

## The Excavation of Villa C at Casale Dragoncello (Acilia)

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*Questo studio riguarda l'area del Dragoncello, nel suburbio ostiense, presso la moderna cittadina di Acilia. Gli scavi condotti sin dagli anni '80 dello scorso secolo hanno portato alla luce fattorie e grandi ville rustiche che delineano l'interesse della classe romana abbiente per quest'area. Lo scavo della Villa C, la più grande attualmente nota in questo territorio, con il suo monumentale quadriportico doppio, è un altro tassello fondamentale alla comprensione di un'area di enorme interesse archeologico e storico, a poca distanza dall'Urbe.*

### *The Dragoncello Area*

The Dragoncello area (fig. 1), in the modern town of Acilia (Rome), is the most known and excavated portion of Ostia's environs: the archaeological research, led since the early 1980s, has established the interest of the Roman élite for this territory, appreciated for its fertile soil and the short distance from Rome (fig. 2).

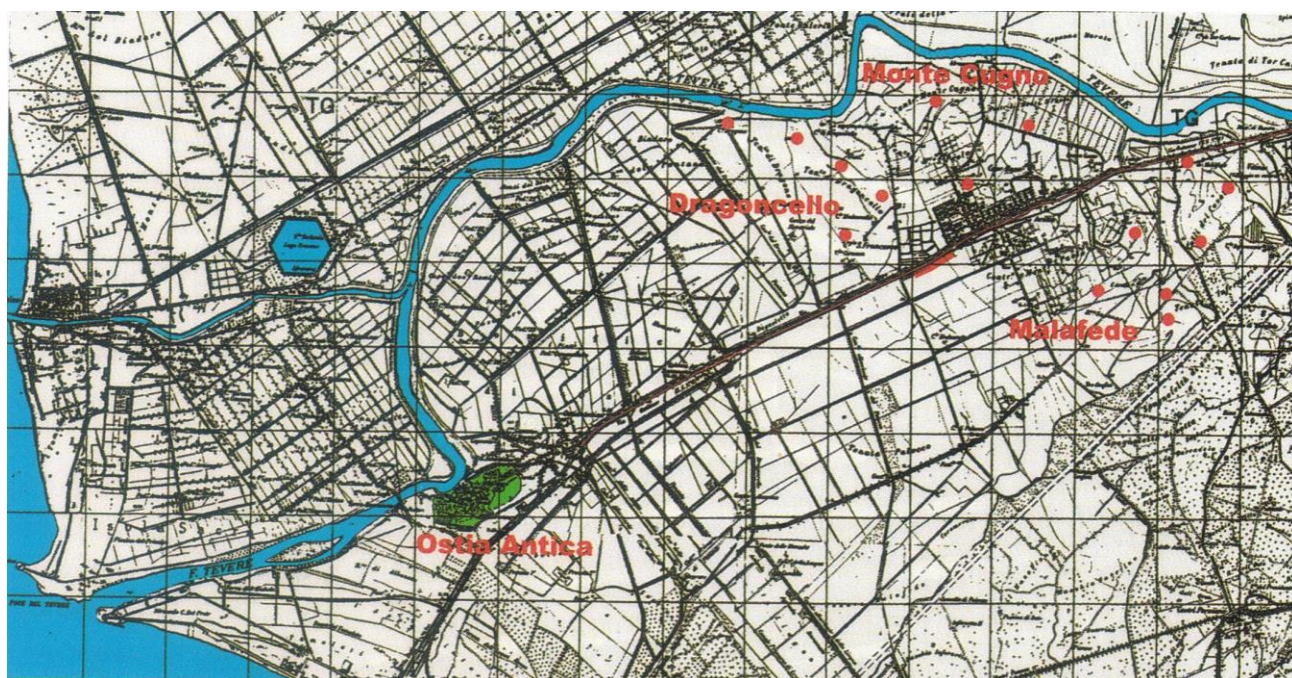


Fig. 1. Plan of Ostia's environs (PELLEGRINO 2003, fig.1).

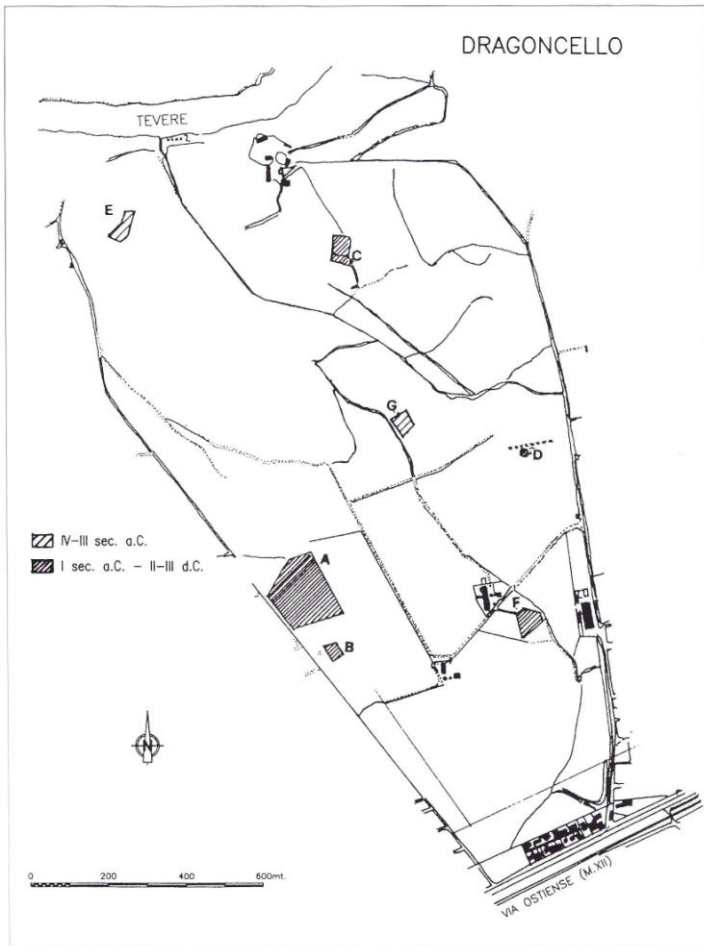


Fig. 2. The Dragoncello Area (PELLEGRINO 2004: fig. 3).

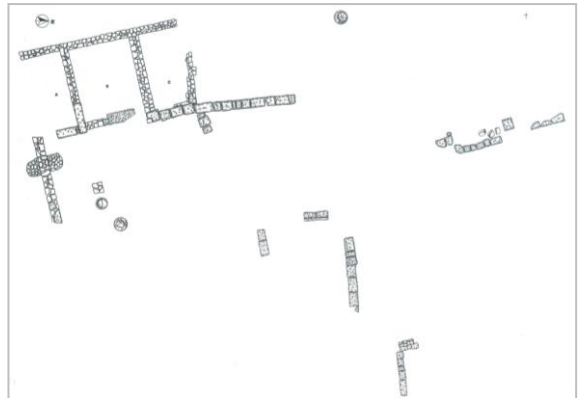


Fig. 3. Area G: an example of the construction technique (PELLEGRINO 2003, fig.16).

