“...Nec Sedere in Villam.” Villa-Churches, Rural Piety, and the Priscillianist Controversy

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Abstract
What was the relationship between Priscillianism and Villas? Did Priscillianists meet and worship in villas? Archaeologists and historians have both made this suggestion more than once, although never in a rigorous manner, and perhaps now is the time for a real appraisal of the evidence.

Disciplines
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Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity
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First, it must be stated that archaeologically, this may be an unanswerable, and indeed, moot question. For how can archaeology uncover heresy? Do certain ceramic profiles or stratigraphic sections reek of heterodoxy? In fact, of Priscillian or Priscillianists, archaeology can tell us nothing. However, recent inquiry has turned to the motivations of Priscillian's accusers, that is, to the socio-ecclesiastical construction of "Priscillianism," and it may be in this area that archaeology can contribute something to the dialogue. For if modern scholarship is right and Priscillianism was a heresy largely constructed from rumor and accusation, it may be that it was thus very much about environment. Archaeology can help us to reconstruct the structural, ecclesiastical, and geographical environment in which both Priscillian and his accusers lived. By understanding this environment, perhaps we can better understand why certain accusations were leveled at Priscillian and why these alleged activities were deemed such a threat.

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First, it must be stated that archaeologically, this may be an unanswerable, and indeed, moot question. For how can archaeology uncover heresy? Do certain ceramic profiles or stratigraphic sections reek of heterodoxy? In fact, of Priscillian or Priscillianists, archaeology can tell us nothing. However, recent inquiry has turned to the motivations of Priscillian's accusers, that is, to the socio-ecclesiastical construction of "Priscillianism," and it may be in this area that archaeology can contribute something to the dialogue. For if modern scholarship is right and Priscillianism was a heresy largely constructed from rumor and accusation, it may be that it was thus very much about environment. Archaeology can help us to reconstruct the structural, ecclesiastical, and geographical environment in which both Priscillian and his accusers lived. By understanding this environment, perhaps we can better understand why certain accusations were leveled at Priscillian and why these alleged activities were deemed such a threat.
Two of the more prominent fears associated with Priscillianism were Christian practices in the countryside and unsupervised worship in the home. It is at the juncture of these two environments, the rural and the domestic, where the archaeology of Early Christian Hispania is unexpectedly rich. A surprising number of Early Christian churches in Hispania are constructed in or near rural Roman villas (fig. 1). By examining for the first time the archaeology, architecture, and geography of the villa-church phenomenon, we will find that it constitutes a major part of the Iberian Christian environment and indeed, seems significantly more common in Hispania than elsewhere in the Empire. However, any direct relationship between Priscillianism and these sites is attenuated by the chronological uncertainty surrounding the majority of these villa-churches, and by the nature of the church councils allegedly convened against these churches and Priscillianism. Rather, this examination will illuminate the general character that the villa-church imparted to Iberian Christianity, a character which from the late fourth century onward may have contributed to the specific distrust of rural and domestic worship and thus to the definition of certain activities as "Priscillianist."

