

The Mosaics of the *Domus I* of the *Plaza de Armas* of the Royal Alcazar in Roman *colonia Augusta Firma - Astigi* (Écija, Seville, Spain) - I

Roma Kolonisi *Augusta Firma*’daki Kraliyet Sarayı *Plaza de Armas*’ın *Domus I* Mozaikleri – Astigi (Écija, Sevilla, İspanya) - I

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Abstract


The Domus I of the Plaza de Armas of the Royal Alcazar of Ecija (Seville, Spain) has been object of archaeological excavations and restoration interventions since 2001, which have revealed that this luxurious urban residence was completely reformed in the Severan period, when several rooms and the central courtyard were decorated with mosaic pavements. The first one in being unearthed was the well-known mosaic of the Satyr / Silenus, with the double representation of these two companions of Dionysus in a single head, thanks to a singular visual play. In 2015 was discovered the so-called mosaic of the Loves of Zeus, which decorate the triclinium of the domus, with several scenes from this mythological cycle, along with Bacchic themes and characters, and the representation of the seasons. More recently, in 2019-2020, the monumental central peristyle of the residence was excavated, which perimetral corridor was covered with mosaic decoration. The thematic represented in the new mosaic is varied, including several planets, meteorological phenomena or the god Dionysus himself, together with a panel which contained a scene following a hunt –unfortunately, in this case largely lost, but still recognizable–, all framed by a singular geometric pattern. In this paper is offered the first publication of the remarkable mosaic of the peristyle, just discovered.

Keywords: Roman mosaic, Astigi, Dionysian thematic, geometric pattern, peristyle.

Öz

Ecija’nın Kraliyet Sarayı (Sevilla, İspanya) Plaza de Armas’taki Domus I, 2001’den beri arkeolojik kazılar ile restorasyon müdahalelerinin nesnesi olmuştur ve bu lüks kentsel konutun Severan döneminde tamamen yenilediği, bazı odalar ve merkezde yer alan avlunun farklı temalardaki mozaiklerle dekore edildiği tespit edilmiştir. Ortaya çıkarılan ilk mozaik, Dionysos’un bu iki yoldaşının tek bir görsel oyun sayesinde tek bir kafada çifte temsil edildiği, ünlü Satyr / Silenus mozaığıdır. 2015 yılında, domusun triclinium’unu süsleyen Zeus’un Aşkları mozaığı, bu mitolojik döngüden birkaç sahne, Bacchic temaları ve karakterleri ile mevsimlerin temsili keşfedilmiştir. Daha yakın zamanlarda, 2019-2020’de, konutun anıtsal merkezi peristilinin kazılmasıyla, perimetral koridordaki mozaik döşemeler ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Bu -yeni keşfedilen mozaikte işlenen tema, çeşitli gezegenler, meteorolojik fenomenler veya tanrı Dionysus’un kendisi ile birlikte bir avın devamının işlendiği bir sahneyi içeren bir panel –ne yazık ki bu kısım büyük oranda kayıptır; fakat yine de tespit edilebilir durumdadır– dahil olmak üzere çok çeşitlidir ve hepsi tekil bir geometrik örüntü ile çerçeve içine alınmıştır. Bu makalede, henüz keşfedilen dikkate değer peristil mozaığının ilk yayını sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Roma mozaığı, Astigi, Dionysos teması, geometrik desen, peristil.

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1. Background and Context

The origins of the fortified enclosure of the *Plaza de Armas* of the Royal Alcázar of the city of Écija (Seville) date to the first half of the 12th century, to the Almoravid period, while the construction of its main features continued throughout the Almohad period. After the Castilian conquest of the city in May 1240, the urbanistic organization of this space was transformed and the “*casas Palacio o avitazion de los cavalleros alcaydes de los reales alcazares*” were created.¹ The loss of the defensive function of the enclosure led to its abandonment and progressive deterioration throughout the 17th century, which finally caused the city to place a request to the Crown, in April 1700, for the demolition of the remaining battered structures in order to convert this space into a “*escuela para los caballos y maestranza para los Cavalleros*”. This use was not long-lived and the *Plaza de Armas* was finally abandoned in the 19th century. From the mid-20th century onwards, it became a neighbourhood of substandard housing. It was still in this state in 1999, when the city council of Écija undertook a series of urban development actions, focusing on the recovery of the historical fortified enclosure (García-Dils et al. 2004: passim).

After the demolition of the existing buildings, the first archaeological excavations began in 2001. They confirmed the occupation of the area known as *Cerro de San Gil* from at least the 8th century BC, with a chronocultural sequence that included Tartessian, Turdetan and Roman remains. During the following years, several urban actions continued to be carried out, aiming to complete the removal of the old housing and the relocation of the inhabitants of this area of the city. In addition, several phases of conservation work were undertaken on the perimeter walls, as well as the restoration of archaeological structures of different chronologies. At present, this process has enabled the recovery of almost the entire walled enclosure of the *Plaza de Armas*, and its opening to the public.

2. *Domus* I

During the course of the archaeological work carried out in 2001-2002, the first structures belonging to the building known as *Domus* I were uncovered, consisting of three rooms and a corridor, badly damaged by the earthworks carried out for the construction of the fortified enclosure, by pits made for the extraction of construction materials and by the excavation of cesspools (García-Dils 2003: passim). One of the rooms, identified as a *tablinum*, was decorated with a unique geometric mosaic pavement in which there were originally four figurative squares around a fifth one (Fig. 1). Of the perimeter squares, one of them was completely lost, and a second showed the representation of a human head, the interpretation of which was made impossible by a careless restoration carried out in ancient times. The remaining two contained theatrical masks. The central square was made with great skill, in *opus uermiculatum*, combining tiny tesserae of stone and glass paste, with a rich polychromy and a successful use of shadows (Fig. 2). It contained an image with a double reading, depending on the observer's viewing point: from the entrance to the room –to the north– a young man carrying a *pedum* or shepherd's crook on his right shoulder, and from the interior –to the south–, a bearded old man with a *tympanum* or Bacchic tambourine, with its characteristic fringes, in his right hand. These figures are easily recognisable, respectively, as a young satyr and a mature Silenus, accompanied by their

1 Municipal Archives of Ecija (AME), AC, Book 165, Meeting of January 8, 1748.

characteristic attributes. Both are members of the Bacchic *thiasos*, a particularly popular and recurrent theme in the mosaics of *colonia Augusta Firma* (García-Dils et al. 2005: passim; López Monteagudo - Neira 2010: 67-93; CMRE XIV: n°34, 76-81).

Figure 1
Mosaic of the Satyr / Silenus. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



Figure 2
The central square of the Satyr / Silenus mosaic. View from the north / from the south of the room. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



3. The peristyle of *Domus* I

The first indications of the existence of a mosaic pavement to the north of the room identified as the *tablinum*, where the Satyr/Silenus mosaic was recorded, date back to 2001. At that time, we thought that it could be a new room, which was provisionally called “Room C” (García-Dils et al. 2005: 397 fig. 2a). Unfortunately, the foundation trench of the medieval wall that crosses the central part of *Plaza de Armas* from west to east cut through the mosaic, of which barely a dozen rows of tesserae were preserved in a surface of 40 cm². New archaeological excavations carried out in this sector since 2015 enabled us to suggest that the fragment may have been part of the decoration of the perimeter corridor of the central courtyard of *Domus* I (CMRE XIV: n°36, 81 fig. 69). This hypothesis was confirmed in 2019, when we had the opportunity to excavate the whole of this monumental peristyle, also confirming that the courtyard was the structural centre around which the entire building was organised. The dimensions of the

courtyard are between 11.10 and 12.63 m (N-S) by 11.88 and 12.02 m (W-E), with a total surface of 140.60 m². The central 42.69 m² would have been open to the sky, while the remaining 97.91 m² would have been a covered perimeter gallery, decorated entirely with mosaic floors (Fig. 3).



Figure 3
The peristyle of the *Domus I*.
Orthophotography by Diego Gaspar
(Arqueocad) for the City Archaeology Office
of Écija.