Fig. 4. Area G: plan of the remains (PELLEGRINO 2003, fig.17).

The first Roman occupation of the area dates between the second half of the 4th and the early 3rd c. B.C., probably as a consequence of the foundation of the colony at Ostia. This early phase sees the construction of small scale farms (Areas E and G), built with a simple technique in which the main walls are in *opus quadratum* of tufa blocks, the dividing walls in stones of different sizes, irregular tufa blocks and fragments of roof tiles disposed without the use of concrete, while simple earthen floors covered the rooms (figs. 3-4). It is very difficult to distinguish the function of the single rooms since the buildings were extremely damaged in the last century by intense ploughing. According to A. Pellegrino these farms were abandoned during the second half of the 2nd - 1st c. B.C. as indicated by the study of the pottery and the lack of structures in *opus caementicium*<sup>1</sup>. These sites were not occupied by new constructions and they were probably not visible even in the last century of the Republic<sup>2</sup>.

Starting from the 3rd c. large villas equipped for more extensive agricultural work (Villas A, F and C) were built<sup>3</sup>.

Villa A (fig. 5) is located in the south-western sector of the Dragoncello area and its extension is probably more than 2000 sq.m.<sup>4</sup>.

At the time of its latest phase, it was divided into three sectors:

<sup>1</sup> PELLEGRINO 1983: 81-82.

<sup>2</sup> This might be rare archaeological evidence of the economical crisis that seems to have taken place in the 2nd c. For a summary of the different opinions concerning this supposed crisis, see DI GIUSEPPE PATTERSON 2009: 7-26.

<sup>3</sup> PELLEGRINO 1986: 297.

<sup>4</sup> PELLEGRINO 1984: 195.



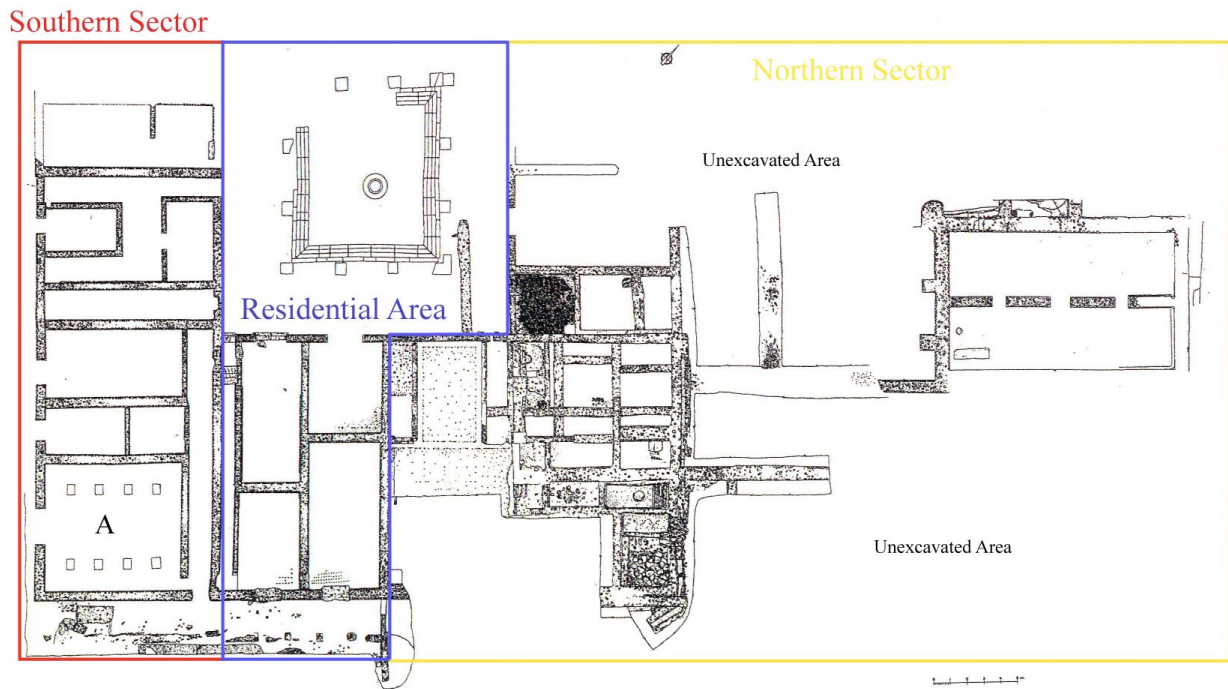


Fig. 5. Plan of Villa A (PELLEGRINO 2004, fig. 6 with the addition of colours, numbers and letters to identify the different sectors).

1. The heart of the complex corresponds to the Residential Area arranged around a Corinthian atrium, where bases for fired-brick columns and a well are still preserved. On its eastern side there are four rooms with walls in *opus incertum* and mortar floors in fine lime, embellished with polychrome stones positioned randomly<sup>5</sup>.

2. The southern sector includes different rooms with an unclear function, delimited by walls in *opus incertum* and covered with *cocciopesto* floors. In this sector, there is also Room A, probably a warehouse: it is covered with an earthen floor and divided into three naves by pillars made with an unusual technique: the bricks used are typical of *opus spicatum* (this is an *unicum* for the villas around Rome<sup>6</sup>); the plan of this warehouse, with a wider central aisle, was probably functional to the movement of the wagons indoors.

3. The northern sector, the *pars rustica*, is the most deteriorated part of the villa. It has revealed rooms delimited by walls in *opus reticulatum* and covered with *cocciopesto* floors (one of the rooms, however, has tiles with a rhomboidal shape). The find of three *dolia* with a capacity of 1000 litres each and some drains suggests a productive function, probably a *torcularium*<sup>7</sup>. A cistern, in *opus testaceum*, was excavated in one of the limits of the sector: it is attributed to an important renovation which took place in the mid 2nd c. A.D. During these works, no important planimetric changes were carried out, although the connections among the rooms were modified, sometimes walling up doors with bricks.

Villa A, the oldest known in the area, was probably built in the 3rd c. B.C. as new excavation works revealed. In fact, the campaigns led in the 1980s and 1990s have been followed by a new excavation project, undertaken starting from 2016<sup>8</sup>.

Not far from this villa, in the southern portion of the Dragoncello Area (Area B), the remains of a large foundation wall in fragments of tufa stone have an uncertain function; it might be interpreted as an enclosure for animals connected to the main building.

<sup>5</sup> PELLEGRINO 2001: 235. In previous publications these floors are indicated as *scutulatum*. For the unclear interpretation of this term, see PELLEGRINO 2017: 30-31.

<sup>6</sup> DE FRANCESCHINI 2005: 254-255.

<sup>7</sup> PELLEGRINO 1984: 195; DE FRANCESCHINI 2005: 254.

<sup>8</sup> The first preliminary results were presented during the congress "Il territorio ostiense: Nuovi dati e studi inediti" at the Ecole Française de Rome, 16-17 November 2016, on a poster entitled "La villa A di Dragoncello (Acilia). Notizie preliminari sulla ripresa dello scavo", by G. Olcese, X. González Muro and A. Pellegrino; during the congress "Oltre Roma medio repubblicana: il Lazio tra i galli e la battaglia di Zama", 7-9 June 2017 at the British School in Rome, Università "La Sapienza" and Palazzo Patrizi Clementi, on a poster entitled "La Villa A di Dragoncello: la ripresa degli scavi", by G. Olcese, A. Pellegrino, X. Gonzalez Muro, A. Razza, D.M. Surace; OLCESE, GONZÁLEZ MURO, PELLEGRINO 2017.

