

The villa of Torre de Palma (Alto Alentejo)

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Torre de Palma in east central Portugal is the site of one of the largest Roman villas in Iberia (fig. 1). First discovered by farm laborers in 1947, it was subsequently excavated by Portuguese archaeologists. In 1987 the University of Louisville began a project of re-excavation which by 1995 had encompassed all structures in the core of the villa. This paper is an interim report on the results of fieldwork to date.

Excavations at Torre de Palma began shortly after the villa's discovery and continued through the 1950's under the direction of M. Heleno, director of the Museu Etnológico, Lisbon. Additional fieldwork was undertaken by Dom F. de Almeida in the mid 1960's. During the course of those excavations hundreds of rooms and spaces were revealed, major mosaics were removed, and many crates of materials taken to be stored in the Museu Etnológico (now the Museu Arqueológico). In his publication of the site Heleno provided a short description of the villa as the setting for the mosaics, which he discussed in some detail.¹ He dated the villa to the 2nd through the 4th c. A.D. but did not attempt to distinguish phases or date specific structures. Other scholars published specific aspects of the villa such as the mosaics, the basilica, and the olive press,² but, because they had to depend on Heleno's publication for basic information, many issues remain unresolved.

The University of Louisville's involvement with the site began in 1983 with a project to re-excavate the Early Christian basilica adjacent to the villa, a church which proved to be significant in a number of respects³ (fig. 17). During the 1983 season, the discovery of mid 4th-c. coins embedded in the original floor established the Torre de Palma basilica as the oldest known double-apsed church in Iberia. In order to under-

- 1 "A 'villa' lusitano-romano de Torre de Palma (Monforte)," *O Arqueólogo Português* ser. 2, 6 (1962) 313-38. No comprehensive site report was ever published, and, according to personnel at the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia in Lisbon, notes on the site are not included with the materials.
- 2 C. de Azevedo, "A Portuguese Roman villa-farm of the third century rich in mosaics," *ILN* 277 (December 24, 1955) 1101-3; O. Sargnon "A la ferme-villa romaine de Torre de Palma (Portugal)," *RA* 50 (1957) 84-88; A. J. Sardinha d'Oliveira, "O lagar romano de Palma," *Boletim da Junta de Provincia de Alto Alentejo* (1958) 5-13; F. de Almeida, "Torre de Palma (Portugal). A basilica paleocristã e visigótica," *AEspArq* 45-47 (1972-74) 103-12; id., "O mosaico dos cavalos (Torre de Palma)," *O Arqueólogo Português* 4 (1970) 263-76; J. M. Blazquez, "Los mosaicos romanos de Torre de Palma," *AEspArq* 53 (1980) 125-62; C. MacMillan, *Mosaïques romaines du Portugal* (Paris 1986); J. Lancha and C. Beloto, *Chevaux vainqueurs, une mosaïque romaine de Torre de Palma Portugal* (Paris 1994). In addition, Lancha is currently preparing a volume on Torre de Palma for a series on Roman mosaics of southern Portugal. The site is also included in J.-G. Gorges' *Les villas hispano-romaines* (Paris 1979); in such general works as J. Alarcão's *Portugal romano* (Lisbon 1983) and the more recent *Roman Portugal* (Warminster 1988). In a recent article, "La campagne de la région d'Evora à l'époque impériale: mise à jour des recherches recentes," *Studia historica: historia antiqua* 10-11 (1992-93) 189-202, J. Lancha and P. André attempt to identify phases of construction at Torre de Palma. Their work is based almost completely on observation of the standing remains. Some of their conclusions are in accordance with the results of our excavations but many are not.
- 3 This project, directed by S. Maloney, was carried out jointly by the University of Louisville, the Universidade de Évora, and the Serviço Regional de Arqueologia, Região Sul. From 1983 to 1986 José O. Caeiro served as Portuguese liaison. Since 1987 Maria da Luz Huffstot, Universidade Lusíada, has been Portuguese co-director. In 1983 and 1984 the project was supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, and private donations. Subsequent seasons have been supported by private donations, grants from Humana, Inc., Abbot Laboratories, and the University of Louisville. Throughout, the project has received in-kind support from the Câmara Municipal de Monforte, the Cooperativa de Torre de Palma, and Dr. Teófilo Duarte. For results see S. J. Maloney "The Early Christian Basilican complex of Torre de Palma (Monforte, Alto Alentejo, Portugal)" and J. R. Hale, "A report on the tombs and human skeletal remains at the Paleo-Christian Basilica of Torre de Palma," *IV Reunião de arqueologia cristã hispanica* (Barcelona 1995) 449-61.