From the centre outwards, the peristyle is structured as follows. First, there is a small garden with a fountain in the northern part, of which only the base, with traces of marble cladding, is preserved². The fountain was supplied with water by means of a *fistula plumbea* that ran from the north-west corner of the courtyard and drained through an underground channel towards the north of the house. From the garden area, a large volume of earth has been preserved with abundant traces of organic matter, which is being analysed in order to determine the plant species it contained. Around the garden, in the form of a *nymphaeum*, there is a perimeter channel, made of *opus caementicium* lined with *opus signinum*, which conducted water around the garden on two different levels. From a hydraulic point of view, it should be noted that the courtyard is set approximately 0.50 m lower than the rest of the house, to improve the performance of the fountain spout or spouts and *nymphaeum*. Thus, while the mosaic of the Loves of Zeus, in the *triclinium*, is at an elevation of 107.85-107.87 m above sea level, and the *atrium* at 107.84-107.95 m a.s.l., the mosaic of the peristyle is set between 107.29 and 107.49 m a.s.l. This in turn conditions the elevation of the rooms located to the north, east and south of the corridor, so that the Satyr/Silenus mosaic in the *tablinum* is located at 107.50-107.53 m a.s.l.

Surrounding this open area, is a covered perimeter gallery, roofed with clay *tegulae*, supported by a scheme of 4x4 columns, of which nine of the bases have

² For the complexity and ambiguities of the lexicon concerning ornamental ponds in the domestic sphere (*lacus*, *impluvium*, *piscina*, etc.), see Dessales 2013: 54-64.

been preserved, consisting of cubic calcarenite ashlar. Of the twelve that were originally there, three of the supports of the southern side were lost due to the creation of the foundation trench of the wall that runs through this area. Around the bases of the columns on the west and east sides of the courtyard, we have found traces of the looting of the *fistulae plumbeae* that supplied water to the fountains, affecting both the mosaic and the *nymphaeum* in the Late Antique period after the *domus* was abandoned. This situation is repeated with the lead pipe that supplied the central fountain of the peristyle, the looting of which caused the linear destruction of part of the geometric mosaic pattern of the north-west corner of the courtyard.

To evaluate the density of the disposition of the *tessellae*, we carried out a systematic sampling in all the representative and well-preserved sectors of the mosaic and found that it varies considerably according to the motifs represented in the carpet. Therefore, the geometric patterns and the background were made with larger and regularly cut pieces, placed with a scrupulous adjustment between them, with values ranging between 95 and 120 tesserae/dm², occasionally dropping to 80-90 tesserae/dm² in the grid of rows of tangent circlelets of the northern corridor of the courtyard. On the other hand, the figured decoration has a density ranging between 180 and 210 tesserae/dm², with a very variable size of *tessellae*, with irregular outlines, depending on their function within the design, leaving a wide separation that, in some cases, exceeds the size of the pieces themselves.

3.1 Composition of the Mosaic and Reconstruction of the Geometric Scheme

The composition of the mosaic is conditioned by the meeting in the peristyle of the walls from different phases of the *domus*, with different orientations. Thus, of the four walls that define the courtyard, the oldest are oriented 342.8 (N-S) and 72.8 (W-E), located on the western, southern and eastern sides; while the northern wall, corresponding to the Severan reform of the house, is aligned with the colonial grid, systematically confirmed in the entire the Roman city, at 335.4° (N-S) and 65.4° (W-E). Thus, in the north-west and north-east corners of the courtyard, the walls do not meet at right-angles and an attempt has been made to conceal these false squares through the adjustment of the geometric scheme to this irregularity, skilfully simulating a feigned symmetry.

The whole of the mosaic is framed by a succession of interlaced ivy scrolls of three colours, represented in a stereotyped and schematic manner (Balmelle et al. 1985: Pl. 64f). This border runs continuously around the mosaic, closing in two parts to coincide with the courtyard's drainage channel to the north. Its absence on the eastern flank of the western corridor is striking, which can be attributed to an error by the artisans. There are numerous parallels for vegetal scrolls in Écija itself, in different versions. First, in the room immediately to the south of the peristyle, next to the Satyr/Silenus mosaic (Fig. 1) (CMRE XIV: n°35, 81); also, in one pavement of the Plaza de España (CMRE XIV: n°38, 83-84 fig. 71); in the mosaic C of the Calle San Juan Bosco (CMRE XIV: n°67, 114-115 fig. 113); in Calle Avendaño n°3 (CMRE XIV: n°72, 117-118 fig. 122); in Calle Navajas n°3 (CMRE XIV: n°80, 120 fig. 127); in the City Hall, from unknown provenance (CMRE XIV: n°87, 122 fig. 129). To mention an example of this motif from another city in *Baetica*, we can recall here several mosaics in the House of Oceanos in *Hispalis* (Sevilla) (López Monteagudo 2015: 106 figs. 37, 39, 47, 48).

On the inner east and south sides, the band between the ivy scrolls and the *nymphaeum* is decorated with a row of intersecting and tangent semicircles, forming ogives and scales in black and ochre (Décor I: pl. 49b). This motif is widely represented in the mosaics of *colonia Augusta Firma*, appearing in the Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne (CMRE XIV: n°2, 37-41 figs. 4, 6); also, in the two mosaics with the Rape of Europe (CMRE XIV: n°21, 59-62 figs. 40, 41, 43; CMRE XIV: n°65, 110-113 fig. 111A); in the pavement of *Oceanos* (CMRE XIV: n°45, 88-90 fig. 79A); in Calle del Conde (CMRE XIV: n°30, 69-72 figs. 58, 60); in Calle Elvira (CMRE XIV: n°60, 99-103 fig. 97). Also, on the meridional flank of the northern corridor and the oriental side of the eastern corridor, there is a wide band of ochre-colored tesserae with schematic floral motifs in black and white.

The northern corridor is decorated with a grid of rows of tangent circlets and recumbent spindles, alternate circlets at the intersection, the compartments here enclosing a schematic flower, creating the effect of an intersecting diagonal grid (Balmelle et al. 1985: Pl. 131b, 238f). Again, is a very common motif in Écija, present in the Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne (CMRE XIV: n°2, 37-41 figs. 4, 6); also, in Calle Almenillas (CMRE XIV: n°9, 50-51 fig. 16); in Calle Cerro de la Pólvora (CMRE XIV: n°57, 98-99, figs. 91, 93); in the Rape of Europa and Ganymede from Calle San Juan Bosco (CMRE XIV: n°65, 110-113 fig. 111A).

Concerning the rest of the geometric pattern, for a better understanding of the question, we have divided the mosaic into a series of modules, numbered consecutively in Fig. 4, following the stages described below, in Fig. 5, for their

Figure 4
The peristyle of the *Domus I*. References. Orthophotography by Diego Gaspar (Arqueocad) for the City Archaeology Office of Écija; drawing by Sergio García-Dils.



