

CLAUDIO MOLLO

EMPERORS, FAMILIES AND FRIENDS



Here a modern overview of the Bay of Naples and the Amalfi Coast.

The geographical maps on the next page are from the imperial age.

In particular, the second map, on which the toponyms are clearly mentioned, shows the Gulf of Naples. The failure to indicate Monte Somma (Vesuvius) is indicative of how irrelevant it was in the geography of the time, that it does not even constitute a reference's point.



The Gulf of Naples today

In the Gulf of Naples, among Lucullan meals, luxurious entertainment, spa relaxation, ostentatious richness, reunions with patrons-supporters of the imperial house, **the foundation of the Roman Empire was intertwined.**

Here, the first six emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty:

Julius Caesar, Augustus Octavian, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, relatives, friends, and lovers started the empire history.



Geographical map of the central south-Italy during the imperial age.



The cities names close to the coast of the Bay of Naples, are clearly visible:

Literno, Cuma, Baia, Giugliano, Pozzuoli, Naples, Herculaneum, Oplontis, Pompeii, Nocera, Stabia, Sorrento, and Capri.

Aiming to estimate the number of inhabitants of these thirteen towns, during the beginning of imperial age, first century a.D., the list evaluation is over two hundred thousand people. Pompeii alone had twenty thousand inhabitants.

Below we list the protagonists who chose to live here with their imperial families, friends, and supporters, according to the Archaeological remains, and sources form classic literature.

LUCIUS CALPURNIUS PISO CESONINUS

101 – 43 b.C.

Father-in-law of Julius Caesar, Quaestor, Praetor, Consul, and Governor of Macedonia.

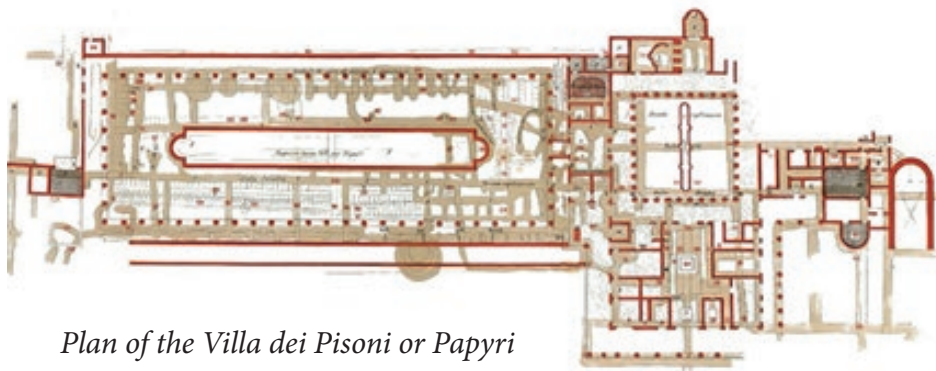
Owner of the Villa dei papyri in Herculaneum. A seafront building on three levels over two hundred meters in length. The villa had a library where eighteen hundred papyrus rolls were found, mostly manuscripts of the Epicurean thought, of Philodemus of Gadara and Chrysippus.



Piso Cesoninus



Wall's decorations



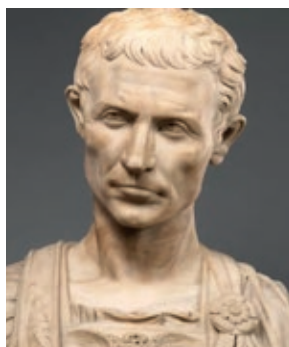
Plan of the Villa dei Pisoni or Papyri



JULIUS CAESAR

101 – 44 b.C.

Marries Calpurnia (fourth wife), daughter of Senator Calpurnius Piso, owner of the Villa dei Papyri in Herculaneum. Having been Dictator, mostly historians consider him the first emperor of Rome. His battles, both as a soldier in Europe and the Mediterranean, and as a politician in Rome, remained epochal.



Giulio Cesare

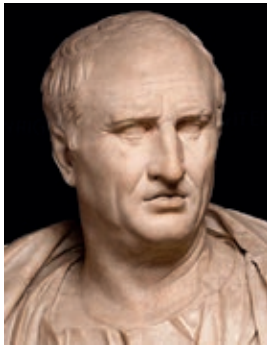


Villa di Giulio Cesare a Baia

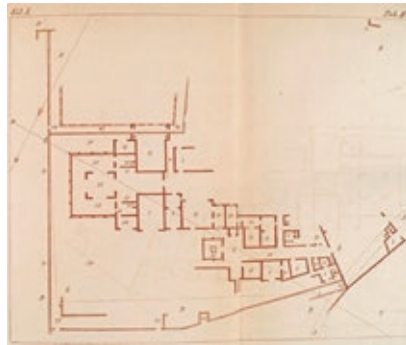
CICERO

106 – 43 b.C.

