Landscapes of Change

Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

Edited by
Neil Christie

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Edited by
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William Bowden received his BA from University College London and his PhD from the University of East Anglia. He currently holds a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of East Anglia. His previous employment includes extensive experience of British rescue archaeology and Italian archaeology, much of the latter working for the British School at Rome. He is actively involved in research projects at Butrint in southern Albania and Jerash in Jordan and his research interests include late antique urbanism and the use of the past in the construction of ancient and modern identities. His recent publications include *Epirus Vetus: The Archaeology of a Late Antique Province* (2003) and the co-edited volume *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology* (Brill, 2003).

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Neil Christie completed his BA and PhD at the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne before receiving a British School at Rome scholarship to study 'Byzantine Liguria'. In Rome he also undertook publication of the 1960s excavations of the papal church and monastery of Santa Cornelia. Further research on late Roman and early medieval Italian archaeology was pursued in a Sir James Knott Fellowship at Newcastle and British Academy Post-Doctoral Fellowship at Oxford. He is currently Senior Lecturer in Medieval Archaeology at the University of Leicester. Previous fieldwork has examined castles and landscapes in central Italy. Publications include *The Lombards* (Blackwell, 1995) and the co-edited volumes *Towns in Transition* (Scolar, 1996) and *Towns and Their Territories between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Brill, 2001).

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David Mattingly followed his BA and PhD (both at the University of Manchester) with a British Academy Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the Institute of Archaeology in Oxford. He has subsequently taught at the University of Michigan and University of Leicester, where he is now Professor of Roman Archaeology. He has maintained a strong interest in North Africa throughout his career, being author of a monograph on *Tripolitania*, the province equivalent to north-west Libya, a co-author of *Farming the Desert. The UNESCO Libyan Valleys Archaeological Survey* and of two volumes of reports on the Tunisian coastal city of *Leptiminus*. His most recent project has been in southern Libya, concerning the Garamantes of Fazzan – southerly neighbours of the Roman empire in the central Sahara.

Patrick Périn gained his first degree and his doctorate at the Sorbonne (thesis title: *La Datation des Tombes Mérovingiennes. Historique, Méthodes, Applications* – 1980). He was Conservateur at the Archaeology Department of the Musée Carnavalet at Paris from 1971–84, and then Director of the Musées Départementaux de Seine-Maritime at Rouen from 1984–96; since 1996 he has been Director of the Musée des Antiquités Nationales (at the Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye). He is also an Associated Professor in Archaeology and Early Medieval Art History at Paris I University (Panthéon-Sorbonne). He has overseen various excavations in the Ardennes (Merovingian cemeteries) and at Paris (including the Church of Saint-Pierre de Montmartre). Research interests focus on archaeological contributions to the history of the Merovingian period.

Andrew Poulter graduated with a BA in Ancient History and Archaeology from the University of Birmingham, then completed an MA by research before completing a PhD at University College, London University. After a year as a British Council scholar at the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest (Romania), he was Lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Leeds before becoming Lecturer in Roman Archaeology at the University of Nottingham. He was director of *The British Archaeological Expedition to Bulgaria* (1985–92) (excavating the Roman to early Byzantine city of

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Sarah Scott studied archaeology at the Universities of Leicester and Oxford; after completing her DPhil on Fourth-Century Romano-British Villas and Mosaics, she spent two years at the University of Durham as Fellow in Social Sciences. Since 1995 she has been a Lecturer in Archaeology at Leicester University. She has published *Art and Society in Fourth-Century Roman Britain* (Oxford, 2000) and has edited, with Jane Webster, *Roman Imperialism and Provincial Art* (CUP, 2003). Her current research considers the history of archaeological approaches to art.

Preface and Acknowledgements

This volume of edited papers can perhaps be best seen as a companion to *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, edited by myself and Simon Loseby in 1996, and also published by Scolar/Ashgate. *Towns in Transition* offered a series of regional analyses of the material, physical and mental changes affecting urban centres in the period AD 300–800 as well as considering the diverse character of urbanism as it evolved and re-emerged in the latter part of the first millennium AD. In that volume, reference was often made to the landscape and to relationships between city, town, fort and country. This present volume therefore more fully addresses the evolution of the landscapes of the Roman world in the transitional period from late Roman to early medieval.

Landscapes of Change seeks a comparable spread of zones of study and tackles comparable themes of continuity and change: the impact of insecurity, the role of the Church, the reactions of farmers and landholders, the redefinition of settlement, the structures of living and perceptions of change. This volume draws together contributions from both young and established scholars and offers the results of new fieldwork as well as revised analyses of older data. In offering in particular synthetic reviews of regions, the range and diversity of change and continuity will hopefully be made apparent, alongside an awareness of directions of study and gaps in knowledge.

As with many an edited volume the contents have undergone their own evolution, due to changes in the list of contributors. I must thank all the contributors for their efforts and patience – especially those 'original' team members, but also those who volunteered late on to fill gaps (here I am especially grateful for Alexandra Chavarría Arnau's ability to produce a high quality paper on Spanish villas at the eleventh hour!). Contributors have of course had to cope with my editing and my apologies go out for any misunderstood deletions, expansions and queries. Emails and attachments have speeded up many an edit, whilst clogging up many an account. Just as importantly, I am endebted to the cool, calm efficiency of Ashgate's Senior Desk Editor for Humanities, Kirsten Weissenberg, for help, guidance and reassurance throughout.

My thanks for technical support within the School of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University of Leicester from Debbie Miles-Williams

and especially Lucy Farr for illustrations and for scanning of images. Finally, on a personal level, the Christie family has suffered many an evening's keyboard tapping, alongside a dramatic consumption of tea bags; to my wife, Jane, therefore, I offer humble thanks for patience and chocolate.

Neil Christie
Leicester, May 2003

Chapter 1

Landscapes of Change in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Themes, Directions and Problems

Neil Christie

Introduction: Transformations

This volume offers a collection of new papers on a key theme in current historical archaeology: rural evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. The period bridges the break-up and dispersal of Roman authority across much of the Mediterranean and European landscape and addresses the characterisation of farms, villages, rural exploitation and fortified sites resultant from the imposition or creation of new political and demographic powers and from related socio-economic changes. This volume is designed to span much of the old Roman world and to seek the variety of human landscapes that emerge between AD 350–750. We will be observing in these papers aspects of old and new, continuity and discontinuity, borrowings and impositions, as well as uncertainties and complexities.

The period in question was the focus of *The Transformation of the Roman World* programme sponsored by the European Science Foundation (ESF), whose series of conferences and workshops have resulted in the publication of an array of edited volumes focussed on themes such as *Strategies of Distinction* (Pohl, 1998), *The Sixth Century* (Hodges and Bowden, 1998), and *The Long Eighth Century* (Wickham and Hansen, 2000). The interdisciplinary nature of these workshops opened valuable dialogues between historians, archaeologists and art historians, and assisted greatly in reassessing the nature and level of changes that occurred with the *Transformation*. Political, religious and social changes and evolutions are particularly highlighted, as is the question of economic communication.

Archaeology contributes strongly to the debate on the evolving economy, and closely linked to this is the question of settlement and population. It is frequently assumed that the late Roman Empire witnessed a population fall, accelerated in the early medieval period through war and plague and marked not just in economic downturn but principally in a debilitated urbanism and a

diminished rural exploitation. Urbanism has been a theme of substantial debate for the Roman to early medieval transition since the 1990s, marked by publications such as *The City in Late Antiquity* (Rich, 1992), *Arguments in Stone* (Carver, 1993), *Towns in Transition* (Christie and Loseby, 1996) and, in the ESF series, *The Idea and Ideal of the Town* (Brogiolo and Ward-Perkins, 1998) and *Towns and Their Territories* (Brogiolo *et al*., 2000). Two most recent volumes include *Recent Research in Late-Antique Urbanism* (Lavan, 2001) and *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity* (Burns and Eadie, 2001). Here debates are informed by new excavations in town centres such as Rome and Brescia in Italy, Valencia in Spain, or London and York in England, which particularly identify reuse and survival 'after Rome' even if at a seemingly impoverished level, with more crudely constructed houses (chiefly in timber or *spolia*), reduced economic and social expressions (for example, an absence/loss of mosaics, wall paintings, baths), and with a modified sense of urban roles (such as with the presence of intramural burial). Alongside such studies are re-evaluations of old excavations and refined chronologies for ceramics, helping to fill out what remain rather 'blank' spaces within the former Roman towns. Further, there is much better and fuller appreciation of the vital role of the Church in ordering and, indeed, in redefining townscapes with new foci of patronage, social attention, and even economic activity. Finally, there is a healthier dialogue between West and East in terms of archaeologies and histories: the decay often recognised in late Roman towns in the West is much delayed in the Roman/Byzantine East, where civic expression and urban and rural prosperity generally endure well into the sixth century (see Banaji, 2001). Understanding the divergences promotes a sharper awareness of the levels of change and loss across the ancient world.

Towns and Territories

Townscapes and their populations were (and are) of course closely bound up with their hinterlands, territories, road links, landscapes and fields, woods, rivers and other natural resources: raw materials for buildings, communications between communities, trade activity, and, most essentially, food were all drawn and intimately connected with the surrounding landscape. Effectively, towns were required to function in unison with the countryside. As yet, synthetic volumes dedicated to the analysis of the late antique landscapes of the Roman world have been lacking (although proceedings from the 2002 Paris and Oxford meetings of the *Late Antique Archaeology* conference series, on the theme of the 'Late Antique Countryside', will do much to fill this current gap). Nonetheless, various of the volumes cited above offer papers which touch on this relationship (notably in *Towns and Their Territories* and in *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts*), and these have clearly

indicated that there is often no simple equation of 'busy countryside = busy urbanism'. Certainly in the heyday of Rome, in the early Empire, towns were expansive, active, and foci of social display (cf. Perkins and Nevett, 2000), and a burgeoning urban aristocracy was accordingly demanding of the lands around (and well beyond); in this context, the landscape is generally abundant in small to large farmsteads, working sites, slave-worked estates, holiday villas and the like, and with experimentation on crops, land clearance and drainage operations duly attested in our documentary sources (see, in general, Lloyd, 1991, stressing the variety). The results of the extended fieldwalking project immediately north of Rome, the South Etruria Survey (summarised in Potter, 1979 – even if now undergoing revision in the light of enhanced dating of fine and coarse ware ceramics), are fairly typical in displaying through distribution plots a highly exploited landscape north of Rome, closely linked to main roads and with an emphasis for many working units to be in 'commuting' distance of the demanding City. A similar pattern of energetic urban-related exploitation is witnessed in Roman Britain, even if not on the same scale materially as in Italy or elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Frequently, also, there is recognition of a good level of continuity from pre-Roman into Roman land use and settlement, but with a heightened density overall, combined with a highly visible industrial exploitation, suggesting the Empire as more than 'stepping up a few gears' from the previous levels of activity (cf. Corney, 2000: 37, 39), to supply the cities as concentrated points of human interaction.

Whilst documents and monumental buildings predominate in the urban context to provide a fairly coherent and tangible guide to the evolving urban form and its society, the countryside in many ages remains rather shadowy, a context for the cultivation, gathering and movement of food and other resources, and inhabited by farmers, villagers and miners. The late Republic and early imperial centuries are adequately served through occasional extant remains and through excavation of villas and farmsteads; arguably, also, at least for the central Mediterranean we have the writings of agronomists as well as poets, to comment on the business and the beauty of the landscape, on fine wines and fish preferences. Syria, Egypt and parts of North Africa (notably Carthage's territory) are well served by epigraphic and literary/papyrological texts and these allow us to chart villages and even products – although often the marrying of textual and archaeological data is problematic (Vallat, 1991: 11–13). But we cannot always extend this documented image far: rural Roman Britain, for example, is almost a void in terms of text, land records, details of ownership, etc. (Dark and Dark, 1997; Corney, 2000: 37–8). Here, therefore, archaeology plays a vital role in identifying and reconstructing landscape settlement and evolution.

Landscape Archaeology: Impacts

A virtual explosion of data and interest in landscape analysis has come through the extensive adoption of landscape archaeology techniques – field survey and air photography particularly – combined with geomorphological assessment, environmental sampling, ethnographic survey, etc., to study beyond individual sites and to understand human impacts across wide areas and regions (Barker, 1991, 1995) (Fig. 1.1). The Roman period is one that can be gauged relatively coherently through the production and availability of far-flung trading items such as amphorae, fine wares, and lamps, matched by local/regional production of imitations or distinctive 'home' wares (Millett, 1991). Such ceramics offer key chronological guides to periods of site occupancy at least, and strong indications of origins and ends to individual units. Problems exist, of course: these guides derive, generally, from the surface of fields walked and sampled and provide no guarantee of an accurate reflection of all materials and periods related to a given buried (or destroyed) site. As with coins, the currency and longevity of ceramic types is extremely variable, although not to the degree that they fail to provide valuable indicators. Excavation is frequently needed to fine-tune chronologies and to glean fuller data regarding site function and format. Nonetheless, the application of such techniques over wide areas such as the Biferno Valley in central Italy (Barker, 1995; Lloyd, 1995), the *ager Tarraconensis* in eastern Spain (Keay, 1991) and the Libyan Valleys (Mattingly *et al*., 1996), has enabled archaeologists and historians to obtain a vastly more populated image of the Roman world.

Landscape archaeology is not an exact science or discipline: there is no single all-embracing methodology; results are dependent on sampling strategy, survivability of material cultures, field experience even; landscape evolution (alluviation, colluviation, reforestation, dam building, etc.) may mask much key archaeology; interpretations are never straightforward; emphases within projects may skew results to a given period; and poor levels of publication may counter the usefulness of any results (cf. Williamson, 1994). Certain periods are better served – the classical, as noted, has a busy and well-produced and thus eminently visible material culture. In Britain, as elsewhere, the early medieval centuries are typified by a much reduced material culture, technologically more 'domestic', damaging the chances of survival through centuries of plough action and weathering. In addition, quantities of such materials in active use were by then much reduced, linked to a recognised population decline for the period AD 400–900 (a very crude indicator being the City of Rome, whose population in AD 100 numbered one million, but by AD 500 may have been as low as 250 000 and by AD 650 perhaps no more than 50 000). For early Saxon Britain and early post-Roman Europe we instead know far more of burial populations than working, farming

populations. When we progress to the medieval period (AD 1000–1500) the picture fills out once more, but that is often due more to the fact that documents resume on adequate levels and that we gain standing and visible archaeology – existing villages, churches, towns, plus ruinous castles, monasteries, manors, etc. Here there is less 'need' to explain the countyside since we can pinpoint so much more of the settlement pattern through text; not surprisingly, therefore, many landscape survey projects often fail to extend properly into the medieval and later worlds.

The intervening early medieval centuries are, however, a current focus of interest and debate: their greyness and material problems have been spurs to seek and identify sites and people in the landscape and to question images of decay and loss and thence medieval revival. Arguably, the South Etruria Survey was instrumental in this, part tied into British involvement in developing early medieval archaeologies: hence Tim Potter's work at Monte Gelato north of Rome, examining churches and caves on a former Roman villa site (Potter and King, 1997); Richard Hodges' projects first at San Vincenzo (for example, Hodges, 1997) and since at/around the town of Butrint in Albania (Hodges *et al*., 2000); Andrew Poulter's studies along the lower Danube focussed on Nicopolis ad Istrum (2000); Colin Haselgrove's Aisne valley survey in Picardy (Haselgrove and Scull, 1995); and a major, ongoing project based on Italy's Tiber valley (Patterson and Millett, 1998). In many instances, notably the San Vincenzo project, extensive historical research has informed the landscape analyses, often in fact pinpointing early medieval sites which are either buried beneath later settlement or which cannot easily be located archaeologically (that is, by conventional fieldwalking methods) (Wickham, 1995; Hodges, 1997: 176–200; cf. Leggio and Moreland, 1986 for Farfa, also central Italy). The last two decades in particular, however, have seen a major national take-up of landscape archaeology across Europe and, accordingly, valuable syntheses are emerging on a regular basis (for Italy see, for example, contributions in Christie, ed., 1995; for Gaul, key are van Ossel, 1992, *Les Campagnes*, 1994, and van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000; for Spain, papers in Díaz-Andreu and Keay, 1996).

Chronologies

Chronologies are a key problem. Literary texts, whether charters, sale documents, wills and transfers, which inform us of the landscape and of towns and their inhabitants, tend to surface in usable numbers only from the ninth century onwards. But these are territorially patchy; not every monastic archive survives, and not many towns have early records. In Italy and France, levels of documentation are better than in Spain, but Spain is better provided for than Britain. Documents do not help by telling us foundation dates, population

numbers and the employments of those people; rarely do they say much about the types of housing or farming, but they may tell us of the presence of vineyards, orchards, mills, woodland, boundaries, chapels and the like. What they usually show is that when documentation begins to re-emerge as an active form of recording and enacting from the ninth century, the landscape is relatively full: people farm, hunt and fish, villages and farms exist, places of rest and worship are known, and complex patterns of ownership, rental and sale prevail. The picture displayed in the Domesday Book for England reveals a full late Saxon-derived system of towns, manors, villages and hamlets; estate charters and placenames help further piece together the Saxon landscape, while sources such as the Burghal Hidage and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle present the rudiments for deciphering a planning of defensive townships or *burhs* from the later eighth and ninth centuries (see, for example, papers in Hooke, 1988, and her own volume, 1998).

At the other end of the timeframe under investigation, the late Roman, early Christian and late antique periods provide variable literary survivals and supports: narratives focus heavily on urban centres as these were the main points of military and political as well as religious attention; their fortunes obviously affected those of the countrysides attached to them, although often we gain little more than sweeping generalisations on plague, poor harvests and the like (some of these are covered in Christie, 1996a). Poetic contributions and letters are more personalised viewpoints and often proffer fuller images of rural life. Rutilius Namatianus, for example, at the start of the fifth century, in his *De Suo Reditu* recounts a journey from Rome to his damaged Gallic estates; on the journey by boat he describes ruinous or active towns, visits to still wealthy and hospitable villa owners, and he mentions village festivals, and robber-infested roads – in effect a patchwork of settlements and lands variously affected by warfare, insecurity, and economic disruption (such as the once busy port town of Cosa inhabited mainly by rats), and yet with zones where life goes on much as before. In the same period, the Younger Melania is recorded with vast estates within various provinces, including Britain, Gaul, Spain and Sicily, each served by multitudes of workers. The letters of Sidonius Apollinaris, meanwhile, reveal how in southern and south-western Gaul, villas remained powerful landscape features even in the late fifth century. These texts therefore tell us villas and farms are there, but it is rare to be able to tie a documented site into an excavated one.

Placenames may provide some human/natural/ethnic/functional/temporal guide, but frequently archaeology has to find its own chronologies and settlement roles for the landscape. Ceramics have long been the essential guide and, as noted, Roman manufactures and exports continued well beyond the fall of the Roman West and persist as sources for assessing periods and even the status of rural (and urban) settlement. Whereas in Britain Roman coin supply ceased with the reign of Honorius – yet may well have continued long

in circulation (though very frequently came to be hoarded instead) – on the continent coin production did not cease and Visigothic, Ostrogothic and Vandal kings duly minted their own issues, generally maintaining Roman styles, standards and issues (and alongside these we have the 'illegible' small change of fourth- to sixth-century date – too small to allow recognition). These appear with less frequency on sites in the fifth century, however, and are very rare in sixth-century contexts. For example, at the San Giusto villa in south east Italy (Volpe, 1998: 251–9), active chiefly from the fourth century into the seventh and with a peak in AD 500–550, of the 1100 coins, 605 were illegible; however, 1043 of these coins came from a hoard or church collection and in this group only 29 were sixth-century Germanic and Vandal issues, whilst some of the 'unidentified' coins may well be Byzantine issues of the late fifth/early sixth century. Another Italian villa example is M. Gelato, but this is perhaps unusual in having a good spread of coins across its lifespan, and in fact has very few coins before *c.* AD 350 (Potter and King, 1997: 236–41). A fairly typical urban context is Brescia, where the Santa Giulia excavations, uncovering pre-Roman to post-medieval contexts and including seventh-century houses, produced 1191 coins, of which 616 were legible, and of which 574 were Roman to early medieval in date. Just 7 per cent of the coins belonged to the fifth to seventh centuries (34 for the fifth century, 3 for both the sixth and seventh centuries); nearly 50 per cent, however, belonged to the period AD 364–402 (Arslan, 1999).

A simple reading of the archaeology for many villas based on the numismatic finds would thus posit extensive abandonment of villas at the end of the fourth or the start of the fifth century (cf. Mancassola and Saggioro, 2000: 322 for central north Italy between Verona and Mantua). This, of course, is often all that can be said from scattered finds, metal-detectored materials, plough material and early excavations; but wider recognition of the date ranges for ceramics, notably localised coarsewares, allows an extension to the sequences of villas or at least activity on/near them even if related (that is, new) buildings are not evident. A wider perspective often forces a revision of ideas: for the Verona zone, despite apparent 'ends' in the early fifth century, many villa sites witnessed later sixth- and seventh-century burials inserted into their ruins, or timber buildings constructed; and whilst some settlement/functional 'gap' is possible, the fact that the Roman centuriation system also persists instead recommends that continuity overall of sites and landscapes is likely (ibid.: 322).

Chronologies indeed are often insecure, due to obvious difficulties in dating materially impoverished layers, increasingly dependent on local and functional ceramics, and lacking coins. Our ability to perceive materials to create chronologies is, however, always improving (see, for example, work in the Farfa region north of Rome for the sixth and seventh centuries: Leggio and Moreland, 1986; Moreland, 1994; Gilkes *et al.*, 1999). The problem is not

helped by the crude data surviving for interpreting the latest villa phases (notably due to old excavations ignoring or ignorant of latest/post-Roman items), meaning that we may be underestimating longevities – especially if we rely on the dates of mosaics to indicate final structural flourishes, since these may have remained in use for a century or so (in some cases even the dates of the mosaics themselves may need revisiting, as suggested for Aquitaine – see Ripoll and Arce, 2000: 94–5 with note 71, citing the example of Montmaurin, with proposed redating from the late fourth to the fifth or even sixth century AD). Likewise surface survey alone cannot provide coherent guides to underlying structural sequences, especially for periods of 'decay' or material impoverishment (cf. van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000: 134–7).

Figure 1.1 Fieldwalking in the Barkby Thorpe parish, Leicestershire – searching out traces of past land use and settlement from surface and sub-surface debris

Rural Populations – Figures and Presences

Such chronological and material concerns also impact on our expectation and awareness of 'late' populations. For the main Roman period these concerns are less prominent, given the extensive trade and production networks that so aid in recognising Roman activities. As Millett (1991: 18) has argued, field surveys have indeed radically revised previous estimates of Roman rural population figures. But he stresses problems in supply and availability and in

the ability of individuals to purchase traded goods, which may all have implications for the better 'visibility' or 'overvisibility' of a population through ceramics in certain phases of the Roman world (ibid.: 20, noting the perhaps artificial high in South Etruria in AD 100, and suggesting the late Republican period population was conceivably at the same level). Most particularly it raises the issue for the late antique and post-Roman periods when a recognised economic shrinkage meant that whilst trade continued, only well-to-do and military customers remain as easily visible recipients; a greater frequency of regional imitations and thence local wares makes for a weaker image of other sectors of society, especially less well-off farmers. With the accepted decline in the ceramic industries from the sixth century and the reversion in the majority of regions to a more domestic mode of production, this archaeological visibility of the (internal) rural – and even the urban – population becomes even less tangible (cf. Moreland, 1994; Gelichi, 2000; Wickham, 1998; Gutiérrez Lloret, 1998a and 1998b for clear images of production and demand in fifth- to seventh-century eastern Spain). But this does not mean populations had gone, fled, shifted, or become devoid of material culture: the value of many field surveys and excavations has been to seek ways of filling this apparent material gap, to enhance knowledge of 'ordinary' wares, to recognise local fabrics and styles, and so to people the early medieval landscapes (see, for example, the valuable contributions in Saguì, 1998, such as Patterson and Roberts, Brogiolo and Gelichi). This is equally true for townscapes, where in the seventh and eighth centuries in Spain and Italy, for example, we hear of churches, monasteries, repairs to city walls, religious meetings, political disputes and the like, and yet only in a few instances have we houses, bodies, ceramics, coins to show real people actively living in these towns (see papers in Brogiolo and Ward-Perkins, 1998; Brogiolo *et al*., 2000). Even then, for early seventh-century Brescia in central north Italy, a former Roman city then with Lombard duke, we have traces of a community of *c*. 50 individuals in one eastern sector of the city, and only scattered burials from elsewhere – hardly sufficient to call this an 'urban' population (Brogiolo, 1993: 85–96). There are signs here in fact of cultivation and animal husbandry inside the walled space: conceivably, on a negative level, one might take this to show massive depopulation of both town and country and a ruralisation of the urban space; indeed, this cultivation and dark soil in Brescia seems best attested for the mid-seventh century *after* the noted settlement activity.

Text and archaeology do not always tell the same story with regard to populations and lands – or, in the case of documentary data, sometimes historians and archaeologists take words too much at face value (as likewise the evidence of – or lack of – dots on distribution maps). A good example of the problem exists for Samnium, central east Italy, modern Molise, for which in the fifth century we hear of waste- and abandoned lands or *agri deserti*, for

the mid-seventh century Paul the Deacon refers to *loca deserta*, whilst the *silva densissima* and its wild animals were, in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, suitably serious obstacles to various monks (De Benedittis, 1995: 331–2; cf. Lloyd, 1995: 252–3). The Biferno survey (Barker, ed., 1995) countered this bleak image through discovery of a busy Roman landscape, in which a number of villas and farms persisted into the sixth century; even with the seventh and eighth centuries at least a few defensive and religious sites could be identified. Excavations at the villa site of Casalpiano near Morrone encapsulate much of this rural sequence: a possible farmstead of the second century BC, followed by a small first-century BC villa, which later gained a bathsuite; the villa continued perhaps into the fifth century and then appears to have become abandoned. However, a sixth-century cemetery (perhaps extending into the seventh) then was imposed over the site, largely respecting the walls, with tombs resting also on the floors of some rooms; the earth-cut and slab-covered graves contained few furnishings, although one coin of the 570s was recovered; hearths nearby may suggest adjoining houses relating to a farm – linked, presumably, to the early medieval toponym, Casalpiano. By AD 1000 two Benedictine churches existed on the site, conceivably connected to an earlier shrine or chapel around which the first burials had been gathered. Only part of the site was excavated, but the fifty or so graves identified testify to at least a consistent, if small farming community. This community was, in effect, revealed only through the tombs, and through detailed excavation, but with precious little in the way of settlement archaeology; the same situation prevails, it seems, for sixth-century Monte Gelato and San Vincenzo (see below) and is no doubt valid elsewhere. We might argue for an early medieval rural population, but they may be elusive without excavation.

Villas: Society and (D)Evolution in the Late Empire

We must be cautious in discussing population loss in the countryside, since too frequently this loss is registered with the demise of the bigger villas – if these go out of use one assumes that the land and tenant farmers accompanying those estates also suffer. In reality, the loss of an architectural unit like a fine villa marks merely a prominent result of changing socio-economic conditions; there is no reason to think that the owner ordered abandonment of its lands, since that owner most probably moved back into a town/city and still required income and food from that estate. The insecurity was enough to scare away the wealth of the noble but might not have deeply affected lesser peasant farmers (cf. Mancassola and Saggioro, 2000: 315–16; van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000: 154). The evidence for continued economic activity on some sites (and often inside former residential spaces) in terms of furnaces, storage areas, and vats may thus denote a redefinition not loss of a site.

Nonetheless, villas still dominate our image of the landscape of the Roman world – they remain the best studied archaeologically since their remains are easier to find and archaeologically more rewarding. Many, however, were dug purely with Roman explanations and contexts in mind, with too little consideration of their ends and possible continuities. With the extension of field survey projects and the resultant contextualisation of villas in broader landscapes and settlement systems, far more can now be said of their roles. Indeed, for the late Empire many such villas took on very prominent social roles, with larger estates formulated and the elite investing more in their structural plans and internal (and presumably external) ornamentation – with a shift of interest *away* from towns which appear, archaeologically, to be in relative decline from the fourth century. This transfer of interest nonetheless occurs in what we still frequently perceive as a period of insecurity, with reinforcement of frontiers, greater military emphasis and a fortification of all major towns. Texts such as the laws incorporated within the *Codex Theodosianus* in fact, for some districts, paint an image of powerful estate owners, with armed bodies of workers and retainers, somehow detached from the law; and yet verse and letters by authors such as Rutilius Namatianus and Sidonius Apollinaris instead refer to fine architectural and natural vistas, poetry recitals, cultural and epicurial contemplations, and even monastic retreats (for the society of the countryside in the late Roman/early Byzantine East, see the volume by Banaji, 2001, stressing overall investment and vitality).

The villa 'outburst' of the fourth century is matched by an outward display of opulence: architectural expansion and the deliberate elevation of the host through the creation of elaborate apsidal (or triconch) dining halls, through the presentation of fine works of art, and through the laying out of fine, message-charged mosaic floors (and presumably to go with these, fine, but now largely lost wall paintings and hangings, plus extensive libraries) (in general, Arce, 1997; Scott, 2000 on Britain and, more widely, in this volume, with bibliography). Some of this late elaboration is now being properly re-visualised through new excavations and through re-analysis of excavated villa sites, ranging from Piazza Armerina in Sicily and Desenzano in north Italy, to Montmaurin in France, and to Woodchester in England (Figs. 1.4, 2.1, 2.2). Importantly, such discussions are increasingly searching to place such villas in a wider landscape context.

In Italy, many villas seem to peak in the course of the mid-fourth to mid-fifth century – thus somewhat later than the peaks recognised for Gaul, Germany, Britain and Spain, although for Spain and southern Gaul, many villas remain at a quality level into the sixth century. As noted, some problems in chronology exist even in assessing these peaks, since we rely too heavily on extant art and architecture which may mark simply the start of opulence, which may have persisted and even been expanded through mobile (and now lost) art.

In Lucania, southern Italy, extensive excavations at the villa of San Giovanni di Ruoti indicate sizeable rebuilding of an early imperial farm in the course of the fifth century, and with the second half of that century particularly distinguished by mosaics and by an imposing apsed dining hall set on a first floor level. Here villa wealth derived most probably from the pig trade, supplying Naples and Rome, as appears attested by sizeable quantities of pig bone in the middens; these latter nonethelesss show a preponderance of local ceramic wares with few clear imports (Small and Buck, 1994; Arthur, 1997). In this case the villa extends 'beyond Rome' and is active under the Ostrogothic regime. In its final phase, however, the owner may have resided elsewhere as more modest structures were added and rubbish dumping was less controlled; nonetheless, it remains a busy site, clearly strongly involved in local and regional exchange. The final demise of the site appears to have come with the insecurities and disrupted markets of the Gothic War (AD 533–554).

Even at the badly destroyed and heavily robbed large villa site at Castle Copse in Wiltshire, England, excavations from 1983–86 (see Walters, 1998) were able to piece together enough to show a sizeable estate centre occupying a prominent hilltop position, endowed with good quality mosaics and buildings of some architectural pretensions; for the fourth-century phase the animal bones (including fish and bird) support an image of 'sumptuous feasting'. But here too there are indications of life persisting beyond this opulence, materially less apparent, but still impacting on the local territory.

Church and Landscapes

Although barely perceptible in Britain, various continental monumental villas are marked also by the presence of churches or chapels (generally) in their latest phases. Is this a straightforward Christianisation of the site's owners, or does it denote the transfer in the owner's lifetime or with the owner's death to Church or monastic control? Or is this the reoccupation of an abandoned site by Church or by monks – the latter with or without local/regional/episcopal permission? What roles did such churches or chapels have – private, estate or parish? And why these sites – location, size, materials, or local population? We might then question whether private church/chapel building was an effort by an elite to show conversion, to keep up with the ascetic fashion, in response to demands from others, or even another way of displaying wealth – that is, a final burst of private architectural and artistic exhibitionism and authority. The question is complex and little studied as yet (cf. Ripoll and Arce, 2000: 107–111. For the Christianisation of rural northern Italy see the valuable paper by Cantino Wataghin, 2000).

For Italy three diverse examples can be briefly noted. The first at Monte Gelato, north of Rome, comprised an Augustan period courtyard-villa which

developed slowly in the second century AD, only then to be systematically dismantled in the early third century. Revival of the site in a very functional form in the mid-fourth century was followed soon after by construction of a small church, whose build stands out from the other structures. The assumption here is that the land had come into Church hands. This small settlement and working unit persisted into the sixth century before apparent loss after the Gothic War. Foundation of a larger church (with baptistery) and community in the early ninth century can be viewed as a renewal of Church control over this property (Potter and King, 1997).

In a second example, San Giusto in Puglia, a site now beneath a dam, a busy residential villa developed in the fourth century from a small earlier farm. In the fifth century a wholly new focus was imposed through construction of a church complex including narthex and baptistery, with stunning polychrome geometric mosaics; in the early sixth century a second sizeable church was added, with a cemeterial role (Volpe, 1998). Whilst the first church is burnt down between *c*. AD 550–625, the second persists, with repairs to the baptistery and tombs cutting into the narthex. Impoverished activity is attested in the seventh century, marked by rough buildings against the narthex and areas of collapse, and a more haphazard series of burials before eventual abandonment. In this case, we see a 'parish' role created in the late Empire, implying again Church ownership, but here the quality of the churches and their size (the first church was of 30.5 x 18.5m; its baptistery of 16m diameter) may indicate an episcopal seat.

A third example in fact comprises a group of Italian sites at which a monastic presence can be recognised (see discussion in Barnish, 1995). The *Chronicon* of San Vincenzo recounts a first foundation by three Lombard brothers in the early eighth century on a ruinous but ancient oratory hidden in dense woodland; excavations beneath the ninth-century remains, however, have revealed an earlier site, as well as a late Roman villa with church; potentially this early Christian church was a monastic foundation, perhaps installed by the villa owner (Hodges, 1997). The Lombard brothers had visited the (then) new monastery of Farfa north-east of Rome before being dispatched to San Vincenzo; here too tradition recounts a monastery founded in the sixth century in a wild and desolate spot, again within an older structure; again excavations point to a late Roman villa with likely chapel/monastic content in the fifth century (see Gilkes *et al*., 1999: 270–71). Finally, the Ostrogothic chief minister, Cassiodorus, in the early sixth century established at his estate of *Vivarium* (Squillace – right on the foot of Italy) a monastic community with a *scriptorium* to enhance religious scholarship. Excavations have uncovered part of the estate centre and the linked church at Copanello (Bougard and Noyé, 1989). In effect, a monastic status or community could exist with a secular one, be attached to this in the villa's lifetime, take over a villa site, or be founded over the remains of one

(wherein walls, courtyards, and terraces would provide ideal foundations – as attested also for St Benedict's monastic seats at Subiaco on the remains of Nero's villa).

In the latter cases, Christianisation of ruinous, secular structures is mainly occurring. In early Saxon Britain, the new Christian Church and its monks were content to utilise the past in a like way (Bell, 1998): in the sixth century, monasteries and churches were erected in some of the derelict Saxon Shore forts – for example, Richborough, Bradwell; in Italy various pagan temples – notably the Pantheon in Rome – came to be transformed into churches, but this was primarily in the seventh century. In Britain there are some instances of former villa sites being chosen for churches, although whether this relates to extant walls, available materials, local memory of older sanctity, or simple topographic coincidence is never clear – at least without full-scale excavation. For example, in Rutland in the Gwash valley, a group of five middle Saxon (presumed Christian) burials cut down carefully into the floor of a former Roman villa (Empingham site 2) which arguably was a chapel converted from a (ruinous but largely upstanding?) ancient structure (Cooper, 2000: 20–22).

In Spain, the coincidence of villa with/to church is much stronger and better studied archaeologically. An important example is provided at Fraga (Huesca) where the *villa Fortunatus*, of third-century origin, was, in the early fifth century, provided with a church in its south-western quarter; a likely *martyrium* suggests this was a private oratory, but this role was probably changed in the mid-fifth-century reworking of the building with added apse, loculus and baptistery, implying a transition to 'official' parish church (Ripoll and Arce, 2000: 75–7, who also record the site of Sao Cucufate in Portugal with a monastery imposed over the fifth-century church in the eighth century). At Torre de Palma in east central Portugal an earlier Christian foundation occurs, since mid-fourth-century coins were found in the floor of the double-apsed church located 100m north west of the villa (and significantly sited over the villa burial plot and over a possible shrine). Renewal in the late fourth or early fifth century witnessed the addition of a baptistery, whilst in the fifth-century 'Visigothic' phase up to 100 burials gathered around this basilica (Maloney and Hale, 1996: 290–93).

For Gaul the physical link between villa and church or monastery is not always watertight, even if the incidence rate between these is high (Percival, 1976: 183–9); texts do at least support the link: Knight (1999: 126) refers to the so far undiscovered estate villa of *Primuliacum* in south-west Gaul, whose owner, Sulpicius Severus, in *c.* AD 400 added a second church and linked this to an existing chapel via a baptistery – this latter implying a private church seeking or gaining parish status. Again the task is with archaeology to help secure the link between late Roman/late antique and early medieval activity.

Defence, War and Loss

Such studies have accordingly also made us more aware of villa/farm fates, prompting revised thinking of relationships and ends. A problem remains, however, in the continued reliance on documented events in which to frame changes of loss, mainly since such events provide 'tidy' explanations. Certainly, the impact of documented warfare on landscapes can be visualised archaeologically in instances of destruction horizons, final coin loss, hoards – as evident in the Alf valley near Trier related to the events of AD 353–355 – although one must be cautious in assuming finite, lasting effects since many areas which suffered raids and looting often appear to show persistent (or renewed) activity (van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000: 138). But loss through accidental fire, or property confiscation might also register a violent end, not necessarily connected to a known historical (and military) event. Whilst some ancient narratives are sweeping in their statements of rural loss and urban destruction, on some occasions the veracity of graphic war loss appears to ring true: hence for the sixth century, the Byzantine historian Procopius, chronicling the brutal and extended conflict with the Ostrogoths in Italy, reports dramatic loss of life in towns and the wiping out of 50 000 farmers in Picenum through famine; the wide-ranging conflict has been linked to the loss of various villas and other sites (for example, San Vincenzo, San Giovanni, Monte Gelato – Christie, 1996a: 271).

Warfare is similarly used to explain instances of *agri deserti* – well attested in the *Codex Theodosianus* for central and southern Italy in the fifth century and explicitly linked to the devastations of Visigothic and later Vandal assaults (for example, *Codex Theod*. 11.28.2 for AD 395 recording 1332 km^2 of 'deserted and unkempt' lands). We need not view such lands as prime agricultural areas; many may have been marginal, upland or drained units; *agri deserti* may also result from new management strategies, mergings of scattered lands and farms, or simply tax avoidance ruses. Some 'waste' had emerged in the 'crisis' of the second and third centuries AD, when landholding suffered. Mancassola and Saggioro claim to have recognised such abandoned lands in one of their Veronese study zones (2000: 322–6), suggesting that this was one area that needed reviving by Sarmatian 'tributari' (ex-prisoners of war) in the fourth century. Indeed, settlement of captured enemies or allies (*laeti*) was one tactic adopted to repopulate or revitalise land across various northern parts of the Empire, extending also in north Italy. So far in Italy there are no clear instances of 'Germanic'-style farms or villages on Roman soil associated with these resettled communities, even if placenames help document their presence; but burials of 'Germanic' and military character are recognisable from the mid-fourth century in Gaul (notably between the Rhine, Seine and Moselle and along the Meuse and Aisne valleys) and Spain (for example, along the Duero) (Cracco Ruggini, 1984: 24–38; James, 1988: 38–9, 44–51).

We cannot deny, however, a modified Empire from the third and fourth centuries: more military emperors, fortified towns, a damaged monetary economy, and reduced public display by the elite. Furthermore, tightened frontier activities and a stronger military presence imply a strong sense of insecurity across many western provinces (though, by contrast, urban defence programmes are much delayed in the East). How did this insecurity impact on the look of the countryside and can we make a direct link between change and insecurity? We must of course be cautious in this: whilst it is easy to proffer a blanket image of insecurity and militarisation, we must note that areas varied in terms of military presence, strategic worth (for example, communications), agricultural productivity, and settlement levels, and that many zones probably never suffered from raids by enemies or Roman soldiery. Certainly we should expect a more direct and earlier response, arguably, in a frontier zone (as suggested for the lands along the Lower Danube, where rural Roman sites appear completely lost by *c.* AD 400: Conrad and Stančev, 2002) than in inner provinces. We might also question what is meant by the terms 'insecurity' and 'militarisation': insecurity signifies a state of uncertainty and a lack of protection, but need not be long term; longer-term insecurity, marked perhaps by movements of troops, demands on the land for supplies, enforced recruitment, might require a more organised consideration of communal and local safety; militarisation, by contrast, implies involvement by the authorities to secure a zone, through provision of towers or forts, billetting of troops and closer overseeing of local populations to ensure supplies of food to the army (cf. Dunn, 2002; Poulter, Chapter 8 of this volume. The so-called 'inner fortresses' of Pannonia – western Hungary – such as Fenekpuszta at the south-western end of lake Balaton, which emerge from the AD 320s, are a possible instance of such 'militarised' landscapes: massive circuit walls protect rectangular spaces containing granaries, church(es), and villa-like residences. Studies are not advanced enough to show if these are fortifications of existing villas, new format imperial estates, or army bases geared to collect and store the *annona*: Christie, 1996b).

Bearing this in mind, we might seek settlement responses on state, private and also communal levels. A first example comprises the Brioni islands off the Istrian peninsula (Dalmatia) (Schrunk and Begović, 2000), featuring some high-class resort villas, of likely senatorial holding in the early empire – then as now a luxury aristocratic retreat. The region was still renowed for its fine villas (*praetoria*) in the time of Cassiodorus in the 530s AD (*Var.* XII, 22), but one site, 'Castrum' on the west flank of Brioni Grande in the bay of Dobrinka, is remarkable for its defensive enclosure, of likely fifth- and sixth-century phases. Whilst the villas as resorts may have peaked in the first centuries AD, there is clear continuity into the fifth/sixth century: the extensive luxury villa of Verige on the east side of the island featured a church with baptistery (and burials) from the later fourth century, although

functional units like lime kilns encroached into the former *villa urbana* zone; at Castrum, a dye-works installed in the mid-second century argues for notable economic modifications; whilst elsewhere on the island stone quarries and saltworks, both active into the sixth century, denote a productive and noisy local economy at work. It is argued that Castrum formed an imperial state factory in the fifth century for cloth processing and dyeing, and that the harbour at Verige served this station (ibid.: 267–78, 264–5). At Sirmione on lake Garda in north Italy, a fine villa at the end of the promontory, seemingly in decay in the fourth century, was, in the late fourth and fifth century, revived to new ends: a defensive cordon and a military cemetery indicate state take-over, probably linked to the creation here of a fleet base to patrol the lake (in advance of the outlet of routes from the Alps into the Po Plain) (Fig. 1.2).

Figure 1.2 The meandering line of a fifth-century defensive wall girding the peninsula of Sirmione at the south end of lake Garda; the peninsula previously hosted various well-appointed villas, some of which were exploited by troops (naval) stationed here

Were the villas' owners bought off in these instances or did the State slap eviction orders on the gates and move in with the military? The scale of the defences noted should be taken as a sign of 'official' action, but there may be instances where the villa owners themselves chose to defend their sites: we have mentioned armed estate workers already, but we hear also of villa-

fortresses, such as recorded by Sidonius, in the mid-fifth century, in connection with Pontius Leontius, who possessed a fortress-like residence at Burgus near Bordeaux (*alta spectabilis arce*), an estate held by the Pontius family for at least two generations, signifying a defended seat since the 350s AD (Sidonius, *Carm*. XXII, 117–19, 142–4); similarly, in Augustine's correspondence (*Ep*. Xi, 1–4), the property of Severus near Lleida in Tarraconensis, Spain, is called a *castellum*. Even the fourth-century agronomist Palladius uses *praetorium* rather than *villa* with its implicit military (structural) connotations (Ripoll and Arce, 2000: 64–5, 97).

Fortified villas in northern Gaul are claimed but not easy to define, since the defensive elements at times comprise little more than ditches (as in examples close to the Rhine), whereas in the Trier region the fortified component on some villas consists of a 'tower-granary', sometimes with surrounding ditch; palatial villas do not appear to have gained such silo-refuges or curtain walls (van Ossel, 1992: 161–8, 220; van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000: 143–5). Where military items are recovered, there is insufficient evidence to argue between 'official' and 'private' defence strategies (ibid.: 156–7; van Ossel, 1992: 165–8).

Few examples of fortified or defended villas are known in Italy. One of the fifth century is claimed for the Veronese at Montorio (Mancassola and Saggioro, 2000: 321–2, equating this with a *castellum* recorded by Procopius in the mid-sixth century); whilst near Rome a possible example is at Le Mura di Santo Stefano near lake Bracciano: the focus was a second-century AD three-storey tower house with wide fenestration; by the ninth century the new focus was a neighbouring church; but in the intervening period, and perhaps to be set to the sixth century, is a phase in which the main residence's lower storey windows are blocked off and a surrounding ditch is cut (Whitehouse, 1982; final report forthcoming) (Fig. 1.3).

England lacks known defended villas. Potentially, however, the Castle Copse villa in Wiltshire fits the case of local defence, aided by its hilltop position and with a demonstrable link (by earthworks) to the adjacent hill of Chisbury Castle, an iron age *oppidum*; the excavators suggest a revival of such earlier defences in the post-Roman epoch, linked to the Wansdyke (Hostetter and Noble Howe, 1997). The emergence in the zone of a ninth-century royal estate plausibly signifies the survival of its landscape status.

Where we recognise upland or hilltop sites, we cannot be certain whether we see further 'private' efforts (such as with Leontius or Severus), shifting from a lowland villa to a defensible position, or else 'communal' responses to insecurity, creating 'refuges'. These hilltop seats appear in Alpine regions already in the third century, but can be urban in nature and later often feature a strong ecclesiastical presence; it is assumed that insecurity provided the first prompt for such upland nucleation, although these had been the earlier (and were also the later) foci of settlement (Johnson, 1983; Ciglenečki, 1987;

Figure 1.3 Le Mura di Santo Stefano, Anguillara, Lazio – an early imperial villa tower-house located not far from lake Bracciano north of Rome. The tower may have been fortified in the late empire; in the distance stands the ruinous apse of a lost early medieval rural church

Christie, 1991). In eastern Spain hilltop villages are attested in the fifth century but are not 'isolated' or hidden units of settlement since they receive African imports (Gutiérrez Lloret, 1998b: 107–108). In north Italy there are late Roman period shifts of population to less open sites, close to heights or onto heights where diverse (for example, silvo-pastoral) economic strategies might have been pursued, prompted by a shrunken market (Mancassola and Saggioro, 2000: 328). In all these instances one can seek the origins of a more 'medieval' landscape, dominated by castles and, where topography allowed, hilltop villages (see Potter, 1979: 155–67 for south Etruria and the debate on *incastellamento*). Were the roots of this diverse social landscape planted in the late Roman epoch? What remains problematic, however, is determining how far such rural change is due also to military or state prompts in Late Antiquity. Potentially, a broad division might be drawn on the basis of the nature of the defences, the site location (strategic or not?), and communications' access (cf. Dunn, 2002).

Relocation to a hill or height does not mean a loss of access to or exploitation of lands – that is, those spaces around the former low-lying 'open'

rural farms and settlements will generally have remained active. Similarly for the Balkans and for the upper Danube, whilst a survey might suggest a significant de-ruralisation or depopulation (as with the Iatrus zone in Moesia: Conrad and Stančev, 2002), what may have occurred is a movement of the remaining rural population into fortified sites such as official forts and burgi and for farming to be undertaken from these secure bases. This is attested in Noricum in the 460s by the *Vita Severini* (Bender, 2001: 190–193), and in the sixth century the historian Procopius mentions how the State might provide forts or walls for a rural community or else encourage their relocation, all so as to ensure continued land use (that is, food for the troops – and often with the troops by then also the farmers) (Curta, 2001: 204–206).

Finally one might mention how the late Roman and early medieval periods witness a revival in the use of caves as refuges, residences and even churches (Christie, 1995; cf. Branigan and Dearne, 1992 for Roman Britain, where numerous caves show Roman period usage, on a variety of levels – workshops, domestic, storage – none obviously tied to 'security'; many persist in use into the fourth century, but poor material culture subsequently cannot deny likely persistence). These also therefore form part of the late antique rural package. Whilst it is easy to dismiss cave-dwelling as prehistoric or primitive, in some Italian examples the residents could afford imports of ceramics and glass; structural repairs were also much cheaper than for surface dwellings.

'Squatters'

In various cases of villas and farms, a form of site continuity is recognisable, but is not one linked to power, defence or display. Sometimes we can observe simply an effort to maintain part of what was there, that is, a farming establishment with lands and resources; elsewhere, we see the Roman site fall out of use, but then its space is reused, often for burials. Frequently in the past such data – crude structures, post-holes, burials – were equated with post-abandonment or 'squatter' activity and left without further explanation (for example, Hayfield, 1986: 273, comments "Evidence for post-Roman occupation has now been recognised on a number of English villa sites (Percival, 1976, 183–99) although its poor quality and peripheral location to the main buildings has suggested squatter settlement amongst the abandoned ruins of the villa buildings") (cf. Fig.1.4). 'Squatters' generally remain undefined, or implies shepherds, passing vagabonds, displaced peasants, highwaymen or the like. The term is ugly and not easily warranted and is a simple device to discard discussion over an uncertain phase of use/exploitation. We need to think through such phases and such weakly-attested human activity.

What we need to note first is that many Roman villas and farmsteads were stone-built or at least with stone footings, tile roofs, garden walls and ditched

boundaries, mills and the like, and the relics at least of these will have long remained visible: yes, we might assume that ruins might be used on occasional bases as shelters, and their materials robbed for use in later farm buildings (as Hayfield, 1986 suggests for Wharram Grange villa in Yorkshire and as occurred at the well-known Settefinestre villa in central Italy, abandoned already in the second century AD), but frequently it appears that people were drawn back to a site. Was this because it held some local significance, or because it offered materials to hand, or because it meant that there was no need to impinge on the field areas around, or did it remain in local family ownership? We must recall also that the period of loss, decay or abandonment in any case coincides with an economic downturn, a loss of coins, a reversion to timber construction, more localised ceramic production, meaning that site visibility and visibility of the inhabitants decreases. Effectively we should hesitate in assuming site loss just because we lack clear stratigraphic and material evidence for a presence (see Rippon, 2000: 52–3). The recognition of timber buildings within a former Roman villa farm or villa complex should not be seen as an imposition of foreigners or newcomers or 'squatters'; why not the owners having to adapt to new circumstances, to a lack of local stone masons (and funds for these), and to a need to 'make-do'?

Figure 1.4 The senatorial villa at Desenzano, near Sirmione and lake Garda: fifth-century burials were inserted into this apsidal hall and elsewhere in the complex – do these relate to 'squatters' or to locals left in charge of the villa?

In Rutland in central England, excavations in advance of the creation of a reservoir in the 1970s recorded two small Roman farms or villas as well as various Anglo-Saxon period cemeteries and settlement units. Spatially these lay in a one km^2 block straddling the Gwash valley, but did not coincide exactly, except in the case of Empingham Site 2, comprising a Roman farm with overlying Middle Saxon burials; Cooper prefers the idea of farmers (in the 'lower orders' of society) persisting here and contributing to the modified settlement structure that emerged during the fifth and sixth centuries (2000: 149–54). The burial evidence, with a new range of material culture, could denote newcomers, but might equally denote local/native integration within the new, wider cultural milieau: "the increasing coincidence of Roman and early Anglo-Saxon pottery scatters during fieldwalking survey promotes the contribution of the post-Roman population to the dispersed pattern of settlement that emerges".

The extensive studies at Wharram Percy in Yorkshire, at both the deserted medieval village (DMV) site and in the parishes around (summary in Beresford and Hurst, 1990, nb. 69–84) have revealed a well-exploited Roman period landscape, marked by two sizeable villas north of the DMV, and with strong hints of a further (removed?) one beneath or close to the medieval North Manor at Wharram Percy itself. Excavations identified iron age and Roman field boundaries and ditches which persisted in use into the time of the village; the village itself now can be seen to have its origins in the later Middle Saxon era, but building on the smaller-scale set of farm structures recognised from the sixth/seventh century (Milne and Richards, 1992, nb. 90–94). As with Empingham above, 'newcomers' might be recognised in terms of certain material artefacts and perhaps in building styles (for example, sunken-featured buildings), but the persistence of settlement location and of boundaries could argue for an underlying continuity of population. But, as an alternative, we could view this persistence as discontinuous and comprising instead a linked series of stop-start rural settlements made up of new owners, new farmers, different systems and ideas, all drawn to the site through availability of active/defined fields, setting, and raw materials.

The Wharram example is important in that it draws also upon evidence derived not just from excavation of a building or set of buildings, but data drawn from a very extensive project which brings in wider landscape considerations and incorporates other excavations and surveys (cf. Rippon, 2000: 51–3). Conceivably many British sites where no continuity has been claimed have not been excavated sufficiently widely – perhaps with simply the main villa residential block studied and no more. Where detailed studies of *all* phases have occurred on a villa, results are suitably rewarding. An example is the recent publication of a long-term project at Frocester Court in Gloucestershire (Price, 2000: nb. 87–118). Corridor villa 'status' is gained towards the end of the fourth century, and then re-elaboration comes with the

peak of *c.* AD 360 when a formal garden is laid out, a bath-house added and mosaics laid in both corridor and in first-floor rooms. Occupation extended into the fifth century (coins run to AD 402), followed at some point by the main building suffering badly from fire damage. Two timber buildings appeared close by (one of 'some pretension' with much associated animal bone), but there was also (later?) occupation within the old corridor itself, converted into a 'long-house' and with signs of animal housing in its western half. Is this a case of the old farming family struggling on or newcomers exploiting an old site? The same questions arise for the oft-cited Orton Hall Farm in the Nene valley (MacKreath, 1996), where recognition of timber buildings allows for a much extended chronology of settlement at this Romano-British farmstead.

Much of the above implies that the loss of stone building technology, the appearance of timber barns and burials *follow* the end of active life at a Roman villa or farm. This is not so. New (and later) people(s) are not always needed to explain change. For example, van Ossel and Ouzoulias stress that alongside the Gallo-Roman façade of stone-built villas lay numerous, traditional timber-built farms, and in some instances timber building tradition re-emerges already in the fourth century (2000: 142). As stressed earlier, any rural establishment will have faced ups and downs in terms of economic and social role and prosperity; hence structural changes, downgrades and losses (especially of bath buildings) can occur *within* the late Roman period when the complex or farm as a whole is still active; building in timber here might simply register an effort to continue but an inability to maintain at the former (architectural) level (ibid.: 147–8, 155: "Above all it was the beautifully regular layout of the villas that seems to have been difficult to maintain"). This does not mean that agricultural output or storage capacities were reduced; indeed, such timber constructions in place of a stone villa might even indicate a heightened emphasis on productive activity. Another consideration to bear in mind is the possible transfer of old properties to new hands, not necessarily 'Roman': above we noted the settlement of *laeti* or prisoners-of-war on Roman soil in the fourth and fifth centuries to help counter rural decay (and to gain extra soldiery); potentially some farms came into their hands and timber buildings may relate to their presence (for possible examples, ibid.: 148–150, but here implying generally 'new' farms and hamlets). This is an area of investigation needing to be developed.

Perceptions of Change: New Powers, New Owners

The period focus of this volume intentionally encompasses events of perceived change – political, military and economic. Starting from the late Empire, military troubles prompted economic and social fragility with

concomitant political repercussions, forcing in many places a militarisation of settlement (town walls, added frontier forts and towns, creation of refuges, military *castra* within provinces). Most pertinent, for much of the Western Empire, the fifth century, at various stages, saw a transition in official power, sometimes bloody, sometimes pacific, sometimes a confused combination of each, and sometimes fragmented (as for Gaul and Britain). For some regions, for long a diverse archaeology held sway, namely that of burials and the study of cemeteries of the new, Germanic powers, whose jewellery and weaponry seemingly marked a completely new focus of display, away from the old towns and villas. Even in Italy, only in the last fifteen years has a proper settlement archaeology for the period AD 500–750 been sought, moving away from studying simply the material culture of Gothic graves and Lombard cemeteries and instead questioning how far these immigrants/newcomers maintained what survived of urban and rural structures and organisation. The final transition to note comes primarily in the eighth century when economic revival, a stronger sense of nationhood, urbanism and cultural display, offer stability and renewal, marked by monastic expansion, village formation, urban regeneration, and text (although, paradoxically, we see also the rise in 'private' defence and territorial display – castles and manors).

The second of these transitions is perhaps one of the most interesting, since it again links into one of the current emphases in landscape archaeology: seeking continuity or discontinuity in the post-Roman period, identifying the impact of the new overlords. Did the Saxons scare away all the Romano-Britons to the west and create a wholly new settlement landscape? Did the Visigoths simply move into all older Roman centres in Spain to live side-by-side with the older Romanised population? Did the Vandals create their own Arian enclaves and evict the old elite from villa estates in North Africa? Did Ostrogothic conquest, Byzantine war and Lombard invasion overturn established towns and villas in Italy? And in the Eastern Empire, where Roman rule persisted until the traumatic conflicts with the Arabs in the seventh century, did the fifth and sixth centuries mark any perceptible change in emphasis in the landscape, and what impacts did the seventh century hold for rural settlement?

Frequently it is recognised that incoming forces/tribes/peoples were numerically inferior to the native populations, and yet we then read of 'takeovers' and we see the burials of these newcomers as archaeological dominants. Numbers are always disputed: for Britain, estimates for migrating Angles, Saxons and Jutes vary between 10 000 and 100 000 (James, 2001: 113–15). The essential fact is that the incomers were generally dominant militarily – reflected frequently in the emphasis of male warrior graves – and it was these warrior elites who dictated policies of settlement and integration. It is not at all dissimilar to the Roman conquest of Britain when *c.* 40 000 soldiers were employed; occupation was first marked by creation of forts and

roads and encouragement of natives to live in Roman fashion or in organised locales; in the Norman conquest a much smaller invasion force was employed, but they too imposed a new landscape form, the castle, on British soil. In the case of the Norman takeover, however, their principal castles were placed in *existing* centres of authority, in town and country, reflecting a strong settlement network and hierarchy. On the continent, in Ostrogothic Italy and Visigothic Spain, or in Burgundia, these new military forces and elites likewise gained kingdoms with a sizeable native Roman population based in towns, in villas, farms and monasteries; no new order could easily be imposed and so integration was a necessity. But integration need not mean wholesale merging, and the divisions in grave ritual, religion often, language and law, and even spatially in terms of settlement (for example, distinct quarters within towns) may have endured for some time. Identification with the old power would be shown in the adoption of Latin, coinage, histories, but also in terms of housing, material trappings, landholding and likewise villa ownership. The Vandal elite in North Africa kicked many a Roman aristocrat and estate owner out and took over their villas (Ripoll and Arce, 2000: 105–106); the less brutal regimes in Italy, Spain and Gaul may have appropriated various villas as their own (especially since the elite had most to lose and are more likely to have fled any takeover), but allowed some Roman nobles to persist in their properties where these were willing to work with the new powers (cf. Glick, 1995: 3–11; Diaz, 2000: 19–32). Survival of Roman place- and villa names might reflect this pattern of integration.

The above is a simplistic model but is one borne out adequately by archaeology: many villas in Italy, Spain and Gaul continue from the fifth to the sixth century, often without obvious disruption; we hear sometimes of new Germanic owners, but they live in 'late Roman villa' fashion and found their own monasteries and chapels on their estates. One example of a new 'villa' is the apparent summer retreat for the Ostrogothic king at Monte Barro, in sight of lake Como – built in Roman courtyard fashion in the early sixth century, but noticeably set on a hill with defensive walls not too far distant (Brogiolo and Castelletti, 1991; 2001). Where villas cease, their end *may* be linked to a destruction through takeover, or resistance by the old owner, but may alternatively be tied to a much older sequence of decay. In Italy, the loss of villas such as San Giovanni, Monte Gelato and Monte Barro instead lies in the destructive Byzantine-Ostrogothic war – twenty years of conflict which damaged all of the peninsula; in Spain and Gaul, later villa loss comes with civil wars and the revival of urban elite society.

Italy generally lacks clear structural evidence for a Lombard takeover of villas and farms, but there is a fairly common trend of later sixth- or seventh-century necropoleis in/over former villa sites in the Veronese of central north Italy, and occasional structural units (Mancassola and Saggioro, 2000: 322; cf. Incitti, 1992). Brogiolo (2000: 320–23) reads more into this and argues that

in the Lombardy and Veneto regions, Lombard aristocrats actively sought rural residences, perhaps deliberately selecting old villa sites, implying that elements of these could still be utilised. The practice in Merovingian Gaul may have been similar, as suggested for Normandy (Ripoll and Arce, 2000: 89), although for northern Gaul, Merovingian period farms and hamlets instead appear to prefer new sites, even if some villa sites attract burials (van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000: 149–50).

In Britain, by contrast, the loss of Roman authority from the early fifth century and an already debilitated urbanism meant that the established foci of Roman power and display were too fragile to require Saxon integration – although there are clear instances of Saxon houses in Roman towns and in some of the Shore forts, which perhaps represent a 'bedding down' prior to expansion. With no substantial resistance, and thus no notable insecurity, a seemingly more open and scattered settlement pattern seems to prevail. But if we accept some towns as still active, so we should expect any incomers to be actively overseeing these. Villa and farm survival depended more, perhaps, on local responses and individual aggresions – but the newcomers needed food as much as the natives and a willingness to allow farms and fields to persist is logical. Indeed, as Rippon argues in an excellent synthetic survey (2000: 53–5, 58), we sometimes too rapidly assume a break between Roman and Saxon – as, for example, at Barton Court Farm, Oxfordshire, where the excavators argued that the Romano-British farmstead had been deserted prior to the creation of a series of timber and sunken-featured buildings; or in Essex where, arguably, natives may have continued (though for how long?) to live in their old locations and early Anglo-Saxon settlements took the more marginal locations.

Relationships between incomers and natives have long been best expressed or identified in burial archaeology, too long divorced from settlement archaeology. The interplay between 'native' goods and powerful immigrant 'ethnic' items such as eagle brooches, the adoption of native/immigrant styles, inferences of intermarriage and acculturation are all essentials here. As Scull (1995) stresses for Britain, we are not dealing with a single documented migration but a fragmented, largely undocumented movement of groups – small to large – in part linked to earlier federate settlement (and, of course, we need stress again that the number and nature of the 'incomers' and their movements remain all too vaguely understood). Material cultures reflect complexities and bonds, but better recognition of where new settlement occurred and why is essential to clarify the character of sub- and post-Roman British populations. One example comprises the barrow burials of the Peak District. These are known for the late Roman period and then seemingly resurface in the seventh century amongst the native elites, desirous to maintain a distinctive display mechanism; noticeably these incorporate some elements drawn from the new powers, and are indicative of internally-generated wealth. Subsequently, in the latter seventh century there is Anglo-Saxon

imposition/power-sharing in the region with a similar display through barrow burials, and thus in 'a fashion comprehensible to the native population' (Loveluck, 1995). The problem here, however, is that the settlements linked to these burials are not known and so we cannot see if the same image of cultural resistance and tradition, acculturation or imposition are recognised in these too. Further west, meanwhile, in areas clear of Anglo-Saxon expansion until *c.* AD 600, we must question more the level of continued Roman 'attachment' (to words, wine, Church) and the reasons for a re-emergent fortified landscape (see Dark, Chapter 10 of this volume).

Volume Themes

There are, accordingly, an array of problems which have to be tackled to comprehend and trace changing landscapes. Key questions to be addressed, directly or indirectly, in this volume therefore comprise:

- To what degree did changing political and military events impact on rural life across the empire from the third century AD onwards?
- How far was economic output maintained?
- What was the nature of urbanism in the late Empire and beyond – what implications are there for population levels, food and resource demands?
- How did the nature of the Roman 'villa' change in the late Empire?
- What changes happened within the villa space and in 'villa society'?
- Did warfare and power changes from Roman to Germanic in the West remodel landscapes?
- Were new modes of rural settlement created by the new political powers of the Goths, Vandals, Franks, Saxons and Slavs?
- To what degree did the new powers maintain the old structures of rural life – did villas persist, did farming and terracing systems change, were drained marshes maintained, did woodland regenerate?
- Were these newcomers drawn to old centres through convenience and logic or was there also some symbolic value attached to old Roman sites?
- What role did the Church play across this period? Do we recognise Church and monastic landscapes?
- What was the economy and material culture of the countryside in the early Middle Ages?
- How 'Roman' and how 'medieval' are the rural landscapes of the early Middle Ages?

It would of course be possible to examine a single region in detail and to analyse the landscape in conjunction with wider changes – political, military, social, urban – and some published volumes have sought to achieve this (for

example, Knight, 1999 for Gaul, extending to AD 700; for Britain, Faulkner, 2000 – but not extending beyond the fifth century – and Dark, 1994; Furger, 1996 for Switzerland). However, this volume instead spreads a wider net, seeking comparisons and contrasts across the Roman world. Similar to *Towns in Transition* (Christie and Loseby 1996), both diversity and conformities emerge in the various contributions which allow readers to recognise wider trends and patterns. Authors exploit their specialist knowledge – often the fruit of personal fieldwork (excavations, survey projects) – to present fresh analyses of the problem of landscape and settlement evolution.

Sarah Scott begins the contributions with a review of the nature of the aristocratic villa and the new meanings we should read in the architecture, art and settings of these late Roman estates. Drawing on old and new examples, she reveals their distinct cultural world, seemingly divorced from the insecurities attested across the Empire and on the frontiers; at the same time, however, a shared elite culture is on display across diverse provinces. Next we consider regional case studies, beginning with the Iberian peninsula, a key and wealthy province of the Western Empire, and one perhaps best 'cushioned' from military upheavals. The chapter by *Alexandra Chavarría Arnau* picks up in detail questions raised in this Introduction and by Scott by analysing fates and changes in the villa landscapes of Spain, identifying the significant structural and functional developments in these, including the imposition of burials, and questioning the owners and peoples behind these varied changes.

Italy is one of the areas best served by textual documentation, and it is here that, potentially, one might meet high levels of continuity yet perhaps simultaneously high levels of destruction and change – after all, Italy suffered badly in fifth-century invasions and raids, and Rome's sacks of AD 410 and 455, and also the earlier rise of Constantinople seemingly tempted many elites away. In this Introduction I have already refered to various northern and central Italian sites and surveys. All too rarely in fact does southern Italy gain full mention: previously this was due to limited fieldwork on Late Antiquity, but in this volume, *Paul Arthur* duly extends coverage to all of Italy and demonstrates the vitality of the south and the emerging wealth of new archaeological data. He examines in particular the evidence of rural settlement beyond the villa, in terms of villages, churches and monasteries, and hilltop sites, addressing en route the evolving economy.

Sicily forms the virtual bridge with the south Mediterranean and the wealthy North African provinces, so vital for the food supply of Rome and the armies, and core for the supply of many of the ceramics so essential for archaeological dating. *Anna Leone and David Mattingly* here review the many field surveys undertaken across the North African regions to assess levels of continuity and loss of farms and other sites, their chronologies, the fortunes of industries and the transition into early Arab domination. As with the transitions of villas in Spain, structures of residence progressively lose out to

structures of manufacture and production, combining to indicate a maintained if modified, yet still busy, landscape.

Greece has been seen as a relative backwater under Rome but with later Roman invigoration (much modified by Alcock, 1993); here the Byzantine or late antique flourish is stunted only from the later sixth century with Slavic expansion. Survey and excavation linked to Late Antiquity have been slow to develop, but the contribution by *Guy Sanders* provides a valuable re-appraisal of data and debates based around the city of Corinth excavations and work in the territory; in particular much re-consideration is needed of established ceramic, numismatic and associated structural sequences (and destructions!). Gaps exist, but there is scope to find ways of closing some of these.

Major work has recently come to bear on ancient Butrint in modern Albania (for example, Hodges *et al*., 2000): the chapter presented here by *William Bowden* and *Richard Hodges* emphasises the old and new interpretations of change and loss in the landscape, identifying the problems brought about by nationalistic archaeologies and contexts. Town and hinterland are considered together to realign the late antique picture of natives and incomers.

From the old Mediterranean core of the Empire we then expand northwards to the frontier provinces where, arguably, change came soonest and the Roman hold fractured in significant ways. In the Danubian provinces, extensive recent fieldwork by *Andrew Poulter*'s team in modern Bulgaria, centred on the town-fortress of Nicopolis ad Istrum, has charted the paradoxes of Roman decline: in Nicopolis itself, urban shrinkage in the late Empire is contrasted dramatically by the imposition and even dominance of the Church in the rubble-strewn townscape. The chapter examines how far the fortunes of this city and other urban units are reflected in the evolutions of the landscape around – did local farmers work from the towns, did they seek their own refuge and protection, or did the natives work on resiliently amidst upheaval and insecurity? What can archaeology show of federate settlement and domination? Importantly, Poulter also addresses questions of archaeological methodology and the ways we might further question our sources of data.

Westwards, in France, *Patrick Perin*'s paper charts the development of archaeological awareness and interpretation of village settlements under the Merovingians. He identifies linkages and divergences from the late Roman and late antique rural landscape but emphasises the coherence of rural settlements in the early medieval period; he notes how – comparable to the so-called 'Middle Saxon shift' in England – many villages are quitted in the ninth and tenth centuries to be re-formulated around a focal church, but the sequence and causes remain to be fully explored.

The final two papers assess the devolution of Roman Britain and the rise of the Anglo-Saxon settlement pattern. *Ken Dark* is anxious to ensure that a continental perspective is drawn from late Roman Britain and to show that

there was a 'Late Antiquity' here. But how was the late antique countryside articulated and by whom? And for how long did a 'Roman' character persist? *Helena Hamerow* continues the story into the seventh century and examines the impact of the Saxons on the British landscape. Like Périn, she reflects on our current understanding and perception of Anglo-Saxon settlements, asking if the questions we set are the right ones: how much do we in fact know about building designs, community strategies, economies and relationships?

Throughout the volume, a diversity of evolutions and responses are seen to occur in the period AD 400–800, dependent on a variety of conditions, impacts and choices. The strength or weakness of local urbanism and of centralised control are central in this: where broken or disrupted early, the 'hold' on the landscape became weakened; urban fragility and insecurity seemingly often prompted more distant and more self-sufficient responses. Yet, elsewhere, we observe a 'clinging-on' or resilience: is this the hold of Rome, simply a desire to remain stable, more local attachment (for example, generations-old landholding), or an enforced continuity? The imports recorded on 'new' British sites like Tintagel and the memorial stones of Deira signify a desired maintenance of ties with the 'lost' Roman world; yet they seem a world away from the cultural retreats of Sidonius not 200 miles away in south-west Gaul. We still need to explain the fate of some of the elite who once held opulent villas: by the mid- to late sixth century most of these sites had become ruinous, or converted to monasteries; were the old families monks, had they died out, or had they returned to the towns? Who controlled the farms and villages that emerged in, say, seventh-century Italy and who re-colonised the villas in Spain? Is it justifiable to think of new dominant groups, whether Visigoths or Saxons? We need not expect blanket explanations: as field surveys have shown, each region differs from its neighbours in clear or subtle ways (though this was true in reality also for Roman times) linked to resources, communications, demands and populations. There is certainly no longer a need to explain change wholly through population exchange (old out, new in), but we do need to question how the rural societies changed and the levels of possible interaction, division and conflict. Importantly, however, even if we do not yet properly understand many of the pictures that are slowly emerging of these changing landscapes, we can at least see people in them.

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Chapter 2

Elites, Exhibitionism and the Society of the Late Roman Villa

Sarah Scott

The palace of the Sun rose high aloft
On soaring columns, bright with flashing gold
And flaming bronze; the pediments were clothed
With sheen of ivory; the double doors
Dazzled with silver – and the artistry was nobler still
(Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* Book II, 1–5)

Introduction

It might seem inappropriate to jump from Ovid, writing in the heyday of Rome, to consider the villa in the last centuries of Roman rule in the West; however, the sumptuousness of Ovid's description more than matches the display and desires of the elites of the fourth and fifth centuries AD. Late Roman elite villas represent a paradoxical phenomenon: in contrast to the image of progressive decay within the urban context and on the Roman frontiers, they denote a dramatic flourish of wealth, power and stability. Our understanding of these villas has been transformed in recent years, with many scholars now looking beyond the architecture and art to consider the evolving society of the villas, and their place within the wider settlement landscape. The expanding impact of field survey – covered in various other papers in this volume – has provided scope for identifying how busy a given landscape was and how the villa estates may have functioned; more detailed excavations and revisiting of old excavation reports have meanwhile further helped in our understanding of individual sites and sequences.

This paper seeks to address some of the key issues raised through consideration of recent research on late Roman villas (see Ripoll and Arce, 2000 as a current guide). The intention is to highlight gaps in current approaches to villas and to identify possible new avenues for constructive dialogue. It is not feasible to engage in a wide-ranging survey of all provinces here; instead the emphasis is placed on comparing two diverse western provinces, namely Italy (with Sicily) as the central and key senatorial imperial heart, and Britain, as a

fringe region yet an equal participant in rural expressions of power. Within these regions we will examine the historical and archaeological contexts of the large villas and their estates, including the nature of their internal and structural designs and their landscape settings; finally, we will consider the fate of these rural 'palaces' and the degree of loss, destruction or transformation.

The terms employed here remain problematic. 'Palace' implies too little attachment to the landscape and people around; 'villa', as is well recognised, is too narrow a term for the wide variances in form, quality and role that existed in the Roman world across all time periods; 'estate' need not include within its remit a central built complex. There are luxury villas – such as along the edges of the north Italian lakes or the Bay of Naples – which have no obvious agricultural role, even though they probably denoted investments of wealth generated from the owner's landholdings elsewhere. Then there are the large villas in which residence and display are evident in the *pars urbana*, but with adjoining or nearby productive agricultural units (*pars rustica*) suggestive of sizeable landholdings. Below this comes the villa forming the head of smaller estates where quality and scale are less evident and the *urbana/rustica* division is less prominent; these may develop from or devolve into smaller *villae rusticae* where the bond with fields and produce is central and residential display limited (cf. Brogiolo, 1996; Mancassola and Saggioro, 2000 for the range evident in central north Italy). All definitions are crude and we need to bear in mind that the ability and resources to display varied across the Roman world: the opulence of Italian luxury villas is nowhere matched in Britain; indeed, many of the lesser villas recognised in the South Etruria Survey materially were better endowed than most elite British examples. In this paper the emphasis cannot be on all types of villa; instead the focus is on those of the high elite, atypical yet dominant.

Contexts of Change

Within many provinces of the Western Empire, the fourth century denotes a major burst of growth and elaboration of rich aristocratic and imperial villas (Fernández Castro, 1982; Hauschild and Arbeiter, 1993; Morand, 1994 for Spain; Scott, 2000 for Britain). For some regions, this notable outlay of private investment commences as early as the late third century; in others, such as Italy and Sicily, the wealthiest villas emerge only from the second quarter of the fourth century (Wilson, 1990: 214–23 – see below). Such sizeable rural investment coincided, however, with a period of general waning of public display within the urban context, as civic (that is, office) demands expanded and became financially onerous, and as town life struggled with the onset of heightening military concerns – marked chiefly by the erection of defensive walls and a general demise of entertainment structures (cf. Arce,

1997: 22–6). The Empire had suffered badly in the third century through external threat, invasion and internal crises, and insecurity was a major factor in the militarising of state and emperor; nonetheless, whilst internal problems persisted, the external threats were less pronounced in the fourth century, only resuming in dramatic and destructive fashion at the end of the fourth and throughout the fifth century. The elite villa 'boom', however, relates chiefly to *c*. AD 320–380, a period of containment and stability along the frontiers (arguably, the appearance of town defences also reflects containment, but with a sense of a changed world: Christie, 2001).

For the elite, urban living, display and office-holding began to lose their appeal from the later third century in response to growing military requirements and funding; traditional modes of display or euergetism thus began to fall away (Ward-Perkins, 1984: 14–37 for Italy). The wealthy fought hard to avoid losing their money in the name of tax and the state. Although many remained prominent citizens and used their moneys to pay for games, they did not suffer unduly; instead the greatest burden was deflected onto the lesser nobility and the middle classes came to be given the unwanted posts of decurions. Whilst there are laws promulgated in the 360s and 390s (*Codex Theodosianus*, 12.18.1–2) against decurions moving permanently into the countryside, with confiscation of property the threat, it is unlikely that this curtailed the self-removal of the highest ranking aristocracy from the increasingly dishevelled and less 'open' urban scene to keep their wealth in private rural luxury (cf. Keay, 1988: 191–8 for Spain). The study of these richly appointed estates therefore offers a prime source of information about the intentions and desired image of their owners: these villas formed foci for display and entertainment for fellow aristocrats and even emperors and entourages; they were also centres of cultural interplay. We learn here, therefore, much about the nobility in the last centuries of Roman rule.