There are two basic structural types of villa-churches, the intra-villa church, constructed inside the *villa urbana* or *rustica* by modifying an extant space, and the extra-villa church, a free-standing building located 100-500 m from the villa proper. The former category is perhaps the most complex and will be considered first, beginning with Monte de Cegonha, deep in the Baixo Alentejo of Portugal (fig. 2). At some point, perhaps in the fourth century, the Flavian-period villa on the site, whose overall form is unknown, was completely rebuilt along the so-called corridor or façade villa plan with two wings. The south wing was composed of a 10 x 8 m central court, bordered by an apsed hall. The north wing of the villa was separated from the south by a drainage canal, restricting the interaction between the two wings. This north wing was largely occupied by a three-aisled basilica with a tri-partite sanctuary and northern entrance. The earliest floor of this basilica is no longer extant and is assumed to have been wooden, set on a rubble base. This rubble base was later pierced by the addition of graves, which were in turn covered by a later floor.
The villa and church of Montinho das Laranjeiras are located to the south of Cegonha, on the banks of the Guadiana in southern Portugal. Largely destroyed by roadwork and flooding, very little remains of the villa or the church. However, nineteenth-century excavations generally outlined a large complex, seemingly a villa, and excavations in the last four years have detailed a large, well-constructed corridor of fourth-century date to the south of the church (fig. 3). The church itself is composed of an uneven cross plan, with a sanctuary, baptismal font, and a burial chamber. Nineteenth-century excavations revealed mosaics of fish and a vase near the baptistery and geometric mosaics were recently discovered in the burial chamber. While the current excavations have not determined the relationship between the church and the surrounding villa, some of the church walls may have been integrated into the villa fabric. The current excavator of Montinho das Laranjeiras, Justino Maciel, has dated the church to the sixth century, based on the cross-plan and supposed connections with Galla Placidia and Ravennate churches. However, the mosaics found in the nineteenth-century excavations as well as those in the burial chamber find their
closest parallels with fourth- and fifth-century examples, and the latest sigillata similarly date to the early to mid-fifth century. A coin of Licinius found inside one of the graves further supports this date. Thus, it is possible that Montinho das Laranjeiras is another fourth/fifth-century church associated with a villa-type community.

In the northeast of Tarraconensis, near modern-day Fraga, yet another church is constructed within the heart of a villa. The so-called Villa Fortunatus was a typical peristyle villa with an additional western atrium and eastern bath suite (fig. 4). Late in the fourth century or early in the fifth, the center room off the peristyle was rebuilt and a new mosaic installed, inscribed with the owner's name, Fortunatus, and a chrismos. Excavations in the late 1980s by Francesc Tuset suggest that at this time, a large hall in the western wing was converted into a Christian church. This area received a tripartite sanctuary and a crypt, and two doors were opened in the lateral walls. During this first phase of the church, the cubicula to the north seemed to have continued in use, their mosaic floors conserving depictions of pagan love scenes. Tuset's re-excavations have tentatively placed both the Fortunatus mosaic and the first Christian phase in the late fourth or very early fifth century.

Turning to the extra-villa churches, the church of Torre de Palma, in the Alto Alentejo, is associated with one of the largest excavated villas in the Iberian Peninsula (fig. 5). The villa's fourth-century fabric consisted of a peristyle with accompanying tri-apsed hall, large granary and olive press, and a detached bath complex. Later, a large house fronted by a courtyard was constructed to the northeast of the villa, (not on plan) and the detached bath complex was heavily modified. The church itself was constructed approximately 50 m from the later house in the pagan, villa necropolis. The surviving basilica is of the double-apsed variety, with a second set of opposed apses to the west. Recent excavations by the University of Louisville revealed a deposit of ten Constantinian-aged bronze coins in the mortar of the floor in front of the altar. The latest of these coins dates from 354–57, leading the excavators to propose a late fourth/early fifth-century date for the church. However, the long circulation of fourth century coins dictate that this date can only be a terminus post quem for what could potentially be a much younger building.

If we move to the east into the Spanish Extremadura, the villa of La Cocosa may offer another Christian villa site, this time specifically associated with funerary cult. The villa was excavated in late 1940s and only partially published. A large peristyle emerged from these excavations, with accompanying baths, servants quarters, and agricultural structures (fig. 6); 250 m to the southwest of the villa urbana, an 11 x 7 m quadriloboed structure was constructed, oriented east-west, and containing a single east-west oriented sarcophagus beneath the apse floor (fig. 7). The structure seems to have been vaulted and either the vault or walls covered with mosaics. A later baptistery was attached to the south wall and a complex of unknown function added to the north. The quadrilobed building seems to be a small Christian church, specifically associated with the cult of the dead. With no stratigraphy or ceramic studies, the modern scholar has been left with only the building plan as a chronological indicator. The probability of vaulting,
use of multiple apses, and glass mosaics have led most scholars to place the building in the fourth–fifth centuries.²⁵

