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Maritime Villas and Seasonality

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Introduction

You say you were delighted with my letter describing how I spend my summer holidays in my Tuscan villa, and you want to know what changes I make at my Laurentine villa in winter.¹

The opening of Pliny the Younger's letter to his friend Fuscus Salinator neatly captures the fact that, for most wealthy Romans, their sojourns at the various maritime and country villas they owned were seasonal. As such, their activities and daily routine while *in villa* could vary depending on the time of the year and location. In Pliny's case, he preferred to spend his summers in the country, at his Tuscan villa, where the air was salubrious (and he could supervise the vintage), whereas his Laurentine maritime villa, due to its convenient proximity to Rome, offered easy escapes in winter and short, intellectually productive, stays.² But maritime villas, especially the luxurious ones around the Bay of Naples, are more commonly associated with leisure retreats (*otium*) in spring/summer, when Roman political and juridical activities in the city of Rome halted and the senate went into recess.³

The Bay of Naples comes readily to mind as *the* place for the development of maritime villas in Italy and where there were some of the most sought-after locations for maritime villas, such as Baiae, famous for curing illness with its thermal waters, but also for feasts, banquets, and relaxed morals.⁴ In fact, maritime villas in the Roman world are an architectural phenomenon that began along the coasts of southern Latium in the late second century BC rather than on the Bay of Naples.⁵ Such installations quickly spread to other location along the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy before appearing also in the provinces during the course of the first century AD.

Maritime villas of Italy, especially those along its Tyrrhenian coast, were predominantly upper- and political-class dwellings, and in consequence were visited according to the political, juridical, and, to an extent, religious calendar of the city of Rome. The Apollinaris of one of Martial's *Epigrams* (x.30) is depicted as being held back in Rome on business for most of the year, despite his longing to be at his favoured out-of-town property, a maritime villa in Formiae. Instead, his *vilicus* and steward are the ones enjoying the beauty and comforts of the villa.

The *feriae aestivae*, which lasted from 24 June to 1 August, offered a long break from political and other public engagements; this is when most wealthy Romans, 'wishing to escape

* I wish to thank Guy Métraux for commenting on an earlier draft of this work, and Diane Favro, Fikret Yegül, and Ciro Cacciola for providing images to illustrate this chapter.

¹ Plin., *Ep.* IX.40: 'Scribis pergratas tibi fuisse litteras meas, quibus cognovisti quemadmodum in Tuscis otium aestatis exigerem; requiris quid ex hoc in Laurentino hieme permute'.

² See, e.g. Plin., *Ep.* IV.6.

³ In April and May, and then again in late summer/early autumn on occasion of the vintage.

⁴ Strabo (v.4.50) describes the waters of Baiae as suitable for both luxury and the cure of illness. D'Arms (2003, a posthumous re-edition) remains a fundamental study on owners of maritime villas along the Bay of Naples.

⁵ See the classics studies by Lafon (1981; 1991) and, more recently, Ferritto 2019, proving that also very early maritime villas were built close to the shore and not at a certain distance, as argued by Lafon. For a perceptive analysis of the architecture of maritime villas on the Bay of Naples: Zarmakoupi 2014.

the heat of the city',⁶ left Rome for prolonged sojourns at their maritime and rural villas. In the Republic, the *feriae vindemialis*, running from 22 August to 15 October and which were clearly related to the harvest and the vintage, had been another period when villa owners were able to leave Rome for an extended period of time. Augustus made some changes to these *feriae* and introduced a series of statutory senate meetings (*senatus legitimi*) in September and October: senators were excused if they needed to supervise agricultural operations at their estates, but a minimum number chosen by lot had to stay to ensure the quorum necessary for the passing of decrees.⁷ Another notable interruption in public activity concerned the recess of the senate, the *res prolatae* or *discessus senatus*, which in the Late Republic and, it seems, also in the Imperial period, ran from the start of April until about mid-May.⁸

In the Late Republic at least, the *feriae aestivae* and the *discessus senatus* were the smartest times to be at one's maritime villas, especially those of the Bay of Naples; during these 'vacation' periods, prominent Romans tended to cluster at a handful of locations, simply moving the web of social engagement and political life from Rome to these locations. Cicero famously remarked that Cumae, where he owned a maritime villa, was a *pusilla Roma* because of the number of people from the capital that could be found there.⁹

There is certainly much in terms of the architectural typology of maritime villas that responds to their specific topographical location and to activities linked to particular times of the year. But this does not mean that *all* maritime villas were inhabited/used only seasonally.¹⁰ There are many examples of maritime villas, particularly in the provinces, which were at the centre of *fundi* engaged in different types of productions and which were in use for the whole year, such as the villas of Pardigon 2 and 3, in the Bay of Cavalaire in southern France, or the Barbariga villa in Istria.¹¹ The latter was not only a luxurious residential complex, but also the centre of large-scale agricultural exploitation, as evidenced by the ten oil presses of its *pars rustica*.

This chapter offers an overview of some specific architectural spaces found in maritime villas of Roman Italy which can be clearly linked with seasonality.

Looking out at the Sea: Panoramas and Seascapes

Pliny the Younger's detailed letter to his friend Gallus describing the delights of his Laurentine villa conveys two main messages about the villa's architecture.¹² First, we find references to rooms and spaces best suited for use in winter or in hot weather, or at different times of the day. He comments on the rooms' orientation; whether they had windows that could be opened and closed as required by the meteorological conditions; and which parts of the villa were best for use in the morning and in the afternoon, according to the shade given by plantings, columns, and overhanging roofs. Second, Pliny dwells on the panoramic views which could be had from various parts of the villa, particularly the views of the sea.

⁶ Gell., *NA* ix.15.1.

⁷ Suet., *Aug.* xxxv.3; Talbert 1984, 211.

