

Water features, the atrium, and the coastal setting of Oplontis Villa A at Torre Annunziata

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A collaboration between the University of Texas at Austin and the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei, the Oplontis Project is studying all aspects of Oplontis Villa A.¹ In addition to study of masonry, material culture, and decorative ensembles, the project has carried out a campaign of excavation below the levels of A.D. 79 in order to clarify the villa's long history. A host of collaborators are carrying out specialized studies on topics that include ceramics, paleobotany, geology, sculpture, pigment analysis and hydrology, and the results will appear in the final digital publication.²

This third and final interim report explains how recent (2009-10) fieldwork has changed the picture of the villa's history.³ Much of the fieldwork concentrated on gardens and water features (fig. 1). It is now clear that much of the villa's pre-A.D. 79 history was purposely buried in antiquity or hidden by later additions. This is especially true in the gardens, where water features were not only non-functioning at the time of the eruption, but also had been disassembled and buried.

Water features

(a) Pool

The first of the hidden water features appeared in trench OPK1 (fig. 2) in the N part of room 80, a thin strip of garden that spans the narrow area between swimming pool 96 and portico 60. Excavations by S. De Caro in the 1970s found evidence that room 80 had once been a pool, possibly an extension of the large pool visible today.⁴ As noted in our previous reports, De Caro speculated that the current pool had been wider and was simply filled and narrowed, perhaps to stabilize the colonnade of room 60. Although we were able to study other sections of this earlier pool when it was exposed during restoration work in 2008, the new trench allowed us not only to document the N limit of this buried pool but

1 Previous scholarship includes A. De Franciscis, "La villa romana di Oplontis," in B. Andreae and H. Kyrieleis (edd.), *Neue Forschungen in Pompeji und den anderen vom Vesuvausbruch 79 n. Chr. verschütteten Städten* (Recklinghausen 1975) 9-38; L. Fergola and P. G. Guzzo, *Oplontis. La villa di Poppea* (Milan 2000). For a more recent analysis, see S. De Caro, "Oplontis," in M. R. Pannetta (ed.), *Pompei: storia, vita e arte della città sepolta* (Vercelli 2005) 372-98.

2 The villa will be published in 4 born-digital volumes in the Humanities E-Book Series of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS); it will include a detailed web-based catalogue keyed to high-resolution digital photographs, as well as an accurate 3D model of the villa, made in collaboration with the King's Visualisation Lab (KVL) at King's College London. The King's College London team is in the final stages of building a base model in 3D STUDIO MAX that reflects the current state of the villa. This model will then be transformed in UNITY, a gaming platform that will allow the model to be fully navigable; it will also serve as a portal into the database.

3 The previous interim reports are M. L. Thomas and J. R. Clarke, "The Oplontis Project 2005-6: observations on construction history of Villa A at Torre Annunziata," *JRA* 20 (2007) 100-9; and M. L. Thomas and J. R. Clarke, "Evidence of demolition and remodeling at Villa A at Oplontis (Villa of Poppea) after A.D. 45," *JRA* 22 (2009) 355-64.

4 Thomas and Clarke 2009 (supra n.3) 363.