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THE DOMESTIC PYLON IN THE LIGHT OF GREEK PAPYRI¹

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Abstract

This paper attempts to reconstruct the internal arrangement and functions of the domestic pylon in the light of Greek papyri uncovered from Egypt. It first deals with representations of domestic pylons in the Pharaonic period to visualise the structure. It then considers domestic entranceways attested in Greek papyri and finally addresses the architectural layout and use of the domestic pylon. In 1973 Pierre Chantraine addressed the origin of the Greek term pylon.² In 1983 Geneviève Husson published her *Oikia* where she alphabetically collected the vocabulary of domestic architecture of Egypt, including the pylon, attested in papyri from the Ptolemaic to the Byzantine period.³ In 2001 Richard Alston mentioned the domestic pylon in passing in his considerations of social life and ritual activities in Roman Egypt.⁴ None of these scholars has dealt in depth with the architectural layout and use of the domestic pylon.

Representations of domestic pylons in the Pharaonic period

Unfortunately, there is no surviving example of a domestic pylon in Egypt, indicating that the structure was probably built out of mud-brick. The absence of archaeological parallels makes it hard to form a clear picture of the physical appearance of the structure and, as we shall see, the papyri offer only limited evidence for this. However, Pharaonic representations of what seem to be domestic pylons help to visualise the pylon mentioned in papyri of the Graeco-Roman period, given the remarkable continuity of native techniques used in domestic architecture.⁵ This section therefore reflects the physical appearance

¹ For citation of papyri and inscriptions, we adhere to the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, which is available at: <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>.

²Chantraine, 1973, 659-64.

³ Husson, 1983.

⁴ Alston, 2001, 60-1.

⁵Husson, 1981, 519-26.

of the domestic pylon on the basis of representations of similar domestic structures in the Pharaonic period.

The ancient Egyptians used the word *bxnt* to refer to the pylon.⁶ It is derived etymologically from a verbal stem, which means 'be vigilant'.⁷ *Bxnt* refers to the whole structure and is sometimes followed by the determinative for a pylon, consisting of two towers and a central doorway in between. In other cases, however, it is followed by a single tower or without a determinative.⁸ From the Eighteenth Dynasty until the Roman period, the word *sb3* is sometimes used to designate the pylon.⁹ The term *sb3* is first used during the Fifth Dynasty to mean a normal 'doorway',¹⁰ and often refers to 'the doors of houses as well as temples'.¹¹ *%b3* also occurred in demotic, and survived into Coptic to mean 'door'.¹² The central gate of the pylon was called *m#ht*,¹³ while the balcony above it was called *m#rw* (the viewing place) or *sSd-n-Xo* (the window of appearance).¹⁴ 'Pylon' is the English for the Greek *πύλων* (monumental gateway),¹⁵ which is used in Egyptian religious contexts to designate the double-towered gateway of traditional temples.¹⁶ Most classical authors used the word 'propylon' to designate the two-towered entrance of Egyptian temples.¹⁷ Diodorus was the first and perhaps the sole classical writer to use the word 'pylon' in his references to the Egyptian monuments.¹⁸

⁶ Faulkner, 1962. 326-7.

⁷ Sethe, 1933, 903.

⁸ Erman, and Grapow, 1926, 471.

⁹ Shubert, 1981, 137-8; Blackman, 1915, 4.

¹⁰ Spencer, 1984, 207.

¹¹ Wilson, 1997, 815-6.

¹² Erichsen, 1954, 419; Crum, 1930, 321b.

¹³ On the orthography of the word *m#ht*: Wilson, 1997, 405.

¹⁴ Junker, 1912, 58-9. On other uses of the word *m#rw*: Wilson, 1997, 404-5.

¹⁵ Jaros-Deckert, 1982. 1202.

¹⁶ Hellmann, 1992, 353.

¹⁷ Hdt. 2.121; Strabo 17.1.28; Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 32.8-10;

¹⁸ Diod. Sic. 1.47.2.



Figure 1. The pylon of the temple of Horus at Edfu.

The earliest prototype of the pylon is a series of temple gateways, which date back to the Middle Kingdom and are built out of mud-brick, except for the frames of the doorways, which are made of stone.¹⁹ This tradition was maintained in mortuary temples of the Nineteenth Dynasty (1307-1196 BC) built on the west bank of Thebes.²⁰ The entrance to the Chapel of King Sankhkare Montuhotep III (1998-1991 BC) at Qurna is often referred to as the 'earliest known pylon'.²¹ The earliest appearance of the term *bXnt* is found in Ineni's statement, inscribed in his tomb at Thebes (TT 81), concerning his supervision of the construction of the fourth and fifth pylons of the Temple of Karnak under Tuthmosis I (1504-1492 BC). The 'superintendent of the royal buildings' records that:

I have supervised the great monuments which he (Tuthmosis I) made at Karnak. A noble hall with columns was erected; great pylons (*bXnt w*) in fine Tura limestone were erected on either side of it (the hall).²²

The use of monumental pylons as the facade-entranceways to traditional temples continued from the Pharaonic, down to the Roman period.²³

We now turn to the appearance of the domestic pylon. Although the physical appearance of the domestic pylon cannot be ascertained, we would argue that the domestic pylon had similar physical features to the entrance-pylon of

¹⁹Badawy, 1968, 177-8.

²⁰ Spencer, 1984, 193.

²¹Nims, 1965, 70.

²² Shubert 1981, 136-7.

²³Abdelwahed, 2012, chapter two.

Egyptian temples (figure 1). The first indication for this is the Tomb of the High Priest Meryra at Tell el-Amarna. In the tomb, the front view of the royal palace of King Akhenaten is represented on the upper half of the east wall as a series of elevations of successive, superimposed sections (figure 2). The lowest level shows the facade of the palace, which has a two-towered pylon as its main entrance with a broken lintel doorway, flanked by two side entrances, probably for the servants. The second level represents the actual front of the palace with the Window of Appearance, which is flanked by a colonnade on each side. Above the facade there is the interior part of the palace, which still preserves the triple division. In the middle lies the Hall of Appearance, serving as the royal banquet hall and being flanked by a corridor. Finally, the upper level contains storerooms and apparently the bedroom, which appears to have a ventilator.²⁴ The appearance of the domestic pylon can be visualised on the basis of the pylon of this royal palace and other wealthy houses, because the pylon is used in religious, funerary, and domestic architecture alike, perhaps due to its distinctive form and symbolism.²⁵

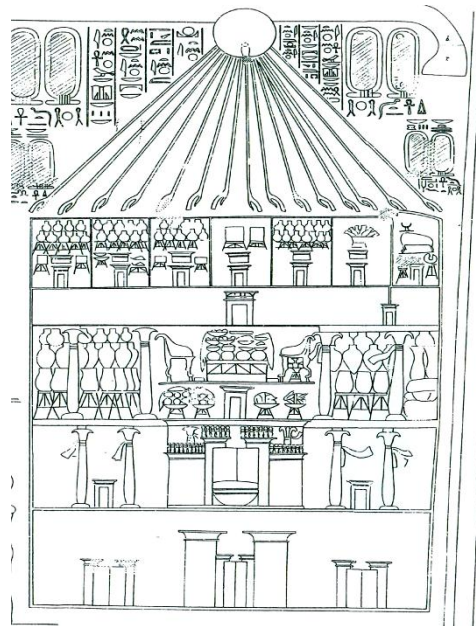


Figure 2. The two-towered pylon of the royal palace as shown in the Tomb of Meryra at Tell El-Amarna.²⁶

²⁴ Smith, 1968, 209, 235.

