

# DISCOVERING A ROMAN RESORT-COAST: THE LITUS LAURENTINUM AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF OTIUM\*<sup>1</sup>

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## I. Introductory

*Otium* - the concept of leisure, the elaborate social and cultural definer of the Roman elite away from its business of political and military power - is famous. We can see in Roman literary texts how the practice of *otium* patterned everyday experience, and how it was expressed in physical terms in the arrangement, on a large and on a small scale, of all aspects of Roman space. The texts likewise show that much of what we would regard as social life, and nearly all of what we think of as economic, belonged in the domain of *otium*. The complexities and ambiguities of this material have been much studied.<sup>2</sup> Roman archaeology equally needs to be an archaeology of *otium*, but there has been little attempt to think systematically about what that might entail.

Investigating the relationship between a social concept such as *otium* and the material culture that is the primary focus of archaeology must in the first place involve describing Roman culture in very broad terms. The density of explicit or implicit symbolic meaning, the organisation of space and time, degrees of hierarchy of value or prestige: it is at that level of generalisation that the archaeologist and the cultural historian will find the common denominators that enable them to share in the construction of explanations of Roman social phenomena. In this account, which is based on research into a particular locality, we shall have to limit ourselves to one of these possibilities.

One of the most distinctive aspects of *otium* was the relationship that it had to place. *Otium* could not be practiced in the same places as public business; indeed to mix the two was a disgrace. The Romans developed social institutions of horizontal mobility which were closely tied to their theory of *otium*. By the late Republic, and through the customs that we label 'villeggiatura', a high degree of mobility had become normal for the upper classes. This should be of the greatest importance for understanding how the economy worked, and the evidence is abundantly available in the shape of the very elaborate and numerous premises that the Roman elite built to accommodate its movements and those of the staff who maintained the lifestyle to which they were accustomed. But the tendency in archaeology has been to study only small parts of villas of *otium*, so that their context in the social, cultural and economic landscape as a whole remains very often unclear. Meanwhile the debate about the mutual relations of town and country goes on without nearly sufficient attention to the fact that the Romans spent so much of their time moving between the two.<sup>3</sup>

The coastal winter-resort which in the late Republic and Empire lay between Ostia and Lavinium - and was integrated with both communities - offers a unique opportunity to correct some of the imbalances in our existing picture through archaeology. While many of the better-known centres of *otium* are on the fringes of cities, the *litus Laurentinum* (Laurentine shore), as it was called, extends sufficiently far from the urban nuclei to make it difficult for its functioning to be seen as in any real sense suburban.

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\* This is an English version of the same article 'Alla scoperta di una costa residenziale romana: il *litus Laurentinum* e l'archeologia dell'*otium*', in *Castelporziano III*, 11-32.

1 I am grateful to Amanda Claridge for her comments on this paper and for many thought-provoking discussions about the nature of the *litus Laurentinum* in Antiquity.

2 J.-M. André, *L'otium dans la vie morale et intellectuelle romaine* (Paris 1966).

3 See N. Purcell, 'The Roman villa and the landscape of production', in T. Cornell and K. Lomas eds, *Urban Society in Roman Italy* (London 1995), 151-79.

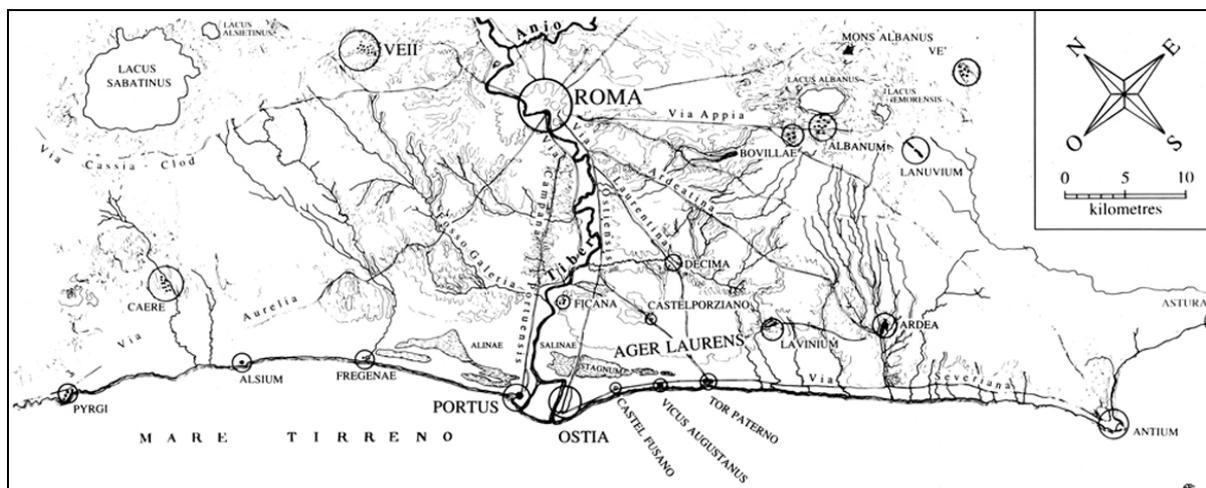


Fig. 1 Map of Rome and the shoreline between Astura and Pyrgi.

Whereas the economy of villas has sometimes been privileged at the expense of the cultural aspects of their life, the environment of these coastlands is not favourable for the large-scale production of staples or the more familiar cash crops, and the agricultural dimension is therefore represented in the Roman period only in rather curious and specialised forms. Most villas in other parts of Italy are mute, telling us nothing of the whimsical or serious associations that their builders and occupiers found in their setting and in what they believed of its past - associations themselves closely linked with the working of the concept of *otium*. But this coastline is a famous place with a remarkable tradition in Roman historical and literary thought. Above all, where most investigations of country estates must make the best of shattered fragments in a setting denuded of archaeological context, here the state of preservation of the landscape is such as to make it possible to study the bits between the nuclei of the villas, the matrix in which they are set in both time and space: thus the origins, formation and demise of the social and economic forms of a resort and the infrastructure which maintained it and the interrelationship between the constituent parts are all traceable to some extent in the archaeological record.

My aim in this paper is to attempt to outline some of what we already know about the functioning of the *litus Laurentinum* from the literary sources, the inscriptions and what has already been discovered of the remains, as a contribution towards establishing an agenda for further work and towards the possible integration of future research into a collective strategy of historical and archaeological investigation.<sup>4</sup> Such investigation must be collective: and it must be based on an understanding of the whole region. Piecemeal research into individual problems will not produce answers to the questions posed here.

4 For summaries of work so far done at Castelporziano, and plans for the future, see A. Claridge, 'Castel Porziano: la zona del Vicus Augustanus 1984' *ArchLaz VII* (= *Quad Cent St AEI*) 1983, 218-223; *Castelporziano I. Campagna di scavo e di restauro* (Rome 1984); *Castelporziano II. Campagna di scavo e di restauro 1986-1987* (Rome 1988). F. Castagnoli, *Lavinium I - Topografia generale, fonti e storia delle ricerche* (Rome 1972) is basic on the area. See also M. Torelli, *Lavinio e Roma* (Rome 1984). The Laurentes are subsumed in Lavinium in Pauly-Wissowa, XII (1925), 1007-12; cf. also *Dizionario Epigrafico s.v. Lavinium*, Vol. 4 (1) 477-80; s.v. Laurentes, Vico Augustano, *ibid.* Basic references in H. Nissen, *Italische Landeskunde II* (Berlin 1902), 566-79.

## II From the Lucrine Lake to the Stagno di Ostia. Origins of a 'maritime façade'.

Much of the west coast of central Italy was in Antiquity very wet. There were great areas of swamps and lagoons between the shoals of the inner coastal waters and the wetlands behind the shore, where the run-off of the heavy west central Italian rainfall was ponded back by beach deposits. The product of the progradation of the coastline by the deposition and redistribution of fluvial material, this landscape was less unchanging in Antiquity than it has become since the stabilisation of the coastal margin and the progressive *bonifica* of the levels behind - it offered, for example, more points of transition from marine to lacustrine waters. Its principal natural vegetation is likely to have been dense woodland and scrub.

The shifting topography of inlets and marshy pools, dunes and reedbeds, and the natural forest which interpenetrates it, is interrupted by 'islands' of less mutable topography where different geological conditions apply - the spurs of the volcanic deposits of South Etruria or the Campagna, the limestone ridges of Monte Circeo, the hills above Sperlonga, or Monte Massico. These places offer access to the otherwise rather difficult terrain of the coastal zone, and places where intercommunication between the resources of that area and the ecologically different regions alongside it can occur.

The wetlands and the dry and wet forests of the coast were unpromising for the production of staples such as cereals, and almost certainly malarial in summer. But they had much to contribute to an economy that was opportunistic in its response to diversity of landscape, and holistic in its approach to the exploitation of any available productive niches. There is not time to explore the subject in full here, but three main aspects may be singled out: i) the extraction of the natural products of the area, fish and fowl, timber, brushwood and marsh plants, especially reed; ii) the improvement of that first category through pisciculture, forestry, the preservation of game and the introduction of specialised wetland agriculture such as flax, certain sorts of viticulture, or intensive horticulture (including the intensive cultivation of fine wheat); and iii) the pasturing, seasonal or not, of animals on the lush herbage.

In the repertoire of managed landscape resources in ancient Italy, then, the coastal fringe was not useless. It offered flexibility through the availability of water and variety of environments through its topographical and pedological diversity. Above all, it was obviously the zone of contact and interaction between the affairs of the land and the world of mobility and redistribution represented from early in the first millennium B.C. by the Mediterranean Sea.

The first major transformation of these conditions by human intervention took place in the aftermath of the conquest of Italy by Rome as a result of increasingly formal and self-conscious management by the Roman *res publica*, in the interests, no doubt, at least in the first instance, of military and naval security. The transformation is most clearly visible in Campania, as the Roman state turned to the systematic exploitation of the resources that it had acquired as the result of victory in the war against Hannibal.

New settlements, such as Liternum, Volturnum and Puteoli, were founded at river-mouths or other natural inlets and embayments, to control and exploit the redistribution of the produce of the land. The land itself was formally divided up and let, and so were the other resources of the landscape. The lagunar coastal waters of the *lacus Lucrinus*, 'lake Profit', between Puteoli and Baiae, provide a symbolic example. Its fishery was the first of the public contracts formally let by the censors, because of its well-omened name.<sup>5</sup> Later, its shores were the setting for many of the first *villae maritimae*, the bases of the wealthy Romans who participated in the transformation of the territory. Their aims were profit, display and power, and the private nature of the enterprise entailed that it came under the heading *otium*; but that should not mislead us into seeing the purpose of the villas as somehow frivolous or purely recreational.<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that the Lucrine Lake returned to public use as a harbour and military base when the luxury resources of the Campanian coast were first harnessed by the nascent imperial system, in the course of the war of Octavian and Agrippa against Sextus Pompey. In Campania, to sum up, prosperous circumstances of production in close contact with the growing Mediterranean-wide economy were revolutionised by Roman rule to form the highly urbanized and

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<sup>5</sup> Festus, s.v. *Lacus Lucrinus* (= p. 108L).

<sup>6</sup> M.W. Frederiksen, *Campania* (1984), 321-2.

very complex social and economic forms of the late Republic and early Empire, whose central features are often labelled a 'resort-coast'. A better term, in many ways, is *façade maritime*, a label evolved by the school of Braudel for the zone of interaction between the economic and social processes of a coastal region and the networks of communication and redistribution provided by the sea.<sup>7</sup>

At the mouth of the Tiber similar conjunctions can be observed. The Tiber delta, in the Roman period, extended much less far into the Tyrrhenian Sea than it does at present; it constituted an indented and lagunar stretch of coast not very different from other low-lying zones to the north and south.<sup>8</sup> In this landscape, the advantages of access to the sea are not restricted to the Tiber mouth, despite the importance of the navigable river. Numerous other inlets or beaches on the Tyrrhenian coast offer landfall to small boats, of the kind that was normal for the vast bulk of coastwise communications in Antiquity. We may cite the mouth of the Ostia lagoon at Castel Fusano, the mouth of the stream which is now the Canale del Pantanello, the streams north and south of Tor Paterno, and the Numicus of Lavinium, the most celebrated of these streams in Antiquity - and all this in a fifteen kilometre stretch of coast.

