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Villas Tardoantiguas en el Mediterráneo Occidental

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MADRID, 2006
CARLA SPAMENI

di veri e propri centri di potere 10. Il problema della

dominanza e della residenza più o meno stabile

10 Nel corso dei secoli, il potere delle numerose ville si trasformò

da vero e proprio centro politico e sociale, ma anche economico.

DEI dei proprietari nelle ville va quindi valutato caso per

caso a seconda dei diversi contesti in esame, senza

però trascurare il quadro generale di riferimento che

le fonti letterarie contribuiscono a delineare.

problema delle trasformazioni e della «risaie» delle ville, si

evoca anche Rigoli, G., Acoc, J., The Transformation and End

of Roman Villas as in the West (Fourth-Seventeenth Centuries): Problemi e Perspettive, in, 63-114.

BUILDING SACRED LANDSCAPES: VILLAS AND CULT

FOR

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RESUMEN

Se examina los rasgos de culto (templos paganos, mascarillas y

máscaras cristianas) relacionados con las vi-

llas tardorromanas en Hispania. El análisis de los aspectos

arquitectónicos, topográficos, cronológicos y funcionales de

estos espacios permite aportar nuevas consideraciones sobre

el papel de los muertos en el periodo tardorromano en la Pen-

ínsula Ibérica. La comparación con otras provincias occiden-

tales revela el importante papel de este tipo de estructuras

y en general de la actividad religiosa (paganas y cristianas) en el

terreno de Hispania.

SUMMARY

This essay provides an overview of the cult evidence from la-

te-Roman villas of Spain from the early-fourth through the

first half of the fifth century, examining associ-

ated 'sacred' temples, masquees and Christian cult buildings.

By examining the architecture, topography, chronology

and possible functions of sacred architecture in villas, the essay

seeks to illuminate the role of the sacred in the late-

antique landscape of Spain.

Contrasts between Hispania and other western prov-

inces will highlight both the long tradition of

villas, as well as Hispania's unusually vibrant cultic

activity in the late-antique period.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Villas, religion, edi
donios de culto, masquees, prácticas funerarias, templos.

KEY WORDS: Villas, religion, cult buildings, masquees, funerary practices, temples.

Over the last twenty years, the study of the Ro-

man villas has been transformed from an art his-

torical exercise in mosaic stylistics and architectural

form to a multi-disciplinary endeavor, embracing

not only art and architectural history, but also this

volume attests, economics, social history, and even

agricultural science. This disciplinary sea-change has

transformed the Roman countryside from a black

and white sketch composed of plows and paven-

ments, to a semblance of the rich and colorful tapestry

that it once was. One thread of that tapestry, however,

is too often left out of the weave, namely religion.

The role of religion in rural life is consistently side-

stepped in most major treatments of the subject,

or limited to brief lists of 'religious' finds, such as vo-

tive inscriptions or statues, and generalized state-

ments about the importance of religion in agrarian

societies 1. One is left with the sense that religion

played a relatively minor role in villa life, and that

this role was acted out on an entirely different stage

from the countryside's 'real' dramas, the ebbs and

flows of rural economics, and the construction of

social hierarchies. Conversely, when significant

cultic evidence appears on villa sites, it frequently

swallows the site's identity, canceling out all other

functions so that the site is re-labeled as a 'religious'

complex, such as mystery cult, monastery or reli-

gious meeting site 2.

This elimination and/or ghotonization of religion in

villa studies is a reflection of our own tendency to

separate the sacred from what we have a priori

marked out as the 'profane,' cult, ritual and belief

are too often held as wholly distinct functional and epo-

hemological categories from economy, land manage-

ment, social structure. Yet ritual, belief, and sacred

topographies permeated every element of rural life.

The boundaries of the estate were set by the ritual

placement of property markers, each consecrated

with a sacrifice 3. Another circumstantialatory rite, the

lustratio, purified the land by driving the sacrificial

animal around estate's perimeter prior to sacrifice 4.

Estates bereft of a temple or shrine could be expected to

wither, and the dominant himself was intermediar-

1 Emblematen are surveys on the villas of Hispania (Greg-

or, I-G., Las villas hispánicas romanísticas, Paris, 1979), Blandin

(Blandin, E., The Roman villas of south-west England (BAR British

Series 171), Oxford, 1987; and Bailey (Franzoni, M.L. Le ville


While broader studies (e.g. Festival, J, The Roman Villa, London,

1974; Festenstein, A., Les cam-

pagnes en Gaule méridionale, Les hommes et l'environnement

en Gaule méridionale, Paris, 1988, 249-261) include longer distri-

bution, none includes anything like a chapter-length study.

Dögl's classic work, "Chretien Grundbesitz und heil-

dische Landnutzung", Archäologie und Reli-

giebsphärische Studien, 64, Mainz, 297-310, is still one of the best theoretical tracts.

For instance, Perea-Colgiano, D., Cesari e Harmar:

imagini, mito e archeologia, 4, 1992, 162-177; Men.

