

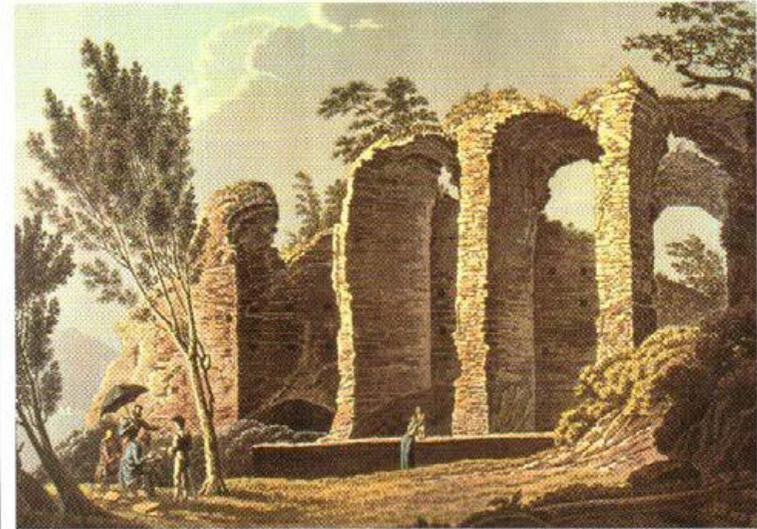
Liceo Statale “G. Bagatta” – Desenzano del Garda
Anno Scolastico 2016-2017

PROGETTO
ALTERNANZA SCUOLA LAVORO
Classe 4 B Linguistico

GUIDED TOUR
NOTEBOOK

Sirmione
The Grottoes of Catullus

The Grottoes of Catullus



6. Les grottes de Catulle. Voyage pittoresque au lac de Garda ou Benaco (1824)



7. Luigi Basiletti, Le grotte di Catullo (1832)

THE GROTTUES OF CATULLUS → **deceiving** name

ORIGIN During the Renaissance the name GROTTUES or CAVES was used for **ruined structures buried under vegetation, looking like natural caves** Paintings (1814, 1822) show the site at the beginning of the 19th century

CATULLUS According to a tradition dating back to the 15th-16th century: the property was identified as the family Villa of Roman poet Catullus (87-54 BC)

In the **Renaissance: great interest for antiquity and Classical Art.** No historical perspective.

Latin poets were translated. Catullus was well-known.

Catullus was from a **rich family from Verona**

Sirmione (In Latin: **SIRMIO**) is mentioned in many of his poems, including **Carme 31**, where homecoming was praised to a unique and exclusive site

From Catullus' poems we understand

- he had a home in Sirmione
- Sirmione was an important station on the road connecting Verona to Brescia

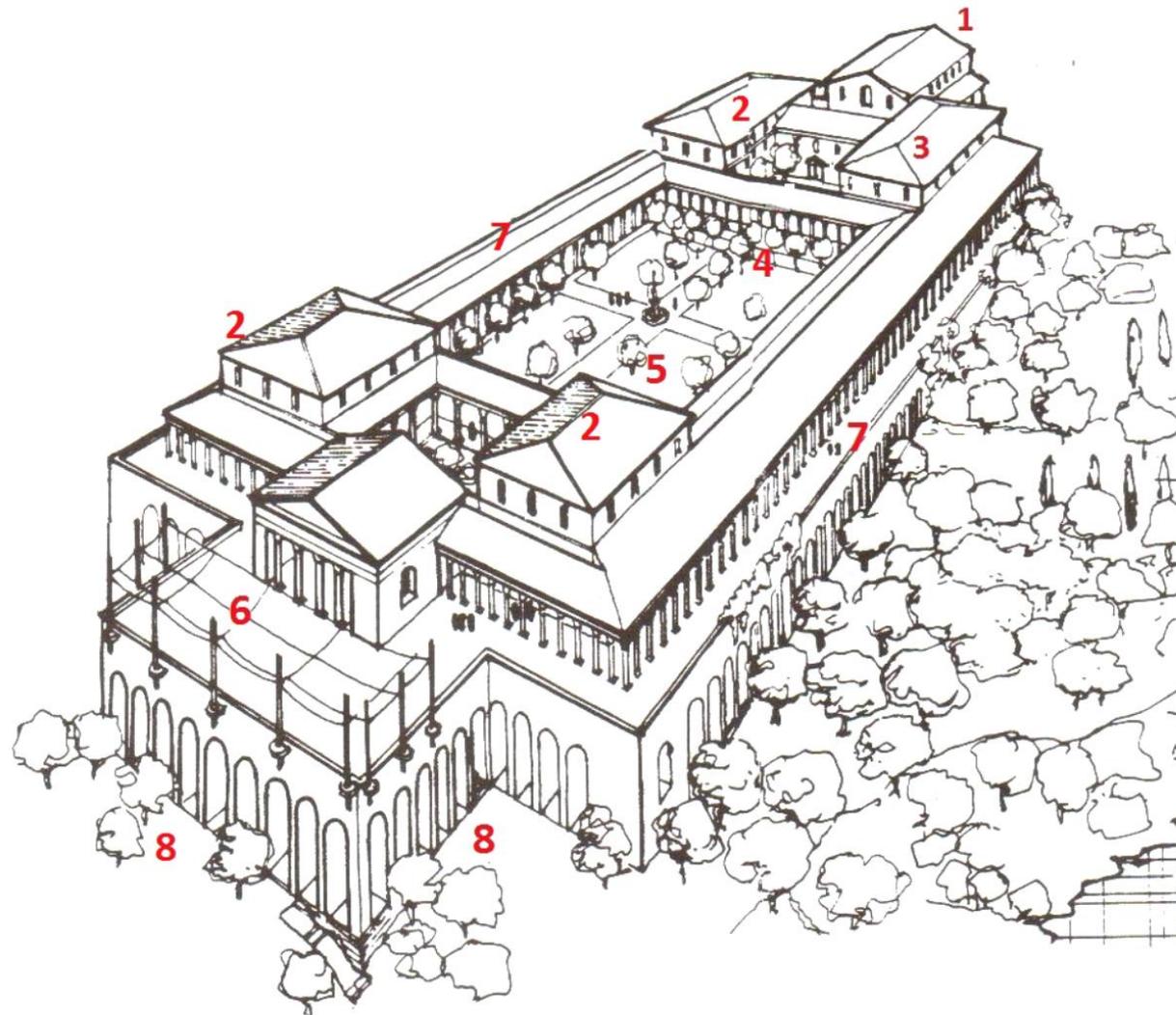
Sirmione, perla delle penisole e delle isole,
di tutte quante, sulla distesa di un lago trasparente o del mare
senza confini, offre il Nettuno delle acque dolci e delle salate,
con quale piacere, con quale gioia torno a rivederti;
a stento mi persuado d'aver lasciato la Tinia e le contrade di Bitinta,
e di poterti guardare in tutta pace.
Ma c'è cosa più felice dell'essersi liberato dagli affanni,
quando la mente depone il fardello e stanchi
di un viaggio in straniere regioni siamo tornati al nostro focolare
e ci stendiamo nel letto desiderato?
Questa, in cambio di tante fatiche, è l'unica soddisfazione.
Salve, amabile Sirmione, festeggia il padrone,
e voi, onde del lago di Lidia, festeggiatelo:
voglio da voi uno scroscio di risate, di tutte le risate che avete.

