

PLINY IN SPACE (AND TIME)

ANDREW M. RIGGSBY

In their original call for papers, the organizers of this volume rightly lamented the fact that work on Pliny has tended to fall into one of two traps. “We have [either] plundered him for snippets on” various aspects of Roman civilization or “confined ourselves to analysis of individual letters.” In a sense, I will commit both sins in this paper, so let me offer some pre-emptive justification. My main interest in Pliny here will indeed be to exploit him in service of something else—in this case the history of geography. I am not, however, looking for pre-existing facts for which Pliny’s record is the incidental conduit. Rather, his record will itself be the salient set of facts. As for the second problem, I will primarily be reading two letters, and a hackneyed pair at that. On this point I can only ask the reader to suspend judgment on the novelty and broader significance of my reading until the end.

The two letters I have in mind are the famous descriptions of his Laurentine (2.17) and Tuscan (5.6) villas. Numerous attempts have been made to reconstruct the respective floor plans from the texts.¹ Most have been plausible, but none demonstrably correct. The difficulty, I suggest, is that Pliny is not trying to do what scholars seem to have assumed he is attempting. In fact, his project is incommensurable with theirs in at least two important respects. In the first (and longer) section of this paper, I treat Pliny’s treatment of space in the villa letters and its inextricable connection with his treatment of time. In the second section, I offer a possible extension of this analysis to an urban context, though the relative lack of evidence

1 E.g., Tanzer 1924, Van Buren 1948. The tradition is surveyed in du Prey 1994.

makes this a more speculative project. Before I get to this, however, it may be helpful if I say a few words in general about how dwellings (and spaces more generally) may be described.

Studies of this topic have often made a fundamental distinction between the route or itinerary, on the one hand, and the map on the other. Even if neither exists physically, many spatial descriptions seem to presuppose one or the other way of organizing information. There is a considerable literature in cognitive psychology on the choice of modes and the use of, for instance, landmarks and orientations within each mode.² One version of the map/itinerary distinction has been applied to the classical world in general by Pietro Janni's 1984 monograph on *The Map and the Periplous: Ancient Cartography and Hodological Space*. In this work, he sets Roman spatial practice in a broader historical context; in particular, he takes a developmental view. Map-oriented thinking represents, he claims, a more advanced stage of development than route-oriented thinking.³ Development from the itinerary to the map did not start until the late Middle Ages or even the early modern period and was not really completed until much later than that. The Romans, on this view, could have had no true maps, or even think in such terms. Maps are perhaps a better way of doing the same thing as itineraries, but they have similar aims. At the most, there is a difference in point of view. One either follows a path on the ground or looks at a map from above. A few classicists have cited Janni's work, most approvingly, but none have built on it or even given his theses extended scrutiny.⁴

A somewhat different spin is put on the same distinction by Michel de Certeau in a section of his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). Generalizing on the basis of a more technical article by Linde and Labov (1975), he analyzes what they call "routes" and "maps." De Certeau, like Janni, sees a historical development and agrees that mapping in the technical sense in question does not really begin until the fifteenth century and is not fully developed until much later. For him (and perhaps for Linde and Labov

2 E.g., Harrell et al. 2000 and Sandberg 2001; Kitchen and Blades 2002 treat these issues (and others) in a broader context.

3 Ingold 1986.130–64 makes a similar distinction between hunter/gatherer (one-dimensional) and agriculturalist (two-dimensional) perceptions of land.

4 For more recent defenses of this position (though they do not add much), see Purcell 1990 and Bertrand 1997.108–11. On this point, however, see the arguments to the contrary by Campbell 1996.89–90.

as well), routes and maps differ not so much in power as in purpose. Routes are about “going,” while maps are about “seeing.” In literary terms, we might say that the distinction between modes lies not just in point of view but in focalization.

I. VILLA LIFE

To turn now to Rome, one might ask whether these theories help explain what Pliny is up to. There are elements in both of his long villa letters that have tempted scholars to see virtual maps behind them. Most notably, Pliny is careful to explain the view from many rooms: “. . . another smaller cubiculum that receives the rising sun with one window and the setting with another” (2.17.6) or “it overlooks the terrace from some windows and a meadow from others” (5.6.23). Scholars use this information to infer the orientation of those rooms with respect to the cardinal points. But did Pliny really have an absolute orientation in mind? The view from particular rooms can, by definition, be determined from individual observation without reference to any kind of grid. Rooms that do not have an actual view are not oriented by this system. Nor are rooms generally given an orientation relative to each other. Instead of direction, Pliny merely notes adjacency. Instead of left, right, forward, or the like, one simply reads adverbs like *hinc*, *inde*, *mox*, or *deinde*, or verbs like *adnectitur*, *adhaeret*, *adiacet*, or *adplicitum est*. Pliny’s descriptions may incidentally give us the orientation of some rooms, but that does not create a map. Instead, they create a set of isolated islands.

