

The elusive *vestibulum*: a comparison of the archaeological and literary sources on Roman domestic waiting areas

This article offers a re-examination of the functions and forms of domestic *vestibula*. I argue that architectural spaces or rooms that have been labelled *vestibula* in the past actually do not correspond to *vestibula* as described in the literary sources.¹ The literary sources are our only guides for helping us to envisage the physical appearance and possible uses of *vestibula*.² They provide uniform and complete descriptions of the physical characteristics of *vestibula* and provide ample information on their function. Only when, based on the written sources, the characteristics and specifications of *vestibula* are drawn up, we can turn to the material sources. Following this procedure, we find that we have very few material remains of *vestibula*.

Over the last two decades a number of studies have appeared that re-examine the forms and functions of spaces in Roman *domus*.³ Some scholars have, on the basis of material remains, successfully challenged the idea that rooms only had one function.⁴ Others have yielded fruitful results from a careful examination of literary sources on specific room-types, such as the *oecus* or the *cubiculum*.⁵ The present study is comparable and indebted to the latter group of studies. Reassessing room forms and functions is about more than the label. Whether or not a *domus* featured a *vestibulum* tells us something about the *dominus*, about his visitors, and, most importantly, about social relationships in the Roman world.

In the first section, a few characteristics of *vestibula* are drawn up. What did *vestibula* look like, how were they decorated, and what took or could take place inside these spaces? This is followed by a discussion of some architectural spaces named *vestibula* in previous studies. I refute most suggestions and propose a more select group of spaces that arguably were *vestibula*, either on the basis of their form or possible function. In the concluding section I offer some suggestion on the discrepancies between the literary and material sources. Throughout, the focus is on domestic buildings (including villas and imperial palaces) constructed between ca. 200 B.C. – 200 A.D.

¹ Both Latin and Greek texts are used in this paper, since Vitruvius (6.7.5) states that the Greek word *πρόθυρον* (*prothuron*) corresponded to what in Latin was called *vestibulum*: '(...) *prothura* in Greek applies to the vestibules before entrance doors' (*prothura graece dicuntur, quae sunt ante ianuas vestibula*). *Prothuron* indeed seems to conform to the term *vestibulum*: Hellmann 1992, 348-349. Hence, I have also included all Greek texts on *prothura*.

² Although four inscriptions with (a part of) the word *vestibulum* have been found, they are of little value for our present purposes: one Capuan inscription is very lacunose (AE 1989, 168 and Solin 1989), another (found at Salona) describes the *vestibulum* of a tomb (CIL III 02072 = ILS 8340 and Cambi 1987, 265-268), while two other inscriptions record *vestibula* of public buildings: one (found in Algeria) mentions the *vestibulum* of a nymphaeum (CIL VIII 02654 and CIL VIII 18104), another (found in Avenches, Switzerland) records the addition of a *vestibulum* to the local *curia* (AE 2005, 1102).

³ Cf. Dickmann 1999 51, n. 20 on the need for a more detailed study of the literary sources to discuss the 'architectural typology' of the *vestibulum*.

⁴ This 'movement' is fronted by Penelope Allison; see Allison 1997, Allison 2004 and Allison 2007.

⁵ Basic are Leach 1997; Nevett 1997 and Nevett 2010, 89-118 (summarizing these new approaches); and Riggsby 1997.

I Literary sources

Before we turn to *vestibula* of *domus*, we need to cast the net wider, since not all *vestibula* were part of domestic buildings. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* gives four meanings of the word *vestibulum*. In most cases, the word refers to (a) an enclosed space in front of the entrance to a building. Indeed, *vestibula* were not only a feature of domestic buildings, but were also constructed in front of temples, senate-houses, baths and tombs.⁶ Even Alexander's campaign tents had *vestibula* in front of it.⁷

The other three meanings listed by the *OLD* are the following: a *vestibulum* could be (b) 'the space in front of the living quarters, natural or artificial, of any creatures.' Columella and Varro use the word in this sense to refer to the entrance of for instance a beehive or a chicken pen.⁸ *Vestibulum* could also mean (c) 'the entrance or approach to any place or region'. In other words, it could be a geographical designation, and an example of this is found in Cicero, where he refers to Messina as the *vestibulum* to the rest of Sicily.⁹ The last meaning (d) is purely figurative: the entry to a subject. An example of this can be found in Cicero's *De Oratore*, where he compares the introduction of a speech with a *vestibulum* (*Or.* 1.200).¹⁰

Vestibula of domus: function and forms

In any discussion of literary sources on domestic *vestibula*, due weight should be given to Aulus Gellius and Macrobius.¹¹ The latter copied a large part of the former's discussion on the word *vestibulum*, which in turn is mostly based on the first century grammarian Aelius Gallus. Below, I aim to extrapolate from Gellius, Macrobius and numerous other sources the general form and function attributed to spaces called *vestibula*. Unlike Leach, I believe that the idiosyncratic forms or functions of some individual *vestibula* do not lead to a 'high degree of ambiguity' concerning their general use and appearance.¹²

Generally, *vestibula* were waiting areas, used by those visiting the *dominus* of the house to greet him during his morning *salutatio*. Gellius and Macrobius both cite Aelius Gallus on the etymology of the word *vestibulum*, and conclude that it was probably derived from the verb *stare* in combination with the prefix *ve-*, thus describing the action of the waiting *salutatores*: 'therefore from that standing in a large space, and as it were from a kind of 'standing place', the name *vestibulum* was given to the great places (*spatia grandia*) left, as I have said, before the doors of houses, in which those who had come to call stood, before they were admitted to the house.'¹³

⁶ Temples: e.g. Aelius Arist., *Her.* 22; Cicero, *Verr.* 2.2.160, *De Orat.* 2.320; Dio Chrys. 36.33-34; Livy 1.45.4, 3.18, 8.6, 24.3.7, 45.27.7; Ovid, *Fasti* 6.279-308; Petronius 133; Val. Max. 1.8.2. The *vestibulum* of the *Curia* is mentioned very often in Livy, e.g. 1.48.1, 2.48.10, 6.26, 7.31; 22.59; 23.2.10; 23.12.1; 23.20.5; 24.24; 30.21.4; 30.24.10; 45.24.12; see also Cicero, *Milo* 19. Baths: Cicero, *Pro Caelio* 62. Tomb: Cicero, *Leg.* 2.61.

⁷ Curt. Rufus 3.12.7-10, 5.10.12, 6.7.17-20, 7.1.4-5, 8.1.49, 8.2.3, 8.3.12, 10.5.8.

⁸ Columella 7.3.8, 8.3.6, 8.4.6, 8.8.3, 9.7.4, 9.7.6, 9.8.2, 9.9.2, 9.12.1, 9.14.17, 9.15.5, 9.15.11; Varro, *RR* 3.7.4, 3.9.7, 3.11.2. See also Pliny the Elder, *NH* 11.80 on spiders; and Vergil, *Georg.* 4.20 on a beehive.

⁹ Cicero, *Verr.* 2.5.170. For comparable 'geographical' uses of the word, see e.g. Aelius Arist., *Theb.* 1.27; Curt. Rufus 7.4.14; Livy 36.22.11; Quint. 1.5.4.

¹⁰ See also Cicero, *De Orat.* 2.230 and *Orator* 50; Seneca, *Nat. Quaest.* 7.30.6.

¹¹ Gellius 16.5 and Macrobius 6.8.14-23.

¹² Leach 1993, 24.

¹³ Gellius 16.5.9-10: *Ab illa ergo grandis loci consistione et quasi quadam stabulatione vestibula appellata sunt spatia, sicuti diximus, grandia ante fores aedium relictas, in quibus starent, qui venissent, priusquam in domum intritterentur.* Macrobius

Gellius supposes that the prefix *ve-* ‘intensified’ the action, thus *vestibulum* is a place where a lot of standing takes place. Macrobius also notes (probably using the fourth-century grammarian Servius as his source) that some think that the prefix could also have a weakening effect: ‘there are others who agree that the *vestibulum* was as we described [i.e. a space before the house, see below] but disagree with the explanation I have given of the meaning of the word, since in their view the word has reference not to the callers but to those who live in the house; for these latter never ‘stand about’ in the *vestibulum* but use the place only as a passage, as they go from or return to the house.’¹⁴ It is imperative to note, however, that Macrobius is (with Servius) the only author who offers another possible explanation of the meaning of the prefix. Even if this possible explanation is correct, this has repercussions for the function of the space for the inhabitants of the house, not for its visitors. Moreover, both are Late Antique authors – it is well possible that in earlier times there was no discussion on the meaning of the word. Leach’ argument that there was no consensus on the meaning of the word and (hence) the function of the space seems therefore unfounded or at least too strong.¹⁵

Indeed, many other sources confirm the general function of *vestibula* as waiting areas; examples can be found in texts by authors as diverse as Appian, Cicero, and Seneca.¹⁶ The size of *vestibula* (to which I turn presently) allowed the space to be used occasionally as a general ‘gathering areas’ for large groups of people. Suetonius records that Augustus’ body was placed inside the *vestibulum* of his house – presumably because this area was larger and more accessible than its *atrium* – while Cassius Dio informs us about banquets that took place inside the *vestibula* of senatorial *domus*.¹⁷

This means that in our search for *vestibula*, we should look for spaces that could have functioned as waiting areas for visitors. We have a large number of sources on the size, form and location of *vestibula* (relative to the *domus* it belonged and gave access to), and it is to these sources that we turn next.

