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INTERIM REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK AT CASTELPORZIANO

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Aims and objectives

Archaeological fieldwork at Castelporziano during the four years 2005-2009 has been designed primarily to support the geomorphological and topographical studies which form part of the AHRC-funded project 'Rome's maritime façade'. Some additional work has been undertaken at the *Vicus Augustanus*, in connection with the preparation of the final report on the building surveys of 1983-1991.

In April 2009 the priority was to complete the drawing and photography of finds and the organisation and inventory of the site archives (housed on the estate), but three small-scale operations were carried out in the field in connection with the geomorphological and geophysical surveys (see Reports): first a more detailed investigation was made of the western sector of 'sea wall' at Tor Paterno (site CPS F2), which is of particular interest to the issue of sea-level change (see also Geomorphology 2009 report), and then two small excavations were made at the Vicus, to test the results of the concurrent magnetometer survey (see also Geophysical Survey 2009 report).

Methodology

Interventions on outcropping remains at Castelporziano are generally limited to the clearance of leaves and other low-level forest debris, together with some of the topsoil if necessary. Small test excavations deeper into the subsoil are made for specific purposes, but kept to a minimum.

1. 'Sea-wall' Site CPS F2, near Tor Paterno (Figs 1-5)

First identified in 1989 and partly recorded in 1990 (see *Castelporziano III*, p.52f, F2, figs 22-23), the site is located in the forest c. 360 m. SW of Tor Paterno, c. 90 metres from the bend in the modern Via del Telefono and 30 m. forward of the large baths F3. It comprises two lengths of massive concrete walling, one to the west (F2W) c.15.3 m. long, the other to the east (F2E) c. 10 m. long, with a gap of about 6 m. between them. Their tops are close to the level of the forest floor behind (which broadly corresponds to the platform on which this part of the imperial villa was raised) but there is a drop of about 1-2 m. on the seaward side, where the original brick facing has been destroyed and the concrete core deeply invaded by what looks like powerful wave action (hence their identification as parts of a 'sea wall'). Extending from both, in the direction of the sea, at various intervals and slightly splayed angles, are thinner brick-faced walls, which could be buttresses or breakwaters. The ground in the gap between them slopes down towards the sea, giving the impression of a ramp. A high dune ridge rises close in front, part of a continuous system which formed along the Laurentine shore, probably during the 5th century AD (see Geomorphology report).

During the 1980s and 90s the site was very gloomy, obstructed by thick brambles and several fallen trees, especially at the western end, where there was also a large mudhole; consequently only a partial plan of the eastern sector was made. In April 2009, however, the mudhole was almost dry, and the vegetation was much reduced. When the outer face of the walling in the western sector was cleaned in order to analyse the pattern of water-erosion more closely (see Geomorphology report) it was



Fig. 1 'Sea Wall' near Tor Paterno, western sector (CPS F2W). General view of seaward side, from south (Photo no. 6077)



Fig. 2 'Sea Wall' near Tor Paterno, western sector (CPS F2W) Top of wall viewed from east. Trench 2 in foreground (Photo no. 6046)



Fig. 3 'Sea Wall' near Tor Paterno. Brickwork on south face of walling [7]. Scale=20 cms

