The Roman villa of Salar (Granada). The sculptural program in archaeological context*

La villa romana de Salar (Granada). El programa escultórico en contexto arqueológico

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ABSTRACT: During the last decade various excavation campaigns have taken place at the Roman *villa* of Salar (Granada, Spain), located in the province *Baetica*. The excavated sector corresponds to the area surrounding a large peristyle of the *pars urbana*. Presiding over the open courtyard on one of the shorter sides is a *triclinium*,

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which in turn is associated with a *nymphaeum*. The *ambulacrum* on the opposite side of the peristyle was also excavated, uncovering a mosaic pavement with an interesting hunting scene, as well as other rooms that open onto it. In this work, the typological and iconographic study of the sculptural program recovered is carried out. The sculptural assemblage consists of 1) two nymph sculptures discovered in the *nymphaeum* associated with the *triclinium*; and 2) a Capitoline type Venus statue, which possibly decorated another fountain located on the southern side of the peristyle. The archaeological context and petrographic analyses add to the study of the pieces, as well as the analysis of this sculptural program related to *nymphaea* and garden environments.

Keywords: *Baetica*; fountain-statues; *nymphaeum*; Roman sculpture; Venus Capitolina; nymphs.

RESUMEN: Durante la última década se han desarrollado varias campañas de excavación en la villa romana de Salar (Granada, España), situada en la provincial romana de la Bética. El sector excavado corresponde a la *pars urbana*, articulada en torno a un gran peristilo central. Presidiendo uno de los lados cortos del patio abierto se sitúa el *triclinium*, asociado con un *nymphaeum*. El *ambulacrum* en el lado opuesto del peristilo ha sido también excavado, descubriéndose un pavimento de mosaico con una interesante escena de caza, así como otras habitaciones que abren a este patio. En este trabajo se aborda el estudio tipológico e iconográfico del programa escultórico de la villa. El conjunto está integrado por: dos esculturas de ninfas, descubiertas en el *nymphaeum* asociado con el *triclinium*; y 2) una estatua de Venus, tipo Capitolina, que posiblemente decorase otra fuente, localizada en el lado sur del peristilo. El contexto arqueológico y los análisis petrográficos se integran en el estudio de las piezas, así como el análisis del programa escultórico del *nymphaeum* y el jardín circundante.

Palabras clave: Bética; estatuas-fuente; ninfeo; escultura romana; Venus Capitolina; ninfas.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Roman *villa* is located in the present province of Granada (Spain) within the municipality of Salar (Fig. 1), which occupies the middle *Singilis* valley, or present Genil River, all within the territory of the Roman province *Baetica* and ascribed to the *conventus Astigitanus*. To which *ager* it belonged to is not known; the nearest Roman city within the province of Granada is *Ilurco* (Pinos Puente), approximately 45 km away (Morales and Castillo, 2009), or *Vlisi* (Archidona) in the province of Malaga, approximately 35 km away (Beltrán and Loza, 2012). Literary and epigraphic sources mention several other Roman cities in this same area, *Baxo, Vesci Faventia, Ilipula Laus* or *Calecula;* however, their exact locations are not known[1]. Archaeological evidence of the *villa* was uncovered accidentally during the construction of the municipal wastewater treatment station in November 2004. A research team carried out an initial phase of excavations between 2006 and 2013, uncovering a *triclinium* associated with a *nymphaeum* and part of the eastern peristyle corridor or *ambulacrum*, as well as the beginning of the southern colonnade (González and El-Amrany, 2013; González Martín, 2014 and 2016).

A new team began work again in 2016 and has continued annually up to present[2], excavating a large part of the western peristyle corridor, as well as several rooms that open onto it (Fig. 2). The decoration found in this area contains outstanding mosaics, mural paint-
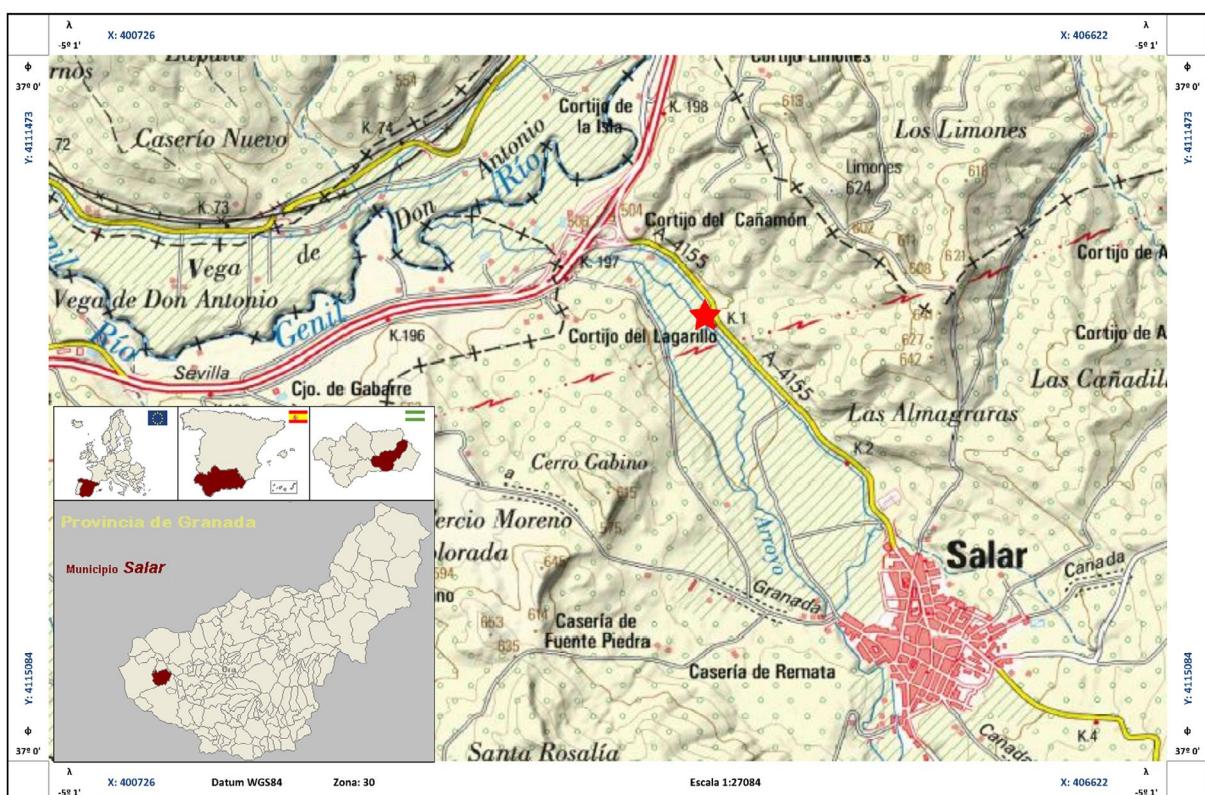

