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Investigating the gardens of the Villa of Livia

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The villa mentioned by Pliny, Suetonius and Cassius Dio *ad gallinas albas* and belonging to the empress Livia lies some 12 km north of Rome in the suburb of Prima Porta. Not only is it one of the largest Early Imperial villas in the region of Lazio, covering at least 14,000 m², but it is one of the best-preserved Roman structures of its kind, featuring a wide variety of wall- and floor techniques, frescoes, and a complex history of construction.¹ Excavations began in 1863 and revealed among other things the celebrated statue of Augustus, now in the Braccio Nuovo of the Vatican museum, and a subterranean *triclinium* decorated with the famous garden frescoes, since June 1998 on display in Palazzo Massimo delle Terme. In the 1950s H. Kähler made investigations in order to establish the original position of the Augustus statue and his results were presented briefly in *Die Augustusstatue von Prima Porta* (see further below).

New excavations were begun in 1970, and from 1982 have been carried out on an annual basis by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma under G. Messineo. This recent work has brought to light a large part of a villa *semi urbana* (fig. 1), the main building phase of which belongs to the late Republican period (the 30s B.C.). A road led up to the entrance from the Via Flaminia, and immediately after entering the *fauces* the visitor reached the *atrium*, beyond which are two *cubicula* and a small garden. To the left (east)² is the presumed Imperial garden terrace. To the right, a corridor leads up to the *balnea* (on the right) and the peristyle. Beyond the peristyle is the famous subterranean *triclinium* and, finally, the SW wing with minor rooms featuring Antonine frescoes and *sectile* floors.

In 1996 the Swedish Institute in Rome, represented by the authors in collaboration with the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma and G. Messineo, launched a project to investigate the gardens.³ The chief aim has been to investigate those parts of the villa that have garden affinities and their environs (fig. 1). The first of these, the so-called garden terrace, was just mentioned. The second garden (fig. 1 at C), south of the *ambulatorium* (no. 48), is a space located behind the atrium. That this space was a garden is based on the discovery of fragments of a planting pot (*olla perforata*) in its NE corner;⁴ further, there were no traces of any floor or walls which would have been required for an ordinary room. A Republican date is implied by the fact that it belonged to the original plan of this part of the villa. This garden was not properly investigated before 1996. The third presumed garden is the peristyle (fig. 1, no. 22) which was surrounded by a portico with Ionic columns.⁵ That the interior had some kind of planting arrangement is plausible considering analogies with Campanian villas.⁶ Worth not-

- 1 For further information on the archaeology and topography of the site, see the project's website: <http://www.arkeologi.uu.se/primaporta>; see also C. Calci and G. Messineo, *La villa di Livia a Prima Porta* (LSA 2, 1984) and G. Messineo, *La via Flaminia* (Rome 1991).
- 2 For convenience, north is considered to be to the left in fig. 1 and the Garden Terrace to be in the east.
- 3 For further information on the results of the earlier campaigns, see the unpublished reports available at the Swedish Institute in Rome: P. Liljenstolpe and A. Klynne, *The Imperial garden-terrace at Prima Porta: 1996 excavations* (Rome-Uppsala 1996); A. Klynne and P. Liljenstolpe, *The Imperial gardens of the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta: a preliminary report on the 1997 campaign* (Rome-Uppsala 1997); iid., *The Imperial gardens of the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta: a preliminary report on the 1998 campaign* (Rome-Uppsala 1998). The 1997 report was also published as P. Liljenstolpe and A. Klynne, "The Imperial gardens of the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta: a preliminary report on the 1997 campaign," *OpRom* 22-23 (1997-98) 127-47.
- 4 These fragments were discovered by G. Messineo in a small *sondage* after the excavation of the atrium in the early 1980s: cf. id., "Ollae perforatae," *Xenia* 8 (1984) 66-68.
- 5 Cf. P. Liljenstolpe, "An Ionic capital from the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta," *OpRom* 21 (1996) 101-5.
- 6 Compare, for example, the peristyle gardens at the Villa of Asellius and the Villa of Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale: W. F. Jashemski, *The gardens of Pompeii, Herculaneum and the villas destroyed by Vesuvius*, vol. 2. *Appendices* (New Rochelle, NY 1993) 285 f., plans 124-25.