

# **Hadrian's other world**

A study of the structures in the High Ground of Villa Adriana

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## Abstract

This thesis is about Villa Adriana at Tivoli in Rome, more specifically about a particular part of the complex, the High Ground. It is a study of four neighboring structures on the High Ground: the Grotto, the Great Trapezium, the Temple of Pluto and the Mausoleum. They all belong to an area which has the grandest effect of all, according to some scholars. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the function/meaning of the Grotto, the so-called Inferi at Villa Adriana and analyze its layout and its relation with the neighboring structures. This is done on the basis of previously published documentation and suggested interpretations.

My research went as far as I hoped to go with the available evidence in order to be able to explain the mystery concerning the four structures. Specifically the most plausible interpretation that I could suggest without ignoring the results from the only excavation and the previous interpretations is that the Grotto was a physical manifestation of the mysterious haunted world of spirits, a passage to the other world. The Great Trapezium expresses the ritual aspect of the High Ground, linked to the Grotto and to Odeon through the subterranean galleries. The Temple of Pluto represents the religious concept and the Mausoleum with a quasi-sacred aspect reinforce the association with the idea of death and its role as a passage to the after-life.

## Preface

Due to my participation in a survey at Villa Adriana in 2012, financed by the Norwegian Institute in Rome, in collaboration with the department of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History at Stockholm University, I was fortunate to study closer the Roman architecture and become aware of the morphology of this impressive complex. The eagerness of the directors Marina Prusac-Lindhagen and Adam Lindhagen inspired me to learn more about this architectural achievement. I am deeply grateful to them and to my supervisor Henrik Gerding since he has urged me to analyze further through my study a specific part of the Villa that stretches the fantasy of the scholars and visitors until today, the High Ground. The High Ground consists of eight structures in total but I have focused my study into four particular structures; the names of which indicate a relation to death and the underworld.

Buildings associated with death and underworld have always been appealing to me. Therefore, in this thesis I chose to present the architecture that is thought to be related to the cult of death in Hadrian's villa and aim to achieve not only a simple description of the specific structures but also discover their actual function by analyzing them spatially and comparing them with relevant buildings.

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# **I. Introduction**

## **I.1. Aims and limits of the present study**

This study is about Villa Adriana in Tivoli and specifically a close study of four particular structures. These structures are located on the High Ground, in the lesser known area of the whole complex. The names of these buildings (the so called Inferi, the Great Trapezium, the Temple of Pluto and the Mausoleum) indicate their controversial meaning and philosophy. This study works as a tool for understanding better this terrace and its buildings. My main concern is to figure out if the name “Inferi” given by Pirro Ligorio to this semi-underground structure is a hypothetical attribution or a representative name indicating the actual function of the building. However, my study consists of five stages: i) Collection of previous literature. ii) A theoretical perspective which must always be applied to the archaeological reality. iii) A presentation of previous investigations and interpretations. iv) A presentation of the four structures. v) An analysis (critical, spatial and comparative) of these structures.

This chapter constitutes a presentation of the aim of this thesis. My ambition does not concern a simple description of the structures which are located in the southern part of Hadrian’s villa known as the High Ground. Instead, the whole thesis is an attempt to interpret/explain the buildings of the High ground. More specifically this study focuses on answering some important questions such as; why the monuments (Grotto, “Temple of Pluto”, Great Trapezium and “Mausoleum”) have this specific layout? What was their actual function? Also another question that could be raised and keeps my interest is; what was the true meaning of these peculiar structures for the emperor? In order to be able to answer these questions, I had to base my investigation on previously published documentation and suggested interpretations.

The particular part of the villa has been discussed by scholars and numerous hypotheses have been put forward, some of them fantastic and some more realistic but none of them certain. So I find myself in a critical position where I can also support some of the previous theories and through the spatial and comparative analysis, to be able to conclude into new suggestions for some of these structures.

On the other hand, during the development of a thesis some limits can be confronted. Regarding the limits of this thesis concern the incomplete clues about some structures due to their bad condition today, as the temple of Pluto. This made my attempt to give an accurate and detailed description very difficult. Moreover another obstacle that I had to confront was the foreign literature which was hard to reach in my hands and the majority of the publications which were not recent enough so the information used was not updated enough.

However, the following pages will reveal the ideas of this study with more detail.

## I.2. Theory and methods

### *Theoretical approach*

As an archeologist, I am familiar with the demands of this discipline which indicates that archaeological evidence with ritual or utilitarian meaning cannot be brought to light and analyzed without an interpretation. Studying material culture means studying artifacts, structures and art; how these could be understood within their context and how they fulfilled the needs they would serve once.

Generally speaking, it is known that material remains that are found in the present function as evidence for the past. Buildings can be used in order to decode the way that people expressed themselves, as well as their values. In my case, limited material like architectural remains can be investigated through different approaches. Thus, it might be possible to understand the actual function of each building in the High Ground (see Fig.1) of the villa like the Grotto called “Inferi”<sup>1</sup>, “Temple of Pluto” and “Mausoleum” keeping in mind that the given names of these buildings are identifications by Pirro Ligorio<sup>2</sup> after reading the *Historia Augusta*<sup>3</sup> and a verification by modern researchers is needed.

I intend to make the reader understand the actual function of the Grotto (was this structure an entrance to the underworld or not?). By developing some hypotheses about its purpose and its connection/relation with the surrounding buildings based on previous arguments, a holistic picture will be created. I have realized that my current study is a problem-orientated research and the choice of a theoretical perspective can be assigned as a tool to answer my questions.

Thus an active interpretive approach is needed. Through the interpretation the past can be explained into a “story” which everyone can understand. Nevertheless, the approach doesn’t recommend a past defined as a scientific source but a past that is a story to be interpreted. In other words, interpretation is a translation, and the archeologist works as interpreter between past and present and between different perspectives on the past.<sup>4</sup>

It must be emphasized that applying the interpretive approach, new interpretations about the structures (Grotto and neighboring buildings) are going to be presented based on the ones of previous scholars. They supported a variety of opinions but I, as

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<sup>1</sup> *Inferi* in latin means the gods below.

<sup>2</sup> Pirro Ligorio was a Renaissance archeologist who did the first large scale modern excavation in Hadrian’s villa. He was the scholar who wrote the first comprehensive description of the villa and prepared the first measured plan of the site. He also assigned names to specific parts of the villa and tried to identify the ancient functions and symbolic meanings of specific buildings.

<sup>3</sup> *Historia Augusta* is a Roman collection of biographies of the Roman Emperors. It was compiled by six different authors in 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, but the date, authorship and its purpose are matters for argument.

<sup>4</sup> Hodder 1991, 14-16.



a researcher, can show my self-reflection on the specific issue by examining whether these previous interpretations match the data or not and draw my personal conclusions.

### *Methods*

Hadrian's villa is a unique case study. It is difficult to understand the site without being aware of what has been studied before; many structures were in a better condition in the past centuries than at the present. My primary concern is with archaeological evidence and based on the reference in *Historia Augusta*, to interpret the structure of Grotto, its purpose, actual function and also its meaning for Hadrian himself. Since my main concern is this, I based on studies by others scholars when the subject has been hardly covered.

Hence, I apply the critical discourse analysis as a basic methodology of this thesis. This method takes other's researches seriously and treats them with respect. So I am able to prove and question one's own opinions as well. It is a kind of an open dialogue on different opinions which requires flexibility and open mindedness of the researcher in order to evaluate the previous arguments.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, I present the previous interpretations and arguments about this structure in order to get a better understanding of the whole complex and specifically about the High Ground where the Grotto is located.

Another method that is applied is the comparative analysis.<sup>6</sup> Comparison is necessary to understand variation over time and space. So I try to interpret the material record through a presentation of similar buildings to the one called "Inferi". These similar buildings have parallel function like entrances to the netherworld across the empire and I compare them in order to have the most plausible interpretation of the specific structure in Villa Adriana.

It should also be noted that as a researcher I get useful information from secondary sources such as antiquarian plans dated back to XV century, sketches, drawings and old pictures, Renaissance manuscripts, old books and modern documentation like recent publications, maps and pictures.

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<sup>5</sup> Jansen 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Smith and Peregrine 2012.

### I.3. Introduction to Hadrian's villa

In AD 117 Hadrian had to face his destiny by ruling one of the mightiest empires the world has ever seen. Hadrian as an excellent emperor accomplished a lot in the financial, military, religious, legal and administrative sector. He saw himself as a new Augustus and as a new Pericles whose mission was to revive Hellenic culture. His restless touring around the provinces made him the most visible monarch the Roman Empire ever had. He was also responsible for a monumental building program in Rome and Athens. His last achievement was the Villa at Tibur which constitutes the subject of research for so many scholars around the world.<sup>7</sup>

Hadrian's retreat at Tibur was turned to be a town positioned in a rustic landscape. Tibur had already been chosen by the elite for summer residences during the late Republic. It offered fresh air when Rome was hot and muggy. Therefore, Hadrian as a Roman who respects himself erected the most famous residence, called in antiquity Villa Tibur, Villa Tiburtina or Aelia Villa and now known as Villa Adriana.<sup>8</sup> It lies 28 km northeast of Rome, below Tivoli on a hillside, easily reached from Rome by land via the Via Tiburtina and by boat through the river Aniene. There is also evidence that indicates that Hadrian was there; a letter to Amphictyons and Delphi was written "from his house at Tibur".<sup>9</sup>

The construction of the Villa started with the restoration and expansion of its predecessor, a Republican villa which probably belonged to emperor's wife, Sabina. Others support that this villa was Hadrian's heritage from his father.<sup>10</sup> However, this building dated back to the second or early first century BC and had been modified in the mid-first century BC and again in the Augustan period.

Villa Adriana is the greatest villa that ever belonged to a roman emperor, with 3 km it is also the biggest one. It is a great monument known for its architecture and art. The complex is a catalog of monumental buildings expanding across the countryside, which fit perfectly to the surrounding landscape and to the magic atmosphere that exudes.

Marguerite Yourcenar had Hadrian say about his villa in her book, *The memoirs of Hadrian*: "the villa was the tomb of my travels, the last encampment of the nomad. Each building-stone was the strange concretion of a will, a memory and sometimes a challenge. Each structure was the chart of a dream."<sup>11</sup> The villa has been studied only periodically through time. Bearing this in mind, many researchers desired over the

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<sup>7</sup> Birley 1997, 192-194.

<sup>8</sup> Boatwright 1987, 138.

<sup>9</sup> Birley 1997, 192-194.

<sup>10</sup> Birley 1997, 192-194.

<sup>11</sup> Yourcenar 1951, 114-115. This novel is a letter of Hadrian to his successor Marcus Aurelius. The emperor describes his past and his philosophy.

centuries to explore most of the site of the villa where some of its parts are still considered as a real mystery.

The starting point of a research across the complex is studying the literary evidence; the primary sources which are referred to its story and analyzing them. There are four ancient references to the villa's story but three are in the problematic *Historia Augusta, Vita Hadriani*, compiled in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The most important is the one which describes the villa (26.5):

*Tiburтинam Villam mire exaedificavit, ita ut in ea et provinciarum et locorum celeberrima nomina inscriberet, velut Lyceum, Academicum, Prytaneum, Canopum, Poecilen, Tempe vocaret. Et, ut nihil praetermitteret, etiam inferos finxit.*

His villa at Tibur was marvelously constructed, and he actually gave to parts of it the names of provinces and places of the greatest renown, calling them, for instance, Lyceum, Academia, Prytaneum, Canopus, Poecile and Tempe. And in order not to omit anything, he even made a Hades.<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted that these buildings are not imitations or copies of the sites that Hadrian had seen through time but exceptional creations inspired by well-known models.

We don't have a lot of information about the use of the Villa after Hadrian's death. The site was despoiled and destroyed through centuries. As W. MacDonald points out, a few portraits of Hadrian's successors (nine Antonine and seven Severan) have been found. So either the villa was used for eighty years after Hadrian's death or imperial officers added them. Evidence is the fact that only two Antonine and no Severan brickstamps have been found. However, this may reinforce the second option.<sup>13</sup>

Another known fact indicating the situation of the villa after Hadrian, is that during the war between Rome and the Goths, 546 Totila camped there and used the site as a fortress. The site was also a source of lime and was exploited for more than fifteen hundred years. This can be proved by the fact that many local structures were built from its remains.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Vita Hadriani* 26.5, Translation D. Magie (Loeb Classical Library) 1953.

<sup>13</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 198-199.

<sup>14</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 199.

## I.4. General description of the Villa/High Ground

The whole villa is built in a cool hill covered by olive trees and gardens where the water is the dominant element of this site. The complex is consisted of buildings for nobles and for servants, containing roads, accesses, underground road system, gardens, cryptoporticoes and tunnels. This complex has been studied and analyzed a lot the last four centuries by different scholars such as architects, archaeologists, artists. It has also been visited by famous visitors through time. A representative example is pope Pius II who made the first postclassical (1461) description of the villa indicating the situation of the ruins. He describes the villa in a way that shows the ultimate decadence of something superior, magnificent and monumental, emphasizing the ephemeral character of the ruins: “About three miles from Tivoli the Emperor Hadrian built a magnificent Villa like a big town. Lofty vaults of great temples still stand and the half ruined structures of halls and chambers are to be seen. There are also remains of peristyles and huge columned porticoes and swimming pools and baths, into which part of the Aniene was once turned to cool the summer heat. Time has marred everything. The walls once covered with embroidered tapestries and hangings treaded with gold are now clothed with ivy. Briars and brambles have sprung up where purple-robed tribunes sat and queens’ chambers are the lairs of serpents. So fleeting are mortal things!”<sup>15</sup>

Describing Villa Adriana is complicated because the buildings are located in different levels, on an artificial terrain. In addition, we know almost nothing about the essence and the meaning of the buildings. Therefore, a lot of discussions, hypotheses and arguments have been proposed by scholars. Explanations were put forward trying to shed light on this matter.

An example of one of the most controversial parts of the complex is the so-called “High Ground”<sup>16</sup> or “Higher quarters”<sup>17</sup> of the villa and especially the four structures under this study which are sited on this terrain:

i) The Grotto or the so-called “Inferi” (Fig. 2, 3) consists of a cave/grotto and a valley which according to some scholars represents the entrance to the Netherworld and it consists also of water as the stream of the death Styx.

ii) The structure connected to the Grotto through its subterranean galleries is the Great Trapezium, (Fig. 4) which according to some scholars also represents a part of the Netherworld and together with the Grotto constitute the “Inferi-complex” according to some scholars.

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<sup>15</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 207.

<sup>16</sup> *High Ground* is a term used by W. MacDonald and J. Pinto.

<sup>17</sup> *High quarters* is proposed by Marina De Franceschini, see her website <http://www.villa-adriana.net/>.

iii) Further north is the “Mausoleum” or “tomb”, (Fig. 9, 10, 11) which is a circular building, reminding of a funerary monument. It is also linked with the others structures on the High Ground through the subterranean galleries.

iv) Last but not least the so-called “Temple of Pluto” (Fig. 8) of which is hard to imagine the layout and role today due to the remains left today.

According to some scholars who have studied this part of the villa, these buildings are all associated to the belief in the after-life and the cult of death. The belief in an after-life was common throughout the Roman world. Some believed in a Netherworld that was underground and that composed the kingdom of the dead ruled over by Pluto and Proserpina.<sup>18</sup> There were at least twenty entrances to Hades in the entire empire. It is no surprise that Hades should become an attractive element of a Roman’s private property.<sup>19</sup> All these are going to be discussed further in this thesis.

