



ROMAN VILLA  
VINAMARGO



 **Mucc**  
Museu  
de la Ciutat  
de Castelló

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE  
AND EXHIBITION SPACE**  
SELF-GUIDED TOUR

## CHARACTERISTICS

🆓 Free admission

🕒 Duration: 45 minutes

👤 Maximum capacity: 60 people



🎧 **VISIT WITH AUDIO GUIDE** VAL CAS ENG FRA

The Wi-Fi system enables visits with an audio guide that visitors can listen to on their phones without having to download it. The use of headphones is recommended.

Instructions:

1. Activate Wi-Fi on your smartphone
2. Select network: **Audioguía Vinamargo**
3. Open your web browser (Safari, Chrome...) and go to: **wifimuseum.com**

## OPENING HOURS

☀️ **Spring/summer opening hours (from 1st April to 30th September)**

From Tuesday to Saturday: from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

and from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Sundays and bank holidays: from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

❄️ **Autumn/winter opening hours (from 1st October to 31st March)**

From Tuesday to Saturday: from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Sundays and bank holidays: from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

\* Closed: 1st and 6th January | 6th and 25th December

☁️ The villa will remain closed on days of heavy rains.

[www.mucc.es/vinamargo](http://www.mucc.es/vinamargo)

## INTERPRETATION CENTRE

1 2 3 4 5 6 Display boards

E1 E2 E3 E4 Outside visit

🎧 Audio guide

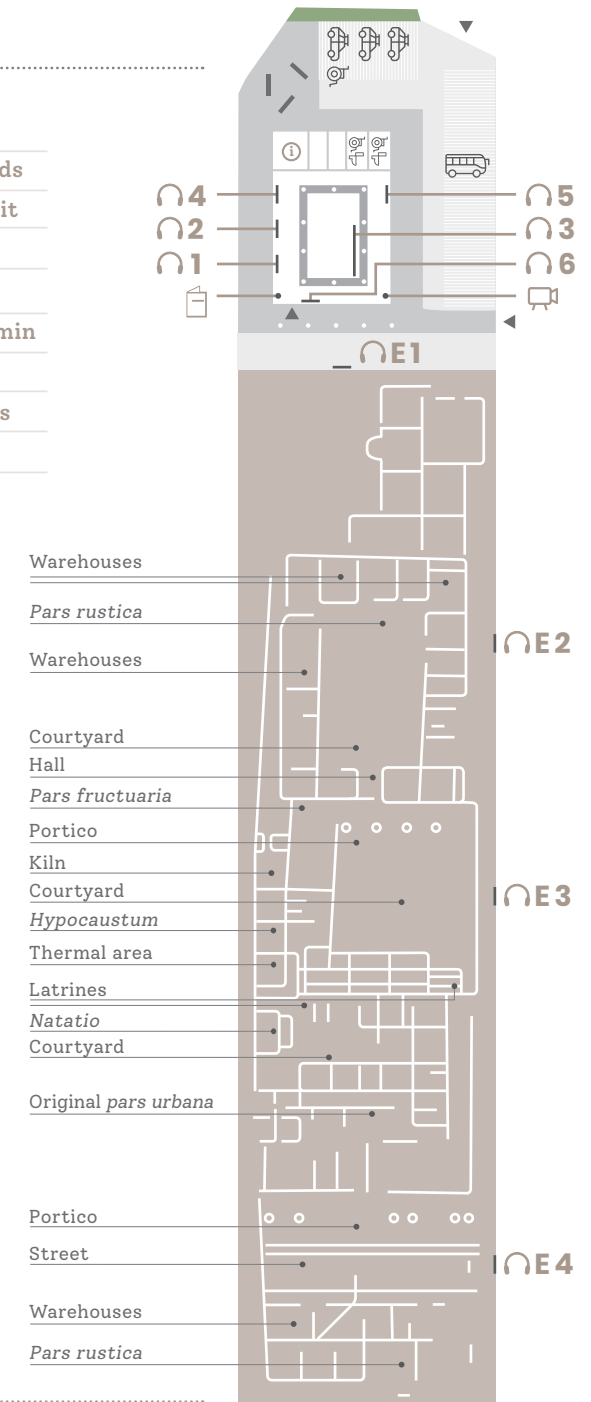
📄 Guide brochures

📺 Audiovisual aid 8 min

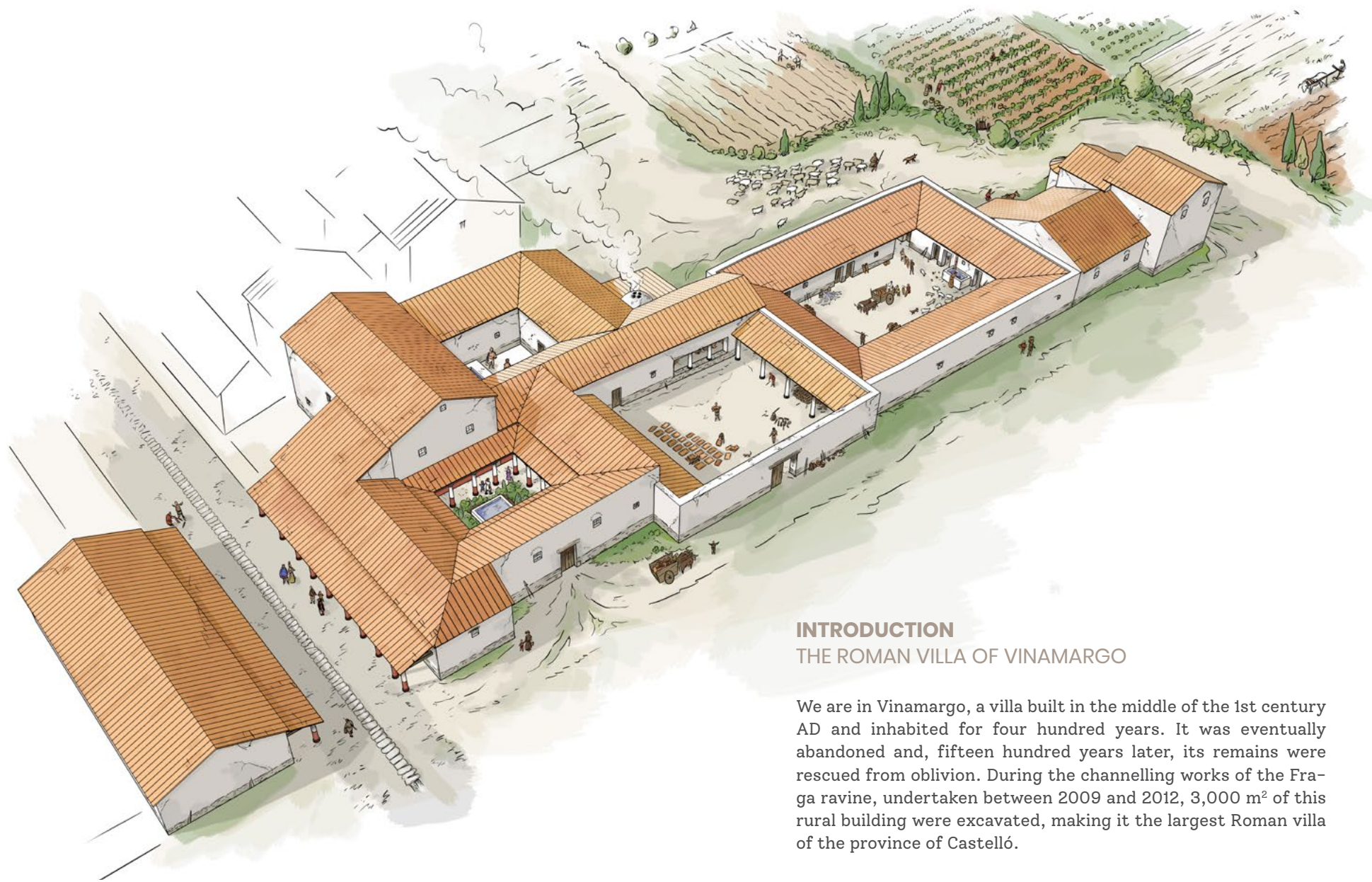
▶ Access

♿ Accessible toilets

🚗 🚘 🚼 Car park



## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE



## INTRODUCTION

### THE ROMAN VILLA OF VINAMARGO

We are in Vinamargo, a villa built in the middle of the 1st century AD and inhabited for four hundred years. It was eventually abandoned and, fifteen hundred years later, its remains were rescued from oblivion. During the channelling works of the Fraga ravine, undertaken between 2009 and 2012, 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> of this rural building were excavated, making it the largest Roman villa of the province of Castelló.

## BETWEEN THE MOUNTAINS AND THE SEA

### A fertile land

An axe and an arrowhead were found in the outskirts of Vinamargo and they tell us about the first Neolithic farmers and herders in this area, over six thousand years ago. But the real occupation and exploitation of these lands began in the Iberian period and, not far from here, there must have been an Iberian settlement, as evidenced by the finding of several cremation urns belonging to its necropolis and dating back to the 6th century BC.

The arrival of the Romans changed the Iberian population's way of life. The adaptation to a new social organisation, culture, language, religion and the most day to day habits, such as their way of dressing, cooking, etc., was a gradual process known as *Romanisation*.

This transformation was also reflected in the new buildings that started to appear throughout Hispania from the change of era: the villas. These farming operations were large rural buildings owned by upper-class Roman citizens, who appointed a foreman to take care of their land and oversee the work of day labourers and slaves in their properties.

