

HOUSES IN
GRAECO-ROMAN EGYPT

ARENAS FOR RITUAL ACTIVITY

Yousri Ezzat Hussein Abdelwahed

ARCHAEOPRESS ARCHAEOLOGY

ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978 1 78491 437 0
ISBN 978 1 78491 438 7 (e-Pdf)

© Archaeopress and Y E H Abdelwahed 2016

Cover: Serenos and his family at a meal, accompanied by a flautist, and the domestic shrine with holes for holding lamps in House C119 at Karanis, Kelsey Museum Archives 812.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owners.

Printed in England by Holywell Press, Oxford
This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| List of Figures | iii |
| Acknowledgement..... | v |
| Note to the Reader | vii |
| Chapter I: The Internal Division of Houses..... | 1 |
| I.1. The <i>aithrion</i> -house..... | 1 |
| I.2. The <i>oikia dipurgia</i> (two-towered house) | 3 |
| I.3. Rural Houses | 5 |
| I.4. Conclusion | 6 |
| Chapter II: The Domestic Pylon | 7 |
| II.1. Representations of Domestic Pylons in the Pharaonic Period | 7 |
| II.2. Entranceways in Greek Papyri..... | 10 |
| II.3. Other Domestic Entranceways..... | 11 |
| II.4. The Architectural Layout of the Domestic Pylon..... | 13 |
| II.5. The Use of the Domestic Pylon..... | 14 |
| II.6. Conclusion | 15 |
| Chapter III: Ritual Activities Enacted Before the Front Door of Houses..... | 16 |
| III.1. The Front Door of Houses..... | 16 |
| III.2. The Sacrifice of Fish on 9 Thoth (Julian: 7/8 September) | 17 |
| III.3. The Sacrifice of Pigs on 15 Pachon (Julian: 10 May) | 21 |
| III.4. Conclusion | 25 |
| Chapter IV: The Illumination of Lamps (<i>Lychnocaiia</i>) for Athena-Neith on 13 Epeiph (Julian: 24 June) | 26 |
| IV.1. The Festival of Lamps in Herodotus' <i>Histories</i> | 26 |
| IV.2. Lamps in Ancient Egyptian Religion and Magic..... | 27 |
| IV.3. Evidence for the Illumination of Lamps for Athena-Neith in Graeco-Roman Egypt..... | 30 |
| IV.4. The Goddess Athena-Neith | 31 |
| IV.5. The Symbolism of the Illumination of Lamps..... | 34 |
| IV.6. The Illumination of Lamps: An Ethnic Perspective..... | 35 |
| IV.7. Conclusion:..... | 38 |
| Chapter V: The House as Social Space..... | 39 |
| V.1. Dining in the House..... | 39 |
| V.2. Birthdays | 40 |
| V.3. The Mallokouria | 42 |
| V.4. The Epikrisis | 43 |
| V.5. Marriage..... | 44 |
| V.6. Conclusion..... | 45 |
| Chapter VI: The House as Religious Space | 46 |
| VI.1. Domestic shrines | 46 |
| VI.2. Wall Paintings and Figurines..... | 47 |
| VI.3. Conclusion | 56 |
| Chapter VII: The House as Funerary Space | 57 |
| VII.1. Mourning rituals for Dead Animals: the Case of Dogs..... | 57 |
| VII.1.1. Animal Cult in Ancient Egypt..... | 57 |
| VII.1.2. The Dog in the Myth of Isis and Osiris | 59 |
| VII.1.3. Other Capabilities of Dogs | 61 |
| VII.1.4. Dogs in the Dynastic Period | 63 |
| VII.1.5. Dogs in the Graeco-Roman Period | 64 |
| VII.1.5.1. Anubis/Hermes (Hermanubis)..... | 64 |
| VII.1.5.2. The "Dog-headed One" in Greek Papyri..... | 64 |
| VII.1.5.3. Anubis and the Lunar Disc of Osiris in Birth-houses (<i>mammises</i>) of Egyptian Temples..... | 66 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| VII.1.5.4. Mourning Rituals for Dead Dogs in Houses..... | 67 |
| VII.1.6. Mummification and Burial in Sacred Hypogea..... | 67 |
| VII.2. Mourning Rituals for Dead Humans | 70 |
| VII.2.1. The Osirian Myth and Burial Rituals..... | 70 |
| VII.2.2. Burial as Necessity and Obligation | 71 |
| VII.2.3. The Egyptian Mode of Burial..... | 72 |
| VII.2.3.1. The Ekphora | 72 |
| VII.2.3.2. The Peristolē..... | 75 |
| VII.2.3.3. The Kēdeia | 77 |
| VII.2.3.4. The Apostolē and Beyond | 81 |
| VII.2.3.5. The Tribunal..... | 82 |
| VII.2.3.6. The Opening of the Mouth Ritual | 82 |
| VII.2.3.7. The Funerary Banquet..... | 82 |
| VII.3. Conclusion | 84 |
| General conclusion | 85 |
| Appendix 1: Catalogue of Roman-period Houses | 86 |
| 1. Houses in the Fayum, the Arsinoite: | 86 |
| 1.1. A sample of houses at Karanis (Kom Aushim): | 86 |
| 1.1.1. House C42..... | 86 |
| 1.1.2. House C43..... | 86 |
| 1.1.3. House C45..... | 86 |
| 1.1.4. House C50/51 | 86 |
| 1.1.5. House C56..... | 87 |
| 1.1.6. House C57..... | 87 |
| 1.1.7. House C59..... | 87 |
| 1.1.8. House C60..... | 87 |
| 1.1.9. House C62..... | 87 |
| 1.1.10. House C68..... | 87 |
| 1.1.11. House C71..... | 88 |
| 1.1.12. House C119..... | 88 |
| 1.2. Houses at Soknopaiou Nesos (Dimê): | 88 |
| 1.2.1. House II 201..... | 88 |
| 1.2.2. Houses II 202, II 203 and II 204..... | 88 |
| 1.2.3. Houses on the West Area | 89 |
| 1.3. Houses at Bacchias (Kom Umm el-Atl): | 89 |
| 1.4. Houses at Philadelphia (Kom el-Kharab el-Kebir):..... | 89 |
| 1.5. Houses at Tebtunis (Kom Umm el-Boreigat): | 89 |
| 1.5.1. House No. 1100 | 89 |
| 1.5.2. House No. 3000 | 89 |
| 1.5.3. House No. 3200 | 89 |
| 1.6. Houses at Kom Medinet Ghoran: | 90 |
| 1.7. Houses at Narmuthis (Kom Medinet Maadi): | 90 |
| 1.8. Houses at Theadelphia (Kharabit Ihrit): | 90 |
| 1.9. Houses at Euhemeria (Qasr el-Banat): | 90 |
| 1.10. Houses at Dionysias (Qasr Qarun):..... | 90 |
| 2. Houses in the Dakhla Oasis, the Thebaid:..... | 91 |
| 2.1. Houses at Kellis (Ismant El-Kharab):..... | 91 |
| 2.1.1. Houses Nos. 1, 2, and 3 | 91 |
| 2.1.2. House No. B/3/1 | 91 |
| 2.2. Houses at Trimithis (Amheida): | 91 |
| 2.2.1. The House of Serenos | 91 |
| 2.2.2. The House of Area 1 | 92 |
| Bibliography..... | 93 |

