

The Mosaic Decoration of *Peristylia* in Roman *Villae* and Domus of Western Lusitania (Portugal). The Interrelationship between Domestic Space Planning and the Chosen Peristyle Flooring

Batı Lusitania'nın (Portekiz) Roma Villaları ve Domus'unda Peristylia'nın Mozaik Dekorasyonu. Eysel Alan Planlaması ile Seçilen Peristil Döşeme Arasındaki İlişki

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Abstract

Within the RoGeMoPorTur project, a specific approach was adopted to analyse the importance of the peristyle not only as a central element of communication and link between the different architectural components of the villa, but also as an expression of a vision very specific to its owner as a member of a Roman or Romanised elite: The peristyle, as the entrance to the villa from outside, was at the same time the first recipient of its cultural message and socio-economic power.

This study aims at a typologisation of the spatial dialogue chosen by the landowner for the introduction to that message through the pavement decoration of the peristyle.


Keywords: Peristyl, domestic space planning, roman mosaic, spatial dialog, decorative program.

Öz

RoGeMoPorTur projesinde, peristilin sadece villanın farklı mimari bileşenleri arasında merkezi bir iletişim ve bağlantı unsuru olarak değil, aynı zamanda sahibinin çok özel bir vizyon ifadesi olarak önemini analiz etmek için özel bir yaklaşım benimsenmiştir. Romalı veya Romalulaşmış seçkinlerin bir üyesi: villaya dışarıdan giriş olarak peristil, aynı zamanda kültürel mesajının ve sosyo-ekonomik gücünün ilk alıcısıydı.

Bu çalışma, peristildeki döşeme aracılığıyla bu mesajın tanıtımı için arazi sahibi tarafından seçilen mekânsal diyalogun bir tipolojisini amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Peristil, ev içi mekân planlaması, Roma mozaiği, mekânsal diyalog, dekoratif program.

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Introduction¹

The study of Roman mosaics found to date in the different provinces of the Roman Empire, has progressively become more differentiated and comprehensive: Concentrating initially almost exclusively on the study of figurative mosaics and their significance for the identification of reciprocal influences of different cultures, it has only recently begun to highlight the significance and importance of mosaics with geometric motifs for the spatial and regional identification of cultural trends, often linked to the socio-economic status of the commissioner responsible for the construction of the building where they were found.²

In the Iberian Peninsula, and more precisely in the territory of present-day Portugal, most of the Roman mosaics that have been discovered, come - with the exception of the paving of urban residences in Conimbriga (Casa dos Repuxos, Casa de Cantaber, etc.) - from *villae* scattered throughout the territory, most of them directly linked to an economic activity, be it the exploitation of land or maritime resources. Their location was generally chosen according to the economic activity to be carried out on the property where it was located: “When you go to buy a farm, visit the chosen place several times and take a good look around you. Make sure you have good weather, not prone to storms. The terrain must be good, with natural strength. If possible, it should be at the foot of a hill, facing noon, in a healthy place where it is easy to find farm workers. It must have abundant water and be near a blossoming town, or the sea or a navigable river or a good and frequent road” (Cato agr. I: 1, 3, author’s translation).

The same care was, in principle, given to the architectural design of both the manor house, first intended to receive the owner during his visits to the economic exploitation and then, from the third century AD onwards and following the economic and fiscal reforms of Diocletian, it became the owner’s permanent residence and that of his family (Fensterbusch 1981: 283; Maciel 2006: 232). This care applied also to the *villae rusticae* (Fensterbusch 1981: 285; Maciel 2006: 233)³. It is also at this time, that an architectural restructuring and, above all, an embellishment of the *villae*, object of a richer decoration, could be witnessed - as foreseen centuries before in the Vitruvian rules for domestic architecture⁴: “Thus, there will be nothing to point out if, fulfilling these rules, the buildings are arranged according to the different categories of people, as it was written about convenience in the first book; because this will be advantageous and correct in all circumstances. These rules, on the other hand, apply not only in the city, but also in the countryside, with the difference that in the city the atriums are usually closer to the doors and, in the countryside, peristyles of an urban type come first and only then come the atriums, surrounded by paved porticos presenting around paved porticos facing lectures and walks” (Fensterbusch 1981: 283-285; Maciel 2006: 233).

1 My sincerest thanks to Dr. Virgílio Hipólito Correia and MMC-MN, Dra. Cátia Mourão, Dr. Miguel Pessoa and Dr. Miguel Serra for the plans, photos and information they put at my disposal for this research.

2 ‘La décoration somptueuse d’une villa (y compris les mosaïques, fresques, sculptures) reflète le pouvoir et le gout romanisé du propriétaire.’ (Curchin 1990: 271).

3 In this article we will not enter into the debate on the different characteristics of the Roman *villa* (urban, rural, urban-rustic, maritime, etc.): we use the term Roman *villa* for a “domestic construction outside the city...the *villa* is a building on the farm, but, in short, a rural construction that serves as a dwelling. This destination of “house” and “farm” is what virtually defines the great majority of *villas*” (Fernandez-Castro 1982: 273; translation by the author).

4 For a better comparative scheme, we use here the concept of “domestic architecture” as opposed to “public architecture” and “sacral architecture”, bringing together not only the “*villae*” (rustic, rustic-urban, urban) but also some peristyle houses of Conimbriga.

With this phrase, Vitruv defined in a few words, what would become the central point in the architectural planning of the classical Roman *villa*: the peristyle (Gorges 1979: 136). Integrated into the architecture of the building, following the basic principles of symmetry, axiality and orthogonality, the peristyle assumes the task of identifying and distributing the spaces where family life, social and representative life and, in some cases, access to the housekeeping area take place, and thus concurrently provide a spatial planning without any unused surfaces. The same phenomenon can also be seen in some examples of domestic architecture in Conimbriga, where the spatial planning of most of the “houses” discovered to date is determined by the peristyle (Correia 2013).

When we review the Hispano-Roman *villae* that have been discovered until today and whose ground plan can be reconstituted and interpreted with some certainty, we can see, that in the Iberian Peninsula, three basic types of *villae* can be identified: the linear plane *villae*, the peristyle *villae* and the monumental aulic *villae* (Gorges 1979: 120). However, in the Roman *villae* situated in the territory of present-day Portugal, it must be noted that most of them are peristyle *villae*, regardless of whether they are linked to an agricultural or fish farm or not.

It is precisely from these *villae* and their mosaic floors, and to which must be added some examples of domestic architecture in Conimbriga, that we have the best testimony of the meaning of the iconographic programme chosen by the commissioner for the floors of each of the spaces of his residence: a fundamental choice for the identification of the socio-cultural stratum to which he belonged. This is because, especially since the 3rd century AD, with the permanent establishment of a Roman or Romanized elite in their latifundia in the province, the *villa* becomes even more a place of representation and development of social and political contacts, of ostentation of the economic and cultural wealth of its owner, of identification of his belonging to an elite that, although far from Rome, has transposed the apparatus and way of life of the *Urbs*⁵ to the province. In fact, as Luz Neira (Neira 2008: 56) rightly pointed out: “its value (of the mosaic in a domestic context, the author’s note) is rooted precisely in offering us “reality”, a concrete reality in virtue of its geographical, cultural and chronological context, as well as the vision of the elite, of the best. It is their pretension to have a determined image of very different subjects, among which, it is to be supposed, their tastes and preferences also fall, which gives the mosaic an extraordinary value as a documental source on the elites in the Roman Empire”.

Thus, the iconographic programme chosen for the decoration of all or only some of the rooms in the *villa*, the decorative grammar and stylistic discourse chosen for each of them, the presence or absence of light inherent to the chosen chromatic cycle, the use of linearity or the introduction of perspective into the composition, shows in itself the increase in value of this “unity” which is the Roman *villa* with all the multiple functions attributed to it.

The Peristyle

Considered as the Roman evolution of the Greek patio, the peristyle assumes, in the architectural organization of the *villa* or the urban house, the function of domestic space planning and circulation between the different “sectors” as foreseen in the Vitruvian norm of separation of the common and private parts of the building, adapting the house to the function and the status of the owner (Fensterbusch 1981: 283; Maciel 2006: 232).

5 ‘Les propriétaires romains se sentaient également à l’aise à la ville ou à la campagne. Le témoignage de l’élite rurale procède principalement des villas’ (Churchin 1990 :270).

Located immediately after the vestibule, the peristyle is by excellence the first point of reference of the social status of the owner and, at the same time, the instrument of subjective orientation of the visitor to the rooms of representation and (public) reception. It is around the peristyle that, as a general rule, we will find the rooms with the most complex mosaic floors, often with representations allusive to paintings, scenes of mythology or simply with a more complex decorative grammar. Also, often paved with mosaic, it presents mostly compositions of geometric scheme, with or without recourse to vegetal, zoomorphic, apotropaic motives, etc.

An analysis of these mosaic floors, their arrangement in the peristyle and integration in the surrounding architecture, the linearity of the composition, the use of *all over pattern* or the construction of “carpets” for the different wings, the choice of symmetry in axiality, the choice of the chromatic cycle for each wing of the peristyle, allows us to collect elements for the understanding of the choice of a certain iconographic programme and the (presumed) addressees of the underlying message.