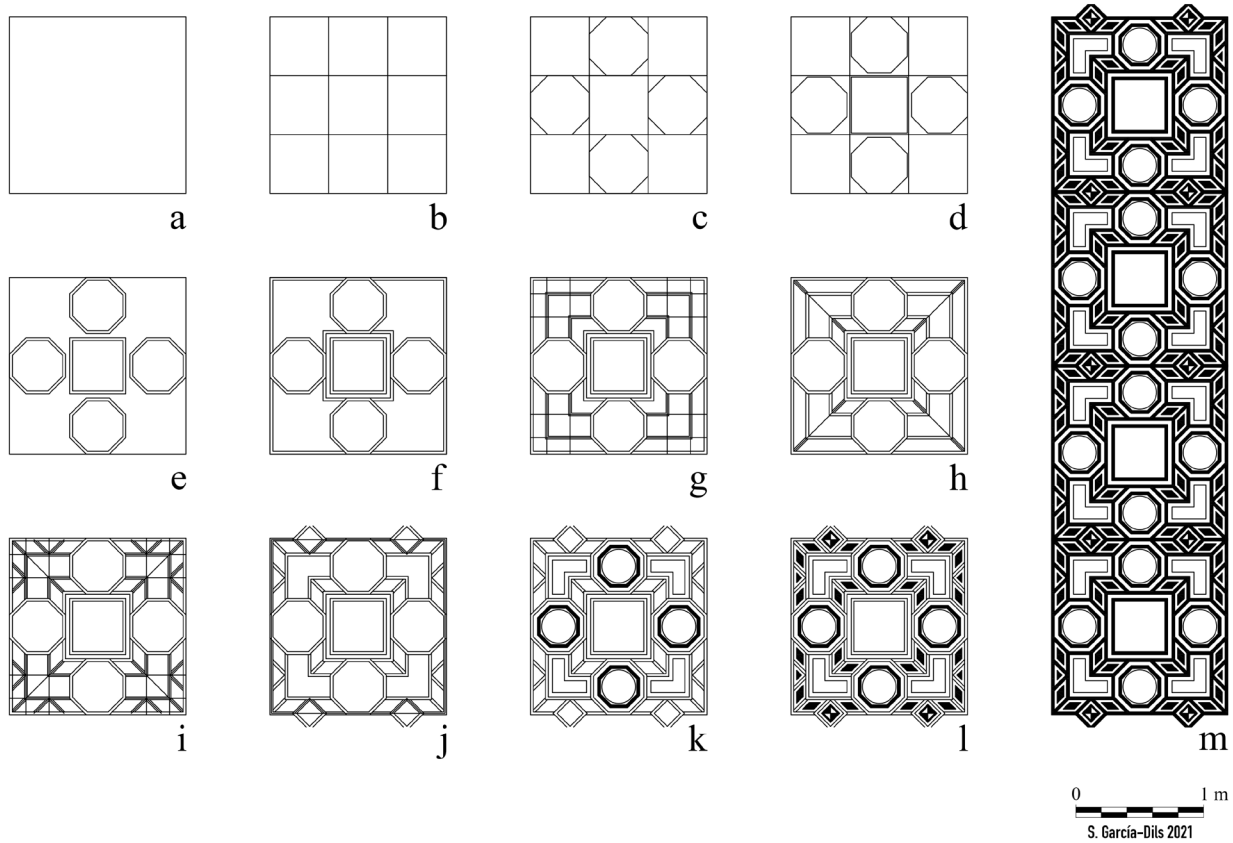


Figure 5
The peristyle of the *Domus* I. Geometric pattern. Drawing by Sergio García-Dils.

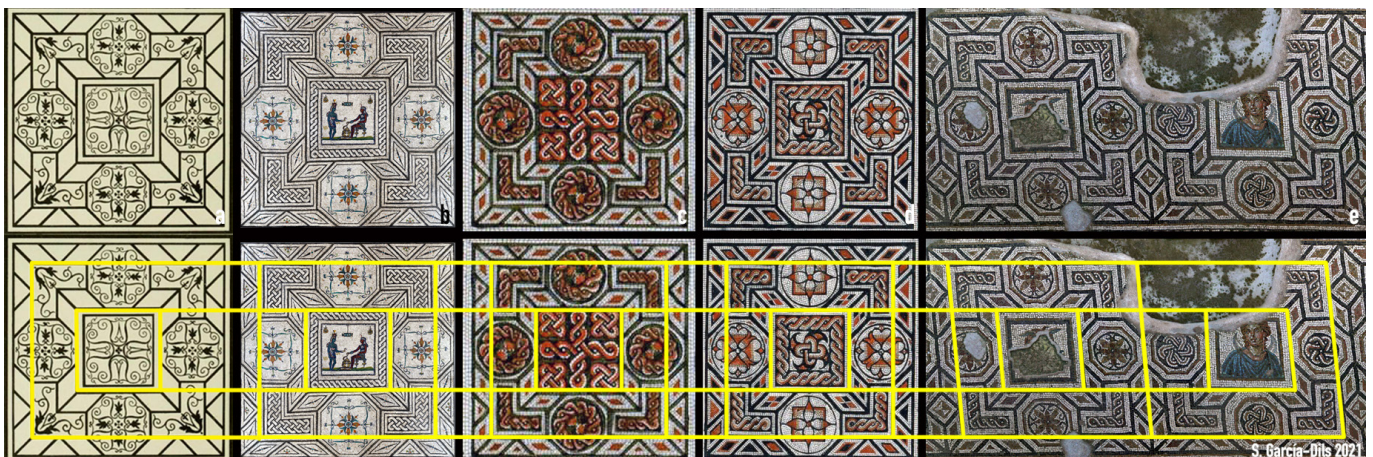
geometric layout. Obviously, some phases were undertaken simultaneously, or were not necessarily carried out in this order, as is the case, for example, of the figurative motifs in modules 4 and 5 –see below– in which it can clearly be seen that the frame surrounding the central character was made after the figure was finished, adapting to its outline, and not the other way round, as might appear to be more functional. First, a square was drawn (Fig. 5a), the edges of which, as noted above, are adapted to the contour of the courtyard. Its dimensions vary between 1.32 m –module 6– and 1.42 m –modules 7 and 10– on the eastern sides; between 1.32 m –module 5– and 1.42 m –module 10– on the western sides; between 1.33 m –module 6– and 1.39 m –module 10– on the northern sides; and between 1.33 m –module 7– and 1.39 m –module 11– on the southern sides. Special mention should be made of module 8, with dimensions 0.84 / 0.94 m x 1.35 m, because it is adapted to the space remaining at the end of the corridor. The square was then subdivided into nine equal squares, forming a 3 x 3 layout (Fig. 5b). Within these squares, four octagons were drawn around the central figure (Fig. 5c). The outlines of these octagons were reduced by one line of tesserae, approximately 1.1 cm, while maintaining their alignment with the outer outline of the module. The central character is also reduced in the same proportion, maintaining its central position (Fig. 5d). An inner band of two *tessellae* was created around the octagons and the outline of the central figurative motif (Fig. 5e). From this outline, the basic outlines of the rest of the composition are drawn, with a width of two *tessellae* (Fig. 5f). The sides of the octagons serve as support for the outline of the adjoining squares (Fig. 5g). Then, the line joining the vertices of the squares establishes the diagonals (Fig. 5h). The extension of the main lines of the squares enables the drawing of the diagonals to be completed (Fig. 5i). Once the diagonals were drawn, the boundaries of the regular rhombi that connect the adjoining modules were established (Fig. 5j). Three rows of *tessellae* were used to create the interior patterns (Fig. 5k). Other

motifs were made from an inner filling of two rows of *tessellae*, reproducing the corresponding geometric figure on a smaller scale and with ochre, red and brown tones. As for the circles inscribed in the octagons, they maintain a margin that varies between one and two *tessellae* (Fig. 5l).

This scheme enables the connection of as many modules as necessary (Fig. 5m). The skill of the craftsmen in adapting the geometric pattern as they went along, depending on the space available and the irregular shape of the courtyard, must be emphasised. The layout of the western corridor shows that the paving was laid out and executed from south to north and from east to west. This is indicated by the drastic surface reduction of module 8 in its contact with the north-west corner of the courtyard, while module 9 could be executed practically in its entirety.

Among the parallels for this type of geometric composition, a mosaic from Stabiae (Fig. 6a; Ruggiero 1881: pl. XVIII), the mosaic with an Egyptian-style scene from the Roman Prima Porta district, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 6b; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/254535>, accessed: January 10, 2022) and the mosaic from the *uilla* Scampton in Lincolnshire (Fig. 6c; Illingworth 1810: pl. 6) are noteworthy for their similarity. The same scheme is also found in the mosaic of Orpheus and the Beasts from the *uilla* of Woodchester in Gloucestershire (Fig. 6d; Lysons 1797: pl. IX-X; Smith 1973; Dunbabin 1999: 92-94 fig. 92), where the paving of the perimeter corridor of the main reception room of the *domus* is structured around a large central emblem dedicated to Orpheus. From the comparison, can see that is the same model, although the case of Écija presents a variation in order to adapt to the aforementioned offset of the peristyle walls, reflected in the vertical axis (Fig. 6e)³. It is interesting to note the temporal –from the 1st century AD to the Severan period– and spatial –Italy, *Britannia*, *Hispania*– scope of this geometric scheme.

Figure 6
Parallels for the geometric composition.
Comparative by Sergio García-Dils.



