

Ancient Greek Housing

The temples and theatres of the ancient Greek world are widely known, but there is less familiarity with the houses in which people lived. In this book, Lisa Nevett provides an accessible introduction to the varied forms of housing found across the Greek world between c. 1000 and 200 BCE. Many houses adopted a courtyard structure which she sets within a broader chronological, geographical and socio-economic context. The book explores how housing shaped – and was shaped by – patterns of domestic life, at Athens and in other urban communities. It also points to a rapid change in the scale, elaboration and layout of the largest houses. This is associated with a shift away from expressing solidarity with peers in the local urban community towards advertising personal status and participation in a network of elite households which stretched across the Mediterranean. Instructors, students and general readers will welcome this stimulating volume.

LISA C. NEVETT is Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her books include *House and Society in the Ancient Greek World* (1999), *Domestic Space in Classical Antiquity* (2010), *Theoretical Approaches to the Archaeology of Ancient Greece* (edited, 2017) and *An Age of Experiment: Classical Archaeology Transformed* (co-edited, 2018). Between 2014 and 2019 she co-directed a field project at Olynthos (northern Greece) which included the excavation of a Classical house. Starting in 2022 she has co-directed a further field project at Pella (also in northern Greece) which aims, among other goals, to reveal additional domestic buildings and their associated material.

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LISA C. NEVETT

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor



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Preface

This volume builds on and moves beyond ideas from my previous work, while at the same time aiming to present evidence and interpretations in a way that is accessible to a non-specialist audience. In my first book, *House and Society in the Ancient Greek World* (Nevett 1999), I sought to break away from what had, until then, been the traditional approach to the archaeological evidence for ancient Greek houses, which focused on placing excavated structures into architectural typologies. Instead, I evaluated the information offered by the architecture alongside that from other sources: the objects found in and around houses; contemporary written evidence; and the iconography of painted pottery. As well as investigating the cultural context of the houses I was examining, I drew on theoretical frameworks employed in the wider sub-discipline of household archaeology. My goal was to understand how the different spaces of a house were once used by their inhabitants, and hence, to reveal something of the social lives of Classical households. I argued that the traditional architectural typology divided into separate categories forms of house which were functionally similar, and I identified a broader group of structures which I termed ‘single-entrance, courtyard houses’, highlighting their main architectural features. This type, I suggested, was shaped by a particular view of how the residents of a respectable household – particularly the male householder and his female relatives – should relate both to the outside world, and to each other. I suggested that the type was characteristic of houses of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE from across the Greek world.

Since *House and Society* appeared there has been an increasing interest in the ancient Greek domestic sphere and a change in the scope of study. Other attempts have been made to synthesise groups of material and to explore how domestic buildings functioned as inhabited structures. At the same time, new evidence has come to light, adding to our picture of the way in which house-forms varied across time and space. In this context, the present volume takes up the investigation of ancient Greek housing where *House and Society* left off. The scope is wide, both in chronological and geographical terms. The book covers a period of about nine hundred years,

from the tenth to the second century BCE. Significant attention is thus paid to: the process of differentiation between residential and other kinds of building (Chapter 2); the development and social significance of the single-entrance, courtyard house itself (Chapter 3); evaluation of just how widespread the single-entrance, courtyard house might have been across culturally Greek areas more generally (Chapters 4 and 5); and finally, to charting the transformation and disappearance of the single-entrance, courtyard house during the late Classical and Hellenistic periods (Chapters 6 and 7). In organising this evidence, I have employed the chronological framework used by modern scholars of ancient material, although I have not applied this rigidly, attempting instead to explore various groups of material according to similarities between them and to the underlying social trends they seem to suggest. Thus, for example, I have focused in Chapter 2 on housing on the Greek mainland and Aegean islands; in order to give a fuller picture I have supplemented this with information from the Asia Minor coast (modern Turkey) but have reserved full discussion of early Greek sites in the wider Mediterranean for consideration alongside the later settlements in these areas in Chapter 5. At the same time, I have broadly confined discussion of the larger houses, especially those with two courtyards, to Chapters 6 and 7, even though chronologically they overlap with some of the houses discussed in Chapters 3–5. When selecting material for inclusion, I have tried to highlight the phase or phases of a site for which the best evidence survives.

