

DAAD Summer School

“Dialogue on Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis”

HISTORICAL RESTORATION OF VESUVIAN SITES- THE ROMAN VESUVIAN VILLAS

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Abstract

The Campania region attracts research and analysis mainly because of its particular geological composition and the archaeological value. The geology of each area is well known that affects the development of history. So the area of Vesuvius has particular interest geologically and historically. This paper presents the Roman villas that were built in the Vesuvius area (fig.1). Firstly, a quick reference to the origins of this architectural project and then present the parts of which it is composed. Finally, presented a specific villa, providing more detail on maintenance and conservation by archaeologists.

The phenomenon of Roman luxury villas appeared in the Italian peninsula in the middle of the 1st century BC and lasted until the end of the 2nd century AD. Wealthy Roman Elite had chosen the Vesuvius area to build their luxurious villas. These buildings were related with cultural, political and economic conditions.

Keywords: Roman Villas, atrium, peristyle, Oplontis, Villa A

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Foteini Constantinou is graduated from the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Cyprus. She was attended to several excavations project as a student, for example, "Palaepaphos Urban Landscape Project" in Palaepaphos-Kouklia, Cyprus. She was an Erasmus student for 6 months to the University of Siena and she speaks Italian. She is interested in Bioarchaeology and plans to do her master on this topic.

INTRODUCTION

It is evident that the reconstruction of these luxurious buildings has its roots in Greek Prototypes (Zarmakoupi, 2014). It is important to mention that from the east and especially from Greece, they imported new raw materials, luxurious materials and works of art, to decorate their luxurious villas.

The second factor which influenced the architectural was the landscape itself, which the Romans admired and praised through the arrangement and decoration of the building.

These two factors determined the structure of the villas (Greek Prototypes & landscape).

Peristyles and porticoes were among the first features that the Romans have incorporated from the Hellenistic architecture on their own buildings. Peristyles were carefully harmonized with gardens and greenery. Also nymphaea, pools and fountains completed this technical landscape.

As time gone by the peristyles stopped being strictly enclosed spaces and eventually they have been replaced by porticus that united different rooms but they still had openings (Zarmakoupi, 2007).

One of the basic rooms in the villas was the triclinium (fig.2). Beds were placed in a specific shape “Π” (like the Greek capital “P”) which was ideal for symposiums. This room was necessary for host’s socializing and prestige. According to Vitruvius, the Roman triclinium was a long narrow room, where the one side had the double size of the other. Gradually they had to reconstruct larger rooms to accommodate more people and offer spectacles. Towards the end of the 1st century BC, the architects created many large rooms and groups of rooms that could satisfy the needs of large symposiums and the recreational activities were related to them. The rooms had large windows which allowed eye contact between them and also used them for internal and external landscapes, as a part of directing symposiums’ entertainment (Zarmakoupi, 2010).

1. Roman villas

The villa was not an isolated building. In contrary, it was a building complex with its own utility. There were not only serving owners’ and its guests’ personal needs, but also covered other needs such as storage and trade in goods. The villas varied considerably in their architecture among them (Zarmakoupi, 2014). Nevertheless the rooms inside were very common. It seems that the first peristyle villas were built in Pompeii in the third quarter of the 1st century.

1.1. History of Roman Villas

The history of the Roman villas initially involved the controlling of large cultivations (3rd century BC) which were overseen by the owner of the farmhouse. Gradually the word villa became a synonym to luxury. When Rome became the major power in the Mediterranean, villas were built all over Italy, mainly because of the feeling of safety that existed throughout the country, even out of the cities. Strabon (63 BC - c. 24 AD) described Campania having interspersed large villas-cottages and cultivations expanded to Gulf of Naples. Today many of the archaeological remains witness what Strabon had seen and described.

When Tiberius moved to Capri, the Bay of Naples for a time literally was the center of imperial power. Even after the eruption of Vesuvius, Villas that were far away and hadn't been affected much continued to exist and grow.

There were two types of villas. The first type, were farmhouses with simpler decoration and architecture, comparing to the second type that were villas with luxurious decoration and more complex architecture. The architects tried to combine the element of luxury with the element of the countryside in harmony with the environment.

The basic agriculture function and design of the "villa rustica" are well described by Cato (234-149 BC), Varro (116 BC – 27 BC) and Vitruvius (80-15 BC).

A main feature for the villas structure was the opus caementicium which allowed the construction of monumental buildings.

The «atrium and peristyle» in the beginning were considerable for villa's structure although, subsequently they were abandoned. The atrium was a necessary element for the ventilation and lighting of the villa. Gradually, it was abandoned as in the countryside were much more open spaces. Beyond the luxury, villas had the necessary technological facilities. An entire water system was connected to gardens and nymphaea of villas (Zarmakoupi, 2010).

Many of the rooms were specially organized to accommodate important personalities, as the hosts wanted to demonstrate their wealth. Therefore the most necessary rooms were those for dinner and baths - especially in the countryside where public baths were too far. The baths were usually near the kitchen, to use the heat, in order to cover simultaneously both needs. Guests combined mental and physical recreation.

A luxurious villa usually contained: Porticus, peristyles, gardens, pool, dining rooms, triclinium, baths-caldarium (hot bath), tepidarium (warm bath), and frigidarium (cold bath), cistern, rooms and habitation units for slaves, workers etc. Most of the areas were decorated with elaborate frescoes mosaics and statues (Barker et al., 2013).

Usually, under the control of the villa were the production of oil, wine and others goods which were used in luxurious symposiums. Some villas also had processing rooms of products and storages.

2. OPLONTIS

One of the most striking examples of various maritime villas in the Vesuvius area is Oplontis. The villas are now in the city named Torre Annunziata. The area destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD. Today because of the city's development the archaeological research is limited and difficult. The name of Oplontis does not appear in any of the ancient Latin writers in the epigraphies brought to light in the Herculaneum and Pompeii. It appears on a kind of map drawn in the 13th century and locates between Herculaneum and Pompeii (Carcavallo, 1980). The remarkable archaeological finds at Torre Annunziata also reveal without shadow of doubt the presence of thermal baths and luxurious villas near the sea.

Several well-known properties lie just a few kilometers from Oplontis. To the east are located the Villa of the Mysteries and Villa of Diomedes at Pompeii, and, to the northeast, the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor and the Villa of the Treasure at Boscoreale. Slightly higher on the slopes of Vesuvius are the Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase and Villa 6 at Terzigno. To the north of Oplontis along the coast are the Villa Sora at Torre del Greco and, further along, the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum. To the south of Pompeii are the villa at Fondo Bottaro even further south are the coastal villas at Stabiae, the Villa San Marco, and Villa Arianna, along with several others (among them the Pastore, Petraro, and Carmiano).

2.1. The villa A

“The villa of Poppaea” is perhaps the largest and most luxurious of suburban villas so far brought to light. It lay beneath of six meters of lapilli and ashes and then a thick layer of mud. The complex was surrounded by extensive dignified and elegant gardens which were bordered by majestic arcades. Examination of wall structure allows the construction date of the villa to be put somewhere in the 1st century BC. The most important parts of the building are in facts of opus incertum while the mural decorations present examples of the 2nd Pompeii style (Carcavallo, 1980). Originally constructed in the 50s B.C., the building was refurbished and enlarged over time and had been undergoing renovation and repairs of damage caused by the earthquake of 62 A.D when it was buried in the eruption of 79 AD. The landward facade of the Villa looked north to Vesuvius and this view would likely have included productive farmland extending toward the volcano's lower slopes. Those approaching the Villa from the road would have seen the large north garden dotted with sculptures and bordered by colonnaded porticoes running along this facade of the Villa. The use of marble columns and capitals within the Villa (e.g., porticus 60), is unusual for villas in this region and marked Villa A as an especially luxurious residence. Mosaic floor and painted walls of varying types occur throughout the Villa. The sculptures were found all over the place, is one of the most extensive collections of statues, busts, and other marble ornaments known from the villas of Campania (Messina & Pascariello, 2015).

It is difficult to say with certainty exactly to whom the villa belonged to. All that can be said for certain is that the owner must have been rich and very important. The family used it as a suburban dwelling or perhaps only for holidays (Carcavallo, 1980). An amphora found in the latrine of the villa bears the inscription “SECUNDO POPPAEAE”- “sent to Secundus, freedman of Poppaea”. This is the reason why some support the theory that the villa belonged to Poppaea , second wife of Nero.

Apart from the traditional living areas leading off the atrium to the peristyle, a garden encircled by a colonnaded portico, the thermal complex with the caldarium, frigidarium and the tepidarium, the triclinium or dining room with adjacent kitchen, the perfectly functional latrine, this villa has a whole series of extra rooms and small chambers used for various purposes but all cleverly interconnecting.

2.2. VILLA B

Another villa is the “Villa B”, which belonged to L. Crassius Tertius. The owner is known due a bronze seal ring with his name engraved on it. The center of the building consists of a large, two-storey peristyle with Doric columns, dating to the end of the second century B.C (Clarke & Muntasser, 2014).

Not only was this peristyle the physical center of the building around which various rooms were organized, but it was also the gathering point for all the commercial activities that the building served. Commercial activities took place on the ground floor, where there was direct communication with the street. The rooms around the peristyle used as warehouses for the products. The amphorae were found in the villa demonstrate the size of the commercial. The archaeologist didn't find processing facilities of the products so they assume that the villa was only for commercial activities.

Other storerooms were found on the south side. In one of them fifty-four people sought shelter from the catastrophe in vain, carrying with them their personal wealth in the form of jewels and gold and silver coins.

To the north of Villa B, a series of shops was discovered with dwelling spaces on the upper floor. It seems that these facilities are not connected with the complex. The villas were an integral part of this economic activity. The pyroclastic layers that Vesuvius flung far down its slopes, as if to hide and preserve forever a moment in civilization that had made these volcanic lands so great, also brought about this unique and perfect preservation of the presence of Roman life on its slopes—not only of buildings, but also of people and frozen moments of human activity taking place on that fateful day in A.D. 79 (Clarke & Muntasser, 2014).

3. A Historical Report of Archaeological research

After the early casual finds that took place from the sixteenth through the twentieth century, it was only in the 1970s that a small group of local scholars, dedicated to the rediscovery of the archaeological history of Oplontis. Among these, important names to remember are Monsignor Salvatore Farro, Carlo Malandrino, and Salvatore Russo (Clarke & Muntasser, 2014).

The first archaeological discoveries in the area of Torre Annunziata were made toward the end of the sixteenth century. As shown by present-day findings, he must have exploited the old Pompeian aqueduct, demolishing entire dwellings and frescoed walls as he went.

Based on the insight of the Spanish Francesco La Vega, exploration work began in the area known as Le Mascatelle in 1785. He followed the same method as that used for nearby Herculaneum: exploration via tunnels.

Five decades after the first archaeological finds, the great discovery was finally made (1831). The first archaeological finds were reported with the appearance of the mineral waters, which were found to have great therapeutic qualities. Continuous excavations revealed an interesting Roman bath complex. Very detailed journal of the excavation was later published in the Civic Annals of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1834 (Clarke & Muntasser, 2014).

The excavations were continued by several archaeologists during the 19th century with several important and impressive findings come to light. Many excavations continued during the 20th century at Oplontis. I will present in more detail the excavations of "Villa A".

3.1. “Villa A” excavations

Early excavation of Villa A 1593–1840:

First excavator was Sarno Canal (1593-1600). Was a completely random excavation where it seems to have revealed the southern part of the villa A which had a sea view.

La Vega (April 1785): He did a more systematic excavation, digging tunnels north of the pool of “the villa A”. He explored the western colonnade of the slaves’ peristyle.

Michele Rusca (April 1839-November 1840): He described the north wall of porticus 40 surrounding the south garden 58. The tunnels are visible on the walls today.

In 1954 a group of local researchers tried to make some excavations. However, there are no records of this initiative, or other evidence that these excavations retrieved remains of Villa A. For Villa A, the earliest preserved “giornale di scavo” dates to 10 November 1971. By that time, rooms 1 through 30 had already been uncovered, their walls re-erected, and their wall painting, stuccoes, and mosaics reconstructed. The only evidence we have for the history of the excavation is the sequence of numbers on the official plan of the Villa and some photographs (Clarke & Muntasser, 2014).

Excavations between the years 1964-1969 revealed: atrium 5, vestibule 4, and viridarium 20. Unfortunately, they didn’t keep any records, so there are only some photos to indicate the time and place of the excavations. The excavators at the same time were taking care of the maintenance and the restoration of the buildings. Attempts were also made to excavate the rooms 11, 12, 14, 15, and 23. Once again, the photographs documented a chaotic situation in the excavation of the spaces to the north: room 1, lararium 27, and rooms 28 and 29. The areas 17, 18 and 31 were excavated in 1968. By the time, attention was completely turned to excavation of Propylon 21, where is located north of rooms 17, 18, 31. Photographs of 1968 show the excavation of porticus 34. Although Luigi D'Amore appears with the title of principal inspector in 1964, after that the on-site supervisor, or inspector, was Carlo Giordano. Overseeing all was Alfonso De Franciscis, whose offices were in the National Museum in Naples. The excavations operators changed in 1971 and then they kept the first excavation notebooks (Clarke & Muntasser, 2014).

Excavation Notebook 1: 10 November 1971–11 July 1973 by Ferdinando Balzano, assistant to the excavations of Oplontis.