Already at the end of the sixth century B.C., the first treaty between Rome and Carthage conceived of Rome's maritime interest in terms of a whole series of *scale*.<sup>9</sup> The significance of such places has been confirmed by archaeology (the archaic remains at Pyrgi are the outstanding case).<sup>10</sup> The first age of coastal colonisation by Rome likewise involved the strengthening of numerous potential landing-places, such as Alsium (247 B.C.), Fregeneae (245 B.C.), Castrum Novum (264 B.C.) and Pyrgi (?247 B.C.).<sup>11</sup> Nor was the function of such settlement wholly defensive. In the second century the poet Ennius (attributing the first foundation of Ostia to King Ancus) saw the function of these places as exchange as well as naval security.<sup>12</sup> The history of this coast therefore concerned multiple landing-places at the end of numerous routes leading down from the interior, rather than the bleak, featureless, useless expanse of inaccessible beach that today reaches from Ostia to Antium.<sup>13</sup> The difference could hardly be greater.

In Latium as in Campania, the stabilisation of Roman dominion in Italy brought about major changes in this *façade maritime*. Some of the special features of the landscape had been state resources from the distant past, such as the *salinae* or salt-works of the lagoons by the Tiber mouth.<sup>14</sup> Equally, the

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7 See, for instance, A. Ducellier, *La façade maritime de l'Albanie au moyen âge: Durazzo et Valona du XIe au XVe siècle* (Thessalonica 1981).

8 A.G. Segre 'Considerazioni sul Tevere e sul Aniene nel Quarternario', in *Il Tevere e le altre vie d'acqua del Lazio antico*, *ArchLaz VII 2* (= Quad Cent AE-I 12), 9-22. For the greater indentedness of the coast in Antiquity, F. Piccarreta, 'Saggi di restituzione e interpretazione di fotografie aeree' *QuadIstTopAntUnivRoma IX* (1981), 7. ff.

9 Polybius 3, 22, 11, listing the Ardeatai, Antiatai, <L>arentinoi, Kirkaiitai, and Tarrakinitai in that order. At 3, 24, 16, in the similar list for the treaty of 348 the Larentinoi are missing, and their presence out of topographical order in the first list has been considered textually suspect. See F.W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius I* (Oxford 1957), ad loc. The Iron Age site within the Tenuta di Castelporziano should be considered in this context.

10 Pyrgi. *Scavi del santuario etrusco* (1959-67), *NSc XXIV* (1970), Supp. 2. See also M. Gras, *Traffics tyrrhéniens archaïques* (Rome, 1985), 7 on 'l'imbrication des trafics' and 9, emphasising the importance of even minor coastal features to coastal voyages in a sea that in many ways has the characteristics of an ocean compared with other parts of the Mediterranean basin.

11 E.T. Salmon, *Roman Colonisation under the Republic* (London 1970), 70-81 with references.

12 O. Skutsch, *The Annals of Q. Ennius* (Oxford 1985), fr. 128 'Ostia munita est. idem locus navibus pulcris/munda facit, nautisque mari quaesentibus vitam'. See Skutsch ad loc., pp. 282-5.

13 On the Tiber too Rome and Ostia were not the only ports. Archaeology reveals the multiple port-functions of the whole lower course of the river in the imperial period: F. Castagnoli, 'Istallazioni portuali a Roma', in J.H. D'Arms and E.C. Kopff eds, *The Sea-borne Commerce of Ancient Rome: Studies in Archaeology and History* (Rome 1980 = *MAAR XXXVI*), 35-42. For an earlier period, a similar effect is implied by quotations of Festus (298 L) from Fabius Pictor referring to the Saxa Paulia: 'ad portum secundum Tiberim', and from Antistius Labeo: 'ubi fuerit Ficana, via Ostiensi lapide XI'. Cf. C. Mocchegiani Carpano, 'Il Tevere. Archeologia e commercio', *Boll. Num.* II 1, 2-3 (1984), 21-81 at 50-1. Note also the theory of J. Scheid, 'Note sur la Via Campana' *MEFRA* 88 (1976) 639-668 that the Via Campana was essentially a tow-path, despite its undoubtedly ancient origin.

14 Livy I 13 for their foundation by Ancus Marcius; F. Coarelli, 'I santuari, il fiume, gli empori', in *Storia di Roma I. Roma*

woodlands of the coast were believed to have been another gift to the *populus Romanus* of King Ancus Marcius.<sup>15</sup> But other distinctive resources, such as winter pasture notably, could now for the first time be safely integrated into pastoral strategies which included the summer grazing of the distant *altopiano* that was inaccessible in winter because of snow, and which removed animals and their keepers from the threat of summer disease in the coastlands. From the third century, we begin to hear of the entrepreneurial *pecuarii* who profited so much from large-scale pastoral exploitation in the late Republic. The indirect and fragmented mediation of the world of the sea to that of the land and vice versa that had characterised the coast of Latium and South Etruria was replaced by a kind of symbiosis (implied by the attitude of Ennius in the passage that we have already cited) between private entrepreneurship and state management. This symbiosis is central to the understanding of *otium* and of the working of this area socially and economically throughout the imperial period.

In detail, the history of the great transformation of this coast is only dimly visible. The archaeological work to identify early sites and the nature of their relationship with their surroundings is badly needed. We should be prepared to discover that the apparent primacy of Campania to which we have already alluded is an accident of the sources, and that this was in fact the region which pioneered the social and economic changes that we can see more clearly in Campania after the Hannibalic War.

Recent excavations have shown a sudden decline in the urban core of Lavinium in the early third century, and that of Ardea at a similar date has been inferred from the literary sources.<sup>16</sup> Such downturns should probably not be seen as the destruction of an autarkic *polis*-like community. It seems unlikely that nucleated settlements in this area could ever have been settled 'agrotowns', each potentially self-sufficient on its territory: the resources of the area in staples were almost certainly never sufficient to support so many centres, even if they were tiny. It seems more likely that these places had always been small 'gateway-settlements' with shifting populations dependent on exchange. The coastal forests of the dunes and marshes of Italy, like other Mediterranean wetlands, have often formed a zone of contact between sea and land, fully answerable to neither, and difficult of access, in which exchange was practiced through the medium of piracy, rapine and brigandage.<sup>17</sup>

A semi-independent and piratical Antium is clearly visible in a note in Strabo concerning complaints made to Rome by Demetrius Poliorcetes at a date probably between 295 and 288 B.C.<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to see the activities of this coast impinging on the concerns of the first of the great Hellenistic sea-kings. This is probably what the Roman presence on the coast was intended to be like: the *coloniae maritimae* were a sign of the need to control and participate in a very fragmented pattern of communications - or to put it another way, to control a pirate-coast in the interests of the Roman state and to prevent others from doing so. The appropriation of the area by Rome need only have replaced one rough, opportunistic population of the coastal villages with another: there is no need to see the crisis of the old centres as the devastation of a long-established rural landscape.

The question of the date at which the Romans started to use the cults and myths of this area to

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in *Italia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1988), 127-51, associating salt and the Forum Boarium by the fourth century B.C. The salt-warehouses in the city are attested in 214 B.C., Livy 24, 47, 15.

15 Cicero RP II 18, 33. For the importance of public woodland, R. Meiggs, *Trees and Timber in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Oxford 1983), 326-30.

16 M. Fenelli, M. Guaitoli, Nuovi dati degli scavi di Lavinium, *QuadAEl* 19, *ArchLaz* X 2 (1990), 182-93. Strabo attributed the destruction of these cities to the Saunitai 'Samnites', but it is quite unclear what he means: 5, 3, 5 (232).

17 As late as the end of the Republic this was still true of the coast north of Cumae: the Silva Gallinaria was famous as a resort of robbers: Cicero *Fam.* IX 23, Strabo 243, Juvenal 3, 307. For a parallel, note the use of the marshes of the Garigliano by Saracen pirates and settlers in the ninth century.

18 Strabo 5, 3, 5 (232) is the only source. W.W. Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas* (Oxford 1913), 48, n. 22 doubts the reality of the exchange, though discussing it in the context of the control of the south Adriatic and Ionian Sea by Demetrius. He notes that Rome had sent a citizen colony to Antium in 338, and considers that Rome could not be regarded as 'leader of Italy' yet. But the battle of Sentinum had established Rome in just that position in 295, and Demetrius' complaint assumes precisely that the Romans were conniving at the action of the Antiates, which fits better with a date after 338. Cf. also Tarn, pp. 85-6 on the Etruscan pirates of the age, citing epigraphic evidence (Dittenberger, *Syll.* 3 305 and 962): this was the mode of engagement with the world of international commerce of the little states of the Italian littoral before the transformation that we are discussing, and helps to understand what was going on on the Laurentine shore at this date.

celebrate their own origins, their relations with their neighbours, and their connexion with the world beyond the sea, is highly complex: all these things can plausibly be asserted of the *litus Laurentinum* by the second century B.C., but they may have been nascent from the end of the fourth century.<sup>19</sup> It is hard to believe that they predated the first institutional interventions of the Romans in this area, such as the foundation of settlements.

We have to wait until the economic and social transformation was already happening for further evidence.<sup>20</sup> The earliest literary allusion to the involvement of the Laurentine shore with the world of *otium* is the anecdote of Scipio Aemilianus (before 129 B.C.) and his friend Laelius, that they shared their *otium* as they shared their public duties, and would be seen collecting seashells as they wandered on the beach at Caieta or the *litus Laurentinum*.<sup>21</sup> The remark does establish a connexion with *otium*, even if there is no positive proof that either man owned a villa there. After that, the evidence for villas before the end of the Republic is briefly summed up. North of the river we hear of the case in which, at the charge of the censor L. Cassius Longinus Ravilla (125 B.C.), M. Aemilius Lepidus Porcina was fined heavily for building too tall a villa in the territory of Alsium.<sup>22</sup> C. Marius owned a villa in the *ager Solonius*, beside the Tiber inland from Ostia, through which he arranged his own and his son's escape from Rome in 88 B.C. In this episode, a vital role was to be played by the estates of Q. Mucius Scaevola, whose grand-daughter was married to the younger Marius; the thrilling story of his escape from pursuit implies both that these lands were close to the Via Ostiensis and - incidentally - that they were producing beans for the urban market of Rome.<sup>23</sup> In the time of Sulla a famous Greek intellectual expatriate, Alexander 'Polyhistor', lived 'en Laurentais', and was burned alive when his house caught fire.<sup>24</sup> An anecdote suggests that Servilius Isauricus (consul 79 B.C.) had an estate reached by the Via Laurentina.<sup>25</sup> Other estates are discussed in the third book of Varro's *De re rustica* and can therefore be assumed to have been established before the late 50's B.C. (compare below).

From the economic and social point of view, there is no reason not to think that the transformation that produced the *façade maritime* of Campania functioned at more or less the same time and pace in Latium, and the silence of the exiguous sources can be no obstacle to such a view. Some authors have suggested that the development of the *villa maritima* was delayed by the insecurity of the coastlands, but this misunderstands the tough world of exploitation and self-preservation in which a great Republican landowner necessarily participated anywhere. Estates, even when they were appointed with all the fittings required for the pursuit of *otium*, were built and staffed for defence, which is why such grave exception was taken to the height of Porcina's Alsium villa; the threats at which the massive foundations of villas were directed were no worse than those inland in this troubled period. It is no surprise to find the early villas at Baiae on the summits of hills rather than on the shore, and to hear

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19 Consuls, praetors, dictators go to Lavinium for inauguration rites 'Penatibus et Vestae', Macrobius 3, 4, 11, cf. Servius, Aen. II, 296, III, 12; annual sacrifice of pontifices and consuls at shrine of Aeneas Indiges, Servius, Aen. I, 259, cf. Livy 8, 11, 15. Hostilius Mancinus' profectio via Lavinium, Valerius Maximus I 6, 7. The religious rites of the area in which the Roman state was involved in the late Republic were thought to be very ancient. The Aeneas traditions with which they were intimately linked were likewise older than the arrival of the Romans, and the process of appropriation is still hotly debated: see nn. 45-6 for the authorities of the second century B.C.

