

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

The City of Athens and Rome
Lecture 2 – The *Oikos* and the *Familia*

CLCS4007
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Introduction to the Athenian and Roman Household

- ▣ Composition, hierarchy and social relationships in the household.
- ▣ Structure of the household.
- ▣ The household as a social space.
- ▣ The household as an economic unit.

Ancient Athens – *Oikos*

- ▣ *Oikos* is often translated as “household”, but has broader meanings.
- ▣ Core of *oikos* is nuclear family, but also includes other members such as unmarried female relatives (residing in the house), orphaned children who require a guardian and slaves.
- ▣ Also refers to the land connected to the household (“estate”).
- ▣ The *oikos* is core political, social, and economic unit of Athens.

Aristotle on the *Oikos*

“The first coupling together of persons then to which necessity gives rise is that between those who are unable to exist without one another: for instance **the union of female and male for the continuance of the species... and the union of natural ruler and natural subject for the sake of security** (for he that can foresee with his mind is naturally ruler and naturally master, and he that can do these things with his body is subject and naturally a slave” – **Aristotle *Politics* 1252a.**

1) "Hearing that the boy was at my house, he came there at night in a drunken state, broke down the doors, and entered the women's rooms: **within were my sister and my nieces**, whose lives have been so well-ordered that they are ashamed to be seen even by their kinsmen" – **Lysias**
Against Simon 3.6.

2) "More than this, men of the jury, my wife happened to be lunching with the children in the courtyard and **with her was an elderly woman who had been my nurse**, a devoted soul and a faithful, who had been **set free by my father**. After she had been given her freedom she lived with her husband, but after his death, when she herself was an old woman and there was nobody to care for her, she came back to me." –
Demosthenes 47.55.

Patrilocality and Matrilocality

- ▣ Patrilocal = a marriage custom in which the couple settles in the husbands home or community (also known as virilocal).
- ▣ Matrilocal = a marriage custom in which the husband goes to live with the wives community (also known as uxorilocal).
- ▣ Most households in Athens were patrilocal due to cultural and legal aspects of Athenian society.
- ▣ Mainly newly-weds reside in house with the husband's parents.

Duties of a Husband and Wife

HUSBAND

- ▣ Managing overall estate and ensuring that sufficient resources/income comes into the household.
- ▣ Engaging in or overseeing activities of the estate (agriculture, but in some cases crafts and other industries).

WIFE

- ▣ Bearing and rearing children (though those with sufficient wealth also used slave as wet-nurses and nannies).
- ▣ Keeping account of the resources in the house.
- ▣ Weaving clothing for the household.
- ▣ Nursing sick children and slaves.

- 1) “[Socrates] “If it goes ill with the sheep we blame the shepherd, as a rule, or if a horse shows vice we throw the blame in general upon the rider. But in the case of women, supposing the wife to have received instruction from her husband and yet she delights in wrong-doing, it may be that the wife is justly held to blame; but supposing he has never tried to teach her the first principles of "fair and noble" conduct, and finds her quite an ignoramus in these matters, surely the husband will be justly held to blame.” - **Xenophon *Oeconomicos* 1.3.11-14.**
- 2) “I give this woman for the ploughing of legitimate children.” - **Menander *Perikeiromene* 435-6.**

Oikos as an Economic unit

1) “[Critobulos:] Certainly, in my opinion at any rate, everything which a man has got, even though some portion of it may lie in another part of the world from that in which he lives, forms part of his estate”
– **Xenophon**
Oeconomics 1.1.6-7.

2) “[Socrates] And by the same token land itself is no wealth to a man who so works it that his tillage only brings him loss? – **Xenophon**
Oeconomics 1.1.7.

- *Oikos* forms the root of are modern English word “economy”.
- *Oeconomics* means household management.

Managing the *Oikos*

“[Socrates] My belief is that a good wife, being as she is the partner in a common estate, must needs be her husband's counterpoise and counterpart for good; since, if it is through the transactions of the husband, as a rule, that goods of all sorts find their way into the house, yet it is by means of the wife's economy and thrift that the greater part of the expenditure is checked, and on the successful issue or the mishandling of the same depends the increase or impoverishment of a whole estate.” - **Xenophon** *Oeconomicos* 1.3.15-16.