Alternatively, these letters might at first sight appear to be fairly typical itineraries on a small scale. The basic structure of each is a series of rooms. Particularly striking is the point at which Pliny virtually retraces his steps through a series of rooms to get back to a central node in the villa: “from the back [of the triclinium at the end of a wing], it looks back at the *cavaedium*, portico, courtyard, portico again, then the atrium, and the woods and mountains in the background” (2.17.5). On the whole, however, this is an illusion created by the inherently linear nature of a letter; these lists are rather less than itineraries. For one thing, they lack crucial indicators at many nodes. Terms like *deinde* and *adiacet* are inadequate descriptions of routes as well as maps. But this vagueness could just be the mark of a clumsily constructed itinerary, not of a different kind of structure altogether. That cannot be said of two other features. Sometimes Pliny just gives up and

lumps a number of rooms (or even suites of rooms) together without putting them in any order:⁵ “From here one reaches two *diaetae*, in one of which four cubacula, in the other three use sun or shade accordingly as the sun circles overhead” (5.6.31). At other times, he explicitly violates the actual order of occurrence. “Not far from the bath are stairs that lead to a cryptoporticus, before that to three suites” (5.6.27). Here, I take it, he gives the most common or most important use of the stairs, then backtracks to pick up other rooms in the area.⁶

The structure of an itinerary is simple enough, however, that it may be more compelling to demonstrate Pliny’s use of alternative structuring principles rather than look for gaps in his lists. Two such principles, I will now argue, are (1) naming as a way of creating isolated, qualitative spaces instead of segmented, quantitative space and (2) the integration of the dimension of time and the compression of space-time.

Pliny’s letters list thirty-eight and twenty-eight distinct rooms, respectively, as well as ten unsegmented suites and numerous courtyards and other outdoor areas. Of these, he describes the shape of only two and the furnishings of a few more. Nor does he generally tell us what the spaces were used for. What carries the weight of his description is a plethora of room-names—thirty, in fact. To reach this total he uses a variety of Greek terms as well as Latin ones. The sheer number and the resort to Greek doubtless enact the profusion and redundancy that is a mark of luxury and invoke cultural traditions that are also a mark of upper-class luxury, but my point has to do with the force of the individual items.⁷ Now, Eleanor Leach has recently shown us (1997) that the conventional room-names used by modern scholars don’t necessarily correspond to ancient usage. Moreover, as both she and Penelope Allison have pointed out, application of these terms to particular spaces in archeological contexts can be problematic, even when the philology is not.⁸ However, as I have argued in the case of the cubiculum, the problem is ours. We may not always be able to tell a cubiculum when we see one, especially in the absence of furniture and the like, but the Romans seem to have had a pretty clear idea of what they meant

5 Also 2.7.11, 12 (bis), 15; 5.6.27.

6 Also at 2.17.12–13, where two *turres* are both described top-to-bottom.

7 Redundancy: Wallace-Hadrill 1994.52–57. Greek: Hoffer 1999.38.

8 Leach 1997, Allison 1993. Allison 2001 retains an absolutist position, but offers no response to the arguments of Riggsby 1997.42–43 that these concerns have to be taken on a case-by-case basis.

by the word. The style of Pliny's descriptions confirms that this must have been true more generally. Otherwise his letters are little more than lists of nonsense syllables. This is particularly clear when Pliny describes a room in the Laurentine villa as "either a big cubiculum or a modest dining area" (2.17.10). Applying different size descriptions to the same room shows that different expectations are generated by different names for the same room.

There is an important point of spatial theory to be made here. Most writers on antiquity have discussed spaces, or representations of space, that differ in ways that I would describe as essentially quantitative: when (if at all) did they use two-dimensional maps instead of one-dimensional itineraries?⁹ How did they represent perspective in painting? (White 1967, Leach 1988). Did they use scale models or—in a more sophisticated study—what is the significance of deviations from precise scale?¹⁰ How does the topology of the *domus*, and particularly the way it was constructed around a few central nodes, affect and reflect Roman notions of privacy (Grahame 1997)? All of these questions lend themselves to discussion in terms of idealized mathematical models and deviations therefrom; this is what makes these approaches "quantitative." What they all lack is a qualitative aspect. They divide up and/or project space as if it were uniform over its whole extent. This assumption works well for modern physics, and has even proved valuable in most of the aforementioned studies, but that need not mean space can only be constructed this way. To illustrate the potential value of looking for qualitative differences, let me start with a temporal rather than a spatial example. We commonly divide time into many different units: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, years, as well as multiples and sub-divisions of these units. When spans of time are divided into so many minutes or years, a purely quantitative distinction is (generally) being made. One year is the same as the next or even one ages later; two years differ from one year by being twice as long. The numerical comparisons can be made because the individual units are identical for most purposes. There are, however, a few cultural contexts in which units of time take on a qualitative aspect. Within the cyclical pattern of the week, different days take on different values. "I have to go to work tomorrow [i.e., Monday]" has quite a different force than "I have to go to work tomorrow [i.e., Saturday]." This is because weekends are seen as a different kind of time than weekdays. Different activities are

9 See the references in note 4 and, most recently, Brodersen 2001.

10 Haselberger 1997 and Taub 1993, respectively.

appropriate at different times. Geertz 1973 and Bourdieu 1977.96–158 have shown how this qualitative aspect can even be the dominant one in some pre-industrial cultures, and Dosi and Schnell 1992.79–83 point briefly to its role in ancient Rome.