But Catullus was **certainly not the owner** of the villa because it did not exist during Catullus' lifetime.

Though the remains of an earlier Villa of the Republican Age have recently been discovered at a lower level, the complex dates back to the Augustan Age. The Villa was probably abandoned around the 3rd Century AD.

A luxurious Villa of the Augustan Age

- ① ingresso
- ② stanze
- ③ terme
- ④ grande cisterna
- ⑤ giardino
- ⑥ terrazza
- ⑦ porticato
- ⑧ sostruzioni



The real sight → **A grand luxurious Villa of the Augustan Age**
a **huge rectangular building 167 x 105 meters** with two projections on the shorter sides on a sloping rock terrace at the tip of the Sirmione peninsula. Probably used as a summer residence by members of the **Roman aristocracy**. Might be connected to the Emperor's family.

A site with a **unique view** on the Lake It covers an area of more than **2 hectares** (=5 acres)

The largest and most luxurious private building in the whole of Northern Italy.

EXCAVATIONS

1801

First plan drawn by Napoleon's General La Combe St Michel

Mid **19th** century

First extensive archeological excavations by count Giovanni Girolamo Orti Manara (published in an interesting illustrated book)

1948

the site becomes public property and **major excavations** start
the well-preserved rooms in the western part of the building are brought to light

Recent investigations have dated the Villa to **the Augustan Age** (last decades of 1st century BC – early decades of the 1st century AD) and confirm that the building was created as a single project

