

porated into a newly composed code and interpreted by Gallic jurists under the auspices of a Gothic king. As he concludes, 'it clearly was envisaged by both the editors and by Alaric II, as well as by the nobles and bishops who endorsed the *Breviarium*, that Roman law would continue to define relations among the Romans living in the Visigothic kingdom' (p. 32). In her learned paper 'Spoiling the Egyptians: Roman law and Christian exegesis in Late Antiquity', Gillian Clark examines the influence of Roman legal traditions on the exegetical and polemical writing of Christian authors. She focuses on the case of Moses and the Israelites who despoiled Egypt, and with it manages to demonstrate quite persuasively how legal arguments were used in order to defend this unjust act. Finally, Catherine Peyroux's paper studies the governance of religious women in Merovingian Gaul, or more precisely the 'legislation on the licit and illicit proximity between nuns and male religious, both monks and clergy' (p. 243). As Peyroux rightly argues, the Merovingian interpretation of the canonical decrees on the matter were very flexible, and 'Merovingian women's monasticism grew up between the laws, in the interstices of sixth-century orthodoxy' (p. 255).

The rest of the papers in the volume deal with the legacy of Roman law in post-Roman Britain (Michael E. Jones); the role of bishops as settlers of disputes (Jill D. Harris); the *audientia episcopalis* and judicial violence in late antique North Africa (Noel E. Lenski and Leslie Dossey respectively); the development of Syriac canon law (Victoria Erhart); the rising social and professional status of lawyers, who eventually became the primary writers of history (Geoffrey Greatrex); the pagan *feriale campanum* and Christianity (Dennis E. Trout); the imperial use of honorifics in legal documents (Ralph W. Mathisen), Roman legislation on Jewish-Christian intermarriages (Hagith S. Sivan); late Roman legislation on Christian 'less-privileged' women, such as actresses and prostitutes (Judith Evans Grubbs); and fifth-century legislation on farmers and landlords (Boudewijn Sirks). The hands of editors of conference proceedings are usually tied, and they are more likely to make editorial concessions from which other editors are free. Hence, it is common knowledge that not all papers in such a collection are of the same quality. This, however, does not exempt the reviewer from mentioning that a couple of the papers in this volume (Antti Arjava's on the survival of Roman family law in the barbarian West and Kathy Peason's on the Salic Law and barbarian diet) are not up to scratch. These reservations aside, *Law, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* is an interesting collection of papers, which many scholars and students will find useful.

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Catherine Balmelle, *Les demeures aristocratiques d'Aquitaine. Société et culture de l'Antiquité tardive dans le Sud-Ouest de la Gaule (Aquitania, suppl. 10)*. Bordeaux/Paris: De Boccard, 2001. 497 pp., 349 figs. ISBN 2 910023 25 7.

'Rare opportunity to acquire luxury villa dating back in parts to the Antonine age, recently and extensively refurbished to include mosaic floors and wall-facings in the latest African styles in all major rooms, with copious use of Pyrenean marble throughout. Magnificent porticoed entrance-courtyard leading into garden peristyle with central fountain, with access to imposing apsidal audience chamber (250m<sup>2</sup>), first-floor gallery with panoramic views over idyllic countryside, summer and heated winter bath-suites drawing on water from adjacent river, fine library and collection of antique imperial statuary. Six principal reception-rooms, suitable for all seasons, luxurious private and guest accommodation, ample domestic and service space, the whole covering 6000m<sup>2</sup>, and offering numerous possibilities for conversion to ecclesiastical use. Set in walled park of 13 ha, and surrounded by delightful 265 ha estate offering rich mixed agriculture (worked

by experienced *coloni*) and fine hunting in mature woodland, all with easy access by road and river. Owner intending to leave region for family lands in eastern empire'.

If a modern estate-agent had needed to sell an early fifth-century Aquitainian villa, then the hyperbole characteristic of the genre of property description would for once have been entirely apposite. It finds its echo, in more elevated if equally inflated style, in surviving late antique evocations of élite residences in the Gallic countryside, the most fulsome of which, from Ausonius through to Fortunatus, describe estates in the Aquitainian provinces, and include Sidonius' celebrated encomia of the *burgus* of Pontius Leontius (*Carm.* 22) and of his own enduringly elusive villa at *Avitacum* (*Carm.* 18-19; *Ep.* 2.2). The geographical bias of the written sources towards this region may be coincidental, but it is unlikely to be wholly fortuitous, for the particular splendour of the region's country houses has long been known from their material remains. A few, such as Chiragan, Montmaurin, and Séviac, have found their way into scholarly literature, but many others, often known only from antiquarian excavations, have languished in comparative obscurity. In bringing the evidence from sixty-four élite residences together for the first time in the context of a synthetic analysis, Catherine Balmelle makes clearer than ever before how late antique Aquitaine featured high-status domestic architecture scarcely paralleled in quality and certainly not in quantity by any other region of Gaul. Its distinctiveness in this regard is perhaps best epitomised by the distribution map which shows that more mosaics of this period are known from the Dordogne and further south than from the rest of France put together.