List of Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1. The ground plan of the house drawn in <i>P.Oxy.</i> XXIII.2406, the second century AD..... | 2 |
| Figure 2. Model of a house, Graeco-Roman period, British Museum, No. 2462..... | 3 |
| Figure 3. Model of a house, Graeco-Roman period, Cairo Museum..... | 4 |
| Figure 4. Tower-houses at Karanis..... | 5 |
| Figure 5. Alston's Reconstruction of a Pharaonic house with two towers attached to the frontage..... | 5 |
| Figure 6. An oven in the courtyard of a house at Karanis..... | 6 |
| Figure 7. An olive press in the courtyard of a house at Karanis..... | 6 |
| Figure 8. The pylon of the Ptolemaic temple of Horus at Edfu..... | 8 |
| Figure 9. The two-towered pylon of the royal palace in the tomb of Meryra at Tell El-Amarna..... | 8 |
| Figure 10. The double-towered pylon of a palace in the Tomb of Meryra at Tell El-Amarna..... | 9 |
| Figure 11. Representation of an Egyptian villa in the tomb of Sennefer (TT 96)..... | 9 |
| Figure 12. Reconstruction of an Egyptian villa in the tomb of Sennefer (TT 96)..... | 9 |
| Figure 13. The propylon of the theatre at Antinoopolis in 1799..... | 10 |
| Figure 14. The Triumphal Arch at Antinoopolis in 1799..... | 10 |
| Figure 15. The propylon of the gymnasium at Cyrene..... | 11 |
| Figure 16. The front door of House C68 at Karanis..... | 16 |
| Figure 17. The front door of House C50 in Karanis..... | 16 |
| Figure 18. The bolt-case of the front door of House C50 in Karanis..... | 17 |
| Figure 19. The entry and exit of a house at Karanis..... | 19 |
| Figure 20. A street in Karanis..... | 20 |
| Figure 21. The sacrifice of a hippopotamus on the inner ambulatory of Edfu temple..... | 23 |
| Figure 22. Gardiner's sign R7..... | 27 |
| Figure 23. An Egyptian floating wick saucer lamp found at Kom Hadid locus 7613..... | 27 |
| Figure 24. Petosiris accompanied by a hieroglyphic inscription alluding to the Khoiak mysteries of Osiris..... | 29 |
| Figure 25. A terracotta Osiriform lamp found in House 11 at Karanis, Kelsey Museum 6478..... | 29 |
| Figure 26. An Osiriform bronze lamp at the Museum of Hatay..... | 30 |
| Figure 27. Neith with her martial emblems, the bow and the arrows..... | 31 |
| Figure 28. The ensign of the Saite nome..... | 31 |
| Figure 29. Fully armed Athena on a third century AD Roman lamp..... | 32 |
| Figure 30. Lantern of helmeted Athena inside a Greek temple in the Museum of Alexandria..... | 33 |
| Figure 31. Lantern of Athena-Neith inside an Egyptian temple in the Louvre Museum..... | 33 |
| Figure 32. The domestic shrine with holes for holding lamps in House C119 at Karanis, Kelsey Museum Archives 812..... | 37 |
| Figure 33. The Thracian Heron and Isis suckling Harpocrates in House B50 at Karanis, Kelsey Museum Archive 5.2159..... | 37 |
| Figure 34. A cupboard niche in a house at Karanis..... | 46 |
| Figure 35. The domestic shrine in room B of House C60 at Karanis..... | 46 |
| Figure 36. The domestic shrine in house C71 at Karanis..... | 47 |
| Figure 37. Harpocrates and Tithoes on the south wall of alcove CF4 of House C65 at Karanis..... | 48 |
| Figure 38. Polis and Olympian deities watch the adultery of Aphrodite and Ares..... | 50 |
| Figure 39. Serenos and his family at a meal, accompanied by a flautist..... | 50 |
| Figure 40. Swaddled doll-figurine, 8 × 3 cm, Kelsey Museum, 26413..... | 51 |
| Figure 41. Terracotta figure of Isis-Hathor or Isis-Aphrodite, c. 300-100 BC, British Museum, 1888, 0601.110..... | 53 |
| Figure 42. Terracotta figure of female tambour player, c. AD 1-200..... | 53 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 43. Pottery vessel marked 'eulogia', c. AD 100-300, British Museum, OA.9431..... | 55 |
| Figure 44. A dog beneath its master's chair on a Ptolemaic situla in the Cleveland Museum of Art..... | 60 |
| Figure 45. A relief of the 5th Dynasty shows a dog catching a gazelle by the leg, while another attacks a hyena from the neck, the Metropolitan Museum of New York. | 61 |
| Figure 46. A sketch of the 20th Dynasty shows a Pharaoh spearing a lion with the help of his dog, the Metropolitan Museum of New York. | 62 |
| Figure 47. A Ptolemaic canine-headed anthropomorphic statuette of Anubis in the Metropolitan Museum of New York. | 65 |
| Figure 48. A canine terracotta mask of Anubis..... | 65 |
| Figure 49. Dogs buried with children at Qasr Allam in the Bahariya oasis. | 66 |
| Figure 50. The falcon/Horus and the dog/Anubis on a funerary stelea from Terenouthis (Kom Abu Bellou). | 69 |
| Figure 51. An #h K̄r n-Rq stela..... | 79 |
| Figure 52. An anthropomorphic bust belonging to a domestic cult of the dead. | 79 |
| Figure 53. A stela from Abydos showing a woman involved in worshipping an ancestral bust. | 79 |
| Figure 54. The first century AD mummy-cupboard of Padikhons from Abusir el-Melek..... | 80 |
| Figure 55. The Opening of the Mouth ritual on the papyrus of Nesitanebisheru, the daughter of Pinedjem II, who died around 930 BC..... | 83 |

