

Peristyle buildings in Late Antiquity: Architecture, Landscape and Function

International Workshop

ABSTRACTS



*Mutation of Architectural, Social and Landscape Space
in the Mirror of Late Antique Peristyle Buildings along the Danube*

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Pécs

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Peristyle Buildings within of *villa* estates, *castra* and *civitates* in the Danube Provinces

Throughout history, architecture, *viz.* built as well as rebuilt structures, has been closely related to the cultural, social and economic living environment. Several elements of human life can be reflected in architecture, like the specific situation of people in a three-dimensional space; the forms of power, administration and exercise of activity, the inclusivity and exclusivity of people and institutions as well as a collective sense of cultural and social transformation. In the MASLAP project proposes to resume a dossier to the different forms of peristyle *villae* along the Danube during Late Antiquity (3rd–7th centuries AD) at three levels: at the *micro-scale* (social spaces); at a *meso-scale* (architectural types) and at a *macro-scale* (elements of a landscape). This presentation deals with the meso-scale of the project. The focus is to examine the forms of architectural expression and their transformations, as well as to understand the multiple functions and the potential phases of conversion or reuse for this type of building. In the light of the various states of the art and based on individual examples the paper shall show the common features and differences between selected buildings in the Danubian and Balkan Provinces. A subsequent analysis elucidates the functions and social activities attributed to the various spaces.

Máté Szabó

Late Antique *villae* in Pannonia: Non-invasive investigations and landscape archaeology

The Late Roman reorganisation of the Empire had a profound effect on the borderland and this period marked as a major transformation for Pannonia too. Roman villa sites can be seen as potential indicators of the changing countryside and, with the reorganisation of land-properties and the birth of large estates, the transformation of villa-dominated and non-villa dominated landscapes also identifiable in Pannonia. Researches in recent years have highlighted the structure and layout of many villa sites and their environs with the help of non-invasive archaeological methods and gave a much more complex picture about the historical, economic and cultural role they played in this region. In my presentation I will focus on the result of our two ongoing researches, on the macro-scale (landscape elements) of the MASLAP project and on the villa landscape studies around Sopianae (Pécs).

Márton Szabó

The meaning of artefacts: Small finds from Late Antique Peristyle *villae* in Pannonia – Preliminary report

This presentation is a preliminary report of my doctoral thesis within the MASLAP project. I'm focusing on the Late Antique *peristyle villae* of the Late Antiquity in Pannonia. The research presents peristyle *villae* that were extended with an apse and an aula in the Late Roman period, and it deals with the the so-called social spaces (micro-scale of the project), with the "meaning" the different types of artifacts and inscriptions. The main goal is the comparative typological analysis, cataloging, and organization of the previously unpublished and published archaeological finds from various excavations and fieldworks with the grouping of the artifacts according to their locations, layers, construction periods, and rooms, which will help us to deduce the role of the building in a given period and the alternating function of its different rooms. As part of the project, the so-called "inner fortresses" will also be investigated, as they also contain buildings with a similar layout to peristyle villas. In this way, it is possible to draw parallels between the main buildings in the rural areas and the inner fortifications and to examine the social and economic situation of the people living there.

Maja Zeman

Peristyle *villae* as settlement centers in Late Antique Dalmatia (4th–6th c.)

Following the newly established theory according to which the peristyle building with an additional bathing facility of the Roman municipium of Rider (today's Danilo village, Croatia) is interpreted as a state-run *mansio* rather than a country residence of urban elites (Zeman 2017), much of the archeological and historical data considering the settlement's main characteristics, as well as its later development, became more explainable. More significantly, having in mind the formal features of Rider's main architectural complex, important analogies are recognized that all prompt us to reconsider our knowledge of the function of several other monumental peristyle buildings excavated in inland Dalmatia that were either defined as Roman rural residences or military camps. Contrary to that, one could argue that regularly planned inner courtyard edifices, such as those of Roman *Andetrium* (today's village of Muć Gornji, Croatia) or Višići near Čapljina (today's Bosnia and Hercegovina), were in their very beginnings built as semi-public administrative centers. That would be implied firstly by their unified architectural arrangement but also by typified modes of rebuilding and functional extensions during the centuries (with workshops, additional warehouses, baths, and sanctuaries). We could even conclude that by late antiquity they had become focal points of an elaborate network of semi-urban settlements on which the economy of the transit hinterland of the province relied. In that respect, early-Christian church complexes are also expected, which are in most of the studied examples archaeologically confirmed precisely next to the main peristyle buildings. It is certainly possible that Church authorities took over the administration of these settlements, which would be indicated by the fact that in most of the examples they are considered centers of church parishes or even so-called rural dioceses commonly established in the late 4th or early 5th centuries.

