

VILLA DESTRUCTIONS IN GALLIA BELGICA AND GERMANIA INFERIOR: REVIEWING THE EVIDENCE FOR RURAL CONFLAGRATIONS IN THE 3RD CENTURY

The dislocation of rural settlement in Northeastern Gaul and Roman Germany in the 3rd century marks an important shift in the socio-economic and political landscape of the region and a key turning point in the wider transformation of the Roman world. The abandonment of much of the rural landscape between c. 200 and c. 300 is an important part of the change from the Classical world to Late Antiquity and beyond. This depopulation pulse has long been identified in scholarship¹. Despite this intense study, there has been little critical analysis or examination of one particular facet of this, the destruction of rural settlements. Destruction is a vastly complex term with a series of interlinked spatial and temporal processes, often tied to other catastrophising terminology². Within Northeastern Gaul, the term is intimately tied to the narrative of a »3rd century crisis«³.

The evidence for the destruction of sites across the provinces of Gallia Belgica and Germania Inferior is complex, contradictory and poorly understood. Stratigraphic layers described as destruction horizons range from clear burnt deposits to dark earth horizons and everything in between. There is a severe lack of quantification or holistic studies. This paper provides a first step in this, examining the archaeological presence, evidence and scale of destructive activity at rural settlements across the northwestern provinces. To explore this, it will use villa complexes as a coherent dataset, given their well-researched nature and wide presence across the region⁴. It presents a clear methodology for the initial identification of destruction horizons and importantly, approaches this from an evidence-rooted point of view. It will not make judgements on the causes of either destruction or depopulation. Settlement destruction and abandonment can be the result of a wide variety of things – anything from raiders destroying a building to a knocked-over oil lamp leading to a conflagration. Instead of making conclusions on the causes, many of which are spread throughout the wider literature, this work will seek to provide an empirical base for assessing these deposits archaeologically⁵.

FROM »LOCAL CRISIS« TO »WORLD CRISIS« AND BACK AGAIN

Initially, destruction and the conceptualisation of a »3rd century crisis« were not strongly linked. The traditional grand narrative, strongly influenced by Edward Gibbon's »Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire«, dominated well into the 20th century⁶. This narrative of a long, slow decline from the 2nd century onwards was a key plank of late 19th century study with the literary sources given priority and archaeology serving to support their accounts. These sources painted a dark picture of unrest, invasion and collapse and this appeared to be confirmed in the *étiage*, fortification and destruction visible in the nascent archaeological record⁷. The conceptualisation of a »crisis« in the 3rd century was first applied before the First World War; however, it is clear that momentum was moving towards a consensus of »crisis« before this⁸. This trend accelerated after the war, with a narrative of »world crisis« developing, especially in the better explored Roman West⁹.

Following the Second World War, the narrative of empire-wide crisis was dominant¹⁰. The 3rd century was viewed as a crux point between »Classical Civilisation« and »Late Antiquity«. In Northwestern Europe, this was overwhelmingly a story of settlement destruction, depopulation and fortification, set against the backdrop of the wider crisis¹¹. From the 1860s onwards, archaeological excavations in Northern Gaul began to uncover destruction layers across a multitude of different sites, both rural and military and as chronotologies developed, these horizons began to be dated, rightly or wrongly, to the 3rd century¹². In this dark picture of instability, incoming waves of Germanic barbarians overwhelmed the frontiers in a *Limesfall*, something reinforced by the Niederbieber ceramic horizon on the Obergermanisch-Raetischer Limes and extrapolated to Lower Germany¹³. Archaeology was marshalled to support this, with destruction horizons, increased coin hoarding and limited coin losses reinforcing the narrative of fleeing refugee populations and plundering barbarians¹⁴. Waves of fortification were thrown up and funerary monuments demolished to quickly obtain the necessary material, forming a powerful symbol of this new, unstable world¹⁵. From the 1980s onwards, new studies established that the »world crisis« was something of a phantom¹⁶. »Crisis« was increasingly questioned as a viable model for the 3rd century; new analysis, more nuanced models and theoretical reconceptualisation began to shift scholarship towards more regional examinations of the period¹⁷. This wider shift had knock-on effects in the study of the 3rd century in the northwest. Numismatic studies identified the periodic supply gaps in the Low Countries whilst there has been a significant reassessment of urban contexts across Gaul¹⁸. This wider engagement with the 3rd century has put the focus back on rural depopulation and destruction in Gallia Belgica and Germania Inferior. As far back as the late 1970s, Paul van Ossel demonstrated half of all known Belgian villas survived the 3rd century intact, although destruction and transformation were a clear presence in the archaeological record¹⁹. This engagement slowly spread to other regions and there is now available data for the quantification of patterns in a variety of microregions of the German Rhineland and the west of the Netherlands²⁰. Although depopulation is now increasingly being examined, the destruction of settlements remains a particular problem within the archaeological narrative. Wider momentum is now moving in the direction of a critical re-evaluation of the meaning and representation of what destruction horizons represent in the biography of sites as well as the wider 3rd century landscape.

GALLIA BELGICA AND ROMAN GERMANY IN THE 3RD CENTURY

At the beginning of the 3rd century, Northwestern Gaul formed part of three provinces, Gallia Lugdunensis, Gallia Belgica and Germania Inferior (**fig. 1**). The landscape was dominated by villa complexes, with a dense »villa landscape« stretching from the Paris Basin through to the Rhine²¹. This belt of villas was concentrated in the fertile loess soils and extended into Northeastern France, where aerial photography has identified large numbers of axially orientated settlements across Picardy²². Further south, a second dense settlement corridor lay along the Mosel river network and the Eifel-Hunsrück massif, where villas were economically and socially dependent on their relationship with the *civitas* capital at Trier²³. The villa system developed in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, eventually colonising much of the primary farmland, and to some extent, other marginal landscapes through a combination of *ex novo* foundations and predecessor Iron Age sites²⁴. This system supplemented a hierarchy of larger urban centres and secondary settlements (variably termed *vici*, *agglomérations secondaires* or roadside settlements). Outwith the large urban centres, the *agglomérations* were generally undefended and acted as political, economic and social *foci* in the landscape²⁵. Indigenous traditions continued along the Menapian *civitas* as well as in the Dutch river area²⁶. This landscape has been very well researched with a series of important regional syntheses²⁷.

