses of Italy. Although their third-century B.C. plans were later modified, three houses excavated at Pompeii (the Houses of the Surgeon, of Pansa, and of Sallust) allow us to reconstruct the typical plan of the patrician dwelling described by Vitruvius (Fig. 1). Since the *domus*, like our modern row house or town house, has party walls on its flanks and an enclosed back area, its principal opening to the exterior is located on the street front. The Romans called this entryway the *fauces* (literally, "jaws"). Shop spaces for rent often flanked the *fauces*.

A long axis running from the *fauces* through the atrium, or central hall, to

2. "[T]he Roman house was a constant focus of public life: it was where a public figure not only received his dependents and *amici* (the two categories flow into one another) but conducted business of all sorts. His house was a power-house: it was where the network of social contacts was generated and activated which provided the underpinning for his public activities outside the house"; Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Social Structure of the Roman House," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 56 (1988): 55–56.

3. For a careful analysis of Vitruvius's text in relation to the *domus*, see Lise Bek, *Towards Paradise on Earth: Modern Space Conception in Architecture: A Creation of Renaissance Humanism. Analecta romana Instituti danici*, supplement 9 (Rome, 1980), 168–170.

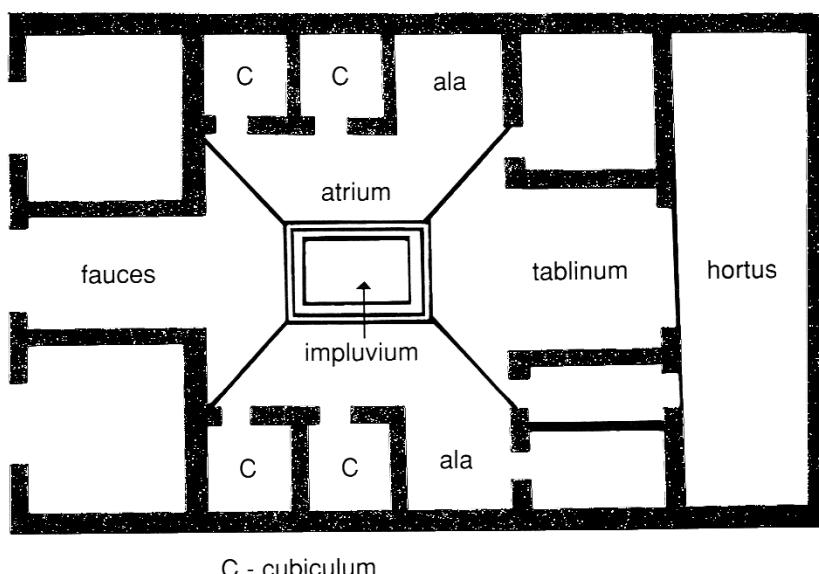
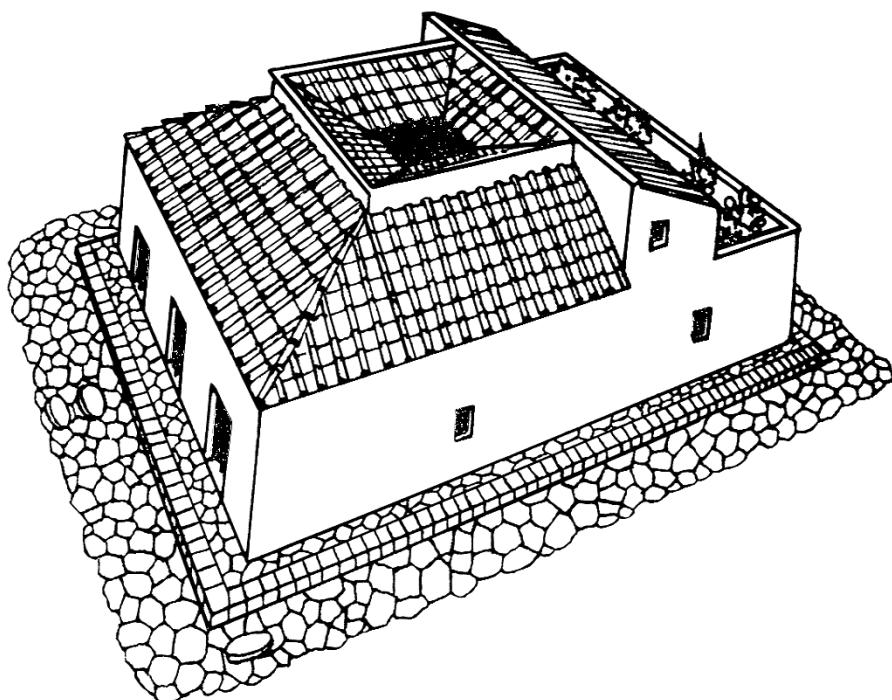


FIGURE 1. The patrician domus of the third century B.C. reconstructed in plan and axonometric view.

the main reception space, the *tablinum*, organizes all the house's interior spaces. Strangely, Vitruvius and other writers on the domus are silent on the subject of the fauces-atrium-tablinum axis, probably because it was such an obvious and invariant feature.⁴ A number of compelling architectural forms emphasize the axis. The space of the fauces, which marks the axis from the point of entrance, is long and narrow. A central opening in the atrium's roof, the *compluvium*, was designed to funnel the rainwater from the roof into a basin below, the *impluvium* (Fig. 2). While the impluvium marks the axis by resting directly on it, the compluvium emphasizes the axis vertically, since it is of the same size and shape as the impluvium and is located directly over it. Rain falling from the compluvium into the impluvium makes their reciprocal relationship visible, yet the compluvium is also the source of light for the atrium and its dependencies. Its light reveals the extent of the atrium's tall spaces, while the movement of the sun marks the hours of the day. The impluvium, on the other hand, is both an axis marker and a symbol of the domus's independence from the outside world, for in the times before water was piped to houses the cistern it fed provided water for the family. What was the ritual that caused the Romans so strongly to emphasize the fauces-atrium-tablinum axis?

It was the *salutatio*, the visit by dependents, collectively called the *clientela*, to the paterfamilias, their patron or *patronus*. The "family" headed by the paterfamilias extended for social and economic reasons far beyond the immediate family members. The clientela included relatives who could not have the status of a paterfamilias, such as sons who had established independent households, all those who worked for the paterfamilias, including both slaves and freedmen (former slaves of the family), plus an assorted group of unattached persons who made the daily rounds of *salutationes* to assure their political and economic security.⁵ The ritual of the salutatio secured the power and fortune of the paterfamilias through those who served his interests. This ritual structured the domus.

A client emerging from the tunnel-like confines of the fauces directly faced the goal of his or her visit, the paterfamilias, standing or seated at the end of the axis in the tablinum and dressed in the toga. A sequence of architecturally framed planes conducted the client's gaze to the paterfamilias in the tablinum.

4. "When reading the descriptions given by Roman authors of houses and villas, one is also struck by their disinterest in any exact definition of the ground plan"; Lise Bek, "Venusta species: A Hellenistic Rhetorical Concept as the Aesthetic Principle in Roman Townscape," *Analecta romana Instituti danici* 14 (1985): 140.

5. A. von Premerstein, "Clientes," *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. George Wissowa (Stuttgart, 1894–1978), [hereinafter *Pauly-Wissowa*], s.v.; Timothy P. Wiseman, "Pete nobiles amicos: Poets and Patrons in Late Republican Rome," in *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome*, ed. Barbara K. Gold (Austin, 1982), 28–31.



FIGURE 2. The architect created this long visual axis by using a series of symmetrical framing elements, even though the plan of the house (see Fig. 6) is irregular.

The first frame was that of the fauces, of narrow width, sloping upward, and having a relatively low ceiling. The doors of the domus were not flush with the street facade but were set well into the entryway and opened inward, to create a viewing position for the visitor.⁶ From here a person would see the tablinum framed by the fauces' floor, walls, and ceiling. Engaged columns, engaged piers (*antae*), or painted decorative frames emphasized the opening of the tablinum, forming a second frame. Behind the tablinum a window or door created a third plane of focus, this time a framed view of the garden, or *hortus*, behind the tablinum. The impluvium, lit from above and sparkling with water, marked the axis but not the path, for to reach the tablinum the visitor had to walk around the impluvium, visually measuring the height and breadth of the atrium along the way. Moving off the axis, a person would be able to look into the *alae*, or wings, usually of the same height as the atrium and located at the back of the atrium, to the right and left of the central axis.

Facing all who entered through the fauces, the paterfamilias controlled the boundaries of his house. Some scholars have compared his position and control of the domus to that of the Etruscan and Roman soothsayers, or *haruspices*, who stood on the platform of the temple to define the physical boundaries (*templum*) of its sacred power.⁷ Clear definition of the axis in front of this platform, and of the cardinal points to the right, left, and behind it, formed the basis of the reading of omens that was at the heart of Etruscan and Roman religion. As the chart shows (Fig. 3), the Etruscan deities were located in relation to the cardinal points, so that the *haruspex* had to position himself in space to read portents, whether they be lightning, the flight of birds, or the markings on a sacrificed sheep's liver.⁸ Each zone of the 360° circle, defined by the half in front of the priest (*pars anterioris*) and the half behind him (*pars posterioris*), belonged to a deity.⁹ If the temple in Roman times, raised on its high podium, was a viewing platform axially situated in a space bounded by its enclosure walls, the tablinum was the seat of power in the domus, controlling the axis of entry that formed its link with the business of the outside world.

The atrium also housed many family rituals, collectively called the *sacra privata*. Images of the family's ancestors hung in the atrium.¹⁰ So far only one per-

6. Heinrich Drerup, "Bildraum und Realraum in der römischen Architektur," *Römische Mitteilungen* 66 (1959): 158–159.

7. Drerup, "Bildraum und Realraum," 148; Brown, *Roman Architecture*, 14–15.

8. Massimo Pallottino, *The Etruscans*, rev. ed. (Bloomington, Ind., 1975), fig. 5.

9. Kent Bloomer and Charles Moore, *The Body, Memory, and Architecture* (New Haven, 1977), 31–40, argue that all human beings understand their spatial position from a bodily sense of "up/down," "front/back," "right/left," and "here in the center."

10. Vitruvius *De architectura* 6.3.6, tells us that the *imagines maiorum* were displayed in the atrium at a height equal to the breadth of the *alae*; Rolf Winkes, "Pliny's Chapter on Roman Funeral Customs in Light of the 'Clipeatae Imagines,'" *American Journal of Archaeology* 83 (1979):

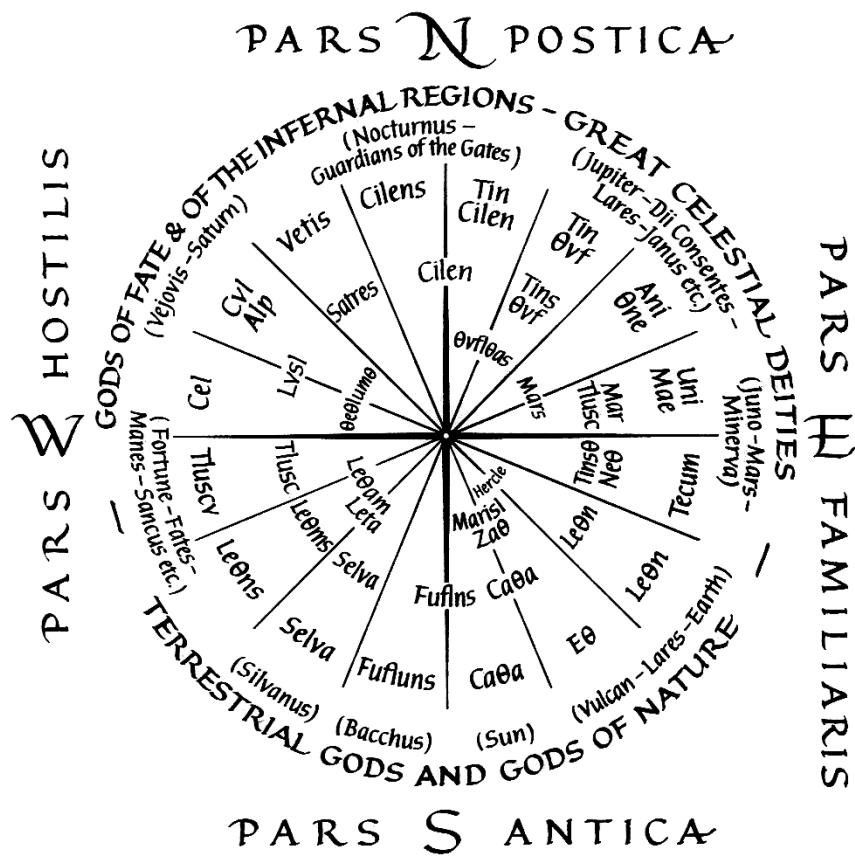


FIGURE 3. Deities located at the cardinal points in Etruscan divination (and the fundamental human sense of “in front of” and “behind”) may have influenced the plan of the Roman house.

manent shrine to the cult of ancestors has been discovered (in the House of the Menander, discussed below), leaving one to suspect that they received offerings and prayers on portable altars. There is much greater evidence for the worship of the penates, the lares, and the *genius*. Although in earlier times worship of these deities took place at the hearth, where they received offerings of perfume, wine, and cakes, later this daily ritual took place at permanent shrines within the house. The plural form of the word “penates” indicates that they were an indistinct group; in fact, the word is used collectively to include all the house-

481–484; Mariette de Vos, “Funzione e decorazione dell’Auditorium di Mecenate,” in *Roma Capitale*, 1870–1911: *L’archeologia in Roma capitale tra sterro e scavo*, ed. Giuseppina Pisani Sartorio and Lorenzo Quilici (Venice, 1983), 233.