Below I will give some information about the excavations based on notebooks.

From mid-November to mid-July 1973 were excavated the following parts of the Villa A: room 30, porticus 34, porticus 24, room 25, stair hall 26, lararium 27, room 28, room 29, and peristyle 32.

The large room along the north wall of the peristyle first received the number 31 or 35 they used both numbers for the records. Excavation continued (1973) along the north boundaries of the site, with an eye to reconstructing the northern porticoes 33 and 34. Also, rooms 36, 37, 38 and 39 were excavated. On the following days, workers excavated the two rooms above ground-floor rooms 43 and 44 and the stairway 42 that connected them with the east wing of peristyle 32 (Clarke & Muntasser, 2014).

Excavation Notebook 2: 12 July 1973–16 November 1973

Moving to the east, near the beam over the doorway connecting the small latrine (47) with the large latrine (48), workers discover the famous amphora addressed SECVNDO POPPAEAE. De Franciscis and other scholars have put forward this painted inscription as proof that Villa A was the property of Poppaea Sabina, second wife of Nero (Clarke & Muntasser, 2014).

Other areas excavated: Porticus 40, corridor 45 and 46, peristyle 32, small latrine 47, large latrine 48, room 49 (caldarium), rooms 50-51.

Excavation Notebook 3: 17 November 1973–3 August 1974

Areas excavated: corridor 52, corridor 53, corridor 55, garden 56.

Excavation Notebook 4: 25 November 1974–19 July 1983

Director of works is Giuseppe Maggi.

Areas excavated: garden 59, corridor 76, garden room 61, corridor 63, room 66, corridor 63, area 92, spaces 64 and 65, corridor 62, hall 69, garden room 70,71,72, oeci 73,74, porticus 60, garden 58, room 54, garden room 68, oecus 69, garden room 67,75, corridor 76, rooms 66,79, corridor 77,81, rooms 82,83, 84, 78, 79, 85, corridor 81, corridor 80, porticus 86, room 97,88,89, room 87, rooms 87-88-89-90, garden 98, rooms 90, 93, 94, 95, and 97. In this excavation period excavated the biggest part of the Villa A (fig.3).

Unfortunately some of the modern buildings destroyed the remains of the southwest and nothing was done at the time to prevent one of the many instances of vandalism perpetrated so easily on the historical heritage of Oplontis.

Oplontis Project

The Oplontis Project began in 2006. The Oplontis Project is dedicated to applying the broadest range of modern archaeological techniques available today, from the broad geography of the region to the microscopic study of materials (Clarke, 2010).

In 2009 the Oplontis Project explored (villa A) the area to the other side of the wall belonging to the second phase of the swimming pool. They found the floor and walls of the northeast corner of the first-phase pool.

Conclusions

As this brief overview of Roman Villa architecture has suggested, the architectural expression of the villa was closely related to the aesthetic appreciation and agricultural exploitation of the landscape and was based on the technological achievements of the period as well as the imperial trade network of luxury art and raw materials. The architecture of Roman luxury villas was indeed an amalgamation of Hellenistic and Roman architecture and took part in the construction of Romans' cultural identity in the

new socio-political situation of the Mediterranean world (Zarmakoupi, 2007). In conclusion, the particular economic, social, political and, more broadly, cultural factors not only provided the conditions but also shaped the design of luxury villas. The design for luxury was influenced, on the one hand, by the wish to make a deliberate reference to Greek culture and, on the other, by the Roman appreciation of landscape. Oplontis is an area with many treasures still hidden and the archaeological research can bring to the light impressive finds in the future.

Annex



Fig.1: Map with vesuvian sites.

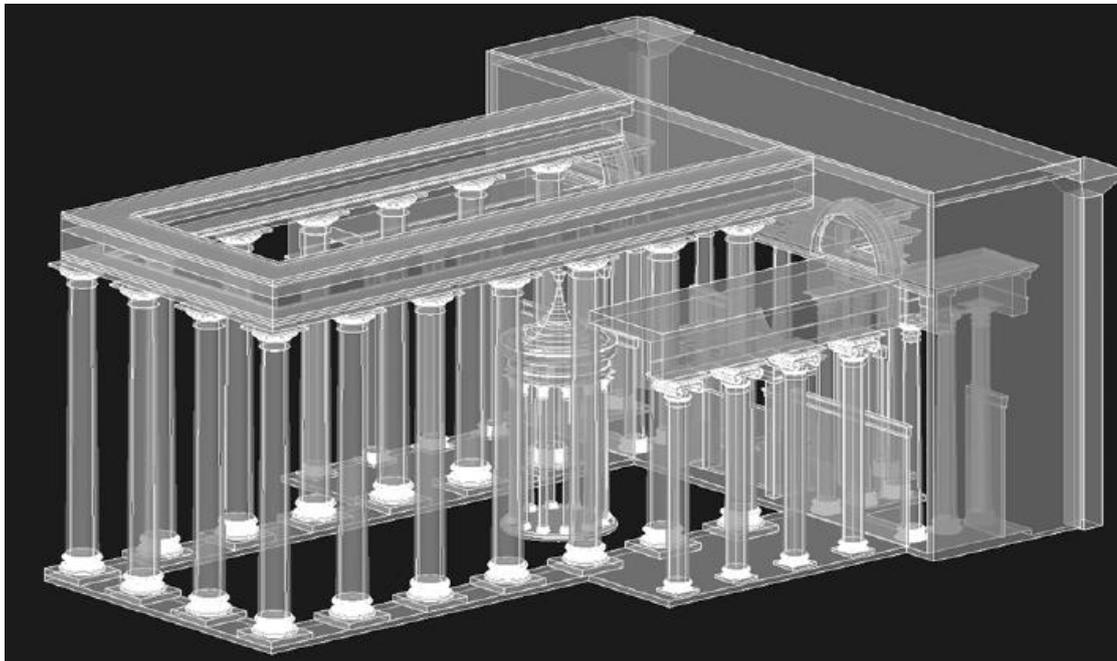


Fig.2: An infographic representation of the imaginative space painted in the triclinium (Villa A,Oplontis). (Processed by G. Manzo; coordination B. Messina, M.I Pascariello).

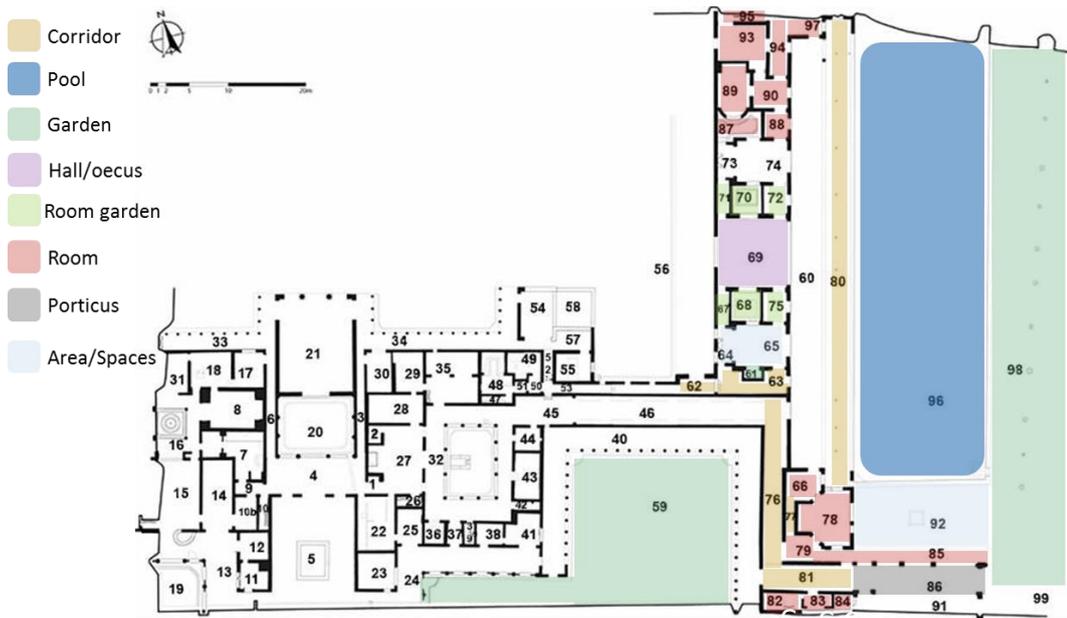


Fig.3: A plan of villa A (Oplontis). On the plan are marked the excavated areas, between 25 November 1974–19 July 1983.

Acknowledgment

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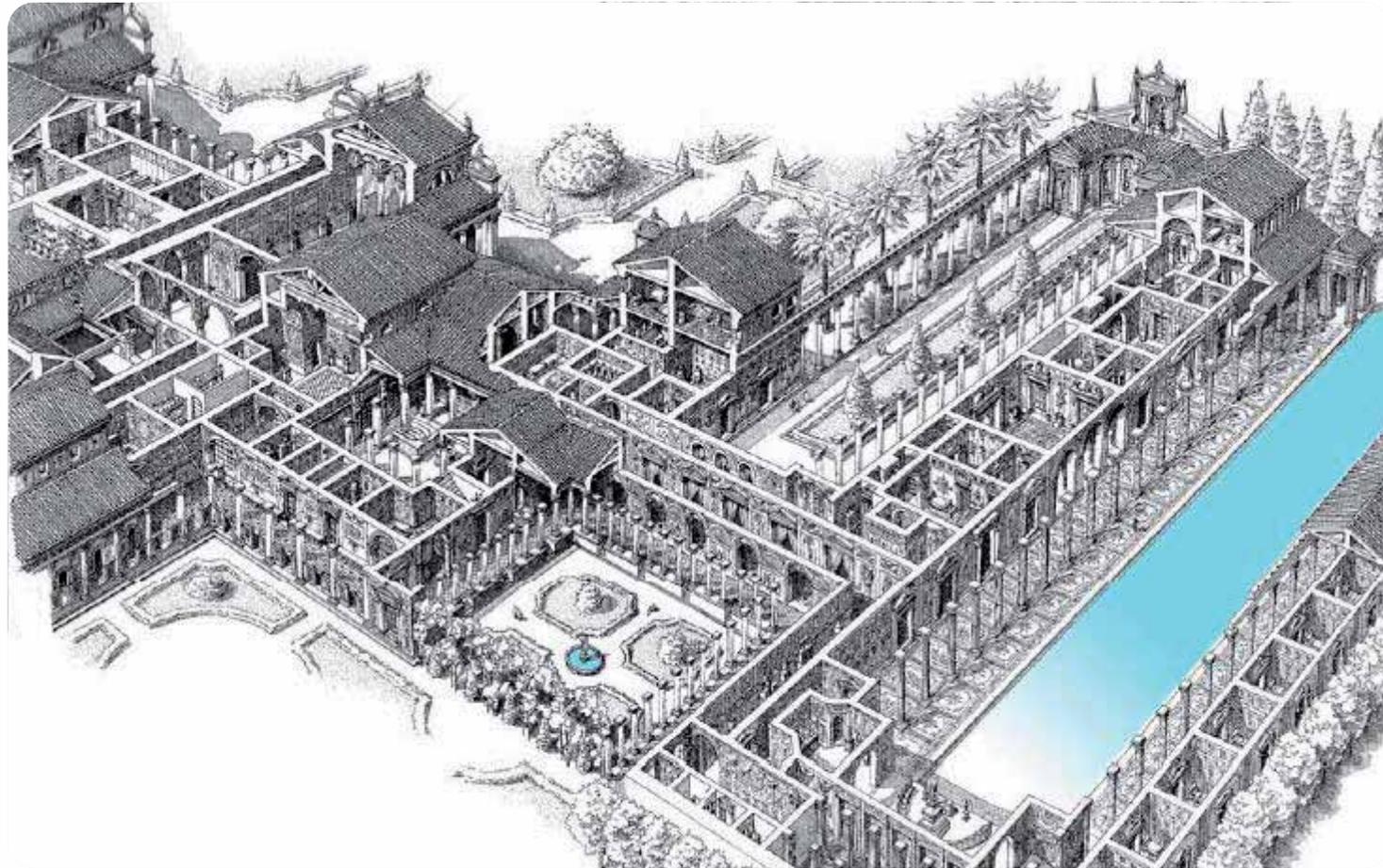
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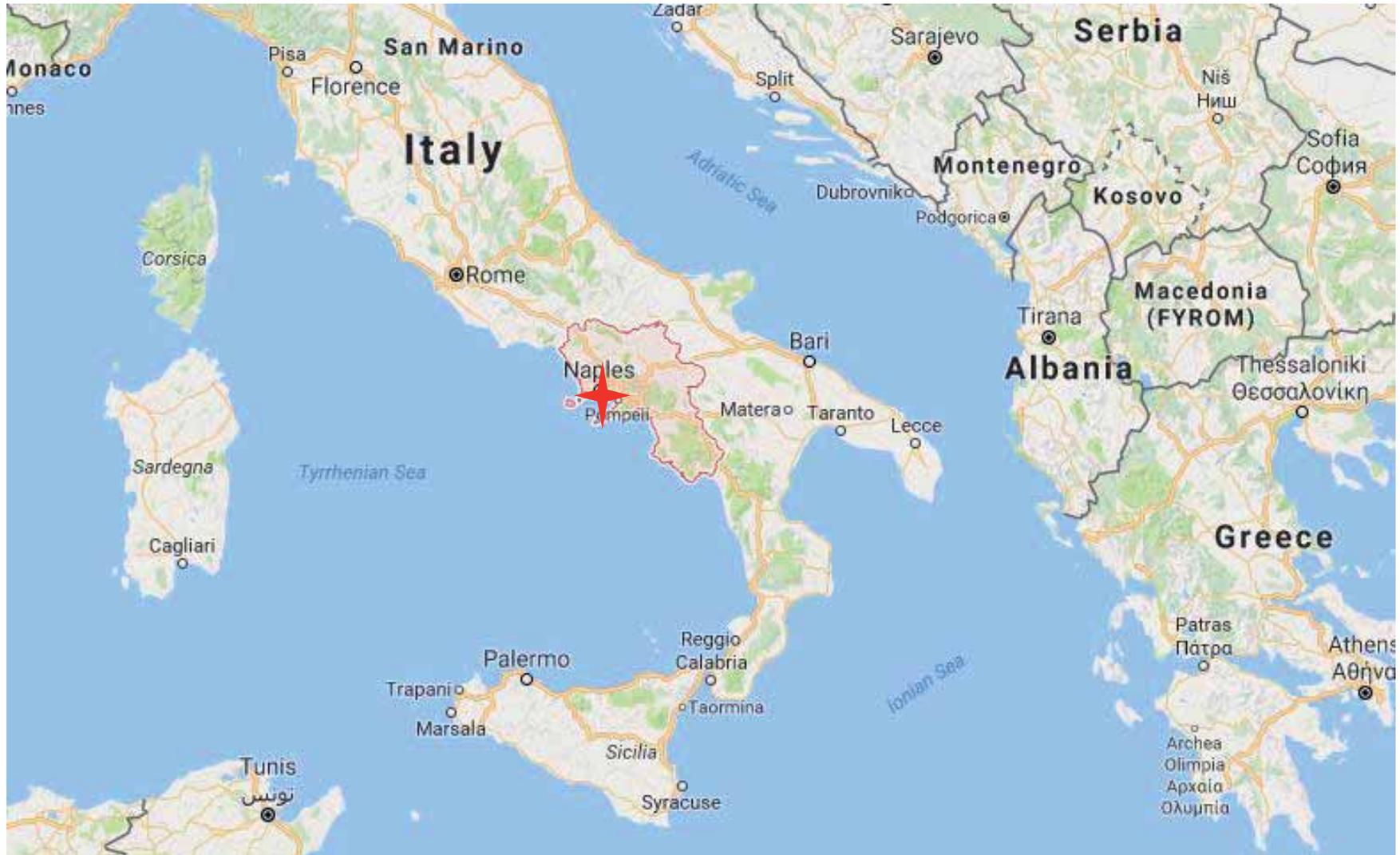
Historical Restoration of Vesuvian Sites- Roman Vesuvian Villas



