



Arianna's Mosaics: A Surey of the Villa Arianna's Mosaics

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Introduction

Arianna's Mosaics A Survey of the Villa Arianna's Roman Mosaics investigates the art historical context behind the creation, function, and experience of the floor mosaics of the Villa Arianna in Roman Stabiae (1st century BCE - 1st century CE) based on original archaeological documentation in the form of measured line drawings of select floors and photographs throughout the excavations. The Villa Arianna was preserved by ash from the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE and excavated in the eighteenth century. Because of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, the frescoed walls and mosaiced floors are exceptionally well preserved and provide great insight into the experience of ancient Roman viewers.

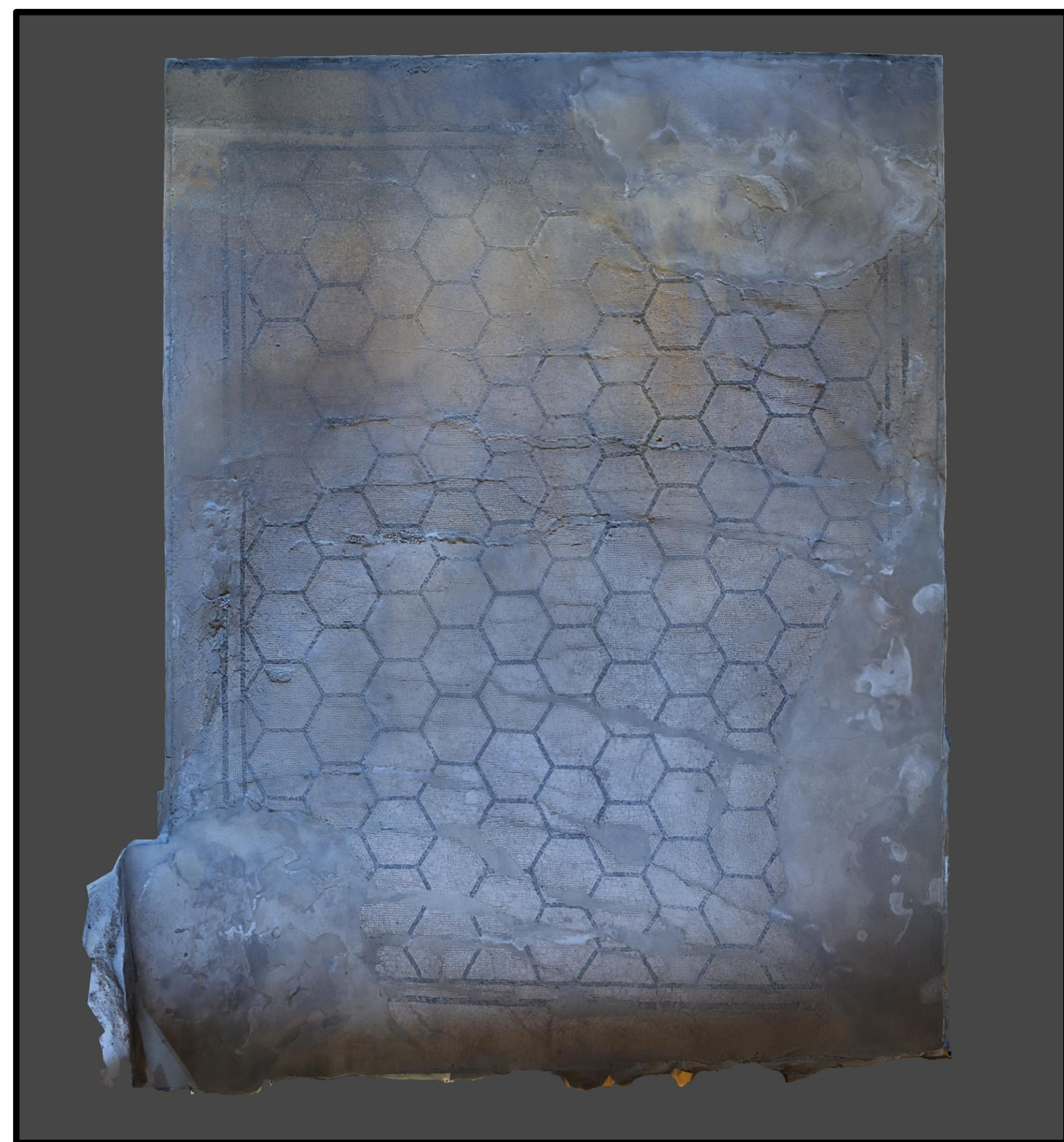


Figure 1:
Orthophoto of room 9 in the Villa Arianna, Stabiae Italy

Technological Methods

The measured digital drawings are made with the assistance of Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) and Photogrammetry technologies. All data collection for this project was conducted on-site at the Villa Arianna, including photographs and measurements. Orthophotos (non-perspectival photographs created with photogrammetry) were made from some of the best preserved mosaiced rooms and door thresholds and then scaled to LiDAR measurements to produce high-quality measured line drawings.

References

- ¹ Dunbabin, K. (1999) *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 304-10.
- ² Swift, E. (2009) *Style and Function in Roman Decoration, Living with Objects and Interiors* (Oxfordshire: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group) 79.
- ³ Swift, E. (2009) *Style and Function in Roman Decoration*, 41.

