

ROMAN VILLA OF VILLAMAGNA (URBISAGLIA, MC, ITALY): SUMMARY OF THE 2018-2021 FIELDWORK

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The Roman villa of Villamagna is located within the boundary of the colony of Pollentia-Urbs Salvia, about 1,5 km northeast of the Roman city.

From 2000 and between 2007 and 2010, the University of Macerata and the Soprintendenza Archeologica per le Marche conducted the first excavation campaigns here. In 2017 the University of Macerata re-started archaeological excavation activities, focusing initially on *pars Urbana* (2017-2018). Then, it gradually moved to *pars Rustica* (2018-2021) to investigate the productive structures of the villa.

People lived around the Villamagna complex for about six centuries (1st century BC – 6th century AD).

Following the abandonment of the Roman estate, the plateau continued to be populated until the 15th century (1422). Since 2011, almost the entire villa's perimeter has been brought to light, but portions of the complex to the north and north-west remain missing. The occupied area was approximately 40,000 m².

PARS URBANA

Pars Urbana consists of a living area, numerous reception rooms, two with apses, a courtyard or garden and a portico atrium with pillars.

PARS RUSTICA

The *pars Rustica* consists of an ample space (10 x 16 m) divided into three naves by two rows of pillars. In the southern section of *pars Rustica*, a complex of underground rooms including a vaulted cellar and a square area still not excavated. To the west, there is another room whose pavement preparation suggests that it may have contained presses (now absent). In the northern section, there is a corridor, a cistern and a well.

Inside the big productive room, identifiable as a production and storage area, we have recognised four phases.

FIRST PHASE

At first, we imagine this ample space with a large basin in *opus spicatum* surrounded by coarse *cocciopesto* kerbs and a complex of four tanks on the perpendicular side. The bottoms of all four tanks are covered in *cocciopesto*. Interestingly, a channel connects the last two tanks, but we are not sure what was produced. The most natural hypotheses are oil and wine. The wine was undoubtedly the product processed in the first tank. The main hypotheses are the production of fruity wine and/or wine with an increased alcohol content thanks to the fermentation of fruit sugars.

Both the basin in *opus spicatum* and the complex of four tanks have on one of their short sides a large *dolium defossum*. These suggest that the tanks and *dolia* were used simultaneously in some processing, maybe of grapes.

SECOND PHASE

At least two rows of *dolia* characterise this phase on the central-northern side of the room, where maybe up to ten *dolia* were located. Of these, superficial and smaller than those *defossa*, we have the remains of only two. Of the other eight, only the pits of spoliation remain.

Then, we no longer use the basin in *opus spicatum* and, covered by a layer of soil, we found the bottom parts of two *dolia*. The semi-circular rupture of the short side of the tank suggests the presence of a third *dolium*. Another *dolium* is added almost to cover the *dolium defossum* near the complex of the four tanks.



Fig. 3 – Opus spicatum tank with two dolia of the second phase (*pars rustica*).

Fig. 4 – Complex of four tanks with dolium defossum (*pars rustica*).

Fig. 5 – Vaulted cellar of underground floor (*pars rustica*).

