

The Roman villa by Lake Nemi: from nature to culture – between private and public*

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Abstract

This paper presents, for the first time in its totality, an overview of the results and a preliminary interpretation of the Roman S. Maria villa by Lake Nemi, excavated by the Nordic Institutes in Rome (1998–2002). The villa had four main building phases from c. mid first century BC until c. AD 150, when the villa was deserted because of a natural catastrophe. It was then used as a quarry for building materials, and finally abandoned about a quarter of a century later. It is argued that the palatial villa was, in fact, the one owned by C. Julius Caesar, constructed *in nemore* or *in nemorensi*, that is in Diana's sacred wood (Cicero *Att.* 6.1.25; Suetonius, *Iul.* 46). The paper also discusses the reconstruction of the ancient landscape of the Nemi crater, not least of all based on the recent investigation of the ancient emissary of the lake. It is concluded that the emissary had a number of separate phases that were foremost related to the activity in the Sanctuary of Diana.

Lake Nemi situated in the Alban Hills c. 25 km southeast of Rome, is a small, intimate landscape (the lake covers a surface of no more than 1.67 km²). Enclosed by the crater is one of Central Italy's most important sanctuaries, the sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis, located on the northern shore of the lake.¹ The lake itself was the arena for Caligula's two pleasure barges, raised from bottom of the lake in the 1920s.² Their function, which was both private and public, has been discussed at length by other researchers.

The S. Maria villa

On the southwestern shore, a few walls scattered over a large territory have been judged to derive from one or more villas.³ The locals have long baptized these walls *la villa di Cesare*. The building remains were excavated by the Nordic institutes during five campaigns between 1998 and 2002, and it was concluded that they were the remains of one, and only one, large palatial villa.⁴ This paper

* This paper is dedicated to the Carlsberg Foundation and to the Fondazione Famiglia Rausing. Without their support, much research in classical archaeology by Scandinavian scholars would never have been accomplished.

¹ See extensive bibliography in Guldager Bilde 2004, 10 notes 11–12.

² Ucelli 1950 remains the fundamental study. A fairly exhaustive list can be found on <http://www.romacastelli.it/vivavoce/vivavoce-070804/articolo3-070804.htm>.

³ Devoti 1987, 17–30; Ghini & Gizzi 1996, 53–55.

⁴ To the bibliography in Guldager Bilde 2004, note 18 can be added: Guldager Bilde 2003; Poulsen 2003; Viitanen 2003; Guldager Bilde 2004; Hermannsen 2004; Poulsen 2004.

presents an overview of the results and a preliminary interpretation of the Nordic excavations of this Roman villa by Lake Nemi for the first time in their totality (*Fig. 1*).⁵ With regard to the theme proposed by the organizers of the conference, the relationship between villa and landscape, the Nemi villa may turn out to be exemplary. From the moment the excavation was planned, it had a clear landscape dimension. The Alban Hills were in general a popular villa resort area drawing on two main advantages: the natural beauty of the area and its nearness to Rome. Four to six villas dotted the rim of the crater.⁶ They had a healthful position and fine views over the lake, the campagna and the sea far in the distance. Only one villa was situated by the lake with direct access to its shore, the villa in the locality of S. Maria. Excavating the site during five summer seasons, we experienced tremendous heat during the day – and cold and damp at night. There must have been some particular attraction that caused the villa's builders to situate it, where it was placed.

⁵ First of all, I should like to thank Barbro Santillo Frizell and Allan Klynne for including a paper on the Nemi villa on very short notice. I should also like to thank the directors of the Nordic institutes for collaboration in the excavations from 1998 and onwards. A heartfelt thanks is due to the Soprintendenza archeologica per il Lazio and especially to Giuseppina Ghini. A final thanks is due to the three main contributors to the funding of the project: two private foundations, the Danish Carlsberg Foundation and the Swedish Fondazione Famiglia Rausing, and one public foundation, the Joint Committee of the Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities (NOS H). We are equally grateful to the following foundations, who also made our work possible: The Norwegian Institute's old donor families: gift in occasion of its 40th anniversary and The Stiftelsen Thomas Fearnly, Heddy og Nils Agstrup.

⁶ Guldager Bilde 2004, 9, note 7 with references.

