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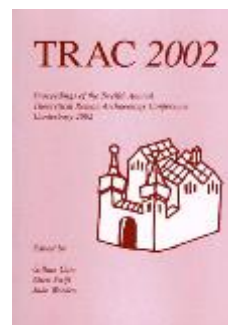
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Author: Chris Martins

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Becoming Consumers: looking beyond wealth as an explanation for villa variability

Chris Martins

Introduction

It is no longer unusual to find the word consumer in the title of papers on Roman Britain (e.g. Ferris 1995; Cooper 1996; Matthews 1997). The conduct known as conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1925) has become in recent years the dominant paradigm for explaining villa construction and aggrandizement. A consumer revolution is the context offered by Woolf (1998) for the widespread appropriation of Roman material culture to shape personal identities in Gaul. In a recent TRAC paper Fincham (2002: 34) argues that the concept of Romanization may essentially be understood as consumer behaviour.

This paper, drawn from continuing research, discusses evidence from seemingly high-status sites in the East of England using insights that arise from current consumer theory. The focus is on villa amenities or 'improvements' (wall plaster, mosaics, hypocausts, bath-houses etc.), asking in particular why the repertoire of such facilities varies so much in space and time. Whilst this approach might be labelled anachronistic and western-centric, it at least replaces a traditional economics-led understanding of the house-wealth relationship with those arguments drawn from anthropology, psychology and sociology that now inform consumption studies. These ideas are offered in order to open up the interpretation of villas to wider discussion. Because the paper is intended to cover much ground, shortcuts are being made. Consequently, methodological concerns arising from imprecise site definition, inexact chronology, incomplete excavation, inadequate reporting and inadvertent bias are acknowledged, but not examined (see Smith 1997: 9–12). The study concludes by asking whether the meaning of villas can be re-appraised in terms of personal and not just social identities.

Previous explanations for villa aggrandizement

Only recently has consumption behaviour been acknowledged as significant to villa development. This may reflect the negative overtones of the verb 'to consume' ('use up', 'waste', 'destroy' etc.), and a British disposition to disparage consumption in favour of production (Campbell 1994). Post-war archaeologists were possibly influenced by high-profile studies that denigrated society excesses (e.g. Galbraith 1962; Packard 1965; Nader 1973; Schumacher 1973). The enculturation model known as Romanization is commonly used to explain the villa ideal, with the owners typically perceived as civilised, mannered, gentlemanly or cultured (see Haverfield 1915: 37; Collingwood 1924: 64; Collingwood and Myres 1937: 210). It is an argument that endures (Ellis 2000: 191). For much of the last century there may have been unconscious identification with a British ruling class whose country house status was under threat from the *nouveaux riches* (Mordaunt Crook 1999; Strong 1996). The broad issue of affluence (or wealth, prosperity, ability to pay etc.) is raised (e.g. Richmond 1963: 110; Collingwood and Richmond 1969: 133, 146; Percival 1976: 95; Frere 1987: 298; de la

Bédoyère 1993: 80; Salway 1993: 411) and is used to explain different house standards (e.g. de la Bédoyère 1991: 121; Potter and Johns 1992: 88). This is underpinned by the reductionist neoclassical economic model of demand (see Himmelweit et al. 2001) which places emphasis simply on what things cost and the stereotypical person's rational concern to maximise utility (see critique of utility theory by Douglas and Isherwood 1979: 15–24). The approach is disparaged for its focus on functional use values, for assuming that needs are innate rather than socially constructed and because it ignores behavioural variables (see below). Villa amenities have also been seen as desirable comforts (e.g. Richmond 1969: 145; Branigan 1991: 96; Alcock 1996: 68) or even dinner party “conversation pieces” (Wacher 1978: 251).

Media references from the mid-1980s to conspicuous consumption (the ‘Yuppies’; Donald Trump, etc.) provide a background to the popularity of the Veblen (1925) model as the orthodoxy for understanding villa construction and elaboration. This hypothesis is widely adopted to explain the strategies of the native elites to retain prestige and power after the Conquest through the adoption of Roman architecture, amenities and art, and later to demonstrate a social distance from an imitative class of newer villa owners (e.g. Millett 1990; Perring 2002). Elsewhere, the phrase is used specifically or euphemistically by Hingley (1989), Jones and Mattingly (1990), Millett (1992), de la Bédoyère (1993, 1999), Potter and Johns (1992), Dark and Dark (1997), Scott (1997, 2000), Smith (1997) and Ellis (2000). Characteristic language suggests that villas were “designed to impress” (Potter 1997: 32), “overawe visitors and social inferiors” (Millett 1995: 72), and to “keep up with, or surpass the Julii next door” (Wacher 2000: 51). However, some question whether wealth and prestige necessarily were displayed through the medium of villas (e.g. Reece 1988; Hingley 1989).