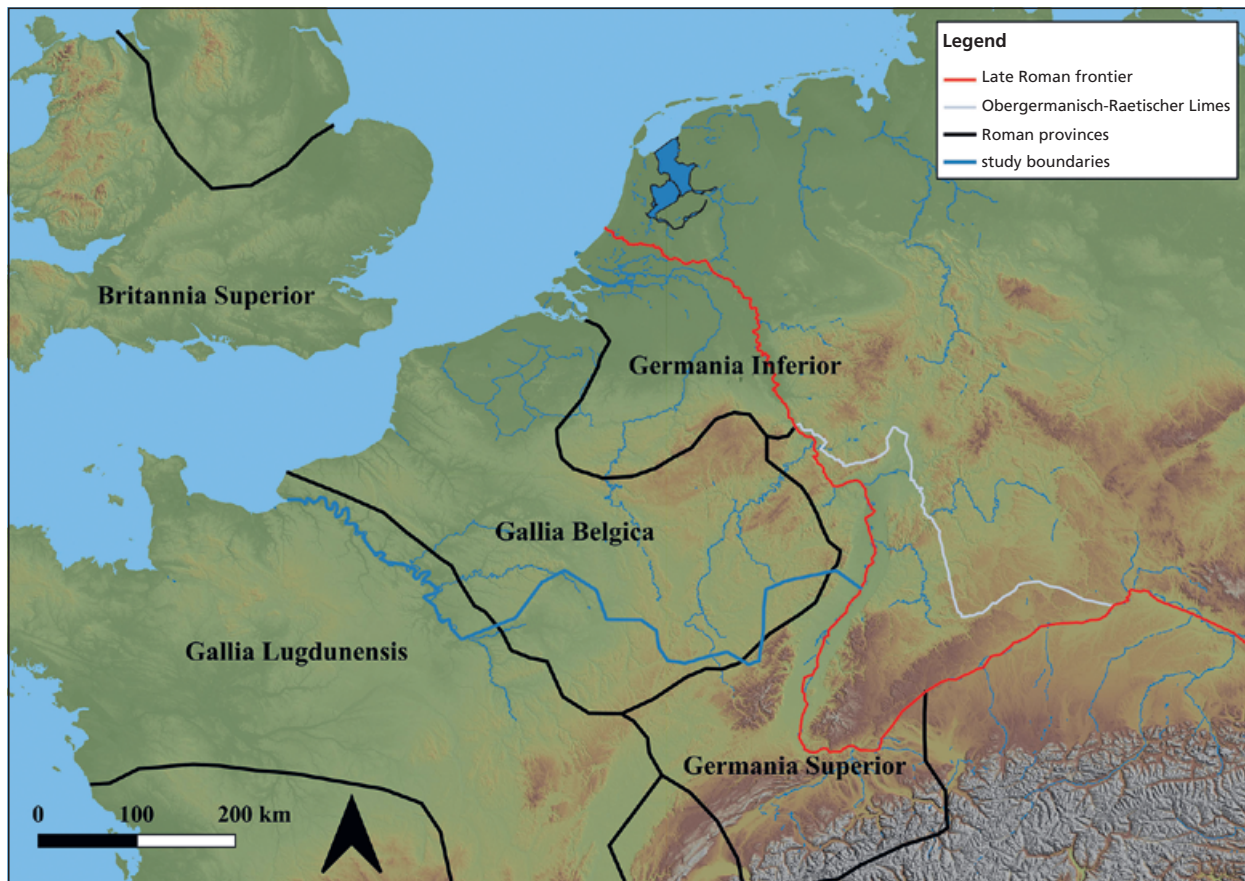


Fig. 1 The region under study: the northwestern provinces between c. 230 and c. 295. – (Map J. Dodd).

Over the course of the 3rd and early 4th centuries, this system broke down. The evidence suggests that the timber settlements and coastal sites in the Pas-de-Calais, Flanders and the Dutch coastal zone – classic »non-villa landscapes« – had begun to shrink in size from the late 2nd century onwards, perhaps having reached their economic carrying capacity²⁸. Building activity seems to have ceased in the 240s or by the latest, the 250s, suggesting widespread abandonment; some of which is marked by violent fire destruction²⁹. The »non-villa landscapes« appear to have experienced this depopulation pulse first, in the mid-3rd rather than later 3rd century. Potential instability or violence in the 250s and collateral from the withdrawal from the *Agri Decumates* further south may have played a role in the increased settlement instability, particularly in the 230s and 250s³⁰.