3.2 Helios

Module 1 and practically all of Module 2 have been lost due to the construction of the medieval wall (Fig. 4-1, 4-2). In the central square of Module 3 (Fig. 4-3), despite the existing void, we can clearly see the representation of a figure with long, unruly hair, dressed in a richly coloured garment that evokes a rainbow, although the colours –blue, red, green, yellow, navy blue– of the mosaic are not characteristic ones of the meteorological phenomenon (Fig. 7). In addition, we

³ Fig. 6e is a photogrammetric orthophotography, so that the distortions that can be seen are those of the actual mosaic.

have as an attribute the presence of a whip or *flagellum* that could have been held in the right hand or else represented in the background, behind the right shoulder.

Figure 7
Helios. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



There are three arguments that lead us to identify this figure as Helios, in this case without the usual *corona radiata*. First, the depiction as a young figure with abundant, untidy, shoulder-length hair, which he shares with a number of well-documented images of the Hyperionides, including the image of Helios in the mosaic of the Planetarium at *Italica* (Fig. 8), also dressed in a richly

Figure 8
Helios in the mosaic of the Planetarium at *Italica*. Photography by Daniel González.



coloured cloak (CMRE XIII: n°66, 69-71 pl. XXII - fig. 134 pl. XXIII - fig. 137), a second image also from *Italica* with the radiated bust of the god, originally part of a mosaic of planets, now partially preserved in the Casa de la Condesa de Lebrija (CMRE I: n°12, 36-37 pl. 33), or the image in the Archaeological Museum of Sparta (Yalouris - Visser-Choitz 1990: n°134, vol. 1, 1019). Second, the whip, one of the main attributes of the god, is linked to his characterisation as the driver of the solar chariot. Thus, this element appears, to cite some notable examples, in the Cosmological Mosaic of the Casa del Mitreo in Mérida, in his invocation as *Oriens*, the Rising Sun (Quet 1981; Letta 1988: n°341, vol. 1, 615 and vol. 2, 378); also, in the mosaic of the planets or Mosaik V, of the *uilla* of Orbe-Boscéaz (Gonzenbach 1961: 184, 187 pl. 60-61; Letta 1988: n°272, vol. 1, 610); in the Tunisian mosaic of the Zodiac and the Planets of Da Bir-Chana, in the Bardo Museum (Stern 1953: 60; Dunbabin 1978: 161, 249 pl. LXIV fig. 162; Stern 1981: 171, n° 92, pl. 34,1; San Nicolás 2014: 135). Finally, the presence on the same pavement of Selene (Fig. 4-5), reinforces the identification, as does likely representation of Mercury (Fig. 4-6), in line with the cosmological iconographic discourse in which a Wind (Fig. 4-4) and a *Dioscurus* (Fig. 4-8) are also depicted. As will be seen below in the section on the lunar divinity, it is common to find its association on the same decorative support with Helios-Sun, especially in pavements related to seasonal and planetary themes or, in general, to the passage of time. Indeed, Helios and Selene form a divine pair that embodied the concept of an ordered and comprehensible sky. Thus, among the most notable examples are the pavements of the Planetarium of *Italica* and Da Bir-Chana, as well as the Tunisian mosaic of *Aion* and the Seasons of the House of Silenus at El Djem-Thysdrus (Dunbabin 1978: pl. LXIII fig. 159; Letta 1988: n°400, vol. 1, 619).

The figure of Helios is not common in the mosaic iconography of *Baetica*, nor in *Hispania*. In addition to the parallels already listed in *Italica* and Mérida, we can recall his possible presence in a mosaic from Póvoa de Cós (Mourão 2008: 38-41) and the questionable identification of the seated male figure in the lost central part of the Fernán Núñez pavement (CMRE III: n°32, 50-54; Morand 1994: 245, 308-309 n°39).

3.3 Beardless Wind

The figure located in Module 4 is noticeably displaced upwards in the interior of the frame, which reinforces the point already made that, at least in some cases, the images were made before the geometric fields that surround them was finished (Fig. 4-4). This is a youthful figure of a beardless male individual, depicted in profile, with his eyes turned upwards, his hair neatly tied back – unlike the image in Module 11 (Fig. 4-11)– from which his wings are spread (Fig. 9). This, in addition to the representation of the air exhaled from his lips, allows us to identify the character with one of the winds.

The identification of the *Anemoi* is inevitably challenged by their iconographic variety and lack of definition (Simon 1997: *passim*). It would be tempting to relate the winds preserved in this mosaic, located respectively in Modules 4 and 11, to their spatial position in the western and eastern corridors of the peristyle. Thus, the wind described in this section would be the spring wind from the west, Zephyrus, while the one on the opposite side would be the autumn wind from the east, Euro. This interpretation is, however, prevented by the fact that the northern corridor has no figurative representations, and probably the southern neither. Furthermore, a good number of figures have been lost, a circumstance

Figure 9
Beardless Wind. Photography by Sergio
García-Dils.



that prevents us from having an overall picture of the iconography of the peristyle, so that we cannot even affirm that the four winds were present on the pavement. Finally, Modules 4 and 11 are not in reality symmetrical or directly spatially balanced.

A similar iconography of busts exhaling winds can be found in a mosaic from Sant'Agata in Petra Aurea on the Via Nomentana, now in the Vatican Museum (Simon 1997: n°4, vol. 1, 188 and vol. 2, 129); also in the mosaic of Aion, Gaea and Prometheus from *Philippopolis* (Shahba), now in the Syrian National Museum in Damascus, in which the epigraphic text identifies the two beardless winds as Noto and Euro (Simon 1997: n°8, vol. 1, 188; Blázquez 2008: 20 fig. 18). To these can be added the representation found in the mosaic of *Oceanus* in the Museu Arqueológico e Lapidar Infante D. Henrique in Faro (Portugal), which has been interpreted as Zephyrus, with which it shares similarities in terms of its execution, although without the exhaled air in this case (CMRP II.2: n°27b, 205, 215-219 pl. XIII-XIV; Lancha 1985: 160-161; Lancha 2008: 83-84).

Finally, it is worth mentioning, not so much for the iconography of the winds, but for the association with Helios and Selene –in addition to the signs of the Zodiac– a mosaic found in Alikakos plot, Triakosion street, in Sparta (Yalouris - Visser-Choitz 1990: n°290, vol. 1, 1026; Panayotopoulou 1998: 114 fig. 10.2, 117; Hachlili 2009: 53 fig. III-15; Panagiotopoulou 2011: 63; San Nicolás 2014: 138).

The well-groomed tied-back hair, as well as the youthful physical characteristics, suggest that this is a calm, gentle wind, perhaps Zephyrus, the west wind of spring, which is coincidentally the identification suggested for the Portuguese parallel. In any case, in the absence of an express epigraphic text, any identification is hazardous, since we have already seen how the beardless winds of the Syrian mosaic are in fact named as Noto and Euro.

As far as Écija itself is concerned, we only find representations of the winds in the Mosaic of the Allegory, documented in Avenida Miguel de Cervantes nº35 (CMRE XIV: nº32, 73-75 fig. 64). They appear in the corners, their habitual location in mosaic pavements, facing ahead, with an iconography of the masks of *Oceanus*, wearing winged helmets.

3.4 Selene

In Module 5 (Fig. 4-5), a female figure is depicted, dressed in a blue tunic, closed by a brooch on the right shoulder, wearing a necklace (Fig. 10). The lunar crescent behind the figure refers to Selene, in a composition that became popular in the Hellenistic period, when the form usually present as a circle or semicircle on the head became a crescent placed either on the head itself or behind her back, as is the case in the mosaic from *Astigi*, which is similar to the representations of the lunar goddesses of the Near East (Gury 1994: *passim*). Other attributes typical of the goddess do not appear, such as the torch or the whip (Auson., *Cup. Cruc.* 42), the veil around her head or, her main attribute in Roman times, the chariot with two horses with which she would cross the night sky (Pind.O. 3.19; Hom. h. *Ven.* 32.9-11; Ov.met. 2.208-209) and with which she is depicted in several mosaics.



Figure 10
Selene. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

The figure exceeds the frame at the top and to the right. Evidently, the figure was created first, and then the frame was adapted around it, resulting in the hairstyle being cut off at the top, which, together with the losses in that area, prevents us from knowing whether she was wearing a high bun and a diadem as is usual in other mosaic representations. She is dressed in blue, in contrast to the poetic descriptions of her brilliant whiteness suggestive of the moon's reflection.