Figure 1. Roman *villa* Salar location (red star) (own elaboration, topographic map 1:25.000, IGN).

ings that imitate marbles (for *Baetica* see: Fernández Díaz, 2010), as well as statuary, on which this paper focuses, consisting of three exceptional pieces: two nymph statues found in the *nymphaeum* and a statue of Venus recovered in the western corridor of the peristyle. The first two pieces have been described by the discoverers (González and El-Amrani, 2013, pp. 48-51; González Martín, 2014, pp. 177-179), whereas, the third has already been analyzed individually (Loza *et al*., 2020).

2. THE *TRICLINIUM NYMPHAEUM* STATUES

The *triclinium* of *villa* Salar included a fountain consisting of a wide U-shaped perimeter channel that partially surrounded the room and a *nymphaeum* located at the rear or eastern wall (Román *et al*., 2018a and 2018b; Román, 2019; Moreno *et al*., in press). A large apsidal basin and the fountain source itself, located at the back, completed this water display. It flows over an inclined surface, creating a small waterfall. The inclined slope that descends from the niche to the second level of the fountain is covered with speleothem fragments; that is, a mineral deposit, which is formed by the precipitation of calcium carbonate deposits in caves, taking on a variety of forms such as stalagmites and stalactites (Fig. 3, A-B). This carbonate formation

must have been intentionally extracted from one of the caves close to the town to be used in the decoration of the fountain, evoking a *nymphaeum* or sacred grotto consecrated to the nymphs, according to Pomponius Mela (II, 3). Hence, a large number of nymph votive offerings modeled in the form of grottoes are known, alluding to nymph sanctuaries located in caves. The water from this grotto-like *nymphaeum* poured into the basin and hydraulic mortar coated canal.

The *triclinium* floor, situated below the fountain floor level, is paved with a geometric pattern mosaic (Marín, 2014-2015) (Fig. 4), while the lower walls are reveted with marble. The eastern perimeter corridor or *ambulacrum* opens onto the peristyle by means of a large entranceway flanked by two columns. This corridor is also situated above the lateral *ambulacra*, joining with them using two steps, as seen in the southern part of the perisytle (Hidalgo, 2016, p. 194). The eastern corridor is paved with a marine *thiasos* mosaic, the western part depicting a nereid riding on a *ketos* or sea monster (Fig. 5), dated, more likely, to the second half of the 4th century AD than to early 3rd century AD, as proposed in previous studies (Marín, 2016, pp. 438-439). Two features relate *villa* Salar to the nearby *villa* Gabia (Gutiérrez Rodríguez *et al*., 2016). In the first place, the use of *tubi fittili* of the type "terracotta vaulting tube with nozzle" (Lancaster, 2015, pp. 106-108