These trends continued to accelerate into the second half of the 3rd century, with major trans-Rhenian incursions noted in the historical sources in 259/260, 270 and 274/275³¹. Within this context, a usurper, Postumus, was declared emperor and, near uniquely, did not seek to depose the legitimate emperor, Gallienus. Termed the »Gallic Empire« (259/260–274/275) in the historiography, this state changed the balance of power north of the Alps and can be seen as both a consequence and contributor towards instability³². Archaeologically, there is limited evidence for problems from the late 2nd and early 3rd century decline at villa complexes, with destruction and abandonment noted in early excavations and associated with incursions of Chauci³³. From 250 onwards, we begin to encounter much more widespread abandonment and destruction across the loess belt. The picture is very patchy due to limited supra-regional data collection: it seems likely that several pulses of abandonment occurred. It is clear that the regions north of the Köln-Bavay road experienced the most intense bouts of abandonment, however the sequence and speed of this

remains unclear due to our chronological resolutions³⁴. In the Rhineland, micro-regional survival rates were under 10% by the early 4th century and it is clear that some regions had lost between 40 and 90% of their villa complexes prior to a limited early 4th century recovery³⁵. The case further west and south is vastly more complex; villas in Wallonia, Rheinland-Pfalz, Luxemburg and Picardy all experienced significant but poorly quantified abandonment pulses³⁶. This period of intense settlement flux was linked to the abandonment of *agglomérations* and the contraction of urban settlement, especially in the north of the region. Some sites, such as Voorburg-*Forum Hadriani* (prov. Zuid-Holland/NL) were abandoned completely, whilst others, such as Paris and Soissons (dép. Aisne/FR) contracted back to a newly built fortified core³⁷. Although some *agglomérations* did survive, by the 4th century, they were increasingly fortified and in some cases underwent destructive events, for example at Dalheim (Kt. Remich/LU) and Bliesbruck (dép. Moselle/FR)³⁸. The military *vici* associated with forts also disappeared during this period³⁹.

The reaction to this appears to have been complex. The early phases of many of the later road forts, urban wall defences and stone forts have been dated to the second half of the 3rd century and it seems as if a coherent defensive construction plan was attempted by the Gallic Emperors⁴⁰. This coincides with the development of new fortifications generally considered to be »emergency« creations at a range of rural settlements⁴¹. The state had largely withdrawn from the *Agri Decumates* by the end of the 3rd century and the Gallic Empire was reunified with the central regime under Aurelian in 274/275, although his successors continued to campaign in the region until the end of the century⁴². This broad period between c. 250 and 300 has been couched in terms of an intense crisis. From the late 19th century onwards, an interpretation of *Limesfall* – the collapse of frontier under external pressure was a common thread to this narrative⁴³. This was based on the assumption of a catastrophic *Alemannensturm* that swept over the *Agri Decumates* in the 230s, although we know now that this was a more complex and slow withdrawal and that the evidence of a *Limesfall* on the Lower Rhine is a phantom⁴⁴. These emotive and impressive description still holds some power in the study of the 3rd century, conjuring imagery of rampaging Germanic hordes leaving burning settlements, looted grave monuments and fleeing refugees in their wake. The period has gained a series of epithets, *la tourmente*, *Germanienfall*, *Katastrophenjahre*, *Frankensturm* and the picture of crisis remains well embedded into the wider narrative.

METHODOLOGY AND DATASET

The end of formal occupation at a site takes a myriad of different forms; rapid abandonment and collapse, planned demolition and long-term degradation are a limited few examples of these trajectories⁴⁵. These elements, particularly the conceptualisation of abandonment, have long been studied within archaeological scholarship and identified as unique events, catastrophic or otherwise, within the stratigraphic record⁴⁶. The problem of identifying them independent of each other is difficult given their interchangeable uses⁴⁷. Within Roman archaeology, scholarship has, until fairly recently been hamstrung by the »Pompeii Syndrome«, which assumes little or no use of a site after the end of formal occupation and can only be realistically applied to a small minority of sites⁴⁸. We are now, as a field, moving away from this to understanding the very long-term trajectories that some buildings and sites can take⁴⁹.

Can't Start a Fire without a Spark: Acts of Destruction in Archaeological Contexts

Destruction is a complex and contradictory activity, resulting from a range of processes within the archaeological record⁵⁰. What this represents is multifaceted: earthquakes, lightning strikes, raiding or even acci-

classification	evidence	no. of sites with evidence
refuse layers	portable material, high-value small-finds, human remains, ceramic debris	0
burning horizons	ash layers, black burnt wood, soot, fire-damaged structural elements collapse debris sealing layers	122
no. of sites with evidence of both		19
undescribed destructions		50
total		191

Tab. 1 Archaeological deposits labelled destruction horizons broken down by broad type within the study area. – (J. Dodd).

dents can be a cause. Instead, these diverse activities are united by a state-movement from *reversible* to *irreversible* and this has implications for reuse and/or reoccupation, regardless of cause⁵¹. Defining this term, both theoretically and practically is well advanced within the literature, however in Roman archaeology, and perhaps more critically, in the context of the 3rd century, there is much more limited analysis of this. Roman archaeology has been significantly influenced by the »acts of destruction« at Pompeii and the clearance and demolition of the 1st century legionary fortress at Inchtuthil in Scotland, both of which are rapid events of totality enacted by natural forces and a well-organised military unit, although it must be noted that post-abandonment activity occurred at Inchtuthil⁵². It is only in recent years, and only then in some regions, that the archaeological evidence for these processes and what can be termed »post-destruction« activities are being analysed⁵³ (**tab. 1**).

A clear definition system for assessing destruction horizons in Roman Northwestern Europe can be adapted from other fields⁵⁴. This definition system is based on a two-stage process laid out by Michael Schiffer in the 1980s; the **abandonment process** – the actions of the inhabitants leaving the site and the **destructive process** – the actions of the destroyer torching the site⁵⁵. Identifying this in the archaeological record is difficult, given that both processes can occur relatively simultaneously and therefore rely on two archaeological elements for analysis. Firstly, the **presence of refuse**. Finds of portable tools, equipment and ceramics as well as high-status elements such as jewellery or, in some places, coinage are indicative of sudden abandonment as such easily mobile objects were not removed⁵⁶. This can be further reinforced by the presence of skeletons, which point towards a rapid, catastrophic event although these are relatively rare and present their own unique issues⁵⁷. Work on the forts of the Obergermanisch-Raetischer Limes has highlighted the possibility of using weaponry to identify destruction levels⁵⁸. Given the rural nature of villas, this is not an option as very few of these sites can be classed as military. Secondly, **burning layers** outside cooking, industrial or, in a Roman case, bath house flues⁵⁹. Burn layers should be relatively self-evident, although it has been clear in Roman archaeology that mis-identifications are fairly common⁶⁰. Generally, fire damage should be easily identifiable; blackened stone, ash, charred wood and damaged or burnt artefacts can all point towards burn layers. A second element of this is the associated collapse deposit. Roof debris collapse when combined with burn deposits, can point towards destructive fires and support conclusions of a catastrophic event, for example at Assesse/Maillen-l'Arche (prov. Namur/BE) (**figs 2–3**). Obviously, there is significant variability in the way a structure collapses or the processes by which a fire itself spreads. Naturally the type of structure being burnt plays an important role in this; wooden buildings obviously take less time, less effort and crucially, less planning to destroy than a well-built bath structure. A good example of this is the villa at Basse-Wavre-L'Hoste (prov. Brabant Wallon/BE). One of the larger main buildings recorded in Belgium, the site consisted of some very opulent construction, several important mosaics, a large bath