All sources agree on the location of *vestibula*: these were to be found in front of the house. Gellius (still relying on Aelius Gallus) states: ‘the *vestibulum* is not in the house itself, nor is it a part of the house, but is an open place before the door of the house, through which there is approach and access to the house from the street, while on the right and left the door is hemmed in by buildings extended to the street and the door itself is at a distance from the street,

6.8.20 confirms this: ‘It was there that the callers who had come to pay their respects to the master of the house used to stand before they were admitted.’ (*in eo loco qui dominum eius domus salutatum venerant priusquam admitterentur consistebant*).

¹⁴ Macrobius 6.8.21: *alii consentientes vestibula eadem esse quae diximus, in sensu tamen vocabuli dissentiunt. referunt enim non ad eos qui adveniunt, sed ad illos qui in domo commanent, quoniam illic numquam consistunt, sed solius transitus causa ad hunc locum veniunt exeundo sive redeundo*. His unnamed source could well be Servius, *Ad Aen.* 6.273, who also provides multiple options for the meaning of *ve-*, including the ‘weakening’ effect: ‘Others state that it is derived from this: that no one stands about there; for a threshold is only crossed [i.e. no one stands waiting on a threshold]. Just as *vesanus* (mad) is said to be *non sanus* (unwise), so *vestibulum* is *non stabulum* (not a standing place)’. (*alii dicunt ab eo, quod nullus illic stet; in limine enim solus est transitus: quomodo vesanus dicitur non sanus, sic vestibulum quasi non stabulum*). I thank Ylva Klaassen for helping me with the translation of Servius’ text.

¹⁵ Leach 1993, 24.

¹⁶ Appian, *BC* 3.14; Cicero, *Att.* 4.3.5 (on the empty *vestibulum* of his rival Clodius Pulcher) and *Or.* 1.200; Seneca, *Ep.* 84.12. Indirect evidence is found in the sources on *salutationes* (see below, n. 30).

¹⁷ These uses are unique: Cassius Dio 51.22.9 and Suetonius, *Aug.* 100.

separated from it by this vacant space.¹⁸ Somewhat later he repeats that the *vestibulum* was ‘a vacant place before the entrance, midway between the door of the house and the street.’¹⁹ In his *Lingua Latina*, Varro defines a *vestibulum* as a space ‘that is before the house’ (*vestibulum, quod est ante domum*).²⁰ Cicero confirms this with his explicit contrast between the *vestibulum* and the interior of a house (*interior aedium pars*); Philo offers the same distinction.²¹

To summarize: *vestibula* are invariably described as spaces in front of the house. They were directly accessible and visible from both the street and the house.²² They closely resembled forecourts or courtyards which opened open to the street, with the other three sides enclosed by protruding ‘wings’ of the house. This ‘enclosure’ is implicitly confirmed by Cicero, who wrote that he once had to ‘retreat’ (*discessimus*) into someone’s *vestibulum* when he was attacked. His helpers could then easily hold off his attackers.²³ One can only repeat Wiseman’s specifications of a *vestibulum*: ‘a substantial rectangular area outside, open to the street but not public property.’²⁴ In short, *vestibula* were ‘empty’ and ‘negative spaces’, existing only because of built-up area around it.

According to Aelius Gallus, *vestibula* were large spaces (*spatia grandia*).²⁵ Two groups of sources are helpful for a more detailed assessment of the size of *vestibula*. First, we have sources on decorative elements, and, second, on the number of people present in *vestibula*. Decorative elements commonly mentioned are statues placed inside *vestibula*.²⁶ Juvenal mentions the *vestibulum* of a lawyer in which a statue of a *quadriga* was placed.²⁷ If we allow some space next to the *quadriga* to walk past – and Juvenal explicitly states that the horses were *alti*, thus probably life-size – this *vestibulum* cannot have been very small. *Vestibula* could also contain and be decorated, much like the *atria* lying behind, with the spoils of war and the *rostra* of ships sunk by its (former) owner.²⁸ It seems that non-domestic *vestibula* were decorated in the same way: in the

¹⁸ Gellius 16.5.3: (...) *vestibulum esse dicit non in ipsis aedibus neque partem aedium, sed locum ante ianuam domus vacuum, per quem a via aditus accessus que ad aedis est, cum dextra sinistra que ianuam tecta que sunt viae iuncta atque ipsa ianua procul a via est area vacanti intersita.*

¹⁹ Gellius 16.5.8: (...) *locum ante ianuam vacuum*(...) *qui inter fores domus et viam medius esset.* Compare Macrobius 6.8.23: ‘it is agreed that the *vestibulum* the name given to the space which separates a house from the street.’ (*vestibulum constat aream dici quae a via domum dividit*).

²⁰ Varro, *LL* 7.81.

²¹ Cicero, *Pro Caec.* 89 (cf. below, n. 34); and Philo, *Virt.* 89: ‘again, the lawgiver says, let no one who lends on usury enter the house of his debtors to take by force any security or pledge for his debt [cf. Deuteronomy 24:10], but let him stand without in the *vestibulum* (*prothurois*), and wait there entreating his debtor quietly to bring him a pledge.’ (Ἐτι φησί· δανειστῆς μὴ ἐπεισίτω χρεωστῶν οἰκίαις ἐνέχυρόν τι καὶ ῥύσιον ἐπὶ τῷ δανείῳ μετὰ βίας ληψόμενος, ἀλλ’ ἐν προθύροις ἔξω παρεστῶς ἀναμενέτω κελεύων ἡσυχῇ προφέρειν).

²² Things in *vestibula* were visible from the street: Philostratus the Younger, *Im.* 877.3; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.31.

²³ Cicero, *Att.* 4.3.3: ‘we retired into Tettius Damio’s forecourt, and my companions had no difficulty in keeping out the rowdies’ (*discessimus in vestibulum Tetti Damionis. qui erant mecum facile operas aditu prohibuerunt*).

²⁴ Wiseman 1982, 28.

²⁵ *Supra*, n. 13.

²⁶ Cassius Dio 46.33.1-2; Pliny the Elder, *NH* 34.29; Tacitus, *Ann.* 11.35.

²⁷ Juvenal 7.122-128: ‘If you come by one gold piece [as a lawyer], some of that disappears according to the contract made with the solicitors. “Though we did a better job in court, Aemilius can name his fee.” The reason is that in his entrance hall there stands a chariot made of bronze with four tall horses, and the man himself [Aemilius’ ancestor who triumphed] sits on a fierce charger, threatening from up there with his drooping spear, a one-eyed statue rehearsing battles.’ (*si contigit aureus unus, / inde cadunt partes ex foedere pragmaticorum. / ‘Aemilio dabitur quantum licet, et melius nos / egimus.’ huius enim stat currus aeneus, alti / quadriiuges in vestibulis, atque ipse feroci / bellatore sedens curvatum hostile minatur / eminus et statua meditatur proelia lusca*).

²⁸ Cicero, *Phil.* 2.68.

vestibulum of the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill there was apparently space for a *quadriga* and a large number of statues of gods and the emperor.²⁹

The second group of sources informs us about the presence of a large number of people in the *vestibula* of domus, waiting there to be admitted into the house. The size of these groups of visitors surely varied, but the word most often is *turba*, 'a multitude'. Although we cannot tell how many people made up a *turba*, we can tell that the crowd of visitors at *salutationes* could fill up entire *vestibula* and *atria*, and even – in Seneca's words – could block whole streets.³⁰ Only once an exact number of people present in a *vestibulum* is given, but sadly this is a passage by Livy on an event that happened roughly 450 years before the time of writing: 306 soldiers were present in the *vestibulum* of the house of the consul.³¹ All in all, the sources present *vestibula* as spacious, large enough to contain groups of visitors and be decorated with space-consuming statues.³²

The last thing to investigate is whether *vestibula* were covered or not. The fact that, apart from large statues and *rostra*, altars were set up and trees could grow in *vestibula* suggests that they were uncovered.³³ This is confirmed by Cicero, who twice in his *Pro Caecina* distinguishes the covered house from the *vestibulum*, which is thus implicitly considered as uncovered.³⁴ Also, the fact that Nero built his 40 meter high colossus in the *vestibulum* of his *Domus Aurea* (see below) makes it improbable that this area was covered by a roof.

However, Vitruvius' passage on *vestibula* suggests that not all were the same. On the one hand, we find that 'those who deal in farm products have stables and sheds in their *vestibula*', which implies that these forecourts of country villas were uncovered. On the other hand, Vitruvius also states that for 'the most prominent citizens, those who should carry out their duties to the citizenry by holding honorific titles and magistracies, *vestibula* should be constructed that are lofty (*alta*) and lordly (*regalia*)', while for those 'of moderate income, magnificent *vestibula*, *tablina* and *atria* (*magnifica vestibula nec tabulina neque atria*) are unnecessary.'³⁵ Here we find that *vestibula* were somehow not unlike *atria* and *tablina*; Seneca

²⁹ The statues are mentioned by Pliny, *Pan.* 52.3; the *quadriga* by Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.86.

