

Architectural Structure, Mural Painting and Mosaics. About the Roman Villa of Almenara de Adaja-Puras (Valladolid, Spain)

Almenara de Adaja-Puras (Valladolid, İspanya) Roma Villası Üzerine: Mimari Yapı, Duvar Resimleri ve Mozaikler

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Abstract

Across the Douro Basin, in Spain, there are a number of remarkable uillae that have been documented both for their magnificent architecture and for the beauty of their mosaics. The Roman Villa of Almenara de Adaja-Puras, in the province of Valladolid, is one of them. Discovered and partially excavated in the first half of the 20th century, it was not until the beginning of the following century that it was completely excavated and, therefore, its decorative designs for floors and walls were uncovered.

The most notable features are the good state of preservation of the mosaic floors -all of them are almost entirely preserved-, their distribution throughout the house, the presence of other types of flooring -opus signinum and mortar-, and also, the existence of a notable group of mural paintings, some of them preserved in situ, while others recovered from debris on pavements. Based on all these remains, the functionality of each room in the house is analysed in its entirety, taking into account the type of floor, the decorative content of the mosaics and the painted decoration of the walls. Finally, markings on the mosaics provide evidence of the internal circulation in the house.


Keywords: Roman villa, Roman mosaic, Roman mural painting, decorative program.

Öz

Douro Havzası boyunca, İspanya'da, hem görkemli mimarileri hem de mozaiklerinin güzelliğiyle belgelenmiş çok sayıda dikkat çekici villa bulunmaktadır. Valladolid kenti sınırlarındaki Almenara de Adaja-Puras Roma Villası da bunlardan biridir. 20. yüzyılın ilk yarısında keşfedilip kısmen kazılan yapı, ancak bir sonraki yüzyılın başında tamamen kazılmış ve böylece hem zemin hem de duvarlardaki dekoratif tasarımlar açığa çıkarılmıştır.

En dikkat çekici özellikler arasında, mozaik döşemelerin iyi korunmuş olması –hemen hepsi neredeyse bütünüyle günümüze ulaşmıştır–, ev içerisindeki dağılımları, başka tür döşemelerin varlığı (opus signinum ve harç), ayrıca dikkate değer bir duvar resmi grubunun bulunması sayılabilir; bunların bir kısmı yerinde (in situ) korunmuş, bir kısmı ise döşemeler üzerinde döküntülerden toplanarak kurtarılmıştır. Bu kalıntılardan yola çıkarak, her bir odanın işlevi; döşeme türü, mozaiklerin dekoratif içeriği ve duvarların boyalı süslemeleri birlikte değerlendirilerek bütüncül bir biçimde analiz edilmiştir. Son olarak mozaikler üzerindeki işaretler, ev içindeki dolaşım düzenine ilişkin kanıt sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Roma villası, Roma mozaiği, Roma duvar resmi, dekoratif program.

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1. The La Calzadilla Site

The Roman Villa of La Calzadilla, or Roman Villa of Almenara de Adajapurás as it is more commonly known, is located in the south of the province of Valladolid (Spain), just 60 km from the provincial capital (Fig. 1). The site was declared a BIC¹ in 1994 and since 2003 the *pars urbana* has been part of the Roman Villas Museum (MVR), an important cultural tourism centre promoted by the Valladolid Provincial Council and whose objective is to publicise this unique element of our Cultural Heritage (Diputación de Valladolid, n. d. <https://www.provinciadevalladolid.com/-/museo-de-las-villas-romanas-2>). Two prizes (AR&PA 2004 Regional Prize and Europa Nostra 2004 Medal Award) have been awarded in recognition of its comprehensive conservation and management plan, and the excellent work done to publicise this Asset of Cultural Interest. The project for the creation of this museum was made possible thanks to the close collaboration between the provincial institution and the University of Valladolid (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2015: 19-25).

Although the villa was discovered accidentally in 1887, it was not until the beginning of the 1940s when G. Nieto excavated much of a building with mosaic floors and paintings on the walls. Despite his firm intention to continue the excavations, it was not until 1969 that the work was given a new impetus. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, conservation work was carried out on the tessellated pavements and new excavations; thanks to all of them, most of the residential part of a villa and some agricultural units were uncovered. The site thus revealed a great heritage potential displayed by its mosaics, such as a spectacular one with the image of Pegasus, and the exceptionally well-preserved wall paintings. Nevertheless, throughout those years, the degradation of the building was also evident due to its exposure to the elements. The turning point of this issue was the enhancement interventions (including an enclosure) that led to the creation of the MVR and the development of a complete research project for which C. García Merino (University of Valladolid) and the author of this article were responsible (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2015: 25-28).

Currently, the task continues, enriching the information obtained from the excavations of the period 1998-2002 with new ones developed until 2019.

Thanks to all these excavations, it is known that the place where the villa is located offers a wide sequence of occupation that goes back to prehistoric times. Referring only to the historical period, it should be noted that a small rural habitat has been identified that emerged in the late Augustan period and remained inhabited during the second century (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2015: 68-69; Quintana López - Sánchez-Simón 2018: 207-214). The occupation continued in to the third century; the evidence of those dates corresponds to a *pars urbana* and several rustic buildings of a villa. In the mid-fourth century, these structures from the third century were demolished and a new *pars urbana* was built to which, subsequently, a pair of long and narrow buildings were attached (Fig. 2). This late palace and the attached agricultural facilities were in use until approximately the middle of the fifth century, when it was unoccupied without any documented evidence of reuse of the property for production or other purposes. It was at that time when a series of production facilities were arranged next to the palace that survived until the second half of that same century. The last serfs who occupied these rural constructions were buried in

¹ BIC stands for “Bien de Interés Cultural”, i. e. “Cultural Interest Asset”, a category of the cultural heritage registers in Spain.

a small necropolis, with just 10 tombs, located about 200 m north of the villa (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2015: 69-73; 2017: 175-183; 2020).