Fig. 2 Recent discoveries of a destruction horizon (represented by the lower burn layer) recovered in a cellar at the villa of Assesse/Mailien-l'Arche (prov. Namur/BE). – (Reproduced with permission of Archéo-J. and S. Lefert).



Fig. 3 Collapse debris sealing a burn layer (see fig. 2) from a destructive event at the villa of Assesse/Mailien-l'Arche (prov. Namur/BE). – (Reproduced with permission of Archéo-J. and S. Lefert).

block and a double portico-façades⁶¹. The site was destroyed sometime between c. 254 and c. 276, ending occupation at the complex. This destruction was initially interpreted as total and caused by a *horde franke* [modern French – *franque*]⁶². Fire destruction of a site of this size would have taken significant planning and labour, something that does not necessarily fit with a picture of raiding warbands plundering the landscape. Fire and smoke would have alerted local populations and the army to their presence, potentially risking confrontation. It is much harder to burn a villa main building primarily built out of stone, an urban centre or a partially stone *vicus* without significant organisation and planning, something worth considering for future analysis of destructive events in the 3rd century⁶³. In these issues lies the inherent problem with destruction horizons - no single stratigraphic level is the same (figs 2–3 for examples from different parts of the same site). Archaeologically, the events of a structural collapse through destruction can come about by fire damage, building instability or a combination of factors⁶⁴.

In a villa context in Northwestern Europe, the evidence for destructive events varies wildly. Everything from mixed burnt layers complete with skeletons to Dark Earth/*terres noires* and intense damaged structural wood elements have been identified in the archaeological record⁶⁵. Our engagement with these horizons further confuses the problem with descriptions and drawings as varied as the horizons themselves. Studies

modern country	total no. of villas	total no. of identified destruction horizons	no. of destructions pre-200	no. of destructions 200–300	no. of destructions post-300	no. of undated horizons
FR, Île de France	12	8	0	5	3	0
FR, Grand Est	54	22	3	10	4	5
FR, Hauts-de-France	104	37	3	23	6	5
BE, Wallonia	127	38	3	28	7	0
BE, Flanders	23	5	0	5	0	0
The Netherlands	37	7	2	5	0	0
Luxemburg	53	18	0	11	5	2
DE, Saarland	8	6	1	3	2	0
DE, Rheinland-Pfalz	55	32	0	12	19	1
DE, Nordrhein-Westfalen	116	18	3	6	5	4
total sites	589	191	15	108	51	17

Tab. 2 Breakdown of the dataset by total number of destructions identified by period across the modern countries under study. – (J. Dodd).

range from well-formed examinations to 19th century assumptions and broad-brush accounts and there is little standardisation between *couche d'incendie*, *Zerstörungshorizont* or *brandlaag*⁶⁶. Reports, especially before the 21st century have been, by and large, strongly influenced by the historical sources. The underlying narrative of a 3rd century *Frankensturm* painted a picture of widespread devastation and destruction levels, where present, have sometimes been assumed to be much more widespread than reality. Limited destruction horizons were often extrapolated across the entire site and little thought was given to the reasoning behind them, with raiders usually assumed to be the guilty party. This has left us with a problematic knot of different types of destructive activity rolled into one supra-interpretation. By moving away from this towards the evidence itself, we can generate a system for grading the elements of a destruction and although beyond the scope of this article, a good next step would be to examine the spatial breakdown of destructive horizons, something that has paid dividends in the study of Late Bronze Age settlements in the Levant⁶⁷.

The Selected Dataset

The dataset comprises 191 destruction horizons spread across 172 different villa complexes. The dichotomy here is that some sites experienced multiple destruction events, with some sites, for example at Carignan-Maugré (départ. Moselle/FR), experiencing up to three separate destructions. This dataset is spread across the 5 modern countries that make up Roman Northwestern Gaul (**tab. 2**). Naturally this leaves significant variation in the collected data and includes evidence from 19th century excavations as well as modern scientific analysis. In order to standardise this, the start point for the research was to provide a structural examination of where and what destruction horizons had been noted in the published sources rather than re-evaluate their presence. This naturally includes the already noted 3rd century biases but remains an important first step in the process.

