Boundaries and control in the Roman house

Joanne Berry

How should we read the structure of the atrium house? On the one hand, it is an open space; its rooms are arranged around the central courtyard or atrium. From its narrow entrance it is often possible to see straight through to the back of the garden or peristyle, and it is hardly surprising that scholars have claimed that the house was intentionally designed to allow people to see within, to guide their gaze to special features in order to demonstrate the wealth and status of the owner, or to make outsiders want to enter and see more.[1] On the other hand, the house was also a sacred space that carried a potent symbolic value. It was protected by the household gods, and was sustained by religious, social and economic resources.[2] Symbolically, the house was private even when it was used for public business. It was also strictly monitored and controlled.[3]

Scholars are increasingly challenging the idea that the inhabitants of Roman houses were more concerned with display than with privacy, and are suggesting methods by which privacy was established.[4] I will argue here that in the Roman house display and privacy are not mutually exclusive, but of equal importance. Within the open atrium plan there were both physical and symbolic boundaries that functioned to control movement and protect the home from visitors who were not members of the household or family. My aim is to explore the creation and deployment of such boundaries in a society that often used aesthetic markers to control space, and to discuss how what may seem to have been free movement within the atrium house may actually have been restricted.

First I make a brief review of the ideology and structure of the atrium house, based on literary sources. Then comes an introduction to some anthropological theory on the creation and maintenance of boundaries. Third comes a comparison with the layout of ancient Greek houses and, fourth, a discussion of how boundaries were established, maintained and reinforced in the atrium house, drawing on examples from Pompeii and Herculaneum.

The literary sources I will use range in date and vary in style and genre. My intent is to build up a general picture of Roman attitudes and beliefs pertaining to the atrium house and the control of movement within it.[5] I use traditional terminology (*fauces, tablinum, cubiculum,* etc.) to describe particular spaces without any assumptions about their actual everyday use.[6]

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1 E.g., A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton, NJ 1994); S. Hales, *The Roman house and social identity* (Cambridge 2003).

2 Y. Thébert, "Private life and domestic architecture in Roman Africa," in P. Veyne (ed.), *A history of private life,* vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA 1987) 407.

3 K. Cooper, "Closely watched households: visibility, exposure and private power in the Roman domus," *Past and Present* 197 (2007) 23.

4 E.g., E. Proudfoot, "Secondary doors in entranceways at Pompeii: reconsidering access and the 'view from the street'," *TRAC 2012* (Oxford 2013) 91-116; M. T. Lauritsen, "Doors in domestic space at Pompeii: a preliminary study," in D. Mladenović and B. Russell (edd.), *TRAC 2010* (Oxford 2010) 59-75; id., "The form and function of boundaries in the Campanian house," in A. Anguissola (ed.), Privata luxuria: *towards an archaeology of intimacy* (Munich 2013) 95-114.

5 See, however, L. Nevett, "Perceptions of domestic space in Roman Italy," in B. Rawson and P. Weaver (edd.), *The Roman family in Italy: status, sentiment, space* (Oxford 1997) 281-98, for a discussion of the perils of using literary sources to interpret archaeological evidence.

6 I have argued that most rooms in the Roman house were multi-functional: "The conditions of

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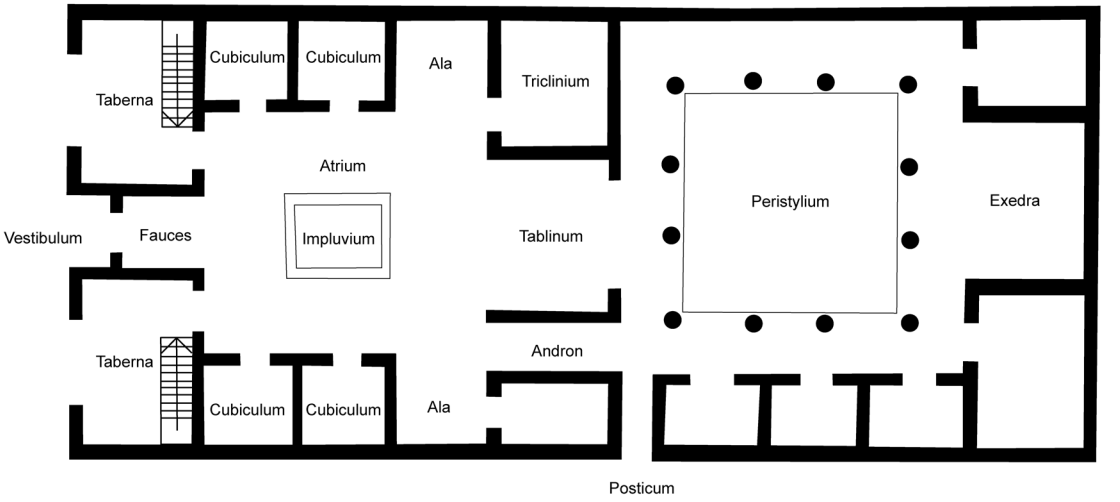


Fig. 1. Ideal plan of the Roman atrium house based on Vitruvius (*del.* J. Andrews).

1. The structure and ideology of the atrium house

Plenty of literary sources can be used to support the view that the Roman house was an open space. Vitruvius described how the house should be organised to create a pleasing effect, claiming that, where possible, it should respect the rules of symmetry. The ideal lay-out (fig. 1) derives from his description (Vitr. 6.3):[7] a house that was designed to frame the status of the head of the household, and one which copied features of public architecture in order give weight to his authority.[8] The house was a public space: visitors were encouraged to enter, to view, and to admire the wealth and, by extension, the political power of the owner. It was a *domus frequentata*, an accessible space linked to political success. In the words of Seneca (*Ep.* 21.6):[9]

> Whenever men have been thrust forward by fortune, whenever they have become part and parcel of another's influence, they have found abundant favour, their houses have been thronged, only so long as they themselves have kept their position (transl. Gummere 1917).

Velleius Paterculus described how Marcus Livius Drusus told his architect, 'If you possess the skill, you must build my house in such a way that whatever I do shall be seen by all'. Clients and grand architecture went hand-in-hand, and were dependent on each other.

The sources also address the types of housing needed for different social classes. Houses had to be suitable for their occupants because they were intimately connected to social standing. According to the élite at least, poor Romans had no need for large apartments and prestigious decoration, since they would visit their patrons rather than receive guests into their own homes.[10] The houses of the élite, on the other hand, were display areas,

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domestic life in AD 79: a case-study of houses 11 and 12, Insula 9, Region I," *PBSR* 65 (1997) 103-25.

7 E. Dwyer, "The Pompeian atrium house in theory and practice," in E. K. Gazda (ed.), *Roman art in the private sphere* (Ann Arbor, MI 1991) 25, points out that, although there are over 200 atrium houses in Pompeii, the majority do not match Vitruvius' ideal. But it is still fair to say that there was a standard 'atrium' type of house.

8 Cf. Cooper (supra n.3) 13.

9 See also Tac., *Dial.* 6 and *Ann.* 4.41; Juv., *Sat.* 1.96: Cic., *Att.* 2.22.3. Cf. R. Saller, *Patriarchy, property and death in the Roman family* (Cambridge 1996) 92-93.

