

Roman wall-painting and social significance

Rolf A. Tybout

1. Introduction: diachronic and synchronic approaches¹

During the last two decades a spate of publications forcefully brought to our attention the importance of the Roman house in the socio-political life of the élite in the late Republic and early Imperial period, both in Rome and in "provincial" towns like Pompeii, the metropolitan center of power setting the patterns for the lifestyle of local grandees.² The focus is on the rôle of architecture in shaping the spatial, and thereby social, articulation of the *domus*. Literary sources concerning Roman domestic life and known for a long time³ are scrutinized for the light they might shed on the archaeological evidence, especially on the functions of rooms and other parts of the house.⁴ Roman wall-painting also attracts fresh attention in this context. The main focus in recent studies is on its synchronic formal variety, allowing painters, or perhaps rather

1 Frequently cited abbreviations:

- Bastet F. L. Bastet and M. de Vos, *Proposta per una classificazione del terzo stile pompeiano* (The Hague 1979)
- Beyen I/II H. G. Beyen, *Die pompejanische Wanddekoration vom zweiten bis zum vierten Stil I/II.1* (The Hague 1938/1960)
- Beyen, *Verhältnis* H. G. Beyen, "Das stilistische und chronologische Verhältnis der letzten drei pompejanischen Stile," *Antiquity and Survival* 2 (1958) 349-72
- Clarke J. R. Clarke, *The houses of Roman Italy, 100 BC - AD 250* (Berkeley 1991)
- Ehrhardt W. Ehrhardt, *Stilgeschichtliche Untersuchungen an römischen Wandmalereien von der späten Republik bis zur Zeit Neros* (Mainz 1987)
- Functional and spatial analysis* E. M. Moormann (ed.), *Functional and spatial analysis of wall painting* (Leiden 1993)
- PPP I. Baldassarre et al. (edd.), *Pompei. Pitture e pavimenti I-IX* (Rome 1990-99)
- Tybout R. A. Tybout, *Aedificiorum figurae. Untersuchungen zu den Architekturdarstellungen des frühen zweiten Stils* (Amsterdam 1989)
- Wallace-Hadrill A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton 1994)

- 2 E.g., F. Coarelli, "Architettura sacra e architettura privata nella tarda Repubblica," in *Architecture et société de l'archaïsme grec à la fin de la république romain* (Rome 1983) 191-217; id. "La casa dell'aristocrazia romana secondo Vitruvio," in H. Geertman and J. J. de Jong (edd.), *Munus non ingratum* (Leiden 1989) 178-187. R. P. Saller, "Familia, domus, and the Roman conception of the family," *Phoenix* 38 (1984) 336-55; T. P. Wiseman, "Conspicui postes tectaque digna deo," in *L'Urbs* (ColLEFR 98, 1987) 393-413. Wallace-Hadrill, esp. 1-61; Clarke; E. Dwyer, "The Roman atrium house in theory and in practice," in E. K. Gazda (ed.), *Roman art in the private sphere* (Ann Arbor 1991) 25-48; R. Laurence, *Roman Pompeii* (London 1994) esp. 122-32; M. Grahame, "Public and private in the Roman house: the spatial order of the *Casa del Fauno*," in R. Laurence and A. Wallace-Hadrill (edd.), *Domestic space in the Roman world* (JRA Suppl. 22, 1997) 137-64. See also the studies adduced below in nn. 4 and 6. For similar phenomena outside Italy, see Y. Thébert, "Vie privée et architecture domestique en Afrique romaine," in P. Veyne (ed.), *Histoire de la vie privée* (Paris) esp. 343-75.
- 3 Still indispensable are J. Marquardt, *Das Privatleben der Römer* (2nd edn., Leipzig 1886) esp. I, 135-340, and L. Friedländer, *Darstellungen* (10th edn., Leipzig 1922) esp. I, 240-66, II, 330-60 and III, 1-118.
- 4 Wallace-Hadrill passim; X. Lafon, "Dehors ou dedans? Le vestibulum dans les domus aristocratiques à la fin de la République et au début de l'Empire," *Klio* 77 (1995) 405-23; E. W. Leach, "The entrance room in the House of Iulius Polybius and the nature of the Roman vestibulum," in *Functional and spatial analysis* 23-28; ead., "Oecus on Ibycus: investigating the vocabulary of the Roman house," in S. E. Bon and R. Jones (edd.), *Sequence and space in Pompeii* (Oxford 1997) 50-72; A. M. Riggsby, "'Public' and 'private' in Roman culture: the case of the *cubiculum*," *JRA* 10 (1997) 36-56; L. Nevett, "Perceptions of domestic space in Roman Italy," in B. Rawson and P. Weaver (edd.), *The Roman family in Italy* (Oxford 1997) 281-98; M. George, "Repopulating the Roman house," *ibid.* 299-319. Literary evidence is also amply used by K. M. D. Dunbabin, "Convivial spaces: dining and entertainment in the Roman villa," *JRA* 11 (1998) 82-100; M. George, "Elements of the peristyle in Campanian atria," *JRA* 9 (1996) 66-80; S. Treggiari, "The upper-class house as symbol and focus of emotion in Cicero," *JRA* 12 (1999) 33-56.