THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF GARDENS IN THE ROMAN VILLA

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THE EVOCATIVE, VIVID, and detailed descriptions of gardens, gardening, and landscapes by some ancient authors influence, if not dominate, our modern image of the Roman villa and its gardens. As a result, many scholarly studies of villas and their gardens have tried to equate archaeological remains with written descriptions. Rather than looking to the ancient written sources as the primary guide to understanding and interpreting Roman villa gardens, this essay focuses, instead, on the pertinent physical remains. Certainly, we cannot ignore the ancient sources, as they tell us much about Roman villa gardens; however, they are only a part of the jigsaw of evidence. We must consider the written accounts in concert with the botanical, horticultural, sculptural, hydraulic, and architectural evidence to understand the garden in the Roman villa as fully as possible. Together all this evidence enables us to understand the origin, function, decor, and ethos of gardens in villas and imperial estates throughout the empire; explore the process of designing and creating villa landscapes and gardens; and examine the significance of the garden in the Roman villa through space and time.

Ancient authors employed different terms, including hortus, xystus, and viridiarium, to identify Roman gardens; however, their meanings are not always clear and are sometimes difficult to apply to actual garden sites. Thus, rather than ancient designations, whose
meanings may vary through space and
time and do not have exact translations,
it is more productive, I believe, to employ modern terminology. For the purposes of this essay, therefore, I propose the use of: “garden,” “landscape,” and “designed landscape.”

A Roman “garden” is a bounded space where plants, and often water features, were fundamental elements; it was typically enclosed by the architecture of a villa, house, or residence, or was closely associated with architecture. Generally, Roman gardens were productive or ornamental, and in many cases, both. The term “landscape” typically describes the larger area around a site; in the case of the Roman villa, the landscape was often the land in which the villa was set and over which the villa looked. The nature of the landscape could vary, from agricultural fields belonging to a villa to the distant hills or coastline visible from a villa. This landscape might not be manipulated or even controlled by a villa owner; however, it was still an important element of the setting of the Roman villa. A “designed landscape,” by contrast, is a natural space, defined and manipulated by man for a functional purpose or to create a specific effect or allusion. A designed landscape was not necessarily an enclosed garden, but rather was a large space, which may not have been bounded by architecture, although it typically included architectural elements. Designed landscapes not only used plants in their construction, but they also deployed other natural elements, such as water or caves, or manipulated the natural terrain to create an artificial, yet often a seemingly natural, environment. “Landscapes” and “designed landscapes,” which scholars might typically call “parks,” can be seen as types of “gardens,” because they incorporate nature with architecture and human elements to create open-air environments.

Like many Roman cultural and artistic institutions, the villa garden had a complex origin and evolution. Archaeologically, “villa” denotes a rural settlement, which ranged from a simple farmstead, primarily focused on agricultural production, to a palatial residence in the country with every possible luxury. The villa of the Roman Republic began as a working farm tied to the Roman conception of the industrious farmer-soldier. So also were its earliest gardens, which began in a relatively humble form as productive parts of the villa environment.

The Villa Regina at Boscoreale, located near Pompeii, is a good, although relatively late, example which scholars call a villa rustica, a producing farmstead (Figure 3.1A; Figure 3.1B). Built in several phases beginning just after 80 BC, this villa was set in a vineyard, a type of productive garden, as traces of 300 root cavities of vines and 195 postholes attest. The root cavities of the vines ranged in dimension from $1 \times 1$ centimeters to $11 \times 16$ centimeters and were planted at a depth of between 7 and 66 centimeters. This variation in size and depth suggests that different species were present, and the small size of even the largest cavities indicates vines were most likely planted after the AD 62 earthquake. Sixteen other small cavities, possibly herbs, were also discovered around the villa itself. Because four of these cavities were on a small path, Jashemski assumed that it was no longer in use, perhaps because of the earthquake.

The vineyard and planting of herbs at the Villa Regina at Boscoreale underscore
Figure 3.1A
Villa Regina at Boscoreale, Bay of Naples, Italy.

Figure 3.1B Villa Regina at Boscoreale, Bay of Naples, Italy, plan, modified from Jashemski 1992, 288, plan 128.
a number of fundamental elements of the garden of the late Republican villa rustica. The original, indigenous Roman villa garden was productive in nature, yielding crops for personal use and/or for commercial profit. The plantings of the Villa Regina suggest that the gardens of a villa rustica could take a number of forms—from a larger landscape, like the vineyard, to the smaller herb garden. Fundamentally, food or agricultural production was the main purpose of these early villa gardens.

The villa gardens of Roman Italy were dramatically transformed in the last two centuries BC. While producing gardens continued to be an essential aspect of the Roman villa until the end of the Empire, the second century BC saw increased Roman trade and military engagements with the East. This interaction brought the Romans into contact with the cultural, artistic, architectural, and horticultural traditions of the Hellenistic world, including the gymnasium and the Hellenistic palace, both of which had a profound effect on Roman architecture and gardens. The result was the transformation of the function and design of many Roman villa gardens and the advent of designed, non-utilitarian villa gardens that had specific cultural resonances and allusions. While the villa garden, like Rome itself, was transformed through this contact, it did not merely copy Hellenistic gardens, but interpreted and incorporated elements of Hellenistic gardens that suited Roman taste and sensibilities. In doing so, what it meant to be Roman and what was “Roman” about the Roman garden was also permanently altered.

The gymnasium was a fundamental cultural institution of the Greek and Hellenistic worlds. Here elite, young men were educated in the arts of philosophy and rhetoric; they also received physical training. Architecturally, the gymnasium was organized around a colonnaded open space of beaten earth. Through their exposure to Greek culture and the Hellenistic world, elite Romans of the late Republic developed a strong interest not only in Greek philosophy but also in its architectural setting. These young aristocratic Romans were often sent to Athens to complete their education, and upon returning home, they transformed the philosophical disputes and training of the body associated with the gymnasium into elite leisure activities. To accommodate these pursuits, the Romans recreated the physical environment of Greek philosophy and the gymnasium by constructing gardens, groves, and landscapes, often set in colonnaded courtyards in their villas. Thus, the gardens and groves associated with the Hellenistic gymnasium and philosophical schools, as will become evident, were significant to the evolution of the Roman villa garden. The exact appearance of many of these philosophical schools remains unknown, but presumably they varied in size and shape. Likewise, the gymnasium was an institution whose physical form was as diverse as the kingdoms of the Hellenistic world. The idea of the gymnasium as a place of learning, perhaps, was more important to the Romans than a specific, codified physical form.

Gardens in Hellenistic palaces of kings and governors were also important in the development of Roman villa gardens of the late Republic. Nielsen identified three types of gardens in Hellenistic palaces: first, the expanded, fenced landscape...
that surrounded the palace; second, the enclosed, often porticoed, garden, which was not architecturally tied to the palace; and third, the novel, porticoed courtyard garden contained within the palace. Each type of garden had a different function. The first was largely used for recreational purposes, which Nielsen identifies as a paradeisos or alsos, a subset of which was used for hunting. The second was more diverse in purpose and was probably a gymnasium-inspired space. Called an alsos or kepos by Nielsen, this type of garden was used for private dining, recreation, and other non-official purposes. Lastly, the courtyard garden, the spatial hub of the Hellenistic palace, was, as Nielsen observed, “radically different”; many rooms, often associated with dining, were located off these planted courtyards. Nielsen’s use of the terms paradeisos, alsos, and kepos highlights the difficulties of using ancient terms to describe archaeological remains. For example, in her typology alsos identifies two types of spaces, making it an ambiguous label.

