

## ARCHITECTURAL MEMORY AND TRIMALCHIO'S *PORTICVS*\*

### ABSTRACT

*This paper seeks to respond to two questions posed by previous commentators concerning the arrangement of Trimalchio's porticus as described in Petronius' Satyricon (Sat. 29): first, whether the freedman's house lacked an atrium; second, whether the cursores (runners) who are described as unconventionally exercising in the portico were pictorial representations or real-life athletes who would symbolize the social incompetence of the dominus. This paper argues that nothing in the text supports the interpretation of Trimalchio's house as having an unconventional architectural layout. Instead, as the narrative requires that Encolpius move quickly towards the triclinium, in his description the loca communia appear conflated, while he only sparsely notices a few relevant elements of the decor. The presentation of Trimalchio's porticus appears to have a functional rather than a simply descriptive purpose: it symbolizes both Roman contemporary practices (the loca communia as a distinctive unit within the domus) and the influence of Greek cultural habits (the characteristic association of colonnaded courtyards and athletics). The excerpt that describes the guests' arrival at Trimalchio's house, therefore, serves an important narrative function, providing essential information about the character's origins, self-image and social life.*

**Keywords:** Petronius; Trimalchio; *domus*; atrium; peristyle; *porticus*

Petronius' description of Trimalchio's *domus* has received considerable scholarly attention. Commentators have written extensively on its apparent idiosyncratic design compared with both the Vitruvian tradition and first-century C.E. Roman houses, such as those found at Pompeii, Herculaneum and other sites. In particular, the layout of the entrance area in the freedman's lavish home appears to be inconsistent with both contemporary practice and Trimalchio's own presentation as a member of the elite, an indication of the character's fundamental inability to appropriately conduct himself as a Roman *dominus*.<sup>1</sup>

According to Petronius' description, upon entering Trimalchio's *domus* (Sat. 29.1), guests would first encounter the *cella ostiarii* on the left and the painting of a menacing

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<sup>1</sup> S. Hales, 'Freedmen's cribs. Domestic vulgarity on the Bay of Naples', in J. Prag and I. Repath (edd.), *Petronius: A Handbook* (Chichester and Malden, 2009), 161–80 is exemplary in this respect. For the debate on Trimalchio's house and its decoration, see G. Vannini, *Petronius 1975–2005: bilancio critico e nuove proposte* (*Lustrum* 49) (Göttingen, 2007), 391–4; A. Anguissola, 'Natus in pergula: Trimalchione e l'inutilità della domus', *SCO* 53 (2007), 275–93.

watchdog next to it.<sup>2</sup> The text continues by describing a painting cycle which occupied 'the entire wall' (*totum parietem*) of the *porticus* and depicted episodes from Trimalchio's rags-to-riches story (29.3–6). Petronius' description then briefly turns to real events, as Encolpius notices a group of runners practising in the portico under the supervision of a trainer (29.7). The guest's attention is then captured by a household shrine in a corner (29.8), which contains silver Lares, a marble Venus and a golden box holding Trimalchio's first beard, clearly the most valuable item in the niche.<sup>3</sup> The introduction to Trimalchio's house ends with a brief mention of other pictures *in medio* (29.9). On his way to the dining room, Encolpius enquires about them to the *atriensis*, who was presumably escorting him across the *domus*.<sup>4</sup> The mention of a *porticus* immediately adjacent to the *cella ostiarii* mirrors a similar sequence, later in the text, which details the way Trimalchio's guests take when leaving the mansion (72.7 *per porticum ... ad ianuam uenimus*, where they meet again with the *atriensis* and a real dog).<sup>5</sup>

Both translators and commentators have contended that the *porticus* is consistent with the house's peristyle. Thus, there is some unanimity in the conclusion that the freedman's house would have lacked an atrium. This architectural feature was traditionally associated with the morning *salutatio* ritual, and homeowners from the mid first century C.E. would go to great lengths to emphasize it as a public theatre for everyday encounters—think, for an illuminating example, of the House of Paquius Proculus in Pompeii (I 7, 1), whose owners enlarged the atrium to the point that it occupied the width of the entire building lot, leaving no space for side rooms whose presence was simulated by false doors painted on the atrium walls.<sup>6</sup> According to this explanation, Trimalchio's lack of a well-appointed atrium was a consequence of his social

<sup>2</sup> On the *cella ostiaria* in Roman houses, see A. Anguissola, *Intimità a Pompei. Riservatezza, condivisione e prestigio negli ambienti ad alcova di Pompei* (Berlin and New York, 2010), 385, 504–5 n. 694.