Acknowledgement

The idea of this book comes from the third chapter of my doctoral dissertation at the Department of Classics & Ancient History, the University of Durham, which is already published as Abdelwahed, Y. 2015. *Egyptian Cultural Identity in the Architecture of Roman Egypt (30 BC-AD 325)*, Archaeopress Roman Archaeology 6, Oxford. In the third chapter of my published dissertation, I have considered the relationship between layers of identity assertion and ritual practices in the domestic space. The research on rituals performed within the domestic property revealed that further research on the ritual side of houses is preferable. A separate monograph on the topic will be welcomed by scholars working on the archaeology and rituals of post-Pharaonic Egypt. This monograph is the outcome of a post-doctoral fellowship funded by the Mission Sector, Ministry of Higher Education, Egypt, for which I like to express my utmost gratitude. Special word of thanks must go to Prof. Annalisa Marzano, Head of Classics Department, University of Reading, and Dr. Rachel Mairs, Lecturer in Classics of the same institution for accepting my request to conduct the research at their respected university.

Note to the Reader

For citation of Greek papyri, I adhere to the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, which is available at <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>. For ancient classical works, I follow the conventions of the Oxford Classical Dictionary, 4th edition, which is available at <http://classics.oxfordre.com/staticfiles/images/ORECLA/OCD.ABBREVIATIONS.pdf>. For citation of periodicals, I follow *The Egyptian Journal of Archaeology*, available at <http://www.ees.ac.uk/publications/journal-egyptian-archaeology.html> and *The American Journal of Archaeology*, available at <http://www.ajaonline.org/editorial/175>.

Chapter I

The Internal Division of Houses

Any consideration of houses in the Graeco-Roman period should start with the question of architectural layout and internal organization. Before attempting to reconstruct the architectural and spatial elements of houses in Graeco-Roman Egypt, we should first consider the materials from which they were built. In contrast with temples and tombs which were enormous and constructed out of stone,¹ houses were often built in smaller scale and from mud-brick.² However, wooden beams, posts, frames, windows, and doors as well as stone lintels were also used.³ As representations of houses in tombs suggest, it was common in the Pharaonic period for wealthy Egyptians to inscribe their names and titles in prominent positions on or by the main doorway of their houses, advertising the owner's social status.⁴ In Herodotus's time, the Egyptians used to sleep on the roofs of their tower houses (*purgoi*), a practice which the historian ascribes to their desire to escape mosquitoes that were unable to fly so high in the wind.⁵ In ancient Egyptian literature, the house was regarded as a place of peace and rest as well as safety for the entire family,⁶ and this notion continued into the Graeco-Roman period.⁷ Not infrequently, travellers asked the general of the night guards to keep an eye on their households and houses.⁸

Diodorus provides an insight into the Egyptian conception of domestic space:

While they [the Egyptians] give the name of lodgings (καταλύσεις) to the houses (οικήσεις), thus intimating that we dwell in them but a brief time, they call the tombs of the dead eternal homes (αἰδίου οἴκου), since the dead spend endless eternity in Hades (the underworld). Consequently, they give less thought to the furnishings of their houses, but on the manner of their burials they do not abstain from any excess of zeal.⁹

At first glance, the passage reveals a remarkable similarity to Roman funerary inscriptions which refer to the earthly house (*aedes*) as an ephemeral lodging (*hospitium*) and to the tomb (*monumentum* or *sepulchrum*) as an eternal home (*aeterna domus*).¹⁰ As in many other cultures,

the Roman living house was considered to have less permanence than the house of the dead.¹¹ The Roman tomb, on the other hand, was regarded as an eternal abode, a function confirmed by its monumental structure, imperial Latin literature, and formulaic inscriptions.¹²

The custom reported by Diodorus may to some extent reflect Graeco-Roman conceptions of domestic and funerary space. But funerary papyri of Graeco-Roman Egypt, written mostly in demotic, confirm that tombs continued to be used and conceived as homes of the dead.¹³ By serving as an ephemeral resting-place of mummies, houses appear to have shared this funerary function, even if temporary.¹⁴ Being a place of impermanent stay for occupants does not mean that inhabitants in Graeco-Roman Egypt always gave less attention to either the construction or adornment of houses, which were sometimes equipped with good furniture that might reflect an extravagant life.¹⁵ In most cases, however, houses were equipped with furnishings that provided the inhabitants with the basic necessities of life.