The closest parallel we have, very similar both in iconography and composition and in the attitude of the figure, is found in the mosaic of the Calendar of the

House of the Planetarium at *Italica* (Fig. 11) (CMRE XIII: n°66, 69-71 pl. XXII - fig. 134 pl. XXIII - fig. 138). The most notable difference is that, in *Astigi*, the goddess's hair is tied back and does not fall over her shoulders, as well as the scale of the lunar crescent in relation to the figure. Unfortunately, this image has suffered the loss of the upper part, so we do not know if it would have shown the characteristic curl of hair on the forehead, as in the case of the Selene of *Italica*. Also close in iconography is the mosaic from the House of Silenus at El Djem-Thysdrus, with a similar hairstyle and a lunar crescent on an equivalent scale, although in this case she is covered with a *palla* that leaves her shoulders uncovered (Dunbabin 1978: pl. LXIII fig. 159; Letta 1988: n°400, vol. 1, 619; San Nicolás 2014: 136-137).

Figure 11
Selene in the mosaic of the Planetarium at *Italica*. Photography by Daniel González.



Recently, San Nicolás has systematised the different figures in which Selene/Moon appears in Roman mosaics from a catalogue of 24 examples, establishing seven compositional schemes through which this deity appears in the pavements (San Nicolás 2014). These are as follows: related to the planets, to the months, to the seasons, her isolated astral attribute, with her brother Helios/Sun, with other gods and, finally, the evocation of her love affair with Endymion. Of all these types, the one that most closely resembles the representation from *Écija* is the one in which Selene appears in a mosaic alongside her brother Helios/Sun, as divinities associated with the ideas of cosmic order and the perpetual renewal of the cycle of life and time.

3.5 Mercury

Module 6 is atypical within the mosaic, as it is the only one in the courtyard framed by a triple band of tesserae (Fig. 4-6). This may, again, support the observation that, at least in some cases, the figures were created before the squares and, if there was additional space available here, that three bands were made instead of two. It could also have been a simple oversight on the part of the craftsman.

Almost all this image has been lost, although it is possible to recognise a figure whose head, seen turned three-quarters to the right of the square, is surmounted by two appendages, which can easily be identified as wings (Fig. 12). A small appendage of black tesserae has also been preserved on the figure's left shoulder, which may correspond to one of the figure's attributes or, perhaps, to part of

the cloak he wears or the brooch fastens it. We rule out the possibility that this figure may be a wind, as the other two preserved figures are depicted completely in profile.



Figure 12
Mercury. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

The immediate iconographic context, related to the planets, suggests that it is Mercury, the patron of merchants and traders, of business and transactions, and also the messenger of the gods (Baratta 2001), all of which are characteristics that fit the sociological profile of *colonia Augusta Firma* and its ruling elites, easily inclined to identify with this god who guaranteed the success of their commercial and productive enterprises and to use his image in the iconographic repertoire of their mansions. However, up until now, the evidence relating to this divinity in *Astigi* has been limited to the discovery of a small bronze figure of the nude god seated on a rock, based on classical Greek models, found by chance in the vicinity of the modern-day urban centre (Merchán 2015: 49-50 n.º 30, 117-118). It most probably came from a domestic *lararium* (Sáez et al. 2004: 210 n. 95). Also, on the mosaic of the *triclinium* of *Domus I* itself, the god is associated with the initial episode of the Rape of Europa.

Above, we have already mentioned the mosaics whose subject matter and iconography is like the new mosaic from Écija. Among them, the most relevant parallel is found, once again, in *Italica*, in the mosaic of the Planetarium, in which the god is represented without the *caduceus*, as the bust of a young man with wings on his head, covered by a cloak gathered with a *fibula* on his right shoulder, which is left uncovered (Fig. 13) (CMRE XIII: n.º66, 69-71 pl. XXII fig. 134 pl. XXIII fig. 140). We should also mention the bust of Mercury in the Tunisian mosaic of the Zodiac and the Planets of Da Bir-Chana, in which this divinity appears with a very simplified *caduceus* but without wings (Stern 1953: 60, 184 and pl. XXXIV.1; Dunbabin 1978: 161, 249 pl. LXIV fig. 162; Stern 1981: 171, n.º 92 pl. 34,1; San Nicolás 2014: 135).

Figure 13
Mercury in the mosaic of the Planetarium at
Italica. Photography by Daniel González.



It is worth noting in this case that the almost complete destruction of the image can be attributed to an episode of Christian iconoclasm, which would have taken place during the plundering of the *fistulae* that ran through the courtyard. At the time of the removal of the pipes, much of the mosaic was covered by the collapse of the roof of the perimeter gallery. When the area was cleared to remove the pipes, this image and that of Module 7 (Fig. 4-7) were exposed and then destroyed, leaving the *tessellae* scattered around them. A crude chrismon was even engraved on the base of the mosaic in Module 6⁴.

3.6 One of the *Dioscuri*

As mentioned above, Module 7 also shows intentional destruction of an iconoclastic nature, chronologically linked to the late-antique plundering of the pipes that ran under the mosaic pavement, on the side corresponding to the base of the columns of the peristyle (Fig. 4-7). In this case, the nature of the act is particularly evident, given that the square and the geometric pattern that surrounded it are perfectly preserved, and only the figurative area is damaged. Module 8, in contrast, due to the offset of the courtyard, contains only half of the geometric module (Fig. 4-8).

Presented as a youthful, long-haired male figure, this is a canonical representation of one of the *Dioscuri* (Fig. 14). His attributes are the usual ones, wearing a *pileus* crowned with a star, covered with a *chlamys* that leaves both shoulders uncovered and carrying a spear resting on his right arm. The spear is of a different colour in the part that protrudes over his shoulder, to distinguish it from the background.

Two points should be noted in relation to the new appearance of a *dioscurus* in *Domus I*, along with the one found in the *triclinium*. Firstly, it is striking that this is a motif that is especially represented in the works of the mosaic workshop working in *Astigi*, which operated during the Severan period, with known works in this same building and in the so-called mosaic of the Bacchic Triumph in Plaza de Santiago (García-Dils 2015: 295-296; CMRE XIV: n°8, 45-50), which brings to three the number of representations of the *Dioscuri* in *colonia Augusta*

⁴ This intentional destruction of an iconoclastic character has been the subject of independent work by the authors of this paper, which is currently being published.



Figure 14
Dioscuros. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

Firma, perhaps due to the prophylactic nature of the twins. This is surprising, given the very few mosaic representations of the brothers. Secondly, in this new mosaic we find the first reliable mosaic representation of a *dioscuros* in this bust format, as opposed to all the other known cases in which they either appear full-length, alone –mosaic of the house of the Dioscuri (III.9.1) in Ostia (Gury 1986: n°10, vol. 1, 613 and vol. 2, 489; Dunbabin 1999: 64-65)– or with a horse –the two examples reported in Écija itself; the mosaic of the *tablinum* (room n°4) of the house of *Dionysos* at Nea Paphos (Daszewski - Michaelides 1988: 26-27 figs. 13-14); the Mosaic of the Horses in the House of Horses at *Carthago* (Gury 1986: n°22, vol. 1, 614 and vol. 2, 490; Dunbabin 1999: 116, 118 fig. 119)–, or only their attributes, such as the *pileus* crowned by a star –mosaic of the central passage of the *Mithraeum* of *Felicissimus* (V.9.1) in Ostia (Gury 1986: n°134, vol. 1, 625 and vol. 2, 500; Dunbabin 1999: 64); mosaic in the baths of *Insula* IV at Tindari (Dunbabin 1999: 130)–, or even still inside the egg from which they hatched –the *Mysteries* mosaic from Kornmarkt (Trier), in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, here shown as triplets, accompanied by Helena– (Gury 1986: n°145, vol. 1, 626 and vol. 2, 501; Dunbabin 1999: 85 fig. 85).

3.7 Dionysus

Moving on to the eastern corridor, we find that Module 9 has been lost, due to medieval looting linked to the extraction of materials for the construction of the Alcázar enclosure (Fig. 4-9). Next, we find, partially preserved, Module 10, the geometric pattern of which was the object of a very unfortunate restoration, in Roman times (Fig. 4-10).