²⁵ E.g. the tomb of Ankh-hor, a wealthy chief administrator in the estates of the Gods Wives of Amun under Psamtik II and Apries of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, at El-Assasif necropolis on the Western Bank of Thebes (TT 414) has a huge mud-brick pylon as its facade-entranceway.

²⁶ Davies, 1903, pl. xxvi

The representation of the estates of Aten at el-Amarna, which are depicted on the eastern side of the northern wall in the Tomb of Meryra, shows a domestic structure which is often interpreted as a palace (figure 3).²⁷ In the drawing the whole structure is preceded by a water-tank with steps, probably used for irrigation. The palace is entered through a double-towered pylon, which is flanked by two small entrances, again possibly for the servants. This pylon entrance leads to the main structure, which is symmetrically arranged with further pylon-gateways at both ends. These have a central doorway and two small side-entrances on the facade of its towers. The interior of the central structure has lines of trees and a series of storerooms, eight on each side. At the back, the two end spaces have turning stairs, leading to the roof of the storerooms. Along the front and back there is a portico. On both sides of the central structure there is a flight of steps, leading up to a platform. Thus multiple pylon gateways were used to access the interior of this domestic, possibly palatial, space.

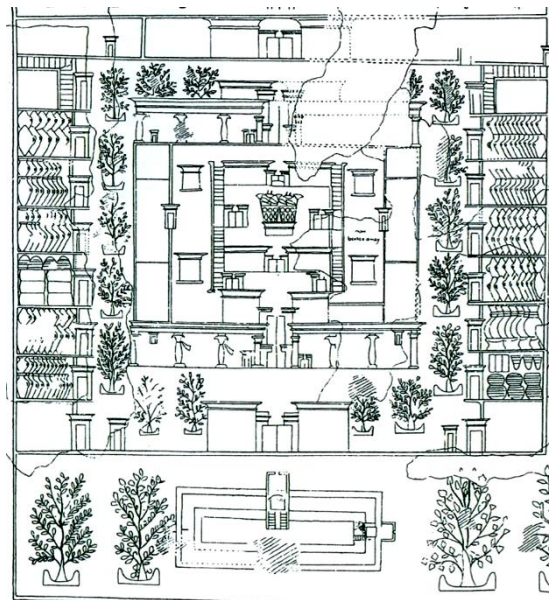


Figure 3. The double-towered pylon of a palace depicted in the Tomb of Meryra at Tell El-Amarna.²⁸

²⁷ Davies, 1903, 40-1.

²⁸ Davies, 1903, pl. xxvii

Based on the representation of an Egyptian villa in the Tomb of Sennefer (TT 96) (figure 4), Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez showed that the villa is entered through a domestic pylon, the top of which is decorated with a cavetto cornice like the pylon of traditional Egyptian temples (figure 5).²⁹ A hieroglyphic inscription is carved on the lintel of the doorway, possibly recording the name and title of the owner. Like those of the palaces at el-Amarna, the pylon-entrance is flanked by two side-entrances, possibly used by the servants. The villa overlooked the Nile and was approached from a harbour with steps. The pylon gave access to the interior of the villa, which contained a garden, trees, flowers, and the main dwelling-structure.

Taking these various instances of non-religious pylons into account, we would argue that the domestic pylon of the papyri looked like the domestic pylons portrayed in tombs of the Pharaonic period, which themselves resemble the pylons of Pharaonic temple architecture. Such a similarity in forms between domestic, funerary and temple architecture is not unlikely, given that architectural forms and motifs can easily transfer between domestic, religious, and funerary architecture. The broken-lintel doorway is a case in point. It is used, for example, in the *pronaos* of the Ptolemaic temple at Deir el-Medina,³⁰ and also appears in funerary architecture at Alexandria, occurring in Fort Saleh Tomb 1. Architecturally, the tomb consists of a rock-cut stairway, giving access to an open court, from which rooms cut with *loculi* extend on a north-south axis. At the north end of the complex there is a painted room with a burial niche. The facade of the burial chamber combines traditional and Greek motifs, where a Greek *kline* is flanked by columns with Egyptian composite capitals. The inner faces of the columns are attached to an Egyptian broken-lintel doorway.³¹

²⁹ Perrot, and Chipiez, 1882, 482.

³⁰ Bagnall, and Rathbone, 2004. 199-200.

³¹ Venit, 2002, 93.