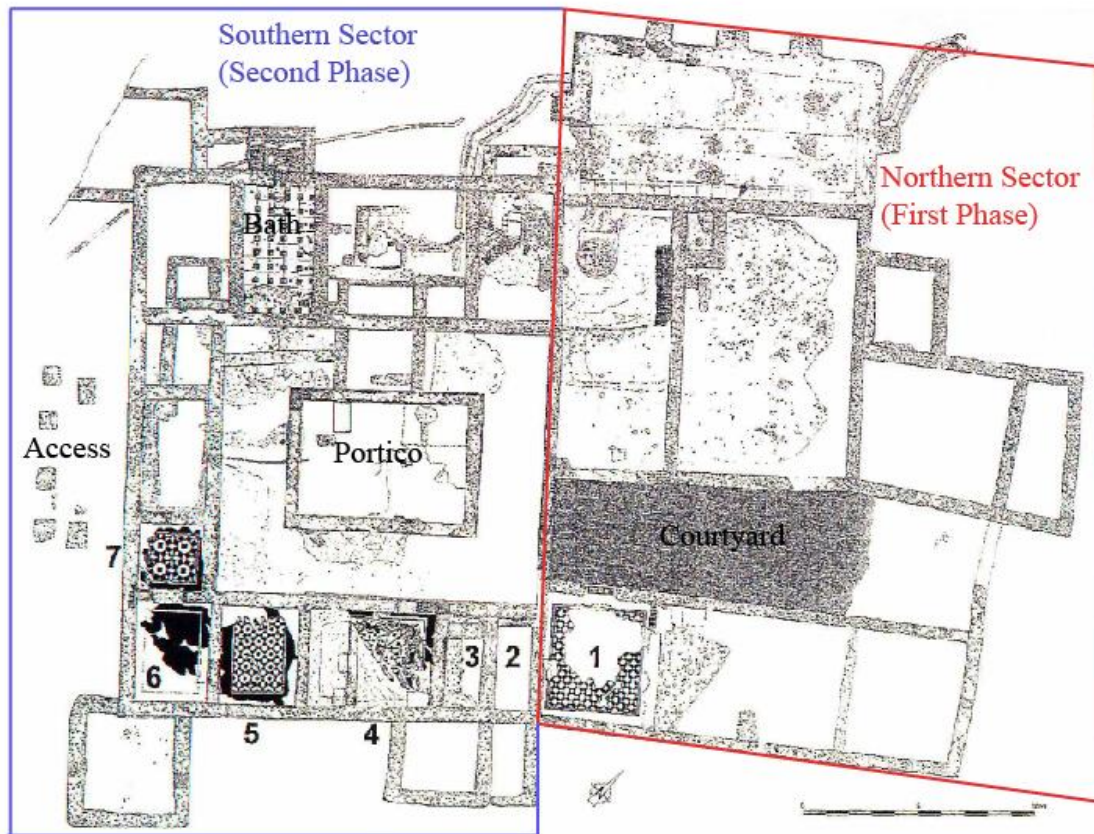


Fig. 6. Plan of Villa F (PELLEGRINO 2001, fig. 4 with the addition of colours and writings to identify the different sectors).

Between the late Empire and the Early Middle Ages, soon after its abandonment, the area of the villa started to be covered by cappuccina-like graves.

Villa F<sup>9</sup> (fig. 6), the closest to the *Via Ostiensis*, was installed in the 1st c. B.C. and completely renovated in the 2nd c. A.D. The oldest remains are preserved in the northern sector: the *pars rustica*. This is arranged around a long narrow courtyard, covered with an irregular *opus spicatum*, surrounded by rooms with scant traces of the original floors. The exception is Room 1 which revealed an interesting geometric mosaic, decorated in black rectangles disposed along diagonals and surrounded by a frame with two black lines (fig. 7a): this decoration is widespread from the Augustan period to the 2nd century<sup>10</sup>.

For this first phase, it is not possible to establish the exact extension and plan of the villa due to the extensive renovation works of the mid 2nd c. A.D. (second phase), as dated by brick stamps<sup>11</sup>.

During this second phase, the villa was extended southward and the floor level in use was elevated. The new access on the southern end of the villa (five bases for columns or pillars still survive) led to the central portico, the heart of the new complex, decorated with a fountain in its centre and surrounded by rooms with different functions: to the west, there was a little bath with *suspensurae* and a *praefurnium*, to the east, four rooms with beautiful mosaics in black and white tiles with geometric decorations (for example Rooms 5 and 7) (fig. 7b) or figurative designs (Room 4)<sup>12</sup>. In particular, the mosaic of Room 4 depicts a horse and a panther in the act of running, framed by an elegant design with plants of acanthus and a vine wrapped around a stick surmounted by a bird, interpreted as a Dionysus' *thyrsus*<sup>13</sup>. This representation, visible in the mosaic's remaining por-

<sup>9</sup> PELLEGRINO 2001: 235-237.

<sup>10</sup> PELLEGRINO 2001: 237.

<sup>11</sup> PELLEGRINO 2004: 37.

<sup>12</sup> PELLEGRINO 2003: 39-99.

<sup>13</sup> PELLEGRINO 2001: 238-239.