The identification of three different types of gardens suggests a key and fundamental point, also relevant to Roman villa gardens: gardens were not only conceived as enclosed, architecturally bounded spaces, but could also be larger grounds, landscaped and designed by humans. The heterogeneity of gardens and landscapes associated with Hellenistic palaces, like the palaces themselves, also suggests that the Hellenistic palace garden did not have a set form, but like the Roman garden, it evolved and varied through time and space.

The most famous of all Hellenistic palace gardens, although none of it is known archaeologically, is the Basileia complex, started by Alexander the Great in Alexandria. The Basileia was endowed with a wealth of diverse gardens. According to Strabo, this complex included an alsos, which may have been park-like, with pavilions, as well as official and private buildings for various functions, and the Sema, or tomb, of Alexander and the Ptolemies. The famous Museion, which had a library, portico, exedra, and dining hall, was also found here; it was probably a gymnasium-like structure with porticoed walks, exedrae, and rooms for strolling, sitting, and conversation. Additionally, there was also an actual gymnasium in the complex, which Strabo identified as the most beautiful building in Alexandria. Other buildings, including temples and sanctuaries, were present there. The Basileia seems to have had at least two of the three garden types that Nielsen identified: the architecturally distinct enclosed garden (in the form of the gymnasium) and a larger designed landscape. While we do not know the design of the Basileia’s architecture or whether there were gardens within the complex, it seems likely that some plantings were integrated within the architecture of the palace as courtyard gardens.

Numerous other Hellenistic residences, belonging to kings, generals, or governors, were also set in designed landscapes. The palace of Tryus in Jordan, better known as Araq el Emir, was on an island in an artificial lake, and the royal palace of the Seleucids in Antioch was similarly located in a designed landscape or garden on an island in the Orontes. Such royal landscapes were clearly a significant type of Hellenistic “garden,” which could take different forms according to variations in personal taste and natural topography.
The derivation and role of the planted courtyard in Roman gardens remain much debated, with scholars arguing for an indigenous Italic ancestry or else for an origin based on a cultural exchange with garden traditions of the Hellenistic world. Such origins are not mutually exclusive because both could have contributed elements to the Roman courtyard garden of the late Republic and Empire. Some recent archaeological evidence, however, seems to suggest a Hellenistic rather than Italic origin. Excavations around the perimeter of the central courtyard of the early Hellenistic governor’s palace on the acropolis of Jebel Khalid, by the Euphrates in Syria, yielded the presence of loose, nitrogenous soil, which is suggestive of plantings, although not confirmed (Figure 3.2). This interpretation would place a garden in the architectural heart of a Hellenistic palace and could support the existence of such gardens long before courtyard or peristyle gardens entered the Roman horticultural tradition. Through a process of cultural exchange, the Romans of the late Republic may well have imported a conception of courtyard gardens from the Hellenistic world, but transformed them into something truly their own, perhaps fusing them with the courtyard gardens that already existed in Roman Italy.

This brief consideration of Hellenistic gardens clearly demonstrates that gardens, of diverse functions and forms, were integral elements in Hellenistic palaces. They served as settings for architectural complexes and possibly as courtyards providing light and fresh air for the residences. Such Hellenistic gardens, which may have been primarily ornamental, could have provided alternatives to the productive Italian gardens and served as an inspiration for Roman villa gardens of the late Republic. Undoubtedly there were Hellenistic kitchen gardens and other productive gardens that supplied vegetables.

Figure 3.2 Hellenistic governor’s palace, Jebel Khalid, Syria, plan, modified from Clarke 2001, fig. 3.
fruits, and other delights, but evidence for these remains scant.

Thus, the advent of a non-producing garden in Roman Italy may not have been an indigenous development but one that resulted from contact and exchange with the eastern Mediterranean. In the late second century BC, the Romans began to incorporate the architecture of the gymnasium and the gardens of Hellenistic palaces into their villas, which served either as working farms and elite rural residences, or as opulent estates with a limited or non-existent producing capacity. The villa at Settefinestre and the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum illustrate the evolution of the Roman villa garden and two of the possible architectural and horticultural forms that it could embody in the late Republic and early Empire.

The villa located at Settefinestre, in the *ager Cosanus* in southern Tuscany near the sea, had two distinct phases, each planted with various gardens. It had both a *pars urbana*, or well-decorated residence, and a *pars rustica*, a productive farm. The first phase of the villa dates from 40 BC to AD 100, and the second to between AD 100 and 200; the villa was abandoned near the end of the second century AD. Although no remains of the plants survive, archaeological investigations yielded evidence for gardens in both of the villa’s phases.

Situated atop a hill, the villa and its gardens were positioned on several levels. Within the first phase of the villa, the excavators identified three gardens: *giardino porticato*, *giardino turrito*, and an *orto* (Figure 3.3). The *giardino porticato* was in fact two gardens, separated by a wall and positioned on two levels at the southwestern edge of the villa. While stairs connected these two spaces on the east and west of the dividing wall, they may have had different purposes.

The excavators observed that the upper garden must have been used primarily for strolling with important guests, attested not only by its location adjacent to the reception rooms, but also by its elaborate, decorative elements and plan. This π-shaped colonnaded courtyard had a central planting bed, which the excavators suggested was divided into two squares, and a path bordered by plants around the perimeter of the colonnade. Furthermore, within the porticoes of the upper garden were niches, perhaps for fountains or statues. The high position of this garden and the exclusion of a portico at the north permitted unobstructed vistas – an important and impressive element in the experience of visitors. The formally planted garden, porticoes, vistas over the *ager Cosanus*, and possible water features or sculptures indicate that this garden was probably a non-productive, luxurious space created for private enjoyment.

A second garden was contiguous to, but at a lower level from, the so-called upper garden; a hedge planted along the retaining wall separating the two gardens must have physically and visually integrated these spaces. This lower garden, enclosed on three sides by walls (a small entrance at the east) and on the fourth (western) side by a portico, was formally planned in two equally sized, square planting beds and a path around the perimeter; a hedge was planted along the dividing wall. The path could have been used for strolling, as in the upper garden; however, the entire ensemble may have functioned as a showpiece to be viewed from the upper garden.

While the excavators considered these two gardens to be part of a unified,
gymnasium-inspired complex, they also acknowledged that the lower garden was located in close proximity to the working, productive elements of the villa and was enclosed by simpler architecture than that which enclosed the upper garden. The lower garden, therefore, may have been a kitchen garden rather than a formal garden; or it may have been multi-functional, serving as a connective space between two levels of the villa, as well as a pleasant, although simple, space for leisured walking.

Another enclosed garden on the level of the basis villae at the northeastern part of the residence was designated by the excavators as the giardino turrito. This garden was organized around two square planting beds bordered by paths. Each bed may have been divided into four smaller,

Figure 3.3 Villa at Settefinestre, Ager Cosanus, Italy, plan, first phase, modified from Carandini 1985, fig. 139.
equal-sized beds, with a central walk; the whole ensemble was probably designed for enjoyment, mainly strolling, rather than for production. Furthermore, as the name given to this garden suggests, the garden’s exterior wall resembled a city wall and its guard towers.

The organization of both levels of the giardino porticato and the giardino turrito introduces us to a fundamental element in the design of the non-productive Roman villa garden: order. The open spaces of these gardens were organized according to geometric principles, using squares and rectangles to create formal environments. The paths reinforced the rectilinearity of the architectural surround by their careful alignment with the colonnades of the porticoes and walls that bordered the open spaces. This formal approach to garden design reflects the Roman attitude toward space: order should be imposed upon architectural and landscaped environments. It also highlights how the garden and architecture of the villa were integral to each other. They were conceived together and connected in terms of design and use. This point, which is evident in the earlier Hellenistic palaces, is fundamental but typically has been overlooked. The garden is not simply a luxury addition but rather an integral part of the Roman villa and Hellenistic palace; it acts essentially as another “room.”

