Mosaics of the Hispanic Meseta Norte: Phases, Officinae, Artistic Taste

Hispanik Meseta Norte'ninMozaikleri: Evreler, Atölyeler, Sanatsal Yönü

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Abstract

About 400 mosaics are known in the Meseta Norte (today, Comunidad Autónoma of Castilla y León), with chronological variants, most of them of the 4th and 5th centuries; with stylistic variants, geometrical topics in preference to figurative themes; with topographical variants, predominantly rural findings against urban findings; and with technical variants, exceptionally sectilia, only one case of signinum and the rest, tessellati. We know nothing about the mosaic workers, just the signature of one who worked in the Baths of La Olmeda (Palencia): Sil [o]. However, stylistic, morphological, or material concordances allow us to suspect the existence of workshops, which usually operated in regional areas. Surely the former ones were Italic workshops serving people of that origin (opus sectile and opus signinum, Asturica Augusta). Almost two centuries after another officina is documented, known as Clunia-Uxama-Asturica, because it worked in these three cities, and their consequences are still tracked in the late third century in certain domus of the above-mentioned cities. The great mutation of Roman mosaic in the Mesetas occurred in the fourth century with the spectacular display of villas, unparalleled in Hispania. Serving these new customers a large number of workshops was developed, for instance, the designated one as the NO peninsular workshop, which worked in the provinces of León and Zamora; the so-called one as Prado-Almenara workshop, because of its presence in these villas from Valladolid, and also in La Valmuza (Salamanca) where another workshop took part closely linked to some villas from La Mancha. Finally, the Cuevas-Valdanzo workshop, whose taste for the aniconism links these villas of Soria with other more western ones.

Keywords: Meseta Norte, Castilla y León, urban and rural phases, Aniconism, Orientalism.

Öz

Meseta Norte'den (günümüzde Castilla y León - Comunidad Autónoma) kronolojik olarak geniş bir zamana yayılan fakat çoğunluğu 4. ve 5. yüzyıla tarihlenen 400 kadar mozaik bilinmektedir. Bu mozaiklerde; geometrik desenlerin figüratif desenlere tercih edilmesi gibi çeşitli stilistik varyasyonlar, kırsal unsurların kentsel unsurlara göre daha ağırlıkta olması gibi değişik coğrafi özellikler görülmektedir. Teknik olarak da mozaiklerin çeşitlilik gösterdiği söylenebilir; mozaiklerin büyük bir çoğunluğu tessellatum tekniği ile yapılmışken, istisnai olarak sectile ve sadece bir örnekte signinum görülmektedir. Sadece La Olmeda Hamamları'nda (Palencia) çalışan birinin isminin Sil [o] olması dışında mozaik yapımında çalışanlar ve ustalar hakkında bilgi bulunmamaktadır. Bununla birlikte, üslup, biçim ya da malzeme benzerlikleri, bölge içinde faaliyet gösteren atölye çalışmalarının varlığı konusunu gündeme getirmektedir. Elbette eski atölyeler, İtalik kökenli olup bölgedeki insanlara hizmet ediyordu (opus sectile ve opus signinum, Asturica Augusta). Çalıştığı şehirlerin isimlerine ithafen Clunia-Uxama-Asturica olarak bilinen diğer bir atölyenin belgelenmesinden iki yüzyıl sonra yani 3. yüzyılda bu atölyenin etkileri yukarıda bahsi geçen kentlerin evlerinde hala izlenebilmektedir. Mesetas'taki Roma mozaiklerinde görülen büyük değişim 4. yüzyılda Hispania'da eşi görülmeyen muhteşem tasvirler aracılığıyla gerçekleşmiştir. Yeni müşterilere hizmet vermek üzere pek çok atölye faaliyet göstermeye başlamıştır. Örneğin

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Leon ve Zamora Bölgeleri'nde çalışan NO olarak isimlendirilen Ada atölyesi ile Vallodolid'den ve La Valmuza'daki villalarda yaptığı mozaiklerden tanınan Prado-Almenara Atölyesi ve La Mancha'daki villalardaki işleri ile bilinen bir başka atölye gibi. Son olarak Soria villalarından ve daha batıdaki örneklerden bilinen çalışmalarıyla ve anikonizm tercihiyle bilinen Cuevas-Valdanzo atölyesi gösterilebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Meseta Norte, Castilla y León, kentsel ve kırsal evreler, Anikonizm, Orientalizm.

We are going to speak about the mosaics of the Hispanic Meseta Norte, highlands (700-800 m on average), a bastion well shaped by mountainous edges (The Cantábrica range in the N, the Ibérica range in the E, the Central range in the S, and abrupt peneplains in the W), drained by the Douro river and its tributaries, with marginal aggregate ones in the NW (Sil Basin), in the E and NE (Ebro Basin), and in the S (Tagus Basin). This is an extensive territory (94.222 km²), bigger than Portugal, at the present configured by the Comunidad Autónoma of Castilla y León (Fig.1), with 9 provinces (Ávila, Burgos, León, Palencia, Salamanca, Segovia, Soria, Valladolid and Zamora). In Roman times it was divided in two large *Conventus Iuridicii*: the *Conventus Asturicensis*, capital *Asturica Augusta*, origin of the Kingdom of León, in the W, and the *Conventus Cluniensis*, capital *Clunia*, origin of the County of Castile, in the E. With less remarkable personality, the old territory of the *Vettones* in the SW (provinces of Salamanca, the south of Zamora and the west of Ávila) formed part of the *Conventus Emeritensis*.

About 400 mosaics¹ are known, with a great territorial asymmetry, because of the origin, technique, theme, and chronology. More than 60% of the exemplars are in the E of the Autonomous Community (provinces of Soria and Burgos), and to a lesser extent, Palencia, in the centre of the Douro Basin, a situation that is, however, rather random. About the origin, the bulk comes from rural deposits (*villae*), and less than 10% from cities, almost all of them from *Asturica*, *Uxama*, and especially *Clunia*. The difference is still greater in technical terms: only one mosaic of *opus signinum* is known, less than 10 mosaics of *opera sectilia*, which should not be confused with simple marmoreal paving stones, and the rest are tessellated. The disparity is similar in theme, and chronological terms: the characteristics which as a whole define the Douro mosaics are their massive aniconism and late dating, as we are going to see later.

Regarding the phases of the mosaic in the Meseta Norte, there are two moments:

- a first urban phase due to its development mainly in the cities and highimperial chronology, coinciding with the Roman military occupation, municipalization and domestic reforms of their houses, between the 1st-3rd centuries AD (Fig. 2).
- a second rustic phase that is manifested mainly in the great late antique *villae*, coinciding with the historical experience of the family of Emperor Theodosius, born in *Cauca* (Segovia), in its almost one century of documentation between the 4th and 5th centuries AD (Fig. 3) (Regueras Grande 2007 and 2013).



