

## СТАТЬИ / ARTICLES

### ARCHITECTURAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE PRIVATE-PUBLIC CONTINUUM IN THE VILLAS OF ANCIENT STABIAE: PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

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ABSTRACT. The article serves as a starting point for a research project dedicated to the dichotomy of private and public, and its implications and dynamics in the late Roman republic – early Empire. The primary focus is on the roman private spaces in the villas and houses of the Vesuvian archaeological area. The main methodological approach is represented by the ‘space syntax’ theory of B. Hillier and the “movement as memory” theory of D. Favro developed within the logics of Spatial Turn studies, further refined by A. Russel in her works on Roman public space.

KEYWORDS: Late Roman Republic, Vesuvian archaeological area, Roman villas, private and public, spatial turn, Space Syntax Theory, movement as memory theory.

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#### I. Historiography and methodology

A fundamental problem in history that continues up to the present day is the question of where exactly the division between public and private life should be. This question has been discussed for centuries and continues to the present day, remaining relevant in the societies of today.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in the occasions of people being accused of political statements in trading centers (privately owned places thus not covered by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution about the freedom of speech), with futile arguments from attorneys that shopping malls are the modern equivalents of old town centers and should therefore be treated like public places (Kohn 2004, 1). The tricky thing is that such malls are places that are privately owned but often use their architectural vocabulary to suggest that they are an old-fashioned town center.

The private-public continuum was and remains one of the most important vectors along which many significant political and cultural processes develop. At times, for example, public interests dominated or even trod on the interests of the average citizen or vice versa.

The varying and changing relationship between the public and private matters are often broken down into the following oppositions such as “individualism-collectivism (public interests)”, “personal interest-public”, “democracy (the power of all) and dictatorship (power of the individual)”, “public domain – privatization and commodification”, “lack of control – regulation”.<sup>2</sup>

For a long time, studying the tensions existing between the limits of public and private were neglected.<sup>3</sup> Why? Modern man has found it too tempting to over-simplify the historical record and concepts and force a modern picture based on a modern view. This should be avoided at all costs.

The post-modernistic shifting of the supposition that the ancient understanding was equal to ours has been recently exacerbated by studies that challenged the traditional dichotomy of public and private. Most of the places that we share with strangers are neither public nor private but exist in a gray area between the two.<sup>4</sup> The clear distinction is not only impossible but is constantly challenged in many ways, for example, by artists.<sup>5</sup> Since this shift occurred, the most important differences between the modern and ancient concepts of public and private have been duly mentioned in a couple of influential works.<sup>6</sup>

In the scholarly sociology the problem of the contradictory nature of the term public has gained increased focus during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, 3–4.

<sup>3</sup> As J. Bailey rightly puts it, the distinction between the “private” and the “public” operates as a common sense and basic reference point, also being one of the most fundamental and constitutive ordering principles in social life (Bailey 2002, 15). Thus, being a self-evident concept, it escapes clear analysis.

<sup>4</sup> For example, M. Kohn states this dichotomy is de facto interpreted as a struggle between big government and corporate control, but that there’s a more populist alternative (*ibid*, 7). Amy Russell states that “both in modern and ancient culture these seemingly simple concepts conceal a morass of grey areas, change over time, and even deliberate manipulation which do not merely complicate the picture of the public/private divide but call into question its usefulness as an analytic framework, and perhaps even its very existence” (Russel 2016, 2).

<sup>5</sup> “Notions of public and private are constantly constructed and dismantled” (Parsons 2008, 124). To complicate the picture even more, the relation of private to public is constantly changing (Bailey 2002, 15).

<sup>6</sup> Milnor 2005, 16–46; Zaccaria 1995, 210; Riggsby 1997, 36–56; *idem* 1999, 555–559.

<sup>7</sup> Weintraub, Kumar 1997, 2, 7; Pitkin 1981, 327–352; Bobbio 1989;

Most influential standpoints follow that of Hanna Arendt, who described “public” as what remains when you take away the economy, the household, and the administrative apparatus of the state.<sup>8</sup> Pierre Bourdieu considered the opposition between public and private “as one of the central dimensions according to which the patronage is organized.”<sup>9</sup>

It is important to underline, that the distinction of private and public was born in the classical Greece as an opposition between *oikos* (a private household within the domestic sphere of production<sup>10</sup>) and *polis*, the space of politics in a multivalent sense of this concept, typical for many concepts of the ancient Greek culture – the place for the exercise of freedom and decision.

The more standard way of referring to the private/public distinction was developed in the Modern times and interprets it as a demarcation between the governmental, public authority and the sphere of voluntary relation between “private” individuals.<sup>11</sup>

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill drew attention to the fact that a detailed examination is required, particularly of the categories that, from today's perspective, appear to be self-evident. It is necessary not only to understand what was contained in the concepts “private” and “public”, but also in what form there were intermediate states or completely different states (for example sacred areas dedicated to the gods - neither private nor public).<sup>12</sup>

In the recent years, all “spatial” themes have become so widespread as to win their own name (“The Spatial Turn”),<sup>13</sup> an integral part of a post-modernist scholarship. The key underlying idea behind it is that space categories must be under-

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<sup>8</sup> Arendt 1958, 22–78. J. Bailey argues that, on the contrary, “the private is what the public is not” (Bailey 2002, 28). Similar though it may seem, these are two different starting points, which greatly impacts the process and a result of analysis.

<sup>9</sup> Lecture “About the State” from November 21, 1991 – Pierre Bourdieu, lectures at the College de France.

<sup>10</sup> J. Squires gives a feminist slant to this topic, previously dominated by men, and rightly calls the world of private as one dominated by women and slaves (Squires 2003, 131).

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 131.

<sup>12</sup> “The contrast of public and private is so fundamental, and so pervasive, that it seems hard to believe it is not a cultural universal, and the more so when our vocabulary... in most European languages... is directly derived from the Latin *privatus* / *publicus*... it might seem that the *publicus* / *privatus* contrast was crystal clear in antiquity” (Wallace-Hadrill 2012, 1).