In addition to the two non-utilitarian gardens, two productive gardens have been identified at Settefinestre. North of the lower level of the giardino porticato was an orto, a productive garden. While few traces of the plantings remain, the plain architecture enclosing it suggests that this was probably a kitchen garden providing flowers, fruits, and vegetables for the villa. In addition, a large, walled pomarium, or fruit orchard, was located along the southern approach to the villa. The presence of torcularia, presses for wine and oil, also supports the existence of nearby vineyards and olive groves. The diversity of the gardens at Settefinestre demonstrates clearly that a Roman villa could be a productive farm and at the same time possess formal gardens.

In the second phase of the villa, the residence and gardens were remodeled. The upper level of the giardino porticato, according to the excavators, was transformed into a palaestra and the lower into a productive hortus, while the orto was reduced in size to accommodate a bath complex at the east (Figure 3.4). Furthermore, the giardino turrito was expanded and modified into what the excavators identified as a “sports field” or a xystus, although no specific horticultural or architectural remains confirm this identification. The excavators’ terminology belies the confusing use of ancient words to describe archaeologically known gardens; there is little from the extant remains to support the identification of these spaces as a xystus or a palaestra.

The porticoes, which enclosed these gardens, suggest that they retained a non-productive, leisure function. Kitchen gardens and orchards as well as non-productive gardens also remained, for obvious reasons, integral parts of villa life during the second building phase. The producing and landscaped gardens at Settefinestre illustrate well the melding of the Italic productive garden with the ornamental, enclosed garden traditions of the Hellenistic world.
Furthermore, the non-producing gardens, architecture, and design of the villa at Settefinestre also highlight other important principles of the Roman villa and its gardens. Not only were gardens often designed according to ordered patterns, but the very position of the villa within its surrounding landscapes was equally important. The villa at Settefinestre, located high atop a hill, provided commanding panoramas for its inhabitants and at the same time majestic views of its architecture for those approaching from below.\(^{41}\) The larger landscapes into which Roman villas were set were often terraced and could have been manipulated to provide the owner of each villa with the best possible views.\(^{42}\) This producing landscape was also attractive to gaze upon; it reminds us that just because a garden or landscape was productive did not mean that it was not aesthetically pleasing.

As we shall see, many of the design principles utilized at Settefinestre were typical of Roman villas and their gardens in the first and second centuries A.D. Yet, Settefinestre, as a functioning farm and a luxurious retreat, is an exceptional villa rustica. For example, many provincial villae rusticae, such as those found in Roman Libya, were either farms or retreats, but not both. There may be no absolute
“Roman villa” or “Roman villa garden,” but instead merely numerous interpretations with enough common elements to be recognized as belonging to a single tradition.

In the first centuries BC and AD, as villas evolved into luxurious retreats of the Roman elite, their former productivity was drastically reduced. The Bay of Naples, Campania, and central Italy were home to the first of these impressive, non-productive maritime and inland villas, which included landscaped gardens, filled with sculptures, paintings, water features, and plantings.

The Villa of the Papyri, located just outside of Herculaneum, is one of the best examples of these luxurious, high-status maritime villas. Since its discovery in the eighteenth century, the villa’s outstanding sculptural collection and its extraordinary library of Greek papyri have garnered much scholarly attention. Although generally not the focus of these studies, the gardens were fundamental elements; they compose a considerable total area of the villa’s footprint (Figure 3.5). Built in two phases, from the first to the second half of the first century BC, the villa contained two gardens: a square, porticoed garden A (29.5 × 28.5 m) from the original phase, and a monumental porticoed garden B (94 × 31 m), constructed during the second phase. Their decor and multiple functions highlight within a single villa the diversity of non-productive gardens.

The porticoed garden A, adjoining the atrium, was the core of the residence. With at least twelve entrances, this transitional space provided access to many rooms in the residence. As the heart of the villa, garden A stands, therefore, in the tradition of central courtyards of Hellenistic palaces and its decor, works of art, and water features all signaled its importance. For example, fountains in the form of conch shells, situated in the intercolumniations of the colonnade, sprayed water into a long, narrow pool in the center of the garden. Some of the sculptural works included a Doryphoros herm by Apollonios, a first-century BC Athenian artist; a female herm; probably busts of philosophers and other male personages; and a statue of Panathenaic Athena. The subject matter of these sculptures alluded to the world of classical Greece and Greek philosophy and, thereby, projected the cultural sophistication and aspirations of the villa owner.
Porticoed garden B seems to have had a purpose and inspiration different from garden A. This garden was a self-contained complex adjoining the residential block and could be reached through a series of nine entrances, primarily from small rooms along its southern side, providing access to rather than passage through garden B. Furthermore, no rooms adjoined garden B on its eastern and western sides, making it more self-contained and architecturally isolated than garden A. In effect, garden B was more a destination designed for leisure activities and less a space through which one passed to reach other parts of the villa.

The sculptural displays, plantings, and long pool must have created an atmosphere of amoenitas. Sculptures of rulers of the Hellenistic world, Greek gods, philosophers, writers, and orators no doubt prompted philosophical, political, and literary discussion as one strolled inside the porticoes or through the gardens, as one might have done in a gymnasium or philosophical school. The bronze wrestlers might have recalled the physical side of a young man’s education in Greece, while the stags, satyrs, and Priapus could allude to Bacchic revels, rural pursuits, and other myths. Other sculptures depict elegantly dressed women in Greek peploi. In garden B, multiple themes play out, seemingly evoking different aspects of the Hellenistic world. It was a garden of allusion; the architectural setting, the plantings, and the sculptures had the capability of transporting visitors to a Greek gymnasium, to a philosophical school, and to a mythical world. Clearly, this porticoed garden was a locus for leisure activities; it was not a connective space, like garden A.

In addition to these gardens, other landscaped settings undoubtedly were important in this villa, particularly a terrace, accessible from garden B, which stretched from the northwestern end toward the coast. Although we cannot reconstruct any horticultural elements on this terrace, we know it had a belvedere, which offered commanding views of the sea and coastline. The terrace with its tower was most likely constructed specifically to take advantage of the view, but its visibility from below must have been of equal importance, similar to that of the position of the villa at Settefinestre, previously discussed. The terrace and belvedere imply that the larger landscape, both in which the villa was set and over which it looked, could become a valuable part of the villa, even if it was not owned or controlled by the proprietor.

The Villa of the Papyri was rich in gardens. Gardens A and B alluded to two of the Hellenistic world’s architectural forms, the courtyard garden of the palace and the gymnasium, respectively. Taken together, the formal gardens A and B, the terrace, and belvedere suggest that the Romans conceived of the larger environment in which a villa was positioned as an integral part of their “garden” experience. As the gardens of Hellenistic palaces cannot be narrowly defined, the Roman villa garden could and did have different iterations; not only was it a formally planted garden in a courtyard or one otherwise attached to a residence, but it also could be a designed landscape (if the term “garden” is used in a broad context, as suggested in the opening part of this chapter) that offered pleasant views from the villa grounds.

Non-producing gardens were particularly associated with villas by the sea,
which were typically luxury residences meant for retreat and leisure. Such formal gardens are attested at Villa Arianna, Villa San Marco, Villa del Pastore, all in ancient Stabia, just south of Pompeii, where there were a number of producing and luxurious villas. On the whole, they were locations of sophisticated display, where sculpture, paintings, water, and plantings expressed elite, cultural interests.

