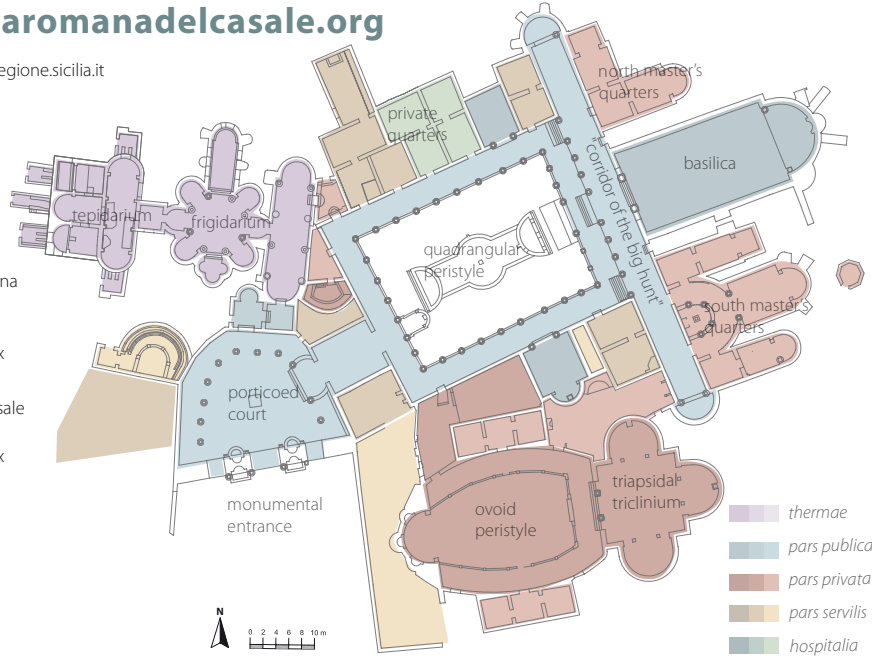


Offices

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Guardhouse

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cover photo Ugo Cavallo

how to get to the Villa

from the Fontanarossa-Catania airport > motorway A19 exit Dittaino > direction Valguarnera > Piazza Armerina

from the Punta Raisi-Palermo and Trapani-Birgi airports > motorway A19 exit Enna > direction Pergusa > Piazza Armerina

from Gela > road 117 bis > Piazza Armerina

The Villa Romana del Casale is located about 5 km from the city of Piazza Armerina, from which it can also be reached by shuttle bus in the summer months.

The Villa is open from 9 AM to one hour before sunset (schedule varies summer-winter), every day, including holidays. Admission is free for citizens of the European Union under 18 years of age and over 65 years of age. For residents of the province of Enna, admission is 1 euro.

For schoolchildren, it is necessary to bring a list on school letterhead to be presented at the ticket desk.

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Dipartimento
dei Beni Culturali
e dell'Identità Siciliana



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Villa Romana del Casale
inscribed on the World
Heritage List in 1997



Villa Romana del Casale, 1950s
(photo from the Archive of the Enna Office).

A unique inheritance for all

For the exceptional richness of its architectural and decorative elements, this late Roman structure has become of highly prominent importance within the programme for the safeguarding and valorisation of Sicilian heritage. It is managed by the Archaeological Park of the Villa del Casale and the archaeological areas of Piazza Armerina and of the surrounding municipalities, the Institute of the Regional Authority for Cultural Heritage.

The Villa, under UNESCO protection since 1997, belonged to a member of the Roman senatorial aristocracy, perhaps a Roman governor (*Praefectus Urbis*). Some scholars believe however that it was instead built and expanded on direct imperial commission. Due to its beauty and complexity, it can be considered

one of the most important examples of a state residence among its contemporaries in the Roman West. The high profile of its patron is eloquently celebrated through an iconographic programme that was stylistically influenced by the art of the African mosaicists who were called to do the work and unfolds in rich compositions decorating an impressive number of rooms, both public and private in nature.



Detail of the gymnasium mosaic: the charioteer of the green faction leads his quadriga to victory (photo by Mario Noto).

The Villa and the territory of the five senses

the scent of the forest

the taste of the products from the earth

the echo of history

the vision of mosaics

the feel of Mediterranean culture

A long history

The late antique fourth-century residence was built on top of a rustic villa built between the first century and the second half of the third century AD. It seems that the archaeological finds and destruction layers found in almost all of the sectors of the villa, discovered in the excavations of recent years, belong to the latter period.

