

## “QUO VADIS.”

A NARRATIVE OF THE TIME OF NERO.

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### CHAPTER I.

PETRONIUS woke only about midday, and as usual greatly wearied. The evening before he had been at one of Nero's feasts, which was prolonged till late at night. For some time his health had been failing. He said himself that he woke up benumbed, as it were, and without power of collecting his thoughts. But the morning bath and careful kneading of the body by trained slaves hastened gradually the course of his slothful blood, roused him, quickened him, restored his strength, so that he issued from the *elæotherium*, that is, the last division of the bath, as if he had risen from the dead, with eyes gleaming from wit and gladness, rejuvenated, filled with life, exquisite, so unapproachable that Otho himself could not compare with him, and was really that which he had been called, — *arbiter elegantiarum*.

He visited the public baths rarely, only when some rhetor happened there who roused admiration and who was spoken of in the city, or when in the *ephebias* there were combats of exceptional interest. Moreover, he had in his own “*insula*” private baths which Celer, the famous contemporary of Severus, had extended for him, reconstructed and arranged with such uncommon taste that Nero himself acknowledged their excellence over those of the Emperor, though the imperial baths were more extensive and finished with incomparably greater luxury.

After that feast, at which he was bored by the jesting of Vatinius with Nero, Lucan, and Seneca, he took part in a diatribe as to whether woman has a soul. Rising late, he

used, as was his custom, the baths. Two enormous balneatores laid him on a cypress table covered with snow-white Egyptian byssus, and with hands dipped in perfumed olive oil began to rub his shapely body; and he waited with closed eyes till the heat of the laconicum and the heat of their hands passed through him and expelled weariness.

But after a certain time he spoke, and opened his eyes; he inquired about the weather, and then about gems which the jeweller Idomeus had promised to send him for examination that day. It appeared that the weather was beautiful, with a light breeze from the Alban hills, and that the gems had not been brought. Petronius closed his eyes again, and had given command to bear him to the tepidarium, when from behind the curtain the nomenclator looked in, announcing that young Marcus Vinicius, recently returned from Asia Minor, had come to visit him.

Petronius ordered to admit the guest to the tepidarium, to which he was borne himself. Vinicius was the son of his oldest sister, who years before had married Marcus Vinicius, a man of consular dignity from the time of Tiberius. The young man was serving then under Corbulo against the Parthians, and at the close of the war had returned to the city. Petronius had for him a certain weakness bordering on attachment, for Marcus was beautiful and athletic, a young man who knew how to preserve a certain æsthetic measure in his profligacy; this, Petronius prized above everything.

"A greeting to Petronius," said the young man, entering the tepidarium with a springy step. "May all the gods grant thee success, but especially Asklepios and Kypris, for under their double protection nothing evil can meet one."

"I greet thee in Rome, and may thy rest be sweet after war," replied Petronius, extending his hand from between the folds of soft karbas stuff in which he was wrapped. "What's to be heard in Armenia; or since thou wert in Asia, didst thou not stumble into Bithynia?"

Petronius on a time had been proconsul in Bithynia, and, what is more, he had governed with energy and justice. This was a marvellous contrast in the character of a man noted for effeminacy and love of luxury; hence he was fond of mentioning those times, as they were a proof of what he had been, and of what he might have become had it pleased him.

"I happened to visit Heraklea," answered Vinicius.

"Corbulo sent me there with an order to assemble reinforcements."

"Ah, Heraklea! I knew at Heraklea a certain maiden from Colchis, for whom I would have given all the divorced women of this city, not excluding Poppæa. But these are old stories. Tell me now, rather, what is to be heard from the Parthian boundary. It is true that they weary me every Vologeses of them, and Tiridates and Tigranes, — those barbarians who, as young Arulenus insists, walk on all fours at home, and pretend to be human only when in our presence. But now people in Rome speak much of them, if only for the reason that it is dangerous to speak of aught else."

"The war is going badly, and but for Corbulo might be turned to defeat."

"Corbulo! by Bacchus! a real god of war, a genuine Mars, a great leader, at the same time quick-tempered, honest, and dull. I love him, even for this, — that Nero is afraid of him."