The shores of volcanic lakes, such as Lake Nemi, south of Rome, were also places for maritime villas that possessed panoramic views of the water, neighboring villas, and the larger landscape. The wider terrain associated with these villas has not been systematically explored, so it is difficult to know whether it was cultivated in antiquity. Archaeological surveys and excavations of the larger landscape would illuminate whether productive gardens were important elements of at least some of these villas.

By the early Empire, villas and villa gardens were popular throughout Italy, but the epicenter was Rome, from which many villas were located within one to two days’ ride. At this time, another type of residence also became a part of the Roman architectural and horticultural canon: the Imperial residence in the city. While these residences were not strictly speaking villas, a discussion of their similarity to the design, decoration, materials, architecture, and gardens of Roman villas enriches our understanding of Roman villa culture. Villas, by their very nature, were non-urban; the domus was the residence within the city. However, many elite urban residences in Rome, due to the new wealth and intense social and political competition that defined the late Republic, soon took on the scale and scope of a villa and came to include lavish gardens and architecture; they were also influenced by elite Romans’ contact with the Hellenistic world. Many of the new trends in architecture and gardens originated in Rome and then were exported in some form to the rest of the empire. But, before discussing Imperial residences and villas, it is worth exploring villas near Rome to understand the development of the Roman villa and its gardens during the early Empire.

The Villa ad Gallinas Albas at Prima Porta, widely accepted as having belonged to Augustus’ wife, Livia, is a large complex (about 14,000 m²) atop a steep hill, located just north of Rome near the Via Flaminia. In 1863 a statue of Augustus and a famous subterranean room with garden frescoes were discovered and more recent excavations have uncovered at least four real gardens, one of which is particularly significant: the garden terrace (Figure 3.6).

Excavations have shown that this square terrace (74 × 74 m), dating from the late Republican period, was enclosed on three sides by double-aisled porticoes. The Corinthian columns of the porticoes were stuccoed and painted; fragments of architectural terracotta, which presumably had adorned the entablature, and fragments of Second Style wall paintings from the western colonnade were recovered. Set behind the northern portico was a series of niches, 50 to 180 centimeters high, cut into the slope of the hill, which were probably planting beds, creating a small hanging garden. In front of these planting beds ran a euripus that was later filled and transformed into another planting bed. Although agricultural activities of later times have disturbed the ancient levels, the analysis of mollusks and the recovery
of ollae perforatae clearly indicate that the terrace was a planted garden in antiquity.66 The plantings are not known; however, some scholars have speculated that it was the place of a famous laurel grove of the Julio-Claudians.67 The luxurious decor of the porticoes and the plantings, whatever they may have been, no doubt created a pleasant atmosphere suitable for leisurely walks associated with a cultured lifestyle.

The design and scale of the garden terrace may have resembled a rural sanctuary, like those at Nikapolis in Greece or Gabii in central Italy.68 Like the π-shaped porticoes that enclosed the plantings and the altar or temple of these sanctuaries respectively, the garden terrace, which was set high on the hill, was intimately connected with its immediately surrounding landscapes. The use of sacred architectural forms within a private residence reminds us that there were many sources of inspiration for the villa gardens. Distant views of Rome were also possible, the colonnades providing a series of framed views, as a sequential, if not quite cinematic, vision of the city.69 The view of a city or of other human habitations was visually stimulating, so those seeing the city from the Prima Porta villa must have considered themselves particularly
fortunate. Likewise, inhabitants of Rome could see the villa itself, making it, and, by extension, its owner a visible part of the landscape. As a result, the villa imbued its owner with baronial power by giving him/her “possession” over all that was visible and at the same time by being the visible object of envy to the less privileged.

In addition to the monumental terrace, the Prima Porta villa had other gardens. A small garden (ca. 6.10 × 9.06 m) was enclosed by an Ionic colonnade, which was paved with mosaics and probably marble (see Figure 3.6). As the garden terrace, this small garden also enjoyed southerly views toward Rome. Twenty-two *ollae perforatae*, found in the courtyard, were aligned with the columns at intervals of five Roman feet, a typical reflection of the Roman preference for order. Many of the planting pots were replacements, indicating a replanting, probably in the late first or early second century AD, sometime after the earlier garden of 40 BC. In the center of the courtyard, on axis with room 51, was a π-shaped concrete structure, apparently original to the first garden, whose function is unknown, but which may have served as a fountain, statue base, or some type of elaborate planter. The central courtyard of the villa (no. 22 on the plan) also may have been planted, as fragments of *ollae perforatae* found nearby attest; there may have also been a garden or planting feature associated with the *frigidarium* in the bath complex. Traces of *ollae perforatae* found in various locations around the villa suggest the presence of other gardens or landscaping, although their original form and purpose are unclear. Another “garden,” and no doubt the most famous at Prima Porta, is the subterranean room, whose four walls were adorned with paintings that created a fantastic and totally artificial garden landscape.

The presence of so many gardens, both real and artificial, suggests that gardens were a priority in the conception, design, and use of this villa. The plantings of the garden terrace coupled with the hanging garden and the double portico must have created a stunning effect of real plantings in concert with architecture. In contrast, the interior space of the subterranean room employed a fictive garden but with similarly astonishing results. Like the garden rooms at Villa A at Oplontis, the *trompe l’oeil* paintings of Livia’s Prima Porta room were meant to inspire viewers into believing they were within an outdoor garden. This inventive and playful attitude toward space, interior and exterior, reality and artifice, which typifies much of Roman art and architecture, was an essential element of the Roman villa garden and speaks to its innovative nature, originality, and diversity. Not only were gardens, such as the small garden and the courtyard no. 22, architecturally central to the villa, but also the size of the garden terrace, 5,476 square meters, was just over a third of the villa’s known area. The total amount of space occupied by plantings in this villa suggests that gardens and the activities they housed were essential to the architectural planning of a Roman villa and to its manifest culture.

Thus far, our discussion has examined a number of the essential decorative elements of the Roman villa garden, in particular the plants and the works of art, as well as the architecture that enclosed them. Water was also critical, not only for its important role in sustaining plants, but also as a decorative element, in the form of fountains, pools, and canals, which
helped create environments imbued with cultural meaning. In fact, some Roman gardens were designed around water as the primary feature, such as in the House of the Fountains in Conimbriga, Portugal, where the central courtyard of the house (25.8 × 11.6 m) featured 400 fountains or “jets d’eau” and a rectangular water-filled basin where six symmetrical watertight planters were placed, creating a unique and remarkable water garden. Water often played a key role in garden triclinia in Roman houses and villas, such as the Scenic Canal (the so-called “Canopus”) at Hadrian’s Villa, which is discussed below. One of the best-preserved water triclinia is the late first-century BC grotto-cum-sculptural gallery at the villa at the edge of the sea near Sperlonga, located about a day’s journey from Rome, which the emperor Tiberius may have owned in the first century AD (Figure 3.7A; Figure 3.7B). This triclinium, I would argue, is a type of designed landscape, which deployed many elements, including a skillful and intentional combination.

Figure 3.7A View from the grotto of the Villa at Sperlonga, Italy.

Figure 3.7B The grotto of the Villa at Sperlonga, Italy, plan, modified from Salza Prina Ricotti 1987, fig 2.
of natural and artificial elements with a specific sculptural program.

The setting today is still impressive: a large, partially water-filled cavern at the base of a rocky cliff near the sea (Figure 3.7A). A man-made, round basin fills the lower level of the cave, beyond which are two smaller grottoes at a higher level. This basin opens outward to a rectangular, constructed basin where a platform for an outdoor triclinium facing into the cave was located. While the overall form of the grotto was a natural cave and spring, it was extensively modified to meet the demands of the villa owner. Thus, water and natural rock were fundamental to the ambience of this grotto and, as the plantings of many villa gardens, were manipulated to create a designed landscape, rich in allusions and cultural meanings.

