CHAPTER 20

Villas and Agriculture in Republican Italy

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1 Introduction

The iconicity of the “Roman villa” affords it a rare status in that its appeal easily cuts across the boundaries of multiple disciplines. This is perhaps because the villa has always stimulated our imagination about the ancient world and cultivated a longing for that realm of convivial, pastoral bliss that the villa conjures up for us. Just as Seneca contemplated Roman virtues in the context of the villa of Scipio Africanus (Sen. Ep. 86), modern (and post-modern) thinkers continue to privilege the villa both as place and space, often using its realm as one in which to generate reconstructions and visions of the ancient past. In the nineteenth century the Roman villa appealed to the Romantics and the exploration of Vesuvian sites, in particular, fueled a growing scholarly interest in the architecture and aesthetics of the Roman villa (most recently, Mattusch, 2008). Often guided by ancient texts, villas were divided into typological groups, as were the interior appointments from wall paintings to floor mosaics. Villas seemed to be a homogeneous type, representative of a “Roman” cultural norm. The fascination with villa life began in antiquity, not only with the likes of Seneca but also poets and scholars such as Virgil and Varro. In spite of the iconic status of the villa from antiquity to modernity, a good deal of uncertainty remains with respect to the archaeology of Roman villas of the latter half of the first millennium.

The scholarly approach to the Roman villa finds itself at something of a crossroads, particularly with respect to the villas of the Republican period in Italy. This state of affairs has been brought about by a myriad of factors including a reassessment of received wisdom and the introduction of new data by way of archaeological excavation and field survey. New and critical approaches to Republican villas find, in some cases, that the
mainstream of Republican villa studies stemming from post-Second World War approaches are in need of updating, if not more radical intervention. At the heart of these reassessments are questions about the utility of traditional approaches to the villa as well as to the intertwined threads of influence in the Mediterranean – for instance, are the villa’s roots Italic or a co-opted form from Greek or Punic spheres? This sort of argument can easily become a “chicken or egg” sort of diatribe, but nonetheless a reappraisal of the archaeological evidence in Italy is instructive, especially as a way to situate the better understood phenomena of villas in Late Republican and Early Imperial Italy, and, indeed, in the Roman Empire writ large. This contribution explores the archaeology of villas in Republican Italy, highlighting debates that center on questions related to the origins of villa architecture, the morphology of villas, and also their agricultural functions. To that end Republican agriculture will also be discussed, with the overarching goal of contextualizing the villa and its function within the framework of Republican Italy. The reader must also keep in mind that in many cases earlier villas have little to do with the rarefied notion of villas that developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but that the development of villas (and their functions) is an important part of the development of the Republican period.

2 Current State of Villa Scholarship

Any useful Companion chapter should address the state of the field with respect to its topic; although such an assessment is needed for Republican villas, the task is a tall order. It will prove useful to highlight several recent and pivotal developments in the study of villas in Republican Italy in order to emphasize the degree to which the field of villa studies has moved forward in recent years. Traditional approaches to the Roman villa (e.g. McKay, 1975) tended to focus only on the most opulent sites, especially the so-called villae maritimae (Lafon, 2001), or on the aesthetics of the Roman villa. While these aesthetic and elite-centered scholarly approaches still retain their value, they do not contribute substantially to the exploration of the roots of the villa phenomenon or on the phenomena of monumental elite architecture of the Italian Peninsula. This topic has been treated quite extensively in Etruria (Stopponi, 1985), but only recently has the topic begun to receive similar attention in Rome’s sphere (Andrén, 1939; Cifani, 2008; Winter, 2009). While one could argue that such a focus is simply another scholarly agenda, it is, in fact, fundamental to understand the means by which the Late Republican villa became a part of the rarefied elite way of life. At the heart of this question is when the villa originated; are the origins to be assigned to the Archaic period? Mid-Republican? Late Republican? Older approaches relied on the chronology of domestic architecture which was founded on the dates that scholars maintained for Pompeian sites, dates that are increasingly unreliable as chronologies have been falling ever lower. The result is a sort of architectural gulf in the Middle Republic, with a number of “grandfather” prestige sites that exist in the landscape and a huge proliferation of “classic” villas dating to after the time of the Gracchi. The implication is that the number of “grandfather” sites is quite small, but nevertheless provided powerful examples to novi homines seeking to establish themselves alongside their hoary patrician colleagues in a time when the Roman world was experiencing radical changes (Pollitt, 1978).
Another significant approach situates villas in their cultural contexts; in this methodology, villas are a locus connected to memory and identity (Boatwright et al., 1982; Bergmann, 1995; Bodel, 1997). The Late Republican villa functioned as a venue in which to cultivate and perpetuate memory and identity, from aesthetic schemes that reflected social standing to the display of specific images and texts that connected the present to the past by way of ancestor worship.