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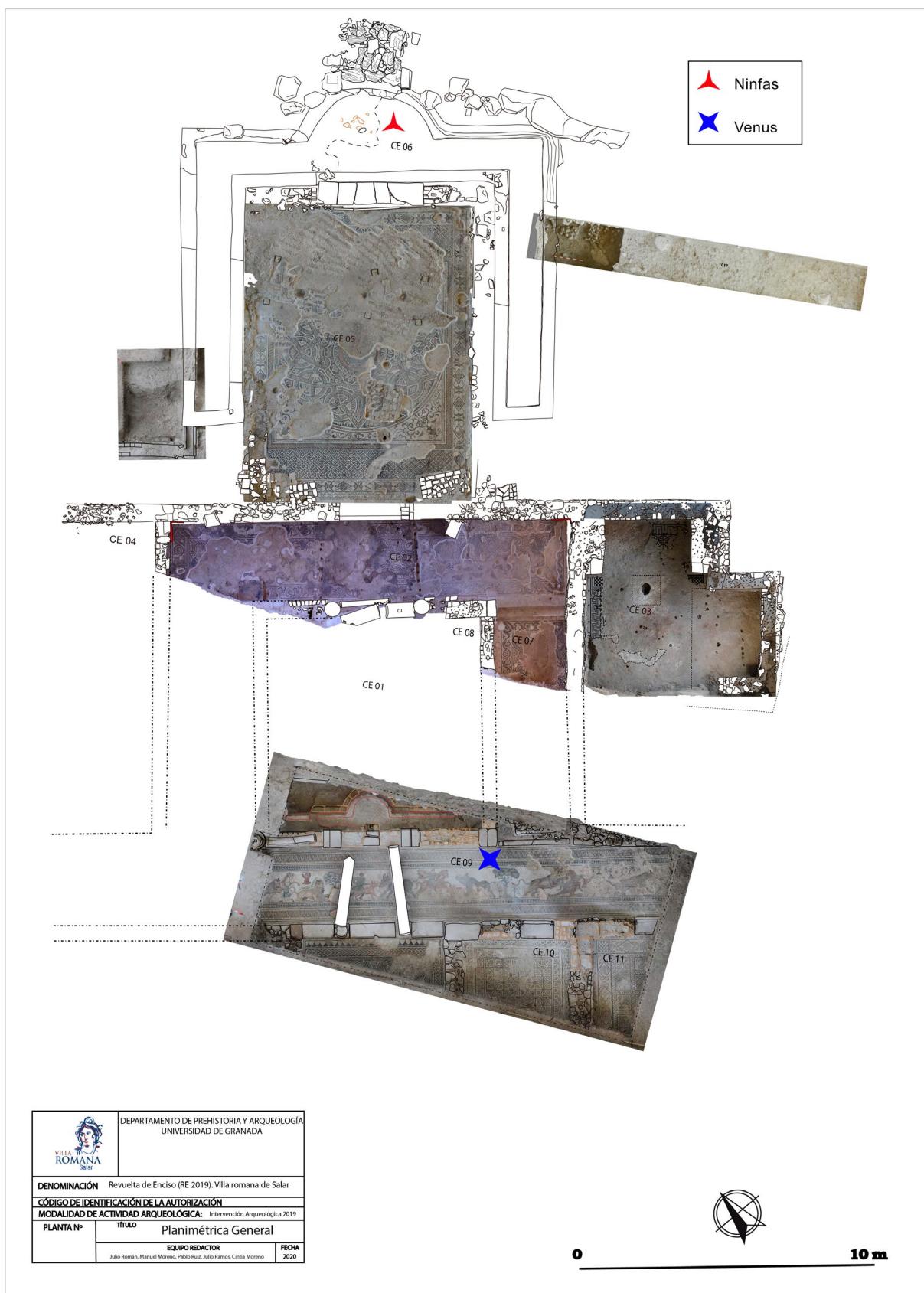
Figure 2. Groundplan indicating where the sculptures were found (PGI *Villa* romana de Salar).
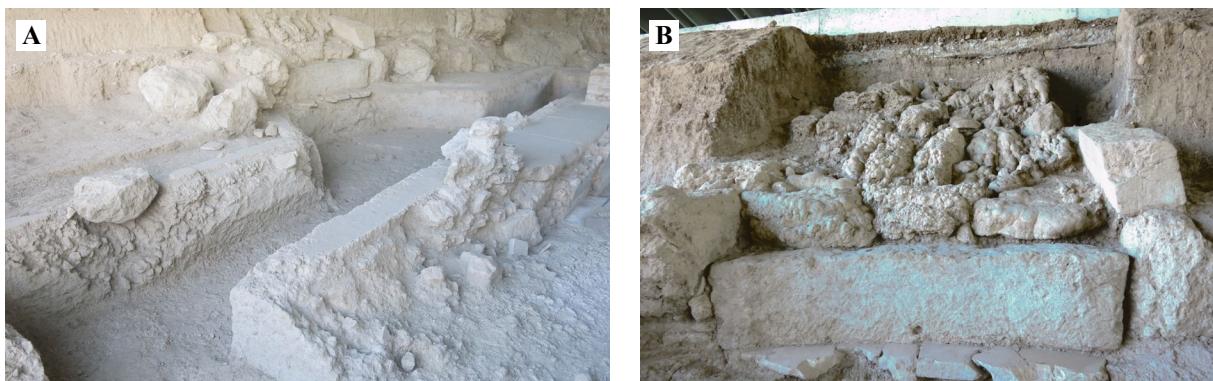
Figure 3. Fountain presiding the *triclinium* of *villa* Salar. A: Detail of the apsidal basin before the excavation of the niche.
B: Speleothem fragments in the niche (Photo J. Beltrán).

and 115-118) for some of the vaults (Moreno, Román and Ruiz, 2019). In *villa* Salar, they were most certainly employed in the *nymphaeum* vaulting, as various fragments were recovered in the fill here (Moreno, Román and Ruiz, 2019, pp. 138-140). Secondly, the presence of pieces of wall *opera sectilia;* those from *villa* Gabia were found in a cryptoporticus dated to the 4th century AD (Gutiérrez Rodíguez *et al*., 2016, pp. 299-301). Also, at the *villa suburbana* La Estación (Antequera, Málaga), dated to the same period, but located further away, similar *opus sectile* wall decor has also been documented (Gutiérrez Deza, 2005; López and Neira, 2010, p. 28).

A *triclinium* with a *nymphaeum*, occupying the rear wall and providing these rooms with water, is a common feature in Roman dwellings. Some cases are very similar to those described by Pliny the Younger (Fornell, 2009) and can be found in garden settings, for example, in Pompeian houses, being generically referred to as "water *triclinia*" (Salsa, 1987, p. 138). *Triclinia* tended to grow larger over time to house a greater number of guests (Dunbabin, 1991); the use of *stibadia* associated with fountains also developed (Morvillez, 2008). In the province *Baetica*, *villa* El Ruedo (Almedinilla), dated to the 4th century AD (Carrillo, 2016; Stephenson, 2009, p. 347) houses an outstanding *nymphaeum ad edicola,* decorated with an exceptional sculptural program composed of bronze and marble statues, that supplied a *stibadium* fountain with water (Vaquerizo and Noguera, 1997). Perhaps, the remains discovered in *villa* Caserío Silverio Mayorga (Antequera) (see discussion in Hidalgo, 2016, pp. 215-217), associated with a unique iconographic assemblage of small-sized statues, can be seen as another example of fountain *stibadium* (Beltrán and Rodríguez, 2018). Furthermore, the addition of rooms arranged around the same axis allowed the development of multiple *stibadia,* as seen, for example, in

Figure 4. Virtual reconstruction of the *triclinium* mosaic
(J. A. Benavides / J. A. Esquivel).