FIGURE 4. Lares and the genius of the paterfamilias in a lararium painting in a kitchen.

hold deities at Pompeii.¹¹ The lares were the most important, a fact underscored by the great number of shrines to the lares (*lararia*) found in houses in Pompeii and Herculaneum. They are almost always thought of in pairs and are represented as two young men wearing country clothes and carrying rhytons, or drinking horns (Fig. 4). In their most important festival the lares of the

11. Although the origins of the penates are unknown, they were probably the guardian spirits of the household storeroom. At Pompeii and Herculaneum, the term includes all deities worshiped

crossroads (*lares compitales*) were worshiped where one family's land joined another's.¹² The *lares familiares*, who protected the entire family (including the slaves), were united with the *lares compitales* in wedding ceremonies.¹³ On Pompeian lararia the *lares* flank the *genius* of the paterfamilias. The *genius* is the spirit of the paterfamilias; he wears a *toga*, usually holds a *patera*, or libation bowl, and sometimes carries a cornucopia.¹⁴ This deity stood for the principle of generation, linked in a very matter-of-fact way with the marriage bed, or *lectus genialis*, which was sacred to the paterfamilias. The *genius*, then, was a fertility spirit who guaranteed the continuation of the clan, or *gens*. The *genius*'s feast day was the birthday of the paterfamilias.¹⁵

The presence of many lararia points to the rituals localized in specific spaces in the *domus*.¹⁶ Usually located in a corner of the atrium (Fig. 5) or in the kitchen area, these shrines included, in addition to statues or paintings of the two *lares* and the *genius*, other symbols of good fortune, such as the serpent (see Fig. 4). The *lares* received a variety of offerings, including incense, spelt, grapes, garlands of grain, honey cakes, honeycombs, first fruits, wine, and even blood sacrifices.¹⁷ At the lararium, the paterfamilias regularly prayed and offered sacrifice to the family *lares*. When a boy came of age, the rituals of his passage from boyhood to manhood, called the *sollemnitas togae purae*, took place at the lararium, under the atrium's high roof. The boy took off his *bulla*, or amulet,¹⁸ and hung it as an offering in the lararium.¹⁹ He then put on the

in the home. David G. Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion: A Study of the Roman Household Deities and Their Shrines at Pompeii and Herculaneum" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1973), 34–44.

12. Daniel P. Harmon, "The Family Festivals of Rome," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, pt. 2, vol. 16, no. 2 (Berlin, 1978), 1594–1595.

13. See below, note 22.

14. Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion," 78.

15. Harmon, "Family Festivals," 1595.

16. George K. Boyce, "Corpus of the Lararia of Pompeii," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 14 (1937). Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion," *passim*; David G. Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion: The Evidence of the Household Shrines," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, pt. 2, vol. 16, no. 2 (Berlin, 1978), 1557–1591.

17. Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion," 23.

18. Propertius 4.1.131–132:

*mox ubi bulla rudi demissa est aurea collo
matris et ante deos libera sumpta toga . . .*

But when you took off the gold amulet
and assumed the toga of freedom
Before your mother's gods . . .

The Poems of Sextus Propertius, trans. J. P. McCulloch (Berkeley, 1972), 206.

19. Persius *The Satires* 5.30–31:

*cum primum pavido custos mibi purpura cessit
bullaque subcinctis laribus donata pependit*

toga virilis, or man's *toga*. He also dedicated his beard to the lares.²⁰ A girl's coming-of-age was postponed to the night before her marriage. She dedicated symbols of her girlhood, including dolls, soft balls, and breast bands, to the household gods.²¹ There were three different marriage rites, but all of them seem to have begun in the bride's home. After a wedding feast the bride was conducted to her new home. The bride carried three copper coins. To mark her passing from one family to another, ritual prescribed that she give one to the lar of the crossroads, one to the family lar of her new home, and one to her husband.²² At her arrival at her husband's house, the bride anointed the door post and placed woolen bands on it as a sign of her domesticity; escorts then lifted her over the threshold. Once inside the house, the groom gave her fire and water, symbols of her new authority as *materfamilias*. Led to the *lectus genialis*, she reclined on her husband's chest. The next day she assumed her duties as *materfamilias* and presided over the household rituals.²³

Wreaths on the door announced the birth of a child to the community; a flame was lit on the altar during the first precarious days of the infant's life. Soon after birth the baby was placed on the ground and lifted up by the father to signify his recognition of the child.²⁴ On the eighth day for a girl, on the ninth for a boy, the infant received its name; sacrifices were also made to purify the baby from pollution believed to come from the birth process.²⁵ Every year the birthday was celebrated with offerings of thanks, including sacrifices of cakes and the burning of incense and through customary gifts given to the person celebrating his or her birthday.

Rituals of death and mourning also took place in the atrium. The heir conducted the rites, seeing that the deceased was bathed, anointed with spices, and laid upon a couch adorned with flowers with incense burning before it. There was a ritual purification by water and fire of those who returned from the funeral, and during the nine-day period of mourning following the burial the heir

When, as a shy youth, I put off the purple gown
of boyhood, and its protection, and hung up my
amulet to the short-girt gods of the hearth

The Satires of Persius, trans. W. S. Merwin (London, 1981), 76.

20. Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion," 16.

21. Harmon, "Family Festivals," 1598.

22. Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion," 15.

23. Harmon, "Family Festivals," 1600.

24. The ritual may also stem from the belief that contact with the earth would strengthen the child, since all living things grow from it.

25. The conferring of the name was called the *nominalia*; the purification ritual was called the *lustratio*; and the day known as the *dies lustricus*; Joachim Marquardt and August Mau, *Das Privatleben der Römer* (Leipzig, 1886; reprint, Darmstadt, 1964), 28–61.



FIGURE 5. A lararium in the corner of the atrium.

purified the house through a ritual sweeping. At the end of the period of mourning there was a sacred meal, the *novennialis cena*, a convivial funeral banquet that was the first of an annual rite honoring the deceased person as one of the divine ancestors, or *divi parentes*.²⁶ The atrium, with its ancestral images, and the images of the lares and genius in the lararium, was as much a center of traditional family worship as it was a place to receive business and political clients. In this connection, it is significant that Vitruvius regards the domus as the framework for the responsible citizen's active life within the social pattern of the late Republican and Augustan era.²⁷

In the original versions of the atrium house, all bedrooms or *cubicula* surrounded the atrium; each cubiculum had a single doorway opening to the atrium, the only source of light and air. The domus nearly always included a hortus beyond the tablinum. In fact, it was the light coming through the tablinum's back wall or door that marked and extended visually the house's long axis. Considering its importance in the rituals of Roman business and family life, the persistence of the fauces-atrium-tablinum configuration in later versions of the Roman house is not surprising. What is astounding is the variety of elements added on to this core in subsequent variations. Given the fact that the atrium saw so much traffic, the development of the back of the domus for quiet activities was a logical one. It was this area that became the new center for private rituals in the course of the second century B.C.

THE HELLENIZED DOMUS-WITH-PERISTYLE

With Rome's conquest of the east during the third and second centuries B.C. came the desire to embellish the domus with great colonnaded porticoes, larger and more elaborate than the venerable hortus. Whereas these peristyles had formed the central courtyard of Hellenistic houses like those preserved at Delos, Pergamon, and Priene, when transplanted to Roman Italy they became articulated gardens, located whenever possible on the fauces-atrium-tablinum axis in order to extend to the maximum the long view from the entryway.

Now that the peristyle enclosed bright sunlight and a garden, the atrium became a kind of formal anteroom for the reception of clients. New rooms with Greek names, arranged around the peristyle, served the private lives of those who lived in the house. Vitruvius tells us that whereas the vestibule (lacking in most Pompeian houses), atrium, and tablinum constituted the part of the house open to the uninvited public, the dining rooms, baths, and bedrooms were only

26. Marquardt and Mau, *Privatleben*, 378–385; Harmon, “Family Festivals,” 1003.

27. Bek, *Towards Paradise on Earth*, 172.

for invited guests.²⁸ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has recently demonstrated how this determined hierarchy of spaces—from public to private—reflects Roman social structure of the Late Republic and Early Empire.²⁹ Whereas the tablinum had doubled as a dining room, now there was a special room, called a triclinium, designed to hold the three couches (*klinai*) for Greek-style dining. Vitruvius specified the proportions of this U-shaped space: it should be twice as long as it was wide.³⁰ His discussion of oeci, rooms similar in shape to the triclinia, includes an important reference to the view *out* from the positions on the couches, suggesting that these rooms were used also for dining and that the view from these rooms was to be planned.³¹ Suites of rooms with special purposes could be built off the peristyle. There could be a private bath suite, with a room for each function: a dressing room (*apodyterium*), tepid room (*tepidarium*), hot room (*caldarium*), and a cold room (*frigidarium*). Intimate rooms for daytime lounging and reading (*cubicula diurna*) were often located along the peristyle, as were open semicircular or rectangular apses (*exedrae*). Villas or houses boasting views had belvedere rooms, or *diaetae*. For private meetings the paterfamilias might make use of an elegant cubiculum, developed in grander houses and villas into a suite.³² We see such cubiculum suites, consisting of a bedroom with two alcoves connected with an oecus, in the Villa of Oplontis (see Fig. 41) and the Villa of the Mysteries (see Fig. 28).³³

The only limit on the luxury of the peristyle was the owner's purse. These spaces housed new rituals of leisure made possible not only by new wealth but also by the architects and artists who emigrated from the devastated east to find work in Italy.

The expansion of the domus with the addition of the peristyle helped solve another problem, that of housing the slaves. They were ubiquitous members of the wealthy household, arranged in a hierarchy of intimacy with the family members. Most intimate were personal slaves, such as the *cubicularii* (who slept on mattresses at the bedroom door), followed by cooks, nurses, secretaries, clerks, and doormen; they often functioned like doors and partitions, forming living buffers between the visitors and the members of the household.³⁴

28. Vitruvius *De architectura* 6.5.

29. Wallace-Hadrill, "Social Structure," 43–97.

30. Vitruvius *De architectura* 6.3.8.

31. Vitruvius *De architectura* 6.3.10.

32. Wallace-Hadrill, "Social Structure," 59 note 44.

33. Alan M. G. Little, *A Roman Bridal Drama at the Villa of the Mysteries* (Kennebunk, Me., 1972), 3–5, for the Villa of the Mysteries; Lawrence Richardson, Jr., "A Contribution to the Study of Pompeian Dining Rooms," *Pompeii Herculaneum Stabiae. Bollettino dell' associazione internazionale amici di Pompei* 1 (1983): 61–71, discusses such linked suites as dining areas where women ate, seated, separated from the men; against which see Wallace-Hadrill, "Social Structure," 93 note 147.