24 Sept. 2016

Place: RAS Foundation

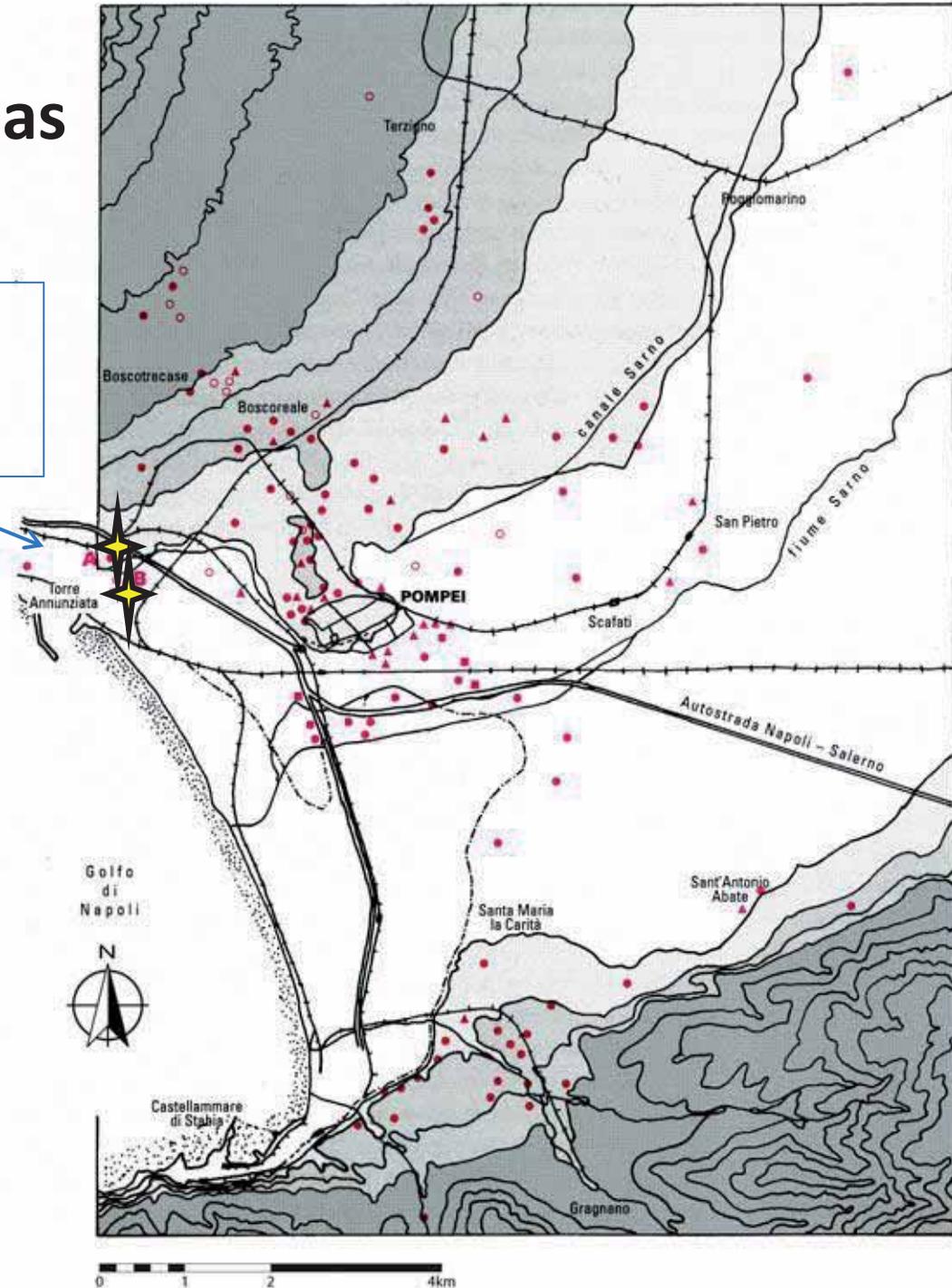
Campania region



Roman Vesuvian Villas

Oplontis Area
"Villa A"
"Villa B"

- certain
- probable
- ▲ necropoleis
- sanctuaries



Map: T. Liddell, after P.G. Guzzo and L. Fergola, eds., Oplontis: La villa di Poppea

Roman Villas

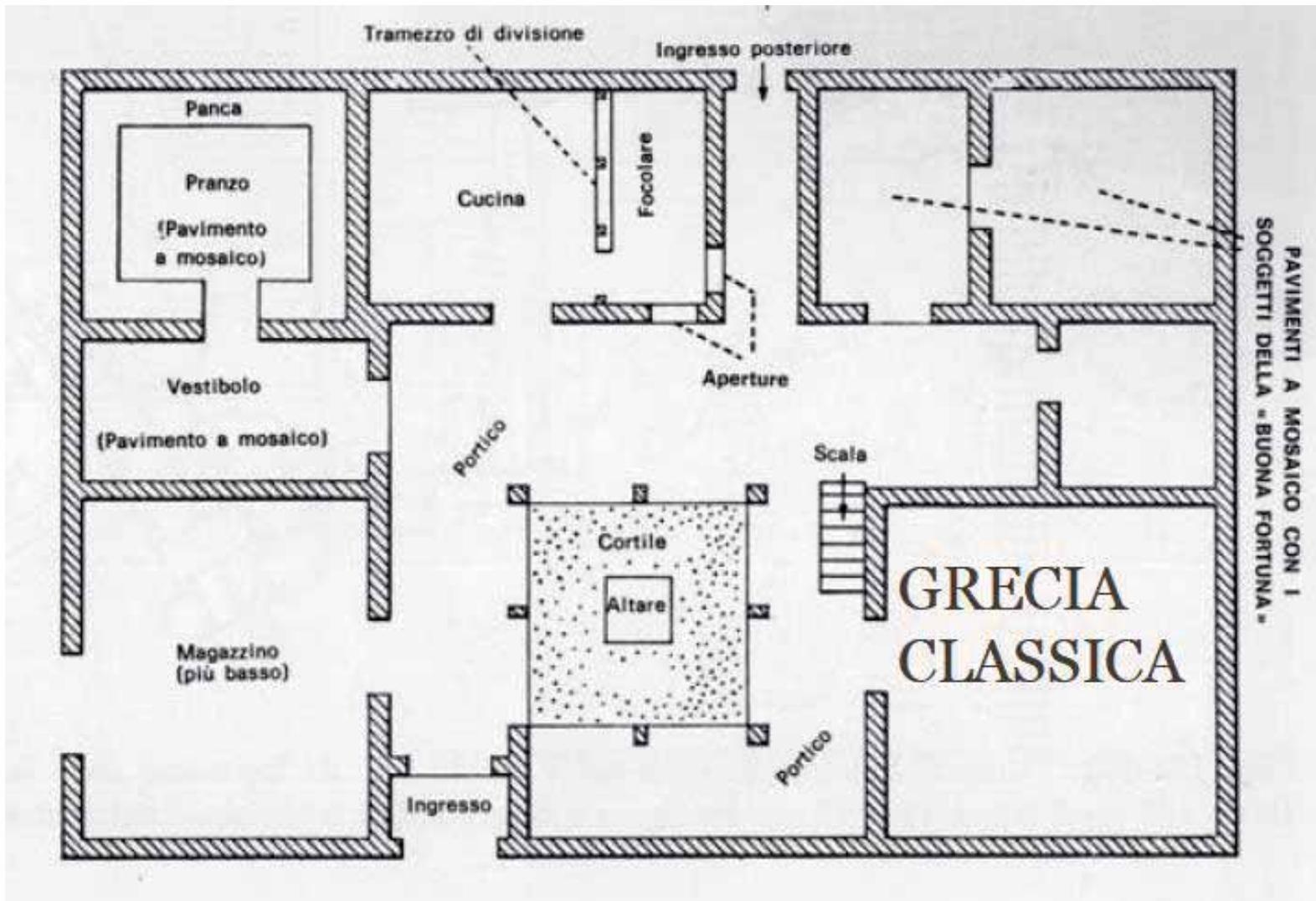
- The phenomenon of Roman luxury villas appeared in the Italian peninsula in the middle of the 1st century BC and lasted until the end of the 2nd century AD.
- Wealthy Roman Elite had chosen the Vesuvius area to build their luxurious villas. These buildings were related with cultural, political and economic conditions.



View of the model of the Villa of the Papyri

Villa in Olynthus

The reconstruction of these luxurious buildings has its roots in Greek Prototypes.



Villa A-Oplontis



Roman Villas

Peristyles were carefully harmonized with gardens and greenery



Villa San Marco, view of the central peristylum garden

Roman Villas

Nymphaea, pools and fountains completed the technical landscape



Model of the Villa of the Papyri: view of the rectangular peristyle from the south-east.

