

WINDOWS AND LIGHT IN ROMAN HOUSES: Spatial organisation, use of space & construction issues

INTRODUCTION

After the battle of Zama in 202 BCE, the Campanian region becomes legally part of the Roman legal territory. The ancient samnites and osci's settlement are reinvested by new Roman colons and the lands are sell to members of the elite of the Roman house. At the beginning the members of the social elite settle some agricultural structures as well as their secondary villa but from the 1st century BCE on, the agricultural and productive part disappears to the profit or the more pleasurable part. These new villas become entirely dedicated to enjoyable activities and leisure ("otium" in latin). The constructions, their architecture and the landscape they insert themselves in are a way for the elite to compete between themselves to show who has the most money and power. As Pierre Gros said: "The leisure residence is not the place for a family, it is a place where one shows his aptitude to live in another way". (Gros, 2001, p. 291).

Construction archaeology in the Vesuvian area focuses on the technics as well as the reasoning for the construction choices in archaeology. In this case we will focus on windows, views and the role of natural light within these Roman houses.



Villa A, Oplontis, room 69 (Picture: Romane Desarbre)

CAMPANIA: A ROMAN EL DORADO ?

The Campanian region is considered a particularly luxurious region by the Romans. The volcanic terrain helps the development of crops. Moreover, the bay also offers incredible views over the sea, lakes and dense forests. The Romans themselves described these amenities as « *cratera illum delicatum* » (the wonders of the gulf) (Cicero, *Ad. Att.*, 2.8)

METHODOLOGY :

- Gathering of data in big quantities in order to be able to treat them in statistical and quantitative way
- Analyse of construction techniques and the way the constructors decided to adapt especially after the 62-63 CE earthquake
- Question of the landscape and the views from the windows of the different rooms

AWAITED RESULTS:

- Typo chronology and characterization of different construction phases within the house.
- Information about the perception of the landscape and role of the view within the constructive process.

Villa A plan, Oplontis (after Oplontis: Villa A ("of Poppea") at Torre Annunziata, Italy. Volume 1. The Ancient Setting and Modern Rediscovery, John R. Clarke and Nayla K. Muntasser)

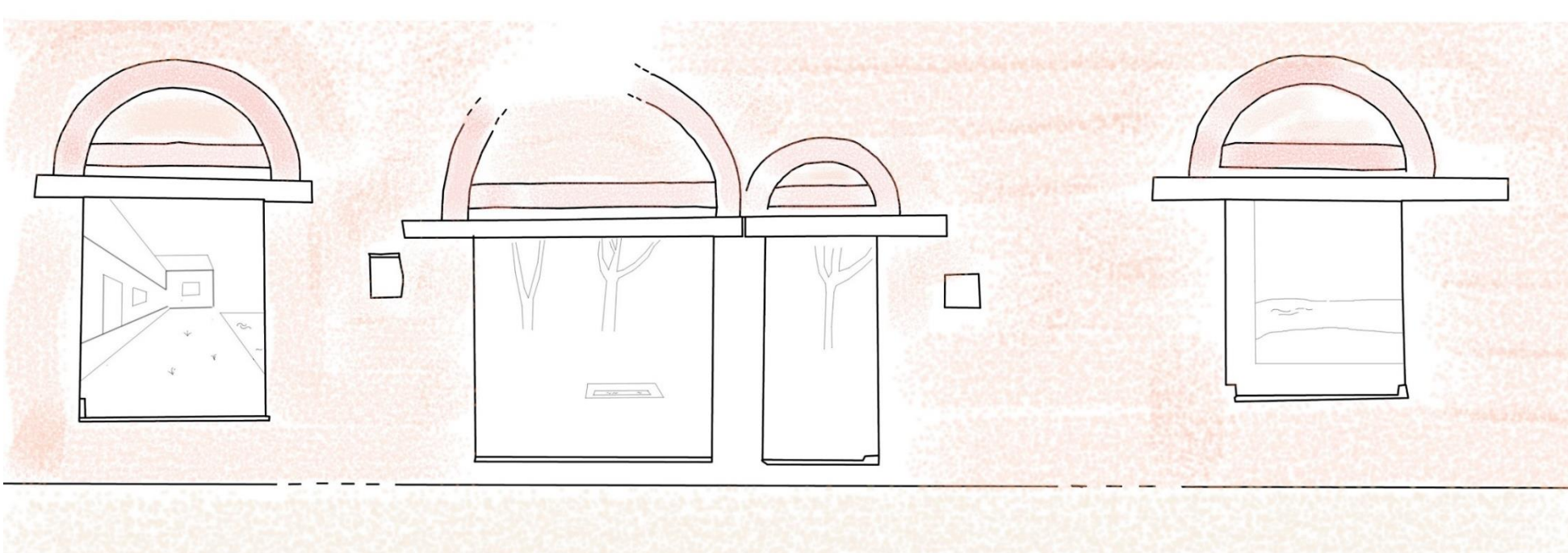
Plan, villa of Diomedes, Pompeii (Hélène Dessales, Julien Caverro)

