



# CAPRI

## La villa di

# Tiberio

Vesuvioweb

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La villa di Tiberio occupa sull'isola uno dei punti più alti dell'intera isola di Capri. Secondo una leggenda , in parte confermata dai ritrovamenti archeologici e da fonti bibliografiche, sull'isola di Capri, l'imperatore Tiberio Tiberio Giulio Cesare Augusto (in latino: Tiberius Iulius Caesar Augustus; Roma, 16 novembre 42 a.C. – Miseno, 16 marzo 37), fece costruire ben 12 dimore, ispirate ai segni dello zodiaco.

Oggi di queste presente archeologiche, eccetto la Villa Jovis, restano poche tracce.

Quella che presentiamo oggi in uno spaccato letterario, documentaristico e romantico dei primi del 1906, è la famosissima Villa Jovis o Palazzo dell'imperatore Tiberio, i cui resti sono inseriti nel Parco Astarita.

Il documento di oltre un secolo fa è commentato con un reportage fotografico recente (2009) che ha l'intento di voler documentare in parte uno dei più straordinari progetti architettonici di Villa Imperiale. Tra terrazzamenti, spianate artificiali e tagli della collina rocciosa, la villa si spingeva nell'angolo più orientale dell'isola, tanto da risultare vicinissima alla costa dello sperone calcareo della Penisola Sorrentina.

Un viaggio tra l'antico ed il moderno alla scoperta di un angolo di straordinaria bellezza: la Capri di "duemila" anni fa vista con gli occhi dell'imperatore.

A.L.

2020

## Villa Jovis

If anywhere in Capri, the magnificence and reality of the occupation and dominion of the Caesars, (whether Augustus or Tiberius, matters little), can be best appreciated, and moulded into concrete form, it is at the so called Villa Jovis at Tiberio, the extreme eastern point of the island, and that which is nearest to the mainland. The position itself is stupendous, and isolated in the highest degree, and seems to be formed by nature as the final retreat of a disappointed potentate. The cliffs drop straight into the sea, one thousand feet below, with menacing precipitousness, and the only approach, by means of a narrow causeway, could have been easily rendered unapproachable to over insistent friend or prying enemy.

In the other Palaces and Villas, to which we have referred, too heavy a strain may be put on the powers of imagination, which (luckily for the harmony of humanity) are very unequally developed in different individuals. We are shown a broken wall, a few pieces of "netted" brick work, or perhaps the shattered remnant of arch or cistern, and are required to reconstruct for ourselves an Imperial Palace glittering with gold, rich with marble statues of colossal size, parterres brilliant with glowing flowers, and peopled by the Ruler of the earth, and his gorgeous attendant retinue. This to many is difficult, if not impossible, and the tourist, unable to mount to the required heights of fancy, feels himself humiliated and out of touch with his surroundings, and doubtless hurries back to his Hotel table d'hôte, where he lustily execrates the phantasmal imaginings of Gregorovius and others. At Villa Jovis on the other hand, the most prosaic Briton can realise without too painful effort, that here indeed stood a mighty Imperial Palace. Here he sees for himself huge chambers, with arched roofs still intact, portions of tessellated pavements, fragments of marble columns, and traces of frescoes on the walls. To still further kindle the lagging imagination the visitor is advised to glance at the reproduction here given of an interesting drawing, made by the architect Sig. F. Alvino in 1853, which shows the remains of the Palace, as they then were. Weichardt observes; "the similarity of the apportionment of the apartments of the Palace of Augustus on the Palatine, and of this Imperial Palace is astonishing, excepting only that the apartments on the Palatine occupy an area four times as large. This fact must naturally lead us to the assumption, that our last and highest situated palace on Capri was built by Augustus, but possibly somewhat altered by Tiberius, that is to say so far as to suit his special purposes \ (" Capri \* Weichardt, p. 99 and 103).

The only one of the Palaces of Tiberius to which Suetonius gives a name is Villa Jovis; "Speculabundus ex altissima rupe identidem signa, quae ne nuntii morarentur, tolli procul ut quidque foret factum mandaverat. Verum et oppressa conjuratione Sejani, nihilo securior, aut constantior, per novem proximas menses non egressus est Villa quae vocatur Jovis \ (Suet, Tib, Chap, LXV). This passage may be translated as follows "Meanwhile he was upon the watch from the summit of a lofty cliff, for the signals which he had ordered to be made if anything occurred, lest the messengers should be tardy. Even when he had quite foiled the conspiracy of Sejanus, he was still haunted with fears and apprehensions, insomuch that he never once stirred out of the Villa Jovis for nine months". All the writers on Capri prior to Mackowen, have concluded that, we are in the presence of the Villa Jovis, thus described by Suetonius, and though I admit that, logical or definite proof on the point is wanting I am inclined to agree with them. Mackowen observes that there were other palaces "placed on lofty cliffs" besides the one at Tiberio, and mentions San Michele and Monte Solaro; and he contends that the fire-signals, that would be made in case of danger or conspiracy at Rome, would be made from Gaeta, which is on the Appian way, and nearer Rome than the Capo Minerva, (the point on the mainland nearest to Tiberio), "and that from either San Michele or Monte Solaro, such signals could be more easily seen, especially from the latter".