"Corbulo is not a dull man."

"Perhaps thou art right, but for that matter it is all one. Dulness, as Pyrrho says, is in no way worse than wisdom, and differs from it in nothing."

Vinicius began to talk of the war; but when Petronius closed his eyes again, the young man, seeing his uncle's tired and somewhat emaciated face, changed the conversation, and inquired with a certain interest about his health.

Petronius opened his eyes again.

Health! — No. He did not feel well. He had not gone so far yet, it is true, as young Sissena, who had lost sensation to such a degree that when he was brought to the bath in the morning he inquired, "Am I sitting?" But he was not well. Vinicius had just committed him to the care of Asklepios and Kypris. But he, Petronius, did not believe in Asklepios. It was not known even whose son that Asklepios was, the son of Arsinoe or Koronis; and if the mother was doubtful, what was to be said of the father? Who, in that time, could be sure who his own father was?

Hereupon Petronius began to laugh; then he continued, —

"Two years ago, it is true, I sent to Epidaurus three dozen live blackbirds and a goblet of gold; but dost thou know why? I said to myself, 'Whether this helps or not, it will do me no harm.' Though people make offerings to the gods yet, I believe that all think as I do, — all, with the

exception, perhaps, of muledrivers hired at the Porta Capena by travellers. Besides Asklepios, I have had dealings with sons of Asklepios. When I was troubled a little last year in the bladder, they performed an incubation for me. I saw that they were tricksters, but I said to myself: 'What harm! The world stands on deceit, and life is an illusion. The soul is an illusion too. But one must have reason enough to distinguish pleasant from painful illusions.' I shall give command to burn in my hypocaustum, cedar-wood sprinkled with ambergris, for during life I prefer perfumes to stench. As to Kypris, to whom thou hast also confided me, I have known her guardianship to the extent that I have twinges in my right foot. But as to the rest she is a good goddess! I suppose that thou wilt bear sooner or later white doves to her altar."

"True," answered Vinicius. "The arrows of the Parthians have not reached my body, but a dart of Amor has struck me — unexpectedly, a few stadia from a gate of this city."

"By the white knees of the Graces! thou wilt tell me of this at a leisure hour."

"I have come purposely to get thy advice," answered Marcus.

But at that moment the epilatores came, and occupied themselves with Petronius. Marcus, throwing aside his tunic, entered a bath of tepid water, for Petronius invited him to a plunge bath.

"Ah, I have not even asked whether thy feeling is reciprocated," said Petronius, looking at the youthful body of Marcus, which was as if cut out of marble. "Had Lysippos seen thee, thou wouldst be ornamenting now the gate leading to the Palatine, as a statue of Hercules in youth."

The young man smiled with satisfaction, and began to sink in the bath, splashing warm water abundantly on the mosaic which represented Hera at the moment when she was imploring Sleep to lull Zeus to rest. Petronius looked at him with the satisfied eye of an artist.

When Vinicius had finished and yielded himself in turn to the epilatores, a lector came in with a bronze tube at his breast and rolls of paper in the tube.

"Dost wish to listen?" asked Petronius.

"If it is thy creation, gladly!" answered the young tribune; "if not, I prefer conversation. Poets seize people at present on every street corner."

"Of course they do. Thou wilt not pass any basilica,

bath, library, or book-shop without seeing a poet gesticulating like a monkey. Agrippa, on coming here from the East, mistook them for madmen. And it is just such a time now. Cæsar writes verses; hence all follow in his steps. Only it is not permitted to write better verses than Cæsar, and for that reason I fear a little for Lucan. But I write prose, with which, however, I do not honor myself or others. What the lector has to read are codicilli of that poor Fabricius Veiento."

"Why 'poor'?"

"Because it has been communicated to him that he must dwell in Odyssea and not return to his domestic hearth till he receives a new command. That Odyssey will be easier for him than for Ulysses, since his wife is no Penelope. I need not tell thee, for that matter, that he acted stupidly. But here no one takes things otherwise than superficially. His is rather a wretched and dull little book, which people have begun to read passionately only when the author is banished. Now one hears on every side, 'Scandala! scandala!' and it may be that Veiento invented some things; but I, who know the city, know our patres and our women, assure thee that it is all paler than reality. Meanwhile every man is searching in the book, — for himself with alarm, for his acquaintances with delight. At the book-shop of Avirnus a hundred copyists are writing at dictation, and its success is assured."