(Mouvement Paganisme, la question, Alpin, 65, 1993, 331-334; more interstingly, L. and J. Hadamek, "Private, un

caso archeologico", IV Roman e Archeologia Cristiana His-


2 Esteves Franca, De conditioons agrarum, (ed. Clavel-

Levignon, et al., 46-70).

3 Caso, De agricultura, 141.
between the land and its workers, and the agrarian gods, their tripartite bond remained each fall with the donation of the first fruits of the crops, ritually passed from laborer, to dominus, to god 1. That is, not only was cult, ritual, and belief ever-present, if it was itself part of the economic and social engines that drove rural life; it informed the physical structure of the estate; it served an integral role in estate management by tightening the mutual bonds between owner and tenant while reinforcing their hierarchical structure; and it helped shape the identity of the dominus himself by intervening his stewardship of the land to his ancestral gens and familial/dominial pietas. The 4th and first decades of the 5th c., were, in many respects, the ‘golden age’ of the villa in Hispania. With the possible exception of the eastern littoral, most villas witnessed a period of expansion and material resurgence unabated in previous centuries 2. This intense investment of resources in the countryside and the attendant flurry of construction and embellishment helped to shape a landscape significantly changed from that of the high empire, thick with a monumentality that had previously been the property of the cities, and heavier with seigniorial presence. Studies on early imperial Gaul, whose newly Romanized landscape was similarly marked by an expansion of rural building and visibility of elite power, have shown that this transformation of the built landscape involved an attendant renegotiation of its sacred topography 3. The appearance of the villa and the birth of the monumental Gallo-Roman rural temple were two halves of the same phenomenon, and changes in land tenure and social hierarchy were accomplished and shaped through topological changes. While a gulf of history and social transformation separates 1st c. Gaul and 4th c. Hispania, it may be that the lessons of one can inform the other, and that a study of the sacred topography of the late Roman villa in Hispania may reveal something of the how’s and why’s of behind late antiquity rural culture and the elites who were its impresarios. This essay, then, provides an overview of the rural evidence from late Roman Spanish villas from the early 4th through first half of the 5th c., examining associated ‘pagan’ temples, mausolea and Christian cult buildings. By examining the topography, chronology and possible functions of sacred villa architecture, it seeks to illuminate the role of the sacred in the late antique Iberian world and to lift the veils of power and identity. Comparison between Hispania and other Italian regions, particularly Gaul and Britain, both of which boast rich evidence for rural cult practices, will highlight both the long tradition of estate cult, as well as Hispania’s unusually vibrant cultic activity in the late antique period. These finds will contradict previous scholarship on residence and cult buildings, which has tended to attribute the phenomenon to imperial models, particularly during late antiquity. A growing body of evidence from certain western provinces, including Hispania, describes a very different relationship between which rural residences, temples and tombs enjoyed a century-long association, one shaped by regionally specific seigniorial identity. This admittance brief survey will focus only on architectural evidence, setting aside, for reasons of space, the rich corpus of epigraphic material that would undoubtedly expand our knowledge of pagan cultic and funerary practices in villa environments 4. Similarly, small-scale constructions, such as built inhumation graves or grave stele, will also be omitted 5. Most significantly, the related, but nonetheless distinct phenomenon of later 5th and 6th c. villa churches, will not be treated here 6. While of critical importance for understanding the spread of Christianity in the Spanish countryside and clearly an outgrowth of 4th and 5th c. villa cult and funerary practice, it nonetheless takes place in a fundamentally altered landscape and its study is best reserved for a more detailed study than the space here permits.

The methodological problems of any study of the archaeology of religion are legion, not least the identification of cult space and material evidence. What defines a cultic or ritual space? How may such sites be identified through material evidence? This study will rely on evidence from a combination of building plans, topography, cultic objects, such as altars, and epigraphic documentation as the sole evidence for cultic function: it is assumed that religiously-themed sculpture or mosaics on their own are insufficient evidence for ritual activity. One side effect of these assumptions is that the rigorous criteria is the omission of the typical focus of most private-cult studies, the domus lararium or household shrine. This lacuna is not meant to suggest that lararia did not form a part of the religious life the late Roman villa, for they undoubtedly did 7. However, because the evidence for these small shrines is so troubled by the total absence of standing walls, and our inability to distinguish cultic stonework from decorative objects, we shall focus exclusively on the more monumental manifestations of rural religion. Monumental villa-temples and villa-mausolea are free-standing buildings set at a distance from the villa core, and thus may blur the line between public and private religious practice. Ideally, we should like to compare the function of domestic lararia with that of their more public counterparts, but such an endeavor will have to wait for the accumulation of more plentiful and detailed archaeological data.

