

perhaps from a nymphaeum,⁶²⁴ and two coins, one from the Antonine period (C23) and one of Constantius II (C20), both residual in medieval contexts. Clearly the area was kept scrupulously clean during the Roman period, which perhaps suggests its importance.

The brick building

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Much later, a large apsidal structure in *opus testaceum* was built into the courtyard at 5 degrees to the arcades of the imperial villa. Measuring 23.7 x 12.3 m, the structure occupies a commanding position in the paved courtyard. Its southeastern corner and apse are visible above modern ground level, and excavations exposed the foundations and lower courses of its western wall: there is little doubt that the later church follows the same lines as this structure. The walls are characterized by coursed bricks of varying lengths and thicknesses with wide mortar joints, and a very hard red-purple mortar, comparable to masonry in Rome dating to the early fourth century (Fig. 5.142).⁶²⁵

A monumental porch on the west side marked the only known entrance to this structure. It was presumably contemporary with the construction, but might have been due to subsequent remodelling: later intrusions make it impossible to tell. The north side, constructed of large limestone blocks, survives in its entirety while small fragments reveal the limits of the east and south walls. Within the porch are two rectangular, below-ground walled tanks, plastered on the interior (Fig. 5.143). In a later period, they were used as tombs, but their original function is unclear, they may have been vats for some production process. An exterior mortar pavement covering the construction trench of the building and the foundations of the porch survived in the northeast corner of trench BI, and was presumably mirrored to the south of the porch.

Little is known of the interior of the building: the small trench, C, excavated in its northwest corner revealed only a large amount of construction clay, similar to that used in the rest of the villa. Cutting this, running on a slight diagonal to the walls of the building, is the *a cappuccina* covering for a *fistula*, a system identical to that used in the winery in Area A (Fig. 5.144). The *fistula* channel is only visible at this point, and it is unclear where it went: there is no trace of it beyond the cut in the floor. Over the channel, and sealed by a much later, large marble block, a mortar preparation supported a fine white marble slab with a polished

⁶²⁴ Birgitta Hoffman (pers. comm). For the distinction between cast and blown glass see her text, p. 000.

⁶²⁵ The masonry closely resembles the earlier walls of Maxentius dating to 308–12, see Lugli 1957, II, tav. CLXIII, no 3.

finish, which may be the remains of the floor. This was covered by what seems to be a similar slab, again with a polished surface. An *in situ* column base is found against the west wall, aligned with the top of its base at the same height as that of the lower slab (Fig. 5.145). It seems to have remained in place for all subsequent phases; the mortar covering its upper part probably relates to later floors. The column base and the possible plinth formed by the upper block suggest that the building had a plan with three aisles articulated with columns.

The dating of the building remains slightly ambiguous. A small section of the foundation trench was excavated on the exterior, sealed by the concrete pavement. It contained a group of large sherds of consistent date: Cadiz amphorae, Hayes 3c, 45A, 48, 182, 197, all of which may be dated to the second half of the third century.⁶²⁶ As we have seen, the masonry also suggests a date around that time. At some point in the sixth century, both the structure and its porch were levelled and a church built in *opus vitatum* was constructed on the same plan.

A basilical plan with a central apse was used in Late Antiquity for several building types, including villa-temples, *mausolea*, reception halls and churches. Later churches have been built on top of all of these types, either following the plan exactly or deviating slightly. Our excavations uncovered so little of the structure that any hypothesis must remain a matter of speculation until the interior has been further investigated. It is worth, however, outlining the possible interpretations, and examining their likelihood in relation to the evidence.

The first two types can be dismissed quickly. Despite its central location in the courtyard, it is unlikely to have been a villa-temple. Most known villa-temples in Italy date to the first and second centuries; they were rarely built after the early fourth century in the western provinces.⁶²⁷ While *mausolea* are common on late antique rural estates between the fourth and sixth centuries, Italian examples are usually rectangular in plan, only obtaining an apse upon their conversion into a church.⁶²⁸ Analysis of the visible masonry on the apse indicates

⁶²⁶ Fragments of a decorated glass beaker dating to the fifth century were labelled as having come from the context (we are grateful to Barbara Lepri for this identification). However, its date is strikingly discordant with the consistent pottery group, and it appears to have been mislabelled.

⁶²⁷ Bowes (2006) has identified a surge in villa-temples in the early to mid-fourth century in Spain, but this is not mirrored in Italy.

⁶²⁸ Brogiolo (2002) suggests the transformation of *mausolea* into churches by the addition of an eastern apse dates to the seventh or eighth centuries: he gives a number of Italian examples. Further examples of this phenomenon in France and Switzerland are given in Brogiolo and Chavarría Arnau 2005.

that our structure was purposefully built with an eastern apse. Moreover, the substantial size of the building makes this an unlikely interpretation.

