The Greek House

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THE GREEK HOUSE.

THE prevalent notions about the Greek house, however much they have varied from one another, have usually agreed on certain essential characteristics ; indeed, it may almost be said that there is a general consensus of opinion

FIG. 1.—(a) GREEK HOUSE (CONVENTIONAL PLAN). (b) HOMERIC HOUSE (CONVENTIONAL PLAN).
After P. Gardner and Jevons, p. 36. After J.H.S. vii. p. 173.

among archaeologists in favour of a normal plan such as that given in P. Gardner and Jevons' *Manual of Greek Antiquities*. According to this plan the Greek house consists of two courts; the first, which is entered through a vestibule from the street, is called the *ἀνδρωνῆτις*; it is the court of the men, and is surrounded by colonnades, out of which open the living and sleeping rooms of the male members of the household. Behind this is a passage, closed by the *μέταυλος* or *μέσαυλος θύρα*, leading into a second court called the *γυναικωνῆτις*, or court of the women. At the back of this second court is the deep recess known as the *παστὰς* or *προστὰς*; on the other sides are colonnades; and around the court are the living and sleeping rooms of the women, the largest and most important, the *θάλαμος* and *ἀμφιθάλαμος*, being on either side of the *παστὰς*.

Of course all who have written about the subject have recognised that this normal plan was subject to modifications dependent upon the situation and other conditions; in particular, it was evident that in the crowded areas of an ancient city it was often impossible to command the necessary space, and that poorer people had to content themselves with one court. But such arrangements have generally been regarded as deviations, the two-court house being the normal type; in particular, it has been thought essential that the front door should lead, not into the women's quarters, but into the *ἀνδρωνῆτις*, the proper place for the reception of guests. And moreover, owing chiefly to the analogy of this normal Greek house, it has been supposed that in the Homeric house also the quarters of the women lay at the back of the Hall of the Men, and were entered through it. The whole theory is consistent and plausible, and it is with some diffidence that I call it into question. But I venture to think that it is difficult to reconcile with the evidence of ancient writers, that it is inconsistent with such remains of ancient Greek houses as have actually been preserved, and that we can easily see how the erroneous notion may have arisen. It appears then that there is need for a reconsideration of the whole question; the present article must be regarded only as an outline sketch, to indicate the lines on which the reconstruction must proceed.

In the case of the Homeric house, there is happily no need to review the literary evidence, because this has already been done by Mr. Myres in the last number of the *Hellenic Journal*.¹ His main contention seems to me indisputable. It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand many passages of the *Odyssey*, if one assumes that the women's quarters lay behind the men's hall, and that the main access to them was by a door in the back of that hall; and I think Mr. Myres is also right in maintaining that so strange an assumption must have arisen from the analogy of the conventional notion of the Hellenic house with two courts. How closely the conventional plans of the Homeric and the historic house resemble each other may be easily realised by a glance at Fig. 1, *a* and *b*, where the two are reproduced side by side. This comparison probably suggested also the usual explanation of the

¹ *J.H.S.* xx. p. 128 *sqq.*

two courts at Tiryns as the men's and the women's courts of the same house—a theory not maintained by any arguments, but assumed as self-evident by

FIG. 2.—PALACE AT TIRYNS.

A }	Forecourt	B }	Court	C }	Hall	D }	Eschara	{ of first house. of second house.
A' }		B' }		C' }		D' }		

the excavators, and repeated ever since on their authority. Yet, when one comes to think about the matter, such a duplication of all parts of a house—

fore-court, court, hall, and chambers—for the use of the men and the women respectively is contrary to probability and to our knowledge of the society at least of the Homeric age. Sir Richard Jebb has pointed out that this duplication, and the isolation of women which it implies, is fatal to any attempt to explain the Homeric palaces on the analogy of the house at Tiryns; but the difficulty disappears when we realise that we have to deal at Tiryns not with one house, but with two, and that each of these, like

FIG. 3.—PALACE AT MYCENAE.

A. Court C. Eschara.
B. Hall D. D. Women's quarters.

that at Mycenae, probably had its own women's quarters though not a separate women's court. At Mycenae, as Mr. Myres remarks, much of the action of the *Odyssey* could easily find its place.

Neither at Tiryns then, nor in the houses described in the Homeric

¹ *J.H.S.* vii. 170.

FIG. 4.—DELOS. HOUSE W. OF SACRED LAKE.