Owners and Villas

Significantly, the later fourth century saw the publication of the agricultural manual of Palladius – in the same vein as earlier agronomists who 'cashed in' on the first major stage of rural investment by elites. Literary sources certainly point to highly active rural retreats for the late Roman elite, many of whom pursued letters and poetry as suitable professional hobbies, and many of whom continued until the fifth century with pagan leanings (Rossiter, 1994; cf. Roberts, 1992). It is noticeable in fact that the first real shift into the countryside also coincides with the official emergence of the Church and its staff. Our sources make clear that various of our named elite estate owners were Christians who, at the start of the fifth century, 'shared a literary culture, a way of life based on landed wealth, and high status in Roman provincial

society ... They saw the life of the great senatorial estate in terms of a withdrawal from the busy distractions of town life, as a *secessus in villam*, the life of recollection and return to rural simplicity, close to the soil and the rhythms of God's nature ... This "sprituality of the great landowners" is a disinct undercurrent in the ascetic literature of the fifth century' (Markus, 1990: 35). Yet it is not easy to show a distinct Christian component in the first wave of villa opulence; Christianity seems prominent only *after* AD 400.

Various author-senators/lords are known, prominent amongst these being Ausonius (a Gallo-Roman, spending time between Gallic and Italian estates), Paulinus (a pupil of the former, who chose to renounce all his landed wealth and devote himself to the service of saint Felix's shrine at Nola), Rutilius Namatianus (a poet-senator and absentee landlord from estates in Gaul), and Sidonius (who became bishop of Clermont in SW Gaul). In Symmachus' letters we hear of twelve of his villas within Italy, plus lands in south-east Italy, Sicily and Mauretania. Christian sources also provide details of the two Melanias (the Elder and Younger), tremendously rich landowners/heiresses who in time devoted themselves wholly to Christ, selling off their far-flung properties in central Italy, Sicily, North Africa, Britain and Spain (the latter at the time unsaleable due to barbarian invasions). For each of these elite members, property size and display were important ingredients: hence the biographer for the younger Melania claims she had estates comprising over 60 farms and 400 slaves, including one estate as big as a city and serviced by numerous craftsmen as well as two bishops (Wilson, 1990: 217).

Sidonius's letters in the mid-fifth century tell us of fellow aristocratic villa owners in Aquitania, such as Pontius Leontius, who possessed a fortress-like residence at Burgus near Bordeaux (*alta spectabilis arce*); as Bodel has identified, this was an estate held by the Pontius family for at least two generations, since the main doorway to the villa featured the names of the founders 'lest posterity forget' (Bodel, 1997: 16; Sidonius, *Carm*. XXII, 117–19, 142–4). Such pride and association in an estate must have been a commonplace, on all social levels. Conceivably the survival of Roman-derived placenames (with endings from *-acum*) in rural France and Belgium in particular might also denote stability in ownership and location: for example, Sidonius' estate is called *Avitacum*; another Leontius held an estate at *Praemicaum* (Percival, 1976: 171–82). However, it seems impossible to decipher owners' names from these sites, many of which evolved into hamlets or villages (see Ripoll and Arce, 2000: 113–14).

Social, Artistic and Architectural Exhibitionism

For many of the landed high elite, the villa provided a cultural theatre and seat of learning, with each seeking to show his or her literary or stoic worth. For

example, Sidonius praises Consentius and his villa as a setting for the flow of 'swift iambics, pointed elegiacs, rounded hendecasyllables, and all the other verses fragrant with thyme and flowers ...' (*Epist*. VIII,4, *c*. AD 478. In general, see Stevens, 1933: 73 on Sidonius' and his colleagues' literary and philosophical pursuits). We may find only passing references to their estates and actual houses (compare Percival, 1976: 171–2 accepting broadly such descriptions and in 1992: 158 rather doubting the reality of Sidonius' words), but enough emerges to reveal these both as points of contact and entertainment between aristocrats, and also as centres of display. Rutilius Namatianus, for example, travels north to Gaul from Rome, and dines excellently amidst the fine estates of Albinus in Lazio (*de Reditu suo* I. 401–12); Sidonius Apollinaris in the mid-fifth century boasts of his own fine estate, of its baths, as well as of his neighbours' fine residences (*Epist.* II,2; VIII, 4); Ausonius (Moselle I,10, 298–348) meanwhile delights in the splendours of the Moselle and its attendant villas:

> Who has the skill to unfold the countless embellishments and forms, and to display the architectural beauties of each demesne? ... This one stands high upon a mass of natural rock, this rests upon the verge of the jutting bank, this stands back and claims the river for its own, making it prisoner in an enfolding bay ... if a stranger were to arrive here from the shores of Cumae, he would believe that the Euboean Baiae had bestowed on this region a miniature copy of its own delights: so great is the charm of its refinement and distinction, while its pleasures breed no excess.

Ausonius' words make plain the desirability, prominence and opulence of these Gallo-Roman rural residences. This era denotes a major redefintion or refoundation of older properties, implying most clearly a desire to reinvest and display one's personal wealth. We might consider, for example, that the Bordeaux villa of Pontius Leontius noted above, whilst recorded by the entrance inscription as having been founded *c*. AD 350, could have been a *re*foundation – if on a substantially more elaborate and imposing style – of a much older family property. Most villas indeed can be traced back to the early Empire or late Republic; whilst many such early villas display some progressive elaboration, for the most part the structural jump achieved in the fourth century is remarkable (see, in general, Percival, 1976. But not all villas – for example, Thurnham, like many villas in Kent, fades away in the early fourth century: OAU, 2000). This phase witnesses in all villas at least the provision of a bath-suite and the reworking of various rooms; in the largest establishments, however, the emphasis is on quality, quantity and space, marked chiefly by the addition of reception halls, tri-apsed dining areas, corridors, bath suites, mosaic floors and statuary. These changes denote more than mere renovation or redecoration: they signify first and foremost the elite's desire to display wealth, which simultaneously signifies an enhanced

frequentation and a greater social role played out in these rural seats. As Brown (1992: 273) notes, rather than retreats from public life, these residences were 'the forum made private'. Classical statuary and other aspects of public architecture now came to reside in the courtyards and entry halls of the villas and palaces (Stirling, 1996; 1997). As the towns decreased in importance as stages for elite competition, so these rural seats became central to social and political life. To visualise this better, we can examine examples from two key provinces.

Sicily and Italy

Sicily was a renowned aristocratic and imperial haven and also a primary grain supplier to Rome following the switch of the Egyptian grain fleets to the new eastern capital of Constantinople (Wilson, 1990: 214–23). Numerous well-provided villas are known across the island, but the two principal excavated sites are Piazza Armerina and Patti Marina (idem., 1988, 1990: 203–14; Carandini, 1982) near the south and north-east coasts respectively, both with residential zones and outbuildings covering *c*. 2 hectares (as so far excavated). For each villa a more functional predecessor seems apparent, active into the third century (Di Miro, 1988); the luxurious expansion of each is generally set to the period *c*. AD 300–340.

The principal planning focus of each villa is a sizeable peristyle (Patti 27 x 18m; Piazza Armerina 30 x 25m) with surrounding corridors and fronting rooms, and with bath complexes as separate units. At Patti an apsed reception hall and a triple-apsed dining room form integral elements to the peristyle organisation; ornamentation is through mainly geometric mosaics considered of Sicilian craftsmanship. In contrast Piazza Armerina (Fig. 2.1) is resplendent with exotic figured polychrome mosaics extending to the bulk of the fifty excavated rooms and with evident traces of figured wall frescoes and extensive marble veneer; African mosaicists are suggested, implying an owner with landed connections in that province (Dunbabin, 1978). Key structural features are the vast reception hall reached by steps from the main east end of the peristyle (itself accessed via a monumental forecourt), and the equally substantial triapsidal *triclinium* (with its own oval court) and distinctive bath buildings. At Piazza Armerina, it is possible to obtain some idea of the nature of official and private movement within the house by considering the mosaic pavements (Carandini, 1982: 67). The north side of the peristyle would have formed the private approach (domestic areas and private apartments were situated on this north flank); the south side provided the 'official' approach, as reflected in the greatest array of animal *protomai* and in an important reception room. Movement within the villa was clearly directed, and in certain areas was carefully controlled. The architectural design and decor explicitly defined the patterns of movement within the house (Scott, 1997).

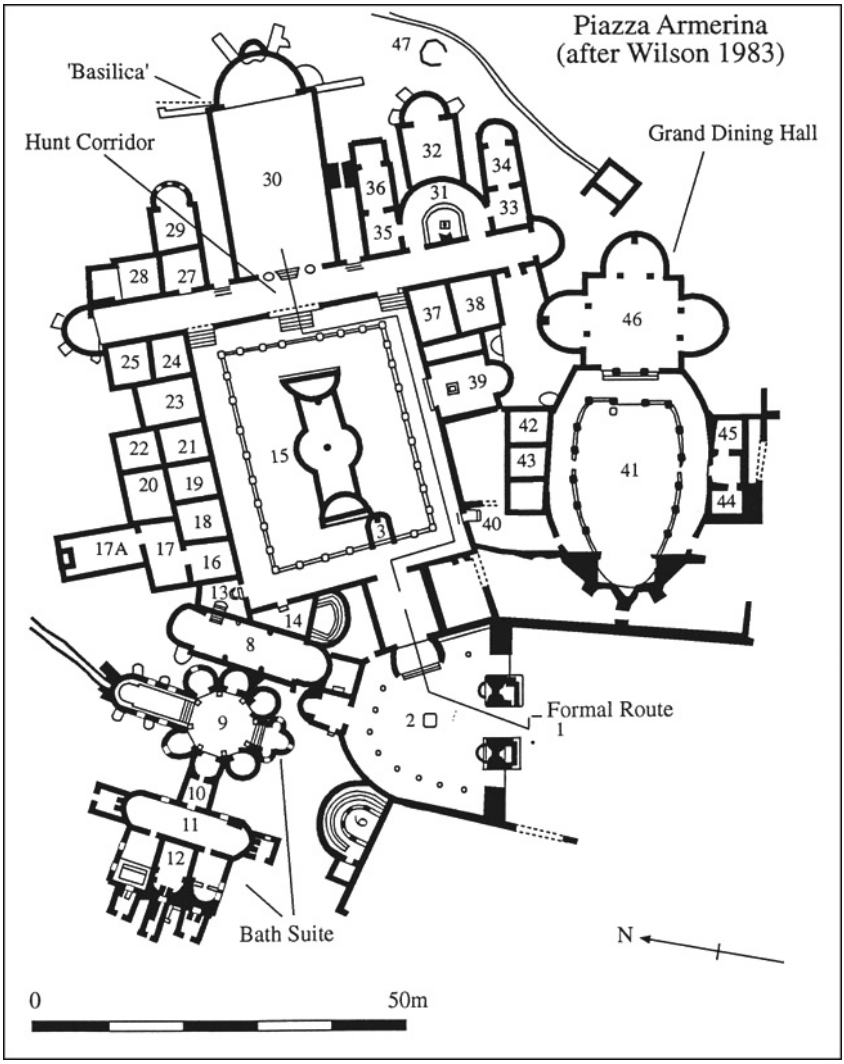

Figure 2.1 Plan of the excavated villa complex of Piazza Armerina, Sicily (after Wilson, 1983)

The decor also served to send powerful social signals at a number of levels (Carandini, 1982; L'Orange, 1965; Dunbabin, 1978: 209 and 1999: 131–46). For example, one of the best known mosaics from Piazza Armerina is the 'Great Hunt'. This corridor pavement shows a wide range of exotic animals being lured into captivity; the beasts are also shown being loaded and

unloaded, representing a sea journey. The representation of the capture and transportation of animals for the Roman amphitheatre is similar in its composition to the figurative tradition of the imperial court. The animals arrive from various corners of the world, symbolized by personifications of the provinces in the apses at the end of the corridor. The scene is watched over by a group of figures who have been variously identified as Maxentius, the Tetrarchs, or members of the highest aristocracy. The mosaic is full of references to various regions of the Roman Empire and beyond, including India, the source for silks and ivory, as well as the mythical land of tigers, elephants and griffins. Wild animals were used by the Roman senatorial aristocrats in their 'strident displays of power for the urban masses, for their own equals and, exceptionally, for the emperor himself' (Carandini, 1982: 71).

The 'Great Hunt' is a powerful composition located in a 'public' area of the villa. It is an overt demonstration of the owner's power, and his links with or patronage of the amphitheatre. The 'Great Hunt' corridor meanwhile acts as a 'vestibule' for the large basilica. This latter room was clearly designed to overawe, with its panels of cut polychrome marble (*opus sectile*) and marble wall veneer; the apse would have had a semi-dome ceiling decorated in glittering mosaic – all reflections of wealth and quality craftsmanship (Carandini, 1982: 86; Dunbabin, 1999: 138–9).

The mosaics in the triapsidal *triclinium* illustrate the labours of gods and heroes: the adversaries of Hercules, the metamorphoses of Daphne and Cyparissos, and the apotheosis of Hercules into the ranks of the gods (Carandini, 1982: 86; Dunbabin, 1999: 136–7). These celebrate victory, glory, and immortality. The mosaic is a form of panegyric: the allusions including the cults of Jove, the emperor, and Rome (L'Orange, 1965: 96, 102), the themes representing a defence of the senatorial order (Carandini, 1982: 84). Hence the mosaics are a glorification of the social order in which the *dominus* would have played a leading role.

Few mainland Italian villas of comparable scale have been examined in detail. Prominent, however, is the lakeside villa at Desenzano not far from Verona, linked to the Decentii family, active in the imperial court of Milan at least from the 340s until the later fourth century. The villa enjoyed fine views across lake Garda; not surprisingly various other large villas are known from the vicinity, including those on the broad promontory of Sirmione (Roffia, 1997; Scagliarini Corlàita, 1997; Mancassola and Saggioro, 2000: 316–17). The Desenzano villa, not fully excavated, is a vast complex of stone, cobble and brick construction focussed on a large peristyle with bath suite on its south flank, octagonal eastern hall, and triapsidal *triclinium* on the west (Fig. 1.4). Extensive mosaic flooring survives, datable chiefly to the mid-fourth century, but with likely later elements within the peristyle. The ornamentation is predominantly geometric/floral (lozenges, squares, knots, etc.) but there is figured work (for example, Orpheus, Four Seasons, fishing

scene and a shepherd figure), all of good execution. Here the mosaics of the peristyle corridors help direct the visitor to the triconch/triapsidal dining-suite, first passing into the atrium with flanking apses and featuring four fishing scenes, peopled by Cupids. Within the *triclinium* a more complex mosaic of twenty-five panels is presented which combines a variety of classical imagery, including the Four Seasons, Bacchic scenes, wild animal hunting scenes, and Cupids guiding carts pulled by wild animals (Ghislanzoni, 1962; Mirabella Roberti, 1994). Many of the Cupid scenes closely recall forms displayed at Piazza Armerina and again hint at African mosaicists.

Behind, yet probably visible through windows in the dining-room, lay a small garden with ornate nymphaeum; to its south were additional mosaic-floored and painted rooms, comprising apsed aula with octagonal room to the west and hexagonal room to the east; fragments of a possible imperial bust came from the octagonal structure and hint at display or commemorative funtions; Ghislanzoni indeed suggested this area formed a library (cf. sculptural finds at Varignano in Italy: Bertino, 1990).

Mirabella Roberti (1994: 113–14) suggests a Christian usage for the 'private' basilica located to the immediate north of the *triclinium* complex, pointing chiefly to comparable mosaic motifs (such as the fishing scene) found in fourth-century churches in north-east Italy; however, similar scenes are not out of place in secular (and not ostensibly Christian) contexts.

Late Roman Britain

Structural and visual display was by no means a Mediterranean phenomenon. Britain too displays a variety of examples that suggests a wealthy and competitive elite, most notably in south and south-west England (Scott, 2000). We should recall how the vast land-owning aristocrats such as Melania extended also to Britain. Clearly we must question whether British villa expansion reflects primarily expressions of power by Mediterranean and continental proprietors or whether these were native owners joining a wider trend. However, close scrutiny of the internal chronologies of these sites reveals that many British villas began their expansion in the later third century, some years ahead of the Italian villas noted above; Britain had been spared many of the third-century traumas suffered elsewhere. Accordingly, Britain might be seen as the initial theatre for these new ideas of private expression (Percival, 1976: 44–50 and 134 noting Rivet's view of continental immigrants to Britain stimulating villa growth). Other sites are later developers though, such as the corridor villa at Frocester, peaking *c.* AD 360 (Price, 2000). Three examples of fourth-century Romano-British villas will be discussed here: Woodchester in Gloucestershire, Box in Wiltshire and Lullingstone in Kent.

Woodchester was extensively enlarged and elaborated at the beginning of the fourth century, culminating in a complex of buildings with three courtyards (Clarke, 1982) (Fig. 2.2). Close examination reveals much about the social use of the architecture, and the significance of the decor. The inner courtyard contained the main living quarters and reception rooms. Room 1, with its impressive Orpheus mosaic, formed the architectural and topographical climax of the villa, an awe-inspiring setting as backdrop for key social encounters (Scott, 1995). Corridors provided access to other rooms, many endowed with high quality mosaic floors (Fig. 2.3); such rooms could have served reception or dining purposes, perhaps for guests on a more intimate footing with the owner. One needs to visualise the villa as it would have then appeared with richly painted walls (including imitation marble veneer), sculpture and other portable objects *in situ*. Sculptures found at Woodchester include a Cupid and Psyche group; selected companion pieces would have have created a rich 'classical' interior, reinforcing the owner's erudite image (Henig, 1995: 151).

The villa at Box was likewise extended in the late third or early fourth century, the north-east corner of the earlier house being rebuilt to accommodate a large apsidal-ended room (Room 26); numerous mosaics were also added (Hurst, 1987). The most striking feature of Room 26 is its scale: with an internal area of over 76m^2 it is almost twice the size of the next largest room in the villa, and indeed is one of the largest rooms in a domestic building in Britain (ibid.: 79). Internally, scale will have been allied to a strong architectural effect, probably with a barrel-vaulted ceiling along its long axis and ending in a semi-dome above the apse; the effect being to produce a strong axial focus on the curving end (ibid.: 31). This large hall must have been used as both reception room and *triclinium*. Such apsidal rooms became increasingly popular in Romano-British villas towards the mid-fourth century, including examples at Lullingstone (Meates, 1972), Dewlish (Putnam and Rainey, 1975), Hinton St Mary (Painter, 1967), and Frampton (Lysons, 1813).

At Lullingstone, a coin sealed below the foundations dated the apsidal Room 13 to no earlier than the 330s (Meates, 1972) (Fig. 2.4). The room would have formed an architectural climax to the villa, with steps leading up to the entranceway. This too must have been the main room for receiving clients and entertaining guests: it was mosaic-paved, depicting Europa and the Bull in the apse, and Bellerophon and the Chimaera in the other half of the room. The connotations of the Bellerophon scene may have included heroism and the hunt, and the victory of good over evil; while the dolphins and mussels might have served as a link between Bellerophon's voyage across the sea, and Europa's sea journey (Huskinson, 1974: 68–97). Interestingly, Barrett notes that the Europa and Bull mosaic is oriented so as to be looked at from inside the apse (1978: 310). The poorer quality of the

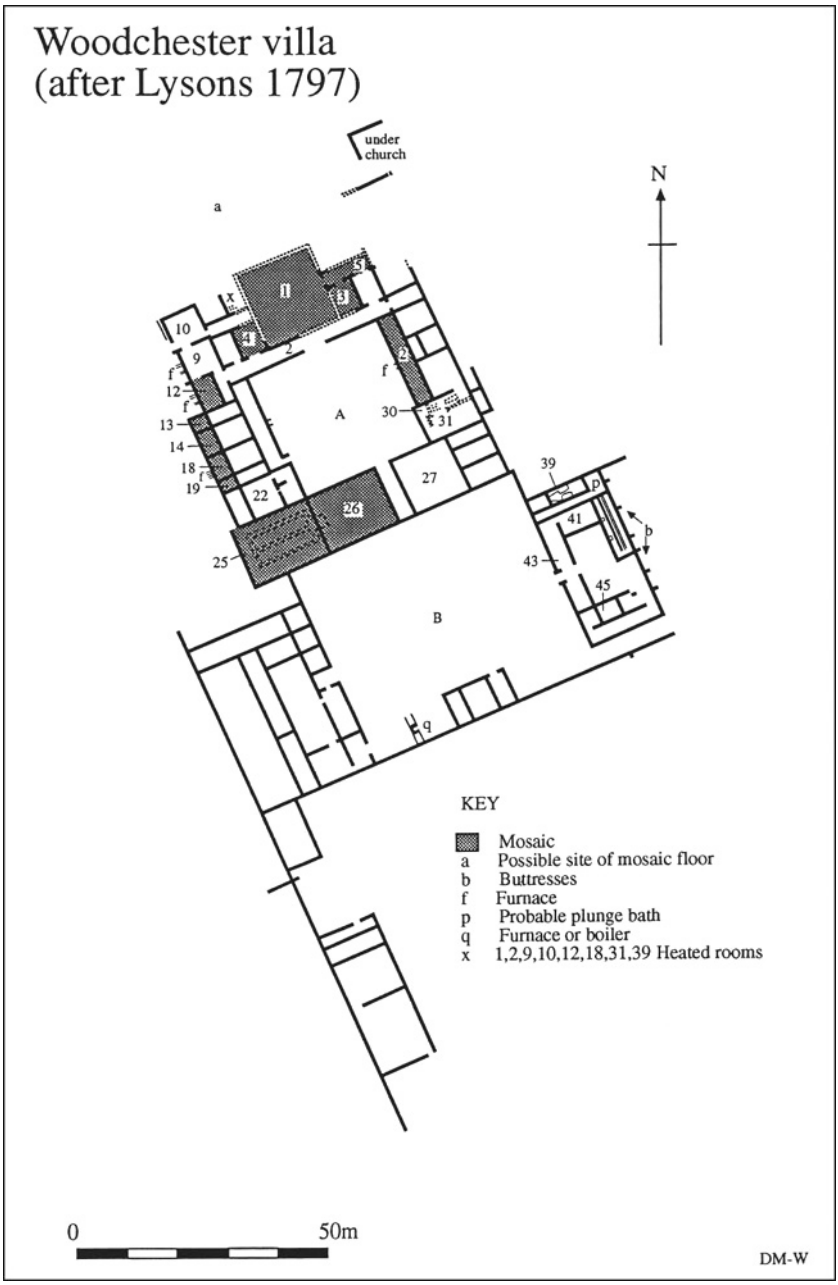

Figure 2.2 Woodchester villa: plan with mosaic distribution highlighted (after Lysons, 1797)

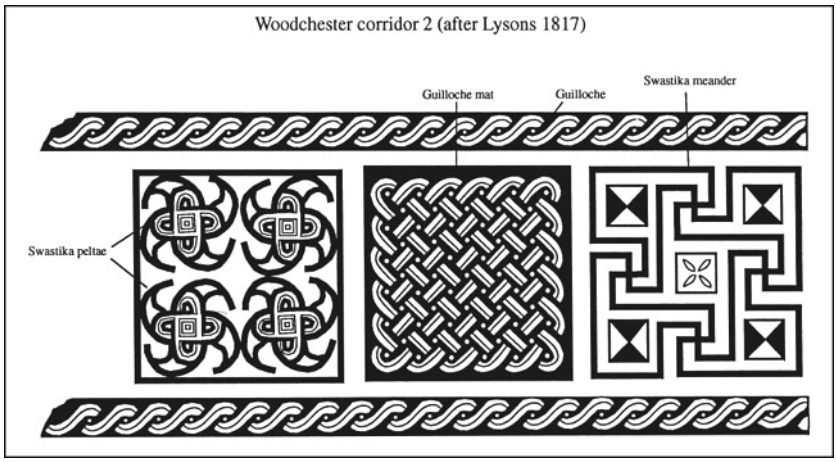

Figure 2.3 Woodchester villa: schematic image of mosaics forming the flooring to part of corridor 2 (after Lysons, 1817)

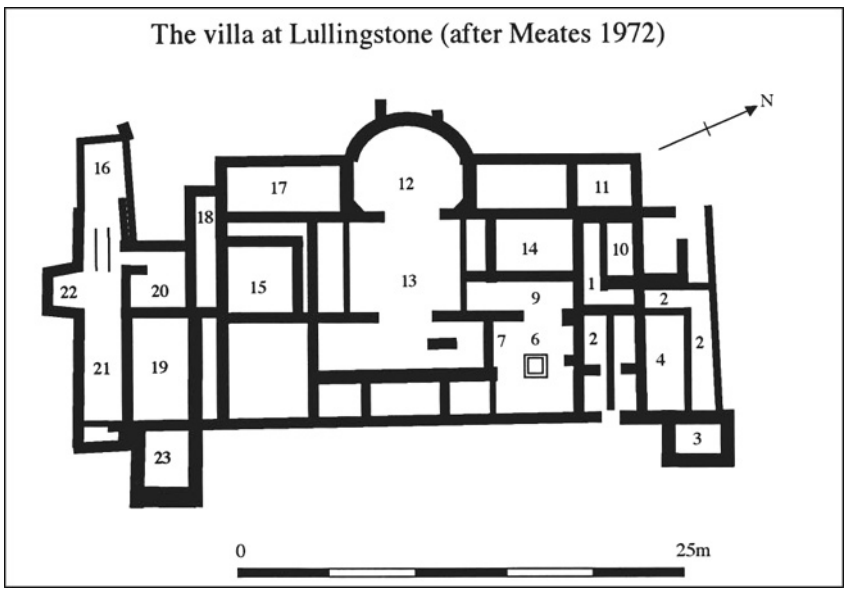

Figure 2.4 Lullingstone villa: plan of main residential complex as excavated (after Meates, 1972)

workmanship around the edge of the wall suggests that the diners' couches would have been situated here, and it is from this position that the mosaic could be best appreciated. An inscription along the base of the semi-circle could have been read most easily from this spot, and the figure of Europa also assumes more realistic proportions this way. On close examination, the language of the inscription recalls the works of Ovid and Virgil, well known poets, but still a reflection of the owner's erudition and his desire to display knowledge (ibid.: 312. Recently, Henig (1997) and Thomas (1998) have proposed a cryptographic interpretation of the inscription with Christian connotations).

Pavements such as at those at Lullingstone, alongside other forms of interior decor, would thus have provided a rich setting for elite social life in late Roman Britain. The clearest examples of such educated display concentrate in the south and south-west of Britain (see Ling, 1997 and Scott, 2000 for recent bibliography), where the evidence for regional styles implies closely networked elites with differing levels of wealth and interests (Smith, 1984). There still remains much potential for studying regional choices in relation to local power relationships.

Messages of Power

What emerges most clearly from such examples is how the architecture of the wealthy houses and villas of the fourth century emulated that of the royal palaces and audience chambers; indeed, in terms of their art, these perhaps even surpassed their imperial models. Most importantly these imperial models had become prominent landmarks in many provinces, no longer being restricted to the capital: hence Maxentius' palace-villa complex on the via Appia *outside* the walls of Rome (at a time when Rome was no longer capital); Constantine's Aula Palatina at Trier; and the palaces at Sirmium and Nicomedia (Pisani Sartorio and Claza, 1976; Wightman, 1985: 234–7. Cf. Mocsy, 1974: 300–302 on the vast 'imperial' villa of Parndorf in Pannonia). The late third- and fourth-century emperors cultivated an air of transcendent remoteness, whilst also being soldiers: these aspects are duly reflected in their architecture, most especially in the case of Diocletian's Palace at Split, a combination of retirement home-cum-villa-cum-castle (Wilkes, 1986: nb. 56–70). At Trier, the Aula Palatina or audience hall of Constantine the Great was a 'glowing' space, illuminated by huge glazed windows, with the light focussed on the large apse at the far end, where Constantine presumably appeared in majesty (Frazer, 1979: 109). Maxentius' suburban seat combined both funerary and ceremonial displays, featuring a circular mausoleum to his son Romulus, set in a substantial rectangular enclosure; immediately north the villa complex itself, not fully explored, comprised bath suites, reception and

dining areas, and an extended corridor joining with the emperor's personal circus (Humphrey, 1986: 581–602).

Audience halls in both villas and urban *domus* allowed aristocrats to emulate the solemnity and separateness of the emperors. As many aristocrats could be imperial or state functionaries, so their architecture could be seen to reflect their status and imperial ties. Certainly there are numerous examples of an increasingly ceremonious domestic urban architecture in the eastern provinces: hence private audience chambers, as at the 'Palace of the Dux', Apollonia (Ellis, 1985), and the 'Palace' at Ephesus (Ellis, 1988: 569) consist of large apsidal rooms, preceeded by a vestibule, entered from the street without penetrating the rest of the house. The aristocrat presumably appeared in the apse surrounded by his retainers; multi-apsed formal dining-rooms would have been used for large receptions (Dunbabin, 1996; see Thebert, 1987 for Roman Africa). Bek has noted the increasing importance in the third and fourth centuries of the apse as a backdrop, not for sculptures or fountains, but for persons or events: 'Instead of being an entertainment of the participants, the *convivium* has become a performance to be staged. The display of social interrelation has become an official show or state ceremony' (1983: 91). These trends came to be transferred into the rural sphere, often on a grander scale (Scott, 1994 and see below).

The mosaics and other forms of decor displayed knowledge and education (Morand, 1994; Scott, 2000). This can be further understood in relation to the increasing importance of *paideia* as a means of defining social worth in Late Antiquity (Brown, 1992; 1971: 32). *Paideia* expressed social distance; its skills were difficult to acquire, and, once acquired, could only be displayed within rigid, traditional conventions. The possession of a certain social and cultural knowledge was essential for obtaining and maintaining a position within the higher echelons of late Roman society: 'the meticulous internalization of the literary classics went hand-in-hand with a process of moral formation: correct forms of verbal interchange manifested the upper-class citizen's ability to enter into the correct form of interpersonal relations among his peers' (Brown, 1987: 240). As Heather (1994: 185) notes, a totally artificial shared literacy gave a sense of identity to a landowning class widely dispersed between Hadrian's Wall and the Euphrates. This shared literacy became the key to high social and administrative status, and was therefore a crucial feature of the late Roman social fabric.

Domestic art and architecture thus became integral to the definition and maintenance of late Roman elite power. As towns decreased in importance as stages for elite competition (though clearly the circus mosaics testify some maintained display – at least in the provincial capitals), domestic architecture came to play a more central role. The art served to enhance the prestige of the villa owners, emphasising their wealth and, more particularly, their cultural superiority and power. This complex fusion of shared ideas then appears to be

utilised in conscious competition between the elites as a backdrop to their literary jousting. Architecture, art and learning actively combined to frame and maintain social relations.

Villas in the Landscape

We must not forget that these villas were out-of-town retreats. They were designed to impress visitors not just internally but also externally, both in their size and design, but also in their wider landscape setting. This visual impact is eloquently reconstructed in Lysons' (1797: 18) Pliny-like evocation of the setting for the ruins of Woodchester:

> The beauty of the surrounding country must ... have been a considerable inducement to building here ... The spot of ground which was occupied by this edifice is sufficiently high to command a very beautiful prospect, yet not so elevated as to be deprived of the shelter afforded by the surrounding hills. It may be reasonably supposed, that, at the time when the building was erected, the country was more wooded than it is at present; there is still however a considerable portion of beech wood near the summit of the hills, which much increases the beauty of the view. No place can enjoy a finer verdure, even in the dryest seasons, than the valley of Woodchester.

It is not far removed from Ausonius' description of the geographical context of the Moselle villas quoted previously, or Sidonius' recounting of his own fine estates or of those of Consentius (*Epist*. II,2; VIII,4). Such texts show an active integration of villa with landscape: to impress by their setting whilst also providing the tranquility and rusticity desired by the owners. Indeed, views from villas into the landscape were crucial, and the architecture was often shaped to take account of these in terms of courtyards and windows – as then, as now for the luxury villas on lake Garda! Yet Ausonius and Sidonius both describe inter-relationships and proximities between elite rural complexes: their rural seclusion is in many ways a fraud, especially in the light of the size and role of the reception/audience and dining halls; often villas did not lie more than half a day's travel from an urban centre:

> I have passed the most delightful time in the most beautiful country in the company of Tonantius Ferrolus and Apollinaris, the most charming hosts in the world. Their estates march together; their houses are not far apart; and the extent of intervening ground is just too far for a walk and just too short to make the ride worthwhile ... The view from one villa is over a wide flat country, that from the other over woodland; yet different though their situations are, the eye derives equal pleasure from both (Sidonius, *Epist*. II,9 to Donidius, AD 461–7).

There were thus other houses in the landscape, some clearly in view of these grandiose villas. But this was not just an elite landscape, for their estates were supported and farmed by smaller units – tenant or slave-run. Aristocratic villas

were simply the top, and structurally (and thus archaeologically) most visible, rank in a wide range of rural seats. The land still required to be farmed.

Accordingly it is important to look beyond the art, architecture and immediate setting of these elite exhibits and be aware of the form, density and fortune of other rural sites and understand any regional forms and trends (for an excavated example of a middle-ranking late Roman Italian villa see Cavada, 1994). This is where the value of field survey (especially when published fully) has made such a substantial contribution (in general, Greene, 1986: 98–141; Barker and Lloyd, 1991; and Christie's Introduction to this volume (Chapter 1)). There is no space here to discuss these results, but it is nonetheless useful to note that such field projects highlight how numerically dominant medium and small-scale functional farms and villas were in the Roman landscape. What remains difficult to show, however, is the control by the elite over such lesser-ranking land units and the actual extent of their estates.

Potentially field survey data can contribute to the presumed sequence of growth of large estates (*latifundia*) showing, for instance, growth at the expense of smaller landholders, the latter being bought out or simply being incapable of competing – and hence disappearing from the archaeological record (cf. Arthur, 1991: 157). Alternatively, however, the *latifundia* need have created no human change, since small farmers could have been incorporated into a bigger whole and continued to work the land to supply the bigger landowner (Coccia and Mattingly, 1995: 117). Elsewhere an absence of elite estate control might be recognisable: for example, when Settefinestre and its sizeable neighbours decline in the mid-second century AD (coinciding with Italy's economic sidelining by Spain and Gaul especially), survey demonstrates a persistence of activity/farms in the Cosanus region, albeit on a more restricted scale, suggesting smallholders re-establishing themselves, working just above subsistence levels. Conceivably the land remained under aristocratic estate control, but the owner preferred investment elsewhere: by the fourth century there are many instances of aristocrats possessing lands across numerous provinces – as in the noted case of the younger Melania – the result of careful or scrupulous purchases, illegal gains, inheritances, marriage dowries, or imperial gifts.

In Britain, the economic operation of the villas by the fourth century was clearly founded on tenurial control, land-ownership, and the ability to extract wealth from the land (Dark and Dark, 1997: 71). The majority of villas and non-villa farms would have been agriculturally based, and many of the larger villas probably formed the centre of an estate. This is exemplified at Winterton (Lincs.), where a number of possible estate buildings have been discovered (Stead, 1976). Despite many attempts to identify estate boundaries, notably at Barton Court Farm (Oxon.) (Miles, 1986), no Romano-British estate boundaries are definitely known. Dark and Dark (1997: 74) suggest that

complex patterns of land tenure may render Romano-British estates unreconstructable on current evidence, and it is possible that several villas could have existed within one estate, perhaps with the major landowner in a courtyard villa at the centre, with tenants or officials in less elaborate structures on the same estate. This would certainly have been the case if a colonate system was in operation, whereby landowners required the help of labourers or workers to cultivate land, and used tenants rather than slaves as labourers (Millett, 1990: 203). This may have been the situation at Stanwick (Northants.) (Neal, 1989), and the villa at Woodchester (Glos.) (Clarke, 1982), with its outer courtyard of farm buildings (Fig.2.2), would surely have formed the focus of a large agricultural estate, whilst simultaneously serving as the palace for a local potentate.

Certainly by the fourth century the rural landscape in southern England was densely populated, and comprised a range of villa and non-villa settlements with complex patterns of land tenure. On current evidence the general picture is one of villas as agricultural estate centres. The wealthy villas that form the subject of this discussion would have dominated this landscape visually, particularly in the south and south west, and in many cases may have formed the economic focus of large and productive estates. Although there are many examples of large and elaborate villas in this period, at both a provincial and regional level, such villa sites must still be seen as exceptional. As yet, however, the broader nature of these estates remains to be investigated in depth.

Beyond the Luxury – The Fate(s) of the Elite Villas

What current field survey data overall reveal is that the fifth century generally marks a downturn in rural activity on both 'peasant' and elite levels. Insecurity must have been a prime factor in this, especially in the frontier provinces and in Britain where the end of the official Roman administration after AD 410 may well have prompted the removal of some elites to the continent. More central provinces did not avoid this insecurity – Italy, for example, suffered various raids in the north and, in the early fifth century, the extended movements of Alaric's Visigoths (see Christie, 1996 with bibliography); and the settlement of barbarian groups to help farm and defend areas may not have been conducive to maintaining elite retreats. This 'militarisation' and 'barbarisation' of space indeed may have prompted the demise of Desenzano and the apparent transformation of Sirmione from elite holiday resort to fortified fleet base. Urban damage, the effects of war and plague on the landscape were cumulative and it is generally agreed that a level of population loss resulted; where urban demands fall and insecurity exists, so the ability of and demands on the land must have diminished. Reduced demands affected

wealth and an ability to display. The picture is patchy, however – witness Sidonius and friends still residing in fine villas in south-west Gaul despite the varied politico-military traumas affecting fifth-century Gaul and Spain. We cannot easily question how well the owners of the luxury villas coped and whether their seats of social power remained unchanged or whether many simply returned to the towns and cities (on the question of 'squatter' activity, see Introduction (Chapter 1) to this volume).

Most importantly we should ask whether the complexes as laid out in the late third and first half of the fourth centuries endured unchanged into the fifth century: it is particularly striking how much of the literature generated from the estates is of fifth-century date and yet we largely lack fifth-century mosaics to go with these (Aquitaine forms a notable exception – Balmelle, 1980; 1987; Percival, 1992: 162. Cf. Keay, 1988: 215 for Baños de Valdearados). Were fourth-century mosaics maintained, kept polished and still admired (and understood)? Were wall paintings touched up and remodelled? Perhaps this was the case. And yet by the early fifth century the vast majority of the elite villa owners will have become Christians – such as Ausonius and Paulinus (Ripoll and Arce, 2000: 107-111). In this modified social context, were these mosaics in keeping with the new religion? Were they viewed as part of the glorious Roman heritage? Were they considered old-fashioned (if we can speak of 'fashion' as a valid social construct)? Surprisingly, perhaps, there appear to be very few recorded cases of deliberate mutilation of ancient mosaics.

Where decay of a villa and thus its art and architecture occurs, whether partial/gradual or through rapid abandonment, we should question whether this indicates the owner's loss, economic damage, accidental/deliberate destruction, or new owners (for example, Germans). Again the archaeology is problematic: we cannot easily identify whether and for how long and how extensively sites were cleared out before (and if) being abandoned or if they were pillaged; robbing need not all have been by 'barbarians', since local townsfolk/farmers could have assisted in this as could the Church, since churches and monasteries often re-utilised architectural elements from villas (see DeLaine, 1991). Nor can we easily gauge the speed or nature of abandonment – that is, overnight, across weeks or partial (quitting unkempt rooms and redundant baths first). In instances where the villa is overlain by a church or monastery it is rarely easy to show a direct continuity – although such transformation strictly denotes a *dis*continuity of form and function (one well-excavated example is San Vincenzo al Volturno: Hodges, 1995: 122–37). On some French and British sites, systematic excavations have traced timber constructions in or around seemingly abandoned Roman villas (see Percival, 1992). Are these new (alien) occupants, 'squatters', or the old owning family in economically-reduced straits? If new owners, why take on a crumbling complex? And where then did the old ones go – back to the fortified towns, or

perhaps abroad to a safer province, or perhaps even to the Eastern Empire? There are some documented transfers of senators/elites to Constantinople in the early fifth century in the wake of Alaric's siege of Rome; in addition author-senators such as Rutilius Namatianus spent most time in Rome and rarely attended his Gallic estates (and we do not know if he did rebuild those destroyed by the Visigoths there in the 410s); but that does not mean the estate lands ceased to be farmed, as farm-workers or bailiffs may have continued their efforts.

For both of the key Sicilian sites considered above, the fifth and sixth centuries seem to denote periods of decay: Patti Marina suffered badly from earthquake damage *c.* AD 400 and saw subsequent transformation into a presumed village complex (estate workers' houses?) (Wilson, 1990: 206, 335). At Piazza Armerina, patchy maintenance can be recognised until an apparent shift in emphasis to nearby Sofiana; no trace of Byzantine or Arab settlement occurs over the villa, but a village community was established during Norman rule in the twelfth century (De Miro, 1988). For each we must speculate whether the wealthy owners had died, been dispossessed, or even transferred to Constantinople (Sicily of course suffered various Vandal raids from Africa). At some point such estates may have shifted into imperial thence Church control and a more functional agricultural role assumed. Perhaps to this context should be set the apparent late and post-Roman vitality of various 'agricultural villages', many previously receiving official listing as posts in the third-century *Itinerarium Antonini* – settlements such as the *massae Calvisiana* and *Philosophiana*; these may have once formed the villages of workers attached to specific estates and provided crafts and market points for estate produce. Sofiana can be identified with *Philosophiana* and excavations here have revealed fourth-century baths and a fifth/sixth-century basilica with cemetery (Wilson, 1990: 223–33, 335). However, too little investigation means the apparent transition in emphasis from elite villas to 'agro-centres' remains hypothetical. On mainland Italy, the case of Monte Gelato could form a comparison (Potter and King, 1997).

For fifth-century Britain, the removal of Roman officialdom instigated a period of instability that had a profound effect on both rural and urban settlements and their societies – although, in reality, the full character of these in *c.* AD 400 remains uncertain. An old image of frightened Romano-Britons fleeing in the face of bands of Saxons persists, yet the archaeological evidence is increasingly pointing to a less dramatic scenario in which aspects of rural continuity occur (on late antique Britain, see Dark, this volume (Chapter 10)): key sites such as Withington villa (Finberg, 1955), Orton Hall Farm (Mackreath, 1978), Barton Court Farm (Miles, 1986) and Frocester (Price, 2000) move us well beyond the dismissive 'squatter occupation'. Now we can start to question the transformation of Roman villas into Anglo-Saxon farms; the union or relationship of Romano-British farmers and in-/newcomers; the

tenacity of the older farming communities; and the efforts at 'continuity'. Further west we can even consider a transformation into monastic estates (Pearce, 1982; Dark, this volume (Chapter 10)).

Despite this fragile evidence for continuity, it is important to note that the ostentatious display of a romanised lifestyle was no longer possible, or no longer important to the villa inhabitants of the fifth century. The evidence for continuity that we have evokes a lifestyle very different from that registered for much of the fourth century. Dark (1994: 39) has convincingly proposed that social divisions, created by the tenurial system, were exacerbated by the religious differences between the elite and other groups. Villas themselves were integral to the creation and maintenance of these divisions, and the result may have been a society increasingly weakened through social and religious differences (Scott, 1994; 2000). By the late fourth and early fifth centuries, these weaknesses may have precipitated the downfall of the elite, who had become progressively isolated at the apex of a society that no longer recognised their style of leadership. Finally we might note that some of the larger British villas and much land may have belonged to non-British and thus absentee landowners such as Melania; we cannot gauge the impact of the 'release' from such distant leadership.

In all of the instances noted, however, there appears to be *some* form of continued activity: villa sites and their lands did not just cease to be, even if their architecture and social role could not be sustained; the art, likewise, must have lost most of its meaning and place. But we have considered a fairly long time span – perhaps a hundred years in some cases, in others more – and we should expect change and loss, especially in the complex last century of Roman control. Excavation and survey duly show that rural activity persisted after the demise of the great villas; this should come as no surprise since towns generally continued and mouths needed feeding. Rural settlement was geared once more to relatively small-scale production; the only real profits lay in the hands of the Church and of monasteries, these now the major players in the landscape.

Summary

The fourth-century villa opulence reflected investments in display of personal wealth, power, authority, and connections. To a degree we can view this as a 'flight to the villas' and a rejection of the towns, and yet the owners of these villas remained urban elites, since the towns were where authority was still conceived and enacted; the land, by contrast, was where wealth came from. Towns were at a lower ebb and were refocussed on security and, in time, on the Church; hence the scope for traditional forms of display – that is, public games and buildings, largesse, festivals, etc. – was progressively reduced. The

polarisation of wealth into the hands of the old elite led to closer management of these moneys and a choice of *inter familia* display: both town houses and villas were elaborated, but whereas the town had finite space, the villas offered a forum for personal expansion and indulgence. They were at the same time reflections of imperial rural and suburban retreats, with the emperor as always the model to emulate.

This paper has shown how artistic, architectural and archaeological analyses fruitfully combine to demonstrate the nature, depth and scope of such 'ruralised' wealth: decor, designs, plans, setting all emerge as interwoven expressions of individual power and culture. But we are still only beginning to investigate and understand these sophisticated social messages: whilst various villas have been excavated, few have seen systematic and scientific scrutiny, and links between objects, place and period remain ill-defined. Archaeological field survey is meanwhile generating much valuable information, but its potential for understanding late Roman elite villas is still largely untapped: detailed scrutiny of land sequences around the opulent and flourishing fourth-century villas of Britain, Spain and southern Gaul is vital to clarify the physical impact of such elites on the landscape.

This narrow rural opulence was undone by various circumstances, mostly beyond the control of individual lords: warfare (invasions/internal) disrupted the provinces and thus the vast estates controlled by the elite; as such wide-flung properties collapsed, so too did the income which their lands created; insecurity will further have prompted the elite to stick more to the cities and some chose to withdraw eastwards to the more stable Eastern Empire; finally, the rise and victory of the Church modified the directions of the old elite as church building became, chiefly from the early fifth century, a new vehicle for public display. Whereas in the fourth century elite take-up of Christianity appears somewhat patchy, by the early fifth century most deemed themselves proper Christians (though they might interpret this in different ways); hence some villas gain churches, whilst others become monasteries. The elite, here, were 'moving with the times'. Even in western Britain a like movement may have been evident, despite a loss of Roman order. The letters of Sidonius show an ability in some areas for old elite values and religious devotion to co-exist; but more generally the former symbols of elitist display were fading. Yet the rich repertoire of architecture and mosaic art seen in fourth-century villas did not by any means disappear. From the fifth century mosaic was exploited for the decoration of divine spaces, most vividly expressed in glittering wall and ceiling mosaics of churches in Rome and Ravenna, but also evident in the polychrome floor mosaics of rural churches such as Torre de Palma (see Maloney and Hale, 1996). In Italy, elite expression had shifted to a new plane – the creation of Heaven on Earth. Thus Ovid's description of the Palace of the Sun cited at the start of this paper might equally well evoke the dazzling churches of late antique and early medieval Europe.

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Chapter 3

Interpreting the Transformation of Late Roman Villas: The Case of *Hispania*

Alexandra Chavarría Arnau

Introduction

The fourth century AD was a period of renaissance for rural residential architecture. In the Iberian Peninsula, as in other areas of the western Roman Empire, many villas, built in the first and second centuries AD, were partly or completely rebuilt and their residential buildings endowed with monumental architectural forms and luxury decorations. At the same time other rural villas experienced significant changes in their organisation and lost their residential character, which was replaced by new, essentially agricultural or industrial, functions (for an overview see Chavarría and Lewit, forthcoming). A first phase of such changes took place in *Hispania* from the third century onwards and more commonly during the fourth and fifth centuries, affecting principally the villas in the east and south of the Iberian Peninsula. Contemporaneously, the villas located in inland regions (Castilian plateau and *Lusitania*) experienced an enlargement and redecoration of their residential buildings in the fourth and fifth centuries. A second phase of transformation took place from the middle of the fifth century, from when the complexes of the inland regions also experienced more or less drastic changes in their character, which led to a gradual disintegration and loss of their main residential areas; these came to be occupied by much more rudimentary forms of habitat evidenced by poorly built or timber walls, huts and hearths, frequently associated with burials or sometimes with a cultic use of the site.

Data from villa excavations carried out in the Iberian Peninsula before the 1980s were analysed by J.-G. Gorges (1979) and Mª C Fernández Castro (1982), two fundamental works, despite their lack of accurate information for the later phases of the villas. Indeed, archaeological work until the 1980s focussed almost exclusively on the discovery and conservation of the decorative elements of the residential buildings, especially the mosaics, ignoring any traces of later phases, which were generally removed/destroyed

without even being documented. In addition, until virtually the 1990s, Spanish research was dominated by a Gibbonian vision of 'Decline and Fall', interpreting all changes which took place from the third century onwards in relation to the dramatic consequences of barbarian invasions: widespread destruction of villas, abandonment of cities, and general ruralisation of late Roman society (Gorges, 1979: 42–8; for a critique of this vision, see Lewit, 2001).

Thanks to an improvement in excavation, documentation and dating methods, more critical analysis of the texts, and wider interest in the late antique period, considerably more data about the later phases of villas have been recovered in recent years. The discovery, analysis and publication of sites such as Vilauba, Torre Llauder, Baños de la Reina, El Val, Tinto, La Torrecilla, El Saucedo, El Ruedo, La Sevillana, Torre de Palma and Milreu (see Appendix for location and related bibliography*) have meant a giant step towards a re-evaluation of the late Roman countryside in Spain and specifically of the transformation of late antique villas.

The aims of this chapter are to analyse the functional changes which villas in the Iberian Peninsula experienced in Late Antiquity; to propose a typological and chronological classification of these changes; and to formulate hypotheses to explain these transformations and the disappearance of Roman villas in *Hispania*.

Characteristics and Evolution of Late Antique Villas in *Hispania*

Archaeological data show important differences in the characteristics and evolution of the villas in eastern and southern coastal areas on the one hand and, on the other, the inland Iberian Peninsula (see a similar differentiation in Olmo, 1992 regarding urban evolution and ceramic distributions). This divergence can probably be explained by differences in topography and in the degree of urbanisation between these areas – these circumstances determining the system of exploitation on these properties and the characteristics of their villas (Fig. 3.1).

Eastern and Southern Hispania

The landscape features of the coastal region led to the existence of medium and small estates. These areas were much more urbanised than the interior of *Hispania*, and the local aristocracies who formed the main property owners

* Note that as well as a general end bibliography, the Appendix of villas includes site-specific references. References in the text of this chapter will thus appear in either of these two bibliographies.

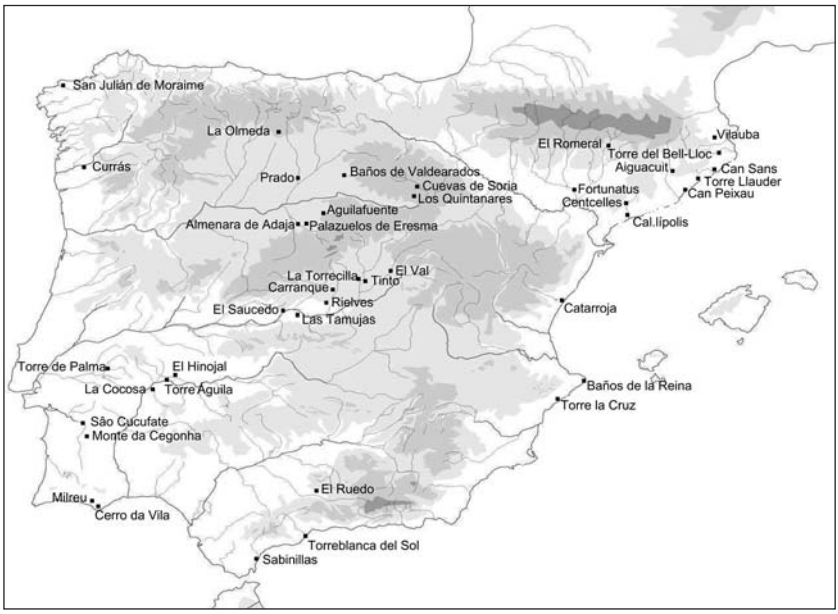

Figure 3.1 Map of *Hispania* noting those villas cited in the text

were much more involved in urban life – a pattern which probably influenced the way in which they managed their properties and their relationships with the villas.

These villas have a basically productive character. Residential areas are generally modest, although bath-houses are frequently attested. Typical sites are Vilauba, Can Sans, Can Peixau, L'Aiguacuit, Sabinillas or Cerro da Vila. A higher degree of luxury occurs at suburban villas like Torre del Bell-Lloc (*Gerunda*), Torre Llauder (*Iluro*) and Centcelles (*Tarraco*). The *partes rusticae* are located near the residential quarters, frequently taking up part of the same building. Botanical data, agricultural tools and productive installations reveal that polyculture was the predominant characteristic of these rural settlements although specialisations are recognised in viticulture (as at Darró), oleoculture (for example, Vilauba) or fish production (for example, Baños de la Reina, Torreblanca del Sol, Sabinillas).

During the fourth century, some of these villas (notably those near urban centres) were partially rebuilt with more complex architectural designs and increased decoration. Contemporaneously, other settlements in the same coastal areas experienced profound structural and functional changes through the installation of agricultural or industrial elements (*dolia*, presses, tanks,

ovens, *opus signinum* pavements) in residential rooms, often destroying decorative elements such as mosaics or baths facilities.

Inland Hispania

In the central Iberian Peninsula and in Lusitania, the existence of enormous plains favoured the formation of immense properties. Monumental villas (Fig. 3.2) such as Cuevas de Soria, La Olmeda, Almenara de Adaja, Aguilafuente, El Val, Rielves and Carranque have been discovered on the Castilian plateau (the Meseta) and in the *territoria* of Lusitania's most prominent cities (Sao Cucufate, El Hinojal, La Cocosa); these point to the wealth and power of their *domini* and the extent of their estates, just as described by Palladius: *Aedificium pro agri merito et pro fortuna domini oportet institui* (*Opus Agriculturae* I, 8). It will be argued below that the rural cemeteries linked to these villas are also evidence of estate importance.

Villa locations are mainly in the valleys of the rivers Ebro, Duero, Tajo, Guadiana and their tributaries. Common features of these complexes are the existence of a monumental *pars urbana*, organised around a central peristyle, with private baths and numerous reception rooms, often endowed with apsidal forms. Geometrical and figurative mosaics, with a preference for circus and hunting scenes or mythological subjects, are the main evidence of luxurious decorative programs in these buildings (Guardia, 1992; Arce, 1993b; Morand, 1994). Sculptured architectural decoration and collections of statues, such as those found at El Ruedo or Milreu, were also common (Koppel, 1993).

The *partes rusticae* are separate from the residential buildings or even distant from them, dispersed through the property. Although in many cases these agricultural quarters are quite unknown, some well analysed installations, plus palaeobotanical and zoological studies show a predominance of cereal production and cattle raising (note, for example, the particularly detailed analyses for the villas of La Torrecilla – Blasco Bosqued and Lucas Pellicer, 2000: 181–232 – and El Saucedo – Aguado Molina *et al.,* 2000). In *Lusitania*, many villas have installations for the production of oil and wine (La Cocosa, Torre Aguila, Torre de Palma, São Cucufate, Milreu). Zoological data, tools such as knives or spearheads and mosaic representations point to the importance of hunting, an activity which gained a significant role in villa life, not only from an economic point of view but as one of the pre-eminent activities of aristocratic *otium* (Arce, 1997).

Dispersed habitational structures, sometimes in the form of nucleated settlements, are known in the vicinity of some villas such as Los Quintanares (Ortego, 1977: 287), Almenara de Adaja (Mañanes, 2002: 66) and La Olmeda (Nozal Calvo, 1995). These structures, in which a rustic population dependent on the property could have lived, can perhaps be identified with the *tuguriae*, *casae, pagi* or *uici* referred to in some texts.

Whilst most of these settlements originated in the earlier Empire, their monumentalisation dates to the fourth century; generally, they continued functioning without dramatic changes until the mid-fifth century AD.

Reflections on the Villa Boom in Fourth-Century *Hispania*

Traditional research interpreted this extraordinary development of villas during the fourth century in terms of 'crisis and decline', connecting it with the conflicts of the third century, a flight of the aristocracy from the cities, and a generalised ruralisation of society. According to this hypothesis, urban decay implied an important change in the traditional economic relations between town and country, with the development of an autarchic economy in the villas, and a dependence of urban centres on imports (Keay, 1981: 464; 1988: 190).

In current scholarship, abuse of the 'third-century crisis' as an interpretation to explain all the changes of Late Antiquity is no longer sustainable and the picture of generally ruined and abandoned Spanish urban centres has been properly rejected (Arce, 1993a; Díaz, 2000; Kulikowski, 2001). Many cities maintained their economic, political and social prestige and the texts reveal that 'in normal times, the city continued to be the preferred place of residence for the notables of the provinces' (Brown, 1988: 21). Rich villas built in the vicinity of towns such as *Augusta Emerita* (Mérida), *Pax Iulia* (Beja), *Complutum* (Alcalá de Henares) and *Tarraco* (Tarragona), were probably the residences of the urban administrative elite, and thus also point to the vitality of these urban centres. The monumentality and luxury decoration, the presence of imported materials and particular types of objects (*contorniati* from La Olmeda, for example – Campo, 1990: 39–41), and textual evidence (see below), all suggest that the *domini* of the Castilian plateau villas were of very high status, in some cases even senatorial aristocrats or members of the imperial court. The interpretation of these villas' development in the fourth century in terms of isolation and autarchy should therefore be rejected.

Further, textual evidence shows that in many cases 'the rural *potentes* were also the urban élite who supplied much of the town's consumption needs' (Whittaker, 1990: 111; see also Vera, 1983: 491). Imported materials found in villas (for example, Carranque) and rural products documented in cities suggest a continuity in the exchange patterns between the two at least until the middle of the fifth century. At São Cucufate and *Pax Iulia*, villa and city present a similar coin circulation profile (Alarção *et al.*, 1990: 195–233). Fourth-century coins have been documented at most of the villas of the Iberian Peninsula, and at some sites (for example, Centcelles, La Olmeda, El Saucedo, Torre de Palma, São Cucufate, and Milreu) this is the best

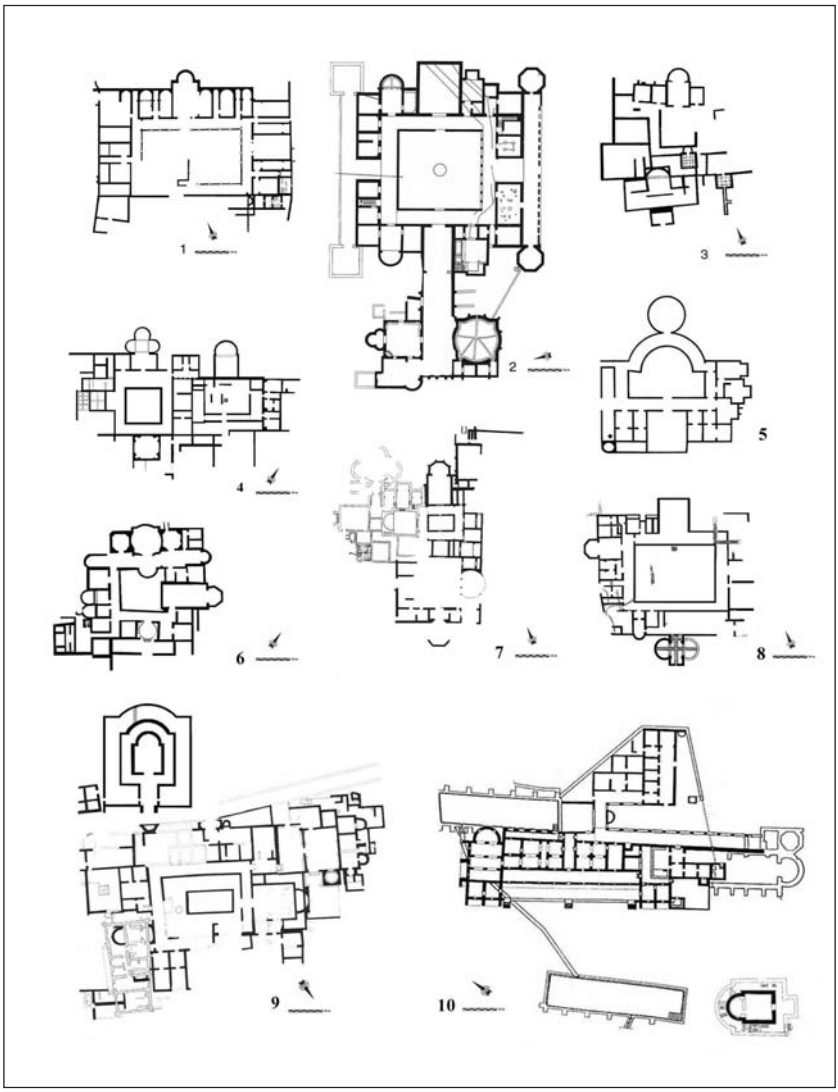

Figure 3.2 **Some of the principal late antique villas of *Hispania* as discussed in the text: 1. Cuevas de Soria; 2. La Olmeda; 3. Prado; 4. Los Quintanares; 5. Rienda; 6. Carranque; 7. Almenara de Adaja; 8. Aguilafuente; 9. Milreu; 10. São Cucufate**

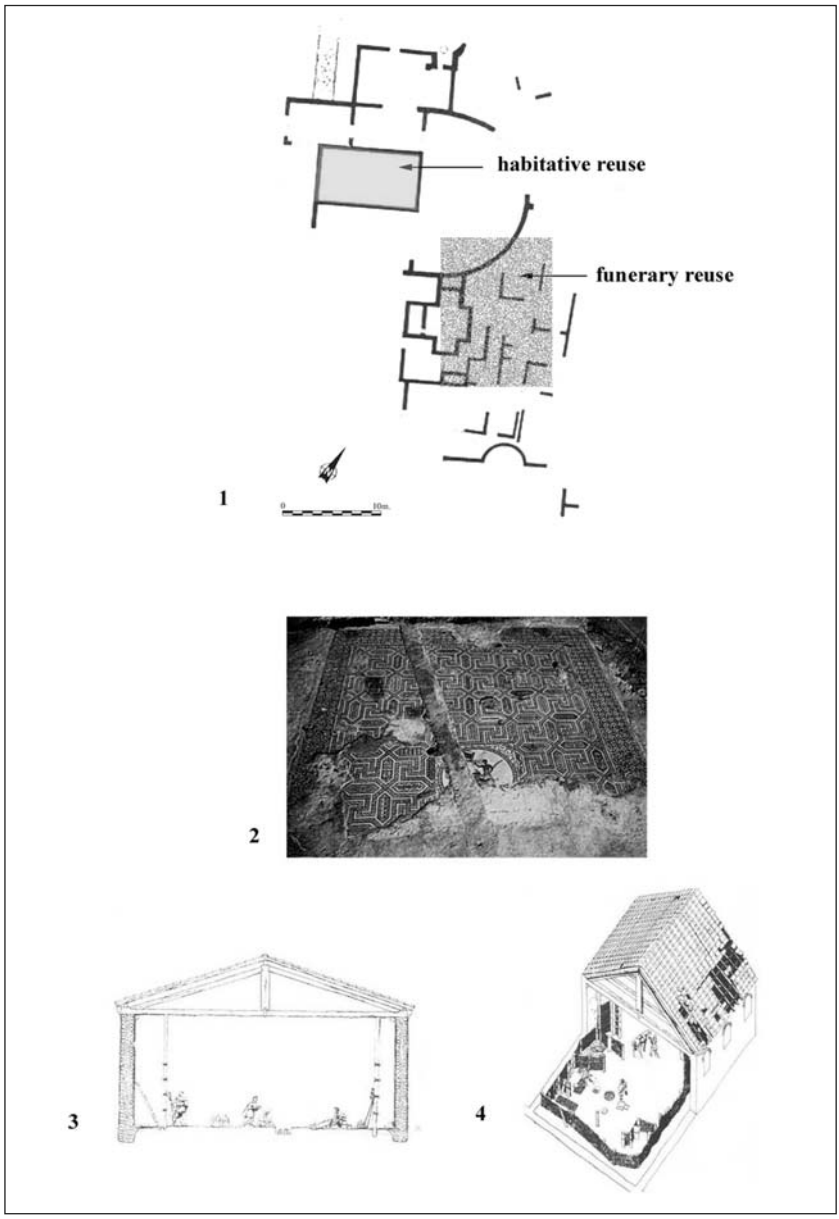

Figure 3.3 **The villa of El Val (Alcalá de Henares). 1. *Pars urbana* (after Rascón Marqués, 1995: Fig. 1, p. 308, changes by Chavarría); 2–4. Reused room with the mosaic of the 'auriga victorioso' (after Rascón Marqués *et al.*, 1991: Figs. 7 and 8, pp. 194, 196)**

represented period from a numismatic point of view (Bost, 1992–93: 222–3; Menéndez Bueyes, 2002: 283–5). The principal towns indeed continued to be active centres of trade and redistribution of products.

The Fifth Century: Barbarians and Villas?

The chronicles of Orosius and Hydatius inform us of continual political conflicts, revolts of *bagaudae* and barbarian incursions in fifth-century *Hispania*. These repeated references led many researchers in the past to paint a picture of generalised destruction in villas and cities during the first half of the fifth century. And yet, there is no obvious archaeological evidence to support this view. Some archaeological reports (published mostly between 1960 and 1980) refer to ash layers and rebuildings in villas such as Romeral (Diez and Mercé, 1968: 773), Prado (Neira and Mañanes, 1998: 48 with previous references), Los Quintanares (Ortego, 1977: 292) and Sabinillas (Posac Mon and Rodríguez, 1979) and these were linked by researchers to destructions caused by Vandals, Alans and Sueves; similarly, their abandonment was often broadly related to the Visigothic 'invasion'. However, it is unclear how extensive these destruction layers were, how they were dated, and on what basis the archaeologists concluded that these sites had been suddenly abandoned.

In contrast, recent archaeological research (see Chavarría, 1996: 169–71 for north-east Spain) has shown the impossibility of identifying destruction layers in some of these buildings; instead archaeologists now point to a process of gradual abandonment, sometimes preceded by significant changes in the nature of the habitat. At the El Val villa (Fig. 3.3), these changes have been related to the temporary settlement of barbarians at the beginning of the fifth century (Rascón *et al.*, 1991). An accurate analysis of the last phases of occupation revealed the presence, in the main reception room, of a 14 x 19m wooden structure, plus storage pits, hearths and ovens. Among the finds were a fragment of imitation *terra sigillata chiara* D, a spearhead, and a hand mill. The excavators dated the building to *c.* AD 400 and linked it to 'grupos germánicos que vivían sobre el terreno quizás en gran medida del saqueo y que utilizan sistemas de vida importados del norte de *limes* (…) gentes de vida seminómada que tan sólo viven algún tiempo en el Val y que habría que relacionar con las invasiones de inicios del siglo V' (Rascón *et al.*, 1990: 197). However, the evidence used to date this phase, as well as to offer the ethno-cultural interpretation of the structure and the military character of the spearhead are very debatable (Azkárate and Quirós, 2001: 45).

In fact, Vandals, Alans and Sueves have practically no archaeological existence in fifth-century Iberia. This invisibility supports the current theory that these *gentes* were deeply romanized (Pohl, 1997; Arce, 2001) and it may

be that their settlements profited from earlier structures, whether villas or larger settlements, and did not destroy them. In spite of the apologetic character of Orosius' work, it is possible that his description of barbarian settlement was not far from reality when he related that: '*Quamquam et post hoc quoque continuo barbari exsecrati gladios suos ad aratra conuersi sunt residuosque Romanos ut socios modo et amicos fouent ...*' (*Historiarum adversum paganos* VII, 41, 7).

Further, texts continue to refer to the presence of rural landowners throughout the whole fifth century. The best-known are Dydimus, Verenianus and their cousins Teodosiolus and Lagodius (relatives of the emperor Honorius), who raised an army from their estates to fight the forces of the usurper Contantine III (Orosius, *Historiarum* VII, 40; Sozomenus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 9, 11, 4. See Balil, 1964: 186; Arce, 1982: 78–9). Hilarius, Bishop of Rome, refers to the *honorati et possessores* from different areas of the Ebro valley in AD 465 (*Epistola* 16, 1; Thiel, 1867: 165–6) and Isidore recalls the opposition of the landowners of *Tarraconensis* to the Visigoths in AD 470 (*Historia Gothorum* 34).

Archaeological data support the veracity of this information. The stylistic and stratigraphic analysis of mosaic pavements reveals that many villas of the Ebro and Duero Valleys maintained residential use throughout the whole fifth century, as is also verified by studies of Aquitanian villas (Balmelle, 2001: 98–122).

Further testimony to the continued vitality of Spanish villas are the large cemeteries known as the 'Duero necropolises' on the Castilian plateau, with a chronology embracing the whole fourth and fifth centuries. After a long debate in the last century on the interpretation of these necropolises, the consensus now is that they should be identified as the burial places of rural communities (Sanz, 1986; Fuentes, 1989), probably linked to huge villas, as revealed by the cemeteries of La Olmeda and Cabriana (Chavarría, 2001a). The funerary deposits (including agricultural tools, knives, spearheads, ceramics, glass, belt-buckles) link these people to agricultural and hunting activities, without excluding the possibility that at particular times (and as related in the texts), they were organised into private armies in the service of the *dominus* on whose property they worked. Whilst from the middle of the fifth century, the presence of the owners of these villas increasingly disappears, it seems clear that the buildings were not always wholly abandoned.

Architectural and Functional Transformations in Late Roman Villas

From the third century in the east and south of Spain, and from the fifth century in the central plateau and *Lusitania*, many villas underwent significant

changes which affected the organisation and function of these buildings. Characteristic elements of the aristocratic Roman way of life, such as mosaics or baths, were destroyed and replaced by the installation of agricultural or industrial structures. Residential rooms were subdivided or reused for the construction of huts, or occupied by burials – a pattern documented elsewhere in the western Roman Empire (Lewit, 1991 and 2003; Augenti, 1992; van Ossel, 1992; Ortalli, 1996; Brogiolo, 1996; Ripoll and Arce, 2000; Christie, this volume (Chapter 1)).

An accurate analysis of these changes in the Iberian Peninsula leads us to connect these reforms to new, different functions given to former residential areas, namely:

- Productive reuse of residential rooms
- Habitational reuse of residential rooms
- Funerary reuse of residential or productive areas
- Cultic reuse of residential rooms.

It must be stressed that these are not closed and independent categories and that sometimes more than one of these types of transformation occurs in the same villa, such as a productive as well as habitational reuse of space. When an area of a villa was reused to build a church, it is frequently associated with the presence of burials, although cemeteries appear on some villas without the presence of cultic buildings. The presence of burials in buildings reused for productive or habitational functions is not infrequent. The difficulty of dating these transformations and the frequent lack of funerary deposits in the burials have prompted many archaeologists to consider both forms of reuse as successive processes. However, our present understanding of post-Roman funerary practices indicates that co-existence of the living and dead was not an uncommon phenomenon at this time, and thus in many cases productive or habitational use contemporaneous with a funerary use can be proposed.

Productive Reuse of Residential Rooms

This process is mainly attested in the coastal areas of eastern and southern Spain (Chavarría, 1996). The typical type of settlement affected is that of small- or medium-size villas (Vilauba, Can Sans, Aiguacuit, Sabinillas), although it is also documented on larger sites (for example, Torre Llauder, Baños de la Reina, El Ruedo) (Figs 3.4–3.6).

The change in function is most evident when it takes place in the main residential rooms, because the new installations are often constructed directly on the mosaic pavements (as at Torre Llauder, Sabinillas) or set in the bath-house, where the hypocausts are filled in or dismantled or their pools divided into smaller spaces (Can Sans, Baños de la Reina, Torreblanca del Sol). The

Figure 3.4 The villa sites of Vilauba (Girona) – areas of productive reuse are shown darker and * denotes burial (after Castanyer and Tremoleda, 1999: fig. 109, p.121) and Can Sans (Barcelona) – productive reuse area shown darker (after Ribas, 1949)

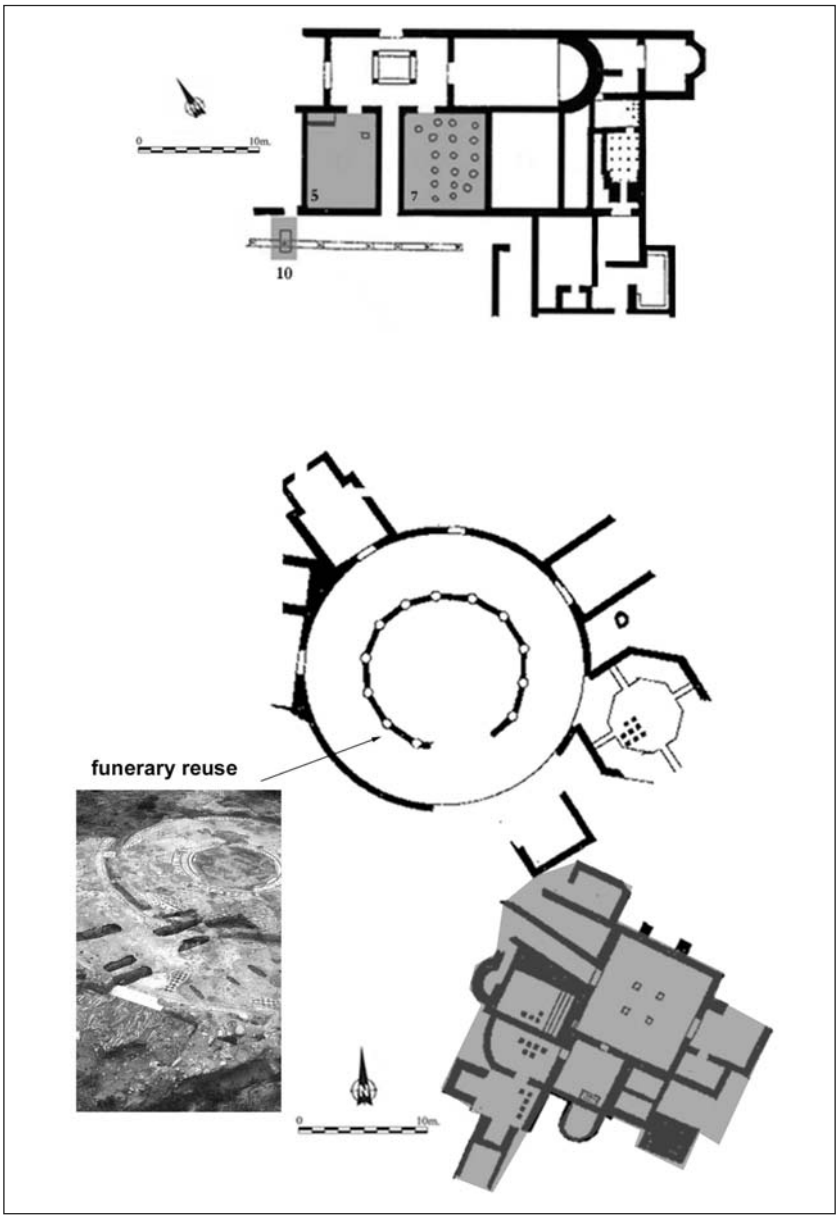

Figure 3.5 **The villas at Torre Llauder (Barcelona) – productive reuse area shown darker (after Clariana and Prevosti, 1988: p.16) and Baños de la Reina (Alicante) (productive reuse area shown darker (after Abascal et al., 2000: 51, 53)**

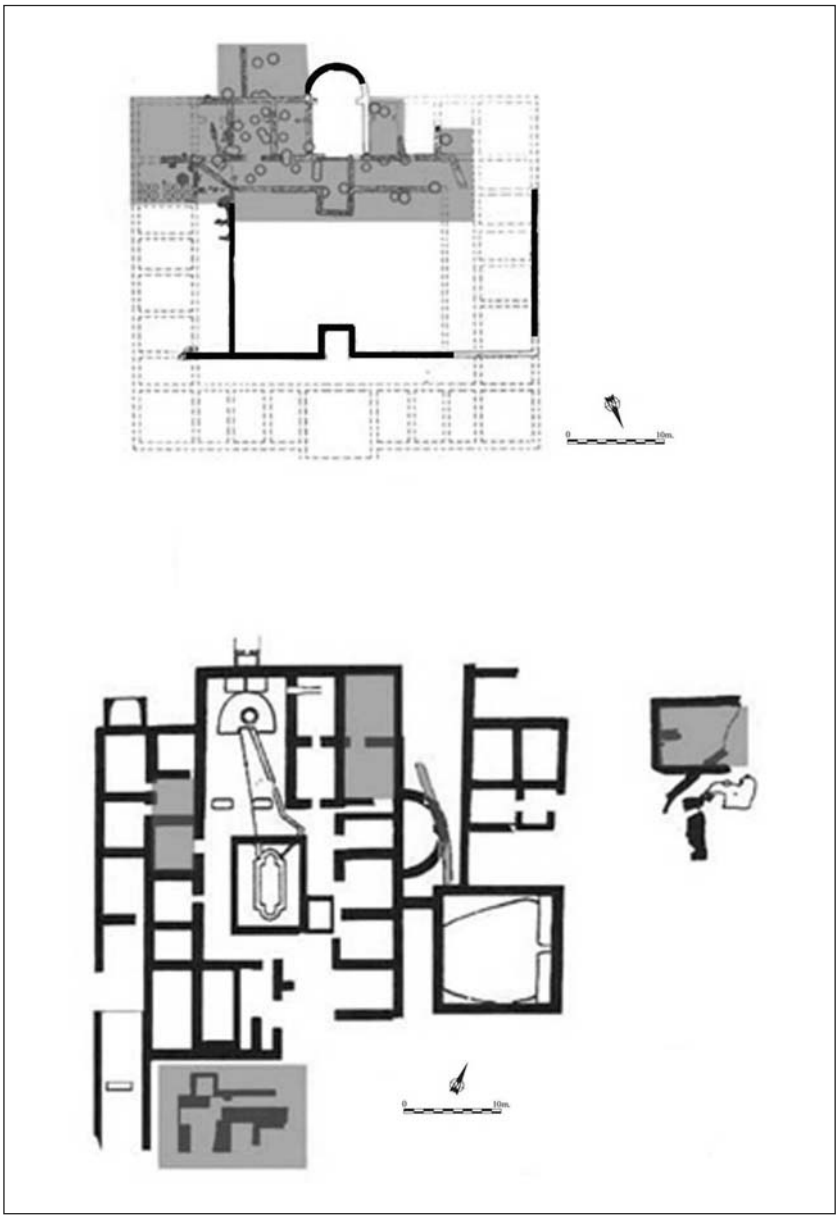

Figure 3.6 The sites of La Torrecilla (Madrid) – productive reuse area shown darker (Blasco Bosqued and Lucas Pellicer, 2000: pl.XII, p.378) and El Ruedo (Córdoba) (Vaquerizo Gil and Carrillo Díaz Pines, 1995: fig.9, p.127).

preference for reusing thermal complexes can possibly be linked to their particular structural characteristics, which made them more durable, or to the existence of elements such as pipes, pools or hydraulic floors which were suited for the new productive functions.