Other scholars emphasize how the villa allowed elite Romans to create a platform upon which to situate their ideas and ideologies with respect to the agrarian life and their own political agendas. This topos is reflected in the famous agrarian treatises, notably those of Cato, Varro and Columella. While these texts are being used in a fairly straightforward way by some scholars who still view them as handbooks or guides to Roman agriculture, the most exciting (and potentially revelatory) approaches to these treatises are those that push beyond the treatment of the Late Republican treatise as simply a handbook to ask deeper questions about the function of such writing in contemporary society at Rome. Ancient writers sought to classify the villa as well as to describe its function(s), in direct and paradigmatic ways. In some cases the villa was simply a setting, though the setting ranged from the literal to the metaphorical. Cicero and Pliny the Younger, for instance, described the life and duties of the villa owner in various ways, while philosophers and poets used the villa and its setting for their own purposes (Boatwright et al., 1982; Bodel, 1997). Others used the villa and the limning of “agrarian life” to frame their own ideological platforms, predicated upon the notion that the purest form of Roman citizenship was the yeoman farmer who could, like Cincinnatus, leave the field to take up arms and then return directly to the field when the threat had been averted. Poets, too, weighed in on this issue, with works like the Georgics of Virgil both extolling the agrarian ideals and also positioning the farmer (and his farm) within the loss of the integrity of the Roman Republic (G. 1.506–8, 2.533–4). It is in light of these motives that philologists have produced new and creative approaches to the Latin agrarian treatises that have focused on the centrality of farming in the world of Rome’s Republican aristocracy (Green, 1997, 2012; Reay, 2005; Terrenato, 2012). For instance, Cato’s De agricultura has traditionally been read as a literal guide to rural living, home cooking and folk medicine, yet some of his advice hardly seems useful in light of the practicalities of actual farming. Scholars such as Reay examine the value of the text as a sort of position piece, an agrarian bulwark for Cato’s conservatism. Likewise, Green’s approaches to Varro explore the allegorical nature of his narrative, even finding that the carefully chosen names of the characters in the text are a part of the Varronian narrative (Green, 1997, 2012). Historians such as Marzano also considered the villa from the view of social history, engaging the ways in which the villa – as a center of production and an essential part of Italy’s settled landscape – helped to cultivate individual identity and status (Marzano, 2007). Interpretations of these Late Republican treatises remain debated, but it is of remarkable interest that in the face of a rapidly Hellenizing world, a crisis of the social orders and a tidal wave of wealth in the hands of relative newcomers on the social scene, conservative politicians built their platform upon a mythologized agrarian past. Yet this was the ancient argument about the meaning of what it was to be a Roman.

The archaeology of villas has also advanced by fits and starts over the course of the modern era. With the re-discovery of Pompeii in the eighteenth century, the more opulent villas in the landscape became the targets of wholesale looting, as collectors and
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dealers sought portable art and wall paintings for sale and show. Thankfully they remained more or less ignorant of more humble rural villas (see Chapter 37). These rural sites came closer to the forefront following extensive field surveys of the mid-twentieth century. In the 1970s Marxist scholarship that focused on the issue of slavery had obvious implications for the investigation and interpretation of productive sites (see Chapter 12). Now in the twenty-first century, villa studies find themselves in a healthy place, but also a controversial one in terms of site classification and the debate over the adequacy of the word “villa” as a useful archaeological term. The range of sites and site typologies concerned is enormous – and this is only a consideration of the Italian Peninsula. In general terms the rich textual and aesthetic corpora for villas need to be augmented still by more extensive investigations of Republican villa sites, investigations that are not guided by a priori assumptions gleaned from texts. This is particularly true for villa sites of the Early and Middle Republican periods, where the possibility exists to map more comprehensively the emergence of perhaps the most iconic of Roman architectural types and thus better understand the phenomenon by which the “classic” villa proliferated in Italy and across the Mediterranean basin from the final decades of the Republic onwards.

