


2018-3

# Piecing Together Roman Life and Art: The Impact of Societal Changes on Developments in Roman Mosaics

Emily A. Lewis

*Xavier University, Cincinnati, OH*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/hab>

 Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#), [Ancient Philosophy Commons](#), [Classical Archaeology and Art History Commons](#), [Classical Literature and Philology Commons](#), and the [Other Classics Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Lewis, Emily A., "Piecing Together Roman Life and Art: The Impact of Societal Changes on Developments in Roman Mosaics" (2018). *Honors Bachelor of Arts*. 36.  
<https://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/hab/36>

This Capstone/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate at Exhibit. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Bachelor of Arts by an authorized administrator of Exhibit. For more information, please contact [exhibit@xavier.edu](mailto:exhibit@xavier.edu).

**Piecing Together Roman Life and Art:**  
**The Impact of Societal Changes on Developments in Roman Mosaics**

Emily Lewis  
Classics Thesis  
Dr. Shannon Hogue, Director  
Professor Kelly Blank and Professor Suzanne Chouteau, Readers  
Dr. Thomas Strunk, Course Instructor

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Adaption of Polychrome Mosaics into Black and White Mosaics</b> .....	<b>9</b>
I. Polychromatic Figural .....	9
II. Polychrome with Black and White Transition .....	17
III. Black and White Figural .....	22
<b>Chapter 2: The Change from Polychrome to Black and White Mosaics</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Chapter 3: The Spread of Black and White Mosaics</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>53</b>
<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Construction of Mosaics</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendix 2: <i>Cursus Honorum</i></b> .....	<b>62</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>63</b>

## Introduction

Imagine yourself walking down the streets of Ancient Rome. You see the hustle and bustle of everyday life going on around you. Carts are being pulled on the cobblestone paths and the occasional shout from two people in a quarrel can be heard in the distance. Magnificent atrium-houses and buildings are on either side of the narrow street. You walk into one of the atrium-houses, look around, and what is the first thing you notice? The decorations. Frescos with gold trim cover the walls around a fountain centered in the room, and covering the entire floor is a beautiful mosaic.

An image of a blue bird is in the middle of the mosaic. The light blue hues of the bird blend together with the darker shades, making it seem as if the bird itself was flying across the floor. You notice that the tiles are so small, the individual plumes are delineated across the wings of the bird. Surrounding the bird is a meander of black and white tiles that covers the rest of the floor. The bands of colors cross over one another to create a labyrinth design. All you can think about is how and why this astonishing, intricate and impressive form of art came to be.

Appearing as luxury decorations in public spaces, urban houses, and rural villas, mosaic trends changed both stylistically and technically over the course of hundreds of years. These types of changes occurred to mosaics that were found within Ancient Italy during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and continued into the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. During these times, many societal changes transpired due to the expansion of the Roman Empire under the Republic, Augustus' founding of the Principate, and the urbanization of ancient cities throughout the Imperial Rome.<sup>1</sup> By relating the changes found within Roman mosaics and the societal differences between the Roman Republic

---

<sup>1</sup> The Augustan Principate refers to the social and political reforms that Augustus made at the beginning of the Roman Empire in 27BC. For detailed information of the Principate see: Edmondson, 2009; Dunstan, 2010.

(509-27BC) and Roman Empire (27BC-476AD), the reasoning for certain developments in Roman mosaics is enhanced.

Figural mosaics were a major form of architectural floor decoration in the ancient Mediterranean. The earliest figural mosaics, appearing in Greece during the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, were **pebble mosaics**, which used natural river pebbles in order to waterproof the existing dirt floors. During the Hellenistic period (4<sup>th</sup> century-1<sup>st</sup> century BC), mosaic styles and techniques underwent several changes. The technique of using pebbles continued throughout the early Hellenistic Era at the same time as mosaicists began experimenting with using forms of shaped stones, including *tesserae* and tiles. A *tessera* was marble, limestone, granite, or volcanic stone cut into square or irregularly shaped fragments.<sup>2</sup> During the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, around the time that *tesserae* started to be used, mosaics found in Pella, the Macedonian capital in Northern Greece, used a mix of pebbles and cut stone.<sup>3</sup> The pebbles were focused within the border and background of the mosaics, while the images were made of *tesserae*. Cut stone allowed for a variety of colors to be used, as well as a more precise design, so the images displayed more detailed than those in pebble mosaics.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars marked the mix of pebbles with cut stone as a transitional period before entering into the full *tesserae* mosaic.<sup>5</sup>

At the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, most of the mosaics made were comprised strictly of *tesserae* in two distinct styles: *opus vermiculatum* and *opus tessellatum*. Mosaics in the *opus vermiculatum* style were highly sophisticated and classified as ‘fine pictorial’ images due to the detail that was conveyed. Using *tesserae* as small as an eighth of an inch, mosaicists were able to

---

<sup>2</sup> Words in bold appear in Glossary.

<sup>3</sup> Pella, a hub for Macedonian kings, including the birthplace of Alexander the Great, was a common trend setter for mosaics due to the regal nature of the city.

<sup>4</sup> Dunbabin, 1999: 18-19.

<sup>5</sup> Ling, 1998: 24.

create subtle shading within the images.<sup>6</sup> The small size of the stones and the colors allowed for shading and small details to be more prominent than using larger stones or pebbles.<sup>7</sup> The *opus vermiculatum* mosaics were commonly found in *emblemata*, however, there were a few mosaics in this style that covered the entire floor.<sup>8</sup> An *emblema* was a detailed, figural mosaic that was made in its own panel, separate from the rest of the mosaic. It was then inserted into the center of an *opus tessellatum* floor, which created designs comprised of same-sized, square stones measuring about three-eighths to three-quarters of an inch.<sup>9</sup> This form was found between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, but was most popular during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.<sup>10</sup> Full *tesserae* mosaics were prominent in Pergamum and Delos, but also expanded to Italy during the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC due to Rome's capture of Macedonia in 168 BC and the Roman invasion of mainland Greece in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

Between the Late Republic and Early Imperial periods (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), Roman Italy adopted and developed mosaic styles from the Hellenistic world. The earliest of figural mosaics found in Italy during the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC were polychrome *opus vermiculatum*. These highly detailed **polychrome mosaics** then adapted into what I will term the “transitional phase” of mosaics because they were a mix of polychrome and black and white colors. These transitional mosaics occurred during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. From there, the mosaics primarily were in the **black and white style** during the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. This change from polychrome to black and white mosaic was a dramatic shift in artistic style and warrants explanation.

---

<sup>6</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 28.

<sup>7</sup> Ling, 1998: 25; Dunbabin, 1999: 29.

<sup>8</sup> Note the Alexander mosaic in the House of the Faun was made in this style. This will be discussed later in the paper.

<sup>9</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 27.

<sup>10</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 25.

Within this polychromatic to black and white shift, there were two major developments of mosaics that can be attributed to social phenomena between the Late Republic and Early Empire. The first was the initial change between the styles of mosaics. The technique in polychromatic mosaics was more precise than black and white mosaics due to the small *tesserae* that were used. In addition, the use of shading made them a more realistic image than the silhouettes that were portrayed in black and white mosaics. Because polychrome *opus vermiculatum* mosaics were the most elaborate in form and the most labor intensive of all mosaic techniques, they were the most expensive.<sup>11</sup> Black and white mosaics were not as demanding in terms of design or creation, and thus were cheaper than polychrome. However, black and white mosaics were favored between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. I attribute this change between the elaborate forms of mosaics to the less detailed and more cost effective technique to the social reforms of Augustus.

The second change in mosaics related to societal differentiations is the expansion of black and white mosaics throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD. The few polychrome mosaics that were found in Italy, due to their expensive and unique style, were primarily within elite houses. After the initial change from polychrome into black and white mosaics, there was a booming number of black and white mosaics found within urban houses. Further, these mosaics were not only found in elite **atrium style houses**, but in the *insulae* of the middle and working class people. I argue that the expansion of black and white mosaics in both elite houses and working class *insulae* was a product of sumptuary laws, lower classes imitating upper class living styles, and the urbanization of cities during the Early Republic.

---

<sup>11</sup> The differentiation between expenses in polychrome vs. black and white mosaics will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

While mosaics did appear in public spaces, the root of the changes in Roman mosaics can be identified in urban homes. Urban houses acted as a place of gathering for many people, and a way to display one's social status. Because of this need to display the status of a family within a house, the use of mosaics helped exhibit an elite status. This contrasts against rural housing because villas outside the city were used primarily for leisure rather than for conducting business, so the decorations within them were used more for pleasure than for impression.<sup>12</sup> Further, very few polychromatic *opus vermiculatum* mosaics were found within public spaces. When public areas began to be decorated with mosaics, it was around the start of the Roman Empire (late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC). These mosaics were typically black and white *opus tessellatum* and appeared in public bath houses or stores. Because there were so few polychromatic mosaics in public spaces, the changes in Roman mosaics is understood more clearly if examined in urban houses. Accordingly, this thesis will examine the developments of Roman mosaics within domestic contexts of Rome, Pompeii, and Ostia because of the drastic changes experienced by these cities during the Late Republic and Early Empire (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC- 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD).

Although these changes in mosaics can be attributed to various factors such as available resources, skills of the mosaicists, and room aesthetics with wall paintings, the changes in the relationship amongst social classes is a factor that is rarely examined, but strongly impacted these development in mosaic styles. First, an analysis of various mosaics from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD will be given so that there is an understanding of the changes that occurred. From there, reasons for the adaptations of polychrome into black and white will be assessed; focusing the argument on analysis of the effects of sumptuary laws and Augustus' influence on society during the founding of the Principate. Chapter 3 will examine the spread of black and white mosaics that happened at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and into the first two centuries AD.

---

<sup>12</sup> Hales, 2003: 35.



To argue for this expansion of mosaics, inspecting the commercialization that was occurring within cities such as Rome, Ostia, and Pompeii will prove critical. While the elite had control over cities during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, it was due to the changes to social classes brought on by sumptuary laws, Augustus' authority at the beginning of the Empire, and the commercialization occurring within cities that influenced the shift from polychrome mosaics into black and white mosaics and the stylistic spread to *insulae* of the working class.

## Chapter 1: Adaptation of Polychrome Mosaics into Black and White Mosaics

Roman figural mosaics dating between the Late Republican and Early Imperial periods exhibited a wide variety of techniques and styles. Like any other art form, these characteristics changed over time. Prior to examining the mechanisms of change, it is first necessary to observe the chronological development of Roman mosaic styles. The earliest figural mosaics in Italy, appeared around the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, seem to be derived from Hellenistic mosaics found in the Greek East. By the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, however, Roman mosaics developed into new styles and techniques not previously seen in Hellenistic examples. At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and into the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, Roman figural mosaics had adapted into their own art form, different from anywhere else in Antiquity.<sup>13</sup> In particular, the mosaics found in domestic contexts, including the urban *domi* and *insulae* of Pompeii, Rome, and Ostia, revealed the most unique developments, specifically of how luxury was portrayed in Roman society.

### I. Polychromatic Figural

During the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> century BC in Italy, one of the most prominent forms of figural mosaics was polychromatic *opus vermiculatum*. This form of mosaic was a Hellenistic technique brought to Italy from the Greek East.<sup>14</sup> Roman elites viewed *opus vermiculatum* as a luxury good because this form appeared in many regal palaces, specifically in Macedonia. Because it appeared in living quarters of kings, Romans imitated examples of the style within their own *domi* so that their wealth would be displayed. If a Roman citizen had the similar art forms to those that appeared in king's palaces, then it would make the Roman seem as if he were of

---

<sup>13</sup> Note that the progression of figural images in mosaics is different than the progression of geometric patterns. For a general overview and introduction to geometric mosaics see: Blake, 1936; Westgate, 2000.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, Roman mosaics overlap with Hellenistic mosaics in Italy. Many Roman mosaics were imitating Hellenistic styles, but because there is not a clear break away from Hellenistic mosaics, I will be including some Roman-Hellenistic in order to show the progression of Roman figural mosaics.

<sup>14</sup> Many mosaics around 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC in Italy resemble mosaics found at Delos, Pergamum, Carthage, etc.

“royal” influence, which could lead to them having more power within the Republic. Because of this desire to have luxurious goods, the Hellenistic mosaic technique was adopted into Roman culture.

*Opus vermiculatum*, the name of which means “worm work,” used very fine, irregular *tesserae* so that the pieces could easily form curves, which allowed for the desired designs. Because fine details were required for the images to appear realistic within the mosaic, this technique was a very time consuming process. This style was considered polychromatic due to the range of *tesserae* colors in materials such as white, red and green marble, black granite, and brown and yellow limestone. Some *opus vermiculatum* mosaics used just a few colors with a range of tones, whereas others had a dynamic variety of colors. The more unique the color was, the harder it was to find, thus many of the *tesserae* found in Roman polychromatic mosaics were imported.<sup>15</sup> Further, because of the use of colored *tesserae* and the long process in which it took to lay the mosaic, *opus vermiculatum* was the most expensive form of mosaics.