10 Sen., *Ep.* 68.10, 76.12 and 76.15, 84.11-12; Sen., *Cons. Marc.* 10.1; Vitr. 6.5.1-2. Cf. Saller ibid. on

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filled with mosaics and wall-paintings that were intended to be seen. Their doors remained open except at times of mourning; a closed door meant that the head of the household had something to hide. Cicero claimed that plots against the Roman State were hatched behind closed doors.[11] In Plautus too characters are surprised to find the doors of the house shut, which suggests that the doors were normally open.[12]

The literary sources also show that the house was the basic unit of society, within which, to quote Cicero (*Off.* 1.54), 'everything is shared; it is the element from which a city is made, so to speak the seed-bed of the State'.[13] The house embodied traditional Roman values and ideals. Cicero (*Dom.* 61.108) further noted:

> What is there more holy, what is there more carefully fenced round with every description of religious aspect, than the house of every individual citizen? Here are his altars, here are his hearths, here are his household gods; here all his sacred rites, all his religious ceremonies are preserved. This is the asylum of everyone, so holy a spot that it is impious to drag anyone from it (transl. Yonge 1913).[14]

Cicero said this shortly after his own house was destroyed by Clodius; while he may have been feeling particularly emotional, he is still appealing to a common sentiment. He did it again in the *Philippics* (12.14.8-10), when he claimed that the separation of a family from its house was a catastrophic event (on this occasion he was in exile). Indeed, the word *domus* was used interchangeably to mean both the physical structure of the house and those who lived within in, both free and slave.[15] Cicero was not the only author to speak of the house as a refuge. Catullus (31.7-11) wrote:

> Ah, what is more blessed than to put cares away, when the mind lays by its burden, and tired with labour of far travel we have come to our own home and rest on the couch we longed for? This it is which alone is worth all these toils (transl. Cornish 1904).[16]

Moreover, it was a crime to eject a man from his house. The *Digest* states that a man could not be dragged out of his house and into court.[17]

The house was also intimately connected to morality and tradition. Suetonius (*Aug.* 72-73) noted the alleged simplicity of Augustus' furniture and household goods, scarcely fine enough for a private citizen; the fact that he used the same bedroom for 40 years illustrated his traditional morality. In contrast, according to Cicero (*Phil.* 2.69), that Mark Antony turned every bedroom in his house into a brothel was evidence of his profligacy and immorality.

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the connection between the *domus* and social status.

11 E.g., Cic., *Mur.* 50; *Phil.* 2.85; *Cat.* 1.8-9; *Sull.* 52. Cf. S. Treggiari, "The upper-class house as symbol and focus of emotion in Cicero," *JRA* 12 (1999) 42-44. For doors shut at times of mourning, see Apul., *Met.* 2.22-24.

12 E.g., *Stich.* 3008 ff; *Mostell.* 444.

13 Transl. Gardner and Wiedemann 1991.

14 See also *Dig.* 25.3.1.2; Val. Max. 5.6, 9.1.6 and 9.15.5; Sen., *Clem.* 1.15.3; Tac., *Hist.* 3.70; *Ann.* 13.4. See Saller (supra n.9) 89 on the general belief of the sanctity of the house, Treggiari (supra n.11) on the house as a strong focus on emotion, and B. Bergmann, "The Roman house as memory theater: the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii," *ArtB* 76 (1994) 225-56, on the house as an extension of self.

15 R. Saller, "The hierarchical household in Roman society: a study of domestic slavery," in M. L. Bush (ed.), *Serfdom and slavery: studies in legal bondage* (London 1996) 115; Saller (supra n.9) 80 and 87.

16 See also Cic., *Att.*1.5.7; *Cat.* 4.2.

17 *Dig.* 2.4.18; ibid. 50.17.103 (Gaius). Cf. Treggiari (supra n.11) 34.

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A tension existed between the public and private aspects of the élite atrium house, neatly summed up by Vitruvius (6.5):[18]

> When we have arranged our plan with a view to aspect, we must go on to consider how in private buildings the rooms belonging to the family, and how those which are shared with visitors, should be planned. For into the private rooms no one can come uninvited, such as bedrooms, dining-rooms, baths and other apartments which have similar purposes. The common rooms are those into which, though uninvited, persons of the people can come by right, such as vestibules, courtyards, peristyles, and other apartments of similar uses (transl. Granger).

Seneca too spoke of 'spacious atria and vestibula packed with a throng of unadmitted guests ...', the point being that these guests were inside the house but did not have access to any private area.[19] We hear that some parts of the house were public and some were private, but in the division of space there was no simple dichotomy of public and private; instead, a series of subtle and fluid grades of privacy was established by a social coding of architecture and decoration.[20] The house was a sacred and protected space. Although its plan was open in the sense that it was arranged around central areas, guests did not have free or equal licence to go where they pleased: they required invitations to enter certain more 'private' parts. Just as in the law courts and other aspects of society, access depended on one's social status and relationship with the head of the household.[21]

The central issue therefore is one of control. If the house was a sacred area that was structurally open and accessible to many people, and not just family members, how were people's movements directed and enforced? If one's house is open, if one wants people to enter and admire it because the wall-paintings, mosaics and other display items reflect one's importance in society, how then does one prevent people from entering uninvited the more sacred or exclusive parts of the house?

2. Modern theories about boundaries

> Humans are territorial animals. We define spaces, mark them out for specific uses, create visible and invisible boundaries, establish cultural conventions of behaviour towards those boundaries, and will defend the territory against unwanted intrusions.[22]

When we create space, both physical and psychological, we also create boundaries, because this is how we structure the space and mark it out. It is how we protect our space. It becomes necessary to protect our space when we come into contact with others. One way of creating physical boundaries is consciously to manipulate the architecture, to create visible partitions in areas where they do not naturally exist. The importance and significance of boundaries (such as doors, walls, partitions) is easily recognised by members of the

18 See also Sen., *Ben.* 6.34.2.

19 Sen., *Cons Marc.* 10.1 (transl. Basore 1928).

20 Wallace-Hadrill (supra n.1) 38.

21 J.-A. Dickmann, "Space and social relations in the Roman West," in B. Rawson (ed.), *A companion to families in the Greek and Roman worlds* (Oxford 2010) 55.

22 D. Sanders, "Behavioural conventions and archaeology: methods for the analysis of ancient architecture," in S. Kent (ed.), *Domestic architecture and the use of space: an interdisciplinary cross-cultural study* (Cambridge 1990) 49. Cf. also Sanders' remark, ibid.: "Territorial markers play a major role in the regulation of expected behaviour. The more public the territory, the more necessary markers become to ensure proper behaviour; the more private the territory, the more likely it is that cultural conventions are used as regulators; and the more permanent the occupancy, the more elaborate the marker system".

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same culture, but they need to be constantly reinforced if they are to be respected — otherwise there is the danger that outsiders (whether accidentally or on purpose) will overlook the visual clues.[23] This is where invisible or symbolic boundaries are needed. These can be subtle, they do not require dominant physical features, they can be as simple as a change in decoration or the type of threshold, yet they mark important transitions (e.g., from outside to inside, from public to private). Working together, visible and invisible boundaries function to remind visitors of both the constraints that exist and the behaviour that is acceptable in a given environment.[24] This is particularly true in public areas, where more elaborate reminders of a boundary often need to be employed, or in situations where outsiders are allowed into special or sacred areas.

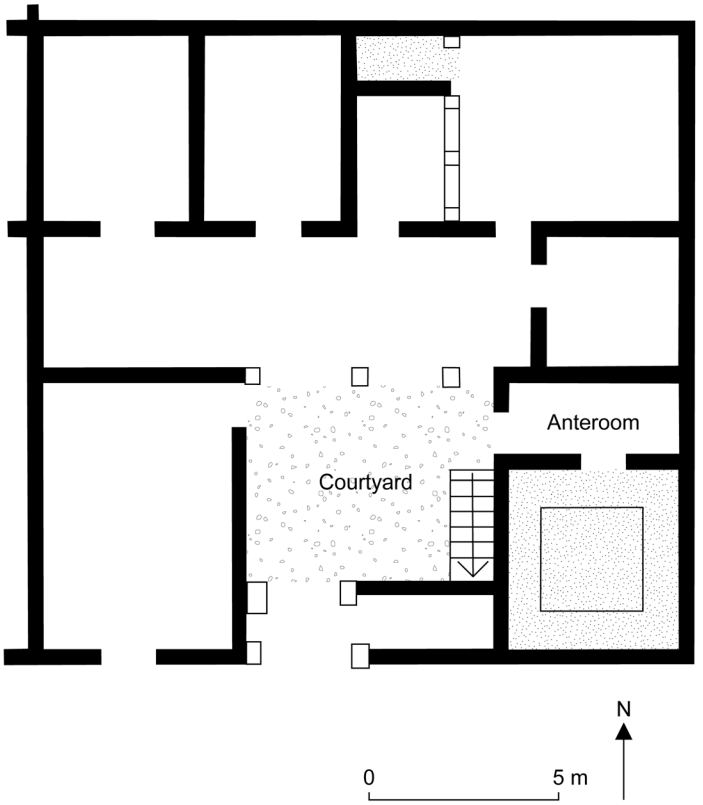


Fig. 2. Schematic plan of a Greek house, based on House A.vii.4 at Olynthos (*del*. J. Andrews, from N. Cahill, *Household and city organisation at Olynthos* [New Haven, CT 2002] fig. 12).