The lack of archaeological evidence for urban housing makes it hard to form a clear picture of the architectural layout and internal organisation and thus to understand their inhabitants. Papyri from urban and rural sites and archaeological remains of village houses together partly compensate for these deficiencies.

1.1. The *aithrion*-house

P.Oxy. XXIII.2406 sheds light on the αἴθριον or court-house, which is frequently attested in urban and rural contexts (Figure 1), and helps to reconstruct the internal arrangement of domestic space in Graeco-Roman Egypt.¹⁶

According to Eric Turner, the papyrus dates to the second century and shows the ground plan of a house. The architectural layout of the house, in Turner's view, consists of a single entrance door (on the left), giving access to three successive courtyards, rather than rooms. The first of them was called πύλων, the second as ἀτρείον and the third was left undesignated. In the second courtyard there is a door named θύρα καταγ(αίου) leading down

¹ For temples: Arnold 1999. For tombs: Venit 2002a.

² Luckhard 1914, 46-7; Hobson 1985, 214.

³ Husselman 1979, 33-48.

⁴ Perrot and Chipiez 1882, 457.

⁵ Hdt. 2.95. But the real reason may have been a wish to enjoy the fresher air, as in Egypt today.

⁶ On a review of this literature: Parlebas 1977.

⁷ Alston 2001, 85.

⁸ *P.Oxy.* VI.933.24-26.

⁹ Diod. Sic. 1.51.2.

¹⁰ On a particular, explicit example of Roman funerary inscriptions: *CIL* VI.27788 = *CLE* 1488 = Borg et al 2005, 144, no. 91.

¹¹ Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 39-78.

¹² For a discussion of Latin funerary texts: Thomas 2007, 183-4.

¹³ E.g. Smith 2009.

¹⁴ Willeitner 2004.

¹⁵ On the furnishings of houses in Roman Egypt: Gazda 1983, 24-30.

¹⁶ Parsons 2007, 18. *P.Oxy.* XXIII.2406 contains only a drawing of the ground plan of a house. See also, Husson 1983, 29-36.

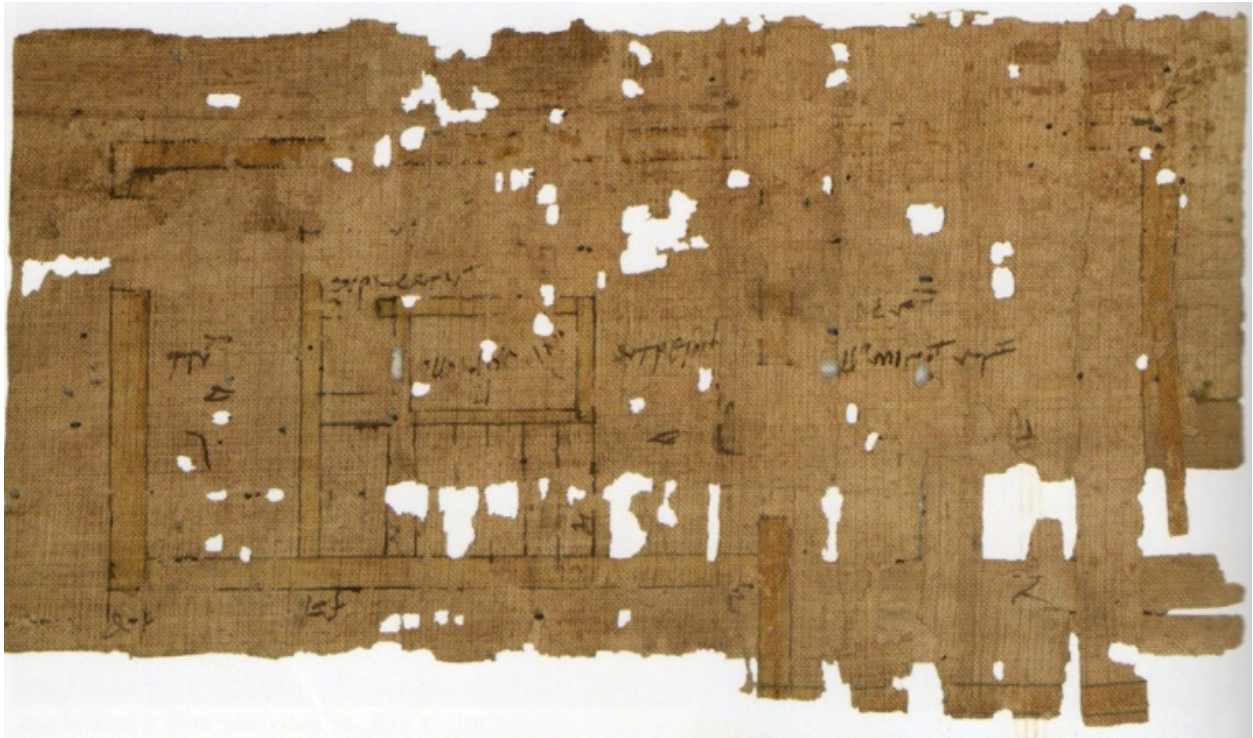


FIGURE 1. THE GROUND PLAN OF THE HOUSE DRAWN IN *P.Oxy.* XXIII.2406, THE SECOND CENTURY AD.

to a cellar.¹⁷ Since pylon has never been attested in papyri to mean a courtyard, Turner's interpretation of the pylon as a court is untenable.¹⁸

Herwig Maehler, on the other hand, argued that the house consists of a tower-like gateway (*πυλών*), giving access to a central courtyard open to the sky in the form of an *aithrion* (αἶθριον), rather than an *atrium*. In the middle of the *atreion* there is a structure named *obolisk(os)* and a flight of steps leading up to the upper stories and a door leading down to a cellar. Finally, the central courtyard leads directly to an unnamed court or yard, probably an *aule*.¹⁹ The plan of this house is similar to that of House 3 at Kellis, which consists of an entrance hall leading to two successive courts acting respectively as an *aithrion* and an *aule* (Appendix 1).

