THE ROMAN VILLA
Definitions and Variations
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INTRODUCTION

The term *villa* had multiple meanings in Latin and many manifestations in Roman history as well as Mediterranean-wide variations in the archaeological record. In fact, the establishment of a precise definition already preoccupied ancient authors such as Cato and Varro, and modern scholars continue to debate how it can be applied to what kinds of buildings. While we may still be far from finding a universal definition, both the written and the archaeological record can point us in the right direction.

As is well known, the original meaning of the Latin term *villa* is “farm,” but if we limit investigation of the phenomenon to this narrow definition, the central role of the villa in the cultural ideologies and aspirations of the Roman cultural elite is missed. In his *De Agricultura* in the 160s BCE, Cato gave us a morally pleasing image of an austere *villa rustica* with a simple agricultural routine, but while the term *villa* could describe a simple farm, it was also appropriate to describe the very grand country retreats of the great men of Rome; Scipio Africanus, one such personage of late Republican times, retired to both an elaborate country mansion and a rural estate, which, in combination, were both called *villa,* and the term continued to be used for both even when they began to develop in very different directions. While apparently antithetical to one another, Cato’s small estate with its modest edifice and the huge, very luxurious *villae maritimae* on the Bay of Naples had a basic common denominator: the Roman elite ideology of landedness and the improvement of the mind by natural surroundings.

The differing criteria for the use of the term *villa* among both ancient and modern writers and from Italy to the Roman provinces, with their array of cultural and climatic conditions, multiplies almost ad infinitum the range of possible meanings of the term and its many manifestations. Nonetheless, certain tendencies and groups of meaning can be identified, both thematically and geographically. These can only be touched on in the discussion that follows, but it is hoped that it will provide a good starting point for the rich variety of material and interpretation collected in this volume.

ANCIENT MEANINGS

Cato’s farming handbook *De Agricultura* provides us with our earliest comprehensive insight into the role of villas in Roman culture. The work begins with a brief discussion of the sources of income available to a Roman citizen, dismissing both trade and money-lending as dangerous and dishonorable respectively; only land provided income that was both dependable and honorable, and, what’s more, land was the very essence of Roman stock: “it is the farming community that brings forth the most
courageous men and the most capable soldiers.”3 His brief introduction reveals two of the most important elements of the Roman villa: its function as a financial investment of a city-based elite and its role as a manifestation of the idealization of country life. Cato uses the term praecidium for the farm as a whole, and the term villa for its main building, but he distinguishes between the villa urbana (master’s residence) and the villa rustica (farm buildings) and the villa urbana (master’s residence), saying that the latter should be comfortable enough for the owner to enjoy visiting as much as possible, and thus benefit the running of the farm; extravagance beyond this financial consideration is to be abhorred.4

Varro’s more ample De Re Rustica of about a century later follows Cato’s lead: It is a manual in three books of how to run an agricultural establishment. It is noted that the more comfortable the residence is, the more time the owner will wish to spend at the property. Maximization of profit is the overriding consideration, right down to the optimization of position near a road or port to minimize transport costs. Income derived from the land is considered desirable because not only is it more ancient but it is also more noble. In the same vein, Varro deplores the apparent prevalence of luxury fittings in the villas of his day. Today, he says, people do not think they have a real villa unless it has peristyles, palaestras, and other frivolous architectural features known by their trendy Greek names.5 Particularly interesting is the discussion in book 3. 1–2 between the author and two men by the name of Quintus Axius and Appius Claudius. Sitting in the shade of the Villa Publica, a civic building in the Campus Martius in Rome used for the census among other things,6 the men get to ponder on the true nature of a villa. Due to its architectural simplicity, the Villa Publica, Appius claims, is more a villa than Axius’ luxury retreat at Reate with its mosaics and citrus-wood furniture. Axius, however, retorts that the fact that a building lies outside the city walls does not make it a villa. What really makes a villa is its fundus — its land — something the Villa Publica lacked. He may be half-joking when he claims that a building is not a villa unless it contains a donkey, but his point is well-taken. What this discussion shows is that, already in Varro’s time, the term villa had become hard to define, reaching from the simple farm to the luxury estate, with its economic basis not necessarily a determining feature. The fact that he chose to record this conversation at all — or invent and publish it as typical — highlights the importance of this ambivalence.

Despite a distinct shift toward luxury villas, a generation later, chapter 6.6 of Vitruvius’ De Architectura still advises on the practicalities of how to build farm buildings. He states that if the owner wants the main building of the villa (for him this term equates to “farm”) to have some opulence, the way it is built should nonetheless avoid impinging on the effectiveness of the work buildings.7 Otherwise, the residential part of the complex is expected to conform to the same architectural plan as townhouses, except that instead of the urban convention that the atrium be situated immediately after the entrance into the house, followed further back by a peristyle, in countryside residences that are built to urban standards (pseudourbanae), these two features should be reversed.8 In other words, for Vitruvius a villa was a farm, but the farmstead could be a simple house or a sumptuous residence with all the trappings of urban life. By the mid-first century CE, the demand for practical farming manuals had not abated, and Columella’s De Re Rustica divides more clearly the different parts of the villa: the villa rustica (farm buildings with slave dwellings), the villa fructuaria (storerooms and silos for the produce), and the villa urbana (the owner’s residence). His description of the optimal positioning of different parts of the latter now assumes the existence of summer and winter apartments, baths, dining rooms, and promenades (Rust. 1.6).

Subsequent literary insights into the Roman understanding of the villa are dominated by incidental but sometimes detailed descriptions of sumptuous country retreats in Roman epistography and ekphrastic literature, revealing the position and function of key elements such as the atrium, the library, the gardens, and the triclinium, preferably with a view of the sea or the surrounding countryside, and the intellectual and aesthetic properties of the artwork on display. Examples of this are Pliny the Younger’s
affectionate step-by-step accounts of his villas in letters 2.17 and 5.6, and Philostratus’ (probably real) descriptions of various picture scenes on display in a Neapolitan villa in his Imagines. The emphasis in these depictions is on these villas providing healthy country or sea air and panoramic views for physical and mental well-being, an intellectually stimulating aesthetic environment, and the peace and quiet to engage in thought and writing. While orchards and stables are mentioned, it is clear that the main purpose of these villas was their role as country retreats and not as agricultural businesses.

Many other sources could be cited: Roman literature abounds in descriptions of villas visited or owned by authors whose work has come down to us. The aristocratic preoccupation with ever more numerous and costly villas did not, for example, escape the satirical humor of Martial and Juvenal,9 while Statius delighted in the fine architectural details and landscape settings of his friends’ villas.10 In fact, by the first century CE, as John Bodel has put it, “the domestic environment in which a gentleman cultivated his leisure was itself worthy of poetic commemoration.”11 However, having now gained an image of the “literary villa,” let us now turn to the “archaeological villa”:12 that which remains as material evidence for modern scholars to interpret.