The built environment of the atrium house (or any house) was not a neutral or passive space. That much is clear from any review of the symbolic and political importance of the house. It is clear too that there is no such thing as a neutral boundary. Boundaries exist to create and highlight differences between people. The problem we have as modern observers is in recognising the boundaries that existed in the ancient world. This issue has been highlighted by scholarship on the Greek house.

3. The Greek house

Like the atrium house, the Greek house was inward-looking and planned around a central courtyard (fig. 2), but there was no long-range perspective, no succession of rooms or views. In general, the Greek house had a greater feel of privacy about it than the Roman house.

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23 M. Grahame, "Public and private in the Roman house: investigating the social order of the Casa del Fauno," in R. Laurence and A. Wallace-Hadrill (edd.), *Domestic space in the Roman world* (JRA Suppl. 22, 1997) 141.

24 Cf. A. Rapoport, "Systems of activities and systems of settings," in S. Kent (ed.), *Domestic architecture and the use of space: an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural study* (Cambridge 1990) 9-20, on mnemonic devices for reminding users of particular types of behaviour; M. Parker-Pearson and C. Richards (edd.), *Architecture and order: approaches to social space* (London 1994) 24-25.

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Twenty years ago, some scholars were using a limited number of sources to claim that women were secluded within the Greek house, whether for the practical purpose of supervising domestic work or for cultural reasons of maintained social respectability (so that they did not come into contact with men).[25] The problem was that it was difficult to locate the 'women's area' in the plans of excavated Greek houses (e.g., at Olynthus, Delos or Eretria). In contrast, the *andron* or men's area was easily identified. As a consequence, it was suggested — partly on the basis of ethnographic studies of modern Islamic houses in Tunis — that the structure of the house may have been responding to more complex cultural needs, that it was not women who were secluded within their own quarters, but rather the male guests who were restricted in their access to the private areas.[26] The point was not that women should be prevented from seeing men, but that they should not come into contact with men from outside the family. Thus the movement of *visitors* was controlled and limited. This may have been achieved by having a special room for entertaining guests close to the front entrance. Close archaeological analysis demonstrated that boundaries were set and maintained in ways that did not match the expectations generated from the literary sources, and were not immediately obvious from the house's architectural layout.

4. The creation and maintenance of boundaries in the Roman house



Fig. 3. Plaster-cast of the front door of the House of the Beautiful Impluvium (I.9.1), Pompeii (D. Esposito).

The atrium house was open in plan and designed to attract visitors. As such, it was very different from the Greek house in conception and design. But, like the Greek house, it was a closely controlled and monitored environment, regulated by both physical and symbolic boundaries.

First, we should consider doors. Doors are the most important type of physical boundary, allowing or denying access to a marked environment, and establishing the relationship of a room or area to the spaces around it. The front door is particularly significant. Literary sources report that the doors of Roman houses were kept open except in unusual or suspicious circumstances. Yet at Pompeii the plaster casts and actual remains of front doors show them to be imposing barriers, with massive locks and bars (fig. 3). The front door of the House of Ceres (I.9.13), for example, was decorated with 22 ornamental bronze studs and secured with

25 S. Walker, "Women and housing in Classical Greece," in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (edd.), *Images of women in antiquity* (London 1983) 81-91. Lys. 1.9-10; Xen., *Oik.* 9.2-5.

26 L. Nevett, "Separation or seclusion? Towards an archaeological approach to investigating women in the Greek house in the fifth to third centuries B.C.," in Parker Pearson and Richards (supra n.24) 98-112.

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a cross-bar; two iron keys were excavated from the vestibule. During the 1920s excavations in the 5 houses of *Insula* I.7, keys and metal door-fittings were found at the entrances of 4 of them.[27] This highlights the fact that front doors were functional: they were intended to protect the house and must have been routinely closed, if only at night. Further, it has recently been pointed out that many Pompeian houses had a second door in the entrance corridor.[28] The exact numbers are unknown but at least 50 have been identified, including the houses of the Ceii (I.6.15), the Lovers (I.10.11), Caecilius Jucundus (V.1.26), and the Silver Wedding (V.2.i). E. Proudfoot suggests that the door closest to the street would have been kept open most the time during the day, to indicate that it was open for visitors, but that the secondary door may have been closed in order to screen the interior from casual passers-by.[29] At the very least, as he notes, the presence of a secondary entrance gave the occupants a variety of options to control both physical and visual access to their home. In addition, many front doors were set back slightly from the street into the vestibule (as can be seen in figs. 3-4), and they opened inwards, marking and reinforcing the symbolic privacy of each house which all visitors had to respect (fig. 4).[30] The inward-opening door also served to restrict the view through the house so that, as S. Hales has noted, the passer-by received a carefully framed picture, rather than an open view of the interior of the house.[31]

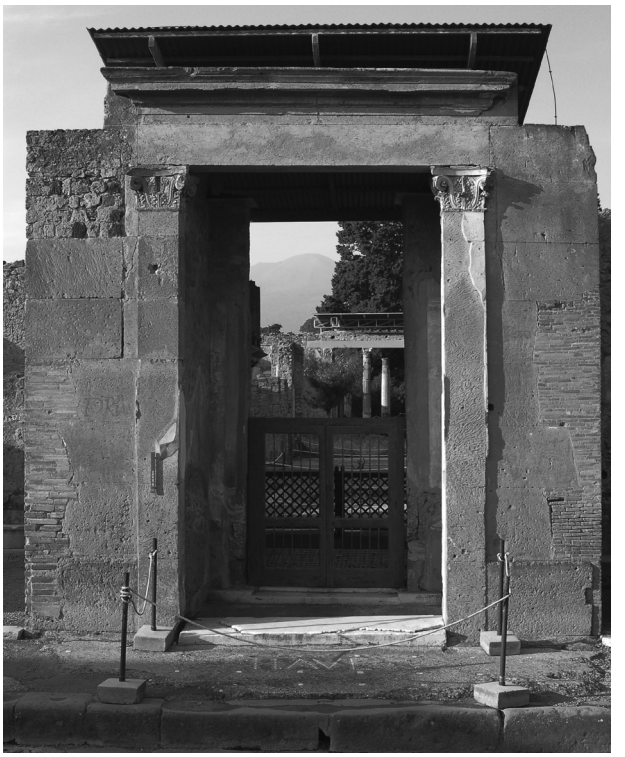


Fig. 4. Entrance to the House of the Faun (VI.12.1), Pompeii, set back from the street (D. Esposito).

Front doors are obvious boundaries, depending on whether they are open or closed and the direction in which they open. They demarcate open or closed areas. Inside the house particular types of doors may also have been important, depending on their size and method of opening. Few such doors have survived in the Vesuvian towns, but their presence can be deduced from cuts on thresholds of entrances to rooms. There seem to be patterns in their distribution: in the 31 houses studied by M. T. Lauritsen, evidence of

27 I.71 (bronze key and decorative bronze studs), I.7.3 (bronze key and bronze door-fittings), I.7.7 (no door-related artefacts), I.7.10 (entrance 10 had fragments from the door and a key; entrance 11 had 22 bronze studs), and I.7.19 (fragments of wooden bar, part of the lock, key).