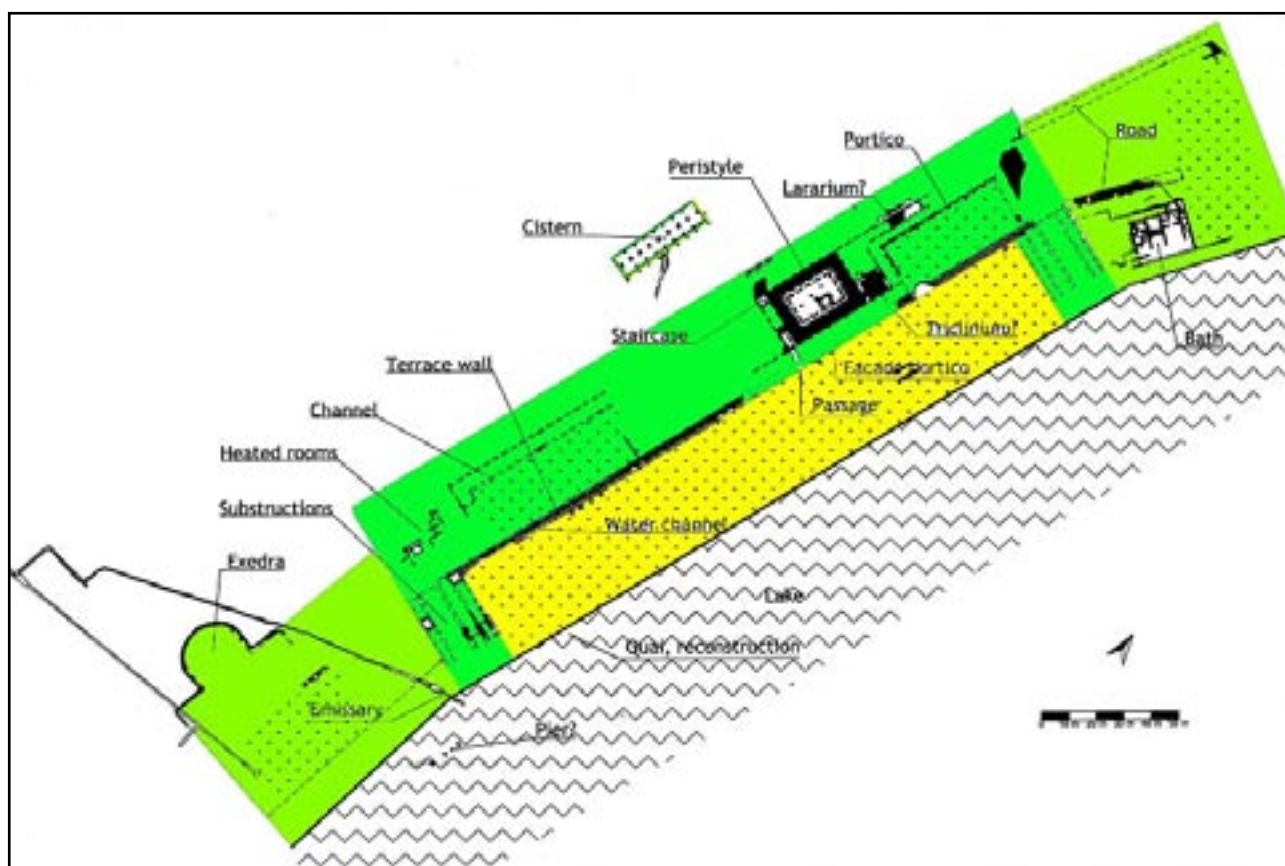


Fig. 1. Reconstructed plan.

The space inside the crater is normally thought to have been part of the sacred *nemus* of Diana. Why was a private villa located within this sacred space? Questions and considerations of this character generated the idea of attempting to understand the structures inside the crater as a hypothetical unity within this enclosed landscape space. The landscape inside the crater was completely transformed as early as the mid-Republican period into a piece of culture, first by the construction of the emissary, which will be discussed below,⁷ and later, c. 100 BC,⁸ by the creation of an embankment which ended the process of taming or cultivating the numinous nature inside the crater before the villa was constructed. Thus, as the major monuments of sanctuary, villa and pleasure barges were connected visually and spatially by the lake, an interpretation of the villa within this context had to be attempted. The excavations have made it clear that the villa had four main phases:

- Phase 1, Late Republican, mid-first century BC
- Phase 2, Early Imperial, c. 20-40 AD
- Phase 3, Late Neronian-Early Flavian, 60-80 AD
- Phase 4, Hadrianic, 120s AD

The villa was abandoned because of a natural catastrophe around AD 150, used as a quarry for building materials, and finally abandoned circa a quarter of a

century later. Before the abandonment, the villa was emptied completely of all valuables. It is, thus, characteristic that out of more than 200,000 objects registered only five coins could be counted. What is more, they are probably all evidence of post-villa activity.⁹

A tour through the villa

The villa is situated on a large artificial terrace measuring c. 260 m x 60 m and is 9 m high (Fig. 1). It is positioned with its longest side parallel to the lake and is oriented roughly north-northeast to south-southwest. The terrace is the backbone of the villa and, though modified several times, was part of the original layout having the same extension from the beginning. In the first phase, it had a plain facade of *opus caementicium*. Its upper facade from a level c. 335 m a.s.l., corresponding to c. 1 m below the level of the terrace's horizontal plane, was finished with a facing of *opus quasi reticulatum* made of basalt cubilia. In the third phase this was completely redone with the addition of 59 (or 60) *fornice*s, on average 2.9 m wide and more than 4.2 m deep, added as support and further monumentalisation. In 2002, huge substructions were revealed perpendicular to the main terrace in the villa's southern section. In all probability a parallel wing defined the terrace's northern end too. However, as the plot where this wing would be

⁷ Castellani *et al.* 2003 with ample bibliography and discussions.

⁸ See below.

⁹ Poulsen 2003, 277; Poulsen 2004, 64.

is under cultivation, this could not be investigated. But if this hypothesis is accepted, the entire villa would have had an overall Π -shaped form. This type of villa is well known especially from Campania – and is often found in Pompeian third and fourth style wall paintings.¹⁰ The living quarters stood on the terrace. During the first four campaigns of excavation, work was concentrated in the villa's northern sector. The fifth and final campaign focused on the southern sector of the villa. To date, 60 trenches have been opened. The excavated area corresponds approximately to 10% of this villa complex extending over c. 45,000 m², including the gardens. All major structures have been cleaned and measured.