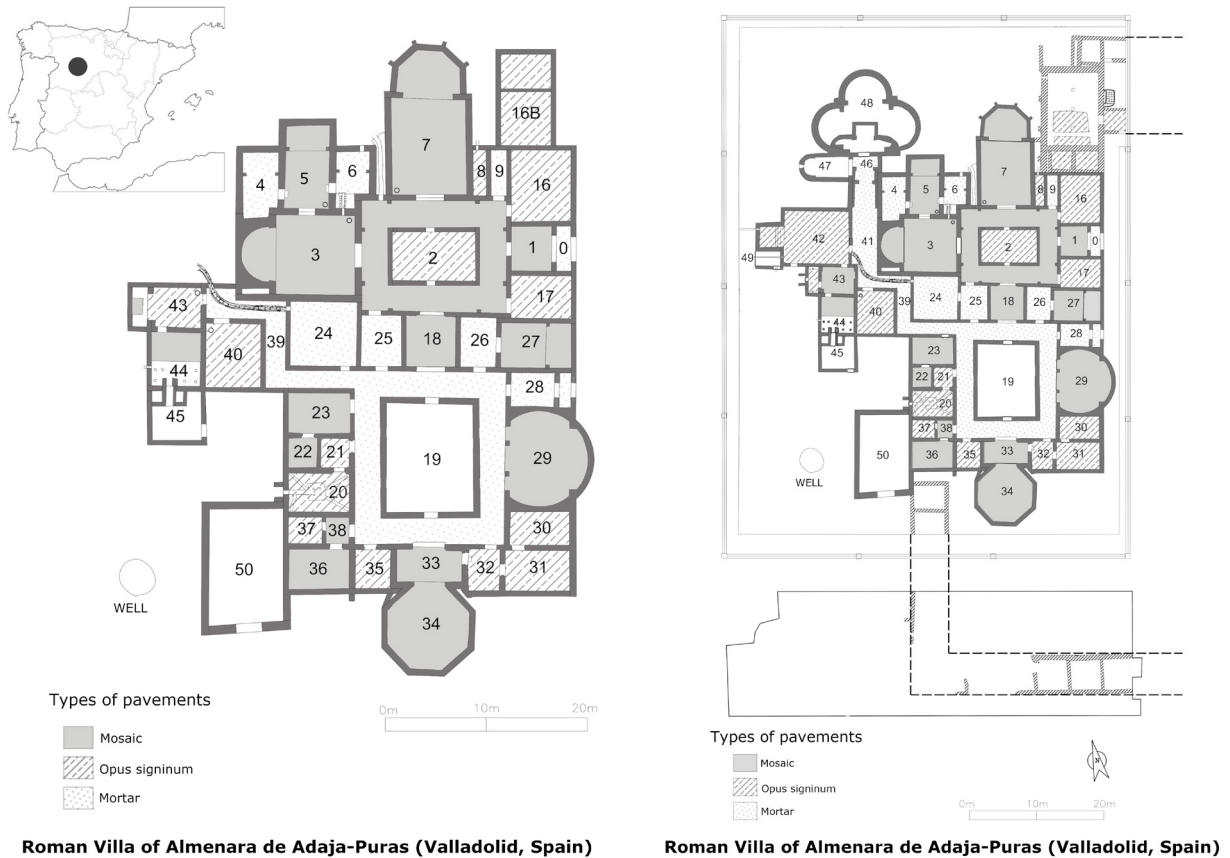


Figure 1 (left)
Layout plan of the *pars urbana* in its initial phase. Inset shows the location of the site in Spain. Drawing by M. Sánchez and E. Martínez.

Figure 2 (right)
Layout plan of the *pars urbana* in its initial phase. Inset shows the location of the site in Spain. Drawing by M. Sánchez and E. Martínez.

2. Architectural Structure of the *Pars Urbana* of the Villa and Types of Pavements

The *pars urbana* shown in Fig. 2 has an area of 2,020 m². It is laid out on an approximately rectangular surface, oriented from North-west to South-east. Its floor plan is the result of modifications made to an initial project built in the mid-fourth century, of 1,728 m² (Fig. 1), which was renovated to provide it with larger baths and to demolish the lounge 16B, when a long and narrow building of the *pars rustica* was attached. All the mosaic pavements correspond to the initial build (except the one placed when the *tepidarium* 43 was renovated) and the parietal decorations found date to the same period (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2015; García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2019; Sánchez-Simón 2020).

To build this building, located on a gentle hill that descends to the North and West, it was necessary to make a series of excavations (levelling) on the ground. That is the reason why the floors are not all at the same level; up to four are recognised. The highest one is marked by the room 34; the lowest level corresponds to the rooms 4, 5, 6, 7 and the trilobed *aula* (47 and 48). That makes the floor of room 7 approximately 1.5 lower than the Pegasus room 34. Due to this arrangement adapted to the slope of the land, it was necessary to reinforce the foundations of the northern sector with buttressing; in addition, the walls were built with concrete and, probably, the arched ceilings were also built using *caementicium*. According to the vestiges found, the vault of *aula* 48 was made of concrete and bricks. In the rest of the house, the walls were raised with rammed-earth on a *caementicium* baseboard and the vaults (if any) would probably be made of wood. The roof of the entire palace was covered exclusively with curved tiles.

Since its creation, this house was characterised by having two colonnaded courtyards, areas 2 and 19, and by the multiplication of reception and banqueting lounges, all with different layouts (Figs. 1, 3). The *pars urbana* has a clear scenographic and symbolic intention; the fact that at the two ends of the major axis (N-S) there are as many places of reception and formality facing (rooms 7 and 34), so that they would be mutually visible through the peristyle 19 and the courtyard 2 seems to affirm it. In addition to this, it should be noted that, on that axis, the figure of the octagon has a relevant presence both as an architectural form (lounge 34 opposite the pentagonal end of *oecus* 7), and as a decorative motif in the mosaics of 7, 2, 18 and 33.

Room number	Kind of room	Area (m2)	Type of paving
Room 0	Covered porch	6,37	mortar
Room 1	Vestibule	17,60	mosaic
Room 2	Courtyard	39,64	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 2	Corridor	105,04	mosaic
Room 3	<i>Triclinium</i>	76,86	mosaic
Room 4	Room	21,64	mortar
Room 5	Lounge	35,31	mosaic
Room 6	Room	16,33	mortar
Room 7	<i>Oecus</i>	92,77	mosaic
Room 8/9	Cistern & corridor	12,83	<i>opus signinum</i> / mortar
Room 16	Antechamber	41,57	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 16B	Lounge	39,80	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 17	Room	47,35	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 18	Transit zone	24,48	mosaic
Room 19	<i>Peristilum</i>	92,16	none
Room 19	Corridor	137,00	mortar
Room 20	Lounge	22,70	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 21	Vestibule	8,10	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 22	<i>Cubiculum</i>	8,21	mosaic
Room 23	Lounge	24,32	mosaic
Room 24	Light courtyard	41,78	mortar
Room 25	Transit zone	20,02	mortar
Room 26	Vestibule	17,26	mortar
Room 27	Lounge	29,19	mosaic
Room 28	Covered porch	4,06	mortar
Room 28	Vestibule	14,51	mortar
Room 29	<i>Triclinium</i>	60,94	mosaic
Room 30	Lounge	19,38	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 31	Lounge	25,44	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 32	Vestibule	12,85	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 33	Vestibule	20,22	mosaic
Room 34	Lounge	54,91	mosaic
Room 35	Room	13,36	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 36	Lounge	23,47	mosaic
Room 37	<i>Cubiculum</i>	8,63	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 38	Vestibule	5,96	mosaic
Room 39	Corridor	40,14	mortar
Room 40	<i>Apoditerium</i>	34,32	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 41	Corridor	38,07	mortar
Room 42	<i>Frigidarium</i>	75,13	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 42	Pool	9,53	<i>opus signinum</i>
Room 43	<i>Tepidarium</i>	18,86	mosaic
Room 43	Pool	2,00	mosaic
Room 44	<i>Caldarium</i>	25,55	mosaic
Room 45	<i>Propnigeum</i>	23,64	unknow
Room 46-47	Vestibule	29,77	unknow
Room 48	<i>Aula</i>	94,98	unknow
Room 49	<i>Latrina</i>	7,90	unknow
Room 50	External courtyard, facility	82,70	unknow

Figure 3
Table with the dimensions of each room. By
M. Sánchez-Simón.