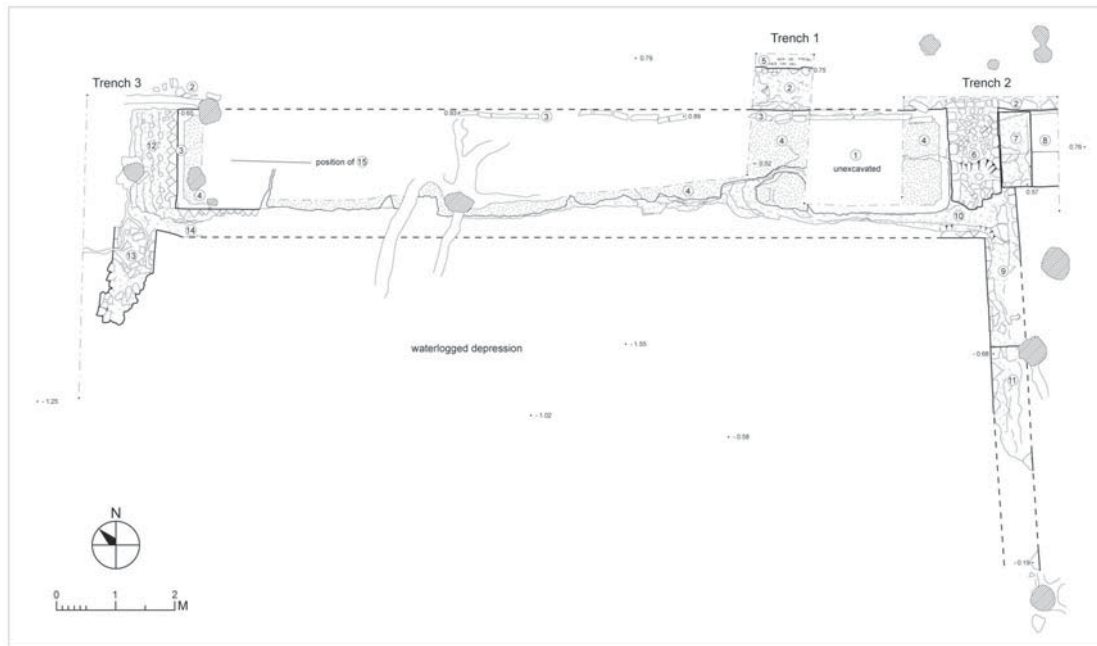


Fig. 4. 'Sea Wall' near Tor Paterno. General site plan.

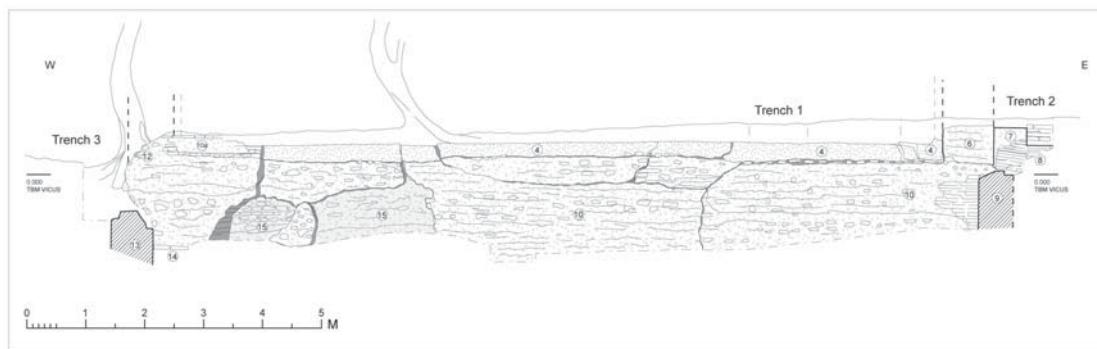


Fig. 5. 'Sea Wall' at Tor Paterno. Seaward elevation.

found to be capped by a layer of waterproof concrete (*cocciopesto* or *opus signinum*) c. 30 cms thick, smoothly levelled on its upper surface. Further cleaning was then undertaken on the top of the wall, to determine the extent and function of the *cocciopesto*, with the expectation that this would also help clarify the nature of the walling as a whole.

The topsoil was removed at three points (trenches 1-3), in the middle and at both ends respectively (Figs 1-2 Photo nos: 6077 and 6046). Revealed in plan (Fig. 3) the *cocciopesto* proved to be the floor of an elongated tank, measuring (internally) 1.5 x 12.80 m., with chamfered inner corners. Fragments of the *cocciopesto* lining of the north (inland) side of the tank (3), 10 cms thick, outcrop on the surface for most of its length (visible in Fig. 2). A short section of the wall which once supported it, now robbed to below the floor level, was exposed in trench 1 (2), c. 60-65 cms thick, with the remnants of a thin layer of coarse grey plaster on the north side (5). Trench 2 clipped the south face of the same wall, which seems to have continued beyond the