34. Wallace-Hadrill, "Social Structure," 78–81.

Yet in the best residences their quarters—unimportant to the prestige of the owner—had to be concealed. A second peristyle with servants' quarters, or upper-story rooms in either atrium or peristyle, successfully removed the slaves from sight when their services were not required. Some city houses, like that of the Menander, made the slave quarters, kitchen, and latrine “disappear” by placing these spaces on a lower level, which included stables and rustic storage areas (numbers 29–34 on plan, Fig. 6).

In his discussion of the rooms off the peristyle, Vitruvius urges the architect to locate rooms to achieve the best possible conditions of light and temperature in relation to the times of the day and the seasons. Baths and winter dining rooms should be located on the west side of the peristyle; bedroom suites, libraries, dining rooms used in the spring and autumn should be on the east, and summer triclinia should face north.³⁵

In testing the dicta of Vitruvius against the evidence of peristyle houses excavated in Roman Italy, several contradictions arise. Whereas Vitruvius urges that the peristyle be placed transverse to the atrium, a survey of existing houses shows that most peristyles continue the fauces-atrium-tablinum axis. The House of the Menander, in particular, has received much attention from scholars because both its plan and the view from the fauces evidence the care taken by the architect to maintain at least a visual axis in the process of adding a peristyle to the preexisting domus. Because the parcels of land acquired by the owner for the addition of the peristyle were irregular, a regular plan was impossible: there was no way to center the peristyle on the domus's axis. Working around this problem, the architect still managed to extend the axial view from the fauces, through the tablinum, to the extreme south end of the peristyle (see Fig. 2). To achieve this goal, he widened the spaces between the columns of the peristyle just past the tablinum to frame the axis, and terminated it with the cupping form of exedra 22.

Heinrich Drerup uses the House of the Menander as the prime exemplar of his concept of the “view through,” or *Durchblick*, in his seminal article on pictorial space and real space in Roman architecture.³⁶ A series of framing devices located on the visual axis constructs the view through the House of the Menander: the widened space between the columns on the axis becomes a window when seen in combination with the low walls (*plutei*) between the columns and the architrave they carry.³⁷ Lise Bek refines Drerup's analysis of the visual axis as a spatial principle. Instead of Drerup's direct linear progression toward a visual goal, Bek sees an effect of symmetrically constructed planes lying one

35. Vitruvius *De architectura* 6.4.11.

36. Drerup, “Bildraum und Realraum,” 145–174.

37. Drerup, “Bildraum und Realraum,” 160–161.

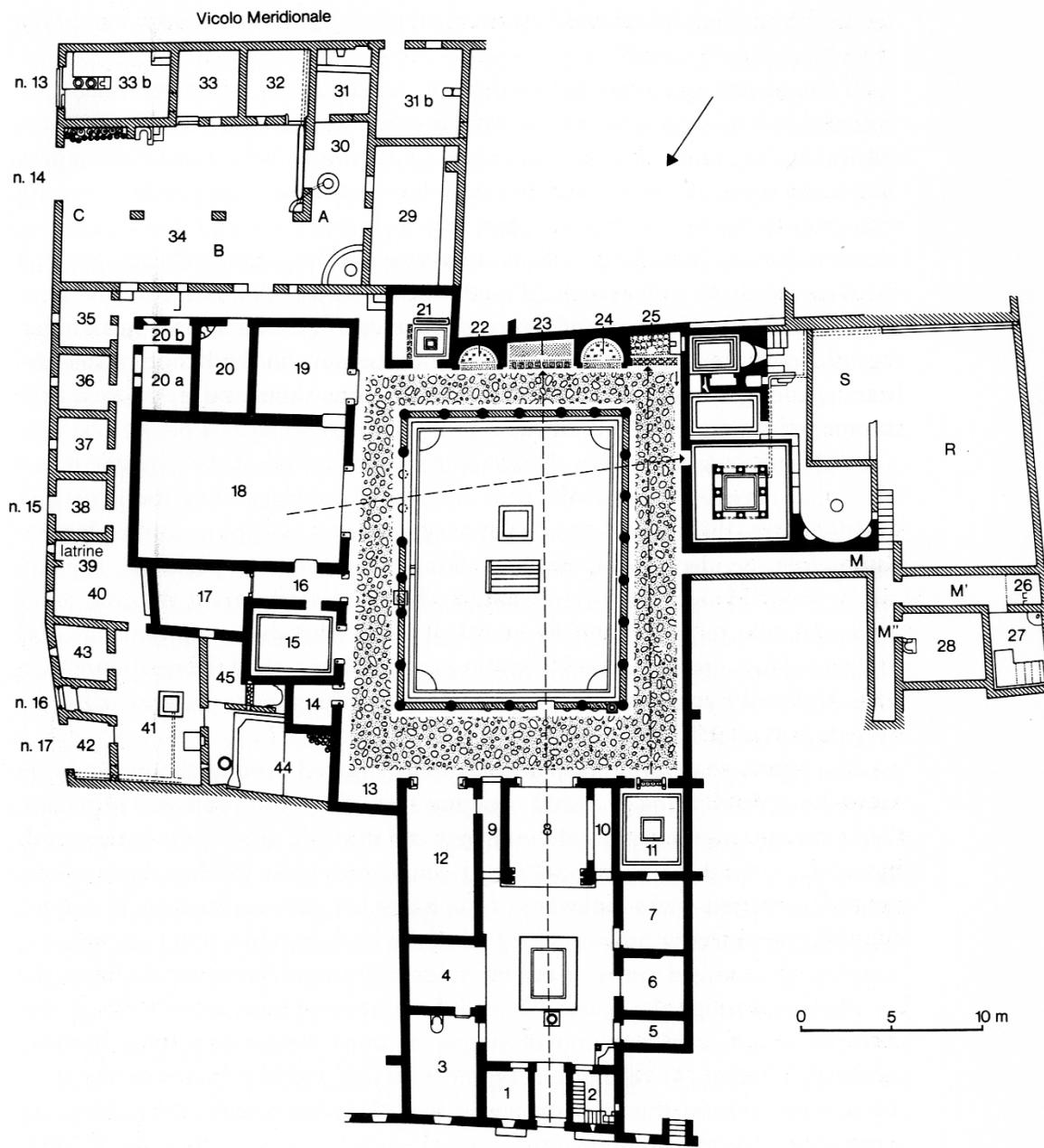


FIGURE 6. Plan of the House of the Menander.

behind the other, articulated by doors, windows, and columns located along the visual axis.³⁸

If the visual axis from fauces through peristyle is a constant, other axes often cross it to emphasize a secondary or tertiary view. Again the House of the Menander serves to illustrate the point. Two rooms have special secondary views. An especially wide space between the columns of the peristyle in front of the great triclinium (18 on the plan, Fig. 6) forms a strong cross-axis to the dominant visual axis. Within the western cover of the peristyle the relationship between oecus 11 and exedra 25 establishes a third visual axis. Like the principal visual axis, these secondary axes articulated the values that the architect and the owner wished to communicate to the visitor. In the House of the Menander the principal axis emphasizes both the great size of the house and the symmetry of its parts. On both scores this visual axis cheats a bit. Bek has noticed that the space between the columns at the far end of the peristyle is less than that between those at the near end, thereby exaggerating the peristyle's depth.³⁹ Also, the house's actual lack of symmetry is evident from the plan but is much less evident to the viewer walking from atrium to peristyle. The secondary axis along the western peristyle shows how important the cult of the ancestors was to the owner: he even had the exedra sheltering the altar (25) decorated to imitate a venerable rural sanctuary. The axis of the triclinium (further accented by its distinctive roofline)⁴⁰ calls attention to its great size (the largest in Pompeii).

The rituals that took place in the rooms situated around the peristyle required a different kind of visual planning from that of the entrance sequence. Whereas the fauces-atrium-tablinum axis and the walk around the peristyle addressed the walking spectator, the triclinia, oeci, and exedrae were places where one rested—and looked out from his or her place on a couch. Dynamic, or walking, spaces announced the goal of the walk from the point of entrance, employing arranged views of the terminus to prompt the visitor as he or she progressed through the spaces. Decoration in these spaces, as we will see, was tailored to quick recognition of simple patterns rather than long, tarrying analysis. In static, or resting spaces, the view *out* was of primary importance. Decoration within this kind of space tended to be complex, requiring the viewer's prolonged attention.

The positions taken by guests on the three klinai in the triclinium are central

38. Bek, *Towards Paradise on Earth*, 183.

39. Bek, *Towards Paradise on Earth*, 185.

40. On the regal associations of the pediment, or *fastigium*, in the private house, see Wallace-Hadrill, "Social Structure," 61–64, but also the caution that the roof of this triclinium may be incorrectly reconstructed.

to Bek's arguments about what she calls "view planning" in domestic architecture. Strict etiquette surrounded the ceremony of the Roman banquet, beginning with an invitation that assigned the guest his or her place at the table, and thereby the person's rank at the function. Horace's famous satire on a comical dinner party demonstrates the disastrous consequences of the wrong seating arrangement.⁴¹ There was space for nine persons on three *klinai*, placed in U-shaped order along the back and side walls of the dining room. Each couch had a name, indicating its position in the room. Looking into the room from its entry, the couch on the right was the *summus*, that against the back wall the *medius*, and the one to the left the *imus*. Romans dined reclining on these couches while supporting themselves on their left elbows, so that the most desirable space, both for its convenience and view out of the space, would be from the left of the central couch. The guest of honor received this so-called consular place (called the *locus consularis*—it was *imus in medio*), and the host reclined to his right (*summus in imo*).⁴²

In her survey of rooms likely to have been used for dining at Pompeii and Herculaneum, Bek has attempted to demonstrate that the view out from the rear left-hand side is a favored one. From there one can best appreciate planned views of fountains, statuary, and gardens framed by a symmetrical arrangement of window and door frames, columns, or pillars. Like the fauces-atrium-tablinum axis, all of these planned views out of static spaces employed a sequence of frames and visual symmetry. But unlike the fauces-atrium-tablinum sequence, the view is not strictly axial, but oblique (Fig. 7).⁴³ Although not convincing in all particulars,⁴⁴ Bek adduces enough evidence for us to infer that the view out of these static spaces in the peristyle was important enough for the architect to move columns, plan gardens, site sculpture, and install fountains as centers of interest for those looking out, and, as we shall see, to substitute painted and mosaic decoration for these features when it was impossible to build them.⁴⁵

41. Horace *Satires* 2.8.18–41.

42. Aug. Hug., "Triclinium," *Pauly-Wissowa*, s.v., and August Mau, "Convivium," *Pauly-Wissowa*, s.v. The boorish host Trimalchio overturns the rules and sits *summus in summo*; Petronius Arbiter, *Cena Trimalchionis*, ed. Martin S. Smith (Oxford, 1975), 66–67, commentary on ch. 31, 8.

43. Bek, *Towards Paradise on Earth*, 194; a repetition of the same arguments in her "Quæstiones conviviales: The Idea of the Triclinium and the Staging of Convivial Ceremony from Rome to Byzantium," *Analecta romana Instituti danici* 12 (1983): 82–88.

44. Franz Jung, "Gebaute Bilder," *Antike Kunst* 27 (1984): 99 note 142.

45. For an analysis of the relation of the *Durchblick* and the view from the *locus consularis* to painted iconographical schemes in the House of the Ancient Hunt at Pompeii (VII, 4, 48), see Jean-Paul Descoedres, "The Australian Expedition to Pompeii: Contributions to the Chronology of the Fourth Pompeian Style," *Pictores per provincias: Aventicum V*, Cahiers d'archéologie romande, no. 43 (Avenches, Switz., 1987); 136–137, figs. 8–11.

