

Select

Hide

Delete

Hide Except

Delete Except

Format

Text

Undo

Undo All

Save

Text Pieces

View More

Newsweek

Archaeologists Discover Roman Villa on Site of 'Unauthorized Eco-Monster'

Published Jan 15, 2024 at 12:21 PM EST

Select

Hide

Delete

Hide Except

Delete Except

Format

Text

Undo

Undo All

Save

Text Pieces

View More

Archaeologists have discovered an ancient Roman villa complex in southern Italy on the site of a development described as an ecological monstrosity.

The researchers unearthed the monumental villa, which is thought to date back to around the 1st century, during urban regeneration works in Bacoli, the Superintendency of Archeology, Fine Arts, and Landscape for the Naples Metropolitan Area (SABAP) announced in a press release.

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 coastal areas of the Gulf were populated in Roman times. The ancient city of Pompeii, which was famously destroyed by an eruption of the nearby volcano Mount Vesuvius that overlooks the bay, is located just off the coast, for example. The Cape of Miseno was also home to an ancient settlement called Misenum, which was the site of a significant Roman port.

[Select](#)[Hide](#)[Delete](#)[Hide Except](#)[Delete Except](#)[Format](#)[Text](#)[Undo](#)[Undo All](#)[Save](#)[Text Pieces](#)[View More](#)

The villa would have once formed part of ancient Misenum, Simona Formola, an archaeologist with SABAP who directed excavations at the site, told *Newsweek*.



The site where the Roman villa complex was unearthed in Bacoli, Italy. The villa is thought to date to around the 1st century.

SOPRINTENDENZA ARCHEOLOGIA BELLE ARTI E PAESAGGIO PER L'AREA METROPOLITANA DI NAPOLI

As part of the urban regeneration works in Bacoli, a project was launched to recover and enhance an area of coast previously occupied by the former Lido Piranha, a

Select

Hide

Delete

Hide Except

Delete Except

Format

Text

Undo

Undo All

Save

Text Pieces

View More

beachside development that SABAP described as an "unauthorized eco-monster" in Italian—meaning an ugly and environmentally damaging construction.

The Lido was in operation from 1982 until it was demolished in 2007. It was responsible, among other things, for degrading the local landscape, which is of great archaeological importance, and producing a significant amount of waste, according to the press release.

The Lido was made up of facilities of different kinds including parking, restaurants, bungalows for overnight stays, a beach with umbrellas—even a pier to dock small boats and yachts. The development was constructed illegally.

"The constructions were obviously built, in part, on Roman remains, both on land and at sea, certainly involving their damage," Formola said.

The Roman villa complex, which extends down to the beach and the seabed, has been found to contain 10 large rooms from different building phases, walking surfaces and traces of wall cladding, according to archaeologists.

Formola said the residence would have been of "considerable size." Current surveys have revealed an area of 32 feet by 65 feet—not counting the submerged parts—but the archaeologists calculate that the villa could extend for more than 300 feet.

The villa was constructed using a technique known as *Opus reticulatum* (or reticulate work), which involves the use of small, pyramid-shaped pieces of tuff—a type of

