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Provincia: Rome

Regione: Lazio

The Universities of Pavia and Oxford continued their investigations in Villa Adriana, in the area called *Plutonium*, traditionally interpreted as a reproduction of the Underworld, and located on one of the highest rises of the complex, in the East part of the Villa.¹

The excavations took place from 27th June to 16th July 2022.² A team of eight graduate students and doctoral researchers, both from Oxford and Pavia Universities, took part in the project, (F. Sorbello; C. Muscas; A. Schrag; S. Lisowski; B. Risposi; C. Ak; T. Mytaloulis; J. Rosebrook). Gilberto Montali, from the University of Palermo, supervised the architectural survey and documentation of the archaeological structures and conservator Mario Colella consolidated and restored specific parts of the monument, following the directives of the Istituto Villa Adriana e Villa D'Este (Villae).

Two trenches were opened in areas already subject to cleaning and documentation in the previous years:

- 1) Trench T, located in the NW part of the built-up complex, within the north side of the structure on high podium.
- 2) Trench D, providing the connection between trenches (C and B) opened in previous years and intersecting the semi-circular structure projecting SW of the front of the *Plutonium*.

Trench T

Trench T measuring ca m. 5 x 3, is located in the centre of the most distinguished room of the complex, characterized by a temple-like façade. The research question connected to this investigation was that of clarifying whether the floor level of the room was still preserved and associated with diagnostic materials. This was particularly pressing, in view of the fact that this part

¹ For a discussion of previous research in the area: Gorrini, Melfi, Montali, Schettino 2020; Gorrini and Melfi 2019; Gorrini, Melfi, Montali 2020.

² Our thanks for supporting and facilitating the project go to the Istituto Villa Adriana e Villa D'Este—in particular to its director, Andrea Bruciati, and to the archaeologists Benedetta Adembri, Viviana Carbonara, Sergio Del Ferro and Sabrina Pietrobono—and to the British School at Rome—especially Stephen Kay. This research would not have been possible without the funds generously awarded in Oxford by the Craven Committee, Faculty of Classics and by the Ludwig Fund at New College; in Pavia, by the Dipartimento Studi Umanistici, Fondo Rettoriale Scavi.

of the building seems to be the only one not previously excavated, and this room, in particular, had been left standing at the time of the massive destruction of the site in order to create arable land. From the Medieval period onwards, it had probably been used for storage or to house animals. In trench T we removed ca. 1 m of filling, characterized by abundant architectural materials, including high-quality coloured marbles (porfidus, serpentine, rosso antico, Numidian yellow- and other lithotypes such as slate, granite, breccia etc.), fragments of stuccoes and wall-paintings, mosaic tesserae, pieces of opus sectile. This level not only does attest the rich decoration of the building, but might well be the result of an accumulation of debris coming from various parts of the complex. In the north side of the room, it covered what was left of a floor in opus sectile: a concrete preparation with visible marks left by the marble slabs. The find of some matching geometric fragment in yellow, red and white marbles allowed the reconstruction of the original decorative pattern as a sequence of conjoined dodecagons, with a hexagon in the centre (Fig. 1). In addition to this, the excavated part of the walls of the rooms revealed to have been covered in marble, at least for up to one meter from the level of the floor, as it is demonstrated by the remains of mortar beds and fragments of grey marble slabs within, all along the base of the SE and NE walls. This setup singles out the room from the others in the complex, where the lower part of the walls was simply lined with slate.

The south part of the floor of the room is not preserved because it seems to have been purposefully removed, judging from an artificial, straight cut, oriented NW/SE, that goes through the whole length of the room. It is not yet clear when the spoliation of the opus sectile and the cut of the floor took place, and whether they were the result of the same action, but judging from the few fragments of pottery found in the archaeological layers and from the typical mix-up of materials, it most likely dates to modern times.

Trench D

The second excavation area reconnected with the archaeological layers of the previous years and allowed us to bring to light the full extent of the large semi-circular structure, possibly the foundation of a portico, projecting SW of the complex (Fig. 2). In particular, the continuation of the excavation clarified that a quadrangular room, lined with high-quality marbles, and found razed to the floor level in previous years (trench B), might be interpreted as the main access to the vast circular area (ca. 40 m diameter), enclosed by the portico, and extending in front of the main facade of the building. The excavation of the two external curved walls and their internal concrete substructure confirmed the pattern identified in previous years, where all structures were built at the same time as part of the same building programme, but must have fallen out of use by the end

of the 3rd century AD, judging from the ceramic finds. They were then subject to massive spoliations (including the stripping of all marble and mosaic revetments, of metal clamps and pipes), abandonment and only sporadic frequentation (probably linked to the episodes of spoliation) until at least the early Medieval period. In later periods, probably late Medieval, all walls were razed to foundation level possibly in order to create flat, ploughable land. The trees that characterised the site later in the Renaissance and early Modern documentation also left large cavities in some of these excavated structures.

At the same time as the excavations, the restoration of the structures brought to light in Trench T took place. The mortar bed bearing the marks of the opus sectile underwent a consolidating and protective treatment (bio-protective); the brick-work, the plaster and lining of the walls were similarly consolidated and minimally repaired, especially in the areas where the marble lining was found in situ.

References:

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Captions:

fig.1: floor preparation in Trench T

fig.2: trench D, view from SW