

The Roman Villa in Rabaçal and Álvaro Siza

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Abstract

The residential area of the Roman villa in Rabaçal is a rare example of a house with an octagonal peristyle remarkable by its design coherence at all architectural levels, from the overall scale to decorative motifs. Everything is regulated by proportions derived from its octagonal plan naturally based in *ad quadratum* geometry. Recently, Siza was challenged to design covers and a visit tour in order to preserve this invaluable patrimony. Quite aware of the quality of the architecture displayed in this Roman villa he must have recognized *in-situ* many of his own architectural concerns. The sketchbook was opened, and the drawing search led him to propose two wood rectangular grid covers which, in spite of their modernity and technical sophistication, are still shapes with formal affinities with each part of the villa.

The Roman Villa in Rabaçal

The Roman road connecting Bracara Augusta (Braga) and Olisipo (Lisboa) passes through Rabaçal, a village 12 km south of the Roman town Conimbriga (Figure 1). In Rabaçal there is a Roman villa, possibly inhabited during the fourth and fifth centuries, whose excavation began in 1984. The *pars urbana* of this villa has a central octagonal peristyle with sides facing the cardinal points. The rooms and corridors define a beautiful radial structure around the peristyle and the East-West line through the centre of the octagonal peristyle is, broadly, a symmetry axis for the overall building (Figure 2).

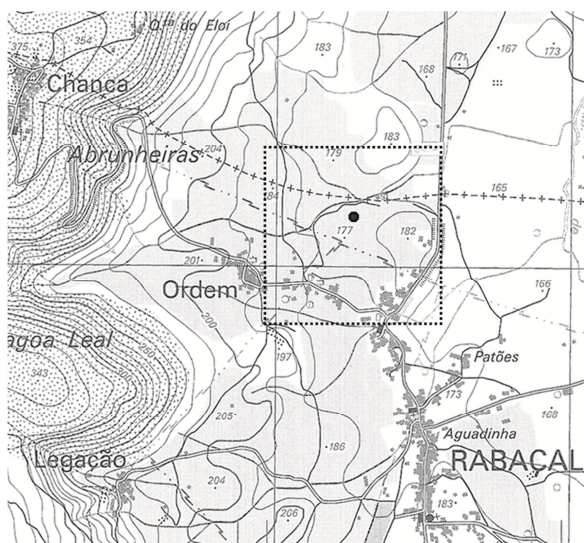


Figure 1: Topographic map, 1:25.000

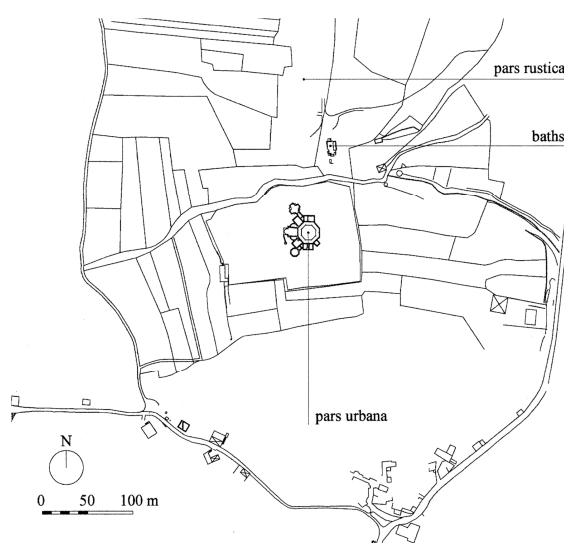


Figure 2: Site plan of the villa, Rabaçal