3 What Is the Republican Villa?

While this question might seem innocuous and overly simplistic, it hinges on a number of current (and entrenched) scholarly debates about the topic at hand. From the traditional standpoint, the Roman villa was a country residence, the pendant, yet apposite, partner of the domus, a house in town. The villa could be situated either in the interior or at the coast, and extant textual testimonials in Latin describe such places. Pliny the Younger, for instance, described a number of his villas that include one by the seaside as well as the more working-class villas that he leased to tenant farmers (Plin. Ep. 3.19). Thus, even from the start the Roman villa had an identity crisis in that it could be a working farm or a rich man’s pleasure palace, and yet still be called by the same name. Ancient authors further subdivided villas into two classifications: the villa urbana and the villa rustica. These labels have entered modern scholarship and have, at times, been applied in a rather uncritical fashion. The villa rustica is presumed to be a more humble place, connected often with production and slaves, as well as with store-rooms for produce, stalls for livestock, and the like. The villa urbana is presumed to be more refined, evocative of the comforts and luxury that the villa owner would also enjoy in his domus. Modern scholars have continued to construct typologies beyond the villa urbana and the villa rustica, as both Rostovtzeff and Carrington did (Rostovtzeff, 1957: 550, nn. 25, 26, but the typology was first proposed in the 1926 edition; Carrington, 1931). The former created a rubric for defining the villa rustica while the latter collected a sample of such villas from the area around the Bay of Naples. Carrington attempted to apply Rostovtzeff’s scheme for classification to archaeologically attested villas, many of them connected, by way of inscriptions, with known historical personages. In terms of today’s scholarship, most researchers would be reluctant to approach the classification of sites precisely according to this system, but we may still observe the continued classificatory impulse in the works of Romizzi (2001) and De Franchescini (2005). Marzano’s villa volume represents the most comprehensive and nuanced recent scholarship, as it expertly combines the archaeology
of villa sites with economic and social history (Marzano, 2007). The impulse to break down a vast archaeological corpus into smaller, more digestible segments is understandable but is only advisable when (and if) the cataloger is prepared to admit the limitations attached to the classificatory scheme. This seems especially true (and pressing) with respect to the villa corpus since the terminological insufficiency of the word “villa” not only impacts our ability to agree upon site classification but also extends to the interpretative universe in explaining the role of the “villa” in the landscapes of Roman Italy.

Within the Roman domestic sphere itself, yet another subdivision was created by modern scholars that mirrors the aforementioned, since the villa tends to be segregated into two distinct zones, the pars urbana and the pars rustica. The former quarter is considered as the more refined part of the house, the seat of the paterfamilias and the place to display the trappings of his status and ancestry. The latter is the part of the house connected to domestic service, slaves, and productive activities. This dichotomous nature, which also exists for the domus, has been well explored in recent scholarship (see Chapter 3).

By the Late Republican period we tend to speak of a “classic” villa plan, one that is perhaps inspired by extant villas that have been deemed canonical. The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii often factors in such discussions, as it demonstrates both the general tendencies of internal division discussed above as well as the centrality of an atrium space in the villa’s layout. Further, for those most comfortable with a reading of the architecture informed directly by the ancient sources, the Villa of the Mysteries also conforms to the scenographic description given by the younger Pliny of his villa at Laurentum (Ep. 2.17). Pliny’s description stresses the relationship between the natural and the built environment, the indoors and the outdoors, architecture and vegetation, and, perhaps above all, lines of sight and perspectives. As important as Pliny’s description is, it is worth noting that despite some morphological trends, great variation exists within the corpus of villa sites and it is difficult to speak in terms of standardization of villa architecture.