⁸ Talbert 1984, 209–10; for both the Republic and the Early Empire, only extraordinary and emergency meetings of the senate are recorded to have occurred in this period. For those serving as jurors on the *quaestiones*, the vacation period was in November and December: Talbert 1984, 211.

⁹ Cic., *Att.* i.13; v.2.2.

¹⁰ A well-known exception to the seasonal occupation of maritime villas of the Bay of Naples is represented by Tiberius, who stayed at his villas on Capri for years. The emperor's retirement there disrupted the political schedule of events (judicial, meetings of senate, and so forth) at Rome; Suetonius and other writers considered this to be quite unusual and shocking.

¹¹ Marzano 2018, 127; Bowden 2018 for the villas of Istria.

¹² Plin., *Ep.* ii.17.

Views of the sea and shoreline from varying distances are certainly an important characteristic of maritime villa architecture. That the *view* of the water represented the essence of a maritime villa is shown by the fact that villas built on lakes' shores were readily equated to maritime villas because of the view of the water they offered:

Nam hoc quoque non dissimile, quod ad mare tu, ego ad Larium lacum. Huius in litore plures meae villae, sed duae maxime ut delectant ita exercent. Altera imposita saxi, more baiano, lacum prospicit; altera, aequo more baiano, lacum tangit. (Plin., *Ep.* IX.7)

(We have a further point in common — you are building by the sea and I on the shores of Lake Como. There I have several villas, two of which give me a lot of pleasure but a corresponding amount of work. One is built on the rocks with a view over the lake, like the houses at Baiae, the other, in the same style, touches the water.) (Trans. B. Rice, with modifications)

Both these lacustrine villas follow an architectural typology that for Pliny and his correspondent is typical of Baiae: whether built on a high cliff, overlooking the water, or close to the shore, the water and the view of it are the defining elements.¹³

Many luxurious maritime villas, like the ones of the Bay of Naples or the Istrian Peninsula (in modern Croatia), built on high coastlines, present terraces, pavilions, and belvederes located away from the main body of the villa, meant to offer wide panoramas. These spaces were intended to be used predominantly in good weather. Even if, like Pliny's Laurentine, the villa proper had suitable spaces and rooms for winter use, such architectural appendices were unsuitable for use when it was very cold or rainy. The famous Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum, which was a luxurious suburban maritime villa, had a round pavilion/belvedere overlooking the sea, some distance away from the main body of the villa (Fig. 16.1). As revealed by the most recent archaeological investigations, one would reach this spot from the villa's large peristyle by following a 4 m wide beaten earth-path running through a vineyard.¹⁴ The fact that the path was not paved, and thus subject to become muddy with rain, suggests that the belvedere would not have been used in bad weather; it is very likely that in the winter months, it was only rarely used or not used at all.

Panoramic, unroofed terraces were also likely spaces designed for maximum enjoyment and use during the warm months. The importance of ensuring panoramic views of the sea had in designing the villa complex can be appreciated in the case of villas which some past scholarship has tended to disqualify from the maritime villa group because they were built on very high cliffs and/or lacking any subsidiary installations right on the shore, such as Villa Jovis in Capri.¹⁵ The primary characteristics of this villa are its position, maximizing panoramic views: the engineering feat of building terraces over 40 metres in height and on eight different levels perched on a high crag; and the presence of specific architectural forms, such as the apsidal loggia and *ambulatio* terrace, offering breathtaking sea panoramas (Fig. 16.2).¹⁶ Maximizing the views of the sea and adjacent coastline was, in my view, a crucial element in maritime villa architecture, more important than whether any structure or outbuildings had *physical* contact with the water. Ensuring the *view* of the seascape and the waters was

¹³ See also Sen., *Ep.* LXXXIX.21.

¹⁴ Camardo 2019, 106.

¹⁵ See Mingazzini and Pfister 1946, 41: 'La villa Iovis invece esula da questo tipo perché situata troppo in alto per potersi considerare marittima'. Cf. also Piccarreta 1977, 17 n. 48 about distinguishing between maritime villas (those which presented structures built right on the waterfront, having physical contact with the sea) and coastal villas.

¹⁶ Villa Jovis is located on the north-eastern tip of the island, just opposite the tip of the Surrentum Peninsula; the position afforded panoramic views on the whole Bay of Naples. On the architecture of villa Jovis, see Krause 2005 (non vidi due to library closures because of the COVID-19 pandemic).

paramount, and it influenced the orientation of rooms, terraces, and open spaces framed by architecture, along with the placing and size of key features such as windows and doorways.

In his letter about the Laurentine villa, Pliny repeatedly emphasized the beautiful panoramic views and the view of the sea one could have from different parts of the villa.¹⁷ Even the cryptoporticus had windows on both sides, offering maritime views from one side and of the garden from the other. Similarly, in the Villa of the Papyri, various parts of the magnificent complex, built on three different levels, had been designed to offer sea-views. The long cryptoporticus part of the *basis villae* supporting the upper levels had large windows opening towards the sea (Fig. 16.1). This kind of sheltered space could be used all year round. In winter and stormy weather, with the windows closed, the panorama could be viewed from a position sheltered from the elements (provided the window had glass panes rather than only wooden shutters); in summer, with the windows opened, the gentle breeze would make for a pleasant environment.

Morally acceptable *otium* had to be productive, exercising either the mind or the body or, ideally, both. Wealthy villas, regardless of their location, had defined spaces in which to stroll and exercise — gardens, *ambulationes* and *gestationes* — even if this meant being carried around in a small vehicle or a litter by slaves!¹⁸ Some inscriptions survive which report the length of these *ambulationes* and how many times one had to walk back and forth in order to cover a healthy distance: one thousand steps or one Roman mile is common.¹⁹ Several gardens in maritime villas offer other examples of the importance of the sea panorama, on the one hand, and of their seasonal use as venues for leisure strolling, on the other.

