

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

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

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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 of different thematic. 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. In this paper is offered an update on the progress of research relative to this outstanding mosaic.*

**Keywords:** Roman mosaic, Astigi, Loves of Zeus, seasons, grape harvest.

### 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. 2015 yılında, domusun tricliniumunu süsleyen Zeus'un Aşkları mozaïği, bu mitolojik döngüden birkaç sahne, Bacchic temaları ve karakterleri ile mevsimlerin temsili keşfedilmiştir. Bu makalede, bu olağanüstü mozaikle ilgili araştırmaların ilerlemesi ile ilgili güncel bilgiler sunulmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Roma mozaïği, Astigi, Zeusun aşkları, mevsimler, üzüm hasadı.

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### The *Triclinium* of *Domus* I: Mosaic of the Loves of Zeus

In 2014, an archaeological campaign was planned in the Plaza de Armas with objective to complete the knowledge of the remains of the medieval fortification<sup>1</sup>. The first indication of the existence of a new room, decorated with a mosaic pavement, appeared in March 2015, to the west of the previously documented structures of *Domus* I, in an area heavily affected by the medieval pits for the extraction of building materials. We then located, in the small excavated area, a sector decorated entirely with a uniform pattern of three-dimensional cubes. Due to logistic circumstances, the extension of the excavation was postponed until April of the same year, when a scene identified as a Rape of Europa was uncovered. Finally, the excavation of the entire room was completed in May (Fig. 1). The poor state of conservation of the mosaic made a rapid extraction advisable, taking place in July. Two years later, in December 2017, the mosaic, divided into thirty fragments of different dimensions, was transferred to Seville to be restored in the facilities of the Andalusian Institute of Historical Heritage (IAPH). The particularly complex and delicate restoration process was completed in December 2018, and the mosaic was replaced in its original location in November 2019 (Fig. 2).



Figure 1

Mosaic of the Loves of Zeus after its excavation. Orthophotography by Diego Gaspar (Arqueocad) for the City Archaeology Office of Écija.

This room had dimensions of between 7.42 and 7.91 m from north to south, and between 4.62 and 4.71 m from west to east, about 25 x 15 Roman feet. It had a single access, located at the northern end of the eastern wall, measuring 1.55 m x 0.56 m. The west and east walls of the room were aligned on the colonial grid,<sup>2</sup> while the north wall was slightly deviated to the south, and the south wall showed a completely divergent direction, determined by the layout of the terrace that bounded the *domus* to the south. Some elements as: the position of the room, forming the south-west corner of the building, the location of its entrance, its notable dimensions and proportions,<sup>3</sup> as well as the compositional scheme of the mosaic, indicate that it was probably a *triclinium* (cf. García-Dils et al. 2009: 532 n. 34).

1 The archaeological excavations were carried out by the City Archaeology Office of Écija, led by Sergio García-Dils and directed by Ana Santa Cruz and Cristina Cívico (García-Dils et al. 2016: passim).

2 The orientation of the *kardines* of the colonial grid plan is 335,4° (True North) (García-Dils 2015: 145).

3 The average interior dimensions of the room are 7.66 x 4.66 m, giving a ratio of 1.64:1. In other words, it follows the well-known theoretical parameters of the golden ratio of 1.62:1.

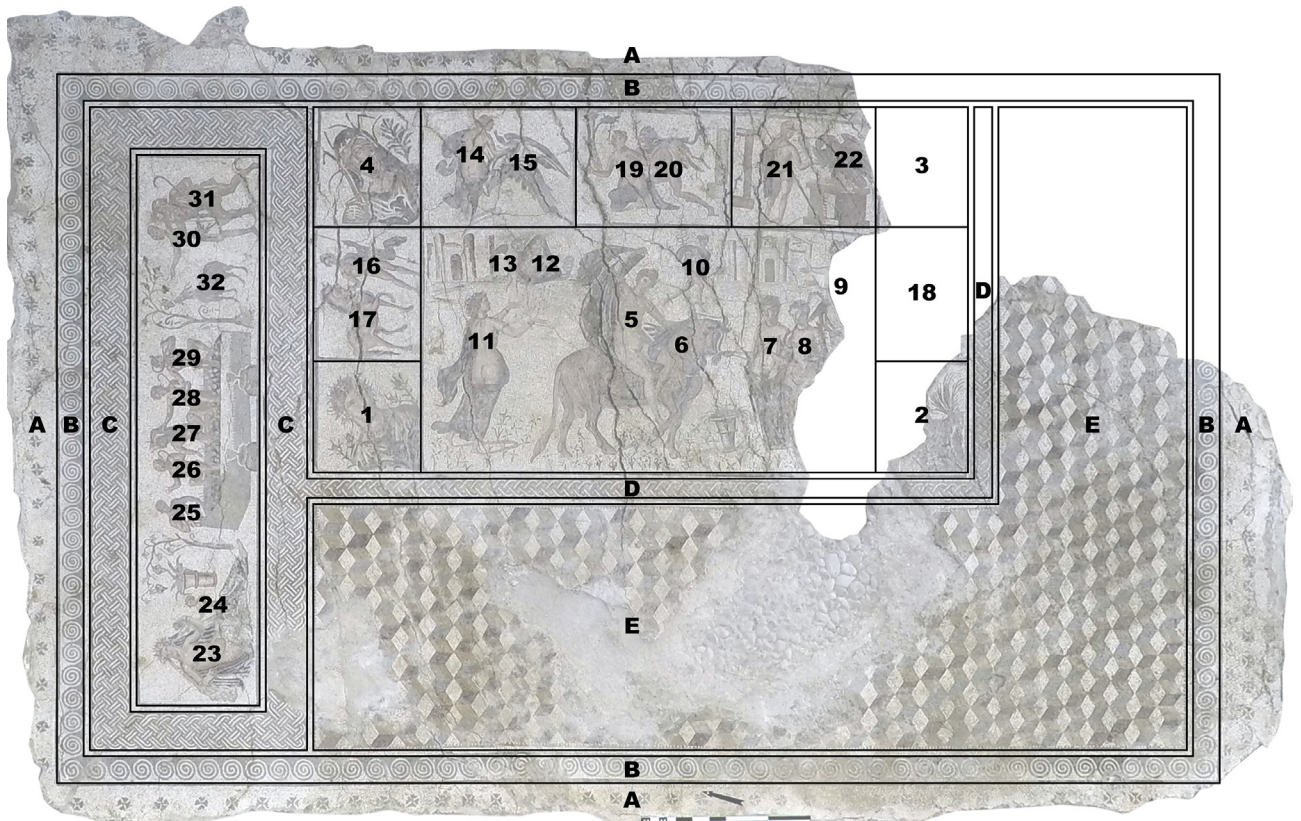
The preservation of the mosaic pavement is due to a series of fortunate circumstances, considering the remarkable general level of razing of the building, leaving hardly any standing remains of its walls. Furthermore, a medieval trench for the recuperation of building materials had destroyed the entire south-eastern corner of the room, causing the partial loss of the mosaic sub-base and creating numerous cracks and damage (Fig. 1).

The mosaic decorated the entire surface area of the room, 37.05 m<sup>2</sup>, as also the entrance threshold. The general composition of the mosaic, which combines figurative and geometric panels, is a simplification of the typical “T” + “U” layout, forming a design of inverted and opposing squares or “L” shapes (Figs. 2-3).

Figure 2  
Mosaic of the Loves of Zeus after its restoration. Orthophotography by Sergio García-Dils.



Figure 3  
Mosaic of the Loves of Zeus. References. Orthophotography by Diego Gaspar (Arqueocad) for the City Archaeology Office of Écija; drawing by Sergio García-Dils.



From the margin towards the centre, the compositional scheme is based on a perimeter band of white tesserae, decorated with crosses or rosettes (Fig. 3-A). This band forms a white field in contact with the walls and the entrance to the room, with small black flowers, carelessly shaped and unevenly distributed. Clearly, this perimeter band, of variable width, was created at the end of the process, to fill the space between the mosaic carpet and the walls, compensating for the irregularity of the floor plan of the room, and using leftover tesserae of different shapes and sizes.

A white line formed by two regular rows of tesserae, 2 cm wide, is followed by a black line with the same characteristics and a border of spirals that encloses the floor at all four ends, with a width of around 17 cm (Fig. 3-B). Next, after a line made up of three rows of white tesserae, 3 cm wide, in the northern part of the mosaic there is a well-executed broad braided border, between 23 and 25 cm wide, framing a field containing scenes related to wine production and agricultural fertility (Fig. 3-C). The lower border is connected to a thinner three-strand braid border (Fig. 3-D), surrounding the area containing the central scenes. The meeting of the braided patterns is particularly well accomplished.

After a 2 cm long black-and-white serrated fillet, the remaining L-shaped field (Fig. 3-E), is filled by three-dimensional cubes. The configuration of this area and its position in the room as a whole suggest that the geometric decoration may be considered as a marker of use, and that this space was probably intended for the position of the *lecti*.

The compositional scheme, especially regarding the three-dimensional cubes, has direct parallels in Écija itself, with almost identical characteristics. Firstly, we find a similar sequence of geometric motifs in the mosaic of the Triumph of Bacchus in Plaza de Santiago nº1, in this case along with a border of interlaced swastikas forming a meander (Fig. 4) (CMRE XIV: nº8, 45-50; Fernández



Figure 4  
Mosaic of the Triumph of Bacchus from Plaza de Santiago nº1. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

Gómez 1997: passim; García-Dils 2015: 295-296). This pavement has also two particular scenes: Leda with the swan and a *Dioscuros* with the horse, very similar in composition and execution to those documented in the example from Plaza de Armas. Both mosaics were certainly the work of the same workshop. Other parallels have been documented in the mosaic of Briseis or a scene from the Iliad, from Calle Espíritu Santo - Barrera de Oñate (CMRE XIV: n°26, 67-68; García-Dils 2015: 350-360), and in the so-called “mosaic of cubes” from Plaza de España (CMRE XIV: n°40, 84-85; García-Dils et al. 2011: 773-774 fig. 2a).

We find in the mosaic clear spatial markers, as Mañas (2007-2008: 97-99) calls them, specifically the geometric patterns of three-dimensional cubes joined at right angles at the SW end of the room, which indicate that we are more properly dealing with a *biclinium*. Aware of this, we use the expression ‘*triclinium*’ in its generic sense and due to its wide use in both ancient sources and historiography.

In order 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 present homogeneous values that remain around 135 tesserae/dm<sup>2</sup>, with larger and more regularly cut pieces, placed with a careful adjustment between them. On the other hand, the figured decoration has a density that oscillates between 200 and 230 tesserae/dm<sup>2</sup>, 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.

## 1. The Seasons of the Year

The theme of the four seasons is particularly well documented in the mosaics of *Baetica*<sup>4</sup> and Écija, which has three other pavements in which representations of this type can be identified with certainty. Indeed, Summer and Autumn are preserved in the aforementioned Triumph of Bacchus in Plaza de Santiago n°1 (Fig. 4) (CMRE XIV: n°8, 45-50; Fernández Gómez 1997: passim; García-Dils 2015: 295-296); Autumn and Winter in the mosaic of the Rape of Europa in Calle Espíritu Santo (CMRE XIV: n°21, 59-62; García-Dils 2015: 350-360); Spring, Summer and Winter in the mosaic of the Allegory in Avenida Miguel de Cervantes n°35 (Fig. 5) (CMRE XIV: n°32, 73-75, where autumn and spring have been confused; Rueda - López 2011: 794; García-Dils 2015: 380-386). In all three, the sequence is shown in an anti-clockwise direction.

