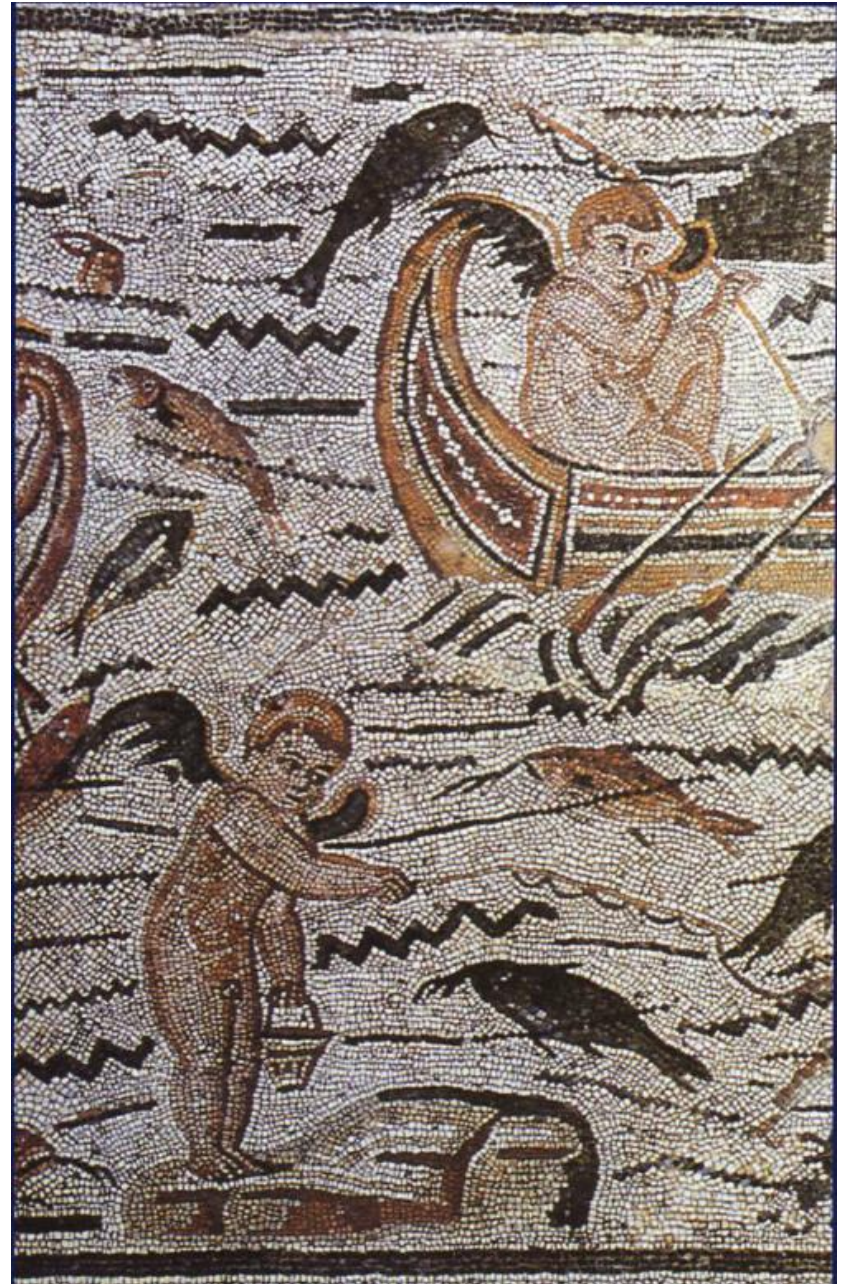


**Liceo Statale “G. Bagatta” –
Desenzano del Garda**

**GUIDED TOUR
NOTEBOOK**

**Desenzano del Garda
Roman Villa**



INTRO

The Villa originally stood in a **highly scenic spot**, facing towards the lake, just a short distance to the north of **Via Gallica**, the main road connecting Bergamo (Bergomum), Brescia (Brixia) and Verona.

It was built in **different stages** between the 1st century B.C. and the 4th century A.D.: the parts that can still be seen today mostly date back to the last stage, when the spaces inside the villa were reorganised and divided into different sectors.