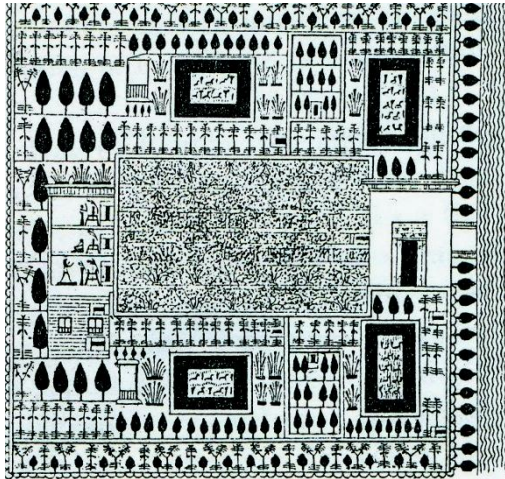


Figure 4. Representation of an Egyptian villa in the Tomb of Sennefer (TT 96).³²

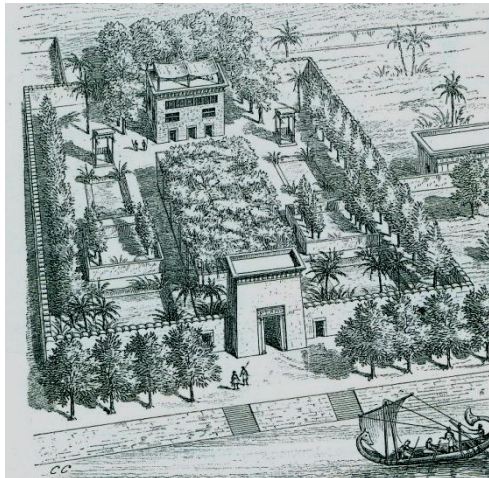


Figure 5. Reconstruction of an Egyptian villa in the Tomb of Sennefer (TT 96).³³

³²Perrot and Chipiez, 1882, 457, fig. 258

³³Perrot and Chipiez, 1882, 483, fig. 267

Entranceways in Greek papyri

The word pylon occurs in Greek papyri from the Ptolemaic to the Byzantine period.³⁴ The earliest surviving attestation of the Greek term pylon occurs in *P.Lon.* VII.1974 of 254 BC, while the latest surviving occurrence is in *SB* VI.8988 of AD 647. It is associated with different forms of architecture; it is used to designate the main entrance to granaries, temples, theatres, gymnasia, and, most notably, houses. It seems that the physical appearance and use of the pylon depended largely upon the context in which the term is used. Since the temple pylon has been sufficiently covered in the previous section, and given that there is no information about the pylon associated with granaries,³⁵ we will only focus on the appearance and architectural layout of pylons associated with theatres and gymnasia.

In a second century AD papyrus from the Fayum, the monumental gateway of a theatre is described as ‘a double-valve pylon’,³⁶ thus forming the entrance to one of the most important structures of entertainment in Roman Egypt. Since it is associated with a distinctively classical style structure and given the presence of archaeological parallels of such theatrical gateways, we would suggest that this pylon took the shape of a Greek *propylon* rather than an Egyptian pylon. One can compare this gateway with the propylon of the theatre at Antinoopolis, which consisted of a monumental gateway with three entrances, where the middle entrance is double in height and three times wider than the two lateral ones (figure 6). Thus the architecture of the Greek propylon did resemble that of triumphal arches like the one at Antinoopolis (figure 7).³⁷

³⁴*P.Münch.* XI.19-20. The papyrus dates to the reign of Maurice.

³⁵*P.Mich.* V.226. deals with the rent of the granary of the temple of Kronos/ Sobek at Tebtunis to the deceased granary guard Thenapynchis and her living son Apynchis, son of Harmiysis, and his wife Thaesis. According to the papyrus, the granary contains “a tower (*πύργος*) and another tower (*πύργος*) adjacent to it and a gateway (*πύλων*)”.

³⁶*BGU* IV.1024.9-10.

³⁷Kühn, 1913, 63-4.

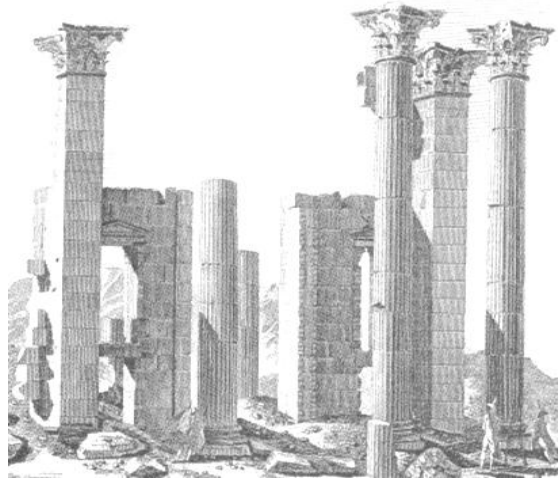


Figure 6. The propylon of the theatre at Antinoopolis in 1799.³⁸

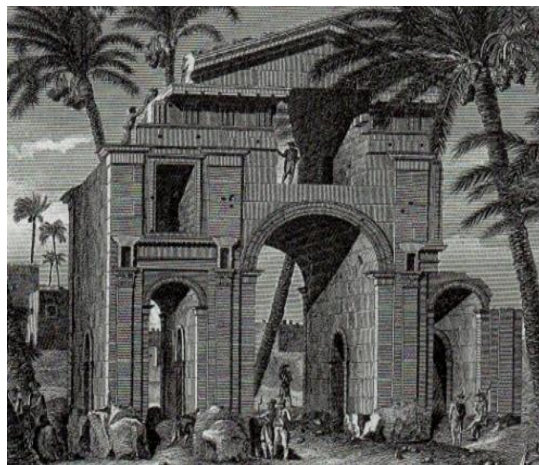


Figure 7. The Triumphal Arch at Antinoopolis in 1799.³⁹

The pylon is also mentioned as the entrance to gymnasia. In AD 283 a papyrus mentions two joiners, who were responsible for joining the wooden beams of a colonnade at Oxyrhynchus, asking Aurelius Apollonius, a holder of numerous municipal offices, for the payment of four talents, four thousand drachmas for their labour in the construction of a street, which ran 'from the principal gateway (pylon) of the gymnasium as far south as the Hierakion Lane'.⁴⁰ The pylon also occurs in connection with the gymnasium at Alexandria: 'Take notice at Alexandria before the principal gateway (*pylon*) of the gymnasium'.⁴¹ According to Jean Delorme, the gymnasium at Alexandria took a classical appearance and

³⁸ McKenzie, 2007, 158, fig. 265

³⁹ McKenzie, 2007, 157, fig. 263a

⁴⁰ *P.Oxy.* I.55.9.

⁴¹ *P.Flor.* III.382.15-16.

had two entrances; a principal gateway that gave access to a secondary one.⁴² The pylon of the gymnasium at Alexandria can be compared with the *propylon* of the gymnasium at Cyrene (figure 8). The appearance of domestic pylons differed from the appearance of the pylons associated with theatres and gymnasia, when the latter clearly had a Classical Greek appearance. The Greek *propylon* refers to the front gateway, which precedes the enclosure wall of sanctuaries, like *propylon* A of the Serapeion C at Delos and the Inner Propylaea at Eleusis.⁴³ It also designates a separate structure within the temple's precinct, where it is approached by a stairway, like the propylaea on the Acropolis of Athens. The physical appearance of the Greek *propylon* can be seen in the gymnasia at Epidaurus, Olympia, and Cyrene. The latter was associated with the Ptolemaic ruler cult, and was remodelled as a Caesareion dedicated to Augustus (figure 8).⁴⁴ The pylons of theatres and gymnasia therefore had different forms to the pylons of traditional Egyptian temples and palaces, and, in the authors' view, domestic pylons.



Figure 8. The propylon of the gymnasium at Cyrene.⁴⁵

⁴² Delorme, 1960, 358.

⁴³ Hellmann, 1992, 350-3.

⁴⁴ On those at Epidaurus and Olympia, see Lauter, 1986, 202-3. On that at Cyrene, see Ward-Perkins et al., 1958, 137-94.