Finally, current excavations directed by Dimas Fernández-Galiano in the villa of Maternus, Carranque in the province of Toledo, are revealing what may be one of the most luxurious villa-churches.²⁶ About 400 m from the main villa, an enigmatic basilican structure has come to light, linked by a series of porticoes to a possible mausoleum. Only brief publications have appeared on this structure, but the most recent claims that it is a late fourth-century church, probably funereal in nature.²⁷ The structure was certainly used as a church at some point in its history, as marble carvings depicting a chi-rho have been found in the abandonment layers. However, it is not clear
if the building was designed as a church from the beginning. The presence of marble from imperial quarries and a mosaic inscription in the villa itself have led the excavators to attribute both villa and the possible church to Maternus Cynegius, consul of the year 388 and one of the many Hispanic members of the Theodosian court.

There are other Early Christian villa-churches that I have omitted here, such as Marialba, whose villa remains unexcavated, or those that definitively date to the sixth or seventh centuries, but I think that the preceding list does show the frequency with which Iberian churches were constructed within or near a Roman villa. However, the mere adjacency of villa and church is of rather limited significance. Churches constructed near or in abandoned villae, and churches constructed in functioning villae are fundamentally different phenomena, and I would suggest that it is only the latter category that interests us here. Thus, we must rigorously examine the datable evidence for both villa and church and determine if the lives of the two coincide.

In each of the cases I have mentioned, there is a certain amount of archaeological evidence for the continuation of the life of the villa during the earliest church phase. The south wing of Monte de Cegonha was clearly conceived with the north, basilican wing and the ceramic profiles, while not yet published, show no marked differences between the two wings. At Torre de Palma, recent excavations have revealed that the large house near the church, and the bath complex some 200 m to the southwest, may be contemporary with the church. It is not known if the peristyle villa continued in occupation, but the many patches in the mosaic floors suggest the possibility of continued habitation. At Montinho das Laranjeiras, the fourth/fifth-century date suggested by the mosaics is matched by similarly aged ceramics and fourth-century coins found in both villa and church excavations. La Cocos may be the most problematic case, as we have only the early excavator’s claim that he found evidence of occupation well into the Visigothic period. However, the construction of a later, enigmatic bisected hall in the villa itself suggests continued, later domestic use.

Thus, while no site provides conclusive archaeological evidence of continuity, in each case there are certain indications that the occupation of the

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Figure 7. “Capella” de La Cocos. Church, plan from Schlunk and Hauschild, Die Denkmäler der frühchristlichen und westgotischen Zeit, fig. 6.
villa coincided with the earliest phase of the church. It must be noted, how-
ever, that the absolute dates of this phase are somewhat uncertain, a fact
that must be kept in mind when we consider any potential relationship with
Priscillianism.37

But even if these churches were constructed in working villas, what popu-
lation did they serve? This is often difficult to establish, although frequently
scholars posit the family oratory as a likely function.38 However, if we ex-
amine only the intra-villa churches, the most likely candidates for domestic or-
atories, the churches’ size and entrance/egress patterns both suggest that these
basilicas are more than private chapels. For instance, the church at Monte de
Cegonha occupies about 13 percent of the villa as excavated. The church was
only accessible from outside the domestic core, suggesting permeability to
extra-household members.39 A similar situation exists at Villa Fortunatus,
where the original church also occupies about 13 percent of the villa urbana,
and where the first Christian phase saw the addition of both east and west
doors, leading to both domestic center and extra-villa environments, re-
respectively.40 Thus, it seems likely that these churches serviced both the family of
the dominus and very likely a portion of the neighboring population.