<sup>3</sup> The idea of growing a beard—which symbolizes the progression from the state of *puer* exploited for the gratification of his master to the freedom of adulthood—holds a special place in Trimalchio's imagery. The contrast between these states is highlighted in *Sat.* 75.10 when the freedman recalls how he used to measure himself against a lampstand and paint his lips with the lamp grease (*labra de lucerna ungebam*) to give the impression of a burgeoning moustache. None the less (*tamen*), he continued to be deployed *ad delicias* of his *dominus* for fourteen years. Trimalchio's excitement and pride for his slave's impending *barbatoria* in *Sat.* 73.6 emphasizes the importance of this rite of passage. This episode, along with other references to physical growth represented by growing/receding hair, is crucial in conveying Trimalchio's relationship with the young slaves in his household as one of identification and self-reflection. For internal references to Trimalchio's coming-of-age, see also J. Bodel, 'Trimalchio and the *candelabrum*', *CPh* 84 (1989), 224–31.

<sup>4</sup> The reference to the *aedicula* implies prior knowledge (provided by the *atriensis*) of the contents of the box containing Trimalchio's first beard (29.8 *dicebant*).

<sup>5</sup> Significantly, Trimalchio's guests meet a harmless painted dog while entering the house and a real menacing animal when they attempt to escape. For the theme of flight and Petronius' depiction of the freedman's *domus* as a labyrinth (72), see P. Fedeli, 'Petronio: il viaggio, il labirinto', *MD* 6 (1981), 91–117; J. Bodel, 'The *cena Trimalchionis*', in H. Hofmann (ed.), *Latin Fiction: The Latin Novel in Context* (London and New York, 1999), 38–51, at 44; T.J. Leary, 'Getting out of hell: Petronius 72.5 ff.', *CQ* 50 (2000), 313–14; Anguissola (n. 1), 287–8 and n. 26. Trimalchio's irresistible need to exercise control over his subjects as well as the fundamental confusion of social practices and of the separation between public and private dimensions in his *domus* are reflected in the placement of a notice forbidding the staff from leaving the premises unauthorized outside the entrance door (rather than inside, where the addressees of the instructions would be able to read them before crossing the threshold); see J. Nélis-Clément and D. Nélis, 'Petronius' epigraphic habit', *Dictynna* 2 (2005), 1–15, at 3.

<sup>6</sup> On the absence of an atrium, see A. Maiuri, *La cena di Trimalchione di Petronio Arbitro. Saggio, testo e commento* (Naples, 1945), 244; more recently, see M. Labate, 'La casa di Trimalchione e il suo padrone', in M. Citroni, M. Labate and G. Rosati (edd.), *Luoghi dell'abitare, immaginazione letteraria e identità romana. Da Augusto ai Flavi* (Pisa, 2019), 81–104, at 89–90.

incompetence and his inability to conform to the rules of traditional hospitality. Other scholars have suggested that Trimalchio's atrium may simply have been excluded from Encolpius' path towards the triclinium, as disreputable guests would be kept away from the area of the house destined for official encounters.<sup>7</sup> This explanation, however, does not seem to agree with Trimalchio's personality as an individual who is fundamentally oblivious to conventions of (in)appropriateness.

Thus, the questions raised by the layout of Trimalchio's house seem to require that we adopt a different, and more nuanced, perspective, de-emphasizing a comparative approach to the archaeological record and highlighting, instead, the narrative function played by architecture in relation to the character's past achievements and present role. By focussing on two much-discussed passages in the description of Trimalchio's house that concern, on the one hand, a set of pictures seen *in medio* and, on the other hand, a group of *cursores* training in the portico, this analysis will draw attention to the limits of current interpretations, inviting an alternative approach based on the analysis of the social function of domestic imagery in the Roman world.

### PICTURES 'IN THE MIDDLE'

When interrogated about certain pictures *in medio* that Encolpius notices immediately before entering the triclinium (29.9), the *atriensis* explains that the paintings depict scenes from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and a *gladiatorium munus*. Scholars have suggested a number of explanations to address the text's apparent reticence—or, more appropriately, indifference—in addressing the actual location of these images as well as their topographical and ideological relationship to Trimalchio's biographical cycle.