“It is true that in the early days, Athenians, she was the most excellent of wives; she was a clever, frugal housekeeper, and kept everything in the nicest order.”
- **Lysias** *On the Murder of Eratosthenes* 1.7.

Athenian Houses

- ▣ Athenian housing of fifth century tended to be modest – cf. **Demosthenes *On Organisation* 13.29.**

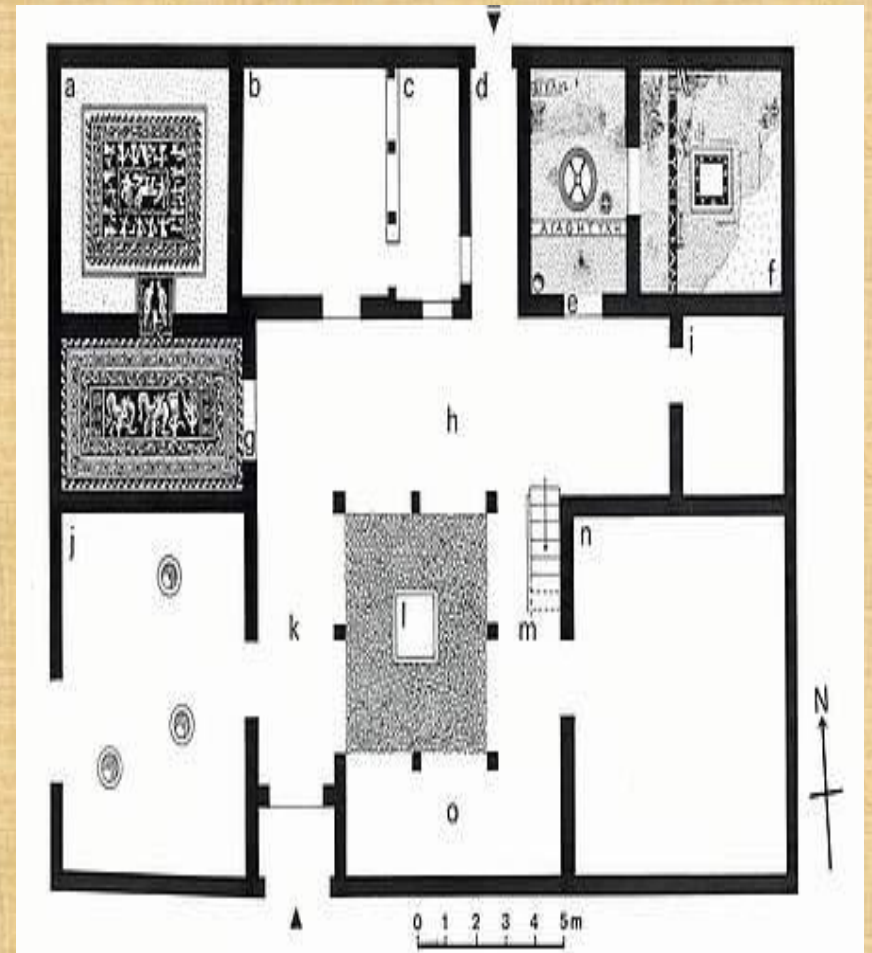
“Now in the first place I must tell you, sirs for I am obliged to give you these particulars, my dwelling is on two floors, the upper being equal in space to the lower, with the women's quarters above and the men's below. When the child was born to us, its mother suckled it; and in order that, each time that it had to be washed, she might avoid the risk of descending by the stairs, I used to live above, and the women below.” – **Lysias *Against Simon* 1.9.**

Typical Greek House

- ▣ One or two stories.
- ▣ Men's and women's quarter (*andron* and *gynaikonitis*).
- ▣ *Andron* – a space for male social interaction e.g. *symposia* (drinking parties).
- ▣ Storerooms.
- ▣ Hearths.
- ▣ “Workrooms”.
- ▣ Courtyard.