Dating was executed through close analysis of the chronological indicators, primarily the ceramic sequences and numismatic record, although both of these have problems for the late 3rd century⁶⁸. These issues can be managed by using broader 100-year chronological blocks. Although this does not necessarily give a highly precise resolution, it does avoid the teleological trap, repeatedly used in the literature, of clustering destruc-

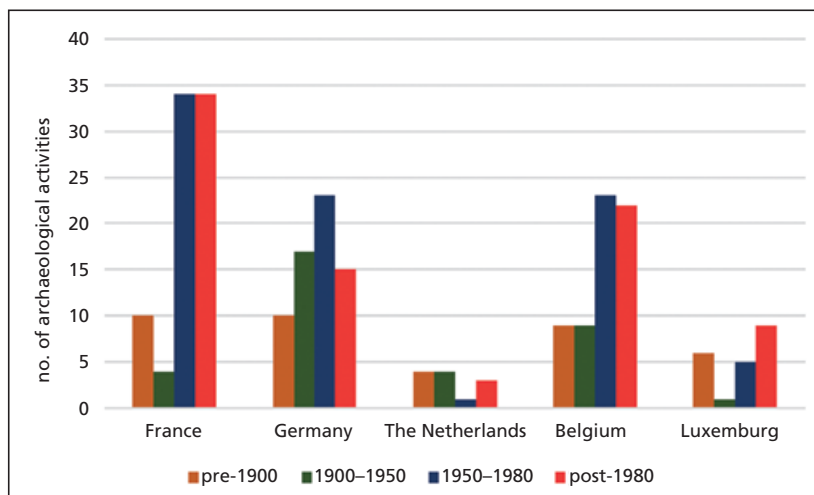


Fig. 4 Total number of identified destruction horizons by period of excavation. – (Graphic J. Dodd).

tion horizons on traditional dates associated with barbarian incursions, namely 260, 269/270 and 275/276. The evidence points towards an upswing in destruction layers in the 3rd century (**tab. 2**). This is suggestive of an increase in destructive events above and beyond a »normal« background rate of destruction. It is however, worth noting that this is not a universal picture. Destruction horizons in Rheinland-Pfalz for example increase in the 3rd century and actually peak in the 4th century. This is usually teleologically tied to a different event; a separate *Frankensturm* in the 350s linked to the usurpation of Magnentius⁶⁹.

Exploring this data breakdown in more detail demonstrates the temporal biases in our identification of destruction levels (**fig. 4**). The primary period in all countries other than the Netherlands for destruction identification is post-World War II (1950–1980). This coincides with the post-war economic boom which resulted in significant construction and archaeological investigation across Western Europe⁷⁰. Equally, this overlaps with the zenith of the »crisis« narrative and is further reinforced by the traumatic experience of the World Wars, so incidents of destruction would be expected in the narrative. These often correlate both with the hoarding pattern, as well as the routes taken by the German Army in 1914 and Wehrmacht during the Battle of France in 1940⁷¹.

It is noticeable that this peak remains high beyond the 1980s, especially in France and Belgium. This may represent several things. Firstly, a possible representative bias as some regions have taken longer to move away from a narrative of crisis and destruction and secondly, it may demonstrate the shift to preventative archaeology, which has allowed a significantly larger but less targeted sample size from different settlements and regions. What it does appear to represent is the real presence of destruction horizons recorded in modern, scientific excavations⁷². **Figure 4** illustrates the long-term spread of identification of destructive events in the archaeological record and by and large, shows that their discovery and analysis is primarily a fixture of 20th and 21st century archaeology rather than a 19th century concept. The exception here is the Netherlands where there has been very limited modern excavation of villa complexes⁷³.

Spatial Distributions

Regionally, there is a limited pattern to destruction horizons (**fig. 5**). There is a significant increase towards the eastern and southern zones of the study area. The densest zones of destruction lie in Wallonia and Rheinland-Pfalz with a smaller group towards the western edge of the region, in Hauts-de-France and Île-de-France. The evidence for widespread 3rd century destruction is fairly limited and concentrated in specific

