

Lisa C. Nevett, *Domestic Space in Classical Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xvii +178 pages, figs. 27, plates 13. ISBN 978-0-521-78945-5 (paperback). £ 19.99.

Lisa C. Nevett's third book is the latest step in her long endeavor to understand ancient households. This work began with the publication of *House and Society in Ancient Greek World* (1999), and continued with a volume (co-edited with Bradley A. Ault) on *Ancient Greek Houses and Households* (2005) and several articles on different aspects of the same topic. *Domestic Space* is part of the series *Key Themes in Ancient History*, edited by P.A. Cartledge and P.D.A. Garnsey. As Nevett explains in the Preface of *Domestic Space*, this volume is the compilation of several case studies which she explored during the past decade delivering oral versions in seminars and professional meetings. Unlike her first book which deals with a vast amount of evidence, both literary and archaeological, trying to cover every aspect of housing in Classical Greece (including Ionia and South Italy), *Domestic Space* focuses on specific subjects which are organized in a long chronological scope, from the Early Iron Age to the Late Roman period, and a broad geographical spectrum, from the west coast of Turkey to the north coast of Africa.

In addition to the Introduction, the book is organized in six chapters and an epilogue, followed by a glossary, a useful bibliographic essay about each chapter, a bibliography and an index. In the Introduction, Nevett discusses the conceptual ground of her approach in the study of domestic space in antiquity. Although rich in content and valuable thoughts, the Introduction is rather long and repetitive at places, yielding the impression that it was written under pressure. Some of the material included in the Introduction would have found a better place in the concluding Epilogue. Nevertheless, a patient and skilful reader can organize Nevett's introductory thoughts in a comprehensive and constructive way.

To begin with, her use of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* as a tangible example of how one can visualize different cultural backgrounds and social identities in a domestic context is a successful choice, and the film should be viewed in the classroom when teaching houses, households, and family life in antiquity. Next, Nevett explains that we study households because what goes on inside a household is a mirror reflection of its broader social and cultural context. Household studies enable us to examine larger social, cultural and historical problems. We can learn about the organization and social dynamics of a household by studying the archaeological evidence, such as the architectural layout and decoration of a house, the artefactual distribution and palaeobotanical remains, as well as the environment that influenced the planning and the organization of the activities in a house. At the same time, Nevett cautions us on the use of the material record, since houses have their "life cycles" and the archaeological evidence usually records the last phase of a cycle which may have lasted for several generations. In addition, the complexity of site formation processes can also affect the data for our interpretations. Therefore, archaeologists have to look for recurring patterns in the architectural layout and artefactual distribution of the houses, with the aim of isolating the random or the exceptional.

When available, the study of the literary evidence can shed ample light not only

on the physical description of the houses, but also on the family relationships. As a matter of fact, it is the study of the texts that has set the research agenda in the household studies. For Classical Greece the questions have centered on gender (e.g., the segregation of men and women in the house and the role of the symposium); for Roman Italy, research has centered around the *dominus* and the manifestations of his wealth and power in the domestic environment. However, textual evidence should also be used with caution since the authors of the texts were male members of the Greek and Roman elite, and their view of the household is self-centered, rarely acknowledging the presence of other household members (women and slaves).

Nevett also warns us against interpretations based on our own cultural preconceptions, using the Western concept of privacy as an example. I agree with her that it is comforting to perceive and interpret the ancient world by projecting into the past our own conceptual frameworks, like Kenneth in *Hassan's Tower* (Margaret Drabble, *A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman. Complete Short Stories*, Boston 2011). After days of struggling with the otherness of the Morroicans, “a sense of overwhelming relief settled heavily upon him,” when he finally imagined them in a London street or on a beach in England. For this reason, Nevett suggests cross-cultural comparisons through the study of ethnographic parallels, which will alert us to other ways of social behavior. In the same realm, one should avoid using modern familiar terms, like kitchen, to identify spaces in ancient houses because these terms may carry different connotations. As with Nevett's previous works, the aim of the current one is to facilitate the dialogue between archaeology and history and to bridge the discussions on the ancient family (the focus of historians) with those on the household (the focus of archaeologists).

Chapter 2 discusses the house-form and its social complexity in the Early Iron Age Greece. Here we have a case where the study of the texts (Homer) is of limited value; therefore, one has to depend solely on the study and interpretation of the archaeological remains. She distinguishes five types of housing. The spatial distribution of houses from coastal Asia Minor from the 10th to 8th centuries (Old Smyrna and Emborio at Chios) reveals single-room structures with possible use of exterior courts. Even with wooden or fabric interior divisions, these houses would have been cramped and left no room for any “privacy.”

The second type of house is that of an elongated curvilinear structure with several communicating rooms and an end entrance, as represented in Nichoria in the 10th and 9th centuries, as well as in other locations of mainland Greece (e.g., Oropos and Euboea which are not discussed by Nevett in the book but noted in her reference to Mazarakis-Ainian 2007). Again, with very little privacy, the only place in which this type of house would have accommodated separate activities is the area near the apse.