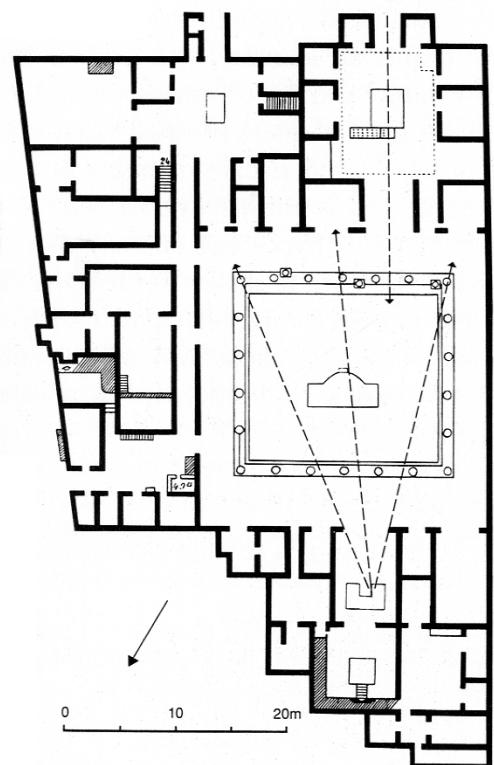
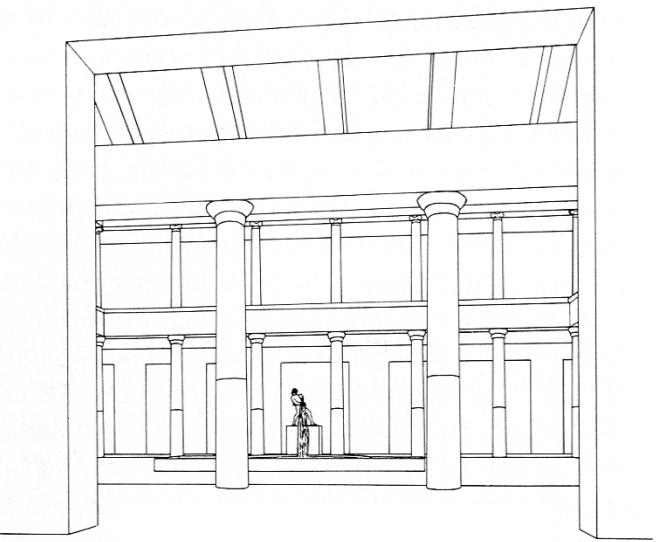


FIGURE 7. Plan and reconstruction of the guest of honor's view from the triclinium of the House of the Centenary.

But we cannot fully understand the rituals that called for decoration in the rooms of city houses without considering villa architecture. If the peristyle was a way of bringing the countryside within the party walls of city houses, the ideal and inspiration was to be found in the country estate.

VIEW VILLAS AND SEASIDE VILLAS

As the letters of Cicero and Pliny eloquently demonstrate, the aim of every wealthy noble was to have several villas, or country residences, preferably with views.⁴⁶ When located near the city, like the Villa of the Mysteries (see Fig. 63), they were called “suburban” villas. Built on a platform with a vaulted corridor (*cryptoporticus*) beneath, the Villa of the Mysteries must have commanded a panoramic view of the Bay of Naples. Its plan, that of the *villa suburbana* described by Vitruvius,⁴⁷ reverses the usual order of the city domus-with-peristyle so that the tablinum and the reception suites clustered around it can enjoy the view through their ample windows.

It is significant for the discussion of ritual to note the changes in the Villa of the Mysteries over its several phases. In the plan of the mid-first century B.C.,⁴⁸ the tablinum was the goal of the visitor, as in the domus, with the difference that the peristyle came first in the entrance sequence. Majestically rising in two stories, the original peristyle conducted the visitor around its perimeter before he or she entered the atrium. The tablinum lay on the axis as the goal, with the impluvium as axis marker, but a portico surrounding the tablinum and the rooms flanking it encouraged invited guests to enjoy a very different ritual from that of the salutatio: the walk, or *ambulatio*, around the upper portico. The views afforded from its high platform were the *raison d'être* of the villa and its architecture.

In the Augustan-period modernization the owner added greater emphasis to the view; he accomplished this through the addition of a large apsidal room beyond the tablinum that cut through the peristyle and extended to the edge of the villa's platform.⁴⁹ With its windows that framed views taken from the pan-

46. Cicero *Epistulae ad familiares* 3.1.2; Pliny the Younger *Epistulae* 2.17.

47. Vitruvius *De architectura* 6.5.3. Nicholas Purcell, “Town in Country and Country in Town,” in *The Ancient Roman Villa Garden*, ed. Elisabeth B. MacDougall (Washington, D.C., 1987), 202–203, more fully defines the *villa suburbana*. He argues that the Romans perched their villas on platforms so that they could be better seen and admired (196–197).

48. Amedeo Maiuri, *La Villa dei Misteri*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1931), 1:37–40, 99–101; Maiuri believed that the villa originated in the second century B.C.; Lawrence Richardson, Jr., *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore, 1988), 171–176, dates its original construction to the period of its mature Second-Style decorations.

49. Maiuri, *Villa dei Misteri*, 58, notes that the belvedere, constructed in the Augustan period, was being completely reconstructed at the time of eruption. Richardson, *Pompeii*, 176, places this

orama, this room epitomizes attitudes expressed by Cicero⁵⁰ and, later on, by Pliny.⁵¹ It was not raw nature, but framed views of nature, that the cultured Roman sought. Two pavilions, or diaetae, were built into the corners of the former peristyle. Shaped like cubicula but furnished with windows, these little viewing pavilions stress specific views, this time for a person lounging on a daybed.

The Roman passion for the view into the landscape can be followed in developments in the literature from Cicero through Pliny the Younger.⁵² Cicero's joking discussion with Atticus about the size of windows needed to achieve a view of the garden reveals the importance of the prospect from the room.⁵³ More than a century later, Statius's *Silvae*, two poems describing two villas belonging to his patrons, praise above all the views the rooms afford. Especially in his second poem in book two,⁵⁴ dedicated to Pollius Felix's Sorrentine villa, the reader imagines a walk from shore to summit through rooms ever more ingenious in their capturing of specialized views.⁵⁵ In the second century Pliny the Younger's descriptions of his Laurentine and Tuscan villas stress neither their layout nor their geometry but the presence of enticing views from all the rooms. It is important that none of the literary sources discussing views from villas praise what in modern terms is called the panorama; raw nature must be framed by the room and its windows for the view to be delightful. Architectural intervention is a necessary part of these constructed views.

If Vitruvius considered the placement of rooms and their function to be part of a civic ideal, Pliny defines their function and usefulness according to the time of day and the season. Decor for Vitruvius was part of the well-ordered life; for Pliny it was "the medium of a private fiction."⁵⁶ The villa added a new experience to those of the city house. To the view of the whole building from the point of entrance (the fauces-tablinum-peristyle view) and the views out of individual rooms located around the peristyle, the view villa incorporated framed views of landscape features. The Vitruvian category of decor gave way to the poets' concept of *amoenitas*, or "pleasantness," a change fully realized during the course of the first century of our era. Now the poets praised the

construction in the post-earthquake period, even though its mosaics and wall construction match that of the Third-Style mosaics in the diaetae.

50. Bek, *Towards Paradise on Earth*, 173.

51. Drerup, "Bildraum und Realraum," 171.

52. Eleanor Winsor Leach, *The Rhetoric of Space* (Princeton, N.J., 1988), passim.

53. Cicero *Epistulae ad Atticum* 2.3.2.

54. Publius Papinius Statius *Silvae* 2.2.

55. Bettina Bergmann, "Painted Perspectives of a Villa Visit," in Elaine Gazda, ed., *Roman Art in the Private Sphere* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1991), 49–70.

56. Bek, *Towards Paradise on Earth*, 180.

charming place, the *locus amoenus*. This change in values had many effects on decoration, but they were probably not to be seen in the fabulous villas of the very wealthy—villas that commanded real views—but in the modest houses of the middle class, where paint, stucco, and mosaic decoration created fictive views where there were none.

Some city houses were able to enjoy real views. Among the more dramatic city houses with views are the House of the Mosaic Atrium and the House of the Stags in Herculaneum; they share a party wall that runs down the middle of the city block they occupy. Like the Villa of the Mysteries they command a view from a platform, but the platform is the rampart of Herculaneum's former city walls (see Figs. 141 and 147). Constructed several decades later than the additions to the Villa of the Mysteries, both houses enthusiastically embrace the view, but in different ways. In the House of the Mosaic Atrium, the fauces-atrium-tablinum axis ends in the tablinum, while a garden bounded on three sides by a covered walkway ends in a great oculus oriented toward the view. The stronger axis is the one toward the sea; its conflict with the fauces-tablinum axis is never fully resolved, yet through a window in the atrium's wall the visitor can at least glimpse what visual pleasures await if he or she is invited to step down into the covered portico to enjoy the rest of the house.

If Vitruvius saw the atrium as a necessary part of the villa, Pliny regarded it as an old-fashioned requisite.⁵⁷ In the House of the Stags the architect suppressed the atrium to create a magnificent oculus that was the first in a series of framed views leading to a platform above the sea. As we will see, both of these urban view villas at Herculaneum, blessed with splendid vistas, have relatively tame decorative schemes in wall painting and pavement systems so as not to compete unduly with the views out of their rooms.

There is evidence for a “view mania” also in Pompeii, where in the last decades of the first century B.C. houses with multiple stories along Pompeii’s high escarpment abandoned the traditional domus plan to take advantage of the ocean view.⁵⁸ But all of these in the end were city houses. One partially excavated seaside villa, that of Oplontis near Pompeii (see Fig. 41),⁵⁹ furnishes some

57. Drerup, “Bildraum und Realraum,” 161.

58. Ferdinand Noack and Karl Lehmann-Hartleben, *Baugeschichtliche Untersuchungen am Strand von Pompeji* (Berlin, 1936), passim.

59. Alfonso De Franciscis, “La villa romana di Oplontis,” in *Neue Forschungen in Pompeji*, ed. Bernard Andreae and Helmut Kyrieleis (Recklinghausen, 1975), 9–10, identifies the site as ancient Oplontis on the basis of the Tabula Peutingeriana, a fourth-century map. See also Wilhelmina Jashemski, *The Gardens of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius* (New Rochelle, N.Y., 1979), 289–314, with an up-to-date fold-out plan of the villa; Arnold de Vos and Mariette de Vos, *Pompei Ercolano Stabia*, Guida archeologica Laterza, no. 11 (Rome, 1982), 250–254.

details of rituals of the very wealthy whose luxury seems to have inspired so many petit-bourgeois imitations in Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Although the core of the Villa of Oplontis dates to around 50 B.C., it expanded laterally along the shore in later additions.⁶⁰ Paintings of such seaside villas, particularly those in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto (see Fig. 75), provide an idea of their appearance. Long porticoes facing the ocean, often of two stories, are frequently arranged symmetrically around a central feature, either a semicircular cupping form or a large hall. Although the seaward disposition of the central hall at Oplontis will never be known, since it was cut by the building of the Sarno Canal in the eighteenth century, the approach from the land is clear. An imposing hall (21 on the plan, see Fig. 41), entirely open to the avenue of approach, juts out from porticoes to its right and left. It looks like a monumental gateway, or *propylon*, since it is supported on its open side by two great columns and corner piers, in this way marking a long visual axis extending to the atrium. Yet this entry hall is not physically accessible to the spaces on that axis. Instead, its back is pierced by a large window opening to an enclosed garden, or *viridarium* (20), exposed to the sky and painted (redundantly) with plants and fountains. The atrium (5) lies yet farther behind this visual axis, preceded by a large transverse space (4). To reach the atrium from the north side of the villa, the visitor had to walk along the long, narrow, unlit corridors that flank rooms 21 and 20. This ritual of entry, although owing much to the combination of straight visual axis and circuitous path that characterized the experience of walking from *fauces* to *tablinum* in the domus, has become more complex in this grand villa. The process has become one of finding the axis visually, then losing it in the dark corridors, only to realign oneself with the visual axis in the comforting symmetry of the traditional atrium.⁶¹ Although the mechanism of the framed visual axis is the same as that of the domus, or a domus-with-peristyle like the House of the Menander, the process of attaining the focus of that axis is much more complex. Although we do not know what view completed this grandiose visual axis, it must have been the ocean—framed, to be sure, with columns, piers, and windows.

Another important instance of a succession of framed—but physically unattainable—views enlivens the series of rooms bordering the western porticus of the swimming pool (*natatio*). Oecus 69, with two framed columns on the side facing the pool, forms the central axial element of the suite. Windows on the long sides of this oecus provide views of unroofed rooms 68 and 70, inac-

60. John R. Clarke, "The Early Third Style at the Villa of Oplontis," *Römische Mitteilungen* 94 (1987): 293–294, figs. 1–2.

61. Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, rev. ed. (New York, 1969), 210–212, discusses a similar process of losing and finding the axis at the Roman Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia at Praeneste.

cessible yet painted, like room 20, with plants, birds, and fountains, here against a yellow-gold ground. The same system of windows framing views of painted garden rooms—open to the sky—articulates the smaller oeci 74 and 65. Clearly the architect was mirroring nature in theatrically lit painted tablaux that mimicked the real garden views visible through other windows.⁶² He created a contrast between both light and shade and the actual and the fictive garden. The consciousness of view planning evident in the Villa of Oplontis helps explain more modest features encouraging similar experiences of axiality and the view of framed features in urban houses.

Rituals of reception and of leisure, but on a grand scale, characterize the spaces of the Villa of Oplontis. One need only consider the sixty-meter swimming pool on the eastern extremity of the excavated area, or the large bath suite on the western part, to imagine the extent of the original villa and its wealth. In the context of this study, Oplontis is a precious, though incomplete, source for understanding the models that inspired the ambitious decorative schemes of the middle and lower classes.

THE VILLA AS MODEL FOR MIDDLE-CLASS HOUSES

Not every Roman lived in an ancestral domus or splashy villa. Particularly after the middle of the first century of our era at Pompeii and Herculaneum a great number of city houses were remodeled to imitate villas, but in miniature. This phenomenon, examined in depth by Paul Zanker,⁶³ often resulted in packing a great number of disparate and uncoordinated villa features into modest spaces. But instead of clearly framed views of distinct features like the fountains, statuary, and swimming pool at Oplontis, the visitor found a hodge-podge giving out mixed signals about the function and meaning of both individual spaces and the house as a whole.

Zanker cites the House of Octavius Quartio (see Fig. 108) as the prime exemplar of the “miniature villa.”⁶⁴ The view from the fauces ends not in a tablinum, for there is none, but in a doorway leading to a three-sided portico surrounding a little garden (g). Having reached this area of the house, the visitor has entered a realm of mixed metaphors and hyperbole. To the left is the principal oecus (h), its larger entry focused, by means of a pavilion, upon a long canal that runs the length of the building lot. It is fed by a second, transverse canal running between two unusual spaces: at the west end is a small pavilion-

62. Jaschinski, *Gardens of Pompeii*, 306–314, figs. 470–475.

63. Paul Zanker, “Die Villa als Vorbild des späten pompeianischen Wohngeschmacks,” *Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts* 94 (1979): 460–523.

64. Zanker, “Villa als Vorbild,” 470–480.

like white room (perhaps a diaeta) outfitted as a little shrine, or *sacellum*, while at the east end there is an outdoor *biclinium* (a dining area with two couches). Zanker counts many built elements taken from villa architecture: the canal, or *euripus*, allusive to the Nile; the rear peristyle with oecus; the little temple or *aedicula* with images of Diana; and the biclinium with fountain. Add the many small-scale statues along the upper canal evoking gods as diverse as Isis, Dionysus, and the Muses, plus five different painted cycles on the exterior walls (see chart, Fig. 114), two painted friezes from different epic sagas in the oecus, allusions to Isis in the sacellum, and one has an excellent example of the kind of bad taste that Cicero had decried a hundred years before.⁶⁵ While Cicero, aristocratic patrician, rejected statues of bacchants, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn as thematically unsuitable for an exedra dedicated to cultural pursuits, the owner of the House of Octavius Quartio built miniature grottoes, fountains, sanctuaries, and canals—and adorned them with statuary and frescoes allusive to a whole panoply of mythic cycles and religions.⁶⁶

How did the ancient viewer experience such miniature villas? From the point of entrance into the peristyle garden, at the tablinum position, a person could walk either to the right or left. To the left he or she would encounter the smaller side entrance of the great oecus (*h*), probably used for both reception of business clients and convivial feasts. To the right the visitor would pass to the diaeta/sacellum (*f*), taking in the paintings both within the room and on its exterior. From here the view of the upper canal focuses on the biclinium (*k*). Statuary lined both sides of the canals, as it filled the little peristyle's garden. Making his or her way through this crowded Disneyland the viewer might also notice the big frescoes on the exterior walls. The next goal would probably be the oecus itself, commanding the carefully arranged view of the lower garden and its three-stage canal. A little bridge crosses the upper canal to reach the pavilion that marks the beginning of this long axis; beneath it, on the lower level, hides a little grotto sacred to Diana. Characteristically, the grotto is too small for a person to enter; it is an allusion to the great grottoes that graced large villas. Similarly, the canal may have doubled as a fish pond, the *piscinae* so important to Cicero and other villa owners.⁶⁷ One's walk though the lower garden included other surprises: the elaborate fountains that punctuate the canal and a statue of a hermaphrodite.

Other examples of villa imitations cited by Zanker, although less extensive than the complex of the House of Octavius Quartio, nevertheless document a

65. Cicero *Ad Fam.* 7.23.2.

66. For a critique of Zanker's position, see Jung, "Gebaute Bilder," 71–73.

67. John H. D'Arms, *Romans on the Bay of Naples* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), 44.

new use of space stemming from new desires on the part of the patrons. If what had meaning in the large villas sinks to mere decoration in Pompeian gardens, it is because a new class, that of the entrepreneurial freedmen, was socially most active in this period. Like the rich former slave Trimalchio in Petronius's *Satyricon*,⁶⁸ these new bourgeoisie imitated the wealthy aristocratic upper class in their desire for the material trappings of wealth. The garden architecture, sanctuaries, fountains and resting spots, picture galleries, real and painted statues, landscape views, and even painted wild animal parks (*paradeisoi*) were all ways of possessing a bit of the luxury villa.⁶⁹

HOUSES OF THE LOWER CLASS

Vitruvius, who liked to make such distinctions, clearly states that those with modest means had no need of magnificent vestibules, tablina, or atria because it was their lot to call upon others and not vice versa.⁷⁰ The clientela, consisting of freedmen, artisans, and owners of small businesses, often lived in smaller houses with spaces arranged around a covered atrium surrounded by rooms on two stories. The tenacious survival of the atrium in the face of increasing urban density in Pompeii and Herculaneum is all the more remarkable in that it is a relatively space-wasting configuration. Rarely, however, can one find all the rooms of the domus in these "mini-atrium" houses.⁷¹ The abiding feature is the fauces-tablinum axis, but rooms tend to be arranged asymmetrically around it, suggesting that for this class practical uses of the other rooms around the atrium were more important than their representational symbolism.

Placement of the house's humble spaces, such as kitchens, latrines, and slaves' quarters, is much less predictable in these smaller houses than in the large houses and villas, where clear separation is the rule. In the House of the Menander (see Fig. 6) considerable space is dedicated to these rooms, but they are out of sight, at a basement level; the Villa of Oplontis housed slaves on two stories around a large peristyle, inferior in decoration and construction technique to the opulent areas to either side of it (see Fig. 41).⁷² But in small houses, the kitchen, the latrine, and the slaves' rooms occur in the margins of the reception spaces, smaller in size, often with lower ceilings, little light, and poor deco-

68. John H. D'Arms, *Commerce and Social Standing in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 97–120; Wallace-Hadrill, "Social Structure," 43–44, 97.

69. Zanker, "Villa als Vorbild," 519–522.

70. Vitruvius *De architectura* 6.5.1.

71. Jung, "Gebauete Bilder," 73–77, discusses the small number of full-fledged atrium houses at Pompeii.

72. De Franciscis, "Oplontis," pls. 38–39.

ration. In the House of the Prince of Naples they take up the ill-lit right side and back of the atrium.⁷³

At both Pompeii and Herculaneum, particularly after the disastrous earthquake of A.D. 62, experimentation arrived at more rational but less traditional solutions that dispensed with the atrium entirely.⁷⁴ In a clever plan the architect of the House in Opus Craticium at Herculaneum fit two apartments and a shop with workrooms into the space of a narrow atrium house (see Fig. 159). Here the rituals of work blended with those of rest, dining, and entertainment because of the “railroad car” arrangement of many rooms. On the ground floor, for instance, the axis defined by the entrance at number 10 begins at the street with a shop leading to three work or work/living rooms behind (9–7). Room 6 opens to the area under the stairs (5), which lead to two dining/sleeping rooms on the second floor. Another street entrance, at 14, gives access to the same stairway and upper-floor rooms. Light for all of these spaces comes from the central light well at 4. This disposition of spaces with thin partition walls made it easy to reassign their use for more than one tenant, and the upper rooms that have windows on the little courtyard are not without some degree of privacy and grace. The same could be said of the separate apartment occupying the remainder of the upper story, reached by an independent stairway at 13. Although the corridor connecting the landing with the balcony is dark, the street-side rooms are light and airy. The decoration of the house, as we shall see, was of relatively good quality—aesthetic compensation for the tenant who had to make do with somewhat crowded and makeshift spaces.

SURVIVAL AND LOSS OF SPATIAL PATTERNS IN THE INSULAE OF OSTIA

A highly satisfactory and uncannily modern solution to urban density developed in Rome during the first century A.D. Employing brick-faced concrete with vaulted support and covering systems, the multistory, multifamily apartment house, or *insula*, replaced the domus and most of its spatial patterns. With sturdy apartment buildings rising as high as five stories, crowded Roman cities expanded vertically instead of horizontally. Because Rome itself has been continuously inhabited, few of these insulae survive, but Ostia, Rome’s supply city during the heyday of the empire, is filled with these dwellings, most of them excavated in the twentieth century.

73. Volker Michael Strocka, *Casa del Principe di Napoli* (VI 15, 7–8). Deutsches archäologisches Institut, *Häuser in Pompeji*, vol. 1 (Tübingen, 1984), passim; Wallace-Hadrill, “Social Structure,” 86.

74. James E. Packer, “Middle- and Lower-Class Housing in Pompeii: A Preliminary Survey,” in *Neue Forschungen in Pompeji*, ed. Bernard Andreæ and Helmut Kyrieleis (Recklinghausen, 1975), 133–146.

Many studies have attempted to establish a typology for the insulae of Roman Ostia.⁷⁵ Perhaps the most successful is that of James Packer, who finds prototypes in the covered atrium house (*atrium testudinatum*) at Pompeii and Herculaneum and in houses combined with shops or workshop areas.⁷⁶ More important for this study of decorative ensembles is the function of the spaces included in the various types of insulae. Carol Watts has proposed a “pattern language,” or typology, of recurring spatial configurations and spatial experiences, for a group of domus and insulae at Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Ostia Antica.⁷⁷ Watts has demonstrated that although certain characteristic patterns were lost in the change from the domus to the insula, other patterns persisted. Patterns of the domus that do not survive in the insula include the long axis providing a view through its spaces (the “visual axis” discussed above), the varied ceiling heights, and the system of illumination from compluvium and peristyle. Two enduring patterns with special relevance to decorative ensembles are those of spatial hierarchies and “entrance experience.” Spatial hierarchies, ranked from the most to the least important spaces in the domus, remained in the insula—even though the locations of the tablinum-equivalent, triclinium-equivalent, and cubiculum-equivalent changed. Both the placement and the relative sizes of spaces would provide cues to a person visiting a flat in an insula. Here mosaic pavements, along with the decorations of painted and stuccoed walls and ceilings, play an important role in signaling the relative importance of each room; wall, ceiling, and floor decoration express each room’s relative importance in the insula as much as do the shapes and locations of the spaces.

In the absence of literary sources describing social, business, and religious rituals that took place in the insula, case-by-case analysis of the archaeological remains must provide likely answers. Arguments for the function of spaces and rooms must be based on careful on-site study. One must also be cautious about naming these spaces. Given the adaptability of the construction technique, a great variety of plans is possible. Two enduring problems, provision for circulation and for light, were solved in a variety of ways in the insulae. Windows on the exterior brought light and air from the street, and when party walls prevented exterior windows, the insulae’s rooms opened to courtyards and light wells.

75. Phillip Harsh, “The Origins of the Insulae at Ostia,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 12 (1935); Guido Calza et al., *Scavi di Ostia*, vol. 1, *Topografia generale* (Rome, 1953); Paolo Chiolini, *I caratteri distributivi degli antichi edifici* (Milan, 1959), 65–69; Axel Boëthius, *The Golden House of Nero* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1960); Russell Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, 2d ed., with corrections (Oxford, 1975), 239–247.