"Are not thy affairs in it?"

"They are; but the author is mistaken, for I am at once worse and less flat than he represents me. Seest thou we have lost long since the feeling of what is worthy or unworthy, — and to me even it seems that in real truth there is no difference between them, though Seneca, Musonius, and Trasca pretend that they see it. To me it is all one! By Hercules, I say what I think! I have preserved loftiness, however, because I know what is deformed and what is beautiful; but our poet, Bronzebeard, for example, the charioteer, the singer, the actor, does not understand this."

"I am sorry, however, for Fabricius! He is a good companion."

"Vanity ruined the man. Every one suspected him, no one knew certainly; but he could not contain himself, and told the secret on all sides in confidence. Hast heard the history of Rufinus?"

"No."

"Then come to the frigidarium to cool; there I will tell thee."

They passed to the frigidarium, in the middle of which played a fountain of bright rose-color, emitting the odor of violets. There they sat in niches which were covered with velvet, and began to cool themselves. Silence reigned for a time. Vinicius looked awhile thoughtfully at a bronze faun which, bending over the arm of a nymph, was seeking her lips eagerly with his lips.

"He is right," said the young man. "That is what is best in life."

"More or less! But besides this thou lovest war, for which I have no liking, since under tents one's finger-nails break and cease to be rosy. For that matter, every man has his preferences. Bronzebeard loves song, especially his own; and old Scaurus his Corinthian vase, which stands near his bed at night, and which he kisses when he cannot sleep. He has kissed the edge off already. Tell me, dost thou not write verses?"

"No; I have never composed a single hexameter."

"And dost thou not play on the lute and sing?"

"No."

"And dost thou drive a chariot?"

"I tried once in Antioch, but unsuccessfully."

"Then I am at rest concerning thee. And to what party in the hippodrome dost thou belong?"

"To the Greens."

"Now I am perfectly at rest, especially since thou hast a large property indeed, though thou art not so rich as Pallas or Seneca. For seest thou, with us at present it is well to write verses, to sing to a lute, to declaim, and to compete in the Circus; but better, and especially safer, not to write verses, not to play, not to sing, and not to compete in the Circus. Best of all, is it to know how to admire when Bronzebeard admires. Thou art a comely young man; hence Poppæa may fall in love with thee. This is thy only peril. But no, she is too experienced; she cares for something else. She has had enough of love with her two husbands; with the third she has other views. Dost thou know that that stupid Otho loves her yet to distraction? He walks on the cliffs of Spain, and sighs; he has so lost his former habits, and so ceased to care for his person, that three hours each day suffice him to dress his hair. Who could have expected this of Otho?"

"I understand him," answered Vinicius; "but in his place I should have done something else."

"What, namely?"

"I should have enrolled faithful legions of mountaineers of that country. They are good soldiers, — those Iberians."

"Vinicius! Vinicius! I almost wish to tell thee that thou wouldst not have been capable of that. And knowest why? Such things are done, but they are not mentioned even conditionally. As to me, in his place, I should have laughed at Poppæa, laughed at Bronzebeard, and formed for myself legions, not of Iberian men, however, but Iberian women. And what is more, I should have written epigrams which I should not have read to any one, — not like that poor Rufinus."

"Thou wert to tell me his history."

"I will tell it in the unctorium."

But in the unctorium the attention of Vinicius was turned to other objects; namely, to wonderful slave women who were waiting for the bathers. Two of them, Africans, resembling noble statues of ebony, began to anoint their bodies with delicate perfumes from Arabia; others, Phrygians, skilled in hairdressing, held in their hands, which were bending and flexible as serpents, combs and mirrors of polished steel; two Grecian maidens from Kos, who were simply like deities, waited as vestiplicæ, till the moment should come to put statuesque folds in the togas of the lords.

"By the cloud-scattering Zeus!" said Marcus Vinicius, "what a choice thou hast!"