This list could be lengthened from the fragment located in Avenida Miguel de Cervantes n°34 (CMRE XIV: n°6, 43; García-Dils 2015: 287-294) and fragment 2 with an allegorical bust at Avenida Miguel de Cervantes n°26-28 at the corner with Calle Cava (CMRE XIV: n°18, 56-57; García-Dils 2015: 339-345) if they are interpreted as the Spring. Also, the character wearing a *petasos*, in the preserved corner of the mosaic with a rosette of triangles documented in Calle del Conde n°8 (CMRE XIV: n°30, 69-72; García-Dils 2015: 368-369), perhaps could be associated with Summer. Finally, in the *Okeanos* mosaic uncovered in

4 For a recent study on this theme in Hispania, with a review of the attributes of the respective seasonal representations in the numerous testimonies of this motif in the Iberian Peninsula, *vid.* Duran Kremer 2011: passim; Rueda 2011: passim. For a general overview of this subject, see Abad 1990a: passim; Abad 1990b: passim. For the assignment to *Italica* of two mosaic fragments with motifs of the Seasons hitherto assigned to *Orippe* (Dos Hermanas, Seville), see Camacho 2021. For a reconsideration of a pavement of Carmo (Carmona, Seville) with the Seasons in the light of the new finding of the bust of Summer, see now Márquez 2016.



Figure 5  
Mosaic of the Allegory, from Avenida Miguel de Cervantes nº35. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

Plaza de España (CMRE XIV: nº45, 88-90; García-Dils et al. 2011: 774-775 figs. 4c and 4d), the four birds perched on tree branches may be suggested as seasonal evocations.

As in the rest of *Hispania*, the most commonly represented type is that of the female bust or head, occasionally with Autumn as a male character, shown frontally or in three-quarter view, and with the figures arranged in a counter-clockwise direction.<sup>5</sup>

Consistent with the usual models, Spring is immediately recognisable in the mosaic from Écija (Fig. 3-1), in an inset measuring 68.5 cm (W-E) by 63.0 cm (N-S),<sup>6</sup> characterised as a woman depicted frontally and with her head slightly turned to her left, wearing a necklace and a floral crown and surrounded by thistles in bloom, a characteristic element of the allegories of Spring (Fig. 6). The arrangement of the thistles, protruding from behind the figure's shoulders, is reminiscent of the representation of spring in the mosaic of the Bacchic busts from *Italica*.<sup>7</sup> It can be ascribed to Group 2 of the representations of this season established by Duran Kremer in his study of the seasonal mosaic representations

5 For the usual iconography of the seasons, see Simon 1966: 468-473 and Parrish 1984: 19-42. On the meaning of the seasons as entities of a beneficial and prophylactic character and symbols of fertility and renewal of nature, a transcript of the prosperity of the users of their representations and the positive connotations and happiness that were associated with this type of motifs and allegories, see Levi 1963: 227; Levi 1971: 85, 161, 230; Dunbabin 1978: 158.

6 The dimensions given below in the text are taken between the centres of the black lines delimiting the respective squares, which have a width of two *tessellae* throughout the pavement.

7 CMRE II: nº3, 27-28 pl. 13.1. It is worth remembering here the fame and price of thistles produced in Corduba (Plin. nat. 19.152).

Figure 6  
The Spring. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>8</sup>

To the right, a representation of Summer (Fig. 3-2) is partially preserved, also wearing a necklace, framed in an incompletely preserved field measuring 69.0 cm (W-E) by (45.0) cm (N-S) (Fig. 7).<sup>9</sup> Despite its state of preservation, it is easily identified as the summer season by its position in relation to the others, as well as by the presence of cereal ears behind the figure, who is also dressed in a light tunic that exposes the right shoulder.

Figure 7  
The Summer. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



8 Duran Kremer 2011: 192. An overview of the representation of this season in Hispanic mosaics can be found in Rueda 2011: 161.

9 Originally, it would have been 61.0 cm (N-S). Parallels in Hispania of the musive summer representation are studied in Rueda 2011: 160.

Autumn (Fig. 3-3) has been completely lost, except for a small blank area in the north-west corner of the square, which does nothing to suggest its evocation, with preserved dimensions of (25.0) cm (W-E) by (10.0) cm (N-S).<sup>10</sup>

Finally, we have Winter (Fig. 3-4), inside an inset measuring 71.0 cm (W-E) by 63.0 cm (N-S), characterised as a woman with her head covered, wrapped in a heavy cloth, crowned with very schematic rushes or reeds (Fig. 8).<sup>11</sup> Next to the figure is a plant motif that can be identified as an olive branch with fruit, alluding to the harvest season.<sup>12</sup> From an iconographic point of view, this allegory is particularly reminiscent of the representation of Winter found in the Mosaico de los Amores from Cástulo (López Monteagudo 2014: passim; López Monteagudo - San Nicolás 2012-2013: 23-24). The image of the mosaic from Écija can be typologically ascribed to Group 1 of the Winter images determined by Duran Kremer (2011: 194).



Figure 8  
The Winter. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

The representation of the seasons in the form of busts was a very popular type of decorative motif in mosaic pavements, especially from the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, as can be seen in the mosaics of Italy, the Syro-Palestinian strip and Africa, where they spread widely (Parrish 1984: passim). The composition that

<sup>10</sup> Full dimensions would be 71,0 cm (W-E) x 61,0 cm (N-S).

<sup>11</sup> As can be seen, for example, in two seasonal busts from *Italica* (CMRE II: n°1, 25-26 pl. 7.3; n°25.3, 44 pl. 51.1), which are reeds –alluding to the humidity of the season– or, rather, dry branches without leaves, also associated with winter. In Écija itself, a representation of reeds can be seen in the winter figure, badly damaged, in the aforementioned mosaic of the Allegory from Avenida Miguel de Cervantes n°35 (Fig. 5).

<sup>12</sup> In African mosaics, it is a recurring motif linked to winter, as Parrish (1984: 32) points out: “*Both the reed and the olive appear as floral attributes of the Winter season in African pavements*”. Among the African parallels, the Algerian mosaic of the Four Seasons of Aïn-Babouch (Parrish 1984: n°4, 99-101 pl. 7a) is worth mentioning. The association of the olive tree with winter can be seen in the aforementioned mosaic of the Allegory from Avenida Miguel de Cervantes n°35 (Fig. 5). Also, in the mosaic of Eros and Psyche in *Corduba* (CMRE III: n°7, 23-24 pl. 9; Rueda 2011: 160). For an overview of olive tree depictions in ancient art, *vid.* López Monteagudo 2007: passim.



places the seasons in the corners of the composition, as is the case here, appears to be typical of the second century in Africa (Parrish 1984: 59-63). It has been noted that it is from this time onwards that the cycle of the seasons is linked to the Emperor, celebrating his rise to power as a manifestation of the *Felicitas Temporum* (Hanfmann 1951: I, 169, 172-173, 176; Quet 1981: 146-148, 193-196; Abad 1990b: 11-13).

In addition to being a recurring iconography, the Loves of Zeus traditionally have a symbolic relationship to certain constellations or phases of the year, given the connotations of deity of the heavens, nourishing god, master of rain and god of agriculture, also a documented facet of Zeus-Jupiter in relation to the grape harvest and the making of wine.<sup>13</sup>

In *Baetica*, we have other examples of the association of the representation of the seasons with mythological episodes of the Loves of Zeus, among which the mosaic uncovered in *Italica* stands out by its good preservation and number of scenes (CMRE II: n°1, 25-26), as well as two mosaic pavements depicting the Rape of Europa, located respectively in Fernán Núñez (CMRE III: n°32, 50-54 and pl. 39A; Blázquez et al. 1986: 109 fig. 15; Wattel-de Croizant 1986: 180-183 fig. 2; Abad 1990b: 16-17; Wattel-de Croizant 1995: 151-153 pl. XVII) and in Écija itself, in Calle Espíritu Santo - Barrera de Oñate (CMRE XIV: n°21, 59-62; García-Dils 2015: 350-360).

## 2. The Rape of Europa

In the central frame of the mosaic, measuring (2.64) m (N-S) by 1.48-1.50 m (W-E),<sup>14</sup> there are two scenes in an open field (Fig. 9). In the first, we recognise one of the Loves of Zeus for which there is greatest artistic and literary evidence, the Rape of Europa (Fig. 3-5),<sup>15</sup> represented at the moment when Europa is sitting on the bull. The princess appears completely naked, wearing only a necklace and bracelets, and a headdress over her hair,<sup>16</sup> which is tied back at the nape of her neck. The figure's position conveys movement and dynamism, an impression

Figure 9  
Mosaic of the Loves of Zeus. Central frame.  
Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



13 *Vid.* on 11 October at *Kalendarium Amiternum* (CIL IX 4192), feast of the *Meditrinalia* or of the new wine (Varro l.l. 6.16), and another festival of wine associated with Jupiter, *Vinalia priora* (Ov. fast. 4.898; Plin.nat. 18.287).

14 Before its partial destruction, the panel would have 2,77 m (N-S).

15 Hom.II. 14.321-322; Hes.theog. 357 and fragm. 52; Hdt. 1.2, 4.45; Mosch. 2.1-152; Ov.met. 2.836-875; Ov.fast. 5.603-620, Ov.her. 4.55, Ov.ars.am. 1.23, 6.103-107; Hor.c. 3.27; Nonn.Dion. 1.46 ss.; Pincelli 1960: passim. An overview of the presence of this myth in Mosaic art, in Wattel-de Croizant 1995, including the study of 44 pavements. See also López Monteagudo - San Nicolás 1995: passim.

16 Perhaps it is a small Phrygian cap, very schematically depicted.

emphasised by the cloak, which she has previously placed on the animal's back and on which she is mounted. The cloak falls over her left thigh, while with her right hand she gracefully raises it above her head, using her left hand to grasp one of the horns of the animal. The bull is depicted docile and calm, motionless, barely raising his right leg. Opposite him are Europa's three companions (Figs. 3-7, 3-8, 3-9), also shown naked, wearing necklaces and bracelets, while their cloaks are gathered around their thighs. The first of the women (Fig. 3-7) holds in her right hand a rope tied to the animal's horns, presenting him with a handful of grass to eat. Hermes flies above the scene (Fig. 3-10). His representation follows the iconographic canons of the Roman type, characterised as a young man dressed only in a *chlamys*, wearing sandals with wings at the ankles, and a *petasos*, also winged, and holding the *caduceus* in his right hand (Fig. 10).<sup>17</sup> The presence below the figures of a basket in a field of flowers, on which the bull schematically casts his shadow, and the presence in the background of a building, indicate that the scene is still taking place on the ground.