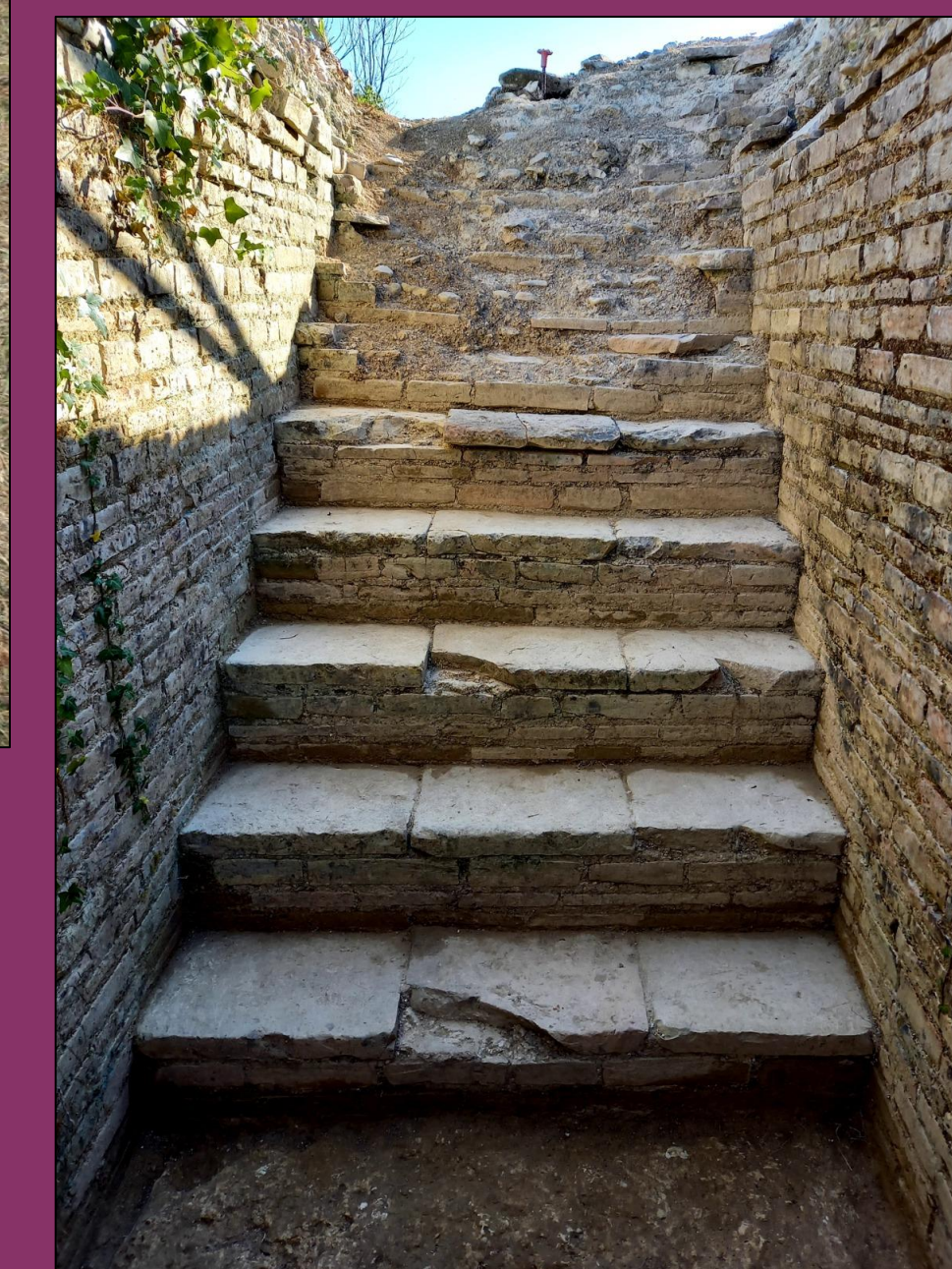
Fig. 6 – Stairs to access underground floor (*pars rustica*).

THIRD PHASE

Later, the western corner is destroyed, perhaps to create an access passage. In this third phase, the room seems to change its intended use. A spoliation pit is filled with ceramic material and brick, while the central one is with the waste material of a furnace/forg. Although the type of production of the furnace/forg is not yet clear, but one particular characteristic is evident: one of the preparatory layers consists of numerous pips and endocarps of *Olea europaea* (olives) and pericarps of *Juglans regia* (walnuts). These items highlight the presence of vines in late antiquity and the use of oily fruits to increase the calorific value during combustion.

FOURTH PHASE

The area, before its abandonment, was occupied by a burial ground with ten graves, particularly in its central northern part.



UNDERGROUND FLOOR

It is conceivable that there had to be a single large room accessible from the stairwell in the first phase. Later, with the division of the big room and the closing up of the stairs, it could have been possible to access the rooms from above-using trapdoors.

The stairwell probably had a vaulted roof and consisted of at least ten steps, of which only the last four remain in good condition. At the bottom of the stairs a surface (floor) of hydraulic mortar surrounded by a raised kerb of *cocciopesto* was identified. In addition, it seems this floor could be connected to a circular hole located at the top of the stairs. By making comparisons to other locations, it could be that the area served as a collection area between the presses and a tank placed on an underground floor: maybe for the decantation of the must. Now, it is only a hypothesis to be verified.

The vaulted cellar is accessed by a small anti-room in which a gutter-vase was excavated in one corner encased in a layer of compact mortar. The lowest sections of the walls of this small room are identifiable as the original foundation walls, on which the cellar was built. It is probably one of the first phases of the life of the villa.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the moment, vine growing, and winemaking are the best-attested activities. Before concluding, it is essential to underline the absence of presses and channels throughout the *pars Rustica* site, which would be necessary to connect the various tanks.