The Villa delle Grotte on Elba Island, built on two artificial terraces, presented a large garden on the lower terrace with residential quarters on the upper terrace (Fig. 16.3). The orientation and axial view chosen, having the panorama as the focal point, clearly privileged the view of the sea. The lower-terrace long axis is at 90 degrees to the upper terrace.

There are two main reasons for choosing this orientation; the actual topography of the site, with its constraints on how to best build an artificial platform, and the desire to give to the entire length of the garden access to the panorama. The former consideration was, of course, important, even more so considering that the platform to be erected had to carry the weight and thrust of substantial buildings above. But Roman engineering projects in villas could be surprisingly daring in embarking on drastic modelling and cutting of the natural rock to obtain a desired final result; easy solutions were not always what guided the decision taken in a building project.²⁰ Much more important was it to ensure the best views possible from most of the garden. Since usually the garden paths built for strolling ran from one short end of the garden to the other, in the Villa delle Grotte placing the short side seaward would have meant that only at the *end* of a path, when turning to take the next, the stroller would have been able to see the panorama. On the contrary, by building the terrace with the garden oriented with the

¹⁷ E.g. when describing the *triclinium* which protrudes out towards the shore, exposed to the sea-spray when the south-west wind blows, Pliny emphasizes the sea-view on three of its sides: *Ep.* II.17.5. See also the reference to the pleasure afforded by sea view at *Ep.* II.17.15: ‘Hac non deteriore quam maris facie cenatio remota a mari fruitur’ (On this side the dining-room away from the sea has a view as lovely as that of the sea itself).

¹⁸ *Gestationes* or ‘drives’ for the taking of exercise by being conveyed in a small carriage drawn by horses or in a litter carried by slaves; see, e.g. Plin., *Ep.* III.1.5; IX.36.3; Mart. I.12.8; Celsus II.15.3.

¹⁹ *CIL* VI.29776–78. Starting from about the late first century/early second century AD, ‘hippodrome’ gardens became a feature of villas and imperial palaces, where one could promenade on foot, on horse, or in a litter. A famous literary example of hippodrome garden is in Pliny’s description of his villa in *Tuscis* (*Ep.* V.6.32–36), whereas an archaeological one is the garden of the Domus Augustana on the Palatine.

²⁰ For a discussion of this point, with examination of examples of early maritime villas from southern Latium: Ferritto 2019.

long side seaward (Fig. 16.3, b), the designer was maximizing the portion of garden in which one could walk *while* looking at the seascape. Villa Arianna in Stabiae also has the large garden oriented with its long side running parallel to the seaside, as is the case for several other villas identified in its proximity on the Varano plateau, such as the so-called Villa del Pastore.²¹ For a provincial example, we can turn to the ‘Villa of the Small Circus’ near Silin, in Libya. Its broad ‘hippodrome’ garden (85 × 16.50 m), which had down the middle a long and narrow feature with semicircular water basins at the ends, probably a large planting bed, has its long side running roughly parallel to the shore (Fig. 16.4.1).²²

The paths that these villa gardens offered for leisure strolls were not paved; their surfaces were simple beaten earth. This can be best appreciated in the large garden of Villa Arianna, which was excavated in almost its entirety according to modern garden-archaeology methods.²³ The garden had several planting beds alternating with beaten earth-paths. Besides the fact that strolling in this garden, with its variety of plants, must have been most enjoyable when the plants were either blooming or fruiting in spring and summer/early autumn, beaten earth-paths would get muddy in the rain. In these conditions, they were unsuitable for leisure strolls by upper-class male and female Romans wearing either togas, long tunics, or the long dress of the *matronae*. The very fact that these maritime villa gardens had unpaved paths suggests that these spaces were conceived mainly for seasonal use in spring and summer, as far as elite activity is concerned.²⁴ An anecdote preserved in one of Phaedrus’s fables may further suggest that strolling in gardens was normally a *summer* activity, and that eventual dust from the paths may have been the real problem the stroller had to face. Tiberius, so the story goes, had stopped at the imperial villa at Misenum and was walking in the villa’s luxuriant garden (*laeta viridia*) when the butler (the *atriensis*), eager to please the emperor and gain some reward, started to make a show of his sprinkling ‘the scorching earth with a wooden watering-pot’, presumably so that the dust would not set on the emperor’s feet.²⁵ The fable pokes fun at servile sycophantic behaviour; what was unusual about the events portrayed was not that the emperor should stroll on dusty beaten earth-paths or that a servant would sprinkle the dry earth, but that he made too much of a show of it in order to be noticed by the emperor. The setting chosen by Phaedrus for the witty anecdote is just a normal occurrence in elite households: walking in a villa garden in summer.

Looking at the Sea and Almost Touching It

In the letter about his Laurentine villa, Pliny dwells on his *triclinium pulchrum*, a fine dining room, emphasizing the view of the sea its large openings offered, but also the fact that in particular meteorological conditions the sea-spray entered the room:

quod in litus excurrit ac si quando Africo mare impulsum est, fractis iam et novissimis fluctibus leviter adluitur. Undique valvas aut fenestras non minores valvis habet atque ita a lateribus a fronte quasi tria maria prospectat. (Plin., *Ep.* II.17.5)

²¹ For an overview of the villas of Stabiae, see Howe 2018.

²² Wilson 2018, 288–89.

²³ Howe and others 2016.

²⁴ Servile personnel had to, of course, tend to the garden and its plants throughout the year. I am not here covering the use of garden space for dining, clearly attested in some cases by outdoor garden *triclinia*, which also would have been seasonal.

²⁵ Phaed. II.5.14–16 (‘alveolo coepit ligneo conspargere humum aestuantem’).

