1 Introduction

Settling in a changing world. Creating oneself a new place in the rapidly developing environment of the Roman provinces, affecting each and every dimension of the lives of local people. That is the core theme of the study lying in front of you. From a bird’s eye view, the development of the northernmost provinces of the Roman Empire involves the creation of a new administrative structure that includes civitates and their capitals, the development of many other urban and rural centres connected by a network of well-constructed roads and a series of military camps, concentrated along the Rhine in particular. These developments can be linked to significant changes to the economic, social, cultural, demographical and political spheres. New markets develop, new institutions of power are created, new lifestyles are introduced and the mobility of people increases significantly. Particularly within the context of their local settlements, the rural population deals with this changing world and creates a new place within it, by changing both the way in which they inhabit and work the landscape and how they relate to each other and the outside world. These processes can be studied by exploring the development trajectories of rural settlements. After all, the adoption of new materials, forms, objects and (spatial) concepts can be regarded as a way to redefine relationships within the local communities as well as between these communities and the outside world. This study is about individual people, families and communities actively creating themselves a new place within the changing world of the Roman provinces and the Empire.

Where, then, does the villa fit into this? The fact that the word villa has not been mentioned up to this point might already have exposed my somewhat reserved attitude towards the concept. This attitude is caused by the difficulties surrounding the definition and use of the term, its limitations and its complex background. Although this particular theme will be discussed in more detail below, I would like to start off by stating that the phenomenon generally referred to as ‘the villa’ is only part of a broader and more complex rural development. Strictly and essentialistically employing a villa definition for both data selection and analysis could, in our view, limit our scope of research and our understanding of the real complexity of the processes at hand. This is not to say that we should, or even could, deny the term ‘villa’ completely. The study of monumental villas is and remains an undeniable and vital part of the provincial Roman archaeological study. However, it is crucial to be aware of the problematic nature of the term and the more complex realities concealed beneath the surface at all times.

Key objectives and basic characteristics

The general objective of this study is to analyse developments and processes of change in rural settlements within the northern provinces of the Roman Empire. Two main parts can be identified. The first one regards the detailed reconstruction, visualisation and analysis of development trajectories of internal settlement organisation and house building. The second concerns the interpretation of these processes from a multi-dimensional approach, further introduced below. A detailed and well-structured analysis of the wealth of settlement data, inventoried in appendix 1 and further discussed in chapter 2, has the potential to improve our understanding of the complex and various ways in which people dealt with and were affected by the changing world of the developing Roman provinces.

With regard to the existing research carried out on villas and rural settlements it could generally be stated that by no means has the full potential of this extensive dataset been used. Particularly for the European continent, broader synthesising studies are lacking and existing studies are generally poorly informed on a theoretical level, as well as strongly empirical and descriptive in character. With this in mind, a study including the following basic characteristics has been designed:

- a development perspective
- a broad empirical approach
- a long term approach
- a large research region covering four modern-day countries
- a theoretically informed and interpretative study with a social focus
Firstly, development, a diachronic approach, is central to this study. Key aim is to understand change and development in its physical as well as its socio-cultural and economic dimensions. Compared to synchronic studies, such an approach could result in an increased understanding of complex phenomena, as their backgrounds and implications are explored in more detail, rather than being restricted to their structural characteristics.

Secondly, the selected approach reaches beyond the scope of most traditional villa studies. As has previously been mentioned, no a priori villa definition has been used regarding data selection. As a result, all types of rural settlements are included, synchronically as well as diachronically. Such a broad approach is able to shed more light on the (regional) variety in processes of change, without being limited to the well-known typical monumental villa settlements.

Thirdly, this study takes a more long-term approach, including not only the period that monumental villa settlements were at their peak, but also the Late Iron Age and Early Roman period. By exploring longer lines of development, we can achieve an increased understanding of the complexity of developments in rural settlements. Both continuity and rapid transformation can be explored.

Fourthly, the region defined as the research region is relatively extensive, covering parts of no less than four modern-day nations (The Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and France). As a result, the dataset is also particularly extensive, and thus a considerable amount of good-quality research may be consulted for detailed analysis. Furthermore, the defined region not only covers the loess region that is traditionally regegarded as the ‘villa landscape’, but also the more northerly sand and clay regions.

Lastly, it is important to emphasise the interpretative character of this study and its explicit use of theoretical insights from archaeology as well as social studies. The general focus of this study is social. After all, processes of change cannot be understood without specifically involving the human as an active and creative agent in the analysis.

Viewed as part of the broader field of academic research, this archaeological study can contribute to the debate in its own specific way, complementing other kind of research on the Roman past in an important manner. The study of developments in spatial organisation and architecture sheds light on the dynamics and the character of social and economic relationships in a way that other fields of research, such as iconography, epigraphy and ancient history cannot.