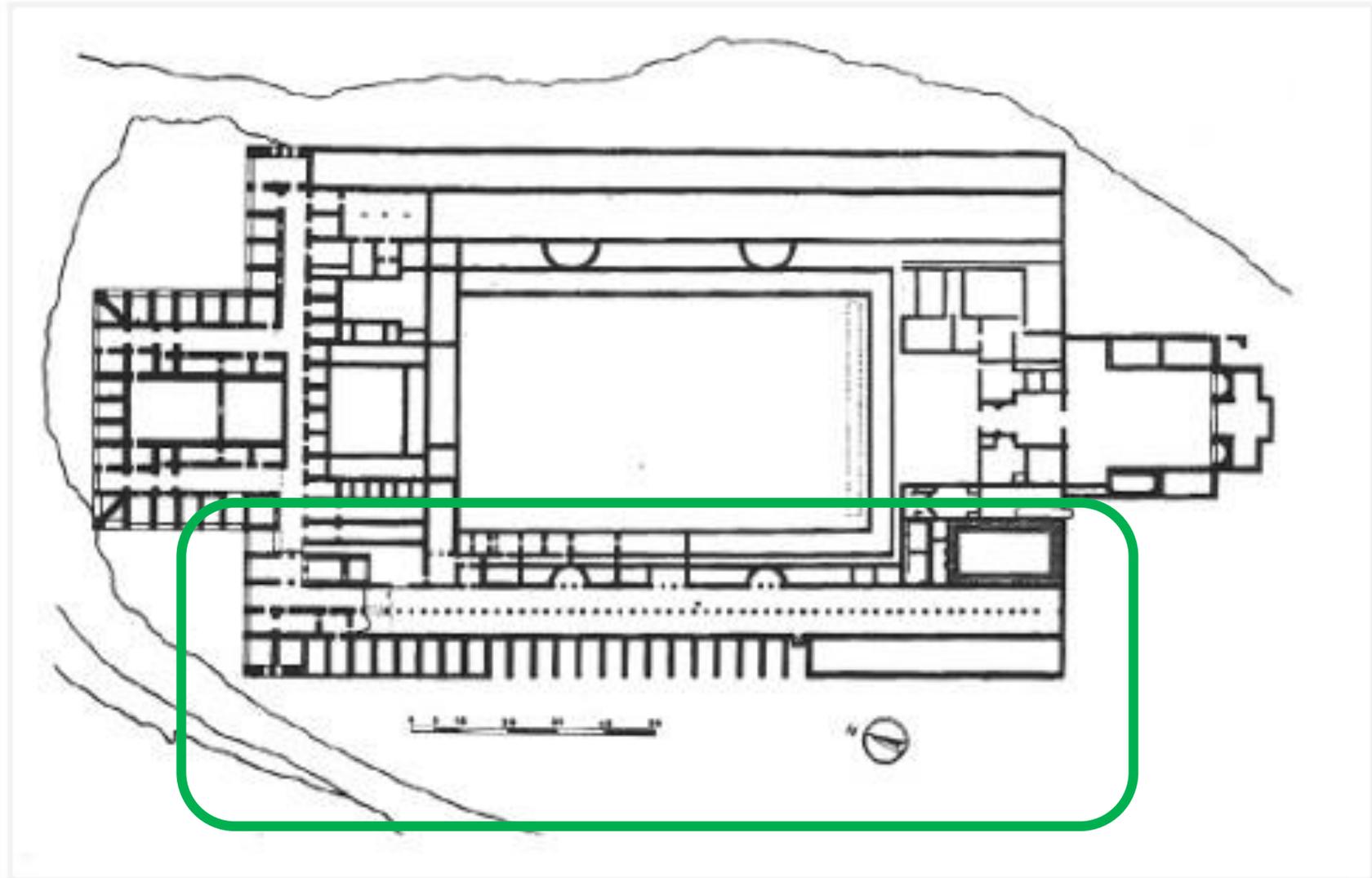
ROMAN VILLAS in the Lake Garda area

Roman Villa at Desenzano about 11,000 square meters, built between 1st century BC and 4th century AD

Villa at Toscolano Maderno, only partly excavated, 1st-5th century AD

Remains in Via Antiche Mura, Sirmione, of a large building used between the Augustan Age and the beginning of the 6th century

The Cryptoporticus - Covered passageway (No 7)



The Cryptoporticus – Covered passageway (No 7)

The Villa lies on a **North-West / South-East** axis.
looks out onto the lake on **3 sides**, with a unique view.
is the result of a successful **fusion of architecture and nature**.

The Villa stands **on a rocky base** sloping towards the lake northward and westward
Sloping ground → structure **resting on different heights**
→ even level created by **cutting the rock**
→ **substructures** necessary to **support some parts of the main floor**

(The highest substructures are on the opposite side of the building, under the North Terrace.)

Southern side: **double cryptoporticus** (159 meters long) obtained by artificially cutting the rock.
→ Impressive undertaking even today with modern machinery!

Divided by a **series of pillars** supporting two large sections of **barrel vaulting**.