Marries Terenzia (first wife) then marries **Pubilia** (second fifteen-year-old wife), a wealthy young woman. The young Pubilia is fascinated by Cicero's eloquence and social status. Their marriage sparked strong criticism from Marco Antonio, but Cicero responded in kind, claiming that he was also the legal trustee of Pubilia, referring to the "lex voconia" which stipulates that no other heir could receive more than the first heir. A law that could easily be circumvented by involving a large number of legates that did not exceed the quota attributed to the legatee. **Cicero had villa in Pompeii, Cuma and Pozzuoli.**



Cicero



Plan of the house



A mosaic from his home in Pompeii

TITUS LUCRETIVUS CARUS

94 – 55 b.C.

Poet and philosopher born in Pompeii; he studied **Epicureanism in Herculaneum in the school of Calpurnius Piso**. Modern historians, despite the difficulties in reconstructing his life from the few fragments found, have attributed parental relations to the House of Lucretius Fronto in Pompeii. As for his health, it is written about his mental health problems and that he died by suicide. Titus Lucretius Carus wrote **De Rerum Natura**, in moments of lucidity, a true monument of classical literature. In *De Rerum Natura*, a masterpiece in 7400 verses, we read about the doctrines of Epicurean physics; of the nature of the human organism; and the origin of the world. Until the year 1417 it was thought that said poem was lost forever, then a copy was found intact in the Fulda Abbey (Germany).



Lucretius



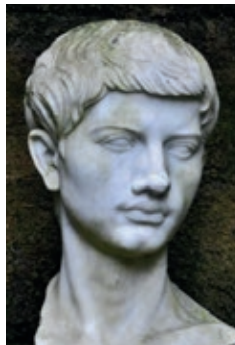
*Typical page of
De Rerum Natura
from the 15th century
by scribe friars*

VIRGIL PUBLIUS MARON

70 b.C. – 19 a.D.

Son of landowners and merchants from Mantua. He arrived in Naples after his failures as a lawyer. Here he attended the Epicurean schools, discovering his talents as a poet. He wrote: **the Bucolics** where he poetically sings about the life and loves of idealized shepherds, **The Georgics**, where he deals with themes such as animal husbandry, work in the fields and equal love for all, and **the Aeneid**, the adventure of Aeneas from Troy to Rome, stopping at the Phlegraean Fields (the Bay of Naples), where with the help of the Cumaean Sibyl, Aeneas descended into the underworld where his father Anchises prophesied his fate. Aeneas would have reached the mouth of the Tiber and, after having gone up the river, he would have reached the Palatine Hill (Pallanteum), the place where a descendant of Aeneas, Romulus, would have started the civilization of ancient Rome.

V. P. Marone lived in Naples.



The young Virgil



Aeneid book VII writes about Capri and Sorrento, kingdom of the Teleboans (Greeks)

PUBLIUS VEDIUS POLLIONE

He was originally from Benevento; the date of his death is known as 15 a.D.

P. V. Pollione descends from a family of Freedmen, and due to his military valour, he reached the imperial equestrian order, the command of mounted troops. Pollione served Caesar Augustus devotedly until he became his advisor, and Governor of the region of Tralles in Lydia. Now extraordinarily rich, Pollione, in addition to his luxurious house on the Esquiline hill Rome, **he also had a magnificent villa in Posillipo Naples**. Upon his death he left part of his wealth to Caesar Augustus, who made the villa of Posillipo his personal home in Naples.



Publius Vadius Pollione



The Palace in Posillipo Naples

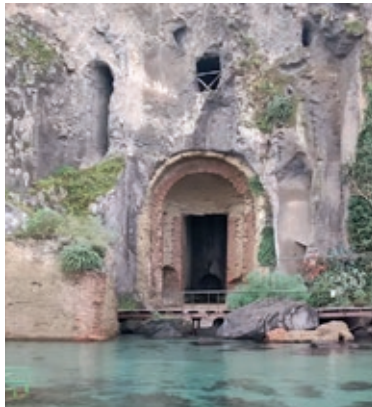
MARCUS VIPSANIUS AGRIPPA

63 – 12 b.C.