Challenging the conspicuous consumption model

Thorstein Veblen proposes that there is an instinctive competitive drive towards ‘pecuniary emulation’ (1925: chapter two). The accumulation of property becomes the “independent and definitive basis of esteem” (ibid. 29); the “possession of wealth confers honour” (ibid. 26); and those above seek to outspend those below, who are driven by envy. Criticised as bitterly prejudiced and merely satirical (Clarke 1986: 3), Veblen’s focus on late nineteenth century America is regarded as too historically specific (Edgell 2001). His arguments are also labelled vague, untestable, uncertain about motives, unclear as to how the reaction of intended audiences of ostentatious display could be judged and improbable for making no allowance for the possible influence of other personal merits like intelligence or courage (Campbell 1995a). Highlighted by Mason (1981) are considerations of group psychology and structures of status and he distinguishes between conspicuous display which is “horizontally-directed” within a reference group and that (Veblenesque) consumption which is “vertically-directed” behaviour between such classes. Whilst personality is influenced by society, Mason (1981: 27) argues that it is possible for individual drives, needs and traits also to shape consumption decisions. Some might eschew self-esteem in favour of community-mindedness, opt for privacy not social aggrandizement, decide to reject wealth display or adopt imitative (i.e. within peer group) rather than emulative (i.e. between peer group) conduct.

Introducing consumer behaviour theory

In a way that is not fully explicit, archaeologists already use language and concepts derived from modern consumer behaviour theory to interpret villas. Recent references illustrate the risks involved in deploying an everyday consumerist vocabulary with apparently straightforward meanings.

Faulkner (2000: 132) describes late third century “sophisticates” expressing affluence, power and status through Roman-style architecture and art in line with the “prevailing fashion” and contributing to a “villa building craze” (ibid. 142). Decisions made by villa owners in respect of household decoration would be evaluated by members of their peer-group “at a local, provincial or empire-wide level” (Scott 2000: 169). Even geometric mosaics were evidence of “emulation amongst local elites” (ibid. 170). Ellis (2000: 9) acknowledges the likely effect of individual expression in house design and décor. He suggests that manifestations of wealth went beyond “conspicuous consumption” to the pursuit of influence (ibid. 182); but Roman amenities could be “simply attractive” and not acquired only as a device to secure political gain (ibid. 191). The period between the late second and early fourth centuries saw a “small and comparatively secure elite, competing with itself” (Perring 2002: 220). The fashion for *luxuria* “was driven by the need to search out new means of displaying status in order to retain a distinction between superior behaviour and the imitative aspirations of inferior classes” (ibid. 215). To Perring, villa architecture symbolised surplus, mastery and power (ibid. 43, 215).

Such arguments over-simplify the topic of consumption, the wider evolution of which is traced by Campbell (1991; 1995b), and for which overviews may be found in Bocock (1993), Corrigan (1997), Goodwin et al. (1997), Storey (1999) and Dant (1999). The potential for such theories to offer a challenging view of villa development will now be illustrated by presenting insights drawn mainly from a genre of consumer behaviour manuals, which combine academic insights with micro consumption studies.

The Romanists quoted above have not examined how or why the elites learned to consume. This behavioural change is understood today (Antonides and van Raaij 1998) as an outcome of new habit-structuring experiences, forms of classical conditioning and role modelling. Consumption is now seen (Solomon 2002) as contributing to personal concept and not just as a component of social identity. Through symbolic interactions with others in society, shared meanings arise which encourage people to consume in ways consistent with self concept, whether self-expressively (reflecting their unique individual qualities) or to symbolise their social relationships (Dittmar 1992: 89). But there can be ‘actual’, ‘ideal’, ‘social’, ‘ideal social’, ‘expected’ or indeed ‘multiple’ self-images (Schiffman and Kanuk 2000: 113, 118). A philosophical requirement is to distinguish human needs from wants (Sheth et al. 1999); the latter are influenced by wealth, reference groups and cultural context. Want-driven items deliver social and emotional benefits, are termed value-expressive and include status goals, pleasures and self-esteem. A question is how villas acquired their value-expressive (i.e. non-utilitarian) function reflecting the feelings, attitudes and aspirations of their owners? When discussing post-Conquest Britain it may be significant (especially because villas are so different from what came before) that consumption as self-definition can be particularly useful for those experiencing a new situation or role or who need symbolic possessions to round off their identity. This is known as symbolic self-completion theory (Solomon 2002: 136).