<sup>13</sup> Russel 2016, 16.

stood as socially produced variables which are created and experienced differently by different people and cultures at different times.<sup>14</sup>

Another premise for studying the roman concept of “publicness” is offered by the theory of cultural critics, who consider the public realm as the arena of sociability, a stage for appearing before others,<sup>15</sup> and as the space filled with an interplay of an inherent struggle between separate groups of the public which want to turn sections of this space into their own private space. After such usurpation, the process starts again.<sup>16</sup>

Modern scholars have given a new gender perspective on the problem of public/private by taking into account that ‘public’ and ‘private’ have historically been associated with a hierarchical gender binary with the ensuing exclusion of women and other oppressed groups associated with the private sphere from power located in the public sphere.<sup>17</sup>

The study of private and public space are also intrinsically linked to architecture. There are several approaches for the study of movement inside architectural forms: most useful for our topic are ‘space syntax theory’<sup>18</sup> of Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson and “movement as memory” approach of Diane Favro<sup>19</sup> – both will be used in my research, the first part of which is represented by this article.

Now let us turn our attention to what is implied by the study of public/private relation in Ancient Rome, and what has been done already.

The most representative study of Vesuvian examples, which form the core of my research portfolio during 2013–2015 work in the Restoring Ancient Stabiae Foundation, belongs to Ray Laurence and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill,<sup>20</sup> but these examples can now be illuminated in a different light following the revolutionary approach of Amy Russel.

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<sup>14</sup> A. Russel makes a crucial assumption that although space is a mind construct experienced individually by every human we cannot ever hope to grasp it neither with respect to Ancient Rome nor our own time – so we must limit ourselves to behavioral, not cognitive approach (*ibid.*, 17). Also, she identifies 3 main channels of experience, which can be traced through historical sources and studied: movement, memory, and performance (*ibid.*, 18).

<sup>15</sup> Sennett 1976.

<sup>16</sup> Acconci 1990, 904.

<sup>17</sup> Pateman 1983, 281–303; Landes 1998; Penner, Borden, Rendell 2000. Also see: Russel 2016, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Hillier, Hanson 1984. They propose that built space has a ‘logic’ which can be conceived as a linguistic or syntactic structure.

<sup>19</sup> See: Favro 1996, who “read” space of Rome as private poetry or public story.

<sup>20</sup> Laurence, Wallace-Hadrill 1997.

The most prominent works on the Roman villas in general and in the Vesuvian area belong to J. H. D'Arms, J.R. Clarke, J.T. Smith, A. Marzano,<sup>21</sup> and the progress and results of current excavation and restoration works in the villas of ancient Stabiae are meticulously reflected in the works of archaeologist Paolo Gardelli, with whom I had the honour to collaborate in the Vesuvian archaeological area.<sup>22</sup> These detailed reports contain valuable pieces of evidence about new spaces of the villas coming to light, and, most importantly, interior decorations that can give clues about the private or public functions of certain areas of the villas.

The most fundamental work concerning the opposition of private/public in Ancient Rome remains to be A. Russell's "Politics of Public Space in Republican Rome" published in 2016. As the title reveals, this brilliant book contains a solid analysis of the Roman concept of publicness and its application. In the book, author set out to explore the multivalency of space in Ancient Rome beyond usual explorations of private villas and took it out to the public space which by default had been considered to be purely public.<sup>23</sup>

She chose several illuminating examples from a typical Roman public space (i.e., Roman Forum) and explored them in a synchronic and diachronic perspective.

In a more general manner, Amy Russel analyzed the definition of public and private in the Roman world and pointed out to many important nuances,<sup>24</sup> also reiterating some of the accepted wisdom about the roman private space.<sup>25</sup> Also, the author performed a microcontext analysis of Latin writers with respect to the concepts of private and public<sup>26</sup> and revealed a "sliding scale of public and private".

Since the thorough comparison between different periods of the Late Republic and Empire on a material of less emblematic spaces like villas, urban landscapes and roads were outside of the scope of her iconic work, most of her analysis is dedi-

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<sup>21</sup> D'Arms 1970, 1974; Clarke 1991, Smith, J. 1998, Marzano 2007; Marzano, Métraux 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Gardelli, Barker, Fant 2016, 439–448; Gardelli 2016, 17–20; Gardelli, Butyagin 2018, 213–218; Gardelli 2019, 145–162.

<sup>23</sup> "If Romans defined and experienced semi-public spaces within the house, they were also capable of defining and experiencing semi-private spaces outside the house" (Russel 2016, 16).

<sup>24</sup> "The house was shaped around a graduated hierarchy of spaces which mixed public and private to varying degrees. Individual spaces could even offer different degrees of privacy based on the time of day, placement of moveable furnishings, or the behaviour of the inhabitants" (*ibid.*, 13).

<sup>25</sup> "The house was not considered primarily as private space, but was the location for business and political transactions involving many visitors, invited and uninvited" (*ibid.*).

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 8. Most notable, examples from Cicero: Cic. *Mur.* 76, *Verr.* 2.1.57, *De officiis* 1.138–40, Pliny *HN.* 36.5, Vell. *Pat.* 1.11.5.

cated only to the chosen examples. She is fully aware of the “flexibility of the terms in our own language and the fact that they vary from one society to the next”,<sup>27</sup> and underlines that “The Roman concepts are hard to pin down not just because they are different from our own, but because they were always unstable.”<sup>28</sup>

Nonetheless, she did not set out to fully explore the dynamics of this unstableness outside the public sphere and whether there were any long-reaching trends within this instability. Therefore, several aspects still wait to be explored.

The purpose of my work is to introduce private and less prominent public urban spaces into the scope of analysis and to apply a diachronic perspective, using the set of suitable approaches and tools developed by the “spatial turn” scholarship: Amy Russel’s “movement, memory and performance” triad, charted transformations of main political spaces in Rome as benchmarks for wider analysis, ‘space syntax theory’ of Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson and the “movement as memory” approach of Diane Favro. To achieve overarching results, the time frame will reach from 2 BCE, with a focus on the Gracchan period, through the transformation of Republic into Empire<sup>29</sup> and well into the Late Empire period. This article serves as an introduction to this research project.

