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THE MATERIALIZATION OF IDENTITY: ARCHITECTURE AND CONSUMPTION IN THE LATE ROMAN VILLAS OF LUSITANIA

Abstract: As of the rest of Hispania, the rural world in Lusitania underwent significant changes during the late 3rd and 4th centuries. During this period, numerous rural residences, characterized by great monumentality and complex decoration, were renovated or built. The emergence of these rural buildings is related to the new political, economic and social order that followed the tetrarchic period, which was characterized in Lusitania and Hispania by the designation of Augusta Emerita (Mérida, Badajoz) as the capital of the Diocese Hispaniarum and the renewal of aristocratic cadres, with the inclusion in the Senate Ordo of bureaucrats and the military. In this socio-political setting, marked by competition and social promotion, rural residences became true centres of social prestige, where architecture and conspicuous consumption were used as a language to display the economic power and the social status of the ownersto visitors and guests. The detailed analysis of the architecture and other markers of consumption documented in various *villages* in Lusitania will help to comprehend what messages the rural owners exactly wanted to convey, contributing to a greater understanding of the social codes of this privileged group.

Keywords: *Identity, consumption, architecture, villa, late roman society, Lusitania.*

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INTRODUCTION: CONSUMPTION AS A BUILDER OF IDENTITIES

The use of consumption by individuals to construct their identities and to increase or maintain their status, once their basic needs have been covered, has been the subject matter of a large number of 19th and 20th century anthropologists and sociologists. Particularly of note is Thorstein Veblen's research, whose pioneering *The Theory of the Leisure Class: an economic study of institutions* (1899) is one of the most interesting works of modern sociology. In his essay, Veblen argued that the privileged sectors of American society in the second half of the 19th century – which he referred to as 'Leisure class' in opposition to the 'working class' – used the conspicuous consumption of certain goods to publicly display their wealth and social status. For Veblen, consumption allowed individuals to distinguish themselves in society based on their wealth, which gave them access to two assets that are synonymous with social prestige: leisure and conspicuous consumption. Veblen established that consumption no longer depends on the basic needs of individuals, but on social needs that mark the differences between members of the same society. In this way, lifestyles and consumption habits of the 'Leisure class', which is at the top of the social ladder, become a reference for the remaining

classes which, sooner or later, through emulation – another concept coined by Veblen – will try to reproduce these leisure and consumption habits with the aim of increasing their prestige and status, and thus achieve social promotion.

In relation to this process of emulation, we may mention George Simmel, who also regarded consumption as a major identity-building factor. Simmel emphasised the importance of fashion for consumption, defined it as the element that allows for the social distinction of classes and the tool used by individuals to signal their belonging to a given social group. According to Simmel, fashion was nothing but a form of social imitation and equalisation, a constant change that allows differences to become visible over time and between classes¹. In relation to this definition, the consumption habits of privileged groups will change when lower social groups adopt them with the aim of achieving social promotion; this leads the privileged classes to adopt other consumption strategies that allow them to remain separate as a social group.

Taking a step beyond Veblen and Simmel, in the mid-1970s Jean Baudrillard analysed the ‘consumption society’ emerged in the second half of the 20th century from a sociological perspective². For Baudrillard, consumption must be understood like a language, as individuals do not acquire items for their material characteristics, but for the meanings that individuals associate with them. These meanings are ordered in a scale of value, which is recognised and accepted by all members of society, allowing for consumption and differentiation strategies to crystallise. For Baudrillard, two elements play a central role in this communication process: the shop window, which is the place in which the meaning of each object is displayed and where the individuals read these meanings; and publicity, which is essential to bind the symbolic and cultural associations of each object. Baudrillard thus defined consumption as a language code that allows individual to express their belonging to a given social group or to flag their promotion within the group, or even upwards into a higher group.

Obviously, these theories about consumption have not gone unnoticed by other social scientists, notably, for the issue at hand, archaeologists and historians. Especially paradigmatic is the work of Andrew Wallace-Hadrill³, who observed that some plebeians in Pompeii and Herculaneum tried to climb socially by decorating their houses like those owned by the privileged classes. The most affluent groups, for their part, tried by all means to avoid seeing their residences imitated by the inferior groups by seeking more complex materials and decorative motifs. Both behaviours are a perfect fit by the concepts of ‘emulation’ and ‘fashion’ developed in Veblen’s and Simmel’s theories, which opened the door to a social reading of architecture that transcended the mere description of decorative motifs. Another important work is that by Xavier Deru and Ricardo Villaescusa⁴, who observed that German elites that lived beyond the Roman limes imported typically Roman foodstuffs (olive oil and garum) in order to both reproduce the behaviour of Roman

elites and stand out within their own society. As pointed out by the followers of Jean Baudrillard, consumption was used as a message by a privileged group that aspires to be recognised and accepted by a peer group. Again, consumption is understood as a language a code accepted by the different members of society.

With all due caution against anachronistic inferences, the social projection of consumption can be used to analyse the splendour observed in 4th-century Hispania, including our case study, Lusitania, from an anthropological and archaeological perspective. During this period, Hispania’s provinces⁵, like other Mediterranean regions,⁶ witnessed the access of numerous individuals to rural and urban elites; this groups regarded their rural residences – *villae* – as the best stage to display their social status and wealth through architecture, decorative elements and the conspicuous consumption of imported goods. *A priori*, the setting is very similar to those described by Veblen, Simmel and Baudrillard in their analysis of contemporary society, so a re-reading of the archaeological record from several similar sites can provide us with a very clear picture of the mentality of these rural owners.