At least four sculptural groups with a Homeric theme were displayed within this imposing setting. They have been dated as early as the second century BC and as late as the first century AD, but most scholars believe, regardless of the date of the sculptures, that they were assembled together in the grotto by the early first century AD. The grotto's sculptural program, coupled with the natural and artificial elements of the cave, transformed the grotto into a series of vignettes from the Odyssey. Additionally, a boat journey to and within the cave could have evoked scenes from the Iliad and Odyssey. Specifically, the sculptures likened the diner's experience there to Odysseus' adventure home by sea, so that the cavern became an "Odyssey landscape."

Only from the triclinium could the sculptural program and the artificial caves be fully appreciated. Located on the left outcropping between the circular and rectangular basins was a warrior, perhaps Odysseus, holding the body of a fallen comrade; this group quite clearly could evoke the battles of the Trojan War as recounted in Homer's Iliad. Located on the opposite side of the grotto was the sculptural group of Odysseus and Diomedes grasping the Palladium of Troy, alluding to the fall of Troy. Together these two groups set the stage for the Homeric journey that played out in the waters and caves of the inner grotto.

In the southern, larger grotto within the cave was a group of Odysseus and his men blinding the giant Polyphemus. The coinciding natural and literary settings (taking place in a cave) for this frightening episode made the diners both witnesses and virtual participants in Odysseus' daring escape. Having avoided death, Odysseus and the diners faced another challenge. On a base in the center of the round basin, on axis with the triclinium, stood a sculptural group of Scylla attacking Odysseus' ship. This group transformed the cave into the Charybdis, the eddy that wrecked ships crossing the perilous Straits of Messina; for a moment the diners became Odysseus' unlucky sailors.

The position of the complex looking westwards to the sea was also important. Just as one could enjoy the vistas into the cave, the views out from the triclinium were equally stunning and evocative, and were probably enjoyed by those who were reclining and dining along the edges of the pool. Likewise, because it faced west, the cave benefited from the outstanding interplay of light and shadow during the evening sunset, making it the perfect venue for Roman dining.
Like the landscaped gardens, here the sculptural program in its water and grotto setting as well as the movement through it created a landscape of allusion that advertised the cultural sophistication and awareness of the owner. The grotto was thus a water garden purposefully designed to be rich with literary meanings. But it was also productive, for it served as a fishpond, or piscina, where fish were raised. Both functions alluded to the sea, and the fish could even be caught for dinner. There is no evidence for plantings and the brackish nature of the water excludes this possibility; however, the fact that fish could be raised here means, as in many planted Roman gardens, this grotto was producing but also was imbued with deep cultural meanings. Perhaps ducks or other appropriate waterfowl were also added to the basins, turning this into an even more dynamic and alive environment.

The villa at Sperlonga is an outstanding example of the extent to which the Romans skillfully manipulated a natural landscape – water, caves, fish, and light – in conjunction with artificial elements, in particular sculpture and architecture, to create a complex setting. The grotto was more than just a decorative water garden, for it employed water, sculpture, and the experience of place to evoke a journey through space, time, history, and myth. As villa gardens exploited nature and artifice for their plantings, so the Sperlonga grotto manipulated rock and water to produce what may be rightly called a “designed landscape.” By fusing these two elements together, the owner of a garden was able to make rich cultural and, in this case, literary allusions. Here the grotto-cave became a venue for a condensed literary experience that would have been the perfect topic of conversation for a sophisticated Roman dining party.

Such creative and innovative approaches to gardens found their most elaborate and sophisticated expressions in Imperial palaces and villas. The Domus Aurea, Nero’s “golden house” in Rome, had all the hallmarks of a villa or of horti, including an artificial lake (stagnum) and architecture with exterior colonnades from which to view the surrounding landscape, stretching from the Esquiline to the Caelian and Palatine hills. It is these features that Tacitus and Suetonius condemned as inappropriate to an urban residence, and which must have been associated with places of pleasure and debauchery. For example, in the stagnum of Agrippa in the Campus Martius Tigellinus held extravagant parties on rafts and ships, which Nero attended and where Roman social order was inverted and Roman decorum challenged. Reportedly, the crews were organized according to age and vice. Furthermore, on one side of Agrippa’s stagnum, Roman matrons served as prostitutes in brothels, while on the other bank, nude prostitutes made obscene gestures. It is not unlikely that Nero’s stagnum could have served a similar purpose. By creating such a landscape in the heart of Rome, Nero challenged Roman conventions of architecture, gardening, and urban planning, just as he challenged Roman mores. The gardens and landscaped terraces of the Domus Aurea within the city were not only a testament to Nero’s power but also an inversion of the proper order of the natural and human worlds (Figure 3.8). The plantings of the Domus Aurea are unknown; however, a large portico on the Palatine Hill identified as having belonged to Nero’s House once enclosed
a monumental garden and the enormous complex on the Esquiline contained several peristyle courtyards where water and gardens must have been key elements. Furthermore, two photographs, taken during excavations in the 1870s, show piles of ollae perforatae unearthed near an octagonal room on the Esquiline. 97 Although we do not know the plants that these pots contained, their very existence implies careful plantings and the presence of designed gardens within or designed landscapes adjacent to the living quarters. 98

These gardens must have been impressive, but the most extravagant garden element was the landscape itself in which the architecture of the Domus Aurea was set. Our knowledge of this landscape is incomplete; the whole area will never be excavated, as it lies in central Rome. We can, nevertheless, examine one feature that confirms the designed nature of the park: the stagnum, or lake, located in a low-lying area partially enclosed by the Esquiline, Caelian, and Palatine hills, where the Colosseum now stands. 99 Scholars had long assumed that this stagnum was simply an artificial, but a naturalistic-looking lake; however, recent archaeological excavations have demonstrated that it was, in fact, a monumental, rectangular basin measuring approximately 200 × 200 meters and enclosed by a colonnade. 100 Although we often lack a sense of the design of the Domus Aurea’s larger, landscaped setting, this square, porticoed “lake” suggests that the entire park was likewise not a naturalistic, wild landscape, but designed as a series of organized spaces.

The gardens of the Domus Aurea inform us that gardens, especially large-scale designed landscapes, often carried political and social connotations. The highly politicized landscape of the Domus Aurea grew out of the late Republican and
early Imperial *horti*, which seem to have been either peri-urban estates immediately outside Rome, or a type of suburban villa.\textsuperscript{101} The gardens of suburban estates, including *horti*, were not only expressions of wealth and social standing but also potential places for political events and intrigues.\textsuperscript{102} Caesar, for example, used his *Horti trans Tiberim* to host a public feast (*epulum publicum*) after his Spanish campaign, while from the grounds of his *horti* Pompey bribed voters in the election of Africanus as consul in 61.\textsuperscript{103} Private gardens were good places where political plots could be hatched, as in the case of Claudius’ disloyal wife, Messalina, who in the gardens of her private *horti* attempted unsuccessfully to conspire to make her lover emperor.\textsuperscript{104} Because such gardens could serve as locations to invert political and social order, as well as to stage political rallies and covert meetings, they were too potent as political spaces to be left in private hands and gradually passed into the imperial domain.\textsuperscript{105} In this larger context, Nero’s decision to transform the heart of Rome into a private, glorified villa and garden, even if public traffic was allowed to pass through,\textsuperscript{106} made Nero the master of the city, just as any villa owner might be titular master over his surrounding countryside.

