

# Tile-stamps of Philippianus in Late Roman Sicily: a talking *signum* or evidence for horse-raising?

R. J. A. Wilson

That a Roman villa lies in contrada Gerace, 10 km due south of Enna in central Sicily (fig. 1), has been known since the discovery of part of a geometric mosaic floor, when erosion of a drainage channel in flood exposed it in 1994. Subsequent excavation by E. Cilia Platamone, then of the Enna Soprintendenza, uncovered the plan of part of a small villa-like building (Area A) consisting of an apsed room, four rooms to its west and a corridor along the S and W sides; she also demonstrated through trial trenching that mosaics existed in at least part of the S corridor and the apsed room, but most of the site was cleared only to the tops of the walls.<sup>1</sup> Excavation in 2007 by C. Bonanno, then also of the Enna Soprintendenza, uncovered more of the mosaic pavements in the S corridor and the apsed room, and demonstrated the existence of further rooms opening off the W side of the W corridor (fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> Two small trial trenches were also dug by L. Guzzardi in 2000 in an area 60 m north of this building (fig. 3, at G1 and G 2).<sup>3</sup>

In order to learn more about the nature of the site, the writer commissioned a geophysical survey from a team under S. Hay based at the British School at Rome. Carried out in May 2012, it covered c.2.25 ha, over much of which surface sherds are visible (a further field lying southwest of the villa-like building could not be surveyed because of a standing crop). This work revealed a series of scattered buildings to the north (fig. 4, nos. 7–10), between the ‘villa’ in Area A and Guzzardi’s trial trenches; an amorphous area of building to the northeast of Area A (no. 3); an apparently rectangular (50 m long) building directly east of Area A (no. 2); and 5 kilns on the edge of the escarpment to the southeast of Area A (nos. 5-6).<sup>4</sup>

Four weeks of excavation in 2013 conducted by the author focused on exposing to floor level parts of two rooms in Area A, and on laying a trench across the rectangular building (Area B) to establish its date and purpose (fig. 3). The rectangular building, provided with a stone flagged floor, was possibly a storehouse for the estate’s agricultural produce; it was built in the second quarter of the 4th c. over the demolished remains of an earlier structure (of uncertain date). It appears to have had a short life, collapsing suddenly and dramatically, possibly in the earthquake under Julian (A.D. 361-63), when Libanius reported that

---

1 E. Cilia Platamone, “Recente scoperta nel territorio di Enna: l’insediamento tardo-romano in contrada Geraci,” *L’Africa romana* 11.3 (1996) 1683-89; ead., “Rinvenimenti musivi nel territorio di Enna tra passato e presente,” in R. M. Carra Bonacasa and F. Guidobaldi (edd.), *Atti IV Colloq. Assoc. Ital. Stud. Cons. Mosaico*, 1996 (Ravenna 1997) 273-90.

2 C. Bonanno, R. Carbella, C. Capelli and M. Piazza, “Nuove esplorazioni in località Gerace (Enna-Sicilia),” in S. Menchelli *et al.* (edd.), *LRCW3* (BAR S2185; Oxford 2010) especially 261 (the pottery reported comprises surface finds, especially from the adjacent almond orchard); C. Bonanno, “La villa romana di Gerace (EN),” in F. P. Rizzo (ed.), *La villa del Casale e oltre* [=Seia 15-16 (2010-11) (2013)] 183 and 185 for the dating; C. Bonanno, “La villa romana di Gerace,” in S. Lo Pinzino (ed.), *Studi, ricerche, restauri per la tutela del patrimonio culturale ennese*, I (Enna 2014) 88-92.

3 L. Guzzardi, “Attività della sezione archeologica della Soprintendenza di Enna negli anni 1997-2000,” *Kokalos* 47-48 (2001-2) 582-84.

4 S. Hay and A. James, “Geophysics projects,” *PBSR* 81 (2013) 353-55.