4 Early Rural Architecture in Central Italy

The search for the beginnings of the “Roman villa” usefully ought to begin not with structures such as the ones described by Cicero and the younger Pliny but rather with rural buildings from across the social spectrum. Ancient authors, including Pliny the Elder, sought to explain villa origins, and the villa emerged as a central topos in the treatises of Late Republican and Early Imperial authors. In archaeological terms, rural architecture in central Italy has been the focus of scholarly attention since the advent of large-scale field surveys that began in the wake of the Second World War and have influenced dramatically the excavation of sites in peninsular Italy (see Chapter 12; Potter, 1979; Patterson, ed., 2004). The identification of a multitude of previously unknown rural sites provided not only an impetus for the examination and reconstruction of ancient landscapes, but also for the potential to excavate selected sites. The 1970s witnessed a spate of “villa archaeology,” from the investigations in the Ager Cosanus to the archaeology of rural sites in Rome’s immediate hinterland (see Chapters 13 and 30). In this latter category, Bedini’s work along the Via Laurentina continues to prove seminal for the discussion of early rural architecture in central Italy. At a series of sites, emblematized by the sites of Torrino and Acqua Acetosa Laurentina, Bedini documented
non-elite rural architecture of the archaic period (Bedini, 1984). These humble farm sites demonstrate the crude construction that was the vernacular of the non-elite architecture of central Italy, including the use of wattle-and-daub and a marked absence of rectilinear plans. Other archaic structures in central Italy, for instance, the multi-phase farm at Podere Tartuchino in Etruria, show a tendency for agglomerative construction in the Italian Peninsula (Attolini and Perkins, 1992). These rural sites show a tendency in their ground plan that is interesting in light of later morphological development, that is, the construction of a semi-enclosed corral area.

The work of Bedini and that of the excavators of Podere Tartuchino is made all the more interesting when the humble, non-elite sites are set alongside their contemporary elite sites. In Etruria and Latium, evidence for palatial architecture exists in the Late Archaic period, in the Etruscan palaces documented at Acquarossa and Poggio Civitate (Murlo), among others (see Chapter 23; Stopponi, 1985). High-quality construction materials and techniques characterize these sites, as does the material culture evidence for elite occupation and activity. These elite sites reach a monumental threshold with the late sixth-century building at Poggio Civitate, which is over 1,500 m². The architectural tendencies that link these sites include the use of colonnaded porticoes that both define and frame central spaces; this is true of the central, enclosed courtyard at Poggio Civitate as well as the L-shaped portico of zone F at Acquarossa.

The Poggio Civitate structure still awaits comprehensive publication, yet it can still be singled out as perhaps the largest structure in peninsular Italy in the third quarter of the sixth century. The destruction of the site notwithstanding, it set important elite architectural precedents both in terms of monumental scale and quality of construction. The nascent monumentality at Rome and in its hinterland took cues from the archaic elites who secured and maintained social position in order to display economic and political power by way of material wealth and monumental architecture. Yet one can reasonably raise the question as to what connection may be (or should be) drawn between the patrimony of Archaic Italian elites and the emergence of the architectural form that we call the villa.

5 The “Early Villa”

When and where can we identify the “first villa” in Italy? This search finds analogy in an epidemiologist’s search for a “patient zero” and is no less complicated, especially given bifurcation of the issue: was the idea of a villa imported or indigenous? Scholarly rationale exists for both lines of thought and the argument is extremely complex and, at times, convoluted. Those who support exogenous origins point to structures like the Dema House in Attica, a fifth-century rural property whose ground plan evokes the Italian villa (Jones, Sackett and Graham, 1962: 75–114). In this case, the argument is that its parallel in Italy is seen in sites like the one at Moltone di Tolve in Basilicata, a case advanced by Torelli (2012; for the site, see Russo, 1992). But support has also been given to an argument for indigenous origins for the architectural form. The architectural morphology of several recently discovered sites, including the Villa dell’Auditorium near Rome (see below) and the structure at Prato-Gonfienti (Cifani, 2008: 275), lend credence to a claim for an Italian origin for the “classic” villa form. More than 20 years ago Carandini christened the Republican villa at Selvasecca di Blera as the “first villa in Italy” (Carandini,
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1989: 101–200). Dating the villa at Selvasecca is problematic as the site has a long history, as do other prestige sites that we shall now discuss.

A major development in early villa studies came in 1997 with the discovery of the Villa dell’auditorium, near Rome, a monumental multi-phase elite residential complex uncovered during salvage excavations in Rome’s Parioli district. The Villa dell’Auditorium is clearly an elite structure even from its earliest phase, with high-quality construction seen in the use of ashlar masonry. The complex underwent a number of stages of development with fairly radical alterations to the ground plan; occupation continued into the middle of the Roman Imperial period. An early appraisal by Terrenato identified the Villa dell’Auditorium as an early architectural precursor of the “classic” villa form in central Italy (Terrenato, 2001a).