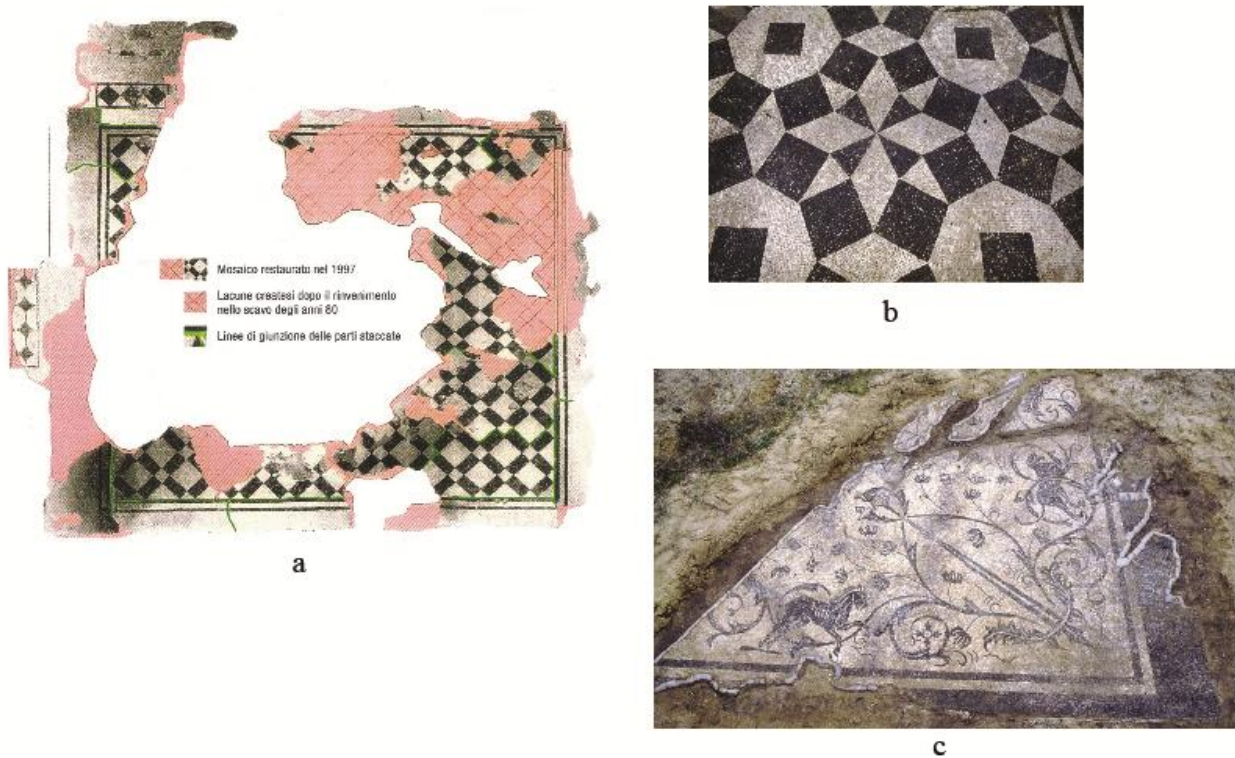


Fig. 7. Mosaics from Villa F (fig. 7a - PELLEGRINO 2003, fig. 20); (fig. 7b shows the mosaic of Room 7 - archive of the Soprintendenza di Ostia); (fig. 7c shows the mosaic of Room 4 - archive of the Soprintendenza di Ostia).

tions (fig. 7c), has been extended to the other lost corners. This decoration could refer to the four seasons, a typical theme of the most visited rooms of the *domus*, intended to show the influence of the owners<sup>14</sup>.

One of the most interesting finds from this villa is a travertine tripod base mentioning the praetors *Silius* and *Critonius*<sup>15</sup>, found recycled in the western area of the southern sector, in the make-up created to level the area on which the structures of the second phase were built<sup>16</sup>. It is not clear if the base was part of the decorations of the first phase, before its reuse, or if it came from a nearby sanctuary; it is dated between the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 1st c. B.C.<sup>17</sup>. Its main interest consists in the names of the two magistrates from the *gentes Critonia* and *Silia* who held important political positions in ancient Rome; some of their members were personally known to Cicero, as the orator's letters suggest. Members of the *gens Silia* seem to have had properties in the neighbourhood of Ostia, near the Tiber (Att. 12.23-25 and 27)<sup>18</sup>. From this conclusion, the find of the inscribed base near Ostia is not surprising and the vicinity of the Dragoncello area to the Tiber river increases the possibility that Villa F, in its early phase, belonged to the *gens Silia* and this was the place where the tripod base could have been originally set.

#### *Villa C at Casale Dragoncello: The Chronological Evolution (Phases I-IV)*

The presence of an important Roman villa in this area was already discovered in the early 1980s however extensive excavation works have been undertaken only during the last few years. Known in previous publications as Villa C<sup>19</sup>, it is not far from the modern town of Acilia, between Via di Dragoncello and Viale Ottaviani (figs. 8-9).

<sup>14</sup> PELLEGRINO 2017: 30-31.

<sup>15</sup> *P(ublius) Sil(i)us C(ai) f(i)lius M(arcus) Critoni(us) M(arci) f(i)lius pr(aetores)*.

<sup>16</sup> PELLEGRINO 1988: 36-37, fig.3; PELLEGRINO 2004: 42-45.

<sup>17</sup> PELLEGRINO 2004: 44.

<sup>18</sup> ZEVI 2002: 13-58; ZEVI 2004: 15-31.

<sup>19</sup> PELLEGRINO 2003: 21; FASCITIELLO PELLEGRINO 2015: 1049-1053; FASCITIELLO PELLEGRINO in press.

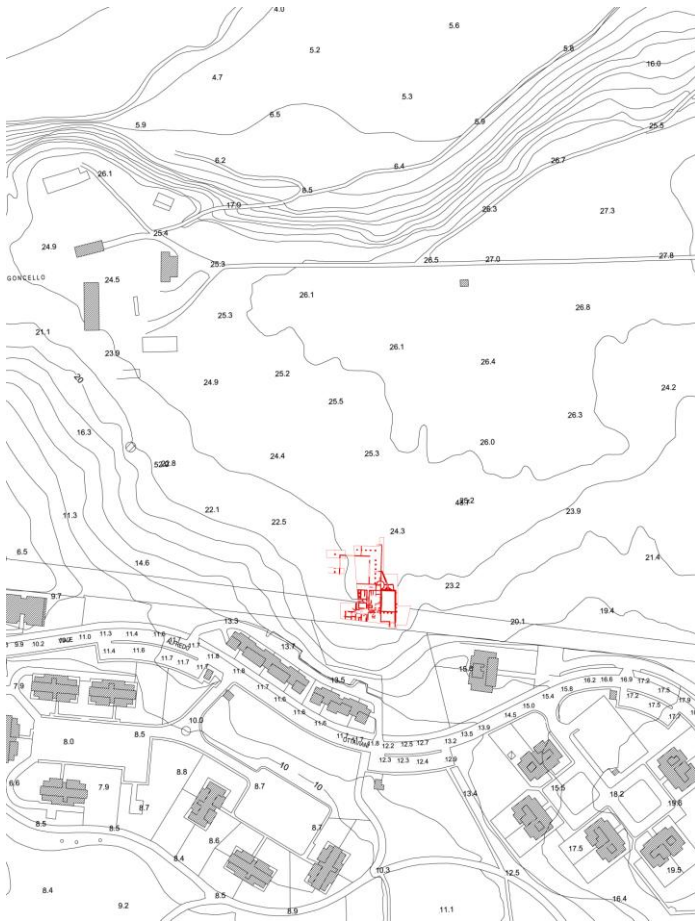


Fig. 8. Cartographic plan of the area around Villa C.