Around each of these major open-spaces there are several high quality rooms of varied floor plan and function: the apse-shaped with a rectangular or quadrangular plan floor *aulae* are concentrated in the northern sector, around courtyard 2, while those of a centralised type are concentrated around the southern peristyle 19. The *conduplicatio* invites us to think about the use of each of these two sectors aimed at a different type of attendee, especially when each of these open-air spaces is accessed from the outside, through a vestibule preceded by a covered porch (0-1 and 28). The fact that 0-1 is a third larger than 28 indicates a hierarchy between the two: while the first allows to move to an area preferably destined to the development of the public activities of the *dominus*, the second leads to the most private parts of the palace. In a previous work (Sánchez-Simón 2020: 408) we have argued as a hypothesis that the door located in the vestibule 28 could constitute the most common access for the residents of the house; the other, 0-1, of a more monumental and restricted nature, would be opened less frequently for visitors.

Indeed, the smaller number of rooms around courtyard 2, its remarkable dimensions and its architectural forms allow us to consider that sector of the house as an area intended for the ceremonial functions associated with the reception, audience and banqueting of visitors. On the contrary, more typical places of daily and family life are distributed around the peristyle 19, among which it is necessary to bear in mind the two large rooms 29 and 33-34 and a smaller one, room 27, suitable for receiving or holding meetings and banquets of a more intimate nature. Accessible from that courtyard garden are other rooms; such as lounge 20, probably very comfortable in winter because it has a *hypocaustum*, the two *diaetae* (22-23 and 36-38), room 35, and grouping of rooms 30-32.

In the bay shared by porticoed courtyards 2 and 19, a small courtyard 24 was accessible from corridor 39 before the renovation of the house; and then from room 25. It should be remembered that the rooms 25 and 18 are transit zones that allow two-way communication between both parts of the house. The fact that they are paved very differently (18 with mosaic and 25 with mortar) leads us to identify an upper class use for 18, while the live-in servants would preferably transit through 25.

Finally, the house has a *balneum* with *latrina* attached to the west and accessible from the southern courtyard by a zigzag corridor (39). In the initial project (Figs. 1-3) it was a modest installation, of 141 m², with an *apoditerium/frigidarium* (40), a *tepidarium* with pool (43) both accessible from the corridor (39), and a *caldarium* with *hypocaustum* (44) that would also have a pool identified by the drain in the wall. Outside, is the *propnigeum* (45) with the *praefurnium*. Some subsequent modifications involved not only the expansion of the bathhouse to 500 m², but also the monumentalisation of this sector (Figs. 2-3). The corridor was extended by about 16 m with a straight section (41) and a new large rectangular *frigidarium* (42) was built, whose pool is located at the far end; this has three steps and a well-preserved drain. A door in the SW corner leads to the *latrina* (49). The use of the bath of the *tepidarium* (43) was also modified, which became a small *hypocaustum* that had to heat a modest *sudation*. At the end of the corridor (41), the large triapsidal *aula* preceded by a vestibule (46-47 and 48) was built. With these modifications, the *balneum* would have been a space giving the image for social practices. However, it does not appear that this ambitious project was fully completed as far as the triapsidal *aula* is concerned. From the information collected, it is known that, although it was completely built -including its lateritious and concrete vaults-, it did not have any decoration

on the walls. As for the floor, only a few pieces of mortar have been identified, probable evidence of a provisional surface rather than the final pavement, given the appearance of the room.

Three types of pavements were found in the house (Figs. 1-3) (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2015; García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2019; Sánchez-Simón 2020). There are fourteen rooms with mosaics, including bedrooms, dining rooms, sitting rooms, lounges, and other rooms; to these must be added the main vestibule and the four corridors of the northern courtyard. There is a total of 607 m², that is 54% of the area, with an extension that was increased to 624 m² when modified, one more was added to the *tepidarium* 43. Undoubtedly, this is a remarkable percentage of mosaics that are present, both for the main representation rooms, as well as for others of more domestic and private use, and even for transit. Mainly, geometric designs are reproduced accompanied by, among others, vegetal motifs, kraters, and guilloches of several strands. In addition, there is room with various fish represented in the bath of *tepidarium* 43 and the impressive figurative scene showing Pegasus and the Nymphs on Mount Helicon in the octagonal lounge 34. In twelve rooms of the type of lounges, connecting rooms, and bedrooms were placed *opus signinum* floors (more than 200 m², 20% of the total house). And finally, there is a third type of pavement made with a layer of lime mortar and sand on the ground; it is typical of transit or service zones (0, 9, corridors 19, 24, 25, 26, 28 and corridor 39-41) although it also appears in areas 4 and 6. It covers a total of 297 m², i. e. 26%.

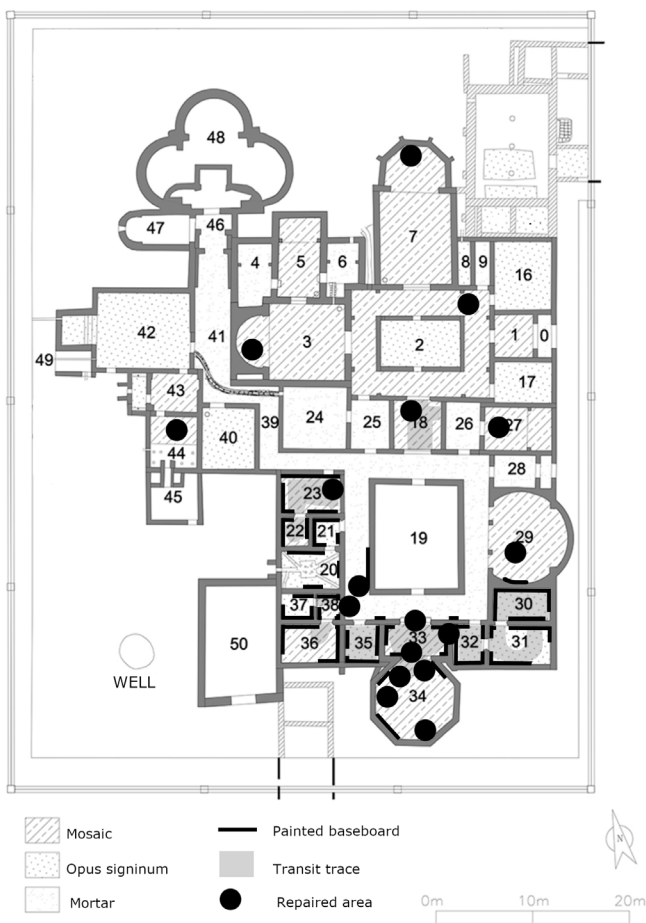
3. Ornamental Program Applied in the Villa