end of the tank to the east. In both places the uppermost course in situ is of brick, but quantities of loose tufa blocks (tufelli) in the associated debris suggest that the facing was actually some form of *opus vittatum*. Thicker supporting walls at both ends of the tank (6) and (12), bonded with wall (2), were uncovered in trenches 2 and 3 respectively, 89/90 cms (3 Roman feet) wide, also reduced to beneath the tank level. Wall (6) was faced with a combination of tufelli and brick, though the number of courses of each, if regular, cannot be determined from the evidence available. The wall forming the south (seaward) side of the tank was thinner, 45 cms thick, and has fallen away, only two courses of the inner face, in brick, are still attached at the far west end (10a); the outer face of the same wall, also in brick, is preserved at a lower level (14) and at the far east end, also on the lower level (10). The walls at either end (9 and 13), projecting towards the sea at slightly splayed angles, are bonded with wall (10). The brickwork facing on walls (10) and (9) (Fig. 6) is characteristic of the late Antonine/Severan period (c. AD 160-220).



Fig. 6. 'Sea Wall' near Tor Paterno (CPS F2W), brickwork facing on wall [9].
Photo scale 50 cms.

Visible in the inner reaches of the two large water-worn holes in the outer concrete mass is another wall (15), faced with 3 courses of tufelli above and 3-4 courses below a course of short square bricks (bessales). The concrete of its core is exposed towards the east and appears identical to that of the surrounding concrete superstructure (shown in cross section in Fig. 6). This, and the combination of tufelli and brick facing, comparable to wall 6, suggest that it is part of the same construction.

Built against the east side of (6), occupying the angle between it and wall (2), is a shorter block of brick-faced walling (7) which bears the imprint of two bipedales on its upper surface. The structure continues on a lower level (8), which also bears the imprints of two bipedales. Thirteen courses of brickwork are visible on the south face

of (7), which has cracked and is falling away (Fig. 3). The bottom 4-5 courses are rougher and less regular, probably foundations; the proportion of mortar to brick and the medley of re-used bricks in the rest suggest a similar date to wall (9). It is possible that (7) and (8) represent a set of steps to access (6) and the east end of the tank. Alternatively, if the impression (noted above) of a ramp leading up to this point is not deceptive, then (7) could be a bench or door jamb and (8) the threshold of a wide doorway. Unfortunately, tree roots made it impracticable to extend trench 2 any further to the east and the question had to be left open. Traces of *cocciopesto* lining are visible on the top of the adjacent length of 'sea-wall' (F2E), suggesting that it too bore a similar tank.

The function of the tank is difficult to determine without knowing its original depth, its inlets and outlets, and what lies beyond wall (2) or at the foot of wall (10). The unequal strengths of its containing walls, notably the imbalance between the long walls (2) and (10), make it unlikely to have been a straightforward cistern, at least not one which was intended to store a substantial head of water, while the width of wall 2 and the vertical drop on the outside of (10) rule out an animal watering trough (which it resembles in proportions). The lesser thickness of wall (10) could be explicable in the case of a fountain, if the wall were quite low and the water simply flowed over the edge or was projected through a row of spouts, from which the water cascaded into the space below, where there was perhaps a pool. The depth of the fill at the foot of the wall is unknown (hand and percussion core-drilling has been attempted in the mudhole but was defeated by dense building debris), but the normal Roman sea level will have been about 4 m below the top of the wall, while the large dune immediately in front of it probably marks the position of the Roman beach. The damage to the wall, which lies almost 2 metres higher than the normal Roman sea level, could have been caused by a period of exceptionally stormy weather at some time before the 5th century AD when the dune formed in front of it (see Geomorphology report). At the time it was built the superstructure on the 'sea wall' was probably intended to be safely out of reach of the sea.