20 The standard account of the origins of the resort-coast is X. Lafon, 'A propos des villas de la zone de Sperlonga: les origines et la développement de la villa maritima sur le litoral tyrrhénien à l'époque républicaine', *MEFRA* 93 (1981), 297-353.

21 Valerius Maximus VIII 8 (*de otio*), 1, from Cicero *de Or.* II 22, referring to the puerility of even such great men when they escaped from town to country. I. Shatzman, *Senatorial Wealth and Roman Politics* (Brussels 1975), 248 accepts a property at both places on this testimony.

22 Val. Max. 8, 1 damn. 7, 'crimine nimis sublime extractae villae in Alsiensi agro'.

23 Plutarch, *Marius* 35, 9-11.

24 Suidas s.v. Laurentais, p. 180 Gaisford.

25 Valerius Maximus (VIII 5, 6) sets a disagreeable story on a narrow section of the Via Laurentina. P. Servilius Isauricus once came face to face with a man who would not dismount from his horse and give him right of way. So great was his auctoritas that when he happened to pass the man in question as he was being tried for some offence in the Forum and intervened to tell his story, the man was condemned almost without further ado.

them praised for the military care and percipience with which they had been sited and laid out.<sup>26</sup> Insecurity, in other words, never put a Roman magnate off the shore: he was the heir of the settlers of the *coloniae maritimae*, his interests in exploiting the *façade maritime* were similar, and so, in many cases, no doubt, were his methods: just as Demetrius found with Romans and Antiates, there is quite a good chance that the villa-owners and the 'pirates' were not always on opposite sides!<sup>27</sup>

A senator's coastal villa could be a lure for the attentions of pirates, which it needed to ward off, and it could therefore also be an escape-route, refuge or strongpoint in case of emergency or conflict; in the process it made a display of magnificence that was readily visible by all those who came and went by the sea lanes of that locality, especially the powerful, with an architecture derived from the Hellenistic display of harbour waterfronts and palaces in ports; and as a centre for participation in the coastwise or longer-distance distribution of the products of the estate or of the neighbourhood, it offered serious economic advantages. In summary, then, we may say that this area was characterised, in the late Republic, by vulnerability to the hazards of the competition for thalassocracy; by centrality to the network of communications that depended on the sea, with a vital role to play in the business of formal arrivals and departures; and by engagement with the risky and morally dubious but enticing world of the profits of maritime redistribution. The three things clearly overlapped.

The moment at which the *façade maritime* came into its own was the show-down when the leaders of Rome fought it out over the thalassocracy of the Mediterranean. The coast of west central Italy was the *ora maritima* which it was Cicero's job to defend in Pompey's interest in the Civil War, with a command that he exercised, perfectly reasonably, by moving wholly within the world of the *villae maritimae*.<sup>28</sup> From the Campanian coast, he assumed the responsibility for the security of the whole *façade maritime* which united the settlements and their adjacent and interrelated clusters of rich estates. A Roman's villa was his castle in a number of important ways, and the murder of the orator finally in the landscape-garden of his villa on the *Formianum litus* was a sign of the length of the reach of the triumvirs. An anecdote of this period similar to the tale of the escape of Marius again shows the estates of the *ager Laurens* functioning as refuges during political crisis. The father of the young conspirator against Augustus in the late 20's, Fannius Caepio, owned a villa on the coast to which his son escaped from Rome with the help of a slave in a daring flight down the Tiber and so to the *ager Laurens*. From here he took boat for Naples, where he was eventually betrayed.<sup>29</sup> The story vividly illustrates the maritime communications that the villas enjoyed independently of the Tiber harbour at Ostia. But it also reminds us of the political importance of such maritime connexions, and the more than purely pleasurable nuances that this sort of villa could have.

The coastline of Latium was a centre of power. The *ora maritima* was the principal theatre of the conflict between Octavian and Sextus Pompey in 39-36 B.C.<sup>30</sup> It was this power-base that Agrippa and Augustus took over once and for all with their naval bases first at the Lucrine Lake and then at Misenum, but also through the appropriation of the greater of the villas.<sup>31</sup> If the centrality of such places to the struggle for political mastery seems strange to us, we should reflect that, in Antiquity, power was inseparable from culture. It was inevitable that places as important to the practical

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26 The villa of Marius was proverbial: Seneca, *Ep.* 51, 11 'C. Marius et Cn. Pompeius et Caesar extruxerunt quidem villas in regione Baiana, sed illas inposuerunt summis iugis montium. videbatur hoc magis militare, ex edito speculari late longeque subiecta... scies non villas esse, sed castra'; Pliny, *HN* 18, 32 'villam in Misenensi posuit C. Marius VII cos., sed peritia castra metandi, sic ut comparatos ei ceteros etiam Sulla Felix caecos fuisse diceret'; Plutarch, *Marius* 34, 2-3, stressing rather the luxurious side. Cf. E. Badian, 'Marius' villas: the testimony of the slave and the knave', *JRS* 63 (1973), 121-32. The earliest coastal villa known to us, that of Scipio at Liternum, was also fortified: Seneca, *Ep.* 86, 4.

27 Interaction between Scipio at Liternum and pirate-leaders: Valerius Maximus 2, 10, 2. Pirates in the Silva Gallinaria of Campania, above, n. 18.

28 E. Wistrand, *Cicero Imperator* (Göteborg 1979), 206-8, with Att. 7, 11, 5; Fam. 16, 12, 5 'ego adhuc orae maritimae praesum a Formiis'. The term used of 310 B.C. by Livy 9, 41, 3.

29 Macrobius I 11, 21, cf. Dio 54, 3, 4-8.

30 See in particular the suggestive remarks of F. Zevi, 'Monumenti e aspetti culturali di Ostia repubblicana', *Hellenismus in Mittelitalien*, ed. P. Zanker, I (Göttingen 1976), 52-83. Destruction at Ostia in the Civil War by the younger Marius: Florus II 9, 2; Plut. *Mar.* 42, 23.

31 J.H. D'Arms, *Romans on the Bay of Naples* (Cambridge, Ma. 1970), 73-84; Frederiksen, cit. (n. 6), 332-5.

preoccupations of the Roman elite as these were should, as part of that importance, be the subject of interpretation and explanation of a literary, historical, scientific kind - in other words the practice of *literae* - that whole complex of cultural expressions that we think of as 'classical' literary civilisation. The mythology, cult-practice and history of the coastal zone were pressed into service in the interests of the men who had appropriated the coastlands for their political self-interest. The Odyssean associations, the cults that articulate the landscape of inlet and river-mouth, the tales of prehistoric simplicity in a pre-agricultural wilderness, the emphasis on the wonders of the natural landscape, all these carried the practical side of life in the *villa maritima* into the heart of the classical tradition, which is therefore the source of a surprising amount of evidence for the society of the areas in question. It is to this that we now turn.

### III. Five types of wilderness

The coast south of Ostia is not just accidentally the landscape of Aeneas' arrival; Virgil was reflecting a vision of that area that already was familiar to his elite audience, and in turn his canonical formulation of this thematic set the pattern for many of the cultural responses of Romans to the *litus Laurentinum* in the centuries that followed.<sup>32</sup> Virgil's *ager Laurens* is a wilderness, the *lucus ingens*, the forest in which Nisus becomes entangled<sup>33</sup>, and it is very likely that the owners of estates in the area in the imperial period saw it as a wilderness too.

The idea of wilderness is a complex one. Five strands are particularly prominent in this case. A) wildernesses have a distinctive visual landscape; B) they are full of wild things; C) they are sterile; D) they are *primaeval*; and E) they are deserted.

**A** The best visual description of the area is, of course, that of the younger Pliny. This is how he describes the landscape on the way to his Laurentinum.

"It is seventeen miles removed from the city, so that you can stay there with some of the day left, when you have transacted your business in Rome. There is more than one approach, since both the Via Laurentina and the Via Ostiensis lead there, though you need to leave the former at milestone 14 and the latter at milestone 11. The road from both is sandy in places and a bit on the sticky side for a vehicle, but quick and easy if you are on horseback. The view is quite different from place to place: at one time the road is hemmed in by the encroaching woods, at another it runs out into the open through great expanses of meadow. There are numerous flocks of sheep, many herds of horses and cattle: they are driven from the mountains by the cold weather and grow sleek on the vegetation in the spring warmth".<sup>34</sup>

So the site is close to Rome, but of a different world. It is hard to find and communications are practicable, but not of the ease that would be normal with a suburban villa. The visual aspect of the landscape is stressed, and it is tranquil but unpopulated - no hint of the people tending the animals - and the productive aspect is wild, the burgeoning of the vegetation and its grazing by flocks from elsewhere. In ancient terms, moreover, the pastoral is inferior to and simpler than the arable; this is an untamed landscape. Finally we note that Pliny has chosen the early months of the year for his vignette, reminding us that he too is a transhumant visitor who will be there to enjoy the natural ambience of this remote place only for a short time and at certain times of the year.

The sea-coast is obviously wild, offering the '*solitudo maris*' that Tiberius enjoyed on Capri. Pliny's rather impractical *triclinium*, where the salt spray could blow in, was designed to make the most of

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32 N.M. Horsfall, *Enc. Virg.* III (1987) 141-4 s.v. *Laurentes*, observes of the use of the topography of the area to elucidate Virgil 'la ricerca non deve partire dal territorio bensì dal testo'. But it is the realities of the Augustan and later periods rather than those of the archaic period that are most closely linked with the evocations of the Aeneid.

33 Virgil, *Aen.* IX, 381-85

34 Pliny, *Ep.* II 17, 2-3.

this.<sup>35</sup> The soil is sandy; there is, for all that, too much water about, and the place is reedy and swampy. But above all, the place is forest. This is the area of the great forests of early Roman history, north of the river the Silva Maesia, and the woodlands to the south running from the Silva Naevia near the city along the Via Ostiensis through the *ager Solonius* down to the territory of the Laurentes.<sup>36</sup>

**B** The fauna, real or imagined, matches the landscape; Silvia's deer in the *Aeneid*, or the portentous wild sow and the numerous other boar of the literary tradition, or the wolf, eagle and fox, another auspicious omen for the Trojans, commemorated with bronze statues, ancient in Dionysius' time, in the Forum at Lavinium.<sup>37</sup> Hostilius Mancinus set out on his disastrous campaign to Numantia in 137 B.C. via Lavinium and its Forum and received the terrible omen of the flight of the sacred chickens away from human control straight into the wild woods.<sup>38</sup> The priests who officiated at the holy places wore hats with huge tassels to frighten the birds that would otherwise carry the sacrificial offerings into the nearby wilderness!<sup>39</sup> The woodlands provided a natural place for the creation of game reserves by the villa-owners, to which we shall return.

**C** However, even in its natural resources of game and the like, this environment is regarded as poor; the wild boar, nourished on reeds and mast, are scrawny, and the lagoons produce only the most meager catch of fish.<sup>40</sup> One of Martial's favourite satirical points, that the decadent villa-owner is not a producer but dependent on the city market, is developed in a poem that contrasts the abundance of Spain with the characteristic fish and game of the Laurentine shore: frogs and minnows, and foxes and badgers.<sup>41</sup> The *topos* can be inverted. At the Laurentinum, because of the salt, in contrast to the fertility of his estate at Tifernum, Pliny can grow the purely ornamental box only in protected places, though the more useful but less prestigious figs and mulberries do well.<sup>42</sup> At another point he indulges in a conceit about the productivity of the different estates, saying that only the Laurentinum shows a profit - when all he owns is 'a building, a garden and then immediately beach'.<sup>43</sup> It is naturally his *literary* yield that is high there...