By indicating that these scenes are *in medio*, Encolpius is unlikely to imply, as previous commentators have suggested, that they are (1) simply 'on display',<sup>8</sup> (2) in the centre of the long wall displaying Trimalchio's biographical cycle (which is said to occupy the entire wall),<sup>9</sup> (3) at eye level (which would imply that Trimalchio's life runs on the upper wall and would thus be much less visible),<sup>10</sup> (4) located further inside the house and therefore invisible to the visitor (in such a case Encolpius would have not enquired about them in the first place),<sup>11</sup> and (5) in the triclinium that Encolpius is

<sup>7</sup> G. Bagnani, 'The house of Trimalchio', *AJPh* 74 (1954), 16–39, at 19–20 contends that Trimalchio's atrium would be located further inside the building, after the 'entrance portico'. The reason for such an unusual entrance into the building may depend on the guests' questionable profile: 'Trimalchio is no fool and is under no illusions as to the kind of people who are coming to the house. He is not likely to leave his best reception rooms open to the inspection of any light-fingered prowler.'

<sup>8</sup> M.S. Smith, *Petronii Arbitri Cena Trimalchionis* (Oxford, 1975), 61 ('available'); P.G. Walsh, *The Satyricon* (Oxford, 1996), 22 ('other pictures on display'); G. Schmeling, *A Commentary on the Satyricon of Petronius* (Oxford, 2011), 101 ('available', 'at hand').

<sup>9</sup> M.J. Ryan, *Cena Trimalchionis* (London and New York, 1905), 9; L. Friedlaender, *Petronii Cena Trimalchionis* (Amsterdam, 1960), 89; V. Ciaffi, *Petronio Satyricon* (Turin, 1967<sup>2</sup>), 111; N. Marziano, *Satyricon* (Milan, 1969<sup>2</sup>), 46; E. Castorina, *Petronio Arbitro: Dal Satyricon: Cena Trimalchionis; Troiae Halosis; Bellum Civile* (Bologna, 1970), 103–5; L. Canali, *Petronio Satyricon* (Milan, 1990), 53; A. Ernout, *Le Satyricon* (Paris, 1990), 25; O. Sers, *Pétrone Satiricon* (Paris, 2001), 43; M. Longobardi, *Petronio Satyricon* (Siena, 2008), 41.

<sup>10</sup> It is unclear whether this meaning is implied by K. Müller and W. Ehlers, *Satyricon: Schelmszenen* (Munich, 1983), 53 ('im Mittelteil') and A. Aragosti, *Satyricon* (Milan, 1996<sup>3</sup>), 195 ('pittura nella parte centrale dell'affresco').

<sup>11</sup> See the parallels in Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.51 (*in mediis aedibus*) and Livy 1.57.9 (*in medio aedium*). For this reading, see M.C. Díaz y Díaz, *Satiricón* (Madrid, 1990), I, 38 ('per el interior de la casa').

about to enter (the revelation that he had no chance to examine the scenes in detail is at odds with the lengthy amount of time that he would have spent in that room).<sup>12</sup> Encolpius explicitly states that he walked along at least one entire wall of the portico decorated with Trimalchio's biographical cycle (29.2 *totum parietem persequi*; 29.5 *in deficiente porticu*). The Homeric scenes and the *gladiatorium munus* may have been placed 'in the most important/visible/prominent position' in the courtyard, that is, flanking the entrance to the main triclinium.<sup>13</sup> It appears equally plausible that the expression *in medio* provides either more precise topographical information, meaning a deep and/or dimly lit recess in the middle of the portico,<sup>14</sup> or—more likely—an in-between space (as in Quint. *Decl. mai.* 1.2). The latter could be either (a) an atrium that Encolpius may have hastily crossed without paying attention to its more conventional imagery,<sup>15</sup> or (b) a point in the courtyard located between where Encolpius is standing when he mentions the paintings and the last thing that he noticed (the *lararium*).<sup>16</sup>

It is relevant that Encolpius refers to the servant attending to the guests and providing information about the room's decor in that area of the house as an *atriensis*, a term that emphasizes the topographic location attached to the man's profession rather than his duties.<sup>17</sup> By using such a term to designate the steward, Encolpius implicitly recognizes the entire area of the house, guarded and managed by the *atriensis*, as an atrium. Eager to partake in the evening entertainment, Encolpius only briefly glances at the arrangement, furnishing and decoration of the space, captured by the frightening painted dog and the eccentric cycle depicting Trimalchio's career, to the point of overlooking scenes from the Homeric poems and requiring the assistance of the *atriensis* to make sense of them.<sup>18</sup>

Bagnani (n. 7), 20 asserts that the pictures *in medio* are in 'the main reception rooms in the centre of the house'. See also F. Buecheler, *Petronii Saturae* (Berlin, 1958), 31.