In this frame, we are presented with the usual image of Dionysus: beardless,

wearing a crown of vines and carrying the characteristic *thyrsus* (Fig. 15). Thus, the god appears in one of the forms most used in Roman mosaics, that is as a static figure absent of narrative content and, in this case, isolated, unlike other cases in which he is depicted with companions from his singular world –silenes, seasons, etc.–. As such, his image is used as a conventional and decorative motif in the context of the fashion of the times and for visual enjoyment, without any identifiable connection with the religious beliefs or cult practices of the commissioner of the mosaic. At most, this image could be associated with the *domus* owner's taste for Bacchic themes and their connotations, well-expressed in other rooms of the house, with ideas of abundance, prosperity, enjoyment of pleasures and well-being. As C. Dunbabin rightly pointed out in relation to North African Dionysian scenarios, “*in other instances we may suspect that the religious significance of the subject has been dissipated by constant use; in some of the domestic contexts in which it appears, it may well represent nothing more than the triumphant power of the god of wine*” (Dunbabin 1978: 182).

Figure 15
Dionysus. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



As for parallels in the province of *Baetica*, this image is reminiscent of the central motif of the mosaic of triangles and water birds in Plazuela de Santo Domingo n°5-7 on the corner of Calle Almonas in Écija itself, in which, despite the loss of part of the floor, the bust of Bacchus can be identified, or, less probably, that of Thetis (CMRE XIV: n°47, 91-92 figs. 81, 83). Its identification in three mosaics from *Italica* in which the bust of the divinity is clearer (CMRE II: n°2, 26-27 pl. 8-10; CMRE II: n°3, 27-28 pl. 11-13; CMRE II: n°14, 38 pl. 37; Blázquez 1984: passim).

Among the iconographic parallels to the image of Bacchus outside the Iberian Peninsula, we should mention the following examples: in the Lugdunensis region, with a *thyrsus* on his back and crowned with ivy, in the *villa* of Goiffieux in Saint-Laurent d'Agny (Balmelle - Darmon 2017: 90-91 figs. 113-114). He is

also depicted in the *triclinium* of the *domus* of Boulevard de la République in Aix-en-Provence (Balmelle - Darmon 2017: 143 fig. 173). Crowned with vines, his image is present in two mosaics from the Villa Dionysus at Knossos in Crete (Dunbabin 1999: 211-212; Sweetman 2013: 49, 159-160, pl. 1, 162-164, pl. 3). Also, in the Villa Constantiniana in Antioch –today at the Rhode Island School of Design– with his usual bunches of grapes in his hair (Levi 1971: 245-248 pl. CLXII; Augé - Linant de Bellefonds 1986: n°54, vol. 1, 519 and vol. 2, 411). Finally, the one from a shallow pool at Zeugma, now in the Gaziantep Mosaic Museum (Başgelen - Ergeç 2000).

The Dionysian theme is the most frequent one in the mosaics of *Astigi*, in keeping with the immense popularity of this divinity throughout the Roman world. There are numerous mosaics depicting this divinity in his various hypostases, located in halls and public performance spaces inside mansions and *domus*. As a complex divinity, his presence in the iconographic repertoires is justified for various reasons (Dunbabin 1978: 173-187; Detienne 2000: *passim*): his consideration as a foreign god, a *xenos* who must be welcomed in accordance with the sacred laws of hospitality and *xenophilia* of which the god is the patron; the recognition of his role as the saviour of mankind, of which he is considered the privileged protector; as the deity who transmitted the knowledge of vine cultivation and wine production, a facet well-represented in the mosaics of *Hispania* and particularly of *Astigi* (Blázquez 1984; Mañas 2007-2008: 102-103; CMRE XIV: 19-24).

3.8 Bearded Wind - Possibly Boreas

Module 11 contains a bearded male figure depicted in profile, with long, untidy hair (Fig. 4-11). The wind itself is clearly represented by the bluish-coloured tesserae exhaled from his lips (Fig. 16). As mentioned above in relation to



Figure 16
Bearded wind, possibly Boreas. Photography
by Sergio García-Dils.

Module 4, the identifications of the *Anemoi* are challenged by their iconographic variety and general lack of specificity.

In the iconographic aspect, within the parallels already offered, it is worth emphasising the similarity of the wind represented here with the one identified as Boreas in the mosaic of Oceanus from Faro (Lancha 1985: 161; Lancha 2008: 84; CMRP II.2: n°27b, 205, 215-219 pl. XIII-XIV). It should also be recalled that in the mosaic of Aion, Gaea and Prometheus from *Philippopolis* (Shahba), the epigraphic text identifies the two bearded winds as Zephyrus and Boreas (Simon 1997: n°8, vol. 1, 188; Blázquez 2008: 20 fig. 18). In view of these parallels and the iconographic characteristics of the figure on the new pavement from Écija, we are inclined to identify the fierce north wind, Boreas, here too.

3.9 Return from the Hunt

Module 12 is extensively damaged (Fig. 4-5), although it is possible to recognise a series of elements that suggest that it is a scene following a hunting episode – not an *uenatio per se* – in which the hunted games are presented to a seated figure located on the left of the composition (Fig. 17).

Figure 17
Return from the hunt. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



We will discuss now about the figures who can be recognised in the scene from right to left. First, we have a figure dressed in a short tunic and wearing boots with laces hanging from the front that allow us to identify them as *cothurni uenatici* (Fig. 4-12A), the boots worn by hunters according to some literary sources (Aymard 1951: 204).⁵ He is depicted carrying an animal on his back, whose hindquarters have been preserved. The figure is bent over, to show that he is supporting a heavy weight, throwing back his left arm to better grasp the hunted animal by the belly. Judging by the size of the animal, the stylised proportions of the legs, the cloven hooves, the tiny tail, the brownish colour of the back which turns lighter and whiter on the abdomen and legs, and the mottled skin, it is clearly a fallow deer (*damma*; Aymard 1951: 18-19).

Next to the feet of the previous figure are the hindquarters of a dog seen from the side walking in the direction of march, towards the left, undoubtedly one of the

⁵ Serv., *ad Aen.* 1.337: “*coturni sunt calciamenta etiam uenatoria, crura quoque uincientia, quorum quibus utriusque aptus est pedis*”. In his commentary on Virgil, Probus (*Ad Verg. G. 2.8*) refers to this footwear as the typical one of hunters: “*cothurni sunt calceamentorum genera uenatorum, quibus crura etiam muniuntur, cuius calceamenti efigies est in simulacris Liberi et Dianae*”.

canine participants in the hunt (Fig. 4-12B). Its skin is composed of tesserae of blackish tones. It would be risky to determine the breed based on information as brief as the tail and hindquarters, unlike in other mosaics, where this is feasible, and thus, for example, the presence of greyhounds can be determined in some North African hunting scenes (Aymard 1951: 235-293; Dunbabin 1978: 49, 257 pl. 22). In any case, the silhouette of the dog would be perfectly compatible with that of a Spanish greyhound, a native Iberian breed.

To the right of the two preceding figures, on a small leafless tree, we find a barn swallow perched (Fig. 4-12C), depicted schematically, but with great realism both in terms of its proportions and in the details of its colouring, such as the rufous throat. The presence of the tree and other plant elements is evidence of a rural landscape setting in which the scene takes place.

Next, we can identify a horse (Fig. 4-12D), of which part of the head, the two front legs, and one of the hind legs have been preserved. The right front hoof is slightly raised and overlaps the left rear hoof, which allows us to recognise that the equine is in a static position, practically facing the front, with its body turned to the right, while its head is turned to the left of the scene. Below the horse, a vague shape appears, perhaps corresponding to another hunted animal or one of the instruments used in the hunt. In front of the equine, a barefoot figure advances (Fig. 4-12E), holding a hare in his right hand, in an attitude of offering it to the seated figure (Fig. 4-12F).

The scene is completed, on the far left, by the seated figure (Fig. 4-12F), whose right foot can be recognised, wearing sandals, as well as the right knee, bent and covered by a multicolored cloak in brownish tones. The state of the mosaic prevents us from knowing for sure on what type of piece of furniture or support the figure would have been installed, although from the small volume of black tesserae underneath it, with a right-angled base, it could be suggested that it is a seat with a backrest.