To this purpose, and to allow a more structured classification of the different concepts of “social discourse” chosen by the owner, without exceeding the limits of this paper, we will focus on the comparative analysis of the decorative syntax chosen for the peristyle floors of some *villae* and urban houses in Portuguese territory. It is a non-exhaustive analysis, by taking into consideration only those *villae* which, being more accessible, allow the individualisation of a coherent typology of the peristyle and therefore a first proposal for typologisation⁶.

On the other hand, the – generally accepted – temporal allocation of these mosaics to the period of the greatest economic development after the crisis of the 3rd century - the end of the 3rd century, the first half of the 4th century - allows them to be placed in a clearly defined temporal and socio-cultural window.

Catalogue of Peristyle Decoration Schemes

I. Composition in *all over pattern*

The Roman Villa of Abicada

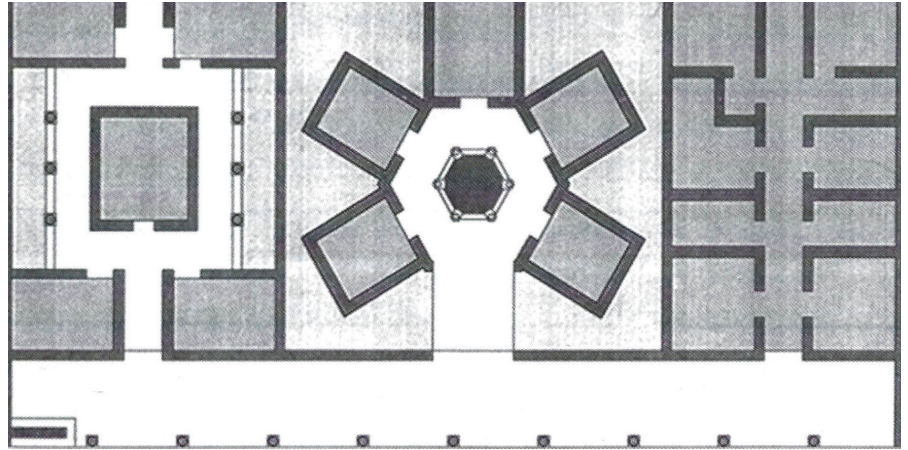
Due to the purity of its architectural layout and the harmony and coherence of the iconographic discourse chosen for the mosaic floors, a prominent place in the sector of domestic architecture in the territory we study, object of several studies and publications in the past⁷, the Roman *villa* of Abicada is considered a remarkable and unusual example of domestic architecture in the territory considered (Fig. 1).

Situated in the south of Portugal, on the southern border of the former Lusitania, about 7 km from *Portus Hannibalis* (Portimão) and 10 km from *Lacobriga* (Lagos), the *villa* was built on a muddy platform between two streams - the Ribeira do Farelo and the Ribeira da Senhora do Verde, over the River Alvor - today silted up but at the time probably navigable. According to Mantas (Mantas 2016: 44) there could have been a private port next to this *villa*, where “no traces

6 In order to typify the different basic principles of interaction architecture - pavement, we will exclusively focus on the “central peristyles” of each of the studied *domus* or *villa*: the decorative programme of the secondary peristyles as well as “partial” peristyles (with only three wings) will be the subject of a forthcoming paper.

7 Chosen bibliography: Duran Kremer 2008a, b, c; 2011; Teichner 2008.

Figure 1
Abicada.
Plan of the Roman *villa*
(© IPPAR).



of facilities related to economic activities” would have been identified, which could lead to classify it as “an establishment exclusively dedicated to receive the owner of the farm during his regular visits or resting periods”.

On the other hand Formosinho Sanches - discoverer and responsible for the first excavation campaigns of the *villa* - had noted in 1942 in his field diary the existence of “a building formed by large tanks, placed to the east and south, on the north side ran an aqueduct of masonry that extended to the newly opened well” (Teichner 2008: 446, translation by the author), a description that could indicate the existence of *cetacea* and, therefore, of facilities for the production of *garum*, and the corresponding identification of this *villa* as belonging to an economic exploitation of maritime resources, so frequent on the Algarve coast and on the west coast of Lusitania.

However, only future excavations extending to the whole of the areal to the north and east of the *villa* may give us more reliable information about this archaeological site, about the possible existence of an agricultural and livestock farm, two types of economic activity which, given the fertility of the land and the abundance of water, have lasted through the centuries to the present day.

The existing and uncovered structures show a strictly symmetrical and axial arrangement of the *pars urbana*, consisting of three distinct sectors - the public, the private and the service sectors, linked to each other by the portico common to all of them, situated to the south. While the western part would contain the rooms intended for the social and public life of the owner, the central module would have been reserved for family life. All the rooms had mosaic floors, though there was no indication of the type of floor chosen for the hexagonal patio or the access to it. In the same way we don't have any indication about the pavement of the south portico.

The west module shows an axial architectural arrangement centred on the peristyle, with the reception room placed in the centre, immediately in front of the entrance to this sector of the *villa* (Fig. 2). To the left and right of the entrance there are two rooms, which mirror each other symmetrically in the northern part of the module⁸. They were probably paved with mosaics⁹.

The decorative programme chosen for the peristyle, which at first sight may seem repetitive in its surface composition, obeyed well-defined specifications.

8 Vide Duran Kremer 2011b for the stylistic analysis of the different pavements.

9 The only fragment of the mosaic indicating the probable existence of mosaic compositions in these two rooms, was found right at the entrance from the peristyle to the room on the left of the entrance.



Figure 2
Reception room (© M. J. Duran Kremer).

Thus, the entrance from the outside to the public sector is clearly defined by a composition showing a shield of triangles in contrasting colours, such as bluish grey, red and yellow on a white background (Décor II: pl. 327b) (Fig. 3). The badly destroyed composition is delimited in carpet by a jagged line, alternating the colours grey and white, and by a row of grey tesserae. In the corners, a floral element on a white background.



Figure 3
Entrance panel (© M. J. Duran Kremer).

Clearly identified as a “carpet” and separated from the mosaic composition chosen for the peristyle, this composition introduces an element of movement directed at the peristyle and the main room, which was certainly already visible from that point.

Still at the entrance to the peristyle and therefore to the public sector of the *villa*, this carpet is followed by a composition in a simple diagonally laid grid, defined by lines of tangent spindles in yellow and red on a white background, the inner circle being composed of two lines in dark grey and light grey, with a smaller circle in grey with a red inscription, under a white background (Décor I: pl. 230b). This composition extends throughout the peristyle, in an *all over pattern*, without any interruption.

In the northern part of the peristyle (Fig. 4) the entrance to the two rooms is marked by a carpet which, in a very sensitive way, stands out from the surface composition chosen for the peristyle. Thus, although using the same compositional scheme, it uses colour as the distinguishing element: the circles and the *peltae* are made up exclusively of bluish grey, a colour also chosen for the delimitation of the carpet (Fig. 5).

Figure 4
The northern part of the peristyle
(© M. J. Duran Kremer).



Figure 5
Detail (© M. J. Duran Kremer).

The mosaics of the peristyle of the Roman *villa* of Abicada, in their capacity as “a hierarchical element of the domestic space” (Mañas Romero 2007: 93) do not establish a standing priority between the rooms which they give access to. The use of primary colours, in different shades, on a white background to create movement in a relatively simple geometric composition extending all over the surface, implies a decorative discourse based on both light (the white colour) and movement (reinforced by placing the lines of red and yellow spindles diagonally). Thus, the peristyle is conceived as a continuous space of circular orientation of the visitor around it, a “fluid” orientation conceived from and to the centre of the activity which this sector is destined for - the social and public aspect of domestic life - the reception room (Fig. 6).

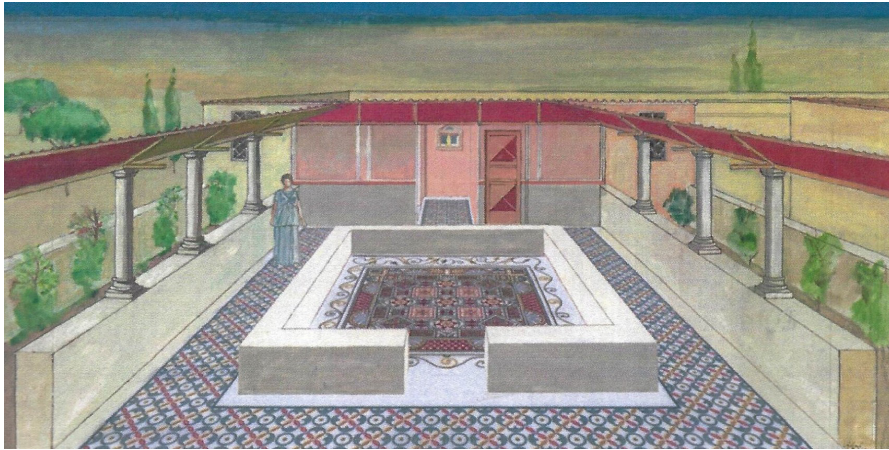


Figure 6
Proposal for the hypothetical aspect of the *pars urbana* (© Drawing of José de Sousa / Jorge Vidal)

An architectural discourse of this kind, supported and underscored by the decorative grammar of the chosen mosaic programme, defines in itself the personality of the contracting owner of the work: aware of the basic norms for the architectural division of the different sectors of daily life, although open to an unhindered social life, it separates social life completely from day-to-day life, for which it reserves an architectural part of the building, equally coherent with the principles of symmetry and axuality, open to the light of the South, with a mosaic floor decoration perhaps richer than that of the public sector.