“Triclinium”

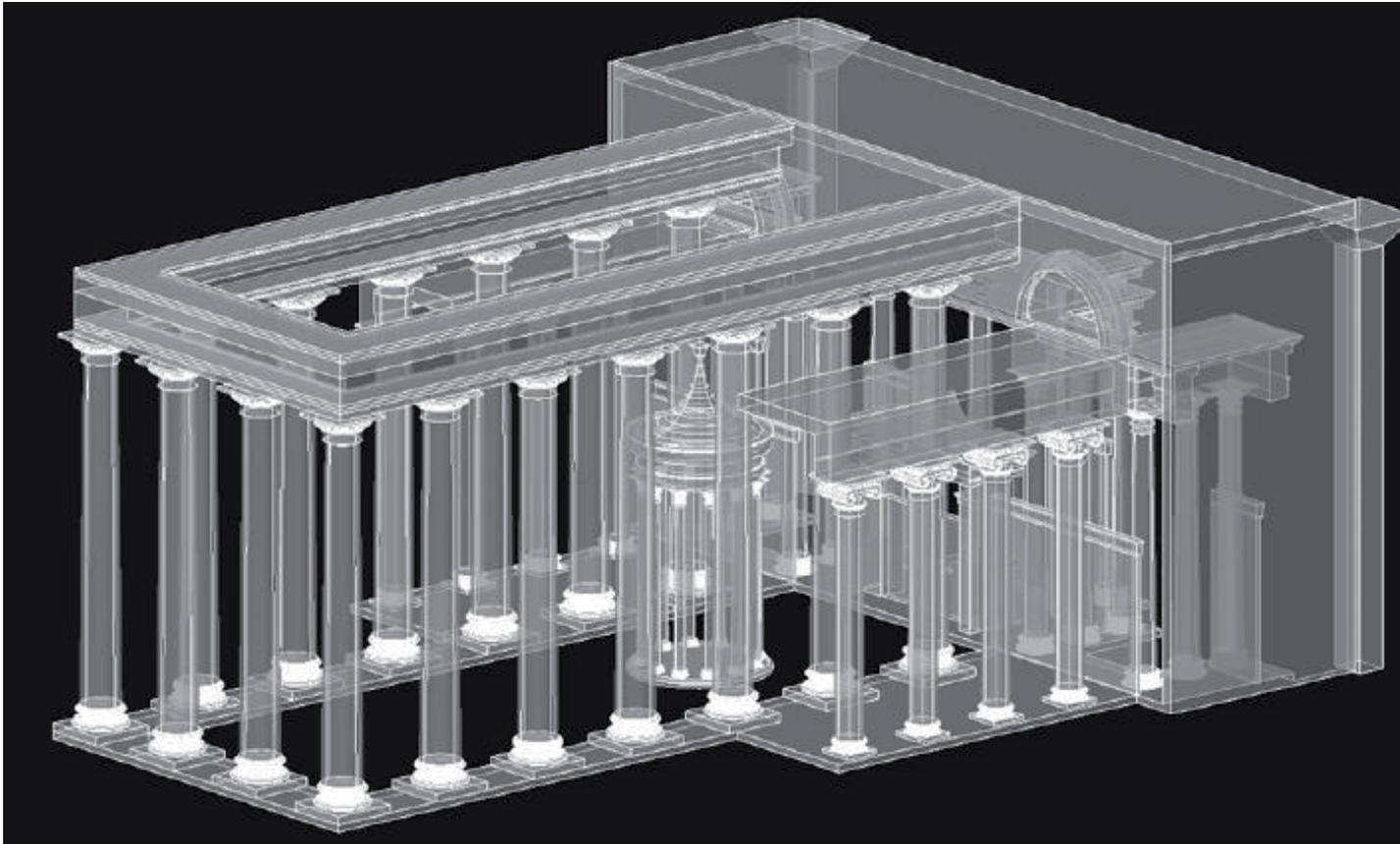
Beds were placed in a specific shape “Π”
(like the Greek capital “P”) which was ideal for symposiums.



Triclinium

"Triclinium"

Shape "Π" (like the Greek capital "P")



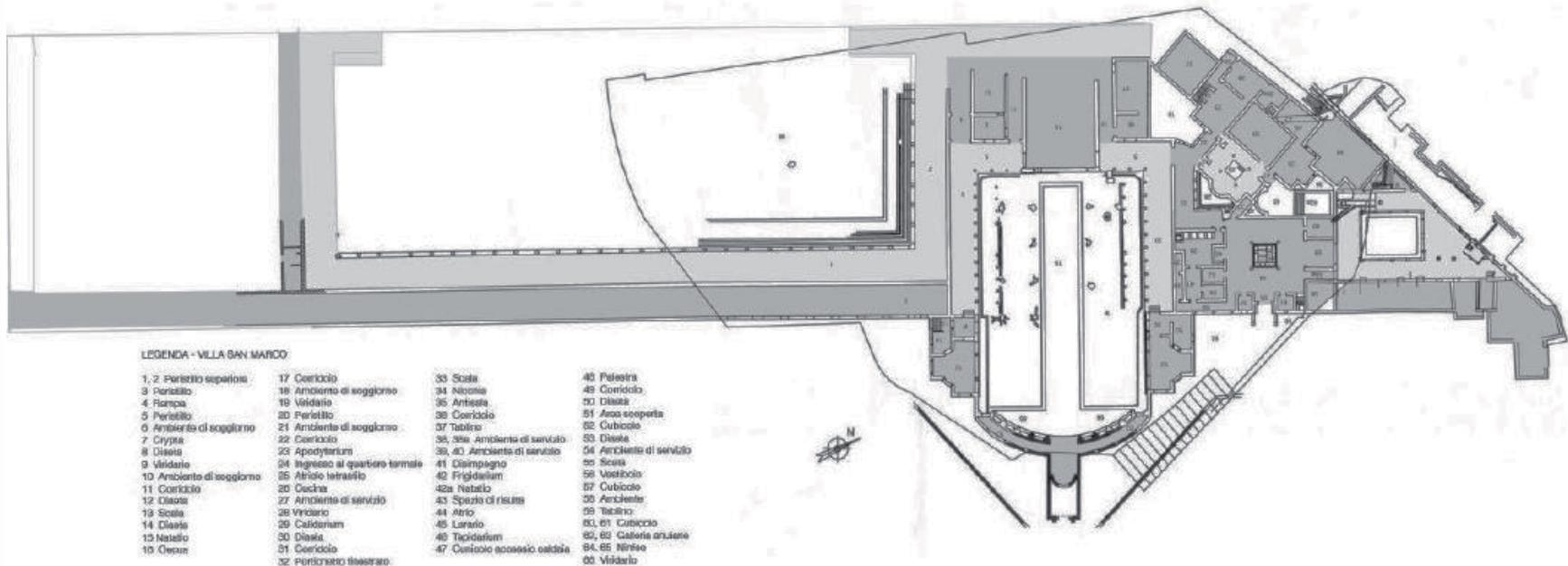
Oplontis, villa of Poppea. An infographic representation of the imaginative space painted in the *triclinium*.

(Processed by G. Manzo; coordination B. Messina, M.I Pascariello)

Roman Villas

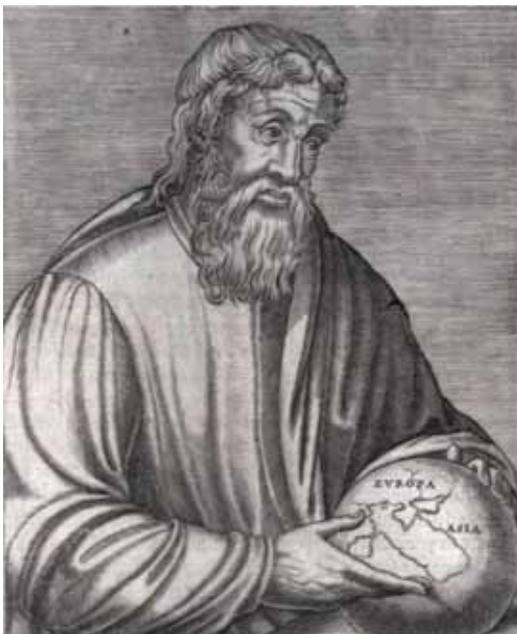
- The villa was not an isolated building.
- It was a building complex.

Plan of the Villa Arianna, updated to 2008 (Courtesy of Thomas Howe).



History of the Roman villas

- The history of the Roman villas initially involved the controlling of large cultivations (3rd century BC) which were overseen by the owner of the farmhouse.
- Strabon (63 BC - c. 24 AD) described Campania having interspersed large villas-cottages and cultivations expanded to Gulf of Naples.
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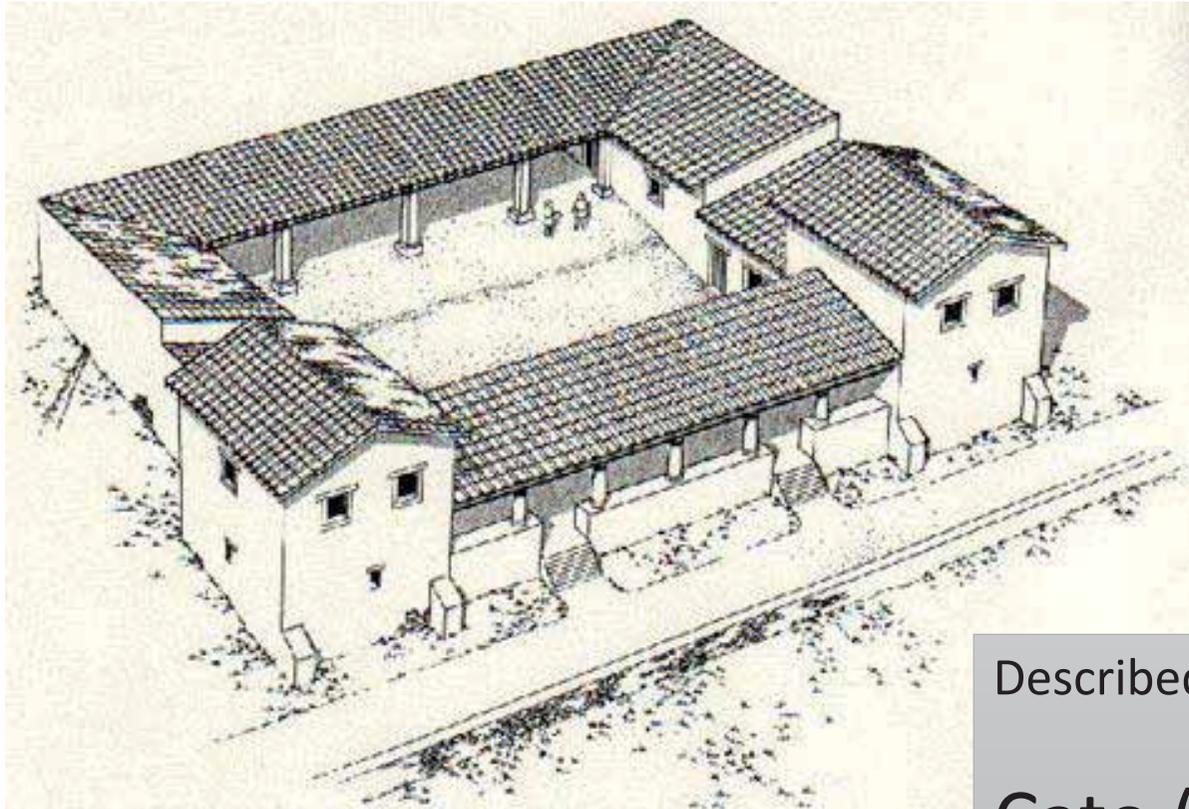


Strabo was a Greek geographer, philosopher, and historian who lived during the transitional period of the Roman Republic into the Roman Empire. Strabo is most notable for his work “Geographica” which presented a descriptive history of people and places from different regions of the world known to his era.

Types of Roman maritime Villas

Villa Rustica	Luxurious Villa
Farmhouse	Big complex with many rooms
Simple decoration and architecture	Luxurious decoration and architecture

“Villa Rustica” (countryside villa)



Described by :

Cato (234-149 BC)

Varro (116-27 BC)

Vitruvius (80-15 BC)

Atrium



Atrium of the House of the Silver Wedding, Pompeii, 2nd century BCE (L. current, R. restored view)