Figure 10  
Hermes. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

The whole of the representation, taking place in a relaxed atmosphere, makes it clear that we are dealing with the initial moments of the myth. Zeus has seen Europa while she was with her companions on the seashore. To achieve his purpose, the god asks Hermes to prepare the meeting and subsequent abduction. Hermes is to drive the King's herd of oxen from the high meadows to the nearby beach, where Zeus knew that Europa and other maidens of Tyre were going to be out walking. In the scene narrated by Ovid (*Ov.met.* 2.836-846), Jupiter tells Mercury of his secret love for the princess, asking for his help as a confidant and an accomplice. His presence in the iconography of Europa is not common, and this case is a *unicum* in *Hispania*. We may recall certain Greek vases in which he appears as part of the scene of the rape and, for example, a hydria from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC that shows Hermes guiding the procession on the sea crossing (Robertson 1988: n°58, vol. 1, 80, vol. 2, 37; Wattel-de Croizant 1995: 32 fig. 10). Europa is wary of the bull, but still approaches him, garlanding his horns and climbing on his back. Nor is there any surprise or agitation in the attitude of her companions, for Jupiter has not yet made his true intentions known. This

<sup>17</sup> Without any justification, the character that appears in (Fig. 6-9) has been interpreted in Vargas et al. 2021: 218 as Io, with whom Hermes would be associated (Fig. 6-10). The absolutely marginal and secondary position that the female character occupies in the scene as a whole, compared to the adjoining characters, Europa (Fig. 6-5) and Danae (Fig. 6-11), who appear in a relevant and central position in their respective representations, leads us to reject this unfounded identification.

tranquillity is reflected in Ovid (Ov.met. 2.857-861) and Nonnus of Panopolis (Nonn.Dion. 1.52-53).

As for the landscape and the elements surrounding the scene, the setting is in keeping with the “flowery meadow” referred to in the poem *Europa* by the Sicilian writer Moschos.<sup>18</sup> The depiction of grass and flowers testifies to the artist’s interest in setting the scene by means of a very simple decorative device that is technically easy to execute, but certainly effective in achieving the desired effect of contextualising the scene in a rural setting, but without including trees, bushes, rocks, water or other elements of nature so common in these open spaces (Durán 2011: passim). The flower basket that appears between the bull and Europa’s companions may be interpreted as the one mentioned in the same text (Mosch. 2.44-45), that is the golden basket that the princess carried to gather flowers from the meadow and was decorated precisely with a scene of the metamorphosis of Io into a calf.

A striking detail is the presence, in the background of the scene, of an architectural image, probably representing the gate of a city, plausibly identified as Tyre where Europa was princess. However, there is no evidence of the seashore, as is normally the case in mosaics depicting scenes that take place by the sea. It cannot logically be postulated that this may be a doorway of *colonia Augusta Firma*, since this type of architectural motifs usually respond to generic, stereotyped and conventional formulae, as is common in the High Imperial period in relation to the urban world,<sup>19</sup> of which several architectural representations are documented, perhaps villas or buildings whose characteristics allude to the cities in which these myths took place, and in African mosaics of later date with images of the rural environment (Dunbabin 1978: 50-59, 119-129 pls. 12 n°23, 16 n°34-35, 18 n°40, 43 n°109, 44-45 n°111-113, 50 n°126-127). In any case, representations of cities in mosaics in *Hispania* are rare. We can only mention the so-called mosaic “de las Murallas” found in Pamplona, which shows a representation of a wall of large blocks with battlements and several towers and a gate (CMRE VII: n°34, 54-55 pl. 33), and an example from Martos (Jaén) (CMRE III: n°42, 62 pl. 51), another one from Mérida (CMRE I: n°63, 51, Fig. 4, Pl. 93), two found in Murcia area (CMRE IV: n°53, 61 fig. 20; n°84, 77-78 pl. 36), one from Rielves (Toledo) (CMRE V: 72 fig. 40) and one from El Reguer (Lérida) (CMRE VIII: n°21, 21-23 pl. 9). All these display arcades and porticoes, with some added buildings, rather than depictions of walls and gates as can be seen in our pavement and in another from *Ilici*, with a crenellated wall and towers, but with a Hellenistic character and technique and a late Republican chronology (Ramos 1975: 73 fig. 2).

The representation of the shadows, both in this scene and in others that will be pointed out in due course, demonstrates the intention of the creator of the mosaic to place the figures in relation to the background, thus increasing the realistic qualities of the scene and avoiding the effect of floating due to the lack of spatial references in the minimalistic setting. The use of shadows under the figures brings to mind some examples of mosaic pavements, particularly from the African sphere, such as those of Tipaza, El Djem, *Carthago*, Sousse or *Utica* (Dunbabin 1978: pls. III.7, VI.12, XI.22, XIII.26, XXVII.69, XXXII.83,

18 “λειμῶνας ἐς ἀνθεμόεντας”, Mosch. 2.63. Cf. Ov. met. 2.841, “*montano gramine*”.

19 These iconographic schemes are ultimately derived from the pictorial models of the Hellenistic world, which were projected into the Roman period and reached the Middle Ages. On the depiction of cities by the sea in mosaics, see Neira 1997: passim, as well as López Monteagudo 1994: passim, with attention to the idealised aspect of the images of cities close to the sea shores in the mosaics of North Africa. As for the evocation of cities in the Late Antique period in the East, particularly in the Jordanian area, *vid.* López Monteagudo 1993: passim.

39.100), and especially the famous examples from Smirat, dated to the second quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, showing the *munus* paid for by *Magerius*, with a profuse use of this artistic resource (Beschaouch 1966: 134-157; Dunbabin 1978: 67-69 pl. XXII.53; Beschaouch 1987: passim; Blanchard-Lemée et al. 1995: 209-216). We may also mention the mosaic of the bear hunt from the area around *Baiae*, dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, now in the J. Paul Getty Museum (Belis 2016: n°2, 10-14), or the scenes with felines depicted in Ostia, in the *Horrea Epagathiana et Epaphroditiana* (Becatti 1961: Tav. XCI-XCII). In the mosaics of Baetica, this resource can be seen in some of the floors of *Italica*, as in some frames of the Bacchic mosaic of the building of Neptune (CMRE XIII: n°12, 33-35 pl. V-VI) and others in the mosaic of Bacchus and Ariadne in the House of the Planetarium (CMRE XIII: n°63, 67-68 pl. XXI fig. 131). As may be expected due to their more than probable provenance from the same workshop, in *Astigi* we also find evidence of this way to represent the shadow of some of the figures of the mosaic of the Triumph of Bacchus in Plaza de Santiago, such as Leda, Castor and Orpheus (Fig. 4) (CMRE XIV: n°8, 45-50; Fernández Gómez 1997; García-Dils 2015: 295-296. Some other pavements, such as the *Tigerreiter* of the splendid *domus* of Calle Espiritu Santo - Barrera de Oñate (*Vid. infra*. CMRE XIV: n°23, 62-65; García-Dils 2015: 350-360), also reflect the use of this formula. Its function seems to be the same as that attributed by O. Wattel-de Croizant to this device in the Fernán Núñez mosaic, so close to that of Écija in so many ways: “*les ombres se profilent sous les sabots du taureau, ou les pieds de chacun des personnages qui l’encadrent, pour les rendre plus stables et amorcer une légère perspective*” (Wattel-de Croizant 1986: 181; Wattel-de Croizant 1995: 152). The scholar adds that this procedure is common in the Severan period, although it can be found in African mosaics in the time of Constantine.

In Écija, there are two other pavements that depict the Rape of Europa, located in two houses excavated respectively in Calle Espiritu Santo (Fig. 11) (CMRE XIV: n°21, 59-62; García-Dils 2015: 350-360) and in Calle San Juan Bosco n° 8-10 (Fig. 12) (CMRE XIV: n°65, 110-113; García-Dils 2015: 303-30). Both illustrate the third phase of the rape, the most common scene, showing the abducted princess on the back of the bull, running on the surface of the waters towards Crete. Among the parallels from *Italica*, the mosaic displayed in the Archaeological Museum of Seville reproduces the same episode (CMRE XIII: n°78, 81-83 pl. XXVII fig. 164), with a very similar composition, while the



Figure 11  
Mosaic of the Rape of Europa from Calle Espiritu Santo. Photography by Esther Núñez.

Figure 12  
Mosaic of the Rape of Europa and Ganymede  
from Calle San Juan Bosco n° 8-10.  
Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



one in the house of the Countess of Lebrija shows the events leading up to the abduction (CMRE II: n°1, 25-26 pl. 1, 3b; Blázquez et al. 1986: 110 fig. 16; Wattel-de Croizant 1974: 285 ss., pl. 1-2 d; Wattel-de Croizant 1986: 175-180 fig. 1; Wattel de Croizant 1995: 145-149 pl. XVIa). The image depicted on the mosaic from Mérida corresponds to the beginning of the escape by sea, with the coast still visible in the background, suggested by a flowery strip of land (CMRE I: n°4, 28 pl. 5; Blázquez et al. 1986: 109; Wattel-de Croizant 1986: 183-185; Wattel-de Croizant 1995: 149-151 pl. XVIb). The scene depicted in the Fernán Núñez mosaic, on display in the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid, is situated at the precise moment of the abduction, with Eros guiding the fugitive couple under the surprised gaze of the Sidonian maidens (CMRE III: n°32, 50-54 pl. 39c; Blázquez et al. 1986: 109 fig. 15; Wattel-de Croizant 1986: 180-183 fig. 2; Wattel-de Croizant 1995: 151-153 pl. XVII.).

Figure 13  
Fresco of the Rape of Europa from the House  
of Jason. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



Among the known iconographic parallels, mention should also be made of the Pompeian fresco of the House of Jason or of Fatal Love, preserved in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples (Fig. 13) (Casa IX, 5, 18. Zevi 1964; PPM 9, 670-719; Wattel-de Croizant 1995: 57-60 pl. IIa). It has notable similarities with the mosaic from Écija as a representation of the initial phase of the myth taking place in a peaceful atmosphere, with Europa just mounted on the bull, side-seated on her cloak, holding on with her left hand and with her right hand raising the cloth over her head, while the animal is attended to by her three companions.

As an alternative interpretation of the character of the third maiden (Fig. 3-9), it has been proposed that she is in fact Io, indicating that the losses suffered by the mosaic do not allow us to glimpse in detail whether she was depicted with small horns on her forehead (Vargas et al. 2021: 218). In this line, the daughter of Inachus would be associated with Hermes (Fig. 3-10) as a liberator who runs to meet her. It should be noted in this respect that the maiden's forehead has been preserved in its entirety, and it can be affirmed with certainty that there is no attribute on her head that would allow us to identify her with Io. On the other hand, the maiden is perfectly integrated into Europa's cortege, and is clearly depicted on a secondary plane and exactly at the same scale as the other two

women; she has been depicted on a different level due to lack of space on the right of the panel and to give depth to the scene. Moreover, as we shall see below, the presence of Mercury should not be surprising, as it is perfectly justified by his appearance in the narratives of this episode of the Europa myth, without having to recur to plot devices to propose the narration of any additional myth. As William of Ockham rightly pointed out in his famous passage, *'pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate'*.

### 3. Danae and Zeus

To the left of the previous image, there is a scene from the myth of Danae (Figs. 3-11 and 14). The main character, with a long shock hair, is depicted with her back turned, her arms outstretched, her hands open and her gaze raised to receive the rain. Her cloak is knotted around her neck, revealing her back and buttocks. Her shadow is cast on the ground in the form of a small dark semi-oval figure, alongside sparse vegetation in the form of flowers or schematic grasses. While the norm in ancient iconography is to show Danae secluded inside her dungeon, seated, reclining or lying on a *kliné*, in this mosaic she appears standing in an open field, preparing to receive Zeus. The god (Fig. 3-12) is depicted in the form of a cloud, reclining on his left elbow (Maffre 1986: n°20 –with doubts–, 22 and 23a, vol. 1, 329). He holds an eros (Fig. 3-13), a symbol of Zeus' love for the Argive princess.<sup>20</sup> Unlike other depictions of Eros in this myth in Roman times, the small figure does not appear to be pouring rain from a vessel. Rather, the rain, represented with tesserae in the form of small drops, falls directly from the cloud in which Zeus is lodged. Above Danae's head and next to the winged infant, there are elements of an architectural scenery, an urban gate flanked by two towers and two lateral sections of the wall, with the presence of a further tower and the hint of a fourth.