Figure 1 Meseta Norte (or Castilla y León) into Iberian Peninsula.

¹ Many of the pavements have been published in the *Corpus de Mosaicos de España (CME)*: López Monteagudo, Navarro Sáez and Palol Salellas 1998 (Burgos); Neira and Mañanes 1998 (Valladolid); Blázquez *et al.* 1993 (León); Blázquez and Ortego 1983 (Soria); Blázquez *et al.* 1989 (Museo Arqueológico Nacional). Outside the *Corpora*: Regueras Grande and Pérez Olmedo 1997 (Salamanca). Regueras Grande 1990 and 2009 (Zamora). Palol 1963, Pérez González 1987, Cortes Álvarez de Miranda 1996, García Guinea 2000, Regueras Grande 2012, Abásolo 2013 (Palencia). Lucas and Viñas 1977, Regueras Grande 2010 (Segovia). Mariné 1995, Moreda Blanco and Serrano Noriega 2012 (Ávila). There are also some synthesis works: Torres Carro 1990, Regueras Grande 2007 and Regueras Grande 2013.

Figure 2 Main Roman cities of Meseta Norte.

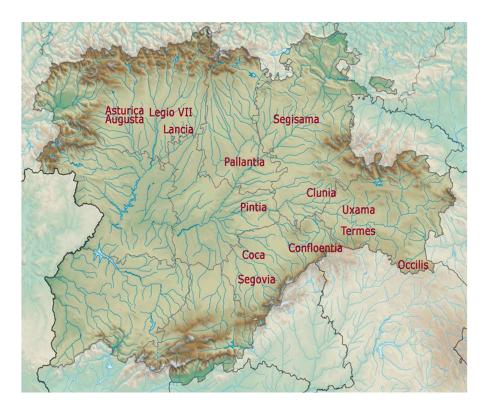
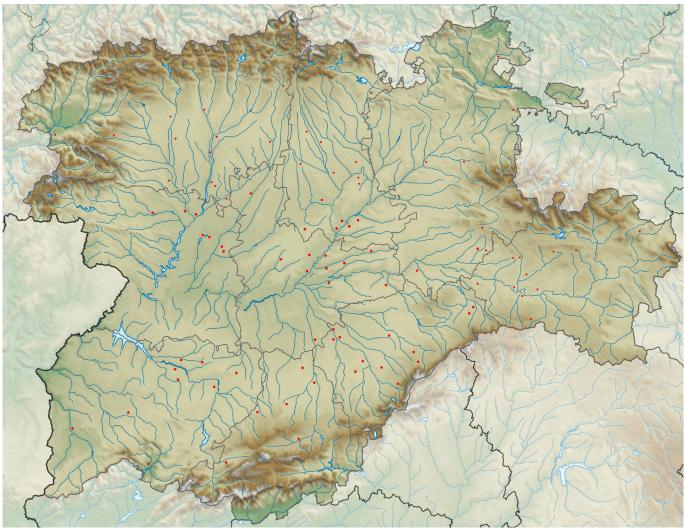


Figure 3 Dispersion of main Roman *villae* in Castilla y León.



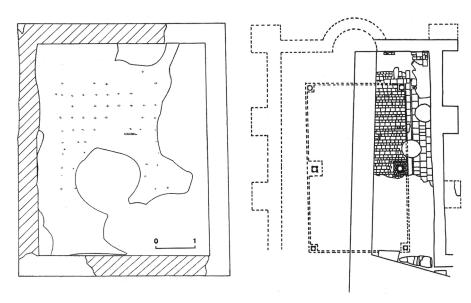


Figure 4 Outline of *opus signinum* from *Asturica Augusta*.

Figure 5 Opus sectile of Aedes Augusti from Asturica Augusta.

One of the first mosaics of the Douro Basin is a paving of *opus signinum* (Fig. 4) of a *domus* of Astorga (Regueras 2002: 37-11), decorated with bichrome crosses, and it dates in the middle of the 1st century AD, *unicum* because of its geographical location, so the *opera signina* are strictly circumscribed in the E and S of *Hispania*. The appearance of this type of floors is associated with the presence of Italic immigrants, who would try to surround themselves with domestic equipment similar to that of their native environment, and in a second moment with acculturated natives eager to emulate the tastes of the new ruling class.

In *Asturica Augusta* it is also documented the oldest *opus sectile* (Fig. 5) in the region, in Julio-Claudian period, paving the *Aedes Augusti*, political centre of the new capital of the *Conventus*. Luxurious (marble), but austere (bichrome), it derives from a simple Italic model of modular writing, and it is the monumental consecration of the first profits of the gold exploitations begun towards the end of reign of Augustus. Slightly posterior it is another domestic tapestry, super-imposed on the aforementioned *opus signinum* during a reform carried out in the middle of the 1st century, and a new *sectile* that upholstered the *frigidarium* of the so-called "*Domus* del gran peristilo", at the beginning of the 2nd century. Both of them have disappeared.

With no apparent connection with Astorga, two other parietal *sectilia* of the Flavian period are known in *Clunia* (Burgos), a basilica of the forum and a triangular room of the *macellum*, with vegetal themes and vegetal composition (López Monteagudo et al. 1998: 41-85), and another in a *domus* of *Uxama* (Soria) (Blázquez – Ortego 1983: 52-54), dated in the first half of the 2nd century, also with imported marbles.

The *sectile* should have continued to be used, but there was practically no trace until the 4th century in the transept of the *aula trichora* of the *villa* of Rioseco de Soria, and especially in the missing ones of Las Pizarras in the vicinity of *Cauca* (Segovia), where more than 20 kinds of marbles have been registered.

We do not know when the *opus tessellatum* appears in the Douro Basin. If we accepted the dating of his archaeologist, Tiberian epoch, (Argente et al. 1990: 37-42), the first example would be (with intrusions in red and black colour) a large monochromatic mosaic area of the *balneum* of a *domus*, in the N of the *Forum* of *Termes* with strange planimetry, a rectangular central room and other two preserved flanking circular rooms. It has come to be interpreted as an

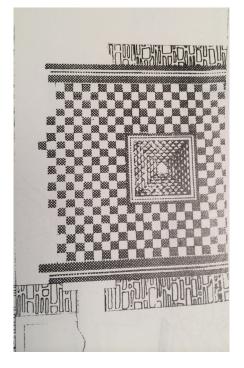


Figure 6 Termas Mayores of Asturica Augusta.