In some cases (for example, Aiguacuit, Baños de la Reina, Torreblanca del Sol), these reforms coincide with the construction of new productive structures. Sometimes certain rooms of the buildings seem to retain their original functions (Torre Llauder, La Torrecilla), whereas other areas situated nearby gained a clearly productive or processing character.

Quite precise dating has sometimes been proposed for the beginning of this process. Thus at Torreblanca del Sol the wholesale remodelling of the baths through the division of the pools and construction of new installations dedicated to the processing of fish products, can be assigned to the mid-third century (Puertas Tricas, 1991–92). After a fire in the third century, the villa of Vilauba was completely reconstructed by the mid-fourth century with a new productive character, as revealed by its oil press and tanks and by the general use of new *opus signinum* pavements (Castanyer and Tremoleda, 1999: 149–59). At Torre Llauder, the conversion of one of the main rooms into a *horreum* (18 *dolia* were set into the mosaic floor) and the provision of tanks in the next room and the peristyle, are dated after the fourth century (Clariana and Prevosti, 1994. Wine production and storage are likely here). The end of the fourth century or beginning of the fifth is the chronology proposed for the transformation of the baths at Baños de la Reina, where pools were divided, some floors paved with *opus signinum* and the hypocaust went out of use (Abascal *et al*., 2000: 52–5). The installation of new tanks, presses and ovens in the villa of El Ruedo post-dates *c.* AD 450 (Vaquerizo and Carrillo, 1995: 132). However, in general, chronologies are vague, extending broadly between the fourth and the sixth centuries.

Habitational Reuse of Residential Rooms

The new productive character of some villas was sometimes accompanied by a habitational reuse of some rooms. At other villas, an exclusively habitational reuse of former residential areas is also attested. This phenomenon is demonstrated by the presence of poorly-built walls used to subdivide rooms, post-holes which reveal the construction of a wooden building, hearths and rough flooring. Generally, the descriptions given by archaeologists of these changes are so vague that it is not possible to state precisely their scope and function, that is to say, whether the new features implied productive or habitational reuse or both, or the level of such adaptation. At Catarroja, we are told of the reuse of the villa structures in Late Antiquity by 'familias visigodas' (García Gelabert and García Díez, 1997: 53); at the villa of Torre-la-Cruz, the subdivision of some rooms with crude walls has been dated in the

sixth century (Gutiérrez, 2000: 109); the villa of Los Quintanares is described as 'finalmente, abandonada, fue refugio de gentes que se albergaron pobremente en sus muros' (Ortego, 1977: 292); and at Prado, the existence of 'garbage' and pits with late antique material led the excavators to talk about an occupation 'de carácter poco estable' after the abandonment of this villa (Sánchez, 1997: 725–6).

One of the best studied examples in Spain of habitational reoccupation is El Val, where a large wooden structure was built in the main reception room after the fourth century, containing storage pits, hearths and ovens. Analysis of the postholes and other elements in the former mosaic floor permit the reconstruction of a room plan with differentiated areas dedicated to kitchen, habitation, storage and stalls (Rascón *et al.*, 1991: 188–93, 198). A similar reoccupation has been identified in the nearby villa of Tinto, with several huts, subdividing walls, pits, hearths and rubbish dumps. At both sites, large burial areas have also been documented near the villas, partly reusing some sections of the buildings. Their excavators judge these cemeteries to be later than the habitational reuse, although contemporaneous co-existence (at least in the first phases of the cemeteries) cannot be excluded.

Despite their lack of precision, two more examples should be mentioned. In the villa of Las Tamujas, the excavator concluded that after its abandonment the residential building was reoccupied and converted into a '*uicus* visigodo' (Palomeque, 1955: 312); a similar phenomenon is postulated at La Cocosa, where several quadrangular buildings were detected (Serra Ráfols, 1952: 145). In both cases, the existence of cultic buildings with later continued use in the vicinity of the villas suggests that they could have served as a central point for agglomerated settlements (hamlets or villages).

This kind of habitational reuse seems to be more frequent in the inland region of the Peninsula; its chronology must generally be placed after the mid-fifth century (See also Christie, this volume, on this question of 'squatters' (Chapter 1)). Reuse is frequently associated with necropolises or the presence of churches.

Funerary Reuse of Residential or Productive Areas

The reuse of structural remains as burial places is a significant break with practice before Late Antiquity. However, researchers in Spain have paid little attention to this phenomenon except where it is related to the existence of a Christian building. Nevertheless, the existence of burials occupying former residential or productive areas of a villa is important, due to the questions it poses in relation to the occupation of these rural settlements: were the buildings abandoned before being reused for funerary practices? Where did the community which buried their relatives in that place live? In the past it was generally assumed that the existence of burial automatically implied that the

buildings were already abandoned; now, however, knowledge about post-Roman funerary practices permits us to suppose that, at least in some cases, there was a possible cohabitation between the dead and the living (hence examples above show habitational reuse plus burials).

In general, the characteristics of the burials are little known because they were destroyed either by agricultural work or because they were ignored and removed by archaeologists more intent on the full Roman period structures. Accordingly, information regarding such burials (in some cases, cemeteries) is very vague and may be limited, at best, to the number of graves, a broad typology and the record of the presence/absence of grave-goods. Many burials did not contain any deposits at all and, due to their typology, are difficult to date.

From an analysis of Spanish rural settlements where funerary reuse has been documented, three different phenomena can be recognised:

1. The presence of isolated burials (perhaps five or less) near an area which continues in use or near an abandoned building. This phenomenon is mainly documented in coastal settlements, many of them in the north east, such as Vilauba, L'Aiguacuit and La Llosa (Chavarría, 1996: 189–93). Grave-goods, typology and stratigraphic sequences place them in the fourth or fifth centuries AD.
2. A reuse of subsidiary and redundant buildings (utilitarian areas or baths). This reuse does not imply the abandonment of the residential buildings, which continue in use without major changes. The process is particularly frequent in the north east of the *provincia Tarraconensis* as documented at the Can Peixau, Darró and Cal·lípolis villas (Chavarría, 2001b: 64). A precise chronology is available only for Cal·lípolis, where the reuse started in the fourth century and continued for some time, as indicated by the different kinds of grave typologies and orientations.
3. An 'invasion' of the whole residential complex by an extensive necropolis. This phenomenon is especially frequent in inland *Hispania*, mostly in Castilian plateau villas such as Aguilafuente, Tinto, El Val and Rienda (Fig. 3.7). The tomb typology and the existence of grave-goods suggest a sixth- and seventh-century date. It is not possible to establish if the complex was completely abandoned when the first tombs appear, and in no case is there a clearly documented existence of a cultic space from which the necropolis could have developed. Especially interesting is the Visigothic attribution of some of these cemeteries (Aguilafuente, Tinto, Rielves), although the published documentation of these complexes is scarce. The clearest case seems to be 300 tombs with Visigothic finds at Aguilafuente, but where, unfortunately, only one of the deposits has been published (Lucas and Viñas, 1977).

Different interpretations of the practice of reusing Roman rural buildings as burial places have been proposed over recent decades, ranging from Percival's practical explanation (1976: 199) to the ideological or symbolic character of reuse argued by Halsall (1995: 181). In the case of the Spanish sites, the interpretation may differ depending on the kind of funerary reuse attested. While in the first two cases a practical explanation probably better explains the reuse of building ruins as a location for burials in the fourth and fifth centuries, in the case of large and later cemeteries (in some cases with a Visigothic component) a more ideological or symbolic interpretation could be proposed. The subject requires further research.

Cultic Reuse of Residential Rooms

The construction of Christian buildings in direct association with a villa during Late Antiquity is a very common phenomenon, documented in different areas of the western Roman Empire (Percival, 1997; Cantino Wataghin, 1999; Ripoll and Arce, 2000). Its analysis is of crucial importance for understanding the early Christianisation of the countryside, the growth of the ecclesiastical *patrimonium*, and the creation and development of the later parish organisation network – all subjects which have attracted research in recent decades (a summary of the main problems is in Monfrin, 1998).

Rural churches related to villas in the Iberian Peninsula are in fact very frequent and even though textual references suggest that this was probably a widespread phenomenon in other areas such as southern Gaul or Italy (for Italy, see Violante, 1982), the archaeological data in Spain are of extraordinary quality both quantitatively and qualitatively (Bowes, 2002).

Again, accurate chronologies for the origin of these impositions are not easy to define, but analysis of some key sites seems to reveal the existence of two different phases. Earlier churches such as Fortunatus, Monte da Cegonha and Montinho das Laranjeiras (see Bowes, 2001: 324–8 for a critical analysis of these) were built inside the *pars urbana*, reusing one or more rooms of these buildings, and belong to the second half of the fourth century or to the earlier fifth century. Their construction was probably contemporaneous with the residential use of the building and they were most likely private *oratoria* built by the owner of the villa. These chapels also had a funerary character, sometimes related to the presence of relics (as argued for Fortunatus by Godoy, 1995: 230). The relationship between oratory and burials is very evident at a site like La Cocosa, where the cultic building (located some 250m from the villa) originated from a mausoleum and might even have been designed as a funerary chapel. It is important to note that none of these buildings originally contained baptismal facilities.

In a second phase (sixth and seventh centuries AD), new churches were frequently built in the vicinity of residential buildings, reusing annexes of the

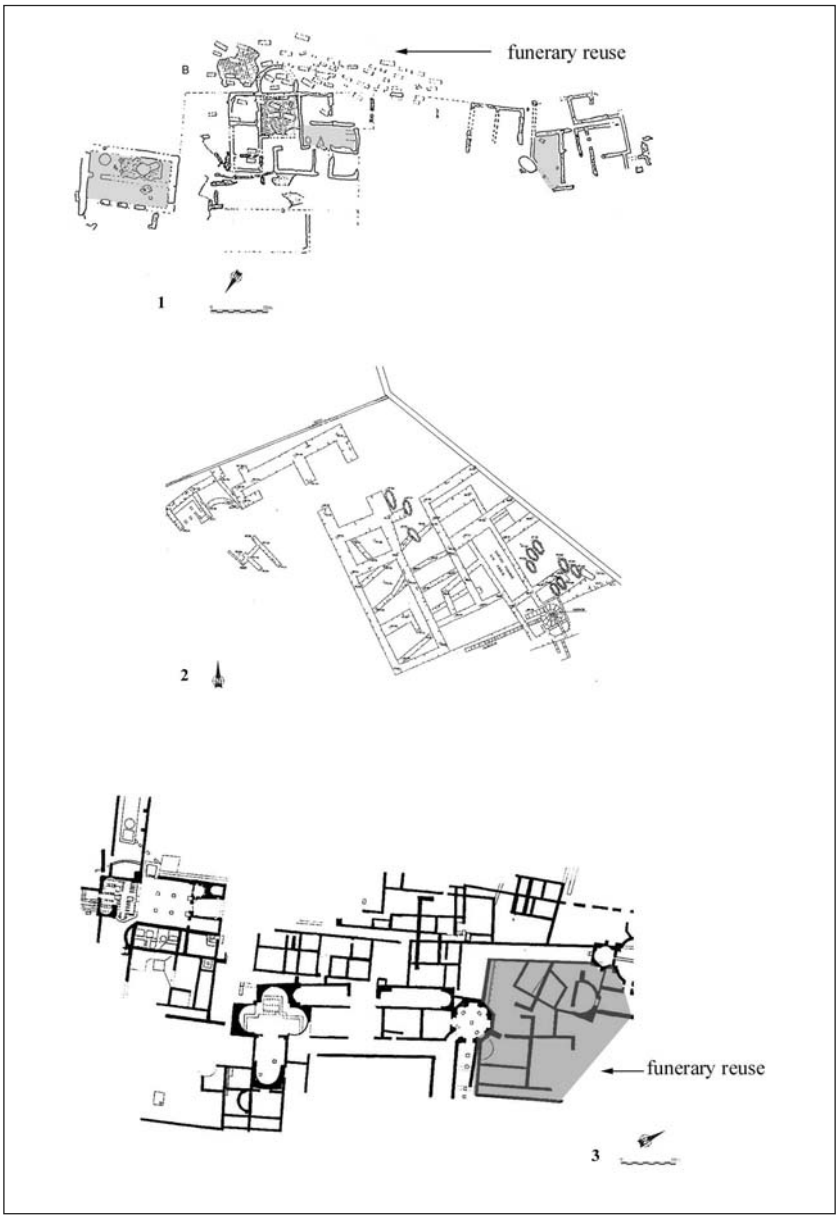

Figure 3.7 Some of the villas reused for funerary purposes: 1. Tinto (Madrid) (after Barroso *et al.*, 2001: Fig. 9, p. 136); 2. San Julián de Moraime (A Coruña) (after Chamoso, 1976); 3. Torre Águila (Badajoz) (after Rodríguez Martín, 1995: 49)

villa such as baths (El Saucedo) or pagan shrines (El Milreu and perhaps Torre de Palma). Most of these were also endowed with a baptistery. These churches are constructed in relation to stone-built complexes which had probably been already abandoned (as villas) or which had seen some reoccupation; in the absence of a late Roman/antique villa owner, it is difficult to establish the function of these cultic buildings, who their founders or donors were, who were their overseers, and what population they served (Fig. 3.8). Monastic groups may be envisaged in some cases but these are not easy to determine.

Interpretation

These or similar processes of functional transformation have been detected throughout the countryside of the western Roman provinces (Lewit, 1991 and 2003), especially in Gaul (van Ossel, 1992; Balmelle, 2001: 120–22), Britain (Webster, 1969; Esmonde Cleary, 2001) and Italy (Ortalli, 1996; Brogiolo, 1996). Very different interpretations have been proposed for these changes, ranging from a barbarian reoccupation of the settlements (Webster, 1969), to a militarisation of society (meaning less interest in maintaining the monumentality of residences – van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2000: 156–7), to technological and economic reasons (Azkárate and Quirós, 2001), and to transformations in the mentality and cultural values of the late antique elites, with a preference for non-Roman lifestyles (Lewit, 1991: 38–40 and 2003; Augenti, 1992).

However, fuller analysis of the current archaeological data from *Hispania* permits us to formulate some new hypotheses for the interpretation of these changes. It must be emphasised that, in general terms, scholars have not distinguished clearly between different types of reuse and different chronologies of these processes of transformation. The study of late Roman villas in the Iberian Peninsula reveals the existence of two different phases in the transformation and reuse of the villas (Figs 3.9 and 3.10).

The first phase had already begun in the third century at some villas, began later at others, and continued through the following centuries, especially the fourth and fifth. It principally affected medium and small settlements located in the areas of eastern and southern *Hispania*, such as Vilauba, Can Sans, Torre Llauder, L'Aiguacuit, Torreblanca del Sol and Sabinillas. Some parts of their residential buildings were transformed and their original residential character replaced by new productive or storage functions, shown by the installation of presses, ovens, tanks, *dolia* or *opus signinum* floors breaking up pre-existing mosaics or discarding former thermal facilities. This was not a wholesale event, however, since other villas situated in these same areas (for example, Torre del Bell-Lloc, Centcelles, El Ruedo) and further inland not only preserved their original residential character but even experienced a

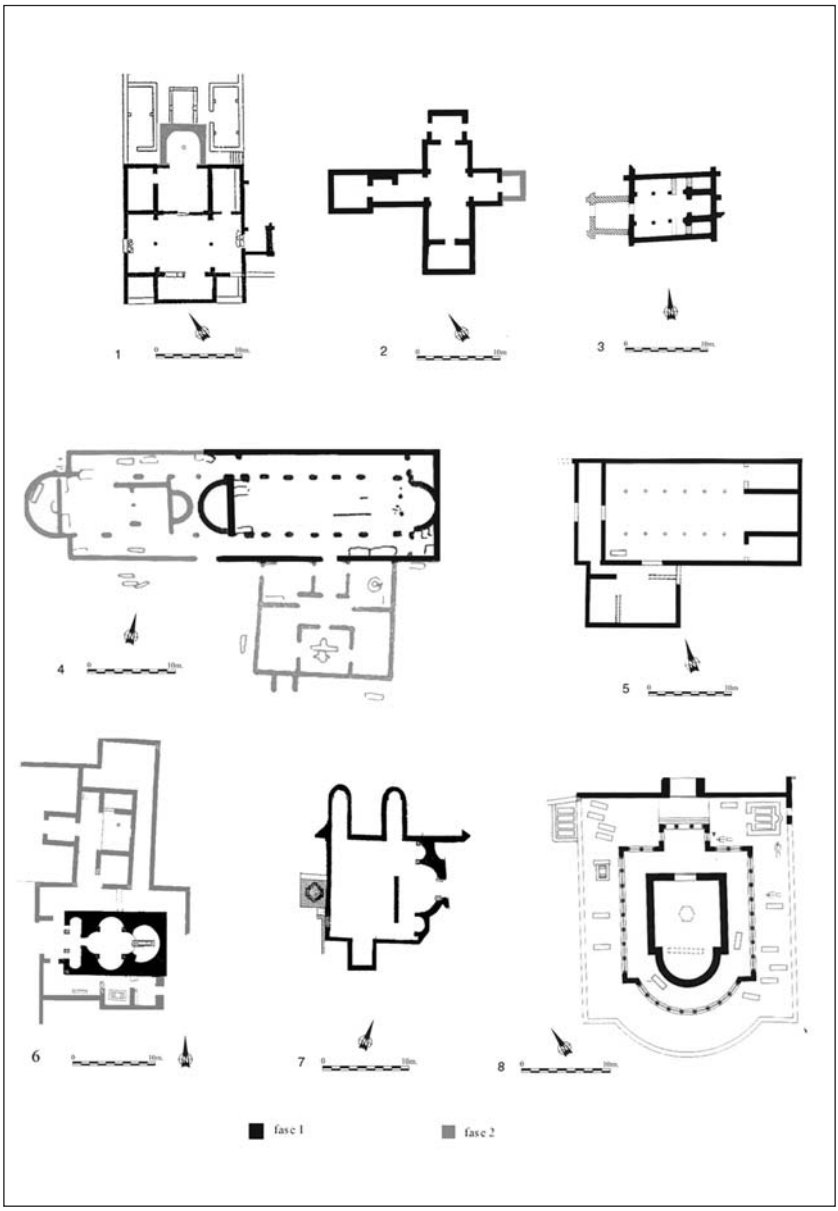

Figure 3.8 **Churches constructed in relation to Spanish villas: 1. Fortunatus; 2. Montinho das Laranjeiras; 3. Monte da Cegonha; 4. Torre de Palma; 5. Las Tamujas; 6. La Cocosa; 7. El Saucedo; 8. Milreu**

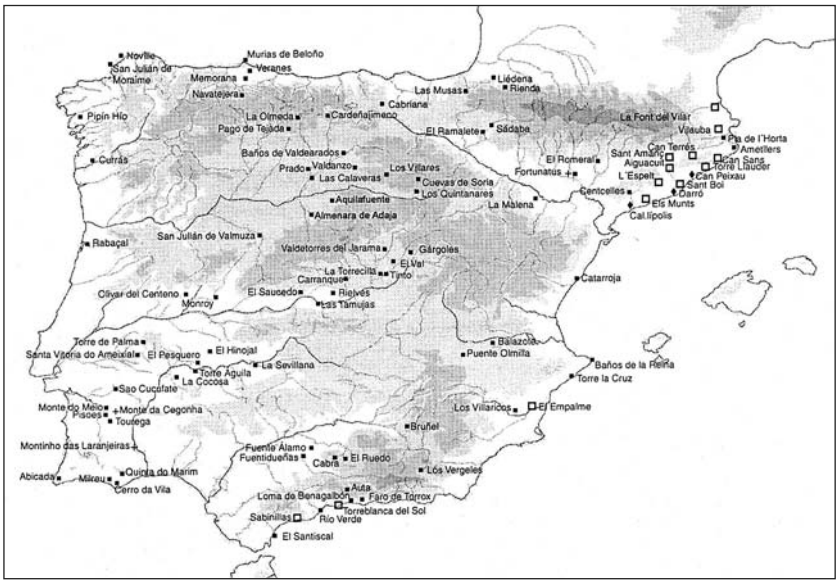

Figure 3.9 Fourth- and fifth-century villas in *Hispania*

simultaneous expansion, with construction of new monumental structures and insertion of expensive decorative programmes.

Following the studies of Vera (1992; 1992–93; 1995), based on an exhaustive documentary analysis, there is now a consensus that from the second century AD onwards there existed a tendency towards a concentration of rural property ownership, at least in the Mediterranean area. This process had important consequences for the way that properties were worked and probably also for the ways in which owners used the buildings located in their properties. I would propose that the productive and industrial reuse of many smaller villas and the contemporaneous monumentalisation of buildings at other sites was directly linked to this process of agglomeration of rural ownership. The absorption of such lesser properties into the hands of some landowners prompted the abandonment of the residential buildings of these 'bought out' sites and allowed their reuse for new economic activities. Textual data support this interpretation (Vera, 1992–93: 299). Thus Hyginius refers to *possessores* who acquired some lands preserving some of the villas and abandoning others: '*Praetera solent quidam complurium fundorum continuorum domini, ut fere fit, I duos aut tres agros uni uillae contribuere et terminos qui finebant singulos agros relinquere: desertisque uillis ceteris praeter ea(m)cui contributi sunt, uicini non contenti suis finibus tollunt*

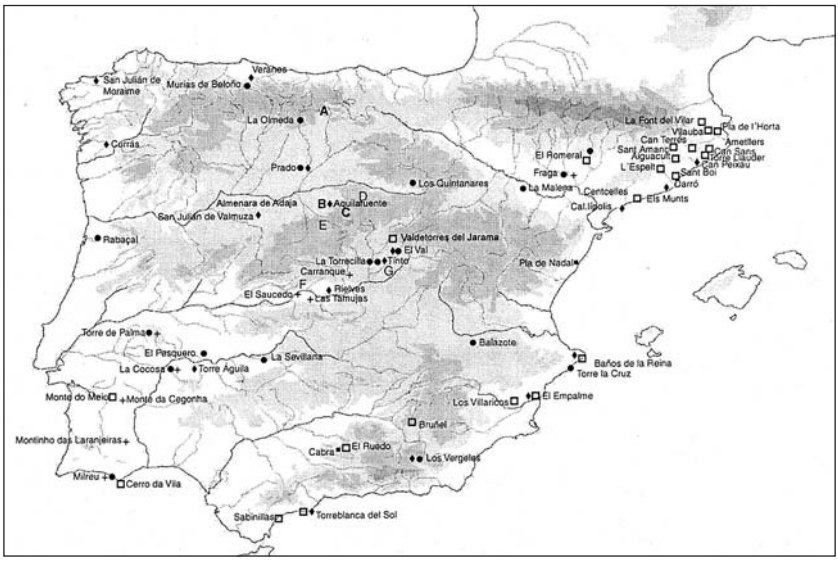

Figure 3.10 Sixth- and seventh-century villas in *Hispania*: (A) Visigothic cemetery of Herrera de Pisuerga; (B) Visigothic cemetery of Aguilafuente (Segovia); (C) Visigothic cemetery of Duratón (Segovia); (D) Visigothic cemetery of Castiltierra; (E) Visigothic cemetery of Madrona (Segovia); (F) Visigothic cemetery of El Carpio de Tajo (Toledo); (G) Visigothic cemetery of Cacera de las Ranas (Guadalajara)

terminos quibus inter fundos unius domini fines obserua(n)tur sibi defendant' (93). Pliny mentions the administration of different properties through a single administrative centre, with the decoration of one of the buildings and maintenance of the other villas: '*Sollicitat primum ipsa pulchritudo iungendi, deinde, quod non minus utile quam uoluptuosum, posse utraque eadem opera, eodem uiatico inuisere, sub eodem procuratore ac paene isdem actoribus habere, unam uillam colere et ornare, alteram tantum tueri*' (*Letters* III, 19, 2).

The interpretation of the second phase of transformation is more complex, due to the characteristics and chronology of the process. This time the villas affected are mainly located inland, in a region characterised, as already emphasised, by the presence of huge and sumptuous residential buildings located in large rural properties. Villas such as La Olmeda, Cuevas de Soria, Almenara de Adaja, Aguilafuente, Carranque, La Cocosa and Torre de Palma experienced a notable phase of vitality during the fourth century AD and this vigour continued at various seats well into the fifth century. In most cases it is

difficult to establish accurately when the buildings were abandoned and when the transformations took place, but it is clear that there was no sudden abandonment or destruction in the last phases of occupation.

From the sixth century onwards, some of these ruinous villas were gradually occupied by burials (Aguilafuente, Palazuelos de Eresma, El Val, Tinto, Rielves). Details of the extent and characteristics of these cemeteries are not very well known, but it seems likely that, as at Aguilafuente and Palazuelos de Eresma, some of the buried population can be identified as Visigoths. Noticeably, all these sites lie in the geographical area where, according to both traditional text-based hypotheses and archaeological evidence from thousands of burial contexts, general settlement of a Visigothic population took place (Ripoll, 1989; 2000; Ebel-Zepenzauer, 2000).

But why were the monumental villas of the Castilian plateau abandoned in the mid-fifth century? Why and how did part of the Visigothic population settle in this region? To answer both questions it is important to establish who were the owners of these properties in Late Antiquity. Although we cannot identify the owners of these villas, it is evident from the architectural characteristics and decorative luxury of the buildings that they belonged to the highest rank of late antique Spanish society – conceivably to members of the senatorial milieu or the imperial court. We need note that the emperor Theodosius was born in this region and thus we must suppose the existence not only of imperial properties but also of powerful landowning families connected with the Theodosian family before, during and after his reign. Textual reference to the rich *campi pallantini* plundered by Gerontius' army after the defeat of Honorius' relatives at the beginning of the fifth century might also be considered useful corroborative evidence of the identity of owners of the Castilian plateau villas. The scarcity and insignificance of urban centres in this area makes it unlikely that municipal elites were owners of these villas.

The gradual disintegration of Roman political structures in *Hispania* and the later settlement of the Visigoths most probably resulted in these imperial and senatorial properties passing into Visigothic hands, as suggested by the emergence of Visigothic cemeteries over/near former Roman villas and of other Visigothic necropolises in the area (for example, Herrera del Pisuerga, Castiltierra, Duraton, El Carpio de Tajo). The existence of a numerically important Visigothic population settled in this region could also explain the election of Toledo as *sedes regia* in the mid-sixth century (Ripoll, 2000a; Ripoll, 2000b: 393–6). Quite possibly these new people took over the Roman buildings, although the characteristics of the reoccupation documented in these sites (subdivision of rooms, post-holes, hearths, etc.) and the related finds allow for no ready identification of specifically Visigothic settlers. However, one must bear in mind that this immigrant group is now considered to have been highly Romanised by the sixth century and to have immediately

mixed with the local population, as argued by Ripoll on the basis of the grave-goods from some cemeteries (1993–94).

In other regions of the Peninsula, such as *Lusitania* or *Gallaecia*, sixth- and seventh-century occupation (well-documented in some villas) was also very different from the earlier residential character of these buildings, and in many villas habitational (in terms of wooden structures, subdivisions and hearths) as well as funerary reuse is attested. Archaeological data are still too scarce and scattered to evaluate if these changes were due to economic or technological problems or to changes in the cultural and ideological structures of the aristocracy as suggested for other regions. The existence of Christian buildings of considerable dimensions and technical quality attests that, at least in some cases, there still existed the capacity for building durable structures; the churches also reveal a populated territory. As noted, however, owners, builders, workers remain rather shadowy figures.

Our evidence overall points to important ongoing changes in the organisation of rural settlement in the late antique and especially early medieval epochs (indicated also through the study of the evolution of vocabulary used to refer to rural settlements): as well as continued open site activity marked by cemeteries and churches, there appears a growing dominance of nucleated settlement in villages and on hilltop sites. Whilst we are starting to understand better the transformation and end of late Roman villas in the Iberian Peninsula, much work remains to be done to identify the next stages of rural evolution here.

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Appendix: Late Roman Villas in the Iberian Peninsula with Select Bibliography

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Chapter 4

From *Vicus* to Village: Italian Landscapes, AD 400–1000

Paul Arthur

The Setting

The Italian countryside is extremely varied, from the fertile coastal plains and rolling volcanic hills of Campania, Latium and Etruria (the centre), to poorer areas of heavy intractable soils or shallow soils barely covering the bedrock (some of the peripheries). Together with a varied hydrography, and the uplands and lowlands with their climatic inconsistencies, this makes for an extremely complex agrarian pattern now, as also in Roman times. One thing, however, was the local, often empirical, response to local conditions, and quite another the, at times, myopic dictates of centralised administrations, whether state, ecclesiastical or lay. Political and economic decisions often outweighed the natural vocations of the countryside. Furthermore, over the 600 years that this study considers, Italy could hardly be considered a political unity. Romans and Ostrogoths aside, shortly after the Justinianic reconquest of the peninsula (AD 555), a good part of the land was conquered by the Lombards (AD 568–595). Nevertheless, much of the south, including Sicily, remained in Byzantine hands, as did large pockets of territory in other areas between Ravenna and Naples. Some of these lands eventually gained independent status or were to fall into the hands of invaders. The net result was a gradual fractioning of power throughout the peninsula (see, in general, Wickham, 1981).

With such multifarious factors coming into play it is very hard to seek a general pattern of rural occupation and land use valid for all of Italy. Undoubtedly the more fertile areas were able to support the larger populations and thus often reveal dense urban settlement to the historian, where ancient towns appear to jostle for space, at times lying less than five kilometres from each other. The less fertile areas yield fewer towns. In Roman times, the highly cultivated countryside was fleshed-out with sumptuous villas, farms and occasional villages, though again varying according to land use. Indeed, conditions, opportunities and responses were so varied that it is becoming

ever more frequent to hear scholars speak of the 'many Italies' of Late Antiquity (see Giardina, 1986; Vera, 1994).

Various field surveys and excavations over the last two decades have now provided abundant, though uneven, data with which to assess the ancient countryside and its uses between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. This chapter will review these data, with particular reference to areas south of Rome – crucial regions too often neglected in literature on Italy's Roman and later archaeology.

Under the later Empire, the patterns of rural settlement changed across all Italy. Some regions witnessed the progressive abandonment of towns and countryside, such as the Maremma, or parts of Basilicata. In others there seems to have been a blossoming of small sites or farms, such as in the Salento, where they may have been related in a hierarchical scale to developing *vici* or villages. However, one common factor within Italy appears to be the decline of medium- and small-sized towns, particularly evident in the centre and south of the peninsula (Arthur, 1999a). Only in a few areas, with the direct investment of central government, ever more incapable of controlling a heavily urbanised country, did some towns develop or, at least, continue to thrive. These were the new administrative centres, or the 'directional centres' of Zanini's Byzantine Italies (1998: 133–45), comprising such sites as Ravenna, Rimini, Genoa, Milan, Canosa, Naples and Reggio Calabria.

Otherwise the pattern of urban settlement fixed under the Republic broke down. American excavations of the town of Cosa in coastal Tuscany, founded as a Latin colony in 273 BC, revealed a quite eloquent picture of the (perhaps somewhat precocious) death of a town (Fentress, 1994). Similar stories are available for a few other towns, from Squillace in Calabria, to Paestum in Campania and Luni in Liguria (Spadea, 1989; Donzelli, 1991; Pedley, 1990: 163–4; Ward-Perkins, 1981; Lusuardi Siena and Sannazzaro, 1984). Of 372 towns that were in existence by the late Republic, 116 had disappeared by the later Middle Ages. Archaeology suggests that most towns probably witnessed shrinking populations, shedding their roles of both consumer and manufacturing centres and, perhaps more significantly, their governmental role. Those that did not totally disappear sometimes metamorphosed into quite different settlements, perhaps more akin to *vici*. Both public and private investment in towns, common under the late Republic and early Empire, lapsed. This suggests reinvestment of surplus and profit elsewhere. Indeed, the death of a town may have released capital, resources and energy that could have been reinvested in the countryside. Towns had become too expensive in the list of late Roman and early Byzantine priorities.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to chart the gradual shrinkage of Roman towns in Italy. Save for a few cases, we lack large-scale excavations or the sort of information available from Gaul. There, a sense of scale may be derived from the appearance of reduced walled areas in Late Antiquity; one need only

think of Autun which shrank from 500 acres to an enceinte of 25 acres. By the end of the Empire, it seems clear that the Roman role of towns had been played out. Conversely, we observe a development of smaller nucleated settlements, which we may term *vici,* at the expense of some towns and of other rural settlements.

Late Antique *Vici* and Other Settlements and the Land

Recent historical and archaeological research has rehabilitated the *vicus*, whether as a private, ecclesiastical or state-run rural establishment, set up to govern agricultural productivity and to channel surplus products to the State and to other leading authorities. This role is suggested by the increase of such sites mentioned in the itineraries and by their very location on major thoroughfares (Volpe, 1996; Colicelli, 1998). To some extent they might be regarded as centres of *latifundia* or *massae*, which from the fourth and fifth centuries developed evermore into the local economic, political and cultural centres for the *coloni* or tenant farmers who substantially replaced the slave labourers of the early and mid empire. It is likely that, through the *vici*, duties were levied (on problems of distinguishing *vici* from estate centres see Vera, 1995).

Though not typical of all areas of Italy, the *vicus* settlement type appears to have been common in much of Puglia and Basilicata (Volpe, 1999a), as well as in Calabria (Noyé, 1999). It is, however, uncertain if it is correct to class them all together as representing a single phenomenon of the late Empire in southern Italy. The *vicus* is generally identified as an agglomeration of rural labourers and their families, with limited administrative autonomy. Such sites could possess public baths and other infrastructures, a church (or even a rural bishopric, such as at Paestum), and often lay along major roads, developing alongside *stationes* and *mutationes* of the *cursus publicus* (Volpe, 1996: 195. On excavations at the *mutatio Valesia*: Boersma, 1995). Little is known about these sites, their origin, growth and functions. Archaeologically, they can appear as large scatters of settlement debris, though generally lacking the architectural pretensions and functional subdivisions deemed characteristic of Roman towns or villas. Over the last few years some have seen excavation, but none fully explored, making it difficult to relate finds from surface surveys to ancient realities. The most telling examples at present would seem to be the site (zona Mele) within the abandoned town of *Metapontum* (Matera region), another site within the defunct town of *Herdonia*, and S. Giusto, near Lucera (both Foggia province).

Of course, whilst the exact form of each of these minor central places should have responded to the potential and reality posed by the agrarian traditions and capabilities of each area, production seems often to have been directed according to official requirements. The site of Mass. Masina–Mass.

San Giorgio, located on the *Via Appia*, lay in an old wine- and oil-producing area, whilst the three sites mentioned above were set in the grain lands of Puglia and Basilicata (Manacorda and Volpe, 1994; Volpe, 1994).

Metapontum, an ancient Greek *polis*, floundered under the Empire, until it was reconverted in Late Antiquity into the *vicus/statio* of *Turiostu* (Fig. 4.1). The renovated site appears to have been governed by the state as a processing and shipment centre for grain. The discovery of abundant late antique occupation up the Basentello valley, including two substantial *vici* around Monte Irsi, may suggest that *Turiostu* handled goods not only from its immediate hinterland, but produced up to 50 kilometres away (Small *et al.,* 1998: 353–4, 366–7). Direct state intervention is emphasised by the discovery of two milestones erected by the emperor Julian the Apostate (Giardino, 1991; Giardino *et al*., 1999). It is tempting to see the numerous imported amphorae and fine wares as having been directed to the site to sustain the agricultural and administrative workforce.

Increasingly, however, large estates were concentrated in the hands of the Church and of wealthy families or individuals. At S. Giusto, near ancient *Luceria*, plausibly identified as the centre of the *saltus Carminianensis*, sited in an area of Imperial property, two large adjoining basilical churches were built, one with baptistery and the other funerary, during the fifth and sixth centuries (Volpe, 1998) (Fig. 4.2). Nearby villa structures yielded evidence for production and storage of wine. It may be that both state and ecclesiastical authorities governed this important site.

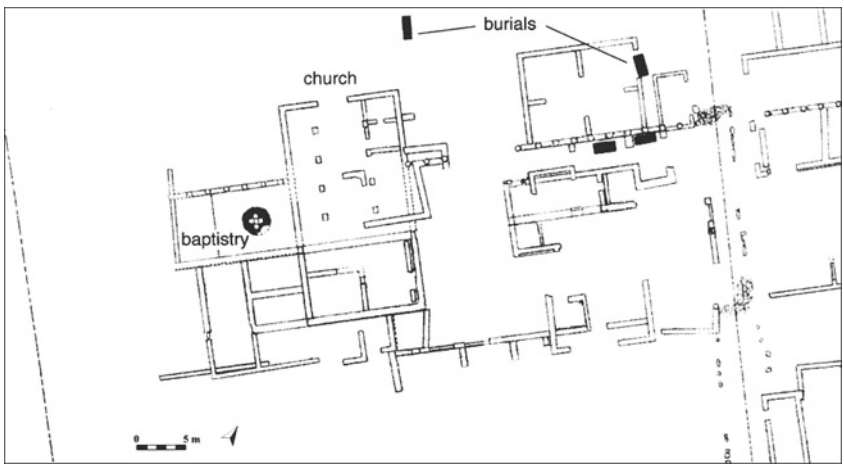

Figure 4.1 Remains of the *vicus* including a church that developed within the shells of early buildings at Metaponto (MT) (courtesy L. Giardino)

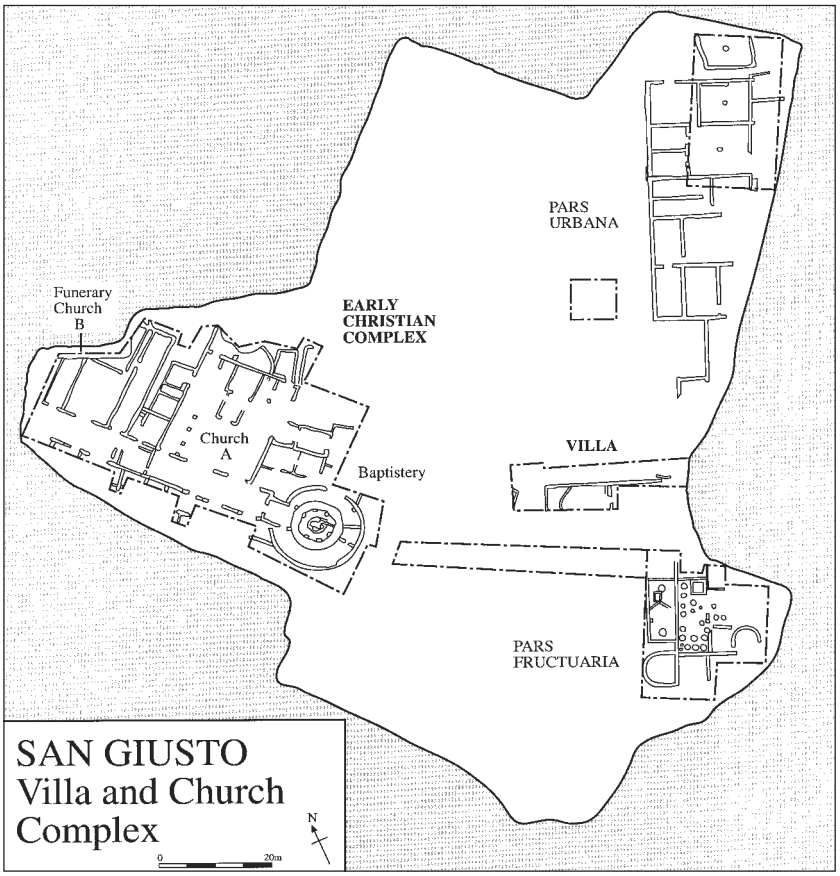

Figure 4.2 Plan of the villa-churches complex at the *vicus* of San Giusto, Lucera (FO) (after Volpe, 1998: Fig. 29)

Finally, Ordona, once the site of ancient *Herdonia*, was largely in decay, the area of the forum occupied by a number of small and curious apsed-buildings (Mertens, 1995; Volpe, 2000; and Scheers, 1995 on coin finds). Grain appears to have been processed, whilst the buildings may testify to market activity, perhaps in the form of a fair.

Similar changes seem to have been occurring in Sicily (Wilson, 1990: ch. 6). Rome relied increasingly on the island's grain after Egyptian grain had been earmarked for an expanding Constantinople during the fourth century and African grain had been taken over by the Vandals in the fifth. Many late antique *vici* are known, though few have been examined, including Sofiana, Kaukana and Punta Secca. In addition, the island saw the development of a

number of grandiose villas during the fourth century, with Piazza Armerina, neighbouring the *vicus* of *Sofiana*, being the prime example. This suggests a more frequent presence of wealthy landowners overseeing their estates than seems to have occurred in southern Italy. In northern Italy, wealthy villas such as Sirmione and Desenzano near lake Garda, may have played similar roles, though apparently hardly outlasting the early fifth century, despite proximity to the imperial court at Milan (Mancassola and Saggioro, 2000).

In internal *Lucania* (modern Basilicata), *vici* are not so common and perhaps neither was grain, with the economy based on alternative products, possibly reflecting greater expanses of forest and pasture (Small, 1999; Gualtieri, 1999). The large villa/*praetorium* at S. Giovanni di Ruoti displays a fundamentally different organisation and economy to the nucleated settlements described above (Small and Buck, 1994). Archaeozoology indicates that pork was one of the principal products, though it must be remarked that this is one of the few sites for which a detailed picture of faunal remains has been published. Pig-breeding was certainly less labour-intensive than grain cultivation, and it implies the existence of a rather different environment, and was far more remunerative. A similar site underlies the later monastery at S. Vincenzo al Volturno in Molise (Hodges, 1993). Architecturally speaking, the complex at Quote S. Francesco, near Locri in Calabria, may be likened to S. Giovanni di Ruoti, though its economic base may have been wine (Avetta *et al*., 1991). Ongoing excavations at the late Roman villa/*praetorium* (with annexed *vicus*?) of Mass. Ciccotti, Oppido Lucano, in Basilicata may reveal a different picture, with an emphasis on grain (Gualtieri, 1999).

Sheep were traditionally bred in sizeable flocks in regions such as the Abruzzo, Molise and northern Puglia. Here large settlements such as *Canusium* (Canosa), *Venusium* (Venosa), *Larinum* and *Saepinum,* persisted to provide the labour for the processing of wool and the preparation of garments, many of which were destined to the State and armed forces. For much of the year, however, the droves were probably confined to the uplands, leaving scant testimony in the archaeological record (cf. Barker and Grant, 1991). *Canusium* was, significantly, the site chosen as seat of the provincial governor in the fourth century and saw early Christianisation (Grelle, 1992; Volpe, 1996: 95–107. On fifth-century decay see Cambi, 1993: 248).

Labour-intensive cultivation continued in various regions, but quite certainly on a much-reduced scale to that of the early Empire. Italian wine production during Late Antiquity is still little understood and, though new areas came to the fore, large-scale exportation was no longer common; most areas were probably supplied by their immediate hinterland (Purcell, 1985: esp. 17). Recent identification of a late antique southern Calabrian and eastern Sicilian commercial transport amphora type has pinpointed the substantial development of at least one area, in contrast to traditional late Republican and early imperial sources of supply. A site (*vicus*?) apparently involved in

Calabrian wine production seems to have been Bova Marina at the toe of Italy. A Jewish community perhaps controlled activity there, as both a synagogue as well as amphorae bearing menorah stamps, have been discovered (Costamagna, 1991).

Analogies between the various sites here classed as *vici* spring to mind. At both San Giusto and *Metapontum/Turiostu*, objects probably linked to administration and taxation, such as small precision balances, weights and a lead seal have been found (Volpe, 1998; Giardino *et al.*, 1999: 358–9). Despite decreasing circulation of small bronze coins in town and country, both San Giusto and Ordona have yielded early sixth-century coin hoards, whilst numerous small coins, yet to be studied, have been found at Metaponto. What also appears to characterise all these sites are stockpiling facilities, suggesting a tightly-controlled organisation of surplus unlikely to have been destined purely for local use. The cultivation, storage and redistribution of grain required a relatively large and stable population that, in turn, would require a number of basic public facilities such as assembly areas, a temple/shrine/church and possibly baths (cf. Renfrew, 1984).

All in all, though the production of oil and wine certainly did not cease, few areas of Italy had the means to produce significant surpluses, and amphora evidence suggests that imports from overseas, particularly from the East, may have increased significantly (Panella, 1993). Where pork continued to be consumed in larger quantities than mutton or goat meat, such as in the major centres of Rome and Naples, it did not outlast the sixth century (King, 1999: 172–4; Arthur, 2002). Thus, Italian agrarian production in the late Empire appears characterised by an ever more significant supply of cereals and the meat of sheep and goat, implying a decline in the proportion of more varied and labour-intensive products. In future, it will be interesting to examine what effect increasing limitations on diet will have had on the Italian population.

Though we have little in the way of faunal assemblages from Italian *vici*, it may be no coincidence that in Italy their growth seems to coincide with the rise in sheep/goat over pig. It is worth noting that in Britain, with respect to other settlement types, archaeology in the small towns generally yields a higher percentage of sheep/goat bones than pig. Indeed, the Italian *vici* may resemble some of the small towns of the northern provinces, both in form and perhaps also in function (Rodwell and Rowley, 1975; Burnham and Wacher, 1990). However, the problem of properly characterising these Italian settlements will not be resolved without further excavation.

Infrastructures of Exchange

Exchange was increasingly centred on the *vici*, some of which survived as ports for the productive hinterlands; other minor ports developed to serve this

new redistribution network. At times, the *vici* and the ports coincided, being one and the same, as, probably, Metaponto, discussed above, and Tropea and *Minturnae*. However, it is difficult to judge how far the productive facilities of the *vici* were replicated at ports, or to what measure the ports served the new redistribution system. More is known of these small ports in Puglia than elsewhere. The harbour at modern Petrolla probably served Ostuni in antiquity, and centuries later was refurbished as the site of *Villanova*, under Emperor Frederick II. San Cataldo served as the port of Lecce. At Santa Maria al Bagno the *emporium Nauna* developed, partly under the aegis of M. Sal(vius?) Balerius, attested in AD 341 through a *tabulus patronatus.* In northern Campania, port facilities may have been increasingly centred on the site of the *Thermae Sinuessanae*, to the exclusion of the declining town of *Sinuessa* to its south, where the noblewoman Viria Marcella, of senatorial origins, provided tiles for a building during the fourth century (Arthur, 1991). At *emporium Nauna* a certain amount of high-status private investment in new facilities seems evident, whilst in northern Campania a small harbour was deemed more practical than a once-thriving Roman port with costly infrastructures. Perhaps similar motivations led to the abandonment of the *portus Cosanus* during the third century, in favour of an undiscovered harbour (Cambi and Fentress, 1989: 82).

The *vici* and ports were first and foremost geared towards the needs of the State, as well as the Church and a few powerful families. However, in the less commercialised environment of the late Empire, the seasonal fair gradually developed, catering for a population ever more fragmented and lacking the traditional points of reference that had been the towns (Arthur, 2000). The oft-cited example, described by Cassiodorus, lay at Sala Consilina, Roman *Marcellianum*. Others certainly existed, perhaps at the see of Cimitile, at the sanctuary of Monte S. Angelo on the Gargano, and perhaps at some of the *vici* themselves, thus helping to explain strange features such as the small apsed buildings of Ordona mentioned above. We may in fact be seeing two opposing aspects of the breakdown of Roman Italy: a very strict state regulated exchange system on the one hand, and a more spontaneous system of exchange on the other.

Through the Sixth Century

This model breaks down with the collapse of Italian centralisation during the sixth century, following the twenty years of continuous warfare during Justinian's re-conquest of the peninsula from the Ostrogoths, the severe outbreaks of plague, and the Lombard invasion from AD 568 (Marazzi, 1998). For the Biferno valley, Lloyd (1995: 253) stated that in the fifth and sixth centuries 'the villages and farms which for a thousand years had underpinned a considerable level of civilisation seem mostly to have gone, and the towns

to have become shadows of their former selves. However it is to be explained, a break with tradition is clearly signalled'. The last straw, it is now often agreed, was the Byzantine/Graeco-Gothic war and its immediate aftermath (Wickham, 1999).

These disruptions had been so severe that the Italy that presented itself to the Lombards was but a poor image of Roman culture. The breakdown of centralised control seems to have led to the dispersal of population groups that had been held together in dependant and artificial settlements. Many surviving rural sites were abandoned and the same fate struck many of those towns, especially in the south, which had already suffered severe demographic shrinkage during the later Empire; during the fourth and fifth centuries, these must have assumed the appearance and more restricted functions of *vici.* Whether or not some *vici* continued to function as institutional central places in the years between the reconquest and the Lombard invasion will have to be addressed through very precise archaeology. Yet, for the most part, they could no longer be managed and new, more secure centres of provincial production and redistribution needed to be identified by the Byzantine administration. Indeed, it seems to me, that the most substantial survival of settlement patterns lay in areas of continuing state control, notably the territories of Rome and Ravenna, part of Liguria, the Bay of Naples and the Phlegrean Fields, and parts of Puglia and Calabria. In general, however, towns in northern Italy fared better than in the south.

In areas of Byzantine domination, though not all towns were abandoned, many gradually assumed the form of defensive *castra*, sometimes accommodating the population from the deserted settlements and the surrounding countryside. The rather particular phenomenon of *castra*, from which we cannot generalise in our analysis of rural settlement in Italy, has long fascinated scholars and has recently been re-examined in a number of studies (Brogiolo and Gelichi, 1996a; Zanini, 1998). Some examples in northern Italy appear to have formed in late Roman and Ostrogothic times as refuge sites, in a climate of general insecurity, especially along the Alpine border (for example, Ibligo – Bierbrauer, 1987; Castelseprio – Carver, 1987; Trino – Negro Ponzi Mancini, 1999; in general Brogiolo and Gelichi, 1996a; Christie, 1991a). But particular growth belongs to the sixth century, as a result of the Graeco-Gothic war and the succeeding Lombard invasion. Both Byzantium and the Papacy in Rome had good reason to promote the construction of fortified strongholds to protect their ever-decreasing and vulnerable territories. A number of instances may be seen around the Venetian lagoon and Ravenna, as well as in Byzantine Liguria. In Liguria, the long-term excavation of the *castrum* of S. Antonino di Perti (Fig. 4.3) has done much to further our comprehension as to how Byzantium grappled to hold on to a relatively small province up until the conquest by King Rothari in 643 (Christie, 1989; Gardini and Murialdo, 1994; Mannoni and Murialdo,

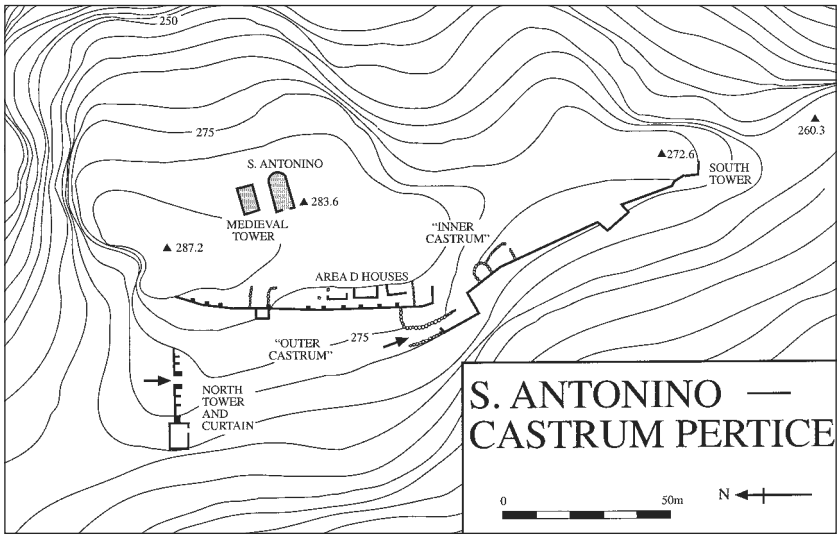

Figure 4.3 Plan of the Byzantine *castrum* of S. Antonino di Perti, Liguria (after Mannoni and Murialdo, 2001)

2001). Such fortifications were probably also intended to guarantee the safety of the Mediterranean seaboard, upon which Byzantium's power was evermore confined, through the establishment of strategic safe-havens. Indeed, S. Antonino has yielded an impressive number of imported artefacts, particularly amphorae, suggesting that it formed part of a specific supply mechanism.

Similarly, we may see the fortification of the old Roman colony of Cosa in the Tuscan Maremma, which, according to Rutilius Namatianus at the start of the fifth century, had become a deserted landscape (*de Reditu suo*, I, 285f). The spectacular site of Cosa has yielded traces of what has been interpreted as a sixth-century Byzantine *castrum (*Fentress, 1994; Fentress *et al.,* 1991). Sailing down the Tyrrhenian coast past Rome, from the fortified enclave of Naples to Byzantine Calabria, ships could heave-to at sites such as Salerno, Agropolis, Policastro, Tropea, to round the tip of Italy, and find other safe-havens at Croton and beyond.

Rural Churches and Cemeteries

The sharp contrast in the archaeological evidence between the early sixth century, for which myriad sites yield African Red Slip and other typical late

antique ceramics, and the later sixth century, for which there is little distinctive pottery, has led scholars to question where people went and how severe population decline was (for example, Hodges and Whitehouse, 1983; Moreland, 1993). It seems clear that the capillary distribution system of late antique times, which led to the large diffusion of certain goods, had broken down by the end of the century. By itself, this is enough to suggest that the *vici* had abandoned their role (Wickham, 1994: 747–8; Zanini, 1998: ch. 5). However, outside of the few remaining urban productions (Rome, Naples), what succeeded industrially-produced Roman pottery is often neither particularly distinctive, nor closely dateable. If found fragmented, abraded and in small quantities on the surface of a field it is hardly going to assist in the identification of an early medieval farmstead (on late antique-early medieval ceramics see Arthur and Patterson, 1994 for the south; Brogiolo and Gelichi, 1996b for the north; and, more widely, papers in Saguì, 1998).

Until settlement sites from the later sixth century and beyond start being identified in good number, there is little evidence to resolve the problem of population distribution, especially in the countryside, outside of the surviving towns and known *castra*. However, some indications exist, such as the numerous early medieval cemeteries and burials that appear, time and again, throughout Italy. Late antique cemeteries are often fairly large with distinctive burial forms, even though few have been excavated and thoroughly published. A recently excavated example, outside of the declining Messapian *oppidum* of Vaste, surrounds the martyrial church of the 'SS. Stefani', in full development during the fifth century. The church, and perhaps the cemetery, survived up to the tenth or eleventh century, without any adjoining settlement, suggesting that it catered for a scattered rural population (D'Andria, 1997: 24–5. See Belotti, 1994 and Bacile, 1902 for a plausible link between the martyr Vitalius and the nearby *vicus* of Vitigliano). At San Giusto, by contrast, the last burials belong to the seventh century, by when site structures had been substantially abandoned (Volpe, 1998).

Datable grave-goods from later sixth- and seventh-century cemeteries – before the use of placing objects in graves totally disappeared – help identify some early medieval burial sites, notably first- and second-generation Lombard cemeteries, though less so as regards indigenous groups, often represented by small burial plots and few grave-goods. In the absence of grave-goods, burials are often very hard to date, and the creation of a seriated typology of burial forms and radiocarbon dating are urgent necessities. Of the few excavated major early medieval cemeteries in rural southern Italy we may cite that at Canne, in northern Apulia, originally identified as Hannibalic (Gervasio, 1938), and those at Matera, where hundreds of burials have been identified, in various cemetery groupings (Salvatore, 1986). That at S. Lucia alle Malve, Matera, has yielded over 120 burials and no grave-goods, save a couple of simple bronze earrings, though one skeleton provided a radiocarbon

date of AD 610–770 (95.4 per cent confidence). Matera, a little-known classical site, expanded into a substantial cave-dwelling agglomeration during the Middle Ages, perhaps having become the seat of a Lombard gastaldate (Bruno, 2001).

Otherwise, cemeteries post-dating the mid-sixth century often amount to no more than about a dozen tombs (for example, Avicenna – D'Angela, 1988; *Cassana*, 1978: 43–4; Ponte Mammolo – Cecchini and Muzzioli, 1980: 94; Minturnae – Johnson, 1935: 14). Rarely, however, are they found associated with contemporary settlements, though in some cases they can be linked to minor stone-built churches. Such churches may be erected on earlier sites, perhaps occurring whilst the site was still occupied or following a phase of temporary abandonment. Both the villa at Avicenna, near Foggia, and the smaller site at loc. Leonessa, Merino, exhibit small churches and cemeteries reusing the Roman structures (cf. Bell, 1998): at Avicenna, a Lombard

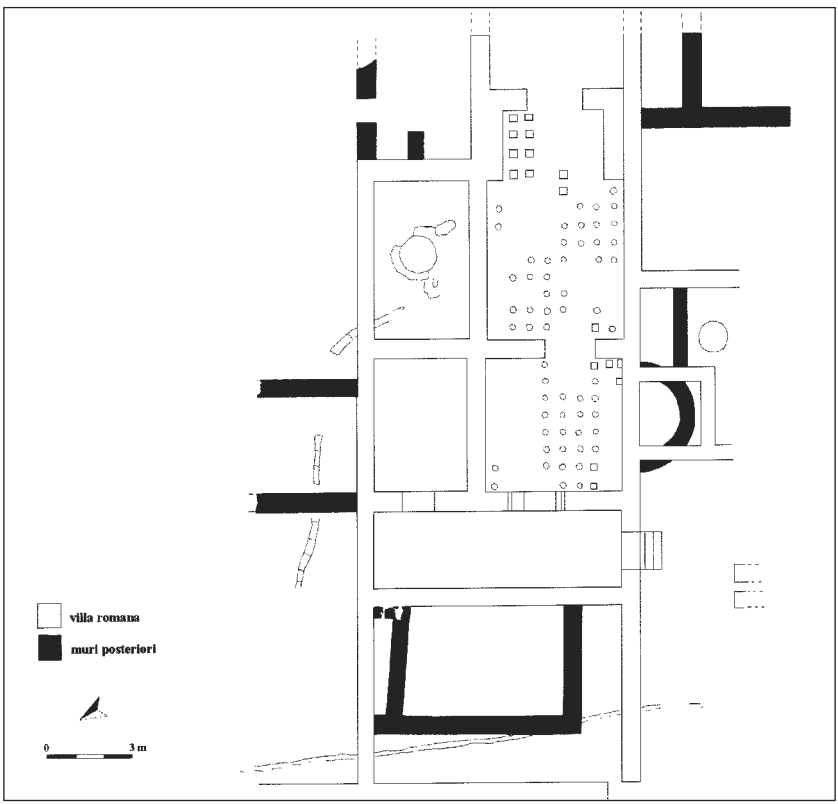

Figure 4.4 The Roman villa at Avicenna, later partially converted into a church (from D'Angela, 1988)

cemetery occupied the site of what was almost certainly an abandoned Roman villa, amongst whose late walls are hints of a church, within whose apse lay a privileged burial (D'Angela, 1988: 54) (Fig. 4.4).

In areas such as Campania, where urban settlement survived quite well alongside wealthy landowners and ecclesiastical institutions, rural churches may have been fairly substantial and founded by the landowners as *Eigenkirchen* or proprietory churches, as well as dioceses and monasteries. Altavilla Silentina and Pratola Serra, in the province of Salerno, are early examples of large churches and cemeteries with little or no adjoining

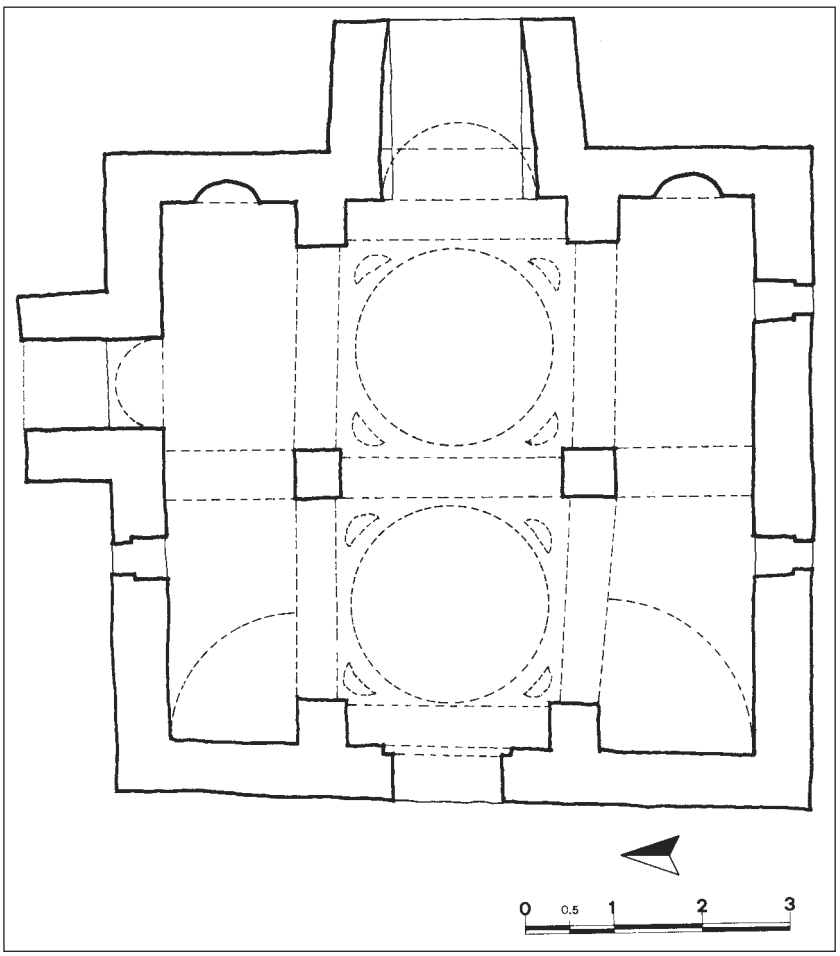

Figure 4.5 Plan of the later eighth-/ninth-century proprietory church of Seppannibale, Fasano (BR) (from Bertelli, 1994)

occupation, at least as far as archaeology has shown, though they may have lain within large estates (Peduto, 1984; 1992). Though attested in the documents (mainly starting in the tenth century), few proprietory churches have been examined in southern Italy; these include the church of Seppannibale (Fasano, Brindisi) (Bertelli, 1994) (Fig. 4.5), and one at Quattro Macine (Giuggianello, Lecce) (Arthur *et al.*, 1996), both adjoining early medieval settlements. Many of these churches and burial grounds probably originally served populations living in scattered farms throughout the surrounding territory, as developing *pievi* or parishes.

But whereas cemeteries and churches are known, settlements still tend to elude us. Potentially churches and cemeteries occupied the same sites as domestic settlement, but excavations have rarely been careful enough to permit identification of structures built of decomposable materials such as wood, thatch, *pisé* and mud-brick. In cases where cemeteries have been discovered without churches, one might hypothesise unrecognised wooden or earth-built edifices (see Brogiolo, 1989 for one timber example). Apart from ease of construction, wooden buildings may well have made use of the greater forest coverage of early medieval times, which still requires detailed study (for example, Hemphill, 1988).

I recall working as a student at the Via Gabina site 11 villa, east of Rome, where stake holes and a pile of ash over a mosaic floor bore witness to some form of habitation of the site in post-Roman times. Another Roman villa, at Marianella, in the hills behind Naples, has yielded clear evidence of late occupation (De Stefano and Carsana, 1987: 61–9). Originating as a farm of classic Vitruvian type, with rooms grouped around three sides of a square courtyard, dating from the first century AD, it yielded broad-line painted pottery dating to the seventh or eighth century. The pottery was associated with two pits and a number of post-holes found within the surviving Roman structures, probably testifying to use of the site as a small farm. A simple adult inhumation burial without grave-goods was cut through the rubble of the building. Though there was evidently continuity or re-use of the Roman farm, farming activity in early medieval times was clearly of a very different nature and greatly reduced in scale. Final abandonment may have been brought about by the shift of the inhabitants to the budding village of Piscinola, attested as *loco Piscinule* in 1058 (MND, *R*. 490).

Farms, Hamlets and Isolated Churches

Despite the increasing amount of evidence for occupation of many ancient Roman villas after the early sixth century, the remains are usually so slight as to suggest that it relates to single families or small groups eking out a living on the land and producing limited surplus for exchange. Many of these sites

had probably become farms or hamlets. Though archaeology of minor rural sites in Italy is still embryonic, a certain amount of evidence does seem to show that early medieval farms and hamlets existed throughout the peninsula, but not always set upon the site of pre-existing Roman buildings.

In Tuscany, small farmsteads, probably single family units, have been found at Poggio al Tesoro and S. Quirico e Pace (Castelnuovo Berardenga, Siena province), and appear to date from the sixth to mid-seventh century. In the *ager Campanus,* survival of the Roman centuriation pattern suggests a rather widespread continuity in farming through Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Excavations of some 70 hectares in the area of four *centuriae*, at Gricignano (CE), have identified two rooms of a modest farm building, with its dwarf walls and an adjoining orchard, perhaps dating to the sixth century and abandoned no later than the seventh (Iodice and Soricelli, 1996). It sat upon a fill, dating to the second half of the fifth century, that obliterated ditches associated with the 20 x 20 *actus* grid of the first half of the second century BC. At Supersano (Lecce), in the heel of Italy, two sunken-featured dwellings or *Grubenhäuser* built on the edge of a marsh have yielded radiocarbon dates of AD 530–660 and 650–780 (both with 95.4 per cent probability) (Arthur, 1999b).

The difference in architecture between Gricignano and Supersano could not be more striking. Traditional views would have the former building of classical tradition, with the latter representing the influx of a new population, presumably Lombard. Whilst stone was being used for building at Gricignano and elsewhere, excavations at Colle S. Giovanni di Atri (Teramo) in Abruzzo have revealed the extensive use of mud-brick in buildings dating from the seventh century onwards (Staffa, 1994). Indeed, the use of mud-brick is becoming quite well attested in Roman archaeological contexts, and perhaps sunken-featured buildings were also part of the classical landscape of Italy (Frayn, 1979: 120). However, it is likely that mud-brick and wooden houses became ever more common from the sixth century. Marco Valenti (1996) has catalogued some 144 late antique and early medieval wooden-built houses in Italy, 52 of which have been found in urban contexts. At the same time, in certain parts of the peninsula, from Arene Candide in Liguria, to Statte near Taranto, caves were gradually being re-inhabited (D'Angela and Gorgolione, 1979; Biffino, 1997; in general, Christie, 1995). It is perhaps best to see the motley of building types in early medieval Italy as principally local responses to the varied environments of the country. Attempts to recognise specific cultural groups or rather to sort out immigrant from autochthonous populations on the basis of architecture are rash and must await a better understanding of both Roman and early medieval rural building traditions.

Some hamlets or small villages also existed, though our knowledge of them is limited. Excavations on the hilltop of S. Maria in Cività, in the Biferno valley (Fig. 4.6), for instance, revealed a probable timber palisade and a stone

rampart enclosing a small settlement with a church. The site appears to have been founded in the later sixth or seventh centuries and abandoned during the ninth (Hodges *et al.*, 1980; Hodges and Wickham, 1995). Founded later, perhaps around AD 800, on the site of a Roman estate centre, the settlement of Mola di Monte Gelato, according to Tim Potter, does not seem 'to have resembled a nucleated, village-type settlement'. He suggests that 'the church [with baptistery] probably served a largely dispersed rural community' (Potter and King, 1997: 78). The small ninth-century church on Colle S. Angelo in Molise may also have served a scattered community, before being abandoned in favour of the village of Colli, founded by the monastery of S. Vincenzo al Volturno in 972 (Foster *et al.*, 1995). At Montarrenti, in Tuscany, a settlement defended by a defensive enclosure wall seems to have already been in existence by the ninth century, later to develop into a large hilltop settlement (Francovich and Hodges, 2003; Cantini, 2003). Similar hilltop sites appear to have dotted the Abruzzi, such as Caramanico and Colle S. Giovanni at Atri (Staffa, 2000).

This still somewhat scanty evidence, with large-scale excavations a rarity, nonetheless recalls similar developments in settlement growth in parts of northern Europe, where the quality and quantity of evidence is enviable (for a general picture see Hamerow, 1995). In discussing the genesis of the village of Wharram Percy in England, Michael Aston suggested that 'Saxon settlement in the area seems to have consisted of a scatter of farms with an isolated church between them, and the Shapwick project seems to illustrate a similar pattern. This may have been the situation at the time of the Domesday

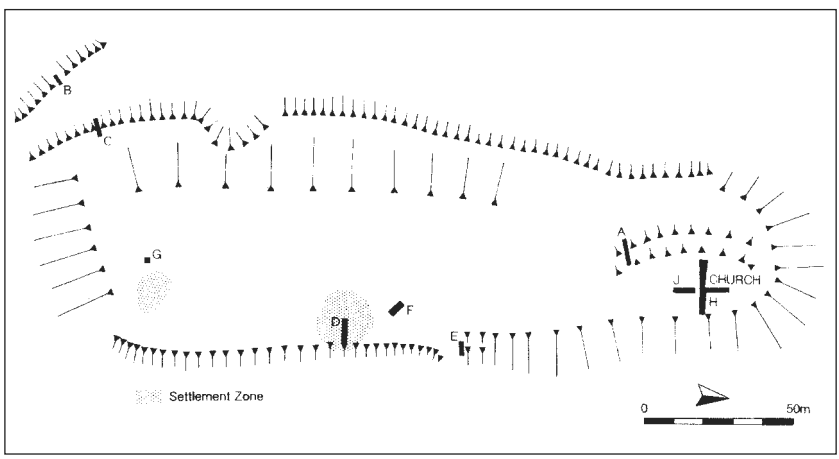

Figure 4.6 Plan of the early medieval hilltop settlement of S. Maria in Città, Molise (from Hodges *et al.*, 1980)

Book, and it may be that a nucleated village was not established until later Saxon times or the twelfth century' (1985: 69).

Medieval Villages

The debate concerning the genesis and chronology of the medieval village in Italy is likely to continue for some time given the scarcity of medieval rural archaeology in many parts of the peninsula, rendering it arduous to discern regional variations. In the hills of Campania, Lazio, Tuscany, the Abruzzo, as elsewhere, villages appear to have taken the form of clustered farms or hamlets perched on the summits and surrounded by defences. The phenomenon, intensively documented over the last thirty years, forms part of the process of *incastellamento*, which was by no means uniform throughout the peninsula (for example, Wickham, 1985; Toubert, 1995). There is some evidence for settlement shift, from lowland areas to hilltops, such as in the case of the *Rocca Mons Dragonis* (nr. Mondragone), where the later medieval perched settlement seems to have been presaged by a low-lying early medieval village of eighth- or ninth-century date (Albarella *et al*., 1989) (Fig. 4.7). In the lowlands of Campania and Puglia, however, where hills are lacking, various later medieval villages developed on the same sites as early medieval foundations; excavations at Apigliano (Martano, nr. Lecce) are revealing a number of pits which belong to what appears to have been an extensive settlement dating from the eighth century and enduring as a village into the fifteenth (Arthur, 1999c). Unfortunately, the pits cannot yet be related to any buildings, once again emphasising the probable existence of quite insubstantial architecture.

Viewed as a characteristic of the feudal mode of production, many scholars have seen the village emerging in Carolingian times, perhaps developing on a model present far earlier in Iron Age northern Europe. An eighth-/ninth-century foundation date would suit the evidence from Apigliano and other medieval Italian villages. However, Apigliano was undoubtedly within Byzantine territory. Thus, unless we accept the view that the appearance of sites such as Apigliano is an expression of Byzantine feudalism, dearly advocated by some Marxist historians, we shall have to seek another explanation for the appearance of villages in Byzantine territory at this date.

Whilst the Norman contribution to village foundation in the South is perhaps less strong than once thought, it is perhaps safe to say that the period that witnessed large-scale multiplication of villages began towards the end of the first millennium. Whilst some villages were no doubt self-sufficient, coming into being through man's inherent gregarious nature, I would see the development of the village in the context of a gradual population increase after the difficulties of the early Middle Ages (cf. Roberts, 1996). If, as has

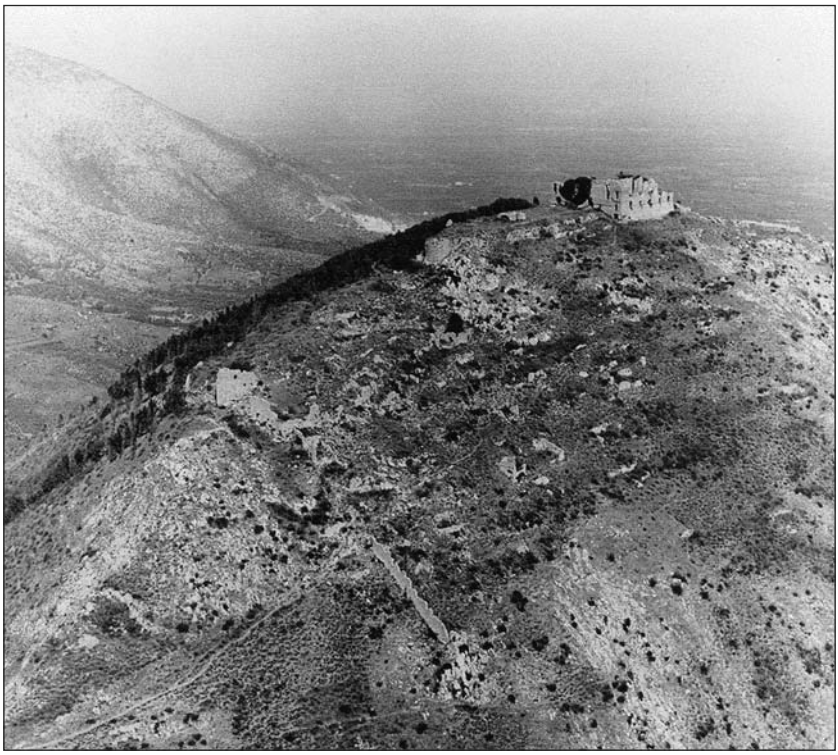

Figure 4.7 ***Rocca Mons Dragonis*** **perched on the hill of Monte Petrino, Mondragone (CE) (author's archive)**

been argued, the downhill trend in the Mediterranean and European economy ceased by the later eighth and early ninth centuries, we might suppose this moment to signal the beginning of an ever-increasing requirement for surplus agrarian produce by developing towns and their societies. Indeed, it would be interesting to see if nucleated rural settlement developed earlier around major centres such as Rome and Naples, than in less populated areas. For the countryside that fed Rome, a little evidence is available: under Pope Hadrian, in the later eighth century, we have specific mention of the creation of *domuscultae*, intended to organise rural production and redistribution. Going by the evidence from S. Cornelia (Christie, 1991b), these were perhaps more similar to monastic granges than villages, though the noted site of Mola di Monte Gelato (Potter and King, 1997) provides a different picture.

The ninth century also witnesses the appearance of a number of major monasteries, both in town and countryside, each of which possessed scattered

holdings throughout Italy. By far the best known is S. Vincenzo al Volturno, which recent archaeology has revealed as a lively centre of agricultural production and industry, whose dependencies could reach as far as Oria in southern Puglia, well over 300 km away. It is hard to doubt that both the mother houses and their dependencies contributed to an economic revival, though greater impetus was almost certainly given by the Norman donations from the later eleventh century onwards.

In much of Italy the boom in rural nucleation relates to the ninth and perhaps more so to the tenth century, possibly responding to further demographic increase, settling political and economic conditions and developing control and rationalisation of agriculture by landowners, including monasteries. The earliest phase at Montarrenti (Siena) consisted of wooden constructions of the eighth century, replaced in the twelfth/thirteenth century by a castle surrounded by its village (Cantini, 2003; Francovich and Hodges, 2003). In southern Puglia, the village of Quattro Macine appears to have developed around a small tenth- or early eleventh-century Byzantine proprietary church, though some form of occupation at the site already existed by the eighth century (Arthur *et al.*, 1996).

By the turn of the millennium most villages probably possessed churches. Churches may well have been used as catalysts for the formation of villages, being sited by farms or hamlets. This sequence works as long as we can show that previous settlement was largely based on scattered farms and hamlets – for which, at present, scanty evidence exists. We have seen above how a number of early medieval churches with cemeteries occur in the Italian countryside without any apparent associated settlement. These occasionally possessed baptisteries, and may well have been created as the centres of *pievi* or primitive parishes to serve scattered populations living in farms. It is quite unlikely that they were solely religious, instead possessing important social and economic functions as centres of markets, permitting the exchange necessary to the developing farming communities, as well as stimulating contacts with the wider world. The Italian evidence would suggest rural nucleation through the gradual shift in the habitation of scattered populations to sites around churches leading, thus, to the creation of villages. But the outside stimulus for this was unlikely to have been based on any great desire by the church founders, whether lay or ecclesiastical, to better the living conditions of the rural population; the existence of villages would have allowed for tighter control of the population by the Church, landowners and the State, in the collection of dues and manpower.