## II. Roman villas in the Vesuvian archaeological area

First of all, to explore the relation of public to private in the ancient Rome means to widen the concept of public space into private area. We will take as a premise the handy definition offered by Margaret Kohn, stating that a public place, although being in actual ownership of the state or a private, is accessible to many people and/or fosters communication and interaction, thus facilitating unplanned contacts between people.<sup>30</sup>

In case of a Roman villa, this would include the public part of a villa, since it was used for communication between friends, clients and relatives of the villa’s master. To cite just one author, Cicero: in the house of a powerful man “et hospites multi recipiendi et admittenda hominum cuiusque modi multi-

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<sup>27</sup> Russel 2016, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson 1997, 243, also states that Roman definitions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ were ‘fluid and interactive’.

<sup>29</sup> A. Winterling pointed out that the Early Empire period was characterized by a change in the concept of public and private, but did not elaborate on that for the period of the Late Empire (Winterling 2005, 223–44).

<sup>30</sup> Kohn 2004, 9.

tudo” (both many guests need to be received and a crowd of men of all kinds must be admitted)<sup>31</sup>.

The strikingly good examples of Roman villas with plenty of private and public spaces to study have been preserved by the famous Vesuvius eruption in 79 CE.

Most well-known cities of the Vesuvian archaeological area, Pompeii and Herculaneum, have been closely studied by archaeologists and historians for more than two centuries. Excavations of Herculaneum began in 1738 on the orders of Charles VII of Naples<sup>32</sup>. 10 years later, in 1748, the amphitheater of the neighboring city of Pompeii finally saw the “daylight surface”.

Currently, the excavated parts of these cities represent a huge open-air museum, which is visited by hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. In Pompeii most of the city's territory has been excavated (44 out of 66 hectares), while only one-fifths part of Herculaneum has been unearthed, the other four-fifths still waiting, as it is partially located under medieval residential buildings.

If no major excavations and discoveries are expected here soon, this does not mean that there is no such place in the Vesuvian area. In fact, the ancient Stabiae south of Pompeii is extremely rich with elite residential structures of the Roman nobility,<sup>33</sup> many of which still wait to be discovered.

Unlike Herculaneum, buried under several meters of pyroclastic flow, Pompeii and Stabiae have been covered mainly by volcanic stones (lapilli) and ash. Around the same time, when Herculaneum and Pompeii excavations started, an officially authorized party of “treasure seekers” began to dig trenches and tunnels in the area of the Church and the bridge of San Marco.<sup>34</sup>

By the standards of modern science, the methods of their work can be called nothing but barbaric: military engineers cut tunnels through the walls of petrified ash, and as soon as they reached the buried walls, they dug along them, carving out frescoes and taking them to Naples.<sup>35</sup>

The walls did not stop them at all (it was not in vain that they were military engineers): where it was needed, breaches were made right through them so that the “miners” could go deeper. These gaps made by the Bourbon engineers are still present in many places of the villas, while in some other places they have been covered by modern archaeologists.

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<sup>31</sup> Cic. *De officiis*. 1.139.

<sup>32</sup> The first discovery of Roman villas in the Vesuvian area was made in 1709/1710 by orders of Duke of Elboeuf (Mattusch, Lie 2005, 1-3).

<sup>33</sup> Strabo *Geog.* 5.4.8: ἅπας δ' ἐστὶ κατεσκευασμένος τοῦτο μὲν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἄς ἔφαμεν, τοῦτο δὲ ταῖς οἰκοδομίαις καὶ φυτείαις, αἱ μεταξύ συνεχεῖς οὐσαι μίᾳς πόλεως ὄψιν παρέχονται.

<sup>34</sup> Gardelli 2016, 681.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, 681–682.





These villas re-emerged thanks to Libero d'Orsi, headmaster of a secondary school of the coastal town of Castellammare di Stabia and an ardent fan of archeology. In the beginning, all was based on his enthusiasm: on January 9, 1950, he went to the excavation site in the company of a school guard and a locksmith.

Although more than half a century has passed since the rediscovery of these villas, only a smaller part of the premises has been excavated or explored – even from those indicated on the plan of the Bourbon times. Many rooms and even whole villas remain hidden. Villas San Marco and Villa Arianna are half excavated, the rest are still to follow. Today, archaeologists from Italy, Russia (Hermitage), USA (Columbia University, University of Maryland and Cornell University), and other countries continue to work at these villas.

### III. Villas San-Marco and Arianna

Villa San Marco, located by the picturesque slope of the Varano Hill, is commanding a perfect view over the Gulf of Naples and Vesuvius. It is the first of two little-known masterpieces of ancient Roman architecture that will be discussed as a starting point of this research. First, however, a brief analysis should be dedicated to the concept of a Roman “retreat” villa (Villa d'otium, villa urbana or villa marittima).

This function determined the external and internal appearance of such buildings. How did the look of a “retreat villa” differ from, on the one hand, a large mansion in a Roman city (Domus) and, on the other hand, from a farm-oriented villa (Villa rustica)?

Representatives of the senatorial nobility could own all three types of estates and visited each of them during a year, inviting friends and relatives. But there were fundamental differences between all three types in architecture (area size, layout, number of certain types of rooms, location) and interior (household items, fresco painting types and other decorations).

Due to the lack of a commercial function that was characteristic of “rural villas”, we will not find grape and oil presses in the garden of a typical “retreat villas” of San Marco and Arianna, as well as a large number of vessels for aging and storage of wine and oil. No craft workshops will be found in the slave part of the estate, and the main efforts of the slaves will be directed to preparing food for the masters' luxurious feasts or heating the bath complex.

The “rural villa” for obvious reasons will be located in the countryside, near olive and fruit groves, and vineyards. The territory of a “retreat villa”, on the contrary, will most likely be limited by the perimeter of its buildings. But in terms of the richness of the interior and the number of various premises, it will many times surpass a rural villa.