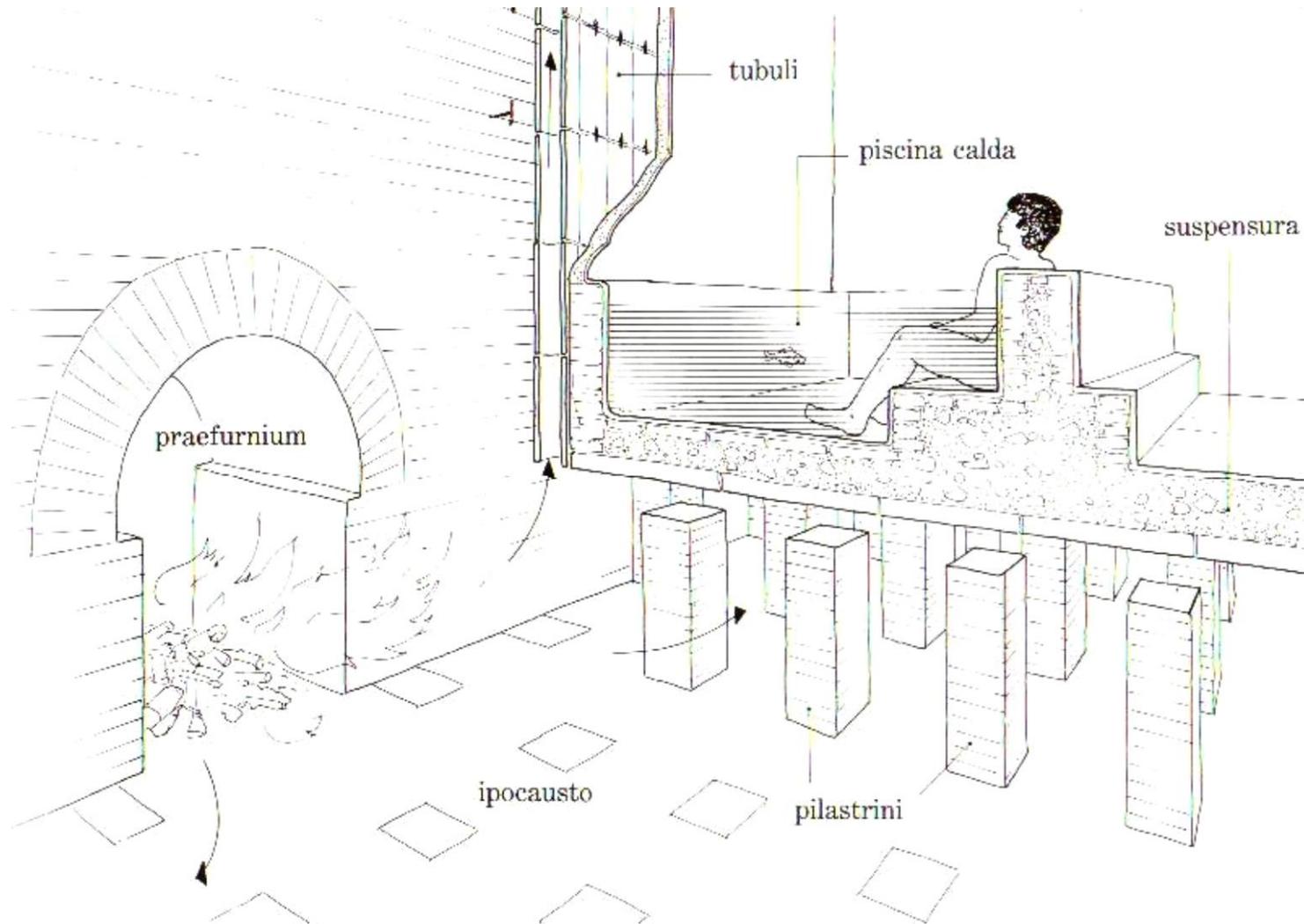
Difficult to imagine **what the Villa looked like**, as:

- the best preserved parts belong to the substructure
- Residential quarters **despoiled of valuable building materials** (columns, bricks, stone, marble), quarried from the villa for centuries, since the 3rd century AD, when the villa was abandoned.
- Ground floor and basement preserved because they were **hidden by layers of soil and vegetation**.

Walls built mainly of **local chippings** [*schegge, frammenti*], obtained from quarrying the rock when preparing the building site, bound with **mortar** [*malta*]. The walls were **plastered** [plaster = *intonaco*].

Pillar basements are original / the **upper parts and the arches** were re-erected during the 1954 restorations with **original materials**.

The Baths (No 3)



Roman Baths (No 3)

- part of the day-to-day life in Ancient Rome. Roman houses had water supplied via **lead pipes**.
- **different from today's Spas**. **Spa** = mineral-rich water is used to give **medicinal baths**. Spa towns or spa resorts (including hot springs resorts) typically offer various health treatments.
- **Roman Baths** used for **personal hygiene**, as a **gathering point**, with **community and social function**. Here people could **relax, keep clean** and **keep up with the latest news**.

Different areas: a cold bath (the *Frigidarium*), a warm bath (the *Tepidarium*) and a hot bath (the *Calidarium*). In a large complex would also the changing rooms (*Apodyterium*), an exercise area (the *Palaestra*), a swimming pool and a gymnasium.

Hypocaust system: floor raised above the ground by pillars and hot air circulating below
Furnaces: to heat the water. Excellent engineering skills to heat up and distribute the water!

In the Villa: ample Baths with several rooms, probably **added at the beginning of the 2nd century AD**.
Unusually large for a Villa of this period.

Uncovered during the 19th century excavations:

- the so-called **Piscina** or Bathing pool, which was probably a *Tepidarium*
- an **apsed chamber** with baths, probably a *Calidarium*
- a **circular chamber** with 4 niches, no longer visible, which contained a *Frigidarium* and also a *Laconicum* and a *Sudatio*, a sort of Sauna with hot air and vapour for sweating

Fragments of stucco have been found in the Cryptoporticus underneath.

Stucco was used in thermal plants to make the walls waterproof.

The Entrance (No 1)

**The western
Cryptoporticus (No 7)**

The Baths (No 3)

The Cistern (No 4)

The Courtyard (No 5)

The North Terrace (No 6)



The Entrance (No 1)

Entrance in the **projecting section of the Southern shorter side**.