(It runs out towards the shore, and whenever the sea is driven inland by the south-west wind it is lightly washed by the spray of the spent breakers. It has folding doors or windows as large as the doors all round, so that at the front and sides it seems to look out on to three seas.) (trans. B. Rice)

Certainly, different seasons offered very different sensory experiences in this room: the view of a calm sea; the gentle noise of the water lapping on the shore; the dazzling reflection of the sunlight on the sea's surface; or, on the contrary, the salty smell penetrating the nostrils; sea-sprays on the skin; and the roar of the waves when the south-westerly wind blew.²⁶ In this room, one could almost touch the sea, be part of it.

A setting that seems remarkably similar to what Pliny describes can be found at the Villa of the Papyri. An entire new part of the villa, previously unknown, has been identified in the most recent excavations; a large, flat-roofed hall with a spacious terrace which fronted the seashore and the sea. The hall was found collapsed due to the eruption, so we do not know how many windows it had, but it is the kind of room we would expect to have had large windows on at least three sides, allowing views of the sea all around. In rough conditions, the sea-spray might well have reached this space, just as at Pliny's villa.

The villa of Torre Gianola, near Formia, is an example of a maritime villa with a complex arrangement (Fig. 16.5) that has several features linked to seasonal use, including two fishponds, a *nymphaeum-museum*, and sea-baths.²⁷ The villa occupied a large area on the promontory of Gianola and had an open-fronted architecture, marked by terraces and porticoes. The villa structures unfolded from the summit of the hill along its southern slope, on three different terraces. Built on the rocks by the sea, with pools cut directly into the bedrock, is a small bath complex which could be reached through a combination of cryptoporticus and stairs leading down to the sea. Since these pools were not roofed or heated, it is clear that they had seasonal use. Bath complexes located at sea level and/or outdoor marine water pools are attested at other villas.²⁸ In more elaborate settings, the 'sea baths' are part of an entire maritime nucleus which could feature also platforms and terraces for dining and other leisure activity or proper summer *triclinia*. On the island of Santo Stefano in the Pontine archipelago, a rock-cut circular pool, connected by steps to a natural platform with rock-cut postholes, probably for some kind of *velarium*, was likely a bathing installation to be used in summer.²⁹ Near ancient Surrentum, the villa of the Capo di Sorrento had an entire 'summer quarter' by the sea, comprising baths, a peristyle garden, a *triclinium*, a protected cove, and a mole linking the *pars maritima* with three little islets along the northern side of the outer port.³⁰

Even when a villa did not feature a proper bath complex by the sea with rock-cut pools, we can find bathing solutions, such as the one identified at the Villa of the Papyri, which were meant to be used only for part of the year. In front of the large hall of the Villa of the Papyri I

²⁶ On the contrast between the roar of the sea that can be heard in part of Pollio's maritime villa and the sections more sheltered by the natural sounds, see Stat., *Silv.* II.2.50–51.

²⁷ Marzano 2007, 373–76; Ciccone 1990.

²⁸ Seawater baths seem to have been, to an extent, desirable also outside of the villa context, as it may be inferred from an inscription found in Pompeii in the eighteenth century which advertises the seawater baths of M. Crassus Frugi: *CIL* X.1063: 'Thermae M. Crassi Frugi aqua marina et baln aqua dulci Ianuarivs I'. A possible identification of this M. Crassus with the Licinius Crassus mentioned by Pliny (*HN* XXXI.2.5) as owning in the Bay of Baiae hot springs coming from the sea itself has been proposed, and Maiuri thought that these baths were the ones located at Capo Oncino, Torre Annunziata, which had been excavated in the nineteenth century, since they featured underground cisterns for seawater and a thermal spring. See <https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/VF/Villa_090.htm> [accessed 1 February 2021] for relevant images and bibliographical references.

²⁹ Mengarelli, Zarattini, and Trigona 2014, 241.

³⁰ Russo 2006; Filser and others 2017; Filser and Kennedy 2018.

have mentioned above, there was a spacious terrace ending with a large rectangular swimming pool overlooking the beach below and the sea in front. A short staircase next to the pool led down the beach, where one could walk by the sea, perhaps picking up shells like Scipio Aemilianus and his friend Lelius used to do during their leisure sojourns in Caieta and Laurentum.³¹

Finding Refuge from the Heat: *Nymphaea*, Grottoes, and Water *triclinia*

On the top of the hill occupied by the Gianola villa mentioned above was a monumental tumulus structure with an octagonal plan, its sides carefully aligned with the cardinal points (Fig. 16.5, top). To the east of this building, was a *euripus*, a long ornamental pond.³² According to nineteenth-century descriptions, pools or vats were located in the octagonal building, possibly an indication that a spring was channelled at this point. The vault of the octagonal hall was decorated with mosaic marble tesserae depicting stars, and the walls had hydraulic plaster, very likely to isolate them from the water-rich rock. Around the central room unfolded a series of rooms with apses. The entire interior of the building was decorated to imitate a grotto, and the *ambulacrum* around the hall had imitation stalactites on the vaults. The width of the central walls of this peculiar structure and archaeological finds from the covering indicate an earth-mound top, probably with vegetation, thus making the rendition of the grotto more realistic. This space, which had a sophisticated system of aeration, illumination, and drainage, may have been a *nymphaeum-museum*, and the apses were possibly intended for the display of works of art.³³ It is clear that it was a space offering respite from the heat. Its alignment to cardinal points and the mosaic of the vault depicting stars may have embodied some cosmic structure, but in general terms, the purpose of this space was not much different from the artificial and natural grottoes used as *nymphaea* and/or *triclinia*, such as the large cave of Tiberius's villa in Sperlonga or the *nymphaeum-triclinium* of the imperial villa at Baiae, now underwater.³⁴

Several villas on the Island of Capri made use of natural grottoes that in the Tiberian period were transformed into *nymphaea*. Sculptures have been found in the famous Grotta Azzurra,³⁵ the marine appendix of the villa of Gradola. Then as now, the interior of the Blue Grotto could be reached only by boat, with calm sea. The other grotto-*nymphaea* known on Capri had dry internal spaces where one could lounge, eat, even sleep.³⁶ The Matromania Grotto, where a water spring was, featured a stepped platform which created a small waterfall and a proper room. Such spaces were seasonal; they were meant to be used in summer and offer retreat from the Mediterranean heat and scorching sun. These cool spaces giving respite from the warm weather, offered atmospheric settings by maximizing the interplay between shade and light, between smooth and reflective surfaces (marble) and rough ones (the rock), between artificial and natural.

