

Roman Villa Associated With Pliny the Elder Discovered in Naples

Matthew Norman January 24, 2024



Site of the Roman villa in Naples connected to Pliny the Elder. Credit: Superintendent of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape for the Naples Metropolitan Area

Researchers in Naples have discovered an ancient Roman villa on the seafront, thought to be the place where Pliny the Elder watched Mount Vesuvius erupt.

Archaeological assistance sought during an urban regeneration project in the vicinity of Punta Sarparella in Bacoli, Naples has led to the uncovering of the [remains](#) of a monumental Roman villa, dating back to around the first century AD.

The structure, built using diamond-shaped cubilia in the opus reticulata form (decorative Roman wall facing), is comprised of ten large rooms in various stages of construction and extends all the way to the beach from the site.

The remains are thought to be part of one of the terraces of the residence of the Prefect of the Roman Tyrrhenian Fleet of the Classis Misensis (subset of the Roman navy). This has been concluded because the residence's position offers maximum visibility of the entire port basin and a broad view of the Gulf.

The Roman Villa in Naples May Be Connected to Pliny the Elder

As Pliny the Elder held the office of Praefectus Classis Misensis, researchers have suggested this uncovered Roman villa may be the spot where Pliny the Elder witnessed the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. He consequently set sail for Stabiae to help inhabitants of several of the coastal cities that were in danger due to the natural disaster.

The site of the villa lies in the vicinity of Punta Sarparella on the coast of Cape Miseno, a headland that marks the northwestern limit of the Gulf of Naples. The Cape of Miseno was also home to an ancient settlement called [Misenum](#), which was the site of a significant Roman port.

Bacoli is already subject to protection by governmental archaeological restrictions because of the density of ancient remains—from the access point and the Roman theater of Misenum to the college of the Augustals and the basin of the ancient port—around Punta Sarparella.

This latest discovery, it is claimed, is especially significant because spaces inside and around the Roman port are still

largely unmapped. Thus, much is still unknown about the organization of the base, routes of communication between the port, and the rest of the town and [location](#) of the center of the Misenum Colony.

The Roman villa discovery related to Pliny the Elder was made during construction work on a municipal villa. Construction was intended to give the public access to Miseno Beach. It had been inaccessible for years due to waste and brushwood.

During the regeneration project, which involved the building of a new access driveway, benches, and a children's play area, the archaeological team brought onto the project came across the remains of the villa.

An extensive excavation project is being planned for the villa. This may also include the submerged and semi-underwater structures along the coastline. However, while that is being evaluated, the perimeter of the rooms has been defined and fenced off.