Little is preserved → building materials were spoiled and re-used and the area was given over to cultivation.

Near the Entrance a small water cistern, called **The Bath**, one of the 7 water reservoirs of the Villa.

Room 88 - vast dimensions (about 220 square metres), might have been a **Triclinium** (Dining Hall).
- simple original **mosaic paving** of small white tesserae surrounded by black borders.
- over 5000 **painted plaster fragments** found in this area, some now in the Museum.
- **Test trenches** beneath the floor discovered a building pre-dating the Villa and dated the Villa to the Augustan Age (27 BC – 14 DC, about 50 years after Catullus' death, 54 BC).

Stratigraphy key concept to modern archaeology, for archaeological finds below the surface.

Finds identify the '**context**' → give clues about the site and about the nature and period of its occupation.

Close attention paid to the archeological layers: the material found at a certain depth (pottery, coins, objects) is compared to similar findings. Finds and features are placed in sequence and the dates interpolated.

Previous excavations only aimed at **unearthing the ancient building**, with no concern for the different strata. Findings were classified and arranged according to **type** and **function**.

Lake Lookout Point (East side of the Entrance). You can see the sulphurous hot water springing at a temperature 70°C (degrees Celsius) from **sorgente Boiola**, discovered in 1889. The water is now used for the treatment of respiratory and rheumatic diseases.

On the western shore you can spot **Peschiera, Lazise, Bardolino** and **Garda**.

The Courtyard (No 5) The Cistern (No 4)



Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Lombardia

G. Laidelli

The Courtyard (No 5)

Large *Peristilium* **rectangular colonnaded courtyard** (about 400 square metres)

- probably decorated with **statues**, like the marble head of one of the **Dioscuri** (in Greek and Roman mythology, the twin brothers Castor and Pollux), housed in the Museum.
- now a large **olive grove**, was certainly laid out as a pleasure garden (**Viridarium**) and was flanked on all sides by **covered porticoes**.

East and West Terraces were embellished with **whole-length colonnades**, also at North and South sides.

West Terrace → supported by the double barrel-vaulted Cryptoporticus,

East Terrace → at ground level.

The Cistern (No 4)

Large underground cistern on the south side of the Courtyard

- herring-bone brick paving (**Opus spicatum**) 47 meters in length perfectly preserved
- barrel-vaulted and paved with small rectangular bricks.
- the same type of paving was used in the long panoramic porticoes on the Western and Northern sides and on the Belvedere Terrace of the Northern Avant-corps.

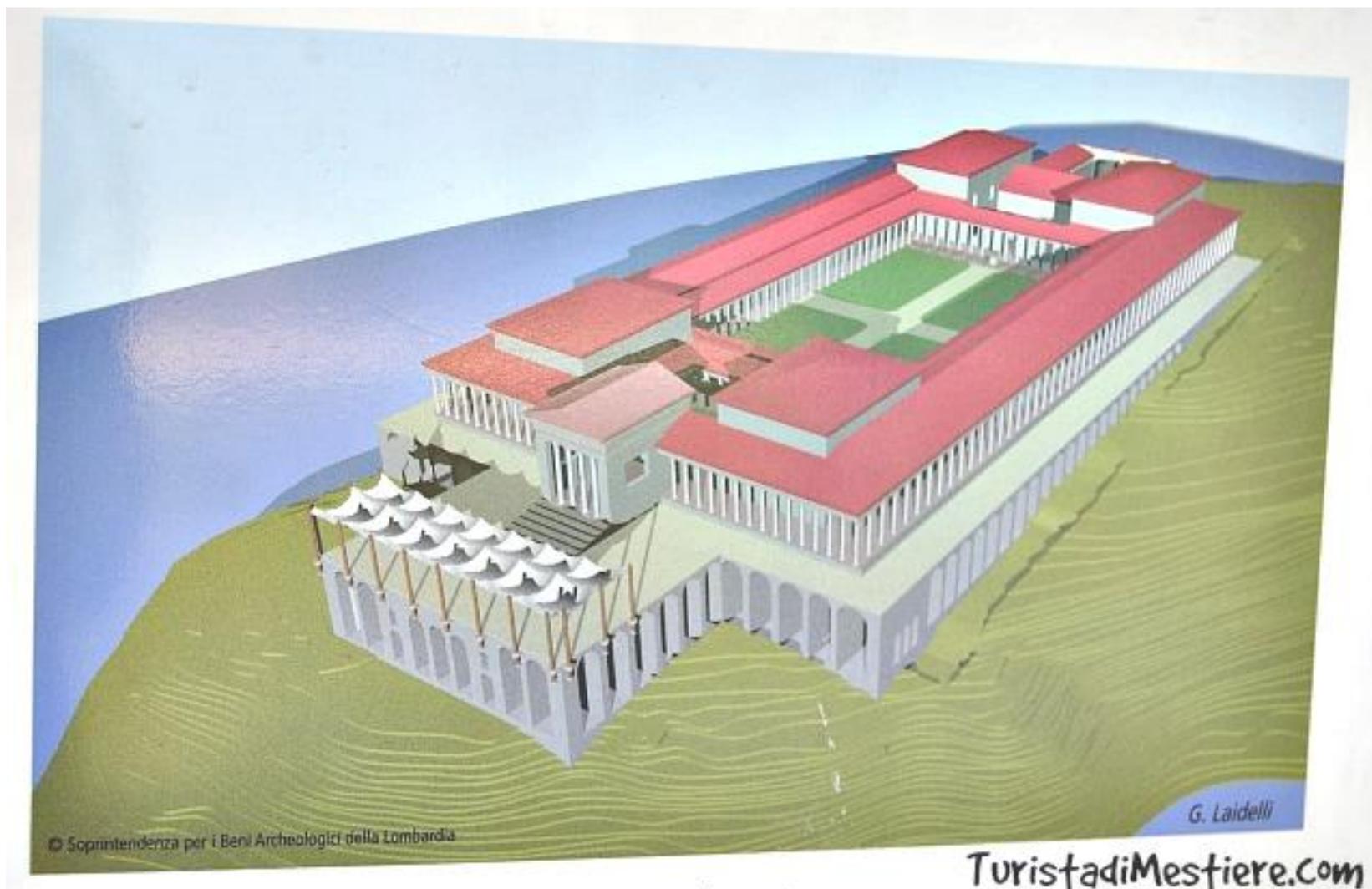
To collect **rainwater from the porticoes** of the colonnade