**D** The sterility of the *ager Laurens* became an important commonplace of the Romans' traditions about their origins already in the second century B.C., when the peers of the writers who were creating the early history of Rome were building in the coastal tract. The place was '*ager macerrimus litorosissimusque*', 'extremely poor and beachlike'.<sup>44</sup> The Trojans had been allotted a tiny part of it anyway, 500 *iugera* on one account and an interestingly precise 698 on another, that of Cato.<sup>45</sup> The first 'Roman' presence in Italy was therefore an allotment of wilderness: in Dionysius, Aeneas cannot believe that the hill three miles from the shore where the miraculous sow comes to a halt can possibly be the place of the divine promise, since it is inconvenient for both agriculture and seafaring. Luckily a Voice speaking from the valley tells him that it is only from such an unpromising start that the destiny

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35 Pliny, *Ep.* II 17, 5; Tacitus, *Ann.* VI 1, cf. IV 67.

36 Silva Maesia: Dion. Hal. 3, 41; Livy 1, 33 (taken from the Veientes before the foundation of Ostia). Silva Naevia, Festus, s.v. (170L).

37 Silvia's deer, *Aen.* VII 483-510; the sow, Dionysius I 56; other boar, Horace *Sat.* II 4 42; Martial 9, 48; 10, 45; wolf, eagle, fox, Dionysius I 59, 4-5.

38 Above, n. 19.

39 Servius, *Aen.* VIII 664; birds also in Aeneas' first vision of the area, VII 32-4; Ardea named from herons, VII 411-13.

40 For boar, n. 37 above. At *Ep.* V 2, Pliny can repay the gift of two beautiful thrushes neither with the resources of Rome since he is at the Laurentinum, nor with its own speciality, seafood, because of the roughness of the sea. Predictably his return is epistolary.

41 Martial X 37.

42 Pliny, *Ep.* II 17, 14.

43 Pliny, *Ep.* IV 6.

44 Q. Fabius Maximus Servilianus (cos. 142 B.C.) at Servius *Aen.* I 3 = fr. 1 Peter (*HRR* I 117).

45 Cassius Hemina fr. 7 Peter = Solinus II 14, the dedication of a statue of 'Venus Mater quae Frutis dicitur'; Cato fr. 8 Peter = Servius *Aen.* 11, 316. 5 miles in all directions from the hill where Aeneas founded the first settlement, Dion. Hal. 49, 1.

of his people can grow truly great; if he chooses a fertile spot the future will be different.<sup>46</sup> The point must be that virtue can only thrive in adversity, and geographically that means in an unproductive wilderness.

Various other localities in the region around Rome became symbols of a generally accepted poverty of natural resources: the *ager Vaticanus*, for instance, just across the Tiber from the city, and further off in the same direction, the territory of Veii; the Alban Hills offered wild wood images in a fierce mountain setting; and above all, the *ager Pupinius*, between Tusculum and the Anio, where some of Rome's most leathery senator-peasant heroes had had plots of unrewarding soil, was proverbial for its uselessness. Contrast places like this, says Cicero, with the lands around Capua.<sup>47</sup> Rome had been founded in a wilderness by typical denizens of the wilderness, and waxed great *despite* the unpromising neighbourhood. The persistent geographical determinism that had been a standard habit of thought of ancient culture, since Herodotus contrasted the tough plateau-dwelling Persians with the soft Ionians, required tough Romans to come from a tough locale.

The Laurentine wilderness is evoked in several other parts of the foundation narrative and the cults that went with it. It was to this forest that Lavinia, Aeneas' widow, fled to escape the wrath of his son Ascanius; she sheltered in the 'casa' of the shepherd Tyrrhus - a reminder of the proximity of the eponymous sea - and gave birth to the future progenitor of the Kings of Alba Longa, who was named for the woods, Silvius.<sup>48</sup> This was a setting for uncanny events such as the disappearance of Aeneas: the shrine that recorded this was at the heart of the landscape of fen and forest on the banks of the Numicus below Lavinium.<sup>49</sup> In the woods of the *ager Solonius* was an important and appropriately nature-oriented cult-place, the Pomonal, whose rites were part of the religious observances of the city of Rome, depending, presumably, on the contrast between the human world and the wilderness.<sup>50</sup> The oracle of Faunus at Albunea, on the edge of this area, combined its wilderness-traits with the horrors of volcanicity.<sup>51</sup>

**E** Nothing makes a wilderness seem wild like thinking that it was once populated, but that now the settlements have vanished. This was another favourite topos in accounts of the Roman *suburbium*. The vanishing peoples of the past conduced to Roman accounts of their early village-wars which foretold the success they would have in mastering the whole *orbis terrarum*, and offered quaint nostalgia to the villa-owner whose estate could be alleged by his poetically or historically minded clients to have comprised the whole territory of some picturesquely remote community.

The rustic Laurentes are relatively well attested as a people of old Latium: they were more intimately involved than most with the Roman tradition. One role that they fulfilled for the Romans was that of the first Italians met by the proto-Roman Trojans. For that reason they could be used to stand for the rest of Italy, and Rome's treaties with them had a special symbolic value, while, for their part, they were models of fidelity.<sup>52</sup> But they also served as ancestors - and symbols - for the Romans. In the comprehensive complexity of their foundation mythology, the Romans could not really do without autochthony, and the toughness that this environment required of its inhabitants suited them for the

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46 Dion Hal. I 56, 4.

47 Cicero, *Leg. Agr.* II 96 'agros vero Vaticanum et Pupinium cum suis optimis et uberibus campis conferendos scilicet non putabunt'.

48 Servius Aen. IV 760 = Cato fr. 11 Peter. Tyrrhus father of Silvia at *Aen.* VII 485.

49 *ILS* 3872, cf. n. 86 below, evokes the landscape while commemorating these cults; for the disappearance, *CIL* X 8348 = *ILS* 63, from an eulogium of Aeneas from Pompeii, stressing his sudden non-appearance in a Laurentine war or on Laurentine soil 'in [---]lo Laurenti subito non comparavit'. See also Servius *Aen.* IV 620 = Cato fr. 10 Peter.

50 Pomonal, Festus 296L. For the Frutinal at Lavinium and its connexion with viticulture, see Torelli, cit. (n. 4), 158-61, 172.

51 Albunea: Virgil *Aen.* VII 8191.

52 Loyalty: Livy 8, 11, 15 for their fidelity at the time of the Latin War. Note also 1, 14, 1-3, the murder of T. Tatius at Lavinium did not lead to war, so close was the link between the peoples. The fact that the Romans arrived under treaty is also an important aition for the use of treaties in the management of their own dominion in historical times. Dion. Hal. I 59, 1.

role.<sup>53</sup> These complex ideas about the Laurentes have posed a notorious problem to historians.

Archetypically rustic and pastoral - their very name is derived from a forest shrub<sup>54</sup> - the Laurentes gave their name to no city. Optimistic antiquarianism has long marked a city of Laurentum alongside Lavinium on maps of the area.<sup>55</sup> Whatever the realities of the settlement-pattern of the coastal strip in the pre-Roman period, once the Romans had begun to use the Laurentes for mythico-historical purposes nothing could have been more natural than for them to lack a city; the wild and the urban do not easily mix.

A decisive moment in the formation of the tradition was clearly the creation by Virgil of a quite detailed picture of the kingdom of the Laurentes. Other communities would not do: Lavinium was to be founded in honour of Aeneas' bride when the terrible strife between Latins and Trojans was resolved, and Alba was a foundation of Ascanius. The Laurentes were a splendid choice for Latinus' realm since they left Virgil free to construct the Latin state to his own tastes, unencumbered by the existence of a later city. It was important that the city of Latinus had no future, leaving the Romans homeless on both sides of their lineage.<sup>56</sup> The Laurentine shore is the void out of which Rome came.

#### **IV. Peopling the wildernesses: the invention of Laurentum**

The coastlands of Latium were therefore elaborated as a central ingredient in the early history of the Romans. It was natural to confront a place that was so convenient and visible a wilderness as the coastlands of Latium with the populous reality of Roman demographic felicity in the Republic and Empire, and this was done in a number of not always compatible ways.

The myth of sterility that was attached to the region invited subversion and denial. Even so significant a disposition of Nature could be undone; indeed, the more the myth of the role of this place in Rome's origins circulated, the more playing with it and confuting it offered as a cultural strategy. In this section three patterns in this process are introduced.

##### **1) A place for urban experimentation.**

The city-less *ager Laurens* invited the imagining of vanished cities, like the vision of Latinus' state in Virgil that we have already encountered, clearly serving as a proto-Rome. Reflection on the genesis of cities was also promoted by the cult-practices and other relics that announced the Trojan presence: there was even a place called Troy.<sup>57</sup> We should not see it as coincidence that the area is notable for the propagation of new urban initiatives. The two outstanding examples (the fortress-like *coloniae maritimae* of the middle Republic scarcely count) are Ostia and Portus.

The growth and transformation of Ostia in the late Republic, and its wholesale reconstruction between the Flavian and Antonine periods, must be seen in its ideological and theoretical context, against the background of this richly symbolic landscape, and this is even more true of the more schematically planned harbour-town at Portus. There are many questions in the problematic social history of Ostia - such as where did the decurional class live, to name only one other - which can only be answered by taking the whole extended hinterland to north and south into account.

The expansion of Ostia should be seen as the creation of a fine new city in the heart of the wilderness that was also Rome's *façade maritime*, and not as a process that had relevance only to Rome or the Tiber. It involved the attribution of the foundation of Ostia to the earliest period, and the

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53 The term comes to be used as synonymous with 'Roman' in silver Latin poetry: e.g. Statius *Silv* I 2, 163; Silius I, 669, cf. 110.

54 See Virg. *Aen.* VII 59-63: laurus is wild bay. On the wildness of the Latins, see especially the remarkable thoughts of L. Saufeius, a contemporary of Cicero, at Servius, *Aen.* I 6.

55 J. Carcopino, *Virgile et les origines d'Ostie*<sup>2</sup> (Paris 1968), 151-340. B. Tilly, 'The identification of Laurentum' *Arch. Cl.* 28 (1976), 283-93 located it at Castel di Decima. Decisive resolution of the debate in F. Castagnoli, 'Commentaires topographiques à l'Enéide' *CRAI* 1983, 202-15 at 207-12; and by Horsfall, cit. (n.32), with further bibliography.

56 I owe this point to Dr E. Kearns. The city is in some senses Lavinium, where Cato thought that Lavinia had reigned after the foundation of Alba and her disagreement with Ascanius. See Horsfall, cit. (n. 32) for the Virgilian sense that cities are a new thing in Italy at the moment of the Trojan arrival.

57 For Troia, Livy 1, 1, 57; Dion. Hal. 1, 53. Note also Phamea's Troianum, Cicero *Att.* 9, 4 and 13, 6.

fostering of the ancient cults that made Ostia a part of the religious landscape of the *litus Laurentinum*. It also involved recognising the centrality of Ostia to the territory. The *colonia* at Ostia is now clearly seen to have been actively involved in the active management of much of this region. A recently published inscription shows that the *colonia* took a serious interest in tenancies and rights on its boundaries (presumably with Lavinium).<sup>58</sup> The honorific revival of the community of the Laurentes in the ways that are examined in (3) below created preferments that were often made available to successful Ostians.