The location of one of these villas in Vinamargo was not accidental; some agricultural treaties from that time already gave recommendations in this regard. Cato the Elder said:

If you are going to buy a farm, repeatedly visit the chosen place, and have a good look around you... Make sure it is in an area with good weather, not prone to storms. The land has to be good and with natural strength. If possible, it should be at the foot of a hill, facing south, in a healthy place where it is easy to find labourers. It must have abundant water and be near a flourishing population, or the sea, or a navigable river, or a decent and well-frequented road.

Cato the Elder, 2nd century BC, *De agri cultura*, I, 1, 3.



Christian medieval period, 14th-15th centuries

Arabic medieval period, 11th-13th centuries



Hamlet of Vinamargo



Roman villa of Vinamargo

Decay-abandonment

4th-5th centuries AD

Oil amphora, Africana II A, made in Tunisia, second half of 2nd century - 4th century AD

2nd-3rd centuries AD

Phalera or decorative disk for horse trappings, 2nd-3rd centuries AD

Founding in mid-1st century AD

Hispanic *terra sigillata* plate, 1st-2nd centuries AD

Ceramics from Aticus' pottery workshop, late 1st century - 2nd century AD:

- Oil lamp handle in the shape of a horse's head
- Canteen



Iberian-Roman period

Coin. Unit of Saitabi, second half of 2nd century BC



Iberian period

Iberian necropolis  
Vinamargo Road, 6th century BC

- Iberian urn
- Bronze buckles



Late Neolithic - Chalcolithic

4th-3rd millennia BC

- Flint arrowhead with barbs and shaft
- Polished stone axe





Between the 1st and 5th centuries, the villa of Vinamargo became a goods production and distribution centre thanks to its privileged location, near the sea and the two main communication routes of the time: the Caminàs Road and the Via Augusta. Over the years, the villa was abandoned and the area was not to be occupied again until medieval times.

## THE ROMAN VILLA OF VINAMARGO

### What was it like?

The new Roman municipalities created a land occupation model based on the mapping of geometric plots, like a grid, that are still visible in some coastal plains crossed by the Via Augusta. The villa of Vinamargo, founded in the middle of the 1st century AD, belonged to the administrative territory of Saguntum (the *ager saguntinum*), the city where the owners of our villa may have resided.

The building was gradually expanded from east to west, reaching its maximum splendour between the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The crisis that affected the Roman Empire in the middle of the 3rd century also left its mark on Vinamargo, which was largely renovated. Although it remained occupied for two more centuries, the villa was eventually abandoned in the middle of the 5th century.

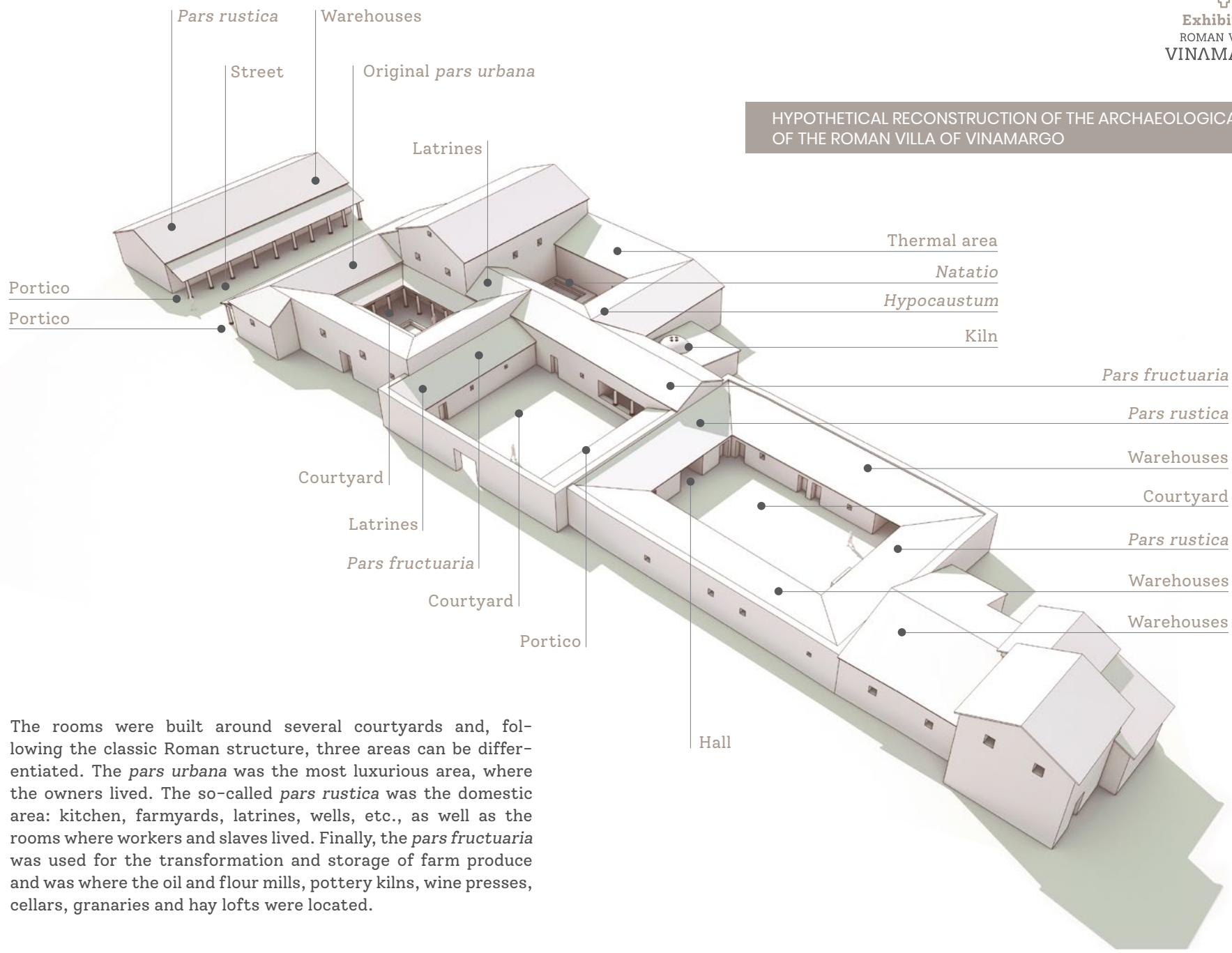
Long after, specifically between the 11th and 15th centuries, some areas were temporarily occupied and several walls dismantled. Their stones were reused as construction material for a nearby dwelling, maybe the hamlet of Vinamargo, whose name we only know through written sources.