The book is divided into four main chapters. The first sets out the wider political, social and economic contexts in which these residences flourished, across the transition from Roman to Visigothic power which followed their *foedus* of 418, usually taken as a defining moment in both regional and wider western imperial history. There is a brief consideration of the productive activity of these estates, but the local archaeological evidence for this aspect of their operations is extremely slight, and only a brief attempt is made to hypothesise about it on the basis of the data available elsewhere; reasonably enough, the emphasis is firmly on the functions of these villas as residential rather than economic entities. The second chapter accordingly sets out the general characteristics of these late antique châteaux (the comparison drawn by Harmand in *Latomus* 1990 was never more appropriate than here). Their siting was dictated primarily by questions of water-supply and scenic potential, two criteria which have dictated the location of élite rural residences throughout the ages. Considerations of defence, however, are imperceptible; the notion, based on Sidonius' description of the *burgus* of Pontius Leontius, that a new style of fortified villa developed in the fifth century appears utterly illusory (Balmelle picks up Bodel's demonstration in *JRA* 1997 that Sidonius ascribes its defences, if such they were, to the efforts of his friend's distant ancestor in any case).

The meat of the volume lies in its analysis of residential architecture and decoration. All these villas incorporated a familiar repertoire of privileged spaces, the main archaeologically identifiable elements of which — entrance courtyards and halls, reception rooms and bath-suites — are discussed by type in chapter 3. But these were prestige projects so, as one would expect, their layouts defy ready classification. Their architects took pains to arrange the standard elements in new combinations, no doubt responding to such variables as the exigencies of the site, but also the whims and the budget of the owner. A distinct hierarchy of splendour is visible even within this élite category, as the colour plans provided at the rear of the volume make especially clear; a fair proportion of these properties appear very grand indeed in scale and conception, and a match for residences of this type anywhere in the empire. The surviving elements of their decoration, analysed in chapter 4, were commensurately lavish. One local resource, Pyrenean marble, was conveniently to hand for architectural elements, flooring and, of course, sarcophagi, but the few surviving specimens of statuary come from Roman and eastern ateliers. Mosaic pavements (and no doubt wall-facings, almost wholly lost) were extraordinarily common by contemporary Gallic standards; their rich decorative repertoire is discussed with particular authority here by the

acknowledged expert. It offers the best demonstration of how the styling of these villas was inspired by empire-wide currents in aristocratic culture, reflecting the interregional nature of the late antique élite, but simultaneously encouraged the emergence of distinct regional traditions, marked by an enthusiasm for mosaics with naturalistic motifs rather than the figural compositions still popular in, for example, Spain and Africa. This ostensibly neutral iconography of natural abundance can be read as a simple evocation of rural agricultural prosperity, but it recurs on the region's late antique Christian sarcophagi, and may well convey allegorical allusions to renewal and to paradise.

This comprehensive presentation of the rural residences of the late antique Aquitanian aristocracy is valuable in itself, but also has important implications for the history of late antique Gaul in general. However, problems of wider interpretation remain. First, Aquitaine lacks the excellent survey evidence available for other regions of Gaul, so it is hard to see how these villas fit into the overall pattern of contemporary settlement. Recent excavations have shown that some of the region's cities, notably Bordeaux and Toulouse, were flourishing in the same period, but while aristocratic urban residences are included within this volume, they are only summarily treated by comparison with their rural counterparts. Even so, the affinities between the plan of the villa at Nérac and the remarkable fifth-century complex on the hôpital Larrey site at Toulouse, hypothetically associated with Visigothic rulers, are rightly emphasised, and there is much potential here for future enquiry. At present, however, the Aquitanian villas continue to exist in splendid, but almost certainly misleading isolation from the society that sustained them. Secondly, in Aquitaine secure dating criteria for this period have been slow to emerge, and in any case only a handful of known villa sites offer stratified archaeological deposits to which they can be applied. The main indications of date are often provided by the typology of the mosaics; this is convincingly established by the author (and increasingly supported by other evidence), but it can offer only an approximate chronology for the latest embellishment of these residences, and not for their subsequent fates.