³⁰ On *vestibula* packed with visitors, see e.g. Cicero, *De Or.* 1.200; Seneca, *Cons. Ad Marc.* 10 (mentioning *vestibula ampla*), *Cons. Ad Pol.* 4.2 and *Ep.* 84.12; Statius, *Silv.* 4.4.39-42. Seneca, *Ben.* 6.34.4-5 states that so many people went to *salutationes* that 'the streets [are] beset with a huge throng of people, and the ways jammed with the crowds of those passing in both directions' (*obsessos ingenti frequentia vicos et commeantium in utramque partem catervis itinera compressa*).

³¹ Livy, 2.49.2-4.

³² We should note again that according to Cassius Dio 51.22.9 some senators gave banquets in their *vestibula* (*supra*, n. 17), for which one surely needed ample space.

³³ Altars: Dio Chrys. 36.33-34 (cf. Lafon 1995, 408). Trees: Catullus, 64.292-294; Val. Max. 1.8.2.

³⁴ Cicero, *Pro Caec.* 35: 'I ask you [Gaius Piso], if, this day, when you are returning home, men collected in a body, and armed, not only prevent you from crossing the threshold and from coming under the roof of your own house, but keep you off from approaching it – from even entering the *vestibulum* – what will you do? (*quaero, si te hodie domum tuam redeuntem coacti homines et armati non modo limine tectoque aedium tuarum sed primo aditu vestibuloque prohibuerint, quid acturus sis*). Compare *Pro Caec.* 89, where the distinction is even clearer: '(...) if you have been driven out of the *vestibulum* as if you have been driven from the interior part of the house.' (*si e vestibulo, quam si ex interiore aedium parte deiectus sis*).

³⁵ Vitruvius 6.5.1-3: '(...) for those of moderate income, magnificent *vestibula*, *tablina* and *atria* are unnecessary, because they perform their duties by making the rounds visiting others, rather than having others make the rounds visiting them. Those who deal in farm products have stables and sheds in their *vestibula*, and in their homes should have installed crypts, granaries, storerooms and the other furnishings that have more to do with storing provisions than with maintaining correctness. (...) For the most prominent citizens, those who should carry out their duties to the citizenry by holding honorific titles and magistracies, *vestibula* should be constructed that are lofty and lordly, the *atria* and

notes that both *atria* and *vestibula* were *ampla*.³⁶ We know that *atria* and *tablina* were always covered, thus we cannot disregard the possibility that the same goes for *vestibula*. In any case, we have to acknowledge that not all *vestibula* were alike.³⁷ Although the bulk of the sources suggests that *vestibula* were uncovered, we cannot accept this as a rule.

This complicates things, and the complications grow bigger when we return to the rest of Gellius' text, only partly quoted above. *Vestibulum* serves as an example in a discussion about words 'which we use commonly, without however clearly knowing what their proper and exact meaning is.' He continues: 'I have observed that some men who are by no means without learning think that the *vestibulum* is the front part of the house, which is commonly known as the *atrium*.' The author explicitly contrasts his own age, when apparently some could no longer distinguish the *vestibulum* from the *atrium*, with 'early times' (*antiquitus*), and then continues to define its form and function on the basis of the aforementioned grammarian Aelius Gallus.³⁸

Gellius is the only author directly or indirectly referring to a change in the form of *vestibula*. His observations suggest that both the *vestibulum* and the *atrium* had more or less merged into one by the late second century AD, at least in the eyes of some people. This is not to say that *vestibula* had become completely obsolete in his time: Gellius himself still used the word, like other contemporary authors, to describe a space quite similar (at least in function and size) to those in 'early times'.³⁹ However, he seems to have correctly observed a trend that took off during his lifetime, as the word *vestibulum* is used only once in all Latin texts from the third century.⁴⁰

A final note on Gellius and Macrobius. They both discuss *Aeneid* 6.273-274: 'just before the *vestibulum*, within the very jaws (*fauces*) to Orcus [the underworld] / Grief and ever-haunting Anxiety make their bed'.⁴¹ The peculiar order of the spaces mentioned in Vergil's text is striking: it seems that the *vestibulum* was reached after one had passed through the *fauces*. *Fauces* are generally regarded as the narrow entranceways behind the front door, found so often in Pompeii and Herculaneum.⁴² It is generally assumed that anyone entering a *domus* that featured both a *vestibulum* and *fauces* would have passed through the former (evidently in front of the house) to reach the latter (behind the threshold). Whatever the exact order of the two spaces in front of Orcus, Gellius and Macrobius agree that Aeneas had not yet entered the 'house of the wicked'

peristyles at their most spacious, lush gardens and broad walkways refined as properly befits their dignity.' (*qui communi sunt fortuna, non necessaria magnifica vestibula nec tabulina neque atria, quod aliis officia praestant ambiundo neque ab aliis ambiuntur. Qui autem fructibus rusticis serviunt, in eorum vestibulis stabula, tabernae, in aedibus cryptae, horrea, apothecae ceteraque, quae ad fructus servandos magis quam ad elegantiae decorem possunt esse, ita sunt facienda. (...) nobilibus vero, qui honores magistratusque gerundo praestare debent officia civibus, faciunda sunt vestibula regalia alta, atria et peristylia amplissima, silvae ambulationesque laxiores ad decorem maiestatis perfectae* (...).

³⁶ Seneca, *Cons. Ad Marc.* 10.1: '[we see] spacious *atria* and *vestibula* packed with a throng of unadmitted clients' (*ampla atria et exclusorum clientium turba referta vestibula* (...)).

³⁷ Leach 1993, 24.

³⁸ Gellius 16.5.1-2 and 8: (...) *vocabula, quibus vulgo utimur neque tamen liquido scimus* (...). *Animadverti enim quosdam haudquaquam indoctos viros opinari vestibulum esse partem domus primorem, quam vulgus 'atrium' vocat. (...) qui domos igitur amplas antiquitus faciebant, locum ante ianuam vacuum relinquebant, qui inter fores domus et viam medius esset.*

³⁹ Aelius Aris., *Plato in Def.* 667-668; Cassius Dio, 78(77).17.1-3; Fronto, *Ad M. Caes.* 4.3.1; Gellius 4.1.1 and 19.13.1. The same goes for authors living in the first part of the second century, such as Juvenal, Suetonius and Tacitus. Quintilian, at the end of the first century, explicitly juxtaposes the *vestibulum* and the *atrium*: *Inst.* 11.2.20-23.

⁴⁰ The one exception is Tertullian, *Paen.* 7.

⁴¹ Vergil, *Aen.* 2.73-274: *vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus Orci / Luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae* (...)

⁴² Leach 1997, 53-54.

but saw the both spaces standing from 'outside', i.e. from the street.⁴³ In short, Vergil offers contradictory information on what we think we know about *fauces*, but the commentary by Gellius and Macrobius only confirms what we know about *vestibula*.⁴⁴

The vestibula of palaces and villas

Strangely enough, we have practically no sources on the *vestibula* of villas. The two explicit references we do have only mention the space but do not elaborate on its appearance or function.⁴⁵ For example, Pliny provides a full description of his Laurentian villa and individual rooms in detail, but only mentions the *vestibulum* in passing.⁴⁶ We are slightly better informed about palatial *vestibula*. These will be discussed next and compared to *vestibula* of *domus*, before some conclusions on the physical appearance of all domestic *vestibula* are drawn.

Vestibula seem to have been an integral part of palaces of (mythological) kings, including the rulers of Troy, Latium, early Rome, Persia, Macedonia and later Hellenistic kingdoms.⁴⁷ We also have sources on the *vestibula* of almost all Imperial residences on the Palatine hill built in the first century, whether it concerns the early Augustan and Tiberian structures, the later *Domus Tiberiana*, the Neronian *Domus Aurea*, or the *Domus Augustana* and *Domus Flavia* constructed by Domitian.⁴⁸

To 'reconstruct' these *vestibula* we have to rely on indirect information, such as Suetonius' note that Vespasian once dreamt about seeing scales placed in the *vestibulum* of his palace (probably the *Domus Tiberiana*), with, on the one side, Claudius and Nero, and, on the other, himself with his sons.⁴⁹ However imaginary, this imperial forecourt must have been spacious enough to contain such massive scales and leave room to walk past. This spaciousness – of at least the *vestibulum* of the later *Domus Flavia* – is confirmed by a passage in Gellius: 'in the *vestibulum* of the palace on the Palatine a large number of men (*multitudo*) of almost all ranks had gathered together, waiting for an opportunity to pay their respects to Caesar [Antoninus Pius].'⁵⁰ We find thus that palatial *vestibula* were large areas, spacious enough to allow room for large

⁴³ Gellius 16.5.12 and Macrobius 6.8.23.

⁴⁴ *Contra* Leach 1993, 24; cf. Leach 1997, 54. She states that Gellius and Macrobius contradict themselves when they state that the *vestibulum* was reached through the *fauces*, yet the contradiction is already found in Vergil's text. Gellius' conclusion that (basing himself on Vergil's text who specifically describes the *vestibulum* and *fauces* of the Underworld) 'fauces designates the narrow passage through which the *vestibulum* was approached' is only logical (*fauces autem vocat iter angustum, per quod ad vestibulum adiretur*).