### *The site of the High Ground*



Plan of the High Ground from the web site: [www.villa-adriana.net](http://www.villa-adriana.net) by Marina De Franceschini.

This sub-chapter is a description of the buildings across the site of the High Ground following the suggested pattern by Marina De Franceschini according to her web site. South of the Canopus is the higher and most isolated part of the Villa Adriana which still is a private property and just recently was partly investigated. It is a huge artificial terrain, which has a long wall on the west side (more than three hundred

<sup>18</sup> Colvin 1991, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Alcock, Cherry and Elsner 2001, 163-166.

meters), across all the way from north – Roccabruna (nr. 1) - to south – Academia (nr. 2) and Odeon (nr. 4).

Roccabruna (nr. 1) is the only building of this area accessible for the public; it is a tower. Only its lower part is preserved where is still visible a rounded interior hall.

A few meters south of the terrain of Roccabruna, is one of the most interesting buildings of the Villa, the Academia (nr. 2). The first visible structures are the remains of its entrance Pavilion or Vestibulum; where three of its four pillars can be seen, which supported some kind of roofing. The entrance Pavilion leads into the internal garden of the Academia, which was surrounded by a porch. Its high walls make it a secret and sheltered garden. But there were openings for the view. On the eastern side of the internal porch the best preserved structure is the so-called Apollo's Temple (Tempio di Apollo) (nr. 3). It is a circular wide hall; but only half of it is still standing. South of the Apollo's Temple is an apsed corridor called Zooteca (a place for sacrificing animals, according to Ligorio); its walls have holes for the beams that once supported the roof of a porch surrounding an inner garden. In the center of the apse a door lead to another room, this was the entrance to the Academia on its southern side.

The eastern side of the Academia's passageway had its own walls, almost fully hidden by vegetation. They passed behind the Canopus with a diagonal route, until they reached the Apollo's Temple, under which the wall became a cryptoporticus.

To the east there was the so-called "Inferi" (nr. 5), a grotto which was flanked by two openings which gave access to subterranean corridors excavated in the tufa bank, linking it to the Odeon and also to the Great Trapezium (nr. 6).

Further south are the ruins of the place where a theater called Odeon (nr. 4) is located. Little is visible of this building, only the part behind the scene.

Further north still survive the remains of a circular structure called "Mausoleum" (nr. 7), which is covered by a thick bush. The XIX century drawing by Penna shows it in a better state of preservation. (See Fig. 10) It is supposed to be a funerary monument.

Not far from the Mausoleum is the "Temple of Pluto" (nr. 8), which due to its proximity to the Grotto with the name "Inferi"; Ligorio named it this way. Almost nothing is known about this structure. Its state of preservation is fragmentary, old maps point out a rectangular building with a central apse on one of its long sides.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Franceschini. All the information for the site of High Ground has been taken from the web site [www.villa-adriana.net](http://www.villa-adriana.net).

## II. History of research

### II. 1. History of investigations

It is impossible to understand the site of Villa Adriana without noticing the previous researches, plans and general views of Hadrian's villa. Looking through these valuable sources, reasonable questions could be raised automatically such as; where does the objective documentation stop and where does the subjective interpretation start? In order to give answers to this justified issue the first step is an overview of past investigations based on W. MacDonald and J. Pinto's model which is presented in detail into this chapter.<sup>21</sup>

16<sup>th</sup> century:

During 1550 the first large scale archaeological excavation took place in the Villa after Ippolito d'Este enrolled Pirro Ligorio as his personal archaeologist. Despite Ligorio's treasure hunting, he was the key-person for later investigations of the Villa due to his important work; a) He was the first who made a detailed description of the villa and b) He conducted the first measured plan of the site when the ruins were in better shape than today and a probable reconstruction is possible based on his work *The Descretion of the superba e magnificentissima Villa Tiburtina Hadriana* (1568), and to his manuscripts "Codes" that left behind him. But it is worth noting that Ligorio's plan of the site was never completed or it got lost.<sup>22</sup> Another important contribution of Ligorio refers to his idea; by using the *Historia Augusta* text, as a trustworthy source to identify the ancient functions and the symbolic meanings of specific buildings. But when he couldn't identify them, he is applying his own imagination.

17<sup>th</sup> century:

In 1668, the first published plan was Francesco Contini's work using Ligorio's manuscripts in order to make his own survey in the villa. After his survey he corrected Ligorio with new information trying to reveal the foundations; his investigation of the network of subterranean galleries connecting the one part of the villa to the other, was established by two things; a) his discovery of chambers below the High Ground and b) his inclusion in his plan of the Underground galleries and numerous cryptoporticoes. Contini's plan provided a graphic overview of Hadrian's impressive design for the first time since antiquity and approved by the researchers until today.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 216-224. All the information has been taken from the chapter VIII of their book.

<sup>22</sup> Codes are the Ligorian's manuscripts where he tells about his explorations.

<sup>23</sup> Contini's description in the introduction of his published work; "I went to the place, observed that it occupied a hill surrounded by two valleys roughly six miles in circumference, and I saw that the majority of the ruins were so covered by earth and debris that their foundations could not be made out. I began to excavate in order to reveal foundations. Through such diligence I also found several subterranean roads, by means one can go under cover from one part of the villa to another." Translation from MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 220-221.

18<sup>th</sup> century:

During this century, more systematic excavations took place in the villa. In 1725, Cant Giuseppe Fede bought as much of the site as he could so the villa started to become a “mosaic” of privately owned fields. As a result the villa at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century was divided into seven large private lands. At the same time the interest for the Villa was increased. Artists and architects who visited the villa left essential testimonies of their antiquarian studies by drawing some impressive features of the villa. At the second half of 18<sup>th</sup> century four accurate surveys came forward: three of them were executed by architects from the French Academy in Rome and one by Giovanni Batista Piranesi. Piranesi is considered as one of the most brilliant interpreter of the villa. “For him Hadrian’s villa represents the ultimate expression of the energy and variety embodied in Roman architecture”.

In 1781, Piranesi’s plan (see Fig. 12) *Pianta delle fabbriche esistenti nella Villa Adriana* was published and got criticized by some archaeologists as a creation of his imagination, but the truth is that it formed a key document in the history of archaeological site description which could provide us with important information about: a) identifications of buildings based on function of the remains, b) precise description of each feature, c) valuable records of find spots of works of art, d) indications of the property ownership of the area. He also specified ruined or vanished structures and whenever the identification was not feasible he also used *Historia Augusta* to interpret the function and meaning of some features.<sup>24</sup>

19<sup>th</sup> century:

Many internal property barriers were removed and the new government of Italy bought half of the site and a more scientific approach of the research was proposed then. So new archeologists and new perspectives came along. They actually took over the study of the villa where Piranesi left it with different goals and aims.

In 1827, another work with useful information comes to the front with the title *Descrizione dell villa Adriana* by Antonio Nibby.<sup>25</sup> He tried through taking into account the ancient sources to apply precise names to the buildings.

In 1831, another important scholar Agostino Penna contributed to the graphic documentation of the physical appearance of the ruins.<sup>26</sup> His research built on previous accomplishments (Ligorio, Contini, Piranesi, Nibby) was an innovative work where his presentation obtained graphical pictures with no hypothetical reconstructions which allow the three dimensional presentation of the buildings and their context, like a virtual trip inside the villa.

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<sup>24</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 246-261. The information about Piranesi has been taken from the chapter IX.

<sup>25</sup> Nibby 1827.

<sup>26</sup> Penna 1831. I could not have access to his book *Viaggio pittorico nella Villa Adriana*, so I took the information from MacDonald and Pinto.



In 1895, the modern Villa research starts with the published work of Hermann Winnefeld<sup>27</sup> whose site map describes ruins on private land like the High Ground, Southern Range and Hall, South Theatre and Underground Galleries.<sup>28</sup>

20<sup>th</sup> century:

In 1904 Pierre Gusman<sup>29</sup> and in 1906 Rodolfo Lanciani<sup>30</sup> in their published work provide to the reader valuable photographs and drawings of the villa. These early studies have been replaced by more recent investigations which were mainly concerned specific buildings of the villa. Furthermore, the number of serious publications has risen sharply especially during the past two decades. A brief catalogue with modern investigations follows:<sup>31</sup>

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Researcher</b>                       | <b>Location in the villa</b> |
|-------------|---|------------------------------|
| 1951-1955   | S. Aurigemma <sup>32</sup>              | Canopo                       |
| 1960        | E. Hansen <sup>33</sup>                 | Piazza D'Oro                 |
| 1975        | C. Giuliani <sup>34</sup>               | Piazza D'Oro, Thermes        |
| 1980        | S. Hoffman <sup>35</sup>                | Ninfeo Stadio                |
| 1987        | E. Salza Prina Ricotti <sup>36</sup>    | Canopo, Vestibolo            |
| 1990        | J. C. Grenier <sup>37</sup>             | Canopo                       |
| 1995        | W. MacDonald and J. Pinto <sup>38</sup> | Survey of the whole site     |
| 2004        | J. Hansen <sup>39</sup>                 | Liceo                        |
| 2008        | C. Ohlig and D. Vieweger <sup>40</sup>  | High Ground: Grotto          |
| 2009        | M. D. Franceschini <sup>41</sup>        | High Ground: Academia        |

<sup>27</sup> Winnefeld 1895.

<sup>28</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 306-316. The information have been taken from the chapter XII.

<sup>29</sup> Gusman 1904.

<sup>30</sup> Lanciani, 1906.

<sup>31</sup> Franceschini 1991, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Aurigemma 1954-1956.

<sup>33</sup> Hansen 1960.

<sup>34</sup> Giuliani 1975.

<sup>35</sup> Hoffman 1980.

<sup>36</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 1987.

<sup>37</sup> Grenier 1990.

<sup>38</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995.

<sup>39</sup> Hansen forthcoming.

<sup>40</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Franceschini 2009, see <http://www.villa-adriana.net/pages/common/vienna2009.pdf>.

## II.2. Previous interpretations

This chapter constitutes a presentation of different interpretations for the function of the four buildings proposed by previous scholars. I use this chapter as a tool for having a background for my critical analysis which follows.

Piranesi's plan (Fig. 12) has been the foundation for the interpretations of the structures in the High Ground, where the Grotto, the Great Trapezium, the "Temple of Pluto" and the "Mausoleum" are all visible. However it is worth mentioning that the lack of evidence such as inscriptions indicating the name of each structure, have made the work of the researchers very difficult.

### *The Grotto*

This structure is an enigma for the scholars who are trying to investigate it. Its layout is unusual and a thick impenetrable veil still covers its function and meaning. It is located on the High Ground of the villa which has only been partially investigated and documented due to the fact that it was part of a private property and not accessible to the public. Scholars have made an effort to lift this veil which will be presented here. Consequently, there are different interpretations of it, which enable me to pursue my research.

Early on the place was thought to be the entrance to the Netherworld of the *Historia Augusta*: "*Et, ut nihil praetermitteret, etiam inferos finxit*"<sup>42</sup> So if Hadrian has really rebuilt his "Inferi", the "entrance to the underworld", he would have chosen it to be on the residence hill in an isolated, dark and beneath the area level.

The previous interpretations concerning this strange structure have been divided into four categories and analysed as following:

#### i) Entrance to the Underworld

Pirro Ligorio (1550) was the first person whose interpretation is characterised by mythological rather than realistic explanations.

E. Salza Prina Ricotti has Ligorio talking about one structure, which has three openings (like doors) with three paths through which the spirits of the dead from Asia, Africa and Europe would descend to the underworld.<sup>43</sup> These gates would be guarded by a three-headed Cerberus, which would scare the descending spirits.<sup>44</sup>

Agostino Penna also talks about the entrance to the underworld (see Fig. 17). The ditch itself is indicated as the "*luogo ove scorreva il fiume Stige*" in his plan (a place, where the river Styx flowed). The Grotto is called "*Ingresso degl'Inferi*"; a road

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<sup>42</sup> Scriptores Historiae Augustae, *Vita Hadriani* 26.5.

<sup>43</sup> The discourse of three gates for three continents is a creation of Ligorio trying to connect them with the three headed Cerberus.

<sup>44</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 2001, 304.

leading to the valley is indicated in the map as “*Via degli inferi*”. After the reference to the paragraph of the *Historia Augusta* “*etiam Inferos finxit*” Penna continues: “This 800 palmi long channel is cut into the tufa; the cliff there is kept in its original condition, for floating water, indicating the river Styx, which the spirits of the dead had to pass on the black ship of the old ferryman Charon to the entrances of the underworld, according to the verses of Vergilius.<sup>45</sup> One can see two holes, which give access to two dark semicircular corridors, which have indicated the two entrances to the Inferno. The dark view of this place could only awake a sad and gloomy impression.” The valley above it can be assumed as a beautiful garden, in order to perform the wonderful stay of the future life in the Elysian realms.<sup>46</sup>

Canina’s plan (1856) indicates the “Inferi ditch”<sup>47</sup> with the name “*Accesso agl’Inferi*” (entrance to the underworld), also influenced by *Historia Augusta* (see Fig. 18).<sup>48</sup>

Gusman (1904) starts his description with the placing of the entry of “Inferi” after a canal dug in the tufa which represented the Styx (see Fig. 19).<sup>49</sup>

E. Salza Prina Ricotti (2001) brings forward the *Historia Augusta* again and calls the whole complex valley of the “Inferi”. She also calls the structure that lies in the southern side and it is opened to the north, Grotto. She believes that in the middle of the “Inferi ditch”, Euripus can be assumed with long riverside banks which start right at the valley-sided openings of the semicircular corridors. They would have worked as the access to the grotto, while the entrance in the middle has probably been blocked by a large water basin. The remains of a cistern above the grotto make possible that the grotto has been blocked by a waterfall. Also consulting the illustration of the “Inferi ditch” in Piranesi’s plan, Salza Prina Ricotti confirms her opinion. She interprets the illustrated lines there as a long central channel (see Fig. 20) from which 90°-angled side channels derive, a system which she compares with the Euripus of the Piazza D’Oro.<sup>50</sup>

## ii) A water reservoir

Francesco Contini (1668) didn’t agree with the mythological interpretation of the structure as an entrance to the Underworld and he focused on the hydro-technical equipment of this structure. He mentioned the “Inferi” simply as a well (see Fig. 14).

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<sup>45</sup> Verg. *Aen* 6.124-157.

<sup>46</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 13-14. The information about Penna’s interpretation has been taken from the article *Untersuchungen um Bereich der sog. "Inferi" der Villa Adriana in Die Wasserkultur in die Villa Adriana*, Siegburg 2008.

<sup>47</sup> “Inferi ditch” is a term used by scholars in order to indicate the small valley leading to the Grotto.

<sup>48</sup> Canina 1856. I could not have access to his book *Gli edifici antichi dei contorni di Roma cognitivi per alcune reliquie, descritti e dimostrati nella loro intera architettura*, so I took the information from Ohlig and Vieweger.

<sup>49</sup> Gusman 1904, 180-181.

<sup>50</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 2001, 383-385.