Tin Turković

***Peristylum* in Late Antique Dalmatia - Between Old Models and New Functions**

In 1988 Simon Ellis started his study of Late Antique Roman houses with the statement: "*The disappearance of the Roman peristyle house marks the end of the ancient world and its way of life. No new peristyle houses were built after A.D. 550*". And, indeed, peristyle houses and *villae* were a trademark of the Roman and Mediterranean civilisation. And it is certainly true that during the late antique period a number of new peristyle houses and *villae* was dwindling. Such a transformation becomes quite understandable when we consider the historical circumstances which brought about the strong influx of architectural models from the northern and northwestern provinces during late antique centuries. Moreover, the same circumstances dictated a change in cultural norms, including the idea of the desired standard of self-presentation. However, although the number of new peristyle houses and *villae* might have been in decline during late antique centuries, *peristylum* as such survived, however, not in the same domestic context.

Of course, there are multiple examples of rearrangements of peristyle houses in the Roman province of Dalmatia from the end of the 4th century onwards, in order for old structures to meet the new needs and their new functions. Both, in the urban centres and in the Dalmatian countryside. However, these rearrangements of domestic architecture represent just the survival of a type of edifice, while *peristylum* as such migrated between the 4th and 6th century into more prestigious architectural context, both in Dalmatia and elsewhere. As to Dalmatia, the model for the peristyle courtyard functioning as a "*cour/tribunal*" of late antique imperial edifices was the *peristylum* of Diocletian's retirement "palace" in Spalato. The same general usage of the *peristylum* as the central "*cour/tribunal*", or to borrow from Dyggve - "*late antique cour d'honneur*", is present in most of the Tetrarchic or 4th century constructions in Dalmatia, and are derivatives of the same conception of peristyle "*cour/tribunal*" defined and promoted through Diocletian's imperial constructions. In that sense, the architectural form of *peristylum* acquired new significance and new vitality. However, its vitality will not wane in Dalmatia even in the 6th century, not even at its end. One of the most monumental examples of *peristylum* courtyard on the eastern Adriatic, equal only to the one of the

palatium in Ravenna, and constructed in the second half or right at end of the 6th century as a part of grandiose structure intended for the assembly of the Salonitan clergy, could be found in Salona, or more precisely, in the Salonitan “episcopal district”. The structure is in itself unique, as it combines two architectural models - one coming from Diocletian’s palace in Spalato, the other from the *palatium* in Ravenna, whose general outlines are perfectly reflected in this imposing Salonitan edifice. The sheer idea of the construction of an episcopal “*cour/tribunal*” in Salona is quite in accordance with defiant and independent characters of the last Salonitan archbishops.

Hence, the aim of the presentation is to demonstrate the particular late antique Dalmatian line of development related to the peristyle courtyards, which will be once again put in the spotlight of architectural developments. So, Ellis might have been correct only partially, as during Late Antiquity the peristyle assumed its new functions and would continue to mirror the Mediterranean character of the Late Roman world. At the same time, the intention of the presentation is to draw attention to the fact that the coastal Dalmatia had its own line of cultural evolution, expressed quite uniquely in grand architecture, even the one constructed at the brink of Early Middle Ages (i. e. first half of the 7th century).

