

VILLAS, TAXES AND TRADE IN FOURTH CENTURY HISPANIA

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Abstract

Many current models of the Roman economy are predicated on a bleak Late Antiquity, including Hopkins' "taxes and trade" model. These models have yet to reckon with an uptick in economic matrices in the early 4th. This article addresses one piece of this puzzle, namely, expansion of villa construction in Hispania. The article argues that this expansion was tied to increased imperial presence and intensified taxation, and produced a band of social opportunism of which villas are the detritus.

INTRODUCTION

Most recent models for the Roman economy would predict, and are in many cases predicated around, a bleak Late Antiquity.¹ For K. Hopkins's taxes and trade model, the integrated Roman world-system was fragmented by the debasement of silver coinage in the 3rd c.² Debasement led to taxes in kind, which in turn curtailed the free-flow of money, stifled long-distance trade, and fragmented once integrated markets into regional economies. For more current scholarship interested in the problem of Roman growth (the so-called maximalists), the troubles of the 3rd c. were also irrecoverable. The allegedly integrated, largely free markets of the 'High Empire' were destroyed by the 'big state' of Diocletian and Constantine, and high taxes; the high levels of monetisation and credit that encouraged trade and production ended with the various debasements of the Severans. Any economic integration was likewise destroyed by inflation and replaced by fragmented, regional economies, while presumed demographic collapse in the 3rd c. marked the beginning of a long, slow slide that ultimately diminished production.³

¹ Noted also by Ziche (2006).

² Hopkins (1980).

³ See respectively, Hopkins (1980); Lo Cascio (2009); Wilson (2002); Hitchner (2009); Harris (2008); Scheidel (2004).

It may be that for many of those interested in growth—and concomitantly (although tacitly) in evidence for Roman economic rationalism and free-marketism—the big state of Late Antiquity looks unavoidably ‘Finleyan,’ its economy too obviously embedded in socio-politics (and thus neither rational nor ‘free’) to be interesting. Consequently, the recent surge of interest in the Roman economy has almost entirely focused on the Late Republic and Early Empire where growth is thought to be concentrated, while the Late Empire is relegated to a footnote.⁴

One might wonder if Late Antiquity is so peripheral to these studies because it refuses to die as predicted. New archaeological work has produced undisputable evidence for a 4th c. (and in the East, 5th c.) upturn in some of the principal indices for economic growth. Certain export industries expand—Portuguese *garum*, Palestinian wine—while others appear for the first time, like the long-distance trade in cooking pots.⁵ The expansion of the sub-aquatic data into previously under-surveyed areas, like the Adriatic, and the use of dive survey, in addition to wreck data, may indicate that Late Antiquity was a significant period of ship movement.⁶ Field survey data from Greece, Asia Minor and parts of North Africa show an expansion in settlements, numbers that demographers presume to be an echo, however distant, of increased population.⁷

None of this amounts to anything like the scale posited for the 1st c. B.C.–early 2nd c. A.D. data: the seemingly massive quantities of shipwrecks; the alleged pollution spikes registered in the ice-cores; the posited large-scale movement of coins; or the alleged increase in meat consumption.⁸ It is, certainly, regionally specific, but no more so than the Tripolitanian olive or the

⁴ As reflected in the single, summary chapter dedicated to Late Antiquity in the new *Cambridge History of the Ancient Economy*, whose maximalist, new-institutionalist approach is avowedly anti-Finley: Giardina (2008), a chapter which dismisses any broader claims for late antique ‘prosperity’. See also Temin (2001), (2004).

⁵ The best summary of the ceramic-borne evidence is now Reynolds (2010); see specifically: Reynolds (2010) 39–48, 74–75 (*garum*); Panella and Tchernia (1994); Reynolds (2010) 49–52 (wine); Reynolds (2005), 432–36 and the proceedings of the tri-annual *Late Roman Courseware International Conference* (cooking pots).

⁶ Royal (2009); Carrié and Rouselle (1999), 546. Cf. Parker (1992); Wilson (2009). Royal’s (2009) shoreline dive survey of the Albanian coast produced the following data: 8th–7th B.C.: 2 sherds (0 wrecks); 5th B.C.: 17 (2); 4th–3rd B.C.: 26 (4); 2nd B.C.–3rd A.D.: 48 (1); 4th–7th A.D.: 122 (1). Thanks to Jeff Royal for sharing this data.

⁷ Rautman (2004). Greece: Pettegrew (2007); *Asia Minor*: Foss (1995); Vanhaverbeke, Martens, Waelkens and Poblone (2004); *North Africa*: Dietz, Ladjimi Sebaï and Ben Hassen (1995); Leone and Mattingly (2004). On the problematic relationship between survey and demography, see now Fentress (2009); cf. Mattingly (2009).

⁸ On the use of these indicators to measure growth, see Scheidel (2009).

Gallic sigillata industries of the Early Empire.⁹ It does, however, amount to a significant moment of recovery whose explanation is not to be found in the current models. Finally, Hopkins' taxes and trade model itself has been used to argue that none of the factors Hopkins identified as incentives for trade in the High Empire—a functional state bureaucracy, a participating elite, and a largely cash-based tax system—changed fundamentally in the later Empire. Late antique trade, it is therefore argued, cannot have been as depressed as we have assumed.¹⁰

At the same time, 4th–6th c. administration, taxation and monetary policy is looking somewhat different than that presumed by the above models. J. Banaji's work on Late Roman monetary policy posits not simply stabilisation under Constantine, but an expansion, produced by the new gold solidus.¹¹ It is no longer easy to assume that taxes were markedly higher in the Late Empire, as the papyrological data are hotly contested and stability seems more likely than any large increase.¹² Finally, C. Kelly's study of late antique administration has described a fee-for-services based system that transformed the “oily, present-giving world” of the High Empire into a more rationalised bureaucracy based on cash.¹³ The Late Empire increasingly appears as a moment of increased, not decreased, monetisation, albeit of a different kind, while the ‘big state’ seems as much an enabler as a suppresser of economic activity.

Aside from its very existence, the late antique recovery presents other challenges to recent models of the Roman economy. The 4th and 5th c. upturn must be, at least in part, aided by the very ‘big state’—its aggressive monetary policy and its large, efficient taxation bureaucracy—some of the agents that were thought to have killed the ‘Roman miracle’. The most conspicuous consumption, at least in the West, does not take place where it should, in cities, but in highly peripheral rural villas far from cities, in western Hispania, Britain, Pannonia, southern Italy and perhaps the Tripolitanian *limes*.¹⁴ In contradiction to the *sine qua non* of economic rationalism that sees the potential for growth directly tied to low transport

⁹ Cf. Giardina (2008).

¹⁰ Ziche (2006). Wickham (2005) 72–80 concludes much the same, although for different reasons.

¹¹ Banaji (2001).

¹² Bowman (1980); Bagnall (1985); Rathbone (2002); vs. Jones (1959), (1964) 468–69; Wickham (2005) 62–66.

¹³ Kelly (2004), quoting MacMullen (1988) 126.

¹⁴ See Chavarria Arnau (2007); Scott (2000); Mulvin (2002); Sfameni (2006); Mattingly (1995).

costs, that is, tied to the Mediterranean littoral, many regions that seem to exhibit notable expansion in production—central Sicily, the Syrian highlands, Asia Minor, the Egyptian *wadis*—are, in fact, distant from the sea and from nearby markets.¹⁵ Roads are the lifeblood of these regions, roads that ought to, but did not, make production for export an unattractive proposition. In short, the 4th c. in the West and the 4th through early 6th c. in the East are puzzles, puzzles that ought to command the attention of anyone trying to make sense of the Roman economy generally.¹⁶

This article focuses on one piece of this 4th c. puzzle, namely, the massive expansion of villa construction in Hispania during the 4th c. through to the mid 5th c. Construction is often used as a barometer of rural economic vitality, and certain parts of Hispania are the scene of massive villa building, beginning seemingly in the first two decades of the 4th c.¹⁷ The first premise of this paper is that villas are *not* straightforward barometers of economic activity. Rather, they are better understood as signs of intensified social competition between elites. The surge in villas, it is suggested, is tied chronologically and geographically with an increased imperial presence—probably both military and bureaucratic—in the central and western parts of the peninsula, beginning with the Diocletianic reforms. This increased bureaucratic presence was almost certainly with the aim of intensified taxation, taxation which, the paper concludes, was principally levied in coin, not kind, as the recent suggestion of an *annona* route through the region has suggested. The paper further suggests that this greater imperial presence meant increased possibilities for social advancement, and that the villas are thus the detritus of a great band of social opportunism. The incentives of both taxation and social opportunism may have been responsible for other multiplier affects that read in the archaeological record as a modest increase in production: in regionally-marketed terra sigillata and in wine.

