

This month's masterpiece from Hadrian's Villa is a series of heavily restored mosaic panels depicting bucolic scenes with animals.

The first panel depicts a rocky landscape with a flock of goats peacefully grazing by a stream. A standing bronze statue dressed in a long tunic is standing on a rock. It holds a bunch of grapes in its right hand and a thyrsus in his left hand. The statue is probably an image of the god Dionysus meant to evoke a sacral-idyllic landscape. Dionysus was also considered to be a god of fertility. A human phallus seems to be represented on the tablet next to the statue. The phallus was a symbol of his power, the ability to create new life, but also served as an anti-evil-eye apotropaic.



Mosaic panel depicting a rocky landscape with goats by a stream and a standing statue of



Dionysus.

The second mosaic panel is very similar. It depicts a group of five goats by a stream, but the figure of the god is seated in a rustic sanctuary.



Mosaic panel depicting a rocky landscape with goats by a stream and a seated statue of Dionysus.



The third panel features a lion attacking a wild bull while another bull looks on with fear.



Mosaic depicting a rocky landscape with a lion attacking bull.

These panels formed part of the floor decoration of a building in the Imperial Palace complex known today as the Sala a Tre Navate (Hall with Three Aisles). It belongs to the second phase of construction (AD 125 – 134) of the Villa. The building consisted of a vestibule that led to a *triclinium* with two rows

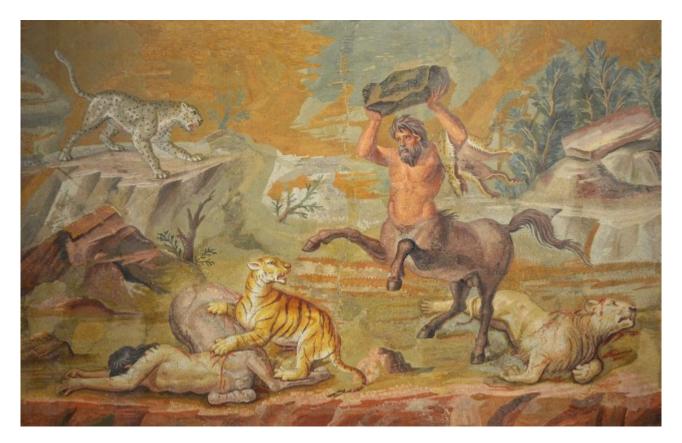


of columns and a small rectangular niche. This type of room was called "oecus corinthius" by Vitruvius. It was a kind of colonnade with a vaulted ceiling in the central part and a smooth ceiling over the external ambulatory.



Sala a Tre Navate (Hall of Three Aisles), Imperial Palace complex.

The vestibule contained the extraordinary *emblema* depicting a pair of centaurs being attacked by wild cats (see full post here).



Pair of Centaurs Fighting Wild Cats Mosaic from Hadrian's Villa, c. AD 130.

Today, the three mosaic panels with bucolic scenes are on public display in the Vatican Museums in Rome, in the rooms Gabinetto delle Maschere (Cabinet of Masks) and Sala degni Animali (Halls of the Animals). The Centaur mosaic is in the Altes Museum in Berlin.

Sources:

- Greek and Roman Mosaics by Umberto Pappalardo (2012, Abbeville Press)
- Hadrian's Villa Guide by Adembri Benedetta (2004, Electa)

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