⁴⁵ Burkhalter, 1992, 308, fig. 5

Other domestic entranceways

Having explored the appearance of the pylons of such public structures as theatres and gymnasia, let us now consider other domestic entranceways. The domestic pylon must be distinguished from other physical and spatial elements connected with houses, including θύρα, πρόθυρον, προπυλῶν, and πύργος. The occurrence of all these terms in papyri suggest that they differ from each other in architectural sense. In papyri and classical literature on Egypt θύρα is the normal word for 'doorway', including the front door of the house.⁴⁶ In a petition of AD 110-112, Heraclas son of Pausirion accused Apollos son of Heraclides, both from Oxyrhynchus, of attacking his wife, Taamois, while she was standing 'before the front door' of the house.⁴⁷ However, there were different ways of referring to the front door. One is the παρόδιος θύρα, i.e. the traversing or passing door.⁴⁸ The παρόδιος θύρα is mentioned in two petitions from Tebtunis, where a number of villagers complained about a gang of intruders who 'crushed the front door' of their houses.⁴⁹ Another word for the front door is ἡ ἐξωτερὰ θύρα, i.e. the exterior or outer door,⁵⁰ which is also mentioned in a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, testifying to a lease of a workshop with its front door.⁵¹ The third phrase used to designate the front door is ἡ αὐλεία θύρα.⁵² Whether followed by θύρα or not, the αὐλειος or αὐλεία can refer to the main entrance.⁵³

Unfortunately, not much information is given by papyri about the design and function of the πρόθυρον and προπυλῶν. However, both were undoubtedly associated with the house frontage, as their combined names imply. The πρόθυρον was probably a 'vestibule', which preceded the main entrance to the house. It could also mean the entrance to the *aule*.⁵⁴ A papyrus of AD 586 testifies that Aurelia Tapia has sold half a house to Flavius Kriakos at Syene (Aswan). The house consisted of 'an outer vestibule, a pylon, a terrace, a court, and a baking-oven (τε προθύρον καὶ πυλῶνος καὶ τεσσοῦ καὶ αἰθρίων καὶ κλιβάνου

⁴⁶ *P.Oxy.* XXXVI.2758.10; Hdt. 2.48; Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 7. See also Husson, 1983, 93-107.

⁴⁷ *P.Oxy.* XXXVI.2758.10: ρτθ' τη=J φυ'ταJ.

⁴⁸ Husson, 1983, 98-99.

⁴⁹ *P.Tebt.* I.45.21-22; *P.Tebt.* I.47.13-14: συντρίψαντες τὴν παρόδιον θύραν.

⁵⁰ Husson, 1983, 99. In *P.Oxy.* VI.903.20, it occurs as τὰς ἔχω θύρας.

⁵¹ *P.Oxy.* XVI.1966.14-15. AD 505.

⁵² *P.Tebt.* III.795.7: τῆς αὐλείς θύρας τῆς οἰκίας.

⁵³ Husson, 1983, 99-100.

⁵⁴ Husson, 1983, 237-8.

)'.⁵⁵ Yet in a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus a πρόθυρον of a landlord's house is exceptionally mentioned to have a small room within it.⁵⁶ In religious contexts, however, the πρόθυρον could also mean the space in front of the main entrance of a temple.⁵⁷ Thus a Greek metrical inscription on the pylon of the temple of Isis and Serapis at Qysis (Qasr Douch) records a collection of money by the high priest of Isis on behalf of the reconstruction of the temple, including 'the πρόθυρον which was built up within the enclosure wall'.⁵⁸

The propylon, on the other hand, has several meanings in connection with different forms of architecture. It was probably used in connection with domestic architecture to mean a 'porch' of the entrance. In that case, it was an essential part of the house, that is, it could not be rented or sold separately.⁵⁹ It may have projected from the facade of the house and preceded the pylon, as its combined name implies.⁶⁰ It is also mentioned in connection with a temple at Busiris, yet the papyrus does not indicate anything about its appearance or function, although it is likely that it simply refers to a monumental gateway.⁶¹

A papyrus of AD 79 certifies the mortgage of a house by Dionysius, son of Phantias in favour of Didymus, son of Sarapion. The house was located in the Quarter of Hermaeus near the Serapeion at Oxyrhynchus, and consisted of a 'two-storied tower and propylon and passage and court and a vaulted chamber (πύργος δίστεγοςκαὶ προπυλῶνκαὶ ἔξω διονκαὶ ἔθριον καὶ καμάρα)'.⁶² The occurrence of the tower (*purgos*) and the propylon in this papyrus indicates that the two structures were architecturally distinguished from each other. The *purgos* is a distinctive structure that is frequently mentioned in papyri.⁶³ In Greek military architecture, it refers to a defensive tower as well as a place of habitation for soldiers.⁶⁴ In contrast, the *purgos* in Egyptian domestic contexts

⁵⁵ *P. Münch.* 11.19-20. The papyrus dates to the reign of Maurice.

⁵⁶ *P. Oxy.* XVI.2044.16: εἰς τὸ κελλ(ιον) τὸ εἰς τὰ πρόθυρ(α) τῆς γεουχ(ικῆς) οἰκ(ίας) .

⁵⁷ Hellmann, 1992, 348-9.

⁵⁸ *SEG XXXVIII.1796 = SEG LIV.1738 = Bernand, 1969, 471-5, no. 118: ἐν(θ)α(δε) τὸ πρόθυρον δωμήσατο τείχος ἐντὸς ὑψηλοῦ ζαθέης Ἰσιδος ἀρχιερέως.*

⁵⁹ *P. Oxy.* II.243.15.

⁶⁰ Husson, 1983, 238.

⁶¹ *P. Oxy.* XX.2272.5-6, 10.

⁶² *P. Oxy.* II.243.15-16.

⁶³ Husson, 1983, 248-51.

⁶⁴ Hellmann, 1992, 361-4.

designates a distinctive form of tower used for certain purposes, including storage of agricultural products,⁶⁵ and habitation (cf. figures 9, 10, and 11).⁶⁶ A papyrus of AD 79 mentions 'a two-storied tower-house in which there are a *propylon*, an *exedra*, an *aithrion* and a vaulted room'.⁶⁷ Multi-storeyed tower-houses were known since the Pharaonic period.⁶⁸ Models of houses in the form of towers (figures 9-10) and excavations at Karanis (figure 11) confirm that tower-houses continued to be common in Roman Egypt.⁶⁹

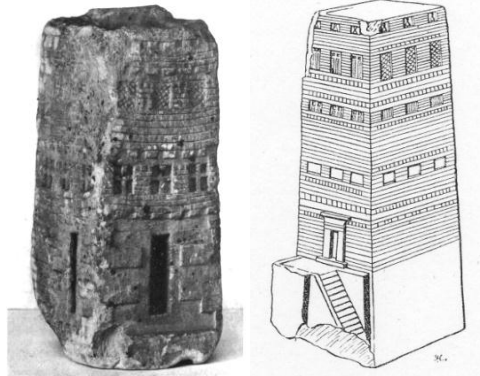


Figure 9 (left). Model of a house, Graeco-Roman period, British Museum, No. 2462.⁷⁰

Figure 10 (right). Model of a house, Graeco-Roman period, Cairo Museum.⁷¹



Figure 11. Multi-storeyed houses at Karanis.⁷²

The *oikiadipurgia* was a distinctive house-type related in some cases to families of considerable wealth.⁷³ Unfortunately, nothing is known about the physical appearance of this house-type, and little of its internal arrangement. However,

⁶⁵ *P.Mich.* V.226.20-21. Preisigke, 1919, 424-32; Nowicka, 1972, 53-62.