The Alexander mosaic, found in the House of the Faun in Pompeii, was one of the earliest polychromatic, figural mosaics found in Italy, and an example of *opus vermiculatum*. The mosaic was located in the *exedra* of the house where, because it was located in an open recess off of the *peristyle*, it could be admired by outside viewers.<sup>16</sup> The House of the Faun was built between the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, and the paintings found within the *exedra* were in First Style, thus scholars dated the mosaic around 120 BC.<sup>17</sup>

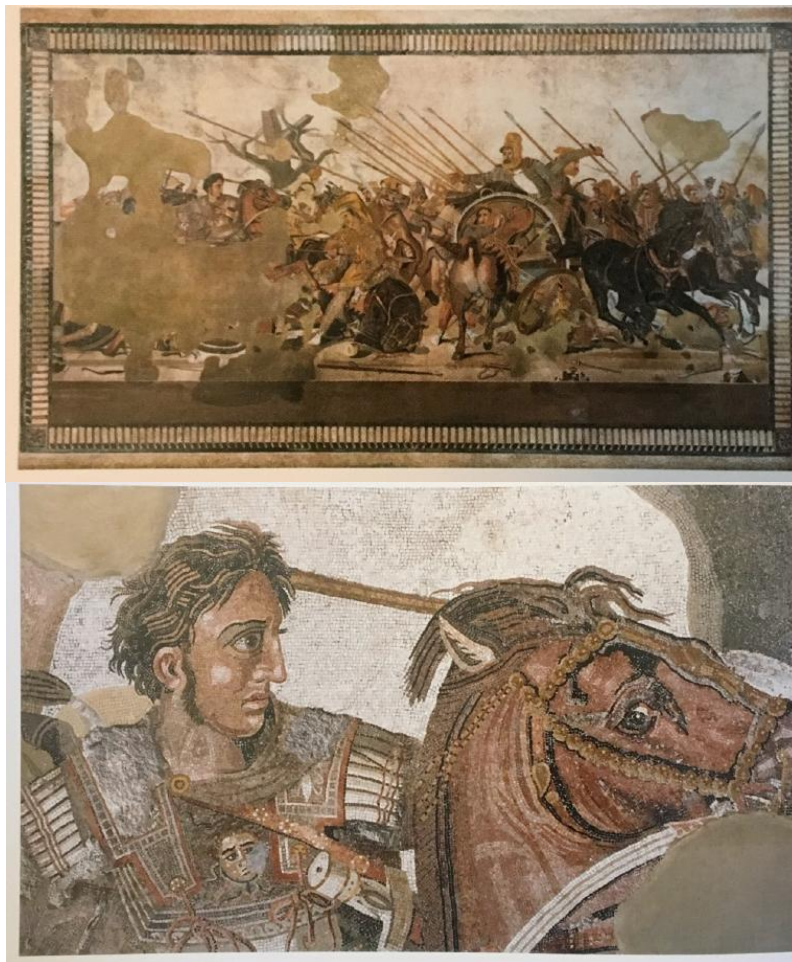
---

<sup>15</sup> Dunbabin, 1999: 279-280.

<sup>16</sup> Ling, 1998: 29.

<sup>17</sup> Dunbabin, 1999: 40. Wall paintings appeared in Italy around 200BC. Between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, wall paintings adapted into Four Styles based on the complexity of the designs. The First Style was very one-dimensional, using colors to create faux marble images. The later examples of wall paintings developed into more 3D like images by adding different points of view and layering images on top of each other. For more information see Tuck, 2014: 94-107.

The Alexander Mosaic, measured in total 10ft. 5in. x18ft. 2in., used *tesserae* about .08in. wide in order to depict the people and animals.<sup>18</sup> Because of the small size of the *tesserae* and the overall dimensions of the mosaic, it was believed that over four million pieces were used.<sup>19</sup> The *tesserae* followed the well-known “four-color scheme” that was used by many Hellenistic artists. This style was composed of various tones in the color palette of reds, yellows, black, and white.<sup>20</sup> While this mosaic was located in Pompeii, scholars still classify it as a Hellenistic mosaic.



**Figure 1 (Above):** Alexander Mosaic: House of the Faun, Pompeii.  
**Figure 2 (Below):** Face of Alexander: House of the Faun, Pompeii<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Generally, most polychrome *opus vermiculatum* mosaics were not made in this grand of size. Typically, this technique was found in *emblema*, which only took up a small portion of the floor.

<sup>19</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 153.

<sup>20</sup> Dunbabin, 1999: 42.

<sup>21</sup> Images from Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 156-158.

To help us understand how this mosaic was classified as Hellenistic, we must begin by looking at the image portrayed. This mosaic depicted the scene where Alexander was victorious over the Persian King Darius during either the Battle of Issus or the Battle of Gaugamela.<sup>22</sup> The amount of detail that was captured within the scene is not plausible unless it had been created close to when the battle occurred—some couple hundreds of years before the mosaic was made.<sup>23</sup> This leads us to believe that the mosaic is a copy of a Hellenistic painting created by someone during the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Pliny the Elder, in his *Natural History*, alluded to two people who could have made the painting from which this mosaic was copied: *Philoxenum Eretrium, cuius tabula nullis postferenda, Cassandro regi picta, continuit Alexandri proelium cum Dario* (Plin, *N.H.* (35.36.110). “Philoxenus of Eretria, of whose picture must be considered of less account by no one, having painted for King Cassander, preserved the Battle of Alexander with Darius.” and Aristides of Thebes, who, *idem pinxit proelium cum Persis, centum homines tabula ea complexus...* (Plin. *N.H.* 35.36.99). “The same [Aristides of Thebes] painted the battle with the Persians, 100 men having been contained in that painting.”<sup>24</sup> As it appears very likely that the mosaic was a copy of a Hellenistic painting, we can deduce the ways in which this mimics Hellenistic art.

Techniques such as *opus vermiculatum* were implemented in order to realistically transcribe people, objects, and other elements in nature, thus the Alexander mosaic in essence sought as accurately as possible to imitate the original painting. By making the entire mosaic completely out of *tesserae*, the mosaicist adopted the trends that were found in Pergamum and

---

<sup>22</sup> Ling 1998: 28. For discussion of the battle debate see Dunbabin, 1999; Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Dunbabin, 1999: 41.

<sup>24</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiella, 2012: 153. All Latin to English translations are my own.

branching into Alexandria at that time.<sup>25</sup> The diminutive tiles and the gradient of the light brown to dark brown colors produced a three dimensional illusion in keeping with the artistic tastes of the Hellenistic world. Seeing that the Alexander mosaic was Hellenistic sets the foundation for understanding the developments within Roman mosaics because it reveals the influence of wealth within the Roman elite.

The Alexander mosaic was not the only Hellenistic mosaic found at Pompeii during the Late Republican period. Dating back to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (around 100 BC), two mosaics found in the Villa of Cicero are considered Hellenistic.<sup>26</sup> Located in the ambulatory of the villa, one at the north end, the other at the south, the mosaics exemplify the same *opus vermiculatum* technique that was used in the Alexander mosaic. In both mosaics, the mosaicist used a process called, “painting in stone,” occurring when the mortar, which held the *tesserae* in place, was painted; allowing for a seamless appearance of fine details throughout the mosaic to stand out.<sup>27</sup> Because this was a common Hellenistic technique, archaeologists were able to be more accurate when dating the two mosaics.

The first mosaic, “The Possessed Girl” measures 17x16 ¼ in. and depicts four musicians, three of whom wore masks and the fourth, a child, who was not wearing a mask. The second mosaic, “Women at Breakfast,” 16 ½x13 ¾ in., shows three women being waited on by a servant boy, as they sat around a lion-legged table. The *tesserae* in both mosaics ranged in sizes no larger than .09in. and as small as .03in.<sup>28</sup> In the figure of “The Possessed Girl” attention was

---

<sup>25</sup> Ling 1998: 24-25. Note that there is some debate whether the Alexander mosaic was made on property or imported from another location. For debate see Dunbabin 1999: 43.

<sup>26</sup> This Villa was most likely not owned by Cicero himself. He refers to it in his works as one of his favorite places to retreat; however, the true owner of the house is unknown (Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 171).

<sup>27</sup> Dunbabin, 1999: 47.

<sup>28</sup> Dunbabin, 1999: 47. It is interesting to note that both “The Possessed Girl” and “Women at Breakfast” were signed by Dioskourides of Samos. These were the “only known signed mosaics from Campania.” This indicates that the mosaics could have been imported in the marble panels that they were made in. For more information see Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 171.

drawn to her through the use of bright colors, such as turquoise, pink, and yellow. The modulation of these colors from lighter to darker values created movement within her figure and the overall image. The use of the bright colors set against a neutral background made the figures “pop” with the illusion of high relief. In the “Women at Breakfast” mosaic, the colors were dark, neutral pink and yellows, which added shade and depth to the mosaic.<sup>29</sup> While the mosaics, “The Possessed Girl” and “Women at Breakfast,” were similar to the Alexander mosaic, they also had significant differences.



**Figure 3 (Left):** The Possessed Girl: The Villa of Cicero, Pompeii  
**Figure 4 (Right):** Women at Breakfast: The Villa of Cicero, Pompeii.<sup>30</sup>

Both the mosaics from the Villa of Cicero and the Alexander mosaic were created in *opus vermiculatum*; however, the way that the mosaics were placed on the floor was completely different. The Alexander mosaic covered the entire floor of the *exedra*. The *tesserae* used were generally the same size and the battle scene was the whole focus of the mosaic. In comparison, “The Possessed Girl” and “Women at Breakfast” were *emblemata*. This means that they were

<sup>29</sup> Dunbabin, 1999: 47.

<sup>30</sup> Images from Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 170-173.

created in their own panels and placed within a surrounding mosaic. While the figural images in the two mosaics were placed on the floor to be the focal point of the mosaic, they were connected by a black, white, yellow, red, and light blue **meander** pattern in the method of *opus tessellatum*.<sup>31</sup> The sizes of the *tesserae* used in the two mosaics were the same size, however, the geometric pattern that surrounded the images in the Villa of Cicero were of a larger size, thus contrasting against the Alexander mosaic. Further, the Alexander mosaic used the four color palette, while the mosaics in the Villa of Cicero used a greater variety of colors, including pinks and blues. By comparing these mosaics, we were able to see that the *opus vermiculatum* method varied in form. However, both *emblemata*, like the mosaics in the Villa of Cicero, and entire floor mosaics, like the Alexander mosaic, would have displayed luxury within the *domus* because of the intricate and expensive technique of *opus vermiculatum*.

Two very similar mosaics dating ten years apart started to display the decline in detailed images that were common with Hellenistic polychromatic *opus vermiculatum*. The first mosaic (Fig. 5) appeared in the House of the Faun in Pompeii sometime between 110BC-90BC. The mosaic was divided into two sections; the top half displayed a scared cat crouching over a bird, and on the bottom half were two sitting ducks.<sup>32</sup> It measured about 20in. on all sides with *tesserae* ranging from .03-0.25 inches, thus exhibiting *opus vermiculatum* technique. The second mosaic (Fig. 6), located in Rome, in the *trinchinium*, the dining room, of the Villa Di Cecchignola found in the Via Ardeatina had a mosaic dated to the first quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (probably between 80-70 BC).<sup>33</sup> This mosaic was an *emblema* that was surrounded by a white mosaicked floor. This 17in square *emblema* was made in *opus vermiculatum* with *tesserae* ranging from .07in.-.15in. When the two mosaics are compared, the mosaic at the House of the

---

<sup>31</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 171.

<sup>32</sup> Tammisto, 1997: 387-389.

<sup>33</sup> Tammisto, 1997: 389.



Faun used bolder colors, ranging from greys, oranges, and greens, than the mosaic at the Villa Di Cecchignola.<sup>34</sup> Further, there were more noticeable details on the cat and wings of the duck than in the Villa Di Cecchignola. Because the mosaic at the Villa Di Cecchignola is dated after the mosaic in the House of the Faun, we can begin to see the decline of details in the images.



**Figure 5 (left):** Cat Catching Domestic Fowl above Two Ducks with a Lotus Flower, Passerines, and Seafood: House of the Faun, Pompeii

**Figure 6 (right):** Cat Catching Domestic Fowl above Two Ducks with a Lotus Flower: Villa Di Cecchignola, Via Ardeatina, Rome.<sup>35</sup>

The continuous use and spread of polychromatic *opus vermiculatum* mosaics throughout Italy during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and into the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC signified the Romans' desire to adopt Greek luxury. However, towards the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, we start to see a diminishing number of new polychromatic mosaics within Italy. Before black and white mosaics fully took over, a transitional phase occurred that blended polychrome with black and white mosaics.

<sup>34</sup> Tammisto, 1997: 387-388.

<sup>35</sup> Images from Tammisto, 1997: Plate 36.

## II. Polychrome with Black and White Transition

Between the middle and last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the mixing of polychromatic and black and white in mosaics occurred. There were mosaics that used the black and white figural background or patterned border with a polychrome *emblema* or figural image in the center. Not only was there a change in stylistic color, but there was also a change in the formation technique as well. Many of the polychromatic mosaics were made in the *opus vermiculatum* technique because of the desire to have detailed images which can only be created using small, irregular shaped *tesserae*. However, in black and white mosaics, because the figures were silhouette images, there was no need for details within the images. Thus, mosaicists used a technique called *opus tessellatum* (same sized, square *tesserae*) in order to achieve the silhouette look. Mosaics found in the transitional phase tended to use the *opus tessellatum* technique, even when using polychromatic colors.