When explaining what motivates people to acquire, consumer behaviourists (e.g. Sheth et al. 1999) acknowledge the continuing universality and general validity of the model of human needs devised in the 1950s by psychologist Abraham Maslow, whilst allowing for variations in culture, individual and historical context. The five-stage hierarchy climbs from physiological and security concerns and the need for belongingness to the fourth level where esteem matters most and is sought through prestige, self-respect, status, and recognition. The highest level of need, for self-actualisation, acknowledges the importance of aesthetic and intellectual ideals. Among the consumption motives identified by psychoanalyst Ernest Dichter (Sheth et al. 1999: 350) are mastery over environment, status, individuality and social acceptance. The psychogenic needs recognised by psychologist Henry Murray (Sheth et al. 1999: 349) include dominance (to direct others) exhibition (to impress) and cognizance (to gain knowledge). People's values also shape their behavioural decisions and to be considered is whether a person is inner- or outer-directed, the former typically more independent, the latter more concerned with the social approval of others (*ibid.* 371). The relevance of personality traits to consumption is discussed below. Environment-Behaviour studies (Lang 2000: 86) take such human needs models into account when interpreting architectural function and Romanists may benefit from this more textured choice of motives to explain the housing spectrum than simply the discourse centred largely on power (e.g. Millett 1990; Perring 2002). Generally there is consistency (Solomon 2002) between things people own/desire and their personal values (self-image congruence theory: *ibid.* 137) and in these terms the repertoire of amenities introduced on villas may be understood as a 'consumption constellation' (*ibid.* 176). The symbolic meanings of the respective facilities relate to each other and display 'product complementarity'. To be explained in villa studies therefore, are those cases where the anticipated groupings of amenities do not occur. The so-called 'halo effect' (Antonides and van Raaij 1998) is the perception that material wealth implies other positive characteristics for the person concerned, such as intelligence, power or success. Some aspects of consumption can be understood as hedonic (Sheth et al. 1999), providing sensory pleasures. These include bathing, sport, giving and receiving gifts or art appreciation. People also desire the experiences of novelty and variety, possibly at increasing levels, with this now recognised as a necessary inner drive to stimulate the central nervous system in the brain (Zaltmann and Wallendorf 1983).

Archaeologists can do more to deconstruct the idea of status. It can be classified as 'ascribed', if an outcome of birth; 'achieved', if earned; or 'desired', if an aspiration (Rice 1993: 261). Measuring this social standing can be complicated by the phenomenon of incomplete 'status crystallization' – inconsistent or unequal achievement of class criteria in any society (Solomon 2002: 396). Further complexities arise from generational change within a family, gender implications, the underlying subjectivity inherent in status positioning, the possible substitution of status symbols over time and knowing how intended audiences will react to them. If the consumer is already a member of the in-group whose approval is sought there is less dependence on stereotypical possessions to achieve this. Acquisitions that may be interpreted as publicly conspicuous – through their visibility in society, newness, luxury, or other status embellishing qualities – are the most likely to be influenced strongly by reference group comparison (Schiffman and Kanuk 2000). Weaknesses in the conspicuous consumption model as a guide to status have been discussed (above). There can be a life cycle for status symbols (Solomon 1999) with some obsolescent, others outmoded, some in passage, a few reviving and others avoided altogether or mocked through parody. Status is only one of eight types of value which consumers seek, alongside the experiences of efficiency, excellence, play, aesthetics, ethics, esteem and spirituality (Holbrook 1999). Social comparison theory may

further inform archaeological interpretation by examining the relevance of particular reference groups to whom villa-owners may be responding. These are defined (Engel et al. 1995: 717) as primary (the family), comparative (neighbours), aspirational (those whose values there is a wish to emulate), as well as formal (an acknowledged network) and informal (friends). According to Wilkie (1994), the social power of the group over individual members of an elite can also be questioned, whether it derives from authority (recognised roles), knowledge (accepted expertise), identification (guided by others), pressure (actual or perceived coercion) or advantage (rewards for fitting in).

Ultimately people consume within a personal strategy of impression management (Leary 1996). Most aspects of behaviour (e.g. expressed attitudes, appearance, consumption) can be directed towards securing favourable inferences from others. This implies that the individual will live within a state of 'dramaturgical awareness' within a physical environment that contributes 'sets', 'props' and 'moods' to this process (Goffman 1959). Successful impression management strategies include the acquisition and manipulation of resources to create a sense of prestige and the use of appropriate symbols to display status (Tedeschi and Norman 1985: 307). Motives which encourage such self-presentation are perceived rewards like raised self-esteem, greater social influence, added power in relationships or enhanced social appeal. Self-presentation can also focus on the inner audience (Greenwald and Breckler 1985: 126), for self-enhancing purposes. People who are high 'self-monitors', paying special attention to the impressions they create, display the greatest self-awareness in public and are more susceptible to reference group pressures (Sabini 1995: 215). Mark Leary, a specialist in the study of self-presentation, believes impression management was as common in the ancient world as today (pers. comm.).

