Introduction

The Roman villa, whether in form of extravagant *otium* villas or more modest farmsteads, once formed a notable landmark from which spatial and social relationships of the rural countryside could be comprehended by people living in, or moving through, the landscape. The significance of the interplay between the parts and the whole, and its potential for increasing our understanding of the Roman society, is easily forgotten when the topic of interest is limited to the villa *per se*, be it in renaissance architecture or reconstructions of sites in virtual reality. Constituting a relatively easily distinguishable feature in the terrain, Roman villas have been the target of innumerable excavations, but varying geographical and ideological circumstances have steered research in different directions in different countries. Whereas regional studies and rural archaeology have long since provided the basis for studies in north-western Europe, archaeology conducted in Italy has shown much preoccupation with luxurious and ostentatious residences, rich with sculpture, mosaic floors and wall paintings. It has been claimed that this situation can seek its roots in an attitude towards the rural countryside which differs between countries, such as England, France and Italy, and it has also been stated that not enough villas have been “properly dug” in Italy to allow a synthesis of the social structure to be drawn from the plans available. Subjective judgments or not, the bulk of studies of Roman villas in Italy frequently appear in the form of lavish publications of single sites, which create heavy demands on researchers trying to produce a comprehensive summary of the cumulative mass of evidence. The single most influential study of a Roman villa in Italy, i.e. Settefinestre, is a point in case, and major monographs have appeared in recent years devoted to specific villas. At the same time, several studies have attempted to create a larger geographic or typological coverage, and large scale surveys have greatly improved our understanding of the rural countryside and its variety of settlement conditions. The research agenda is thus changing, as villas emerge as a subject to be comprehended in the landscape in which they were set, and not just as isolated dots on a map.

This volume contains the papers given during a two day’s conference at the Swedish Institute in Rome in September 2004. The idea was to bring together established and emerging scholars with the aim of sharing results and thoughts on the Roman villa’s relation to the landscape, whether from ideological, ecological, economical, or yet other angles, primarily based on archaeological research. For the sake of geographic unity, the coverage was restricted to the hinterland of Rome, defined as within one or two day’s access from the Urbs, and the chronological scope was loosely defined as from the Republic to Empire, leaving out Late Antiquity, which has been treated elsewhere. It goes without saying that we have treated elsewhere.

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6. Cf. the bibliographies in this volume.
make no pretence at completeness. Anyone familiar with the *Latium Vetus* or *Formae Italicae* series realises how overwhelming the amount of data is, and the problems involved when trying to digest the uneven nature of evidence. Finally, it should be said that theoretical issues on the concept of ‘landscape’ or ideological definitions of what really constitutes a ‘Roman villa’, were left to be addressed by the individual authors.

The volume opens with a paper by Helga Di Giuseppe, who presents a synthesis of the results obtained during the Tiber Valley project, as far as the villas are concerned. More than 900 villas and farmsteads have been located, and the enormous amount of data collected allows for an analysis of the development of sites from the Orientalizing period down to the Imperial period and beyond. Taking the ceramic evidence from well-dated Late Republic/Early Imperial villas as a point of departure, the author examines ways of tracing the development and status of sites, and attempts to define the underlying causes for the diverging fate of different villas/farmsteads. She also addresses pivotal issues of site definition and pitfalls connected to the integration of archaeological and literary sources, when discussing the economics, politics and population of the region.

The second paper is a joint contribution by the team working together with Francesco di Gennaro in the IV municipality of Rome. Pietro Barbina, Mauro de Filippis, Francesca dell’Era, Gerardo Fratianni and Paolo Togninelli present the ongoing studies from literary, epigraphic and archaeological sources. Several levels of investigation, from general research strategies down to excavations of single villas, paint a picture of a district where the position of varying types of estates as well as their owners now can be understood in relation to the geographic conditions of the region.

The third paper by Gaetano Messineo constitutes a preliminary report on the recent discoveries in the area of Grottarossa north of Rome. Here, a cluster of villas has been encountered, which, due to their close proximity to each other, raises questions about the division of land and the possible existence of a rural community of a single *familia*. Further, a re-study of finds made close to Ponte Milvio allows for a discussion on the suburban *horti* in this region.

The paper by Rita Volpe and Antonia Arnoldus Huyzenveld constitutes a survey of the villas discovered in the area of Centocelle in the south-eastern suburbs of Rome, and reports on the variety of environmental data collected during the project. By analyzing the geology, morphology, hydrology etc. in the region, they explore ways of advancing beyond the mere counting of archaeological sites when trying to estimate the numbers of villas/estates that once stood in the territory. As a methodological tool, their model has important bearings for all future research on villa settlement relations to the surrounding landscape.

The contribution by Lynda Mulvin provides a comparative case study of villas from the Danube-Balkan region and the villas at Tor Marancia and Centocelle. She seeks to demonstrate how these may be understood in a broader context of the socio-economic environment, where the alimentary supply network of the Roman system of administration conditioned the development of the villa architecture in Late Antiquity, both in the provinces and at the very heart of the Roman Empire.

The paper by Zaccaria Mari examines the hinterland of ancient Tibur. Covering an abundant material of archaeological remains and discussing the dating of constructing techniques, this area study pays proper attention to the development of different kinds of villas in different areas during the Middle and Late Republic. By integrating the written sources in this narrative, a discussion on the agrarian economy of the region and its effect on the development of the “Catonian” and “Varronian” type of villas is presented.