The myth of Danae (Escher 1904: 2084-2086; Cressedi 1960: 1-2; Maffre 1986: vol. 1, passim) is part of the broader myth of Theseus, in particular the initial part, which is known in its most developed form from the passages of Pherecydes and Apollodorus concerning the birth of the hero (Pherec. ap. FGrH 3 F 10-12; Apollod. 2 [26] 2 and 2 [34-48] 4, 1-4), as well as from other sources<sup>21</sup>. The only daughter of Acrisius, King of Argos, and Eurydice, Danae was imprisoned with her wet nurse in an underground chamber protected by bronze gates because an oracle at Delphi had revealed that Acrisius would be killed by his daughter's son. Seduced by the girl's beauty, Zeus, through an opening in the roof, descended upon her womb in the form of a shower of gold to impregnate her and give birth to Perseus.

According to a certain tradition, taken up by Horace and Ovid, rather than in an underground building with a bronze chamber, Danae was kept away in a tower. One may wonder whether the architectural elements of our mosaic may be an allusion to this variant of the myth, particularly the door flanked by strong towers closely associated in the composition with the figures of Zeus and Danae. In the classical sources, Horace (Hor.carm. 3.16.1) noted the tower of bronze, doors of oak, and the strict guard of watchdogs that protected Danae from nocturnal lovers; Ovid asked who Danae could have known if she were always to remain in her tower until she grew old (Ov.ars am. 3.415-416). In other passages of the *Amores*, Ovid stated that had Danae not been kept in a tower, Jupiter would not



Figure 14  
Danae and Zeus. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

20 Maffre 1986: n°5, 7, 9a, 14, 16, 28, 35, vol. 1, 327-330, with Eros flying over or next to the figure of Danae.

21 Soph.ant. 944-950; Pind.p. 12.17; Isoc.or. 10.59; Men.sam. 766-769; Ov.met. 4.610-611, 698, 11.117; Nonn.Dion. 7.120, 8.290, 302, 25.113-114; Anth.Pal. 5.64; Paus. 2.23.7, 10.5.11.

have made her a mother (Ov.am. 2.19.27), and that the gates were of bronze and the tower of iron (Ov.am. 3.8.32). It is possible, in our opinion, that this literary image may have been in the mind of the creator of the mosaic when this scene was composed, containing a detail of the cultured and refined poetry practised by the Roman elites and in keeping with the aristocratic and luxurious characteristics of the *domus* in which this floor was located.

The passage of Danae's myth concerning the golden rain was commonly depicted during the Greco-Roman period, not only in mural paintings, but also gems, reliefs, luxury pottery and mosaic pavements (Maffre 1986: n°18-22, vol. 1, 329; López Monteagudo 1998: 441-446). In the Iberian Peninsula, prior to the appearance of the mosaic analysed here, the initial episode of the myth of the conception of Perseus had only been documented in one of the medallions of the mosaic aforementioned from *Italica*, moved to the house of the Countess of Lebrija, which also includes different pictures of the mythical cycle of the Loves of Zeus (CMRE II: n°1, 25-26 pl. 7a; Maffre 1986: n°22, vol. 1, 329). In this case, Danae appears seated, in the style of the most ancient Greek representations, as opposed to the fashion of presenting her standing, as in the mosaic from *Astigi*. However, a common aspect between the two mosaics is the representation of Zeus on a cloud, leaving only his head and the upper part of his naked torso in view. The mosaic from the House of the Horses at *Carthago*, dated *circa* 300 AD, also shows the bust of Zeus on a cloud pouring rain (Salomonson 1965: 67 and 120, n°48 fig. 52 pl. XLVIII.3; Maffre 1986: n°20, vol. 1, 329; López Monteagudo 1998: 442-443). On this occasion, Danae is also standing and partially nude, as in *Écija*, although the quality of the latter representation is far superior.

Regarding the image of Zeus, it has been alternatively proposed that he is represented here as a figure reclining next to a rock or fountain from which water flows, 'with the typical iconography of the river-gods', accompanied by eros turning this water into the shower of gold (Vargas et al. 2021: 217-218). It should be noted that there is nothing here that reminds of this type of iconography, except for the vague hint that the figure is reclining. Only the torso, left arm, and head of the divinity are depicted, surrounded by the same dark cloak that covers the god's head. On the right, the image we find is perfectly compatible with the schematic representation of a cloud, so it is not reasonable to see here a fountain or a rock that is flying in the sky, and much less that water flows from here, since the raindrops come directly from the image of Zeus himself.

#### 4. Leda and the Swan

The moment of Leda's union with Zeus, transformed into a swan, is represented here in a square measuring 91.0 cm (N-S) by 71.0 cm (W-E). The second episode of this myth, the hierogamy, is the most frequently represented scene of this story in the Roman mosaics and other types of plastic figurations (San Nicolás 1999: *passim*; San Nicolás 2005: *passim*; San Nicolás 2011: 328-333). As is common, Leda (Fig. 3-14) is depicted standing, half-naked, with her cloak open and falling over her left shoulder and under her buttocks, rolled up over her left arm. In this case, she extends her right arm over the swan (Fig. 3-15), which she grasps firmly by the neck and pulls towards her, while the bird seeks Leda's lips with its beak, clinging to her hip with its left leg (Fig. 15). The play of colours of the *tessellae* gives volume to the depiction of the female figure. This is a scene of great dynamism, emphasised by the movement of Leda's cloak, the shadows cast on the ground and, above all, by the swan's outstretched wings, which flutter in the air, covering a large part of the frame. The swan is oversized, practically



Figure 15  
Leda and the swan. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

the same size as Leda, which allows for the identification of the motif of the giant swan, along the lines of what Balil pointed out about this scene in certain parallel representations (Balil 1989: 119-124). Indeed, this would have been the only operative formula by which to place the two protagonists at the same height. This is also evidenced by the using of the swan in flight and at a much larger size than natural, rather than on the ground and at its true scale. In this way, the formal aspect of the superiority of the divinity, its strength and power, which will ultimately achieve its purpose, is well illustrated.

This representation of the myth at the precise moment when Leda is taken by the bird is rare from an iconographic perspective and is only documented in two other Roman mosaics. The first of these parallels is located in *colonia Augusta Firma* itself, in the aforementioned mosaic from Plaza de Santiago, with which it shares numerous formal characteristics, not only in the composition of the scene, but also in details such as the shape of the shadow cast on the ground or Leda's slightly raised left heel (Figs. 4 and 16) (CMRE XIV: n°8, 45-50; Fernández



Figure 16  
Leda and the swan in the mosaic of the Triumph of Bacchus from Plaza de Santiago n°1. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



Gómez 1997: passim; García-Dils 2015: 295-296). In this case, she grasps the swan's neck with her left hand. As has already been noted (San Nicolás 2005: passim; San Nicolás 2011: 329; Lancha 2011: passim), what is striking about the representation in these two cases, is the depiction of Leda standing with her back turned in the moment of union with the swan of a size equivalent to that of the queen. With the appearance of the new mosaic from *Astigi*, the figure of Plaza de Santiago ceases to be a *unicum* in the iconography of the Iberian Peninsula. The second example that can be mentioned is found in the mosaic of the *cubiculum* AN of the so-called House of the *Coiedii* of Suasa, dated to the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, here with Leda on the right-hand side of the scene (Dall'Aglio - De Maria 1994-1995: 144-149 fig. 22; San Nicolás 1999: 369 fig. 18; San Nicolás 2005: 987 fig. 6). A third parallel may be added for the depiction of Leda standing with her back turned, in this case separated from the swan, either immediately before or after their union, as in the Cypriot example from *Palaepaphos* (Kouklia), dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (Michaelides 1987: n°20 pl. IX; Saliou 1990: 370 figs. 1-2).

As mentioned above, the hierogamy between Leda and the swan is widely documented in Greco-Roman visual arts, both in the sculpture and mosaics, thus demonstrating the popularity of this theme (Kahil et al. 1992: vol. 1, 231-246). On the other hand, in Hispanic mosaics, the representation of this mythological scene of the union between the queen and the swan is unusual, since, apart from the two mosaics from *Astigi*, its use has only been documented on three other occasions. Thus, we have the cases from Quintanilla de la Cueva, with a chronology in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Blázquez et al. 1986: 108-109 fig. 13; Balil 1989: 119-124; San Nicolás 2005: 975 fig. 2), from *Complutum* (Alcalá de Henares), from the late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century, including an inscription identifying the scene (*HEp* 1, 463; Fernández-Galiano 1984: 203-213 fig. 13-14 pl. CIX-CXII; Blázquez et al. 1986: 108-109 fig. 14; Gómez 1997: 106-107 M2; San Nicolás 2005: 975 fig. 1; San Nicolás 2011: 341 fig. 10), and, finally, from *Italica*, in the collection of the Countess of Lebrija and dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (CMRE II: n°1, 25-26 pl. 1 and 2a; Blázquez et al. 1986: 109-110 fig. 16; San Nicolás 2005: 976 fig. 3).

In the narratives of mythography,<sup>22</sup> Leda appears as the daughter of Testius, King of Aetolia, and of Eurythemis, sister of Hypermnestra and Althaea. She is presented as the wife to the Spartan monarch Tyndareus and mother of Timandra, Clytemnestra, Phoebe, Helen and the Dioscuri. Her extreme beauty attracted not only the exiled Spartan but also the King of Olympus, who came in the form of a swan on the very night of her betrothal beneath the peaks of the Taygetus, so that her children, the Dioscuri or Castor and Polideuces, are at the same time children of Zeus and Tyndareus. It is no coincidence that one of the neighbouring frames in our mosaic shows the figure of one of them, in a noteworthy narrative association.

## 5. One of the *Dioscuri* and a Horse

In a square located to the north-west of the previous frame, measuring 79.5 cm (W-E) by 64.0 cm (N-S), we find one of the *Dioscuri* (Fig. 3-16), depicted frontally, naked, covered only with the *chlamys* on his back and over his left shoulder and arm, and wearing the *pileus* over a shock of abundant hair. He

22 Hom.II. 3.426; Hom.Od. 11.298 ss.; Hom.Od. 4.184; Hes.fr. 23 A8; Him. Hom. 17.1-5, 23.2; Apoll. Rhod. Arg. 1.146; Eur.Hel. 16-22, Eur.Iph.A. 49-51, 794-800; Eur.Or. 1385-1387; Eurip.Mel. 17, 214, 257, 1149; Verg.Aen. 8.130; Hor.sat. 2.1.26; A.P. 147; Strab. 10.4.61; Paus. 3.1.4, 13.8, 16.1, 21.2; Apollod. 1.7.10, 3.10.5; Anth.Pal. 5.36; 5.307.

holds the spear in his left hand, in an attitude of sovereignty, while with his right hand he grasps the reins of the horse (Fig. 3-17) at his side (Fig. 17). The animal is depicted from the side, facing towards the right, with its right leg raised, in movement. In both cases, the use of *tessellae* of different tones adds volume and movement to the figures. In the frame (Fig. 3-18), which is completely lost except for its south-west corner, measuring (17.0) cm (W-E) by (12.0) cm (N-S), the second brother, Pollux, may have been represented. If so, the images of the twin Dioscuri would have very effectively completed the symmetry of the composition surrounding the Rape of Europa formed by the seasons of the year (Figs. 3-1, 3-2, 3-3, 3-4).