Pietro Rosa's archaeological map of Latium (c.1865) includes a quite detailed plan of the villa at Tor Paterno (Fig. 7) which shows a platform extending from the villa, along the sea front, and containing a large rectangular re-entrant in the seaward edge. Although Rosa's re-entrant is much larger, measuring. c.140 m. wide and 66 m. deep, and there is nothing like it visible on site today, the position of its rear wall coincides with that of our site F2, beside which the ground steps back in a wide curve. It is possible that Rosa saw traces of similar walling to the west (at present densely overgrown with brambles) and joined them together. His plan not only simplifies (it was drawn at a scale of 1:20000) but also attempts to restore the evidence. Much is recognisable but much is definitely invented, based on what even in his day were widely scattered elements. He may not have seen the eastern half of our site F2 at all; it could be a quite recent excavation, perhaps at the same time as the baths F3 (which do not appear on his map either).

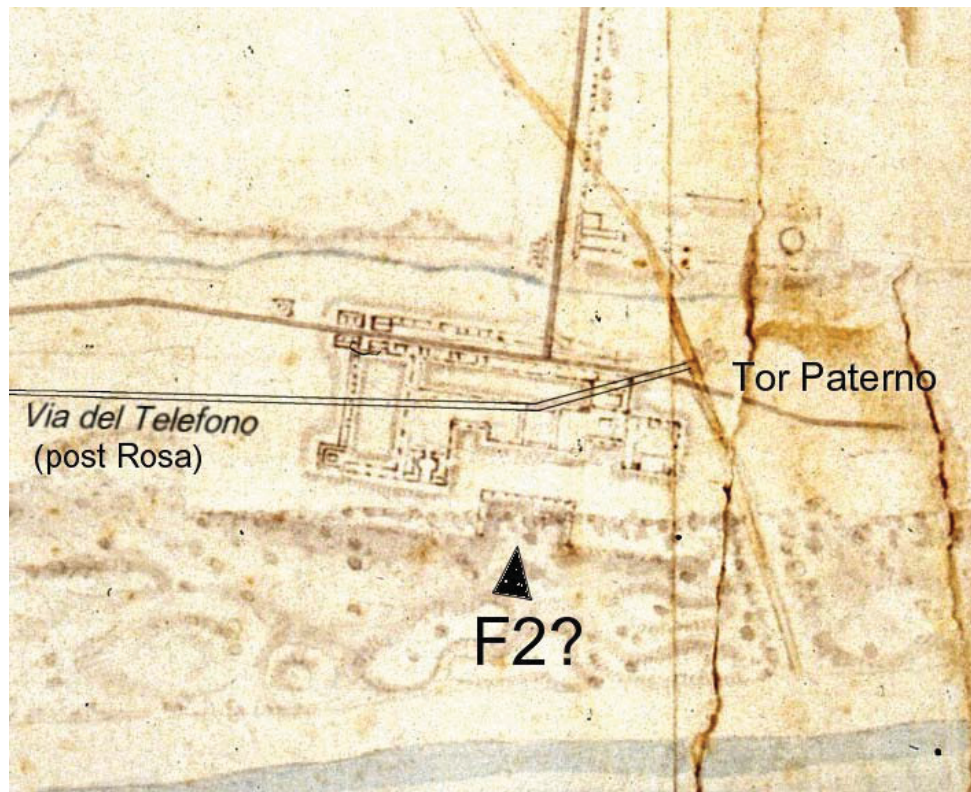


Fig. 7. Pietro Rosa, Archaeological map of Latium c. 1870 (detail)