3.1. Wall Paintings

As for the wall coatings, logically the whole house was painted, although unfortunately only evidence of the baseboards of the southern rooms has survived to the present day (20 to 23 and 29 to 38) (Fig. 4) as well as various fragments of the middle and upper area of the wall at 21, 22, 30, 31, 32 and 34 (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2015; Sánchez-Simón 2020). The set identified responds to the type of decoration characteristic of the domestic buildings of the Low Empire, that is, in the imitation of stony coatings, of plates of various and expensive types of stones. In Almenara de Adaja-Puras, we identified a simulation of the red porphyry and other marbles, such as *numidicum*, *luculleum*, cipollino, and an indeterminate white one. They are arranged, either in the form of vertical slabs (19, 20, 22, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 36), or as geometric pieces imitating *opus sectile* (29) (Fig. 5A), or even in a continuous baseboard (21, 23, 30, 35, 37 and 38).

From the lounge 34, which has the Pegasus scene, we have also recovered enough fragments of the middle/upper area of the wall, so that its decoration can be recreated in a more complete way. Thus, on a baseboard of vertical slabs imitating marbles, a horizontal band is arranged in which square *crustae* alternate with other rhomboidal; above, there is a wide frieze (50 cm) with populated scrolls on black background and vegetal motifs like branches, elaborate red flowers, and animal protomes (one feline and two possible herbivores) associated with birds (Fig. 5B); and finally, in the upper area, rectangular, square, rhomboidal with inscribed circles *crustae* of veined, smooth, and mottled stones appear again forming larger panels.

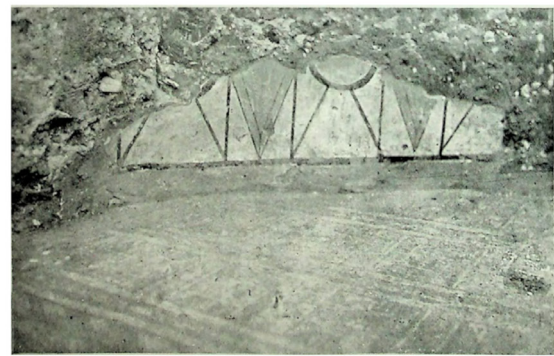
Thanks to the study comparing the pictorial decoration of the rooms with their functionality and with their more or less private character, patterns can be established in the choice of one or the other schemes when it comes to decorating the lower areas of the wall (Sánchez-Simón 2020). In lounges 34 and 36, both



Roman Villa of Almenara de Adaja-Puras (Valladolid, Spain)

Figure 4 (left)
 Layout plan of the *pars urbana*. The location of known painted baseboard and the position of floor repairs and transit traces are noted. Drawing by M. Sánchez and E. Martínez.

Figure 5 (right)
 Examples of mural painting discovered in the *pars urbana* of the villa: A) Painted baseboard of room 29. Photo by G. Nieto (Nieto 1943: pl. V). B) Frieze with populated scrolls on a black background and plant motifs and animal protomes associated with birds. Photo by M. Sánchez Simón.



A



B

with mosaic floors, the same type of ostentatious baseboard was arranged, formed by an alternating succession of wide vertical slabs (34 cm) with others of only 16 cm. The marbles represented for the largest are the cipollino, the porphyry, the *luculleum*, the *numidicum*, and another marble streaked with bright red. In the case of the narrow marbles, only the red stone is imitated. Rooms such as 20 (with hypocaust and *opus signinum* floor), 31 (also with *opus signinum* floor) and 33 (antechamber of 34 and with mosaic pavement) repeat this scheme, although in a simpler version as they lack red and narrow slabs. All of them are interpreted as sitting rooms or living rooms, although obviously, with a different degree of privacy and sumptuousness. It is remarkable that a room not very accessible from the peristyle (19), such as 36, offers the same type of baseboard as the most luxurious room in this part of the house, the one for which the scene with Pegasus is revealed; that demonstrates it is a space of special consideration. With this same composition, in its less complex version, the baseboard of the southern wall of the peristyle is decorated, the one in which the octagonal room opens onto. With no data for the rest of 19, it becomes difficult to know if the entire peristyle was painted with this design or just this section of the wall.

The decoration of room 29 is also complex. Although it is only preserved in the 1940s documentation, a succession of slabs is recognised in the baseboard, alternating some with diamonds and others with circles. The backgrounds are painted in white and the geometric figures in red, edged in black. This composition is reminiscent of what is known of the upper area of the wall in

room 34. This simulation of *opus sectile* has not been documented in the lower part of the wall of any other room, therefore it is unique in the villa. Perhaps, the use of a different scheme is explained precisely by the close relationship that exists between the mosaic program of 29 with that of rooms 3, 5, and 7.

On the other hand, the continuous baseboards of a type of marble with black, yellow, and red veins are reserved for anterooms such as 21 (with *opus signinum* floor) and 23 (with mosaic). Regarding 32 - clearly a vestibule with *opus signinum* floor - the same type of stone is depicted, although in the form of 34 cm wide slabs that alternate with others of 17 cm. Another model of this continuous baseboard is that in which a white marble is imitated. It is identified in not very accessible rooms such as 30 and 37 (both with *opus signinum* floors); it also appears in 35 and 38. If the choice of this type of imitation is reserved for intimate, very private places, functionally room 35 (with *opus signinum* floor) would have been one such room, despite its direct access from the peristyle. A similar circumstance would occur in the case of 38, although this is an anteroom that has a mosaic. With a dashboard imitating white marble, is also decorated the lower part of 22 *cubiculum* with restricted accessibility. Here, thin black fillets mark 59 cm wide slabs, perhaps in an attempt to give a more sumptuous look to this *cubiculum* with a mosaic.

The study of painted coatings also reveals some technical aspects of how the work was planned and executed (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2015: 120-121). The walls were covered with two layers of lime and sand mortar. The outermost one was tempera-painted using brushes and paintbrushes of different thicknesses whose strokes are perfectly visible. As for the preparatory designs, the use of horizontal and vertical lines can be seen. Only in lounge 31, in the baseboard, a subsequent repainting seems to be identified. The study of pigments made with Raman spectroscopy showed that all the compounds used for the manufacture of the different colours are inorganic materials and very common in Roman wall paintings: calcite (white), charcoal (black), hematite (red), goethite (yellow), blue glass (blue), and glauconite-celadonite (green). The different shades are obtained by mixing charcoal for a darker colour or calcite, and other white minerals for a lighter one (Sánchez-Simón - Jorge-Villar 2020: 327).