Carla Sfameni

Late Antique Peristyle *villae* in Italy

The main residential villas built in Italy in the 4th century are characterized by the presence of a central peristyle, within an ancient tradition, well attested for the dwellings of the Roman elites in urban and rural contexts since the Republican period. The peristyle constitutes the nucleus in which the public and private functions of the dwelling converge: it is an area for the distribution of visitors and inhabitants which allows everyone to reach the rooms with a representative function, the “private” apartments, and the other sectors of the building. The size and characteristics of the peristyles or central courtyards of the late antique villas can vary considerably, as can their decorations. If the architectural decoration, in fact, presents itself as the main feature of the peristyle defining its forms, as the very name περί-στυλος reveals, all the other decorations, such as paintings, floors, sculptures, hydraulic systems and gardens flora and furniture contribute to shaping or updating its appearance according to the needs of the owners. The aim of this contribute is to analyze the characteristics and functions of the main late antique peristyle villas known in Italy in the context of contemporary villas in Italy and in the provinces in order also to verify how far this typology was used for the extra-urban residences of the aristocratic elites and with which main functions.

Beate Brühlmann, Felix Teichner, Florian Hermann (Marburg)

Late Antique luxury *villae* in the surrounding of Augusta Treverorum (Trier)

The starting point of this presentation is the extensive, non-invasive investigations of the Roman villas in Oberweis and Mötsch (Eifelkreis Bitburg-Prüm), conducted by the team from the Prehistoric Seminar at Philipps University Marburg, led by Prof. Félix Teichner, in the last years. These investigations have yielded surprising results regarding the extent and structure of the two long-known sites and are further examined in terms of their architectural types (axial villas). The luxurious villa near Oberweis is located 10 km west of the Late Antique fortress Bitburg, while the villa in Mötsch is 2 km east of it and within the Late Antique imperial Langmauer district (2nd half of the 4th century). The obtained information provides new insights into the layout design and construction development of these villas. Finally, they will be discussed in the context of the Late Antique administrative reforms since Diocletian, during which Trier was expanded into an imperial residence city. For not only within the city itself but also in the surrounding areas, restructuring and architectural impacts can be documented, which were accompanied by the influx of imperial elites, administrative officials, and the presence of military units.

Alejandra Chavarria Arnau and Rafael Hidalgo Prieto

Late Antique Peristyle villae in Hispania

Numerous specialists have analyzed the characteristics and typology of Hispanic villas since J.G. Gorges published his monumental catalog and study of villas in 1979 and M.C. Fernandez Castro's volume on Spanish villas appeared in 1982. In both works it could be seen how many Hispanic villas built or renovated during the 4th century are characterized by the presence of a porticoed courtyard or peristyle surrounded by porticoed galleries to which the main rooms of the building open.

Many villas (with and without peristyle) have been discovered since then, as well as synthesis works related to specific territories or specific problems linked to this particular form of residential architecture that spread all over the Mediterranean during the Roman expansion and practically disappeared with the end of the Empire. Much remains to be done, however, particularly as regards the characteristics, meaning and function of the spaces that make up the urban parts of the peristyle villas, whose important homogeneity in some cases as regards the form and distribution of the main environments- Despite the regional variations and the different richness and quality of the buildings allows us to intuit very similar forms of life and representation for their inhabitants in a large part of the Empire.

Among the spaces that have attracted the most attention of researchers in recent years are probably the *balnea* (from an architectural and structural point of view) and the reception or performance halls, in particular those dedicated to the *convivium*, especially if equipped with *stibadia*. Less attention has been paid to other spaces such as bedrooms, offices, libraries, rooms dedicated to more or less private worship and the peristyles that articulated the residential complex.

In this paper we will present some aspects related to these aspects focusing on the architecture and the location of the different rooms to understand if there is a logic that can determine their function in relation to the lifestyle and social dynamics of the Roman aristocracies in Hispania.