There were at least 5 significant interventions over the ages, before it was abandoned in the 5th century.

Although the name of the owner of the villa is uncertain, it is possible that the person who ordered this final stage of the works was **Flavius Magnus Decentius**, brother of the Emperor Magnentius (350 – 353 A.C.), from whom the city of Desenzano takes its name today.

Some dates

1st half of 1st century AD

Group of rooms under the museum

2nd half of 1st century AD

General layout of Area A & B

1st half of 4th century AD

Complete rebuilding now visible

Excavation

1921-1923 Area A excavated

1928-1930 Area A restored

1663-1976 Area A completed

Area B and C brought to light

1988 excavation resumed

1990 Areas B C D protected with covers

Area of about one hectare.

Area A and areas B C D separated by a road

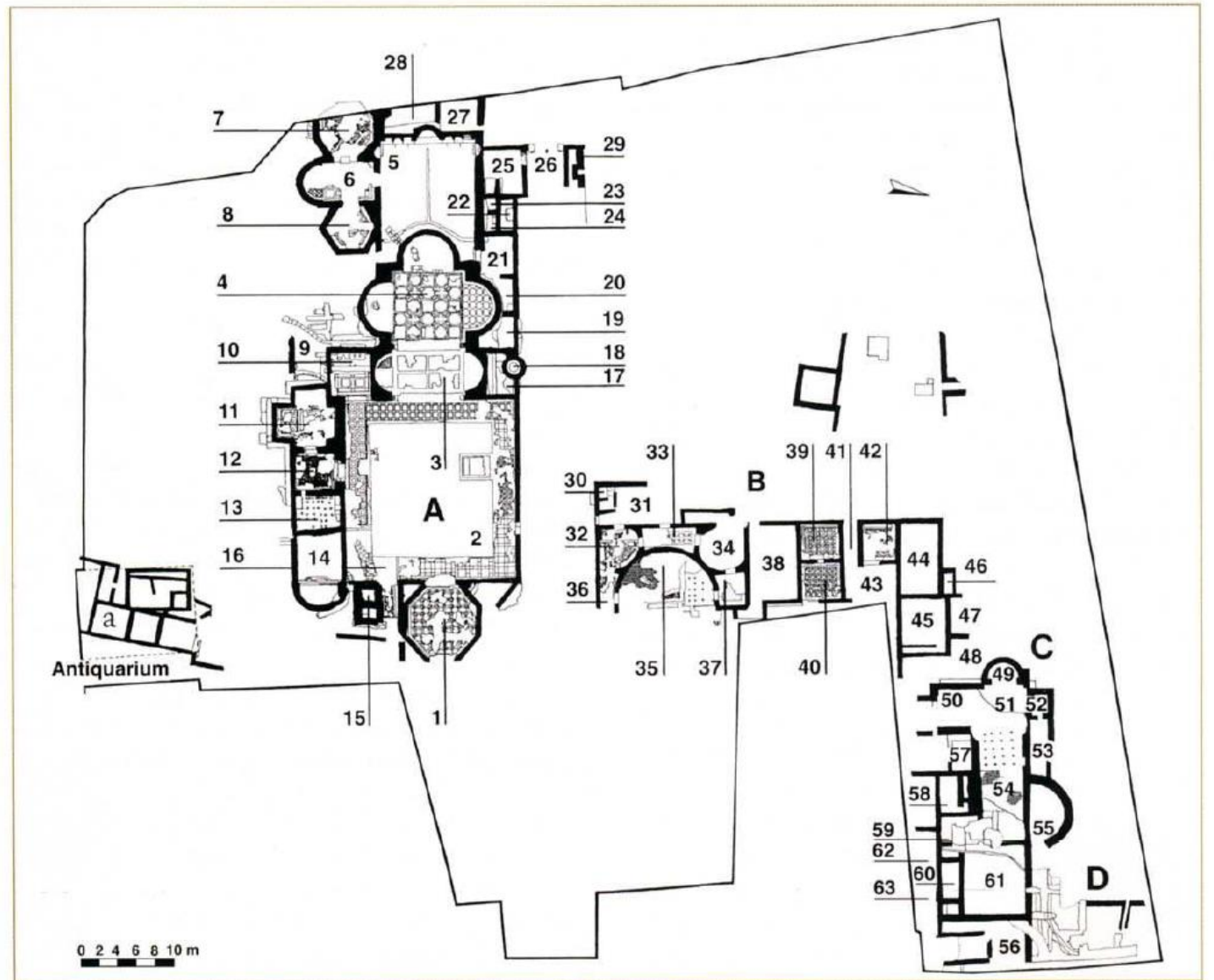
Location: North of Via Gallica and on the lake (today less than 70 meters away)

The front door was once facing the lake.