3.2. The Mosaic Pavements

3.2.1. Technical Aspects of the Execution of the Mosaics

All the mosaic floors of the house share a very similar technical execution. In the restoration process that was carried out between 1998 and 2002, the foundations were documented thanks to their stratigraphic excavation and a series of archaeometric analyses (Hernández Valverde 2001). Thus it can be indicated that at the base the *statumen* was arranged approximately 10 cm thick, made with limestone masonry and large boulders (approximately 6/10 cm long); above it, the *rudus*, a 5 cm layer of mortar made with a mixture of aggregate (with a predominance of quartz -90%- over feldspar -5%-) and lime in 1:1 proportions; above the *nucleus*, also of lime and sand and 3 cm thick, in which a finer grain was used; and also it should be noted that, in the thin layer of mortar in which the tesserae were placed, the calcite reached values of more than 90%.

In certain very specific rooms, technical solutions have been identified that affect the foundations of these mosaics and that allowed them to be preserved from the rising subsoil moistures, given that the house was built near a lagoon (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2010: 200-205). Among these are the cases of the *tepidarium* bath 43 and the *oecus* 7, in which the *nucleus* reaches a thickness of

40 cm or more. On the *nucleus* of room 7, a synopsis was discovered outlining the main lines of the design. Another solution is documented for salons 3, 29 and 34. In these cases, ducts made with tiles or bricks have been identified whose purpose would have been to drain and evacuate moisture from the subsoil.

As far as the tesserae are concerned, these were mainly manufactured from coloured limestones (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2019: 127 and 129). Around half a square centimetre were used in the figurative emblem of the room 34 and in the garlands of rooms 27 and 29; a little larger, of 0.8 square cm, are those of the motifs of the mosaics of the southern area; those of the rest of the mosaic pavements measure approximately 1 square cm. In addition, vitreous paste was used in the spaces 29 and 34 and thicker terracotta pieces (1.5/2 square cm) in the vestibule 1, in the corridors of courtyard 2 and in practically all the connecting bands between the mosaics and the walls.

Analyses of the stone tesserae have been carried out, which has made it possible to characterize them and compare the results with geological areas of the North Plateau (Hernández Valverde 2001). The samples studied were taken from yellow, white, cream, bluish grey, brown, black, pinkish, and red pieces. The results indicate that they come from fine-grained limestones, with very generic characteristics, without an important fossil content, and that they may correspond to rocks of less explicit ages and diverse origins such as the Douro, Tagus, and or Basque-Cantabrian zone. In the case of a blue-grey example, due to its fossil content it is recognised as a marine limestone, probably from the Mesozoic; for this one could think of an origin from the northern area of Palencia or from the Sorian Iberian System. As for the vitreous paste tesserae, when analysing them, it has been found that they are made with alkaline-calcium glasses, rich in silicon, but also with sodium, potassium, calcium, sulfur, and aluminum, and that the colours were achieved by adding copper, iron, lead, and manganese (Hernández Valverde 2001). Unlike what happens in other villas from the plateau area, neither the Espejón (Soria) stone nor the variscita of the Zamoran mines was used at Almenara de Adaja-Puras (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2019: 132).

In addition to these issues, the study of the mosaics of the villa allows us to recognise in three rooms (22, 27 and 34) evidence on the performance of the work of the mosaicists (Sánchez-Simón 2020: 412 and 413). Thanks to the identification of tesserae of different colour and/or module in very specific areas of each of these three floors, we have been able to identify some sectors (between 1 and 1.5 square meters) that seem to respond to the work carried out by a *tessellarius* in one day. Undoubtedly, the most evident example is provided by room 34; in the mosaic decorated with black *peltae* on a white background, two different sectors are identified in which a cream-colored and slightly larger piece was used, instead of the white one that appears in the rest of the tessellation. We relate this very specific use of a different material on the same floor when there was a shortage of raw material. Alongside this, we have been able to point out the joint work of pairs of operators in each of these rooms; for example, in the case of *cubiculum* 22 there were two artisans working simultaneously.

3.2.2. About Damage and Repairs to the Mosaics

The pavements of the house offer a curious testimony of the daily life of its inhabitants. The foot traffic through the corridors and rooms can be seen reflected in the abrasive wear offered by the mosaics and also the *opus signinum* floors (Fig. 4), which informs us about which zones had more foot traffic and which did not, in some cases, probably because they were hidden under the furniture (Sánchez-Simón 2020: 410-412). These traces have only been visible in the

southern zone of the *pars urbana*. In the rest it has not been possible, except in 18, because in the restoration work of the 70s abrasive products were used that have considerably affected the upper part of the floors.

Starting with room 18, it shows marked wear in the eastern half. Also, in the *diaetae* located on both sides of the heated lounge 20, this type of evidence is observed; the rubbings at 23 and 38 indicate the route respectively towards *cubicula* 22 and 37. In addition, the fact that in 22 there is an unaltered surface attached to the dividing wall with 20, leads to the hypothesis that the *lectus* was placed there; this position is very logical, as it would benefit from the heat of the *hypocaustum*. Finally, in the set formed by the antechamber 33 and the large room with an octagonal floor 34, this wear can also be seen; in room 33 it can be seen over the entire surface, while in room 34 it is only in the area closest to the entrance. It can be deduced, therefore, that the second is a more restricted area than the first.

In addition, and also as a consequence of daily life in the house, it is necessary to consider the damage to the mosaics and their repairs (Sánchez-Simón 2020: 410-412). The type of solutions for these repairs ranges from an identical replacement (in 3 and 33-34), to the important changes in the decoration of room 29, passing through another in which, probably due to lack of original material, tesserae of other colours were used, but with the intention of maintaining the same composition (in 2, 3, 7, 23, at the thresholds of 19, 32-33, 33-34 and 38, and in 44). The repaired surfaces are not extensive, they range between 10 and 50 cm². There are also patches of lime and sand mortar arranged on the wall and floor of some corners in rooms 19, 22, 36 and 38. Finally, it should be mentioned that in the room 34 four small holes (just 2/3 cm in diameter) were made parallel to the eastern wall. We interpret them as deliberate damage of unknown purpose, beyond the possible placement of vertical elements. Probably, these last two types of evidence correspond to a later period in the life of the house, probably when the owners no longer lived there.

Of course, evidence of this wear has also been detected in the mortar and *opus signinum* pavements of other rooms arranged around the peristyle 19, such as the corridor of that garden, the *diaetae* formed by 30-32 and in the room 35. In the latter, the wear was so intense that, next to the threshold, even some of the boulders of the *rudus* are visible; this is probably due to repeated actions of polishing the mortar to repair it.

3.2.3. Mosaics: Surface Compositions and Motifs

The mosaic set of the villa has been fully documented and is also perfectly contextualised thanks to the fact that the residential sector was excavated in its entirety². That is why it is possible, on the one hand, to characterise the decorative approach of the floors of the *pars urbana*, and on the other, to analyse the distribution of the compositional schemes and the motifs, considering their adequacy to the functionality and importance of some of the rooms to which they belong (García-Merino - Sánchez-Simón 2019; Sánchez-Simón 2020).

