

BUSINESS, LEISURE, AND PIETY: ANIMAL MOTIFS IN THE FLOOR MOSAICS AT  
THE VILLA OF PIAZZA ARMERINA

by

MELISSA DEPIERRO  
(Under the Direction of Asen Kirin)  
ABSTRACT

The villa of Piazza Armerina is a prime example of a luxury Roman villa meant to house leisurely activities and official business. It is also known for its extensive *in situ* animal mosaics that adorn the floors of the villa. This thesis aims to take a select group of these animal compositions that are carefully placed on the public and private visitor routes throughout the villa and explain how they encourage specific movement throughout the villa for particular visitor types. This thesis also examines the narratives generated by the movement through interior spaces of the villa in the selected group of mosaics and how their subjects contribute to understanding the status and occupation of the patron.

INDEX WORDS: Piazza Armerina, animals, *venationes*, hunting, *otium*, leisure, devotion, protomes, Orpheus, Small Hunt, Great Hunt, basilica, *opus sectile*

BUSINESS, LEISURE, AND PIETY: ANIMAL MOTIFS IN THE FLOOR MOSAICS AT  
THE VILLA OF PIAZZA ARMERINA

by

MELISSA DEPIERRO

Bachelor of Arts, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2020

A Thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2023

© 2023

Melissa Rae DePierro

All Rights Reserved

BUSINESS, LEISURE, AND PIETY: ANIMAL MOTIFS IN THE FLOOR MOSAICS AT  
THE VILLA OF PIAZZA ARMERINA

by

MELISSA DEPIERRO

Major Professor: Asen Kirin  
Committee: Mark Abbe  
Nicolas Morrissey

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott  
Vice Provost for Graduate Education  
and Dean of Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
May 2023

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to offer my thanks to my advisor, Dr. Asen Kirin, for guiding me through my research, writing, and for reading many drafts. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Mark Abbe and Dr. Nicolas Morrissey, for providing valuable insight that contributed to this thesis. In particular, I would like to extend thanks to the Willson Center for Humanities and Arts and the Lamar Dodd School of Art for funding my research trip to Piazza Armerina. Without that experience, this thesis would not have been possible. Finally, thank you to Dr. Jordan Pickett and the Department of Classics for their encouragement, and mentorship and for allowing me to foster a new love of learning.

To my parents, thank you for putting your dreams aside to support mine. I am honored to be the first person in our family to receive a college degree, and I hope I made you proud. To Kevin, thank you for waiting up for me on late nights, driving hours on end to Athens, looking at many research papers, and being my best friend and biggest supporter. I truly could not have done it without you. Finally, to Cheeto, Chopstick, Luna, Sir William of Orange, and Yoshi. While you will never read this, thank you for always greeting me with meows at the door, giving me snuggles, and always being a constant source of joy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
THE CONTEXT OF THE VILLA.....	2
ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES OF THE SITE.....	2
THE MOSAICS OF THE VILLA AND ITS OWNER.....	4
PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE: PATTERNS OF TRAFFIC THROUGH THE VILLA.....	6
QUADRANGULAR PERISTYLE.....	10
ORPHEUS.....	13
GREAT HUNT.....	16
SMALL HUNT.....	23
PIETY AT PIAZZA ARMERINA.....	25
CONCLUSION.....	26
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	29
FIGURES.....	32

## Introduction

The villa of Piazza Armerina is tucked away in the mountains of central Sicily, located in the modern-day region of Enna. Originally, the villa would have been surrounded by lush vegetation, fields, and orchards of olives and nuts, which were hydrated by the River Gela that flowed nearby.<sup>1</sup> Today, it is regarded as one of the best examples of an elite Roman villa in the world, particularly for its abundance of mosaics that showcase some of the best connections to North African workshops.<sup>2</sup> The site was constructed in the early fourth-century CE and was initially deemed as the work of an imperial patron due to its grandeur; however, it was later now generally considered that it was commissioned by a wealthy Roman citizen rather than an emperor.<sup>3</sup> It is an expansive architectural complex with a peristyle courtyard in the center (Figure 1). Each of the peristyle's four wings allows for access to chambers clustered to the North, South, East, and West. The villa is known for its extensive floor mosaics, over forty in number, which have been exceptionally well preserved throughout the centuries *in situ*.<sup>4</sup> Among the many motifs showcased in the villa, a significant number feature animals in various themes such as aquatic, entertainment, hunting, and mythological. These compositions appear in the peristyle, baths, corridors, bedrooms, and dining spaces throughout the villa. Not all of these compositions will be featured in this discussion as their dominative subjects are not the animals themselves or

---

<sup>1</sup> Luciano Catullo, *The Ancient Roman Villa of Casale at Piazza Armerina: Morgantina* (Messina: Arione, 2001), 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 201; Hans Peter L'Orange, "Nuovo contributo allo studio del Palazzo Erculio di Piazza Armerina," *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia*, 2, (1965): 100-103; R.J.A. Wilson, *Piazza Armerina* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 92-95. In her discussion on the ownership of the villa, Dunbabin identifies Gino Gentili and L'Orange as scholars who believe Piazza Armerina was imperial, particularly belonging to Emperor Maximian; however, most of these imperial associations were taken by scholars during early studies of the villa, and later ones, such as Roger Wilson, have now accredited the site to a member of the Sicilian elite.

<sup>4</sup> Although not as well preserved as the floor mosaics, Piazza Armerina boasts fragments of wall paintings throughout the complex. Based on the fragments, these appear to be mostly figural scenes, and they are more complex in the rooms accessible off the southern route of the peristyle.

activities centrally focused on them. This thesis focuses on mosaics that feature animals as their main subject and that are located on the main axis of advancing through the space of the villa.

Anchoring the start of the study in the large peristyle court, decorated with animal heads, known as protomes, this thesis covers the connecting rooms: to the South, the apsidal hall with the Orpheus mosaic; to the North, the private apartment with the Small Hunt mosaic, which illustrates hunting for sport and consumption; and to the East, the transverse corridor containing the famous Great Hunt mosaic, which showcases the capture and transportation of animals. The culmination of these rooms is the basilica, which is accessible through the Great Hunt. In striking contrast to the rest of the villa, the basilica is not adorned with a floor mosaic, but rather, a geometric *opus sectile* floor of rare and expensive polychrome marble.

Finally, while considering the movement throughout the villa, this thesis seeks to examine the narratives generated by the movement through interior spaces of the villa in the selected group of mosaics and how their subjects contribute to understanding the status and occupation of the patron. In addition to the critical identification and examination of common themes, imagery, and narrative while experiencing the mosaics, this thesis also explores the cultural significance of animals during the Roman Empire, as well as their significance to the owner of the villa.

## **The Context of the Villa**

### **I. Archaeological Studies of the Site**

A series of archaeological excavations began in the late nineteenth century and culminated with a large-scale exploration in the early 1950s, led by Italian archaeologist Gino Vinicio Gentili, who published an initial survey of the site and a plan, including descriptions of

the villa's individual rooms.<sup>5</sup> At that time, the excavations destroyed archaeological evidence related to later settlements on the site was destroyed, thus effectively erasing a significant history of the villa.<sup>6</sup> This loss of data was due to the archaeologists eagerness to reach the oldest layer containing the much-desired mosaics.<sup>7</sup> The excavations revealed that the villa was carefully maintained throughout the years. There is evidence of restorations that were completed in Antiquity, which involved seeing some of the original mosaics being replaced entirely, such as the famous mosaic of athletic women working out (Figure 2).<sup>8</sup> The villa's transformation into a UNESCO World Heritage site, which involved the erection of modern structures in the late twentieth century, makes it impossible to carry out a complete survey of the complex.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of the losses of data, the study of the floor mosaics has not suffered, and we can interpret them with confidence because they are preserved *in situ*.

Piazza Armerina is a prime model for a villa intended for aristocratic leisure, a phenomenon that became increasingly popular since the first century CE amongst elite Romans throughout the empire. These elite residences were a shift away from earlier villas, which were

---

<sup>5</sup> Gino Vinicio Gentili, *The Imperial Villa of Piazza Armerina* (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1956). This source was Gentili's initial survey of the site and descriptions of the individual rooms. For further publications about the villa from Gentili refer to Gino Vinicio Gentili, and Annibale Belli, *La Villa Erculia Di Piazza Armerina: I Mosaici Figurati* (Milan: Edizioni d'Arte Sidera, 1959) and Gino Vinicio Gentili, *La Villa Romana Di Piazza Armerina Palazzo Erculio* (Milan: Fondazione Don Carlo, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Giada Cantamessa and Ilaria Cremona, *La Villa Romana del Casale di Piazza Armerina: Guida all'interpretazione degli ornati musivi: Mito e realtà tra gli ambienti della residenza Tardoantica* (Palermo: Kalós, 2013), 31-35; Andrea Carandini, Andreina Ricci, Mariette De Vos, and Maura Medri. *Filosofiana, la villa di Piazza Armerina: Immagine di un Aristocratico Romano al Tempo di Costantino* (Palermo: S.F. Flaccovio, 1982), 7-8. The villa is known for its Late Antique structure, but the site has evidence of occupation from the Byzantine to the Norman periods. An Arabo-Norman village, and another from a later date in the Medieval period were the main structures destroyed during these early excavations in addition to the initial stratigraphy. Restorations were attempted during these excavations, but they were particularly focused on the mosaics rather than the structural parts of the villa.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, *Piazza Armerina*, 14-15. The first excavations started in 1881 and ended in 1955 with the completion of the large-scale exploration. Despite the long-term activity on the site, it is not necessary to consult these excavations outside of the knowledge that some of our archaeological evidence was destroyed by them.