Grotto-*nymphaea* were normally satellite appendixes of the main body of the villa, belonging either to the outdoor sector of the villa, as at Sperlonga, or located at a certain distance, on land that was part of the villa estate. For examples of spaces within the villa

³¹ Cic., *De or.* II.22 (VI).

³² It measures 75 × 5.30 × 1 m deep.

³³ Ciccone 1990.

³⁴ Yegül and Favro 2019, 285, 289.

³⁵ In the 1960s, statues of Neptune, two Tritons, and a headless Peploforos were found.

³⁶ The Grotta dell'Arsenale, Grotta del Castiglione, and Grotta di Matromania or Matermania; Esposito and Lucignano 2010, 8–16.

building proper which aimed to offer a similarly cool setting for hot days, we must turn to *nymphaea-triclinia*. A particularly well-preserved dining room with associated *nymphaeum* can be found at the maritime villa of Minori on the Amalfi Coast. Built just by the beach, near the mouth of a small river, the villa featured an elegant *nymphaeum-biclinium* as the focal point of the architecture unfolding on three sides of a garden.³⁷ A stepped niche opening on the back wall of the room housed the fountain, with the water cascading first on the steps, then in a small pond, whence it flowed into channels placed in front of the masonry bases for the dining beds, where one could wash his hands or where small vessels carrying foods could be floated. This dining room, with all the water that flowed in it and its very wide opening onto the garden, was clearly a summer room. It was not suitable for use in winter when another *triclinium* (not excavated) would have been available for use.³⁸

Piscinae and *triclinia*

One of the most evident connections with seasonality in upper-class residences concerns *triclinia* and *coenationes*. As mentioned, the majority of villas would have had a summer *triclinium* and a winter one. But there is a specific category of dining spaces which is typical of maritime villas and which appears in conjunction with another exclusive maritime villa feature, the fishponds: *triclinia* in the middle of a fishpond or overlooking it.

Marine fishponds were a feature of many maritime villas, particularly of those along the shores of Tyrrhenian Italy. In the context of maritime villas, large fishponds displaying a complex design had a dual function: they were part of the villas' architectural display, but they were also structures for commercial fish-farming.³⁹ From a purely technical point of view, the running of marine fishponds and fish-farming activity were strictly linked to the different seasons. This is primarily due to the natural cycle in the biology of fish and the technical aspects of ensuring optimum water renewal and oxygen levels inside the fishponds, things influenced by variables such as temperature, tide, and prevailing winds, which change according to the seasons.⁴⁰ As in agriculture and husbandry, there are specific tasks to be attended to in the different seasons — such was the case for marine fish-farming. But beyond the practicalities of fish-farming, the connection between *piscinae* and seasonality manifested itself also in the 'display' side of these fishponds, linked to the use of the spaces around them.

It was not uncommon to find terraces or *coenationes/triclinia* overlooking the fishponds, or proper dining platforms/*triclinia* protruding out towards the centre of the fishpond, as in the case of the so-called 'piscina di Lucullo' in the Circeo area.⁴¹ Two architectural examples may suffice here. The first is the famous maritime villa of Sperlonga, which became an imperial property with Tiberius. The best-known part of this villa is the sector by the sea, comprising a large fishpond and the cave where a large statuary group depicting the

³⁷ Johannowsky 2016.

³⁸ A similar dining setting comprising a *biclinium* and a central water canal is attested in a second-century AD villa in Greece (Baltaneto, Naoussa): see Papaioannou 2018, 333–34.

³⁹ Marzano 2013, 205–25. Unless the *piscinae* were small, in which case the supply of fish was meant to satisfy the needs of the villa.

⁴⁰ For instance, fish have very different feeding patterns between winter and summer; there are specific times of the year when it is possible to capture in the wild juveniles to be used both to restock the fishpond and as feed for larger fish; and the high temperature and evaporation rates of summer months mean that in summer, much more attention had to be paid to water renewal and management of the fish-stock in the fishpond.

⁴¹ The circular fishpond is located along the ancient canal which connects the Lake of Paola to the sea; it is generally assumed that it belonged to a yet unidentified coastal villa; see Higginbotham 1997, 152–55.

blinding of Polyphemus was on display.⁴² At this villa, a small rectangular ‘island’ stood in the middle of the rectangular portion of the fishpond (Fig. 16.6). It has recently been shown that this ‘island’ was planted, possibly with some kind of aquatic plants placed in terracotta containers along the edge of the artificial ‘island’.⁴³ This space in the middle of the fishpond could offer a more private setting for dining than the large grotto opposite it. This central ‘island’ certainly offered a different view and angle for the enjoyment of the various sculptural groups that populated the immediate surroundings, creating a mythical landscape.⁴⁴ However, both the grotto setting and the ‘island cum garden-*triclinium*’⁴⁵ would have been most unsuitable in cold and rainy weather and would have been used at their best from late spring to early autumn.