Carandini, as the principal investigator, wove a narrative that adds to the mix components that include ritual usage and slave quarters (Carandini, D’Alessio and Di Giuseppe, 2006). The Villa dell’Auditorium (which I will refer to as “the Auditorium site” to maintain some neutrality as to its function) finds itself at the heart of a terminological debate at the ground level – should it be termed a villa, palace or workshop (fattoria)? The title of Carandini’s final report – *La fattoria e la villa dell’Auditorium* – belies the biases of the principal investigator and his reckoning of the site’s role in a slave-based economy. The first phase of the Auditorium site dates to the final third of the sixth century and covers some 300 m² (Figure 20.1) (Carandini *et al.*, 1997: 120–1). Phase II at the Auditorium site enters the same category as the archaic complex at Poggio Civitate, in that both exceed 500 m² in terms of built surface area, unusual in pre-Hellenistic Italy (Terrenato, 2001a: 15). This second phase oriented itself around an enlarged central courtyard that provided the focus of the plan and that, in later phases, became the atrium.
proper. The use of ashlar blocks of cappellaccio demonstrates elite status, as this is effectively the same building technique employed in contemporary monumental structures in the center of Rome, for example, the podium of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus (see Chapters 17 and 26; Cifani, 2008: 80–108).

Its less well-preserved neighbor, the Villa delle Grotte at Grottarossa on the Via Flaminia, is the Auditorium site’s likely architectural peer. This villa, excavated in 1926, demonstrates a primary and secondary phase akin to those of the Auditorium site and it, too, remains in use across a broad time frame (Becker, 2003). The Villa delle Grotte, along with the Auditorium site, represent potential archetypes for the villa; their longevity in the landscape allowed them to serve as models for later villa builders and owners (Becker and Terrenato, 2012).

These two remarkable sites are not alone in Rome’s hinterland, as we may safely add other potential peer sites to this group. Among these is the Casale Ghella villa site on the Via Cassia (Messineo, Petracca and Vigna, 1985; Messineo, 1987–8). This villa, excavated in the 1980s, is poorly preserved, but the dimensions of its early phase and the presence of a cistern connected with a series of rock-cut cuniculi suggest an elite residence similar to the early phases of the Villa delle Grotte. The Villa delle Grotte has as well a system of cuniculi cut into the tuff bedrock beneath the structure. These cuniculi are likely connected with a system of cisterns for water collection (Becker, 2003: 17–19). Also like the Villa delle Grotte, the Casale Ghella villa underwent substantial Late Republican renovation, thus complicating attempts to arrive at accurate chronologies for the earliest phases. However, it would seem that this constellation of prestige “grandfather” villas in Rome’s suburbium establish an important precedent both in terms of their early monumentality and their long-range occupation, thus setting them apart from the vast majority of suburban villas.

Taken together these long-lived residential elite complexes in the urban periphery suggest that the landed, rural elites maintained a literal basis of their power outside the pomerium of the city, an interpretation that calls to mind both the scholarship of L. Ross Taylor (1960) who focused on voting districts as a way to examine the political landscape of Republican Rome, as well as more recent approaches to the gens as a means to devise a state formation model for Rome (Smith, 2006; Terrenato, 2011). These sites also are most appropriately compared to the archaic palaces of Etruria, both in terms of built surface area and in terms of aesthetic adornments. For instance, the eaves tile depicting the river god Acheloös discovered at the Auditorium site clearly demonstrates the presence of elite occupants, as it is now widely accepted that architectural terracotta decoration is a mark of elite status (La Rocca, 2006: 485–500). Another mark of distinction for the sites in this category is the fact that their early origins mark them as prestige sites in the landscape and they enjoy a long and unbroken history of occupation and status. Their early origin sets them apart from the vast majority of villa sites that emerge during the Middle and Late Republican periods.