"I prefer choice to numbers," answered Petronius. "My whole 'familia'<sup>1</sup> in Rome does not exceed four hundred, and I judge that for personal attendance only upstarts need a greater number of people."

"More beautiful bodies even Bronzebeard does not possess," said Vinicius, distending his nostrils.

"Thou art my relative," answered Petronius, with a certain friendly indifference, "and I am neither so misanthropic as Barsus nor such a pedant as Aulus Plautius."

When Vinicius heard this last name, he forgot the maidens from Cos for a moment, and, raising his head vivaciously, inquired, —

"Whence did Aulus Plautius come to thy mind? Dost thou know that after I had disjointed my arm outside the

<sup>1</sup> Household servants.

city, I passed a number of days in his house? It happened that Plautius came up at the moment when the accident happened, and, seeing that I was suffering greatly, he took me to his house; there a slave of his, the physician Merion, restored me to health. I wished to speak with thee touching this very matter."

"Why? Is it because thou hast fallen in love with Pomponia perchance? In that case I pity thee; she is not young, and she is virtuous! I cannot imagine a worse combination. Br!"

"Not with Pomponia — eheu!" answered Vinicius.

"With whom, then?"

"If I knew myself with whom? But I do not know to a certainty her name even, — Lygia or Callina? They call her Lygia in the house, for she comes of the Lygian nation; but she has her own barbarian name, Callina. It is a wonderful house, — that of those Plautiuses. There are many people in it; but it is quiet there as in the groves of Subiacum. For a number of days I did not know that a divinity dwelt in the house. Once about daybreak I saw her bathing in the garden fountain; and I swear to thee by that foam from which Aphrodite rose, that the rays of the dawn passed right through her body. I thought that when the sun rose she would vanish before me in the light, as the twilight of morning does. Since then, I have seen her twice; and since then, too, I know not what rest is, I know not what other desires are, I have no wish to know what the city can give me. I want neither women, nor gold, nor Corinthian bronze, nor amber, nor pearls, nor wine, nor feasts; I want only Lygia. I am yearning for her, in sincerity I tell thee, Petronius, as that Dream who is imaged on the Mosaic of thy tepidarium yearned for Paisythea, — whole days and nights do I yearn."

"If she is a slave, then purchase her."

"She is not a slave."

"What is she? A freed woman of Plautius?"

"Never having been a slave, she could not be a freed woman."

"Who is she?"

"I know not, — a king's daughter, or something of that sort."

"Thou dost rouse my curiosity, Vinicius."

"But if thou wish to listen, I will satisfy thy curiosity straightway. Her story is not a long one. Thou art ac-

quainted, perhaps personally, with Vannius, king of the Suevi, who, expelled from his country, spent a long time here in Rome, and became even famous for his skilful play with dice, and his good driving of chariots. Drusus put him on the throne again. Vannius, who was really a strong man, ruled well at first, and warred with success; afterward, however, he began to skin not only his neighbors, but his own Suevi, too much. Thereupon Vangio and Sido, two sister's sons of his, and the sons of Vibilius, king of the Hermunduri, determined to force him to Rome again — to try his luck there at dice."

"I remember; that is of recent Claudian times."

"Yes! War broke out. Vannius summoned to his aid the Yazygi; his dear nephews called in the Lygians, who, hearing of the riches of Vannius, and enticed by the hope of booty, came in such numbers that Cæsar himself, Claudius, began to fear for the safety of the boundary. Claudius did not wish to interfere in a war among barbarians, but he wrote to Atelius Hister, who commanded the legions of the Danube, to turn a watchful eye on the course of the war, and not permit them to disturb our peace. Hister required, then, of the Lygians a promise not to cross the boundary; to this they not only agreed, but gave hostages, among whom were the wife and daughter of their leader. It is known to thee that barbarians take their wives and children to war with them. My Lygia is the daughter of that leader."

"Whence dost thou know all this?"