⁶⁶ *Hdt.* 2.95; *P.Tebt.* I.47.15-16.

⁶⁷ *P.Oxy.* II.243.15-17.

⁶⁸ Davies, 1929, 236-9.

⁶⁹ Engelbach, in *ASAE* 31, 129-31; Gazda, 1983, 19.

⁷⁰ Davies, 1929, 250, fig. 14

⁷¹ Engelbach, 1931, 129, fig. 3

⁷² Gazda, 1983, 19, fig. 30

⁷³ *P.Oxy.* XIV.1703.

on the basis of ancient Egyptian representations, which show large houses with two slanting towers attached to the frontage (figure 12),⁷⁴ Alston has suggested a reconstruction of its physical appearance.⁷⁵

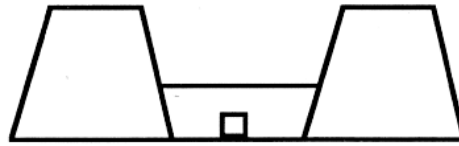


Figure 12. Reconstruction of a Pharaonic image of a large house with two slanting towers attached to the frontage.⁷⁶

The frontage of the *oikiadipurgia* was probably flanked by two towers, which were mainly used for habitation.⁷⁷ According to Alston, the construction of two huge towers was perhaps meant to create a more imposing frontage. As elsewhere in the Roman Empire, there was an architectural emphasis on the house frontage in Roman Egypt. Impressive house frontages had the potential not only to 'assert the status of the occupants of the house in the public space of the street', but also to 'demarcate the boundary between public and private'.⁷⁸ The use of the house frontage for communicating social statuses and identities is known also in the Pharaonic period, when representations of houses in tombs show that some wealthy Egyptians used to inscribe their names and titles in prominent positions on or by the main doorway of their houses.⁷⁹ A good example is the house of the chief builder Hatiay (T34.1 & 4) at el-Amarna, which is notable for its complete and brightly painted door lintel that carries his name and positions (now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo).⁸⁰ Such major architectural and externally visible features as the pylon and *dipurgia* served to identify the house in the Roman period, as had the names of neighbours in sale and lease contracts.⁸¹ A variety of other entranceways and house facades were known in Graeco-Roman Egypt; those associated with the larger houses of wealthier

⁷⁴ For illustrations of a two-towered pylon in an ancient Egyptian house, see Davies, 1929, pl. xxxii.

⁷⁵ Alston, 2001, 62.

⁷⁶ Alston, 1997, 31, fig. 2

⁷⁷ Nowicka, 1973, 175-8.

⁷⁸ Alston, 1997, 30-7.

⁷⁹ Perrot and Chipiez, 1882, 457.

⁸⁰ Frankfort and Pendlebury, 1933.

⁸¹ *P.Mich.* V.294.

families tend to take monumental forms in order to assert status. Such entranceways can be architecturally distinguished from the domestic pylon, which has other distinctive architectural features that will be discussed below.

The architectural layout of the domestic pylon

Having explored the general appearance of the domestic pylon with regards to its likely similarity to the pylons of Egyptian temples, and discussed the other forms of domestic entranceways, let us now turn to the architectural layout of the domestic pylon. The domestic pylon appears in papyri as an architectural unit.⁸² The first problem that should be raised is the location of the pylon in relation to the house. *P.Oxy.XXIII.2406* seems to provide the answer. The papyrus depicts the internal arrangement of the *aithrion*-house, which is frequently attested in urban and rural contexts (figure 13).⁸³ According to Eric Turner, the papyrus dates to the second century AD and shows the ground plan of a house. The architectural layout of the house, in Turner's view, consists of a single entrance door (on the left), giving access to three successive courtyards, rather than rooms. The first of them was called *πυλών*, the second as *ἀτρείον* and the third was left undesignated. In the second courtyard there is a door named *θύρακαταγ(αίου)* leading down to a cellar.⁸⁴ Since *πυλών* has never been attested in papyri to mean a courtyard, Turner's interpretation of the pylon as a court is untenable.⁸⁵ Herwig Maehler has therefore argued that the house consists of a tower-like gateway (pylon), giving access to a central courtyard open to the sky in the form of an *aithrion*, rather than an atrium. In the middle of the *atreion* there is a structure named *obolisk(os)* and a flight of steps leading up to the upper storeys and a door leading down to a cellar. Finally, the central courtyard leads directly to an unnamed court or yard, probably an *aule*.⁸⁶

⁸²Luckhard, 1914, 55-6; Husson, 1983, 243-6.

⁸³*P.Oxy. XXIII.2406*. This papyrus only contains a drawing of the ground plan of a house.

⁸⁴Turner, 1957, 142-5.

⁸⁵Husson, 1983, 243-6.

⁸⁶Maehler, 1983. 136. Cf. the plan of House 3 at Ismant el-Kharab, which consists of an entrance hall, which leads to two successive courts, acting respectively as an *aithrion* and an *aule* (Hope, 1988, 160-78; Gardner and Lieu, 1996, 146-69; Knudstad, and Frey, 1999, 189-214.