The villa complex covered a surface area of around a hectare, in which the **residential quarters** stood alongside **farm buildings**.

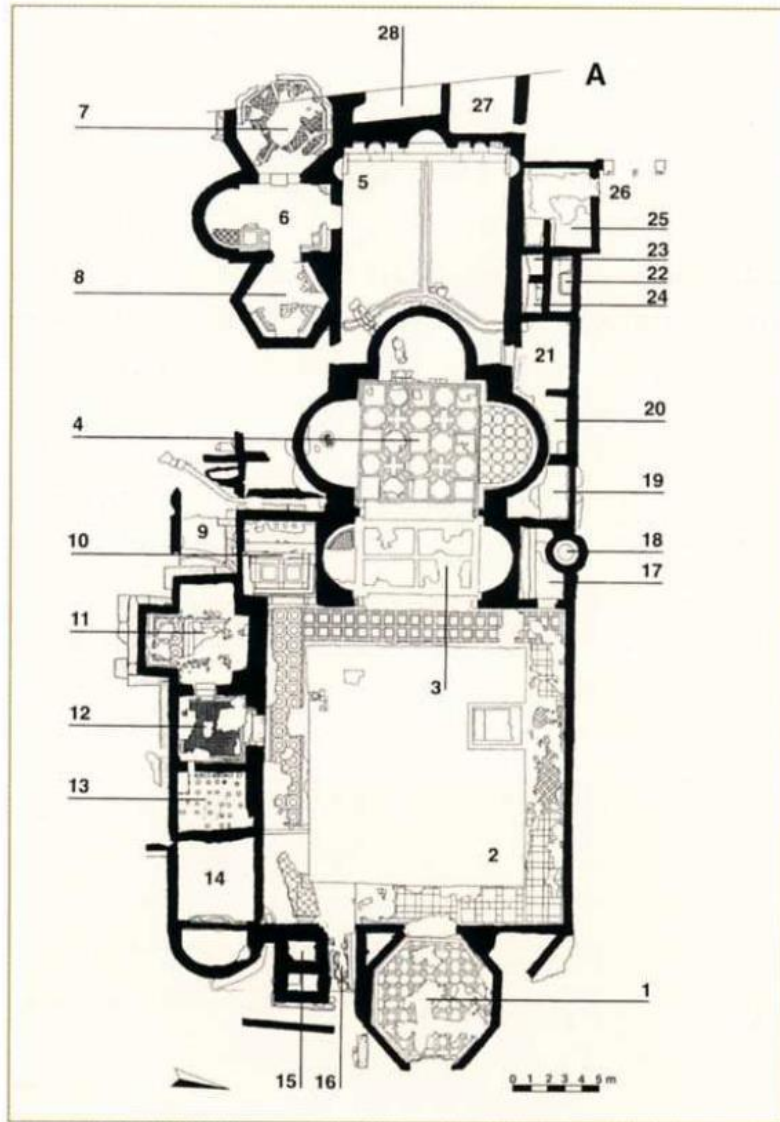
At the time of its construction, the villa looked over the lake. The surrounding landscape must have been the decisive element in the distribution of the rooms, which all offered a panoramic view.

The site had a number of ramifications made of **piers and quays**, and probably ponds where the fish was farmed. Several charming and **well-preserved coloured mosaic floors** portray pagan scenes.



Area A

High-status functions; mainly residential area



Sequence of luxurious ceremonial rooms

1. THE VESTIBULE.

Way into the villa, where guests were received

Octagonal room with mosaics of geometric shapes.