I have suggested elsewhere that a similar attention to qualitative differences will be profitable in the study of Roman spatial representation. In particular, we can identify several different kinds of space in Caesar's *de Bello Gallico*. For instance, Gauls move and organize themselves in forests; Romans cannot enter or even see into these areas. Now, in fact, such rough terrain must have been more difficult for ordered legions than for their Gallic counterparts, but Caesar has converted that difference in degree into an absolute difference in kind. This is a move we will see again. Even by itself, the rhetoric of names in Pliny's letters shows a variety of spatial types. Caesar uses a small number of types repeatedly, so we can determine their properties with some precision. This is impossible for most of Pliny's terms, at least within the confines of these two letters. Nonetheless, it may be worth noting two possibilities. Three cubacula, and only cubacula, are praised for their absolute isolation from the noise and activity of the rest of the house (2.17.22, 24; 5.6.21). If, as I have argued elsewhere (1997.43–47), the cubiculum was a place of relative secrecy, then Pliny is accepting and even exaggerating that physical characteristic to create a special type of space. That is, he, too, takes what must in fact have been differences in degree between different rooms and schematizes them into a difference of kind. Also, I would suggest that Pliny's attention to the vistas of different rooms is better thought of qualitatively than in terms of orientation. He is not interested in direction for its own sake, but for the effects that view, temperature, and wind have on the room and its inhabitants. "On either side [of a cryptoporticus] are windows, multiple on the sea side, fewer and single on the garden side. When the day is serene and calm, all these are open; when the winds are blowing from this side or that, those on the windward side are open" (2.17.16). Or, "In the middle [of a cryptoporticus], a triclinium receives an especially healthful breeze from the Appennines" (5.6.29). And, as we noted above, only rooms with actual views are categorized this way. "Facing the sea" and the like are ways of describing not the location of a room but the kind of room.

The other organizing principle has to do with time. Itineraries are normally set in a particular time path ("I left home at 8:00, got to the airport at 9:00, arrived at O'Hare at 11:00") or abstracted away from standard time altogether ("Take the next left, drive for about 5 minutes, then get on I-35").

Either way, they lend themselves to representation in terms of diagrams such as figure 1a, favored by Lund-school “time geographers.”¹¹ (The x and y coordinates give a map location of an individual at a given time; advancing time moves up the t-axis. The fragment shown here shows an individual staying at one point, moving to a second, then staying there for a while. In principle, the graph could be extended indefinitely up into the future or down into the past.) The physical paths in Pliny’s letters have a more complicated relationship to time. Many of the rooms in both letters are situated in time, but in a very different way. First, that time is cyclical: recurring times of day or seasons of the year.¹² Second, like most forms of cyclical time, these are qualitative.¹³ Summers and evenings have qualities, characteristics that distinguish them from winters and mornings. This qualitative time is then able to mesh with largely qualitative space. Third, many of the rooms are situated in both frames. Fourth, rooms are multiply situated within those frames. That is, Pliny describes both morning and evening or both winter and summer in a given room. “Behind either *cryptoporticus* begins a portico suitable for winter use in the morning, for summer use in the afternoon” (5.6.31) or “Such is the delight of the room in the winter, even more so in the summer. For, in the morning, its shade cools the terrace, in the afternoon, the nearest part of the *allée* and garden” (2.17.18).

Given this set of facts, we can say something more about the particular way space and time come together in Pliny’s villas. They correspond not to the individual paths mapped by diagrams like the one just discussed (1a) but with a slightly different variety proposed by Giddens 1984.133–34 (my figure 1b). Here instead of a linear movement through time, we get a reversible loop. Time (t) moves through the loop of a single day. (Incidentally, place is here represented more abstractly along a single axis. This example could be read, for instance, as a graduate student moving between library [left], seminar room [center], and home [right], then back to the library.) This form of diagram also draws our attention to regularities of action by proposing a single stereotype rather than a continuous stream of action. In the linear model (figure 1a), the repetitive, routinized character of much of daily life will show up as a repetition of patterns throughout the

11 For an introduction to time geography, see Parkes and Thrift 1980.243–78.

12 The distinction is inscribed even more clearly in two later letters. 9.36 and 9.40 give Pliny’s summer and winter villa routines respectively.

13 As are the references to Saturnalia (1.7.4, 2.17.24, 8.7.1) and, humorously, to April (1.3.1) and July (8.21.2), as months in which poets are “in season.”

