

Living Theatre in THE ANCIENT ROMAN HOUSE



For the Romans, much of life was seen, expressed and experienced as a form of theatre. In their homes, patrons performed the lead, with a supporting cast of residents and visitors. This sumptuously illustrated book, the result of extensive interdisciplinary research, is the first to investigate, describe and show how ancient Roman houses and villas, in their décor, spaces, activities and function, could constitute highly-theatricalised environments, indeed, a sort of ‘living theatre’. Their layout, purpose and use reflected and informed a culture in which theatre was both a major medium of entertainment and communication and an art form drawing upon myths exploring the core values and beliefs of society. For elite Romans, their homes, as veritable stage-sets, served as visible and tangible expressions of their owners’ prestige, importance and achievements. The Roman home was a carefully crafted realm in which patrons displayed themselves, while ‘stage-managing’ the behaviour and responses of visitor-spectators.

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**THE ANCIENT
ROMAN HOUSE**
THEATRICALISM IN THE
DOMESTIC SPHERE

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Our work on the book is dedicated to our parents:
Lowrie and Margaret Beacham
Anne and Vincent Denard

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THE POET JACOPO SANNAZARO IN his work *Arcadia*, composed in the 1480s and published in 1504 – centuries before the discovery and identification of Pompeii – described how his protagonist, awakened from a dream, was led by a nymph to the site of the buried town. She named it and spoke of its destruction, ‘And then with these words we were there at the city she described, whose towers, houses, theatres and temples we could see as if intact’ (12, 16–17). This was the first reference in literature to Pompeii since antiquity, a literature that subsequently became vast and continues to expand. Our study aspires to contribute to this body of work new insights and understanding fashioned from facts, imagination, analysis and interpretation, and conjured into life not by the ministrations of a nymph but through the contribution and encouragement of myriad scholars and organisations while benefiting from the creative agency of digital technologies to ‘see as if intact’ the ancient artefacts.

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