Stefan Groh

Bruckneudorf: From *villa rustica* to *villa murocincta*

In Bruckneudorf (Austria, Pannonia superior), a *villa rustica* was built in the late 1st century AD. The Roman *fundus* was implemented in the traditional territory of the Boii community (*civitas Boiorum*) living here. The history of the region always has been determined by the important traffic routes, be it the rivers Leitha and Danube or the roads. Decisive for the ancient prosperity up to the culmination in the 4th century AD was the convenient location along the Amber Road, which led from the Adriatic to the Danube. The Leitha waterway provided a connection to the ore-rich foothills of the Alps as well as to the Limes. The large villa of Bruckneudorf in Late Antiquity, magnificently decorated with mosaics, developed from a simple farm with the additional function of a *mansio* in the 2nd century AD to a representative *villa* of peristyle-type in the early 3rd century to the *villa Murocincta* of the 4th century AD. This very eventful history is reflected in a lively cultural exchange between West and East across all provincial borders of the Roman Empire. The function as a central storage site (*horreum*) gained additional importance in Late Antiquity with a density of storage halls unparalleled in the region. In the 4th century, the estate had a central function as a logistics centre for grain and other foodstuffs for the entire large region in the Limes hinterland. The storage volume of the large buildings could supply 60,000 people for a year. According to the description of Ammianus Marcellinus, the *villa Murocincta* of the 4th century AD, a splendid peristyle-villa, surrounded by a maze of walls, was probably the place, where the family of Valentinianus I. resided in 375 AD.

David Bartus

Where did Valentinian die? Aula-type building in the legionary fortress of Brigetio

The legionary fortress is the least researched of the three main topographical parts of Brigetio. Although the retentura of the legionary fortress is almost entirely covered by modern buildings, the praetentura can be researched by remote sensing methods. The northern wall and gate, several roads and buildings have been identified on aerial photos during the last decades. The most interesting feature is a large, apsidal building near the porta principalis dextra, which we have started to excavate in 2017.

The area of the building is approximately 600 m², consisting of an apse, two large halls and a number of smaller rooms. Several brick stamps and coins indicate that it was built most likely by Frigeridus in the first years of the 370s. Valentinian I was killed on 17 November 375 in the legionary fortress of Brigetio, when he gave an audience to the Quadi and suffered a stroke, as told by Ammianus Marcellinus, but the exact location of the audience and the death of the Emperor was unknown until now. The aula-like plan and the dating of the building indicate that it was the most suitable place for an imperial audience, and Valentinian I was most likely killed there.

Stefan Pop-Lazić

Some notes on late roman Sirmium villae

Systematic research of Sirmium, started almost 70 years ago, continues with varying intensity until today. Among the more than 90 sites explored so far and hundreds of trenches, the remains of civil buildings characterized by rich architectural decoration were discovered in several places.

Among them, the remains of a partially explored villa (loc. 4) in the area north of the hippodrome stand out. In the peristyle of this villa, numerous remains of marble architectural elements as well as remains of paneling made of different types of colored stone were discovered. In addition to other types, the use of Breccia verde di Sparta (Psefi Peloponese, Greece) is also indicative, which is the only one we still find in Sirmium in the area of the Imperial Palace.

In the last couple of years, as part of the wider research of Sirmium, excavations of a larger architectural complex were started at the site of Glatz, four kilometers from Sirmium to the southeast. On an area of a few hectares, the remains of buildings that roughly date to the period of the tetrarchy have been discovered. Some buildings in the complex are also distinguished by their rich decoration. For now, the largest room of over 450 square meters has a mosaic on its entire surface. In addition to the mosaic decoration, in several places on the site, the use of paneling made of different types of decorative stone was recorded, the most numerous of which are Porphydo verde antico (Krokees, Peloponese, Greece) and Giallo antico (Chemtou, Tunisia). Rare finds of Porphydo rosso antico (Gebel el Dokhan, Egypt) and Breccia polychroma della vittoria (Akrini, West Macedonia, Greece) were also recorded.

Tino Leleković

Peristyle house in the rural and urban context – several examples from the Croatian part of Pannonia

Despite numerous excavations, peristyle houses remain rare in the Croatian part of Pannonia. The paper will give an overview of these finds in the region, focusing on two examples: Ciglenice and Mursa. The site of Ciglenice, on the territory of the Roman town of Siscia, includes remains of a sizeable Roman estate. The excavation from 2013 to 2019 revealed a central building that was a peristyle house. More recently 2022, another hole revealed a larger peristyle home in the western suburb of the Roman town of Aelia Mursa. Even though both houses include peristyle as an element in the building design, these houses differ in appearance and function. The paper will discuss the use and plan of peristyle houses in the broader context, comparing these two new examples with other known ones from the region.