In another *villa* in the south of Portugal we find the same concept of surface decoration in an atrium that assumes, here, the functions of domestic space planning intrinsic to the peristyle: we are referring to the *villa* of Pisões (Beja), also in *conventus pacensis* (Nunes Ribeiro 1972; Gorges 1979: 475; IPPAR 2000).

The Roman Villa of Pisões

Located about 7 km south of Beja, in Herdade da Argamassa, the Roman *villa* of Pisões is located about 200 m from a Roman dam on the river of the same name. The structures discovered until today would probably correspond to an *urban villa* and the baths of a *fundus*, which is estimated to have covered an area of 200 to 420 hectares and would certainly have extended north, south and east¹⁰ (Fig. 7). Most of the 40 rooms uncovered so far, as well as the two corridors are richly decorated with mosaic pavements with geometric and vegetal motifs, with two exceptions: the rooms EA and No. 4 of the *villa* plan published by IPPAR. Two exceptions of greater importance when considered in their interaction with the peristyle (Fig. 8).

When we analyse the plan of the *villa* of Pisões we find that, in principle, we are faced with two possibilities of identifying the main access to the *villa*: by a narrow corridor which, from the porticoed façade on the South side would lead to the peristyle or, as we defend, by the wide corridor to the North which ends on a wide scale, with 14 steps in grey marble. They lead directly to the vast vestibule adorned with a polychrome mosaic of great decorative richness. This vestibule, whose walls were lined with marble at the bottom and red and black plaster painting on a white background¹¹ at the top, opens onto the peristyle,

¹⁰ Not having been analysed in depth in the past, this archaeological site is today at the centre of an olive grove with intensive cultivation. It is unclear if and when it will be possible to continue the excavation work. See: Sardica 1971-75; Nunes Ribeiro 1972; Alarcão 1974: 111-112; Gorges 1979: 474-475; IPPAR 2000; Couto 2007).

¹¹ This type of wall panelling at the bottom of the wall, next to the ground, in grey marble, followed by

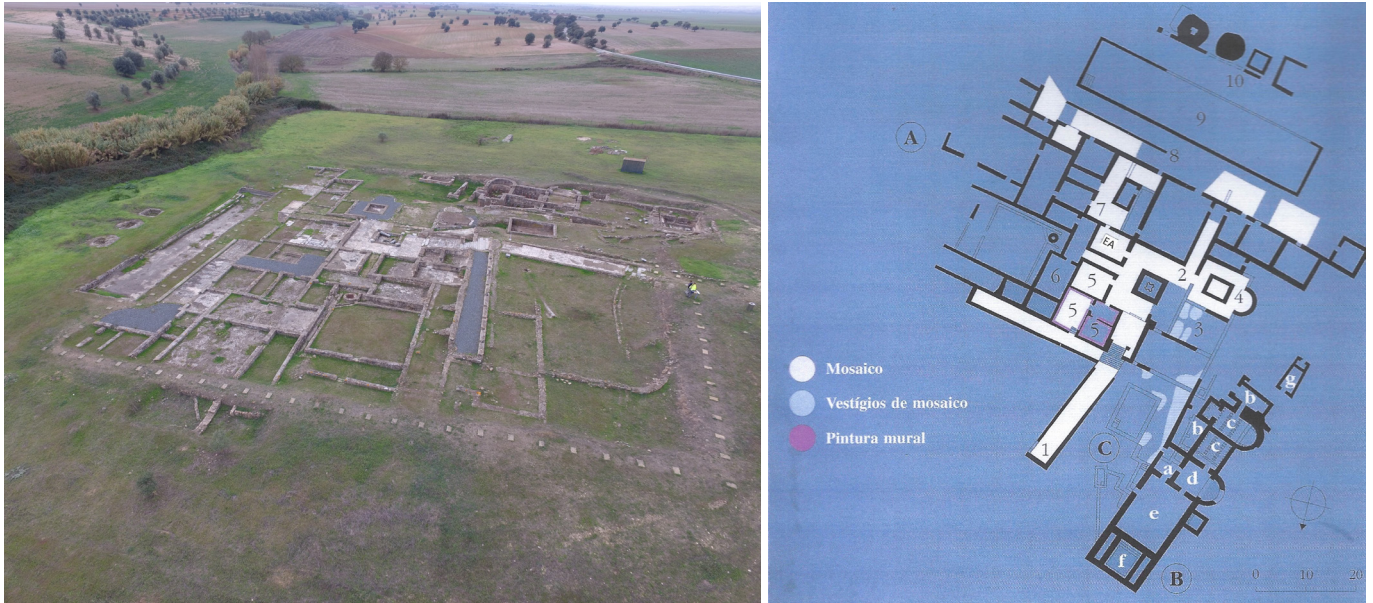


Figure 7
Pisões. Aerial view
(© Arrow4d – Consultores de Engenharia e Geofísica).

Figure 8
Pisões.
Plan of the roman *villa* (© IPPAR).

Figure 9
Entrance (© M. J. Duran Kremer)



from which it is separated by two steps, also in grey marble (Fig. 9).

The peristyle floor was decorated with a composition in a black and white bichrome *all over pattern*, in an outlined orthogonal pattern of irregular adjacent octagons and intersecting on the shorter sides forming squares and oblong hexagons (Décor I: pl.169a) (Fig. 10). The composition is delimited both by the pond and by the side walls by a wide band of white *tesserae* with a sinusoid line and serrated polychrome squares inscribed. Though being linear, the composition acquires a movement which is transmitted by the distribution of the different motifs filling the inscribed squares, forming a diagonal line from the inside - tank - to the outside.

Although the architecture of this *villa* cannot be characterized as a whole by

Painted stucco could be seen in many rooms of this *villa* at the end of the 70's, beginning of the 80's. In our frequent visits at the time, we still could see the existence of painted stucco walls, with the predominance of red, yellow and blue on a white background.



Figure 10
Mosaic of the peristyle
(© M. J. Duran Kremer).

symmetry and axially, there is no doubt that it was designed to be the most representative space of the taste and economic power of its owner. Thus, when we analyse the plan of the IPPAR, we find that - regardless of whether we place the entrance at the north or south façade of the building, the peristyle defines a horizontal axis parallel to both hypotheses: the east wing, with the entrance to rooms 5 and EA, with an intermediate corridor leading to the more interior rooms; and rooms 3 and 4, on the west wing, defined respectively as *tablinum* and *triclinium*. It is precisely in the EA room and in room 3 that we will find the discourse defining the social position of the owner: a landowner with possessions that would allow him to build a *villa* of considerable size and to a certain extent influenced by at least the mosaic art in Roman Africa and the type of decoration often prioritised by the large landowners and directly related to their economic activity: water, as a source of life and the seasons of the year (Duran Kremer 1998; idem) as an irrefutable testimony to the cycle of life, that repeats and renews itself eternally.

The mosaics that covered the floor of room 3, being in very poor condition, are no longer existent: We only know that they probably had a composition combining geometric and vegetal motifs, in black, red and pink on a white background (Nunes Ribeiro 1972: 30). In the centre of the room, we find a tank, “covered with marble and mosaic pavement of white background, with central fountain and hole of dumping” (idem) (Fig. 11), in a composition whose theme is also present in other *villae* of the considered territory.

For its part, the mosaic of the EA room - the mosaic of the seasons - is, until today, unique in its symbolism (Fig. 12): the use of water, flowers, fruits and, above all, birds give it a prominent place among the representations of the seasons of the year far beyond the borders of present-day Portugal. The fact that the composition includes the head of Medusa right after the entrance to this room, underlines the meaning that this room and the message of the pavement would assume in the axially with rooms 3 and 4. An axially closely linked to a peristyle where the floor, in its compositional simplicity, scheme and polychromy reduced to the use of two colours did not establish a hierarchy of architectural moments linked to other rooms.

The peristyle of the Casa de Cantaber in Conimbriga could possibly be assigned to this group.

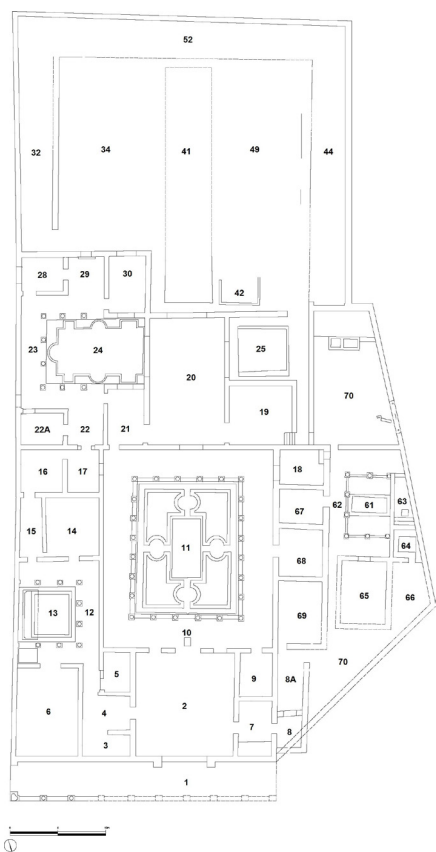
Figure 11
Mosaic of the tank in room 3
(© Cátia Mourão).



Figure 12
Mosaic of room EA
(© M. J. Duran Kremer).