While the Domus Aurea was architecturally innovative and extraordinary in its landscapes and gardens, later Imperial properties were equally impressive and inventive. Hadrian’s Villa, located near Tivoli, east of Rome, was more a small city than a villa, for it was an imperial base of operations.\textsuperscript{107} Built in two phases from AD 117 to 125 and AD 125 to 133,\textsuperscript{108} it was a sprawling, but organized, complex of more than 120 hectares (300 acres), filled with a wealth of diverse gardens (Figure 3.9).\textsuperscript{109} Unlike the Domus Aurea the preservation of

\textbf{Figure 3.9} Hadrian’s Villa, Tivoli, Italy, plan, modified from MacDonald and Pinto 1995.
much of the architecture and landscape of Hadrian’s Villa permits good understanding of the diverse types of gardens and their significance in an Imperial villa context. Although early explorers and scholars identified certain buildings with names appearing in the Historia Augusta, a notoriously unreliable fourth-century AD text, scholars now consider most of these to be incorrect and misleading. Other titles were simply created, without reference to an ancient text, as useful markers. I will attempt to use more neutral terms, although traditional names will appear in parentheses when useful.

The Water Court (“Piazza d’Oro”) is a large, luxurious portico-garden complex located in the eastern part of the estate (Figure 3.10). In the center, on axis with a pavilion, was a long marble-lined euripus (fed by a large fountain in the pavilion). A complex drainage and irrigation system supplied the western part of this garden with water. Crisscrossing water channels, cut into the tufa bedrock, 1 meter below the original ground level, allowed drainage. The plants in this garden are unknown; the excavators have suggested box hedges.

The size of this complex (63 × 54 m), akin to porticoes and gardens found in cities, such as the Templum Pacis in Rome, suggests that urban public architecture influenced architectural forms.

Figure 3.10 Hadrian’s Villa, Tivoli, Piazza d’Oro, plan, modified from Salza Prina Ricotti 2001, 266, fig. 96.
and gardens in country villas.\textsuperscript{114} Because Hadrian’s Villa functioned as an imperial residence that accommodated both public and private functions, the Water Court could well have served as a location for strolling with ambassadors, dignitaries, and friends before dining in the pavilion, in much the same way as the Vigna Barberini may have been used by the emperor in the Domus Augustana on the Palatine Hill in Rome.\textsuperscript{115}

The interest in and adaptation of public architecture and gardens are also evident in the villa’s Stadium Garden. Set in the heart of the central residential block, this garden had an elongated architectural form, curved at the southern end, which evoked the architecture of a circus or a stadium, just like the circus garden in Domitian’s residence on the Palatine (Figure 3.11A; Figure 3.11B),\textsuperscript{116} but was actually an elaborate, semicircular \textit{nymphaeum}. A northern garden, also set within a portico, featured a series of rectangular planters enclosing a \textit{euripus} and a small pavilion.\textsuperscript{117} The
pavilion had *opus sectile* paving, marble fountains, and statues. The platform in the center of the complex may have been used for theatrical performances and was visible to the emperor and others who sat at a higher elevation in the eastern *exedrae*. Together with the plantings, *nymphaeum*, and *euripus*, it created an atmosphere appropriate for leisure activities.

The Stadium Garden attests to the playful and experimental nature of Roman villa architecture and garden design that goes back to the late Republic. By transforming monumental public architecture (in this case a race or running track) into an architectural and horticultural *locus* of contemplation and theater, Hadrian and his predecessors blurred the boundaries between public and private. 118

The East-West Terrace was erroneously identified from the *Historia Augusta* as the Stoa Poikile, but it clearly could not have evoked the fifth-century bc *stoa* in Athens, which was a small building named for famous paintings that hung on its interior walls. 119 The terrace at Hadrian’s Villa, because of its size, design, and decorative elements, must have been a large, walled garden complex (Figure 3.12A; Figure 3.12B). A rectangular portico (232 × 96 m) with curved short ends (the north had a double colonnade) enclosed a monumental pool and garden. 120 The enclosed space, the length and breadth of the porticoes, the impressive water basin, and the plantings speak of a place of leisured movement and social intercourse.

To the west of the final approach to the Grand Vestibule was the Antinoeion, a temple complex dedicated to Hadrian’s
deceased young lover, Antinous (Figure 3.13). The excavators have reconstructed the precinct, whose poor preservation is due to modern agricultural cultivation, as a temenos with two unidentified, marble temples (63 × 23 m) and a colonnaded exedra (27.3 m in diameter). It has been suggested that the obelisk dedicated to Antinous, which now stands on Rome’s Pincian Hill, stood between the two temples. Although the temenos was paved, plantings played an important role, as revealed by trenches cut into the tufa bedrock on three sides of the temples. Their size, at least 1.2 meters deep and 1.5 meters wide, suggests that they could have accommodated plants with developed root systems; the archaeobotanical remains indicate date palms. While these trees were highly suitable to such a precinct because they evoked the landscape of Egypt, where Antinous died, the exact arrangement of these plantings remains unclear. No individual planting pits were found for the trees, which are typical for plantings in temple groves, and other reconstructions published by the excavator have suggested that hedges framed the temples. Four other bedding trenches were reportedly found in the complex; these beds were shallower than the other trenches and so they may have contained flowers or hedges. Until there is detailed publication of the excavation results, conclusive interpretation will have to wait. However, it is certain that the Antinoeion was an exceptional garden complex in this villa because it was not meant for leisured walks or social events but instead for reflection and commemoration, similar to temple gardens.

South of the Grand Vestibule was the Scenic Canal, a monumental water garden-cum-banqueting pavilion, mistakenly...
identified from the *Historia Augusta* as the “Canopus,” presumably an allusion to the Alexandrian Canopic branch of the Nile (Figure 3.14). The setting for this complex, perhaps better called the Scenic Canal, was an artificial valley that had a long central pool (119 × 18 m) lined by colonnaded arcades and sculptures. A terraced garden was on the western side and evidence of plantings has been discovered as well to the east. The focal point of this complex at the south is an elaborate vaulted, semicircular dining pavilion resembling the mouth of a cave, set into the sloping terrain. Like the grotto at Sperlonga, nature and artifice were used together to striking effect. Constructed behind and above this pavilion was a complex system of channels that led water down a set of central steps into a small, rectangular pool flanked by a matching pair of intricately configured chambers. Guests, dining within this elaborate interior, had a commanding view of the landscaped valley and of numerous sculptures displayed within and around the expansive canal. It was a truly impressive designed landscape of architectural fantasy, artistic masterpieces, waterfalls, and manicured gardens – a place fit for an emperor and his entourage.

The architecture and gardens of Hadrian’s Villa are truly exceptional in their scale and diversity. Not only were there designed exotic landscapes and gardens, but also numerous porticoed garden courts, such as in the Central Vestibule and the so-called “Sala del Trono.” Water also played an important part not only as sustenance for the plants but also as an important decorative device, as in the so-called Maritime Theater, the so-called Academy, and the peristyle-pool complex. There we find almost every type of Roman garden, from the planted...
courtyard and the public portico, like the Water Court (“Piazza d’Oro”), to the commemorative, temple-like garden of the Antinoeion and the water gardens of the Scenic Canal (“Canopus”). For all our knowledge about the luxury gardens of Hadrian’s Villa, virtually nothing is known about the possible cultivation of the larger landscape in which the villa was set, but it is there where the kitchen gardens, croplands, and orchards likely existed.

Hellenistic palatial gardens, the gymnasium, and the indigenous Italic horticultural tradition of the Republic were, as has been discussed, influences on Roman villa gardens; however, by the early and high Empire, as demonstrated by Hadrian’s Villa, new forms were invented to satisfy the demands of the super-wealthy. Through the adoption and reinterpretation of Roman public architecture, specifically the public portico, the theater, the stadium, and the circus, and through a fantastic use of water, landscaping, as well as the more traditional decorative elements, such as sculpture, architects and designers created ever more complex and evocative gardens and outdoor spaces.