The second example is the Torre Astura villa, near Antium. Not much is known of the villa proper, which lies buried under sand dunes and pine trees in a military zone. The massive fishpond, however, is much better known because of its impressive size, design, and complexity. A bridge-aqueduct connected the main part of the villa to an artificial island with pavilion overlooking the fishpond. This pavilion, enlarged in two subsequent phases dated to the Imperial age, featured in the Republican phase only a dining room, where one could dine while enjoying the view of the large fishpond and its content. Pavilions like this one offered the kind of setting alluded to in one of Martial’s epigrams about Apollinaris’s maritime villa in Formiae: there he enjoyed fishing from the fishpond with the cane, while reclining in bed or on a couch.⁴⁶

Being next to a mass of water, in a natural environment like a cave or in a *triclinium* with large openings must not have been very attractive if the weather outside was cold, windy, and/or rainy. However, this is not the only reason why this kind of dining pavilions and *triclinia* were used seasonally. They were chiefly meant to offer a prime view of the fishpond and *its contents*. Varro comments on the practice of dining in *aporothecae*, where the *fructus* of the farm could be admired.⁴⁷ Agricultural production was a spectacle and could be put on show. We know, from literary and archaeological sources, that even the imperial family enjoyed dining in a press room and *cella vinaria* during the vintage, albeit one fit for an emperor: the ‘utilitarian’ *opus spicatum* floor was, in fact, made with tiles of *pietrasanta* marble, not bricks.⁴⁸ Likewise, in these maritime villas, it was the ‘production’ of the fishponds, that is, the fish, that was on show. The different types of fish one successfully kept in the ponds, their size and amount, the owner feeding from his hands his/her pet fish, and the technical ingenuity in having a well-working and pleasantly designed fishpond were all things to be admired while dining and were also a tribute to the diligence and interests of the owner. Not to mention that seeing fish caught from the pond and shortly after served at the table in some kind of elaborate

⁴² This grotto was the location of an important event narrated by Tacitus (*Ann.* IV.59): while the emperor and guests were dining in the cave, some boulders fell down, and Sejanus promptly shielded the emperor with his body, thus gaining his complete trust.

⁴³ Pesando and Stefanile 2016.

⁴⁴ In addition to the Polyphemus group in the cave, on the top of the cave’s mouth was a statue of Ganymede snatched by Zeus in the shape of an eagle; in the round pond part of the larger fishpond was the famous Scylla statuery group.

⁴⁵ Pesando and Stefanile (2016, 207) note that no traces of flooring have been found in their investigations, and that from the concretions on the amphorae used for plantings, it seems they were exposed to a very humid/water-logged environment, and therefore they suggest that the whole little island was a garden and not a *triclinium*.

⁴⁶ Mart. X.30; see also Plin., *Ep.* IX.7.4 about one of his lacustrine villas in Comum, where one can fish from the *cubiculum*, reclining in bed.

⁴⁷ Varro, *Rust.* I.59.2.

⁴⁸ Young Marcus Aurelius writes about dining in the press room of one of the imperial villas in one of his letters to Fronto (*Ep.* IV.6, Teub. ed.); excavations at Villa Magna have identified this remarkable space: Fentress, Goodson, and Maiuro (eds) 2016, 95–98.

preparation was also part of the spectacle and not much different from dining in aviaries, where the diners could see the birds fly and then see them, cooked, served on their plates.⁴⁹ But in order to enjoy the sight of fish actively swimming around and feeding, the dinners had to take place in seasons other than winter, when the fish metabolism slows down, the fish eat less, and tend to stay still at the bottom of their pond.

Dining al fresco while being able to see, and have ready access to, the fish kept in the fishpond were specifications the ancient architects often had to deliver for their demanding clients. A recently excavated fishpond dating to the Augustan Age at Lac-de-Capelles near Narbonne exemplifies this nicely. Built in what in Antiquity was a coastal, brackish lagoon, the large circular fishpond, which was probably part of a luxurious maritime villa, had at its centre a rectangular platform with summer *triclinium*.⁵⁰ On one side of this platform was an exedra facing a smaller fishpond, connected by channels to the larger one, but also featuring a separate internal tank in wood. The wooden tank, as revealed by the finds of many oyster shells, was used to keep the fresh oysters to be eaten during the banquets, whereas the rest of this smaller fishpond could have been used to keep rarer fish, or simply a selection from the large pond that the diners could admire: this smaller fishpond must have been in full view of the *triclinium* and the diners and was built for both practical and aesthetic reasons.

Windows: An Indication of Seasonality

Windows in reception rooms such as *triclinia* and *oeci* had an important role in directing and framing the views. Some architects had specific theories and rules on the best sizing of windows depending on what views they were meant to frame. A passage from one of Cicero's letters to his friend Atticus is most interesting in this respect, if partly enigmatic, revealing theories of the time, grounded in physics and philosophy:

Fenestrarum angustias quod reprehendis, scito te Κύρον παιδείαν reprehendere. nam cum ego idem istuc dicerem, Cyrus aiebat viridiorum διαφάσεις latis luminibus non tam esse suavis. etenim ἔστω ὄψις μὲν ἢ Α, τὸ δὲ ὁρώμενον <τὸ> ΒΓ, ἀκτῖνες δὲ † ΑΙΤΑ † —vides enim cetera. nam si κατ' εἰδώλων ἐμπτώσεις videremus, valde laborarent εἰδῶλα in angustiis; nunc fit lepide illa ἔκχυσις radiorum. (Cic., *Att.* II.3.2)

(You find fault with the narrowness of my windows. Let me tell you that you are censuring the 'Education of Cyrus'. When I said precisely the same thing, Cyrus told me that views of greenery through wide apertures are not so agreeable. For let vision be A, the object perceived BC, the rays, etc. (?) — you see the rest. Of course, if sight were due to the incidence of images, the images would have a hard time of it in the narrow spaces, but as things are the emission of rays operates very nicely.) (trans. D. R. Shackleton-Bailey)

Whereas large windows in elite urban *domus* tend to open to inward views, such as the garden seen from a *triclinium*, or in between two reception rooms,⁵¹ in villas this could be very different, particularly in the case of maritime villas on high cliffs. In these cases, access to the buildings was controlled, so a large window opening on the side of the cliff to take in the panorama did not present a high security risk. Because the superstructure of ancient buildings is rarely preserved, we do not always know the placement and size of windows. The villas of the Vesuvian area, due to their exceptional conservation, offer multiple cases of windows/windowsills preserved, allowing appreciation of how large windows could be used

⁴⁹ See anecdote about Lucullus's aviary: Varro, *Rust.* III.4.3.

