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*E S T R A T T O*

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# Horta da Torre Roman villa (Fronteira) and the monumentalisation in *Lusitania*'s rural landscape

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## Abstract

Le ricerche in corso dal 2012 presso la villa romana a Horta da Torre (Fronteira, Alentejo, Portugal) hanno portato alla scoperta di un ambiente a doppio abside con *stibadium*. La stanza, ampia 90 m<sup>2</sup>, era interamente pavimentata in *opus signinum*, permettendo dunque all'acqua di scorrere attraverso l'ambiente e creando uno scenario artificiale in cui natura e strutture artificiali convivevano. Le murature erano rivestite con mosaici policromi, realizzando un programma decorativo molto coerente. Verrà dunque presentata una panoramica generale e una sintesi delle otto campagne di scavo, ponendo Horta da Torre come un ulteriore elemento nel panorama dell'edilizia privata nel paesaggio rurale della Lusitania.

## 1. The Horta da Torre villa: a discussion of its components

An object of archaeological excavations since 2012, the Horta da Torre villa proved to be one of the most notable archaeological sites in the Alto Alentejo region (fig. 1). In the Roman period, this area belong to the former province of *Lusitania* of which the capital was *Augusta Emerita*, it having thus been included in the *Conventus Emeritensis*. The surrounding region contained a landscape punctuated by villae with monumental *pars urbanae* surrounded with buildings used for agricultural operations. As such, the structures were spread over several hectares<sup>1</sup>.

In the case of Horta da Torre, a similar picture can be observed. However, agricultural practices caused massive



1. - Horta da Torre in the Iberian Península.

amounts of damage and destruction, some of which was done intentionally. The excavations carried out have nonetheless made it possible to identify a structural ensemble that is in surprisingly good condition. An interpretative analysis of the results has also proved, in addition to the phase in which the Imperial villa was fully occupied, indicators referring to one (or several) instances of post-abandonment occupations, with an informative set that constitutes one of the best documented in any of the villae in *Lusitania*<sup>2</sup>. However, given the purpose of this edition, the focus shall instead be placed on describing the structures that have been under excavation since 2012.

## 2. Context: resources present

The Horta da Torre site is located in the area best known due intensive field surveys, within the boundaries of the current municipality of Fronteira<sup>3</sup>, where a dense concentration of settlements has been found to date back to Roman times (fig. 2). The area benefitted from soils with excellent agricultural capacity, in addition to a great diversity of landscape models that allowed for a broad spectrum of economic strategies to be implemented.

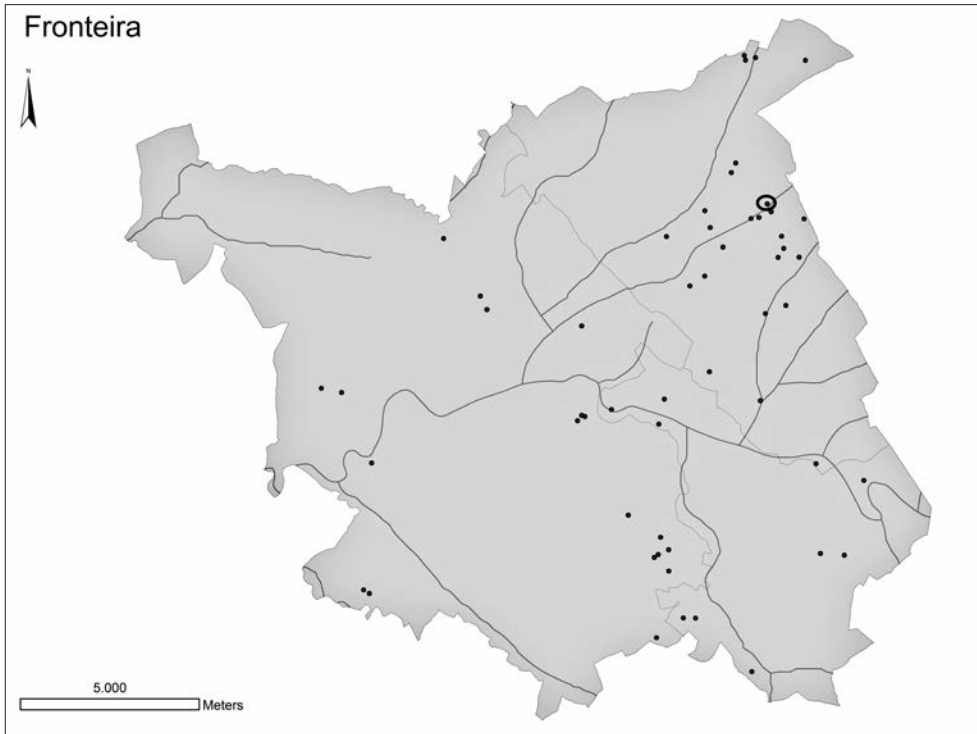
Two resources are present within the villa's surroundings that should be highlighted. One is a thermal spa nowadays used for medicinal purposes, located about 2km away, in the Sulfúrea valley. The place has several remains that point to an occupation in the Roman period, probably serving as a focus that attracted people. To allow this, a communication route connected the spa to the Horta da Torre villa, but this itinerary had other purposes. In fact, that would have been a part of the XIV route of the Antonine

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<sup>1</sup> Carneiro 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Carneiro 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Carneiro 2014 II, 249-281.



