

# Oplontis B: a center for the distribution and export of Vesuvian wine

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At the time of the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, the site known as Villa B at Oplontis contained sufficient amphoras to ship over 30,000 liters of wine.<sup>1</sup> Though the study of J. T. Peña and M. McCallum rightly recognized the site as a bottling facility,<sup>2</sup> this note uses recent data to argue that its function went beyond that to include significant export and distribution of Vesuvian area wine, and possibly the import of foreign wine. The data has been accumulated by the ongoing study of the facility by the Oplontis Project, using geo-prospection, excavation, and a census of amphoras at the site. The findings suggest that the immediate proximity to the coast, the design of and modifications made to the courtyard area and the sheer number of transport amphoras it contained enabled it to fulfill an important rôle as one of the primary wine distribution centers on the Bay of Naples.

The 12th-c. copy of a Roman map known as the *Tabula Peutingeriana* identifies a place named “Oplontis”, its site on the Bay of Naples seemingly just down the road from Pompeii. Based on that map, Sir William Robinson suggested in 1831 that this Oplontis was an ancient place that lay buried somewhere beneath the modern town of Torre Annunziata, and archaeologists still accept his theory. The modern excavations there have uncovered two major sites that have been labeled Oplontis Villa A (known to many as the Villa of Poppaea) and Oplontis Villa B (also referred to the Villa of Lucius Crassius Tertius). This note will focus on the latter site, offering an updated interpretation of its function based on new evidence from recent fieldwork by the Oplontis Project.<sup>3</sup>

Archaeological activity in the area of Torre Annunziata dates back to the late 16th c. when construction of the Sarno Canal cut through several areas of archaeological importance that included Pompeii and Villa A.<sup>4</sup> The canal construction must have uncovered significant material associated with Villa A since it cut through the southernmost section of the villa. In the 1830s the restored Bourbon monarchs commissioned a campaign of tunneling through parts of Villa A. Scientific excavation did not begin until 1964 when the Ministry of Culture decided to uncover this villa, under the direction first of A. De Franciscis and later S. De Caro. In 1974, while these excavations were ongoing, coring to sink concrete pillars in a gymnasium for the nearby local school revealed evidence of another ancient structure. The plans for the gymnasium were immediately modified and excava-

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1 This is my conservative estimation based on the project’s ongoing census of the amphoras (under the supervision of J. Muslin). The site preserves at least 1200 Dressel 2-4 wine amphoras, which have a capacity of c.25 liters, see D. P. S. Peacock and D. F. Williams, *Amphorae and the Roman economy: an introductory guide* (London 1986), Table i, 52

2 J. T. Peña and M. McCallum, “The production and distribution of pottery at Pompeii: a review of the evidence. Part 1, Production,” *AJA* 113 (2009) 191.

3 The Oplontis Project has undertaken a full-scale study of “Villas” A and B since 2005: see the three interim reports at *JRA* 20 (2007) 222-32; *JRA* 22 (2009) 355-64; and *JRA* 24 (2011) 370-81; and the first of 4 born-digital volumes, J. R. Clarke and N. K. Muntasser (edd.), *Oplontis: Villa A (“of Poppaea”) at Torre Annunziata*, vol. 1. *The ancient setting and modern rediscovery* (2014) ACLS E-Book: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb90048.0001.001>.

4 J. Clarke, “History of the excavations 1964-1988,” in the Oplontis Project’s (digital only) vol. 1 (ibid.), provides the first history of the archaeology for the two sites.