FIG. 6.—DELOS. HOUSE IN STREET BY THEATRE.

FIG. 7.—DELOS. HOUSE ABOVE INOPUS.

FIG. 5.—DELOS. HOUSE N. OF SACRED LAKE.

FIG. 8.—DELOS. HOUSE AT TOP OF HILL.

FIG. 10.—POMPEI. A SMALL HOUSE.

FIG. 9.—DELOS. HOUSE ON BANK OF INOPUS.

The plans of the houses on Delos are after *Bull. Corr. Hell.*, 1895, Pl. III.—V.
A. Court. B. Pastas or corresponding recess. C. Andron. D. Front Door.

poems, do we find any historic justification for the supposed Hellenic house of two courts; on the contrary, we find that this imaginary Hellenic house has been itself the cause of error in the interpretation both of Homer and of Tiryns. We must next see what evidence there is for the existence of two courts in the house of the fifth and fourth centuries before our era.

Unfortunately no house of the fifth or fourth century has hitherto been found in a complete enough state for us to form any satisfactory notion of its plan, but at Delos the French excavators have brought to light several houses of the ensuing period. Though these houses differ among themselves in situation, in general conditions, and in many details of their arrangements, they have several features in common. Each of them is built round a single court; there is usually a colonnade round this court, at least on its north and east sides; the court is hardly ever in the middle of the house, but more towards the south and west; sometimes it is only separated by a wall from the road in one or both of these directions. Either at the north or the north-east corner of the court there is almost always a deep recess, evidently corresponding to the *παστὰς* devised to catch the winter sun and to escape the wind; the aspect of all these Delian houses is doubtless dictated by the prevalent N. E. winds, which sweep down with great force through the channel between Tenos and Myconos, and are bitterly cold in winter. Another feature common to most of the houses is a large room opening by doors and windows on to the court, and evidently to be identified as the *ἀνδρῶν* or guest-room for entertainments. In some cases there are indications of stairs leading to an upper story; but nowhere are there any traces of a second court.¹ There are some dangers in arguing from these Delian houses of the third and second centuries to houses in Athens a couple of centuries earlier; but it is unlikely that we should find no trace in the houses of the rich merchants of Delos of luxurious arrangements that were already customary in Athens. We should expect the earlier Attic houses to be simpler, not more elaborate. And this inference is borne out by almost all the literary evidence.

To classical scholars the most familiar picture of the Attic house is that in Plato's *Protagoras*, describing the hospitable mansion of Callias, the porticoes around its court where the distinguished guests held their discourses, and the chambers where some of them slept. There is, however, no direct reference here to a second court, though the women of the house must doubtless have had some separate living rooms into which they could retire when the court was thus occupied.

The clearest information as to the fifth or early fourth century is given us by Xenophon, who puts into the mouth of his master Socrates or of his favourite character Ischomachus many remarks that probably reflect his own opinions; he evidently had a keen interest in the subject. The question of

¹ The Greek houses recently discovered at Priene still remain unpublished; but I am informed that they confirm, in general, the

inferences here drawn from the houses at Delos.

aspect was regarded by him as paramount; 'if a house faces south,' he says, 'the sun will shine into the pastas in winter, and in summer it will be high over our heads and over the roof, and so we shall have shade. Accordingly we should build the rooms that face south higher, so that the winter sun may not be excluded from them, and the rooms facing north lower, that the cold winds may not penetrate into them.'¹ In all this there is no hint of more than one court. Aristotle almost repeats the same advice. 'Both for pleasure and for health a house should be breezy in summer and sunny in winter; and this will be the case if it faces the south and is not of equal breadth all round.'² This last word, *ἰσοπλατής*, might confuse us, in relation to Xenophon's recommendation that the house should be built higher on the north, but for the Delian houses, which at once illustrate Aristotle's words and give their explanation. The northern chambers, into which the low winter sun can shine from the court, are built deeper; while on the southern side the chambers are either shallower or altogether absent. It is evident that if there were two courts to consider, this heightening or broadening of one side would complicate the plan, and would require some modification; and the absence of any reference to two courts may fairly be taken to imply that there were not two courts to refer to. Moreover, that this one court, approached directly from the front door, was the place where the women of the house were usually to be found is shown by the statement of Plutarch that 'in old days, before everybody kept a porter, it was customary to knock on the door with a stick before entering a house, in order that a stranger might not come on the mistress or the daughter of the house, or a slave being chastised or the maid-servants screaming.'³