At present, perhaps the best archaeological evidence in Italy for the process of nucleation comes from Tuscany, where scattered farms of the sixth to mid-seventh century have been recognised, dating prior to the appearance of villages. In one example, scattered farms are followed first by the construction of the rural church of Galognano, presumably serving a dispersed community,

and later by the foundation of the village at Poggio Imperiale (Valenti, 1996) (Fig. 4.8).

The great importance of churches to villages might also be recognised in village toponyms with the fusion of the church dedications with the names of localities where villages were to develop. San Giorgio a Cremano or S. Pietro a Patierno, both in the hinterland of Naples, can be cited as just two possible instances where, prior to the development of the nucleated sites by a sort of gravitational pull exerted by the churches, Cremano and Patierno were simply localities. Virtually nothing is known regarding the first phase plans of villages, making it difficult to speak about settlement planning. Indeed, what little data exist suggest that planned villages were a phenomenon of the later Middle Ages, at times resembling the *bastides* of France and Britain. Therefore, village foundation documents, for which we possess a certain amount of evidence, may have been intended to formalise a developing state of affairs, that of gradual and, at times, enforced nucleation, so as to establish property and taxation rights.

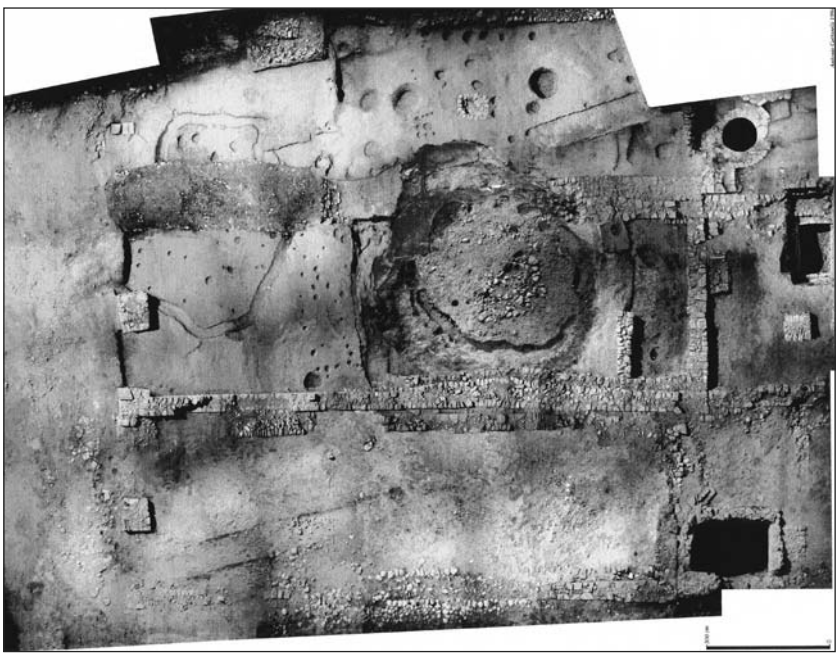

Figure 4.8 General view of the 1995 excavations at Poggio Imperiale at Poggibonsi (SI). Lombard and Carolingian-period buildings beneath twelfth- to thirteenth-century walls (courtesy M. Valenti)

Some Explanations

This discussion began by emphasising the great diversity of natural environments in Italy, with varying economic potential. This undoubtedly was a major factor both in the development of medieval and modern Italy and in the creation of concepts such as the 'industrialised North' and the 'backward South' or *mezzogiorno,* which still guide Italian (and now European community) politics. No paper can do justice to this variety, which requires a depth of knowledge and breadth of vision of Braudelian stature (Carandini, 1993). I have attempted a brief synthesis only of what appear to be the overriding trends in the development of Italian landscapes between *c.* AD 400 and 1000, offering some tentative explanations.

For a long time late Roman and early medieval archaeology in Italy has been coloured by a debate on the levels of continuity or rupture in the towns of northern Italy. This has been most recently summarised by Ward-Perkins (1997) in a stimulating paper on continuity or catastrophe. What is now becoming ever more pressing is the need for analysis of interaction between town and country, two absolutely indivisible entities. Where towns survived, it was often the countryside that permitted it, implying its organisation in some fashion. Where towns did not cope, we should perhaps imagine greater disruption of the countryside.

Following the crises of the third century, the first actions of the Tetrarchy were an attempt at tighter control of the means of production and exchange and a weakening of private enterprise, witnessed in the reorganisation of the empire and its administration and legislation. Subsequent breakdowns of this policy of control provoked a reaction, visible as an increase in the autonomy of leading families and of the Church with respect to the emperor and the State. The intents of government and populace seem to have taken ever more separate ways.

Arguably much of the new settlement hierarchy of Late Antiquity was a result of the administrative changes and state centralisation of the Tetrarchy and Constantine that eventually set the model for both ecclesiastic and private foundations. The *vicus* settlement type, with variegated characteristics, was certainly present earlier, co-existing with villas and farms within a town-dominated landscape, though until the fourth century it does not seem to have been a dominant feature of state control. From Late Antiquity the ratio of towns to *vici* perhaps changed in favour of the latter, implying substantial structural changes, involving a more centralised administration and changing ideological values, partly brought about by Christianity. The major difference, nonetheless, should perhaps be sought in the quantities and management of agrarian surplus required by the new state of affairs. Thus the *vicus* was no longer a relatively marginal productive and marketing unit within a strong market economy, but rather had become central to the functioning of a closely

controlled late Roman distributive network which, nonetheless, did not negate free trade (Wickham, 1989). Despite what may be judged as a failure on the part of Rome, particularly if viewed from the towns, the new economic system permitted the survival of the State, and of privileged towns, as well as providing a solid base for the ensuing Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy.

The economic network was, nonetheless, fragile, and the warfare under Justinian effectively resulted in its fragmentation through a systems collapse. During that episode, regular communications broke down as Rome, besieged thrice, and the major towns themselves, were all contended by the two warring parties. The structured *vici* could not survive the severing of links between centre and periphery, and it is likely that there was some measure of population movement away from these centres or agro-towns. It is still too early to judge the effects that the war may have had on the *vici*. The principal church of San Giusto, for instance, may have burnt down during the war, sealing a hoard with coins no later than AD 523–530. The succeeding history of the site is one of precarious reuse of the structures, with likely population decline, until its final abandonment during the seventh century (Volpe, 1998: 298–300).

Procopius stated that 'Italy, which is not less than three times the size of Libya, is more destitute of men'. Following the Byzantine/Graeco-Gothic War there was a need to create a new organisation of production and exchange, which is witnessed by the *Pragmatica sanctio* of AD 554, supported by Pope Vitalian. The generalissimo-cum-governor Narses is attested as in charge of reconstruction in AD 565, though few of his works are known (one project was the rebuilding of a bridge of the *Via Salaria*, cut by Totila: *CIL* VI, 1199). Reorganisation of the economy was based, of necessity, on the strongest surviving centres, towns and *castra*, and no longer on the capillary system of *vici*, which would have been too difficult to reconstruct and repopulate. It is no mere coincidence that later Byzantine towns were termed *castra*. Investment in these centres is demonstrated by archaeology, which has yielded evidence of directional trade necessary to their upkeep.

Indeed, administrative control outside of the surviving centres and their immediate hinterlands seems to have been all but absent. In this context, some population groups may have formed hamlets, perhaps through concerns of defence, including such different entities as hilltop settlements (for example, S. Maria in Città and Castelseprio) and island refuge sites (for example, Torcello and Ischia). Other population groups may have founded single family farms, at times reusing the sturdy and convenient remains of earlier Roman buildings or the caves present in areas of *karst* geomorphology.

One may suggest that Justinian pumped money into Italy so as to stimulate the economy and collect taxes to finance the war effort and his public works elsewhere in the Empire illustrated by the *De Aedificiis*. A signal of this exploitation may be the assigning, as early as AD 537, of the comparatively

wealthy island of Sicily under the administration of the *comes patrimonii per Italiam*, responsible for tax collection and the creation of palatine mints at Ravenna and Carthage (Hendy, 1985: 404). But in reality, the 'golden age of Justinian' was such solely for strategic sites and the centres of Empire.

With the Lombard invasion, the weaknesses of Byzantine power in Italy seem to be shown by gradual marginalisation of many of its territorial possessions to peripheral lands. Only the vital strongholds such as Ravenna, Rome, and Naples, lay in highly productive territories, though they were lost to the empire during the eighth century, the last two to separatist movements that must have been largely stimulated by the agricultural wealth of their respective countrysides.

The Lombards gradually brought about the creation of some new administrative central places, particularly in south Italy, which may have been more devastated by the vicissitudes of war and where we might suspect greater demographic upheavals and abandoned lands. Though the archaeology of Benevento (Lupia, 1998), the centre of southern Lombard power, is just beginning, and little is known of the gastaldates (satellite administrative centres), investigations at the probable example at Matera are beginning to show the emergence of what may have been a substantial population already by the eighth century (Bruno, 2001); on the eve of the Norman invasion it appears to have become a thriving town.

Both within the Byzantine territories and in the old Lombard lands of southern Italy and the north, reorganisation of the rural environment towards the end of the millennium seems strongly conditioned by the foundation of churches. These were ostensibly for the *cura animarum*, though added value was provided by their function as market sites – a pattern that appears also in various parts of France and lowland England. By attracting populations, they also served in resettling abandoned or marginal lands, preparing them for agricultural development. However, we should be wary of the scale and chronology of land clearance. In the Molise valley it appears to have been of rather limited scale until the end of the Middle Ages whilst around S. Vincenzo al Volturno it was perhaps already significant by the ninth century (Barker, 1995: 313).

The creation of fortified sites (*incastellamento*), making use of hilltops where possible, was also a feature of certain areas of Italy towards the end of the first millennium. These sites may at first be likened to lowland villages, though, as the centuries passed, many developed into seigneurial strongholds. This seems to have occurred particularly in areas of less centralised political control or in borderlands. The phenomenon is perhaps less marked in Byzantine and later, Norman, southern Italy.

Though I remain acutely aware of the shortcomings of this paper, they reflect, in part, the still scanty knowledge of early medieval Italy. Hardly a single cemetery or settlement has yet been fully excavated or published,

surveys often skip the 'Dark Ages', and secure artefact chronologies have still to be achieved. Furthermore, early medieval landscapes remain evanescent. Most of the work to date still aims to put dots on a map, whilst many views of the countryside remain coloured by the stock sequence of late antique abandonment, early medieval wilderness, followed, around the year 1000, by land clearance and the spread of cultivation. Clearly, the way forward is first and foremost methodological: standards of excavation need to be high, particularly to recover evidence of wooden, mud-brick or *pisé* buildings, and chronologies must be tightly anchored, perhaps through radiocarbon dating. What stands out, however, is the variety of responses throughout the peninsula to the changing economic situation during the second half of the first millennium. The only way to fully understand them is to gather and collate, area by area, further and more detailed evidence regarding such diverse subjects as the environment, settlement types, construction methods, the nature of stock and arable economies, ceramic and monetary distributions, and so on. Much work thus remains to be done to create a properly coherent picture of early medieval rural Italy.

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Chapter 5

Vandal, Byzantine and Arab Rural Landscapes in North Africa

Anna Leone and David Mattingly

Introduction

In this chapter we shall discuss a range of evidence pertaining to late antique landscapes and land-use in North Africa. The focus will be on the transformation of the rural landscape from the late Roman to the Vandal, Byzantine and, when possible, Arab periods, and on the provinces of Zeugitana, Byzacena and Tripolitania (modern Tunisia and northern Libya). (For a general description of the landscape organisation in Roman times see Leveau *et al.*, 1993: 155–200.) Our analysis is based on published data from field surveys, historical and epigraphical sources, and data related to ceramic production, botanical and faunal evidence. Yet these data are far from perfect. In addition to a general dearth of excavated rural sites, two main limits must be stressed: the lack of homogeneity of the data, deriving from different projects with diverse methodologies; and a similar unevenness of knowledge of the material culture used to date the phases of activity.

The organisation of rural landscape is in large measure (even if not entirely) a product of economic systems and their trajectories across time and the analysis of this topic is closely aligned with the study of the archaeological evidence related to economy. Substantial evidence exists of Roman-period pottery distribution and production in North Africa, particularly for fine wares (especially in Tunisia) and amphorae. For that reason we argue that a synthesis on the location of the pottery kilns in the countryside would provide further clues regarding the late antique rural landscape, especially when we consider that North African fine ware enjoyed an extensive distribution to Mediterranean markets and surely stands proxy for large-scale exports of agricultural products (such as cereals, olive oil and wine) and other commodities; moreover, it is the pottery evidence that defines the chronology of occupation of sites and buildings. Unfortunately, ceramic chronologies and the evolution of particular forms/types cannot be considered here in detail, because it requires too many elements not directly related to land exploitation and its organisation.

In what follows, we shall first outline the nature of the field survey data and the evidence of regional ceramic production, before considering the contribution of rural field survey evidence from Tunisia and Libya, and finally assessing how this can feed into an historical and palaeoeconomic synthesis.

An important issue to be considered is the extent to which rural Africa was a land in decline in Late Antiquity (a point often argued in relation to literary evidence – see Lepelley, 1967 – but rarely considered in relation to the archaeological data now available). The period has often been compared unfavourably with the Roman imperial period, when the North African countryside has been characterised as a 'landscape of opportunity' (Mattingly, 1997); furthermore, historiographical tradition usually views the Vandal period as a 'Dark Age' for North Africa (though objections on this were expressed by Christian Courtois already in 1955). The subsequent development of studies of Vandal Africa, especially over the last twenty years, has generated further doubts. The misplaced emphasis on ruinous decline was in part due to the contribution of the ancient sources and especially of Victor Vitensis in his *Bellum Vandalorum.* Although he certainly paints a picture of decadence and decline, this image is based strongly around the partial destruction of Carthage by the Vandals in AD 439 (ch. 1.4). We must consider this as a report of a specific historical event – the capture of the city – not of the nature of Vandal rule in the long term. On the other hand, nor should we take at face value the testimony of documentary sources such as the Albertini Tablets, which deal with the continued use of traditional Roman forms of agricultural tenancy and land-holding arrangements in southern Tunisia under Vandal rule (Hitchner, 1995; Mattingly, 1989). Both continuities and changes are to be expected against the backdrop of political and economic upheaval in late antique North Africa, but equally significant is the extent to which we can discern different regional trajectories developing in this period.

Reconstructing Rural Landscapes: Surveys in Tunisia and Northern Libya

Although there has been an increasing interest in rural field survey in North Africa in recent decades (syntheses in Mattingly and Hitchner, 1995: 189–96; Stone, 1997), the region still lags far behind the European sector of the Mediterranean as regards the quantity of published data. What is lacking in terms of quality is in part compensated for by the extraordinary preservation of surface traces in some cases, allowing much more realistic inferences to be drawn about the nature of the settlements recorded than is commonly the case with European plough-zone assemblages (see Francovich *et al.*, 2000). Another interesting aspect is that the North African surveys span a wide range of environments, from Mediterranean farming belt to inland steppe and pre-

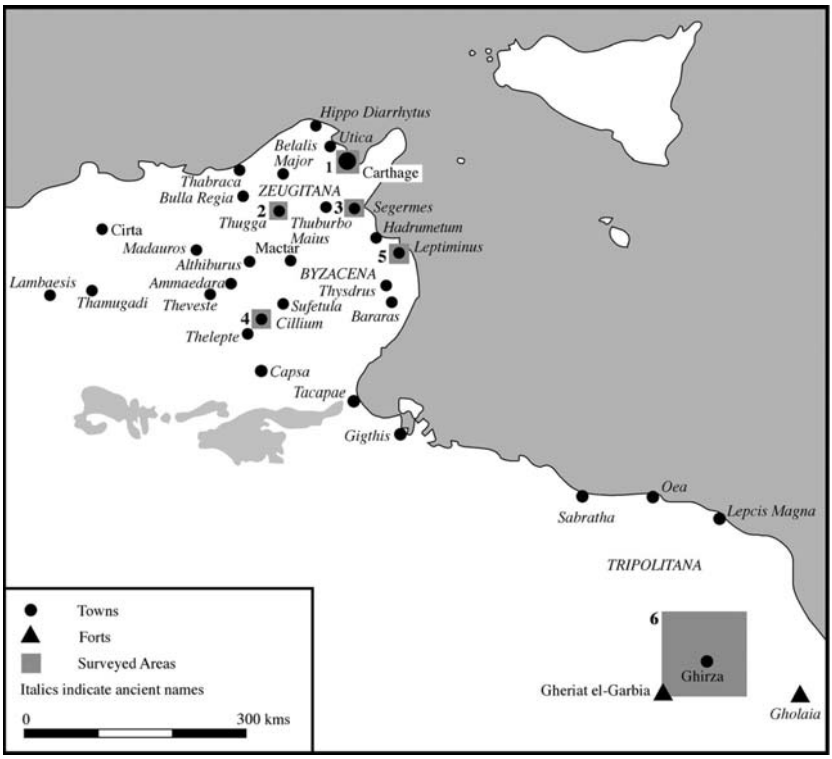

Figure 5.1 Map of Tunisia and Tripolitania indicating survey areas discussed in the text (drawn by L. Farr)

desert zones, each offering different possibilities for ancient exploitation. It would not be surprising to see these varied landscapes responding differently to the challenges and transitions of Late Antiquity (Fig. 5.1).

In Tunisia a broad image of the archaeological remains was provided already in the nineteenth and early twentieth century by the Atlas Archéologique (Babelon *et al.*, 1892–1913). More recently, numerous surveys have occurred, mainly in the north and centre of the country. Some of these have focussed on a particular aspect, such as the study of the coasts (Paskoff *et al.*, 1991; Paskoff and Trousset, 1991) and that of the 'Sahel Pottery Survey' (Peacock *et al.,* 1989; 1990) directed towards the analysis of the distribution of pottery kilns (either producing fine ware – African Red Slip (ARS) – coarse ware or amphorae) in Byzacena (inland and south of Hadrumetum – modern Sousse) (Fig. 5.2). Other surveys have focussed on only very small areas and have been only partially and superficially published

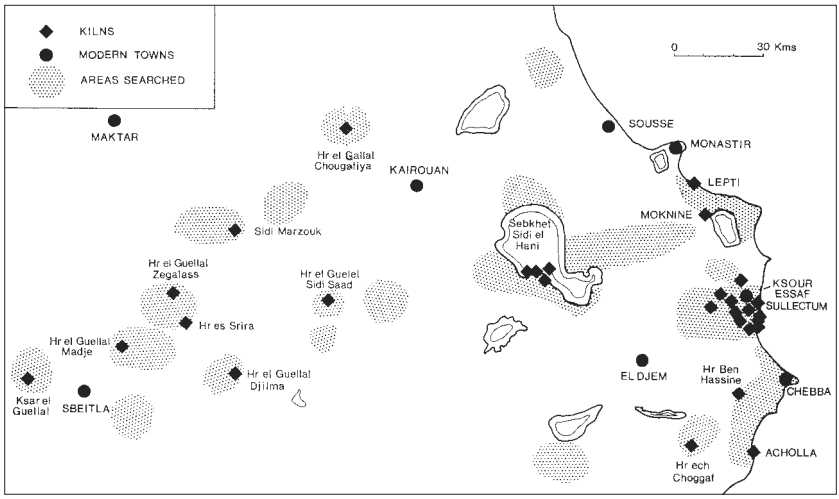

Figure 5.2 Sahel Pottery Survey – plan with the location of pottery kilns (from Peacock *et al.*, 1990)

(for example, the Brathay survey in the Sbeitla area: Addyman, 1962; Addyman and Simpson, 1966). Other small scale surveys have also been realised, such as around the city of Sbeitla (Duval, 1990). A major archaeological mapping initiative in Tunisia has recorded 'classical' rural sites over a large area, but is not useful for our analysis because these surveys have not systematically recorded ceramic data, excluding the possibility of the sort of fine chronological analysis required by this study (Ben Baaziz, 1993).

More extensive surveys are fewer in number – the most notable being the Carthage, Segermes, Dougga, Kasserine and Leptiminus surveys – and are not easily comparable because of different methodologies and levels of publication of the data collection. Greene's survey around Carthage focussed on reconstructing the organisation of the landscape between prehistory and the Ottoman period in the area directly surrounding the city (Greene, 1983; 1992). However, the relationship between the results obtained and the overall territory of Carthage is unclear, especially as the latter is believed to have been exceptionally large, extending further south and west than the area surveyed. Unfortunately very few results from this survey have been published and only the broad chronological evolution and transformation of the settlement pattern can be sketched, not aided by the failure thus far to publish the pottery found in the survey.

Higher quality data are available for the survey around Segermes in Zeugitana (Fig. 5.3), where a large number of sites have been recorded, many

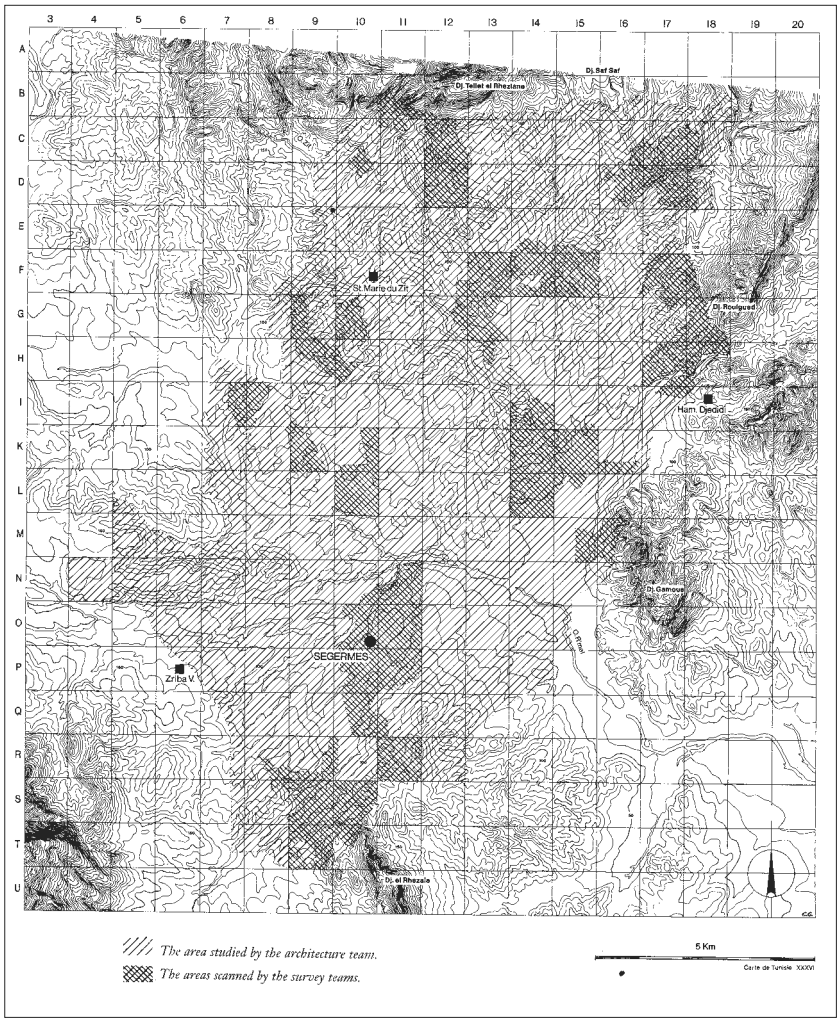

Figure 5.3 Segermes Valley Project – plan of the surveyed area (from Dietz *et al.*, 1995b)

with structural remains (Dietz *et al.*, 1995a/b; Ørsted *et al.*, 2000). The survey has analysed different areas (including the *municipium* and its suburbs) and extended across a large part of the Segermes plain and surrounding hills. The Dougga survey in north-western Tunisia has investigated three different areas near the ancient city: the southern part of the Wadi Arkou (probably occupied by an imperial *saltus*); the Gettousiyya valley towards the Djebel Garn

el-Kebsh (characterised by a high percentage of urban settlements); and the most fertile area sector of the Wadi Khalled valley, between Dougga and the Khalled river (data partially published in de Vos, 1997; 2000).

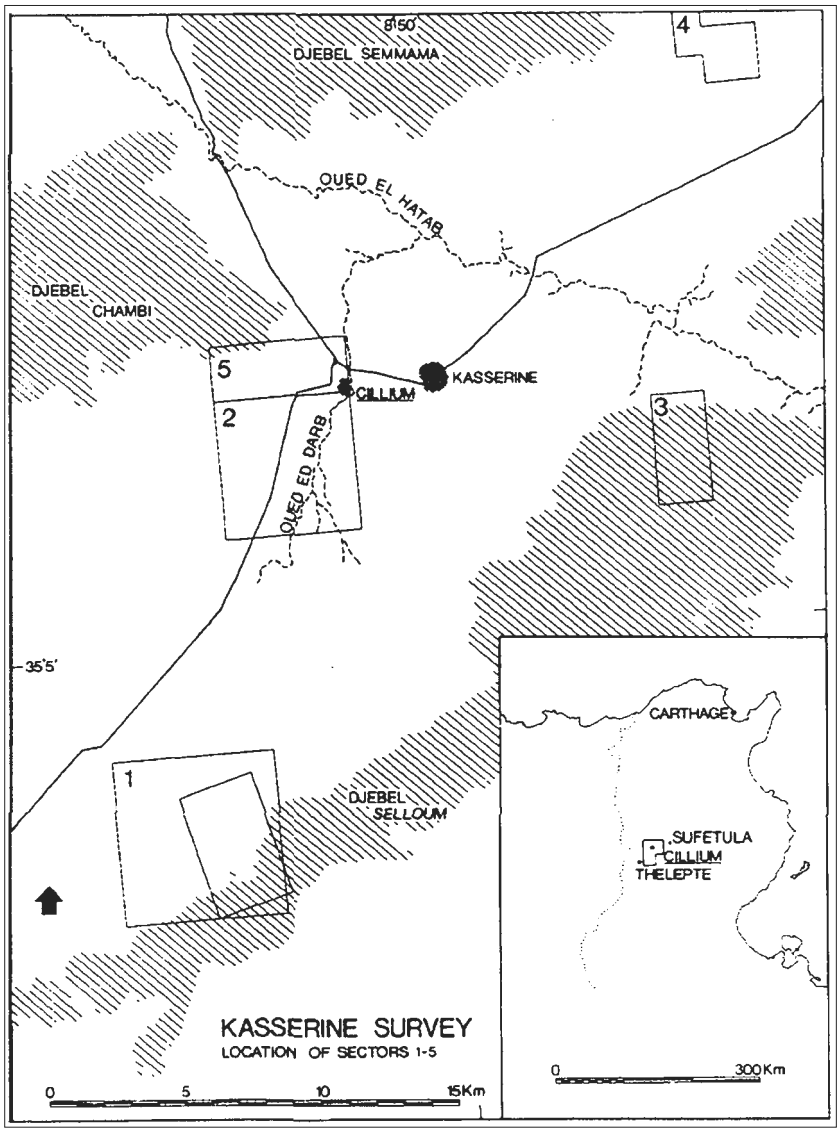

Figure 5.4 Kasserine Project – plan of the surveyed area (from Hitchner, 1988)

Moving further south into central Tunisia, to the province of Byzacena, the Kasserine Survey has attempted to reconstruct the society and economy of the region around the Roman and Byzantine towns of Cillium (Kasserine) and Thelepte (Fig. 5.4). Six areas or sectors within a 20 km radius of the modern town of Kasserine were selected, including a representative sample of the high steppe zone, where vegetation and climate had generally favoured pastoralism since pre-Roman times (as attested by Sallust in *de Bello Jugurtino* 90.1), but where the Roman-period expansion in oleoculture caused a deep transformation in landscape management/exploitation (Hitchner, 1988; 1989; 1990; 1993; Mattingly, 1988a). On the Byzacena coast, the Leptiminus Archaeological Project has investigated the ancient town and its immediate

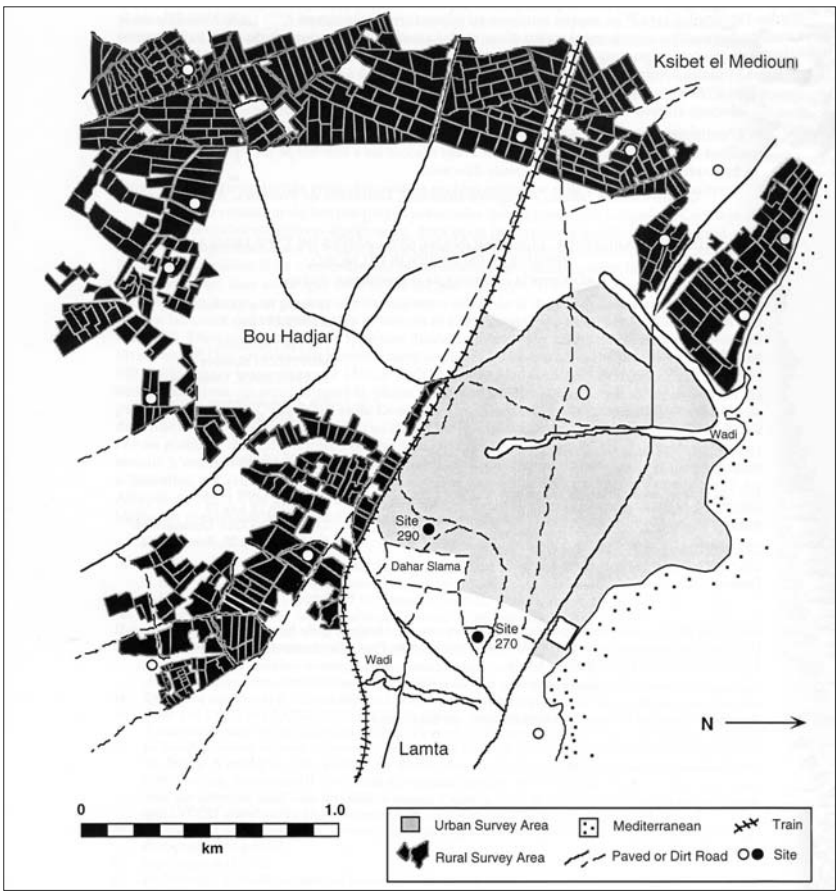

Figure 5.5 Leptiminus – plan of surveyed area (from Stone *et al.*, 1998)

surroundings (*c.* 10 km^2 – Fig. 5.5) in the Sahel region of Tunisia (Ben Lazreg and Mattingly, 1992: 89–114). Although the rural survey has been limited in range, preliminary results reveal differences in settlement type and chronological range in comparison with the immediate suburbs of the town (Stirling *et al.*, 2000; Stone *et al.*, 1998).

In Tripolitania a large project sponsored by UNESCO was undertaken in the pre-desert zone south of Lepcis Magna (Barker *et al.*, 1996a/b). The surveyed area runs along the Wadi Sofeggin and Wadi Zem Zem, forming a rectangle of *c.* 300 x 250 km (75 000 km^2). Tributaries of the Wadi Sofeggin mark the northern limits of the rectangle, and this sector is much better watered than the rest of the pre-desert (the effective northern limit of the survey was at lat.32°N); the southern limits were on the southern side of the Wadi Zem Zem basin at around lat.30°20'N along a series of oases which constituted the edge of the pre-desert settlement in Roman times (Mattingly, 1998 places these in a wider Tripolitanian context).

In comparing these surveys below, we shall look principally at the decrease/increase in the number of sites; only occasionally is information on the kind of buildings given. For this reason we cannot evaluate the data completely, but it is possible to reconstruct the general trends of land use and land occupation in the period of the fourth to seventh centuries AD. Further transformations are not, however, easy to discern, for although Roman to Byzantine fine ware and amphora production is well known in North Africa, particularly in central Tunisia (due principally to the Sahel Pottery Survey), very little is yet known about continued pottery production into the Arab period.

Transformations of the Rural Landscape: Archaeological Evidence

In examining the data from surveys, different regional trends emerge. The Carthage Survey seems to show that the peak periods in terms of numbers of sites were the second and third centuries and the sixth century AD, and with many of these earlier sites continuously occupied into the latter period (Greene, 1992; cited in some detail in Stone 1997; Fig. 5.6). The increase of sites in Late Antiquity began in the fifth century (a 30 per cent increase from the fourth century) and continued in the sixth century AD (a 10 per cent increase), before a decline is attested from the second half of the sixth century. Sites appear abandoned rapidly in the seventh century AD and few survived the Arab conquest into the eighth century (Stone, 1997: 135 – though limited knowledge of early Arab-period pottery could have determined this interpretation).

The Segermes Project has shown evidence of a similar trend (Dietz *et al.*, 1995a/b: 773–99; Ørsted *et al.*, 2000: 105–31). In the first half of the fourth century AD the number of sites increased: 34 sites were distributed over an

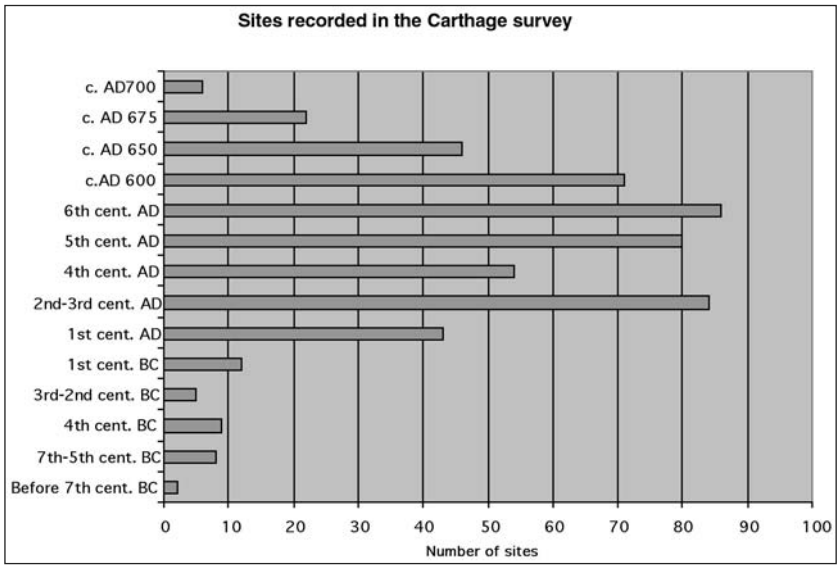

Figure 5.6 Graph with the percentages recorded in the Carthage Survey (after Greene, 1992)

area of 30 km^2, though the northern foothill zone and the central plateau were less densely inhabited than previously. About 20 new sites came into use after AD 350, suggesting an even busier landscape, with the city (*municipium*) of Segermes being the most important centre in the valley. From around AD 400 onwards, and including the early Vandal period from AD 439, the general settlement pattern remained approximately the same with an addition of a few more sites and a few more areas in use (59 sites are recorded, distributed over 48 km^2). A very minor decrease occurs in the last half of the fifth century, but with seven sites in use for the first time.

The first half of the sixth century (including the early Byzantine period) shows evidence of the most intensive use of the valley surrounding Segermes: a total of 83 sites was recorded over 59 km^2. The next century and a half witnessed a gradual, but evident, halving of both numbers of sites and areas in use (41 sites in 34 km^2). In the seventh century the town of Segermes was progressively abandoned, though farms/sites on the central plateau continued to be inhabited. The north-east corner and the southern part of the valley repeat this trend: from a total of 13 sites over 12 km^2, by the last part of the seventh century, before the Arab conquest, only three sites, all located on high ground, remained in use (for a general collection of datasets see Dietz *et al.,* 1995a/b; Ørsted *et al.,* 2000).

Further west, the Dougga Survey shows similar trends (De Vos, 1997; 2000: 20–26, 71–7 – though note that the published ceramic chronology should be treated as provisional: Wilson, 2001). Settlements are classified according to size and typology: large settlements (over 5000 m^2), characterised by monumental buildings and several olive presses; small settlements (smaller than 2000 m^2), centred on temples, *mausolea*, tombs, etc. or hill settlements characterised by mud-brick buildings; smaller settlements (less than 1000 m^2), some with preserved parts of olive presses; artefact scatters; stone quarries. The survey registered how the majority of the late Roman sites originated between the second half of the second century and the fourth century, and belong to the <2000 or <1000 m^2 settlement types, especially in the Wadi Khalled and the Wadi Arkou areas. After the Vandal conquest many sites, primarily small settlements, notably linked to temples, *mausolea* and tombs, were abandoned; the productive centres and farms on the other hand, remained occupied to ensure continuity of land use. Most of the sites persisted until the first half of the seventh century; the latest survivors were small farms with single olive presses, suggestive of a more self-sufficient economy.

Data related to pottery production (particularly African Red Slip – ARS) also come from both rural and urban kiln sites in Zeugitana. For instance, the rural site of El Mahrine, located near Tebourba in north-eastern Tunisia (Fig. 5.7), probably lay on a large private *fundus* (Mackensen, 1985; 1993). The distribution of ARS from here shows an exportation between the second half of the fifth century and the seventh century, all over the west Mediterranean and to most areas of the east except for the northern sector of the Aegean (ibid.). ARS kilns are also known at rural Sidi Khalifa (not far from Hammamet), operating during the early sixth century. An example of an urban-based late antique pottery manufacturing centre is attested by kilns constructed over the *thermae* of the *Laberii* in Oudna and in the periphery of the town, active from the second half of the fifth century until the seventh century AD (Barraud *et al*., 1998: 146; on the general presence of pottery kilns in towns, see Leone, 2003). Given the extensive diffusion of this fine ware, many additional rural and urban kiln sites no doubt remain to be recognised in Zeugitana.

Moving further south, in Byzacena, in the Kasserine area (Fig. 5.4) most of the rural sites were farms, often characterised by olive presses, terraces, enclosures, and irrigation systems. The chronology is long, and the general evidence from the survey suggests that incorporation into the Roman Empire stimulated a significant increase in agriculturally-based settlement early on, with activity continuing at most of the sites between the third and at least the fifth centuries AD, with some enduring to the sixth through the seventh centuries AD (Hitchner, 1988: 8; 1989: 389). Hitchner proposed the subdivision of the sites into different types: oileries (minimum of three presses – substantial centres of agricultural exploitation); villas (buildings with signs

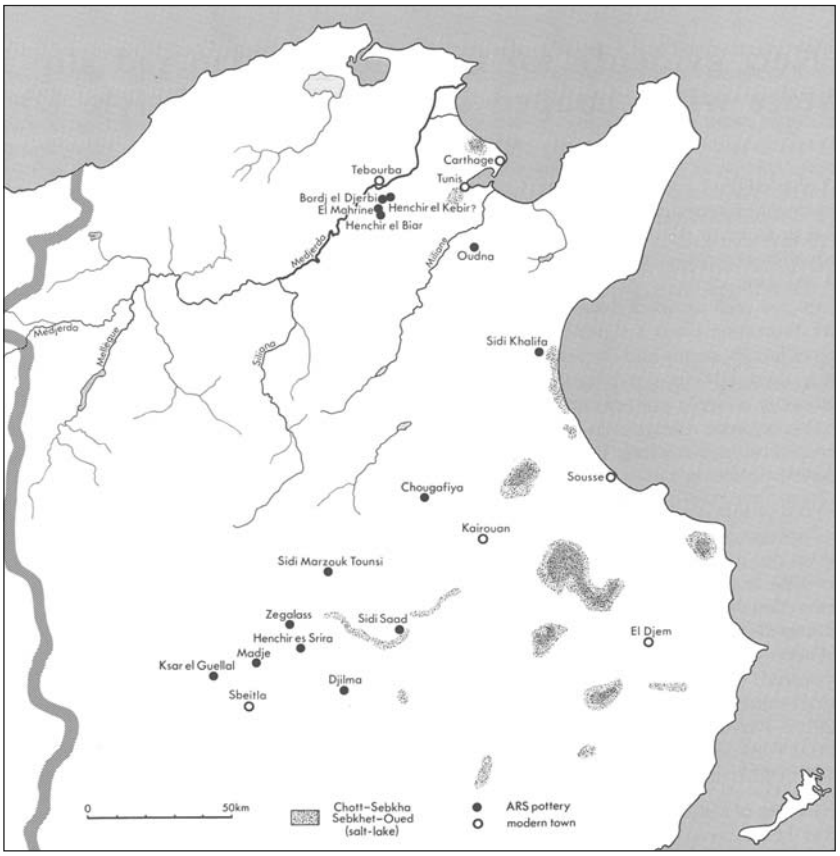

Figure 5.7 ARS pottery kilns in Tunisia (after Mackensen, 1998a)

of wealth such as baths, mosaics, mausolea); 'agrovilles' (large sites containing both civic monuments and numerous substantial agricultural facilities); agglomerations (large nucleated sites, lacking more distinctive features); and small farm sites (some with one or two presses, others with unidentifiable structural remains) (ibid.: 389).

The range of settlement types implies a sophisticated agricultural organisation of the countryside around Cillium and Thelepte, but there is not enough excavated evidence to attempt a complete reconstruction: the examination of the data does at least suggest that some of the smaller sites were satellites of the larger villas and oileries.

At Leptiminus, the rural survey has recorded 27 sites, dating from the Neolithic period to modern times. The Roman sites include three hydraulic

installations, six farmsteads, one cemetery, one kiln and two possible villas. No conclusions about the settlement hierarchy are possible on such a small sample. However, evidence of amphora manufacture has also been recorded at the focal settlement of Leptiminus, where production of Africana I (Africano piccolo) and Africana II (Africano grande) and later of Keay 25 and 62 is attested in the suburban zone (Mattingly *et al.*, 2000: 75–7; cf. Dore, 2001: 76–7, 80–82).

Large-scale ARS production is attested in Byzacena from the third century by several known potteries (Fig. 5.2; centres of so-called 'C' and 'E' fabric production – Pavolini and Tortorella, 1997: 267); numerous kilns have been recorded by targeted survey work in the area between Sullecthum, Kairouan and Sbeitla, including eight potteries for ARS production (Peacock *et al.*, 1989; 1990: 66–84). Two of them (Henchir es-Srira, Djilma) ceased activity around the middle of the fifth century. Others (Chougafiya, Zegalass, Madje, Ksar el-Guellal) seem to have had only a regional distribution and likewise ceased production at the beginning of the fifth century. More significant is the rural site of Sidi Marzouk Tounsi, 105 km from Sousse and 50 km west of Kairouan, with kilns active during the fourth, fifth and early sixth centuries AD (probably ending *c.* 520–530). Others have been recorded in the same area, such as at Ksour Essaf, where the industry has been dated to the fifth century AD. In some cases rural production seems to have succeeded kilns clustering around urban centres. A similar trend has been recorded in the area around Acholla (Peacock *et al.*, 1989). On the southern shore, at Sebkhet el-Hani, the sites were occupied from the late third century and continued certainly until the fifth century, and possibly into the sixth (Peacock *et al.*, 1990: 82).

Turning to Tripolitania, the Libyan Valleys Survey demonstrated a decrease in its site numbers of sites from the mid-Roman period (third to fourth centuries AD: 279 sites) to the late Roman period (fifth century: 193 sites); though the phenomenon is more evident in the east than the west (Figs 5.8–5.9). The greatest drop of sites occurred in the Wadi Umm el-Kharab, but with some evidence (as elsewhere) for increased nucleation of settlement at a smaller number of larger sites. A further reduction of site numbers is observed from the late antique to the Islamic period (sixth century and later: 141 sites), although these numbers are almost certainly affected by a decrease in the number of identifiable diagnostic ceramics in this period. Even sites known to have remained in occupation throughout Late Antiquity appear to have enjoyed less regular access to fine pottery and amphorae and assemblages of this date are generally smaller in size than those of earlier centuries. This strongly suggests a region falling out of contact with the Mediterranean-based political and economic structures. Three hypotheses have been proposed to explain the decrease in apparent settlement activity (Barker *et al.*, 1996a: 179–80). Primarily it could result from a decrease in the

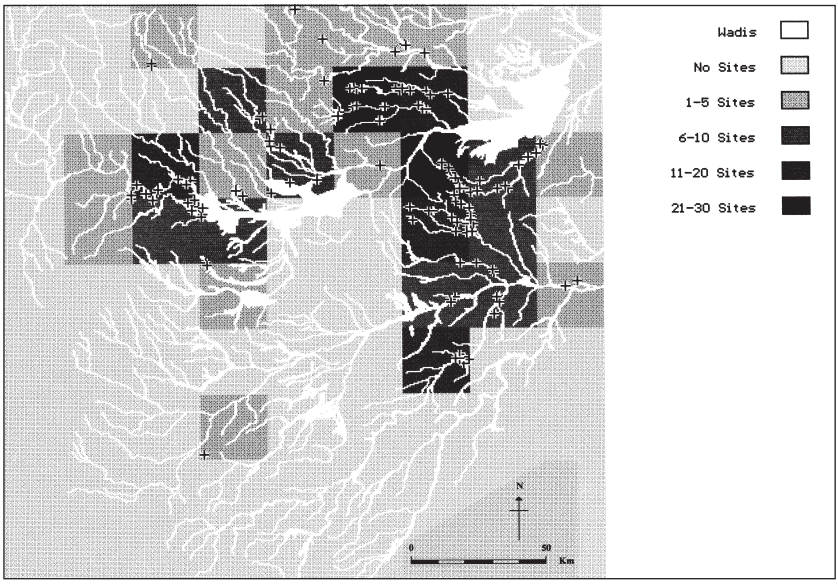

Figure 5.8 Libyan Valleys Survey – distribution of Late Romano-Libyan sites

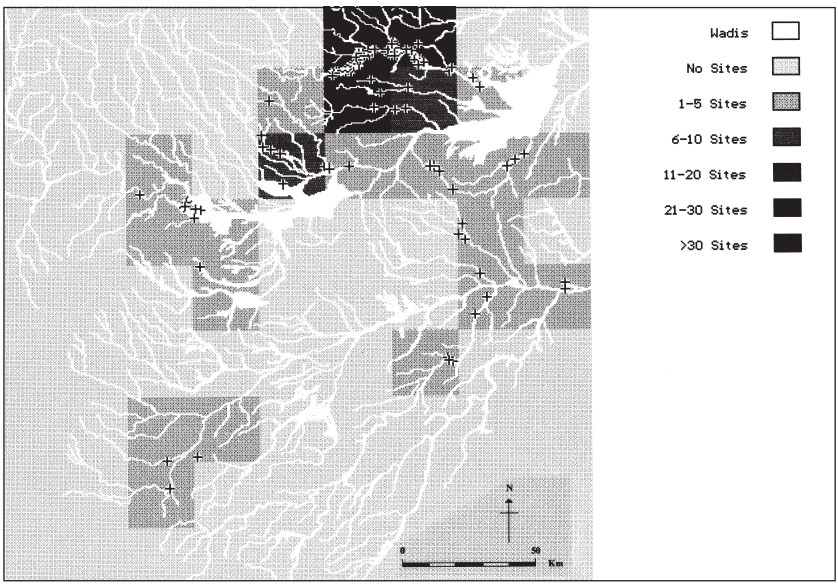

Figure 5.9 Libyan Valleys Survey – distribution of late antique and Islamic sites

supply of diagnostic pottery during the late Roman, Vandal and Byzantine periods; in this case, some additional farms could still have been occupied in Late Antiquity but a lack of pottery evidence prevents corroboration. Secondly, it could be a real reflection of the decrease in occupation of the pre-desert in Late Antiquity, perhaps related to environmental factors, because most of the surviving sites are located in the best-watered areas. The last hypothesis suggests a change in the organisation of land and in the nature of settlement. A combination of these three hypotheses most likely provides the best explanation: socio-economic reorganisation of pre-desert society led to increased nucleation around major sites in certain preferential locations and was accompanied by decreased access to Mediterranean markets (and thus availability of diagnostic pottery).

In the survey area, there were also changes in settlement type between the mid-Roman period and Late Antiquity. Most evident is the appearance of *gsur* (fortified farms), with increasing numbers in the fourth century and more substantially from the fifth century. These buildings probably progressively replaced earlier élite sites of undefended type and nearby unfortified farms seem to have often been in some sort of dependent relationship with them. Although *gsur* were very widespread in the late Roman period, by the Islamic periods the major concentrations of *gsur* were along the Wadi Beni Ulid and the Wadi Merdum, near the northern limit of the surveyed area, where rainfall was the highest in the pre-desert zone and where environmental conditions were most conducive to continuity. A notable exception to this trend was the site of Ghirza on a southern tributary of the Zem Zem (where average rainfall is under 50 mm/year), though there are reasons for suggesting that that site was a tribal and religious centre of special significance (Barker *et al.*, 1996a: 133–4, 337–8; Mattingly, 1999). In considering this aspect, further studies of these local Libyan populations and their organisation are needed. As illustrated, for instance, by the case of Ghirza, these tribes partially adopted Roman models, but it is hard to identify the level of influence of Roman economic organisation and land exploitation (Mattingly, 1998). An engagement in commercial exchange can be hypothesised from the pottery evidence, as Tunisian and Tripolitanian red slip wares have been found in the excavations (Brogan and Smith, 1984: 234–42; Barker *et al.,* 1996b) and some of the tombs in the region were evidently paid for in cash. But there is other evidence to suggest that the Roman affiliation of these rural elites in the frontier zone was far from complete. (For an analysis of the Berber populations in North Africa see Brett and Fentress, 1996; for comments on the cultural dimension of the Ghirza settlement see Mattingly, 1999; for a general analysis of another tribe, the Laguatan, see Mattingly, 1983.)

Changing Rural Landscapes: Problems and Directions

Reconstructing the settlement pattern and changing rural landscapes of Late Antiquity is complex, especially if we consider that different trends have been recorded even within the same broad regions. Bearing this heterogeneity in mind, it is still possible to discern some common features and some historical reasons that might have favoured the creation of the new patterns. It is clear that traditional models of drastically early decline and abandonment of rural landscapes in North Africa are not generally applicable. Parts of North Africa remained densely occupied until the eve of the Arab invasions and perhaps beyond (to be confirmed by more reliable data on pottery typology). However, there are signs that the economic orientation of rural settlement was affected by successive invasions (Vandal, Byzantine and Arab) and by the impact this had on land-holding, taxation and Mediterranean commerce. In some frontier areas the affiliation between native Africans and the Roman Empire was also weakened or ruptured, leading to unrest and even secession (Rushworth, 2000).

First of all we can observe clear differences between Zeugitana, Byzacena and Tripolitania. In fact in the Carthage and the Dougga areas and in the Segermes valley (all located in Zeugitana) there was no decrease in site numbers until at least the second half of the sixth century. Both Carthage and Segermes indeed witnessed the highest numbers of rural sites in the first half of the sixth century AD, perhaps in part linked to the continuation of large-scale Mediterranean commerce in pottery and agricultural produce. Evidence of continuing activity at many rural olive farms is not necessarily proof of continued surplus production of oil, though it seems a reasonable supposition (even if we lack excavation of such late antique presses); however, the establishment in Late Antiquity of many presses inside towns (as at Sbeitla or Thuburbo Maius) does suggest some reorganisation of at least part of the oil-producing economy (Leone, 2003). More precise dating on these late antique urban presses is desirable.

A different trend is evident in both Byzacena and Tripolitania. Starting from the mid-Roman period, for the latter, and from the end of the fifth century for the former, it seems possible to determine a general decrease in rural occupation, in part at least explicable in terms of changed social conditions in the countryside. The pre-desert zone of Tripolitania became progressively more insecure and pressurised from neighbouring tribal populations (Mattingly, 1995). The effects of such a situation resulted in the increased building of fortified farms from the fourth century in Tripolitania and then a progressive nucleation of rural sites. In Byzacena, as argued by Hitchner (1994), there is some evidence for a renewed development of pastoralism on the steppe lands, perhaps in response to a diminished level of olive oil exports due to changes in the Mediterranean economy (on some

aspects related to olive oil production in North African cities see Roskams, 1996). The survey evidence certainly indicates that oleoculture remained an important activity, though now perhaps more directed to local rather than overseas markets (at least in Byzacena). A further change might have been caused also by a postulated period of increased aridity in the high steppe in the late fifth century AD, which may have generated a decline in both animal and crop production (Hitchner, 1994). By contrast, the limited evidence of the Leptiminus Survey suggests that activity in and around that coastal city remained more closely connected to a Mediterranean trading economy, if on a lower level than in earlier times.

Pottery kilns, principally producing ARS and amphorae, were an important aspect of the rural landscape in both Classical times and in Late Antiquity. From the second half of the fifth century (after the first impact that the Vandal invasion probably had on the province), the traditional suburban pottery manufacturing zones of many of the main centres were abandoned in favour of either an increased presence on rural estates or a relocation within selected urban buildings. At Leptiminus, for instance, pottery assemblages from the rural survey appear to peak later than those found in the urban area; second- to fourth-century amphora forms are found in higher percentages in the urban survey, while fifth- and sixth-century amphorae (notably Keay type 62) are much more prominent in the rural surveys. This changing pattern could be explained by the hypothesis that settlements in the countryside had better access to the products of the urban market in Late Antiquity (Mattingly *et al.*, 2000). In effect, some shift of economic activity from the city to the hinterland occurred, perhaps prompted by a decline in the significance and scale of overseas exports. The idea receives support from the data related to the fine ware distribution: in Late Antiquity, commercial activity, especially in Byzacena, became principally focused on local production, with new ARS forms imitating products recorded in the Zeugitana area and having a localised distribution only within Byzacena (see Dore, 2001). Regional and inter-regional markets may thus have partially replaced a diminishing Mediterranean trade.

Secondly, data from the Leptiminus Survey offer a further potential confirmation to this panorama, suggesting a relocation of kilns within the suburban zone, the abandonment of long-established manufacturing sites, and the re-emergence of production in the Byzantine period inside the shell of the old suburban bath complex (Stirling, 2001: 51–72). Thus relocation is taking place within the same urban periphery. This evidence contrasts with the Sahel Pottery Survey, which indicated that potteries were generally located in suburban districts in the earlier period and were moved into the countryside from the Vandal period (Peacock *et al.*, 1989; 1990). These different indicators may in part be due to the diverse spatial scales of the two surveys. The continued presence of some kilns at centres along the coast should not occasion surprise and does not invalidate the general observation that there

was a fairly general relocation (implying reorganisation) of pottery production in the late antique period. It could be argued on the basis of the Byzantine date of the revival of amphora production at Leptiminus that this represents a second phase of major reorganisation of production after a period of relative abeyance. Moreover, one might suggest that the inland rural pottery production centres in Byzacena were mainly directed to local/regional distribution, and the coastal sites instead related principally to commercial activity linked to Mediterranean trade, with greater emphasis in the Vandal period on the former and a revival of the latter after the Byzantine re-conquest.

It is interesting to note an urban pottery production also based in former public structures at Carthage, as identified in an excavation on the northern side of the circular (commercial harbour). Hurst suggested that these craft activities and the entire area were under imperial control/ownership (1994: 68, 93). Other kilns were inserted into a variety of buildings, some at least dating to the late sixth and seventh century AD, such as within vaulted stores on the quay of the rectangular harbour and on the island in the middle of the circular harbour (Humphrey, 1980: 98–9; Hurst, 1992: 88–9 – although the chronology is uncertain). The phenomenon probably continued into the Arab period, as similar evidence has been recorded at Lepcis Magna, where excavations of the Flavian temple, located inside the Byzantine wall, and close by the harbour have revealed pottery kilns and associated production activities, interspersed with domestic structures dated to the early Arab period (ninth/tenth century) (Fiandra, 1975; 1997: 251; Munzi and Cirelli, 2001; for a general synthesis on the phenomenon in North Africa see Leone, 2003 and 2001: 210–15, vol. 1).

The recognition of one or more major reorganisations of pottery supply has profound implications for aspects of rural production. The question of whether this belonged primarily to Vandal or Byzantine times requires further work, though the survey evidence would seem to suggest that an initial shift occurred in the fifth century and that the Arab arrival simply accelerated a pre-existing evolution in the management and organisation of productive activity.

Finally it must be stressed that knowledge of the Arab period is still at a very preliminary stage and further survey work and ceramic studies may refine the picture considerably. Developing studies on the manufacture of North African fine wares have shown that the export-oriented ARS pottery production in Zeugitana continued for longer than it did in Byzacena (for a general synthesis of evidence for ARS production from the fifth to seventh centuries, see Mackensen, 1998b). In Zeugitana there was a final phase of production from the late sixth century AD, characterised by new forms. The conventional view used to be that the production of ARS pottery ended around the mid-seventh century or slightly later (Mackensen, 1998b: 33; Tortorella, 1998); recently, however, it has been proposed that it continued in places into the eighth century AD (Zanini, 1996; Pellecuer and Pene, 1996; Gelichi and Milanese, 1997; 1998).

Palaeoeconomic Data

There is as yet only a very limited amount of published evidence on faunal assemblages and archaeobotanical remains from excavations in North Africa. (Material published up to 1995 are summarised, with references, by Mattingly and Hitchner, 1995: 196–8; see now King, 2001, for a comparison with other parts of the western Mediterranean.) Although the data are too few to draw reliable conclusions about general trends, there are strong hints that significant changes in stock-raising occurred at local levels at least in Late Antiquity. The evidence from various sites excavated at Carthage indicates a decline in the significance of cattle in comparison with the early centuries AD, accompanied by a rise in the volume of pig and (to an even greater extent) of sheep/goat. By the eleventh century, bone assemblages at Carthage were over 90 per cent composed of ovicaprids, though up to that point pig bones continued to be quite well represented. Lepcis Magna, on the other hand, shows little change in its faunal assemblages between the fourth and tenth centuries, apart from the decline of pig bones from *c.* 6 per cent to zero, with cattle remaining below 10 per cent of the total and the assemblage heavily dominated throughout by ovicaprids. The same picture is represented by material from the Libyan Valleys Survey. The sixth- to seventh-century assemblage from the reused eastern baths at Leptiminus provides a useful addition to the list compiled in 1995 (Burke, 2001): cattle again appear to have been of lesser importance here, with 73 per cent of the bones belonging to ovicaprids and 21 per cent to pigs. Another coastal city, Cherchel (in Algeria) shows a different pattern again, with a fifth-century decline in cattle bones, reversed in the seventh century; pigs were evidently not as significant at Cherchel as they were at Carthage and in late antique levels never exceed 10 per cent. Another Algerian site, the inland city of Setif, had high levels of pig bones in fifth-century levels (nearly 50 per cent), but with an almost total replacement of these by ovicaprids and, to a lesser extent, cattle by the tenth century. The available evidence thus reveals a great deal of local variability in meat consumption in late antique Africa.

Interestingly, the butchery analysis of the Leptiminus assemblage strongly suggested that this was not simple domestic waste, but rather the work of professional or semi-professional butchers at the site (Burke, 2001: 448–50). The context of the waste disposal, deposited in a structured way within a building given over to a range of productive activities, recommends that this was not merely 'squatter' action within an abandoned building, but something that was still highly organised and requiring sanction from urban authorities. All the cases cited appear to show the continuance of a controlled pattern of meat supply to urban centres in North Africa, though with cattle perhaps increasingly limited to the northern coastal districts. The raising and consumption of pigs in no way stopped with the first Arab invasions, but

finally declined and disappeared only after the large-scale conversions of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Botanical evidence is much more problematic because of the small number of published sites and the almost total bias amongst these in favour of locations of consumption (for instance, towns), as against places where the food was actually produced. The Libyan Valleys Survey is almost unique in publishing a series of rural assemblages ranging in date from early Roman imperial times to Late Antiquity and the Islamic period (Barker *et al.*, 1996a: 227–63). This material reveals a relatively stable agrarian regime across a lengthy time period, despite the evident changes in settlement type and economic orientation. The main changes during Late Antiquity in this area appear not to have involved new crops or major shifts in the balance between crops, but rather to have been linked to changes in the overall scale of the agrarian economy and the mobilisation of surplus production. More work is urgently needed on these aspects.

Modelling Change: History and Archaeology

Next we need ask how these observations compare with the historical evidence. Zeugitana differed from the other areas in that it probably experienced a complete reorganisation of the countryside after the Vandal conquest, as most of the lands were confiscated (Courtois, 1955). A similar trend may initially have affected Byzacena, but most likely many landowners later regained their properties (as attested by the *vita Fulgenti*, 1; Courtois, 1955: 278). Paradoxically, the relative lack of Vandal interest in the lands of Byzacena and Tripolitania may have contributed to an earlier abandonment of some parts of the countryside there and certainly to the increased isolation of areas from the inter-regional economies in which they had once participated so richly. The ceramics show an increasingly localised pattern of ceramic distribution from the sixth century (see above), perhaps matching a decrease in other forms of production. Despite this, other archaeological evidence (for instance, mosaics in rich houses and churches) in Byzacena seems to attest the maintained presence of a wealthy community in that region.

A peculiarity of *Africa Proconsularis* was the very large area of land held as imperial properties (*saltus imperiales*), with large numbers of tenant farmers or *coloni* (on this subject see Kolendo, 1976; 1996; Sahili Kooli, 1996; Vera, 1987: 268–70). Some of our documents/sources – for instance, the Albertini Tablets (see Courtois *et al.*, 1952; Mattingly, 1989) – imply the continuity and survival of the same sort of organisation from the second to the end of the fifth century and arguably later. This evidence must be set against other indications that the system of managing the land changed from the second century, and most clearly from the fourth century, resulting in a

profound transformation. We in fact witness a switch in emphasis from wheat cultivation to a new kind of agriculture, principally olive oil production (Whittaker, 1978; Mattingly, 1988a; 1988b). Slowly a new kind of organisation/management of lands emerged, mainly related to the imperial and large private properties. In both cases, it involved the institution of a new tenurial status, that is, *Enphyteusis*, (on the origin and evolution of the phenomenon starting from the 250s AD see Vera, 1987: 279; 1991: 472, 477). In the imperial *saltus* it became an indefinite agreement, whilst on the large private *fundi* it became a long-term rental system; very little is meanwhile known of the destiny of small properties (Vera, 1988: 976–8). This re-organisation corresponds with an increase in the number of sites recorded in many areas in the first half of the fourth century, suggesting that the change was in the beginning an advantage for Roman North Africa, because it favoured the redistribution of property and of income previously concentrated in the imperial *fiscus* (Vera, 1987: 279; 1991: 478, 482). Another probable factor to justify the common adoption of the *enphyteusis* system by late Roman emperors will have been the difficulty of managing the *locatio/conductio* system, which in the past obliged *conductors/coloni* to exploit the land on five year leases and then abandon it (Vera, 1991: 472 n. 26), favouring wheat cultivation over long-term arboriculture (On the influence of the different managing systems on the land use and cultivation see Vera, 1987: 276–7, 285–6; 1988: 978–9; on reasons for the adoption of this management system still being debated, ibid.: 276 n. 38).

The change to a sort of hereditary system also aimed to facilitate the total exploitation of the countryside, to recover *agri deserti* and to yield a guaranteed income (Marcone, 1993: 829). When followed by sharp increases in taxation the new form of tenancy may have contributed to periodic agrarian crises and to the progressive abandonment of lands. Zeugitana was not entirely reorganised, except probably in the case of the territory of Carthage as suggested by the increase in the number of sites in the first half of the sixth century AD, and this situation exacerbated the problems related to Roman, and then Byzantine, land exploitation (Courtois, 1955: 257–9). This probably contributed further to the creation of a different image of the landscape, starting from the Vandal period, but becoming more evident during the sixth and the seventh century AD, characterised by a series of reduced cultivated sectors and small rural centres, mainly surviving close to fortified complexes due to the increasing insecurity of the countryside. Another aspect of the diffusion of the *enphytheusis* relates to a change in the management system of lands. *Fundi* were progressively controlled directly by their owners. This situation resulted also in a transformation of the distribution of properties/settlements, giving more space to indigenous groups/nuclei (Vera, 1986: 374), as attested for instance in the case of Caesarea in Mauretania (Leveau, 1984: 503–5).

Arguably, the success stories of late antique rural settlement were those areas closer to the main connecting network of roads or sea lanes, best placed to participate in the still existing, even if reduced, commercial activity. From his analysis of fourth-century ostraka in Carthage, Peña (1998: 171–217) has hypothesised that the mobilisation of state oil involved its overland transport from inland production areas in skin containers and that oil was then stored and 'bottled' in amphorae at warehouses in the harbours. The late antique evidence for amphora production suggests a major change in organisation at the exporting harbours (and a slow but substantial diminution of exports), with some 'bottling' now shifted to inland rural estates (though not far beyond the immediate hinterland of the Sahel coast). Starting from the Vandal period and persisting, a significant volume of olive oil was subsequently bottled directly at the place of production (Panella, 1993: 641–4). This new mode could be linked to the ending of the *annona* system with the Vandal conquest, and the possible development of a productive system more focussed on the private sector of the economy (on the *annona*, see Chastagnol, 1960: 321–30; Pavis d'Escurac, 1976: 188–202). Although the sources do not offer strong support regarding the revival of the *annona* at the Byzantine reconquest in the 530s AD (*contra* Durliat, 1990: 113–20), taxation was re-organised, and the creation of kiln facilities in old public buildings at major ports, as at Leptiminus and possibly Carthage, might be a product of the renewal of a system of taxation/exports, focussed on the productive hinterlands of these cities. At Leptiminus, the date of this industrial activity is certainly within the Byzantine period and, although there is evidence of well-organised and high-standard manufacturing, the overall scale falls well short of second- to fourth-century levels of amphora production (Mattingly *et al.*, 2000: 75–9).

Despite an evident reduction in the number of rural sites after *c.* AD 550, pottery distribution patterns suggest that the North African economy did not completely collapse. Indeed, African wares have been recorded, for instance, in Italy until the eighth/ninth century, if in lower quantities than hitherto (see synthesis in Panella and Saguì, 2001). Moreover, the continuing importance of North Africa as a producer of olive oil in the sixth and seventh centuries was widely recognised: Gregory of Tours noted that large quantities of North African olive oil were reaching Marseilles in the last quarter of the sixth century (Loseby, 1992), and after the defeat of the Byzantine army at Sbeitla in AD 647, the Arabs were informed that olive oil was the source of that region's still evident wealth (Mattingly, 1988a: 56). This situation need not have changed catastrophically in the early centuries of Islam. Recent studies focussed on textual sources and survey in and around the city of Lepcis Magna have highlighted the occupation of the city and its territory until the eleventh century, observing an increase in site numbers in the Arab period in comparison with the late Roman and Byzantine evidence (Cirelli, 2001: 432). This emphasises the need for a more sympathetic and profound investigation

of the evidence for the early Arab period elsewhere. As a general hypothesis, we might expect to find the strongest evidence for continuity and a maintained surplus production around the major coastal sites, like Carthage and Lepcis Magna (Leone, 2003; Cirelli, 2001: 431).

Conclusions

The synthesis proposed above is only an initial attempt to reconstruct the slow and complex process of transformation of the rural landscapes in North Africa, starting from the second half of the fourth century AD. The limited amount of both archaeological and textual information for some periods and certain regions prevents us from defining a precise evolution, and many different elements seem to have been involved in the transformations that are hinted at in both source records. One important phenomenon, particularly characteristic of the late sixth and early seventh centuries, was marked by the appearance of intensive productive activities inside many cities, significantly changing the aspect of urban areas. In the case of Sbeitla (Duval, 1990), we can identify these as small nuclei of productive centres, churches and fortified structures, distributed in different parts of the classical cities. The phenomenon became even more evident in the early Arab period (for a synthesis, see Leone, 2003). In many parts of North Africa, then, we can identify a connection between the transformation of the rural landscape and the changing nature of the townscapes.

Another key element to evaluate in future analyses of North African rural landscapes is the importance of urban and rural churches through their control of land and their contribution to economic and productive activity. Historical sources certainly attest significant involvement of the clergy in the organisation of rural markets (Shaw, 1995: 70–71) as well as in urban-based processing of agricultural produce and manufacturing (Leone, 2001).

To clarify and confirm or deny the panorama proposed here, future field surveys must consider not only changes in the percentages of sites recorded, but also pay more attention to the kind of structures that survived and their location. Above all, however, there is a pressing need for more excavation of rural sites of varied types with evidence of late antique phases and for accompanying full palaeoeconomic investigation of the nature of their subsistence base and market connections. A transformation of these complex and varied landscapes is evident, but the fine details of this remain to be drawn.

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Chapter 6

Problems in Interpreting Rural and Urban Settlement in Southern Greece, AD 365–700

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> Those who have taken upon them to lay down the law of Nature as a thing already searched out and understood, whether they have spoken in simple assurance or professional affectation, have therein done philosophy and the sciences great injury. For as they have been successful in inducing belief so they have been effective in quenching and stopping inquiry; and have done more harm by spoiling and putting an end to other men's efforts than good by their own (Francis Bacon: *Novum Organum*)

Rural Settlements and Chronologies

Archaeological survey has sought to explore the evolution of the Greek countryside over time. Like excavation methodologies in Greece, survey techniques have changed radically in recent decades. Valuable unsystematic work by individuals prospecting for period-specific sites (Wiseman, 1978) have been supplemented by several systematic multi-period surveys of relatively small areas. The latter projects successfully draw on the expertise of physical, historical, economic and social geographers in an attempt to integrate the cultural landscape with the physical landscape (for example, Wells, 1996; Cavanagh *et al*., 1996; Cherry *et al*., 1991). While great advances in our understanding of rural Greece have accordingly been made, systematic survey and the conclusions drawn from it are hampered for the period of Late Antiquity by several constraints. The bulk of the survey finds are roof tiles and undiagnostic body sherds of household pottery. While some conclusions can be drawn from fabric typologies and site assemblage seriation, the finite chronology of the periods of occupation derives from less common feature sherds, decorated pieces and diagnostic imports; as a result, the accuracy of dating a site's occupation is limited by factors such as relative wealth, distance from a market and, where they exist, the quality of studies on local pottery typologies.

In most of the publications to date, chronological uncertainty has forced the material to be presented by period – for instance Early Roman, Middle Roman, Late Roman – and there is seldom accord between the published works when one period begins and the next ends thus making synthesis somewhat haphazard. Sometime *c.* AD 300 begins what is variously labelled Late Roman, Early Christian, Early Byzantine and Late Antique. These appellations are both difficult to define in terms of the material culture found and crude: for instance, 'Early Christian' presumes that a majority of the population is Christian, while 'Early Byzantine' is overly suggestive of discontinuity from the previous political administration. 'Late Roman' and 'Late Antique' are preferred terms but we should perhaps substitute 'Early Medieval' for 'Early Byzantine' to harmonise scholarship on the Mediterranean region with that on northern Europe. In illustrating a terminology of standard chronology, Susan Alcock (1993: 36) places Late Roman between the early fourth and the early seventh centuries. The material culture itself suggests that the period should be extended to embrace the entire seventh century; furthermore, the growing suspicion that Cypriot Red Slip continued to be produced and exported into the eighth century (P. Armstrong, pers. comm.) may recommend an even longer span.

My own experience has been that many surveys also suffer from bias in recovery strategy. Surveys designed by Prehistorians and Classical archaeologists may elect not to recover early modern lead glazed material; inexperienced survey personnel may not be able to discriminate between early medieval, medieval and early modern lead glazed pottery, thus potentially marginalising or omitting surface material dating from the seventh through nineteenth centuries. Such a strategy is short-sighted because the written record of medieval monastic and modern Greek settlement, communications, subsistence and landholding is relatively rich, and when read with the recovered material culture of the period these sources can provide valuable analogues for the interpretation of periods much less rich in primary sources (Vroom, 2002). These are, moreover, periods worthy of equal archaeological attention. In addition, my experience has been that archaeologists with less field experience – in other words the majority of fieldwalkers employed – tend to be unfamiliar with and therefore partly blind to certain categories of material, meaning that stone artifacts, obsidian, coloured glazed pottery, sherds with white and black fabric (that is, not red), marbles, complete pots and walls may be missed and this neglect only detected when a site is revisited in different light or with differently experienced team members.

In the absence of reliable regional chronologies, surface survey has had to rely heavily upon the series of fine wares classified by John Hayes' *Late Roman Pottery* (1972) for the identification of late antique sites. Supply of the main classes of ceramics covered by *LRP,* notably African Red Slip Ware (ARS), is, however, uneven. For instance, at Corinth in the fifth century, the

quantity of ARS drops quite dramatically while in the seventh century African imports are uncommon and those from Asia Minor are rare (Slane and Sanders, forthcoming). In the countryside the abundance of identifiable imported pottery will be determined by similar market factors but exacerbated by distance from the place of import. In this context one should contrast late antique Melos, where sites identified by pottery imported between *c*. AD 400 and 850 are relatively common (Sanders, 1996, Fig.3), and the Lakonia Survey territory, which appears to have been abandoned by *c*. 400 (Lawson, 1996: 123). Using imports alone, our understanding of the countryside will tend to follow the flawed model of cycles of boom and bust (see below). With better regional pottery typologies and chronologies it should be possible to be far more precise than 'Early' or 'Late' Roman – each period covering a span of many centuries. In fact at Corinth it is now possible to date most Roman and medieval diagnostic pottery quite precisely: amphoras and storage vessels can be placed within +/-100 years, cooking vessels easily within +/-50 years, and fine wares within +/-10 to 25 years (Slane and Sanders, forthcoming). With this kind of precision for other regional centres far clearer conclusions can be offered of the evolution of the Greek countryside from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages.

What had so far been observed is what appears to be a dramatic increase of Late Roman and Middle Byzantine sites identified through fine wares and glazed pottery. Using the crude formula *pottery = sites & population*, these increases have been correlated with a dramatic expansion of rural population in these periods (for instance, Harvey, 1989: 18, 66, 244–5). Susan Alcock asks whether 'this is a genuine pattern representative of behaviour in the past, or is it a function of the relative "visibility" of certain periods, and of our taxonomic schemes?' and goes on to discuss penetration of datable imported fine wares in the landscape and how representative surface finds are of the subsurface strata (1993: 50–55). One example serves to illustrate these concerns. Byzantine glazed pottery is readily identifiable and increasingly well dated (Morgan, 1942; Sanders, 1987; 1993; 1995a; 1995b; 2000a; 2000b; 2001; 2002a). At Corinth, the capital of the Byzantine theme of *Peloponnesos*, the quantity of glazed pottery in the assemblage is 0.2 to 1.0 per cent by weight in the ninth to eleventh centuries while the overwhelming majority of the assemblage consists of amphoras, table amphoras, basins and cooking vessels. At the end of the eleventh century, under the influence of Polychrome Ware imports from Constantinople, Corinthian potters start experimenting with white slip backgrounds or slip designs painted on the ceramic surface for their glazed products. The amount of glazed pottery in urban assemblages at Corinth meanwhile quickly rises to about 2 per cent by weight. By *c*. AD 1150 it increases to 6 per cent and to about 20 per cent by the mid-thirteenth century. In Greece the presence of late eleventh-century glazed products has only been observed at the larger urban centres of Thebes (Ioannita Vroom,

pers. comm.) and Corinth (Sanders, 1995a; 2000a; 2002a); in lesser cities such as Athens and Sparta glazed and decorated pottery only become common towards the mid-twelfth century (Franz, 1938; Sanders, 1993; 1995b) and in the countryside presumably sometime thereafter.

The vibrant colours of glazed pottery stand out on the surface even when dirty; accordingly, the visibility of recognisable and datable pottery in the landscape should increase dramatically by the thirteenth century. In this case the higher site numbers based on glazed pottery need not signal an increase in population or settlements but rather reflects new uses of old technologies and successful market penetration of these products. This hypothesis was first proposed by analysts of survey data in central Italy where an increase in the number of sites yielding ARS or post-medieval glazed wares was noted (Mannoni and Mannoni, 1975: 121–36; Blake, 1978) and explained through the penetration of cheap ceramics (often mass produced wares distributed by efficient trade networks) to rural populations that, for various reasons, had newly acquired disposable income over and above subsistence requirements.

A second problem raised by Alcock, that of identifying how representative the surface finds are of subsurface strata, cannot easily be demonstrated (1993: 50–53). Casual observation of surface material at Corinth unsurprisingly suggests that later phases are well represented but earlier phases are poorly represented or absent. In the ongoing Panayia Field excavations the surface and topsoil horizons contain late antique and early modern pottery with only a smattering of medieval; but excavation recovered Geometric, Classical, Hellenistic, Early Roman, Middle Roman, Late Antique, Early Byzantine, Byzantine, Frankish and Early Modern material. However, the remains of the earlier periods had been drastically truncated by the construction of a large third- to fourth-century *domus*, whose builders cut down and levelled an extensive area; the *domus* floors were kept so scrupulously clean that in the destruction horizons, only wall painting and sculpture were found. The mud brick wall collapse sealed much of the site to a depth of *c.* 0.5 m. A late antique stone recovery operation then removed the *domus* foundations and material from phases sealed under the destruction was deposited in the back-fill of the robbing trenches. Only a very small amount of this material was re-deposited by later disturbances in higher strata. Two concrete and rubble late antique structures were built over the mud brick deposit; when abandoned they were partly demolished and the concrete debris was dumped on site in a thick layer. Little of the medieval phase survived because the walls were almost completely robbed out and post-medieval ploughing obliterated even the floors. In fact, over most of the field, the early-modern phase immediately overlies the late antique walls and the demolition debris. In this case, therefore, the surface material represents unevenly only the last 800 years of a rich and complicated history of human activity spanning 2,800 years (Sanders and Herbst, forthcoming).