3.2.3.1. The Mosaics of the Northern Sector

Within the rooms around courtyard 2, there are three areas dedicated to reception, audience and banqueting: 3-6, 7 and 16-16B (before the renovation of the house) (Figs. 1-3). The ends of all these stand out, either for having a higher

² A previous study on these mosaics is that of L. Neira and T. Mañanes (Neira - Mañanes, 1998: 13-34), based on the knowledge of the mosaic complex prior to the excavations of the period 1998-2002.

floor (3, 5 and 7), or for being marked with pilasters attached to the wall (4, 5 and probably in 16B). There is no doubt about the thematic and chromatic unity of the decorative program of these rooms, in which mosaics the garlands and laurel wreaths are profusely represented, as well as gadrooned kraters accompanied by fleshy *acanthus* leaves and fine stems with round-petalled flowers, and round fruits, all of them drawn on neutral or dark backgrounds. The central emblem of the *oecus* 7 must have been remarkable. Although it is not currently preserved, the old photos show it inside a black background box, two diadems in the form of a headband decorated with precious gemstones, and an elaborate laurel wreath. The inner corners of that box were decorated with *acanthus* leaves, rounded fruits, and other motifs that were difficult to identify. It is also known from ancient documentation that, on the threshold of the pentagonal head, in the same layout mentioned above a wide frieze (55 cm) was arranged with a garland of *acanthus* leaves accompanied by two kraters, one at each end of the strip. Octagons, hexagons, swastikas, and kraters completed the design, although hardly any debris of them remain. For *triclinium* 3 (Fig. 6) a decoration based on a swastika meander pattern was chosen. In the centre emerges a square emblem in which the protagonists are the gadrooned cups and the *acanthus* foliage. One

Figure 6
Room 3. Photo by F. Manteca, Valladolid
Provincial Council.



of these elaborate containers is also depicted on the apse-shaped end, framed by a succession of friezes with broken and straight meander, three-strand guilloche, dentille band, and lotus blossom patterns. Likewise, foliaceous wreaths and kraters with *acanthus* leaves decorate the central area of room 5 (Fig. 7), in this case divided into four squares. Flanking them, wide bands with eight-strand guilloches were arranged. In the apse, on the access step, there was a garland of *acanthus* equal to what has already been described for the end of the *oecus* room 7. Next to it, and on a white background, a composition in running-*pelta* pattern, shaped in black, red, and yellow; and all this framed with a narrow frieze of tendrils scrolls. A feature that these three rooms also share is that they have a concavity covered by a mosaic (between 45 and 60 cm in diameter and 17 cm



Figure 7

Room 5. Photo by F. Manteca, Valladolid Provincial Council.

deep), always located in a corner near the door. As for its functionality, there is no sure information; it could be related to a ritual use of water in reception, audience and banquet ceremonies. In this regard, it should be remembered that, next to the *oecus* 7, there is a small enclosure that contains a tank for storing liquid (8-9).

The three mosaics described were made with limestone tesserae; the colour palette included white, cream, black, bluish grey, yellow, red, ochre, and pink. The softer tones were used to create volume in the fleshy *acanthus* leaves, flowers, round fruits, gadrooned cups, in the three-strand guilloches, lotus blossoms bands, and circles.

Very different are the mosaics of the vestibule 1 and the corridors that border the courtyard 2. In this case, they were made with large tesserae (2 square cm) of little chromatic variety: red terracotta for the backgrounds and white, black, and yellow to form the compositions. This creates a carpet with hexagons containing white fleur-de-lis at the entrance hall, while two other compositions are chosen in the corridors of the peristyle: 1) the secant circles with simple white flowers inside and 2) the octagons and crosses, these last ones as well in white. The sections of the floor with the octagons decorate the corridors aligned with the central axis of the house. In the entire house, only these two transit spaces were paved with this type of *tessera*, perhaps because a greater intensity of use was foreseen.

Finally, reference should be made to room 18, that connects both courtyards and is decorated with a careful geometric design of adjacent octagons combined with ellipses forming irregular concave octagons in the intersections.

3.2.3.2. The Mosaics of the Southern Sector

Around the peristyle 19 are organised different spaces which are recognised as the most intimate for family life, although there are also large *aulae* of centralised ground plan (Figs. 1-3). Due to the fact that we have, in addition to a large set of mosaics, information on the pictorial decoration of the baseboards and, even, of the rest of the wall in very specific cases (21, 22, 30, 31, 32 and 34), it has been possible to better identify the rooms, comparing their floor plan, the position in the house, the type of floor and the pictorial ornamentation.

From the perspective of the ornamental program, in this southern part of the house the mosaic pavements are reserved for the most important rooms (27, 29 and 33-34) and also for other rooms for more private use, such as two *diaetae* formed by groups 22-23 and 36-38. On the other hand, *opus signinum* floor is used in *cubiculum* 37, in 35, and in lounges 20, 30, and 31; the transit zones are paved with both *opus signinum* (21 and 32) and mortar (19 and 26). As a common feature, it is appreciated that the decoration of the lounges intended for the reception, audience and banqueting (27, 29 and 33-34) has important connection with that described for rooms 3, 5 and 7, with the use of octagons, leaf garlands, scrolls resembling *acanthus*, spiraling tendrils, kraters, circles, *peltae*, and eight-strand guilloches. On the contrary, geometrical compositions are exclusively reserved for the *diaetae*. It is evident that the functional differentiation and importance of rooms is expressed by the type of floor and the decorative codes of the mosaics. To this we must add the information of the painted baseboards, to which we have referred in a previous section.

Clearly, two bedrooms are recognised in a pair of sets of rooms (*diaetae*). The formed by rooms 22 and 23 offers a mosaic pavement, from which it is deduced that it should have been the main one. Large adjacent circles forming irregular

concave octagons in the intersections and imbricated with a mesh of swastikas decorate the antechamber 23; adjacent bipartite scales in contrasting colours in the *cubiculum* 22.

On the other hand, rooms 36-37 show stars of rhombuses in room 38 and a mesh of large intersecting circles forming saltires of quasi-tangent solid spindle in room 36; the *lectus* would be located in *cubiculum* 37, with *opus signinum* floor. As for room 36, it has been indicated in a previous section that, despite its intimate nature, it should have been a place of special consideration. In its mosaic, there is a clear difference between the half closest to the door and the back of the lounge. This does not imply any change in the composition, as this is achieved by slightly modifying the background tone by introducing a brown tessera next to the white one. In this way, an area is individualised as an entrance hall. Probably ephemeral elements, such as curtains or screens, could have created a visual barrier, thus providing greater privacy at the back of the room.