Evidence from Olythos

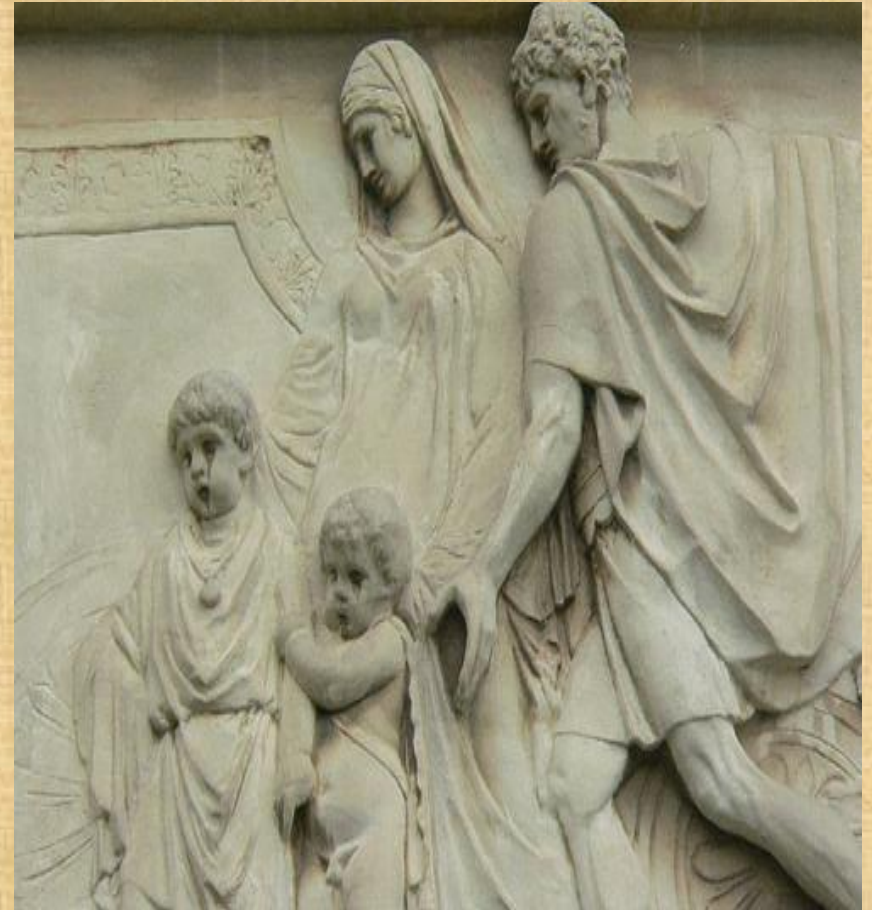


Oikos as a Religious Space

- ▣ Funerary rites and burial conducted by members of the *oikos*.
- ▣ Shrines inside and outside the house.
- ▣ Hestia is goddess of the hearth (fireplace).
- ▣ Hearth the symbolic centre of the *okios*
 - new members of the household were introduced/inducted by ritual at the hearth (e.g. brides, children, slaves).
- ▣ Archaeology suggests that hearths often portable rather than fixed.

Roman *Familia* and *Domus*

- ▣ *Domus* - the household, used to refer to household physically (as well as socially) and those belonging to it.
- ▣ *Familia* – wider family and kin outside the house hold.
- ▣ *Gens* – extended clan.



Paterfamilias

- ▣ The *paterfamilias* was the head of the household, the most senior male member of the family.
- ▣ All members of the family submitted to his power, that was lifelong.
- ▣ *Patria potestas* already attested in **Twelve Tables (c. 450 BC)**. Originally the *patria potestas* included power of life and death over the members of the family. In the later Republic, the *paterfamilias* still kept all the property of the family.

Adoption

- ▣ It was possible to adopt people into paternal power. Adoptees could be independent or in power. Very common strategy to secure the future of a family and his patrimony (inheritance).
- ▣ Famous adoptees:
 - P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus (Africanus Minor) and Quintus Fabius Maximus Aemilianus.