Not only in Rome and its environs but also outside Italy, soon after the establishment of the empire under Augustus, elaborate gardens became significant features of villa landscapes. These provincial villas and their gardens may have taken their lead from Rome; however, they reveal, sometimes considerable, diversity from their Italian prototypes and even among themselves. The provinces were settled by Romans at different times, had various levels of urbanization and cultural sophistication, and differences in religious practices, climate conditions, economic stability, and ethnic makeup. Diversity is also evident in architectural and horticultural traditions, which influenced appearances of villa gardens in the provinces. While it is not possible to review here the villa garden traditions of each province, a few select examples should highlight their diversity and the cultural exchange between Roman and local elements.

Fishbourne, a grand villa dated to ca. AD 70, located on the southern coast of Roman Britain in modern West Sussex, was designed around a monumental, colonnaded courtyard (Figure 3.15). Bedding trenches, 10 meters wide, suggest formal plantings in a balanced, geometric layout (alternating rectangular and semicircular shapes) flanking a central path (12.1 meters wide) through the courtyard from an impressive entrance hall to an audience chamber. Other bedding trenches along the outer edges of the courtyard defined paths parallel to the colonnades. There is no evidence of the types of plants associated with these bedding trenches; however, box, a common plant in antiquity for defining walkways, has been replanted in some of them. At the eastern edge of the courtyard planting pits and postholes suggest trees and perhaps shrubs against a trellis. Because only a single planting pit was found within the large, rectangular area at the north defined by the bedding trenches, the excavator concluded that it was probably a grass lawn. Ceramic pipes beneath the original surface of the courtyard likely ran from a water storage tank at the northwest corner to a pool in the entrance hall and perhaps to small semicircular basins set into the box hedging. No other decorative elements have been surmised save for a single sculpture.
that likely stood on a preserved base in front of the assembly hall as a focal point at the end of the central path. As Cunliffe observed, this garden was a “show-piece, there to set off the building to the wonder of visitors and demonstrate to second generation provincials the sophistication of Roman culture.”

The planting beds differ from the broad central east-west corridor bordered by mirror-image hedges to the narrower west path flanked by complex and different patterns of plantings. The opposite east path appears not to have been bordered by a hedge along the north but instead it may have been planted with small herbaceous flowers. Furthermore, beside the east colonnade may have been rose bushes or other plants climbing onto lattice-worked trellises, and 10.6 meters in front of this colonnade were likely fruit trees that were trained along timber frames. Finally, the terrace wall of the west wing, raised some 1.5 meters above the ground level of the garden, was plastered and painted with images of vegetation against a uniform deep green background that must have effectively blended with the actual plants, camouflaging the wall and visually increasing the size of the garden.

South of the villa is an artificial terrace (about 100 m long) with views of the sea (Figure 3.16). Unlike terraces associated with many of the villas on the Bay of Naples, this one at Fishbourne has survived. An artificially created “natural”

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**Figure 3.15** Roman Palace, Fishbourne, West Sussex, plan, modified from Cunliffe 1998, 51, fig. 15.
garden, it had a meandering stream flowing into a constructed pool near the center; the arrangement of its bedding trenches and planting pits suggest random plantings. No doubt, the garden was intended to look like a natural landscape that sloped down to the sea, where boats could have docked, allowing newly arrived visitors a view of the villa and inhabitants of the villa reciprocal views of their visitors. The terrace at Fishbourne is similar to other constructed landscapes, such as those of the Villa of Livia and the Domus Aurea, in the manipulation of nature as an expression of power. Controlling and remaking nature as one saw fit was a way for Romans, either as a group or as individuals, to articulate their power over nature and within their own society.\(^{141}\)

In addition to the decorative gardens at Fishbourne, there were possibly two less formally planted areas that likely were kitchen gardens, introduced to Britain by the Romans shortly after their arrival:\(^{142}\) one in the northwestern sector of the residence and another to the northeast of the villa, along the main approach, where *ollae perforatae* were found.\(^{143}\) The gardens of Fishbourne clearly served the needs of its owner, who is often thought to have been an important member of the local, “Romanized” British elite.\(^{144}\)
its mosaic pavements of geometric patterns and themes from classical mythology, strongly suggest the owner’s desire to express a Roman lifestyle and cultural outlook.¹⁴⁵

Roman villa gardens are well attested throughout all of Rome’s provinces. The villa at Lalonquette in France is another good example of the role of gardens in a provincial villa.¹⁴⁶ It had numerous phases, beginning from the late first century AD and stretching into the late fourth or early fifth century AD. A defining feature that remained throughout the villa’s history was a central, peristyle courtyard, probably containing a garden, with reception rooms opening onto it (Figure 3.17A; Figure 3.17B); this courtyard provided access to the major wings of the house. It is also noteworthy that, from its second phase, another garden court was added at the southern part of the villa, making the gardens a major component of the villa in terms of square meters. This garden may have existed in some form or another until the end of the villa’s life. The presence of two good-sized gardens suggests that they and the activities that they accommodated were integral elements of the provincial villa. The inclusion of the gardens within the architecture of the villa shows marked similarity to those found in Italian villas, such as the Villa of the Papyri. The surroundings of this villa have not been explored, so that we cannot comment on its relationship to its setting; however, two other examples from Gaul suggest that the topographical setting of the Romano-Gallic villa was just as important as it was in Italy. The residence of the Villa of Arnesp (8,400 m²) overlooked the right bank of the Garonne toward the Pyrenees, and the villa at Montmaurin has views along the main axis of the residence that were aligned with the Pyrenees, a most dramatic vista.¹⁴⁷
These examples show that the Roman villa arrived in the western provinces soon after their conquest. While Fishbourne is exceptional for its size, decor, gardens, and early date, Roman villas and their gardens soon became prominent landmarks in the landscape of the northwestern provinces. The much-debated question of who owned these residences continues to endure. Did members of the local, pro-Roman elite or did elite Romans, who settled in the provinces, construct and inhabit them? We know little about the owners of these villas anywhere in the empire; however, it is reasonable to assume that they were both local elites and affluent Roman settlers. Villa construction was most likely a reflection of the local elite’s acceptance of Roman rule and cultural institutions, as was the Roman settlers’ expression of their Roman identity in what had been non-Roman territory. The creation of designed gardens set in colonnaded court-yards that served as the heart of the villa is an example of this cultural exchange on a micro level. Yet, the introduction of local elements, like local plants, suggests that the Roman villa garden was not accepted without modifications but was adapted to suit local conditions, taste, and needs. Thus, the Roman villa garden, like other Roman gardens, is another index that allows us to observe complex, cultural change and exchange across the empire.

Gardens were also prominent spaces of villas and palatial residences in North Africa and the Eastern provinces. The villas of North Africa generally fall into two classes: productive farmsteads and opulent residences, both of which contained gardens. The former were set in productive environments, like that of Boscoreale; they had large cereal fields and/or olive groves that produced the grain and olive oil that fed much of the Roman Empire. Villas such as Henscir Sidi Hamdan in Tripolitania exemplify the producing villa. While little of the environs of these villas has been explored to determine how their land was used, the rich tradition of North African mosaics suggests that hunting and the productive landscape were part of villa life and that there was a blurring between these two broad types of villas. In contrast to the producing farmsteads were luxurious residences, generally located near towns or along the seaside. The maritime villa at Silin near Lepcis Magna in North Africa had impressive architecture and was up to date with current villa fashions, as its largest garden, designed as a circus-garden, demonstrates (Figure 3.18). The landscape associated with such North African maritime villas has never been explored in depth, but its position along the shore recalls the locations of villas on the Bay of Naples, suggesting that production was not so important as setting.