28 Proudfoot (supra n.4).

29 Ibid. 104.

30 Good examples of this are the House of the Bull (V.1.7) and the House of the Beautiful Impluvium (I.9.1) at Pompeii.

31 Hales (supra n.1) 107. Grahame (supra n.23) 163 argues that the view from the *fauces* passes through all the areas where the inhabitants of the house were least likely to be, thereby preserving their privacy.

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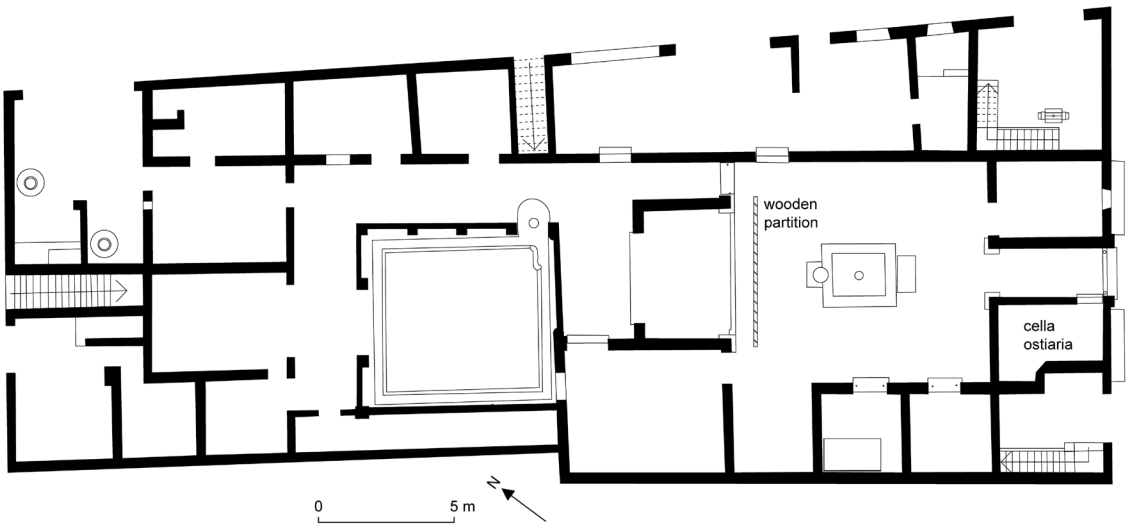


Fig. 5. House of the Wooden Partition, Herculaneum, illustrating possible location of the *ostiarum* and the position of the wooden partition (J. Andrews, after id., *The use and development of upper floors in houses at Herculaneum* [Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Reading 2006] vol. 3, fig. 11).

doors was found in 90% of the *cubicula* located off the atrium, whereas rooms off peristyle gardens and in service areas tended to have far fewer doors.[32] Since the rooms around the atrium were the closest to the main entrance, they were also those most at risk from prying eyes.

Further evidence of doors comes from the traces found of wood, fragments of iron and hinges. Often such evidence is found in the area of the *tablinum*.[33] In view of the width of this room, these were probably folding-doors, like one found in Herculaneum's House of the Wooden Partition (III.11) (fig. 5). It could be folded away to both sides of the *tablinum* to give the impression that there was no door at all, but it remained available as a potential physical boundary. In this way physical boundaries within the house could change: as a background to the morning *salutatio* at the best houses, the doors to the rear of the *tablinum* might be shut, but later in the day they could be opened to allow a view through to the peristyle and garden. There were many options. The perception of spaces could also be altered by curtains, or by the positioning of partitions and furniture, or by plants and trellises in gardens.[34] In Herculaneum's House of the Bicentenary, the remains of an expanding wooden trellis screen were found at the entrance to one of the *alae* (fig. 6). Later on, St Augustine (*Serm*. 51) claimed that the higher a man's rank, the more hangings (*vela*) he had in his house — which gives even more opportunity for creating boundaries and controlling both access and lines of sight.[35]

32 Lauritsen 2013 (supra n.4) 103-8.

33 In the House of the Silver Wedding (V.2.i), for example, a pair of bronze discs with protruding ship bows discovered at the front of the *tablinum* have been interpreted as evidence for curtains or partition fittings; at the rear of the same *tablinum* there seems to have been a wooden door. Cf. A. Sogliano, *NSc* 1892, 274; id., *NSc* 1896, 424; A. Mau, *RömMitt* 8 (1893) 33. For further discussion of these phenomena, see Proudfoot (supra n.4) 92-93. Markings on the marble threshold of the *tablinum* of the House of the Prince of Naples (VI.15.7-8) reveal that this space could also have been closed by wooden shutters.

34 For more discussion, see Lauritsen 2013 (supra n.4) 101-3.

35 For literary evidence of folding-doors, see Plin., *Ep*. 2.17.21, 5.6.18 and 5.6.29; for glass-doors and curtains, ibid. 2.17.21. At Herculaneum, evidence for curtain-rails was found in the House

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The physical barrier of the door was not enough, however, to guarantee the good behaviour of visitors. Doors thus had a symbolic significance for the Romans. Ovid (*Fast*. 1.135-36) wrote,

> Every door has two fronts, this way and that, whereof one faces the people, and the other the house-god (*lar*) (transl. Frazer 1931)

illustrating the house's dual nature, its public and private faces, in which context the front door has a particular symbolic importance. In the *Res Gestae* (34.2), Augustus claims that the posts of his front door were hung with wreaths of bay-leaves and a civic crown was placed over the lintel;[36] visitors could not fail to notice that they were entering a special space — as was clearly his intent.[37] The façade incorporating the front door was the first symbolic boundary to be encountered, and archaeology seems to confirm this.[38] At Pompeii and Herculaneum the front door of many houses was ornately decorated, marking them out as something special. The front door of the House of the Augustalis (II.2.4; fig. 7) bears a wreath (*corona civica*) above its lintel; the door-frame of the House of the Menander (I.10.4) has fake Corinthian capitals, marking it out as special, and is flanked by benches provided for clients who presumably came to pay their respects to the master. The façades could include a variety of status-enhancing features, as in the case of the House of Loreius (II.5.2) with its combination of half-columns, benches, projecting balcony and moulded decoration.[39] Some householders went further to mark out their property as special, decorating the pavement in front of the entrance. Good examples at Pompeii are the Houses of the Faun (VI.12.1; fig. 4) and of the Boar I (VIII.3.7), and there are also cases at Herculaneum.[40]

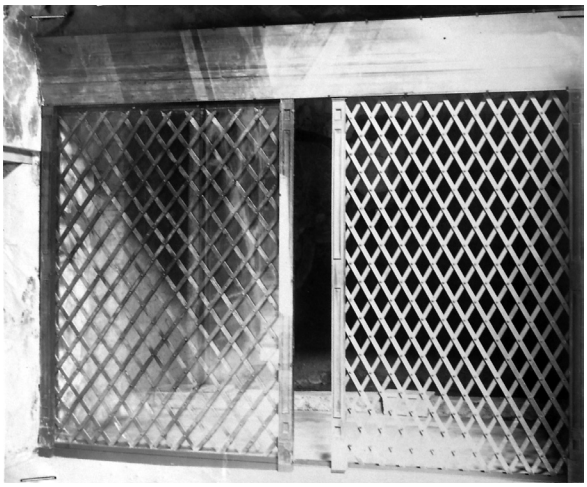


Fig. 6. Left, the wooden, trellis-like screen of the House of the Bicentenary, Herculaneum; right, reconstruction of the screen by A. Maiuri (Soprintendenza di Pompei).

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of Argo: cf. M. Ruggiero, *Storia degli scavi di Ercolano recomposta su' documenti superstiti* (Naples 1885) 545-46 and 549 (I owe this reference to James Andrews).