Rather than being economic or commercial in origin, then, the successive stages of urbanisation at Ostia should each be seen as an instance of an urban policy that is part revivalism, part cultural display, part landscape architecture, part euergetism. We can now see a parallel in the creation of the civic centre - away from the specialised economy of the Tiber-port - at Grotta di Piastra, where some of the modest public buildings can now be dated to the Tiberian period.<sup>59</sup> Whatever the precise identification of this site, it surely represents the provision of an urban nucleus of some kind for the people who had hitherto been notable for lacking it, the Laurentes - not that that theory implies that there was any such thing as a 'real' Laurens to benefit!

## 2) A site for agrarian transformation.

The urban development of Ostia in the late Republic went hand-in-hand with the establishment of the estates that we outlined in Section II, the private and the public interest working in tandem. The villas of the coastal strip transformed the countryside as benefaction and state expenditure did the town. The proprietors of villas were conscious that their villas were in their refinement urban, and that it was an achievement to bring such urbanity into so wild a place. The achievement consisted in managing an intractable environment for their own convenience, comfort and profit. The convenience of a well-stocked, out-of-the-way villa, defensible at a pinch, and accessible privately by sea and land has been explored in Section II: the pursuit of comfort and profit, which led to the re-peopling of the wilderness while proprietors still sought those things here, must now be examined.

The move down to the Laurentine shore offered a change of air and climate, and for that reason the coast became primarily a winter-resort.<sup>60</sup> The *salubritas* of the coast was part of its general attraction, but there were special features too: the doctors of Commodus recommended that he should take refuge from the plague in Rome in the scented groves of bay on the Laurentine shore.<sup>61</sup> Equally special was the hope that this particular environment could reproduce the beneficial effect that it had had on Rome's Latin forebears: it was noted in the reign of Augustus that it was from an imperial estate in this area that there came the imperial slave who bore quintuplets, an almost unparalleled achievement, which the procreation-conscious *princeps* commemorated with a monument suitably placed on the Via Laurentina.<sup>62</sup>

To emphasise the strangeness of the place, you could invest in the creation of a fantasy landscape. The famous *venatio* of Q. Hortensius made use of the wilderness and the animals that should populate

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58 F. Jacques 'Biens caducs revendiqués par la cité d'Ostie. Attribution et délimitation d'un terrain d'après une nouvelle inscription du Latium', *Epigraphica* 49 (1987), 29-70 = *AEp* 1987.391. The inscription is of uncertain provenance, but clearly shows that the title to estates on the edge of the colony's jurisdiction was a matter of considerable importance.

59 For the new inscription from a vanished monument with carefully chosen statues of A.D. 37, see E. Thomas, in *Castelporziano III*, 137-49. In this context the Tiberian milestone from Decima on the Via Laurentina has some relevance, *CIL* XIV 4086, A.D. 30-1. This must be the *vicus* of Pliny *Ep.* II 17, but need not be that of the Augustani.

60 Winter and early spring were naturally the prime seasons for the coastal villa, and this is confirmed by Pliny, *Ep.* IX 40, assuming that the Tiber valley is the summer resort, and the coast the winter equivalent (no siesta and work into the hours of darkness characterise Pliny's routine). In *Ep.* II 17, 24 Pliny clearly expects often to be there at the mid-winter Saturnalia. According to Cicero, *Mil.* 20, 54, Pompey was at Alsium on January 18th 52. M. Aurelius wrote a letter to Fronto from Naples complaining about the unevenness of the temperature, comparing the different resorts; the context fits spring best, when a warm midnight is what is regarded as typically Laurentine. For summer use, however, note *Ep.* VII 4, 4. Also the paddling philosophers of Minucius Felix (*Octavius* ii), are there at the time of the vintage recess in the law-courts, when we also find Marcus at the Alsium villa.

61 Herodian I 12, 1-2.

62 Aulus Gellius *NA* 10, 2, 2.

it.<sup>63</sup> The Julio-Claudian emperors went one better: in choosing a coastal estate here for the keeping of the imperial elephants they outdid the indigenous wildness and celebrated the links that their ports had with the still stranger wildernesses across the sea.<sup>64</sup>

So singular an environment offered an economic challenge too. To improve the characteristic local produce so that it became a highly profitable cash-crop was the villa-owner's dream. The prime example is the estate of M. Seius, whose villa on the shore in the territory of Ostia forms a recurrent example of *pastio villatica* throughout the satirical discussion of the third book of Varro's *De re rustica* (dramatic date about 50 B.C.).<sup>65</sup> It had *urbana ornamenta* as well as *rustica membra*, and Seius, a *novus homo*, reared there geese, hens, pigeons, cranes, peacocks, dormice, fish, bees, boars and other game. His freedman and secretary (*scriba librarius*) entertained senators there on his behalf. The villa, presumably located in the Castel Fusano area, made use of the natural resources of the setting but transcended them. According to the satirical Varro, for instance, the boars that are proverbial inhabitants of the groves, for instance, Seius fed on special beech-mast and acorns that he brought in from outside the wilderness!

It was amusing and sophisticated to carry on the business of intensive luxury production in a place which had a reputation as a desert - and to do all that you could to exaggerate the desertedness in order to make your achievement seem all the more amazing. So Pliny admits that his Laurentinum produces figs and mulberries, as well as good soles and prawns: fishing, although a proverbially poverty-stricken occupation, could also, notoriously, be turned into the rich man's plaything and source of income.<sup>66</sup>

The proprietor in this region wanted it to seem an achievement to live there, for all the real advantages of proximity to Rome and to the communications routes and the actual possibilities of profit from the environment. Pliny's description of his Laurentinum made the area famous, but we should not overlook the fact that he pretends to adopt an apologetic tone: his correspondents need to be convinced of the advantages of so complete a *secessus*, which lie in the very emptiness and the philosophical detachment that it makes possible.<sup>67</sup> The presence of connoisseurs of the wilderness like Pliny had a paradoxical effect on the area. His own presence refutes his protestations: no landscape was a desert if it had a Roman ex-consul in it. For all the joys of solitude, moreover, the place is as good as a city: the proximity of the *vicus* and the city of Ostia supplies necessities and the coastal villas seen from either the sea or the beach look like a multiplicity of cities.<sup>68</sup> We see again that the development of a resort-coast is intended to be an urban as well as an urbane phenomenon: the settlements of the past - Antium, Lavinium, Ardea, even Ostia - are now subordinated to the domains of the present. That was more than ever true of the imperial villas of the area, with their overwhelming size: Alsium and Fregeniae, where *coloniae maritimae* had once stood, and the development at Tor Paterno, with its vast size, its aqueduct, and probably its own harbour, in all likelihood yet another belated provision of a 'city' for the Laurentes.<sup>69</sup>

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63 Varro, *RR* 3, 13, 2.

64 *CIL* VI 8583 = *ILS* 1578. Torelli, cit. (n. 4), 235-6 sees the choice as being a reflection of an ancient cultic link between the ritual functions of the elephant and the cult of Sol Indiges. He cites G. De Angelis D'Ossat, 'Elefanti nella regione romana', *L'Urbe* 8 (1942), 1f., on finds of elephant bones at Castel Fusano 'non troppo lontano' from the sanctuary of Sol: but surely too far for such a connexion to be more than possible.

65 See n. 3 above.

66 For fishing, see Pliny, *HN* 9, 67 on the cost of fish from suburbana litora, and the improvements made by the praefectus classis Optatus under Claudius, Pliny *HN* 9, 62-3; Macrobius, *Sat.* III 16, 10: the systematic introduction of the scarus to the coastal waters between Ostia and Misenum. Pliny *Ep.* II 17, 28 on soles and prawns; fishing-boats on the beach at Ostia at Minucius Felix Octavius iii, 3.

67 Pliny, *Ep.* I 9, 6 'O rectam sinceramque vitam! O dulce otium honestumque et paene omni negotio pulchrius!' Protestations of desolation were not intended to be literally believed. Misunderstanding passages like Lucan *Bell. Civ.* VII 391f., in which commonplaces of wilderness are deployed in the context of the luxury villa zones of both the Laurentine shore and of the Alban Hills, has caused serious error about the settlement pattern of the Romana regio in Antiquity. See also Castagnoli, cit. (n. 56), 209 for exaggerations of the desolation of Ardea. Villa-owners liked to think of their domain as being in the wild, and the literature reflects that.

68 Pliny, *Ep.* II 17, 26-7.

69 For the city-villa topos, N. Purcell 'Town in country and country in town', in E. MacDougall, ed. *The ancient Roman*

Finally, another game with the city-country-wilderness spectrum is attested here. The luxury estates of the periphery of Rome known with the piquant name of 'horti' or 'vegetable-gardens' are attested in the vicinity of Ostia already by the time that Cicero was looking for one suitable for the tomb of his daughter Tullia.<sup>70</sup> This is not surprising. The lavish domestic production that characterised the Roman luxury villa, parodying the normal cultivation of staples for sale, was also characteristic of the *horti*, the aim being to 'create the semblance of what Nature had denied'.<sup>71</sup> The particular improvement on Nature that was the speciality of *horti* was the bringing together in the same scheme of productive and unproductive, country and town, human existence and the wild. Their presence here confirms the picture of Varro, and shows that the building of villas too in this area was linked both with urban forms and with agricultural productivity, since both are necessary to the theory of the *horti*.

### 3) A region whose people can be redefined.

Alongside the provision of new urban foci, the Laurentes were revived as a people. That they had certain privileges, the *iura Laurentum*, the fruit of the ancient treaties that had always been so scrupulously observed, was recognised by imperial law, in the context of the establishment of the 'Laurentes Lavinates', an honoured group within the *ordo equester* from at least the second century of our era. The significance of this institution is further discussed in Section VI: here it must simply be mentioned as an instance of the way in which the manipulation of a landscape in the Roman world often meant manipulation of the population and the classification of its institutions. The best parallel, as has long been seen, is the formation of the curious community of the Albani Longani Bovillenses on the Appian Way. They too represented a glorious and vanished mythical past, a dramatic history, and a luxury villeggiatura zone, combined with a link with a major axis of communications and some serious implications for security.<sup>72</sup> The difference was due principally to the special circumstances that followed from the functioning of the other area as a *façade maritime*.

In the later epigraphic record some of the Laurentes are called 'Augustani', and described as attached to a *vicus*.<sup>73</sup> They should be connected in some way with the fortunate equestrians, though they appear to be a wider group: it is also possible that there is a link with the citizen-settlement schemes of which we hear in the area, attributed to Vespasian, Trajan and Hadrian by the *Liber Coloniarum*. No trace of centuriation or direct epigraphic confirmation has yet been found, but it does seem likely that an attempt might have been made to repopulate with free citizens an area of famous desolation quite close to Rome and in which there was to be so much imperial investment in buildings.<sup>74</sup>

The *Liber Coloniarum* also records, after colonial settlements in the Ager Ostiensis by the same emperors, the concession of lots to private proprietors. The recreation of the *populus Laurens* not having perhaps been a great success, the emperors who took such an interest in the coastal area themselves seem to have been deliberately facilitating the investment there of the rest of the court.<sup>75</sup> There is a parallel in the arrangements prevailing by the later imperial period around Portus, where public land was rented to the townspeople in very small lots at rents proportional to its productivity, a flexible arrangement given the very varied soils and degrees of wetness in the alluvial plain around the

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*Villa-garden* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks 1988), 185-203.

70 For the horti Siliiani, Cicero *Att.* 12, 27; for a villa of Cotta there 12, 23.

71 Tacitus, *Ann.* XV 42 on Nero's domus aurea; cf. N. Purcell, cit. (n.69).

72 For them see *ILS* 6188-90; *CIL* XIV pp. 230-1.

73 See especially J.R. Patterson, 'Il vicus di epoca imperiale nella Tenuta di Castelporziano, in *Castelporziano I*, cit. (n. 4), 67-9. It is tempting to see this in the centre at Grotta di Piastra, but caution is still in order.

Note *CIL* XIV 2045, stressing that this vicus is Augustanorum Laurentium; there are other Laurentes and they might have a separate vicus named after them.