This is not the place to discuss in detail the structures of the villa. The first four years of excavation have been recently described,¹¹ and the results of the fifth and final campaign will be published on the occasion of the conference, *Terzo incontro di studi sul Lazio e la Sabina*, Rome 18-19 November 2004. A few words, however, on the general layout will be given below in order to provide a general characterization of the villa.

The villa is a pure *otium* villa. No production unity has been found and it is almost certain that it never existed. The excavations have shown that the layout of the villa was sharply partitioned according to various internal functions. The smaller northern sector was – seen in a comparative perspective – quite poorly equipped and was probably the living quarters of the villa's servants. The central part was seemingly the representative sector, whereas the southern section constituted the villa's recreational sector. The central and southern sectors were much more luxuriously equipped than the northern part. The general orientation of the view is towards east-southeast and accordingly towards the lake. However, the orientation of the buildings at either end of the villa (the exedra and the bath respectively) was altered with respect to its general orientation so that the villa's overall layout follows the curvature of the lake. This feature was already established during the first phase of the villa. It may, of course, be a coincidence, but the curvature of the building at either end had the effect of improving the view towards the sanctuary from the owners' half, while the view from the servants' sector was almost cut off from the sanctuary.

A brief overview of the site will take us through the villa. We will start with the proposed servants' quarters in the north and move southwards. On the terrace a c. 48 m x 17.5 m Π -shaped portico opened towards the lake. Behind this portico are series of small one-storied *cubicula*. The walls of these rooms are white and the exterior facade red. This sector of the villa is characterized by the presence of geometric black and white mosaic floors.¹²

One room stands out. In the fourth phase a central medallion was inserted into the geometric floor mosaic. It shows exotic birds alternating with palmettes and in the

centre a parrot smelling a flower. The mosaic was furnished with an inscription: *M pa(v)imentum fecit*, a signature of an anonymous artist.¹³ The white internal walls of the room were furnished with a flat ceiling made of reeds and also painted white. Where the wall meets the ceiling was a floral stucco frieze. A small Corinthian capital was found inside the room, as well as stucco friezes on a lesser scale than that of the wall.¹⁴ Most probably, both derive from a small shrine, and we propose that the room was a *lararium*. This function would also explain why only this room featured a figural mosaic. Only one room in this section, the side-room of the *lararium*, had a floor of *opus spicatum*. North of and lower than the villa plateau a small bath building was excavated.¹⁵ The now visible structure goes back to the villa's third phase, but it is only in the fourth phase that we are certain of its function as a bath. As it was connected with the servants' quarter by an internal road, this bath probably served that part of the villa.

As already mentioned, the central part of the villa was probably its representative sector. The main structure in the excavated part of the villa is a large closed portico (21.25 x 13.5 m). The portico features a Tuscan or Ionic peristyle (6 x 10 columns) with a lavish *opus sectile* floor of the type called *isodomo listellato*.¹⁶ This type of floor is found in several places in this part of the villa including the floor of the long facade portico. Separating the peristyle from the garden is a large channel, 1.1 m wide and 0.75 m deep with an artificial garden island in the centre. Immediately north of this courtyard a large triclinium opens to the lake. This too had an *opus sectile* floor of the type just mentioned.

The portico is surrounded on at least its western and southern side by *cubicula*. They are larger than those found in the servants' sector and they are also furnished with *opus sectile* floors. Instead of whitewashed walls, these rooms feature walls with coloured stucco. What is more significant is that one of the rooms contained a staircase. This is the only instance in the villa where we have discovered evidence for a second storey. The staircase is placed so close to the axis of the villa that it must be assumed that the centre of the villa was emphasized architectonically. The actual centre of the villa is more or less completely destroyed, as there is an olive grove situated immediately on top of the floors (plots 167-168). Taking into account the role played by the axis in Roman architecture (*Fig. 2*), it is a pity that we cannot gain further information on this part of the villa.

The southern half of the villa investigated in 2002 was also partly destroyed due to olive cultivation and extensive bulldozing in recent times. Even though we only had at our disposal one campaign of excavation in this part of the villa, it soon became clear that this sector must have been very rich. Comparing the number of marble fragments found in the fill during the first four campaigns with

¹⁰ Thagaard Loft 2003.

¹¹ Guldager Bilde 2003; Poulsen 2003; Viitanen 2003; Guldager Bilde 2004; Hermannsen 2004; Poulsen 2004.

¹² Guldager Bilde 2004; Hermansen 2004.

¹³ Guldager Bilde 2003, 265, fig. 7; Guldager Bilde 2004, fig. 35.

¹⁴ Poulsen 2003, capital: fig. 12; stucco frieze: fig. 5.

¹⁵ Viitanen 2003.

¹⁶ Guldager Bilde 2003, 265, fig. 8.



Fig. 2. Stabiae, S. Marco villa. Pompeian 4th style, before AD 62.

that of the last campaign, it can be noted that in 2002, 18 % of the total of the finds (24 % of the total weight) consisted of marble, whereas of the finds made in 1998-2001 9 % of the total finds (and only 6 % of the weight, indicating that the fragments are much smaller) was marble. The number from the bath area should probably be even lower if it is corrected to take into account a lime kiln located in this area, as some of the marble fragments found there may have come from other parts of the villa and ended up in the northern part due to post antique lime burning.