Piranesi (1781) had also no mythological influenced descriptions for this area, so he refers only to the hydro-technical equipment; in his plan two water basins are indicated, from which today only the one exists to the east. At this point it should be noted that in his plan the intense lines are used for what Piranesi examined through his survey in the area. While the lighter lines are used for what he thought maybe existed. So keeping in mind the lines for the proved findings and the lines for the additions and hypotheses, in the case of sketching the “Inferi”, Piranesi did not know anything about the formation of the Grotto complex, and this should be considered for further hypotheses that are based on Piranesi’s plan.<sup>51</sup>

The Biblical-Archaeological Institute of Wuppertal has been responsible for the geophysical researches in the area around the Grotto expecting findings in the underground confirming its hydro-technical characteristics; The level above the grotto on the southern end of the structure has been studied, where in the plan of Piranesi two water basins are indicated, from which today only one exists. The purpose of the research focused on whether the second water basin has actually existed and if the basin has played a role in the water supply of the underneath grotto and whether in the “Inferi ditch” float channels or waters. The second research focused on the “Inferi ditch” itself.<sup>52</sup>

The studies of the Institute suggest that contrary to Piranesi’s plan in the southern ending of the Grotto only one basin has existed. The geomagnetic and geo-electric investigations could not prove any parts of the missing basin in the questionable area. However, the surface of the area today, in which the basin on the opposite side was constructed, lies underneath the height, where the second basin was indicated by Piranesi, which makes it impossible to eliminate the idea that there has originally been a basin in this area.<sup>53</sup>

### iii) Park Grotto

W. MacDonald and J. Pinto gave their own interpretation and described the structures with their own terms. They named the area around the Grotto “Park Grotto” (see Fig. 13) and the whole site as “High Ground”.<sup>54</sup> So it becomes clear that even if they refer to the mythological explanations for the “Park Grotto” and to the different interpretations, they intend to withdraw themselves from the traditions and the explanations behind it.

They call the valley in front of the grotto “approach avenue” with curved surrounding walls. “The great avenue, wider than many Roman main streets” implies ceremony or

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<sup>51</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 21.

<sup>53</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 22.

<sup>54</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 117.

ritual character.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps this was the main element of the Park Grotto's meaning and its terminal space in front of the Grotto, was only a part of a larger model.

It also becomes clear that the thoughts of MacDonald/Pinto differed much from the previous. The reference to the same structure in Piranesi's plan, which is a support for Salza Prina Ricotti's interpretations for it to be Euripus. MacDonald/ Pinto assumed that a road is meant here, which possibly is a road of rituals or a place for mass gatherings.<sup>56</sup>

#### iv) Tufa quarry

This new interpretation has been suggested by Ohlig and Vieweger.<sup>57</sup> The following analysis is based on their article "*Untersuchungen um Bereich der sog. "Inferi" der Villa Adriana in Die Wasserkultur in die Villa Adriana*". The only excavation trench going through the "Inferi ditch"<sup>58</sup> of approx. 43 m., in front of the Grotto had been organised by them in 2004.

The excavation in front of the grotto did not have any new results, as there is neither evidence of a Euripus (hypothesis by Salza Prina Ricotti) nor of a street (hypothesis by MacDonald/Pinto). It gives the impression that the so-called "Inferi ditch" has remained without changes after its use as a tufa quarry and filled up through time with soil during the modern times.

The ground showed no horizontal flattening in the excavation trench, as it could be expected in case of a street. There are also no suggestions, which can be related to the structure in Piranesi's plan and also no traces of a covering surface (paving or mortar). If the condition of the walls and the ground in the excavation section would be representative for the entire ditch, then a left open and unchanged tufa quarry is suggested.

### *The Great Trapezium*

This complex of subterranean tunnels is also a peculiar structure due to its layout and its strange shape. It forms the shape of a trapezium. It is assumed by scholars that Great Trapezium appears in the centre of the system of communication network.

What is known about the subterranean tunnels, in general, is not complete. The function of the Great Trapezium has also excited controversy. Was the Great Trapezium a representation of the Underworld, or just a practical creation? Four hypotheses for its function have been proposed by different scholars. One of the

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<sup>55</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 122.

<sup>56</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 124.

<sup>57</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 45-47.

<sup>58</sup> "Inferi ditch" is a term used by Ohlig and Vieweger to indicate the small valley leading to the Grotto.

interpretations refers to the symbolic meaning of this structure in correlation to the Grotto and three of the interpretations correspond to utilitarian interpretations.

#### i) Symbolic meaning

It is worth mentioning a short interpretative history through time in order to get a holistic picture of how the scholars faced this structure into their plans.

Pirro Ligorio (1550) wanted to name the various parts of the villa based on the list of remarkable sites that Spartian wrote.<sup>59</sup> He believed that Hadrian wanted to reproduce in his complex and especially in its underground an impressive representation of the after-life. Pirro Ligorio indicates that this structure belonged to the complex known as the underworld “Inferi”. The next references about the Trapezium by early scholars show confusion between the “Inferi” and the Great Trapezium:

Firstly, Antonio Nibby (1819) referred to the Trapezium as “Inferi”, and he mentions that there was a way which leads to the Elysian Fields, located in the surrounding area (see Fig. 16). Luigi Canina (1856), Rodolfo Lanciani (1899) and Pierre Gusman (1904) also indicated the Trapezium as “Inferi”. On the other hand, other scholars did not even give a name to this peculiar building.

W. MacDonald and J. Pinto emphasize in their interpretation the symbolic meaning connected to the Underworld and to the Eleusinian mysteries (see the comparative analysis). They also support this hypothesis by the presence of Odeon. They are the first who attach the role of the theatre (Odeon) to symbolic and ritual representations. So the tunnels which were attached to Odeon could achieve special stage and theatrical effects.<sup>60</sup>

#### ii) Transportation function

According to Zaccaria Mari this subterranean system was used during the construction phase of the villa for transportation of *pozzolana*<sup>61</sup> and tufa from near quarries and after the completion of the works remained as a mean of access for the carriages, assigned to the supply of materials.

Eugenia Salza Prina Ricotti also agreed with this hypothesis/interpretation. She also points out that at the south-east the galleries become narrower and smaller, a kind of rustic gates. She informs us that this passage is blocked today, but it was served for connecting Great Trapezium with a huge *pozzolana* quarry used during the

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<sup>59</sup> Spartian is thought to be one of the authors of the biography of Hadrian in *Historia Augusta*.

<sup>60</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 135.

<sup>61</sup> *Pozzolana* is a volcanic material used for buildings and underwater construction.

construction of the villa. This system of tunnels perhaps was created during the first phase of construction of the complex.<sup>62</sup>

### iii) Traffic function

Another function suggested by Eugenia Salza Prina Ricotti concerns the traffic, which was possible only in one single direction and the vehicles could not turn. They had to exit from the villa in order to change route. It is possible that the caravans entered in dawn and went out after dark and vice versa.<sup>63</sup>

Marina De Franceschini also suggests the same as Eugenia Salza Prina Ricotti and she mentions that the subterranean road network was used probably for carts bringing supplies to the villa.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, W. MacDonald and J. Pinto set against this interpretation the argument about the lack of entrances and exits (there were only two: the one entrance existed next to the Doric Temple and the other in the Southernmost Ruins). In addition, there was no room for maneuvering carts so how the traffic could be controlled is a matter for doubt.<sup>65</sup>

### iv) Barn/ stable

Eugenia Salza Prina Ricotti puts another function forward which says that the eastern branch of the tunnels can be identified as a large barn, equipped with one hundred thirty one feeders.<sup>66</sup> According to her, this could be confirmed by the drainage channel that exists there. She adds that this corresponds to the modern facilities for the housing of horses. It is noted by her that the various dimension of the two groups of feeders correspond to 80-90 cm; established for donkeys and 130 cm; established for horses (see Fig. 7).

Summing up, everything was meant for the stabling between 51 mules or horses and 80 donkeys. The free space of 140 m before the feeders could be used to support the carriages after the disconnection of the animals.

This interpretation is rebutted by MacDonald and Pinto who support that these galleries are not the right place for permanent stables. The horses which need special care can hardly be pictured in these galleries. As it is known these animals need grazing land and air and a space like this could not provide these facilities.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 1973, 219-248.

<sup>63</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 1973, 219-248.

<sup>64</sup> Franceschini, see the web site [www.villa-adriana.net.com](http://www.villa-adriana.net.com).

<sup>65</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 137.

<sup>66</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 1973, 219-248.

<sup>67</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 136-137.

### *The Temple of Pluto*

As MacDonald and Pinto indicate (if Piranesi's map is right), this structure could be the largest at the villa. He might have been correct in restoring it with a large courtyard, due to the fact that in this huge space little else could fit.<sup>68</sup>

The structure's proximity to the Grotto indicates a probable connection with it, even though evidence for this is missing. So the interpretations following, concern the function of this building as a temple devoted to Pluto.

However, scholars like Pirro Ligorio (1550), Francesco Contini (1634) and Piranesi (1781) have included this building into their sketches but without indicating its name. Stefano Cabral (1779) mentions that this temple is neighboring to the Grotto so it can be assumed that this temple was dedicated to Pluto and Proserpina. Agostino Penna (1831) calls this building Temple of Pluto and Proserpina. On the other hand, Pierre Gusman (1904) refers to it as "Plutonium" and MacDonald and Pinto described it as "Platform Structure". They support that both the position and orientation of the structure within the Park's east wall give an explanation for its enclosure among the Park's major features.<sup>69</sup>

The discussion about the name of this structure indicates the influence of the Greek mythology and the belief in after-life which Hadrian also believed in according to scholars, which has affected the hypotheses/theories about it since 16<sup>th</sup> century while its actual function remains unclear until today.

### *The Mausoleum*

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century the scholars have named this structure as a tomb due to its shape. It is a Hadrianic construction; the step ring dome profile is typical of the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>70</sup> But the real question is whether this building is an actual tomb or not. The interpretations concerning the function of this structure can be divided into three categories; i) Memorial, ii) Tomb iii) Snow storage room.

#### i) Memorial

Some arguments that provide skepticism derive from the existence of windows, columns and porch which indicate a special building. It is a rotunda with a temple-front entrance, reminds a small Memorial, a Pantheon-like design. Raeder suggests that this is a monument in memory of Antinous.<sup>71</sup>

#### ii) Tomb

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<sup>68</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 124.

<sup>69</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 124.

<sup>70</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 121.

<sup>71</sup> Pensabene 2010, 120.



Patrizio Pensabene (2010) after his involvement into the research across the valley from Canopo to Piazza D'Oro and Great Trapezium to Academia suggests another interpretation of this building; a Mausoleum due to its shape. This building follows the architectural concept of the royal tombs with the drum base as a podium and a dome on top.<sup>72</sup>

### iii) Snow storage room

Another thread associates this heat-resistant structure and its closeness to the underground; snow-storage rooms with the function of preserving the emperor's wines. This idea is suggested because of the lack of evidence within the site for kitchens and pantries that a villa should contain.<sup>73</sup>

W. MacDonald and J. Pinto support the utilitarian structure-interpretation. But they also keep in mind the theory about Memorial which according to them suits to the general dark and spiritual character of the High Ground.

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<sup>72</sup> Pensabene 2010, 120-124.

<sup>73</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 122.

### III. Description of the structures

In this chapter I will try to give an approximate<sup>74</sup> description of the four structures, in order to provide a basis for the evaluation of the various interpretations and the analysis of their true functions/meanings. The descriptions rely on previously published documentation.

#### III.1 Grotto complex (Fig. 2)

The layout of this structure is unusual and unique. Different descriptions have been presented by scholars. An early description has been given by Pierre Gusman who investigated the villa in 1904. He mentions in his book that across the bushes and olive trees a Grotto was found which was also reported by Piranesi and Penna.<sup>75</sup> He describes the structure as follows: a wide arch covered by rocks and stalactites forms a cave at the bottom of an opening which gave way to an extensive waterfall. One can reach on this niche by a low door. From there can be led to a semi circular corridor circulating the cave in front of the channel.

According to the recent studies of Christoph Ohlig and Dieter Vieweger about the Grotto a more accurate description has been presented.<sup>76</sup> The so called Grotto complex consists of an extended “valley” of approximately 135 m length and approx. 18 m width. The east and west sidewalls of this ditch slope upwards, parts of it slightly broken off in a stepped way, and they are today overgrown with thick scrub and brushwood, which is partly also the case for the “Inferi” ditch itself. The narrow side in the south of the ditch is closed in a circular formation inside which according scholars waters were flowing, making a connection to the waters of Styx.

The research in the quarry ditch showed that in the central area of the whole construction, there are tufa walls (50 cm width and 1m length). The soil material indicated no horizontal or vertical layers. In the east side there is the lower part of the wall. The mortar, soft and crumbly between the thick stone layers cannot state when was built.<sup>77</sup> There were two walls at the outer edge of the former quarry, which were protruding 2.50m over the level of the quarry ground. About the time of origin and the function of these two walls, which are of bad quality, no statement can be given. It can also not be said how long these walls were and where they started or ended.<sup>78</sup> There is also a crevice at the southern ending of the quarry. Around it, a small worked out from the rocks grotto/cave and a small nymphaeum with a small water exit have been designed. A small grotto/cave and a larger grotto/cave of masonry are integrated to two semicircular corridors which are connected to the underground path network.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>“Approximate” due to hypothetical sources and few remains which are left today.

<sup>75</sup> Gusman 1904, 180-181.

<sup>76</sup> Ohlig-Vieweger 2008, 6-8.

<sup>77</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 30-34.

<sup>78</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 30.

<sup>79</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 28.

Water reservoir: Behind the nymphaeum there is a water reservoir which functions as water outflow into the nymphaeum inside the grotto/cave. It is located on the upside of the grotto/cave. On the east side of its rectangular layout there are wall leftovers. Its function can be assured by the plaster layer from *opus signinum*<sup>80</sup> of the walls.

The grotto/cave (Fig. 3)

The grotto consists of three parts. The frontal, highest part consists entirely of masonry and was placed in front of a natural tufa wall. Whether this tufa wall has been there naturally or if it was maybe the southern edge of the nymphaeum is not recognizable.

The second part of the Grotto, much lower and narrower than the front part (with approximately the same depth), was worked out from tufa and looks like the front part. The inner part of this Grotto section is made in a way that it gives the impression of an uneven ashlar.

The third part of the Grotto shapes a small niche, which is worked into the wall, whose exact dimensions are almost not defined any longer, due to the destruction. It can be assumed that the measurements have been approximately 90 cm width, 90 cm depth and about 150 cm height (=3' x 3' x 5'). It is not located in the middle of the Grotto, but it is clearly displaced eastwards, so that no line symmetry in the central area is given.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Opus signinum* is a building material used in ancient Rome.

<sup>81</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 24-25.

### III.2 Great Trapezium (Fig. 4, 5, 6)

The eastern side of the Grotto is connected to a tunnel, a branch of the communication network that ends up to the Great Trapezium. The Great Trapezium is a part of the subterranean road network more than four kilometers long. The whole complex of galleries is excavated in a bank of tufa.

It is consisted of four galleries of different lengths; its sides are not parallel (as the shape indicates). Pierre Gusman describes this structure by giving the measurements of the sides of the trapezium: 300 m long-each of the longest ones and the other two-100 to 150 m long.<sup>82</sup> A more accurate measurement of the sides of the trapezium is suggested by Salza Prina Ricotti who says that the longest is 304 m long, and the others; 296 m, 140 m and 100 m.<sup>83</sup>

Marina De Franceschini mentions that this structure internally is illuminated by big oculi (70 oculi). The oculi/windows are 1, 5 m. in diameter. They were all placed at equal distances. The galleries were 4, 15 m. tall and 4, 60 m. wide. Externally the Great Trapezium follows the form of the unworkable underground, filled with soil and water. Unfortunately, a great part of these galleries are still buried in the soil and they have never been studied in an analytical way.

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<sup>82</sup> Gusman 1904, 179.

<sup>83</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 2001, 97.