Among all the lounges, understood as reception or banqueting spaces, or simply as living rooms in which other functions could also have been developed, room 29 has a prominent position with its lobed floor and mosaic pavement. Also prominent is the grouping of rooms 33-34 with a rectangular entrance hall room 33 attached to an octagonal exedra room 34 (Fig. 8). They have preferential access and have direct visibility from the peristyle 19.

The mosaic of room 29 repeats motifs from the program of rooms 3, 5 and 7. Despite being heavily damaged the central area a square emblem with kraters in the corners can be recognised. Enclosing it, there are different borders formed by an *acanthus* scroll, a serrated saw-tooth band, a lotus blossoms band, a three-strand guilloche, a broken and straight meander band, a wave band, and another garland of lanceolate leaves with circles. On the floor of the three apses, a grid of squares is drawn, having each one another concentric facing the interior resembling the coffered ceiling. With regard to the room 34 and its antechamber 33, its relevant character and its clear scenographic intentionality are evident, both for being located in a higher position and centered with respect to the central axis of the house, and for combining - in the architectural form and in the mosaic decoration - the symbolic language of the octagons and *peltae* in groups of four; the latter being the ones that wrap the figurative emblem with the scene of Pegasus and the Nymphs next to the Hippocrene fountain. The way in which the horse is represented, without wings, could be interpreted as the desire to show a concrete equine; probably one very dear to the first owner of the house. Other motifs that appear in the decoration are the leaf garland that surrounds the central emblem and a frieze with an eight-strand guilloche on the access step. A further indication of the special importance of this octagonal room can be seen in the very careful execution of the band connecting to the wall; instead of the usual thick terracotta tesserae, a smaller limestone pieces, also red, was used. As for the painting of the middle/upper area of the wall, as already indicated before, there is a linear scroll of *acanthus* populated with animal protomes, little birds, and fine stems with flowers that resembles those of the mosaic pavements of other rooms intended for the reception or banqueting. To conclude, the sitting room 27 would also be part of this set of relevant rooms (Fig. 9). With a rectangular perimeter, it is accessible from the peristyle, through the antechamber 26. With dimensions equal to room 5, it shares with it having a raised end, indicated by pilasters. Likewise, the mosaic includes on the raised end a pattern of three rows of tangent and linked swastika-*peltae* wheels with a central Solomon knot and a stylised scroll of *acanthus* with hexapetal flowers. The rest of the room is decorated with secant octagons, forming in the centre

of each one a square, bordered on all sides by hexagons of unequal sides. The parallelism that can be established with the decorative program of the rooms 33-34 is clear, with *peltae* for the elevated area and octagons in the lower one.

Figure 8
Room 34 and antechamber 33. Photo by F. Manteca, Valladolid Provincial Council.



3.2.3.3. The Mosaics of the Thermal Baths

The modest original *balneum* had two mosaic pavements, one of a geometric nature in the *caldarium* 44 and another in the bath of the *tepidarium* 43 (Figs. 1-3). The one in the *caldarium* reproduces a composition of octagons combined with ellipses and circles, very similar to that of room 18. In the bath, of which only the bottom is preserved, there is a marine theme: two dolphins and five other fish of different species. With the renovation of the thermal baths (Figs. 2-3) the *opus signinum* floor in the *tepidarium* was replaced with another mosaic. There are really very few traces of it left, just in a corner with a composition of adjacent small circles having other concentric ones facing the interior. The scarce chromatic type is striking, with a palette reduced to red, yellow, and black tesserae.



Figure 9
Room 27. Photo by F. Manteca, Valladolid
Provincial Council.

4. Discussion

In a recent article, L. Neira refers to the bias with which the vast majority of Roman country houses are known and how this conditions the valuation and interpretation of mosaic decorations in those contexts not completely excavated (Neira 2020: 370). The territory of the Douro Valley is no exception. Although the list of late villas with mosaics is long (Regueras Grande - San José 2017: 317-331), there are rather few stately residences that have been fully excavated and in which it has been possible to establish dating and constructive phases. Even though in recent years there have been some large-scale interventions in sites such as Camarzana de Tera (Zamora), El Vergel (San Pedro del Arroyo, Ávila), La Dehesa (Cuevas de Soria, Soria), Las Pizarras (Coca, Segovia), Saelices El Chico (Salamanca), Santa Cruz (Baños de Valdearados, Burgos), and Santa

Lucía (Aguilafuente, Segovia), La Olmeda in Palencia and Almenara de Adaja-Puras in Valladolid, are, up till now, the only ones that have been completely excavated, which allows studies of their mosaics in a fully known architectural context. On the other hand, most of the buildings of La Dehesa and Santa Lucía are known.

For all the villas of the North Plateau, the research has emphasized the characteristics of the most sumptuous spaces, generally with figurative mosaics, leaving in the background a more detailed understanding of other environments with a greater degree of intimacy. This issue has been analyzed in Almenara de Adaja-Puras. For this reason, and to conclude our contribution in tribute to C. Balmelle, we will approach some aspects related to the villas of La Olmeda, La Dehesa and Santa Lucía, to point out not only the similarities that may exist with the Valladolid case, but also certain particularities. Among the latter, undoubtedly the most outstanding is the organisation of the domestic space around two porticoed courtyards and the *conduplicatio* of rooms in Almenara de Adaja-Puras. This layout is also documented in Los Quintanares (Rioseco, Soria) (García-Merino 2008: 423). Likewise, the Valladolid case certainly offers access through a vestibule preceded by a covered porch, a layout hitherto unparalleled in Castile and León.

Undoubtedly, La Olmeda is the *uilla* that provides very complete documentation (Abásolo – Martínez 2017 : 15-76, Diputación de Palencia s. n.). With 4.400 m², 1.416 m² of them are mosaic. The high-quality rooms are magnificent and well-known. Especially the large *oecus*, showing the scenes of a lively hunt, and that of ‘Ulysses in Skyros’, framed by a wide band with a series of oval *clipei*, a genuine family portrait gallery with the *dominus* and his relatives; but also, other rectangular rooms with an apse-shaped end flanked by rectangular or square rooms (rooms V-14, V-16-18, & V-25-27). There are also other private spaces, not without luxury, whose distribution has clear similarities with the *diaetae* of Almenara de Adaja-Puras. They are generally arranged in groups of three, interpreted as vestibules and small lounges, and even what appears to be a *cubiculum* whose mosaic reproduces a large octagon with a leaf wreath (rooms V-07-09, V-11-13 & V-30-32). The mosaic floors are reserved, not only for this mentioned *cubiculum*, but for the living rooms. The V-13 one is notable. The tapestry presents an octagonal composition with a central emblem: a leaf wreath. The entire composition was reminiscent of that of the *oecus* 7 of Almenara de Adaja-Puras. It should be remembered that this type of motif is not very frequent in the villas from the north plateau area; there are not many examples, only Almenara de Adaja-Puras y Navatejera (Villaquilambre, León), to which this of La Olmeda is added. Other rooms of possible private nature are recognized at the western end of the northern corridor, to which their doors open. Its floors are made of mortar, and on the baseboards, there are still a few remains of floral motifs.