Research Objectives

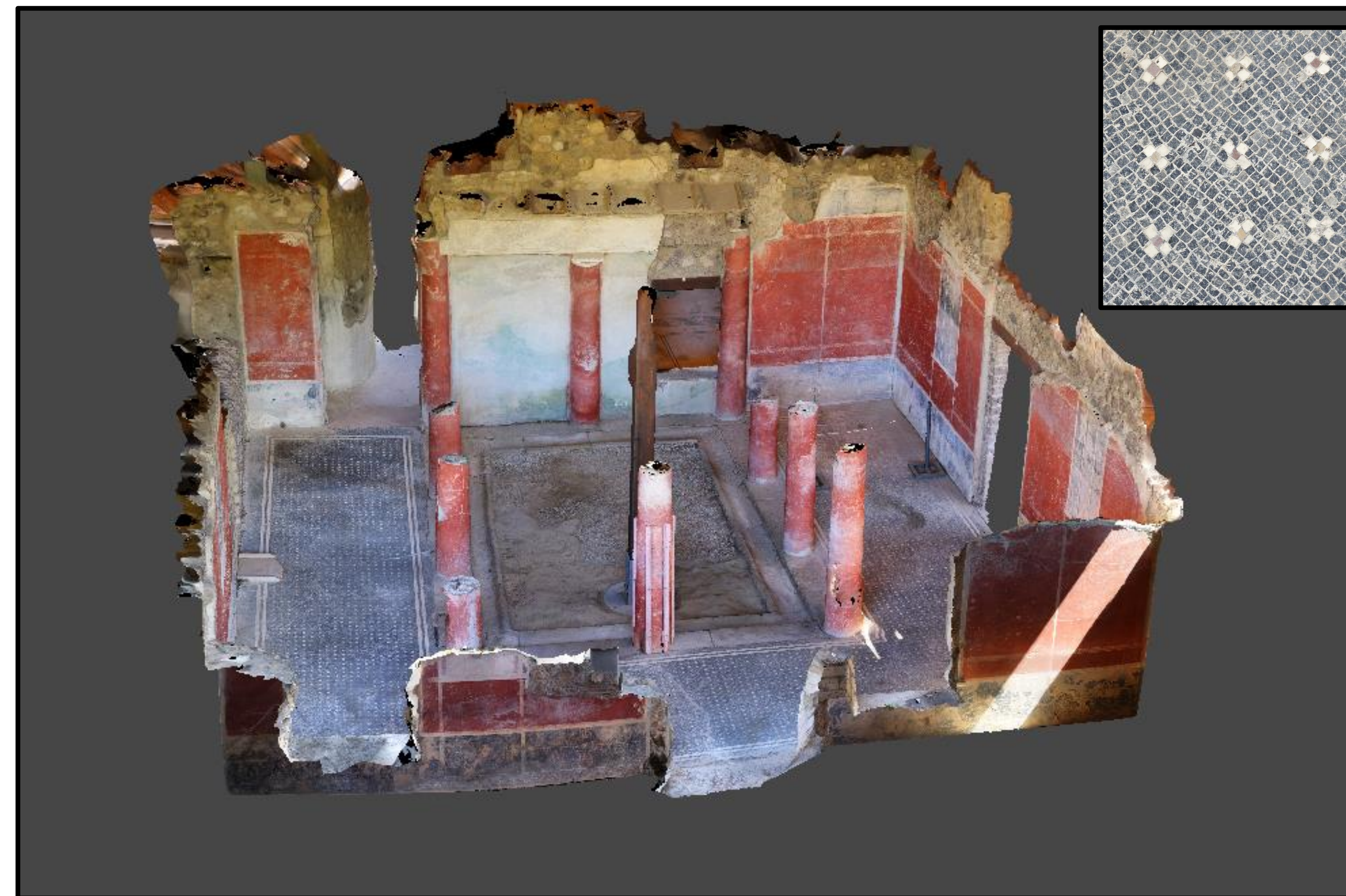


Figure 2: *Photogrammetrical model of room 86 of the Villa Arianna, Stabiae Italy. Inset: detail of the mosaic floor pattern in room 86.*

The research from this project examines the chronology of the Villa Arianna's mosaics in relation to the overall decoration of the rooms, particularly their response to the development of the villa's fresco program. The mosaics have not been well studied, but the leaders of the University of Maryland Villa Arianna survey have recognized their substantial integration with the rest of the visual and spatial program, which included frescoes, gardens, water features, and framed views. This research applies a mixed methodology to the study of the mosaics within the villa, connecting their creation processes, functions of use, iconography, and concepts of space. Furthermore, this research investigates if there is a visual sequence within the decoration of the rooms intended to guide the movements of the viewer.

Mosaic floors are a key element within a decorative program, that heavily impacts the viewer's experiences of a Roman residence through their function. Mosaic floors can be used to distinguish the hierarchy of rooms by comparing their complexity in relation to one another within a Roman residence.¹ The lavishness of a space depends on its use as a private or public area, with the latter more embellished to impress visiting clients. Furthermore, many Roman floors are intended to interact with their viewers such as to indicate a direction for movement, provide illusions for entertainment, and even protect a space from evil intent. Other designs are meant to engage with the theme of the decorative program more directly by displaying variations on similar motifs to play with the viewer's memory.²