This paper thus concludes that a version of Hopkins's taxes and trade model might hold true for certain regions during Late Antiquity, but with considerable modifications to his original precepts. *Contra* Hopkins, it suggests that some indices of economic activity—investment in rural

¹⁵ On transportation costs: Burford (1960) Finely (1999) 126–30; cf. Adams (2007), who demonstrates the complexity of transport which almost always involves both water *and* land.

¹⁶ As noted by Saller (2005).

¹⁷ Wilson (2006), on the impact of construction, generally on the economy; Temin (2006), on urbanisation as a reflection of GDP.

monumental architecture and regionally-focused exports—are not driven by the need to meet tax burdens, but are the direct or indirect products of major status-oriented consumption economies spurred by social competition. While the paper does not deny the vibrancy of market exchange in Late Antiquity, *contra* the new maximalists it emphasises its socio-political embeddedness and the catalytic role of the state.¹⁸

Finally, in contrast to Hopkins, his critics, and the maximalists, it draws attention to a thriving regional economy which, it is argued, was not produced by market fragmentation but rather was deliberately planned and orchestrated from the centre, that is, by the imperial bureaucracy: a very different definition of ‘regionalism’ than previously supposed. In its conclusions, the paper suggests that to underestimate fiscal demand and its piggy-backed status-economies in favour of market exchange is to miss a major moment of economic activity, and thus to simplify Roman economic behaviour past the point of usefulness.

PREVIOUS APPROACHES TO HISPANIA’S LATE ANTIQUE ECONOMY

Unlike most regional economies with claims to distinction—Tunisia, Tripolitania, northern Syria—Hispania’s claims to a prosperous 4th–early 5th c. are not predicated on a large export market, or at least one visible through amphora-born goods. Its *garum* industry, concentrated on the Sado estuary, Lusitanian and Baetican coasts, and more sporadically in Gallaecia, produced for local as well as long-distance export. The long-distance exports were significant for a few cities, such as Beirut and Narbonne, but generally comprised a modest percentage in others and never reached the heights of, for example, the Baetican oil industry that preceded it.¹⁹ Still more restricted was the local wine industry, focused on the Catalan, and to a lesser extent, Andalusian coasts, which was largely producing for a regional consumption.²⁰ Another production-marker of economic activity is the fine ware business: Terra Sigillata Hispanica Tardía, with a possible southern variant (the so-called Terra Sigillata Meridional), plus a series of later ARS imitations, came into production in Late

¹⁸ See also Wickham (2005) 72–80.

¹⁹ Reynolds (2005) 388–94, (2010) 41–48.

²⁰ Reynolds (2005) 395–97, (2010) 52–53.

Antiquity, vying with imported African Red Slip ware.²¹ Again, their circulation is largely regional, or, in the case of Terra Sigillata Meridional, sub-regional, only rarely appearing outside the peninsula.

It is the region's villas, however, which supply the most apparent evidence for late antique prosperity. Hundreds of these villas dot the landscape, ranging from the modestly rich to the truly majestic, but all with some claim to monumental status: defined here as possessing columns, mosaics, baths, apsed architecture or other manifestations of luxury.²² Most late antique monumental villas did not originate in Late Antiquity, but saw their greatest period of expansion, particularly of their monumental quarters, beginning in the first half of the 4th c. The boom seems to fizzle out at most sites in the middle of the 5th c., with some continuation through to the century's end.

Approaches to Hispania's Late Roman economy take three basic paths, corresponding roughly to the nature of the three forms of evidence. A traditional model posited a largely regional economy whose motor was the inward-looking, largely self-sufficient rural villa, whose autarchic economies were dissociated from now defunct urban-rural systems.²³ The second model, advanced by Javier Arce, has argued against any real prosperity, noting the modest scale of the *garum* and ceramics industry and debunking exaggerated readings of the textual sources: Arce has argued for a relatively poor Hispania.²⁴ The most favoured current approach has followed general trends in Spanish archaeology and downplayed any regional peculiarity by emphasising Hispania's shared participation in the broader trends of Mediterranean history: Hispania's economy is no different from any other region and thus, tacitly, all regions experienced something like its 4th c. prosperity.²⁵

Each of these approaches has problems. The notion of an inward-looking villa economy has been roundly disproven by new villa excavations documenting persistent ties with outside markets, principally evident

²¹ Juan Tovar (1997) (TSHT = Terra Sigillata Hispánica Tardía); Orfila Pons (2007) (so-called TSM = Terra Sigillata Meridional); Reynolds (2010) 56–67 (summary and other wares).

²² The old catalogue of Gorges (1979) is now replaced for Late Antiquity by Chavarría Arnau's (2007) excellent volume, with attendant regional and site bibliography. For a summary, see Chavarría Arnau (2005). See also Ripoll López and Arce (2000). The long and disputed bibliography concerning the definition of 'villa' can be accessed through the excellent discussion of Leveau (2002).

²³ Gorges (1979), (1992), echoed in part by Arce (1997b); Keay (1988) 176, 190.

²⁴ Arce (1997b).

²⁵ Ariño Gil and Díaz Martínez (2002); Chavarría Arnau (2007); Fernández (2010).

through Tunisian fine wares and amphorae.²⁶ Arce's idea of Spanish poverty was a welcome correction to over-exuberant textual interpretations, but has become increasingly untenable due to recent archaeological discoveries: the massive 8 ha. palace of Cercadilla outside Cordoba, or the villa of Carranque outside Madrid with its pan-Mediterranean marble collection, possibly from imperial quarries, suggest large fortunes making significant investments in domestic architecture.²⁷ Finally, the notion of Spanish non-particularity runs aground on the villa evidence: a map showing the major concentrations of Late Roman villas finds Hispania with a particularly large share of those villas (fig. 1). Clearly, there is something going on in Hispania that is not shared by, for example, central Italy.²⁸

LATE ROMAN VILLAS IN HISPANIA: CHARACTERISTICS AND PECULIARITIES

Surprisingly, relatively little recent attention has been devoted to what drove the florescence of rural villas in late antique Hispania.²⁹ For some, this is due to the tacit assumption that the Spanish villa boom was not particular to Hispania and all provinces experienced similarly vibrant villa culture.³⁰ Other narratives attribute the rise of villas to the rising prominence of Spanish elites under Theodosius.³¹ A third approach, following the work of Domenico Vera on Italian villas, suggests that the appearance of these 'mega-villas' were produced by a concentration of landholdings in the hands of the prosperous few, the result of which was ever larger, more splendid villas.³²

The first two hypotheses are less than convincing. The empire-wide tally of villas with monumentalising late antique phases shows a clear Spanish peculiarity, while the beginnings of that villa boom, seemingly in the first quarter of the 4th c., precedes by at least a generation the Theodosian dynasty. New work has likewise pointed out that very few 'Spaniards' held

²⁶ Ariño Gil and Díaz Martínez (2002) 71.

²⁷ *Cercadilla*: Hidalgo Prieto and Ventura Villanueva (1994); cf. Arce (1997a), who convincingly argues that the site is probably not an imperial palace, as the excavators propose, but probably a governor's mansion. *Carranque*: Fernández Galliano (2001), to be read again with the above article by Arce (1997a).

²⁸ See also Bowes (2010).

²⁹ An old model which adduced fleeing *curiales* and a 'ruralisation' of Spanish society, is now largely defunct: see Kulikowski (2001).

³⁰ Ariño Gil and Díaz Martínez (2002) 68.

³¹ Fernández Galliano (2001); Chavarría Arnau (2007) 39–49, among several arguments.

³² Chavarría Arnau (2007), cf. Vera (1995).