2 examples of Roman villas:

- **The villa A in Oplontis** is located in the modern town of *Torre Annunziata*, was built during the 2nd century BCE and then developed during the 1st century CE. It is constructed just over the edge of the littoral cliff. The villa was owned by the imperial family and was allegedly given by Nero to his courtesan Poppea. The east wing of the villa was especially developed with a succession of little rooms and gardens made for the pleasure of the eyes and the ears. (GAZDA, CLARKE, MCALPINE 2016).
- **The villa of Diomedes** is located at the outskirts of Pompeii, just behind the Herculaneum door. Implanted on an ancient villa, the new settlements develops itself toward the coast nearby. The villa suffered from the earthquake of 62-63 CE and was still under renovation at the time of the eruption. (DESSALES (éd.) 2020)

A FEW PRELIMINARY RESULTS:

Intervisibility graphs in the villa A in the Villa A in Oplontis

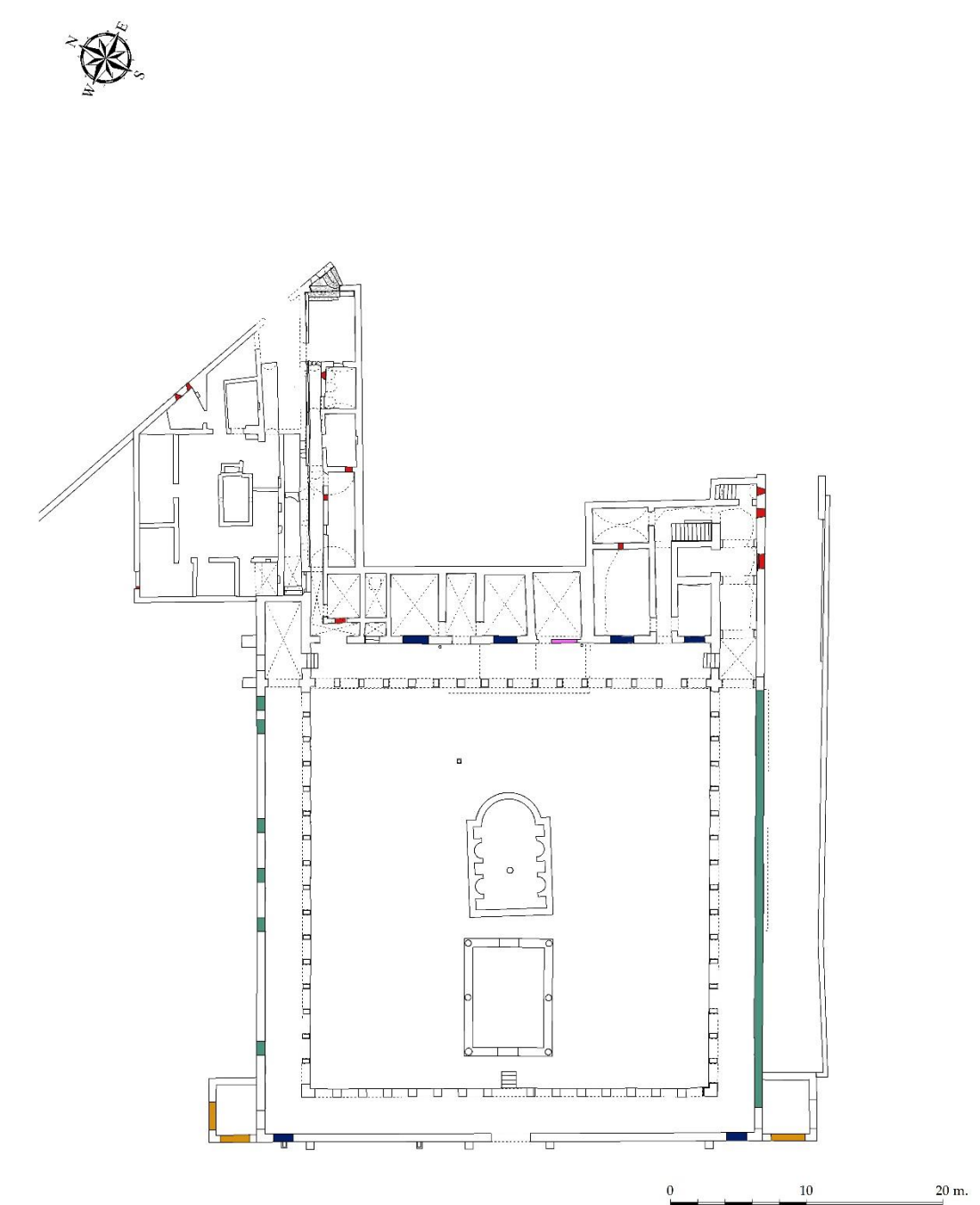
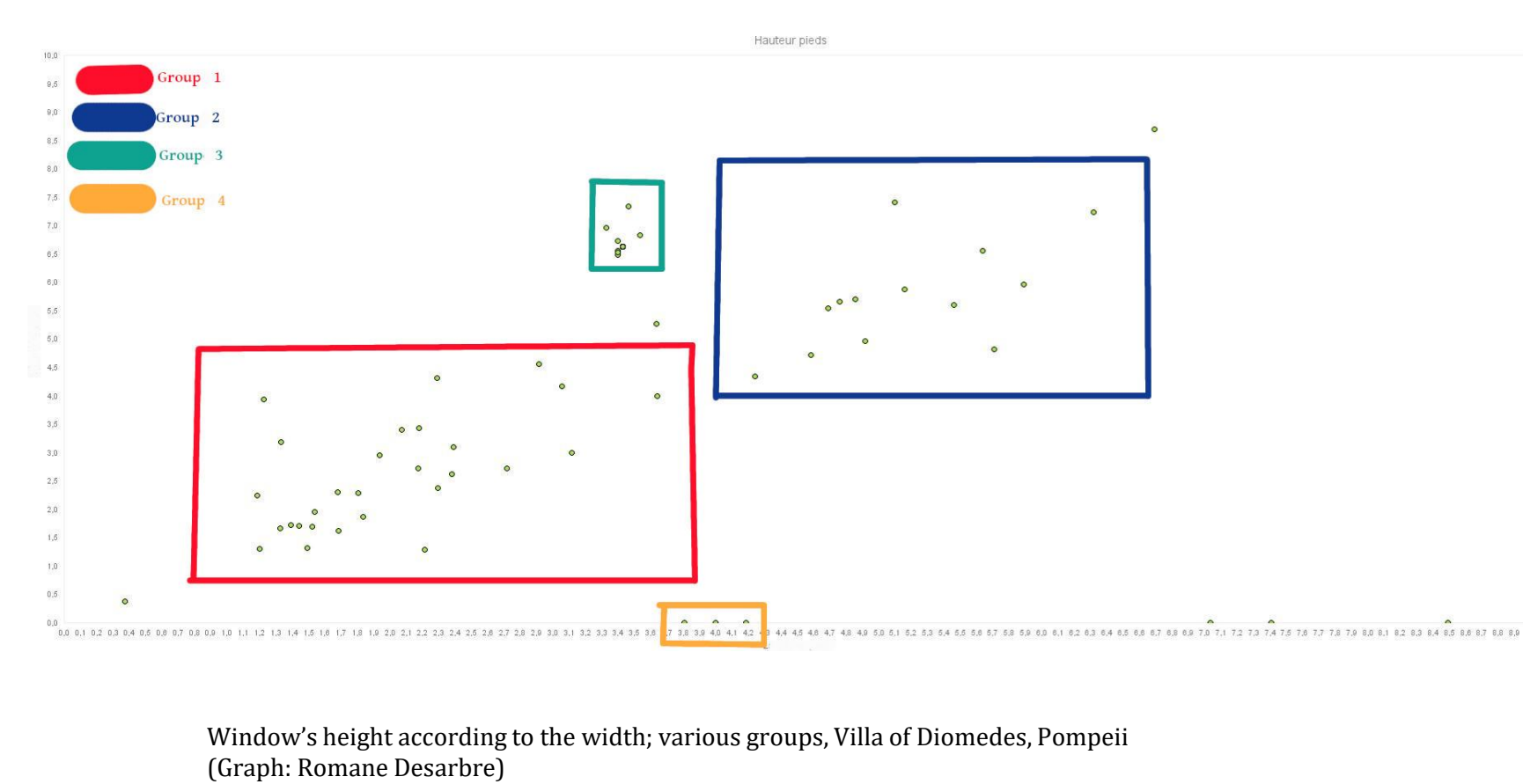


