

The excavations at the so-called Villa of Titus (Castel Sant'Angelo, Rieti)

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During the months of May and June, 2018, a team of archaeologists and archaeological students engaged in fieldwork at the site of the so-called Villa di Tito (Villa of Titus), a monumental complex situated alongside the ancient Via Salaria on a terrace above Lago di Paterno in the territory of the comune of Castel Sant'Angelo (province of Rieti) (fig. 1). The structure consists of a massive concrete terracing wall defining a large platform 60 m in length (E-W) and ca. 20 m wide (N-S), atop of which are various smaller structures (fig. 2). The excavation of the site was directed by Drs. Myles McCallum (Saint Mary's University) and Martin Beckmann (McMaster University), their Italian collaborator and coordinator, dott. Simone Nardelli, and their field director, Matt Munro, a PhD student in archaeology (University of Calgary).

The goals of the 2018 excavations were to expand our current knowledge about the building's plan, date of construction, and occupational history, to test the hypothesis that the structure is indeed a villa, and to find concrete evidence for the attribution of this site to the emperor Titus and the Flavian family. We also sought, through examination of surface remains in the immediate environs of the concrete structure noted above, to more accurately define the size of the entire complex with which it is associated. As this is our first year of work at the site, our research was also keen to identify the overall archaeological potential of the site to determine if it merited continued research in subsequent years.

Our results indicate that the monumental concrete terrace structure was constructed sometime in the late first century BC to the first decades of the first century AD, with at least two subsequent major renovations, including a complete reworking of the site prior to its abandonment. Overall, the ar-

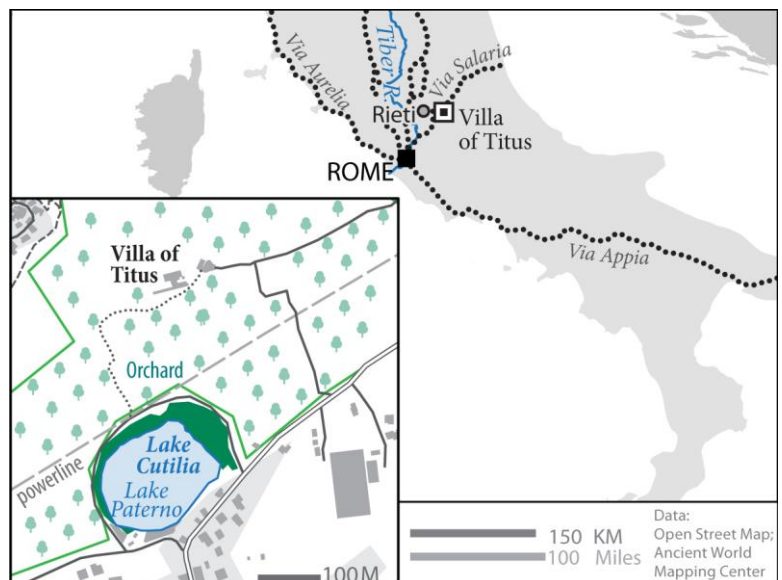


Fig. 1. Map showing location of the Villa of Titus (Will Flanagan).



Fig. 2. Southern exterior of concrete terrace structure showing pilasters restored in the 1980s (Myles McCallum).

chitectural and artefactual data are consistent with the hypothesis that the structure is a villa rather than a bath complex. We were unable to confirm that the site was once the property of the Flavian emperors. Finally, surface data suggests that the monumental concrete terrace structure is one part of a much larger rural complex extending across the hillside.

Physical Setting

The Villa di Tito site is situated on the slopes that comprise the northern side of the Velino River valley, immediately to the north and steeply upslope from Lago di Paterno, likely the ancient *lacus Cutiliae*. The site itself sits on a small natural terrace, widened through the use of concrete to form what may be referred to as a *basis villae* complete with a cryptoporticus. The slopes above the villa, to the north and northwest, in the direction of the village of Paterno, are covered with trees, many of which were part of a former olive and fruit orchard that has now gone wild. Adjacent the site and to the east is a historical farmhouse, a *casale*, dating to the nineteenth century and recently restored and converted into a guesthouse and a small museum. To the northeast of the *casale* is a broad olive orchard set in what locals describe as a natural theatre formed by the hillslope rising up above a now dry lake bed, *Pozzo secco*.

History of Research at the Site

Niccolò Persichetti, at the end of the nineteenth century, describes the site as follows: “Intanto tra il lago di Paterno e Pozzo secco evvi una località detta Fornice, dove sorgeva un altro grandioso stabilimento balneare. I ruderi maestosi che ne avanzano, meritevoli di accurato studio, dimostrano ch'era una delle terme principali dell'antica *Cutilia*. Il muro meridionale era lungo m. 60; quello orientale m. 50. Il primo che costituiva la facciata esterna, presenta 13 alti pilastri, che dividevano dei vani, probabilmente fontane di disuguale larghezza; il più piccolo di m. 2, il più grande di m. 4, ma tutti della lunghezza di m. 2,10. Sulla parete di fondo veggonsi uno o più canali in terracotta per la condotta dell'acqua. E nel centro della muratura è notevole l'incavo di grossi

Fig. 3. Concrete wall showing various voids possibly associated with wooden elements or used as water channels (Myles McCallum).