Overlooking the lake, was originally flanked by piers and docks



2. THE PERISTYLE

Open space surrounded by columns on 4 sides

Colonnade decorated with frescoes



3. ATRIUM Large two-winged room, one of the most splendid ceremonial rooms, used for banquets and to receive guests. Once linked to the *trichora* by a colonnade.

Decorated with mosaics divided in 4 sections, arranged to welcome both perspectives of those entering and leaving the room.

Winged cherubs on boats and rocks, trying to catch fish leaping among the waves. Reference to the lakeside landscape

4. TRICHORA TRICLINIUM (dining room) with 3 apses

Apsidal hall with rooms behind the apsis Once decorated with refined paintings on the walls and splendid mosaics: winged cupids, animals chasing one another,

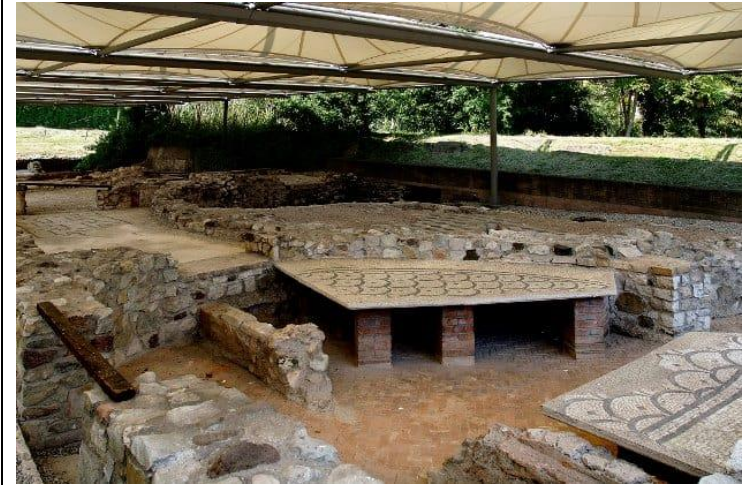
framed in geometric patterns of octagons and squares linked by crosses. 25 panels with cupids in various activities, like grapes harvesting, and beasts hunting one another. Repeated symmetries to be seen from different points of view.

Diners were lying on reclining couches placed in the apses. Left apse: black and white mosaic found under the Late Antiquity floor. Hole in the central apse, perhaps to host a fountain

Tribute to the art of Convivium entertaining company with poetry, dancing, conversation, food,



5 VIRIDARIUM (Garden) terminated by a Nymphaeum (monumental fountain with water flowing through a conduit). Decorated with statues now displayed in the Antiquarium (Museum)