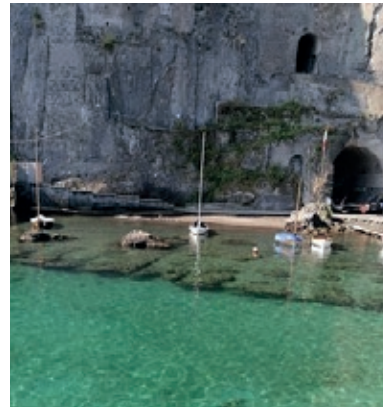
Childhood friend of Augustus Octavian. He married Pomponia, daughter of Cicero.

Marcus was the architect of the Roman Pantheon and general strategist of Octavian Augustus' naval fleet in the battle against Marco Antonio at Actium. He was also the architect of the imposing port Julius, between Baia and Pozzuoli, which gave access from the sea to Lake Averno through Lake Lucrino. This new port was the mooring most used by sailors in the Mediterranean until Claudius had the port of Ostia built north of the mouth of the Tiber River.

Marco also built a splendid villa on the seaside of Sorrento, with its own pier and nymphaeum.



The Nymphaeum



The submerged pier

AGRIPPA POSTUMUS

12 b.C. – 14 a.D.

He was the son of **Julia Major** and Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa. In the year 4 a.D. Agrippa Postumus was adopted together with Tiberius by Caesar Augustus, but three years later due to his violent character, to the point of discrediting both Livia Drusilla and Augustus, he was forced into exile, first to Sorrento in the Villa built by his father, and then to the isle of Pianosa, where someone put an end to his days. The sister of Agrippa Postumus was called **Vipsania Agrippina** or Agrippina Major, who married Tiberius emperor, becoming his first wife.



Agrippa Postumus



*Sorrento, the Nymphaeum
of Agrippa's Villa*

MARCO NONIO BALBO

1st century b.C.

Was born in Nocera Superiore next to Pompeii, and died in Herculaneum, where he spent his last years in **the house of Telephus and Gemma**. M.N. Balbo held the positions of praetor and proconsul of the provinces of Crete and Cyrene, elected tribune of the plebs, obtained honours as a partisan of Octavian Augustus during the Civil War, receiving benefits that allowed him to accumulate enormous wealth.



House of the Gem



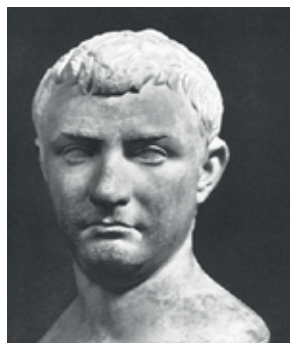
House of the Relief of Telephus

LUCIO ELIO SEIANO

19 b.C. – 31 a.D.

Marries **Giulia Livia**, daughter of Drusus the Minor and nephew of Tiberius.

Sejanus held the position of Praetorian Prefect (civil and military administrator of the empire as well as commander of the praetorians) during the reign of Tiberius. His cunning and thirst for power, get him closer and closer to the emperor, to the point of almost taking his place. Tiberius, realizing the conspiracy, had him invited to the Senate with the excuse of giving him a higher level of command, and here, during his investiture he had him strangled and thrown into the Tiber River. Sejanus' father was Lucius Strabo in sixty b.C. - 24 a.D., also politician and praetorian prefect.



Sejanus



*The remains of the first century
b.C. in Pezzolo, Vico Equense,
Naples*

CAESAR AUGUSTUS OCTAVIAN

63 b.C. – 14 a.D.

Adoptive great-grandson of Julius Caesar, marries Livia Drusilla (third wife, daughter of the politician Livio Drusus). Livia Drusilla is considered the first empress of Rome.

Caesar Augustus Octavian, among all his possessions spread in the Roman world, he had **palaces and villas also in Capri and Somma Vesuviana (next to Pompeii)**. C. A. Octavian spent the last moments of his life in his farm on the northern slopes of the Somma volcano (Vesuvius).

During the last minutes of his live, Octavian is exhausted but lucid, he asks for a mirror to be brought to him, he looks at his face close to death, and pronounces his last sentences: “if you have appreciated the comedy of my life, then applaud” and turning to his wife Livia he whispers “I abandon you, live in the memory of our marriage” and so said he died in her arms.