This volume moves beyond the static, normative model for domestic organisation constructed in *House and Society*, broadening the scope to investigate the social and cultural significance of continuities and discontinuities in domestic organisation across time and space. I highlight generational shifts in the meaning encapsulated by the domestic sphere, from the earliest differentiation of houses from buildings with other roles in the Early Iron Age, through the use of urban Classical houses to materialise membership of the wider community, to the large Hellenistic double-courtyard- and peristyle-structures which signalled a re-orientation of their occupants' allegiances away from their neighbours towards a Mediterranean-wide social and economic elite. At the same time, I point out the existence of local, non-elite housing cultures, which can be detected throughout the period discussed, but which are particularly characteristic of the Early Iron Age and Archaic settlements as well as being prominent in Hellenistic times.

The amount of archaeological material available is such that this volume cannot provide a comprehensive listing of all the relevant information

about Greek housing of the first millennium BCE; nor does it offer a detailed discussion of all of the sites mentioned: there are simply too many sites and houses, so that the result would have been unwieldy (and unreadable). I have, therefore, placed the main emphasis on examples from mainland Greece. In order to give a flavour of the extent of the distribution of the single-entrance, courtyard house, I have also drawn very selectively on sites from other regions, not only on the west coast of Asia Minor, but also in modern Sicily and southern Italy, on the northern Black Sea coast (in and around modern Crimea), and on the north African coast (modern Libya). Because there was no politically unified 'Greece' as we know it today, the 'culturally Greek' world explored here refers to a group of communities sharing some linguistic, mythical-religious, and material-cultural traits, although there were significant differences between them as well. The lives of their inhabitants drew not only on some elements that modern scholars might classify as characteristically 'Greek' but also on others we might associate with other cultures, and this was done to varying degrees depending on the location and time period. As suggested in Chapter 5, in the context of ongoing discussion about the extent to which specific cultural groups can be identified in the material record and potential methods for doing so, the architecture of houses, together with the organisation of domestic activities, provides one among a number of potential barometers of cultural variability across time and space. Nevertheless, these are sources which should be handled with care: the construction of a house and the use of its internal space can be (and as I suggest below, was) consciously manipulated to symbolise individual identity and status, or to articulate the acceptance or rejection of social norms (for example).

Over the past twenty years or so, the subject of ancient Greek housing and domestic social life has entered the student curriculum at school- and university-levels. I have received a number of comments to the effect that *House and Society* has been used for teaching in both of these contexts, despite the fact that the book has a somewhat narrow focus and was written in a technical manner which was not aimed at a student audience. In this context, as well as investigating the chronological and geographical boundaries of the single-entrance, courtyard house, the current volume is intended to provide an approachable overview of a selection of the vast array of primary evidence for ancient Greek housing now available. In the hope of making this material accessible to those without extensive background knowledge I have minimised the use of technical terminology, as well as avoiding the use of footnotes and references in the text. A glossary is

provided for those terms that were unavoidable, and for anyone wishing to follow up individual points further I have provided a Bibliographic Essay containing detailed references to the sources on which my discussion is based. Also with a non-specialist audience in mind, I have incorporated numerous figures as an aid to visualising the individual structures under consideration: many of these hint at the three-dimensional forms of the original buildings, with the caveat that the locations of doorways are sometimes unknown. I have also included translated extracts of many of the ancient texts to which I refer. In bringing together bibliography and sources in this way, I hope to encourage readers not only to evaluate the evidence for themselves, but also to follow up their own interests by carrying out new research which moves beyond the selection of issues and evidence discussed here.

