



Diputación
DE PALENCIA

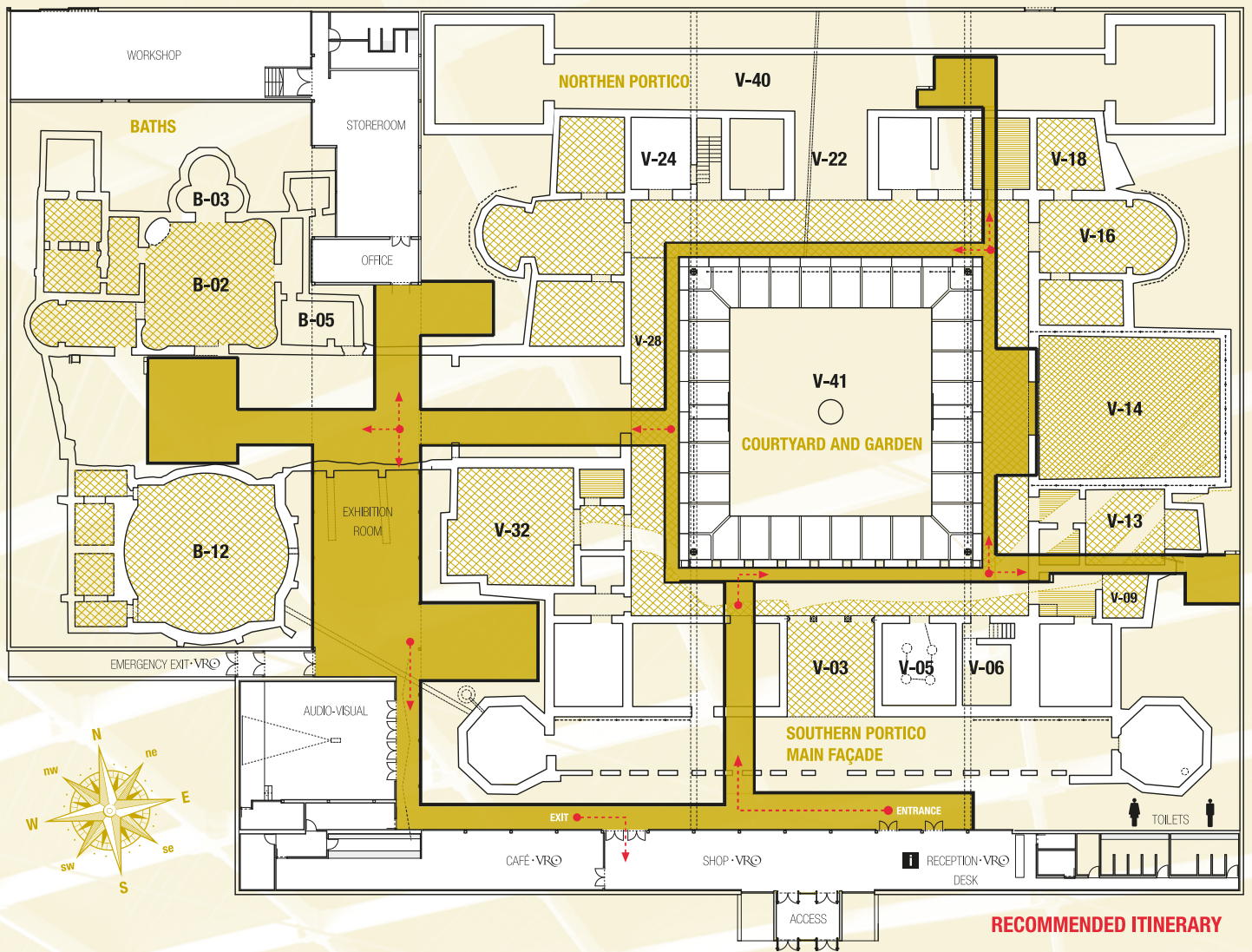
VRO VILLA ROMANA LA OLMEDA

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ASSET OF CULTURAL INTEREST from 1996

EUROPA NOSTRA PRIZE. Special Mention 2010





◆ **The Roman Villa (4th century A.D.)**

Total surface: 4.400 m², 1.416 m² of mosaics.

Oecus' mosaic: 175 m²

Baths: 900 m², a garden, 5 corridors, 4 towers, 2 porticos, 31 rooms

1 cold and warm bathroom, 10 rooms in the baths, latrines,

1 wardrobe.

◆ **The new building (2009)**

Urbanization: 28.000 m², Total building volume: 63.865 m³, Total building surface: 7.040 m², Surface covered by vaults: 6.083 m², Visitors' walkway surface: 974 m², Visitors' structure surface: 528 m², Polycarbonate closing: 1.850 m², Steel closing: 3.300 m², Steel structure: 680.000 Kg.