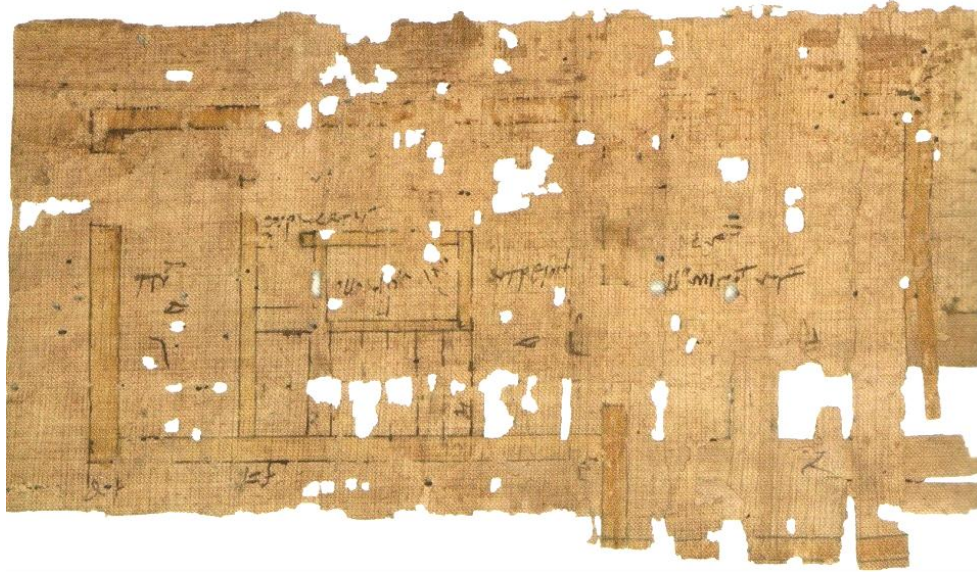


Figure 13. The ground plan of the house drawn in *P.Oxy.XXIII.2406*, the second century AD.⁸⁷

As for the size of the house, Turner noticed that the ‘measurements given on the plan, if they are measurements, cannot be reconciled with each other or interpreted in absolute terms as dimensions of the house’.⁸⁸ For example, $d = 4$ under *πυλ(ών)* could be applied to the distance between its parallel walls, $b = 2$ under *ὀβολίσκος(ος)* could be applied to the distance between the two horizontal limits, and $d = 4$ upside down under *ἀτρεῖον* could be taken to be the same unit and applied to the distance from the wall to the exit door leading to the undesignated court. However, it is not a unit that will fit the figure $eg/ = 5\frac{1}{3}$ of the horizontal measurements of the undesignated room, or the two *g*’s (one in the *πυλ(ών)* and one by the exit door from the *ἀτρεῖον*). Although the Egyptian cubit (52.5 cm) was still in use in the Roman period as a unit of measurement for Egyptian traditional buildings,⁸⁹ the figures are not meant to be measured against the Egyptian cubit, or even against the Roman cubit (44.4 cm), particularly when compared to house measurements in other papyri.⁹⁰ Despite the incompatibility of measurements and the inadequacy of the plan, which is clear from the absence of room divisions, the plan throws light on the internal organisation of domestic space in Roman Egypt. The pylon is the first architectural structure in the house. Since the word *πυλ(ών)* is never used to

⁸⁷ Parsons, 2007, 18

⁸⁸ *P.Oxy. XXIII.2406*.

⁸⁹ Arnold, 1999, 229.

⁹⁰ Cf. *P.Lond. I.50.7* where a house measures 21×13 cubits and its *aule* measures 4×13 cubits.

designate the front door of the house,⁹¹ it follows that it is written on a court-shaped space in order to show that it was not a simple doorway, but a huge tower-gateway, which had an extension in depth. The pylon itself then had an entrance-door (*thura*).⁹² This position recalls the already discussed pylon of Egyptian-style temples and the two-towered gateway of houses and palaces which appear on representations of Pharaonic tombs.⁹³ *P.Oxy.* XXIII.2406 therefore confirms that the pylon formed its facade-entrance.

References to pylons in papyri, related in particular to the rent, sale, or confiscation of domestic properties, provide various hints as to their possible appearance. The pylon could be a freestanding⁹⁴ or an attached structure (εἰς τὸν προσπαρακεί μενονπυλῶνα).⁹⁵ Like other architectural elements of the house, the pylon could be refurbished, as occurred at the house of Diotimos in third-century BC Philadelphia,⁹⁶ or repaired, if damaged.⁹⁷ Papyri also confirm that the domestic pylon could be rented,⁹⁸ confiscated,⁹⁹ or even sold, whether whole or in part.¹⁰⁰ In one papyrus only the *triclinium* chamber within the pylon was sold.¹⁰¹ It seems that there is no pattern as for the orientation of the pylon. The orientation of the pylon simply followed that of the main house, the directions of which must have been dictated by its location in relation to the street and other houses. According to surviving papyri, the pylon could be oriented east (νε[ύο]ντα εἰς ἀπηλιώτην),¹⁰² west (νεύοντος εἰς λίβα),¹⁰³ or north (νεῦον εἰς βορρᾶ).¹⁰⁴ Although there is no surviving papyrus in which the pylon is oriented towards the south, it is likely that pylons were oriented to the south as

⁹¹Husson, 1983, 243-46.

⁹²*P.Princ.* III.153.5-6.

⁹³Dombart, 1933. 87-98; Shubert, 1981, 135-64; Jaros-Deckert, 1982. 1202-5; Graefe, 1983, 55-75.

⁹⁴*P.Lond.* III.1023.19. This is inferred from the papyrus where the pylon is not attached to any other building.

⁹⁵*P.Lond.* V.1722.18-19.

⁹⁶*P.Cair.Zen.* IV.59764, verso, 27.

⁹⁷*PSI* V.546, recto, 13-14.

⁹⁸*Stud.Pal.* XX.53.19-20.

⁹⁹*BGU* VI.1222.23.

¹⁰⁰*P.Mich.* V.295.4.

¹⁰¹*P.Mich.* V.295.4.

¹⁰²*P.Lond.* III.978.8, 10, 13.

¹⁰³*SB* VI.9586.14.

¹⁰⁴*P.Lond.* V.1724.25.

well.¹⁰⁵ The domestic pylon appears in papyri as a multi-storeyed structure.¹⁰⁶ *P.Oxy.* III.495 refers to the presence of ‘an exedra and a room in the upper (sc. storey) of the pylon’.¹⁰⁷ A papyrus of AD 96 confirms that a domestic pylon consisted of at least two storeys with different rooms, some of which served as living suites.¹⁰⁸

Papyri seem to suggest that bath-houses such as the house of [---] Severus at Oxyrhynchus lacked such pylons.¹⁰⁹ The same holds true of the *oikiadipurgia* (two-towered house) and the *oikiatripurgia* (three-towered house). Papyri indicate that domestic pylons were associated with gate-houses and *aithrion* houses.¹¹⁰ The high cost of constructing multi-storeyed pylons suggests that pylon-gateways were closely associated with wealthy houses such as the family of Soeris mentioned below.¹¹¹ The occupants perhaps used the pylon to create an imposing frontage and probably to assert their social status and position within their local community.