Some have also suggested the extra-villa basilicas were constructed as
parochial churches.41 The construction of parochial churches assumes a
firmly established, widespread Christianity, and requires the existence of
some kind of parochial structure. However, the church councils of the fourth
and early fifth century are silent on matters of parish organization. The only
canons scholars have cited as evidence for such organization are precisely
those condemning villa-churches.42 It seems then, that the parish system in
Hispania, as with so many other provinces, was in its infancy until the mid-
late fifth century.43 Furthermore, as Pablo Diaz has shown, the later, sixth-
century church councils, testaments, and hagiographies provide ample evi-
dence of the continued independence of villa-churches from the episcopal
and even parochial hierarchy.44 It is thus far more likely that these churches
fell principally under the authority of the dominus himself.

The case of Torre de Palma suggests a better model for the origins and
functions of the extra-villa churches. Beneath the basilica floor was found the
remains of a two-roomed, rectangular structure. Since earlier excavations
found an altar to Mars as agricultural deity near the site, these foundations
may represent an earlier pagan villa-temple that was later replaced by the
Christian church.45 The pagan villa-temple, although it has never been com-
prehensively studied, was a common component of both Iberian and Gallic
villa life.46 Usually constructed at some 100–300 m from the villa proper and
sometimes serving funeral as well as cultic functions, these temples were
usually dedicated to agrarian or water deities and seemed to have served both
dominus and coloni.47 Both in its geography, funeral function, and
semi-public use, the villa-temple thus parallels the later villa-church. This
suggests a certain degree of continuity in the villa’s religious experience, an
experience that always seems to have featured both the dominus as impre-
sario, and extra-household members.

If the Christianity of Hispania was particularly marked by the villa-
church, can this phenomenon be linked in any way to the allegations of
Priscillianism? Certain canons in the so-called anti-Priscillianist councils of
Zaragoza and Toledo reveal a fear of the villa-church based on characteris-
tics that we have found in the archaeological evidence. Canons 2 and 4 of
the Council of Zaragoza prohibit the faithful from convening in other’s villas,
(ad alienas villas agendorum convenient,) or remaining in villas (sedere in villam) during Lent and Christmas.48 The first canon characterizes this
villa Christianity as collective (ad alienas villas) rather than purely familial,
a precept continued from canon 1 which further prohibits women from
attending prayer meetings with aliens, or non-family members.49 The addi-
tional descriptive villas agendorum, or “villas of the powerful,” vividly
describes communities led by a dominus. Contrary to other scholars’ inter-
pretation that the faithful retreated to villas during holidays, the use of the
phrase sedere in villam also indicates that these communities were perma-
nent.50 The suspicion with which this type of villa community was regarded is
abundantly clear. Villa worship was associated with non-orthodox or
pagan practice (suspicionibus), particularly the practice of walking bare-
footed, (nudis pedibus incedere) which Virginia Burrus, Henry Chadwick and
others have suggested probably pertains to pagan crop rituals.51

The council of Toledo in 400 makes more explicit reference to churches
per se in villas, and seems to have come to terms with their existence, but
instead of banning them outright, insists on episcopal involvement in their liturgy. Canon 5 requires any cleric who is in a castle or town or villa (aut casteli aut vicus ut villae) to attend church every day, while Canon 9 states that if the ritual of the lucernarium is celebrated in a villa, a bishop, presbyter, or deacon must be present.52

Taken together, the canons of the councils of Zaragoza and Toledo attest to the presence of extra-episcopal villa-churches that were viewed as a threat to episcopal control. Their rural setting suggested non-orthodox practices specifically associated with agricultural rituals. The link with the domestic sphere placed them outside the public, regulating eye and they seem to have co-opted traditional episcopal activities, such as the Lenten and Christmas services.

The question then arises, how closely were these councils and their canons tied to Priscillianist allegations? Traditional historiography has labeled both the councils of Zaragoza and Toledo as “anti-Priscillianist” councils, and assumed, particularly in the case of Zaragoza, that their canons were reflective of perceived Priscillianist activities or beliefs.53 However, recent scholarship has noted quite rightly that none of the above cited canons mentions Priscillianism specifically, that not all of the canons in either council were written to combat Priscillianism, and that some instead may have reflected general, community concerns.54

Thus, while the above canonical descriptions bear a striking resemblance to the archaeological remains of villa-churches, namely quasi-independent, rural churches with permanent communities made up of both dominus and locals, I do not believe that we can view this conjunction as evidence for Priscillianist activities in villas. Not only is the chronological evidence for these churches too imprecise, as we have seen, but the councils’ reaction to villa-churches is only loosely tied to the heresy itself. Thus, I think that any attempt to connect these sites with the Priscillianists must be rejected.