Consumption and the Roman villa

A suitably modernist introduction to this discussion will demonstrate how 'expensive' villas were. A subjective classification for such expenditure has been offered by Rivet (1969: 211) and more scientifically by Faulkner (2000: 71, 138) using the expertise of quantity surveyor Jack Newman. Faulkner-Newman accept the gross simplifications involved, among them chronological and stratigraphical uncertainties, variable building techniques and presumptions about 'costs'. Their estimates (a sample of 78 sites, at 1994 prices) suggest that villas 'cost' from under £100,000 to over £300,000, figures presented as 'construction unit values' to reflect the possibility that surplus labour was the likely resource (this could mean tenants but for a discussion of the presence of slaves on villas, see Samson 1999). Besides, the use of manpower is, itself, ostentatious consumption because workers had to be supplied, housed, fed, managed and instructed. Newman's method was to allocate a value to an average room, corridor, mosaic, hypocaust or bath-house, and compute the total 'expense' by each chronological phase. Utilising resources on this scale was arguably not needs-driven or logical-functionalist behaviour, but instead, discretionary, self-indulgent, irrational and psychologically motivated. But can this be demonstrated?

Case studies

Case-studies follow in which consumer theories help demonstrate how behaviour towards material culture in the Roman world may be better understood. These focus specifically on

aspects of domestic architecture but similar approaches to personal possessions may be possible.

(a) *Cinnabar and the 'snob' and 'Veblen' effects*

In this example, the accepted correlation between interior decoration and status on villas is shown, using a consumption hypothesis, to afford scope for more detailed interpretation. Wall painting is acknowledged as a relatively costly but quite widespread expression of prestige in Britain (Davey and Ling 1982: 46). Although a typology recognises a panelling effect, architectural features or figurative work (Ling 1985) the interpretation of social motives is difficult, in contrast to Pompeii where more work has been possible (e.g. Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 1994, but see Tybout 2001). Because evidence is fragmentary, inferences about status typically are drawn from the size, shape and probable purpose of the room, the polychromy, intended symbolism, technical merit and the relative novelty or fashionability of the particular decoration.

The use of cinnabar (mercuric sulphide, the ancient *minium*) may cut across such considerations. Morgan (1992) highlights its scarcity value both in Britain and Italy. Mercury was mined only in southern Spain, refined in Rome and then imported to this country. Classical sources attest to the association between the pigment and personal standing; its special significance being attested by Vitruvius (*On Architecture* 7) and by the Elder Pliny (*Natural History*, 35) who identifies cinnabar as one of the brilliant colours (*floridi*) which the patron supplies at his own expense to the painter, as opposed to naturally occurring pigments. A price ceiling was set in Italy for cinnabar (Ling 1991: 209) and in Pompeii it is found only in the finest rooms in the most affluent homes (Ling and Ling 2000: 58) and in similarly prestigious settings in Rome (Rozenburg 1997). Morgan identified cinnabar in 27 out of 70 locations, among them Fishbourne Palace and half-a-dozen villas, most considered relatively luxurious (Bignor, Kingscote, Leicester (Norfolk Street), and Piddington). The use of cinnabar in Britain would be imbued with Imperial prestige, confirming an elite identification with the power and culture of Rome in much the same way that was the case with marble (Isserlin 1998). Special influence was perhaps required to obtain the material.

Consumer theory offers a more nuanced analysis. Cinnabar was coveted because it was expensive, though piecemeal finds make it impossible to know how much was used. Morgan shows that a square metre of fresco painting required 40g of the refined material, or eight sesterces at prices quoted by Pliny (33, 40). There were also the costs of procuring and importing cinnabar and the recommended protective waxing and oiling to stop it turning black. Two consumption motivations may be inferred (Leibenstein 1950), the so-called 'snob effect', a wish to be exclusive (demand would decline if others used the pigment) and the 'Veblen effect', where the requirement was that cinnabar was both costly, and its conspicuous price was also high. This is not just what others presume was paid, but what the property owner thinks that others imagine that it cost. A contrast may be drawn with Leibenstein's 'bandwagon effect' or acquisition merely to be fashionable, to belong, and which might characterise the widespread use of commonplace pigments.

A curiosity is the discovery of cinnabar in the small aisled villa of Empingham (Cooper 2000: 129). In a building without a mosaic perhaps its use was intended to impress influential people from nearby Great Casterton (Nick Cooper pers. comm.), but consumer theory suggests a more specific explanation. The newly rich, or those attempting to represent themselves as

such (as opposed to families with long standing wealth), may consume in a conspicuous way out of 'status anxiety', to be seen to do the correct emblematic thing (Solomon 2002: 403). Such symbolic self-completion recognises flamboyant display as the means to acquire an identity in an unaccustomed role though the acquisition of the right symbols. The Empingham example challenges the presumption that only large villas represent wealth or prestige.

(b) House styles as a 'bridge' to a 'golden past'?

The idea that possessions can be an inventive medium for the creation of new symbolic meanings in society offers a theoretical approach to the explanation of anomalous building practices. Two housing forms in the East Midlands are exceptions to the generalisation that Iron Age timber round houses in civilian areas were succeeded by rectangular timber 'protovillas' and in turn stone-built, increasingly 'developed' houses. The model is noted by Rivet (1964: 106–7) and in this study at Piddington (Friendship-Taylor 1997: 49).

