Introduction

This volume is about the related concepts of house and household in Classical Antiquity and about how those concepts were materialised at different times and in different places through the physical structure of the house itself. More importantly, it considers how that physical structure and its associated concepts can help to address major questions about social structure, patterns of cultural interaction, continuity and change in Classical Antiquity. The chronological scope is long, ranging from the tenth century BCE (the Early Iron Age) down to the fourth century CE. The geographical spread is equally broad, stretching from modern Turkey in the north east to Tunisia in the south-west, taking in Greece and Italy on the way. My goal, however, is not to present a comprehensive account of everything that is known about housing and households within this span. Instead, the individual chapters constitute case studies based on evidence from specific regions during particular periods. In each instance discussion begins by seeking to understand the appearance, organisation or representation of housing through archaeological, iconographic and/or textual sources, but the aim is much broader. The size, form and decoration of an individual domestic structure are determined by a variety of factors: environment, technology and availability of resources impose broad parameters. Nonetheless, an equally important role is played by culturally specific expectations about the kinds of architecture and decoration that are appropriate, about how and where different activities should be carried out, and by and with whom.

It is those expectations, and the wider social and cultural systems of which they are a part, which this volume seeks to explore. Each chapter pursues one among a variety of possible avenues for the investigation of the questions and evidence presented. While the examination of major issues from a single point of view in this way obviously cannot be comprehensive, my intention is to offer new perspectives on familiar problems, suggesting that a more detailed understanding of one limited aspect can contribute to a

clearer picture of the whole. I hope that using the household as a tool in this way will also facilitate more dialogue between the related, but frustratingly separate, areas of academic discourse on the ancient 'family' (based largely on texts) and 'household archaeology' (focused on the material record). At the same time I seek to engage with some of the recent scholarship on domestic space in the Classical world, exploring ways in which it might be possible to push the evidence further in order to address a broader range of issues.

Through the book as a whole I also wish to argue two larger points: first, that while houses, households and families have in recent years become increasingly important as objects of inquiry in Greek and Roman contexts, their potential as sources of information both about domestic life, and about wider social and cultural issues, has yet to be fully realised. Second, and more broadly, in keeping with some recent developments in Classical Studies I wish to support a re-evaluation of the way in which different types of evidence are used, giving greater weight and independence to the material sources in comparison with texts. While the amount of ground this volume covers will undoubtedly mean that it leaves untouched more questions than it is able to address, I hope that it will at least indicate something of the potential of an approach grounded in the material culture as a means of furthering our understanding of the social history of the Greek and Roman worlds. At the same time, I try to evoke some of the fascination of ancient housing as a subject for study and to indicate the power of the household as a lens through which to examine larger social, cultural and historical problems.

CHAPTER 1

Domestic space and social organisation

> Dwelling is about the active projection of the social and individual being by means of the artefact.
>
> Humphrey 1988, 18

> [F]ocus on the fine-grained relationship between people and the material culture of the home . . . leads to powerful insights into the societies in question.
>
> Miller 2001, 15

INTRODUCTION

In the 2002 film comedy *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, the Greek American screen parents of actress Nia Vardalos host a dinner for her fiancé's White Anglo-Saxon Protestant mother and father, so that the families can meet each other for the first time. The event is held at their home in a Chicago suburb, yet to the guests of honour it is obvious from the outset that this is not going to be quite the dinner party they had anticipated. Drawing up at the house they are greeted by a large, extended family gathered outside. Two whole lambs are roasting on spits over an open fire in the middle of the front lawn. In the background the house itself is an unremarkable two-storey building but it has been customised by the owners: an up-and-over garage door has been painted to resemble a Greek flag, and replica Classical statues of the Greek goddess Aphrodite watch over the assembled crowds. As the evening unfolds, the Greek Americans continue to confound their guests' expectations: a contribution brought to the evening meal has to be identified as a cake for the hostess. Ushered inside, the visitors find themselves taking their meal seated on a sofa, where they are offered a succession of bite-sized morsels, to be washed down with tiny glasses of spirits.

The film derives its humour from juxtaposing the unconscious assumptions of the two ethnic subgroups. For example, what is meant by

'family': from the Greek American point of view, 'meeting the family' includes uncles, aunts and cousins – an extended family group. To their guests, however, the definition is much narrower, limiting itself to the basic nuclear family of husband, wife and any children. The film encourages us to question some of our expectations about a variety of activities that we would not normally stop to think about: what kind of an occasion do we envisage when invited to someone's house for dinner? Where do we normally cook a meal? What food do we eat, and where and how do we serve it? There are in fact many ways these simple actions could be performed, yet from early childhood we become accustomed to certain patterns of behaviour. If we choose to adopt them, then we implicitly define ourselves as belonging to a particular community and we accept our allotted place within it. (So, Vardalos' character dutifully helps her mother to prepare for the evening's festivities beforehand by helping her to chop vegetables, but when her brother enters the kitchen it is his role to sit and eat as much food as possible.)