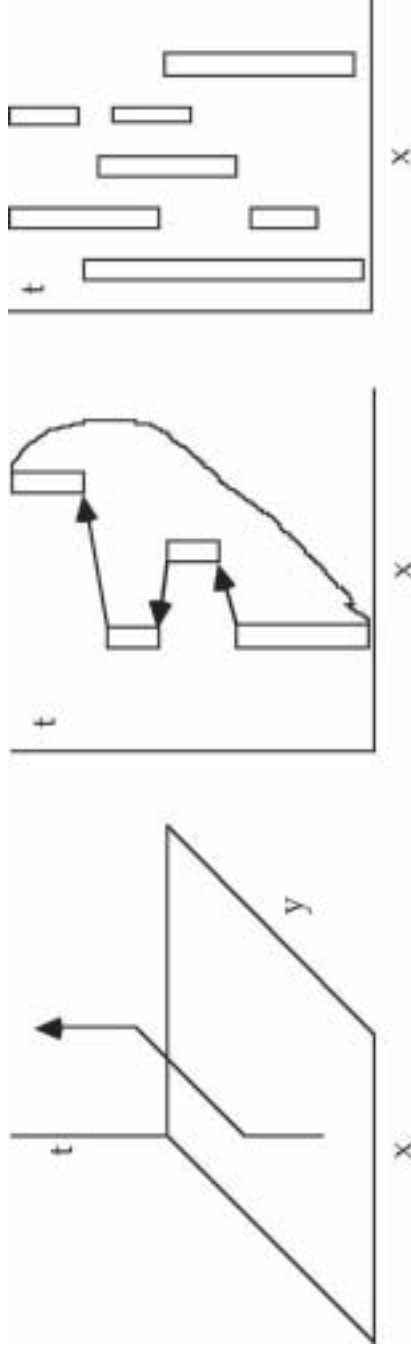


Figure 1a, b, c. Figures 1a and b (after Giddens 1984, 134) are from Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Copyright © Anthony Giddens 1984. Reprinted with permission of the University of California Press. Fig. 1c is by the author.

graph. Yet in that form, those regularities are accidental. The compressed form of figure 1b also de-emphasizes travel and focuses attention on “stations” where most interaction takes place. Again, the purely linear formalism (1a) does not capture the intuition that there is a significant difference between sites of interaction and places in between. In fact, to capture what Pliny is doing even better, we could draw a graph like figure 1c, with all the travel lines removed, since he is not much interested in the paths. Moreover, we can take fuller advantage of the fact that we are in cyclical time and allow overlap in that dimension. You can only be in one *cubiculum* at any point in linear time, but you can have many that you associate with, say, the afternoon siesta or the midnight oil burnt over fine-honed orations. This would represent the universe of isolated, interchangeable, timeless environments that his letters offer up—neither a map nor an itinerary but something more like a stack of (potentially resortable) snapshots.

In this context, it is not surprising that Pliny’s rooms are sometimes described in some architectural detail—doors, windows, sometimes even piping—but only four rooms appear to have any furniture. And in three of those cases, the fixtures are built-in.¹⁴ We get the experience of the villas in general, not any particular visit to them. Similarly, both villas are described as uninhabited, or rather uninhabited by any particular persons. Pliny’s comments about his isolated *cubacula* imply a buzz of activity elsewhere but no specific action anywhere. His famously passing reference to the slaves’ and service areas also illustrates generic inhabitation (2.17.9): “The remaining part of this wing is given over to the use of slaves and freedmen.”¹⁵ Similarly, there are rooms where guests in general may sleep (2.17.9) or friends generically will dine with Pliny (5.6.21). Certain types of people will inhabit those spaces throughout the day and year. By contrast, we do not encounter single individuals, not even (as has been noted by others) Pliny’s wife.¹⁶ The one exception to this rule is Pliny himself. At several points we get his experience as he dines (5.6.37), or reads (2.17.8), or writes (2.17.24),

14 Built-in: 2.17.8, 11; 5.6.25. Not: 2.17.21.

15 There is probably an even more oblique allusion to uncharted service quarters at 5.6.30.

16 This is largely true of 9.36 and 9.40, where Pliny gives a similarly generic account of villa life from the point of view of daily routine rather than spaces. Laurence 1994.130 takes her absence as evidence of a gendered segregation of space-time also observed in the urban world (cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1996). This is probably correct, but given the generalizing force of the letters with respect to other individuals, Pliny’s account may incidentally exaggerate the rigor of that separation.

or everywhere enjoys the views. And even when Pliny appears, his activity can be typical rather than specific. The books he pulls from the built-in shelves in the Laurentine villa are described not as *legendos* but *lectitandos*.

In offering these modern theories and their respective graphic representations, I do not, of course, mean to suggest that Pliny was intervening in a social-theoretical debate that had yet to occur. Nor do I mean to suggest that any of these models provide a superior explanation of all phenomena in the ancient or modern world. In fact, I'd like to argue nearly the reverse. Giddens doesn't even claim that his own version is superior in a general way; as we've seen, it's explicitly designed to suppress certain kinds of information. In choosing a form of representation, you pick the one that emphasizes the information most important to you.¹⁷ And this is precisely what Pliny did, though probably not so deliberately.

The space described in these letters is specifically that recognized by the owner/occupant. On the other hand, the casual visitor experiences particular places, as the sites of particular events, in a particular order. There is, in fact, an example of this in Pliny's corpus. I quote here Hoffer's (1999.32) reading of the series of questions that open letter 1.3:

The questions mark out a spatial journey, starting from the town Comum and proceeding through the villa grounds into the inner rooms. They also mark out a temporal schedule of activities in the villa, first exercising in the riding grounds, then having a bath and dinner, and finally withdrawing to the bedrooms, where the serious business of studying and writing goes on.