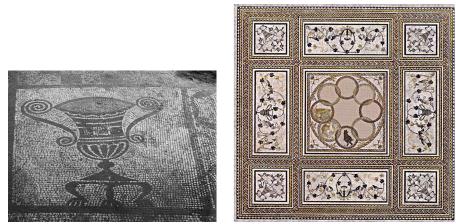
Figure 7 Mosaic of the Kraters of *Clunia*.

Figure 8 Mosaic of Quinta Romana of *Uxama*.

Figure 9 Mosaic of Casa del oso y los pájaros of *Asturica Augusta*.



Figure 10 Mosaic de las Veneras of *Clunia*. Museo Arqueológico Nacional (Madrid).



initiatory sauna of Celtiberian tradition. It presents stylistic problems similar to the enormous black &white pavement of Las Molleras in Salinas de Rosío (Burgos), for some people it is of the 1st century, and for others it is late and of equally complicated functional interpretation.

From the end of the 1st century until the 4th century (*Clunia*) several *officinae* work here, in *Uxama*, and in *Asturica*. They maintain until the end the attachment to the Italic tradition in schemes to compass (Fernández Galiano 1980a) and squares of bands, and the taste for the bichromy without renouncing the colour. A first moment is manifested in the work of *officina/officinae* that intervened in the Pequeñas Termas, and Termas de Los Arcos I and Los Arcos II of *Clunia* at the end of the 1st and 2nd centuries, perhaps also in the denominated Casa Basilica of *Uxama* and Termas Mayores of *Asturica* (Fig. 6).

The consolidation of these teams takes place at the end of the 2nd and 3rd centuries with the workshop called Asturica-Clunia-Uxama, the most important cities of the territory, united through Iter 27 of the Antonine Itinerary between Asturica and Caesaraugusta. It is always an officina of Italic tradition in its cartons, attachment to the bichrome tradition despite the use of the colour, use of linear scrolls associated with birds and some identical formal and syntactic motifs: kraters, split hexapetals, geometric borders and link of panels. The connections between the mosaic of the kraters of the Casa nº 3 (Fig. 7) and the Casa Triangular of *Clunia*, the mosaics of the Quinta romana of *Uxama* (Fig. 8) and the Casa del Oso y de los Pájaros of Asturica are incontestable (Fig. 9). It is possible to establish links between this workshop and some other urban mosaics dated in the 2^{nd} and 3^{rd} centuries: e.g. the one that carpeted two *tabernae* near the Foro Flavio de Termes, with the theme of scrolls of acanthus populated with little animals, one of these recalls some mosaic of the Calle San Gil de Medinaceli (Occilis), where the scrolls of tendrils with pigeons and kraters, and the same meander of swastikas of Termes also appear. The presence, on the other hand, and design of the gryphus in one of the decorated bands of the tessellated of Occilis we have to relate it with the heraldic bichrome ones of Uxama, dated by Balil in the 2nd century, and perhaps with those ones of the Seminario Conciliar of Tarazona (Zaragoza) of the same date.

At last, the schemes to compass in shape of a shell of segments are reiterated in *Clunia*, especially in the mosaic of the shells of Casa Taracena (Fig. 10) and in the strictest parallel, room no. 1 of the so-called "Basilica" of *Uxama* (Fig. 11) in reduced version and larger scale in the most colourful of the Plaza de San Pedro de Medinaceli. A later variant of this interest in compass (and segments) motifs is found in one of the few *villae* of the Meseta, Villabermudo, in the N

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of Palencia, their mosaics have been dated in the 3rd century, with parts in the Constantinian period: mosaic of Diana, mosaic of the exedra, and mosaic of the kraters. Curiously it is a suburban villa, very close to Pisoraca, city of military origin as Asturica, the Legio IIII Macedonica was stationed there during the Cantabrian wars (Pérez González 1987: passim). The contacts between the three cities are not ended with these examples. Twenty years ago I already posed the affinity between the mosaic of the room no. 6 of the Casa Taracena de Clunia, and a fragment of mosaic of Uxama drawn by Loperráez in the 18th century, with the same scheme: star of rhombuses determining large right squares and small ones with sharp point (AIEMA 367), with similar themes inscribed, which was then used by me to reconstruct vestiges of a pavement of Asturica the so-called "Casa del opus signinum" (Regueras Grande 2002, mosaic no. 6), one of the main houses of the city that opened to the cardo maximus. Fortunately, in April 2016, they were able to confirm his belonging to the west wing of a peristyle (Fig. 12). Some remains of the north wing also appeared, with the possible theme of panels framed by braids of three ropes, all of them maintaining the same attachment to the Italian tradition in the traces, even in the austerity and chromatic continence. The dating, well into the 3rd century, is still the most reasonable.

Another *officina*, with the same formal and chromatic sensitivity, which operated on the same dates, made the mosaics of *Pallantia* (Palencia) and *Segisama* (Sasamón, Burgos), where the *Legio IIII Macedonica* was also settled, *mansio* between *Asturica* and *Burdigala*. Although the old scheme of octagons and crosses is used mainly in late times, with filler of geometric or vegetal motifs, our Castilian tapestries are ordered by mythological images: Gorgona and the Seasons (*Pallantia*) or by a marine character, perhaps Triton (*Segisamo*), apart from many other figurative coincidences (birds, marine animals, *fulmina*) (Fig. 13).

What it does look like a very important set, with very classic taste, are the mosaics excavated at the end of the 18th century (Gómez de Somorrostro 1820: 215-225) in Los Mercados (Duratón), a place that today is often identified with the city of *Confloentia*. At least five mosaics are known, three of them were extracted, one of the Medusa, other one of the *Annus* and another of the Grape Harvest, its detailed description reminds us of Bacchus mosaic of *Complutum*. The configuration of this one also resembles that of the Seasons of Paradinas (Segovia) (Fig. 14) (Regueras Grande 2012: 288-293), showing a relationship between the mosaics on one side and the other one of the Central range, lands well connected by a *via* between *Complutum*, Duratón and *Clunia*, known in Islamic era, but surely with a Roman origin. Only the one of *Annus* is conserved, with so many spare parts that Balil considered it a contemporary *pastiche*. Blázquez (Blázquez et al. 1998b: 34) dates it in the 2nd century. Figure 11 Room no. 1 of Basílica of *Uxama*.

Figure 12 West wing of the peristyle of the Casa del *opus signinum* from *Asturica Augusta*.