<sup>12</sup> H.C. Schnur, *Satyricon: ein römischer Schelmenroman* (Stuttgart, 1975<sup>2</sup>), 38: 'im Salon'.

<sup>13</sup> According to Vannini (n. 1), 392, *in medio* should be translated as 'in vista', that is, 'le pitture principali'. Labate (n. 6), 90 n. 33 expands on this reading and interprets these images as flanking the entrance to the main triclinium (the Homeric scenes on one side and the gladiatorial scenes on the other side of the door). Labate considers that Encolpius' hesitation may have stemmed from the images being located at the opposite side of the peristyle from where the narrator was standing at that point in the story. The idea that the pictures may be described as being 'in vista' is supported by the use of *in medio* at a later point of the novel, when Trimalchio commands that his cook be presented in the triclinium in front of the master and his guests—arguably, in the middle (i.e. the most visible point) of the room (49.4).

<sup>14</sup> An example for such an *exedra* is room G in the House of the Golden Cupids at Pompeii (VI 16, 7.38) with a Fourth-Style painted decoration that includes mythological pictures inspired by the Homeric epics; see F. Seiler, *Casa degli Amorini Dorati* (VI 16, 7.38) (Munich, 1992), 36 and figs. 171–204.

<sup>15</sup> It is unclear whether this is the meaning of *in medio*, according to W.H.D. Rouse, *Petronius Satyricon* (London and New York, 1925), 43, 'in the hall'.

<sup>16</sup> I owe idea (b) to Fabio Guidetti, who also suggested that, by *in medio*, Petronius might intend a recess in the wall.

<sup>17</sup> The *atriensis* belongs to a category of servants defined by the location of their activities (e.g. *ostiarus*, *ianitor*, *cubicularius*), as opposed to staff entrusted with a particular, less specifically located function (e.g. *nomenclator*, *dispensator*, *procurator*). Schmeling (n. 8), 101–2 interprets *atriensis* in *Sat.* 29.9 and 72.10 as 'a slave with various responsibilities'. On Trimalchio's household staff, see B. Baldwin, 'Trimalchio's domestic staff', *AClass* 21 (1978), 87–97; G. Puglisi, 'Il microcosmo di C. Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus. Schiavi e liberti nella casa di un mercante romano (Petr. 27–78)', *Index* 15 (1987), 207–26.

<sup>18</sup> See also the comments in Anguissola (n. 1), 276–7, 288.

The ideological and functional distinction between the atrium and the peristyle of a Roman *domus* is, indeed, largely a modern construct. The most authoritative Roman source on the subject, Vitruvius' *De architectura*, leaves no doubt that his contemporaries would consider the *uestibula*, the *caua aedium* and the *peristylia* to be part of a house's *loca communia*, which could be accessed even when uninvited (*De arch.* 6.5.1).<sup>19</sup> When wide passages into the *tablinum* were open, the front and rear courtyards of the *domus* could also appear as a single architectural unit, as many houses from the period show.<sup>20</sup> Encolpius' trajectory appears to follow such a familiar architectural layout: he encounters the *loca communia* as a single functional unit before reaching the triclinium, the first of the house's *loca propria*. A different steward guarded admission to the dining room (30.1 *procurator*). In Encolpius' account of the architecture and decor of Trimalchio's house, the actual layout of the *loca communia* appears as a secondary negligible detail in relation to the importance consecrated to the function of their painted decoration.