2. Vicus, west of building Y. Magnetometry Test Trench 1 (Figs 9-11)

Located 30 m. south of the Via del Telefono and 17 m. to the west of building Y, the trench (1 x 3 m.) tested the sub-surface archaeology relating to anomalies registered in both the 2009 and the 2008 magnetometer surveys (see Geophysics reports): a distinct linear anomaly running N-S, probably a wall, and a weaker and wider anomaly running at right angles E-W. A wall (6), 30 cms wide, was found in the position indicated by the anomaly, its top 45 cms below the surface, constructed of concrete with a facing of unevenly sized tufa reticulate and amphora pegs. The overlying stratigraphy consisted of 5-6 cms of forest soil (1), 10-12 cms of yellowish sand (2) containing a scatter of pot and amphorae sherds and fragments of Roman brick and tile, a further 10-20 cms of brownish scorched sand interleaved with lenses of burnt matter (3) (in the eastern half of the trench, were the decayed remains of a large burnt-out tree (4), which had been rooted beside the wall), then 20-25 cms of earthy sand (5), softer and reddish in colour, with patches of charcoal and black ash, containing amphora- and potsherds which became denser towards the bottom, forming a lightly trampled surface, almost on a level with the top of wall (6). The sherds found in (5) were all quite small body sherds – no rims, handles or pegs – perhaps the residue from smashing amphorae for building material. The deposit had accumulated on the top of (7), a fairly level spread of fragments of roof-tile (*tegula*), brick, reticulate tufa cubes (on their sides) and larger amphora sherds, rims and handles. Two Constantinian coins were found in the interface of (5) and (7). Underneath (7), about 60 cms below the present ground level, was a mass of

concreted rubble (tufa nodules), sloping down to the west and south, with patches of reticulate facing (9) like that on wall (6) and probably representing its collapse, brought down by earthquake. Against the sloping south side of (9), deposited by natural (wind-blown) or human agencies (an effort to level the ground), are quantities of light yellowish sand (8), containing the neck and handles of an amphora, some pegs and some large sherds, and animal teeth.

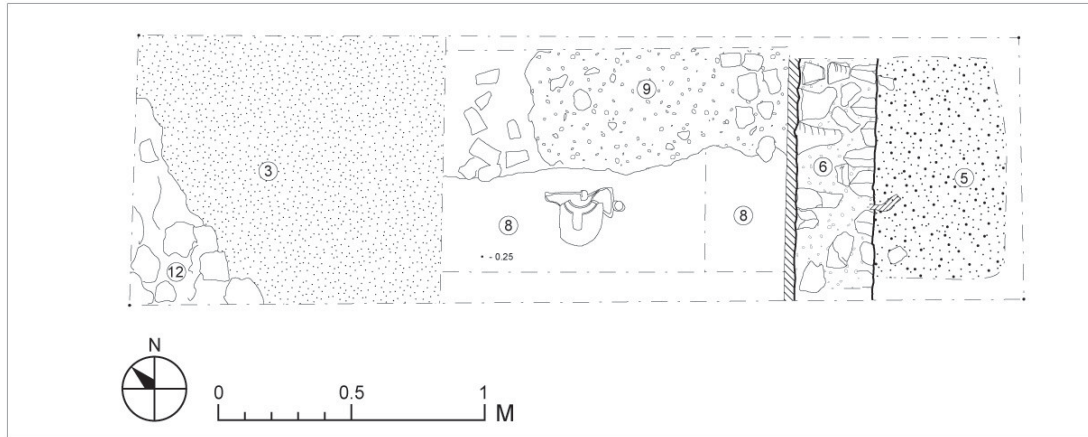


Fig. 9 Vicus, West of Y-Z Mag. Test trench 1. Plan, all features.

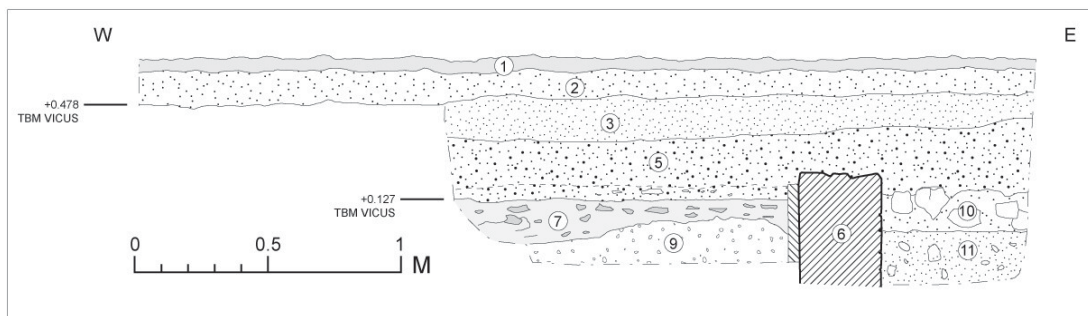


Fig. 10. Vicus, West of Y-Z, Mag. Test trench 1. E-W Section.