2. - Roman sites in the Fronteira municipality with Horta da Torre highlighted, according to Carneiro, 2014.

Itinerary (*Olisipo-Augusta Emerita*)<sup>4</sup>. Horta da Torre is less than 500 m from this itinerary, from which it benefited greatly, as allowed it to be fully integrated into extra-regional communication circuits.

The positioning of the site also corresponds to the model of *ideal landscapes*<sup>5</sup>. It was placed halfway up a gentle slope, thus granting it excellent visibility, protecting it from the northern winds and allowing maximum sun exposure. A permanent watercourse runs along the base of the hill. It should be noted that the design of the *villa* takes into account the visual relationship established with the surrounding landscape: the built structures were laid out in successive topographic levels, as if on different terraces. Thus, for now, two primary, constant topographic levels can be picked out: the first houses the double apse room, as well as the *stibadium* and the large peristyle, and the second, which is a lower topographic level, houses the small peristyle.

### 3. Horta da Torre: an overview of the research

Though visible structures do exist on the surface and are well known among the local population, the *villa* had never

previously been subject to any protective measures or scientific research until the beginning of the field surveys in 1999. This fact is particularly telling of the archaeological investigations conducted in the region. In fact, Horta da Torre is located about 8 km from Torre de Palma (Monforte), the most extensively excavated *villa* in Portugal, where consecutive campaigns were carried out by both Portuguese and American archaeologists for over 50 years<sup>6</sup>.

For this reason, Horta da Torre was totally absent from the research studies until it was identified in 1999 within the scope of the works carried out for the Archaeological Mapping of Fronteira. On the first visit to the site, the advanced state of degradation of the visible remains was observed, the build-

ings having been severely damaged by harmful agricultural work and intentional destructive actions, made worse still by campaigns carried out by detectorists. In 2004, agrarian works destroyed a mosaic floor, leading to an emergency archaeological survey. The structures identified (in an area that had 4 x 5 m, that is, 20 m<sup>2</sup>) were so devastated, however, that excavations were suspended until 2012, when the decision to resume the excavations was also made as part of a broader research project that mobilised a vast team with an interdisciplinary perspective. Thus, an intense, high precision photographic survey has been annually carried out using drones. Once graphic and digital work had been conducted on these surveys, a 3D reconstruction and virtual models were then put together<sup>7</sup>. This analysis is based on the evidence presented by the strategy carried in the archaeological intervention conducted since 2012, which has been centred on an *open area* method of excavation in order to recover the maximum amount possible of the structures' conserved planimetry.

An analysis of the surrounding territory and the settlement patterns of sites has been carried out continuously since 1999. However, in 2018, Landscape Archaeology became

<sup>4</sup> Carneiro 2008, 58-66.

<sup>5</sup> Carneiro 2014, 144-151.

<sup>6</sup> In the absence of detailed reports of the archaeological campaigns, see the mosaic and architectural study presented by the French team in Lancha, André 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Working team made up of drone operators João Marques (Geodrone.pt) and Jesus García Sánchez; Gonçalo Lopes carrying out volumetric reconstitutions, Carlos Carpetudo with 3D virtualisations, Mónica Rolo and Ana Martins carrying out the study of the archaeological remains and graphic processing. An initial proposal can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzyEanG9aVk>.

the central axis of the *Fronteira Landscape Project*, collaboration between the Universidade de Évora and Universiteit Leiden. Within this project, it was also possible to carry out extensive geo-radar and field survey campaigns in both 2018 and 2019. The results obtained were surprising, providing evidence that the structures belonging to the Horta da Torre villa extend over more than three hectares. The villa's planimetric model is structured around two large courtyards, similarly to its neighbouring site in Torre de Palma. The area currently under excavation is located precisely at one end of the largest courtyard. The results of this Landscape Archaeology analysis are relevant but shall be assessed further in other studies, as this paper intends to focus on the data gained from the archaeological excavations.

#### 4. Results of archaeological intervention

##### *The stibadium room*

After the disappointing results obtained in the 2004 rescue survey, excavations began in 2012 with a survey involving the large visible structure that named the site: *Torre* ("Tower"), as the semi-circular perimeter wall had been named, having been interpreted, in the local imaginary, as being a defensive structure from which the Romans could watch their enemies.



3. - Fragment Late Hispanic *Terra Sigillata* bowl found in the *stibadium*'s fabric.

The excavations carried out confirmed that the structure belonged to a double apse room, which was in surprisingly good condition (the northern wall has a maximum preserved height of 1.25 m). An analysis carried out on the mortars used to construct the walls<sup>8</sup> provided confirmation that both belonged to the same construction phase, an aspect upon which doubt had been cast as the walls are not intersecting perfectly. The room was built according to a floorplan that followed recommendations made by Vitruvius (VI, 3, 8), who referred that the length should be twice as long as the width, thus creating a visual plane that extends that of the peristyle.