This is perfectly true, as far as it goes, but as we have endeavoured to prove (Chap. XIII. San Michele) no Imperial Palace, but a Temple, stood on that hill; at Monte Solaro there are no traces of a gigantic and magnificent Palace, such as exist at Tiberio. Again, it seems improbable that Tiberius would have elected to immure himself for nine months in so exposed and bleak a situation as Monte Solaro, which in winter is swept by every wind that blows, and is often immersed in fog clouds for days together. Apart from the existence at this day of such considerable remains at Tiberio, which clearly demonstrate the existence of an Imperial Palace, is the fact that, no more beautiful spot could have been selected by the Emperor in the whole island for his self-imposed confinement. A Palace placed here commands the entire island, is easily accessible to the landing place at Punta Tragara, and, as stated above, could be made inviolable to friend or foe.

" The palace of a Roman emperor had not, like a modern princely castle, in addition to a few state apartments, some five hundred rooms expressed externally by innumerable windows only, instead thereof, a few vast halls and apartments sufficed, together with a limited number of smaller chambers, for the needs of the ruler of the world. But these few areas were fitted out with the choicest of splendour: the most distant races were compelled to furnish the costliest kinds of marble and wood for the requirements of the Emperor, and the greatest masters required to hold their arts at his disposal. ... in view of the superabundance of statuary, together with the costly materials, the incrustations of the interior with gold, bronze, and marbles, the costliness of the paintings which distinguished this architectural age, the palaces on Caprae must have stood at the height of the times and have been monuments of imperial splendour \ C\* Capri \ Weichardt p. 122).

After passing the ruins of the light-house, (See Chap. VIII " Faro "), we come to the alledged Salto: from this point looking North, the ruins of the Imperial Villa lie before us. The present ascending path nearly follows the ancient principal stairway. Looking down to our left, we see a small, fairly well preserved apartment, (lying nine feet below the present path): this apartment Weichardt regards as the vestibule to the sole official entrance of the Palace: here may be seen some fragments of pavement of black and white " tesserae ", and the drums of some columns of \*\* cipollino ^ In the rear of this apartment, the visitor will observe a niche, which may be regarded as the resting place of the Praetorian on guard, or perhaps a marble statue, or altar rested here. On our right may be seen the remains of three bath-rooms with leaden pipes, which served to conduct the water from huge reservoirs in the overlying masonry. Beneath us may be observed vast cisterns, and indeed we may conclude that this portion of the Palace was devoted to store-rooms, baths, cisterns, and the slave quarters: these cells are lighted by a small slit in the wall: the walls of some of these apartments are still in a tolerable state of preservation, and show traces of red painting, and remains of mosaic pavements.

From the hall on the ground-floor, which is accessible to all the household, a single flight of steps led up to the private apartments of Tiberius, which occupied the first floor of the Palace. The entrance to the Emperor's apartments was probably through a corridor, about three metres in breadth, by which the peristyle and throne-room were reached. " The peristyle, which was never wanting in any Roman residence of the better sort, and still less in an Imperial Palace, was invariably the central point of the dwelling. Surrounded by colonnades, it obtained its light through a large opening in the roof, through which both sun and rain had free admission \ (" Capri ^ Weichardt, p. 112-113). Proceeding due south, we reach the substructure of a long apartment, terminating in an apse, which Weichardt considers to have been the triclinium, or dining-room.

Other antiquarians, however, hold that the form of this large chamber suggests a theatre, which would be looked for in a Palace of such magnificence and importance. Running round the triclinium or theatre, and facing due east was a semicircular colonnade; now occupied by the little Chapel of S. Maria del Soccorso, and the walled "bella vista" in the centre of which is a gilded figure of the Madonna. Further on to the south is to be seen a level space, which Weichardt, probably correctly, identifies as a private garden. A particularly stout wall with a semicircular projection still stands on the southern side of the palace, marking of the boundary of the area.