The remains preserved nowadays are the foundations of the walls, made with stones bound with earth, on which the kneaded earth walls (rammed earth) were built, then covered with plaster and, in the most luxurious areas, painted with bright colours (red, yellow, green and blue). Some areas had more than one floor and the ceilings were covered with large flat tiles, called *tegulae*, that were combined with curved tiles or *imbrices*.

### ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES SURROUNDING THE PLAIN OF CASTELLÓ



HYPOTHETICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF THE ROMAN VILLA OF VINAMARGO



The rooms were built around several courtyards and, following the classic Roman structure, three areas can be differentiated. The *pars urbana* was the most luxurious area, where the owners lived. The so-called *pars rustica* was the domestic area: kitchen, farmyards, latrines, wells, etc., as well as the rooms where workers and slaves lived. Finally, the *pars fructuaria* was used for the transformation and storage of farm produce and was where the oil and flour mills, pottery kilns, wine presses, cellars, granaries and hay lofts were located.



## THE PARS URBANA OR RESIDENTIAL AREA

### **A reflection of the social status**

The noble part of the villa is hardly known. It was probably located south of the excavated area, where remains of the private baths are preserved. Some isolated remains have been recovered and indicate the level of luxury their owners were used to, such as fragments of stuccos and mural painting with plant motifs, combining colours such as green and yellow with large stripes in dark red; fragments of window panes have also been found in the baths, as well as some marble slabs and stone and vitreous tiles from the mosaics that decorated the floor of some private rooms.

The lord (*dominus*) spent long periods with his family at the rural farm, so its rooms had to be as comfortable as those of his house (*domus*) in the city. Therefore, different rooms such as the bedrooms (*cubicula*), the dining room (*triclinium*), the private baths (*balnea*) or the office where the lord ran his business (*tablinum*), were distributed along a corridor with columns providing access to a courtyard: the atrium.

Actually, the building erected as the interpretation centre of the Roman villa of Vinamargo reproduces the atrium of a Roman house. It is important to highlight the atrium role, since it was located next to the entrance and it was a public space. That was where the *dominus'* guests and clients awaited to be received, so it had to be welcoming and richly ornate. It was a bright courtyard, thanks to the roof opening (*compluvium*), where rainwater entered and was collected in a small central basin (*impluvium*), and it was also where the *lararium* was placed, a small household shrine in which daily rites were performed to preserve the family's prosperity.

In the villas where there were no space restrictions, the atrium became a large courtyard surrounded by columns (peristyle), with a large central basin, landscaped with fruit trees and flowers, and sometimes decorated with fountains and sculptures.

Hypothetical reproduction of a mosaic made with the coloured tesserae found in Vinamargo.







## TRADE AND CONSUMPTION

### *Production and exchange*

All kinds of products arrived at the villa for consumption. Roads such as the Via Augusta and ports such as Saguntum's became trade exchange and distribution networks. The remains of amphorae found in Vinamargo reveal this intense activity during Roman times: oil from Hispania Baetica, salted products from the Bay of Cádiz, wine from Hispania Tarraconensis, and also from more remote regions such as North Africa, Italy or the Eastern Mediterranean.

At the port of Saguntum, part of this trade was plied with boats that sailed a short distance from the coast of Castelló, anchoring in front of the beaches of Nules, Borriana, Almassora, Alcossebre, Benicarló and Vinaròs to serve small settlements that, like that of Vinamargo, could exchange their goods and be part of this trade network, where wheat, oil and wine were the basic produce of these farming operations in Hispania. Some of them were produced in the villa of Vinamargo for their own consumption, while the surpluses were packaged for their preservation and trade. Proof of this are the basins, canals and remains of large vessels (*dolia*), as well as a potential oil press, demonstrating a part of the work carried out in the villa, at least, for self-consumption.