This double apse encompasses the entire structure of a *stibadium*. The latter has a fragile structure, being made up of carefully arranged stones coated with fine plaster, though stuck together with a binding agent made from soil without any mortar. Its semi-circular shape is slightly extended, generally corresponding to one of the known typologies (Morvillez 1996, 128-130). One fragment of late Hispanic *terra sigillata* bowl found within its fabric [UE27] (fig. 3), allows it to be dated to the mid/late 3<sup>rd</sup> century. This element is of significant relevance, as generally we don't have indicators that could be used for dating purposes within known *stibadia*<sup>9</sup>. Likewise, it appears that this device was constructed after the room had been planned, as the *stibadium* rested on

the floor (see also fig. 5). It should also be noted that this is the second example identified in Portugal, the first having been found in Rabaçal<sup>10</sup>. However, conceptual parallels are similar to those in El Ruedo (Almedinilla, Cordoba)<sup>11</sup> and, particularly in terms of structural and environmental design, the paradigmatic case in the villa of Fargola (Ascoli Satriano)<sup>12</sup>. It can thus be observed that the Horta da Torre villa is an *unicum* within *conventus emeritensis*: in truth, the neighbouring villa adopted a triple apse room as their preferred model, as was the case in Quinta das Longas (Elvas) and the aforementioned Torre de Palma (Monforte). It is worth noting that this compari-

<sup>8</sup> Valdez Madrid 2019.

<sup>9</sup> The material culture of the double apse room is being studied by Mónica Rolo and Ana Martins.

<sup>10</sup> Pessoa 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Vaquerizo Gil, Noguera Celdrán 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Volpe 2006. For a bibliography on *stibadia*, see Hidalgo Prieto 2016, 210, n. 41.

son is being made between areas that did not serve precisely the same function, geo-radar surveys having confirmed that the *stibadium* room in Horta da Torre is peripheral to the larger courtyard.

The use of *stibadia* does not seem to have been homogeneous throughout the Iberian Peninsula, with examples mainly in coastal areas (and seemingly absent northwards of Salamanca and inland from the Ruta de la Plata axis). No examples exist in the entire area south of the Tagus river: no direct evidence having been found or indirect evidence, as could have been provided by *in absentia* decoration of mosaic pavements. The closest examples of the latter are the Martim Gil case as well as that of Arneiro, which is in the Leiria region (*Colippo*), both representing Orpheus with the animals (references in Bernardes 2007, 21 and 50, respectively), and the apse mosaic presenting a decorative emptiness in a *stibadium* shape. In another province, though still in the same regional area, the possible case in Rio Maior (Santarém) is also significant, given the shell shape in which one of the floors was constructed, which is suggestive, though not conclusive (the shell is a decorative symbol in itself). The example of S. Julián de Valmuza (Salamanca) is also in *Lusitania*, and we have cases in *Baetica* of Daragoleja (Granada) - which is distinct as it is located in a rectangular, rather than an apse room, as per the limits of the mosaic - and Fuente Álamo (Cordoba), to list only rural examples, as more *stibadia* have been found in urban *domus*, including one in *Augusta Emerita*<sup>13</sup>.

One of the most innovative elements in Horta da Torre lies in the technical solution implemented to allow water to flow into the room. The baseboard of the apsed wall was fitted with a gate that allowed it, in a controlled manner, behind the *stibadium*, creating a shallow reflecting mirror within the room. It is possible that an existing hole in the wall, where the construction device changes from stone masonry to *opus latericium*, was used as a water nozzle. An identical solution shall also be imagined as having been present on the opposite side of the wall, thus resulting in two strands of water dripping from holes in the wall. This visual effect would create a thin reflecting water mirror across the entire floor of the room, which measured around 100 m<sup>2</sup>. This is also the reason for which, unlike similar *villae*, the pavement in Horta da Torre was entirely covered in *opus signinum*, thus waterproofing it in its entirety up to the floor-wall junction, which had been added using a typical half-pipe ledge. It should also be noted that the *opus signinum* pavement appears to feature an alternating chequered painted pattern made up of square blue and red motifs. However, the conditions under which it was observed do not allow for accurate readings to be taken, given the limestone concretion caused by

the water covering the floor, and later this flooring being overlaid by stones and mortars from the collapse of the walls.

The double apse structure (the “Tower”) that frames the *stibadium* crowns one wall of large representation room. When excavations began, a layer of mortar and overturned mosaic fragments [UE 20] was uncovered at a depth of around 30 cm, seemingly confirming the widespread reported destruction. These mosaics were not, however, found to have been part of the flooring (as is usually the case), having instead been part of the wall decoration, or that of an eventual dome crowning the apse. These mosaics having fallen from the surfaces upon which they had previously been placed explains why they would have been found at such angles and face down during the excavation. Although they were almost entirely destroyed by the walls collapsing, it was noted, nonetheless, that the mosaics would have had figures of pentafolio aquatic plants, which would also have been reproduced on a small marble fragment of the frieze that crowned the top of the wall. This iconographic design was therefore ideally suited to the room’s overall atmosphere, resulting in optical illusions and *trompe-l’oeil* confounding the built space and surrounding landscape.