legni che, serpeggiando dai pilastri esterni alle pareti interne, nonché lungo gli altri muri di precinzione, il tutto legavano e sostenevano ad uso di catene. Sul lato meridionale si osservano altri vani con muri dell'enorme spessore di m. 4,50. L'interno dell'edificio è quasi interamente coperto di terra che si coltiva. Vi si veggono soltanto i resti dei muri di un vano, probabilmente serbatoio o vasca natatoria, avendo sulla parete settentrionale una lunga fila di canali che vi conducevano l'acqua. L'intonaco è caduto dappertutto. Nulladimeno sarebbe interessante se anche questo monumento, benché deperito, si rimettesse interamente all'aperto"¹. Beginning with the last set of features described by Persichetti, the exact location of the cistern or swimming pool described is unclear. Perhaps he is referring to the cryptoporticus (described below), which sits on the interior side of the thick (4.50 m) concrete terracing wall and associated pilasters in the southeastern corner of the building. Or, it may be that he is describing features associated with the terrace itself (also described below), and so not within the cryptoporticus. In general, Persichetti repeated the interpretation of nineteenth century archaeologists who were only



able to observe and so describe the monumental fountain and not the rooms within the concrete terraced structure. The horizontal and vertical recesses within the masonry of the terraced structure (fig. 3) may have accommodated wooden beams, possibly used during construction but perhaps of structural significance, and only careful study of the structure will allow us to accurately reconstruct its original shape and other decorative elements such as columns. It is also possible that some of these voids were water channels. Also, it is unclear to what row of channels used for the transport of water he refers in his description. If they are those 'channels' visible today within the walls of the cryptoporticus, the exact function of these channels is unclear. They may be used for conducting ground water away from the building's foundations, part of the structure of the building itself (possibly used for wooden beams?), or, as he suggests, for conducting water towards a pool of cistern, for use in a pool, as drinking water, or for other purposes.

The first scientific excavations were carried out in 1987, when the Archaeological Superintendency of Lazio engaged in a program of cleaning in preparation for restoration work of the concrete structure. Another brief campaign, also associated with restoration work, was carried out in 1993. These excavations were focused on those parts of the building adjacent the south-facing concrete terrace wall, in particular the southeastern corner of the structure. Here excavators found a series of rooms at the base of the terracing wall entered from the east through a large door (fig. 4). These rooms were constructed in *opus reticulatum* and quasi reticulatum-faced concrete and the central part of the structure unearthed was covered by a long barrel vault extending internally from the eastern facade. This barrel vault supported an artificial terrace above, situated at the same level as the rooms unearthed during excavations in 2010/2011, the remains of which were removed as part of the 1987 and 1993 cleaning operations and excavation. Today, at least two construction phases are visible in this part of the structure, but only further cleaning and careful inspection of the architectural elements will allow for a more definitive understanding of the structure's construction and occupational histories.

¹ PERSICHETTI 1893: 168.

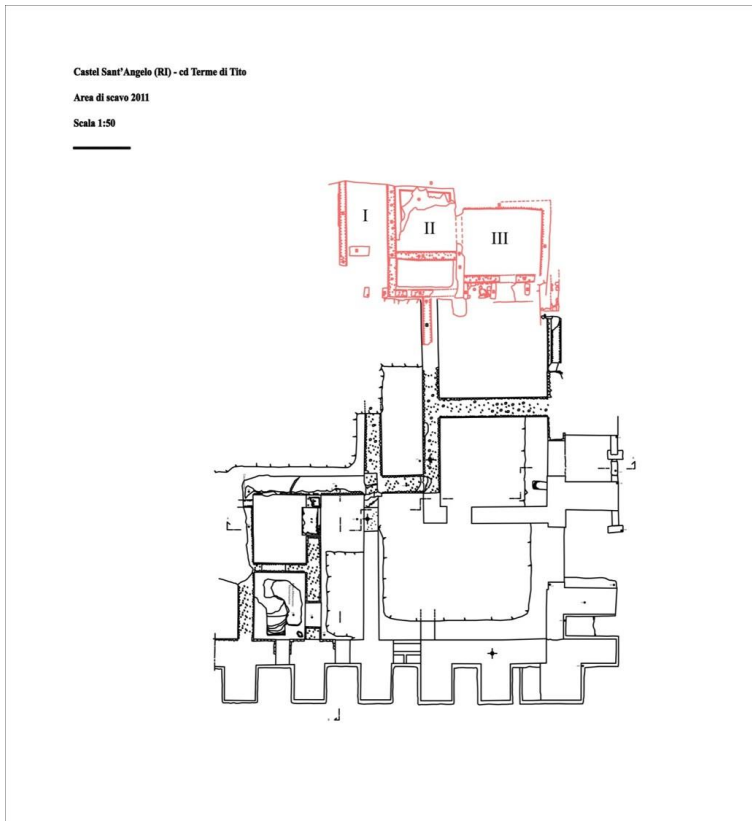


Fig. 4. Plan of previous excavations, not reproduced to scale; the portion in black represents the excavation of the cryptoporticus (Courtesy of Francesca Lezzi).

Fig. 5. Wall delimiting the northern extent of the concrete terrace structure excavated in 2010/2011 (Myles McCallum).



Most recently, an excavation campaign was carried out by the Superintendency in 2010/2011², which brought to light three rooms at the eastern edge of the terrace and bounded on the north by a large terracing wall that may be the northern limit of the building itself (fig. 5). While floor levels were not reached in all of the rooms and hallways uncovered by excavators, a black and white mosaic with a simple black-band frame was uncovered (fig. 6). This series of rooms, their arrangement, and the finds found in the archaeological layers associated with them, suggested to the excavators that the building was a villa rather than a bath complex. Unfortunately, these excavations did not discover the means of communication between the lower levels of the structure (noted above); presumably, there must be some sort of internal staircase linking these levels, the traces of which have yet to be discovered.