Tiberius (son of Livia Drusilla) together with Agrippa Postumus, were his adopted sons.



*Caesar Augustus
Octavian*



*The remains of a Roman
construction
in the city of Somma Vesuviana*

TIBERIUS

42 b.C. – 37 a.D.

Marries Giulia Maggiore (second wife). Tiberius was not the designated successor, and he showed no interest in the throne, but the other heirs were all deceased and eventually, let us say, he ceased opposing it. Yet, despite his efforts, he never managed to establish a good relationship with the Senate nor with the empire significance. It is thought that also for this reason, after twelve years of government, he chooses Sejanus as his substitute in Rome, and he retired to the island of Capri where he lived for eleven years, until the remarkable age of seventy-nine a.D. Historians spoke of Tiberius as a vicious and dissolute man, others as a careful and judicious politician. It was under his rule that Pontius Pilate had Yehoshua Ben Joseph Ha Nozri crucified, year 27 a.D.



Tiberius

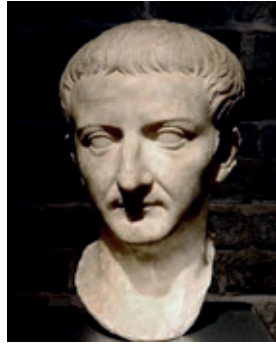


Jovis Palace in Capri

CALIGULA

12 – 41 a.D.

Marries Milonia Cesonia (fourth wife). Caligula was the son of Vipsanius Agrippina Major, who was the daughter of Julia Major mother of Agrippa Postumus. Caligula also lived on Capri during the last years of Tiberius. As emperor he fell seriously ill with fever to the point of coma, and after days of delirium, when he recovered, he was mentally unstable to the point of committing madness which led to him being eliminated by the Praetorians. Of the twelve villas built for the imperial families on Capri, only three still have the architectural structure visible.



Caligula

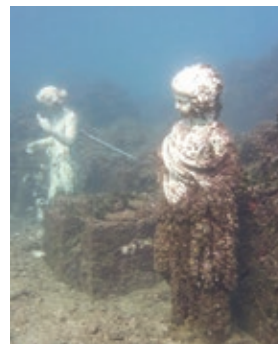
CLAUDIUS

10 a.D. – 54 a.D.

He marries his niece **Agrippina Minor** (fourth wife), and sister of Caligula. Agrippina Minor, when she married Claudius, she already had a son named Nero, who was later adopted by Claudius. Even Claudius, due to his nature and physical weaknesses, was not destined for the throne. But unfortunately, due to Caligula's premature end and lack of heirs, he had no choice. Among his many assets, Claudio had a **Palace Baia**, now submerged, at over three meters of depth in the **Gulf of Pozzuoli**. The triclinium Nymphaeum is still visible, where guests were entertained with water games, food, and dances.



Claudius



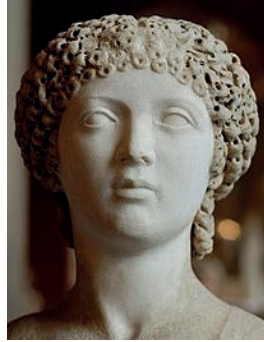
*The submerged
entrance into the
Nymphaeum*

VALERIA MESSALINA

20 – 48 a.D.

Was the first wife of Claudius, **she often lived in Baia.**

Of her youth we only know that she was of appealing beauty, Messalina shows up in her history since she married the emperor Claudius. Messalina's figure is overly complex, she adores her power, and she has a lot of influence on her husband. This strategic dominance leads her to manipulate Claudius to the point of systematically eliminate all her enemies.

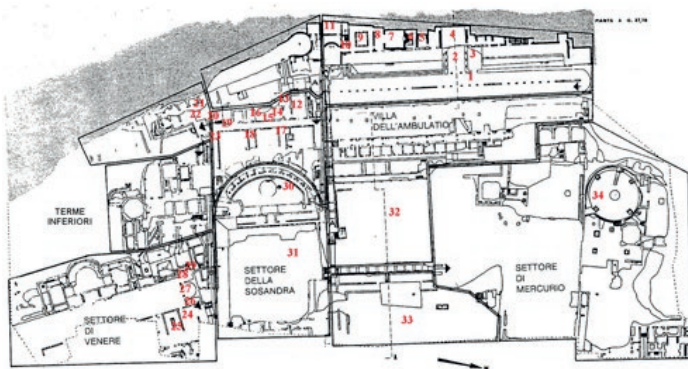


Messalina

THE IMPERIAL BATHS OF BAIIA saw the leisure of Julius Caesar, Cicero, Seneca, Tiberius, Pliny the Elder, Licinius Grassus, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. Titus Claudius Secundus, former slave of Emperor Claudius, wrote:

«*Balnea, vina, venus corrumpunt corpora nostra sed vitam faciunt*»

«Baths, wine and love ruin us, but they make life wonderful!»