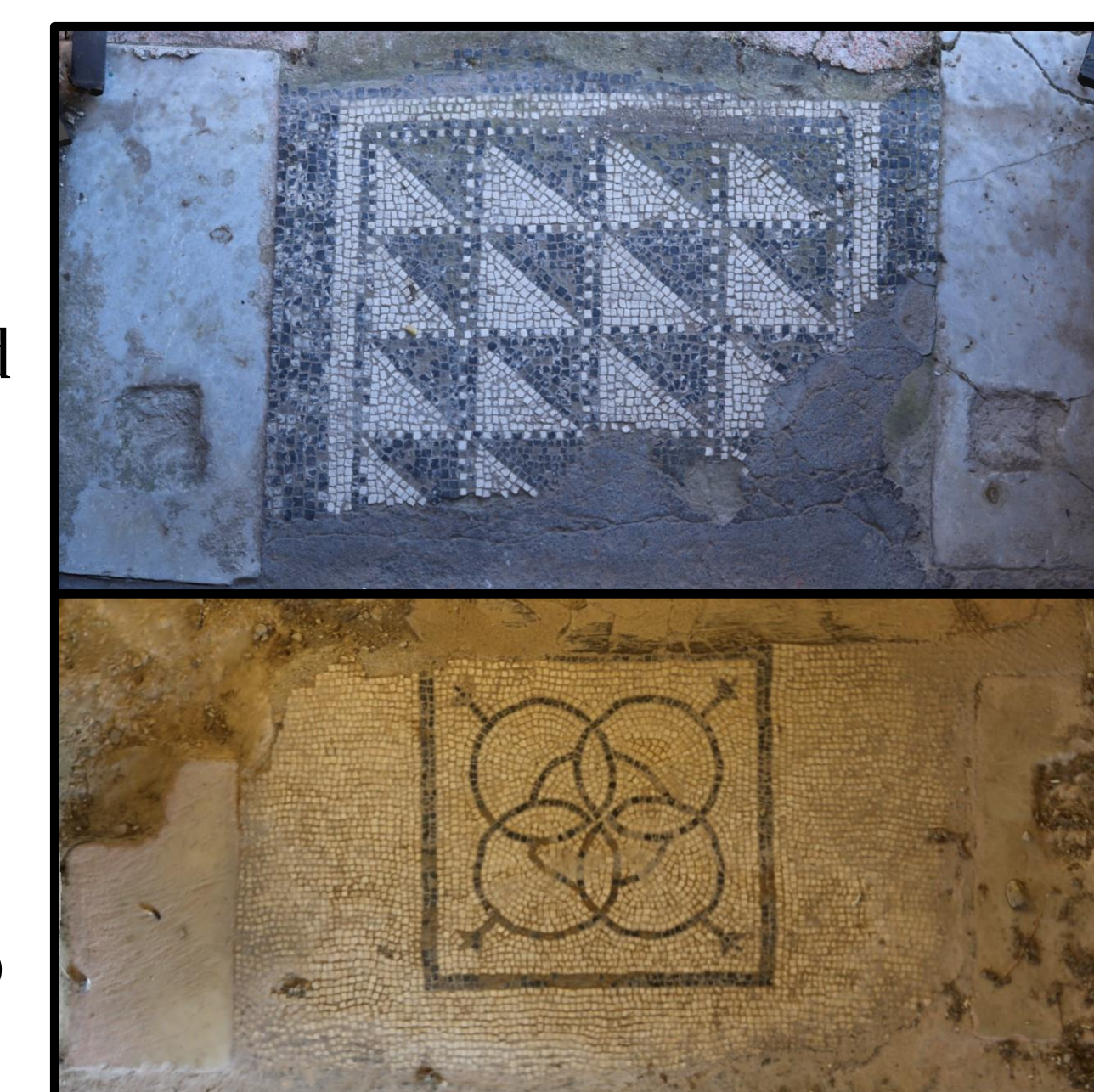


Figure 3: (above) *Doorway threshold of room F in the Villa Arianna exhibiting an interactive illusion, Stabiae Italy. (below) Room O doorway threshold in the Villa Arianna, Stabiae Italy.*