The brief examination of these examples highlights the diversity and spectrum of villas, their gardens, and their environs in the province of North Africa. The nature of these villas differed from that of other provinces, based on the clearer division between their producing and non-producing aspects. That said, the architecture of the North African villas remained identifiable as Roman, as were their gardens. The circus garden, as seen at Silin, was a garden design popular throughout the Roman Empire beginning in the late first century AD. Furthermore, the producing landscapes captured repeatedly in the mosaics of North African villas and houses until the end of the Roman
Empire suggest that this landscape was again something that the Romans and/or local, pro-Roman elites enjoyed viewing, be it the real thing or a mosaic representation of it.\textsuperscript{154}

Palatial villa gardens were also to be found outside Rome. One of the great builders of the early Empire was King Herod the Great of Judaea. In Jericho, Herod constructed his Third Winter Palace on both sides of Wadi Qelt (Figure 3.19A; Figure 3.19B).\textsuperscript{155} The Winter Palace bears the hallmarks of Roman architectural and horticultural influence, reminding us that the exchange between east and west was not a one-way route.\textsuperscript{156} Like many Roman palaces and villas, it exploited both its climate and its placement in the landscape. The palace was used seasonally to take advantage of the flooding of the wadi after the heavy winter rains. The villa also exploited its physical setting; although it did not have commanding views like Herod’s other palaces in Jericho, its placement on both sides of the wadi enabled it to be transformed from a desert abode into a \textit{villa maritima}, at least for part of the year.\textsuperscript{157} In terms of its construction techniques, architecture, decor, and position in the landscape, the palace had much in common with the elite villas of Rome.\textsuperscript{158}

Its gardens also reflect Roman influence. Enclosed courtyard gardens were important parts of the north wing. The most noteworthy of these was the Ionic peristyle garden, which was planted in the orderly fashion of the gardens of Rome.\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Ollae perforatae} were also used here, as
they were in many Roman villa gardens of the time. The plants, however, were not only indigenous but were also of particular importance to Judaea. In this courtyard balsam, which was closely associated with the kings of Judaea and could only be grown in this part of the world, may have been cultivated. In the ancient world balsam was extremely valuable, prized for its scent and used for incense. In addition, the balsam grove was also aesthetically pleasing; in this respect it resembled many of the producing gardens of Roman villa gardens. While the garden was...
similar in form to many Roman gardens of the period, its plantings were Roman not so much in type as in spirit, reflecting a blending of local and Roman traditions.

Opposite on the southern bank were three wings of the palace: the sunken garden, a large pool, and a tell, or large, earthen mound. The sunken garden (145 × 40 m), which has not been explored in depth, used planting pots and had long colonnades to frame views of the garden, the wadi, and the north wing of the palace, as many of the villas of Roman Italy. The cavea-like structure in the center of the southern wall recalls the spectacle architecture found in many villa gardens in Roman Italy. The large pool, measuring 90 × 42 meters, located to the east of the sunken garden and tell, was probably used for swimming and boating. The use of pools, which was very popular in Roman villa gardens, is grounded in the traditions of the Near East. The manipulation of water, a scarce resource at the best of times in this region, was a traditional display of power.

Herod’s Third Winter Palace integrated local and Roman elements to create a palatial complex that suited the tastes and needs of King Herod. Likewise, its gardens and landscaping were both Roman and local. The use of water and a pool owes much to the local, Near Eastern horticultural and architectural traditions, while the use of planting pots and spectacle-like architecture in a garden speak to the influence of the Roman villa garden. Like other provincial villa gardens that we have seen in Roman Britain, Gaul, and North Africa, the gardens, pools, and landscaping of this complex reflect a mixing of local and Roman traditions to create a horticultural effect specific to each province.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter, as a limited and selective survey of Roman villa gardens, can in no way do justice to the subject. However, a few worthwhile points have emerged. Most fundamentally, there is no single category such as a “Roman villa garden.” From the second century BC onwards, Roman villas had a range of gardens, from simple productive gardens to elaborately designed landscapes. These spaces fall into two broad categories: gardens and landscapes of production and those of allusion. The productive garden, indigenous to Rome and central Italy, was the original kitchen garden of both domus and villa, and it remained an important element in the tradition of gardens in the Roman villa until the end of the Empire. Productive gardens were often nestled within the architecture of villas or adjoined them. The formally planted peristyle courtyard, enclosed within the villa, whose origin ultimately lies in a fusion of the Italic garden traditions with the gardens of Hellenistic palaces, and in the gymnasium-inspired garden, also became a key element of the Roman villa garden tradition. Many Roman villa gardens and landscapes were constructed as evocative, culturally charged environments. The larger, designed landscapes, like the grotto at Sperlonga or the Scenic Canal at Hadrian’s Villa, allowed Roman villa owners incredible freedom to create unique and varied spaces for their enjoyment that were rich in cultural allusions. These landscapes are exceptional for antiquity and distinguish Rome’s garden traditions.

During the last century BC and first two centuries of the Empire, the repertoire of
the villa garden and landscape continued to expand. Not only did water become a prominent feature of villa gardens and landscapes, but the Romans also started borrowing and manipulating their own public and urban architecture and gardens within the sphere of the villa. Imperial villas, such as Hadrian’s Villa, had different types of gardens to accommodate any and all of the needs of the emperor. Within Rome, even for the emperor, however, there were limits to architectural and horticultural experimentation; recall that the artificial villa landscape of Nero’s Domus Aurea was the focal point of contemporary literary attacks.

In order to achieve many of these culturally rich effects, the Romans created their gardens in accordance with a number of identifiable principles of design. We see a preference for order over chaos, for the designed over the natural. Roman villa gardens were often bounded by architecture and full of organized plantings; their walks and planting patterns were specifically arranged to maximize the effectiveness of each space for the viewer or the walker. Likewise, even naturalistic landscapes, as embodied by Fishbourne’s seaside terrace, were constructed. The Romans preferred to design and order their villa gardens; this gave them control over nature and allowed them to create gardens and landscaped environments suitable to their architecturally complex villa residences. Gardens were not only placed within the architecture of a villa, but the larger designed landscape, so often overlooked, was also an important “garden” in the Roman villa. Furthermore, each province developed its own local garden and landscape traditions and fused these with the traditions of the Roman villa garden as developed in Italy to create unique horticultural expressions.

The Romans manipulated nature for their purposes. Creating gardens of allusion was a key way to enhance the cultural sophistication of the villa’s owner. Together, carefully chosen plants and sculptures, combined with water, in an appropriate architectural setting could elicit thoughts of a time and place removed from the present. One could stroll in a philosophical school or gymnasium without ever leaving one’s villa, as at the Villa of the Papyri. At Sperlonga, where water and sculpture evoked Odysseus’ epic travels, those dining in that elaborate setting experienced his journey. The result of this cultural mixing and innovation in the gardens of the Roman villa was the creation of one of the most original, sophisticated, diverse, and enduring garden types in ancient Rome’s horticultural tradition.

Lastly, whether it was a producing garden associated with a villa rustica, such as at the Villa Regina at Boscoreale or the central courtyard garden and the gymnasium-inspired garden of the Villa of the Papyri, gardens were integral parts of the Roman villa. Often they were the heart of the villa, providing access to the main rooms and directing people into and out of wings and suites. This reminds us that architecture and garden were not separate things, but rather were parts of a whole; both were important building blocks in the construction of Roman space.