Figure 17  
*Dioscuri* and a horse. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

This is a frequent iconographic type, for which there are numerous parallels, both in statuary and in pictorial and numismatic representations, although not in mosaics (Hermayr 1986: vol. 1, *passim*; Gury 1986: vol. 1, *passim*). Very few floors, located in Nea Paphos (House of Dionysus) (Daszewski - Michaelides 1988a: 27 figs. 13 and 14; Daszewski - Michaelides 1988b: 22 fig. 7) and *Carthago* (House of the Horses) (Salomonson 1965: 125, n°60 fig. 64 pl. 51,1; Gury 1986: n°22, vol. 1, 614 and vol. 2, 490) show the figure of the Dioscuri accompanied by their horses (San Nicolás 1999: 372-374). As far as *Hispania* is concerned, we can only mention the pavement from the House of the Mosaic of the Birth of Venus in *Italica*, dated to the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, in which the figures of both brothers are represented by their zodiac counterparts, the Gemini (CMRE XIII: n°72, 74-76; Lancha 2011: *passim*).

At any rate, the presence of one of the Dioscuri next to Leda is a peculiarity for which we have only one parallel, again located in Écija itself, in the mosaic from Plaza de Santiago, hitherto considered a *hapax* (Figs. 4, 18). In this case, the star is depicted above his head, one of his attributes as a celestial and astral divinity, while the horse is behind the figure, forcing the composition into the octagonal shape of the composition (CMRE XIV: n°8, 45-50; Fernández Gómez 1997: *passim*; García-Dils 2015: 295-296). The evident formal resemblance between this image and the mosaic from Plaza de Armas, especially the horse, once again reinforces the suggestion that both pavements may be the work of the same workshop.

Figure 18

*Dioscuros* and a horse in the mosaic of the Triumph of Bacchus from Plaza de Santiago nº1. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



The Dioscuri, Lacinian heroes with a complex mythological personality (Bethe 1905: passim; Bianco 1960: passim; Hermary 1986: passim; Gury 1986: passim), are generically and etymologically considered as sons of Jupiter, although only Pollux is, hence his immortality compared to that of his sibling. Greek tradition and epic poetry have marked their personalities, Pollux as a pugilist and Castor as a horse tamer<sup>23</sup>, both at once mortal and immortal (Lykophr. 565; Eur.Hel. 138; Verg.Aen. 6.121). The written sources present them above all as knightly or warrior gods, and in this guise, they intervened in support of Rome as early as the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC in the famous Battle of Lake Regillus. They are generally depicted on horseback, or on foot beside a horse or guiding one by the bridle, as in the present case, in which the figure, probably Castor, bears the characteristic attributes with which the Dioscuri are distinguished in literary tradition and classical art: *pileus* or conical Lacedaemonian bonnet (Paus. 3.4.5; 3.24.5; 4.27.2; Catull. 37.2; Thuk. 4.34), purple chlamys on the arm (Paus. 4.27.2, Just.Epit. 20.3; Dion. Hal.ant. 6.13.1-4), spear or javelin (Paus. 4.27.2; Stat. 5.439; Lucian.dial. deor. 26). In Rome, they are preferably designated as *Castores*, indicating the pre-eminence of Castor, the athletic and warrior knight over his brother, who remains in the shadows, at least in the Republican period. Their symbolic and emblematic value is evident in the iconography of the Imperial period, which effectively reflects their multi-functionality as knights, protectors of navigation or symbols of an astral nature. The representation of one of the *Castores* standing and leading a horse by the bridle has numerous examples in the art of the Imperial era (Gury 1986: n°59-73 vol. 1 617-618; vol. 2 495). Unfortunately, the almost complete loss of the scene in the inset (Fig. 3-18) makes it impossible to confirm the possibility that the second of the brothers was also depicted –and under what specific formal expression–, as may be suggested to support the symmetry in the composition and to represent the two brothers as an iconographic expression in the Imperial period of cosmic and social harmony. Here again, the parallel with the scene in the mosaic of Plaza de Santiago is of no help, as it has not been possible to recover the part of the mosaic where Pollux and his horse would presumably have been located.

23 Hom.II. 3.237; Hom.Od. 11.300; Hymn.h. 33.; Apoll.Rhod. 1.146; Theokr. 22.2.34; Ov.met. 8.301; Ov.fast. 5.700; Hor.sat. 2.1.267; Hor.c. 1.3.2, 1.12.25-27; Paus. 3.26.3, 4.16.5, 4.27.1-6.

Regarding the iconography of the Dioscuri, we find the closest parallel of these two Astigitan figures in a wall painting located behind the main entrance door of the Casa dei Dioscuri in Pompeii (VI.9.6), now in the Museo archeologico nazionale di Napoli (inv. no. 9455).

## 6. Antiope and Zeus

Here we find a representation of the myth of Zeus and Antiope, in a frame measuring 93.0 cm (N-S) by 71.0 cm (W-E), showing the god, metamorphosed into a satyr, pouncing on the squatting young woman (Fig. 19). Antiope appears naked (Fig. 3-19), almost completely stripped of a bluish *stola* that barely covers her legs, turning backwards in surprise. Formally, the rich colours of the female figure's cloak stand out, in glazed tesserae in red, orange, blue and green, as well as the nuances in the flesh tones, contrasting with the darker skin of the satyr. The pictorial effect of the shadow cast on the ground is also striking, adding perspective to the composition.



Figure 19  
Antiope and Zeus. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

For his part, the satyr (Fig. 3-20) is depicted with tousled hair<sup>24</sup> and naked, covered only with the skin of a feline draped over his shoulders, in the manner of a chlamys, blowing in the wind and contributing to the dynamic impression of the scene. He is not holding the characteristic *pedum*. He ithyphallically assaults Antiope, whom he grabs by the waist from behind in an aggressive attitude that suggests attack rather than courtship. The scene is framed by a schematically drawn tree on the left and a column on a plinth on the right.

As in the parallel from *Italica* mentioned below, the scene can be identified as the moment in which Zeus catches Antiope, after chasing her, and tries to strip her of her dress, while her attitude and face show the surprise and fear that overwhelm her. It thus corresponds to the first moment in the phase of Zeus's seduction that can be seen in the iconography of the myth, that of assault and rejection in the first encounter between the two characters. This image belongs to the iconography so often represented in different contexts and characters in

<sup>24</sup> More unlikely, it could be a plant wreath, like the ones on the mosaics in Malaga and Zeugma cited *infra*.

the Hellenistic and Roman aesthetic universe, of the “nymph surprised” by the satyr in the context of amorous seduction (San Nicolás 2010: 498-502).

This is a myth that is not well represented in the mosaic theme of the Loves of Zeus (López Monteagudo 2003: passim; Durán 2008: passim; Rodríguez Oliva 2009: 187-196; San Nicolás 2010: passim). In *Baetica*, there is a close iconographic parallel, of this myth and of this specific scene, in the mosaic of the Loves of Zeus from the house of the Countess of Lebrija, originally from *Italica*, dated to second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (CMRE II: n°1, 25-26 pl. 1, 4b; Durán 2008: 1313 and 1315). In this representation, the satyr, crowned with vine leaves and carrying a *pedum*, also pounces on a fleeing Antiope, depicted squatting or kneeling, from whom he tries to tear off the *stola*. The representation in the mosaic of the *uilla* of Torre de Benagalbón (Malaga), from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (Mañas - Vargas 2007: passim; Rodríguez Oliva 2009: passim), on the other hand, suggests the courtship of the characters in an atmosphere of persuasion and acceptance of the love game.

Among the extra-Hispanic iconographic parallels of this mythological episode, with a similar representation in terms of the fear and rejection displayed by Antiope, is the scene of the so-called Mosaic of Ganymede, which decorated the *triclinium* of the *domus* of *Sollertius* de *Thysdrus*, in El Djem (Tunisia), preserved in the Bardo Museum and dated to the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century (Rodríguez Oliva 2009: 192 pl. VIII; San Nicolás 2010: 500 fig. 4). In this case, the resemblance of the tree to the left of the figures in the two scenes is noteworthy. Also noteworthy in this line are two mosaics, one from Timgad, located in the *Philadelphi* baths, dated to the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (Germain-Warot 1969: 77-79 n°96 pl. XXXIII; San Nicolás 2010: 501 fig. 5), and the other from the Turkish city of Antakya (Antioch), in the House of the Psyche's boat and dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Palagia 1986: n°22, vol. 1, 346; vol. 2, 257; San Nicolás 2010: 501 fig. 6). However, in these two cases, Antiope -carrier of a *tympanum* in both cases-, is more receptive, in some way prefiguring the scene of acceptance of the courtship game in the following episode of the story.

The myth of Antiope was dramatised by Euripides in his lost *Antiope* and described by Hyginus (Hyg.fab. 7-8), as well as in several references by various authors (Hom.Od. 9.260; Apollod. 3.5.5, 3.41-44, 3.111; *schol.* Apoll. Rhod. 4.1090; Paus. 1.38.9, 2.9.17.4 ss., 10.36.10; Ov.met. 6.110-111; Nonn. Dion. 16.240, 31.218, 33.301). Antiope was the daughter of the king of Thebes, Nictéo, and Polyxus, although other versions present her as the daughter of the river-god Asopos (Paus. 2.6.2). Blinded by her extraordinary beauty, Zeus, metamorphosed into a satyr, seduced her, and from this union the twins Zetho and Amphion were born (Hom.Od. 11.260-265; Paus. 1.38.9). Considering himself dishonoured by his daughter, Nictéo took his own life after entrusting the capture and corresponding punishment of Antiope to his brother Lico, who took his place on the throne. In fulfilment of his vow, Lycus and his wife Dirce imprisoned Antiope in Thebes and forced her to abandon her twins in the forest, where they are raised by shepherds while their mother was subjected to inhumane treatment during the years in which they grow up. Dirce's ruthless and cruel behaviour, jealous of her beauty, is finally avenged by her children after Antiope escapes and takes refuge with them on Mount Cithaeron. Dirce's punishment by being tied to a bull until she is torn to death is a well-documented iconographic motif in the visual arts.

We have included the later development of the myth because of its relevance in the classical imaginary, and the presence in many representations throughout

the Empire of the Punishment of Dirce, although the number of examples that illustrate the moment of the courtship is significantly smaller. In fact, Écija itself has a Punishment of Dirce, dated to the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, among its extensive repertoire of mosaics (CMRE IV: n°10, 25-30, Láms. 7-9; Blázquez et al. 1986: 119 fig. 31; CMRE XIV: n°1, 35-37 figs. 1-2; García-Dils 2015: 287). Likewise, the fact that the god Bacchus plays a fundamental role in the outcome of the tragedy does not seem to be a trivial fact. It may be suggested that, given the special inclination and sensitivity that the *colonia Augusta Firma* appears to have felt towards the Dionysian themes, judging by the abundance of representations of these in the local mosaics, it was particularly decided to include this metamorphosis and this mythical episode, less common, among the numerous series of Zeus' amorous adventures.