The recognizable vegetation in the painting –scrawny tree, bare bushes– suggests that the scene is set in winter, although the presence of the barn swallow would suggest that we are already in the transition to spring. The figure of the bird perched on the branch of the tree suggests the images surrounding the central emblem of the *Oceanos* mosaic in one of the *domus* in the Plaza de España in Ecija, and in which a seasonal connotation can also be assumed in view of the clear differences in the foliage of the trees (CMRE XIV: n°45, 88-90 figs. 79A, 79B). On the other hand, the schematic and stylised representation of the tree can be directly related to the vegetal elements present in the mosaic of the Loves of Zeus, in the *triclinium* of this same *domus*.

Also, in other Ecijan mosaic pavements, such as those that appear in the Triumph of Bacchus in the Plaza de Santiago, specifically in the scenes of Orpheus and Narcissus, the work of this same Astigitan mosaic workshop, although in these two cases they have been represented with greater exuberance (CMRE XIV: n°8, 49-50 fig. 15). Furthermore, in three of the semicircles surrounding the central scene of the mosaic of the Rape of Europa on Espíritu Santo street (CMRE XIV: n°21, 59-60 fig. 41), where a maenad with thyrsus and two male figures from the Bacchic procession with *nebrys*, syringa and *pedum* appear respectively, around which some bushes or shrubs, or even saplings, are placed, very similar in execution to the one in our mosaic. Finally, a bush of similar conventionality is also found in the central emblem of another Astigitan mosaic, very fragmented, from a *domus* on the Cerro de la Pólvara street (CMRE XIV: n°57, 98 fig. 91-92). All of them are examples of how a specific ornamental motif can allow

different mosaic pavements to be attributed to the same group of craftsmen or to groups linked to each other by their forms of work, in this case in the same urban community of *colonia Augusta Firma*.

Regarding the games hunted, we will not cite here the numerous musive parallels documented for the moment of the hunt itself, or with the animals still in the wild, but specifically those related to the scene we are dealing with. Concerning fallow deer, we count in Roman Hispania textual testimonies on the hunting of Cervidae. For example, on a marble altar dedicated to Diana, in her role as the goddess of hunting, by a legate of *Legio VII Gemina* (CIL II 2660 = *HEp* 2002, 317), the inscribed text reflects the hunting activity of the dedicant, mentioning *capreae* (roe deers) and *cerui* (deers). Martial, on the other hand, states that *dammae* (fallow deers) were hunted in his lands of Laletania in Tarragona, specifying that this was done with the aid of nets (Mart. 1.49.23; cf. Aymard 1951: 67, 165, 212, 252, 353). Aymard, the author of reference in hunting matters, reflects on the introduction by the Romans of the fallow deer into western Europe, coming from central or eastern Europe, in a state of partial domestication, which fits in well with both the chronology of the mosaic presented here, and with the possible relevance given to the piece in the mosaic pavement, perhaps coming from a reserve owned by the commissioning family (Aymard 1951: 18-19, 67, 98, 110, 113, 115, 212, 252, 353). As far as we have been able to document, the way in which the fallow deer is carried by a single individual constitutes a *hapax*. In general, for larger games, such as deer, it is usual to carry them by two people, as can be seen, for example, in a mosaic from the Roman villa of East Coker, in the Museum of Somerset (<https://somersetcollections.org.uk/object/tncm-a-266/>, accessed: January 10, 2022).

As for the hare, we have a good number of parallels for the representation of individuals holding a hunted one. In this context, we have, for example, the mosaic from the Maison de la Chasse at Utica (Dunbabin 1978: 57, 62 fig. 33); also, the mosaic from the Maison de Bacchus at Djemila; also, one of the scenes in the mosaic of the Small Hunt in the villa del Casale in Piazza Armerina, in which we see a bearded hunter holding a hare in his left hand and a *uenabulum* on the other hand, at the end of the hunt (Lavin 1963: fig. 110; Carandini et al. 1982: 178, fig. 95, foglio XXIV; Dunbabin 1999: 133 fig. 137). Similar images are also found in representations related to the grape harvest (Dunbabin 1978: 116-117 n. 27; Hachlili 2009: 154-155), as in the mosaic of the *Dominus Iulius* at Carthage, in the Bardo National Museum (Dunbabin 1978: 119-121 fig. 109; Parrish 1979: passim; Parrish 1984: 111-113 n° 9 pl. 15, 16b; Dunbabin 1999: 118-119 fig. 122), or in the mosaic with vintage scenes from Cherchel (Dunbabin 1978: 116 pl. D fig. 107).

Finally, concerning the games hunted, it can also be noted that the hunting of fallow deer and hares would fit well with the winter dates we propose for the scene, as Virgil, among other authors, expressively recounts when referring to the activities typical of this season: “*the time to set snares for cranes and nets for the stag, and to chase the long-eared hares; the time to smite the fallow deers*” (Verg., *G.* 1.307-308; Aymard 1951: 115, 165, 353). Perhaps the possible presence of the cold north wind, Aquilo / Boreas, in the preceding panel of the mosaic can be interpreted in this sense, as Martial points out: “*And when rimy December and winter wild shall howl with the hoarse Aquilo, you will go back to the sunny shores of Tarraco and your own Laletania. There you will slaughter fallow deers snared in soft-meshed toils and native boars and run the cunning hare to death with your stout horse –stags you will leave to the bailiff–*” (Mart. 1.49.19-26).

Regarding the composition and attitude of the figures and animals present in the Ecijan pavement, they remind us of well-known scenes, such as one of those represented in the aforementioned mosaic of the Small Hunt in the villa del Casale in Piazza Armerina, in that case in relation to the presentation of offerings to Diana. Thus, the position of the horse in the Sicilian scene would be very similar to that which can be reconstructed on the new Astigitan pavement, with the body represented three-quarter length, facing to the right, while turning its head, held by the reins, to the opposite side.

As for the possible seated representation of the *dominus* or *domina* on the left of our composition, to whom the results of the hunt are being offered, it evokes an atmosphere like that contained in the mosaic of *Dominus Iulius*, which shows the lord and lady of the estate seated beside the buildings of their villa, and receiving the gifts of its seasonal produce, a hare among them. The uses and visual conventions used in Roman iconography, in general, and on the musive pavements, in particular, of seating to mark social differentiation and statutory rank are well known: slaves, servants and dependents, standing; lords, ladies, owners of the mansions and dignitaries, seated (Bermejo 2018: 86-88).

In conclusion, this is the first example of a hunting-related scene in the extensive mosaic repertoire of *colonia Augusta Firma*. Hunting as an iconographic motif in mosaics developed especially from the beginning of the 3rd century, particularly in North Africa and Italy, with notable examples also in the Iberian Peninsula⁶. In fact, it is the Severan period that saw the decisive projection of the theme in western mosaics, using an expository technique centred on the juxtaposition of narrative paintings presenting various episodes of the hunt as opposed to the use of *emblemata* typical of the Hellenistic world (Blázquez - López Monteagudo 1990: 61; López Monteagudo 1991; Duran 2011: 315-316). Before this, scenes of this type with examples of country life and hunting motifs were rare in the mosaics of Hispania, unlike in the Late Roman period, where this iconographic theme was widely represented from Severan times onwards.

Unfortunately, the scene on our pavement is very damaged and prevents us from being able to go deeper into the idea of the message that the commissioner of the mosaic wanted to express with the use of iconographic references linked to hunting, one of the characteristic interests of the aristocracy and a model of their ideal of life, their personality, their philosophy of life, and their spirit as a privileged and proud social class: an expression of their status of wealth and economic capacity expressed graphically in the musive art, the occupation of sovereigns and dynasts, especially from the 3rd century onwards (Morand 1994: passim). The use of this iconographic motif is also related to the invocation of good fortune, or *felicitas temporum*, which gives form to the aristocratic values of the *otium* of the wealthy classes, one of the best reflections of which is to be found in their grand residences. The *uirtus* of the great landowner is manifested, for example, in the hunting activity that members of the ruling classes boast of in so many mosaics in their dwellings. This kind of scene is present on many pavements from all periods, but became more widespread in late imperial times, as a symbol of social status and of the practice of hunting by the great lords on their properties, considered to be one of their main hobbies, and also conceived as one of the most effective mechanisms for identifying their social class (Aymard 1951: passim; Lavin 1963: passim; Levi 1971: 236-244; Dunbabin 1978: 46-64; Blázquez - López Monteagudo 1990: passim; López Monteagudo 1991: passim;

⁶ Anyway, representations of hunting scenes are not very numerous at Baetica, cf. López Monteagudo - Neira 2010: 156-158.