Drawn from well heads, the supply was sufficient to meet the entire needs of the Villa.

The water used for the Baths and the Garden was **NOT pumped up from the lake**, which lies 50-60 meters below. Rainwater was collected in a series of **large cisterns** located at **the higher level**.

Smaller cisterns are visible under the North Terrace, connected by a system of declining pipes and conduits

The North Terrace (6)



The North Terrace (6)

Wide belvedere Terrace (three pillared-prospect) located in the **Northern Avant-corp**

- supported by **grandiose underpinnings** (=puntelli).
- part of the **vaulted roof** still visible in the north-east corner of the northern avant-corps,
- with the **original herring-bone brick paving** (*Opus spicatum*).

The use of this type of paving was common in external areas and rustic quarters of Roman Villas.

Large window divided by two small pillars called **The Window of Paradise**, with a wide view across the Lake.

The Hall of the Giants → large **terraced quadrangle** flanked by two ramped side passages
→ fragments of **wall plaster** visible on some of the walls

(Fancy name: common in the 19th century to label the rooms with evocative names to impress the visitors)

- **Large wedge-shaped** (=cuneiformi) **keystones** (=chiave di volta) collapsed from the ceiling
- **Base blocks pierced through by holes** probably used to support the **poles** of a **Velarium**, (awning, shelter)
- The terrace was **not covered** by permanent roofing.
- It was protected in the heat of summer by a **mobile awning system**.

Putlog (or Putlock) holes (=Buche pontaise) → small holes made in the walls of structures to receive the ends of poles (small round logs) or beams **to support a scaffolding**.

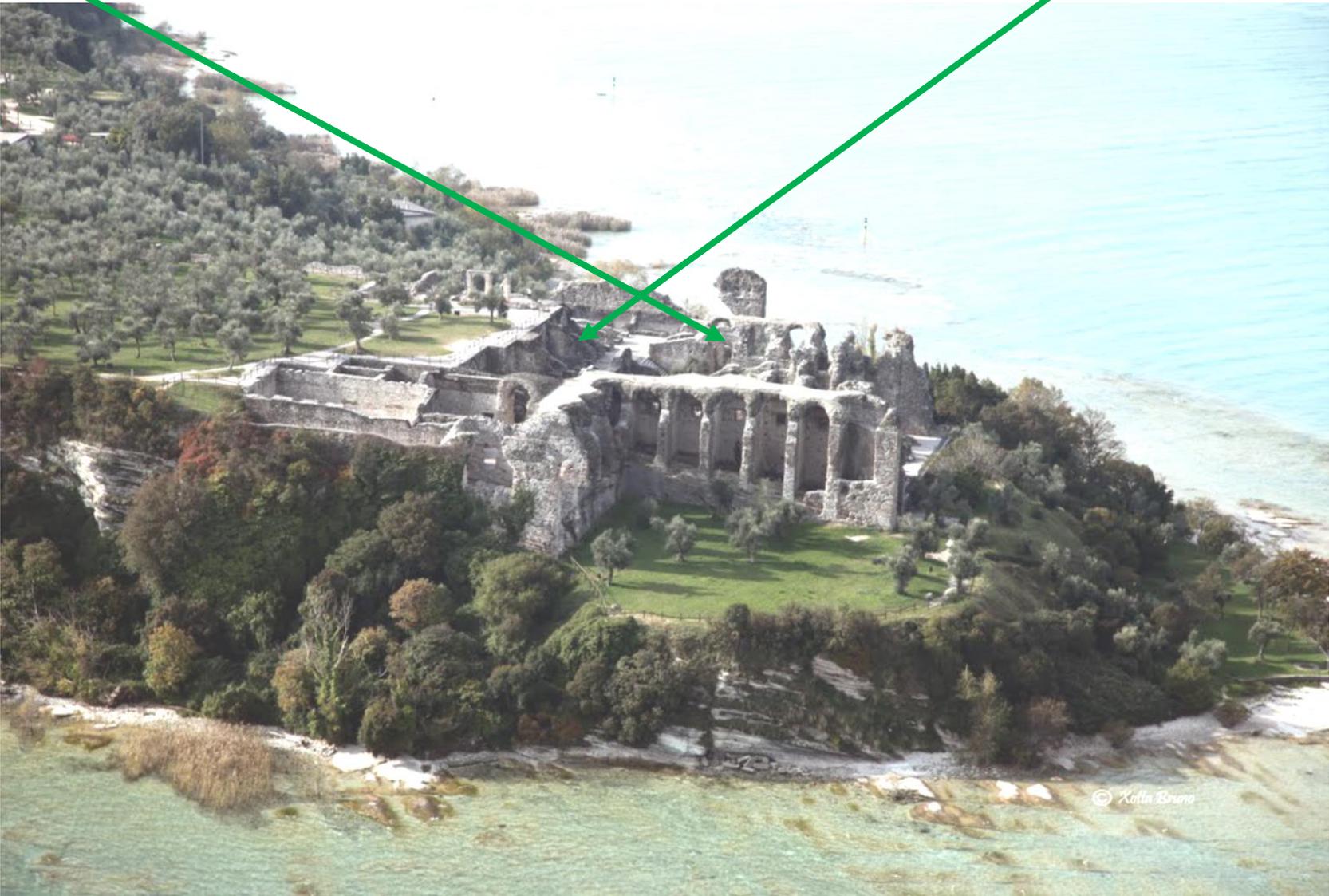
In different parts of the Villa: → five-sided openings in the walls for the **erection of scaffolding** (=impalcature)