<sup>8</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 56-59.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. Carandini et al. produced one of the most extensive surveys of the site in the 1970s, but the modern structures developed for tourism did obstruct some of their surveys.

associated primarily with agricultural production.<sup>10</sup> The development of the luxurious country villa was the result of shifting attitudes among Roman elites whose wealth allowed them to live an opulent life in the secluded beauty of the countryside, with the amenities of the city.<sup>11</sup> Piazza Armerina was a seasonally used country house, where the owner could organize hunting expeditions in the surrounding countryside and host various forms of entertainment such as elaborate dinner parties and musical events, among others. The layout and decorations of the villa reflect the existence of public and private spaces. These distinct spaces indicate that the villa was more than just a place for relaxation and pleasure, but also, a place where official functions would be held for part of the year.

## II. The Mosaics of the Villa and Its Owner

Over the years, scholars have discussed who the owner is and have argued over his identity. Despite some disagreements, the consensus is that the proprietor was a Roman praetor, magistrate, or other high-ranking official wealthy enough to commission a villa of such grandeur.<sup>12</sup> Based on the abundance of animal mosaics at Piazza Armerina, it is thought that the owner would have been closely associated with the widespread and lucrative animal trade, used to supply *venationes*, staged animal combats held in the arena. Such pursuits would also explain

---

<sup>10</sup> R. J. A. Wilson, "Roman Villas in Sicily," in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, ed., Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 196-200. In Sicily, there are three fourth century CE villas. Apart from these, most villas in Sicily date to the Roman Republic or the earlier parts of the Roman Empire. There are presumably more villas in Sicily, but as of 2018, less than a dozen villas had been excavated, including luxury and agricultural ones.

<sup>11</sup> Mantha Zarmakoupi, "Private Villas: Italy and the Provinces," in *A Companion to Roman Architecture*, ed., Roger B. Ulrich and Caroline K. Quenemoen (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 364-365; Neil Christie, *Landscapes of Change: Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 11. This development for luxury is prominent in the fourth century CE, where villas 'boomed' in production to produce opulent architecture that was typically associated with imperial individuals.

<sup>12</sup> Catullo, *The Ancient Roman Villa*, 9; Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 52. Carandini et al. suggest that the villa's owner was Proculus Populonium, a Roman praetor, but other names that have been put forth are: Caeionius Rufius Albinus and Maximian Heraclius.

his interactions with the North African provinces manifested in the content and the style of the mosaics.<sup>13</sup> Examinations of the mosaics have yielded a general consensus that they were the creation of North African craftsmen, likely imported by the patron himself.<sup>14</sup>

Arguably, the most common mosaic depictions in the North African repertoire are those related to *venationes*, featured also at Piazza Armerina.<sup>15</sup> Due to the popularity of *venationes*, the capture of exotic animals and their shipment to Rome and other parts of the empire became a large military operation, and this is visually highlighted in the Great Hunt mosaic. The patron of Piazza Armerina is thought to have filled the role of a magistrate or praetor, as these were positions that typically presided over the ordering and shipment of animals to supply them for their emperors.<sup>16</sup> This would have required hunting and keeping wild animals for the purposes of circus games, and then selling them at great financial gains. Putting on successful games would reflect highly on the owner, and the representation of hunting for the games in the mosaics may have been a form of self-glorification of his status and power.<sup>17</sup>

Other animal-related floor motifs in the villa serve as further proof of the patron's high status. He must have been an individual who manifests his desire to organize large-scale, grand entertainment. For instance, two circus mosaics contribute to the patron's interest and connections to the Roman arena. The main composition is in the doubled apse hall in the bath complex at the opposite end of the villa (Figure 3). This room is believed to be a *palaestra*, a

---

<sup>13</sup> Wilson, *Piazza Armerina*, 92.

<sup>14</sup> Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 137.

<sup>15</sup> Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 47. While the date for Piazza Armerina has not been fully agreed on, it is believed that production began sometime following the Severan period into the early fourth century CE. Dunbabin notes that during this time, the themes of North African mosaic were based more on the patron's desires rather than simply copying popular motifs. During this time, more patrons were commissioning hunting themes likely as a reflection of both a popular activity and form of entertainment.

<sup>16</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

space for light exercise for guests to use before entering the baths. The mosaic scene here shows a chariot race between four teams colored blue, green, red, and white, likely inspired by those held in the Circus Maximus in Rome due to the depiction of the matching obelisk that stood in the venue at the time of the villa's construction. This chariot race is more complex than the one in the vestibule, showing the race at the beginning, middle, and finale.<sup>18</sup> We can see several events unfold during the race (Figure 4). Partway through the race, the red chariot has fallen over in a wreck after colliding with another competitor. In the end, it appears that the green chariot emerges victorious, waiting to be greeted with a palm leaf.<sup>19</sup> The second circus scene is located just off the southern apse of the transverse corridor is the Vestibule of the Little Circus (Figure 5). This scene shows a chariot race, except the charioteers are pulled by a variety of birds, including flamingos, geese, and doves, compared to the usual horse-drawn chariots.<sup>20</sup> These two mosaics show the patron's interest in arena entertainment and his desire to support the same grand-scale spectacles held in Rome with his occupation.

### **Public vs. Private: Patterns of Traffic through the Villa**

The villa was set up to receive two types of visitors, public and private. The distinction between the two types of guests is observable through the architectural layout and floor mosaics of the villa. More specifically, the villa sets up public visitors to make their way through the complex for short visits that would culminate with paying homage to the owner seated in the audience hall—the basilica, on the east side of the peristyle. While advancing through the interior spaces of the villa, these visitors would encounter carefully selected animal compositions

---

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, *Piazza Armerina*, 19-20.

<sup>19</sup> Gentili, *The Imperial Villa*, 20-21.

<sup>20</sup> Catullo, *The Ancient Roman Villa*, 84.

intended to inform guests of the social standing, occupation, and piety of the owner. In contrast, private visitors would spend more extended periods of time at the villa and enjoy various forms of entertainment provided by the owner. Private visitors still experienced the animal compositions seen by the public, but they were exposed to other narratives in the floor mosaics.

As in antiquity, visitors to the site would approach the villa along the avenue from the western side of the complex, which is parallel to the aqueduct connected to the extensive bath complex on the western part of the grounds. After coming down the road to the site, the formal entrance for all visitors was a monumental triple-arch doorway, embellished with Ionic columns (Figure 6).<sup>21</sup> Through this entryway, visitors entered a D-shaped courtyard.

The courtyard provides immediate access to the baths and the vestibule that leads to the peristyle, allowing access to the northern and eastern parts of the villa. The placement of the bath complex at the point of entry into the rest of the villa is common in the layout of Late Antique palaces, as discussed by Slobodan Ćurčić in his article, “Late-Antique Palaces: The Meaning of Urban Context.”<sup>22</sup> This arrangement allowed both private and public visitors to access the baths from the courtyard, without entering the rest of the villa. Public visitors would have used the baths before entering the villa to greet the owner or before leaving entirely. In contrast, private visitors would use the baths to refresh themselves both before entering or during their time in the villa.<sup>23</sup> An additional corridor from the baths leads to the northern wing of the peristyle,

---

<sup>21</sup> Cantamessa and Cremona, *La Villa Romana*, 85-86.

<sup>22</sup> Slobodan Ćurčić, “Late-Antique Palaces: The Meaning of Urban Context.” *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 67–90; Gaius Petronius Arbiter, and Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Satyricon*, trans. Gareth L. Schmeling, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 217-219. A number of Late Antique residences and palaces show baths at the point of entry into the complex. This architectural set up is showcased in Petronius’ *Satyricon* when Encolpius and companions are led to the baths at the front of the complex before entering Trimalchio’s villa for celebrations.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, *Piazza Armerina*, 20. Since the baths had an extra entrance that did not require entering the villa, Wilson suggests that the baths may have been open at certain times for public use by nearby farmers or servants and their families.

suggesting that long-term guests and residents could access the baths without having to exit the villa entirely. The floor mosaic of the private passage depicts a woman and two children, thought to be the owner's wife and two sons, although they are unidentified. Since this entry to the baths was intended for private visitors, it is evident that the owner wanted to remind his most esteemed guests about himself as the patron and to honor his family as they moved between the villa and the baths.<sup>24</sup>

Since all visitor types could enter the baths, those not using the private corridor would enter the villa through its main point of entry, the vestibule. This leads them to the peristyle, where the two groups of visitors would diverge to their separate routes in the villa (Figure 7). Long-term guests and residents would walk down the peristyle down the northern corridor, and the public would be directed through the southern corridor. Along the public route, there are some additional rooms whose function is still under debate, but the presence of intricate figural scenes on the floor mosaics, such as Orpheus, has led scholars to believe they were used for large-scale gatherings at the villa (Figure 8).<sup>25</sup> In contrast, along the villa's private route, several rooms are primarily decorated with geometric compositions, except for the Small Hunt (Figures 9 & 10).<sup>26</sup> The rooms off of the northern corridor functioned as offices, dayrooms, bedrooms, and a smaller dining hall for the residents of the villa, so the floor mosaics did not require the same grandeur as those meant to impress public visitors. The rooms off the northern corridor functioned as offices, dayrooms, bedrooms, and a smaller dining hall for the residents of the villa, which did not require the same grandeur mosaics meant to impress public visitors.