Cattle farming was focused on the production of beef and it became highly important for the villa's economy. Remains of sheep, goats, horses, pigs and poultry have also been found.





### ***Aticus' workshop***

Vinamargo also had its own pottery workshop, as shown by the discovery of a kiln and a landfill that contained abundant pottery remains with firing faults and defective parts, some of them marked with a name: *Aticus*.

This name may have belonged to a freed slave of Greek origin that reached a high status thanks to his businesses. However, for the time being, his mark has not been found outside Vinamargo.

Aticus' workshop was active from the end of the 1st century and throughout the 2nd century, and among its productions, the following can be found: canteens, oil lamps, little amphorae and the so-called *tintinnabula*, wind chimes adorned with bells used for protective purposes.



## LIFE IN VINAMARGO

### **Daily activities**

The artefacts uncovered in Vinamargo give us an insight into the daily life of its inhabitants. Food was cooked in pots and pans, and the leftovers reveal what was commonly eaten: wheat, as bread or porridge; wine; olives and oil, or some vegetables and fruit, such as grapes, pears, apples, pomegranates, dates, peaches, figs and plums; while eggs, meat, fish and molluscs, such as winkles, oysters and scallops found in Vinamargo, were mainly eaten by the owners and their families. There was also the occasional game meat, deer, wild boar and lynx, supplementing the diet of Vinamargo's inhabitants.

All this was served in dishes, plates, jugs, bottles and glasses from Hispania and from different parts of the Mediterranean.

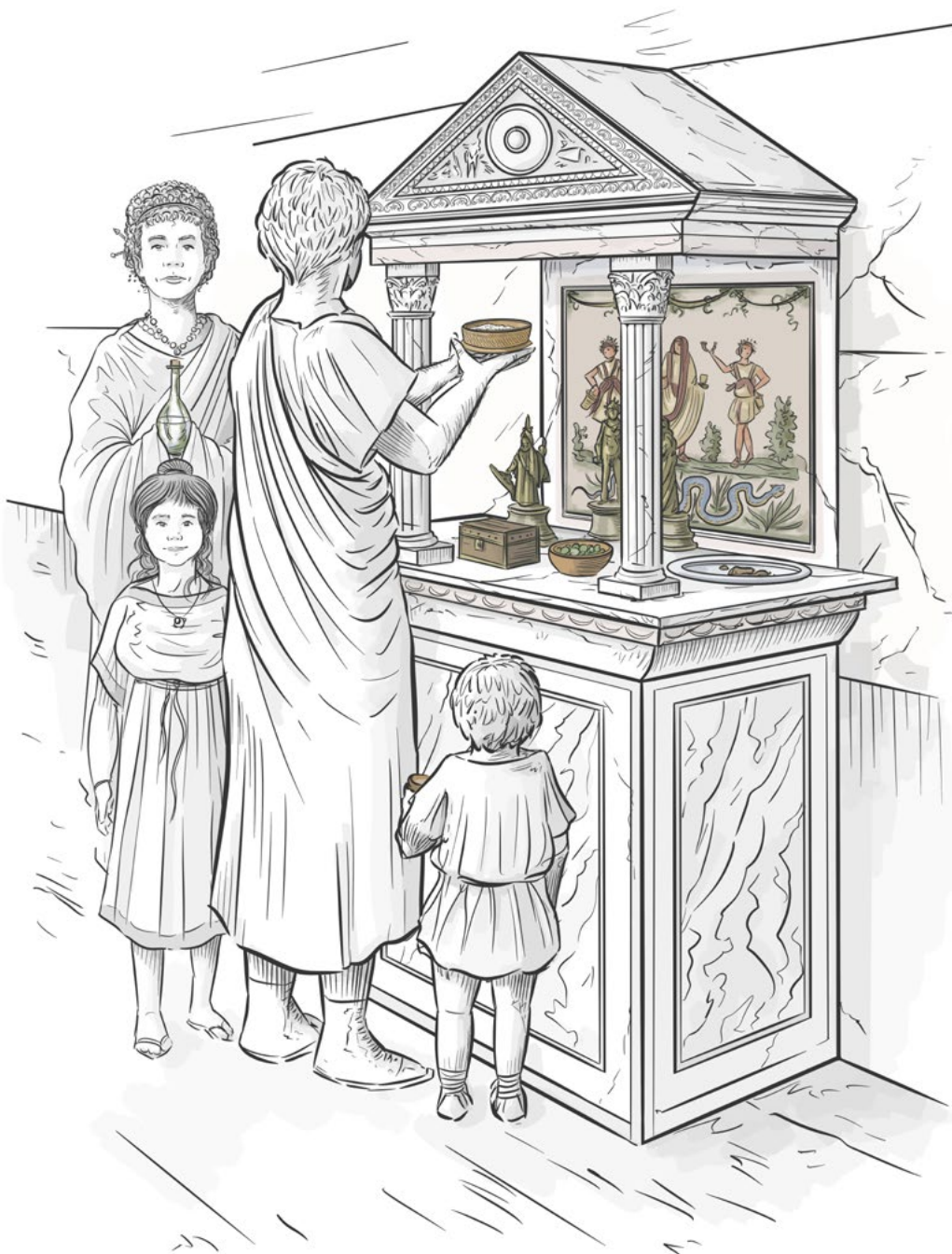
Textile work was carried out at the villa, as evidenced by the finding of counterweights (*pondus*) used in vertical looms and in the spinning process (spindle whorls). Even though most of the fabrics were made by slaves or bought in specialised workshops, Roman society considered this work an honourable activity for high-status women, who were in charge of making some of the clothes worn by their families.