76. James E. Packer, “The Insulae of Imperial Ostia,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 31 (1971): 62.

77. Carol Martin Watts, “A Pattern Language for Houses at Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Ostia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1987).

Even more space saving for insulae closed in with party walls on three sides was the so-called *medianum* plan.⁷⁸ In the House of the Yellow Walls (see Fig. 188), the medianum, a well-illuminated, covered courtyard (3 on the plan) with a bank of three high windows opening on the street, provided light and circulation for all the rooms. Although we will analyze this and other houses individually later in this book, a glance at the plan of this apartment suggests new relations between static and dynamic spaces from those encountered in the domus and its variations at Pompeii and Herculaneum. For one thing, a person entering the generous entry hall at 1 has no axial view through the complex. Instead the visitor would have an oblique view of the medianum, with light streaming in from the left, and a view of the doorway to the larger of the two reception spaces, room 7. Once the visitor reaches the medianum, a dynamic distribution space, the hierarchy of functions becomes clear. Whereas their position on the less well-lit side of the medianum announces that 4 and 5 are private rooms, certainly cubicula, the opposite set of circumstances identifies rooms 7 and 8 as reception rooms. They are well lit, each with three windows on the street, and their doorways answer each other across the medianum's space, creating a visual axis between the two rooms. Further analysis reveals the function of room 7 to be that of a triclinium, both because of the disposition of the mosaic floor, meant to be seen from two couches, and because of its relation to room 6, perhaps intended as a kind of kitchen or pantry space. As we shall see, the decoration of these spaces in the House of the Yellow Walls provides even clearer signals about the function of the spaces and the activities that took place there.

This new language of brick-faced vaulted architecture also served the wealthy patron in Rome and at Ostia. The best example to illustrate functional patterns is that of the House of the Muses (see Fig. 163), whose elegant spaces surround a spacious arcaded courtyard. Here most of the traditional rooms of the domus-with-peristyle can be found around the courtyard, with the added advantage that the sturdy concrete construction sustained upper floors for servants' quarters or for tenants, provided with separate street entrances. A visual axis employing the by now familiar device of successive, symmetrical, framing elements connects two important rooms, room 15, an oecus, with room 5, a small salon dedicated to Apollo and the Muses. The mosaic program distinguishes dynamic and static spaces, the more complex mosaics also emphasizing visual axes. Corridor 7 creates a pocket of privacy for interconnecting rooms 8 and 9, most likely a bedroom suite. The insula challenged the architect both to accommodate the occupants' rituals and to signal each room's function for the

78. Gustav Hermansen, *Ostia: Aspects of Roman City Life* (Alberta, 1981), 35: definition of the medianum.

visitor. As close analysis of six representative Ostian insulae will show, these architects succeeded quite well in attaining these objectives. It is interesting in this connection that Axel Boëthius has shown how the insula pattern has survived in modern Mediterranean cities, demonstrating the practicality and versatility of this ancient Roman solution to the problems of urban density.⁷⁹

This chapter has established that the manifold rituals—both prescribed and habitual—that took place in the Roman house found expression in specific architectural forms. Despite the diverse shapes that the house's dynamic and static spaces took, several elements remained constant: emphasis of the visual axis in dynamic spaces; planning of the view out from static spaces; and the careful differentiation of public space from private space. As Bek points out:

The universal quality appears . . . in the canonical disposition of the rooms, for instance in the entrance sequence and in the relative constancy in the representation of the complete visual image. Owing to this and to the stability of the social pattern, the pattern of private representation in its various aspects is also . . . of a form that was to a certain extent commonly applicable. Because of this element of recognition the participants in the ceremonial would have been enabled to carry out the roles allotted to them without difficulty in given situations in any house, as a client or dominus, host or guest, since the accepted order of precedence formed the invariable condition for the distribution of roles. There were no passive spectators, all participated actively through visually taking possession of the room.⁸⁰

If a house's spatial layout is a system that programs the behavior of all the persons who use it, what role does decoration play in this system? Examination of the general aspects of ritual and space in the Roman house suggests the thesis of this book, that in each house the ensembles of painted, stuccoed, and mosaic decoration participated in a coding process that modified, emphasized, and often personalized ritually defined spaces through perspective, color, and the meanings of images included in the decorative schemes. The following chapter considers the chronologically successive styles of painted and mosaic decoration in terms of their formal development, paying special attention to technique, working methods, and how each style of decoration addresses the viewer, that is, how the viewer perceives the decoration. In this way the reader will be prepared to "enter" the case-study houses in the following chapters with a good understanding of the general stylistic, compositional, and perceptual problems that belong to each historical system of decoration.

79. Boëthius, *Golden House of Nero*, 129–185.

80. Bek, *Towards Paradise on Earth*, 202.

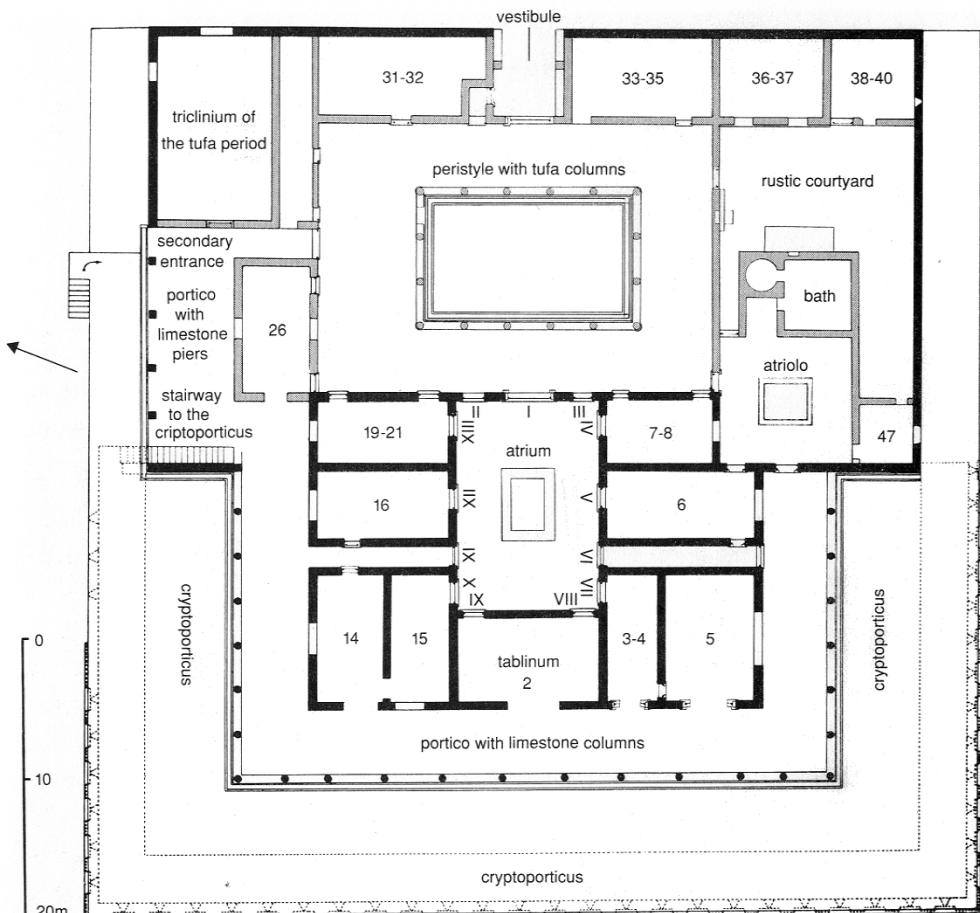


FIGURE 28. Plan of the Villa of the Mysteries in the period of the Second Style, ca. 60 B.C.

four suites. Alan Little has suggested that cubiculum 16 may have functioned like the tablinum, used by the paterfamilias for receiving the clientela. Rooms 4 and 5 would have been reserved for the *domina*, or woman of the house; ceremonies preparing the family's brides for their weddings would have taken place in the famous room of the frieze. The destroyed northwestern suite would then have been reserved for the private use of the paterfamilias, and the triclinium, 6, situated near the kitchen, would be for dining.³¹ Although highly conjectural, Little's hypothesis is supported by the differences in the quality of deco-

31. Alan M. G. Little, *A Roman Bridal Drama at the Villa of the Mysteries* (Kennebunk, Me., 1972), 3–5, 9–10.

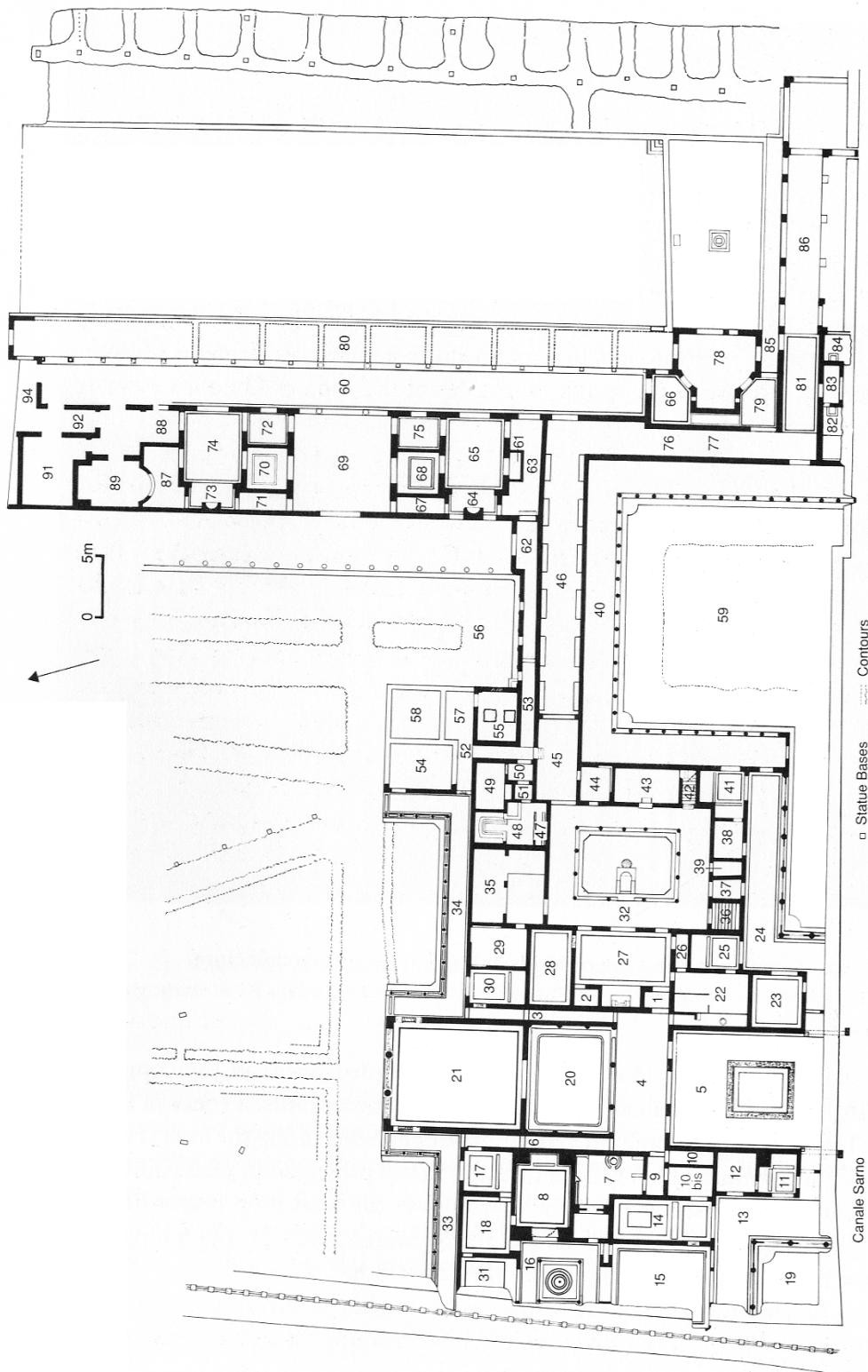


FIGURE 41. Plan of the Villa of Oplontis.