To conclude this brief reference to La Olmeda, it should be noted that, due to the scarce evidence of painted stuccoes, it is not possible to make considerations about the association of certain decorations with particular spaces, regardless of the type of floor used.

La Dehesa (Alonso Benito - Sánchez-Simón 2013) is another *uilla* where most of its floor plan is known. Two facts make this house an unparalleled example in the Duero Valley, on the one hand, all its rooms (halls, corridors, etc.) have mosaics³; and secondly, there is an absolute absence of figurative scenes. Both

3 The despoilment suffered by the rooms with hypocaust is what prevents us from knowing what the

issues make La Dehesa an exceptional instance, since in most of the palaces in Castile and León, tapestries of mythology, hunting, horses, etc., are identified; in addition, in the thermal spaces, marine themes have been represented. Almenara de Adaja-Puras is, in this sense, a paradigmatic case. Although the most common thing in the villas from the plateau area is that each house has only one figurative scene, there are cases (particularly Camarzana de Tera (Regueras Grande 2009) that have more than one room with figurative mosaics.

With an area of around 4,000 m², the main rooms of La Dehesa are located on the northeast and east sides of the peristyle: an *oecus* with an apse-shaped end (room 13) and another notable rectangular *aula* (room 23); the *balneum* is located in the southern corner of the courtyard (rooms 25 & 27). The more private and reserved rooms are next to those prominent rooms. In all cases, they consist of sets of three: an elongated corridor flanked by two (rooms 10-12, 15-17, 18-20 & 20-22). In some cases, all of them have apsidal heads; in other, fewer cases, the ends are straight. It has been argued that this peculiar structure responds to the need to prevent cold air draught. The floors are decorated with geometric tapestries of various compositions. Octagons, hexagons, circles, squares, *peltae* and swastikas combined to create beautiful carpets that are only interrupted, in four cases, by a central square emblem that seems to reproduce the monogram of the IRRICO family, the owners of the country estate (Fernández-Galiano 2012: 354-355). This emblem is resolved within a square, which in turn, shows different geometric figures (octagon, square, circle and rhombus); in the centre, framed by a leaf wreath, emerges the monogram. Significantly, two of them are located in the NE and E corridors, marking both access to the main rooms, respectively the *oecus* and the rectangular one. Another decorates the large rectangular room; the fourth is reserved for the *apoditerium/frigidarium*.

Geometric central emblems are not exclusive to La Dehesa. Other well-known examples are those of the villas of San Pedro de Valdanzo (Soria) (Jimeno Martínez et al. 1989: 425-428), Requejo (Santa Cristina de la Polvorosa, Zamora) (Regueras-Grande 2021: 60-61), Los Casarejos (San Martín de Losa, Burgos) (Torres Carro et al. 1997: 152-157) and Prado (Sánchez-Simón 2016: 84). On the other hand, in Almenara de Adaja-Puras, where there are central emblems (rooms 3 & 7), they always offer vegetal motifs, not geometric ones. In addition, around them, there are bands with kraters from which *acanthus* scrolls sprout, on a black background. This type of border, which is documented in Prado as well, made M. Torres recognized the work of the same *officina*, called “Prado-Almenara” (Torres Carro 1988: 191) in the 1980s.

Another argument lay in the similarity of the emblem of room 5 from Prado and *triclinium* 6 from Almenara de Adaja-Puras, as both exhibit a square panel with gadrooned kraters at the four corners and *acanthus* scrolls. However, new findings and research make it necessary to be cautious about the existence of this *officina*. In this regard, F. Regueras points out that there is a decorative unit and a repeated presence of certain motifs and compositional schemes in various mosaics from Castile and León, such as *acanthus* scrolls, garlands, leaf wreaths, and gadrooned kraters. Some examples are those of Camarzana de Tera (Zamora), Cardeñajimeno (Burgos), El Vergel (San Pedro del Arroyo), Los Villares (Quintana del Marco, León), and Prado (Valladolid). In his own words, he defines it as a kind of “cross-cutting phenomenon” with different workshops performing a common and “standardized *koine*” themes (Regueras - San José 2017: 329). Assessing the pace with which these decorations are incorporated

floors of some of the rooms in the thermal area were like.

into the rural tessellated sets of the Douro Valley requires a better understanding of the performance of the workshops based on a better knowledge of the stately residences.

The third *villa* is Santa Lucía (Martínez Caballero et al. 2021, Frías Alonso 2021). its house has almost 2,000 m². Unfortunately, the preserved surface of tessellations is very scarce, as almost all of them have been destroyed. However, an important part of the large rectangular mosaic of the *oecus*, has still survived. Its central emblem originally consisted of two pairs of horses facing each other, tied to trees, with their names in cartouches; the rest of the tapestry was made up of a succession of squares, all different. On the other hand, the use and distribution of the mortar floors -which seem to have been intended for private spaces, is better known. Thus, for example, those located on the north corner of the courtyard, and those at the other side of the *triclinium* with the pentagonal head (A-1/A-4, A-6/A-9, A-14/A-16 & A-17/A-19). These *diaetae* consist of a corridor and two rectangular rooms of approximately 12/14 m² each. Unlike what has been identified in Almenara de Adaja-Puras, La Olmeda and La Dehesa, do not seem to be common other small/medium-sized, intimate, private rooms with a degree of sumptuousness comparable to those destined for the reception and banqueting. Santa Lucía shares with Almenara de Adaja-Puras and La Olmeda the most functional modest floors used in the corridors associated with the baths. In the Segovian case, the southwest corridor of the peristyle is paved with mortar instead of mosaic; in the Valladolid case, mortar is also used; in the Palencia one, it is an earthen surface.

Finally, we would like to draw attention to the room with the pentagonal end (A-12/A-13) due to its clear similarities with the one at Almenara de Adaja-Puras, although it is smaller (63 m²) and it is unknown how it was paved. Another room with this morphology is recognized in the *villa* of Los Villares: on its head, there is a mosaic with octagons; in the room, there is a scene showing Hilas and the Nymphs (Regueras 2013: 86).

For the latter, we must point out that, particularly thanks to the study of the villa of Almenara de Adaja-Puras, but also of other examples in the Duero Valley, it could be said that paving (mosaics and others) constitutes an important element in the construction of domestic space. Actually, it is deeply linked to the architectural and functional conception of the property and to the micro-dynamics of the social and residential activities that take place in it. These observations on pavements should also be extended to painted coatings, although due to their greater difficulty in conservation, information on them is often scarce. In Almenara de Adaja-Puras, it has been possible to analyze the functionality of the domestic spaces, characterize their more public or private nature and recognize which were the most appropriate places for the development of everyday life, as well as those destined for the reception, audience and banqueting. This due to the fact that the architectural form of the house is perfectly known, the type of floor each of the rooms was paved, as well as important information on the painted decoration of the baseboards of a part of the building.

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