⁵⁰ Carayon and others 2016, 93–94.

⁵¹ Michielin 2019.

to frame a series of vistas from residential rooms such as the *triclinium*, but also to control, at a basic level, the temperature in a room. The so-called *triclinium* A at Villa Arianna in Stabiae had nine very large windows on three of its sides, with the fourth completely open to views of the Bay of Naples, Vesuvius, and the sea.⁵² Large windows such as these are a viable choice in a building in two cases only: either they had glass panes, which became more common in the second part of the first century AD, to block out the wind and the cold, or, if the windows could be shut only by wooden shutters (thus no view, light, or air when the window was closed), the room in question was used only in warm weather. Similar considerations are valid for another space revealed by the new excavations at the Villa of the Papyri: a large, semicircular corner room which protruded from the *basis villae* (Fig. 16.1). It had two superimposed rows of large, rectangular windows, evidently intended to offer an almost uninterrupted view of the sea, but also to allow plenty of sea breeze in warm weather. If the windows had glass sheets, one could be in this space also in winter and enjoy dramatic views of the sea.

If we had more data on windows at seaside villas, we would have a much better understanding of the seasonal use of certain spaces and the activities that could take place in them. In the absence of standing superstructures, the orientation of a room and the general building principles found in literary sources — winter rooms should have a westerly orientation, summer rooms should look north — are our only guide. However, when a maritime villa had to be used for the whole year, whether by choice or necessity, compromising solutions could be found. The villa ‘of Julia’ on Ventotene in the Pontine archipelago, a villa where Augustus’s daughter was confined, has a *triclinium* room oriented to the west, as prescribed for ‘winter rooms’, so that the afternoon sun could be taken in, but large windows, presumably to make the space suitable also for warmer weather.

Maritime Villas Used Only Seasonally

There are some examples, unfortunately not very well known from an archaeological point of view, of maritime villas erected on tiny islands. Not only were these establishments almost completely dependent on the shipments of foodstuff and of drinking-water from the mainland; since they did not have any permanent source of freshwater and sufficient land for cultivation, they also did not have proper harbours. They could be reached only when weather conditions allowed sailing and safe landing. These were truly seasonal maritime villas, visited only during the good season and left **unoccupied** (with just a guardian/few servants maybe?) in winter.

The small island of Isca, just off the southern coast of the Sorrento Peninsula, is little more than a rock in the sea; yet, it had a relatively large maritime villa. This villa must have been part of the ‘network’ of Roman installations that are known in the area, comprising water reservoirs and storerooms on the coast opposite the island, at the fiord of Crapolla, a cistern on the nearby small island of Vivaro, and other maritime villas which could be reached with a relatively short sea journey: the villas of Capri, the Gallo Lungo islet, and Positano.⁵³

The remains still visible on Isca in the early twentieth century, albeit scant, were sufficient to give an idea of the complexity of the layout.⁵⁴ The villa had two landing points with simple quays and rock-cut steps. The remains featured a large cistern to collect rainwater and part of the *basis villae* consisting of several cisterns supporting proper residential rooms above them. A panoramic terrace opened in front of these structures, while a garden or other panoramic terrace may have stood on the top of the island. From here, a staircase led to the

⁵² Howe 2018, with previous bibliography, for an overview of the Stabian villas.

⁵³ Mingazzini and Pfister 1946.

⁵⁴ Mingazzini and Pfister 1946, 153–57.

other landing point, in proximity of which were two *nymphaea* set in natural caves. The entire setting, beside reiterating what was observed earlier about the importance of panoramic views, is best suited to occupation only during the months of fine weather. Similar considerations can be made for the villa on nearby Gallo Lungo island: these were not meant to be inhabited for the whole year. Even in modern times, no one lived on Gallo Lungo in winter, except for the custodian in charge of the lighthouse.

Seasonality and Activities

I conclude this survey of the links between maritime villas and seasonality by turning away from specific architectural spaces to consider activities linked to seasonality which, in some very exceptional cases, are documented by archaeological evidence. I am here concerned with one specific type of activity, which every building needs: maintenance and upkeep. It can be argued that, like today, properties by the sea needed more frequent maintenance than others. The exceptional archaeological record of the Vesuvian area due to the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 has preserved many contexts, often not disturbed by later occupation. In some of the maritime villas, as in the urban houses of Pompeii, evidence that building and maintenance works were going on at the time of the eruption has been identified. Especially in Pompeii proper, this type of evidence is largely explained with the long rebuilding effort required after the serious earthquake of AD 62. But without wanting to dismiss such an interpretation or underestimate the time it might have required to restore, rebuild, and repurpose buildings damaged in 62, we cannot forget that buildings — maritime villas among them — also need regular maintenance. And we can be sure that maritime villas, just like any other elite mansion, would have required on occasion changes in decor to keep up with changing fashion (e.g. in type of wall paintings or flooring) or satisfy the tastes of new owners: properties such as these were bought, sold, willed, and confiscated all the time.