Peristyle



House of the Vettii Peristylum, Pompeii, 1st Century BCE

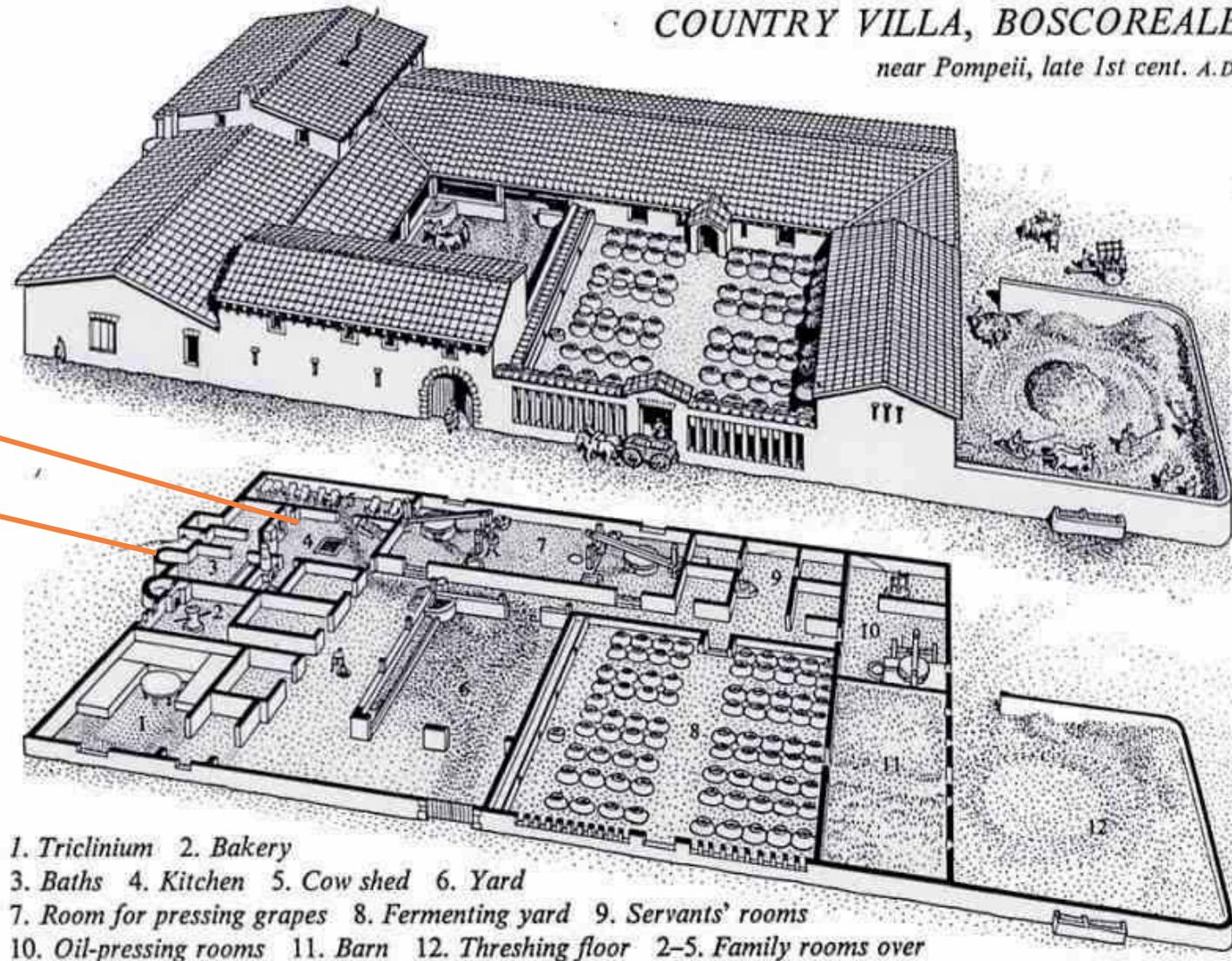
Baths

COUNTRY VILLA, BOSCOREALE

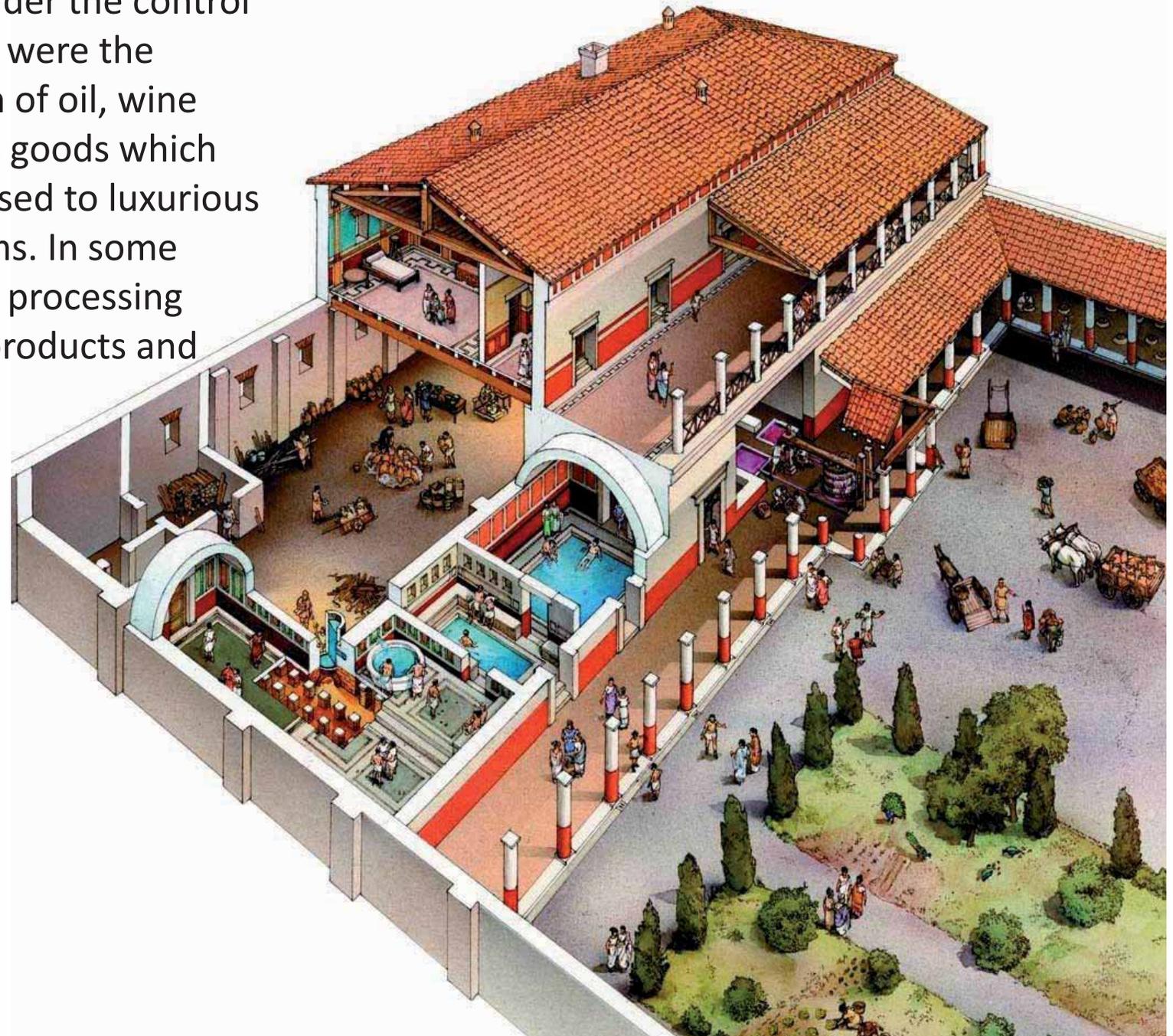
near Pompeii, late 1st cent. A.D.

Kitchen

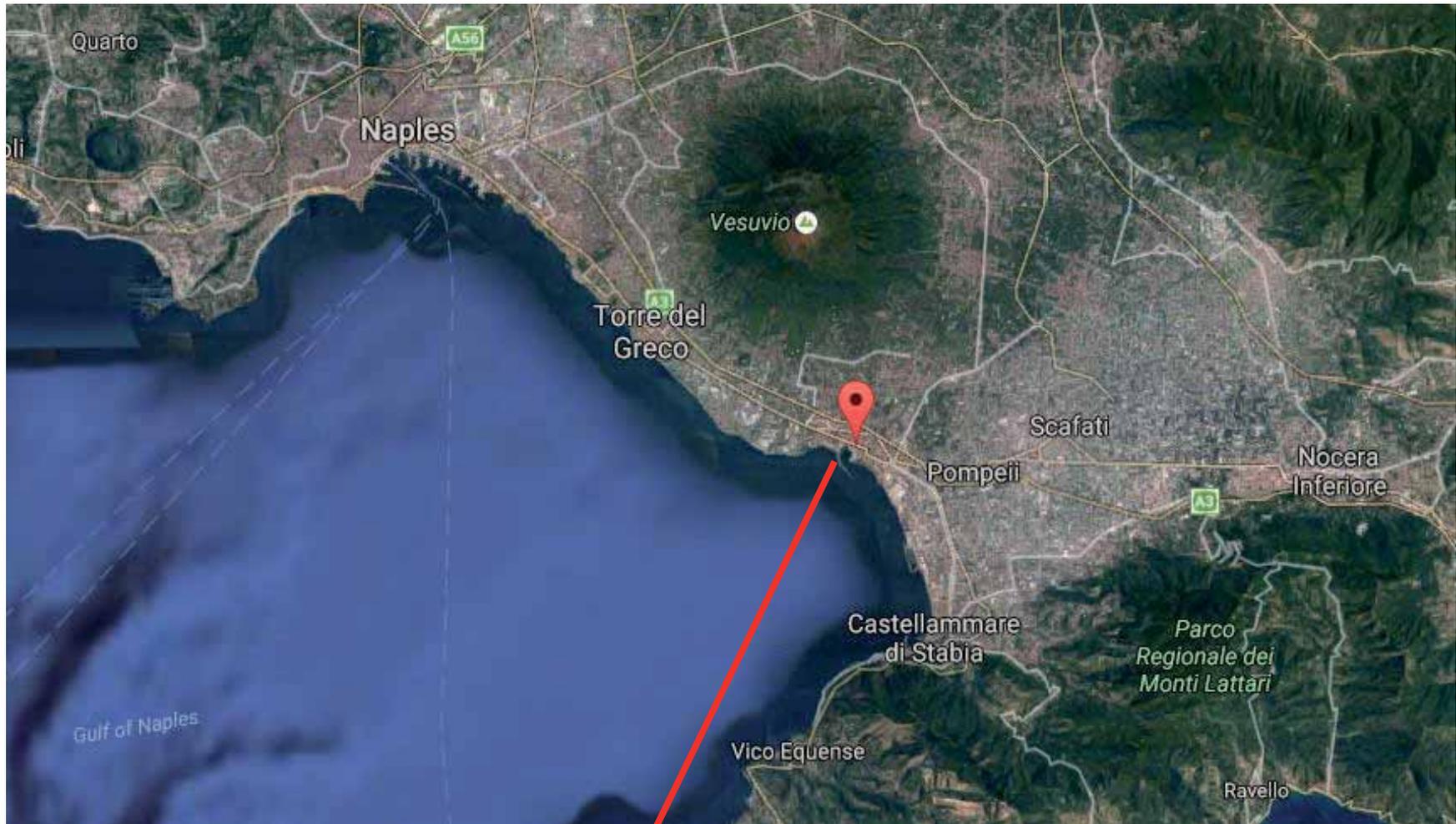
Baths



Usually, under the control of the villa were the production of oil, wine and others goods which certainly used to luxurious symposiums. In some villas were processing rooms of products and storages.