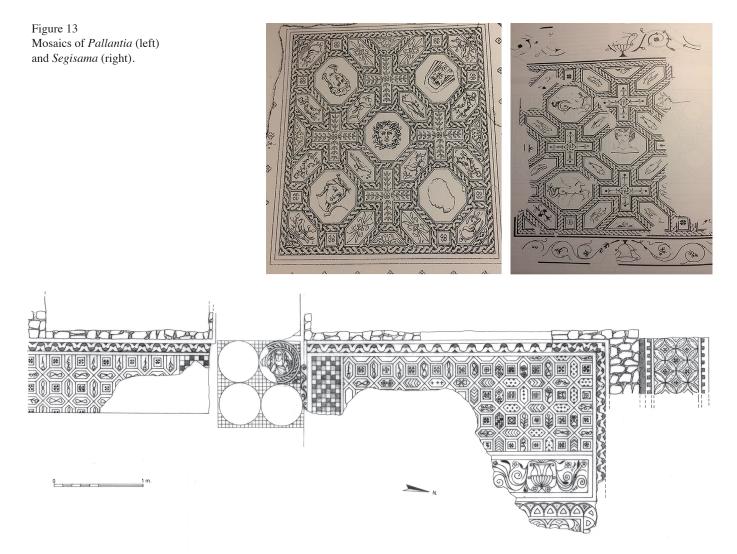


Figure 14 Season mosaic. Paradinas (Segovia). Despite the languor of the cities in the 4th century, the mosaic did not disappear, but we know a few examples. In *Clunia*, a coin of Constantine in the *rudus* of the mosaic no. 4 of the Casa de Taracena leaves no doubt about chronological speculation (Fig. 15). In Leon, after almost 35 years of excavations, only a "representation of a sea full of algae and fish" (1884) from the baths under the cathedral is known, but all that remains is only a fragment of a water flower and a Cypraea clam, (Fig. 16) of the style of the so-called "NW workshop" (Regueras Grande 2015: 279-304). In Medinaceli, the mosaic of the Plaza Mayor (Borobio - Pascual 1998: 39-45) with its images of the winds and Ceres, seems a variation of the same motifs in the *villa* of Villares de Santervás del Burgo (Soria). Finally, in Segovia, some polychrome mosaic fragments from the Calle Judería (Martínez – Vilches 2015: 82-83) have allowed a recomposition of the scheme based on a mesh of rotating squares with birds and other inscribed geometric motifs, elements that could not be assigned to the 1st and 2nd centuries as their excavators do, rather to a late epoch.

The second phase of the Douro mosaics is developed in the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century coinciding with its generalization in the *villae*. In the Late Roman Empire there was a concentration of property after the changes that took place during the tetrarch period, which resulted in the replacement of the old and frugal high-imperial installations with more pretentious and larger ones. This monumentalisation of the manor house is expressed through an arrogant



architecture (basilical and apse-shaped *aulae*) as in no other part of *Hispania*, and a luxurious ornamentation, of which only the mosaics are usually left.

We know a little about the owners of our villae, although the exceptional archaeological record of contorniates in the villae of Quintana del Marco (León) and La Olmeda (Palencia) (Cortes Álvarez de Miranda 1996: 59-78), emphasises their quality of elites. The story of the family of Emperor Theodosius, born in Cauca (Segovia), rich landowners from the father Flavio Theodosius until the cousins of his son Honorius, Didymus and Verinianus, who defended the rights of the legitimate monarch against usurpers and barbarians, coincides and documents almost a century, with the display of our villae in the 4th and 5th centuries. Unfortunately we lack of epigraphic testimonies on mosaics. An exception in this anonymous landscape could be the case of Cuevas de Soria (Soria) where they wanted to associate the Irrico, family of Celtiberian origin that is buried in the vicinity of the property, with analleged monogram (Fig. 17) that appears strategically repeated in several mosaics of the house. Another one that dresses one of the panels of the no. 3 carpet of the villa of Requejo (Santa Cristina de la Polvorosa, Zamora) is less firm. Due to its location and quality some images are perhaps their portraits: in the border of intertwined cornucopias that involves the Bacchus triumph of Baños de Valdearados (Burgos) there are two central busts, masculine and feminine, that if they were not the owners of the villa, it would make little sense (Fig. 18). In La Olmeda, also in a wide heraldic valence Figure 15 Mosaic no. 4 of the Casa Taracena, *Clunia* (Burgos).



Figure 16 Cathedral Baths. León.

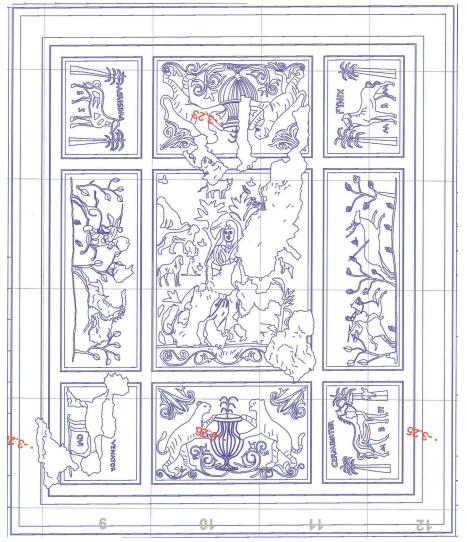
Figure 17 Alleged monogram of the Irrico, (Cuevas de Soria, Soria).





Figure 18 *Domini* of the *villa* of Baños de Valdearados (Burgos).

Figure 19 *Triclinium* with the *Orpheus* Mosaic. Camarzana (Zamora).



of the mosaic of Achilles, 18 male and especially female portraits of different ages are unfolded, undoubtedly the family saga of the *dominus*. It is also probable that some horsemen spearing their prey, such as the one of the threshold of the *triclinium* of Camarzana de Tera (Zamora) (Regueras Grande 2009), the other one disappeared from the *villa* of Campo de Villavidel (León), that one of

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the dismounted rider of the *frigidarium* of Dueñas (Palencia) next to his steed, or the other one that accompanies Atalanta and Meleager in Cardeñajimeno (Burgos), all of them could be the effigy of the owners of the mansion represented in one of their favorite activities. Their hunting tastes were well reflected in the mosaics, such as the hunt: Camarzana (Fig. 19), Cardeñajimeno, Campo de Villavidel, *venationes* (La Olmeda), or transFig.d from the myth: Diana the Huntress (Villabermudo –Palencia–, Prado –Valladolid); Bellerophon (Ucero –Soria–, Saelices – Salamanca); Atalanta and Meleager (Cardeñajimeno, San Pedro del Arroyo – Ávila). It is the same passion for the horses, which presides over the main rooms of the house: Aguilafuente (Segovia) (Lucas – Viñas 1977: 245), Camarzana; and they are sometimes transmuted into mythological horses, Pegasus without its wings of Almenara –Valladolid–(Fig. 20), or the *dominus* takes his favorite foal on his golden ring (Quintana del Marco), or his horse presides over the large carpet of its *balneum* (Dueñas) (Palol Salellas 1963: pl. X).