Figure 5. Nereid riding on a *ketos* (Photo Siglos, S.L.).

the Lusitanian *villa* Quinta das Longas (Elvas) with a triple-apsed *triclinium* (Dunbabin, 1996, p. 77), associated with an exceptional sculptural assemblage, all dated to the 4th century AD (Nogales, Carvalho and Almeida, 2004). The development of multiple *triclinia* and *stibadia* made it possible to entertain the guests during dinners with music, theatre, poetry, stunts, etc. *Nymphaea* would have provided these rooms with an architectural stage-like *scaenae frons* (Dunbabin, 2008), refreshing as well the summer evenings and providing a pleasant, soft background murmur (Fornell, 2005, pp. 368-376). In all, they were carefully planned rooms, following standards and professional guidelines, like those given by Vitruvius (VI, 5, 1-3), and steeped in cultural importance where the love of nature and good taste was clearly expressed in the décor elements (mosaics, mural paintings, sculptures and fabrics).

The *villa* Salar *nymphaeum* would have been a niched fountain (Gagniers *et al*., 1969) with an inclined wall, following the *nymphaeum ad edicola* type of Neuerburg (1965, pp. 61-64) and Letzner (1990, type XVI). In this case, the niche structure was placed behind the space coated with hydraulic mortar. The most frequently mentioned examples are those found in domestic settings of Pompeii and *Herculaneum*, although at *Ostia*, in the *Casa d'Amore e Psiche*, this type appears with a single central niche, therefore, similar to *villa* Salar, but from a later era (Jansen, 2018, p. 418, fig. 15). This first type is less complex than the facade *nymphaeum* type, which usually has a semicircular central niche flanked by two smaller ones, like the example located next to the *triclinium* in the *Casa del Torello* at Pompeii (Soprano, 1950) with niches capable of housing fountain-figures (Neuerburg, 1965, p. 76; Anderson, 1990, pp. 221-224). As to U-shaped perimeter canal fountains that surround the *triclinium* walls, the best example in Hispania is *Casa dos Repuxos* at *Conimbriga* (Hidalgo, 2016, pp. 208-209), although in this case it is lacking the fountain structure. Perhaps another example can be seen in *villa* Cadima (Los Gallardos) (Llidó, López and Martínez, 2016), but the room in question could either have been a large exedra-shaped fountain pool or a *triclinium* set on axis with the peristyle. Statues could have been installed in the exedra (Hidalgo, 2016, p. 209), as several unstudied sculptural fragments recovered in this room suggest. Among this collection is a female hand with a *thyrsus*, perhaps a maenad, and a statue support of a personification, possibly a character from a Bacchus *thiasos* (Llidó, López and Martínez, 2016, p. 30, fig. 7).

Two female sculptures carved in marble were found in the fill that had sealed the *nymphaeum* exedra of *villa*

Salar. They had served as fountain-figures in the decor program of the water display, perhaps inside the fountain niche or, more likely, installed on the facade. The first figure, representing a nymph (Fig. 6, A-B), was made in white marble, fine to medium-grained with homogeneous texture, coming from Pentelic quarries (Greece) according to petrographic analysis[3]. It measures 52 cm (height), 18 cm (width) and 11 cm (thick) with an irregular plinth, 4 cm in height. The head and right forearm are missing, also the central torso presents a large fracture, as well as other minor ones in the left arm, shoulder and neck, but all fragments join. A deep slit, running from the nape of the neck to the waist, shows traces of a small lead pipe[4], confirming its fountain-statue function. Usually in this model, water poured forth from a vessel held by the figure, but in this case, the figure had been repiped, making it flow from above. The nymph is depicted resting her weight on the left leg, wearing a mantle that covers the underbelly – hinting at view of the pubis – and legs with only the tips of her sandaled feet visible. The upper part of the mantle appears rolled up, as well as on the left forearm, from where it falls into a stepwise ray of folds. As mentioned before, the tilt of the torso was compensated by placing the right arm on a pedestal or low column where an attribute, usually a jug or pitcher, was added to help support the figure. In the study case, the statue support is missing and only a *puntello* remains on this side. Its stylistic features date it to the 2nd century AD, possibly, towards the middle or third quarter of the century, and also indicate that it was not manufactured in *Hispania,* but imported.

This nymph statue is a replica of a well-known Greco-Roman type, which derives from the Aphrodite *Pontia Euploia* model (e.g. Delivorrias, Berger and Kossatz-Deissmann, 1984, pp. 69-70; Díez Platas, 1987; Inan, 1989; Schroder, 2004, pp. 257-260, n. 150; Aristodemou, 2012, pp. 116-119), closely related also to the Venus Marina type, well defined by G. Becatti (1971; also, for example, Delivorrias, Berger and Kossatz-Deissmann, 1984, p. 65, n. 554-562; Loza, 1992; Schröder, 2004, pp. 172-175). Both types were frequently used, although not exclu-

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3   Archaeometric analysis report on the sculptures found in the Roman *villa* of Salar (Granada) by Dr. Esther Ontiveros Ortega (reference PPT000506), Geology Laboratory of the *Instituto Andaluz de Patrimonio Histórico* (IAPH). 19_VS_2 GE sample, petrographic, mineralogical and geochemical study using optical microscopy of light transmitted on thin sheets, X-ray diffraction and X-ray fluorescence. Corresponds to a fine-grained calcic marble (MGS 1mm) with mosaic texture and curved and semi-curved contacts.

4   According to González and El Amrani (2014, p. 49) they are the remains of an iron spike to join with the head, which we consider incorrect.