74 *Liber Coloniarum* 234L 'Laurum Lavinia lege et consecratione veteri manet. ager eius ab imp. Vespasiano Traiano et Hadriano in lacineis est adsignatus', cf. L. Keppie 'Colonisation and veteran settlement in Italy in the first century A.D.', *PBSR* 52 (1984), 77-114 at 104 and 107. In this passage it is worth noting that the agrimensor has adopted a version of the 'learned', literary titlature of the territory.

75 *Lib. Col.* 236L 'Ostiensis ager ab imp. Vespasiano, Traiano et Hadriano inprecisuris in lacineis et per strigas colonis eorum est adsignatus. Sed postea imp. Verus Antoninus et Commodus aliqua privatis concesserunt.' Cf. Keppie, cit. (n. 76).

river-mouths, and the great fertility of the best bits.<sup>76</sup> We have already noted the concern of the administration of Ostia for the management of its public lands: there were more varied forms of agricultural exploitation even outside the domain of the *villae* and their *pastio villatica* than Pliny implies in the description that we have quoted.<sup>77</sup> Such lots produced the foodstuffs for which the area is occasionally mentioned, such as market-garden produce or the Ostian pork of pseudo-Apicius.<sup>78</sup> We must not be misled by the overwritten accounts of perverse productivity into underestimating the potential value of the real output of the area.<sup>79</sup>

It was perhaps as a result of all this activity that a change in the nomenclature of the area came about. Cato had invented the label *Laurolavinium* to get over the antiquarian difficulties posed by the conflicting traditions. The name *Laurentum*, which is a solecism and not found in the Republican evidence, is attested by the time of Strabo and later. It is, we may assume, a creation of the transformation of the area into a landscape of *otium*.<sup>80</sup>

## V. A famous countryside: a landscape of learning

The order of these last two sections has made it look as if the formation of the idea of the Laurentine wilderness came first, and its subversion followed. In fact those two processes were indissolubly intertwined, and both were a central part of the manifestation of the culture of *otium*.

A tantalising graffito from Pompeii, '[ ]bile signum Laurentis ru[r]is [ ]', provides a glimpse of the extent to which this area became *rus* of an archetypal kind.<sup>81</sup> Fuller detail emerges on the roughly carved inscription that was published from the so-called 'Villa di Plinio' immediately south of the Grotta di Piastra site in 1984: 'Father Silvanus that dwellest in the countryside and silent Grove and chattering Echo, Dryads, and ye my woodlands, Antonius Balbus set me up, born in this cottage and now proconsul of Africa'.<sup>82</sup> Here the mythological and religious denizens of the woodlands are invoked to give an idea of the setting of a villa which in the fond imagination of the dedicator is a 'casa', a countryman's refuge, quite different from the grandeurs of the *negotium* associated with the job of proconsul of Africa. There are parallels for this romanticism. The establishment of a cult of Silvanus by a freedman of Nero on a remote estate with woodland and a *vivarium* inland from Salernum in south Italy is one.<sup>83</sup> This was a landscape of religion, punctuated by picturesque rustic cults with arcane

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76 *Lib. Col.* 222L 'pars agri quae circa Portum est Tiberis in iugeribus adsignata adque oppidanis est tradita et pro aestimio ubertatis professionem acceperunt'. For the fertility of the Isola Sacra and the intensive horticulture there, R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1973), 265. On winter-pasture and floriculture - and ignoring the harbour at Portus - Aethicus in *Geog. Lat. Min. (Riese)*, p. 83 'insula ...tantae viriditatis et amoenitatisque ... ut neque aestivis mensibus neque hiemalibus pasturae admirabiles herbas dehabeat; ita autem vernali tempore rosa vel ceteris floribus adimpletur ut... insula ipsa...almae Veneris nuncupetur'. The famous vegetables of the Ostia area were not grown exclusively there however.

77 See n. 35 above.

78 7, 14, 5. Cf. Meiggs, cit. (n. 76), 263-70.

79 Varro (*RR* 3, 2, 7) suggests that Seius' estate (above, p. 00) was a possible purchase for a patrician senator of the power and taste of Ap. Claudius Pulcher: and that (*RR* 3, 2, 17) L. Abuccius hoped to make 100,000 sesterces p.a. from his estate on the shore. These villas, even Pliny's, were not necessarily net consumers of income.

80 The name *Laurentum* in the Itineraries: *Tab. Peut.* VI 1; *It. Ant.* 45 Cuntz. Also Strabo 5, 3, 2; Val. Max. VIII 8, 1; Mela II 4, 71; Pliny *HN* III 56. *Laurolavinium*: Cato, cit. (n. 45), Fabius Servilianus, cit. (n. 45). *Laurentum* is an impossible original for the old-attested ethnic *Laurens* -ntes. If it had been an ancient name, the people would have been the *Laurentini*. It is interesting that Pliny thinks that his friend Gallus may object to the term *Laurentinum*, and says 'my *Laurentinum*, or if you prefer, my *Laurens*' *Ep.* II 17, 1. This suggests both that the later adjective had become normal, and so therefore had the form *Laurentum*; and that the older ethnic was considered pedantically correct in the sort of literary circles in which Pliny moved. See Skutsch, cit. (n. 12), 189 arguing on linguistic grounds for the priority of *Laurens* as the name of a people not a place. Even if the *Augustani* are a late creation, the idea of a *Vicus Laurentum* or *Laurentium* (see n. 73) may be an earlier one.

81 *ZPE* 57 (1984), 172 = *AEp* 1989. 185. Note also the dedication to the 'Laurentes nymphae' at Moguntiacum, *CIL* XIII 7212 = *ILS* 1319, on which see also below.

82 M.G. Lauro, 'Cippo con dedica a Silvano', *Castelporziano I*, 57-60. Something of a parallel for the slightly comic tone in *ILS* 1319 'C. Hadius Ventrionis eques Romanus natus inter beta et brassica'.

83 *ILS* 3546.

ancient associations quite as much as any 'sacral-idyllic' painting. We have already seen how cult spoke of the arrival of Aeneas, of the early ties with Rome, and of the federal spirit of the first inhabitants. Cult identified vanished communities and alluded to them attractively on the *saltus* and *villae* which had taken their place. Cult sacralised the woods - Pomona, Silvanus, Echo - and the river mouths and marshes - Marica, Numicus and the nymphs; the old settlements of Arula, Ficana, and the first Ostia (Volkanus, a cult located outside the later town, since its site has not been identified); and the protagonists of epic legend - Aeneas, Faunus, Pilumnus.<sup>84</sup> The dedication found at Malafede is particularly telling: 'To Mars Ficanus, Agathon the slave of the Emperor, bailiff with responsibility for the workers on the *saltus* and his relatives gladly paid his vow with this gift'.<sup>85</sup> The active cult of the deity whose name evoked the romantic past on the part of the staff of the imperial Laurentine domain gives us a glimpse of how the mood of the landscape was felt. But Imperial Mars Ficanus was also the object of cult at Ostia.<sup>86</sup>

Archaeologically, contentment with smaller properties is attested by the famous 'casino' excavated early this century at Capocotta south of Tor Paterno.<sup>87</sup> Here a pavilion of a dozen rooms on a raised platform are arranged about a line of access from the coast road to the sea, with some sort of a garden space alongside to the south. In scale it would make little more than a *diaeta* for the greater villas of the Campagna, and it invites comparison with the outlying wing of Pliny's Laurentine villa-complex.<sup>88</sup> But like the small domestic units that characterise later imperial Ostia, it is finished to a quite high degree of elaboration, and in both cases we may see a deliberate restraint of scale dictated by a more or less sentimental notion of the needs of the life of *otium* down by the seashore.<sup>89</sup> In a great *suburbanum*, the city, and the calls on the time of the great man that necessitated opulent architecture on an enormous scale, were not far away. In the *ager Laurens* the objective was rather different, and you could play at the life of the woods.

In Ostia, during the heyday of Portus, moreover, the old port town may have had more in common with the coastal strip to the south than with its own more strenuous past. The resort coast visibly begins at the suburb outside the 'Porta Marina'; in practical terms it may well have subsumed the whole nucleus of the town, an *amoenissima civitas*, as it is called in a text of the turn of the second and third centuries, Minucius Felix's dialogue *Octavius*.

The charming prologue to this work, in which the suitably philosophical scene is set in a walk through the town that ends in a paddle on the beach, gives us a parallel to the shell-collecting strolls of Scipio and Laelius.<sup>90</sup> The speakers enjoy the softness of the sand, and the early morning breeze as they walk down the gently curving shore; the scenery includes the rippling of the waves, boats drawn up on oak chocks to prevent rot, and a group of boys playing ducks-and-drakes with potsherd. They eventually sit down on the blocks of a breakwater built out into the sea to protect a set of baths that must be situated, like Pliny's villa, right on the shoreline. The sand of the beach is described as being 'levelled by the gentle waves as if it was being made into a promenade': it acts, in other words, like the *gestatio* of a villa-gymnasium on a huge scale. This imitation of art by Nature is the key to much of the exploitation of the coast further south too. Not only is the beach-garden of the Capocotta casino

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84 For these cults the most striking source is the metrical inscription *CIL XIV 2065-6 = ILS 6181-2*, referring in choliambics to 'Numice Lavinias... virecta Pilumni... clara sanguis Aeneae'. Parallel provided by the verses in honour of the Ostian festival of Castor and Pollux with Neptune, celebrated on the 27th January by a praetor urbanus and hailing 'litoribus vestris': *CIL XIV 1 = ILS 3385*. For Numicus see also Dion. Hal. I 64, 5.

85 Meiggs, cit. (n. 76), 343, 'Marti Ficano Agathon Caesaris ser. vilicus saltuariorum cum suis voto libens d.d.'.

86 *CIL XIV 309*, a 'magister ad Martem Ficanum Augustum'.

87 R. Lanciani, in *Monumenti Antichi XVI*, 243-74.

88 Pliny, *Ep.* II 17, 20-24.

89 A possible glimpse of the mood, and the terminology, of such places in Seneca, *Ep.* 51, 12, as so often contrasting the present with the higher standards of the past: 'do you think that Cato would ever have lived in a "mica" counting the dirty-weekenders as they sailed by or the various kinds of multi-coloured boats or the rose-petals tossing on the lake, listening to the competing strains of song in the small hours?' This clearly refers to Lake Lucrinus, but the term mica, or 'crumb', attested otherwise of individual luxury apartments or triclinia, here appears to name a whole establishment.

90 Minucius Felix, *Octavius* ii-iii. A precedent in A. Gellius, *Noct. Att.* 18, 1, 1-3.

arranged with a copy of the Discobolus, but in Pliny's villa too, this position below the villa and along the shore is called the Gymnasium.<sup>91</sup>

Antonius Balbus' 'casa' is not only rustic and appropriate to the simple life but historically apt too. The arrival of Aeneas was something that concerned the property of the area and gave meaning - and value - to the villas. At Lavinium you could see Aeneas' hut.<sup>92</sup> In the Augustan period a visitor from the East could believe that most of Aeneas' urbanisation of Lavinium, indeed, survived in what was to be seen there.<sup>93</sup> The literary past was alive in the resorts of the *litus Laurentinum*. In the Forum at Lavinium stood statues of the Virgilian past - of Lavinia, and of Silvius Aeneas.<sup>94</sup> But the literary milieu was not wholly Roman.

'I have often wandered all around the confines of Baiae, because of the hot waters and the pleasures of the sea'. But the speaker, Socrates son of Astomachus of Tralles in Asia, was buried on the way to the *litus Laurentinum*, beside the Via Ostiensis, where Cicero had looked for suitably frequented sites for Tullia's memorial.<sup>95</sup> At Castelfusano, Aratos the musician dedicated a funerary inscription to P. Aelius Samius Isocrates, citizen of Nicomedia and Ephesus, a sophist.<sup>96</sup> We have already noticed that it was here that the learned Alexander of Miletus called Polyhistor bought the property where he came to a sad end. These are the people who shared Pliny's philosophical *secessus*, advisors on how to lead the uncomplicated life in a proper manner.