---

<sup>24</sup> Gentili, *The Imperial Villa*, 23-24; Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 331-334. Gentili identifies one of the children as a girl, but later scholars identified both children as boys. Similarly, to the owner, various identification of these figures has been put forward in scholarship, but they are highly dependent on the identity of the patron.

<sup>25</sup> Wilson, *Piazza Armerina*, 23-24.

<sup>26</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 59. The wall paintings found in these private rooms also show smaller figures compared to the life-size figures seen along the public route.

The two routes converge at the eastern wing of the peristyle, where there are three doorways leading into the transverse corridor that boasts the Great Hunt mosaic (Figure 11). The two far entrances mark the end of the peristyle's northern and southern corridors, and the third is in the center of the east wing, axially aligned with the large fountain in the courtyard and with the entrance into the basilica. Public visitors could use the southern or central entrance to continue their movement toward the large basilica placed to the east of the transverse corridor. Where they would then enter the basilica and pay respect to the owner, who would be sitting in the apse. Private visitors would enter the transverse corridor through the far north entrance, although it does not seem that the central entrance would have been off-limits for them. These visitors would then travel down the transverse corridor to access various rooms on either side of the basilica. Some of the chambers are believed to have been the sleeping quarters for the patron and his family, or these could have functioned as the site for more intimate gatherings; for instance, the Semicircular Portico and the connected Hall of Arion at the southern end of the transverse corridor.<sup>27</sup> A doorway by the southern apse of the transverse corridor was reserved for private visitors to enter the oval porticoed court, from where they could then enter the *triconchos*, a three-apse hall that served as the formal *triclinium* for the villa.<sup>28</sup> Private visitors could use this entrance to the *triclinium* to participate in feasts and other forms of entertainment during their extended stays at the villa.

The two routes are distinguished by the notable number of compositions that feature animal motifs, which are particularly present along the public route. Public visitors not only start their journey with the protomes that decorate the peristyle, but they end their time in the villa

---

<sup>27</sup> Cantamessa and Cremona, *La Villa Romana*, 179-184; Wilson, *Piazza Armerina*, 26-27.

<sup>28</sup> Gentili, *The Imperial Villa*, 22.

experiencing the protomes that decorate the oval porticoed court they walk through when exiting. The private route, by comparison, has far fewer animal mosaics.

### I. Quadrangular Peristyle

One of the many animal mosaics in the villa is located in the peristyle, which surrounds a central courtyard (Figure 12). In antiquity, the courtyard was an area filled with lush elements of nature. The exterior of the large fountain in the center was originally covered with white marble, some of which remains today. The bottom of the fountain was decorated with elaborate fish mosaics, with fragments surviving along the inside edge of the basin. The surrounding area would have also been filled with various types of greenery and inhabited by a variety of birds, such as doves, pheasants, and peacocks, that were imported to the villa.<sup>29</sup>

The floors of the surrounding peristyle are decorated with one hundred and sixty protomes. These protomes were laid next to each other in pairs and showcase various exotic and domestic animals, including antelopes, bears, boars, deer, horses, large cats, onagers, oxen, rams, one elephant, and one ostrich (Figure 13), with the greatest variety of animals appearing in the southern corridor of the peristyle, the one encountered by public visitors to the villa.<sup>30</sup> The poses of the heads vary from profile, three-quarters, and frontal views. It is not clear why the protomes were laid with this distinction between the individual species, as there is not a clear pattern between the animals, but it may be an artistic preference or another form of significance that is now lost.

---

<sup>29</sup> Catullo, *The Ancient Roman Villa*, 30-31; Hazel Dodge, *Spectacle in the Roman World* (London; Bristol Classical Press, 2011), 47-48; Gentili, *The Imperial Villa*, 25. It was a common practice for wealthy landowners to house animals on their property in enclosures known as *vivaria*.

<sup>30</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 135.

Each protome is placed within a square, with the edges decorated in a braided pattern. The corners are adorned with alternating depictions of ivy leaves or small birds (Figure 14).<sup>31</sup> Within the square, each head is surrounded by a *tondo* of laurel leaves that alternate between red with green bands and green laurels with pink bands.<sup>32</sup> In each pair of protomes, there is one green and one red laurel wreath that switches position in every consecutive register. Accordingly, this pattern creates a diagonal connection between the laurel colors throughout the corridors.

Throughout the peristyle, the protomes are oriented where they would be experienced in a forward-facing direction. The direct placement of the protomes is noticeable when first entering the peristyle from a vestibule, which was the villa's main point of entry. Upon entering the peristyle, a visitor would be aligned with a small room that projects into the courtyard, thought to be a shrine to the villa (Figure 15).<sup>33</sup> The protomes in front of this room show a change in orientation which represents the divergence of the two routes. There are two protomes, a bear and oxen, that are aligned with the northern column of the small room (Figure 16). They face south towards private visitors, greeting them as they approach their route. The adjacent pair of protomes, with the same animals, face north for the visitors as they enter the public route. The positioning of these protomes shows the preemptive thought of the two routes through the

---

<sup>31</sup> Henry Maguire, *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), 57-60. During the Byzantine period, birds became associated with the top of the hierarchy of animals due to their associations with the myth of creation, the sky, and carrying martyrs and saints up to the heavens. Maguire describes a "bird rinceau" motif, which involves birds being intertwined into the tendrils, similarly to how they are depicted around the protomes heads at Piazza Armerina. These were more frequent in later fifth and sixth-century CE mosaics, like one found near the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem, dating to the sixth century CE. Other examples have also been found in Christian churches, particularly from Roman provinces in the East. Although the examples described by Maguire are associated with Christian beliefs and iconography, the birds on the protomes at Piazza Armerina may indicate associations with Jupiter, the king of the Roman gods, and similar associations of animal hierarchy in Roman thought.

<sup>32</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 243-244; Catullo, *The Ancient Roman Villa*, 104-110. Laurel wreath medallions were seen in other North African mosaics, and the pattern also appears in two other rooms in the villa in non-animal related scenes.

<sup>33</sup> Wilson, *Piazza Armerina*, 17.

peristyle and that by keeping the animals facing the viewer, they would stay fully immersed in the mosaic.

The protomes face the viewers until they reach their respective entrances on the north and south sides of the transverse corridor. The mosaics surrounding the central entrance of the corridor are separated from those of the northern and southern routes peristyle with a slab of marble, isolating it as its own space compared to the other entrances. The floor at the bottom of the stairs to the central entrance is decorated with a geometric pattern that leads visitors into the courtyard, with a series of protomes on either side. The medallions on either side of this entryway are split, with each side positioning the animals to face inwards towards the geometric mosaic (Figure 17). These figures are positioned to face the viewer as they exit either north or south. The protomes would also face inwards towards the visitor if they entered the transverse corridor from the courtyard; however, if a visitor decided to use the central entrance to the transverse corridor after following the public and private routes of the peristyle, the protomes would be facing away from them. Despite the availability of the central entrance, the presence of the marble boundaries that physically separate its mosaics from those on the public and private routes encourage the viewer to use the entrances into the transverse corridor at their respective end of the peristyle, keeping them fully immersed in the mosaics of the protomes and courtyard until they reached their respective destination in the villa.

One key function of the protomes is to represent the owner's personal dedication to the beasts that are depicted. By building a luxury villa in the country, the owner is intruding on the realm of Diana, and the habitat of the animals that occupy the land. This intrusion into the country is further seen in the hunting expeditions carried out by the owner and his visitors for leisure. Since the countryside is important for the setting of the villa, as well as the activities

conducted there, it was necessary for the owner to pay homage to the surrounding nature through the glorification of beasts in the peristyle. The intermittent placement of the species and the forward-facing orientation of the protomes, experienced by the viewer as they are walking through the peristyle, allows an individual to personally acknowledge a particular species, from the local game to the exotic beasts. Additionally, the distinct separation of the protomes allow a viewer to perceive a beast as an individual being, and not as a part of a larger grouping of animals. This placement adds significance to the beasts, making them look important to a viewer since they have been singled out in separate protomes. In turn, it shows the obvious manner in which the owner wanted to pay homage to these specific beasts.