Figure 6. Pudica nymph from *villa* Salar. A: Front. B: Back (Photo: PGI *Villa* romana de Salar).

sively, as fountain-figures, differing only in the mantle arrangement. Thus, the Aphrodite *Pontia Euploia* model was simplified by leaving part of the left arm uncovered and eliminating the usual triangular end arrangement of the mantle in front of the thighs. Some 20 Roman replicas of this type have been documented and debates focus on its origin –whether in Rhodes in the 2ⁿᵈ century BC or Alexandria towards the end of the century (Inan, 1989; discussion in Schröder, 2004, pp. 275-260) – or if it represents a nymph or the goddess Venus, although "la estatua fue transformada en una Afrodita sólo en tiempos romanos" (Schröder, 2004, p. 259).

Statue supports were usually placed next to the left leg, although in the nymph or Venus statue from *villa* Salar it appears on the opposite side. Also, the coiled arm bracelets have been left out, and the mantle arrangement and its folds are quite simple. However, its interest lies in the fact that it is the first representation of this Roman sculpture type documented up until now in Hispania[5]. Other figures have been documented, but

in very poor condition, making it impossible to establish their types, as the two small fragmentary sculptures from *Lusitania*, one from Ança in the *Museo Nacional Machado de Castro* (Coimbra) collection (Loza, 1992, pp. 438-439, n. 96, lám. LXXXIX; Díez Platas, 2013, p. 65) and the other in the *Museo Regional* of Evora (Loza, 1992, pp. 447-448, no. 96, lam. LXXXIX; Díez Platas, 2013, p. 65). Also, a larger and well preserved sculpture found in the Lusitanian city of *Augusta Emerita* (Mérida) is posed like the Salar copy, but, even though its right arm is resting on a column where a jug lays horizontally, its general iconography is more akin to the semi-drapped Venus Pudica type (Loza, 1992, pp. 424-427, n. 76, lam. LXXV).

A second figure was discovered next to the nymph sculpture described above, in this case, a nymph with a shell (Fig. 7, A-B). It was carved in white marble, most likely local stone[6], visually identified by its macroscopic aspect and dolomitic properties with marble from the southern region of *Sierra Mijas* (Málaga) (Beltrán and Loza, 2003). In any case, the use of local marble ensures that it was produced in a local workshop towards the end of the 2ⁿᵈ century AD or, more likely, the beginning of the 3ʳᵈ century AD. It is known that local workshops manufactured statuary with marbles extracted from Mijas (Málaga) quarries up until the Severan period (Beltrán and Loza, 2003; Beltrán *et al*., 2018). The figure is preserved only from the waist down, measuring 42 cm in height and 24.5 cm in width with a plinth, curved in the front and left side fragmented, 7 cm in height. The mantle falls along the back, surrounds the hips and opens on the side, exposing the legs and bare feet. It holds a large shell in both hands, covering the abdomen and pubic area, bored with a hole, like a *labrum*, from which water poured forth into the fountain. This hole appears also at the back, boring through the statue almost horizontally.

The standing nymph holding a shell is one of the most common types of fountain-statues, stemming back to the 3ʳᵈ century BC Hellenistic period, although it also has iconographic similarities with Aphrodite representations that derive from sculptural prototypes that inspired the 4ᵗʰ-3ʳᵈ centuries BC creations, as G. Becatti has pointed out (Becatti, 1971). However, the addition of a shell functioning as a fountain source dates to Roman era, as seen in the first known example, a relief from Ischia (Díez Platas, 1987 and 2013, p. 62). Altogether, the shell motif associated

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5 The Prado Museum Venus or nymph, dated between 75-100 AD, is not come from Hispania, but was originally part of Christine of Sweden's collection in Rome (Schröder, 2004, pp. 257-260, n. 150). Nor is the Venus Marina statue of the *Museo de Zaragoza* Spanish, but originally part of the Marquis of Villahermosa collection (Mora, 2001, p. 135, fig. 7).

6 The petrographic analysis (vid., supra, note 3) did not reach an exact conclusion. Sample 19_VS_1 GE (IAPH Geology Laboratory) corresponds to a calcic marble, with heteroblastic texture, MGS >2 mm and straight and sutureed grain contact.
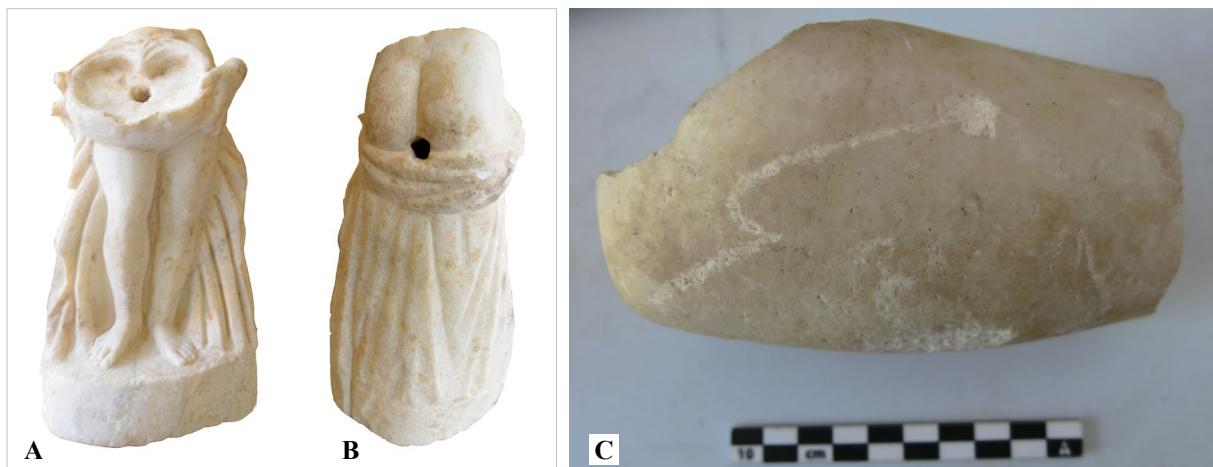
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Figure 7. A-B. Nymph with shell from *villa* Salar. A: Front. B: Back (Photo: PGI *Villa* romana de Salar). C. Sculpture fragment, from *villa* Salar (Photo J. Beltrán).