→ to ease the **movement of materials** during construction work.

→ later covered by **layers of plaster**

→ used in some cases to **insert wooden beams** (=pali, travi) and rafters (=travi) supporting **permanent wooden structures**

The North Terrace (6) The Long Corridor (8)



The Long Corridor (8)

Long Corridor, decorated with figural and vegetal motifs of good quality (fragments displayed in the Museum)

The Northern front is the only area where the residential quarters were supported by

→ **15 underlying chambers**, the *Cubicula* (Guest Rooms or Bedrooms),

- a **succession of vaulted rooms** along the southern side of the Corridor.
- **disproportionately high vault** necessary to compensate the steep sloping ground.
- part of the **vault at the east end** is still intact.

Last chamber Recent excavations (1996) conducted with the stratigraphic method, evidence of the **exact dating of the Villa to the Augustan Age** (27 BC – 14 DC, about 50 years after Catullus' death, 54 BC).

A particular **type of vase** was found in the lower strata, which was only made by an **identified potter** who lived in the 1st century AD,

The **Workshops** Remains of the **Western Sub-structures**, with parts of the large saw-toothed walls.

Basement rooms of **equal size**, but **variable height** according to the rock level.

Originally roofed with **tufo stone vaulting**, large pieces of which lie on the ground together with **parts of the Cocciopesto** (*Opus signinum*) from the floor above.

Cocciopesto building material made of **tiles, lime and sometimes pottery**, broken up into **very small pieces**, mixed **with mortar**, and then **beaten down with a rammer** (= *pestello, maglio*)

Other Places of Interest

The so-called **Hall of the Three Pillars**,

lit by small splayed (= *strombate, svasate nello spessore del muro*) windows on the east wall.

The **Walnut Field** one of the most pleasant spots in the archeological site.

overall view of the North-East sector, with the **substructures at their greatest height**.

- they **rise from the solid rock** and are artificially cut to a depth of 6 metres.
- the **tufo stone vaulting** is still in place.
- on the North-Western side of the Villa, great effort was made to **compensate the uneven surface** of the ground by means of these structures

Horse Grotto

a large hall with vaulted ceiling which supports part of the Long corridor flanked by other chambers, probably used as **service rooms** or cellars.

Medieval Fortifications Along the pathway leading to the Exit, on the left

- **remains of a wall**, made of stone chippings on a herring-bone pattern
- they were erected in early **Medieval times** (3rd-4th ce.), when Sirmione was moved to its present site.
- they **surrounded the entire headland** as part of the whole defence system of the promontory.