Analysis

The first step in this study is to explore the inventoried dataset as such, visualising and analysing the basic character and differentiation of this dataset (chapter 2). The inventory itself is presented in appendix 1. Secondly, in chapter 3, a spatial-morphological approach is chosen, reconstructing and visualising development trajectories in settlement organisation and house building. Subsequently, chapters 4 and 5 will analyse these developments from social and economic perspectives. Chapter 4 explores the way in which people actively and creatively changed their direct living environment to redefine the relationships towards themselves, each other and the broader outside world. A variety of aspects and dimensions of the developments explored in chapter 3 will consequently be discussed. Chapter 5 focuses on production and the organisation of production. It will explore the changing productional strategies and relationships within the context of rural settlements throughout the research region, using settlement data as well as archaeolobotanical and -zoological data. Finally, in chapter 6, the intimately related developments explored in this study will be synthesised and regarded from a bird’s eye view in order to achieve an even more detailed understanding of the complex processes of change in the countryside of the Roman period.

Research programme

The present study is part of a broader research programme entitled ‘Roman Villa Landscapes in the North: Economy, Culture and Lifestyles’. This programme entails four parts; three thematic studies and a synthesising study.1 The general objective is to present a picture of the origins, development and social interpretation of Roman villa landscapes in the region between Cologne and Bavay at the northern

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1 Besides this study, the thematic studies within the research programme are carried out by Karen Jeneson (in prep.) and Laura Crowley (in prep.). The synthesising volume will contain synthesising papers as well as case studies, by several authors (Roymans/Derks in prep.).
frontier of the Roman Empire, as well as to develop a new interpretive model of villa landscapes that does justice to both the socio-economic and cultural dimensions.\(^2\)

The thematic studies differ with regard to the perspective, methodology and the choice and use of sources. The first study aims to reconstruct and analyse the entire settlement landscape, including burial and infrastructural evidence. Using the results of every type of archaeological and other types of research, it is hoped to obtain a model of settlement, specific to the loess regions in the North. This study uses GIS technology to store, analyse and visualise the archaeological and environmental data. The third thematic study focuses on the privileged burials associated with villa settlements. Striking because of their monumental markers, associated grave gifts and/or iconography, these elements provide considerable insight into various aspects of the lifestyles and identities constructed by the deceased and their survivors.

The present study could in a certain way be regarded as taking an intermediate position between the above mentioned thematic studies and has overlaps with both. As each settlement is embedded within a settlement landscape, acquired knowledge about the position of settlements within this landscape could provide additional insight into the significance of settlements and their development. Soil type, geographical position, the spatial relation to towns and military camps, and the character of the broader settlement system could all be among the aspects of importance. Graves are intimately related to the communities inhabiting the rural settlements. They can shed more light on social differentiation and the active way in which people constructed new social identities and new lifestyles; a topic also discussed in this particular study. The integration of this study into the broader research programme widens the analytical horizon, something that we will attempt to employ throughout this study.

The fourth part of the programme presents an overarching perspective, integrating the themes discussed in the aforementioned studies and raising a number of new topics as well. The approach taken combines several dimensions (economic, social, institutional, individual, long-term, short-term) and covers several disciplines (archaeology, classical studies and social studies). The programme as a whole is able to offer a uniquely wide, synthesising and multi-dimensional view on the significant developments on the provincial countryside of the first centuries AD.

**Frameworks**

This initial chapter introduces the frameworks of this study. The first paragraph will specify the geographical and chronological frameworks and both the research region and research period are broadly characterised. Subsequently, the theoretical and conceptual bases, crucial to the analyses carried out in this study, will be explored. Then, the dataset and methodology are examined, while the last paragraph serves to elucidate this study’s structure.

**1.1 Geographical and chronological framework**

Geographically, this study covers the northwestern, continental part of the empire, broadly extending between the Rhine-*limes* in the east and Channel coast in northern France in the west.\(^3\) This extensive region encompasses parts of four modern-day countries and a multitude of regions (see fig. 1.1). A first broad division that can be made is that between the sand and clay regions in the north (covering large parts of The Netherlands and Germany just south and west of the Lower Rhine and Flanders) and the loess belt running from the Cologne region through the southernmost part of the Netherlands and Belgium towards the French Picardy region. In Germany and Belgium this loess-belt is bordered to the south by the mountainous region of the Eifel-Ardennes. It is precisely on this relatively narrow loess belt that the most important route runs between Cologne and Bavay and all the way to Boulogne-sur-Mer and Amiens. Furthermore, it is this loess zone that is generally regarded as the ‘villa landscape’, where intensive wheat production took place and monumental villas dominated the landscape. As mentioned previously, this study explicitly chooses to look beyond these presumed ‘villa landscapes’ and also include the

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\(^2\) NWO (the Dutch organisation for scientific research) research proposal ‘Roman Villa Landscapes in the North: Economy, Culture and Lifestyles’ (nr. 360-60-060).