Fig. 2 Drawing of bas-relief from Tor Paterno (Visconti 1830, tav II, see note 98).

This was Rome's façade to the sea, and with that to the Second Sophistic. It is emblematic that the text of Pythagoras that the sage Apollonius of Tyana brought out of the oracular cavern of Trophonius at Lebadea was to be seen in the imperial villa at Antium. It had been sent to Hadrian, whose favourite coastal resort this was, and was much visited. The notice demonstrates that these places were for display, as well as the nature of the display, and of the audience.<sup>97</sup> The heyday of the resort can be seen both from the epigraphy and the increasingly meagre literary evidence, but most of all by the remains themselves, to have been when the capital looked out as a centre of Greek culture to the triumphantly

91 Pliny, *Ep.* II 17, 7.

92 Dion. Hal. I, 57: the kalias that they kept holy was the place where Aeneas had sacrificed the sow and her progeny to the ancestral Gods.

93 Dion. Hal. I 64. His ship was kept at the Navalia in Rome in late Antiquity: Procopius *BG* VIII, 22, 7.

94 *CIL* XIV 2067-8.

95 *CIL* XIV 480 'omnia Baiarum lustravi moenia saepe propter aquas calidas deliciasque maris'.

96 *NSc* 1944-5, 79 = *AEP* 1947.162.

97 Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* VIII 20.

Hellenic world around it, but without losing a sense of the need to celebrate the literary tradition that Virgil had done most to locate in the place where Rome's visitors arrived. A decorative monument presumably from one of these estates is apt for the wilderness at the doorstep of the capital of the world; it commemorates Alexander's victory at Arbela, with learned poetic allusions to the conquest of everything within the confines of Ocean and the concept of a historically universal conflict, and sculpted personifications of Asia and Europe<sup>98</sup> (Fig. 2).

'O sea, O shore, O true and secret *mouseion*!', says Pliny of his villa.<sup>99</sup> The arts could only properly be cultivated in this highly specialised landscape, but the paradox is that the practice of *otium* and the philosophical and literary retreat was a hallmark of high society and was therefore political. What Pliny advertised in his letters, emperors wanted to do too, and it is not in the least surprising to find the wealthy hermits of the first century joined by the imperial court in the age that brought a philosopher to the imperial station.

## VI. The path to Rome: an imperial wilderness

We have observed that, at the conclusion of the Civil Wars, Augustus made sure that he controlled the *façade maritime* of west central Italy. For the next three centuries, this coastline experienced the closest links with the imperial power. Under the management of the emperors, the themes that we have examined so far united to form a complex organic whole, blending the economic and political functions of the gateways to Rome with the heritage of the re-peopled wilderness from which Rome had sprung, and with the landscape of cultured *otium*.

### A. Ambiguous imperial harbours

The early emperors came and went through the various gateways of the Latin coast as their forebears had done. It was clearly quite normal to travel to Campania by sea. Augustus went via Astura south of Antium on his last journey south, no doubt to embark there, and Tiberius' route back towards Campania just before his death involved descending from the seventh milestone of the Via Appia to Astura, and then working his way down the coast, probably by sea, to Circeii and eventually Misenum.<sup>100</sup> Because of its southward communications Antium was also favoured, as we have seen - communications that at least to Gaius Caligula meant the way to the East as well as that to Campania.<sup>101</sup> Agrippina was travelling from Antium to Campania by sea in A.D. 59 when Nero met her and escorted her to Bauli where the collapsible boat was waiting.<sup>102</sup> In the other direction, Nero's triumphant return from Greece took him first to Naples, then to Antium, then inland to Alba, and so to Rome, with ceremonies at each point.<sup>103</sup> His plan for a coastwise canal between Campania and the Tiber mouth should be seen in this context of imperial journeying.

Such a project also, naturally, served some perceived public utility, though it might be hard to separate it from the ambitions of the ruler. Herein lies the distinctive ambiguity of the imperial history of the *litus Laurentinum*: the emperor's private business was at the same time the public interest. Claudius built the great harbour north of the Tiber mouth: did the name *Portus Augusti* imply that this was the Emperor's own harbour in a special way? It certainly included an imperial residence and became an imperial destination.<sup>104</sup> Likewise, at Centumcellae, Trajan's villa was intimately linked with the project for the new harbour, and the amenity of the villa was not in the least incompatible with a

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98 *IG XIV 1296, Opere varie di E.Q. Visconti*, ed. G. Labus, III (Milan 1830), 63-83, tav. II.

99 Pliny, *Ep.* 19, 6.

100 Suetonius, *Aug.* 97, 3; *Tib.* 72, 1-3.

101 Below, n. 111.

102 Tacitus, *Ann.* 14, 4.

103 Suetonius, *Nero* 25.

104 Carcopino drew attention to this problem, cit. (n. 55), 741-4, suggesting that the name actually refers to Augustus himself and alludes to a plan for this harbour of his devising.

project of major public utility.<sup>105</sup> At Antium Nero developed in tandem a great imperial villa and a fine new artificial harbour.<sup>106</sup> The imperial villas at Tor Paterno and Marina di S. Nicola were equipped in the same way.<sup>107</sup>

The combination of public monuments and the grander properties of the most wealthy citizens made the suburb of an ancient city a kind of *scaenae frons*. Its relationship to the route to Rome had given this kind of suburban function to the whole coast around the Tiber mouths. Now that effect was reinforced by the appropriation of the coastlands for the self-publicity of the emperors.

The imperial age saw a new role for the Tiber. The earlier tradition about the arrival of Aeneas seems - from at least the time of Ennius - to have focussed on the 'Lavina litora'.<sup>108</sup> Strabo says explicitly that the hero landed at 'Laurenton'.<sup>109</sup> Virgil, however, gave great emphasis to the Tiber in his narrative of the Trojans' experiences, and this fitted, and probably helped to create, a new pattern.

The prototype was Ptolemaic Egypt. The parallel is striking. Here was a way in to a country at the mouth of a great river - the comparison of the Tiber and the Nile became commonplace.<sup>110</sup> Beside the mouth was the great emporium, a safe haven, with monumental warehouses housing prestigious goods, all dominated by a great light-house, and overlooked by the palaces of the rulers. Along the coast, the elite and the populace shared in the pleasures of a landscape improved to cater to the life of luxury: Ostia was Rome's Canopus.

Alexandria was the city with which the early emperors needed to compete. But the competition needed to be discreet. Rome was famous for its inland site, and its new Alexandrian façade should be at arm's length. It was an example of Gaius' megalomaniac lack of judgement that he was thought to have intended to move Rome to Antium, decisively re-peopling the wilderness, but at one stroke ending the city's proud moral distance from the corrupting sea.<sup>111</sup> Even the Athenian compromise and the imitation of Piraeus was the brainchild of a tyrant: it was Nero who was alleged to have contemplated the construction of Long Walls down to Ostia, that would bind Rome closer to the maritime, Hellenic world that Romulus had so prudently rejected, but that he so much preferred to the ancestral austerity.<sup>112</sup>

## B. Ambiguous imperial cities

From Astura and Antium, through the *litus Laurentinum* to Ostia and Portus, north through Fregenae to Alsium and Lorium and even as far as Centumcellae, there was, in the imperial period, a single unified zone of settlement phenomenon pivoting on the Tiber mouth, integral to the social and economic existence of the city of Rome, and central to the daily life of the imperial court.<sup>113</sup> The roads that joined the new centres were designed to unite the coastal tract into a still tighter whole.<sup>114</sup> Their history reflects that of imperial interest in the area, reaching a peak with the construction of the coast-road south from Ostia in the Severan period. The Via Severiana is a symbol of an involvement which is clearly reflected in the archaeology of the coastal villas.<sup>115</sup> The importance of the communications of

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105 Pliny, *Ep.* VI 31, 15 'villa pulcherrima cingitur viridissimis agris, imminet litori, cuius in sinu fit cum maxime portus', cf. 17 'eritque vel maxime salutaris: nam per longissimum spatium litus importuosum hoc receptaculo utetur'.

106 Tacitus, *Ann.* 15, 46, 9; Suetonius, *Nero* 9.

107 X. Lafon, 'Marina di S. Nicola. Il complesso archeologico', *BollArch* 4 (1990), 15-29.

108 Ennius 30 Skutsch 'quos homines quondam Laurentis terra recepit'.

109 Strabo, 5, 3, 2 (229). The form of the name may suggest that he was thinking of the estates of the Ager Laurens: above, n. 80.

110 Pliny the Elder is at pains to establish absurdly that the volume of water carried by the Tiber is no less than that of the Nile, *HN* 36, 70 'non minus aquarum huic amni esse quam Nilo'. See also Castagnoli, cit. (n. 55), 211; J. Le Gall, *Le Tibre, fleuve de Rome, dans l'antiquité* (Paris 1953).

111 Suetonius, *Gaius* 8, 5, cf. 49, 2 where his plans also include the move to Alexandria.

112 Suetonius, *Nero* 16, 2. The plan was characteristically accompanied by the plan to dig a canal to improve the navigation of the Tiber.

113 Cf F.G.B. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, 26-8. For Fregenae, *NSc* 1929. 168-9.

114 The precedent was the ancient Via Herculanea on the Campanian coast, Cicero, *Div.* 2, 8587.

115 C. Pavolini, *NSc* 1981. 141-3 for the Ostian end (late second century, with no obvious precursors). The road out of the south gate was presumably the earlier route.

the coast as late as Maxentius is attested by his repairs to the Via Laurentina.<sup>116</sup>

We are accustomed to attempt to detach Ostia and Portus, the 'cities', from the rest, which is dismissed as villas or a resort-coast. But these places, as we are now in a position to see, are as vital as the urban nuclei, and those nuclei are not less artificial than the estates and agglomerations of the countryside and coast. Imperial patronage united and maintained the whole region, which prospered or declined in response to no other stimulus than the favour of the ruler. This is how we solve the problem of the *amoenissima civitas*: Ostia was the centre of a landscape of imperial patronage which embraced both the aspects of economic life that we think of as Ostia's primary role, and the life of cultured *otium* that took place in the imperial villas and their numerous imitators.

Comparison with Antium is instructive. For Strabo, this city had become one of those places which were nothing except villa, reserved for the 'rulers' for visits to revive them after their cares of state.<sup>117</sup> Residence of Augustus and Tiberius is attested, and Caligula was born there.<sup>118</sup> As a result, the place was marked as suitable for an upgrading in status to match the imperial interest - even the ultimate promotion of Gaius' ambition, already noted, to make it a replacement for Rome. Nero acted in a not wholly dissimilar manner in making Antium a *colonia*, for the specific purpose of peopling a deserted landscape, and in developing his own villa there into a city-like centre that had a great artificial harbour.<sup>119</sup>

If the towns shared in the life of the villas, supporting the leisured life of luxury, like the *vicus* so close to Pliny's Laurentinum, the villas, as we have seen, gave themselves the air of towns: that at Tor Paterno even had its own aqueduct.<sup>120</sup> As with port-facilities, the architecture of benefaction could be applied ambiguously in both public and private contexts. And in a place like this where the towns, the countryside and the people were all constantly reinterpreted as part of the mythopoiia of the Roman elite, the difference could be hard to tell: as when Carinus and Numerian recorded their restoration of the Castel Fusano bridge on the Via Severiana 'Laurentibus et Ostiensibus'.<sup>121</sup> So the imperial reoccupation of the site of Lavinium is part of the experience of our resort coast and not to be regarded as somehow the fate of a 'real' town outside the rather unreal atmosphere of allusion and whimsy that characterises the coastal zone northwards to Ostia.<sup>122</sup> A new dedication found at Pratica (Lavinium) records the gift of a restoration of a bath complex by Constantine and Licinius 'Laurentibus suis'.<sup>123</sup> A similar process can be assumed for Ardea.<sup>124</sup>

It was the patron's duty to make sure that levels of general amenity were assured for his dependents, and the emperors can be seen doing just that to all the inhabitants of the region, not distinguishing the villa-staff of Pratica or Malafede from the urban needs of nucleated Ostia. The people who unloaded annonal grain at Portus and those who fed the imperial menagerie at Tor Paterno were, after all, equally and wholly dependent on the structures of imperial power, whatever their role in the theoretical schemata that patterned life on the Laurentine shore, and to which we turn next.