⁴⁵ Pliny 2.17.15 and Val. Max. 2.10.2b. Vitruvius' comment on the *vestibula* of 'those who deal in farm products' probably concerns *villae* rather than city dwellings: *supra*, n. 35.

⁴⁶ Pliny, *Ep.* 2.17.

⁴⁷ Troy: Vergil, *Aen.* 2.469-470. Latium: Vergil, *Aen.* 7.167-178. Rome: Livy 1.40.5-7. Persia: Curt. Rufus 5.7.7. and 5.10.12. Macedonia: Livy 40.9.5. See Hyginus, *Fab.* 96 on the palace of King Lycomedes; and *supra*, n. 7, on the *vestibula* of Alexander's tents. Apparently Carthaginian homes also featured *vestibula*: Livy 30.12.11 and 33.48.9.

⁴⁸ For comprehensive overviews of the archaeological and literary sources concerning the imperial dwellings on the Palatine hill, see Royo 1999 and Winterling 1999.

⁴⁹ Suetonius, *Vesp.* 25: (...) *stateram media parte vestibuli Palatinae domus positam exanime aequo, cum in altera lance Claudius et Nero starent, in altera ipse ac filii*.

⁵⁰ Gellius, 4.1.1: *in vestibulo aedium Palatarum omnium fere ordinum multitudo opperientes salutationem Caesaris constiterant* (...). Cf. Gellius 19.13.1: at least two (small) groups of people were waiting in the palatial *vestibulum*, quite a bit apart from each other, but close enough for Gellius to catch the conversation.

groups of visitors and statues. As with their counterparts in the *domus* of the elite, palatial *vestibula* were primarily used as waiting areas for those wanting to greet the emperor.⁵¹

The question whether palatial *vestibula* were covered or not can only be tentatively answered by referring to Suetonius, who records that Nero had a colossus (120 feet tall) constructed in the *vestibulum* of his *Domus Aurea*.⁵² Given its height, it seems improbable – though not entirely impossible – that this forecourt was covered.⁵³ No traces of anything like a *vestibulum* or the original site of the Colossus have been found, but it is generally agreed that it must have stood somewhere close to or on the site of the later temple of Venus and Roma.⁵⁴ Seemingly helpful but in fact useless is Dio's statement on Commodus, who would not allow those wanting to greet him at his *salutatio* to stand in the *prothuron* of the palace, so that they had to wait outside (ἔξω). The use of the word 'outside', however, does not necessarily imply that the *prothuron*/*vestibulum* was inside and covered, but just that the space where they had to wait was outside the palace 'precincts'.⁵⁵

Quite a bit more interesting – and equally confusing – is Suetonius' note that Caligula 'extended a part of the palace right into the Forum, taking over the temple of Castor and Pollux as his own *vestibulum*. Often he would stand between the divine brothers displaying himself for worship by those visiting the temple.'⁵⁶ Cassius Dio confirms this, but does not label the temple as the *vestibulum*/*prothuron* of the palace.⁵⁷ Nowhere else do we find a whole and separate structure functioning as a *vestibulum* for another building. Moreover, this *vestibulum* was not a waiting area, but the actual space where the emperor would encounter his subjects. This passage forms an anomaly compared to other descriptions on the form and function of *vestibula*. We have to assume that it was an anomaly to near-contemporaries also – Suetonius notes this fact in the part in his biography on him 'as monster' (*de monstro*), in which his royal and godlike behaviour is described at length.⁵⁸

With the exception of Caligula's *vestibulum*, we find that the *vestibula* of palaces were spacious waiting areas that formed an integral part of the building they belonged to. The palatial *vestibula* were probably but not necessarily uncovered. This corresponds to what we know about the *vestibula* of *domus*. To conclude this section, a few general characteristics can be laid down.

Vestibula were spaces before the entrance of a building and bordering the street, probably enclosed on three sides and probably but not necessarily uncovered. Most importantly,

⁵¹ Gellius 4.1.1 and 19.13.1; Cassius Dio 78(77).17.1-3; and possibly also Epictetus, *Diss.* 1.30.6-7. See Winterling 1999, 117-144 on *salutationes* of the emperors in general.

⁵² Suetonius, *Nero* 31: *vestibulum eius fuit, in quo colossus CXX pedum staret* (...). Cf. Pliny, *NH* 34.45-46.

⁵³ It was possible to see the later colossus (when it had been reworked into a statue of the Sun) standing at the foot of the Palatine hill: Martial 1.70. By then, the statue surely stood outside.

⁵⁴ Lega 1989-1990, 353-354 (348-352 for all literary sources on the colossus).

⁵⁵ Cassius Dio 78(77).17.3: 'he would not admit us to the *vestibulum*, so that we had to stand somewhere outside.' (μηδὲ ἐς τὰ πρόθυρα ἐσοδεχόμενος ἀλλ' ἔξω πού ἐστῶτας).

⁵⁶ Suetonius, *Cal.* 22.2: (...) *partem Palatii ad forum usque promouit, atque aede Castoris et Pollucis in uestibulum transfigurata, consistens saepe inter fratres deos, medium adorandum se adeuntibus exhibebat* (...).

⁵⁷ Cassius Dio 59.28.5: 'He cut in two the temple of Castor and Pollux in the Roman Forum and made through it an approach to the palace running directly between the two statues, in order, as he was wont to say, that he might have the Dioscuri for gate-keepers.' (τό τε Διοσκόρειον τὸ ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ τῇ Ῥωμαίᾳ ὃν διατεμὼν διὰ μέσου τῶν ἀγαλμάτων ἔσοδον δι' αὐτοῦ ἐς τὸ παλάτιον ἐποιήσατο, ὅπως καὶ πυλωροὺς τοὺς Διοσκόρους, ὥς γε καὶ ἔλεγεν, ἔχη).

⁵⁸ Suetonius, *Cal.* 22. See below for the archaeological remains of the possible Caligulan link between the palace on the Palatine and the temple of Castor and Pollux. Claudius 'returned' the temple to the people of Rome: Cassius Dio 60.8.

they were spacious enough to accommodate large groups of people, apart from statues and other decoration. It seems that *vestibula* ‘grew inwards’ in the late second century up to the point where *atria* and *vestibula* could not be distinguished any more. This is problematic: if contemporary Romans could not distinguish these two spaces, it is surely impossible to do so now. Nevertheless, the literary sources stipulate that in our search for *vestibula* we should be looking for large and partly enclosed forecourts.

II Archaeological remains of *vestibula*

A close reading of the literary sources would be unnecessary if we could easily find and determine *vestibula* archaeologically. Other scholars have labelled dozens of rooms or spaces that have been labelled as *vestibula* in Ostia, Pompeii, Rome and elsewhere in the empire.⁵⁹ I on the other hand believe that only a few excavated spaces ‘deserve’ this label, because very few excavated spaces conform to the specifications set in the previous section.

The constraints of space and time make it impossible to discuss all suggested *vestibula* individually. Therefore, I have grouped them together in different types. Below, a typical example of each type is discussed and references to other spaces of the same type are provided. The groups are ordered from ‘least likely’ to ‘most likely to be *vestibula*’. The first consist of rooms inside *domus*. These are followed by small porches, larger porticos and so-called *fauces-vestibula*. I conclude with a discussion of the few spaces that arguably might have been *vestibula*.

Internal rooms

The problem with the idea that rooms inside *domus* or villas were *vestibula* lies in the simple fact that they were inside the house, behind the front door and the threshold.⁶⁰ This contradicts all basic information we have gathered from the literary sources. Even if a *vestibulum* was covered, not one passage provides even an indirect suggestion that one had to pass a door or cross a threshold to reach a *vestibulum*.

Leach has proposed to consider ‘atrium A’ of the Pompeian House of Iulius Polybius (IX 13,1-3) as a *vestibulum* (fig. 1, room ‘C’).⁶¹ Using Vitruvian labels, we can state that this space was *alta* as it rose up to the first floor and *regalia* due to the elaborate first-style wall paintings on the walls. Leach takes this room to be a *vestibulum*, partly because it lacked an *impluvium* (and was hence not an *atrium*) and partly because of the ‘stately’ wall paintings. We do not find evidence for wall-paintings in *vestibula* in the literary sources, but we should not discard the possibility – put forward by Leach – that the *dominus* wanted to impress his visitors before they reached the *atrium* of the house. However, the absence of an *impluvium* does not necessarily mean that the

⁵⁹ Dozens of *vestibula* have been labelled in, for example, the Laterza archaeological guides on Ostia (Pavolini 2006) and the excavated towns and villas around Vesuvius (Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006). Förtsch 1993 (pages 127-134 and 181-184); Leach 1993 and Lafon 1995 are three studies dedicated to *vestibula* alone (though Hallier 1971, 192-194 also offers some suggestions), and I will primarily refer to suggested *vestibula* in these publications.

⁶⁰ Förtsch 1993, 182-183 lists a total of eight ‘internal *vestibula*’ (cat. no. XI 10-17), including the House of Iulius Polybius discussed here. Lafon 1995, 416 also suggests the entrance room of the House of the Telephus Relief in Herculaneum (Or. I, 2-3).