As for the size of the house, Turner noticed that the 'measurements given on the plan, if they are measurements, cannot be reconciled with each other or interpreted in absolute terms as dimensions of the house'.²⁰ For example, $\delta = 4$ under *πυλών* could be applied to the distance between its parallel walls, $\beta = 2$ under *ὀβολίσκος* could be applied to the distance between the two horizontal limits, and $\delta = 4$ upside down under *ἀτρεῖον* could be taken to be the same unit and applied to the distance from the wall to the exit door

leading to the undesignated court. However, it is not a unit that will fit the figure $\epsilon\gamma' = 5\frac{1}{3}$ of the horizontal measurements of the undesignated room, or the two γ 's (one in the *πυλών*) and one by the exit door from the *ἀτρεῖον*). Although the Egyptian cubit (52.5 cm) was still in use in the Roman period as a unit of measurement for traditional monuments,²¹ the figures are not meant to be measured against the Egyptian cubit, or the Roman cubit (44.4 cm), particularly when compared to house measurements in other papyri.²²

Despite the incompatibility of measurements and the inadequacy of the plan, which is clear from the absence of room-divisions, the plan throws light on the internal organization of domestic space in Graeco-Roman Egypt. The *πυλών* is the first architectural structure in the house.²³ The annotated drawing in *P.Oxy.* XXIII.2406 refers to the central spatial feature next to the *obolisk(os)* as *ἀτρεῖον*. However, since the *ἀτρεῖον* has never been attested elsewhere in Egyptian domestic architecture,²⁴ and only occurs in papyri in connection with public and religious buildings,²⁵ it is probable that the central court of the house took the form of an *aithrion* (αἶθριον), rather than an *atrium*. The absence of the *impluvium*, which is

¹⁷ For the edition of *P.Oxy.* XXIV.2406: Turner 1957.

¹⁸ Husson 1983, 243–46.

¹⁹ Maehler 1983, 136.

²⁰ Turner 1957, 145.

²¹ Arnold 1999, 229.

²² Cf. *P.Lond.* I.50.7 in which a house measures 21×13 cubits and its *aule* measures 4×13 cubits.

²³ For a full discussion of the domestic pylon, see chapter two.

²⁴ The *ἀτρεῖον* is not included in Husson's monograph on domestic vocabulary in Egypt.

²⁵ *P.Fouad* I.21.4 (63): ἐν τῷ μεγάλῳ ἀτρίῳ, ἐπὶ βήματος; *SB* V.8247.15–16 (63–4); *P.Yale Inv.* 1528; *IGR* I.1048, 1175 (the representation of Isis known as the Ἴσις ἐν ἀτρίῳ).

a characteristic feature of *atria* in Roman houses, may support the assumption that this was an *aithrion* house-type.²⁶ In fact, there is no need for the presence of the *impluvium* as it is rainless in the *chora*.²⁷ Houses in Graeco-Roman Egypt had instead a draw-well (φρέαρ) in their courtyards.²⁸ Since the house is not architecturally recognisably as an *atrium*-house, it is widely accepted that the *atreion* corresponds to the *aithrion*.²⁹ The two words are even etymologically related.³⁰ The *aithrion* is the central, internal court of the house; it is the open courtyard which provides light to the interior of the house. Since it could not be sold separately, the *aithrion* was an integral part of the house.³¹

The *aithrion* should be distinguished from the ἀύλη (*aule*), which could be sold separately or even shared with another house. In that sense, the *aule* was not integral to the house. The expressions ἀύλην περιτετιχισμένην³² and τῆς προσούσης ἀύλης³³ indicate that the *aule* was a small yard ‘surrounded by walls’ and ‘annexed to the house’. It was probably used for agricultural or household works.³⁴ Houses may have had an *aithrion* and an *aule*, as in a papyrus of 164 from Oxyrhynchus, attesting the lease of a house with its appurtenances for 18 months at a rent of 200 drachmas per year. The tenant, Ptolema, daughter of Theon, is bound to deliver the buildings in good condition at the end of the lease, and the landlord, Dionysia, daughter of Chairemon, is responsible for the police-tax and brick-tax. The house contained ‘a courtyard (ἀύλην) and two yards (αἴθρια δύο), in one of which there is a well (φρέαρ)’.³⁵ An unclear structure, the ὀβολισκ(ος), appears in the middle of the courtyard in *P.Oxy.* XXIII.2406. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the structure and function of the *obolisk(os)*.³⁶ Turner hesitantly suggested that it was used to designate ‘water-pipe’ or ‘conduit’.³⁷ In a late papyrus from Herakleopolis, the *oboliskos* is mentioned in association with a domestic pylon, suggesting that it was an important element of the house with certain unknown functions.³⁸ Nothing can be said about the undesignated part of the house behind the *aithrion*. However, it was perhaps another court or a backyard.