The color limitation and use of *opus tessellatum* as opposed to polychromatic *opus vermiculatum* lowered the cost of the mosaic. Marble in black and white colors were commonly found within Italy. The use of local *tesserae* increased and imported *tesserae* decreased, allowed the cost of the mosaic to reduce. Further, the size of tiles used for *opus tessellatum* were larger than those used for *opus vermiculatum*. Because silhouette images limit colored details, larger sized tiles were used because the image would be one continuous color as opposed to the blending of multiple shades. This lowered the amount of tiles used, and ultimately, the cost of the mosaic. In addition, since there were less tiles used, the mosaic would take a shorter amount of time and less manual labor to make. These factors began to lower the cost of the transitional *opus tessellatum* mosaics from the cost of polychrome *opus vermiculatum*.



Figure 7: *Caldarium* mosaic: House of Menander, Pompeii<sup>36</sup>

The first transitional mosaic to be examined was found in the *caldarium* of the House of Menander in Pompeii. This mosaic was made around 20 BC. It featured a black and white aquatic scene with a circle enclosing a colored **rosette** in the center. By using the technique of *opus tessellatum*, the mosaicist was able to create a “false *emblema*” out of the similarly sized colored *tesserae*. The colored *tesserae* in the center produced a false *emblema* because they were not created in their own panel, rather, they were made continuous with the rest of the mosaic. Further, whereas the traditional *emblema* may only be viewed from one angle, the House of Menander mosaic allowed rosette to be the focus. However, in this mosaic, there were other figural images surrounding the circle that allowed the mosaic to be viewed from more than a single viewpoint.<sup>37</sup>

A major difference between the transitional phase of mosaics and polychromatic mosaics was the color limitation. While most polychromatic mosaics used colors ranging from grey, blue,

---

<sup>36</sup> Image from Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 14.

<sup>37</sup> Clarke, 1979: 59; Dunbabin, 1999: 58.

brown, pink, yellow, etc., the mosaic in the House of Menander incorporated only a few dark red, green, and yellow colors.<sup>38</sup> In addition, polychromatic mosaics, like “The Possessed Girl” mosaic in the Villa of Cicero, a range of hues within the colors could be seen, whereas the House of Menander mosaic consisted of only a light and a dark shade of the specific color. Also indicative of this transitional phase, the black and white figures had shading of grey on the dolphins. The presence of grey shading was unique because later black and white mosaics were rarely seen with multiple shades. When noticing the two male figures in the corners of the mosaic, we see that they did not have any shading and only white sockets for the eyes.<sup>39</sup> These two figures signify the beginning of the black and white mosaic trend because they were lacking even the slightest detail compared with those seen in the dolphins. Moreover, when compared to the Alexander mosaic, the monochrome look and lack of detail in the two male figures represents the initial development of silhouette design. Because of these variations that we see when comparing the use of color within the *caldarium* mosaic in the House of Menander to regular polychrome mosaics, we begin to realize a transition into black and white mosaics.

One very unique mosaic covered the entire *atrium* and *fauces* of the House of Paquius Proculus in Pompeii. This mosaic was dateable to the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.<sup>40</sup> It expanded over the entire floor, measuring about 31.25ft.x24ft. It not only combined polychrome with black and white, but there were many individual figures, each encased in their own square.<sup>41</sup> Most of the *tesserae* used were the same size, indicative of the *opus tessellatum* technique. The majority of the images in the squares were white birds with black backgrounds bordered by black triangles with a thick black band. Two images, however, were medallion shaped with black busts

---

<sup>38</sup> Clarke, 1979: 59.

<sup>39</sup> Clarke, 1979: 60-61; Dunbabin, 1999: 57-58.

<sup>40</sup> Tammisto, 1997: 400.

<sup>41</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 185.

in the middle.<sup>42</sup> In addition, there were a few other images portrayed in the individual squares, such as a lion. Further, in the *fauces*, people were greeted by a dog in the black silhouette style.

Due to the scale and appearance of this transitional mosaic, it is necessary to compare the complexity of this to that of the Alexander mosaic in order to have an understanding of the diminishing costs of transitional *opus tessellatum* mosaics. First, the majority of colors in the atrium of the House of Paquius Proculus were black and white, which could have allowed for a lower cost than that of the Alexander mosaic because the resources were more available in Italy, thus no need to import the materials. Second, the design element of the Alexander mosaic was certainly more intricate than the atrium mosaic. The blend of colors in order to create a realistic image would have needed careful planning rather than using a majority black and white palette. Finally, the laying of the mosaics would have varied in the amount of time and money spent.

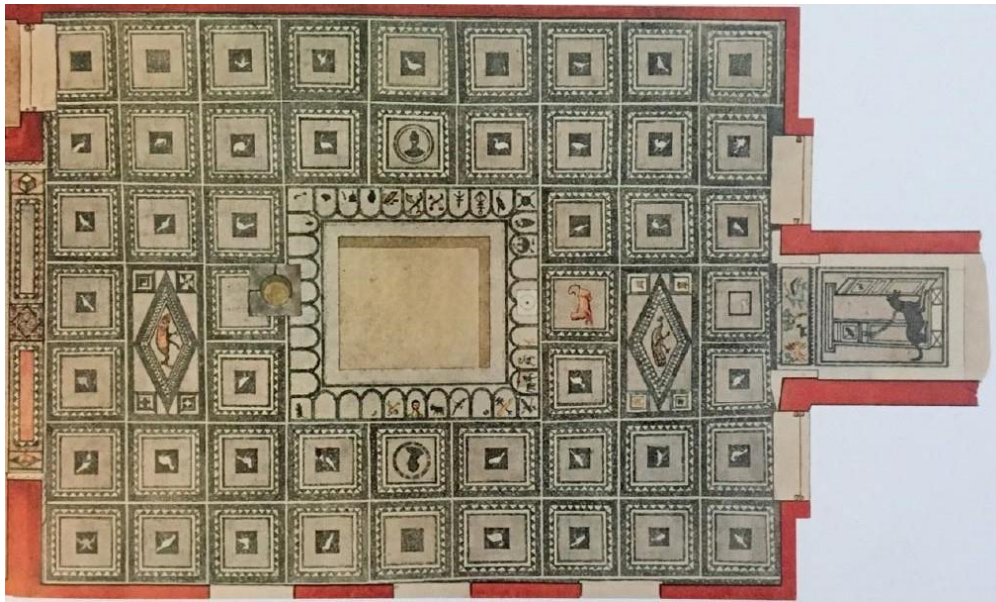
Typically, there would have been the master mosaicist who would have laid the most complex and intricate design elements (generally the figures themselves), then he would have had assistants lay the simple features, like the background or monochrome colors.<sup>43</sup> Because there were simpler features, like the geometric borders, in the atrium mosaic, the master mosaicist could have focused on the images themselves, while his assistants could work on laying the plain white and black *tesserae*. The help of the assistants would have allowed the mosaic to be made in a shorter amount of time than that of the Alexander mosaic because the master mosaicist would have needed to focus on laying all the figures in the Alexander mosaic because they were all complex. The size of the atrium mosaic does need to be taken into consideration. It was a larger mosaic than the Alexander mosaic, so it could have taken the same or more time than the Alexander mosaic, as well as more *tesserae*. However, even with those

---

<sup>42</sup> Clarke, 1979: 8.

<sup>43</sup> Dunbabin 1999: 282.

considerations, because the Alexander mosaic was polychrome *opus vermiculatum*, the luxurious quality was more obvious than the transitional *opus tessellatum*. Overall, creating the Alexander mosaic as a realistic image would necessarily have required more time to plan and execute, thus making it likely to be more costly than the atrium mosaic.



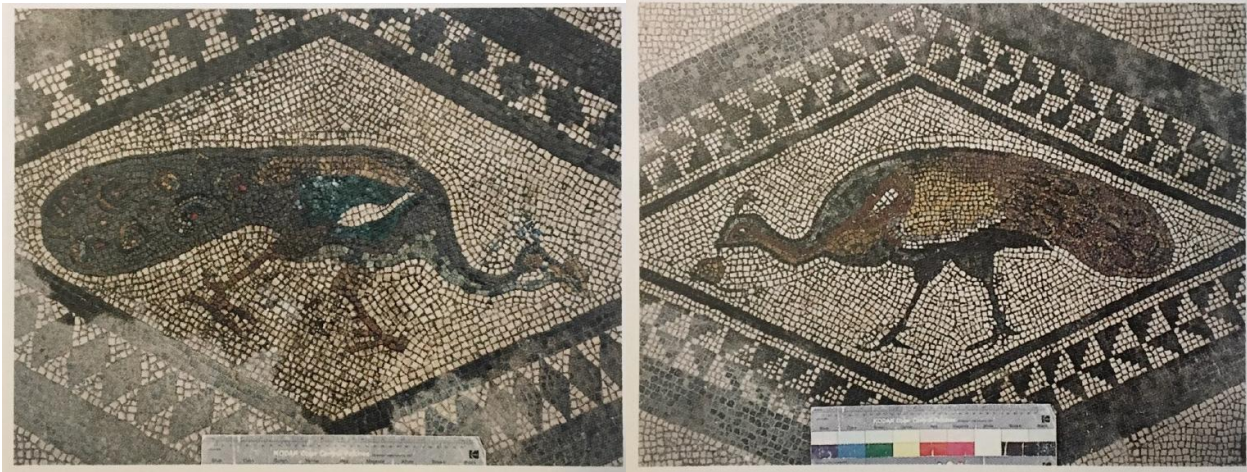
**Figure 8:** Atrium: House of Paquius Proculus, Pompeii.<sup>44</sup>

While the majority of the images in this *atrium* mosaic were enclosed in square borders, two images were shaped like rectangles, thus making them stand out from the rest of the figures. One rectangular image was located as you enter the room from the *fauces*, the other was as you are leaving the room to go to the *tablinum*. In each of these rectangles, a peacock was presented. Both of the birds were polychromatic using blues, yellows, reds, and browns, yet there was minimal shading.<sup>45</sup> The birds themselves were created in *opus tessellatum*, thus allowing a flow between the image and background. Unlike in the *caldarium* in the House of Menander where silhouettes of dolphins and men surrounded the color center, both peacocks were enclosed in a

<sup>44</sup> Image from Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 185.

<sup>45</sup> Tammisto, 1997: 400-404.

black and white diamond-shaped frame.<sup>46</sup> While the individual images were edged with a geometric design, the culmination of all of the figures together allowed for multiple viewpoints of the mosaic. These images in combination with the rest of the floor help show the transition from polychrome to black and white.



**Figure 9 (left):** Blue Peacock, Atrium: House of Paquius Proculus, Pompeii  
**Figure 10 (right):** Yellow Peacock, Atrium: House of Paquius Proculus, Pompeii<sup>47</sup>

During this transitional phase, we notice a breakaway from Hellenistic, polychromatic mosaics. Rather than focusing on details of the images, monochrome *tesserae* were used to create silhouettes of the objects. Along with that, a larger size of *tesserae* were used, that blends figurative elements with the background to create a “false *emblema*.” While this transitional phase seemed to last only the last half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, it ushered out Hellenistic *opus vermiculatum*, leaving room for Rome to develop its own technique and style of mosaic.

### III. Black and White Figural

The black and white figural mosaics started appearing towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and extended well into the Early Empire. Black and white mosaics were the final push away

---

<sup>46</sup> Clarke 1979: 8.

<sup>47</sup> Images from Tammisto, 1997: Plate 48.

from the Hellenistic mosaics that began the immersion of mosaics within Italy. The black and white mosaics were the start of the true “Roman” mosaic style.

Unlike the polychrome or the transitional phase of mosaics, black and white rarely had any shading. Most of the images portrayed were silhouettes with little detail. In addition, many of the images were isolated within the mosaic as opposed to depicting a scene. The tiles that were used were generally made out of white limestone or marble and black volcanic stone. Typically, using these types of materials, was cheaper than polychrome tesserae.<sup>48</sup> Because white and black limestone could be found locally, rather than needing to be imported, it was generally cheaper to make. Most of the black and white mosaics stretched over the whole floor rather than just an *emblema* in which polychrome mosaics were typically found.<sup>49</sup> Because of these changes in style and technique, the number of black and white mosaics significantly increased.

A typical black and white mosaic that appears in Pompeii was a dog that guards the *fauces* of the house. This image appeared in variations in many different houses throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, like the similar polychromatic bird and duck images appearing in the House of the Faun and Villa Di Cecchignola. During the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, this image of the dog appeared in the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii.<sup>50</sup> The chained dog appears with *Cave Canem*, “beware the dog” written underneath. The dog was primarily made out of black *tesserae* with white *tesserae* indicating patches in the fur. Further, the dog had a red collar with a hint of red in its eyes for frightening effect.<sup>51</sup> The use of color in this mosaic was completely different from the use of color found in polychromatic mosaics. In polychrome mosaics, shading was used to show depth and realism of the image, whereas in the dog mosaic, it was used to

---

<sup>48</sup> Clarke, 1979: xx.

<sup>49</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 66.

<sup>50</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 67.

<sup>51</sup> Dunbabin, 1999: 58.



distinguish one part of the dog from the other. The *tesserae* were of similar size and shape, thus employing the *opus tessellatum* technique. The dog appeared on a white background with large black *tesserae* in two parallel lines creating a rectangular border. This mosaic provides a striking contrast to the earlier polychrome style based on the lack of color and little detail that is used. The absence of these features impacted the cost of the mosaic, similar to those that occurred within the transitional phase. The cost to make the black and white mosaics was much cheaper than the polychromatic because the *tesserae* was not imported and the *opus vermiculatum* used more, smaller-sized *tesserae* than in *opus tessellatum*. The skill required to make the black and white mosaics was reduced from the polychrome mosaics because the master mosaicist could have focused on constructing the figures, while the assistants worked on the background. These diminished elements made the black and white *opus tessellatum* mosaics cheaper and less luxurious than the polychrome *opus vermiculatum*.