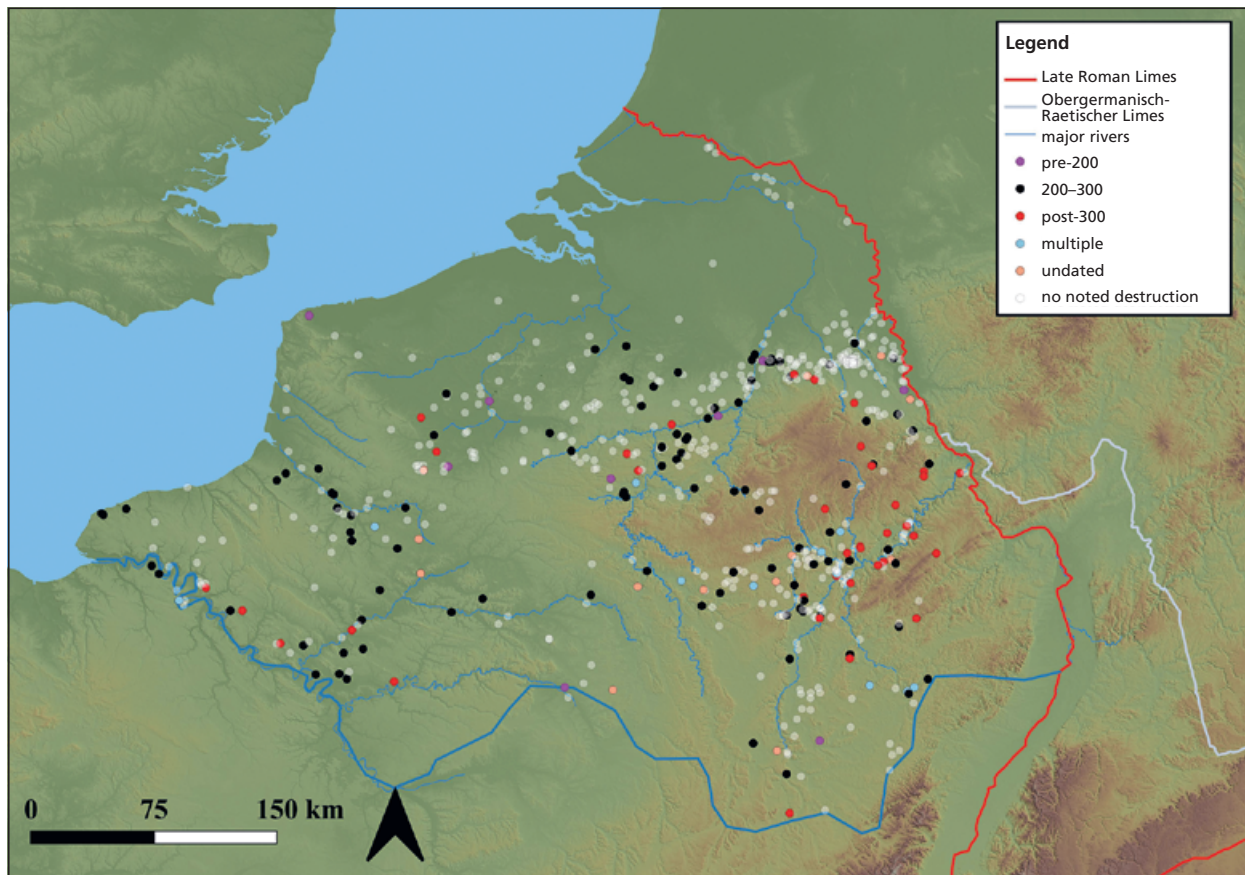


Fig. 5 Plotting destruction: sites with identified destruction horizons in the northwestern continental provinces, broken down by chronology. – (Map J. Dodd).

zones despite the presence of widespread abandonment pulses in the rural landscape⁷⁴. Where present, destructions are broadly focused on riverine corridors. The Somme, Aisne, Mosel, Seine and Maas networks see significant clusters of villa destructions, dating both to the 3rd and 4th centuries. This may partly be the result of excavation biases but this is worth further analysis, for example, integrating destruction horizons at other site types such as *agglomérations secondaires* may draw out further patterns⁷⁵.

Figure 5 does illustrate how flawed any kind of invasion mapping based on destructions can be. Traditional approaches highlighted invasion routes from the Rhine, with marauding barbarians passing into Gaul across the Ardennes. The hoarding pattern has been repeatedly used to identify the routes of these incursions and destruction horizons were linked to this in large-scale mapping⁷⁶. There is a limited discernible pattern to this when considering destructions – simply, where there are villas, there are destruction horizons. Naturally, zones with the most intense villa landscapes, the Mosel and the loess belt, contain the largest number of destruction horizons of all periods. The cluster of sites in Dutch Limburg, primarily excavated in the 19th and early 20th centuries, is probably worth further investigation. A range of closely linked complexes, located around the Geul river, all appeared to have been destroyed between the 2nd and late 3rd centuries, with limited evidence for occupation into Late Antiquity⁷⁷. Unfortunately, the physical quality of these remains, coupled with poor descriptions and limited modern trial trenches makes it difficult to assess this as a wider phenomenon⁷⁸. In some cases, these horizons were well described for the period, however, the majority cannot be further understood, making it imperative to re-examine the region more holistically with targeted excavation to re-examine destruction levels⁷⁹.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has demonstrated the wild variability in our current dataset of destruction horizons at villa complexes in the northwestern provinces. The evidence remains patchy, complex and has limited temporal and spatial patterns with a research history riddled with biases. This study is by no means a complete survey but rather represents an important jump off point for future research in the field by providing a method for destruction horizon assessment going forward and a current review of the available evidence. This paper acts as a call for more integrated thinking and further projects in the field, and there are three important recommendations I would like to make to develop this:

- **A standardised approach to destruction horizons** going forward is a clear necessity. Our understanding of these layers remains problematic: typologies have never been applied nor do we have a coherent strategy for dealing with them archaeologically. Exploring potential guidelines for the investigation of these horizons and a close analysis of the type of destructive activity is a priority for understanding these levels. Re-identification is also a key plank of future research. Where they survive, it is imperative to examine the variation in excavated destruction horizons and assess what exactly was identified in original reports. An important development to this would be the spatial analysis of where destruction horizons were actually identified on sites, allowing clearer study of their nature.
- **Transnational data collection** has shown that data integration can pay dividends in understanding change across larger chronological units. Integrating destruction and depopulation in a »Big Data« approach will help to negate »silosisation« and build on current open-access databases such as *Rurland*, the *Rural Settlement of Roman Britain* and *Rural Riches*, allowing the resolution and data to make empirical examinations of the destruction pattern on a very large scale⁸⁰. Expanding this beyond the villas to other rural settlements, urban centres and *agglomérations secondaires* would also pay dividends for future work and avoid the isolation of different research trends⁸¹.
- **Chronologies are key** to building a more concrete resolution for these horizons. Stijn Heeren has called for a re-appraisal of the »Niederbieber horizon« whilst there are identified problems with our Samian chronologies⁸². Coarse ware dating should be a priority for understanding the temporal progression of depopulation and destruction. This should be used in conjunction with scientific methods to attempt to provide a backing to our chronology of the 3rd century, although it is clear that C-14 have significant issues.

Destruction is a key element to site biographies across all periods but has been little examined in the northwestern provinces of the Roman Empire. The 3rd century represents a good testing ground to explore this given the problematic transitional nature of the period and the important shifts in rural socio-economical functionality that it entails. Exploring destruction is one prong of this and requires further companion work in the identification and analysis of associated depopulation pulses on a broad canvas. These are key to understanding how the landscape developed and functioned in the 4th century and significant further analysis is needed to move this forward. This initial survey acts as a call for future work and increased investigation of what these thorny issues represent for Roman provincial archaeology.