Bence Simon

Rural landscape around Aquincum in the Late Antiquity

Villages dominated the rural landscape in the hinterland of Aquincum until the early 3rd century, when medium-sized Roman-style buildings, the *villae*, began to be built. Although the background of the transformation of the village landscape into a villa landscape is still unclear, in my paper I attempt to present what location analysis can contribute to this question. How did the settlement network change, where were the Late Antique settlements located in relation to earlier villages, what priorities can be outlined in choosing the villa-sites on a regional level? In my presentation I will also focus on the situation of the two best known Late Antique villas of Szentendre, Skanzen and Pomáz, Lugi-dűlő.

Zsolt Mráv

Portable luxury goods from late Roman villas in Pannonian provinces

In the presentation, the author undertakes to collect and examine in a comprehensive manner the portable and transportable luxury objects that were found in the late Roman Pannonian provinces, in the area of imperial and privately owned luxury villas, imperial palaces or elite urban houses. The genre of these objects was already defined by Lea M. Stirling in 2014. According to her, due to their valuable material, this includes mainly precious metal objects, especially lavish silver vessels and ivory carvings. Diatrite and/or dichroic glasses, marble sculptures and elaborate table tops, although not made of particularly valuable materials, required skilled craftsmanship and were therefore considered an expensive luxury goods of the period. These types of objects had different fates, in which we can determine certain general patterns. It must be said in advance that the number of these portable and transportable luxury goods in the Pannonian provinces is not very high for now but it is still enough to demonstrate their presence and use as well as to draw some conclusions from them. Among others, the Pannonian caches containing silverware, such as the Seuso and Vinkovci treasure troves, as well as the sites and archaeological contexts of the late Roman luxury glass finds, especially the glass collection of the Nagyharsány villa, will be discussed in the presentation. The author provides fresh insights into the late Roman mythological statuettes and other sculptures and marble tabletops connected to Pannonian villas and urban residences. This new synthesis places the outstanding Pannonian finds both in their immediate environment of late Roman society of the Pannonian provinces and in the wider context of the art, iconography and luxury of the late Roman world.

Nadja Gavrilović

Constantine the Great's palatial domain at Mediana, Naissus: from Principia to villa with peristyle

The archaeological research of Late Antique suburb of Dardanian' capital Naissus, last more than one century and yielded so-far 20 buildings (like *horreum*, military barracks and workshops, villa with octagon, villa with conches, *villae rusticae*, two early-Christian churches etc.), among which the most important one is imperial residential complex of Constantine the Great – villa with peristyle.

The residential complex consisting of villa with peristyle, *thermae*, monumental gate with access communication and large courtyard, was separated from the rest of the antique settlement by an enclosing wall and it had three building phases: in the first phase of construction (end of the 3rd-beginning of the 4th century) it was a building of a simple form of elongated rectangular shape with a large apsidal hall on the north and large courtyard in the middle, around which were side rooms (cubicula) arranged in two rows forming the western and eastern wing of the building. In the second construction phase (330-378) huge reconstructions were done – a small vestibulum was built on the southern part of the villa, two *stibadia* (dining or banquet rooms) were attached western and eastern from the apsidal hall, wooden pillars on the porch of the peristyle were replaced with marble ones and major renovations included decorating the villa with mosaic floors, marble and porphyry sculptures and fresco-paintings.

The third construction phase (378-441) was the period of inhabiting families of Gothic *foederati* at Mediana (by imperial orders), who adapted to their needs some of the buildings including building of two early-Christian churches, until 441 year when Huns invaded and demolished Naissus and Mediana. This paper proposes to present the imperial residential complex at Mediana, including the results of the newest archaeological research.

Christoph Rummel, Stefan Pop-Lazić

Romuliana/Gamzigrad - new insights in view of latest fieldwork

The archaeological site near the modern village of Gamzigrad in Eastern Serbia that has long been identified as the retirement palace of the emperor Galerius, Felix Romuliana, has now seen systematic archaeological investigations for 70 years. At the heart of the walled compound lies a luxurious complex of buildings with several peristyles. These are embedded not just in a wider architectural complex surrounded by major fortifications, but also within a wider landscape that contains and is structured by several man-made markers. Serbian and German joint research has provided detailed studies of individual architectural elements as well as the surrounding landscape and contextualised the initial Tetrarchic palatial complex and its surrounding landscape within a diachronic scope that ranges into the early medieval period – tracing changes, modifications and reuses of elements and wider spaces. The paper provides an overview of the newest results and the way in which they affect current understanding of the site and its history.