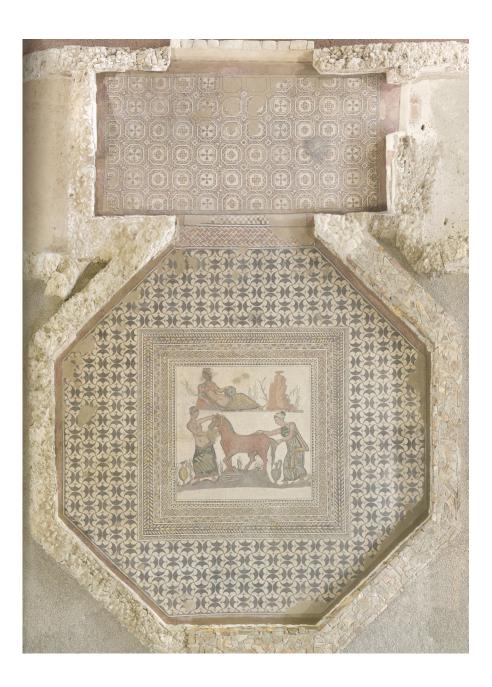


Figure 20 Pegasus and the Nymphs. Almenara de Adaja (Valladolid), after García Merino and Sánchez Simón 2015. Adjusting now strictly to the mosaics, we do not know what relations could be between the old, high-imperial *officinae* and the new ones that usually work in the Late Roman Empire, but the bonds with the Galician area (NW workshop), Ebro Valley and above all the Meseta Sur (several *officinae*) are well contrasted. The lack of dating by archaeological methods remains a burden to establish a precise evolution during the 4th and 5th centuries, with very imprecise extreme margins.

The aniconism is the main distinctive feature of the late mosaics, not only these ones of the Douro, a taste for the formal complexity and the entanglement, for some geometric compositions with clear textile modulation and variegated chromatic charge that anticipate future styles of Islamic art and pre-Romanesque art, without forgetting its close relationship with the Asturian painting of the 9th and 10th centuries (Schlunk – Berenguer 1957, *passim*) that uses the same cartons, almost always from outside the figurative representation. It would be too easy to reduce it to a purely economic question, a geometric mosaic is undoubtedly cheaper than a figurative one, but it would not be forgivable to link it to a certain Neo-Pythagorean esotericism. In the Meseta, in addition, the reassumption of the old indigenous aniconic traditions should reinforce this tendency that, beyond a passing fashion, expressed the profound changes that a society in transit towards the feudalization experienced.

Except some *villae* (Camarzana de Tera, Quintana del Marco, Quintanilla de la Cueza–Palencia) (García Guinea 2000: 221-301), with good presence of figurative themes, usually only a great mythological pavement presides over an aniconic complex (Almenara, La Olmeda, Cardeñajimeno, San Pedro del Arroyo, etc.) (Fig. 21), or all tapestries are geometric (Requejo, Valdanzo–Soria, Cuevas



Figure 21 General plan of La Olmeda with the mosaics. After Abásolo 2013.

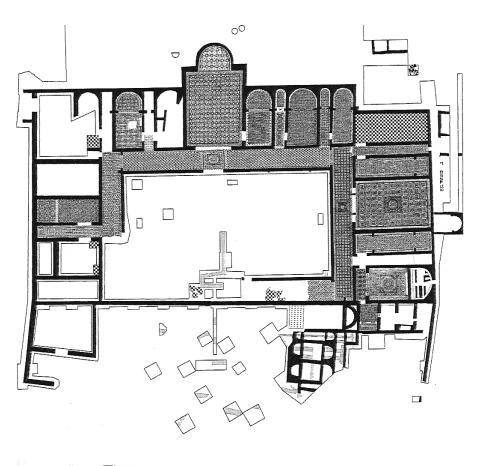




Figure 22a General plan of Cuevas de Soria

(Soria) with the mosaics. After Sanz Aragonés et al. 2011.

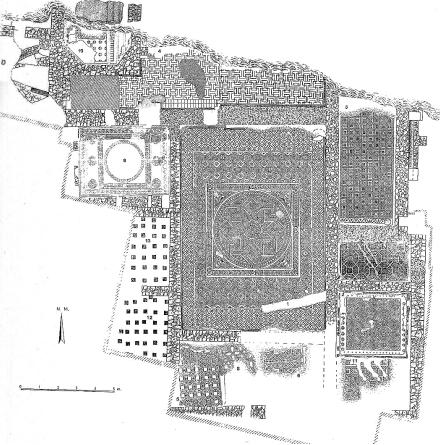


Figure 22b General Plan of Requejo, (Santa Cristina de la Polvorosa, Zamora), with the mosaics. After Regueras Grande 1990.

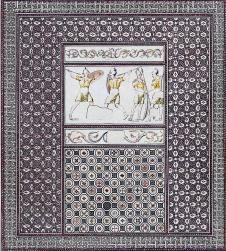


Figure 23 Meleager and the Calydonian boar. El Vergel, (San Pedro del Arroyo, Ávila). After Moreda – Serrano 2012.

de Soria, etc.) (Fig. 22a-b). The imagery normally illustrates the function of the room: pelagic themes decorate *balnea* (*Oceanos* of Dueñas and Quintanilla de la Cueza, both in Palencia); the most versatile mythological themes, we find them mostly in *oecus* and *triclinia*, sometimes with explanatory epigraphs (*Storia Meleagri* of San Pedro del Arroyo, *Bellerophon in equo Pegaso occidit Chimera*, Ucero, Soria) (Fig. 23); others, bilingual, as the struggle of Glaucus and Diomedes of the *Iliad* in Cabezón de Pisuerga (Valladolid) (Neira – Mañanes 1989: 36-46).

It has been emphasised a lot in orientalism (Fernández Galiano 1984a: 411-430, Blázquez 2008: 7-31). The aniconic taste and the formal and decorative complexity of many of our mosaics (mosaic C de Baños de Valdearados, aula XII of Santervás, mosaic of the pitchers and the kraters of Prado) are even ascribed to it. This orientalism must be placed in the context of the Theodosian period that strongly influenced the late imperial elites of the Meseta. The use of more than 20 different types of marbles, mainly oriental and the use of mother-ofpearl in the villa of Las Pizarras (Coca, Segovia), establishes an unquestionable relationship with the E of the Mediterranean sea (such as the mosaics of Noheda – Cuenca–, the ones of Carranque–Toledo–, or the mosaic of Las Vegas mausoleum of Pueblanueva -Toledo-, in the Meseta Sur). It seems logical to also assign oriental features to the Latin and Greek epigraphs of the Iliad in Cabezón de Pisuerga (Valladolid) with the image of Glaucus and Diomedes, unicum in the Roman mosaic art that has served to interpret another one of Rielves (Toledo) known only by an 18th-century watercolour (Fig. 24a and b). However, some style coincidences are less certain, coincidences with the "oriental way" of fan-shaped or "scaly" backgrounds that are recognized in the most sumptuous mosaics with mythological episodes and hunting scenes, always in the second half of the 4th century. Although there are splendid later specimens in Antioch or Constantinople (Imperial Palace) and exceptionally in Utica, Carthage or Colony, their maximum development occurs in the villae of the Hispanic Meseta