### III.3 Temple of Pluto (Fig. 8)

The only source that someone can use in order to describe this structure is the restoration proposed by Piranesi. His reconstruction was hypothetical due to the few ruins that existed in 18<sup>th</sup> century. As someone can assume the attempt to describe this specific structure had been too hard for previous scholars, due to the limited sources written about it.

The name of this structure is a matter of question; MacDonald calls it “Platform structure” because it is located on a flat terrain, Gusman calls it “Plutonium” and Penna as “Temple of Pluto”. During my research I chose the name “Temple of Pluto”.

About the layout and the purpose of this structure little are known. Piranesi’s symmetrical plan is the only detailed description of this structure. Eugenia Salza Prina Ricotti based her reconstruction on his plan. (See Fig. 8) He indicates that this temple was one of the largest buildings in the whole complex. In his hypothetical sketch a building which is consisted of a line of rooms at its western part and at the eastern part (due to symmetry) is shown. He includes on the south a projecting curve which fits a circular temple, surrounded by columns. All these were enclosed a large court. At the north corner there is a room with openings on the walls, including two walls on the inside which have similar diameter and openings in the middle.<sup>84</sup>

Antonio Nibby mentions in his work that this structure is a round temple peripteral, with a wide area in front, flanked on the sides by a portico which is preceded by columns. He specifies that the only visible part is the skeleton of it.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 124.

<sup>85</sup> Nibby 1827, 55.

### III.4 Mausoleum (fig. 9, 10, 11)

Zaccaria Mari points out that following the route of the Great Trapezium someone could be led to the Temple of Pluto, the Academia and the Odeon.<sup>86</sup> About this zone there is no further information except the passage that reaches to the so-called “Tomb”. “Tomb” is considered as Mausoleum due to its shape, which is circular with a lowered dome and with an interior part including a cellar with a circular colonnade.

The reconstruction of this structure has also raised controversy as the previous buildings did; Ligorio and Contini indicate in their plans that the structure consisted of a small circular chamber. Piranesi and Nibby show in addition an external ring of 20 or 22 columns around the structure.<sup>87</sup>

Gusman describes the lower part of the Mausoleum as follows: the exterior wall surrounding the monument was 2 m thick. Piranesi wrongly described that it had only portico pillars supporting a cornice. It was illuminated by six windows. The entrance was arched, and gave access to a small central circular chamber of 3 m.<sup>88</sup>

The most recent research held by Università di Roma and Soprintendenza ai Beni Archeologici del Lazio, gives a detailed description of this monument.<sup>89</sup> They support that it is dated in the period of Hadrian after a comparison to other buildings in the Villa. It is also confirmed by the bricks found and stamped with the consular date of 123. The “Mausoleum” is a cylindrical structure. It consists of two floors. The lower structure (functions also as a podium) is accessible through a narrow vaulted door. It is composed by an annular corridor, illuminated by small windows and a small central room, surrounded by Doric style columns. This room is separated from the rest of the structure by a colonnade and covered by a dome (see Fig. 11). The colonnade limits the central room (diameter of 6, 5 m.) which is paved with slabs of marble.

The corridor supports the upper structure connected with a staircase. This staircase continues to the top floor. The upper floor can be reconstructed from the scattered remains which indicate the same structure of that of the podium.

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<sup>86</sup> Mari 2009, 34.

<sup>87</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 121.

<sup>88</sup> Gusman 1904, 181.

<sup>89</sup> Pensabene 2010, 120-124.

## IV. Analysis

### IV.1. Critical analysis

After presenting the previous interpretations/theories suggested for the Grotto (the so-called “Inferi”), Great Trapezium, “Temple of Pluto” and “Mausoleum”, it is time now to analyze further these explanations by ending up to the most plausible for each one. Examining the evidence it is proper to keep in mind that what was built for one purpose may have been adapted later to another.<sup>90</sup>

#### *The Grotto*

Even though important researches have been conducted in the area of the Grotto nothing can be said with certainty. Starting from the Grotto, the so-called “Inferi” I have divided previously the theories into four categories according to the explanations given by scholars. Two of those indicate utilitarian use. The first theory discussed here has been related to the hydro technical equipment of this structure. This has been proposed by Francesco Contini and Piranesi and examined further by the Biblical-Archaeological Institute of Wuppertal in order to confirm the hydro-technical characteristics of the Grotto. The studies showed that there is just one basin and not two as Piranesi proposed in his plan and the water channel comes from an artificial well of the back wall of grotto.<sup>91</sup>

This theory cannot be totally excluded by scholars because the water is one of the most dominant characteristics of this structure but it is obvious that it could not just be a simple well or a fountain. On the other hand little can be said about whether it was a reservoir for saving rain water or an element of the conduit system. Even the function of the container - reservoir or water passage container - cannot be determined. The preservation condition allows no conclusions about the hydro technical installations.<sup>92</sup>

Even if the holding capacity of the reservoir, which might have an access from the south (today buried), cannot be precisely estimated, it is certainly enough for the functioning of one or more small water outflows into the small nymphaeum inside the grotto. An additional reservoir of bigger height would not be necessary.<sup>93</sup>

The next two interpretations suggest a Euripus<sup>94</sup> (hypothesis by Salza Prina Ricotti) in the middle of the ditch of “Inferi” with long riverside banks and the other one an “approach avenue”(hypothesis by MacDonald and Pinto). MacDonald and Pinto assume a road of rituals or a place for gathering.

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<sup>90</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 134.

<sup>91</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 45-47.

<sup>92</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 45-47.

<sup>93</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 45-47.

<sup>94</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 2001, 383.

But the excavation in front of the grotto refuted them. It brought no results, as there is neither evidence of a Euripus nor a street. The ground showed no horizontal flattening in the excavation trench, as it could be expected in case of a street.<sup>95</sup>

However the most plausible interpretation is the one of tufa quarry, based on an excavation and detailed documentation. It gives rather the impression that the so-called “Inferi” ditch has remained without changes after the task of the tufa quarry and filled up in the course of time with the ground/soil during the modern times.<sup>96</sup>

There is indeed a ditch, which starts at the nymphaeum and lies approx. in the middle of the grotto. It is however very likely that this ditch is built in order to lay the iron pipe and was not completely filled.<sup>97</sup>

If the condition of the walls and the ground in the excavation section would be representative for the entire ditch, then we are simply dealing with a left open and unchanged tufa quarry. But Ohlig and Vieweger point out that this quarry ditch should be excluded from the interpretation of the structure.

The excavation in front of the grotto has not raised new results, as there is neither evidence of a Euripus nor a street. It gives rather the impression that the so-called “Inferi” ditch has remained without changes after the task of the tufa quarry. However, they sum up that against the background of these thoughts the quarry ditch in front of the grotto has to be totally excluded from the interpretation of the grotto because they cannot define any use for the Grotto.

However, I believe that this structure has a connection with the cited reference in the *Historia Augusta* which I recommend not to be ignored by the scholars who study this area. Even though the *Historia Augusta* is considered by many scholars not reliable and provokes scepticism, this reference has led to a search for an edifice to which the characteristics of the underworld mythology could be applied (located at the lowest level, a cave/grotto as the gate to the underworld, water as the stream of the death Styx).

All these characteristics reinforce the theory for the entrance to the Underworld. Moreover after German’s suggestion that the quarry ditch in front of the grotto would have to be excluded from the interpretation of the Grotto, consequently I suppose that this structure could have the role of a setting for mystic and spiritual experiences at Hadrian’s time due to its association to the underworld myth.

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<sup>95</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 46.

<sup>96</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 45-47. See the summary of the article.

<sup>97</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 45-47.



### *The Great Trapezium*

Analysing the interpretations about the Great Trapezium, it can be assumed according to scholars that these subterranean galleries could be a diverse and multifunctional structure. First, during the construction phase of the villa these galleries were used for traffic and transportation from near quarries of *pozzolana* and tufa. Later, these galleries after the completion of the works could function as a means of supplying materials to the rest of the villa or as stables for horses. On the other hand these galleries could also be the setting for experiences either religious or spiritual as MacDonald and Pinto proposed.<sup>98</sup>

Regarding the traffic function, I believe that this argument is not reliable because the traffic control of vehicles was not possible due to the lacking of entrances and exits. And at the same time there was no space for turning the carts in order to change route. Perhaps they were meant as workshops during the construction phase which required temporary installations.

As far as the barn/stable-interpretation concerns it seems not probable either because this space does not offer the ideal conditions for horses. These tunnels are lacking of space and air for the animals. This space does not provide all the healthy facilities for them. It could not be permanent stable but housing working animals only during intensive construction.

The attachment of the Great Trapezium with the South theatre/Odeon which basically had a religious character and its connection to the Grotto reinforce the argument of the symbolic meaning related to the Underworld and to the Eleusinian mysteries. MacDonald and Pinto suggest that cult ceremonies or drama could begin on stage of the Odeon and at night would shift to the Underworld through the stairs leading underground. Passing through the tunnels they could experience the underworld, and peripatetic rituals and other cult activities could be simulated. The special effects that the galleries offered through their openings reinforced the idea of this simulation.<sup>99</sup>

It is possible that the Great Trapezium has not served just one purpose after all. It could be first a functional construction for transportation of materials and later functioned as the setting for experiences either religious or cosmic. I believe that the Great Trapezium enhances the mystery that covers the whole complex of the High Ground and represents the interest in the haunted world of spirits that Hadrian intended to preserve into his residence as well.

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<sup>98</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 136.

<sup>99</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 131-138.

### *The Temple of Pluto*

The hypothesis about this structure as a “Temple of Pluto” offers a plausible scenario; its proximity to the Grotto shows a possible connection with it, even though actual evidence is lacking. This structure belongs to the religious context of the High Ground.

Generally speaking, Pluto was the ruler of the underworld in Greek mythology. The earlier name for the god was Hades. He represents the concept of the after-life. The idea of Hades became cherished in the minds of the Romans too.

Hadrian wanted probably to complete the puzzle of the mystery that characterizes the High Ground by building a temple dedicated to chthonic divinities such as Pluto-the ruler of the underworld, and his wife Proserpina. The best place to do that would be close to the so-called “Inferi” the entrance of the underworld. He had in mind the Greek sanctuaries of Pluto (*Plutonia*) which were usually located next to entrances of the Underworld like in Eleusis and in Avernus. This temple expresses the religious concept of the High ground.

### *The Mausoleum*

The most plausible interpretation for this structure due to its form is a Mausoleum. This structure represents the funerary cult that Romans have adopted from Greeks. The word “Mausoleum” derives from the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus. Historically, a mausoleum is a large and impressive construction for a person of importance. Generally it consists of a burial chamber above ground. It can be located on a private land like on Hadrian’s villa. The specific structure follows the shape of known Mausolea of Augustus and Hadrian with vaults holding up the roof and with a corridor leading to the heart of the structure. The funerary chamber is accessible from the outside in a way that could allow the living to return or to perform funerary rites. The space around the central chamber could serve the funerary cult which is characterised by the idea that the spirit of dead needed nourishment; the offerings to the dead.

A tomb was more than an honorable container for a corpse; it was the point of contact between alive and dead. It was a means of communication with the spirits. Even though the basic purpose of a funerary monument was religious, Greeks and Romans believed that the afterlife began in the tomb.<sup>100</sup> So after presenting the different interpretations the conclusion corresponds to the fact that the meaning and the function of such a building fits perfectly to the inspired High Ground landscape, justified also by the presence of the previous structures with an eschatological significance.

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<sup>100</sup> Colvin 1991, 55. For more information, see the chapter V.

On the other hand, just because a building's plan is tomb-shaped, does not necessarily mean that its functions are obvious. So I believe that perhaps it was built in the first place as a tomb destined for Antinous, but this can be refuted because in recent excavations (2008) a tomb-temple of Antinous was found in the villa,<sup>101</sup> so it can be assumed that it may have functioned later (at late Hadrianic age) as something else. Maybe its function was for keeping the emperor's wines cold due to its thick, heat-resistant walls. According to MacDonald and Pinto it was a utilitarian building and the lack of evidence for kitchens and storage rooms across the area enhancing this interpretation.<sup>102</sup>

My opinion is that its shape externally reminds of the rotunda of the Pantheon with the dome and the thick drum wall and internally presents similarities with the spatial arrangement of the Hadrian's Mausoleum in Rome. So I believe that the so called "Mausoleum" was initially meant probable as a tomb for Antinous and maybe later changed its role to a utilitarian building.

My personal conclusions are characterised by the idea that all the above structures are related to the eschatological, mystic and religious concepts which the High Ground adduces.

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<sup>101</sup> Mari 2009, 31.

<sup>102</sup> MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 122.

## IV.2. Spatial and functional analysis

After the review of the previous interpretations and their analysis, in this chapter the different building's meaning (Grotto and Great Trapezium) and layout will be analyzed in order to find out what function they might have had by placing them in relation to each other. In order to understand the function, an investigation if the hypothesis of Pirro Ligorio about the name "Inferi" is reasonable should be done. The mythological correlation should be analyzed in order to investigate the hypothesis of Pirro Ligorio; whether the name "Inferi" could be applied to this structure or not. I believe that we have enough information to understand the actual meaning and use of these buildings.

### *The Grotto complex as "Inferi"*

The reference to the underworld myth starts with Pirro Ligorio. An important supposition for understanding the layout of the so called "Inferi" is the correlated imagination of this name-giving (the life after death of the descents in the underworld), of the antique Greek-Roman mythology.

The death deities Hades (*Pluto*) and Persephone (*Proserpina*) rule the underworld, also called Hades (*Orcus*) in a hollow space in the inner side of the world, where the sunlight never shined and the climate was either cold or chilling. After their death, the souls of the humans have to descend to the kingdom of the death as shades, from which they (apart from famous exceptions such as Herakles or Orpheus) can never return. The gate to the underworld, for which different places have been named during the ancient times, found in volcanic areas, at lakes, caves or mountains (among others Taenarum and the Avernus-lake in Campania), and which always stands wide open, is guarded by the dog of Hades, the Cerberus. This dog is a monster with three heads and a snake tail, which wheedle to every new arrival friendly, but barks to every shadow that wants to escape, and prevents everybody to leave by showing his terrifying, baring teeth. Beyond the gate, a river awaits the souls that have become shadows, the Styx (the Stygian waters seemed to burst from Mount Aroanius in Arcadia), which they have to cross in order to arrive to the actual underworld. Because of the riptide stream, this was only possible with a ferryman named Charon, who took the souls on his boat to the other side and needed to get a wage for that service. For paying this price, the relatives of the descendent had put a coin in the mouth of the deceased. While the Hades remained the location of the big amount of souls, there were few souls that proved to be especially good. For these good ones the Elysium existed. The environment in Elysium was peaceful and cheerful, able to enjoy the pleasures they experienced when they were alive, such as hunting, sports, music and feasts.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Burkert 1985, 190-199.

Another myth also related to the Grotto and of high importance for the naming and the meaning of the “Inferi” of the Villa Adriana is thus: Persephone was abducted by Hades to the underworld. Her mother, Demeter (Ceres), the primal goddess of agriculture and fertility (Gaia), wandered in human form of an old woman that is searching for her daughter, unrecognized through entire Greece. Wherever she was accepted to a home, she left fertility and blessing. From that profited also the region around the town Eleusis, nearby Athens, because the king Keleos welcomed the goddess very warm. For thanking him, Demeter taught him how to use the plough. When Demeter finally found her daughter in the underworld, she was not allowed to return to the heavens permanently anymore, but only temporarily, because she had already eaten from the pomegranate that her husband had given her. The respective stays of Persephone in the underworld in the heavens are closely connected with the vegetation: During the time of summer drought, the daughter of mother earth stays in the underworld but with the first rain in October, she is allowed to come back to her mother. This return is celebrated in Eleusis, the main place of worship of Demeter, with the “Big Eleusinian festivity”.<sup>104</sup>

Both myths have strongly influenced the discussion about the meaning of “Inferi”. The cited reference in the *Historia Augusta* led to a search for an edifice to which the characteristics of the underworld mythology could be applied (located at the lowest level, a cave/grotto as the gate to the underworld, water as the stream of the death, Styx).