36 See Cic., *Dom.* 60 for door-posts. For discussion of ritual practices relating to the door of a house, see J. Hartnett, *The Roman street: urban life and society in Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Rome* (Cambridge 2016).

37 On a different note, Petronius (*Sat.* 29) describes how, in the house of the wealthy freedman Trimalchio, a notice fastened to the front door declares 'no slave to go out of doors except by the master's orders. Penalty one hundred lashes' (transl. Heseltine 1913). It illustrates the symbolic boundary between the house and the wider world, but this time to the slaves of the house rather than to visitors.

38 Hales (supra n.1) 103-4.

39 J. Hartnett, "*Si quis hic sederit*: streetside benches and urban society in Pompeii," *AJA* 112 (2008) 112.

40 Ibid. 101. The marking out of the front door as a special feature is not unique to Roman culture. For example, in Jewish houses today the Mezuzah can be seen fixed to the doorpost, symbolising god's protection of the house. Inhabitants will touch the Mezuzah as they pass through the door. I owe this point to R. Evyasaf.

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Fig. 7. House of the Augustalis (II.2.4), Pompeii (author)

The *fauces* (*vestibulum*), a space of transition before a visitor entered the house proper, represented a further boundary. Aulus Gellius (*NA* 16.5) claimed that:

> the vestibule is not in the house itself, nor is it a part of the house, but is an open place before the door of the house, through which there is approach and access to the house from the street (transl. Rolfe 1927).

The *vestibulum* was named after the goddess Vesta; it marked the sacred area between the house and the street.[41] It was a liminal zone which served to remind people once again that they were entering a protected space, one that was easily policed. Crossing the boundary of the *vestibulum* was a symbolic act.[42] It is for this reason that so many houses have elaborate mosaics in the *fauces*, such as the bear in the House of the Bear (VII.2.45), the dolphins in that of Caesius Blandus (VII.1.40), or the dogs in the entrances to a number (see further below).[43] One of the best examples is the elaborately decorated *fauces* of the House of the Faun (VI.12.1; fig. 4): huge columns with Corinthian capitals frame the entrance; two marble thresholds suggest that there were two doors to pass through before one entered the *fauces*, which itself was decorated with a mosaic 'carpet' and fine First-Style wall-decoration that imitated the architecture of public buildings.[44] A handful of houses at

41 Serv. 2.486.4; Cic., *Har. Resp.* 31.8.

42 Grahame (supra n.23) 159.

43 See also the entrances of the House of Geometric Mosaics (VIII.2.16), VIII.2.23, the House of the Boar II (VIII.2.26), and the House of Severus (VIII.2.29).

44 A number of houses appear to have had double front doors, including the House of Venus in

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Pompeii (including that of the Faun) have mosaics before the entrance bearing words of welcome: SALVE and HAVE.[45] At first glance it appears that these served to welcome visitors, but they also made people aware that they were crossing a boundary: mosaic and text worked together to reinforce a directive.

The visitor entering an atrium house discovered that it was inward-looking: there were virtually no windows to the street, and all rooms were arranged around the central spaces of the atrium and peristyle. All guests had to pass through the atrium, which thus occupied a position of particular importance.[46] There was a general lack of transitional spaces such as corridors, which meant that other methods had to be employed to create boundaries and control movement. This is where thresholds became important. According to Saint Augustine (*Civ. D.* 4.8), thresholds had their own god, Limentinus. Whether or not that is true for earlier periods, thresholds were surely considered sacred or symbolic. Cicero (*Phil*. 2.68) was shocked that Mark Antony dared to cross the sacred threshold of Gnaeus Pompeius' house:[47]

> Oh the cruel audacity! Did you dare to enter into that house? Did you dare to cross that most sacred threshold? And to show your most profligate countenance to the household gods who protect that abode? (transl. Clarke 1918).

There were also superstitions concerning thresholds, as can be seen in Petronius' novel (*Sat*. 30):

> Fed full of these delights, we tried to get in [to the dining-room], when one of the slaves, who was entrusted with this duty, cried, 'Right foot first!' For a moment we were naturally nervous, for fear any of us had broken the rule in crossing the threshold (transl. Heseltine 1913).

The belief here is that it is unlucky to cross a threshold with the left foot first. Petronius is satire and not necessarily a reflection of social reality, yet the Roman predilection for right over left can be found in other areas of life too:[48] according to Vitruvius (3.4.7), temple steps were to be uneven in number so that those entering could start and finish their ascent with their right foot, while Pliny the Elder (*NH* 18.64) claims that, when sowing seed, the hand must always go with the right foot. Ovid (*Tr*. 1.3.55) says that he touched his threshold three times before he went into exile, highlighting its symbolic importance.

In literary sources the importance of the threshold is clear because it marks the *transition* from one area to another. Areas such as the peristyle which have no doors still normally have a threshold of some kind or other; many *cubicula* have thresholds, in marble or mosaic, both at their entrance and within their confines to mark out the position of the *lectus*.[49] Divisions within rooms are often reinforced by changes in both pavement level and wall-decoration. Thresholds can be marked in several ways: by a change in floor level, or by

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a Shell (II.3.1-3) and the House of the Anchor (VI.10.7). See Proudfoot (supra n.4) for further discussion.

45 *Salve*: VI.1.7 (House of the Vestals), Villa Arianna (Stabia). *Have*: VI.12.2 (House of the Faun), VII.2.45 (House of the Bear). '*Salve*' and '*have*' have occasionally also been found further inside houses or shops.

46 Dickmann (supra n.21) 60.

47 See also Hor., *Ep.* 1.18.73; Liv. 2.48; Ov., *Tr.* 3.5.5-10 and 5.4.31-36.

48 Cf. S. Ellis, "*Pes dexter*: superstition and state in the shaping of shop-fronts and street activity in the Roman world," in D. Newsome and R. Laurence (edd.), *Rome, Ostia, Pompeii: movement and space* (London 2011) 166-69.

49 On the cultural importance of thresholds, see the articles in Parker-Pearson and Richards (supra n.24).

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Fig. 8. Mosaic threshold in the House of the Tuscan Colonnade, Herculaneum (Soprintendenza di Pompei)

the materials used (limestone, tuff, marble or mosaic) (fig. 8).[50] They are often found even in rooms or parts of the house that did not have doors. Mosaic thresholds, for example, are generally located at the entrances to the most important spaces: in Pompeii's House of Caesius Blandus (VII.1.40) mosaic thresholds are found at the entrance to the atrium from the *fauces*, at the entrance to the *tablinum* from the *atrium*, and at the entrance to the *ala*; in the House of the Gilded Cupids (VI.16.7) mosaic thresholds mark both entrances to the *tablinum*, to the exedra, and to 3 *cubicula*. A survey of Pompeii's *Regiones* I and VI reveals a pattern: the most common location of mosaic thresholds is at the entrance to the *tablinum*; other commonly marked areas are so-called *cubicula*, *alae*, *exedrae* and *triclinia* (all the types of room that tend to have the best decoration). Mosaic thresholds are thus a subtle boundary connected to the status of the room: one knows one is entering an important room because one has to step over an elaborate marker, which causes one to pause, to take note.

