

# The Villa of Quinto Voconio Pollione in the Suburbium of Rome: Indicators of Production from Recent Excavations

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## Introduction

The villa of Quinto Voconio Pollione, located in Ciampino, a municipality close to Rome, is one of the most important *villae* in the Roman *Suburbium*. Q. V. Pollione was one of the owners as it was found written on a lead pipe uncovered in one of the rooms of the villa.

The villa was discovered at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>1</sup> when the Marcandreola locality was considered a good field to survey thanks to the ancient structures came to light during the building of the railway from Rome to Albano.<sup>2</sup>

Before that time the only ruins of this villa already known, given that they had never been covered were the structures pointed out by Pietro Rosa on his map.<sup>3</sup> These consisted of a huge exedra linked to a squared space defined by walls and rooms.<sup>4</sup> According to Lanciani they could have been part of a *therma* or a *nymphaeum*, used until the IV century AD.

After occasional discoveries, a more intensive survey was planned. From 1884 to 1885, three excavation campaigns were conducted by Luigi Boccanera,<sup>5</sup> who obtained the permission to carry out them out in the “Tenuta delle Frattocchie in località Marcandreola”, in the property of the Colonna’s family. Boccanera worked under the supervision of Rodolfo Lanciani, at the time “Capo Ufficio Tecnico degli Scavi di Antichità di Roma”.<sup>6</sup>

Even though the uncovered remains were reburied a few years later, we can deduce an idea of the villa’s layout and the artefacts found inside the excavated structures thanks to the precious documentation of Rodolfo Lanciani. He pointed out the strategic location of the site (fig. 1), described the richness of the residential space – which was organized in the typical layout of Roman villas – and provided a lot of detail about the building and about the furniture, the decorative elements and the marble statues, which highlighted the *status* of its former owner.

## Excavations in the Nineteenth Century

Based on the available documentation, the villa extended over three consecutive terraces, on a raised level compared to the rest of the area, confined in its east side with a ditch (the “Fosso di Pantanicci”), and was surrounded on its western side by a big colonnaded garden. It was located in the middle of a road network, taking advantage