4TH-CENTURY LUSITANIA AND ITS RURAL OWNERS

With some isolated exceptions⁷, the continuity that marked 3rd-century Lusitania⁸ gave way to a major transformation driven by the administrative reforms undertaken by Diocletian in the last quarter of the century: the creation of the *Diocesis Hispaniarum* and the designation of *Augusta Emerita* – capital of the province of Lusitania – as capital of this new administrative unit. This appointment had profound political, social and economic effects on the province and especially of the city, which became a first-rate political, administrative and bureaucratic centre⁹. This led to the beautification of the city with new constructions¹⁰, especially those in which the the bureaucrats of State carried out their functions, notably the *vicarius hispaniarum* and his entourage¹¹. Unsurprisingly, these new arrivals settled in *Augusta Emerita* and also acquired rural possessions in the city’s hinterland and the province, where they built substantial rural residences¹². An illustration of this is the famous Disc of Theodosius (Fig.1) found in a rural area 25 km south of *Emerita*, where, according to Javier Arce, the rural residence of the *vicarius hispaniarum* may have been situated¹³; it is easy to imagine this civil servant displaying this singular object in front of their guests, as a demonstration of his status and his special place in the emperor’s affections. But this phenomenon was in all probability not limited to the *ager emeritensis*, because the arrival of such a bureaucratic and military contingent must have been felt throughout the province. This explain the *ex novo* construction or the reconstruction, beautification and expansion of *villae* in Lusitania in the late 3rd

5 CHAVARRIA 2007, 41–45.

6 MARZANO/MÉTRAUX 2018.

7 EDMONDSON 2020, 179–180.

8 CEPAS 1997, 35–36, 196 sqq; WITSCHERL 2009, 495–496

9 ARCE 2002, 16.

10 SASTRE DE DIEGO 2015, 54–55.

11 ARCE 2002, 16–17.

12 SASTRE DE DIEGO 2015, 65–65.

13 ARCE 2002, 25–26.

1 SIMMEL 1989, 27.

2 BAUDRILLARD 1970.

3 WALLACE-HADRILL 1990.

4 DERU/VILLAESCUSA 2014.

and through the 4th century¹⁴ (Fig. 2). A similar process has been attested in regions such as Aquitania¹⁵, North Italy¹⁶ and Moesia¹⁷, where the expansion and beautification of *villae* was widespread, especially in the vicinity of the diocesan capitals.



Fig. 1. Copy of the Missorium of Theodosius. MNAR Photographic Archive/Photo: Lorenzo Plana Torres.

On the other hand, this architectural boom, attested not only in Lusitania but elsewhere in Hispania as well, can also be related to other parallel phenomena dated to the initial decades of the 4th century. First, Constantine's monetary reform, which turned the new gold coin – the *solidus* – into the value of reference for all transactions by losing its equivalence to bronze coinage¹⁸; this increased the *solidus*'s value as main market denomination, considerably increasing the wealth of some individuals – especially money-changers, bankers and merchants – who saw the gold stocks that they had accumulated as a refuge investment soar in estimated value¹⁹. Second, in relation to this, the renovation of traditional aristocracies also promoted by Constantine must be emphasised; this opened the senatorial *ordo* to civil servants and the military at the service of the state²⁰, as well as to the wealthy businessmen who had benefitted from the aforementioned monetary reform, who in their wish for social promotion did not hesitate to buy the necessary influence to be accepted in the *ordo*²¹. If we take into account that prestige was still linked to the possession of land and the great competitiveness triggered by the political and economic reforms, it is hardly surprising that the businessmen enriched by the new value of gold and those who accumulated merits by serving the state sought the recognition of

their status by acquiring property and building large urban and rural dwellings, in which they could easily materialise their power and influence²².

Despite the importance of these socio-political changes and the substantial number of large *villae* documented in Lusitania for this period, very few of them can be directly related to their owners. The written sources indicate that some major *potentiores* had important holdings in Lusitania, such as Dydimus, Virinianus, Ladogius and Theodosius, mentioned by Paulus Orosius²³ and Zosimos²⁴. These were relatives of Emperor Honorius, who, in the struggle against the usurper Constantine III, recruited troops among the colonists and slaves in their properties, situated, according to Javier Arce, in Lusitania²⁵. However, this evidence is insufficient to associate these names with any of the Lusitanian *villae*. The same situation happens with inscriptions. Some early imperial inscriptions of a votive – one dedication to Mars by *Marcus Coellius Celsus* found in Torre de Palma, (Monforte, Portalegre)²⁶ – or a funerary nature – inscription for *Quintus Iulius Maximus* found in Tourega (Evora)²⁷ – have been directly linked to these properties, and the social position of some of the characters mentioned has been established²⁸. However, for the Late Empire the evidence is scarce and uninformative to trace the socio-political trajectory of the individuals mentioned in the inscriptions. For instance, the text in the mosaic found at the entrance of the *villa* of *Cardilius* (Torres Novas, Santarem), in which *Cardilius* and *Avita* are identified as this rural residence owners²⁹, and the brick bearing the name *Basilius* found in the aforementioned *villa* of Torre de Palma. Some authors even reject the possibility that this name represents the owner of the *villa*, thinking that a brick is hardly the right medium for its display³⁰.