Throughout the room, a baseboard made of marble slabs was placed between the half-pipe ledge of the *opus signinum* floor and the wall, a decorative choice similar to that registered in the *triclinium* of the El Salar *villa* (Granada)<sup>14</sup>. In Horta da Torre, it is worth mentioning its greyish-white hue, thick grain and fish-squama effect. Though the Estremoz/Vila Viçosa quarries were located closer to the *villa*, the marble used must have come from Trigaches (Beja), possibly because the marble’s larger grain size resulted better in the reflections provided by the water mirror. After the location was abandoned, these slabs were removed almost in their entirety, only remaining in the areas it would have been most challenging to remove them from (where they joined onto the wall and half-pipe). It should also be noted that the apse where the *stibadium* is located is slightly raised by 2 cm, which is logical if the need for water drainage is considered, but which would also subtly raise the level upon which guests of the *stibadium* would have been sitting. This slight difference in height is marked and visually accentuated by a frieze, which was constructed out of marble slabs and arranged horizontally, joining onto the half-pipe paving [UE34].

The floor plan is genuinely original in its design (fig. 4). The corners of the room are opposite each other and open outwards after the double apse, thus allowing for an increased visual range from the *stibadium* structure. This layout highlights the area around the *stibadium* and its surrounding apse, with an impressive visual impact. The result is the built

<sup>13</sup> Méndez Grande, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Hidalgo Prieto, 2016b, II, n° 40.



4. - The double apsed and *stibadium* room (drawing by Ana Martins)

structure on the other side becoming immediately visible to anyone who may enter the door. Back to the corners, both feature granite ashlar to reinforce the 90° angles, where the most tension is focussed, making them very strong and imposing. The northern wall [UE40], in contrast, has remained in better condition thanks to it having been less exposed to agricultural works, it being more protected by the gradient of the slope: solid, resistant mortar masonry brings the *laterae* together in horizontal rows. A section of a marble column (which can reliably be considered as being from Estremoz) was found on the external facade, as well as three holes where it could fit into the structure of the north wall. These findings led to the possible conclusion that there would have been arches on the wall, supported by columns, perhaps framing interspaced mosaics, or possibly allowing for openings through which the landscape could be contemplated.

Likewise, the excavation work carried out on the collapsed walls made it possible to identify alignments of bricks

that formed an arch from an entire section of wall that would have fallen in one piece. As previously mentioned, an architectural element finely decorated with a pentafolio with lanceolate tips allows for the conclusion to be drawn that a frieze or cornice was used on the wall finishes. But determining how was the solution to the covering of the room is problematic. In fact, few roof tiles were found, the only ones conserved being those in close proximity to the south wall [UE33]. However, this data must be analysed alongside the process of later reoccupation of the *villa*, which led to a systematic cleaning of the room before a hut was constructed. Assuming the existence of a roof vault is an audacious engineering exercise: the calculations made for the virtualisation proposal imply that a vault would have reached a height of almost nine meters, meaning considerable pressure would have been placed on the walls if the almost 11-metre room-span is taken into account (fig. 5). The walls, which had an *opus latericium* baseboard, would have had to withstand a



5. - 3D proposal made by Gonalo Lopes, Carlos Carpetudo and Andr  Carneiro. Roof solution is problematic.

considerable unloading of forces, which they did not seem strong enough to do. The more likely scenario is that this room did not have a roof, functioning as a *cenatio aestiva*, allowing those who frequented the location to have a more thorough enjoyment of the landscape. The walls would have been lined with columns separated by gaps filled with mosaic panels, or the former would have been placed between the gaps. In the latter case, the room's walls would have contained windows, increasing the visual interplay between the indoor decoration and the outdoor scenery.

The interpretive proposal that this locale was used only occasionally, in the summer months, is also supported by its peripheral position. The geo-radar prospecting data obtained shows that the room is located in a peripheral area within the complex, requiring a specific route to be followed in order to access it. This is not compatible with the hypothesis that it would have been used regularly as a reception room or for *convivium*. Two other arguments must be considered. The fact that the *villa* is located inland, in a region where temperatures frequently reach 40°C in the summer. As such, those attending a banquet could enjoy the natural airflow provided by the open room, a sensory aspect as pleasant as the running water. It should also be noted that in other environments such as in Faragola or the oval *xystus* of Piazza Armerina<sup>15</sup>, an effort is made to recreate banquets held in the country, sur-

rounded by nature, which seems compatible with the plant-based decorative elements found in Horta da Torre.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the *opus signinum* floor contains an orifice through which water could flow through the room. This solution is located next to the south wall, allowing for a complex system of ducts coming from several points around the *villa* to come together here and dispel their contents. The downward slope in this location allowed gravity to direct this wastewater towards the stream. It should also be noted that the thin film of water used to beautify the room forced another unusual architectural solution to be implemented. The room's entrance had an unusual design: two steps would be descended, a logical solution to avoid the water draining towards the entrance in an uncontrolled fashion (fig. 6).

