

Social distinctions and issues of privacy in the toilets of Hadrian's Villa

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Roman toilets are the subject of increased attention.¹ The first studies concentrated on where toilets were located, what they looked like, and how they operated. Then interest shifted to the place of toilets in systems of water-supply and of waste-disposal.² Recently, work is in progress on how toilets functioned in the context of personal care and social behaviour, addressing questions of hygiene.³ The present article will consider particularly the questions of 'Who used which toilet?' and 'How much privacy was available?' For this, the many toilets of Hadrian's Villa near Tivoli provide a suitable test case. Planned and built by the emperor himself, the villa was not constrained by lack of space or shortage of funding. It shows where one emperor chose to build toilets. Because it has segregated areas for the emperor and his family, for his guests, and for servants, it provides an opportunity to investigate whether different toilets were designed for different social classes,⁴ and it provides hints about the sanitary customs and issues of privacy among the different groups.⁵

Shortly after becoming emperor in A.D. 117, Hadrian began to build a vast palace that incorporated new design concepts (including his own).⁶ It covered 120 hectares of countryside c.30 km from the capital. Whenever he was not travelling through the empire he stayed there or in the city. At Tivoli he was never alone but surrounded by a thousand or more, including his family, friends, members of his administration, personnel and slaves. He also received many visitors, for he enjoyed banqueting and entertaining guests, as the many dining-rooms attest, ranging from areas where many could be received (e.g., the large Water Court, 31)⁷ to smaller areas (e.g., the Scenic Triclinium, 17), to intimate rooms for a few (e.g., the Island Enclosure, 17) (fig. 1). His guests could marvel at the architecture, works of art, and large gardens filled with wat-

- 1 See, for example, G. Jansen, "Water systems and sanitation in the houses of Herculaneum," *MededRom* 50 (1991) 151-73; ead., "Paintings in Roman toilets," in E. M. Moormann (ed.), *Functional and spatial analysis of wall painting* (BABesch Suppl. 3, 1993) 29-31; ead., "Private toilets at Pompeii: appearance and operation," in S. E. Bon and R. Jones (edd.), *Sequence and space in Pompeii* (Oxford 1997) 121-34; R. Neudecker, *Die Pracht der Latrine* (München 1995); A. O. Koloski-Ostrow, "Finding social meaning in the public latrines of Pompeii," in N. de Haan and G. Jansen (edd.), *Cura aquarum in Campania* (BABesch Suppl. 4, 1996) 79-86.
- 2 See, for example, G. Jansen, "Systems for the disposal of waste and excreta in Roman cities. The situation at Pompeii, Herculaneum and Ostia," in X. Dupré and J.-A. Remolà (edd.), *Sordes Urbis. La eliminación de residuos en la ciudad romana* (Rome 2000) 37-49; A. Wilson, "Drainage and sanitation," in Ø. Wikander (ed.), *Handbook of ancient water technology* (Leiden 2000) 152-79.
- 3 A. Wilson, "Incurring the wrath of Mars: sanitation and hygiene in Roman North Africa," in G. Jansen (ed.), *Cura aquarum in Sicilia* (BABesch Suppl. 5, 2000) 307-12, and G. Jansen, "Studying Roman hygiene: the battle between the 'optimists' and the 'pessimists'," *ibid.* 275-79; A. O. Koloski-Ostrow, "Cacator cave malu(m): the subject and object of Roman public latrines during the first centuries BC and AD," *ibid.* 189-95; ead., *The archaeology of sanitation in Roman Italy: water, sewers and toilets* (Chapel Hill, forthcoming).
- 4 This theme was already touched upon by Neudecker (*supra* n.1) 68.
- 5 I will not here make use of ancient texts referring to latrines since that would require a separate study. The texts sometimes deal with chamber pots or movable chairs, another topic requiring attention. Further, each text must first be analysed to discern any possible humorous context or psychological connotations. On the texts, see for now E. Salza Prina Ricotti, "Lavacra pro sexibus separant," *RendPont* 66 (1995) 77-110.
- 6 For general information on the villa see W. MacDonald and J. A. Pinto, *Hadrian's Villa and its legacy* (New Haven 1995) and E. Salza Prina Ricotti, *Villa Adriana. Il sogno di un imperatore* (Rome 2001).
- 7 The names of different parts of the villa vary from one publication to another. Here I will follow those given by MacDonald and Pinto (*ibid.*), as marked on fig. 1.