"Aulus Plautius told it himself. The Lygians did not cross the boundary, indeed; but barbarians come and go like a tempest. So did the Lygians vanish with their wild-ox horns on their heads. They killed Vannius's Suevi and Yazygi; but their own king fell. They disappeared with their booty then, and the hostages remained in Hister's hands. The mother died soon after, and Hister, not knowing what to do with the daughter, sent her to Pomponius, the governor of all Germany. He, at the close of the war with the Catti, returned to Rome, where Claudius, as is known to thee, permitted him to have a triumph. The maiden on that occasion walked after the car of the conqueror; but, at the end of the solemnity, — since hostages cannot be considered captives, and since Pomponius did not know what to do with her definitely — he gave her to his sister Pomponia Græcina, the wife of Plautius. In that house where all — beginning with the masters and ending with the poultry in

the hen-house — are virtuous, that maiden grew up as virtuous, alas! as Græcina herself, and so beautiful that even Poppæa, if near her, would seem like an autumn fig near an apple of the Hesperides.”

“And what?”

“And I repeat to thee that from the moment when I saw how the sun-rays at that fountain passed through her body, I fell in love to distraction.”

“She is as transparent as a lamprey eel, then, or a youthful sardine?”

“Jest not, Petronius; but if the freedom with which I speak of my desire misleads thee, know this, — that bright garments frequently cover deep wounds. I must tell thee, too, that, while returning from Asia, I slept one night in the temple of Mopsus to have a prophetic dream. Well, Mopsus appeared in a dream to me, and declared that, through love, a great change in my life would take place.”

“Pliny declares, as I hear, that he does not believe in the gods, but he believes in dreams; and perhaps he is right. My jests do not prevent me from thinking at times that in truth there is only one deity, eternal, creative, all-powerful, Venus Genetrix. She brings souls together; she unites bodies and things. Eros called the world out of chaos. Whether he did well is another question; but, since he did so, we should recognize his might, though we are free not to bless it.”

“Alas! Petronius, it is easier to find philosophy in the world than wise counsel.”

“Tell me, what is thy wish specially?”

“I wish to have Lygia. I wish that these arms of mine, which now embrace only air, might embrace Lygia and press her to my bosom. I wish to breathe with her breath. Were she a slave, I would give Aulus for her one hundred maidens with feet whitened with lime as a sign that they were exhibited on sale for the first time. I wish to have her in my house till my head is as white as the top of Soracte in winter.”

“She is not a slave, but she belongs to the ‘family’ of Plautius; and since she is a deserted maiden, she may be considered an ‘alumna.’ Plautius might yield her to thee if he wished.”

“Then it seems that thou knowest not Pomponia Græcina. Both have become as much attached to her as if she were their own daughter.”

“Pomponia I know, — a real cypress. If she were not the wife of Aulus, she might be engaged as a mourner. Since the death of Julius she has not thrown aside dark robes; and in general she looks as if, while still alive, she were walking on the asphodel meadow. She is, moreover, a ‘one man woman;’ hence, among our ladies of four and five divorces, she is straightway a phoenix. But! hast thou heard that in Upper Egypt the phoenix has just been hatched out, as ’tis said? — an event which happens not oftener than once in five centuries.”

“Petronius! Petronius! Let us talk of the phoenix some other time.”

“What shall I tell thee, my Marcus? I know Aulus Plautius, who, though he blames my mode of life, has for me a certain weakness, and even respects me, perhaps, more than others, for he knows that I have never been an informer like Domitius Afer, Tigellinus, and a whole rabble of Ahenobarbus’s intimates.<sup>1</sup> Without pretending to be a stoic, I have been offended more than once at acts of Nero, which Seneca and Burrus looked at through their fingers. If it is thy thought that I might do something for thee with Aulus, I am at thy command.”

“I judge that thou hast the power. Thou hast influence over him; and, besides, thy mind possesses inexhaustible resources. If thou wert to survey the position and speak with Plautius.”

“Thou hast too great an idea of my influence and wit; but if that is the only question, I will talk with Plautius as soon as they return to the city.”

“They returned two days since.”

“In that case let us go to the triclinium, where a meal is now ready, and when we have refreshed ourselves, let us give command to bear us to Plautius.”

“Thou hast ever been kind to me,” answered Vinicius, with vivacity; “but now I shall give command to rear thy statue among my lares, — just such a beauty as this one, — and I will place offerings before it.”