As no foundations are found at this place, but on the other hand, a quantity of mould, it is probable that a small, palace garden existed here. ("Capri". Weichardt, p. 106). As we retrace our steps, leaving behind us the peristyle and throne-room, and descending the steps that lead from the little Chapel, we enter on our right a corridor, still paved with the original black and white mosaics. The sloping almost steep condition of the corridor has led many to conclude that a path led from here to the sea, or else through the rocks to a grotto situated beneath the palace, but the walls — as Alvino still saw them, although they have since then fallen down at their termination — prove that the corridor only led to the apartments of the palace lying on the western slope of the hill, which were probably reserved for the Imperial suite. Traces of what is to all appearance the same corridor or passage, can be seen lower down the hill, where doubtless was the principal garden of the Villa ("Capri" Weichardt, p. 111).

Such are some of the chief features of these imposing ruins, but those interested in such matters can easily spend hours in wandering about the various chambers, which are scattered over the hill far down its westerly slope. The first excavations at Villa Jovis were undertaken in the year 1777, during the reign of Carlo III, by Dr Luigi Giraldi of Ferrara. A pavement was discovered of rare and precious African marbles, "giallo antico", "rosso", and "saravazza". This pavement was most artistically designed and made; (See, Chap. XXX San Costanzo): it is now to be seen in the presbytery of the Church of San Costanzo. (Mang. Ric. Top. p. 88).

A statue of white marble in the Greek style was also found in the course of these excavations. This statue, which represented a nymph, came into the possession of Sig. d' Andrea, the Regent of Capri at that time. (Romanelli, p. 84). Other columns of "giallo antico" were also brought to light, which now adorn the altars of the Church of Salvatore belonging to the monks of Santa Teresa. (C Storia dell' Isola di Capri". Canale, p. 292 and Mang. Ric. Top. p. 89). The second excavation of the Villa Jovis was undertaken in 1806 by Hadrava, who says; "Of the twelve Villas alluded to, the most celebrated and conspicuous was that of Jove, situated on the eastern promontory, where was a palace erected by Augustus, and afterwards enlarged by Tiberius. To gain an idea of the magnificence of this Villa, one must observe the great mass of masonry, not only what is today in ruins, but what is buried out of sight. Here one sees the floors of various chambers, as well as numerous cisterns. Everyone marks with surprise a long dark Grotto, hewn out of the living rock. There still exist prisons, where the unhappy Drusus was confined". (Had. Letter. XIII). Hadrava prepared for publication an account of his excavations with many illustrations, but his death took place before its publication, and the MSS. were lost. In 1827 the Royal Architect Antonio Bonucci was sent to Capri to examine the site of the Villa Jovis, and consider whether it would be possible to clear away the masonry, which encumbered the various chambers, and excavate the parts, which were covered with earth. Having associated himself with Sig. Atticiati of Naples, Sig. Bonucci expressed the opinion that excavations could be undertaken with valuable results, provided he had the right to acquire the left side which belonged to Francesco Salvio, he was conceded the permission to excavate on the right side, which was part of the Charity lands of the Comune of Capri.

The King having given his sanction to this arrangement , by a ministerial order of Oct. 1st 1827, directed Sig. Giuseppe Feola to undertake the work of excavation. (Feola , p. 28). Sig. Feola discovered two marble " puteals " or well-heads, decorated with bas-reliefs , one representing growing vegetation , and the other the autumn season. Both these " puteals " were sent to the Naples Museum , where they can be seen today. (Feola , p. 30). In Feola' s presence another discovery of considerable interest and value was made : this being a marble basrelief measuring in length about twenty inches. This bas-relief, which is now in the Naples Museum, represents a nude male figure (said by Feola to be Augustus), with wreathed head, and bearing in his right hand a wand. He is mounted on a spirited horse , which is pawing the ground: the horse is being restrained by a groom with a flowing robe.

In front of the male figure is seated a female figure, in her right hand she holds a torch, and with the left holds up her drapery.

To the right of the group is the nude figure of a boy, holding a basket, and mounted on a wreathed pedestal. To the left of the pedestal is seen a tree, possibly an oak , as Feola says ; " there is also an ancient oak , which with its hanging fruit and leaves, forms a complete pavilion \ (Feola, p. 30). Secondo in his " *Relazione storica dell'antichità, rovine e residui di Capri* \ relates that a column of lapislazuli, five feet in height and ten inches in diameter, and elaborately sculptured, was discovered at the Villa Jovis and was sold to an Englishman for 40 scudi. The precious stones, consisting of sapphires, beryls and garnets which now adorn the mitre of the figure of San Costanzo , were also found at Villa Jovis. (Mang. Ric. Top. p. 89

Tratto da

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