In future excavation campaigns, we will direct ourselves towards a complete understanding of the phases of the villa and the environment in which it spoke during its life.

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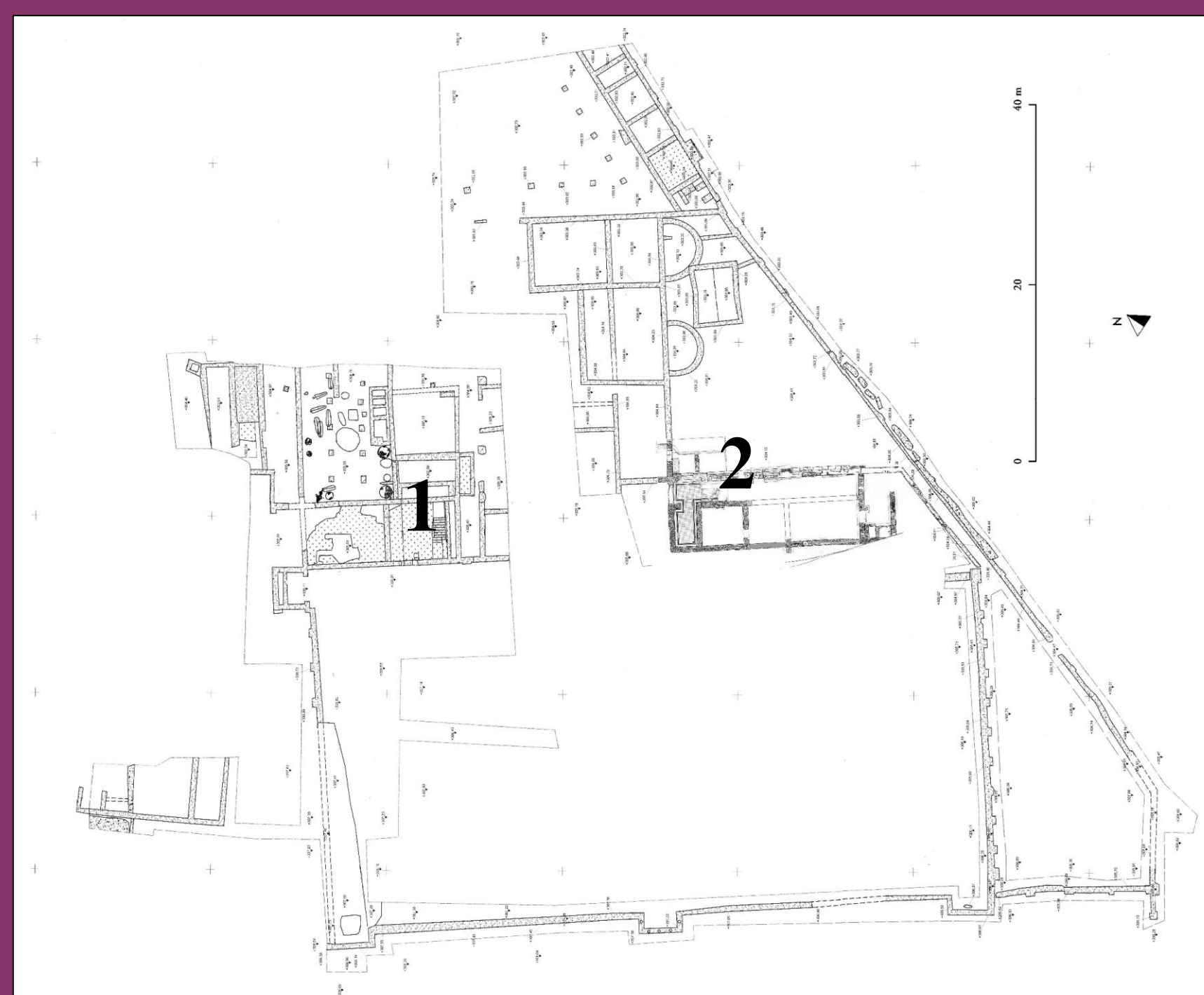


Fig. 1 – Plan of the roman villa of Villamagna (1-*pars Rustica*; 2-*pars Urbana*).



Fig. 2 – Pars Rustica of the roman villa of Villamagna.