When would have been the best time to carry out maintenance works? Ideally, in the case of a luxurious maritime villa where the owner wanted to engage in fruitful *otium* and/or entertain guests, when he or she was not in residence and when, especially in the case of outdoor works, the weather was still settled. The reappraisal in recent years of the date of the AD 79 eruption to late October rather than August explains much better why, in several villas of the area, there were ongoing building works at the moment of the eruption: we can assume that the proprietor and his guests were not in residence in late October. At the Oplontis Villa A, for instance, some works were probably taking place in the rear garden area, since statues from this garden were found stored away in the east rear portico.⁵⁵ At nearby villa Sora, at Torre del Greco, one of the vestibules was being refurbished, involving also, as suggested by a graffito, new wall paintings.⁵⁶ At Villa of the Papyri, in the northernmost room of the *basis*

⁵⁵ Jashemski 1979–93, I, 306.

⁵⁶ Pagano 1991. The graffito, scratched in the wall plaster, reads: ‘K(alendas) Novmres tripic[t]um A XIV *I’. Years ago, Pesando (2016, 49) suggested that the graffito was made not long before the eruption, thus being a confirmation of an autumn date for it. More recently, a new wall inscription, in charcoal, from the new excavation at Regio V in Pompeii has made headlines as the ‘proof’ of the date of the eruption in autumn. I must say that the archaeobotanical evidence gathered by Borgongino and Stefani (2001–02) is still more convincing than any graffito, *pace* those who wish to defend one of the variants of Pliny’s manuscripts at all cost, maintaining the traditional date of 24 August. Archaeological evidence from some of the rural villas near Pompeii also clearly points to an autumn date for the eruption rather than August. At the villa della Pisanella, for instance, the sunken *dolia* were all already filled with must (the vintage could not have already taken place in August), and the olive pressing was ongoing (the olive harvest, depending on the cultivar, occurs between late October and early February), as indicated by a heap of pomace found in the courtyard: De Simone 2014, 200–01.

villae, both the wall painting decoration and the stuccoes on part of the ceiling were being either restored or executed *ex novo*, and part of the wooden scaffolding for the workers was found in situ during the excavations carried out in 2007–08.⁵⁷ At the recently excavated villa of Positano, a long, two-handled iron saw used for cutting timber was discovered in the elegant and luxuriously decorated *oecus*, while an array of metal vessels, cooking pots, and more valuable objects was locked away in a strongbox placed in that same room. Although this is the only room that has been investigated, it seems clear that it was not being used as a reception room at the time of the villa's destruction, and that some kind of maintenance works were ongoing in that room or in one nearby. Another example comes from Villa Arianna in Stabiae, where various rooms in the eastern part of the villa, labelled as 'servants' quarters', contained an array of objects — from an elegant tower-shaped samovar, now in the Naples Archaeological Museum, to glass vases, metal masks, pastry moulds, and pieces of furniture.⁵⁸

It is true that the Romans travelled to their maritime villas in winter, too. Cicero wrote a number of letters from his villas in Astura and Antium in winter, and of course Pliny the Elder, the younger Pliny, and his mother were all in residence near Misenum when the eruption occurred.⁵⁹ Pliny the Elder, as admiral of the Misenum fleet, had good reason to be in the area at that time of the year. But sojourns at most maritime villas in late autumn and in winter were rarer than in spring and summer, so disruptive renovation works took place then. If we remember this, the frequent evidence for ongoing building works from villas destroyed by Vesuvius is more logically understood as seasonal maintenance carried out in autumn, even if it was to repair some of the damage done by the earthquakes in the months preceding the eruption (and not some major damage caused by the quake that had struck seventeen years earlier): if possible, it was preferable to choose a time when the works were not going to be too disruptive for the owners and their families.

Conclusions

This overview of maritime villa architecture and its link with seasonality has identified several spaces which were destined for seasonal use. A clear feature of Italian maritime villas, especially those located at a certain distance from Rome, is the fact that they were used most frequently in the spring and part of the summer, and therefore they offered various spaces — *nymphaea*, water *triclinia*, cryptoporticoes, etc. — in which to escape the heat during the day, alongside spaces such as belvederes and outdoor swimming pools to be used in good, warm weather.

The relationship between maritime villas and the sea is a crucial element in maritime villa architecture. Panoramic views of the sea were highly appreciated and as a consequence, ensuring the best possible view of the sea often dictated the positioning of the various villa parts, including the garden. But in the case of maritime villas, the sea was important also as a route to reach the villa itself; travels by sea, being faster and more convenient, were preferred whenever possible. Sailing was clearly conditioned by the seasons, or the weather conditions at least. Therefore, the mode of journey to one's villa — and the experience one would have

⁵⁷ Camardo 2019, 111–13. Some cracks in the wall paintings suggest that, besides normal upkeep, the workers were repairing damage caused by the earthquake(s) which preceded the eruption.

⁵⁸ Such as rooms W1 and W15, following the eighteenth-century plan by Weber: Marzano 2007, 145.

⁵⁹ Plin., *Ep.* 6.16; 6.20. The letter the younger Pliny wrote to Tacitus about his uncle's death also reveal that there were other members of the Roman elite in residence at villas of the Bay of Naples at the time of the eruption, such as Rectina, who had sent a message to the Elder Pliny to ask for help and a Pomponianus who was in Stabiae.

on the journey — was also something which varied according to the seasons. Approaching a maritime villa by boat allowed a full appreciation of the monumental architecture of the villa; landing would take place at the quay or harbour structure that each maritime villa had. At times, a clear effort had been made to enhance the decorative effect of even the structural components of a villa, such as retaining walls: at the Villa delle Grotte discussed earlier, the retaining walls of the artificial terraces and the ramps have an *opus reticulatum* facing displaying *cubilia* of different colour, so as to create an attractive, distinctive decorative effect. On the contrary, arriving by land — the kind of journey we would expect a maritime villa owner undertook in winter — often did not allow a view of the full extent of the villa or its most architecturally impressive parts. Maritime villas were meant to be seen and admired primarily from the sea, while sailing on calm waters.

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