Figure 13
Domus of Cantaber. Plan: V. H. Correia
© MMC-MN/DGPC.



The Domus of Cantaber

From the point of view of spatial planning of architectural structures, we are dealing with an urban peristyle house (Fig. 13). The vestibule, open from a portico façade and placed axially with the triclinium, was not only the obligatory point of passage for visitors and family members but also established a well-defined separation between the social and the family part of the house.

In fact, the access to the private sector of the house was made first by the vestibule, secondly by the North wing, next to the triclinium. From the highly damaged mosaic peristyle floor, some fragments of a polychrome composition of outlined lattice-pattern of adjacent hexagons and lozenges (creating the effect of adjacent and intersecting large irregular hexagons) can still be seen (Decor I: pl.213) (Fig. 14).

The information we have received - "The little that remains of the peristyle of Casa de Cantaber seems to be all of the same composition of hexagons, with only a few floral "rugs" dividing the wings" - allows a hypothetical reconstitution of a decorative syntax of the peristyle floor in an *all over pattern* with small elements



Figure 14
Mosaic. Detail
(D. Pavone © Mediaprimer / MMC-MN).

of separation between the wings and eventually leading to the entrances of the private sector. We would thus be faced with a variant of this group, using small plant elements to “cut the monotony” of a composition on an uninterrupted surface. This decorative principle would be consistent with the nearly complete isolation of the private sector allowing us to underline the only two connections between this sector and the peristyle. However, this hypothesis is merely speculation and a simple work proposal.

II. Composition of *All Over Pattern* Differentiated by Parallel Wings

The Roman Villa of Torre da Palma

It is also in the *conventus pacensis*, in the Roman *villa* of Torre da Palma, that we will find another decorative syntax in the floors covering the peristyle of the house of the same name - Pristyle House (Maloney - McNabb 2014: 36 – 63) - which would correspond to the *villa urbana* of the end of the 3rd century, the beginning of the 4th, when the whole domestic architecture of this *fundus* was profoundly remodelled and the manor house was built (Fig. 15). Discovered in 1947 and excavated by Manuel Heleno until 1956, this *villa* was the object of several archaeological interventions and of careful documentation and bibliography, which have already been published. Since this is not the purpose of the present analysis, we will not enter into a debate about the different construction stages of the various architectural structures of the *fundus*, nor of their dating and chronology¹².

According to Lancha (Corpus Portugal II: 39) the structures of the *pars urbana* as they are known today, would correspond to the last phase of occupation of

¹² For these see Corpus Portugal II (with previous Bibliography) and Maloney - McNabb 2014.

Figure 15
Torre da Palma.
Plan of the roman villa (© DRCA).



the *villa*. The peristyle, the organising element of the domestic space and around which the reception and living rooms were located, had a vast tank in the centre, surrounded by a garden (Maloney - McNabb 2014: 38) (Fig. 16). The peristyle wing floor was decorated with two polychrome compositions of geometric motifs on a white background (*all over pattern*), distributed over the parallel wings:

Figure 16
The peristyle of the Peristyle House.
(© M. J. Duran Kremer).



- the north and south wings have a composition in a variant of outlined grid-pattern of adjacent cushions and recumbent ellipses, forming irregular concave octagons (the axial sides the shorter) (D'Écor I: pl. 253e). Both pavements are badly damaged (Fig. 17);



Figure 17
The mosaic of the north and the south wings
(© M. J. Duran Kremer).

- the east and west wings show a composition in a variant of an orthogonal pattern of tangent crosses of interlaced scuta with concave ends, forming circles and lozenges (Décor I: pl. 153a) (Fig. 18).



Figure 18
The mosaic of the east and west wings
(© M. J. Duran Kremer).

Of great decorative and polychrome richness (pink, ochre, blue-grey, dark-grey, various shades of rose, cream-white, light red, orange-red, red, dark red), the compositions occupied the entire length of the wing they were decorating, without interconnection with the next wing, marking - despite the parallelism in the decorative dialogue - the passage from one sector reserved for the public life to another, probably used both for social and family life. Marked by a great richness of colours and secondary motifs integrated in the determining motifs of the two geometric schemes chosen, the decorative grammar of this peristyle does not establish a hierarchy of the rooms surrounding the peristyle. On the contrary, neutrality is established in relation to them: it is, for example, through the south wing that one has access to the service area - kitchen - situated near the *triclinium*.

III. Differentiated *All Over Pattern*

This type of decorative programme of these peristyle floors is characterised by an individualisation of the different wings of the peristyle using a differentiated *all over pattern* composition for each one. In this decorative system, the floor of each wing of the peristyle is the object of a very specific space - function - decoration dialogue. The two most remarkable examples of this group are in the *conventus scalabitanus* - in Conimbriga and Rabaçal.

The House of the Swastika Cross

In Conimbriga, the house of the Swastika Cross is, from the point of view of the architecture of private residences, relatively 'unimposing' (Fig. 19). Built on a relatively modest plot of land, it sees the triclinium and adjacent rooms placed axially at the main entrance, the private part and the service part of the house to the right and left of it.

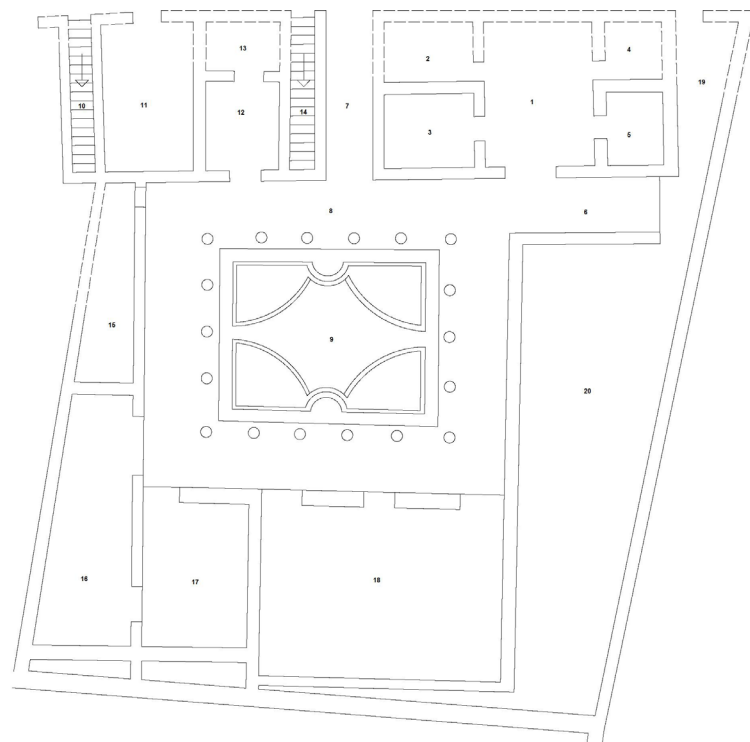


Figure 19
Domus of the Swastika Cross.
Plan: V. H. Correia
© MMC-MN/DGPC

At the same time, the iconographic programme of the floors of this house testifies to a careful reflection and a choice of decorative grammar based on the simplicity of complexity, using highly decorative themes but only partially - when the size and importance of the room justified it - including perspective as an element of decoration.

The peristyle mirrors this iconographic programme (Fig. 20): the *all over pattern* surface compositions (west wing - Décor I: pl.161b; east wing - Décor I: pl.213a; and south wing - Décor I: 205c) show schemes with motifs of a marked polychromy on a small scale, originating movement and perspective. The north wing highlights this effect, both in terms of colour, movement and perspective (Décor I: pl. 174b). As a whole, it is a coherent programme, an expression of the knowledge of the owner with regards to the meaning of colours as a vehicle of light and movement in a composition.



Figure 20
The peristyle (D. Pavone © Mediaprimer / MMC-MN).