Fig. 11. Vicus, West of Y-Z, Mag. Test trench 1, from west.



Fig. 12. Vicus. North of building Z
Mag. Test trench 2. View from NW
(photo no 6202)



Fig. 13. Mag Test 2 from East
(Photo no 6249)

3. Vicus, north of building Z, Magnetometry Test Trench 2 (Figs 12-15)

The trench tested two strong linear anomalies, seemingly two walls meeting a right angle, registered by the 2009 magnetometer survey to the north of the outcropping bath building (Z), close to the edge of the Via del Telefono (79 m west of the west wall of Baths A). The spot is occupied by two trees, which the excavation had to work around, but walls were found in both the positions predicted. The larger, running N-S (2) lies c. 30 cms below the surface and is 45 cms wide, with a core of amphora and tile aggregate in grey pozzolanic cement, faced with well-cut tufa reticulate cubes at the south end and brick to the north end. The brick facing may have been combined with tufa blocks (tufelli, numbers of which were found loose in the fill), and formed a pier or jamb beside a doorway (marked by the reticulate facing). Abutting the east side of the wall is a level surface of concreted rubble tufa (3), faced with tufelli on the north, probably a step outside the doorway; in the angle between the two is the body of an amphora surrounded by small lumps of tufa (5). The second wall (6), running E-W, c. 36-38 cms wide and 40 cms below the surface, is composed of large blocks of tufa, irregular in size and shape, with an infilling of smaller pieces, bonded with clay. Although the north side forms a fairly straight edge, which has been faced with grey mortar, there is no sign of a similar finish on the south side.

In materials and technique wall (2) and step (3) are closely related to those of building Z, which contains Hadrianic brickstamps, and very probably form part of it. Whether wall (6) also belongs is less clear, despite the vicinity in level and placement at a right angle to wall (2). Its large irregular blocks of tufa and mortar facing have parallels on the fish-farm sites examined in 2007 and 2008 where they form foundations in one case (D5 trench 1) and the wall of a basin or pool in another (D6 trench 4). Both these cases are dateable in the 1st century BC, but the technique could have continued in use, or been revived, in later periods. Unfortunately the overburden had been disturbed down to the level of the top of wall (6), probably by the construction of the Via del Telefono (see section, Fig. 17). Where the two walls (2) and (6) should intersect, a tree growing on the surface appears to be rooted in a pit which has destroyed the relevant part of wall (6). Two large nails and a metal surveying arrow were found when cleaning around the tree, which probably accounts for a strong dipole which the magnetometer recorded at this point.

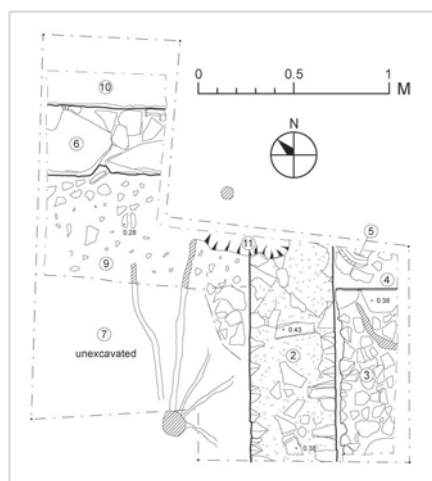


Fig. 14. Vicus, north of Z
Mag. Test trench 2. Plan.

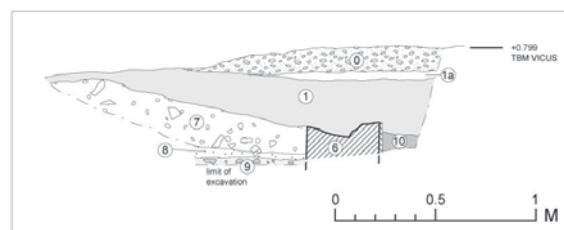


Fig. 15. Vicus, north of Z. Mag. Test trench 2
N-S section (west side of trench).