When we analyse a subterranean structure like the Grotto, we can imagine it as a setting in a film with a thematic function and we should ask ourselves the following: i) what degree of spatial and temporal specificity does it demonstrate? And ii) how is it utilizing this space: generically or as a thematic centre?

Considering all these we can decide how to explain the use of this space. Depicted in fantasy an underworld functions thematically as an otherworld. It is a spatially specific otherworld, a thematic centre and this has important consequences to the meaning of the space. Its meaning is symbolic. The so called “Inferi” with its quasi-subterranean status and its qualities attributed to the archaic underground and the mythic underworld functions as a boundary between life and death, real world and illusion.

### *The Great Trapezium*

The underground galleries of the Great Trapezium belong to the category of cryptoporticoes. There are four types of cryptoporticoes according to their functional analysis in Roman architecture: a) Cryptoporticoes with religious function (crypts of

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<sup>104</sup> Powell 2001, 244-246.

oracle temples). b) Cryptoporticoes with funeral function. c) Cryptoporticoes with traffic function. d) Layouts and supporting function spaces in terrace.<sup>105</sup>

The complex of villa Adriana presents a variety of underground tunnels. These subterranean passages in general are one of the elements of great attraction in Villa Adriana. According to Salza Prina Ricotti, they can be divided into four categories specified by the function for which they were created;<sup>106</sup>

1) Cyptopoticoes proper to function as ambulatory (place for walking, a covered passage) built in brick.

2) All the galleries which were part of the communication network which connect different parts of the villa. According to Ricotti, among them one can find one group consisting of carriage able routes and another one of big walkways. She also suggests that the Great Trapezium belongs in this category.

3) Internal communications that connect different buildings or parts of buildings. They are pedestrian and they distinguish form the others because of their smaller dimensions and less importance. Probably they were designed for servants.

4) Cryptoporticoes used for the most various purposes; those used to achieve special stage effects/theatrical effects, those used as a warehouse and those for storing the snow.

The interest for these underground elements came from Francesco Contini (1600) who was the first that realized their importance. In the preface of his book he mentions: "I began to dig the ground in order to find the foundations, I surpassed the obstacles that prevented me and I came down in various wells and openings which I discovered in those steep vineyards. And I discovered some roads where you can go from one place to another, as you can see; drawn in the map which I made with as much precision I could."<sup>107</sup> Contini designed their route on his map in a way accurate enough and he made a few errors that can be rectified today with successful excavations and use of more precise tools. However, these inaccuracies do not affect neither the validity nor his discovery.<sup>108</sup>

Summing up the Great Trapezium may at first sight belong to the second category of the communication network, as Eugenia Salza Prina Ricotti pointed out, because it is linked by subterranean galleries with two other structures: Odeon and Grotto. But considering the two structures that it is connected to, with their symboling meaning:

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<sup>105</sup> Martin 1973, 25-26.

<sup>106</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 1973, 219-223.

<sup>107</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 1973, 220.

<sup>108</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 1973, 220-221.

Odeon was used for symbolic and ritual representations<sup>109</sup> and the Grotto was the underworld itself, the Great Trapezium could function for its users as an endeavor to return from the mysterious and dark world which Hadrian and his guests visited. So the Great Trapezium had a thematic function due to its peculiar layout (trapezoid shape) and its connection with the Grotto and Odeon. So following a tunnel would be an exploration of the unknown world.

I should make it clear at this point that the whole complex of Villa Adriana is a microcosm and the structures analyzed in this chapter, fit better in a vast, remote and isolated terrain such as the High Ground.

### *The Mausoleum*

One of the functions of the funeral structures was to help the transition of the soul into the afterlife.<sup>110</sup> The Mausoleum's connection with the galleries of the Great Trapezium is also underlying the meaning of the High Ground.

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<sup>109</sup> Franceschini, see [www.villa-adriana.net](http://www.villa-adriana.net) .

<sup>110</sup> Bremmer 1983, 89.

### IV.3. Comparative analysis

#### *The Grotto*

When we reconsider the myths analyzed in the previous chapter, we conclude into two basic explanations about the Grotto which fit perfectly to its meaning and its architecture. The first explanation presents an architectural correlation and the second a historical one:

- i) As an oracle of the dead similar to these in Ephyra and Baiae.
- ii) For mystery cults and initiation rites in association with the Eleusinian mysteries.

#### i) The Oracles of the dead

The idea of Nekromancy was that the dead were wise and they could predict the future. This future was prepared in the underworld where the souls separated from their bodies, so it is assumed that they had a clearer perception of everything.<sup>111</sup> Nekromancy can be imagined as a place situated between the world above and that below. Nekromanteion is a place of an oracle of the dead, a place where you can receive prophecy from them. The only evidence for Nekromancy in Greece is applied on the ancient literature - the wanderings of Odysseus in the Homeric Odyssey<sup>112</sup> (700-650 BC) where Odysseus visits the oracle of the dead or Nekromanteion of Acheron in Thesprotia.

The Oracles were entrances to the underworld and were situated either in lakeside precincts, in artificial or natural caves.<sup>113</sup> i) The Tainaron belongs to the category which the whole construction is based on a small natural cave. ii) The Acheron and Avernus were based in precincts next to a lake. These caves were usually connected with dark tunnels where choreographed ritual progressions were proceeded (another possible function of the cryptoporticoes of Hadrian's Villa). There are three categories of Nekromanteia; a) Psychagogion,<sup>114</sup> b) Oracles of dead heroes and c) Underworld entrances as caves which myths of the descent of Persephone are attached (see the myth in spatial analysis) like Katabaseis or passages to the Underworld. There were a lot of locations considered as entrances to the Underworld.<sup>115</sup>

Additionally to the Oracles mentioned before, one of the most famous descents was at Eleusis, an actual gate to Hades. These had a physical connection to the Underworld due to their proximity to natural caves and to rivers but some were man-made constructions. One of these man-made constructions of descent can be considered the Grotto at Villa Adriana where a journey to the Underworld could be simulated in order to seek information regarding afterlife.

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<sup>111</sup> Ogden 2001, See the introduction xv.

<sup>112</sup> Hom.Od. 11.654-658.

<sup>113</sup> Ogden 2001, See the introduction xv.

<sup>114</sup> *Psychagogion* is a word which describes a ritual of raising souls from the dead.

<sup>115</sup> Ogden 2001, 22-26.



The practice of Nekromancy can be associated also with emperors Pagans or Christians. Hadrian was interested in Nekromancy. Some believed that Hadrian's favorite, Antinoos died by drowning in the Nile, others that he had been sacrificed by Hadrian, who was interested in divinations and sorceries, so that he could practice Nekromancy.<sup>116</sup> So they support that Hadrian made an artificial underworld at his villa as a *psychomanteum*<sup>117</sup> in which he could converse with the ghost of Antinous.<sup>118</sup>

### *The Parallel architecture to the Grotto*

The Nekromanteion of Tainaro (Fig. 21) is placed inside a cavernous rock in a bay where the sanctuary of Poseidon is also located. It is believed that the gate of Hades was located there and Kerberos guarded it. From there, Hercules descended to the underworld and brought Kerberos to earth in his last feat. Also Orpheus came down from there in order to bring back from the underworld his beloved wife Eurydice but he did not succeed after all.<sup>119</sup>

The Nekromanteion of Acheron (Fig. 22) is the most famous Nekromanteion of ancient Greek world. It is located in western Greece. It was excavated by the professor Dakaris in 1958 between the rock ledges of the big swampy plain of the Acherousia Lake and the river of Acheronta. The morphology of the area corresponds into the descriptions of Homer<sup>120</sup>, Herodotus<sup>121</sup> and Pausanias<sup>122</sup> describing roads and passages leading to the Underworld.

It consists of a central hall above ground and a large vaulted chamber, cut into a rock, at a cave beneath it. The visitors had to pass from dark corridors and go through a twisting passage. However, the topography of this site provided a physical connection to the Underworld.<sup>123</sup>

The Nekromanteion of Avernus (Fig. 23) was a flooded volcanic crater near Cumae in Campania. It has been considered as an entrance to the Underworld that it may be the chief inspiration of the project to map Odysseus's wanderings onto the west Italy. The

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<sup>116</sup> Birley 1997, 247-249.

<sup>117</sup> *Psychomanteum* is a mirrored room, specially set up to communicate with the spiritual realm. Reflective surfaces, such as water, were considered a conduit to the spiritual world in ancient times.

<sup>118</sup> The Nekromancy was a source of wisdom of the dead, so one needed to get information from a specific ghost in order to learn about one's death or about death in general. A ghost can come close to revealing the future through knowledge of its own past in a different way. The dead can also give eschatological information about the nature, life, death and universe. It is believed that this wisdom comes by experiencing the afterlife. Ogden 2001, 153-154.

<sup>119</sup> Anonymous 2012 see [http://logioshermes.blogspot.com/2012/04/blog-post\\_8262.html#ixzz2VQoHxjrn](http://logioshermes.blogspot.com/2012/04/blog-post_8262.html#ixzz2VQoHxjrn).

<sup>120</sup> Hom.*Od.* 11.

<sup>121</sup> Hdt. 1.46.

<sup>122</sup> Paus. 9.39.

<sup>123</sup> Ogden 2001, See chapter 4.

most famous description of the cave is that of Vergilius, referring to the mythical Aeneas (*Aeneid* 6.338-341): “Deep was the cave; and downward as it went, from the wind mouth, a rocky rough descent; and th’ access a gloomy grove defends, and there th’ unnavigable lake extends”.<sup>124</sup>

At Baiiae, on bay of Naples (Fig. 24) consists of a cramped entrance, leads into a pitch black passageway. It is an underground complex with narrow tunnels. The whole tunnel system has a ceremonial function: the niches and the oil lamps that were found inside assure this. An underground stream was running deeper into the hillside, at the bottom of a steeper passage. According to some scholars this mysterious system fits to the concept of the Netherworld: it was believed to be constructed by priests in order to imitate a visit to the Greeks’ mythical Underworld passing through the Styx.<sup>125</sup>

The Plutonium of Hierapolis in Turkey (Fig. 25) is the most recent discovery. Hierapolis was one of the richest cities in Asia Minor in Roman times, as its monumental remains can prove. In the first century AD Hierapolis was characterized by an intense construction activity, mainly pursued by the emperors of the Flavian dynasty, with the construction of theater, and gymnasium. Also in the second century the monumental Agora was built and probably Hierapolis was visited by the Emperor Hadrian<sup>126</sup>, who, as a sign of generosity, he returned the “*aurum coronarium*”.<sup>127</sup> Pluto was worshipped at Hierapolis. The Plutonium consists of a cave believed to be an entrance to the underworld. The cave emitted poisonous gas from ancient times, until today. This is the reason why the entrance is sealed off. A temple was built over a cave and there was a thermal area, beneath it. A stamped dedication to Pluto above the entrance has assured the identification of the gate. The ancient Greek geographer Strabon (6.8.14) mentions in the tales of his travels in Asia Minor the "singular properties" of this cave: "it is an opening of sufficient size to admit a man, but there is a descent to a great depth ... [The] space is filled with a cloudy and dark vapor, so dense that the bottom can barely be discerned."<sup>128</sup> In order to prove this, the archaeologists threw in sparrows, which immediately fell down lifeless.<sup>129</sup>

Close to the chthonic deities (Temple of Pluto), to the funerary cult (Mausoleum) the meaning of the High Ground for Hadrian can be fulfilled by the mystery cults. These mystery cults concern the afterlife and require cult sites situated underground in caves or in subterranean tunnels, in order to be able to re-enact the journey to the dark Netherworld.

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<sup>124</sup> Verg. *Aen* 6.338-341.

<sup>125</sup> Ogden 2001, see chapter 5.

<sup>126</sup> Esposito and Mastrangelo 2013, see [www.hierapolis.unisalento.it/15?articolo=2](http://www.hierapolis.unisalento.it/15?articolo=2).

<sup>127</sup> *Aurum coronarium* is a large sum of money offered by the city to celebrate Hadrian’s accession to the throne.

<sup>128</sup> Strab. 6.8.14.

<sup>129</sup> Elisabeth Snodgrass 2013, see <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/04/130414-hell-underworld-archaeology-mount-olympus--greece/>.

## ii) Eleusinian mysteries

The other explanation for the “Inferi” at Hadrian’s villa is correlated to the Eleusinian mysteries. Eleusis in antiquity was one of the most famous religious centers of the Pagan world. The Eleusinian tradition characterized by the cult of Demeter and Persephone known as the Mysteries of Demeter or Eleusinian mysteries. This cult had a universal status and it was also adopted by Romans. When Hadrian was archon in Athens (123 AD), he initiated into the Lesser Mysteries.<sup>130</sup> After five years (128 AD) he fulfilled his initiation where the representation of death and rebirth was clear enough for him.<sup>131</sup>

During this initiation, the participants filled with awe and confusion had to follow the traditional procedures where in the sixth day through the *Dromena*, they felt closer to Goddess’s presence. They enacted the story of abduction, wanderings of Demeter and the reunion of mother and daughter. It was an unforgettable experience for them.<sup>132</sup> Foucart pointed out that the *Dromena* was a simulated trip of the initiates through the lower world where in darkness they could see the apparitions, phasmata that would cause terror. Then the initiates would pass to the Elysian plain, lighted by a stunning light.<sup>133</sup> The philosophy of Eleusinian mysteries is related to the underworld, and to the promise of a happier life in the other world. So Elysium was promised to initiates. There are also ancient sources that assure this such as: Homeric Hymn<sup>134</sup> “Happy is he among men upon earth who has seen these mysteries; but he who is uninitiated and who has no part in them, never has lot of like good things once he is dead, down in the darkness and gloom”.

### *The Temple of Pluto*

After the reference to Eleusinian mysteries and Hadrian’s involvement in them, someone can assume that a temple of Pluto which belongs to the cult district of Eleusis, it can only be placed, where the essential elements of the myth are also topographically found, which is at the cliff of the acropolis in front of a natural empty cave. According to the myth (Eleusis as the main place of the Demeter’s worship and season change of Persephone’s residence into the underworld) in this cave, the entrance to the underworld was seen.<sup>135</sup>

In front of this cave, in an almost triangular shape, a small Temple of Pluto was located. However if someone compares the two structures can observe that in Eleusis

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<sup>130</sup> There is a poem written by the priestess of Eleusis which indicates Hadrian’s initiation: “It was not the Dioscuri nor Asclepius nor Heracles that had initiated, but Hadrian, the lord of the wide earth, who poured out boundless wealth on all cities and especially on the city of Cecrops.” Birley 1997,

<sup>131</sup> Birley 1997, 215.

<sup>132</sup> Mylonas 1961, 224-285.

<sup>133</sup> Mylonas 1961, 224-285.

<sup>134</sup> Anonymous, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 480.