I.2. The *oikia dipurgia* (two-towered house)

Another house-type that is more often connected with urban rather than rural sites is the οἰκία διπυργία.³⁹ Strictly speaking, the *purgos* or tower is a distinctive structure that is frequently mentioned in Greek papyri uncovered from Graeco-Roman Egypt.⁴⁰ In Greek military architecture, however, the *purgos* refers to a defensive tower as well as a place of habitation for soldiers.⁴¹ In contrast, it is mentioned in domestic contexts in Egypt to designate a distinct form of tower used for certain purposes, possibly for storage of agricultural products.⁴² A papyrus of AD 79 from Oxyrhynchus registers the mortgage of a house in which there are ‘a two-storied tower (πύργος δίστεγος), a propylon, an exedra, an *aithrion*, and a vaulted room’.⁴³ The *purgos*

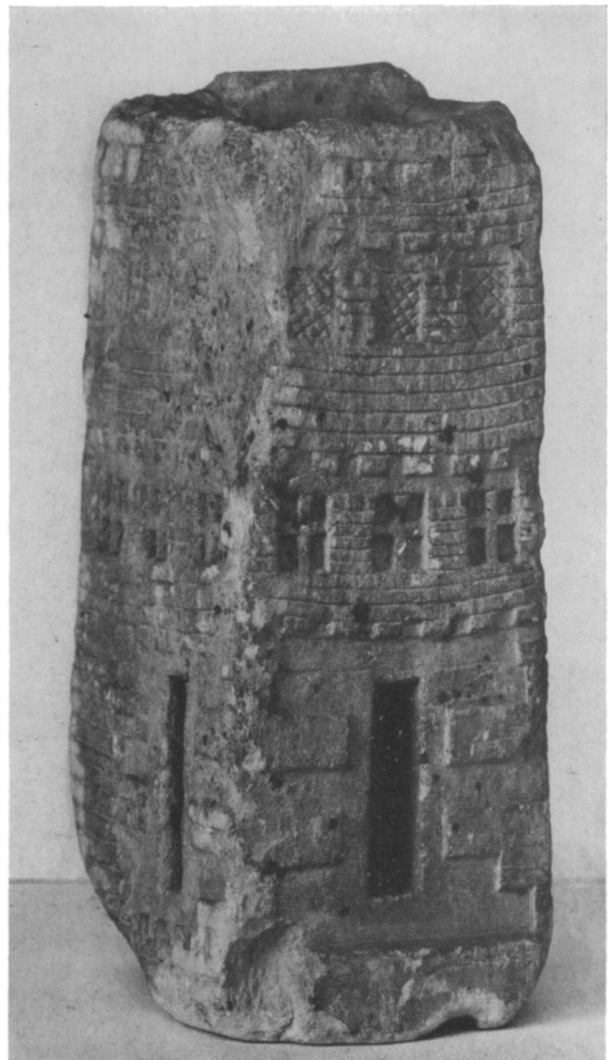


FIGURE 2. MODEL OF A HOUSE, GRAECO-ROMAN PERIOD, BRITISH MUSEUM, NO. 2462.

²⁶ Maehler 1983, 137.

²⁷ Diod. Sic. 1.10.4.

²⁸ *P.Oxy.* III.502.18 (179) = *SB* XX.14199.

²⁹ Alston 1997b, 25-39.

³⁰ Chantraine 1964, 7-15.

³¹ Husson 1983, 29-36.

³² *P.Oxy.* III.505.7 (179) = *SB* XX.14199.

³³ *P.Oxy.* III.482.11-13 (109).

³⁴ Husson 1983, 45-54.

³⁵ *P.Oxy.* III.502.17-18.

³⁶ The ὀβολισκος is not included in Husson's monograph on the vocabulary of houses.

³⁷ Turner 1957, 145.

³⁸ *P.Lond.* II.391.2.

³⁹ Alston 1997a.

⁴⁰ Husson 1983, 248-51.

⁴¹ Hellmann 1992, 361-4.

⁴² Preisigke 1919; Nowicka 1972.

⁴³ *P.Oxy.* II.243.15-17.

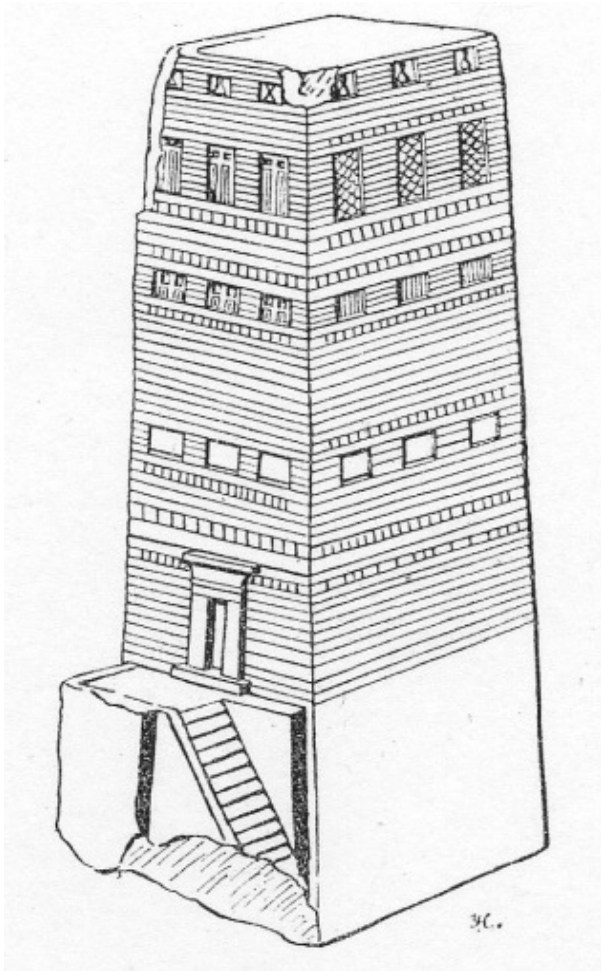


FIGURE 3. MODEL OF A HOUSE, GRAECO-ROMAN PERIOD, CAIRO MUSEUM.