Select

Hide

Delete

Hide Except

Delete Except

Format

Text

Undo

Undo All

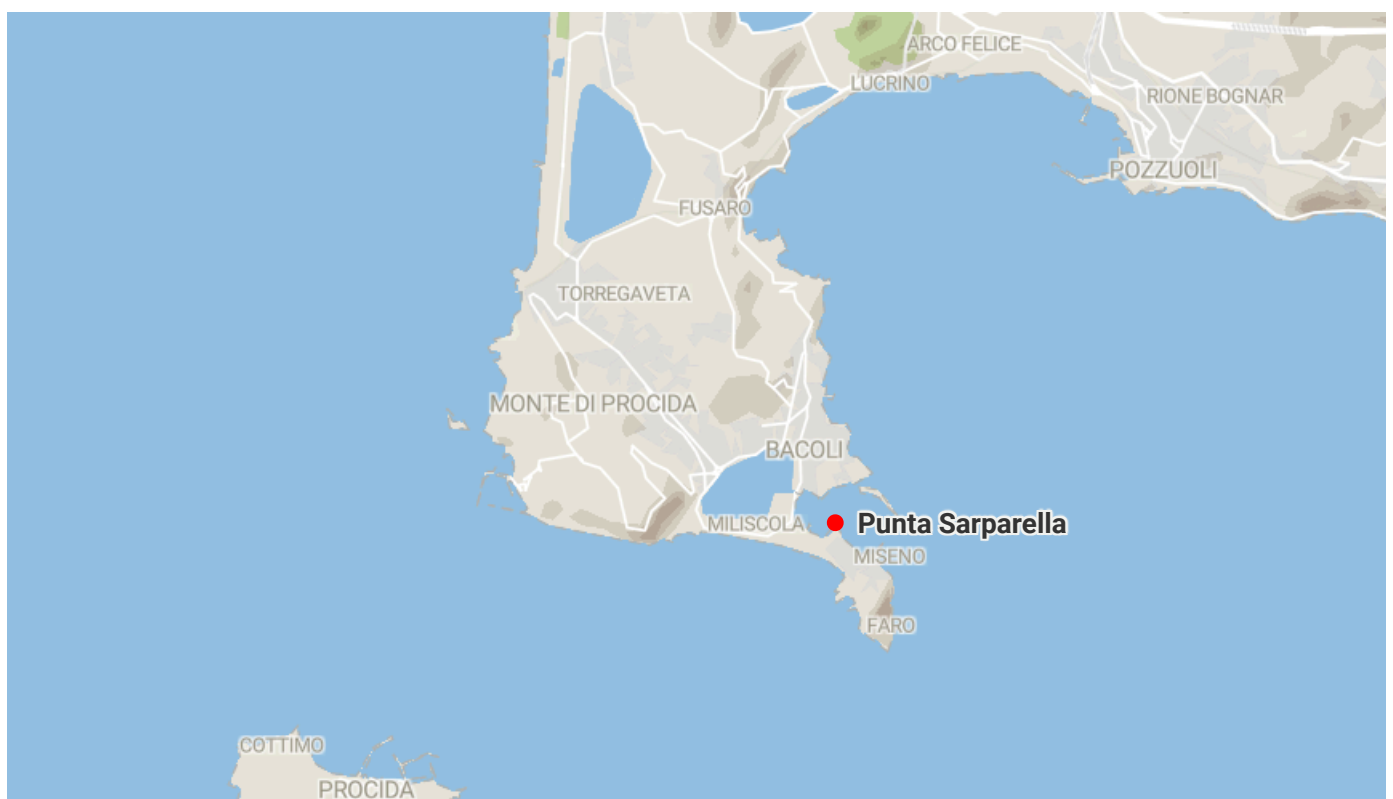
Save

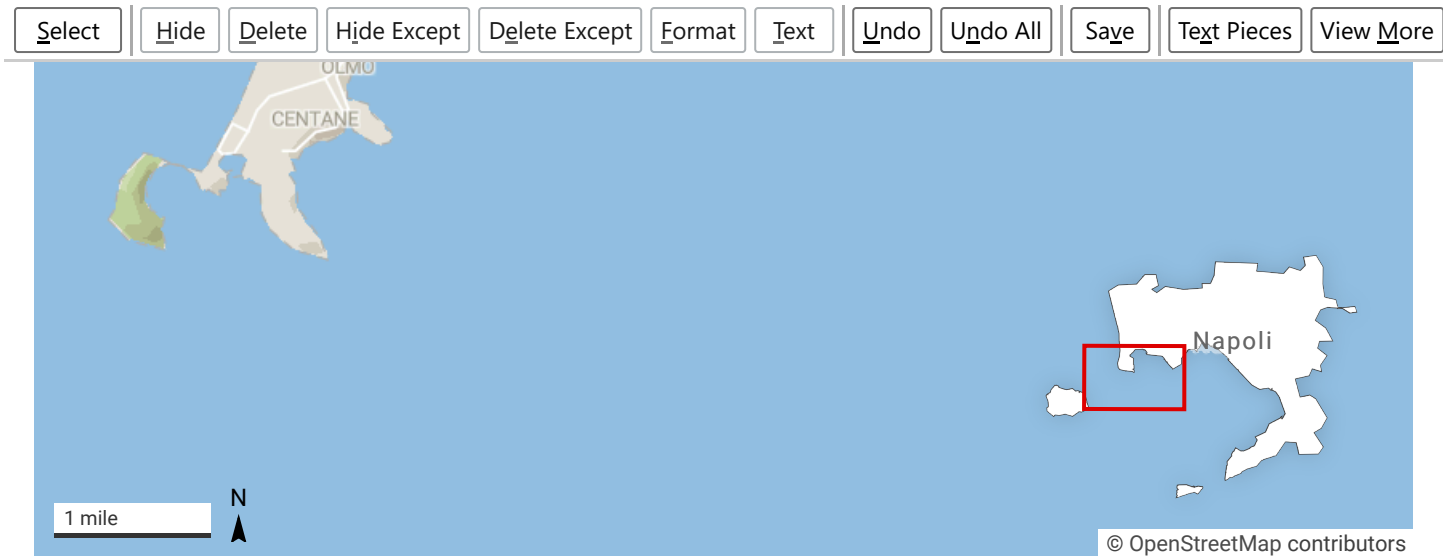
Text Pieces

View More

volcanic stone—embedded into concrete. *Opus reticulatum* was used in Roman architecture from around the first century B.C. to the early first century.

Evidence from the site suggests that the villa may have been the residence of a prominent political figure in the ancient Roman region. One possibility the archaeologists suggest is that the residence belonged to the prefect of the *Classis Misenensis*—the senior fleet of the Roman navy—which was based at Misenum.





A map shows the location of Punta Sarparella, on the coast of Bacoli, Naples, Italy. The municipality of Bacoli lies on a headland known as Cape Miseno that marks the northwestern limit of the Gulf of Naples.

Source: Ian Randall • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Although this hypothesis has yet to be verified, the residence would have been an ideal location for the prefect to live, given its location on Punta Sarparella—a point on a promontory that juts out into the Gulf. This position would have provided a broad view of the surrounding coastline and the Gulf in its entirety.

According to SABAP, this promontory may have been the site where Pliny the Elder—the famed Roman author, philosopher and military commander, who once held the office of the prefect of the fleet—witnessed the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79.

SABAP said the latest discovery was of "exceptional significance"—noting that the perimeter of the villa site has now been fenced off, awaiting further excavations, which could include the submerged and semi-submerged structures along the coastline.