<sup>135</sup> Ohlig and Vieweger 2008, 47.

where the “original” temple of Pluto exists cannot be found the smallest clue of water. On the other hand observing the “copy” in the area of the Villa Adriana, the Styx is formed. Especially in the so strongly by Salza Prina Ricotti emphasized characteristic about the hydro-technical equipment of the grounds, no parallels can be found between the “Plutonium” in Eleusis and the “Inferi” of the Villa Adriana.<sup>136</sup>

Thereby Hadrian has had the Plutonium of Eleusis ( Fig. 27) as a model before his eyes, but instead the presence (or artificial construction) of a cave in a respective location, he chose to build it in a more distant spot of the terrain and he reinforce its role with the placement of a temple dedicated to Pluto close to his entrance to the underworld.

### *The Mausoleum*

The specific structure follows the eccentric shape of the known Mausoleum of Hadrian in Rome. Seeing their layout, both have vaults holding up the roof (see the Fig. 28). The internal arrangement presents some similarities with the Mausoleum at Hadrian’s villa. There is a principal door opens upon a corridor leading to a large niche shaping a vestibule. On the right side of this vestibule near the niche, starts an inclined spiral way leading up to the central room.

### *Conclusions*

The strangeness of Nekromancy made it an appropriate characteristic for Roman emperors, a way of expressing their exceptional status and their desire to compete with the gods. The Romans found the Necromancy a proper way to predict the death of the emperor when the more megalomaniac emperors thought they were superior to fate.<sup>137</sup>

Even though the Grotto in Villa Adriana is not a subterranean structure in architectural terms such as the oracles mentioned previously it shows some similarities (cave, stream etc.) which could characterize it more as a transitional spot between the world above and the world below. It can be considered as a passage to the Underworld, where someone could descent and lead himself to the mysterious world of the souls.

The existence of such a passage at Hadrian’s villa reflects the emperor’s mystic and cultic beliefs. Both correlations with the oracles and the Eleusinian mysteries where architectural similarities can be also visualized reinforce the idea around afterlife.

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<sup>136</sup> Salza Prina Ricotti 2001, 384-385.

<sup>137</sup> Ogden 2001, 152.

## V. Conclusion

When we have weighed all the evidence, the solution of the mystery is not so remote and confusing anymore. The Grotto and the other structures of the High Ground are characterized by the idea that what was built for one purpose may have been adapted later to another. So the Grotto may have been partially a tufa quarry and partially something else. I have suggested that the Grotto should be regarded not only as a *tufa* quarry as the only excavation proved but as a structure connected to the underworld. Following the basic explanations discussed previously in the comparative analysis, about the existence of such a passage in villa Adriana, the options correspond to spatial and cultic concepts. So the most plausible interpretation that I could suggest without ignoring the results from the only excavation and the previous interpretations is that the Grotto was a physical manifestation of the mysterious haunted world of spirits, a passage to the other world. The name “Inferi” also seems suiting better into this structure than any other in the whole complex.

Additionally, the Cryptoporticoes express the ritual aspect of the High Ground, linked to the Grotto and to Odeon, the temple of Pluto represents the religious concept and the Mausoleum with a quasi-sacred aspect reinforces the association with the idea of death and passage to the afterlife. It can be assumed after this research that these structures are associated with Death, cult activities, chthonic divinities and eschatological beliefs.

Hadrian’s intention to discover what goes on behind death’s dark curtain is known. He devoted his life to seeking what is going on when the soul starts its journey to the other world. It would be appropriate for him to build this kind of structures in order to be able to simulate/understand this journey to the underworld. He wrote a poem about this:

Little soul, little wanderer, little charmer,  
Body’s guest and companion,  
To what places will you set out for now?  
To darkling, cold and gloomy ones-  
And you won’t make your usual jokes.<sup>138</sup>

After this research I may have not offered ideal solutions but I would suggest to the scholars who intend to work in Villa Adriana to give emphasis to the High ground. In order to give a solution to its mystery buildings, a systematic investigation across the site would be appropriate.

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<sup>138</sup> Birley 1997, 301. See the chapter Epilogue *Animula Vagula Blandula*.

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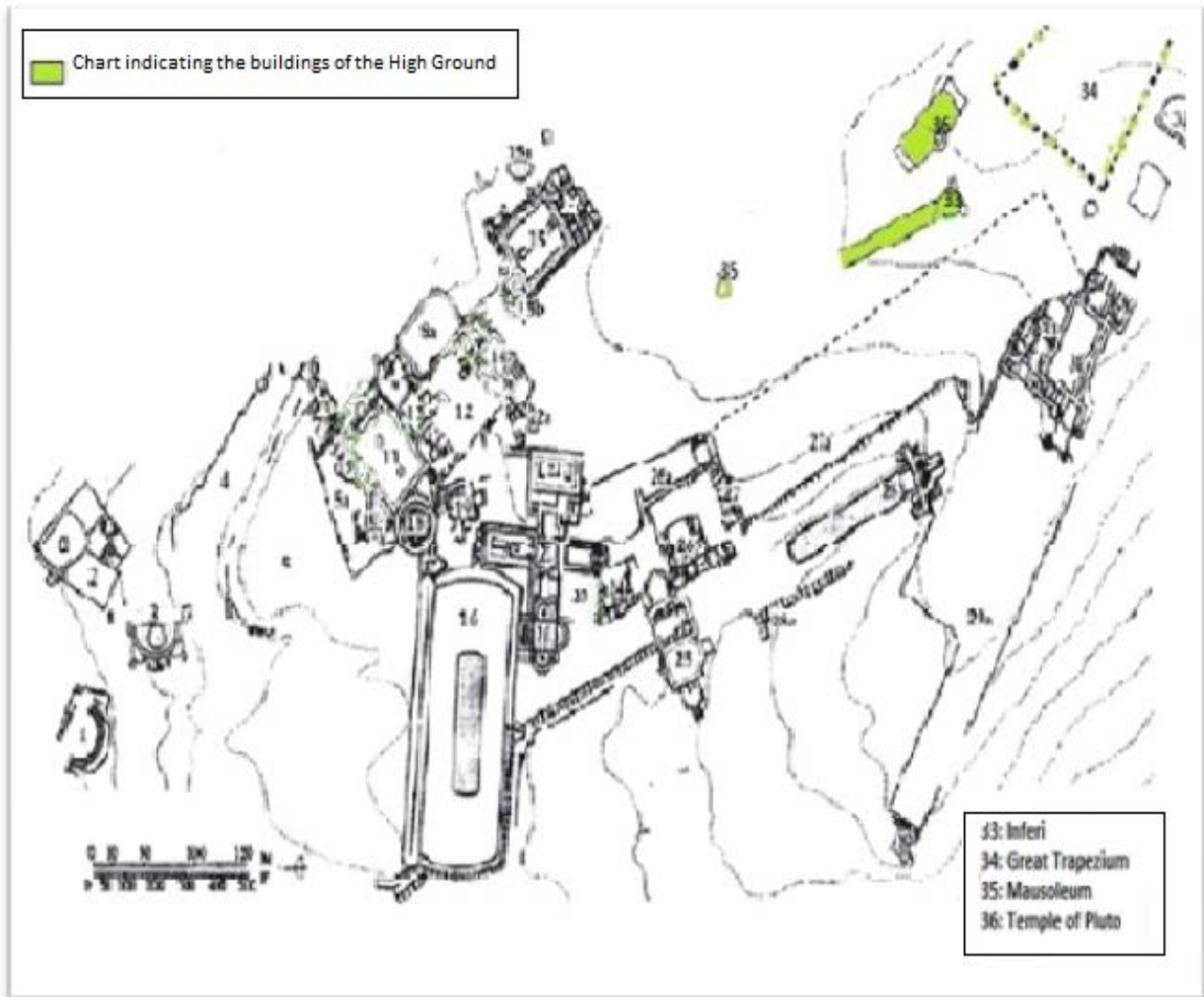
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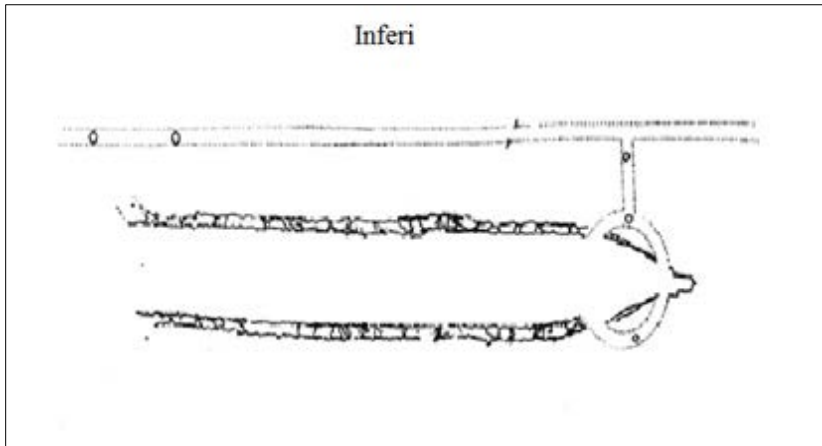
## VII. Figures

Figure 1



The plan of the Villa Adriana indicating the High Ground.

Figure 2



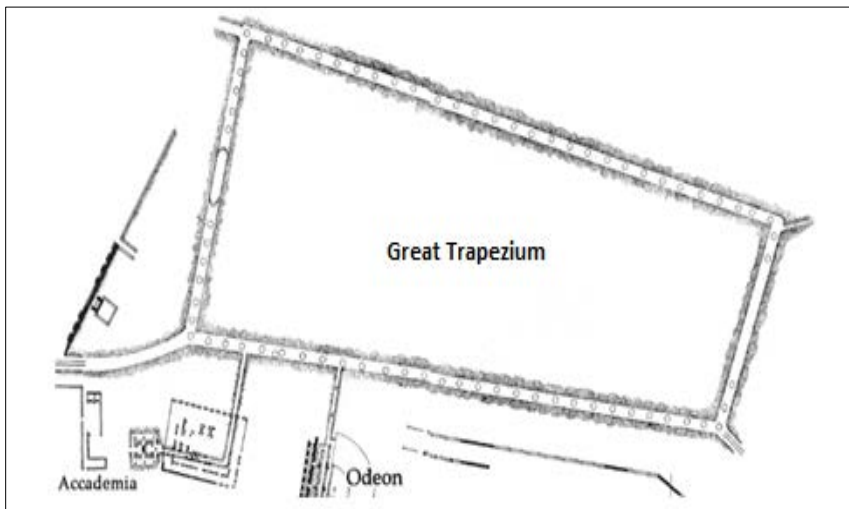
The floor plan of the Grotto.

Figure 3



The Grotto/cave

Figure 4



The Floor plan of the Great Trapezium.

Figure 5



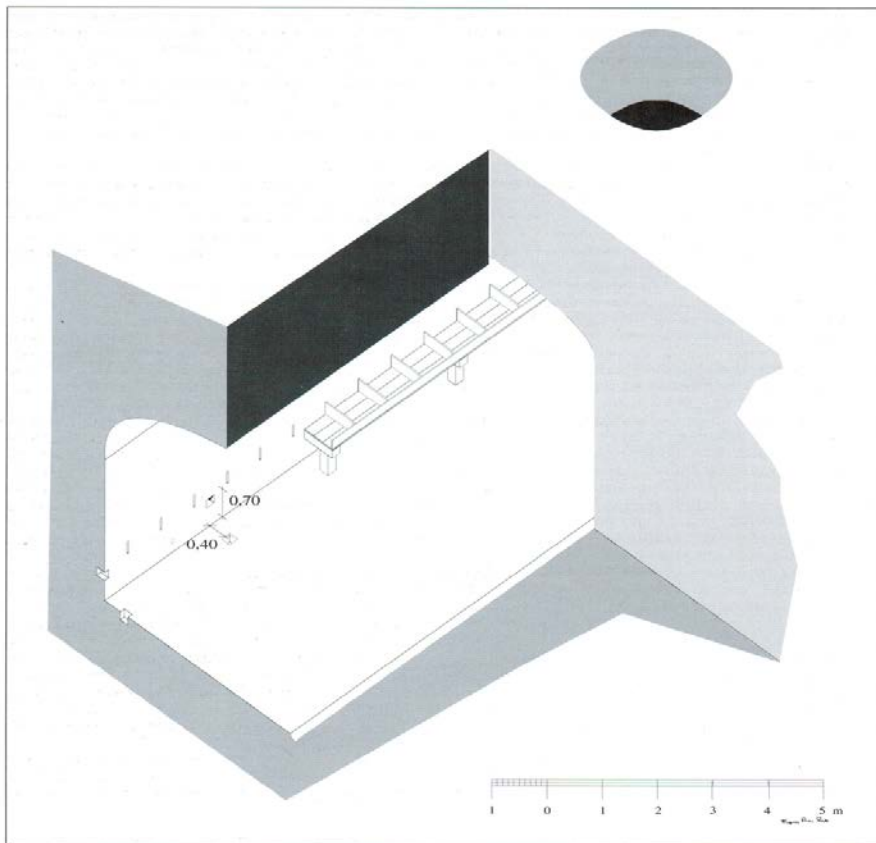
The north tunnel of the Great Trapezium.

Figure 6



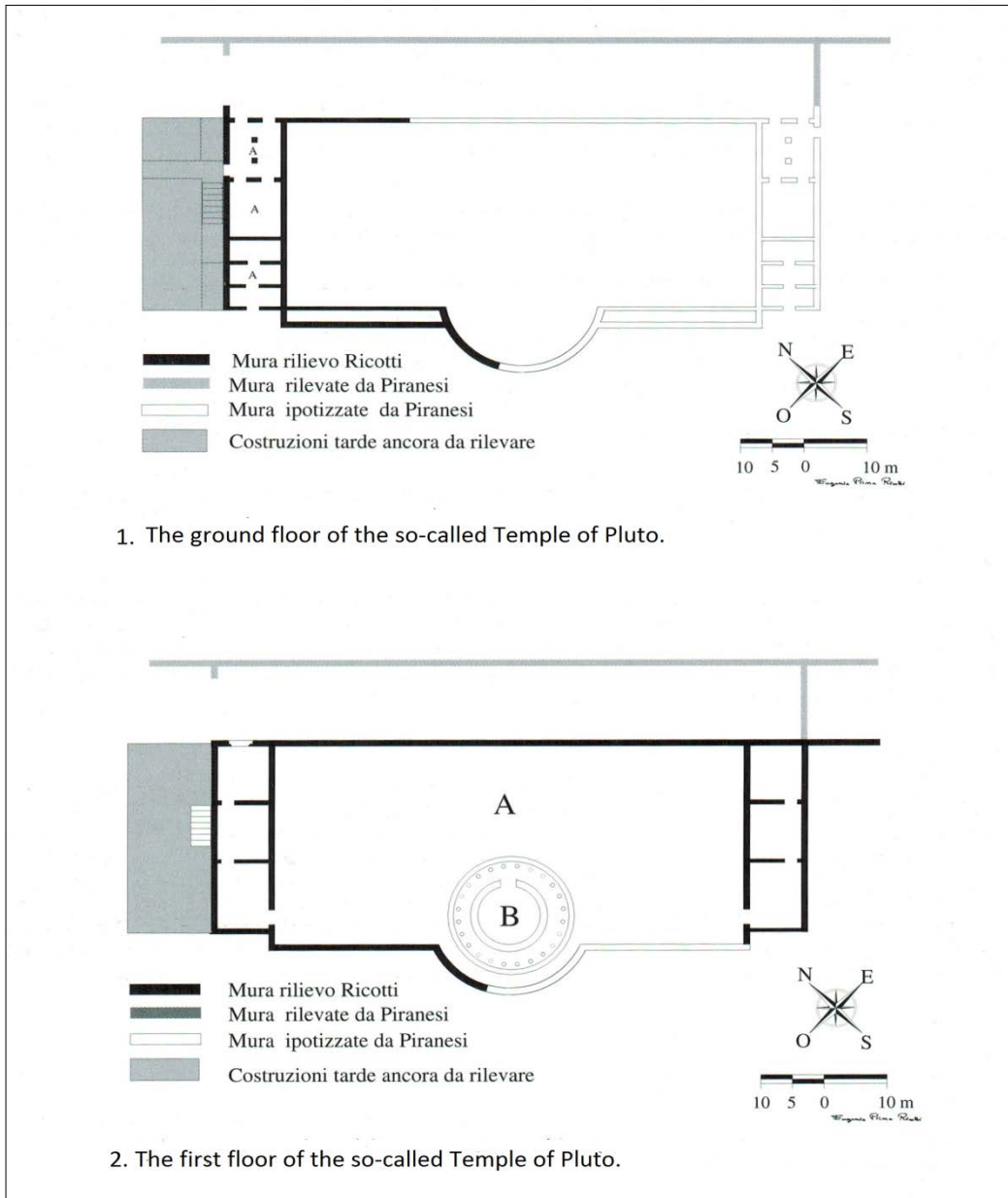
The east tunnel of the Great Trapezium.