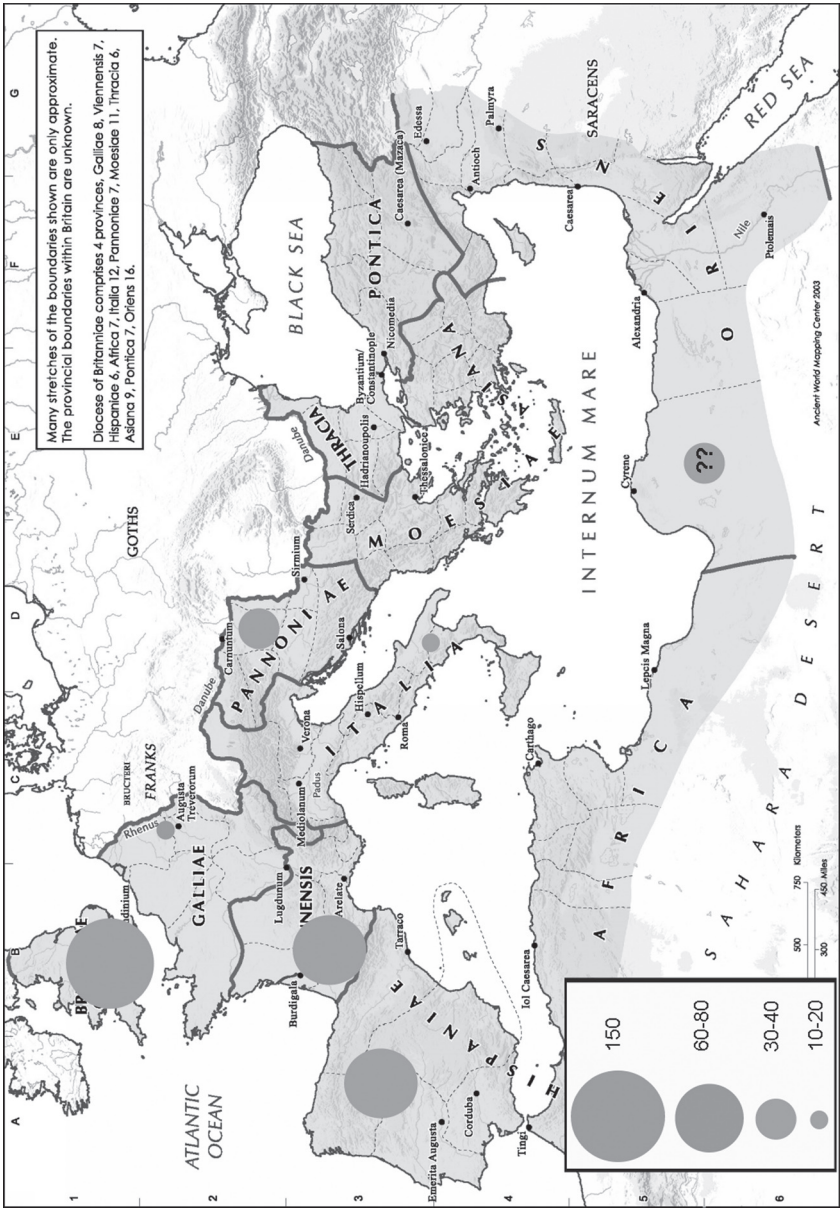


Fig. 1. General map of monumental villa concentrations in the later Roman empire. Bowes (2010) fig. 21.

upper-level positions in the Theodosian court, and even the 'Spanishness' of Theodosius himself, who seems to have spent very little of his life on the peninsula, has been challenged.³³

The validity of the third hypothesis is best examined by looking at the broad characteristics of Hispania's villas. Most notable, particularly to someone accustomed to the late antique 'rustbelts' of central Italy or northern France, is the extraordinary density of these villas.³⁴ Even an impressionistic, non-scientific field survey, like the one carried out around the southern Portuguese town of Serpa, reveals not just one villa in a micro-region, but tens of sites with claims to villa status.³⁵ Equally important is the range of material pretensions they exhibit: from the modest Monroy (Badajoz) villa with its coarse mosaics, masonry and little apses; to the splendour of La Olmeda (Palencia), with its pseudo-towers and magnificent mosaics.³⁶ (figs. 2 and 3). The villas of Hispania are particularly numerous, unusually dense in some areas, and heterogeneous in their relative wealth and splendour. All of these facts point to something other than land-grabs by a narrow band of elites.

The very few field surveys that have examined the settlement patterns around large villas find a persistence, or minor expansion, in various forms of rural settlement (villages in parts of the Meseta, smaller dispersed sites elsewhere) at the time of villa expansion.³⁷ For those who would read the small sites of field survey as the farms of small or medium-farmers, the villas' increasing size does not seem to result in the death of the small proprietor. But this reading is problematic, just as problematic as that which reads these same small sites as the homes of the *coloni* who worked the lands of the great estates.³⁸ Survey cannot reveal land tenure, and the continuity, or increase, of small sites or agglomerated nuclei

³³ Bravo Castañeda (1996), (1997); McLynn (2005), respectively.

³⁴ Micro-regional collections that emphasise this include: *Central Lusitania*: Cerillo Martín de Caceres (1984); Aguilar Saenz and Guichard (1993). *Lower Ebro*: Pita Mercé (1969), (1977); Fernández Galiano (1987). *Gallaecia and North-west Tarraconensis*: Fernández Ochoa, García-Entero and Gil Sendido (2008). Blázquez and Ortega y Frías (1983); Blázquez (1993); Neira and Mañanes (1998); *Northern France*: Van Ossel (1992); Van Ossel and Ouzoulis (2000). *Italy*: Sfameni (2006).

³⁵ Lopes, Carvalho and Gomes (1997).

³⁶ *Monroy*: Cerillo Martín de Caceres (1988). *La Olmeda*: Palol and Cortés (1976); Palol (1986). On socio-economic heterogeneity, see Kulikowski (2004) 133.

³⁷ Alarcão, Étienne and Mayet (1990); Nozal Calvo (1995). See also Fernández (2010) 55–65 a general analysis of settlement patterns in two sub-regions: northern Meseta and Lusitania. See Chavarría Arnau (2007) 61–62 for a list of possible estate 'villages'.

³⁸ On the problem, see Lewit (1991).

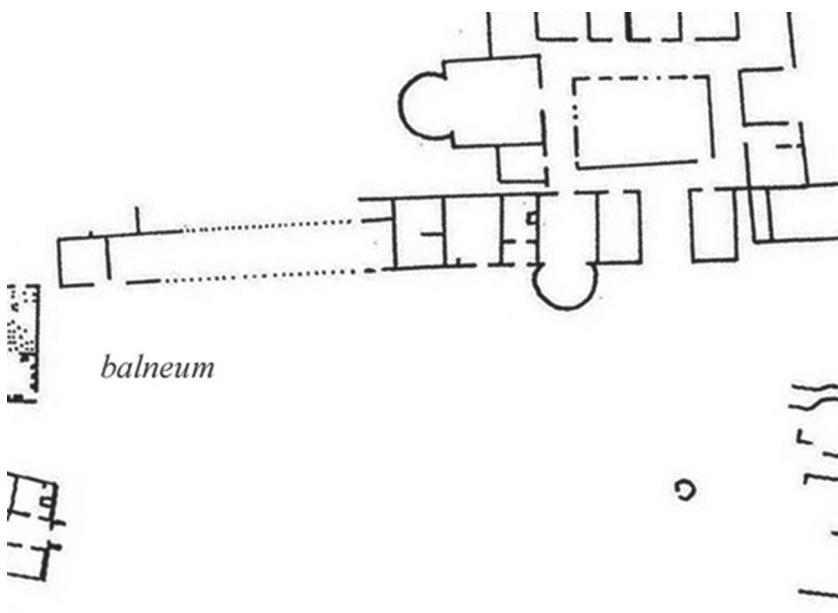


Fig. 2. Monroy villa, plan. Chavarría (2007) fig. 107.

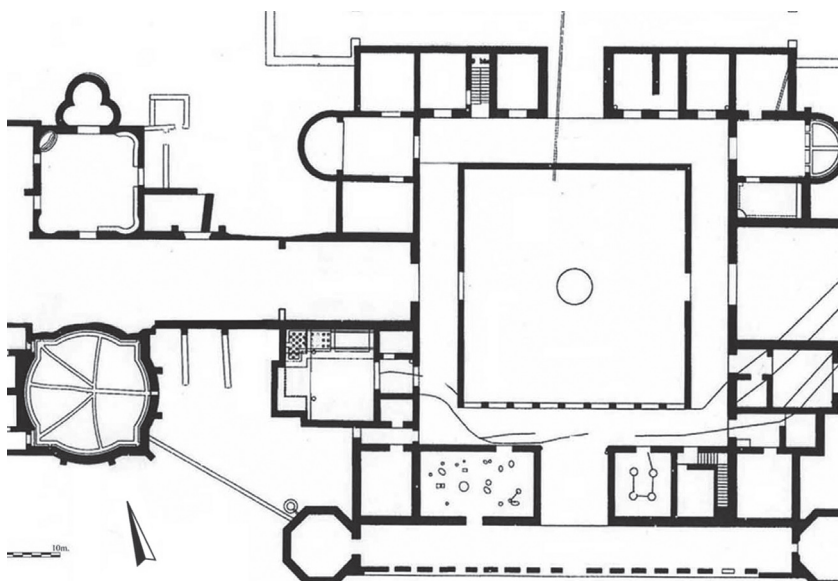


Fig. 3. La Olmeda villa, plan. Chavarría (2007) fig. 69.