If there is a relationship between the allegations and rumors of Priscillianism and the villa-churches of Hispania, it is complex one. One point of connection may be the ecclesiastical geography of Late Antique Hispania in which both the rumors of heresy were perpetuated and the villa-church grew and flourished. Most villa-churches are located in areas where rumors of early Priscillianism were propagated, namely Lusitania, where the allegations originated, and north-east Tarraconensis, where suspicions of Priscillianism were described by Consentius in the early fifth century.55 Southern Lusitania, however, is clearly the locus of the phenomenon.56 The Christian communities of southern Lusitania were principally governed by the bishops in Emerita Augusta (Merida) and Ossonoba (Faro). However, the episcopal structure of this area was particularly sparse. In fact, in the fourth and fifth centuries, there is definitive evidence of only three bishops for the whole of southern Lusitania, leaving the bishops in Emerita, Ossonoba, and Olisipo to monitor between them an area of over 52,000 km².57 The sixth century saw only slight improvement in this episcopal lacuna, with the addition of documented bishoprics in Ebora (Evora) and Pax Iulia (Beja). If indeed our villa-churches date to the late fourth–fifth centuries, the inclusion of anti-villa church legislation during this period may have been due to the increasing presence of such churches in these territories, the increasing episcopal awareness of them, and the converse inability to control them.

Indeed, if we further examine the populations and geography of Lusitania, both the formation of villa-churches and the episcopates’ fear of them is hardly surprising. Occupying around 120,000 km², the province boasted only three conventi and 50 identified oppida.58 Compared with Baetica, for instance, the truly rural character of Lusitania is obvious. That rural landscape, however, is emerging as a much richer and more complex environment than the huge latifundia imagined by earlier historiography.59 The latest field surveys around Beja, Caceres, and Merida indicate a surprisingly densely settled landscape with smaller sites every 1.5 to 3.2 km, punctuated by larger, villa-type sites.60 The Beja survey suggests that not only did the villas see their apogee in the Late Empire, but that many of the smaller sites also continued, although the duration of that occupation is not always clear.61

Furthermore, as several scholars have noted, the villa communities of Hispania and the aristocracy that ran them seemed to have been powerful, particularly independent entities, enmeshed in a web of local politics and concerns.62 Not only Orosius’ description of private, estate-stocked armies
points in this direction, but even Consentius' narrative of the so-called Priscillianist enclaves in Tarragona betray a local landowner/clergy, controlling the definitions of orthodoxy in their spheres of influences, and closing ranks around those who would question their authority. This is a world in which city and country were simultaneously linked by social and economic ties, yet psychologically, the country could stand apart, an enclosed world delimited by the dominus, tied to his prosperity and subject to his laws and his faith.

Thus, if the phenomenon of villa churches in Hispania can inform our understanding of Priscillianism, it is not in a simple, cause-effect way, but as a reflection of the Christian environment generally current in Hispania in the fourth and fifth centuries. The accusations of Priscillianism were born in the growing pains of a new faith and the struggle to implement that faith in an environment where the power of the local Christian domini was more immediate than that of a still distant but growing episcopate. The villa churches similarly suggest a semi-independent, rural Christianity, tied to the dominus and the fundus, and founded in areas with few urban entities and even fewer bishoprics. As the villae urbanae disappeared, as their churches were gradually converted into parish churches, and the ecclesiastical and landowning aristocracy merged into one, the distrust with which these churches were regarded diminished, although it never disappeared completely. In the fourth and fifth centuries, however, these quasi-independent communities, probably specifically dedicated to rural concerns and patronized by a powerful, local elite, were inherently suspicious, perhaps suspicious enough to fuel the rumors and accusations which would long be termed Priscillianism.