Yet surface survey in the landscape is very rarely followed up by remote sensing survey (Cavanagh *et al*., 1996; Gregory and Kardulias, 1990), let alone excavation. Consequently the interpretation of rural sherd scatters is too frequently assertion unbiased by objective criteria. One rare and invaluable instance is the excavation of a tower site in the Berbati valley (Hjohlman, 2002; Penttinen, 2001; Wells, 1996). The surface remains consisted of a rectangle of large, well jointed quarry-faced blocks standing several courses above ground level. From the surface pottery it appeared to have been occupied during the Classical and Hellenistic period although some Geometric, 'Early' Roman and 'Late' Roman material was also recovered in the area. Excavation revealed that the Classical and Hellenistic periods were much abraded by later occupation. Two ceramic kilns – whose presence was unsuspected from the preserved surface material – were discovered, both predating the tower. By far the best preserved strata were late antique but dating proved problematic: no fine ware ceramic imports or coins dated after the reign of Justinian were found and the temptation might have been to speculate abandonment after the AD 551/552 earthquake (see below). Initial comparison of the coarse wares with finds from Argos suggested the main phase ended with the coming of the Slavs *c*. 585. It was only when the scholar responsible for the later material came to view Corinth material from unpublished contexts (Slane and Sanders, forthcoming) that a late sixth- to mid-seventh-century date for the phase was established. As in the case of the Panayia Field, the identification of site function, size and duration of occupation from the surface remains at the Berbati tower was no more than speculative.

The picture of rural life given by the late antique phase of the Berbati excavation is in fact unique in Greece (Hjohlman, 2002). The portion excavated revealed several fragmentary rooms appended to the tower; the tower itself was refurbished as a storage area and a wine press installed. Botanical and faunal remains and metal finds indicate that the inhabitants were practising polyculture: cereal cultivation was marked by seeds and chaff of barley, oats and wheat, including durum, and by an iron ard-share and sickle; lentils, broad beans and peas were grown, perhaps in rotation with cereals to replenish the soil; Spanish vetchling, bitter vetch, dwarf chickling, nettles and poppy seeds suggest wild plants were gathered, probably for fodder and herbal remedies; figs, olives, carob trees and vines were also cultivated. Of the animal bone recovered and identified 40 per cent belonged to ovicaprids, these perhaps grazed on the mountainside and in the fields and brought back to the settlement at night. Sheep were kept principally for their secondary products – wool, milk, manure and hides – but some were slaughtered young for meat; goats were kept for milk, hides, hair and meat. About 15 per cent of the bones were of pigs and another 14 per cent were of cattle that provided traction, milk, meat and hides. Dog, hare, and small birds

bones suggest hunting activity and fish bones indicate purchase of items from the coast some way away. An abundant supply of perennial water from the Asterion river nearby, terebrinth and holly oak on the mountain slopes, dog faeces, and lime (perhaps made from calcining local marl clay) were all readily available for the cleaning and curing of hides.

The archaeological record for the settlement is incomplete in that its full extension was not identified, meaning we cannot state whether the settlement was a single farmstead, a hamlet or even a village, although the assumption is for a single family dwelling. Since the survey was unable to identify exactly contemporary sites there is no way to judge the density of habitation and population in the Berbati valley let alone reconstruct a hierarchy of sites or to discuss the provision of services such as a market for produce and the purchase of specialist items or a church for the rites of baptism, marriage and burial. The inhabitants fully exploited their environment and were able to maintain a standard of living above subsistence level. They bought in iron objects and regionally produced ceramics including transport amphoras, cooking and storage containers from the same production centres that supplied Corinth but apparently not Argos.

Ostensibly there is little with which to compare the Berbati house. Future research will show that a contemporary assemblage at Argos (Aupert, 1980) is rather later than the published date, that the Hellenistic tower at Kephalari near Argos has a contemporary occupation phase (based on unpublished material stored in Corinth Museum), and that the agricultural community at Nemea survived into the seventh century (based on published material in Miller, 2001: 122–38 and on displayed pieces). With the eventual assimilation of these sites we will have a better understanding of the Greek countryside in Late Antiquity, but clearly more excavation and publication of the quality, speed and thoroughness undertaken at Berbati at other rural sites are essential. Above all scholars must reformulate their ideas in the face of flawed interpretations of the results of older urban excavations; some of the problems faced are summarised in the following sections.

Urban Settlements

Much of the urban archaeology of southern Greece in general and Corinth in particular has been written taking the primary and secondary historical sources as almost irrefutable fact. Major phases of building activity have been associated with the creative genius of individuals such as Herodes Atticus, Diocletian and Justinian; similarly, destruction horizons of these buildings are associated with violent events such as the sacks by Heruls, Visigoths and Slavs and several universal earthquakes. As a consequence, the urban archaeology of the region in Late Antiquity reads as a spasmodic cycle of

prosperity followed by catastrophe culminating in complete collapse. Unsurprisingly, archaeologists studying the landscape have borrowed the urban model to describe the changes in the countryside.

A condensed version of Corinth's history from AD 365 to 800 followed by many scholars (including Finley, 1932; Broneer, 1954; Gregory, 1979; Ivison, 1996; Sanders, 2002b) reads as follows. Corinth, principal city of the province of Achaia, was destroyed by earthquakes *c.* AD 365 and 375; after restoration under Valentinian I Corinth was sacked by the Visigoths in 395/6 and a new city wall built in the early fifth century. Meanwhile, repeated prohibition of the worship of Hellenic deities by Christian Emperors led to the decline and closure of the pagan sanctuaries some time before AD 400. After the plague of 532, Corinth was again destroyed by an earthquake in 552. The final desertion of Corinth's population to Aegina was precipitated by the invasion and settlement of the Slavs in AD 584. A period of complete obscurity followed until the Byzantine recovery of the Peloponnese in the late eighth century.

There have been few halting advances in the archaeology of late antique Greece during the thirty years since Hayes' *Late Roman Pottery* (1972). Unfortunately this work came too late to influence the preliminary reports of major excavation campaigns of the 1960s at Corinth (Wiseman, 1967; 1969; 1972; papers by Pallas). Yet, since its appearance, scholarship has largely been devoted to updating the old historical paradigm rather than to testing new hypotheses. One major exception is Anna Avramea's recent (1997) critical analysis of the historical image set against a developed archaeological record. The single greatest problem encountered in attempting a synthesis of this kind is the quality of the archaeological literature. A cursory reading of the archaeological bibliography provided by Avramea reveals that few of the excavations cited received full and final publication; most were brief reports on work undertaken, only rarely enhanced by a photograph or a plan. As a result, the conclusions presented therein tend to be based on the historical rather than archaeological record.

Avramea comes to several valuable conclusions questioning the quality of evidence on which the historical assertions are based: the Heruls, for instance, have now been found innocent of sacking Olympia (1997: 53–4). Similarly, Kathleen Slane is disinclined to accept their destruction of the Sanctuary of Demeter (1994: 127–8, 163; Slane and Sanders, forthcoming; Ivison, 1996: 101). The generally accepted statement that the Heruls destroyed the South Stoa (Broneer, 1954: 143–4, 151) does not bear close scrutiny either, as re-examination of the pottery in the 'Herulian destruction' debris in Rooms XX-XXII and H reveals the critical layers to be no earlier than the late fourth century. The foundations of a bath, formerly dated to about AD 300 (and with claimed destruction in the late fourth century), were in fact dug into the fill over the debris. This fill contained LRC form 1 and mid-fifth-century cooking

forms (Biers, 2002: n. 27); the bath, therefore, can only have been constructed more than fifty years after its implied destruction date! Critical autopsies of unsupported statements are clearly fertile areas for further work.

Over one hundred years of excavation and relatively full and prompt publication of the Corinthian and Athenian Agora monuments and material culture have justifiably made the opinions of the scholars working at these sites highly regarded in countries bordering the eastern Mediterranean. Their published records have served as the basis for urban, ceramic, glass and numismatic studies whether generated in the library, in excavation or by archaeological survey. Yet many of the precepts accepted in formulating the thumbnail sketch of the history of Corinth outlined above are falsifiable. It follows, therefore, that the published records of other sites and surveys may accordingly be erroneous. Here I present a brief synopsis of the problems that exist.

Earthquakes

Universal earthquakes, two in the late fourth century and another in the mid-sixth century, have been credited with causing widespread destruction. This assumption has been met with increasing scepticism (Avramea, 1997: 42–5; Sanders, 1999: 474–5; Rothaus, 2000: 16–17). Ammianus Marcellinus described an earthquake and tsunami in 365; the latter drowned thousands of people and wrecked ships in unspecified locations; ships were stranded on top of buildings at Alexandria and a Lakonian ship was stranded two miles inshore at Mothon. The earthquake, with a magnitude estimated at Ms 7.0, perhaps had its epicentre about 50 km west of Paphos in Cyprus and did significant damage to Kourion. The effects of the attendant tsunami have been noted in east Crete (Dominey-Howes *et al.*, 1998). Stathis Stiros (2001) presents a better candidate off the south-west coast of Crete dated 353 (±80 years), where an earthquake of estimated magnitude Ms 8.0 caused extensive uplift of up to 9 m. The earthquake of 375 is described by an early sixth-century source, Zosimos, following Eunapios (Avramea, 1997: 45). This report is to the effect that an earthquake after the death of the emperor Valentinian I (375) affected all Greece except Athens. Potentially Zosimos, as Eunapios, were employing a literary topos to mark the death of the emperor as well as the favour with which the Hellenic gods held Athens. Libanius' funeral oration for Julian in 363 that has all Greece except one city devastated (read Athens?) by an earthquake and Eunapios' assertion that only Athens was spared by Alaric are both resonant of the same sentiments and stylistic devices (ibid.: 42–5; Rothaus, 2000: 17). The earthquake of 551/552 and the attendant tsunami are described by Procopius who reports damage in Achaia, Boeotia and the region of the Alkionides and Malaic Gulfs. Procopius specifies that Chaeroneia and Coroneia, both in western Boeotia, Patras and Naupaktos both

at the west end of the Corinthian gulf and Echinus and Scarphea on the Malaic Gulf were destroyed (*Bell. Goth.* 8.16–25; Sanders, 1999: 474–5).

Many years of research by Professor N. Ambraseys have clarified the extent of earthquake damage in the eastern Mediterranean. In the conclusion of a recent article (1994) he states that: 'We should not, as we consistently have done, presume that the orderly or disorderly distribution of masonry pieces always implies earthquake effects and presume that an earthquake, many tens or hundreds of miles from the site, however well attested in the sources, necessarily caused the damage. Great care must be taken to establish the simultaneity of the destructive effects of early earthquakes at places located large distances apart. Quite often the amalgamation of the effects of two or more different historical events stretches the size of the earthquake beyond the limits of the possible, and leads to speculation and to the development of "catastrophe theories". The long-term seismicity of central Greece is clearly different from that of neighbouring Anatolia in that either (a) no earthquakes of magnitude greater than Ms 7.0 occur, or (b) 500 years is not long enough to reveal such events in central Greece, whereas 100 years is more than adequate in Anatolia and in other parts of the Middle East ...'. Indeed, at Corinth earthquakes with their epicentre in the immediate region of the city, such as that of 1858, and not those with their epicentre in the Corinthian Gulf let alone in central Greece, have caused damage to the city's fabric (Ambraseys and Jackson, 1990).

None of the ancient sources documenting the earthquakes enumerated above specifically mention Corinth as a victim. This fact is significant in consideration of the place that Corinth held in late antique Greece. Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia and probably the principal city south of Thessalonika; destructions surely would have been a newsworthy event. In the absence of a better hypothesis we should accept, until falsified, Ambraseys' conclusions based on his research into the effects of five centuries of earthquake activity in central Greece. In consideration of the documentary data, we can conclude that the earthquake of 365 and the earthquakes in central Greece in 551/552 did *not* damage Corinth and that a single earthquake did *not* devastate the whole of Greece sparing only one centrally located city in 375. That is not to say that Corinth avoided earthquake damage then, only that there is no *prima facie* evidence cited in the historical sources. It may be that the ancient authors conflated more general seismic activity in the Aegean region during these periods into single cataclysmic events. Indeed the period is so seismically active that seismologists have identified a block of about two hundred years as the 'Early Byzantine Tectonic Paroxysm' (Stiros, 2001)! If Corinth was destroyed by undocumented earthquakes in the late fourth century, they were quickly repaired for St. John Chrysostom, who, in his Homily on 1st Corinthians, *c*. 390, was able to state '... Corinth is now the first city of Greece ...' (Rothaus, 2000).

We are on much firmer ground, however, in believing that Corinth suffered grievously in an earthquake dated by scholars variously in 524/25, since we are specifically told that the event preceded the Plague of 542: '... and earthquakes destroyed ... Corinth ... and afterwards came the plague as well ... which carried off about one half the surviving population' (Procopius, *de Aed.* 4.2.24; *Bell. Goth.* 2.22–3; *Anec.* 18.41–4). A severe global climatic event that endured for *c.* AD 536–545 is thought to have brought famine and to have precipitated the onset of the plague of 542 (*Bell. Goth.* 4.14.5–6; Baillie, 1994; 1995: 91–107; Baillie and Munro, 1988; Stothers, 1984; Stothers and Rampino, 1983).

Coins

Coins represent the foundation of archaeological chronology in the historical period. All too often, however, archaeologists take coin finds at face value without considering the significance of their condition. There is also a marked reluctance to consider the function of the object itself as a medium of economic exchange and therefore of intrinsic value. Ancient coin losses and their recovery in the course of excavation are governed by the quantity of a type minted, their value, their size and both the chronological and geographical patterns of their original circulation (Casey, 1986: 68–79). In Late Antiquity, the smallest denomination and most frequently lost coins were *minimi* or *nummi*, small coppers with a theoretic value of 6000 to the gold *solidus*. Most *minimi* are only 0.008 to 0.011 m in diameter and may weigh less than a gram. They are, consequently, quite difficult objects to see in excavated earth. Despite the large numbers in the collections of the Athenian Agora and Corinth excavations, we should not imagine that the number recovered is anywhere near the actual number that existed. Pre-war excavations at both sites employed several hundred workmen, wielding large pick-axes in extensive areas under minimal supervision with no sieves available. In 1986 a controlled experiment was conducted at Corinth to compare sieved with un-sieved recovery rates: a homogenous dumped fill of medieval material, 6.8 m^3 in volume, was excavated using a hand-pick in two unequal parts by different individuals supervising the same excavation personnel. The entirety of one part (56 per cent) was dry-sieved with a 0.010 m gauge mesh (diagonal dimension of 0.014 m) and produced 2,430 sherds weighing 30.1 kg. per m^3 and six coins. The other part was not sieved and produced 1,130 sherds weighing 19.4 kg per cubic metre and no coins (Sanders, 1987 n. 3). All six coins found in the sieve were approximately twice the size of the smaller *minimi*. The recovery rate of all material culture including small denomination coins, even in relatively modern excavations, is clearly very poor.

Coin longevity is poorly understood. Examination of coins in hoards and shipwrecks indicate that while some coins were lost within months of their

issue, the majority saw extended circulation, even several decades, before deposition (Sanders, 2000a: 154–6; Fagerlie, 1982). Coins are also extremely resilient. Many context finds, like a proportion of the pottery in a given deposit, are re-deposited as survivors. Together, circulation and re-deposition account for the disturbing statistics from Portchester in Britain: in late fourth-century contexts only 5 per cent of the coins were contemporary or nearly contemporary with the pottery and almost half were minted forty or more years before (Crummy and Terry, 1979: 50–51).

Large quantities of legible coins of the late fourth century and after the mid-fifth century have been found at Corinth but coins dating to the years between are relatively few. A similar pattern has been noted at Athens (Hayes, 1998). This intervening scarcity of coins on the one hand appears to confirm the hypothesis that the late fourth-century earthquakes and the Visigothic sack severely disrupted commerce and destroyed the fabric of Corinth. A better explanation, however, might be that economic reasons determine the perceived hiatus in production and deposition of small module coinage. In the West, the module of the *minimus* was reduced by 33 per cent to about 1g and by 402 Western mints had virtually ceased minting the larger copper denominations. In the East, the same reduction happened slightly later and the production of larger coppers also discontinued; this change was followed by a further reduction in the size of the *minimus* to 0.5g in the last quarter of the fifth century (Hendy, 1985: 474–5). From *c.* AD 404/408 until at least the reign of Anastasius (491–518) *minimi* in the East were made from a bronze alloy with a high lead content. The tiny lettering of the reigning emperor, difficult to read when the coin is in mint condition, is frequently rendered illegible by wear on these softer coins; furthermore, the lead content ensures rapid oxidization and deterioration when buried. Although the name of the emperor on the obverse is frequently illegible, the reverse obverse designs, such as the Victory–captive motif, are often sufficiently clear to enable identification. But since these motifs are the same reverse types as found on coins produced before AD 408 there is a tendency to identify these coins as a late fourth-century issue rather than coins of the late fourth to mid-fifth century.

The influential publications referring to Agora deposits of late fourth- to early fifth-century material culture (Robinson, 1959; Perlzweig, 1962; Franz, 1988; Karavieri, 1996) and Corinth destructions (Broneer, 1954; Weinberg, 1960) cite coins firmly attributable to an emperor. One publication at least indicates that coins were used selectively: 'Many coins were so corroded as to be wholly illegible; still more were in a condition which permitted no more than a partial identification or general indication of date. Only those coins sufficiently well preserved to be included in the Agora catalogue of coins are listed here; and of these only such as are of significance for the date of a given group or layer' (Robinson, 1959: 1). Absent, therefore, are illegible coins that

on the basis of size, weight and fabric can be attributed either to the late fourth/fifth century or the fifth/sixth century. Quantities of such coins have been identified in recent work at Corinth (for example, Biers, 2002: 309 n. 28; Williams and Zervos, 1987: 35) and probably existed in earlier excavations, but misidentified or ignored. Consequently the ceramics dated by the coins are placed too early. The net result is that the late fourth century has been overloaded with coins and material culture and an artificial lacuna created for the decades immediately following the events.

The extreme rarity of seventh- and especially eighth-century coins at Corinth and in Greece in general has been taken to support the conclusion that Corinth and the Peloponnese were devoid of a Late Roman population probably as a result of the Slavic invasion. Noticeably, the Corinth coin finds of the late seventh to mid-ninth centuries are predominantly silver issues; if graphed by value rather than number, the lacuna appears less marked (Sanders, 2002b). This phenomenon seems to be economic: several eastern mints ceased production and the form of compensation for military service may have changed (Hendy, 1985: 417–18, 619–62).

Ceramics

Two landmarks in the study of Late Antiquity in Greece have been Judith Perlzweig's (Binder) lamp study (1961) and John Hayes' *Late Roman Pottery* (1972). Until these appeared there were no credible late antique ceramic chronologies and archaeological phases were dated almost entirely by coins and historical events.

At Corinth large quantities of late antique lamps were found in the Asklepieion cemetery, in the Fountain of the Lamps, in the excavation of the Late Roman Wall and in the area of the Forum. Many belong to Broneer's types XXVIII (a later variant of type XXVII), whose production was seen as commencing in the mid-third century. The majority, including those with Christian monograms, were set to the fourth century with the type disappearing at the beginning of the fifth (Broneer, 1930: 113–14). This lamp chronology remained in standard use until Perlzweig published material from the 1930s–1950s Athenian Agora excavations, when she observed that 75 per cent of Broneer's type XXVIII lamps were made in the same fabric as his later lamp types; since this fabric was absent in Athens, they must be local Corinthian products (1961: 9). Broneer's type XXVIII is a group which consists of glazed and unglazed Athenian lamps and local imitations. Later, (Perlzweig) Binder (1982: 138–9) recognised that her earlier chronology had to be down-dated by 25 to 75 years, with the Athenian production of lamps with Christian symbols starting not in the mid-fourth century but in the fifth.

In recent years a complete change in lamp chronology has come about and all publications discussing lamps in Greece have to be carefully read to

account for these revisions. It is now clear that Athenian producers did not cease the use of glaze in the fourth century but maintained this into the mid-fifth century (Karavieri, 1996); it is not known when the production of unglazed Athenian lamps began. Kathleen Slane now considers that there was no Corinthian lamp industry in the first half of the fifth century. Corinthian imitations of Attic imports probably begin no earlier than 450 but by *c*. 500 they outnumber imported unglazed lamps and continue well into the sixth century (Slane and Sanders, forthcoming). Broneer type XXXI lamps, formerly dated to the fifth century (1930: 119), are unslipped copies of variant AfRS type II lamps decorated in style E(ii) with a jewelled cross design. The production of the prototype covered the years *c*. 525–550 (Hayes, 1972: 313–14; Garnett, 1975) and the copies must be contemporary or later. Copies derive from a late sixth-century cistern (Slane and Sanders, forthcoming) and from deposits over the floor of the Great Bath on the Lechaeum Road dated *c*. 600 (Biers, 1985: 103–4). The latest attested examples come from the destruction horizon of the fortress at Emporio on Chios, dating from 650 (Balance *et al*., 1989: 118–21). No terminal date can be given for the type but small misshapen examples made from worn secondary moulds may continue to the end of the seventh century and even later.

John Hayes researched *Late Roman Pottery* between 1960 and 1964, relying heavily – like Robinson, Perzweig and Karavieri – on the same isolated deposits from the Athenian Agora, whose problems we have enumerated. Recent work has demonstrated that the chronology of African Red Slip of the fifth through seventh centuries is accurate (Reynolds, 1995), but Hayes himself has identified problems with the late fourth and fifth century material and addresses them in his forthcoming volume on fine ware imports to Athens. He is also aware of the limits that his hugely successful book has imposed on the study of Late Antiquity because it 'seems to be quoted more and more as it gets more and more out of date' (1998: 9)!

The lesson is that neither *LRP* nor any other study, no matter how valuable it appears, should be treated as Gospel. Indeed, Late Roman fine ware pottery represents only a small proportion of the total in any given urban deposit and a far smaller proportion on rural sites. While much of it will be contemporary with much of the pottery deposited, some will be re-deposited survivors. It therefore makes sense that *all* the pottery in a context be considered when judging the date of a horizon and that this should be read in the light of the contents of other contexts in the statigraphic matrix.

Solutions: Recent Late Antique Research at Corinth

The adoption of a version of open-area, single-phase methodology at Corinth in the late 1980s and its stricter application with the introduction of Harris

Matrices in the Panayia Field since 1995 have both facilitated the interpretation of phases by simplifying the association and phasing of material culture with stratigraphy and architecture, especially of deposits at a considerable horizontal and vertical remove from each other. Simultaneously, improved methodology has opened a Pandora's box of questions about what is happening in Corinth and Greece after AD 300.

The Panayia Field and the Late Antique City Wall

Excavation in the Panayia Field, south east of the Corinth Forum (Fig. 6.1), started in 1995 with the hope that the work would illuminate phases of the domestic occupation and periods not well represented in the Forum and in the sanctuaries previously excavated (Sanders, 1999; Sanders and Herbst, forthcoming). A large urban *domus* occupied between the late third and late fourth century incorporates mosaic floors, peristyles, pools and fountains within its fourteen identified spaces. The building was destroyed by a fire which caused the collapse of the roof. The exposed plastered and painted mud brick walls then gradually disintegrated over the tile debris. A destruction horizon yielded four coins that date the event to some time after the reign of Julian (361–363). Cut into this debris were the partial remains of a building preserving an apsidal exedra of a dining room. Initial reading of the coins and pottery found in successive floors suggested a date *c*. 400 but the discovery of a coin dated to the second quarter of the fifth century on the earliest floor raised questions about the material culture found in the horizons above. In conjunction with material from east of the Theatre, this evidence has brought about a radical reconsideration of Corinth's late Roman pottery chronology (see below).

A small bath house on the site had *opus sectile* floors, marble revetment inside and was painted red on the outside. On the evidence of pottery in the sub-concrete floor strata and a coin and pottery in levels cut by the foundations of the hot rooms, the bath can be firmly dated to the mid-sixth century. We can now identify several such small baths in and near Corinth and one at Kokkinorachi near Sparta, previously dated to the third to the sixth century (Athanasoulis, 1998; Sanders, 1999; Biers, 2002) (Fig. 6.2). The bath's form and plan are in fact close enough to the baptistery of the Lechaion basilica for it to be taken as a kind of copy. Another structure, a long building, lies to the south, but of uncertain function. It extends almost 50m E–W on the same orientation as the bath and had basement rooms to the east. To judge from the fill of robbing trenches, this structure also dates to the sixth century.

Inside one of the basement rooms the plasterer incised fish with his trowel. Such incised fish are known elsewhere: the trans-Isthmian wall, walls in the South Stoa, the Hemicycle on the Lechaion Road, the small bath near Sparta mentioned above, and at least fifteen are incised in the walls of the Lechaion

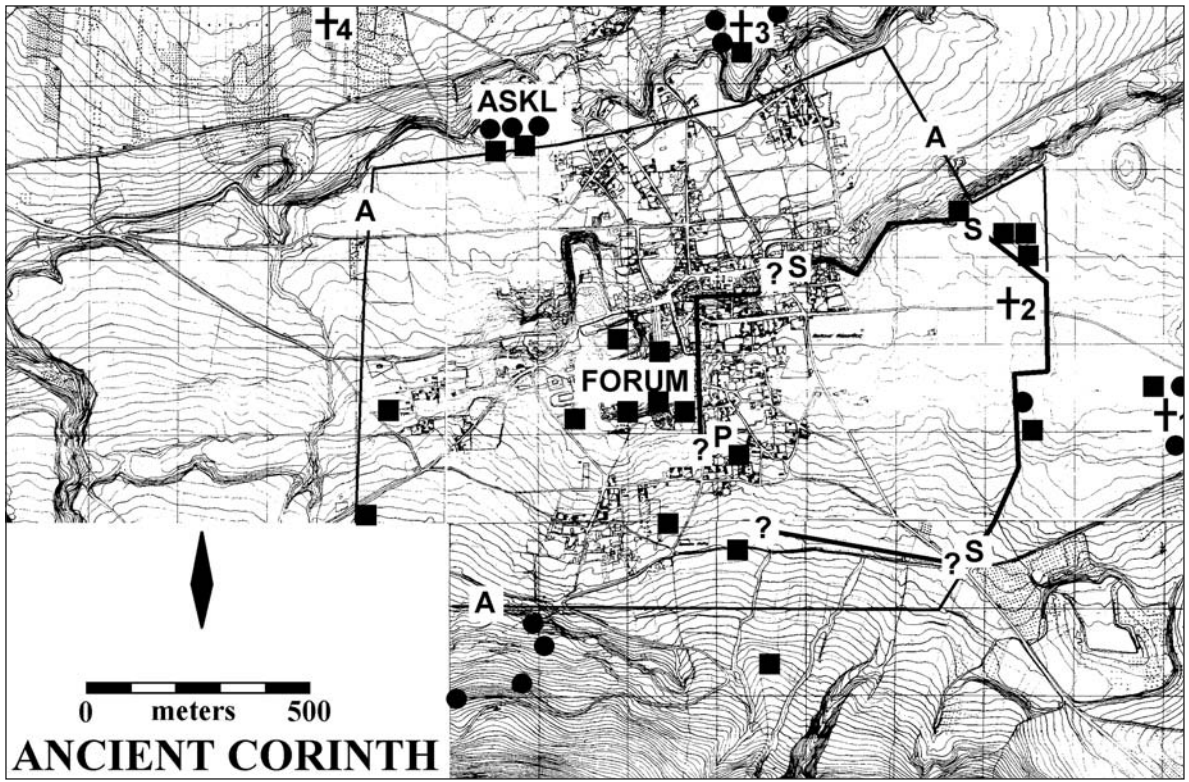

Figure 6.1 Plan of Corinth (after D. Peck)

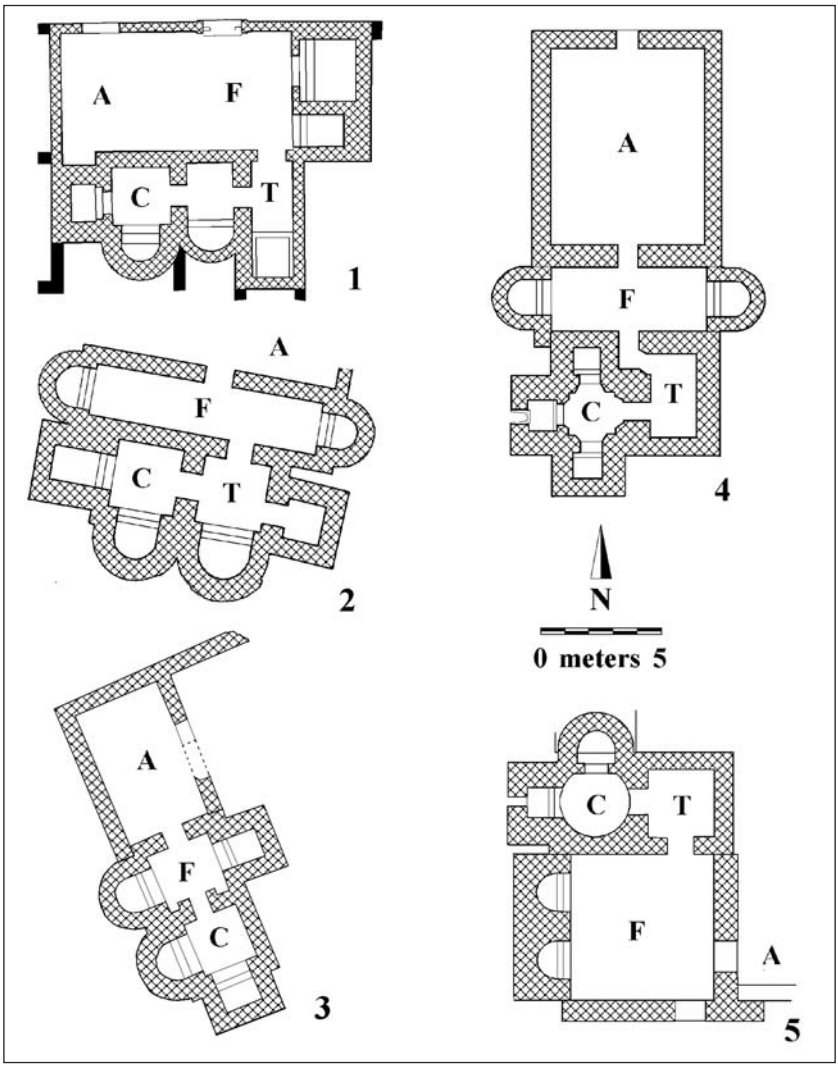

Figure 6.2 **1. South Stoa bath (Corinth); 2. Zeugalati bath (Corinthia); 3. Sparta bath; 4. Panayia bath (Corinth); 5. Bath west of Odeion (Corinth)**

basilica (Athanasoulis, 1998). Outside, along the face of the wall, are several burials including adult tile graves and graves of neonates each placed within a Gaza amphora coffin. Such amphorae were imported to Corinth from the mid-fifth century, becoming more common towards the end of the sixth (Slane

and Sanders, forthcoming). The latest graves contain small containers for liquids associated with the grave-side burial liturgy. Demolition of the bath and long building resulted in the accumulation of a deep deposit of cement gravel between the buildings. Pottery in this more resembles Byzantine than Roman prototypes; this and a coin suggest the date *c.* AD 800.

Remote sensing survey east of the village in the area known as Kraneion has revealed traces of the late antique city wall, featuring relatively regular spacing of towers and an exterior moat. A small excavation at the south-east end of the surveyed area has exposed its concrete and rubble core and cut limestone block outer face. This and a second smaller trench to the north also uncovered a cemetery of densely-packed, built late antique cist graves outside the walls. In the area surveyed were also traces of many linear features, probably houses, and two large anomalies, one the continuation of a small late antique bath, and the other a circular or octagonal structure about 12m in diameter, immediately adjacent to a square feature measuring 20 x 20m – the baptistery or martyrium recognised by Pallas (see below, *Basilicas*).

These discoveries have important consequences for the late Roman topography of Corinth (Fig. 6.3). The circuit of the late antique wall as previously reconstructed enclosed an area of about 1.8 km^2 centred on the Roman Forum and covering the two terraces south of Hadji Mustapha fountain (Gregory, 1979). It may now be tentatively suggested that the wall actually excluded the Forum area from its enceinte (Sanders, 2002b: 647–8), since the Forum saw burial activity from the late sixth century to eighth centuries, indicating either that the Theodosian and Justinianic prohibition of burial within cities had lapsed or that the area was no longer within the city as such. If this new reconstruction of the fortifications is remotely accurate, the enceinte perhaps enclosed only about 0.4 km^2.

Although originally identified as Justinianic, the date of the circuit wall has been fixed in the first two decades of the fifth century by Gregory (1979: 268–70). His argument appears to be fairly tidy but the excavation record is not nearly as transparent as one would wish: the ditch indicated by remote sensing survey was not identified in the excavation and from the notebook it is possible only to gain a vague impression how objects found relate to the wall. The coins may well be late fourth-century but the lamps of Broneer type XXVIII in the Visigothic 'destruction debris' were produced well into the sixth century. Potentially the eastward extension of the city wall was designed to accommodate the basilica and mausoleum identified by Pallas and dated by him to the reign of Justinian. The introduction of burial in the Forum (Fig. 6.4) in the later sixth century also suggests that this area was only excluded from the late antique city at a later date.

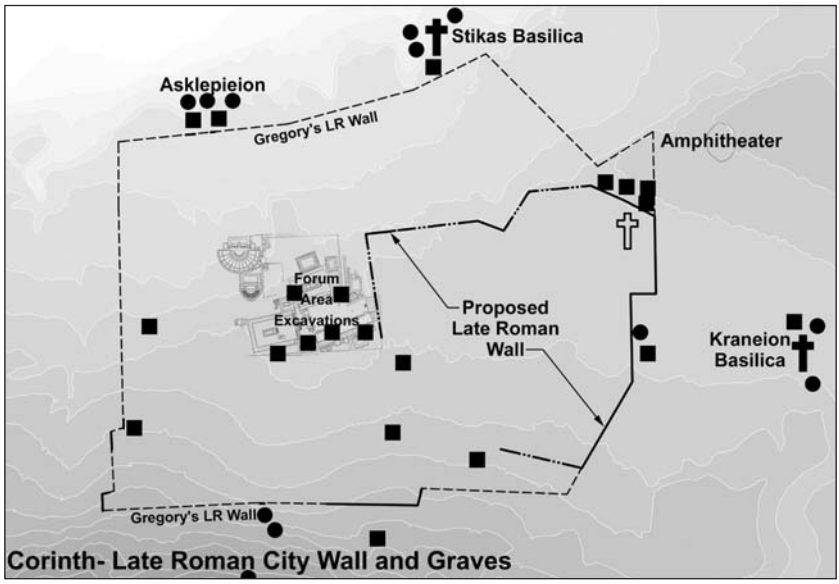

Figure 6.3 Late antique city wall as proposed by Gregory 1979 and late antique city wall surveyed and/or visible
Key: Circles = late fifth- to sixth-century grave(s); Squares = late sixth- to eighth-century grave(s) (image by G. Sanders and J. Herbst)

Graves

Mary Walbank and Kathleen Slane are currently preparing graves of the first through fifth centuries at Corinth for publication. Burial practices of the fifth and succeeding centuries have been misrepresented and misdated in the extant literature (Ivison, 1996) and require further study. In the Asklepieion district there is an extensive cemetery that was excavated in the 1930s (Roebuck, 1951; *Corinth Note Books* [NBs] 122, 126, 136 and 138).

At its core in the Lerna Court immediately west of the sanctuary is a dense concentration of some 250 tile graves interspersed with about 15 infant burials in Gaza amphoras dug into a deposit of earth about one metre deep that had accumulated over the court. The graves appear to be set out in discrete but, in places, overlapping plots leaving large spaces free, perhaps for burial liturgy and attendant mourners. In the centre, in the largest of the open spaces, lay a sigma or agape table of a type also found in the hemicycle on the Lechaion Road, in the Peribolos of Apollo and in the Kenchrian Gate basilica, and probably used for a funerary meal. Depending on the size of the deceased, the tile graves

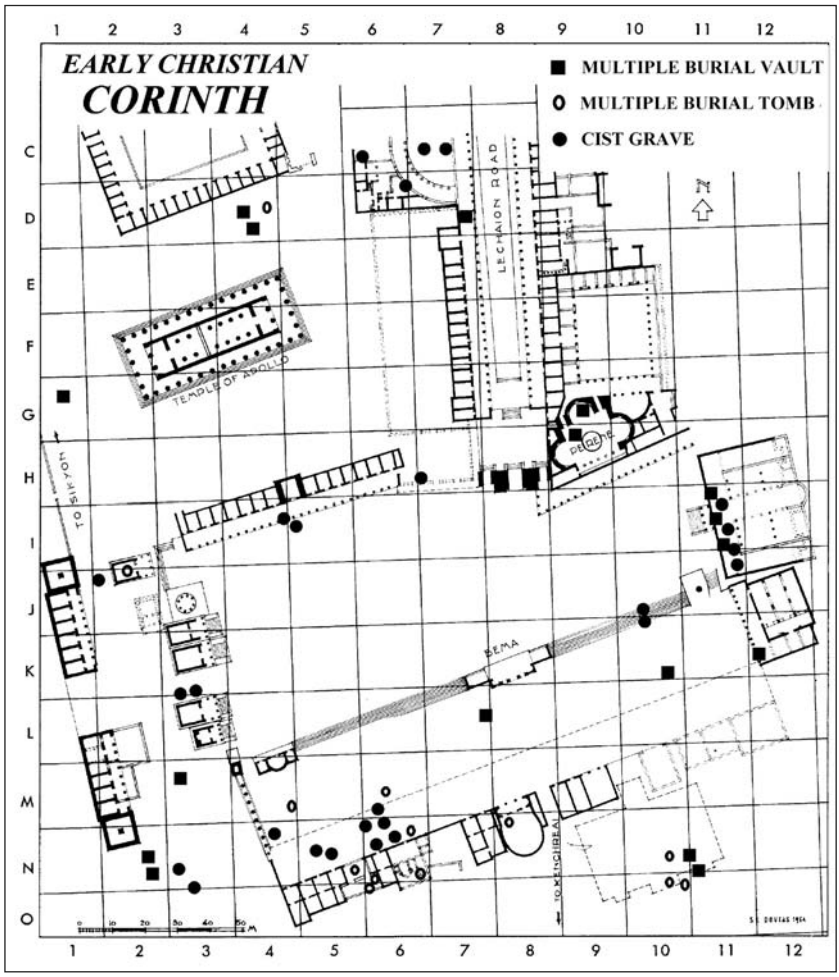

Figure 6.4 Plan of Forum area showing distribution of seventh- and eighth-century graves, showing various distribution of built family/multiple burials (open circles), vaults (closed squares) and of cist burials (closed circles)

consisted of up to four complete Lakonian roof tiles which, where complete, measure *c*. 0.85 x 0.35 m. The tiles were set on edge resting against each other to form a tent (Fig. 6.5). The tiles used have the same general dimensions as those used for the sixth-century graves found in the Panayia Field. The dead were laid out extended and oriented E–W (heads to the west); the hands, as appears to be customary in later Christian burials, were placed on the abdomen.

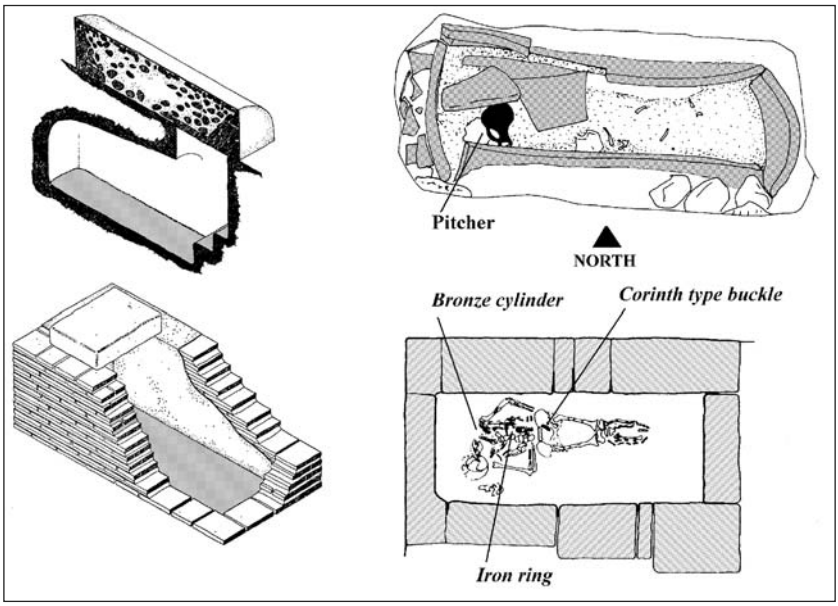

Figure 6.5 Late antique graves: seventh-century graves from the Gymnasium and Asklepeion area (left); early seventh-century grave from the Panayia Field (top right); eighth-century grave from the Forum area (bottom right)

Inside the chambers of the Lerna fountain were found what has been interpreted as a memorial chapel. Coins of Constans II under a built bench indicate usage at least beyond the mid-seventh century. One of the reservoirs contained about one hundred primary burials: despite the orderly layout of inhumations including some infants in Gaza amphoras, it was suggested that this may have been a plague pit dating to the Justinianic plague of 542 (Roebuck, 1951: 164); however, re-examination of the coins therein demonstrate a deposition at least in the reign of Justinian's successor, Justin II (565-578); furthermore, the associated lekythoi also appear to date to the latter part if not the end of the sixth century.

On the higher plateau to the east of the Lerna court, E–W rock-cut tombs skirt the edges of the Aklepieion court on the edge of the scarp. Some of the sixty five fragmentary and complete epitaphs from the excavation were found here. One found *in situ* (Kent, 1966, I: 1019) reads:

> † A sepulcher belonging to Eusebios the Anatolian, a shoe and clothing merchant, purchased from Leonidios the fuller. Here lies Noumenis of blessed memory who died the fifth day of the month of June, in the sixth year of the indiction †

The grave contained four skeletons and was dated in the Corinth publications to the fourth century on the strength of two associated lamps (Broneer Type XXXI). These lamps we would now place in the later sixth or even seventh century. Unlike the tile graves of the Hollow, the rock-cut graves were regularly used for multiple burial and frequently contained small pitchers and lekythoi. The noted inscription states in no uncertain terms the purchaser, seller and occupant, and indiction date as if declaring a legal claim to the property. Several inscriptions include the price – one and one half gold pieces – of the grave. This and similar stones have all the appearance of being legal documents; under Justinian the dating by indiction was made compulsory for all legal documents with the end of the *fasti consulares* in 535 in the East and 541 in the West. The Roman Church, under whose auspices Corinth fell, adopted the indiction for establishing the dates of documents under Pope Pelagius II (579–590); arguably, all gravestones bearing an indiction must date after 535 and plausibly at Corinth from after 579.

To the west of the Lerna Hollow there is an extensive cemetery excavated by Richardson in the 1890s, De Waele in the 1930s and Wiseman in the 1960s (Wiseman, 1967: 417–20; 1969: 79–87; 1972: 8–9). These too are multiple burial, rock-cut cists. Although close to the surface and exposed to modern ploughing, many tombs preserved vaulted stuccoed mounds heaped over them, one or two of which were incised with a cross in the stucco. Large quantities of fragmentary lamps were found in the mounds and many complete lamps found around the tombs. Small pitchers and lekythoi are common; one grave contained eight bodies along with seven such libation vessels and an imported red slipped bowl of *c.* AD 600 (*Corinth NB* 136, as Sanders, 1999, no. 5; Slane and Sanders, forthcoming, deposit 3).

The later fifth- to late sixth-century graves lie in dense cemetery plots such as the Asklepieion, outside the late antique city wall east of the Forum, and at the Kenchreian Gate basilica (Shelley, 1943; Pallas, 1970b; 1972; 1976; 1980; Gregory, 1979). Seventh-century graves show a somewhat more random distribution, for example scattered on the periphery of the Panayia Field (Williams *et al.*, 1974; Williams and Fisher, 1975; Robinson, 1976). Stray late graves (unpublished) occur on the slopes and summit of Acrocorinth, at the classical city wall and some distance to the west and south west of the Forum. The rock-cut graves of the Asklepieion district appear to anticipate mid-seventh- to late eighth-centuries grave types. These later tombs were for multiple burials and were built of *spolia* or brick either with a vault with eastern entrance hole or simply covered with squared slabs (Fig. 6.5). Securely dated, late seventh-century graves with Syracuse-Type and related belt buckles are few and widely distributed (one in the Kenchreian Gate basilica had a Syracuse belt buckle and two coins of Constans II – Pallas, 1981: 298 and n. 18). Eighth-century burials occasionally have Corinth-Type buckles (Ajbabin, 1984; Ambroz, 1971a; 1971b; Avramea, 1997: 86–96) and

a selection of weapons, jewellery and libation vessels (Williams *et al.*, 1974: no. 8; Williams and Fisher, 1975: no. 2, pl. 57a; Robinson, 1976: 222). Graves with these buckles cluster in the region of the former Forum.

The question of the function of the pottery in the tombs arises. The lekythoi and pitchers are clearly not offerings but probably connected to the burial liturgy. In modern Orthodox practice the priest chrismates the body of the deceased with oil, water and wine at the graveside. The containers are now plastic bottles which are discarded after use but until the recent past ceramic pitchers were used, which were broken at the graveside or placed within the grave to prevent reuse. The dish in one of the graves may have been for kallyva – boiled whole grains mixed with pomegranite seeds. These practices seem to relate to pre-Christian Greek burial liturgy.

Basilicas in Corinth

The Lechaion basilica was excavated by the late Demetrios Pallas in the 1950s (Pallas, 1956–1960a; 1962; 1965; 1970a; 1979; 1990). It lay on a sand spit separating the inner basins of Lechaion harbour from the sea and comprised a three-aisled structure with two atria at the west end and a transept and single apse at the east end. The total length from outer atrium to apse is 180m. Like all of the basilicas at Corinth and a great many found in Greece, the nave is divided from the aisles by the high stylobate of the colonnade and by screens between the columns, presumably to separate the congregation in the aisles from activity in the nave. Galleries for catechumens above the aisles were accessed by stairwells outside the basilica immediately to the north and south of the inner atrium. The uniform order of columns, capitals and screens are of Proconnesian marble. It has plausibly been suggested that the basilica was an imperial donation, dedicated to the martyr Leonidas and his companions and marks the site of their burial. However, there are only four graves associated, one of which, set against the exterior of the apse, belonged to the presbyter Thomas and is datable from its contents to *c.* AD 600 (Pallas, 1956: 177–8 and pl. 72b).

The date of the basilica is a significant issue. A coin of Marcian (450–457) in its foundations indicated that construction began no earlier than the mid-fifth century; a coin of Anastasius I (491–518) found under a section of the interior pavement shows it substantially complete around the turn of the century; and a coin of Justin I (518–527) in the foundations of the outer atrium, which does not bond with the basilica, reveals how additions were still being made in the sixth century. Pallas dated the destruction of the building to the AD 552 earthquake centred on Chaironeia that we now consider not to have affected Corinth; indeed, the tomb of Thomas the presbyter at least implies that the structure continued to function after this date.

Three other basilicas have been recognised archaeologically at Corinth. These share the division of nave and aisles and of lower storey from upper

storey. The Kenchreian Gate (Kraneion) Basilica resembles the Lechaion basilica but at a much smaller scale (Shelley, 1943; Pallas, 1970b; 1972; 1980; 1990); it lacks an atrium but does have a baptistery on its north side. It is a cemetery church of likely sixth-century date, with ample evidence of vaulted brick built cist graves over a large area to the south and west in particular. A complete Sigma table was found in the cemetery to the south; lamps, pitchers and coins in the graves indicate that burial continued well into the seventh century. The sixth-century basilica of Saint Kodratus lacks an atrium or baptistery (Stikas, 1964; 1966; Pallas, 1990). Mausolea are attached to the aisles and graves within the aisles and nave include that of Bishop Eustathios. The Skoutelas basilica has a baptistery but was not used as a cemetery church (Pallas, 1960b; 1990); it too is a sixth-century foundation.

Finally, an impost capital resembling but larger than those from the Lechaion basilica was found east of the Forum on the road to the Kraneion Basilica close to the amphitheatre. Pallas thought that the remains of a cement and rubble structure nearby belonged to a martyrium dating to the mid-sixth century (1959b: 205–7; 1990: 764). American School investigations here in December 2000 identified a circular or octagonal building 12m in diameter attached to a rectangular structure 20m square. To judge from the density of built cist graves north of the city walls close by, this was a martyrium or part of a baptistery.

Pottery

What have been revealed in recent investigations are both revisions in accepted sequences and the large gaps still present in our knowledge of regional Late Roman pottery in southern Greece. An article publishing phases of pottery *c.* AD 450, 500, 600 and 650 drawing on excavations in the Baths of Aphrodite, Panayia Field and East of Theatre is in an advanced state of preparation (Slane and Sanders, forthcoming). Material of *c.* 550 is generally quite sparse though this is unsurprising given the events which affected the city in the two decades from *c.* AD 522 to 542. Nonetheless, small quantities of mid-sixth-century pottery come from the Panayia Bath excavations (Sanders, 1999), and larger groups were recovered from the excavation of houses built up against the basilica at Lechaion (from which imported ARS and LRC pieces were published by Hayes, 1972: ARS forms 87B, 99A, 104A, 104C and LRC forms 5 and 6). Unpublished context pottery from the University of Texas excavations south of the Asklepieion includes lots of a similar date.

With the seventh century defined and the later ninth century becoming clearer, it is also possible to place material which is neither one nor the other. This is represented by a single chafing dish, some cooking pots and table amphoras from the Panayia Field, rare pitchers found in built tombs, an amphora antecedent to the ninth century form and occasional scraps

represented as survivors in later deposits. The richest source of this material seems to be from south of the Forum where the American School recently acquired 0.6 ha. for future excavation.

Conclusions

To have written an archaeological synthesis of the late antique countryside in Greece would have been to build a Potemkin Village bearing 'the marks of material dilapidation, artistic decline and civic helplessness' (Broneer, 1954: 159). It should be obvious that we have inherited a largely fictitious vision of urban archaeology in Greece written under the influence of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. This vision ought not now be extended to the countryside. Instead we should take the opportunity presented by resurging interest in Late Antiquity to investigate the processes by which urban and rural Greece evolved from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. To do so is a major task requiring the deconstruction of a century of scholarship, weeding the bad from the good, and rebuilding new hypotheses.

There are great virtues of urban archaeology of the kind developed at Corinth: the financing and material resources are in place for year-round, post-excavation research; there are opportunities to undertake new excavations, using new methodologies, to test existing hypotheses; and there is a huge corpus of published and unpublished material to rework and reanalyse. Thus a relatively modest excavation programme, such as that in the Panayia field, can generate a product that extends far beyond the limits of the project and out of all proportion with the investment in time and financial resources invested. At Corinth it may seem impossible to reinvestigate large portions of the site excavated before 1959 but the example of Peirene offers hope in this regard (Robinson, 2001).

Equally there is great virtue in smaller scale projects. While central Greek ceramic typologies are now well established and the comparanda easily accessed, there is only a vague impression, at best, of other regional assemblages. Full publication of late antique pottery from centres such as Thebes, Sparta, Olympia, Tegea and Messene are a priority if we are ever to work out what is happening in the urban and rural landscape. Quantification and seriation will add considerable precision and together with serious study of fabrics will present opportunities to develop ideas about distribution and trade of ceramics in Greece.

In archaeological survey the problem of significance has to be resolved. This can be partly achieved, relatively cheaply, by extensive remote sensing programmes after surface sampling. The excavation and full publication of even one complete rural settlement, whether individual building complex, hamlet or village would add volumes to the interpretation of survey surface

scatters. Survey generates a vast chronological span of material culture and many types of pottery that are represented by only a few or unique individuals. Tentatively or misidentified objects can only be independently assessed if the finds are published in full. Finally, survey must realise that later periods, especially the early modern, for which there is a rich textual, monumental and ethnographic record, offer much scope for understanding more ancient landscapes.

This chapter may seem to have concentrated on chronology but really it has shown that we have been trying to study a historical period using anachronistic material culture. Beyond the chronological issues there are far more interesting social issues to be investigated, including the assimilation of the new peoples and charting the economic and social changes that led to the transformation of the Mediterranean world. One provocative issue raised by the late lamps, basilicas and burials is the rate at which Christianity developed a monumental identity in southern Greece. Lamps bearing clearly Christian motifs start to appear only in the second half of the fifth century. The appearance of identifiable Christian burial forms *c*. 475 suggests that, for whatever reasons, the Hellenic forms long sufficed. In the seventh century, the renewed provision of liquid containers in graves suggest a degree of syncretism between Christian and Hellenic beliefs and burial liturgy. There is no evidence at Corinth that any buildings were dedicated to Christian worship before about 475. These buildings provided an inordinate amount of space for the accommodation of adult catechumens and three are fitted with impressive baptismal facilities. The conclusion arises that Corinth still had a large unbaptised adult population. If the capital of the province was tardy in this respect, what can be said about the state of the Church in rural areas?

Acknowledgements

In trying to reassemble late antique Corinth I have benefited greatly from the numismatic knowledge of Orestes Zervos who has kindly shared his vast unpublished knowledge of relevant excavated coins at Corinth. I have also spent many hours discussing chronological problems and their significance with Kathleen Slane. I am grateful to Michael Boyd, Ben Millis, Joe Rife, Rebecca Sweetman and Mary Walbank with whom I have talked through some of the problems.

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Chapter 7

Balkan Ghosts? Nationalism and the Question of Rural Continuity in Albania

William Bowden and Richard Hodges

Why this sudden bewilderment, this confusion?
(How serious people's faces have become.)
Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,
everyone going home lost in thought?

Because night has fallen and the barbarians haven't come.
And some of our men just in from the border say
there are no barbarians any longer.
Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?
Those people were a kind of solution.

(C.P. Cavafy, 1904, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, trans. Keeley and Sherrard, 1975: 15)

Introduction

Albania was formally defined as a country at the Treaty of London in 1913. Its inter-war history was marked by desperate poverty and eventual invasion by Italy in 1939. In 1944, Albanian partisans, led by the Marxist Enver Hoxha, succeeded in expelling the occupying German forces and, initially in collaboration with the Yugoslavians, set out to build a new country. In 1947, as tensions with neighbouring Yugoslavia developed, Hoxha boldly instigated a nationalist archaeological programme, run by a branch of the Academy of Sciences' Institute of Geography. A series of excavations began and promising young students were despatched to study in the Soviet Union, adding to a small, older generation of scholars who had been trained in the classical tradition in pre-war Western Europe with its emphasis upon monuments and art history. The 1960s, marked by Albania's switch from an affiliation to the Soviet Union to one with the Chinese, was a period of intense activity for its small band of archaeologists, which culminated in the establishment of the Institute of Archaeology as a branch of the Academy of Sciences in 1970.

Locked into the rationale for its existence was an explicit nationalist model evolved over the previous two decades of archaeological research.

This chapter examines the problems this model created with regard particularly to the late antique and early medieval periods of modern Albania. What role did 'barbarians' play in this? Were they a 'solution' for the Academy of Sciences? And how has this model been allowed to evolve?

'They have proved the Illyrian-Albanian continuity' (*Albanian Phrasebook*, 2000)

One of the principal problems faced by Albania during the communist period was the organisation of efficient control mechanisms for all human sciences in order to provide the country with a distinctive identity. The task of historians and archaeologists was to construct a systematic and well-documented Albanian past. To counter the territorial claims of surrounding powers (notably Greece, Italy and Yugoslavia), the issue was to prove that the Albanians had inhabited their country from the most ancient of times. To this end, the main line of research supported by the authorities was the study of the Illyrians, with particular emphasis on their ethnogenesis and their ethnic and cultural links with the modern Albanian population. Signal importance was attached to their social structures, especially with relation to a Marxist view of historical development.

The question of continuity with the country's Illyrian past has therefore been a constant theme in post-war Albanian archaeology. Enver Hoxha (1985: 40) adopted an explicit view of the past which he described in a speech at Shkodra in 1979:

> Ne jemi pasardhësit e fiseve ilire. Në këto troje të lashta të të parëve tanë kanë vërshuar grekët, romakët, normandët, sllavët, anshuinët, bizantinët, venedikasit, osmanët e shumë e shumë pushtues të tjerë, por ata nuk izhdukën dot as popullin shqiptar, as kulturën e vjetër ilire, as vazhdimësinë e saj shqiptare.
>
> (*We are the descendents of the Illyrian tribes. Into the land of our ancestors have come Greeks, Romans, Normans, Slavs, Angevins, Byzantines, Venetians, Ottomans and numerous other invaders, without having been able to destroy the Albanian people, the ancient Illyrian civilisation and later the Albanians*)

Hoxha's need to demonstrate the social integrity and homogeneity of Albania and its people was of course directly related to the fragile country's increasing isolation from the rest of the world. Under the policy of self-reliance, following the split with China in 1975, the purity of Illyrian ethnicity was essential to the nationalist government's political ideology.

The broad thrust of the Albanian historical narrative in this sense was that the Illyrians occupied the entire area of modern Albania throughout antiquity

and maintained a cultural identity distinct from that of interlopers such as the Greeks and Romans. Greek colonists in Epirus were thus a minority among an Illyrian majority. All the major antique settlements were considered to be Illyrian foundations, showing little Hellenic influence. The Roman period was identified as a period of occupation, implicitly compared to the Italian occupation of 1939–43, while the slave-owning Romans themselves were co-opted into a rather crude evolutionary Marxist framework (Anamali and Korkuti, 1971). According to this model, although the Illyrians participated in the economic life of the Roman empire, and adopted Latin as the language of commerce, their identity as Illyrians remained unchanged. Indeed, Illyrian remained the language of the common people who moreover retained their customs and their traditional material culture (for example, coarse ware ceramics). However, in the immediate post-Roman period the Illyrian identity was reasserted and restored; accordingly, this period formed one of the main areas of research for Albanian archaeologists.

As in Greece, the presence of barbarian invaders in the early medieval period remained a constant obstacle to an ethnic history that flowed in a seamless continuum from prehistory to the present day. But, unlike Greece, where archaeology has largely side-stepped the issue, Albania's archaeologists confronted the problem head-on, creating what John Wilkes has referred to as 'a highly improbable reconstruction of Albanian history' for the post-Roman period (1992: 278). This reconstruction saw the 'southern Illyrians' (the Albanians) as unaffected by the migrations of Avars, Slavs and others, even though the northern Illyrians (who inhabited the area occupied by the former Yugoslavia) were overwhelmed by Slavs. This was intended to counter the claims of Yugoslavian archaeologists to an Illyrian heritage. The strong organisation of southern Illyrian society, however, and the mountainous geography of the area were held to have ensured the continued ethnic integrity of the Albanians.

'They have built a wall around Butrint' (*Albanian Phrasebook*, 2000)

Albanian archaeologists therefore painted a rather simplistic picture of the early medieval history of their country, in which archaeological material was used to illustrate a pre-determined historical narrative. Like the borders of modern Albania, the walled towns and *castra* of Late Antiquity provided a definable context with clear boundaries and limits separating the indigenous population from the barbarian Other. Slavic settlements were considered to be 'islands in an Albanian sea' (Frashëri, 1982: 104–6). Approaches to the landscape within this model took two basic forms. One of the earliest projects of Albania's archaeologists was the creation of an archaeological map, with the intention of documenting all the country's archaeological remains on a region by region basis. This topographic approach has remained a central part

of archaeological methodology in the country, resulting in a number of useful synthetic surveys (for example, Budina, 1971; 1975; Muçaj, 1980; Bela and Përzhita, 1990). The surveys took the form of descriptive gazetteers of known sites and monuments, usually of all periods until the end of Late Antiquity. The role of archaeology, however, remained passive, and archaeologists limited themselves to empirical observation and description. This was compatible with a second approach which viewed the countryside within an evolutionary Marxist framework (see also Bejko, 1998). In this parallel approach the rural landscape remained a hypothetical environment inhabited by an indomitable peasantry, who moved from Roman-dominated slavery towards medieval feudalism in their inexorable progress towards the communist ideal. Damian Komata summarised the position in his 1976 synthetic treatment of the archaeological investigation of early medieval fortresses (1976: 183):

> Pour mieux comprendre la réalité de l'époque quand au développement de l'artisanat et de l'agriculture, référons-nous à Engels qui, parlant de moyen âge, observe: 'Il existait partout une petite production basée sur la propriété à partielle des travailleurs sur les moyens de production; dans les campagnes dominait l'agriculture des petits paysans, libres ou serfs, dans les villes, l'artisanat'

However, Marxism and the actual results of archaeological investigations were never fully reconciled with one another. As Bejko (1998) points out, the dominant ethos of Albanian archaeology remained that of nationalist-driven culture history that precluded a more sophisticated application of Marxist theory.

Any in-depth consideration of the landscape was also limited by the desire for a sophisticated urban Illyrian society. Urbanisation was a constant theme for Albanian archaeology, and a typology of settlement was constructed in which Illyrian settlements went through a proto-urban phase before attaining their fully evolved urban form (for example, Ceka, 1998). Moreover, evidence of autochthonous urban development was a crucial factor in playing down the influence of Greece and Rome, although ironically this involved an acceptance of one of the basic tenets of classical history *viz.* the cultural superiority of urban life. This focus on urban settlement is a defining feature of late antique and early medieval archaeology in Albania, in which urban continuity was viewed as of paramount importance. This was particularly true in the cases of settlements such as Butrint, which were clearly occupied in both the late antique and later medieval periods, thereby allowing archaeologists to demonstrate occupation in the intervening period (for example, Anamali, 1989).

We are therefore left with a situation in which the early medieval countryside became the realm of the barbarian 'Other', the culturally backward Slavs who were divided from the Albanians by the walls of the cities and fortresses and one in which the countryside became ideologically questionable. Its perceived lack of sophistication had little role in an historical

narrative that stressed Illyrian society as advanced and urbanised in a way that owed little to Hellenic influence. This antithetical relationship with the ancient countryside was furthermore a direct reflection of Enver Hoxha's policies towards contemporary Albania in which he strove to create an urbanised industrial society (Vickers, 1997). The city-dwelling elite of the communist regime consciously attempted to extinguish peasant roots by creating new communities, moving mountain villages to occupy coastal sites and imposing political prisoners and their families on these places. The new villages were designed on urban models and the workers of the collective farms were housed in tower blocks that rose incongruously in Albania's rural landscape. The process of collectivisation involved erasing a sense of place and ethnic identity; only the State and Party mattered and these were fused into a 1930s construct of the urban idyll. It is telling that exile for intellectuals in Albania meant being sent to a village (Vickers, 1997: 190).

However, notwithstanding these negative attitudes towards the countryside, the concentration on the early medieval period during several decades of well-funded research has created a wide and interesting body of archaeological material that sheds a certain light on the transformation of the landscape between *c*. AD 400–800.

'The Albanians built castles ... to defend themselves from the attacks which came from all directions' (Korkuti, 1971: 1)

Of particular importance to Albanian archaeologists was a group of *castra* excavated in central and northern Albania, seemingly associated with a number of remarkable, furnished inhumation cemeteries, which were held to represent the early medieval Albanian population, known as the Koman, Arbër or proto-Albanian culture (see Popovic, 1984; Wilkes, 1992: 273–8; Bowden, 2003a). The objects within the graves are characteristic of grave assemblages from contexts throughout migration period Europe, and include objects imported from the Byzantine world, together with dress items and weapons which are paralleled in Lombard, Merovingian and Avar contexts. These objects suggest that the cemeteries were in use between the late sixth and late eighth or early ninth centuries. Despite the presence of grave goods, both Albanian and non-Albanian scholars contend that the occupants of these graves were Christian and represent a surviving post-Roman population. This is based partly on the concentration of Latin toponyms in the area of the cemeteries and a corresponding absence of the Slavic place names that are common elsewhere, and partly on the presence of Christian objects within the grave assemblages themselves.

These cemeteries have often been used to provide comparative dates for the fortified sites that sometimes lie in the vicinity. This tactic is by no means unproblematic: the distribution of the fortified sites is far wider than that of

the cemeteries, suggesting that the cemeteries reflect a more localised phenomenon. The relationship between cemeteries and *castra* is therefore almost certainly far more complex than has previously been allowed. Furthermore, later occupation of these sites recommends that the dates given for the occupation phases of the *castra* should be treated with some degree of caution.

The appearance of these sites is part of a widespread phenomenon in the Balkans whereby populations transferred periodically, temporarily, or permanently to more defensive positions on fortified hilltops. This can be observed in FYROM/Macedonia, Bulgaria, and northern and central Greece (Dunn, 1994; 1997). Komata (1976) counts around 70 of these late antique and early medieval fortresses and citadels in Albania, although even at the most extensively excavated sites the results remain ambiguous (Fig. 7.1). These sites are frequently located along river valleys and lines of communication. It is unclear as to whether this is indicative of a co-ordinated defensive policy on the part of the emperor, or merely a reflection of the location of the earlier settlements that required these fortifications. Procopius' *Buildings* suggests the former, but this remains a highly ambiguous source (see below and Bowden, 2003b). Some of these fortresses lie in proximity to the early medieval cemeteries such as Shurdhah. We shall briefly note the results of the excavations of various sites and outline some of the problems associated with their interpretation. In general, the fortresses present a picture of remarkable uniformity, although the methodologies employed and the ideological background of the excavations make this result unsurprising.

The fortress of Shurdhah (Sarda) is situated in northern Albania on a promontory above the Drin valley and close to Koman itself. Excavations during the early 1970s failed to produce conclusive evidence of its early medieval occupation, although a number of objects were found that are paralleled in the early medieval cemeteries (Spahiu and Komata, 1975; Komata, 1980). However, the excavation report implies that no early medieval contexts were found within the fortress itself, which seems to date mainly from the late eleventh century. Nonetheless, the presence of early medieval objects and the cemetery are suggestive of earlier occupation.

The fortress of Symize is also interesting in this context. Symize occupies a steep-sided pyramidal hill to the north of Maliq in central eastern Albania. It was excavated from 1973–75 by Gjerak Karaiskaj, who concluded that the site had been settled without interruption from Late Antiquity until the start of the Ottoman period (Karaiskaj, 1980). Like many of the late antique hilltop sites, Symize was constructed within an earlier pre-Roman fortification, which at some point was augmented with a poorly-constructed masonry wall. Excavations focussed on two cisterns, one of which was dated to the late antique period although its contents suggest that by this period it was used for the rubbish disposal rather than for water storage. A single burial was also

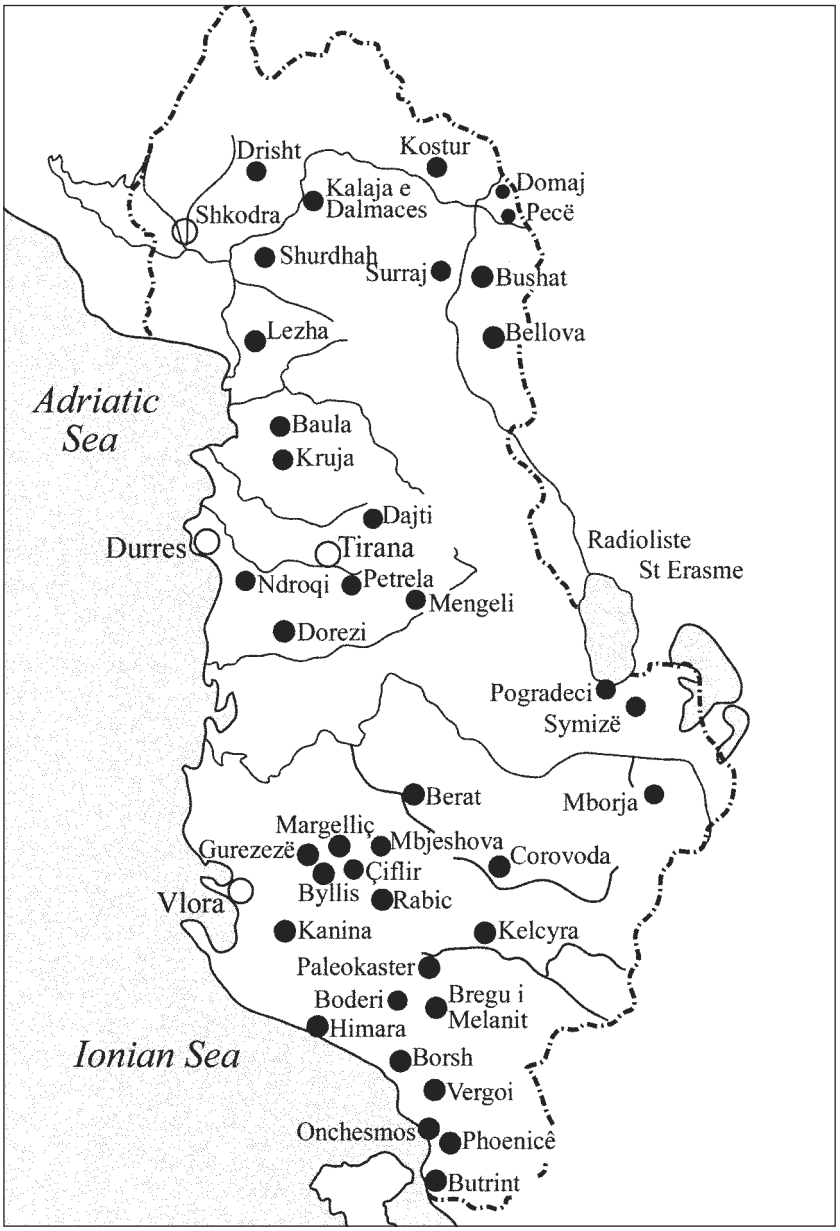

Figure 7.1 Albania: distribution of known and presumed late antique and early medieval hilltop and fortress sites (adapted from Komata, 1976)

discovered within this. Ceramics recovered from the cistern, dated by Karaiskaj to the fifth and sixth centuries, are dominated by coarse wares and great storage jars or *pythoi*. The coarse wares resemble those found in other late antique contexts in Albania. These are frequently thin-walled globular jars with flat bases and flaring rims, with two handles joined directly to the rim. Possible examples of eastern Mediterranean cooking wares have also been noted from the published assemblages (cf. Arthur *et al.*, 1992: 110–11). In addition, coins of Anastasius and Justinian as well as unidentified late Roman issues were recorded, but without clarity as to exact provenance on the site. The coin sequence from the site recommences in the twelfth century. Fourth-century occupation of the site was ascribed to a small group of Goths who, it was suggested, were assimilated into the dominant Albanian culture.

A broadly similar sequence can be observed at other sites in central and northern Albania. A series of fortifications were investigated in the area of Kukës, close to the border with Kosovo. These include Bushati (Fig. 7.2) and Pece (Fig. 7.3), which, like Symize, were active between the fourth and sixth centuries with a second phase of occupation attested in the later medieval period (Përzhita, 1986; 1990). The excavator postulated continued usage in the intervening period. Both sites occupied precipitous positions on hills and were surrounded by substantial mortared fortifications. Bushati (0.70 ha) in particular was a major defensive work, ringed with towers of varying forms; Pece's walls enclosed an area of 0.13 ha. A smaller castle at Domaj (Fig. 7.4), with a surface area of only 325m^2, was also investigated, although in this case

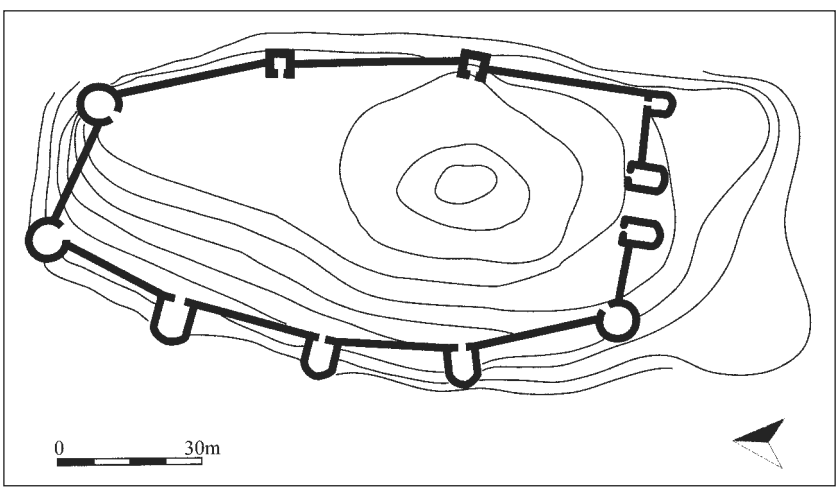

Figure 7.2 Plan of the fortified site of Bushati near Kukës (after Përzhita, 1986)

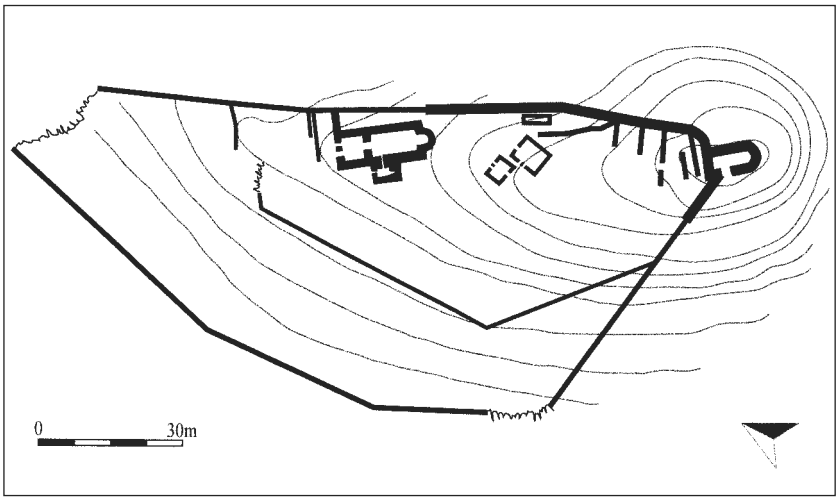

Figure 7.3 Plan of the small fortified site of Pece (after Përzhita, 1990)

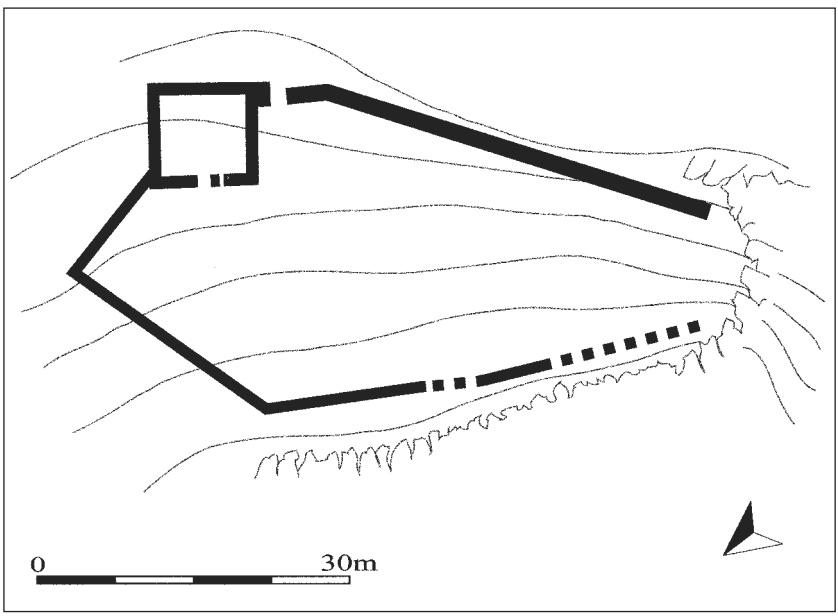

Figure 7.4 Plan of small late antique defended site at Domaj (after Përzhita, 1995)

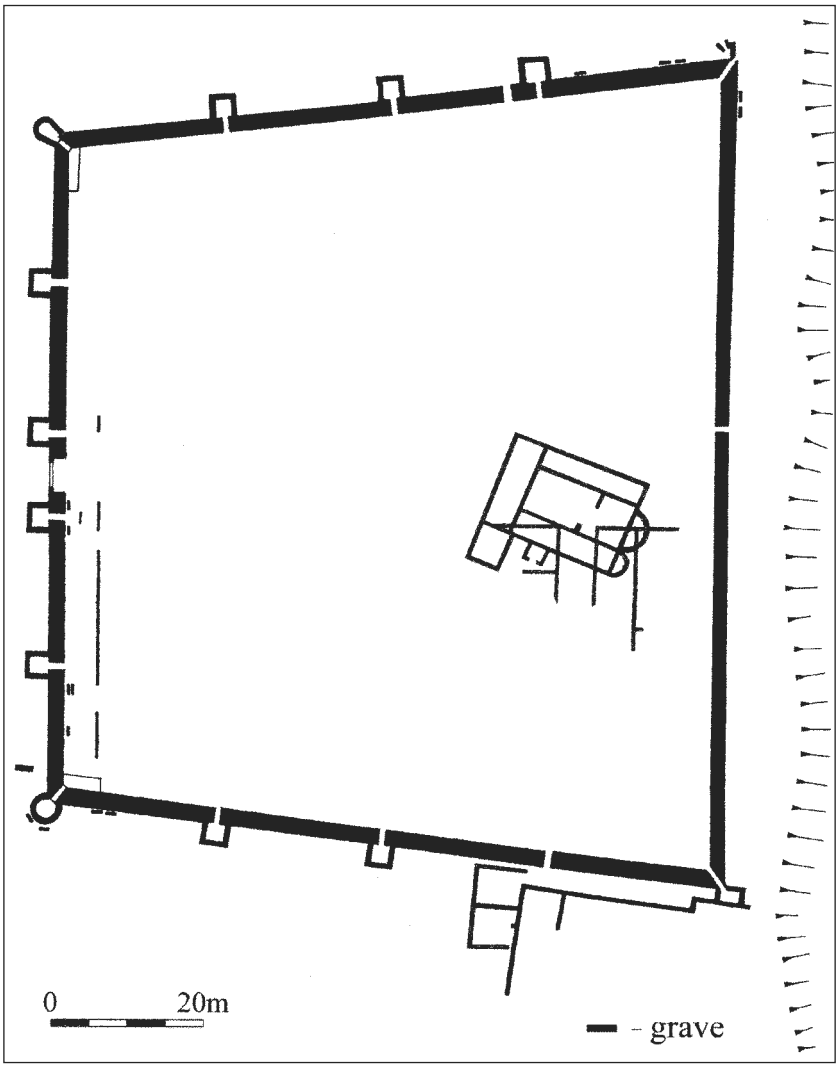

Figure 7.5 Paleokaster: late Roman cavalry(?) fortress and fortified complex (after Baçe, 1981)

only one phase of occupation was noted, dated by a single coin of Justinian (Përzhita, 1995).