does not reveal anything about the way these estates were managed. At most, the evidence points to a general continuity in settlement patterns from the 2nd through 4th c. A.D., which in turn points, tentatively, away from the kind of sudden, large-scale changes in land management posited by the land-concentration hypothesis.³⁹ Likewise, the relationship between the size of an individual's land holding and the size of their actual rural residence is nowhere a direct one, let alone in Hispania.⁴⁰ The evidence for estate sizes in the Roman West is extraordinarily sparse, while any reliable evidence for the change in those estate sizes over time is non-existent. Even the Egyptian papyrological archives reveal no clear increase in the amount of land owned by wealthy individuals; more evident is the large share that elites claimed at all times, rather than any marked change over time.⁴¹

All these factors—high density, wide socio-economic range and generally conservative settlement patterns—speak against the idea that such villas were the product of land-grabs by a narrow elite, and also against the notion that estates around these villas were larger than those in areas without such villas. Rather than changes in the way land was managed, the most impressive evidence is for an increasing investment in monumentalisation. This investment in mosaics, baths, apsed architecture and the like—that is, what we might term a villas' status apparatus—takes place in villas across the wealth spectrum and thus seems to have been embraced by a wide cross-section of elites, a phenomenon in sharp distinction to the largely 'high-end' phenomenon in places like southern Italy.⁴²

It may be that Hispania's particularity is most visible from an architectural perspective, for among the floor plans of its villas one finds not only the entire grammar of late antique forms—the multi-apsed hall, the grand entrance court, the elaborate vestibule—but the use of this grammar in regionally-competitive discourse.⁴³ While the cataloguers of mosaics have been alert to regional and micro-regional stylistic and iconographic

³⁹ For a summary of the evidence in western Hispania, see Fernández (2010), who nonetheless cautiously advocates for an increase in the size of properties.

⁴⁰ Bowes (2010).

⁴¹ Duncan-Jones (1990) 129–42; Bagnall (1993) 310. Cf. Sarris (2004).

⁴² On the Italian evidence, Sfameni (2006) is an excellent guide. On the diversity of elites in Hispania, see now Fernández (2010), who provides more detail on sub-regional elites, and rightly emphasises the relative coherence of all 4th c. elites in comparison with the far more heterogeneous post-Roman period.

⁴³ On forms of late antique domestic architecture, see Sodini (1995), (1997).

patterns, less attention has been paid to regional architectural clusters.⁴⁴ These architectural patterns might be the result of local workshop practice, but as they embrace the planimetry of entire sites, they are equally, if not more likely, to be the product of owners' choice and input. The rigorous symmetrical arrangements of villas of the upper Tajo, like Gárgoles (Guadalajara) or La Torrecilla (Madrid), or the precocious niched octagonal reception spaces in the villas of Soria province, like Santervas del Burgo or Los Quintanares, bespeak not simply shared craftsmen, but an architectural discourse shared among competitive peer groups: a kind of peer-polity interaction.⁴⁵ The much remarked-upon tendency of Spanish elites to 'speak' through their mosaic floors, through inscriptions naming their proprietors and addressing the viewer, would seem to be part of the same phenomenon.⁴⁶

Finally, the late antique boom in villa monumentalisation seems to have a particular geography: just as monumental late antique villas were not *au courant* in every part of the Roman West, within the peninsula itself villa expansion projects were regionally focused. (fig. 4) Monumental villas cluster along the Vía de la Plata in central Lusitania, in the Meseta, in the Ebro Valley, in the upper Tajo and perhaps, as more recent excavations are suggesting, the Guadalquivir. Areas in which monumental villas appear only sporadically include: the Lusitanian and Cantabrian coasts, Valencia, and the coasts of Baetica and Tarraconensis, the latter of which had seen monumental villa construction during the High Empire, but very little in Late Antiquity.⁴⁷

As a decade of excellent work on late antique settlement on the peninsula has made clear, other kinds of rural sites associated with production, but without a monumental apparatus, are more broadly distributed. The early imperial villas of the Catalan coast that were transformed into agro-industrial sites—the small settlements of the Vinalopó Valley in Alicante, the new *garum* factories of the southeast coast—all describe a different economic geography, namely littorals associated with modest production

⁴⁴ The mosaics are catalogued in Guardia Pons (1992), while the regional catalogues of the *Corpus Mosaicos de España*, (e.g. Blázquez and Ortego y Frías (1983); Blázquez (1993)) still incomplete, provide an in-depth look at regional schools over time.

⁴⁵ For plans and bibliography of Gárgoles, La Torrecilla, Santervas del Burgo and Los Quintanares, see Chavarría Arnau (2007) 236, 230–31, 214, 210–14, respectively. For peer-polity interaction, see Refrew and Cherry (1986).

⁴⁶ Blázquez (1992); Gómez Pallarés (1997); Rodà de Lanza (1994).

⁴⁷ Noted by Chavarría Arnau (2005) 522–27, and attributed to different estate size in different parts of the peninsula.



Fig. 4. Location of monumentalised Late Roman villas in Hispania.

for regional and, to a lesser extent, pan-Mediterranean consumption.⁴⁸ These coasts of production look not unlike contemporary littorals in Tunisia and Sicily, not least in that they are largely devoid of monumental houses or other indicators of elite posturing. These two, quite distinct geographies of prosperity are further evidence that rural prosperity and monumentalised villas are not necessarily synonymous: in other words, the elites of the above-listed regions chose, for some reason, to invest their capital in domestic architecture and to use their houses to do important social work. The elites that controlled the production sites of the coast, who may or may not have been the same elites of the inland villa corridor, did not. Villa monumentalisation in Hispania was not simply an

⁴⁸ Chavarría Arnau (1996); Reynolds (1993).

inevitable by-product of rural wealth, but a choice, motivated by local social exigencies.

As study on earlier Roman houses has shown, be they in Pompeii or in rural Britain, houses were the most important tool in a Roman's status apparatus.⁴⁹ Using domestic architecture to frame social encounters, to make sophisticated statements of group membership, and to frame the self in socially advantageous ways, was a quintessential Roman habit, one which did not stop in Late Antiquity.⁵⁰ Thus, rather than the product of a narrow elite or a symptom of general rural prosperity, the diversity of Spanish villas, their relatively tight chronology, and the appearance of micro-regional architectural patterns, all suggest that villa building in the early 4th c. was the product of heterogeneous, competitive elites, who relied on villas to perform the task of competition and self-proclamation.

CONTEXT AND COMPETITION

If the choice to build a villa is locally determined, knowing something about the local context is thus particularly important. If our assumption is that villa building is tied to local elite competition, probably among elites of varying levels of wealth and status, any examination of context must begin with the locus of elite competition, the local cities. As Michael Kulikowski has shown, the cities of Hispania remained the locus of administration, of political life and thus of elite competition throughout the 4th c.⁵¹ Interestingly, the regions that see the densest concentration of monumentalised villas—the Vía de la Plata, the Meseta, and the Ebro Valley—also witnessed the construction of major urban fortification circuits.

New work on these circuits by Carmen Fernández Ochoa and Angel Morillo, which has included a series of stratigraphic excavations, has identified a coherent moment of fortification that included the walls of Astorga, Braga, Lugo, León, Gijón, Tiermes, Iruña, Zaragoza and Gerona.⁵² This moment is now well-dated to the last decades of the 3rd c. to the very beginning of the 4th c., that is, to the age of Diocletian. The circuits at Chaves, Coimbra, Conimbriga, Evora, Cáceres, Coria, Caparra, Inestrillas, Sagunto, Elche, Castulo and Pollentia may also have been constructed in

⁴⁹ Wallace-Hadrill (1994); Hales (2003); Scott (2000).

⁵⁰ Bowes (2010).

⁵¹ Kulikowski (2004).