In these circumstances, and with the evidence available, it is obvious that the study of the large number of *villae* known in Lusitania will not allow us to investigate the origin and social trajectory of their owners with any precision. Some authors have argued, as Kim Bowes³¹, that most rural owners in Lusitania and the central plateau of the Iberian Peninsula were probably state officials, as the main *villae* in these territories were close to the main communication and supply routes, which would enable the *villa* owners to channel resources towards the army or the court. However, Kim Bowes was aware of the limitations of her arguments, illustrating the difficulty of defining the ascendancy of the owners through their residences. For this reason, and considering all of this, it may be said that rural owners in Lusitania must have been a heterogeneous group – both in terms of social status (traditional aristocracy, bureaucrats, nouveau riches) and wealth (agricultural wealth, trade and other lucrative exploits, such as rent-seeking and tax-farming)

14 CHAVARRÍA 2007, 93–94; CORDERO RUIZ 2013, 274–277.

15 BAMELLE 2001, 37.

16 BROGIOLO/CHAVARRÍA 2018, 185.

17 MULVIN 2015

18 CARRIÉ 1999, 581–582; LO CASCIO 2008, 172–173.

19 CARRIÉ 1999, 582.

20 HEATHER 2008, 209; BROWN 2016, 77.

21 KELLY 2008, 180; BANAJI 2016, 112–115.

22 BOWES 2010, 77–78; BROWN 2016, 90–91.

23 OROSIUS, *Historia adversus paganos*, 7, 40, 6.

24 ZOSIMOS, *Historia nea*, 6,4,3.

25 ARCE 2007, 43.

26 IRCP, 568.

27 CIL II, 112.

28 See the analysis of these two inscriptions in CHAVARRÍA 2007, 44; CARNEIRO 2014a, 124.

29 PAÇO 1964.

30 CHAVARRÍA 2007, 269, following LANCHÁ/ANDRÉ 1993–1993, 201.

31 BOWES 2014, 207–208.

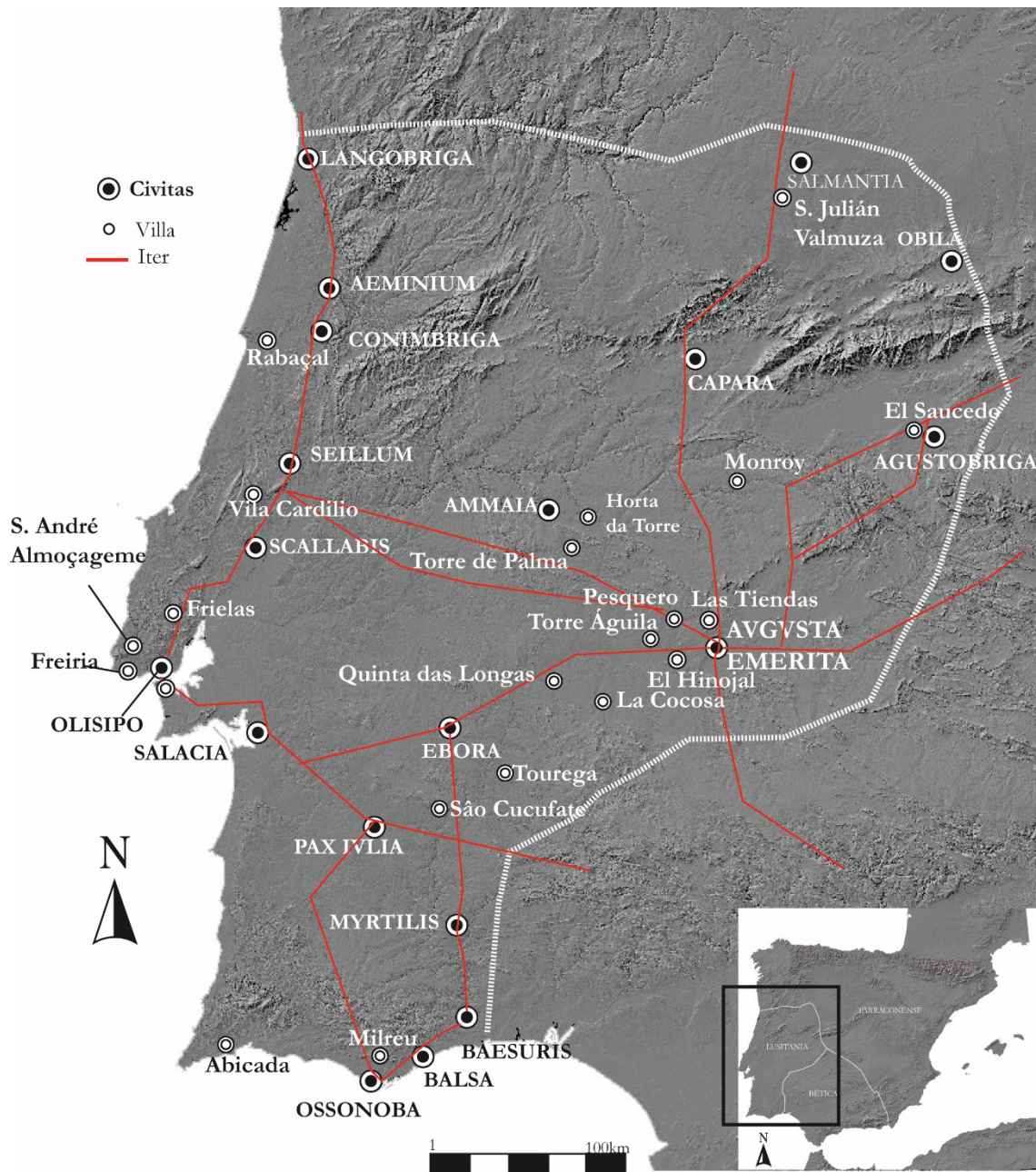


Fig. 2. Map of Lusitania with the villas mentioned in the text.

– dominated by a strong competition for social promotion, as attested in other regions of the Empire³². The re-examination of the material evidence documented in these residences – notably architecture, dress and luxurious foodstuffs – from an anthropological perspective will allow us to address the codes and languages used by these individuals.

THE ROMAN VILLA: A VERITABLE SOCIAL ‘SHOP WINDOW’

In this setting marked by competition and social promotion³³, *villae*, like urban residences, turned into the perfect stage to materialise the wealth and social position of their owners through consumption. In this regard, drawing a

parallel with Baudrillard’s ‘shop windows’ seems pertinent; *villa* and *domus* were important stages in the public life of these characters, where they met their acquaintances and the members of their patronage network, in which every detail was carefully curated to present the predominant position of their owners vis-à-vis the rest of society. Other members of society, for their part, recognised and accepted the message that the owner conveyed through architecture, decoration and conspicuous consumption.