⁶¹ Leach 1993. On the house in general, see De Franciscis 1988.

room was in not an *atrium*, since the house was constructed in the third century B.C. Early Roman *domus* often featured covered (testudinate) *atria*, which precludes any use for an *impluvium*.⁶² Moreover, the room had to be reached through a narrow hallway (and thus did not border the street, at least not via the principal entrance), was inside the house, and was covered by a roof.

On the basis of its form it is easy to refute 'atrium A' as a possible *vestibulum*, and with it all other internal rooms labelled as such.⁶³ When it comes to function, however, we cannot rule out the possibility that it was actually a waiting area or perhaps a reception room. The same principle goes for a number of rooms that lay directly behind the front door and which were equally grand. The best known example is the entrance hall of the Villa Iovis on Capri (fig. 2), a spacious (ca. 10 meters deep and 8 meters deep) and monumental room with four columns probably supporting an arched roof.⁶⁴ Other 'internal' entrance rooms of villas include the massive entrance hall of the early imperial villa found at Fishbourne (30 x 12) and the T-shaped entrance room of a villa found in Francolise (7 x 12,5 in the middle section and half as deep at the sides) built around 30 B.C.⁶⁵ Each of these rooms opened up directly to the peristyle rather than an *atrium*, much in line with Vitruvius: '(...) in the city the *atria* are customarily next to the entrance, whereas in the countryside and in pseudo-urban buildings the peristyle comes first, then afterward the *atria* (...)'.⁶⁶ Although these rooms were arguably 'entrance rooms', the fact that they formed an integral part of the building, were covered, and, most importantly, behind the front door, excludes them as candidates for the label *vestibulum*. 'Vacant spaces between the door and the street' they were emphatically not.

Porticos and porches

More suitable candidates are a number of porches or porticos that were built in front of the main entrance of a house. Some small porches, such as those that gave access to the Villa of Diomedes just outside Pompeii, the so-called Villa of Rabato on Malta, or a villa excavated at Punta Barbariga near Pula, should be discarded as *vestibula* on the basis of their size.⁶⁷ Grander porticos were built at a villa in Sirmione (near Mantova) and at the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor in Boscoreale (fig. 3, space 'B').⁶⁸ As the former can only be partially reconstructed, the latter deserves special attention. It is an exterior space that gave access to a leisure villa, closed on three sides (the walls on these sides were covered with wall-paintings) and completely open to the fourth. Its dimensions (ca. 4,5 x 12) provided ample waiting space for even large groups of visitors. The fact that it was a podium does not necessarily mean that it was not a *vestibulum*. In a

⁶² Wallace-Hadrill 1997.

⁶³ It is frankly staggering to read that Leach is well aware of the specifications laid out by Gellius, Macrobius and others, quotes Wiseman (*supra*, n. 24), and yet still argues that the entrance room of the house of Iulius Polybius 'answers to Wiseman's specifications': Leach 1993, 23.

⁶⁴ Förtsch 1993, 182 (no. XI 11); see also Krause 2003.

⁶⁵ Förtsch 1993, 182 (no. XI 12-13). On Fishbourne: Cunliffe 1971, 119-123. Francolise: Cotton and Métraux 1985, 42.

⁶⁶ Vitruvius, 6.5.3: (...) *in urbe atria proxima ianuis solent esse, ruri ab pseudourbanis statim peristylia, deinde tunc atria habentia* (...).

⁶⁷ Villa of Diomedes: Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 266-267 with further bibliography. Villa of Rabato: Ashby and Rushforth, 1915, 34-48. Punta Barbariga villa: Förtsch 1993, 182 (no. XI 9) and De Franceschini 1998, 591-592.

⁶⁸ Sirmione: Ruffia 2005. Boscoreale: listed by Förtsch 1993, 184 (no. XI 20), and first published by Barnabei 1901, who names the portico as 'androne o vestibolo' on 14, n. 11. A more recent publication is Bergmann 2010.

passage by Seneca, difficult to interpret, we find the expression *vestibula suspensa*.⁶⁹ *Suspensus* can mean a number of things, including 'raised'. Perhaps some *vestibula* were podium-like structures reachable only through a flight of stairs. However, the stairs, the columns and the wall-paintings make it anything but a *locum vacuum*.

'Fauces-vestibula'

Förtsch has listed some spaces (dubbed '*fauces-vestibula*' by him) that can be best described as small areas in front of the door that were as narrow as or slightly wider than the *fauces* lying behind.⁷⁰ In most cases, the door was set back 2-3 meters from the outer wall – halfway or at two thirds of the narrow entranceway – thus leaving an area before the door, open to the street. Usually these areas were covered by the roof of the house, or, in the case of the Villa of San Marco in Stabiae, by a small porch. These areas were thus fully incorporated into the main building and enclosed on three sides.

The Villa of San Marco features one of the larger and more elaborate entrance areas in this group of *fauces-vestibula* (figs. 4 and 5).⁷¹ The whole area, almost square at 3,55 x 3,45, is outside and covered, partly by the main roof and partly by an extending porch. Benches were constructed along the walls in the area covered by the main roof. Entering from the street and passing through this space one directly entered the *atrium*. In many ways, this and other spaces collectively labelled as *fauces-vestibula* confirm to what we know about *vestibula* on the basis of the literary sources. The spaces are outside, between the door and the street, and rather vacant apart from (in some cases) benches along the walls, even though these were probably constructed for much more diverse uses than solely as seating areas for *salutatores*.⁷²

Surely most *fauces-vestibula* could have functioned as waiting areas. However, the number of visitors these spaces could contain was very limited. As noted above, the surface area provided space for only small groups (certainly not exceeding a dozen persons), which does not confirm to what we know about visitor numbers at *salutationes*. The entrance area of the Villa of San Marco is the most imposing and one of the largest of the group. A comparable space at the Pompeian House of D. Octavius Quartio (II 2,1-3.5-6) is much smaller at 1,90 x 2,80 (fig. 6).⁷³ Other *fauces-vestibula* are equally small compared to the building they gave access to and equally had no room for any decoration other than wall-paintings. On average, these spaces have a surface area of less than 10 m².

Given their size, these areas seem hardly proportionate to the rest of the house. In no sense do these spaces confirm to Cicero's rule: '(...) just as with *vestibula* and entrances that are added to the house and temples, the prologue that is put before a case must be proportionate to

⁶⁹ Seneca, *Ep.* 84.12: *magno adgestu suspensa vestibula* can be translated as 'the raised *vestibula* [beset] with a huge throng'. However, the Loeb translation is equally correct: 'the *vestibula* rendered hazardous by the huge throng'.

⁷⁰ Förtsch 1993, 181-182 (no. XI 1-6). Note that he wrongly includes the entrance of House of the Faun in Pompeii (VI 12,1-8) in this list. At the House of the Faun, we do find a door halfway the *fauces* (as is the case with the *fauces-vestibula*), but this is not the actual front door: there was another door before this one, almost directly bordering the sidewalk, making this whole area inside and not outside as with the *fauces-vestibula*.

⁷¹ Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 423-427, with further bibliography.

⁷² Hartnett 2008.

⁷³ On the house, see Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 138-140.

the subject matter itself.⁷⁴ A comparable dictum is found in Vitruvius: ‘appropriateness in accordance with custom is demonstrated when, for example, suitable and elegant *vestibula* matching magnificent interiors will be built for buildings; for if the interiors have elegant finishes but the entrances are ordinary and shabby, they will not conform to what is appropriate.’⁷⁵ On the basis of their (average) size, we should discard the *fauces-vestibula* as ‘proper’ *vestibula*.

Other possible vestibula

An entrance-area seemingly akin to the *fauces-vestibula* is found at the so-called Casa di Giove Fulminatore in Ostia (ca. 3,90 x 2,80, figs. 7 and 8), a *domus* built in the Augustan era.⁷⁶ Again, it is a fairly small area in front of the door of the house, but there are two differences between this space and the *fauces-vestibula*. First, there is the question of proportion. The Casa di Giove Fulminatore covers an area of ca. 550 m² and has an entrance area of roughly 11 m², whereas the House of Octavius Quartio covers ca. 1000 m² (which makes it the smallest house in the group of *fauces-vestibula*) and featured an entrance area only slightly over 5 m².⁷⁷ Secondly, this area was truly vacant: there is no pavement whatsoever. It is a negative area, ‘existing’ only due to the built-up areas to the sides. As such, it confirms to a large degree in both form and function to the *vestibula* as described in the literary sources, even though in absolute terms this space still seems small indeed.

The final three buildings discussed are all quite diverse, but they all confirm to the characteristics of *vestibula* laid out above. Most importantly, they are significantly larger than the spaces discussed so far, which makes them more suitable as waiting areas and hence more likely to have been named or functioned as *vestibula*.

In its first conception, the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii (fig. 9) featured an entrance area of ca. 3 x 4 in front of the main door.⁷⁸ It was only partly covered by an arch, open to the street, and benches were built along the walls. When the villa was enlarged, an open space before the existing area was created by adding two ‘wings’ on either side. As a result, the villa had a forecourt of at least 3 x 7-8 meters (its actual dimensions are unknown, since it has not been completely excavated). The space was thus fully incorporated into the building and enclosed on three sides. One can easily imagine visitors waiting here before being admitted into the villa.