\(^3\) The research region covers the modern provinces and departments of Nordrhein-Westfalen, Rheinland-Pfalz (Germany), Zuid-Limburg (The Netherlands), Vlaams Limburg, Luik, Vlaams Brabant, Waals Brabant, Henegouwen/Hainaut, Namen/Namur (Belgium) and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Somme, Aisne and Oise (France).
northern sand and clay regions, as well as parts of the Eifel-Ardennes. As such, we are able to achieve more insight into the differentiation in rural settlement development and contextualise these developments.

As such, the total research region covers a total of around 350 by 200 km. Inherent to its size, is the area’s considerable geographical diversity. By providing some insight into this diversity, it is possible to add a background to the developments reconstructed in the following chapter. Therefore, the research region will now be explored from a geographical perspective.

Fig 1.1 The modern geography of the research region with four main Roman period centres and the limes along the Rhine. The general division in landscapes can be recognised as different shades of grey.

A diversity of landscapes

Geographical regions can be defined on the basis of a number of factors, among which soil type, relief, altitude, geological structure, hydrology, climate and vegetation. These partly intimately related factors vary considerably between regions, defining the physical characteristics and potential of the different landscapes. The research region can be divided into a number of landscapes from north to south: a mainly flat sandy region of Pleistocene origin and clay and peat regions of Holocene origin, a hilly to flat Pleistocene loess region, and a mountainous region of pre-quartarian origin (the Eifel-Ardennes massive).4 The northernmost region is dominated by sand, clay and peat soils. During the Roman period, extensive, largely uninhabitable peat bogs could be found in the western parts of The Netherlands, behind the coastal strip, in particular. The central and eastern river area, dominated by river sediments, was generally more suitable for habitation. This is a relatively fragmented landscape consisting of old river arms, levees, backlands and peaty areas. South of the river area, the so-called Meuse-Demer-Schelde (MDS) region, covering both Dutch and Belgian Brabant and Limburg, can be located. This region is dominated by sandy soils that also extend into adjacent Germany. These sandy soils are mineralogically poor, limiting their natural fertility. The landscape is generally flat. Towards the south, these sandy landscapes are bordered by

4 Denis 1992; Derks 1998, 55.
the loess-dominated landscapes. In Belgium, the transition between sand and loess soils follows the line from Ghent, Mechelen towards Hasselt. In Dutch Limburg, the loess starts to extend somewhat more towards the north up to around Sittard. In Germany, it steeply extends towards the north up till around Duisburg. The core of the loess region entails a flat or hilly landscape, cut by river and brook valleys. In the German region, the loess landscape consists of a number of generally flat plains. These so-called Rheinische Lässbördenden are cut by the rivers Rur and Erft, running in broad, slightly hilly and adequately habitable valleys. At least the Erft valley was inhabited intensively, as detailed archaeological surveys have demonstrated. Towards the west, the Dutch loess region or Limburger Börde consists of a number of plateaus, separated by brook and river valleys, of which Geul, Wurm and Meuse are the most important. Compared to the German loess plains, the Limburg area is more articulated and fragmented. The plateaus are between 120 and 200 m above sea level, while the valleys are situated up to between 80 to 150 meters lower in some cases. The highest parts of the plateaus are not or barely covered with loess, limiting their agricultural potential. In the Belgian loess region, it is also possible to define a number of plateaus, particularly the Haspengouw, Henegouwen and Brabant plateaus. West of the Meuse, the Haspengouw stretches out, bordered by the Gete river to the east. These Belgian plateaus are situated at an altitude of between 100 and 200 m above sea level. River valleys cutting the plains are relatively shallow and little articulated. The southernmost part of the research region is formed by the French Picardy region, consisting of three departments: Somme, Aisne and Oise. This region is characterised by highly fertile loess plains stretching over a large area. Still in modern times this region is an essential region for the large-scale production of wheat.

Towards the south, the loess landscapes are bordered by the higher and mountainous regions of the Ardennes-Eifel. In the Belgian region, the wide Meuse-Samber valley forms the division line between the loess region and the Condroz, Herve and Fagne-Famenne plateaus. These plateaus, constituting the transition between the loess region and the mountainous regions, are situated at altitudes between 200 and 300 m above sea level and are more articulated. In the German region, the North Eifel forms such a transition zone, quite similar to the Condroz region.