Museum

Built in **1959** and later enlarged, displays samples of the various finds and items of interest discovered during the excavation work at the Villa:

- Reproductions of **old prints and plans** of the Villa, with extracts from the account of travelers visiting the Grottoes
- **Head of one of the Dioscuri**, discovered in 1941 during work on the large cistern. Broken off at the neck, it is identified by the typical casque or *pilos*, a conical helmet on the curly hair. The Dioscuri **Castor and Pollux**, twin sons of Zeus, were represented together as protectors of sailors, patrons of journeys, trade and hospitality. This piece is a Replica, that is a Roman copy from a Greek model.
- **Coins**: the oldest pieces about 64-50 BC, numerous coins of the 4th century AD
- **Personal adornment**: bracelets with serpent heads 4th-5th century AD, fibulae (buckles)
- **Fragmented wall paintings** from the Hall of the Three Pillars, part of a complex group of wall paintings:
 - **marine landscape** with a sailing boat approaching a rocky shoreline with two fishermen and a rowing boat moving away from the shore in the background
 - virile figure of a **poet** in the toga with a book (*volumen*) in his hand; it maybe a **portrait of Catullus**
 - **wrestler** scraping the sweat from his body while a masculine bearded figure stands by
- **Earthenware** (or Pottery): plates, vases, mugs, cooking pots, amphorae and other vessels, part of the table and kitchenware. **Combined with stratigraphical data** from the most recent excavations they are the **base of the dating evidence** of the Villa.

F.A.Q

Why was Sirmione important in the past?

Sirmione was known in ancient times as a **Mansio**, or rest-house, a **stopping place** between two towns at a distance that could not be travelled in one day.

It was **exactly half way between Brescia and Verona**, 33 km (33 Roman miles) from either of them. It lay along a minor road, the **Via Gallica**, linking Milan – Bergamo – Brescia (Brixia) – Verona, where it joined a major road, **Via Postumia**, connecting Genoa to Aquileia and crossing the entire width of Northern Italy.

Numerous **Milestones** found in the area testify the importance of the road: see some of them in the Museum, three at the Scaliger Castles, one at the Entrance gate to Sirmione and elsewhere.

Its **unique location** offered an impressive view from the Northern end of a peninsula which stretches **over 2 miles into Lake Garda** between the bay of Desenzano and the bay of Peschiera

Who was the owner of the Villa?

Impossible to suggest the names of the owners. Unquestionably, it must have belonged to a **person of high rank**, if not directly related to the **imperial family**. Close parallels can only be found in prestigious villas of Campania and Latium (the regions around Pompeii and Rome)

What older building underlies the Villa?

There is evidence of an early construction in the Southern sector, the so-called **U-shaped Villa** with projecting wings, dating from the middle of the 1st century BC (Republican period).

The older villa was **totally demolished** before constructing the new one to a totally different design.

Why was it abandoned? What events caused its decline and collapse?

Impossible to say. The existence of burial places, both inside and outside the Villa point to the abandonment of the Villa. Grave furnishings, coins, bracelets and buckles suggest that the end came in the **4th-5th century AD**

What construction materials were used?

The choice of materials was determined by **structural requirements**: the height of the walls and the weight they carried.

Materials used: **mortared pebble stones, mortar-bound brick, rock fragments/chippings, limestone (=calcare), tufo** stone (a type of volcanic rock made of ash compacted into a solid rock in a process of consolidation). Tuff is a lightweight, relatively soft rock used for construction since ancient times.

Alternate courses of brickwork and rock chips, were also used to give greater stability

Why are some parts of the building called with fancy names?

In the **19th century** it was common to label the rooms with **fictitious names**, incorrect in most cases, to impress the visitors and suggest an imaginary use in the past: *Grottoes of Catullus, Hall of the Giant, Horse Grotto, Workshops*, etc.

Catullus, Carme XXXI

Paene insularum, Sirmio, Insularumque
ocelle, quascumque in liquentibus stagnis
marique vasto fert uterque neptunus,
quam te libenter quamque laetus in viso,
vix mi ipse credens Thyniam atque Bithynos
liquisse campos et videre te in tuto.
O quid solutis est beatus curis,
cum mens onus reponit, ac peregrino
labore fessi venimus larem ad nostrum,
desideratoque acquiescimus lecto?
Hoc est quod unum est pro laboribus tantis.
Salve, o venusta Sirmio, atque ero gaude
gaudente; vosque, o Lydiae lacus undae,
ridete quidquid est dome cachinnorum.

Sirmio, jewel of islands and of peninsulas,
Whatever each Neptune carries
In the stagnant clear waters and in the vast sea,
How gladly and how happy I see you,
Scarcely myself believing myself that I have left behind
Thynia and the Bithynian fields and that I see you in safety.
O what is more blessed than cares freed,
When the mind puts down its burden,
And we tired from foreign labor come
To our hearth and rest in a longed for bed?
This is that which is the one thing for such great labors.
Greetings, O beautiful Sirmio, and rejoice in your master rejoicing;
And you, O Lydian waves of the lake,
Laugh whatever there is of laughter at home.

Sirmione, perla delle penisole e delle isole,
di tutte quante, sulla distesa di un lago trasparente o del mare
senza confini, offre il Nettuno delle acque dolci e delle salate,
con quale piacere, con quale gioia torno a rivederti;
a stento mi persuado d'averle lasciato la Tinia e le contrade di Bitinta,
e di poterti guardare in tutta pace.
Ma c'è cosa più felice dell'essersi liberato dagli affanni,
quando la mente depone il fardello e stanchi
di un viaggio in straniere regioni siamo tornati al nostro focolare
e ci stendiamo nel letto desiderato?
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Salve, amabile Sirmione, festeggia il padrone,
e voi, onde del lago di Lidia, festeggetelo:
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