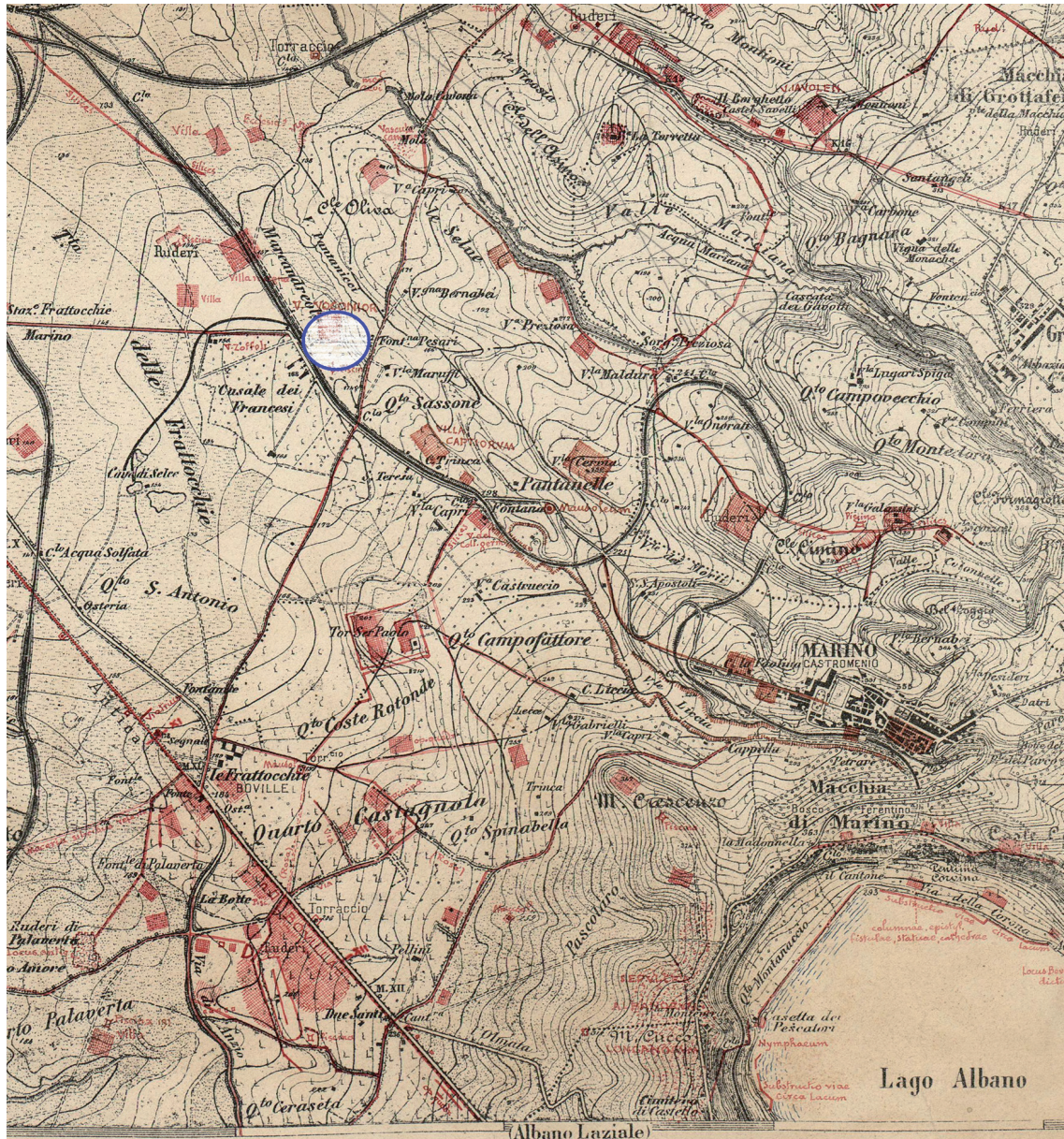


Fig. 1: Area of the villa in the Lanciani map.

of the so-called via Castrimeniense,<sup>7</sup> the via Cavona<sup>8</sup> and the secondary roads derived from them.

The villa consisted of two different parts, and, according to Lanciani, the western one was the oldest. One of the gardens gave access to a squared *vestibulum* and beyond it there were the colonnade *atrium* and some rooms of uncertain function. All of these rooms were adorned with mosaics, refined frescos and *sectilia* of coloured marbles covered both the walls and the floors.

As such as was the way in the old methodology of excavating, the aim of these excavations campaigns was to find decorative elements and statues to sell to Italian and foreign museums,<sup>9</sup> stopping the survey in the rooms if there was no evidence of them.

Dozens of precious statues were unearthed in the abandoned rooms of the villa; it suffices to recollect the three statues found in the *tablinum*: an athlete, a statue of Heracles and a refined statue of the Apollo Pizio (fig. 2). The Apollo is more than life-size, half-covered by a *chlamys* and has sandals on his feet. He leans against a tripod that is being climbed by a snake. The hairstyle, fixed on the nape except for two thin braids, as well as the soft shaped anatomical features give Apollo an almost female aspect. In a group of artifacts found in the western garden there was an inscription dedicated to Iside and Serapide. Both this inscription and three antefixes with the relief of a *ureus* are dated back to the II century AD and lead us to assume the presence of a private shrine in the Voconii property. There were also found several fragments of “Lastra Campana”, dated back to the I and to the II century AD, although not always well carved, but with an interesting amount of reliefs motives.

After these initial discoveries, the ruins completely disappeared in the landscape, on the one hand because of the decision to refill the excavations to preserve the ruins, and on the other hand because of the progressive filling up of the “Campagna Romana”.

### The Modern Excavation Campaign

During the 2006, after more than a century, in an area close to the earlier described excavations, toward SW, archaeological excavations were carried out in Marcandreola locality, prior to planned building activity. These excavations brought to light more features linked to the villa, especially structures related to the *pars rustica*. The studied area is close to the part of the map where Lanciani pointed out the most recent structures: this included the thermal baths and a number of reused rooms that had probably changed the dimension, orientation and function of earlier used spaces.