It was discovered in the summer of 1968 when Mr. Javier Cortes was levelling an area of his farming land. In 1980 his owner donated the site to the Diputación Provincial (*Provincial Council*) of Palencia, who has managed the archaeological work and the promotion and visiting of the villa since then. For this purpose a functional building was built and inaugurated in 1984. This building was expanded at different stages until the Diputación finally undertook the construction of a new one by architects Pedrosa-Paredes, finished at the beginning of the spring of 2009. This enables a visit to the villa and its conservation within a modern framework.

La Olmeda Roman Villa dates back to the late 1st or early 2nd century, in Flavian times, period which can be assigned to the structure of a primitive villa located north of the present one. In the mid 4th century a radical change in the location of the villa took place: the primitive building was abandoned or given another use and a new one erected, this one concentrates now most of the work on the archaeological site and is the main archaeological complex open to visitors.

It is a magnificent building with two separate parts linked by a wide corridor, the abode of the dwellers and to the west of this, the baths, with a total extension of 4,400 square metres and 1,400 square metres of mosaic pavement. But the villa complex was also made up of quarters for tenants and servants, storerooms, stables and other working areas. It also had a burial ground.





THE PALACE

The house, with nearly 3,300 square metres, has a square shape, with a garden in the middle surrounded by porticos that lead to the rooms. The house belongs to the type known as 'peristyle' house, of Mediterranean origin and frequent in the Roman world.

In its North and South fronts there are porticos with towers at either side, octagonal in the south front and square in the north. After going through the south portico, room **V-03** was the main entry into the building. At the back of room **V-03** there were two columns whose bases are preserved *in situ*, marking the passage from the hall to the south gallery of the peristyle.

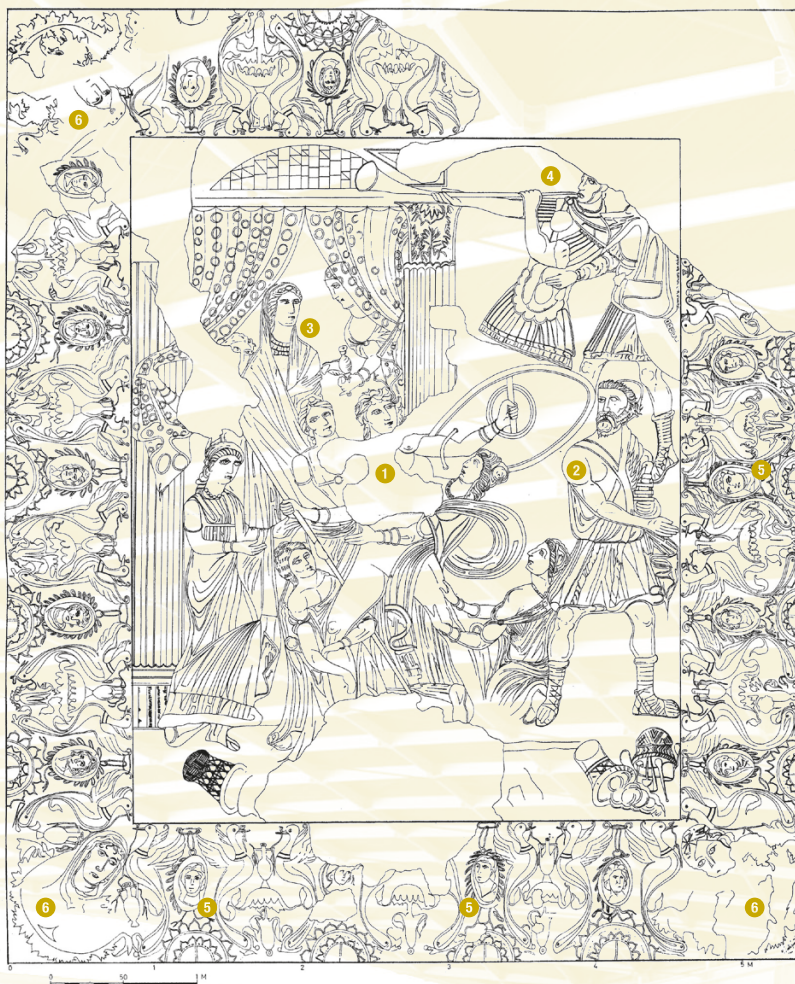
From the south gallery of the peristyle one could go into room **V-05**, with an *opus signinum* pavement (mortar of lime and ceramic fragments) presenting in its centre four hemispheric holes linked by channels, interpreted as a base for vases. This room and the adjacent **V-06** could have been used as a larder-storeroom.

On the outer part of the north wall of **V-06** there are remains of painting and the stairs to the upper floor can be seen. Room **V-09** is a kind of bedroom with one of the finest geometric mosaics in La Olmeda whereas room **V-13** can be considered one of the dining rooms or *triclinium* of the house.

The oecus (**V-14**), main room of the house with 175 square metres, boasts the best preserved and most important figured mosaics in La Olmeda.