Neira 2007: 267-270). Through the representations of hunting in mosaic art, the ruling elites project an image of power and self-representation of their value in the exercise of their virtue, identified with victory and triumph over wild animals and as an allegory of triumphant glory, an ethic of heroic meaning characteristic of the lordly behaviour of the great *dominus*, especially from the 4th century onward.

Nevertheless, the little that has survived of the scene allows us to observe a realistic treatment of the figures, both animal and human, with naturalistic details drawn from the interests and everyday reality of the patron who commissioned the pavement, apparently imbued with the new realist tendencies that spread in mosaic art from the beginning of the 3rd century, particularly in the Severan period, when the fashion for the representation of themes taken from contemporary life spread (Dunbabin 1978: 112, 114).

Given that this is not strictly speaking the representation of a *uenatio*, it is worth asking whether a mythological episode is being depicted here, following the general tone of the mosaic decoration of this *domus*. In this case, we could consider the possibility of relating the scene to the myth of Atalanta and Meleager, which is usually combined with hunting scenes (Apollod. 1.8.2-3; 3.9.2; Ov.met. 8.270 ff., Hyg.fab. 175). We rule out this option since in the preserved part of the new Astigitan mosaic there is no indication of the presence of the Calidon boar, which should be one of the central axes of the composition. Moreover, the only two figures likely to carry its carcass are already carrying two small animals that have nothing to do with the development of this story.

Another option that we discard is that we are dealing with a ceremony such as the "*honneurs du pied*" that some Greco-Roman literary and iconographic sources recall associated with the more common and better attested practice of dedicating to the divinities of rustic sanctuaries the head, fenders, teeth, or antlers of hunted animals (Aymard 1951: 508-512; *Sch. Ar. Pl.* 943a-c; Chantry 2009: 342-343).

3.10 The Summer

In Module 13, the mosaic returns to the general geometric scheme of the rest of the pavement (Fig. 4-13). Although badly damaged, we can recognise here the bust of a female figure, three-quarter length, with a sickle turned inward, superimposed on the figure's right shoulder (Fig. 18). The dress leaves the right shoulder uncovered. She appears to be wearing a deep blue necklace.

It may be proposed that this is the personification of Aestas, the Summer. In that case, by analogy with the figure seen in the neighbouring mosaic of the Loves of Zeus, we would expect the usual cereal spikes to appear behind his left shoulder (Abad 1990: passim; Dennert 2009: passim; for Hispania, Rueda 2011: 161-162).

There are numerous parallels for this stereotypical depiction, as we have already seen in the section dedicated to the seasons in mosaic of the *triclinium*. In Ecija, we can mention again the mosaic of the Plaza de Santiago, where the personification of the summer season wears a blue cloak covering his left shoulder, the sickle on his right shoulder and a cereal wreath on his head (CMRE XIV: n°8, 48 fig. 15); also, the mosaic of the Allegory of Miguel de Cervantes avenue, where the eros representing summer holds a sickle in his right hand (CMRE XIV: n°32, 74 fig. 64). In *Italica*, in the Ibarra mosaic of the Seasons, the corresponding bust, wearing a cereal wreath, has a sickle superimposed on



Figure 18
The Summer. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

the right shoulder (CMRE XIII: n°79, 83-84 pl. XXVIII fig. 171); similarly, in the mosaic with Bacchic Busts, we see Summer with a wreath, a sickle on his right shoulder, and a pitchfork on the left one (CMRE II: n°3, 27-28 pl. 11-13). Finally, in the *Corduba* mosaic of Bacchus, where Aestas is symbolised by a bust in bluish robes wearing a cereal wreath, with a sickle on her left shoulder (CMRE III: n°12, 30 pl. 13).

Among the African parallels, we cite here the Algerian mosaic of the Four Seasons from Aïn Babouche, with the cereal crown and the sickle superimposed on the right shoulder, because of the similarity in the representation of this agricultural instrument (Parrish 1984: n°4, 99-101 pl. 6, 7b).

3.11 Chronology

In a recent work, Mañas has summarised the main characteristics of musive production in Hispania between the 2nd century and the first half of the 3rd (Mañas 2019: 154-155): a predilection for polychrome designs as opposed to the black and white bichrome pavements of the previous period, aligned with the Italic taste of the commissioners, centralised compositions around hexagons or octagons, compartmentalisation of the pavement surface into small quadrangular spaces, also hexagonal or octagonal, associated with geometric or vegetal decoration, with the latter preferring designs based on braids, Solomon's knots, *peltae* and schematic vegetal forms. As we have seen in the preceding lines, many of these premises are met in the case of the mosaic we present here, which in principle offers us a first approximation to the chronological delimitation of this pavement.

The study of the ceramic artifacts recovered in the archaeological excavation, together with the stratigraphic relationships of the documented structures,

allows us to narrow this chronology, establishing that the musive decoration of the *domus* corresponds to the general renovation undertaken in the house in the Severan period, linked to the urban transformation of this sector of the city, which included, for example, the repair and enhancement of the water supply (Ordóñez - García-Dils 2021: passim). This chronology fits well with the main panel of the peristyle, which is dedicated to hunting, a theme that, as López Monteagudo (1991: 499) points out, was introduced in the West in Severan times.

3.12 Some Conclusions

The mosaics presented in this paper illustrate the interesting question of paving as a hierarchical element of domestic space, as well as an indicator of movement inside the house and a decorative marker of the use of space, as Mañas (2007-2008: 93-99) points out in her studies. Thus, we see a notable contrast between passage areas, such as the atrium, and some secondary rooms, which present a sober paving of calcarenite tamped with lime and sand mortar, and the rich mosaics presented here, corresponding to reception and representation spaces.

It is possible to interpret as areas destined for the installation of furniture those with an exclusive presence of geometric patterns. These would be both the “L” of three-dimensional cubes in the mosaic of the Loves of Zeus in the *triclinium* and the rear part of the room decorated with the Satyr / Silenus pavement, which we identify as the *tablinum*, where we can reconstruct a large panel with geometric decoration from the surviving evidence. Also, in the northern corridor of the peristyle, which suggests the seasonal use of this area, perhaps as a summer dining room. It should be noted that both the *triclinium* mosaic and the northern corridor show notable erosion, with occasional deterioration marks indicating the presence of furniture legs.

In the case of the *triclinium*, the intended effect on the guests is particularly evident, as the orientation of the scenes in the central panel converge towards the corner where the *lecti* were installed, especially in the case of the depictions of the seasons located in the corners.

Regarding the peristyle, it should be noted that the presence of figural panels is striking, especially that of the return of the hunt, in areas eminently for passage, something that seems more typical of the eastern part of the Empire, as can be seen in the House of Dyonisos in Nea Paphos (Mañas 2007-2008: 94).

There is no evident discursive logic in the preserved iconographic ensemble. The winds do not occupy a defined position within the ensemble, as might be the angles of the peristyle, nor are they occupied by the seasons, as evidenced by the presence of a *Dioscuros* in the northwest corner. Winds, stars, planets, etc. alternate indistinctly.

We can see how different mosaic workshops concurred in this *domus* during the Severan period, executing works with similar themes, although they contributed their own points of view and iconographic resources, which are different in the cases analysed. We can once again affirm the stable or, at least, prolonged presence of the *officina* that executed the mosaic of the Loves of Zeus presented here and other pavements in *colonia Augusta Firma*, such as the Triumph of Dionysus from the Plaza de Santiago, the mosaic of Briseis or a scene from the Iliad, from Calle Espíritu Santo, and in the so-called “mosaic of cubes” from Plaza de España. This raises, once again, the suggestive question of the itinerancy of these craftsmen throughout the main cities and *uillae* of *Baetica*, as well as the circulation of cartons of the models represented, as Neira (2019: passim; 2020: passim) and Mañas (2011: passim) have drawn attention to in documented works on the subject.

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