6 Villas and the Middle Republic

Recent scholarly trends in both archaeology and ancient history have focused more attention (and deservedly so) on the Middle Republican period. It was during this time that Rome’s hegemonic expansion was fully under way with colonial foundations placed
across the peninsula (see Chapters 19 and 30). An important question in this case relates to the appearance of the villa in the landscape of peninsular Italy. It is important to keep in mind that numerous Late Archaic and Early Republican prestige sites like the Villa delle Grotte and the Auditorium site continued in use, perhaps still projecting the local power of the clan chiefs who may have inhabited them. It does not seem, however, that the onset of Roman expansion translated directly to a reproduction of these prestige sites in other parts of the Italian Peninsula. Some sites with still unclear chronologies, such as the villa at Selvasecca di Blera, may have undergone restorations during this period, but even Selvasecca seems to pre-date pronounced Roman expansionism. The chronological problems of the Selvasecca villa remain essentially unresolved, but it is clear that the interpretations offered in the preliminary report have not found widespread support, prompting more recent reappraisals (Berggren and Andrén, 1969; Klynne, 2006–7). The villa is large (c. 1,100 m² in area) and is constructed of local tufo using opus quadratum masonry. The preliminary report gives a second-century date for the construction of the villa, but this attribution is not consistent with the numerous fictile fragments that may be dated to the fifth or fourth centuries (Terrenato, 2001a: 23). Unfortunately, the villa remains enigmatic owing to incomplete excavation and publication, yet the combination of domestic space (pars urbana) and production space (pars rustica) suggests that the building had elite status as the pars rustica includes facilities for the production of architectural terracottas.

The Middle Republic sees the proliferation of small farms in central Italy (Figure 20.2). Among these are the villa sites on the Via Gabina, identified by field survey and subsequently excavated (Ward-Perkins and Kahane, 1972: 91–126; Oliver-Smith and Widrig, 1982: 99–114; Widrig, 1986: 141–82, 1987, http://viagabina.rice.edu). These sites were located in Rome’s eastern suburbium in the area of Tor Bella Monaca. The two villas that were excavated represent a long period of occupation stretching from the Republican period to Late Antiquity. The Republican phases demonstrate household industry with evidence for presses and vats and the production of wine and processing of wool that took place at the site. The Via Gabina villas are representative of the small-scale farms common to the Mediterranean basin that predominate in the Italian landscape in the Middle Republic (Volpe, 1990; Terrenato, 2007).

7 Late Republican Villas

The Late Republican period witnessed a veritable explosion of villa architecture across the Italian landscape. Many of these villas belong to the first century and their construction radically changed the settled landscape of peninsular Italy. The classic villa plan was replicated again and again, becoming a widely distributed architectural type. The Francolise villas, located in the Ager Falernus, are good representatives of villa construction in this period. These villas at Posto and San Rocco are modest in size and connected to productive activities. The first phase of the Posto villa belongs to the late second century and its plan centers on a courtyard (Cotton, 1979: 17). The San Rocco villa, which has a slightly more complicated plan than Posto, is a terraced structure with the lower terrace given over to the pars rustica. The pars urbana occupies the higher terrace (Cotton and Métraux, 1985: 11–12). The Francolise sites show a range in terms of
appointments and remind us of the combination, in the space of the villa, of the productive activities alongside other features.

The so-called Villa of the Volusii Saturnini at Lucus Feroniae on the Via Salaria is also an important Late Republican case study, one that occupies a different end of the archi-
tectural spectrum than the Francolise sites. Dating to c. 50, the villa is associated with Q. Volusius Saturninus, whose family may have served as patrons of the nearby town of Lucus Feroniae. The family flourished under the principate of Augustus and, in turn, their villa was beautified and monumentalized. As Marzano notes, the villa itself was a visible projection of status and surely attracted attention (Marzano, 2007). What is extremely interesting is that the model here hearkened back to its earlier republican patrician aristocrats, such as the gens that surely occupied the auditorium site. Late republican aristocrats relied upon the entrenched villa culture of republican elites in order to convey and consolidate their own authority on the local level. With the family of the Volusii Saturnini achieving the status of patroni coloniae, their ability to project their status at the local level became all the more important.

The villa at Settefinestre, located in the Ager Cosanus between Orbetello and Capalbio, looms as one of the most important Late republican villas (Figure 20.3). Excavated between 1976 and 1981 by Carandini, the villa has become the archetype of a large-scale, slave-run estate in Republican Italy, and the embodiment of Varro’s notion of the villa perfecta (Rust. 3.1.10). Such an interpretation is not without controversy (Carandini, 1985a; see Kuzičin, 1984). Latifundia, for some ancient authors, represented the ruination of Italy and the Roman Empire (e.g. Plin. HN 18.7.35); in Carandini’s reconstruction, the Settefinestre villa is an example of the Republican sources of that decline.
The villa has been linked to the Volusii family; the first phase is assigned to the middle of the first century, with modifications in the first century CE. It was briefly abandoned in the later second century CE, but later reoccupied. The villa is a sprawling complex, resting on a great cryptoporticus. Yet it is seen not as a luxury villa like those from the Bay of Naples region, but as a center of Roman agribusiness.

