

–agricultural tool– and the letters IRRICO, the Celtiberian family name of the foremost family in this area, who had remained proud of their Celtiberian roots despite their total Romanization.

The tasks of research and preservation are far from finished. It is particularly important to locate and excavate the auxiliary facilities of the villa, as well as the necropolis and other elements which form part of the splendid complex of the “La Dehesa” Roman villa in Cuevas de Soria. The present intention is to continue the research in order to discover what the state of knowledge in Roman times was, as well as to be able to show how the excavation and preservation of the discoveries of the site is progressing.



A strong commitment by the *Diputación Provincial de Soria*, the Autonomous Government of *Castilla y León*, and the support of the European Union, has helped protect the excavation and create the museum over the site. In view of the importance with which nature was held in the development of villas as a cultural and social phenomenon in the Roman world, the image of the goddess Magna Mater has been chosen to represent the three Roman villas in the province of Soria: “La Dehesa” in Cuevas de Soria, “Los Quintanares” in Rioseco de Soria, and “Los Villares” in Santervás del Burgo.



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INFORMATION AND RESERVATION

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MAGNA  
MATER

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ROMAN VILLA “LA DEHESA”  
IN CUEVAS DE SORIA

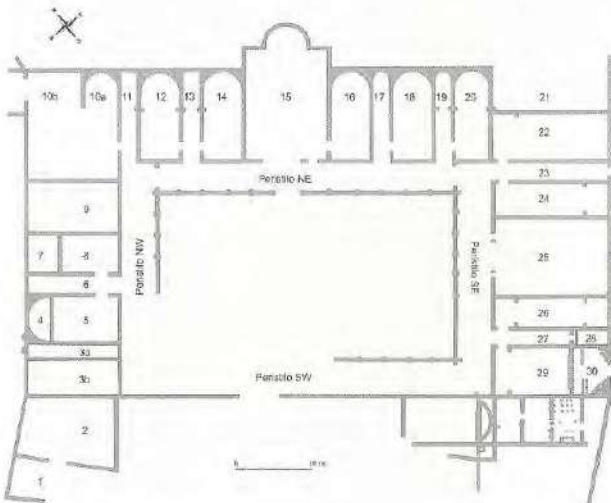
## ROMAN VILLA "LA DEHESA" IN CUEVAS DE SORIA

The Roman villa "La Dehesa" near the village of Cuevas de Soria was discovered and excavated by Blas Taracena and José Tudela in 1928. In view of the importance of the discovery –at the time it was considered the most important monument of its kind known in Spain– the *Diputación Provincial de Soria* took charge of the excavations and later acquired the lands where it is located. Since then numerous excavation campaigns and conservation initiatives have been undertaken, and they can by no means be considered complete as yet.

The archaeological site is located by the Izana River, south west of Soria, and has revealed a spacious mansion of almost 4000 m<sup>2</sup> built in the middle of the IV century over a previous construction of which we know little. The building was situated in the most sheltered part of the valley, and follows the gentle slope to the south, which enhances the appearance of the northern side of the house, and its largest room which sits in the middle.

The building's structure is simple. It has a rectangular floor plan encircling a central inner garden, and numerous rooms magnificently decorated with high quality materials. The strength of the foundations of mortar made of stone and cement, on which the walls were raised, has preserved the decorated floors of the rooms, resisting the heavy erosion suffered by the site since Roman times.

Surrounding the inner garden is the peristyle formed by a row of limestone columns which supported the portico and whose bases are still preserved. The corridors of the peristyle linked the various rooms and quarters of the building.



Excavations so far have revealed more than thirty rooms of different shapes and sizes, many of them have a semi-circular back wall whose function is not entirely clear. Two large halls mark the centre of the north and east sides of the building respectively, and seem to have been the only rooms without a second storey. The *Aula Magna*, or main hall, in the northern side is almost 200 m<sup>2</sup>. Its entrance had a central double door with two small doors on each side, as did the other great hall on the eastern side. The building has several narrow rooms which allowed access to the larger adjacent rooms, avoiding the cold of the inner garden in winter.

The heating complex is located on the south-eastern side of the villa, where a series of thermal rooms, with external furnaces for heating, can be identified, and these served the function of the typical *frigidarium*, *tepidarium* and *caldarium*; there is also a long and narrow bath decorated with a mosaic in the inside. Next to the heating complex there is a series of solid and symmetric structures which are hard to interpret.

It is thought that the villa's main entrance was located next to the heating complex in the south side of the building, though it still has to be positively identified. Due to the large size of the



house, several small service doors not included in the original plan were needed, such as the one which was made by opening a hole in the semi-circular wall in one room in the north-western wing.

The majority of the rooms in the villa have their floors magnificently paved with mosaics of different geometric designs made from *tesserae* of many colours, and which indicate the sumptuousness with which the villa was built.

It is unusual to know the name of Roman villa's owner, although, in the villa of Cuevas de Soria, there is a monogram which appears systematically in the mosaics. These monograms have been known since the discovery of the villa, but they have only recently been deciphered when new discoveries and epigraphic studies have shown that the villa's owners were named Irrico: various inscriptions with the name of this family have been found in the vicinities of the villa. In his latest studies Dr. Fernández Galiano has concluded that the monogram was originally composed of two associated elements: a *bidens*