Vardalos' story may be fiction, but the underlying premise is one her audience will recognise: unconscious patterns of domestic activity can be just as revealing about someone's cultural background and sense of identity as overt symbols like the Greek flag and the replicas of Aphrodite. The same principle has motivated academic studies by anthropologists, sociologists and scholars in a range of other related disciplines who have investigated numerous cultures throughout the world. Their findings show that there are a wide variety of ways in which households can potentially function as units to meet the basic needs of individual members for food, shelter and social contact. In any one society the manner in which domestic activities are organised and the roles individuals play are determined by cultural factors. These include the status accorded to different social groups (women, men, the elderly, children, servants and so on) and beliefs about how those groups should interact. Thus the daily performance of routine household tasks maps out relationships, establishing and reinforcing social structures and norms. Bringing up children to assume their correct place in a household is a means of passing on cultural values to the next generation. Study of the organisation of activities within households therefore provides an important resource for understanding how societies define and perpetuate themselves and how they change through time and space. Such research has important implications for understanding past societies, including those of the Greek and Roman worlds, showing that the household is an essential topic for study in its own right. Perhaps even more importantly, such work also demonstrates that households offer a window through which to view

many aspects of society as a whole: because what goes on inside a household is inseparable from its broader social and cultural context, households offer a means of addressing questions about, for example, the relative status assigned to men and women, or the amount of differentiation between rich and poor, citizen and non-citizen, or indigenous groups and settlers. Households can therefore reveal not only wider social systems but also the effects of larger-scale political, economic and social change.

Research on Greek and Roman households has tended to concentrate on their organisation, functioning and internal social dynamics. Archaeological study has focused largely on the physical layout and decoration of excavated houses. Where an attempt has been made to view the domestic environment as a lived space as well as an architectural structure, the main emphasis has been on understanding how the arrangement of rooms, artefacts and decoration may have been designed to support particular kinds of social relationships. For example, prompted by the view of housing expressed in surviving texts, the elite houses of Roman Italy have been interpreted as having been designed to enhance the wealth and status of their male owners through elaborate decoration (see Chapter 5), while in relation to Classical Greece, debate has centred on the extent to which women were segregated from men in domestic contexts. It is normally impossible to use the excavated evidence to follow the histories of individual households and their members through time. Instead the volume of evidence, the variety of dates and locations from which it comes, and the range of social groups represented, all enable us to look at more general cultural patterns. For example, we can assess what factors were important in structuring households, evaluate what may have been typical behaviour and what may have been exceptional, pay attention to social groups whose voices are rarely heard through the surviving texts, and look for continuities and discontinuities between different periods and areas.

Alongside archaeological study a second area of research has involved using texts and inscriptions to examine social relationships between individual family members. This has shed light on a wide range of topics, from the degree of affection between husband and wife or parents and their children, to inheritance and the passing of property rights between generations. While providing numerous insights into family life, such studies have rarely intersected with investigations of the archaeological evidence. One reason is that although 'household' (a group of people living together under the same roof) and 'family' (a group of people related to each other by blood or by marriage) are sometimes used interchangeably, they are not the same

thing. Identifying the social groups living in the houses found on Greek and Roman sites during excavation is notoriously difficult. Nuclear families may have dominated in some periods and locations, while extended ones may have been more common in others. Patterns of residence may also have varied according to a household's social and economic status. In addition, each individual household would have had its own 'life cycle': as today, its composition is likely to have changed through time as children were born, grew up and moved away, while elderly relatives may have moved in, and spouses may have died or been divorced and new marriages taken place. Evidence of all of these processes taking place in Graeco-Roman Antiquity can be found in surviving written sources, but they are difficult or impossible to trace through the material record.