What is the difference between a “retreat villa” and rich city mansions of the Roman and provincial nobility, numerous examples of which you can observe in Pompeii and Herculaneum (House of the Faun, House of the Surgeon, House of the Vettii, etc.)? The main difference lies in the physical restrictions of the available area – while the latter is located in an extremely high urban environment, the former usually disposes of larger space. For example, villas of ancient Stabiae sit on a spacious terrace that drops off to the picturesque seashore.

Therefore, the mansions of the rich inhabitants of Herculaneum or Pompeii do not occupy more than one city block. The largest of these houses is the House of the Faun, whose owner successively expanded his estate until it swallowed all neighboring houses (2,970 sq. meters). But countryside villas could be 5 or more times larger than that. For example, the Second Complex villa has an area of approximately 5,500 sq. meters, followed by Villa San Marco with an area of around 13,000 sq. meters, then Villa Arianna which measures 17,000 sq. meters and finally Villa del Pastore which occupies an area of approximately 19,000 sq. meters.

A further major difference lies in the “relationship” between a residential complex and the landscape. City mansions were like fortresses: on all sides, they were surrounded by blank walls. This is understandable: had there been windows, one could see only a fussy crowd hurrying about their business, annoying freedman Postumius selling cheap wine in a shop opposite,<sup>36</sup> or slaves from the laundry of Stephanus, carrying packs of dirty clothes all day long. Only the front entrance to a “domus” was clearly distinguished by the size and beauty of its decoration to reflect the grandeur of its owner.

Villa d'otium is quite another matter. Countryside villas have been specially planned to take full advantage of a picturesque location. Cicero was highly praising the advantages of a country villa,<sup>37</sup> the panoramic view from the windows of the villa to the sea was valued even more than the interior. If there was no such view over to the sea (as, for example, in the cramped cities of Pompeii or Herculaneum), the owner of a “domus” tried to compensate as much as possible by luxurious wall paintings imitating landscapes. Such frescoes depicted a parallel reality with wonderful gardens, marble palaces and terraces, exotic animals and plants.

Most important for our research, retreat villas were most suited for inviting guests and visitors, serving as a showcase of wealth, taste and power of their owners, therefore dedicating much attention to public spaces within.

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<sup>36</sup> Court, Rainer 2020, 92; Wallace-Hadrill 2011, 280.

<sup>37</sup> Cicero, *Letter XIX*: ad familiares 7.1.

To make the most out of the “pleasantness of location” (*amoenitas*),<sup>38</sup> a series of panoramic rooms overlooking the sea have been provided for in both villas San Marco and Arianna. In the Villa San Marco, there is a luxurious triclinium or “oecus” (banquet room). On one side, this room overlooks the edge of the hill with the seashore, while the other side opens into the inner garden (peristyle), framed by columns, with a pool and a fountain in the middle.

Retreat villas, therefore, provided their owners with the opportunity to enjoy the countryside and silence, while at the same time having the basic amenities of a “city life” with baths, rooms for reading, porticoes for walking,<sup>39</sup> kitchens with all the necessary equipment to cook any dishes and in any quantity, and – most importantly – enough spaces in which it was possible to spend time with important guests.

#### IV. Why Roman villas were less private and more public?

Life of a Roman was literally “taking place” – because it necessarily had to be a very public matter. Every important operation had to be performed in the presence of a witness – be it a sales or purchase transaction, or another step in the politician’s career. The main venue for public life was a forum in the center of the city – but not only, baths, markets and villas were not less important for public policy than places for political assemblies.<sup>40</sup>

Since villas were seeing frequent visitors – clients, friends, political partners, its space had to be segregated in several zones. Every room assumed some degree of privacy and public function, thus creating a continuum of spaces differing in a proportion of private and public.

All interior rooms and spaces in the villa were therefore within this continuum. This scale of private morphing into public existed not only as a visual and mental construct but, more powerfully, as a physical reality, created through everyday usage and actualization.

Which sources are most valuable for the study of this continuum? In line with Amy Russel’s “movement, memory and performance” triad, these are narratives by villa owners or their guests recalling visits to villas, in which they moved

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<sup>38</sup> This was the term used by Pliny the Younger for the villas of the Naples bay in his description of the unsuccessful rescue operation by his uncle: “ascendit ipse non Rectinae modo sed multis – erat enim frequens amoenitas orae” (Plin. *Ep.* VI, 16, 12).

<sup>39</sup> Zarmakoupi 2011, 50–61.

<sup>40</sup> The Digest defined the man’s domicile for tax purposes (we could compare it the modern notion of main legal address) as the place where he farms, visits the forum, the theater, and the baths (*Dig.* 50. 1. 27. 1).

through various rooms.<sup>41</sup> Another example is “travel guides” through villas, where their owners implicitly reveal the inner logic of space, describing the premises.<sup>42</sup>

On the one side of this continuum there was a private extreme – cubiculum, where no guests were allowed. On the opposite side, there was vestibulum – waiting room in front of the atrium, where clients, slaves and guests gathered every morning, waiting for the master of a house to come out and collect invitations, news or requests.<sup>43</sup> The public category also included atrium, triclinium (dining room), tablinum (owner’s office), baths and peristyle (garden).

Most important rooms that played a particularly big role in public proceedings, were often aligned along the central axis. These were: atrium which served as a main transitory space between private and public zones of a villa,<sup>44</sup> tablinum, peristyle and triclinium.

In the house of a man who was himself a public figure, a luxurious atrium was regarded in many ways as public space.<sup>45</sup>

Tablinum (from the word *tabula* – a waxed tablet for writing with a stylus) was the study of a *pater familias*. The importance of this room was often emphasized by its location just opposite the entrance to the atrium. Visitors who were entering a villa, were able to catch an impressive view between two columns on either side of the vestibulum: a vertical column of light falling from the compluvium, behind which was the entrance to the tablinum, in the far end of which an open window into the garden with other wonders.

This alignment of rooms would serve as a natural spectacular perspective, penetrating the most representative and public premises of the villa, and thus leading the gaze into infinity through repeating geometric shapes (similar to baroque effects with mirrors on the opposite walls). This eye-catching perspective must have been powerful enough to impress any visitor, who was thus implicitly

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<sup>41</sup> In this case this was a memory about other man’s movement in a villa: Plin. *Ep.* VI, 16, 12.