The excavations of 2010/2011 were accompanied by geophysical prospection, specifically GPR (ground penetrating radar), conducted by researchers from the CNR³. Two areas were subject to GPR: the terrace whereon excavations were conducted in 2010/2011, and by our team in 2018, as well as an adjacent olive orchard to the northeast of the terraced structure. The results (fig. 7) suggested that the rooms excavated on the terrace in 2010/2011 continued to the west, including one area with some

sort of apsidal wall, indicated by 3b on the plan in the “Zona terme” area⁴. The results from olive orchard indicate the possible remains of at least two large structures (one possibly 40 meters in length) between 0.60 and 1.35 meters beneath the surface with walls orientated roughly northeast-southwest and northwest-southeast, indicated by 4a, 5a, and 6a on the plan in the so-called, “zona inghiottitoio-dolina” area⁵. As the olive orchard is located on private property, we did not seek permission to excavate here during the 2018 season, but we intend to conduct intensive surface survey in the field during 2019 and at some future point may seek permission to excavate here.

² ALVINO 2014a and 2014b.

³ Piro and Zamuner 2014.

⁴ Piro and Zamuner 2014: 67-69.

⁵ *Ibid.*



Fig. 6. Black and white mosaic from 2010/2011 excavations, post conservation (Myles McCallum).

2018 Excavations

Our excavations have built on the archaeological research carried out at the site in 2010/2011 by extending the former trench to the west along the terrace. Initially, we laid out a roughly 300 square meter trench, of which we excavated ca. 200 square meters. This included the removal of a former agricultural terrace once used for oleoculture but apparently abandoned during the restoration work of the late 80s and early 90s. The initial phase of the excavation required the removal of brush and brambles that had grown up at the site since the last excavations. This resulted in our discovery of a quite substantial concrete core masonry wall, approximately 2.5 m high (fig. 8), along the northern limit of the structure, roughly in line with the terracing wall previously uncovered in 2010/2011. This masonry structure served as the northwestern limit of our trench.

In total, over a five-week period, we removed roughly 250 cubic meters of soil, principally colluvium, and architectural collapse layers, to reveal the presence of at least two new rooms and the continuation of a room partially excavated and a corridor identified in 2010/2011. Unfortunately, in no part of our excavation did we arrive at floor or foundation levels. This is primarily due to the substantial amount of colluvial overburden and the thickness of the wall and roof collapses covering lower stratigraphic units, in places well over two meters deep and including substantial pieces of concrete masonry weighing hundreds of kilograms.

At the same time, excavations in 2018 provide information about the layout and scale of the structure, as well as data consistent with the interpretation of the site as a villa rather than a bath complex.

Method

During May and June of 2018, our team engaged in open area excavation at the site. This method was chosen as it had the greatest potential for revealing elements of the structure's overall plan. Throughout the excavation, we engaged in dry sieving between 50% and 100% of all contexts, depending on size and reliability. We also collected 50 litre soil samples from each archaeological context and will float this material when we are

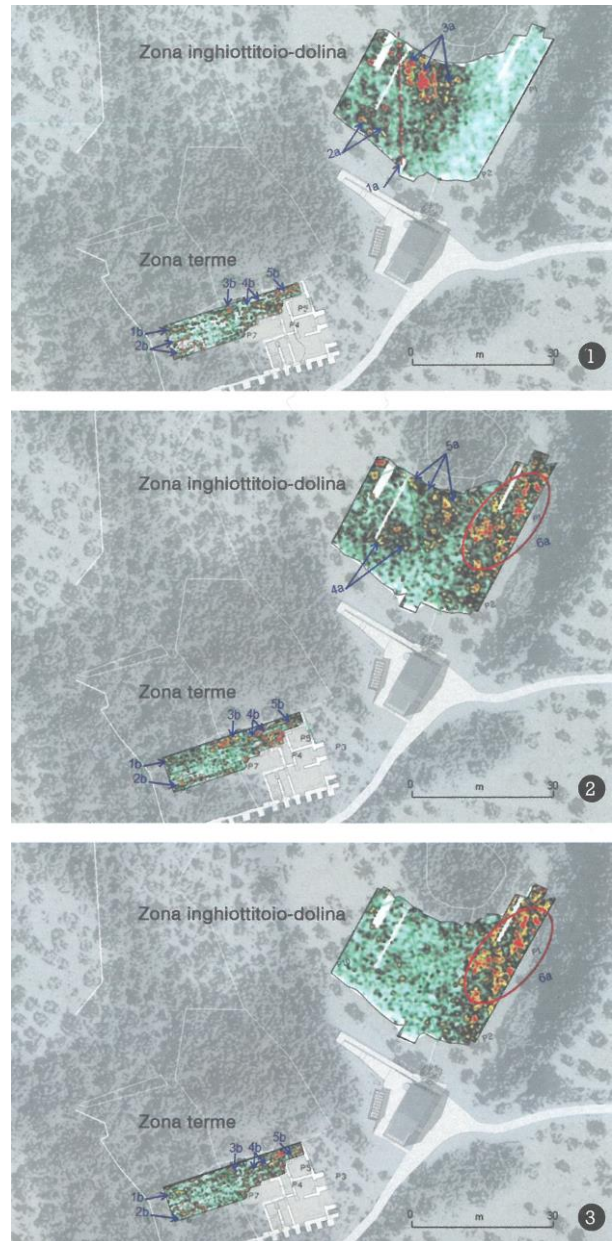


Fig. 7. GPR results from 2010/2011 (from Piro and Zamuner, 2014).

