

This week marks the start of a new set of pictures called "Art and sculptures from Hadrian's Villa".

Hadrian was the greatest patron of the arts. His imperial villa at Tibur was adorned with the very best of what the Roman empire had to offer in terms of works of art and building materials. Hundreds of statues, reliefs, architectural marbles and other decorations were found in the villa. Many of them have been lost, others are in Museums and private collections around the world.

Of particular interest is the central panel (*emblema*) of a large mosaic depicting a pair of centaurs (mythological creatures with the head, arms, and torso of a man and the body and legs of a horse) fighting wild cats. It is one of the most significant Roman mosaics.



*Pair of Centaurs Fighting Wild Cats Mosaic from Hadrian's Villa, ca. 120-130 AD, Altes Museum Berlin © Carole Raddato*

Mosaics were used throughout the complex but polychrome mosaics were only used in the noble buildings, mainly paved with *opus sectile*. This mosaic was found in situ along with other ones that

bore depictions of landscapes, animals and masks. It was part of the floor decoration of the dining room (*triclinium*) in the main palace. Presumably, it was modelled after a Greek panel painting or mosaic from the Hellenistic period.

The dramatic scene depicts a centaur casting a rock at the tiger who has slain his female companion. The female centaur lies dead, bloodied by the raking claws of the beast.





*Detail of the Centaur Mosaic; the male holding a rock aloft above his head*

© Carole Raddato

The mosaic is made of thousands of small, closely set tesserae (1-2 millimeters) called *opus vermiculatum*.



*Detail of the Centaur Mosaic; the tiger brings the female centaur to the ground and sink its claws into her side. © Carole Raddato*





*Detail of the Centaur Mosaic; the lion lies dead on the ground, bleeding. © Carole Raddato*



*Detail of the Centaur Mosaic; the leopard is ready to join the attack on the centaurs. © Carole Raddato*

This exquisite mosaic is on display at the [Altes Museum](#) in Berlin, along with stunning sculptures of Hadrian and Antinous.

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