The next type of house is also elongated but rectilinear in plan and the entrance is on the side. According to Nevett, it is found “only in Crete and western Greece, and only between the tenth and eighth centuries” (p. 32), although she provides no reference about examples from western Greece. In addition, one must also correct Nevett's chronological statement, since this type of house continues in Crete well into the Hellenistic period (Eleutherna and Lato). Although the Hellenistic houses at

Eleutherna and Lato have been known for a long time, the reader will benefit from reading Ruth Westgate's recent overview of "House and Society in Classical and Hellenistic Crete: A Case Study in Regional Variation" (*AJA* 111, 2007, pp. 423–457).

The fourth type of house consists of multiple-room structures with more than one entrance, with examples from Vroulia in Rhodes and Kastanas in Chalkidike. Unfortunately, the author does not provide any reference for the Kastanas site, either in the text or the bibliographic essay. Again, one has the sense that this chapter was written under pressure, or not edited with care. In addition, I disagree with the author's decision to lump together the Vroulia houses and the Kastanas building, since the similarities are superficial and the archaeological evidence from Kastanas is far from conclusive. In discussing the geographical distribution of the fourth type of houses, Nevett mentions that "no examples are found outside central Greece" (p. 34). I find the author's geographical interpretation of Greece, as it is explained in the map of Fig. 2.1 (p. 25), somewhat confusing in the sense that it combines under Central Greece, the peninsula of Chalkidiki and Rhodes, thus treating Thasos differently from its neighbor Chalkidiki.

Finally, the last type of house is found in the composite houses of Zagora on Andros, with multiple rooms and multiple entrances leading off a single space. Nevett concludes her chapter with some interesting observations, the most important being (p. 42) that there is an increasing segmentation of space during the course of the 10th to the 7th centuries B.C., at least in some of the areas discussed, which must be related to the escalating complexity of social relations (providing in some sense the earlier social context for Pericles' citizenship law in the 5th century B.C.) As for the lack of archaeological evidence from the 6th century B.C., which Nevett explains convincingly, the reader should be aware that the recent publication of the excavations at Azoria near Kavousi in Crete has already enriched our knowledge for this period and region (Donald Haggis et al., "Excavations at Azoria, 2003–2004, Part 1", *Hesperia* 76, 2007, pp. 243–321).

With Chapter 3, Nevett leaves behind the unfamiliar territory of Early Iron Age and proceeds to the familiar grounds of Classical Greece and the social institution of the symposium, for which she proposes a new reading based on a careful examination of the archaeological evidence. The author challenges long-held views that the symposium was an elite activity in the 6th century associated with aristocratic families, which either opened up in the 5th and 4th centuries to include more people or remained an elite and antidemocratic activity, depending on which school of thought we follow. These interpretations have been based on textual evidence or the study of images on Attic painted pottery. New studies on the sympotic imagery of Athenian vases, however, suggest that until the late 6th/early 5th c. B.C. the symposium most likely took place in a semi-outdoor space, with the houses' courtyard being one of the candidates. It is suspected that such an arrangement would have encouraged the participation of more people. The emergence of a dedicated space (andron) with a restrained capacity in the 5th and 4th century B.C. houses, as a place to host the symposium, is most likely related to Pericles' new law of citizenship and the need of the owner of the house to conform to

a new set of social rules which encouraged gender segregation.

Nevett's study of the architectural layout and artefactual distribution (when possible) of the Classical courtyard house shows that, in addition to one's need to conform to a well-defined ideology of domestic culture, there was also a pragmatic approach to the everyday life of families. For example, the re-examination of Olynthos shows that only a minority of the houses featured an andron, whose existence in the Classical house has been taken for granted by some scholars, even when there is not enough archaeological evidence to sustain its existence. Furthermore, the discovery of storage and cooking vessels in the courtyard suggests a variety of domestic activities taking place at the heart of the house by many of its members, and contradicts polarized views which support a segmented Classical house. With or without an andron, the most important feature of the Greek Classical house remains its radial plan which performed a dual role: encouraging, on the one hand, contact between the various members of the family, while, at the same time, securing a high degree of watchfulness. Nevett's new interpretation of the Classical house is most refreshing, and takes research onto a new level. The reader can find an elaborate version of the same topic in her recently published "Domestic Culture in Classical Greece" (which appears incorrectly as Nevett 2009a in her bibliography, but was published in 2010 in *Cultural Messages in the Graeco-Roman World. Acta of the BABESCH 80th Anniversary Workshop Radboud University Nijmegen, September 8th 2006, Babesch Suppl.* 15, ed. O. Hekster and S.T.A.M. Mols, pp. 49–56).