The sector unearthed during the recent excavations is not well preserved, especially for the more SW part of the structures, maybe already erased in ancient time. This part (fig. 3) includes the remains of a *doliarium* with still the bottom of the vases *in situ* and the traces of the foundation walls, that describe a squared room with three pillars in the middle, supporting the roof, totally missing as well were the walls.<sup>10</sup> There were also

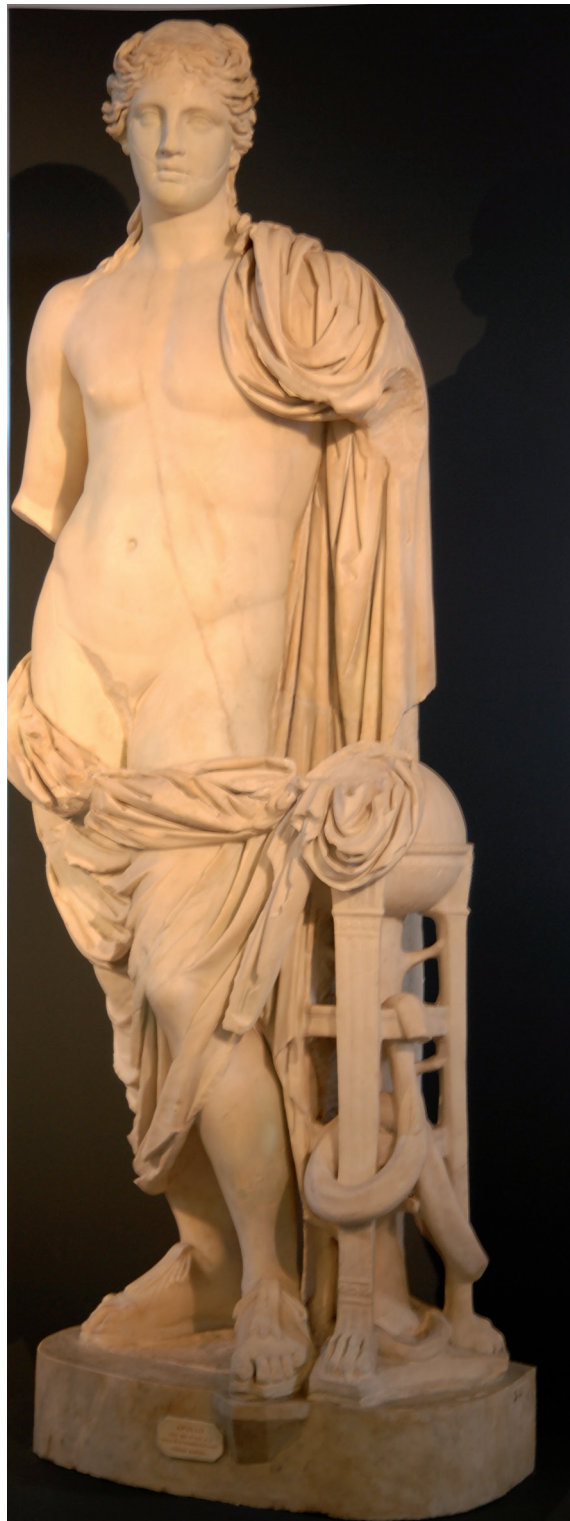


Fig. 2: Statue of Apollo Pizio.



Fig. 3: *Pars rustica* (*doliarium* and tanks).

tanks excavated in the tuff, two of them located at different levels and connected with each other by lead pipes. Both these tanks were linked to a squared cistern, restricted by a wall in a new phase of use. These structures were close to a big area with evidence of the work of a plough. Two phases of plough traces were discovered, with different orientation. The oldest phase was related to a canal, that crosses the field toward the system of tanks. Better preserved features were unearthed close to this area, on the other side of the modern road, consisting in a big cistern close to the remains of a pillar, and perhaps the relics of a *torcular*. Placed near to the *torcular* was a *cocciopesto* floor, with almost 30 holes on the surface, the most of them done in a second phase of use (fig. 4). Fragments of amphoras have been found inside the holes, suggesting the place where the final step of the production were stored. All around there were *scrobae*, irregular pit, squared or circular, not deep, excavated in the tuff, functional to the plantation.