The southern sector is dominated by two large structures probably intended for the villa owner's leisure: a long pool and a huge exedra. In between the two were the living quarters of the owner and/or a bath. The most significant structure on the villa plateau proper was the monumental water channel, at least 63 m long, 4.3 m wide and 1 m deep. It was cut partly into the rock and was furnished with 0.75 m wide mortar walls. Inside it was covered with a thick layer of *opus signinum*. It was built in the early first century AD. The southern end originally had a curved wall (probably a circular pool) with steps leading into the basin. In a later phase, the steps were removed, and part of the pool was integrated into a Π ?-shaped monumental channel. Its long side ran parallel to the main terrace wall, and it was drawn back from its edge. Behind and embracing it was probably a Π ?-shaped portico, few traces of which remain. Due to recent agricultural activities, nothing is preserved of the garden that may have been located in the open zone between the channel and the edge of the terrace.

As we can gather from the excavated outlet, water was led to this part of the villa from the villa's completely preserved cistern. The cistern is placed almost on the villa's axis and at its highest point. Its exterior length is 37 m, whereas its internal length is 34 m, its internal width almost 8 m and its height almost 6 m. Internally and externally the

cistern was furnished with nine pilasters securing the stability of the walls, while the main room was divided into two aisles by seven squarish pillars. Due to the soil and vegetation covering the cistern's roof, it has not been possible to verify the position of the aqueduct bringing water to the cistern. In all likelihood, however, it entered the cistern in the northern corner. The cistern's capacity was more than 1,000 m³, so it supplied the villa amply with water.¹⁷

South of this structure was a series of smaller rooms. With the exception of one room furnished with a floor of *opus spicatum*, the rooms here were also provided with *opus sectile* floors. In the walls were *tubuli* and the floors were placed on *suspensurae*. In one of the rooms was a small centrally placed basin or fountain. The walls were in general furnished with marble revetments rather than with stucco. However, the room with *opus spicatum* floor had red-painted stucco walls decorated with thin yellow candelabras. Too little of this part of the building was excavated to be certain of its interpretation: was it another bath, i.e. that of the owner? Or was it luxuriously heated living rooms?

At its south end, the villa was finished with a huge exedra built against the rock. It measures 48 m including the two wings. The horseshoe-shaped main room has a diameter of 21 m and a depth of 17.5 m. Presently 10.5 m are visible; however, the total height can be estimated to c. 15 m or slightly higher. It was unfortunately not possible to excavate it. Because of this lack of excavation, its function cannot be verified with certainty.¹⁸

Parallel to the exedra was a 1.1 m wide water channel with an apse-shaped advance. The channel is partly cut into the ground, and partly furnished with mortar walls. On the inside, it is provided with a crude layer of *opus signinum*. The original ground surface is destroyed, so the channel is preserved to the height of c. 20 cm only. The exedra and the channel probably date to the villa's third phase, and the channel was modified several times. This type of garden feature is well known, and its date corresponds neatly with ours.¹⁹

The villa's gardens

Much of the villa, not just in front of the exedra, must have been taken up by ornamental gardens (*Fig. 1*). There was probably a garden beneath the main terrace also. However, in this part of the villa the ancient level was destroyed to such an extent that the modern level is either at the same or at a lower level than that of the ancient period. Yet it was apparently finely equipped with a herm gallery and other garden sculptures.²⁰ When Boccanera excavat-

¹⁷ For a description of the cistern, see: Guldager Bilde 2004, 22–24.

¹⁸ For a more detailed description, see: Guldager Bilde 2004, 24–25.

¹⁹ Farrar 1998, 72, 74–75, ornamental pool type B.

²⁰ Borsari 1888, 195.

ed in the villa, on the then plot 945 (today plots 154, 198, 155, 166, 169, 179, 180),²¹ he found among other objects seven herms (of white marble, bigio marble, and of green marble). One of the herm shafts carried the inscription MAENANDROS.²² Found in the same place were fragments of white marble candelabra, a basin of *porta santa* marble, a fragment of a white marble crater and other garden elements. Unfortunately, the present whereabouts of all these finds is completely unknown. Their discovery, however, provides us with a general idea of how this part of the villa was once equipped, and the information was fully confirmed during the 2002 excavations, when a plain herm shaft of Luna marble and a large fragment of a finely crafted, white marble basin were found. It is difficult to refrain from mentioning the villascape paintings so commonly featuring herm galleries in the zone beneath the main villa terrace, and on the villa embankment.²³

In 2001 and 2002 an American team investigated several of the assumed garden areas around the bath, in front of the large portico in the servants' quarter, in the garden island situated in the closed portico, in front of the long pool in the villa's southern part, in front of the exedra and beneath the main terrace wall.²⁴ It could be concluded that the very fertility of the volcanic soils proved problematic for garden identification. The soil needed no fertilizer, and the few inclusions or changes in soil colour produced no obvious distinction between modern and ancient cultivated surfaces. Currently, flotation and soil analysis are in progress, so further information will be available at a later stage.

Decoration of the villa

The villa was, as already mentioned, lavishly decorated. Some of the marbles from the interior decoration have been found in situ, but many were found in the fill. The marbles derive from all over the Mediterranean, and even granite²⁵ and porphyry have been found.