It is true that this attitude was not an innovation of the Late Empire, and is abundantly attested in the republican and early imperial periods³⁴, during which aristocratic houses served as hubs for social promotion; they were designed to meet the needs of the public and social activity of their owners. However, the late 3rd and the 4th centuries

32 BROWN 2016, 402–406.

33 BROWN 2016, 73–74.

34 WALLACE-HADRILL 1990, 44–46.

witnessed a series of transformations that intensified this language through architecture and consumption. First, the number of people that demanded the construction of these residences increased. As noted, the traditional Roman aristocracy, proud of their traditions and of the origin of their wealth, had to begin competing for status with state officials, soldiers and even nouveau riches that benefitted from Constantine's monetary reforms³⁵. A wide section of society began to demand the services of architects to present their power and influence through their urban and rural houses³⁶, always looking to stand out by following the most 'en vogue' architectural models³⁷. This was compounded by the adoption of court ritual practices³⁸ and new architectural elements copied from new palatial models, like audience halls³⁹. These halls not only aimed to exalt the position of the owner, who presented themselves to the visitors like the emperor before the court⁴⁰, but to surround the guests by all-engulfing visual and auditory sensations⁴¹ through complex decorative devices and multiple exotica from all over the Mediterranean.

A CODE-RICH ARCHITECTURE

As noted, the most important *villae* of Lusitania underwent important changes from the late 3rd and through the 4th century. In some cases, these changes followed some period of abandonment, as attested in Torre de Palma (Monforte, Portalegre)⁴², Torre Águila (Barbaño, Badajoz)⁴³ and Milreu (Estoi, Faro)⁴⁴. Although it was initially thought that these changes had to do with the end of the instability that has traditionally been associated with the 3rd century, the fact is that many of these residences have yielded no evidence of sudden abandonment or destruction, so it is likely that these structural transformations have more to do with a change of owners than with the famous barbarian invasions, in Lusitania and elsewhere in Hispania⁴⁵. The same can be said about those *villae* that continued active and occupied since their foundation during the 1st and 2nd centuries, which also underwent substantial monumentalisation processes in the late 3rd century, for instance S. Cucufate (Vila de Frades, Beja)⁴⁶, La Cocosa (Badajoz)⁴⁷ and El Pesquero (Pueblonuevo del Guadiana, Badajoz)⁴⁸.

Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that changes in ownership were a prime factor in the monumentalisation of these rural residences in Lusitania – a phenomenon attested in other regions of Hispania⁴⁹. The process must have been fairly straightforward: nouveau riches and state bureaucrats

taking advantage of the economic troubles of other *domini* to buy their estates and country dwellings⁵⁰ and changing them in order to stand out from the former owners while adopting the latest architectural fashions. This transmission of property distinguished the new owners outright; they used architecture to display their dominant position and seek the recognition and acceptance of the elites to which they aspired. Obviously, this process of monumentalisation also reached traditional aristocracies, which, without needing to acquire new properties, decided to invest their wealth in renovating their residences. Ultimately, these traditional aristocracies not only had to demonstrate their secular elite nature, but also show their contempt⁵¹ for those new owners who wished to enter the elite merely on the basis of their wealth or their services to the state; as such, decorating their residences became also their form of expression.

The architectural design of late imperial *villae* in Lusitania have been analysed on a number of interesting monographs⁵², and we shall not linger in architectural details, but focus on the spaces used as a communication channel.

It can be said that nearly all the *villae* built, reformed and monumentalised in Lusitania from the 3rd century onwards are organised around the peristyle. This is not a novelty, for many early imperial *villae* presented highly developed peristyles, which were sometimes even endowed with gardens and fountains: the most significant example is São Cucufate⁵³. In the Late Empire, the peristyle continued playing an essential role, distributing the internal spaces of the residence and marking the boundary between the public and private areas. For this reason, this courtyard was one of the first things seen by visitors past the vestibule and before entering the noted – and new – audience halls⁵⁴. These courtyards were ample and full of light, and presented dynamic designs; all the elements used were carefully coordinated and curated, contributing to convey the desired message.

As in other parts of the villa, peristyles changed according to the interests of the house owners. Therefore, although it is traditionally held that Lusitanian *villae* had square peristyles⁵⁵ – Torre de Palma⁵⁶ Vila Cardilio⁵⁷ –, rectangular – Milreu⁵⁸, La Cocosa (Badajoz)⁵⁹, Monroy (Cáceres)⁶⁰ – and even polygonal peristyles – Rabaçal (Penela, Coimbra) y Abicada (Alvor, Portimão)⁶¹ – are also attested; the latter designs must have led to changing light-and-shade contrasts in the course of the day. Like the previous period, the centre of peristyles was decorated with gardens and fountains, like in the *villae* of Santo André de Almoçageme (Sintra, Lisbon), Frielas (Cascais, Lisbon), Freiria (Loures, Lisbon) and Vila Cardilio, whose peristyles were almost identically decorated by a