The historical contextualisation of these villas therefore has its limits. But the late fourth century is persuasively identified as a particularly vibrant period of building activity which saw the extensive refurbishment of existing villas as well as a number of *ex nihilo* creations, a phenomenon in marked contrast to developments north of the Loire but also without compare elsewhere in the south. Balmelle alludes to potential sources of local wealth such as agriculture and, perhaps, the Pyrenean marble quarries, but these seem insufficient to account for the difference; the dramatic rise to fame and fortune of members of the regional aristocracy was surely a more decisive novelty, in which case these villas are concrete reminders of the success in imperial service of Ausonius and his cronies. They were maintained in some style for much of the fifth century, again calling into question the real impact of the crisis of 406-409, and, more importantly, of the Visigothic settlement of 418, too often discussed without reference to any aspect of regional archaeology except the absence of the material culture of the newcomers. The growing evidence for regional prosperity in town and country alike in this period is a reminder that, whatever the specific explanation and the mechanics of their installation in 'Aquitania Secunda and other cities thereabouts' (a circumscription which corresponds closely to the geographical scope of this volume), the Visigoths must initially have been put there to maintain the *status quo*, and this they seemingly did. But the nature of the evidence makes it much more difficult to understand exactly when and how the villas subsequently disappeared. There are very few signs of their ongoing refurbishment along traditional lines down into the sixth century, but this need not indicate their abandonment, especially since the latest occupation levels on such sites have been neglected until very recently. One sequence suggestive of gradual change has lately emerged from Séviac, where activity in and around the late antique complex continued throughout the Merovingian period, while steadily obliterating its luxurious mid-fifth century character (the site may be that of the *villa* of *Sauniago* mentioned in a text of 679/80). Much of the villa complex was given

over to more basic forms of occupation, attested by party-walls, hearths and post-holes, while a cemetery was installed across the southern wing, associated with a small church erected alongside the villa complex in the sixth century. It is tempting to regard this as an example of the 'villa to village' transition, the modalities of which are still far from clear, but which would have taken place somewhat earlier in most regions of Gaul, though in a similar period in northern Italy and Spain. Séviac was eventually abandoned, but several other villa sites in the region feature Romanesque churches, without any evidence of intervening continuity (whether fiscal or residential) between the two.

Only data from more sites, sharper ceramic typologies and wider understanding of settlement patterns will help to further our understanding of the fate of the Aquitainian villa. But the heyday of these residences is much more vividly apparent from this volume, handsomely produced on a lavish scale in keeping with its subject, with generous use of illustrations, many in colour. It is regrettable that no space was found for a convenient listing of the numerous figures, and the internal logic of the text would have been helped by a more transparent hierarchy of headings within sections, but the quality of presentation is otherwise exemplary. This book was badly needed, and although hoped-for advances in the regional archaeological record may modify some of its conclusions, it sets the study of the élite residences of Aquitaine on a new footing, and is sure to take its place as a standard work of reference for some considerable time to come.

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Rachel Barkay, *The Coinage of Nysa-Scythopolis (Beth-Shean)*, *Corpus Nummorum Palaestinensium V*. Jerusalem, 2003. 272 pp., 15 plates. ISBN 965 90558 0 3.

Haim Gitler and Matthew Ponting, *The Silver Coinage of Septimius Severus and his Family (193-211 AD). A Study of the Chemical Composition of the Roman and Eastern Issues*, *Glaux 16*. Milan, 2003. 157 pp., 17 plates. ISBN 88 87235 33 3.

Two books by Israeli numismatists appeared in 2003. The monograph by Rachel Barkay is devoted to the coinage of Nysa-Scythopolis, an important Greek urban centre of ancient Palestine. The full and updated catalogue presents all the coins of the city from the earlier Roman period (50s BCE) until the time of Gordian III (240/241 CE). This catalogue supersedes all earlier publications on the subject, including that by Augusto Spijkerman in 1978. Apart from the catalogue, the book also includes a discussion of the city's pantheon against the background of recent archaeological discoveries at the site of Beth Shean, and a survey of names and titles of Scythopolis. The chapter on denominations contains an interesting suggestion on the role of the die diameter in distinguishing between coins of different value. The book will be of help to any scholar dealing with the history of ancient Palestine in the Roman period.

The book by Haim Gitler and Matthew Ponting is largely about what its title says — the chemical composition of the Roman and Eastern silver issues of Septimius Severus. Most of it is for a specialist in the field of metallurgical analysis of coins. However, some of the book's conclusions may be of interest for a historian. Thus, according to the authors, their analysis suggests that an official empire-wide debasement took place in 194, when a bullion content of 46% of silver was fixed throughout the Empire (p. 46). This official standard was maintained even by what the authors call 'semi-official mints' that produced silver coins to answer a particular local need. On the numismatic level, the book shows that an analysis of the chemical composition can sometimes help in the clarification of controversial attributions; it demonstrates also that the mint of Laodicea in Syria continued to operate until at least 203, or possibly some time later. The authors explain