<sup>42</sup> First example of this was given by Cato with respect to his villa rustica (Cato. *De agr.* 10). It contains a painstakingly concrete inventory of equipment, therefore it is considered to is not a typical model but a full description of Cato’s own villa. Examples for villas d’otium can be found in: Plin. *Ep.* 2.17, 4–5; 16–19; 5.6, 19–22; 27–31.

<sup>43</sup> In Villa San Marco the main entrance of the house is framed by two columns. Also, on both sides of the entrance, there are squat benches on which *clientes* and other visitors could sit in anticipation of the morning “greeting” of the owner.

<sup>44</sup> Bedrooms, dining room and utility rooms communicated through the atrium – an internal square room with columns.

<sup>45</sup> Russel 2016, 9.

motivated to quickly work himself into the owner's favor and to be received in the hidden and still tantalizingly close parts of the villa.

If space and the owner's budget allowed, the architects designed the villas so that the maximum number of public spaces was located along this spectacular axis and connected by windows or doors.

Most luxurious villas tend to keep as much of this axis as possible – Villa San Marco boasted two such axes. One at the entrance: it united atrium, tablinum and the smaller peristyle. Due to the difficult terrain and the positioning of a villa next to the steep slope to the south the main axis of the complex stretched from south to north, but the access was from the west. Another restriction was set by the Stabiae's city walls to the north. Due to all these challenges, the perspective was not developed into the full sequence. For example, tablinum in the Villa San Marco was shifted to the right from the vestibulum-atrium axis.

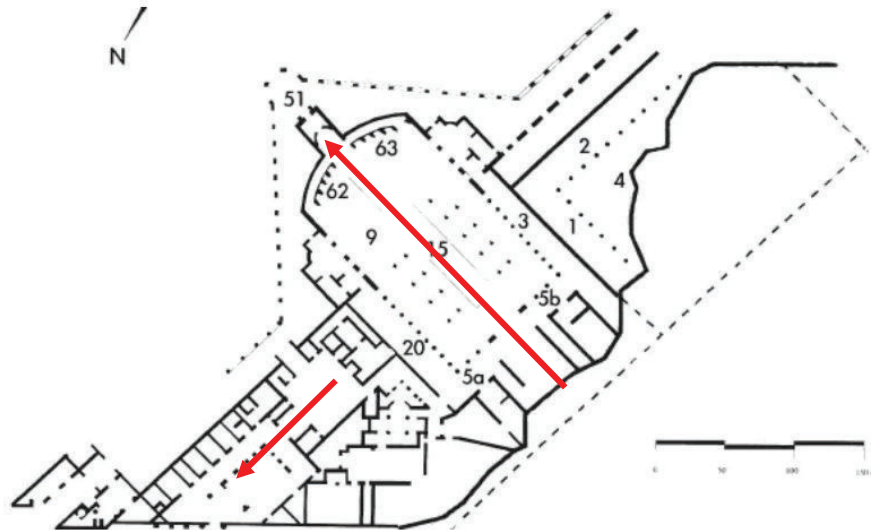


Fig. 2. Villa San-Marco, Stabia

The second axis was organized around a luxurious *oecus* on the edge of the cliff. Through the opposite wall, guests could see the whole peristyle up to the nymphaeum at its far end.

In villa Arianna the axis united an older, smaller peristyle and a tuscan atrium.

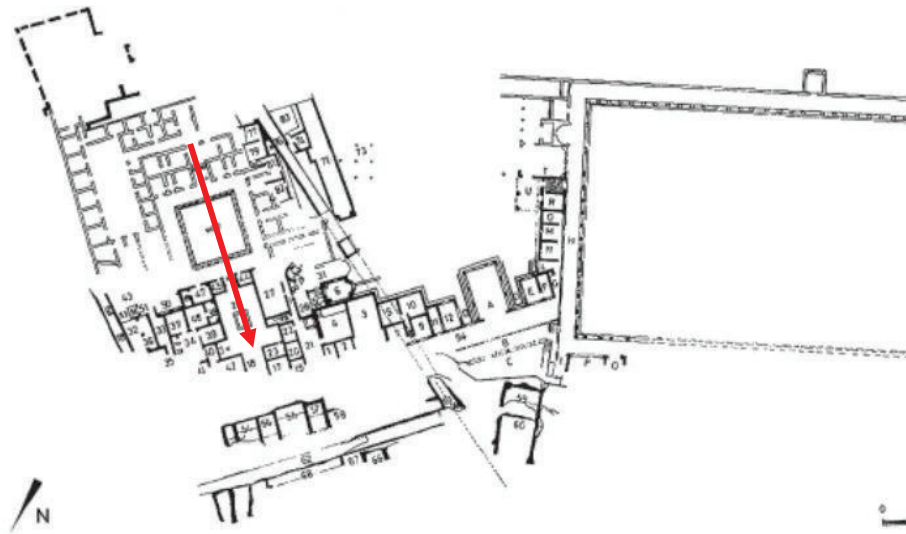


Fig. 3. Villa Arianna A, Stabia

In the Villa Arianna, Second Complex, a big dining hall, *oecus* (No. 13 – Fig. 4) was opening into both peristyle (No. 1 – Fig. 4) and a room, while the layout of the place dictated a third opening into the terrace facing the sea.