Funding

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Notes

- 1) van Ossel 1992; van Ossel/Ouzoulias 2000; Heeren 2015; 2018; Dodd 2021a.
- 2) Lucas 2008; Driessen 2013a; Cunningham/Driessen 2017 for overviews of the literature on this.
- 3) Witschel 1999; 2004; Heeren 2015, 273–274.
- 4) Agache 1978; van Ossel 1992; Henrich 2006; Brulet 2008; Roymans/Derks 2011; Seiler 2015.
- 5) van Es 1981; Wightman 1985; Heeren 2015; Roymans/Heeren 2022 to name a few studies examining causation.
- 6) Gibbon 1776–1789.
- 7) Cf. Alföldy 1974.
- 8) Blanchet 1900; 1907, 299–318; Grenier 1906, 119–121; Homo 1913.
- 9) Lot 1927; 1937; Grenier 1934, 890–900; de Maeyer 1937, 292–297; Vannérus 1942, 11–14.
- 10) Lot 1947, 238–249; cf. de Blois 2007; cf. Esmonde-Cleary 2013, ch. 1.
- 11) Wightman 1970, 54–55; 1985, 191–192; Johnson 1983, 67–81; Willems 1984, 273–274.
- 12) Holwerda/Goossens 1907; Braat 1934.
- 13) van Es 1981, 47–48; cf. Heeren 2016.
- 14) Wightman 1970, 52–58; 1985, 193–200; Agache 1978, 378–382; Fischer 1999; Schulzki 2001.
- 15) Gilles 1985; Wightman 1985, 240; cf. Brulet 1990; Cüppers 1993, 87.
- 16) King/Henig 1981; Drinkwater 1983.
- 17) Strobel 1993; Witschel 1999; 2004; de Blois 2002; 2016; Liebeschuetz 2007.
- 18) Kropff/van der Vin 2003; van Heesch 2020; Mairat 2022 for coinage; Schatzmann/Martin-Kilcher 2011; Fischer 2012 for wider studies.
- 19) van Ossel 1978; 1987; 1992; Dodd 2021a.
- 20) Gechter/Kunow 1986; Lenz 1999; Vos 2009, 89–99; Heeren 2015; 2017; De Bruin 2019.
- 21) Roymans/Derks 2011; Gaitzsch 2011; Jeneson 2011; Reddé 2017.
- 22) Agache/Bréart 1975; Agache 1978.
- 23) Henrich 2006; 2010a, 158; cf. Krier/Henrich 2011.
- 24) Clotuche 2009; Habermehl 2013.
- 25) Petit/Mangin 1994; Coquet et al. 2011.
- 26) Henrich 2006; Vos 2009; de Clercq 2011; Roymans et al. 2015.
- 27) Henrich 2006; Heeren 2009; Vos 2009; Roymans/Derks 2011; Habermehl 2013; Seiler 2015; Reddé 2017; 2018; Brüggler et al. 2017 to name a few recent studies.
- 28) Heeren 2009, 49–74; Vos 2009, 89–99.
- 29) Heeren 2015; van Thienen 2017, 120 fig. 1; de Bruin 2019, 213–216; Roymans/Heeren 2022, 136 fig. 2; Vanhoutte 2023, 37–39.
- 30) Drinkwater 1987, 21; Reuter 2007, 81–86; cf. Heeren 2016; Scherer 2020, 16.
- 31) Witschel 1999, 347–349; cf. Heeren 2015, 272; 2016.
- 32) König 1981; Drinkwater 1987.
- 33) Habets 1871, 384–385; Holwerda/Goossens 1907.
- 34) Schulzki 2001; King 2013.
- 35) Gechter/Kunow 1986; Lenz 1999; van Thienen 2017; Dodd 2021a, 91–92 fig. 4.21.
- 36) van Ossel 1992; Giljohann et al. 2017, 138; Bernigaud et al. 2017, 285–286.
- 37) Coquelet 2011, 219–230; Wightman 1981.
- 38) Plumier/Hanut 2010; Krier 2011a; Petit/Santoro 2016, 249; Clotuche et al. 2017; Brulet 2017; Kasprzyk 2017; 2019.
- 39) Arbuthnot 2014 for a comparative look at military *vici* on Hadrian's Wall; Vanhoutte 2023, 37–39 for Oudenburg (prov. West-Vlaanderen/BE).
- 40) Johnson 1983; Brulet 1990 for large surveys, Brulet et al. 1995; Reddé 2021 for an overview of the state response; Vanhoutte 2023 for examples .
- 41) Henrich 2010b; 2016/2017; Krier 2011b; Dodd 2023.
- 42) SHA, specifically Life of the Deified Aurelian, Life of Probus; Paneg. 7; Drinkwater 1987, 42–43; Scherer 2020; Christol 2021.
- 43) Mommsen 1894, 150–152; Koethe 1942; van Es 1981, 47–48.
- 44) Schönberger 1969, 175–177; cf. Heeren 2016; Scherer 2020.
- 45) Cameron/Tomka 1993; Stanton/Magnoni 2008, 6–9.
- 46) Derrida 2007, 457; Driessen 2013a; 2013b.
- 47) Favier/Granet-Abisset 2005; Engels et al. 2013; Cunningham/Driessen 2017.
- 48) Cf. Schiffer 1985.
- 49) Keevill 1995; Howell 2000; Gerrard 2008; for a specific structural example, see Gerrard/Seddon 2022.
- 50) Schiffer 1972; 1987; Driessen/Macdonald 1997; LaMotta/Schiffer 1999; Driessen 2013b, 11–12.
- 51) Lucas 2008; Driessen 2013a; Snead 2016, 134–136.
- 52) Pitts/St. Joseph 1985, 279–280; Shirley 2000, 159–160; Rakoczy 2008; Driessen 2013a; Kreimerman 2017.
- 53) Gerrard 2008; Henrich 2011; Krier 2011a; Vanhoutte 2023, 96–97.
- 54) Kreimerman 2017, 176–178.
- 55) Schiffer 1987, 89–90; cf. Kreimerman 2017, 176.
- 56) Schiffer 1972; 1987.
- 57) See examples at Weisweiler 112 (Aachen/DE): Becker/Päffgen 2003; Obergermanisch-Raetischer Limes: Scherer 2020, 94–101 for a summary; Dodd 2021b for a range of burials in villa complexes.
- 58) Scherer 2020.
- 59) **Tab. 1**; Schiffer 1987, 89.