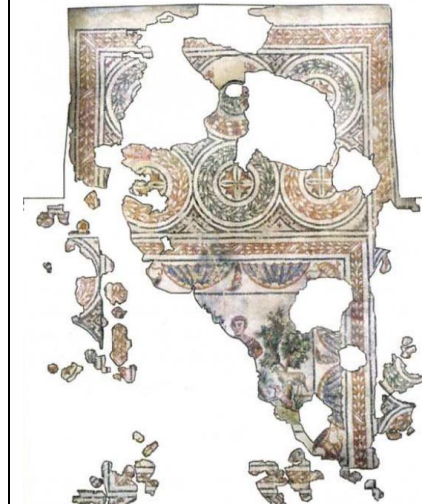


Rooms 11, 12, 13, 14

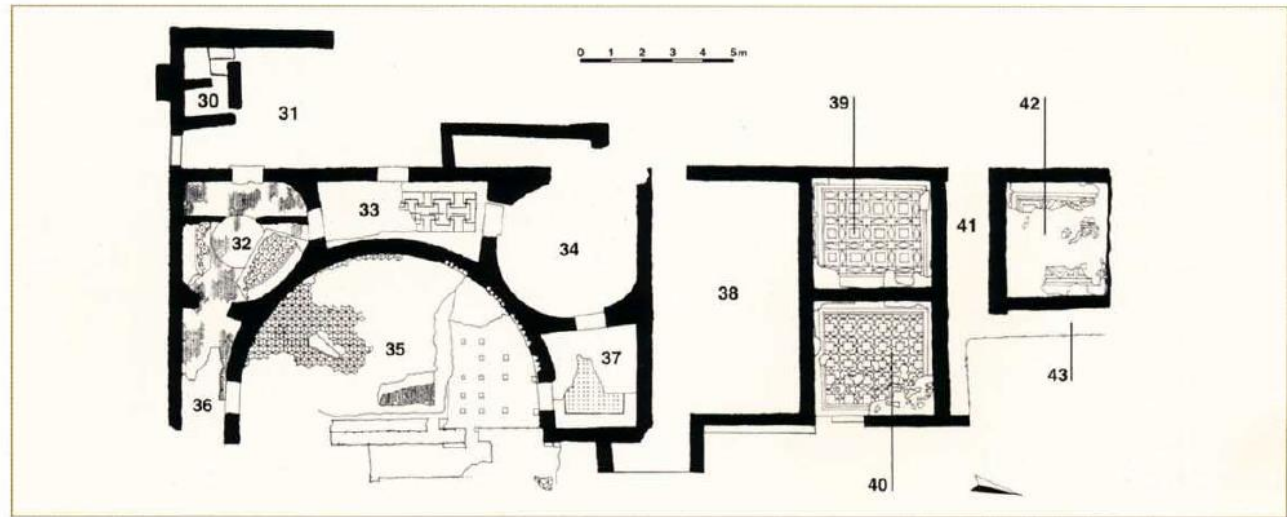
Bath complex heated by hypocausta

Room 11. Cruciform room, possibly a *cubiculum* (bedroom) with 2 alcoves

Geometric decoration of one of the alcoves and in the central area a male figure in a bucolic scene with animals and trees: Good Shepherd or Orfeo with animals



Area B



AREA B was first a production area, later transformed into a residential area, as the Villa was probably a residential building which sustained a significant agricultural activity

Various transformations visible in the various layers of the floors. Under the black and white mosaic you can see a red brick floor of the 1st century AD, with circular mark of an oil press. Area used for Workshops for grains, olives, grapes processing.

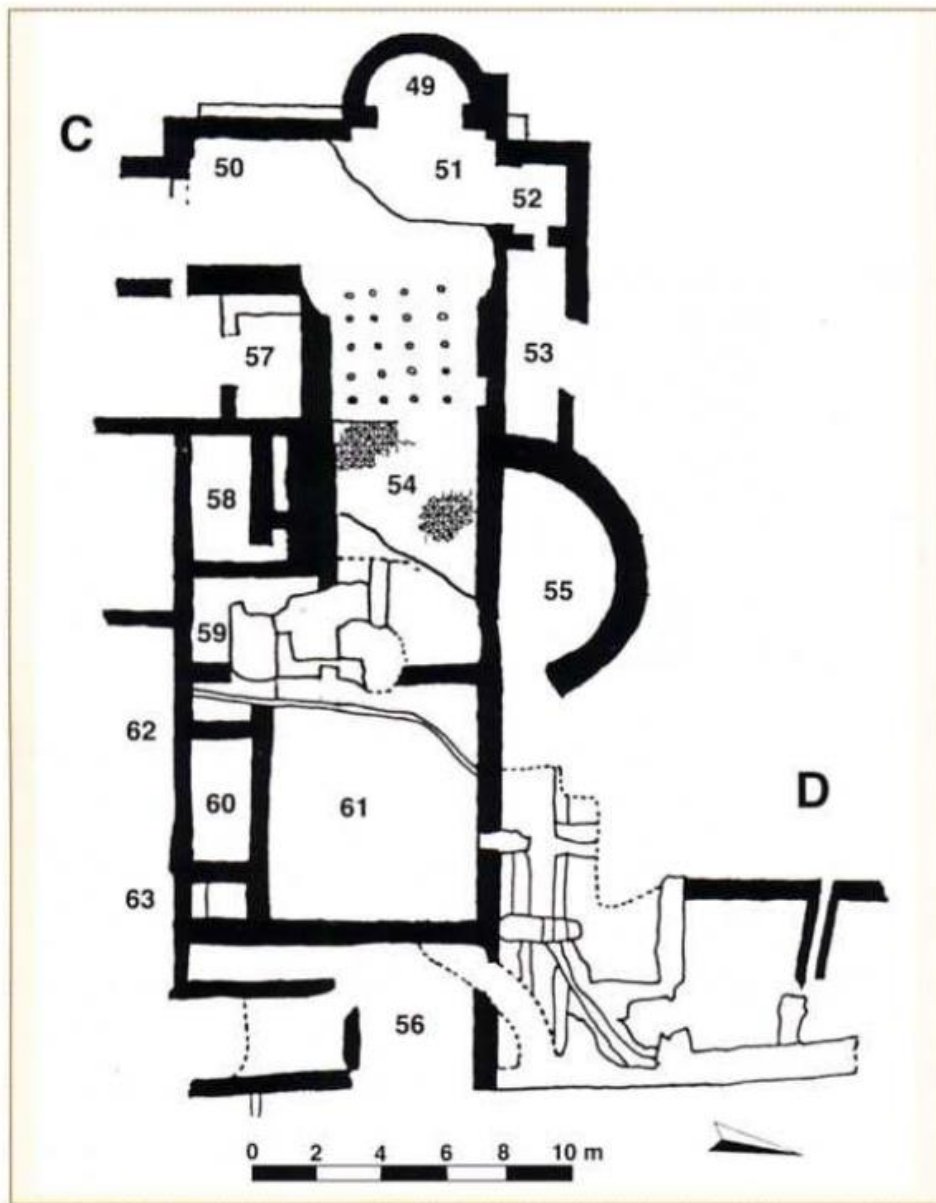
Older floors covered by new ones on different layers. Circular marks left by oil and grapes pressing machine Previous *pars rustica* (production areas), later transformed into a residential area with the large apse.