Freedmen

- ▣ Freed slaves would take a masters *nomen* and *cognome* but would retain personal name.
- ▣ Inscriptions showing ex-slaves in family tomb (indicates part of the *familia*).



Client – Patron Relationships and Retinues

- ▣ “Retainers” – those associated with a elite family for various reasons.
 - e.g. Polybios with Scipio Aemilianus and Fabius Maximus.
- ▣ *Patronus* and *cliens* had a social, political, and economic relationships and obligations to each other (Patron superior in status).
 - freedmen (*liberti*) would become *clientes*.

House as a Social and Political Centre

“The house which had been his father's he made over to his brother, and dwelt himself near the Palatine hill, in order that those who came to pay their court to him might not have the trouble of a long walk. And men came to his house every day to pay him court, no fewer than came to Crassus for his wealth or to Pompey because of his influence with the soldiery, and these were the two greatest men among the Romans and the most admired. Nay, Pompey actually paid court to Cicero, and Cicero's political efforts contributed much towards Pompey's power and fame.” – **Plutarch** *Cicero* 8.3.6-7.

Wealth and Property

- ▣ *Patrimonium* – inheritance and the wealth of the family estate. Managed by the *patrafamilias*.
- ▣ Dowry – property that bride brings into the marriage. Managed by husband but with restrictions.
- ▣ *Peculium*: a fund of property made available to the dependent son or daughter (also a slave).

House as a Religious Space

- ▣ Funerary rites and ancestral masks.
- ▣ *Paterfamilias* responsible for conducting sacrifices to the household gods – Lares (guardians) and Penates (gods of the store-cupboards).
- ▣ Vesta = Hestia.

Types of Roman Housing

- ▣ *Villa urbana*
- ▣ *Villa rustica*
- ▣ *Domus* = a large house/ mansion containing a single householder and *familia*.
- ▣ *Insula (ae)* = a block of flats or tenement building.
- ▣ *Cenaculum (a)* = a flat within an *insula*.
- ▣ *Medianum* = corridor in a *cenaculum* or *insula*.
- ▣ *Taberna* = a shop, usually with living accommodation attached. Also a tavern.
- ▣ *Deversorium (ia)* = a lodging-house, where you could rent a room or bed for a short period.
- ▣ *Tugurium* = shanty type housing (the word means hut).