Then he turned toward the statues which ornamented one entire wall of the perfumed chamber, and pointing to the one which represented Petronius as Hermes with a staff in his hand, he added, —

“By the light of Helios! if the ‘godlike’ Alexander resembled thee, I do not wonder at Helen.”

<sup>1</sup> Nero’s name was originally L. Domitius Ahenobarbus.

And in that exclamation there was as much sincerity as flattery; for Petronius, though older and less athletic, was more beautiful than even Vinicius. The women of Rome admired not only his pliant mind and his taste, which gained for him the title *Arbiter elegantiæ*, but also his body. This admiration was evident even on the faces of those maidens from Cos who were arranging the folds of his toga; and one of whom, whose name was Eunice, loving him in secret, looked him in the eyes with submission and rapture. But he did not even notice this; and, smiling at Vinicius, he quoted in answer an expression of Seneca about woman, — *Animal impudens*, etc. And then, placing an arm on the shoulders of his nephew, he conducted him to the triclinium.

In the unctorium the two Grecian maidens, the Phrygians, and the two Ethiopians began to put away the vessels with perfumes. But at that moment, and beyond the curtain of the frigidarium, appeared the heads of the balneatores, and a low "Psst!" was heard. At that call one of the Grecians, the Phrygians, and the Ethiopians sprang up quickly, and vanished in a twinkle behind the curtain. In the baths began a moment of license which the inspector did not prevent, for he took frequent part in such frolics himself. Petronius suspected that they took place; but, as a prudent man, and one who did not like to punish, he looked at them through his fingers.

In the unctorium only Eunice remained. She listened for a short time to the voices and laughter which retreated in the direction of the laconicum. At last she took the stool inlaid with amber and ivory, on which Petronius had been sitting a short time before, and put it carefully at his statue. The unctorium was full of sunlight and the hues which came from the many-colored marbles with which the wall was faced. Eunice stood on the stool, and, finding herself at the level of the statue, cast her arms suddenly around its neck; then, throwing back her golden hair, and pressing her rosy body to the white marble, she pressed her lips with ecstasy to the cold lips of Petronius.

PLAN OF A ROMAN HOUSE OF THE CHARACTER OF  
THAT OF PETRONIUS.

PUBLIC PART OF THE HOUSE.

VESTIBULUM.	An open court with stables and guard rooms at the sides.
OSTIUM.	The inner entrance.
ATRIUM.	The public court, open to the sky at centre.
HOSPITALIUM.	House for guests.
CUBICULA.	Sleeping-rooms.
TABLINUM.	Reception-room.

THE BATH.

LAONICUM.	The hot bath.
TEPIDARIUM.	Warm room with warm plunge bath.
APODYTHERIUM.	Dressing-room.
EXEDRA.	Place for rest and conversation.
FRIGIDARIUM.	Cold room with cold plunge bath.
UNCTORIUM.	Anointing-room.

PRIVATE PART OF THE HOUSE.

FAUCES.	Passages between public and private portion of house.
PERISTYLE.	The private open court with fountain in centre.
CUBICULA.	The sleeping-rooms of the family. The rooms for slaves and attendants are on the upper floor, under the roof.
ÆCUS.	A hall.
GLYPTOTHECA.	Sculpture gallery.
PINACOTHECA.	Picture gallery.
CYZICENE	
TRICLINIUM.	Dining-room for summer use.
CULINA.	Serving-rooms. The other rooms, kitchen, etc., are in the basement.
GARDENS.	The gardens surround the house on three sides, the fourth side facing a small forum.

as a citizen of Rome, he was not only a member of the Senate, but also a member of the equestrian order, and a member of the Roman aristocracy. He was a man of great wealth and power, and his house was one of the most magnificent in Rome. The plan of the house is shown in the accompanying drawing.

**PLAN OF A ROMAN HOUSE OF THE CHARACTER OF THAT OF PETRONIUS**

But the most important feature of the house is the central peristyle, which was a garden surrounded by a colonnade. The peristyle was the center of the house, and all the rooms were arranged around it. The peristyle was a place where the family would gather, and it was also a place where the family would entertain their guests.