My aim in this volume is to build on previous work in both of these areas in a number of ways. By exploring how analytical methods might be refined and how previous conclusions might be extended to include new data, I attempt to suggest more nuanced views of households in familiar contexts. At the same time I also try to broaden the scope of discussion to include topics lying beyond the boundaries of the house itself, asking what the study of households can lead us to conclude about larger social and cultural issues where text-based study has had much to say. The individual chapters that follow deal with a selection of chronological periods and geographical locations, and each one aims primarily to address a different issue. There are, however, a number of themes which naturally recur. Perhaps one of the most fundamental is the extent to which a distinction between the 'public' and 'private' spheres is applicable to discussions of the ancient world. In modern western society this opposition underpins our definitions of house and home, and the terms have often been used by scholars in relation to both Greek and Roman housing (for example Leach 2004). Nevertheless, ethnographic study has demonstrated that concepts such as privacy are not universal, they are specific to contemporary western culture and cannot be applied in other cultural contexts (Kent 1991, 32 n. 1). In fact the terms as they are understood in the West today took on their present meaning only relatively recently. As ancient historians have suggested, redefining the domestic and public spheres to make them applicable to Greek and Roman societies is not a straightforward task; rather than being static, their definitions may have been contested and subject to shifts through time. It seems, therefore, that specific locations and periods demand either their own tailored definitions of the private sphere, or even the total replacement of this concept by other ways of defining the sets of activities appropriate to different physical settings.

One means of approaching this issue is by looking at representations of domestic activities in literary and artistic sources. These are revealing, not so much as depictions of the appearance and use of actual structures or architectural spaces, but as windows into the conceptual world surrounding the household, an approach explored in detail in Chapter 6 in relation to the symbolic value of representations of villa architecture in urban houses of Roman North Africa. But the archaeological evidence for the house itself provides a starting point for the consideration of these issues, offering an insight into the degree of flexibility in the conceptual boundaries between different spheres which in turn can indicate underlying social conventions such as the amount of interaction expected between members of the household and outsiders. Examination of the domestic context as a single system can reveal something of the range of activities considered to be appropriate to it in different places and at different times.

Even cursory study shows that residential buildings often acted as the backdrop for a number of activities that would not necessarily take place in a private home today, so that defining a 'house' is not always as straightforward as one might assume. While some of the functions central to domestic life are familiar, such as storing, preparing and consuming food, there are others which we would not necessarily think of as 'domestic' in character. A household may often have produced many of the items needed for daily life with, for instance, spinning and weaving textiles commonly taking place in the home in both Greek and Roman contexts. Urban houses, as well as farms, could be used for storing sufficient crops produced on the household's own land. Those crops could also be processed in the house itself to make flour, olive oil and wine. In addition, small-scale workshops were sometimes integrated into domestic buildings and manufactured a wide range of items including pottery, sculpture and metalwork. Some of the processes involved must have created levels of noise, heat and smell which might be considered unacceptable in a residential neighbourhood in a modern western city, again emphasising the differences in expectations between different cultures. Retail shops were also a feature of houses in many settlements throughout Antiquity. There is thus a blurring of the boundaries we might expect to see in western contexts today between domestic, industrial and commercial activities, as well as between what we might consider the private and the public spheres.

A further fundamental issue which underlies much of this volume has already been touched on in the opening to this chapter, and that is the role played by houses in articulating the identities of both the household as a group, and various of its members individually. This is one of the most

complex aspects of the domestic sphere, but it has a great deal to offer as a means of addressing a range of social questions and therefore receives considerable emphasis here. Expressions of identity in the domestic context are potentially very variable: they may be both conscious and unconscious and may involve assertions about membership of social, cultural and ethnic groups as well as about social, economic or even political status. A single house can simultaneously convey a number of messages about different aspects of identity, or indeed about a variety of identities. This can be done through a range of elements including architecture and decoration, as well as the organisation of rooms and exterior spaces, their relationship to each other, and the uses to which they are put. Messages may sometimes be mixed, or even contradictory, with, for example, contrasting cultural affiliations expressed by the architecture of a house and by the pattern of use of the internal rooms.

By viewing each individual house as part of a wider group and comparing aspects of the domestic environment across that group, such tensions can be explored and their underlying causes unraveled. This method can also be used to investigate whether patterns of elite culture are espoused by households lower down the socio-economic scale, or whether members of different social and economic groups have their own distinctive sets of values and subcultures. A similar strategy can also be used to study patterns of interaction between contemporaneous societies: for example, there has recently been a great deal of important and far-reaching debate over the expansion of the Roman world and its consequences both for the Mediterranean cultures with which Rome came into contact, and for Rome itself. Study of individual households on Delos (Chapter 4), where Greek, Italian and Near Eastern inhabitants shared the same settlement space, enables the applicability and explanatory power of different models for cultural change to be explored in one specific and well-defined context.