with Venus and nymphs was highly popular in the Roman world, appearing in standing or crouching nymph fountain-figures (Leander-Touati, 2005, 13), clothed or completely naked (Ghedini, 1985; Baratta, 2013), following the diverse iconographic types. Their association to *nymphaea* made them a common feature in the decoration of stepped fountains, a small-sized water display found frequently in Roman houses, like an example on display in the Archaeological Museum of Altino (Galliazzo, 1979, lám. XVI, fig. 21) and another in the Archaeological Museum of Sparta (Aristodemou, 2012, p. 120, n. 75). This nymph type also appears in various Pompeian mural paintings, as in the *Casa delle Vestali*, *Casa dei Ceii*, *Casa di Romolo e Remo*, *Casa di Cecilio Iucundo* or *Casa di Salustio*; in other wall decoration examples, they were depicted as sculptures, for example, in the *Casa della Fontana dell'Amore*, *Casa della Venere in Bikini*, *Casa di Marco Lucrezio* or also in the Stabian baths (Moorman, 1988, p. 44).

The most common sculptural scheme is the standing nymph, represented partially draped in a mantle slung around the hips, as the copy in study. However, they correspond to two different types depending upon the mantle and leg arrangement, those being the Venus Pudica and the Venus of Siracusa or Landolina (Ghedini, 1985; Aristodemou, 2012, pp. 119-120; Baratta, 2013). In the first case, the mantle appears wrapped around the hips and completely covering the legs, while it holds a large scallop shell (Ghedini, 1985); whereas, in the second type the legs are left uncovered, as in *villa* Salar's figure. The Venus Pudica type was very common throughout the entire Roman Empire (Kapossy, 1969, pp. 12-13, figs. 1-2; Baratta, 2013, p. 199) and a few copies have been documented in *Hispania*. Two slightly larger than life-sized statues

were found in the province capital *colonia Patricia Corduba*, belonging perhaps to part of the theater's decorative program (Loza, 1993, pp. 145-146, lám. 2), together with another smaller sized copy, currently lost (Loza, 1993, p. 146); also, there is a fragmentary figure from *Tarraco* (Tarragona) (Loza, 1992, pp. 327-329, n 63, láms. LX and LXI; Díez Platas, 2013, p. 65). As well as a copy in the Prado Museum, however the shell is a Modern Age addition and its provenance is foreign (Schröder, 2004, pp. 167-171, n. 18); lastly, there is another example in the Alba collection (Loza and Beltrán, 2011, pp. 314-316, n. 13).

The second nymph type, like the *villa* Salar copy, derives from the Venus Landolina prototype (Ghedini, 1985). This model receives its name on account of a sculpture found in a *nymphaeum* at Syracuse, corroborating its original function as part of fountain decor (Becatti, 1971, pp. 27-28). In some cases, as when water flowed directly from the breasts, the shell was only an attribute, like the Bardo Museum example or another copy discovered in Marseille (Kapossy, 1969, p. 14). Up until now, the only known replica in Roman Hispania was a fragmentary figure, missing the head, arms and part of the shell, from *Tarraco* (Tarragona). Presumably, it belonged to a domestic environment and formed part of the sculptural arrangement in a small *nymphaeum*; the rough finishing on its backside suggests that it was installed in a niche (Koppel, 1985, p. 119, n. 187, lam. 83, pp. 3-5).

Another sculpture fragment, discovered when cleaning the pool on the right side of the nymphaeum, corresponds to a third female statue (Fig. 7, C). It is modeled in fine-grained white marble and visibly similar to the stone of the first sculptures studied, as, at the moment, no analysis has been carried out. The measurements preserved are the following: height, 13 cm;

width, 7,5 cm; thickness, 6,5 cm, which suggests that this figure was slightly larger than the other two sculptures discovered in the fountain. It shows part of the right arm and elbow, and, at least, the part preserved appears naked. Its partial state impedes identifying the character represented, as well as the sculptural type it would correspond to. However, it must have been part of the *nymphaeum* statuary decoration, most likely, a representation of a nymph, as the other two preserved sculptures. The arrangement of the fountain, which reproduces a grotto, reinforces this hypothesis and, therefore, the decorative program would have consisted of three sculptures, most probably nymphs.

The *villa* Salar nymphs most certainly adorned the *nymphaeum* in the 4th century AD, although their exact arrangement is unknown. They could have simply been installed on the facade, displaying the variety of nymphs as fountain sources and decor. The aforementioned relief from Ischia, in the Hermitage collection and dated to the 1st century AD (Piotrovsky, 2001, p. 142), offers a hypothetical sculptural arrangement. In the central part, a nymph or Venus is depicted pouring water from a scallop shell and flanked by two other nymphs, each supporting an overturned vessel on a pedestal from which water flows, creating a pendant, a sculptural display well-known in the Roman world (Bartman, 1988 and 1991, pp. 80-82). Although this votive relief, which possibly represents an ideal statue arrangement in a *nymphaeum*, has no direct relation to the Salar pieces, it can be used as a proposal for their original sculptural arrangement. According to this, the

nymph holding the shell would have stood in a central position flanked by two *Pontia Euploia* type nymphs, forming a pendant. This mode was followed in Hispania and can be found in similar fountain contexts near *villa* Salar, for example, in *villa* Bullas (Murcia), where various marble Erotes fountain-figures have been found (Loza and Noguera, 2018). According to this hypothetical arrangement, only one of the two nymph replicas has been recovered in *villa* Salar, that is, the figure holding a jug on its right side, which in the original scheme would have been positioned to the left of the main sculpture.