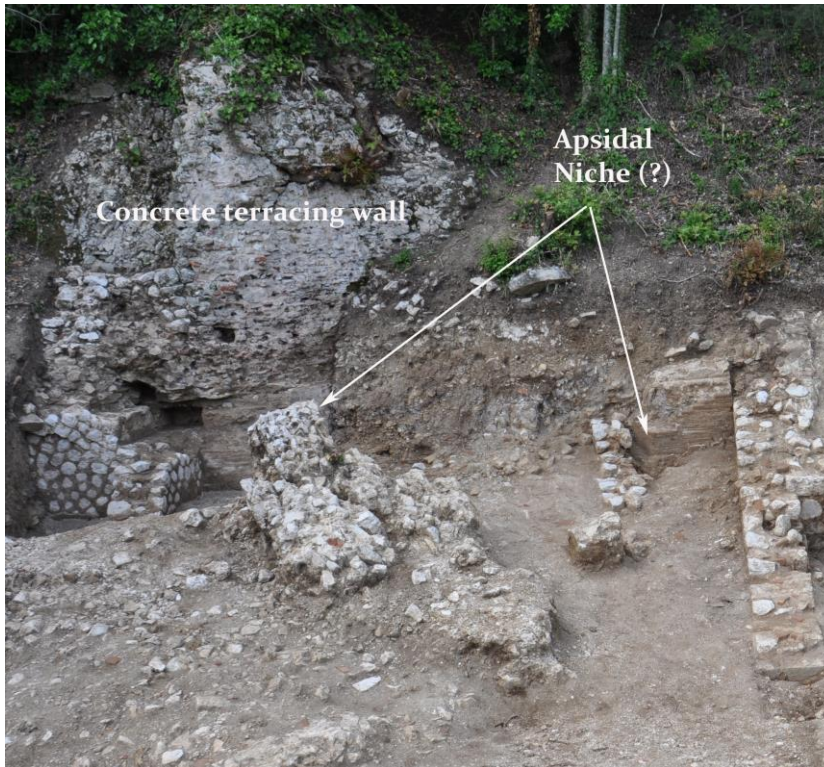


Fig. 8. Concrete core wall during excavations, northwest sector of trench (Myles McCallum).

in the field again next summer (2019). For all stratigraphic units, we have record photos, day photos, start and end photos, as well as reconstructions in CAD and GIS as overlays. We documented all architecture using photogrammetry, as well as all archaeological sections. Marco di Lieto has created a 3D model of the excavations using this photogrammetric data. We processed all finds onsite, recording measurements and weights, photographed all artefacts, and drew all complete artefacts and diagnostic pottery sherds.

With respect to surface survey, we engaged in preliminary reconnaissance, assessing potential surface visibility, agricultural regimes,

and noting the presence of architectural material and datable artefacts in a relatively casual manner in anticipation of engaging in intensive field survey in the immediate environs of the Villa di Tito. This surface survey will be complemented by geophysical prospection, initially magnetometry and electrical resistivity survey.

At the end of the season, we backfilled our trench after covering all exposed stratigraphic units and architecture with *tessuto non tessuto*.

Overall Plan

Assigning room numbers to those that have been excavated since 2010/2011, including those unearthed in 2018, there are clearly at least 10 rooms or interior spaces such as corridors (fig. 9). Rooms 1 through 7 were either partially or completely excavated in 2010/2011 and, as noted above, floor levels were reached in only a couple of these rooms, including the room containing the mosaic (Room 3). Rooms 6 and 8 were initially partially excavated during 2010/2011, and the excavation of these spaces was expanded during the 2018 campaign.

Preliminary indications are that the rooms can be divided into two groups: northern rooms adjacent the northern limit of the structure and terracing wall; and a southern group of rooms. Both groups were initially divided by an E-W running corridor, Room 6 (and also 4), part of which was filled in when Room 4 was constructed during renovations. This long corridor appears to be an important architectural element guiding the circulation of traffic within the structure.

Of particular note among the northern range of rooms are Rooms 8 through 10, which were the focus of our excavations in 2018. Room 8, situated on the easternmost edge of our trench, was partially excavated in 2010/2011, although the excavators did not reach the floor level along the wall separating Room 8 from Room 5. At the same time, since the excavators in 2010/2011 had not backfilled their trench, the western section of this trench was clearly visible (fig. 10), showing several layers of colluvial deposition and collapse. This clearly visible stratigraphy helped guide our excavation of this room.

The northern wall delimiting Rooms 8 and 9, which joins the northern wall delimiting Rooms 1, 3, and 5, provides important evidence about the structure's original plan. Prior to our excavations, we hypothesized that the wall visible from the 2010/2011 excavations formed a straight terracing wall and that it would continue to the west in the same orientation. Once excavations began, it soon became clear that this was not the case. As is