The passage in Petronius also shows that, whilst there was an acknowledgement of the symbolic importance of thresholds and boundaries as marking transitions, this sometimes needed to be reinforced by surveillance. Slaves (*ostiarii* or doorkeepers) reinforced the architectural and physical barriers and could prevent access to certain parts of the house should the symbolic boundaries generated by the wall-decoration or thresholds fail to deter intruders.[51] Trimalchio's visitors were directed immediately into the *triclinium* and a guard-dog then posted at the door; later when some of the guests attempted to leave the party, they were prevented by the guard-dog, which frightened one of the characters so much that he fell into the *impluvium*, and they were directed straight back to the revelries

50 Lauritsen 2011 (supra n.4) 71.

51 See Riggsby (supra n.50) 45 on slaves posted outside bedroom doors; Apul., *Met*, 9.30; Liv. 42.28.12; Tac., *Ann*. 13.44; Val. Max. 1.7.7. Slaves are also attested outside other doors in the house: Curt. 5.1.42, 8.6.18, 8.6.22 and 9.6.4; Tac., *Hist*. 3.38. In *Slavery in the Roman world* (Cambridge 2010) 185, S. Joshel discusses how slaves could function as doors and walls to direct the movement and control the access of visitors to the house. See also ead. and L. H. Petersen, *The material life of slaves* (Cambridge 2014) 39. Wallace-Hadrill 1994 (supra n.1) 39 describes slaves as "living barriers to access to the master".

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by a slave. Petronius also humorously describes a wall-painting of a dog on the wall by the front door that so frightened one character that he fell over the step.[52]

Ethnographic studies indicate that strangers usually receive special treatment when they enter a house, and that their movement is watched and controlled.[53] At the door of Trimalchio's house there was a porter, and his guard-dog is called 'the guardian of the house and the slaves'; Tibullus (2.4.31-32) describes a dog set to guard the threshold.[54] It is more difficult to find archaeological evidence for such surveillance; presumably the open nature of the house allowed effective visual control of both outsiders and family members, ensuring movement and behaviour acceptable to the master. But there are some suggestions that guests would be watched, or that an effort was made to put them on guard and ensure their best behaviour. Three mosaics and two wall-paintings depicting guard-dogs have been found at the entrances to houses, where no one could miss them:[55] in Pompeii's House of Paquius Proculus (I.7.1) a dog is shown sitting across a mosaic threshold in front of a partially-opened front door; in that of the Tragic Poet (VI.8.8) the mosaic is accompanied by *Cave canem* (*CIL* V 877), while in the House of Orpheus (VI.14.20) the body of a chained dog was uncovered in the *fauces* and a mosaic depicting a dog was found in the first room to the right of the atrium.[56] Another indication of surveillance is the *cella ostiaria*, a room accessed from the *fauces* which could be used by someone whose job it was to guard the entrance or open and shut the front door.[57] We cannot be sure that the primary purpose of these rooms was surveillance, and there is a good chance that they were multifunctional, but certainly their location would have been ideal for observing visitors. Possible *cellae ostiariae* have been identified in the Pompeian houses of the Prince of Naples (VI.15.7-8), the Labyrinth (VI.11.9-10), and the Small Fountain (VI.8.23-24), and in Herculaneum's houses of the Mosaic Atrium, Neptune and Amphitrite, the Alcove, the Skeleton,

52 *Sat.* 29.9.

53 R. Hirschon, "Essential objects and the sacred: interior and exterior space in an urban Greek locality," in S. Ardener (ed.), *Women and space: ground rules and social maps* (Oxford 1981) 72–87; L. Nevett, *Variation in the form and use of domestic space in the Greek world in the Classical and Hellenistic periods* (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge 1992).

54 Verg., *Aen.* 8.96, described Cerberus as the 'triple porter (*ianitor*) of the Stygian seat'.

55 Mosaics depicting dogs were found in the House of Paquius Proculus (I.7.1), House of Caecilius Jucundus (V.1.26), and House of the Tragic Poet (VI.8.8). Wall-paintings of dogs were found in the House of Marcus Casellius Marcellus (IX.2.26) and the Shop of Sotericus (I.12.3). Cf. G. Stefani, *I calchi. Antiquarium di Boscoreale* (Naples 2010) 2-3.

56 Cf. Stefani ibid.: the famous cast of the dog was made on Nov. 20, 1874 (MANN inv. no. 110666); see E. Dwyer, *Pompeii's living statues* (Ann Arbor, MI 2010) 87-89, for descriptions of the dog in the years immediately following its discovery. A similar discovery of a dog chained at the threshold of a property was made in the Pisanella Villa: A. Pasqui, *MonAntLinc* 7 (1897) 471-75. Other skeletons of dogs were found in the Houses of Varenius Zethus (VI.1.7), of Romus and Remus (2 dogs) (VII.7.10), of the Menander (in the stable) (I.10.4), in I.13.1, and in I.9.12, although some were too small to have been guard-dogs. Cf. M. Zedda *et al.*, "Ancient Pompeian dogs — morphological and morphometric evidence for different canine populations," *Anatomia Histologia Embryologia* 35 (2006) 323, on the faunal remains belonging to 10 dogs uncovered in the 18th-19th c., only two of which they identify as possible guard-dogs. See also C. Giordano and G. Pelagalli, "Cani e canili nella antica Pompei," *Atti Accad. Pontaniana* 7 (1957-58) 165-201.

57 Pompeii: I.4.25. Herculaneum: II.5, III.3 (House of the Skeleton), IV.2 (of the Mosaic Atrium), IV.4 (of the Alcove), V.7 (of Neptune and Amphitrite), VI.26 (of the Tuscan Colonnade). Cf. Suet., *Aug.* 19.2: "even a soldier's servant from the army in Illyricum, who had escaped the vigilance of the doorkeepers (*ianitoribus deceptis*), was caught at night near the emperor's bedroom, armed with a hunting knife".

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and the Wooden Partition.[58] As we know from epitaphs, both *ostiarii* and *ianitores* existed; two *ianitores* are attested at Pompeii.[59] Roman love poets even claimed that the *ianitor* could be chained to the front door,[60] like the dog from the House of Orpheus.

Case study: House of the Wild Boar I (VIII.3.8-9)[61] (fig. 9)

A case-study will illustrate some of the points made. The House of the Wild Boar I was excavated between 1838 and 1840 and given its modern name after the discovery of a mosaic depicting two dogs harrying a wild boar. Located on the Via dell'Abbondanza near the Forum, it has the typical *atrium–tablinum–*peristyle layout of many Pompeian houses.

Visitors had to cross a series of boundaries to enter this house, which began in the street. Here a *cocciopesto* carpet with a network of rhombi in white tesserae extends across the pavement from Shop 7 to Shop 9, marking out the public façade of the house and its dependent

58 Other possible *cellae ostiariae* have been found at sites across the Mediterranean, but in a particularly interesting example at Masada the captain of the guard's house is located right at the entrance to Herod's palace. I owe this observation to R. Evyasaf.