In Progress Research

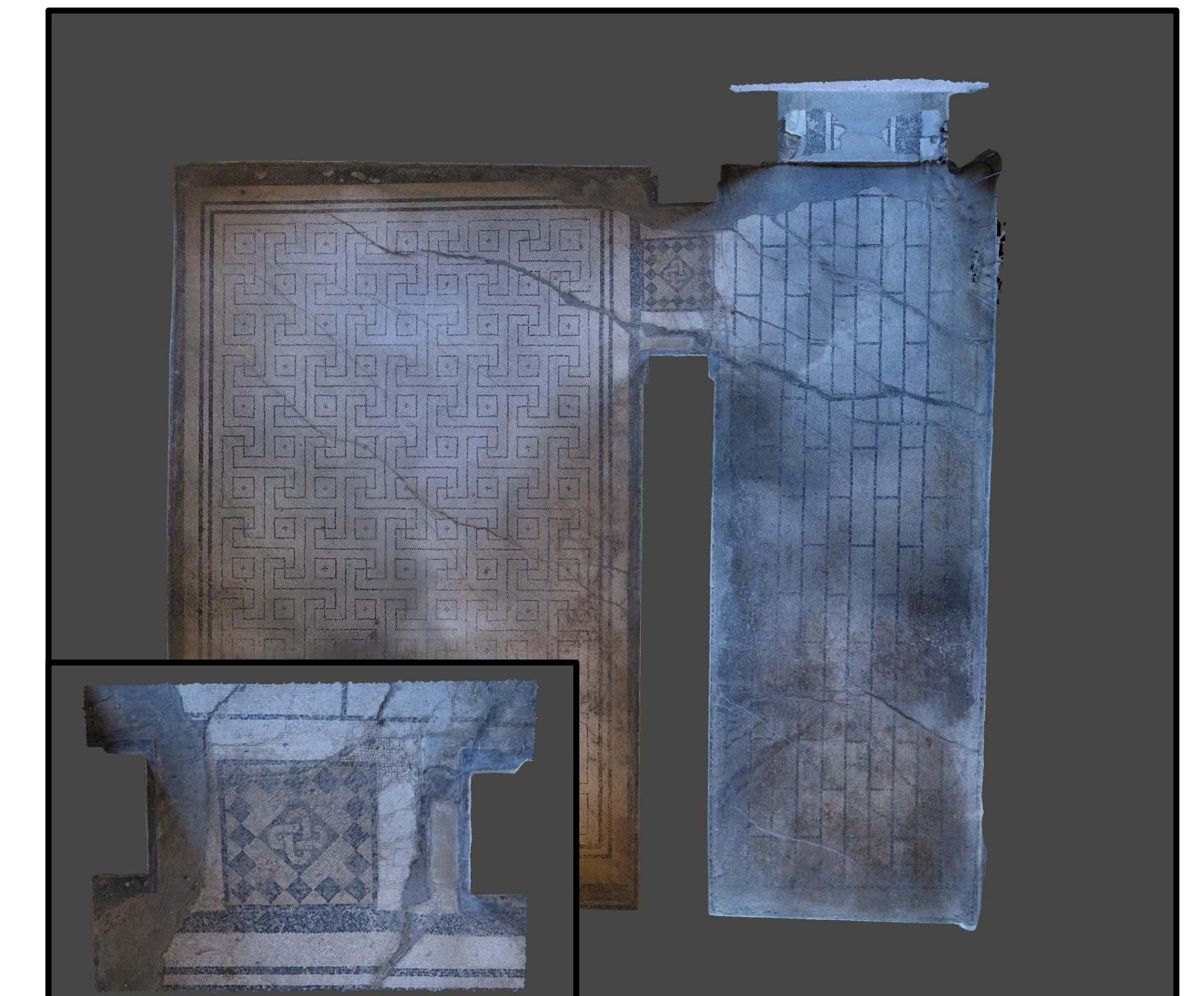


Figure 4: *Orthophoto of rooms 11 and 12 of the Villa Arianna, Stabiae Italy. Inset: Solomon's Knot doorway threshold mosaic.*

Apotropaic motifs are meant to ward of evil intent and safeguard the space that they reside in. These types of symbols include a wide range of imagery, from ferocious beasts to geometric patterns. The Solomon's knot on the Threshold of rooms 11 and 12 is one of these protective symbols (Figure 4). Apotropaic imagery often appears in liminal spaces such as hallways and thresholds. Dunbabin explains that in cases where a singular apotropaic symbol is used, it serves a protective function, whereas, in instances where they form a pattern, they are utilized more for decoration, such as the connected swastika pattern in room 12 (Figure 4).³ These symbols would have been recognizable to Roman viewers and therefore would have impacted their experiences of the space.

Conclusion

- High-quality illustrations not only aid in the research project for which they are created but also contribute to the wider scholarly community as interpretative tools for facilitating understanding.
- Research into the mosaic floors of the Villa Arianna will both further clarify the historical context behind the villa's decorative program and provide a better understanding of the experience that these artworks were meant to impart on their ancient viewers.



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