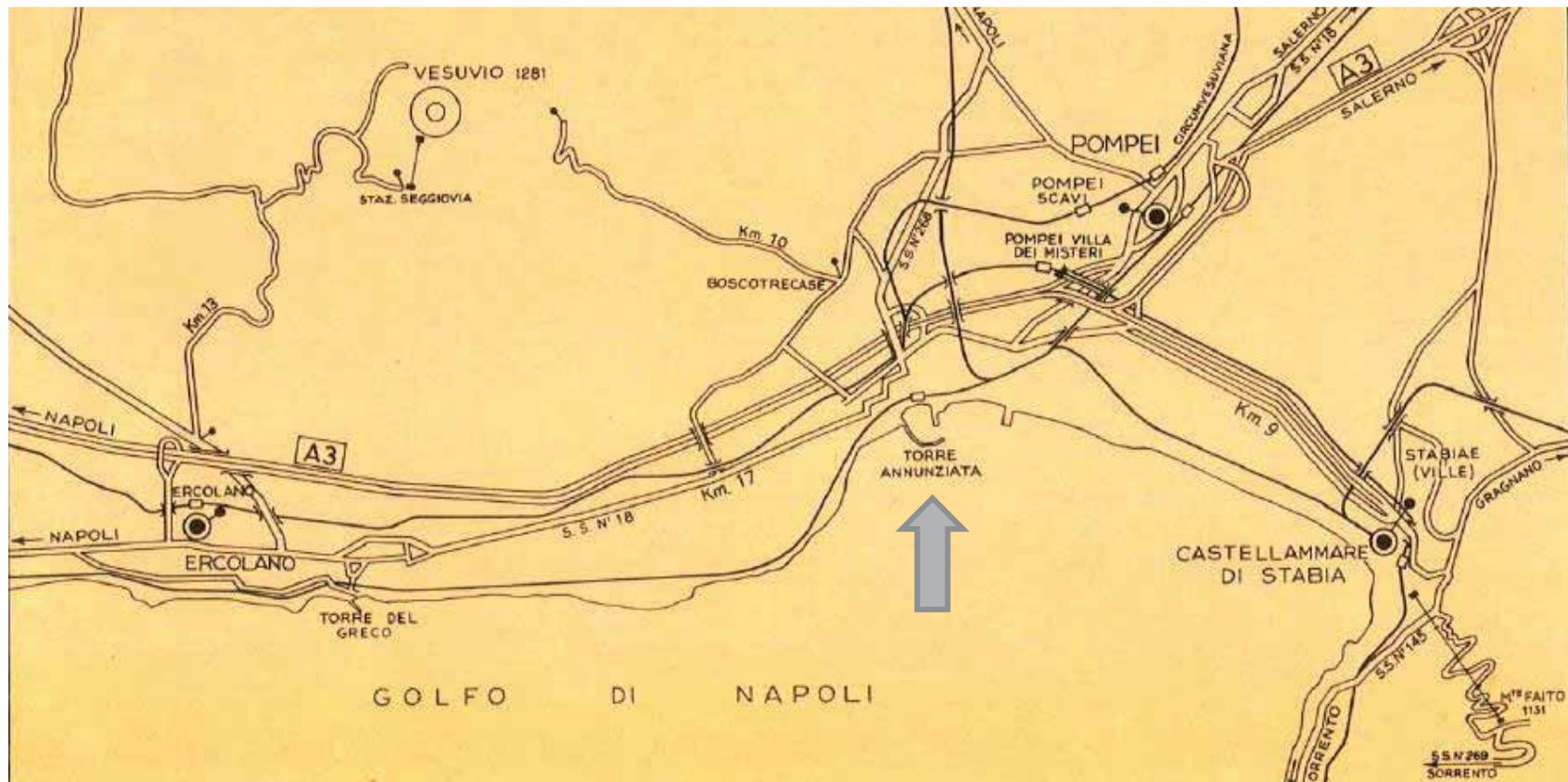


OPLONTIS

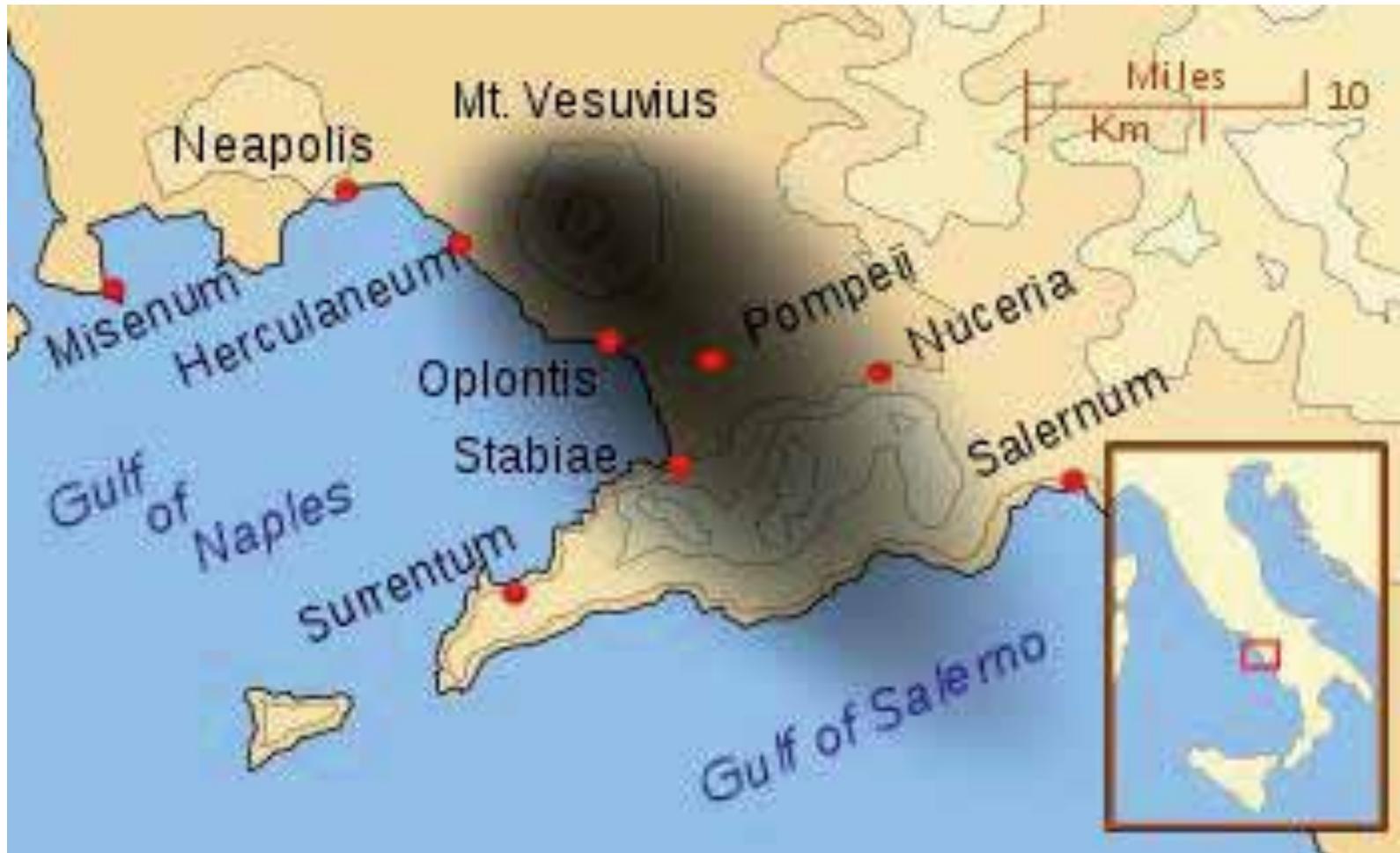


Torre Annunziata

Oplontis-Torre Annunziata



Vesuvian Sites

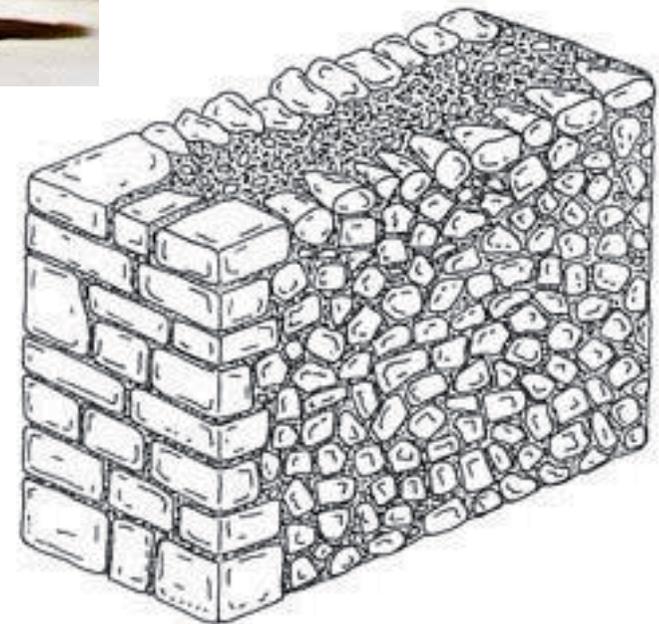


The villa A- “The villa of Poppaea”



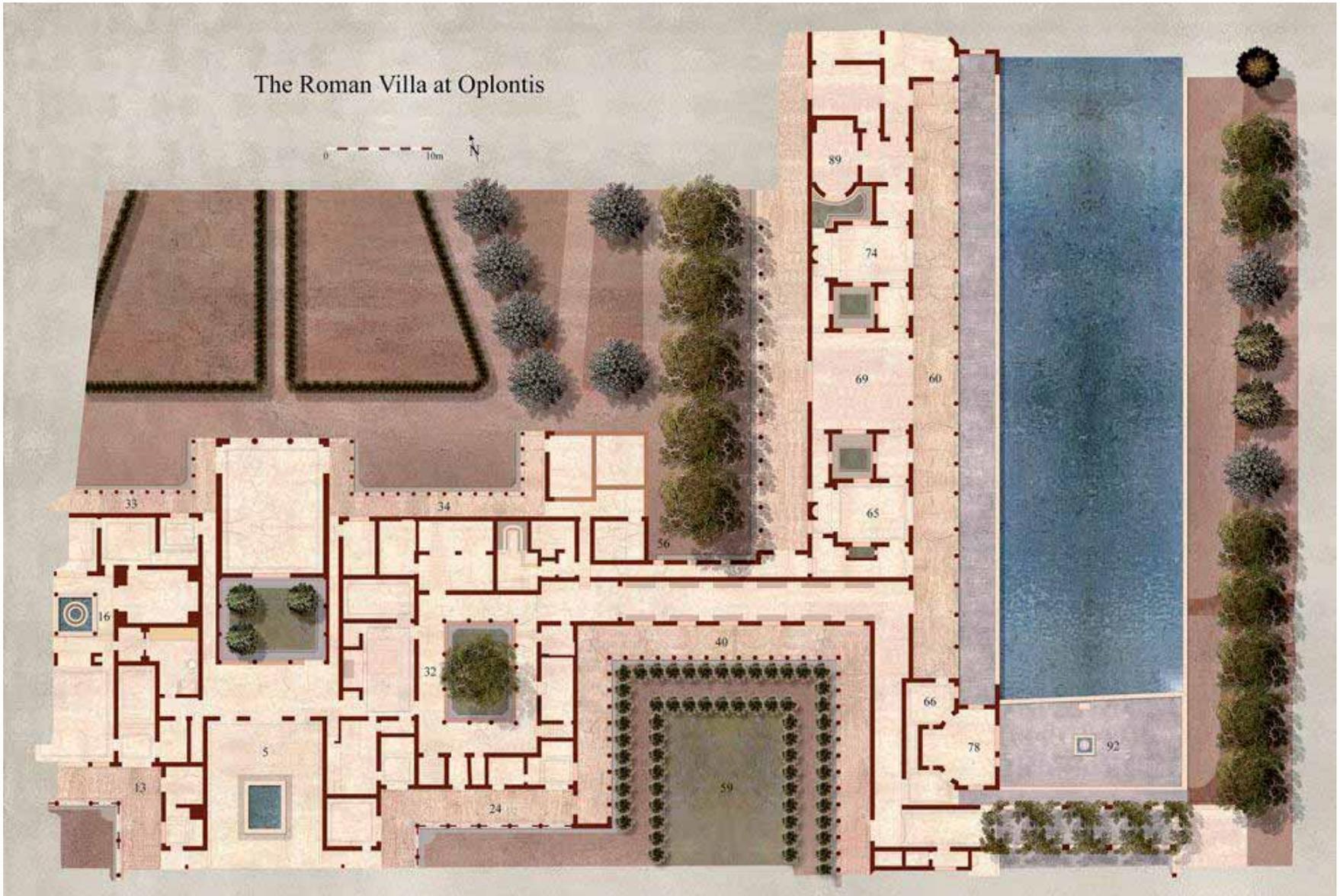


**Frescos on the wall of the atrium
at Villa di Poppaea**



OPUS INCERTUM

The Roman Villa at Oplontis





- Use of marble columns and capitals
- Mosaic floor
- Painted walls
- Sculptures



The villa of Poppaea?

An amphora found in the latrine of the villa bears the inscription "SECUNDO POPPAEAE" - "sent to Secundus, freedman of Poppaea".



Villa B- Villa of L. Crassius Tertius



The seal ring bears the inscription "L.CRAS.TERT."



L·CRAS·TER



Commercial activities in Villa B

The amphorae were found in the villa demonstrate the size of the commercial.

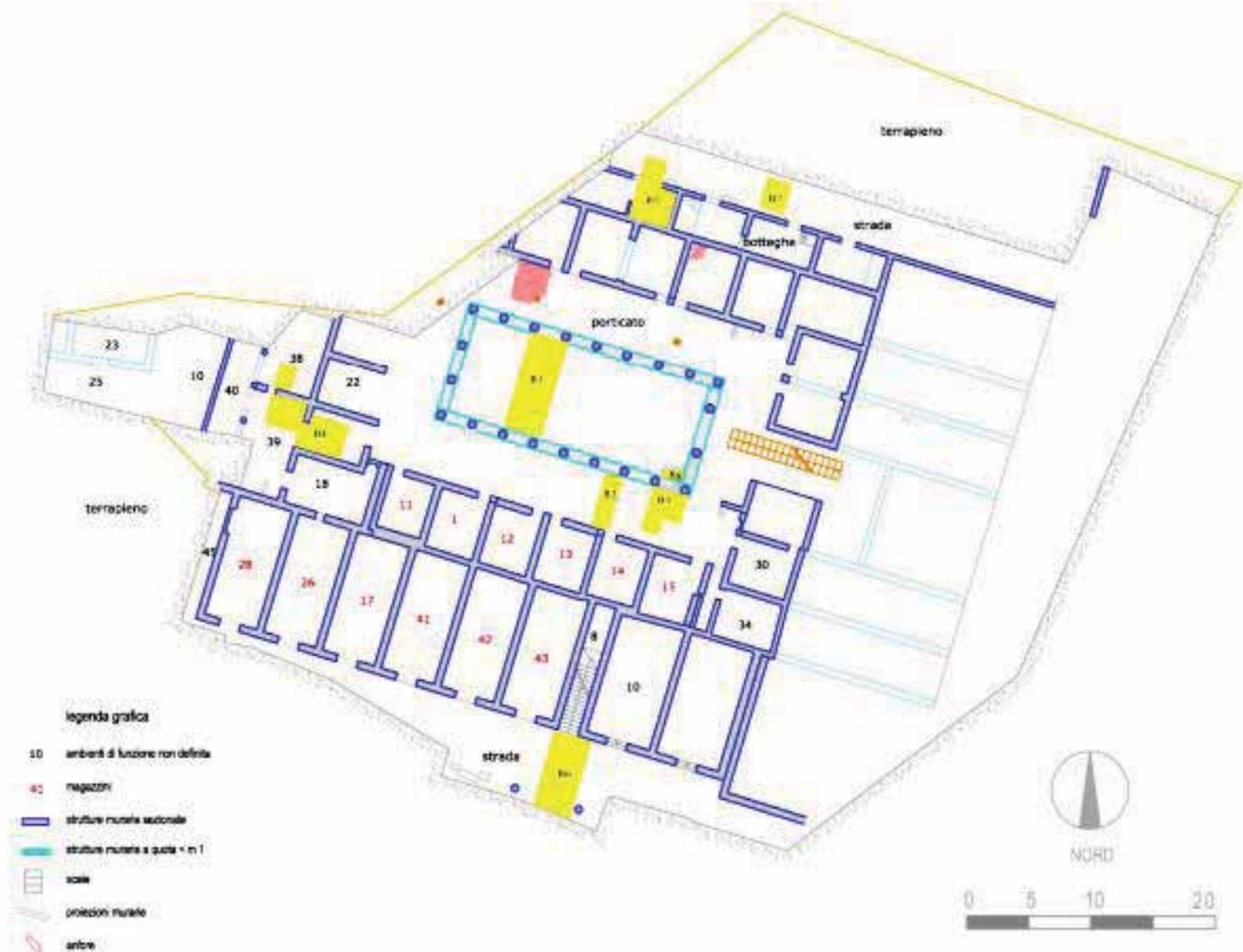


Villa B- 79 AD

Over 50 people were entombed in their underground hiding place.