Various objects of personal adornment have also been found: rings, hairpins, multi-coloured glassy necklace beads, some of them imported from the East, pins and fibulae used to fasten dresses, and even a brooch representing the Greek myth of Leda and the Swan, when the god Zeus transforms into a swan to seduce Leda, who in the brooch caresses Zeus perched on her lap. In addition to these personal ornaments, a phalera was found, that is, an embellished metal disk used as a decorative feature on horse harnesses and which, together with the rest of the pieces, indicates the high purchasing power of the villa's owners.









## RELIGION AND BELIEFS

### **Rites and traditions**

Private life in Roman times was shrouded in magic and religion. Together with the official worship of public gods, to whom sanctuaries and temples were dedicated, there were minor and daily deities that received offerings and private rites. Every important moment in family life, such as births, marriages, birthdays, or passing from childhood to adulthood, had its own divinity, and each house had small household shrines or *lararia*.

In the *lararium* oil lamps were lit, perfumes were burned as an offering to the spirits protecting the house and libations were performed, a ceremony that consisted of spilling milk, wine or honey in honour of the gods. These small shrines were placed in transit areas such as the courtyard located at the entrance (atrium), the kitchen or the garden, and were painted and decorated with wood, clay or bronze figurines representing the following minor deities: the Lares, household deities and guardians of the fields; the Manes, ancestors' spirits that protected the home, and the Penates, gods in charge of taking care of the food, who sometimes had their own shrine located in the pantry (*penus*).

Superstition was expressed through amulets, and in Vinamargo many of these have been uncovered. The small bells or *tintinnabula*, produced in the villa's pottery kilns, were representations of the guardian spirits and were hung in outdoor areas to keep evil spirits away with the sound of bells. Unfortunately, only the figurines' legs have been found, which acted as a clapper, so we do not know what the complete shape of these amulets looked like.