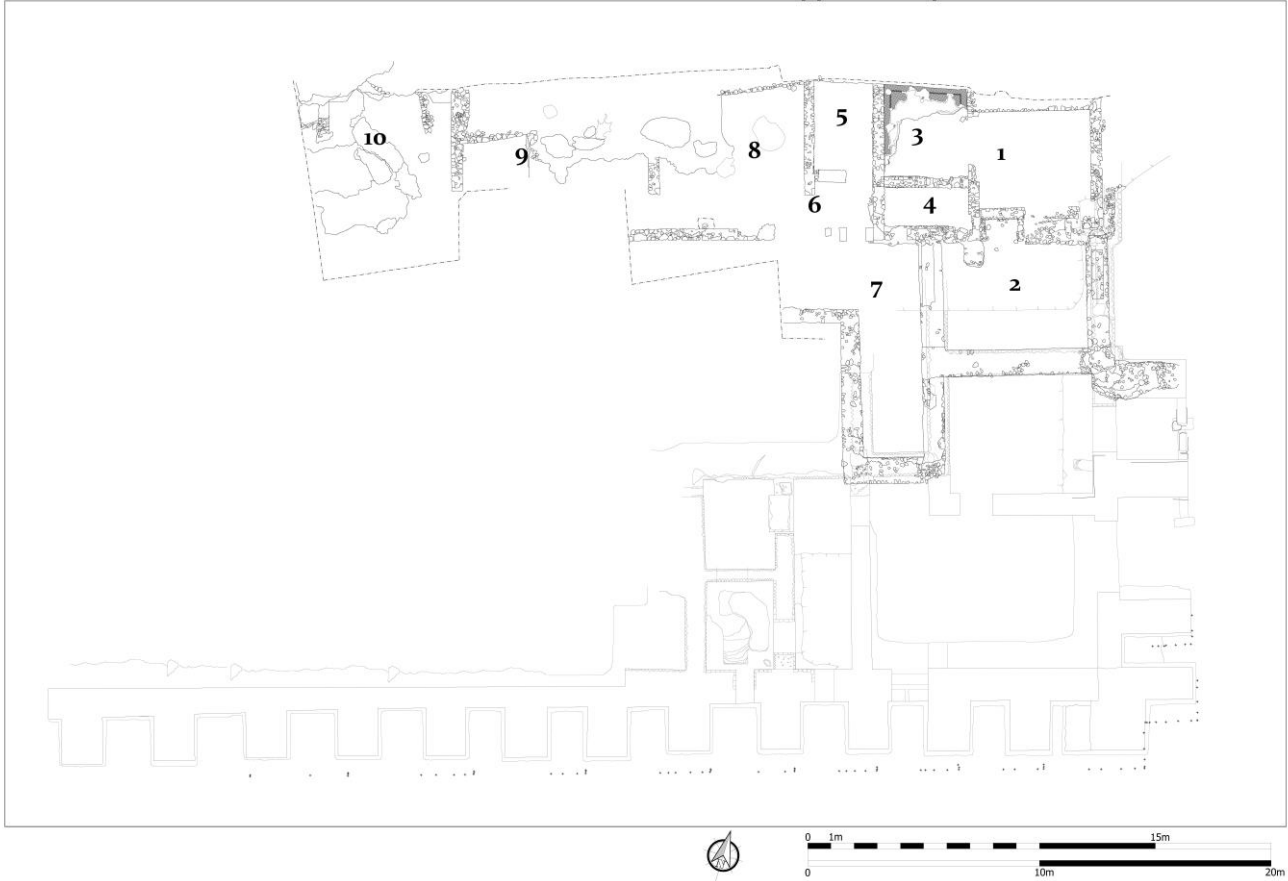


Fig. 9. Plan of most recent and previous excavations with room numbers indicated (Marco di Lieto).



Fig. 10. Stratigraphic section visible at the western edge of 2010/2011 trench (Myles McCallum).

clearly visible in the plan, this wall is offset by roughly 20 degrees and runs roughly northeast-southwest. It appears that the northern wall of the structure traces the line of a natural bedrock terrace and so is not completely orthogonal.

Rooms 8 and 9 are both roughly the same size. Their walls are constructed in the same masonry technique, a rubble and concrete core with a quasi-reticulate surface. Their interface with the corridor, Room 6, is unclear as we did not reach floor level in either room. As just noted, the northern walls of both rooms trace the line of a natural limestone terrace. Based on the presence of the limestone, the northern wall is only a single stone wide, indicating that the limestone itself must have served to provide some degree of structural support for the roof.

Room 10, which sits at the westernmost limit of our trench, is the space about which we can say the most. It is connected to Room 6, the corridor, through a door in its eastern wall. The northern limit of this room is significantly different from Rooms 8 and 9, being formed not by a thin wall but rather by a quite thick (ca. 2.47 m) concrete wall preserved to an extraordinary height (ca. 3.08 m) and incorporating an apsidal structure faced with brick (fig. 8).

Stratigraphy

The archaeological stratigraphy from the 2018 excavations is relatively simple and straightforward. As noted elsewhere, from the outset we encountered a great deal of recent soil that once formed part of an agricultural terrace located along what appears to be the northern perimeter wall of the terraced structure. Added to this was soil that had been redeposited during cleaning efforts associated with conservation work in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as preparations for the 2010/2011 excavations. While excavating this terrace, we encountered topsoil and a thick layer of colluvium. Beneath this colluvium and across the entire width of the northern part of our trench were two primary stratigraphic units: a thick layer of architectural collapse (1064), associated with the collapse of walls, ceilings, and the roof; and, a layer of natural limestone, heavily weathered by rainfall (1058). The masonry chunks associated with this collapse were substantial, particularly those in Room 10 which appear to have come from the collapse of the concrete terracing wall, an apsidal niche, and a concrete ceiling, likely vaulted. Due to the presence of this collapse and the limited time available to us during the 2018 season, we divided the trench into two sections during the last week in an effort to reach the floor level in some part of the excavation. The result was a western sector, mostly within Room 10 but also including the westernmost part of Room 9, and an eastern sector most within Room 8 but also including a small part of the corridor, Room 6.

Within the eastern sector, we were fortunate to have preserved the western section wall from the 2010/2011 excavations, which showed the complex stratigraphy of the various colluvial events and collapses associated with the building's destruction. The complexity of this stratigraphy, and the substantial colluvial overburden, greatly affected the speed of our excavation here, however. Still, through concerted effort, we were able to perhaps come closest to the floor in Room 8, although we decided during the final days of excavation to halt digging when we arrived at what is likely a layer of sediment (1023) sitting immediately on top of the most recent floor level, since we would not have had adequate time either to properly excavate and dry sieve this layer or process finds found therein.

