The Atrium-House in Attica: A Roman Architectural Form in the Greek World

In Vitruvius' *De Architectura*, he states, "*atriis Graeci quia non utuntur, neque aedificant*" (6.7.1). The atrium in a Roman house comprised a covered court, whose roof rose to a central opening, below which was an *impluvium* pool for collecting rainwater. Around this court area lay a series of rooms. This was a common design for domestic architecture in Italy and the western provinces between the 3rd century BCE and 1st century CE (Ellis 2000). The atrium house has long been studied in the Roman world, with many well-preserved examples found in Italy and the western provinces. However, a few scholars have ignored Vitruvius and looked eastward to Greece to find examples of this quintessential Roman house type. In her 2007 and 2010 articles, Maria Papaioannou discusses how atrium houses were popular in cities like Sparta and Patras. However, she does not dwell for long on this house type in Athens and Attica. Much like Papaioannou, Dimitris Grigoropoulos mentions such houses in his 2005 dissertation and 2016 article on Roman Piraeus, but his brief discussion is not fully put into its Attic context.

There are at least three possible atrium houses that have been identified in Attica: one in Eleusis, one in Piraeus, and one in Athens. However, they all differ in various ways, both from each other and from atrium houses in Italy and the west. The first aim of this paper is to look at and to better understand these differences, one of which is their late date. For example, in contrast to the period when the atrium house is popular in Italy, the example from Piraeus dates to the late 2nd or 3rd century CE. Another difference is how the *impluvium* affected movement through the house. Since the atrium house at Eleusis was axially arranged around the court, this would create a different interaction with the surrounding the space as compared to the house in Piraeus, which was not axially arranged. A further interesting aspect of atrium houses in Attica is

the intended function of the atrium, and how the courtyard in the Greek period may have ultimately affected the purpose of the atrium in the Roman period (Nevett 2002). The second aim of this paper is to expand on why these differences matter and what they can say about a Roman architectural form in the Greek world. Athens in particular is an interesting city in which to consider the implications of the atrium house. Not designated a colony like Patras or a provincial capital like Corinth, Athens' fame endured because of its historical associations and as a center of learning. Therefore, the presence of a Roman form like the atrium house is particularly noteworthy, especially in a city that was relatively unaffected by the Empire's administration. This same observation can be extended to Attica as well. Because of this, conjectures can be made not just about architecture, but also about society and the people who used it. By looking at a Roman architectural form in a Greek region we can glean a little bit more about daily life and everyday life decisions for the occupants of these houses in the 2nd century CE.

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