Rather different is the court of a ‘working villa’ excavated along the Via Gabina, some 10 km east from the Porta Maggiore in Rome (fig 10).⁷⁹ The villa underwent major changes in its plan and use, but in its first phase (from roughly the end of the third century B.C. until the early imperial period) it had U-shaped plan. This left an open and very large forecourt (ca. 12 x 6) that gave access to both the working and domestic areas of the villa, respectively the ‘arms’ and the

⁷⁴ Cicero, *De Orat.* 2.320: (...) oportet, ut aedibus ac templis vestibula et aditus, sic causis principia pro portione rerum praeponere.

⁷⁵ Vitruvius 1.2.6: *ad consuetudinem autem decor sic exprimitur, cum aedificiis interioribus magnificis item vestibula convenientia et elegantia erunt facta. Si enim interiora prospectus habuerint elegantes, aditus autem humiles et inhonestos, non erunt cum decore.*

⁷⁶ Lorenzatti 1998.

⁷⁷ The five other *fauces-vestibula* listed by Förtsch all give access to houses/villas (significantly) larger than 1000 m². Note that the Domus di Giove Fulminatore was one of the larger and more conspicuous *domus* in Ostia: Lorenzatti 1998, 79.

⁷⁸ See Förtsch 1993, 183 (XI 7) on the *vestibulum*. On the villa in general: Dickmann 1999, 170-176; and Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 267-273.

⁷⁹ Förtsch 1993, 183 (XI 19) on the *vestibulum*. On the villa in general, Widrig 1980.

'base' of the U.⁸⁰ This building is very possibly a good example of the *vestibula* of those 'whole deal in farm products', although no traces of any structures like 'stables and sheds' survive.⁸¹

The final *domus* discussed here is the so-called Casa dei Diadumeni or the house of M. Epidius Rufus (IX 1,20; fig. 11).⁸² The house features a podium (running along the whole facade of the house) of roughly 1,5 meters in height, 19 meters wide and 1,5 meters in depth. The podium occupied the space between the actual house and the street, and the front door could only be reached via the podium, which, in turn, was accessible via two small flights of steps at both ends. As such, the podium is an integral part of the house, but outside and uncovered, and provided some space (though not much) to stand. It is a unique structure, unparalleled in Pompeii and (as far as I know) elsewhere in the Roman world.

Archaeological traces of vestibula on the Palatine

Unlike the *domus* and villas discussed above, we can be certain that at least some imperial dwellings on the Palatine featured *vestibula*. Indeed, generations of scholars have tried to link the literary sources and the archaeological material to make sense of Caligula's *vestibulum* (the temple of Castor and Pollux) and to locate the *vestibulum* of the *Domus Flavia*.

The remains of the House of Augustus are too scanty to reconstruct the whole building, let alone an entrance space or *vestibulum*. The buildings occupied by Tiberius, Caligula and probably also Claudius occupied the western end of the Palatine (known as the Gemalus), bordered on the south by Augustus' house and on the north by the Forum and *Clivus Victoriae*. These dwellings were anything but unified palaces – rather, they were an amalgam of earlier Republican houses and built-up spaces in between.⁸³ In the reigns of Claudius and Nero the complex took on a more unitary form, and from ca. 68 onwards it was known, quite anachronistically, as the *Domus Tiberiana*.⁸⁴

Material remains of the *Domus Tiberiana* are few and far between due to the fact that the Farnese gardens were built on top of it. However, two recent excavations projects have shed some light on the more outlying areas of the complex: Hurst has published on the work in the area of the S. Maria Antiqua while Krause comprehensively gathered the findings in the northern sectors (mostly bordering the *Clivus Victoriae*).⁸⁵

Hurst re-addressed the question whether Caligula could in fact have used the temple of Castor and Pollux as the *vestibulum* to his palace.⁸⁶ He concluded the excavated structures just behind the temple (an *atrium* and possibly a *tablinum* and *peristylum*) do not contradict the passage in Suetonius: '[i] caratteristiche particolari della sistemazione architettonica – la

⁸⁰ The fourth side was closed off in the Early Imperial period. The courtyard was subsequently covered and probably turned into an *atrium*. The excavators note that to the best of their knowledge this is the only villa with a U-shaped plan excavated in Italy: Widrig 1980, 122-123.

⁸¹ 'Farm products': Vitruvius, 6.5.2; see *supra*, n. 35.

⁸² Förtsch 1993, 183 (XI 18) on the *vestibulum*. See also Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 234-235.

⁸³ Royo 1999, 209-214; Winterling 1999 47-65; Wiseman 1987; cf. Tamm 1963, 65-77. Excavations underneath the Farnese Gardens on the Palatine have recently started but any finds are yet unpublished.

⁸⁴ All sources (literary, material and epigraphic) on the *domus Tiberiana* have been gathered by Royo 1999, 214-301. See also Krause 1994, Krause 1995, and Krause 1998 on recent archaeological excavations.

⁸⁵ Hurst 1988 and Hurst 1995; Krause 1994.

⁸⁶ Already the central problem in Van Deman 1924 and Tamm 1964. See *supra*, n. 56-57 on the texts by Suetonius (*Cal.* 22.2) and Cassius Dio (59.28.5).

relazione tra tempio ed atrium e la posizione del tablinum – possono essere chiarite senza difficoltà dai riferimenti letterari.⁸⁷ Sadly, the walls of the temple cella are gone, which makes it impossible to corroborate Dio's statement that the back wall was broken through. How a connection between the palace and the temple was executed architecturally remains unclear, as the structural remains below the temple are ca. 6 meters lower than the podium. A wooden bridge seems the most plausible solution.⁸⁸

The excavations led by Krause have not brought anything like a *vestibulum* to light; however, the traces of a large flight of steps towards the Forum have been found.⁸⁹ These were built in the Neronian period and provided an imposing entrance to the palace. The stairs were subsequently replaced by a bathing complex in the Domitian era, so that a flight of stairs on the eastern side of complex was the only monumental entrance left, bordering on the so-called *area Palatina*.

We should turn to the unitary Domitian complex to the east of the *domus Tiberiana* that comprised the *Domus Flavia* (the more public sector) and the *Domus Augustana* (the more private sector).⁹⁰ Finsen suggested a small octagonal room as the palace's *vestibulum* and public entrance, a room roughly in the middle of the western facade of the complex. In his eyes, this entrance room was the easiest to guard, but otherwise, there are no reasons to suppose that this was the *vestibulum*.⁹¹ To reach it, visitors had to walk around the north-western corner of the palace, actually passing the front entrance of the so-called *Aula Regia* at the north-western end of the complex (fig. 12, space 2), which was very probably the principal venue for public *salutationes*.⁹² It seems that the octagonal room is too small and too peripheral to have functioned as the waiting space for imperial *salutationes*.

It makes more sense to have a *vestibulum* on the northern side of the complex, as this was the direction from which visitors would have come, having made their way up the *Clivus Palatinus* towards the palace.⁹³ The courtyard on the north-eastern end (fig. 12, space 7) was the first palatial space reached from this road, and seems to confirm to the characteristics of *vestibula* in general. Although it can only be partially reconstructed, it is clear that it was enclosed on three sides, uncovered, and very spacious (ca. 50 x 40). This courtyard thus confirms to the space pictured in the literary sources, and must have been an imposing and fitting *vestibulum* of the palace.⁹⁴ Ricardo Mar has recently offered some suggestion on how the audience chambers (the *Aula Regia* and the neighbouring *Basilica*) were reached from the *vestibulum*.⁹⁵ How this courtyard was linked to the huge structures and gardens now underneath the Vigna Barberini to the north

⁸⁷ Hurst 1988, 17.

⁸⁸ Ibidem, 17; a solution first proposed by Tamm 1964, 163.

⁸⁹ Krause 1994, 182-189.

⁹⁰ On the *Domus Flavia*, see especially Finsen 1962; Finsen 1969; Royo 1999, 303-368; Zanker 2002, 105-130 (with further bibliography); and Mar 2009.

⁹¹ Finsen 1969, 9-10.

⁹² On the three large reception rooms in the *Domus Flavia*, see Zanker 2002, 110-114.

⁹³ I follow Zanker 2002, 115-116 and Mar 2009 in this respect.

⁹⁴ *Supra*, n. 51: Gellius 4.1.1 and 19.13.1; Cassius Dio 78(77).17.1-3. Mar 2009, 258: '[it is] l'unico spazio che poteva avere la funzione di vestibulo (...)'.
⁹⁵ Mar 2009, 256-257:

and the *Area Palatina* to the west is yet quite unclear.⁹⁶ The fact that Gellius once waited with some friends on the emperor's *salutatio* in the *Area Palatina* only adds to the confusion.⁹⁷

Late vestibula?

Gellius' remark that some learned men in his day were unable to distinguish *vestibula* from *atria* triggers a desire to designate these late *vestibula* as well.⁹⁸ Yet Gellius is our only source on these changes over time, and he fails to describe the *vestibulum* or *vestibulum/atrium* in his day in terms of size, decoration or function. As a consequence, it is not clear what we should be looking for architecturally.