Within the western sector, we likely bit off more than we could chew. First, and as noted above, the massive chunks of concrete masonry collapse (1085-1090) proved impossible to move without machinery, although in a couple of cases we were able to break the masonry into smaller chunks, after it had been documented using photogrammetry, thus facilitating its removal. Also, the presence of numerous channels or voids (1086) within the concrete terracing wall (1002) in the northwestern corner of the trench was difficult to excavate quickly. Finally, the discovery of a late phase, dry masonry wall (1117) set within Room 10 during the penultimate week of fieldwork, which was extremely difficult at times to differentiate from the wall collapse around it, made arriving at the floor level of this room impossible.

In both sectors, then, we did not arrive at stratigraphy associated with the occupation or construction of the villa itself. As is noted in the next section on dating, this has some consequences for our overall understanding of the occupational history of the site.

The stratigraphy does provide important information for understanding the site's reuse and eventual de-

struction and abandonment. The last phase of occupation of the site saw a greatly reduced footprint, with structures inserted within the original, much larger building, and built from construction debris from the earlier phases. This indicates that the overall villa was in a state of disrepair during this final phase, but that much of the rear terracing wall and the roof of the northern part of the building were still partly or largely intact. The final act of destruction brought down both the walls, ceilings, and roof roughly contemporaneously, perhaps due to a landslide, an earthquake, or possibly a combination of the two.

Phasing and Dating

There are three clearly visible construction and occupation phases at the site. We have an initial construction phase, at least one major renovation, and then a final occupation phase during which the terrace structure is in a state of partial abandonment and smaller structures are constructed within its rooms, reusing building material. Included as part of the initial construction phase appears to be the large concrete terrace, complete with pilasters, the lower level excavated in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as Rooms 1 through 9 excavated in 2010/2011 and 2018 (although there were certainly subsequent renovations). Room 10, or perhaps certain elements visible during the 2018 excavations, appears to be a more recent addition. As noted above, the room, rather than tracing the natural limestone terrace as is the case in Rooms 1, 3, 5, 8 and 9, has been cut into this terrace. Also, the wall construction technique here is different from those rooms adjacent and to the east. The final phase corresponds to a period during which the function of the overall structure changed markedly, when smaller buildings or rooms were constructed within the larger, monumental building. This likely indicates that the roof had collapsed either partially or in places, and possibly also some of the walls. Building debris was then reused in these new constructions. This reuse of the structure may take place after a period of abandonment.

Based on the use of concrete masonry with quasi-reticulate facing throughout the structure, both that visible from the earlier excavations and that uncovered in 2018, the terrace building must have its origins in the second half of the first century BCE to the early first century CE. Unfortunately, as we did not excavate floor fill or construction trenches, it is not currently possible to provide a more specific or certain date for the building's initial construction. The recovery of two *in planta pedis* tile stamps (*CERDO VOLUM · L · S · F*) datable to the late Republican through Augustan/Tiberian period⁶, is perhaps the most useful dating material for the building's initial construction, although it should be noted that one tile was recovered on the surface and the other from wall or ceiling collapse in Room 10, so not highly reliable stratigraphic contexts (see below for more on this stamp). The majority of datable pottery from the layers of colluvium and collapse (which was not abundant) also date to this period (Dr. 2/4 amphorae and Italian Terra Sigillata) (fig. 11), although, as just noted, this material cannot be used to date the Phase 1 structures.

We are equally unable to provide very accurate dates for subsequent phases. Phase 2 must clearly post-date the building's construction, but without artifacts from stratified deposits associated with these renovations, we can only guess that these renovations took place sometime during the later first or second century CE, based on the use of *opus latericium* as part of a renovation within Room 10 (fig. 12). It is also possible that future excavation seasons will identify other periods of renovation to the structure.



Fig. 11. Upper portion of a Dressel 2/4 amphora during excavations (Myles McCallum).

⁶ LEZZI 2009: 112, figs. 4-4a.



Fig. 12. Opus latericium wall in Room 10 (Myles McCallum).



Fig. 13. Post-hole dug through mosaic (Martin Beckmann).

The final phase of occupation at the site is one of reuse. Post-holes (fig. 13) are dug through the mosaic in Room 3, indicating perhaps the presence of a wooden hut of some sort, and a dry masonry wall is inserted within Room 10, which is clearly not in line or phase with earlier, more substantial walls. Again, the date of this final occupation is not clear. Material from colluvial layers above the collapse can be dated to the early Medieval period (so-called Forum Ware), as well as Medieval Lead Glaze and more recent pottery (from the sixteenth through early twentieth centuries). While this does not provide us with dating evidence for the final occupation of the structure, it does indicate that there was activity on and around the site in the Late Roman through Medieval periods. Future excavation campaigns will look for stratigraphy associated with the construction of the dry masonry wall (there was no datable material in the post-holes) in the hopes of finding datable material.

Surface Remains

Unfortunately, the weather during the 2018 season, which was quite cool and wet for the first three weeks of the excavation, meant that there was much thicker ground cover than is usual at this time of year, in part because haying operations were delayed. As a consequence, relatively systematic surface exploration, which had been planned as part of our first-year of research at the site, was not carried out. Instead, the project directors did some reconnaissance of surface remains in those few fields with some visibility during the last two weeks of the project. The results were interesting and merit inclusion in our report.

The three fields with some surface visibility are located northeast and south of the terraced structure and are labelled Fields 1, 2 and 3 (fig. 14). Field 1, the most distant field to the northeast and upslope from the terraced villa and the adjacent orchard, contained no ancient material, although there was building debris from an early modern farmhouse currently undergoing renovation.

Building debris that appears to be Roman was noted in the lower parts of Field 2, particularly in the highlighted section. The building debris included chunks of concrete masonry with ceramic inclusions, perhaps Roman *cocciopesto*, roof tiles (*tegulae*), some small wall sherds of what appear to be fine-bodied tablewares (undatable), and two stones from quasi-reticulate concrete wall-facing, quite similar to those recovered during excavations. It should be noted that some of these finds are relatively close to the possible subsurface structures identified previously through gpr survey, and all were noted within 20 meters of the limit of the gpr survey area.

