

The 'Wings' of Roman Architecture: Ancient References to the *Alae* in Public and Private

While more recent scholarship in Roman architecture (Allison 2004, Leach 1997) has questioned the use of traditional terminology associated with Roman houses and challenged the interpretive constraints of Mau's nineteenth century domus plan (Mau 1899), convenience as well as recurring architectural features within Roman domestic spaces have prevented the complete dismissal of such terms. The need for a closer investigation of the occurrence and application of these terms in ancient texts and in Vitruvius in particular is undeniable.

In the case of the so-called *alae* (wings) – which are traditionally described as a pair of symmetrical rooms opened onto either side of the atrium - their location in relation to the atrium, as well as their distinct architectural features make them generally an easily identifiable space within the atrium house. While previous publications have examined the archaeological evidence of these spaces (e.g., Cova 2015), this paper will focus on the ancient literary and epigraphic evidence for the term 'ala', considering its origin and occurrence within both public and private architectural contexts.

Vitruvius' *De Architectura* (6.3.4-6) is the only ancient source that mentions the *alae* in a domestic context, while the only epigraphic evidence comes from inscriptions attached to religious buildings, one of which still in situ at the Sanctuary of Diana at Nemi (Braconi et al. 2014). Finally, no direct ancient testimony attests to the activities performed specifically in *alae*; however, they have been associated traditionally with the cult of the family's ancestors and the display of *imagines maiorum* (Flower 1996) based on a reading of Vitruvius (*De arch.* 6.3.6). The goal of this paper is to shed some light on this problematic term in order to provide a more

nuanced interpretation of its use in relation to domestic and religious spaces and their potential relationship.

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