

BOOK REVIEW

Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes (c.100 BCE-79 CE). By MANTHA ZARMAKOUPI. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. VII + 315. Hardcover, \$160.00. ISBN 978-0-19-967838-9.

The Bay of Naples was a preferred destination for the wealthy elite of Rome, particularly during the late Republican and early Imperial periods. Not only did they sojourn at the opulent thermal springs of Baiae, but also they constructed lavish villas with spectacular vistas and innovative architectural features. Zarmakoupi focuses on how the luxury lifestyle informed upon the architecture of the villas, and vice versa. Her primary case studies are the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, Villa Oplontis A and B at modern-day Torre Annunziata, Villa Arianna A and B at Stabiae, and Villa San Marco also at Stabiae. Although much has been written on Roman villas – in general, this book helps to fill a lacuna in publication on several of these specific villas.¹ In addition it contributes to the study on how particular architectural elements influenced the atmosphere and experience at these sites.

In Zarmakoupi's chapter-by-chapter analysis of luxury architectural components, she questions why certain features were included and how they contributed to the quotidian past-times of the inhabitants. By considering the social dynamics of an elite Roman villa, she explains how certain additions to the basic layout of the house facilitated movement, an appreciation for the natural landscape, and scholarly contemplation. Although usually inspired by components of the urban Greek sphere, she demonstrates how the Romans transformed structures, like the porticus, into original expressions of social interaction that beautifully intermingled with the surrounding landscape and took advantage of Roman technological advancements in concrete and water supply. This research began as part of Zarma-

¹ Some publications on Roman villas include A. Marzano's 2007 *Roman Villas in Central Italy: A Social and Economic History* (Leiden and Boston: Brill); A.G. McKay's 1998 *Houses, Villas, and Palaces in the Roman World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press); J.T. Smith's 1997 *Roman Villas: A Study in Social Structure* (London and New York: Routledge).

koupi's DPhil thesis, which accounts for the presence of some seemingly extraneous information, but clearly it has evolved into a well-researched volume intended primarily for scholarly readers.

Seven chapters constitute the corpus of this book, and there is also one appendix. Chapter 1 provides an introduction, a brief historiography on previous scholarship, and a layout of the scope of the project. Chapter 2 introduces the five case studies mentioned above, including a summary of excavation and phasing on each, and some brief description of relevant and unique features.

The next four chapters provide a discussion of specific architectural elements incorporated into the layout of Roman villas, explaining their origin, physical and social functions, and relationship to the landscape. The case study villas are sometimes mentioned with respect to each architectural feature, but less so than expected. Chapter 3 covers the porticus and cryptoporticus, which evolved from the urban eastern stoa, to the domestic connective space that provided shade for intellectual promenades. Pliny's (*Ep.* 9.36.3) discussion of the cryptoporticus in villas leads Zarmakoupi to deduce that he invented the term (87). She also distinguishes when these features were used strictly as service corridors by evaluating the zebra-stripe patterns found painted in the cryptoporticus of Villa Oplontis A (95). Ultimately, she claims that the stripes served as directional markers (98), but her conclusion is obfuscated by a previous comment that the stripes represented waves that were meant to imitate marble (97). In Chapter 4, the display of wealth in the form of porticoed gardens with exotic plants, water features, and sculptures is addressed. The chapter focuses on the origin of these gardens, along with the landscape paintings within the spaces, rather than on the specific aspects of the gardens.² Water features fed by aqueducts are elaborated on in Chapter 5, illustrating their value as a "stage for sensual encounters in social practice" (141). There is a helpful discussion on ornamental water structures and swimming pools, but fishponds and baths are only briefly mentioned.³ In fact, bathing curiously is addressed only with reference to washing before a banquet in the next chapter (199). Large dining facilities and triclinia, as presented in Chapter 6, were settings to impress important guests, not only through their decoration and design, but also by

² For more on gardens found in villas, see W.M.F. Jashemski's 1993 *The Gardens of Pompeii: Herculaneum and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius* (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas Bros.); and E.B. MacDougall's 1987 *Ancient Roman Villa Gardens* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection).

³ For more on artificial fishponds in Roman villas, see J. Higginbotham's 1997 *Piscinae: Artificial Fishponds in Roman Italy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).

providing ample space for performances, including music, dance, and pantomime. Windows looking out from these rooms allowed for an interaction between the performance and the outside landscape. Chapter 7 summarizes how the four major architectural features described in the preceding chapters both framed household activities, and facilitated interaction with the landscape. Finally, the appendix provides dating of phases and general dimensions of the peristylum-gardens and porticus-gardens found in the five case studies from the Bay of Naples area.

Zarmakoupi's work provides a useful perspective on ways to analyze Roman villas and their architectural features by examining how social interactions would have contributed to the selection and design of architectural elements. Many helpful plans and digital reconstructions are provided to illustrate these concepts. There are also abundant photographs throughout the volume. Unfortunately, what could have been a valuable aspect of this book is, instead, a frustrating distraction. All of the photographs are black-and-white, and the vast majority of them are not clear, often making it virtually impossible to recognize features from her discussion. It is hoped that in future printings, the quality of the images will reflect the excellent quality of the writing. Overall, Zarmakoupi's work sheds light on sites that have seldom been published, and can offer tremendous data on ancient Roman luxury villa lifestyles.

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