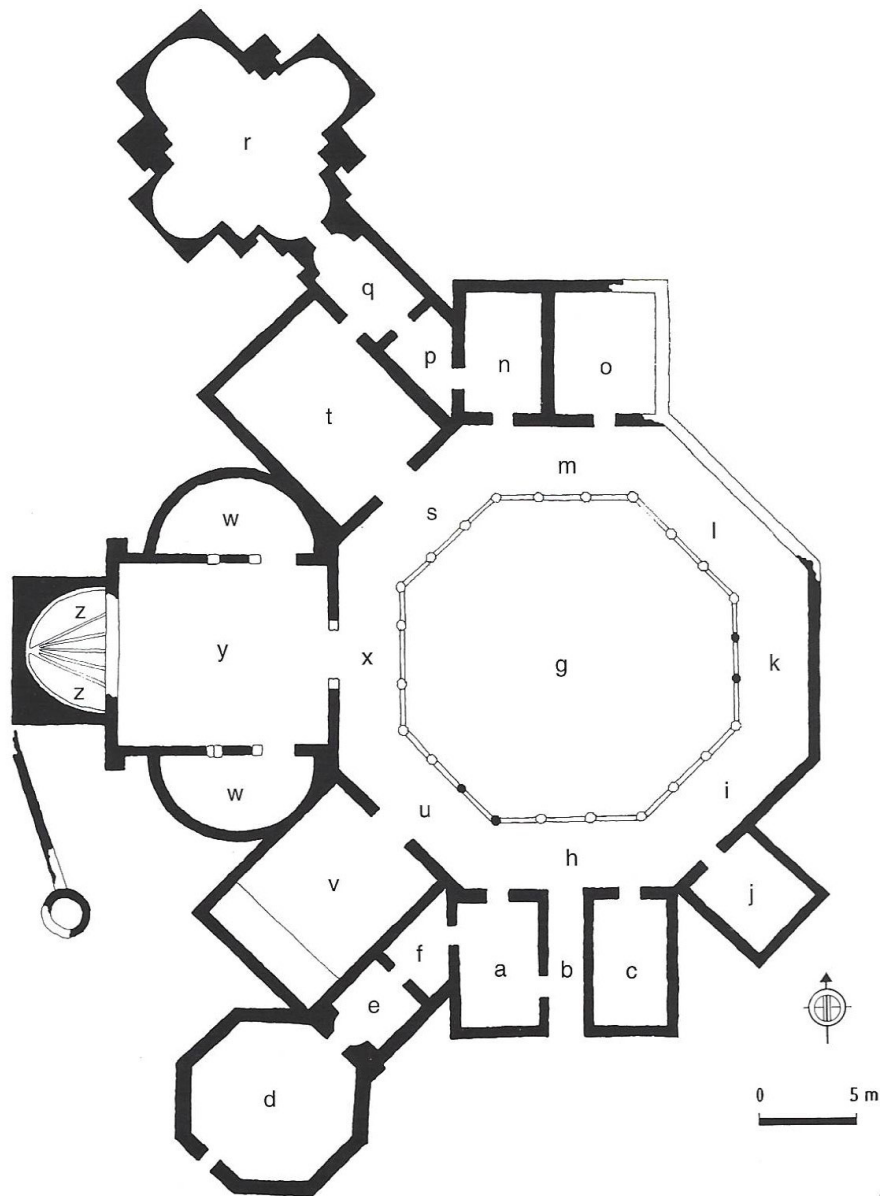
Another element testifies to the intrinsic significance of the compositions chosen for the floors of the different wings of the peristyle as a determining element of spatial planning and their direct relationship to the rooms for which they marked the entrance in a perspective of continuity: the mosaic composition of the east wing of the peristyle extends northwards beyond the perimeter of the peristyle itself, including room 1, from which the private part of the *villa* (rooms 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) could be accessed. At the height of room 5 - which would be closed to the peristyle, the composition ends and is continued by a simpler compositional bichrome pattern, in a grid of bands with a square at the intersections, the colours counterchanged (variant of Décor I: pl. 143).

The Roman Villa of Rabaçal

The second example of this type of *all over pattern* composition comes from the Roman *villa* of Rabaçal (Fig. 21).

When Roman remains were discovered at the beginning of the 20th century, it was only in 1984 that the first surveys were carried out on the ground as part of an archaeological research programme. Launched by Miguel Pessoa, the work of

Figure 21
Rabaçal. Plan of the roman *villa*
(© José Luís Madeira, *Mosaicos de Conimbriga* 2005).



discovery and investigation of this exceptional *villa* has continued to the present day and an exhaustive study of Roman architecture and mosaics discovered so far has been published (Pessoa: 2017). We will thus limit ourselves to the analysis of the decorative programme of the peristyle as an ordering and hierarchizing element of the domestic space.¹³

The peristyle of the *villa* of Rabaçal differs in its layout from the classic, Vitruvian, rectangular peristyle, “one third longer than wide” (Maciel 2006: 229 VI. 7). On the contrary, we find here an octagonal peristyle, with corridors of slightly approximate dimensions. The symmetrical arrangement of the different uncovered structures allows us to assume an overall symmetry of all the rooms surrounding the peristyle. The recovery work of this *villa* and its mosaics has brought to us, even though fragmented, the mosaic compositions of the peristyle with geometric *all over pattern* motifs of the corridors k, i, h, g, s, as well as the figurative composition x.

¹³ We will not go into the stylistic analysis of the floors: studied and analysed down to the last detail by the head of this archaeological station, Miguel Pessoa, it was published in 2017 in the *Corpus dos Mosaicos Romanos de Portugal*. We will also not address the theme or style of the mosaics, very rich, found in several rooms of this *villa*.

The analysis of the iconographic programme of this peristyle could allow its classification either in the group of peristyles with all-over pattern panels or geometric or figurative carpets - or both. However, it should be stressed that, with the exception of mosaic x, we are faced with two unique geometric compositions: that of the corridors i, k, h, u, with small variations in the number of motifs represented due to the adaptation of the composition to the dimensions of the surface to be decorated (Décor I: pl. 135a) and those of the wings s, m and l (variety of Décor I: 169) (Fig. 22). The pavement of the corridors h and m, situated on the axis which, crossing the peristyle, connects the entrance to the rooms n and o, still has a swastika-meander strip with single returns in reciprocal opposition. From a strong polychromy and linearity, they all “lead” the visitor to the west corridor and to the x mosaic, gateway so to speak to the most important representation sector of the whole *villa*: “We attribute (to this architectural space, note of the author) the specific function of *triclinium*, noble hall for banquets and large receptions, taking into account the fact, that it presents itself as the largest room of the residence, endowed with three apsis (spaces available in case the number of guests makes its use necessary) and gather the most elaborate architectural decoration” (Pessoa 2017: 270 II. 5 .1.3). The various compositions are separated by irregular lozenges, necessary to fill in the free spaces left by the rectangular wings between them.

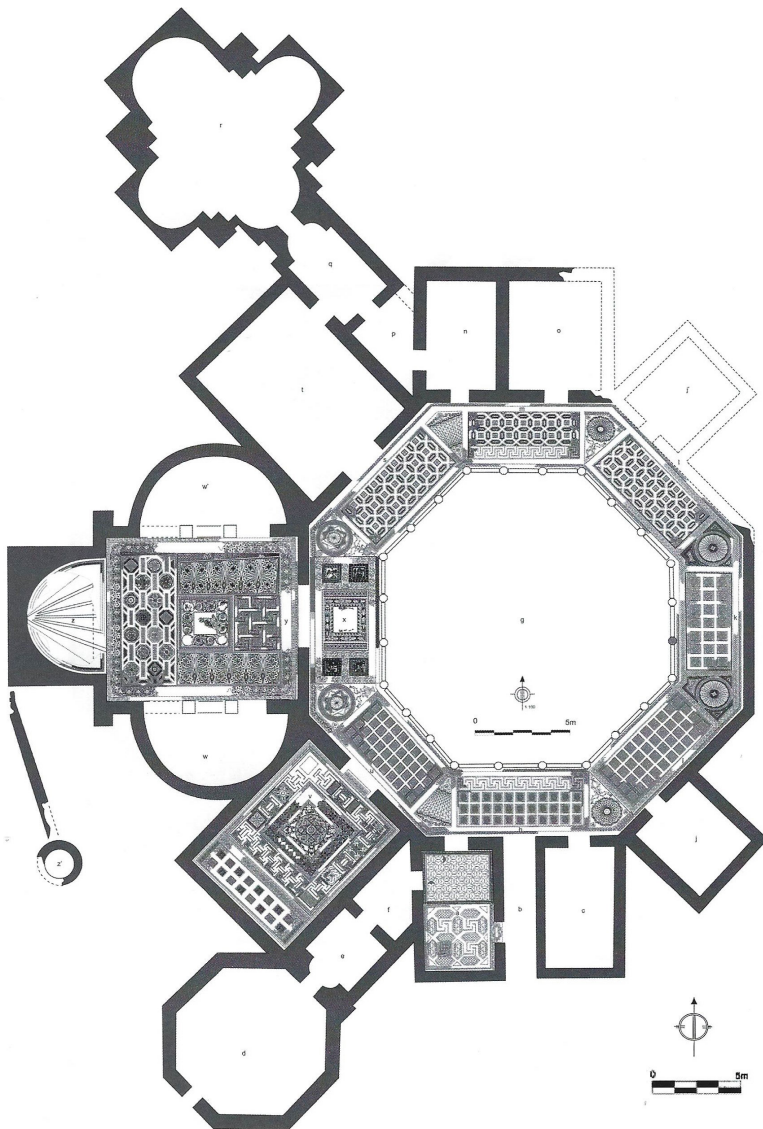
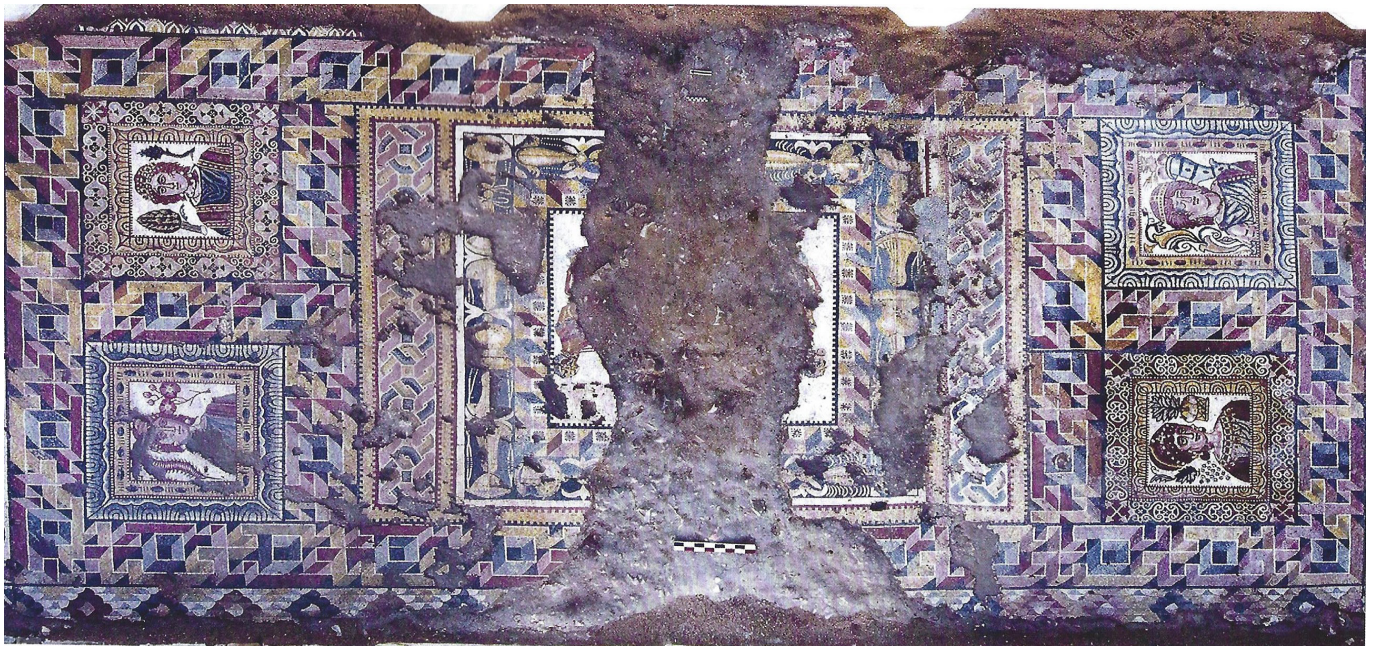