VILLAS AND Temples

The phenomenon of villa cult buildings, either temples or mausolea, remains as yet uncharted territory; so general study exists and local surveys are few and generally superficial 8. The estate-specific cultic and social functions of villa temples, their relationship with other kinds of rural shrines, and the phenomenon’s regional-temporal variation are topics that await us. This study, indeed, the only studies to approach villa-temples on a regional, rather than an individual, basis, have focused on the northern Gallic and smaller British corpus, almost all of which date to the high empire. While we shall make frequent reference to these temples as a reference point, it will soon become apparent that the particular and regional circumstances that shaped Hispania’s temples make this largely a regional study.

Fig. 1. Arcilla temple. Plan and section. (Dulac-Casero 1997, 124).

1 See Clénet, De legibus, 2.11.27; Auguste, Epit. 46. For the notion that this practice might be Christianized, John Claudius, Sacred Spaces on the 18-45 (PG) 67-147.150.
5 Detels, T., Gods, Temples and Ritual Practice, 113.
7 For the space evidence for Spanish Lararia, see Portela Filgueiras, M., «Los dos templos en la Hispania romana», Lucernae, 3, 1984, 153-160, most of which pertain to the lararia publica, auriti, porta, etc., rather than domestic lararii.
The corpus of Spanish villa temple is a small and uncertain one, but nonetheless suggestive. It includes a one-room shrine containing two altars decorated with bulls-heads, set just outside the villa of Arribillo (Navarra) (fig. 1) and dated to the 4th c.; a two-room temple to Mars at Torre de Palma (Alto Alentejo) (fig. 2a–c) tentatively identified by an out-of-site altar dating to the 2nd–3rd c.; a poorly understood apsidal structure, orientated N-S, adjacent to the villa of Odrinhas (Estremadura) and dated to the late 4th c. (fig. 3a–d); and a collection of strikingly similar structures, all from western Hispania and identified as temples by their location apart from the villa and their similarity to Gallo-Roman ambulatory or 'amphora' temples (fig. 3a–d). Each temple of this latter category is composed of a paved cela set on a podium and surrounded by a porcided ambulato.

These include the mid-4th c. temple at the villa of Miletum (Algarve), oriented N-S, originally roofed with a brick groin vault, its apse containing a pool fed by piped water (fig. 5). Glass mosaics encrusted its vaults while the vertical face of its podium wall was covered with mosaics of fish. The nearby temple at Olhado Quinto do Marim (Algarve) (fig. 6) and the temple at São Caetano (Baixo Alentejo) (fig. 7), vary in their details but in plan, orientation and size are almost identical to Miletum. A putative temple at Las Castilianos (Badajoz) is known only from survey, but seems to have possessed a podium and ambulatory, was oriented E-W, and has been dated by surface material.

17 Marenco, J. and Baracho, C. "El monumento abacial de Odrinhas (Elvas)." El Boletín d'Arqueologia Cristiana Espanyola, Malaga, 1992, 93-103.
finds to the early 4th c. Finally, a more ambiguous example at Caracusa (Toledo/Madrid) (not shown), lacks an ambulatory, but was set on a podium and like Méren, was provided with piped water, enriched with sumptuous marble decoration and similarly dated to the mid-late 4th c. 26


While these sites which produced actual cultic implements, such as Areliano and Torre de Palma, may be confidently identified as cultic spaces, the others must be approached more cautiously. The positive temple at Odrinas has been variously identified as a trichilium, a mausoleum or a temple. Given its location at the side of the villa and absence of contemporary graves, a temple may be the least problematic attribution, but nonetheless one derived purely through the process of elimination rather than any positive evidence from the site itself. The col-

lection of Lusitanian ambulatory structures described above present more positive evidence for cultic function; they are all set apart from the villa and thus seem unlikely to be monumental reception spaces, and their ambulatory plans seem to be a modified version of the Gallo-Roman temple plan 27. However, not one of these temples has produced hard evidence of cultic use, and thus caution is still in order. Thus, the small corpus of temples presented here should be regarded as a provisional, rather than an absolute list.

Given this paucity of evidence, it is hardly surprising that precise functional evidence for these spaces is almost completely lacking. The bull altars at Areliano have led to its identification as a site for nearobolium, or bull sacrifice. The nearobolium was, from epigraphic and literary accounts, a ritual popular with late antique elites, particularly those of Rome. The poet Prudentius, a Christian who spent much time in Rome but was also native of Cal-

lagurris, not far from Areliano, wrote a particularly vivid, if largely inaccurate account of sacrabolic rit-

27 As noted by Hauschild, 1984, cit. (n. 17), 189.

ual 32. It should be noted, however, that bull images on the altars at Areliano does not necessarily or even persuasively imply the specific site of the nearobolium. Furthermore, the excavations have turned up no evidence for the worship of Antis or Cybele, the deities most frequently honored with the nearobolium. The probable dedication to Mars at Torre de Palma was, on the other hand, something of a rural commonplace, as defender against natural cataclysm and guarantor of fertile earth. Mars was wor-

shiped as an agrarian god throughout the rural West 33. The dedication of the other temples eludes us, for none has produced altars or votive materials. The presence of a piscina and marine decoration in the Méren temple suggests a nearobolium, as does the

32 Millon (The Fourth-Century Temple, Phoenix, 1996, 38-39, 312-313), rightly notes that Prudentius' description of the site is almost wholly fabricated. However, given the most apparent of a collection of 4th-c. 'bull altars' in the Ebro valley (see Tubb 1986, 373-379) it may be that Prudentius' list, if not his information, derived from local rather than Roman experience.