Relatively few fragments of wall paint have been

found and very little in situ. Of painting preserved in situ should foremost be mentioned the small part of a second style wall painting featuring a painted Doric pilaster on the façade of the later *lararium*.²⁶ The *fofnices* of the southern part of the terrace wall and of the southern wing also preserved traces of wall paint on the wing, indeed in several layers, the earliest layer being yellow, the latest marble imitation. From the fill come two groups of paintings that merit being mentioned: from the southern part of the villa come a number of fragments that show that one or more rooms originally featured a garden painting, as several fragments showing trellis work painted in yellow on a background of greyish blue have been found, quite similar to the one found in the villa of Livia at Prima Porta for example.²⁷ A second group features an embroidery pattern on light blue.²⁸ Campana plaques are used throughout the building for decorating the porticoes.²⁹

Caesar's villa?

After this very brief tour through the site, one fundamental question remains: who were the owners of the villa? Let us first summarize the evidence for the first villa:

- 1) It was constructed in the mid-first century BC
- 2) It was as large as the later villa on the site
- 3) It was as lavishly decorated – perhaps even more so by late Republican standards, and
- 4) It is the only villa with access to the lake

It is an attractive idea to couple these facts with a few literary sources that mention that C. Julius Caesar constructed a palatial villa *in nemore* or *in nemorensi*, that is in Diana's sacred wood. If one is to believe Cicero (*Att.* 6.1.25), the villa was still no further than the planning stage in 50 BC, and, according to Suetonius, Caesar had it torn down when it was finished as "it did not meet his expectations" (*Iul.* 46). In many trenches, the walls of the first villa were reduced (torn down?) to socle height to be reconstructed only in the early first century AD. This took place some time between post-50 BC and *c.* AD 20/30. It may be suggested that the one to do so was Augustus rather than Caesar himself. At least the important reconstruction of the Augustan villa at Prima Porta presented by Allan Klynne during this conference revealed how Augustus in that villa mixed a block-shaped living unit of rather traditional Republican design with an appended laurel grove framed in an architectural setting emulating that of the late Republican sanctuaries. Even though the addition of the grove in its setting is very daring, the Hellenistic, almost royal, connotations provided by the Nemi villa may have been

²¹ I am much obliged to Mauro Ercolani for verification in the archives of the correspondence between the old and the recent plot numbers.

²² Richter 1965, 226 no. 5. Richter has not seen it, and she notes it as lost.

²³ E.g. the House of *M. Lucretius Fronto* at Pompei (Peters & Moormann 1993, 219–223, figs. 197–198).

²⁴ 2001: a group of six American archaeologists, Kelly Cook, Beth Ryan, Daniel Costura directed by Irene Romano (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia) and Kathryn Gleason (Cornell University, Ithaca, New York), assisted by James Shryver; 2002: Daniel Costura, James Shryver directed by Irene Romano; soil samples made and analysed by John E. Foss, archaeobotanical analysis was made by Jane Ramsay, and Simon Fraser University, Burnaby.

²⁵ Apart from floor elements in granite found during the Nordic excavation, Borsari mentions that on the occasion of his excavation in 1887, two granite columns were found in front of the exedra (Borsari 1888, 194).

²⁶ Guldager Bilde 2004, fig. 14.

²⁷ See also Farrar 1998, fig. p. 45; 150; colour pls. 8, 13 (House of Marine Venus, Pompei).

²⁸ Poulsen 2004, fig. 4.

²⁹ Poulsen 2003, fig. 2; Poulsen 2004, fig. 6–7.

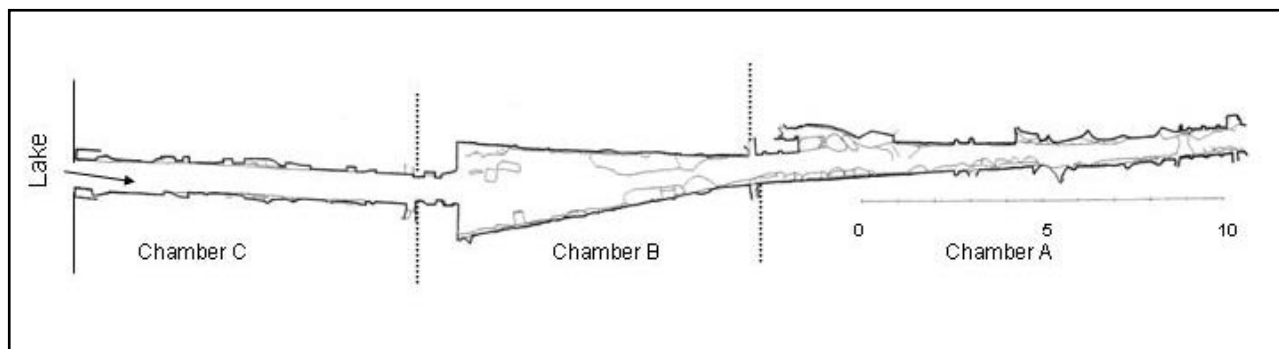


Fig. 3. Plan of the emissary, lower inlet. K.A. Nilson *et al.* 2002.