#### *Structures south of the stibadium*

This small area was primarily destroyed by constant agricultural work, which means that possible interpretations can only be taken from the existing foundations. A hypocaust was found in a rectangular room, the furnace mouth of which still contained a patch of ash [UE100] on horizontally placed tiles [UE95]. This small room (covering an area of no more than 6m<sup>2</sup>) would have had stucco-covered walls, with residues preserved in the lower level [UE64]. Unfortunately, both destructive and erosive processes have acted relentlessly here, a height of little over 30cm having been preser-

<sup>15</sup> Volpe 2011, 520.



ved. For this reason, the connection between rooms is no longer visible. While we know that these rooms allocated to equipment contained structures with which to provide quick baths or washes before and during banquets, it can be assumed that the hypocaust room in the Horta da Torre villa had a similar function. For example, one of the most typical cases is the Desenzano del Garda villa<sup>16</sup>, which has a small hypocaust in one of the rooms attached to the triple apse.

A small basin was found next to this room, which was fed by a lead pipeline with a step at its base. It is also possible, that there was a tile roof outside, as what appears to be the base of a pillar [UE82] was uncovered as well as some scattered, fallen roof tiles. Several water drainage pipes also flow away from this area. The two main tubes form a Y shape, bringing together water evacuated from the double apse room and from the large peristyle garden. The pipes are joined in an atypical mortar structure [UE86], which is placed against the wall [UE80], yet off-centre, and which appears to be a water box with another pipe coming out of its south facade following the [UE86].

It should also be noted that a large waste disposal area [UE50] was found, which would have been used during banquets held in the *stibadium* room. Numerous remains of fauna, as well as shells of molluscs - oysters (*Ostrea*), clams (*Ruditapes decussatus*), cockles (*Cardiidae*) and conch (*Mollusca gastropoda*, possibly *Buccinum*) and several fragments of well-preserved lamps (*lucernae*) were found in this location, indicating that the banquets held went on into the night. A similar unit [UE32] is located on the opposite side, near the north side of the outer apse.

#### *The small peristyle*

The survey that initially began in 2004 made it possible to recognise the facade of a wall that was completely destroyed by agricultural work. When excavations resumed in 2012, it was extended southwards of the original area. It was noted that the south facade of the wall faced an area with an



6. - The double apsed room and the entrance (drone photo by Jesus García Sánchez in 2019).



7. - The small peristyle (drone photo by Jesus García Sánchez in 2019).

unexpected depth of about 50 cm, as it was located on a lower level. This difference in levels allowed for a significant functional interpretation of the spaces and logic behind the housing built in this area to be carried out, given that the topographical difference between the two levels ensured that

<sup>16</sup> Roffia 2001.

the entire built area was preserved to a far greater extent (fig. 7). The following excavations made it possible to uncover a circulation peristyle around a central basin (*impluvium*) with *opus signinum* flooring. Each of the four corners of the peristyle has negative indents where columns would have been attached. This private, pleasant space was fed by water that would flow from a small fountain located adjacent to the south facade of the wall [UE12] mentioned. For this reason, a supply line was found in the initial survey, which was excavated in the rock and lined with tiles. Thus the water from the large peristyle fed a small fountain embedded into the south facade of the dividing wall and to flow through a duct inserted into the *opus signinum* floor, towards the *impluvium*. No more than 30 cm deep, its use as a reflecting pool could also be added to this duct's utility as a water and rainwater receptacle, thus also eliminating other possibilities of it having had other uses due to the lack of access steps<sup>17</sup>. This space would, therefore, have been entirely softened by water, to both smooth and calm the surrounding environment, creating conditions that would encourage privacy and rest. It has a rectangular shape and presents a wide mouth used to flush water away to the south.

As it was excavated, it was found that the interior of this *impluvium* had been filled in its entirety when the collapsed roof tiles [UE72]. Likewise, stucco paintings have also been preserved in the north-eastern corner of the small peristyle, thus demonstrating how this environment was decorated using bright colours. It is worth noting that two coins were found on the pavement inside the *impluvium*, which could be traced back to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century or beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup>.

This small peristyle was a private area, kept separate from a visitors' access to the *stibadium* room. This visual boundary is demarcated by the location of the wall that separates the two peristyles [UE12], which must have served as a significant barrier. Communication did take place with the upper level, allowing access to be gained to the large peristyle, as steps were found in the north-eastern corner of the small peristyle. However, the passageway is not visible due to agricultural operations having destroyed this area.

The privacy of this part, which is located away from the circuit used to access the double apse room, is also marked by the existence of a *cubiculum*. This room has not yet been excavated fully, but is located to the east of the small peristyle, accessed through a gap and bearing an *opus signinum* floor. Its small dimensions visible hitherto (no more than 8m<sup>2</sup>) and the absence of structural or artefactual elements within the room, have informed the conclusion that it was an area reserved for rest. There will undoubtedly be another such room on the opposite side of the small peristyle, as its

western wall has a gap in it, which is indicative of a doorway. This wall forms the western boundary of the area excavated hitherto.

#### *Access to the double apse room: the large peristyle*

Before the *stibadium* room is reached, there lies a large, particularly monumental peristyle (fig. 8). Its large volume, which can be seen very clearly although it is still not completely excavated, is reinforced by the use of granite column bases, three of which have remained *in situ*, in the inner corners of the corridor. The existence of a large, porticated peristyle with an interior garden space therefore becomes clear, having been adorned with elaborate patterns of flowing water. Its proportions followed the norms recommended by Vitruvius: that peristyles should be a third longer than they are wide (VI, 3, 7).