Insula

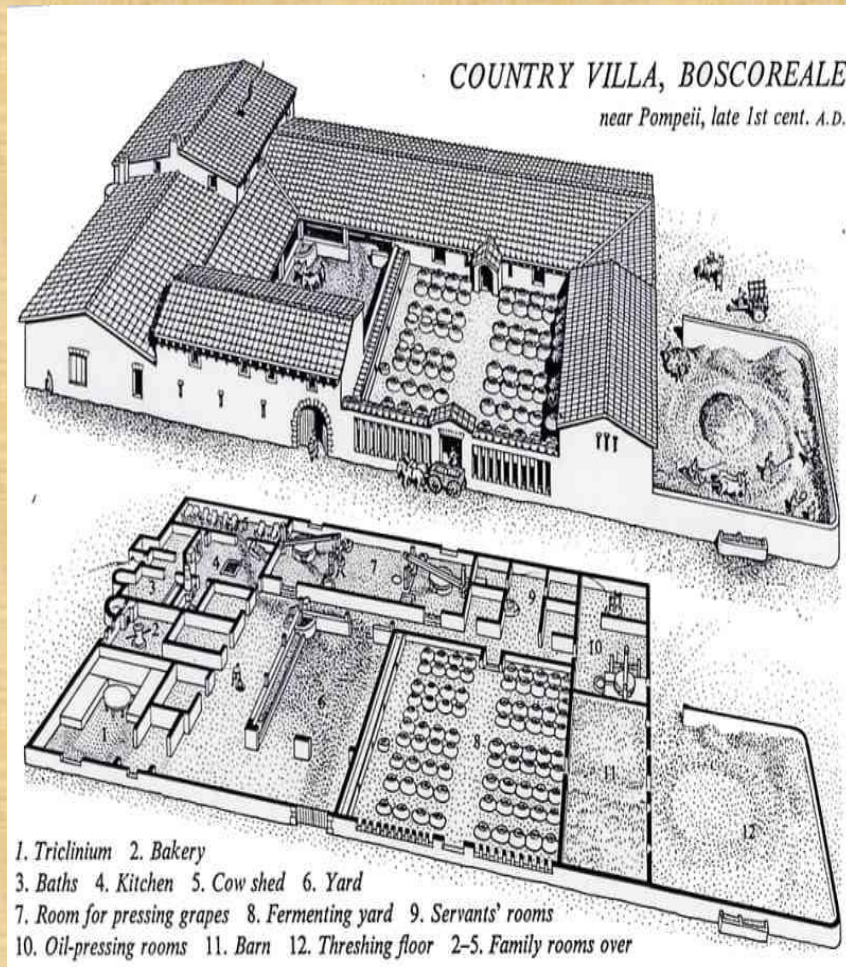


“By means of stone pillars, the walls of baked brick and party walls of rubble, towers have been raised, and these have been joined together by frequent board floors to produce upper stores with fine views over the city to the utmost advantage. Therefore walls are raised too a great height through various storeys, and the Roman people have excellent dwellings without hindrance.”

Vitruvius 2.8.17.



Villa



“You are surprised, you say, at my infatuation for my Laurentine estate, or Laurentian if you prefer it so. You will cease to wonder when you are told the charms of the villa, the handiness of its site, and the stretch of shore it commands. It is seventeen miles distant from Rome, so that after getting through all your business, and without loss or curtailment of your working hours, you can go and stay there....” – **Pliny the Younger** *Letters* 2.17.



Vestibulum | Fauces |

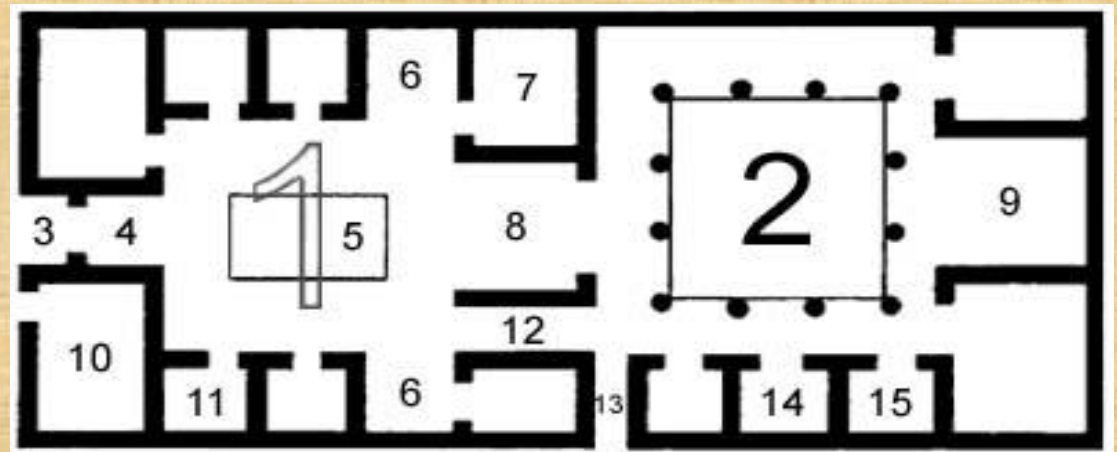
Atrium |

Ala |

Tablinum |

Peristylum

Peristyle villa



1 Atrium, 2 Peristylum, 3 Vestibulum, 4 Fauces, 5 Impluvium, 6 Ala, 7 Triclinium 8 Tablinum, 9 Exhedra/Oecus, 10 Taberna, 11 Cubiculum, 12 Andron, 13 Posticum, 14 Bathroom, 15 Cucina (kitchen)



Impulvium - cistern



Peristylum - courtyard



Triclinium - dining room



Cubiculum - bedroom