too outspoken to fit Augustus' ideology. It would, at least, make better sense if the villa was torn down intentionally by the *primus inter pares* rather than by the *dictator*. There are no further references in the literary sources to an Imperial villa by Lake Nemi, but finds and other sources wholly confirm the Julio-Claudian dynasty's interest in the area in general, and Imperial ownership of an estate in the sacred wood apparently prevailed until as late as the Constantinian era, when Constantine the Great donated the *Massa Nemus* to the Basilica of John the Baptist in Albano.³⁰

Indirect evidence may be gained from a series of tile stamps referring to the family of the *Atii*. In the course of the excavation, numerous stamped tiles have been found reused in the later constructions in the villa featuring the letters ATI, with AT in the form of a ligature. The letters are flanked by a winged *caduceus* and a palm branch (CIL XV 2235a). The stamps can be dated to the late Republican period, and M. Steinby has persuasively linked stamps of this and similar types to M. Atius Balbus, praetor in 60 BC. He was married to Caesar's sister Julia, and their daughter, Atia, married C. Octavius and became the mother of the future emperor, Augustus. The *Atii* were a renowned family of Aricia, the main town of the Alban Hills. They played a definite role in the life of the Sanctuary, and stamps bearing their name have also been found there.³¹

It is likely that the villa or the land remained under the ownership of the Julio-Claudian emperors. At least, it is difficult to envision the activity around the two floating palaces of Caius Caligula without some firm base on the shore of the lake (corresponding to the date of the villa in the second phase).

The late Neronian or early Flavian period witnessed considerable activity in the villa (Phase 3). By that period, the Nemi lake apparently had achieved high prestige within court circles. I have elsewhere suggested that the Nemi villa was lent, given or sold to a branch of the Vo-

lusii Saturnini, at some point to be inhabited by one of the main *euergetes* of the Sanctuary of Diana, *Volusia Q. f. Cornelia*, as amply attested in epigraphical documents found there.³² Certainly, by the time Domitian constructed his magnificent villa at Castel Gandolfo the Imperial focus had shifted from Lake Nemi to Lake Albano.

From nature to culture: the Nemi emissary and the regulation of the landscape

An important factor for understanding the landscape of the Nemi crater is the emissary and its effect on the landscape. The emissary is the lake's ancient overflow, a 1653 m long tunnel cut through a mountain and ending in Vallericca c. 10 m lower. The emissary has two inlets from Lake Nemi: an upper tunnel cut into the rock and a lower tunnel also cut into the rock but furnished with a series of chambers constructed of large peperino ashlar (*Fig. 1*). The upper inlet is the earliest, while the second inlet situated around 11 m lower must have been constructed later in order to create and secure a lower water level in the lake (*Fig. 3*).

There is no consensus as to the date of this impressive piece of ancient engineering. Proposed dates vary from late 6th century or early 5th century BC to the Roman period. So far, no objective criteria have been brought forward to support a specific date. During the excavation, it was a working hypothesis that it was connected with the villa. However, the excavations in 2002 led us to abandon this theory.³³

In general, the landscape space of the Nemi crater was regulated considerably on at least three different occasions. First, the construction of the first emissary running in a completely straight line through the mountain c. 1600 m until Vallericca secured a constant level in the lake of c. 333 m a.s.l. The construction of this emissary was quite simple as it was cut in the rock from the inlet to the outlet. As well, the inlet opening towards Lake Nemi is quite plain. We have no means of dating the first phase of the emissary. The technique corresponds well to *cuniculi* of the Latial and Etruscan area in general, so it could have been built anytime from the 7th century

³⁰ References and a more thorough discussion in Guldager Bilde 2004, 37–40.

³¹ CIL XIV.4090.28 (one); Museo delle Terme, inventory nos. 310861–310863 (three; found in the area of the theatre); Castle Museum, Nottingham, nos. 735–736 (two: Wallis 1891, 46). According to dott.ssa Giuseppina Ghini, the excavator of the Nemi sanctuary from 1989 onwards, many ATI tiles have been found in the recent excavations of the sanctuary. I am grateful to dott.ssa Ghini for mentioning these tiles to me.

³² Guldager Bilde 2004, 39.

³³ It should be noted that the interpretation of the emissary in its earliest phase is still preliminary.

BC until the Roman period. We only know that it was replaced with the second inlet situated c. 11 m lower and on that occasion was filled in. In 2002, excavations were made inside the outer part of the upper inlet. A homogeneous material of Black Gloss pottery was found there not attested elsewhere in the villa excavation. It can therefore be concluded that inlet 1 was filled in in c. 300 BC.³⁴ This calls for a complete re-evaluation of the emissary and its context. In past research, the almost complete contemporaneity of the upper and lower inlets has been taken for granted. Our excavation of the intact filling in inlet 1, ignored by Ucelli when the entire emissary was cleared in the late 1920s in connection with the draining of the lake to raise the two boats, proves otherwise.

Second, the closing of the upper inlet took place only after the lower inlet was constructed. This meant lowering the water level by up to c. 11 m, the difference in the height between the two inlets. The closing of inlet 1 thus dates the lowering of the water level in the lake to 322.25 m a.s.l.

The built chamber of the lower inlet was measured in detail in 2002.³⁵ It is constructed in huge ashlar of *peperino*. It soon became apparent that even this lower inlet had not just one phase, as is commonly assumed, but at least four consecutive phases, as a series of new chambers had been built in prolongation of each other, and with slightly varying techniques (Fig. 3). This implies that it was only the construction of the first inlet chamber (A) that was dated by the filling of the upper inlet.