3. THE VENUS STATUE

As stated earlier, the access between the eastern *ambulacrum* and the peristyle had been monumentalized with two large columns sustaining a pediment. A *diaeta* decorated with a mosaic pavement added to the embellishment of this area of the open courtyard (Hidalgo, 2016, p. 192). In our opinion, various columns, smaller in size than the supports used in the *ambulacra* and re-used in a late Roman remodeling of this environment, could have been taken from a fountain display or pool located in the non-excavated central area of the courtyard. A perimeter canal coated with hydraulic mortar completed the additional architectural elements found in the peristyle. The western *ambulacrum* and the southwestern part of the interior courtyard have been completely excavated, revealing the presence of small semicircular fountains located
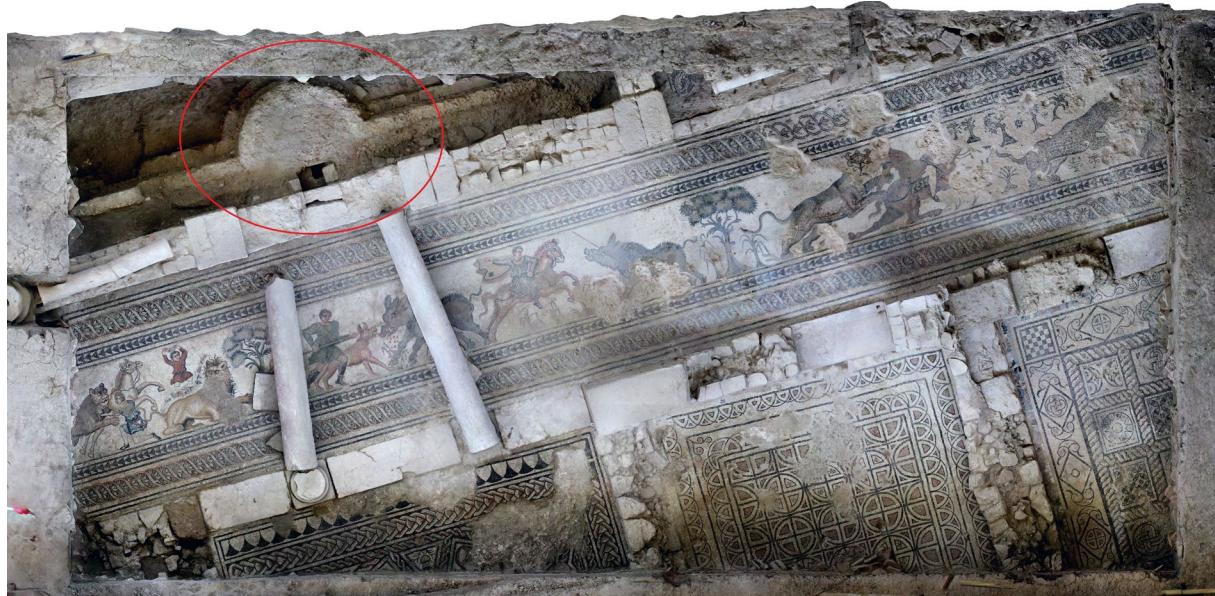

Figure 8. *Villa* Salar. Sounding 4. Western corridor hunting scene mosaic, adjacent rooms, and the possible original location of the Venus statue in the peristyle garden fountain (red circle) (Photo PGI *Villa* romana de Salar).

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Figure 9. Capitoline type Venus from *villa* Salar. A: Front. B: Back (Photo PGI *Villa* romana de Salar).

Figure 10. Original archaeological context of the Venus statue from *villa* Salar (Photo PGI *Villa* romana de Salar).

at each central point of the perimeter canal. These fed water, on one hand, to the *ambulacra* (perhaps for occasional cleaning), and, on the other, towards the non-excavated central sector of the *viridarium*, where supposedly a fountain or pool is located, supplying it with water or even a cistern located beneath it. However, only future excavations can clarify these aspects. Whereas, the mosaic subject in the eastern *ambulacrum* corridor is a marine *thiasos*, the western gallery shows a unique hunting scene, a very popular theme among the late Roman *villa* elite, although examples in *Baetica* are rare in comparison to the more frequent geometric or mythological mosaics (López and Neira, 2020, pp. 157-158). While still not fully excavated, it shows three scenes of different animals being hunted, each one separated by a tree figure (Fig. 8). From north to south, the first scene shows a nobleman, dismounted from his horse, attacking a lioness with his sword, while another figure throws a stone at a lion. The second group depicts a hunter on foot with a dog harassing a boar, while another hunter on horseback is spearing a wild boar. In the last scene, a leopard is seen griping a horse with its claws and also reaching the rider, while another hunter is chasing an herbivore, perhaps a deer, as only its hind legs can be seen. This noteworthy mosaic has been dated to the 4th century AD, although parts of it show repairs made most likely during the 5th century AD (Román *et al*. in press).

In 2018 a statue was discovered during the excavation of the western *ambulacrum*. The figure had been intentionally placed horizontal and face down on a level of brick and *tegula* fragments (Fig. 9, A-B) which has been dated between the second half of the 5th century AD and the first half of the 6th century AD (Fig. 10). Its preserved height is 74 cm and is carved in white marble, medium to fine- grained, coming from Pentelic quarries[7]. It presents some slight loss on the lower legs, hands and nose, also the right arm is in several fragments but joins also with the corresponding hand. It is a female figure representation, a nude Venus, modestly covering her pubis and left breast with her hands, posing with her body weight on the left leg and head turned toward the left. Bracelets are visible on both arms and the earlobes have been perforated. A support or, more likely, an attribute currently missing, would have reinforced the stability on the left side, also traces of a *puntello* can be seen on the right waist, which would have helped support this arm. The hair is arranged in a typical *krobylos,* rolled up on the crown and a bun at the nape of the neck, letting two thick locks fall over the shoulders and upper chest careless. This pose represents the goddess as she prepared for the bath, completely naked, following a model created by the famous sculpture Praxiteles, the Venus of Cnidus (for example, Lee, 2015, pp. 115-116; Buell, 2016, pp. 4-8; Olivieri, 2019, pp. 133-134).

