

## Movement and Power at the Roman Villa in the Works of Pliny and Statius

Recent scholarship has established that urban movement functioned as a display of power and status among the Roman elite classes. The morning walk of a republican politician to the Forum, the procession of a magistrate with his lictors, leisurely strolls through the city's porticoes, etc., had ideological connotations: they were public displays of calm, orderly motion that advertised the walker's ability to maintain control of himself and others (e.g. Macaulay-Lewis 2011, Hellström 2015, Östenberg 2015). The discussion of the relationship between movement and power has, to date, been limited to the urban context. Scholarship on walking in the other major locale of elite life, the country villa, has presented the *ambulatio* as a performance of intellect and leisure, not of power (O'Sullivan 2006, 2011). This paper therefore examines the role of movement, and especially walking, in the villa context, with a particular focus on Pliny the Younger and Statius, two of our key sources for high imperial villa culture. It argues that these authors' focus on the calm, easy motion of villa owners is intended to reflect a quasi-imperial control of the villa landscape.

Pliny and Statius both show persistent interest in demonstrating the villa owner's control of motion. The everyday lives of Pliny and his friends are carefully regimented, with a strict routine setting out regular times for movement and rest. In addition, motion is usually restrained, characterized by walks and orderly carriage rides rather than frenetic exercise. Even when Pliny goes hunting in the woods (*Ep.* 1.6), the scene is remarkably calm, and the activity is somewhat unrealistically presented as an extension of his habitual *inertia et quies*. Statius' depiction of villa *otium* is similarly low-energy. The Sorrentine villa of Pollius Felix, one of the poet's patrons, is praised for its provision of porticoes that allow for gentle perambulation over what had once

been rugged clifftops (*Silv.* 2.2). Similarly, a depiction of a perfect day at the villa shows its residents lying immobile in the shade (*Silv.* 3.1).

A key to interpreting this phenomenon is found in Pliny and Statius' depictions of the movement of emperors. In a poem about the construction of the new Via Domitiana to Naples (*Silv.* 4.3), Statius highlights how Domitian has mastered a sandy landscape that was once slow and grinding to travel through: the power of the emperor calms the terrain, and travelers fly swiftly across it like birds. Pliny, too, regards assured motion as a hallmark of imperial power over space. In the *Panegyricus*, he presents Trajan roaming confidently through Italy's forests and mountains and expertly steering his own boat in rough seas (*Pan.* 81; see Manolaraki 2008). In contrast, the reviled Domitian is so out of control of his own movement that his boat has to be towed along by another one, to the delight of the unpacified Danube and Rhine (*Pan.* 82).

The personal movement of landholders is therefore a microcosm of the movement of emperors. Specific passages from both authors suggest the imperial connotations of villa movement: for example, Pollius' remodeling of his clifftops for easier walking, described significantly with the term *domare* (*Silv.* 2.2.31), and Pliny's belief that calm ambulation is a means for the villa owner to achieve total knowledge, and hence control, of his property (*Ep.* 1.24). The landholder is portrayed as a kind of emperor in his own domain, moving as confidently through his property as Domitian and Trajan do through the empire. Thus, even the seemingly quotidian activity of walking was caught up in the ideologies of Roman imperialism. This conclusion adds to our understanding of Roman elite views of the rural landscape as a space to be possessed and dominated.

## Bibliography

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