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NOTES

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5. I have found evidence of approximately eleven villa-churches on the Iberian Peninsula, versus four examples in Gaul, and two in Italy. These figures are based on sites where villa and church show at least some evidence of contemporaneous occupation.


7. See R. Alfenin and C. Lopes (1992), The dating of this phase is made difficult by mixed stratigraphy and the small amount of fourth- and fifth-century ceramics. (Personal communication and 1986 and 1988 Interim Reports, Archive, Instituto Português do Patrimônio Arquitectónico, Evora.)

8. A north entrance is assumed, since no evidence for entrances on other sides is possible. The extant south wall is preserved well above floor level with no evidence of a door, and the ground level on the west side is too low to accommodate a door without a step. Since no step was found, the largely destroyed north wall remains as the only possibility. See C. Lopes and R. Alfenin (1992), 491.


13. A careful reading of the nineteenth-century excavation notes indicate that the font was cut into the mosaic floor, and not itself paved with mosaics, as some authors have assumed. See M. L. B. A. Santos (1972), 374.

14. The excavator has found no evidence of the continuation of the walls of the church into the villa. However, numerous modern fence walls extend from the church walls to the villa (e.g. the SW wall) and these may be placed on earlier walls. These areas
have not been fully excavated.


16. No mosaics from the mainland of the Iberian Peninsula have been found to date later than the early to mid-fifth century. Only the Balearic Islands have produced sixth-century mosaics, and both a different style and great geographic distance separates them from those at Laranjeiras. See H. Schlunk and T. Hauschild, *Die Denkmäler der frühchristlichen und westgotischen Zeit* (Mainz am Rhein, 1978), 185; T. Hauschild, “Técnicas y maneras de construir en la arquitectura paleocristiana hispánica,” *II Reunión d’Arqueología Palaecristiana Hispanica* (Barcelona, 1978), 83.


21. Puertas suggested the church may have been part of an earlier, pre-church phase, but Tuset’s excavations seem to have definitively attributed the stairs and lower chamber to the first, church phase. See R. Puertas (1986), 75; P. d. Palol (1986), 2001.

22. See M. Guardia Pons (1992), 87 and 97–98. There is no stratified ceramic material to date this construction.


24. For the coin evidence, see S. Maloney (1992).


29. This attribution has been disputed, particularly by J. Arce, “Las metamorfosis de Carranque (Toledo),” *Madrid Mitteilungen* 27 (1986): 365–74, although the recent discovery of Theodosian mason marks makes the possibility of Maternus Cynegus as patron more likely.


33. Thanks to Stephanie Maloney and Åsa Ringbom for providing information on the
recent excavations.

34. See notes 17 and 18 above.

35. J. Serra Ráfols (1952), 166.

36. The fact that this building was placed inside the villa urbana has suggested to some that it post-dated the villa. See J. Serra Ráfols (1952), 67. However, the orientation and more importantly the door of this enigmatic structure aligns with the door leading to rooms off the peristyle, indicating the structure was planned to relate with extant, functioning villa buildings. Furthermore, the most recent, and to my mind, most sensible hypothesis of the apsed structure's function as audience hall, further indicates the continuation of domestic functions. T. Ubiet (1978), 109; A. Sánchez, "Las estancias absidiales en las villas romanas de Extremadura," Norba 4 (1983): 205.

37. I am working with a Finnish team who have pioneered a new, more precise method for the dating of mortar, to provide more secure dating for each of the sites mentioned. For the method, see J. Heimemier et al., "AMS C-14 Dating of Lime Mortar," Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research. Section B 123 (1997): 487-95.


39. See note 8 above.


42. For this assumption, see J. F. Alonso, La Cura Pastoral en la España Romano-Visigoda (Rome, 1955), 202. Alonso then goes on to say that these same canons indicate the presence of "iglesias propias" which fall outside the episcopal system. See also R. Menendez Pidal, Historia de España. España Visigoda (Madrid, 1940), 303.