The house was a large and imposing structure, and it was built in the style of the Roman aristocracy. The house was a masterpiece of Roman architecture, and it was one of the most beautiful houses in Rome. The house was a symbol of the power and wealth of the Roman aristocracy, and it was a place where the family would entertain their guests.

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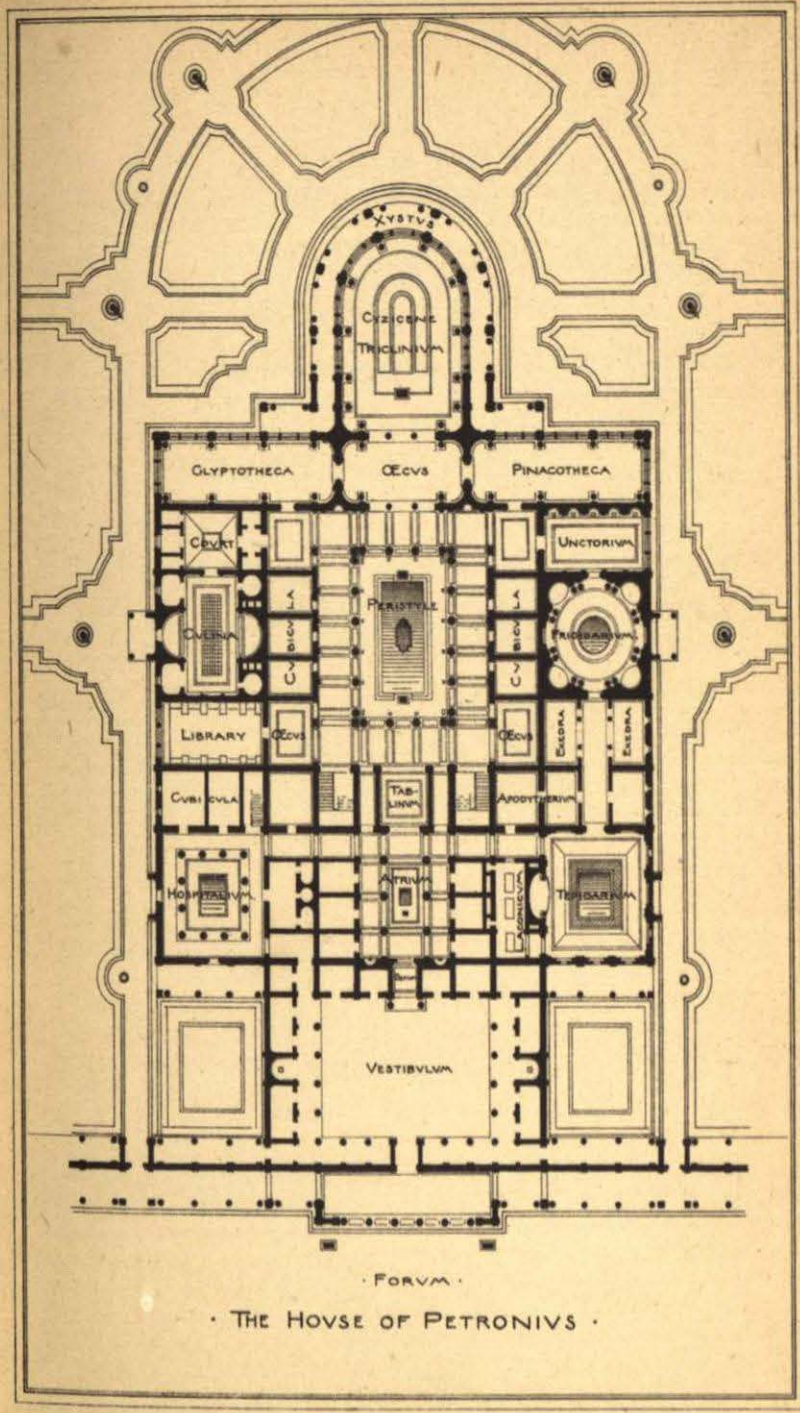
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• FORVM •  
• THE HOUSE OF PETRONIVS •