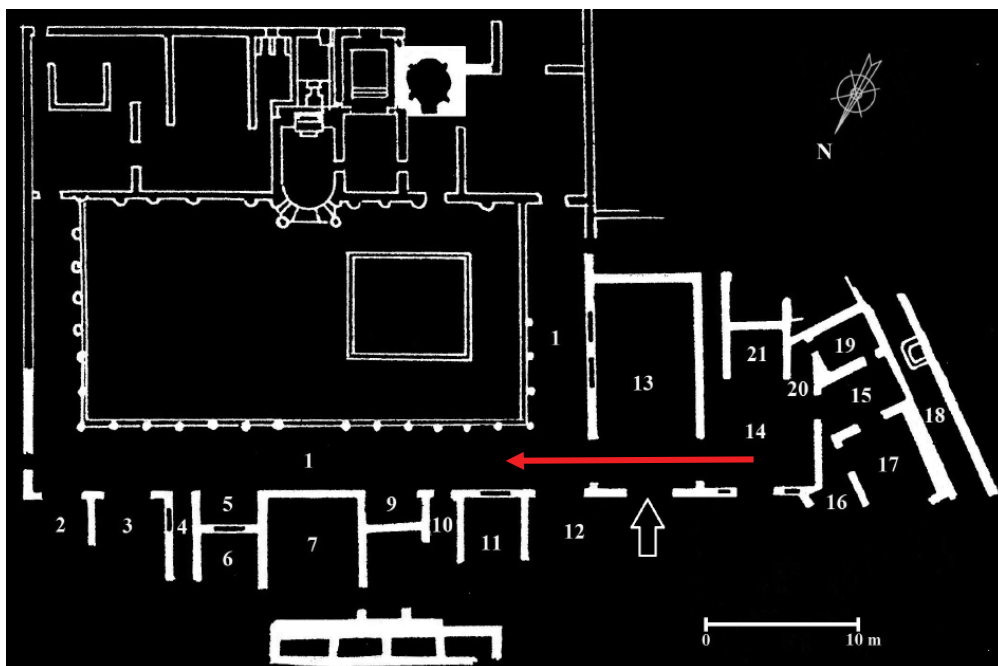


Fig. 4. Villa Arianna, Second Complex<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Gardelli, Butyagin, Giordano, Squillante 2017, 164.

In the Villa of the Papyri thanks to an abundance of available space the axis united both peristyles.

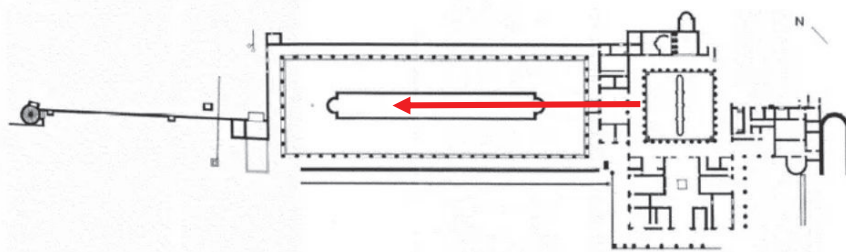


Fig. 5. Herculaneum – Villa of the Papyri

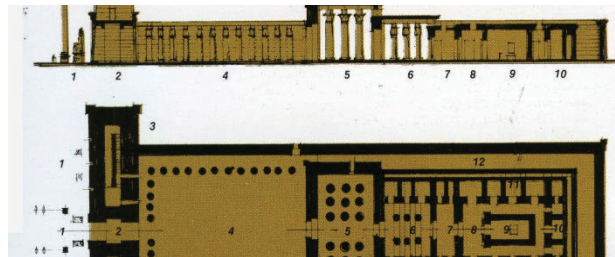
Such a longitudinal axis that structured public-private continuum was present in most of the villas where there was enough space and the landscape allowed for such layout.

The first examples of such axis intentionally utilized in the architecture are present in Egyptian temples of the Middle and the New Kingdom. Below you can see a longitudinal axis in the Karnak temple complex (see next page).

This perspective presumably served as a powerful tool for leading a visitor through a series of transitional spaces in order to reach the sacred interior of the temple. An intricate interplay of light and shadow from the columns must have intensified this effect on a laic.

In Rome, private houses were like fortresses, and public buildings were like hospitable spaces – with inviting porticoes on all sides of the forum, and wide streets leading to it. To put it in the terms of mainstream psychology, Roman houses and villas were architectural introverts, turned inward into themselves. From the street, the houses looked like impregnable fortresses with narrow windows or without them.

The spacious atrium was the center of life at home – here daily rituals were performed on the lararium (home altar). Here, through the compluvium (a hole in the roof), light and rainwater fell inside the house. The light illuminated the atrium and the neighboring rooms.



Random petitioners and strangers could not go beyond the vestibulum or atrium. Acquaintances and friends could end in triclinium, tablinum or thermae (on a big party for many people). And only the closest friends could walk with the owner in the shady silence of the peristyle or in a later and more luxurious space for walks, cryptoporticus.<sup>47</sup> M. Zarmakoupi showed in her article, that cryptoporticus were often used to connect different public sectors of the villa.<sup>48</sup> In light of the argument of this article, such corridors could serve as a means of channeling

<sup>47</sup> See: Zarmakoupi 2011, 60.

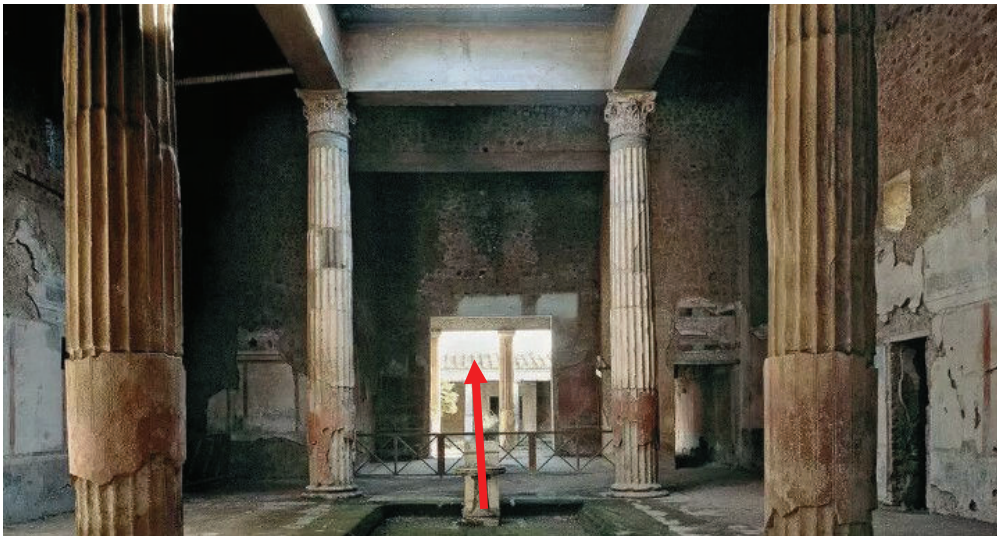
<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 60: Thus, the owner and his friends could have enjoyed a leisurely promenade: first enjoying the view to the sea at the south...and then the view of garden from the porticus. Taking this route, the owner could have led his guests to the large reception room without much interaction with the interior of the villa.



guests around more private zones, in order to sustain the overall balance of public and private inside a villa. Or even distributing guests into several flows,<sup>49</sup> varying in the degree of the vicinity to the master of a villa.