## II. Orpheus

To the south of the public route, through the south wing of the peristyle, there is a large room adorned with a mosaic depicting Orpheus (Figure 9). The doorway to this chamber is one of the largest of those accessible from the northern and southern corridors, which allows visitors on the northern side of the peristyle to see the fountain placed in the center and the marble statue of Apollo (Figure 18).<sup>34</sup> The wide entryway also enables the viewers walking through the southern corridor to see the foreground of the composition, which includes animals such as an ox, elephant, and hippo in close detail, and to an extent, the upper portions of the compositions along with the statue. As a visitor finally reaches the threshold to the space, they see the full extent of the composition due to the placement of the figures in various registers.

While the myth has many stories, the scene here shows the hero playing his lyre, showcasing his musical talent and his ability to enchant wild beasts with his music. This chamber

---

<sup>34</sup> Gentili, *The Imperial Villa*, 44-45; Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 140. The statue of Apollo corresponds to the statue of Diana seen in the room of the Small Hunt.

is believed to have been a living space for public visitors, most likely where musical events would be held due to the subject of the floor mosaic. In this mosaic, the figure of Orpheus, although damaged, is depicted in the section above the fountain, with roughly fifty animals surrounding him, including real and mythological creatures of all sizes. The animals are depicted motionless, enchanted by Orpheus's music as they look toward him and hear the song he is playing on his lyre (Figure 19).<sup>35</sup> Some look at Orpheus with wide eyes, and some, such as the lion and hippo in the bottom left corner, hold their mouths open as if they were singing along with him.<sup>36</sup> Philostratus the Younger's literary account of the myth indicates a lion, boar, deer, hare, and an eagle as some of the animals that surround Orpheus as he plays his music, which is found in the mosaic at Piazza Armerina.<sup>37</sup> Other accounts of the myth seem to have a range of animals included in the description, from those considered to be "local," such as deer and hares, to exotic beasts like large cats. The Orpheus mosaic at Piazza Armerina has both categories of animals present, but there is an increasingly large number of exotic animals, including an elephant, hippo, camel, tiger, lion, ostrich, and even the mythological griffin and phoenix, many of which appear in other compositions found in the villa. This appears to reflect once again the patron's interest in showcasing his career in the exotic animal trade by highlighting them in

---

<sup>35</sup> Brigitte Steger, *Piazza Armerina: La Villa Romaine du Casale en Sicile* (Paris: Edition A. et J. Picard, 2017), 204; Gentili, *The Imperial Villa*, 45. There are smaller animals such as lizards, snails, and a goldfinch, which have not been seen as much in the villa's mosaics compared to the larger animals such as big cats, bears, and antelope. The mythological animals include the griffin and phoenix which are both depicted in the Great Hunt mosaic.

<sup>36</sup> While North African mosaics are not the focus of this thesis, it is important to briefly mention them in discussion with the mosaics at Piazza Armerina. The third century CE *Maison d'Orphée* at Volubilis depicts Orpheus in the center of a large medallion shape, with all the animals spreading out from the center of the composition, growing from smaller animals to larger ones as you reach the edge of the medallion, which differs from the rectangular composition at Piazza Armerina. Other examples of this scene, such as the one from the Antonio Salinas Regional Archaeological Museum in Palermo, Sicily, depicts the animals looking at Orpheus with their mouths gaping open, entranced by his music, like the composition at Piazza Armerina. These comparisons show Orpheus' popularity in North African repertoire, but they are different in their organization and do not encompass the same scope of animals present in the mosaic at Piazza Armerina.

<sup>37</sup> Philostratus the Younger, *Imagines*, trans. Arthur Fairbanks. The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 308-313.

various mosaics throughout the villa, particularly in the public spaces. Regardless of the substantial damage, the mosaic in this room includes one of the most detailed and expansive depictions of Orpheus making music.<sup>38</sup>

What is notable about this space, in the context of the villa, is the inclusion of Apollo's statue (Figure 20). As one of the few temple statues present at Piazza Armerina, it turns this space into a site not only for entertainment, but also for devotion. The marble statue is modeled after a Greek original, the Lycian Apollo type, often attributed to Praxiteles.<sup>39</sup> The connection between Apollo and Orpheus as father and son, as well as their musical talents, explain the addition of this statue. Their inclusion also complimented the musical entertainments held in this space, which was meant for the leisure of the owner and his visitors, as associated with the Latin abstract term *otium*, meaning "leisure." However, these events simultaneously provided devotion to, and in honor of Apollo, adding an element of piety to the entertainment occurring in this space. This room is one example of how some of the villa's chambers function as spaces of piety and devotion.<sup>40</sup> In her book, Brigitte Steger notes that at the time of the villa's construction, the Lycian Apollo, represented the oracular possession of Delphi, the ecstatic experience, and links to the initiatory journey of the soul. In Steger's interpretation, these associations with Apollo, in

---

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, *Piazza Armerina*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Aileen Ajootian, "Praxiteles," in *Personal Styles in Greek Sculpture*, ed. Olga Palagia and J. J. Pollitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 126-127. This sculpture was believed to have been a copy of a bronze Apollo that would have been in Athenian gymnasiums. Apollo would have had a bow in his left hand, with his right hand resting on his head. The position of the right hand over his head is suggested by scholars to be an expression of the god's role as a singer. Ajootian notes that the Lycian type has been attributed to Praxiteles due to the similarities in both style and pose to the Hermes at Olympia, and it has been dated by various scholars from the fourth century BCE to the Hellenistic period.

<sup>40</sup> Alison Keith and Franziska C. Eickhoff, "Imperial Leisure: The Politics, Poetics, and Philosophy of Leisure in Augustan Rome," in *Muße Und Rekursivität in Der Antiken Briefliteratur: Mit Einem Ausblick in Andere Gattungen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck GmbH and Co. KG, 2016), 269. *Otium* has encompassed several meanings, but it is typically defined as "freedom or business from work" or "leisure" as stated by Keith.

conjunction with the decorations of Orpheus, shows the influence of music on elevating the soul, and the devotional function of the space.<sup>41</sup>

Other spaces in the villa that combine entertainment and devotion are the *nymphaeum* and the domestic shrine in the peristyle. These chambers indicate a continuous theme of piety and paying homage to the deities that support the resources and events taking place throughout the villa.

### III. Great Hunt

The transverse corridor boasts, arguably, the grandest mosaic of the entire villa: the Great Hunt, the larger of the two hunting mosaics in the complex (Figure 12). It is important to note that this is the largest and most elaborate composition involving animals in the villa. The motif here shows Roman soldiers capturing animals to transport them to Rome for *venationes*, rather than hunting with the intention to kill them for sport or consumption like the Small Hunt. The Great Hunt mosaic is divided into eight segments that elaborately illustrate different episodes of hunting and moving animals from the Roman provinces of North Africa, which at the time of construction would have been Africa Proconsularis, Mauretania, Numidia, and Egypt in the east before transitioning to the capture of animals in India.<sup>42</sup>

The transverse corridor, which is a bi-apsidal, stretches approximately seventy meters in length, and provides access to the eastern wing of the villa. It also functions as the convergence

---

<sup>41</sup> Steger, *Piazza Armerina: La Villa Romaine*, 204.

<sup>42</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 94. At the end of the third century, Africa Proconsularis was split into three regions by Diocletian: Zeugitana, Byzacena, and Tripolitania. Since the date of Piazza Armerina is still up for debate, I will be using Africa Proconsularis as the name for this region since it is plausible that the construction of the villa started before it was split. In the first century CE, Mauretania was split into Mauretania Caesariensis and Mauretania Tingitana by Emperor Claudius.

point for the public and private routes of the peristyle and allows access to the large basilica and private quarters located behind the transverse corridor.<sup>43</sup>

The northern apse shows a female figure, who is thought to be a personification of the African region, Mauretania, flanked by a leopard and a bear (Figure 21). The animals on the mosaic from the African regions shown include lions, panthers, elephants, rhinos, hippos, ostriches, and antelopes (Figure 22). Next to the northern apse is a depiction of Roman soldiers capturing large cats and rolling them in carts towards ships bound for Rome. When a visitor walks through the north entrance doorway from the peristyle to the transverse corridor, they experience the scene of an ox-drawn cart walking towards the center of the mosaic, and large cats hunting antelopes in the background (Figure 23). More scenes of soldiers carrying captured animals continue as one moves south over the mosaic, before reaching the center of the long composition.

The center scene of the mosaic aligns both with the central entrance from the peristyle, and the entryway to the basilica that sits behind the transverse corridor, uniting the three spaces together. This portion of the mosaic illustrates two ships, assumed to be sailing across the Mediterranean, with soldiers loading and unloading animals, for *venationes* (Figure 24). The first port has been identified as Carthage, which served as a shipping hub, particularly for transporting beasts from North Africa to Rome. There are two buildings in the background, one is a circular structure and the other is rectangular, both are surrounded by a portico. Matching buildings were found during the excavations of Carthage carried out by British archaeologists in the twentieth century, which supports the identification of Carthage (Figure 25).<sup>44</sup> In the area between the two

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 209-210.