### 7. Ganymede and the Eagle

The next scene is framed in a rectangular field measuring 93.5 cm (N-S) by 71.0 cm (W-E) (Fig. 20). The figure can be identified as Ganymede (Fig. 3-21) thanks to his most distinctive attributes: the Phrygian cap, the chlamys which, in this case, is carried over his left arm, and his ephēbe-like anatomy, depicted here with his back turned. Unlike in other documented cases, he is not wearing boots. He holds out a small bowl to an eagle, which we interpret as Zeus, who seduced this prince of Troy under the form of this bird, in what seems to be an iconographic anticipation of the future occupation reserved for Ganymede as cup-carrier of the gods on Olympus. Thus, the moment depicted in the mosaic is not the actual moment of the abduction, but the previous seduction, with a trusting Ganymede giving a drink to the eagle of Zeus, or to the metamorphosed god himself (Fig. 3-22). The depiction of this scene also includes, to the left of the young man, a highly simplified representation of a structure including what appears to be a column shaft.



Figure 20  
Ganymede and the eagle. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

Again, this mosaic has chosen a less iconographically common part of the myth. Much more usual, as, for example, in the well-known pavement of the House of Dionysos at Nea Paphos (Michaelides 1987: 18 n°14 pl. XXI; Daszewski

- Michaelides 1988a: 31-32 fig. 19; Daszewski - Michaelides 1988b: 31 fig. 13), is the scene of the eagle flying with its talons firmly grasping a bewildered youth, often depicted in dramatic attitudes trying to break free from the bird's rapturous grasp, or at other times rather pleased and joyful at his fate. In contrast, in the mosaic from *Astigi* the artist has preferred to focus on the scene that precedes the previous episode, in which the young Phrygian is shown giving the eagle a drink just before it takes flight with its prey. This depiction is found on oil lamps, marble and bronze reliefs, inscriptions, carvings and gems, sarcophagi and sculptures, but only occasionally in mosaics (Sichtermann 1953: pl. 14.1, 14.2, 15; Wattel-de Croizant 1974: 295-296; Sichtermann 1988: n°138-169, vol. 1, 161-162). We may recall here the example from the House of the Buffet Supper in Antioch (Levi 1971: 130-132 pl. XXIV; Blázquez et al. 2004: 311), in which Ganymede is depicted frontally, standing on a *podium*, offering a cup to the eagle, of which only the head has been preserved. Also, the pavement of Ouled-Agla (Algeria) (Wattel-de Croizant 1995: pl. XXIXa), in a variant in which Ganymede gives a drink to Jupiter himself, next to whom the eagle is perched. Another example, in a mosaic from a private collection in Belgium, kept on loan in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, probably from the territories of the Roman provinces of the eastern Mediterranean (Neira 2020: 145-146 fig. 8). In the Iberian Peninsula, we have the scene depicted in one of the frames of the aforementioned mosaic moved to the house of the Countess of Lebrija from *Italica*, dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, in which the protagonist also appears with a chlamys on his back and a Phrygian cap, but with the difference that here the eagle perches on an altar or pedestal and receives the contents of a phiale offered to him by the young man (CMRE II: n°1, 25-26, pl. 1-5b; Blázquez et al. 1986: 108). Centuries later, it was with this same iconographic formula that B. Thorvaldsen carved his famous representation of Ganymede giving drink to the eagle from a bowl. It can also be interpreted here as Neira notes (2019: 353-354; 2020: 145) that the scene takes place once the rapture has been consummated, with Ganymede, already immortal, serving as cupbearer in the Olympian sphere.

There are further parallels in *Hispania*, which follow the more conventional models for depicting the myth. Also, in the Lebrija collection, from *Italica* and dated circa 150 AD (CMRE II: n°4, 28-29 pl. 14; Blázquez et al. 1986: 108 fig. 12), there is another example, much retouched during its installation in the Sevillian palace house, with the main character holding a spear and accompanied by a dog. Finally, in the same city, there is evidence of the existence of a third Abduction of Ganymede in a pavement that is now lost, possibly from the House of the Mosaic of Hylas, the only graphic documentation of which is in the description and drawing by Demetrio de los Ríos (CMRE XIII: n°55, 53-55 pl. XIV fig. 108). Also, in the *uilla* of Quintanilla de la Cueva (Palencia), in the floor of room 10, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, we find this particular mythological motif, although only one of the eagle's wings has survived (Blázquez et al. 1986: 108).

In *colonia Augusta Firma* itself, we have another pavement decoration, located in calle San Juan Bosco n° 8-10 (Fig. 12), in which the abductions of Europa and Ganymede have been represented together, although unfortunately only the legs of the young Phrygian and part of the eagle's wings have been preserved from the latter scene. In this case, the action takes place on the ground, but not, as in the present mosaic, in a gentle and calm attitude of the two characters, but in the moment when the eagle takes flight with its prey (CMRE XIV: n°65, 110-113 fig. 111A; García-Dils 2015: 303-309; López Monteagudo 2008: 266-268).

In the scene identified in the mosaic from *Astigi*, Ganymede is shown holding a spear, an aspect of his iconography that stands for the hunter described in certain literary sources (Verg.Aen. 5.253; Stat. 1.549), or that of a warrior in some artistic representations (Sichtermann 1953: 89 n°238; Kyle 1960: 259 fig. 20). We see him in a similar attitude, with a pair of spears and a shield leaning against a nearby tree, in the above-mentioned mosaic of the stibadium in the House of the Buffet Supper at Antioch, in the Hatay Archaeology Museum in Antakya (Dunbabin 2003: 159 fig. 93); in the same museum, the protagonist of this mythological episode holds two spears in one of the panels of a mosaic from Tarsus, in this case at the moment of being snatched by the eagle of Zeus (Budde 1969: 93 figs. 169, 172). Also, we see him holding a spear, with a pelta on his side, on the pavement of the House of Dionysus in Nea Paphos.

The kind of altar or pedestal on which the eagle appears to rest is not common in mosaics in conjunction with this theme, although we can see it in the pavement from *Italica*. On the other hand, this device, which comes from the field of sculpture, is better documented in other plastic arts, whether reliefs, jewelry or medallions, in which Ganymede appears seated next to the eagle perched on the said pedestal (Sichtermann 1988: n°138, 147, 156, 162a and 165, vol. 1, 161-162).

The Abduction of Ganymede was already celebrated by Homer (Hom.II. 5.265-267, 20.230-233; Hom.h. 5.202-217), who described the Trojan prince as the most handsome of men, and for this beauty he was snatched by the gods from Mount Ida to be their cup-carrier and to live among the immortals. This is a narrative that was very popular among classical authors<sup>25</sup>, with several variants in the transmission of the tradition, and which has had an important repercussion in the Greco-Roman plastic arts, whether in paintings, reliefs, sculptures or mosaics (Sichtermann 1953: passim; Kyle 1960: passim; Foucher 1979: passim), and also among the minor arts. Once again, Zeus interfered with a member of mortal royalty, although this case is peculiar in that it is a homosexual affair. The depiction of this myth nevertheless has abundant parallels in the Greek and Roman world throughout the Empire (Neira 2020: passim).

### 8. *Tellus* and a *Karpos*

At the northern end of the mosaic, in a frame measuring 3.30 m (W-E) by 0.72 m (N-S), there are three scenes distributed within an open field (Fig. 21). First, *Tellus* can be recognised (Fig. 3-23), depicted as a female figure reclining on a rock, covering her voluptuous naked body with a shawl attached to her head, crowned with flowers. She is accompanied by a child (Fig. 3-24). Behind the child, there is a basket from which some branches protrude, and a vine that acts as a dividing element with the adjoining grape harvest scene (Fig. 22).



Figure 21  
Mosaic of the Loves of Zeus. Northern frame. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.

<sup>25</sup> Pind.Od. 1.43, 11.105; Eur.Tro. 822; Theoc.Id. 20.40-41; Verg.Aen. 1.28, 5.252-257; Hor. 3.20.16; Ov.met. 10.155-161; Ov.am. 1.10.7; Prop. 2.30.30; Diod. 4.75.3 and 5; Paus. 5.24.5; Strab. 13.1.11; Stat. 1.549; Hyg.fab. 224.4, 271.1.



Figure 22  
*Tellus* and *karpos*. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



In the recently published *Corpus* of mosaics from *Astigi*, S. Vargas suggested the identification of the female character as Ariadne (CMRE XIV: n°37, 81-83; Vargas et al. 2021: 226-227). This interpretation was based on an apparent attitude of compunction of the eros, which would allude to the abandonment of the young woman in Naxos, who looks to her right “*consciente de la traición de su amante*”, Theseus, who took her to the island from Crete after the death of the Minotaur, and to the discovery of the island by Bacchus. This was thought to be corroborated by the Bacchic affiliation of the two characters on the far right of the scene, identified as old satyr with *pedum* and an individual with a short tunic and crown, pointing at Ariadne. For our part, we consider that here we simply have the goddess *Tellus* with a child, as she is usually depicted, although it is not completely possible to ascertain the infant’s supposed mournful character from the scarce number of tesserae with which the face is composed.

Specifically, we believe that the child accompanying the goddess must be identified as a *karpos* (καρπός), a genie-like infant figure, winged or not, as is the case here, representing the link with the fruits of the earth and, therefore, sometimes with a cornucopia, his most common attribute, and sometimes with baskets of flowers, as in our case. Furthermore, this character is associated with the representation of *Tellus* as *karpóphoros* (καρπόφορος) or *kourotrophos* (κουροτρόφος).

*Tellus Mater*, the Greek Gaea or Ge, is a divinity of vegetation, of the fertility of the fields, sowing and harvesting, a manifestation of the creative force of nature and, therefore, the generator of life in all its forms, animal, vegetable and human (Ghisellini 1994: passim; Gesztelyi 1981: passim)<sup>26</sup>. However, there is a theological dimension that considers her to be the mother of the gods. As such, she is closely associated with Zeus/Jupiter and, in this sense, her presence in the *Astigi* mosaic is well justified and, in our opinion, better supported than the dubious identification with Ariadne in Naxos discovered by Bacchus after her abandonment by Theseus, which is suggested in the *Corpus* of the mosaics of *colonia Augusta Firma Astigi*. On the other hand, it should be stressed that there is no reason to suggest that the character located on the right at the other end

26 Cf. the verse of Hor.carm. saec. 29: “*fertilis frugum pecorisque Tellus*”.

of the panel is pointing specifically to this female personage, rather than to the goat immediately in front of him. This is evidenced by the slightly downward inclination of his hand, pointing directly at the goat. Furthermore, as will be seen later in the corresponding section, we have a direct parallel to identify these characters with Icarus and one of his servants.