35 ENJUTO SÁNCHEZ 2004, 145.

36 BANAJI 2016, 112–115; BROWN 2016, 405.

37 BOWES 2010, 95.

38 BROWN 2016, 89–90.

39 BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 29–30.

40 BALDINI LIPPOLIS 2001, 49; BROWN 2016, 92, 405.

41 ELLIS 1991, 120–123.

42 MALONEY/HALE 1996, 285–287.

43 RODRÍGUEZ/CARVALHO 2008, 234.

44 TEICHNER 2006, 212.

45 CHAVARRIA 2007, 89–91.

46 ALARCÃO/ÉTIENNE/MAYET 1990, 87–88.

47 CORDERO RUIZ 2013, 275.

48 CORDERO RUIZ 2013, 280.

49 CHAVARRIA 2007, 89–91.

50 RODRÍGUEZ/CARVALHO 2008, 310; CHIC GARCÍA 2010–2011, 297–299.

51 ENJUTO SÁNCHEZ 2004, 142, 158.

52 GORGES 1979; FERNANDEZ DE CASTRO 1981; CHAVARRIA 2007.

53 ALARCÃO/ÉTIENNE/MAYET 1990, 59.

54 GORGES 2008, 38–39.

55 RODRÍGUEZ/CARVALHO 2008, 312.

56 MALONEY/HALE 1996, 285–286.

57 PAÇO 1964.

58 TEICHNER 2006, 208–210.

59 CORDERO RUIZ 2013, 138–140.

60 CERRILLO 2006, 202–203.

61 CHAVARRIA 2007, 95, note 405.

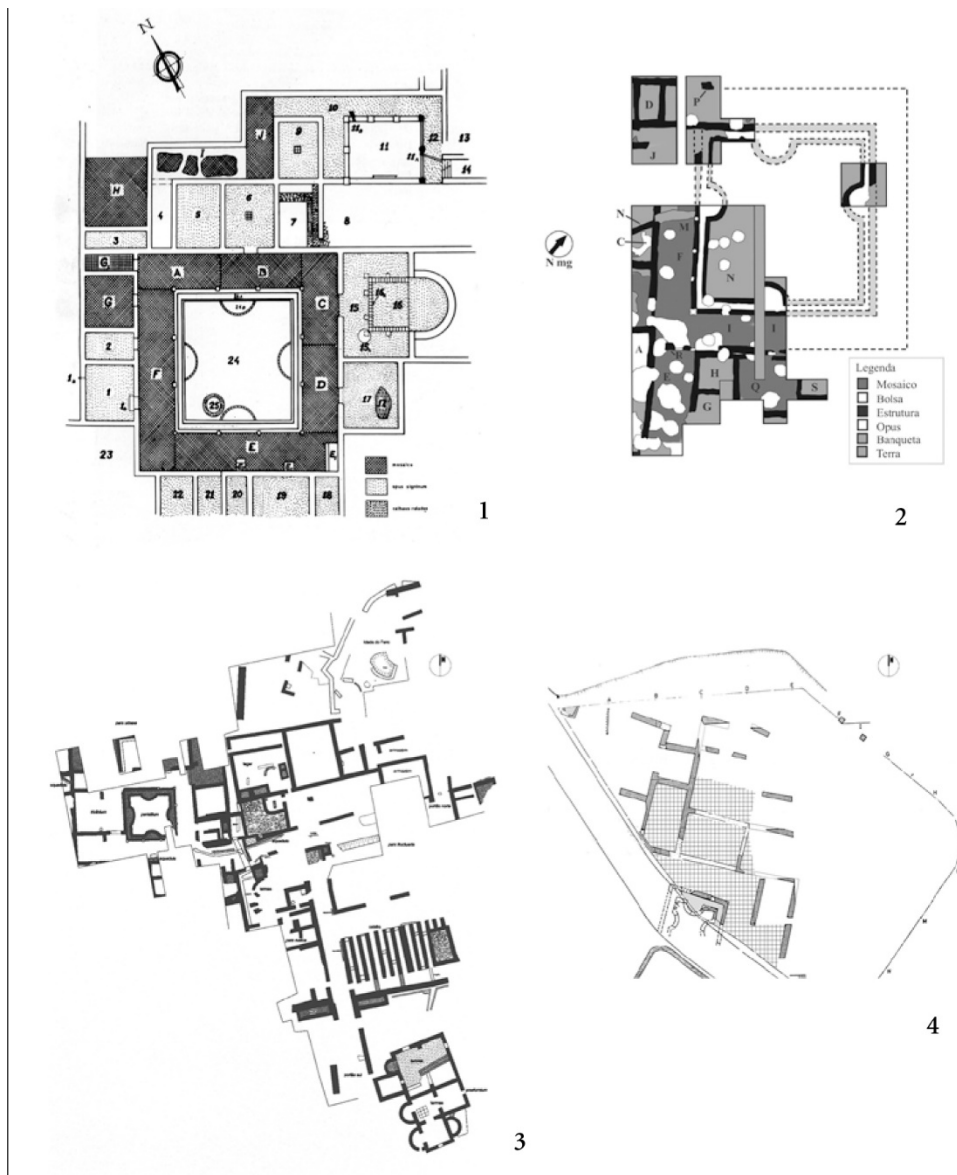


Fig. 3. Comparison of the peristyles of the villae of Cardilio (1), Frielas (2), Freiria (3) and S. André de Almoçageme (4) (RODRÍGUEZ/CARVALHO 2008, 314).

channel that formed an exedra in each side of the courtyard⁶² (Fig. 3); in El Saucedo, a large polygonal fountain occupied the front of the peristyle that gave access to the audience hall⁶³. These architectural elements, in addition to help cooling down the nearby rooms, must have generated interesting water sound effects that could not have gone unnoticed.

Finally, the geometry of peristyle design was complemented by polychromous mosaic pavements, which covered the galleries surrounding the courtyard – this is a feature attested in most Lusitanian villae – and sometimes interesting sculptural repertoires in marble – the most interesting example is found in Milreu, which includes several imperial busts⁶⁴ – or terracotta – like in the villa of La Cocos⁶⁵.