Field 3, steeply downslope from the terrace structure, contained some pieces of tile and building stone

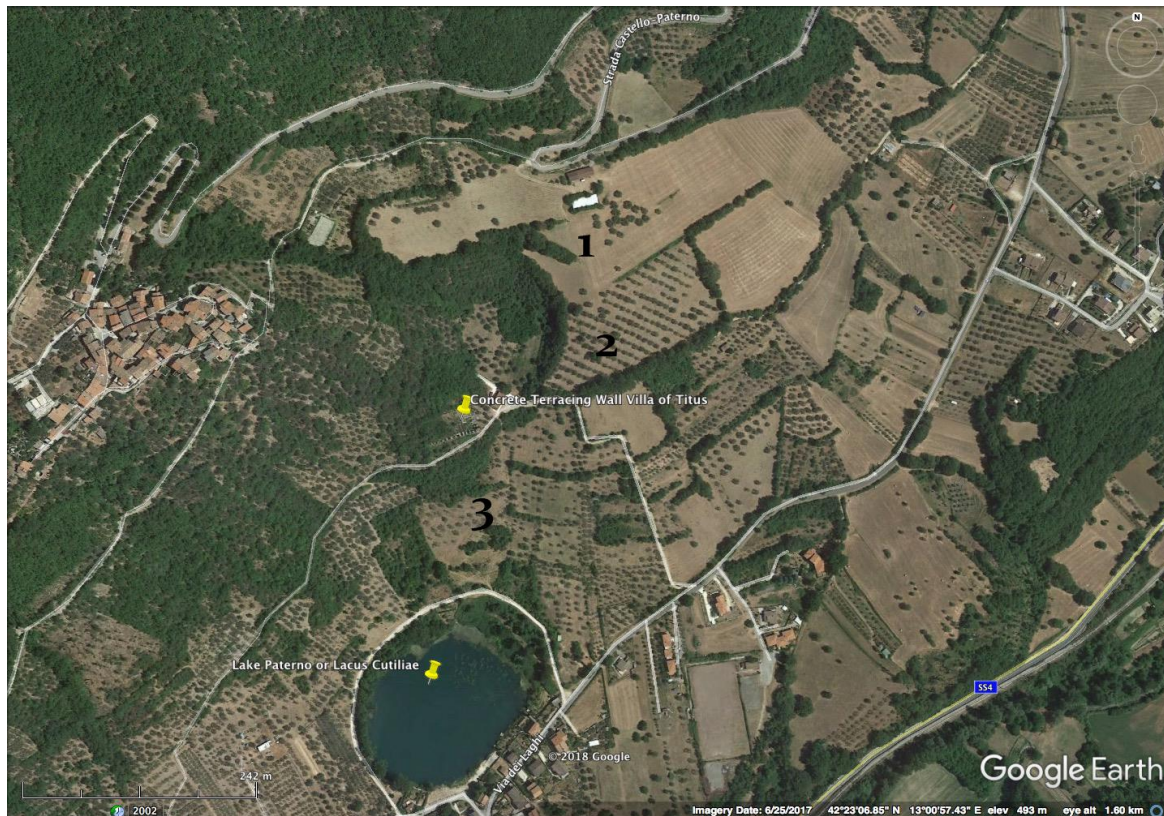


Fig. 14. Google Earth view of fields surveyed (Myles McCallum).

along the edge of the brush lining its northern edge. It may be that there are some subsurface archaeological remains within the brush, or that this material was brought downslope as colluvium through the natural processes of weathering and erosion.

Interpretation of Results

Type of Building

As noted previously, for many years it was believed that the monumental remains looming above the Lago di Paterno were once a Roman bath complex. The recent excavations, particularly those in 2010/2011, challenged this identification, leading excavators to refer to the site as a large villa⁷. At the same time, these earlier excavators noted that the function of the rooms uncovered in 2010/2011 and their relationship to each other are difficult to determine based on the architectural and artefactual remains⁸.

Our results, while not conclusive, are more in keeping with the identification of the structure as a villa rather than a bath complex. We found no architectural evidence for baths and little evidence for the movement of water within the structure. Also, the decorative elements and, in particular, the finds are more consistent with a residential structure than a bath complex. Many other interpretations are still possible however (a building associated with a rural sanctuary, for example). For the moment, we will continue to refer to this structure (and associated buildings such as those indicated by the ground penetrating radar conducted in 2010/2011) as the co-called Villa di Tito.

At the same time, the range of rooms discovered in 2018—8 through 10—, when combined with the results from 2010/2011, suggests that excavations to date have been carried out in what was likely the *pars urba*

⁷ ALVINO 2014a.

⁸ ALVINO 2014a: 99.

ana of the villa complex. In particular, Room 10, a well-appointed space with a high degree of architectural elaboration, including possibly an apsidal nymphaeum (Room 10) or ornamental niche, and positioned roughly at the midpoint of the terrace, was likely an important reception area within the structure (fig. 9). Future excavations will be needed to determine definitively the role played by Room 10 in the life of the building and its architectural and functional relationship to other spaces in the structure.