The imperial baths of Baia today

SENECA THE YOUNGER

4 b.C. – 65 a.D.

Son of Anneus Seneca the Elder, marries Pompeia Paolina (second wife). Seneca was a highly appreciated playwright and philosopher; in Rome he held important positions as Senator and Quaestor. Seneca becomes the tutor of the young Nero until he takes over the leadership of the empire, assisting him in the so-called period of good government.

Of poor health, Seneca suffered from asthma attacks and fainting spells which often took him to Pozzuoli to the house of his friend Lucilius to rest and heal. In fact, he will spend **most of his time in Baia**. Tired of his physical problems, disappointed and persecuted by Nero, who could not stand his constant moral courses, Seneca ended his days by cutting his wrists.

Tacitus wrote of Nero: "...after killing his mother and brother, he forced his educator and teacher to commit suicide.



Seneca

NERO

37 – 68 a.D.

Marries Claudia Ottavia (first wife), Poppea Sabina (second wife) and Statilia Messalina (third wife). Controversial emperor, he governed assisted by his mother Agrippina and his tutor Seneca. The emperor was excessively supportive of the people, with donations and free public performances. In a brief time, he brought state finance to default. His disregard for the Roman Senate led him, to the same end as his uncle Caligula. **As his second wife, Poppaea Sabina had an imposing palace at Oplontis a mile west of Pompeii, Nero is supposed to have stayed there.**



Nero



The Nymphaeus in Bacoli named Agrippina's mausoleum as well



This spectacular mosaic from the Julio-Claudian dynasty, was found in the Villa Pipiano in Mas-salubrense next to Sorrento

GAIUS PLINY SECOND, PLINY THE ELDER

23 – 79 a.D.

Writer and naturalist philosopher, governor of Roman provinces and commander of the military naval fleet stationed in Miseno, in the Bay of Pozzuoli. The only work by Pliny that has survived in its entirety is the “Naturalis Historia.” An encyclopaedia of thirty-seven books covering astronomy, geography, anthropology, zoology, botany, materials, medicine, metallurgy, mineralogy, and art. Even today it represents a fundamental document for the scientific knowledge of antiquity. He lived in his Villa in Miseno during the eruption of Mount Somma (Vesuvius).



Pliny the Elder

PUBLIUS POMPONIUS SECOND

First century a.D.

Politician and writer, close friend of Pliny the Elder. Tacitus writes about him: of refined habits and great intelligence. P. Pomponius had a Villa in Stabiae (three miles south of Pompeii) where Pliny during the eruption of 79 a.D. seek refuge and where he took his last breath.



A plan of a Villa in Stabia



A wall painting

POPPEA SABINA

30 – 65 a.D.

Marries Nero (her third husband). Poppea committed suicide due to Messalina's intrigues. Her father was the Praetor Titus Ollius, and her mother was Poppaea Sabina Major. **Her Palace in Oplontis (Torre Annunziata) is considered today, one of the best preserved in the Roman world.**



The plan of the Villa in Oplontis



The wall decoration of the rooms is still in situ

JULIA AGRIPPINA AUGUSTA OR AGRIPPINA MINOR

15 – 59 a.D.

Marries her uncle Claudio in her fourth marriage. She had a son called Nero from her first marriage with the politician Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus. The continuous attempts to control Nero's imperial life, led her to obsess the already unstable son. Nero plans to eliminate his mother. He arranges a fake party in her honour and gave order to transfer her from her place by a previously tampered boat. During the transfer, the boat sank in the sea of Baiae, but the fortunate Agrippina was saved by some fisher men, and she returned to **her palace in Baia**. Unfortunately, here too, Nero's murderers reached her to put an end to her days. The chronicle of those times wrote, Agrippina pointed out her womb to the executioners, to say: strike me here where my son was conceived.