Apart from soil type, altitude and relief, climatological circumstances are yet another key factor. The climate in the relatively low loess landscapes is relatively mild and moist with early springs and a great number of sunny days, making it very suitable for agriculture. Regarding the region near Cologne, the average annual temperature is above 10 degrees Celsius. The circumstances in the more southerly mountainous regions are nevertheless different. With its longer and harsher winters, this region is considerably less suitable for arable farming. Less climate-dependent activities such as livestock farming and pottery, glass and chalk production are consequently of greater importance in this particular area.

**A cultural landscape**

One of the prominent elements within the research region is the east-west oriented road that runs from Cologne to Boulogne-sur-Mer and Amiens. This road is the essential connection between urban centres and smaller rural centres or vici. After a phase of mainly military use, from the 1st century AD onwards, the
road developed towards an economic artery, connecting the fertile agricultural areas with urban centres and military troops along the Rhine. Via secondary roads, leading to this main artery, rural settlements in the hinterland were connected to the broader, rapidly changing outside world. As such, the road network formed an essential element in the development of the provincial countryside.

Along the main road, several towns and many road-site settlements, or rural centres, are situated, among which Bavay, Liberchies, Tongres, Maastricht, Julich and Cologne. Such centres generally served economic, religious and administrative centre purposes. Quite a number of locations along the road are known from the *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti*. Archaeological research has nevertheless demonstrated that yet more locations were in fact situated along the main road. It seems highly likely that these were of less importance, as they were not mentioned in the *Itinerarium*. Furthermore, it is crucial to realise that not all centres were situated along the main road. Aquae Granni (Aken), for example, is situated 16 km south of the route between Cologne and Bavay.

Another important road runs along the northern border of both the research region and the Roman Empire. This limes road connected the considerable number of auxiliary and legionary camps as well as a civilian centre such as Xanten. In the northern regions, the military presence unquestionably exercised a dominant influence on the hinterland directly south of the Rhine.

With regard to the pre-Roman background, it should be mentioned that a substantial part of the research region is situated north of the so-called oppida zone, where major fortified settlements with centre functions of various character, controlled by elites, were found. As a result, it has often been assumed that the societies found in this northern region were more egalitarian as and less complex. Recent research has demonstrated, however, that the existence of locations with a supra-local importance, controlled by elite figures, should be taken into account with regard to this region as well.

**Chronological framework**

In order to understand the complex developments in rural settlements, it is vital to focus on short-term transformations as well as longer lines of development. To be able to achieve this, confining ourselves to the High Empire, the period that monumental villa settlements are at their peak, would be damaging. Instead, the chronological scope should in fact be broadened into the later Iron Age (see fig. 1.2 for a chronological scheme). Structure and development of rural settlements in the last centuries BC and the transition period between Iron Age and Roman period can provide useful insights into the longer lines of settlement development and shed light on continuities and discontinuities. On the other end, the Late Empire is not a period of focus. After the 3rd century AD, a great number of villa settlements do not continue to exist as agricultural settlements. In quite a number of cases, the re-use of abandoned buildings for artisan production has been documented. These later phases will here be largely left unconsidered.

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16 Bagacum (Bavay), Vodgoriacum (Waudrez), Germiniacum (Liberchies), Atuatuca Tungrorum (Tongeren), Coriovallum (Heerlen), Iuliacum (Julich), Tiberiacum (Thorr?) en Colonia (Cologne) are mentioned.
18 Roymans 2005. Regarding the Dutch region, such a location of supra-local importance could possibly be identified at Kessel. In the German and Belgian plains, relatively large enclosed sites could possibly be regarded as a kind of low-land fortifications with certain centre functions.
1.2 View on villa and settlement

Up to this point, this study has been critical towards the villa concept as often used in archaeological studies. This section will explore the existing research on villas and the general category of rural settlements in more detail. Furthermore, the approach taken in this research will be elucidated. Most crucially, how does this study relate to existing strands of research?