Until c. 300 BC, the sanctuary consisted alone of a clearing, the *lucus* in the sacred *nemus*. Around this date, however, the first temple in the *nemus* was constructed in *opus quadratum*, and from this point onwards can be dated the sanctuary's flourishing. Since there is an apparent contemporaneity between the lowering of the water, the building of a new inlet and the constructing of the temple, it is difficult not to consider a connection between these events. The monumentalizing of the cult and the securing of more terrain around the sanctuary after the lowering of the water is probably to be viewed in connection with the general opening up of the Alban hills to much increased traffic and activity after the construction of the via Appia in 312 BC.

Third, the construction of an embankment sustaining the banks of the lake marked the last major reshaping of the Lake Nemi landscape. On the occasion of the lowering of the water in the 1920s, it was observed that in many places remains of the ancient embankment encircling the entire shore could be seen. The embankment was constructed of huge wooden "boxes" filled with *opus caementicium*. A few remains of the mortar walls and of the wooden encasements are preserved, best seen in the southern end at the locality called *il porto*.³⁶ With the kind permission of the Soprintendenza, in the sum-

mer 1999 we took a few samples from one of the wooden poles remaining visible above water due to the fact that the water level by *il porto*, as already mentioned, is c. 4 m lower today than in antiquity. The samples were subjected to C14 analysis.³⁷ The C14 date revealed was 2090 +/- 40 Before Present (the calibrated date is 170-45 BC or 95 BC with a +/- 1 standard deviation). As there is no building activity in the villa before c. 50 BC, it is, again, likely that this last major intervention in the Nemi landscape was also connected with the major late Republican building activity in the sanctuary. The building material for the construction of the large terraced sanctuary came from the *peperino* quarry at the southern end of the lake; this is also true of the locality of *il porto*. The date 95 BC is so close to the date commonly accepted of the last quarter of the second century BC for the major reshaping of the sanctuary into a huge terraced construction evolving on the two large artificial terraces constructed in *opus incertum* that it cannot be a coincidence. The middle chamber (Chamber B), triangular of form, was added to the lower inlet (Chamber A) before the villa of 50 BC was constructed. The mortar vault over this chamber is clearly secondary. A *pozzo* with a facing of *opus incertum* was made as one with the cover of the chamber. This *pozzo* lead up to the villa terrace and was later blocked from above. The covering of the originally open emissary with a mortar vault seems to have taken place in connection with the first villa phase. This will place Chamber B after the early third century BC and before 50 BC. It is, thus, more than likely that it was built in order to function as an inlet in connection with the new embankment around 100 BC. We have no means of dating the outer chamber (Chamber C). However, it was certainly later than the covering of Chamber B. Perhaps it was made in connection with the construction of Caligula's floating palaces.

Villa and sanctuary

With the above information on the landscape regulations in mind, what was, then, the interrelation between the various structures by the lake? Access to the villa was possible in two different ways. For transport of goods, etc., a road paved with trapezoid basalt blocks entered the villa at its northwestern corner. This road connected with the road system of the Alban hills, as it intersected the likewise paved road, probably the Via Virbia, that connected the sanctuary of Diana with Via Appia.

In antiquity, the water level of the lake was more than 4 m higher than today. This made it possible to sail to the villa and moor by its quay. Access was therefore also possible by boat. A vaulted passage cut through the terrace wall in Phase 2 and provided access to the central, representative part of the villa. This was probably the main means of access, when the villa owner entertained his guests.

³⁴ I am grateful to Birte Poulsen, the director of the excavation's find registration and – analysis to provide me with a preliminary dating of the material found in the inlet.

³⁵ Kjell Aage Nilson, Karin Nordström, Mette Pripp Bonné and Camilla Nybye Løntoft.

³⁶ See also Ucelli 1950, 119–125, figs. 124–126, 132.

³⁷ Jan Heinemeyer, Institute of Physics and Astronomy, University of Aarhus.

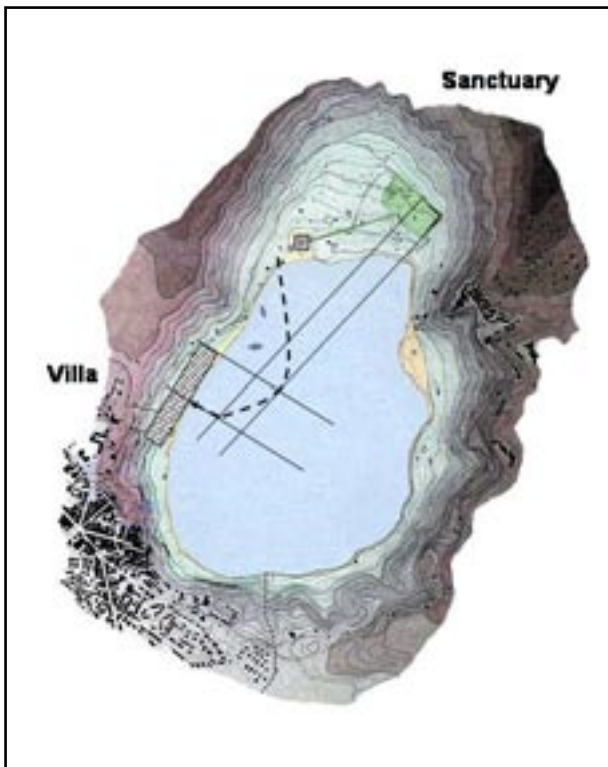


Fig. 4. Proposed route of navigation to the villa.