The figured side of the room is made up of three diverse themes: the one nearest the doorway is a lively hunting scene, in fact seven different scenes. One of the finest figures is a wild boar hounded by dogs, of extraordinary realism uncommon in Hispanic mosaics. The centre of the room features a mythological theme: it is the legend of the trick by Ulysses to track down Achilles when the latter was hiding disguised as a woman in the *gynaecium* of the palace of the king Lycomedes, on the island of Skyros. In the mosaic, Ulysses, on the right, is pointing his finger towards Troy before Achilles, while the princesses of the island, daughters of Lycomedes, are trying to avoid his departure, in the knowledge that his fatal destiny will doom him to death at the war.

A broad band surrounding the scene of Achilles and Ulysses on the four sides is the third figured theme, the most important one for its singularity and accomplishment. It is a series of oval medallions hanging from the end of duck's wings whose tails turn into dolphins. Each medallion or *clipeus* displays a face, alternating male and female in most of the band, of predominantly young characters, even a young boy. These characters are a genuine gallery of family portraits with the *dominus* and his relatives. The four seasons are represented in the four corners of the band, winter being the most completely preserved.



Achilles in Skyros

- detail of the oecus' mosaic -

- 1 Achilles
- 2 Ulysses
- 3 Rea, Lycomedes' wife
- 4 Trumpet
- 5 Medallions with portraits
- 6 The four seasons

At the east end of the gallery a doorway leads to an apsed room, **V-16**, which had *hypocaust* or underfloor heating system.

The mosaic in room **V-18** has very bright colours, mainly yellow and red, with a pattern of squares and long hexagons separated by cable containing various geometric and flower motifs. Two bands surround it, one inside with three-petalled flowers (tulips) facing each other and another outside with four-petalled flowers inside squares. This mosaic is one of the few preserved in its entirety.

The rooms leading to the north gallery of the peristyle have *opus signinum* and earthen floor. **V-22** is the north entrance to the palace and in **V-24** we can observe where the staircase to the first floor was located. There were two floors on these north and south sides of the building, whereas the east and west wings were only one floor.

The west gallery of the peristyle (**V-28**) is paved with a mosaic with the same design as the one in the east gallery.

From the centre of this gallery starts a corridor to the west that leads to the baths. Room **V-32** was probably the dining room or main *triclinium* of the house.

The central space of the house, the peristyle garden (**V-41**), had a fountain in the middle, with hardly any surviving remains, surrounded by a small mosaic, now totally destroyed. From the fountain a brick drain visible now crosses the north gallery of the peristyle under the mosaic, room **V-22** and the north portico (**V-40**) and flowed into a perpendicular stream which existed at the time.

THE BATHS

It is a building located west of the house and linked by a wide corridor. House and baths are a unified construction built at the same time.

The corridor divides the baths in two: a large circular room of 170 square meters to the south, **B-12** in the floor plan, with four projections at right angles and light-colour *opus signinum* floor. On top of this is a juxtaposed mosaic.

This room was heated by means of hypocaust and the flues were located in the right-angle projections of the room. Two doors west of this circular room lead to four small rooms.

North of the corridor connecting baths and house and opposite the circular room in the south is the *apodyterium* or changing rooms of the baths, room **B-02**. It is square with rounded corners and a bench built on the east and part of the south walls. In the northwest corner a small oval-shaped bath in very good condition with steps to get into it.

The whole of the room is covered with *opus signinum* floor, superimposed on a roughly made mosaic. From the southeast corner of the room starts a deep stonework drain crossing room **B-05**, identified as the *letrinae* (toilets), covered with bricks or tiles.

From the centre of the north wall of room **B-02** a broad staircase goes down to the *frigidarium* (room for cold baths), of trefoil shape. This is room **B-03**, also with two opus signinum floors superimposed. West of the *apodyterium* was the area for lukewarm and hot baths (*tepidaria* and *caldaria*). One of these rooms is topped with a semicircular apse to the west and has mosaic flooring.

The group of mosaics in La Olmeda is one of the largest in private buildings in the Western Roman Empire. But for the approximately 400 square metres of the upper floor, now almost completely lost, the other mosaics making up 1,400 square metres are largely well preserved.

Their importance lies not only in their quantity but also in their quality, both in the geometric and in the figured ones, superior to most of the other Late Roman mosaics to be found in Spain.

One of La Olmeda's greatest achievements is mosaic preservation *in situ*, allowing the visitor to see materials from archaeological excavations nearby and providing a general idea of what a Roman villa was like.

THE MONOGRAPHIC MUSEUM OF LA OLMEDA ROMAN VILLA
is in the Church of San Pedro, in Saldaña, and it can be visited
with the same ticket for the Villa.



◆ **PHOTOGRAPHS AND VIDEO**

Taking photographs or filming inside the villa is not allowed.

◆ **DISABLED VISITORS**

There are toilets adapted to the disabled and wheelchairs available.

◆ **BABYS**

Baby seats, toilets and baby changers.

◆ **GIFT SHOP/BOOKSHOP**

Books, posters, T-shirts and a range of reproduction artefacts related to the villa can be purchased here.

◆ **COFFEE AND SHOP**

Snack Bar

◆ **OTHER SERVICES**

Meeting room, exhibition area, car and bus park, free wifi



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