The pylon could also be associated with communal structures.¹¹² Thus in AD 240 the estate centre of Sphex in the Fayum contained a number of workshops, rooms, and a pylon in which there is a porter’s lodge used by Saprion.¹¹³ It is unclear whether this structure had the same architectural form as the gate-houses. There is no other attestation of a pylon in a rural estate context in Roman Egypt. However, one might compare tower-houses illustrated in late Roman mosaics and the fortified farms in north Africa such as the *castellum* at Nador, which an inscription carved over the entrance identifies as the estate of M. Cincius Hilarianus. The facade of its entrance is characterised by the presence of an impressive central arched gate, which is framed by two

¹⁰⁵ *BGU* VI.1222.23.

¹⁰⁶ *BGU* VI.1222.23: πυλῶνος διστέγου.

¹⁰⁷ *P. Oxy.* III.495.8: τε ἐξέδρα καὶ κήκη τῆ ἐράνω τοῦ πυλῶνος .

¹⁰⁸ *P. Oxy.* I.104.25-26: ἐν οἴκῳ ἐνὶ ἐν ἐπιπέδῳ ἐν τῷ πυλῶνι .

¹⁰⁹ *P. Oxy.* XVII.2145.

¹¹⁰ *P. Oxy.* XXIII.2406;

¹¹¹ *P. Oxy.* I.104.25-26.

¹¹² *P. Mich.* XI.620.i.9-10.

¹¹³ *P. Mich.* XI.620.9 from Theadelphia: πυλῶν ἐν ᾧ θυροουρικὸν .

monumental rectangular towers.¹¹⁴ This simply means that the pylons of rural estates did resemble those of other houses.

The use of the domestic pylon

Having considered the architectural layout of the domestic pylon, let us now turn to its use. Like other types of the above mentioned entranceways, the domestic pylon shaped the house frontage, making it a potential arena for harassment, normally caused by settlers. Thus in 221 BC one person complained that Antigonus, a Persian of the Epigone and a settler in Berenikis Thesmophoru in the Arsinoite, 'hit him before the pylon of the house (ἐστῶτός τῶι πυλῶνι[τῆς] οἰκίας)'.¹¹⁵ Similarly, in AD 126-132 Akous son of Herakleos from Tebtunis petitions the *strategos* and complains about a gang of intruders, who 'made a bold attack upon my house in the village ... in the gateway (ἐπῆλθον ἀυθάδως ἦν ἐχω ἐν τῇ κόμῃ οἰκίαν[...]φασαριων ἐν τῷ πυλῶνι)'.¹¹⁶

Papyri indicate that the ground floor of the pylon contained a number of rooms, some of which served as living-suites for the house owners.¹¹⁷ *P.Oxy.* I.104, written in AD 96, is a will of Soeris in which she bequeaths her house to her son, Areotes. Her husband has the right to live in it, with a yearly payment of forty-eight drachmas until the husband has received three hundred drachmas, which is the amount she had borrowed from him. If the father dies, the son has to pay the sum to his sister, Tnepheros. Soeris allocated 'one room on the ground floor in the pylon' as the dwelling-place of her daughter, Tnepheros, if she becomes separated from her husband.¹¹⁸

Storehouses were also located in the ground floor of the pylon (ἐπὶ τοῦ ταμείου ἐπιπέδου ἐντὸς τοῦ πυλῶνος ἐστὶν),¹¹⁹ in which were stored various items and supplies, including wine jars.¹²⁰ Although storehouses are not confirmed on the ground floor of the pylon of the house of Soeris, there is no reason for assuming

¹¹⁴Anselmino et al., 1989, 46-52, fig. 13.

¹¹⁵*P. Enteux* 74.3-4.

¹¹⁶*P. Tebt.* II.331.7-9.

¹¹⁷*P. Oxy.* I.104.25-26.

¹¹⁸*P. Oxy.* I.104.25-6: ἐν οἴκῳ ἐνὶ ἐν ἐπιπέδῳ ἐν τῷ πυλῶνι . See also Lindsay, 1963, 206.

¹¹⁹*PSI* VIII.913.3-5.

¹²⁰*P. Princ.* III.153.5-6.

that storehouses were absent from the pylons that had dwelling areas on the ground floors. Presumably there were different rooms and spaces located on the ground floor of pylons, as was the case on the upper floors, and some of these could be used as storehouses or living suites, or perhaps for both ends. There was a tax levied on the pylon in the Ptolemaic period, perhaps because of its possible commercial uses. Thus in a papyrus of 239 BC Sokrates acknowledged that Therous daughter of Nektathumis, an Arsinoite, with her guardian Herakleides son of Apollonios, ‘has paid to the Crown at the Bank of Python at Krokodilonpolis the tax on a house and a pylon and a bath-room’.¹²¹ Furthermore, the domestic pylon mentioned in a papyrus of AD 189-190 from Philadelphia had a ‘vaulted chamber’ (καμάρα), which was possibly used for storage,¹²² as were the καμάραι located ἐν τῷ καταγαίῳ of the main house.¹²³

Being located at the house frontage, certain rooms within the pylon were appropriate spaces for hosting social events and thus for communicating the family’s social status through the furnishings of its rooms. A papyrus of AD 333 from Hermopolis Magna confirms an *andron* in the first floor of the pylon.¹²⁴ As late as AD 647 a *symposion* is located in an upper storey of a domestic pylon of a house located in Oxyrhynchus.¹²⁵ Similarly, at Tebtunis in the first century AD, Thasos, daughter of Konnos, sold to Paches, son of Peteeus, ‘a dining room with three couches (sc. located) in the pylon, in which there are a storehouse and a silo (τρίκλινον ἐπι τοῦ πυρῶνος, ἐν ᾧ ταμίονκαὶ σιρὸς)’.¹²⁶ Given the common l-r shift in Greek papyri uncovered from Egypt, the meaning of the word πυρῶν should not be puzzling.¹²⁷ It is almost certain that πυρῶν occurs in Egyptian domestic contexts to designate the πυλών.¹²⁸ In contrast with Roman houses elsewhere, as at Pompeii and Ephesus, where *triclinia* were located deep within

¹²¹ *P. Tebt.* III.1.814.30-5.

¹²² *BGU VII.* 1575.9.

¹²³ *P. Lond.* III.978.8, 10, 12, 13-14. This house has four cellars in which there are vaulted chambers.

¹²⁴ *P. Lond.* III.978.13.

¹²⁵ *SB VI.* 8988.57-8: συμποσίου ἐπάνωτῆς πυλώνος τῆς αὐτῆς οἰκίας .

¹²⁶ *P. Mich.* V.295.4.

¹²⁷ The word πυρῶν also occurs in a second-century BC inscription from Delos (*Inscr. Délos* 444 *B* 107: καὶ πυρῶνα; παρ' Ἀγάθωνος).