33 Cam, De agricultura, 145; Labra, S., 'Los cultos orientales en España desde Troya a Hadriano', Los emperadores romanos d'España, Madrid, 1985, 242.
A liminal topography likewise characterized the high empire villa-temple complexes in northern Gaul, the area to have produced the richest evidence for villa cult. Villas such as Saint-Ulrich or Flevières included a separate temple complex set outside the villa, either on the access road or to one side. Many of the so-called Jupiter columns, monuments to Jupiter as weather deity, seem likewise to be set some distance from their associated villas. The contrast with Hispania’s examples, however, is also immediately evident; with the exception of several villas in the region of Berry whose temples were set only 10-50m away from their respective villas, most Gallic villa temples were located 400m or more from their respective villas and the intimate association of temple and villa entrance evident in the Spanish examples is rarely documented. This topographic divergence may point to functional differences, particularly as regards the composition of the intended worshiping community. The Gallic examples’ far-flung topography implies a broader estate-based worshipping population, including not only the dominus but also tenants and travelers. The more intimate relationship between villa and temple in the Spanish examples may suggest a cult more closely tied to the dominus and his intimates, and perhaps excluding tenants and simple passers-by. Additionally, the disparity might be the result of a topographic/functional shift over time. The far-flung Gallic examples are all of high empire date, while the Spanish examples are all late antique. Indeed, temple complexes closely associated with the villa entrance in Aquitaine and Britain are also late antique in date.

As will be discussed below, this topographic shift may be directly related to transformations in late antique domestic architecture and attendant emphasis on the space and ritual of entrance.

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33 Beulé, H., ‘Les sanctuaires dits “aux Jupiter colonnes”’, in *L’architecture gallo-romaine de la Gaule* (Bruxelles, 1961); see, e.g., ibid., figs. 7, 154. In his *ibid.*, p. 120, Beulé notes that the association of Jupiter columns with villas varies by region.
These temples’ distinctive liminal topography permits some very general hypotheses regarding their specific function, or at least symbolic potential. As mentioned above, the site itself possessed a ritually-inscribed boundary, set at the edges of the estate land and ritually re-inscribed each day through the sacrifices of the terminus. The location of Galician villa-temple complexes sets some distance from the villa buildings and thus possibly at the boundaries of the estate, adds further weight to this notion of a sacred estate “powerbase.” However, other data from late Roman Hispania itself suggests strongly that these buildings themselves might also define this boundary. A number of Catalanian villas have produced ritual deposits of eggs and birds, laid just outside the villa walls. These deposits, dated roughly to the 3rd C. A.D., may have been offered annually to assure the estate’s fertility, while their location suggests that the estate’s sacred boundary might also be located at the boundary of its monumental heart. That is, the villa buildings may have served as a synecdoche for the estate as a whole, and the repeated sacralization of this boundary through temples or votive deposits acted in the same way as the terminus and lastratio, protecting the land and its inhabitants and guaranteeing fertility. Regardless of its relative location, this boundary was a divinely-monitored survey line, simultaneous-ly establishing ownership and guaranteeing proper-ty for the land/home that it embraced. These villa temples may thus be the physical embodiment and perpetual re-sewer of this sacred boundary.

The relatively late date of the majority of Spanish villa temples also calls for some comment. With the exception of the Torre de Palma temple, most known Spanish villa temples discovered to date in Hispania are of early to mid-4th C. date. Naturally, the lacuna of earli-er temples may be due to the exigencies of preserva-tion: earlier temples may lie unexcavated beneath the late antique examples, or may have been destroyed by subsequent villa re-buildings. Indeed, the many 1st and 2nd C. votive inscriptions found on Spanish rural estates point to thriving cultic activities on earlier vil-las. The late antique ‘temples’ if temples they be, this seems to be the latest and perhaps most monumental manifestation of a century-long practice. Nonetheless, the appearance of new, monumental temples in the 4th C. is noteworthy, particularly in light of the paucity of urban temple building in this period. As with most western provinces, the general cessation of monumental urban projects by the 3rd C. affected temple construction; urban temples of Hispania were generally constructed before the late 2nd C. and with the exception of a new 3rd C. temple and some 3rd-4th C. renovations in Córdoba, the archaeological record has thus far presented little evidence for new temple construction or restoration after this date. That is, if these villa temples are indeed cultic structures, it is the rural, rather than the urban sphere which witnessed new temple construction in late antiq-uity Hispania.