**Figure 11:** *Cave Canem*: House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii<sup>52</sup>

Another black and white mosaic found in Rome was from the Tor Marancia in the Villa of Munantia Procula. It was dated to 123 AD and featured Odysseus and the Sirens.<sup>53</sup> In this mosaic, Odysseus was pictured on a boat, tied to the mast with the boat supporting the siren.

<sup>52</sup> Image from Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 67.

<sup>53</sup> Clarke, 1979: 74.

Surrounding the boat were dolphins and other sea creatures. All of the images were silhouettes with a white background. Further, the same size tile was used to make *opus tessellatum*. The boat had white lines in it, to define the boat's shape without the need for any additional colored detail. The use of white lines was different from the silhouette images found in the *caldarium* mosaic of the House of Menander. The male figures in that mosaic had no white lines, whereas later black and white mosaics used white lines in order to add dimension without the use of color.<sup>54</sup> Even when comparing the mosaic from Tor Maranica to the *Cave Canem* mosaic at the House of the Tragic Poet, a slightly older mosaic, we noticed that the white lines were on the figures in order to show definition and body structure, whereas the white spots on the dog were there to indicate tufts, not body definition.



**Figure 12 (left):** Villa of Munatia Procula in Tor Maranica, Rome  
**Figure 13 (right):** Odysseus and the Sirens up close: Villa of Munatia Procula, Rome<sup>55</sup>

Another black and white mosaic of interest to be examined was in the *tablinium* of the Caseggiato of Bacchus and Ariadne in Ostia, where Dionysus and Ariadne along with other Bacchic figures, watched Pan and Eros wrestle. This mosaic dates to around 120-130 AD.<sup>56</sup> The mosaic covered the whole floor and was about 20ft.x20ft. Further, all of the tesserae were of the

<sup>54</sup> Clarke, 1979: 75.

<sup>55</sup> Image from Clarke, 1979: Illustrations 76 and 83.

<sup>56</sup> Clarke, 1979: 24.

same size and shape, again the *opus tessellatum* style. All of the figures were black with a white background, but, like the Tor Maranica mosaic, the figures had internal white lines to add dimension and body structure. There was no shading that appears within the images, but the added white, internal lines helped define and created more legible images. Surrounding the figures were systematically-arranged, floral images that covered the rest of the floor.



**Figure 14:** Dionysus and Ariadne: Caseggiato of Bacchus and Ariadne, Ostia.<sup>57</sup>

The unique aspect of this mosaic was not the figures themselves, but the details around them. The figural images were focused to only the center part of the mosaic, however the majority of the mosaic was filled with vines and other floral patterns. Unlike in the Tor Maranica mosaic or even the *caldarium* mosaic of the House of Menander, where the human and animal figures spread across the entire mosaic, the images in this mosaic were located in one specific spot. To compensate for this, the background around the figures was full of organic, leafy details.

---

<sup>57</sup> Image from Clarke, 1979: Illustration 82.

Instead of having a plain white background, the mosaicist added the decorative border, thus giving pictorial variety.

By looking at these specific mosaics, we are able to see the development of polychrome into black and white. We can recognize that polychromatic figural mosaics made in *opus vermiculatum* allowed for small details within the images. Further, we observe the diminishing need to mimic Hellenistic detailed art during the transitional phase of the mix of polychrome and black and white *tesserae* within mosaics. This leads us to consider that need for luxury to demonstrate one's wealth and status in *domi* of elite members in Roman society was not as necessary during the Roman Empire as it was during the Roman Republic. While we still see some detail within the transitional mosaics, it was not the same use of shading that occurs within polychrome *opus vermiculatum* mosaics. Along with that, mosaicists used larger *tesserae* in *opus tessellatum* to create silhouettes in the transitional and black and white mosaics. In the following chapters, we will look at some of the reasons as to why Roman mosaics developed in the way that they did.

## Chapter 2: The Change from Polychrome to Black and White Mosaics

From the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, Roman mosaics adapted from polychrome into black and white. While we understand that this change happened, there is still the lack of understanding as to *why* this change happened. Many of these changes correlate to the social reforms that Augustus brought with the founding of the Principate.

During the Roman Republic, one's social life generally impacted his political position. For the reason that citizens needed to demonstrate their social status in order to be influential within politics, one's *domus* became a hub for conducting business. The way that the *domus* looked in terms of size, location, land quantity, and decorations within it had a strong impact on the way that the citizen was portrayed to the rest of society. However, the beginning of the Roman Empire led to simpler domestic displays due to Augustan changes to societal structure, sumptuary laws, and his personal example. Because the purpose of my thesis is to understand the way that wealth and social structure impacted the development of mosaics in Late Republican and Early Imperial Italy, it is important to have a general understanding of daily Roman life and household living before applying these concepts to the changes of mosaics.

Society in Ancient Rome depended heavily on a hierarchical system. Citizens were classified in different *ordines*, "orders" depending on their property, portrayal of wealth, and *familia* status. These *ordines* not only defined what social status the citizen was, but also the role he was able to play within society, specifically regarding his involvement within the government.<sup>58</sup> Up until the end of the Republic, social mobility, or the allowance of a citizen of a lower class to advance up the hierarchical scale, was increasing. Many citizens opposed the State and the senatorial class. Even when Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian (Augustus) formed the Second Triumvirate for the purpose of limiting conspirators, class and power struggles continued

---

<sup>58</sup> Mayer, 2012: 9.

to increase.<sup>59</sup> When Augustus obtained total power and founded the Principate in 27BC, he wished to limit these social class advancements and restore the original distinction that came with the senatorial and upper classes.<sup>60</sup> In order to do this, he created laws that specifically distinguished the senatorial class from lower classes and issued sumptuary laws in order to limit spending amongst classes. These societal changes, made by Augustus in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, appeared around the same time that polychrome mosaics were shifting to the “transitional phase” and continuing to the black and white mosaic.

As established during the Roman Republic, the “upper class,” or patrons as I will refer, consisted of members in the *ordo senatorius*, *ordo equester*, and decurions. Citizens within these *ordines* were the distinguished members of society. Members in the *ordo senatorius* had the ability to hold positions within the Senate and had the most influence within society. The *ordo equester* members tended to be rich businessmen with jobs such as merchants or tax farmers that allowed them to be prominent landowners, thus ensuring their high social rank.<sup>61</sup> Finally, decurions were members of municipal councils.<sup>62</sup> Citizens within these elite groups had duties to uphold that not only involved providing for the State, but for citizens of a lower class as well.

The plebians were any citizens that were not part of the patrician *ordo*.<sup>63</sup> These people were typically considered the “working class.” Generally, plebians consisted of farmers, craftsmen, and freedmen. However, members in the *ordo equester* and decurions would be observed as plebian elites because they were not distinguished as the “patrician order.” Freedmen were slaves that had been manumitted from their owners, were granted citizenship once free, and classified under the plebian status. They had the ability to work and earn a higher social status

---

<sup>59</sup> Dunstan, 2010: 6497a.

<sup>60</sup> Garnsey and Saller, 1982: 22.

<sup>61</sup> Dunstan, 2010: 41m-41n.

<sup>62</sup> Garnsey and Saller 1982: 23.

<sup>63</sup> Dunstan, 2010: 80.

through maintaining relationships with their previous owners in a patron-client relationship discussed below.<sup>64</sup> If members that were classified as plebians were able to gain enough wealth and recognition, they would have the ability to move up within the social hierarchy and achieve more power within the State.

Throughout the Republic, the State's focus for society had been on pleasing the elite members of the upper classes. While these groups consisted of the minority of the population, they outranked and had more leverage within the state than the lower plebian *ordo*.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, the patrician *ordo* had a higher standing within society than that of the plebians; however, individual patrons still needed to stand out from the rest of the elite in order to make advancements within their career. If a patron wanted a spot within the Senate, then he needed to ensure that he was recognized in a way that encapsulated the power and status that he had.<sup>66</sup> The *domus*, or house, was a place in which the *paterfamilias*, or the eldest male exercising his rights as head of the household, could do this. If his *domus* looked more luxurious than another person's, then he might have exhibited the appearance of greater influence and receive the higher position within the Senate.

The *domus* was the center for political, social, and domestic life. It was a place where *amici*, friends, of the *paterfamilias*, gathered, as well as the *clientes* who served him.<sup>67</sup> Every morning, the *clientes* would greet the *paterfamilias* during the *salutatio* in the atrium of the *domus*. During this process, the *paterfamilias* would give the *clientes* gifts, as well as duties and political favors for the *clientes* to do that day.<sup>68</sup> In this patron-client relationship, both parties were providing for each other in some way. The *paterfamilias* provided the *clientes* with money

---

<sup>64</sup> Dunstan, 2010: 41q.

<sup>65</sup> *Cursus Honorum*: see Appendix 2.

<sup>66</sup> Hales, 2003: 16.

<sup>67</sup> Dunstan, 2010: 52.

<sup>68</sup> Hales, 2003: 2; Metraux, 1999: 392-405; Dunstan, 2010: 52.

and food so that they could survive. In return, the *clientes* supported the *paterfamilias* in his political endeavors by speaking highly of him, following him around the city, and voting for him in elections.

In addition to the *paterfamilias* using the *domus* to advance his political career, he used it to tend to his social life. He invited his *amici* to come over and enjoy a dinner within the *triclinium* of the *domus*.<sup>69</sup> Up until the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, elite citizens dominated the living conditions in cities like Rome and Pompeii. They lived in atrium style houses, which were *domi* in the city with a large, open-roofed space in the center that allowed for a gathering of people.<sup>70</sup> Atrium-style houses allowed owners to use their *domus* as a gathering place because they had very large rooms within them. Some central atriums by themselves measured up to 430sq.m. and held up to 2,000 people.<sup>71</sup> Because of the size of the *domus* and the roles the *paterfamilias* played within society, the *domus* was a place that served multiple public functions for business and entertaining, as well as a private residence.

Roman authors of the Late Republic and Early Empire reinforce this duality of the *domus* as both a public and private space. In Pliny's *Natural History*, he states, *mox forum et in domibus privatis factum atque in atriis: honos clientium instituit sic colere patronos* (Pliny *N.H.* 34.9.17), "soon a *forum* was made in private homes and in *atriums*: the esteem of the clients made it a practice to honor the patrons in this way."<sup>72</sup> Along with that, Cicero, in his letters *Ad Atticum*, says, "*sed domus est, ut ais, forum* (Cic. *Ad Att.* 12.23). But a house, as you say, is a forum."<sup>73</sup> Both of these authors contribute to the idea that a *domus* acts both as a private area for the *familias* to live, as well as a public *forum* for people to gather. Given its function as a public

---

<sup>69</sup> Hales, 2003: 2.

<sup>70</sup> Metraux, 2010: 395

<sup>71</sup> Metraux, 2010: 395

<sup>72</sup> Hales, 2003: 57.

<sup>73</sup> Hales, 2003: 57.



gathering place, the *domus* was an excellent vehicle for exhibiting social status of the *familias* and more specifically, the *paterfamilias*.

Because the *domus* was a place that incorporated both the private and public life of the patron, it needed to encapsulate the elite status of the *paterfamilias*. One of the ways to assert the social status of the *familias* was through interior art and decoration within the *domus*.<sup>74</sup>

Typically, the art found within a *domus* consisted of things like frescos, statues, and, of course, mosaics. If the *domus* had lavish decorations within the house, visitors would be able to recognize that the *familias* was part of the “upper class,” thus emphasizing the position that the *paterfamiliae* within society. Vitruvius in *De Architectura*, states, *...nobilibus vero, qui honores magistratusque gerundo praestare debent officia civibus, faciunda sunt vestibula regalia alta, atria et peristylia amplissima, silvae ambulationesque laxiores ad decorem maiestatis perfectae.* “However, for nobles, who in bearing honors and magistracy, ought to excel the duties of citizens, they should acquire high regal entrances, the most spacious atriums and courtyards, and wider porticos of wood, until the beauty of their greatness had been completed (Vit. *De. Arch.* 6.5.2),” thus reinforcing the concept that the *domus* needed to depict the status of the man who owned it.<sup>75</sup> Mosaics found during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and into the early 1<sup>st</sup> century BC were considered a luxury decoration, which might be why patrons chose to put them in their houses.

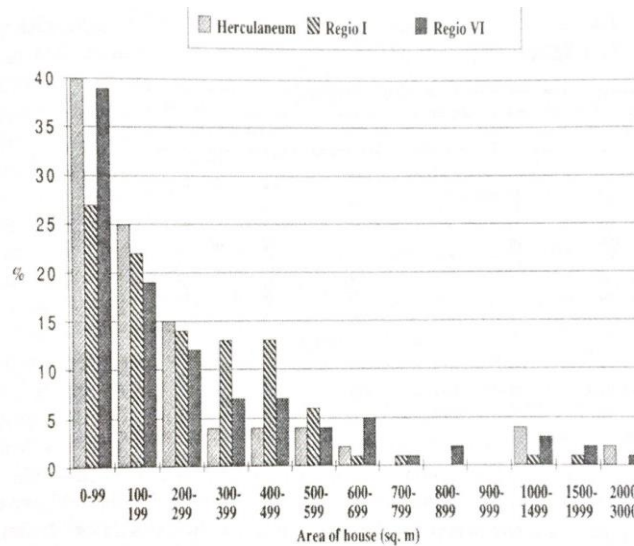
In a statistical analysis completed by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, he demonstrated the claim that mosaics were a luxury decoration for the Roman citizen. In a sample size of 234 houses, 78 houses from Regio I in Pompeii, 104 houses in Regio VI in Pompeii, and 52 houses in Herculaneum, Wallace-Hadrill analyzed how the size of the houses corresponded with the

---

<sup>74</sup> Hales, 2003: 3.