(Camarzana, Cardeñajimeno, La Olmeda, Quintana del Marco, Carranque, Noheda, Cabezón, Almenara, Saelices, etc.) with peripheral finds in *Lusitania* (Torre de Palma –Monforte, Portalegre–, El Hinojal–Las Tiendas, Badajoz–, Rabaçal–Condeixa a Nova, Coimbra–, etc), Ebro Valley (La Malena, Zaragoza) and now also in Lugo (mosaic of Daedalus and Pasiphaë) and the Dionysian *cortège* of Coriscada (Meda, Guarda). Other "oriental" features are the populated scrolls on a black background with vegetal Fig.s, "*grutesques*" (Cardeñajimeno, Camarzana), or *putti cacciatori* like that of Quintana del Marco (Fig. 25) and, above all, the representation of allegorical images embodied in the form of female busts: the *Abundantiae* of the workshops of Soria (Santervás, Rioseco, Medinaceli), which extends to the *Iscallis* of the *villa* of Saucedo (Talavera de la Reina, Toledo) at the end of the 5th century.

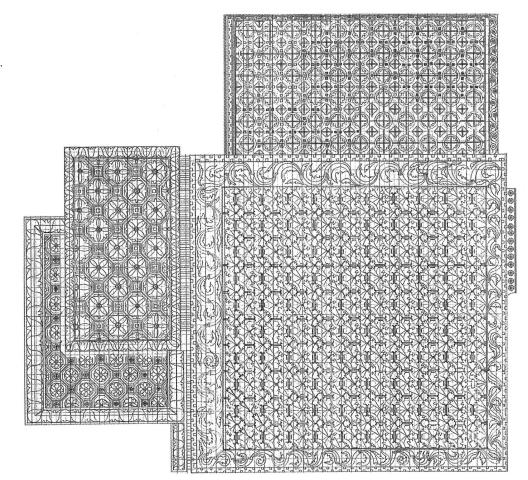
With regard to the *officinae* that acted in a territory as wide as the Meseta, for more than a century, and about such a large number of mosaics, most of them not properly studied, only approximations, "selective affinities" based in stylistic criteria or in the use of "rare" materials (variscita). Without chronological



Figure 24a Glaucus and Diomedes. (Cabezón de Pisuerga, Valladolid). After Mañanes.

Figure 24b Glaucus and Diomedes. Rielves (Toledo). Watercolour of the XVIII century.

Figure 25 *Putto cacciatore* of Quintana del Marco (León).



precisions it is very difficult to establish the existence of *officinae*. In any case, it is possible to prove analogies between many of our mosaics and centrifugal relations with the workshops of the peninsular NW and the southern Meseta, which in reality form a single community in the use of schemes, taste and style.

Firstly, La Olmeda is the best excavated and well-known villa in the Iberian Peninsula, with mosaics from two floors, and with vertical and horizontal mosaic stratigraphies (Fig. 26). About the 14 known mosaic firms throughout Hispania, only one is registered in Castilla y León, at a corner of the great room with four apses of the baths of La Olmeda (Pedrosa de la Vega, Palencia), a SIL [O] (Fig. 27), we do not know if one of the tessellarii of the carpet of braids and interlaced garlands; by the way, its design is the richest and the most widespread in the house: external border of oecus, the east and west gallery of the peristyle, the room of balneum with four apses and apodyterium, sealed by a caementicium pavement and above another tessellatum of octagons, with poor elaboration). If so, presumably at least two other workshops would exist in the *villa*, the one in charge of the figurative ensemble (Fig. 28) and another one of the later simpler mosaics (as the above-mentioned one of octagons). In Carranque it is verified the presence of two officinae, an extension in space and a mosaic complexity less than in La Olmeda. Several tesserae deposits (V-13, V-21, under the south gallery of the peristyle), tesserae and glass cakes -some of them with gold foilshave been documented in the V-35, for mosaics never made or perhaps to cover the irremediable repairs of the house, which would presuppose the existence of a fixed officina of the maintenance In this deposit, it is also known with sufficient precision where they extracted the calcareous material to build their mosaics,

Figure 26 Horizontal stratigraphic. Room no. V-32 of La Olmeda (Palencia). Courtesy of Diputación de Palencia. a place in the Cantabrian range between Alar del Rey and Aguilar de Campoo (Palencia), the gray marble of some rooms (V-14 and V-09), from the quarry of Velilla del Río Carrión (Palencia), slightly more than 30 km to the N, and in the *oecus*, some reused marble tesserae come from Espejón (Soria). Underneath this pavement there were many defective pieces and tesserae, a customary circumstance in mosaics of other *villae* (Requejo, Valdanzo). The raising and restoration of all the mosaics of the *villa* allowed to verify the existence of underlying sinopias that outline the main lines of these mosaics; and the documentation of three coins of Constantine (307-337) and his son Constans (337-350) served to establish a *terminus post quem* of the corresponding mosaics. Thanks to these data and to the careful monitoring of the *villa* –which has been continuously excavated since 1968– an absolute chronology of its mosaics can be determined between the second half of the 4th century and the first half of 5th century.

Another similar deposit, with reused tesserae from a 3rd-century pavement, was located in the nearby *villa* de Los Moros (La Serna, Palencia), a procedure, widely documented in *villae*: the Villa de la Estación (Antequera, Málaga), in Betica; those ones of Rio Maior (Santarem) and Rabaçal, to cite two Portuguese examples (Vargas Vázquez – López Monteagudo 2014: 127-142).



Figure 27 SIL[O], perhaps a *tessellarius* of La Olmeda.

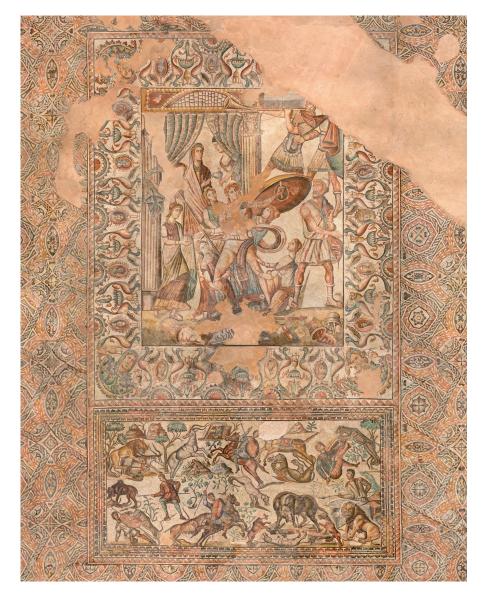


Figure 28 Oecus of La Olmeda. Mosaic of Achilles in Skyros and scene of venationes.