**Modern Interpretations: The Economic Dimension**

Given the apparent conflict in the written sources between sterile economic reckoning and gushing descriptions of architectural extravagance, to what extent do the existing remains reveal the Roman villa as an economic establishment? Some scholars have chosen to focus on this aspect as the deciding factor, and, indeed, legislative measures such as the Lex Claudia of 218 BCE saw agricultural production as the only appropriate economic activity of senators,13 meaning that in order to obtain the resources necessary for a lifestyle befitting rank, the Roman nobility had, in theory, to invest their capital in lucrative rural enterprises.14 By the time of the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE), there was a great amount of such capital, a growing amount of available land, and an overabundance of slaves who could work it. Small-scale farmers, many of whom had spent long periods away from their land fighting in the wars, had little chance to compete with these enterprises on the market, and many headed for the cities, securing this change by selling their properties to large-scale landowners. Although some still produced in small quantities the full range of basic foodstuffs for domestic use, the new, larger agricultural properties for the most part specialized in financially rewarding animal breeding or cash crops such as wine and olives for trade,15 leaving the increasingly urbanized population of Italy reliant on imports from Sicily and Sardinia, and later Egypt and the Black Sea, for the more essential but less profitable grain.16 Over time, even the transport to, and storage of, agricultural produce in cities was subcontracted to brokers and agents.17 Ironically, as Hans Drerup says, “it is precisely this marked distancing from agriculture that created the circumstances for the development of villas.”18

One of the first substantial studies to view Italian villas in economic, rather than artistic or architectural, terms has been Andrea Carandini’s and M. Rossella Filippi’s influential report on the excavations at Settefinestre in Etruria, and indeed, large storage facilities and what have been interpreted by the excavators as slave quarters show that this villa, at least, was a sleek money-making machine.19 For many, not only the production of a significant agricultural surplus but also the employment of large teams of slaves to work the land was one of the distinctive features of the Roman villa as a phenomenon.20 In this respect, the villa was no longer simply a “farm” but an enterprise, and one inextricably linked to the city:21 The city required large agricultural surpluses and solvent buyers for its manufactured goods to remain viable, while the villa owner needed a market for his produce, a source for the things he needed to maintain his lifestyle, and an urban pied-à-terre to conduct his political life.
In this light, the link between the villa as “capitalistic farming”\textsuperscript{22} and the villa as lavish country retreat is not one of paradox but of correlation: In order to be able to afford the fountains and palaestrae, the villa owner had to derive from the estate as much wealth as possible. Nicholas Purcell has put the case in the following way:

\begin{quote}
[W]hat gave the landscape of the villa, the landscape of production, a coherence from Britain to Syria, was patterns in the attitudes of producers and consumers to what was to be produced and how and by whom it was to be consumed. For my “landscape of production” is indissolubly embedded in that landscape of consumption which is formed by stratification, patronage and euergetism in the Roman city. If there is a coherence in the estates of the ancient countryside, it derives only secondarily from architecture and much more from the effect that ancient society had on producing coherence in the patterns of exploitation.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

As the “the visible place where wealth was produced,”\textsuperscript{24} the villa’s fields and barns were thus just as much a symbol of economic power as its architectural extravagance.

**Modern Interpretations: The Morphological Dimension**

But what of this architectural extravagance? A large portion of villa scholarship not only for Italy but throughout the empire has focused on distinctive architectural and decorative features that are considered to constitute a Roman villa: peristyles, baths, fountains, fishponds, gardens, libraries, small rooms for quiet activity, triclinia and garden dining areas, mosaic floors, frescoed walls, hypocaust heating, and such follies as towers and artificial grottoes. The outlook and layout of these constituent parts were often designed to link the structure with the surrounding countryside by the use of slope locations, ambulatory structures, and the positioning of windows and terraces to enable the enjoyment of panoramic views.\textsuperscript{25} Far from being a cosmetic consideration, these features were the manifestation in bricks and mortar of elite Romanitas, the ideology of land-based wealth and the salutary qualities of the countryside expounded by authors such as Cato and Varro.\textsuperscript{26} Having developed out of the increasingly comfortable residence of a working farm, the Roman villa soon developed offshoots that focused more on the lifestyle aspect of this ideology. The compact, inward-looking ground plans taken from elite residences in the city were gradually adapted to be outward-looking, with porticos and gardens surrounding the building, instead of vice versa, and windows and terraces inviting the landscape in.\textsuperscript{27} Special features of some villas were the cryptoporticus and terraces that enabled the villa to sit up high and straddle uneven terrain. What modern scholarship has termed “\textit{otium} villas” were often built in locations chosen for their commanding views and healthy air, such as the Campanian coastline or the northern Italian lakes. It is into this type of villa that we get such a detailed insight through Pliny’s letters and the excellent state of preservation of estates in the Bay of Naples that were covered by the explosion of Vesuvius in 79 CE.

The architectural characteristics described above were also a demonstration of a certain level of education for villa owners. Under the influence of newly conquered Hellenistic Greece, which for many Romans was synonymous with intellectual refinement, the elite of the middle and late Republic developed a taste for eastern architecture and cultural pursuits. While the monarchical and effeminate undertones of Greek culture rendered excessive philhellenism inappropriate to the ideally stern and pragmatic men of the Roman republic, such fancies could nonetheless be enjoyed in the greater seclusion of the countryside.\textsuperscript{28} Many of the architectural features associated with the Roman villa were lifted directly from Hellenistic architecture, along with the fashionable Greek names that Varro found so pretentious: \textit{prooecition} (anteroom), \textit{palaestra} (exercise room), \textit{apodyterion} (dressing room), \textit{peristylon} (colonnade), \textit{omnithon} (aviary), \textit{peristeros} (pergola), and \textit{oporothea} (fruit room).\textsuperscript{29}

In these “Bildungslandschaften,”\textsuperscript{30} or “intellectual
landscapes,” both the natural and the cultural could be combined, great collections of books and art could be displayed and used in bucolic surroundings, and the mind could be free to ponder the large questions of life.  

However, while traditional villa scholarship has (rightly) focused on the high level of sophistication in layout and furnishings as a particular achievement of Rome’s ruling class, more recent studies have called for a greater acknowledgment of the production elements in these very same villas.  

Annalisa Marzano has shown, for example, that the large, and undoubtedly picturesque, piscinae in some of the coastal villas were used first and foremost as highly lucrative fish farms, and this is certainly in keeping with the information related by Varro that there was more money to be made in aquaculture than in agriculture.  

Even if they consumed more wealth than they produced, the most urbane seaside villas still usually included at least apiaries, dovecotes, orchards, and vineyards, and it was a source of great pride to villa owners to serve their guests produce derived exclusively from their estates. In the case of suburban villas, the conspicuously large wine-pressing room in the Villa dei Misteri at Pompeii was not, as earlier interpretations held, a transformation of a reception room by boorish later owners, but an original feature of which the owner was obviously proud, given its prominence in the complex.  

The Roman villa was the manifestation of this twofold value system: A Roman gentleman had to be both urban and rural.