Veselka Katsarova

Peristyle villas north and south of Hemus Mountain in the Roman and Late Roman period

The establishment of the Roman governance on the territories between the Danube to the north and the Aegean coast to the south in 1st c. AD gave way to an active process of adopting the Roman way of life by the inhabitants of the Thracian territories. New residential and economic estates (*villae*) were established in the country and new construction techniques, materials and modern architectural solutions were introduced.

One of the architectural layouts documented in *villas*-residences from present-day Bulgaria territory in the Roman and Late Roman period is the open courtyard (*peristylum*) surrounded by colonnades and portico, in the center of which is built a decorative pool (*impluvium*). The peristyle buildings were the most common architectural design for public and domestic spaces in the Eastern Mediterranean,

Asia Minor and the Orient since the Hellenistic period. The main purpose of the peristyle is to introduce the garden both into the *villa* and into the city house. The luxurious decoration of the peristyle depended only on the wealth of the owner.

The residential parts of the villas at Chatalka locality, Stara Zagora region and Armira near the town of Ivaylovgrad are among the earliest buildings with *perystilium* dated back to the late 1st and the early 2nd century AD. The majority of the villas with peristyle were built in the period 2nd – 3rd c. AD., but some of them continued to be used later in the 4th c. In the overview are commented both the data for long studied and well-known villas such as Madara, Beli Lom, Montana № 2, Skretiska, Armira, Chatalka, Nevestino and recently discovered villas and those with ongoing excavations such as Pokrovnik, Mursalevo and Kasnakovo.

Priscilla Ralli

Peristyle Villas in the Late Antique Peloponnese. A Regional Review

In an attempt to take stock of the evidence known in the Peloponnesian area referable to peristyle villas of the 5th–6th century, the conciseness of the data available, often the results of emergency excavations, will immediately be noted. This is a peculiarity that Jean-Pierre Sodini and Platon Petridis had already highlighted in their studies dedicated to housing in Late Antiquity (Sodini 1987; 1997) and to the villas built in Greece from the beginning of the 6th century (Petridis 2008). The little interest reserved for this non-religious architectural data may in some cases have also compromised the continuation of the investigations, and therefore the production of exhaustive documentary material, if not even compromised their conservation (Petridis 2008). Regarding the area close to Corinth, which was the capital of the Province of Achaia and the urban center of absolute economic, administrative, and religious importance in the Late Antique Peloponnese, Richard Rothaus several decades ago had taken an analysis of the villas and the connection of these structures with the surrounding area, an examination conditioned by the diversity of the available data. Precisely because of the archaeological history of the area and the attention traditionally given to the monumental center of Corinth, the scholar noted how a few sporadic ceramic finds could in some cases be clues to unknown villas but, on the other hand, warned against considering any residential structure with mosaic floor remains a villa. Provocatively questioning the very term of origin *villa*, which would stand for "a western, not an eastern phenomenon," Rothaus hoped to "adopt a terminology more suitable to the East" hoping for more data from archaeological research (Rothaus 1994).

Investigations conducted recently (Ministry of Culture and Sports; Ephorates; foreign institutions operating in Greece) together with very recent studies (e.g., Papaioannou 2018) now make it possible to have new data useful in outlining the Peloponnese in Late Antiquity.

The present contribution aims to provide a regional assessment of peristyle villas in the Peloponnese of the 5th–6th century, taking into consideration about ten cases. These are sites identified at different times. Hence, there is a heterogeneity of available data. The chance to glean useful information within a broader regional perspective also stems from the location of these buildings, placed in the ancient monumental center of an urban site, in the immediate suburb of a city, in an area with a clear rural connotation, etc. The known peristyle villas in the Peloponnese will therefore be read in the context of a comparative analysis aimed at shedding light on the functions and significance of each within its relevant frame of reference (local and regional) in the context of the spatial re-organization patterns characterizing the area between the 5th–6th century.