⁵² Fernández Ochoa and Morillo Cerdán (2002), (2005).

this period, but their dating is less certain. Many of these circuits share profound similarities, such as their plan and tower placement, something that Ian Richmond long-ago labelled the “Legionary Style.”⁵³ That coherence has suggested a common source of planning and possibly of labour, probably to be found in imperial directives and the assistance of imperial troops, here, if we are to believe the *Notitia Dignitatum*, carried out by the Legio VII Gemina, stationed in the region since the time of Vespasian, and the new mobile units of *palatini* and *comitatenses*.⁵⁴

Those cities with fortification circuits are in turn connected by a well-used and, for Late Antiquity, unusually well-maintained road system; running from Córdoba or Sevilla in the south, up through Mérida, then to Braga along the coast, or Astorga via the Vía de la Plata, across the Cantabrian Basin to Chaves, Zaragoza and the Pyrenean passes. The use of these routes is well-documented by Tetrarchic to Theodosian-period milestones, which are particularly dense in Gallaecia near the newly fortified urban centres of Braga, Astorga and Lugo, suggesting consistent maintenance beginning in the late 3rd and continuing through the 4th c.⁵⁵ The unusually high number of Theodosian bronze AE3 coins, both hoards and excavated finds, along the Vía de la Plata, has also suggested an intense use of the southern parts of these routes, at least during the later 4th c., possibly by military troops.⁵⁶ Both the coin and milestone evidence trails off as one moves east through the Ebro and becomes increasingly scarce everywhere beginning in the 5th c.

Also worthy of note are the cities and roads of central Hispania. While cities like Complutum and Toledo did not receive the 3rd–4th c. wall circuits of their fellows further west, they did see moments of significant intramural building: Complutum particularly saw a real, otherwise inexplicable, renaissance in the 4th c. with new baths, a rebuilt civic basilica, fine townhouses and a flourishing *curia*.⁵⁷ Likewise, while the road network connecting Mérida to Toledo and on to Zaragoza did not receive the

⁵³ Richmond (1931).

⁵⁴ *Not. Dign.* [occ.] 42.24–32; 7.118. It has been suggested that these units were phantoms, preserved in a document that was largely antiquarian: Van Berchem (1952) 58, 94, 117–18. Others have suggested they served principally as guardians against brigandage: Arce (1997) 65. More recent arguments have tended to accept the *Notitia Dignitatum*'s testimony, and suggest that the purpose of these units was to guard strategically important routes: García Moreno (2002); Díaz and Menéndez-Bueyes (2005).

⁵⁵ Solana Sainz and Sagredo San Eustaquio (1997).

⁵⁶ Cepeda (2000); García Figuerola (1999).

⁵⁷ Rascón Marqués (1995a), (1999).

same maintenance (as attested by milestones) as the roads of the north-west, this was clearly one of the Peninsula's major route-ways and one that continued to be so during the 4th c. The appearance of a number of coin hoards along the route near Toledo/Complutum attests to their continued importance in the latter part of the century, as do a concentration of late antique and Visigothic sites along its probable path.⁵⁸

The monumentalisation of villas, which began in the early 4th c., that is, during or just after the spate of wall building, roughly parallels these routes and/or their fortified nuclei. (fig. 5) The concentration of baths, mosaics, apsed architecture parallel (at some distance) the Vía de la Plata as it moves from the capital at Mérida, cluster to the south of the route as it leaves Astorga and León and flank the road as it moves east through the Ebro Valley and its tributaries. A probable secondary concentration of major villas tracks the road from Mérida to Zaragoza, via Complutum. The Theodosian AE3 coins that litter the eastern and central parts of this route also find their way into the adjacent villas in large numbers, further attesting to the connection that bound monumental villas with this city/road corridor. As yet, there is no clear evidence for late antique walls at Sevilla or Italica, thus, the smaller cluster of villas along the Guadalquivir may or may not be related to the phenomenon.

AN ANNONA ROUTE FOR THE FAR WEST?

One proposed explanation for the concentration of villas, fortified cities, maintained roads and increased monetisation along these corridors in western and perhaps central Hispania is a heretofore unknown state supply route. Fernández Ochoa and Morillo have connected the spate of fortification building to a military supply route in which the state, through its bureaucratic and military agents stationed in the walled towns, collected tax in kind and transported it up from Mérida, across the Cantabrian basin to ports in Bordeaux and Tarragona, for shipment on to the Rhineland frontier.⁵⁹ A more limited spate of late 3rd to early 4th c. fortification building in Aquitaine at Bordeaux, Bayonne, and Dax and beyond in Perigueux, Poitiers and Saintes, seems to follow this posited route over the

⁵⁸ Fernández Miranda *et al.* (1990); García Moreno (1987).

⁵⁹ See Fernández Ochoa and Morillo Cerdán (2002), (2005). See also Fuentes Domínguez (1996).

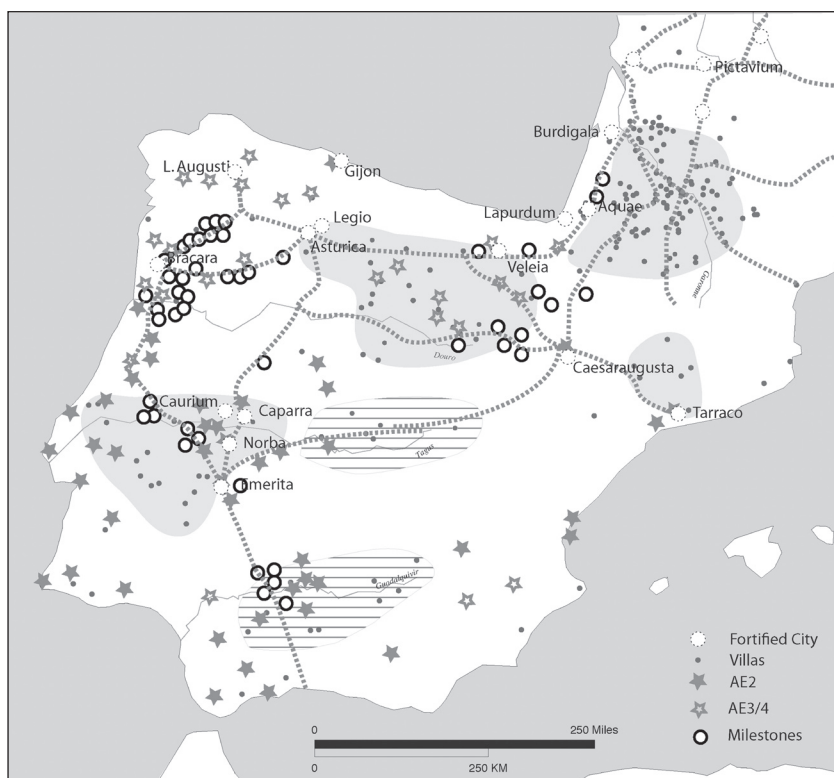


Fig. 5. Location of late 3rd–early 4th c. fortified cities, major roads, Tetrarchic milestones, major Theodosian AE2 and AE3/4 deposits, and monumental villas.

Pyrenees towards the Rhineland-directed routes, supporting the notion of a deliberately fortified, trans-Pyrenean transport system.⁶⁰ While unsupported by fortification data, the diagonal route through the centre, via Complutum to Zaragoza, might also figure in this model (fig. 6).

Certain Diocletianic changes to provincial boundaries could support this hypothesis. The creation of the new provinces of Novempopulaniae in Gaul and Gallaecia in Hispania might be connected to this route.⁶¹ Since most of the other new Diocletianic provinces are associated in some way with supply or defence, it may be that these new provinces, centres of fortification building and in the former case, home to the bulk of the Spanish

⁶⁰ Garmy and Maurin (1996).

⁶¹ On the creation of these provinces and the problem of dating, see Albertini (1923); Kulikowski (2005) 41–42.

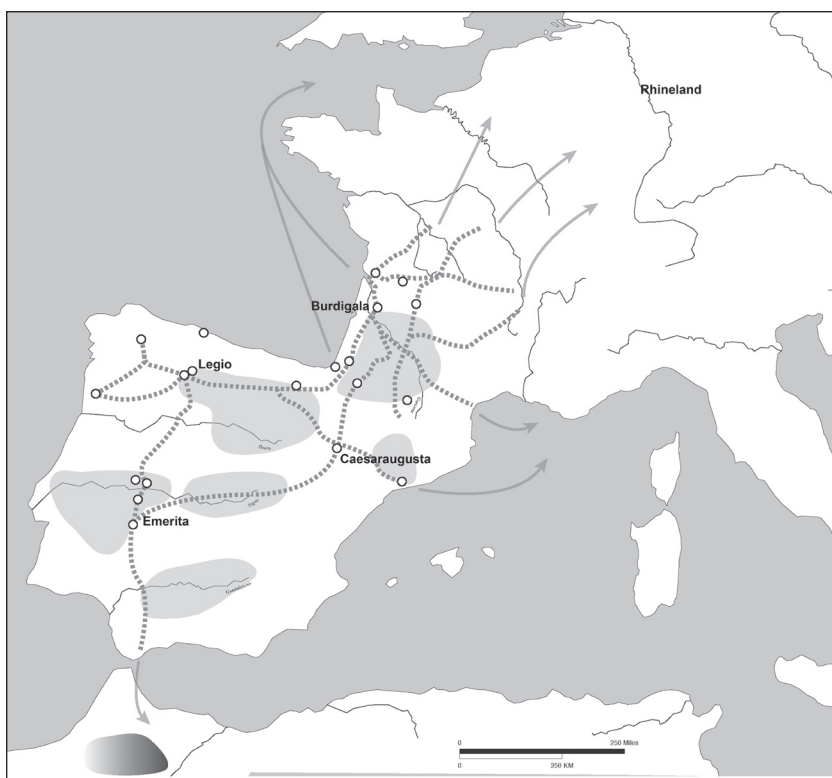


Fig. 6. Schematic showing proposed military supply routes originating in Hispania.

troops, might explained by these regions' pivotal role in a state supply route.⁶² The assignment of Hispania to the Prefecture of the Three Gauls, i.e. to Rhineland supply, might be similarly explained.