Fig. 5. Capital from the villa's long facade portico (2000).



Fig. 6. Capital from the sanctuary's portico. Neg. from Savile's excavation in 1885. Courtesy of the Castle Museum, Nottingham.

We have several sources in Latin literature that describe the impression offered by a villascape when it was approached from the water (e.g. the description of Pollius Felix's villa in the Bay of Naples in Statius *Silvae* 2.2, translation: D.R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb, 2003):

Between the walls well-known by the Sirens' name and the cliff burdened with Tyrrhene Minerva's temple there is a lofty villa looking out upon the Dicharean deep [...]

Curving cliffs on either side pierce crescent waters, making a calm recess. Nature provides space. The watery beach interrupts the heights, running inland between overhanging crags. The spot's first grace is a steaming bathhouse with twin cupolas, and from land a stream of fresh water meets the briny sea. [...]

Before his house the cerulean governor of the swelling wave keeps ward, guardian of the harmless home; his temple foams with the friendly surge. [...]

From that point a colonnade creeps zigzag through the heights, a city's work, mastering the rugged rocks with its lengthy spine. [...]

This mansion faces sunrise and Phoebus' early ray [...]

Some spots Nature has favoured, in others she has been overcome and yielded to the developer letting herself be taught new and gentler ways. Where you see level ground, there used to be a hill; the building you now enter was wilderness; where now you see lofty woods, there was not even land. The occupant has tamed it all [...].

Such an approach, when the building was seen from a low viewpoint revealing the facade in its totality, surely provided an impressive view (Fig. 2).

Embarkation must have taken place close to the present Museo delle Navi. This is where the paved road comes closest to the lake before turning off towards the sanctuary. The remains of a monument in *opus caementicium* may have marked the spot.³⁸ I should like to propose a sailing route along the stippled line (Fig. 4). This would provide fine views of both villa and sanctuary, and from one spot it would be possible to see both structures from the front, even though the villa would be more prominent. The route would also pass the two floating palaces. It is important to stress that they must have been lying more or less permanently at the same place in the lake (probably where they were found), and were not, as is commonly assumed, moved. Onboard the ships were found a number of large-sized lead pipes. Water in considerable quantity must therefore have been brought to the ships via these veritable pipelines. The water probably came from the copious spring at *le mole* immediately beneath Nemi, where similar pipes have been

³⁸ A quadrangular structure (only its core is preserved) measuring 1.7 x 2.4 m with a preserved height of 2.5 m is found immediately beside the basalt road. It is published by Lenzi, who proposes that the structure was a funerary monument (2000, 175, no. 25, fig. 38).



Fig. 7. Oplontis villa, Torre Annunziata. Pompeian second style, 50-40 BC.

found.³⁹ This implies that the ships – as already suggested in the Renaissance⁴⁰ but since then forgotten – had a more permanent position once they were anchored. If they really were positioned, where they were found, they will have constituted a spectacular backdrop for the parade of sail from the point of embarkation to the villa.

One final element is to be mentioned. It may be suggested that the villa already in its first phase emulated the architecture of the Sanctuary of Diana. Part of the villa's facade was constituted by an impressive façade portico (Fig. 5).⁴¹ Its type of Doric capital with a tall plain neck was also used in the long porticoes of the sanctuary (Fig. 6). The villa capital is, to my knowledge, by far the latest capital of this type used in actual architecture, even though this type, as featured in majestic porticoes, was still celebrated in the earlier phases of second Style wall painting (Fig. 7).⁴² That the type chosen for the villa portico may be regarded as deliberately antiquarian, also points to the Sanctuary as its source of inspiration. The sanctuary capitals are nearly identical in size to the villa capitals indicating that even the heights of the porticoes were

³⁹ Kircher 1671, p. 50b.

⁴⁰ Ratti 1797 *passim* with references to Renaissance sources.

⁴¹ Guldager Bilde 2003, 261 with references, fig. 4.

⁴² E.g. the House of the Labyrinth, cubiculum 46, 70-60 BC (Strocka 1991, figs. 336-337, 340-343), in the Oplontis villa, 50-40 BC (La peinture de Pompéi 1993, triclinium 14, p. 239-240, pl. 149; room 15, p. 241, pl. 153; cubiculum 23, pp. 241-242, pl. 154) and in the contemporary villa of *P. Fannius Synistor* at Boscoreale (Lehmann 1953, alcove of cubiculum pl. XVIII-XIX), and also in the frigidarium of the slightly later House of the Cryptoportico at Pompei, 40-30 BC (La peinture de Pompéi 1993, 19) and in Rome, in the House of Augustus (room 6), 30-25 BC (Carettoni 1983, pl. L).

almost the same. Viewed at a distance, the two structures would, accordingly, appear rather similar with their overall Π -shape and extended porticoes, and the villa would, thus, provide offer a deliberate reminder of this venerated public and sacred building. Potentially, such architectural manipulation would cause visitors to confuse the two structures, when both were seen from the same point in a boat in the middle of Lake Nemi. It was probably intended.

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