<sup>44</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 96-97; Henry Hurst and Lawrence E. Stager, "Excavations at Carthage 1975: The Punic Project: First Interim Report," *The Antiquaries Journal*, 56, no. 2 (March 1975): 36. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003581500035460>. Carandini et al. have identified this scene as the port of Carthage due

ships, soldiers are shown loading and unloading animals. Scholars have assumed that the area between the ships depicts Ostia, the ancient port of Rome, rather than one in Sicily because most animals captured in these imperial hunts were shipped to Rome to be used for arena entertainment.<sup>45</sup>

The second ship appears to be at the port of Alexandria, which was a frequently used port for animal transfer from the eastern regions of North Africa.<sup>46</sup> The identification of Alexandria is due to the shift in imagery on the mosaic. The background shifts to a tanner color representing the desert, and the plants are now palm and acacia trees, both found in Egypt.

The southern entrance from the peristyle brings visitors to a scene of a rhinoceros standing in shallow water, which creates an illusion of the Nile, being pulled by soldiers towards the center of the mosaic (Figure 26). Apart from the rhino, a camel is present in this composition, both of which are native animals to Egypt, supporting the argument that the port is Alexandria in this segment (Figure 27)<sup>47</sup>

The port of Alexandria is where the composition changes to enhance the idea of capturing animals in regions that were outside of the western Roman world. The buildings featured in this section show pointed roofs (Figure 28) which were not characteristic of Roman architecture in Egypt, but they further visualize movement to the eastern regions of the world. This is also

---

to the rectangular building with a circular portico. This building matches a temple dated to the Antonine period found at Carthage, but it is possible that this is also just a scene of a coastal villa.

<sup>45</sup> Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 208.

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Epplett, "The Capture of Animals by the Roman Military," *Greece & Rome* 48, no. 2 (2001): 212. Some of the literary evidence we have for the use of Roman soldiers in animal hunts comes from papyri found in Egypt, so it is known that this was a region used for animal supplies. In a papyri letter from Wadi Fawakhir, Egypt, dating to the early second century CE, the writer was a soldier who was a part of the auxiliary troops used in capturing animals. Later, in the fourth century CE, another letter from the Fayum region in Egypt shows a local priest requesting the military to come and capture a herd of gazelles that had trampled the local crops.

<sup>47</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 97-102; Dale J. Osborn and Jana Osbornová. *The Mammals of Ancient Egypt* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1998), 140-141; Dodge, *Spectacle*, 54. Rhinoceroses and hippopotami were not the most common animals in *venationes*, sometimes used in aquatic arena spectacles, but they were often transported through Egypt when used. They appear to have been more novel animals as they did not often provoke the same combativeness as other animals, such as lions, bears, or boars.

evidenced by the soldiers in this segment, who wear various outfits that show syncretism between both Eastern and Roman garb. Some tunics are adorned with *orbiculi*, decorative patches, and *clavii*, decorative stripes, which range in their designs throughout the composition. After the scene in Alexandria, the *orbiculi* and the *clavii* become even more elaborate and ornamental, further exaggerating the geographical distance from the western provinces and the Egyptian and Asiatic influences.<sup>48</sup>

Moving further south, the last section of the Great Hunt shifts to the hunting of animals in India. Unlike the section depicting Alexandria, the landscape becomes rockier, and more green shrubs and trees are dispersed throughout. The same pointed roofs are present on the buildings in this section, which is characteristic of Asiatic architecture. There are still depictions of animals that could be found in both Africa and Asia, like lions and leopards, mixed into these scenes, but this is the first time Indian animals, such as tigers and the griffin appear (Figure 29).<sup>49</sup> This section ends in the southern apse, which marks the other end of the Great Hunt. Similarly, to the composition in the northern apse, there is a female figure, also thought to be the personification of a region, this time, India (Figure 30).<sup>50</sup> She is seated on a large rock, with one hand wrapped around a tree and the other cradling an ivory tusk from an Indian elephant, with a second tusk lying on the rocky landscape behind her. Her skin has a blue tint and is noticeably darker than most figures on the mosaic, likely to establish her as a non-Roman figure. On either side of the

---

<sup>48</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 99.

<sup>49</sup> Yan Chang, "Griffin's Artistic Style in the Early Mythologies and Epics in the Tigris and Euphrates," *The 5th International Conference on Art Studies: Research, Experience, Education (ICASSEE 2021)* no. 1, (2021): 48. Griffins were associated with many Ancient Near Eastern empires, which explains their location in the "eastern" regions on the Great Hunt mosaic. Although griffins are mythical animals, they were seen as animals associated with imperial triumphs, like elephants during the Roman Empire.

<sup>50</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 103. Carandini et al. note that there has been evidence that personifies India as a female, an example being a silver plate in the Museum of Archaeology in Istanbul. Many female figures have been associated with various hunts, like the sacrifice of Diana in the Small Hunt and Mauretania on the northern apse of the Great Hunt.

woman stands a tiger and an Indian elephant with a phoenix perched in a nest above. The phoenix is a manifestation of the contemporary style of introducing mythological creatures in hunting mosaics, showing a thematic shift away from realism.<sup>51</sup>

Publications by Salvatore Settis and J.M.C Toynbee have suggested that the patron may have included an inscription that would identify him as the owner of an elephant and, in turn, the villa as a whole in the composition.<sup>52</sup> This is in addition to scholars, such as Roger Wilson and Katherine Dunbabin, who have pointed to the owner's inclusion of a potential self-portrait.<sup>53</sup> The evidence for an inscription comes from the section between the two ships, the port of Ostia. Above the ramp of the first ship are the fragmented remains of an elephant (Figure 31). By the elephant, there are the fragmented remains that now read "MA." Carandini noted that during his survey of the villa, the fragment appeared to be added later and assumed it was during one of the restorations that took place in antiquity.<sup>54</sup> In their discussion of the Great Hunt, Settis and Toynbee have taken this fragment to be the owner of the elephant's name, who would have been the patron of the villa in this case, and that he may have identified himself here because there are two men dressed in elite clothing behind the elephant, and while it was not common in mosaics,

---

<sup>51</sup> Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek*, 133. Similar scenes of capturing and transporting animals are found in North African mosaics, as they were connected to popular *venationes* scenes, but the scale of the Great Hunt alone is unprecedented in the region. In her examination of Piazza Armerina, Katherine Dunbabin has attributed most of its mosaic to Carthaginian workshops, which is particularly seen in the Great Hunt. Dunbabin states that the resemblance in figural style, technique, and subjects are more than just copies of popular North African themes and motifs that were widely circulated, but rather specific indications of craftsmanship only produced by Carthaginian workshops.

<sup>52</sup> J. M. C. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 27-30; Salvatore Settis, "Per L'interpretazione di Piazza Armerina," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*, 87, no. 2 (1975): 873-994. The Great Hunt is often cited in discussions of the owner as the composition alludes to his occupation and activities. The prominence and scale of this mosaic suggests that its subject matter was of particular importance for the villa's owner. This display of highly detailed scenes of transporting animals represents the patron's career as a supplier or sponsor of *venationes*. In addition to the large scale of this mosaic which indicates the wealth and power of the owner, it provides information about the widespread capture and movement of animals that was important to Roman entertainment, military, and economy.

<sup>53</sup> Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa* 201-202; Wilson, *Piazza Armerina*, 24-25.

<sup>54</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 226.

it was not unheard of to put an owner in a composition. This inscription could have also been the name of the elephant. Animal names were not a common motif for hunting mosaics, but they sometimes appeared on mosaics depicting spectacles. The late second century CE boar mosaic from the House of Silenus and the third century CE Magerius mosaic from Smirat both depict *venatio* scenes where the animals are individually named (Figure 32). Naming animals was usually meant to indicate specific *venatio* or animals that were possessions like horses.<sup>55</sup> Another late third-century CE hunting mosaic from a villa in Althiburus has names depicted next to the horses and dogs but was to indicate them as possessions of the villa's owner (Figure 33).<sup>56</sup> In the case of the Great Hunt, assuming the fragment was meant as a name, the owner may have had a particular experience with an elephant at a *venatio* or elsewhere that he wanted to identify in this mosaic.

The other presumed form of self-identification comes from three men who appear in the mosaic directly after the register of the port of Alexandria (Figure 34). The central figure in this group is dressed in garb that is stylistically like those worn by the tetrarchs in the porphyry statues from Venice (Figure 35) with the Pannonian beret, ornamented cloak, and tunic. Compared to the rest of the figures, who mostly wear decorative tunics (*tunica manicata*), the elite designation of these figures through their garb that calls to imperial imagery has further encouraged ideas of imperial ownership among scholars.<sup>57</sup> The face of this central figure also has

---

<sup>55</sup> Lewis Sian and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *The Culture of Animals in Antiquity: A Sourcebook with Commentaries* (Milton Park Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 745-746; Gilhus, *Animals, Gods, and Humans*, 34. The names include Victor, Crispinus, Luxurious, and Romanus.

<sup>56</sup> Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek*, 113.