59 Examples of *ostiarii* include Suet., *Vit.* 16; Petron., *Sat.* 28-29 and 77; Sen., *De cons.* 2.14, *De ira* 3.27, and *Ben.* 3.28; Sid. Apoll., *Ep.* 5.17.8; Liv. 7.5.3; Plin., *NH* 12.30; Vitr 6.7.1. Most epigraphic references to *ostiarii* come from **Rome**: *CIL* VI 968, 3995, 3996, 3997, 5849 (= 828), 5871 (= 865), 6215 (p. 3851) (= D 7360), 6217 (p. 3851) (= D 7450), 6227 (= D 5157 = *EAOR* vol. 1, 40), 6326 (p. 3851) (= D 7438), 8961, 8962, 8963, 8964 (p. 3463), 9737, 9738 (p. 3470); *Hispania Epigraphica* 15 (1989) 428 (= *AE* 2006.234); *ICUR* 1, 1486 (= *ICVat* p. 260 = *ILCV* 1997 = *AE* 1997.166); *ICUR* 7, 20012b; *ICUR* 7, 20227; *Il Lapidario Zeri di Mentana* (Rome 1982) 1, 55 (= *AE* 1983.64); *Libitina e dintorni. XI Rencontre franco-italienne sur l'épigraphie* 1, 5 (= *AE* 2004.210); L. Avetta, *Roma - via imperiale. Scavi e scoperte (1937-50)* ... (Rome 1985) 126; *CIL* X 3319; **Aemilia**, Bononia: *ILCV* 2349; **Latium**, Ostia: *CIL* XIV 201; **Liguria**, Dertona: G. Menella, *Inscriptiones Christianae Italiae septimo saeculo antiquiores, Regio IX* (Bari 1990) vol. 7, 3 (= *ILCV* 1288). **Africa Proconsularis**, Vicus Maracitanus: *AE* 1949.108 (= *AE* 1950.185); **Baetica**, Corduba: *CIL* II.7, 346 = A. Ceballos Hornero, *Los espectáculos en la Hispania romana. La documentación epigráfica* (Merida 2004) vol. 2, Z = *AE* 1952.127 = *AE* 1962, 53); **Hispania Citerior**, Saguntum: *CIL* II.14.1, 587 = F. Beltrán Lloris, *Epigrafia latina de Saguntum y su territorium* (Valencia 1980) 278 = J. Correll, *Inscripcions romanes de Saguntum y el seu territori* (Valencia 2002) 333 = *HEp* 12, 522; **Dalmatia**, Salona: *CIL* III 9666 (p. 2326) (= *CIL* III 13142 = *ILJug* III, 2481 = *ILCV* 1289 = *Salona* IV.2, 449); *CIL* III 14305 (= *ILCV* +648 = *ILCV* +1289 = *ILCV* 3791a = *Salona* IV.1, 271), *CIL* III 14909 (= *ILJug* III, 2489 = *Salona* IV.1, 274); **Belgica**, Augusta Treverorum: *CIL* XIII 3789 (= *ILCV* 1288 = *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule* [1975] 1, 165); **Germania Superior**, Heidelberg: *CIL* XIII 6405 = H. Castritius, M. Clauss and L. Hefner, "Die römischen Steininschriften des Odenwaldes und seiner Randlandschaften (RSOR)," in *Beiträge zur Erforschung des Odenwaldes und seiner Randlandschaften* 2 (1977) 237-308, no. 57 = *AE* 1889.96); **Lusitania**: Myrtilis: J. Vives, *Inscripciones cristianas de la Espana romana y visigoda* (Barcelona 1969) 489; **Germania Inferior**, Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium: *IKoeln* 154 = *AE* 1990.733; **Gallia Narbonensis**, Arelate: *ILGN* 107 (= D 9074 = *CAG* 13.5, p 368 = *AE* 1910.77, 153 and 211). On the *ostiarius*, see M. George, "'*Servus* and *domus*': the slave in the Roman house," in Laurence and Wallace-Hadrill (supra n.23) 19. Examples of *ianitores* include Tib. 1.1.56, Ov., *Am.* 1.6, Suet., *Rhet.* 3. All epigraphic references to *ianitores* come from Italy, including two from Pompeii: *CIL* IV 1894 and 1921; from Spoleto: *CIL* XI 4765,3 (p. 1372) = *ICI* VI 46 = *AE* 2008.496; from Ostia: *CIL* XIV 2027; from Rome: H. Solin and M. Itkonen-Kaila (edd.), *Graffiti del Palatino* vol. I. *Paedagogium* (ActInstRomFinl 1966) 360, *ICUR* II 4107 = AE 2007.205; *ICUR* II 4119, 4127, 4148 and 4786a = *ILCV* 1761c, *ICUR* VII 18017 = *CLE* 1423 = *ILCV* 1194.

60 E.g., Ov., *Am.* 1.6.1; Tib. 2.4.1-2.

61 I. Baldassare, *Pompei pitture e mosaici* vol. VIII (1990) 362-85; E. Breton, *Pompeia. Guide de visite à Pompéi* (3rd edn.; Paris 1870) 453; U. Pappalardo, *Le descrizione di Pompei per Giuseppe Fiorelli (1875)* (Naples 2001) 123.

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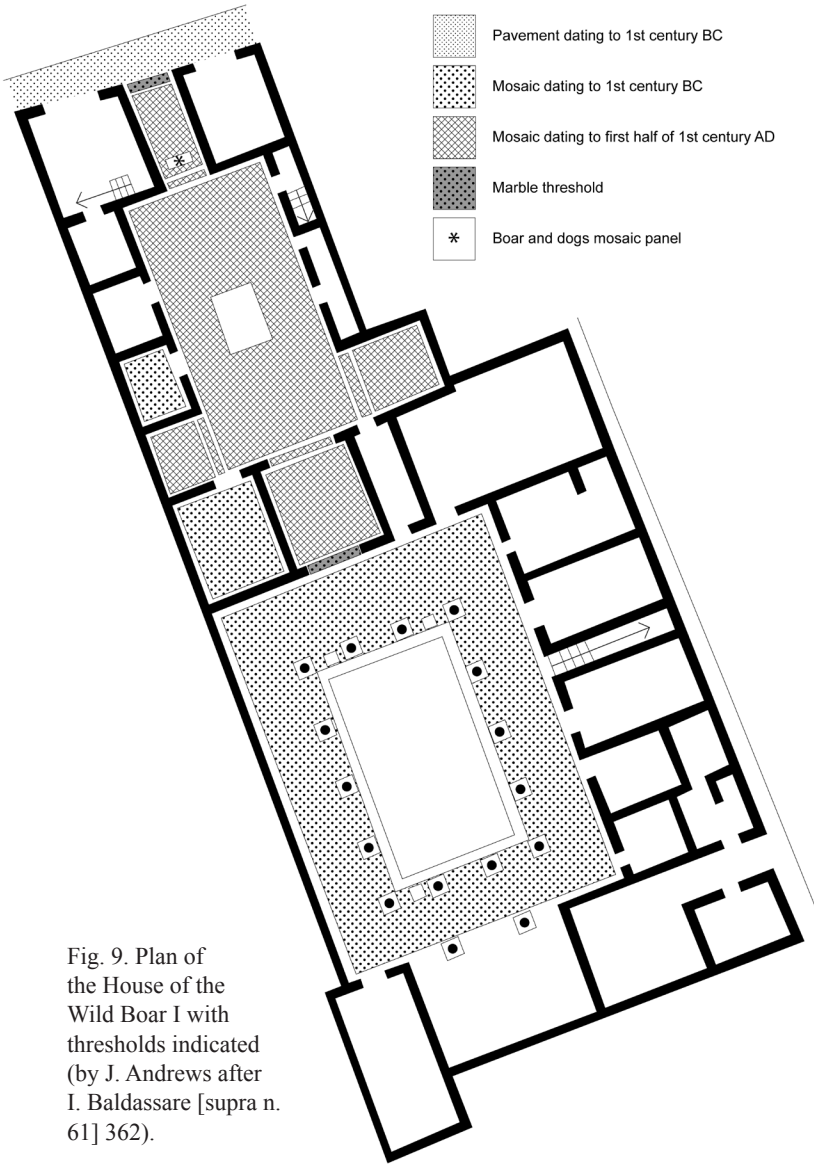


Fig. 9. Plan of the House of the Wild Boar I with thresholds indicated (by J. Andrews after I. Baldassare [supra n. 61] 362).

properties.[62] The entrance to the house is high and imposing, highlighting its importance, in direct contrast to the shop entrances to either side. From here, today there is a view through the entire house to the *exedra* (14) at the rear of the peristyle, although in antiquity a wooden *bifores* door would have been used to secure the house at times when visitors were not expected, thus controlling access to this view.[63]

The house is set at a slightly higher level than the street. Thus, in order to enter, visitors had to step up into the *fauces*, which further emphasised the transition from street to house. The *fauces* is decorated with a black-and-white mosaic in which a series of squares lead to a rectangle containing the scene of the dogs attacking a wild boar (fig. 10). This possibly could be read as a warning to visitors of the dangers of unacceptable behaviour within the house, on a par with the mosaics of dogs discussed earlier; certainly it was deliberately eye-catching. This was a symbolic reinforcement of the physical barrier of the door and step, one that reminded a visitor that he or she was entering a protected space. This mosaic is followed immediately by a separate mosaic threshold marking the entrance into the *atrium*.[64] These mosaics (and those of the *atrium*, *alae* and *tablinum*) have all been dated to the first half of the 1st c. A.D.[65]

62 Harnett (supra n.39) 101. This pavement has been dated to the Republican period: cf. I. Bragantini (ed.), *Pitture e pavimenti di Pompei* vol. III (1986) 324.