Deriving from this model are two well-known representations of Venus Pudica, the Capitoline Venus and the Medici Venus, although both differ in the pose, head

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7   According to the petrographic analysis result (vid, supra, footnote 3) Sample 19_VS_3 GE corresponds to a fine-grained calcic marble (MGS 1mm), with mosaic texture, curved and semi-curved contacts.

position, hairstyle and lateral support (Stewart, 2010; Barrow, 2018, pp. 37-38). The *villa* Salar sculpture adds to the number of replicas, over a hundred in various sizes, currently known of the Capitoline type. Its origin varies according to the different authors, dating from around the turn of the 4th century BC and early Hellenistic era (Stewart, 2010, pp. 24-25; Corso, 2014, pp. 123-125) up to the middle of the 2nd century BC (Havelock, 1995, pp. 74-76). Hence, the attribute on the left side covered with a towel could have been a *loutrophoros*, or wedding vase, representing the nuptial bath (Schröder, 2004, pp. 145-153) although, on occasions, it was replaced with a *hydria*, a dolphin – as in a sculpture from *Illici* (Elche) (Noguera, 2002) – or even with a tree stump. Bracelets appearing in Venus Cnidus replicas are also common in Capitoline Venus copies. Lastly, it possibly had earrings, as the ears appear pierced, a common feature in replicas manufactured in eastern Mediterranean workshops (Lee, 2015, 212-4). However, following information gathered from Roman inscriptions, there was also a widespread tradition in *Baetica* to "embellish" female statues (Beltrán, 2009). According to Havelock (1995, p. 75), oriental replicas are smaller in size than western productions, which would be consistent with the *villa* Salar figure. Stylistically it has been highlighted with a polished finish, along with the use of drill holes in the hairstyle, creating deep chiaroscuro contrasts. The eye and lip corners have also been enhanced using this technique. In our opinion, this statue was manufactured around mid-2nd century AD, most likely, in a foreign workshop in consonance with the use of Pentelic marble.

In this case, it is not a fountain-statue, as it has no water source, but possibly fulfilled a decorative function in a water display situated perhaps in the western area of the peristyle where the perimeter channel widened into a small fountain, or in the water feature that, as argued before, must have decorated the center of the courtyard.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The sculptures would have been placed in selected areas of the *villa*, in "public" spaces within the private domain, created and decorated to impress the guests and highlight the wealth and social preeminence of the *dominus*, especially before his equals, the *amici* (Ellis, 1991; Videbech, 2015, p. 460). In the 4th century AD the visitors would have been toured through the central access on the western wing to impress them with the eastern wing entrance, decorated with a pediment supported by two large columns and paved with a magnificent hunting scene mosaic. They would have then reached the *triclinium* through the lateral *ambulacra* – mosaic

pavements here are not known – or crossing through the center of the open courtyard, where the Capitoline Venus sculpture would have stood, as a well known statuary type, that can be added to the assemblage known in *Baetica* (Beltrán, 2004). The statue and its models would have been recognized and admired by the *amici*, as the structure of the late Roman culture was characterized by its scholarly and literary knowledge (Beltran, 1995), as well as its nostalgia for the pagan repertoire despite the new Christian ideology (for example, Weitzmann, 1979). The eastern *ambulacrum* pavement displayed a marine *thiasos* theme presided by a nereid, highlighting the importance of water in this environment, which was fulfilled in the *triclinium* with the decisive presence of a *nymphaeum*, consisting of a niched fountain and perimeter canal. Here, there were at least two different iconographic types of nymph statues decorating the room, or the *dominus* could have possibly chosen to impress his visitors with a sculptural pendant, as argued before, where the nymph with the shell stood in the center and was flanked by representations of *Pontia Euploia* type nymphs with the position of the figure supports changed. It is also possible that both of the statues, dated to the 2nd century AD and manufactured in Pentelic marble, were part of a sculptural program consisting originally of imported pieces; and that this first program was completed, during the Severan period (as dated) or later in the 4th century AD (when placed in the *nymphaeum*), with another nymph sculpture, manufactured now in local Mijas marble. However, the scheme referred to in the Ischia relief and, especially, the context where the statues were found strongly points to the interpretation suggested above.

According to the mosaics and sculptures, as it is not possible to know if the rest of the decor – mural paintings and *opera sectilia* – had figurative scenes, the ornamental program should be dated to the 4th century AD, and, therefore, all three sculptures are earlier. The figure of the nymph with a shell carved in Mijas (Málaga) marble would have been manufactured in a local workshop during the early Severan period. The other two sculptures are mid-2nd century AD or scarcely later. Therefore, either the sculptural group belonged to the early *villa* or they were included during this last phase, acquired through what has been referred to as "antiquities trade" (Beltrán, 1995 and 2007, p. 27). *Villa* Salar is therefore an addition to the well-documented series of *Baetica villae*, together with the aforementioned *villae* of El Ruedo (Almedinilla, Córdoba) or La Estación and Caserío Silverio (Antequera, Málaga), that went through significant reforms during the 4th century AD and – in many cases – were monumentalized, adding decorative programs based on mosaics, sculp-

ture and, less preserved, mural paintings. All are part of a common cultural current that has recently been reviewed, especially the statuary decor (Rodríguez, Beltrán and Baena, 2016). Specifically, these figures from Salar highlight the significance water environments had in the *villae* of *Baetica* and how they were embellished with sculptural programs that included fountain-statues and other appropriate representations, such as the Capitoline Venus or the bathing Aphrodite.

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