

AR-502

The origins of domestic space

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Cursus	Sem.	Type
Architecture	MA1, MA3	Obl.

Contact language	English
Credits	3
Session	Winter
Semester	Fall
Exam	Oral
Workload	90h
Weeks	12
Hours	2 weekly
Lecture	2 weekly
Number of positions	

Summary

The course is part of a three-year trajectory dedicated to a comprehensive history of domestic space and its relationship with urban form. This year the course will be devoted to the origins of domestic space, from hunter-gatherer forms of life to the rise of private property.

Content

Besides being a commonplace of our everyday existence, domestic space is a complex and often contradictory sphere in which care and oppression are constantly intertwined. While the term 'domestic' evokes a sense of familiarity and intimacy, its invention and development have often had more to do with government and power over subjects. The word itself, *domestic*, comes from *domus* whose etymology is linked to the Greek root *demi*, to build; yet, its many declensions gave origin to words such as dominion, domination, etc. We can say that domestic space implies a vector of command over its subjects. The question is why domestic space has become such a hegemonic form of life for the human species. The answer to this question is neither simple nor obvious and we should resist any fatalistic understanding of domesticity as an inevitable condition of humanity. By studying the beginnings of domestic space we can see how the process of sedentarization of the human species was far from being linear and instead consisted of a complex back-and-forth that involved a great range of place-making strategies. This little studied aspect of domesticity - especially in architectural education - casts a very important light on the history of domestic space and forces us to question many assumptions about the most ubiquitous kind of architecture, the house. Indeed, the key goal of this course is not erudition in ancient history - although this is an important objective - but to challenge our presumed knowledge about things we take for granted such as family relationships, the individuation of gender roles, and the hierarchical organization of societies in classes. Above all we'll go beyond dichotomies such as savage vs. civilized, or primitive vs. advanced, that to this day still plague architects' understanding of architecture and social formations. The course will discuss examples from different parts of the world and will focus especially on the relationship between architecture, class, and gender relationships. A very important focus of the lectures will be what the archaeologist Richard Bradley has called the 'ritualization of life', a reading that expands the concept of ritual far beyond our current understanding that limits the idea of ritual to the sphere of the sacred. On the contrary, ritualistic behaviour was one of the most important aspects of human existence and perhaps the fundamental link between the human being and architectural form. Another important aspect that will be discussed is the politics of domestic space and how its evolution is evidence of power relationships within ancient social groups. For this reason, special attention will be given to the relationship between the house, its ecological context, the formation of settlements and in some case the development of cities.

Course Sessions

Session 1

September, Thursday 22nd

- What is home, what is house: architecture and human domestication
- Before domestic? Hunter/gatherers beyond the myth

Session 2

October, Thursday 6th

- Questioning the origins of domestication: the complex transition from foraging to farming

- Early examples of domestic architecture: from circle to rectangle

Session 3

October, Thursday 20th

- The ritualization of life: from house to temple
- Tracing the origins of domestication in ancient China

Session 4

November, Thursday 3rd

- The organization of the domestic household from village to city in the Near East and Eurasia
- The organization of the domestic household in Egypt and pre-Columbian Americas

Session 5

November, Thursday 17th

- *Polis* and *Oikos* in Ancient Greek Literature
- From Megaron to Oikos: the architecture of domestic space in Ancient Greece

Session 6

December, Thursday 1st

- Domesticity in Ancient Rome
- A Negative Utopia: the emergence of the Villa and the gentrification of the Countryside

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student must be able to:

- Interpret in a critical manner the concepts developed during the course
- Argue the relations between domestic space, gender and class relationships
- Develop a reflection on the relationship between historical conditions and architecture

Expected student activities

Personal work during the semester, reading of texts, personal study of a theme to be concretized into a paper of approximately 3.000 words.

Assessment methods

The main goal of the course is to encourage students to read as much as they can. Therefore, the main factor in the evaluation will be the student's capacity to assemble and read a relevant body of texts.

40% **Specificity** of the theme and **reading** relevant bibliography

40% Writing of the paper, especially referencing and footnoting

20% Clear oral exposition

Supervision

Office hours	No
Assistants	Yes
Others	Korbi, Marson, Assistant scientifique

Resources

Moodle Link

- <https://go.epfl.ch/AR-502>