Other spaces that also used architecture to convey messages were *nymphaea*. These spaces, dedicated to aquatic nymphs, aimed to impress visitors through water

62 RODRIGUEZ/CARVALHO 2008, 314, FIG. 3.
 63 CASTELO et alii 2006, 178–179.
 64 GONZALVES 2019.
 65 ÁLVAREZ/NOGALES 1992–1993, 293–294.

architecture and decoration, and held pride of place in many peristyles. Abundant throughout the Iberian Peninsula, the Lusitanian examples of Milreu and Quinta das Longas (Elvas, Evora) deserve to be described in detail. The former was a large *nymphaeum* that comprised a podium, a portico and a cella, and was preceded by a sacred pool, all of which were decorated by marble and mosaic sea motifs⁶⁶. The latter, smaller but equally spectacular, was a polygonal room paved in *opus sectile*, flanked by two pools that functioned as *specula* and richly decorated with sculptures from the Aphrodisias school which represented mythological motifs⁶⁷ (Fig. 4). These outstanding materials – both in terms of quality and provenance – could not go unnoticed by visitors, who must have recognised their cost and the breadth of the *dominus*'s Mediterranean networks.

The sensations generated by peristyles and *nymphaea* were increased by audience halls, which were accessed directly from the peristyle. These were large and profusely decorated rooms, with mosaic floors and marbled or stuccoed walls; they were square or rectangular in shape, and some had single or complex apses⁶⁸. As pointed out by Alexandra Chavarría, these generic features can lead to some identification issues – audience halls are easily mis-

taken for *triclinia* – especially in villae in which several similar rooms can be found⁶⁹. In Lusitania, this problem is not especially severe (Fig. 5), because, although in many rural sites more than one room with apses can be found – e.g. Quinta das Longas, Monroy, El Saucedo, Vila Cardilio and Rabaçal – audience halls clearly stand out from other rooms on account of their size. A similar thing happens with their position with regard to the peristyle. In general, these halls were situated at the back of the villa⁷⁰, like in Quinta das Longas, Torre de Palma, el Saucedo and S. Cucufate, but they are sometimes found to one of the sides of the peristyle, like in Vila Cardilio, Monroy and La Cocos⁷¹; this lateral position forced visitors to a longer route inside through the peristyle.

66 TEICHNER 2006, 209–210.
 67 NOGALES/CARVALHO/ALMEIDA 2003.
 68 GORGES 2008, 32–33.
 69 CHAVARRÍA 2007, 100.
 70 GORGES 2008, 30.
 71 See the table of peristyles published by RODRIGUEZ/CARVALHO



Fig. 4. Sculptures discovered in the *nymphem* of Quinta das Longas (NOGALES/CARVALHOALMEIDA 2003).

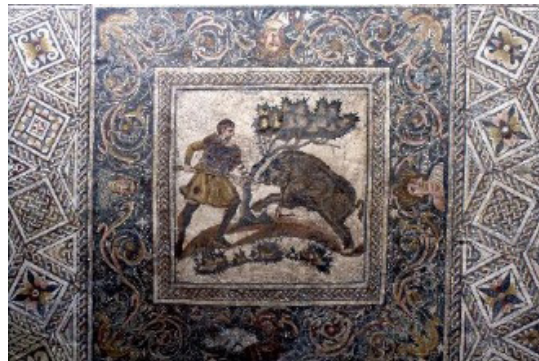


Fig. 6. Scene of "Wild Boar Hunting" documented in the village of Las Tiendas (MNAR). MNAR Photographic Archive/Photo: Lorenzo Plana Torres.



Fig. 7. Scene from "The Muses" documented in the villa of Torre de Palma. (National Museum of Archaeology of Lisbon). (LANCHA/ANDRÉ 2000).