is also used in Egypt as a form of tower-house used for habitation.⁴⁴ Multi-storied tower-houses were known since the Pharaonic period.⁴⁵ Together models of houses in the form of towers (figures 2-3) and excavations at Karanis (figure 4) confirm that tower-houses continued to be a common feature of housing in Graeco-Roman Egypt.⁴⁶

The *oikia dipurgia* was a distinctive house-type related in some cases to wealthy families. A papyrus of AD 90 mentions 'a two-towered house in the middle of which there is a court'; the house also contained an annexed *aule*.⁴⁷ A papyrus of AD 261 concerns the cession of a two-towered house, which belonged to magistrates and was located in an Oxyrhynchite village.⁴⁸ *P.Oxy.* LXIV.4438 of AD 252 is the only surviving reference to a three-towered house (οἰκία τριπυργία), which contained an *aithrion* and two *aule*. The house was bought by the wife of a former magistrate of Oxyrhynchus

from a gymnasiarch of the same city, suggesting that it was a residence for the elites.⁴⁹ The *aithrion* and *aule* were distinctive features of the *oikia dipurgia* and *oikia tripurgia*. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the physical appearance of these towered houses and little is known about their internal arrangement. However, it seems safe to say that the towers were integral and prominent architectural features of the houses, as their names imply. Alston suggests a reconstruction of the physical appearance of the *oikia dipurgia* on the basis of ancient Egyptian representations which show large houses with two slanting towers attached to the frontage (figure 5).⁵⁰

The façade of the *oikia dipurgia* may have been flanked by two towers, which were perhaps used for habitation.⁵¹ According to Alston, the construction of two huge towers was meant to create a more imposing frontage. Impressive house frontages might have the potential not only to 'assert the status of the occupants of the house in the public space of the street', but also to 'demarcate the boundary between public and private'.⁵²

The occupants of such houses probably exploited the two towers as an architectural means to assert their social status on the public space of streets. Representations of houses in Pharaonic tombs show that wealthy Egyptians inscribed their names and titles on the main doorway of their houses, advertising their social status. Prominent and externally visible towers served to identify the house in the Roman period, as did the names of neighbours in sale and lease contracts.⁵³ The identification of a house by the name of its owner continued into the Roman period.⁵⁴ Houses of named individuals were used as landmarks in directions to couriers.⁵⁵ Similarly, the use of houses of named residents as topographical points in surveys unrelated to taxation confirms this assumption of a close relationship between the occupant and his or her house.⁵⁶

There is no archaeological evidence for two-towered houses, three-towered houses, bath-houses, and gate-houses in the well-excavated sites of the Fayum and the Dakhla oasis. Although they have not been identified in urban sites, it is possible that they are closely associated with cities, given their frequency in urban contexts. The court-house, however, has been identified in surviving houses at Karanis and Kellis. In urban and rural sites,

⁴⁹ *P.Oxy.* LXIV.4438.14-5.

⁵⁰ Alston 1997c, 31, fig. 2. For an illustration of a two-towered pylon in a Pharaonic house: Davies 1929, pl. xxxii.

⁵¹ Nowicka 1973, 175-8.

⁵² Alston 1997a, 30-7.

⁵³ *P.Mich.* V.294.

⁵⁴ E.g. *P.Oxy.* XVII.2145 (building measurements for a bath in the house of [---] Severus, AD 185); Husson 1983, 58-60. Cf. *P.Theon.* 15 (the mid-second century).

⁵⁵ Llewellyn 1994.

⁵⁶ Alston 1997a, 36.

⁴⁴ Hdt. 2.95; *P.Tebt.* I.47.15-16 (113 BC).

⁴⁵ Davies 1929, 236-9.

⁴⁶ Engelbach 1931, 129-30; Gazda 1983, 19, fig. 30.

⁴⁷ *P.Oxy.* II.247.23: οἰκίας διπυργίας ἐν ἧ κατὰ μέσον αἶθριον.

⁴⁸ *P.Oxy.* XIV.1703.



FIGURE 4. TOWER-HOUSES AT KARANIS.

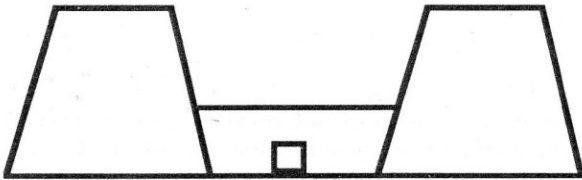


FIGURE 5. ALSTON'S RECONSTRUCTION OF A PHARAONIC HOUSE WITH TWO TOWERS ATTACHED TO THE FRONTAGE.

some of the houses comprised just one storey;⁵⁷ however, two-storey houses seem to have been standard,⁵⁸ as was the case in the Pharaonic period.⁵⁹ Three- and four-storey houses were not uncommon, as papyri and rural archaeological material confirm.⁶⁰ The construction of multi-storied houses in the Roman period is a tradition preserved from the Pharaonic period and confirms the persistence of traditional structures and techniques.⁶¹