Any confusion would only arise if the two spaces had, at least visually, merged into one. The words used by Gellius to describe an *atrium* (*partem domus primorem*) suggest that this space was – as it always had been – inside the house. This means that the *vestibulum* had somehow 'moved' from the outside inwards. It seems reasonable to assume that spaces that looked like a *vestibulum* and an *atrium* in one were spacious, grand and very close or directly bordering to the street. Such spaces should be sought in *domus* dating from the late second century or later – the fact that Macrobius copied Gellius' words after some 250 years suggests that they were still valid in Late Antiquity.

It lies beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full overview of spaces that more or less confirm to these characteristics. A first glance at the evidence provides us with – again – only a few examples.⁹⁹ Perhaps spaces such as the one found in the late second-century 'Maison d'Ikarios' in Oudna (present day Tunisia) should be considered as such.¹⁰⁰ It is a paved entrance room of ca. 9 x 7 that provided access from the street directly into the corridor of the peristyle. There is no visible *atrium* proper, which is fairly normal for houses built in this period. The entrance room may have combined the functions of a *vestibulum* and an *atrium* (i.e. both a waiting and a reception area) in one.

Connecting the literary and material sources: concluding remarks

The uniform and good descriptions we have of *vestibula* should lead us in our efforts to assess the function of Roman domestic spaces and giving each, if possible, a 'label'. In the first part of this article the characteristic forms and functions of *vestibula* were laid out. In the second part, I have tried to link the information extracted from the literary sources with the archaeological

⁹⁶ The structure under the Vigna Barberini has been excavated under the direction of the École Française: Villedieu 2001 is so far the best (short) synthesis on the whole excavation; see 63-64 on the 'missing links' between these areas/structures.

⁹⁷ Gellius 20.1.1-2: *in area Palatina cum salutationem Caesaris opperiremur* (cf. 20.1.5). Either both spaces functioned as waiting areas, or the *vestibulum* was (also) called *area Palatina*, a suggestion perhaps less ridiculous than it seems: we know practically nothing of this *area* (*area* meaning 'open space'), and Gellius 20.1.1 is actually the only literary source on this space; see Torelli 1993.

⁹⁸ Gellius 16.5.1-2 and 8: *supra*, n. 38.

⁹⁹ For example, a quick scan through Guidobaldi 1986 (providing an overview of late-antique *domus* in Rome) yields no results. Many suggestions have nevertheless been offered in Carucci 2007 (on North-African *domus*); Hales 2003, 172-180 (on houses in southern-France); and Pavolini 2006 on Ostia.

¹⁰⁰ Carucci 2007, 158-160.

remains of excavated rooms and spaces. However, the number of ‘matching’ remains is very small. Even if the so-called *fauces-vestibula* and the portico of the villa at Boscoreale functioned as waiting areas for *salutatores*, the total possible *vestibula* we have archaeologically does not exceed a dozen. Why do we not have more? In this concluding section, I propose a few answers, each of which deserve further investigation.

It is possible that there are much more remains of *vestibula*, but that these have not yet been excavated, or, if they have been excavated, have not been considered as such. We should keep in mind that one of the most important aspect of a *vestibulum* was that it was an ‘empty’ space. Gellius uses the word *vacuum* twice and explicitly states that a *vestibulum* was not *in ipsis aedibus neque partem aedium*. If such spaces were also unpaved or otherwise undecorated, there are literally no remains to be found. This problem can perhaps be best illustrated by looking again at the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor in Boscoreale. The area in front of the portico (fig. 3, space ‘A’), lying some 1,5 meters below the level of the villa itself, could equally have functioned as the *vestibulum* of the villa. It was large, in front of the building, uncovered, and enclosed and monumental (or *regalia*, in Vitruvian terms) due to the rows of columns to either side. It is truly a vacant and negative area, which existed only because of the built-up spaces around it.¹⁰¹

The second answer as to why we do not have more remains of *vestibula* should perhaps be sought in the literary sources. It is well possible that the literary sources only describe the *vestibula* of the *domus* of the senatorial elite, especially if we consider the social background of most of the authors discussed here (Cicero, Gellius, and Tacitus were all senators, to name but a few). What if *vestibula* were constructed in front of the house of ordinary Romans also? Vitruvius states that ‘for those of moderate income’ only ‘magnificent *vestibula*’ are unnecessary, which allows for the construction of ‘normal’ *vestibula* in front of the ‘normal’ houses of those of ‘moderate income’. Given their size, the *fauces-vestibula* seem the most likely candidates to be such normal *vestibula*. Yet above I have argued that the *fauces-vestibula* found (so far) are too small to be considered suitable waiting-areas for the buildings they gave access to, all of which were grand *domus* or villas.

It is perhaps more likely that only very few *vestibula* have survived because very few were built. It is possible that *vestibula* were ‘luxury spaces’, only constructed in front of the villas and *domus* of the senatorial elite and the imperial palaces. Senatorial *domus* were out of necessity constructed in Rome itself.¹⁰² If we return to the function of *vestibula* (for a moment disregarding the *vestibula* of working villas, which served another purpose), they are invariably described as waiting areas for *salutatores*. A detailed investigation shows that *salutationes* were hosted by the very top of the elite, i.e. senators and some very powerful *equites*. The sources also suggest that *salutationes* were usually held in Rome itself; if not, then at the suburban villas of senators.¹⁰³ If *salutationes* were rarely or never held outside Rome, there was no obvious need for *vestibula* to be added to *domus* anywhere but in the capital itself.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the obvious place to

¹⁰¹ Sadly, no pictures have survived of this area. See Barnabei 1901, 14 on the lower-lying area, which he labels as ‘[il] piccolo peristilio sull’entrata’ on 18.

¹⁰² Eck 1997 on the necessity for senators to live in Rome.

¹⁰³ The possible exceptions to this rule are Cicero, *Ad Q. Fr.* 1.1.36 and Martial 12.68, but in both cases it is unsure whether these truly concern *salutationes*.

¹⁰⁴ Obviously, the absence of evidence for *salutationes* outside Rome does not mean that there were indeed none.

start looking for *vestibula* is Rome, and the domestic *vestibula* described in our sources are all to be found in Rome, apart from one notable exception.¹⁰⁵ However, it has proven to be very difficult to find useful remains of Roman *domus*, and it is not surprising that I have not been able to find any archaeological remains matching the literary evidence from the capital.¹⁰⁶

These answers are not mutually exclusive. It is possible that there could well be more *vestibula* 'out there' which have not yet been excavated, that the literary sources we have only describe some 'senatorial' *vestibula* and not 'normal' *vestibula*, but that only few *vestibula* were built in the first place (mostly in Rome) because it was a domestic space only fitting for the elite. Perhaps a *vestibulum* of the house of a *decurion* in a provincial town is still waiting to be excavated.

¹⁰⁵ Apuleius, *Flor.* 22: 'He was therefore counted among the nobles of Thebes, before he became just Crates; his family belonged to the elite, he had hoards of slaves, and his house was graced by a large *vestibulum*.' (*igitur, priusquam plane Crates factus, inter procures Thebanos numeratus est, lectum genus, frequens famulitium, domus amplo ornata uestibulo, ipse bene uestitus, bene praediatus*).

¹⁰⁶ On the fact that we have very few remains of Roman *domus*, see Wallace-Hadrill 2001, 128-130; with Guidobaldi 2000, 133-134.

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Figures

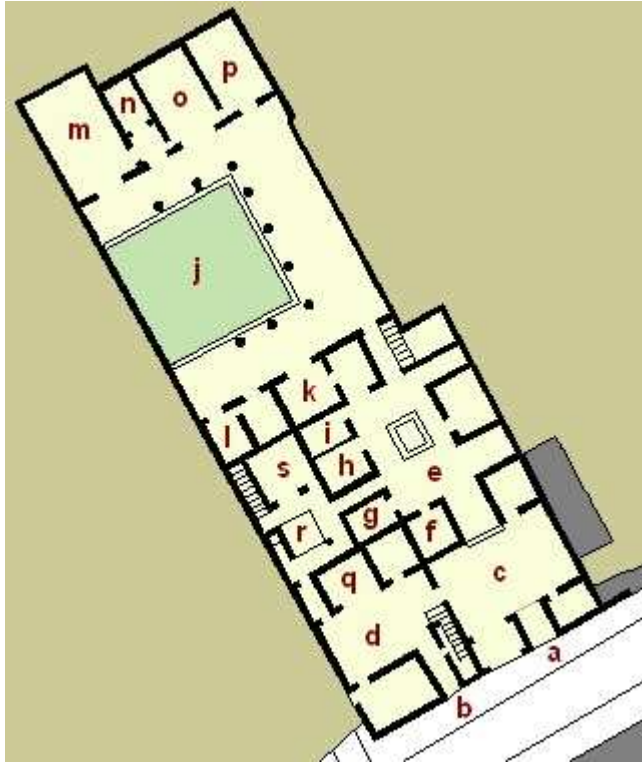


Fig. 1: plan of the House of Iulius Polybius, Pompeii.



Fig. 2: entrance room of the Villa Iovis, Capri.

