

A mosaic of Aion with the Seasons at Masseria Ciccotti (Lucania) and its 3rd-c. A.D. context

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New evidence on the Roman villa in S Italy

Less than two decades ago A. Carandini, in the context of an overview¹ on rural landscapes and the development of villas in the Italian peninsula between the 1st and 3rd c. A.D., proposed classifying villas in two distinct categories: *villa centrale*² and *villa periferica*. Such a classification was based primarily, as he himself underlined, on a geographical criterion set forth by the *agrimensores*, who establish a clear distinction between the *suburbana regio Italiae* and the *longinqua regio*.³ The classification entailed, however, fundamental differences in the economic function, labour organization and, presumably, the lay-out and architectural development of the two types.⁴ In spite of some initial reservations,⁵ his formulation and some of the arguments upon which it is based have been instrumental in underlining the unquestionable regional configurations of the 'villa phenomenon' in the peninsula, and both large-scale excavations and systematic surface surveys conducted since the 1980s have served to highlight the varied regional articulations of the Italian countryside.⁶

In a slightly later paper,⁷ Carandini re-examined the classification of villas with a more specific reference to the S part of the peninsula, especially Apulia and Lucania. In the face of the fragmentary archaeological evidence then available from rural sites in that part of the peninsula,⁸ he concluded that it is especially in S Italy that a type of *villa periferica* would most probably have been the prevailing type and have displayed its peculiar characteristics. Nevertheless, he acknowledged the need for caution⁹ in taking such a clear-cut distinction at face value.

Subsequent research and recent villa excavations, especially in Lucania and Apulia,¹⁰ have documented many examples of villas which would hardly fit into the category of *villa periferica*. The spectacular example of an atrium-peristyle villa at Termito¹¹ near Metapontum, dated to the Late Republican period and now sufficiently well documented, testifies to the precious presence in a remote part of Italy of the type of *villa centrale* that followed closely the model of the so-called 'Varroian' villa,¹² popular along the Tyrrhenian side of Etruria,

1 A. Carandini, "I paesaggi agrari dell'Italia romana visti a partire dall'Etruria," in *L'Italie d'Auguste à Dioclétien* (CollEFR 198, 1994) 167-74.

2 Of which Settefinestre is an emblematic case study, owing to the extensive and systematic excavations promptly and exhaustively presented: A. Carandini and A. Ricci (edd.), *Settefinestre. Una villa schiavistica nell'Etruria romana* (Modena 1985).

3 O. Behrens and L. Capogrossi Colognesi (edd.), *Die römische Feldmesskunst* (Göttingen 1992).

4 A recent overview, with particular reference to later Roman villas, is given by C. Stamni, *Ville residenziali nell'Italia tardoantica* (Bari 2006) 19-20.

5 L. Capogrossi Colognesi, "Dibattito" in *L'Italie* (supra n.1).

6 S. L. Dyson *The Roman countryside* (London 2003) 77.

7 A. Carandini, "Paesaggi agrari meridionali: ed etruschi: a confronto," in *Bulllettario Oraziano* (Venosa 1993) 239-45.

8 A notable exception was the villa at San Giovanni di Ruoti, which, however, pertains mostly to the late-antique period.

9 Carandini (supra n.7) 242-44.

10 The San Giovanni di Ruoti excavations paved the way for a line of research not previously developed in these regions. The scarce excavation data from the *Bruttii* (Calabria) in *Regio III* has been well analyzed by A. B. Sangineto in E. Lo Cascio and A. Storch (edd.), *Modalità insediative e strutture agrarie nell'Italia meridionale in età romana* (Bari 2001) 203-48.

11 A. De Siena and L. Giardino, "Trasformazioni delle aree urbane e del paesaggio agrario in età romana nella Basilicata sud-orientale," *ibid* 153-56 and fig. 17.

12 See, however, N. Terrenato's remarks cautioning scholars against applying such categories, extrapolated from literary texts, to examples of villas archaeologically documented: "The Auditorium site in Rome