<sup>57</sup> Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 201-202; Tuna Şare Ağtürk, *The Painted Tetrarchic Reliefs from Nicomedia: Uncovering the Colourful Life of Diocletian's Forgotten Capital* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 45-56. The garb on this figure of the Great Hunt also matches other examples of tetrarchy portraiture such as a porphyry column of two *Augusti*, now at the Vatican Library, and the painted reliefs of the tetrarchs embracing found at Nicomedia, which have similar garb minus the Pannonian beret. In Dunbabin's discussion on the ownership of the villa, she identifies Gentili and L'Orange as scholars who believe Piazza Armerina was imperial, particularly belonging to Emperor Maximian, and the garb of this figure of the Great Hunt is frequently evidenced in discussions of imperial ownership.

more individualized features than other figures in the composition, with the inclusion of a beard, a more elongated face with wrinkles shown in his forehead, and even darker skin and hair, which has led to the idea of this being a self-portrait of the owner. On either side of the central figure are two soldiers acting like bodyguards, indicating this figure is important. Whether he is imperial or not, if the owner oversaw these animal hunts as many scholars believe, it would have been important to keep him protected from beasts in case anything went awry, which justifies the presence of the soldiers.<sup>58</sup> Despite the fact that this is seemingly an identification of the patron, the ownership of many villas, especially those in the North African sphere, is still unidentified. Mosaics were not commonly found with the names of patrons, and those that have been determined have often been through the context of the composition, like the Magerius mosaic from Smirat (Figure 32) whose owner was determined by an inscription on the mosaic.<sup>59</sup> There have seldom been inscriptions found in North African mosaics, so questions of ownership have almost entirely relied on visual studies of them and contextual settings. The presence of this elaborately dressed figure on the Great Hunt deviates him enough from the overall composition to try and use him to determine patronage, but that may still not be enough to uncover the owner's identity. However, since it has been determined that Great Hunt would have been viewed by all visitors in the villa, the inclusion of a self-identification would also be included in the scope of viewership.<sup>60</sup> In turn, this would provide motivation for including his self-identification, but the evidence is not concrete enough to fully determine if it is present in this mosaic.

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>60</sup> Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 182; Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 210; R. J. A. Wilson, *Caddeddi on the Tellaro: A Late Roman Villa in Sicily and Its Mosaics* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2016), 3.

One of the main functions of the transverse corridor was to provide access to the basilica, the official audience hall for the owner, that is set behind it. The basilica would be the first time a visitor was not immersed in animal compositions after walking over the protomes and the Great Hunt. Instead of a figural floor mosaic, the space is decorated with expensive, polychrome marble slabs laid in a geometric pattern. The center niche in the back is believed to have held a statue of Hercules, which was found fragmented during excavations.<sup>61</sup> Public visitors would greet the owner in the basilica before exiting the complex through the oval porticoed courtyard.

#### **IV. Small Hunt**

The last mosaic that is important for this discussion is the Small Hunt, which functions as the main figural composition accessed through the northern corridor of the peristyle (Figure 11). It is named for being the smaller of the two hunting mosaics present at the villa. Unlike the Great Hunt, which depicts the capture of animals, the Small Hunt illustrates hunting local game for sport and nourishment, a commonly enjoyed activity in the countryside. The room is in the northeast corner of the courtyard along the private route of the villa, roughly symmetrically positioned with regard to the Apsidal Hall that holds the Orpheus mosaic. Its subject features the domestic hunting parties noted by the depictions of local fauna found in Sicily and Italy, primarily deer, boars, hares, and foxes, all being hunted by men and their dogs. These domestic hunts were a favorite pastime, particularly in the fourth century CE, enjoyed by elite Romans at their luxury country villas.

The overall composition is divided into five registers that illustrate different episodes of hunting or hunting-related activities. The top register (Figure 36) depicts scenes of men hunting

---

<sup>61</sup> Cantamessa and Cremona, *La Villa Romana*, 231-233.

with their dogs. The register below features a scene where a group of three men is gathered around a statue of Diana to make a sacrifice to the goddess, which was traditionally performed before a hunting expedition to ask the goddess for her protection and a successful hunt (Figure 37). On either side of Diana's altar, horses appear, looking out from behind the men towards it. To the left, two men carry a boar carcass towards the altar (Figure 38), presumably for sacrifice, with a dog following underneath, trying to jump up towards the dead animal. On the right is a young boy petting a dog as they walk toward the altar. Behind the young boy stands a huntsman, facing away from the image in the center, holding a dead hare. Below the image of Diana, the composition becomes more compact to show a variety of hunting events, from men hunting a boar, to capturing antelope with a net. All of these are positioned around the scene of men having a feast (Figure 39), likely after a long day of hunting. These episodes represent activities that would have occurred during these leisurely hunts, potentially experienced by the patron himself and other estate owners who took part in this pastime.

The function of this space has not been established with certainty, but scholars have suggested that it was used as a winter living room or as a *triclinium* for the adjacent private apartments. This is because the layout of the mosaic is oriented around the large scene showing a feast in the center. The registers at the top and on both sides of the feast scene visualize a U-shape around it, suggesting the traditional layout of couches used in a *triclinium*.<sup>62</sup>

The depiction of Diana's altar in this mosaic has also led some scholars to determine this room as a dedication to the goddess.<sup>63</sup> Despite the multiple mosaic compositions in the villa, depictions of the gods are rather infrequent. Diana's shrine, in the context of the Small Hunt, is a

---

<sup>62</sup> Catullo, *The Ancient Roman Villa*, 47; Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 175.

<sup>63</sup> Gentili, *The Imperial Villa* 29; Carandini et al., *Filosofiana*, 52. Carandini et al. suggest that the villa's owner was Proculus Populonium, a Roman praetor and that the two young men at Diana's altar would be Proculus' sons.

part of the narrative of the overall composition. It is meant to represent the sacrifices made to the goddess at the beginning of every hunt, rather than functioning as a temple statue intended for devotion like Apollo in the room of Orpheus.<sup>64</sup> The musical entertainment that took place in the room of Orpheus was directly associated with Apollo, creating a need for his presence through a temple figure; whereas, the events taking place in the room of the Small Hunt, whether they were feasts or casual entertainment, do not showcase a need to sacrifice to Diana. The room of the Small Hunt, and its floor mosaic, was meant to showcase the ritual of the Hunt, with the sacrifice to Diana being only a piece of the ritual, not the focus.

### **Piety at Piazza Armerina**

As noted throughout this discussion, several spaces in the villa were intended to serve as places of devotion. The deities represented in these rooms were carefully chosen in relation to aspects of the owner's personal life or career. As already established, several of the rooms with animal compositions feature depictions of Apollo, Diana, and Orpheus. In addition to these deities is the statue of Hercules in the basilica, which was meant to evoke an association between the owner and the mythical hero when being greeted by public visitors.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Judith M. Barringer, *The Hunt in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 147-158; Steven L. Tuck, "The Origins of Roman Imperial Hunting Imagery: Domitian and the Redefinition of Virtus under the Principate," *Greece & Rome* 52, no. 2 (2005): 221-222. Sacrifices to Diana would also occur after a successful hunt, as a thank offering to the goddess. Images of sacrifice appear in both Greek and Roman art in conjunction with scenes of hunting. Tuck notes that hunting imagery in Rome did not particularly rise in popularity again until the second century CE and remained popular into the fourth century CE, being showcased in many mediums.

<sup>65</sup> In addition to the statue in the basilica, Hercules is depicted in the floor mosaics of the *triconchos*, which is the main *triclinium* of the villa. The mosaics in this space depict various scenes of Hercules' labors. Like the statue in the basilica, it seems that the presence of Hercules here is meant to further evoke a connection between the owner and the hero. It seems that this connection put forth by the owner may also be related to his career. In addition to showcasing the ability of Rome to dominate militarily and expand its territory, *venationes* represented man's power over nature. Hercules was often associated with powerful and successful *venatores* in the arena, and the owner may have wanted to draw upon that association since he provided the beasts that were then defeated in the arena.

In the room of the Small Hunt, the depiction of Diana's altar was the owner's way of paying homage to the goddess for overseeing his leisurely hunts and those related to his career, as seen on the Great Hunt without transforming the entire space into one of devotion. It is also another instance where the patron included his appreciation and dedication to nature. The visual connotations of Diana in the Small Hunt, along with the presence of the *nymphaeum* and the protomes in the peristyle, provide spaces throughout the villa for the owner and his visitors to pay homage to nature and its related deities. These spaces are essential for the villa because nature is particularly important to the patron's personal and professional life. With the multifaceted role that hunting, and nature played in the owner's life, and the setting of the villa, it was only necessary that these spaces were included by the owner.

Since many of the devotional spaces were included in rooms where animals were the central theme of the floor mosaic, it seems that the owner held not only particular deities but animals in the highest regard. This meant they were also included in some acts of devotion performed by the owner and his visitors. The importance of animals to the owner not only explains why the villa is adorned with so many animal motifs, but their placement in routes experienced by visitors shows that he wanted them to experience the compositions that have been discussed above and continuously pay homage to them throughout the villa.