Chapter 4 takes us to Late Hellenistic Delos, which was inhabited by a host of different ethnic groups, making it an ideal case for studying the degree of acculturation in the individual households. By examining four houses at Delos (the House of Cleopatra and Dioscorides, the Diadumenos House, the House of the Dolphins and the House of the Trident) the author sets out to test the idea that interaction between various and different cultures resulted in the creation of new and distinctive "hybrid" cultures on Delos (p. 70). With two parameters in mind when studying the Delian houses, namely, the limited artefactual evidence and their long, multi-generational occupation, Nevett distinguishes two types of houses, one that adheres to the Greek Classical tradition of protecting the interior of a house from the outside viewers, and another that is closer to the Roman tradition that allows a certain degree of permeability. The latter feature goes hand-in-hand with a desire for public display of prosperity. So, instead of a single new "hybrid" culture, one sees the co-existence of two cultural trends which most likely reflect two cultural groups. However, as with the Greek Classical house (Chapter 3), there is also the pragmatic approach, with in-between and ambivalent interpretations of the two trends, like the House of Cleopatra and Dioscorides, which opts for a partial opening of its interior.

Chapter 5 introduces the reader to the Roman house as well as to the principles of the household analysis. Because of their superb state of preservation, the Pompeian houses have been the subject of several works on domestic space, including those of Wallace-Hadrill and Allison. Nevett proceeds to review both works, highlighting the pros and cons of each approach: Wallace-Hadrill, the first to view ancient houses as occupied spaces rather than empty shells, has based his interpretation on Vitruvius' description of the Roman elite house (*domus*), which was designed to accommodate

the social obligations of the master of the house (*dominus*) enhancing the latter's status and prosperity. Naturally, an interpretation so heavily based on Vitruvius, a member of the Roman elite himself, leaves no space for the other members of the house (women and slaves).

Allison, on the other hand, approached the Pompeian houses by focusing on the archaeological evidence, while ignoring Vitruvius' text completely. Surprisingly enough, her examination of 865 rooms and 16,000 objects hardly identified any spaces reserved to a single dominant activity. Instead, almost every space yielded evidence for more than one activity, including the Vitruvian atrium where the master of the house received daily his clients for the morning *salutation*. Allison's household analysis produced a variety of domestic items like loomweights and tableware, indicating that other members of the house used the atrium as well.

Nevett, rightly, notes that the results of artefactual distribution and organizational patterns can often be unfulfilling because they do not give answers regarding the precise function of a room. Most likely, our cultural misconceptions prevent us from asking the right question. For instance, the idea of multi-functionality in the use of a space is a strange concept to recent western thought. In addition, archaeologists tend also to ignore the short-term change which would have allowed for different uses of a space at different times of the day and the year, following the changes in the light and temperature. Therefore, the artifacts we find in the rooms usually represent short-term activities (the author does not mention that there are techniques like micro-stratigraphy which can also trace medium-term activities in a space), the study of which "produces a more deeply textured understanding of the household as a composite social unit," rather than the domain of the master of the house (p. 118).

Nevett's last chapter (Chapter 6) deals with visual representations of households in the Roman provinces of North Africa. Focusing on the unique Dominus Julius mosaic, Nevett offers once again a new reading of an image which has been taken to symbolize the fertility and prosperity of the African landscape. First, by comparing the fauna that is depicted on the African mosaics with the results of zooarchaeological studies in Roman Africa, Nevett concludes that the images are highly selective and cannot be interpreted as literal representations of the countryside. For example, while game animals feature prominently in the mosaics, we know from zooarchaeological studies in the area of Carthage (where the mosaic was found) that the majority of the population consumed sheep and goats. The images on the mosaics wish, however, to convey the message that their owners did have access to the same expensive and prestigious foods as their peers in other parts of the Roman Empire. The same message is conveyed with the images of the peasants offering goods to Julius and his wife, which are part of a wider iconographic trend frequently encountered in state and private monuments of the Late Roman period. Finally the villa, which occupies the central area of the Dominus Julius mosaic, should not be taken as a literal representation of an actual country villa in North Africa, but instead as a symbol of the family and its continuity.

In the Epilogue, Nevett highlights one of the main concepts of the book, that of the "privacy" of the Classical house and the permeability of the Roman house. The

reader is reminded that although the andron was a material expression of citizenship, the privacy of the Classical house was, in practice, negotiable and redefinable. Most importantly, the author reminds us that we cannot single out one methodology when studying ancient housing. Instead, we have to take into consideration all available evidence, textual and material, as well as visual imagery. Her aim remains to open up a dialogue between those who study “families” and those who study “households.” Finally, two corrections need to be made in the Bibliography: Nevett 2009a should be corrected to Nevett 2010 (see above my comments on Chapter 3) and Vogeikoff-Brogan, K. and Glowacki, N. to Glowacki, K. and Vogeikoff-Brogan, N. Despite some weaknesses, this is a very stimulating volume, full of ground-breaking ideas about ancient housing and related aspects. With the exception of Chapter 2, which needs further study and revision, the rest of the book will serve as an excellent resource for those wishing to explore ancient houses and households throughout the Greek and Roman periods. The book would also have benefited from a chapter on the development of the domestic space during the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C., especially in Macedonia. Hopefully, Nevett has already set out to cover this gap.

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