## Death

### *Sit tibi terra levis*

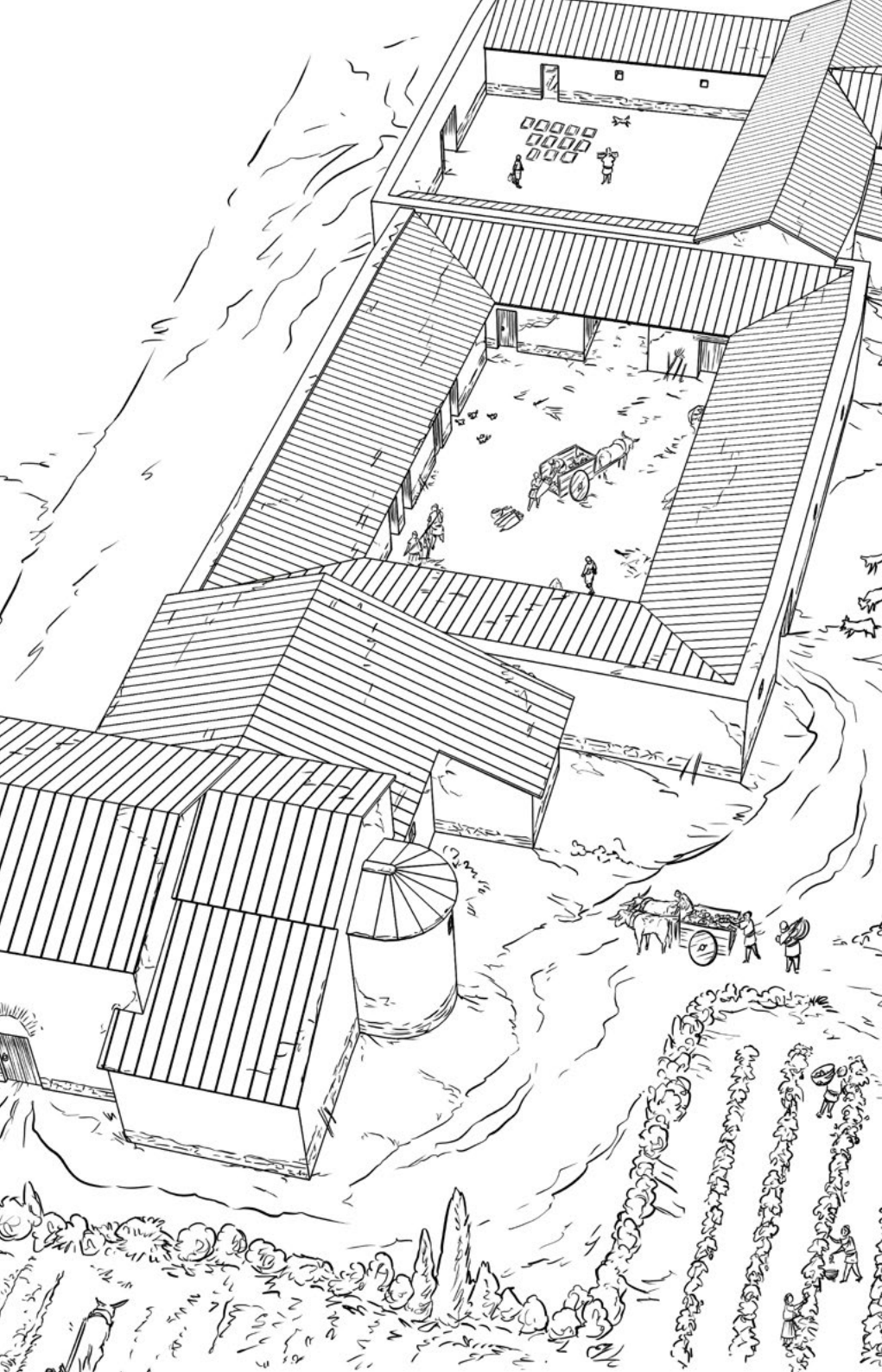
May the ground be light to you

The veneration of the dead was also represented in the funerary rite. Over time, cremation fell out of favour and burials became more common. The deceased were buried with various offerings, such as food, perfumes, personal items and a coin placed on their mouth or eyes in order to pay Charon, the ferryman who took the souls to the world of the dead.

The funerary rite was different in the case of young children, who were given special treatment as they were not considered full-right citizens. In this regard, Pliny the Elder claimed: “It is the universal custom of mankind not to cremate a person who dies before cutting his teeth” (Pliny the Elder, 1st century AD, *Naturalis historia*, 7. 70-72).

The remains of a six-month-old baby were found in Vinamargo who, following an ancient custom, was buried inside the house, in a pit covered by a flat tile, with a coin on his mouth and accompanied by a small jug as part of the offering and a fragment of tegula featuring the two paw prints of a feline. However, the cemetery where the inhabitants of Vinamargo were probably buried has not been located, although a fragment of a 3rd century tombstone that might have been dedicated to a member of the Licinii Saguntian family, dead at 55 years of age, has been recovered.





## THE VILLA

Over its four hundred years of existence, from the 1st to the 5th century, the villa underwent many renovations, which makes it difficult to identify its original layout. Its construction began in the middle of the 1st century AD in the area further east and extended to the west when new courtyards and adjacent areas were built. The foundations that we see today belong to different construction stages, mostly undertaken between the 1st and 3rd centuries, at the peak period when the oldest part of the building was also remodelled.

The villa belonged to the *ager saguntinum*, the territory administered by the city of Saguntum, and its founders would probably be outstanding members of the Saguntian upper class, although it is likely that its owners changed throughout its history.

It was located on a wide coastal plain crossed by rivers and ravines that provided rich fluvial deposits that made it a fertile area for agriculture and livestock. The territory was very varied, with flood zones near the coast (marshlands) and dry lands in the interior, which together with the mild climate and the existence of aquifers explains why it has been inhabited for several millennia. Moreover, the villa was well connected thanks to the proximity of the Caminàs Road and the Via Augusta, which undoubtedly favoured its trading activity as an agricultural and farming production centre.





## THE BUILDING

The Roman villa was the house from which a large rural property was managed (farm or *fundus*) and played a key role in the occupation and exploitation process of the territory conquered by Rome. Although its primary role was productive or economic, it also had to meet the owners' leisure needs, hence the building had three clearly differentiated parts: the *pars rustica* and the *pars fructuaria* as work areas, and the *pars urbana* as the residential area.

The villa of Vinamargo has a large number of rooms distributed around several courtyards. The original residence was remodelled and most of the structures we see today belong to the *pars rustica*, where the housework was done, and to the *pars fructuaria*, used for transformation and storage of the farm products.

Currently, only the foundations made with stones remain; the walls have long since disappeared, because they were made of kneaded earth with the rammed earth technique, as can be seen in some of the villa's reconstructed walls. The Roman concrete (*caementicium*) was hardly used in Vinamargo, and was used only for basins and canals, although some remains are preserved in walls from the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The walls were plastered with lime or stucco and some were painted or decorated with marble slabs (*crustae*) depending on the type of room and its use. These buildings could have more than one floor and the ceilings combined flat tiles (*tegulae*) with curved ones (*imbrices*).