44. P. Díaz, "Iglesia propia y gran propiedad en la autobiografía de Valerio del Bietzo," I Congreso Internacional Aragón Romana (1986), 297-303. In this respect, the church seems to be the forerunner of the so-called "iglesia propia," or private foundation church. This phenomenon was particularly common in Spain during the Early Middle Ages, but its origins have been associated with the fourth century, anti-villa church canons. Like the villa-church, the "iglesias propias" maintained a disturbing amount of independence from the episcopate and were chiefly run by their founders. See R. Bigad, La Iglesia Propia en España, Analecta Gregoriana, 5 (Rome, 1933); M. Torres, El origen del sistema de iglesias propias en España, "Archivo de la Historia del Derecho Español, vol. 5 (1928). The assimilation of the archaeological evidence into the history of the "iglesia propia" is an important, future task.

45. For the altar, see J. d'Encarnação, "Epigrafia do Nordeste Alentejano," Cominibriaga 16


46. Examples include, in Hispania, Milreu, San Cucufate, Olhão and perhaps the unpublished Los Castillejos. In Gaul, Valentine, Newel and Montmamm. In Britain, Lullingstone, Rapsley and Chedworth.


48. J. Vives (1963), 16-17, c. 2 and 4. A Theodosian code edict from 407 (C. Th. 16.5.49) specifically bans Priscillians from meeting in villas.

49. For alienei, see V. Burus (1995), 35-43.


52. J. Vives (1963), 21, c.5 and 9. The former canon also betrays the lacuna of a true diocesan structure guiding their activities. Rather than terming the clerics' area of responsibility as parochiae, the canon uses an enumeration of traditional site categories, castellum, vicus, or villa.

53. For example, Chadwick, 12-29 (Zaragoza) and 170-74 (Toledo), and on Zaragoza, see B. Vollman, "Priscillianus," in Realencyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft, suppl. 14, ed. Pauli Wisowa (Munich, 1974), 498-502 and 546-51.


56. Burus has even claimed that Priscillianism only existed in Lusitania and Baetica and that the heresy did not extend to either Aquitaine or Galicia. See V. Burus (1995), chap. 4.

57. This includes the bishops of Merida, Ossonoba and Olisipo (Lisbon). There is some disagreement as to whether the "Elbora" mentioned in the Council of Elvira was Elbora, modern day Évora. The great majority of scholars have placed this Elbora near Caesarobriga. However, some still hold out hope for an Alenteján "Elbora." See J. Maciel (1996), 37n. 173; M. Sotomayor, T. Gonzalez Garcia, and P. Lopez de Osaba, Historia de la Iglesia en España. La iglesia en la España romana y visigoda (Madrid, 1979), 91.

58. For the most recent assessment of the boundaries, urbanization, and size of Lusitania, see J. Alarcão, J.-G. Gorgès, V. Mantas, M. S. Frías, P. Sillières, and A. Tranoy.
RECENTLY FRANK TROMBLEY HAS ARGUED THAT "THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE Syrian countryside is of archetypal significance for understanding that process elsewhere," in part because of "abundantly detailed narrative sources and numerous dated inscriptions which permit analysis down to the village level." In this article I wish to both endorse and expand upon Trombley’s point by arguing that the process so richly documented in textual and epigraphic sources needs to be supplemented by a careful examination of the extensive standing remains of the region since the built environment of the Syrian countryside is an equally rich and revealing but surprisingly neglected source for understanding how the area became Christian. A study of Christianization from this perspective takes us across several past and present “frontiers.” As far as the past is concerned, it allows us to assess the shifting boundaries between urban and rural Christian cultures as manifested in the distinct configurations of their built environments and the exchanges between them. In the present, from the perspective of historians of Late Antiquity, it involves crossing disciplinary frontiers by using the insights of archaeologists, architects, and communications theorists to address a problem normally taken up by historians using...