## **Conclusion**

The animal compositions not only show functions of devotion but their role in guiding patrons through the villa. Regarding the two routes, the placement of the mosaics throughout the villa reflects the deliberate way in which the owner wanted visitors to experience them. It is apparent that the public route is the more immersive of the two when it comes to keeping the

viewer interacting with the animal mosaics. After their initial entry through the vestibule attached to the peristyle, public visitors only experience mosaics that are centered around animals, particularly those associated with the patron's career in the animal trade. The only time public visitors experience a room where animals are not the central theme of the composition is the basilica. This shows how the owner and mosaicists deliberately chose to represent animals on the routes they knew visitors would follow to make specific statements.

Several of the animals used in the floor mosaics throughout the villa are elephants, bears, bulls, and occasionally, camels, giraffes, rhinoceroses, and crocodiles were also seen in the arena.<sup>66</sup> These animals repeatedly appear in the protomes of the peristyle, and the Orpheus and Great Hunt mosaics, which are all connected via the public route. The experience of moving over the protomes and then past the Orpheus mosaic, while en route to the final culmination of the Great Hunt, shows how the owner deliberately chose to represent animals on the routes he knew visitors would follow to make specific statements about himself, his career, and the vital role animals played in his life.

---

<sup>66</sup> Dodge, *Spectacle*, 23-24; Donald G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 310; Pliny, *Natural History Volume VIII*, ed. and trans. W. H. S. Jones. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1963), 53. A giraffe may be present on the Great Hunt mosaic. There is an animal which appears to be a camel at first glance, but it is depicted with spots along its back and stripes down the front of its neck, chest, and front leg. In the North African mosaics, camels were not typically depicted with these markings. Even within the villa, there is another depiction of a camel in the apsidal room with the Orpheus mosaic. The camel on the Orpheus mosaic has no spots and is depicted as taller and lankier than the one on the Great Hunt, which is slightly shorter and stockier. This camel was the result of a mistranslation that led to a failed attempt at a giraffe. In Greek, the word giraffe is *καμηλοπάρδαλις*, which translates to "camel-leopard." Giraffes, although not frequently, did appear in Roman spectacles, making their first appearance during Julius Caesar's games in 46 CE. In his description of these games, Pliny describes giraffes as a cross between a leopard and a camel. If you look carefully at the camel, its spots are nearly identical to the leopards' depicted near the northern apse. The animal's body has a hump and a split toe, physical features associated with camels. The mosaicists clearly knew how to depict a camel, as there is the example discussed above in the villa, so it seems that this depiction was intentionally meant to indicate another species. Most examples of these "camel leopards" are from Roman provinces in the east, which is more comprehensible for craftsmen in eastern regions since they were not exposed to giraffes like those in North Africa. In the case of the Great Hunt, I believe that the artist working on it had limited knowledge of what giraffes looked like, so they translated *καμηλοπάρδαλις* literally, which resulted in the camel-leopard rather than a giraffe.

This continuation of animal motifs along the public route is only broken when a visitor enters the basilica. The simple geometric pattern of the basilica's marble floor is a striking difference to the rest of the public route, in which a visitor experiences some of the most elaborate mosaics in the villa. The *opus sectile* was meant to evoke a statement of order in the space that was carefully maintained by the owner. Since the basilica was used as the official audience hall for the owner to receive visitors, it did not need the same elaborate mosaics. Rather, the order of the geometric floors keeps the visitor focused on the presence of the *dominus* and paying homage to him as the pinnacle of their visit. The basilica functions as an allegorical statement of the ability of the owner to maintain order in the earthly realm, which is demonstrated by geometric precision and the expensive materials of the *opus sectile*. Additionally, this order and precisions represent his control over nature, which visitors experience through the floor mosaics while en route to the patron.

## Bibliography

- Ağtürk, Tuna Şare. *The Painted Tetrarchic Reliefs from Nicomedia: Uncovering the Colourful Life of Diocletian's Forgotten Capital*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2021.
- Ajootian, Aileen. "Praxiteles." In *Personal Styles in Greek Sculpture*. Edited by Olga Palagia and J. J. Pollitt, 90-129. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Barringer, Judith M. *The Hunt in Ancient Greece*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Cantamessa, Giada, and Iaria Cremona. *La Villa Romana del Casale di Piazza Armerina: Guida all'interpretazione degli ornati musivi: Mito e realtà tra gli ambienti della residenza Tardoantica*. Palermo: Kalós, 2013.
- Canter, H. V. "Roman Civilization in North Africa." *The Classical Journal* 35, no. 4 (1940): 197–208.
- Carandini, Andrea, Andreina Ricci, Mariette De Vos, and Maura Medri. *Filosofiana, la villa di Piazza Armerina: immagine di un aristocratico romano al tempo di Costantino*. Palermo: S.F. Flaccovio, 1982.
- Carucci, Margherita. *The Romano-African Domus: Studies in Space, Decoration, and Function*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007.
- Catullo, Luciano. *The Ancient Roman Villa of Casale at Piazza Armerina: Morgantina*. Messina: Arione, 2001.
- Chang, Yan. "Griffin's Artistic Style in the Early Mythologies and Epics in the Tigris and Euphrates." In *The 5th International Conference on Art Studies: Research, Experience, Education (ICASSEE 2021)*, vol. 1, (2021): 48-54.
- Christie, Neil. *Landscapes of Change: Rural Evolutions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Ćurčić, Slobodan. "Late-Antique Palaces: The Meaning of Urban Context." *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 67–90.
- Dodge, Hazel. *Spectacle in the Roman World*. London; Bristol Classical Press, 2011.
- Dunbabin, Katherine M. D. *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.

Dunbabin, Katherine M. D. *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Epplett, Christopher. "The Capture of Animals by the Roman Military." *Greece & Rome* 48, no. 2 (2001): 210–22.

Gaius Petronius Arbiter, and Lucius Annaeus Seneca. *Satyricon*. Translated by Gareth L. Schmeling. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020.

Gentili, Gino Vinicio. *The Imperial Villa of Piazza Armerina*. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1956.

Gentili, Gino Vinicio, and Annibale Belli. *La Villa Erculia Di Piazza Armerina: I Mosaici Figurati*. Milan: Edizioni d'Arte Sidera, 1959.

Gentili, Gino Vinicio. *La Villa Romana Di Piazza Armerina Palazzo Erculio*. Milan: Fondazione Don Carlo, 1999.

Gilhus, Ingvild Sælid. *Animals, Gods, and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman, and Early Christian Thought*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Hurst, Henry and Lawrence E. Stager. "Excavations at Carthage 1975: The Punic Project: First Interim Report." *The Antiquaries Journal*, 56, no. 2 (March 1975): 11-40.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003581500035460>.

Keith, Alison, and Franziska C. Eickhoff. "Imperial Leisure: The Politics, Poetics, and Philosophy of Leisure in Augustan Rome." In *Muße Und Rekursivität in Der Antiken Briefliteratur: Mit Einem Ausblick in Andere Gattungen*, 269–94. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck GmbH and Co. KG, 2016.

Kyle, Donald G. *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.

Lindstrøm, Torill Christine. "The Animals of the Arena: How and Why Could Their Destruction and Death Be Endured and Enjoyed?" *World Archaeology* 42, no. 2 (2010): 310–23.

L'Orange, Hans Peter. "Nuovo contributo allo studio del Palazzo Erculio di Piazza Armerina." *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia*, 2, (1965): 65-104.

Maguire, Henry. *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987.

Newmyer, Stephen T. *Animals in Greek and Roman Thought: A Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 2011.

Osborn, Dale J., and Jana Osbornová. *The Mammals of Ancient Egypt. The Natural History of Egypt: Vol. 4*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1998.

Philostratus the Younger. *Imagines*. Translated by Arthur Fairbanks. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Pliny. *Natural History Volume VIII*. Edited and translated by W. H. S Jones. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1963.

Setti, Salvatore. “Per l’interpretazione Di Piazza Armerina.” *Mélanges de l’École Française de Rome. Antiquité* 87, no. 2 (January 1, 1975): 873–994. doi:10.3406/mefr.1975.5460.

Sian, Lewis and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones. *The Culture of Animals in Antiquity: A Sourcebook with Commentaries*. Milton Park Abingdon: Routledge, 2018.

Slim, Hédi. “Africa, Rome, and the Empire.” In *Mosaics of Roman Africa: Floor Mosaics from Tunisia*, edited by Michèle Blanchard-Lemée, 17-31. New York: George Braziller, 1996.

Sparreboom, Alex. *Venationes Africanae. Hunting Spectacles in Roman North Africa: Cultural Significance and Social Function*. Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2016.

Steger, Brigitte. *Piazza Armerina: La Villa Romaine du Casale en Sicile*. Paris: Edition A. et J. Picard, 2017.

Toynbee, J. M. C. *Animals in Roman Life and Art*. Cornell University Press, 1973.