To the West there is a set of seven rooms with exterior access built during the 2nd century, where the remains of a child's burial were found.



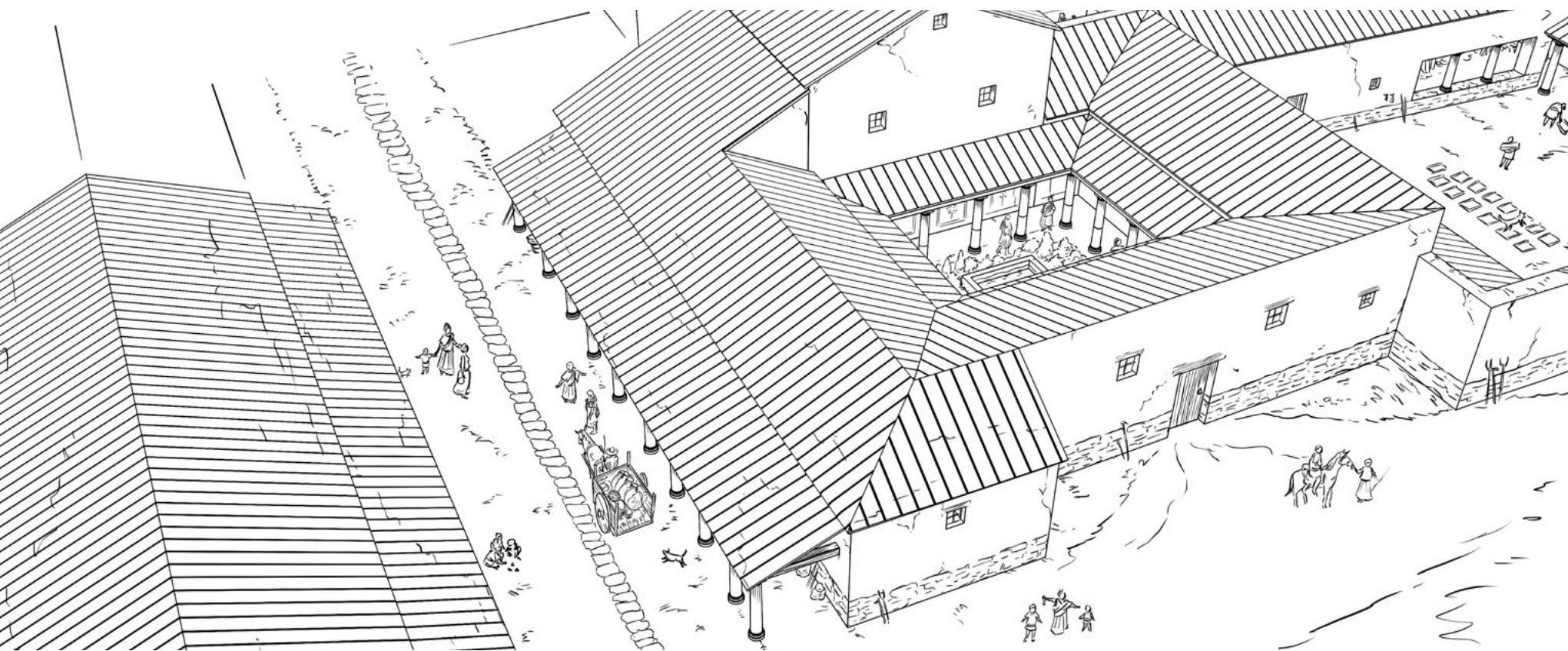
## WORK AND HOUSING AREAS

The layout of the villa follows the classic Roman structure with several courtyards around which the rooms are distributed. The remains preserved in Vinamargo mostly correspond to areas for domestic work and for transformation and storage of products elaborated in the farm.

Around the central courtyard we find the *pars fructuaria* rooms, with a kiln, an oil press (*torcularium*), a basin and two large vessels (*dolia*) to store grains or liquids. Behind the portico there was a covered corridor which led to another courtyard with warehouses (*cellae*) and farmyards.

The *pars urbana* or residential area, where the owners probably lived, is hardly known, since the villa renovations undertaken in the 3rd century pushed it out of the excavated area and the original rooms were transformed into *pars rustica* for domestic use: kitchens, latrines, servants' quarters, etc.





## THE PORTICOED STREET

The rooms in this sector are distributed on either side of an interior street with porticoes on the sides and crossed by two long canals, one in the centre and another one, parallel, to the east.

It is the oldest part of the villa of Vinamargo, where a large hall can be seen, giving access to a courtyard, in which a small basin to collect rainwater (*impluvium*) is still preserved.

With the renovations and the extension of the villa undertaken in the 3rd century, new rooms, some latrines and the baths were built, although we do not know their total area, since the villa has not been fully excavated.



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