Perhaps no other document gives us such a good notion of the arrangements of a Greek house as the speech against Euergus and Mnesibulus, commonly attributed to Demosthenes. The victim of these marauders relates⁴ how they broke into his house by the garden door, intruding on his wife and children, who were having their lunch in the court (*ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ*). They seized and carried off by violence all the furniture and household stuff; but the female slaves, who were in the tower that formed their quarters, shut themselves in when they heard the noise, and so saved its contents from being plundered. A certain Hagnophilus, who was passing by, was hailed by the neighbour's slaves; he did not think it proper to enter the house in the absence of the master, but saw from the neighbouring plot the goods being carried off and the robbers coming out of the house. Here it is evident that there was only one court, entered by a back door from the garden as well as by a front door from the street; that the women of the house used this court freely, and resented intrusion, and that they had also special quarters of their own, in what is here called a tower (*πύργος*).

So far we have avoided passages which make any explicit distinction between *ἀνδρωνίτις* and *γυναικωνίτις*. The existence of these two words, perhaps more than anything else, has led, if not to the invention of the two-

¹ *Mem.* iii. 8.² *Ec.* i. 6.³ *De Curios*, 3.⁴ § 53.

court theory, at least to its general acceptance and retention. But their usage by Greek writers does not really lend much support to the theory. Xenophon, in making Ischomachus describe his house,¹ mentions the *ἀνδρωνίτις* and *γυναικωνίτις*, and states that the latter was shut off by a strong door, so as to protect its contents and to enable the master to control the intercourse of the male and female slaves; but it is clear that these objects would be as well or even better attained if the *γυναικωνίτις* were a sort of keep or *πύργος* than if it were another court. In Lysias, *de caede Eratosthenis*, the speaker describes his household arrangements with some detail.² He had 'a small double house, the upper and lower floors corresponding, in *ἀνδρωνίτις* and *γυναικωνίτις*'; when his child was born, for the sake of his wife's safety and convenience, he changed quarters with the women, and he lived upstairs, they downstairs. Accordingly, when he brought a guest home to dinner, he entertained him upstairs. Neither *ἀνδρωνίτις* nor *γυναικωνίτις* seems to have a definite meaning, and their usage varies in different writers. *Ἀνδρωνίτις* seems often to be merely an expansion of *ἀνδρῶν* or *ἀνδρῶνες*, the guest-chamber or chambers for the entertainment of male guests, the sense in which it is used by Vitruvius. *Γυναικωνίτις* sometimes means the quarters of the women of the house, including slaves; sometimes, on the other hand, it seems to mean the court and surrounding rooms for family use, in which the women lived when no guests were present. Thus in Lysias iii. 7, a man is charged with coming drunk one evening to another man's house, forcing open the door, and so entering the *γυναικωνίτις*, where some women of the family were. This suggests the passage of Plutarch about the custom of knocking before entering a house lest the women might be surprised within (*ἐν μέσῳ*), evidently in the *αἴλη*; and Vitruvius expressly identifies the court entered immediately through the front door, and the chambers surrounding it, as the *γυναικωνίτις*.

There remain several passages in which the *μέταυλος* or *μέσαυλος* *θύρα* is mentioned; and this, especially in its second form, has usually been interpreted as the door between two courts, while *μέταυλος* has also been given a similar meaning, on the analogy of *μεταίχμιον* and *μεθόριον*. But neither explanation is necessary; *μέταυλος* may perfectly well mean behind the court, on the analogy of many other compounds with *μετά*; and *μέσαυλος* may mean within the court, just as *μεσόγαιος* means inland or *μεσονύκτιος* in the middle of the night. The evidence of etymology being ambiguous, that of usage becomes paramount; and, if we exclude the opinions of late grammarians or scholiasts, who interpret the word according to their etymological theories, not from any knowledge greater than we possess about the ancient Greek house, we find that usage is decidedly in favour of the meaning 'behind or within the court,' not 'between the two courts.' The clearest evidence is offered by the house already quoted from Lysias *de caede Eratosthenis*. This house cannot, from the description, have had two courts;

¹ *Oec.* ix. 2.

