REGION VII

ORBETELLO

**Villa at Settefinestre**

Settefinestre, near Orbetello in Tuscany, provides an example of the great villas of Central Italy purposely constructed for intensive agriculture and specialized stock raising (Figs. 1, 2). Located in central Etruria, in the territory of Cosa, it was built between 40 and 30 B.C. by a member of the gens Sestia. The complex closely matches Varro’s account of the villa *perfecta*, where buildings for production and profit (*pars rustica* and *fructuaria*) were seamlessly welded to an urban luxury dwelling (*pars urbana*).

The central nucleus of the villa covered 2780 m2, with just under 3000 m2 of formal gardens, and a further 1000 m2 of kitchen gardens. Thus the *horti* represented three fifths of the enclosed area of the estate. Outside the complex there were minor buildings, threshing areas and an orchard with a nursery, planted close to the entrance. Elsewhere there were enclosed spaces that were possibly used for climbing plants, as well as vases and beds containing herbs. Outlying fields offered specialized cultivation and woodlands serving the villa (*circa villam*). Nothing has been preserved of the various outdoor furnishings except for a few fragments of planting pots. In the second century C.E.., when the villa passed into imperial hands, the formal gardens with their symmetrical beds were dismantled and transformed into spaces for exercise or agriculture.

*The Porticoed Garden*

This hortus, of almost 1600 m2 (Fig. 3), was reserved for the owners. Located on two descending terraces, and edged with three porticoes from which the panorama of the valley could be seen across the lower gardens. This arrangement recalls the gymnasium Cicero describes in his villa at Tusculum, while the plantings are similar to garden 59 of the villa of Oplontis or to the Palaestra at Pompeii. The garden was accessible from the loggia of the *pars urbana* and from the portico of the basis villa, but also from the farmyard. Along the terrace wall that divides the garden in two was found a ditch for a rectangular planting bed or for a hedge. We have reconstructed eight symmetrical beds along this wall, separated by paths, recalling the arrangements of the Turreted Garden below. In front of the porticos an open path ran around the whole garden, descending to the lower level by a wooden stair. There is no evidence for the species that were planted in this garden. The thick layer of humus found over the beds would,, according to Varro, have been suitable for plants such as violets (*RR* 1.35.1).

In the second phase of the villa the formal garden was eliminated. The upper terrace was paved with a layer of beaten earth, similar to that of the xystus of the turreted garden, while the lower terrace was probably turned into a kitchen garden, for excavations showed a layer with parallel furrows 2-3 cm. deep spaced 10-15 cm. apart. These were probably created with a spade.

*The Turreted Garden*

Along the facade of the villa, below the pilastered portico, a garden of 1300 m2 was excavated (Fig. 4), surrounded by a wall whose thin, circular towers imitated a city wall. Two other such villas are known form the surrounding area, while we find similar villas painted on the walls of the Vesuvian towns. Along the portico, a cut in the rock suggests that a climbing vine adorned the lower half of the portico. The garden itself featured two large symmetrical beds, quartered by paths and surrounded by a wider walkway. Within these beds lay the remains of parallel furrows, for the cultivation of flowers or rows of shrubs. These were 30 cm. deep, and while no specific plants could be scientifically detected, these furrows could have been used for planting roses (Columella *Arb.* 30.2). In the Hadrianic period the construction of a bath building along one of the short sides of the garden led to the transformation of the garden into a somewhat larger open area, possibly shaded by a few trees, in which exercises and races could have taken place: the new, enlarged perimeter corresponds exactly to the length of a stadium. These activities would have taken place before bathing.

*Orchard*

The orchard, which covered nearly a hectare, (5 jugera) was planted on the slopes of the hill, along the road that led up to the villa. The trapezoidal space was surrounded by a wall three meters high. To prepare the ground the bedrock was cut and leveled, and covered with new soil cut by drainage ditches. There is no evidence for the plants grown here, but it seems reasonable to assume that the wall surrounded a *pomarium* such as that mentioned by Columella (1.6.24; 5.10.1; 5.10.12) who describes in detail the enclosure walls, nearness to the villa buildings, the type of earth and the manuring required. The upper terrace could have been used originally for the kitchen garden (four beds have been reconstructed) or seed bed (Columella *Arb*. 25.4). The rest of the area was probably planted with fruit trees, including some walnuts, whose shells were found in the midden deposits of the villa. The trees were probably planted in lines oriented north-south, following the terraces. Between 100 and 400 trees could have been planted, depending on the intervals between them. Manure would have been available from the farmyard, where stalls for cows could be found. There may also have been beehives in the orchard, as Columella (9.4.4) recommends, for honey from flowering trees was prized.

*Kitchen Garden*

A second kitchen garden, just over 1000 m2, surrounded by a rectangular wall was found next to the turreted garden, just below the Porticoed Garden. Irrigation was provided by rainwater distributed in channels from the upper garden, while fertilizer probably came from the two manure heaps found not far from the Turreted Garden. At the beginning of the second century A.D., when the baths were constructed, this hortus was reduced to around a third of its final size.

Other Cultivated Areas and Natural Resources

Settefinestre’s estate has been reconstructed as covering 510 jugera, 10 covering the two hills, while on the plain below there were two lots of the centuriation of the third century BCE, each of 62.7 ha. (250 Roman iugera). Our hypotheses about the use of this area derive from field survey, environmental evidence, the horrea and other productive structures of the villa and the testimony of the *scriptores rei rusticae*.

An olive grove is suggested for the hill of Settefinestre, which would have served the needs of the slaves and the owners. Calculating the annual consumption and the productivity of a single tree, we suppose that 500 liters could have been obtained from 400 trees. These would have occupied an area of between 8.5 and 22-50 jugera, depending on whether their cultivation was intensive or interspersed with other crops.

The vineyard represented the principal productive crop of the Settefinestre estate, from which it would have derived an income of up to 60,000 sesterces a year. The vines were probably located near the villa, along the lower slopes. The wine itself was produced in the pressing area of the pars rustica, with its basins, presses and dolia. From a series of calculations based on the productive processes and on the capacities of the lacus and the dolia it has been suggested that Settefinestre produced around 200 cullei (104.784 liters) each year. For these 100-125 jugera would have been necessary, corresponding to a century of the Cosan centuriation. It is probable that the woodland of the villa was located in the area of the modern oak wood (*quercus ilex*), known today as “La Leccetina” on the hill of Settefinestre. The wood possible covered around 10 jugera.

The size of the grain fields can be calculated by subtracting the area of the villa, its gardens, woodlands and specialized plantations from the total area of the estate. This gives us between 315 and 355 jugera for the alimentation of the villa, and for its pasture land. Using Columella we can suggest that there were 340 jugera, divided between wheat (100 jugera), autumn legumes (70 jugera), spring legumes (30 jugera), fallow (30 jugera), and pasture (140 jugera).

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FIGURES:

Fig. 1: Reconstruction of the villa in the first period (from Settefinestre 1\*, fig. 139).

Fig. 2: Axonometric reconstruction of the villa in the second period (from Settefinestre 1\*, fig. 148).

Fig. 3: Reconstruction of the Porticoed Garden in its first phase (from *Settefinestre* 1\*, fig. 153).

Fig. 4: Reconstruction of the Turreted Garden in its first phase (from Settefinestre 1\*\*, fig. 154).