Figure 29a Variscite from the *villa* of Quintana del Marco (León).

Figure 29b Oceanos mosaic from the *frigidarium* of the *villa* of Dueñas (Palencia).

Figure 30a Mosaic of the peristyle (detail). La Valmuza (Salamanca).

Figure 30b Mosaic of Alcázar de San Juan (Ciudad Real).

Figure 30c Mosaic of the peristyle (detail). La Valmuza (Salamanca).

Figure 30d Mosaic of Alcázar de San Juan (Ciudad Real).

Figure 30e Mosaic of the peristyle (detail). La Valmuza (Salamanca).



On the basis of a recent multidisciplinary study about materials (Gutiérrez Pérez et al. 2015: 165-181), it has been possible to determine the precise origin (Palazuelos de las Cuevas, Zamora) of variscite, a semiprecious stone whose use in the Late Roman Empire was almost exclusively restricted to the manufacture of *tesserae* (Fig. 29a-b) of the most beautiful mosaics of the Roman *villae*: Possidica of Dueñas (Palencia), Quintana del Marco (León), and although it was not analysed, almost certainly, the ones of Camarzana de Tera (Zamora), all of them already associated by stylistic and iconographic traits in common. This use of an unusual material could imply the existence of an itinerant workshop in these *villae* where it was assumed (Quintana del Marco) that another *officinal* would work, called by M. Torres Prado-Almenara, because of his intervention in these *villae* of Valladolid (Torres Carro 2011: 41-52).

This *officina* likes vegetal themes –really scarce in the Meseta– on neutral or dark backgrounds: garlands that start from kraters with segments, flowers of very thin stem in the form of a little bell that leave of the vegetal horn of the scroll associated with rounded fruits. They are subjects and forms that are traced in the *villae* of Prado, Quintana del Marco, Navatejera (León), Cabezón de Pisuerga and also in the N and S arms of the cruciform *aula* of Pegasus of La Valmuza (Salamanca) (Regueras Grande – Pérez Olmedo 1997: 15-40). It is a territory where there is an interest in vegetal weaving in the old descriptions of the mosaics of Cabrillas and Castañeda de Tormes, both in Salamanca). The study of the tapestries of this *villa* of La Valmuza makes it possible to distinguish another *officina* (or group of skilled artisans within the same workshop) who worked in the SE area of the peristyle, and whose schemes and decorative forms are identical (Fig. 30a-e) to the mosaics of Alcázar de San Juan (Ciudad Real). The first *officina* (Prado-Almenara) would intervene mainly in Almenara



de Adaja where, as in La Valmuza, the theme of Pegasus and the Nymphs is also recorded, exclusive iconography of both *villae* inside Hispania, although its composition is different; The second *officina*, in Alcázar de San Juan and other *villae* of the Meseta Sur, for a long time associated with the work of the same itinerant workshop, among them the one of Gárgoles (Guadalajara), in which there is a cruciform *aula*, almost identical to the *aula* of La Valmuza.

This archaeological unit between the Douro Basin and the Tagus Basin, which form part of what we could call the "Theodosian historical nucleus", can also be seen in the relationship between the mosaics of Segovia (in the Meseta Norte) and the ones of *Complutum* (in the Meseta Sur): that one of the room with the Seasons of Paradinas presents a compositional organization apparently similar to that of Bacchus of *Complutum* whose iconography resounds in the description of Martín Sedeño, at the end of the 18th century, about the disappeared mosaic of the grape harvest of Los Mercados (Duratón). The so-called "red mosaic" of *Complutum* (Alcalá de Henares, Madrid) shows the same chromatic containment and linear treatment as the geometric carpet of the *oecus* of Aguilafuente, in line with aesthetics of the end of the 4th and 5th centuries. Relationships between the two Mesetas that Fernández Galiano wanted to extend to the *villa* of Quintanilla de la Cueza (mosaics of Leda, Bacchus and Cupids). (Fernández Galiano 1984b: 186).

This movement of the officinae is also reflected, as we pointed out, in a repertoire of images such as the scenes of the Iliad of Cabezón (Valladolid) and Rielves (Toledo), and above all in the busts of allegories that preside some of the most emblematic spaces of the east and west arms of the aula trichora of Los Quintanares (Rioseco de Soria, Soria), decorated with a mesh of hexagons and vermiculated central emblems, also with hexagonal form, only preserved the one of the western side with representation of Abundantia (or Fortuna) carrying plate and cornucopia (Fig. 31); in Santervás del Burgo (Fig. 32), in the middle of the oval room with rich carpet of complex geometric design, with image of Ceres, also with cornucopia and flabellum, inscribed in a frame of two squares that are crossed diagonally. It is possible that the mosaic B of Baños de Valdearados that carries the same rotating squares in the centre could have housed an allegory like that of Santervás. Also in the mosaic of the Plaza Mayor of Medinaceli (Fig. 33) a mosaic of triclinium was documented and its central part was occupied by a standing image of Ceres/Abundantia with the cornucopia, surrounded by representations of the winds, being identical in their formal coarseness to that one of Santervás. On the other side of the mountains we know two busts in the villa of Saucedo (Toledo): the first of them is of Iseaius, who

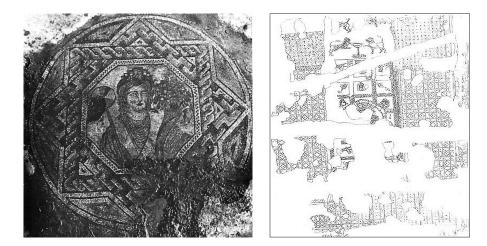




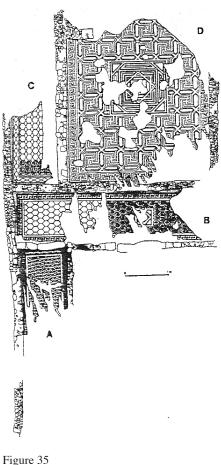
Figure 31 Feminine bust of Rioseco de Soria (Soria).

Figure 32 Feminine bust of Santervás del Burgo (Soria).

Figure 33 Mosaic of the Plaza Mayor of Medinaceli (Soria), after Borobio – Pascual 1998.



Figure 34 *Iscalis* of Saucedo (Talavera de la Reina, Toledo).