Over the course of the fifth and sixth century AD, the structures of the Villa were adapted to defensive purposes, following a specific fortification plan revealed during the excavation campaigns by the thickening of the perimeter walls at numerous points and by the closing of the surviving arcades of the aqueduct connected to the baths. This determined an initial process of abandonment and of the functional transformation of the rooms, which would be reoccupied in later centuries by new residential structures. These new structures were built on top of the destruction layer of the pre-existing walls and beyond the perimeter of the late empire building. The medieval settlement that derived from this development took the name "Palàtia", Blàtea or Iblàtasah, as defined by Al-Idrīsī, the twelfth-century Arab geographer, until assuming the name Plàtia. Considered to be possibly one of the most extensive and articulated of its kind in central-southern Sicily, the settlement was destroyed in 1160-1 during the reign of William I and, two years later, a new fortified city was founded on the current site of Piazza Armerina. The persistence of highly-structured settlements in the area of the Roman villa is further evidenced in the fifteenth-century, by a small group of houses known by the name of Casale, from which the Villa's name derives.



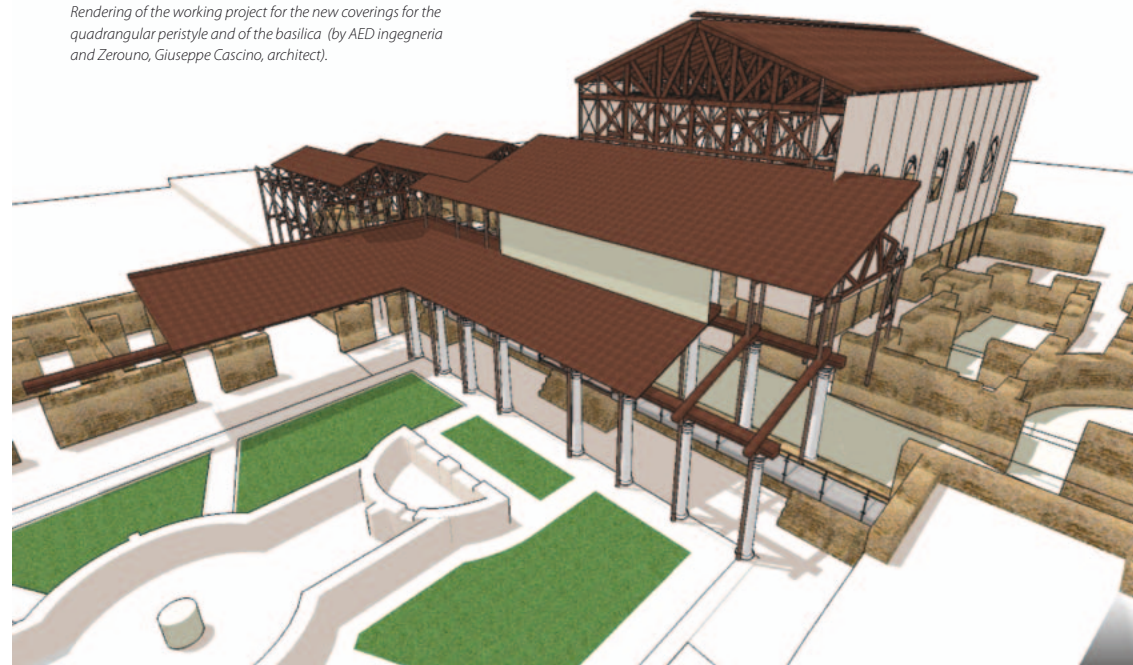
Praefurnium of the baths transformed into a kiln in the medieval period (photo by Mario Noto).

The archaeological investigation

Over the course of time, the historical evidence found around the site occupied by the late antique villa increased the interest of many scholars, who began exploring its remains starting in the first years of the nineteenth century and then again in the first years of the twentieth century, with the excavations led by Biagio Pace and Paolo Orsi, up to the major excavation campaign carried out in 1950s and early 1960s by Vinicio Gentili, followed by numerous initiatives targeting the consolidation of the mosaics.

The discovery of such constituent richness immediately necessitated its protection, a need fulfilled by the design and installation of laminated plastic structures. This solution, considered innovative and effective at the time, was proposed by architect Franco Minissi who, inspired by Cesare Brandi, revisited the solution already implemented in 1941 by Piero Gazzola for the covering of the triapsidal hall. Further systematic excavation campaigns were carried out in the successive decades, up until recent times, which unearthed the remains of an extensive medieval settlement next to the villa structure.

Rendering of the working project for the new coverings for the quadrangular peristyle and of the basilica (by AED Ingegneria and Zerouno, Giuseppe Cascino, architect).



A new face

Since 2006, the site has been the subject of a systematic restoration and conservation programme, the guidelines for which were written by High Commissioner Vittorio Sgarbi and implemented by the Regional Authority for Cultural Heritage, with funding from the European Union, on the project devised by Guido Meli, Director of Works.

The intervention concerns around 3000 square meters of mosaic and opus sectile pavement in addition to numerous polychrome wall paintings, as well as the three-dimensional reconfiguration of the spaces. The formal and material methods that were adopted are different than those of the past, in order to better preserve and make use of this residence, considered one of the most prestigious monumental testimonies to antiquity in the Mediterranean.

Restoration of an animal head from the peristyle floor mosaic using the incised mortar chromatic abstraction technique.