Villa research: a rich tradition

Traces of monumental villa houses have constituted a central feature of studies of the Roman period for centuries. Over time, however, the academic objectives, views and interpretations have been subject to considerable change.
The earliest interest in villas as traces of a past culture had a personal, mainly socio-political background. From the 16th century onwards, the Renaissance triggered a considerable interest in the classical past. Consequently, the ideal of an Arcadian rural life, as opposed to the hectic urban life, revived. This development took a start in 16th-century Italy, but can be identified in for example 17th- and 18th-century Holland and England as well. Up to the 20th century, provincial villas were considered the luxurious residences of a Roman elite. Students of these monumental remains had a profoundly Romano-centric and elite-oriented perspective. In the early years of the 20th century, the work of Mommsen and Haverfield pleaded for a more complex perspective, elucidating the interaction between the Roman occupiers and the local populations. Central concept here was 'romanisation', then regarded as the process whereby local indigenous cultures are influenced by Roman culture to such an extent that the Roman element eventually takes over the culture in question. These insights also influenced villa archaeology, as illustrated by the important excavations at Mayen. In this research, conducted in the 1920s, Franz Oelmann recognised a post-built construction under the monumental 'Roman' villa. The villa had, as Oelmann concluded, developed from the indigenous post-built house that had preceded it. A few years later, such a post-built predecessor of a monumental house was also recognised by Fremersdorf at Cologne-Müngersdorf. In the publication, he specifically refers to the indigenous background of the inhabitants of the villa: ‘Obwohl die beschriebenen Bauten nach ihren Abmessungen, nach Art und Technik einen rein römischen Eindruck machen, glaube ich, das der Besitzer des Kölner Gutshofes kein Römer, sondern ein Mann aus der einheimischen Bevölkerung gewesen ist…’. This attention for the indigenous people was, however, still little nuanced. As a result of the absolute and uniform culture concept used, 'Roman' and 'native' were dichotomised. Furthermore, the archaeological focus was generally still limited to the most monumental parts of the settlements, the main house, and thus the upper social circles of society.

It was also Oelmann and Fremersdorf who first raised socio-economic research themes with regard to villa settlements. However, it would not be until the 1960s and 1970s that such a socio-economic approach was developed further. British authors Rivet and Percival attempted to reconstruct the social and economic structure and functioning, predominantly on the basis of classical-Roman texts by Columella, Cato and Varro. Later authors refer to this historical orientation as the 'Italic' or 'historical' model. To reach beyond this Italic model, Slofstra and Wightman examined other, in their opinion more reliable sources. Slofstra has employed anthropological modelling, while Wightman relies on parallels from the earlier medieval period. During this period, the villa was regarded as an element within a broader socio-economic system, which was even labelled a 'villa system' by Slofstra. The social characteristics of the villa main house were also studied from another perspective. Smith quite directly interpreted spatial structure in social terms, concluding that a social continuity existed between pre-Roman and Roman times. This direction was continued by a number of authors, among which Hingley, Clarke, Scott and Samson, all of which British authors.

From the 1990s, the academic orientation shifts from a focus on broader, more long-term processes and structure to micro-processes, diversity and individuality. Focusing on the processes of everyday life, new perspectives on the house and household develop. The house is regarded as a locus for day-to-day social and economic interaction, production and reproduction of social identities. Furthermore, social

19 See Dyson 2003; Bentmann/Müller 1990; Glaudemans 2000; Hingley 2000.
20 Mommsen 1886; Haverfield 1905/1906.
21 Oelmann 1928.
22 Fremersdorf 1933, 47-48.
23 Rivet 1969; Percival 1976.
24 Slofstra (1983, 87) speaks of the Italic model, involving the interpretation of provincial phenomena on the basis of sources from the Italic region. Both Rivet (1969, 179-182) and Percival (1976, 119-144) use classical sources and could thus be said to be employing such a Italic model. Both Slofstra and Wightman (1978) harbour strong doubts about the value of such a model for the reconstruction of the situation in the northern provinces of the Roman Empire. Hingley (1989, 3) has also stressed the strongly historical interpretative frameworks within which archaeological finds and phenomena are being interpreted.
27 Hingley 1989; Clarke 1999; Samson 1990; Scott 1990.
perspectives on material culture also placed additional emphasis on consumption and its social significance.  

Subsequent to this broad sketch, it is important to highlight a number of shortcomings within the existing studies. First of all, the general lack of synthesising studies on rural settlement within the research region is to be mentioned. Apart from some regional overviews, real syntheses, analysing the wealth of available settlement data in a structural way, are simply not available.  

Secondly, the general focus on the most monumental buildings or monumental development phases should be highlighted. As a result, non-monumental settlements or settlement phases are less often excavated and not as much included in villa studies. Furthermore, secondary houses and economic buildings, constituting an integral part of settlements, often remain underexposed. As a final point, it is crucial to mention the generally poor theoretical and interpretative quality of the continental studies. All too often, excavated settlements are not analysed beyond the empirical level, and as synthesising studies are lacking, so are interpretations on a social, economic or cultural level. Theoretical concepts, developed in British archaeological studies, are only rarely employed within the scope of continental studies. 

This study would like to challenge these shortcomings by choosing a broad, synthesising approach, including a wealth of settlement data from four countries. As mentioned, using no *a priori* villa definition, the full range of rural settlements and buildings are included in the analysis. In addition, shedding light on the non-elite rural population is also among the explicit objectives. Furthermore, this study has a significantly interpretative character. Theoretical insights developed in British archaeology, as well as models and insights from social studies, are used to create new understanding of the complex processes regarding change of the countryside of the northern Roman provinces. In the next section, the central theoretical concepts and themes will be introduced.