Villa B



Archaeological research- Oplontis Area

- Spanish Francesco La Vega → Mascatelle 1785
- 1831 → Roman bath complex. Detailed journal of the excavation was later published in the Civic Annals of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1834
- Excavations continued during the 20th century at Oplontis

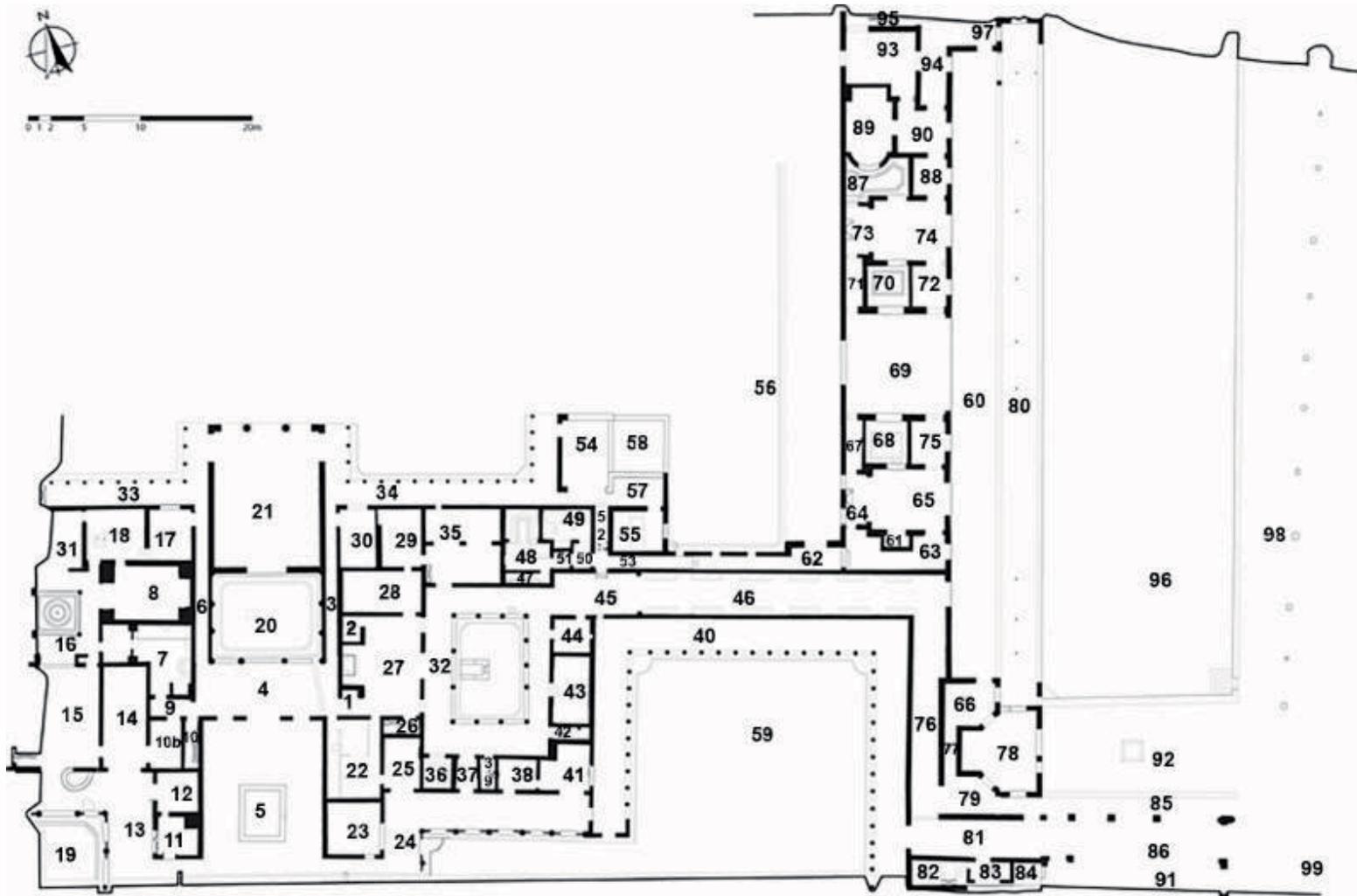
Villa A excavations

- 1593: Excavator Sarno Canal (1593-1600). Have revealed the southern part of the villa A which had a sea view.
- April 1785: La Vega. Digging tunnels north of the pool of the villa A.
- April 1839-November 1840: Michele Rusca described the north wall of porticus 40 surrounding the south garden 58.
- 1954: local researchers, there are no records of this initiative except some photographs.



Photo: Bisogno, *La Gazzetta del Golfo*,
June 1959

Plan view Villa A



Excavation: 1964–1969

Luigi D'Amore the principal inspector and Carlo Giordano the supervisor or inspector



Excavation: 1964–1969



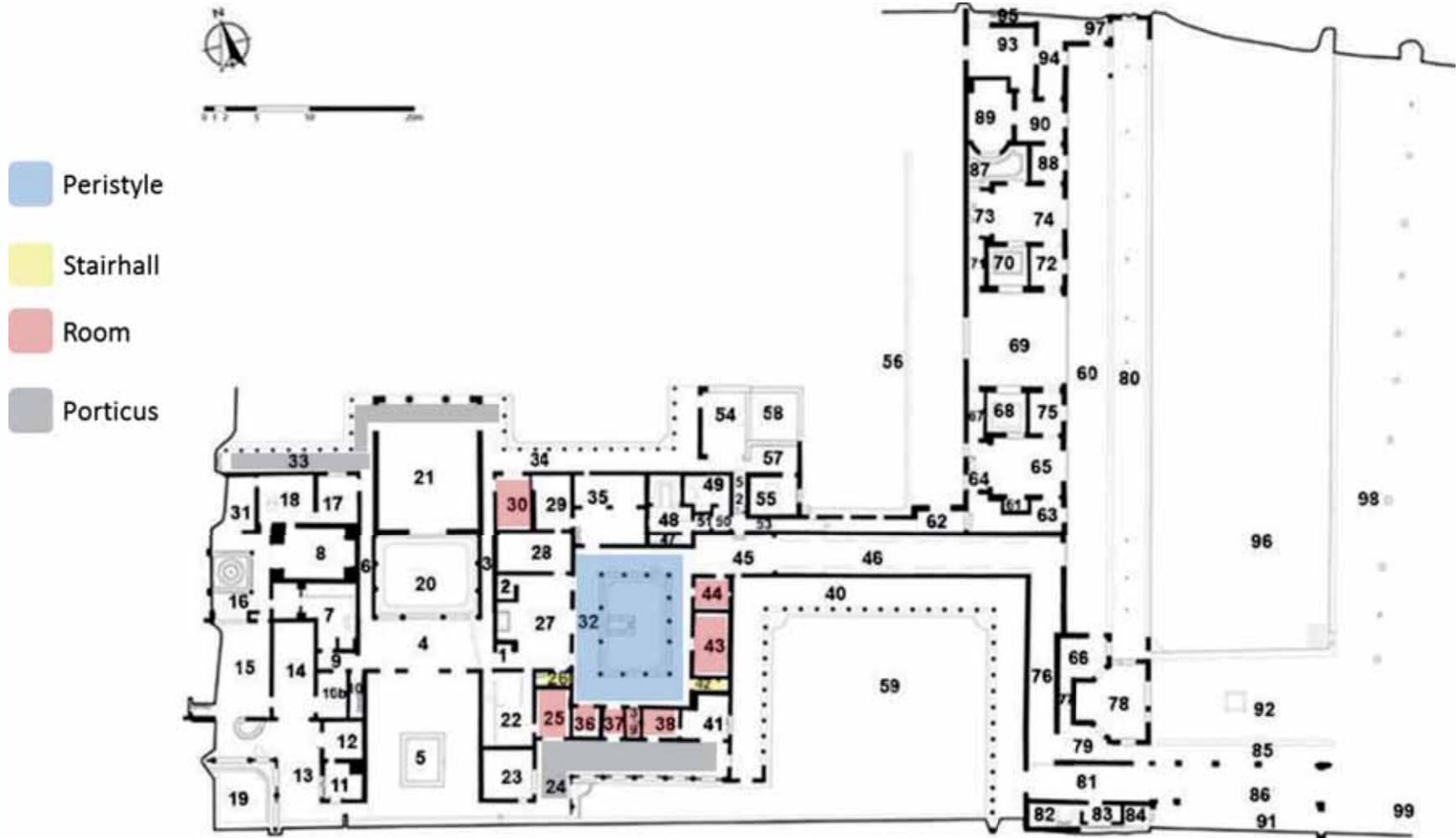
Excavation of atrium 5, vestibule 4, and viridarium 20, August 1966. View from the southeast.

Photo: SAP De Franciscis

Excavation Notebook 1:

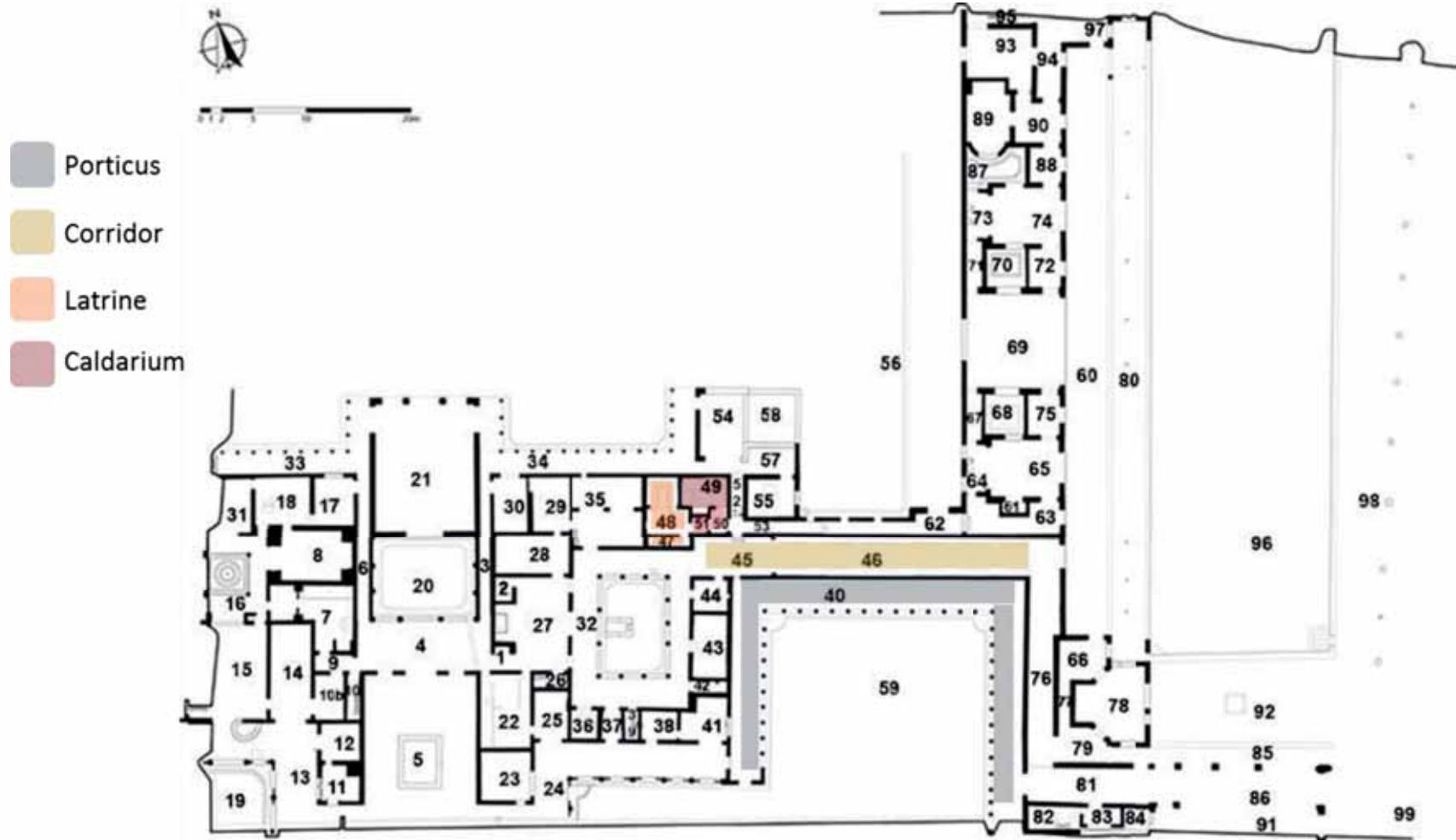
10 November 1971–11 July 1973

by Ferdinando Balzano, assistant to the excavations of Oplontis.