Encolpius is able to independently decipher the images of Trimalchio's life owing to detailed written *inscriptions*. In light of this remark, one may wonder whether Encolpius' failure to notice the Homeric legends *in medio* is attributable to their plainer appearance, compared with the lavish and detailed celebration of Trimalchio's career, as well as with the lack of textual clarification that would have ironically made them more difficult to decipher than an obscure personal epic. Long captions are exceedingly rare in the corpus of first-century C.E. Roman painting. A few occurrences include literary quotations and lengthy texts used to elevate the tone of decorations and to convey their intellectual history.<sup>21</sup> Although little information exists about Roman biographical painting and its relationship to written texts, it is likely that the images in Trimalchio's peristyle were designed as a mythological series, inviting the viewer to naturally interpret the images—and Trimalchio's quite literal rise to fame—as being rooted in the literary tradition. In this sense, the images *in medio* with episodes from Homer's poems and scenes from a gladiators' spectacle complement the biographic cycle, thus completing the ensemble by highlighting Trimalchio's cultural aspirations and his place among the local elite, as well as the crucial role that athletics played in his domestic imagery. The choice to leave the topographic sequence for the images unclear serves an important narrative function, namely conveying the impression of Encolpius' rapid progression into the house, his amazement at its lavishness, and his struggle to understand the subject and meaning of the decorations. The ambiguity that emerges from the guest's description of the architectural layout of the house serves the same purpose, crucially presenting Trimalchio's house as a wondrous menacing place that escapes

<sup>19</sup> A. Zaccaria Ruggiu, 'Loca propria e loca communia: lo spazio triclinaire e il concetto di privato in Vitruvio', in S. Bonomi (ed.), *Techne. Studi di architettura e urbanistica greca e romana in onore di Giovanna Tosi* (Padua, 1998–1999), 185–204.

<sup>20</sup> The best discussion of the perceived axiality and of strategies of visual penetration in Roman houses is A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton, 1994). I have addressed the ideological structure and (pseudo-)axial arrangement of the so-called Roman *Normhaus* in A. Anguissola, 'Tra domus e villa. Spazio e società nelle abitazioni lungo le mura di Pompei', in A. Dardenay and N. Laubry (edd.), *Anthropology of Roman Housing* (Turnhout, 2020), 115–46.

<sup>21</sup> L. Piazzzi, 'Poesie come didascalie di immagini: tre casi pompeiani', in F. de Angelis (ed.), *Lo sguardo archeologico. I normalisti per Paul Zanker* (Pisa, 2007), 181–98, with earlier literature. See also B. Bergmann, 'A painted garland: weaving words and images in the House of the Epigrams at Pompeii', in Z. Newby and R. Leader-Newby (edd.), *Art and Inscriptions in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 2007), 60–101.

categorization according to Roman social standards. However, the conflation of the *loca communia* of Trimalchio's *domus* also embodies a quintessentially Roman attitude towards the social function of the domestic sphere.

### ATHLETES IN THE COURTYARD

Encolpius' description of a group of runners training in the portico, which he evidently considers a noteworthy sight (29.7 *notaui etiam in porticu gregem cursorum cum magistro se exercentem*), provides additional insight into Trimalchio's use of his house. Some scholars have suggested that the *cursores* may actually be the subjects of another painted scene (or a mosaic) in the portico.<sup>22</sup> The apparent contradiction between the presence of training athletes and the alleged function of a peristyle in a Roman house—namely, a covered pathway intended for strolling, conversation and the enjoyment of the artworks displayed in the galleries and garden—contributed to this interpretation.<sup>23</sup> Those who, instead, believe that Encolpius is referring to a real-life group of runners training under the supervision of a *magister* attribute Trimalchio's inappropriate use of the peristyle to social incompetence.<sup>24</sup>

Based on the text, there is no reason to believe that the *cursores* were part of the painted or mosaic decoration. This reading disregards the fact that Encolpius appears to have concluded his account of Trimalchio's biographical cycle of paintings and that nothing in the text suggests that the scene of running athletes could have belonged

