

Rural churches and settlements in late-antique and Early Mediaeval Tuscany

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The relationship between Roman villas and their re-use as ecclesiastical buildings in late antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* has been much investigated in recent years. This topic is now integrated into the debate about the end of the villas and of rural settlements more generally.¹ Since the bibliography is extensive, I shall highlight only the main interpretative and more recent studies. As is argued in a series of studies focusing on the Italian peninsula, Roman villas underwent structural, functional and spatial changes from the end of the 4th c. despite their continued use.² The most striking modification is the erection of churches on rural settlements. The chronology and nature of this Christianisation of the countryside are still subject to debate.³ I will examine the best-known villas in the territory corresponding to

* All dates refer to the present era unless otherwise indicated.

1 On rural settlement or “secondary settlements” in general, see P. Leveau, “*Vicus, ‘agglomération secondaire’, des mots différents pour une même entité,*” in C. Cribelier and A. Ferdière (edd.), *Agglomérations secondaires romaines en région Centre* (Tours 2012) 165-75; P. Garmy, “Les mots et la chose: à propos des agglomérations secondaires antiques,” *RACentre* 42 (2010) 183-87; on the processes of their “Christianization”, see G. Cantino Wataghin, V. Fiocchi Nicolai and G. Volpe, “Aspetti della cristianizzazione degli agglomerati secondari,” in R. M. Bonacasa Carra and E. Vitale (edd.), *La cristianizzazione in Italia fra tardoantico ed altomedioevo: aspetti e problemi* (Palermo 2007) 85-134.

2 A. Castrorao Barba, “Continuità topografica in discontinuità funzionale: trasformazioni e riusi delle ville romane in Italia tra III e VIII secolo,” *Post-Classical Archaeologies* 4 (2014) 259-96; id., “Ville romane e riusi tra Tardantichità e Altomedioevo: per un bilancio nazionale,” in F. Redi and A. Forgione (edd.), *Atti del VI Congresso naz. di Archeologia Medievale* (Florence 2012) 175-80; id., “Le ville romane in Italia tra III e VI sec. d.C.: approccio statistico e considerazioni generali,” *Amoenitas. Rivista int. di studi misc. sulla villa romana antica* 3 (2014) 9-24; on Roman villas in late-antique Italy in general, see C. Sfameni, *Ville residenziali nell’Italia tardoantica* (Bari 2006); on the end of Roman villas in Italy, see G. P. Brogiolo, A. Chavarría Arnau and M. Valenti (edd.), *Dopo la fine delle ville: le campagne dal VI al IX secolo* (Mantua 2005). For the Roman West, syntheses include: J. Percival, “The fifth-century villa: new life or death postponed?,” in id. and H. Elton (edd.), *Fifth-century Gaul: a crisis of identity?* (Cambridge 1992) 156-64; J. Arce, “*Otium et negotium: the great estates, 4th-7th centuries,*” in L. Webster and M. Brown (edd.), *The transformation of the Roman world, AD 400-900* (London 1997) 19-32; G. Ripoll and J. Arce, “The transformation and end of Roman villae in the West (fourth-seventh centuries). Problems and perspectives,” in G. P. Brogiolo, N. Gauthier and N. Christie (edd.), *Towns and their territories between late antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden 1997) 63-114; T. Lewit, “Vanishing villas: what happened to élite rural habitation in the West in the 5th-6th c.?,” *JRA* 16 (2003) 260-74; A. Chavarría Arnau, “Considerazioni sulla fine delle ville in Occidente,” *ArchMed* 31 (2004) 7-20; ead., “El final de las villas y las transformaciones del territorio rural en el Occidente (siglos V-VIII),” in C. Fernández Ochoa, V. García Entero and F. Gil Sendino (edd.), *Villas tardorromanas en Hispania. IV coloquio int. de arqueología* (Gijón 2008) 193-214.

3 See, e.g., the two different interpretations advanced, on the one hand, by A. Chavarría Arnau: “Aristocracias tardoantiguas y cristianización del territorio (siglos IV-V): ¿otro mito historiográfico?,” *RACrist* 82 (2006) 201-30; “Changes in scale in the Italian countryside from late antiquity to the Early Middle Ages,” in J. Escalona and A. Reynolds (edd.), *Scale and scale change in the Early Middle Ages. Exploring landscape, local society and the world beyond* (Turnhout 2010) 121-32; “Churches and villas in the 5th century: reflections on Italian archaeological data,” in P. Delogu and S. Gasparri (edd.), *Le trasformazioni del V secolo. L’Italia, i barbari e l’Occidente*