I.3. Rural Houses

A clearer picture of the internal divisions of rural houses can be formed from the archaeological remains at Karanis.⁶² The topographical study of the site suggests that it was occupied from the late Ptolemaic period to the early fourth century.⁶³ However, papyri and coins

suggest a lengthier occupation from *c.* 270 BC to *c.* AD 500, and possibly later.⁶⁴ In the Roman period, the villages of Egypt had substantial houses that were used over longer periods of time. More than 106 houses were excavated in Karanis by the University of Michigan between 1924 and 1935; however, the excavations were never completely published (for a sample, see Appendix 1).⁶⁵ The villages were also dominated by modest houses constructed of mud-brick with a floor space measuring about sixty square meters.⁶⁶ These houses were smaller than those at Pompeii, which have mean areas of 266 square meters (Region I) and 289 square meters (Region VI), and Herculaneum, which have a mean area of 241 square meters.⁶⁷

Although many houses in Karanis reveal a pattern in their internal arrangement, other houses of the same village do not. Houses in Karanis usually had an underground basement with vaulted ceilings, serving as storage bins for keeping the family's cereal stock and other foodstuffs.⁶⁸ The dominant feature of the houses is the central courtyard, which occupies about a quarter of the total floor space. It was usually situated at one end or at the side of the house, where there was direct access to a street or a passageway. It sometimes occupied the centre of the house with a number of adjoining rooms. The courtyard was open to the sky and enclosed with walls. It was around these courtyards that household

⁵⁷ *P.Oxy.* VII.1027.3 (the first century): οἰκ[ί]ας μονοστέγου.

⁵⁸ *P.Oxy.* IV.719.15 (193): οἰκιῶν δυο διστέγου.

⁵⁹ Badawy 1966, 15-8.

⁶⁰ *P.Oxy.* XLVII.3365.ii.77 (241): οἰκία τρίστεγος; Gazda 1983, 19 (fig. 30).

⁶¹ Husson 1981; Gros 1996, 216.

⁶² Boak and Peterson 1931.

⁶³ Husselman 1979.

⁶⁴ Haatvedt and Peterson 1964.

⁶⁵ Husselman 1979.

⁶⁶ Luckhard 1914, 16-23.

⁶⁷ These figures are taken from Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 76.

⁶⁸ Bowman 1986, 149.



FIGURE 6. AN OVEN IN THE COURTYARD OF A HOUSE AT KARANIS.

activities generally revolved. The presence of fireplaces, ovens (figure 6), grain bins, Theban millstones (small hand-mills of a traditional design) and other cooking pots and jars in the courtyards of many houses at Karanis indicates that the courtyard was the kitchen.

Given that pigs, sheep, goats, geese, and other domesticated animals and birds were reared in the courtyards of houses, the inhabitants looked upon the interiors of their houses, particularly courtyards, as an important source of income. Storage bins, animal pens, feeding troughs, and mangers were largely located in the courtyards of houses at Karanis.⁶⁹ In addition to helping the inhabitants in field works by transporting seeds and hoeing the earth, domesticated animals supplied the inhabitants with their dietary needs from milk, butter, and meat, not to mention the economic value obtained from selling them.⁷⁰ The presence of bases of olive presses in many courtyards (figure 7) also suggests that the courtyard functioned also as a small factory producing highly economic products.⁷¹

Leaving the courtyard aside, the internal stairway is another important feature of multi-storied houses at Karanis. It is a continuous staircase connecting all the floors of the house. The living accommodation on the

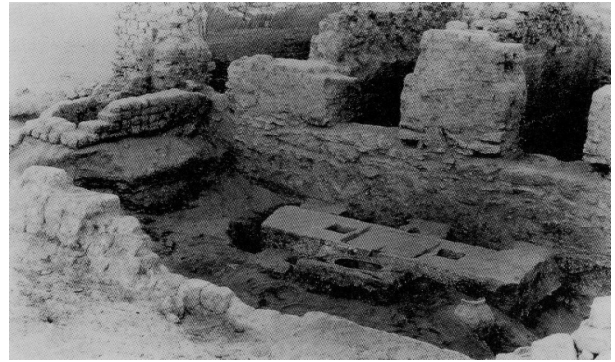


FIGURE 7. AN OLIVE PRESS IN THE COURTYARD OF A HOUSE AT KARANIS.

floors of houses consisted of two or three rooms of relatively considerable size with plastered walls and wall-niches.⁷² Excavations revealed that houses at the nearby village of Soknopaiou Nesos (Dimê) (Appendix 2) bore a remarkable resemblance to those of Karanis in both layout and material. Yet much less pottery and household furniture were found in houses at Dimê. Similarly, houses at Dimê consisted of an entrance-doorway leading directly to a courtyard or to a short passage and a courtyard, around which a number of rooms were arranged. Houses also had a stair unit, which led down to the underground rooms and up to the upper floors.⁷³ Like other houses in the Dakhleh oasis, houses at Kellis typically consist of a single storey with vaulted roofs. A staircase provided access to the roof, which was often used as a storage space. Within the house, there was a central courtyard surrounded by living and work spaces. Walls were mud-plastered and often contained strips of white wash along the rear walls and around doorways and wall niches (Appendix 1).⁷⁴

1.4. Conclusion

Together, archaeology and papyri help to reconstruct the internal arrangement of Egyptian houses in the Graeco-Roman period. There was a variety in house type in both urban and rural sites. House types included the aithrion-house, the oikia dipurgia, the oikia tripurgia, and the bath-house. Multi-storied houses were also common in poleis, metropoleis, and komai. Some domestic facilities such as oil-presses and household activities such as animal breeding provided the occupants with nutritional necessities and revenues. The house was a marker of social status as the occupants emphasised their position within the local community by such externally features of the house as the two-towers, the three-towers, and the domestic pylon.

⁶⁹ Husselman 1979, 49-54.

⁷⁰ Bowman 1986, 149-50.

⁷¹ Husselman 1979, 38-9.

⁷² Bowman 1986, 149.

⁷³ Boak 1935.

⁷⁴ Hope 1988; Gardner and Lieu 1996; Knudstad and Frey 1999.