Figure 22
Graphic reconstitution of the composition and motifs of the mosaics. Drawing: © José Luís Madeira. Digital print: © Daniel Pinto.

The decorative grammar of mosaic x was designed to unequivocally underline the cultural level and the economic and social power of the owner of the *villa*, as a clear introduction to perhaps the richest decorated space in the entire *villa*: the *triconch room* (Fig. 23). It does not only show a very careful technical execution, but also a clear allusion to oriental or orientalisng models chosen for the figures of the seasons of the year, introduced in an orthogonal polychrome pattern of spaced three-dimensional swastika-meanders with single returns, the spaces staggered and containing a square, in lateral perspective (D cor I: 305 pl. 193f) in profusely decorated frames. In the centre of the composition, a panel with probably a representation of a quadriga (see Pessoa 2017: 268-309).

Figure 23
The mosaic x, west wing of the peristyle
(  Francisco Pedro).



IV. Composition by Differentiated Carpets

Although we have not yet found a decorative programme based exclusively on a floor-mosaic dialogue without perceptible reciprocal interaction in peristyles of *villae* in the considered territory, we still have to take into consideration this form of artistic-cultural expression.

An example of this type of discourse can be seen in the west wing of the peristyle of the House of the Water Fountains (Casa dos Repuxos) in Conimbriga.

The House of the Water Fountains – west wing

Discovered in 1907 when farm work on the site unearthed - as it so often did in the past and still does today! - the remains of a building with columns, mosaics, plumbing, “swimming pools or tanks”, etc. (Corpus Portugal I: 9)¹⁴.

The mosaic floors covering the different wings of the peristyle of the House of the Water Fountains, no matter how badly destroyed, could lead to the classification of this iconographic programme as a variant belonging to group II - Composition *all over pattern* differentiated by parallel wings (Fig. 24). In fact, the North

¹⁴ This *domus* was the subject of the first volume of the Corpus dos Mosaicos Romanos de Portugal and, since then, of numerous studies and scientific publications, so we will not focus on architecture, chronology or even the stylistic or motif analysis of peristyle floors or others.

and South wings have the same decorative grammar (although enriched with figurative medallions next to the entrances to the rooms that surrounded it) which - applying the principle of symmetry between opposite wings - would allow to assume that the floor of the West and East wings present the same compositional system.

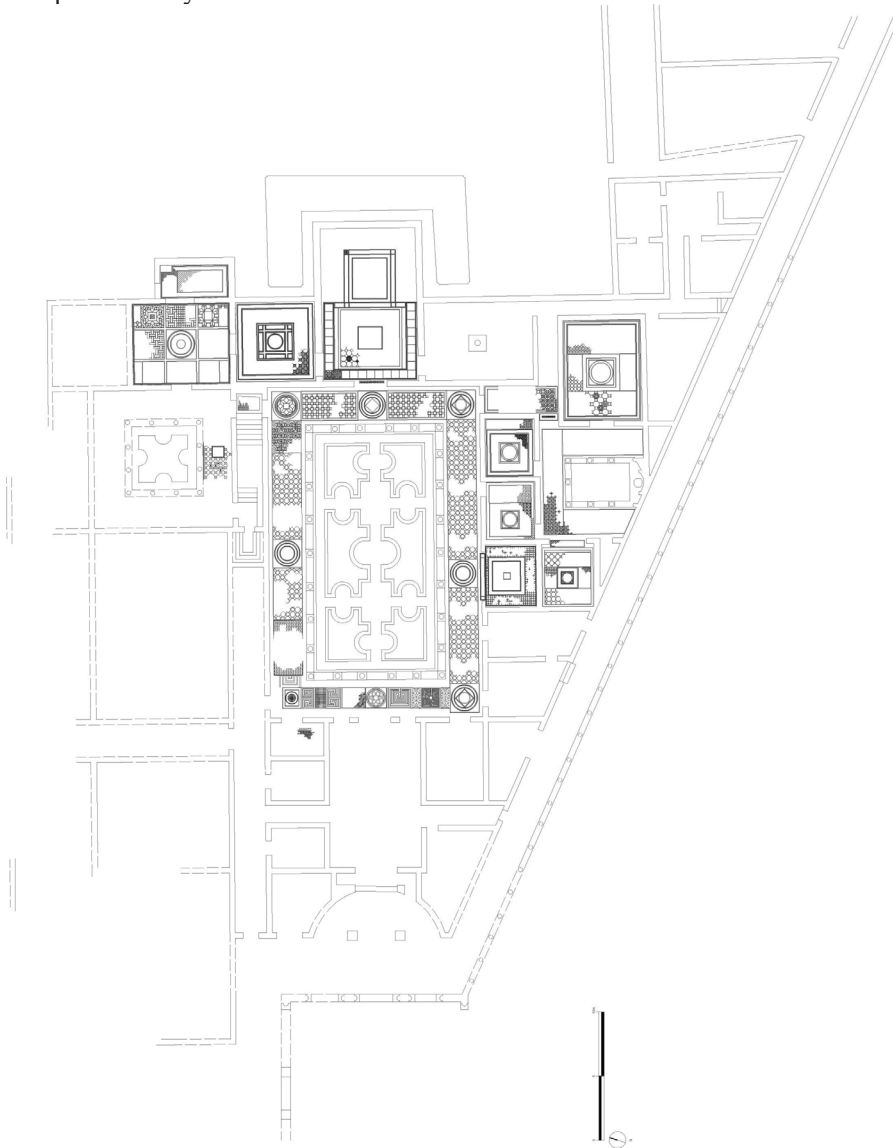


Figure 24
Domus of the water fountains.
 Plan: V. H. Correia © MMC-MN/DGPC.

However, the current west wing presents a totally different decorative principle (Fig. 25): most probably due to a need for floor renovation (all wings show numerous restorations in their compositions, made over the centuries with more or less skill of the craftsmen), it mirrors a radical change in decorative discourse.

Thus, the surface to be decorated is divided into panels of different dimensions and motifs. Starting from the meeting point of the North and West wings, there is a clear iconographic and even mythological division of the chosen themes: half-recumbent double-latchkey meander (Décor I: pl. 37), checkered (Décor I: pl. 8b), irregular geometric composition with chevrons, squares, rhombuses, expressed in a strong and not always very harmonious polychromy (Décor I: pl. 119g). It is followed by a medallion with an inscribed circle and filled by intercrossed “eights” and, in the outer corners of the circle, stylised ivy leaves coming out of a kantharos.

Figure 25
 Peristyle. West wing
 (© M. J. Duran Kremer).



This rug is located right in front of the main entrance of the atrium to the peristyle. It is followed by a carpet with the representation of a polychrome labyrinth in a simple rope pattern, a separation carpet with a line of inverted *peltae* as delimitation and a central line of triangles and filled circles. This composition is repeated after the last carpet, whose composition takes up the motif of the labyrinth, enriched with the representation of the head of the minotaur in the centre. The two medallions at the ends of the wing still belong respectively to the composition of the North and South wings, as can be seen from the delimitation strips of the composition near the wall and the garden.

The dichotomy between the exclusively geometric decoration of the north-western part of this wing and the south-western part, loaded with mythological symbolism, makes us recognize a clear intervention of the owner in the choice of the decorative syntax of this wing.

V. Composite Composition

The last group that we identified in the analysis of the iconographic programmes chosen for the mosaics of the peristyle floors is perhaps the most complex and difficult to define.