In central Albania, fortified sites were recorded in the region of Mallakastra (Muçaj, 1980). Apart from the major city of Bylis, with its large fortifications dated by a series of inscriptions to the reign of Justinian, five further fortresses

were noted (Rabie, Margelliç, Cifi, Gurezezë and Mbjeshove), together with a number of basilicas spread along the valley of the Gjanice river. Four of the fortresses produced evidence of late antique occupation including quantities of *pythoi* of a type characteristic of late antique contexts at Bylis. The fortresses were interpreted as military centres used by the Byzantine administration to oversee/subdue the autochthonous population. The wealth of the basilicas, however, was viewed as indicative of the economic development of the rural areas. The apparently quite dense occupation of the area covered by Muçaj is in marked contrast to the results of the Mallakastra Survey, where field survey in two areas a few kilometres to the west failed to produce any late antique traces (Korkuti *et al.,* 1998: 262).

A final site of particular interest is that of Paleokaster in the Drinos valley close to the town of Gjirokastra (Baçe, 1981) (Fig. 7.5). Paleokaster differs from the other sites in that it occupies a low-lying position at the confluence of the Drinos and Kardhiq rivers. The fortress is of a regular, trapezoidal plan, covering an area of 0.915 ha. Its excavator, Apollon Baçe, suggested that it was originally a base for a cavalry cohort of 500 men, constructed in the early fourth century. This date is proposed on the basis of a fourth-century grave *stèle* incorporated into a later phase of construction. Excavations also revealed traces of regular barrack blocks. Twelve coins of the third and fourth centuries were found, with the latest dating to the reign of Constantius II (AD 335–361). An inscription from the reign of Licinius, overwritten during the reign of Constantius II, also points to a significant fourth-century presence at the site.

During the sixth century, a civilian population apparently reoccupied the walled enclosure. Two basilicas were erected: one inside the enclosure and a second *c*. 100m to the south. The church within the wall circuit overlay the earlier barracks but followed a completely different alignment, suggesting that these were no longer standing at the time the fortress was reoccupied. Substantial quantities of ceramics were recovered relating to both periods of occupation. The published drawings suggest that these included LR 1 and LR 2 amphorae, Late Roman C ware and African Red Slip ware. As at Symize, eastern Mediterranean cooking wares are noted in the published assemblages (Arthur *et al.*, 1992: 110–11).

Within their socio-political context these excavations were highly successful, providing material with which to illustrate an accepted cultural history. Archaeologists played a largely passive role in maintaining and augmenting a pre-existing historical model, with the result that there was little requirement to demonstrate the veracity of their findings, which, publicly at least, were accepted without question by their colleagues. This presents significant problems in approaching the results of these excavations, in which the claims are seldom substantiated by more detailed explanations. Ceramics in particular were interpreted within the context of a model that assumed cultural continuity between Late Antiquity and the later medieval period, with

the result that coarse wares were often assigned uncritically to the intervening period. Nonetheless, despite the problems associated with these excavation results, they provide some interesting indications as to the changing patterns of life outside the walled towns during Late Antiquity, or at least some indication as to directions for future research.

The finds on many of these sites suggest that they were occupied permanently or semi-permanently, rather than functioning solely as refuge sites. In the absence of evidence from outside the fortresses this must remain largely supposition. Andrew Poulter, for example, argues the opposite for the hilltop sites of Moesia Inferior, basing his conclusions on survey data which suggest continued use lowland settlements and villa sites (1983: 97–100; see also this volume (Chapter 8)). Similarly, the large number of churches noted by Muçaj in the Mallakastra region would indicate continued occupation of unprotected lowland sites, although the general absence of late antique material noted nearby in the Mallakastra Survey denotes a complex situation with very localised variations. Equally, while we may note that the occupation of certain sites is broadly contemporaneous, the available information does not allow us to detect whether a site was occupied for two years or two centuries. However, the frequent occurrence of the large *pythoi* or storage jars at the sites, and indeed the quantities of other material present, could signify quite lengthy periods of occupation.

The apparent lack of fine wares or amphorae in any quantity is notable on the more remote sites such as in the region of Kukës, although in the absence of quantitative data this can remain no more than a general impression. The seemingly wider range of imported material at Paleokaster, situated on one of the main north-south routes through Albania, and indeed much closer to the coast, could suggest that imported material seldom strayed far from the coastal littoral.

The question of continuity remains unanswered. It is certainly possible and indeed likely that these sites remained occupied into the seventh century and beyond. The presence of the early medieval Komani cemeteries mentioned above shows that the landscape continued to be utilised in some form, and it seems not unreasonable to suggest that the Komani population were using the same sites as had been used in the sixth century. However, this question needs to be tackled rigorously and removed from the ideological constraints that have previously prevented this from happening. Perhaps most importantly the hilltop sites need to be examined in relation to earlier Roman settlement and land use patterns, from which they appear such a radical departure.

‘May we see a cow shed?’ (*A Guidebook to Albanian*, n.d.)

Our knowledge of the Roman countryside is thus far very limited. This is particularly true of Albania, where, with the exception of the Diaporit villa

and the site of Malathrea (see below), no excavations of villas or other rural Roman sites have ever been conducted. There is a similar absence of systematic villa excavations in Greece. Although a number of villas have been investigated here, published results are limited to partial building plans and mosaics, with little consideration of associated land use and material culture. This is partially alleviated by the wealth of field survey evidence. Greece, for reasons not unconnected with the difficulties of obtaining excavation permits, is probably the most intensively surveyed area of the Mediterranean, providing a remarkable, if problematic, database of material (see, in general, Alcock, 1993; Sanders, this volume (Chapter 6)). Surface survey, however, is inevitably a broad-brush approach that cannot easily detect important nuances of site history. Equally, although they are ostensibly diachronic, many of the surveys were carried out by archaeologists whose research interests lay in the pre-Roman period and who correspondingly paid less attention to Roman and post-Roman sequences.

Related to the above, there is a general absence of published ceramic sequences resulting from detailed stratigraphic excavation. This is wholly the case in Albania and partly true for Greece, meaning that with the exception of a handful of sites (notably the agora in Athens, Corinth, Knossos, Argos and Gortyna) almost nothing is known of locally-produced Roman and late antique coarse wares. Survey results have been entirely dependent on analysis of fine wares and amphorae, with the potential for distortion that this entails – a fact acknowledged by many of the archaeologists in question (Alcock, 1993: 49–53). This absence of stratified sequences has meant that field survey has been unable to meet its full potential as a research tool with relation to the Roman and post-Roman periods.

The absence of rural excavations also means that our knowledge of agricultural practice is largely dependent on documentary sources. There is a corresponding need for the application of zooarchaeology and archaeobotany in both urban and rural contexts; equally, we need to examine the relationship between urban centres and their rural hinterlands. Is it indeed possible to detect a pattern in the changing fortunes of the towns and the sites in their vicinity?

The Roman and Late Antique Landscape: Butrint and its Hinterland

The Butrint Project is an attempt to answer some of the questions outlined above. Butrint (ancient *Bouthrotos* or *Buthrotum*) is situated on the Ionian coast of Albania immediately opposite the island of Corfu and within the former Roman province of *Epirus* (later *Epirus Vetus* following the provincial reforms of Diocletian). The site and its hinterland have been the subject of a multi-disciplinary research project since 1994, which started with the aim of

charting the history of the city and its relationship with its environment during the late antique and medieval periods (Hodges *et al.*, 1997; 2000; forthcoming a). The project has subsequently expanded to take account of all periods of the site's history.

The central area of Butrint occupies a small peninsula that extends into a large inland lake, connected to the sea by the Vivari Channel (Figs 7.6 and 7.7). This geographical position aided the construction of a topographic model that saw Butrint as constituted by only the walled area that occupied the peninsula. The walled city became the focus of research, despite the presence of significant standing remains beyond the intra-mural area. This topographic model of Butrint that remained in place until the start of the present project was therefore entirely a cultural construct that emphasised the division between urban and non-urban in accordance with the ideology outlined above.

The site was first settled around the eighth century BC and quickly thrived, aided by the presence of a popular (and doubtless lucrative) cult dedicated to Asklepios. It was not one of the cities that sided against Rome during the Third Macedonian War and consequently it escaped the ravages of Aemilius Paullus in 167 BC, in which seventy other Epirote cities were razed to the ground and 150 000 people reportedly taken captive.

In the first century BC members of the Roman aristocracy began to acquire land holdings in Epirus. This availability of land possibly resulted from the depredations of Aemilius Paullus although it may also have been part of an ongoing process in which land and wealth became concentrated in fewer hands during the late Hellenistic period. This process of social change is documented in a set of manumission inscriptions inscribed on the *parados* of the theatre at Butrint which reveal, during the last two centuries BC, a reduction in the number of group manumittors and a concomitant increase in individual slave owners, who appear to derive exclusively from certain important families (Cabanes, 1976; 1997). Whatever the timing of the process, it is clear that members of the Roman senatorial aristocracy acquired large estates in Epirus. These landowners, described by Varro in the second book of *De Re Rusticae*, included Cicero's correspondent, T. Pomponius Atticus, who owned an estate in the vicinity of Butrint.

In 44 BC Caesar attempted to establish a veteran colony at Butrint, in part in retaliation for the Buthrotiens failure to pay a certain tax, the nature of which is unknown. This plan was met with stiff resistance on the part of Atticus, who asked Cicero to intervene on the town's behalf in order to avoid the loss of lands that would result from the arrival of the colonists. Atticus eventually avoided the imposition of veterans by himself paying off the town's debt. The respite was short-lived, however, as the colony was eventually established by Augustus sometime after his victory at Actium in 31 BC (Deniaux, 1987; 1998). The physical effect of the colonists' arrival on land-holding patterns is unknown but the territory of Butrint should probably have

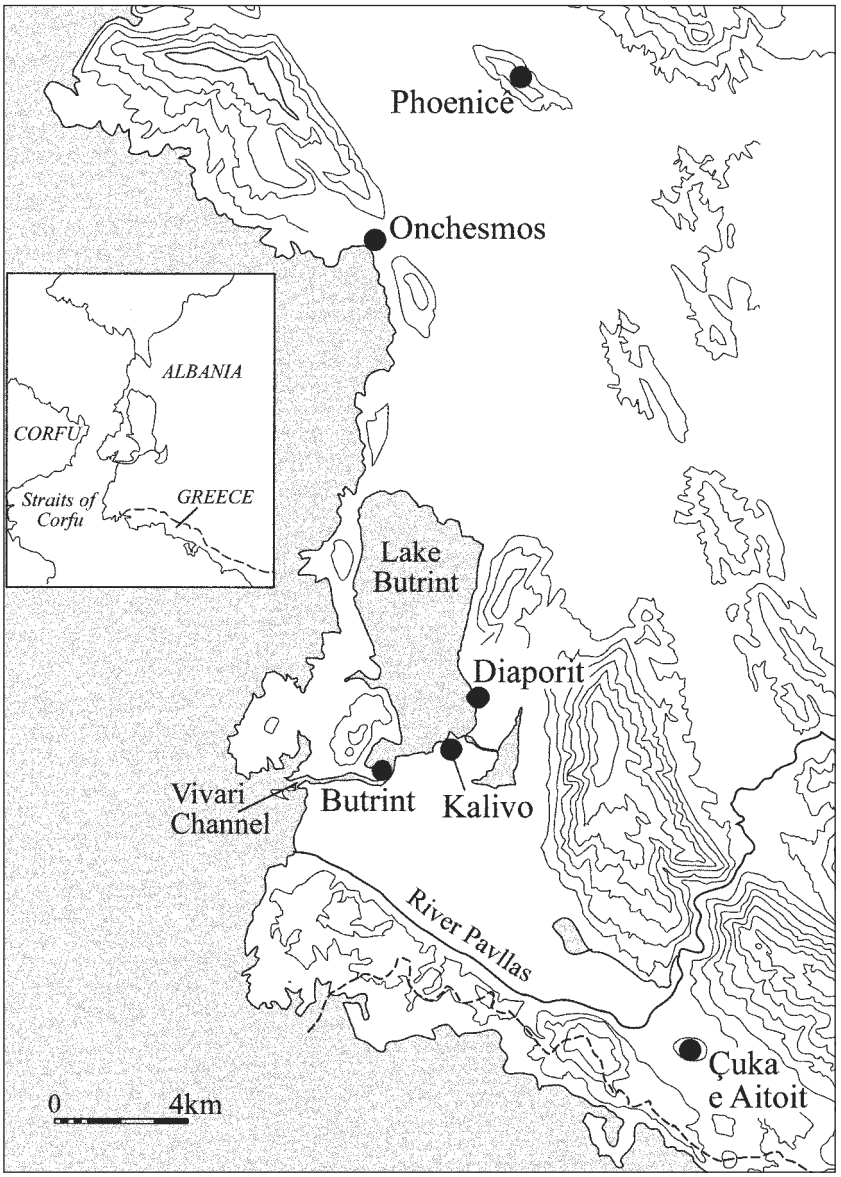

Figure 7.6 Butrint and its region: geographical setting

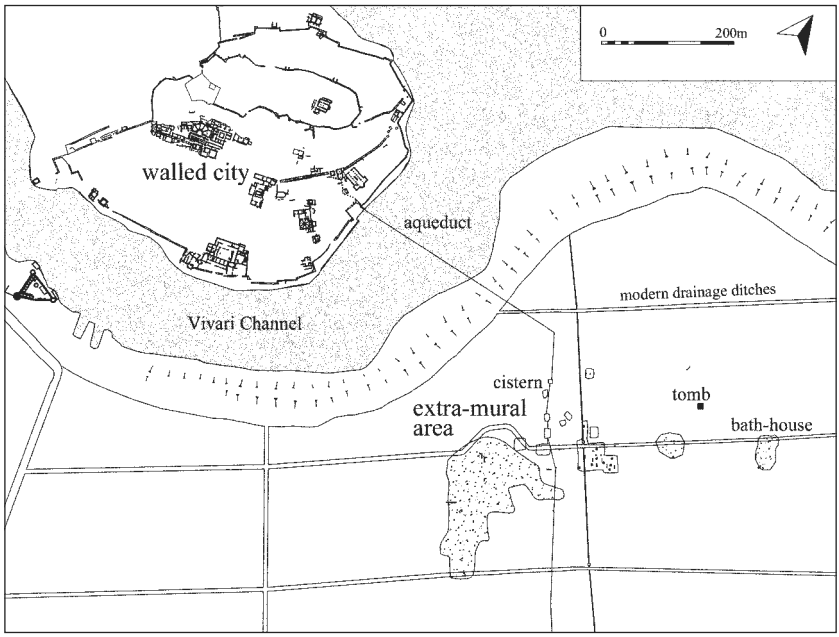

Figure 7.7 Plan of the city of Butrint with its main excavated and monumental sites

undergone a process of centuriation as occurred in the landscape surrounding the contemporary foundation of Nikopolis (Doukellis, 1988) and slightly earlier at Corinth (Romano, 2000). Indeed, aerial photographs of the Butrint region, taken prior to the communist period programme of land drainage, show traces of field patterns that are aligned with structures associated with the city's colonial expansion, notably the aqueduct and the orthogonal street grid of the south-eastern suburb of Butrint, as inferred from geophysical evidence (Martin, forthcoming).

Field survey has demonstrated that the plain south of Butrint, on which the new suburb emerged, was quite densely occupied during the imperial period and continued thus into Late Antiquity (Hodges *et al.*, 2000; Pluciennik *et al.*, forthcoming; Bowden, 2003b). This apparent continuity is closely paralleled by the evidence from the Nikopolis Survey which showed only a slight drop in site numbers (from 36 to 30) between the Roman and late antique periods (Wiseman, 2001). There is, however, a sharp contrast between the evidence from Butrint and Nikopolis and that from surveys elsewhere in Greece, where a dramatic drop in site numbers can be observed during the late Hellenistic period and a low density of occupation is sustained

until the late Roman period after which a significant increase in sites occurs (Alcock, 1993: 48). By contrast, as mentioned above, the Mallakastra Survey in central Albania detected very little late antique activity (Korkuti *et al.*, 1998: 262).

Sources indicate the continued presence of substantial estates in Epirus Vetus during the late Roman period. Paula of Rome is noted by Jerome in 384 as owning land at Nikopolis, 'which is located on the coast near Aktion and constitutes a large part of your property', while Paulinus of Pella inherited estates in Achaea, Epirus Vetus and Epirus Nova, which provided sufficient income 'to cover the most ambitious pretensions of an aristocrat' (Chrysos, 1981: 91–3). Like Atticus and his contemporaries four centuries earlier, these landowners were both members of the western senatorial aristocracy.

Roman Butrint itself in fact emerges as a small and fairly unremarkable maritime town. During Late Antiquity it underwent changes of the type widely recognised in towns elsewhere in the Mediterranean: a possible contraction of public space and the construction of palatial *domus*, one of which extended across a series of building plots on the waterfront; probably during the fifth century a new city wall was erected, limiting the defended area to the peninsula and excluding the suburb on the side of the Vivari Channel; and in the first half of the sixth century Christian buildings were erected, including a substantial basilica and a large and elaborately decorated baptistery. In the first half of the seventh century, however, areas of the town appear to have been largely abandoned, although occupation continued in other areas of the city (possibly the acropolis, the steep hill that dominates the centre of the town). The area of the triconch palace, a palatial *domus* dating to the fourth and early fifth century, was used for burial into the second half of the seventh century (dated by a nearly complete Crypta Balbi 2 type amphora used for an infant burial) (Reynolds, in Hodges *et al.*, forthcoming b). The latest Roman coin from the site dates to the reign of Constans II (641–668). Butrint reappears in historical sources at the end of the ninth century, when a coin sequence also recommences (Hodges *et al.*, 1997; 2000; forthcoming).

The agricultural economy of the Roman town was probably not dissimilar to that practised in the Butrint region today, which is based largely on pastoralism and fishing. Midden assemblages recovered from late antique contexts in the palatial *domus* indicated that sheep/goat and pig formed a high proportion of animals used for domestic consumption, with cattle and horse appearing less frequently. Not surprisingly, fish played a major role in the diet of Butrint's inhabitants, which was supplemented with game, including hare, boar and wild fowl (Powell, forthcoming).

Recent excavations have also begun to shed some light on the relationship between Butrint and the sites within its hinterland. A substantial villa and Christian basilica have been located at Diaporit on the south-east corner of

Lake Butrint (Figs 7.8 and 7.9), marked by standing remains and by surface ceramics (recovered by the field survey team) which suggested that the site was occupied from the late Republican period until the sixth century. The site features a series of terraces that slope down towards Lake Butrint, while walls in fact run under the surface of the lake, providing further indication that the water level has risen since the Roman period. The presence of Republican ceramics raises the possibility that Diaporit could be the site of the villa of Atticus or one of his contemporaries, although thus far the earliest structures excavated (including a large bath complex) date to the mid-first century AD. After various modifications, the buildings seem to have been abandoned around the start of the third century. Nearby Malathrea too has been suggested as a contender for the villa of Atticus. Malathrea was a fortified farm dating mainly to the Hellenistic period, but in use or reused during the Roman period. The excavator dated the latest occupation of the site to the early fourth century, indicated by coins of Diocletian (Çondi, 1984).

Diaporit was reoccupied around the start of the sixth century, with reoccupation focussed around a three-aisled Christian basilica, built on the northern side of the site and probably involving partial reuse of some of the buildings of the bath complex. One of the larger rooms of the bath appears subdivided in this period, and a hearth or oven inserted into a statue niche. Yet excavation so far has not been of sufficient extent to establish the nature of this

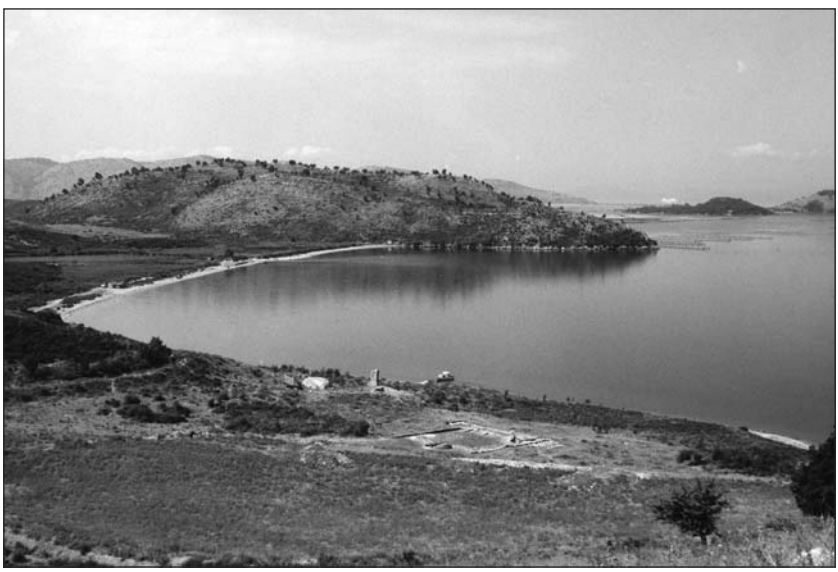

Figure 7.8 The villa site of Diaporit at lake Butrint seen from the north

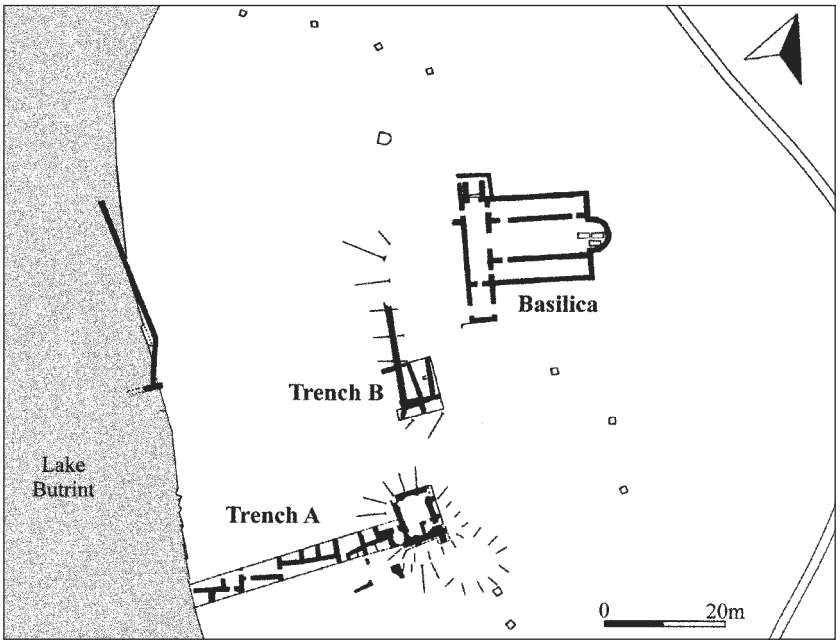

Figure 7.9 Diaporit: plan of the excavated remains

sixth-century occupation. Equally, the discovery of an early fourth-century Gazan amphora in the foundation levels of the church may be indicative of some occupation during the intervening period in a part of the site not yet explored. However, in the context of this paper it is important to note that the late antique use of the site appears to differ significantly from its early imperial occupation, with no sign of grandiose residential structures and with a predominantly religious role. Equally, the suggestion of a period of abandonment lasting for up to 300 years is a further indication of the dangers inherent in assuming continuity of occupation derived from field survey data that indicate activity in both the Roman and late antique periods. As at Butrint, the sequence of occupation at Diaporit extends into the second half of the seventh century. This later phase of deposition, noted in all the excavated areas, includes amphorae provisionally dated to AD 670–700. Crucially, fragments of this material have been recovered from deposits that are stratigraphically earlier than a series of modifications to the northern annex of the church, indicating that the church was still in use in the late seventh or early eighth century.

The excavations overall raise questions regarding the relationship between Diaporit and the town of Butrint. There are certainly significant differences between the pottery assemblages from the two sites (Reynolds, in Bowden *et*

al., 2002, 221–7). For the first period of the villa's life (*c.* mid-first century AD), the ceramics assemblage contains (as might be expected) significant quantities of fine wares. However, the later first- to third-century levels, although ceramic-rich, produced almost no fine wares at all, in marked contrast to Butrint. Differences likewise emerge in the coarse wares from the two sites: although a similar range of imported kitchen wares is present at each, the local coarse wares at Diaporit appear to derive from a different source to those from Butrint. And yet these two sites are inter-visible and separated by only 40 minutes on foot or by rowing boat. Clearly additional studies at Diaporit and at other comparable sites in the vicinity are required to clarify these somewhat surprising economic discrepancies.

'We must live and work as in a state of siege' (*A Guidebook to Albanian*, n.d.)

The continued activity at Diaporit into the later seventh century and beyond is also of significance in relation to the use and occupation of the landscape in the early medieval period. Albania, as we have already seen, is dotted with late antique fortified sites including both newly established hilltop defences and reoccupied prehistoric and classical sites. The Butrint region is no exception to this. The town of Phoenicê (to the north of Lake Butrint) retreated to the eastern end of its fortified acropolis, probably during the sixth century (Bowden, 2003b) (Fig. 7.10). Phoenicê is of particular note owing to the quite lengthy description provided by Procopius (*Buildings*, IV. i, 36–8):

> These two towns, namely Photicê and Phoenicê, stood on low-lying ground and were surrounded by stagnant water which collected there. Consequently the Emperor Justinian, reasoning that it was impossible for walls to be built about them on foundations of solid construction, left them just as they were, but close to them he built forts on rising ground which is exceedingly steep.

Despite the problems of interpretation associated with Procopius and the *Buildings*, it is tempting to see a correlation between his description and the remains of late antique Phoenicê (cf. Karagiorgou, 2001: 214–15 for comparable shifts in Thessaly). Much of the Roman town appears to have been built on the lower slopes of the long saddle-backed hill on which the classical and Hellenistic settlement was situated, and on the plain immediately to the south west. Substantial Roman remains can still be seen, interspersed among the houses of the present village (Ugolini, 1932: 14). Environmental data indicate that the Butrint lake originally extended as far as Phoenicê and it is possible that marshy conditions did prevail in some areas of the plain (much as they do today). Certainly, late antique occupation is concentrated on the summit of the steep-sided acropolis, where a basilica was excavated in the 1920s (ibid.: 124–33). A few traces remain visible of a poorly constructed

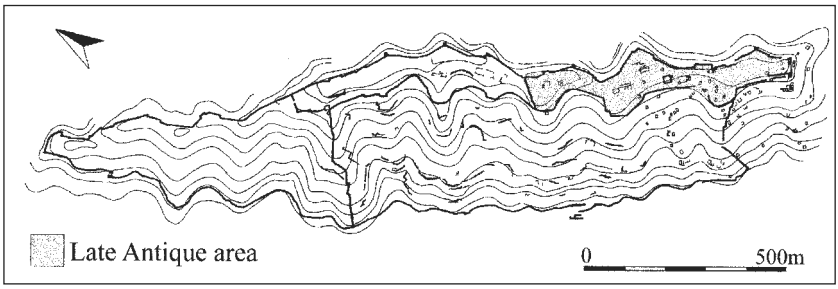

Figure 7.10 Plan of the acropolis site of Phoenicê (adapted from Ugolini, 1932)

fortification, which follows the line of the classical or Hellenistic city wall for much of its length, although the association of this circuit with Justinian is yet to be proven (see Bowden, 2003b).

Finds from the summit include the *pythoi* that are characteristic of late antique contexts at Butrint and Diaporit (Ugolini, 1932: 189). Coins from the basilica excavations included a number of small Ostrogothic coins with a monogram of Baduila, plus three from the reign of Justinian and a single coin of Heraclius. The baptistery associated with the basilica, erected within a former Hellenistic 'treasury', showed signs of having been destroyed by fire (ibid.: 107–8).

The classical and Hellenistic site of Çuka e Ajtojt, some 12 km southeast of Butrint was also occupied in Late Antiquity (Fig. 7.11). Çuka e Ajtojt (literally 'Eagle Mountain') is a steep-sided pyramid-shaped hill that dominates the surrounding area of the flood plain of the Pavlas river, at the point where the Pavlas emerges onto the plain. The site therefore controls one of the main north-south land routes. The hill is also clearly visible from Corfu. The original fortified area of *c.* 4.5 ha, enclosed by three substantial circuit walls of polygonal and isodomic masonry, was reduced to 1.3 ha by a later wall circuit, thought to date to between the fourth and sixth centuries AD (Lako, 1982: 214). The later fortress or *castrum*, built of mortared masonry, was trapezoidal in shape with at least three towers of triangular, semi-circular and rectangular plan. Parts of the earlier lower circuit show signs of reinforcement which are probably contemporary with the construction of the fortress. Excavations at Çuka e Ajtojt in 1959 recovered material dating from the first to fourth centuries AD, suggesting that these sites were not necessarily occupied *ex novo* in the later period (ibid.: 214).

The hill of Kalivo, lying between Butrint and Diaporit, with its massive polygonal wall, was also utilised during Late Antiquity, although surface finds also indicate Roman-period activity as at Çuka e Ajtojt (Budina, 1971: 317).

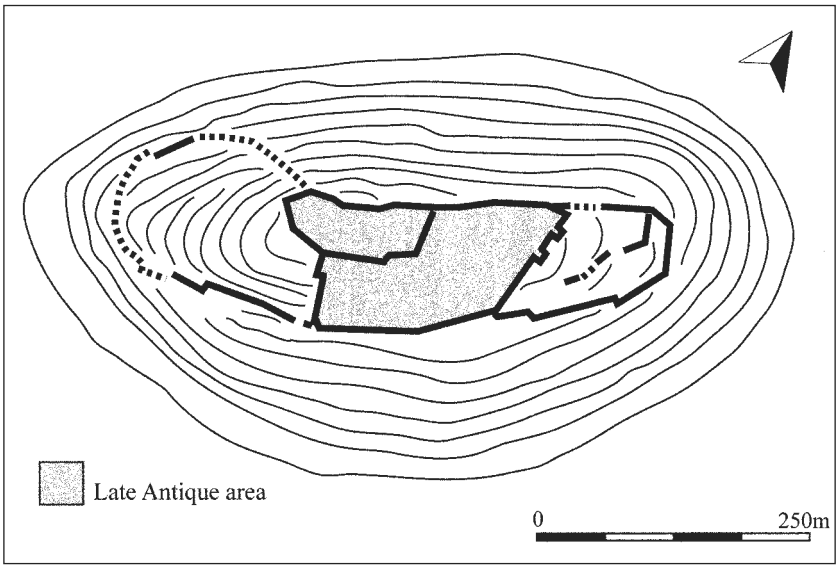

Figure 7.11 Çuka e Ajtojt: plan of the city defences and later *castrum* (after Lako, 1982)

Kalivo is in fact a much larger site than nearby Butrint, and appears to have been densely occupied in certain periods, but it so far lacks trace of a late antique fortification; it is likely that the combination of the lake and surrounding marshland afforded considerable protection.

Butrint itself, as stated, may have been confined to its acropolis during the seventh century, in way similar to that postulated by Haldon (1999) for the cities of Asia Minor, although this remains to be confirmed. Those areas excavated in the lower city thus far show no sign of activity between the early seventh and later ninth century. However, grave finds published by Ugolini, from the cemetery area to the west of the city, indicate that the cemetery remained in use, or was reused, during the early medieval period (1942: 157).

The initial impression given by this agglomeration of fortified sites is of a population forced to take refuge behind strong walls and only able to survive, as Timothy Gregory puts it in relation to Greece, 'as islands of Hellenism in an increasing tide of barbarism' (1992: 235). While Gregory's ethnic emphasis is different to that of Frashëri cited above, who saw the islands as Slavic and the sea as Albanian, the essential idea is the same, suggesting a population divided along bipartisan lines and existing in a more or less permanent state of hostility and siege. This model of a society polarised on

ethnic lines is of course highly compatible with Albania's image of itself during the communist period.

The presence of fortified settlements throughout the Butrint region is certainly indicative of local insecurity. Çuka e Ajtojt, Kalivo and the acropolis of Phoenicê are inhospitable sites – steep and rocky and poorly supplied with water, with little to recommend them apart from their defensive properties. Indeed, their locations suggest a dependence on territory beyond their walls in terms of pasture and arable land, although a number of sites such as Çuka e Ajtojt include sufficient space for storage of animals within the late antique walled enclosure. A similar question is raised by the intensive late antique occupation of the tiny island of Kephalos in the Ambracian Gulf some 100 km to the south, which must have been dependant on the mainland for grazing and arable farming (see Bowden, 2003b).

The nature of the Slav incursions into Epirus is a contentious issue, but leaving aside their effect on the region's gene pool, the documentary and archaeological evidence indicate that the impact on social and economic patterns was significant (Chrysos, 1981: 68–80; Bowden, 2003b). While the contraction and abandonment of sites in the early seventh century and the contemporaneous decline in the use of coinage and imported ceramics should not be wholly ascribed to the reportedly devastating raids of the late sixth and early seventh centuries, it would be foolhardy to dismiss a possible connection.

Yet, as seen, at Diaporit, excavations recommend that activity, including modifications to the church, continued into the late seventh century and possibly beyond, thus demonstrating a Christian presence on an undefended lowland site some 60 years or more after the purported arrival of Slavic settlers. Its relationship with the hilltop site of Kalivo, which lies a few hundred metres to the west is obviously important in this context. It is unclear if Kalivo was permanently occupied or whether it functioned as a temporary refuge in times of insecurity. Nor can we determine if occupation at Diaporit was continuous or extended beyond pilgrimage, occasional festivals or similar. However, the evidence does suggest that a bipolar model in which *castrum*-dwelling autochthones and barbarians exist continually separated by physical barriers is overly simplistic. Equally, we can envisage a situation in which the local settlement hierarchy – Butrint and Phoenicê surrounded by a constellation of satellite sites – had entirely changed. Although sixth-century Phoenicê is listed as a *polis* by Hierocles, there seems to be little to distinguish it physically from numerous other sites, in terms of the strength of its fortifications and the size of the defended area. By the mid-seventh century, Butrint may have been no different from the settlements in its hinterland. However, our present state of knowledge dictates that this must remain a working hypothesis, as we know very little of the extent of occupation and the differential nature of material culture at any of these sites.

Conclusion

Numerous questions thus remain unanswered regarding the nature of land use and occupation in the early medieval Balkans. In Albania, the later seventh, eighth and early ninth centuries are largely unknown in many important respects, yet this basic fact has been obscured by a nationalist historical model that stresses continuity. This model, which was an entirely political construct, created a division between the Roman/autochthonous population and the semi-mythical barbarian 'Other'. While this served the purposes of an isolationist regime that needed to stress the unity and homogeneity of its people and their difference from the world beyond Albania's borders, the results are at best questionable and at worst entirely unsustainable. Nonetheless, more than four decades of archaeological activity have resulted in a remarkable body of archaeological material, at least some of which dates to the period in question. The revival of a furnished burial rite, represented by the Komani cemeteries, is indicative of the dramatic changes in social structures that occurred during the seventh century. This apparent transformation is also indicated by the archaeology of towns such as Butrint, which, despite considerable efforts of archaeologists to demonstrate cultural continuity, cease functioning as true urban centres in the late sixth or early seventh centuries. Whether a consistent population remained within their walls has yet to be demonstrated archaeologically.

The development of the hilltop fortresses remains equally obscure. Some sites may have been occupied by the fourth century (if not before), while others may date to the later fifth and sixth centuries. It is likely that we are looking at a multi-faceted process involving a combination of local initiatives and possible interventions on the part of the provincial or imperial administration. The appearance of the *castra* accompanies a blurring of the distinctions between the urban and rural spheres. By the later sixth century areas within the city walls of Butrint may have been undergoing a process of ruralisation, which saw the abandonment of areas such as that formerly occupied by the triconch palace – symbolic of a rich urban elite.

Nothing can really be said of settlement patterns in Albania during the eighth and early ninth century. Despite the sustained excavation campaigns of the communist decades, no occupation horizons or structures dating to this period have been recovered. An analogous situation exists for the Greek countryside, where recent field surveys have failed to shed light on this period, other than emphasising its apparent invisibility. In Albania, and to some extent in Greece, these lacunae can only be filled by systematic and detailed stratigraphic excavation on a variety of sites, as has occurred in Italy where vast strides have been made in recent years. At Butrint, excavations within the city are allowing the creation of an increasingly coherent local ceramic typology for the fourth to sixth centuries, which can now be applied to sites

within the region with the intention of charting changing relationships between the urban and rural spheres. Seven years of work at Butrint have raised more questions than they have answered, but we are now in the position to take the first tentative steps towards an understanding of the complex interaction between sites in the Butrint region.

Thus, night fell in Albania and the barbarians didn't come. Communism as it was in Albania is over, and its historical platitudes cannot be maintained. For nearly fifty years the barbarians have been 'a kind of solution' in both Albania and Greece where the creation of a non-Albanian or non-Greek 'Other', both in antiquity and in the present, has sustained a unified national identity. Archaeology has often participated in this construction, which has precluded detailed research on the early medieval period in both countries. Archaeologists from across the political and ideological spectrum (from which we clearly cannot exclude ourselves) must therefore continually question and deconstruct their own preconceived ideas of what the early medieval landscape was, how it was used, and who lived and worked within it.

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Chapter 8

Cataclysm on the Lower Danube: The Destruction of a Complex Roman Landscape

Andrew Poulter

Introduction

Twenty years ago, our understanding of the Roman countryside on the Lower Danube was limited because few sites had been excavated, and most were inadequately published (Poulter, 1983b). Systematic survey had not begun to exploit the potential of an unexplored landscape. Since then, archaeology has contributed further detail, despite the fact that political changes in the late 1980s were accompanied by severe financial restraints, slowing the pace of both rescue and research excavation. But the most significant development has been a reappraisal of existing evidence, challenging assumptions about the form and social structure of settlements. This new research direction is supported by fieldwork designed to meet specific objectives and by the application of fresh methodologies, developed to provide the requisite data. Amongst other results, this approach has contributed to the breakdown of stereotypical divisions between the traditional categories of settlement and is now widening our understanding of the ancient landscape, suggesting a much more diverse and subtle picture than I – or others – had previously thought.

One important aspect should be emphasised from the start. In some parts of the Empire, there are signs of continuity, the preservation and adaptation of the Roman landscape to political change. On the Lower Danube, the situation is very different. In this region there is increasing evidence for a sudden and emphatic collapse of the Roman economy in the later fourth century, an upheaval which brought with it a dislocation of population and the abrupt introduction of alien forms of settlement, underpinned by a new economic momentum and a very different social organization. As political hegemony fluctuated between Goths, Huns, Goths again, then Avars, Slavs and Bulgars on the one side, and the embattled Eastern Empire on the other, further changes took place, modifying the social landscape in ways that can be detected, but not yet adequately understood. All then disappears into the black

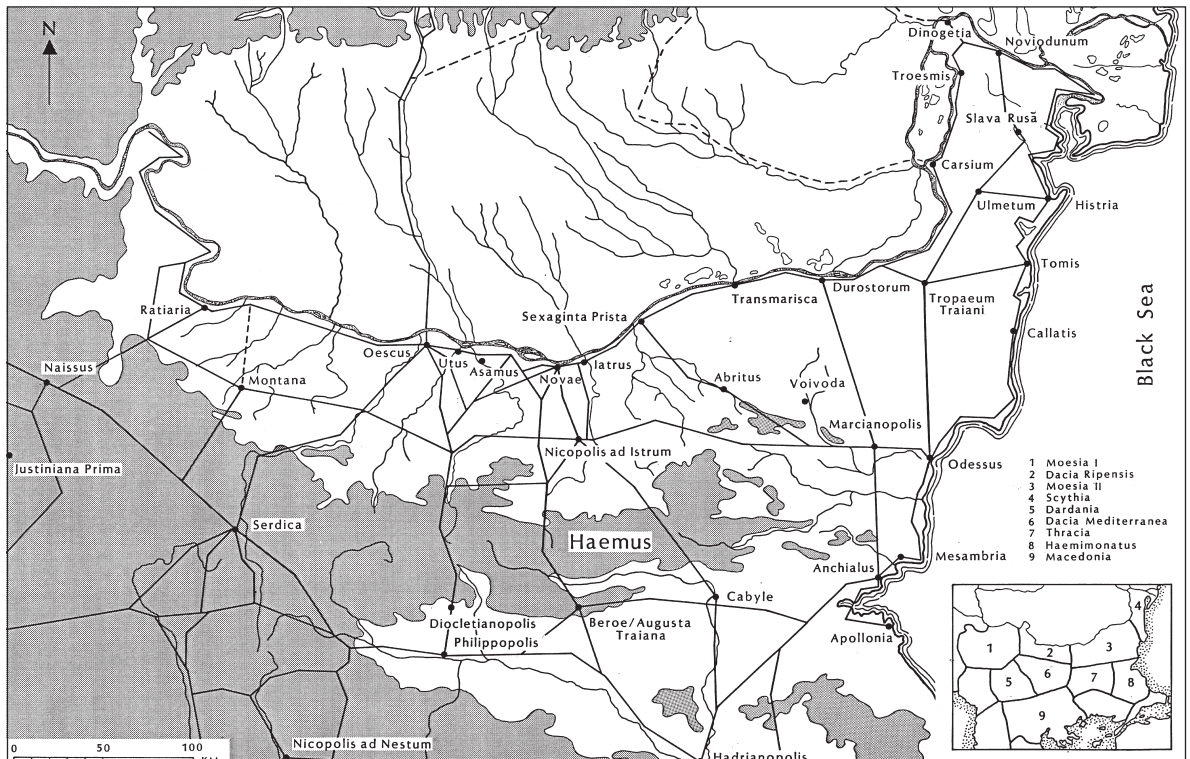

Figure 8.1 The Lower Danube, Moesia Inferior and northern Thrace

hole of the seventh century. It would be impossible to trace the course of these changes across the landscape of the eastern Balkans; the patchwork of information is too uneven. Instead, in this contribution, each period will be considered in turn and examples used to illustrate the processes at work, some increasingly apparent, some probably even real, which divide the Roman Empire from the nascent state of medieval Bulgaria.

Historical and Geographical Differences

In quality and quantity of information, the Lower Danube differs from most other western provinces of the Empire. Though deficient in many respects, the region does sometimes provide a remarkable insight into aspects of rural settlement denied to most parts of Western Europe. We know a lot about villages, their organisation, local differences, their obligations to the Roman State, as well as direct evidence for exchanges of correspondence with provincial governors and emperors (Poulter, 1980). Unfortunately, the physical appearance of villages is totally unknown; some have been 'sampled', none excavated (cf. Suceveanu, 1998). As for villas, more than thirty have been investigated in Bulgaria and some well published (Dinchev, 1997a); in the Dobrogea (south-eastern Romania) a few have been dug and briefly reported. Extensive survey, as part of the Bulgarian national programme for mapping archaeological sites, was carried out systematically during the 1980s, significantly increasing the number of known sites, but without improving our knowledge of the type and distribution of different forms of settlement. Pre-Roman origins of native sites remain largely a matter of conjecture; Thracian settlement is still less well understood than the Roman. The dominance of native, Getic names in the north Bulgarian Plain and of Thracian toponomy south of the Haemus (Stara Planina) corresponds well with the known geographical division of the lower Danube between these two ethnic groupings. Whilst many settlements were probably established well before the Claudian annexation of Thrace, there is also reason to suspect (see below) that in some regions at least, clear discontinuities existed between Thracian and Roman landscapes.

The wide Thracian plain extends south, its rivers linking the interior with the shores of the Mediterranean. From the Classical, and even more so from the Hellenistic period, Thrace was open to cultural and economic influences originating in the Greek world, and transmitted through the Greek colonies of the Aegean and the Black Sea (Archibald, 1983). Direct involvement was more limited although the process of Hellenisation continued and, after Philip of Macedon's foundation of a city at Philippopolis, urban settlement was established, if precariously, in the heartland of Thrace. More typically, the assimilation rather than wholesale adoption of Greek civilization is reflected

in the creation of 'cities' such as Seuthopolis, imitations of Classical organization but responsive to monarchical, not democratic, forms of government (Chichikova, 1983). The tribal kingdom of the Odryssi formed a strong political entity and used a system of regional government under military *strategoi*, inherited by the Roman Empire and maintained as late as the early second century AD. Not that this eliminated local separatism. The Thracian tribes, especially those occupying the mountainous strongholds of the Strandja, Balkan and Rhodope ranges, remained fiercely independent, antagonistic to rule by the Odryssi no less than by Rome. But the existence of a strong administrative organisation facilitated the integration of Thrace and its *strategiae* into the imperial province and ultimately the adoption of urban government while still maintaining its system of local village administration.

The situation was very different beyond the Haemus (Fig. 8.1). In the north Danubian Plain, the Roman administration was a new creation, introduced because there existed no cohesive tribal system that could be restructured. The most pressing need was to harness the region's excellent agricultural resources to supply the army, stationed along the Danube. The Getic population, in language and culture, was more closely related to peoples living across the Danube than with those living in the Thracian lands to the south. At the time of the Roman annexation, no tribes exercised more than local authority and none occupied *oppida*; worse, Strabo could dismiss those occupying the open steppe lands close to the Danube mouth as being no more than troglodytes (*Geogr*. VII.5, 12). With difficulty, the Odryssian client kingdom imposed its control here during the first half of the first century. After the Claudian annexation, these small tribal groupings were placed under military supervision. Some were new, artificial creations (Timachi, Tricornenses, Picenses); others have names familiar from the pre-Roman period but had been reorganized and given new territories, dependant upon Roman forts (Moesi upon Ratiaria, Triballi upon Oescus). As in the case of the Timachi, these territorial units were probably quite small, limited perhaps only to a single valley system communicating north to the Danube (Timachus/Timok), where each tributary's mouth was invariably guarded by a legionary or auxiliary garrison, and they were supervised by *praefecti* (*ILS*, 1349). That interest in the population living in the hinterland of the frontier was motivated by the need to ensure military supply. Tiberius Claudius Silvanus, governor of Moesia under Nero, settled more than 10 000 Getae south of the Danube in order to increase tribute in kind (*ad praestanda tributa*, *CIL* XIV. 3608). The policy appears already in force immediately after the Roman occupation under Augustus, since the governor Aelius Catus settled 50 000 transdanubians in Moesia. The importation of new peoples suggests that the primitive system of tribal organisation was not the only problem faced by the provincial administration. The region, despite its fertility, was depopulated, perhaps by incessant raiding from the north, a

problem which had frustrated the Thracian kingdom's attempts to pacify the lower reaches of the Danube until it was finally annexed by Rome towards the mid-first century AD.

This disparity between southern Thrace and northern Moesia explains significant differences in treatment during the early second century AD. The conquest of Dacia was followed by the demilitarisation of the Danube bank opposing Muntenia in the west and, to the east, the reluctant occupation of the lower reaches of the Danube by Roman garrisons (Poulter, 1983c). Trajan's urban foundations in central and southern Thrace were grafted onto the existing political structure whereas those in Moesia Inferior were either military in origin (*colonia Oescus*) or new Greek style foundations (Nicopolis ad Istrum, Marcianopolis) – where economic growth was so rapid because they were estabished not by native Thracians, but by immigrant settlers from Asia Minor (Poulter, 1995: 22–5). Indigenes played no part in the creation of urban centres, appearing as members of the city elites only by the early third century (Poulter, 1992a). Despite this stimulus, the impact of urbanism on the landscape of Thrace was limited, perhaps more limited than has been recognised. The traditional view is that cities possessed large territories, administered through emporia, market centres established in outlying districts (Jones, 1971; Poulter, 1992a: 77). This may not be the case. For example, two outlying emporia are known to have been used by Nicopolis but they were located only *c*. 30 km from the city. Urban centres had clearly defined local interests within the immediate hinterland of the city. Quite possibly, large tracts of land, such as the less fertile and underpopulated region between Nicopolis and Marcianopolis, were not divided between the two cities but instead remained under tribal administration (Fig. 8.1).

Villages: Imperial Stimulus, Regional Diversity and Imperial Function

The character of villages on the Lower Danube illustrates vividly how pronounced regional differences can co-exist even within a single category of settlement. They were important for imperial administration perhaps, as in Asia Minor, because urban foundations were few and widely dispersed. The evidence relies upon inscriptions belonging to the second to first half of the third centuries AD. In Moesia, villages, all with native names, are attested sporadically across the north Danubian plain (Poulter, 1980). Magistrates are rarely mentioned. These communities were mostly pre-Roman in origin, some administered by a headsman (*princeps vici*), perhaps the descendent of a local chieftain, a social pattern which survived little changed, into the Roman period. Along the Black Sea coast, villages (*komai*) are occasionally mentioned but lack any complex administrative structure. In the upland in north-eastern Bulgaria, none are known. Exceptional, however, are the numerous villages of

the Dobrogea, between the lower course of the Danube and the coast. They appear early in the second century, with Latin names, and possess a quasi-municipal form of organisation with two annually-elected magistrates, and a quaestor, in some cases their status expressly described as a mixed community of natives and Roman citizens (*Bessi/Lai et Cives Romani consistentes*). They held their own religious festivals, passed their own decrees, and erected their own public buildings (*auditoria*). Most of this group of villages have Roman personal names (cf. *vicus Narcissiani*, *vicus Quintionis*, *vicus Clementianensis*); possibly, these were settlements established on private estates which adopted the names of the landowner (cf. Vulpe and Barnea, 1968: 193). The two tribes mentioned in the inscriptions, the Bessi and Lai, are not local: they originate in southern and south-western Thrace. They always appear in different villages, each a mixed community including also Roman citizens, perhaps veteran settlers. Another notable feature, which suggests that these were no ordinary villages, is that every year, one of the magistrates was a Roman but the other was always a native. Probably these natives were moved to the Dobrogea, a transfer of population which involved the establishment of these highly organised communities close to the Danube mouth and in a region which, like north-eastern Bulgaria, was sparsely settled until after the Roman occupation. Their primary purpose, like the settlements of Getae, may have been to increase agricultural production and thereby taxation in kind, required to supply the newly established forts along the right bank of the Danube. But they were also required to maintain the strategic roads linking the Danube with the coast. The inhabitants of one community, the *Chora Dagei*, complained bitterly to Antoninus Pius, citing a successful application made by another village to the provincial governor; the villagers were unhappy about their role in maintaining the public post (*angareia*) and about other duties performed 'many times a year'. The role of villages in supporting the *cursus publicus*, is demonstrated further south, in Thrace. A *libellus* addressed to Septimius Severus in AD 202 by the emporium of Pizus refers to its creation by imperial command and involving the transfer of people from other settlements (*IGBulg*. 1690). The new community had been established on the important highway linking the central Balkans with the East and the villagers were compelled to supply a garrison responsible for the maintenance of the *cursus publicus.* To some degree, the burden was alleviated by exemption from paying taxes to the city in whose territory Pizus lay (presumably Augusta Traiana). Similar duties reappear in a petition made to Gordian III in AD 238 by the village of Scaptopara in the Strymon valley (*IGBulg*. 2236). The settlement lay between two forts, which the villagers regarded as a blessing, presumably because it offered security. However, the villagers were obliged to provide free food and accommodation for officials entitled to use the *cursus publicus*. This latter duty was causing grave concern because visitors, claiming to be on official business, demanded hospitality even though they had come just to visit the local fair. The

problem was the more serious because the fair was a popular event and attracted people from far and wide. The inhabitants even threatened to abandon their village if no action was taken.

Along the Danubian frontier, villages were perhaps directly involved in military supply: Hadrian reorganised the legionary extramural settlements (*canabae*) and these perhaps administered the surrounding territory, presumably the *prata legionis,* providing military supplies by way of direct taxation (Poulter, 1987). A similar practice may have guaranteed the supply of auxiliary units. There was a civilian *quinquennalis*, perhaps a magistrate, of the *territorium Capidavensis*, farming in the central Dobrogea. Capidava was never a municipality: it was a fort with an extramural *vicus*. Seemingly, the fort, civilians and a territory, which included agricultural land in the interior, were combined. The most likely explanation is that this close linkage between the fort and its civilian hinterland was created to facilitate military supply.

Villas: Complexity of Form and Differing Social Structure

For Thrace and Lower Moesia, there are now over 30 known villa sites, still not a large corpus and unevenly distributed: the majority in western Thrace, somewhat fewer scattered across the north Bulgarian Plain. Before more recent discoveries complicated the picture, there appeared to be essentially three types: (i) the 'peristyle villa' comprising a square complex of rooms on each side of a central court surrounded by a colonnade (for example, Madara in north-east Bulgaria and Armira in southern Thrace); (ii) a much simpler establishment consisting of a square or rectangular courtyard with outbuildings along the inside walls, the principle residence invariably on the north side, facing south across the enclosure; and (iii) the 'courtyard villa', whose main living quarters faced south, dominating a long rectangular court, flanked on its other three sides by outbuildings, often including a separate bath building – this type is the commonest arrangement adopted by the larger, late Roman villas (Poulter, 1981: 85–90). However, this simplistic typology is positively misleading (Dinchev, 1997a: 15–18). The three courtyard villas near Mihailovgrad in north-west Bulgaria (Ognenova-Marinova *et al.*, 1987, 1–3) are amongst the most fully explored examples of the courtyard type, but here additional granaries, enclosures and ancillary buildings spread out in a distinctly haphazard fashion, up to 100m from the regularly planned central complex. Where research has been less comprehensive, it is likely that the full extent of the villa has not been identified, even where the central nucleus has been fully excavated. Construction methods differed from villa to villa and are probably more significant than the layout of the central buildings. The Mihailovgrad villas were all built with mortared stone walls and were substantial structures. But at Kralev Dol (Pernik) in Thrace, though it also had

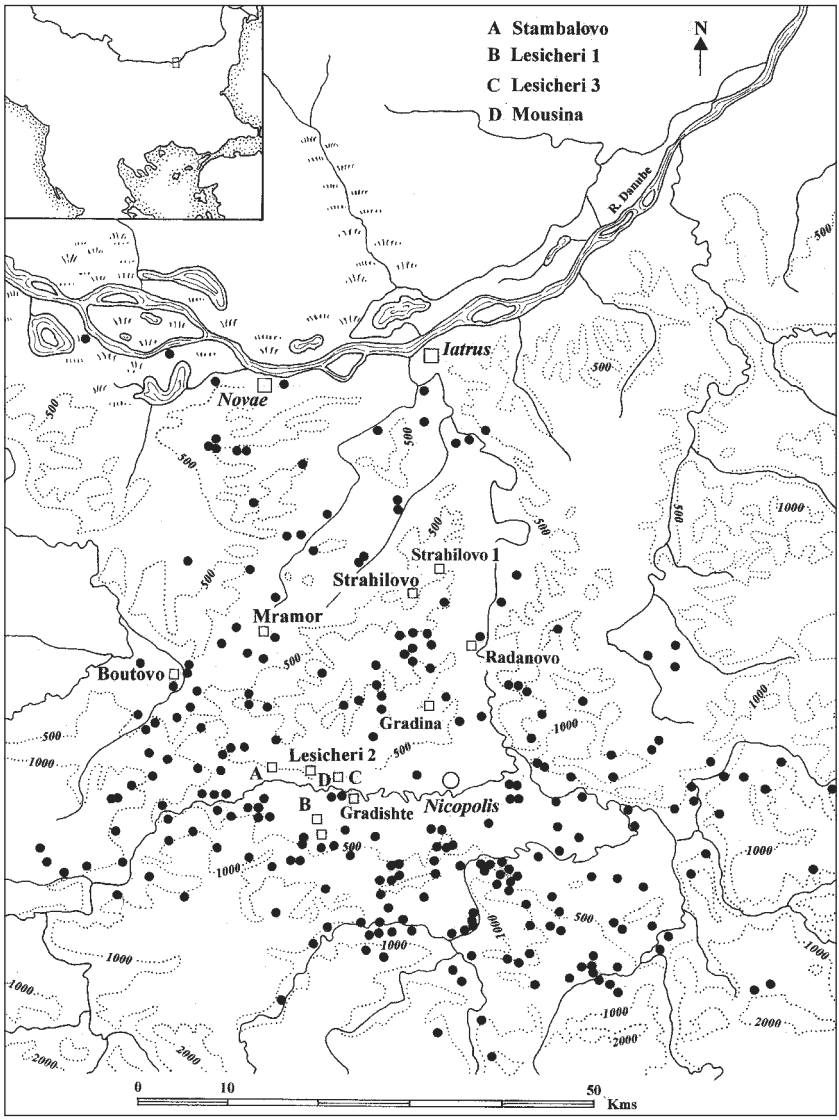

Figure 8.2 Roman to late Roman settlements in the survey region

regular suites of rooms surrounding an open court and was also of sizeable proportions (60 x 45m), its foundations used mortar sparingly and supported walls built of mudbrick and timber. Emphasis should lie far more on building forms and functions than basic plans of the *villa urbana*.

The economic activities in which villas engaged can be described briefly: there is very little to tell. A mixed agricultural economy, perhaps with a greater dependence upon hunting for those villas in upland regions such as Prisovo (Turnovo), would seem true for the second to third centuries AD. Pottery, especially high quality table wares, was extensively distributed and no doubt represented a lucrative trade, whereas the multiple and substantial granaries found in some of the large fourth-century villas point to an increasing interest in large-scale arable cultivation (Poulter, 1983: 89; Dinchev, 1997a: 146–7).

More can be said about ownership. In north-central Bulgaria the main concentrations of sites mirror the distribution of monumental gravestones set up by estate owners, many legionary and auxiliary veterans of East Greek origin who had served on the Danubian frontier (Poulter, 1992a). In Thrace, one of the tumuli outside the villa of Chatalka contained a Roman auxiliary helmet (Nikolov, 1976: 48–9); given the substantial recruitment of Thracians into the *auxilia*, it would not be surprising if many returned to invest their savings in land. Occasionally, the mausolea, built outside villas, provide direct evidence about the occupants; Anicetus, a Greek probably of eastern origin, is commemorated on a tombstone from Montana no. 2 and other Greek speakers established the pottery workshops at Boutovo and Pavlikeni (Poulter, 1983b: 89). Signs of modest prosperity are especially evident in the larger fourth-century villas, although mosaics are few and rarely complex; the marble wall veneers and statuary found at Armira provide an example of richer villas, which were probably more common in southern Thrace (Mladenova, 1991). One exceptional villa is Kostinbrod, west of Serdica, close to the main Balkan highway. Lavishly decorated with high quality mosaics and with a central complex of 150 x 110m, it was constructed early in the fourth century AD. Its scale and wealth places it on a level with Mediana, an imperial residence just west over the mountains, outside Naissus (Nish). Kostinbrod must have been used by someone of exceptional wealth and status, perhaps the provincial governor (Dinchev, 1997a: 83–94).

Despite limited excavations, the impression is that there were fewer, but larger villas in the fourth century, at least in the hinterland of the Danubian frontier (Poulter, 1983b: 120–22). Whereas south of the Stara Planina, all excavated villas continued into the late Roman period, some of those in the north certainly did not: Vardim (Svishtov), Turgovishte, Beli Lom (Razgrad), Prisovo, Pavlikeni and Mogilets (Turnovo), as well at Horia and Niculiţel in the Dobrogea, were abandoned about the mid-third century. The most obvious explanation is the insecurity of the region during the Gothic invasions, a problem which continued to afflict the Danubian provinces for a generation. As some villa estates were abandoned, the value of land must have plummeted, providing an opportunity for those landowners who had weathered the storm, or who returned in the early fourth century, to amass substantial landholdings (Poulter, 1992b).

There are complications. Where excavations have reached beyond the main complex, some sites had not just a few additional outbuildings but were associated with extensive complexes, as at Nevestino (Kiustendil), Chatalka (Stara Zagora), Madara (Turgovishte) and Pavlikeni (Turnovo). The last of these is particularly well known; it included a variety of fairly modest buildings and enclosures extending up to 200 m from the main house. There are indications that villas in the late Roman period had dependant communities. Small churches were built just outside the villas at Montana, nos. 1 and 2. Presumably they served estate workers living close by. Yet given the distance of many of these 'ancillary' buildings from the main house, it is difficult to accept that they were all outbuildings. Some may well have belonged to a settlement. Dinchev, in an attempt to improve the criteria which could be used to identify a villa, argued that because there was so much variety in the arrangement of outbuildings, the existence of a villa could only be proved if the main residential part of the complex lived up to the standards expected of a substantial landowner (1997a: 15–18). This approach has its drawbacks. In the case of Prisovo (Veliko Turovo), the modest appearance of the enclosure and the main central building was considered sufficient reason to argue that it was not the site of a villa but a village, especially since there were signs of further occupation and a tumulus cemetery *c*. 500 m to the north (ibid.: 97–9). The similarly simple courtyard establishment at Mogilets (Turgovishte) with a closely associated Roman tumulus cemetery and additional indications of a nearby Roman settlement, suggested to Dinchev that this, too, could well have been one house in a village (ibid.: 104–5). However, if these buildings do belong to villages, then houses were widely spaced, with their own substantial enclosure walls – not an arrangement found in the roadside villages excavated widely across western Europe (Poulter, 1987). Unfortunately, since no *vicus/kome* has ever been fully excavated on the Lower Danube, we do not know for certain what we should expect of a Thracian village. Perhaps at Prisovo and Mogilets we are dealing with farmers of more modest means or with houses belonging to a settlement in the immediate vicinity of a yet unidentified villa. As yet aerial photography has had a limited and surprisingly disappointing impact, except for the northern Dobrogea. Without a better understanding of the place of a 'villa' within its immediate setting, it is impossible to reconstruct its full layout, its social structure, and often even to distinguish it from other classes of settlement. Fortunately, the application of a new method can help to overcome this problem.

A New Approach to Site Survey and the Complexity of the Rural Landscape

Field surveys carried out over the last three years in north-central Bulgaria have not formed part of a traditional intensive survey programme. The aim has been modest: to discover whether there had been any change in the character

and distribution of major rural settlements in the late Roman period, and, in particular, to establish when Roman villas and villages disappeared from the landscape. This forms part of a wider project, *The Transition to Late Antiquity,* which includes the excavation of a late Roman site at Dichin (Poulter, 1999a). Within a region of 2000 square kilometres, stretching from the Stara Planina north to the Danube, systematic survey, carried out by Mr Ivan Tsurov and his colleagues from The Historical Museum Veliko Turnovo has identified 270 sites of Roman to late Roman date (Fig. 8.2). Because the methodology was extensive, foci located invariably belong to the upper levels in the settlement hierarchy; few hamlets or isolated farmsteads have been found, though presumably they did exist. Attention has concentrated primarily on the Rositsa valley, west of Nicopolis, where as many sites as possible are being surveyed. Others from different parts of the survey region have been included, where possible from contrasting areas, to see whether any differences in overall chronology or character of occupation can be detected.

Although the range of targets for the survey was limited, a new method had to be developed to meet the objectives of these site-specific studies, namely to ascertain the identity of each site (whether villa, village, temple, industrial centre, etc.), the chronology of occupation, and the location of all contemporary buildings within the immediate locality, that is within 1 km radius of any primary focus. During a trial survey in north-eastern Greece, a previously unknown early Byzantine 'city', was investigated using a combination of geophysics and intensive pickup within grid transects (Poulter, 1998). Resistivity survey proved that no discernable movement of surface pottery and building debris had occurred since Antiquity, even though the 18 ha survey was carried out on rich agricultural land that has always been intensively farmed. Essential for the success of the method was exceptionally good surface visibility. Even though the transects were laid out in fields under cultivation, at ground level 100 per cent visibility was achieved by employing a somewhat unorthodox approach, stringing out the pick-up grids on top of standing crops of cotton! Furthermore, 'click surveys' proved surprisingly accurate in detecting quite subtle changes in the density of surface finds, correlating well with the results from the 100 per cent pickup within the transects of 5 x 5 m squares.

Such methods were applied and developed in the Bulgarian programme. Here, however, the crops were not as accommodating as the Greek cotton fields and so surveys were carried out in the spring, immediately after ploughing, and even then only on sites with approaching 100 per cent visibility. The major improvement in methodology involved the adaptation of the standard 'click survey' to record the total density of ancient surface debris (building stone, brick/tile as well as pottery) across the landscape, by quantifying material not per field but by standard recording units of 5 x 25 m, and plotting the results in GIS (Fig. 8.3). Walking across fields, often a kilometre in length, with team-members spaced at 5 m intervals,

Figure 8.3 Mramora: the survey plot of the full site

concentrations of building material located were then examined by resistivity. In the majority of cases, it was established that they immediately overlay buildings. As in Greece, there had been negligible movement of surface debris, despite regular and deep ploughing. Although total density plots were able to pick out individual buildings, by recording the different categories of debris separately, the method was refined still further; differences in distribution of surface materials could distinguish between structures of different status, the use of mortared or dry-stone walls, the presence or absence of brick/tile (Figs. 8.3 and 8.4). Only when all buildings had been identified, was pottery collected, and then not from the site as a whole, but as separate assemblages, with total pickup from each of the concentrations. Subsequently, each concentration could be analysed separately, its dates established and its pottery quantified, using the ceramic sequence established for the city of Nicopolis (Poulter, 1999b). This method identifies the number and location of all buildings within the broader landscape. This is certain because all Roman and late Roman buildings on the lower Danube, even the humblest of structures, had stone foundations (whether bonded with earth or mortar); where they existed, the survey has had no trouble finding them.

Of some fifteen sites so far investigated, all except one, a small industrial centre on the left bank of the Yantra, have proved to be villas. This is somewhat surprising, since at least three villages, all with native names, are known to have belonged to Nicopolis: *vicus Saprisara* (*CIL* VI.2933), *vicus Zinesdina Maior* (RMD IV, no. 311, 587–8), and *kome Theolopara* (Tsurov, 1999).

Mramora is an example of the complex topography of a villa and its setting. It lies just north of the modern village of Gorna Lipnitsa, 22 km north-west of Nicopolis. Resistivity survey carried out over the largest concentration of fine ware pottery and building materials, located the clear outline of a peristyle villa, on the northern side of a rectangular enclosure, containing outbuildings and a central courtyard, south-east of which was a conspicuous high resistance feature, 18m in diameter, possibly a mausoleum (Fig. 8.6). To the west were other discrete concentrations of pottery and building material, *c*. 150–700 m from the main villa, although one was more than 1 km away (Fig. 8.7, no. 3). A conspicuously large rectangular concentration (Fig. 8.8, no. 1) can be confidently identified as a courtyard with a building on the north side, recorded as a clear surface feature 25 years ago, although by the time the current survey was carried out all internal detail has been obliterated by ploughing (compare Figs. 8.3 and 8.8). However, the outline of another courtyard, with a building on its north side (Fig. 8.8, no. 2), was found in 2000. All these buildings are too remote from the villa to have served as convenient outbuildings. The quantification of the pottery from each concentration proved to have similar proportions of coarse to fine ware vessels as the pottery collected from the main villa building. This strongly suggests that the ‘concentrations’ were

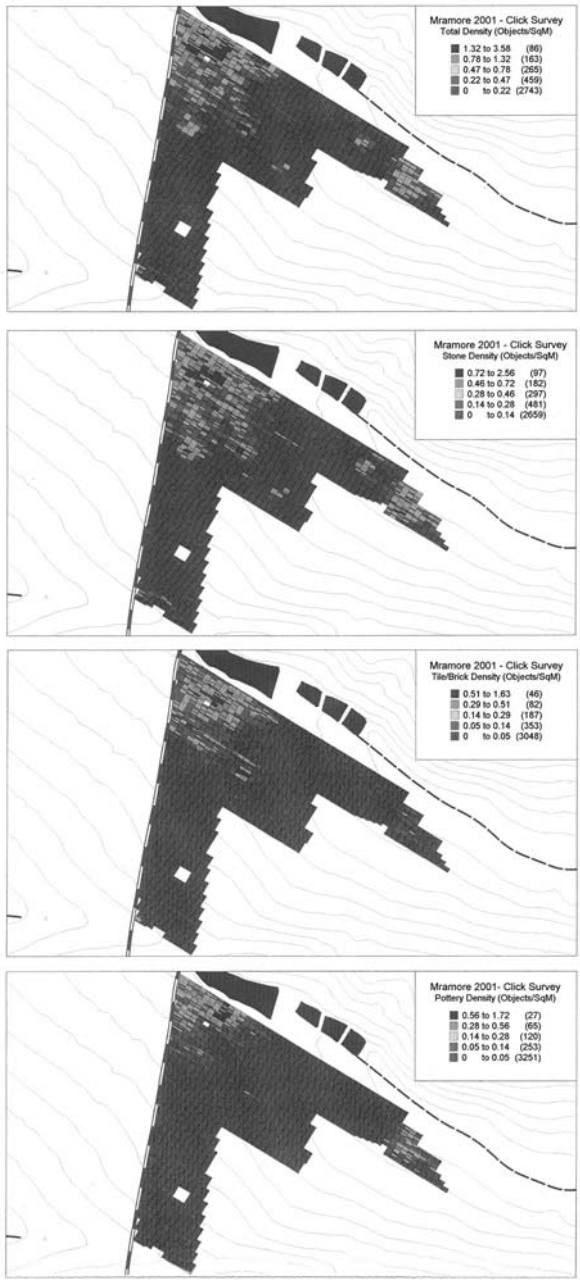

Figure 8.4 The eastern field at Mramora, with separate plots of materials from click survey

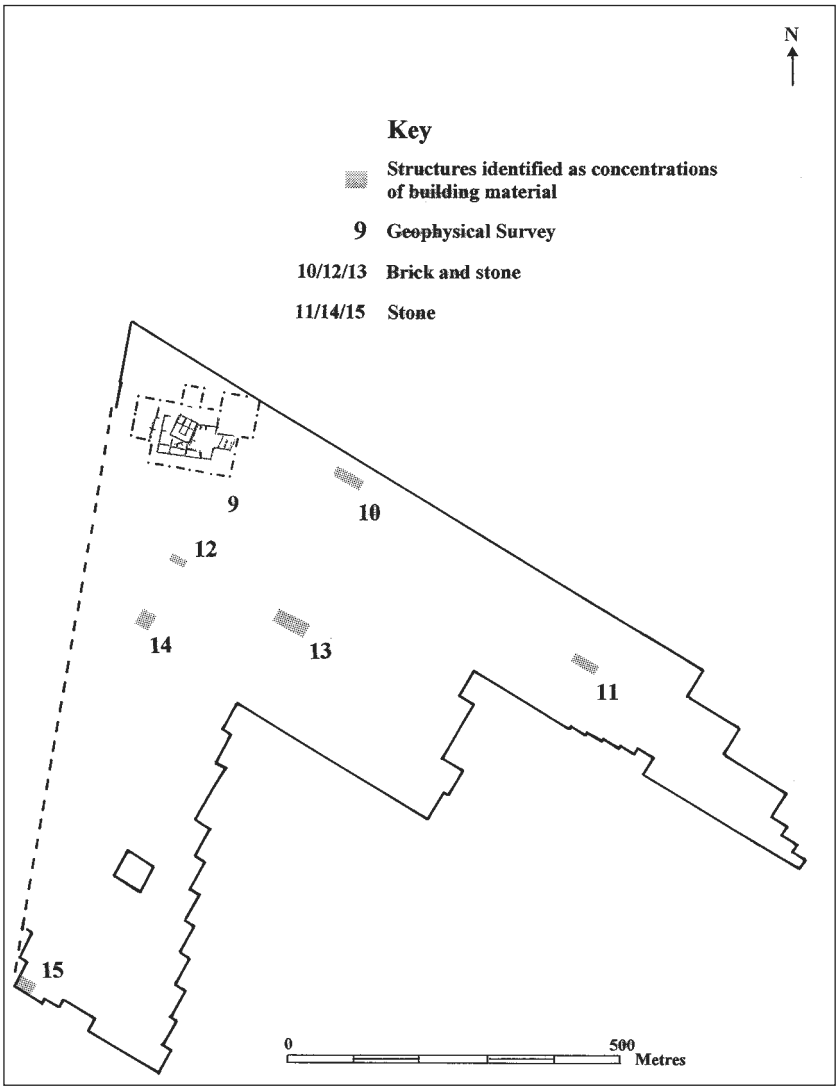

Figure 8.5 Interpretation of Mramora, east field

houses, although, unlike the main villa, their stone foundations had been bonded with earth, not mortar, indicating that their occupants were of lower economic and probably social standing. Noticeably there were partly ploughed-out tumuli, running in a straight line west/east just beyond the southern limit of this satellite settlement (compare Figs 8.3 and 8.7); these

burial mounds were no doubt part of a cemetery used by this community. Although the plans of only two houses can be reconstructed in any detail, the other houses were probably of similar size and plan, together comprising a settlement of some seven houses, each comparable in layout to the buildings at Prisovo and Mogilets. The house assemblages, like that from the main villa, include examples of the very earliest pottery found at Nicopolis; both main villa and settlement were thus contemporary and established soon after the foundation of the city. The buildings with associated south-facing courtyards are features shared with modern Bulgarian villages where the yard provides protection for livestock and gardens, producing fruit and vegetables. Quite likely is it that these Roman courtyards, like their modern equivalents, built with earth-bonded walls with a mudbrick superstructure, served much the same function for some seven family groups, presumably farm workers living close by, but separate from the main villa building.

In the eastern field, for the first time in 2001, brick/tile, stone and pottery were recorded separately. Here the picture was different and, because of the refinement to the technique, the results provided greater detail. Three 'high status' buildings (Fig. 8.5, nos. 10, 12, 13), built with brick/tile as well as stone, were located beyond the main villa compound. Still further east, 500m away, a concentration of building stone and pottery dates to the high medieval period. South of the villa lay simple structures of stone and earth, their roofs probably thatched (Fig. 5.8, nos 11, 14, 15); almost certainly these were Roman but served as outbuildings; none produced more than a few sherds, all Roman. However, one notable ceramic concentration did not correspond (as resistivity proved) to the site of a building but was situated immediately east of the main villa enclosure (compare Figs 8.4 and 8.5); it probably represents the main villa's rubbish dump. Notable also is the rapid fall-off of pottery finds away from the 'halo' which surrounds the main buildings – no evidence here for a scatter across the landscape which might indicate manuring and therefore intensive farming (Fig. 8.4, stone).