The iconography with which *Tellus* was represented in the Imperial period became canonised from the time of Augustus, when she was incorporated into the state pantheon under the formula of *Terra Mater*, from a scheme based on Hellenistic and Alexandrian prototypes: reclining or lying on the ground, with her bust erect and leaning on one arm folded while extending the other, a cloak draped around her legs, and sometimes, as seems to be the case here, with a veil or shawl ballooned behind her back and head. Crowns of ears of corn, leaves, flowers or fruit are also common attributes also found in our mosaic. On the other hand, it is not possible to determine with certainty whether the goddess wears a representation of the serpent on her neck, a symbol of the constant renewal of nature, which *Tellus* usually wears in other images with greater definition, or whether it is a simple necklace, as can also be seen in other representations; only a row of blue tesserae is really distinguishable, which mark a clear contrast with the divinity's dark skin. Finally, the same pose, looking backwards, is well attested in the iconography of *Tellus*, and is found, for example, on a sarcophagus from the *Urbs*, alongside Prometheus (Ghisellini 1994: n°85, vol. 1, 886 and vol. 2, 610). There is also no lack of written (Philostr. 2.34) and iconographic evidence, both in reliefs (Ghisellini 1994: n°23-27, 29, 46-47, vol. 1, 881-883, vol. 2, 607) and mosaics (Ghisellini 1994: n°41, 42, 44, 53, 54, vol. 1, 882-884, vol. 2, 608), of the link between *Tellus* and the Seasons, as seen in the floor from *Astigi*. According to Hanfmann (1951: I, 182; II, 82 n. 232; 143 n. 81; 150, n. 151, 152; Quet 1981: 193 n. 777), the combination of *Tellus* and the seasons of the year would be a characteristic of imperial art, and would not be attested anywhere before the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, thus supporting the date in this century for the mosaic (*Vid. infra*). This is the case, for example, of the *Aion* mosaic from *Sentinum*, from the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, preserved in the glyptothèque of Munich (Gelsomini 1996-1997; Ghisellini 1994: n°42, vol. 1, 883), and the *Tellus* mosaic from *Carthago*, from the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (Parrish 1984: 50-51, 122-125, n°13 pl. 23; Ghisellini 1994: n°44, vol. 1, 883, vol. 2, 608).

Apart from these examples, a painting from the Via Latina catacomb, dating from the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (Ghisellini 1994: n°5, vol. 1, 880 and vol. 2, 605), and two reliefs, one from the Vatican necropolis, dated circa 170 AD (Ghisellini 1994: n°6, vol. 1, 880), and the other from *Pannonia*, from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Ghisellini 1994: n°16, vol. 1, 880 and vol. 2, 606), should also be mentioned for their iconographic proximity in terms of the representation of *Tellus*. Finally, although she is not shown in the iconography present in the mosaic from *Astigi*, as only her bust is adorned with flowers, fruit and ears of wheat, it is worth noting in this context the presence of *Tellus* in a pavement from the House of the Birds in *Italica*, dated between 150 and 175 AD, with a crown of ears of wheat, flowers and fruit, a cloak and a serpent coiled around her neck (CMRE XIII: n°19, 38-39 fig. 56 pl. VII, fig. 57; Luzón 1972: 291-295, fig. 19.1; Ghisellini 1994: n°13, vol. 1, 880, vol. 2, 606).

## 9. Grape Harvest

In the centre of the panel is a grape harvest scene (Fig. 23). Moreover, the scene is dedicated to the production of wine, represented by four figures treading the grapes that a fifth figure pours into the vats, just as documented in the mosaic of the *Tigerreiter* in the *domus* of the Calle Espíritu Santo in *Astigi* (Fig. 24) (CMRE XIV: n°23, 62-65; García-Dils 2015: 350-360). The must produced in the vats is poured into two *dolia* through two orifices topped with feline heads. While one of the actors in the scene (Fig. 3-25) is shown pouring a bucket of vine shoots into the vat, a Silenus (Fig. 3-26), a satyr (Fig. 3-27) and two other figures (Figs. 3-28 and 3-29), all with their shepherd's staff or *pedum*, are treading the grapes. The scene is framed by two vines.

Figure 23  
Grape harvest. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



Figure 24  
Mosaic of the *Tigerreiter* from Calle Espíritu Santo. Photography by Sergio García-Dils.



In general, as Balmelle and Brun pointed out, the mosaic iconography linked to the culture of the vineyard and the making of wine can be organised around two major cycles (Balmelle - Brun 2005: 899; Dunbabin 1978: 115-; Blázquez 1993: passim). On the one hand, there is the seasonal cycle of agricultural work, to which our pavement could only very tangentially be ascribed, given that only one of the operations in the work chain of wine production, the treading of the grapes, is represented here. In fact, there are no references to the harvesting of the fruit, the transport of the bunches in carts or on the backs of animals, the preparation of the *dolia* and the fermentation of the must, the pressing of the

paste generated in the treading, etc., all aspects which are well represented in other mosaics of the Roman world, both urban and rural, although certainly not all of them to the same level of detail and precision (Dunbabin 1978: 16 pl. 7-8). For this reason, it seems much appropriate to associate our pavement with the other great figurative cycle, the Dionysian programme, as can be drawn from the immediate presence of Icarius and the inclusion of some of the characters usually accompanying his procession, the Silenus and the Satyr, who take part in this scene.

The frame that we are now discussing depicts a common activity in agricultural installations, the treading of grapes prior to pressing and fermentation. However, despite being a common place scene, it is by no means a trivial one, since not in vain was Dionysus himself its inventor. In fact, it is usual for iconography, including mosaics, to select the scene of treading as an emblematic image of the whole process of transforming grapes into wine, which is why it is the most common representation of this activity, as it is also an operation that symbolises the end of a whole process, that of harvesting, which required so much effort on the part of the communities whose livelihood depended on the production of wine. The figure who is pouring the bucket with the grape shoots (Fig. 3-25), evidently a *uindemiator* who had previously picked the ripe grapes from the vineyard, seems to be handling a small basket without handles in the shape of a truncated cone -a *corbula* (Varro rust. 1.15; Colum. 12.52.8; White 1975: 56-59) or, more properly, a *qualus uindemiatorius*<sup>27</sup>-, although it could also be a wooden bucket if we consider the three metal rings or straps that can be seen around the utensil. In this case, it would be a *hama*, a container that some texts include among the farm tools, the *instrumentum fundi* (Dig. 33.7.12.18, 21; Isid. Etym. 20.15.3). The grapes are being deposited in the wine vat, here a large tank represented in its usual quadrangular shape, named *forum*<sup>28</sup> in the texts on agronomic subjects, or by its synonym, *linter* (Tib. 1.5.23-24; White 1975: 164-165) and in which the grapes were trampled before pressing, not depicted in our mosaic. This process made it possible to obtain the grape juice and a paste still full of juice, called *pes*, which was then pressed mechanically by means of one of the various procedures –lever or screw presses– available in the Roman world. In our case, the bunches of grapes are depicted in a very schematic manner, without responding to the usual norm of their figuration in relief and mosaic, which usually treats them realistically in a triangular scheme of superimposed rows of rounded fruits (Braemer 1990: passim).

Inside this tank, apparently of masonry, there are four figures treading the grapes. They are what some texts call *calcatores* -ληνοβάται-. Three of them are represented carrying their respective *pedum*, which here seems to be an exhibition of a Bacchic attribute rather than a stick used by other figures to avoid falling in such a slippery environment.<sup>29</sup> Of these three, the one on the far left is a silenus with his prominent bald head and bushy beard (Fig. 3-26); next to him is a satyr (Fig. 3-27), identifiable by his characteristic horns. The other two figures (Figs. 3-28 and 3-29), clearly more muscular, must correspond to characters from the Bacchic procession that we cannot specifically identify. Contrary to what is usually the norm in representations in relief, here the gatherers are not

27 Gloss. Lat. 5.237.46: “*qualos corbes quibus uuae portantur*”; Dig. 33.7.8: “*quali uindemiatorii exceptorique in quibus uuae comportantur*”. White 1975: 59-61.

28 Varro rust. 1.54.2; Colum. 11.2.71, 12.18.3; Isid. Etym. 15.6.8: “*forum est locus, ubi uua calcatur, dictus quod ibi feratur uua, uel propter quod ibi pedibus feritur*”; White 1975: 147-149.

29 This circumstance is pointed out by White 1970: pl. 60. On other occasions, the *calcatores* are shown attached to ropes hanging from the ceiling of the room in which they work.

depicted holding hands, but each one is shown moving at his own pace. They all appear dancing, following the rhythm of the music that the written sources tell us was used to accompany this process (Nonn. Dion. 12.350-355, 366-369; Longus, *Daphnis & Chloe* 2.36) and is also occasionally reflected in the iconography (Tchernia - Brun 1999: 76 fig. 95, 83 fig. 107; Balmelle - Brun 2005: 909 fig. 12c). Finally, they are all barefoot and naked, which clearly refers to the symbolic Bacchic context in which this scene should be considered. In contrast, some texts are expressive about the hygiene recommendations to be followed for treading in the wine vats, for instance, in the *Geoponica* it is stated that the men treading the grapes must be dressed and wearing pants, due to the sweat they secrete (Geop. 6.11).

As mentioned above, the grape must flow into the *dolia* through two orifices in the vat, decorated with lion's heads. This motif can also be seen in other pavements, as for example in one of the frames of a mosaic from Cherchel with the theme of the grape harvest, albeit of a very late date, in the late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century (Dunbabin 1978: 116 pl. 105; Ferdi 2005: 106-108, n°86 pl. XXXIX, n°86; Balmelle - Brun 2005: 908 fig. 11c). It has also been noted that this decoration appears as a constituent element in the drainage devices of Roman wine-making installations in the area surrounding Alexandria (Brun 2004: 153-157, *uillae* de Huwariya and Burg el-Arab; Balmelle - Brun 2005: 907-908; Tchernia - Brun 1999: 84-85 fig. 110), and there is also no shortage of figurative documentation in the western Roman provinces.<sup>30</sup> The mosaic from *Astigi*, as is usual, shows a simplification of the operations of pressing and obtaining the grape must, since it was usual for it to flow from larger to smaller vats and then into the containers for fermentation. Here the creator of the mosaic, in his eagerness to simplify, chose to have the liquid collected directly from the *dolia*. These, as well as in the Cherchel parallel mentioned above, are depicted in a similar manner to that documented in other mosaics of the same scene, which will be referred to below.

Scenes representing grape-treading are relatively frequent from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century onwards in Mediterranean mosaics. Therefore, there is no shortage of scenes like that documented in *Astigi*, which are abundant both in *Hispania* and beyond. There is an excellent parallel in *Écija* itself, in the *Tigerreiter* mosaic (Fig. 24) (CMRE XIV: n°23, 62-65; García-Dils 2015: 350-360). Among other scenes of Dionysian content, it contains a representation, unfortunately incomplete, of the treading of the grapes in a vat by figures holding hands—one of them, the only one preserved, holding on to a rope hanging over his head—while the must flows towards three *dolia* in a very realistic manner through the corresponding holes in the vat.

We may also mention the mosaic from *Italica* figuring Dionysian *thiasos*, in the Ibarra collection and dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. In one of the octagonal scenes, there are three fauns, each carrying their *pedum*, treading grapes while the must flows from the vat (CMRE II: n°5, 29-30 pl. 15-16). From Mérida, from the House of the Amphitheatre, another mosaic, dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, shows three workers busy at a shallow wine-vat, holding hands while two of them lean on sticks (CMRE I: n°39, 44, Pl. 73; Trillmich - Nünnerich-Asmus 1993: 297 fig. 67b). Finally, a 4<sup>th</sup>-century pavement from *Complutum* depicts three harvesters holding hands, two of them with their *pedum*, in a clearly Bacchic context with the presence of Dionysus, satyrs and maenads (Fernández-Galiano 1984: 171-179).

30 E.g., the bas-relief in the Louvre Museum with a scene of grapes being crushed in a vat with two lion-headed spillways (Tchernia - Brun 1999: 52 fig. 53). Or the same motif on one of the winepresses of the Molard *uilla* (Drôme), Brun 2005: 47.