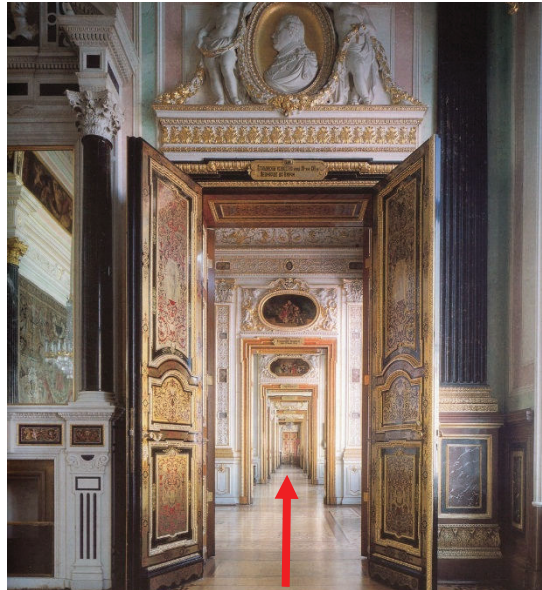


An artists' reconstruction of an atrium opening into a peristyle



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<sup>49</sup> As shown on the example of a zebra-striped cryptoporticus in villa Oplontis by M. Zarmakoupi: *ibid.*, 61.



A typical baroque enfilade, the heir to the Roman longitudinal axis, that stressed the idea of eternity and sustainability of the absolutist regimes

Before the dinner (*cena*)<sup>50</sup> or (less commonly) after it guests could go to baths to socialize.<sup>51</sup> Even in emergency situations like the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, Pliny the Elder decided to stick to the traditions and first go to baths at his friend's villa in Stabiae.<sup>52</sup>

There was an internal logic in a bath complex. It should not surprise us, because this was still another venue for socializing. The guests would go through this sequence of cold, warm, hot and very hot rooms together (*frigidarium*, *tepidarium*, *caldarium*, *laconicum*).<sup>53</sup> In some or all of these spaces the bather was invited to participate in true communal bathing, not in individual hip baths on the Greek model, but in shared basins of cold or heated water (called *alvei* or *solia*).<sup>54</sup>

Such a predefined route necessitated sustained close contact over a prolonged period with other bathers. By the 2nd century BC, this sequence became systematic and routine,<sup>55</sup> which made it a powerful ritual to be used in socializing.

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<sup>50</sup> See Plut. *Brut.* 34.

<sup>51</sup> Petr. 73.

<sup>52</sup> "Utque timorem eius sua securitate leniret, deferri in balineum iubet; lotus accubat cenat, aut hilaris aut – quod aequè magnum – similis hilari" (Plin. *Ep.* VI, 16, 12).

<sup>53</sup> Plaut. *Rud.* 382–85.

<sup>54</sup> Fagan 2011, 3.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

As G. Fagan appropriately puts it, the ubiquity of the bathhouse from the first century BC well into the Byzantine era, marks it as one of the central *loci* of social contact in the Roman world.<sup>56</sup> A keen analysis by the same author of a fragment in Cicero's speech *Pro Caelio* shows that Roman baths were a ubiquitous feature in every Roman city, familiar to the elite without further precision and that they were an absolutely normal venue for social intercourse,<sup>57</sup> where privileged men might be seen together with slaves.<sup>58</sup>

Being a place where people of different classes interacted, public baths might be therefore compared to those parts of a villa, which could be visited by slaves of other masters (*vestibulum*, *atrium*) and by visitors of all kinds (*vestibulum*, *atrium*, *tablinum*, *triclinium*, *peristyle*). Even if a wealthy man had his own private bath, he did not hesitate to use a public bath in order to save time or money for heating up his own thermal complex.<sup>59</sup> Following the venerated tradition of Cato the Elder<sup>60</sup> and Piso Frugi,<sup>61</sup> Roman landowners were always practical and cost-conscious.

To conclude, a day of a Roman can be generally seen as a progression from openness and public accessibility to increased privacy and higher exclusiveness in contacts.

The morning started with receiving all kinds of visitors at the entrance (*vestibulum*) – here everyone could address the owner of the villa. Relatively open accessibility characterized routine walk through the forum, where a Roman could be stopped by a passer-by and addressed in some way or another. However, some restrictions could be imposed here – a man in a hurry could refuse personal contact (slave retinues and lictors of a wealthy Roman served as a filter for any unwanted conversation out in the streets).<sup>62</sup> A visit to the baths usually followed the busy day in the forum, which, in Garrett Fagan's words, "marked the transition

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Also see Valerius Maximus (9. 5. 4), Gel. 10. 3. 1–3), Suet. *Tit.* 8. 2; HA *Had.* 17. 5–7, Heliogab. 17. 9, Alex. Sev. 42. 1. Pliny (*Ep.* 3. 14. 6–8.).

<sup>58</sup> Garrett G. Fagan. *Ibid.* P. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 2. 17. 26.