Figure 7



The feeders found in the Great Trapezium.

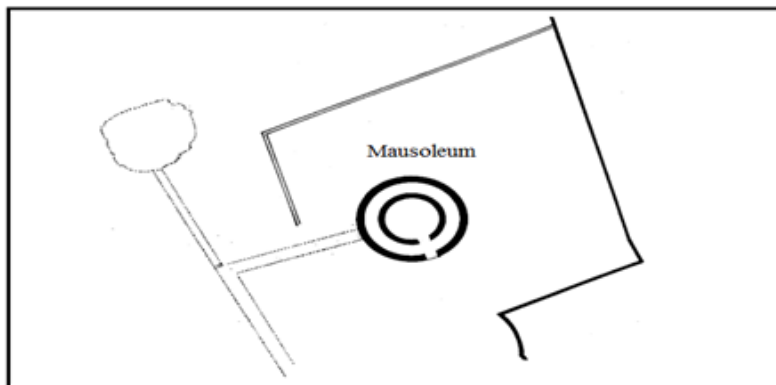
Figure 8



The Temple of Pluto



Figure 9



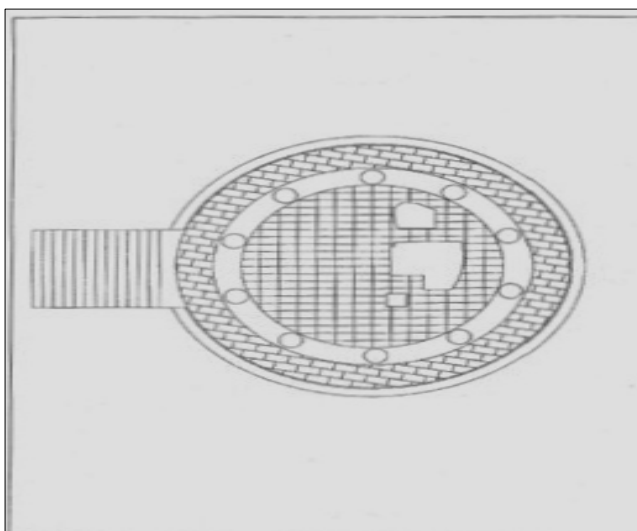
The floor plan of the Mausoleum.

Figure 10



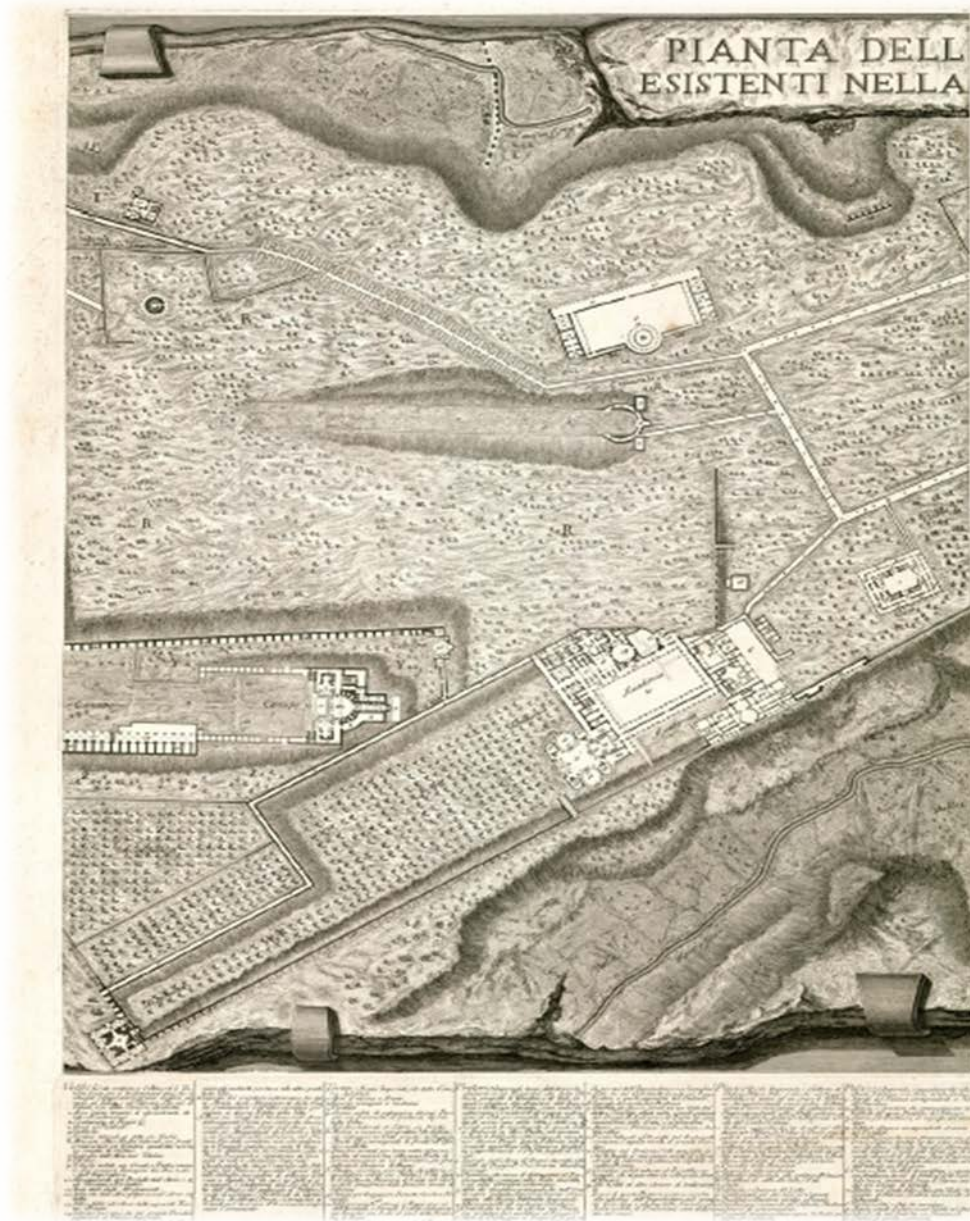
The Mausoleum as was visible in the XIX century in an engraving by Penna (1831).

Figure 11



The internal part of the Mausoleum.

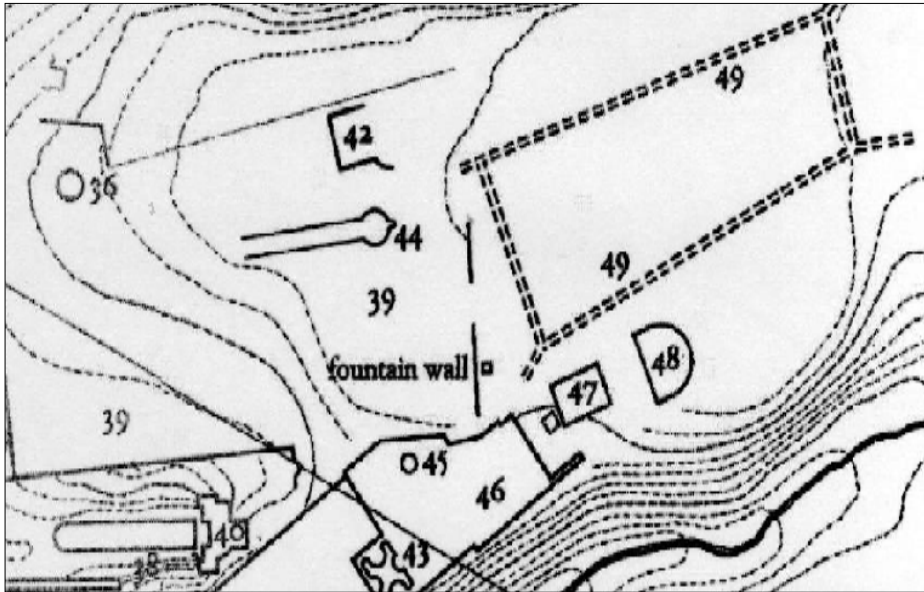
Fig. 12



The High Ground in *pianta delle fabbriche esistenti nella villa adriana* by Piranesi (1781).

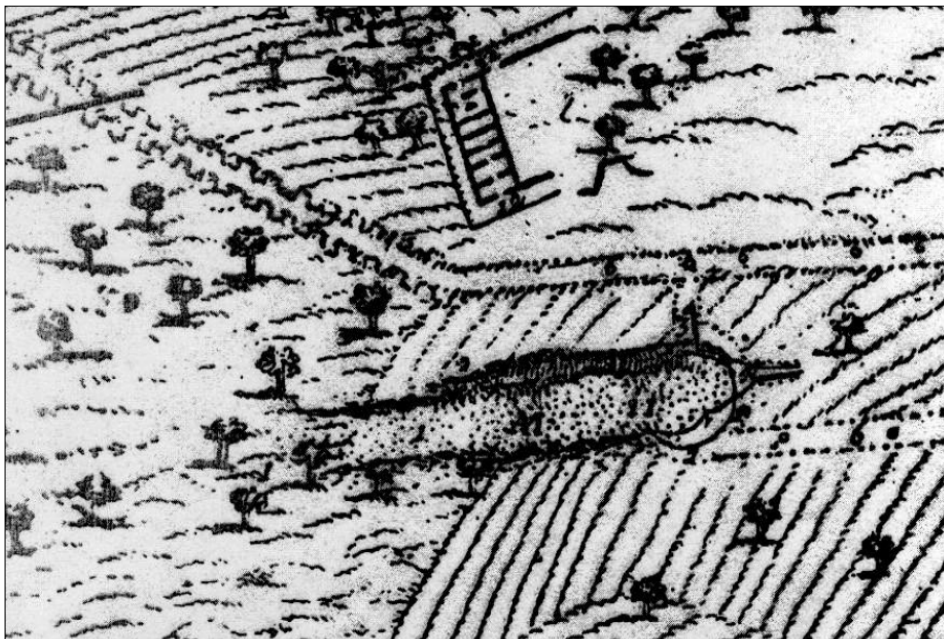


Figure 13



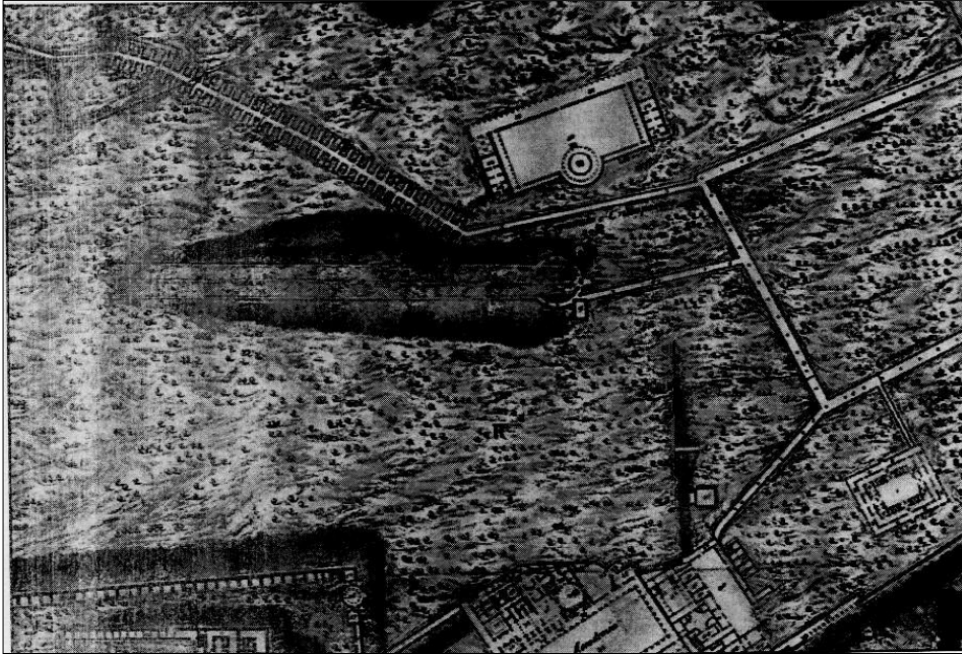
The “Grotto Complex” in the map of MacDonald/Pinto (Nr. 44: “Park Grotto”). Top right in the map, the so-called Trapezium (Nr. 49: “Underground Galleries”) (1995).

Figure 14



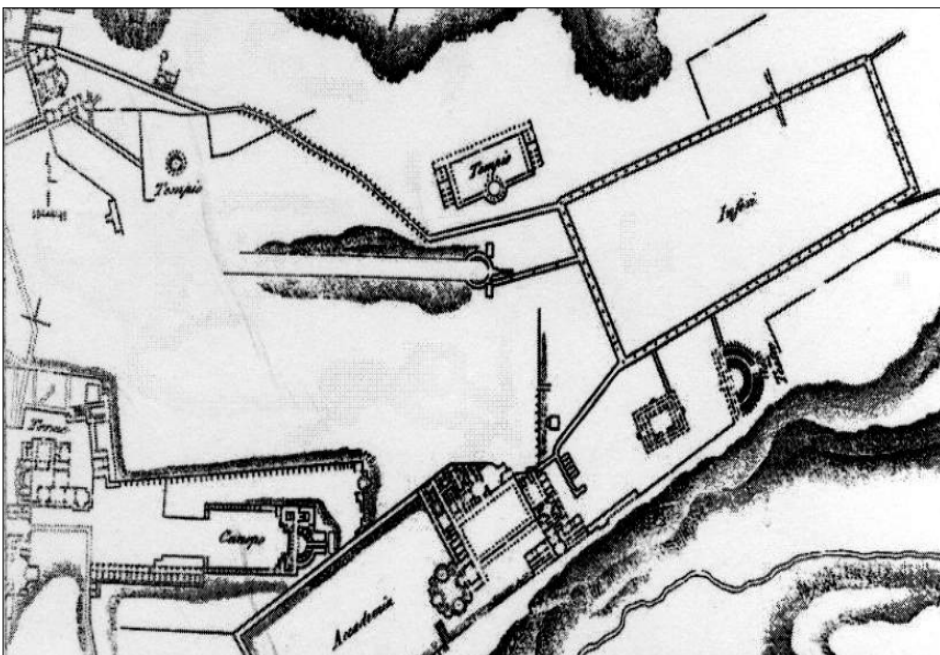
The Grotto in the plan from Ligorio/Contini; the underground aisle system is indicated with dashed lines (1668).