Ownership History

The popular interpretation of the site as either a bath complex or more recently a villa owned by the Flavian family is based entirely on supposition. Indeed, without better epigraphic evidence, such suggestions of the building's ownership history are conjectural, evidenced entirely by historical sources, which report that the emperors Vespasian and his son Titus both died at *Cutilia*⁹. There is little doubt, as was already noted by Persichetti, that *Cutilia* can be located within the vicinity of Paterno somewhere between Cittaducale and Castel Sant'Angelo. The toponym Paterno clearly has Latin origins and may be derived from *paternus fundus* rather than from *Dis Pater*, as many scholars have suggested¹⁰. If so, then *paternus fundus* may refer to property owned by the Flavian family (and subsequent emperors as part of the *Res Caesaris*), purchased by the paternal family line. We know that both Vespasian's father, Titus Flavius Sabinus, and his grandfather, Titus Flavius Petro, belonging to a rich and noble family of equestrian rank from *Reate* (Rieti), had many properties in the Sabina. It is entirely possible, then, that the so-called Villa di Tito was one of the Flavian family properties, and the villa constructed by either Vespasian's father or grandfather, which would be consistent with the limited dating evidence recovered from our excavations of those carried out in 2010/2011. It is also equally possible that the villa was not once owned by the Flavian family.

The hypothesis that this structure was an imperial residence is not new, having been already proposed by the likes of Lear in the nineteenth century, who provides a general description of the monument, "a large mass of brickwork on the hillside is called the ruins of his Palace, or by some the baths of Titus"¹¹. There is no direct evidence that the so-called Villa di Tito was an imperial property. Certainly, it is not the only lavish Roman villa identified in the area of Cotilia, but its architectural characteristics and engineering, along with its physical setting, situated roughly adjacent Lago di Paterno, Varro's *umbilicus Italiae*, sacred to the goddess Vacuna and to the *Limphae Commotiles*¹², does make the structure unique among known Sabine villas. It is clear, then, that the building and the surrounding property were possessed by an individual or family of some means. Whether this family was the *gens Flavia* is not known.

Turning briefly to the epigraphic data, the only inscriptions recovered from the site to date are the two stamped tiles noted previously, both of which are impressed with identical stamps, *CERDO VOLUM · L · S · F* (figs. 15 and 16). This stamp presents the name of the *dominus*, or property owner, Lucius Volumnius, as well as the name of his slave, Cerdo, who must have been the *offinator* of a tile production facility¹³. Identical stamps have been recovered elsewhere in the Velino River Valley, and it seems likely that the production centre was somewhere between Cotilia and Castel Sant'Angelo (RI)¹⁴. Unfortunately, the epigraphic evidence tells us nothing about the ownership history of the site. While the tiles were manufactured on the property of a member of the *gens Volumnia*, there is no reason to believe that they were used only in construction projects on properties owned by the family. As is the case in the nearby Tiber Valley, the production of brick and tile for the market was common from the late Republic throughout the imperial period.

⁹ SUET., *Vesp.*, 24; *Tit.*, 11.

¹⁰ NISIO, VENTURA 2010: 117.

¹¹ LEAR 1846: 122.

¹² PLIN., *NH.*, 3.109; VARRO, *De Ling. Lat.* 5.73.

¹³ Please see, STEINBY 1978-1979: 82, n. 214 and 215.

¹⁴ LEZZI 2009: 114.

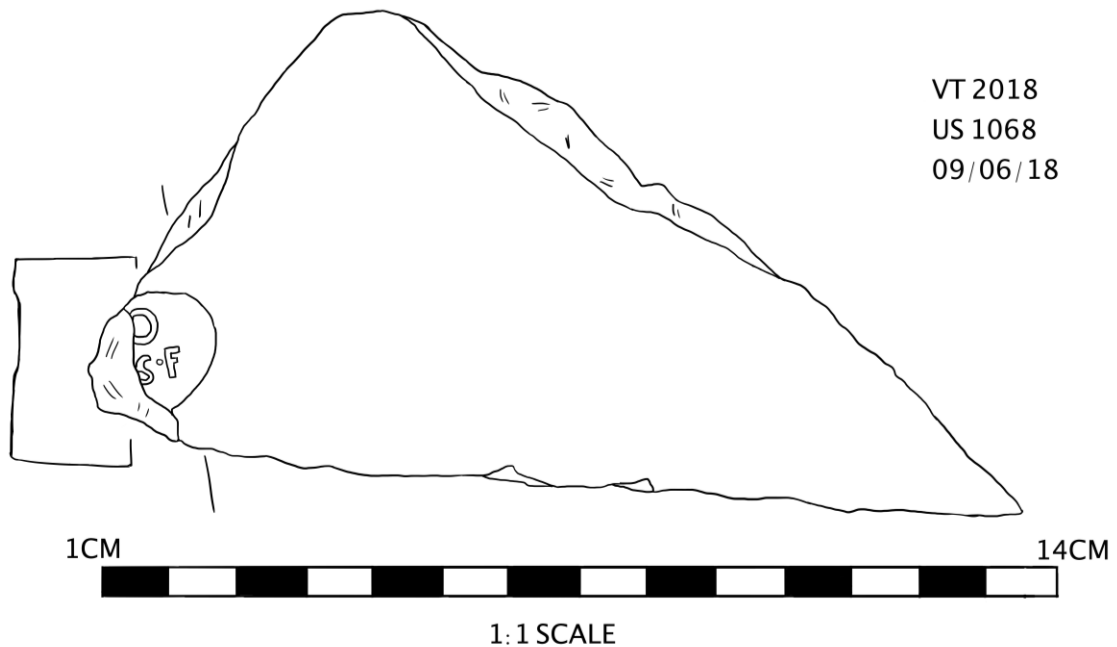


Fig. 15. Stamped tile #1, photo (Myles McCallum).

VT 2018
SU 1000
SURFACE FIND AT WEST END OF TERRACE
09/06/18



Fig. 16. Stamped tile #1, drawing (Martin Beckmann and Emily Nolan).



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Fig. 17. Stamped tile #2, drawing (Martin Beckmann and Emily Nolan).

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