Kulikowski has also suggested that the assignment of the new province of Mauritania Tingitania to the Spanish diocese may have been intended to supply the newly redeployed garrisons in that province. In this scenario, peaceful, fertile Baetica and southern Lusitania, anchored by the diocesan capital at Mérida, were oriented southward, serving as hinterlands to an African frontier.⁶³ As yet, there is no evidence of widespread fortification building and road maintenance in the Baetican cities: only Italica and Castulo stand some chance of being late antique in date. The

⁶² Williams (1985) 105–108; Lo Cascio (2005) 179–80.

⁶³ Kulikowski (2004) 72–76.

milestone evidence is more encouraging, with a small concentration of Tetrarchic and Constantinian monuments, and thus presumably maintenance, between Málaga on the coast, Sevilla/Italica and Cordoba.⁶⁴ Likewise, the massive, late 3rd/early 4th c. residence of Cercadilla, just outside the provincial capital at Cordoba, points to a significant administrative presence, probably of the new provincial governor.⁶⁵ Were Kulikowski's hypothesis correct, the smaller group of Baetican monumental villas might be associated with the administrative apparatus directed towards the Mauretanian frontier. Taken together with the northern evidence, the posited supply route might thus have been Janus-faced, the north-west focused towards Gaul and the south-west directed towards Africa, with the two faces joined at the diocesan capital in Mérida, whose central-west location was chosen presumably just for this purpose.⁶⁶

In this model, then, the resources of the farthest western province would have been deliberately mobilised to supply the Rhineland, and possibly North African, *limites*. Two (or three) new provinces would have put bureaucratic feet on the ground in greater numbers, facilitating collection, while a new network of walled cities, connected by well-maintained roads, would have both guarded those supplies from brigandage, the plague of supply lines in even the most pacific of provinces, and stood as markers of imperial presence. The model thus posits the development of a western/central Spanish economic "hotspot" caused by the requisition of goods for military purposes, along the lines that Michael Fulford has posited for southern Britain and other regions in this period.⁶⁷

If we accept this hypothesis, the villas could be interpreted as producing for and thus enriching themselves from, a military supply line. Aside from the villas' particular geography and chronology, both of which point to a general connection with the posited Diocletianic route, more specific evidence suggests a correlation. A number of villas, such as Liédena (Navarra), Arellano/Las Musas (Navarra) or São Cucufate (Beja), located near the proposed route or its tributaries, have large, contemporaneous granaries, storage for the most likely item of *annona* taxation.⁶⁸ Other Spanish villas, a more modest number, including again Liédena, El Val

⁶⁴ Solana Sáinz and Sagredo San Eustaquio (1997).

⁶⁵ See Arce (1997).

⁶⁶ On the odd choice of Mérida as diocesan capital, see Kulikowski (2004) 75.

⁶⁷ Fulford (1996), (2007).

⁶⁸ Taracena Aguirre (1949), (1950); Mezquíriz Irujo (2003); Alarcão, Étienne and Mayet (1990), respectively.

(Madrid) or Torre de Palma (Alto Alentejo), have reasonably well-documented horse stabling facilities.⁶⁹ Spain was still famous for its horses in Late Antiquity, and while Symmachus ordered steeds for circus-racing, more practical breeds would appear on any list of likely Spanish products for military use.⁷⁰ Another possible supply item, textiles, is harder to track: a Theodosian Code rescript directed to the *praeses* of Baetica, stated that the overdue taxes of that region might be paid in gold, silver, or textiles (*ob vestium auri argentique*).⁷¹ Distinguishing large-scale textile production from household production is difficult.⁷² However, excavators claim to have identified textile storage facilities in some villas, such as Rabaçal (Coimbra) and Monroy (Badajoz), while in others, faunal studies yielded higher-than-usual sheep bone counts, possible evidence of market-oriented wool production.⁷³

Finally, there is a tenuous connection between the Gaellecan and northern Meseta villas and the possible renewal of mining in these regions.⁷⁴ Mining is thought to have collapsed in Hispania by the early 3rd c. for reasons that remain obscure and ill-explained.⁷⁵ The settlement and cemetery associated with the silver mines at Rios Tintos were abandoned by 180 A.D. (allegedly because of the Mauri incursions) and the spike in atmospheric lead pollution detected in Greenland ice cores, much of which is thought to derive from the silver/lead mining of south-west Spain, likewise subsides.⁷⁶ In the gold mines of the north-west, the military *castrum* associated with the mines near León were abandoned in the 2nd c., while inscriptions associated with the Duerna Valley installations, surveyed by Barri Jones, stop by the early 3rd c.⁷⁷ Edmonson has suggested that mine administration was privatised from the later 2nd c., leading to lowered output but a possible continuity of extraction. Indeed, in the case

⁶⁹ Rascón Marqués (1995b), Rascón Marqués and Méndez Madariaga (1997); Maloney and Hale (1996). See also Quirós Castillo and Vigil-Escalera Guirado (2006) 93.

⁷⁰ Arce (1982) was sceptical of the textual accounts of horse-rearing in Hispania. See now Darder Lissón and Ripoll (1989).

⁷¹ *Cod. Theod.* 11.9.2. Another letter describes horses and textiles as payment: *Cod. Theod.* 11.9.1.

⁷² For the problems, see Carrié (2004). For one attempt to locate large-scale textile production in an urban context, see Wilson (1990).

⁷³ The Spanish evidence is collected in Fernández (2010) 132–33, 184.

⁷⁴ Thanks to Dave Mattingly and Bruce Hitchner for encouraging further investigation on this possibility.

⁷⁵ Domergue (1990) 221–23, 351; Edmondson (1989).

⁷⁶ Jones (1980); Hong *et al.* (1994); Rosman *et al.* (1997).

⁷⁷ On the abandonment of *Aquis Querquernis*: Pérez Losada (2002) 180–99; on the *Duerna Valley*: Jones and Bird (1973); Jones (1976).

of the north-west gold mines, there is little stratified archaeological evidence from the mines themselves to confirm the presumed abandonment, and a certain amount of circumstantial evidence suggesting continuity.

Some, albeit limited, material evidence points to such continuity, such as the hoard at Balboa del Bierzo that indicates continued extraction in that region, or the settlement at Las Marchanas seemingly involved in mining, and supervised by the military.⁷⁸ Second, the short-lived predecessor to the province of Gallaecia, *Hispania Nova Citerior Antoniniana*, founded by Caracalla, may have been organized in recognition of the region's mineralogical importance and the concomitant concentration of troops that guarded that resource: the later Diocletianic Gallaecia would logically have served the same function.⁷⁹ Likewise, the unusual road maintenance in this region through the High Empire is often put down to mining activity: the continued maintenance of those same roads in Late Antiquity might be due to the same reasons.⁸⁰ Finally, the continued presence of the legions in northern Spain has puzzled generations of scholars who have been unable to explain their presence in the absence of a genuine frontier or any military threat of note.⁸¹ Through the 3rd c. one of the principal duties of those troops had been guarding mineral extraction, a duty that may well have continued in the 4th c.

If gold mining continued in the north-west, its form and administration doubtless changed. Edmonson suggested that in face of increasing costs, the state turned control over mining activities to local landowners.⁸² The re-emergence of smaller-scale extraction activities would not leave the same ecological or archaeological footprint as the large, state-run enterprises and indeed, the villas of Gallaecia and the Meseta may have replaced the *castra* as the monumental expression of control over mineral resources.

Ultimately, however, at least at this stage of inquiry, the *annona* route theory fails to convince. The most glaring problem is the absence of any evidence, textual or archaeological, for an actual product moving out of Hispania to points along the Rhineland frontier or Mauritania Tingitana. If the product were grain or horses, it would be invisible to us. Similarly,

⁷⁸ García Figuerola (1996); Edmondson (1989) 91, respectively.