**MODERN INTERPRETATIONS:**  
**THE TOPOGRAPHICAL DIMENSION**

If the Roman gentleman had to be both urban and rural, did it follow that his urban dwelling should have rural elements? One of the most difficult problems in considering the nature of the Roman villa is the question as to where to draw the architectural line between the villa of the country and the domus of the town.

Of course, in many ways the geography is straightforward; we are easily able to distinguish among villae maritimae next to the sea, such as the Villa San Marco at Stabiae, villae suburbanae in the outskirts of cities, like the Villa dei Misteri at Pompeii, and what Pierre Gros has called “villas lacustres” on the shores of lakes.  

We can even mark the difference among thoroughly rustic villas like the Villa Regina at Boscoreale (Figure 2.1) and those with very clearly divided villae rusticae and villae urbanae, like the Villa San Rocco in Francolise.  

But what of the horti within the urbs on the Aventine and the Palatine in Rome itself, pleasure gardens that were developed into pseudo–country retreats by their elite owners? Paul Zanker and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill have suggested these be considered together with villas because they belonged to the same people and provided the same “suitable moral alibi” as quiet and aesthetically pleasing places to entertain and engage in otium (as well as to grow apples). On the other hand, although it seems logical to follow Roman legal texts and the great

**Figure 2.1.** Boscoreale, Villa Regina, reconstruction drawing (from Helen and Richard Leacroft 1969 [www.theromans.co.uk/domestic_architecture.htm accessed April 4, 2014]).
many scholars\textsuperscript{40} who let location within or outside city walls decide what is a villa and what is a \textit{domus}, in actual fact the situation is rather complicated. The agglomerations of \textit{villae maritimae} at places like Stabiae took on the appearance of towns, and almost identical houses were built either side of the town grid boundary.\textsuperscript{41} At Pompeii and Herculaneum, seaside residences were even built over the top of former city walls that faced the sea,\textsuperscript{42} and Sallust claimed that some villas were even the size of towns in their own right.\textsuperscript{43} For many, \textit{villae suburbanae} occupy a transitional category between \textit{domus} and villa in that they were primarily residential without the room to command vast estates, but with the typical ground plan of the country house.\textsuperscript{44}

Because, for the most part, the same social class owned both \textit{domus} and villas, similar architectural and decorative elements emerged in both. As we have seen, Vitruvius held that an ideal country house should reverse the order of rooms of a \textit{domus}: Instead of entering into the austere \textit{atrium}, and only later proceeding into the more ornate and airy peristyle garden in the rear, the visitor to a country house should be immediately met by the greenery and space of the peristyle (perhaps a relic of the large farmyard that had been at the heart of the Roman farm), and only later proceed to the \textit{atrium}.\textsuperscript{45} As Wallace-Hadrill has put it, “Vitruvius turns the villa into the mirror image of the town house … To “urbanise” the country is to stand the town on its head.”\textsuperscript{46} On the other hand, archaeological remains show us that this rule was not strictly observed: Pseudo-urban villas at Herculaneum and even the “model villa” at Settefinestre were outside the city walls and boasted extensive grounds but started with an \textit{atrium} and moved on to a peristyle.\textsuperscript{47}

By the same token, while the \textit{domus} of an elite family in town needed “business” rooms for \textit{negotium} (public and political life) together with a residential part, in rural houses the \textit{negotium} quarters were to an extent replaced by those given over to \textit{otium}, although rural villas could also have “public” areas, and \textit{otium} was not necessarily confined to the countryside.\textsuperscript{48} There was also a correspondence in substance: Although country houses were mostly built to shut the outside out and rural villas often brought the outside in, both have been shown to have been designed with an eye for visual angles and a keen sense of symmetry, space, and perspective. Moreover, with time many of the “rural” features associated with country estates started to creep into townhouses, largely as a result of being the products of the same social group, but perhaps also to an extent due to middle class emulation of elite tastes, bringing into more modest urban dwellings luxurious elements such as peristyle gardens, landscape paintings, and mosaic scenes. This congruence of features was not confined to ornament: Caputo’s “\textit{domus-villa urbana}” at Cumae in Campania was situated within the city walls but had extensive orchards and terraces,\textsuperscript{49} and in Pompeii, agriculture and horticulture were conducted within the city walls, both in private gardens and in separate vineyards and olive groves.\textsuperscript{50} Jashemski has shown that gardens were standard features of houses even in more densely settled quarters, and the second-century BCE House of Pansa, one of the oldest dwellings in the city, had an \textit{atrium}, a peristyle, and a back garden, which by its size (it took up a third of a city block) and structure (maximization of space and water use) was clearly meant to turn out a significant quantity of produce.\textsuperscript{51} At the extreme end of the scale, the term \textit{domus} for Nero’s \textit{Domus Aurea} in Rome was, in fact, a gaudy irony: Although it was in the center of town, it boasted vineyards, fields, woodland, and even flocks of sheep.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{Modern Interpretations: The Geographical Dimension}

The discussion has hitherto focused quite intentionally on Italy: The question as to the definition of a villa is difficult enough in this core area. Italy itself was a patchwork of different villa landscapes: \textit{Otium} villas tended to concentrate in the areas with the most fertile land (Etruria, Campania, the Tiber, Arno, Volturno, and Po valleys), while in other regions smaller estates and those worked by tenant farmers rather than slaves were variously abundant.\textsuperscript{53} The situation is even more varied when taking into account the Roman provinces with their widely varying climates and cultures. On the one hand, the typical Italian-style villa with its large landholdings, its elaborate farmhouse, and its armies of mainly slave laborers can be found in
provinces with comparable social and climatic conditions such as Gallia Narbonnensis and Hispania Baetica; in these regions even the more compact, inward-looking architecture of the older Italian villas prevails. On the other hand, it is especially with regard to its more distinctive regional variations in the provinces that scholarly use of the term villa is most wide-ranging.\textsuperscript{54}

**Regional Forms of Villas: The North-Western Provinces**

In the north-western provinces,\textsuperscript{55} where the greatest number of relevant sites has been explored, the term villa is usually used to denote rural estates that display imported Mediterranean architectural features – especially construction in stone – which distinguished them from native, mostly wooden-built houses.\textsuperscript{56} These complexes are usually referred to as villae rusticae, even if the residence displayed lavish architecture and decoration that would qualify it as a villa urbana in Italy.\textsuperscript{57} Extensive aerial photography in this region in recent decades has added significantly to the number of known ground plans, so that it is now possible to distinguish a range of regional forms both for the central buildings of the estate and the residence. The villa yard was generally arranged either haphazardly (“Streuhof” or “scattered yard” – e.g., Köln-Müngersdorf and most sites in the Hambach brown coal-mining region to the west of Cologne in Germany: Figure 2.2)\textsuperscript{58} or axially, with the main residence in a central position at the back of the block, and the secondary buildings arranged in rows either side reaching to the front gate (e.g., Verneuil-en-Halatte, France: Figure 2.3).\textsuperscript{59}

The main residence was built either around an inner peristyle (e.g., Bad Kreuznach, Germany),\textsuperscript{60} or more

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**Figure 2.2.** Köln-Müngersdorf, villa complex, plan (after Percival 1976, fig. 24).