<sup>75</sup> Beck, 2009: 367.

decorations within them.<sup>76</sup> Amongst the houses that he analyzed, he split them into four quartiles; the first quartile being the smallest and most likely of lower class and the fourth quartile being the largest, elite houses. The majority of the houses he found were in quartile one, 0-99sq.m. (40% of sample), but 2% of the houses in the sample were in quartile four, 2,000-3,000 sq.m. (Fig. 15).<sup>77</sup>



**Figure 15:** Wallace-Hadrill, “Distribution of Houses: Pompeii and Herculaneum samples compared.”<sup>78</sup>

While Wallace-Hadrill observed various types of art, such as wall-paintings, within the houses of his study, mosaics seemed to be the most uncommon.<sup>79</sup> None of the houses in the first quartile, i.e. the smallest houses, had either entire floor mosaics or *emblemata*, and only about 2% of the houses in the second quartile had either a complete floor mosaic or an *emblema*. There was a slight increase of entire floor mosaics (19%) and *emblemata* (10%) that appear in quartile three. Finally, the largest amount of floor mosaics and *emblemata* were found in houses in

<sup>76</sup> Herculaneum was a city in the Bay of Naples that was destroyed by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79AD along with Pompeii.

<sup>77</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 1990: 154-156.

<sup>78</sup> Graph from Wallace-Hadrill, 1990: 159.

<sup>79</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 1990: 172. Note that Wallace-Hadrill does not distinguish between figural and geometric mosaic pavements and leaves *emblemata* as its own category.

quartile four; entire floor mosaics at 51% and *emblemata* at 17%.<sup>80</sup> However, regular decoration (i.e. wall paintings) were found in 10% of quartile one, almost 60% in quartile two, 74% in quartile 3, and 90% of the houses within quartile four (Fig. 16).<sup>81</sup> Because of the large difference between the quantities of wall paintings compared to the number of mosaics, it is clear that mosaics were rare. Moreover, because wall paintings appeared in houses within the first quartile, whereas the majority of mosaics and *emblemata* were found within quartile three and four, it is inferred that mosaics were more luxurious than wall painting. This could be due in part to the expense of the resources needed to make mosaics compared to that of wall paintings. Further, the least amount of decorations that appeared in houses were *emblemata*, which were figural, polychrome *opus vermiculatum*, demonstrating that these were the most luxurious form of mosaics. Overall, by looking at the amount of mosaics that were in houses during the Late Republic and recognizing that the houses belonged to the upper class, it is obvious that mosaics were tailored to the concept of luxury.

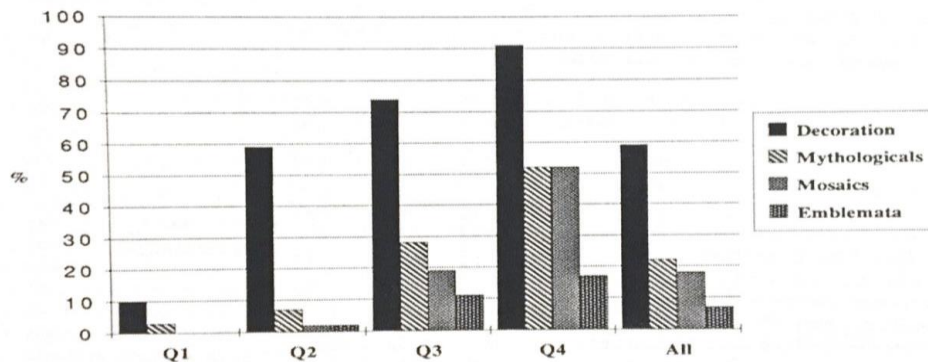


Figure 16: Wallace-Hadrill: “Distribution of Decorative Features.”<sup>82</sup>

With the general understanding that, during the Late Republic, patrons needed to assert their status so that they could reach top ranking positions within their social class, and that having a luxurious *domus* might have helped them achieve that, we are able to see how this

<sup>80</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 1990: 174-175.

<sup>81</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 1990: 174-175; Ling, 1998: 115.

<sup>82</sup> Graph from Wallace-Hadrill, 1990: 175.

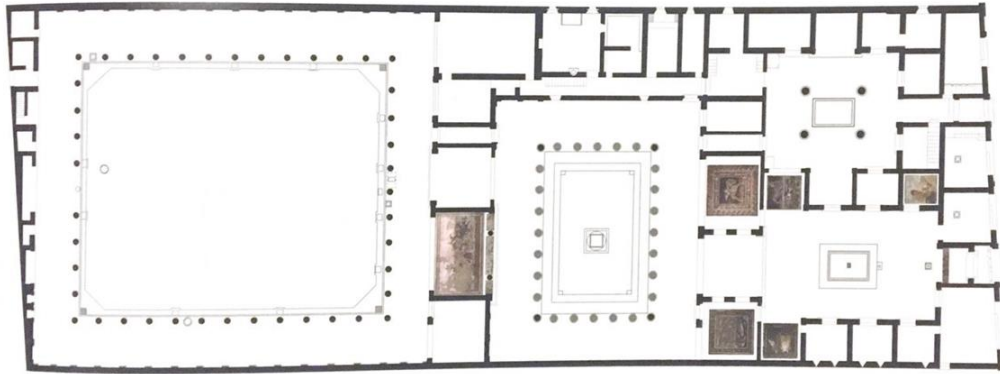
applies to the introduction of polychrome and later developments of black and white mosaics in Roman *domi*. Between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, polychrome *opus vermiculatum* dominated the figural mosaics found within this time. Due to polychromatic *opus vermiculatum* using expensive, colored *tesserae* and typically taking an extended amount of time to make because of the precision that was required, we understand that polychrome figural mosaics were the most luxurious form, thus being a coveted new form of décor amongst the elite during the Late Republic.

For example, looking at the Alexander mosaic (Fig. 1) discussed in Chapter 1, we recognize that this mosaic would serve as a public display of luxury. First, the House of the Faun in itself would be classified within Wallace-Hadrill's quartile four because it measures about 3,000sq.m. thus displaying that the *familias* was of elite status.<sup>83</sup> In addition, the *domus* location within the city itself showed that the *familia* was of the elite class. The House of the Faun was located near the forum of Pompeii, which was one of the busiest parts of town. This allowed for the house to be seen and admired by all. Second, because over four million *tesserae* were used and it was made in *opus vermiculatum*, the mosaic itself would have been expensive. Finally, it was placed within the *exedra*. The *exedra* was a sitting area accessible from the *peristyle*, or colonnaded garden (Fig. 17). The *paterfamilias* used this area as a public gathering space so that his guests would not need to enter the main living areas. Thus, because the *exedra* was located in a place that allowed outside viewers to see it, it demonstrates that the mosaic was there so that the *familias* could display their social status. It can further be inferred that this display of wealth would have helped to increase the *paterfamilias* chance of earning a spot within the Senate. By examining the Alexander mosaic, we are able to recognize that polychromatic *opus*

---

<sup>83</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 136.

*vermiculatum* helped assert one's social status in order to help advance his political career during the Late Republic.



**Figure 17:** House of the Faun layout<sup>84</sup>

New standards diminished emphasis on public displays of wealth and conspicuous consumption, which led to the adaptation of polychrome *opus vermiculatum* to black and white *opus tessellatum*. The idea of not having to decorate one's house extravagantly was introduced during the middle 1<sup>st</sup> century BC by Cicero in *De Officiis*. He states, *ornanda enim est dignitas domo, non ex domo tota quaerenda, nec domo dominus, sed domino domus honestanda est* (Cic. *De Off.* 1.139). "It is indeed that dignity may be adorned by a house, all should not be obtained from the house, the master must not be adorned by the house, but the house must be adorned by its owner"<sup>85</sup> which ensured the idea that *domi* should not be what defined a person's character, rather, the person himself should be the one to display his status. While Cicero and his supporters believed this to be true, thus bringing the idea within society, it was not accepted by the majority of the upper class. Cicero was a *novus homo*, or the first person in a *familias* to reach a position in the Senate. While he had influence within society, some elite members were bitter about his position in the State and did not trust his opinions.<sup>86</sup> However, when Augustus became emperor,

<sup>84</sup> Image from Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 135.

<sup>85</sup> Stewart, 2008: 33.

<sup>86</sup> Dunstan, 2010: lxxxv

the changes in society that he created allowed Cicero's vision of less elaborate houses to be incorporated into society.

Towards the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, we see a visual change in expression of mosaics that can be attributed to the societal change that Augustus fashioned with the beginning of the Roman Imperial Period. The end of the Roman Republic left society in disarray.<sup>87</sup> By the time Augustus gained control of the state in 27 BC, the upper class had become a less prestigious class due to the social mobility amongst plebian elites. These elites started to gain control within the *senatorius ordes*, which caused the senatorial patrons to lose their positions within the State. Dio Cassius, in *Historiae Romanae*, demonstrated that the *ordo senatorius* needed to be defined from what it previously was during the Early Roman Republic. "I maintain, therefore, that you ought first and foremost to choose and select with discrimination the entire senatorial body, inasmuch as some who have not been fit have, on account of our dissensions, become senators (Cass. *H.R.* 52.19.4)." Because plebian elites were taking over positions that were designed for patricians, the senatorial class needed to design tactics that prevented the plebians from gaining control.<sup>88</sup>

An attempt to limit the amount of plebian elites in senatorial positions was initiated with sumptuary laws. Sumptuary laws were prominent within the latter half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and into the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, with the last being implemented by Augustus in 18BC.<sup>89</sup> Generally, these laws put spending limits on luxury entities such as food and banquets. The goal for these laws, which were initiated by the senatorial elite, was to curb conspicuous consumption so that the

---

<sup>87</sup> The Civil War, occurring between 49-45BC, was a war between Caesar and Pompey. This led to societal conflicts due to the *populates*, "people's men" who were common people that supported Caesar, being accused of upsetting the natural order of the government by the *optimates*, "best men" who were patrons that supported Pompey. (Dunstan, 2010: 56-64z.)

<sup>88</sup> Jaczynowska, 1962: 469.

<sup>89</sup> For examples of specific sumptuary laws see Dari-Mattiacci and Plisecka, 2010: 11.

plebian elites would not outspend the senators.<sup>90</sup> If there were limits to the amount that a plebian elite could spend on luxurious goods, then that plebian would not be able to use those goods to signal their wealth (i.e. signaling). This would cause the plebian elites to have less mobility within the social classes because they would not be able to demonstrate that they were wealthy, thus be unable to be considered as a part of the senatorial class.

While the goal for sumptuary laws was to limit spending amongst the plebian elite class so that they could not use luxurious goods to signal that they were wealthy, these laws actually stimulated signaling and competition between the patrons and plebian elites. One argument that claimed the opposite effect of sumptuary laws was that the laws were not limited strictly to the plebian elite class, but applied to the senatorial class as well. If there were limits to spending on luxury goods, then the patrons would not be able to spend as much money on expensive items, thus it would be difficult to see the distinction between patrons and plebian elites.<sup>91</sup> Because of this, competition between the classes was still prominent, thus sumptuary laws were rarely enforced. However, the lack of enforcement in itself promoted the signaling of wealth in the plebian elite class. If a plebian elite was caught violating the sumptuary laws and therefore had to pay a luxury tax, then that would demonstrate that they were of the elite class. This act would signal that the plebian elite was wealthy and therefore he would gain more control within the senatorial class; something that sumptuary laws were to prevent. Eventually, with sumptuary laws having the opposite effect, the *ordo senatorius* lost its economic power to the *ordo equester*, which diminished the power that the patrons had, and allowed the power of the State to be taken over by Augustus.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Dari-Mattaicci and Plisecka, 2010: 4.

<sup>91</sup> Dari-Mattaicci and Plisecka, 2010: 4.

<sup>92</sup> Dari-Mattaicci and Plisecka 2010: 6

Augustus used his new power to not only benefit the State, but to benefit himself as well. He quickly gained control within Rome, eventually having all the power and influence over the patrons. He even claimed in his *Res Gestae*, *post id tempus auctoritate omnibus praestiti, potestatis autem nihilo amplius habui quam ceteri qui mihi quoque in magistratu conlegae fuerunt* (Aug. *Res Gest.* 34). “Thereafter I excelled all in authority, although I possessed no more official power than others who were my colleagues in each office.” Because of this authority and power that he had within the state, and the fact that the *ordes senatorius* lost the political power they had during the Republic, many patrons followed the orders that Augustus gave, or tried to imitate the lifestyle that he lived. Augustus’ use of his authority ultimately lead polychrome *opus vermiculatum* to adapt into black and white *opus tessellatum*.