Tuck, Steven L. “The Origins of Roman Imperial Hunting Imagery: Domitian and the Redefinition of Virtus under the Principate.” *Greece & Rome* 52, no. 2 (2005): 221–45.

Wilson, R. J. A. *Piazza Armerina*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983.

Wilson, R. J. A. *Catteddi on the Tellaro: A Late Roman Villa in Sicily and Its Mosaics*. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2016.

Wilson, R. J. A. “Roman Villas in Sicily.” In *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, edited by Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux, 195-219. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Wilson, R. J. A. “Roman Villas in North Africa.” In *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, edited by Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux, 266-307. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Zarmakoupi, Mantha. “Private Villas” In *A Companion to Roman Architecture*, edited by Roger B. Ulrich and Caroline K. Quenemoen, 363-380. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013.

## Figures

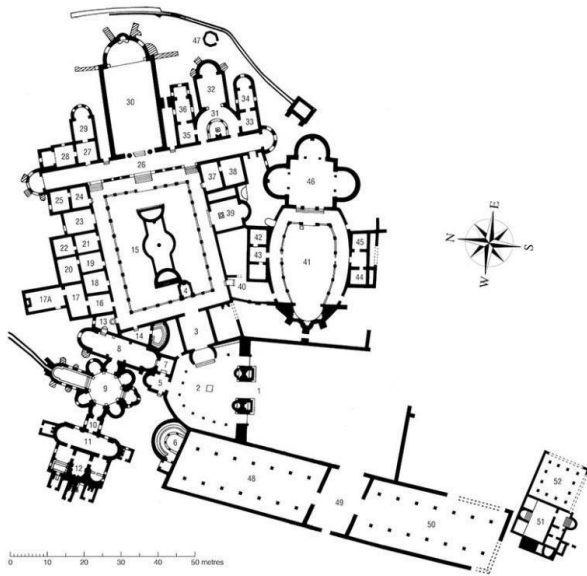


Figure 1. Plan of the Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily. Courtesy of Bryn Mawr University.

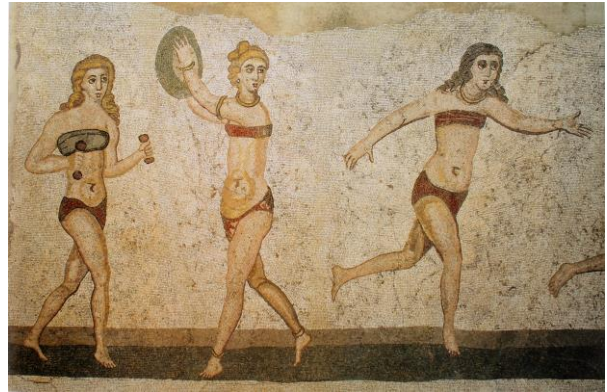


Figure 2. Mosaic of athletic women, mid-fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 3. Circus mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 4. Detail of the circus mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 5. Vestibule of the Little Circus, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 6. View of the monumental entrance, early fourth century CE, limestone and marble, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.

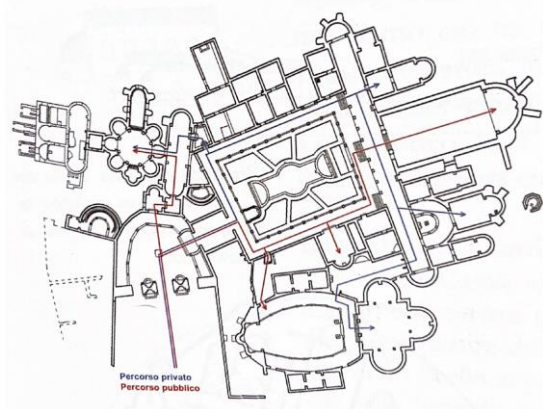


Figure 7. Plan of the private and public route, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily. Courtesy of Giada Cantamessa and Ilaria Cremona.



Figure 8. The central courtyard, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 9. Apsidal hall with the Orpheus mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 10. Service room with geometric mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.

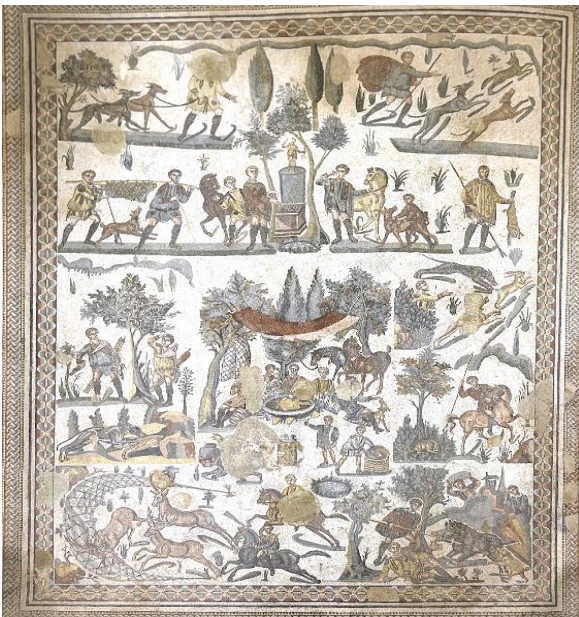


Figure 11. Room of the Small Hunt, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, 5.9 x 7.05 m. Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 12. Transverse Corridor with Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina Sicily.

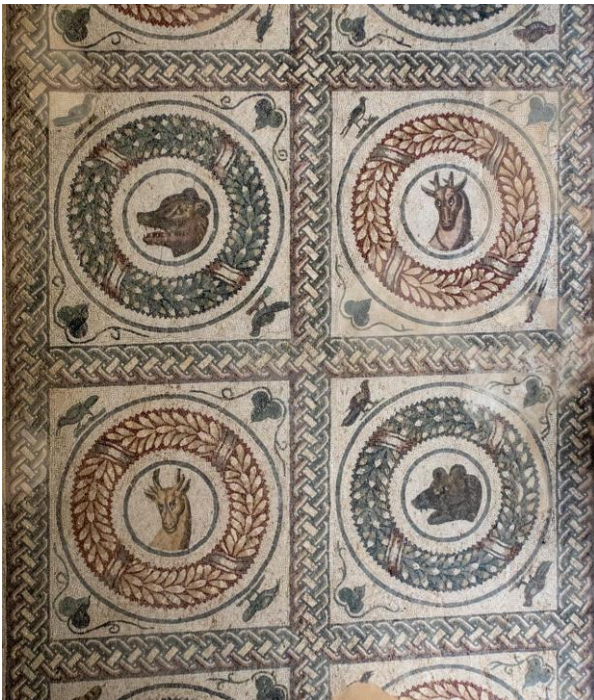


Figure 13. Protomes from the peristyle, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 14. Protome from the peristyle, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 15. View of the courtyard, domestic shrine, and peristyle, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 16. Protomes from the peristyle, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.

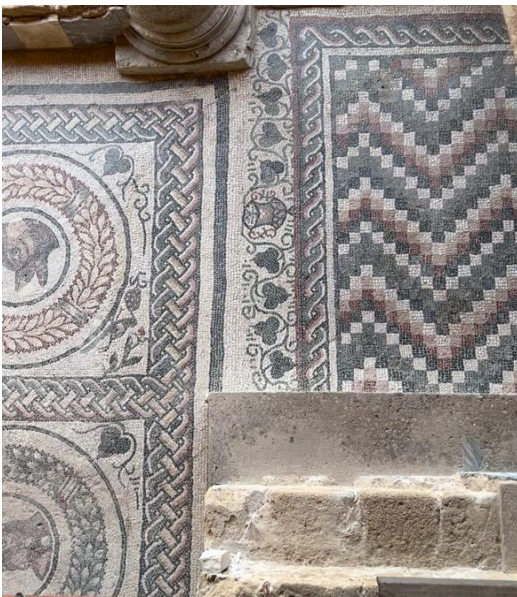


Figure 17. View of the geometric mosaic and surrounding protomes at the entrance of the Great Hunt, mostly blocked by modern construction, early fourth-century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 18. Apsidal hall with the Orpheus mosaic and statue of Apollo, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, marble, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 19. Details from the Orpheus mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 20. Detail of the statue of Apollo, early fourth century CE, marble, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 21. Northern Apse from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 22. Detail from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 23. Detail from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 24. Detail from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 25. Detail from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 26. Detail from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 27. Detail from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 28. Detail from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 29. Detail from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 30. The Personification of India from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass stone tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 31. Detail of an inscription from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass stone tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 32. Magerius mosaic from Smirat, third century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Sousse Archaeological Museum, Sousse, Tunisia.



Figure 33. Hunting mosaic from Althiburus, late third century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Bardo National Museum, Tunis, Tunisia.



Figure 34. Detail from the Great Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 35. Portrait of the Four Tetrarchs, early fourth century CE, porphyry, 137 cm. St. Mark's Basilica, Venice, Italy.



Figure 36. Detail from the Small Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 37. Detail from the Small Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 38. Detail from the Small Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.



Figure 39. Detail from the Small Hunt mosaic, early fourth century CE, stone and glass tesserae, Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.