**Villa, villa or…? A problematic definition**

Defining ‘the villa’ has been a somewhat problematic theme throughout the villa study. Although seemingly self evident at first sight, the definition and demarcation of the villa phenomenon is a difficult task, complicated further by the multitude of perspectives from which it has been studied. 

The Latin word *villa* was originally a term employed by classical authors, serving to refer to a certain settlement or house form. In antiquity, however, the use of this term was already little specific and inconsistent. Therefore, this study will exclusively use the term villa as modern archaeological term and not as a historical Latin term. 

In archaeological studies, the villa as a house has been associated with a high degree of ‘Roman-ness’, an investment of wealth and display of status in architectural form. Over time, besides morphology, also social or economic characteristics have been taken as the primary basis for defining the villa. In the archaeological practice, the term villa has been applied to a broad array of structures. In general, a division between morphological and relational definitions may be devised. A relational definition is highly interpretative in character and mainly aims at the function purpose of villa settlements within economic and social structures. Such definitions are often shaped within strongly historical interpretative frameworks, constructed on the basis of a limited and biased collection of historical sources. 

The archaeological substance of such definitions has often faded, however. As Hingley argues, ‘If the term ‘villa’ is to be more useful than merely a description of building form, a great deal more must be discovered concerning the origin and nature of the settlements on which these buildings are found. The alternative -forcing inadequate evidence into a predetermined and over-simplistic historical framework- will not create a true picture of the economic and social background and lifestyle of the rural elite of

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30 In the studies of Woolf (1998), Hingley (2005) and Martins (2005) the consumption perspective takes an important position. 
31 In this respect, the northern sand and clay region is a well-researched region, as settlement data have been used for a number of synthesising studies (Gerritsen 2001; Roymans 1996; Verweij 1998; Theeuw/ Roymans 1998). For northern France some regional overviews are available as well (Bayard/Collart 1996; Ben-Redjeb/Querrel/Duvette 2005). Many of the excavations, however, have not been well-published. 
32 Classical authors on the villa include Columella (4-70 AD): De re rustica (I.6.1-3); Cato (234-149 BC): De agricultura (I.4.1); Horatius (65-8 BC): Odes (I.17), Epistularum (I.7 and 10); Plinius minor (ca. 61–112): Epistulae (II.17, V.6). 
33 See Hingley 1989, 45-46. 
34 Hingley (1989) distinguishes a historical and an archaeological definition. 
35 See Hingley (1989, 3) for a critical view on such historical interpretative frameworks. Other frameworks are based on anthropological or ethnological parallels (Slofstra 1983; Wightman 1978).
Roman Britain’. An alternative definition is an archaeological one. Such an approach is taken by Woolf, who has defined the villa mainly as a ‘style of consumption’, by which new architectural forms, materials and objects are being consumed, in relation to social and economic strategies. But even then, it becomes apparent that within the extensive research region, developments as well as their outcomes may vary considerably. In quite a number of cases, this would lead to a discussion on whether or not to term a settlement or house a villa. In our opinion, such arguments are essentially useless, as it is much more important to reconstruct and understand developments, rather than the outcomes and their place in a classification system. From a similar perspective, it has been suggested that it would be beneficial to abandon the term villa altogether. Then, we would no longer speak of villas but only of farms, differing among themselves. Although on a theoretical basis this would be an interesting suggestion, it seems to us neither possible nor preferable to actually attempt to ignore the term, mainly because of its strong roots in the archaeological study. The point remains, however, that the term villa should not be used in an essentialist way and that the much broader and more complex developments on the countryside should always be taken account of. Furthermore, we should be aware of the potentially misleading and simplifying associations with regard to ‘the villa’: its Roman-ness, its interpretation as the residence of an elite and its functioning as a rationally operating enterprise. As we will see, the actual differentiation of rural settlements is so pronounced that such simplifications would undermine the understanding of complex historical realities.

1.3 An interpretative framework

This being an interpretative study, before analysing the data in the following chapters, an interpretative course should first of all be constructed. After introducing a number of general approaches and presumptions, several themes will be explored in somewhat more detail.

First of all, it should be emphasised that the approach taken is essentially a social one, as archaeology ultimately concerns people. Apparently neutral concepts such as space, technology and objects are all embedded in the ‘social’ and should consequently be studied as such. As Hodder states, ‘everything is social’; all aspects of daily life can be seen as part of the continuous active negotiation of social roles.

