

SCULPTURES IN CONTEXT

The Ariadne Barberini and the decorative programme of the Domitian's Villa in Castel Gandolfo

In recent times a restoration has been carried out on the statue of Ariadne, found in the thirties of the last century among the ruins of the Domitian's Villa in Castel Gandolfo.

What remains of the imperial villa lies today almost entirely within the confines of the papal property known as Villa Barberini; in antiquity, however, the villa was at the center of a much larger property most likely starting at the Via Appia and extending towards the summit of the caldera and the borders of the lake which had been formed within. To the north, its limits would have coincided with the current center of Castel Gandolfo; to the south, with those of the town of Albano Laziale. Even though the project of Domitian's villa must have included previous residential clusters within its plan, as proved by the remains resurfacing in various sections of the villa, the plan remains one of absolute originality, characterised as it is by a series of building units of great enterprise distributed over a large area. The most significant of the surviving structures is the monumental *cryptoporticus*, but the small theater is also well preserved.

More elusive remains the appearance of the cluster of buildings downhill of the central terrace, among which is the so-called 'hippodrome', more likely a large, monumentalised garden-space with a function similar to that of the Palatine stadium. In this area a series of sculptures have been found during excavation works in the 1930s, currently mostly preserved in the Antiquarium at Villa Barberini, and among these also the statue of Ariadne.

The monumental statue (230 cm), made in pentelic marble, testifies a statuary type known from other copies and spread over a precise dating by the second half of the 1st century AD. The aim of this study is to analyse the statue within the more general argument about its copy tradition and its insertion in the sculptural decoration of the Domitian's Villa. The findings, together with the material unearthed from the seventeenth century onwards, testify vividly to the quality of the decorative marbles, although it is not easy to try to reconstruct the programmes unfolded in the Villa,

since its mobile decorations have suffered an even more serious dispersion than its architectonic material.

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