For the owner, by contrast, multiple layers of experience are compressed into each other, blotting out any particular time or occasion or order.¹⁸ But for all this combined experience, the descriptions are not complete. At the Laurentine villa, he only alludes to service areas, and, in Tuscany, perhaps not even that. Sherwin-White 1966.192 has plausibly suggested that Pliny also omits the dressing room in the baths in the former villa. Again, this is

17 Note how Laurence 1994.125, 128—to be discussed at length below—uses graphs of both types 1a and 1c to convey different kinds of information.

18 Hoffer is certainly right to point out the similarity of this villa to Pliny's (as part of an international style). I would merely argue that the owner's and visitor's experiences stand in a relationship of reciprocity instead of identity.

the view of the owner, in contrast to that of a more distanced figure like a surveyor or architect.

Parenthetically, let me suggest that there is a reason that the most itinerary-like part of Pliny's text comes near the beginning of a letter (2.17.5). He begins by making the effort to adopt another's perspective, a visitor's point of view. This makes sense in a letter that is, after all, posed as an answer to a question (2.17.1). And he can certainly adopt a linear approach (at least in time) when the occasion calls for it, as when he describes his own or Vestricius Suprinna's daily routines (9.36, 3.1.3–9).¹⁹ But the question posed at the beginning of the letter is essentially about his own experience (*cur me . . . tantopere delectet*), and there's no practical need to provide directions. Thus he lapses into the easier task of representing his own point of view.

I'll turn now to my general points. As I said at the beginning, my main interest is the history of geography. Obviously by this I mean not just the formal disciplines of antiquity and of today. What I've been talking about is perhaps more specifically ethno-geography—the full range of means at a culture's disposal, whether theorized or not, to represent and more generally account for space. My first two points on this score are simply to reiterate two observations I've already made. The history of Roman spatial practice must take into account at least (1) time as well as space and (2) the qualities of space, not just its shape.

The third point is the sheer variety of representational models available to the Romans. Here I've mentioned two—one linear and one cyclical. I have argued elsewhere that there were probably at least two or three other mental models available for the so-called *domus*, the standard Romano-Campanian elite townhouse (Riggsby 1997.40–41).²⁰ One is apparently built around a few intersecting lines. This is suggested by the standard architectural form of these houses, which is based on a set of long, open axes. This map establishes the political shape of the house by creating a hierarchy of visibility. Another model is based on a series of containers—

19 I thank Professor Leach for calling my attention to this point, *viva voce*. Note also Hoffer's observation (1999.113) that 1.9 follows a similar path; it begins with Pliny mouthing an anonymous, generic point of view, then shifts into what is more clearly his own point of view.

20 On the *domus* in general, see the references at Riggsby 1997.36 note 2. The narrow use of this term to refer to one specific form—to the exclusion of "houses" construed more broadly—should probably be understood as a modern innovation.

concentric circles or the like. This establishes the moral topography of the house.²¹ Successive layers (moving inward) are more and more charged with the values (e.g., family, privacy) attached to the “domestic.” The latter model also seems to extend out beyond the house itself. Incidentally, letter 1.3 as read by Hoffer provides an excellent example of this model. Moreover, this is a model with both strong qualitative and quantitative aspects.

Studies of the ancient world have generally tended to assume a fairly small repertoire of representational models: usually one or two. The variety apparent just in the case of the house suggests to me that we should be looking for variety not generalization. Moreover, most of these models do not correspond closely with either the map or the itinerary. Those two modes are important for their general utility, but are not exhaustive. This leads me to the last general point.

This has to do with the source of variety in spatial representation. Are the representational features and modes in these texts deployed at whim or by universal cultural convention, or is there some principled way to choose among them? First, we must note that these are cultural phenomena not natural givens. Even if one believes in the theoretical possibility of a “true” and complete representation, clearly none of these are it. All show a selection and abstraction that must be culture specific. On the other hand, the discussions above of the real-world motivations of Pliny’s accounts of cubicula or Caesar’s of forests show that spatial conventions are context specific. That is, we do not want to speak of *the* “ancient” or even *the* “Roman” way of organizing space. But, equally, we do not want this context specificity to bring back in through the back door the view that some representations are “naturally” correct. The treatment of specific terrain types such as swamps and forests shows that environmental effects are not direct but culturally mediated. What is important, for instance, is the effect of climate *on Roman villa owners* or of forests *on Roman legions*. The orientation of rooms is important to Romans because they had poor artificial climate control and didn’t live in Los Angeles. We can also see this more broadly in the case of the house. The choice of mental model is dependent on context, but that context itself can clearly be an entirely social construct (for instance, the status distinctions on which the linear model of the house depends). This middle ground—culturally mediated local context—is what

21 For a cross-cultural overview on this point, see Tuan 1977.107–13.

one might expect on general cognitive grounds and is likely to be the level at which other forms of spatial representation will be found.²²