In architectural terms the Settefinestre villa looks forward as much as it looks backward, reflecting the heritage of prestige architecture in the Republican landscapes of Italy as well as establishing a long-lived architectural trajectory that would spawn the massive suburban villas of the Middle and Later Imperial periods, from Tivoli to Piazza Armerina. Indeed such villa sites also mark a pronounced connection between the Roman world and its successors in the medieval period.

8 Villas and Agriculture

In recent years ancient historians have focused a good deal of attention on farming and farmers in the Republican period (see Chapter 13). The rationale behind this scholarly trend is that the issue of farming is connected to larger research questions, especially those connected to hegemonic expansion and demography, both of which continue to enjoy robust scholarly interest. Additionally, manpower studies remain in vogue, following the work of P.A. Brunt, which still is discussed as vigorously as it was when it was introduced (see Chapter 10; Brunt, 1975; Rosenstein, 2004). Important contributions, like those of Rosenstein, help to contextualize agriculture within a larger socio-political framework (Rosenstein, 2004, 2008). Reconstruction of the rural economy and demographic trends continues to be important in the reconstruction of the history of first millennium Italy (Laurano, 2011).

In general, studies of agriculture in Roman Italy are at something like a scholarly turning point, due in large part to the growing importance of archaeobotanical and palaeoenvironmental research (e.g. Motta, 2011). A paradigmatic example of these changes is Foxhall’s 2007 monograph dealing with olive cultivation in the Greek world. Foxhall’s work, although not directly applicable to the Italian sphere, is a worthy example of this new trend as her research uses archaeological material to challenge long-held preconceptions and assumptions about cultivation in the ancient world. Roman farming practices and the scholarship surrounding those practices also show a textual dependency, as is evident from the work of White (1970, 1975).

At a lower level, the combination of impulses such as those embodied by White’s volumes with material evidence has produced, in some cases, useful reconstructions of the fundamental Roman farm implement, namely the plow. Working from a figural model of a plowman and team of oxen, reconstructions of Roman plows help aid our visualization of the Roman farmer and his work (Manning, 1971; see also Edlund-Berry, 2006a: 116–17; and, in general, Aitken, 1956). The plow is perhaps the most fundamental Roman farm implement and, as a result, the image and idea of plowing was of great interest to ancient artists. The farmer tilling the earth may be connected both with the fundamental ideological role played by farming in the Roman mindset and also with the ritual practices connected with inauguration. The imagery of the plowman remains one of the most vivid images connected with Roman agriculture that survive from antiquity.
Increasingly, scientific work on animal husbandry and fish farming, for example, continue to inform us about the intricacies of the Roman diet and the economy of production connected to villa sites (Higginbotham, 1997; MacKinnon, 2001). Compendia like Rossiter’s collection of evidence for presses in peninsular Italy are useful for extending White’s original work (Rossiter, 1981; Margaritis and Jones, 2008). It should be noted, however, that the discipline remains without any comprehensive spatial collation of evidence for Republican productive sites, although the work of the Comune di Roma, plotting villa sites and putative villa sites in the suburbium, represents an important step forward (Volpe, 2012).

In terms of archaeological evidence for cultivation and processing at villa sites, there is an abundance of information that has been collected, but a thorough and systematic compilation of these data still remains to be done. For instance, the Via Gabina sites show evidence for small-scale production – from harvesting to processing – with evidence for pressing and processing of the products of the fields and storage facilities associated with the villa sites. These are humble sites, with relatively small plots of land. Larger affairs, such as the villa sites at Centocelle, show evidence for viticulture in the form of planting trenches for vineyards (Gioia and Volpe, 2004; Volpe, 2009, 2012). This evidence comes in the form of vineyard trenches, of which archaeological traces are still evident (Carandini, 1980; Volpe, 2009).