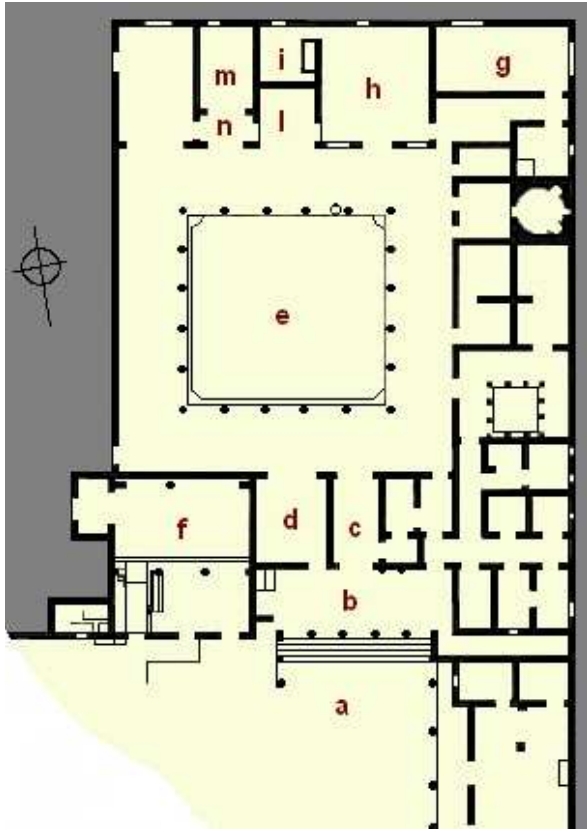


Fig. 3: plan of the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, Boscoreale.



Fig. 4: entrance area of the Villa of San Marco, Stabiae.

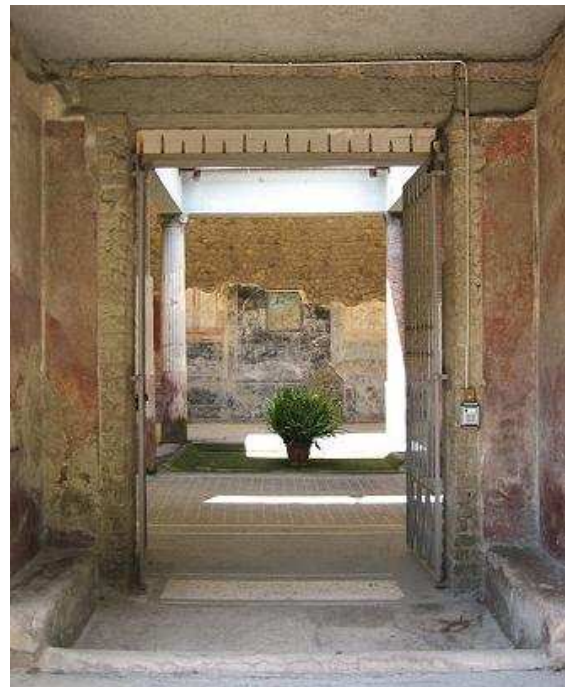


Fig. 5: entrance area of the Villa of San Marco, Stabiae.



Fig. 6: Entrance area of the House of Octavius Quartio, Pompeii.

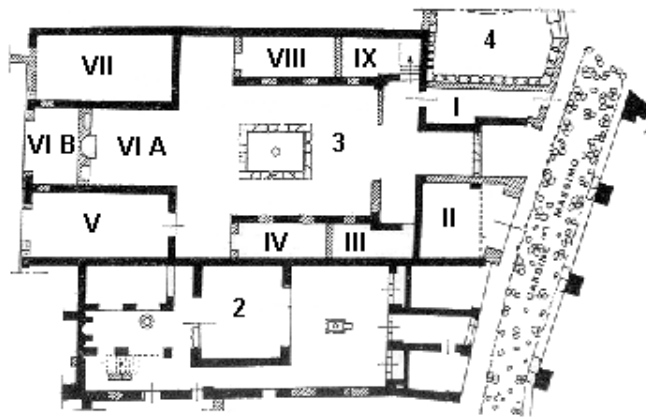


Fig. 7: Plan of Casa di Giove Fulminatore, Ostia. The possible *vestibulum* is to the lower right of room I and to the upper right of room II.



Fig. 8: entrance area of the Casa di Giove Fulminatore, Ostia.



Fig. 9: entrance area of the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii

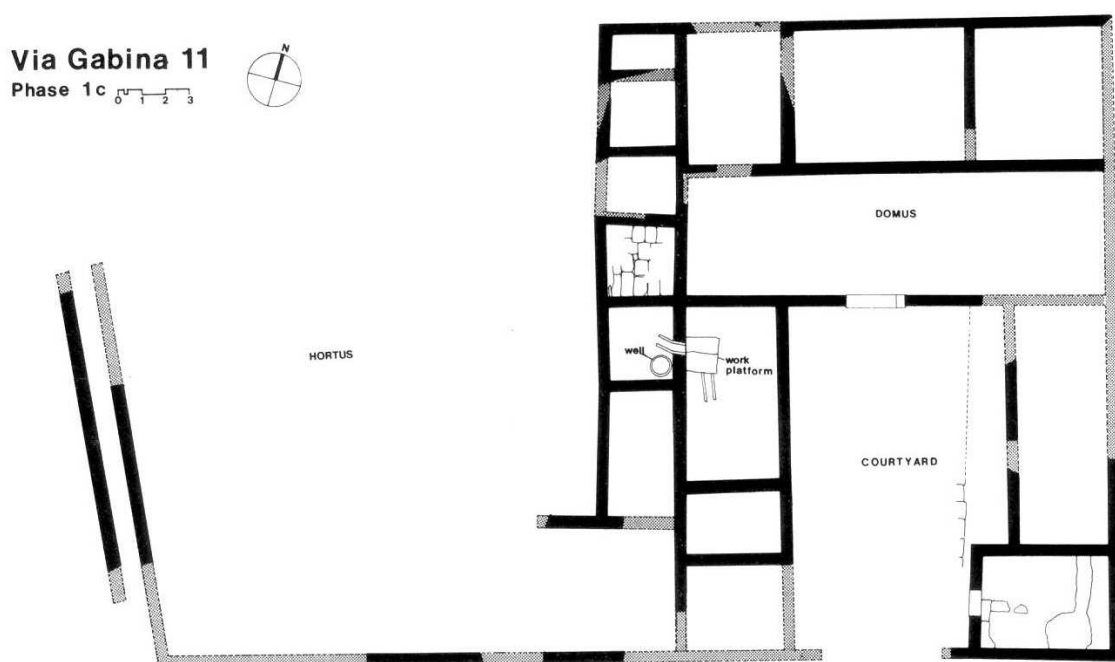


Fig. 10: plan of the villa excavated along the Via Gabina



Fig. 11: podium of the house of M. Epidius Rufus, Pompeii

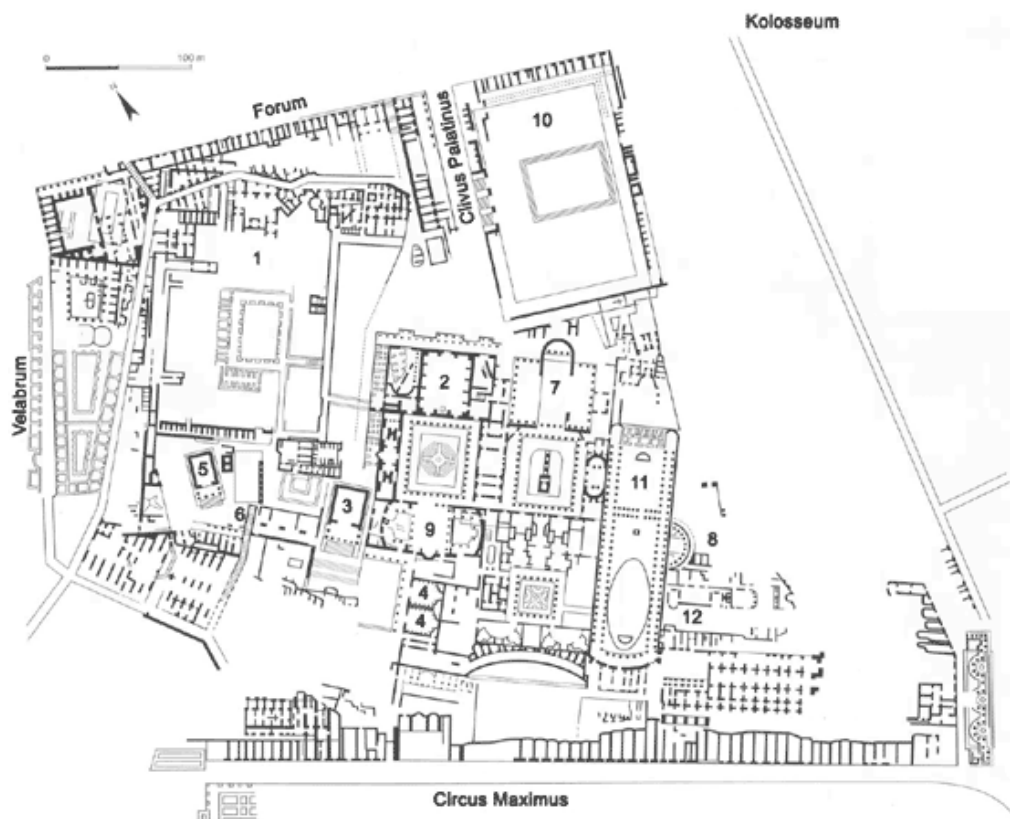


Fig. 12: the excavated structures on the Palatine Hill, Rome.