Nevertheless, it would perils to conclude from this evidence that Hispania witnessed a “rural pagan revival” in late antiquity, such as that proposed for other provinces, such as Britain. First, and most importantly, none of these Spanish examples has yielded any evidence of ritual activity; the votive deposition of figurines, coins and altars found in ac-tive Gallo-Roman and British sanctuaries are wholly absent from the Spanish corpus. While this lacuna may reflect their seignorial, versus public function, even this admission limits any supposed ‘revival’ to a narrow elite core. The seeming limi-tation of new temple-construction to villas, plus the general synchronicity between temple appearance and villa expansion and reconstruction, likewise sug-gests a highly limited phenomenon, related to a new seignorial presence of elites in the countryside. Indeed, the “rural pagan revival” in Britain has been more plausibly explained as a by-product of increased seignioral activity and influence. While again, the construction of the temple was accompanied by a monumentalization of the villa façade. The so-called ‘fortified villas’ depicted on North African mosaics with their decorated towers and facades are similarly the visual ‘epabrasses’ of an elite that fetishized the façade elevation and its dramatic effects above per-spectival or proportional accuracy. This particular-ized emphasis on the façade reflects a tendency to identify place, be it city or villa, through the bound-ary that separated the sacred from the profane, the sameness of ‘outside’ to emphasize a conspicuous interior. The Spanish late antique villa temples may thus be a ritual sacred counterpart to this fascination with the act of entry, thereby elevating the seigniorial seat and its impres-sario above its surrounding landscape.
Finally, we must consider the question of architectural form, particularly that of the pseudo-Gallo-Roman temples. While this sub-group comprises only four examples, their shared plan and generally Lusitanian find-spots make them a tightly-knit group. The Gallo-Roman plan, with its centrally-located cela embraced by a surrounding porticoed ambulatory, is generally found in Mediterranean contexts, but seems to be restricted to Gaul, Germany and parts of Britain. In these provinces it was solely a rural phenomenon, where it flashed marked pages, boundaries, sacred sites and, in particular regions, was frequently associated with rural villas.

As we have mentioned, most of these rural shrines were constructed in the 1st and 2nd c. B.C., but new evidence suggests that many remained in use until the early 5th c., when it seems that some kind of 'browsing' from Gallo-Roman sources may explain their appearance in Hispania. And yet, while the buildings retained the Gallo-Roman ambulatory and central cela, they added an apse and vaulting, features generally absent from Gallo-Roman examples. That is to say, the Gallo-Roman prototype has been updated to a Gallo-Roman prototype with the most current Mediterranean architectural vocabulary. We lack sufficient evidence at this stage to explain why, at this time and in this limited geographic area, this hybrid appeared. Recent immigrants or immigrating ideas from the northern provinces into the local boomtowns and provincial capital at Mérida, is one hypothetical scenario. In any case, the appearance of the oddy mixed imports, within a short period of time in a relatively narrow geographic area, strongly points not simply to a 4th c. Lusitanian fade, but a regional architectural language, by and through which communicative regional identity.

The afterlives of these Spanish temples is similarly distinctive: the temples at Mérida, São Cucufate, Laterix and perhaps those at Castilejos were subsequently used as funerary spaces; indeed, a mausoleum was added to the temple at Mérida soon after its construction, and a 9th c. Arabic inscription attests to its use as a funerary space for over four hundred years. It is not inconceivable that in places like Mérida, where the mausoleum was constructed soon after the temple, the site served both pagan cult and funerary functions simultaneously.

While sacred and funerary space were kept apart in urban pagan provinces, in the rural world of the western provinces, the boundaries between temple and tomb occasionally blur; for instance, the villa-temples at Aguilar de Valdecañas, where a Persephone sarcophagus was found in a temenos, are not uncommon.

However, the evidence for temple/funerary complexes in the northern provinces barely debated, and in most of the Spanish cases, the addition of graves seems to date considerably later than the temple and forms part of the related phenomenon of intra-villa grave construction in the 5th-6c. A. Nonevertheless, even in this later funerary phase, the temples seem to be the preferred site of grave construction on their respective vallae, and thus the remembrance of the temple as a sacred space may have made it a particular funerary magnet, thereby maintaining the physical topography of the sacred.

This frequent use of rural temples as grave spaces, either during or after their civil life, may have aided their subsequent conversion into churches. Mérida and very possibly São Cucufate, Oibão, Odeínias were converted to church use by the later 5th or 6c. In comparison, the conversion of the northern Gallic or British temples to churches is quite rare. Thus, it may be that the intermediary use of these Spanish temples as funerary space, combined with the generally long life-span of Spanish vallae into the later 5th and 6c, may have helped bridge the narrow sacrificial-temporal gap between a 4th c. 'monumental' paganism, tied to the villa-boom, and the flourishing estate Christianity of the 6c B.C. 45

The association of temple and burial is typically held to be an invention of Didascalius, in whose place at Split temple and tomb was set opposite one another. See Breck, 1994, c. 13, n. 13 who cites only Newsal as a provincial example. The strongest association between temple and tomb in the northern provinces was recorded at Lead Hand, Totana, C. 1975, 287-302. See also Lewis, A., L'atelier d'architecte, en Languedoc au début de l'époque mérovingienne, c. 2000, in the occasional proceedings of the International conference.