**Figure 2.3.** Verneuil-en-Halatte, villa complex (courtesy of Jean-Luc Collart, SRA Picardie).
often as a wide, shallow building with a portico along
the front; a typical design of the region is the “por-
ticus with pavilions,” in which extra rooms or
towers acted as wings at either end of the front portico
(e.g., Serville, Belgium, Friedberg-Pfingstweide or
Blankenheim, Germany: Figure 2.4). A house style
confined to Britain was Richmond’s “aisled house”
with its three-span hall.

The term villa for these structures is, however,
highly problematic. There is every reason to believe
that they were inhabited by indigenous families, and
indeed roughly half of those currently known devel-
oped out of more simple farms, often originating in
the pre-Roman period. The main building fre-
cently consisted of a Hallenhaus (or “hall house”),
typical of the La Tène culture native to Gaul in the
pre-Roman period, to which was gradually added
a corridor and Mediterranean features such as a
portico or a tiled roof, or which was rebuilt in
stone (e.g., Grémecey in the Moselle region of
France, where the postholes of the earlier Hallenhaus align perfectly with the later stone struc-
ture: Figure 2.5). Such cases render the customary
deinition of villas in this area as stone-built struc-
tures somewhat arbitrary, as the attainment of a so-
deined villa reected perhaps no more profound
change than a slight improvement in financial
capacity, especially when it is considered that the
transition often occurred many generations after
Roman conquest. Moreover, some large farm-
houses, such as at Druten in the Netherlands, had
a distinctly Roman ground plan but were con-
structed entirely of wood. Karl Heinz Lenz has
convincingly argued that the ubiquitous native Vie
eckschanzen of the pre-Roman north—west –
square, ditched enclosures containing several build-
ings – were not religious sites but in fact farms, and
that these formed the basis of the characteristic
farmyard arrangement of the later “villas.”

Even the more Mediterranean-looking peristyle villas
may have had a speci
c local development in that
the pavilions at the ends of the portico grew over
time to enclose three, and eventually four, sides of
the central yard, although there may have been
parallel in
fluence from the courtyard plan of the
headquarters or praetoria of Roman army

camps. On the other hand, it is not insigni
ficant that many
of these structures show strong Mediterranean
influence, not only in their structure but even in
their positioning on hillsides and spurs, and the
terminology used by Roman authors for rural
dwellings in the region tends to suggest that they,
too, were reluctant to call any farm a villa unless it
had some Roman accoutrements.

Villas housed families, and the variety in their
forms prompted John T. Smith to link space and
social structure in his investigation of provincial villas
throughout the empire. On the basis of ground plans
for villas from Britain to Bulgaria, he argues that the way rooms, hearths, and corridors were arranged reflected the groups of people who lived there, and changes in these arrangements reflected changes in the composition of those groups. Smith claimed to have identified a kinship structure in north-western villas, consisting of several related families in separate residences with large communal areas like dining rooms and baths.\textsuperscript{72} While there has been criticism of Smith’s approach,\textsuperscript{73} it deserves merit for attempting to marry architecture to social structure, aspects which had hitherto been treated separately in villa scholarship of the north-west.\textsuperscript{74}

Widespread in studies of rural settlement in the north-west is a more socioeconomic approach to the development of villas, and it is perhaps in this regard that they are easier to grasp. In many parts of the north-west before the Roman period, small villages consisting of a handful of farms producing mainly or entirely for self-consumption were the normal rural settlement form. The introduction of a monetary economy\textsuperscript{75} and taxation, together with towns and army camps whose populations required large quantities of food, led to a switch to cash crops and an accumulation and concentration of wealth that could be spent on such luxuries as baths and mosaic floors.\textsuperscript{76} In the pre-Roman period, farms in the north-west had produced a small surplus for use by the elite and inhabitants of the permanently settled \textit{oppida}; what changed with the Roman conquest was the dramatic increase of that surplus and the resulting change in agricultural practices.\textsuperscript{77} Consequently, villas in the north-west tend to concentrate around cities and in particularly fertile areas like the region around Colonia Agrippina (Köln, Cologne) and the plains of northern France and Belgium.

Despite adaptations to Roman and Italian villa features, continuity with the pre-Roman past with regard to the social and economic structures seems to have existed in the form and functioning of these buildings. In contrast to the Italian use of villas as country retreats, most villas in the north-western areas of the Roman Empire appear to have been permanent, or at least main, residences. Substantial farm buildings were usual, as was positioning on major roads and waterways, so agricultural production was central to their establishment and viability. \textit{Otium} villas never developed, despite the considerable opulence of some of the sites. The range of foodstuffs produced by a single estate seems to have been more varied in the north-west, and a combination of pastoralism and cropping was common. There is also no evidence for slave agricultural labor north of Gallia Narbonnensis, while pictorial and other evidence points to the widespread use of tenant farmers who paid rent to the landowner in both coin and kind.\textsuperscript{78} It would appear that the villa system as it evolved in the north-west allowed the social structure of pre-Roman society, with its landed elite and semi-dependent tenant farmers, to continue largely as before.

\textbf{Regional Forms of Villas: North Africa and Eastern Provinces}

In North Africa,\textsuperscript{79} an entirely different scholarly discourse on villas has been underway. Here the term villa is used to refer mainly to the many Roman-period farms that grew olives and produced oil for both local and overseas markets.\textsuperscript{80} In the first two centuries CE, they were often small in size and displayed very few Roman architectural features such as baths and mosaics, and it is likely that if they were discovered in Italy they would not be identified as villas at all. While the north-western “\textit{porticus} with pavilions” type of villa was adopted in North Africa, probably via Spain,\textsuperscript{81} the form it took was more compact and block-like, with high outer walls and portico galleries appearing on the upper floor (see Figures 16.4, 16.5, and 16.6 in Chapter 16).\textsuperscript{82} The impression given is one of concern for safety at the expense of permitting the interplay between the inside of the building and the landscape that was such a major feature of villa architecture further north. Although the Carthaginians had already had large country estates before the Roman conquest in the second century BCE, the occupation of the region by the latter was characterized more by
discontinuity with the past than in other regions, especially as a great deal of Carthaginian land was carved up into small lots for Roman veteran settlers. In this region, the advent of villas went hand-in-hand with the extension of land use into previously unusable areas such as deserts and mountains, primarily through improved investment in irrigation made possible by the commercial nature of many of the installations. As in the north-western provinces, agricultural labor was provided mainly by coloni.

In addition to these unambiguously agricultural sites, North Africa also has pockets of what might be considered otium villas: large, luxurious, and primarily residential coastal estates catering to the lifestyles of the elites of metropolitan centers such as Leptis Magna and Carthage. These have often been referred to as villas, even when they are discovered within the city limits of places like Carthage, as they show many of the features of Italian-style maritime villas: peristyles with gardens, mosaics, fountains, and panoramic views out to sea, although some scholars insist on the use of the term domus for those found within city limits.