Acknowledgements

As the origins of this project imply, the ideas presented here are the result of years spent exploring, assembling and re-assembling a kaleidoscope of evidence for Greek housing in different ways to consider a range of social questions. I am deeply grateful to Anthony Snodgrass for supporting my first forays into this research area, as well as to the late Jim Coulton for suggesting the expression ‘single-entrance, courtyard house’, which continues to prove so useful. The present volume has taken far longer to write than it should have: writing was ultimately finished in the spring of 2020 under ‘pandemic conditions’, with severe limitations on library access and no possibility of travel. Fortunately, it was already mostly complete in 2013 when I took on a significant administrative responsibility at the University of Michigan (directing the Interdepartmental Program in Classical Art and Archaeology), a post I held for seven years while continuing to teach a full course load and with only a single term of leave. In summer 2014, along with colleagues from the Greek Archaeological Service and British School at Athens, I also embarked on a field project at the site of the city of Olynthos, involving scholars and students from Michigan and from numerous institutions across Europe and North America. It has been a joy to work with all of these participants in different ways throughout this time. It has also been a privilege to have the opportunity to collect new kinds of data which will help to address many outstanding questions about domestic organisation, even if at the same time it raises as many new ones. Discussions in the field and in the process of studying our material have helped me to structure my thoughts and sharpen my analysis. In particular, Bradley Ault has been a constructive interlocutor and helpful sounding board on numerous interpretative issues, as well as facilitating the use of information from Halieis. Bettina Tsigarida has generously shared her extensive knowledge and ideas about excavated houses and information about the palace at Pella and, most of all, her infectious enthusiasm for the archaeology of northern Greece. The kindness of other colleagues has also contributed to the final text: Alexander Mazarakis Ainian kindly gave me offprints detailing some of his work at Skala Oropou. Vaso Missailidou also helpfully provided offprints relating to her excavations at Aphytis. Elpi

Naoum led a memorable tour at Petres, shared information about the site and facilitated the use of images of the houses. Mme Sylvie Bouchoule of the University of Nancy II permitted me to study Émile Burnouf's scholarly archive and facilitated my visit to Nancy. Parrish Wright and Laurel Fricker efficiently helped with sourcing and organising some of the source material for the illustrations and commented on versions of the text. Special thanks are due to Lorene Sterner for beginning the daunting task of preparing the many drawings that are an integral part of the book and are fundamental for understanding my discussion of the individual houses. Max Huemer and Laurel Fricker deserve my eternal gratitude for stepping in and methodically carrying that task to completion. The work could not have been undertaken without the generous support of the Frier Fund of the Classical Studies Department and the research funds provided by the College of Literature, Science and the Arts at the University of Michigan, for which I am very grateful. Sabbatical leave and a Michigan Humanities Award gave me an opportunity to write some of the material included here. I gladly acknowledge the many students at Michigan who have taken my courses on ancient housing, especially those in my graduate seminars on ancient domestic space: they have helped me continually to refresh and re-think many of the ideas presented here, and I know they will continue to do so into the future. I also thank a number of scholars and institutions who generously granted permission to reproduce various images, as noted individually in the captions of the Figures. (I regret that the cost of obtaining permission obliged me to omit many others in the final stages of preparing the book for publication.) I am grateful to Sally Bjork who re-photographed some of the images for reproduction. David Potter kindly read and commented on a chapter of the text, while Cambridge University Press's two readers made numerous constructive suggestions across the entire volume which have significantly improved it. I am indebted to Michael Sharp for his patience in awaiting the long-overdue typescript and to him and to Katie Idle for all of their advice along the way. I am grateful to the copy editor, Linda Duarte and indexer, Pam Scholefield, for their work on the volume. Most of all, I thank my husband David Stone, who has continued to believe in and support all of my academic endeavours, even when they seemed to be without end, and who has consistently shouldered more than his share of our own domestic activities to give me time to work. This book is for him, and for our daughter Charlotte, who once dreamed that we were excavating a perfectly preserved house from its roof on downwards; may that dream one day come true!

Chronology

Early Iron Age	ca. 1050 BCE–ca. 700 BCE
Geometric Period	ca. 900 BCE–ca. 700 BCE
Archaic Period	ca. 700 BCE–480 BCE
Classical Period	480–323 BCE
Hellenistic Period	323–31 BCE

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