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few global studies have addressed the problem, a cursory glance suggests that the phenomenon may be at least partially driven by both pre-Roman practices and modern Roman urban settlements. Numerous excavations have been conducted in the Iberian Peninsula, and the results are often conflicting. In this case a denser urban network, as well as the absence of pre-Roman burial traditions, may have exerted dual influences. Nearby, however, conversely, has produced negligible Roman funerary monuments, but a sizable number of possible villa mausolea; here villa mausolea are common landforms in the countryside during the 1st and 2nd centuries. Indeed, the majority of documented, imperial-period tombs in Hispania are rural, rather than suburban in origin. Although we still lack a specific study of high- and middle-status villas and their funerary topography, a cursory overview indicates that villas funerary monuments included most of the major Roman tomb forms, and, like their Gallic cousins, were set some distance from the villa on topographic high points or roads. This tradition of rural villa tomb monuments in Hispania, it is hardy surprising that the Villa of the 4th and early 5th centuries carried as a new wave of monumental tomb construction. For instance, a late 4th-century building in the villa of Sádaba (Zaragoza) seems to have included a large (13 x 14m) cruciform structure, oriented N-S, with two lateral apses and a terminating square exedra, set some 60m from the villa proper. Preceded by a vestibule which contained a single sarcophagus, the body of the mausoleum was likely vaulted, and its northern exedra was pierced by win-


Anejos da AEAP XXXII, 2006, pp. 73-95.

Fig. 4a. Sádaba. Mausoleum reconstruction. (García y Bellido, 1963, fig. 7.)

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BILDUNG SACRED LANDSCAPES: VILLAS AND CULT

Indeed, the majority of documented, imperial-period tombs in Hispania are rural, rather than suburban in origin. Although we still lack a specific study of high- and middle-status villas and their funerary topography, a cursory overview indicates that villas funerary monuments included most of the major Roman tomb forms, and, like their Gallic cousins, were set some distance from the villa on topographic high points or roads. This tradition of rural villa tomb monuments in Hispania, it is hardy surprising that the Villa of the 4th and early 5th centuries carried as a new wave of monumental tomb construction. For instance, a late 4th-century building in the villa of Sádaba (Zaragoza) seems to have included a large (13 x 14m) cruciform structure, oriented N-S, with two lateral apses and a terminating square exedra, set some 60m from the villa proper. Preceded by a vestibule which contained a single sarcophagus, the body of the mausoleum was likely vaulted, and its northern exedra was pierced by win-
All of this suggests that the construction of villas in late antiquity, just as in the early empire, was not an inevitable result of investment in villas per se, but a choice inspired by regionally and temporally-specific means of constructing elite identity. In these cases, local elites used funerary memorials to create sacred villa landscapes, defined through the memory of their domus.

The funerary topography of late antique Hispania describes just such a strong tie between tomb and estate, and seemingly, a rural elite who judged its monuments of personal and family memory best placed in rural estate, rather than urban, contexts. Given that this tendency to construct rural seignorial identity through funerary architecture was apparent already in the high empire, the late antique examples described above seem to represent a continuity of practice, although not necessarily in meaning or function. The example of Hispania thus further emphasizes the long-term traditions of villa-monuments in certain provinces. In doing so, it challenges the imperium-periphery model that particularly underlies studies of late antique villa-mausolea, and again highlights the importance of local traditions, driven by local means of constructing seignorial identity. 46

In the majority of Spanish cases, epigraphic and/or decorative evidence that might provide some insight into the nature of this seignorial identity is wholly absent. We are left simply with fine examples of vaulted funerary architecture, almost certainly used to house the remains of the domus and his family, but with little sense of the ritual or religious context surrounding their use. Particularly provocative and, rarely clear, is the question of religious affiliation: it is tempting to ascribe those examples with E-W oriented buildings and/or burial of Christian patrons, but a paucity of vestigial materials, such as inscriptions or Christian symbols, make this a temptation better left alone. 47

46 On the assumption, see Breck, 2003, cit. (n. 13), 157: «Es war die römische Zeit, die erstmals allgemein anerkannt Typen, Fundorten und Topographiem wie Vokabeln ungenannter menschlicher Kunde verbinden ließ». 47 For example, the mausolea at Las Vegas de Pedraza and familia have been identified as Christian on the basis of tomb orientation or the presence of a nearby, early church, respectively.