Archaeological scholarship on the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, in particular Asia Minor and the Levant, has a long tradition of referring to elaborate Roman townhouses as villas. These display a considerable degree of continuity from pre-Roman urban architecture: courtyard houses with public and private areas date back to Babylonian times (fourth to mid-second millennium BCE) and are typical of Near Eastern architecture in general, not least in the Hellenistic period. Here, scholars identify a dwelling to be a villa on the presence or absence of Roman architectural features, not necessarily a position within a city or outside it. As such, despite a lack of agricultural or horticultural production, luxurious townhouses with triclinia, elaborate mosaics, and peristyles in cities like Zeugma (Turkey) and Sepphoris (Israel) are usually termed villas because their architectural elements link them with elite houses in other parts of the empire. Similarly, another category of building referred to as villa by scholars of the Near East are the sumptuous residences built by Herod at Jericho, Caesarea, the Herodium, and other sites in Judaea. Herod’s taste was strongly influenced by elite architecture in Italy, and his villas display many of their typical features, such as baths, colonnades, gardens, and sumptuous mosaics. The positioning and layout of his villa complex on the promontory at Caesarea, for example, was clearly inspired by the villae maritimae on the Campanian coast in Italy. However, the Roman practice of city elites escaping to agricultural estates or at least to more airy complexes on the outskirts of town was not widespread in the East until late antiquity. Many of the handful of comfortable but often also, and perhaps primarily, productive suburban villas that date to the first and second centuries CE are thought to belong to newcomers to the area. The words used in Greek for such estates reveal their nature: Proásteion can be translated as suburbium in Latin, meaning either proximity to town or the extension of city amenities to a country location; the term képos, which is also often used, means simply garden or smallholding.

The lack of a landed element in elite ideology in the East in comparison to Italy and the western provinces of the Roman Empire also influenced the structure of rural settlement and agricultural production. The main unit of rural habitation in the eastern provinces was the nucleated village (kômê) of small-scale farmers set in the agricultural environs (chôra) of the local town ( pólis) and producing primarily for the town itself. Elite investment went into imposing houses in the towns and rarely into estates in the countryside, which meant that, at least until the third century CE, Roman-style villas were, as has often been noted, much less common, although improved survey work is tipping this balance somewhat. The Near East had a long tradition of building medium-sized farms and a typical architectural form in the so-called courtyard house, which, by its vertical division into working and living space, its flat roof, and its grouping around a yard, was perfectly adapted to the conditions of the region. But such farms are not necessarily regarded as villas. Again we are faced with a problem of definition: As was the case with urban buildings, scholars often only classify Near-Eastern residences in the countryside as villas if they display Roman architectural features such as mosaics and porticos.
architectural features are, as is often the case, a sign of habitation by a specific social group, such as the elite, they are indeed significant, perhaps even enough to warrant using a different term. But it is conceivable that such features often symbolized nothing more than a change in taste or an improvement in financial circumstances of one and the same family. It is not without significance that, generally until the Byzantine period, the pre-Roman style of farm prevailed, even on large estates and in close proximity to Roman-style cities.\(^98\)

There were, however, some regional divergences from this pattern. In Judaea, for example, although small villages were the main rural settlement type, the Hellenistic kings and Hasmonean rulers also had large country domains worked by tenant farmers,\(^99\) as did the Hellenistic rulers in Syria, where the tenant-farmer system was maintained into the Roman period.\(^100\) Quite independently of the adoption or not of Roman architectural forms, there are a number of isolated farmhouses in Judaea that date to the first century CE,\(^101\) and that century also saw a development in some places toward the subordination of peasants by larger landowners who, however, usually had their centers in villages.\(^102\) The tension was particularly pronounced in areas where Herod settled his veterans and his administrators, who likewise ran large estates with tenants.\(^103\) In some cases, however, the isolated farmhouses were indeed the centers of large estates, such as Ramat Hanadiv in the hills near Caesarea.\(^104\)

The transfer of the imperial capital to Constantinople in 330 CE brought a new elite culture to the Roman east as well as intense Christianization, with the result that wealth and attention were lavished on the Holy Land and the landscape of the eastern provinces began to change. The senatorial elite at Constantinople indulged in a taste for country estates, a taste that was gradually adopted by rich urban citizens throughout the Roman east, and late antique sources often refer to country villas that served as retreats, especially from summer in the city, and as hunting lodges, although at times they also appear to have functioned as retirement homes or refuges in times of political strife.\(^105\) Truly suburban recreational villas tended to cluster around major cities like Antioch, Beirut, Beth-Shean, and Ephesus, although most of them also contained gardens and small plantations that produced food for the household.\(^106\) The adoption of a “landed” ideology and the general increase in exploitation of the eastern landscape in late antiquity led to a boom in large, elite-owned farming estates in thoroughly rural areas as well.\(^107\) A valuable description in a letter from Gregory of Nyssa (330–95 CE) to Adelphius, the owner of a villa in central Anatolia, reveals a layout and lifestyle not unlike earlier estates in Italy, but the description also mentions new features that set it apart from earlier structures: It was entered through a large gateway and was heavily fortified with walls and towers for protection against brigandage, the inner complex centered around a colonnaded courtyard with a pool in the middle from which one entered the main reception rooms. Garden furniture was placed under the trees outside the villa’s main entrance for outdoor dining—a nod to the earlier Roman stibadia—and the complex included a chapel and a mausoleum at some distance from the main building. Curiously, no bath house is mentioned.\(^108\) The presence of new and changed features in late-antique villas inevitably leads to the question as to whether we can still use the term for the structures of this period, as Near Eastern scholars do, or whether new terms should be applied, as is often the case in the western provinces.

**Modern Interpretations: The Chronological Dimension**

One of the most difficult, and for some most arbitrary, factors in determining what should be termed a villa is the requirement that it must be Roman. This in turn raises a chronological problem: From which point in time can we start to speak of the villa as an architectural, economic, and cultural category? A great deal of discussion has centered on the matter of the Hellenistic origins of the Roman villa. Some, like Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, see Roman villas as manifestations of the strong influence of Hellenistic styles and values on the Roman aristocracy following
the conquest of Greece in the second century BCE but translated into a manifestly Roman form, which justifies seeing them as a separate, *Roman*, architectural category. Others see villas as the product of an aristocratic ideal that combined a landed economic base with the ability to retreat from the strains of urban political life to the beauty of the countryside—styles that go back at least as far as the Macedonian royal family’s country houses of the fourth century BCE and perhaps even earlier. Nicholas Purcell has pointed out that Odysseus’ father Laertes retreated to a garden estate, and the style of Hellenized gardens with their fruit trees and their control and use of water owed much to the Oriental enclosed garden (paradeisos), which had a long history reaching as far back as the Assyrian royal palaces of the eleventh century BCE.