63 Due to the early date of excavation of this house, few traces of this door can be seen today.

64 There may well have been another wooden door at this point, but the architectural traces of it are no longer visible. Cf. Proudfoot (supra n.4).

65 Bragantini (supra n.62) 325-26

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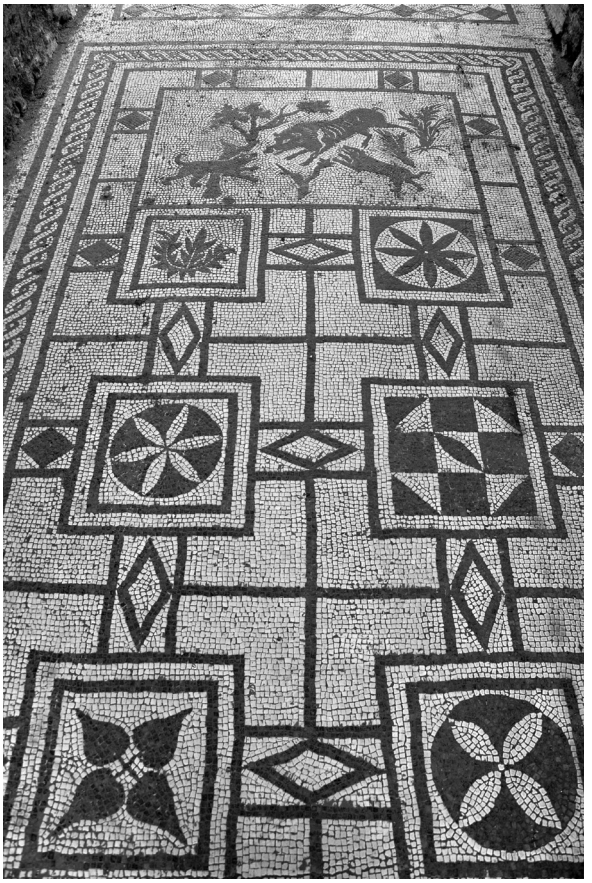


Fig. 10. *Fauces* of the House of the Wild Boar I (D. Esposito).

The *atrium* is decorated with a black-and-white mosaic in a double 'T' design, the edges of which depict a crenelated city wall with gates and towers.[66] The two *alae* (5 and 9) and the *tablinum* (7) also have elegant black-and-white mosaics. Of relevance here, however, are the distinct mosaic thresholds at the entrance to each of these rooms. These consist of a band of meandering double 'T's at the entrance of *ala* 5, a band of opposing shields ("pelte") at the entrance of *ala* 9, and a band containing a central acanthus head with trailing tendrils at the entrance of the *tablinum* (7). All three rooms are completely open to the *atrium*, with no evidence of the presence of doors, and these thresholds served to highlight the transition from the 'open' space of the *atrium* to the smaller reception rooms in the front part of the house. It is possible that curtains or partitions were also used to control access to these rooms, although no evidence of such survive in this house today. However, imprints in the travertine threshold to the rear of the *tablinum*[67] demonstrate that there were once wooden doors here that could have restricted access and sight into the peristyle. This could have been used flexibly, for example as a backdrop to activities taking place in the *tablinum*, or as a means of limiting or directing the view from the *fauces* or *atrium* into the peristyle.

From the *tablinum* (7), there is a step up to enter the peristyle, which was enclosed on all four sides by a portico with Ionic columns. The flooring here also consisted of a black-and-white mosaic pavement.[68] Although there are rooms all along the E side of the peristyle, the main reception room here was the *exedra* (14) at the rear, which was located on an axis with the *fauces*. Its importance was further highlighted by two columns placed

66 It is thought that the house had undergone structural work in the period immediately before the eruption of A.D. 79 since the edges of this mosaic are covered in places. There is little evidence of wall decoration in the house beyond a few traces of Fourth-Style painting; cf. Baldassare (supra n.61) 362. In the *tablinum* there was a painting of Mars and Venus which no longer survives; cf. ibid. 375.

67 The thresholds and pilasters of *tablina* in many houses demonstrate that doors were commonly located here; examples include the House of the Tragic Poet (VI.8.3) and the House of the Silver Wedding (V.2.i) (supra n.33).

68 This mosaic has been dated to the Republican period: cf. E. Pernice, *Die hellenistische Kunst in Pompeji* VI: *Pavimente und figürliche Mosaiken* (Berlin 1938) 66.

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on pedestals to either side of its entrance.[69] Although nothing remains of the pavement in this room today, a 19th-c. observer recorded that there was a high-quality white mosaic here, bordered by a meandering band of black, white, red and yellow tesserae.[70] The stone threshold of this room was divided into three parts, which surely reflects the presence of a wooden door here (even though there is no longer any evidence of this).

In this house it can be seen that symbolic markers worked alongside physical boundaries to control the free movement of visitors and protect the privacy of the home; to these must be added the inhabitants of the house themselves who, although now invisible to us, would have played an active rôle in regulating access to the different parts of the house.

Conclusion

There is a paradox in the Roman house, an ambiguity built into its structure.[71] On the one hand, the élite felt it essential to be seen in their domestic environment by the people, as seen in the words of Velleius Paterculus: 'you must build my house in such a way that whatever I do shall be seen by all'. Yet this conflicts with the need to protect the house which Cicero (*Off.* 1.54) described as the 'seed-bed of the State'.[72] I have argued that a combination of physical/visible and symbolic/invisible boundaries was the solution to the paradox. From a structural point of view the house was open, but movement and behaviour were strictly controlled by a variety of methods. No doubt the extent of control varied according to the type and size of the house, since more modest houses (and probably most rural villas) would not have had to cope with large numbers of visitors. We do not know for certain that the atrium houses of the Vesuvian towns thronged with visitors in the way that those of the Palatine did, or even that rituals such as the *salutatio* took place.[73] We also do not know if all the boundaries and thresholds in the Vesuvian houses retained their significance over time. If alterations took place (as in the case of I.6.7, originally a house but later converted into the *fullonica* of Stephanus), it is possible that any symbolic boundaries lost their significance and no longer needed to be reinforced. Ultimately, the Roman house was a flexible space responding to the needs of its inhabitants, but the preponderance of such markers in so many houses suggests that at some point the boundaries were marked and maintained, and that visitors recognised and had to respect them. In the Roman house space could be controlled and manipulated within defined cultural conventions. This was achieved through a combination of physical and symbolic markers — architecture, doors, decoration, thresholds —, the markers within the house of transitions that could, if necessary, to be reinforced by human (or canine) effort.

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Versions of this paper were given at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, in 2013, and at the 'Public and Private in the Roman House' conference held at the Finnish Institute in Rome in 2014. I am grateful for all the comments received on those occasions. I wish to thank Sarah Bond for comments on an earlier draft and I thank James Andrews and Domenico Esposito for providing illustrations.

69 Breton (supra n.61) 453.
70 Ibid. 453. This mosaic has been dated to the Republican period: cf. Pernice ibid. 66.
71 Wallace-Hadrill (supra n.1) 11.
72 Transl. Gardner and Wiedemann 1991.
73 In *Salutationes: die Morgenbegrüßungen in Rom in der Republik und der frühen Kaiserzeit* (Klio N.F. Bd. 16, 2010), F. Goldbeck argues that there is no evidence to support the idea that the *salutatio* took place in the houses of small towns like Pompeii; Dickmann (supra n.21) 61 disagrees, but admits that we do not know how populated the *atria* were, or who was admitted to the house.

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