Augustus took it upon himself to promote the idea that the elite should invest, not in their own *domi*, but in the preservation and aesthetic appeal of Rome itself. Augustus cherished Rome and treated it as if it were his own *domus*.<sup>93</sup> He encouraged elite members to donate public monuments rather than to spend the money on expanding their own houses. He even went as far as to tear down Vedius Pollio’s *domus* on the Esquiline and build the Porticus Liviae, a public monument (Cass. *H.R.* 54.23). While it may seem that Augustus was trying to benefit Rome for its own sake, the more colossal buildings and aesthetically pleasing the city was would benefit Augustus’ own reign. If there was glorification of Rome, then that would demonstrate that Augustus was performing his duties well, thus he would be glorified. However, donating public monuments would still benefit the patron. If a patron was investing in the city of Rome instead of in his own *domus*, then he would already have the ability to be recognized within the state through the monuments he donated. Because a patron would be investing money into the State, the amount they could spend within their own *domus* would be limited. This could have affected

---

<sup>93</sup> Favro, 1992: 72.



the development of Roman mosaics because polychromatic *opus vermiculatum* were more expensive when compared to black and white *opus tessellatum*. If a patron was spending more on public monuments, then he might not have been able to afford an *opus vermiculatum* mosaic, thus he would have needed to purchase a cheaper style of mosaic so that he could still display that he was wealthy.

Augustus set the example to the elite members that a *domus* could still have luxury items, but through less of an expense, by using his own *domus*. Suetonius in *The Life of Augustus* states:

*Habitavit primo iuxta Romanum Forum supra Scalas anularias, in domo quae Calvi oratoris fuerat; postea in Palatio, sed nihilo minus aedibus modicis Hortensianis, et neque laxitate neque cultu conspicuis, ut in quibus porticus breves essent Albanarum columnarum et sine marmore ullo aut insigni pavimento conclavia.*

He lived at first near the Forum Romanum, above the Stairs of the Ringmakers, in a house which had been of the orator Calvus; Afterwards, on the Palatine, but in nothing smaller in modesty to the dwelling of Hortensius, which was remarkable neither for size nor elegance, having but short colonnades with columns of Alban stone, and rooms without any marble decorations or handsome pavements (Sue. Vit. Aug. 72).

This demonstrated that Augustus' own *domus* was not decorated with beautiful mosaics or other luxury materials. While Augustus did donate much of his money to public monuments and lived a less luxurious life than most rulers did, scholars do tend to believe that Suetonius was exaggerating the simplistic lifestyle that Augustus lived, and this can be demonstrated by the artistic remains in his own home and Livia, Augustus' wife.<sup>94</sup> Prima Porta, the villa that Livia lived in, had wealthy attributes, like a marble statue of Augustus himself.<sup>95</sup> Augustus' *domus*,

---

<sup>94</sup> Favro, 1992: 72; Hales, 2003: 64-66

<sup>95</sup> Dunstan, 2010: 4199n.

atop the Palatine, had wall paintings and decorations that were more extravagant than those found within patron's *domi*.<sup>96</sup>

However, because of the authority Augustus had within the State, he was able to portray that he lived a less luxurious lifestyle so that patrons and plebian elites would imitate his "standard of living." Just like the senatorial class pushed for sumptuary laws during the Late Republic so that plebian elites would not outspend them, Augustus prompted less luxurious goods in one's house so that the elite members would not overthrow his authority. Because the senators would not be putting as luxurious of goods in their *domi*, they would not be signaling their wealth, and therefore would have less power within Rome, as well as giving more power to Augustus.

From this, we can see the transition into black and white mosaics. Because black and white mosaics were cheaper and less opulent than polychrome *opus vermiculatum*, they were less luxurious. Black and white *opus tessellatum* would have signaled a standing of a lower class when compared to a polychrome *opus vermiculatum* because they were less expensive and time consuming to make. Augustus, therefore, due to his ultimate authority and objective to not be overthrown, would have pressed for black and white mosaics to be used in elite *domi* than polychrome mosaics because they would have exhibited a lower lifestyle. If the patron had a lower class status, the chance of them overthrowing the emperor was highly unlikely because they would have limited power within the State. Ultimately, black and white *opus tessellatum*, while still beautiful, were not as lavish of art decoration when compared to that of polychrome *opus vermiculatum*. They were simpler and required less time and money to make, but they still added a "luxury" quality that the elites cherished. Augustus, by setting the example that he lived a modest lifestyle, paved the way for black and white mosaics to dominate Early Imperial Rome.

---

<sup>96</sup> Hales, 2003: 66.

Based on the known information about how the social structure functioned within Roman society, we are able to draw connections as to how that impacted the style and technology of mosaics. First, the *domus* was an area that was used as a gathering place for various people. Because of this, the *paterfamilias* needed to lavishly decorate his *domus* so that he could assert his elite position within society. Thus, during the Late Republic, the mosaics that were found in Italy were polychromatic *opus vermiculatum* because they were an expensive, highly magnificent art form. Due to the initiation of sumptuary laws, and the opposite effect that they had, the *ordes senatorius* lost its power to Augustus at the start of the Imperial Period. Using the complete authority as Emperor, Augustus rendered that he lived a simplistic lifestyle so that the elite members would imitate him and not be able to gain power to overthrow him. Because of this, we can see the adaption into black and white mosaics because they were not a lavish decoration. It is clear that the development of mosaics is linked to societal structure and changes during the Principate.

### Chapter 3: The Spread of Black and White Mosaics

Examining the different images of luxury that were portrayed with a polychrome *opus vermiculatum* used in a *domus* compared to a black and white *opus tessellatum*, allowed us to understand how Augustus' influence within the State affected the development of polychromatic into black and white mosaics in the Early Empire. However, the expansion of black and white mosaics to both elite *domi* and working class *insulae* can be attributed to the differences between the Late Republic and Early Imperial urban life. During the Republic, many working class citizens lived outside the city on farms to provide crops for the rest of the city, as well as to sustain their own *familias*. On the other hand, elite citizens lived in atrium-style houses within the city in order to pursue their political careers. A change that occurred at the end of the Republic and continued throughout the Early Empire, created the popularization of elites' owning farmland, thus forcing the working class to move to *insulae* within cities. In addition to cities growing, the effects of sumptuary laws that were initiated at the end of the Republic were still taking effect. With the urban influx, sumptuary laws, and the plebians' natural instinct to imitate the upper class, we see a rise in the amount of black and white mosaics found within the various types of houses of different classes.

When compared to polychromatic *opus vermiculatum* mosaics, black and white *opus tessellatum* mosaics were the cheaper, less elaborate style; however, they were more popular during their prime than polychrome mosaics were. In Ostia alone, 1,000 black and white mosaics, for which a third were figural, were found.<sup>97</sup> When compared to the analysis that Wallace-Hardill executed of houses within Pompeii, only about 20% of the 234 houses in the sample had mosaics, thus showing the increase in black and white mosaics that occurred in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Further, black and white mosaics appeared in both atrium-style houses and

---

<sup>97</sup> Clarke, 1979: xix.

*insulae*, living quarters of the lower class. In a study performed by Glenn Storey, accounting for the amount of *insulae* compared to atrium houses within Ostia, he found that on average, there were 26 *insulae* to every 1 *domus*.<sup>98</sup> It can be inferred that of the almost 400 black and white figural mosaics found in Ostia, mosaics in residential locations appeared more frequently in *insulae* than atrium houses because *insulae* dominated the housing conditions in the city.

Noticing in Wallace-Hadrill's study there were no polychrome mosaics found in the first quartile (the smallest of houses), and only increasing to 10% of houses within the third quartile (larger houses), the black and white mosaics expansion to various types of residences (i.e. *insulae* vs. atrium-houses) is further supported because of the large number of black and white mosaics in Ostian *insulae*, rather than strictly in atrium-houses. Looking at the amount of black and white mosaics and *insulae* in Ostia and comparing it to the polychromatic mosaics found in the houses of Wallace-Hadrill's study, it is clear that there was an increase and spread of black and white mosaics. Examining the reasons as to why and how black and white mosaics appeared both in elite and non-elite housing will allow us to see the diffusion of black and white mosaics. From this, we will be able to see how the commercialization of cities accounted for the increased number of black and white mosaics in *insulae*.

There is a social theory that people of a lower class tended to imitate the people from higher classes.<sup>99</sup> It is common for people to want to advance within social classes. By a plebian or freedman placing forms of art similar to a patron's decorations within their own *domus*, it could be for an "expression of aspirations."<sup>100</sup> The freedman or working class plebian could have had the desire to want to be a patron, but because of his income level, did not fit within those social standards. However, if he had a few decorations within his *domus*, it gave the impression

---

<sup>98</sup> Storey, 392.

<sup>99</sup> Edmondson, 2009: 252.

<sup>100</sup> Stewart, 2008: 40.

that he was of a higher status.<sup>101</sup> In addition to desire, decorations could have also been used to honor the patron that the client served. As seen on page 31 of this thesis, Pliny in his *Natural History* stated *...honus clientium instituit sic colere patronos* (Pliny *N.H.* 34.9.17), “the esteem of the clients made it a practice to honor the patrons in this way.” By incorporating decorations that were similar to the ones used in a patron’s house, the client would have been performing his duties to serve and support the patron. The client’s support would have helped the patron’s political career succeed, so if similar decorations were used in the client’s house, then the patron would be well known and influential within the State, thus furthering his career.

In order to show desire and support for the upper class, plebians tended to imitate the embellishments that appeared within elite *domi*. To support this, Tacitus, in his *Annals*, notes that luxury spreads through imitation. “*Nec omnia apud priores meliora, sed nostra quoque aetas multa laudis et artium imitanda posteris tulit* (Tac. *Annals* 3.55). Nor was everything better before, but our lifetime also, to be imitated by our descendants, bore much of praise and skills.” Imitation for the Romans, entailed using a similar form of decoration within a *domus* or dressing in a similar way. While imitation could happen in various ways, it was most commonly seen in terms of social classes imitating the class above them; specifically the upper class imitated the emperor and plebians imitated patrons.<sup>102</sup>

When black and white mosaics began showing up in *insulae* of working class plebians, they could have been imitating what they saw in the upper class *domi* and in public buildings. Because black and white mosaics were cheaper to make than polychromatic mosaics, they were much easier to implement in an *insula* of a lower class citizen. Polychromatic mosaics were more expensive than black and white, so the lack of polychrome mosaics in *insulae* could have been

---

<sup>101</sup> Mayer, 2012: 164.

<sup>102</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 1990: 146.

related to the fact that the lower plebians could not afford it. However, once patrons started acquiring black and white mosaics within their households, their cheaper value gave accessibility for plebians to have them within their *insulae*. Thus, black and white mosaics appearing in *insulae* could be freedmen and plebians trying to imitate the upper class in a way that shows their desire to be in that rank.

More practically, the utilitarian features of mosaics posed a reason for the appearance of black and white *opus tessellatum* in lower class housing. Pebble mosaics were initially intended to waterproof the dirt or wooden floors. However, centuries after pebble mosaics were used, *tesserae* mosaics still provided the waterproofing qualities, but allowed for the luxurious displays of wealth to be noticed. When black and white *opus tessellatum* were made more accessible to the masses because of being more cost efficient than polychrome *opus vermiculatum*, lower class citizens could incorporate black and white mosaics into their *domi* so that they could be used as both a decorative and utilitarian feature. This decision would allow the plebian to effectively invest in their *domus*, while still displaying their “expression of aspirations.”

Another factor that contributed to the appearance of black and white mosaics in non-senatorial housing during the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC were sumptuary laws. While they ultimately led to Augustus gaining power, the increased signaling and competition still affected society. As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, sumptuary laws, which were initiated into society by the senatorial class so that plebian elites would not outspend them, had opposite effect than what they were designed for. Instead of limiting signaling and competition between classes, sumptuary laws enhanced these concepts.

If the sumptuary laws were enforced, then the limits on spending would not only affect the plebian elite class, but the senatorial class as well. This would make classes “equal” because

members from either side would not be able to outspend the other, thus there would be no way of demonstrating through luxury goods that the citizen was of a higher class. The result of this would have increased competition, thus more black and white mosaics would have appeared in houses of both classes because they would be trying to signal that they were of high standing. Further, with the enforcement of sumptuary laws, there would have limits on the amounts they could spend of luxury decorations, so black and white mosaics would be used rather than polychrome. If the sumptuary laws were not enforced, then the natural competition that occurred between classes would still exist, so citizens would feel the need to use luxury decorations in their *domus* to signal wealth. Thus, because of Augustus' influence, black and white *opus tessellatum* mosaics were used at the beginning of the Empire more than polychrome *opus vermiculatum*. The increase in the amount of black and white mosaics in both atrium-style houses and *insulae* would elude then to the increase in competition and signaling as a result of the sumptuary laws.

Something to account for the dramatic increase in the amount of black and white mosaics appearing in *insulae* in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD was the elites desire to own farmland, further leading to the urban influx of working class citizens. Metropolitan and work-industry changes began after the Second Punic war in 201 BC. Before the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, farms were owned and worked by citizens known as small-scale farmers. These men could work a small plot of land with the help of their sons and a few slaves. They were able to produce enough crops to be able to sustain the lives of their *familia*, and even sell to a few urban consumers.<sup>103</sup> However, the effects of the Second Punic war from 218-201 BC, left farmlands in

---

<sup>103</sup> Dunstan, 2010: cliii.



shambles.<sup>104</sup> Many of the farmlands surrounding Rome and similar cities were destroyed from the battles that took place on the lands. When small-scale farmers returned to their farms after serving in the wars, they realized they did not have the capabilities of restoring their land and producing crops. Without being able to produce crops, they had no way of providing for their *familia*. Facing poverty and unemployment, they had to flee to urban areas in search of work.<sup>105</sup> With the land surrounding cities being free from tenants, it gave elite members the opportunity to expand their property, which would help signal their wealth.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, patrons gained control over the destroyed land that small-scale farmers left. With this land, great estates called *latifundia* were created. *Latifundiae* were composed of a large amount of land that allowed for the mass production of crops. In order to work this land, an abundance of slaves was needed.<sup>106</sup> Derived from this desire to own a large quantity of land, the idea arose that in doing so, it allowed patricians and plebian elites to further display their social status. By owning a lavishly decorated *domus*, in addition to having a plentiful amount of land, exhibiting one's social status came at ease for the upper class.