Mramora is not unique. The most fully investigated comparable example lies to the south-east, at Gradina, 10 km north-west of Nicopolis. The main villa, two mortared stone buildings, was identified by surface survey and confirmed by geophysics, but there was also an associated settlement, 160m to the south and extending west for 400m. Other villas present quite different physical layouts; Lesicheri I, on the south bank of the river Rositsa, is representative of this group. Here, a Roman column, next to the remains of a temple, with fine marble decoration, dedicated to the Thracian rider God and rediscovered by resistivity survey, stands close to an unusually large Roman tumulus. An extensive spread of pottery and building debris was initially interpreted as belonging to a settlement, perhaps a village associated with the temple; however, below the main concentration of building material, resistivity located the clear plan of a peristyle villa with an attached courtyard,

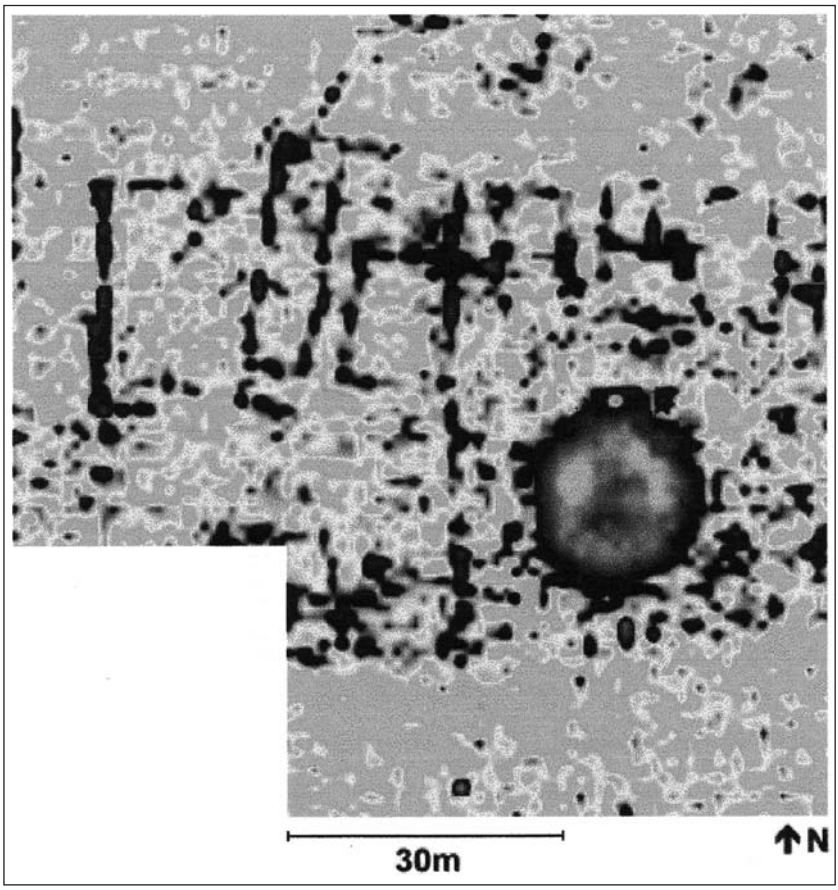

Figure 8.6 Resistivity survey of the main villa complex at Mramora (M. Boyd)

containing another large building (Poulter, 1999c). The survey across the surrounding landscape found kiln debris, 200 m to the south-west, but only three other buildings, all built of limestone blocks, bonded with earth, with a mudbrick superstructure, situated 170 m to the north, each producing minimal quantities of pottery and therefore probably outbuildings. There was certainly no associated settlement. Along both sides of the Rositsa valley, other sites, approximately 2.5 km apart, have proved to be villas conforming to the Lesicheri I pattern: buildings cluster around a central nucleus without any associated settlement. Here, the spacing of the villas is so regular as to suggest an ordered, even planned landscape where estates were all about 500 ha in size. That this represents the allotments allocated to family farms seems a

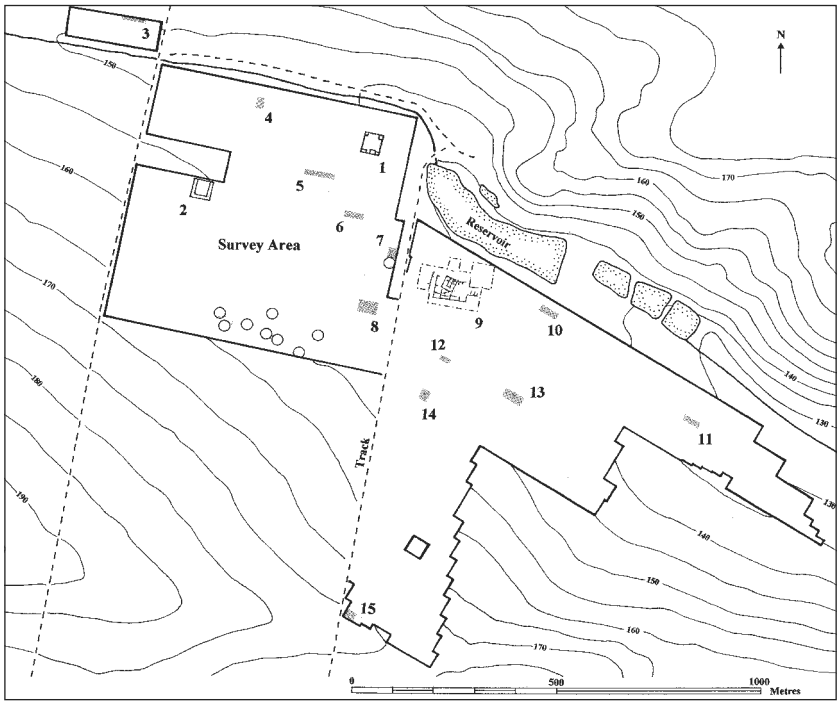

Figure 8.7 Interpretation of the full extent of occupation at Mramora

plausible explanation, the most likely context being the city's foundation and grants to colonists.

The situation further north, as at Gradina and Mramora, was very different. Not only is the physical and social structure not the same as in the Rositsa valley but the distribution of high status sites (mainly villas) is less dense and more irregular. Although Greek and Roman names dominate the heartland of Nicopolis' lands, including the Rositsa valley, towards the limits of the city's territory, Thracian or Getic names predominate (Poulter, 1992a). Perhaps this difference is reflected in the morphology of the villas. Those with associated settlements, which lie to the north and east, may be estates that were not reallocated when the city was founded but continued to be owned by the local Getic aristocracy. If so, the communities of estate workers living close by could have been natives who continued to be dependant upon the same landowning families as they had been during the pre-Roman period. At any event, the distinction between the two types of villa – and their geographical separation – remains a striking feature of the Roman landscape. At the very least, it is remarkable how, as with villages, within another single category of

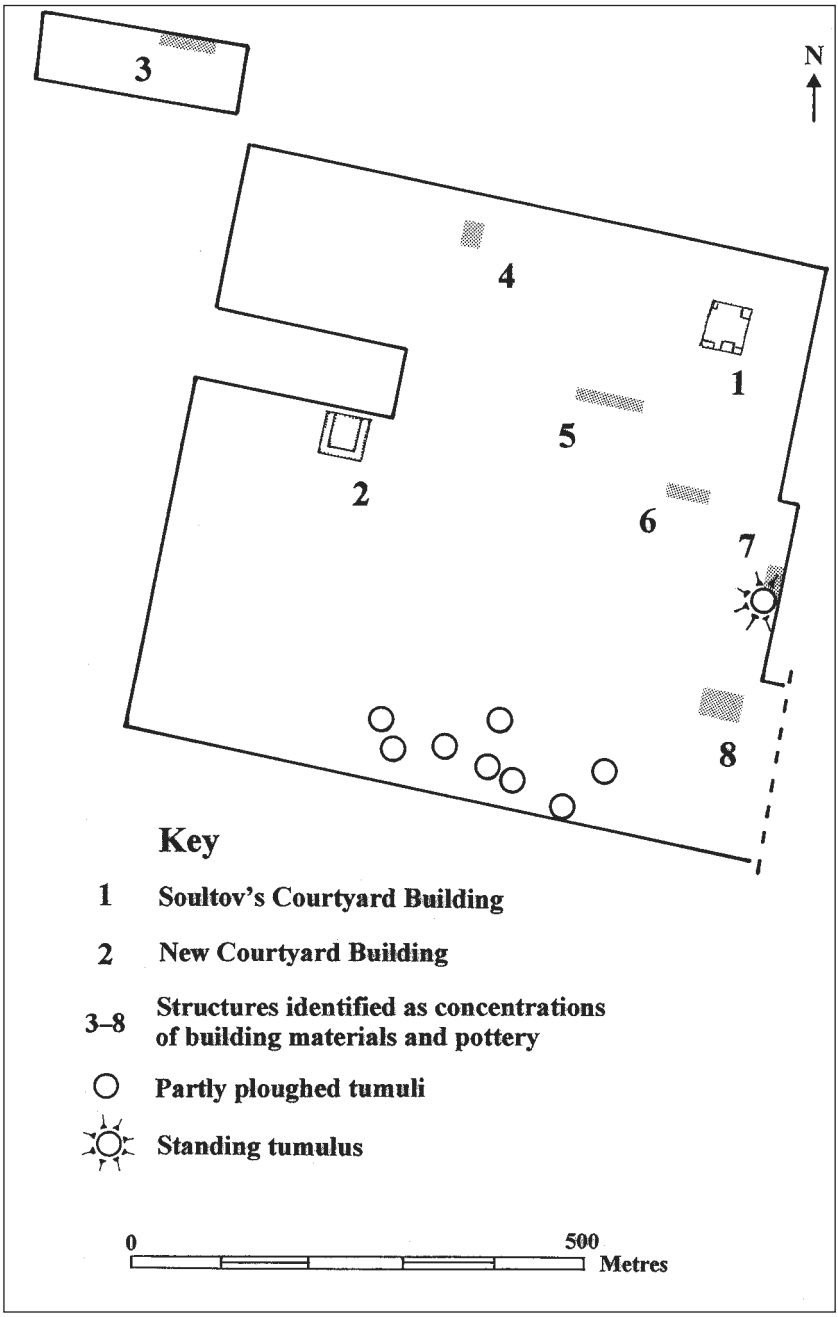

Figure 8.8 Interpretation of the west field at Mramora

settlement, there could be such a variation in layout, with social and economic implications, and each with a clearly localised distribution. It is worth reflecting that the apparent absence of villages in the survey, noted as a curiosity at the beginning of this section, might be so because it is the satellite settlements outside villas to which the inscriptions refer. The existence of *vici* or *komai* on villa estates is not without parallel elsewhere in the Empire.

Catastrophe and Change in the Late Fourth Century

None of the villas surveyed survived much later than the end of the fourth century. None of the assemblages for these sites are comparable with the ceramic finds from Dichin, first occupied in the early fifth century. Unlike western Europe, there was no interruption in coin supply on the Lower Danube between the late fourth and the late fifth century. Therefore, the terminal coins from villas are generally reliable indicators as to when they were abandoned. Makresh (Vidin), the three villas around Montana (Mihailovgrad) and Smochan (Lovech) were deserted sometime in the second half of the fourth century. Surprisingly, the situation further south in Thrace was much the same. Of the excavated villas around Serdica (Sofia), three did not outlive the end of the fourth century (Alexandrovskata Bolnitsa, Philipovtsi and Stefan Karadja); a fourth (Obelya) was abandoned probably soon after AD 395. Chatalka, nearby Lambata (Stara Zagora) and a villa near Kazanluk still existed in the mid-fourth century but must have been deserted not much later (Dinchev, 1997a). Armira, far to the south, was occupied only down to the third quarter of the fourth century (Mladenova, 1991). At a few sites, occupation continued or newcomers took over (Makresh and villa no. 1 near Montana, Stefan Karadja and Chatalka); but in no case is there evidence that the main villa building was maintained or that even these were occupied beyond the mid-fifth century.

That a dramatic change took place in the countryside during the late fourth century is beyond dispute. It certainly disrupted the villa economy, but we should not assume any long-lasting abandonment of the countryside. The carbonised grain from the period 1 destruction level at Dichin included a wide variety of produce: emmer wheat, oats and barley as well as millet, rye, Celtic beans, bitter vetch, lentils and pea. Mutton and pork were eaten; wild animals were hunted (including deer, boar, hare and wild bovines), but not in such numbers as to suggest that they formed a significant element in the inhabitants' diet. As yet, from the wide range of locally-grown foodstuffs identified, there is no reason to suspect any diminution in the quantity or the range of crops compared to the Roman period (Poulter, 1999b: 176–7); in *c*. AD 475, and probably without interruption since the late fourth century, the land was under cultivation.

Conventional though it may seem, the catastrophic events of the late fourth century, played out on the Lower Danube and culminating in the decimation of the eastern Roman army and the death of Valens at Adrianople (AD 378), remains the most plausible explanation for the abandonment of villas in the region. The Goths' main grievance, which precipitated their revolt in 376, had been lack of food. No doubt they took revenge on the Roman state by taking supplies from where they could. The settlement, forced on Theodosius in 382, granted Roman land to the Goths and left them in effective control of their own affairs (Heather, 1991: 158–65). Quite where the Goths were settled is not known but they were certainly dispersed across the north Bulgarian Plain and new arrivals occupied land in Thrace by the 420s (ibid.: 261–2). How many of the villa estates were handed over to – or taken over by – the Goths cannot be determined but the Empire's failure to reimpose its authority immediately must have destabilised the agricultural economy and ruined the landed elite, no longer able to count on the protection of Roman law even when they retained ownership of their estates. The impact on the ordinary native population is likely to have been worse, since they lacked the opportunity and the means to flee south, so had little alternative but to stay and reach whatever accommodation they could with the Gothic settlers. The effects of warfare and then the permanent settlement of the newcomers need not have been a single event, but the end of a process. The Gothic followers of Ulfilla arrived in the territory of Nicopolis as early as AD 347/8 (Poulter, 1995: 15); some may have chosen to establish a large, extramural community there subsequently (ibid.: 32). In the countryside, even envisaging a generally peaceful takeover of land *c*. AD 350, the Gothic presence must have greatly disrupted the villa economy.

The character of pottery supply illustrates just how profound the changes were. At Dichin in the fifth century none of the fine, high quality red wares, so popular at Nicopolis and on villa sites, has been found. There is no reason to suppose that the occupants would not have appreciated such tableware if it had still been available. Production must have ceased because the market for such luxury items no longer existed or was so restricted that it could no longer support the industry. Instead, the functional grey wares dominate the fort's assemblage, the only exception being rare fine ware imports from the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea regions.

The demise of the villa economy had disastrous consequences, especially for the cities. The case of Nicopolis is unlikely to have been exceptional. Although it was still inhabited until its final destruction, probably by the Huns, *c*. AD 450, there was no revival of its fortunes after the eventual restoration of East Rome's authority on the Lower Danube in the latter years of the fifth century. Instead, the new sixth-century 'city' became a military and imperial centre of administration, lacking a sizeable civilian population and based on a very different economy; instead of utilising the resources of its

hinterland, as it had done for 300 years, the early Byzantine polis seems to have intensively farmed land only in the immediate vicinity and, for other necessities, relied upon the importation of supplies from abroad (ibid.: 43–7).

The Militarisation of the Countryside

The consequences of such a revolution must have been profound, and not only for the provincial population. During the fifth century, as before, the hinterland of the Danubian frontier was required to provide military supplies for the frontier garrisons. How this was done has remained a long unanswered question, but now, by good fortune rather than design, the excavations at Dichin provide significant clues.

This was a fortified settlement on the south bank of the river Rositsa, close to the modern village of Dichin and 10 km west of Nicopolis (Poulter, 1999a, 1999b). An essential objective was to provide a full environmental sequence to compare with that from the city to show whether the dramatic change in the city's economic base during the fifth century also applied to a modest village, away from main roads and of no particular importance. But Dichin proved to be no ordinary settlement: it had finely built, massive walls with rectangular and circular towers, strengthened by a secondary outwork (*proteichisma*); the discovery of weapons and shields indeed suggest a fort with a garrison, established soon after AD 400 and maintained at least down to its first destruction in the third quarter of the fifth century. Although not occupying an obviously strategic position, the fort does command a broad sweep of land along the middle reaches of the Rositsa, which represents some of the most fertile parts of Nicopolis' extensive territory. In each excavation area, the destruction deposits marking the end of period 1 contained substantial quantities of cereals, mostly stored in granaries with raised floors and of unusual design. The quantities of grain seem more than would have been needed by Dichin's small garrison, suggesting that the fort acted as a stores-base, a collection point for agricultural supplies, most probably intended for frontier garrisons. Hence its position on the banks of the Rositsa allowed the transportation of produce downstream to the Yantra, then north to the Danube (Fig. 8.1).

If Dichin was a supply base, others presumably existed in the region. To the west, at Montana (Mihailovgrad), a strongly fortified hilltop site, overlooking a rich agricultural landscape, was occupied during the fifth and sixth centuries. Like Dichin, it had a *proteichisma*, barracks and buildings with stone bases to support raised floors – surely granaries (Ognenova-Marinova *et al.*, 1987). Still more striking is the appearance at Iatrus of large buildings with mudbrick bases, identical in every detail to the curious granaries at Dichin (Poulter, 1999d). Although a frontier fort, Iatrus commands another

fertile agricultural region, the lower course of the river Yantra. To the east, a fort at Madara had its own substantial store facilities, a cave filled with massive dolia to contain grain (Dremsizova and Antonova, 1964). Like Dichin, all these forts were occupied after the abandonment of the villas and down to the end of the sixth century. The role and date of other military installations in the countryside are more difficult to establish. There were road forts in the Dobrogea (Zahariade and Opaiţ, 1986) and *quadriburgi* in the north-Bulgarian Plain at Koula (Vidin) and in Thrace at Bistritsa (Dupntisa) and Orlandovtsi (Sofia), the latter certainly still in use under Theodosius II (408–450) (Dinchev, 1997a: 95–7). Whether these smaller forts were also concerned with military supply is unknown, but they add to the general picture of a fortified landscape extending behind the frontier into the countryside and well south of the Danube.

Dichin's fifth-century occupants were also engaged in agriculture: the first destruction level contained no less than 30 scythes, a plough and other tools. These soldier-farmers, at the time of the fort's destruction during the reign of Leo (457–474) or shortly thereafter, could not have been regular Roman troops; the region was then under Gothic, not Roman, control. They must have been Goths (or Gothic allies) and *foederati* (federates), but owing direct allegiance to whichever Gothic warlord was in charge of the region and not to the emperor in Constantinople. There was a basic symmetry in the layout of the site, but there was no headquarters building nor baths and the store buildings' walls were massive but bonded with earth not mortar. The barracks were of unusual design: the ground floors were used for storage and the upper floor for accommodation, reached by exterior stone staircases. What is of exceptional importance is not that this eccentric layout existed so late in the fifth century but that it was essentially the same when the fort was first occupied. There had been minor changes to existing structures but no major reorganization which might indicate a change of garrison from regular Roman troops to Gothic allies. It therefore seems very likely that there had been no handing over of an existing Roman fort to *foederati*. Although Roman engineers had built the fort, it was probably destined to contain an irregular Gothic garrison from the start, that is, *c*. AD 400. Support for this interpretation is provided by the sequence at Iatrus which, in its first period, *c*. AD 300–350, had a regular arrangement of barracks, embellished with a colonnade, a *principia* of traditional plan and commanding officer's quarters; at some point after AD 350 the interior was reorganised: the *principia* lost its administrative function and was used for industrial purposes; the *praetorium* was abandoned; and the barracks replaced by separate houses. This change has been plausibly interpreted as the replacement of a regular garrison by Gothic *foederati* (von Bülow, 1995: 29–53). The similarities between Dichin and second-period Iatrus are clear: the same irregular planning, the use of generally low quality but massive

buildings, and the provision of the curious granaries with mudbrick bases supporting a raised wooden floor.

If this explanation is correct, then its implications are profound for our understanding of the Gothic settlement. The decision to settle a Gothic garrison at Dichin and presumably at other forts in the interior, was probably imperial policy, carried out as part of a major building programme, consequent upon the collapse of the villa economy. The sequence may well have been as follows. After Theodosius had reached an accommodation with the Goths, there was no prospect that the villa system could be revived and with its disappearance, there followed the precipitate decline of the cities in the region. Dichin and other forts were built in the interior using Roman technology and on imperial orders to act primarily as supply-bases for the collection of the *annona*, shipped on to the ongoing frontier garrisons. From the start, these new military centres housed, not regular Roman forces, but *foederati*, presumably Goths, these same forces taking over responsibility for the protection of the frontier at forts such as Iatrus. The system was maintained into the second half of the fifth century when the Goths themselves became the effective rulers on the Danube and their federate status was little more than a nominal acknowledgement of Roman authority. But there may have been modifications resulting from this new independent role: although coin-loss at Dichin proves continuous occupation down to *c*. AD 475, the absence of coins of Marcian and Leo at Iatrus is now surely significant (ibid.: 55–7) and suggests that this fort, after destruction probably by the Huns *c*. AD 450, was abandoned for about 40 years. For the Goths, security along the frontier was evidently of less concern than it was to the Roman state. Forces may have been redeployed to the hinterland where they could live off their own resources as soldier-farmers and, of course, by the taxation (exploitation) of the civilian inhabitants. Only with the restoration of direct military control from Constantinople was the frontier reinstated. At Iatrus, the resumption of coin-loss can be taken to suggest that this occurred, at latest, by the reign of Anastasius (von Bülow, 1995: 55–7).

Hilltop Fortifications, *c*. AD 400–600: Refuges or Settlements?

The most obvious change identifiable in the late antique countryside is the appearance of numerous fortified hilltop sites, both across the mountains of western Thrace and in the northern foothills of the Stara Planina (Poulter, 1983b: 97–100; Dunn, 1977; Dinchev, 1997b). Some were perhaps established as early as the late fourth century, although the majority came into existence during the fifth and early sixth centuries AD. Their number, in regions where even a modestly undulating landscape provided some natural defence, is striking. Where survey has been systematic, they occur at frequent

intervals, perhaps no more than 2 km apart. Their defences are, for the most part, crudely built, often drystone with simple earth bonding and sparse mortar. Towers are often solid and curtain-walls are provided only where natural protection, usually by way of a cliff or precipitous slope, could not be used. They were thus of a standard that could usually have been achieved by unskilled local labour. Most contain small churches, but sometimes these are of surprising size and elaboration as at Kroumovo Kale (Turgovishte), where the church dominates the enclosure, almost blocking the single entranceway. Perhaps, when imperial authority was incapable, it was the Church which took responsibility for the organisation and protection of local communities (cf. Noricum – Alföldy, 1974: 220–27). There are a few notable similarities, especially between the large sites: double enclosures are common, the inner circuit protecting houses, the outer enclosure left vacant, perhaps used to corral stock when danger threatened; also characteristic is the use of a single large tower, attached to the inner defences, presumably as an observation platform. By the sixth century, some did contain villages: Golemanovo Kale in north, central Bulgaria, is the best known example; its alleyways and small houses formed a closely-packed settlement, commanding a naturally strong defensive position on the banks of the Vit (Uenze, 1992).

However, insufficient excavation has been undertaken to discern whether all such hilltop fortifications were permanently occupied. It has been argued for northern Greece (Dunn, 1997) that such sites denote a migration of population away from lowland sites, abandoned because of the threat – and often the reality – of invasion. The data for the Lower Danube are less clear: even if villas appear abandoned, occupation of lowland native farmsteads or villages may have continued, if with recourse to hilltop sites as temporary refuges. Despite the common features described, there is still considerable variation in the character of these fortifications. Some scholars have been too quick to assume that all served a military function (Curta, 2001: 157–67). We simply do not know if the upland sites in the interior have any common identity or similarity with the regularly-built fortifications on the frontier, which more obviously performed a military role. No evidence whatsoever exists that imperial Roman or early Byzantine policy adhered to the principle of defence-in-depth.

Technology Change and the Arrival of New Settlers in the Sixth Century

As noted above, the traditional building technique in the region was founded on the use of mudbrick. In the Hellenistic period, it was used to construct both buildings and defences in Seuthopolis (Chichikova, 1983). During the Roman period, mudbrick or pisé could be used, either on a mortared or drystone foundation in the construction of the principal buildings of a villa (Nikolov,

1976), or even for well-appointed town houses, decorated with high quality frescoes (Poulter, 1995: 194–8). Satellite settlements alongside villas used mudbrick on foundations of earth and stone – a method employed widely for domestic building in the fourth century. Even in the next century, the same techniques continued, albeit, as in the case of Dichin, using massive earth and stone walls, often a metre or more in width – a necessary innovation since they supported not only thick mudbrick walls at ground level, but an upper storey as well. But in the sixth century, on the frontier (von Bülow, 1995: 62–4) and in the hilltop refuges, there is a significant change. Wood, not large timbers, but branches, were extensively used for buildings, and walls were constructed of wattle-and-daub; foundations are slight and roughly constructed with, at best, one or two simple courses of stones (Dinchev, 1997b).

Dichin is a good example as to just how abrupt the change could be: following destruction in the late fifth century, there was a short period of abandonment, during which dogs/wolves scavenged amongst the ruins and gnawed at the bones of corpses, presumably left exposed in the debris: evidently the burning of the fort was not part of a planned withdrawal of its garrison. Following extensive levelling of the period 1 buildings, Dichin was reoccupied and held until the latter years of the sixth century. Along the central roadway, the upper walls of the former barracks were reused as foundations at this time, but only for slightly built stone walls, supporting a wattle-and-daub superstructure, almost certainly with a roof of thatch or reeds. Similar simple structures were excavated on the western side of the site and at the east gate. This represents a fundamental change in construction methods, completely breaking with the ancient tradition of mudbrick building. This degeneration is surely only explicable if it was introduced by newcomers arriving about AD 500. That these were Slavs or other nomadic migrants, to whom such fragile structures would have been more familiar, is a probable explanation, the more so since, in southern Thrace, a region less likely to have been affected by Slav settlement until the seventh century, traditional methods of mudbrick building continued well into the sixth.

Nothing is known about the open countryside in the sixth century and, given the particular difficulties involved in assessing the extent of Slav settlement (see below), this is a problem likely to persist. The change in building practice also means that settlements of this period are not susceptible to identification by site-specific survey or by resistivity. The only known change which merits general consideration is the use of coin, more especially gold coin. Golemanovo Kale and Sardovsko Kale both produced remarkably substantial quantities of gold coins, not only in hoards, but also as individual finds (Uenze, 1992). The discovery of so much gold is most unusual in a Roman or Byzantine context and one explanation is that inhabitants of some settlements received bullion as cash payments for military service, even though, from the finds of agricultural implements, they were also engaged in

farming the land. Though the population may have been different, their status, like the Goths of the latter fifth century, was probably that of *foederati*. It is only certain that many of these hilltop settlements were not so fortunate as to have access to this lucrative additional source of income.

Not all was decline and gloom. There was rebuilding on the frontier at the end of the fifth century and, for most of the sixth, at least the Black Sea coast prospered from trade and commerce, exchanging raw materials from the interior for imported luxury items, shipped up from the Aegean (Poulter, 1992b). In the interior, exceptionally, there was also some new building. Founded at the very end of the fifth century, a new site, as large as 21 ha, was established; commanding an almost impregnable position, protected on all sides by cliffs and linked only by a narrow causeway to high ground, the large citadel at Tsarevets (Veliko Turnovo) was held throughout the sixth century (Dinchev, 1997c). It had mortared and tile-built structures, four churches, cisterns and perhaps a bishop's residence; its fortifications used large, well-cut masonry at the gate. Whether this was primarily a military site or not, it must have been one of the most important centres in the hinterland of the Danubian frontier in the early Byzantine period.

The End of Early Byzantine Rule and the Seventh-Century Dark Age

Coin-finds from the lower reaches of the Danube and its hinterland terminate with the reign of Justin II or, at latest, Heraclius (von Bülow, 1995: 66). Further east, along the Black Sea coast, the latest evidence for early Byzantine control dates to the first quarter of the seventh century (Poulter, 1981; Barnea, 1990). In the interior, major sites such as Tsarevets were destroyed by fire and abandoned. At Nicopolis, there was no continuity or reoccupation; only the stockpiling of roof tiles, just before its abandonment, suggests that shortly before AD 600 materials were taken away for reuse, probably at no great distance from the ancient city (Poulter, 1995: 44–5). From the second quarter of the seventh century, a Dark Age envelopes cities, forts and the countryside.

At first sight, the earliest datable settlement of Slavs south of the Danube is suggestive. Pliska, established as the capital of the Protobulgarian state in AD 681, lies well east of the fertile lands around Nicopolis and commands the plain between the Dobrogea and the Black Sea coast which was sparsely occupied in the Roman period. It would be tempting to argue that Pliska was chosen because the Slavs and Protobulgarians occupied a region vacated in the early Byzantine period; but this is almost certainly not true. The region is steppe country, an environment that could support a nomadic economy, most suited to the invading Slavs. One important factor has gone largely unnoticed: the seventh- to mid-eighth-century levels at Pliska have demonstrated that the first Bulgarian capital was not a successor to any early Byzantine site and that

the earliest structures, large, round buildings, constructed with massive timbers set vertically in post-holes, are clearly unrelated to late Roman buildings but do resemble the large tents used by the Bulgars' nomadic ancestors. Of more general significance is the total absence of pottery from this period of occupation; ceramic vessels appear for the first time only from the second half of the eighth century (Rashev, 1983). The tendency has been to date the origins of Slav pottery (known to have been used in the ninth/tenth century) far too early in order to plug the seventh-century gap (Curta, 2001: 228–34); nonetheless, the probability that Slav pottery does not exist or is exceedingly rare because the nomadic Slavs did not use it, has not been widely appreciated. The literary evidence is clear that Slav settlement occurred in Greece as well as in the eastern Balkans but the reason why it has not been recognised in the archaeology must be because, as an aceramic culture, the evidence is singularly difficult to find. Acknowledging this as a limiting factor does not make it any easier to assess the extent of the first Slav settlement, nor to compare it with the distribution of sites occupied in the early Byzantine period. There are some pointers: in southern Thrace there is more continuity of toponyms than in the north; along the north Bulgarian Plain, river names were preserved but no placenames except, curiously, that of Nicopolis, still known as Nikiup in the eighteenth century.

The monumental stone buildings set up at Pliska at the beginning of the ninth century have no antecedents in late Roman or early Byzantine architecture. True, the application again of Roman building technology, even the use of aqueducts, occurred but this does not represent continuity; the knowledge had to be reacquired, not from Rome, but from Constantinople.

Discontinuity and an Early End to the Roman Landscape

Whatever the watershed between the sixth and seventh centuries actually meant, there is no doubt that, by then, there existed very little which could be called Roman. The creation of a Roman landscape in Thrace, and especially along the Danube, had been delayed until the early second century. The stimulus was imported, largely from the eastern provinces, and was not firmly based upon native institutions. In its brief development in the Antonine and Severan periods there appear pronounced differences between regions, partly due to intervention by Roman authority, partly because of local historical and geographical factors. Even within the main classes of Roman settlement there were marked variations, creating a complex, changing pattern across the countryside. The process of disintegration is unlikely to originate in one single event. The third-century military collapse had a profound impact, especially in the north, less so in central Thrace. A revival of sorts in the fourth century can, with reservations, be accepted; some villas were more wealthy but at the

expense of others. But it was the political and military collapse in the late fourth century which precipitated a massive, abrupt and fundamental change in the landscape. The rebellion of the Goths was a setback but their settlement proved decisive. The immediate disruption was catastrophic, bringing down the Roman economic then social system, which had been based upon the symbiotic relationship between town and country; it swept away the towns and native institutions and in their stead, Rome imposed a new military form of government, using federate troops. This achieved its primary objective, namely securing the *annona* for the frontier. But what it did not do was assimilate the Gothic settlers into Roman society. Well before the Slav invasions, the Roman landscape had disappeared. Not that that would have worried the Slav newcomers who had even less interest in Roman systems of organisation than the Goths: when, in the ninth century, Bulgaria emerged as one of the new kingdoms of medieval Europe, it owed nothing at all to its Roman past.

Abbreviations

CIL *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*.

IGBulg. *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae*, vols I–IV, 1956–71, ed. G. Mihailov, Sofia.

ILS *Inscriptiones latinae selectae*, ed. H. Dessau, vols 1–5, Berlin, 1892–1914.

RMD *Roman Military Diplomas*. Issued as occasional publications, Institute of Archaeology, ed. M. Roxan.

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Chapter 9

The Origin of the Village in Early Medieval Gaul

Patrick Périn

The Earliest Archaeological Discoveries

Until the 1972 publication of the excavations at Brebières (Pas-de-Calais) by Pierre Demolon, practically nothing was known about the form and character of rural settlement in Merovingian Gaul, hence the interest with which this discovery was greeted (Demolon, 1972). About 30 huts were found, dispersed along a strip of land covering *c*. 500 x 50 m (Fig. 9.1). Of rectangular plan, the huts measured 3–6 m long and 2–3.5 m wide and seem to have comprised wattle walls covered in daub. Their pitched roofs had been supported by two, four or six timber posts. Their bottoms, cut below the level of the external ground surface (from 0.1–1.0 m) – hence the name 'fonds de cabanes' or Sunken-Featured Buildings (SFBs) (Chapelot, 1980) – could have been surmounted by a boarded floor, closing off an empty cellar space. Relatively insubstantial and usually without any trace of internal floors, these huts were nonetheless identified as genuine dwellings. If some scholars raised questions about the curious contrast between these scanty constructions and the relative richness of the grave-goods found in neighbouring rural cemeteries, others, notably historians, accepted this type of settlement, seeing it as a logical consequence of the economic recession which followed the barbarian invasions (see, for example, comments by E. Will in Demolon, 1972: 7–8).

At the time, however, it was already possible to dispute this interpretation of the site of Brebières, by drawing on the notable example of Gladbach, excavated not far from Bonn shortly before the Second World War (Sage, 1969). Alongside sunken-featured buildings exactly like those at Brebières, lines of post-holes were brought to light, which could be convincingly reconstructed as houses, built at ground level. At Gladbach it was demonstrated that the adjacent huts did not seem to have served as regular dwellings, but rather as annexes to these houses (Chapelot, 1980). In particular the presence of spindle whorls, loom weights and smoothers showed that some of these had been used for textile production. Other

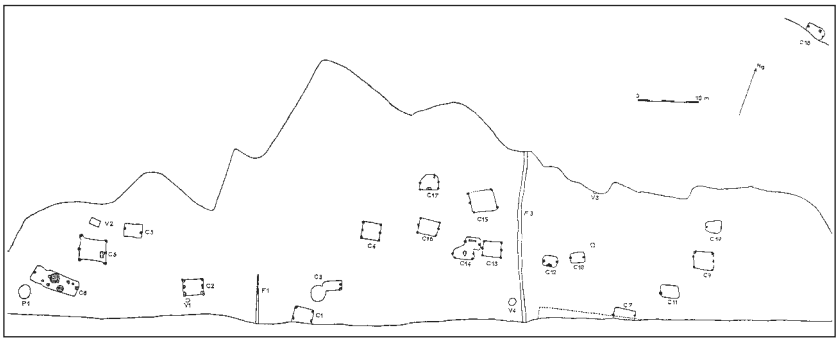

Figure 9.1 Site plan of the Brebières (Nord) settlement (after Demolon, 1972)

functions naturally suggested themselves: shelters for poultry and small animals, dairying, tool sheds, storage for produce, etc. It could therefore be proposed that the sunken-featured buildings at Brebières could also have been associated with dwellings similar to those at Gladbach, but these had not been recognised at the time because they had been built on sill-beams. In fact the ground had been stripped before the excavation, and only the deepest structures remained visible, hence the recognition of the 'fonds de cabanes'.

In the following years, a series of excavations, notably those undertaken in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais (Florin, 1983) and in Picardy (Bayard, 1995; Nice, 1994), confirmed the validity of this viewpoint (Figs 9.2 and 9.3). At Juvincourt-et-Damary (Aisne), for example, lines of post-holes were in evidence as well as sunken-featured buildings (Bayard, 1989; 1995) (Fig. 9.4). One of these Merovingian-period houses (of *c*. 15 x 5 m), endowed with an entrance porch and comprising two rooms, one set aside for residence, probably with a hearth, the other intended for rest, was subsequently reconstructed at Soissons at the abbey of Saint-Jean-des-Vignes. It was also confirmed that this settlement site, established at the beginning of the sixth century, had other dwellings, likewise associated with two or three satellite huts; the data suggest that this was one hamlet of a polyfocal village. Its centre of gravity shifted to the north in the course of the second half of the sixth century. From the mid-seventh century, when dry-stone foundations reappear, this settlement adopted a more structured spatial organisation before being abandoned, either at the end of the eighth century or during the ninth.

In connection with the politics of major redevelopment in France (motorways, high-speed trains, theme parks such as Disneyland Paris, etc.), the last twenty years have seen a spectacular expansion of rescue archaeology

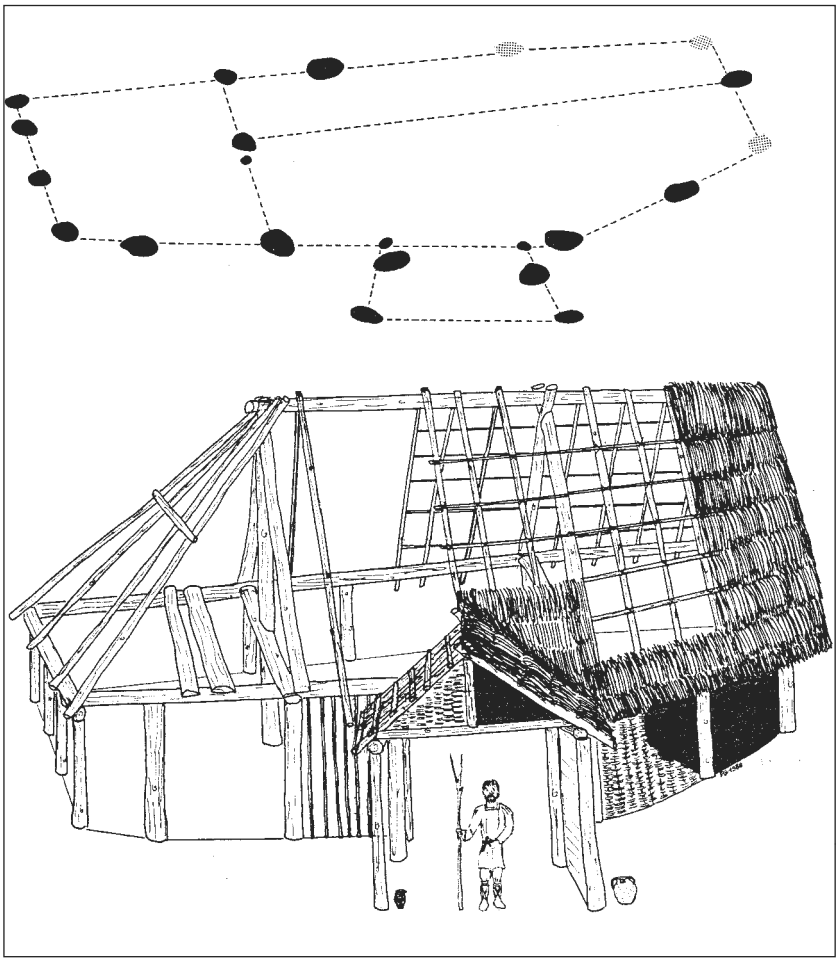

Figure 9.2 Villiers-le-Sec (Val-d'Oise). Reconstruction drawing of one of the houses (after Guadagnin, 1988)

in France, and an unprecedented explosion of excavations. As far as early medieval settlement is concerned, more than 500 sites have been discovered, with a concentration of discoveries in the northern part of the country, where the density of major projects is highest. Wholly confirming the typology of the settlement structures, and especially the regular co-existence in the Merovingian period of both dwellings built at ground level and sunken-featured buildings, in addition to their association with wells, granaries, silos, fenced enclosures, etc., this research has shown that these structures endured

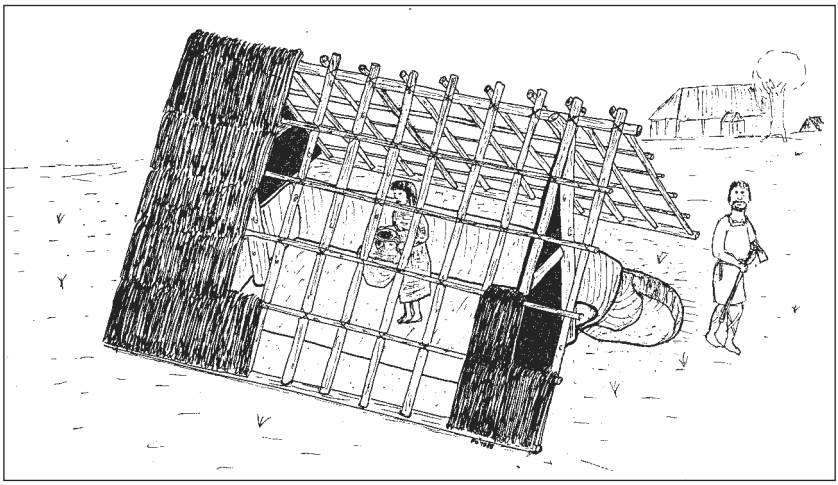

Figure 9.3 Villiers-le-Sec (Val-d'Oise). Reconstruction drawing of one of the sunken-featured buildings (after Guadagnin, 1988)

into the Carolingian period, when in general they proliferate (Lorren and Périn, 1995; Peytremann, 1995; 1998; 2003).[1]

However, the majority of these excavations have been partial, of necessity limited by the scope of the developments; fortunately, some have involved complete or near complete excavation of the settlement sites, allowing the investigation of their spatial and structural organisation and evolution, as the following examples testify.

Early Villages and Archaeology: Case Studies

Mondeville and Grentheville (Calvados)

As a first case study we can commence with the site of Saint-Martin and of Trainecourt, at Mondeville and Grentheville, whose excavation began in 1977 (Lorren, 1989; summarised in Peytremann, 2003). Covering an area of many

[1] The majority of excavations of early medieval rural settlement sites in France remain unpublished, but since 1991 such work has been reviewed or summarised in the annual 'Bilans Scientifiques' published by the Regional Archaeological Services. Nonetheless a variety of sites are considered in the papers of the conference held in 1993 (Lorren and Périn, 1995). Edith Peytremann, using the accessible data, provided on two occasions a 'state of research' paper (1995; 1998), before publishing in her thesis a very detailed corpus of early medieval settlements in northern France (Peytremann, 2003).

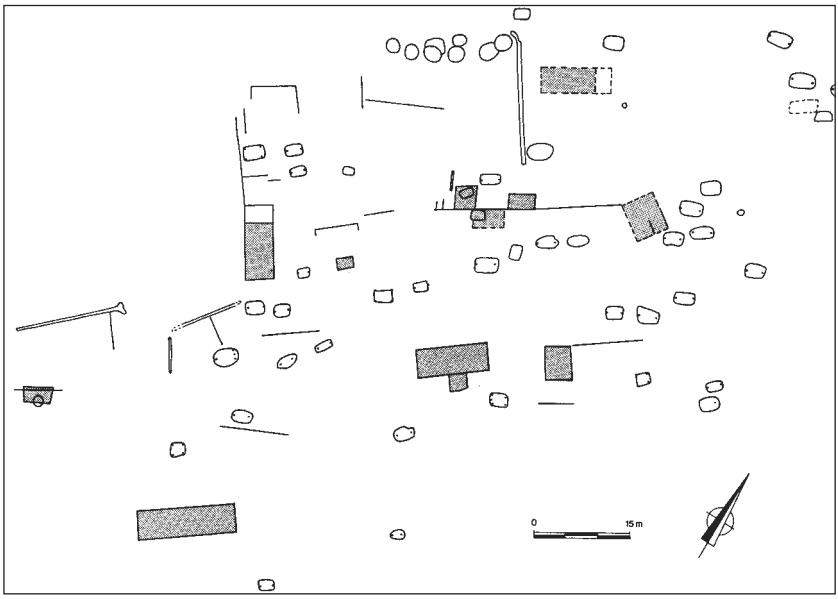

Figure 9.4 Site plan for the habitat of Juvincourt-et-Damary (Aisne) (after Bayard, 1995)

dozen hectares, an uninterrupted occupation from the end of the Bronze Age to the fifteenth century AD was revealed. At the beginning of the first millennium AD, wooden, Protohistoric structures were succeeded by buildings with dry stone footings, forming a *vicus* which inherited the earlier division of land into long strips. At the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century, this type of settlement is replaced by partly subterranean huts – without which feature the dwellings constructed at ground level would not have been clearly recognised. As the excavation director emphasises, these huts, because of their early date, cannot be explained here according to received wisdom, that is, by Germanic influences following on from the great invasions of the fifth century. On the contrary, they should correspond to those types of insubstantial structure that have formed part of the wider settlement structure in Gaul since Protohistory. At the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century, the method of construction with dry-stone footings reappears. Dwellings now comprise a single room hollowed out of the ground, with a central hearth, and a roof supported by central posts, which see constant adaptation. In this period a church is constructed; the dedication to Saint-Martin is preserved in the placename (Fig. 9.5). With a rectangular plan, and an off-centre square extension in its earliest phase, this building also has

dry-stone foundations. It served as a place of burial and marked the centre of a cemetery delineated by an enclosure. The priest in residence lived within this; his dwelling, first of wood, later of stone, was found, as well as the granary, which was replaced by a barn sheltering a large silo, certainly intended to receive tithes, which become widespread from the second half of the eighth century. This church was destroyed in the twelfth century, at which date the lord of Grentheville built another place of worship *c*. 1 km away '*in capite sue culture*'. In this period the settlement, whose shift had already begun, was located 500m to the south of the church of Saint-Martin, and archaeological traces of communal facilities have been found there (pond, byre, bake-house). It survived until the fifteenth century as a hamlet dependent on the village of Grentheville, before being finally abandoned.

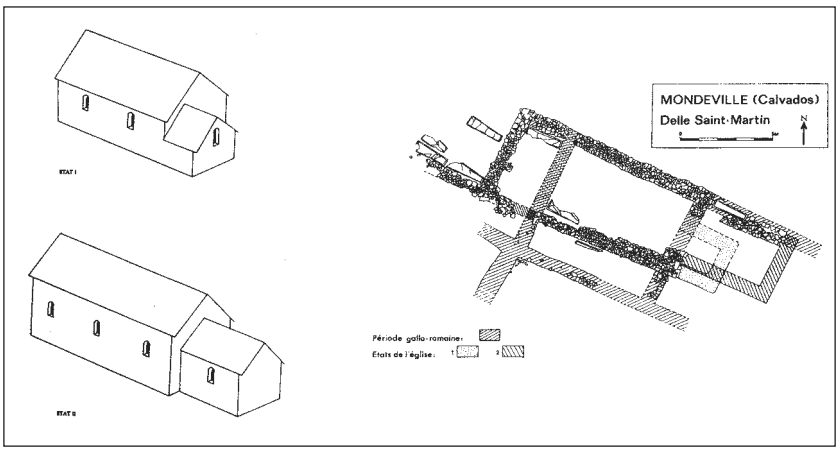

Figure 9.5 Mondeville (Calvados). Plan and reconstructions of the church of Saint-Martin (after Lorren, 1989)

Tournedos-sur-Seine (Eure)

Tournedos-sur-Seine, on the left bank of the Seine, saw excavations from 1986 (Carré and Guillon, 1995; Peytremann, 2003). Occupied from the end of the Merovingian period to the tenth century, the area consisted of three distinct zones from north to south: the settlement itself, the church and its cemetery, and finally an area for craft activities (Fig. 9.6). The settlement was divided into fenced enclosures of which at least five have been recognised; they were laid out with respect to a road. Each of these comprised a well, many sunken-featured buildings, as well as raised granaries; there must have been a dwelling resting on sill-beams which explains why no trace has been

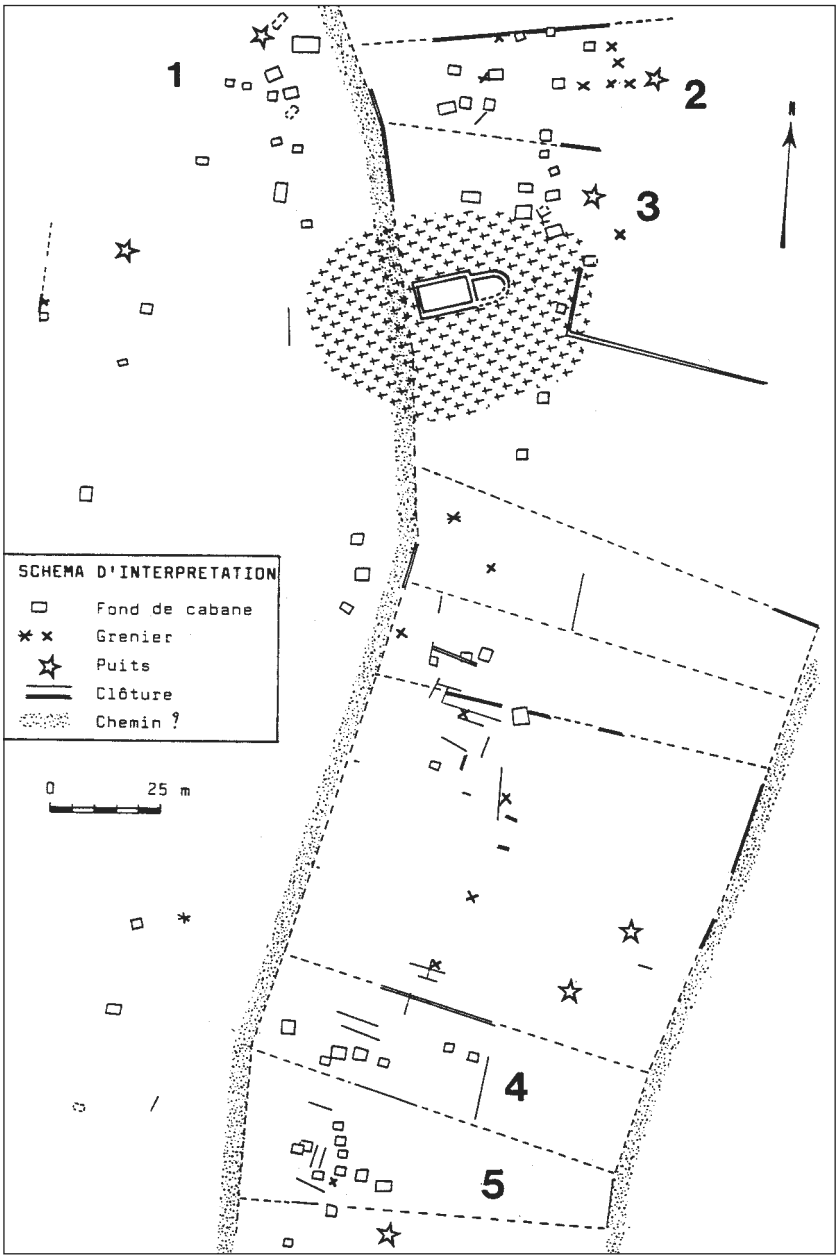

Figure 9.6 **Site plan for Tournedos-sur-Seine (Eure) (after F. Carré, in *De la Gaule à la Normandie*, Musée des Antiquités de la Seine-Maritime exhibition catalogue, Rouen, 1990: 258)**

preserved. Near a buried wooden structure (family mausoleum?) was an early post-built church, soon replaced by a structure with drystone foundations, consisting of a rectangular nave 12 x 6m and an apsidal chancel. As at Saint-Martin de Mondeville, this place of worship was associated with burials, the earliest of which seem to date to the seventh century AD. The craft area produced many wooden buildings, wells and hearths in addition to many pits with kilns and iron agricultural tools (notably two scythes, two sickles and a ploughshare). The presence of a quantity of carbonised grain should signify also nearby corn-drying kilns. Although this settlement, which appears in documents under the name of Portejoie, shifts upstream in the valley of the Seine towards the end of the tenth century, the church continues in use until the fourteenth century, when it appears in documents with a dedication to St Cecilia – the same as its burial-ground.

La Grande-Paroisse (Seine-et-Marne)

The form of the settlement of la Grande-Paroisse, excavated in the valley of the Seine not far from Montereau and near the famous prehistoric site of Pincevent, is very similar, although its occupation does not appear to go beyond the tenth century (Petit, 1987; Peytremann, 2003). Set near a ford crossed by a small Roman road, it comprised at least nine principal timber buildings (Fig. 9.7). Built at ground level (with a surface area of *c*. 90m^2) and divided into compartments by either three or five lines of posts, these buildings are associated with sunken featured buildings (many of which have provided evidence of weaving activities) and raised granaries, silos, pits and domestic ovens, like the preceding sites. The great quantity of ironwork, especially tools, which have been found on the site, testify to the relative affluence of the inhabitants. A church with dry-stone foundations and a nave, extended by an apse, is likewise associated with this settlement, from which it is separated by a cemetery. The seemingly careful abandonment of this site appears to be connected with the foundation of the church of Saint-Germain, dedicated in 1005 in the neighbouring village of la Grande-Paroisse.

Saleux (Somme)

For the northern part of France it is appropriate now to cite the remarkable site of Saleux, excavated in 1993 (Cattedu, 1997; Peytremann, 2003). Covering an area of over 4 ha, these excavations have revealed an early medieval settlement that was established on the floodplain of the Selle, the only navigable tributary of the Somme (Fig. 9.8). First settled during the second half of the seventh century, the early community had a small neighbouring cemetery, distinguished by the presence of a 'privileged' burial in a stone sarcophagus (the only example in the cemetery) which is protected by a

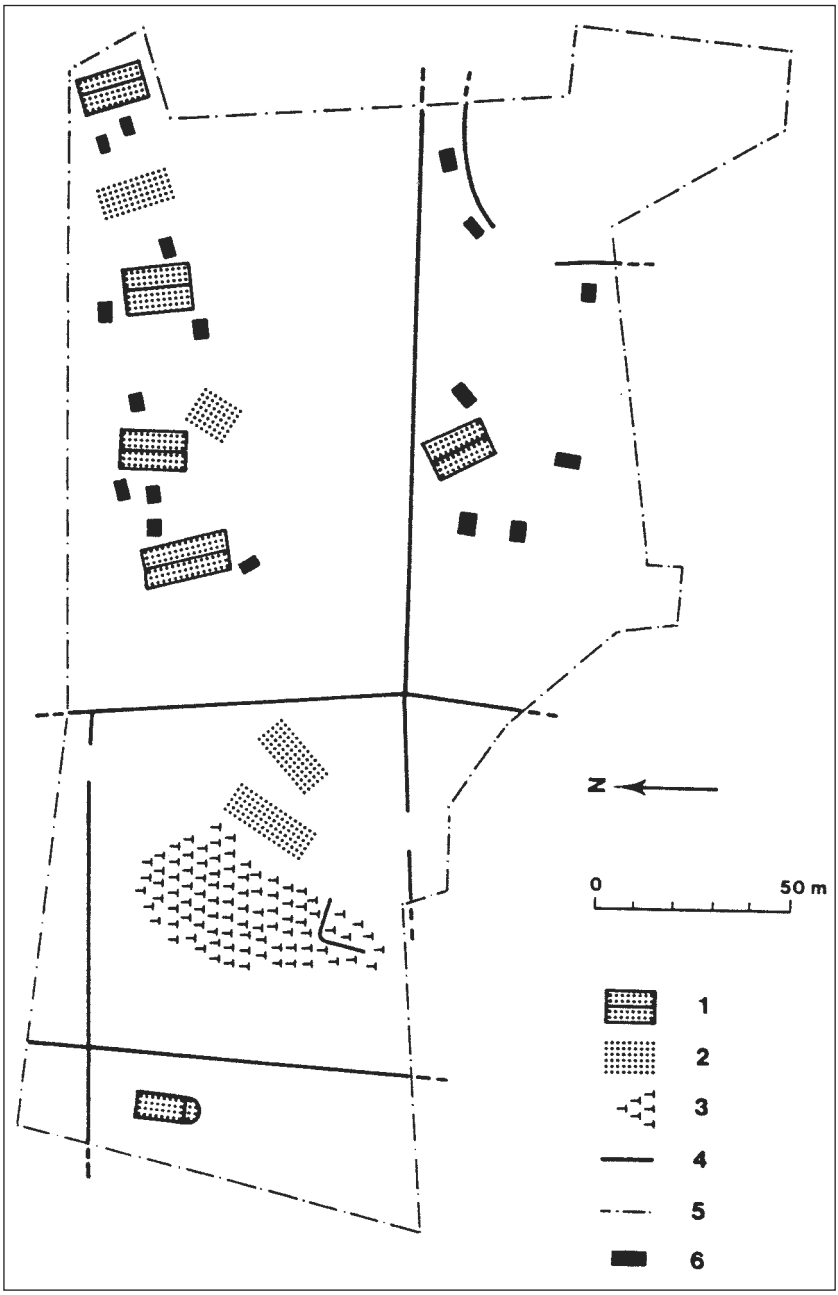

Figure 9.7 Site plan for the la Grande-Paroise (Seine-et-Marne) settlement (after Petit, 1987)

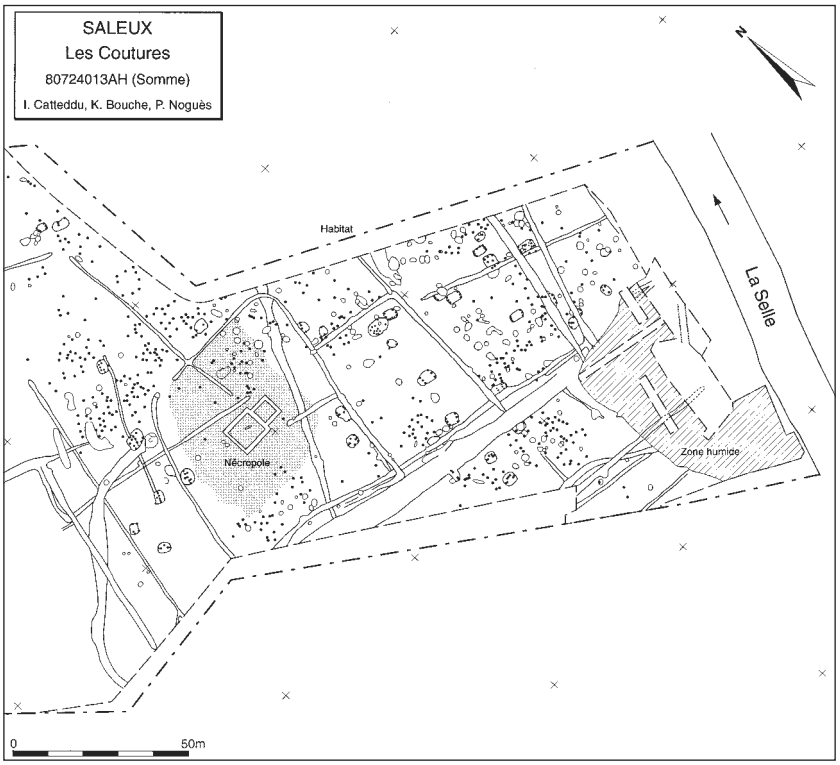

Figure 9.8 Site plan for the habitat of Saleux (Somme) (figure kindly provided by I. Cattedu)

shelter of wood. In the eighth century, a wooden church replaces the early shelter, and becomes the centre of the cemetery, which is defined by a ditched enclosure. In the ninth and tenth centuries this edifice is endowed with a square chancel with dry-stone foundations, and then, towards the year 1000, with a nave of the same construction. The settlement then becomes denser, and progressively envelops the burial area, which remains visible in spite of overcrowding. The eleventh century marks the abandonment of the settlement of Saleux, possibly following catastrophic flooding of the Selle – this in spite of the construction in the eighth century of a mill-race with a mill-pond and sluices, intended to feed a mill as well as to control the flow of the river.

Much interest centres on the agricultural units at Saleux. Organised in a system of plots which evolved over time, the agricultural units are characterised by sunken-featured buildings, initially with six but increasingly with two posts; many of these have revealed fittings and finds associated with

weaving activity. As at Tournedos-sur-Seine, the rarity of post-built constructions at ground level can be explained here by the progressive erosion of the soil as well as by the use of sill-beams. The study of the plant samples, in progress, attests a balanced mixed economy, with a predominance of bread wheat, followed by rye, then hulled barley, spelt wheat and legumes, as well as exploitation of local forest resources. Silos were also numerous. As far as animal husbandry is concerned, beef and sheep/goat dominate, at the expense of pork, which elsewhere at this time generally is more prominent; it seems, therefore, that this was a matter of economic choice. Finally, the study of the cemetery and its funerary data has identified over 1500 individuals (in 1200 graves), revealing a population of a classic 'archaic' type, offering many examples of growth problems, chiefly explicable by malnutrition than by under-nutrition.

Larina (Rhône)

It would be interesting to contrast this series of examples in the northern part of France with case studies from the south, but unfortunately the archaeological documentation is still rare for this area as regards early medieval rural settlement sites – these often situated in perched (that is, defensible) positions and with specific types of structure and forms of construction (dry-stone walls), as in the Mediterranean south (Midi). Nonetheless, the site of Larina at Hières-sur-Amby (Isère), excavated from 1977, is a happy exception (Porte, 1999). Situated at the confluence of the Rhône and the Ain, this scarped promontory was occupied from prehistory through to the ninth century AD. The research particularly allows for a reconstruction of the settlement evolution from late antique to early medieval times. In the course of the fourth to sixth centuries, wattle and daub huts with pebble foundations are replaced by proper houses of quarried stone, associated with agricultural buildings and a cemetery (Fig. 9.9). This rural establishment was destroyed by fire during the sixth century, and was in turn succeeded by a veritable *villa*, built of quarried stone and roofed with tiles. The residence was refurbished on many occasions up to the eighth century, before being abandoned in the ninth. The agricultural buildings likewise see renewal, whilst the cemetery is shifted to the other end of the plateau, where a hamlet of dry-stone huts emerged. The restoration of the rampart, the presence of two funerary enclosures around which the graves in the cemetery are arranged, as well as the recovery of objects characteristic of a superior social status, such as spurs, identifies this as an undoubted seigneurial residence active until the ninth century. Even if, for the moment, this remains an isolated example, not comparable to the sites previously described because it is a fortified *villa*, Larina is nonetheless very important, because it provides a guide to one specific type of settlement active in Merovingian south-east Gaul.

In south-west France, where recent research has shown that some *villae* of Late Antiquity have traces of Merovingian occupation (Larrieu *et al*., 1985), other settlements have come to light that are wholly comparable with those in the north, such as at La Crèche (Deux-Sèvres), where sondages have made it possible to recognise a settlement site occupied from the fifth to the eleventh century AD (Boissavit-Camus, 1989a).

'Le village des historiens et le village des archéologues ...' (Zadora-Rio 1995)

These archaeological case studies, as well as many others, partly contradict the ideas of eminent French historians, such as Robert Fossier who has concluded from the surviving documentary sources that the settlements of the early Middle Ages were 'uncertain and woolly', 'unstable' and 'mobile', and 'poor' and even 'miserable' (1990). In fact, the sites which he calls into question rather give the impression of a settlement pattern that, although more or less dispersed, and to a certain degree mobile in the long term, is nonetheless perfectly coherent when studied through sufficiently extensive excavations. Well adapted to the natural environment, for obvious economic reasons, the pattern is closely linked with existing communication networks. In many cases an internal organisation is transparently clear, with agricultural units which may correspond with fenced enclosures – but sometimes too rapidly identified with the '*manses*' which appear in seventh-century written sources (Guadagnin, 1988). The aspect itself of these habitats does not necessarily reflect the precariousness or instability often been attributed to them. Whilst some buildings such as huts or raised granaries are constructed in light or impermanent materials, and could have been relatively ephemeral, in contrast, the dwelling houses compare favourably with the traditional and often very old farmhouses which can still be seen today in Normandy as well as in northern Germany. The lifespan of these constructions then as now could have been long, and it would be easy to verify this archaeologically. The objective impression is thus one of hamlets, sometimes even groups of habitats, that were often close to a *villa* of early medieval date documented in written sources, and of which they could have formed a component (see Peytremann, 2003).

The internal coherence of some of these settlements could be possibly further reinforced by the existence of sectors devoted specifically to craft production, and above all by the relatively frequent presence of a place of worship, around which the graves of the community are grouped. In fact the metal objects that have come to light at all of these sites – blades from scythes and sickles, ploughshares, various tools – stand in total contradiction to the ideas about poverty and a poorly-equipped agriculture, which again are drawn from a too rapid interpretation of scanty and generally later written sources.

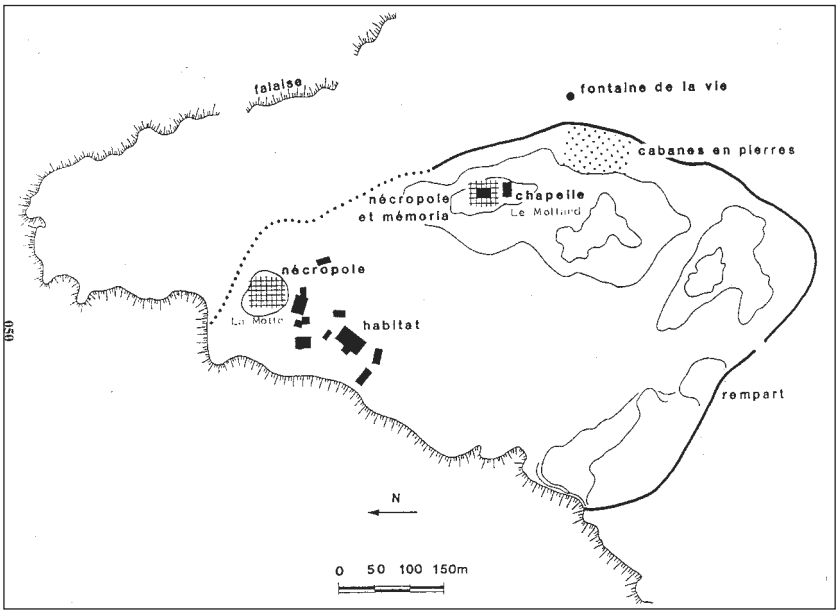

Figure 9.9 Plan of the fortified site of Larina (Rhône) (figure kindly provided by P. Porte)

It is therefore reasonable to classify these settlement sites as 'villages' even if all of the criteria put forward by Robert Fossier to define this concept are not present, 'such as legal status, a central position in the land, and, above all, things which survive: churches, cemeteries, castles' (1983: 191f). After all, can one realistically apply to the early Middle Ages an historical definition derived from a much later socio-economic context?

An Archaeology Just of Deserted Villages?

One critical reflection regarding these settlements stands out, however. In reality, for the most part, they have only been excavated because they are situated away from modern settlement – that is, in the potential sites for motorways, railways, industrial zones and theme parks. We are therefore dealing with settlements that have been deserted, and the extent to which they are representative needs to be objectively examined. Nearly all of these settlements are no earlier than the seventh century, as demonstrated by finds and related burials. Similarly, most of them were abandoned around AD 1000 or a little later, even if the place of worship and the cemetery endure at least

for a few more centuries, as at Tournedos-sur-Seine. It is thus tempting to tie the creation of these settlements to the economic growth and the consequent demographic thrust – on which both historians and anthropologists are in agreement – that can be recognised over a large part of Western Europe in the seventh century. Archaeology indicates that there are not generally ecological or economic reasons for the abandonment of these new concentrated habitats (the single exception for the moment being Saleux). A more convenient explanation is a concern for land reorganisation, reasons for which are attested after the end of the ninth century: namely a concern by lords to get better value for their land, as well as the desire to protect and oversee dispersed groups of peasants. Historical sources exist to record this, as for example at the site of Mondeville (Lorren, 1989).

Stable and Enduring Settlements

If it is not in doubt that from a typological perspective these deserted villages are representative of early medieval settlement in the northern part of France, they do not necessarily give a full picture of the settlement pattern. Indeed, it is clearly important to consider also all the sites which have endured, as opposed to those which have only been excavated because they had become deserted. Wherever archaeological agendas have been set up, it becomes apparent that those Merovingian-period cemeteries that are totally isolated, and therefore probably linked to a corresponding deserted settlement, are the exception. On the contrary, the cemeteries are found almost systematically in proximity to modern villages and hamlets (Périn, 1982; 1992). Although some of these are documented by name from the early Middle Ages, more commonplace is an attestation only later, after AD 1000. In many cases, however, it is permissible to push their origins back at least as far as the Merovingian period thanks to their associated graves, as it can often be established that these are almost always adjacent to the settlements. Archaeological verification is obviously difficult in the heart of modern villages and hamlets, and it is often impossible to work out whether the settlement has remained perfectly stable, or has seen slight displacement.

There are, nonetheless, fortunate exceptions, such as at Yutz (Moselle). From 1989 to 1999, a programme of archaeological survey and excavation carried out on the land of this commune, and notably at the site of the village of Haute-Yutz, voluntarily razed in 1815 for strategic reasons (Blaising, 2000; Peytremann, 2003). The results of this research are eloquent and can serve as a valuable model. Following traces of occupation from the end of the Bronze Age to the Middle/Late La Tène period, from the first to the fifth centuries AD the area of Yutz contained three settlements: a very large *villa* at Haute-Yutz, as well as two other settlement sites, one at Basse-Yutz and the other at 'Val-Joyeux'. One

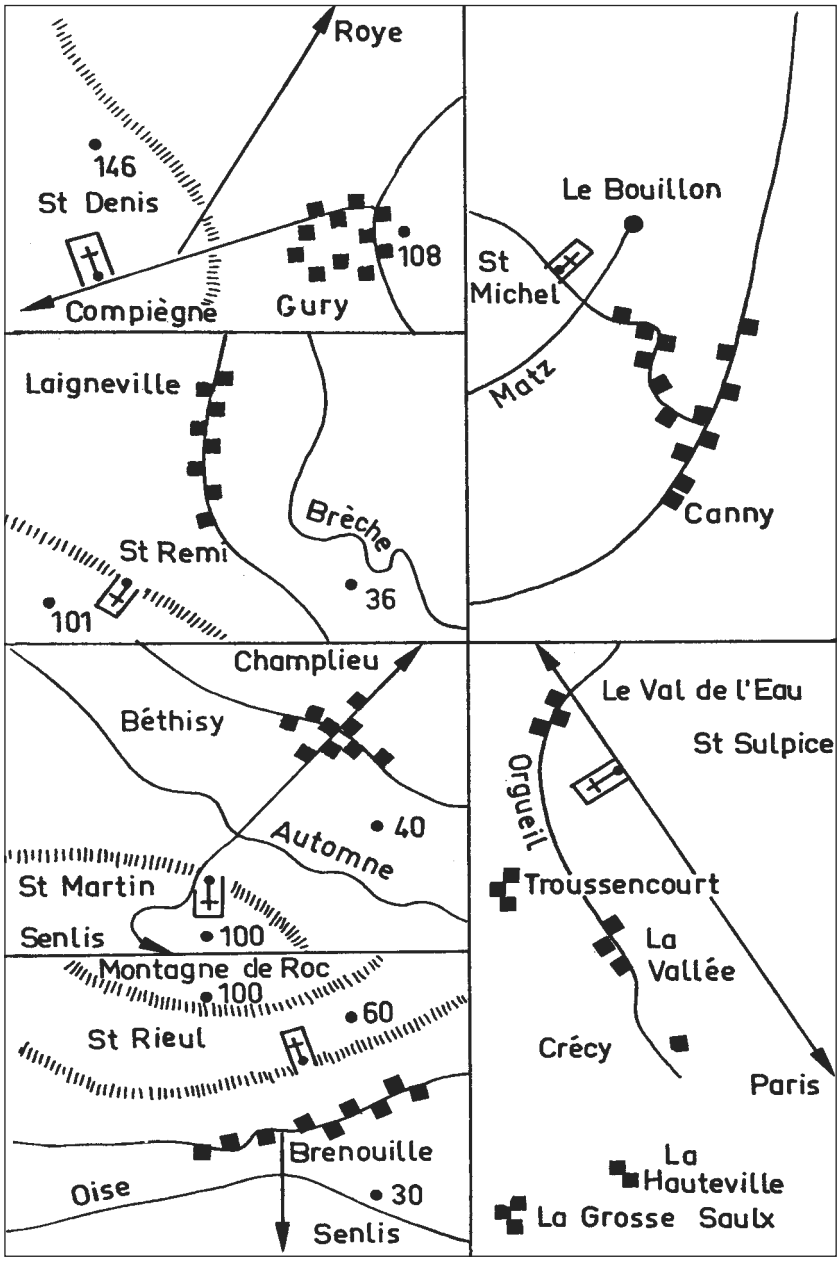

Figure 9.10 **Examples of villages of the département de l'Oise, where the parish church, set on the periphery, has origins as a Merovingian cemeterial chapel**

Figure 9.11 The commune of Neuville-les-This (Ardennes). Each site figuring on the eighteenth-century Cassini map corresponds to a Merovingian cemetery (after Périn, 1982: 80f)

should further add to these an early imperial period cemetery, and two later Roman ones; the former is associated with the settlement of Basse-Yutz. The development of these sites during the Merovingian period is significant. It can be demonstrated that the site of 'Val-Joyeux' is abandoned during the fourth century AD; on the other hand, the *villa* at Haute-Yutz and the settlement at Basse-Yutz are continuously occupied, and at Basse-Yutz the late Roman necropolis also remains active. These two settlements, both products of the Roman period and both subsequently endowed with a place of worship and a cemetery, survived throughout the Middle Ages until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Such a continuity is similarly illustrated by other sites in Lorraine.

Some of the cemeteries associated with these settlements received a funerary chapel in the Merovingian period, and some feature burials of high status if siting and grave goods are taken into account. These 'privileged' or even 'founder' burials should indicate that the chapels were generally constructed on the initiative of the local aristocracy (Böhme, 1993). In some cases the funerary chapel forms the precursor of the surviving parish church, in the same way that the adjacent cemetery on the edge of the settlement may survive to the present day. This can be proven, for example, in a certain number of villages in northern and eastern France (Roblin, 1978) (Fig. 9.10). More usually, however, as at Hordain (Nord), there was abandonment of the funerary chapel when a parish church was built in the centre of the neighbouring village, usually in the course of the eighth century – this accordingly prompting (with some disruption) the transfer of the cemetery to around the new place of worship (Demolon, 1987). Many sites in Lower Normandy illustrate this sequence well (Decaens, 1971: 95f).

An Established Rural Landscape Pre-AD 1000?

Contrary to the opinion of some French archaeologists (see Zadora-Rio, 1984; 1995), the study of the division of Merovingian cemeteries and their associated settlements offers the conclusion that in many cases the settlement pattern of the greater part of the landscape of northern France was established well before the year AD 1000 (Périn, 1992). Among many examples one can cite is the commune of Neuville-les-This (Ardennes), where four cemeteries are associated with the village and its three hamlets that feature on the eighteenth-century Cassini map (Périn, 1982) (Fig. 9.11). There can be no doubt here that the exploitation of this forested zone dates from the Merovingian period. It is equally interesting to note that of these four settlements, only one became a medieval village, as a result of which the parish church was established there. It is important to emphasise that this church thereby restructures the burial pattern for the region, but without the loss of the other settlements. The same situation occurs in the valley of the Couture (Deux-Sèvres), where a succession

of Merovingian cemeteries attests the clearance of parts of the ancient forest of Argenson from the seventh century (Boissavit-Camus, 1989b).

Once it is accepted that most of the settlements excavated in northern France can be related to a common phenomenon in the seventh to tenth centuries, and that the general rule seems to have been that, from the Merovingian period, settlement was stable or permanent, what remains to be defined are its earlier origins. The question is one of scale and can only be touched on here, drawing notably on the innovatory recent work of Paul van Ossel (1992 and 1995; van Ossel and Ouzoulias, 2001).

From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages

It was long recognised that, as far as northern Gaul is concerned, the Germanic raids of the third century in many places prompted a brutal rupture of the occupation and agricultural exploitation of the land. One of the proofs advanced was the almost systematic topographic discontinuity between the 'network' of Gallo-Roman *villae* and that of Merovingian cemeteries. However, a careful re-examination of old excavation reports and records, as well as the contribution of recent projects, allow production of a more nuanced picture: the majority of researchers now highlight the archaeological indications of continuous land use, evidenced in the settlements themselves (for example, Bonin, 1994–1997; 1999).

One can also affirm that in the later Roman epoch, rural settlement was less intensive than before, but this does not provide evidence of reorganisation. The villas are fewer in number and survive less well, and frequently there is a reduction of the space occupied, and only summary refurbishment. If some *villae* survive into the fifth and sixth centuries, they never formed (or do not yet appear to form) the antecedents of Merovingian settlement of the sixth century. The example of the Gallo-Roman *villa* of Saint-Germain-les-Corbeil (Petit *et al*., 1990; Petit, 1993) remains a material exception to this view, since here one part of the court of this establishment as well as some of its partly-destroyed buildings see the subsequent appearance and multiplication of post-built structures and sunken-featured buildings (Fig. 9.12).

Nonetheless, in almost all of the well excavated rural establishments of the later Roman period, the presence of summary restorations and refurbishments in wood is notable, and marks a progressive departure from the Roman model (for example, Limetz-Villez (Yvelines): van Ossel, 1993). It is during this period that two principal styles of construction become common: one with sleeper beams or stone pads, the other with posts, associated most often with buildings without aisles. Other aisled, post-built structures appear to be associated in northern Gaul with an indigenous habitat mode that persists alongside the *villae* and resurfaces in the early Middle Ages. As for the

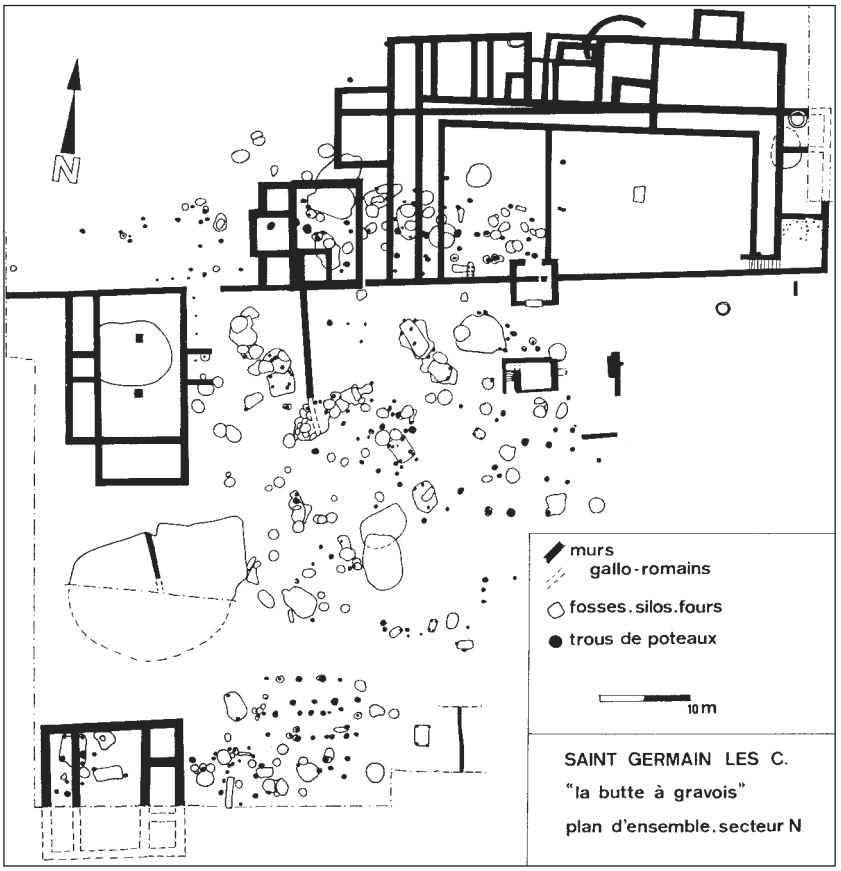

Figure 9.12 Site plan for Saint-Germain-les-Corbeil (Essonne) (after Petit *et al.*, 1990)

sunken-featured buildings, these seem to emerge as early as the third century and especially in the fourth century, and are associated with these settlements in small numbers. The appearance in this period of habitats built entirely of timber and distinct from *villae* is an innovation which carries the germ of early medieval settlements in these regions. In some exceptional cases, such as at Herblay (Val-d'Oise) (Valais *et al.*, 1994) or at Servon (Seine-et-Marne) (Gentili and Hourlier, 1995), continuity of occupation is attested until the seventh century (other examples are provided in Peytremann, 2003).