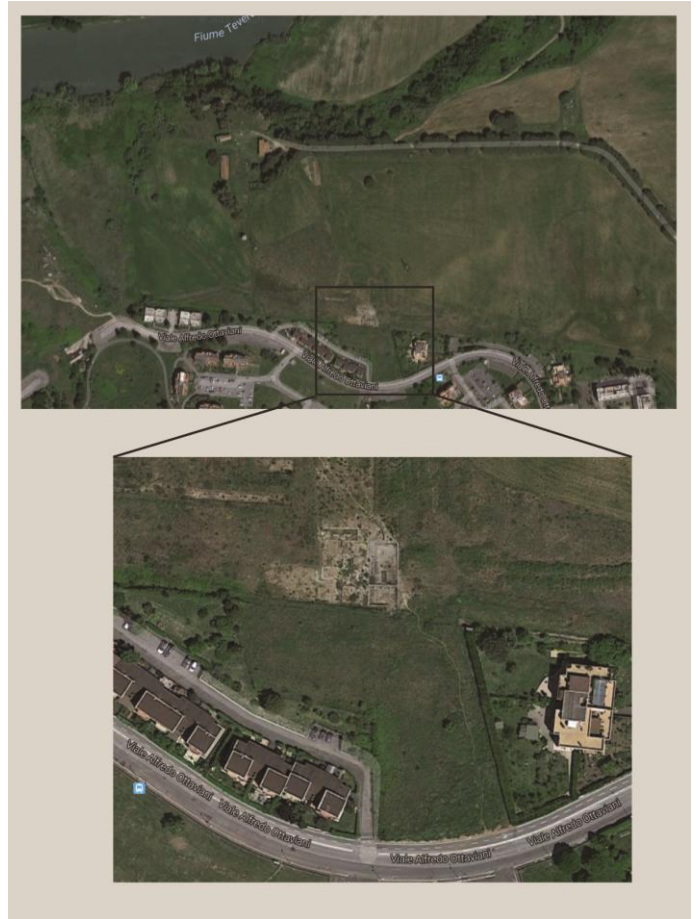


Fig. 9. Villa C seen with Google maps.

The excavations were carried out for four months between September 2011 and January 2012, during general public works for the construction of a rain water collector: the target was to establish the size of the villa and start the public works without damaging any archaeological evidence. The research was useful for the understanding of the chronological sequence of the constructions and the relationships with the other villas of the Dragoncello area<sup>20</sup>.

However, the works were conditioned by the poor state of conservation of the structures, due to intense ploughing on the site, which has reduced most of the remains to the foundation level.

Villa C covers a surface of about 60x50m (3000 sq.m.) and, at the moment, it is the largest villa of the Dragoncello area. The works have revealed four different phases of occupation explained in the following pages (fig. 10).

#### *Phase I: The Installation of the Villa*

The oldest remains have been found in the eastern sector and belong to the so called basin and Room A: these were never extensively transformed during the existence of the villa (fig. 11).

The basin is about 9x6m, almost rectangular in shape and about 1,20m deep. It is completely covered with cocciopesto and the walls surrounding it have a concrete core made with fragments of basalt (the major-

<sup>20</sup> I wish to thank Dott. Angelo Pellegrino (Soprintendenza of Ostia) for giving me the opportunity to publish this paper. Since the beginning of this project his support has been essential. My gratitude also extends to Arch. Roberto Giarrusso. Since the year 2007 our conversations on the use of the CAD system have improved my skills in its application to archaeological digs.



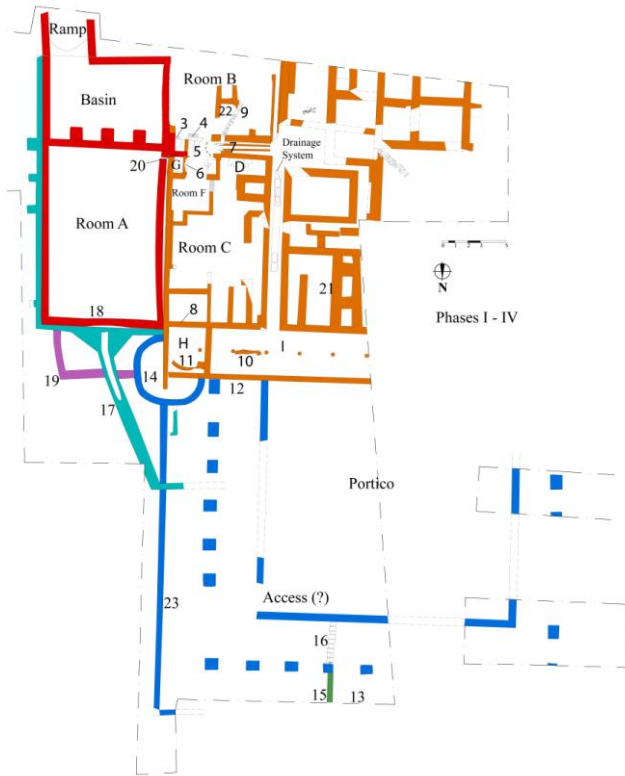


Fig. 10. Plan of Villa C.

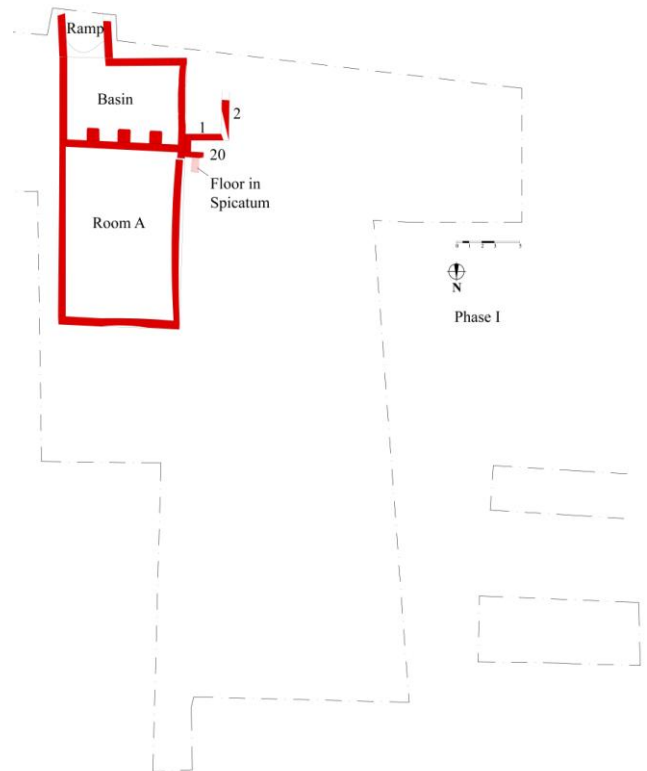


Fig. 11. The oldest remains of the villa.

ity), irregular red and yellow tufa blocks, joined by dark-grey cement (fig. 12). The portions of the walls above the water level were faced in *opus reticulatum*, as confirmed by the collapse of the western wall on the basin's floor.

Access to the basin is provided by a ramp: this feature, instead of steps, makes this structure unique in Rome's environs<sup>21</sup> (fig. 13). The remains of a tile collapse on the basin's floor might be the sign of a tile roof; unfortunately, their position and direction do not confirm this hypothesis: they might be the remains of the roof which covered Room B as well (fig. 14).

Room A is found on the northern side of the basin (fig. 15). It was constructed at the same time and with the same technique; it is rectangular in shape (about 27x8,50m) but there is no evidence for *cocciopesto* on its walls.

This shows that the room was not used as a basin, at least in the latest phase, even though the thickness (40cm) (fig. 16) and the composition of the floor, as well as the general features of this room, are identical to those of the basin and may suggest the presence of *cocciopesto* in the earliest phases. Unfortunately, no evi-



Fig. 12. The basin (from the west).

<sup>21</sup> DE FRANCESCHINI 2005: 381.



Fig. 13. The basin and its ramp (from the north-east).



Fig. 14. The collapse of the basin's western wall; on the right, the roof tile collapse (from the east).



Fig. 15. Room A (from the north).