Around the apse, 5 rooms of different shapes in a semicircle, communicating but not symmetrical
Second group of rooms on the level below, decorated with mosaics some similar and some different from sector A, made by different craftsmen

35 Apse with *suspensurae* (small pillars supporting the floor and heated with hot air)

Function of Apse is unknown, not excluded Christian worship in the transition between late Roman and early Medieval period

39, 40 Geometric mosaics, secondary function of these rooms



Sector B C D not completely excavated, still to be studied

Area C

Seriously damaged by buildings in the 1970s. Use as thermal section in the Late Antiquity period.

Two large communicating rooms with hypocaust heating system

Traces of semicircular tub covered with marble, possibly the frigidarium

Room with apses was probably the calidarium

Area D



Production building with foundations dating back to the most ancient phase to the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD.

In Late Antiquity it was fully rebuilt and incorporate into the Thermal Bath sector

Traces of a sector F with another production area have been found outside the current archeological area. Linked with an internal road, probably access from the inland.

Antiquarium (Museum)

The most important findings in the villa area are on display in the three exhibition rooms in the Antiquarium. The first one houses ceramic kitchen and dining receptacles and small bronze utensils: amphoras, stone tiles, clay bricks, containers, pots, goblets, bowls, plates. Fragments of the statues, which decorated the villa, Hercules, Dionysus, portrait of a young man, are on display in the second hall. In the third hall, two large panels exhibit the fragments of a decorative fresco, which adorned one of the rooms in the villa.

	<p>Glass cup</p> <p>Dated to the late 4th century A.D., the image on the outer surface portrays Christ talking to a rooster. The nighttime scene, shown by the stars in the background, may be interpreted as alluding to Peter's triple denial of Christ, according to a famous passage from the Gospels.</p>
	<p>Portrait of a young man</p> <p>Portrait of a young man</p> <p>It is the case of a white Carrara marble bust of an adolescent, from a life-size statue. It is probably a celebratory representation of one of the owners' family members of the villa in the 2nd century A.D., according to a common custom among the various domus and villas at the time.</p>

Dionysus, the god of wine, in the headless statue of a young man moving. Identified by the goatskin covering part of his body and the presence of a panther (animal sacred to Dionysus) at his feet

Statue of Hercules



The white marble sculpture on display in the second hall dates back to the mid-2nd century A.D. Along with the other effigies exhibited in this room, it adorned one of the villa gardens, in particular either the one open to visitors or the one reserved for the owner and his family. The statue was inspired by models of the classical age



Compare and contrast to the Marble statue of bearded Hercules at New York Metropolitan Museum of Art