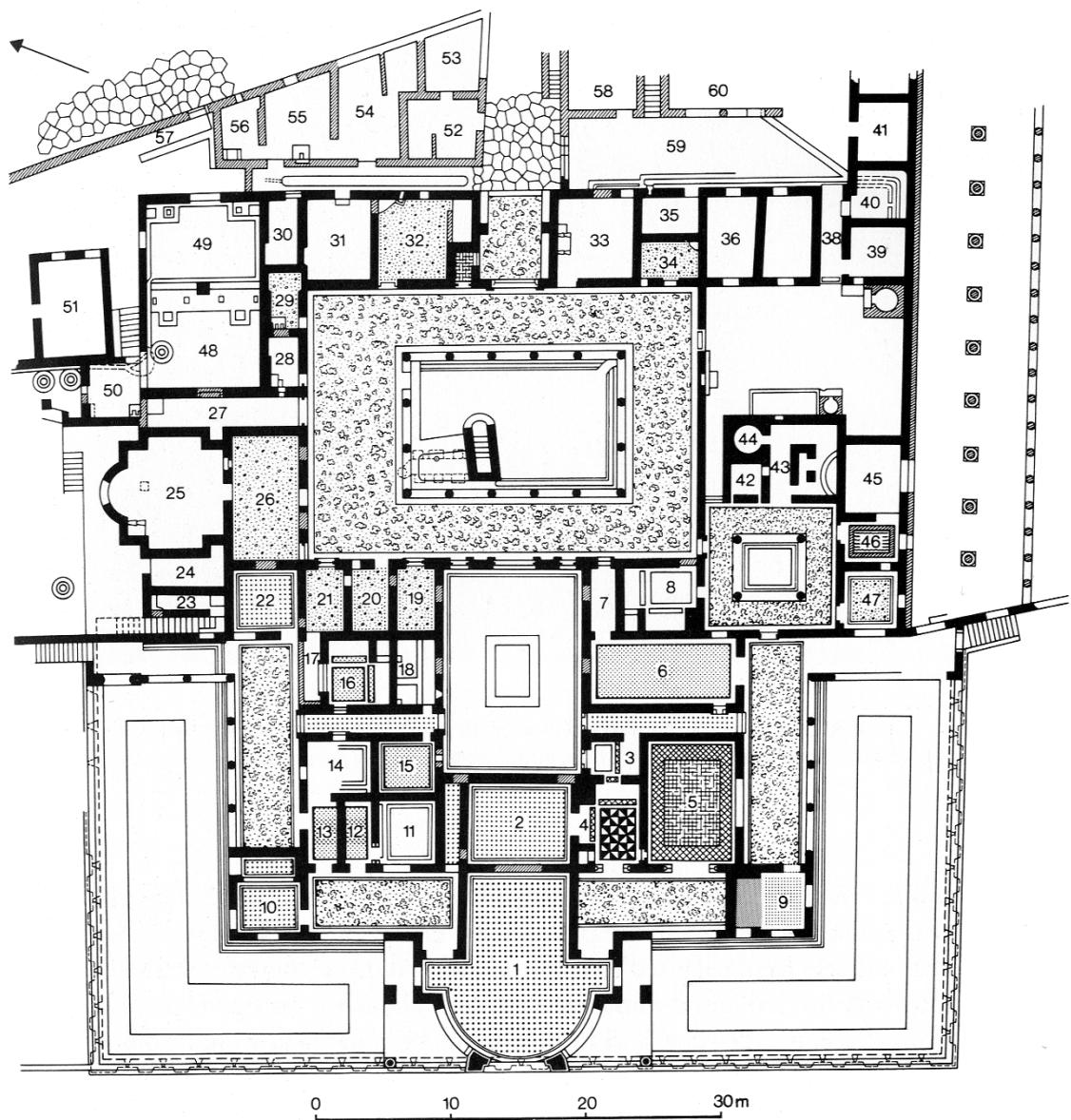
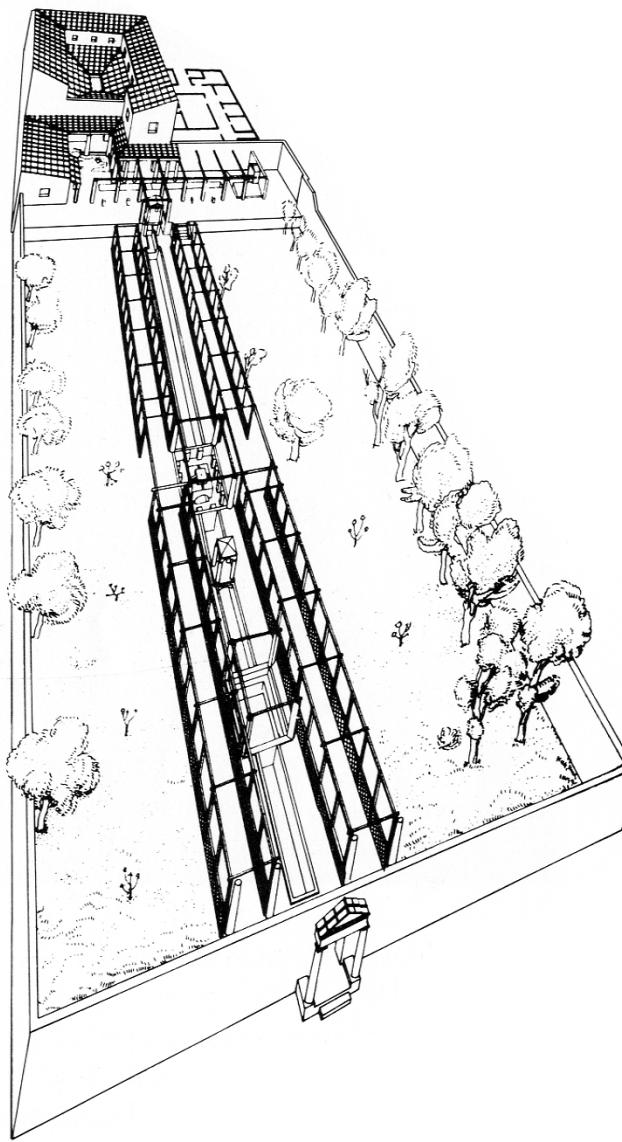
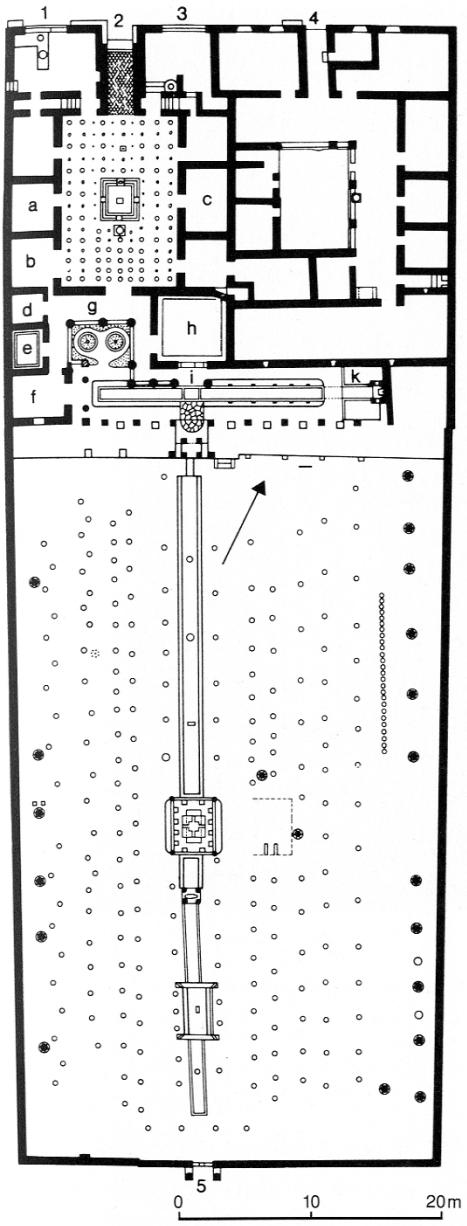


FIGURE 63. Plan of the Villa of the Mysteries showing modifications of ca. 15 B.C.—A.D. 15.



FIGURES 108 and 109. Plan of the House of Octavius Quartio. The axonometric drawing illustrates the relationships among house, gardens, and canals.

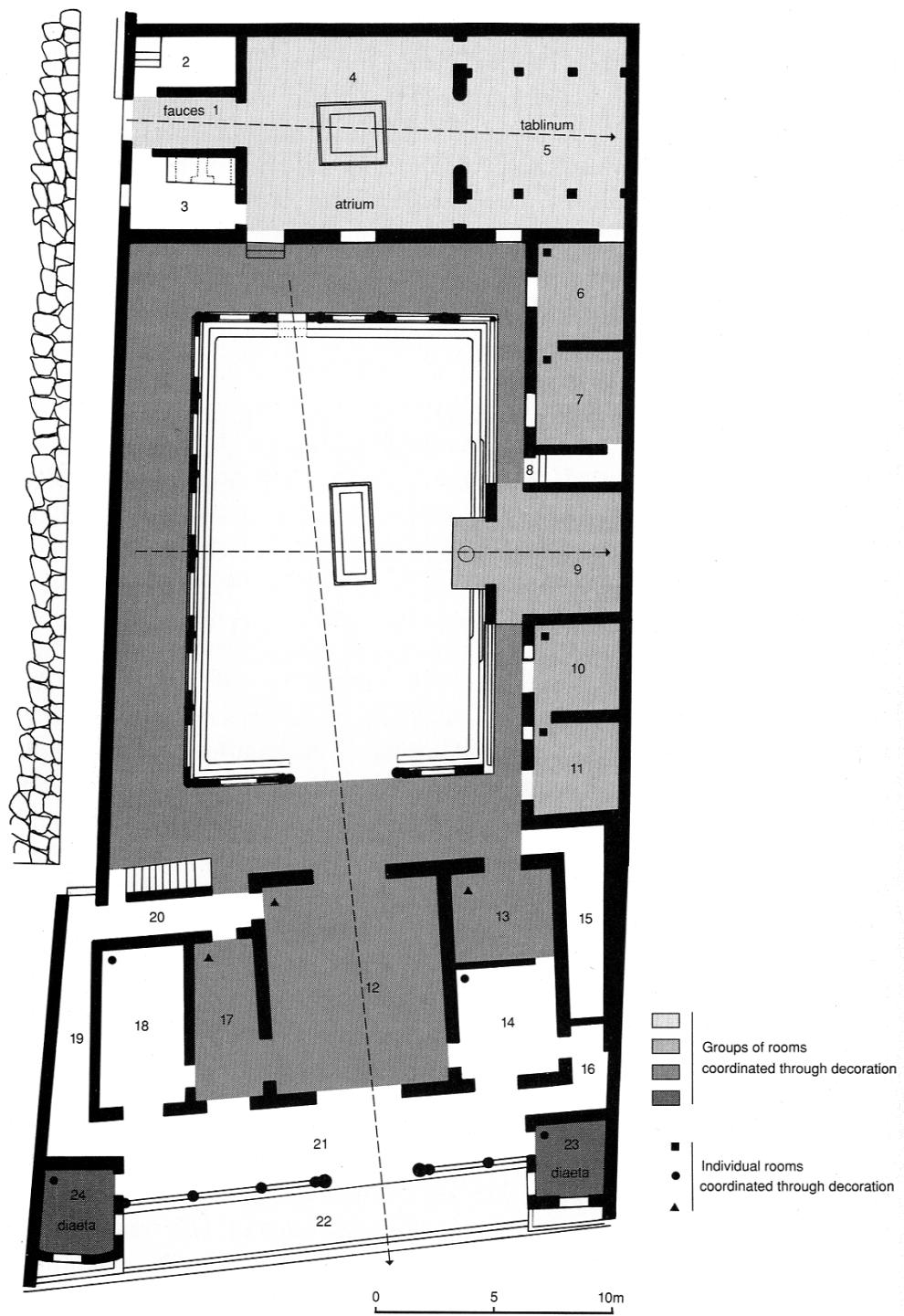


FIGURE 141. Plan of the House of the Mosaic Atrium. Four pavement systems differentiate spaces in terms of function and importance.