Fig. 16. Sondage showing the thickness of Room A's floor (from the north).

dence has been found to confirm this hypothesis, nor do we know the reason why the *cocciopesto* would have been removed. However, the lack of an access or a way to get to the floor level, that perhaps could have been reached through a wooden stair or ladder, and the presence of three buttresses along the southern side can be an indication of its original use as a cistern.

The basin and Room A are the centre of the productive sector of the villa, probably for making oil or wine: unfortunately, no certain conclusions can be reached due to the complete absence of materials associated with this portion of the villa.

Other structures of the same phase, certainly connected to the previous ones, have been excavated on the western side of the basin: one of the walls shows its original face in *opus reticulatum* (20), the others (walls 1 and 2) are less preserved; the northern side of the wall in *reticulatum* (20) is faced by the remains of an *opus spicatum* floor (about 0,65x1,10m)<sup>22</sup>.

It is clear that other rooms with different functions were located in the same area; however, the rearrangement of the villa, starting from Phase II, has completely cancelled any remains, and any possibility to understand the functional disposition of these rooms in Phase I.

<sup>22</sup> See below fig. 20.





Fig. 17. Fragments of a mortar floor in fine lime embellished with polychrome stones positioned randomly on a bright red surface, recycled in the foundation 162 which corresponds to number 21 in plan.

The slight chronological evidence we have and the comparison with the other villas of the same area, allow us to date the installation of Villa C in the first half of the 1st c. B.C.

Furthermore, some fragments of mortar floors in fine lime embellished with polychrome stones positioned randomly on a bright red surface, found in the foundations of the walls belonging to Phase II, might suggest a similar chronological sequence (fig. 17). These fragments were probably in use for decorating the floors in Phase I. At the time of the reconstruction (Phase II), they could have been removed and recycled as building material for the new foundations. These fragments can be dated to the early 1st c. B.C.<sup>23</sup>.

### Phase II: The First Renovation

Phase II corresponds to the rearrangement of the villa in its western portion. The surface in question is about 32x30m, without considering the area not yet excavated (fig. 18).

The reconstruction led to the demolition of pre-existing structures and to the installation of new foundations; only the productive sector around the basin was spared and reused with the same function.

The mortar floor of Room B was levelled above the wall 2, while the wall 1 was covered by the thresholds 3 and 4 and by the make-up of Floor 5 (fig. 19). Wall 6 cut the pre-existing wall in *reticulatum* (20), while the floor in *opus spicatum*, established in Phase I and connected to the wall 20 was mostly removed: its surviving portion was covered by a thin layer of plaster and reused as the floor of the small Room G (fig. 20).

The new arrangement of Phase II can be divided into three different sectors (fig. 21):

1) The Eastern sector, directly connected to the ramp and the basin, was apparently separated from the other sectors by the brick wall 8, to the north, and the drainage system, to the west. Remains of a *cocciopesto* floor in Room D and the connection with the basin make this area an enlargement of the productive sector of the villa. The possible presence of productive activi-

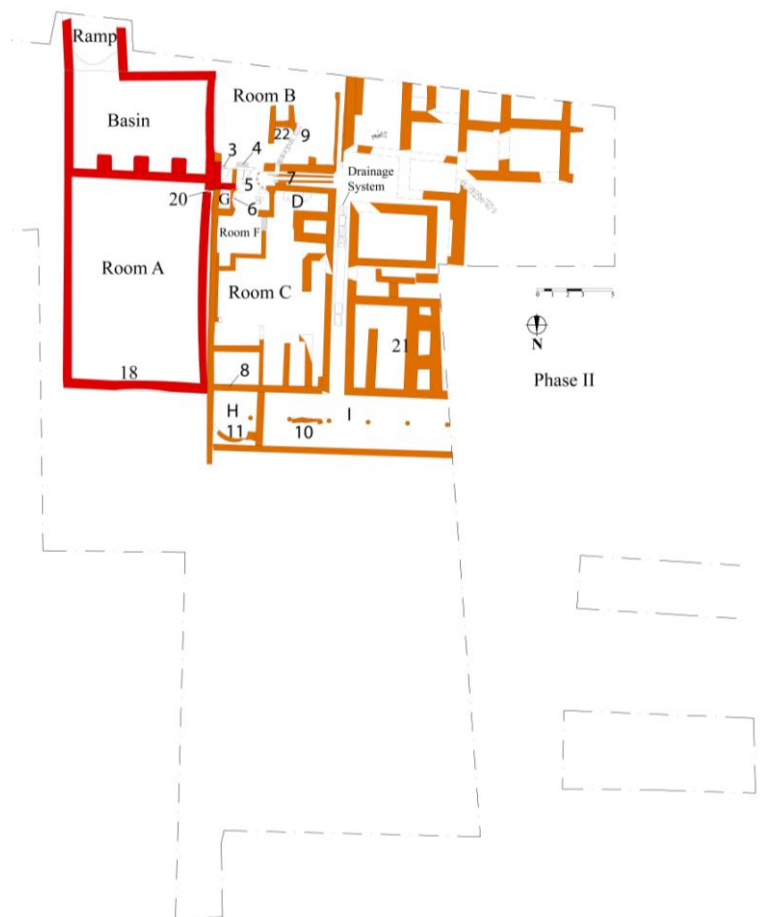


Fig. 18. Plan of Phase II.

<sup>23</sup> They can be compared to others from the houses excavated under the churches of S. Prudenziana (MORRICONE MATINI 1971: 13, 28, Tav, II, n. 40) and S. Pietro in Vincoli (MORRICONE MATINI 1971: 13, 29, Tav, XII, n. 38) in Rome.

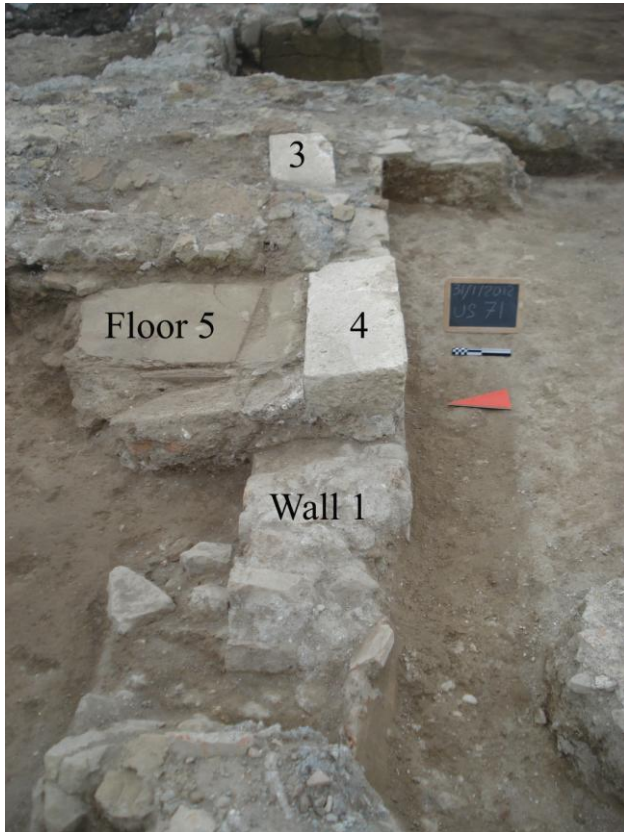
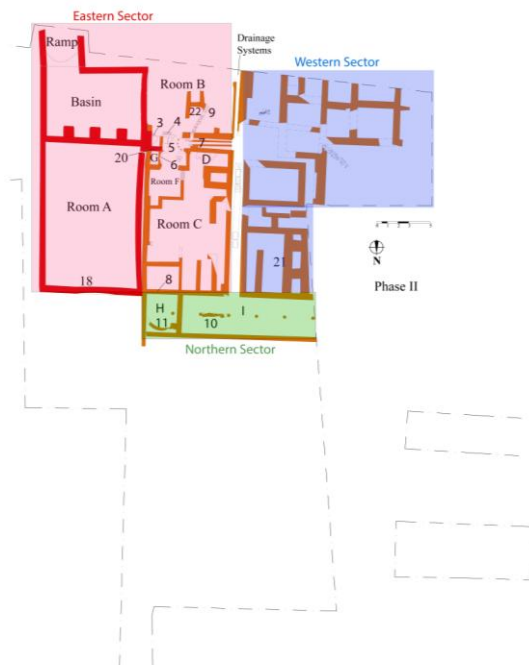