<sup>22</sup> See, in particular, Baldwin (n. 17), 89; D. Rebuffat and R. Rebuffat, 'De Sidoine Apollinaire à la Tombe François', *Latomus* 37 (1978), 88–104, at 95 and n. 21; J.-C. Dumont, 'Le décor de Trimalchion', *MEFRA* 102 (1990), 959–81, at 969. Other commentators remain neutral on this question and believe that both options—a real or a painted *grex cursorum*—are equally likely: see, for example, Schmeling (n. 8), 100; B. Wesenberg, 'Zur Wanddekoration im Hause des Trimalchio', in L. Castagna and E. Lefèvre (edd.), *Studien zu Petron und seiner Rezeption* (Berlin and New York, 2007), 267–86, at 268 n. 6; A. Bonandini, 'I disegni del Fato. La rappresentazione delle Parche nell'*Apocolocyntosis* e in Petronio', in L. Belloni, A. Bonandini, G. Ieranò and G. Moretti (edd.), *Le Immagini nel Testo, il Testo nelle Immagini. Rapporti fra parola e visualità nella tradizione greco-latina* (Trento, 2010), 425–49, at 445. According to V. Rimell, *Petronius and the Anatomy of Fiction* (Cambridge, 2002), 38, Encolpius' account 'seems to obscure the difference between what is actually happening and what is part of the two-dimensional mural'. In her view, 'it is not clear whether *in porticu* is intended to mean on the colonnade walls, or within them'. However, the quick narrative pace and Encolpius' abrupt shift from the description of paintings (Trimalchio's biography) to real people and objects, and his later return to paintings (those *in medio*), appear to depend on his hasty progression towards the triclinium rather than on a blurring of reality and fiction. At this point in the story the guests are still relatively clear-minded, as they are yet to experience the intoxicating extravagance of Trimalchio's hospitality (although the frightening encounter with the painted dog had already dealt a considerable blow to Encolpius' confidence).

<sup>23</sup> Dumont (n. 22), 969–70 comments that 'quelle soient les dimensions du péristyle, il ne constituerait pas un espace approprié à l'entraînement des coureurs ... La possession d'une écurie de tels esclaves est un signe de richesse que le parvenu a voulu immortaliser par une peinture'. According to Baldwin (n. 17), 89, the painted *grex* creates a contrast with the much smaller entourage of four *cursores* who escorted Trimalchio's litter (28.4).

<sup>24</sup> C. Cesene, 'Considerazioni sull'autorappresentazione di Trimalchione: gli affreschi della *porticus* e il monumento funebre', *AncNarr* 17 (2021), 91–123, at 100–1: 'il fatto che il portico sia uno spazio convenzionalmente non appropriato a una siffatta attività non può essere preso come un dato significativo, dal momento che a casa di Trimalchione non sempre i luoghi sono consoni alle attività svolte'; similarly, see Bagnani (n. 7), 23: 'no one but Trimalchio would allow such an activity in this part of the house'. E. Courtney, *A Companion to Petronius* (Oxford, 2001), 78 n. 14 believes that, by using the peristyle as a space for sports, Trimalchio is attempting to elevate his relatively modest household to imperial level.



to the *in medio* images displayed in that part of the house. The suggestion that the *porticus* of a *domus* would not be sufficiently large to host the training of a group of runners is at odds with the actual size of townhouses attested in Roman cities around the Mediterranean: the Houses of the Faun (VI 12, 2) and of the Citharist (I 4, 5) in Pompeii, for instance, had multiple peristyles with porticoes that exceeded twenty meters in length, as did single-peristyle buildings such as those in the Houses of Menander (I 10, 4) and the Centenary (IX 8, 6).<sup>25</sup> Besides, nothing in the text indicates that the men training in the *porticus* would actually be running. Encolpius had met Trimalchio's small yet extravagant entourage of runners before, as they escorted their master's *lectica* in their conspicuous outfits (28.4), and he would therefore be able to recognize them regardless of the exercise they were performing. As for the reason why Petronius would include the mention of a group of runners as part of the house's noteworthy sights, I believe that it may warrant a different and less perfunctory explanation related to the freedman's personal history.

Trimalchio's name indicates that he is from the Hellenized Eastern Mediterranean. He, in fact, mentions that he arrived in Rome from Asia when he was a boy (75.10).<sup>26</sup> Trimalchio's origins are, therefore, inextricably rooted in the notions of idealized beauty, luxury and eroticism that the Romans associated with Greek culture. Like the anthropomorphic lampstand (*candelabrus*) that he used to measure his own height and assess his growth, at the beginning of his life Trimalchio was perceived as an exquisite object of pleasure.<sup>27</sup> As a successful and, eventually, free adult, Trimalchio himself perpetuated such relational dynamics based on the eroticization of young male bodies. Encolpius' first encounter with Trimalchio occurs in the public baths where the balding freedman enjoys playing ball with a group of handsome boys (27.1)—*pueri capillati* (also at 34.4 and 70.8)—who resemble his old self, the young *Trimalchio capillatus* (29.3, 57.9, 63.3). Just as Trimalchio did when he was younger, these boys are also obliged to satisfy the whims of the current *senex calvus*.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Trimalchio's house functions as a public display of his social life and as an expression of his cultural identity and aspirations. His *domus*, fitted with two large courtyards with marble (or, more likely, marble-clad) columns (77.4 *habet ... porticus*

<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that Trimalchio's house may have been equipped with two peristyles (if we accept that, in the building's presentation, the term *porticus* designates exclusively a peristyle rather than, more generically, any courtyards with marble-clad columns), thus providing a more than an adequate circuit for running (77.4).