Peter Attema and Tymon de Haas take us into the Pontine region. Intensive surveying and refined collecting of environmental data has led to an improvement of the chronological resolution of sites, which renders possible a more detailed discussion on origins, continuity, change and decline. The authors challenge earlier views of the development of the region and show how different types of land systems were subject to different types of cultivation. In this context, the key role of the Roman colonies for the ebb and flow of villas and farmsteads in the rural system is emphasised. The authors also address fundamental methodological issues of survey strategies which, unless they are tackled, threaten to render comparisons between projects conducted on Italian ground well-nigh impossible.

Jochen Griesbach focuses on the ideology behind the placement of mausolea in relation to villas in the rural landscape. He explores the reciprocal dynamics between villa and tomb and the transformation over time when the latter was gradually incorporated with the former. It is argued that this process reflects a changing attitude vis-à-vis the dead ancestors, which eventually was to merge with the burial habits of early Christianity, when monuments transformed into memory.

The paper by Laura Chioffi relies chiefly on epigraphy, and offers an overview of the equestrian and senatorial landowners around Rome. A suburban landscape of living and dead comes to life, where the neighbourhoods were far from anonymous as they might appear today. Although it is hard to discern whether expensive plots of land attracted specific groups of owners, a close study of the material reveals trends in land investments, which reached its height during the High Empire.

The contribution by Eric De Sena plugs into the debate on the scale and nature of the import of commodities to Rome. He argues that the role of the hinterland of Rome has been considerably underestimated when it comes to the production of wine and oil, and by moving beyond the empirical analysis of ceramic containers he offers a model for estimating the yield of the region. Irrespective
of the inevitable margins of error, these calculations give an idea of the number of villas required to sustain the Urbs with agricultural products, and provides target figures for future research to relate to.

After these studies with a regional or thematic scope, contributions on specific villa sites follow. Mantha Zarmakoupi discusses the possible intentions behind the unusual design of the so-called “Villa Anguillara Sabazia”. By analogies to modern architecture, she draws attention to how a visitor’s experience of architecture and landscape might have been decisive factors for the villa’s layout, and that such factors tend to pass unnoticed in research based on comparisons of archaeological plans.

Matilde Carrara relates for the finds made during the recent excavations in the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta. These have revealed traces not only of artefacts and architecture of the Republican period, but also enable a better understanding of how the Augustan re-building relates to prior phases, something, which until now, has remained unknown. The evidence points at a high status settlement during the Republic, similar to other villas encountered along Via Flaminia.

The present writer discusses the possible visual impact of the Imperial gardens in the Villa of Livia. It is argued that the architectural setting played with the image of a sanctuary, with the intention of dominating the visual ideology of the landscape as well as communicating the sacral dimension of Augustan rule.

The contribution by Maria Teresa D’Alessio and Helga Di Giuseppe provides a detailed case study on the Auditorium Villa in Rome. Acknowledged as uniquely important for our understanding of the beginning and development of the Roman villa, the site has also been interpreted as being identical with the sanctuary of Anna Perenna. The authors argue instead, on the basis of a close scrutiny of the artefacts from a small shrine adjacent to the villa, that the record points instead to domestic ritual practices. At the same time, the blend of private and public functions mirrored in this material hints at a shared sector between Via Appia and the Tiber, which is more or less empty in our present knowledge. At the same time the increasing pace of expansion around the metropolis brings to mind what Dionysius of Halicarnassus (4.13.4) experienced when he described the “suburban sprawl” around Rome by the turn of our era, namely the difficulty of discerning where the urbs ends and where the rus starts. Several speakers drew attention to the approaching challenges connected with the Piano Regolatore Romano, which calls for overall strategies and perhaps a completely new protocol, embracing not only archaeology but also questions of cultural heritage management, if past and present shall have the chance to interact more fully. This volume can be seen as a trailer for such future work.

During the closing remarks at the end of the last session of the conference, various speakers underlined that proper attention need to be given to synthetic studies, whether diachronic or synchronic, in order to deal with the increasing complexity of the situation. It is not surprising that the question “how many villas should we picture to have been out there – 500, 1000, 2000?” posed by Elizabeth Fentress, did not find an answer. Her suggestion to create a GIS data base for mapping the Suburbium and countryside around Rome met with approval, but as pointed out by Zaccaria Mari, Rita Volpe and others, the shifting quality of accessible information renders such undertakings extremely difficult. Eeva-Maria Viitanen (of the Finnish Institute for Classical Studies in Rome) shared her experiences from an ongoing attempt to map the villas around Rome, where the general weakness for laying a foundation for GIS studies is the uneven state of surveying. The well-studied northern and eastern sectors stand out in sharp contrast against the southern sector between Via Appia and the Tiber, which is more or less empty in our present knowledge. At the same time the increasing pace of expansion around the metropolis brings to mind what Dionysius of Halicarnassus (4.13.4) experienced when he described the “suburban sprawl” around Rome by the turn of our era, namely the difficulty of discerning where the urbs ends and where the rus starts. Several speakers drew attention to the approaching challenges connected with the Piano Regolatore Romano, which calls for overall strategies and perhaps a completely new protocol, embracing not only archaeology but also questions of cultural heritage management, if past and present shall have the chance to interact more fully. This volume can be seen as a trailer for such future work.

Rome, September 2005
Allan Klynne

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1 Tombraegal’s paper will appear as part of his forthcoming dissertation Die römischen Otiumvillen von Tivoli. Untersuchung zur Chronologie, Bautechnik, Architektur und zu den historischen Hintergründen.
2 The working title for her forthcoming dissertation is: The ancient villas in the countryside east of Rome – Studies in location.