² 92-94.

yet the master, when locked by his wife into his upstairs bed-room, hears in the night both the front door and the *μέταυλος* opened. Here the *μέταυλος* can only be a door at the back of the court, leading into the rooms then occupied by his wife and her attendants. We can hardly doubt that the strong door shutting off the women's quarters mentioned by Xenophon, and the door of the women's tower which is mentioned in the speech against Euergus, are also to be identified with the *μέταυλος θύρα*, though the fact that the word is not used in either case may perhaps imply that the name was not universally recognised. A precisely similar arrangement, a passage with a strong door, leading from the court to the women's rooms, is described by Achilles Tatius,¹ though his date makes his evidence of little value. And there is no early reference to the *μέταυλος* which implies that it lay between two courts. It appears therefore that the usage of the term *μέταυλος*, so far from confirming the existence of two courts, tells against the existence of more than one.

An interesting example of the use of the term *μέσανλοι θύραι* occurs in Euripides' *Alcestis*. Admetus, entertaining Heracles as his guest at the moment of his bereavement, bids his servants show the hero into the separate guest-chambers, which have an access outside the house, and to shut the *θύραι μέσανλοι*, that the sound of wailing may not reach the guest as he feasts.² It is obvious that it would be useless for this purpose to shut a door of communication between the two courts of the house, or between the men's and the women's quarters; the door referred to must be a door of communication between the house and the guest rooms. It may however be doubted whether any serious inference can be drawn from this passage as to the Greek house. The whole arrangement is dictated by stage exigencies and convention. Since the death and funeral of Alcestis was assigned to the middle door, it was clearly necessary that Heracles should be led into a side door, representing the entrance of a separate set of chambers, whence he was later to emerge for his famous scene with the slave; and so the *θύραι μέσανλοι* are to be imagined by the audience as separating the two sets of rooms in which the action behind the scenes is supposed to take place. Curiously enough, this passage from the *Alcestis* gives us the clue to what is otherwise an inexplicable statement in Vitruvius. At the end of his description of the Greek house³ he says 'inter duo autem peristylia et⁴ hospitalia itinera sunt quae mesauloe dicuntur quod inter duas aulas media sunt interposita.' He has just been speaking of the separate guest-chambers provided in splendid Greek mansions. It is very difficult to resist the conjecture that Vitruvius got this notion of the mesauloe from Euripides; he must have inferred from the reference in the *Alcestis* that the mesauloe were a means of communica-

¹ Ἑρωτ. ii. 19.

² l. 543—

χωρὶς ξενῶνές εἰσὶν οἱ σ' ἐσάξομεν

* * * *

ἡγοῦ σὺν, τῶνδε δωμάτων ἐξωπίους

ξενῶνας οἴκας, τοῖς δ' ἐφ' ἐστῶσιν φράσον

σίτων παρῆναι πλῆθος· ἐν δὲ κλήσατε
θύρας μεσαύλους· οὐ πρόπει θοινωμένους
κλύειν στεναγμῶν οὐδὲ λυπεῖσθαι ξένους.

³ vi. 10.

⁴ So MSS.; Rose and Müller-Strubing emend.
to *ad*.

tion between the house and the *hospitalia* or *ξενῶνες*. In any case it is to be noted that he does not hint at the existence of a *μέσσυλος* or *μέταυλος θύρα* in the place where one would naturally look for it according to the accepted theory, viz., in passing from the court of the women to that of the men.

A few words must be said here about Vitruvius' description of the Greek house. For I believe that description to be one of the chief sources of the prevalent erroneous conception, though no restoration which I have seen makes any attempt to follow his clear and obvious meaning. He begins with a correct description of the normal Greek house with its court or peristyle entered through a short passage from the front door, with the *pastas* or *prostas* at the back of the court and other chambers round it. This, he says, is called the *gynaeconitis*; and we have seen some evidence from earlier

FIG. 11.—THREE ROMAN HOUSES FROM THE CAPITOLINE PLAN.

writers that it was occasionally so called, though the name was also applied in a narrower sense to the enclosed chambers of the women. To this, he says, were added more sumptuous courts and chambers, especially intended for the entertainment of male guests only, and therefore called *andronitides*. These courts and chambers are, in fact, to be regarded merely as an expansion of the *ἀνδρῶνες* or the single *ἀνδρῶν*, the large dining room which we find opening out of the court in almost all the Delian houses. The two - court arrangement, which is somewhat similar

to what we see at Pompei, seems to have been adopted at about the same time by the Greeks and by the Romans, probably in about the second century B.C., but in neither case is there any evidence for an outer court of the men and an inner court of the women entered through it. In the Roman house, as Vitruvius expressly says, the peristyle as well as the *cavum aedium* was regarded as a place of public reception, not restricted to family use. And he warns us against the error of equating atrium and men's court, peristyle and women's court; for he says that, the Greeks having no atrium, the peristyle or *gynaeconitis* was the court you first entered in the Greek house, the *andronitis* being merely a luxurious excrescence. Had commentators and restorers kept more carefully to the evident meaning of Vitruvius' words, the chief errors as to the nature of the Greek house would have been avoided.