While upper class citizens were taking over the farming industry, the small-scale farmers and other working class members who moved to the cities needed to find jobs to maintain their *familia*. These citizens found that the easiest way to become employed within a city was to develop a skill. Soon, working class members became artisans or craftsmen of specific skills such as baking or glass blowing. During the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, *tabernae*, or shops, filled with handmade plebians' goods to sell, began lining the city streets.<sup>107</sup> The rise in wishing to sell one's own product began to commercialize the city, a trend that continued in the Early Imperial

---

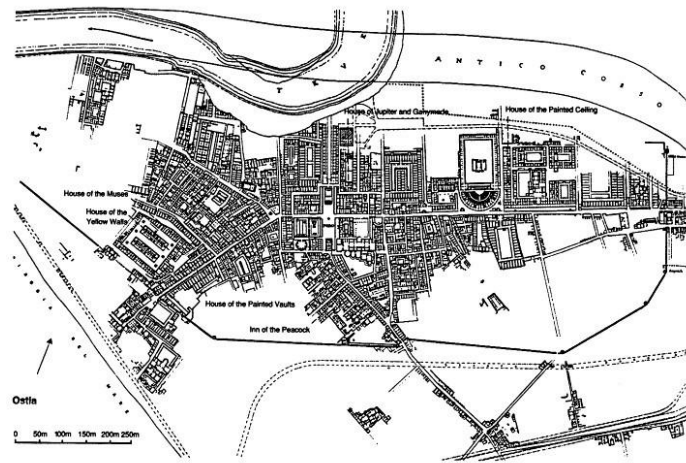
<sup>104</sup> The Second Punic War was the war between Hannibal and Rome for the possession of Spain and the Italian peninsula (Dunstan, 2010: cxviii).

<sup>105</sup> Dunstan, 2010: cliv.

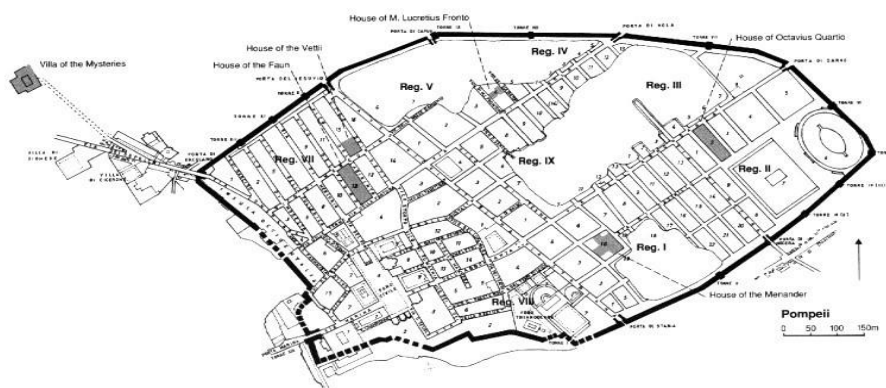
<sup>106</sup> Dunstan, 2010: cliv.

<sup>107</sup> Mayer 2012: 74.

Period. There was a recorded number of 600 *tabernae* in Pompeii from before 79AD (the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius) and over 800 from 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD in Ostia. When compared to the amount of atrium style houses, only 400 *domi* were found within Pompeii.<sup>108</sup> Associating the amount of atrium-style houses to *tabernae* in Pompeii demonstrated the commercialization that cities were going through because of the large difference in numbers. Instead of cities being dominated by elites pursuing political careers, the working class plebians started to leave a mark within them.



**Figure 18: Ostia: Plan of ancient city**



**Figure 19: Pompeii: Plan of ancient city<sup>109</sup>**

Well into the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the urban influx was still increasing. During Claudius' reign as emperor, he began constructing two piers in Ostia. With their completion in 64 AD, Ostia

<sup>108</sup> Mayer 2012: 34.

<sup>109</sup> Maps from Clarke, 1991: xxx-xxxi.

became the main port for trade for Rome, which allowed Ostia to become independent from Rome and thrive as its own city.<sup>110</sup> This, in addition to the amassed *tabernae* within the city, helped commercialize Ostia.<sup>111</sup> With goods being able to come and go through Ostia, more people started moving to the city in order to find work. Because of this, Ostia had become both a residential and commercial location.

The increase in trade and expansion of cities continued throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD with Trajan's reign. During Trajan's rule (98-117 AD), he built many roads, harbors, and aqueducts in Rome and its surrounding provinces.<sup>112</sup> Specifically, in Ostia, Trajan expanded upon the harbor that Claudius built. Between the time of Claudius' reign (41-54 AD) and Trajan's, boats had increased in size and more were appearing in the Ostian port. The original harbor by Claudius could not withhold the growing trade industry, so Trajan built a larger harbor called *Portus Traiani Felicis*, "Port of Favorable Trajan."<sup>113</sup> This construction, in addition to the newly built roads, allowed for trade to increase between Rome and its provinces. It also permitted the Roman Empire to expand outwards as well. Further, Trajan also built a market within Rome, which became one of the most popular places for business within the Roman Empire. Filled with *tabernae*, Trajan's Market boosted the production and sales of goods, especially within the lower plebian class. While the expansion of trade and merchant sales within cities helped working class plebians succeed, it also created a growth in the population of the cities, which created housing problems.

---

<sup>110</sup> Wilson, 1935: 30.

<sup>111</sup> Wilson, 1935: 51.

<sup>112</sup> Dunstan, 2010: 90.

<sup>113</sup> Bennett, 2000: 142.

With small-scale farmers among other plebians moving to the city, cities soon became very crowded. By 30 BC, Rome itself had almost one million inhabitants.<sup>114</sup> With the increase in population of cities, new housing conditions needed to be developed. *Insulae*, or six to eight story tall buildings with single family apartments to rent out, were built within cities.<sup>115</sup> These cheaply-built buildings tended to be associated with the working class citizens. Of the 50,000 citizens in Ostia at the beginning of the Empire, many formed into *collegia*. *Collegia* were labor unions comprised of working class citizens to perform the work of shipbuilders, merchants, grain measurers, and other professions. It was because of these unions that scholars deemed Ostia as a working class city.<sup>116</sup> Because of this notion that Ostia was susceptible to lower class work, it can be assumed that plebians dominated the housing locations in the cities. Further, due to the affordability and easy accessibility to work locations in the city, *insulae* would have commonly been lived in by working class plebians. Because black and white mosaics started appearing in *insulae* during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD due to plebians imitating the upper class and sumptuary laws, when the increase of *insulae* occurred in cities, the number of black and white mosaics in *insulae* would have increased as well. In addition, because of the commercialization cities, public buildings, particularly *tabernae* in Ostia, appeared with black and white mosaics depicting the items associated with the specific *tabernae*.

The spread of black and white mosaics can be attributed to the commercialization and expanding of Roman cities, as well as the lasting effects of sumptuary laws. With black and white mosaics being cheaper than polychrome mosaics, working class plebians had the ability to imitate them within their *insulae*, thus showing their aspirations to be in a higher class. Further, because sumptuary laws enhanced competition and signaling amongst classes, black and white

---

<sup>114</sup> Mayer, 2012: 19; Dunstan, 2010: 411.

<sup>115</sup> Metraux, 398-400.

<sup>116</sup> Clarke, 1991: 268.

mosaics would have been a provision of these concepts. By small-scale farmers not being able to tend to their farms after the destruction of the land during the Second Punic War, patrons were able to invade upon that land. Further, small-scale farmers and other working class plebians moved into the cities looking for work. They soon began developing skills that they could make products to sell to the public, which led to the increase of *tabernae* within cities. Concurrently, Ostia became a main port which brought more sales and movement of people to cities. Because of this, *insulae* needed to be built in order to accommodate for the growth in population. The product of the increased amount of *insulae* would contribute to the increased amount of black and white mosaics appearing in *insulae*. With all of this information, we are able to see how black and white mosaics spread throughout Roman *domi* and *insulae*.

## Conclusion

The goal for this thesis was to demonstrate what social changes impacted the styles and frequency of Roman figural mosaics between the Late Republic and Early Empire. Mosaics experienced quite a few changes during these time periods. While this thesis primarily focused on the impact of wealth and society, other mechanisms of change would have been contributing to the changes in mosaics between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

The availability of resources had a huge impact on the look and style of mosaics. When comparing the polychrome colors used in Hellenistic mosaics to the black and white Roman mosaics, black and white limestone were more accessible in Italy than the colorful marbles that were found in the Greek East. Another impact would be the skills of the mosaicists. Polychrome *opus vermiculatum* would most likely have been crafted by the master mosaicist. However, by the time black and white mosaics appeared, *collegia* of mosaic craftsmen started to form, which then led to the skills of mosaicists diminishing because they worked as a group as opposed to a primary artist with a few assistants.<sup>117</sup>

In addition, workshops were created to build mosaics outside of the *domus*. In these workshops, mosaics became commercialized by having layouts of popular designs from which the buyer could choose to put into their *domus*. With a predesigned panel, the mosaicist would have been able to execute the mosaics more effectively, but it would have lost some precision that came with creating the mosaic without the layout. An example of this might be viewed in the polychromatic *opus vermiculatum* mosaics of the cat and duck appearing in both the House of the Faun and the Villa Di Cecchignola. Other clear indications of the increase in “mass” black and white mosaic production would be the *Cave Canem* dog images found in the *fauces* of the

---

<sup>117</sup> Dunbabin, 1999: 302.

House of the Tragic Poet and House of Paquius Proculus in Pompeii. The availability of resources, skills of mosaicists, and development of workshops, along with many other factors could have influenced the development of mosaic styles. Taking those into consideration, the impact of societal changes during the time of Augustus highly contributed to the changes in mosaics.

The changes examined in this thesis began during the 2<sup>nd</sup> BC- beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> century BC with polychrome *opus vermiculatum*. This technique used small, irregular *tesserae* in different colors to depict a realistic image. This type of mosaic appeared in entire floor mosaics and *emblemata*, which were mosaics created in their own panel and inserted into a surrounding floor mosaic. Mosaics in the polychrome *opus vermiculatum* style appeared in the Alexander Mosaic in the House of the Faun in Pompeii, “The Possessed Girl” and “Women at Breakfast” at the Villa of Cicero in Pompeii, and the cat and ducks mosaic in Villa Di Cecchignola in Rome.

After polychrome *opus vermiculatum*, mosaics experienced a transition phase where they mixed both polychrome and black and white colors. These mosaics generally appeared during the middle to last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC in the technique of *opus tessellatum*. This technique used the same sized *tesserae* and is usually created in black and white color. The transitional phase used a colored center surrounded by black and white silhouette images or geometric designs. This style was exemplified by the *caldarium* mosaic at the House of Menander, and the entire atrium at the House of Paquius Proculus in Pompeii.

Finally, transitional mosaics were developed into black and white mosaics at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and continued into the first two centuries AD. Like the transitional phase, these mosaics were made in *opus tessellatum*. Different from the polychrome mosaics, these focus less on realistic details and more on silhouettes of images. For this reason, black and white

mosaics took less time to make and were cheaper, which made them less luxurious than polychromatic mosaics. However, an abundance of black and white mosaics spread not only to elite *domi*, but also to working class *insulae*.

In order to show how polychrome mosaics adapted into black and white mosaics, I examined the societal structure and its changes between the Late Republic and Early Empire. In the Late Republic, patrons were focused on achieving a senatorial position within the state. In order to do this, they benefitted from decorating their *domi* with outstanding decorations because their *domus* acted like a forum where people would gather, thus they could easily display their elite status through decorations. Polychromatic *opus vermiculatum* mosaics were adopted as a way to display elite status because it was the most luxurious style of mosaic.

Sumptuary laws were brought into Roman society during the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and continued in use until the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. The laws were designed to limit spending amongst classes that were not of the patrician order. These laws, however, often had the opposite effect, and rather encouraged competition and signaling amongst classes. Because of the increased competition and signaling, the *ordes senatorius* lost its economic and political influence to Augustus. Augustus helped stimulate the initial change of polychrome to black and white. He promoted the idea that the elite should donate their wealth to public monuments within the city rather than invest in their own *domi*. In donating to the State rather than to one's own home, Augustus would be glorified because of the aesthetic appeal of the city. Further, Augustus used his authority to claim he did not decorate his *domus* extravagantly, and influenced imitators to put thrifty decorations in their *domi*. By doing so, there would be less of a chance for Augustus to be overthrown because the elite members would not be displaying their wealth, thus would gain less power within the State. Because of Augustus' personal intentions for the State,



black and white mosaics appeared within elite homes because they still represented a luxurious quality, but were not as expensive as polychromatic, thus allowing the upper class members to embrace the societal changes.