One is a tradition of stone-walled circular structures which emerged and continued notably in Northamptonshire, between the mid-second and fourth centuries AD (Keevill and Booth 1997). Various functional and social explanations are offered for the 'tenacious cultural trait' (ibid. 42) of round buildings. Most are accepted as having domestic uses and are often associated with high-status sites, though being less aggrandized (with exceptions) they are considered of relatively lower social importance than rectangular villas. The other example is the lasting preference in parts of Leicestershire and Lincolnshire for the rectangular aisled timber building. This style appeared as a partial successor to wooden round houses and by the late third and fourth centuries became a 'hybrid' household which featured 'Roman' improvements, whilst retaining indigenous practice in respect of the division of internal space (Taylor 2001).

The consumer behaviour concept of 'displaced meaning' (McCracken 1990) offers an insight. His hypothesis, which can apply equally to nations, communities, cultures or individuals, is that a distance exists in life between experienced (unsatisfactory) reality and an imagined (desired) ideal. The discrepancy is resolved by 'meaning manipulation', the appropriation of possessions to serve as an illusory 'bridge' to a different place or time. This would be a golden age (a notion which McCracken shows was used in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) that can be either long gone or to come. The object becomes a symbolic but solid access point to the displaced perfect ideal and a substitute in the mind for unattractive reality. Contemporary examples quoted by McCracken (ibid. 110–11) are the 'rose-covered cottage' in this country as redolent of someone's perfect future, and the 'log cabin' as being evocative in America of a virtuous past.

Arguably, constructing round houses in stone enabled people to protect beliefs associated with a 'golden' (pre-Conquest) tradition, whilst for appearances they adopted a new building resource. Similarly, those opting for aisled buildings could retain their affection for a time-honoured construction in timber whilst adopting (outwardly) Roman embellishments and facades, for example at Denton (Smith 1964). Further support for this hypothesis may be evident at Winterton, where Stead (1976: 88) remarks on the 'curiously primitive' decision to use post-holes for the structural support of two aisled houses with the hitherto usual practice of using stone foundations 'deliberately discarded'. In these examples the housing form made palpable and also evoked an idealised synthesis of past experiences, continuing beliefs and projected hopes. There is a classical clue to the possibility that Roman society could be

susceptible to such “rosy”, self-justifying nostalgia. It arises from the attention drawn by late Republican historians seeking to eulogise the origins of Rome to the putative wooden hut of Romulus on the Palatine Hill (Wiseman 1994: 104). This reminds us that Romans were aware of, and manipulated, their pasts too. Perhaps the British examples drew upon a knowledge of this Roman context.

(c) Ancestral meanings and Roman villas

Material culture can convey status in ways which are not always overt, and the deterministic correlation between periods of economic prosperity and house aggrandizement noted by some Romanists (e.g. de la Bédoyère 1999) can be challenged. Many have not examined the implications of villa longevity and the possibility that, with the passage of time, buildings came to mean different things to later generations. Many villas evolved, albeit in phases, over a period of centuries, through a dozen generations. Often there was no apparent development for decades. A simple house-wealth interpretation (e.g. Faulkner 2000: 71) relates periods of such apparent stability to economic stagnation with bursts of upgrading viewed as resurgent conspicuous consumption.

To demonstrate how status symbolism need not necessarily reside in the obvious, McCracken (1990) cites the so-called patina system of consumption which operated in the medieval and Elizabethan periods. Class legitimacy was founded on what constituted an invisible code evoked by evidence of the wear and tear of possessions over time. Such indications of age communicated genuine prestige, old wealth and honour. The basis was a ‘five generation rule’ (ibid. 38), the period necessary to achieve authenticity through gentility. The ‘cult of family status’ (ibid. 137) linked lineage past, present and to come, and depended on patina to convey nobility. Although there are dangers in applying cross-cultural generalisations, it is possible that reverential emotions were attached to villas built generations earlier. One consequence may have been to imbue a particular family or kin-group with added social standing, another to equate prestige with the ancestry of the building and its originality, or lack of change. Equally, a particular wall decoration, mosaic, bath-suite or hypocaust might acquire iconic significance because it was old, serving as a direct connection with a founding generation. The importance attached to household ancestry (see Bodel 1997) is suggested by the villa mausoleum at Bancroft (Zeepvat 1994). The excavators were convinced that its location related to its connection with ancestors as the site had been continuously occupied from the late Bronze Age to the late Iron Age, after which it was used for a cremation cemetery until the mausoleum (considered a ‘status symbol’) was built (Bob Zeepvat pers. comm.). Furthermore, at Stanwick a hypocaust was constructed using re-cycled funerary sculpture conveying mythological scenes, and assuming the re-used stone was local this suggests there may have been monuments of greater prestige than the villa itself (Vicky Crosby pers. comm.). Such deliberate veneration of the past seems to have been the case at the House of the Menander in Pompeii (Roger Ling pers. comm.), where wall decorations date from the Second and Fourth Styles, a century apart. Also from Pompeii are examples of the patching of a revered mosaic, re-plastering which copied an earlier style, the re-cycling of pieces of esteemed decoration, and the revival of dated designs in unexpected settings (Ling 1993: 18).

