## Creating the Past: Roman Villa Sculptures

Hadrian's pool reflects his wide travels, from Egypt to Greece and Rome. Roman architects recreated old scenes, but they blended various elements and styles to create new worlds with complex links to ideal worlds. Romans didn't want to live in the past, but they wanted to live with it.

Why "creating" rather than "recreating" the past? Most Roman sculpture was based on Greek originals 100 years or more in the past, but these Roman copies, in their use & setting, created a view of the past as the Romans saw it.

In towns, such as Pompeii, houses were small, with little room for large gardens (the normal place for statues), so sculpture was under life-size and highlighted. The wall frescoes at Pompeii or Boscoreale (as in the reconstructed room at the Met) show us what the buildings and the associated sculptures looked like.

Villas, on the other hand, were more expansive, generally sited by the water and had statues, life-size or larger, scattered around the gardens. Pliny's villas, as he describes them in his letters, show multiple buildings, seemingly haphazardly distributed, connected by porticoes.

Three specific villas give an idea of the types the Villa of the Papyri near Herculaneum (1st c. AD), Tiberius' villa at Sperlonga from early 1st century (described also in CHSSJ April 1988 lecture by Henry Bender), and Hadrian's villa at Tivoli (2nd cent AD).

The Villa of Papyri, small and self-contained, is still underground, its main finds having been reached by tunneling; the not very scientific excavation left much dispute about find-spots and the villa had seen upheaval from the earthquake of 69 as well as the Vesuvius eruption of 79. The J Paul Getty museum has reconstructed this villa, following standard Roman architectural forms. The Getty has set up a group of 5 bronze female statues (the originals are in the Naples Museum) in a line on a small pool in the inner peristyle. Their identity is not agreed upon: Danaids? owner's daughters? The features are idealized and in the manner of the Severe Style (between the archaic and classical periods): straight and simple. The Getty copies are very good but lack some of the detail of the originals.

Realistic portraiture, originating in the Hellenistic period, was popular in Roman art. Since it was easy to make good copies, many Romans were probably fooled into thinking they were buying Greek originals. A pair of crouching young men is set up facing one another in the Getty, as if they were wrestlers, but the original find-spot was at the end of the long pool, suggesting these slim young men may have been runners, placed side by side as at the start of a race, with the long pool representing the race-course. Inside the Getty, the tablinum has been reconstructed with a statue of Athena (in an archaistic style, meant to look old), perhaps originally presiding over the race. So, the same villa might use a variety of different style (Severe, realistic, archaistic).

Tiberius' villa at Sperlonga featured a cave incorporating statues based on the Odyssey, the sculptures recognizable as specific mythic figures. With a dining platform at the mouth of the cave (and/or the back of the cave), diners sat among the sculptures and thus participated in the stories, the subject suggested by the seaside/cave setting. Depicted in the orientalizing Hellenistic style seen at Pergamum (and by the same sculptors who did the Laocoon, as we can tell from the works being signed), Odysseus is holding onto his ship. Within the cave another group, featuring a giant size Polyphemus, shows Odysseus just about to put out the eye of the cyclops. Another group shows the theft of the Palladium (planned and executed by Odysseus), the small statue of Athena represented in the archaistic style, in contrast with the Hellenistic style of the human figures, since the sacred talismanic statue was supposed to be very old.

Hadrian set his villa at Tivoli in a new spot in the hills so he would have a clean slate for his designs. From a model of the villa, we can see the randomized distribution of vari-sized buildings, porticoes, water (piped in for the pools and fountains), statues and libraries. The ruins of the buildings, which inspired Piranesi's drawings, are still spectacular today. The Canopus pool develops an Egyptian theme, with a Serapeum at one end and the pool reflections doubling the number of columns. Of the statues around the pool, some were brought fl,' ᵃ ê ᵃ h'fᵃ —Ê ê ᵃ ê Neax e gtᵃ ioner tk ea,atl