Of course, many of the features we associate with Roman villas, such as peristyles and terraces, were directly and consciously copied from Hellenistic architectural templates, but does this make villas Hellenistic in substance? Hans Lauter has argued that, in terms of their forms and the inclusion of features that facilitated enjoyment of the landscape, Roman villas were indeed a continuation of Hellenistic traditions, but that the socioeconomic character of many Roman villas, with their large-scale farming operations and slave labor, and the resulting transformation of the countryside, was specific to the historical circumstances of Italy in the second century BCE. But even this, some argue, was not necessarily Roman. Alexander McKay pointed out that “capitalistic farming” was already conducted by the Etruscans and Hellenistic kings, and Harald Mielsch regards the intensification of agriculture in the Roman Republic as influenced by farming practices in Greek colonies.

The chronological question comes even more sharply into focus when we try to determine when villas “end.” The major political and economic changes of the third and early fourth centuries that had such a profound effect on the villa landscape of the eastern provinces had no less of an impact in Italy and the West. Although late Roman estates continued many of the features of earlier villas, such as division into productive and residential sections, there were also many new features and forms that catered to the new social and economic circumstances. Increasingly, grand entrances and belvederes were intended to impress both visitors and passers-by, and the aula regia, an apsidal hall, was used to receive visitors with the regal splendor befitting the elevated status of the late-antique aristocrats (the honestiores) and their increasing social distance from the ordinary classes (the humiliores). New fashions also emerged in the rounded courtyards and triconch dining rooms. A new term began to emerge for these complexes — *palatium* — that had started out as the word for the dwellings of the Roman emperors but was soon used to refer to other aristocratic residences as well. These estates were often built in towns, and combined features of both the *domus* and the villa, but those in the countryside proper often served not as rural retreats but as main residences, especially in regions where urban life was in decline, and in those regions where urban life continued, the country retreat began to appear inside the cities.

A similar trend can be observed in the western provinces, where the local elite, who in earlier times had had at least some political connection with the town, retreated more and more to large country estates, laying the foundation for the feudal system of the Middle Ages. These estates could be splendid, even idyllic, but due to the increase in threat of both raids from outside the empire and banditry within, they tended also to be heavily fortified, and indeed another new term that took over from *villa* during the course of the fifth century CE and that was applied to these kinds of estates — *prae torium* — was explicitly taken from the name of the residence of the military commander of a Roman army camp. Not just the name, but also the architecture, began to integrate military styles, rendering many of these farms barely distinguishable from late-antique *castella*.

What can we make of these changes? How significant is the preference for new terminology in the sources? The fourth-century CE writer Palladius still used the term *villa* in his farming manual, and his work testifies to a continued emphasis on agricultural production, but Domenico Vera has shown that there were also fundamental changes in those systems of production, and the architecture of villas
suggests an increasing preoccupation with spectacle at the expense of pragmatism. Guy Métraux has explored this question from the point of view of economic function. He observed that the decline of many small-scale villa estates in Italy in the second century CE that is perceptible in the archaeological record was probably linked first to competition by producers from abroad, and then to the decline in urban life, which narrowed the market. Far from there having been a seamless continuity, many late-antique villas were built from scratch many years later on the sites of their earlier counterparts.¹²⁶ For Métraux there was, to address each end of the spectrum, a significant difference between the early Roman domus, which was “expressive of familial dignities,” and the late-antique villa urbana, which was “influenced by imperial and hierarchical frigidities.”¹²⁷

But where do we draw the line? Despite an obvious continuity in social structure into medieval feudalism, the vast majority of villa estates in the north-west were abandoned during the course of the fourth century CE.¹²⁸ In the Roman east, on the other hand, early Arab conquerors often built country homes in the late Roman style, and they even hired the artists of the old Byzantine regime to decorate them.¹²⁹ If defined as the expression of a specific kind of aristocratic ideal that linked virtue to agricultural production, and the proper pursuit of leisure to enjoyment of the countryside, the phenomenon of the villa can be seen to reoccur in the Arab desert castles, Italian Renaissance country estates, and the rural seats of the English aristocracy, to name but a few.¹³⁰ The dilemma is that if we follow this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, we risk diluting the term villa and removing it from its profound historical roots in the culture of Rome and the landscapes of its empire.

Conclusion

John Percival’s observation in 1976 that “[t]he Roman villa is a subject about which we could be said to know a great deal and understand very little”¹³¹ remains valid today. Our understanding of the individual phenomena scholars have for one reason or another termed “villa” has undoubtedly changed, but we are no closer to pinpointing exactly what it is that ties those phenomena together. It is not as though there is such a thing as a villa perfecta,¹³² a prototype against which all potential cases can be measured and admitted or dismissed according to degree of conformity. As Lafon has noted, hand in hand with such an approach goes the consequence that “any variation from the basic model by its very nature reduces and devalues it.”¹³³ In fact, even among the Romans there was a great deal of uncertainty as to the meaning of the term; the image of the “classic villa” proves to be less than certain on close inspection.¹³⁴

One of the main problems in attempting to define the Roman villa is the existence of a great many separate discourses, both geographically and in terms of sources. Roger Wilson has suggested that “[t]he way forward is probably to set aside . . . written source-based terminology in favor of a wholly archaeological definition and classification of the material remains.”¹³⁵ This is both rational and methodologically pleasing, but it would result in a distancing of archaeological scholarship from the many rich literary references and descriptions that help us make sense of the remains. On the other hand, due to a lack of such literary evidence, scholars of the Roman provinces have largely been applying Wilson’s principle to their material all along, and they are nonetheless a long way from agreeing with one another across, and at times even within, regional boundaries. In the end, what all villas had in common was their connection to an elite social group of one form or another, whether local or imperial, and the frequent formulation of elite taste in the use of elements from an empire-wide aesthetic language of architecture, which undoubtedly reflected aristocratic values propagated in an equally empire-wide cultural and educational canon. The way this is applied to interpreting bricks and mortar in the four corners of the empire is varied and, at times, even contradictory due to the lack of dialogue among scholars from different areas. It is hoped that the present volume will go some way to prompting further conversation of this kind.
NOTES

1. I am sincerely grateful to staff at the Roman-Germanic Commission in Frankfurt for their hospitality while writing this chapter, to Heinrich Zabehlicky and Susanne Zabehlicky-Scheffèneegger for feedback on initial ideas, and to Guy P.R. Métraux, Roger J.A. Wilson, and Thomas Noble Howe for sharing their valuable thoughts on the *villa-domus* divide with me.

2. Sen., Ep. 86.

3. Cato, *Agr. praef.* 4. All translations are by the author unless otherwise stated.


7. Vitr., *De anh.* 6.6.5.

8. Vitr., *De anh.* 6.5.3.


10. Stat., *Silv.* 1.3; 2.2; 2.3; 3.1.


13. Livy 21.63.3.

14. However, in practice senators made a great deal of money from trade and commerce indirectly through the use of (usually freedman) agents.

15. See Cato’s list of profitable crops in *Agr.* 1.1.7.

16. For these developments see esp. Rostovtzeff 1957, 17; Hopkins 1978, 48ff.

17. See, e.g., Métraux 1998, who has suggested, moreover, that the decline in Italian villas perceived by archaeologists in the late second century CE was in part due to competition from abroad made possible through the use by urban authorities of such brokers.


