

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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