Other parallels beyond the Iberian Peninsula can be mentioned, without dwelling here on this well-attested representation in the field of sarcophagus relief (Hanfmann 1951: n. 470, 471, 475, 480, 492, etc.; Matz 1969: passim; Blázquez 1996: 522-523; Turcan 1999: 114, 156, 164 etc.; Nicolau - Zimmermann 2001: 236-237). In the field of mosaics, many pavements are illustrated with this same scene, with the logical variations derived from the personal taste of the commissioners and the skill of the craftsmen. In *Caesarea* (Cherchel), one of the pavements of the House of the Bacchic Mosaic, dating from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, shows three workers holding hands and treading the grapes while a fourth supplies more grapes to the vat (Dunbabin 1978: 116 pl. 105; Ferdi 2005: 60-61, n°45 pl. XIII, n°45; Blázquez 1996: pl. X.1). Dating from the first third of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, there is a mosaic from *Thysdrus* (El Djem); in this case there are only two workers, holding on to ropes hanging from a bar, another of the devices used to avoid slipping during the treading operation (Dunbabin 1978: 111 pl. 99; Parrish 1984: 158, Pl. 42; Tchernia - Brun 1999: 69 fig. 80; Foucher 2002: 92-93 fig. 24; Brun - Tchernia 2004: 244 fig. 263). Moving on to the Italic peninsula, in *Minturnae* there are three people employed in these tasks while the must flows into the storage *dolia* (Balmelle - Brun 2005: 907 fig. 11a), while in Rome itself, in one of the mosaics of the vault of the mausoleum of Constantina, the daughter of Constantine, in the church of Saint Constance, there are three grape pickers, each armed with a *pedum* (Stern 1958: fig. 33; Oakeshott 1967; Brun - Balmelle 2004: 318 fig. 350). In Gaul, one of the paintings (XXIV) of the well-known mosaic of St-Romain-en-Gal, dating from the first quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, a pavement that summarises the various activities of the grape harvest and wine-making process, includes the scene of the treading and decanting of the grape must into four *dolia* (Tchernia - Brun 1999: 83 fig. 107; Balmelle - Brun 2005: 908 fig. 11b). In the Musée de la Civilisation Gallo-Romaine in Lyon, there is a mosaic, dated around 150 AD, showing a grape harvester treading grapes in a vat connected to the collecting *dolia* by lead pipes (Brun 2005: 58; Brun - Tchernia 2004: 237 fig. 253). In the mosaic from *Sepphoris* (Israel), satyrs are treading of the grapes in the form of a dance.<sup>31</sup> Finally, from the late Antique period, in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, there are some church pavements that depict this same scene of grape treading in the wine-vat. Those from the Syrian area, in which the *calcatores* are associated with a screw press in a central position, are particularly noteworthy (Brun 2003: 216-217; Brun 2004: 128-129).

The Dionysian associations of this agricultural economic activity and the sacred symbolism of wine production, linked to the figure of Dionysus and the concepts of fertility, prosperity and wealth embedded in the production of wine and the exploitation of nature, must have infused the ideology of a great landlord such as the probable owner of the monumental *domus* of *Astigi*. The ideas of pleasure, *joie de vivre* and drink are also at the base of the Dionysian notions that justify the inclusion of a wine-making scene in the mosaic repertoire of the room.

## 10. Icarus and a Servant

Finally, on the right of the panel are two men wearing boots and the short tunic characteristic of peasants and shepherds (Fig. 25). The one on the left, a young man with curly hair, points to a vine with his right hand (Fig. 3-30). Next to him is a mature, bearded individual, holding a *pedum* in his left hand and wearing a *petasos* (Fig. 3-31). This character is undoubtedly Icarus (Gondicas

<sup>31</sup> Balmelle - Brun 2005: 907, 909 fig. 12a. In this case, the motif is accompanied by the inscription ΑΗΝΟΒΑΤΕ (ληνοβάτης), allusive precisely to the treading of the grapes.

Figure 25  
Icarius and a servant. Photography by Sergio  
García-Dils.



1990: passim), the Athenian hero through whom the knowledge of wine was transmitted to mankind. He is depicted holding his hand to his mouth in surprise. In front of them is a goat (Fig. 3-32), eating the grapes hanging from a vine. Although it may be suggestive in the overall context of the mosaic as a whole, in this panel in particular representing agricultural wealth and wine production, we do not identify the young character as Dionysus,<sup>32</sup> considering that he is not wearing any of the proper attributes, such as the crown of branches, the *nebris* or the *thyrsus*, nor is it expressly a scene related to the offering of the gift of wine.<sup>33</sup>

According to the mythological accounts,<sup>34</sup> Icarius, father of Erygone, was an Athenian hero who, during the reign of the mythical King Pandion, received from Dionysus the gift of knowledge of vine-growing and winemaking after the god had fallen in love with the girl and in gratitude for the hospitality he had been given on his visit to Athens. In other versions of the story (Sil.Pun. 7.171-176; Ach.Tat. 2.2; Nonn.Dion. 47.34-39), Icarius is presented as a gardener, which fits better with the depiction of him in our mosaic as a peasant or shepherd, rather than a figure of royal blood. Enthused by the new liquor, and disregarding the god's advice not to disclose his knowledge because of the disasters it could bring upon him and his family, Icarius in turn shared a wineskin with the shepherds around him, who, intoxicated and believing themselves poisoned, killed him and buried his corpse under a tree. The invention of viticulture was, therefore, attributed to this kind, familiar and close god. His gift, wine, would provide mortals with a formula to forget their worries and anxieties of daily existence, bringing them joy, happiness and rejoicing at banquets, which, however, had to be controlled if it was not to lead to violence and madness (Detienne 2000: passim).

As for the specific scene that appears in the mosaic from *Astigi*, we believe that it evokes the episode that appears in Hyginus, who recorded a tradition

32 We did assess this possibility, as a working hypothesis, in the course of the preliminary study of the mosaic (Ordóñez - García-Dils 2017: 591-593).

33 Vid. Gasparri - Veneri 1986: passim, especially in the section devoted to the visit of Dionysus to Icarius (Gasparri - Veneri 1986: n°855-858, vol. 1, 495). Also, Augé - Linant de Bellefonds 1986: passim, with Icarius in n°103, vol. 1, 524; Gasparri 1986: passim.

34 Hyg.astr. 2.4; Hyg.fab. 130; Apollod. 3.14.7; Arist.Frg. 515; Ail.nat. 7.28; Eratosth.Erigone frg. 22-27. About the figure of Icarius, vid. Heeg 1914: passim; Conticello 1961: passim.

relating to Icarius dating back to the Hellenistic period. After learning the art of viticulture from Dionysos, “It is said that, once he had planted the vine and made it blossom with ease, having taken great care of it, a billy-goat rushed into the vineyard and plucked the tenderest leaves it saw. Icarius, angered by this, took the goat away and killed it. He turned the goat’s skin into a wineskin, filled it with air, tied it up and threw it at his companions, forcing them to jump around it. Thus says Eratosthenes: ‘At the feet of Icarius there is, for the first time, dancing around a billy-goat’.” (Hyg.astr. 2.4.2; see also Ov.fast. 1.354-360). The surprised, perhaps even angry, reaction of Icarius, raising his hand to his mouth, and even the position of his legs, as if he were about to start running, support this suggestion. However, we are aware that other interpretations are possible, following the texts of Hyginus himself. Thus, in the light of another passage of the author, in which the discovery of pruning is recorded, “a goat, which had gnawed a vine, caused it to produce more fruit; hence the invention of pruning” (Hyg.fab. 274.1), one could point in this direction, given that pruning for fruiting, with the intervention of animals, whether in green (spring) or dry (winter), was well known in the Roman world (Varro rust. 1.31.1-4; Colum. 4.10). This would also justify the scene in the mosaic in Calle Espíritu Santo, where it is Icarius himself who presents the bunch of grapes to the caprid (Fig. 24).

The parallels of our scene in the field of mosaic art are certainly not numerous. The most significant appears to be the right-hand side panel of a 4<sup>th</sup> century AD mosaic, now on display in the town hall of Manosque (Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, France), recovered from the *triclinium* of the *uilla* of Pèbre near Vinon-sur-Verdon (Var), which shows a scene very similar to that of *Astigi*, both in terms of the composition and the clothing of the figures, wearing boots and short tunics (Fig. 26) (Gondicas 1990: n°3, vol. 1, 645-646; Chaillan 1919: passim; Brun 2003: 46; Brun 2005: 77). Icarius, wearing a *petasos*, points with his right hand to a goat perched in a vine, eating its fruit, while his companion, identified as a servant, gestures with his hands. The general contexts are also similar. In the mosaic of Écija, the grape harvest and *Tellus* appear next to this scene, and in the mosaic from Gaul, it is accompanied by the Three Graces – central panel– and Dionysus and Icarius –left panel– (Fig. 27). In this respect, note may be made of the univocal characterisation here of Dionysus, crowned

Figure 26

Icarius and a servant in the mosaic from the *uilla* of Pèbre near Vinon-sur-Verdon (Var). Photography by Alberto Bolaños.

Figure 27

Dionysus and Icarius in the mosaic from the *uilla* of Pèbre near Vinon-sur-Verdon (Var). Photography by Alberto Bolaños.





with branches, naked, covered only with a cloak over his left shoulder, holding an amphora in his right hand and a *thyrsus* in his left.

In relation to Icarus, we must once again mention the *Tigerreiter* mosaic from Écija (Fig. 24) (CMRE XIV: n°23, 62-65; García-Dils 2015: 350-360), in which this figure is represented as an elderly, bald, grey-bearded man, seated on a rock and surrounded by vine branches. He wears a short tunic that exposes his right shoulder and a bluish cloak over his left shoulder, and boots. He holds a *pedum* in his left hand, resting on his shoulder, and in his right hand he holds a bunch of grapes, with which he feeds a goat.

In one of the mosaic panels in the House of Dionysus at Nea Paphos (Cyprus), dated to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, Dionysus is depicted seated, offering a bunch of grapes to the nymph Acme, while beside him Icarus is shown as a herdsman with his load of wineskins, as well as a pair of drunken shepherds beside him with a legend identifying them as the first wine drinkers (Gondicas 1990: n°4, vol. 1, 646; Daszewski - Michaelides 1988a: 40-43 figs. 29-32; Daszewski - Michaelides 1988b: 23-25 fig. 8). The depiction of Icarus is along the lines of the one in the *Tigerreiter* mosaic.

## 11. Chronology

In addition to the stylistic evidence, which can be inferred from the characterisation of the different characters that appear in the mosaic, discussed in the previous sections, the main direct indication of date of the mosaic of the Loves of Zeus [UEC-15219] is provided by the ceramic materials recovered in its subbase [UEC-15244] and in the level located immediately below it [UED-15275]. Considering the presence of African sigillata, the construction of the room can be dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, a time frame that can be refined to the second half of the century according to the known typological parallels. Based on the *terminus post quem* provided by the pottery analysis and considering the themes represented, as well as the iconographic and formal parallels of the mosaic, we are inclined to place its execution in the Severan period.

As for the abandonment of the room, materialised in [UED-15218], interpreted as the level of the first generalised collapse over the mosaic pavement, the presence of African kitchen wares and of their regional imitations, as well as fragments of common pottery with a coarse fabric, point to a date from the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup>

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35 Data provided by J. Vázquez, responsible for the ceramic analysis of the archaeological intervention.

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