19. Carandini and Filippi (eds.) 1985. For doubts on the identification as purely slave quarters see Marzano 2007, 126–37. In the more substantial scholarship of villas in the north-western provinces, on the other hand, economic function has always been at the forefront of interpretation (see discussion below).

20. E.g., Frazer 1998, vii. This definition runs into problems in the provinces, where slave labor was rare (see below), but even in Italy it is clear that land was also often worked by tenants (*coloni*). These *coloni* could often have been the original smallholders, so that often, “although the pattern of land ownership had changed for good, the unit of tenure was much the same as ever” (Percival 1976, 119). For slave labor in villas and the problem of interpreting evidence of slaves in the archaeological record, see Marzano 2007, 125–33 with further references; for agricultural slave labor generally: White 1965; Hopkins 1978, 48–95; Finley 1980, 135–60; Rathbone 1981; 1983; Andreau et al. 1982, esp. contribution by Carandini; Purcell 1985, 1995; Morley 1996, 108–42, 2001; Jongman 2003; Roth 2007; and the various *Colloques sur l’esclavage* (= *Annales littéraires de l’Université de Besançon. Dialogues d’histoire ancienne*).


24. Purcell 1995, 166. Even if wealth was produced from less noble means such as trade, it could nonetheless not be shown off in this way. See also Wallace-Hadrill 1998, 43.

25. Ward-Perkins (in Kahane, Murray Threlkeld and Ward-Perkins 1968, 153–6) proposed that the term “farm” be used for all rural sites in central Italy without these high-status architectural features, and “villa” for those with them. This contradicts the use of the term *villa* by the Romans themselves as the Latin word for “farm.” On the other hand, as Percival (1976) has pointed out, if we follow, say, Varro’s definition of a villa, we have no use for the word in English at all; we could simply say “farm.” It is clear that part of the problem here is a divergence between the original meaning of the Latin term and the fact that the same term has come to be widely used in English (also French, German, etc.) to mean a luxury building. It can, however, be argued that a separate term — why not continue to use “villa” in its modern meaning — is, in any case, needed in modern scholarship to denote the very distinctive phenomenon of buildings with the features mentioned above.

26. For comprehensive general discussion of this ideology see, e.g., Brockmeier 1975 and Ackerman 1990.

27. Swoboda (1924) first distinguished between villas with *atrium* and peristyle and villas with portico around the outside in Roman Italy, but see also, e.g., McKay 1975, 115–19.


29. Varro, *Rust.* 2.1. For Zanker (1990, 151), villas were in fact “a key factor in the reception of Hellenistic culture by the Roman elite.”
31. For villas as places to exhibit art, see Gazda 1991; Vorster 1998; Neudecker 1998. For libraries in villas, see Blanck 1999. For villas as monuments, see Bodel 1997. For the layout and social role of Italian villas generally, see D’Arms 1970; Lafon 1981a; Schneider 1995, 2007; Howe 2004; Mayer 2005; Ortalli 2006.
32. E.g., Purcell 1995; Zarmakoupi 2006.
33. Varro, Rust. 3.2.17; Marzano 2007, 47–81 and Chapter 8 in this volume.
35. Gros 2001, 302–13. See also Roffia 1997. Lafon 2001 for maritime villas. It is surely unnecessary to add a further level of terminology such as Carandini’s (1994) “villa centrale” (villa near a town/harbor/major road) and “villa periferica” (villa in remote place). Further discussion by Gualtieri (Chapter 10) in this volume.
39. See Dig. 30.16.198 (Ulpian), where buildings are divided into those “in towns” (in oppidis) and those in villas and villages (in villis et in vicis); also more explicitly Dig. 30.16.211 (Florentinus): “urban buildings are commonly called: ‘aedes,’ rural buildings ‘villae.’”
40. E.g., Wilson 2008 and most German scholarship: e.g., Mielisch 1987, 7; Lauter 1998, 21.
41. See Howe in this volume (Chapter 6).
42. See Howe in this volume (Chapter 6).
43. Sall. Cat. 12.3. In fact, Melania the Younger’s villa near Tagaste in North Africa was bigger than the town itself: Gerontius, Vita sanctae Melaniae 21; Clark 1984, 215.
44. Percival 1976, 54f.: the villa suburbana “belongs in all meaningful senses to the town rather than the country.” See also Gros 2001, 266.
45. Vitr., De arch. 6.5.3.
47. Mustilli 1956; Carandini and Filippi (eds.) 1985. Of course, if one goes far enough back in time, the portico/peristyle of the country house and atrium/peristyle of the townhouse both probably developed from the same source of the primitive farmhouse with courtyard (see McKay 1975, 108).
50. E.g., the large plot in insula 1.15 (evidence of vines and olives).
51. Jashemski 1979, 18–19. Even small houses like the House of the Surgeon had a garden and the second-century BCE House of the Faun already had two large peristyles with greenery and gardens (Jashemski 1979, 16; 19–21).
52. Suet., Ner. 31. For the Domus Aurea in general, Ball 2003. It is interesting to note that Hadrian’s rural villa at Tivoli, although equally opulent, was called a villa and not a domus. Gros (2001, 350–78) makes an altogether separate category out of “villas impériales.”
54. For a comprehensive overview see Leveau 1983.
55. Britain, the Tres Galliae, Upper and Lower Germany, and the Alpine and western Danube provinces.
56. E.g., Richmond 1969, 51: “the establishment of any folk who farmed the land and were able to build upon it a house of Romanised style”; Wightman 1970, 139: “all farms or country-houses built at least partly in stone.” It should be noted, however, that some scholars do have a more nuanced definition in mind. For Agache (1973), a villa had to possess several constituent parts, like a residence, barns, storehouses, etc. For Dark (2004, 282), villas in Britain were “economic and tenurial centres” that were characterized by both the production and consumption of wealth.
58. E.g., Niederzier-Hambach 69; Smith 1997, 153 fig. 42 (a) and the examples in Lenz 1998, 53.
61. Oelmann 1916.
62. Swoboda’s (1924) “Portikusvilla mit Eckrisaliten.” This essentially corresponds to the British “winged corridor house” (Richmond 1969).
64. Richmond 1969. For villas in Roman Britain: Hingley 1990; De la Bédoyère 1993; Salway 1967; Percival 1976.
66. For a good example of a gradual transition see the villa at Mayen, Germany, which developed out of a La Tène farmstead and lasted through eight or nine building phases until the late fourth century CE (Oelmann 1928; Mylius 1928). A minority of villas
in the Roman north-west do not conform to this pattern and were clearly built with no connection with pre-Roman structures or practice. These can often be traced to Roman army veterans (e.g., Köln-Münstersdorf: Fremersdorf 1933).


68. Lenz 1998. The French have come to a similar conclusion with their femmes indigènes: Bayard/Collart 1996.

69. Three sides: Tétting (France), Borg (Germ.), Wiedlisbach (Switz.); Four sides: Newel (Germ.); Fishbourne (UK). See Reuetti 2006, 380ff. and Richmond 1969 (“courtyard house”).