Oecus of Valdanzo (Soria), after Jimeno, Argente and Gómez 1988-1989.

wears a tunic and a bonnet of Pannonia, inscribed in a *tondo* in a mosaic with the known scheme of squares and circles, and holds cornucopia with the left hand, under which a fish goes, and an apple with the other hand; the second bust is of *Iscalis*, a matron dressed in a robe and mantle, carrying a cornucopia and a globe (Fig. 34), symbols of *Fortuna* or *Tyche*, in the of a Christian basilica at the end of the 5th century, built on the site of an old thermal space. This taste for supplanting mythological compositions by other allegorical or symbolic embodied abstractions is the fashion of the Late Roman Empire, as D. Levi pointed out for the mosaics of Antioch.

Finally we will refer to a workshop that D. Fernández Galiano called Cuevas-Valdanzo (Fernández Galiano 1980b: 127-137), because of the close affinity between the two *villae* of Soria. They are pavements of great ornamental intensity that take advantage of a simple and universal repertoire of geometric schemes and themes and also of a restricted chromatic palette (four colours). In spite of this they show a great compositional complexity that required preparatory designs and a technical knowledge previously defined by sinopias, or incisions, that guided the execution of the tapestry. A relevant feature of this officina is the development of squares, with inscribed circles, or crossed obliquely generating octagons, as emblems on the field of mosaic, markers of the distinction of the room or pointing, at other times, the access to them in the mosaic of the peristyle (Fig. 35). This complex treatment of the geometric themes, with concentric compositions, very overloaded and baroque compositions of textile modulation, turns some of our mosaics into authentic "oriental carpets" avant la lettre. Even the aforementioned squares rotated 45 degrees that give rise to an eight-pointed star suggest whether there would be no prophylactic interest in the development of this system, which will then retain all its magical value in the arts of Islam.

Beyond the relationship between the two *villae* (Cuevas-Valdanzo) and others of Soria such as Rioseco, Santervás and Ucero, others of Toledo as Rielves and others of the Ebro Basin, with dozens of geometric mosaics of the same tenor, we must understand the Cuevas-Valdanzo *officina* as a sort of "transverse phenomenon "that affects a good part of the peninsular interior area, especially the Mesetas), with different groups or teams working on common variables. That is, the wording of all these mosaics indicates above all the circulation of a standardised *koiné* that, for different reasons attracted many late Roman owners, being applied with different accents. Perhaps it is no coincidence that there is a close proximity between the centred scheme of the *oecus* of Valdanzo, the *triclinium* to the East of Cuevas, and the great mosaic no. 1 of the *villa* of Requejo, at the other end of the Castilian Meseta (Fig. 36a-b); or between the pool of the *frigidarium* of Requejo and the small bath of the *caldarium* of Cuevas. Nevertheless, although everyone shares this common feeling, for the moment, it is not possible to go further.

Other small *officinae* are detected in smaller areas, such as the one that worked in successive times in Cardeñajimeno, at the end of the 4th century and already in the 5th century in Baños de Valdearados, both in the province of Burgos; in Quintanilla de la Cueza and La Olmeda, or the group that intervened in *villae* of Ávila like Magazos, possibly Mancera (Ávila) and especially in San Pedro del Arroyo (Fig. 37a-b). Here we find an old scheme (El Picadero, Écija, in the 2nd century), reformulated in the 4th century in four *villae* of the Meseta: San Pedro del Arroyo, (Ávila), Guijar de Valdevacas (Segovia), Prado (Valladolid) and Villasirga (Palencia), to the extent that it seems work of the same mosaicists (Fig. 38a-d).

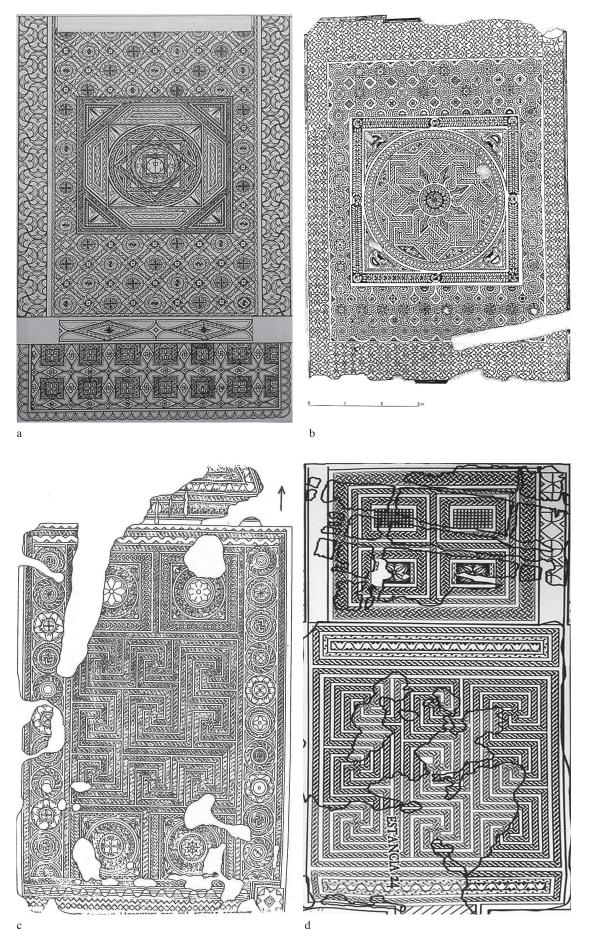


Figure 36a *Triclinium* of Cuevas de Soria (Soria).

Figure 36b Mosaic no. 1 of Requejo (Santa Cristina de la Polvorosa, Zamora), after Regueras Grande 1990.

Figure 37a Mosaic of Magazos (Ávila), after Museo de Ávila.

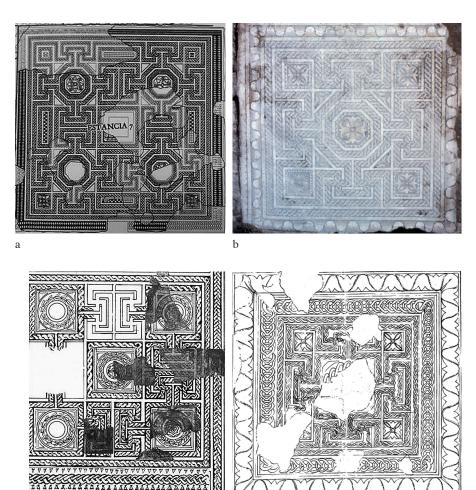
Figure 37b Mosaic of El Vergel (San Pedro del Arroyo, Ávila), after Moreda – Serrano 2012.

Figure 38a Room no. 7. San Pedro del Arroyo (Ávila), after Moreda – Serrano 2012.

Figure 38b Mosaic of La Palatina (Guijar de Valdevacas, Segovia).

Figure 38c Mosaic of *villa* de Prado (Valladolid).

Figure 38d Mosaic of Villasirga (Palencia).



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