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36 Hingley 1989, 22-23.
38 Illustrative in this context is the introduction of the term ‘proto-villa’ by Slofstra (1991). This underlines the absolute typology, applied to rural settlement, using a typology of settlements being ‘native’, a proto-villa or a ‘real villa’. Such an abstract model, within which these terms are fitted, does not account for the complex heterogeneity and differentiated processes of change with which the villa phenomenon can be related.
40 As Taylor (2001, 49) points out, there is a real danger of confusion between subject and object in the archaeological study: archaeological phenomena, such as house plans, tend to overshadow the societies that created them and in which they played an active role.
41 Hodder 2004, 26, 36.
Understanding more of the real complexity of the developments explored in this study, also requires a complex approach. In recent decades, quite a number of archaeologists have called for the development of integrated perspectives, combining strengths from processual and post-processual archaeological approaches. 42 Webster speaks in this context of an eclectic approach. 43 Jan Slofstra developed a suitable model combining several dimensions for the integrated analysis of processes of romanisation (fig. 1.3). In this model, time-space dimensions, micro- and macro-scale, short and long term are combined. Moreover, Slofstra also distinguishes between institutional and cultural dimensions. The former relates to political and economic institutions and structure, the latter to more informal social interaction, culture, identity and agency. 44 It is the complex, dialectical interaction between the different dimensions, spheres and scales that is especially central to Slofstra’s model and can provide better insights into structures, processes and their dynamics.

A dimensional approach, as outlined in the previous, can be applied to this study. What is more, in order to achieve a better understanding of the processes of change within rural settlements, the dimensions mentioned by Slofstra, as well as their interaction, need to be considered. It is in the settlements that the institutional and cultural dimensions interact, and approaching settlement development from both short and long term and micro and macro scale could improve our understanding of the backgrounds and implications of the processes of change. 45 After having explored these general presumptions, I will now define and explore a number of more specific themes central to this study’s interpretative course.

Rome and the others

One of the important and traditional themes in the archaeology of the Roman provinces concerns the process that has generally been referred to as ‘romanisation’. Originally, romanisation was regarded as a unidirectional process in which native people became ‘romanised’. More modern approaches on romanisation, however, approach it as a complex and multi-vocal, socio-cultural interaction between the
Roman occupier and local groups and individuals, shedding light on both Romans and the native population as active and creative agents. This study will connect to such more complex perspectives on romanisation. Studying villa development is particularly suitable to elucidate the processes of change in all its facets and complexity. Following the dimensional model introduced in the previous, we will shed light on the various dimensions of these processes. On the one hand, institutional power (both political and military) is a factor of importance. On the other, more informal and personal processes of change and the creativity of the individual should not be overlooked. Romanisation was thus a social process by nature. As Hingley states, ‘Roman’ culture was brought into being by means of the creation of relations between peoples within the expanding empire, as part of a developing imperialist discourse. The local settlement was one of the important loci in which these relationships were created, shaped and reproduced, both towards the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’.

**House, space and community**

From the 1970s and 1980s onwards, more attention was paid to the house concept as such. Apart from simply examining it as a physical structure, the house was now regarded as the residence of a social group, and consequently as the location for production, consumption and the social practices of every-day life. These day-to-day practices in and around the house form an important social arena for the production and reproduction of social identities and relationships of power. This being such an essential element, it could even be stated that the house and its inhabitants live in a mutually constituting relationship. House and settlement as a research theme offers good possibilities for the integral social study of architecture, space and mobile material culture. How were these elements used to produce and reproduce social relationships and identities within the house, as well as between the inhabitants of the house and the outside world? As they are embedded in social practice, architecture and space are regarded as socially significant. In this study, space will be studied both on the level of the individual house and that of the settlement. How do new types of architecture and new ways of ordering space develop in the countryside and how can this be linked to changing social relationships, identities and production strategies?

With regard to the social approach of house and settlement, three concepts, ‘family’, the ‘household’ and ‘community’, are especially important. Family is a specific social unit, mostly -although not always exclusively- based on biological kinship. Generally, a division is made between nuclear families and extended families. Households are the smallest social systems where intensive and important social interaction takes place, usually consisting of people who are relatives and usually also live under one roof. ‘Community’ can be regarded as a more general concept that can manifest itself on various levels. It is a social network in which social interaction takes place. Communities often also have an ideological dimension; they are constructed in symbolic ways.

**Material culture and consumption**

Over the last few decades, the concept of material culture, referring to the complete material environment created by humans, including non-fixed (mobilia), semi-fixed (furniture) and fixed (buildings) elements,
has gained considerable importance in archaeology. The complex relationship between people and material culture has been a point of particular interest. ‘Material culture is a medium through which people create and negotiate social roles; culture operates through material dimensions’. As such, material culture is not a passive reflection of human behaviour, but an integral and active part of social processes, playing an important role in the productions and reproduction of identities. Viewing settlement and house as material culture, more light can be shed on the complex relationship between people and their settlement environment, as well as the significant processes of change therein.