II. FROM THE VILLA TO THE CITY

In the passages cited in the previous section, time of day was reported simply as morning or afternoon. There are, however, other passages in which a slightly more specific formulation is offered. For instance: “Much of [the Tuscan villa] faces south and ‘invites’ the summer sun from the sixth hour, the winter sun a little later, into a broad, projecting portico” (5.6.15). Here Pliny starts with specific hour (*ab hora sexta*), but then shades over into a fuzzier expression (*aliquanto maturius*). In fact, in five of the six passages in which Pliny times an event at a villa by hour, he offers some sort of equivocation, typically offering two or more possibilities: “I get up, usually around the first hour, often before, rarely later” (9.36.1).²³ Why bother to give the time if it is always so unspecific? There are a number of at least plausible answers that need to be considered. The most basic has to do with the variability of the Roman hour (Dosi and Schnell 1992.66–68). The length of the *hora* was one-twelfth of the time between sunrise and sunset; thus, depending on the season, it varied in length from about 45 to 75 minutes. Correspondingly, any particular “hour” could fall at different times of the day by modern reckoning. Pliny’s multiple specifications might then represent an attempt to describe uniform times by means of a system not well adapted to the purpose. This might be at work when Pliny mentions Spurinna’s bath time: “When the bathing hour is announced (that is, the ninth in winter, in summer the eighth) . . .” (3.1.8). But the other passage that clearly ties variation in hour to season (5.6.15, quoted above) works the other way. That is, the sixth hour in summer corresponds on a modern clock to an earlier hour in the winter. Moreover, Pliny usually does not tie the variations in time to season.²⁴

An alternative theory might take space into account as well as time. Not only does Pliny equivocate in nearly all his references to times in villas,

22 On this expectation, see Riggsby 1997.41 note 30.

23 3.1.8, 3.5.8, 5.6.15, 9.36.1, 3; contrast 3.1.4.

24 The elder Pliny’s rising from dinner “while still light in the summer, within the first hour of night during the winter, as if compelled by law” (3.5.13) might be another example of clock-synchronization, but (1) it is less precise, and (2) the point seems to be not so much his precision as his zeal to get back to work quickly.

but it is *only* in the context of villas that such equivocation occurs. Perhaps his studied vagueness is a feature (in geographical space) of rurality or (in social space) of *otium*. After all, as Leach (above) shows, leisure time is one of the few luxury items Pliny openly displays in the letters. Such a view might be buttressed by a passage such as the following: “When the fourth or fifth hour comes (for there is no certain or fixed time), as the day persuades me, I take myself into a garden or the cryptoporticus” (9.36.3). Here the variation is deliberate. Pliny, at least in his villa, is not controlled by the clock. We might then predict that more specific temporal references would appear in regard to the city and/or the world of *negotium*. Such a prediction is partially borne out but not in a simple way.

Pliny refers to a specific, unequivocal time of day four times. One is an exceptional villa instance (3.1.4); the other three might be described as historical. Two of these times are part of his narrative of the eruption of Vesuvius (6.16.4, 6.20.6). Here he gives not only the hours but specific days and (implicitly) the year (6.20.6).²⁵ Pliny’s references are historical not just in the sense that his anecdote is (ideally) destined to be written into literary history, but also in the sense that they pick out a particular time in a universal, linear stretch of time. The latter is true of the other specific reference: “He sat next to the bed and asked on what day and at what hour she had been born” (2.20.3). Here the context is astrological (not historical in the sense of the genre), and the specific point in time is not revealed to the reader, but he is still clearly picking out a specific point in a universal sequence of times. On the one hand, then, we can plausibly suggest that the greater or lesser precision of historical or villa time is context specific. On the other hand, the time of ordinary urban life still has not been brought into the picture.

In what we might call the time scheme of the forum, there are no references to specific hours, whether equivocated or not. What we do find there are a number of references to “hours” not as points in a sequence but as units of duration—not “in the sixth hour” but “for six hours.”²⁶ Moreover, as the example just given suggests, that duration is generally specifically quantified. The one apparent exception proves the rule: “Are we wiser than our ancestors? More just than the laws themselves, the laws that grant so many hours, so

25 Specific dates are quite rare in the letters. Outside of Book 10, there are only 1.7.4 (which gives an approximate date), 8.6.13 (in a quotation), and 9.39.2.

26 2.11.14, 4.9.9, 4.16.2, 6.2.6.

many days, so many hearings?" (6.2.6). At the very least, Pliny is pointing to a specific number of hours (*tot horas*) rather than a vague quantity of time (cf. 5.6.15: *aliquanto maturius*). But, in fact, the broader context thematizes the quantification. Pliny has just been talking about (and will shortly take up again) the use of the water clock to time advocates in court.

In the contexts in which Pliny gives explicit durations—the courts and the senate—quantification of time has a practical purpose. Speakers in either forum were held to strict time limits. But quantification may also serve a broader purpose in the world of *negotium*. There is a calculus of duties that must be observed, and time spent is one of its important variables. I quote at length Pliny's most general discussion of his urban life (although it is much briefer than either villa letter) (1.9.1–3):

It's strange how one can account for oneself (or appear to do so) on a day-by-day basis in the city, but when you take the days all together, the accounts do not balance. If you ask someone, "What did you do today?" he will respond, "I helped someone don the *toga virilis*, I attended a betrothal or wedding, someone (*ille*) asked me to witness a will, another (*ille*) to defend him in court, another (*ille*) for counsel." These things seem necessary as you do them, but pointless if you recall that you do them daily, and all the more so when you get away from them. Then the thought occurs to you, "How many days I have spent in such trivial things!"²⁷

Pliny does two calculations: one day-by-day, the other longer-term (§1). In the daily course of things, his typical duties seem necessary; seen in a longer perspective, they look pointless (*inania*, §3). I take it then, that when Pliny says his duties "add up" (*ratio . . . constet*) individually but not collectively, the first calculation is meant to be commonsense and taken for granted by the reader.²⁸ The second calculation and the resulting paradox are Pliny's idiosyncratic contribution. Time is a quantifiable resource, and there is an

27 For an earlier discussion of the same passage see Leach, pp. 157–58 above.

28 As Hoffer 1999.112 note 4, 114 note 7 points out, complaints about similar obligations are a widespread topos.

obligation to allot it appropriately.²⁹ Even in the slightly iconoclastic conclusion, Pliny does not question this general model; his failure is measured by the number of days he has squandered.