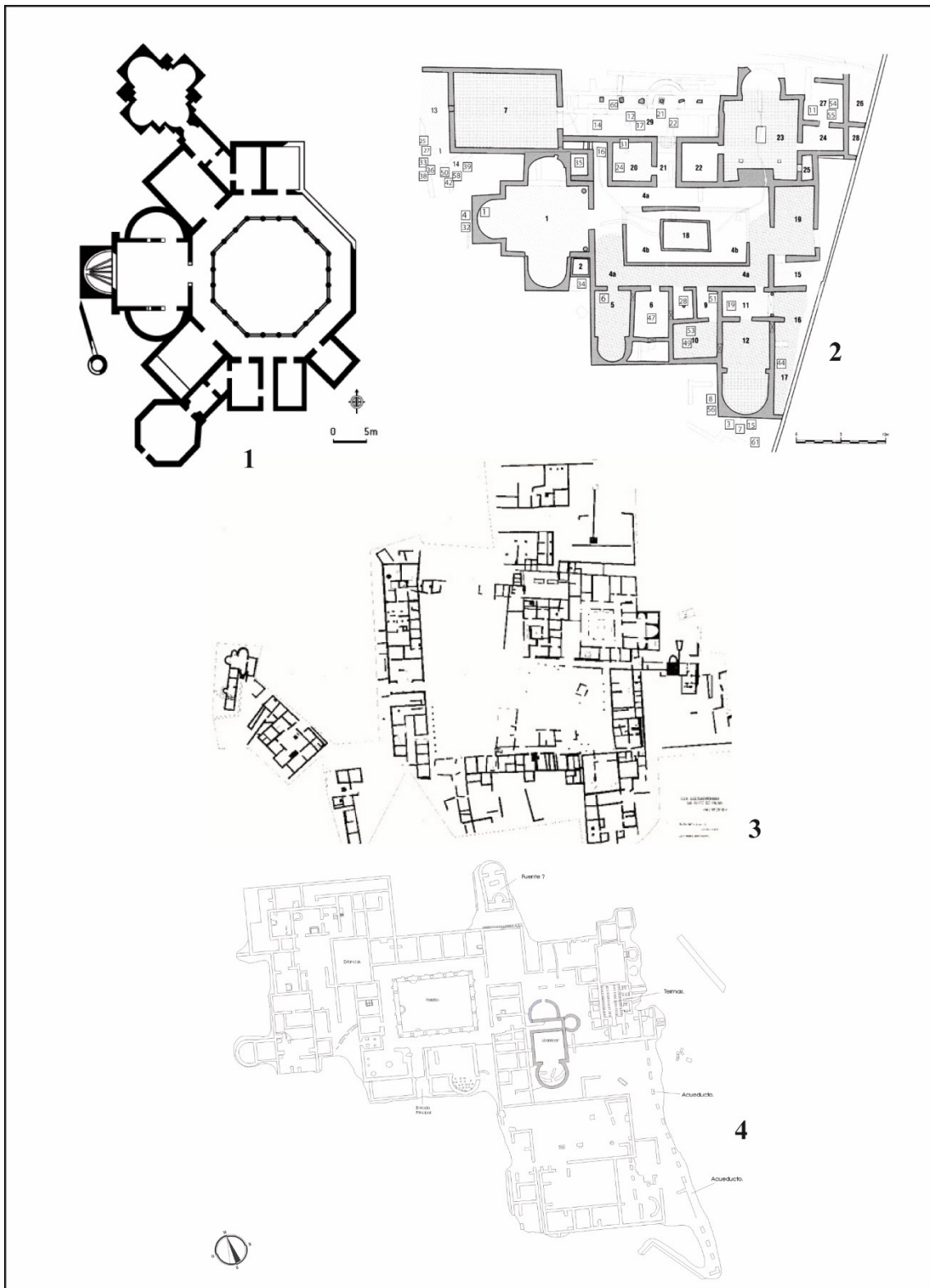


Fig. 5. Plan of the villas of 1.- Rabaçal (PESSOA *et alii* 2008) 2.- Quinta das Longas (NOGALES/CARVALHO/ALMEIDA 2003), 3.-Torre de Palma (MALONEY/HALE 1996) and 4.-La Cocola (CHAVARRÍA 2007, 265).

Audience halls played a central role in the codes that the *dominus* wished to convey through architecture. If previous rooms already presented the economic leverage and social status of the owners, these halls showed them in their full splendour to guests and clients, hence their consideration

as central displays in the global ‘shop window’ represented by the *villa*. Along with the stuccoed and marbled walls, the best mosaics of the *villa* were laid down in these halls. Iconographies contributed to elevate the figure of the *dominus*⁷² in different ways: as a skilled hunter – e.g. the hunting

2008, 328, Fig. 3.

72 MORAND 1996, 150. For these examples see ALVARES/NOGALES

scenes in Las Tiendas (Mérida) (Fig. 6) –, as a connoisseur of Greco-Roman culture – the mythological scenes in Torre de Palma (Muses) (Fig. 7), Las Tiendas (Nereids) o Rabaçal (estaciones)–, or as a proud animal owner – like with the mosaic in Torre de Palma, which featured a number of named horses⁷³.

This wide array of ideological codes transmitted through architecture were complemented by spectacles and performances in which the owner of the house always held a position of dominance, almost like the emperor in his palace⁷⁴. In this section, we must not forget the important role played by baths in the social discourse: we have, however, decided not to linger in them because they have been analysed many times from similar perspectives to those adopted in this work⁷⁵.

TABLE AND DRESS: A LITURGY OF THE SENSES

Closely related to representation halls were *triclinia*, a similar space in which the owner offered *convivia* – another excuse for ostentation – to his guests and relatives⁷⁶. Apses were common in banquet halls, for this semi-circular space frequently accommodated *stibadia*, a sigma-shaped piece of furniture that allowed guests to lie down and enjoy their food facing one another⁷⁷, while enjoying singing performances, theatrical pieces and games staged in the free space in the centre of the room. Although virtually all Lusitanian *villae* present large halls with apses, the examples of *stibadia* are scarce, as they were generally made of wood and covered in soft fabrics. Some mosaics represent the way these pieces of furniture were arranged, as analysed by Alexandra Chavarría in the mosaic found in one of the apsidal rooms in the *villa* of San Julian de la Valmuza (Salamanca)⁷⁸, the only example of its kind in Lusitania. Also exceptional is the masonry *stibadium* found in the *villa* of Horta da Torre (Fronteira, Portalegre), which presides over a richly-decorated hall of interesting proportions. The singular nature of this *stibadium* is not only that it was built in masonry, but that was part of a complex hydraulic system that fitted the decoration of the hall (waterfalls on the walls, wall mosaics with gold and silver tesserae, marbles and paintings with water motifs) (Fig. 8). This leads André Carneiro⁷⁹ to argue that the owner of Horta da Torre likely presented his guests with water shows during banquets to increase his prestige, especially considering that rainfall is rare in the region in which the *villa* is located.

These displays were complemented with select menus, made of exotic and wild animals and sea products.



Fig. 8. Stibadium documented in the villa of Horta da Torre (CARNEIRO 2014B, 219).

Archaeozoological studies undertaken in the garbage dumps in the *villae* of Torre de Palma, Horta da Torre, Quinta das Longas and Milreu show this (Fig. 9); animals such as the deer (*Cervus elaphus*), the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), the fallow deer (*Dama dama*) and the partridge (*Alectoris rufa*) are attested, but in much smaller numbers than domestic animals. These species were traditionally associated to virility and strength, and their consumption – which was limited to special occasions – is thus regarded as a medium of expression. They were not only costly and hard to come by, but also served to convey the idea of the *dominus* as a skilled hunter; as noted, hunting scenes were common in audience halls.