Figure 15



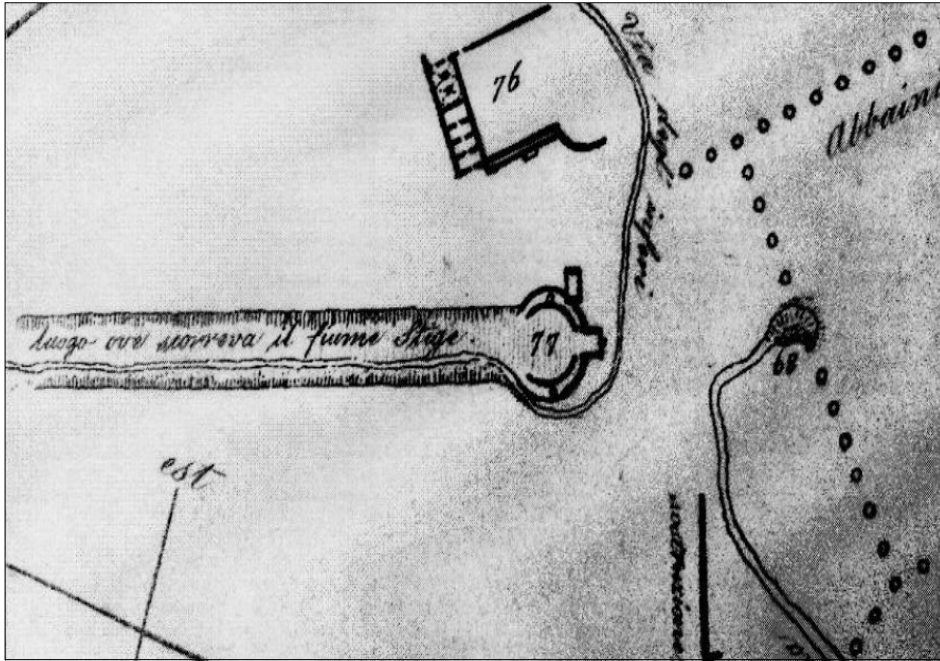
The “Grotto Complex” and its connection to the so-called Trapezium in the map of Piranesi (1781).

Figure 16



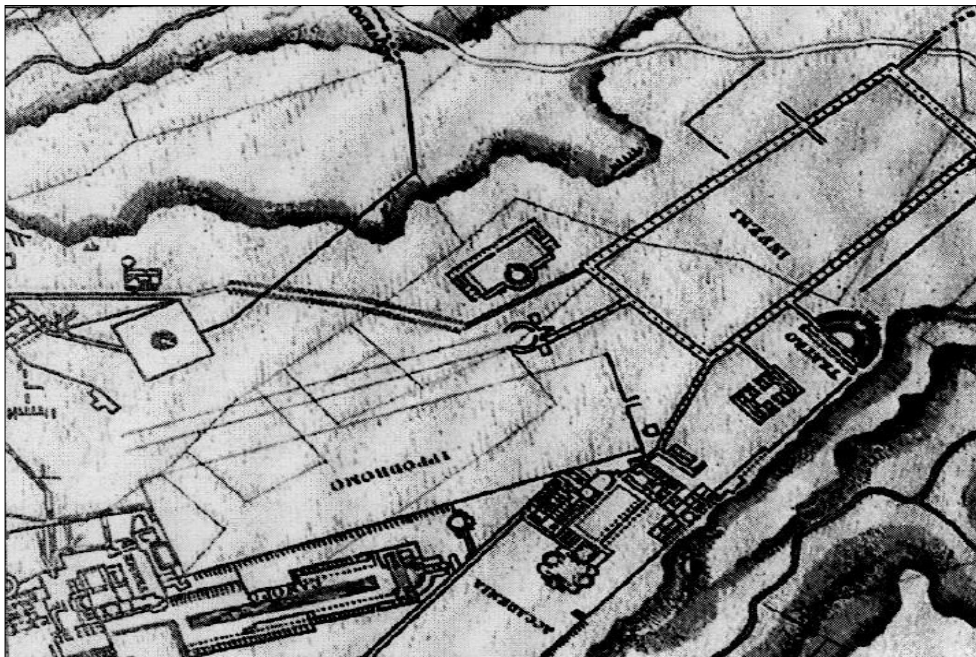
The (no name) Grotto complex and the Trapezium indicated as “Inferi” in the map of Nibby (1827).

Figure 17



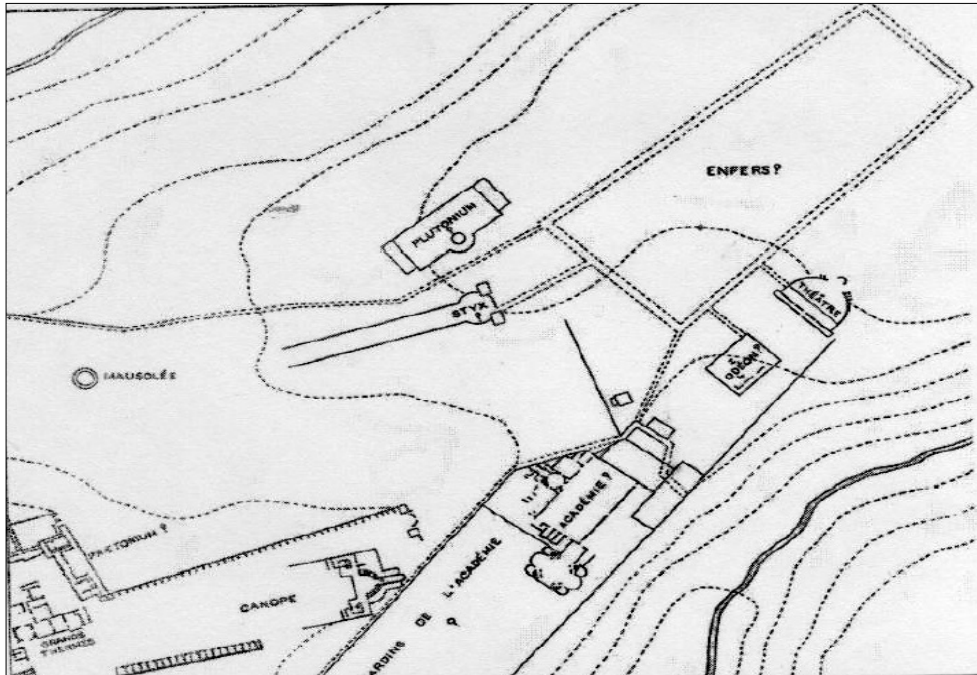
The Grotto complex in the map of Penna (1831).

Figure 18



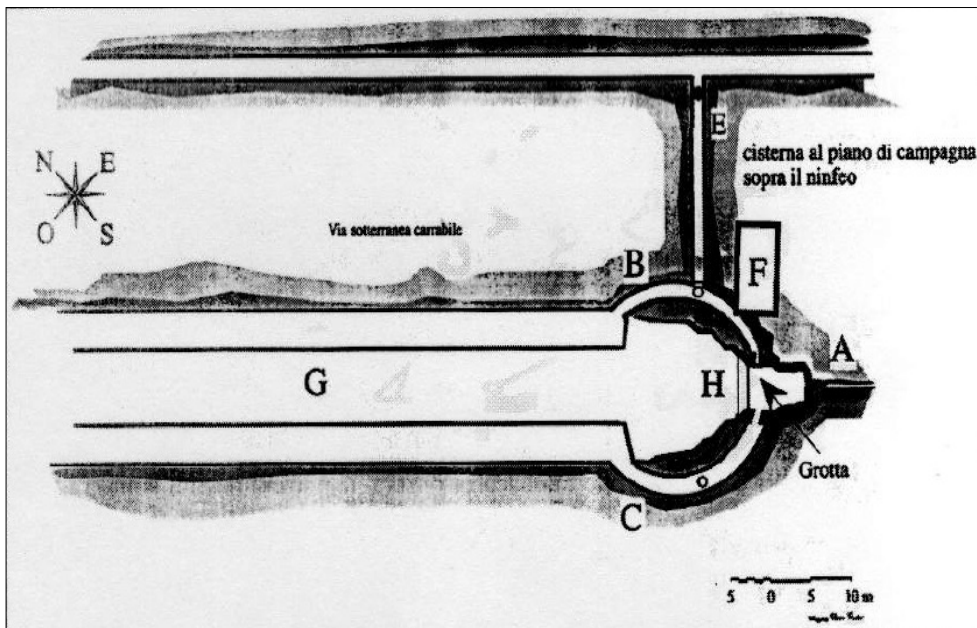
The (no name) Grotto complex and the Trapezium indicated as “Inferi” in the map of Canina (1856).

Figure 19



The Grotto ditch with the designation “Styx?”, “Plutonium?” and “Enfers?” in the plan of Gusman (1904).

Figure 20



The “Grotto Complex” in the illustration of Salza Prina Ricotti (2001).



*Comparative analysis*

Figure 21



The Nekromanteion of Tainaro

Figure 22



The Nekromanteion of Acheron

Figure 23



The Nekromanteion of Avernus

Figure 24



The entrance of the Oracle at Baiae

Figure 25



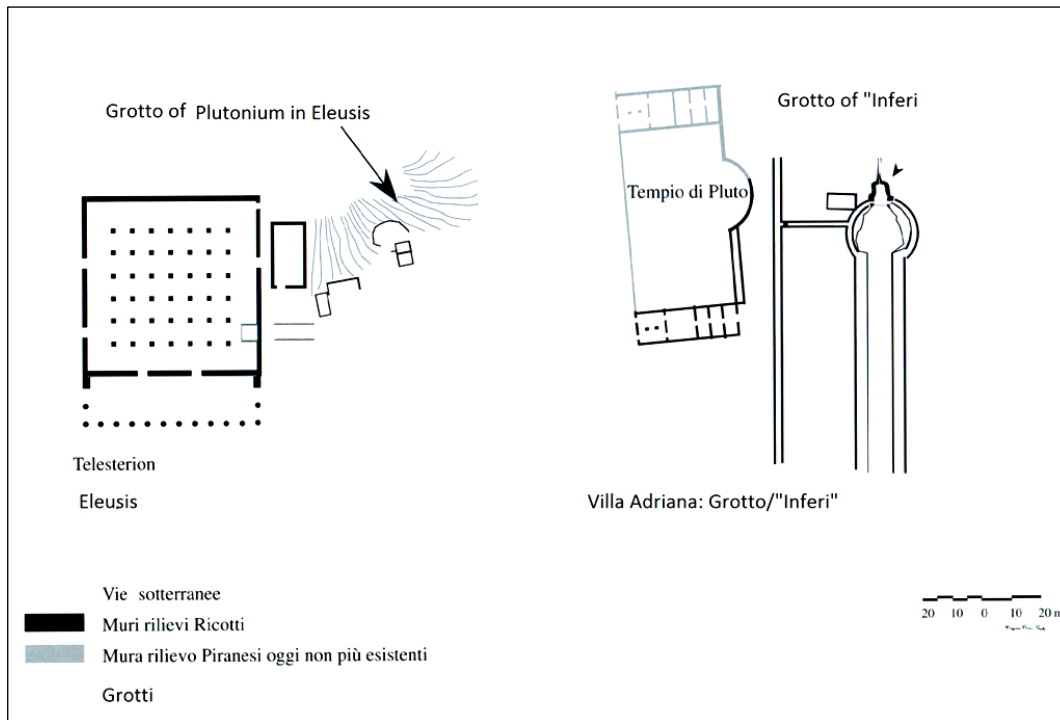
The Plutonium of Hierapolis

Figure 26



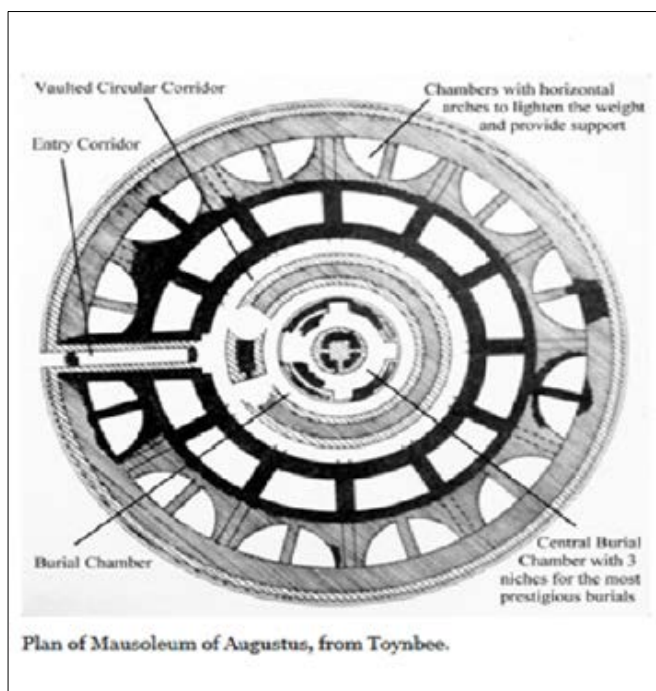
The Plutonium in Eleusis

Figure 27



The comparison between the so-called Temple of Pluto and the Grotto of the Underworld with Telesterium-Plutonium by placing them in the same scale.

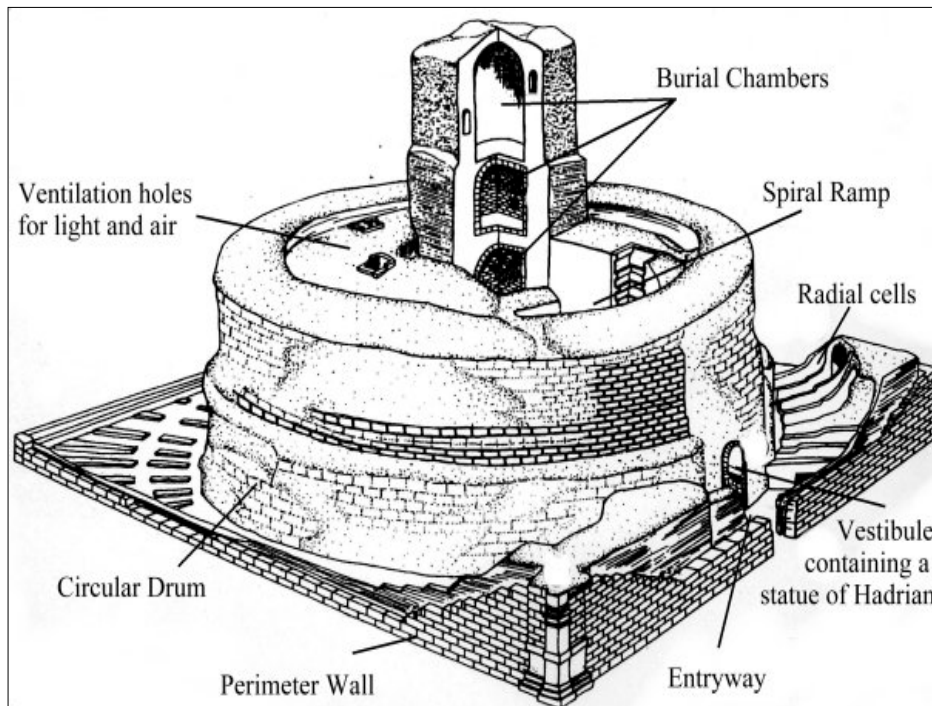
Figure 28



The plan of the internal of the Mausoleum of Augustus, similar to that of Hadrian's.



Figure 29



The plan of Hadrian's Mausoleum in Rome.