### C. Ambiguous imperial dependents

The *infrequentia locorum* of the Laurentine wilderness was, as we have seen, countered by the

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116 *CIL* XIV 4087.

117 Strabo 5, 3, 5 (232).

118 Suetonius, *Aug.* 58, 1: the plebs en masse visited him there to offer him the title pater patriae; *Tib.* 38.

119 Tacitus, *Ann.* 14, 27.

120 Pliny, *Ep.* II 17, 26 'ceteras copias Ostiensis colonia ministrat. frugi quidem homini sufficit etiam vicus, quem una villa discernit'. For the Tor Paterno aqueduct, V. Mannucci, 'L'acquedotto laurentino e Tor Paterno: osservazioni e primo intervento di restauro', in *Castelporziano I* (cit. n. 4), 31-41; id. 'L'acquedotto Laurentino', in *Castelporziano II* (cit., n. 4), 31-6.

121 *ILS* 608.

122 See now F. Castagnoli, *Enc. virg.* III (1987), 149-53 s.v. Lavinium.

123 *AEP* 1984. 151 = M.G. Granino Cecere, *Epigr. e Ord. Sen.* I, 662-2, A.D. 312-24.

124 Ardea: Statius *Silv.* I 3, 85 'Laurentia iugera Turni', also Castagnoli cit. (n. 55). The Aphrodision at Lavinium seems to have retained some federal function into the Augustan period, according to Strabo 5,3,5, cf. Torelli, cit. (n. 4), 157-73. Unity of Laurentine and Ardeate territories suggested by the joint job of repairing their roads, *ILS* 1472.

imperial revival of the cities and the repopulation of the countryside. The language and the institutions may have derived ultimately from the settlement schemes of the late Republic, but the territory of the *litus Laurentinum* was now unavoidably imperial, and nothing could disguise the dependence of the settlers: even the Laurentes were now at least in part Augustani. Nor was that a disgrace: honour now flowed from the imperial patron.

The emperor was now the heir of the ancient peoples of Latium: 'arboribus Rutulis et Turni pascitur agro/ Caesaris armentum'.<sup>125</sup> His dependents took over the cults of the ancient towns that had vanished into the villas.<sup>126</sup> The functionaries of the estates made the Emperor the centre of their observance: like the imperial freedman Aglaus, in charge of the Emperor's *saltuarii* who set up *imagines dominorum* at the Grotta di Piastra site.<sup>127</sup> Such people *were* the population, as their tombs testify.<sup>128</sup>

The dependents who were maintained in the area by the imperial patrons were not all resident. Like Canopus in the Alexandrian suburbs, this was intended as a resort for the dependent population of the city, and the topography of their *commoda* or entertainments and privileges extended far beyond the built-up area of Rome. It was members of the *plebs urbana* who offered Augustus the title of *pater patriae* at Antium; the urban populace likewise are the intended audience of the festival which Nero intended to found there in honour of the Claudian and Domitian *gentes* after the model of Bovillae.<sup>129</sup> These are the people who flocked to Portus to watch the spectacle of the trapped whale in Claudius' harbour, or the games in honour of Castor and Pollux at Ostia.<sup>130</sup>

Underlying movement from the city we must also see the economic opportunities offered by the region: helping unload cargoes in the harbours obviously, but also seasonal labour in the fields and gardens. The evidence of more recent times makes it clear that labour from Rome was normally employed in this region for agricultural purposes, and there is no reason to assume that things were different in Antiquity.<sup>131</sup>

#### **D. Imperial messages: Latium in a world empire**

One way of looking at this coast, as we have seen, is to make it the place whence the Romans came. But we have also seen that the Romans at the same time thought of themselves as in some senses the indigenes, in which case this appears as the place where the aliens arrive, as the foothold or beachhead on Italian soil of the people who belong elsewhere.<sup>132</sup> This made it possible for the treaty which Rome had had since the earliest times with the peoples of this area to be used as a type of Rome's obligations to other non-Romans. In the reign of Claudius we hear by chance of one particularly explicit and emphatic ritual re-enactment of the treaty between Rome and the *nomen Latinum* which were celebrated at Lavinium. The sanctity of *foedera* and the importance of *fides* are clearly being stressed here, and it is hard to think it a coincidence that it is in this period too that the idea of 'Latin' citizenship becomes a regular part of the portfolio of statuses available to the emperors and their agents.<sup>133</sup> There is a certain appropriate irony in the reflection that a term that had once denoted Rome's uneasy relations with the Latin League should now become part of the decorative cultural paraphernalia of a resort-coast, and that the images used to express the structures of loyalty in an imperial dominion should be those of the purlieu of the Emperor's leisure.

I suspect that a similar aim lay behind the recreation of the Laurentes, both the Augustani and the

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125 Juvenal XII 105. The herd is of elephants: cf. n. 64 above.

126 For Ficana, above, nn. 85-6.

127 Carcopino cit. (n. 55), 225; cf. O. Hirschfeld, *Die kaiserliche Verwaltungsbeamten bis auf Diokletian* (Berlin 1963), 138.

128 Musicus vilicus et Favor a corintis Caesaris servus, *NSc* 1975, 223 n. 73.

129 Tacitus, *Ann.* 15, 23.

130 *CIL* XIV 1 = *ILS* 3385, the urban praetor of A.D. 216 celebrates the games on 27th January: 'litoribus vestris... Castor venerandeque Pollux'. The ritual, earlier patronised by Claudius, and possibly revived by him, combined antiquity with the protection of commerce and communications, and the celebration of the coastline.

131 Cf. n. 8.

132 Sicilians lived here before Aeneas came: Servius, *Aen.* I 2 'where Laurolavinium now is'.

133 *CIL* X 797 = *ILS* 5004. Cf. A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1973), 27.

more prestigious joint citizens of the *ager Laurens* and the revived Lavinium, where their ceremonial headquarters seems to have been.<sup>134</sup> This way of identifying prominent equestrians with the places that were most redolent of Rome's early origins became an important ingredient in an empire-wide hierarchy of status.<sup>135</sup> The centrality of Rome and its neighbourhood was reassuringly restated through the language of history and in the vital matter of social standing.<sup>136</sup>

The Emperor himself, when resident in this area, was seen as participating in a special way with the past and with the landscape. That, at least seems to be the implication of the dedication from Mainz 'nymphis Laurentibus' for the health of Alexander Severus. The *salubritas* characteristic of many places of villeggiatura is here linked with the special religious atmosphere of the *ager Laurens*. From the region itself there are parallels, dedications for the well-being of the emperor and his establishment. Such a function of course gained stature from the increasingly disease-prone circumstances of the later Antonine Age.<sup>137</sup>

But the main point is that this was perceived as the imperial landscape that it was: an integral part of the cultural setting of the imperial system itself, and the place, as we have seen, where imperial Italy abutted on the economic, social and cultural world around it. Cicero had claimed that Pompey's conquests had made the whole Mediterranean the harbour of Rome. It was the achievement of the emperors to turn the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy into the waterfront of that harbour, their façade to the cultural and economic world that centred on the inland sea.

## VII. Conclusion

The outline provided here already draws heavily on archaeological research. The investigations at Grotta di Piastra and Tor Paterno are already beginning to produce fascinating clarification of the problems of the *litus Laurentinum*, and the neighbourhood of Ostia is also receiving much-needed attention. The new opportunities to excavate at Portus will pose the questions briefly raised by Meiggs about the functioning of that anomalous place in new ways. The principal objective of new work must be integration, to match the tightly-knit social, economic and cultural continuum that I have attempted to sketch here: and the attempt must be made to engage Ostia fully with its hinterland in the wide sense. In my view, it is not too much to say that it is *only* through work of this kind that we shall ever come to a proper understanding of the city that is one of the principal archaeological resources of the Roman world.

Some of our current desiderata are chronological. We need to explore the earliest settlement history of the area, and the nature of coastwise and inland communications: the Iron Age site on the surface near Grotta di Piastra is a token of what might be expected here. What was the effect on cultural change in the area of Rome's first politically expansion? But the nature of any occupation in the fourth and third centuries is as pressing a problem, and one on which virtually no light has as yet been shed except at Lavinium and Ostia. I suspect that these communities will, in the earlier as in the later periods, turn out to be shifting and transient agglomerations of men and women on the move and opportunistically

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134 *ILS* 5004. For the Laurentes Lavinates see *ILS* 6183 (Antoninus Pius thanked because 'privilegia eorum non modo custodierit sed etiam ampliaverit', cf 3872, referring also to 'iura Laurentum'; 6182-6; *CIL* XIV pp. 187-8, *Cod. Theod.* 8, 5, 46. Note the odd base *EE* IX p. 371 no. 571, a dedication of some kind which also used the phrase 'e iure Quiritium'. It was recorded in the late eighteenth century between Castelporziano and Tor Paterno, but does not survive.

135 Did the term derive from Cato's Lauro-Lavinium? Above, n. 80.

136 If Carcopino (cit. [n. 55], 45-53) was right to see in the obscure priesthood of the sodales Arulenses a claim to remember a vanished town called Arula, this is a parallel for the celebration of the non-existence of Laurentum. There is certainly a tie-up between the Arulenses and the honorific posts of the Vicus Laurentium, as well as between this cult and the rites of the colonia at Ostia. *AEp* 1988. 207 is the complete text of the stone *CIL* XIV 4625. It reads D. IUNIO D.F. PAL. BUBALO/IMPETRATO/EQUITI ROMANO DECURIONI/COL. OST. DECUR. LAURENTIUM/VICANOR. ARULENSI PRAETORI/PRIMO SACRIS VOLKANI FACIUND. The reference to 'Laurentes vicani' is interesting, implying as it does the existence of other Laurentes. Bubalus' equestrian status is also worthy of note. *AEp* 1982. 132, another equestrian decurion and IIIvir at the Vicus was sodalis Herculanus, a post probably to be connected with the cult of Hercules at Tibur. 137 Cf. above, n. 63 for Commodus on the Laurentine shore. The Mainz dedication is *ILS* 3872. Cf. *CIL* XIV 2040 'Fortunae Augustae', 2041 'Laribus Augustis', and 2043, a dedication to Caracalla of A.D. 214.

deriving the means of support from the communications and redistributions that passed through this zone, but have argued even so for a certain continuity of function through into the second century B.C. Both views can only be corrected or confirmed by the physical remains.

There will no doubt also turn out to be many vicissitudes in the history of the villa-occupation which we can not yet see. The support systems of a landscape of villas, and their relationship with other forms of settlement, should be splendidly demonstrable in this area. But we must also look for evidence of the dependent settlers, either in centuriation or their dwellings: and we need to clarify the relationship, if any, of the honorary functions of the region in the empire to what was and is to be seen on the ground. My hypothesis that the imperial life of the area was wholly dependent on the interest of the emperor should be tested through work on the third and fourth century remains and the nature of the abandonment.

Last, but not least important, are the cultural questions that can be explored through the understanding of the architecture and landscaping of villas and settlements. Through further finds of inscriptions or decorative elements, as through the study of the upstanding remains, we have a chance to see how a whole landscape functioned allusively as a setting for *otium*. I hope to have shown both that that study would be neither frivolous nor simple; in this place it offers a direct contribution to Roman self-perception in all its complexity, of a kind that is not available elsewhere, even in the Vesuvian cities. The possibilities could hardly be more exciting!