Such timber-built settlement units have often been labelled as 'Germanic'. It is true to say that whilst comparable in terms of building types (dwellings at ground level, sunken-featured buildings, granaries on posts) and in their

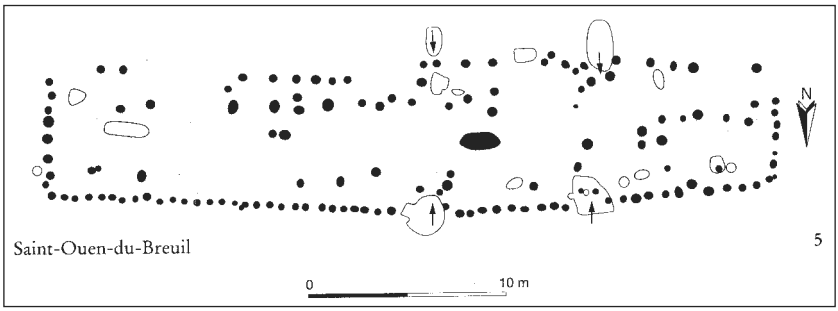

Figure 9.13 A 'maison-étable' at the site of Saint-Ouen-du-Breuil (Seine-Maritime) (after Gonzales *et al.*, 2001)

spatial organisation to sites along and near the Rhine *limes* (notably in The Netherlands), these latter are moreover clearly distinctive in terms of the plans of the post-built structures or the material collected archaeologically. In the present state of research, one is thus prompted to look to local Gallic tradition for the origin of this type of timber farmbuildings; however, one should not underestimate that the settlement of Germanic peoples or groups could have had a considerable impact on this evolution.

The example of the site of Saint-Ouen-du-Breuil (Seine-Maritime) is possibly of key significance here (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2001). Excavated between 1994–1997 across an area of 12ha, the archaeologists revealed a late Roman habitat overlying a ditch system established at the end of the Iron Age or the beginning of the Roman period. This ditch system, although mostly redundant, still clearly remained visible in the landscape for some considerable time, since it determined the location of the late antique settlement, as well as two ponds. The archaeological material provides good evidence for an establishment in the second half of the fourth century and with abandonment at the beginning of the fifth. The excavations identified about 40 timber buildings constituting at least four agricultural unts, with sizeable three-aisled houses that had slightly convex walls (from 38m long and 8m wide), smaller buildings composed of one to three aisles (from 14–16 x 5–6m), sunken-featured buildings, and post-built granaries (Fig. 9.13). Whilst currently one-floor constructions with transverse partitions and dug hearths are totally atypical of Roman Gaul, these nonetheless offer obvious kinship with the Germanic world of the late imperial period, especially in terms of the 'maisons-étables' or combined house and stable/byre (apparently absent from Gaul) recognised on the two banks of the Lower Rhine (for example, at Bennekom and Gennep) (*Die Franken*, 1996: I, 66f ; II, 818f). Relying on the presence of both hand-made pottery and cross-bow brooches, it is

understandable that the excavators were led to make the connection between this settlement and the establishment of Germanic auxiliaries in the Roman army, a hypothesis which could be supported by the discovery here of a possible votive offering comprising gold and silver coins dating to AD 345–350, three silver spoons and a gold ring.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it seems that most of the many early medieval settlement sites uncovered or identified in France during the last 30 years, whilst representative, typologically, of the rural landscape, do not directly denote the origins of extant medieval villages, with which, as we have seen, they only rarely coincide – hence allowing their recognition and excavation. Generally established at the end of the Merovingian period, and yet abandoned about AD 1000, they are associated with a linked demographic, economic and political phenomenon.

On the other hand, the recurrent presence of Merovingian cemeteries in the neighbourhood of many villages and hamlets attested since the medieval period pleads in favour of a connection or even a foundation at least as far back as Merovingian times (Périn, 1982; 1992) – as is beginning to be verified archaeologically (Bonin, 1994–1997; 1999). Easily distinguished topographically from countless Gallo-Roman *villae*, some Merovingian settlements may have had a Gallo-Roman origin – this too indicated by an increasing number of archaeological discoveries (Blaising, 2000). While the economic system of the *villae* was being progressively abandoned, to a large degree these Merovingian habitats could have been the direct heirs of the interspersed, indigenous or native rural settlement units which must have persisted alongside the more visible network of *villae* and *vici*. However, as has been achieved in towns in recent decades, only a coherent strategy of systematic excavations in the villages and hamlets of today will accumulate the archaeological evidence necessary to prove this image of both rural change and continuity in Gaul.[2]

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[2] Thanks are extended by the Editor to Deirdre O'Sullivan (Leicester) for translating this paper and to David Mattingly for assisting with the editing.

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Chapter 10

The Late Antique Landscape of Britain, AD 300–700

Ken Dark

Introduction

The development of the British landscape during the period *c.* AD 300-700 has often been depicted in terms of sharp discontinuities between the 'Romano-British landscape' of partly stone-built villas, temples and 'native settlements', and the 'Anglo-Saxon landscape' of timber-built small hamlets and farms. The latter, it is often observed, seems 'butt-jointed' onto the former, with almost no trace of continuous development, implying, therefore, that the immediately post-Roman British landscape exhibits a 'stop-start' sequence. This is, of course, dependent upon understanding 'Anglo-Saxon' settlement and society as a break with the past (for example, as suggested in Miles, 1986). This paper adopts a different perspective. Instead of focussing on eastern Britain and on the early to mid-fifth century alone, it attempts to trace patterns of change that transformed the early fourth-century landscape into that of the early seventh century. It will be argued that these patterns depend both upon very gradual changes produced by social and economic factors and more rapid transformations brought about by political and religious change. Currently these trends are best traced through rural evidence, since urban data for Britain in the late fourth to late sixth centuries remain extremely problematical. We shall see that, in terms of landscape development – as in other ways – fifth- to seventh-century Britain was not an isolated exception to the general trends in European development but can be placed within the wider world of 'Late Antiquity' (see Randsborg, 1990 for a brief overview of such broader trends).

Britain and the Concept of Late Antiquity

In recent decades, the concept of 'Late Antiquity' has proved increasingly popular among scholars discussing western Europe and the Mediterranean in the fourth to seventh centuries AD. Late Antiquity may be used as both a

cultural and chronological term, referring to a mode of life, a period in time, or both (Cameron *et al*., 2000). Different scholars have contrasting views regarding how both of these dimensions of Late Antiquity are defined. Culturally, the period is usually seen as comprising a synthesis between Roman imperial ways of life with all their regional, social and economic diversity and the Christianization of society from the fourth century onward. Thus, one way of thinking about Late Antiquity is as a 'Romano-Christian' culture, albeit one in which Christianisation was an ongoing process and in which religious identity was never the sole defining characteristic. Thus, to be 'late antique' was to participate in the re-formation of 'Roman' ways of life in an Empire that had adopted Christianity as its official religion, or to adopt or maintain such ways of life, partially or wholly, outside Roman (including Early Byzantine) political control.

Defining Late Antiquity in this way, it is apparent that not only the Byzantine Empire may be placed within this cultural world. The world of Late Antiquity also encompasses both 'barbarian' peoples (such as the Franks and Goths) and those peoples whose ancestors had once been Roman citizens (the so-called 'sub-Roman' population) in lands under their rule. Even populations always outside the Empire, such as the independent kingdoms of North Africa, participated in this late antique culture. A cultural definition of 'Late Antiquity' also carries chronological implications. Seen in these terms, this should encompass the whole period from at least the fourth to seventh centuries AD.

Although some may dispute whether the concept of Late Antiquity has any relevance to fifth- to seventh-century Insular societies at all, recent studies have argued that Britain indeed belongs within the 'world of Late Antiquity' (Esmonde Cleary, 2001; K. Dark, 1994a, 2000a). If accepted, one must ask how this can be applied to landscape studies. To address this question, we need look at shared features of late antique landscapes elsewhere as defined both through archaeology and textual sources. These comprise a patchwork of estates centred on surviving villas, scattered farms or reused hillforts. The latter are surprisingly common locations for rural political and economic foci in Late Antiquity, with well-attested examples stretching from the Rhineland to Italy and at least as far to the east as Greece and the Balkans (see Cameron *et al*., 2000). Another characteristic type of late antique rural settlement comprises (usually small) monasteries, often with heterogeneous rules and forms. Such sites were frequently associated with pilgrimage. Monasteries and rural churches may replace Roman-period temples on the same site, even occasionally reusing their structures, thereby denoting a key aspect of Christianisation of the countryside. At the same time, however, pagan (usually Germanic) communities also existed in most parts of the late antique world and there were Jewish communities in some areas, such as in Gaul or Spain.

The landscape context of these settlements was characteristically the survival of the latest Roman agricultural economy into the fifth and sixth

centuries, collapsing only in the late sixth or seventh century; accordingly many antique rural communities (if not intrusive to the area) persisted at Roman-period farms and villages.

The combination of these characteristics might be claimed to create a 'typical' (or, if the terminology is preferred, a 'model') late antique landscape. This landscape (like the period in general) usually incorporates both Roman and Christian features. Yet it is distinct from both the landscapes of the third/fourth century and the ninth century in the form of sites and structures it involves. If we accept that the concept of Late Antiquity is potentially relevant to fourth- to seventh-century Britain, then it is reasonable to seek a 'late antique' British landscape of this sort. The starting point for such a search is necessarily the Romano-British landscape in *c.* AD 300.

The Early Fourth-Century Romano-British Landscape: Widespread Wealth and a Proliferation of Villas

The eastern and southern parts of early fourth-century Roman Britain had a settlement pattern dominated by villas and towns. These centres marshalled considerable agricultural resources, probably mobilised (at least in large part) through rural estates based on villas and local market centres at 'small towns'. The bulk of the rural population will have lived on farms and in villages of various sizes, most of which would not be called 'villas' by archaeologists. But so few of these settlements have been extensively excavated (Evans, 2001 estimates that only *c.* 17 per cent of all Romano-British sites excavated between 1969–88 were such sites), that one is still forced to look primarily at the sites usually termed 'villas' and 'temples' to understand changes in the fourth-century landscape. Yet there are very severe limitations even with the apparent profusion of information from these sites. Data come from survey and partial excavation, often using methods that would be seen today as outdated. No villa-estate in Britain can be reliably reconstructed and precise tenurial relationships between sites are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct. That an estate sometimes had more than one villa house is demonstrated by the immediate juxtaposition of two contemporary villa houses at several sites, but most estates in south-east Britain were probably centred on a single villa complex.

Agricultural produce was probably stored in large barns at many villas and then sold on through local centres to wider markets. This presumably tied villa estates into the money-based economy, a point reinforced by coin finds at the villa-sites.

But villas were not merely centres of production. In terms of consumption, the houses reveal purchases of luxury goods and manufactured items through the same cash economy – pottery, glass, jewellery and carved bone and shale

objects. The inhabitants/owners plainly had a high material standard of living compared to people living on most rural sites without 'Roman' style masonry structures. This wealth was also expressed in the purchase of architectural embellishments for the buildings, including mosaics, painted wall-plaster, statues, stone veneers and other carved stonework. These were used to display wealth and status, and their disposition sought to impress both visitors and those who observed the house from outside (Scott, 2000; K. Dark, 1994a: ch.1).

Villas were, therefore, economic and tenurial centres that both generated and consumed considerable wealth. They were also perhaps the main rural centres for demonstrating this social status and for ordering and controlling resources and people. This was further reinforced by a display of literacy, reflected in finds of styli, seal-boxes and graffiti (Tomlin, 2002); literary erudition and the use of inscriptions will have constituted effective 'status symbols' stressing the differences between landowners and estate workers or tenants (Henig, 1995: 157; Scott, 2000: 127). In these ways, surrounding landscapes could be ordered and regulated. This regulation might well have involved the exercise of the legal frameworks needed to support villa-ownership as part of an Empire-wide elite society, although evidence for this is naturally scarcer than for other aspects of the Romano-British villa system.

In areas where villas were the centres of such estates, they might reasonably be seen as not only social and economic centres but as foci of local political authority. This authority was, arguably, in turn tied up with the exercise of the legal codes underpinning property rights and the right to exact agricultural surplus. This latter point further connected local villa-owning elites and the state authorities, through the payment of tax in coin and in 'kind'. The former was possible in most cases only through the conversion of agricultural produce into cash by engagement with the urban-based market through villas and 'small towns'. In this way too, local elites furthered and mediated the political authority of state in the countryside.

The connection between local and imperial elites did not extend, in most cases, to religious belief and patronage. Aside from the well-known cases of Lullingstone and Hinton St Mary (and possibly the enigmatic structure at Frampton), archaeological or textual evidence for Christian Romano-British villa owners is extremely slight. In contrast, there is a vast amount of evidence for pagan belief at Romano-British villas: many villas had mosaics or artefacts expressing pagan imagery and there is no reason to doubt that this was in a pagan religious context. There is also a close topographical and architectural link between pagan temples and villas, which comprise the majority of early fourth-century, masonry-built, tile-roofed and tessellated-floored structures across most of rural southern Britain (see Dark and Dark, 1997a; Scott, 2000: 129–30). Such connections suggest a link between local pagan cults and villa owners, perhaps with local elite providing both the

priesthood and the patronage maintaining rural temples. These links are emphasised by the choice of pagan imagery for the objects and architectural features in villas. As these might be seen as selected to impress the authority of the villa owners on visitors to their homes, it seems probable that most of the Romano-British villa-owning elite consciously sought to associate themselves with pagan ritual and local temples. As a result, political, pagan religious and economic authority may have been inextricably linked to most of the villa-owning elite. Their estates, whatever their exact borders, must (given the numbers of villas known) have encompassed collectively much of southern and eastern Britain. Such centres dominated and structured not only the settlement pattern and tenurial framework but the political, economic and religious life of most rural communities in this area. This zone might fairly be termed the 'villa landscape' for this reason alone.

The majority of the rural population were not, of course, resident within villas, but many, perhaps most, probably lived on estates dependent on villas. Fourth-century non-villa farms of equivalent wealth to villas have not been found anywhere in this part of Britain. Although local elites could well have chosen to express their position and wealth in other ways, there is no evidence that they actually did so after *c.* AD 300 in south-east Britain.

Land ownership did not merely give rise to agricultural wealth but, by the early fourth century, led to the establishment of flourishing rural 'industries'. These included metal extraction, metal-working, tile production, production of specialist food products, glass-making and other forms of specialised manufacture. The most intensively studied rural 'industry' in late Roman Britain is probably pottery manufacture. This became increasingly concentrated on a few well-defined localities after the mid-third century. Swathes of country became dotted with kiln sites producing virtually identical products, which were then very widely marketed. Such was the level of production that these products come to dominate all early fourth-century Romano-British pottery assemblages; indeed, the scale is probably best understood as 'proto-industrial' rather than purely a by-product of the agricultural economy (K. Dark, 2001: 26; Dark and Dark, 1997a: 128–9). Production on this scale generated considerable wealth. This, too, was expressed and articulated through a 'Roman' medium, both in the construction of villa buildings and in the purchase of manufactured goods. Perhaps the clearest example of this is at Castor, where a 'stately home' – probably at the end of its own purpose-built 'drive' – was constructed on a terraced hillside above the pottery-producing centre of the Nene Valley (ibid.: 128–9; K. Dark, 2001: 26; Perrin, 1999).

This growth in large-scale production may be one reason why the early fourth century seems to have been a period of unprecedented wealth in Roman Britain, being especially visible in the very areas where these developments occurred. Whole 'small towns' grew up that were apparently based on the

income generated by such 'industries'. Tips of waste from production on such a large scale modified sizeable tracts of open land permanently, as at Alice Holt.

In the network of villa estates, the growth of production sites and 'industrial settlements' can best be understood as the result of deliberate investment by estate-owners themselves. The alienation of such large tracts of land, and the mobilisation of the investment needed to establish production and marketing on this scale also imply elite involvement. That this occurred in late Roman Britain may suggest a lack of the anti-commercial ethic detected by historians elsewhere amongst the Roman Empire's landowning elites, although it would be a mistake to assume that such 'proto-industrial' development was restricted to Britain.

Yet the productive and agricultural wealth extracted from the villa estates apparently rendered Britain exceptionally prosperous in the early fourth century, leading, in turn, to a wider adoption of 'villa' lifestyles and the consolidation of this system by *c.* AD 350. Even Neil Faulkner (2000), who has argued for a radical reassessment of the wealth of fourth-century Britain, concedes that (as he puts it) the 'golden age' of Romano-British villas lasted from the late third century until the middle of the fourth century. At this time, on his assessment, villa construction and the development of existing villa sites was at its peak. Other scholars are even more confident that (on every material index of wealth) fourth-century eastern Britain was prosperous.

To the west and north of this 'villa landscape' zone, different forms of landscape organisation prevailed. In these areas there were few (and in large parts *no*) villas at any time in the Roman period and few, if any, temples similar to those in south-east Britain; there were no urban centres, not even 'small towns', and no large-scale production took place. Some mining and the recovery of raw materials occurred, but in all other respects the economy was wholly agricultural. In the North, this may have been closely connected to the needs of the army stationed on and behind Hadrian's Wall. There, forts were commonly the only local representation of the state and must have served as centres for tax collection, presumably recovering tax 'in kind' from communities among whom money was seldom used. In the West, a handful of forts, such as Segontium, may have had a similar role (Dark and Dark, 1997a: ch. 4). In these areas, almost the entire early to mid-fourth-century population lived in settlements similar in form to those of the late pre-Roman Iron Age, namely enclosed and unenclosed farms and a smaller number of hillforts. The latter seem to have retained a role as focal places and probably the residences of local elites, as suggested at the excavated sites of Dinas Emrys and Dinorben.

One other important difference is that settlement forms (other than forts) apparently reflect tribal units known from textual and epigraphic evidence. Thus, distinctive enclosed settlements are found among the Dumnonii, the

Ordovices and Demetae for example, and in each area there are hints of distinctive features of the local material culture. Despite these regional variations, Romano-British manufactured goods were nonetheless widely available and changes in building shape and roofing denote contact with the east of Britain.

The Later Fourth-century Romano-British Landscape: Social Polarisation and the Rise of Great Estates

After the mid-fourth century, many smaller villa sites show a lack of further investment in terms of architectural development. Some may even have ceased to be occupied. In his recent discussion of the end of Roman Britain, Neil Faulkner (2000) has produced histograms (based on numbers of sites according to conventional dating of their occupation) suggestive of a declining number of villas in the later fourth century. Such histograms may not be all they seem, because of the numerous problems incurred by using archaeological data in this way (notably those concerning dating and sampling). Putting aside these methodological problems, Faulkner sees the pattern he depicts as representing the 'retreat of Romanisation' and economic decline. Even assuming that there was a reduction in the *number* of rural sites in the late fourth century, this ignores the very well-evidenced growth and continuing prosperity of an exceptional class of sites: the 'palatial villas'.

Palatial villas are a group of large and wealthy villas, far exceeding the architectural elaboration and size of 'normal' Romano-British villas. This encompasses sites such as Bignor, North Leigh, Woodchester, Chedworth and Great Witcombe; several new sites of this sort have been found in recent years, suggesting that even today their true number remains underestimated. These display 'Roman' architecture unique in Britain or architectural decoration being executed on an especially grand scale, such as in the principal mosaic at Woodchester, the largest in the fourth-century West (Walters, 1996; Scott, 2000: 137–9). Indeed, these palatial villa complexes were still being occupied in the same way and, in some cases, extended, after the mid-fourth century – as, for example, the villa at Chedworth which gained new wings in the late fourth-century; high quality finds likewise continue.

The palatial villas of later fourth-century Britain might reasonably be supposed to be the centres of great estates, requiring vast resources to construct and furnish with lavish architecture and sculpture. Wealth and, in particular, land ownership were coming to be concentrated in fewer hands. If there was a decline of smaller villas, it was probably because competition from great estates rapidly increased.

This might well place another statistic produced by Faulkner in a new context. He has observed that, according to his method of quantification, the

number of rural settlements overall declines gradually over the fourth century (2000: 71–2, 144–5, 148). A similar decline is, arguably, seen in statistics from Katie Meheux's (1997) study of Romano-British 'native rural sites' in the Severn Valley and Welsh Marches, although these data might also be indicative of the rise of larger land units with fewer independent farmers. The concentration of known palatial villas in the Cotswolds and Wiltshire may hint that their wealth originated in agriculture rather than mass production.

Whether or not we use these attempts at quantification, the prosperity of 'palatial villas' may suggest that the later fourth century marked a growth of great estates at the expense of lesser landowners. Quite possibly, rural Romano-British society increasingly polarised through the fourth century, with fewer but 'larger' landowners. The new summit to the social hierarchy was apparently no more Christianised than that of earlier in the century. Not one of these palatial villas has produced any hint at all of Christian belief on the part of its owners. Indeed, at Chedworth, a pagan shrine immediately next to the principal house was still in use after *c.* AD 350. This tenacity of pagan affiliation might be explained if social position was being legitimated through religion. With a largely pagan rural population, involvement in temple rituals and patronage of shrines and temples might have consolidated social rank. Specific myths and images may have been used to promote an association between the natural order and social order and evoked in public and semi-public contexts through art and behaviour (see, in detail, Scott, 2000).

Both the increasing polarisation of rural society and the legitimation of social position through pagan religion may help explain the next major development in this landscape, which saw the sudden collapse of the villa system in Britain, accompanied by the disappearance of temples from the landscape.

The Fifth-Century British Landscape: Christianisation and the Cultivation of Modesty

The cessation of Roman imperial rule after 410 had a profound effect on the north and west of Britain, in that the official military presence (and presumably the local tax regime it represented) ceased to exist. No Roman fort in these areas has compelling evidence of occupation far into the fifth century (see papers in Wilmott and Wilson, eds, 2000; K. Dark, 2000a: 194–9). In the south and east of Britain, this political change had similarly wide-ranging effects to be traced most clearly through the evidence in the landscape.

Whereas parts of Gaul, Spain and Italy provide plenty of examples of villas in use during the fifth century, in Britain the villa system appears to experience a dramatic collapse from the end of the fourth century into the early decades of the fifth. The first examples of this collapse might be

explicable simply as the outcome of competition between lesser villas and their palatial neighbours, but this cannot be the whole story. Although some villas were disused by *c.* AD 400, many (notably palatial villas) reveal occupation in the style of fourth-century villas into the final decade of that century (K. Dark, 1994a: 235–9). Yet by *c.* AD 420, on current evidence, very few villas were still occupied in this way in Britain. Not all were deserted, as at most well-excavated late fourth-century villas so-called 'squatter occupation' follows the final phase of 'villa occupation'. This 'squatter' activity exhibits very strong similarities from site to site and would seem to represent a shared pattern of re-use of villa buildings. This involved the propping up of parts of the roof or walls with wooden (or, less frequently, drystone) supports, the partition of internal rooms and corridors and placing open hearths in rooms regardless of their existing decoration – often cutting through mosaics – but would retain the outer appearance of the part of the house refurbished in this way (K. Dark, 1993; see also Christie, this volume (Chapter 1)).

I have argued elsewhere that this form of rebuilding can be interpreted as a British version of the 'distinctive sub-Roman architecture' created by the subdivision and blocking of existing walls, noted by Simon Ellis in the late antique Mediterranean (K. Dark, 1994a: 176–7; Ellis, 1988: 565–7). In Britain, this sort of 'architecture' is rarely well dated, as diagnostic fifth- to seventh-century finds are seldom found in association and there are few radiocarbon (or other scientific) dates for such phases. Instead, associated material is usually superficially late fourth century, although the question of just how late in the fifth century this was in use has recently returned to the fore of scholarly debate. Indeed, in a brilliant recent study of the latest datable 'Romano-British' artefacts, Hilary Cool (2000) has shown that definable new fashions in artefact use were appearing at the very end of the fourth century. These can be traced in the latest coin-dated layers at several sites continuing to the first decade of the fifth century. These fashions employed a different assemblage of superficially late fourth-century objects from those used in the late fourth century itself. Simultaneously, superficially fourth-century objects were manufactured in a much more restricted range of colours – particularly tending to white, black and red versions of objects produced in a wider colour range before *c.* AD 400. These objects look identical to late fourth-century objects in form, but not in the visually obvious (but typologically seldom considered) dimension of their colour. Cool demonstrates a recognisable beginning for a shared fashion of dress and everyday material culture among very late fourth-century and early fifth-century Britons.

Cool has taken this as far as coin-dated early fifth-century sequences go. But these same fashions are still found in the superficially Romano-British material culture that forms the bulk of the excavated material at datable later fifth- and early sixth-century settlements in western Britain. This material is

in layers dated by stratigraphical association with imported Phocaean and African red-slip wares dating from the late fifth and early sixth centuries, although occasionally artefact types recognised by Cool have been replaced by very similar new types of the late fifth and sixth centuries: for example, type D and E penannular brooches replaced by types F and G – widely accepted as later continuations of the same metalworking tradition (K. Dark, 2000a: 136–42). Thus one may define – on exactly the same grounds as Cool herself employs – the continuation of such fashions at such sites until the sixth century. The replacement of 'missing' elements by imports may well suggest their active maintenance.

If this material culture fashion began in the last decades of the fifth century and continued until the sixth in western Britain, then it seems likely that the material culture of the fifth-century Britons took this form. The reason that fifth-century British material culture has proved so elusive is not that it had dramatically changed or disappeared, but because it had changed so little. This has wide-ranging implications for the material culture of the fifth-century Britons and opens up new possibilities in the identification of contemporary occupation.

This conclusion also prompts one to review those sites where convincing fifth-century occupation sequences have been published in detail. Ironically, given the enigmatic nature of most evidence of this date from towns, perhaps the best example is still from a Roman-period *civitas* capital, namely Wroxeter. At the Baths Basilica site, Philip Barker and Roger White have shown that superficially late fourth-century objects were being used throughout the fifth (and probably into the sixth) century, by people living in a large complex of newly-built, Roman-style timber-framed buildings (Barker *et al*., 1997). At the adjacent public baths and *macellum* site, market stalls were erected and the *macellum* entrances re-paved (and this paving worn through much use) contemporary with this 'late' occupation. Again, the associated material comprises entirely superficially Romano-British objects. This suggests, although does not absolutely prove, that the *macellum* remained a centre of economic activity into the later fifth, if not sixth, century for people using a wholly 'Romano-British' material culture. The final excavation report for the site argues that this resulted from periodic markets for rural produce from the town's hinterland (Ellis, 2000).

This interpretation is made even more interesting because one villa with 'squatter occupation' has been excavated outside Wroxeter, at Whitely Grange. Data here demonstrate that the villa baths were still used into the mid-fifth century or later, before the 'squatter' phase even began. This was associated with exactly the sort of 'superficially Romano-British' artefacts excavated within the town in late fifth- or sixth-century contexts. In a subsequent phase, timber-framed structures similar to those at the Baths Basilica site were built there too (White and Barker, 1998: 126–8).

This may suggest that Wroxeter was still functioning as a local economic centre in the fifth century. This relationship between town and country might just be visible elsewhere also, as at Verulamium and Dorchester (Dorset), where occupation of fifth- or even sixth-century date occurred both inside and immediately outside former *civitas* capitals, in both cases, with continuing occupation of Romano-British buildings (Niblett, 2001: 129–46. Cf. ceramic dates for York – Monaghan, 1997: 847–50, 867, 971–3, his periods 9b and 9c).

Returning to the countryside, if we accept that 'squatter occupation' was an attempt to maintain villa houses for continued occupation, the disregard for mosaics and other 'luxury' fittings might seem surprising. Impoverishment of the previous owners fails to explain the lack of interest shown in retaining the internal organisation and well-preserved decoration of the house. If lack of money is the problem, why dig through an intact mosaic floor to create a hearth? Impoverished owners might be expected to conserve their homes, not destroy the most luxurious fittings. What we see is the use of 'luxury homes' for the functional needs of home life and farming. In fact, the striking disregard for the trappings of their previous occupation such as mosaics and wall decoration, suggests a change to ownership by people with different values or the deliberate re-modelling of the buildings to convey new and different values. Further, the shared characteristics of these phases might suggest a 'mental blueprint' behind refurbishment, rather than the site-by-site expression of diverse local choices. This renders true squatting unlikely.

That values were changing at this time is indicated by archaeological evidence relating to the end of Romano-British pagan temples and shrines in the early fifth century. Of the many such sites excavated in recent decades, not one shows convincing evidence of continuing pagan religious use after *c.* AD 410. On archaeological grounds it would appear that Romano-British paganism was eradicated completely within the first half of the fifth century (K. Dark, 1994a: ch. 2). If the ruling elite of the Romano-British 'villa landscape' had legitimated their social position through pagan religion, then widespread religious change might have had disastrous political consequences for them. Removing the basis of this legitimation, it would also have eliminated temples as a venue for elite patronage. This may explain the correspondence between the decline of villa occupation in its fourth-century form and the end of pagan ritual activity at temples.

Similarly, if the rapid collapse of rural paganism in archaeological terms represents the realities of religious belief in the early fifth-century Romano-British countryside, then the Christianisation of lower-status groups might well have alienated the estate populations from villa-owning landowners. Specific forms of Christian belief, especially Martinian monasticism, becoming popular in western Gaul at this time, could well have played some role in aggravating this situation (ibid.).

If this was so, one would expect there to be exceptions. Where local landlords were Christians or, perhaps, where they were quick to convert in the face of changing attitudes, they might have retained their estates. Unfortunately, neither of the villas with strong evidence of Christian ownership can provide us with archaeological evidence one way or the other, but both Whitely Grange and St Patrick's account of his fifth-century boyhood (the *Confessio*) may elucidate this (K. Dark, 2000a: 109, 114; 1993). Roger White has argued that Whitely Grange was never an agricultural estate centre, interpreting it as a private country retreat for a dignitary from the nearby town, perhaps even the bishop. Whether or not it has ecclesiastical connections, the villa could have escaped the wrath of enraged tenants simply because it was not related to agriculture. Patrick's testimony is even more helpful: although he grew up in a fifth-century *uillula*, he makes it clear that this was family property and that his father and grandfather held ecclesiastical office. Even if this takes us back to the fourth century, such connections might well have saved their estate.

A transition from pagan elite ownership into the hands of former estate workers or their favoured candidate (such as a Christian priest) might explain the choice to change the internal layout of the villa according to contrasting values. These might well, as was also the case in fifth-century Gaul (see the letters of Sidonius – Anderson, 1963–65: IV. xxiv), have emphasised simplicity or modesty rather than luxury and display. Such owners need not have shown any hesitation in destroying parts of the mosaics of the principal villa rooms, possibly treating with contempt any pagan symbolism they displayed and negating their association with the previous owners.

Thus, religious change may be the simplest explanation for this dramatic transition in Britain. This might explain the contrasts with Gaul and Spain, where many villa owners retained their estates even when 'barbarians' ruled their provinces. There, the rural elite survived any similar fate because it did not employ paganism as a mainstay of its social position and converted to Christianity at a similar rate as the population as a whole. In Britain the rural elite had perhaps become so entangled with local paganism that the demise of one necessitated, in most cases, the end of the other.

Evidence from Gaul suggests that another way in which villas might have survived is as monasteries. The best evidence for this in Britain is perhaps at Llandough in south Wales, where a late fourth-century villa was found next to a fifth-century and later cemetery. The cemetery contained eighth-century burials that cut the villa's disused structures, but these buildings might have co-existed with the earlier phases of burial. Ninth-century sculptured monuments at Llandough seem to indicate that it was a monastic site at that date (the usual context for such monuments in Wales) and the whole sequence was succeeded by a medieval monastic site and later church, still in use. Conceivably the villa at Llandough was the focus of a fifth-century monastery (see K. Dark, 2000a: 116–25).

In this religious context, it is no surprise to find that some late fourth-century Romano-British temple sites were also being converted to what might be monastic (or at least ecclesiastical) use. At Uley, a univallate enclosure (containing both domestic activity and a possible church) overlay a fourth-century temple site (Woodward and Leach, 1993). Nettleton temple was succeeded by a (probably Christian) cemetery and domestic occupation dated by fifth- to seventh-century glass (Wedlake, 1982). But not all possible fifth- and sixth-century monastic sites have been found at former villas or temples. At Glastonbury Tor, the summit of a prominent knoll was occupied by a (possibly monastic) settlement associated with Mediterranean imported pottery, grass-tempered pottery and metalworking evidence of fifth- to seventh-century date. A freestanding drystone tomb-like structure, containing no burial, located within the settlement might even have been a focal shrine.

Monasteries could have replaced temples in the fifth-century British landscape in more than simply locational terms. These might, like earlier pagan temples, have been centres of pilgrimage and devotion by local people, and been used as the stages for displays of elite patronage and piety or even for periodic fairs.

The landscape that emerged from this was, therefore, one in which many villas perhaps remained estate centres, but were modified to reflect new values. The people who occupied these used a material culture drawing on the fashions of the late fourth-century past, whether or not it actually consisted of things manufactured prior to *c.* AD 400. These were 'Romano-British' people, just with different beliefs and values, and the estates were probably often 'under new management'. Imperial rule, and the rule of landowners who had collected imperial taxes, may have been rejected by the occupants of such sites but their way of life re-worked components of the late fourth-century past rather than innovating completely new forms.

This new system has all the characteristics of the classic 'late antique landscape' as defined earlier. Nevertheless, this zone encompasses only those areas in which villas had been widespread in the fourth century. In the North and West, the early fifth century marked the final termination of activity at all, or almost all, military sites. Although there may have been a later attempt to revive the defence of Hadrian's Wall, it too was initially redundant at this time (K. Dark, 1992; 2000b; Dark and Dark, 1997b). In the west of Britain, the fourth-century pattern of farms (and the agricultural economy it represents) may have remained intact, as both pollen analysis and the few extensively excavated sites suggest. Throughout these areas landowning elites could well have remained resident in the same hillforts that their predecessors had occupied in the fourth century. This is just as one would expect, if the social polarisation of the villa landscape was not found in this area and long-standing identities and political affiliations remained strong. When texts

enable us to comment, the people of this whole zone often still referred to themselves by the same tribal names recorded by Ptolemy in the early Roman period, such as the Dumnonii or Demetae. However, in the next phase, even this zone was brought within the world of Late Antiquity (K. Dark, 2000a: ch. 4).

The British Landscape from the Late Fifth to Seventh Century: Hillforts and the Growth of Kingship

It is frequently supposed that the moment the Britons were free of Roman rule they adopted kingship as a form of government, in a frenzy of 'Post-Colonial' self-assertion. Although Gildas, writing in the mid-sixth century, perceived the Roman Empire as a former coloniser, there is no contemporary evidence for British kingship in what had been the 'villa landscape' prior to the late fifth century. The only potentially reliable textual witnesses to fifth-century political history, Patrick and Gildas himself, do not even imply that what had been Roman Britain had kings prior to the last generation of the fifth century. The kings castigated by Gildas seem to have been third-generation dynasts – which presumably takes British kingship into the late fifth century (Dumville, 1984a).

The rise of British kingship may have its own reflex in landscape organisation. It is perhaps no coincidence that in the west of what had been the 'villa landscape', iron age multivallate hillforts were re-used from the late fifth century onward, but not earlier. Such sites are rare, but characteristically exhibit indications of wealth and the mobilisation of considerable resources, as at South Cadbury ('Cadbury Castle') and Cadbury Congresbury. As significant are the few new hillforts, such as High Peak, and other large-scale works, notably Wansdyke and Wats Dyke, which attest the same ability to mobilise large quantities of labour, food and timber and to alienate substantial blocks of land (K. Dark, 2000a: 144–9).

A more specific relationship between hillforts and kingship, at least in this period, may be supported by the close link between post-Roman hillforts and kingship in Scotland and Ireland, attested in more extensive textual sources available from Ireland and represented archaeologically at several recently excavated sites, such as Clogher in Ireland and Dunadd and Dunollie in Scotland. In Britain, Gildas may have associated kingship and hillforts and, when, in the ninth century, British texts next permit historical comment, the Welsh sites of Tenby, Degannwy and Dinefwr may have been closely connected with major rulers (K. Dark, 1994b: chs. 1 and 2).

If we associate the origins of fifth-century hillfort use with the emergence of British kingship, then this helps explain the cessation of so-called 'squatter' activity at villas prior to the circulation of imported goods of late fifth-century

date. In fact, a few villas were still used after this date: what may be sixth-century finds occur at Llantwit, Barnsley Park and Frocester (see Price, 2000, nb. 111–18). The latter and Whitely Grange have other evidence of sixth-century occupation, but these are rare exceptions. At least Llantwit and Whitely Grange might be interpreted as ecclesiastical property by this date.

At this point the long-standing division between the settlement pattern of southern and eastern Britain and that of the West seems to disappear. During the course of the fifth century, Christianity was exported – probably from the West Country and south Wales – into the British West and to Ireland. These areas very rapidly adopted aspects of late antique British secular culture, such as secular Latin literacy. Perhaps the best archaeological indicator of this change is the widespread use of Latin-inscribed memorial bearing typical late antique memorial formulae found too in Gaul, Spain and Italy (K. Dark, 2000a: 38–40). This cultural change is very unlikely to be due to a 'flight to the hills' from eastern Britain. All the available evidence for western Britain suggests settlement continuity and there is no unambiguous evidence of a military threat affecting the South East more seriously in the early fifth century than in the late fourth century.

The scholarly assumption that coastal defence collapsed after *c.* AD 410 may well be erroneous (see Pearson, 2002). Recent (unpublished) evidence from Pevensey and Richborough could denote continued activity in these forts throughout the fifth century, with the 'Anglo-Saxons' only becoming visible in the mid- to late fifth century. Irish raiding might be expected to have focussed on the west of Britain, rendering this a strange choice for frightened refugees. Hence, ecclesiastical links seem a much more likely pathway of cultural contact in early and mid-fifth-century Britain than refugee movements. As a consequence of this, differences between social and cultural practices among the Britons were greatly reduced. This may have been assisted by a revival or reinvention of 'tribal' identities across Britain, so that the new kingdoms of the West Country may, for example, reflect what appear today to be pre-Roman rather than late Roman groups, such as the Dobunni and Durotriges (K. Dark, 1994a: ch. 4).

Thus, by *c.* AD 500 a new pattern had emerged, in which an eastern landscape of villas and temples was fully replaced by a landscape of scattered hillforts and monasteries across the whole area in which British elites still held sway. As we have seen, both elite hillfort use and the proliferation of rural monasteries was typical of late antique landscapes elsewhere. Around these political, tenurial and religious foci, doubtless rural life continued at many lesser farm sites and villages, but the evidence for these remains extremely scarce. Datable material did not reach them and few have been excavated and published in such a manner as to enable the detection of post-400 occupation – let alone its accurate dating. To judge from pollen analysis, agricultural productivity continued into the fifth and sixth centuries and an

agricultural surplus is necessitated by the access to resources needed for the construction projects already mentioned. That is, there is no hint at all that later fifth- or sixth-century Britain was impoverished or striven by famine, rather that this was a wealthy agricultural society (P. Dark, 2000; K. Dark, 1996a).

This new pattern was maintained until at least the start of the seventh century. Then, the hillfort-based elite in the south and west was swept away by the expansion of 'Anglo-Saxon' kingdoms, which emerge late in the sixth century. Although some monastic centres probably survived this 'elite replacement', hillfort use ceases in this area and new patterns of landscape organisation (a theme beyond the scope of this paper) begin to develop. In Wales and Cornwall, British kings and the settlement pattern already described, lived on, but their kingdoms were soon transformed by changing political, religious and economic circumstances (K. Dark, 2000a: 10, 229).

That the end of the late antique system of landscape organisation occurred in the seventh century is typical of broader European trends. That it was due to the emergence of the 'Anglo-Saxon' kingdoms, begs the question of developments in those parts of eastern Britain where the Britons had not remained politically dominant throughout the fifth century.

The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Landscape: Living on the Edge

Until the end of the fifth century the 'Anglo-Saxons' were not a major factor in the landscape development of what had been Roman Britain. As there is no reliable method of dating 'Anglo-Saxon' settlements of the fifth century to one part of the century or another, so cemetery evidence provides the clearest chronological guide to the spread of 'Anglo-Saxon' settlement. The earliest well-dated 'Anglo-Saxon' cemeteries may belong to the mid-fifth century, but these are few in number and occupy a very restricted area of the east Midlands. Only after *c.* AD 450, perhaps by AD 475, can we see 'Anglo-Saxon' sites spread more widely across eastern Britain and large areas may have been under British control well into the sixth century (ibid.: 38-40, 58). This spread of 'Anglo-Saxon' burial customs in Britain coincides remarkably well with David Dumville's chronology for Gildas' narrative of fifth-century history. According to this, the 'Saxon rebellion', in which Germanic *foederati* overthrew British rule and established their own political control in the east of Britain, occurred in the 490s, following a period of co-existence between what we would call 'Anglo-Saxon' and British communities, under British rule. This and the archaeological dating suggest that, after more restricted settlement earlier in the century, there was a phase (possibly *c.* AD 450/70–490) in which people using 'Anglo-Saxon' material culture settled widely in eastern Britain under British authority. This was followed first by armed rebellion against the British authorities and then by protracted

conflict, which the Britons eventually won in the year of Gildas' birth, perhaps *c.* AD 500. This left the Britons in militarily dominant position until the late sixth century (Dumville, 1984b).

In archaeological terms, this period is that in which we see hillforts replace villas as British political centres. Gildas may even be alluding to this when he says that the Britons took to hilltops and coastal promontories for refuge during the war with the 'Saxons'. Perhaps it was the necessities of military leadership that led to the Britons, in what had been the 'villa landscape', adopting kingship for the first time since the beginning of the Roman period.

This raises the question of the character of the 'Anglo-Saxon' communities. Almost all known fifth- and sixth-century 'Anglo-Saxon' settlements are small clusters of timber buildings, exhibiting very little sign of wealth. The only extensively excavated exception is West Heslerton in Yorkshire, where the site exhibits unique zoning into residential, burial, productive, and possibly elite, areas. Structures and finds at these settlements are very similar from one site to another, and there is no indication of the re-use of Romano-British buildings for domestic purposes in definitively 'Anglo-Saxon' contexts (Powlesland, 2000; see also Hamerow, this volume (Chapter 11)).

Conversely, 'Anglo-Saxon' burials exhibit much evidence for diversity and wealth in terms of the deposition of grave-goods. The latter include much jewellery probably obtained from peripatetic craftsworkers travelling from hamlet to hamlet, seeking trade. These objects cannot have been simple to produce or cheap to purchase. Consequently, furnishing the dead with these costly grave-goods presumably placed an economic strain on such small communities if – as seems probable – each settlement provided for its own members. This situation was probably further aggravated by the selection of adult women as the recipients of the most elaborate burials. A common feature of this demographic group in pre-industrial societies is that it experiences an exceptionally high mortality rate, due to the risks of childbirth. Dividing the population of excavated cemeteries by the duration of their use, gives the statistic of at least one burial of this sort per annum (K. Dark, 2000a: 71). Even without other expenditure, this would have placed a major economic burden on the community (probably family) at each 'Anglo-Saxon' settlement throughout its existence. If so, we might expect to see impoverishment and evidence for a general lack of disposable resources. This is well attested in the very simple, functional, design of buildings and the lack of imported or specialist-manufactured goods found on settlement sites. To put it another way, early 'Anglo-Saxons' may have only looked 'rich' in death, not in life and the former may well be a consequence of the social practices that produced the latter.

In the later fifth and sixth centuries, therefore, eastern Britain may have contained an 'Anglo-Saxon' population living close to a subsistence level due

to the economic requirements of its social practices. The 'Anglo-Saxon' contribution to the late antique settlement pattern in eastern Britain was, therefore, probably one of many small farming hamlets and associated cemeteries. Even where large cremation cemeteries were established instead of inhumation burial, there are hints that the dead were cremated in similarly elaborate clothes and with grave-goods (O'Brien, 1999; Lucy, 2000).

The possibility that fifth- and sixth-century 'Anglo-Saxon' communities were impoverished suggests that all social and economic relationships between the Britons and 'Anglo-Saxons' need not have been slanted in favour of the latter. The rise of 'Anglo-Saxon' kingship, perhaps initially resulting from links with Frankia, must have recreated this patchwork of identities and social and economic relationships in different terms. Here too, therefore, the late sixth and seventh centuries might be seen as a crucial period in the transition from the late antique to 'Anglo-Saxon' landscapes.

The impoverishment and relative disorganisation of the 'Anglo-Saxon' communities may help to explain why these proved so unsuccessful in comparison to their continental counterparts in seizing political and military control prior to the end of the sixth century. If the Britons had larger and more highly organised polities, healthier populations and more disposable wealth – along perhaps with weapons and tactics derived from the Roman past – then the 'Anglo-Saxons' of the fifth and sixth centuries may have been no match for them in either political or military terms.

Conclusion

Seen in this way, the development of the fifth- and sixth-century British landscape can be understood as showing all the defining characteristics of late antique landscapes seen elsewhere in Europe. A gradual transition from the Romano-British to late antique British landscape can be traced, punctuated by phases of more rapid revolutionary change. These phases of rapid change were the 'British revolution' in the early fifth century (perhaps *c*. AD 409/10), the 'Saxon rebellion' in the late fifth century (perhaps *c*. 490) and the rise of 'Anglo-Saxon' kingship in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. At these times, political and, perhaps especially, religious events may have reshaped the British landscape, but underlying continuities ensured that the formation and dissolution of this landscape took place in the context of longer-term processes of slow change. Too often it is often claimed that landscape processes have nothing to do with specific events in political or religious history; arguably such events played a central role in transforming the late antique British landscape into that of 'Anglo-Saxon' England. This conclusion clearly has wider implications for the study of the landscape in Britain and elsewhere, both in Late Antiquity and beyond.

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Chapter 11

The Archaeology of Early Anglo-Saxon Settlements: Past, Present and Future

Helena Hamerow

The Past

The remit of this paper[1] was briefly to summarise the 'past, present and future' of Anglo-Saxon settlement studies. I will begin by doing what archaeologists do best and look to the past – back to 1974, to be precise, to the publication of a volume of conference proceedings entitled *Anglo-Saxon Settlement and Landscape*, edited by Trevor Rowley. The volume contained an article by Keith Wade entitled, 'Whither Anglo-Saxon settlement archaeology?', the emphasis of which was firmly on issues of sampling and whether the handful of Anglo-Saxon settlements which had been excavated at that time could be considered to be in any way representative. Wade complained that 'any excavated settlement of the Anglo-Saxon period appears to gain national importance overnight. This is hardly surprising when one can count the number of excavated early Saxon settlements on the fingers of one hand and the middle Saxon settlements on the other' (1974: 87). He went on to observe, rightly, that such a tiny sample, whose distribution was anything but random, was bound to lead to the formulation of simplistic generalisations which, once established, would be hard to shake – for example, the belief that these settlements were invariably on light, marginal soils, or that only 'failed' settlements were available for excavation, with 'successful' sites lying beneath present-day villages (see below).

The sites which were on people's minds thirty years ago were West Stow (Suffolk), Mucking (Essex), New Wintles Farm (Oxfordshire), Chalton (Hampshire), Yeavering (Northumbria), and a few others (West, 1986; Hamerow, 1993; Gray, 1974; Addyman *et al*., 1972; Hope-Taylor, 1977). These excavations were certainly important in establishing architectural forms

[1] A version of this paper was delivered at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds in 2000. Its scope and remit are those broadly suggested by the session organiser.

and providing insights into the variety of settlement types present in the fifth to seventh centuries, and yet it is a little disheartening to realise that these sites – two of which remain incompletely published – still dominate discussions of early Anglo-Saxon settlements as well as undergraduate reading lists on the subject. Nonetheless, this rather narrow horizon is slowly widening and the publication of the excavations at West Heslerton in Yorkshire (Powlesland, 1987 and forthcoming) and Eye Kettleby in Leicestershire (Finn, 1997, 1998) in particular will no doubt stimulate more developed considerations.

From Past to Present

It is perhaps hard to believe that it was possible as recently as 1972 for a senior British archaeologist to wonder, not unreasonably, whether sunken-featured buildings ('SFBs' or *Grubenhäuser*) 'constituted the main or most common *dwelling*' in Anglo-Saxon settlements (Addyman, 1972 – my italics). Indeed, the first ground-level timber building was not recognised until the 1950s and not until the 1970s had enough buildings of this kind been excavated to enable a distinctive 'type' of Anglo-Saxon timber building to be identified – although, as noted below, we now know that within this broad genre lies a great deal of variability (Hamerow, 1999a). Studies have of course moved on since the 1970s and here I want to consider some of the recent work on early Anglo-Saxon buildings before proceeding to consideration of the structure and economies of settlements as a whole.

Thanks to a database of timber buildings compiled by Anne and Gary Marshall (1993), the chronological development of early Anglo-Saxon buildings can be summarised (very roughly) as follows (Fig. 11.1): (i) in the fifth to mid-sixth centuries, buildings appear to have been uniformly small (that is, less than 12 m in length), aligned east-west and built of posts set into individual post-holes; throughout the period, an internal partition can be identified in around 25 per cent of buildings (generally, in somewhat larger buildings), creating a small compartment at one end of the structure. (ii) Towards the end of the sixth century, the use of foundation trenches was introduced in some settlements; the first really large buildings, with floor areas greater than 100 square metres – what might be called 'great halls' – also appeared around AD 600 in several regions of England.

It has recently been recognized that templates were used in the construction of early Anglo-Saxon buildings, and that these templates were widely shared, not only within a given settlement but across different regions of England and, most remarkably, with settlements on the other side of the North Sea (Tummuscheit, 1995; Hamerow, 1999a; Zimmermann, 1988) (Fig. 11.2). This is not a question of standard units of measurement, the existence of which is still a matter of debate for this early period (Marshall and Marshall, 1993).

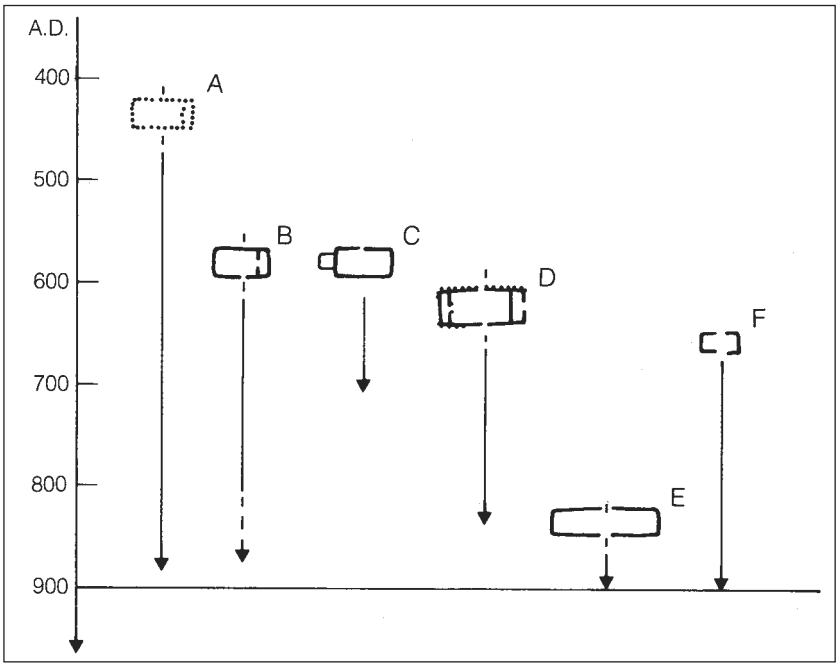

Figure 11.1 The development of timber buildings in Anglo-Saxon England (after Hamerow, 1999a: Fig. 3)

What is important is that it indicates the existence of certain norms in the way in which internal space was organised; the placement of entrances and subdivisions created a built environment which would have been recognisable across large areas of north-west Europe. That said, by no means can every building be shown to have made use of such templates. This uniformity in ground plan may furthermore mask variability in the superstructure of these buildings which signalled important differences, for example in function or status.

One puzzle that has long plagued archaeologists dealing with Anglo-Saxon settlements is the absence in England of the longhouse (in which living areas and a byre lay under one roof) which was for centuries the main house type found across much of north-west Europe (Fig. 11.3). I have argued elsewhere that this absence should not be explained by calling the buildings found in early Anglo-Saxon England 'Romano-British', or even 'Romano-Saxon', though a degree of hybridisation of building traditions seems likely (Hamerow, 1999a; James *et al.*, 1985; the buildings at Dunston's Clump (Staffordshire) remain the most persuasive Romano-British parallels for the

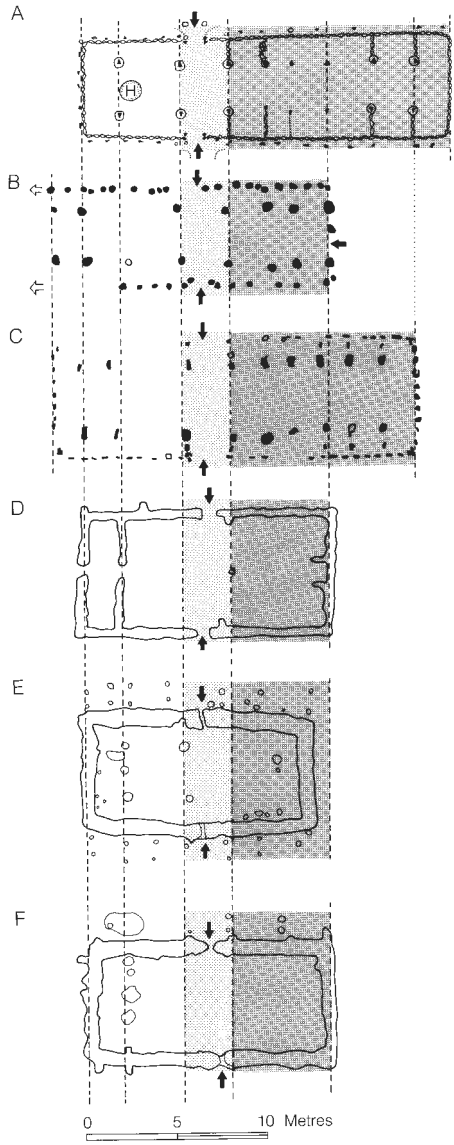

Figure 11.2 **A comparison of plans of fourth- to seventh-century timber buildings from north-west Germany, the Netherlands and England. A) Feddersen Wierde Haus 14; B) Flögeln Haus 2; C) Wijster House XIV; D) Chalton House AZ1; E) Thirlings Building A; F) Thirlings Building L; H = hearth (after Zimmermann, 1988: Fig. 7; O'Brien and Miket, 1991)**

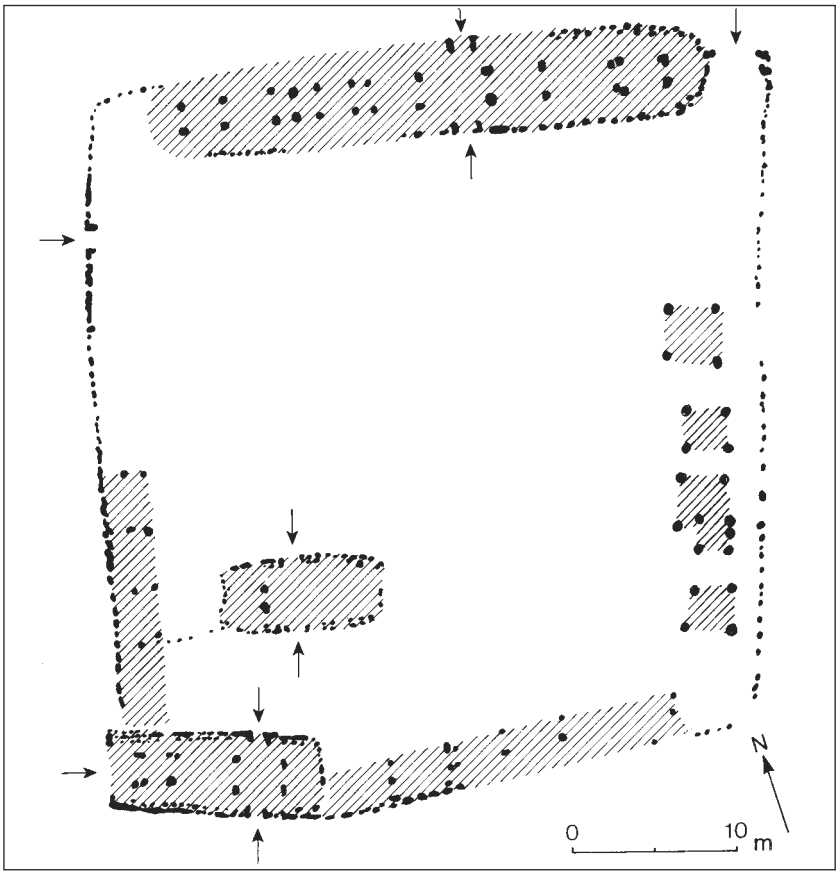

Figure 11.3 Nørre Snede: a farmstead with longhouses, granaries and smaller buildings (after Hansen, 1987: Fig. 11)

'Anglo-Saxon house' of which I am aware: Losco-Bradley and Wheeler, 1984, Fig. 9). Instead, the abandonment of a house type associated with ancestral farmsteads on the Continent in favour of a building without a byre – a type which was becoming increasingly common in north-west Europe in the fifth and sixth centuries – should be seen as a response to socio-economic conditions that were fundamentally different from both late Roman Britain and southern Scandinavia or north-western Germany in the preceding centuries (Hamerow, 1995; 1999a, Fig. 5). One possible explanation is that, due to the upheavals of the fifth and sixth centuries, 'Anglo-Saxon' households (which adopted a wide array of material culture from north-west Europe, despite the fact that most of these households must have consisted

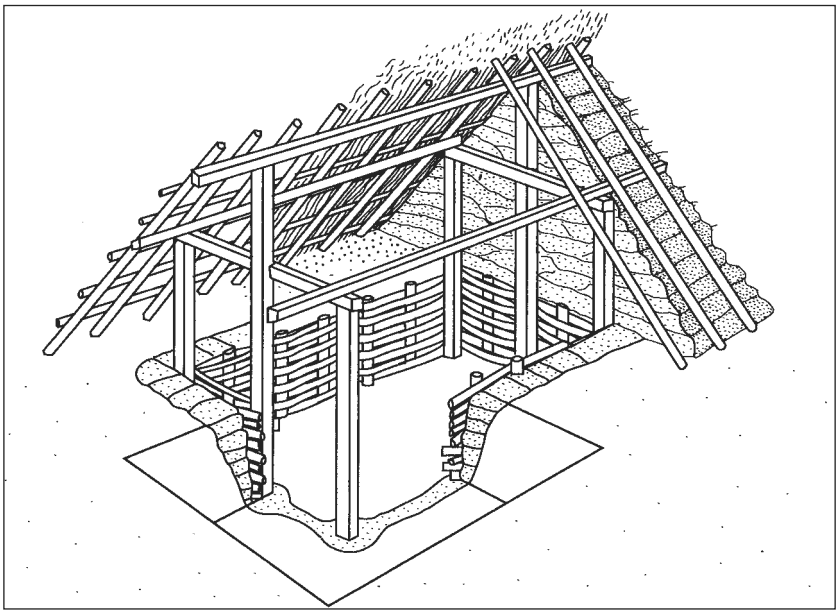

Figure 11.4 A reconstruction of a two-post sunken-featured building (after Heidinga and Offenburg, 1992: 61)

largely or entirely of indigenous Britons) were unable to command either the material capital – that is, tonnes of seasoned timber from managed woodland – or the social capital – namely voluntary labour from outside the immediate household or village – needed to build large, enclosed longhouse complexes such as those found in Denmark during the fourth century AD (for example, Hvass, 1986; Fig. 11.3). We must of course remember that building a house was as much a social act as it was a technical one.

Sunken-featured buildings or SFBs have also been subject to new interpretations, most notably the reconstruction proposed in the 1980s by Stanley West based primarily on evidence from West Stow, in which a planked floor is suspended over the hollow (West, 1986, Fig. 290). The evidence on which this model is based has come in for some criticism, but so too has the evidence from a number of other settlements, here and on the Continent, that the bottom of the sunken hollow acted as the effective floor surface (one recently excavated German example with evidence for 'trampling' on the sunken floor comes from Bremen-Grambke, in Lower Saxony: Witte, 1994–95) (Fig. 11.4). The jury remains out, but surprisingly little work has been done on SFBs in recent years (Tipper, 2000 being the notable exception), and it is to be hoped that the evidence from West Heslerton will stimulate

renewed interest in these structures. The intriguing SFBs excavated over 30 years ago at Puddlehill (Bedfordshire), and interpreted by the excavators as dwellings, would, for example, repay further study (Matthews and Hawkes, 1985). It is worth noting, finally, that the largest SFBs are just as large in terms of floor area as the smallest timber buildings and that the two need not always have been functionally distinct.

Current thinking about early Anglo-Saxon settlements as a whole has also moved on considerably since the 1970s. The first point to make is that, with very few exceptions, only fragments of settlements have been excavated, often only small fragments. Inasmuch as one can generalise from such evidence, what has been published so far suggests that, until the late sixth century or so, these settlements were not planned: they were of course organised, but not in a way which indicates adherence to a generally agreed or imposed design. They did not, furthermore, contain obviously focal, or exceptionally large buildings (that is, with a floor area of around 100 square metres or more). Representatives of this kind of settlement include not only Mucking (Fig. 11.5) and West Stow, but also the much more recently excavated settlements at West Heslerton (see Powlesland, forthcoming) and Eye Kettleby, near Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire (where 21 timber buildings and 26 SFBs have been recorded, spread across 4.2 hectares: N. Finn, pers. comm.; Finn, 1997, 1998). Yet where cemeteries are associated with settlements such as these, the evidence makes quite clear that we are dealing with internally-ranked communities; some people were buried with a great deal more burial wealth than others. This suggests that social differentiation, whether defined by gender, age, cult, descent or something else, was largely contained within households rather than between them (cf. Welch, 1992: 81; Härke, 1997). It was not obviously expressed in house size and thus in the ability to maintain a particularly large household under one roof. This expression appears to have changed towards the end of the sixth century, when a few settlements with exceptionally large buildings and planned layouts were established, most famously at Yeavering, identified by Bede as a royal vill, and Cowdery's Down in Hampshire (Hope-Taylor, 1977; Millett, 1984) (Fig. 11.6).

These earliest settlements are also characterised by a lack of clearly defined edges, internal boundaries or other signs of delineation, such as enclosed groups of buildings. Evidence of enclosures around buildings (as distinct from animal pens or paddocks) is extremely scarce, and arguably even absent for this period. Essentially permanent enclosures which circumscribed planned arrangements of buildings are not in fact apparent much before *c.* AD 600 (the early date previously posited for the enclosures at Catholme is now in doubt after the recalibration of the radiocarbon dates: Kinsley, 2002). Enclosures demarcating properties become more evident from the late sixth century onwards, and it is hard to put this down entirely to differential archaeological survival. The seventh and eighth centuries seem truly to be the period when,

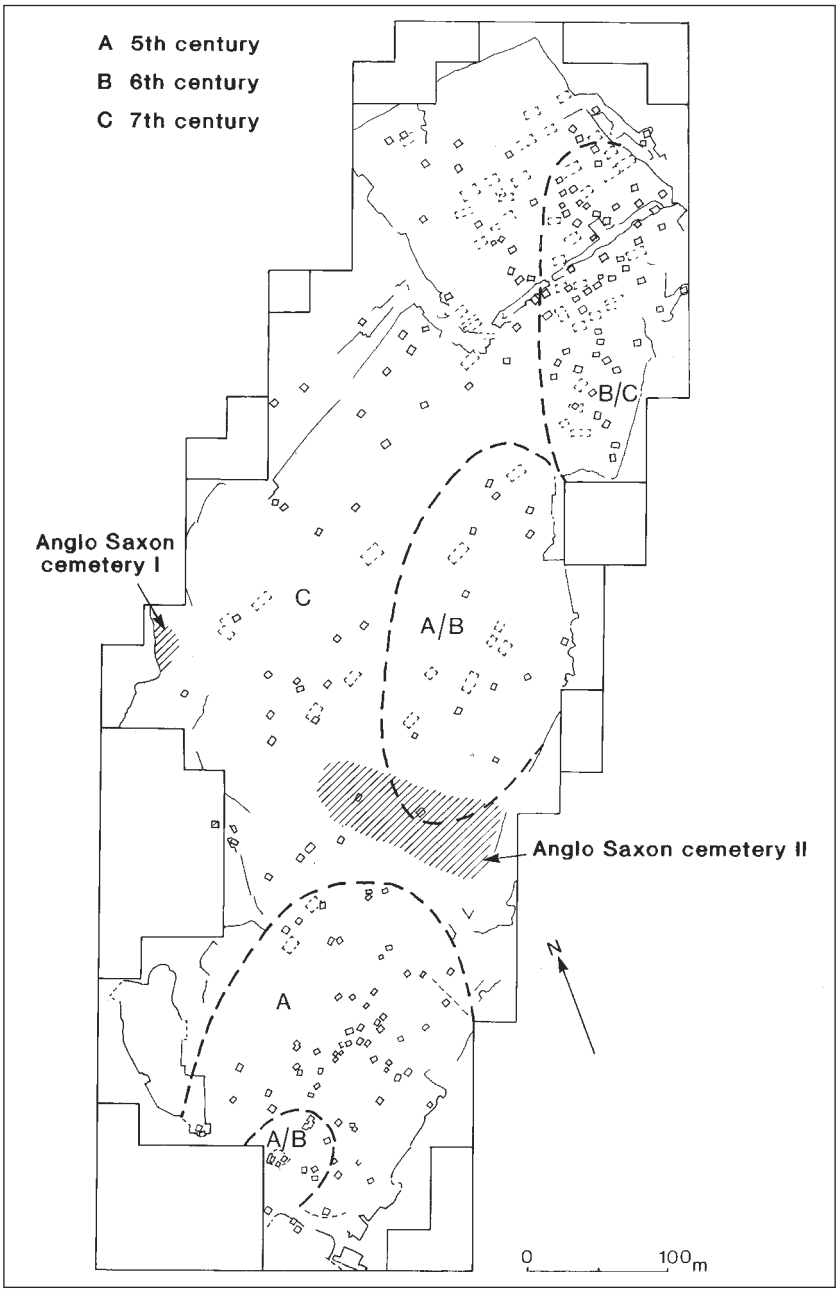

Figure 11.5 Mucking: the spatial development of the Anglo-Saxon settlement (after Hamerow, 1993: Fig. 195)

at least in southern England, settlements became more firmly inscribed onto the landscape as both secular and religious landlords exerted growing influence over their estates.

Indeed, in some cases, as at Yeavering, planned settlements with large buildings which made lavish use of timber and labour can uncontroversially be interpreted as the residences of new elites who established separate settlements, simultaneously displaying an ostentatious style of building set within a distinctive layout. The carefully-planned layouts so evident at Yeavering and Cowdery's Down reflect a desire to impress and to control access to particular buildings and zones. Yet planning and the use of enclosures need not inevitably imply high status. The settlement at Pennyland (Milton Keynes), for example, contained neither large buildings nor exceptionally rich material culture, yet in the course of the seventh century (at a time, incidentally, when the community gained access to long-distance imports in exchange, presumably, for agricultural products), enclosures around buildings or paddocks were constructed (Williams, 1993). It is tempting to regard these developments as a prelude to the more dramatic changes in burial practices and settlements evident in the seventh and eighth centuries, such as the appearance of princely burials, monasteries and *emporia*. But we should not seek a single, teleological explanation for these changes, attributing them to some kind of inevitable process of kingdom formation. Change in Anglo-Saxon society played itself out in different ways in different regions; it occurred in ways that were neither steady nor revolutionary, but rather sporadic and contingent.

It is worth remembering that for many years it was thought that the Anglo-Saxon settlements available for excavation represented 'failed' settlements which had been abandoned for some reason in the seventh century, and were therefore not overlain by medieval villages (cf. Hawkes, 1986: 85). That may apply in some cases, but the evidence from Mucking and many other sites indicates that settlements periodically shifted location during much of prehistory, and elsewhere in north-west Europe; we should not find it odd to see it here (Hamerow, 1991; 1993: 86). In this case, we are not excavating failed settlements, but rather small fragments of much larger settlement complexes, whose 'missing' phases may well lie a considerable distance away. The model provisionally proposed for West Heslerton, however, as a large, highly organized, indeed 'proto-urban', settlement already in the fifth century, is radically different (Powlesland, 1997). Clearly there can be no single model of an Anglo-Saxon settlement, any more than there is a single kind of Anglo-Saxon cemetery – there is obvious variability and the archaeologists' role is to explain it. The future thus promises much as old paradigms are questioned, modified and overturned.

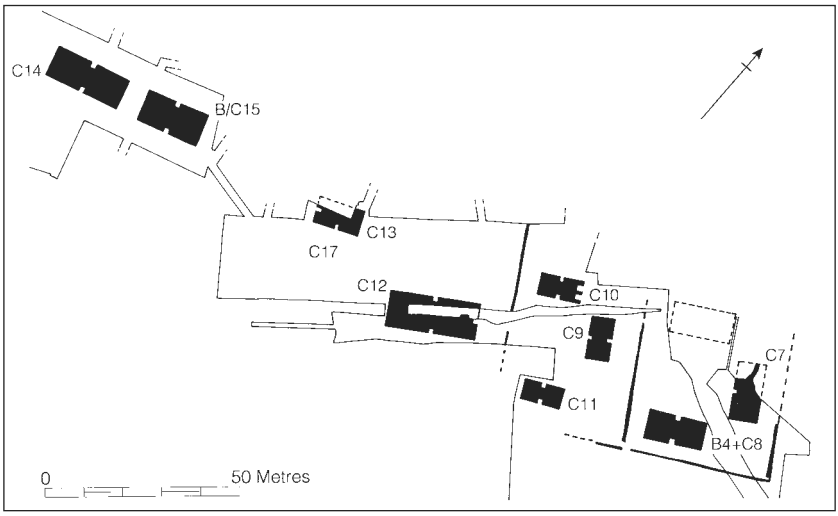

Figure 11.6 Cowdery's Down: Period 4c (after Millett, 1984: Figs. 6 and 31)

Into the Future

In 1974, Keith Wade described Anglo-Saxon settlement archaeology as 'still in its infancy' (1974: 92). By now we might say that it has entered sulky adolescence. So, what might future maturity hold, if we are lucky?

First on any list of desiderata for future work must be a better understanding of what was happening in the period from *c.* AD 400 to 500 – a century as troublesome to the study of settlements as it is to cemeteries. There is no space here to discuss the issues involved in any detail, but the site of Barton Court Farm in Oxfordshire is a good illustration of the kind of dilemma with which we are faced (Miles, 1986). Here, adjacent to a Romano-British villa, one of whose buildings contained a coin hoard deposited in the the first half of the fifth century, SFBs were constructed, probably also in the fifth century, whilst in the sixth century, 'Anglo-Saxon' graves were dug inside the derelict Romano-British buildings. It is difficult to deny that the surviving material culture of the two phases is radically different, despite the absence of any significant chronological gap separating them. Yet the relationship between the occupants of the site's Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon manifestations is anyone's guess and a wholly convincing scenario to explain sites such as Barton Court Farm has yet to be drawn. It is to be hoped, however, that in investigating this tantalisingly elusive period, we will cease to focus upon supposed oppositions between extreme views of mass migration

on the one hand and essential continuity on the other (cf. Lucy, 2000a: 16) – views which few have held for some twenty years. Are there really archaeologists who still envisage mass Germanic invasions of a depopulated Britain, or who believe that people who buried their dead in a style originating on the European mainland were invariably immigrants? I doubt it. Current views seem to lie along a fairly narrow continuum and accept that the roles played by migration and endogenous processes in the formation of what we have come to call early Anglo-Saxon England were highly complex and varied regionally, and that generalising models, while useful, are by themselves inadequate to explain what really happened.

Second on the list is the publication and synthesis of the evidence for the agrarian and non-agrarian economies of early Anglo-Saxon communities. In 1974, Keith Wade observed that 'to date, there is not one adequately published faunal or palaeobotanical report for an Anglo-Saxon settlement' (1974: 91). Even today, only Pam Crabtree's 1990 analysis of the animal bones from West Stow attempts a detailed reconstruction of animal husbandry practices. This is unsurprising, however, as there are still few sizeable faunal or palaeobotanical assemblages from early Anglo-Saxon settlements. Despite the lack of detailed studies, it is clear that the animal husbandry regimes of the fifth and sixth centuries had, in important ways, more in common with those of the Iron Age than those of market-oriented Roman Britain. The emergence of the so-called *emporia* in the seventh and especially eighth centuries, however, had a noticeable impact on animal husbandry practices. The animal bones from these sites indicate that at least some of these trading and craft-centres were provisioned by a system of taxation involving food renders (cf. Bourdillon, 1994) and there is evidence from rural settlements of this period that some farmers moved away from a diverse regime geared essentially towards self-sufficiency, to a more specialised strategy oriented towards an emerging market for meat and wool (for example, at Pennyland: Williams, 1993). We also need to exploit the considerable evidence already available from early Anglo-Saxon settlements for exchange. All communities would periodically have produced surplus livestock and crops. Even settlements within a few kilometres of one another could have had access to quite different natural resources and would have benefitted from exchange with their neighbours, which would of course also have served to foster social relations.

Related to this is a basic problem which remains to be resolved regarding the storage of agricultural produce: where are the barns and granaries in early Anglo-Saxon settlements? Surely not all timber buildings were houses, but how can we distinguish between barns and houses on the basis of the archaeological evidence? The question of storage is of considerable importance: not only was it a means of preserving food, but it also provided the opportunity for some individuals and households to accumulate and monopolise surplus. It is worth noting in this connection that there is

continental evidence, to complement that from West Heslerton, that some SFBs were used for grain storage (for example, hut 8 at Gasselte, in Drenthe: van Zeist and Palfenier-Vegter, 1979: 271).

The scarcity of evidence for non-agrarian production, particularly metalworking, during the fifth to early seventh centuries is also a puzzle that we can look forward to solving (Hamerow, 1999b). The likelihood that most of this evidence lies 'off site', and well away from the main habitation areas, needs to be explored. For example, radiocarbon dates for massive slag heaps in the Rockingham Forest region of Northamptonshire indicate that the same heaps remained in use from the fifth to thirteenth centuries (Foard, 2001).

Finally, is it too much to hope that, some day soon, a waterlogged settlement, or even just a few buildings, might be excavated? The Anglo-Saxon buildings found during the construction of the M3 at Abbots Worthy in the Itchen valley in Hampshire, for example, lay just 30 m north of the valley peat deposits and suggest the possibility of well-preserved waterlogged settlement remains (Fasham and Whinney, 1983). Recovery of surviving Anglo-Saxon ground surfaces, especially associated with timber buildings, would also enable us to do more than merely speculate about their functions and help to fill in those crucial 'spaces' between the buildings, as work at West Heslerton is beginning to show (Powlesland, 1997).

Lastly, some comment needs to be made regarding settlement patterns. It is clear that at least two aspects of this important subject will make considerable advances in the near future: first, certain regions which remained for many years resolutely 'blank' where early Anglo-Saxon settlement was concerned are now bearing fruit; East Kent was one such region, but, thanks to the archaeology revealed by the construction of the Channel Tunnel, we now have at least fragments of several settlements, for example at Whitfield, near Dover, and Manston Road, Ramsgate (Riddler, pers. comm.). Settlements of this period remain under-represented in many regions, but probably not for long. Second, GIS (Geographical Information Systems) should transform our understanding of the development of Anglo-Saxon settlement patterns, and their relationship to preceding and succeeding landscapes. This is an area where significant studies will emerge before long, including, for example, one undertaken in the Vale of Pickering (Powlesland, 1987).

In conclusion, the number of early Anglo-Saxon settlements of which we can confidently say that at least half has been excavated remains small, indeed tiny, in comparison to the number of cemeteries which have been extensively excavated, and which still form the basis of our understanding of early Anglo-Saxon society (Lucy, 2000b). But this is changing. There is reason to hope that in the not-too-distant future we will have published evidence of sufficient quantity and quality to enable us to explore in some detail the relationship between settlements and cemeteries, and to begin to examine settlements as dynamic social arenas rather than passive

agglomerations of 'features'. Recent excavations have embraced current methodological theory, despite the pressures of contract archaeology, and they will have much to teach us.

More than a quarter of a century ago, Keith Wade was of the view 'that large-scale and total excavation was achieving a rather unhealthy monopoly of excavation strategies in British archaeology' (1974: 90). But the large-scale excavations at Mucking and West Heslerton demonstrate that, where Anglo-Saxon settlements are concerned, the significance of the results obtained by excavating one settlement in its entirety, or near entirety, could not be gained by the partial excavation of three or four settlements, which may provide little more than yet more SFBs or timber buildings and a few more dots on a distribution map. The dispersed nature of most early Anglo-Saxon settlements and their lack of clear 'edges' mean that we cannot take the same approach to sampling and excavation as with a Roman villa, an Iron Age farm, or a medieval village. The future of early Anglo-Saxon settlement studies depends upon the continuation of active debate, the construction and deconstruction of models but, above all, on the publication of settlements, including old excavations, to nourish that debate.

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