Fig. 19. An example of the reconstructions undertaken in Phase II; **71** corresponds to Wall 1.



Fig. 20. Room G: an example of the rearrangement of the villa in Phase II. Pavimento **58** corresponds to the thin layer of plaster made to cover the floor in opus spicatum established in Phase I.



ties is suggested by the mortar floor of Room C (fig. 22) and by the recycling of roof tiles and travertine blocks to make the floor **5** (fig. 23), the thresholds **3** and **4**, and a drainage channel (**9**)<sup>24</sup> (fig. 24). Moreover, the small size Room G and the inner divisions of Room C, suggest that they could have stored tools or materials used for productive activities. One of the drains (**7**) (fig. 25) has revealed a rectangular stamp with the letters M.BAB; it can be connected to the fragmentary stamp M.BA/, published by J. Coste and completed in M.BA[R]. The letters of the two stamps are the same size and shape and appear to be the same. If so, they refer to *M. Babatius* and can be dated to the second half of the 1st – beginning of the 2nd c. A.D.<sup>25</sup>.

2) The Western sector has revealed several foundations of walls with fragments of tufa and concrete, cut into the virgin soil, delimiting different rooms. The function and the connection of the rooms are unfortunately impossible to de-

Fig. 21. Plan of Phase II with its different sectors.

<sup>24</sup> A fragmented block of travertine, the same as thresholds 3 and 4, is reused as a part of the drainage 9.

<sup>25</sup> CIL XV 883; STEINBY 1978, Vol. 1: 333, n.1144; Vol. 2: Tav. CXCVI; COSTE 1970: 81 (nota 40), 93.





Fig. 22. The mortar floor of Room C (from the south) which corresponds to 120 of the picture.



Fig. 23. Floor 5 (from the north) which corresponds to 69 of the picture. In the background, Threshold 4.



Fig. 24. Drain 9 (from the north). 105 corresponds to the collapse of tiles 22.



Fig. 25. Drain 7 (from the west).

sophistication and complexity of the room's decoration.

There are no remains of the original floor and no way to know if it was in marble; just a small portion of plaster has been found between the walls 8 and 10, probably the make-up to support a more complex tiled floor. From the same area come the remains of an arch; its blocks were found separated and in different parts of Room I. Unfortunately, we cannot know its original position.

termine as this sector has been seriously damaged by modern ploughing. Also, the rooms are larger in size and more regular in shape than in other sectors of the villa; some of the foundations are wider and their size could probably have housed walls enough thick to support an upper floor.

3) The Northern sector with Rooms H and I.

The excavated portion of Room I has revealed 5 brick columns along its centre (fig. 26). The remaining base of the wall 10 (fig. 27) is decorated on both sides by red plaster. Moreover, the fragments of painted plaster found in this room (fig. 28) show the





Fig. 25. Drain 7 (from the west).



Fig. 27. The remains of Wall 10 which corresponds to layer 188 of the picture (from the south).



Fig. 26. Room I (from the west). 196 corresponds to the collapse of one of the walls of the room: remains of painted plaster are visible.



Fig. 28. The remains of painted plaster found in Room I.



The function of Room H and its connection with the previous room are hard to understand. The only clearly visible feature is an almost semi-circular structure (11) of unknown function<sup>26</sup>.

This extension of the villa, in Phase II, can be dated to 1st - 2nd c. A.D.

*Phase III: The Enlargement of the Northern Side: The Construction of the Portico*

This phase saw an extension of the northern side of the villa with the construction of a portico (fig. 29), two thirds of which have been excavated and whose remains are preserved in the foundations. It is composed of wings surrounding an open area at the centre: the wings have bases along their centre to support brick columns. The state of preservation makes the interpretation more complicated and the lack of evidence limits our understanding of how these wings might have looked. Different hypotheses have been provided:

1. In previous studies<sup>27</sup>, it was supposed the wings could be reconstructed as a sort of *cryptoporticus* with the eastern and northern wings forming two corridors lit by windows, while the western branch, was delimited by a wall facing the centre of the courtyard and open on the other side to enjoy the view of the surrounding valley (fig. 30). This interpretation would make this structure an exception in the panorama of the Roman villas and is very hard to accept, especially for the general loss of symmetry.

2. The wings formed a *quadruplex porticus duplex* surrounding the central courtyard (fig. 31)<sup>28</sup>. The inner wall of each wing was a stylobate supporting brick columns which in turn supported the roof: in this way the

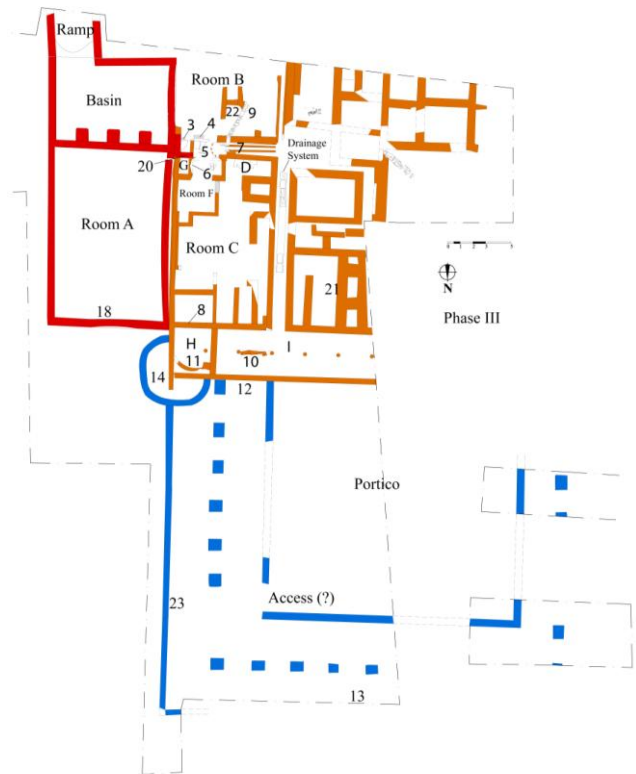


Fig. 29. Plan of Phase III.