Agrippina Minor

GAIUS PLINY CAECILIUS SECUNDUS

62 – 114 a.D.

Roman lawyer, writer, and magistrate, known as Pliny the Younger.

Adopted by Pliny the Elder after his father's death. Pliny gave him his name and took care of his education. At the age of seventeen **he was with his uncle in Miseno**, during those catastrophic days of the Mount Somma (Vesuvius) eruption.



Pliny the young



Pale traces of Pliny's villa today

LUCIUS LICINIUS LUCULLUS

117 – 56 b.C.

Skilled orator, extraordinarily rich, refined, and eccentric Roman, General and Praetor, he married Cecilia Metella, daughter of the consul Cecilius Metellus. L. Lucullus remained proverbially known in history, for the grandeur of his receptions, the magnificence of his sumptuous and refined banquets. A Typical menu: seafood, bird's nest with asparagus, oyster cake, scampi. Porchetta breasts, fish, duck, hare, turkey, peacocks from Samo, Phrygian partridges, Gabes moray eels, Rhodes sturgeon. **Lucullus had villas and palaces in Miseno and Baia**, but it was in Naples that he had an immense residence on the sea, which went from Mount Echia to the islet of Megaride (S. Lucia district and Castel dell' Ovo). The villa included fish hatcheries, a library, an orchard and enormous triclinia and terraces for the different seasons.

In this fabulous residence, a few centuries later, Romulus Augustulus, the last emperor, lived his last days, it was the year 476 a.D. The history of the glorious Western Roman Empire ends here, where it started almost five centuries before. Here in the Bay of Naples, where in the Aeneid we read, about the meeting of Aeneas receiving instructions from his father Anchises, about the place where to found the civilization that would avenge the destruction of Troy, and so it was.



*The traditional aspect
of Lucullus*



The remains on the hill of Echia in Naples

GAIUS CALPURNIUS PISO

Inherited a network of relationships with several high-ranking Roman families, while his mother left him considerable wealth.

G. C. Piso owned a Villa in Baia, a location much appreciated by the wealthy Romans. An excellent orator, but of dubious morality, it is said that he defended the accused in trials even if they were guilty. In thirty-seven a.D. Caligula drove him out of Rome and took Livia Orestilla as his wife, the same day he was about to get married, accusing him of adultery.

Today the remains of his Villa are submerged.



POLLIO FELICE

Statius give us a great description of Pollio Felice Palace in his anthology of poems the “Silvae.” He writes about the marbles as follow: “...the villa is rich in the most beautiful stones of Greece, Siene, Phrygia, the green of Laconia, the yellow of Numidia, the very white marbles of Thasos, Chios and Caristo. Pollio Felice, he frequents the Greek Naples more than his fellow citizens of Pozzuoli. The Neapolitans will be able to worthily appreciate his refined soul! “



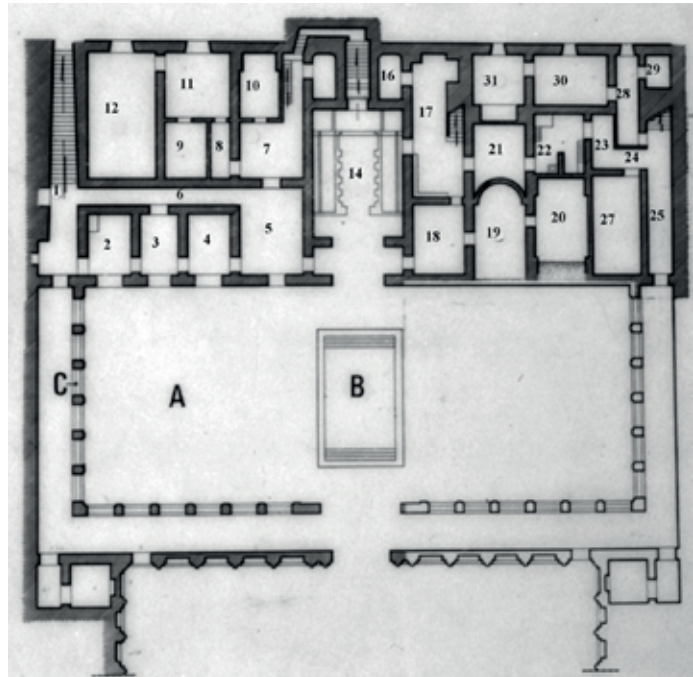
The Palace of Pollio Felice in Sorrento

MINORI A CITY OF THE AMALFI COAST

A large Villa built between 30 and 60 a.D. Unfortunately, there are no written traces of the owner, who was certainly a rich and refined personage of the imperial era.