The monumentality of this built space contrasts with the humility of the paving found - a specific type of *opus signinum* named *coccio pesto* [UE99], a functional type of flooring that was easy to clean and maintain. It was common for these *ambulacrum* areas to have monotonous floors, in order to facilitate concentration when the *dominus* spoke to their visitor(s). The choice of these repetitive pavements is, therefore, planned to create expectations, directing the *dominus'* *amici's* attention towards intentional focuses.

Three coins were found on the floor in this locale, in the corridor of the Eastern section, one of which is distinctly Constantinian, providing a *terminus post quem* dating back to the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century. This date can be combined with a fragment of the edge of an African Red slip ware D Hayes 67 found between the upper layer in [UE104], which dates the roof falling and its tiles being deposited on the layer of abandoned debris in the lower layer [UE113] back to 360/480. It should be noted that the south wing of the peristyle did not reveal any signs of the roof having fallen in due to it being very exposed to erosion and agricultural operations (which also destroyed part of the paving in this area).

As previously mentioned hereinabove, the *stibadium* room was accessed via two steps that provided direct access into the large peristyle. There would therefore not have been either a narthex or *vestibulum* to serve as a reception area for the guests. Two granite ashlar blocks helped take the pressure off what would have been the door, though it is a complex process to assess what the walls would have been like, as they are in an advanced state of destruction. However, the wall being filled with small stones provides ground for the conclusion that the wall would have been low, reinforcing the idea that the *stibadium* room would not have been covered.

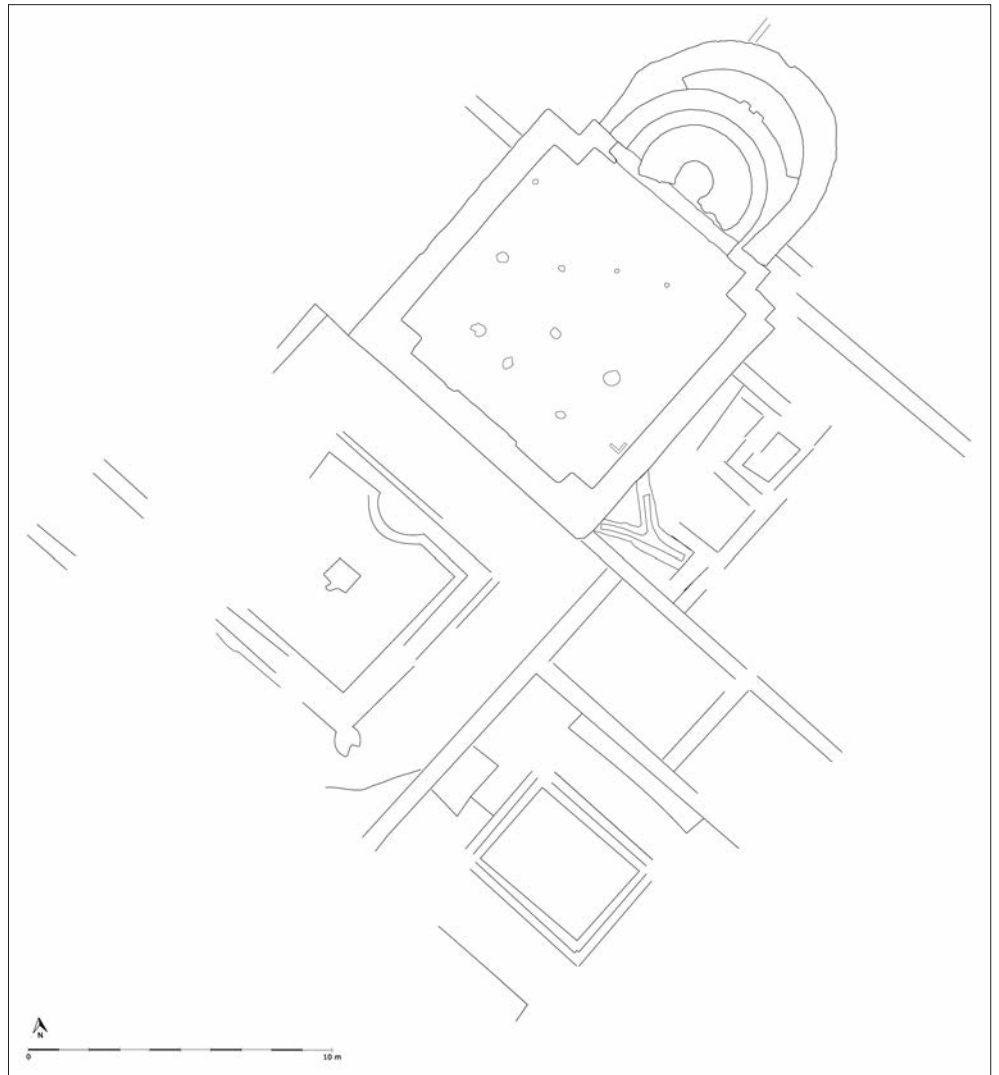
Columns were located in the inner corners of the peristyle, supporting a low wall that ran around the inner edge of the entire perimeter. This structure is different in that it has an *exedra* right in front of the entrance to the large double apse room. Another *exedra* was identified on the opposite