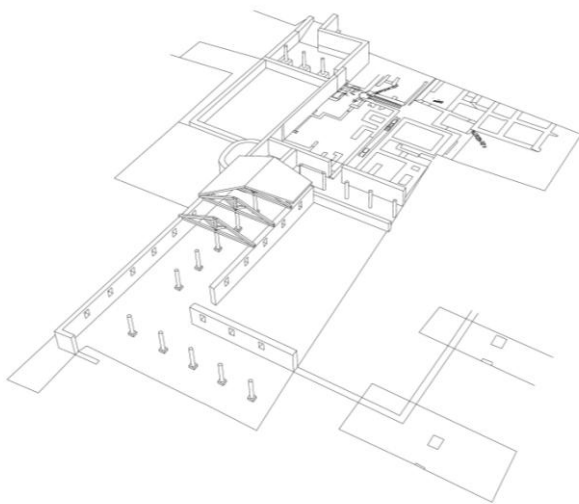


Fig. 30. The first hypothesis for the Portico's shape.



Fig. 31. The new hypothesis for the Portico's shape.

<sup>26</sup> The northern sector became the southern wing of the *quadruplex porticus duplex* built in Phase III.

<sup>27</sup> FASCITIELLO PELLEGRINO 2015: 1049-1053; FASCITIELLO PELLEGRINO in press.

<sup>28</sup> Many thanks to Arch. Chiara Pattaro for having designed this image following my sketch and instructions.

corridors were well illuminated. This specular plan would give a sense of symmetry to the whole structure, more proper for a Roman courtyard. This hypothesis seems more certain than the previous one, even though the interpretation of the western wing leaves some doubts due to the lack of a back wall, symmetrical to wall **23**, to function as the limit of the portico on its western end. The lack of a back wall could be due to the erosion of the slope which delimits the villa on this side. The portico's size was impressive: about 26x36m long (the northern and southern sides were the longest ones) and each wing was about 7,50m wide (except the southern one which was 3,5m). However, the wings were certainly covered by wooden beams and a tiled roof, as shown by two tile collapses<sup>29</sup>.

Concerning the open area at the centre, nothing remains to give us an idea of its function or arrangement. It might have been used for storing wine or other substances in *dolia*, as documented in the Villa Regina at Boscoreale<sup>30</sup>, or for a garden/vineyard as in several villas at Pompeii<sup>31</sup>. The latter may have been more logical in a city *domus*, where there were fewer green areas, rather than in the courtyard of a *villa rustica* where a garden at the centre, instead of a storage area, could have been considered a luxury<sup>32</sup>. How the inhabitants of the villa entered the courtyard is not clear; a possible access was in the north eastern corner of the peristyle.

The function of the almost-circular structure **14** is uncertain, however it may have been related to an entrance to the north, facing the river side, which is still unexcavated.

Unfortunately, the chronology of Phase III is uncertain<sup>33</sup>.

#### Phase IV: The Last Transformations

The transformation of the villa in Phase IV, even though surely undertaken after the construction of the Portico, is impossible to date, nor is a chronological sequence of their sub-phases obvious.

Phase IVA saw the construction of structures **15** and **16** which divide the northern branch of the Portico into two different sections, on the north-south axis. Structure **15** is a wall of irregular blocks of red tufa stone which cuts one of the column bases of the Portico (Phase III). Structure **16** is made of recycled roof tiles, aligned on the floor, on the same axis as the wall **15**. Its function is hard to establish: the hypothesis that it was the base for a flowerbed is just a suggestion that unfortunately is not supported by any archaeological evidence. In conclusion, these structures likely had a simply division function.

Phase IVB is characterised by the construction of the drain **17** (fig. 32) which brought water from Room A to the area of the Portico, through a lead pipe. This one is just preserved at its southern end, where the wall **18** (Phase I) had been cut to set up the pipe. This structure is an extra evidence that Room A functioned as a sort of cistern.

During Phase IVC, structure **19** was built too; its function remains unclear.



Fig. 32. Drain 17 which corresponds to **171** of the picture (from the north).

<sup>29</sup> In fig. 29 numbers 12 and 13.

<sup>30</sup> DE CARO 2006: 273-275.

<sup>31</sup> An example is given by the House of D. Octavius Quartio at Pompeii: DE CARO 2006: 138-140.

<sup>32</sup> DE FRANCESCHINI 2005: 325-326.

<sup>33</sup> Phase III is in poor state of conservation due to intense ploughing. The way how the southern wing of the portico was installed on the pre-existing structures of Phase II (Rooms H and I) is not clear yet. Further researches could also clarify its chronology.



## Conclusions

The Villa C at Casale Dragoncello confirms the interest of the Roman aristocrats in this area either for the fertility of its soil or for the presence of natural water sources and the easy connection to Rome by the Via *Ostienses* and the Tiber river.

Unfortunately, the state of preservation due to the intense ploughing of this field over the last century, has almost completely destroyed the structures and seriously limited our research: the depth of the soil which covered the remains of the villa is only 50-70cm.

We cannot establish when the villa was abandoned; unfortunately, the total lack of pottery from the site, except for some potsherds of coarseware makes greater chronological precision harder.

However, the size of this villa, the remains of sophisticated decorations and the comparison with similar villas in the Dragoncello area, increase our knowledge of the importance of this territory between Rome and Ostia.

The remains of painted plaster found in Room I, the size of Villa C (even larger than the other villas in the area) and the find of mosaic *tesserae* in the soil surrounding Villa C, confirm the importance of this residence. Furthermore, it has been suggested a marble headless statue of the 2nd century moved to a medieval tower, today part of a farm which is still in use, comes from this villa<sup>34</sup>.

The importance of the Ostia's suburbs, in particular those closest to the Tiber, such as the Dragoncello, is underlined by the failed attempt of Cicero to buy a property in this area from a member of the *gens Sillia*, in order to build a mausoleum to the memory of his daughter<sup>35</sup>. The orator's letters inform us that the land he would have liked to buy was close to the villa belonging to Cotta, consul in the year 65 B.C.

Further evidence of the agricultural development of this territory and the infrastructures that were found there, is given by a dock built in the 1st c. B.C., along the Tiber bank, not far from Villa C, for the easy shipment of the products cultivated there<sup>36</sup> and an extended drain (Area D), built in the 1st c. B.C. and excavated for 110m, which supplied the villas and their fields<sup>37</sup>.

These constructions were built at the same time as the construction of Villa C and F, after the oldest Villa A, in a program of general improvement of the area.

I would like to conclude this paper with a proposal for further research on this field. It could be hoped that future research in the Dragoncello area, reopened with the new excavations at Villa A, might clarify the chronologies of the villas found in this important territory between Rome and Ostia.

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<sup>34</sup> ZEVİ 2002: 21-22, Fig. 4; FASCITIELLO PELLEGRINO in press.

<sup>35</sup> PELLEGRINO 2004: 44.

<sup>36</sup> PELLEGRINO 2004: 37. In the previous publications the building is identified with the letter H.

<sup>37</sup> PELLEGRINO 1983: 79, 81; PELLEGRINO 2004: 37.

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