These are situations where an awareness of consumer theory helps to avoid simple generalisations. A decision not to build/alter/decorate may itself be an issue of consumption and status.

(d) Consuming the view

Domestic architecture can be appreciated as offering scope for status display, but consumption decisions may embrace wider landscape values. Considerations which influenced villa location probably included proximity to or distance from other settlements, access to water including spring lines, topography and soil type, micro-climate, site ancestry and cosmological beliefs (Perring 2002). Additionally there may have been a desire for physical prominence, whether to view or be viewed, or both. The decision to appropriate the vantage point perhaps imbued such settings with added social significance by confirming the ability of owners to use wealth and influence to command attention and respect.

A possible further advantage is that it was well-attested behaviour in Roman Italy, and could remind observers of the proprietor's awareness of elite values close to Rome. Written sources highlight the importance attached to a panorama: see, for example, Pliny the Elder (*Natural History*, 4. 30); Cicero (*Ep.* 2. 3. 2. and 3. 1. 2); and Horace (*Ep.* 1. 16. 1), and whilst allowing for possible literary licence (Bergman 1995) also Pliny the Younger's description of the prospect from his Laurentine (*Ep.* 2. 17) and Tuscan (*Ep.* 5. 6) villas. Zanker (1998: 17) suggests that the new fashion for a villa lifestyle from the mid-second century B. C. embraced the view to identify with Hellenistic ideals of nature. Purcell (1987) understands this preoccupation with the view as an expression of dominance over nature, the owners' mastery of landscape, and control of resources.

It is difficult without literary evidence to confirm the importance of such psychological experiences of landscape in Britain. Certainly there were villas which, taking the opinion of excavators, were conspicuously sited with dominant views. Examples are Brantingham (Dent 1989); Dalton-on-Tees (Brown 1999); Scampton, near Lincoln (SMR records); Wharram Grange (Rahtz et al. 1986) and Mansfield Woodhouse (Rooke 1787). Equally, there were exceptions, for example Gargrave (Brian Hartley pers. comm.). Although further research is required because many factors are relevant, there are indications (subject to tree lines) that consumption directed towards a villa could be focused to extra effect if intended audiences could admire the setting from afar. Four possibilities arise, which could overlap. There is conspicuous siting to be visible generally, perhaps to dispersed non-elite homesteads. Second, an attractive location might be near a road, to win the approval of travellers, for example Brantingham (Dent 1989) overlooking the Brough to York road, or Drayton II, built in precise alignment with the Gartree Road (Cooper et al 1989). Similarly a riverside location might appeal, for example at Piercebridge (Harding 1984) or Stanton Low (Woodfield 1989). Another variant is to be within view of a nucleated settlement, for example the site of Greetwell near Lincoln (SMR records) or Norfolk Street villa near Leicester (Mellor 1981). There is also positioning to be noticed by villa owners of equal, higher or lower status. Nether Heyford (Stephen Young pers. comm.) could arguably be seen from three other villas (Nether Heyford II and Harpole I and II), the small town of Bannaventa and from Watling Street. Jeremy Taylor (pers. comm.) highlights a 'theatre of social display' featuring at least four intervisible villa sites overlooking a stretch of the middle Nene Valley near Irchester. The facades of the villas at Wollaston, Wollaston Quarry, Great Doddington and Earls Barton were structured so as to face each other, look down on two valley roads, and be viewed from below across a status-enhancing landscape of crops and vineyards.

(e) Consumer 'fashions' in wall decoration

Cultural meaning in the consumption and use of possessions is never fixed; a trajectory over time can be explored. Archaeologists often cite the modern construct of 'fashion' to describe/explain changes in style on Roman villas. Examples include references to changing colours of clothes (Liversidge 1973: 128); popular wall decorations (Alcock 1996: 70); the status bestowed through the adoption of Roman ways (Smith 1997: 279); conformity in villa typology (Wacher 2000: 51); and decisions to build in stone (Perring 2002: 37). Typically fashion is taken as a given cultural phenomenon rather than a complex expression of consumption.

Solomon (2002: 503) summarises the behavioural science perspectives involved. Fashion can be defined variously as a process affecting the social diffusion of cultural styles, as a shared code of symbolic meanings within society, or as a design currently in vogue. At one level it is an outcome of personal decisions- at the other, a reflection of societal values. Explanations for fashion change owe to individual psychology (e.g. drives to comply, be different, seek novelty), an economic rationale determined by availability and price (e.g. the Veblen, 'snob' and 'bandwagon' effects: above), or a sociological model influenced by the motive of social comparison (e.g. status symbols as the determinant of class). Stages within a fashion life cycle are broadly innovation – acceptance – obsolescence, but there can be short-term whims adopted by a few or long-lived trends taken up by many.

