

A COUNTRY VILLA

Many wealthy Roman families had a large house - or villa - in the countryside, where they went to escape from the stress of city life and the hot summers in town. The family usually owned all the farmland around their villa, and made lots of money by selling produce from their farm.

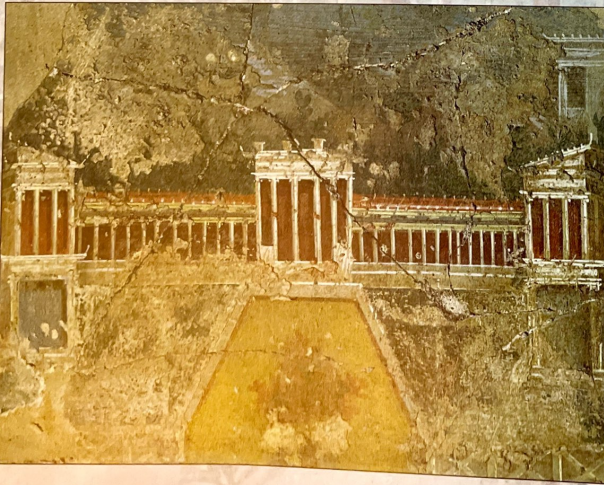
EARLY VILLAS

The first villas, built during the Republic, were simple farmhouses surrounded by orchards, vineyards and fields for growing crops and keeping animals. Most of these farms were run by a manager, as the owner usually lived in town.

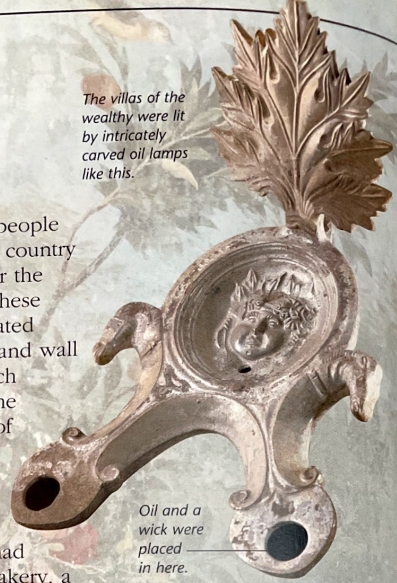
MAGNIFICENT MANSIONS

As Rome became more prosperous, and more people became wealthy, grand country villas were built all over the empire. The rooms of these villas were often decorated with beautiful mosaics and wall paintings, some of which survive to this day. Some rooms showed scenes of everyday life, while others depicted events from Greek or Roman mythology. The most luxurious houses also had underfloor heating, a bakery, a bath-house and even a swimming pool. The villas near Rome, owned by the most wealthy citizens, were particularly impressive.

This fresco from the villa of the Empress Livia shows a large Roman villa and part of its garden.



The villas of the wealthy were lit by intricately carved oil lamps like this.



Oil and a wick were placed in here.

Most villas were still part of a farm - or estate - but many were situated well away from the fields. A few of the largest villas had no connection with farming, and were built simply as lavish country homes. The nearby fields only grew food for the owner and his family.

The grandest villas had spacious gardens full of statues and ornamental pools. People relaxed in courtyards surrounded by elegant columns, and the silence was broken only by birdsong and the rippling water of fountains.

INTERNET LINK

For a link to a website where you can take a photo tour of a Roman villa in Germany and find out how the remains of the villa were discovered, go to www.usborne-quicklinks.com