The example of Delos highlights another major theme of the volume as a whole, and that is the comparison of Greek with Roman domestic culture. Early approaches placed Greek and Roman housing into a single evolutionary continuum in which Roman domestic architecture was viewed (like many other aspects of Roman culture) as deriving ultimately from Greek models. Through time, however, an increase in the available archaeological evidence, particularly from Greek sites, has made contrasts between structures of different dates and from different parts of the ancient world increasingly apparent. Questions and interpretative models have simultaneously become more sophisticated. Recent studies have attempted to unravel the extent to which Greek architectural forms, such

as the colonnaded peristyle courtyard, influenced the creation of Roman ones. But there are also broader questions to be asked about the relationship between the two cultures in connection with their construction and conceptualisation of the domestic sphere: do similar architectural forms indicate comparable ways of using the house, for example as a tool in social relationships? Did both Greek and Roman households manipulate their domestic architecture as a means of articulating status and identity to the same degree and in comparable ways? And does a comparison between the two cultures of the way in which the domestic sphere responded to broader social, cultural and political change help to improve our understanding of the processes involved? Placing detailed studies of different aspects of the domestic sphere in Greek and Roman contexts side by side in this volume is not meant to imply a return to the single evolutionary framework invoked by early archaeological research on ancient housing. But it is intended to provide an opportunity to make implicit comparisons of this kind, enabling conclusions to be drawn about the relationship between the two cultures and about some of the general processes that can be seen to operate either in one or in both of them.

I return to some of these issues in the Epilogue to this volume. For the moment, however, it is necessary to lay the groundwork for addressing these larger questions by defining the object of inquiry more closely. The remainder of this chapter considers, first, what the excavated evidence tells us in general terms about ancient houses as physical spaces and the sorts of constraints they imposed on social practice; and second, what kind of conceptual framework we can use to try to understand and interpret the physical evidence. This sets the scene for more detailed discussion of the individual cultural contexts and their associated data sets presented in each of the succeeding case studies.

ANCIENT HOUSES AS PHYSICAL PLACES

To a casual visitor at an excavated Greek or Roman town today the residential areas are often the most difficult to visualise as inhabited spaces. In Greek contexts in particular, the materials used in construction tended to be less durable than those employed in public architecture: unlike temples and theatres, which are often built entirely in stone, house walls were often founded on stone socles (bases) but the superstructure was generally made of mud-brick (blocks of sun-dried, unfired mud). This was the traditional construction method used in many parts of Greece until the twentieth century and it has obvious advantages: the raw materials – mud with added

sand, silt and vegetable-matter – are normally readily available at or close to the building site, and mud-brick offers good insulation against summer daytime heat and winter cold. As ethnographic studies in modern contexts have shown, making the bricks is also a quick process and can be done without extensive specialist knowledge, so that with the help of friends and neighbours families can construct their own homes (Sutton 1999, 84). An obvious difficulty, however, is that mud-brick is very vulnerable to erosion by moisture, which effectively dissolves the individual blocks. For this reason walls built in this way require careful construction and maintenance. A coating of lime plaster on the exterior protects the surface, while the use of a stone socle reduces the chances of rain pooling against the bases of the exterior walls and undermining them, and it also increases load-bearing capacity enabling the construction of upper storeys. A pitched roof of thatch or terracotta tile with deeply overhanging eaves also helps to prevent rain water reaching the outside walls.

The long-lived and widespread use of mud-brick buildings, not only in the Mediterranean but also in hot, dry climates in other parts of the world such as the American south-west, shows how effective they are. But once the inhabitants cease to renew the protective plaster coating on the exterior and to maintain the roof in watertight condition, decay rapidly sets in. Roofs and upper floors would originally have been supported on timber joists, but except in arid desert environments such as Egypt, wood does not survive once exposed to the elements, and its decay causes further collapse. Where terracotta tiles were used on the roof, provided they were not salvaged when the building was abandoned, they are generally preserved in archaeological deposits as a thick layer, sealing the remains of the house. Underneath, the fallen mud-bricks have normally dissolved and become soil deposits overlying the house floors. Once these are removed, what remains is the low stone socle, often only two or three courses high, which reveals the layout of the house's ground floor and says something about the character of some of the rooms. In the earliest Greek houses the floors themselves were compacted earth. By the Classical period additional materials were sometimes used, especially on exterior surfaces that were exposed to rain: these could be composed of mortar or paved or cobbled.

A more decorative effect was achieved with mosaics. At around 400 BCE when these were first introduced, they were composed of black and white or coloured pebbles laid in patterns into a mortar matrix. From the fourth century onwards specially cut tesserae or cubes of stone or terracotta were laid in designs which became increasingly complex into the Hellenistic period. By the Roman era the repertoire of designs could include