A study of clothes and jewellery in the ancient world (De Brohun 2001) concludes that society was distinctly fashion-conscious, with evidence of fads, rapid change and conscious innovation as well as notions of correct and 'power' dressing. As evidence, she quotes the criticisms of individuality in grooming by conformist moralists like Cicero and Seneca, the Elder Pliny reacting to crazes in perfumes, and Ovid describing rapidly changing hairstyles.

Whilst agendas for managing personal appearance in Rome and choosing wall plaster in Britain need have no meaningful relationship, there are cases where changes in interior decoration – which otherwise can survive for hundreds of years (Roger Ling pers. comm.) – need explaining. Overpainting is relatively easy, and typically a previous pattern is 'pecked' to ensure bonding. Davey and Ling (1982: 29) cite references to two such layers in Verulamium, three presumed within the second century in the Catterick *mansio*, four in a decade in the London *forum*, five during an 80-year period in the Lancaster fort bath-house, and six during the fourth century in the *praetorium* at Binchester fort. Villas illustrate a similar propensity for change. Examples are Castle Dykes (Lukis 1875) where three layers relate to a room within a bath-suite; Leicester (Norfolk Street) where plaster featuring two layers was found in the cellar (Mellor 1982); and also Harpham (Collier 1906), Redlands Farm (Edward Biddulph pers. comm.) and Winterton (Liversidge 1976). Possibly the fragmentary evidence of wall plaster might mislead: were these sections repairs?

Because evidence for such redecoration is relatively uncommon (although plaster remains are easily destroyed) it may be that of the three models for fashion change (above), those relating to wider economic and societal issues are least plausible. Instead, the decision may owe to individual values, alternative motives for which are identified below. A further explanation may be 'divestment ritual' (McCracken 1990: 87), action intended to obliterate associations with former householders. Earlier meaningful connections are expunged and re-constituted with new owners.

(f) Villa variability as consumer behaviour

Possessions are understood by consumer behaviourists as expressive of personality and as material symbols of personal identity. Only rarely is attention drawn in Roman housing studies to the possibility of decision-making at the level of the individual or a particular family (e.g. Wachter 2000: 51; Ellis 2000: 112) but this presumption is offered descriptively, not theoretically. Examples show it is not unusual to find apparent inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies in the consumption constellation displayed on villas, and consumer behaviour may offer an explanation. The simple villa at Carsington featured a central room, hypocaust, possible mosaic, probable bath-house and window glass, but no wall plaster (Ling and Courtney 1981: 73). At Winterton (Stead 1976: 86, 91), six cold baths were found, but not a heated one, and no rooms with mosaics had a hypocaust. Brixworth villa featured a bath house which was probably never utilised (Woods 1970: 4). Despite having hypocaust heating, wall plaster and an apsidal end, the main dining/reception room at Piercebridge villa featured only a flagstone, not mosaic, floor even though a contemporary bath suite had a mosaic (Harding 1984: 12). In contrast, at Dalton Parlours, the probable high status apsidal wing, featuring a Medusa mosaic and wall plaster, had no hypocaust (Wrathmell and Nicholson 1990 and Stuart Wrathmell (pers.comm.)). Easton Maudit villa (Charmian Woodfield pers. comm.) uniquely incorporated two round 'wings'. The exterior of Piddington villa was strikingly decorated (Bidwell 1996) and is not matched elsewhere in the Province. There were more hypocausts (at least six: Nick Cooper pers. comm.) during the life of the small aisled Drayton II villa than in an equivalent length of time at Fishbourne Palace, where there were just four (Black 1985: 77).

A problem, not helped by the vagaries of archaeological evidence, is to define the typical suite of villa 'improvements'. One approach has been made possible by using quantity surveyors' estimates (Newman, above) and is being pursued (Martins, in progress). It involves house-by-house, period-by-period comparison of the proportion of the overall 'construction value' of a property which can be accounted for by each amenity and by all such amenities. Since the underlying 'cost' presumptions will be the same for each building (in reality techniques may have altered over space and time), the varying percentages attributable to such 'embellishments' should provide a 'status-through-consumption' index for that villa, and for comparison with other villas. But this is still not an explanation for variation, and one premise, arising from consumer theory, is that the buildings were inevitably personalised. On what basis could such an argument be sustained? First, by acknowledging that the interlude for initial construction and/or subsequent improvements was a matter of months or a few years. Confirmation of short time-scales comes from Butser Farm and concerns the continuing re-creation of the Sparsholt villa (the late Peter Reynolds pers. comm.). Second, because there was such diversity, it may be presumed that, intentionally or unconsciously, a dialogue existed between the ideal of a particular villa type and that chosen by the owner. Third, there was the possible influence of Vitruvius (*On Architecture*, 6, preface), and perhaps other authorities. He advises "I cannot refrain from praising those owners of estates who, fortified by confidence in their own erudition, build for themselves ... to spend their own capital to their own liking rather than to that of anyone else". Fourth, there are insights from environment-behaviour research. Lang (2000: 86) uses Maslow's human needs model (above) to theorize how personal motivations relate to buildings in a given social context. Architectural cues which match the level four needs of esteem and status include 'a sense of place', a 'sense of importance', 'recognition' and 'personalization' (ibid. 88). Finally, there are personality traits which may influence consumption (Schiffman and Kanuk 2000), including receptivity to innovation,