The mapped structures, combined with the uncovered artefacts, which consisted mainly of amphora and *dolia* fragments, leads us to assume the production of wine and oil, during the I–II century AD, and probably also for the following centuries.<sup>11</sup> The discovery of ancient traces of ploughs regularly aligned in the field close to this area,



Fig. 4: *Pars rustica* (cistern, *torcular*, floor with holes).

of the *scrobae* and a complicated system of water distribution, corroborate the interpretation of these structures as related to agricultural production, covering all steps from plantation to the processing of the grapes and the olives.

Moreover, based on the recent analysis of the archaeological materials from the site (still ongoing), it is likely that glass production took place inside the villa. Particularly interesting are some pieces of “fritta”, turquoise slabs of dense glaze. Unfortunately, these fragments come from a surface survey and it was not possible to obtain additional data during the excavation. However, the number, the dimensions and the quality of these slabs lead us to link them to some similar artefacts discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> in the courtyard. Lanciani recorded, “a wonderful slab of glaze green as the sea with a round decoration relief 8 millimetres high”,<sup>12</sup> and a room filled with slabs of *lapis specularis* and fragmented glaze, that are elements of windows, collected from all the rooms of the villa and stored with their own frames and nails.<sup>13</sup>

The production of wine and oil, attributed to the I–II centuries AD, but maybe related to a wider chronological range, was aimed at meeting the demands of the villa (the owners and the community around them) and any surplus production could be aimed at the commercial market of Rome, with which the site is connected through the cited roads network.<sup>14</sup>

At this moment of the study the glass production is attributed rather to the demands of the owners for the decoration of the residential *pars* of the villa than linked to a com-

mercial trade. With the progress of the studies and the results of archaeometric analysis we will have more information about the use of these kind of artefacts.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Aglietti et al. 2005, 79–108; Aglietti 2010, 17–27.

<sup>2</sup> In that occasion three buildings came to light, one of these considered a little shrine by Lanciani. After providing the documentation, the ruins were refilled in order to preserve them.

<sup>3</sup> Pietro Rosa worked on his precious map from 1850 to 1870.

<sup>4</sup> Nowadays just few remains of the exedra are left, included in a modern house.

<sup>5</sup> Boccanera was involved in reserching antiquities to sell, in many sites of Lazio and Etruria.

<sup>6</sup> He was the director of a department of the ancient Roman ruins.

<sup>7</sup> Fischetti 2019, 57–76.

<sup>8</sup> Aglietti 2000, 127–162.

<sup>9</sup> A little collection of statues found in the nineteenth cent. are now exhibited at the Badisches Landesmuseum in Karlsruhe, others are in the Museo Nazionale Romano, in Rome, others are unfortunately missing. The collection placed in Germany is still indicated as from Marino instead of Ciampino. The Municipality of Ciampino is independent from Marino just from the 1974, but at time of the discovery the villa of Q. V. Pollione was still in Marino municipality.

<sup>10</sup> A big amount of *cubilia* spread all over the site suggest the originally presence of *opus reticolatum* or *opus mixtum* walls. There also were big fragments of parts of the floor, made as *opus spicatum*. Few fragments of tiles, that probably came from the remains of the roof.

<sup>11</sup> There are evidences of the use of this villa untill the IV cent. AD.

<sup>12</sup> Buonocore 2001, 262.

<sup>13</sup> Lanciani 1884, 159.

<sup>14</sup> Add to the so called Castrimeniense and the Cavona also the connections with the via Appia (Manigrasso 2010, 1–11).

### Image Credits

Fig. 1: BiASA (Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte, in Rome). – Fig. 2: S. Aglietti – A. L. Fischetti – D. Rose (eds.), Catalogue of the Exhibition “Ciampino Archeologica” (Ciampino 2010). – Fig. 3, 4: by author.

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