A similar calculus, and perhaps a similar anxiety about his success according to its rules, appears in a conversation with Pliny's like-named uncle. The elder Pliny reproached the younger for walking when he could be carried in a sedan chair (and thus read or write on the journey): "You could have avoided losing these hours" (3.5.16).³⁰ A central theme of the entire letter, in fact, is Pliny's uncle's rigor in using his time well, and, again, this is framed quantitatively: *parsimonia temporis* (3.5.12).³¹ Despite his duties, he "expended" enormous time on his studies (3.5.18). Practically speaking, "clock" time (the answer to the question "when?") must have been of some importance in the city. Your advocacy cannot help your friends if you do not show up in court at the right time (though, in some cases, Pliny seems to have been called into court without advance notice [1.9.2, 8.21.3]). Nonetheless, Pliny systematically suppresses this clock time in favor of what might be called "stopwatch" time (the answer to the question "how long?").³² To explain the discrepancy, we need to recall two general points made in the previous section. First, representations of time and space are often stereotyped, ignoring one or another kind of detail in fact available to the person producing the representation. They are more-or-less deliberate over-simplifications. Second, the choice of what to keep and what to ignore is highly context specific. There are at least three salient contexts here. Pliny is interested in ethical self-presentation. His commitment to his social and moral obligations is measured by duration, so that is what is motivated.³³

29 We should keep in mind Hoffer 1999.114: "Pliny's complaints about empty social duties differ greatly from the satirical poets' complaints which they resemble (e.g., Mart. 10.70). Pliny differs from the resentful client who must humbly attend on more powerful patrons. . . . Pliny goes to these social functions as an equal who condescends to offer his time freely; as such, his attendance is ennobling."

30 The phrase may have been proverbial (Otto 1890.114), but that would merely mean that the scheme I've attributed to the Pliny family may have been yet another general feature of the culture.

31 My reading of this important letter is due to Henderson 2002c.

32 The clock/stopwatch distinction made here is not conventional because (I suspect) the technologies behind both were one and the same in early modern Europe and in areas colonized by Europeans. In classical antiquity, however, the primary "when" device (the sundial) and the "how long" device (the water clock) were distinct.

33 It is perhaps not accidental that the ethically salient model here is one that almost entirely abstracts away real quantitative elements; in the case of models for the house discussed above, it was also the most spatially abstract one that was most directly connected to ethics.

Moreover, when Pliny describes his urban duties in letter 1.9, he gives a generic day. Thus, as in the villa letters, specific time is not particularly important. The superimposition of numerous real days blots out any particular schedule and leaves only generic types of experience. (Note in this context the disjunction “betrothal *or* wedding,” 1.9.2.) Finally, the decision to collect and publish letters emphasizes the effects of the first two contexts. While any letter may facilitate self-fashioning by the writer, private letters often have informational value for the addressee. Pliny’s publication for an essentially random audience puts the focus squarely on the former function. And when letters are redirected to an audience beyond their (purported) addressee, the practical value of specific times and dates falls away.

Keeping in mind this issue of context specificity, it may be useful to conclude by comparing Pliny’s version of urban time and space with another one reconstructed by Ray Laurence. Before making that comparison, however, I need to note quickly a few other features of Pliny’s model. Not only are his duties not assigned a particular time, they seem to have no particular order. Note particularly the anaphora *ille . . . ille . . . ille*; the summonses are interchangeable. Describing his day in words forces some linear order (as it did with the rooms in the villa letters), but the rhetoric suggests the equivalence of these duties. Generic experience of the city, as of the villa, lends itself to description in isolated islands. Nor is there any spatial differentiation. Other sources might suggest different locations for some of these activities—at a minimum some would take place in public, others in private homes—but Pliny’s letter gives no hint of this. The three contexts that make it easy for Pliny to suppress clock time also operate to suppress specific locations. Instead, all we get is a vague sense of motion: “ad signandum . . . in advocationem . . . in consilium” (1.9.2).³⁴ This is sufficient to symbolize the effort Pliny is expending (and which is quantified in temporal terms). If we know Pliny is moving from point A to point B to point C, we do not need to know where A, B, and C are.