In fact, we have gathered in this group those peristyles, whose mosaic floors have characteristics common to different previously defined groups. So, when we talk about an *all over pattern* composition, which almost always shows a geometric scheme, with inserted medallions - be they vegetal, figurative - alluding to a certain mythology or not - or even geometric, are we faced with a variant of the unique composition in surface or *all over pattern*? Or are we faced with a composition made up by differentiated carpets? And how to interpret the presence of two different semantic fields in the same peristyle?

For the present work of typologizing the peristyle floors, which is an essential element in the architectural planning of the Roman *domus* or *villa*, and given the different combinations of possible iconographic programmes, we have included the studied peristyles of the House of the Water Fountains (east wing, north and south, seen in conjunction with the west wing) treated as an example in the previous group, the House of the Medusa (Casa da Medusa, Alter-do-Chão) and the Roman *villa* of Torres Novas - better known as *villa cardilio* in this group.

The House of the Water Fountains

The peristyle floors of this house, as they can still be seen today, are defined by two distinct decoration programmes: that of surface decoration (south wing, east wing and north wing) and that of carpet decoration (west wing, treated above). If, on the one hand, the chronological factor plays an important role in the choice of decorative programmes, this is always the result of a deliberate decision by the owner. Thus, when renovating the floor of the west wing of this domus, the owner could have chosen - had he so wished - a decorative discourse similar to that existing in the other wings. He did not do so and introduced another type of semantic reflection into this architectural structure. Hence the correct inclusion of the House of the Water Fountains in this group.

As regards the east, south and north wings, they probably constitute a variation of the *all over pattern* composition differentiated by parallel wings: in these cases, we are dealing with a surface composition, in which panels, indicating the entrance to the rooms around the peristyle, were introduced, and were certainly intended to underline the cultural richness and the social and public activities of the owner.

The south and the north wings (Fig. 26) would have hosted a diagonal grid composition of outlined bands, with a lozenge inscribed in the rectangles and a posed square in the intersection, forming cruciform compartments (variant of Décor I: 146b), decorated with vegetal motifs. Probably due to a necessary restoration of the pavement in the northeast, the north wing shows a lattice-pattern carpet of biconvex adjacent scales in four colours (variant of Décor I: 218c). The east wing has the same decorative scheme, but led orthogonally (Fig. 27).

Figure 26
Peristyle. North wing
(© M. J. Duran Kremer).

Figure 27
Peristyle. East wing
(© M. J. Duran Kremer).



Unlike in the west wing, the decorative programme of these three wings is based on an active discourse between the pavement and the adjacent rooms: the visitor is led to them by a unified composition, in a richness of motifs, that uses polychromy to underline the movement and the direction to follow. The movement is only interrupted in front of the access door to each of the most important rooms in each wing by a figured tondo.

The fact that they show a clear allusion to mythological scenes, combined with the fact that these representations are framed by a cyrillic frame without edges, underlines the welcoming gesture of the owner to his visitors, leading into the rooms they point to¹⁵.

¹⁵ In this article we are not going to address the scenes represented in the tondos, which have been largely destroyed. See *Corpus Portugal I*: 32-80; Correia 2013: 290-309.

The House of Medusa

Located in Alter-do-Chão - the *Roman Abelterium*, the House of Medusa is, so to speak, the best example for the existence of a very cultured and economically powerful elite in the territory taken into consideration, settled in the most western region of Lusitania.

When, in 1954, the first mosaic was uncovered by Bairrão Oleiro, one could not imagine the true mosaic treasure hidden beneath the earth. Although the excavations of António Brazão, in 1980 and 1982, had brought to light several other mosaic floors, it was Jorge António, archaeologist of the municipality of Alter-do-Chão, who unearthed what is now considered to be not only the most beautiful figurative mosaic in Portugal, but also the ultimate proof of the influence of Eastern mosaic tradition in the westernmost part of the Roman Empire¹⁶.

The most updated plan of the Casa da Medusa shows us the part of the structures corresponding to the wings of the peristyle and the atrium, that have already been excavated, as well as the rooms distributed around them. Among them is a large apsidal room (37) (Fig. 28).

Figure 28
Alter-do-Chão: Casa da Medusa.
Plan: ©Jorge António,
drawing: ©Hermínia Santos.

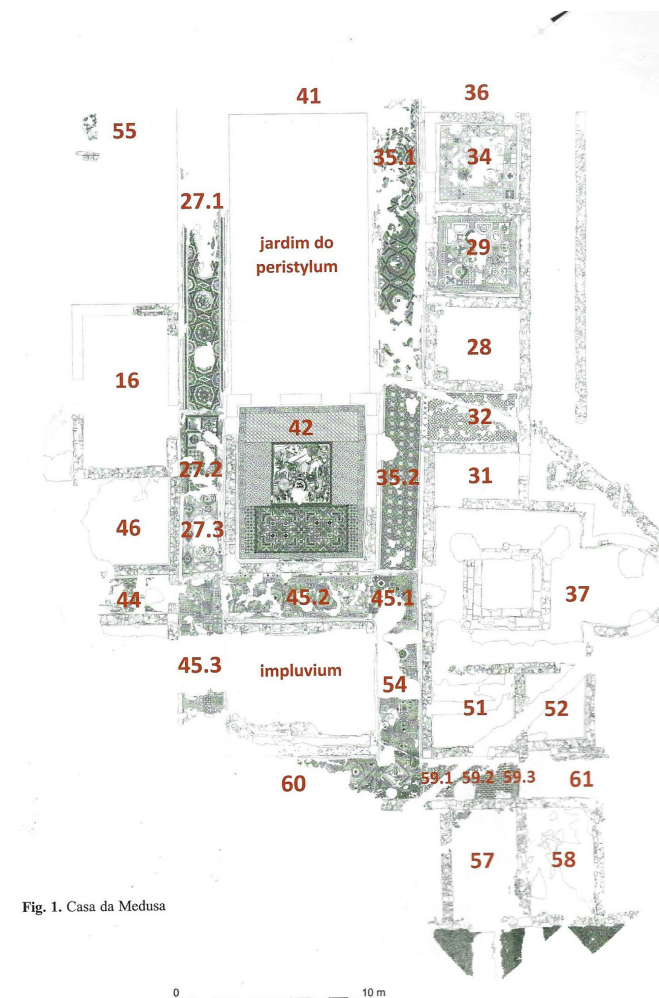


Fig. 1. Casa da Medusa

¹⁶ The mosaics of this *domus* are currently the subject of the doctoral thesis of our colleague Jorge António, so that we will only deal with the geometric mosaics of peristyle, already published by him, as they are an example of this architecture-mosaic dialogue. Similarly, we will not address issues related to the dating of mosaics. The illustration and plan we have used here has already been published by our colleague (António 2017).

According to this plan, the Casa da Medusa is a classic Roman house, with an atrium and peristyle, around which the most representative and ostentatious rooms, showing its owner's wealth would be concentrated. In the centre of the peristyle, and similarly to the architectural discourse followed in the Roman *villa* of Abicada, is the reception room /triclinium, with the image of Alexander and the battle of Idaspes.

The analysis of the mosaics that decorate the surface of the peristyle to date excavated, shows that we are faced with a complex decorative programme: while in the North wing we will find two geometric compositions (35.1 and 35.2), in an *all over pattern* that is not interrupted in the access to the rooms that surround it, the South wing contemplates a geometric surface composition (27.1) and two carpets (27.2 and 27.3). For its part, the atrium has four geometric *all over pattern* compositions in its 4 wings, the west wing being common to the peristyle (45.2).

It is not up to us here and now, to try to interpret the architectural layout of the existing structures: in due course, the responsible archaeologist will, when in possession of all the data already obtained and those he will obtain in future campaigns, give answers to all the open questions: what is there in the “peristyle garden” space? Where and how would it end? What is the decorative grammar chosen for (41)? Why are there two carpets (27,2 and 27,3)? What we can conclude, is the fact, that the whole programme obeyed a clear vision of the spatial planning role which, also in the House of Medusa, was attributed to the peristyle and the mosaics that adorned it. A possible example is the carpet 45.1, which is inscribed between two *all over pattern* compositions (35.2 and 54), with the specific purpose of marking the entrance to the apsidal room (37).

The Roman Villa of Torres Novas – villa cardilio

Known for its existence in Casal de Santo Antoninho da Caveira (Torres Novas) since 1932, it was in 1936 that work on the site brought to light a mosaic floor that covered the floor of a square room of 7 metres in side: it was a geometric mosaic of the white-black type, with a polychrome central carpet¹⁷. After the responsible authorities had been alerted, the site was immediately visited by Manuel Heleno, director of the Lisbon Ethnographic Museum (the current National Museum of Archaeology), who took over the excavation and publication of the findings. In the course of the works, a second, unidentified mosaic was found, the most complete description of it dating from 1959: “In Santo António da Caveira, in the same place where the aforementioned mosaic appeared, Prof. Manuel Heleno gave us the news of another mosaic found on 9 May 1938, south of the previous one and 10 m away. It must have belonged to a hypocaustum because the characteristic arches appeared. The mosaic was on a pavement to which three steps went down. The part exposed when Prof. Manuel Heleno visited was polychromic, with white, yellow and red *tesserae*. It was the geometric type with concentric circles, squares and other fantasy decorations”¹⁸. The floors were recovered with earth, recommending the owner of the land not to touch the site. However, years went by without any follow-up work, so that the existing structures were razed to the ground and the site was used as a quarry by the inhabitants of the region.