70. Förtsch 1995. The praetorium at Anreppen, for example, shows clear links to local villae. It is worth noting that scholarship on the north-western provinces also has a similar rural–urban problem in the use of the term villa as was discussed above for Italy. In Carnuntum in Pannonia, for example, the most elaborate of the houses in the civilian city, assumed to be the residence of the governor of Pannonia Superior, has recently been called a “Stadtvilla,” or “town villa” because of its luxurious furnishings and hypocausts, and its rambling arrangement with various corridors, courtyards, and gardens rather than around a central area (Cencic 2003, image plate 2, building 54).

71. Percival 1976, picking up on a point first made by Rivet 1969, 181ff. See, e.g., Caesar, BGall. 3.29; 5.12: Gauls have aedificia and tuguria, but not villae.


73. E.g., Rossiter 2000. See also George 2002.

74. A number of other studies have applied a similar approach. For a methodology involving starting with a family structure and looking for evidence of it in the spatial layout of houses, see Hales 2003; For the reverse approach deriving information on family structure from the layout of houses see Hillier and Hanson 1984.

75. As opposed to merely coins, which the Celts, for instance, used for other purposes before Roman conquest.

76. For a discussion of this see Clarke 1990. Also: Ljapoustina 1992.


78. See, e.g., the relief scenes of tenant farmers bringing rent in the form of farm produce and coins on funerary monuments from Neumagen and Trier (Germany): Esperandieu 1907–81, V, 4102, 4149; VI, 5148, 5268. For Gallia Narbonensis see e.g., Clavel 1970.

79. Excluding Egypt, whose special legal status as an imperial domain obstructed private agricultural enterprise, resulting in a lack of villas.

80. See, e.g., Rind 2009.


82. This block-like and obviously defensive building style was also popular in parts of Syria.

83. Over time these small farms were often accumulated by wealthy landowners, causing Pliny to comment that half of Africa was owned by only six men (Plin., HN 18.6.35).

84. For villas in North Africa see, e.g., Hitchner 1989; Rind 2009; Wilson (Chapter 16).


86. E.g., Carucci 2007, Lézine 1968. See also Wilson (Chapter 16).

87. See, e.g., Freyberger’s (1998) general preference for neutral terms like “Palast” (palace) and “Wohnbau” (dwelling), but lack of reluctance to use the term villa for townhouses in Apamea with Hellenistic-Roman features like peristyles.

88. See, e.g., Amiran and Dunayevsky 1958.

89. In an interim report on rescue excavations by the Packard Humanities Institute in the “Valley of the Mosaic Houses” between the acropolis and the Euphrates in Zeugma, Robert Early and Janet DeLaine use the term “house,” while their Turkish colleagues use the term villa for the same structures (Early 2003). See also Ergeç 1998 for the “Ergel Villa.” For Sepphoris, see Weiss in this book (Chapter 18) and Talgam and Weiss 2004.


91. See, e.g., Wickham 2005, 468, who sees the landed ideology of the European aristocracy in antiquity as “firmly part of western aristocratic identity” (leading to the feudal structures of the Middle Ages) and unmatched in the East.

92. E.g., Ein Yael just outside Jerusalem, probably the estate of a retired soldier who had been stationed at Jerusalem (Edelstein 1986, 1987, 1990). Perhaps the maritime villa at Apollonia near Tel Aviv also belongs to this list: Tal in this book (Chapter 17).


94. Rossiter 1997. The reason for the agglomeration of farmers into villages would appear to have been security and water supply (Applebaum 1977, 363).

95. E.g., McKay 1975; Percival 1976; Mielisch 1987.

97. See, e.g., Hirschfeld’s seminal typology of Palestinian dwellings in Hirschfeld 1995, although this has been revised by Guijarro (1997) and Fischer et al. (1998), and Richardson proposed the use of the term only for very high-status dwellings like Herod’s palaces (2004, 56, table 3). Likewise in Dacia, Thracia, and Moesia, where in the pre-Roman period large fortified farmhouses with enclosed courtyards existed, in the Roman period these are referred to by scholars as villas when they take on Roman architectural features (see, e.g., Valeva 1998).

100. For estates in Syria see, e.g., Villeneuve 1985; Freyberger 1998.
101. E.g., Khirbet Moraq near Hebron or Tirat Yehudah on the coastal plain (Applebaum 1977).
102. Applebaum 1977. For this trend also in Syria see Tchalenko 1953, 377ff.
106. Rossiter 1989, 102. E.g., Yakto near Beirut (Lassus 1938) and also coastal villas involved in fishing and the production of purple dye, such as Yavneh Yam south of Tel Aviv (Kaplan 1993).
111. Purcell 1995.
112. Lauter 1998, 22 and n.2.
113. McKay 1975, 102.
114. Mielsch 1987, 32.
116. According to Drerup (1990, 146 note 33) taken directly from the towers of earlier Greek farms that were used to store fruit and grain.
117. See further Schneider 1983; Scott 2004.
118. The best-known example displaying these features is the complex at Piazza Armerina, for which see Wilson 1983 and this volume (Chapter 12).
119. Cassius Dio (53.16.5–6) tells us that imperial residences were called palatia because Augustus had lived on the Palatine in Rome, and that the residences of subsequent emperors in other places had nonetheless retained the name.
120. For late-Roman villas in Italy: Scagliairini Corlaita 2003; Sfameni 2006.
122. For late-Roman villas and palaces in the provinces see von Bülow and Zabehlicky (eds.) 2011. For the late-Roman palace at Bruckneudorf in Austria see Zabehlicky 1998; 2002; 2004. For links between the late Roman villa system and feudalism see Jones 1958.
123. E.g., Ausonius’ description of the villa landscape around Trier in Mosella 12–42. The increased importance of Trier in late antiquity is perhaps the overriding factor here: The large villa at nearby Nennig is also late in date.
124. See, e.g., the letters of Symmachus or Cassiodorus’ Variae.
125. Vera 1995. See also contributions to Christie 2004.
126. Métraux 1998. See Marzano 2005 and 2007, 199–222, for further discussion and the idea that the “agricultural crisis” of Italy has been exaggerated.
128. With the exception of the area around Trier (see above). For the abandonment of villas in the northwest see, e.g., Hinz 1970 (Kölner Bucht) and Reutti 2006, 385–6.
129. E.g., the palace at Khirbet El-Mafjar near Jericho (= “Hisham’s Palace”): see Al-Asad and Bisheh 2000.
130. This is the view taken by Ackerman 1990 and Lauter 1998. See also Galand-Hallyn (ed.) 2008.
132. Varro, Rust. 3.1.10; Carandini and Filippi (eds.) 1985.
133. Lafon 1994, 222.
134. See discussion of Varro in “Ancient Meanings” section in this chapter; also Lafon 1994, 222; Tamm 1973 for the lack of a perfect model for Roman houses in general.
Map 2. Ancient towns and sites of southern Latium and Campania mentioned in Part I.