The other side of the rural economy and production question is the market, a topic that has garnered a great deal of recent attention. For the Italian Peninsula, De Ruyt’s work on the macellum remains fundamental (1983), but increasingly the collection of site compendia is made stronger when combined with theoretical frameworks for understanding the ancient economy, as Oxford’s Roman Economy Project is seeking to do (http://oxrep.classics.ox.ac.uk). More collation of archaeological data for production and storage sites, as well as for markets and periodic markets, is badly needed in the archaeology of peninsular Italy.

9 Conclusions

The world of Republican villas is one that has been transformed thanks to archaeological fieldwork over the course of the past 35 years. From the perch of an early twenty-first-century observer, it is challenging to imagine the scholarly landscape of Republican villa studies without the excavations of villas such as the Villa of the Volusii at Settefinestre or the Auditorium site in Rome. These discoveries over the last four decades have been transformational. Taken together with constant revision and down-dating of the architectural remains from the Vesuvian sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum, the arena of Early and Middle Republican villas is now one in which a great deal is at stake. Yet the importance of archaeology can be felt especially in terms of the way in which we view and understand the Late Republican cultural milieu. This period is the one which we think we know best, as it is contemporary to (and embraced by) ancient authors; and its archaeology is more abundant and better preserved. However, Late Republican villa culture does not spring on to the scene ex nihilo – it originated somewhere (and sometime) earlier. This debate involves most every facet of Republican archaeology and philology and the potential for a comprehensive reassessment of the archaeology and culture of Republican villas has never been greater.
The bibliography for Republican villas is a vast one. A copious bibliography appears in Torelli (1990) as well as in Gros (1996–2001). Earlier studies on Roman villas are numerous, yet the scholars who wrote them tend to be more interested in later Republican and Imperial villas (e.g. Painter, 1980; McKay, 1975; Percival, 1976; Mielsch, 1987). Rostovtzeff essentially created in 1926 (see 1957) a three-part division of the villa rustica corpus, emblematic of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarly propensities for systems of neat classification. Such reasoning also informs Lugli’s first volume of the *Forma Italiae* series (1926), where platforms in rural landscapes are referred to as *basis villae* (J. Becker, 2007: 215–31; Bodel, 2012). Numerous compendia enumerating villa sites have appeared in the last decade (e.g. Lafon, 2001; Romizzi, 2001; De Franceschini, 2005). These texts, in some cases, establish typological schemes for the sites that they collect. More recently, social historians have become involved in the study of villas of the Late Republic and Early Empire (e.g. Marzano, 2007); however, such an approach has not been realized for villas of the Early or Middle Republic. The 1970s produced a tradition of Marxist-driven Italian scholarship on villas as the loci of slave-oriented production (e.g. Giardina and Schiavone, 1981).

For the earliest Republican villas, the publications on the Auditorium site near Rome should be consulted (Carandini *et al*., 1997; Terrenato, 2001a; Carandini, D’Alessio and Di Giuseppe, 2006), as should the work on the villa at Selvasecca di Blera (Berggren and Andrén, 1969; Klynne, 2006–7). Work on archaic period rural sites is also helpful (e.g. Bedini, 1984; Cifani, 1995, 1998, 2002; Attolini and Perkins, 1992). Important publications have resulted from the excavations at Centocelle (Gioia and Volpe, 2004; Volpe, 2007) and from the *Suburbium* congresses hosted by the École française de Rome in 2003 and 2005 (Pergola, Volpe and Santangeli Valenzani, 2003; Jolivet *et al*., 2009).

The advent of bioarchaeological and environmental archaeological approaches has influenced the field to a great extent, with an increased interest in diet and production (MacKinnon, 2001; Motta, 2011). These studies of diet and distribution also extend to scholars whose interests lie in human skeletal pathology (see Chapter 9); in the not-so-distant future, a profitable convergence of scholarship on agriculture should occur with scholarship addressing nutrition and pathology of disease by way of human osteological data. Closely linked to this is the growth area of demography studies (e.g. de Ligt and Northwood, 2008; also Chapter 10) and a growing interest in new approaches to the rural populace of Roman Italy (Launaro, 2011) and slaves (Rathbone, 1983; Bradley, 1984, 1994; Bradley and Cartledge, 2011). Garden archaeology has also proven influential in Roman villa studies (MacDougall and Jashemski, 1981; Jashemski and Meyer, 2002).