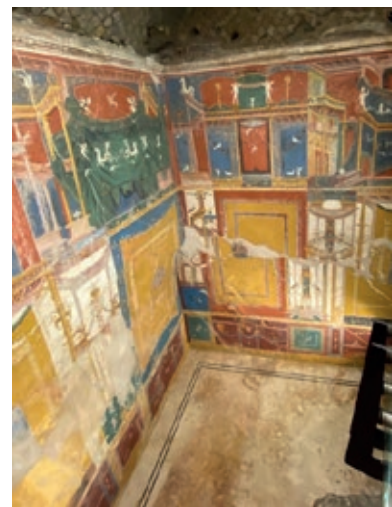
The Villa Nymphaeum



The house plan

ROMAN VILLA IN POSITANO, numerous sources refer to Posides Claudi Caesaris, freed man of the emperor Claudius, from whose name the toponym of Positano derives. High-ranking and wealthy person whom Claudius rewarded for his participation in the conquest of Britain, P. C. Caesaris also distinguished himself as an architect, and in peacetime he designed several villas and spas in various areas between Pozzuoli and all coastal areas.

The few visible rooms today are evidence of refinement and elegance.



At this point it is easy to imagine the intense traffic via sea and land to supply all the activities of this multitude of demanding people, to say the least. An incredible opulence that powered the import and export of products to and from the entire empire.

Artists, bankers, traders, slaves, sorcerers, sailors, cooks, restaurateurs, priests, gladiators, soldiers, politicians, artisans, carpenters, builders, and doctors, all satisfying increasingly extravagant requests. In the shadow of a volcano and among craters of the thunderous fields in bay of Pozzuoli. And here too fate was lurking, the events that put an end to the sweet life in the Gulf of Naples and Salerno were natural events.

- the earthquake of the year 62 AD. in the first days of February

- the eruption of the mountain Somma (Vesuvius) occurred on October 24, 79 AD.

The earthquake was devastating, estimated at grade VI on the Mercalli scale, with its epicentre near Stabiae. The eruption began with a violent explosion in the early afternoon and lasted for over seventy hours. These two catastrophes led to the abandonment of palaces and villas, which were no longer habitable.

The best descriptions of these disasters have come down to us from Seneca regarding the earthquake, and from Pliny the Younger for the eruption.

The morphology of the Gulf of Naples had now irremediably changed.

The accustomed mystifiers wrote of a divine punishment due to excesses of pleasure and debauchery. Which means that from then until today hundreds of earthquakes and dozens of eruptions have occurred, the Gulf of Naples is therefore destined for eternal punishment.

Yes, those were dark years, if we add the fire of Rome in July 64 and the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in September 70, so what?

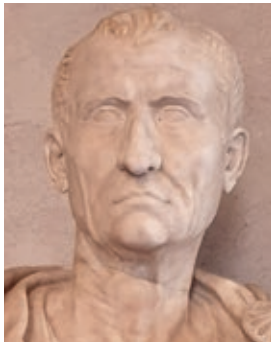
Yet, dear readers, here we are again. The Gulf of Naples and Salerno are among the most visited places in the world, because here nothing is taken for granted. We call Vesuvius his Majesty, and the thunderous fields (Phlegraean Fields) his court. Here life is today, here love for nature is intense, even more if it is rebellious. Life's incognita makes you appreciate its surprisingly beauty, with its red sunsets and intense gazes.

The same atmosphere as two thousand years ago, at the time of the imperial age, here, a contemporary poet wrote:

"When there will be two of us, the universe as well will change its name".



For historical completeness only, upon Nero's death in May 69 a.D. as there were no heirs, the Julio-Claudian dynastic inheritance became extinct. The empire degenerated into the most ferocious chaos, the army generals, to compete for the throne, clashed with their armies in a fratricidal struggle, and between 68-69 a.D. four emperors succeeded one another.



Galba, June 9, 68 to January 15, 69 a.D. murdered by the Praetorians



Otho, January 15 to April 16, 69 a.D. died by suicide.



Vitellius, April 16 to December 20, 69 a.D. killed by the people.



Vespasian, December 69 to June 79 died due to illness.

Bibliographic sources on request: c.mollo43@gmail.com