In 1963 and 1964 two excavation campaigns were carried out at the site and all

¹⁷ This is the mosaic designated by the letter H in Afonso do Paço's plan.

¹⁸ Sá 1959: Appendix. It is important to underline the undoing of the dates pointed out for the discovery of the second mosaic.

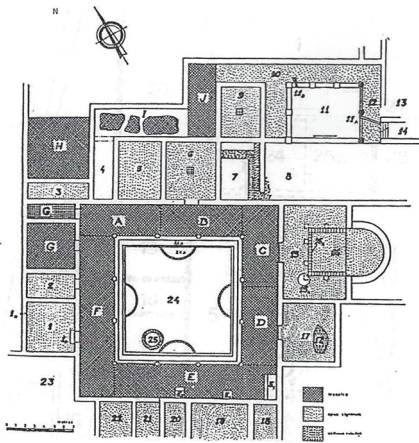


Figure 29
Torres Novas: *villa cardilio*. Plan.
@ Afonso do Paço (in Duran Kremer 1999:
plan 1).

the mosaics known today, were unearthed (Fig. 29): the discovery of the panel with the inscription *VIVENTES CARDILIUM ET AVITAM FELIX TURRE* made this archaeological station known as the *villa Cardilio*. In 1968 the death of Afonso do Paço put an end to the works and the *villa* fell back into oblivion. In 1979 the City Hall of Torres Novas decided to re-launch the works, contacting the Institute of Archaeology of the Faculty of Coimbra. Under the technical direction of Dr António João Nunes Monteiro and with the support of Prof. Dr Jorge de Alarcão several campaigns of excavation of the *villa* were carried out (from 1980 to 1984, 1985), extending the prospecting area to the west and south, which allowed the discovery of *pars rustica* of the *villa*.¹⁹ Afterwards, apart from a few case - by - case works, no more excavation work was carried out on the Roman *villa* of Torres Novas. Since then, this archaeological site has been the object of preservation measures and opened to the general public. The peristyle mosaics are still in situ (with the exception of the west wing mosaic, removed in the 1980s) and covered with sand²⁰.

The non-publication so far of a detailed study of the different phases of occupation of this *villa* and the resulting architectural changes has limited in the past and still limits our observations regarding the currently visible structures. Thus, it can be seen that the rooms of this *villa* are distributed in two different levels, the lower level - housing the peristyle and directly adjacent rooms - being probably reserved for the social and public activities of the owner, while the private sector would be concentrated around the patio, whose access from the peristyle would be through the corridors (4), I and J. In the southeast corner of the peristyle, there is still a staircase leading to the upper-level compartments, all of which have *opus signinum* flooring. In the east corner of the patio, we find three steps leading to at least one room on the upper level, also with *opus signinum* flooring.

The peristyle mosaics, polychrome and of geometric scheme, occupy an area of 240 m² and constitute the most elucidative example of a coherent iconographic programme in a composite composition.

In fact, the plan of the *villa* shows us a regular square peristyle, around which several rooms are distributed in the north, east and west wing. In the south wing the compartments visible today are at a higher level. The entrance to the peristyle, from a portico located in the existing façade on the west side (Duran Kremer 1999: 11-12 figs. 32 -34), was through room G, where one can find the most programmatic mosaic of all those found until today and which, besides mentioning the names of the possible owners, makes a stylised reference to the seasons of the year, due to the iconographic programme chosen for them (Duran Kremer 1999: 98-121; 2011: 189 -202).

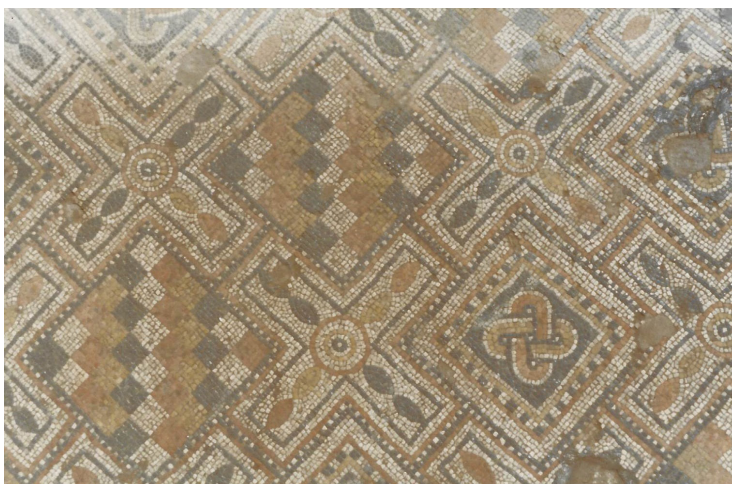
On the axis of it we find an apsidal room of remarkable dimensions and a central tank surrounded by a *porticus* supported by 6 columns. The floor of the *porticus*, the apsis and the tank are in *opus signinum*, the centre of it being marked by brick slabs. Still in situ the water drains of the pond, in marble. Next to this room, to the south, a room of considerable dimensions, also with pavement in *opus signinum*.

19 Agricultural work of greater depth on the land 400 m south of the already discovered structures brought to light materials that proved the existence of a building. In 1985 the land was excavated and located in the *pars rustica* of the *villa Cardilio*. According to the report published in *Informação arqueológica* 7, Lisboa 1986, these p.79-80 "...there was collected a lot of rubble, fundamentally ceramic, which attests to a continuity of occupation from the middle of the 1st to the end of the 4th century".

20 The study of these mosaics was the subject of the PhD thesis of the author (Duran Kremer 1999). See Duran Kremer 2011a, idem 2008.

The peristyle mosaics mirror the order pre-established by the owner for access to the different parts of the house, as well as their hierarchy, by choosing an individual geometric decoration with clearly delimited carpets, centred on each of the rooms in the North and East wings. With them, he defines the access path to the rooms destined for his “public” life (Figs. 30-33); on the contrary, the floors of the West and South wings are made in *all over pattern*, and surely conceived as the corridors doing access to the rooms on the upper level (Figs. 34-35).

Figures 30-35
Peristyle. Panel A-B-C-D-E-F
(© M. J. Duran Kremer).



All peristyle floors were executed with quality and expertise. Very rich in their polychromies, they play with the movement introduced by the different geometric schemes, combined with the palette of colours used and alternately placed orthogonally or diagonally. In all of them there is a linear view of the composition, without perspectivation of the different motifs.

Due to the clarity of the architectural layout of the open structures, the Roman *villa* of Torres Novas can, in our view, be considered the best example of a very clear conception of the role of the peristyle as an ordering element of the domestic space, differentiating the different sectors - public and private - of which it is composed, using a complex but very clear, decorative discourse.

Conclusion

The analysis of the peristyles of *villae* and *domus* which, for this purpose, we considered representative for a typologisation of the decorative discourses followed by the owners when choosing the iconographic programmes, they wanted to see portrayed in what is the central point of public and family life, from where and to where everything converged, showed us that we can reduce the different types of discourse to five main groups of decorative grammar:

- I. Composition in *all over pattern*
- II. Composition of *all over pattern* differentiated by parallel wings
- III. Differentiated *all over pattern*
- IV. Composition by differentiated carpets
- V. Composite composition

The analysis of each of them, together with the study of other determining elements - architecture, mural decoration, statuary, ceramics, coins - certainly contributes to a better individualisation of the socio-economic and cultural stratum which the owner belonged to.

However, the meaning of the peristyle cannot be underestimated as “the structural nucleus with the greatest impact on the Spanish-Roman *villa*” having been “at a later Roman time systematically conforming to the central nucleus of the residential *villa*” (Fernandez-Castro 1982: 273). It is an element that organizes the domestic space, it is a pivotal point between the representation rooms, destined to the public facet of daily life and the rooms destined for the private and family life of the owner and his family.

The discourse architecture – functionality, is underlined by the decorative grammar chosen for the paving of the peristyle and by the type of arrangement of this same decoration in the space to be decorated. When trying to identify the most marked types that this choice can assume, we must bear in mind the fact that “Roman domestic architecture is a privileged vehicle of conscious transmission, on the part of the owners, of a set of values assumed as their own and recognised as positive” (Correia 2013: 249), and that “Roman life, especially that of the elite, is a deeply “theatricalised” life, turned outwards, towards its peers, towards its dependents, towards those higher up on the social scale, towards “the others”, in short” (Correia 2013: 250).

In other words: the choice of the semantic discourse in which he wanted to see this first image of himself given to the visitor when he entered his home is very much linked to the social and economic position he enjoyed, the respect he wanted to receive both from his peers and from his economic and subordinate interlocutors

- in short, from others. At the same time, he defined by this decorative program his vision of the contact he wanted to cultivate with visitors, friends, customers: from an uninterrupted one - through a decoration without “visible limits” - all over pattern - until the clear delimitation of the accesses to the reception and reception rooms, through the decoration by differentiated panels or carpets.

The choice of the decorative grammar for each surface, with a geometric structure more or less complex, with the use of more or less filling motifs, with the use of a more or less rich polychromy and the light captured by the different colours, the possible inclusion already in this space of figurative motifs sometimes linked to mythology corresponds to a very personal vision of the *villa* owner. Being so, the choice of the type of decorative discourse for the peristyle - the first moment of communication and reception of the message from the outside - by the owner is, per se, an identifying factor of the fundamental values valid for him, and which - with his choice – he fixes indelibly in stone for himself and for future generations.

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