Sea shellfish and fish were also costly products, owing to the logistical difficulties involved in bringing them to interior Lusitania. The discovery of a large number of oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) shells in Quinta das Longas, Torre de Palma and Horta da Torre – which are located over 150 km distant from the coast – can only be interpreted as a sign of prestige-consumption, as also noted by several researchers in other Mediterranean contexts⁸⁰.

These exotic species must not make us forget domestic animals, which were also highly appreciated. Authors as Kim Beerden have demonstrated that the consumption of domestic animals was also considered a sign of distinction in the republican period⁸¹, and some kinds were reserved for special events. It is reasonable to assume that the same applied to the Late Empire, and it is plausible to think that some of the most widely consumed species in Quinta das Longas, Torre de Palma, Milreu and Horta da Torre – calves

1992–1993 with references.

73 LANCHÁ/ANDRÉ 2000.

74 BROWN 2016, 91–92.

75 REIS 2003, GARCÍA-ENTERO 2005, FERNANDEZ 2017.

76 TCHERNIA 2008, 155–156.

77 DUBABIN 1991, 123.

78 CHAVARRÍA 2007, 10, 102.

79 CARNEIRO 2014B, 219–221.

80 CABOURET 2008, 208.

81 BEERDEN 2018.

<i>Villae</i> (época bajoimperial)		Horta da Torre	Torre de Palma	Quinta das Longas	Milreu				
Ámbito		Sala <i>Stibadium</i>	Basurero	Basurero	<i>Pars Res</i>				
Especies		NRD	NRD	NRD	NRD				
<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	Conejo salvaje	1	3,1%	-	9,9%	110	20,9%	27	0,4%
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	Perro		--	-	2,5%	2	0,4%	21	0,3%
<i>Equus caballus</i>	Caballo	9	28,1%	-	1,2%			58	0,9%
<i>Sus</i>	Cerdo/javali	7	21,9%	-	25,9%	122	23,1%	1166	19%
<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Venado	4	12,5%	15,4%		39	7,4%	491	8%
<i>Dama dama</i>	Gamo	1	3,1%			28	5,3%		
<i>Capreolus capre.</i>	Corzo	-	--	--	--	--	--	9	0,1%
<i>Capra pyren.</i>	Cabra pirenaica	-	--	--	--	--	--		
<i>Bos taurus</i>	buey/vaca	5	15,6%	-	14,2%	127	24,1%	383	6,2%
<i>Capra hircus</i>	Cabra	-	--	-	3,4%	99	18,8%	54	0,8%
<i>Ovis aries</i>	Oveja	-	--	-	1,7%	--	--	31	0,5%
<i>Ovis a./Capra h.</i>	cabra/oveja	5	15,6%	-	34,3%	--	--	1491	24,3%
<i>Gallus domes.</i>	Gallo	7	46,7%	-	--	41	41,4%	491	8%
<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Perdiz roja	-	--	-	--	40	40,1%	45	0,7%
<i>Perdix perdix</i>	Perdix pardilla	-	--	-	--	4	4,0%		
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Anade							3	0,04%
Otros pájaros		8	46,7%	-	1,9%	14	14,1%	5	0,07%
Domesticos	Total	76,9%		72,0%		61,3%		60,1%	
Salvajes	Total	23,1%		28,0%		38,7%		7,03%	

Fig. 9. Comparative table with the archaeofaunal record of the villas of Torre de Palma, Quinta das Longas, Horta da Torre and Milreu (BENECKE 2008; CARNEIRO 2020).

and sheep/goats – may have been reared exclusively for these occasions.

Apart from these, other elements with no archaeological visibility – incenses, perfumes, spices – must have also been part of table liturgies, alongside oils, wines, sauces, and imported tablewares (attested by the few detailed ceramic studies undertaken in the *villae* of the province)⁸².

Finally, following Peter Brown, it is obvious that dress played an important role in this process of staging and representation, especially during the Late Empire, with the use of clothing and jewellery to convey the military ideals promoted by the state⁸³. Wearing one of these elements was a way to express belonging to a group, not only a way to demonstrate wealth and social status, but signal the individual’s membership of the elite.

The perishable nature of these products – e.g. dyed silks – has meant that they are no longer visible in the archaeological record of Lusitanian *villae*, and the same happens with personal adornments made in noble metals, which were easily convertible in times of need. The only exception is a Keller 6 fibula found in El Pesquero, which according to Alexandra Chavarría could be signalling the social status of the *villa*’ sowner⁸⁴. This find could reflect the social ascension of

state officials and members of the military during the reign of Constantine, who would proudly flag their new identity through their dress and their rural and urban properties.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of the material evidence found in Lusitanian *villae* has enabled us to draw the sociological profile of their owners, even if their specific names and career paths are difficult to establish with precision. Despite these limitations – to which we might add the lack of detailed studies of most material remains, as many of these *villae* were excavated in the 20th century with the only purpose of defining their plans and documenting their mosaics – very interesting readings of the available evidence remain possible. It can be safely argued that these *villae* were used, like Baudrillard’s ‘shop windows’, by the *villa* owners to send a clear message through architecture and consumption: their dominant economic position, their elevated social status, their wish to be recognised as part of the elite, and the demonstration of their social success.

The great differences presented by these *villae* in terms of size, decoration and architectural design not only suggests that they were used to express social distinction, but also that late imperial Lusitanian elites must have been a heterogeneous group. It may be that the names of many *villa*

82 ALMEIDA/CARVALHO 2003, CARDOSO 2018, 298, among others.

83 BROWN 2016, 88–89.

84 CHAVARRIA 2007, 47.

owners will never be known, but an in-depth examination of the materials found within these rural complexes – notably marbles, ceramics, amphorae, glass, bone items and coins – will greatly contribute to outline their economic and social profile and to establish whether the codes that they used through consumption were a good fit to their real position, of whether they were spending beyond their means.

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