Nonetheless, at least one mausoleum provides clear evidence for Christian use, while yet another group, with provocative but more ambiguous signs, may be categorized as "probable" Christian exempla. In the first category is the tomb adjacent to the unexcavated villa at Puéblanueva (Toledo) 48 (fig. 6a-b). A 24m diameter, double-shelled octagon, its piers supporting a trussed roof, this grand tomb was entered through a western door, while an eastern bay was separated from its fellows by dividing walls that created a small abode. A below-ground crypt was entered via stairs in the upper chamber, and was vaulted in pitched-brick technique, a construction style current in Asia Minor but uncommon in the west at this time. The small space contained the remains of three sarcophagi, one of which was seemingly of eastern, perhaps Constantinopolitan, manufacture, and was carved with depictions of the Twelve Apostles. The sarcophagi, combined with the emphasis on the eastern niche above, strongly suggests a Christian patron, and possible Christian funerary rituals.


Fig. 6a. Puéblanueva. Site plan (after Hauschild, 1989, fig. 7).

Fig. 6b. Puéblanueva. Mausoleum reconstruction (Hauschild, 1978, fig. 16).

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The mausoleum, 250m from the large villa at La Coca (Badajoz), is somewhat less clear (fig. 7a-b). An E-W oriented tetrachon inscribed in a massive rectangular outer wall, the structure was preceded by a narrow, double-sided narthex. Its eastern porch was larger than its western and contained a single, E-W oriented marble sarcophagus, seemingly laid beneath the floor. Ceilings were covered with glass mosaics and walls decorated with painted frescoes. While the large amounts of Christian material removed from the structure all dated to its subsequent conversion into a church, the orientation of the structure, combined with the below-floor marble sarcophagi, point to probable, although not definitive, Christian function. The same is true of another architectural oddity, the mausoleum at La Alberca (Mérida), set adjacent to a partially excavated villa which seems to include an important 4th c. phase (fig. 8). Bristling with external piers, the W-E oriented rectangular structure included an inscribed western apek and was composed of two stories, an upper-storey of uncertain function, and an under-storey crypt. The crypt contained three N-S oriented sarcophagi. The mausoleum’s unusual form has its closest parallels in Dalmatian mausolea, particularly the martyrium of Anastasia in the Meruviana necropolis outside Salona. At Meruviana, however, the martyrs’ relics were laid in the crypt aepx, while family burials were set in the main crypt chamber, the two spaces separated by a fenestella confessionis. La Alberca produced no fenestella or altar and thus no definitive proof of martyrial cult. However, given this orientation and clear Dalmatian, probably Salonian ori-

40m from the villa, this 70m long, NE-SW oriented complex included a porticoed entrance plaza that led to a large (20 × 17m), centrally-planned hall, vaulted with a central dome and four side-domes all laid in pitched brick technique. Another porticoed complex set perpendicular to the first may have been a slightly later addition; attached to one end of this complex was a tetrachon, which combined two well-constructed graves. Large quantities of import-
ed stone, from opus secile pavements and revet-
ments to Phrygian marble columns, perhaps from imperial quarries, were found in the destruction lay-
ers of the domed building, along with a number of Christian finds, including marble plaques inscribed with chi-rho’s and ivory pieces decorated with lambs and peacocks. The excavators have attributed both villa and adjacent complex to Maternus Cyprius, Theodosius I’s fervent Christian prastor prefect, and have claimed that this grand complex represents Maternus’ mausoleum/memoria.

A number of issues must be resolved before the porticoed complex can be assigned any original Christian funerary function. First, it must be con-
firmed that the graves in the tetrachon are indeed original and not a later medieval addition. Second, the Christian attribution rests heavily on the as-
sumption that the estate belonged to the Christian Maternus, a contention which has been hotly debat-
ed and has not yet been resolved. Without a histori-
cally-attested Christian patron, the finds from amb-
iguous destruction levels are the only clear evi-
dence for Christian use. As these may have come from a subsequent period when the monument is known to have been converted into a church, they cannot be fully trusted. However, the fact that some of these objects, such as the ivories, seem to date to the late 4th/early 5th c. is promising evidence of

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10 Serra Redón, J., “La capilla funeraria de la dícesis de “La Coca”, Revista de Estudios Extremenses, 5, 1949, 101-116; ibid., La villa romana de la Dehesa de La Coca”, Badajoz, 1952, 131-144; Pabón, F., Arqueología Cristía-
12 Dygne, H., History of Salamanca Christianity, 1951, 78.
added a second, but attached imperial tomb. Such projects were not only the province of emperors; Flavins Rufius, a provincial administrator from southern Gaul, built a mausoleum-cum-
memorial-cum-monastery on his villa outside Châlons in the 390's. The memorial contained the relics of Peter and Paul obtained from Rome and was separate from, but set adjacent to, the mausoleum. It is possible that Car-
narque represents such a memoria/maus-
soleum, but until the many puzzles raised by the excavations are solved, the notion must remain in the realm of speculation.