⁷⁹ Fuentes Domínguez (1996) 214.

⁸⁰ Blázquez (1978) 242–47. Cf. Edmonson (1987) 47; and Arce (1997) 123, rightly notes that the continuity of road maintenance alone is unconvincing evidence.

⁸¹ For a summary of the evidence, see Díaz and Menéndez Bueyes (2005).

⁸² Edmonson (1989).

the chronology of the gold mines remains circumstantial. The only products we can readily track, namely amphora-born wine, oil or fish-sauce, appear only in low numbers in Gallic sites associated with military supply (Lyon, Vienne).⁸³ Furthermore, if the Rhineland was the destination, why does the villa and fortification pattern not continue past Aquitaine? Why does the Rhone valley, a major Rhineland supply route, not see similar fortification and villa clusters?⁸⁴ Indeed, the small cities of *Novempopulaniae*, seemingly central to the route as it passed over the Pyrenees, are not seemingly fortified until the early 5th c.⁸⁵ We lack, in short, a smoking gun: a clear, non-circumstantial piece of evidence for a major supply route.

Another major objection to the theory lies in its implications for the levying of tax. The supply route theory presupposes tax levied principally in kind, that is, in materiel, and a super-structure of transport and security built to facilitate its collection and transport. Much, although not all, recent scholarship rejects a shift to tax in kind during Late Antiquity, at least not on an empire-wide scale, and instead assumes a continued reliance on coin, with the possibility of local flexibility.⁸⁶ The evidence for how tax was levied in Hispania is limited to those Theodosian Code rescripts directed to Baetica—an area admittedly largely outside the proposed supply-zone—indicating that gold, silver, horses or cloth were all possible mediums of payment.⁸⁷ This limited evidence suggests that coin continued to be one of, if not the predominant medium of taxation in the region. Secondary indicators from the archaeology support this: the countryside of late antique Hispania, particularly in the north-west and centre, was monetised as never before, particularly around small-scale exchange, probably around the myriad other multipliers that took place around taxation—transport, rents, retail purchases etc.—as well through the local soldiery expending their pay.⁸⁸ All this is not to deny that horses, cloth, grain or other supplies were probably being moved out of the

⁸³ See now Reynolds (2010) 18 (table 6b). The rise in Spanish goods in the 4th c. may be a result of urban civic, not military, supply: Reynolds (2010) 33.

⁸⁴ Indeed, the numbers of Spanish amphorae at La Ramière villa on the Rhone is low throughout the 4th c: Reynolds (2010) table 7. Thanks to Simon Loseby for raising this issue.

⁸⁵ Garmy and Maurin (1996).

⁸⁶ Banaji (2001); Carrié (1999) 589–91; Ziche (2006) 269–71. Cf. Lo Cascio (2005) 175 for a restatement of the earlier arguments.

⁸⁷ *Cod. Theod.* 11.9.1–2 (A.D. 323, 337).

⁸⁸ See García Figuerola (1999); Alarcão, Étienne and Mayet (1990) 228–31.

province from the west and centre. Rather, it is to suggest that the notion of a purpose-built *annona* route designed to move in-kind taxation from Hispania the great distances to the Rhineland, lacks both compelling evidence on the ground, and is contradicted by the region's most likely taxation strategies that continued to be levied in cash.

VILLAS BEYOND PRODUCTION: THE EXPLOITATION OF BUREAUCRATIC OPPORTUNITY

While a physical supply route may be untenable, the evidence for imperial attention—walled cities, maintained route ways, legionary presence, and monetisation—on these corridors in the west, north-west and centre is still compelling. Rather than the movement of goods along a kind of pipeline, this evidence can also be read simply as an intensification of governing intent. In the absence of revolts or other unrest (something the region notably lacked) that intent must have been revenue-driven, that is, the focus on the centre, west and northern part of the peninsula must have been aimed towards improved, intensified tax collection levied mostly in cash. That is, the evidence points towards an effort to intensify control and thus taxation of the west and centre through improved communication, and an increased bureaucratic and military presence.

Such increased bureaucratic/taxation attention could have had a variety of implications. Scholars have disagreed over the consequences of taxation for production, with some (including Hopkins) seeing taxation as an incentive toward surplus production, and thus increasing economic activity, with others (notably Jones) arguing that taxes depressed production.⁸⁹ As discussed above, the countryside surrounding these corridors of intensified bureaucratic presence seem to have been vibrant just at the moment these imperial attentions descended on the peninsula, with a seeming florescence of villas, smaller sites and in some areas, agglomerated settlements. As we noted, however, a paucity of systematic field survey forces us to rely principally on the evidence from major sites, mostly villas and some villages, and thus that 'vibrancy' can be only generally sensed, not quantified. As a working hypothesis, however, it seems on balance that bureaucratic presence, and thus potentially more intensive taxation, was invigorating, rather than depressive to these regions' economies.

⁸⁹ Jones (1959).

But bureaucracy's economic effects were not limited to the impact (positive or negative) of taxation on agricultural production, but were at least as critical to the elite's socio-economic strategies.⁹⁰ As Chris Kelly and others have emphasised, the socio-economic possibilities of the new, bigger imperial bureaucracy were both legion and critical, as access to the court via the bureaucracy become the only mode of social advancement.⁹¹ By the Tetrarchic period, fortifications were not purely, or even primarily for defence; they were potent ideological statements, constituting the principal definition of 'city,' and proclaiming the power and watchful eye of the state.⁹² The fortified cities of Hispania, particularly the provincial capitals at Braga and Zaragoza and the diocesan capital at Mérida (possibly fortified in the later part of the century, although the chronology remains unclear), would have been home to an eclectic collection of elites. This would have included military officers, the *officiales* associated with provincial and diocesan administration and finally the curial *ordo*, whom Michael Kulikowski has demonstrated continued, possibly undiminished, in these cities.⁹³ The cities of the centre remained unfortified, and thus evidence for imperial investment, and thus administrative and military presence here, is therefore less clear. Complutum, as far as we know, was not an administrative centre, and thus why it should have experienced such a marked early 4th c. urban renaissance is unknown; the vibrancy of its local government is not to be doubted, however, as emphasised by the proud basilica inscription.

Along the axes defined by the fortified cities, good roads and army presence, the state's representatives—be they local *curiales*, increasingly folded within the state apparatus, or the diocesan bureaucracy—now lay thick on the ground, and with them, access, however second-hand, to the advancement and honours of the distant court.⁹⁴ Likewise, the presence of the Legio VII Gemina, and the increasingly city-billeted *comitatenses* in the north-western cities held out the possibility of military contracts and advancement through the military echelons. The traditional urban magistracies, as Lepelley has shown for North Africa, continued to constitute the first rung of the *cursus* towards senatorial status, and thus remained

⁹⁰ As discussed by Purcell (2005); Wickham (2005) *passim*.

⁹¹ Kelly (2004); Heather (1998).

⁹² Wilkes (2005).

⁹³ On the administrative staff of late antique governors: see Palme (1999). For Hispania, see Kulikowski (2004) 71–72, 82–84.

⁹⁴ In general: Kelly (2004); Carrié (2005) 280. For the impact on Hispania: Kulikowski (2005) 40–41.

minor powers in their own right.⁹⁵ In short, the areas in which monumental villas were thickest on the ground were those regions in which the possibilities for social advancement were also particularly thick. Focused imperial attention would have subtly, but critically, changed the socio-political character of these regions by concentrating in their cities a diverse, competitive mixture of elites.

In the Roman world, the locus of social advancement was the city and this was no less true for Hispania. But central, western, and north-western Hispania—those places where bureaucratic attention was focused—had a particularly thin urban network. Here the newly fortified cities were few and far between, separated by long miles of under-urbanised countryside. In the absence of a dense network of cities, like that, for instance, of the North African provinces, I would suggest that competitive social manoeuvring also took place in the countryside. The land itself was an increasing object of bureaucratic attention and thus, very probably, bureaucratic presence. The development of the *iugum* as a unit of tax, and the notion of *origo* to attach tax responsibility to specific pieces of land, placed rural land at the centre of political-economic theory, while the development of agents like the *praepositus pagi*, as yet unattested in Spain but present in other western provinces, may have been those theories made flesh, in the form of a rurally-based official charged with verifying the fairness of the tax levy.⁹⁶

In short, under the Diocletianic and Constantinian reforms, the countryside came into sharper focus, both as an object of the bureaucratic gaze and a category of socio-economic importance. In regions where bureaucratic presence was high and cities were few, the countryside, I would then suggest, might also be a place where honours might be won and social competition, previously the purview of cities, might be acted out.⁹⁷ It is no accident, I would argue, that the famous Theodosian *missorum*, showing a grateful subject receiving his codicils of office from the emperor, came from such a rural context: a villa deep in the Lusitanian heartland.⁹⁸

It is thus likely that the monumental villas of central and western Hispania were built to exploit the social and economic opportunities presented by a concentrated bureaucratic presence. As sites of social manoeuvring and elite self-definition, they were active agents of social

⁹⁵ Lepelly (1979–81).