<sup>26</sup> On Trimalchio's biography and origins, see F. Guidetti, 'L'integrazione e i suoi limiti: per una storia sociale di Trimalchione', in M.L. Delvigo (ed.), *Centro e periferia nella letteratura latina di Roma imperiale* (Udine, 2021), 357–89. See also H. Solin, 'Onomastica petroniana. Il senso nascosto dei nomi nel *Satyricon*', *Il nome nel testo* 19 (2017), 315–28.

<sup>27</sup> See the excellent discussion in R. Bielfeldt, 'Candelabrus and Trimalchio: embodied histories of Roman lampstands and their slaves', in M. Gaifman, V. Platt and M. Squire (edd.), *The Embodied Object in Classical Antiquity*. Special Issue of *Journal of the Association for Art History* 41.3 (2018), 420–43. This passage highlights the essential confusion that permeates Trimalchio's domestic environment between, on the one hand, real people who—as slaves—are objectified and forced to submit to their master's commands and, on the other, objects that in turn appear to be animated by some sort of independent inner will. For a broad discussion of Trimalchio's *automata*, see F. Grillo and C. Panayotakis, 'Automata and other technological devices in Trimalchio's dinner-party', in T. Bur, M. Gerolemou, I. Ruffell (edd.), *Technological Animation in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford) (forthcoming).

<sup>28</sup> At *Sat.* 27.6, Trimalchio uses the hair of one of his young slaves to dry his hands. On the rhetoric of youth and beauty, as exemplified by the *pueri capillati* in Petronius' novel, see C. Panayotakis, 'Slavery and beauty in Petronius', in S. Panayotakis and M. Paschalis (edd.), *Slaves and Masters in the Ancient Novel* (*Ancient Narrative Supplements* 23) (Groningen, 2019), 181–201.

*marmoratos duos*), is designed to provide entertainment for high-standing Roman citizens, those whose visibility and public duties required *peristylia amplissima* to accommodate large gatherings (Vitr. *De arch.* 6.5.2). As a man raised in the Hellenistic East who appears to have retained a strong imprint of his social and cultural upbringing, Trimalchio would have immediately associated a large colonnaded courtyard with its primary location in the Greek world: the public space of the gymnasium.<sup>29</sup>

Peristyle courts appear to have been integrated into the layout of Roman and Italic houses around the turn of the second and first centuries B.C.E. as a response to a widespread cultural interest in Greek lifestyle.<sup>30</sup> Both Encolpius and Trimalchio use the word *porticus* to refer to the colonnaded courtyards in the house, demonstrating that neither their function as *ambulationes* nor the architectural norms that determined the arrangement of a *peristylum/peristylum* mattered to them. Instead, the word emphasizes the luxurious nature of such elements of design.<sup>31</sup> As Vitruvius clarifies, even the covered areas of a colonnaded atrium (a so-called 'tetrastyle' or Corinthian atrium) could be defined by the term *porticus* (*De arch.* 6.5.3 *atria habentia circum porticus pauimentatas*). Although, in this passage, Vitruvius is actually referring to the layout of country villas, his choice of words leaves little doubt that by *porticus* he means an architectural structure rather than a specific area within the building. Thus, some caution should be exercised in reading Petronius' text and translating all occurrences of the word *porticus* as 'peristyle'.

Trimalchio's courtyards and their signature marble columns are part of the standardized features of a well-appointed home—nothing less than a *templum*, to borrow his own words (77.4)—as well as powerful references to the sphere of Greek athletics and the cult of the male body, both of which are deeply rooted in his cultural imagination. It is therefore not surprising that he would have *cursores* (who were most likely part of the small entourage of runners tasked with escorting his litter, 28.4) exercising in the long colonnaded ambulatories, as if his own *domus* were an extension of the *palaestra* where he had been spotted playing with a group of attractive boys. The memory of a distinctively Greek public space, which spread across the Eastern Mediterranean as a recognizable and culturally defining architectural structure during the Hellenistic period, overlaps with the canons and expectations of Roman social life. Thus, the architecture, function and painted decoration of the courtyard represent the character's personal history, which is symbolically captured in the architectural features of the *domus*.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See Anguissola (n. 1) for a discussion of Trimalchio's 'social memory' in his use of domestic spaces, with particular reference to his *cubicula*.