Views from the diaeta 78, villa A, Oplontis (Drawing: Romane Desarbre)

The east wing of the "Villa A" in Oplontis allows the architects of the 1st century CE to play around with the different views offered by the landscape. As for an example, the *diaeta* 78 (in red on the plan) at the very south of the east wing allows us to identify a tripartition of the views. At the north, the window of the *diaeta* open on part of the porticus, the garden and the *natatio*. From the east window the viewer can see the rest of the garden and a little basin. Finally, from the south window the excavation's limits are stopping the view but according to the studies of the paleoenvironment this windows is very likely to have open on the sea.

Constructions techniques and monumentalisation of the villa of Diomedes

In the villa of Diomedes, it was possible to make a diagram showing the relation between width and height. From this diagram it is possible to distinguish a few clear window groups (confirmed by a histogram). Placing these windows on the plan of the villa of Diomedes, it is possible to see different constructive use and moments. For instance, all the windows highlighted in teal are in the same area of the house and are part of the same construction phase. The use of the construction techniques as well as their dimensions confirms the appartenance to the same constructive phases. A similar work must be held to determine if the other groups are from the same construction phase or if the follow another logic.



Garden floor plan and materialisation of the different window groups, Villa of Diomedes, Pompeii (Plan: Hélène Dessales, Julien Caverro; colors: Romane Desarbre)

DESSALES (éd.) 2020
Hélène Dessales (éd.), *The Villa of Diomedes; The making of a Roman villa in Pompeii*, Paris/Rome, Hermann, 2020.
GAZDA, CLARKE, MCALPINE 2016
Elaine K. Gazda, John R. Clarke, Lynley J. McAlpine, *Leisure & Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Kelsey Museum publication 14, 2016.
GROS 2001
Pierre Gros, *L'architecture romaine du début du IIIe siècle av. J.-C. à la fin du Haut-Empire*, Paris, Picard, 2001.