Quite crucially, the increased attention for consumption is closely related to developing views on material culture. Consumption should not be regarded as a purely economic phenomenon but also as a socially significant act, or even a strategy. The study of changing consumption patterns can increase understanding of important social transformations within the studied communities. From this perspective, Woolf in fact regards ‘Romanization as a change in patterns of consumption’.

**Temporality**

The past is not a static circumstance but a dynamic situation. While this is likely to come across as fairly self-evident, temporality has more than once been marginalized in the study of the past. With an eye on the research themes defined in this study, it is important to highlight this concept here shortly. First of all, it is crucial to be aware of the time depth and dynamic that is concealed beyond what archaeologists find beneath the surface. The archaeological record is per definition a palimpsest. In most cases, plans of monumental houses are the result of various phases of construction and reconstruction. What is more, settlement plans cannot be read without considering chronological factors. The explicit aim of this study is to reconstruct and analyse such development trajectories. Another approach reaches beyond time as an absolute and measurable entity. What role did time and the past play in the past communities under study, and how did attitudes towards the past change over time?

**Elite and non-elite**

As already became clear, the traditional research focus has chiefly concerned the most monumental buildings in rural settlements and thus the higher echelons of society with the most conspicuous lifestyles. Only in recent years, the less monumental settlement complexes within the traditional villa landscapes have also been excavated. In the northernmost regions, the tradition of excavating post-built ‘native’ settlements has nevertheless been around for much longer. In order to increase understanding about changes in rural habitation and the phenomenon of villa development, I consider it essential to shed light on the lower echelons of society, those less visible and non-elite. How did these people live and how did they create themselves a new place in the changing world? Furthermore, what were their relationships to the elites and how were these created and maintained? Taking such a broad perspective, it is important to include non-monumental houses within monumentalised settlements and simple non-monumental settlements in the dataset as well. Furthermore, the simple graves found near or in many settlements could be an interesting category for studying non-elite people.

**Town-countryside relationships**

In order to enhance comprehension of the developments within rural settlements, these should not be studied in a vacuum. Quintessentially, the broader context of these developments needs to be elucidated as well. The relationships between the developing urban centres and rural settlements are a particularly interesting theme in this respect. Town and country are mutually dependent and are linked to one another in a multitude of ways. First of all, rural settlements are the loci of agricultural production, essential for urban markets. Furthermore, the elite families who had important functions in the *civitas* or provincial

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60 See Tilley et al. 2006 for a good overview.
61 Hingley 2005, 73.
64 Martins 2005, 10; Woolf 1998.
65 See Hingley 2005 for a short discussion on the historical dimension of material culture.
66 For critique on elite-focused research see Hingley 1989 and Hingley 2000.
administration had close ties to the countryside and probably also lived there at least part of the time. They probably owned rural estates. Other inhabitants of the countryside could have had ties with (partially) town-based landowners, by means of patronage or tenancy relationships. An archaeologically recognisable phenomenon is the relationship between urban lifestyles and the developing villa lifestyle. Houses were built, walls were decorated and bathing areas were constructed in an urban fashion. How did this link between town and country develop over time? Moreover, can the villa settlement actually be regarded as a link between town and country?

1.4 Structure of this study

The objectives set out in the above are developed in the following chapters of this dissertation. First of all, the next chapter will explore the dataset. After discussing the inventory that is at the heart of this study, the basic characteristics and biases of the dataset will be explored. The inventory itself is presented in the site catalogue (appendix 1). The third chapter constitutes the core analysis of this study. Here, the developments in rural habitation will be explored by reconstructing and analysing a range of development trajectories, both with regard to the organisation of settlement space and house building. These analyses are almost purely spatial-morphological in character. Social and economic interpretations of the reconstructed developments remain underexposed here. However, the fourth and fifth chapters will be completely dedicated to the latter themes. The fourth chapter approaches the reconstructed developments from a human perspective, exploring the developments and transformations as related to active and creative human agents operating in the social arenas of their families, settlement communities as well as broader societies. Quite a number of different themes will be discussed in this chapter, among which the reorganisation of social space, the break with existing building traditions, monumentalisation and the creation of new symbols and lifestyles. In order to do so, concepts, insights and models from both archaeology and social studies will be employed. Subsequently, the fifth chapter will focus on production and the organisation of production. Again, developments and transformations constitute the central element of the study. Archaeobotanical and -zoological data provide information on changing production strategies and internal settlement organisation. Specific economic buildings within these settlements can shed light on developments in the organisation of production. This latter theme also connects to topics discussed in the fourth chapter. In the final chapter, the synthesis, the insights gained in the preceding chapters are brought together to attempt to create a high resolution image of the complex developments on the provincial countryside between the 1st century BC and 3rd century AD. At this point, some recommendations with regard to future research on villas and rural settlements in general will also be made.