After this adaption of polychrome into black and white mosaics occurred, black and white mosaics began appearing in *domi* of both the elite and plebians. Because black and white mosaics were cheaper, plebians had the ability to imitate and show their desire to achieve a higher status or show support of their patron by placing the mosaic within their *insulae*. Further, sumptuary laws allowed for the democratization of black and white mosaics within non-elite housing. These concepts, in collection, created the spread of black and white mosaics to *insulae* of the working class. However, it was due to the commercialization of cities was occurring during the Early Empire that increased the amount of black and white mosaics appearing in *insulae*. Elite men began to expand their estates to own farmland, and farmers and working class men began to move to cities. Through the working class creating shops for selling their handmade products and the increase in trade at Ostia, more housing was required within the cities. *Insulae* were built in order to accommodate for the growth. The appearance of black and white mosaics in *insulae* correlated to the rise in number of black and white mosaics within *insulae* because more *insulae* were being built due to the growth of cities, so naturally, more black and white mosaics would have appeared.

In conclusion, the adaptation of polychromatic to black and white mosaics to the spread of black and white mosaics between the Late Republic and Early Empire directly related to the societal and urban changes that were going on during this time. Undeniably, there were other factors that contributed to these changes in mosaics, however, societal changes incorporated by Augustus at the founding of the Principate and the urbanization of cities during the Early Empire

were prominent influences. While polychrome *opus vermiculatum* and black and white *opus tessellatum* varied in cost and manual labor, both were luxurious entities that anyone would be privileged to have within their *domus*.

## Glossary

### Atrium

Open roofed hall in center Pompeian style *domi*, usually with an *impluvium*<sup>118</sup>

### Atrium House

*Domi* within the city with a large, open-roofed space in the center

### Black and White Mosaics

Commonly found in the style of *opus tessellatum*, black and white mosaics were used to create silhouettes of images. Black and white mosaics were popular between the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>119</sup>

### Caldarium

Hot room in a Roman bath<sup>120</sup>

### Cubiculum

Bedroom in a Roman *domus*<sup>121</sup>

### Dominus

Male master of the *domus*

### Emblema (-ata)

Literally “(something) inserted”<sup>122</sup> A finely-made figural mosaic in *opus vermiculatum* that was made in its own panel separate from the rest of the mosaic. It was then inserted into the center of the *opus tessalatum* floor. This form was found between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, but was most popular during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.<sup>123</sup>

### Exedra

Rectangular or semicircular niche or open recess off the peristyles or porticoes in a *domus*<sup>124</sup>

### Fauces

The entrance passageway in Pompeian type *domi*<sup>125</sup>

### Frigidarium

---

<sup>118</sup> Dunbabin 1999: 342.

<sup>119</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 25.

<sup>120</sup> Dunbabin 1999: 342.

<sup>121</sup> Dunbabin 1999: 342.

<sup>122</sup> Ling 1998: 138.

<sup>123</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 25.

<sup>124</sup> Ling 1998: 138.

<sup>125</sup> Dunbabin 1999: 342.

Cold room in a Roman bath<sup>126</sup>

### Impluvium

Basin to catch rain water at the center of the *atrium* in Pompeian style *domi*<sup>127</sup>

### Insula (-ae)

Block of buildings containing multiple apartment style living areas<sup>128</sup>

### Lozenge

Diamond or rhombus shaped designs<sup>129</sup>

### Nucleus

Upper layer of fine mortar mixed with crushed tile in which *tesserae* are embedded<sup>130</sup>

### Meander

Geometrical design consisting of straight lines turning at right angles and crossing over each other, like a labyrinth<sup>131</sup>

### Oecus ('-i)

Large reception room or common area in Roman and Hellenistic *domi*<sup>132</sup>

### Opus Signium

Using a culmination of terracotta in mortar, pavement becomes waterproof<sup>133</sup>

### Opus Tessellatum

Square stones measuring about three-eighths to three-quarters of an inch were placed together to create designs.<sup>134</sup> Because the *tesserae* were larger than those used in *opus vermiculatum*, figural images were not as detailed.

### Opus Vermiculatum

Using *tesserae* as small as an eighth of an inch, mosaicists were able to create subtle shading within the images. *Emblemata* were most commonly made in this technique.<sup>135</sup>

### Pebble Mosaics

---

<sup>126</sup> Dunbabin 1999: 342.

<sup>127</sup> Dunbabin 1999: 342.

<sup>128</sup> Dunbabin 1999: 342.

<sup>129</sup> Ling 1998: 138.

<sup>130</sup> Ling 1998: 138; Dunbabin 1999: 342.

<sup>131</sup> Ling 1998: 138.

<sup>132</sup> Ling 1998: 138.

<sup>133</sup> Ling 1998: 139.

<sup>134</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 27.

<sup>135</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 28.

Through the use of river pebbles, people during the Minoan-Mycenaean age were able to waterproof pavements. During the 8<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century BC, geometric and figural images were incorporated into pebble mosaics.<sup>136</sup>

### Peristyle

Colonnaded garden or court of the *domus*<sup>137</sup>

### Polychrome Mosaics

By using a variety of colors, mosaicists were able to create detailed images. Polychrome figural images were common in the style of *opus vermiculatum*.

### Rosette

Radiating petals of a flower in a design<sup>138</sup>

### Rudus

Lowest level of mortar bedding composed of rubble and lime for *tesserae* to be placed<sup>139</sup>

### Statumen

Pebbles or rubble underneath the layer of mortar bedding<sup>140</sup>

### Tablinum

In Pompeian style home, main room located off the atrium<sup>141</sup>

### Terracotta

Baked clay, common for pottery, tiles, and bricks<sup>142</sup>

### Tessera (-ae)

Found in materials such as marble, limestone, granite, or volcanic stone, tile was cut to form small pieces. Pieces could be regular squares, or irregular shaped fragments.

### Trinclinium (-a)

A dining room of *domi* where three couches are arranged against back wall<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> Pappalardo and Ciardiello, 2012: 28.

<sup>137</sup> Ling 1998: 139.

<sup>138</sup> Ling 1998: 139.

<sup>139</sup> Ling 1998: 139; Dunbabin 1999: 343.

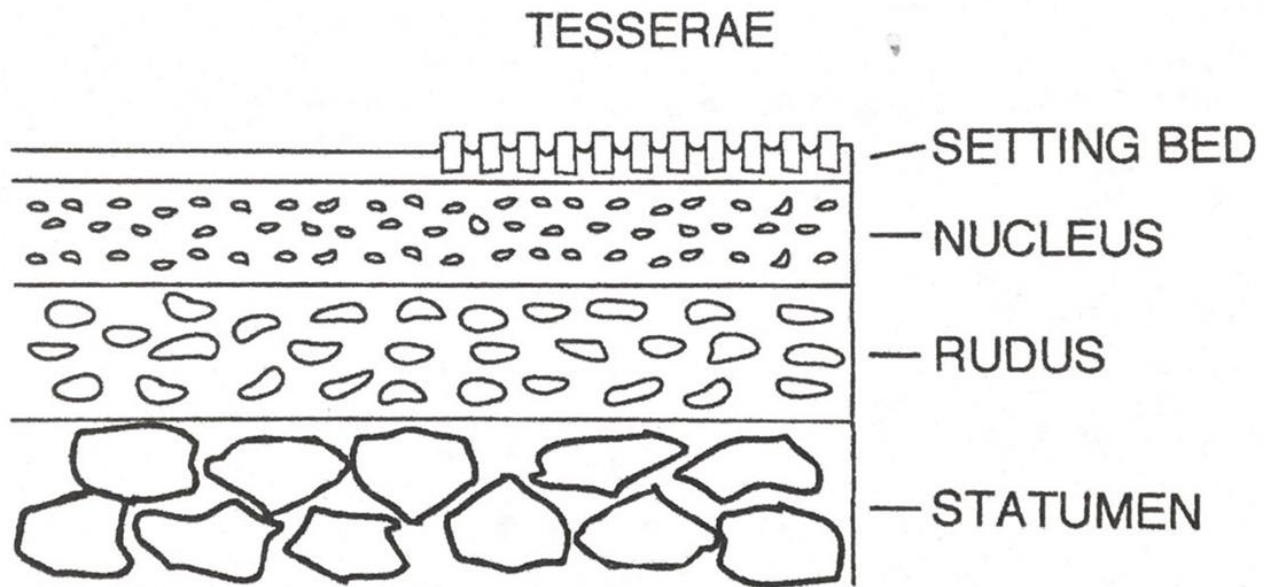
<sup>140</sup> Ling 1998: 139.

<sup>141</sup> Dunbabin 1999: 343.

<sup>142</sup> Ling 1998: 139.

<sup>143</sup> Ling 1998: 139; Dunbabin 1999: 343.

## Appendix 1



288 Diagram of mosaic foundations.

<b>Top Layer</b>	<b>Tesserae</b>	Leveled in a setting bed
<b>Third Layer</b>	<b>Nucleus</b>	3:1 crushed tile/potsherds:lime mixed in fine mortar bedding
<b>Second Layer</b>	<b>Rudus</b>	9in thick layer of beaten rubble and lime mix
<b>Bottom Layer</b>	<b>Statumen</b>	Bedding of fist-sized stones <sup>144</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Dunbabin 1999, 281-284.

## Appendix 2

Cursus Honorum	The Ladder of Offices during Republic and Empire
Consul	2 men selected for yearlong terms, chief executives. Patrician rank
Praetor	1 man during Republic, 16 during Empire, held judicial power and helped command army. Patrician rank
Aedile	4 men oversaw games and city functions. Plebian rank
Quaestor	20 men oversaw finances and 2 <sup>nd</sup> in command for armies or governors. Plebian rank
Censor	Form consul held a 5 year term reviewing laws and watching over Senate

Senate: Central body of government, 300 men selected by Censor. Debated laws and gave orders to magistrates

*Comitia Centuriata*: Military-aged men voted for magistrates and declared war

## Bibliography

- Augustus. *Res Gestae*. Available on thelatinlibrary.com
- Beck, Hans. 2009. "From Poplicola to Augustus: Senatorial Houses in Roman Political Culture." *Phoenix* Vol 63.
- Bennett, Julian. 2000. *Trajan : Optimus Princeps*. Florence: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Blake, Marion Elizabeth. 1936. "Roman Mosaics of the Second Century in Italy." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* Vol 13: 67-214.
- Cassius Dio. *Historiae Romanae*. Translation available on <http://penelope.uchicago.edu>
- Cicero, M. Tullius. *De Officiis*. Available on thelatinlibrary.com
- Cicero, M. Tullius. *Epistulae Ad Atticum*. Available on thelatinlibrary.com
- Clarke, John R. 1979. *Roman Black-and-White Figural Mosaics*. New York: New York University Press.
- Clarke, John R. 1991. *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.–A.D. 250 : Ritual, Space, and Decoration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dari-Mattiacci, G. and A.E. Plisecka. 2012. "Luxury in Ancient Rome: An Economic Analysis of the Scope, Timing and Enforcement of Sumptuary Laws." *Legal Roots*: 189-216.
- Dunbabin, Katherine M. D. 1999. *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dunstan, William E. 2010. *Ancient Rome*. Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Edmondson, Jonathan. 2009. *Augustus*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Favro, Diane. 1992. "Pater Urbis": Augustus as City Father of Rome." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 51.
- Garnsey, Peter and Richard Saller. 1982. *The Early Principate: Augustus to Trajan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jaczynowska, Maria. 1962. "The Economic Differentiation of the Roman Nobility at the End of the Republic." *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* Vol 11, no. 4: 486-99.
- Hales, Susan. 2003. *The Roman House and Social Identity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.



- Ling, Roger. 1998. *Ancient Mosaics*. London: The British Museum Company Ltd.
- Mayer, Emanuel. 2012. *The Ancient Middle Classes : Urban Life and Aesthetics in the Roman Empire, 100 BCE-250 CE*. Cumberland: Harvard University Press.
- Metraux, Guy P. R. 1999. "Ancient Housing: "Oikos" and "Domus" in Greece and Rome." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 58.
- Pappalardo, Umberto and Rosaria Ciardiello. 2012. *Greek and Roman Mosaics*. New York, NY: Abbeville Press.
- Pliny, C. *Naturalis Historiae*. Available on thelatinlibrary.com
- Pollio, M. Vitruvius. *De Architectura*. Available on thelatinlibrary.com
- Stewart, Peter. 2008. *The Social History of Roman Art*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Storey, Glenn R. 2001. "Regionaries-Type Insulae 1: Architectural/Residential Units at Ostia." *American Journal of Archaeology* Vol 105.
- Tacitus, P. Cornelius. *Annales*. Available on thelatinlibrary.com
- Tammisto, Antero. 1997. *Birds in Mosaics*. Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae.
- Tuck, Steven L. 2014. *A History of Roman Art*. Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Tranquillius, G. Suetonius. *Divus Augustus*. Available on thelatinlibrary.com
- Wallace-Hadrill, Andrew. 1990. "The Social Spread of Roman Luxury: Sampling Pompeii and Herculaneum." *Papers of the British School at Rome* Vol 58.
- Westgate, Ruth. 2000. "Pavimenta atque Emblemata Vermiculata: Regional Styles in Hellenistic Mosaic and the First Mosaics at Pompeii." *American Journal of Archaeology* Vol. 104, No. 2: 255-275.
- Wilson, Frederick H. 1935. "Studies in the Social and Economic History of Ostia: Part I." *Papers of the British School at Rome* 13: 41-68.