responsiveness to social influence, degree of materialism and need for cognition. Others can be creativity, vanity, extroversion, hedonism or narcissism. Guided by impression management theory (above), predictive cues about personality can be observed from possessions and household settings (see Burroughs et al. 1991; Gosling and Jin Ko 2002). The 'house-as-a-symbol-of-the-self' thesis (Cooper 1974) draws on Jungian theories of symbolism and the collective unconscious to suggest that houses, externally and internally, reveal both the inner psyche and intended personal presentation. Environmental clues about intended identity must be recognised within society for the meanings to be accepted (Rapoport: 1982), and such individuality in expression was perhaps applauded in Roman Britain.

What follows is subjective, and owes to the suggestion (Gosling and Jin Ko 2002) that observer opinions of facilities can help interpret domestic environments. For villas such research might be based on annotated excavation plans, isometric modelling or a virtual reality programme and would seek insights into personal identity. Two cases illustrate the potential of the idea. The trait of voluntary simplicity may be apparent at Welton Wold villa overlooking the Humber, five km from Brough. This is conduct which eschews consumption values, preferring freedom from materialism (Kilbourne 1992) and has been noted in the ancient world (Belk et al. 1996). The five-room, late first to early fifth century stone-built house featured a central room and corridor but was never aggrandized; there was no evidence of tiles, mosaic, window glass or plaster, nor of wings, a hypocaust or bath-house (Mackey 1998 and pers. comm.). In contrast was the sophisticated nearby villa at Brantingham (Liversidge et al. 1973). Having made an early decision to adopt Roman-style architecture at Welton Wold was the decision taken that ostentation was thereafter unwanted behaviour? Winterton (six km from the Humber) presents the opposite case, suggesting the trait of materialism (Belk 1985). Highly materialistic consumers are particularly status-driven and concerned with social comparisons (Richins 1992). The massive wealth on display (Stead 1976 and specialist reports) from the late second to late fourth centuries included unusually early mosaics, later portrait and figurative pavements and wall plaster in a high proportion of rooms. It has been argued that materialism is a substitute for declining feelings of community (Antonides and van Raaij 1998: 533).

Concluding remarks

The case studies are not exhaustive, but illustrate the potential for using consumer theories to investigate villa evidence. I have attempted a deconstruction of traditional models for explaining architectural change. Arguably, archaeologists should use consumption terminology in more explicit and less simplistic ways. Assumptions that wealth always represents size and scale and that status symbols are necessarily ostentatious or unchanging can be challenged. Influential reference groups can be infinitely variable with a likely mix in Britain of domestic, local, regional, provincial and even inter-provincial audiences.

At another level, however, this study acknowledges the collaborative potential of relations between psychology and archaeology as a possible guide to past behaviour. A particular case is a new discourse focusing on the emergence of the individual (and individuality). This has been noted, for instance, in the wider use of toiletry objects in the first century AD (Hill 1997) and recognised in Roman Gaul in the creative responses to the options afforded by greater cultural choice (Woolf 1998: 12, 171; Woolf 2001). Similarly, it is implicit in this paper that there may be scope to examine the interface between the public image and the self-image of the elite.

Whereas it has been usual to discuss villas in terms of social identities, there may be scope to approach the concept of personal identities, too.

Traditionally the 'meaning' of villas has been sought in terms of an architectural or cultural typology, and more recently through an interpretation related to status and power. A further construal is possible: that manifestly overt consumption may signal a changing orientation of values within the individualism-collectivism construct of cultures (Wong 1997), with the new materialist tendency implying a preference for possessions over people (ibid. 202). Because of this, it may be speculated that villas provide a glimpse of the evolution of the independent self, unique and self-determining, and contrasting with the interdependent self in which identity is embedded within the social group (Dittmar 1992: 188). (This is a point worth making to social psychologists who do not acknowledge selfhood prior to the late medieval period – see Baumeister 1987).

If this can be argued it also extends Woolf's point (1998: 149) that rural settlement (including villas) is best viewed as a continuum of consumption, varying in scale and style. The opportunities to consume afforded by Roman governance might be seen less in terms of a cultural dialogue (i.e. 'Romanization') and more as a stimulus to psychological evolution. Villa variability may point to the process of consuming being used deliberately to fashion individual identity through possessions.

Department of Archaeology, University of Durham

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