The model of urban space-time just sketched here is quite different from that laid out by Laurence 1994.122–32. He offers this graphic summary of the space-time experience of an urban aristocrat (figure 2). Moreover, on the basis of a variety of texts, he gives even more specific hours and locations for a number of activities, e.g., high finance in the fourth and fifth hours, games from the second through eleventh hours (with a break during

34 I say a “vague sense” since there is grammatical ambivalence here between motion and purpose.

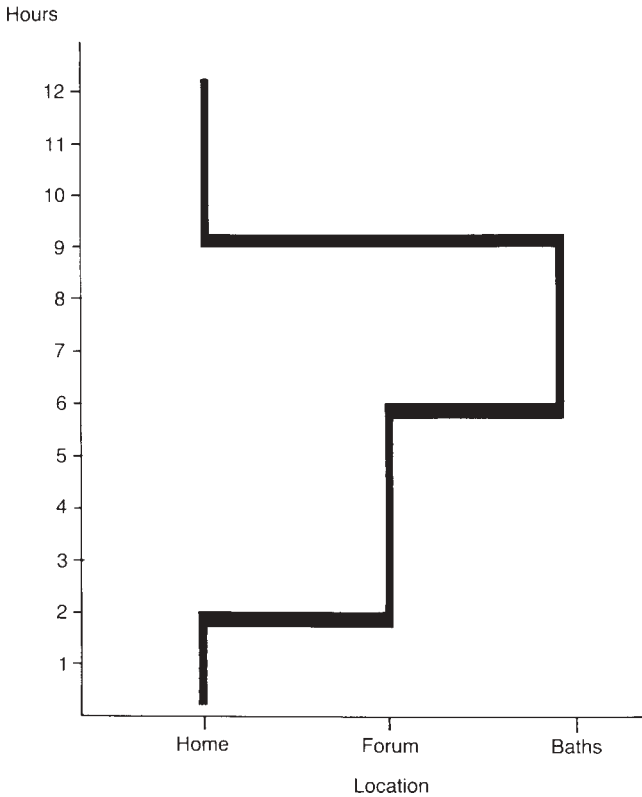


Figure 2. From Ray Laurence, *Roman Pompeii: Space and Society*. London: Thomson Publishing, 1994. Reprinted with permission.

the sixth), the *salutatio* during the first and second hours.³⁵ In all, Laurence detects a much more elaborately articulated space-time than I have suggested is to be found in Pliny. Now, strictly speaking, our two accounts cannot be held to be contradictory or otherwise. I have attempted to reconstruct a subjective, cognitive pattern. Laurence is interested in the more-or-

35 These data are helpfully summarized in a graph on his p. 125. Some of the times involved are based on quite slender evidence, some pieces of which were probably not intended to have typical or generic force. Nonetheless, if this type of analysis is to be attempted at all, I do not think there can be substantial improvement on Laurence's results. Passages of Martial are prominent in the evidence offered; this may merit further attention.

less objective patterns of the spatial and temporal availability of various activities. The two types of pattern are of different orders and so need not be identical (cf. Parkes and Thrift 1980.275). On the other hand, the two are also in large part mutually constitutive (cf. Giddens 1984.116–17). Expectations and mappings are based on actual experience, while regular patterns of interaction require agents with at least partially overlapping expectations to continue to generate them. Thus we might look for a general correspondence. In the absence of that correspondence, I would make three suggestions. First, Laurence shows that, while elites depended heavily on the clock, most persons would have lived “task” time instead.³⁶ This demonstration, however, should not blind us to the possibility that task time, too, remained important for the elite. In particular, given a day very broadly divided into segments by the clock, the mostly quasi-private obligations Pliny lists in 1.9 (as opposed to fully public ones like senate meetings or criminal trials) may have become more of a “to-do” list than a timetable. Second, we are reminded how specific “context specificity” can be. (The “can” needs to be emphasized. As Laurence’s observations on elite vs. non-elite time show, very broad contexts can be salient as well.) If the suggestion I have just made about elite use of clock and task time is correct, then we have the alternation or embedding of two different schemes in day-to-day life. Even if I am wrong on that point, we still have one scheme for day-to-day life and another for generic reflection. Thus, again, it will not do to look for “*the* Roman concept” of time or space. Third, we may need to query Laurence’s finding that time and space in the villa were less structured than they were in the city (1994.129–30).³⁷ Now this is certainly not an implausible claim, but there are perhaps evidentiary problems. The evidence offered for rural time is almost entirely limited to the letters of Pliny discussed above. These, I hope I have shown, are fairly abstract constructs of generic experience. While the absence of specific time indicators is consistent with a relatively unstructured use of time in the country, it might also be an artifact of the process of abstraction practiced in these particular letters. That would not, of course, mean that we are in general required—or even entitled—to

36 That is to say, a time scheme that is about not “time when” but “time to” (as in “time to reap”). See Thompson 1967.48–51.

37 Within the terms of his argument, the case is perhaps even stronger than he makes it out to be, for many of the hours he gives for rural activities are not actually attested in the texts and so there is even less structure.

ignore particular letters (or any texts) because their contexts make them special cases. All cases are special cases. Rather, individual letters (texts) need individual interpretation in the process of their deployment as evidence in other arguments.³⁸

University of Texas at Austin

38 I would like to thank Ruth Morello and Roy Gibson for their kind invitation to participate and the other contributors and the original audiences, both in Manchester and Philadelphia, for a variety of helpful comments. I would also like to thank Matt Roller and John R. Clarke for their remarks on an earlier written version.