

# Palazzi di Casignana near Locri: a palatial residence in late-antique Calabria

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## Introduction

In 1964 an enormous Roman villa was discovered at the town of Palazzi di Casignana on the Ionian coast of *Bruttium* (modern Calabria) in the “toe” of Italy, 15 km south of the ancient Greek colony of Locri (fig. 1). Dating originally to the 1st c. A.D., it was rebuilt on a monumental and lavish scale between the 3rd and mid-4th c., passing through several phases until its abandonment around 450.<sup>1</sup> Its opulence shows that enormous wealth existed in this region during the 4th c.,<sup>2</sup> a time when the senatorial aristocrat Q. Aurelius Symmachus was appointed *corrector Lucaniae et Bruttii* while his father served as prefect of Rome (A.D. 364–65).<sup>3</sup> According to G. A. Cecconi, it is legitimate to correlate the importance of a province with the political and social stature of the official assigned to administer it.<sup>4</sup> Thus it is unlikely that someone of Symmachus’s status would have been chosen to



Fig. 1. Aerial view of the villa (Sabbione *et al.* 2007, 36, fig. 29).

- 1 The area surrounding the villa continued to be inhabited until the 7th c.: Sabbione *et al.* 2007, 36. An account of the villa’s phases and main features is given in the same publication.
- 2 A conference held in Rome on late-antique Bruttium greatly enhanced our understanding of the period in this region: “La Calabre de la fin de l’antiquité au Moyen Age” (Actes de la Table ronde, 1989) = *MEFRM* 103.2 (1991). For late-antique Calabria, see Fiaccadori 1994.
- 3 Matthews 1990, 14. During this period Symmachus’s close friend Virius Nicomachus Flavianus governed Sicily as a *consularis*.
- 4 Cecconi 1994, 51 ff., especially 52.