<sup>17</sup> Dessales 2011, fig. 7.

side, thus creating a sense of symmetry, though unfortunately, it is now very destroyed and only visible as a shell-shaped remnants. The north side is yet to be excavated, though it is believed that could have been four. As a whole, this patio was arranged and decorated in a fashion that was relatively rare for *villae* in Lusitania but more frequent in *Baetica*, as in El Santiscal (Cadiz)<sup>18</sup> and Mondragones (Granada)<sup>19</sup> in terms of their general design, though they present *exedras* demarcated using tiles, while *opus signinum* was used in Horta da Torre.

In our case study, two factors stand out. Firstly, because they were coated with *opus signinum*, they operated as reflecting water mirrors. This solution was carefully planned, leading to them being seen as reflective elements used in the rhythmic play between columns and pilasters, in order to create a visual effect that would multiply these elements, operating as impressive scenographic apparatus. Also we have to consider that the *exedra* was perfectly aligned with the optical axis of the *stibadium* and the double apse room created an effect that certainly had a profound impact on anyone who entered the peristyle through the opposite access.

An *opus signinum* structure that would have formed the foundation of a water channel [UE96] is located between the garden and the peristyle's delimiting wall. This low duct frames the peristyle; a canal augmented in height by the aforementioned wall that, due to agricultural work, has largely disappeared, leaving a ditch where it once stood [UE98]. Horta da Torre, therefore, does not have a canal running around its perimeter, as is the case with other provincial *villae* (Monte da Chaminé in Ferreira do Alentejo being one example). A shallow duct coated in *opus signinum* that conducts a thin strip of water via gravity is supported on a small wall and cut into the shape of the *exedra* along the main sides



8. - Schematic planimetry of the excavated area in the end of the 2019 campaign (drawing by Ana Martins).

of the peristyle. This wall is a means through which the ends of the column bases are brought together. Spaces into which narrower columns would have been inserted can be seen, all the way to the paving (east corridor, in front of the entrance to the *stibadium* room). These columns could possibly have been constructed out of rectangular bricks, though these have not been preserved. The corridor would thus have had smaller intercolumniations, making it particularly elegant. The water therefore travelled along the low wall via gravity, aided by the wall's *opus signinum* lining, going on to flow into a duct that ran under the *cocciopesto* paving and into the aforementioned Y channel.

As for the interior of the peristyle itself, the same sediment is omnipresent across its entire floor [UE108]. This element, in addition to the absence of structures, indicates that

<sup>18</sup> Mora Figueroa 1977, fig. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Rodríguez Aguilera *et alii* 2013-2014, 490-491, fig. 10.

there would have been a garden here to add beauty to the locale, functioning as a small *viridarium*. Thus, while the small peristyle used water as a modelling element, this room, which was used to access the double apse room, would have had its vegetation and garden as central elements in creating the expected atmosphere. Since a dividing wall by [UE12] separates the structure of both peristyles, there was visual barrier, preventing visitors from being able to see into the private repose area around the small peristyle's *impluvium*.

## 5. General overview

The list of *villae* excavated in the southwestern Iberian Peninsula is still scarce and, in many cases, these excavations have only been conducted partially. This can be put down to projects having been interrupted, in many cases due to the chronic under-financing Archaeological work suffers in Portugal, or more recently the increased impact of infrastructures that are preceded by minuscule interventions being conducted, that do not allow for any readings to be taken and cannot be interpreted (nor are they published). Some standards, however, can be defined, deriving from the architectural and decorative elements.

Horta da Torre meets some of these standards from a more general, superficial perspective. Geo-radar prospecting allowed for the design of the building to be detected as being spread over two courtyards, similarly to its neighbouring *villa* at Torre de Palma. Likewise, the use of a peristyle as a central axis in the planimetry and perceptual design is also well marked. The visiting circuit is well defined, with accesses depending on the visitor's status and intimacy with the *dominus*, as studied by Simon Ellis<sup>20</sup>. The composition of the apses is of particular importance, creating ingenious solutions with numerous advantages to be applied, both in terms of their architectural modulation, allowing for developments such as the triple apse rooms, opposing apses and even polylobules. Also in this respect, the double apse room of Horta da Torre, which contained the *stibadium* structure and allowed for the ingenious application of water-based decoration, is an example. The inside of the room would, of course, have held further creative solutions, either to allow for the normal functioning of banquet services, or for entertainment and musical performances during meals<sup>21</sup>.

For all the items mentioned above, Horta da Torre presents similarities with the most generic prototypes in rural *Lusitania*. What sets it apart from other sites, however, is the profound creativity and originality of the way in which solutions were implemented, while also demonstrating the extensive knowledge its designers had of extra-provincial

prototypes. This fact is relevant as the well-known phenomena that governed spatial and environmental design were often an emulation of neighbouring sites, allowing for clusters, or regional concentrations, to be identified – good examples being the sites with orphic mosaics in the region of Leiria, mentioned hereinabove, or the example of the two apsed basins in neighbouring *villae* in Cordoba, as indicated by Rafael Hidalgo Prieto<sup>22</sup>.