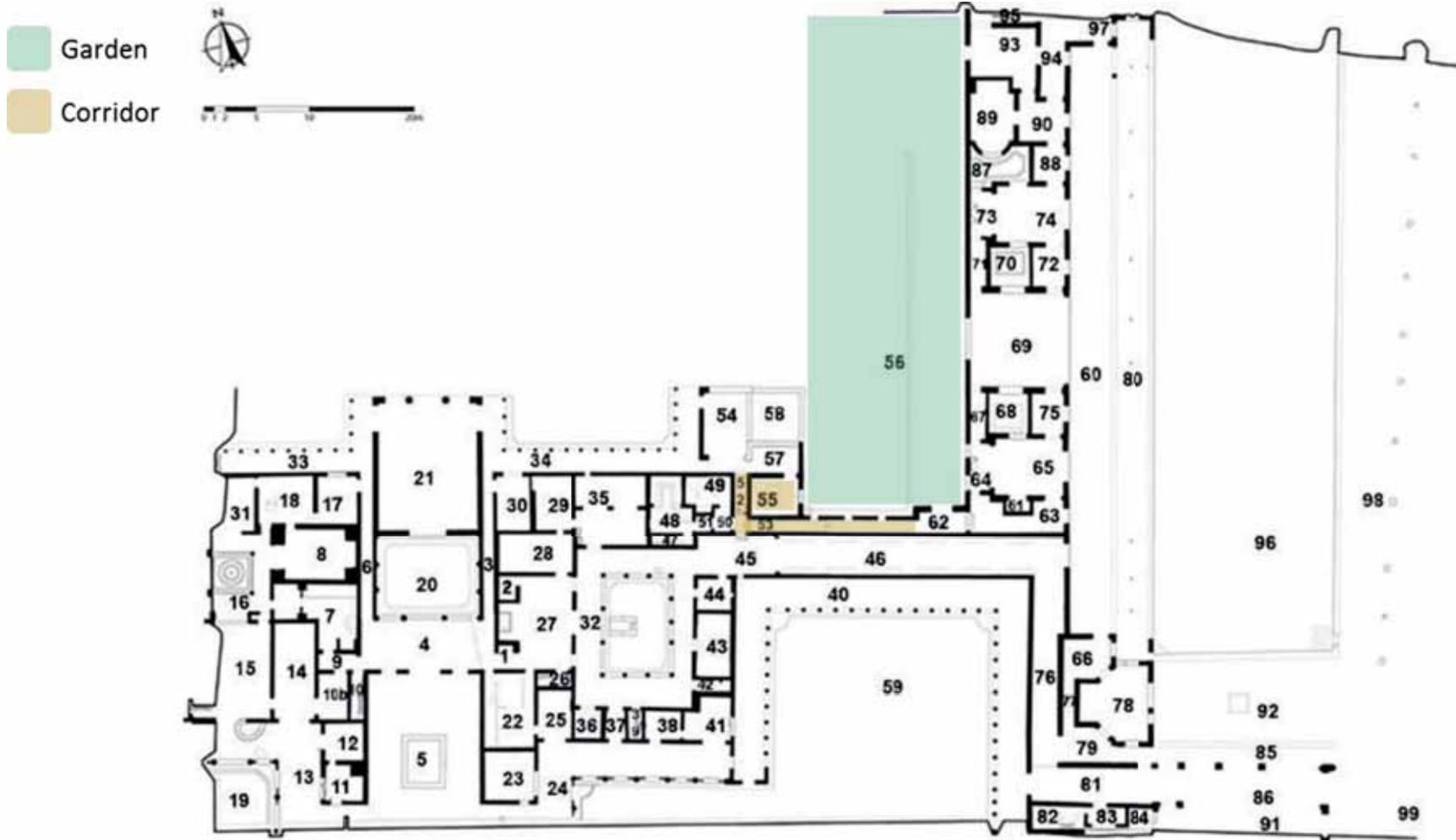
Excavation Notebook 2:

12 July 1973–16 November 1973



Excavation Notebook 3:

17 November 1973–3 August 1974

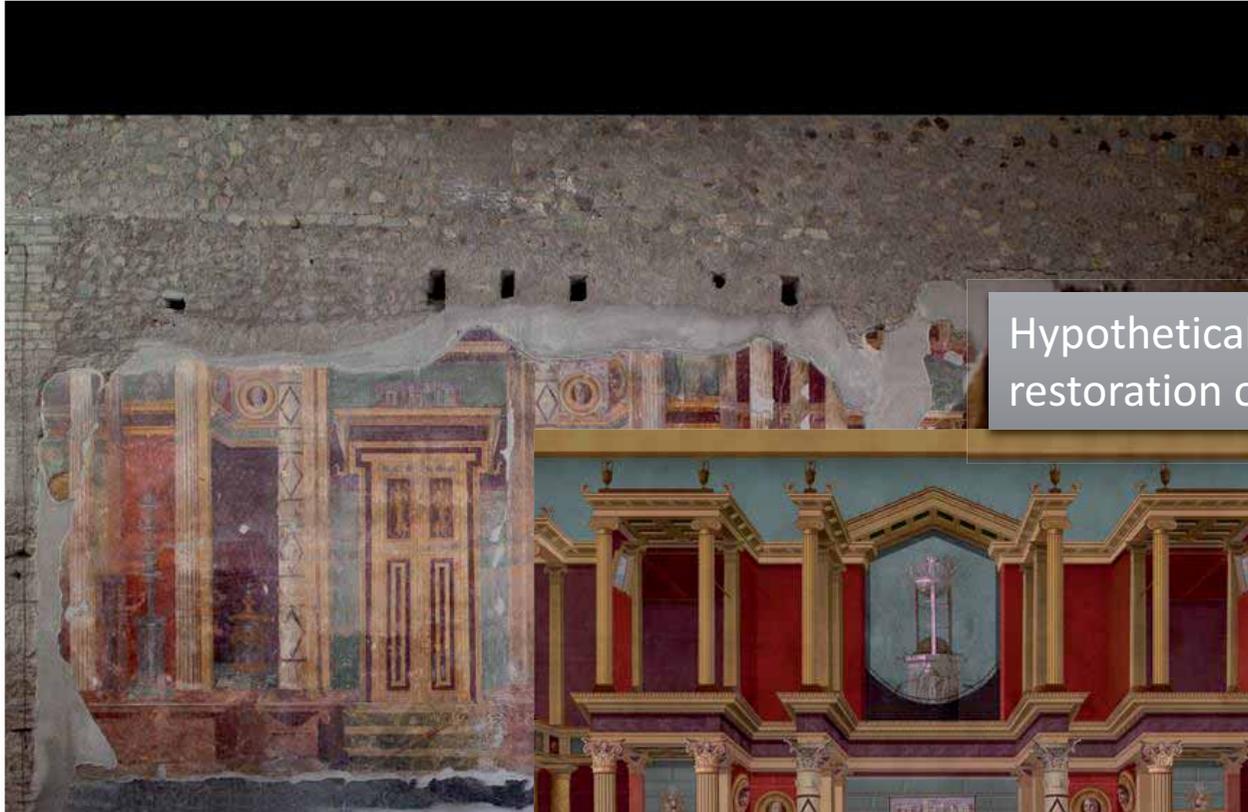


Excavation Notebook 4:

25 November 1974–19 July 1983

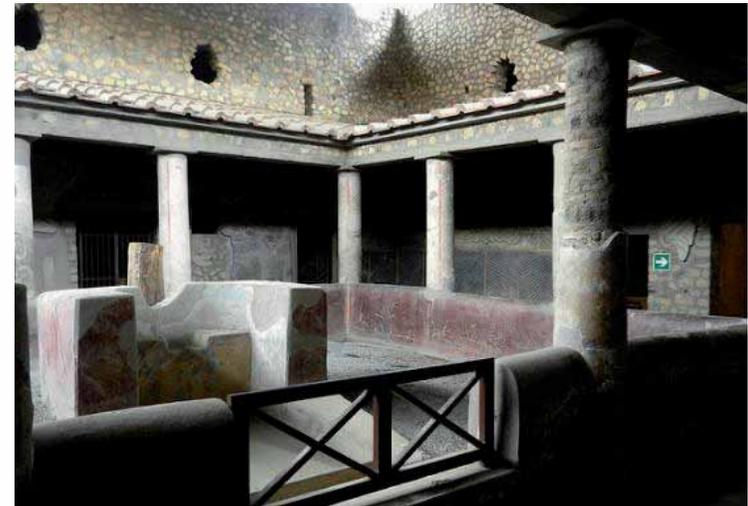
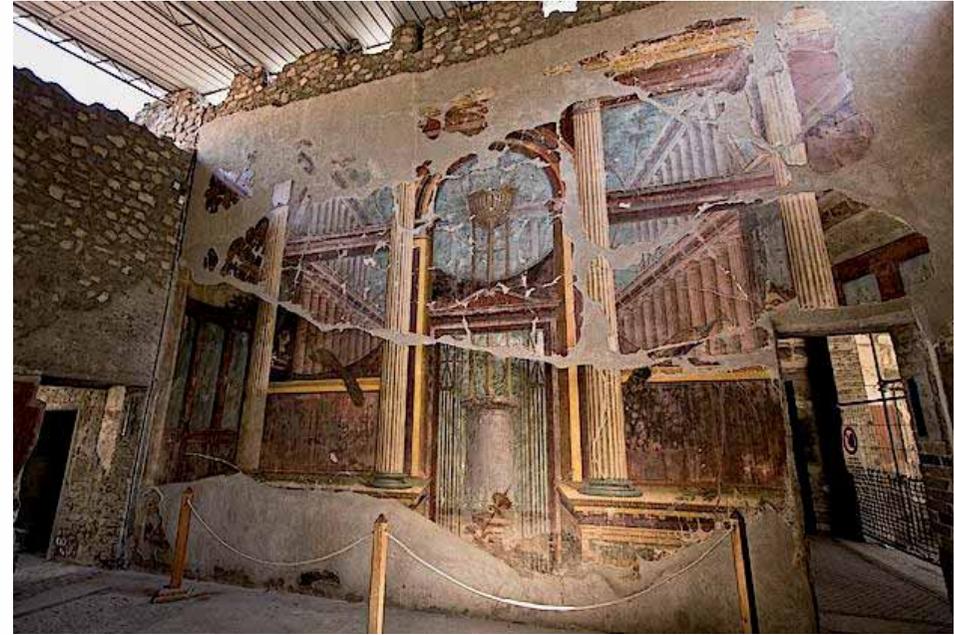


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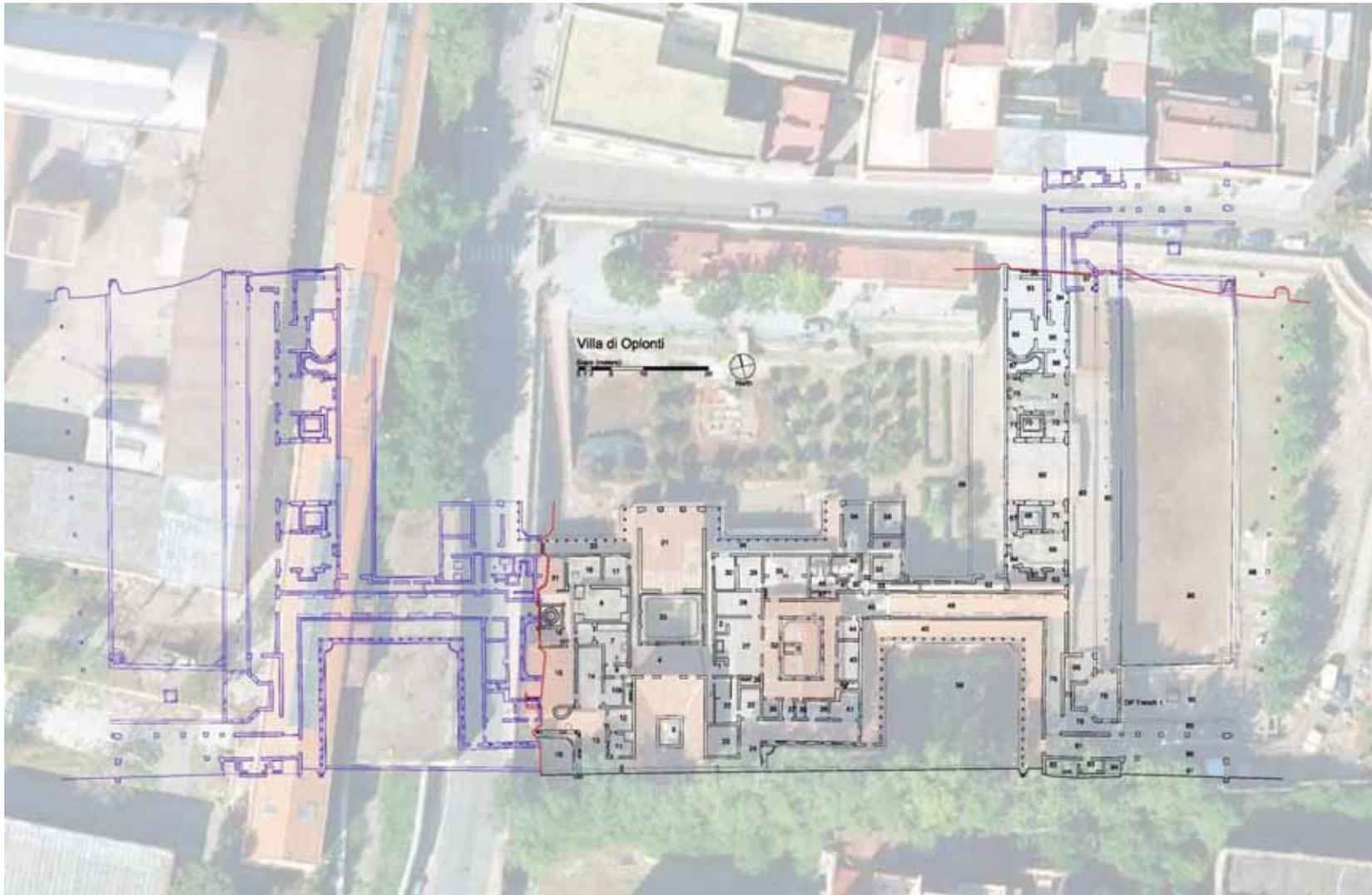


Hypothetical wall painting restoration of room 5, west wall





Thank you for your attention!



Plan of actual and hypothetical remains of villa A.
Drawing Timothy Liddell. ©The Oplontis Project