The origin of the now prevalent, and, as I think, erroneous conception of the Greek house as having two courts, an outer for men and an inner for women, is probably to be traced to a combination of several influences. First there is the apparent analogy of the Pompeian and Roman houses; then there is a kind of inverted interpretation of Vitruvius; and there is also certain corroborative or circumstantial evidence which we have found on examination to be illusory. Its chief recommendation is a certain continuity, from Homeric right down to Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman times; and if we destroy this continuity, it may well be expected that we should find some other relation or evolution to put in its place. I therefore conclude with an outline of what seems to me the most probable course of development of the normal Greek house.

The primitive form seems to have resembled the farm-house described by Galen,¹ as is suggested in P. Gardner and Jevons' *Manual*. It consisted of a court, entered by a door on the south side, if possible (Fig. 12). Opposite the door was the deep recess called the *prosta* or *pastas*, with the chief chambers on either side of it; other chambers and stables &c., surrounded the court. In the court was the altar of Zeus Herkeios; in the *pastas*, which was the living room, was the

FIG. 12.—PRIMITIVE GREEK HOUSE.

Hestia or Eschara. The Mycenaean and the Homeric house, which are essentially identical, preserve many of these features; they have the doorway, the court, the altar and Eschara, the surrounding chambers; but instead of the *pastas* we find a new and extraneous feature—a hall with *prodomos* and *aithousa*, shut off by one or two partitions from the court. This *prodomos* type, as we may call it, is found in the second city at Troy (Fig. 13), and on almost all sites where early Aegean remains have been discovered; it is the prototype of the Greek temple, and survived for this purpose into historic times, possibly through the influence of examples such as we find at Athens, where the house of Erechtheus was identical with

¹ *De Antidotis*, 1. 3.

the early temple of Athena.¹ At Tiryns and elsewhere we find this building of the *prodomos* type associated with the primitive features of the Greek house, but it is to be noted that the Hall or *Megaron*, with its *prodomos*, is merely an amplification of the *pastas* or a substitute for it; the primitive arrangement of court and surrounding chambers persists alike in the primitive Greek house, in the Mycenaean palace, and in the Greek house of historical times. The *prodomos* type does not seem to have persisted in domestic architecture; and after the Mycenaean age we find a reversion to the primitive type of court and *pastas*, which continues to be characteristic of the

Greek house throughout the times of Greek independence. About the second century before our era a custom seems to have begun of adding a second court to the first, for purposes of entertainment or of display. The custom may have originated in Rome, when Greek influence began to prevail among the wealthier classes; and, the primitive Italian house being nearly identical with the Greek in form, the result was a curious duplication of all essential features, such as we see at Pompei, the atrium and tablinum corresponding to the *peristyle* and *prostas*. We have no means of knowing whether there was a similar duplication in the Hellenistic mansion of the same period; it is perhaps improbable, as the second *peristyle* was designed especially for entertainments, and very likely varied considerably in arrangement and construction. But this excrescence should not blind us to the fact that the original court, which Vitruvius calls the *gynaeconitis*, was always the same in its

FIG. 13.—PALACE AT TROY.²

essential features, from the earliest to the latest time at which we can trace the existence of the Greek house. Nor is it to be wondered at that this single court was often regarded as especially belonging to the women. The

¹ The resemblance of the Hall and Court of Tiryns to the temple and temenos of later Greece is sometimes very remarkable. Cf. the temple of Zeus Soter, 'Excavations at Mega-

Iopolis,' p. 58.

² A third building should be added on the left, corresponding exactly to the one on the right; see Dörpfeld, *Troja*, 1895, Pl. I, II E.

life of a Greek man was always out-of-doors in free Greece, in the agora or the law courts or the palaestra; he practically only came home to sleep, or to dine and entertain his friends in the *ἀνδρῶν* that was reserved for the purpose. It was not until degenerate times that he sought in the luxury of private life a compensation for the loss of political freedom, and found it necessary to add to his house a separate court and suite of apartments for the use of himself and his guests.

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