Now, in the case of Horta da Torre, as part of the general designs of prototypes that were clearly “family-friendly”, extraordinarily imaginative and elaborate solutions have been found that have only been witnessed in very distant locations. One example is the crucial design element found in the area excavated until the end of 2019: the *stibadium*.

This structure can be inserted into the “esplosione di *stibadia*”<sup>23</sup>, which suddenly seemed to proliferate. From this point of view, its conceptual paradigm is identical to others. However, Horta da Torre demonstrates that the room's entire setting was planned in order to place it as a viewpoint over an artificial landscape, intermingling with the natural background. This design required an entire set of devices to be elaborated in order to create these atmospheres, circumstances for which the only parallels have been witnessed in the cases in El Ruedo and specially Faragola. Thus, the result is a room into which water would flow, allowing for illusory scenarios to be created. So, the existence of a *cenatio aestivalis*, emulating prototypes recognised in other provinces, can be proposed.

It should also be noted that the excavation area is located in the periphery of the second courtyard, that is, this setting indicates that there would have been other reception and banquet areas. Other *villae* have rarely been found to share these characteristics in *Lusitania*: though the rooms in Rabaçal demonstrate diversity and constructive boldness, none of the rooms seem to meet the conditions described, as neither the polygonal room to the south nor the tetralobulated room to the north appear to have been banquet rooms (although *villa* Constantino in Mediana did have a *stibadium* set up in this type of environment<sup>24</sup>). Likewise, neither Torre de Palma nor Quinta das Longas seem to have presented with these properties, which also are absent from the sites in the Algarve. Only the *villa* in Pisões (Beja) may have contained a similar area (n° 30 in Ribeiro 1972's diagram), around a very small *lacus* (L2 in the same diagram). We have to consider that interpreting the functionality of this space is a complex task, as no area is marked out to the west (ideally, it could be a prototype similar to that found in Cañada Honda in Italica, though its details contain many differences: Hidalgo Prieto *et alii* 2018, fig. 5). However, in the case of Pisões, the area

<sup>20</sup> Ellis 1991.

<sup>21</sup> An example being a painting at the Serenos *villa*: Schultz 2015, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Hidalgo Prieto 2016, 202-203.

<sup>23</sup> Volpe 2019, 215.

<sup>24</sup> Popovic 2016, 10 and n° 6a.

appears to be centralised, located next to the main access; in Horta da Torre, the *stibadium* room is highlighted in itself, located at a distance. The investment made into this room, as well as in the large access peristyle, shows the high funds made here, both in terms of economic capacity and planning.

In this sense, identifying the *stibadium* in the double apse room was a crucial element in enabling to understand the organic functioning of the space. In fact, the data demonstrates us that *stibadia* were used more frequently in the Eastern part of the Empire, it being a structure associated with practices linked to relations and social hierarchy specific to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, though they lasted a long time, according to the codes of the Byzantine ceremonial<sup>25</sup>. In this sense, the example in Horta da Torre, in a context that can be dated to around the mid/late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, is very relevant. It should be noted, for example, that *stibadia* are associated with a practice of sharing tables and repertoires, which, as per the current state of the investigation, are almost entirely absent in Horta da Torre<sup>26</sup>, as the types registered as dating back to more recent times in this site do not extend beyond the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It is also interesting to note that, until 2019, the ceramic fragments found consist mainly of lamps (*lucernae*) collected in the two waste disposal areas on each side of the room, which would be consistent with banquets being held here that lasted well into the evenings and nights. The fact that the flickering light provided would have created an illusion of movement is also considered to have been an essential factor in increasing the impact made by the decorations and iconographic languages<sup>27</sup>. None of the other items would have been added by chance either, from the thin sheet of water in the room, multi-coloured mosaic decorations and the specific choice of marble decorating the baseboards of the room, multiplying the sensorial effects created. It should also be noted that careful decisions were made when it came to the impact created by the torch holders, as demonstrated pragmatically by the findings of incised glass lamps in Faragola<sup>28</sup>.

The way in which the atmosphere of a *cenatio* was carefully planned to create a potentiating effect on guests can therefore be established. In Horta da Torre, the way in which this room was designed down to the very last detail is particularly notable, from the entrance circuit to the set of architectural, iconographic and functional features that created an ambience that is unparalleled in neighbouring sites. As such, erudite architectural practices based on extra-regional parallels and circuits were displayed, the most effective methods of creating a distinct, original atmosphere having spread through the Mediterranean *ouikoméné*. In this sense, Horta da Torre represents a paradigmatic example of the high levels

of innovation, and elaborate creation asserted through the architecture of Lusitanian *villae*.

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<sup>25</sup> Dunbabin, 2003, 191-195.

<sup>26</sup> Vroom, 2007, Hudson 2010 and Dunbabin 2003, with abundant iconographic apparatus; see fig. 9.3 with examples of typologies.

<sup>27</sup> Weitzmann 1979, n° 556.

<sup>28</sup> Turchiano, Giannetti 2016.

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