¹²⁸ The word is absent from the monographs of Husson and Hellmann.

the house,¹²⁹ in Roman Egypt *triclinia* were normally located near the house frontage, although they could also be located in courts.¹³⁰ The construction of *triclinia* in houses in Egypt might have been a Graeco-Roman influence; however, banquets in domestic space are attested since the Pharaonic period. Simon Ellis stressed the capacity of western Roman *triclinia*, which were usually fitted out with fine mosaic floors and wall-paintings, to articulate social relations and communicate the social status of the owner.¹³¹ In its use as a space for dining, the domestic pylon therefore provided an arena for ritual activities, which reinforced the social and cultural identity of the participants.

Symposia are also associated with the upper storey of the pylon, particularly in the Byzantine period.¹³² A papyrus of AD 331 from Hermopolis locates a small chamber (μικρὰν κέλλαν), an oven ([κά]μινον), and an *andron* (ἀνδρῶνα; a male dining area) in the first floor of the pylon (ἐπὶ τῆς πωρ τῆς στέγης ἐπάνω τοῦ πυλῶνος).¹³³ The *andron* refers to men's apartment in a house. It also designates a banqueting hall, where men meet for feasting or the guests of the master of the house were received.¹³⁴ It is unclear whether men and women dined together in Roman Egypt. Dinner invitations were normally held by men;¹³⁵ however, some invitations were issued by women.¹³⁶ The existence of an *andron*, which is infrequently mentioned in late papyri, is insufficient in itself to suggest that the internal arrangement of houses or pylons reflected any gender differentiation.¹³⁷ The presence of an *andron* on the second floor of a pylon also does not indicate that women dined separately.¹³⁸ In Greek houses like those at Olynthos, dinner parties were presumably held in the *andron* and were probably limited to males.¹³⁹ The *andron* was sometimes so separated

¹²⁹Wallace-Hadrill, 1988, 43-97.

¹³⁰Husson, 1983, 279-81.

¹³¹Ellis, 1991, 117-134; Ellis 1997, 41-51.

¹³²*P.Lond.* V.1724.24-26.AD 578-582; *SB* VI.8988.57-58 (AD 647).

¹³³*P.Lond.* III.978.8, 10, 13.

¹³⁴For papyrological attestations of the ἀνδρῶν, see Husson, 1983, 37-40.

¹³⁵*P.Oxy.* XIV.1755.

¹³⁶*P.Oxy.* XII.1579; *P.Coll. Youtie* I.52 (the second or third century AD).

¹³⁷On attestations of the ἀνδρῶν in papyri: Husson, 1983, 37-40.

¹³⁸*P.Flor.* III.285.12: ἐν τῇ δευτέρῃ στέγῃ.

¹³⁹Robinson and Graham, 1938, 75-80.

that it could be entered without approaching the main house (*oikos*).¹⁴⁰ In Roman society, women participated in private dinner parties, and this practice is taken for granted as a distinctive feature of Roman social life.¹⁴¹ Dining rooms were a major feature of Roman houses, and were an important space for the display of wealth and luxury.¹⁴² In addition to public structures and temples,¹⁴³ the domestic pylons in Graeco-Roman Egypt provided dining facilities for a variety of important social occasions, including the birthday of a son.¹⁴⁴ Given the location of the pylon at the house frontage, the positioning of the *triclinium*, *symposion* and *andron* within it may also indicate that the residents wanted to limit access and maintain the privacy of the internal areas of the house.

The upper floors of the pylon would have other kinds of rooms, which served numerous functions. A papyrus of AD 181/4 locates ‘an exedra and a chamber in the upper (sc. storey) of the pylon (ἐν τε ἐξεδρα καὶ κέλλη τῆ ἐπάνωτοῦ πυλῶνος),¹⁴⁵ which might have been used as parlours or saloons as is the *exedra* attested in a private house in Roman Oxyrhynchus.¹⁴⁶ The reference to a silo (a place for storing grain) in the pylon sold by Thasos, daughter of Konnos, to Paches, son of Peteus, at Tebtunis, suggests that it was located in the upper floor, because an oven has been confirmed in the upper storey of the pylon elsewhere.¹⁴⁷ While the ground floor of the pylon contained living suites for house owners, a small bedroom is also confirmed in the second floor of a pylon (μικροῦ κοιτῶνος ... ἐν τῆ δευτέρᾳ σ[τέγ]ῃ ἐπάνωτοῦ πυλῶνος).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁰Nevett, L. 1994,98-112; Nevett 1995. For the architecture of Greek houses in general see Nevett, 2005.

¹⁴¹Vitr. *De arch.* 6.4.

¹⁴²Clarke,1991.

¹⁴³E.g. the first birthday of a daughter in the Serapeion at Oxyrhynchus (*P.Oxy.*XXXVI.2791); a dinner invitation issued by the exegetes ‘in the temple of Demeter’ (*P.Oxy.*XII.1485); a feast ‘in the Thoereion’ in relation to a coming-of-age ceremony (*P.Oxy.* I.110; *P.Oxy.*XII.1484; *P.Oxy.*XXXI.2592; *P.Oxy.*XXXVI.2791; *P.Oxy.*LII.3693; *PSI* XV.1543; *SB* XVIII.13875); a dinner party in the birth house (*P.Köln* I.57.3; *P.Oxy.*VI.927; *P.Oxy.*XII.1484); and a banquet ‘in the gymnasium’ in relation to the crowning of a son (as a magistrate?) (*P.Oxy.* XVII.2147).

¹⁴⁴*P.Oxy.* IX.1214 (the fifth century AD).

¹⁴⁵*P.Oxy.* III.495.8-10.

¹⁴⁶*P.Oxy.* VI.912.12-13. Cf. *P.Oxy.* VIII.1128.15.

¹⁴⁷*P.Lond.* III.978.8, 10, 13.

¹⁴⁸*SB* VI.9586.14.

Conclusion

The domestic pylon of the Pharaonic and post-Pharaonic periods appears to have been influenced by the pylon of traditional Egyptian temples in its physical appearance. The domestic and religious pylons were huge structures, which contained multiple storeys and rooms that were approached by an internal stairway. Both structures served as the facade of, and entrance to, the construction in which they are embedded. Yet the function of each architectural form depended on the context in which it was used. The domestic pylon appears in papyri as a huge, self-contained structure, forming the centrepiece of the house frontage. It consisted of multiple storeys and contained numerous rooms. The rooms in the upper storeys served as bedrooms, magazines, storerooms, silos, *andreia*, *triclinia*, and *symposia*, whereas those in the ground floor were used as dwelling-places for the house occupants, but also for storage. Therefore, the rooms in the ground floor mainly served living and storage purposes, while those located in the upper storeys were allocated for sleeping, storage, and different social occasions. The rooms in the upper floor of the pylon were reached by an internal stairway, which connected all the storeys of the structure. The pylon was used as an indicator of social status as it was associated with houses of wealthy families.

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