- 60) Cf. Hiddink 2022, 327.
- 61) Brulet 2008, 297–299.
- 62) Dens/Poils 1905, 324.
- 63) Kreimerman 2017, 178.
- 64) Gerrard 2008; Tringham 2013; Kreimerman 2017.
- 65) Braat 1953, 53; Matthys 1973, 14–15 fig. 5; Raepsaet 1974, 4; cf. Verslype/Brulet 2004 for the problems of Dark Earth.
- 66) Habets 1871, 384–385; Goossens et al. 1908; Leblois/Leblois 1970, 17–18.
- 67) Kreimerman 2017.
- 68) Delange 2003; King 2013; Mairat 2022.
- 69) Wigg-Wolf 1991.
- 70) Habermehl 2013, 21 tab. 2.2; Dodd 2021a, 28.
- 71) Démougeot 1969; Johnson 1983, 75 fig. 24.
- 72) For example, Chavignon-La Malmaison (départ. Aisne/FR) – Derbois et al. 2007; Merbes-le-Château-Champ de Saint Éloi (prov. Hainaut/BE) – Authom/Paridaens 2015, 50–51 figs 19, 22; 23, 74–75.
- 73) Tichelman 2005; Hiddink 2022.
- 74) Cf. van Ossel/Ouzoulias 2000; Dodd 2021a, 92 fig. 4.3.
- 75) Agache 1978; Derbois et al. 2007; Duvette 2017.
- 76) Blanchet 1900; Koethe 1942; van Gansbeke 1952; 1955; cf. Drinkwater 1987, 199–205; van Heesch 2020.
- 77) Cf. de Groot 2006; 2007.
- 78) de Groot 2007, 58–63 for the example of Valkenburg-Heihof (prov. Limburg/NL).
- 79) Habets 1871, 427–428; de Groot 2005 for a description of Meerssen-Onderste Herkenberg (prov. Limburg/NL).
- 80) Lawrence 2022.
- 81) Mattingly 2017, 152.
- 82) King 2013; Heeren 2016, 202–203.

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Villenerstörungen in Gallia Belgica und Germania Inferior. Analyse der Zeugnisse für ländliche Brandkatastrophen im 3. Jahrhundert

Die Zerstörung von Siedlungen ist ein wichtiges, aber problematisches Element der ländlichen Besiedlung im nordwestlichen Gallien des 3. Jahrhunderts und in der Erzählung von der »Krise des 3. Jahrhunderts«. Zerstörungshorizonte finden sich in einem breiten Spektrum von Fundstellentypen und stehen in Verbindung mit gut belegten Entvölkerungsschüben in Gallia Belgica und Germania Inferior. Trotzdem ist die Zerstörung ein kaum verstandenes Element der Veränderungen im 3. Jahrhundert. Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Geschichtsschreibung, die diesen Horizonten zugrunde liegt, und geht auf ihre archäologische Darstellung ein, indem er Villen als zusammenhängenden Datensatz verwendet. Der Artikel präsentiert einen ersten Überblick über die Befunde und stellt eine neue Methodik zur Bewertung und Charakterisierung dieser Horizonte vor. Damit zielt der Beitrag darauf ab, einen *status quaestionis* unseres heutigen Verständnisses des Phänomens und einen Ausgangspunkt für künftige Arbeiten zu bieten.

Villa Destructions in Gallia Belgica and Germania Inferior. Reviewing the Evidence for Rural Conflagrations in the 3rd Century

The destruction of settlements is an important but problematic element of rural occupation in 3rd century Northwestern Gaul and is rooted in the narrative of a »3rd century crisis«. Destruction horizons proliferate at a wide range of site types and are tied to well-attested depopulation pulses in Gallia Belgica and Roman Germany. Despite this, destruction is a poorly understood element to the 3rd century changes. This paper examines the historiography behind these horizons and addresses their archaeological representation using villas as a coherent dataset. It provides an initial overview of the evidence and presents a new methodology for assessing and characterising these horizons. In this, the paper intends to provide a *status quaestionis* of our current understanding of the phenomenon and a jumping-off point for future work.

Destructions de villas en Gaule Belgique et Germanie inférieure. Analyse des données relatives aux conflits ruraux au 3^e siècle

La destruction d'établissements ruraux est un élément important, mais problématique de l'occupation rurale dans le nord-ouest de la Gaule au 3^e siècle, qui est enraciné dans le récit d'une »crise du 3^e siècle«. Les couches d'incendie prolifèrent sur un large éventail de types de sites et sont liées à des vagues de dépeuplement bien attestées en Gaule Belgique et Germanie inférieure. Malgré cela, la destruction est un élément mal compris des changements intervenant au 3^e siècle. Cet article examine l'historiographie qui sous-tend ces horizons et aborde leurs représentations archéologiques en utilisant les villas comme un ensemble de données cohérent. Il fournit une première vue d'ensemble des preuves et présente une nouvelle méthodologie pour évaluer et caractériser ces horizons. En cela, l'article vise à fournir un *status quaestionis* de notre compréhension actuelle du phénomène et un point de départ pour les travaux futurs.

Schlüsselwörter / Keywords / Mots-clés

Römisches Reich / Spätantike / Zerstörungshorizont / Krise des 3. Jahrhunderts / ländliche Siedlung
Roman Empire / Late Antiquity / destruction / 3rd century crisis / rural settlement
Empire romain / Antiquité tardive / horizon de destruction / crise du 3^e siècle / habitat rural

James Dodd

Université Catholique de Louvain
Centre de recherche d'archéologie nationale, INCAL
Place Cardinal Mercier 53/L3.03.01
BE - 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve
james.dodd@uclouvain.be
ORCID: 0000-0002-9165-6907