⁹⁶ *Origo*: Grey (2007). *Praepositus pagi*: Giardina and Grelle (1983); Carrié (2005) 297.

⁹⁷ See also Bowes (2010).

⁹⁸ Almagro Gorbea *et al.* (2000).

competition. As evidenced from the material evidence, they performed that all-important function through a sophisticated visual and spatial culture whose purpose was competitive discourse with neighbouring peer-villas. The broad socio-economic range along which this competition took place, as evidenced by the widely divergent size and material splendour of these villas, suggests a broad range of elites, from first-generation *curiales* to senatorial grandees, energised by these opportunities. Finally, the temporal and geographic correspondence between areas thick with villas and areas thick with bureaucratic and/or a military presence, suggests that the monumentalisation boom in western Hispania might well be tied to the state's heightened attention on precisely this area, beginning with the Diocletianic reforms and the social opportunities it spawned.

This physical investment in social opportunism itself may have produced multiplier affects, some of which would have been significant. As suggested above, some, but not all, of these villas were probably engaged in large-scale surplus production—of grain and possibly horses or textiles—possibly for long-distant export, as well as more modest wine, oil and other staples needed to supply themselves and their micro-regions. The production and distribution maps for Late Roman fine wares (Terra Sigillata Hispánica Tardía and painted wares) overlap remarkably with those of monumental villas, and undoubtedly developed to meet the demands of those villa-rich regions.⁹⁹ The same may be true for the local wine industry: concentrated in part on the coasts and in part in the villa-rich Ebro Valley, most of the 4th c. wine installations lack accompanying evidence for export amphora production, pointing to regional consumption. In central Spain, small painted table amphorae may have been used to ship wine to regional and micro-regional markets.¹⁰⁰ Baetican wine, bottled in flat-bottomed amphorae, was also exported around the peninsula, as well as in small quantities abroad.¹⁰¹ While not as tightly focused on the villa-belts as the fine wares, the mild resurgence of regional wine manufacture in central and southern Spain may also be villa-driven.

CONCLUSIONS: TAXES, TRADE AND BEYOND

Recent economic histories, including that of Hopkins, have tended to read monumental villas as straightforward economic indicators: of land-tenure

⁹⁹ Reynolds (2005) 404–406, 407–408 (maps 5, 6, 8, 9).

¹⁰⁰ Reynolds (2005) fig. 11 (form 24).

¹⁰¹ Reynolds (2005) 395–400.

or labour arrangements, of production for export, of rural demographics, or of tax-collection units.¹⁰² The model posited above suggests that if we want to use monumental villas as economic evidence, we need to understand them first and foremost as the Romans would have: as sites of competitive social manoeuvring between peers. As economic indicators, then, monumental villas are not necessarily reliable barometers of property relationships or production outputs—although they undoubtedly were engaged in landholding and production—but much better guides to otherwise undetectable moments of social opportunism. In the Late Empire, most social opportunism can be traced, at various stages, to the state. Villas thus might be used as sensitive barometers of bureaucratic presence—civilian or military—particularly in under-urbanised parts of the empire like Hispania.¹⁰³

According to Hopkins, the demands of taxation required the production of surpluses that were then sold on more or less open markets for coin. Local economic activity was thus characterised by intensified cultivation and production, and market-style exchange around surplus. The archaeology of Hispania and the revised reading of its villas, however, adds another factor. The field survey evidence from the peninsula tentatively points to intensified cultivation and production that coincides with the monumental construction in villas, but as or more important were the economies of consumption that took place around social competition, spurred by the social possibilities of taxation itself. In Hopkins' model the state's demand for tax catalyses a set of market relationships (i.e. exchange of surplus for cash) that are the primary movers of economic activity. The vast investment in houses to do important social work, and the multiplier industries that circled around those investments, suggest that, in late antique Hispania at any rate, it was the social possibilities of state presence that yielded significant economic outputs. That is, *pace* Hopkins, perhaps the most significant economic impacts of taxation were not necessarily increased production or monetisation, but the development of a status economy predicated on the social possibilities presented by the state and its taxation bureaucracy. This should not be taken to suggest that these state-catalysed, status-focused economies represented a shift to demand or other kinds of 'primitive' non-market economies. State demand, through taxation, forms a significant percentage of GDP in modern market economies, and no one who has ever visited New York

¹⁰² See Vera (1992), (1995); Wickham (2005); Carandini (1985), (1989); Fentress (2009); Durlat (1990), respectively.

¹⁰³ Cf. Fulford (1996).

or Washington would ever suppose that consumption for the purposes of social competition does not constitute a major economic engine in those same markets.

Finally, the evidence from Hispania suggests a thriving regional economy, but one originating from the centre. The dissolution of the integrated Roman market system by the upheavals of the 3rd c. is usually thought to lie behind the increasingly regional character of late antique prosperity. While the precise nature of what we mean by late antique 'regionalism' is rarely discussed, it is generally assumed to imply a fragmentation of the allegedly uniform prices, economic activity, or trade of the High Empire, which then produced very different economic histories in individual areas.¹⁰⁴ The lesson of Hispania is that what appears to be 'regionalism', that is regional or even sub-regional economic activity, may be owed ultimately to imperial intervention, and thus the product not of fragmentation, but planned regionally-specific investment.¹⁰⁵

Given the likelihood that the infrastructure and bureaucratic investment in Hispania coincides with the Diocletianic reforms, and given that those reforms may have even included a new province (Gallaecia) designed to promote efficient governance and taxation in the north-west of the peninsula, it is not too far-fetched to assume that, in effect, Diocletian and his planners deliberately set out to harness the resources of these regions and invested in them preferentially.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, much of what might be counted as indices of economic vitality here—the villas, the possible increase in rural settlement, and above all their piggybacked industries of wine and ceramics—are secondary effects of this investment. That is, they are a product of both status economies and the market economies that grew up around those status economies. 'Regionalism' in this case is both state-catalysed and home-grown, and is thus akin to the world-system of combined fiscal investment and market activity posited by Wickham, and thus far more complex than the current models, predicated on largely market-based integration, might suggest.¹⁰⁷

In sum, if the size, numbers and wealth of its villas comprise the principal evidence for economic activity in 4th through early 5th c. Hispania,

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Duncan-Jones (1990) 30–58, who claimed, *contra* Hopkins, that regionalism had characterised the Roman economy from the beginning.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Carrié and Rouselle (1999) 591; Fulford (1996).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Wickham (2005) 77, who assumes that the civil bureaucracy was evenly spread throughout the empire.

¹⁰⁷ Wickham (2005) 72–79.

and if those villas are a response to and exploitation of an increased bureaucratic presence, the nature of Hispania's economy is a far more complex animal than simple market economies would indicate. The model described here would trace Hispania's positive economic indices to a fiscal engine, but one whose power lay not simply in monetised exchange, but in social opportunity, wherein began a cycle that resulted in large-scale consumption and secondary-product production, both of which were monetised and market-based. This is then not only a more complex view of Hopkins' taxes and trade model, but also a rather different model than that espoused by the new maximalists, for whom socially-embedded, state-stimulated consumption is usually a side-show to the real action (i.e. free-market trade).

In large part this difference stems from different evidence, read differently: an economy reconstructed through villas read as instruments of social competition necessarily yields a more socially-embedded vision of rural economics than one reconstructed through shipwrecks, technology and field survey data read as raw economic indicators. Hopefully, however, the current essay will have also suggested that the current models for Roman growth, which eschew both massive state intervention and the resultant social-embeddedness of production as potential positives, are one-sided. Similarly, it points beyond late antique 'regionalism' as fragmentation or isolation, to instead a product of deliberate geo-politics originating at the centre.

As R. Saller has noted, a widespread misunderstanding of Finley's so-called ancient economic 'primitivism' has resulted in a rejection of his most powerful ideas, not least a subtle understanding of the tight-knit relationships between large-scale production and export, and Roman social structure and imperial power.¹⁰⁸ What is needed now is a way beyond a potentially facile emphasis on growth and its free-market baggage, towards a more complex understanding of the intersection of state, elites and production, and how these might have operated to positive affect in the world after the 'Roman miracle' had finished.

¹⁰⁸ Saller (2005).

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