An interpretation as a reception hall is more plausible: villa complexes of the first and second century were often partly or completely rebuilt in the fourth and fifth century with increasingly elaborate plans, including apsidal and tri-apsidal reception halls and triclinia.⁶²⁹ However, other Italian examples of reception halls are typically integrated into the villa complex by interconnecting rooms and passages.⁶³⁰ At Villa Magna, the brick building is freestanding while the main residential complex was both detached and at a higher level than the courtyard, and no obvious structures adjoin the brick building. Finally, its decoration is not poor, but missing entirely: there is no preparation for a floor, nor is there any trace of floor or wall veneers. It seems difficult to imagine an imperial reception building without any trace of decoration.

Archaeologically, it has often proved challenging to identify rural churches in fourth- or even fifth-century Italy⁶³¹ since later medieval churches and burials often obscure the stratigraphy. An apsidal plan is typical, however, as is the presence of a substantial entry porch and a location facing the main road.⁶³² Our building is comparable in interior plan to the mid-fifth-century three-aisled basilica built at S. Giusto (Puglia) measuring 30.5 x 18.50 m, and interpreted as a rural diocesan centre built by a bishop.⁶³³ S. Giusto is, however, much larger (and far more elaborately decorated) than most contemporary Italian rural churches.⁶³⁴ There is also no sign here of an associated baptistery, or any burials dating to this phase, though these might have been located in unexcavated areas. These peculiarities, in combination with an early fourth-century date of the assemblage in the foundation trench, make it difficult to support the interpretation of a church.

One final possibility is suggested by the passage of Palladius already cited in the context of the distribution system from the *calcatorium* in the winery. This is that the building was, in

⁶²⁹ For other examples, see: Baldini Lippolis 2001; Sfameni 2004; 2006; Romizzi 2006.

⁶³⁰ See catalogue in Romizzi 2006: 44–55

⁶³¹ Note the difficulty in dating precisely early churches in Lazio documented by Fiocchi Nicolai (1999 and 2007) and Gelichi 2001.

⁶³² On the relationship between late antique churches and roads in Italy, see: Cantino Wataghin, Fiocchi Nicolai and Volpe, 2007; Corsi 2005.

⁶³³ For the full discussion, see Volpe 1998: 325–8 and 2007.

⁶³⁴ These much smaller churches are typically identified as private aristocratic foundations, though see Chavarría Arnau 2010: 646–50.

fact, a new winery, built in the 'basilical' form suggested by Palladius' text.⁶³⁵ This would explain the clay floor, the lack of decoration and the presence of the *fistula* – although its precise function escapes us. The paving slabs may represent passages between the *dolia*. A model for its reconstruction is provided by the recent excavations at the site of Passolombardo (Fig. 5.146), where the *calcatatorium* occupied the apse of the building with a *lacus* on either side. From there, channels ran down the aisles of the structure, feeding wine into long rows of *dolia*. We cannot prove that this was the function of our building, but it seems the most plausible interpretation of those we have considered so far. A fourth-century date remains slightly later than the abandonment of the winery, which we believe took place c. 250. However, the presence of one of the *dolia* of the first phase of the winery in the later sixth-century *doliarium* in front of the church suggests a continuous passage of *dolia* from one winery to the next.

What this building seems to indicate, then, is a major investment in the economic structures of the villa which consolidated the productive facilities of the estate at its heart, in front of the imperial residence. This reorganization of the villa space perhaps speaks to an attempt to centralize production and maximize efficiency. The new *cella vinaria* was roughly twice the size of the old one, although, again, we must allow for storage elsewhere – perhaps in the vast substructures of the imperial residence – these, indeed, may have been the destination of the *fistula* which appears to have run out of the building.

Whatever the function of this enigmatic building, its size and quality of construction indicate that the estate was flourishing in the fourth and probably the fifth century, whether or not there was still a *pars urbana*. Fragments of possibly fourth-century sculpture, including a panther's paw from a probably Dionysiac sculpture found near the church, further support the impression of continued wealth and display in the later history of the villa (see Kuttner, p. 000). If our interpretation of the building as a winery is correct, it reflects the continuing importance of large-scale viticulture and agricultural production at Villa Magna in the late antique period (see Maiuro, p. 000).

⁶³⁵ 'cella uinaria ...ut basilicae ipsius forma' (The *cella vinaria*... the same form as a basilica) Palladius *Opus Agriculturae* 1.18; for the villa of Passolombardo, see Ricci 2005.