<sup>30</sup> J.A. Dickmann, 'The peristyle and the transformation of domestic space in Hellenistic Pompeii', in R. Laurence and A. Wallace-Hadrill (edd.), *Domestic Space in the Roman World* (Portsmouth, RI, 1997), 121–36; J.A. Dickmann, *domus frequentata. Anspruchsvolles Wohnen im pompejanischen Stadthaus* (Munich, 1999), 127–44. On Roman domestic peristyles, see also S. Simelius, *Pompeian Peristyle Gardens as a Means of Socioeconomic Representation* (London and New York, 2022) and, specifically regarding housing in Greece during the Roman Imperial period, P. Bonini, *La casa nella Grecia Romana* (Rome, 2006), 53–5.

<sup>31</sup> On the vocabulary that Latin authors use for colonnaded spaces, see Simelius (n. 30), 15–20 and Y. Kawamoto, 'The colonnaded space in Vitruvius' *De architectura*', in A. Anguissola, M. Iadanza and R. Olivito (edd.), *Paesaggi domestici. L'esperienza della natura nelle case e nelle ville romane* (Rome, 2020), 19–23. In *De arch.* 5.9.1, Vitruvius clearly distinguishes between the *porticus* (that is, the covered path with columns) and the *ambulationes*. Similarly, he uses the term *porticus* to define one of the rows of columns of the *peristylia* (*De arch.* 6.3.7). In the case of a *palaestra*, usually characterized by a square or rectangular peristyle, three sides of the courtyard are described as single *porticus*, while the fourth side is defined as a double *porticus* (*De arch.* 5.11.1).

<sup>32</sup> See Anguissola (n. 1) for an investigation of the possibility that Trimalchio's unusual choice (77.4) of locating his personal bedroom upstairs (although he supposedly owned twenty *cubicula*)



## CONCLUSION

Scholarly preoccupation with the layout of Trimalchio's fictional *domus* has primarily attempted to find similarities and discrepancies with the archaeological record that could strengthen the understanding of this character as a ridiculed nouveau riche, trapped in the eternal oscillation between his contradictory ambitions and his cultural shortcomings. This paper argues, instead, that greater attention should be paid to the functionality of the spaces in Trimalchio's house as a principal subject of analysis. Nothing in the text, in fact, suggests that the house was unconventional in its layout or interior design, and the question of whether it had a full, lofty atrium is ultimately of little relevance.<sup>33</sup> Encolpius' description of the house conflates the *loca communia* into a single functional unit, conveying the guest's (misplaced) impression of seamless movement across an undivided space until he finally reaches the host's *loca propria*, the location destined for evening entertainment. Encolpius' swift pace on entering the house determines the elliptic account of its layout and decoration, as if the guest's attention and interest were progressively—and rather chaotically—captured by a sequence of individual elements within a shared, topographically flimsy, architectural framework.

As he crosses the *porticus*, the visitor is confronted with Trimalchio's identity, history and personality, all of which are reflected both in the painted decoration and in the architecture, its uses and the cultural memories it evokes. In this sense, Trimalchio's home plays a significant narrative function that exceeds its simple role as the setting for the lengthy *cena Trimalchionis*. Rather, Petronius' narrative choice to present the building by means of an inconsistent accumulation of loosely related elements seen through the eyes of a dinner-guest is instrumental both in setting the tone of the episode—dominated by Encolpius' increasing restlessness and sense of helplessness—and in characterizing Trimalchio as a product of his origins, struggles and experiences.

University of Pisa

ANNA ANGUISSOLA  
[anna.anguissola@unipi.it](mailto:anna.anguissola@unipi.it)

may be interpreted as a subtle hint at his inability to improve his lifestyle. Regardless of his conspicuous consumption and public display of a lavish *aedes*, Trimalchio continues to live like someone who is *natus in pergula* (77.14).

<sup>33</sup> Trimalchio's house is admittedly the result of progressive expansion from a humble abode to a *templum* (77.4), as noted by Labate (n. 6), 83–4. However, the building's past is far from unique and, therefore, does not justify speculation about its degree of unconventionality.