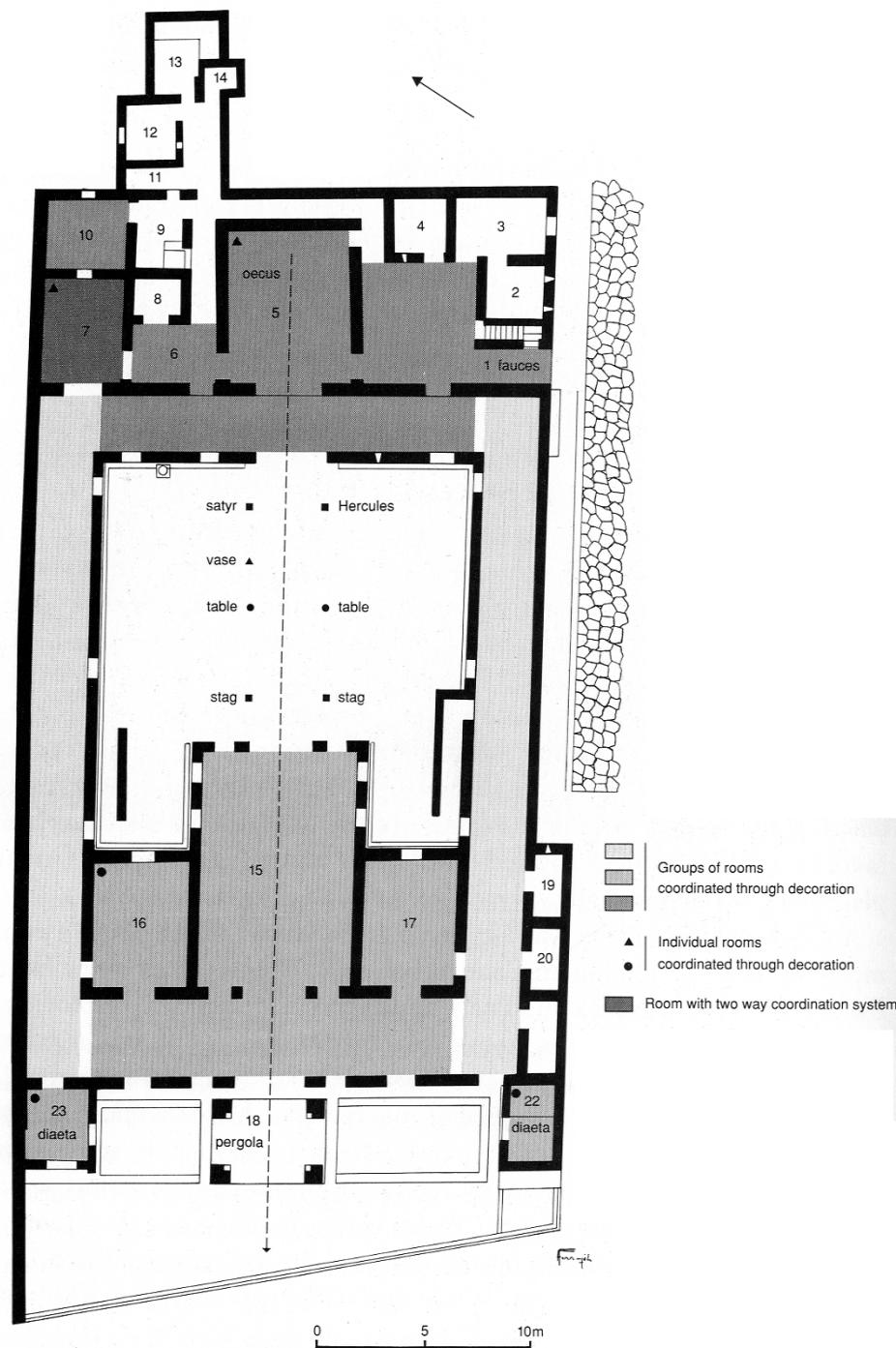


FIGURE 147. Plan of the House of the Stags. Four pavement systems differentiate spaces within the house, while symmetrically arranged sculptures and furniture frame the visual axis in the garden.

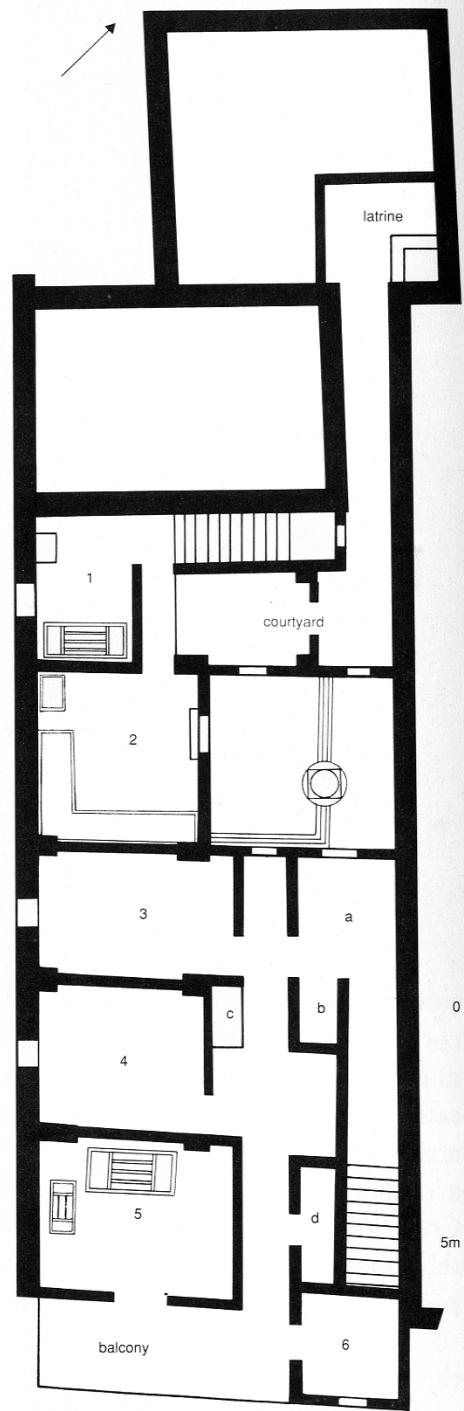
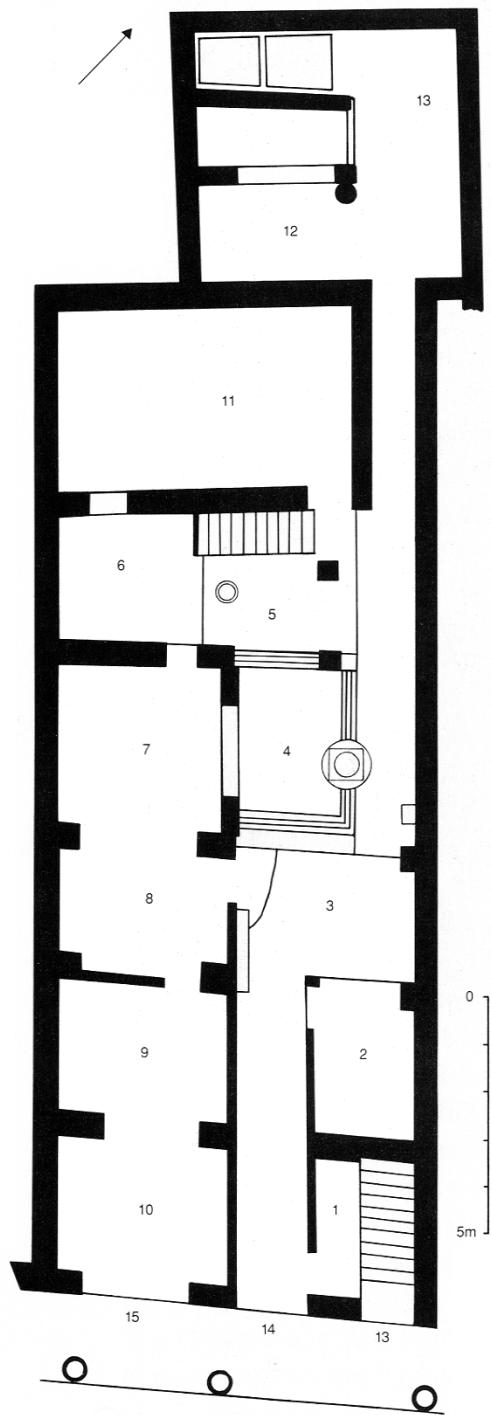


FIGURE 159a, b. Plans of the ground floor and the upper story of the House in Opus Craticium.

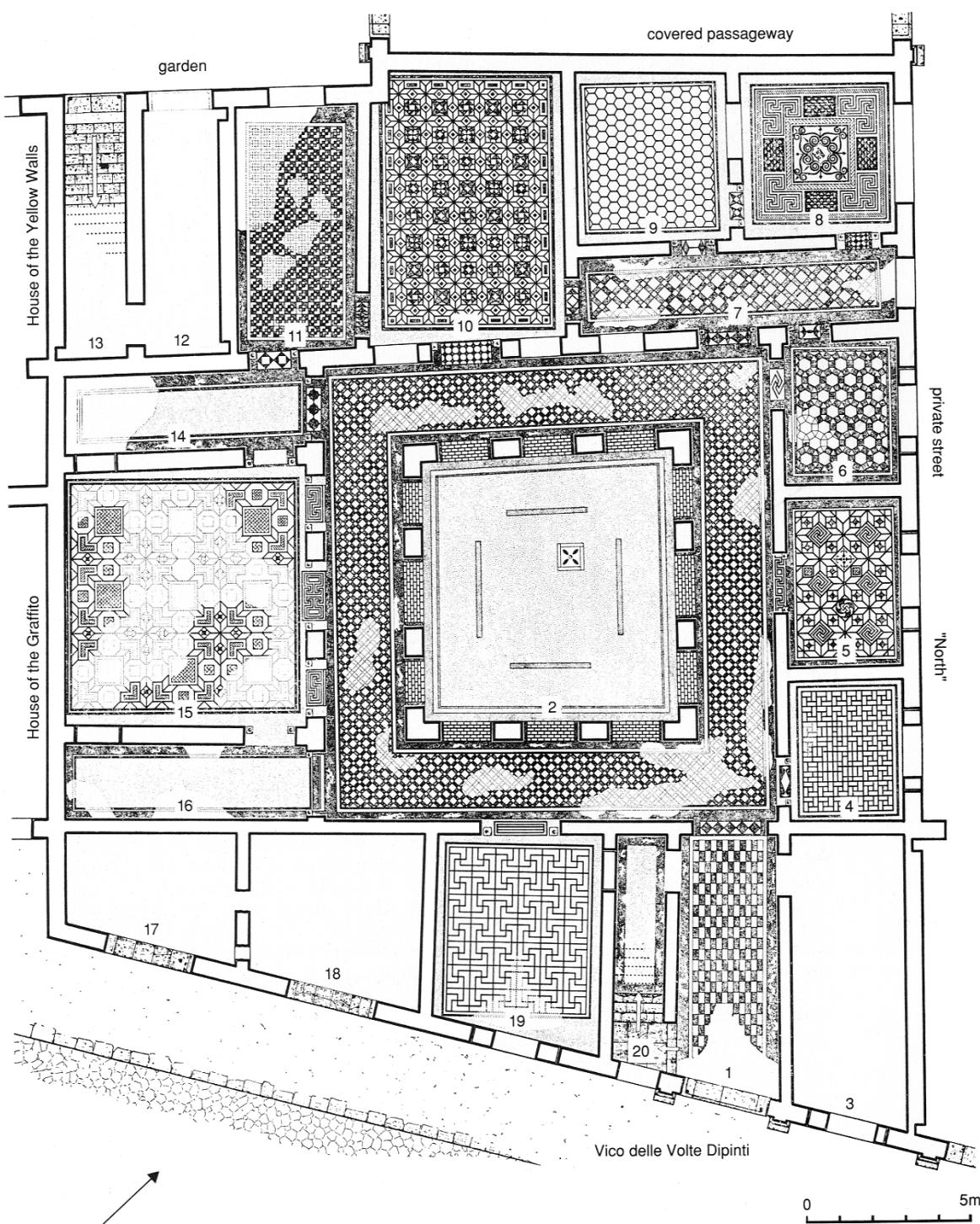


FIGURE 163. Plan of the House of the Muses with mosaics drawn in.