Out of the question, as problematic is the domed structure in the villa of Centelles 18. The room in question is a circular structure, inscribed in a square, and set in the monumental heart of the villa, where it connected to a tetrachron structure, seemingly a mausoleum. The instead of brick dome was covered with an elaborate mosaic cycle depicting a hunt, Old and New Testament scenes, and enigmatic seated figures. In the center of the room a narrow set of stairs led to an underground vaulted chamber. The project was never seemingly finished, as no floor was laid and the adjacent tetrachron was never roofed. The excavators have interpreted the remains as a mausoleum, built into an abandoned, unfin-
ished villa. On the basis of the enigmatic seated figures depicted in the mosaics, they identified its occupant as the emperor Constantine, the tradition of the Pyrenees in 350. However, recent re-examination of the frescoes’ iconography have presented con-
vincing evidence that the favored sites of burial and mausolea is dominus, not the emperor and his retinue 19.

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Possibly in the late 4th-early 5th c., 67 (fig. 10). The building assumed the N-S orientation of the earlier hall, and its 'sanctuary' consisted of three rooms, the center of which was fitted with a sunken area by steps and set off by protecting stone screens. This odd arrangement seems to be a miniature pseudo-crypt, too small for an actual crypt, but perhaps built to hold relics. The second is the site of Mariabla, outside Leon, where a villa was supposed, but not excavated. 68 Adjacent to the putative villa space a large (23 x 14m), N-S oriented structure with horseshoe apse, perhaps a temple or mausoleum, was converted to Christian use by the insertion of 15 contemporary tombs into its now-raised apse, and the construction of a groin vault supported by engaged piers in the nave to create a centralized space. The resultant building has been interpreted as a martyrium, and dated by grave goods to the early 5th c. If both structures are indeed martyria and were constructed in functioning villas, it is likely the abbot who was the impresario behind the building and presumably the cult itself. Archaeologically-attested private church chapels are rare indeed, and Villa Fortunatus and Mariabla join only a handful of known examples. 69 However, if the written sources are any guide, privately owned and venerated relics were something of a fad in the late 4th-early 5th c., and members of the Gallic and Spanish aristocracy scrabbled eagerly to obtain relics of both local and Holy Land provenance, to enrobe them in suitable structures. Paulinus of Nola, Sulpicius Severus, Melania the Elder, Silvia (sister-in-law of the above-mentioned Rufinus) all seem to own a named number of relics. 70 The letters exchanged between Paulinus and Sulpicius describe in some detail the latter's elaborate provisions for his ever-increasing relic collection. Sulpicius, who had attempted to procure the body of Martin of Tours, had to be content with that of Clarus, Martin's disciple, which he housed in a church on his estate near Caesaricia, all of which suggest that the former and elaborate (and in the private sphere, wholly unnecessary) chancery of relics recalls, if nothing else, Sulpicius' urgent desire to possess some piece of the holy and to recreate on one's estate a simulacrum of the great martyr-shrines.

The above-mentioned Rufinus with his mausoleum-timaeum further suggests that the commemoration of the dead and the cult of the 'special dead' might also bleed into one another in the private sphere. This last example, plus Paulinus of Nola's obscure descriptions of a church/mausoleum on his ancestral estate near Bordeaux, 71 might lead us to take a second look at sites like Puebla-Rexave, with its provocative eastern alcorob, or Carrancue, with its extraordinary domed building. These complexes probe


68 Paulinus of Nola, Ep. 23.8 (ed. Hesbert, CSEL 29, 282); Sie egen magnis placitato lato de crece beneficiis ad doctrinam missionis aequo et dividem in prompser his, sed non contum a searc, non emper ad malum, ut oras exist. 64.


CONCLUSIONS

We should not underestimate the degree to which the massive spate of building, refurbishment and expansion of ecclesiastic halls during the 4th and early 5th c. transformed the character of the Spanish landscape, particularly the great stretches of the interior. Field surveys and excavations paint a picture of an early empire landscape carpeted with modestly outfitted farms of all sizes, occasionally punctuated by grander structures. 72 Beginning in the early 4th c., this built landscape began to change, taking on an increasing monumentality, punctuated by the sudden profile of looming facades, the domes of sprawling bath complexes and in some cases beyond the walls an insistent, dizzying array of mosaic floors, statuary, and fine mosaics. It became a landscape heavy with signification, shaped not by the person of increasingly absent landlords, but by buildings, buildings which themselves conveyed the requisite sense of power, magnificence and centrality of place in the increasingly complex patchwork that made up an estate's lands. This transformation of the built landscape seems to have carried with it, at least in certain regions, a commensurate centrification of the sacred landscape. The urge to build extended to structures both sacred and profane as certain Spanish landowning elites found the monumentalization of temples and tombs as critical to their self-articulation as the addition of another apsed dining space. And like the apsed dining hall, the villa-ta-tum, mausoleum or martyrium served its function not simply by acting as a space of cult or burial; in its monumentality and its carefully choreographed placement it also functioned as a language, transforming personal pietas and commemoration into markers of place and identity, thereby rendering them part of the broader estate apparatus.