<sup>60</sup> Cato. *De agr.*

<sup>61</sup> Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* III. 20. 48, describing wealthy landowner who came to claim his part of the Gracchan grain dole. Cato. *De agri cult.*

<sup>62</sup> Or he simply did not have enough time for every person who wished to speak – like Caesar who did not manage to read the warning message given to him by a passer-by on the day of his murder: Suet. *Caes.* 81.

from relatively open accessibility in the forum to more limited accessibility at the dinner party, which was populated by invited guests only.”<sup>63</sup>

Another interesting element is a specific decoration that underlined and fostered movement along the aforementioned continuum. In her article about cryptoportici Mantha Zarmakoupi made a curious assumption about the so-called zebra stripe decoration in the peristyle and cryptoporticus in villa Oplontis.<sup>64</sup> Previously it was considered as a marker of a service/servile area of a villa. This design was used in the rooms of public buildings with much traffic (the corridor in the Stabian Baths and the passageways of the amphitheater in Pompeii). As M. Zarmakoupi appropriately puts it, “the zebra patterns were probably meant to create an eye-catching and repeating design that would encourage movement in the more public areas of a house rather than signifying the service areas”.<sup>65</sup>

The author then concludes that such patterns could provide a unified style of decoration that would easily guide a visitor on his route towards another public space of the villa. In the case of villa Oplontis, visitors would have been led through peristyle and into the cryptoporticus where they might sit on the benches, waiting to be received by the owner. Their view would have been directed through the zebra patterns through the opening of the porticus onto the pool and garden complex.<sup>66</sup>

If this was the case, such dynamic decoration might be the first predecessor of the modern lines and stripes on the floors and walls, channeling visitors of hospitals, airports and other big public buildings.

Do we know any names of the owners of the six identified Stabian (or, more generally, Vesuvian) villas? Ancient sources have brought to us the names of two owners of the local villas. Their names are Marcus Marius Gratidianus and Pomponianus. Marcus Marius was a friend of Cicero and his villa was located in the Vesuvian area. In one of the letters, Cicero is praising the beauty of the place where his friend lives: “Indeed, you could wonderfully enjoy your leisure time, since you stay in this pleasant place (...) I greatly praise and approve of you and your way of life...For I doubt not that in that study of yours, from which you have opened a window into the Stabian waters of the bay, and obtained a view of Misenum, you have spent the morning hours of those days in light reading”.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Fagan 2011, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Zarmakoupi 2011, 60.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Cicero, *Letter XIX: ad familiares* 7.1.

Pomponianus is mentioned by Pliny the Younger in a letter to Tacitus,<sup>68</sup> where he describes the heroic death of his uncle, Pliny the Elder. At that time the famous ancient author and naturalist commanded the Roman fleet at Misenum.<sup>69</sup> At the onset of the historical eruption on October 24/25<sup>70</sup> he tried to evacuate locals by ships (probably from Herculaneum).<sup>71</sup>

He could not approach the shore near Vesuvius and so went further south. There can be only one place where he could be headed – Stabiae with its villas. Later this day he and his host Pomponianus ran the risk of being blocked inside the villa by a huge layer of ashes. Having escaped from the villa whose walls started to crumble, Pliny the Elder died at the beach of suffocation. Studies have shown that the damage area from a disastrous eruption of Vesuvius could extend as far to the south as Stabiae which is approximately 15 km from the volcano. Surrentum is further away and therefore less vulnerable (it is not included in the danger zone by Italy's civil protection plans in case of an explosive eruption<sup>72</sup>).

#### V. Next steps

An important part of the study will be represented by the analysis of the public and private spaces within a roman suburban and country-side villa, which served as an efficient arena for political communication and exchange. This will be done according to the aforementioned approaches and microcontext analysis of literary evidence, as well as archaeological data, mostly from the Vesuvian area.<sup>73</sup>

It is important to unite the study of the literary and archaeology sources and the methodology. A study of the transformation of spatial notions along the spectrum of private and public must inevitably rest on two pillars – literary evidence that describes people's "memories and performance", to use Amy Russel's scheme, and archaeology, which helps to track "the movement aspect", which sets "users" of space into the physically determined background by architectural elements.

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<sup>68</sup> Plin. *Ep.* VI, 16.

<sup>69</sup> "Erat Miseni classemque imperio praesens regebat" (Plin. *Ep.* VI, 16, 4)

<sup>70</sup> Until recently the accepted date was the 24<sup>th</sup> of August.

<sup>71</sup> Because first he hurried to help his friend Rectina, but then decided to provide help to many people. Plin. *Ep.* VI, 16, 4, 9.

<sup>72</sup> [http://www.protezionecivile.gov.it/attivita-rischi/rischio-vulcanico/attivita/piano-emergenza-vesuvio#zone\\_pericolosita](http://www.protezionecivile.gov.it/attivita-rischi/rischio-vulcanico/attivita/piano-emergenza-vesuvio#zone_pericolosita).

<sup>73</sup> During the work on Ph.D. thesis I have been actively involved in scholarly and educational activities in and around Vesuvian archaeology area, and witnessed excavation and restoration works, employed by the Restoring Ancient Stabiae Foundation.

Gracchan reforms of Roman society were the most important attempt to overcome the crisis of the 2nd century BCE. Although seemingly a failure, the Gracchan legislation and its consequences had far-reaching effects expressed in the irreversible transformation of many concepts, mental attitudes and processes associated with the “private-public” opposition. As a result, the interpretations of the main concepts – such as public land, private and public property, roads etc. – have experienced a profound change.<sup>74</sup> Modern sociology sees a strong link between the privatization of public space and reinforcement of existing patterns of segregation,<sup>75</sup> which decreases opportunities for political conversation between social groups and makes it easier for a political system, based on “divide et impera”, to establish itself – this is well in line with the political transformation of the Republic into Early Empire.

Another important consideration to be elaborated further is that according to the archaeological evidence the central role of the atrium in public life of a retreat villa has been progressively replaced by large peristyles during the first century BCE. This is in line with the overall hellenization of the Roman mindset and architectural habits.<sup>76</sup> Over time these became the real centers of the villa activities. All the rooms around the peristyles are getting equipped with large windows, opening into vistas and enfilades. This article is the first step in the research project, within which I plan to elaborate on the issue of the private/public dichotomy.

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<sup>74</sup> Telminov 2018. The thesis contained an analysis of the shift within private/public paradigm during Gracchan reforms, which allowed to pinpoint several important trends.

<sup>75</sup> Kohn 2004, 6.

<sup>76</sup> Some aspects of the transformation of previous architectural forms have been described in the work: Zarmakoupi 2011.

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